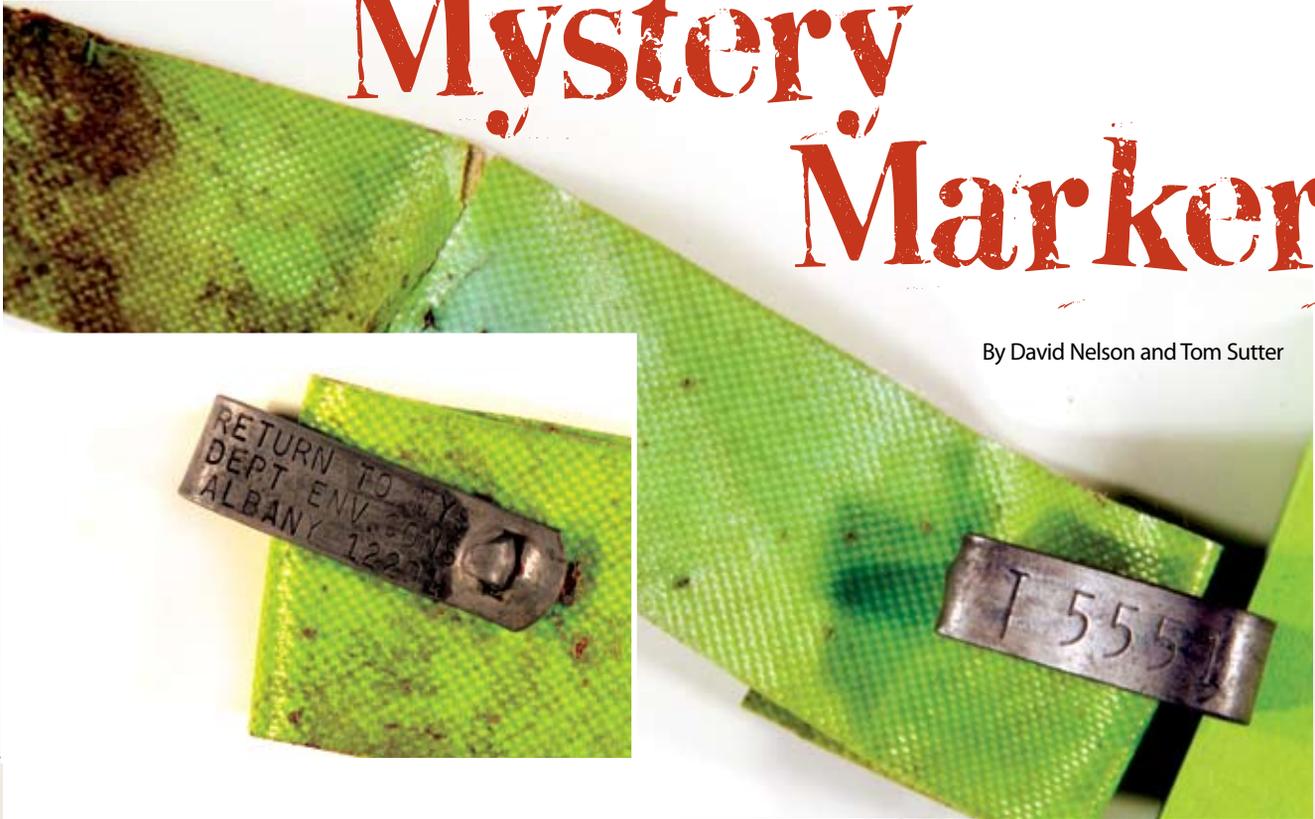


Mystery Marker

By David Nelson and Tom Sutter



James Clayton

Out for a casual stroll in a woodlot near her home last year, Rensselaer County resident Lynn Rowley found a piece of bright green material in the duff on the forest floor. At first, it looked like just a bit of litter. On closer inspection, she noticed a crimped aluminum band attached to the plastic material. Inscribed on one side was: RETURN TO NYS DEPT ENV. CONS ALBANY 12201. The other side simply said "T5551."

Curious about the find, Ms. Rowley sent an e-mail to DEC, which went to Tom Sutter, a principal fish & wildlife technician in Albany. Tom was intrigued and asked Ms. Rowley to send him the item so he could do a little research. After talking with several former employees and digging through some old data, Tom determined the band was a wing tag used years ago in DEC's trap & transfer program to re-establish wild turkeys throughout much of New York.

But to find out more, Tom had to search DEC's warehouse where he was able to locate a handwritten ledger containing the original banding records for the project. According to those documents, on September 12, 1974, three adult female turkeys and eight poults were captured in Allegany State Park in Cattaraugus County. They were tagged, and then transported and released in the vicinity of Hicks Pond in the Town of Poestenkill that very day. Interestingly, this was the same area in which Ms. Rowley discovered the tag nearly 36 years later.

All of the turkeys trapped and released in this group received two sequentially numbered tags and colored Tyvek streamers. The tag Ms. Rowley found would have been on a turkey that also sported wing tag #T5552. Tom noted that one of the immature birds from this same release was recovered in the Horsford Pond area near North Rd. in East Poestenkill in the fall of 1974, with both sets of wing tags and streamers.



John Goerg

Ms. Rowley thanked Tom for taking the time to solve the puzzle and keeping her family informed. In her words, "My boys enjoyed knowing the history of the mystery tag. Now we know where all these turkeys came from."

DEC encourages anyone who finds a bird band or a wing tag to report the discovery either using the address listed in the hunting and trapping regulations guide, or better yet, in an e-mail to: fwwildlf@gw.dec.state.ny.us.

For more information on DEC's historic turkey trap and transfer program, see *Conservationist for Kids* in this magazine.

Dave Nelson is Editor of the *Conservationist*. Throughout his 30-plus year career with DEC, **Tom Sutter** has worked on myriad wildlife projects, including wild turkey management and waterfowl banding.