

# A Century of Service

by Greg Bartles and Paul M. Hanyok

Two agencies of the Department of Natural Resources have reached a common milestone. The Wildlife and Heritage Division and the inland enforcement officers of the Natural Resources Police are celebrating 100 years of service to the citizens of Maryland. Although conservation laws in Maryland date back to 1654, it wasn't until 1896 that the General Assembly created the office of state game warden and the State Game Department.

Maryland's first wildlife law placed a bounty on wolves in 1654. That same year, non-residents were prohibited from hunting in Maryland. In subsequent years, bounties were paid for killing other species of Maryland wildlife including crows (1704), squirrels (1713), bears (1728), foxes (1765), panthers (1823), wildcats (1862), hawks, owls, mink, weasel and skunk (1874). Many of these bounty laws remained in effect well into the 20th century.

The first legislation to protect Maryland's natural resources was enacted to prevent "striking fish" in the waters of Dorchester and Somerset counties (1694). In 1729, the General Assembly acted to preserve "the breed of wild deer" when a closed season was ordered from Jan. 15 to July 31. The closed season was extended in 1730 and "fire lighting" and the use of gunning lights were outlawed. Just prior to the Revolutionary War, deer hunting became more restrictive and in 1773 it was prohibited entirely for three years.

Laws protecting waterfowl were first passed in 1832. Other conservation laws restricting the shooting of ducks followed. In 1872, legislation was enacted that provided for a waterfowl gunning season and the licensing of sneakboats and sink boxes in the waters of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries in Harford and Cecil counties. Additionally, the General Assembly created a "Board of Special Police," commonly known as the Susquehanna Flats Ducking Police, to enforce the new laws.

More wildlife protection laws were enacted by both state and county governments in the 1880s and 1890s. Although not declared an official Maryland emblem until 1947, the Baltimore oriole and other wild birds were first protected in 1882, 100 years after the bald eagle became the national symbol. As interest in the conservation of wildlife grew, so did local legislation. These county laws lacked uniformity and were poorly enforced by local sheriffs. Additionally, county laws at this time took precedence over state law in Maryland, adding to their ineffectiveness.

In 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court declared that the states had the right to protect wildlife living on private property as well as on public land. In Maryland, sportsmen's groups and other conservation-minded citizens pressured the General Assembly to upgrade the enforcement of wildlife laws. Chapter 293 of the Acts of 1896 authorized the governor to appoint a state game warden for a period of two years.

Gov. Lloyd Lowndes appointed Robert H. Gilbert of Baltimore as Maryland's first state game warden. He was "to provide for more vigorous enforcement of the game and fish laws of this state." Deputy game wardens were appointed to assist him.

The state game warden received an annual salary of \$500. Deputy game wardens did not receive a salary, but were compensated out of the fines collected upon prosecution of game and fish law violators. A portion of these fines went to the state game warden and to the State Game Protection Fund.

Funding for the State Game Department saw little change during the first 20 years. The 1914 appropriation by the General Assembly was only \$2,600 for a two-year period. Then, in 1918, a bill known as the Statewide Hunter's License System was enacted. Revenues from the first year's sale of hunting licenses totalled \$61,770. The State Game Protection Fund was now large enough to support an effective game protection and propagation program.

In 1916, the Conservation Commission was created and three members were appointed to take over the Shellfish Commission, the State Fish Commission and the State Game Department. This new commission was authorized to appoint the state game warden and on June 1, 1916, E. Lee LeCompte received that honor. LeCompte served as the head of the State Game Department until his retirement in 1945.

1654	1694	1728	1730	1832	1872	1896	1916	1918	1919	1945
Maryland's first wildlife law - bounty on wolves.	First law protecting a Maryland natural resource - preventing "striking fish."	Law passed to preserve "the breed of wild deer" - closed season from Jan. 15 to July 31.	Deer season closed for three years.	First waterfowl hunting law passed.	Susquehanna Flats Ducking Police created.	General Assembly created office of state game warden - first Maryland game warden was Robert H. Gilbert.	Conservation Commission created; E. Lee LeCompte appointed state game warden.	First statewide hunter's license.	First state wildlife refuge established at Gwynnbrook.	C D fo

DNR photo



*The Conservation Department of Maryland provided an exhibit at the Outdoor Life Show in 1939.*

Prior to 1918, the Game Department relied primarily on law enforcement to save Maryland's declining wildlife populations. The hunter's license bill provided funds to pursue other game management options of that time period. In 1919, the department purchased 290 acres at Gwynnbrook in Baltimore County and established the state's first wildlife refuge. By 1930, Maryland either owned or leased 40,000 acres of land as game preserves. Game propagation became a major part of the duties of department personnel.

Starting in 1918, salaried district deputy game wardens were hired and put in charge of the unpaid "fee deputy wardens." Game breeders later joined the paid staff of the department as the artificial propagation of quail and pheasants on the State Game Farm increased. Game was purchased from other states and Mexico for release into Maryland habitat. By 1936, more than 300,000 game birds and mammals, including quail, pheasant, cottontail and snowshoe rabbits had been liberated to restock the state's fields and woodlands.

grouse and several varieties of quail and pheasants.

A 100-acre deer corral was established at the Meadow Mountain Game Refuge in Garrett County and surplus deer born there were released. 1931 was the first year requiring deer hunters to report kills and a total of 32 were harvested in Garrett and Allegany counties. As deer populations increased, more counties were opened for hunting. However, the statewide reported kill did not exceed 1,000 until 1951. By 1960, the deer kill

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	1928	1931	1937	1939	1941	1945	1969	1972	1996
Evolution Department d.	Salaried deputy game wardens required to wear uniform.	Deer hunters required to report kill— 32 deer harvested that year.	Pittman- Robertson Act provided federal funds for wildlife restoration.	Game and Inland Fish Commission organized.	Board of Natural Resources formed to coordinate conservation efforts.	E. Lee LeCompte retired head of Game Department title changed from "state game warden" to "director."	Department of Natural Resources created.	Department of Natural Resources reorganized, resulting in Wildlife Administration and Natural Resources Police-Inland Division and Marine Division.	Wildlife Division and Natural Resources Police, inland enforcement, celebrate 100 years.

# Two agencies celebrate milestone

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reached 5,000 with all counties except Montgomery reporting a harvest. 1971 saw 10,208 deer reported killed. As late as 1986, the annual reported deer harvest was only half of what it is today—now in excess of 50,000.

As the decades passed since the hunter's license law brought much needed growth to the Game Department, many noteworthy changes and accomplishments took place. The number of salaried wardens increased from eight in 1918 to 53 by 1940, just about equal to the number of inland enforcement officers of the Natural Resources Police today.

1928 was the first year game wardens were required to wear a uniform. Although the district wardens maintained a "jack-of-all-trades" position within the Game Department well into the 1960s, other personnel joined them as more specialized areas of responsibility evolved. These activities included education, public relations, publication of bulletins and the "Maryland Conservationist" magazine, research, habitat manipulation and the maintenance of department properties.

Artificial propagation of game animals was gradually eliminated as more effective methods of wildlife management were developed. Maryland's very successful trapping and transplanting of wild turkeys is a wonderful example of DNR's wildlife managers' service to the state.

In 1937, Maryland and the rest of the nation benefited from the Pittman-Robertson Act which provided tax revenue from the sale of sporting arms and ammunition. These funds allowed Maryland to purchase and develop new wildlife areas and enhance wildlife restoration efforts statewide.

Governmental reorganizations have changed the name of the original Game Department several times since 1896. The three-man Conservation Commission of 1916 was replaced by the Conservation Department in 1922, headed by a single commissioner. That same year all salaried wardens were classified by the Maryland State Civil Service.

In 1939, the State Game and Inland Fish Commission was created consisting of five members. The Commission was vested with the authority to propose and adopt regulations governing birds, waterfowl, inland fish and game.

In 1941, the Board of Natural Resources was created for the purpose of coordinating the activities of the several state departments concerned with conservation. At the same time, the Department of Game and Inland Fish was formed. Upon State Game Warden E. Lee LeCompte's retirement in 1945, the department head's title was changed to director.

In 1969, the Board of Natural Resources was replaced by the Department of Natural Resources and the position of Secretary of Natural Resources was created. The agencies of the Department of Natural Resources over which the secretary exercises authority were reorganized in 1972. Two of the new agencies resulting from this reorganization were the Wildlife Administration and the Natural Resources Police.

The Natural Resources Police resulted from the merger of the Maryland Ma-

*Shown here is an early  
deputy game warden  
badge, circa 1900.*



rine Police and the Wildlife Enforcement Division (called wildlife officers since 1968) of the Department of Game and Inland Fish. For the first time since 1896, the "game wardens" were no

longer a part of the "Game Department." They were instead a new and separate unit composed entirely of personnel supporting a law enforcement mission.

The Wildlife Division of the Department of Natural Resources has seen other organizational changes since 1972. Its associations with different units of the department has been modified to keep pace with the dynamics of government and the needs of Maryland's wildlife—a process that continues to evolve as Maryland enters its second century of wildlife management and wildlife law enforcement. \*

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