



Field Notes

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission sworn personnel are fully constituted police officers with the authority to enforce all laws of the state, not just those relating to resource conservation.

Do what you've got to do

Investigator Eddie Gatlin directed Officers Willie Mailoto, Andy Maltais and Pete Rockwell to a PWC that was being operated by an obviously impaired operator. The operator refused all requests for any afloat sobriety tasks, telling the officers, "I know what I've got to do; you do what you've got to do." They did, booking him into the local jail for operating while impaired.

Gator getter

Officer Lee Birge responded to a call of an alligator trapped in a storm drain. Fearing the alligator might escape when children were in the area, Officer Birge climbed on his hands and knees through a discharge pipe to reach the reptile. To the neighborhood's relief, he was able to capture the alligator and relocate it.

No-so-light fingered

Lt. Adams and Officer Hensley assisted the Sumter County Sheriff's Office with a burglary investigation. A man broke into a shed containing permitted venomous reptiles and an alligator. Upon taking several snakes and attempting to take the gator, he was bitten on his hand by one of the snakes. He left the scene and went to the local Wal-Mart where store employees contacted the sheriff's office due to the subject's condition. The man was transported to a hospital, and charges were filed. The owner of the shed was issued a citation for possession of an alligator without a permit.

Hear the whistle blow

Officer Jeff Gier was on patrol near the Lake Woodruff National Wildlife Refuge and came upon a large tree down across a busy railway. He contacted the rail company, CSX, and explained the situation. CSX radioed a train on its way, which Officer Gier could hear coming. He then moved down the line to a safe location. The large freight train slowed, but was not able to stop

in time to avoid a collision. The tree was pushed down the track and wedged under the locomotive. Officer Gier helped the engineers remove the tree and CSX sent a crew to inspect the train and rails before the line was reopened.

What a water hazard

Officers Rick Sloan and Loren Lowers responded to a complaint of a person being bitten by an alligator at a golf club. A man was retrieving his golf ball from a pond when an alligator bit and grabbed his right hand and forearm. The victim was taken to a local hospital where he was treated for his injuries. A local alligator trapper responded, and officers helped remove a 10-foot, 11-inch alligator from the club's pond.

The young and the stranded

Officer Johnson and Reserve Officer Wise observed a man driving recklessly, fishtailing and doing donuts on a clay and sand road. When the officers got the car stopped, they saw two adult passengers and a 9-month-old baby. The baby's parents were in the car and told Officer Johnson they were stupid to allow their friend to drive like that. The man was booked for reckless driving and child endangerment and Officer Johnson later contacted Child Protective Services. Before the officers left the scene, they assisted a stranded motorist. His car ran out of gas and he walked up to them, asking for help. Officer Johnson had gasoline in a can in the back of his truck. Before he left, the young man commented that his father was in prison and his family always looked at cops in a negative way. He said it was really something for an officer to help him and he really appreciated it.

Get 'em feeding

FWC officers participated in a plainclothes detail, "Operation Get 'Em Feeding" created in response to a Wildlife Alert complaint of airboat tour guides feeding alligators while conducting public tours. Three airboat tour operators

were observed, photographed and video-recorded feeding alligators. The operators were cited for the unlawful act of feeding alligators. One was additionally charged with molesting an alligator for physically handling it. These actions put the passengers, tour guides and the general public in jeopardy because feeding alligators trains them to associate humans with a food source.

Dinner and arrest

Officer Ray Woolrich stopped for dinner at a restaurant when he saw two suspicious men walk into the bathroom and then leave. Officer Woolrich finished his dinner and went outside, where he was approached by three panic-stricken victims who had just been car-jacked at gunpoint. Officer Woolrich obtained suspect information and relayed it to FHP and Martin County Sheriff's Office. The suspects' descriptions matched that of the two suspicious men Officer Woolrich had seen earlier. The sheriff's office knew the suspects, one of whom was a serious, habitual, juvenile offender. They advised Officer Woolrich that his presence probably had thwarted a robbery attempt of the restaurant.

Gator greetings

Officer Eddie Brown and K-9 Grady were on routine patrol checking fishermen. Officer Brown saw two men cast-netting in fresh water and looked in a bucket in the back of their truck. A 10-inch alligator hatchling poked its head out of the bucket to greet him. Officer Brown received consent to search the rest of the vehicle. K-9 Grady noticed a tool box in the truckbed. When it was opened, officers Brown and Greg Louque discovered a 3.5-foot-long alligator tail wrapped in a towel. The men were issued citations, the hatchling was released alive and the alligator tail was seized as evidence.