



Little Stinker

While walking in the woods, I came across this unusual thing growing on the forest floor. Can you tell me what it is?

Paul LeMieux
Franklin County



In the Northeast we call this a veiled stinkhorn mushroom. Members of the stinkhorn family often get our attention with their unpleasant foul odor, but they're irresistibly delicious to flies and beetles. Interesting to note is that this specimen is almost devoid of the olive-green to olive-brown spore slime usually covering its top, and which insects eat and spread to other sites in their travels. Either the spores were already consumed when you came upon it, or they might have been washed away by rain. Most people are acquainted with the far more common dog stinkhorn—the color and shape of a small carrot. You may very well find it too; just follow your nose!

—Frank Knight, retired DEC Environmental Educator



Into the Wild

I thought you might enjoy this shot of a deer taken in the early morning at Knox Farm State Park. She had two fawns with her, but they never came out in the open.

Don Nieman
East Aurora, Erie County

Big Toothache

While walking my family's property on Black Lake, I found these two skulls. The larger skull has a portion of a smaller skull wedged in its teeth. I'm guessing the larger animal killed the smaller, but couldn't free the head from its mouth, which might have eventually killed it. Does this sound plausible, and do you know what animals these might be?

John A. Eustis,
Black Lake, St. Lawrence County

What a unique and interesting find. The large number of teeth, pronounced sagittal crest (ridge) on the top of the skull, and the overall shape, identify the larger skull as an opossum. However, we are unable to determine from the photo what species of small mammal the other skull is from. To properly identify it, we would need to see it, so I encourage you to bring it in to a local DEC office if possible.

As to how the opossum may have died, we cannot say for sure, but feel that given the location of the smaller skull, it is likely that a healthy opossum could have freed this skull from its tooth. Had you found this near a road, for example, then we might surmise that the opossum (an opportunistic feeder) was feeding on roadkill when it was hit by a car.

—Andrew MacDuff, DEC Wildlife Biologist



✉ LETTERS



Pond Beauty

The dragonfly article in your June issue inspired me to bring my camera down to our pond. I had a lot of fun taking photos!

Karen Velez
Hillsdale, Columbia County

*It's great to hear you were inspired!
Thanks for sharing your photo with us.*

—Conservationist staff



Lounging Around

While hiking near a cliff edge above Lick Brook in Ithaca, I came upon this snake lounging in the leaves. Do you happen to know what species it is?

Nigel P. Kent
Rochester

*You've captured a photo of an Eastern ratsnake (*Elaphe alleganiensis*). It is similar to an Eastern racer (*Coluber constrictor*), but has some distinguishing characteristics. The primary feature that identifies this snake is the raised ridge,*

or keel, running lengthwise through the center of each scale. An Eastern racer's scales lack that keel. Additionally, the ratsnake's eyes are situated closer to the front of its head, while a racer's eyes are situated farther back.

—William Hoffman, DEC Fish & Wildlife Technician



Model Dog

I wanted to share this photo of my three-year-old dog sitting on a muskrat house. She's a wonderful dog with a great disposition. It took her some practice to actually retrieve ducks, but now she is very proud of herself when she does!

Kathy Forbes
Albany County

What a great pose. A proud girl, indeed!

—Conservationist staff



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Ask the Biologist

Q: Recently a pair of red fox have been spotted hanging out near a local school. They routinely let people get close, which is causing concern about safety, such as someone being bitten or the worry about rabies. Is it normal for fox to exhibit this kind of behavior? And is it safe for people to be so close? Should something be done?

—Jim Getman, Schoharie

A: It is not unusual to see foxes in developed areas, especially in late spring/early summer when they are actively rearing their young and therefore are constantly searching for food. There is no reason to be concerned about this, as long as people keep their distance and the animal appears healthy and is acting normally. Remember, for both adults and children, it is very important to keep all wildlife at a distance and make no attempts to get close. Pets should be kept restrained at all times as well. If any person or pet does happen to come in direct contact with a red fox (e.g., a bite or scratch), a medical doctor or veterinarian should be consulted since any mammal is capable of carrying rabies.
—Gordon Batcheller, DEC Wildlife Biologist

