

MASSACHUSETTS WILDLIFE

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**iNaturalist, Bobcat Cache,
Bird Banding Lab Marks 100 Years,
Junior Conservation Camp**

MASSACHUSETTS WILDLIFE

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In this time of COVID-19, you can practice social distancing, connect to a worldwide network of wildlife enthusiasts, and contribute to citizen-science by using the iNaturalist app on your next walk in the woods.

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A photography assignment at the Massachusetts Junior Conservation Camp brings camp memories back into focus for this alumnus and reveals a curriculum that is still providing valuable skills to youth after 70 years.

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On the Cover: A bobcat feeds on a cached white-tailed deer in Hubbardston. This unusual behavior was captured by MassWildlife's late photographer Bill Byrne during his last long-term field project. See page 12.

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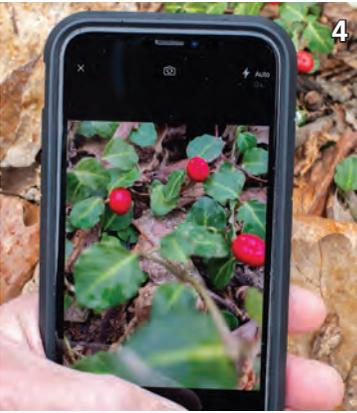


Photo by Troy Gipps/MassWildlife



Photo by Bill Byrne/MassWildlife



Photo by Troy Gipps/MassWildlife



Photo by Troy Gipps/MassWildlife

THROUGH THE LENS: MASSACHUSETTS JUNIOR CONSERVATION CAMP



STORY AND PHOTOS BY TROY GIPPS



The day started with a slow drive down a bumpy road. Dust rose up behind my truck as I passed by the dining hall, then the campsites. Then my right front wheel bounced off that giant rock. I instinctively grabbed for my camera, which had been resting on the passenger seat. I grasped the lens barrel in mid-flight and bounced back down on my seat. Equipment crisis narrowly averted. Driving even slower, I wound down the remainder of the dirt road to the shooting ranges. I stepped out and the thump of my closing door was met by the word "Pull!" and a shotgun blast a

split-second later. An orange clay pigeon turned to dust in front of one of three wooden shootinghouses. The instructor congratulated the smiling camper for her excellent shot. With the breech now open and the firearm empty, the camper safely returned the shotgun to the gun rack as her peers waited for their chance to shoot. I walked up, with camera in hand, to find that the shooting instructor was Jon Green, the Director of Education and Training for the Gun Owners' Action League of Massachusetts. Time jumped backward 35 years as we shook hands.



It was an unexpected reunion between two Massachusetts Junior Conservation Camp (MJCC) alumni. Jon and I had bunked in the same tent in 1983 when we attended the MJCC at 4-H Camp Marshall in Spencer. Now the camp is conducted at the H.A. Moses Scout Reservation in Russell. The Scout property has a beautiful waterfront, dining facility, medical lodge, classroom buildings, and a variety of shooting ranges and sports facilities.

As we briefly caught up, the first of many fuzzy camp memories rose to the forefront of my mind. I recalled a handful of camp graduation photos my mother had taken that survived the passage of time tucked in family albums. I began to see our faces; my fellow campers and I leaning into each other as those formative moments were caught on film. We proudly displayed the trophies we had won for placing in the top three for various camp events, including the shooting sports; we introduced our new friends to our families, and felt both the pride of camp completion and the weight of impending goodbyes. But mostly, as Jon and I reminisced, the memories of those friendships, from so many years ago, and the general feeling of the camp



experience took shape in my mind's eye.

Time has a way of muting the past, but in the days that followed, while on assignment for the magazine, I visually immersed myself in the present-day MJCC through the lens of my camera. Through that creative process, old memories snapped back into sharp focus and I could clearly see a connection between my experience as a camper and the trajectory of my personal and professional life. The camp was both a proving ground for the outdoor skills I had learned from my

father and an opportunity to build on those skills alongside my peers. It also deepened my understanding of the natural world and my place within it.

Camp Curriculum

The focus on outdoor skills and conservation responsibilities continues at camp today. During its one two-week overnight session in August, the camp introduces 120 13–17-year-old boys and girls to the ethical concepts and knowledge essential to a lifetime of properly enjoying our natural resources and the leisure activities that depend on their careful stewardship. Outdoor skills subjects include archery;





basic camping; fly- and spin-cast fishing; map and compass; riflery; and shotgun, muzzleloader, and handgun shooting. Conservation topics include forest-fire control, forestry, and fisheries and wildlife management—subjects taught by MassWildlife and Department of Conservation and Recreation professionals. The Environmental Police teach the state-certified Small Boating Safety Course, which in this case includes an on-the-water boating component that is not available at any other such course. The state Basic Hunter Education course is taught by MassWildlife staff and volunteer instructors. Campers who previously passed Basic Hunter Education are given an opportunity to learn other skills. Additional classes include plants and their uses, wilderness survival, navigation with GPS and compass, and field-to-table fish and game preparation. Evening programs include demonstrations and skill sessions such as wild turkey calling, presentations on natural resource careers, birds of prey, and a talent night. Elective programs have included a river fishing trip, hiking trip, introduction to SCUBA,

and Bowhunter Education. Campers also have ample opportunities to participate in traditional summer camp activities such as swimming, fishing, boating, and volleyball. If you haven't noticed, the words "course" and "class" are purposeful. This camp is all about learning, practicing, and supporting one another in a fun and friendly setting. Campers with a desire to learn will thrive in this hands-on atmosphere.

The camp's resident counselors and junior counselors—many of whom are camp alumni—are experienced outdoorsmen and -women who each embody a strong commitment to conservation and outdoor recreation. Each year, a select group of "super campers" are invited to return to camp the following year to mentor their peers. Certified lifeguards and medical personnel are also on staff.

The MJCC operates as its own entity as a 501(c)(3) non-profit. It has significant support in the form of instruction and guidance from MassWildlife, the Department of Conservation and Recreation, the Environmental Police, and the Gun





Owner's Action League. Various outdoor groups and companies have provided equipment and other support for the camp.

Camp History

Conservation camp has a long history, beginning way back in 1949 when a non-profit group, Wildlife Conservation, Inc., held the first camp for 20 boys at the Swann State Forest in Monterey. MassWildlife was actively involved in the program from its inception, offering instruction in a variety of outdoor skills and curriculum guidance. Recently, we heard from a camp alumnus who attended that very first session. He was pleased to hear the camp was still in operation, though it's very different from his experience in the Berkshires so long ago. By 1961, the camp moved to a larger facility at 4-H Camp Marshall in Spencer and remained in place until 1994. From 1995 to 2001, it relocated to Scout camps Cachalot and Child in southeastern Massachusetts. In 2003, the camp moved back west to the Chesterfield Scout Reservation for a number of years and has operated for the

last decade at Camp Moses in Russell.

It wasn't until the late 1970s that the MJCC enrolled girls. Now about 35%–40% of campers are girls. One camper in that first group of girls recalled that her experience at camp provided her with career aspirations to become a game warden. Sure enough, she has served for two decades with the Environmental Police, rising to the level of captain. Other campers have also gone on to careers with the Environmental Police, MassWildlife, or the Department of Conservation and Recreation. Alumni campers include past MassWildlife directors and fish and wildlife biologists, Fisheries and Wildlife Board members (some of whom taught classes at camp or were on the camp leadership team), legislators, a state secretary of the environment, and other conservation leaders in Massachusetts.

Tuition and Scholarships

Tuition for the 12-day session is \$1,000 per camper, covering lodging, food, and most activities. A few elective activities may have additional costs in the





\$20–\$40 range. Over 85% of campers are supported by scholarships provided by individuals, sporting clubs, and civic organizations. Obtaining a camp scholarship is easy. In most cases, a potential camper need only write a letter to the sponsor group on why he or she would like to attend camp. To inquire about sponsoring a camper, working as a camp staff member, or to make a direct donation, visit juniorconservationcamp.org.

Through the Lens

As I moved through the curriculum, following groups of campers on those hot and humid August days, I witnessed the enthusiastic camp staff imparting lifetimes of outdoor knowledge in a hands-on, experienced-based learning environment. Although some campers had considerable experience in some of the subject areas, others were only beginners and were making a connection with nature and these skill sets for the first time. It was quite clear, however, that a sincere interest in learning was the only prerequisite. A consistent message of outdoor safety, especially with regard

to shooting and boating sports, and the need to respect our natural resources, pervaded all instruction.

I also spent some time with the campers and their counselors in their living and dining areas to capture images of camp life. It brought me right back to 1983. The campers still sleep in two-person tents—just like Jon and I had—on cots set atop raised platforms. As I moved through the campsites taking photographs, a few campers waiting for the dinner bell were lazily swinging in hammocks strung between trees. The murmur of lively camp conversations filled the forest. You would never have guessed these kids had just met a few days to a week earlier. Just as I remembered from my experience, this camp is as much about establishing long-term friendships and having fun as it is about building outdoor skills and instilling a deep appreciation for the natural world.

I walked back up the dirt road to the dining hall. When I pushed open the doors the clamor was just as I remembered it, complete with the rush of campers back





into the food line when the magic word “Seconds!” was called out by the head counselor.

As I tap out this sentence on my keyboard, having just surpassed the 1,700-word mark, I pause for a moment, lean back in my office chair and decide that rather than typing another 1,700 words, I’ll let my photographs tell the rest of this story.

Clearly, the Massachusetts Junior Conservation Camp is worth supporting. I know it helped me become the conservation-minded person I am today, and I think it can help a boy or girl in your community to do the same.

At the end of April, the MJCC Board of Directors will be deliberating about the prospects of the August 2–14, 2020, camp session. With the effect of COVID-19 on summer camps still uncertain, there are no guarantees, but I sincerely hope that campers will be having a great time connecting with the outdoors and one another this year. If not, there is always next year!

CALLING ALL MJCC ALUMNI!

We would like to publish some memorable camp moments in a future issue of the magazine and on the Massachusetts Junior Conservation Camp web and social media sites! If you attended the MJCC we want to hear from you! Send photos if you have them and let us know how the camp experience shaped your life. You can reach us at mass.wildlife@mass.gov.



1983, MJCC, 4-H CAMP MARSHALL, SPENCER

About the Author



Troy Gipps is the editor and art director of Massachusetts Wildlife. He plans to send his two sons to the MJCC when they are old enough to attend.



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Paddlers Overboard! Budding canoeists take a purposeful spill as part of the Small Boat Safety Course at the Massachusetts Junior Conservation Camp (MJCC). Moments later, they were practicing the proper technique for emptying and re-entering their boat under the guidance of an Environmental Police instructor. Designed for teens aged 13–17 who want to try new outdoor activities, improve their current skills, or meet other like-minded peers, the MJCC offers a hands-on curriculum focused on outdoor skills, conservation education, and ethics to girls and boys. Shooting sports, fishing, forestry, wildlife, and other outdoor subjects are taught by experienced outdoor enthusiasts and natural resource professionals. See page 30 to discover the fun, friendly, and supportive environment campers experience while connecting with the outdoors and one another. Photo by Troy Gipps/MassWildlife

