

Wildlife Leadership Academy

By Jackie Rosenberger

I HAVE ALWAYS enjoyed being in the great outdoors. Whether I am hunting, fishing, hiking or canoeing, I just love to be outside viewing wildlife. I have observed many species during my 15 years, and my desire for knowledge about these wild animals has never stopped growing. This desire for knowledge is what inspired me to participate in the Wildlife Leadership Academy for the past two summers.

In the summer of 2010, I spent a week learning about the white-tailed deer at the PA Bucktails field school. Through classroom and field activities, I learned about the biology and management of our state animal. I learned tons of interesting information from specialists with many state agencies, including the Game Commission, Quality Deer Management Association, Department of Conservation of Natural Resources, Penn State University and more.

This past summer I par-

ticipated in the PA Drummers field school, where I spent a week learning about our state bird, the ruffed grouse. While there, I also learned from many of the same agencies, as well as the Ruffed Grouse Society. In fact, one of my favorite parts of field school was having the opportunity to learn from these experts. For example, Tim Flanigan came to talk to us about ruffed grouse natural history and nature photography. He was a WCO for 30 years and has a wealth of knowledge about wildlife and the outdoors. His tips on photography are also helpful when I take my camera into the outdoors. He



Photographer TIM FLANIGAN did a program about the ruffed grouse and also tips about taking photos to students at the Wildlife Leadership Academy.

even took the time to give us a little “pep talk” about our futures.

Linda Ordway, a regional biologist for the Ruffed Grouse Society, was another individual who I learned a lot from. She described ruffed grouse habitat in detail, and her presentations were

enlightening. One thing I learned is that clearcutting a piece of forest is not always a bad thing. It may not be beautiful to look at, but it actually allows plant life in the understory to grow and flourish. These types of conditions are considered early successional habitat and they provide a source of food and cover for many kinds of wildlife, including grouse.

When we were not in the classroom, we were competing in trivia games or participating in field activities, such as necropsy, plant collections, habitat evaluations, and radio telemetry and GPS exercises. We even engaged in nature photography and journaling, and, of course, target shooting.

My favorite afternoon at field school was learning about the role of hunting in wildlife management from the Game Commission’s former executive director, Pete Duncan, and shooting sporting clays. My first summer at WLA was the first time I had ever used a shotgun, and I have fallen in love with it.

To mix it up a little, students were involved in many team-build-



STUDENTS learned to identify many species of plants at the Wildlife Leadership Academy.

ing activities throughout the field school. These activities helped to develop skills in leadership, critical thinking and teamwork. WLA really prepared me for coming back home and reaching out to my local community. It equipped me with the necessary skills to teach others about wildlife and conservation, and gave me an experience worth telling about.

The Wildlife Leadership Academy is not just a program for students who are interested in a career in biology or ecology. For me it was so neat to learn about the animals I hunt and observe. In addition to the field schools I already mentioned, you may apply for the PA Brookies field school, which focuses on our state fish, the brook trout. To apply you must be 14 to 17 years old. However, adults can apply for Adult Team Leader positions and have the opportunity to learn everything the students learn.

The Wildlife Leadership Academy is facilitated by the PA Institute for Conservation Education, and for more information and to download applications go to www.PICEweb.org and click on the Youth Programs Link. For questions, contact program coordinator Michele Kittell at mkittell@picweb.org □