

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF A GAME AGENT

By **BILLY K. JAMES**, *Wildlife Game Agent of the Law Enforcement Division, Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission*

The time is fast approaching when a Game Agent will be required to do and know more than simply finding and apprehending game law violators. As a matter of fact, many of us here are well aware of this already.

Progress, in the form of game management's new techniques; their proven success in the fields, woods and streams of all the states; demands that a game agent be equipped with a knowledge of new developments as they arise. The successful game agent must be able to contact the public and answer their questions, maintain good public relations, and display discretion and diplomacy in dealing with violators.

Violations and complaints of a serious nature are consistently being reduced in my area by efforts of our game agents to inform and educate our populace. Of course some persistent violators are only educated by paying a penalty for their indiscretions. These are people who do not recognize that the game or fish in their region are public property and not solely for their benefit and gratification. These "game hogs" and market hunters are only repressed by good, impartial prosecution!

The youth of our nation, properly informed by press, radio, television and ourselves when we encounter them in the field, are expected to support us in our program to improve hunting and fishing by careful management and sensible enforcement.

Nearly all of our adult citizens, after being informed of our aims, will not willingly violate the game laws. Our ability to communicate to these people and explain our goals will greatly influence their attitude, and gain their cooperation. Without this public cooperation, a game agent's activities assume wrong proportions. He finds himself in the role of an investigator more and more often with a proportionately smaller chance of success.

The modern Game Agent must be equipped to handle a share of his correspondence, reports and records. He should be able to take the initiative in dealing with situations as they arise, make decisions, and display a willingness to assume responsibility. This is necessary because of his remoteness, generally, to any higher authority. In your district, *you* are the representative of your department, and the public sees in *you* alone a representation of the department. Of course, basically, an agent is familiar with the terrain and probable areas of violation in his district. It also helps if you have some idea of who is likely to violate the game laws; but even more essentially, you must have developed an all-round knowledge of conditions and familiarity with them.

Since all Game Agents are expected to be well versed in the game laws and legal procedures of their state; I will not dwell on this, except to say that an Agent's responsibility does not end with knowing the law. He should be familiar with the local application of these laws and follow through on the cases he submits to the courts, to determine if he has fulfilled all his obligations to the department, *and* the citizen..

In the State of Louisiana, we have recently ENACTED a boat registration law, designed to promote safer boating, and establish ownership and responsibility of boat operators. This law is essentially the same as the Federal Boating Act, which you are probably familiar with in your state. We have selected an outstanding group of agents and equipped them with high-speed boats and vehicles to enforce this Act and contact the public. As of this time, these agents have already displayed great enthusiasm and ability in their jobs. They have shown remarkable success in effecting good public relations, educating the public to the new law and its ramifications, and giving material assistance to people in distress. We have aided the public in disaster situations, in searches for missing persons lost in our remote areas, accessible only to boats; and in reducing the number of accidents on our waterways. The men assigned to the Boat Registration section more than anyone else are responsible for the fine reception accorded us by the public. We only have ten such Agents for the whole state, which is comprised of sixty-four

parishes! Each Agent is thus responsible for a large district, usually six or seven parishes, or counties as you know them! It is well indicated that these men possess more than ordinary knowledge of the aforementioned attributes of a successful Agent. These men have sought responsibility, and displayed the ability to function without close supervision, relying instead on their own abilities.

Here is a case in point, and it happened to me not long ago. As we all know, there are many boaters whose feeling for the water is fear, when it should be respect. The safe boatman is the man who takes the necessary precautions before embarking. It's the overconfident boat operator who neglects these safety procedures and invites injury for himself and others.

Now in the aforementioned case, while I was working on one of our Louisiana lakes, I noticed a man and his wife were about to embark in a small boat with only one life preserver. I prevailed upon the pair to secure another one from the man at the wharf who rented such gear along with his boats. A short time later the small craft was rammed and sank in 12 feet of water. The wife, who couldn't swim a lick, had on her life preserver, rented for 25 cents, and was fished out of the lake by other boatmen. Now if this had happened before the small boat law they probably would have told me to "go fly a kite" and been at the bottom of the lake as a result. This just shows what good public relations and the confidence in the lawman will do.

If we are to retain in our Great American Heritage the fruits of our fields, streams and forests in number sufficient to enjoy their bounty, we must change and adapt our enforcement techniques as public attitude changes and we enter an era of game management designed to meet an expanding population and shrinking frontiers. Since World War II the number of hunters afield has multiplied six times over! This increase must be met with a program of enforcement designed to revolve around a well-informed, better-equipped, more capable Game Agent.

I know that it is your intention to be among those Agents who are not found lacking in abilities. You and I are responsible for a part in a multimillion dollar annual enterprise! Let's be sure we maintain our status in the coming years.

EVIDENCE IN WILDLIFE LAW ENFORCEMENT

*By ELLIOTT LOTT, Area Supervisor
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Much has been written about evidence. Little has been written about evidence in wildlife law enforcement.

On the cover of the citation book of every Florida Wildlife Officer are printed the words, "Remember, one good case is better than several poor ones." I feel that these are words of wisdom.

If we agree that a good court case is better than a poor one, then we have admitted that there is a difference between the two. There is a difference, and this difference is usually nothing more or less than *evidence*.

It is, therefore, certain that evidence is a most important matter in the field of wildlife law enforcement and a subject worthy of our consideration.

The question might be asked, "Just what is evidence?" Webster defines the word evidence as "a means of ascertaining the truth." Since that seems to be a pretty good definition, we will conclude that evidence is closely related to *truth*. When we have begun to think of evidence and truth together, we have taken a step in the right direction.

It is the will and determination of our courts to render unto every man his due. In order to accomplish this our courts must safeguard the innocent while punishing the guilty, and this can be done only through the presumption that all men are innocent until proven guilty.

The purpose of a trial by jury is to search for and establish the *truth*. Only by this process are our courts able to preserve *justice*.