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Interview with Michael Miller

Molly Sharp

Michael Miller

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ELFS-MS-A020401A

Researchers present: Molly Sharp

Event: Interview with Michael Miller (Knox Co. Wildlife Officer)

Location: The Rural Life Center (upstairs room)

Mike Miller (from now on referred to as “MM”) arrives wearing his full wildlife officer uniform. He is young, probably in his early thirties, and very friendly and willing to talk. We sit down diagonally to each other at the desk in the small upstairs room.

MS: Our project is on foodways in Knox County. We’re just looking at different aspects of how food moves. We’ve been split up into twelve different sections, and mine is hunting and gathering or “natural foods”. I don’t know anything at all about hunting. I understand that most of the hunting that goes on out here is more for sport than food, but that most people do eat what they kill.

MM: Yup. Ninety-nine point nine percent of them.

MS: Is it any better than what you can get at the grocery store?

MM: It’s leaner, yeah. As far as lower cholesterol, lower fat, and stuff like that? Yeah, it’s a lot lower. Somebody in our agency will have those facts and figures, but compared to beef and pork and poultry, it’s much leaner and healthier. At least as far as lower cholesterol and lower fat content. Somebody’s taken the time to find out what’s in what.

MS: How about you? Do you get a chance to go out and hunt from time to time?

MM: Yeah. Ducks, geese, rabbits, squirrels, and deer and turkey.

MS: That’s a lot! So how often to do you go?

MM: I’ve going rabbit hunting once a week if not twice a week, but usually I go for about three hours at a time.

MS: Do you go anywhere in particular?

MM: In Ohio you have to have permission from the landowner to be on their property. But fortunately I get to drive around the county and work so I know a lot of people. I get to look and I can find the best places to go. Like we’re probably going to go rabbit hunting tomorrow just down the road from my house. There are a lot of rabbits there, and nobody’s hunted there yet this year, so that makes it better. I have a Beagle, a dog. We got a pup this spring, so this is his first year. He’s still learning but he’s doing really well.

MS: You eat what you get?

MM: Yup.

MS: Do you usually get a lot?

MM: Well no, because I like hunting things better than cleaning things. Hunting would be even better if it was like fishing where you can catch and release, but hunting’s not that way. But no, because my wife doesn’t like to eat rabbit. The only thing she’ll eat is venison. So that means I’m not going to eat four rabbits. Usually what happens is we’ll go and I’ll shoot one rabbit...maybe two rabbits, because in Ohio

you're allowed to kill four a day. When you have a dog that's very easy to do. You can go rabbit hunting without a dog, and you might see one or two rabbits all day but you're only seeing one out of every ten or fifteen rabbits if you don't have a dog. The only rabbits that you're seeing are the ones that sit real tight and jump right in front of you. Versus a dog picks up their scent—the ones that you've never seen. So when you have a dog you get a lot more rabbits...you see a lot more rabbits.

MS: So the dog will just follow wherever he smells them, and then you just follow the dog?

MM: No, they come back to you. You see rabbits just basically run in a big circle. Now the circle might be a half a mile or it might be a mile, but they just run in a big circle basically. So all you have to do is get to where you jumped the rabbit (or that general area where the dog jumped it) and you just stand and wait for the dog to chase it back. Sometimes rabbits are real slow and they'll be like a foot in front of the dog, and then sometimes they're way out. They might be five hundred yards in front of the dog. So you just kind of stand there and wait for the rabbit to come back. It's a lot more fun, because if you're using a dog it increases your odds of getting a rabbit but the fun part is listening to the dogs. That's what the dog lives for, because the dog loves to chase rabbits. So if you think about the most fun activity that you like, that's the way it is for the dog. They bark and they just have a good time. You can watch a rabbit watch a dog. A rabbit knows you're there, because you can see it. You see the rabbit out ahead of you and he'll see you standing there. He might not now what you are, but the minute you move he goes off in a different direction and might change his whole course entirely. But the rabbit will actually stop and look for the dog. He'll look and say, oh there's the dog, I'll go this far. Or you can see sometimes the rabbit will sit tight because they'll jump from one side to the other and make different directions of travel to confuse the dog. You can actually see the rabbit do that. The rabbit will go this way and then cut back and then sit real tight and the dog will go past, and then he runs out of tracks so he'll have to back track and figure out what happened to the rabbit. It's like a puzzle, so it's really neat to watch. That happens anytime you use a dog. For tracking dogs like that--Beagles for the most part. Guys also hunt like coyotes and fox with dogs, and raccoons and things like that...bear. Up in New Hampshire that really big. The only thing I know about New Hampshire is there've been some really good illegal bear hunts. Guys who got arrested up there because you can use bear dogs in New Hampshire, and Maine and places out there. It's the same principle.

MS: None of this is a danger to the dog?! The size of a bear and the size of a dog.... There's going to be a problem.

MM: There is a danger to the dog with a bear because basically small bears will run and go up a tree. Big bears will run a little bit and then turn around and kill the dog, plain and simple. Big bears don't run very far from dogs because they quickly figure out that they're bigger. That's what happens a lot of times, so yeah if you hunt bears you can lose your dogs real easy. So they try and teach dogs to not go in on a bear...what they call "keeping at bay". So they'll tree it, and they'll try and get it to stay and circle just out of reach of the bear and try and get it to stay in one spot. Dogs and people have been together for centuries. However it happened when people first domesticated dogs, that's why they did it. They did it for a reason—because dogs were helpful. Either for protection or for hunting and it even continues today. Then you get into the whole thing about different dogs. You've got beagles that aren't worth anything for hunting because the hunting has been genetically bred out of them so you have to be very particular about where you get your dogs from for hunting.

MS: You train them yourself?

MM: Yup. This is the first successful training adventure I've had.

MS: How long does it take to train a dog?

MM: They say they're at their prime in three years as far as when they're going to be the best. He just turned a year now. He's still pretty good. They like to chase about anything and he really likes rabbits, but we're trying to teach him not to chase after deer. That's the hard part. I'm really worried about that. He's getting better. If I yell at him really loud if you get off on a deer track or something like that, then he'll usually quit.

MS: So what are you worried about him chasing a deer?

MM: Because deer run for miles. That's how you lose your dog. Exactly. Plus you can tell by their bark, by what type of bark or whine he's making as far as what he's trailing so you can tell right away. Beagles are good dogs, and we just got him this spring. A friend of mine breeds beagles and he just breeds a certain style of beagle. It's the type that's got really big ears, and looks like an English style of dog where they're real stalky with real big ears. They're cute looking. You see a lot of different types where the head might be real tiny and the body real big and vice versa so you try and look for different colorations and different proportions and sizes.

Rabbit hunting, that's what's in season now, it's the end of February.

MS: And there's a spring turkey season?

MM: Spring turkey season and we also have a fall turkey season. The spring turkey season is the last week of April and first two weeks of May. That's for gobblers only, and you can kill two. I haven't killed a turkey in years because they're very hard to get. They're tough and they're a bird. You know a bird has a brain as big as your fingernail, but they have very keen senses. A lot of things that you hunt, like turkeys and rabbits, they're at the bottom of the food chain so they have a lot of senses that enable them to stay alive. Turkeys have extremely good eyesight and hearing. In other words if you're sitting in the woods and you're three or four hundred yards, or a quarter mile away from a turkey and you hear it gobbling—if you use your turkey call and call to him, he knows exactly where you're at. If they're looking for a hen to breed with (that's what you're trying to do is imitate it) that's when it's kind of fun because it's very exciting as far as their gobbling and they display and do their courtship rituals and stuff like that when you're calling them because they think that they are coming in to a hen. If you're lucky enough to fool them. They're very wise. They know exactly where you're at when you're calling, and that's part of the challenge—getting them to come in. You're imitating a hen to come in. So I've worked a lot of turkeys, which means I've called to them and had them come in, but not close enough to shoot.

MS: How close do they have to get?

MM: Inside of forty yards. Really it should be inside of thirty yards because you can only use a shotgun in Ohio. With a shot it is close range, whereas like West Virginia and Pennsylvania they can use rifles and they could be four hundred yards away. That wouldn't be a challenge. Anybody can get four hundred yards from a turkey. That wouldn't be as much fun to do because hunting is the whole activity. It's the whole thing; the getting up, to the calling, to the excitement of the hunt, and the whole bit. Actually the killing at the very end is the anticlimactic point because it's done and it's over with. Anybody that hunts, that's it. It's done and it's over with. That's the whole bit is the chase. Different types of hunting—like rabbit hunting—that's a social event and a lot of deer hunting and pheasant hunting and things like that. Those are like social events with either your family—usually you hunt with family or friends. Very seldom do you go out with people you don't know. A lot of that has to do with just safety. If I'm out hunting with somebody that I've never hunted with, I'm paranoid about getting shot. You have better chance of getting in a car accident going to where you're hunting at than you do getting shot, but the problem is you don't know those people. You don't know how safe they actually are when handling firearms. So it takes me a while to loosen up when I'm going with somebody new because I worry about that. I don't want to have that happen to me. It's usually a social event. When the dogs chasing a rabbit, that's when you stand around and talk. Same thing with deer hunting, like deer drives when the guys get together, and pheasant hunting or duck hunting when you're sitting there waiting for ducks to fly in or something like that. It's a social activity. You can set a lot of business deals. I know people that that's what they do. They have hunting leases for the business, and if the people they're doing business with hunt then that's where they do their business at. A lot of families, especially for rural America, Thanksgiving is a traditional family day. You get together and that's a traditional day to go hunting. That is one of the busiest days of the year for hunting, is Thanksgiving Day. You get extended family and everybody comes together and that's the time they go out together. So they go out rabbit hunting or something usually on that day. It's a pretty big event as far as you get a lot of quality time with your kids or with your friends and things like that.

MS: Do most people hunt on their own land around here?

MM: Yes. Most people do. There's a lot of people in Ohio that don't have to get permission to be there so they go to public hunting areas. We have about 1,600 acres of public hunting area in the state. In Knox Co. there's about 900 acres of water that you can hunt on as far as duck hunting and things like that. Other than that most of the county is private property. If they own the property they hunt on their own of course, but if you live in Mt. Vernon and you don't own property you have to get permission.

So you've got duck and goose hunting. That varies from setting decoys out in the water and having a boat and sloshing around in the mud and all that stuff to laying in a cornfield. With geese you lay in a cornfield and you just listen for geese in the distance and you lay around in the field talking to each other. Messing around until the geese come. Then you call to them and hopefully they'll come in. It's all the same, just different things. It's all got it's own flavor. Some people like to rabbit hunt, some people like to goose and duck hunt, some people like to deer hunt. To be successful at all of them is really hard. I'm kind of like a jack-of-all-trades when it comes to that. I can go rabbit hunting and I can get rabbits. Turkey hunting is what I struggle with, that's the hard one. They're so finicky turkeys are. Whereas Canada geese—if you put a turkey and goose together—the turkey's a much smarter animal than a goose. Geese are pretty stupid.

MS: So what's the most popular thing to—

MM: Deer. Deer are the number one thing in the state of Ohio. In Knox Co. all the schools are off school except for Mt. Vernon for opening day of deer gun season. In a lot of states it's that way. I know Pennsylvania's that way, and all the rural parts of the state. They usually take advantage of that and have their teacher conferences that day so the teacher have a meeting that day. So the whole county is basically off school except for Mt. Vernon. That's a lot, and you see that. You see a lot of kids out hunting. Knox Co. is changing. Knox Co. is becoming a suburban county. So eventually that will probably change. It's nice to see the kids if they're parents are willing take them out...it's nice to see that. That's time with their family.

MS: Do kids have to go out with their parents, or can they go out alone?

MM: If you're under sixteen you're not allowed to be out by yourself.

MS: But sixteen and over...

MM: Sixteen and over you can be by yourself, but under sixteen you can't. That varies from state to state. Some states you can't even hunt deer until you're seventeen or eighteen. Some states you're not allowed to be by yourself until you're like eighteen. It just varies from state to state. In Ohio if you're under sixteen you have to have adult supervision.

MS: Another thing I was curious about is just the places that you go. Do people have favorite places if they don't hunt on their own land...or even if they do?

MM: Yeah, because that's the key to being successful is you look for good habitat. Like with rabbits, rabbits like brushy areas. I have our best success if you go to woods that you been clear cut and then they're about three to ten years old. They're clear-cut with a bunch of multiflora rose and raspberries and blackberry brambles that have grown up in those woods. Then on the bottom part you'll have a little grass as far as the type of food that rabbits eat. The thicker the cover, or the thicker the rose patch, in the winter when there's a lot of snow and it's real cold. When there's snow on the ground rabbits eat the bark. They eat the bark of young trees, and multiflora rose, and blackberries. They just eat the bark around the edge along the bottom. You have to look for the perfect type of habitat if you're going to be successful.

If you want pheasants you look for grassy fields next to agricultural fields. So you'd go out and look for ten, or fifteen, or twenty acres CRP fields which are just set aside with the farm program. It's just thick grass because that's pheasant's best habitat. Of course they eat a lot of agriculture, so like corn and stuff like that to find food. So that's where you look for them.

Deer, there are different parts of the county that traditionally just have more deer because it's just better habitat as far as places for the deer to hide. Certain parts of the county have bigger deer as far as

antler size. For whatever reason there's a little bit better nutrition as far as the fertility of the soil and it usually grows bigger and better things. Certain parts of the county are traditionally better. Knox Co. is one of the better counties in the state for trophy-size whitetail deer as far as growing large antlers. It depends, but habitat is the key to everything. If you have good habitat, you have plenty of wildlife. If you have bad habitat you don't have any wildlife no matter what it is. I had a guy call me...I do a monthly call-in radio show. A guy called to ask me about that. He wants to go catch rabbits and then release them. That's what he wants to do because he doesn't have any on his farm. He's got deer, he's got turkeys, and he's got squirrels. Those three species automatically tell you what type of habitat he's got. He doesn't have the habitat for rabbits so to go catch rabbits and let them go is useless. What he needs to do is create rabbit habitat. Yeah, that's the key is looking for a place. If you go somewhere where they don't have the right habitat for what you're hunting, you're not going to see it.

MS: I imagine that since it's your job you know where all the best places for everything are around here. So do people call you to find that out, or do they just wander around until they find their own places?

MM: People do call but I don't tell them. What happens is that people are lazy. Like a guy from Cleveland will call, "Can you get me a hunting spot for pheasants?" No. You can come down and drive around the Centerburg or Brandon area of the county and drive around and ask landowners yourself. I'll tell them what part of the counties to go look for that type of critter but as far as setting somebody up a place to hunt, no. I do that for friends or family or somebody like that, or I might ask somebody that I know where to hunt after that but as far as people in general no. People need to spend the time to get out and look. That happens. Locally, I have local guys ask, "Where are the pheasants?" You need to look on the other side of the county. It's like deer gun season. You'll talk to people during deer gun season that never see a deer. Usually if that's the case, they just don't have a clue what they're doing. It's like anything else.

MS: Are most people like that? They won't share the specific places that they hunt?

MM: Right. They don't share specific places because in Ohio the hunting is kind of competitive to a certain extent because there are so many people and so few good places to hunt that people protect those places. It's not uncommon—like a really good duck hunting spot that my friend's got in Lincoln Co.—every Christmas the guy gets a honey-baked ham and whenever the guy calls for anything Bill is down there helping him out. So people are really protective because they go the extra mile to treat the landowners pretty good to make sure they keep that place from somebody else that could come in there and take it away from them. There are just so few good places like that, and it's a fantastic spot. For the state of Ohio it's probably the best place in the entire state that you can hunt. Each time you go there you're going to see three or four thousand ducks of many different species. Plain and simple. It's just a ten acres button-bush swamp out in the middle of some fields. Bill used to live up near Akron where he worked at, in Lake Co. which is just east of Cleveland. I'd worked down here for twelve years, and I'd always known that that was a swamp back there but I never bothered. Duck hunting doesn't like thrill me the most so I don't go out of my way for that. I always knew there was a swamp back there, but I never bothered to ask the guy for permission. As soon as Bill got down here and saw that, well he was right in there because he loves duck hunting more than anything else. Usually I go duck hunting with him. We trade, because he's got good duck hunting spots and goose hunting spots in Lincoln Co. and then I have good rabbit hunting spots and deer hunting spots in this county so we trade back and forth as what we're going to be doing. But as far as people that don't see anything, they don't know what they're doing. Most hunting you pick up by other people. As far as your parents, grandparents, or friends or somebody who's taking you hunting. The next thing of course is that you can go get books, or videotapes, or that kind of stuff. Experience is the best teacher when it comes to that.

MS: Most people learn from their family?

MM: Yeah, for the most part family and friends.

MS: And you run courses too?

MM: Yeah. We have hunter safety classes. All first time hunters are required to take a hunter safety class...well, all first time hunters that are required to purchase a hunting license. So on your own property, if you never hunt off your property, you don't have to take a hunter safety class. We recommend that you do, but if you never go off your property you don't have to. Because to purchase a hunting license for the first time requires that you take a hunter safety class. So we do have those classes. Those are taught by volunteer instructors for the most part. We have about 700 to 820 instructors in the state that voluntarily hold those classes. There is a variety of methods. We've got a class where you can go sit in it for like ten to fifteen hours if you want. Then you can do a home-study class where they send you a workbook. You study, fill out all the questions in the workbook, and the first Saturday of each month (like here in Knox Co. you go to the 4H center) you do hands on about how to safely handle guns. You go over all the types of actions of guns. You go over ammunition, how to safely cross fences, and do different types of things like that. Then you do a review and you take a test. Then if you're eighteen or older you can test out. So you go to any district wildlife office, or you can show up on the test night of a hunter safety class and take the test. They've tried to make it a lot easier on people to be able to take the test. What they're looking for is just the fact that you have some basic understanding of how you should hunt safely. Since hunter education started as mandatory back in like the mid to late 70s hunting has gotten safer, and safer, and safer. It gets a lot of hype at certain times of the year, especially deer gun season, because most of the accidents that occur happen during that time period. You're looking at 550,000 people out hunting and you might have six people get injured during that whole week. It's 99.96% of the people that have a safe trip, but that one week it really hits the press. It's that week and that's it. Overall I mean hunting is safer than fishing as far as serious injuries.

MS: How is that possible?

MM: People get hooked. They hook themselves in the head, in the eye, and that's what it is. Boating is a recreational sport, and hunting is safer than that. It just varies. But, hunter safety classes have made it that way because before that there were a lot more injuries around the country. It first started out at voluntary. The National Rifle Association taught it, and then it became mandatory.

MS: Is a hunting license like a driver's license that you have to renew, or once you get it do you have it?

MM: You've got to buy one each year. You just have to go through the course once. Most of the hunting incidents are usually older people that were grandfathered into our safety class where there was some sort of wildlife violation that occurred when it happened. There's ten rules, but I can't remember all of them off the top of my head. I know what they are, but as far as saying how they're written...but basically there's ten guidelines for safe firearm handling. If everybody followed those ten guidelines there's no possible way for anything to get shot that shouldn't get shot. There's always one of those that get violated when somebody does something that they shouldn't have done. Usually there's a legal violation for the most part when things happen. Somebody's just being stupid for the most part. Occasionally an accident just happens, but not very often along the line.

MS: I was reading a transcript from an old interview that you did and you were talking about Knox Lake and you mentioned seeing an eagle's nest. People were getting worried about farming and being near the lake because of the eagle. Do you notice changes like that in the places that you hunt between the times that you go?

MM: Changes? Oh yeah. I usually hunt with other officers for the most part, guys I work with. We're close anyway because we work together, but we usually just extend that into going hunting and whatever else that is. Levi in Fairfield county, I don't know how many years he has but he can retire anytime he wants but he's not going to. He doesn't have a rabbit-hunting place in the whole Fairfield County that has a rabbit on it. He says there are no rabbits in Fairfield County. Fairfield County is a lot more suburbia than what Knox is and the agriculture is changing down there a lot quicker than up here. The extreme southeast corner of the county is very hilly, but the rest of it's pretty flat. So, the agriculture in suburbia has pushed things out and he's lost rabbit hunting spots. But then again, he goes back to the same places that he did thirty years ago and the habitat has changed. Seeing guys here in Knox County that have lived here their whole lives complain about no rabbits, or how they go hunting and they never see a rabbit. That's

because they hunt the same places. It's because the habitat changes, so where you hunted rabbits at twenty-five and thirty years ago has changed. Now you see turkeys, and deer, and things like that at those places. You just have to change. I've only been here five years, and we don't have a problem getting rabbits. Not at all. It's just because you have to look for good habitat. So things do change. At Knox Lake the habitat up there has changed greatly. Like the lake no longer supports a good pan-fish population because of siltation and agricultural run-off. The herbicides are still active a lot of times when they hit the water so it's killed off the weed beds in the lake. Because of the change in agriculture and the development for housing, there's a lot more siltation. So that increases the silt load, which smothers the eggs, which cuts back on the amount of light penetrating, which also cuts back on vegetation in the lake. So Knox Lake is no longer a good pan-fish lake because of that reason. So things change quite a bit, sometimes fast and sometimes slow. The eagle nest up there is still there. I think it's been there four years, or three years, and there's another eagle nest down in the county last year, and I found an eagle nest this past year in deer season. There's three eagle nests in the county now and that's all happened in four years.

MS: So most of these changes for the worst you are blaming on farming changes and people moving in?

MM: The biggest problem is urbanization, plain and simple. The number one problem is habitat for wildlife. If you have good habitat and you have good rules and regulations, then the wildlife will be here forever. But when you change things and don't create habitat or destroy habitat, it's gone. This is what's funny, and you'll get a kick out of this. Most people move to a rural environment because they want to escape crime and they want it to look nice, or they want to have trees, and they want to have wildlife. The first thing you do is you buy ten acres and you cut down everything and keep a lawn. Then you put chemicals down on the lawn. So you have this bare, green, monoculture of grass. Plant some geraniums, so ewes or something like that as far as around the foundation of the house, and then they stick a blue bird box up in the middle of the yard. That's their idea of wildlife habitat. That's what happens. They mow ten acres of grass, spent 1,000 or 1,500 dollars a year mowing grass. That doesn't make sense. Then, as soon as deer come up and eat the bushes they complain. Or a rabbit choose around the bottom of their apple tree they complain, yet they don't do anything to prevent that from happening. Or they're feeding birds. What happens when you do that, what you create is habitat for starlings and house sparrows, which are not a native species of wildlife to the country. So they're at the bird feeder, and then a cooper's hawk comes down and picks off a bird at the bird feeder so they call complaining about the cooper's hawk. Or they only want to feed birds. They don't want to feed squirrels and deer. Like in Apple Valley. If you put a bird feeder out in Apple Valley you're going to have raccoons, possums, and deer, and turkeys at your bird feeder. The deer will empty an entire bird feeder in a night so people complain about the deer eating the birdseed because they want to feed the birds. People in the country, we're very lazy and we get very species-specific about what we want. That's one of the problems with wildlife in this position. That half the people will only put up with so much wildlife, period. Once it goes over "this is no longer fun anymore" then it changes. It's like with deer. Thirty-five years ago there were no deer in Ohio. The same with New Hampshire—very few deer. Of course you guys have moose up there now, and I remember there was a big controversy about having a moose hunt.

MS: Now they're everywhere.

MM: Exactly. Now there's a lot more people who would rather see a moose get shot probably to thin the population out. But then you still have some people that don't want that to happen, but those people are usually the people that aren't being impacted by what's going on for the most part. Wildlife is strange because you have to manage it for everybody. In Ohio it's managed for people that hunt, and fish, and trap, and then of course the people that don't hunt, or fish, or trap. But all the bills for wildlife in the state are paid for by people who hunt, fish, and trap. Our agency is completely funded by hunting and fishing license dollars and then the excise tax on hunting and fishing equipment. We're providing a lot of services for people that don't contribute to pay the bills which is a struggle sometimes. No, wildlife habitat's the key. With continued urbanization we lose lots of habitat and lots of wildlife. You'll still have some species of wildlife, but whatever is specific to that type of habitat. Canada geese for example, the populations 40 or 60 years ago there were no Canada geese. They thought the Canada goose was going to become extinct on this continent. Then they come with ways of increasing the goose population. Basically using restrictive seasons, and at times they taught geese to next on barrels out in the water. They

put barrels on stilts out on the lake to where raccoons and stuff like that couldn't get them. Canada geese are grazers. All they are is a cow with feathers. So you have a lake or a pond, and you have short mowed grass that's fertilized to keep it short and green, and that's all a Canada goose requires. Then you have EPA regulations with parking lots and housing developments having to slow down their stormwater run-off so they put in these retention ponds. An ideal pond to a person is mowed, short grass around it, and no grass in the pond. It's an ideal place for a Canada goose. So what happens is Canada geese can have eight, ten, or twelve goslings a year. So before you know it you start off with two, and in ten years you have 150 on the pond and they poop all over the place. So that's where we've gone with Canada geese. Like with deer, and beaver, and a lot of species of wildlife that were actually almost extinct on this continent, they're brought back to population levels that are above where people want them. That's because we've changed. You used to want to see deer, you used to want to see turkeys, and now people complain. With some counties (I lived in Columbus for four years before I came up here), even in the city of Columbus there are people that live there that never really leave Columbus. I lived right near the fairgrounds where you have a nice neighborhood and a bad neighborhood. There were a lot of kids in the bad neighborhood that never a live deer unless they saw it on TV or at the zoo. I think of New York City, and Chicago, and LA—big cities. People grow up there and they don't see anything like that. It's weird, and that's the whole thing with us as wildlife management. Most of the voting block, people that control whether we hunt or not, live in the city. Those people don't understand anything about hunting, or fishing, or trapping.

MS: Is any of the public hunting land around here conserved or protected somehow?

MM: The Department of Natural Resources has 11 or 12 divisions. We each have a different mission and a different goal. Ours is to promote hunting, fishing, and trapping, and to manage wildlife resources for everybody in the state of Ohio. So we have state wildlife areas that are public hunting and fishing areas. They're also used for hiking, and we have a couple campgrounds. Things like that. A lot of bird watching. A lot of wildlife related activity takes place. We're not the place you go to go skiing. None of our properties allowing skiing, or snowmobiling, or anything like that. We don't even have any horse trails. You're allowed nothing but foot traffic, and that's it. Our purpose is wildlife, period. It's to be disturbed as little as possible as for those types of activities. Woodbury Wildlife Area which is a half-hour east of here, there's 20,000 acres there that we own that as long as you follow simple rules (you're not allowed to camp in certain areas, no fires, certain times of the night you're not allowed to be there, things like that) you can go do whatever you want. You can go for a hike, pick berries, look for mushrooms, go do whatever you want. We manage those areas for certain species of wildlife. That would be considered mostly for grouse, deer, turkeys, and things like that. For some small game they have management plants where they keep succession set back for certain fields to continue certain types of habitat. Deer do require brushy areas because deer are browsers, do they need to eat small trees and shrubs and things like that especially in the wintertime since there's no agriculture around. So they'll have a management plan for the area to keep it maybe 60% woods, 10% brush, 5% open land, and things like that. We do manage those areas just like that. Here in Knox County we've got the Kokosing Wildlife Areas which has 1,400 acres, and it's managed for farmland-type game so its got large fields. 100-150 acre fields of open switch grass for permanent cover for grassland-type species wildlife. We also rope-taped fields for agriculture-type production which also provides food value for wildlife, and also keeps the succession of timber and trees cut back. There's wood lots on the property and things like that. There's 154-acre lake there also. It provides a variety of wildlife for farmland-type wildlife. You've got a lot of pheasants and rabbits, fox, squirrels, you've got some deer and turkey but if you go to Woodbury you've got a lot more deer and turkey because it's just managed differently because of the habitat. See how we manage each area we own for wildlife for a specific species of wildlife. We've got some areas of the state that we manage just for endangered species like Killdeer Plains Wildlife Area which is Winedot county about an hour west of here. They manage areas of that specifically for—because it's a lot of wet meadows—for misoga rattlesnakes, eastern plains garter snakes, and things like that.

MS: There are snakes in Ohio?

MM: Yup. We've got misogas which are about this big, and then some timber rattlesnakes, but very few. They're both endangered species so there's not very many. There's not any here, so if you're afraid of snakes don't worry about them. No one that has claimed to have had a poisonous snake in the county has

ever shown one to me. It's always something non-poisonous. Those types of snakes just don't like being around people. They manage areas up there specifically for them. We work cooperatively with the Cleveland, Cincinnati, Columbus zoos, the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, Cleveland zoo, for managing those species of wildlife. They'll go out and catch those things and they they'll breed them in the zoo, raise the young to a certain age, and then we'll take them out and let them go. Things like that increase the number of young that are surviving in the wild. We manage all of our areas. We have private lands biologists that will assist landowners with managing their farms if they request help and all kinds of different things. There's a lot that goes on.

MS: I do have one last question, which is more of a curiosity question. Is it really true that if people hit a deer or something in their car that you can take that home with you?

MM: Yeah, if you get a receipt for it.

MS: Do people really do that?

MM: Oh yeah. I don't think that they hit them on purpose, although there's a few people that do but not that many. All you have to do is just cut away the bad parts where it's really bruised really bad. You get a receipt from me, the sheriff's office, or the highway patrol. What happens if you hit a deer you'll get all the hemorrhaging with all the blood in the muscle, and that does not taste very good. I guess if Polish there's Polish duck-blood soup or something, but if you like that type of food it'd be fine. Most people cut that part out. Or say you break a bone. When you break a bone it splinters so you get all those little bone fragments all through the tissue, all through the muscle so that type of stuff you'd get rid of. That happens a lot because Knox County is the number six counties in the state for total number of roadkill deer a year. They hit right about 600 deer a year on average in the county...just that are reported.

MS: Do people have to report it?

MM: No. Only if you cause more than \$300 damage to your car. You're supposed report it, but not everybody does. Most insurance companies require an accident report be turned in for auto insurance so they'd have to report it. A lot of time people hit a deer and it runs off. Sometimes the deer's fine, and sometimes they're not. Deer are pretty hearty. You can hit them with a car, and you can shoot them, and they'll still live. But you catch a wild deer and put it in a pen and it dies. It dies from stress. They can't stand to be caught and put in a pen. I just finally read an article about that. Most animals in zoos nowadays aren't from the wild, they're from other zoos where it's just a selective breeding that they'll continue to keep the population going. Some zoos will do it with the hope of reintroducing a wild species. You take a wild animal and coop it up, and that's bad. It causes stress and they die, just the same as us. Exact same thing as us. Wild animals are the same way. I just read an article by an animal rehabilitator that was talking about that. He was talking about euthanasia versus, say you get a red-tail hawk that has a broken wing or is blind in one eye and you can never release it into the wild. The suggestion is is it better to keep that animal as basically a show bird or is it better to just go ahead and euthanize it? She talking about the whole concept that this things has been in the wild it's entire life, and it's like putting it in prison. As far as actual overall health of the animal what's better for it?

MS: What was the verdict?

MM: She left it open at the end. Mine is it depends. Some animals can adapt to that type of thing and some can't. Like a deer can't. You take a wild deer and put it in a pen and that's bad. We just arrested a guy for doing that. Well, we're going to arrest him tonight. We already interviewed him. He raises deer commercially, so he's got semi-tame deer that are pen-raised and are domesticated. He's been taking a dart gun and illegally taking deer out of the wild and putting them in his pen. We're going to go down there tonight and take those deer out of his pen. That's bad because the deer are going crazy in there. They can't stand it. Some animals, some birds, you do that. Then again people only care about what they can see, feel, and touch. If you show a person a picture of a rabbit or something, he doesn't care as much as if you take the rabbit in. So when you're doing programs and you need to promote things you do need to have the live things to show. I watched Planet of the Apes last night. Planet of the Apes III where they went back in

time where the apes were considered stupid and it was kind of tables turned. It was kind of funny because it is that. Because the apes treated people how the people treated apes, and that's kind of an odd concept if you think about it. I think that kind of stuff all the time.

Does that answer all your questions? Was that what you wanted?

MS: Thank you very much for all your help, this was great!