

# California FOCUS

## Three California Students Attend Wildlife Leadership Academy

Three students from California Area School District were among 20 from across the Commonwealth that attended the 2010 Wildlife Leadership Academy sponsored by the Pennsylvania Institute for Conservation Education.

Senior Aaron Sutch of Daisytown, sophomore Sam Gumbert of Allenport, and incoming freshman Michael Luketich of Scenery Hill, spent a week dedicated to learning about the State bird, the ruffed grouse, at Powder Mill Nature Preserve in Ligonier.

The students worked with radio telemetry equipment, and learned about nature photography from professional photographer, Tim Flannigan.

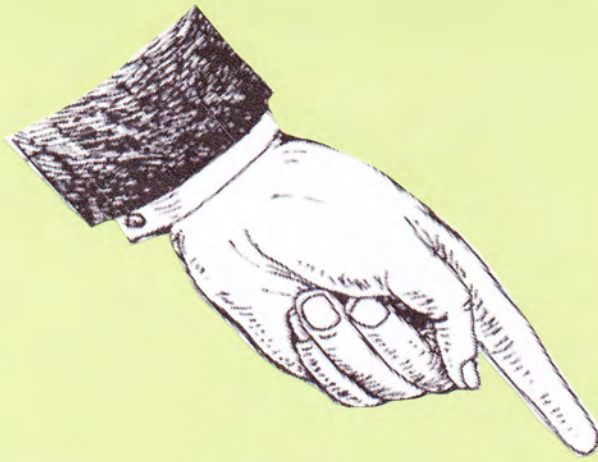
They learned about land management, habitat, plants and journaling. Time was spent with labs and pointers in dog training, and grouse necropsy to learn about anatomy and physiology. Instructors educated the students on gun safety, and several hours were spent shooting sporting clays. There were daily trivia challenges, panel discussions, mock town meetings, and lots of fun. One evening the students enjoyed a pheasant dinner.

The academy also concentrates on developing leadership skills, such as public speaking and teamwork. Media professionals assisted in preparing the students for communicating through radio, television and writing.

According to Michael, a typical day at the wildlife leadership academy started at 6



Three California students who attended the Wildlife Academy were (left to right, clockwise) Michael Luketich, Sam Gumbert and Aaron Sutch. The two adults were leaders at the camp. The boys not only had a great time, they learned a lot, including leadership and communication skills.



a.m. Before eating breakfast, campers wrote in our journals while sitting outside in an open-air amphitheater. After journaling, they had team cadences (marching/chanting in military style.) Following cadences was breakfast. In the morning they were introduced to types of plants the ruffed grouse prefer. Next they learned about the ruffed grouse both in the classroom and in the field.

Some topics covered were general ecology, forest ecology, ruffed grouse necropsy, habitat management and predators of the ruffed grouse. The students often worked together to accomplish different tasks as a team. Around noon, they ate lunch and, right after that, they would take a quiz on the plants that we learned about earlier in the day. Throughout the afternoon, they would continue learning about the ruffed grouse and doing other hands-on activities. After that, came dinner, which was followed by more class work, project time and various presentations. At the close of each day, there were cabin inspection reports. Each day typically ended after midnight, he concluded.

Sam, who received the Leadership Award, was surprised when he was named the recipient. "On the last day of the academy all the students and instructors vote on the person who demonstrates outstanding work ethic, attitude, and team work during the field school. I was surprised to receive the award and I appreciated everyone's confidence in me," he added.

Sam and Aaron were both on the team that received the number one ranking. Sam said that the team worked well together and scored well in daily trivia challenges and other events. Members of the team were Team Leader Ed Votisek, a high school teacher from Linesville, PA, Assistant Team Leader Aaron Sutch, Billy Pfeiffer, Ben Henrichs and Luke Wessner.

The Number 1 Team earned a ruffed grouse hunt, and Aaron was excited about that possibility all week. "I was really impressed that our team won. We were losing in the beginning, but we finally got on top and stayed there the entire week," he added.

Aaron said that the whole camp is great, from the projects to the team building exercises, but the thing he liked most was meeting kids from all over the state.

"The thing that impressed me the most was how many people have an interest in the ruffed grouse, conservation, and this program," explained Michael. "They took time to come from all over the state to inform us about the ruffed grouse and encourage us to share what we learned with others."

Sam is a member of California Boy Scout Troop 1423, and is working toward his Eagle rank. He is on the Smokin Guns Shooting Team from California Hill Gun Club, and during the winter he participates in the Roscoe Sportsmen's Club Youth Trap League.

He is the son of Ken and Lynne Gum-

bert, and the grandson of Ken and Billie Gumbert, Allenport, and Duane and Kay Nelson, Belle Vernon. He has one brother, Bill, 20.

Michael is an incoming freshman, but he was active in middle school basketball, baseball, Audubon Society, National Junior Honor Society, Mathcounts, and a number of high school musicals. He is the son of Kevin and Pam Luketich, and the grandson of Donald and Ardith Thompson, California, and Frank and Ann Luketich, Beallsville. He has two brothers, Samuel, 17, a senior at California High School, and Nathaniel, 11, a 6th grader at California Intermediate/Middle School.

Aaron is a member of the Drama Club, Leo Club, Marching Band, National Honor Society, and the Envirothon Team. He volunteers at Mon Valley Hospital, and is active in Mon Valley Dartball League and the Pike Run 4-H. He is the son of Jim and Michele Sutch, Daisytown, and the grandson of Ron and Darlene Howes, Fredericktown, and Wayne and Nellie Sutch, Coal Center. He has two brothers, Adam, 19, and Austin, 12.

