

Eye on Campus

We're on their turf

Nightlife, no, but Delco has wildlife

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Take a look around, and you just might notice that there is quite a menagerie surrounding us here at Penn State Delco.

The fields between the buildings and the surrounding woods provide excellent habitats and hiding places for many kinds of wildlife.

In the evening, white-tail deer congregate in a small herd in the empty field adjacent to the campus, where it used to be rumored that dorms were to be built and sometimes in the very late evening they venture into the fields in the middle of campus.

If you look carefully, you may notice that the deer all look like does. This is not the case. In the winter, bucks, the male deer, shed their antlers and look like does until spring, when they acquire a new set according to the Web site www.whitetaildeer.com. The Web site states that whitetail deer get their name from the white underside of their fluffy tail, which they raise straight in the air in a position called "flagging" while running if they see or smell a predator. John Ousey, associate professor of environmental sciences, had a lot to say about Penn State's deer population.

"Ones that bunch up tend to be female," Ousey said. "There are a lot of deer, and a lot of deer ticks because of the deer. Ten years ago an albino deer could be seen around here. It frightened some people because it was so unusual," he said.

Groundhogs, or woodchucks, also can be seen all over the campus.

They are burrowing mammals with "stocky" bodies and "flattened heads," have fur color "ranging from yellowish to dark reddish brown," can be found throughout Canada and all parts of the U. S. except the west, are members of the rodent family, which includes squirrels, chipmunks, prairie dogs, etc., and like to eat "green vegetation" like clover and alfalfa and occasionally "snails, insects, young birds, or bark" according to the Canadian Wildlife Service Web site (<http://www.cws-scf.ec.gc.ca>). Both Ousey and Dr. Barbara Daniel, the assistant director of academics, have both seen groundhogs on campus.

"I've seen lots of groundhogs behind the library," said Ousey.

"Once I saw one at the top of the stairs to the library, and he didn't run away. They are so cute," said Daniel.

Pennsylvania's most famous groundhog is called Punxatawney Phil and can be seen on the local news every Groundhog Day, Feb. 2, when he predicts whether there will be more winter if he sees his shadow. Phil can also be seen in the comedy film "Groundhog Day" starring Bill Murray.

Ousey confirms seeing the Eastern Bluebird on campus.



Rare is the person that hasn't seen a deer while on the Penn State Delco campus. Deer are plentiful in the area surrounding the campus and in the winter, all appear to be does, because the males shed their antlers until acquiring a new set during the spring.



Behind the Vairo Library is apparently the spot to find groundhogs, which feed on vegetation and small insects.

"There is a bluebird trail, with bluebird nest boxes all over campus, but tree swallows often take them over," he said. "More tree swallows can be seen than bluebirds."

According to "The Audobon Society Field Guide to North American Birds: Eastern Region," the Eastern bluebird

appears in the spring, is "bright blue with a reddish-brown breast and white belly," has a song that is a "soft melodious warble," nests in "open farmland with scattered trees" and can be found across the United States, although they have become rarer in the east and "competitions for nest sites" may be the reason. The guide says that the tree swallow is "sparrow-sized," has "metallic blue or blue-green upperparts and pure white underparts," has a song that is a "cheerful series of liquid twitters," can be found in the northern United States and its coasts, and habituate themselves near "lakeshores, flooded meadows, marshes, and streams."

Spring brings the plover-like killdeer birds back to the fields of Delco. One or two can usually be seen on campus. They are "robin-sized birds, brown above and white below with two black bands on the breast and a blackish bill, have a cry which sounds like "kill-DEEE" and is "repeated endlessly," like to nest on the ground in "open plowed fields," and can be found across the United States, according to "The Audobon Society Field Guide to North American Birds: Eastern Region."

"Killdeer do a broken-wing routine if you get near their nest in the grass," says Ousey.

In the morning, one may hear the "Jay, Jay Jay!" call of the blue jay. They are "bright blue" above with black and white wings, tail, and chest, and a "prominent crest," can be found "East of

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the Rockies from southern Canada to the Gulf of Mexico," reside mainly in forests with oak trees, and "often bury seeds and acorns" for food according to the Audobon Society Field Guide to North American Birds: Eastern Region. In late spring, they can be found foraging for their favorite food in the trees in front of the Main Building. They do not appear migrate when winter comes, but this is a misconception. Jays migrate in large flocks through spring and fall and appear to never leave our area because, according to the bird guide, in the eastern United States, "birds from farther north replace the local population in winter."

Take a walk around Penn State Delco and observe and enjoy its wildlife population.