



COURTESY OF GAYLE ZYDLEWSKI UNDER ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT PERMIT 16036

Graduate student Lisa Izzo releases a shortnose sturgeon into the Penobscot River after measuring the fish and implanting a small tagging device.

Big buck stories draw thousands of readers. Why?

A few weeks back — as yet another “big buck” story ran wild on the Internet, generating thousands of page views an hour — my editor asked me a question that should have been quite simple.

Why do so many people want to read about big dead animals?

Unspoken: We can write touching, heart-warming stories about people in our community, or stories about fires or crimes or courts, for that matter, and one big dead deer (huge rack of antlers optional) and that deer story will trump ‘em all.

Want proof? The most popular story on our website last year (and a couple more in our top 10) involved big dead deer.

Since I grew up in Maine and my editor is from Connecticut, we were coming at the question from different angles. Neither of the first two responses I thought of — “Because” and “Why not?” — was particularly powerful, nor persuasive.

In Connecticut, I found out, there’s not much of a market for big dead deer stories. Go figure. (They probably don’t get their jollies from hanging deer carcasses in a tree and inviting in their neighbors over to take pictures, either. I guess there’s no accounting for taste).

Of course, when editors start pondering such important questions, there’s a predictable outcome: Eventually, they’ll tell you to write about it. And she did.

Given my marching orders, I sought out some people who could help. And one of the first things I learned was that the big deer fascination (while possibly not being observed in Connecticut) is a pretty primitive thing.

“Antlers have a long history of being held in admiration by people,” said Kyle Ravana, the deer biologist for the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, in an email. “Studies of wildlife going as far back as the time of Aristotle have expressed interest in antler growth. Today, society seems to hold them in higher esteem than maybe even the animal itself.”

With that said, Ravana admitted that for the deer themselves, antlers aren’t as big a deal.

“In regard to nutritional status, antlers are considered a physiological luxury,” he said. “What I mean is that they are not needed to survive. As such, if an animal is in poor condition, the energy the animal takes in will be allocated toward maintaining itself before being allocated to antler growth.”

Ravana’s colleague, wildlife biologist Scott McLellan, also pays particular attention to antlers. He’s an avid “shed hunter” and spends the winter months tromping through the woods, looking for antlers that have been dropped by moose or deer.

He said the allure for him — one that likely affects others who like looking at photos of big deer or deer with large antlers — is the fact that he gets to experience something that’s pretty rare.

“I think one of the biggest things that’s most fascinating is the fact that you don’t see big, huge antlers all that often,” McLellan said. “We live in a state that is very, very forested, sometimes just viewing deer is a big deal. It’s a unique sighting to see a big-antlered deer ... those big bucks are usually pretty nocturnal for the most part, and they really aren’t observed all that often.”

Josh Slezak, who lives in Wilbraham, Massachusetts, said he checks out the Bangor Daily News for outdoor coverage. Among the things he likes to read are stories about big deer.

“I think from a hunter’s perspective, it’s the



JOHN HOLYOKE

Changes in the Penobscot

UMaine researchers document shortnose sturgeon movement

BY JOHN HOLYOKE
BDN STAFF

ORONO — Ever since an angler targeting striped bass caught a shortnose sturgeon in the Penobscot River 10 years ago, scientists have been studying the fish, tracking their numbers and movement as a restoration project changed the character of the river.

In October, for the first time, that University of Maine team documented fish — three tagged females that can be tracked by acoustic receivers — that had moved into a stretch of the river above the former Veazie Dam.

And while those researchers have been tracking sturgeon movement for nine years, that slight upstream move — perhaps the precursor to spring spawning activity — is being heralded as a major step in the recovery of the species, which is listed under the federal Endangered Species Act.

The slight upstream migration into freshwater could mark the next step toward sturgeon actually spawning in the river, researchers say.

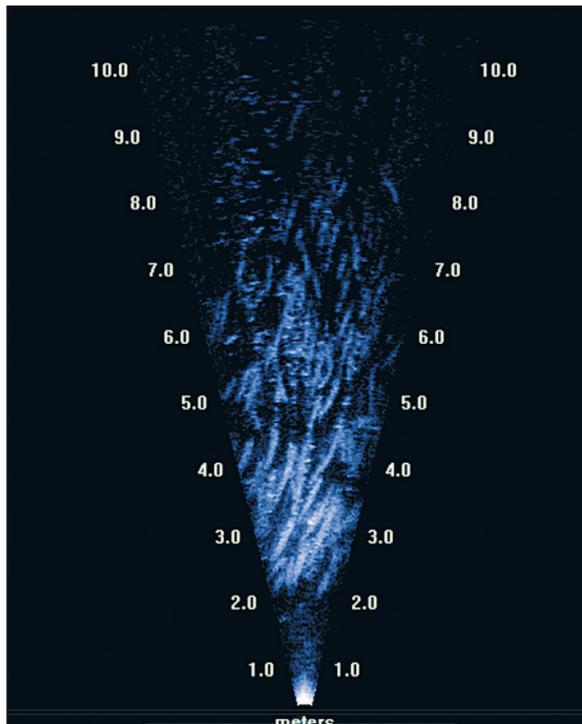
“For us, we think it’s very encouraging that we’re seeing fish start to explore regions of

the river past the [former] dam, up to the portions that we think spawning might happen,” said Michael Kinnison, a professor in the University of Maine school of biology and ecology. “Those are the sort of forays that fish could take this time of year that could lead to [spawning].”

Since 2004, Joe Zydlewski of the U.S. Geological Survey, who also serves as assistant unit leader at the Maine Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, has been helping scientists track a variety of fish in the river. Funding for the project has been provided by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries, and the collaboration includes the Penobscot River Restoration Trust, The Nature Conservancy and others.

The network of acoustic receivers he has helped install in the river allow fish that have been fitted with a tag to be tracked as they swim past those receivers. Among the species that have been fitted with tags: Atlantic and shortnose sturgeon, Atlantic salmon, striped bass, sea lamprey and American eels.

“I think one of the things we’ve been doing over the last years is uncovering the com-



COURTESY OF GAYLE ZYDLEWSKI
An acoustic image of approximately 50 sturgeon (the elongated objects) over a 10-meter area of the Penobscot River was taken during the winter, just before the river iced over.

plexities of movements of [shortnose sturgeon],” Zydlewski said. “You think that the fish are here, so you assume they’re completing their life cycle here.”

That’s not necessarily the

case, as Zydlewski’s wife, Gayle Zydlewski, an associate professor in the UMaine School of Marine Sciences, can tell you.

Since 2006, she has studied

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Wildlife’s lessons on dressing warm

BY AISLINN SARNACKI
BDN STAFF

Black bears are tucked away in their dens, and birds have flown south. Maine’s wildlife knows that winter is coming, and those that aren’t equipped for the cold have either left the state or found shelter where they can wait the season out.

Some of us don’t have that luxury.

Year-round Mainers — the human variety, that is — have to endure the winter, with its blizzards and ice storms and subzero nights.

We have our methods. We cook and watch movies, knit and read, play board games and fix leaky faucets. And one of our finest methods of surviving the winter is simply bundling up in warm clothes, stepping outside and embracing it. We ski, snowmobile and ice fish.

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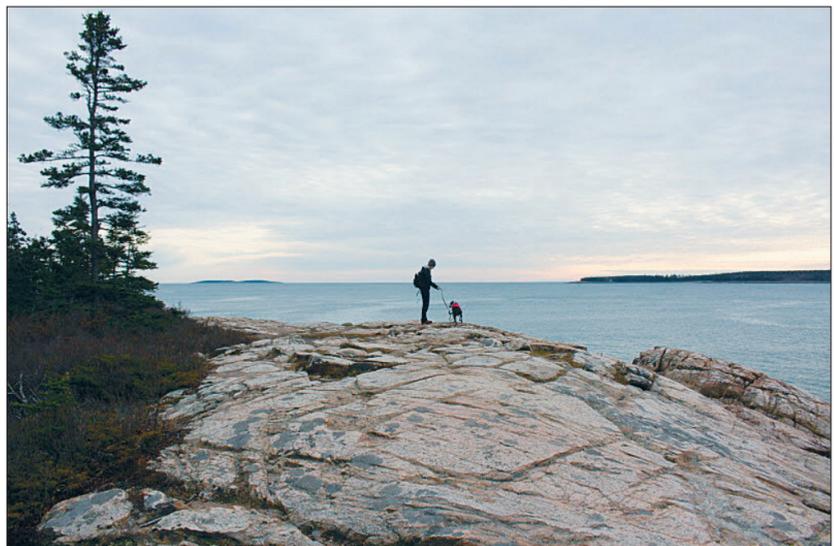
1-Minute Hike: Ship Harbor Nature Trail

Difficulty: Easy to moderate. The trail forms a 1.3-mile figure eight. The first loop is surfaced with gravel and designed to be wheelchair-accessible; while the second loop is not surfaced with gravel, not wheelchair-accessible and includes bog bridges, rock sections and some exposed tree roots that can easily trip people not paying attention to their feet.

How to get there: Drive onto Mount Desert Island on Route 3 and veer right after the causeway to head toward Southwest Harbor on Route 102. In 5.2 miles, veer left at the fork and continue on 102 for 11.3 miles, passing through a light in downtown Somesville (at about 5 miles) and the town of Southwest Harbor. At 11.3 miles, you’ll come to a fork; veer right onto Route 102 and drive 1.6 miles to an intersection in the town of Bass Harbor and veer left onto Route 102A. Drive 2.3 miles on that road, passing the road to Bass Harbor Head Lighthouse, and the parking lot for Ship Harbor Nature Trail will be on your right, just 0.3 miles be-



AISLINN SARNACKI



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Ship Harbor Nature Trail in Acadia National Park

fore the Wonderland Trail park area, which also will be on your right.

Information: The Ship Harbor Nature Trail is one of several easy, family-friendly hikes in Acadia National Park. Shaped like a figure eight, the trail leads to the rocky coastline and through a whimsical spruce forest-fir forest.

Watch the video
bangordailynews.com

Along the way, beautifully illustrated nature displays help walkers interpret their surroundings.

The trail starts at the parking lot and crosses a small clearing before entering the woods, where a kiosk displays a trail map and

visitor guidelines. Soon after the kiosk, the trail splits into the first loop, which is wide and surfaced with gravel.

If you turn right and hike the loop counter-clockwise, the smooth trail winds its way through the woods to a viewpoint of the Ship Harbor. The trail then

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