

## Sunflower Fox

One afternoon I was surprised to see a gray fox apparently eating sunflower seeds that had fallen from our bird feeder. Is this normal behavior for what looks like a well-fed fox? The fox was alert and wary of humans as I would expect it to be.

Mark Yonteff



*It appears this fox may have stumbled upon an easy meal. This often happens in developed areas, as foxes and coyotes may sometimes establish their dens very close to homes or offices. By mid-summer, young pups emerge to explore their local environment and eventually wander off as both young and adults disperse to a larger area. It is common, then, to see much activity, but to avoid conflicts with foxes (as well as with any animal) people must not feed them. This is certainly true of obvious “hand-outs” or feeding stations, but it also applies to the untidy placement of garbage or the use of an unreasonable amount of bird seed. And, as always, people should avoid contact with wild animals.*

—Gordon R. Batcheller, Chief Wildlife Biologist

## Stumpy Sturgeon

While diving in the Niagara River last summer, I came across what I thought was a lake sturgeon, but the tail anatomy seemed strange. Is this a lake sturgeon with a damaged/missing caudal fin (tail)?

Jim Sanders

Buffalo, Erie County



*We checked with our fisheries biologists who offered a couple of possible explanations including that the caudal fin could be curled away from the camera, or it could be a hatchery defect. Looking at the photo, it appears that the caudal fin is missing and that the fish might be using the dorsal and anal fins as an artificial caudal fin. Our biologists agreed it's possible the defect may have happened in the hatchery, but didn't find record of any hatchery fish being released into the Niagara River. However, sturgeons were stocked into the Genesee River not too far away!*

—Eileen Stegemann, Assistant Editor

## Mini Mantids

Every spring I purchase praying mantis egg cases, as they are such great garden buddies. This year I frequently checked the one I hung outside of my kitchen window and was fortunate to see the babies as they began to hatch.

Marjory Greenberg-Vaughn

Saugerties, Ulster County

*Great photo! Ambush predators with quick reflexes, praying mantids dine on moths, crickets, flies, grasshoppers, and any insect that happens across their paths—even their own kind.*

—Jenna Kerwin, Staff Writer



### Snacking Herons

I was attempting to photograph this great blue heron at Ring’s Pond when suddenly he snatched a huge largemouth bass from the water!

Maureen Moore  
Cornwall, Orange County



I captured this picture of a great blue heron that stalked and caught a chipmunk in my backyard. I had no idea that a heron would consider chipmunk food.

Vern Jakubowski  
Wilton, Saratoga County



*Though surprising to many people, herons will eat chipmunks and other small rodents. The majority of a heron’s diet is fish, but it will also eat turtles, snakes, insects, frogs and even other birds, as well as small rodents like voles, chipmunks, mice, etc. This is especially true when herons return in the spring before ice-out.*

—Conservationist staff

### Laid-back Plover

This fanciful plover did not present with the usual feigning injury dance that most killdeer do when harm to their nest is perceived. Instead, a settling back onto the clutch was its only business.

Laurie Dirkx  
Ontario, Wayne County



*Early returning migrants, killdeer can be heard high overhead in spring, calling out their name with their plaintive cries. They nest completely in the open, often in sites disturbed by humans, such as in gravel parking lots, railroad yards, building or excavation sites, or anywhere with enough loose gravel to make a suitable nest site. Rather than hiding their nests, they rely on the camouflaged coloring of their eggs and employ a “broken wing” behavior to distract potential predators from the exposed, but difficult to find, nest site.*

—David Nelson, Editor

### Big Brown

I thought you might like to see the 27-inch brown trout I caught last June on Charlotte Creek, between Summit and Oneonta.

George Novellano

*Congratulations on an impressive catch!*  
—Conservationist staff



## What is It?

If you guessed it’s a bird on a tree trunk, then you guessed right. If you guessed this is a yellow-bellied sapsucker on a birch tree, then you really know your birds!

Lydia Green of Wolcott sent us these pictures of a yellow-bellied sapsucker that was visiting her yard. She remarked on how well these birds blend in with their environment. We agree.

Small-sized woodpeckers, yellow-bellied sapsuckers are found throughout the state. They make neat rows of shallow holes in trees and return later to eat the sap that oozes out—hence their name—and the insects that are attracted to the sap.

