

# Wildlife Leadership Academy

*This summer Alex Clapper attended the Wildlife Leadership Academy's Pennsylvania Bucktails field school. The mission of the Wildlife Leadership Academy is to empower youth to become ambassadors for wildlife conservation in order to ensure a sustained wildlife legacy for future generations. This is Alex's story about her experience...*

I would like to tell you my personal account of the PA Bucktails boot camp. Yes, it is a boot camp.

At first, when my mom told me there was an outdoor camp that my grandfather taught at and I was going, I was much less than thrilled. Personally, I am not a very outdoorsy person. I would much rather play a video game, watch YouTube videos, or figure out how to solve a Rubik's cube than go ride my bike or play outside. I was convinced that this camp was going to be awful and a waste of a week. To make things worse, I was going by myself and wouldn't know any of the other students there. This would be the first time I would be going to a camp without a friend or sibling. So I was nervous, and annoyed.

When I got there, I got my stuff, and my mom and I headed to my cabin to unpack. I reached my cabin and all the other girls were either unpacked, or in the process. At 14, I was clearly the youngest there and was feeling really awkward about having to share a small space with people I didn't know. Eventually I was unpacked and we all went into the main building. A short time later, I was alone with my team, aka five people I didn't know. We all introduced ourselves and then we had to come up with a team name. We soon settled on the White Wolves. After all this, we dove right in with a bunch of classes and a deer necropsy. I was getting to know my team a little better, but I still wasn't happy being there.

Then, we had to do team cadences. We had to pick a cadence and yell it as loud as we could and march in step. Needless to say, no one was very loud, or marching very well. But as the week wore on, we got louder and louder to the point of losing our voices.

Every day, we had a few classes that remained the same, such as Team Building, Plant of the Day, Plant Quizzes, Deer Trivia, Cabin Inspections, the Dailies, and a few others.

As the week went on, we did more and more activities and I got more and more comfortable with my team, the students at camp, and the instructors. I felt like I could talk to anyone whenever I needed to and we addressed all the instructors by their first names.



ALEX SHOOTING THE .22 RIFLE AT THE SCOTIA RANGE IN CENTRE COUNTY, PA, DURING THE FIELD SCHOOL.

A few of my favorite things from camp included: going to the shooting range, playing deer trivia, meeting new people, cabin inspections and the Dailies. I know you may be thinking, "Cabin inspections? She finds cabin inspections fun?" These cabin inspections were hilarious! Every night two or three of the teachers would present things they saw while in the cabins, and they were really picky. For example, my team leader always left out a heavy-duty metal flashlight and every time the teacher would pretend they had been hit on the head by "the unsecured, blunt object." Another frequent topic of the cabin inspections was my wolf stuffed animal. The first day there, the instructors had said that my wolf had bitten one of them, so just to be funny, I taped a fake angry mouth on my wolf's face. The instructors had a field day and everyone thought it was hilarious. The next night, because I feared we lost points because of my joke, I made the wolf apologize with a "paw-written" note.

The Dailies (or Daillies as the instructor jokingly spells it) are basically a humorous recap of the whole day with lots of funny pictures the instructor took. These two periods at the end of our day always had everyone laughing our heads off, and laughing right along with everyone, I felt like I was part of the group.



Then came... The Night. I will refer to it as The Night because it deserves its own title. Everyone stayed up until at least 3:00 in the morning working on projects for the next day. But, instead of feeling completely overwhelmed like I would if these were school projects, I knew I would be able to get everything finished. We did, we got every project finished – our tri-folds, PowerPoints, plant collections, and nature photos. There was no way we could have finished everything without help from the amazing instructors, though.

The next day, we had to present our PowerPoints to everyone at camp. Yes, I was a little nervous, but not nearly as much as I usually am. Later, when the head instructor was talking to us, everyone's eyes were glued to the scoreboard. Every few minutes a new score would go up and some team would cheer. That morning, my team had been in second place by 13 points. We thought it was the point of no return, but we gave our best anyway, and we pulled ahead. We won! I was no longer the shy little girl who had walked in on the first day, I was an equal to every 15-, 16-, and 17-year-old in that room. We were all friends now, we will all keep in touch.

I am currently working on this thing everyone has to do after you complete the camp, called Community Outreach. Everyone is required to do at least three Outreaches, more if you want to get invited back as an Assistant Team Leader. I have done four Outreaches so far, this newsletter article is my fifth, but I plan on doing many more so I will be able to return next year. You never know, if you have just heard about this program and are planning to apply, I may see you there :).

The moral of my story? This camp will change you forever, for the better. Come join us! You'll have loads of fun and learn while doing it!

~Alex Clapper, 2013 Bucktails Student

*The Wildlife Leadership Academy is a cooperative initiative of various state agencies and conservation organizations. It is coordinated and administered by the Pennsylvania Institute for Conservation Education, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. For more information and to find the application, visit [www.picweb.org](http://www.picweb.org). 2014 Field School dates will be posted on the website soon!*

SHOWN AT LEFT IS ALEX (FAR LEFT) WITH HER TEAM, THE WHITE WOLVES.

