

JENNIFER VOSE

Naturalist

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Time: 3:36 p. m.

Location of the Interview: Ellsworth High School Library

Student Interviewers: Courtney Ray	Grade: 10
Rachael Wing	Grade 10
Katie Beskey	Grade 10

School: Ellsworth High School
School Location: Ellsworth, Maine

Teacher or Parent
Interviewer/Chaperone: None

Transcriber: Joyce Whitmore

CR: So what do you actually do?

JV: I work for the Marine Environmental Research Institute in the summer and I am a naturalist on their boat trip so we take the general public out and we haul up lobster traps and we talk about the ecology of the area, and the habitat, and we look at the species that we catch in the traps and explain their anatomy, their life cycle and what they eat and who eats them and their importance to the fishing industry and just try to teach people about local ecology.

RW: Do you take just anyone who wants to go?

JV: We have different kinds of trips; we have trips just for kids and trips for kids and adults. There is different lengths of time and anybody who wants to go on a trip it cost money but anybody can go. (Laughter)

KB: How often do you do these trips?

JV: I usually do two trips a day about four to five days a week so I am out on the boat a lot. I don't have to pull the traps which is really very good. The traps are slimy and it is pretty heavy-duty work to pull up the traps. They can weigh a lot when they are submerged. It will take three bricks to make them to lay flat. It depends on what is in the trap which can be very heavy but the captain will pull up the traps and then open them up. And both of us have a lobster license. I get an educational lobster license at the

beginning of the year. And, We take all the species out and we talk about them and then throw them back in the water. I am out on the water sometimes for eight on nine hours a day.

RB: So is he like a lobster fisherman that allows you to use his..

JV: It's a she. (Laughter) The captain is a SHE which is something to throw in. She also gets an educational license so each of us can have five traps and that is it. She pulls them up because her license is a different kind of classification than mine is. I can legally touch the trap but I shouldn't haul it up.

RW: Do you do this just in the summertime?

JV: Yes, just in the summer.

CR: What type of stuff do you usually pull up?

JV: We usually get at least some crabs in a trap. There are two species of crabs that we get all the times: those are rock crabs and jonah crabs. Lobsters are pretty common. We usually pull up a couple of lobsters, Sea stars. There are a few kinds of sea stars. We get northern sea stars and ford sea stars. They are sometimes hard to tell apart. Just general looking starfish. Sometimes we get sea slugs which are really slimy little creatures, which we have to pull from the traps and they are neat to pass around. A lot of times they are pink and they have frills on there back that are poisonous so you pass them to the people. (Laughter) They are not toxic enough to hurt a person, thank goodness. Some species are but not what we catch.

We have caught some really weird things. We caught a scalpin which is a type of fish. I never thought we would catch a fish in a lobster trap but we did. We caught a flounder in a lobster trap. It is one of those flat fish with the eyes in the top of his head.

KB: Have you ever caught a blue lobster or a half and half lobster?

JV: I have never seen a blue lobster or an albino lobster hauled up. We did have a half and half lobster in our trap but it wasn't large enough to keep. We have an ocean room which has a big tank, a couple of big tanks. One is for tidal pool creatures; and one is for deep-water creatures. We wanted to get a half and half to put in our deep-water tank but it wasn't big enough.

CR: What is the color of a half and half lobster?

JV: I guess lobsters have five different colored pigment genes that they can inherit. So you could get half blue, half red, half red, half brown: brown and orange, red and orange. And there is a greenish color too. The ones we caught were common lobster colors: half red and half brown.

KB: I saw there is a lot of shell disease going on and have you seen that?

JV: I haven't seen any come up with the shell rotting disease. It seems to be in warmer waters right now. I know they are finding it in southern Maine. Some of the lobsters they pull up have the shell wasting disease. You can tell because the lobster is covered with black growths. And it makes the shell really soft and it can rot the shell right off the lobster. And they are worried about it spreading. But we haven't caught any with that yet.

RW: How do you get the lobsters in the trap? Is there anything in there to draw them in? I don't know anything about this. (Laughter)

JV: Yes, We put really very, very smelly oily salted fish in a bait bag. And the way a trap works, we use the wire traps not the wooden ones. So it is a wire box and it has two compartments. In the front compartment there is an opening with a net that the lobster can crawl into. There is a bait bag that hangs there and we usually use salted herring – really smelly fish. They try to eat the herring in the bait bag. They might get a little bit. The opening in the trap the lobster is not very flexible it cannot turn and around and get back out. It cannot climb up and out so instead it has to crawl through the opening into the second compartment. The first is where the food is - called the kitchen and then the second compartment where they wait is called the parlor. They can't get out so they just have to sit there and wait.

RW: Do you keep any of the lobsters or do you let them all go?

JV: We let most of them go. Occasionally if one is the right size and is not a female with eggs or anything like that we will take it back and put it into the tank in the ocean room for a month or two and then we will put them back in the water.

CR: Who is the captain of your boat?

JV: My captain's name is Meagan. We have a couple of captains but Meagan is the one I work with most. She is about my age. She is twenty-five or twenty-six. She has worked in Boston. She worked for the Coast Guard and a whale watch company. She is from this area and she moved back. She builds boats and works on boat engines in the winter and in the summer helps captain for Mary.

RW: Do you have a lot of tourists?

JV: Yeah, we don't get many local people on the boat which is sad because I think it is very important to learn about where you are from. Occasionally we get a couple of repeat customers who are from the area. They are kids that go on it every year because their parents are involved with Mary or know about Mary. Mostly it is tourists from as far away as England.

CR: Is this in Bar Harbor?

JV: Blue Hill.

RW: So how far out do you go?

JV: We don't go out very far because our boat has a really old engine. It is a Buick engine. So it is not very powerful and it is not like a whale watch where you can go out really, really fast to where you can see whales. We stay in a sheltered bay it takes us forty minutes to get to where we really want to go whether it is pulling a trap or stopping at an island. Then we stay out for a couple hours and then it is forty minutes back in. If we wanted to go out very far we would have to get a different kind of boat.

KB: Do you know the average weight of a lobster?

JV: The lobster you can keep is usually a little over a pound. We determine if you can keep a lobster by looking at its length from the eye socket to where the tail starts. It is called a carapace measurement. There is a little tool we have to gauge the size. You have to hook it in the eye socket which sounds gross but their eyes are on stocks so they can move them out of the way so it is just a shell. The tail starts after the bottom part of the measuring stick you know they are big enough to keep. They have to be over three and a quarter inches from the eye socket to where the tail starts, I believe, and they have to be less than five, I think.

CR: Why is there a measurement?

JV: We put the biggest lobsters back. The reason we do that is because lobsters have to breed with the same size lobster. The bigger the lobster the more eggs the female can lay. We throw back the tiny ones – they are babies and are still growing. We throw back the huge ones because they can have lots of babies. We keep the ones in the middle.

RW : When the lobster is born. It is like eggs? Right?

JV: They start out as plankton. Plankton is anything that floats in the water and can't self direct its movement. So Lobsters will start out as tiny floating creatures mixed in with other tiny floating creatures, plants and animals. And as they get bigger they kinda settle out of the water column and drift down to the bottom of the ocean and become ground dwelling lobsters and find good habitat and places to hide and things to eat and keep on getting bigger and bigger.

RW: So after the mother lays the eggs she has nothing to do with the eggs after.

JV: No, not really. I don't know. I think they figure something like one per cent of the eggs survive to become lobsters pass the plankton stage. So if the lobster lays a thousand eggs, maybe ten of them will settle out and become lobsters on the ocean floor.

CR: How long does it take to develop a shell?

JV: I don't know how long it takes to develop a shell. I do know that the lobsters that you typically buy and eat are about five years old. So it takes about five years to get to a full size lobster stage, about a pound or pound and a half.

KB: What is the biggest lobster you have ever caught?

JV: We caught a pretty large lobster last summer, Uh, I think it was July. And I would guess it was about eight pounds. It was huge! (Laughter) It was definitely so big we had to throw it back. We couldn't pick it up; we didn't know how to get it out of the trap. It was huge.

CR: What are the smallest ones you have ever caught?

JV: Yeah, We catch little ones that will fit into the palm of your hand. There are holes in the trap where the little ones are suppose to escape. If we pull them up before they get out, we get little ones. They are cute. Their shells can be really, really soft. We usually hand the lobsters around after we ban the claws but we won't hand the little ones around.

KB: Have you ever been pinched?

JV: I have. It hurts. (Laughter) It hurts a lot. I have been pinched by a couple of crabs but getting pinched by a lobster really really hurts. I had a big cut for a long time.

RW: How long have you been doing this?

JV: This is my third year out on the boat.

CR: Are you going to do this again next summer?

JV: I think so.

RW: What do lobsters eat?

JV: Lobsters eat everything. They are scavengers. They will eat anything dead they come across. They will eat crabs; they will eat other lobsters. Clams and mussels are some of their favorites because they can crack right through the shells of their claws.

JV: They have two different claws. One claw is really big and it is called the crusher claw. That is for crunching through shells. They also have a skinner claw, which is for catching soft things like fish. I have seen one in a deep-water tank try to catch fish in the tank too. A fish will swim by and this big lobster we have would just sit there with his claws open. When the fish got close, it would snap the claw to try to catch them. He caught a couple. It would open pretty fast if it is catching things. Yep.

KB: Has anyone ever fallen off the boat?

JV: No. Thank Goodness. Wait, I have to take that back. . We do rescue drills where we plan somebody to fall off. Not a passenger, a fake. So yes, I had to fall off the boat and a couple other people had to fall off the boat and the captain fell off the boat and we had to rescue them. Not accidentally, no, not when I was on there.

RW: Did you have to take any first aid classes or like that?

JV: Yep, we do CPR and first aid certification and a couple of people usually have their lifeguarding certificate too.

KB: How many people are allowed on the boat?

JV: It is a small boat so we can fit sixteen people and that is usually the captain plus two crew so about thirteen passengers.

CR: Is there an age limit?

JV: Nope. We have had a two -month old baby that came with their parents and we had a very small life jacket.

CR: Everybody has to wear a life jacket?

JV: Everybody under thirteen has to wear a life jacket. And then the adults can kinda choose whether they want to wear them or not.

KB: Do you see seals and all that stuff out there?

JV: We do. We see a lot of seals. We actually go look for the seals. That is one of the biggest things people want to see. We do a little bird watching on the way out. We point out the local species that people may not know about. Some of the things that are unique. Like cormorants that can't keep oil on their feathers like ducks can. So, We see a lot of cormorants standing with their wings outstretched trying to dry off. If they didn't do that, they would sink. We tell people things like that on the way out. We pull up a trap and go look for some seals. There are a couple of places where the seals always hang out. Seals tend to prefer these rocks kinda of a way from the main land out towards some islands where there is lots of food and less people. Then we will come back in and pull a couple more traps. That is about a three-hour trip.

KB: Do you go to the same place every time you go out?

JV: Well, we have five traps and we usually only pull two or three on a trip. We try to leave them for twenty-four hours before we pull them up again. Uh, sometimes nothing happens in twenty-four hours and you pull up an empty trap and you try to find another one. We have seven different islands that we have permission to go too. So if it is a trip

when we get off on an island it depends on the tide, weather, and the wind and the age group of the passengers. There are different things to do on each island, so..

CR: What are some of the most interesting things about lobsters that people don't usually know?

JV: There is a couple. One thing is that lobsters are right and left handed or clawed. People don't usually know that. The side the crusher claw is on is the dominant hand. So if you are a left-handed lobster you have your crusher claw on your left-handed side of the body. Some lobsters are right handed; they have a crusher claw on the right side. Also, everybody wants to know how to tell the difference between male and females. You have to look at the swimmerets; if it is soft and feathery it is girl; if they hard and kind of pointy it is a boy.

CR: Is it very difficult to tell?

JV: No, it is pretty clear. And then, uh, the thing that amazes me the most is that lobsters molt their shells but they eat their shells afterwards to regain the calcium that they have lost. They are one of the only animals that does that. Crabs do not do that but lobsters do.

RW: What type of birds do you see?

JV: We see all the different kinds of seagulls, of course. We see gullamots, which are cute little black birds that have white patches on their shoulders. They are called the humming birds of the sea cause when they fly with the white patches it looks like they are flapping very fast. We see cormorants and loons and we lots of different kinds of ducks especially eiders. . We see lots of bald eagles. We see some terns. We see a lot of birds. I cannot think of any other.

CR: What are some predators of lobsters?

JV: Definitely people. Other lobsters are predators of lobsters. Fish actually eat lobsters. Cod eat lobster; sculpin eat lobster. A lot of times they will look for soft-shelled lobsters. Lobsters that have recently molted. Crabs will try to eat lobsters when their shell is really soft.

RW: Are hard-shelled lobsters more expensive to buy than soft shelled?

JV: When a lobster has just grown a new shell it sucks in a lot of water so that it will puff out the new shell so that it is as big as possible so the lobster has lots of room to grow into it. When you buy a shedder that means it has got a lot of water inside the shell so those are cheaper. Hard-shelled lobsters are full of meat and are a lot more expensive.

KB: What part of the lobster don't you eat?

JV: I (Laughter) eat the claws and the tail. I have a brother in law who eats everything. Not the shell. He plucks out the legs and he eats the body. I don't think you are supposed to eat the body; but he eats everything. He just leaves the eyeballs, the antenna and that is it.

CR: Why do lobsters shed their shell?

JV: That is the only way they can grow. If the shell is hard and they were trying to get bigger and they couldn't shed their shell they would be stuck.

CR: Is there anything else that you think we should no that you should do. I think you are the only naturalist to be interviewed.

JV: Well, I think it is really important like you asked do any local people come out? I think it is very important no matter where you end up that you do put some effort into understanding the ecology of where you live. I think our natural places are disappearing very fast and it is your age group that in particular that if it doesn't put some effort into learning about and caring for where you live the things we have now -. They are going to disappear. That would be my final message, I guess, as a naturalist.

CR: Thank you very much for doing this.