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NEBRASKAland

March 2016



A squeak of light washes over a northern Thomas County pasture while thunderheads build over the Sandhills to the south. Photo by Bill Hager.

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INSIDE

Images of the Missouri • From Our Readers
Time Well Spent in March • In a Crane Blind
Put-and-Take Trout • Invasive Mussels



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NEBRASKAland Magazine

Volume 94 • No. 2 • March 2016

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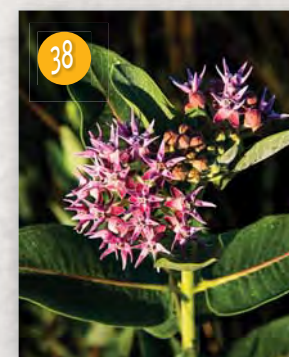


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Cover: Sandhill cranes prepare to leave their roost on a sandbar in the Platte River at Martin's Reach Wildlife Management Area near Alda. Photo by Eric Fowler.



Mike Travis looks on as his daughter, Paighton, raises her gun toward a flushing pheasant on a Pheasants Forever youth mentor hunt in October in Washington County.

Pressey Perfect

Thank you for featuring Pressey Park in the Jan/Feb 2016 issue of *NEBRASKAland*. I now know who the park is named for and much of the history of the area. Myself and many friends ride our horses in the area frequently. The hills, valleys, cliffs and river are a great place to ride away from the arena and corn fields. We are looking forward to many more hours in the park.

Anita Hertner
Kearney, Nebraska



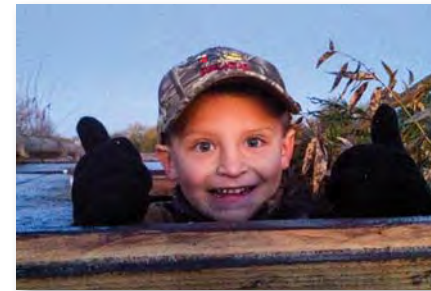
Jessica Tickle sent in this photograph of frosty leaves after visiting Arnold Recreation Area in Custer County.



Twelve-year-old Emma Frederick of Falls City found this sycamore leaf, which measured 17 inches across, southeast of Rulo at the mouth of the Big Nemaha River.



Paul Warner submitted this photo of a mule deer buck to the *NEBRASKAland Magazine* Facebook page.



The Start of Something Special

This photo was taken on the South Platte River near Brule on the opening day of duck season this fall. I took my 5-year-old grandson Andrew Salomon to the duck blind and he helped put out duck decoys and even blew my call. The two of us had a great morning even if we didn't get a duck. The hot chocolate and donuts helped to pass the time.

When I asked him if he was having a good time he gave me the two thumbs up sign – just doesn't get much better than that!

John Frates
Brule, Nebraska

A Hunter's Farewell

Many times we hunted,
you and I and the dogs,
through the corn fields, marshes, sandhills
and rivers of the plains.

It never mattered, you know,
what if any game we claimed.
It was always the adventure,
the fellowship, the friendship.

Now you will go without me I think,
but I worry not for I will follow
sooner or later on that same path,
and all in good time.

As you go, I wish you this:
your best dog at your side,
the sun at your back and a fresh skiff
of snow under your feet.

I trust the dogs and old friends
will greet you at the end of the corn row,
and expect you will meet me
when I finish the hunt.

By C.R. Sadler, of Lincoln, for friend
Jon Welty, who passed away Thanksgiving
Day, 2015.



Leon Gillespie captured this trail camera photograph of a tom turkey eight miles south of Broadwater.



MadiLou Kish caught this otter wriggling out of a pond in North Shore at Lake McConaughy.



Kirk Noller's trail cam photo of a mangy coyote and turkey in the background was taken about 10 miles northeast of Kearney.



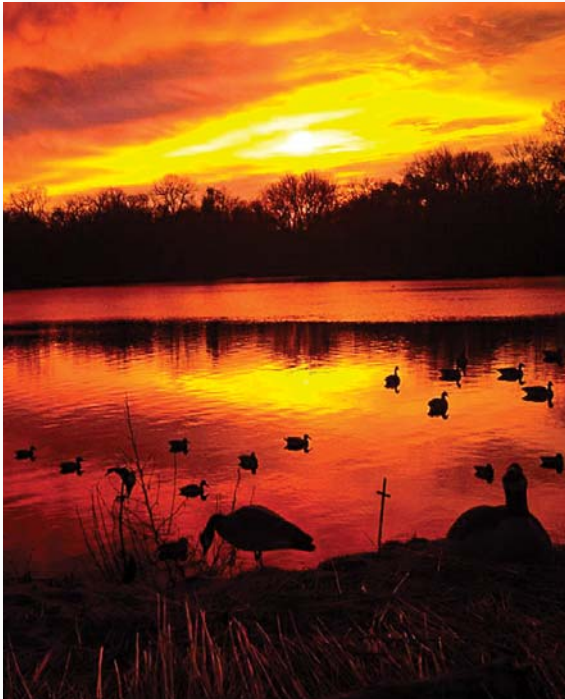
Justin Pence submitted this photograph of a great blue heron at Prairie Queen Recreation Area in Sarpy County.

Spring Creek Holes

At Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center south of Denton, we had some visitors curious about what animal was digging holes in the hillside near our visitors center, so I decided to put up a trail camera. We captured this badger photo late one night.

You can see that he or she has made themselves right at home in the tallgrass prairie. I hope that you find this picture as interesting as I did.

Edward Hubbs
Denton, Nebraska



Bob Parks took this sunrise photo from his duck blind near Fremont.



Outdoor Plates

Shawn Meyer fell in love with hunting while growing up near Campbell, and roughly 40 years later his license plate tells everyone he still likes to hunt. Now living in Beatrice, he enjoys hunting waterfowl, upland game, deer and pronghorn, but admits he spends most of his time guiding for his sons.

If you have a unique outdoor message plate you would like to share, or know someone who does, e-mail a photo (high-resolution, JPEG format only, please) of it to **Eric.Fowler@Nebraska.gov**, along with your name, hometown and a brief description of the interests expressed on your license plate.

Correction: The Travelogue on page 8 of the January-February issue mentions Atkinson State Recreation Area. The park is now known as Mill Race Recreation Area. All inquiries should be directed to the city of Atkinson and not O'Neill. We regret the error.

-Editor

Send your comments to:
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NEBRASKAland Magazine
P.O. Box 30370
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or e-mail **Jeff.Kurrus@Nebraska.gov**
Please include your postal address and telephone number. Letters may be condensed and edited. Photographs are also welcome.

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A Mammal Brief

American Badger

By Lindsay Rogers

Taxidea taxus

Head into vast stretches of grasslands and, if you are lucky, you will spot an American badger. These short animals are easily identified by their black and white striped face, stubby legs and long, gray-brown fur. They have characteristically long claws, which allow them to be extremely efficient diggers – a skill used for both digging a burrow and hunting. They are carnivores, eating mainly ground squirrels, gophers, mice and other small burrowing mammals. They spend much of their life underground in large burrows which can be up to 10 meters long. Badgers are solitary animals and mainly active at night, although they can be seen any time of day. They do not hibernate, but do spend much of the winter sleeping underground. They emerge on warm winter days. ■

Lindsay Rogers is an outdoor education specialist with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

PHOTO BY ROCK HOFFMANN

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1/30/2016	Bazile Creek PF	Bloomfield
1/30/2016	Great Plains PF	Holdrege
1/30/2016	Perkins County PF	Grant
2/5/2016	Platte County PF	Columbus
2/6/2016	Webster County PF	Blue Hill
2/6/2016	Plains Sportsman PF	McCook
2/13/2016	Nebraska PF/QF State Banquet	Kearney
2/20/2016	Little Blue River PF	Hasting
2/20/2016	Lower Elkhorn Valley PF	Wisner
2/20/2016	Pheasant Fest & Quail Classic	Kansas City, MO
2/26/2016	Cornhusker PF	Lincoln
2/26/2016	Franklin County Covey QF	Franklin
2/27/2016	Cedar River Ringnecks PF	Greeley
2/27/2016	Maple Creek PF	Howells
2/27/2016	Ponca Creek Ringnecks PF	Spencer
2/27/2016	Rainwater Basin PF	Sutton
2/27/2016	Seward County PF	Seward
2/27/2016	Southwestern Nebraska PF	Imperial
3/4/2016	High Plains PF	Sidney
3/4/2016	Nemaha Valley PF	Johnson
3/5/2016	Heritage PF	Alliance
3/5/2016	Lincoln Creek PF	Aurora

Date	Chapter	Location
3/6/2016	Boone County PF	Albion
3/10/2016	Douglas County West PF	Elkhorn
3/11/2016	Wachtel Fur Immer QF	Eustis
3/12/2016	Corn Country PF	McCool Junction
3/12/2016	Dixon County PF	Ponca
3/12/2016	Loup River PF	Ord
3/12/2016	Mile High PF	Kimball
3/17/2016	Elkhorn Valley PF	Norfolk
3/18/2016	Logan Creek PF	Wayne
3/19/2016	Golden Prairie PF	Neligh
3/19/2016	Otoe County PF	Syracuse
3/19/2016	Republican Valley PF	Cambridge
3/19/2016	Saline County PF	Wilbur
3/19/2016	Sherman County PF	Loup City
3/19/2016	Washington County PF	Blair
3/26/2016	Dodge County PF	Fremont
4/1/2016	Lower Platte PF	Ashland
4/2/2016	Cass County PF	South Bend
4/2/2016	Niobrara Sportsman PF	Gordon
4/2/2016	Medicine Creek PF	Stockville
4/9/2016	Antelope Valley PF	Oshkosh
4/16/2016	Southwest Prairie QF	Culbertson



For more information visit www.NebraskaPF.com





Travelogue

By Julie Geiser

Lewellen

Travel on Highway 26, and at the west end of Lake McConaughy your journey will take you through the small but mighty town of **Lewellen** in Garden County.

Rich with history, Lewellen lies in the North Platte River Valley that was once populated by Native Americans, French traders and weary pioneers headed west with hand carts or in wagon trains to stake claims on the frontier. Nearby **Ash Hollow** provided a camping place for these travelers, offering shelter, abundant water and lush green fields.

The town is named after Frank Lewellen, who built a small store and post office in 1886. Evolving around an east-west wagon route, Lewellen grew with a small schoolhouse (1890), a bridge built across the North Platte River connecting to **Big Springs** and **Ogallala** (1891), the Methodist Church (1899), and Lewellen Merchantile (1901) – all encouraged more settlement in the area.

Today, Ash Hollow is a State Historical Park (SHP) that boasts a visitor center sitting in a beautiful landscape. Climbing Windlass Hill, where Oregon Trail wagon-wheel ruts are still visible, and visiting Ray Brown's original sod house are other attractions at the park.

The Battle of Blue Water Creek, also known as the Battle of Ash Hollow, was an attack U.S. Army soldiers, led by General William S. Harney, made on a Brulé Lakota village in September 1855. The confrontation resulted in the largest loss of women, children, warriors and property that the Brulé Sioux had ever experienced.

A historical pageant is performed every June at Ash Hollow SHP. Accompanied by a live band, actors tell the stories of pioneers traveling the Oregon, California and Mormon trails from 1843 to 1864 through their diaries and songs.

While in Lewellen, also visit the **17 Ranch Winery** on Main Street for their light, fresh Nebraska Table Wines made from their own vineyard and working ranch. Stay at the **Gander Inn Motel Bed and Breakfast**, which features several rooms and cottages, outdoor games for the whole family, picnic tables and grills. For a taste of country living stay at **Nancy B's Backyard Bunkhouse**.

For home-town meals visitors can indulge at **The Most Unlikely Place**, the **Blind Goose Restaurant & Lounge** or the **Oregon Trail Trading Post**.

Clear Creek Refuge and Wildlife Management Area, east of Lewellen, is open to seasonal hunting and fishing, and also hiking, mushroom hunting and bird watching. ■



Ray Brown's soddy at Ash Hollow



17 Ranch Winery on Main Street in Lewellen



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Get a home-town meal at "The Most Unlikely Place"



Lakeland High School, believed to be the only sod high school in the nation, was built in Brown County, Nebraska, in 1934.

A Brief History

Brown County's Sod High School

From the Nebraska State Historical Society

What do you do when local students need a high school but there's not enough money to build one? During the Great Depression, some residents of Brown County did what early settlers had done. They got together and put up a sod house. The story is found in a 1935 report of the Nebraska Emergency Relief Administration (NERA), a copy of which is at the Nebraska State Historical Society.

About 20 miles southwest of Ainsworth, three rural school districts decided to build a consolidated school, with sod as the basic construction material. Earlier generations, making do without timber, had learned that sod was a good insulator against heat and cold. And if you didn't mind a lot of hard, heavy work, its cost was... well, dirt cheap.

There was still some expense involved, but NERA provided funding, and work began on July 20, 1934. Sod was cut from old lake beds in the area and a foreman was hired from among the local unemployed workers on relief. A sod roof supported by pole rafters topped a two-room structure, consisting of a classroom and living quarters for the teacher. It was completed on Sept. 10. Several outbuildings, including two toilets and a barn for the students' horses, were also built of sod.

More than 50 people attended the school's dedication, including the state superintendent of public instruction. The school opened with 11 students. Ninth, 10th, and 11th grades of study were offered.

There was nothing fancy about Lakeland High School. The

rooms were heated by “prairie coal” (cow chips) picked up by teachers, students and parents. And the barn for students’ horses was an important feature, because some students rode horseback up to 10 miles. Others stayed with nearby families and helped with chores for their room and board.

Altogether, 33 students attended Lakeland, with 11 receiving diplomas. Eventually the building began to deteriorate, and the school closed in 1941.

Today a historical marker stands along Highway 20, seven-and-a-half miles west of Ainsworth. Look for it the next time you're out that way, and think of those kids riding their horses to their sod high school. ■

Visit the Nebraska State Historical Society's website at Nebraskahistory.org.



The students of Lakeland High. The building stood straighter than the photographer did.



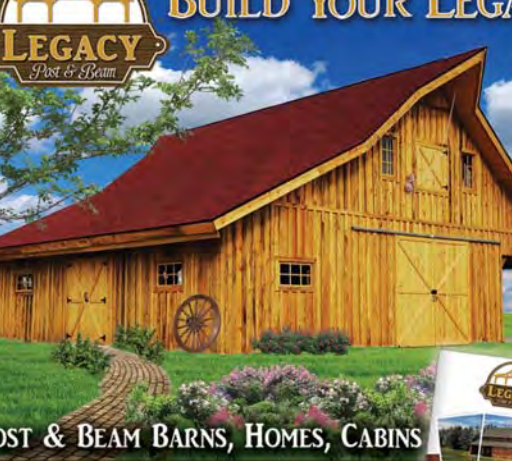
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Mark Harris
Foreword by Cindy Muehlen

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—Joel Sartore, National Geographic photographer

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Access Granted

By Jeff Kurrus

Gaining permission to hunt and fish private land is possible as long as you're willing to put in the work. You probably won't receive an immediate "yes" every time, but here are a few tips that will help you gain and hopefully maintain permission for years to come.

1) Plat maps are helpful in finding out who owns land. These can be viewed and purchased from county courthouses, and many are now online.

2) When possible, leave your hunting and fishing gear at home when you ask permission. This becomes a bit more tricky when hunting species like snow geese, when they're here today but gone tomorrow. Yet most of the time, you can always come back. This works especially well when asking to fish.

3) When you ask to fish, ask the landowner if they want any fish taken out of a lake. Sometimes all they will want is catch-and-release, and other times they may want you to take as many of a particular species as you can and is legal. When possible, take some cleaned, fresh fish back to the landowner to say thank you.

4) Keep your request simple. Ask permission for yourself or you and your young outdoor enthusiast, not your entire group of friends. Also, be cognizant that the biggest reasons some landowners won't let you hunt or fish is because they've been disappointed before. So I always go with the motto: "A doe with a bow" when I ask to deer hunt, letting a landowner know that not only will I only be bowhunting on their land, but I would also be pleased with the opportunity to only shoot does. It's a great way to build trust and show them what type of hunter/angler you'll be on their place.

5) Lastly, always say thank you. ■



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Cheyenne County

The communities in *Cheyenne County* are a destination for anyone who loves outdoor recreation, history, shopping and small town charm. From hunting and fishing to tin roof sundaes and duck pin bowling you never know what you'll find in Cheyenne County.

Sidney Dalton Gurley Lodgepole Potter

For more information on all that Cheyenne County has to offer, please contact the
Cheyenne County Visitor's Center 658 Glover Road, Sidney, NE 69162 (308) 254-4030/(866) 545-4030
www.sidneycheyennecountytourism.com

Nebraska History News

By Jeff Kurrus

Nebraska History Magazine's flagship publication, published four times yearly, provides an in-depth look at some of the most important aspects and events in this state's history. To offer even more Nebraska history, NEBRASKAland Magazine has been publishing "A Brief History" feature, on page 10 of this issue, since July, 2013.

Yet there is even more history to be had, as current subscribers of Nebraska

History Magazine also receive Nebraska History News with their yearly subscriptions.

News gives a preview of upcoming Nebraska History content, news of upcoming historical events and quick-hitting history pieces. Recent articles have focused on Henry Fonda, the 13th Amendment and World War II.

Readers can access all of the issues of Nebraska History News, dating back to December, 1997, by visiting the link below. ■

See more Nebraska history, including publications dating back to December of 1997.



A Look Back

By Jeff Kurrus

Anytime one takes a look back into the pages of NEBRASKAland or its predecessor, Outdoor Nebraska, one is sure to see how much has changed ... and stayed the same.

In the March, 1959, issue of Outdoor Nebraska, writer Pete Czura chronicled a bunny hunt that featured two archers, a rifleman and a pistol hunter during a time when rabbit hunting was open year-round.

Also featured was Gene Hornbeck's story, "Cow Trail Icing," about fishing at Flowing Well Lake in Cherry County, a lake that still exists but is private, and "Trail of the Big Cat," an article about a bobcat hunt near Harrison.

Not unlike outdoor articles of today, the "ABCs of Dog Care" was also shared with readers, as was cooking tips on smoking fish and meat. Lastly, a natural history piece on sandhill cranes taught readers about these majestic birds: "One of the most spectacular sights in Nebraska wildlife occurs each spring ..." the article starts, a reminder and hope that some things in nature never change. ■



1st Graders and Box Turtles

Dear NEBRASKAland readers,
After listening to wildlife educator Monica Macoubrie teach our class about box turtles, we found the following facts interesting. We hope you do too.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Secora's 1st Grade Class,
Whitetail Creek Elementary

- Box turtles do not have teeth. They have a beak-like mouth.
- There are red dots on the boy turtles to impress girl turtles.
- All Nebraska turtles, including box turtles, are cold-blooded vertebrates.
- The box turtle's shell is made of keratin, the same material as human fingernails.
- An adult box turtle has few predators. They would include foxes, coyotes and raccoons.
- When laying eggs, mommy box turtles can lay 4 to 5 eggs in a season. And the eggs are kind of squishy.
- Box turtles have sharp claws to dig and defend themselves.
- Boy box turtles have red eyes. Girls have brown or green. ■



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

Nebraska Bird Library

American White Pelican

Song or calls: Adult pelicans are usually silent, but sometimes utter a piglike "grunt." Young have low, whining grunt.

Description: Sexes similar. Flies with head drawn back. Adults very large, mainly white with black wing tips, yellow feet; unfeathered yellow throat pouch and dull, yellow bill. Immatures duskier, with gray bills.

Behavior: Scoops up fish while swimming by submerging head and neck. Does not plunge dive.

Habitat: Large marshes, lakes and reservoirs are used by migrating and non-breeding birds.

Where in Nebraska: Abundant regular spring and fall migrant statewide, non-breeding birds will summer in Sandhills and large reservoirs; locally rare regular winter visitor in Keith and Lincoln County. Large Sandhills lakes and reservoirs like Lake McConaughy and Merritt Reservoir may attract pelicans during the summer months. Less commonly, white pelicans will use sandbars in the Platte River.

Fun Facts: American white pelicans do not dive for fish but rather dip their heads in and fill their bills. Sometimes many pelicans will fish together, circling in the water to congregate fish, and then dip their heads simultaneously. ■

To learn about more birds visit: NebraskaBirdLibrary.org.



PHOTO BY JON FARBAR

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Harrison Village Mall
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(402) 504-4450

wildbirdhabitatstore.com



Wingtips by Wild Bird Habitat

White Pelicans have one of the largest wingspans at 9.5 feet weighing 19.5 lbs.

Knobs develop on the bills of both sexes when breeding and later shed

Where as Brown Pelicans dive for fish, White Pelicans seine for fish with their bill pouch that can hold up to 5 gallons of water.

White Pelicans nest in large colonies called "pods" that become nurseries after their two eggs hatch.

Adults will fly up to 100 miles from the nursery to catch fish for their young.

DDT, draining wetlands, and shooting by humans significantly reduced their populations in the twentieth century.

Today breeding adults number 120,000.



Choosing a Turkey Choke

By Jarrod Spilger

Careful consideration should be made when choosing a turkey choke for spring gobblers. You'll need something much tighter than the full choke tube that came with your shotgun to get the dense patterns needed to place enough killing pellets into the head and neck vitals of a tom.

On a standard 12-gauge with a .730-inch interior bore diameter, an Extra-Full .665-inch turkey tube is a good start. On overbored barrels with larger bores, a slightly more open .675-inch choke might be a better choice. You don't want a choke that's too tight, though. Over-constriction is almost worse than not enough, as it can cause pellet deformation and "blown" patterns with large gaps. There's a fine line between too little constriction and too much. The only way to determine if a choke is producing dense, uniform patterns is to shoot your chosen load at a turkey target.

The conventional benchmark is 100 pellets in a 10-inch circle at 40 yards. However, you're not shooting at 10-inch circles, but rather at a gobbler's head and neck, which is much smaller. For that reason, I like to count only head and neck strikes when determining pattern effectiveness. While it's true one pellet in the right spot is all it takes, don't rely on luck. Twenty pellets in the head/neck vitals is good, 40 or 50 hits (or more) is even better.

Do your homework this spring and pattern your shotgun before turkey season begins. That way, when you call a gobbler within range, you can pull the trigger with confidence. ■



PHOTO BY JARROD SPILGER

Snow Goose Hunting in March

By Julie Geiser

For hunters new to the light goose conservation order, keep the following things in mind as you venture into the field.

Regulations

- White and blue-phase snow geese and Ross's geese may be hunted statewide, but different regulations apply in each zone, including closing some areas to avoid disturbing other migratory birds, including ducks, cranes and other geese.
- There are no bag or possession limits during the light goose conservation order.
- Shooting hours are 30 minutes before sunrise to 30 minutes after sunset.
- Unplugged shotguns and



PHOTO BY JULIE GEISER

electronic calls may be used.

Hunting Tactics

- Scout, hunt, and then scout again. These wary birds will not stay in one place for long; be prepared to move often.

- Many decoy spreads contain hundreds of decoys to fool snow geese. Use a combination of shells, full bodies, silhouette and rag decoys to afford these hunts. ■



THE GREAT PARK PURSUIT

VISIT PARKS. BE ACTIVE. WIN PRIZES.



Nebraska Recreation and Park Association



www.papionrd.org

Learn more at NEGPP.org Team registration begins April 1, 2016

Upcoming Events

by Jerry Kane

Contact the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission at 402-471-0641 or visit OutdoorNebraska.org for more information. Visit HuntSafeNebraska.org for a list of hunter education classes and BoatSafeNebraska.org for a list of boating safety classes.

March 1, 3, 5 Women's Combo Hunter Education
Roger G. Sykes Outdoor Heritage Education Complex, Platte River State Park (SP), Louisville

March 1, 8, 15, 22, 29 Outdoor Skills Discovery Program
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

March 1, 15 Ladies Day at the Range
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

March 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 Introduction to Gun Safety and Technique for Young Shooters
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

March 3 .22 Pistol League
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

March 3, 10, 31 Turkey Hunting Series
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

March 3, 10, 17, 24, 31 Explore Hunting
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

March 5 Critter Corner
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

March 5 Archery Fun Shoot
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

March 5-6, 12, 19-20, 26-27 Marsh Madness
Ponca SP, Ponca

March 5, 12, 19 Explore Archery
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

March 6 Shootout at Salt Creek
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

March 7, 14, 21, 28 Centerfire Challenge
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

March 7 Hunt Safe Session
Roger G. Sykes Outdoor Heritage Education Complex, Platte River SP, Louisville

March 10 Explore Archery Day Camp
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

March 19 National Archery in the Schools Program State Tournament
Speedway Sporting Village, Lincoln

March 20 Landscaping for Wildlife
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

March 21 Hunt Safe Session
Roger G. Sykes Outdoor Heritage Education Complex, Platte River SP, Louisville

March 25 Archery and youth archery spring turkey hunting season opens

March 26 Free Pistol, Standard Pistol and Rapid Fire Pistol Match
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

March 31 Trapping seasons close for muskrat and beaver

Migration Season

By Paula Hoppe

Spring is in the air, literally! Step outside; warm breezes blow from the south, melting snow and encouraging the ice on lakes and ponds to break up. This in turn opens the door for a river of birds coursing north through the sky. Waterfowl migration has arrived. Birds make this seasonal movement for two main reasons: food and nesting habitat. Following resources south in the fall, this month they begin to return to their northern breeding grounds. Nebraska is directly in the path of their journey, a perfect stopover to eat and gather strength before continuing on their destination in northern territories. As they migrate through Nebraska the birds follow a predictable pattern.

- Snow geese are one of the first to move through the state, and the sheer number of birds (upwards of a million in the Rainwater Basin) makes them hard to miss. Look for them also in the Missouri and Platte river floodplains as they move between fields where they feed mid-morning and mid-afternoon to their overnight roosts on lakes. Others migrating through are Canada, cackling, Ross' and greater white-fronted geese.

- The distinctive call of sandhill cranes are often the first clue they are passing through, peaking at almost half a million birds in the central Platte Valley. During the day as they feed in farm fields they are easily viewed from cars along the roadside. But the best experience is to watch from blinds at Rowe Sanctuary or the Crane Trust or viewing platforms near Alda, Gibbon and Fort Kearny as they leave the river at sunrise or when they return at sunset in a cacophony of sound. It's an unforgettable experience.

- Ducks move through the state in waves with certain species arriving in February in mild years and others appearing on lakes and ponds later in March. Many are already actively performing courtship displays.

- American white pelicans are also migrating through the state in large numbers. Harlan County Reservoir is a great place to view pelicans as the Harlan White Pelican Watch gets underway Mar. 1- Apr. 15 with free birding tours available. ■

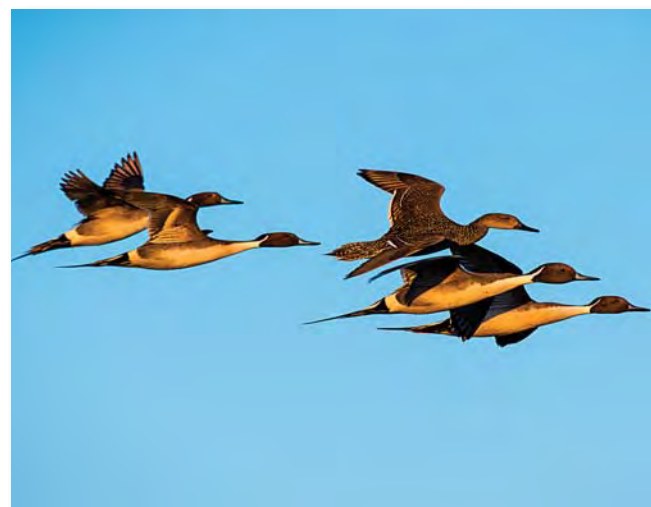


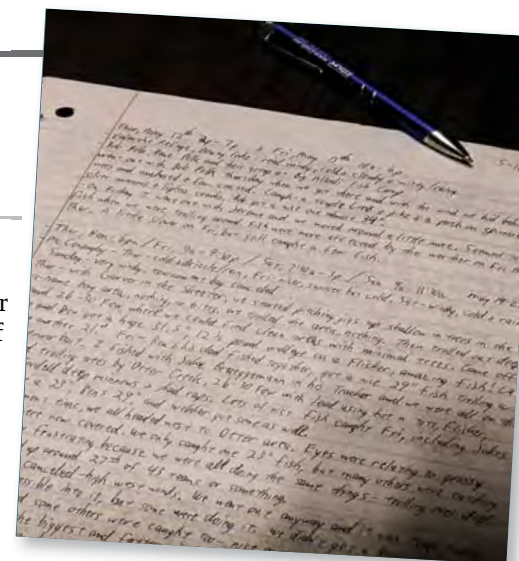
PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Fishing Logbook

By Brian Robinson

Sometimes I amaze my friends with the little details I'll remember from a fishing trip, like the date of a specific catch. I'm not sure why I do, but for all the details I can't remember, a fishing log has been the answer.

I've been keeping a log since February, 2000. It started very simply, but soon escalated into recording details about how the fish reacted to certain baits, or how fast I was trolling. As my logbook has evolved, there are certain things I now always record. They include the date, times of day, where I was, whom I was with, and especially the water temperature and weather conditions. You can determine how specific you want to make your log, as it can help increase your fishing success in upcoming years. I have one friend who swears by moon phases, and another who's obsessed with atmospheric pressure. I often look at information in my log before I fish a familiar spot and compare notes when done. Sixteen years of information takes up little space and has helped me increase my skill level, thus putting more fish in the boat. Give it a try to see what it can do for you. ■



Send Us Your Trail Cam Photos!



David Shafer photographed this stand-off between a white-tailed deer and a coyote near Burwell.

Please submit your trail camera photos by e-mail to: nebrtrailcam@gmail.com. Also include any information that will help explain your photo.

NEBRASKAland Visitor



Last issue's winner of the Visitor drawing was Larry Sindelar of Columbus, Nebraska, who found the **stag beetle** on page 14-15.

Readers are encouraged to contact NEBRASKAland within 10 days after this issue's publication with the correct page number and name of this issue's "Visitor" – a critter found in Nebraska. We will then gather the correct entries and draw one to win a NEBRASKAland mug. To enter each month, write: **NEBRASKAland Visitor**
2200 North 33rd Street,
Lincoln, NE 68503.

Or e-mail:

Tim.Reigert@Nebraska.gov with "Visitor" in the subject line of the message.

HINT: This issue's visitor is not on pages 9, 13, 19, 21, 40, 41, or 42.

The giant stag beetle (*Lucanus elaphus*) is found in deciduous forests in the U.S., from the north-east, west to Nebraska. The stag beetle is a very large, dark brown beetle, with males growing up to 2.5 inches in length. Male stag beetles are easily distinguished by their very large mandibles, the antler-like pinchers at the front of their head. They use these to defend themselves, and to fight other males for females. Females also have pinchers, but they are much smaller. Female stag beetles lay eggs in rotting logs and stumps. Grub-like larvae hatch from the eggs and feed on decaying wood, feeding for more than a year before pupating and emerging as adults. The giant stag beetle causes no harm to trees, and in fact may be beneficial as they assist with breaking down and recycling decaying wood.



Special thanks to Julie Van Meter, State Entomologist, Nebraska Department of Agriculture.

THE GATEWAY FISH

How to Catch Put-and-Take Trout

Story and photos by Jeff Kurrus

Show up at Two Rivers State Recreation Area near Yutan on this park's opening day of trout season in March each year, and you're sure to find a parking lot full of cars and folks of all ages surrounding the edges of Lake No. 5. You're also sure to see a number of kids, out for the first time that year or maybe even the first time of their lives, partaking in one of Nebraska's

best gateways to the outdoors – fishing for hatchery raised rainbow trout.

Armed with any number of baits – from marshmallows to corn – anglers await what will eventually be pan-fried delights as they stretch out the last of the winter creaks from a long time indoors, as they watch anglers to the left and right trying to see if their bait is “the” bait for the day.

Baits

The bait for the day can be any number of options, including nightcrawlers and salmon eggs, said Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Fisheries Biologist Daryl Bauer. “They’re very curious, so they’ll try to eat anything. They’ve lived in a hatchery their whole lives until we stock them, and have swam around looking for pellets for food. That’s what they know as food. When we stock them, their behavior is much the same. So something that smells like a trout pellet works well.” Bauer advocates specifically for Berkley’s trout baits. “If you sniff their baits, they smell just like trout pellets from the hatchery, the same pellets these fish have fed on their whole lives.”

For anglers wanting to fish with artificial baits, use lures that give off flash. Little spinners, spoons and husky jerks work well. “You may not catch a lot of fish on these lures, but they allow you to cover water quickly and you’ll often see fish chasing your lure, allowing you to see that fish are there,” said Bauer.

Tackle

An **ultralight rod and spincast reel** is the most often used rod and reel combo for trout, with 6- to 8-pound test line, as lighter lures and baits are usually used. Anglers may also fly-fish for them when



Put-and-take rainbow trout can be caught on any number of baits and lures, including jigs, such as this fish caught at the Ponca State Park pond.



While 10-to-13-inch fish are the typical size of put-and-take trout, larger fish, like this one at Two Rivers SRA Lake No. 5, are also caught.

the fish are active on top, with some anglers even tying deer hair flies to resemble trout pellets floating. “If fishing near the bottom, people might also use a marshmallow as a leader,” said Bauer, “and fish with a crawler on the bottom.” Using between four and six inches of line between the two, the nightcrawler will stay just above the bottom and increase the angler’s chances at a strike.

The Best Strategy

Whether you’re at a crowded opening day or by yourself, fly-fishing or fishing baits below bobbers, the main objective is to experiment. While these fish will work drop-offs and weedlines like many other fish species, they’ll also swim in open water looking for meals. Besides what the neighboring anglers are doing, the trout themselves will often tell you where and what they are eating. Watch for feeding activity on the surface and you’ll find fish. Just think like a trout: be curious. Then, if you’re a newcomer to fishing, use this curiosity to start fishing for other species, for trout are the beginning of your fishing career, your gateway, not the destination. ■

Trout Stocking

Each spring and fall, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission stocks put-and-take trout throughout the state. In 2016, the Commission plans to stock more than 264,000 catchable fish statewide, including these state parks and state recreations areas (SRAs).

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| ● Bridgeport SRA (Northwest Lake) | ● Lake Ogallala SRA |
| ● Chadron State Park Pond | ● Long Pine Creek SRA |
| ● Eugene T. Mahoney State Park (CenturyLink Lake) | ● Niobrara State Park (Lake No. 2) |
| ● Fort Kearney SRA (Lake No. 6) | ● Ponca State Park Pond |
| ● Fremont Lakes SRA (Lake No. 2) | ● Rock Creek Lake SRA |
| ● Keller Park SRA (Lake Nos. 4, 5) | ● Two Rivers SRA (Lake No. 5) |
| | ● Windmill SRA (Lake No. 2) |



Madeline Kurrus photographs sandhill cranes on Crane Trust property in Hall County.

EUROPEANS, CRANES AND A DAUGHTER

Story and photos by Jeff Kurrus

An overnight viewing blind turns into a place of magic for a father and daughter.

Sometimes a writer doesn't tell the full story. For fear of embarrassment, backlash, or the like, they stay away from a good tale. Well, this time I won't.

Because I was scheduled for a speaking engagement at the Crane Trust Nature & Visitor Center near Alda last March, I was offered a night in one of the Center's overnight blinds as a trade for my talk that afternoon. Having never spent an evening in one of the blinds, I jumped at the chance, bringing along camera gear, winter clothes for the 35 degree overnight, enough food to hold me off until Kentucky Fried Chicken in York the next morning and my newly-turned 6-year-old daughter, Madeline.

Madeline has made a few appearances in the magazine thus far in her young life, most notably being on-hand when I was bitten by a snake for the first time. But this trip would be different. She'd be with me in her first overnight blind, without a ride to take us out until well into the next morning.

We waited beside our vehicle with our gear as a young 20-something employee of the Trust came to take us, along with another pair of gentlemen, to adjacent blinds along the south side of the Platte just a few miles away.

The men in our company had enough equipment to photograph for a month – bag after bag was loaded into the back of the truck as the two men spoke another language to each other – my guess was western European. They also communicated in English with me and our guide, who loaded us in and drove us toward our blinds.

"And she's going?" one of the other photographers asked me.

"Yeah, she'll be fine," I said, knowing that, when it comes down to it, my frog-catching, deer-skinning, Toadstool-hiking daughter is fit for just about any challenge. All this would be is a night camping in a photo blind for her. No worries.

"Okay, so we have three blinds down here," said our young guide, "and I'm not exactly sure who is assigned to each. I forgot my sheet.



Sandhill cranes return to the Platte River near sunset.

So do you want to just look at each of them?”

“We want the best one,” said one of the other men.

This stuck in my craw just a little bit. Yes, I know they had a large pile of camera equipment and wanted to use this opportunity to get the best crane photos they could, and I also knew they weren’t locals so this was a big deal for

them. But when kids are around, we have to do our best at spending a few minutes to think about what will make them nature lovers long-term, whether they’re our own kids or not.

Knowing the other photographers’ desires, we would have gladly bypassed the “best” spot so they could get their photographs. However, after that comment, I wasn’t so sure.

We looked at the three blind options, and, way in the distance to the west, cranes were starting to arrive for their afternoon roost.

“We’ll take this one,” I jumped in, pointing to the far western blind, knowing exactly what was about to happen. Unbeknownst to the strangers with us, I knew that cranes are confidence birds, like a lot of



Six-year-old Madeline and her stuffed animal, Mr. Dog, are all smiles after an overnight in a Crane Trust photo blind.



Sandhill cranes leave the Platte River in front of the Crane Trust blind to feed in nearby crop fields.

animals that journey in large numbers.

All incoming cranes were going to do was look for the birds already on the water, then continue to land beside them, over and over, building their numbers forever east in our direction.

If my plan was correct, we’d have birds right on top of us.

The other men, in turn, chose to occupy the remaining two blinds, confident that their two-for-one strategy would provide the best plan

for their photos.

We ducked into our straw-bottomed, four-wall blind that was definitely a head splitter if you stood up too fast. Portal holes were in all directions, easily opened and closed by a 6-year-old, and the action was immediate.

Flock after flock flew by our blind, filling the sky with their forms and their sounds. The scene was mesmerizing. I bounced back and forth between both of my cameras, unable to decide at times between long lenses

and wide angles, finally just turning to Madeline, handing her a camera, and saying “Do your best.”

We shot the rest of the afternoon and into the evening as the cranes stair-stepped each other in our direction. By this time, I was shooting with both still cameras and Madeline was videoing the birds with our iPad. In the frenzy, as birds careened across the sky from all directions, I heard a little voice beside me: “Daddy, I love you.”

It was unannounced and unprovoked.

It was simply a testament to the power that these wonders of nature can have on a person, regardless of age: when we allow ourselves to be lost in nature, an entirely new level of existence occurs.

I have, over and over again, seen the response that accompanies the looks of people who have seen the sandhill cranes for the first time. That squint-your-eyes, shake-your-head astonishment that accompanies these moments that quite often ends with the

statement: “I’ve never seen anything like it.”

My 6-year-old was having that same moment, staring up during the last light at silhouettes in the sky that seemingly meant more than just silhouettes in the sky. We were part of something larger that afternoon, and it didn’t take a grown-up to realize it.

As the light faded entirely, we ate crackers and candy, washed it down with mom-approved water, settled into our sleeping bags and, by red light only, read a couple of books before fading off to sleep as the sounds of sandhill crane voices outside our blind did not.

The next morning, I looked out one of the portals and whispered back to Madeline. “You got to see this.”

We both peered out a moment later and were welcomed by cranes not 30 yards in front of us. They were everywhere – had covered everything in front and to the west of us. Minutes later, I began photographing again, and did so for the next two hours until nearly every bird had left the water to begin their day of feeding and socializing.

Shortly after, we saw a truck in the distance and knew our pick-up would be arriving soon. We gathered our gear and waited. Then we waited a bit longer because of all the equipment our counterparts had brought.

As soon as the truck arrived and the doors opened, one of the strangers got out and, without even a hello, said, “They were right in front of you, weren’t they?”

“Yep,” I replied, as he shook his head and thought about an evening lost as I thought about my evening, with my little girl, won.

And at this point, one could easily argue that I should have been the better man the day before, should have shared my knowledge of these birds so that these gentlemen could, in fact, have had the greatest chance at having birds right in front of them by morning’s light.

Yet every time I ponder this option, I re-play those four little words I heard from my daughter the night before, and come to the conclusion that not one part of me would ever change a single thing about my decision. Ever. ■

Sandhill Crane Viewing Etiquette

Crane watching etiquette follows some very common-sense, yet worth repeating, guidelines that we should all keep in mind next time we’re seeing this spring phenomena.

If viewing at a public blind destination, such as Rowe Sanctuary or the Crane Trust Nature & Visitor Center, pay attention to your guides, and also adhere to these rules:

- No flash photography or flashlights.

- Dress for cool weather. Because of unpredictable weather, the Crane Trust suggests preparing for weather 20 degrees less than the temperature is predicted to be.

- Minimize your noise, both from talking and your cell phones.

If viewing from other public locations, the Kearney Visitors Bureau includes these tips:

- Do not stop on major (paved) roadways, driveways or any other private road.

- When viewing birds from a gravel road, please pull as far off the road as possible and use your emergency flashers.

- Do not attempt to approach the birds. Stay in your car for the best viewing opportunities.

For more information on sandhill crane viewing etiquette, as well as facts about cranes, videos, and viewing locations, visit Cranetrust.org, Rowesanctuary.org and Visitkearney.org.

Time Well Spent

What to do in the month of March

March can be an unpredictable time outdoors. Cold and windy one moment and warm and sunny the next, nature enthusiasts should be prepared for indoor and outdoor activities, which can be found at a number of venues throughout the state. The following are five great things happening this month. More information on these and many other events is available on the outdoor calendar on our website, OutdoorNebraska.gov. ■



PHOTO BY CHRIS MASADA

Migration

All Month Long
Central Nebraska

March is Nebraska's peak month for viewing migrating birds of all species, most notably sandhill cranes, numbering more than 500,000 birds, in central Nebraska. Yet other bird species, including snow geese, come through the state in large numbers. Viewing can be done at state recreation areas, including Windmill and Mormon Island, Rowe Sanctuary and the Crane Trust Nature & Visitor Center, or along a number of gravel roads between Grand Island and Kearney.

Marsh Madness

March 5-6, 12, 19-20, 26-27
Ponca State Park

Ponca State Park will once again host its Marsh Madness event with bird viewing tours, nature hikes and other bird-related activities every Saturday in March. Guided Avian Adventure Tours begin at sunrise, and observing various waterfowl, bald eagles and other species is common. Visitors are encouraged to dress warmly, have raingear if necessary and bring along binoculars and camera equipment. For more information on lodging and tour reservations, please contact Ponca State Park at 402-755-2284.



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

Stream Fishing

All Month Long Panhandle/Northeast

As winter's ice and snow make their descent, March is a great time to wet a line on one of Nebraska's trout streams. It's early enough that summer vegetation isn't crowding the water and a hike along a creek bank may even remedy your spring fever. You won't have to worry about mosquito bites, but you may notice an increase in activity from other small insects – an occurrence which triggers ample opportunities for the observant angler.

Turkey Archery Opener

March 25
Statewide

With the best turkey hunting in the country and plentiful and affordable permits, start the 2016 hunt season with a bow in your hand in search of long beards. Turkeys will usually be flocked up this time of year, which many hunters counter by using more decoys than later in the spring or staying mobile by glassing birds throughout their hunts.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Mahoney Playhouse

Beginning March 11
Eugene T. Mahoney State Park

Live melodrama performances take place at the Denman and Mary Mallory Kountze Memorial Theater year-round, with this year's season beginning with "The Queen of Bingo," by Jeanne Michels and Phyllis Murphy, from March 11 to April 10. Shows begin at 7:30 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays and at 2 p.m. on Sundays.



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

A full-page photograph of a sunset over a lake. The sun is low on the horizon, partially obscured by a rocky cliff on the left. The sky is filled with orange and yellow clouds. The water is dark with gentle ripples, and a large, dark rock is in the foreground on the right. The overall mood is peaceful and serene.

The Missouri River through Lewis and Clark Lake

Photos and story by Sam Stukel

One of the first warm days of spring ends with waves gently lapping at the shore of Lewis and Clark Lake as the sun lazily sinks into the clouds.



Making connections is a specialty of the mighty Missouri. Steamboat captains once referred to it as a long spiral staircase to the Rockies, connecting the high country of the west to the growing civilization of the east. Beyond that readily-apparent linkage the Missouri does much more to thread things together in the upper Midwest.

It melds together the aquatic and upland ecosystems, often blurring the line that separates them. Worlds collide when a giant cottonwood falls halfway into the current and nesting habitat for birds becomes basking habitat for turtles. The story of a tree's role as provider does not end when it comes down with a muddy splash; instead it merely begins a new chapter of providing food, shelter and a place for lives to begin.

Pulses of spring water reach up onto an overgrown sandbar letting fish explore a new world for a few days. The same flood allows the river to gather up organic matter debris from the formerly-dry ground, and bring it back into the flow. There it becomes fuel used by many organisms making their way through the cycle of life.

The Missouri also provides a connection from the present to the area's rich history. Giant cottonwood stumps still protrude from the water, weathered and



Left: Winter has a firm grip on this cedar driftwood on Lewis and Clark Lake in early December. It was too windy for the reservoir to freeze but anything splashed by the waves became locked in ice.

Above: From saplings to mature trees to jagged snags, these two cottonwoods in the Green Island chute near Yankton may have stood together for a century or more.



worn from many decades battling the current. The largest of these were passed under by early explorers and used as shelter by Native Americans.

If they could talk they'd tell you of the last days when elk roamed the river bottom and describe the sounds the first steamboats made when they chugged around the bend.

The west was explored, settled and civilized while these same trees stood fast, rooted in the rich river bottom soil. The Missouri serves as a living museum twisting and turning along our border during all seasons. It gives us glimpses into the way life was when it was both simpler and harsher, things that should never be forgotten. ■



This is Sam Stukel's first photo essay for NEBRASKAland Magazine.

Ice heaves are a tell-tale sign of a dramatic power struggle between the ice sheet and shorelines at Lewis and Clark Lake. Something has to give when the ice expands during a long cold snap.

Prairie Restoration

A Strategy for Challenging Times

By Gerry Steinauer, Botanist, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission



In the coming decades, prairie restoration may well become an increasingly important conservation strategy in the Midwest. As climate change intensifies, and water for irrigation becomes even scarcer, drier regions of our state could become unarable. One option would be to seed these areas with a diverse mix of well-adapted prairie plants to provide sustainable grazing lands and wildlife habitat.

In addition, in increasingly farmed and fragmented regions, such as eastern Nebraska, many plant and animal species are disappearing from small, isolated remnant prairies due to overgrazing, predation and other factors. Their security lies in larger prairie landscapes enhanced through restoration. Furthermore, as temperatures rise, many prairie species will be forced northward to more suitable climates to survive. Establishing corridors of grassland between the prairie landscapes would aid their migration across the miles of inhospitable intervening cropland.

Last July, I attended the 13th annual meeting of the Prairie Restoration Network in Moorhead, Minnesota and saw firsthand how The North Star State is gearing up its prairie restoration and conservation efforts to meet similar challenges.

Prairie Restoration Inc.

The Prairie Restoration Network was co-founded in 2002 by Chris Helzer of the Nebraska Chapter of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) as “a means to allow Midwestern restorationists an opportunity to interact, share ideas and build on others’ success.” The two-day meetings are held in a different state each year and consist mainly of field trips to restoration plantings and facilities.

On the first day of last year’s meeting we visited the seed farm of Prairie Restorations Inc. (PRI), the nation’s largest private prairie restoration company, located near Moorhead. Here seed is harvested from single species production plots and native prairies and wetlands to annually plant nearly 3,000 acres of restorations on conservation, corporation and private lands.

PRI harvests and plants only local ecotype seed whose genetics originate from regional prairies, and avoids using seed of native cultivars – varieties bred for vigorous growth, seed production or showy flowers. “Restorations work best using local seed,” said Ron Bowen, who founded PRI in 1977. “Cultivars of big bluestem and other prairie grasses

are so dominant they prevent establishment of wildflowers. Also the life cycles of many insects and other wildlife are synchronized with the emergence, flowering and seed production of local plants, and not synchronized with cultivars because these often originate in far off regions.”

Though local ecotype prairie seed is rather easily obtained for restorations in states east of Nebraska, there are no providers in western Nebraska and only a few in the eastern part of our state. The largest is the Prairie Plains Resource Institute located in Aurora. They annually collect seed for and plant about a thousand acres of restorations.

Minnesota’s Bowen emphasized that prairie restoration is still in the “horse and buggy stage of development and its practitioners still have much to learn. We need money to advance the science of restoration, but first society must value what we do. As our professionalism increases and the environment continues to degrade, the money will come.”

Glacial Ridge

The second day we visited the sprawling Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge located about 90 miles northeast of Moorhead. The Refuge had its origins in 2000 when TNC purchased a 24,000-acre farm and then began restoring 20,000 acres of its crop fields, gravel quarries and overgrazed sheep and cattle pastures using local ecotype seed of over 200 species. For comparison, Nebraska’s largest high-diversity prairie restorations to date, located at Ponca State Park and TNC’s Platte River Preserve, are several hundred acres in size.

Though TNC transferred the Preserve to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service in 2004, they continued to lead the \$9 million dollar restoration project completed in 2011. The project included restoring over 3,000 acres of wetlands by filling 118 miles of ditches, some 30 feet deep, originally dug to drain the landscape for farming.

“I claim it is the largest prairie restoration in the nation [which it is], and no one has argued with me yet,” said a smiling Jason Ekstein, a native of Juniata, Nebraska, who headed the endeavor for TNC. “A major challenge was getting our 30 conservation partners [ranging from water conservation districts, nearby towns, and state and federal agencies] to share a common vision,” said Ekstein. “Some wanted to restore deep ponds and forego more natural shallow marshes, while others argued against plugging the ditches at all. Several were leery of using local ecotype seed, preferring the cheaper seed of cultivars. In the end it all worked out.”

A primary benefit, the restoration connects over 5,000 acres of formerly isolated prairie remnants and 17 existing conservation lands. The Preserve now supports healthy populations of prairie chickens and other wildlife species that require large prairie landscapes with diverse habitats.

Glacial Ridge is among 12 prairie core areas identified in Minnesota’s recent *Prairie Conservation Plan*, a 25-year strategy to accelerate conservation in the state’s western



Showy milkweed is a native wildflower commonly seeded in prairie restorations.

prairie region. By far the Midwest’s most ambitious prairie conservation plan, it calls for permanent protection of over 850,000 acres of prairies, wetlands and other habitats through fee title acquisition from willing sellers or conservation easements within the core areas and six-mile wide corridors connecting them. The core areas range in size from 4,500 to 300,000 acres, and must have at least 15 percent of their area remaining in grassland, the majority being native prairie. The plan calls for extensive restoration in both core areas and corridors, the latter allowing for species movement. All conserved lands will remain working lands with active livestock grazing, haying and other economic uses.

The Minnesota plan comes with a daunting \$3.6 billion price tag, which may not be as overly ambitious as it seems. In 2011, the state’s legislature established the progressive *Outdoor Heritage Fund* that provides over \$100 million annually in sales tax revenues “to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands, prairies, forests and other habitat for fish, game and wildlife.” The Fund is the envy of Midwestern conservationists.

Minnesota’s prairie restoration and conservation efforts were an eye opener for me – a worthy model for challenging times. ■

During the meetings we also visited The Nature Conservancy’s 6,078-acre Bluestem Prairie Preserve. This diverse landscape is home to over 400 native plant species.

Out-musseled

Battle Ongoing with Zebra and Quagga Mussels

Story and photos by Sarah Kocher

It's the most uncomfortable shoe you could ever imagine wearing, this sneaker. It's old, dirty and probably wouldn't even fit anymore, but not for the traditional reasons. This sneaker did a stint in Lake Mead and came out covered heel to toe in razor-sharp quagga mussels. In fact, the word "shoe" might be stretching it – "shoe-shaped shell collage" is perhaps more fitting.

And, like an art display, the shoe now spends its days on Nebraska Invasive Species Program Technician JoLeisa Cramer's boater education table to demonstrate how these invasive mussels will attach themselves to any hard surface. "Outreach and education has been shown to be one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS) and one of the most cost effective options," said Nebraska Invasive Species



ALLISON ZACH

Program Coordinator Allison Zach. "Chemical and mechanical removal of invasive species is costly and sometimes impossible. So our best option is to be proactive rather than reactive."

Along with education, Nebraska continues to be proactive with the creation of an aquatic invasive species program and corresponding stamp to counter this invasive challenge.

Invasive Species Challenge

"If you look at Nebraska on a map, you almost scratch your head, thinking, 'how haven't they spread across Nebraska yet?'" said Nebraska

Game and Parks Commission Fisheries Biologist Tony Barada. Kansas, Iowa, South Dakota and Missouri have zebra mussels in their waters. According to Zach, Kansas found its 24th infested water body in early June. In addition, quagga mussels, what Zach calls the zebra mussel's "bigger, badder cousin," are on the radar as well.



TONY BARADA

since spread to many surrounding states.

Zebra mussels reproduce at an alarming rate, attach to rocks, docks or other mollusks and clog pipes. Their larvae are microscopic and can enter pipes, attach and clog them as they grow, affecting municipal water systems and irrigation pipes. They can do the same thing to watercraft engines causing them to overheat and, with their razor-sharp shells, cut the feet of beachgoers as they wash up on shore.

Zebra mussels prefer freshwater lakes and ponds and slow-moving streams and rivers. They have a difficult time thriving in fast-moving waterbodies due to their need to attach to hard substrates. They begin to reproduce when water temperatures reach 56 degrees Fahrenheit.

"Larvae are microscopic and free floating in the water column for two weeks before settling to the bottom of the water column and attaching to substrate," said Zach. "These larvae can live out of water in damp conditions, making them easily transportable by watercrafts to infest other waterbodies. Adults can attach to watercrafts and survive two weeks out of water, and can be hard to find on boats due to their small size and dark color, making them very transportable to non-infested waterbodies."

"They're invasive for a reason," Barada said. "They've found a niche and are more successful at doing something than a lot of native species are, and that's their filtering rate. They filter water so fast they can clean out a lot of the plankton in a lake." This is the same plankton on which native mussels and larval and juvenile fish feed.

"The whole schematic, the whole food web, is basically thrown out of



Quagga mussels encase a tennis shoe found in an infested lake.

PHOTO BY KARIE DECKER

A zebra mussel is a small, freshwater mussel that can grow up to two inches in length, has a striped shell with a zigzagging, yellowish striping pattern and a flat side that allows the mussel to stand up on its edge. This mussel requires a hard surface to attach itself to using basal threads. By comparison, the quagga mussel is larger, paler, sometimes banded or striped, and does not require a hard surface to attach itself, allowing it to survive in sandy bottomed waterbodies.

These two mussel species traveled to the U.S. in the ballast water of commercial shipping boats, which carried water from lakes in southern Russia. They were discovered in the Great Lakes in the 1980s and have



PHOTO BY SARAH KOCHER

Invasive Species Technician JoLeisa Cramer removes a plankton drag sample from Offutt Air Force Base Lake in Aug. 2015.

whack when zebra mussels get into a reservoir," Barada said.

But these mussels are more than filtering fiends: they're sneaky, too. Excess filtering reduces the quality of the habitat for most other aquatic species in that waterbody. It can make the water appear clearer, which to some may appear visually healthier than a lake that's slightly cloudy. Barada said clearer water is often less productive water. Bluegreen algae blooms have been attributed to changes made by these mussels since they selectively filter green algae instead of the bluegreens.

"Sampling methods for these mussels are like looking for a needle in a haystack," said Zach. "Most of the time when we find larvae or adults an infestation is already established."

There are currently three waterbodies infested by zebra mussels in Nebraska – Offutt Air Force Base Lake, Lewis and Clark Lake and the Missouri River below Gavins Point Dam. There are no quagga mussel infestations at this

time. "It is a continuing battle to keep our waterbodies protected because neighboring states have detected zebra and quagga mussels, and people are highly mobile with their watercrafts which serve as a major vector for these mussels," Zach said.

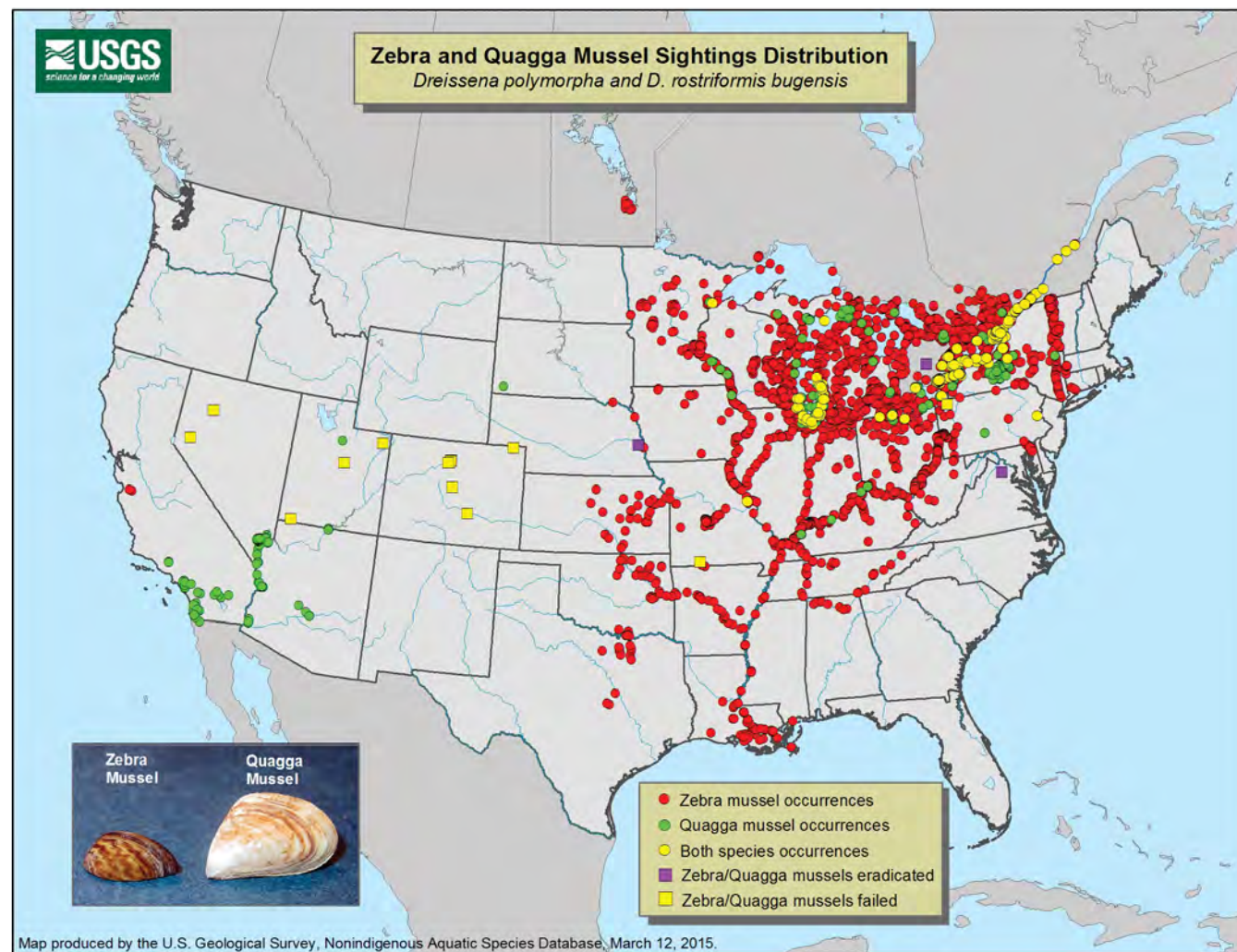
Offutt Base Lake

Offutt Air Force Base Lake is located in Bellevue and presence of zebra mussels was confirmed in 2006. The lake was treated with copper sulfate in both 2008 and 2009 and initial



PHOTO COURTESY OF CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

While quagga mussels (left) and zebra mussels (right) are small, do not let their size make you think they can't become a problem in Nebraska's waterbodies.



indications was that it was a successful treatment.

In order to contain the infestation, motorboats have not been allowed on the lake since 2008 except boats owned by the lake for rental by the public.

Unfortunately, unless you kill 100 percent of the mussels they will continue to reproduce, which was the case in this lake as a new infestation was confirmed in 2014.

Lewis and Clark Lake

One live adult zebra mussel was discovered in Lewis and Clark Lake in northeastern Nebraska in November, 2014 on the South Dakota side of the lake. In the summer of 2015, adult mussels were found on docks and boats in the lake, on floating docks at the Midway boat dock on the South Dakota side, the private marina on the northeast corner of the dam, Lewis and Clark State Recreation Area's Weigand

Marina and in the Missouri River below Gavins Point Dam.

South Dakota and Nebraska will continue to monitor the infestation, and signage will be installed in the infested areas alerting boaters to take preventative measures to contain the infestation. Outreach and media will also be employed to spread preventative information to a wide reaching audience.

The infestation includes areas of the Missouri River; however it will take time to determine the extent of the infestation and how the mussels will tolerate areas with high flow rates. Modifications to the Gavins Point hydropower facility operation will be required to ensure mussels do not damage equipment. Water being pulled from the infested waterbodies by pipes will require monitoring to ensure municipal water systems and irrigation systems are not clogged by mussels.

Lake Zorinsky

Lake Zorinsky, in Omaha, is one of the few successful eradications of an established zebra mussel infestation in the U.S. When the mussels were discovered in November, 2010, Zorinsky was drawn down 20 feet that winter, exposing the mussels and freezing out the entire population. There are no longer zebra mussels in Lake Zorinsky. It was officially reclassified in 2016 as a zebra mussel free waterbody.

Its success came from it being a flood control reservoir with a gate structure – one that allowed such significant water manipulation. Lakes like Zorinsky have a chance, unfortunately this reservoir type is not typical of reservoirs built prior to the 2000s. Most of Nebraska's larger reservoirs were built for irrigation purposes, making it highly unlikely they would be drawn down for zebra

mussel eradication. Thus, if they did become infested, there is no proven treatment that is effective but not cost prohibitive. Extensive research is underway to find control and management options for zebra and quagga mussels in open lake systems.

Education and New Stamp

Ultimately, it comes down to preparation. The Commission and the Nebraska Invasive Species Program have come to know their opponent and realize that the best way to fight these invasives is to keep them out of the ring altogether.

According to Zach, part of this means teaming up. Invasive mussels are easily spread by watercrafts; therefore, prevention programs working across state lines to educate the public and inspect watercrafts to prevent new infestations is imperative.

Furthermore, when out-of-state boats from infested waters are destined for one of Nebraska's many water bodies, "I'll actually get an e-mail telling me that from some states with established boat inspection programs," Zach said. Instead of isolating themselves, states are working together to increase public outreach and boat inspection efforts.

Fortunately for Nebraska, a formal AIS program is just what the state legislature ordered. This past March, Nebraska instituted a triennial fee for resident motorboat registration and an annual AIS Program sticker for non-resident motorboats launching

"To prevent the spread of zebra and quagga mussels, we must be proactive rather than reactive."

– Allison Zach, Nebraska Invasive Species Program Coordinator

in Nebraska waters. The sticker can be purchased on the Commission's website, Outdoornebraska.gov. The income raised by these fees fund an AIS program at the Commission. This is an important step which provides a permanent funding source for waterbody inspections, management, treatment and prevention efforts to protect Nebraska's waterbodies from all invasive species.

The Nebraska Invasive Species Program has been conducting public outreach and boater surveys since 2010. It will continue AIS outreach and coordinate with the Commission and their new Aquatic Invasive Species Program. Public outreach is where the shoe comes in. Cramer's biggest mussel defense is education. She attends community fishing events, hands out tattoos and bobbers to kids, and conducts surveys to ascertain how to best tailor future outreach efforts. Cramer and her fellow technicians also conduct voluntary boat checks, which serve as another opportunity to spread preventative information.

Protect our waterbodies by being proactive and drying watercrafts. Prior to leaving a boat ramp, drain all water out of the boat, towel dry

live wells and other areas that contain water and spray with vinegar, pull boat plugs and dry the entire boat for at least 5 days between uses to kill AIS. Inspect your boat to find attached mussels or vegetation to prevent the spread of AIS. The key is to not move any water or material from one waterbody to another as it can contain organisms that no one wants moved. By preventing new waterbodies from becoming infested by AIS we are buying ourselves time to find effective treatments to eradicate and manage infestations. Learn more at the Nebraska Invasive Species Program website (www.neinvasives.com). ■



CHECK
and remove
mud, plants and
aquatic life



CLEAN
boat and gear by
washing, draining
and drying



DRAIN
water from bilge, live wells and
ballast tanks prior to leaving
waterbody



DRY
for at least
five days



Cold Water Cats

For best tasting catfish, catch them through the ice or during the thaw of spring.

Story and photos by Julie Geiser

Catfishing can be done year-round, but I prefer catfish through the ice. Yes, the days of set lines and 10-pound plus test line on a heavy rod can bring in monster catfish, but for the dinner table, I prefer a wintery catch. The last days of ice in March can provide just that, and the fishing remains just as hot once the water opens back up.

Catfish meat is more firm in the winter when the water is cold. Catfish caught in the summer tend to be mushy, although I've been told by several anglers to simply put my summer catch on ice to replicate my icy-water catch.

Almost any of Nebraska's small ponds, lakes or interstate lakes can produce a limit of catfish. For short trips close to home grab the

essentials: ice auger, auger gas, sled to carry supplies, ice cleats, bait, tip-ups or rods and reels, extra hooks and fishing equipment, needle-nose pliers for removing hooks, an ice hut for those bitter cold days, a heater, life jackets, 20 feet of rope, a throw cushion for safety, and a couple gallon buckets for sitting on and for storing supplies, snacks and fish. I keep all our equipment on the sleds in the garage so they are ready to go on a whim, adding to the supply list if we make longer trips.

Fishing for panfish is fun with ice fishing rods and reels, but for bigger catfish tip-ups with braided line of 20 to 30-pound test and a treble hook loaded with smelt for bait are a must; the legal limit is five tip-ups per person.

Tip-ups allow anglers to fish multiple holes at the same time, at varying depths if needed, and at different positions on drop-offs or other structures. When a fish takes the bait the flag on the tip-up goes up in the air, then the race to get the fish is on. Using sonar systems is a good way to find fish under the ice; drill a couple holes, put the sonar down for a look and either move on or start fishing. Mark your "honey holes" with GPS to be able to go back to them each winter.

When spring fills the air and the frozen waters thaw, switching gear is as simple as changing out the tip-ups for a medium action rod and reel and six-pound test line or heavier for cold water catfishing. Do this from a boat or the bank on reservoirs or small ponds. The water will still be cold this time of year, meaning that catfish meat will be firm for the dinner table. ■



Tom Geiser prepares the tip-ups by placing store-bought smelt on the treble hook before setting the flag and dropping the line.



Catching cold water catfish can be done at many of Nebraska's reservoirs, ponds or I-80 lakes.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act

Many bird populations in jeopardy before 1916 treaty.

By Joel Jorgensen, Nongame Bird Program Manager, NGPC

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) is one of the most important environmental laws in our nation's history, yet it remains relatively obscure and most may not know it will be turning 100 years old in 2016. The MBTA prohibits the unpermitted killing, capture, possession, selling (and a few other things) of migratory birds in the U.S. Prior to its enactment, many bird populations were in jeopardy because of unregulated commercial harvest and trade. Much of the harvest was for food, but birds were also slaughtered for the fashion industry as certain feathers were in demand and used to adorn women's hats in the early 20th Century.

Just as the name indicates, the MBTA is a treaty, originally between the U.S. and Canada originally signed in August of 1916. Later conventions expanded the MBTA to include agreements with Mexico (1936), Japan (1972) and the Soviet Union (1976), now Russia. Even if you've not heard of the MBTA before, you've likely been affected by it.



In the early 1900s, many women's hats were adorned with bird feathers.



Hawks, like this Swainson's in Dawes County, and owls were originally not protected by the MBTA, but were added in 1972.

The MBTA provides the legal framework in which the federal government and states work together to provide hunting seasons and bag limits for migratory birds such as waterfowl, rails and mourning doves. The MBTA also protected populations of a number of birds, such as bald eagles



Whooping cranes are protected by both the MBTA and Endangered Species Act.

How Does This Effect Hunting?

According to the MBTA, hunting seasons on migratory birds can only occur between Sep. 1-Mar. 10 for a maximum of 107 days. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, with the Flyways, may establish frameworks inside of those dates and lengths, but not beyond.

The MBTA determines that shooting hours are 30 minutes before sunrise to sunset, and also establishes means of take and possession limits.

The MBTA also has provisions, including laws for legal shooting hours, for Conservation Orders or Seasons, which are not hunting seasons and can occur outside those dates (e.g., Light Goose Conservation Order).

and whooping cranes, from facing extinction.

Even though some birds continue to experience declines due to habitat loss and other factors, the MBTA is a foundational law that has made bird conservation a priority in the United States for a century. ■

Product Review

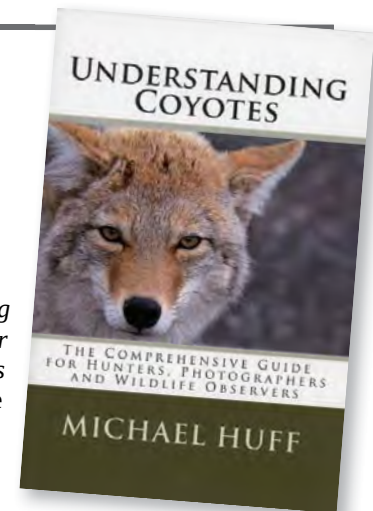
A handful of leftover gems from the holiday season.

Reviewed by Robert Gaia, Jeff Kurrus, Terry Mayfield and Dylan McCaugherty

Throughout the year NEBRASKAland Magazine tests a number of products so you don't have to. Here are a few more from the 2015 holiday season that you might want to try in 2016. ■

Author Michael Huff's book, *Understanding Coyotes: The Comprehensive Guide for Hunters, Photographers and Wildlife Observers* accomplishes the goals it sets forth. If you have any interest in this mysterious predator, this book's 120 pages are a great starting point.

Amazon.com. –JK



I'm an over-the-top kind of guy. My bar-b-que grill is the front end of a 57 Chevy, and I have a drinking fountain in my living room, so when I first saw the blue flame from the Air Lighter fire starter, I immediately fell in love. While many would see a butane charcoal starter this large as, well, over the top, I saw it as both an effective way to start a fire and perhaps, more importantly, a conversation. For any extremist on your gift list, look no further. Thebisoncompany.com. –TM



Kudos to this saw for chainsaw work around the house or deer camp. The saw is lightweight and boasts plenty of power to cut through 10-inch diameter trees. I found this saw not only great around the house, but also for clearing old logging road/ATV trails in the woods. It's the perfect saw for outdoor enthusiasts. Blackanddecker.com. –RG

When buying a food dehydrator, be sure you know what your plans are. I recently had the opportunity to try out two models of Excalibur food dehydrators. The first, a 440-watt five-tray model, was perfect for anything you wanted to try, from venison jerky to fruit. Available in multiple colors, it would fit perfectly in just about any kitchen. We also tried the EZ Dry, a stackable unit that worked well for nonconsumptive users, such as hikers and bikers, looking for a healthy, dried fruit snack. To view the complete line of dehydrators, visit Excaliburdehydrator.com. –JK



As someone who works behind a desk all day but enjoys getting outside after rush-hour traffic, I really appreciated the versatility of Ridgmont's complete shoe line. I've worn the Outback while a colleague of mine has tried their Monty Lo, and these are attractive and we could wear them both to the office or downtown with friends. We also wore both models out hiking and found them to be quite durable and comfortable on both paved and unpaved trails. I would recommend these shoes for someone who lives in an urban environment but likes to get out of the city and explore nature. Ridgmontoutfitters.com. –DM



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It's a Dog's Life

Living with dogs for more than 50 years.

By Roger Welsch

I love dogs. I love dogs so much I wrote a book about them, *A Life With Dogs*. My friends have heard me say "Dog is god spelled backward, and kitty cat is ticky tacky spelled backward ... almost" so often they don't even bother to yawn any more. I got my first dog when I was 6 years old and have been without a dog very rarely since, and have had at least one dog in the house for over 50 years now. In fact, I have always argued that just to be on the safe side everyone should make a point of always having two dogs, preferably big and ideally black: your basic number one main dog and a back-up dog just in case. For 25 years Linda and I have maintained a crew of two black Labs in the house, with the occasional golden retriever spare, every one of them a noble creature that we loved as much as we loved each other. Linda has always leaned toward naming dogs the obvious – Blackie, Goldie, Whitie, Brownie. I tend toward the evocative – Slump, Abigail, Thud (the name he earned with his head), St. Dunstan, Lucky (he wasn't), Black Jack, Pooter (the name she earned with her ... oh, never mind.)

I couldn't imagine life without a dog. Until last year when in a matter of a couple months we watched Dunstan and Abigail decline into old age far too quickly and then suffered the misery of watching them die. They did ok, passing out of this life with a usual canine dignity that has always suggested to me that they know a lot more than we do about the process. But their passing was not so easy on us. Over the weeks as they said their goodbyes, they seemed more sorry for us in our pain and despair than they did for themselves. Believe me, the person who comes up with the 100-year dog is going to be stinking rich, and deservedly so.

We took the loss of Dunstan and Abbie pretty hard ... we still expect to see them when we come into the yard from a trip to the grocery store ... but we decided we just weren't ready to adopt a new friend and needed some time before looking for another dog. Linda was worn out from taking care of ailing, old dogs (when she says that, she looks meanfully at me) and I'm not sure there is enough energy for another bout of mourning in me, at least for a while.

Thank goodness, we have friends with dogs and they are

always welcome here. Mick's Handsome Joe loves life at the cabin, or as he prefers to call it "Stick Heaven," and Antonia's Evey just paid her first visit here to her Nebraska grandparents' home and seemed to have enjoyed her stay (aside from that one little accident on the living room floor). Both Joe and Evey have come to know Linda as "Cookie Lady" and me as "Grandpa Who Throws Like A Girl."

Probably the least trouble of all of our canine friends on the place are the coyotes who regularly come down our cabin road, picking through gut piles left by hunters and the scraps I leave for the crow family that lives along the river. I always enjoy their moonlight serenades and the little gifts they leave on the river road. They too are "good dogs" but have never settled down beside my lounge chair for a good ear rubbing while I read the newspaper.

Will Linda and I ever have another dog? It's hard to



imagine we won't, considering the degree to which we miss them and how gleeful we are when we have canine visitors. Linda and I both anguish when we see images of dogs up for adoption at the local Humane Society. Especially the big black ones. We make a point of never visiting the rescue center because no resolve is strong enough to resist. At least not ours. Certainly not mine when it comes to a black Lab puppy with brown eyes. A man has his limits, after all. Sooner or later all resolve will disappear, I'm sure, and some little guy is going to make it clear that he belongs here and Linda and I will have no argument to offer to the contrary. ■

Roger Welsch is an author, humorist and folklorist. He has appeared in NEBRASKAland Magazine since 1977.



My Photo Tip: Speed is Everything

Whether you want to stop action or not, and reduce camera movement, dictates shutter speed selection.

By Eric Fowler

Choosing the correct shutter speed can be critical in obtaining a quality photograph. But just what that “correct” speed is depends on many factors, including your subject and the type of photograph you are trying to capture.

A camera’s shutter speed determines how long its sensor (or back in the old days, its film) is exposed to light. In most cases, your shutter speed must be fast enough to stop action that can come in two forms.

The first is your ability to hold the camera still. A shaky camera will produce photos that are not sharp. A tried and true rule photographers counted on before the days of image stabilization (IS) is the slowest shutter speed you can use to guarantee a sharp photo is 1 over your focal length. That means you can hand-hold a wide-angle, 20 mm lens at 1/20th of a second, and a 300 mm telephoto at 1/300th of a second. IS and Vibration Reduction (VR)-equipped lenses allow us to push those numbers two or more stops,

something we could already do if we braced our camera properly against our body, and our bodies against a solid object. But in low light situations, when we’ve already turned up our ISO as high as we’d like, we still have to use our tripod, especially with long lenses.

The second form of action you need to stop is the movement of your subject. How fast that subject is moving, the direction it is moving and the lens you are using all factor into exactly how fast of a shutter speed is needed. It will take a faster shutter speed to freeze a blue-winged teal in flight as it buzzes the marsh than it will a mallard backpedaling to land. Yet while many cameras have shutter speeds of up to 1/8000th of a second, you can stop most birds with a shutter speed of 1/500th of a second to ensure your subject and the background are sharp.

But one of the main rules of photography is that rules are meant to be broken. So now you have to decide whether you

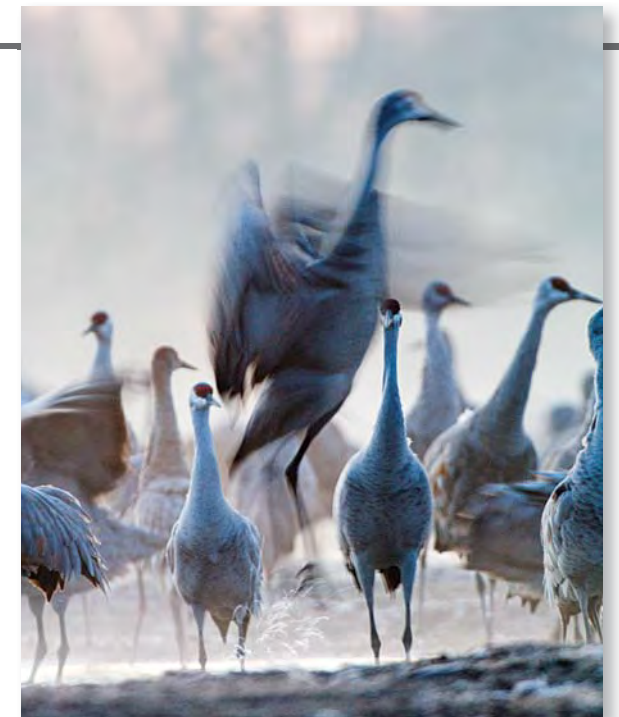
want to stop the action, or which action you want to stop.

Motion blur, when done properly, adds a unique, artistic effect to a photograph. Hold the camera still and let your subject move through the frame and it becomes a blur. How big of a blur depends on the shutter speed you choose.

You can use this trick when you head to the central Platte River to watch sandhill cranes come to roost. Put your camera on a tripod and set your shutter speed at 1/30th or slower and the cranes that have already landed will be sharp and the ones coming in to land or dancing on a sandbar will blur.

Yet whether you are photographing a deer or your daughter running down a field, it’s always a good idea to move your camera to follow the action. Ignore the advice I gave you in the second paragraph and choose a slow shutter speed, however, and you can blur the background, producing another interesting effect. If you do a good job panning with the action and keeping your subject steady in the frame, they will remain sharp, or at least parts of them will.

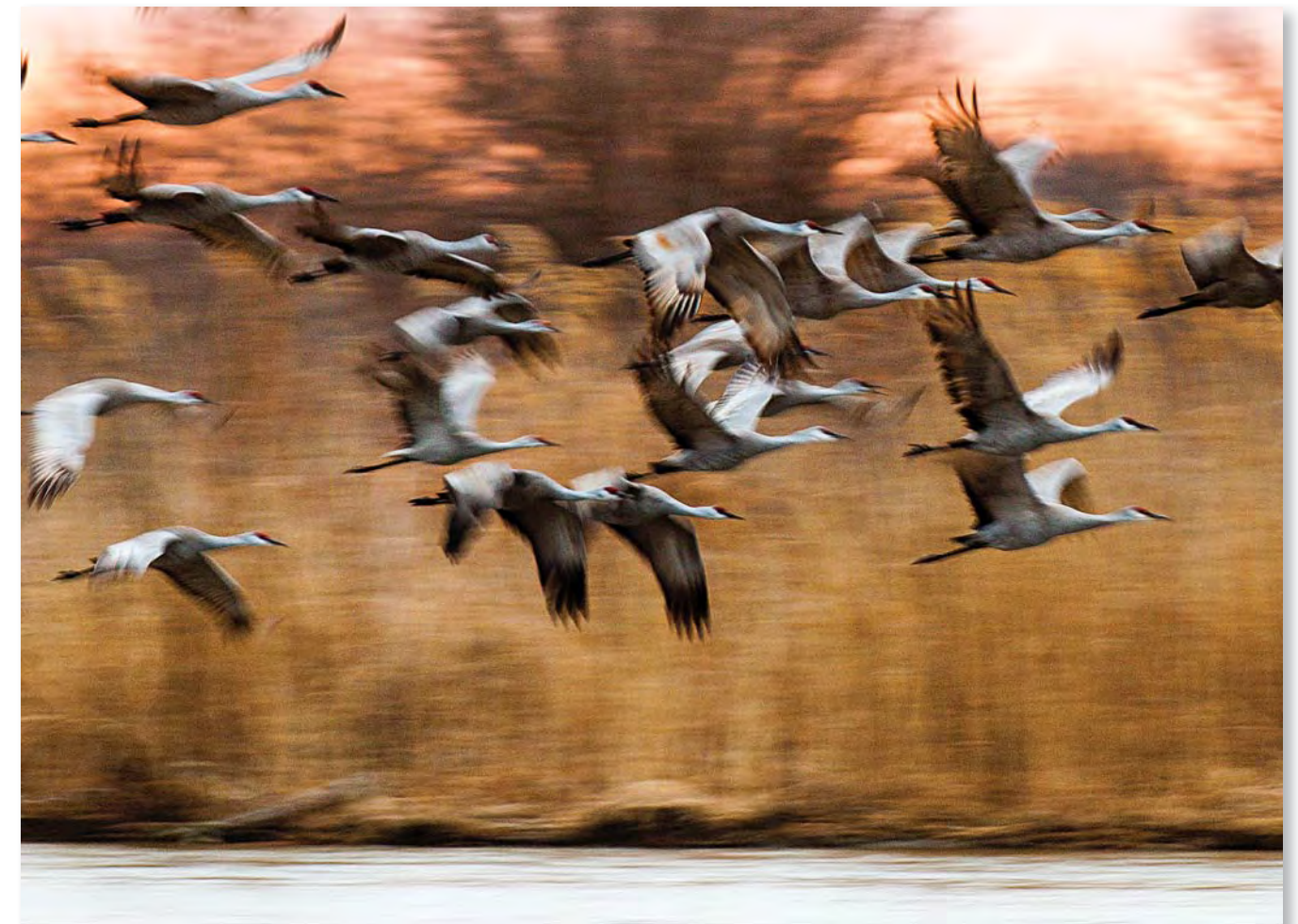
When you head out to watch the migration this spring, flip your camera into shutter priority mode and break some rules. You may like the results. ■



In this photo, captured at Martin’s Reach Wildlife Management Area, a tripod and cable release eliminated camera movement and held the 500 mm lens steady at a shutter speed of 1/13th of a second, which was enough to freeze the standing cranes but not the one dancing.



In the photo above and at right, captured 15 minutes apart from the same blind on the Platte River panning with a 500 mm lens, a shutter speed of 1/640th of a second froze the cranes in flight and the background (above), while a shutter speed of 1/60th of a second left the background a blur and froze the cranes just enough to call the photo artistic (opposite page).



Harvesting Native Seeds

An interview with Jan Jorgensen.

By Brenda K. Johnson

Conservationist Jan Jorgensen of Creighton, Nebraska, has a second part-time job made for her. It fits well with her current part-time position leading conservation projects for six counties at Northeast Nebraska Resource, Conservation, and Development in Plainview and her 33 years in conservation work.



Jan's friend Alison Krohn started a seed farm called Shoestring Acres on Alison's family farm near Clearwater. The wildflower and native grass seed farm features local ecotype species of upland environments. Working with native plants drew Jan into conservation so seed harvesting is becoming natural for her. Jan has spent a lot of time outdoors and has special interest in wildflowers and native grasses, both of which she spoke about during a recent interview.

Q: *How did you start seed collecting?*

A: Alison would tell me what seeds she was looking for and I would go look for them. I didn't have to have a lot of training to harvest seed. I have another friend who also has a farm and he has plants that I'm less familiar with. It's been a fun experience that I've enjoyed.



By identifying wildflowers in early summer, Jorgensen knows the types of seeds to collect in the late summer, fall and winter.

Q: *How do you find the native plants you want?*

A: I get in my pickup and can harvest from roadside ditches. I also harvest on our farm and on my brother-in-law's land. I start looking for the wildflowers in early summer for the plants my friend has on her list, so I'll know where the plants are when harvest time comes.

Q: *When do you collect seed?*

A: Most of the harvesting is done in the late summer, fall or winter when the seeds are mature. It's often hard to identify plants without the bloom, so I take notes on where the wildflowers are located.

Q: *Are the plants you harvest far apart and seeds hard to handle?*

It's labor intensive because it's hand harvest and you walk and carry little buckets on your hips attached to a belt. You need your hands free and you need lids on your buckets when harvesting fluffy seeds. Other seeds are heavy enough that they don't blow away on windy days. When you find a place where you can gather two or three kinds of seeds, that's really a good site. If they are not quite ready, you have to come back.

Q: *What is a typical day harvesting native plants?*

A: I pick a nice day to go out. One thing about this job is that you call your own shots. When seeds are ripe, I hang buckets on my hips and put on gloves. You don't need many tools. I may gather seeds three or four hours at a time. When I get home, I put seeds into paper sacks if they are dry. If they still need to dry some, I spread them out in baby wading pools or boxes to lose moisture. Keeping seed notes and keeping seeds separate from each other as they dry is important. When I have a supply, I make a trip to the seed farm to sell the seed.

Q: *Do you harvest rare seed in short supply?*

A: I do leave seeds for nature, and definitely don't harvest them all. There's some seed spillage anyway as you take seeds off in your hand. And I never dig up plants. ■

Jorgensen says it doesn't take many tools to be a seed harvester. "You need lids on your buckets for the wind, a keen eye to tell mature native plants apart, patience and good notes from earlier harvesting trips." Knowledge of wildflower identification and resources for questions are also valued parts of her skill set.

Early Risers

Why do some reptiles and amphibians wake up before others?

By Dan Fogell, Herpetologist, Southeast Community College

Nobody likes winter, really. Especially those animals that rely on the sun for body heat. As winter approaches, amphibians and reptiles in Nebraska find shelter to wait out the harsh cold until the heat returns. But before the warmth of spring arrives, even while winter is still toying with us, there are some that emerge so early from their winter slumber that snow is often still on the ground. And so the question we all want to ask is "Why get up if you don't have to?"

The hands-down winner of the "first to wake up every spring" award is the **small-mouthed salamander**. All salamanders are cold-tolerant, and in fact they prefer cooler to warmer temperatures. Here in Nebraska as winter draws to a close in late February and early March, these little gray salamanders make an annual pilgrimage to shallow pools filled with melted snow. Many of the pools are still covered with ice, but the salamanders slide beneath the ice into near freezing water temperatures.

Not long after the small-mouthed salamanders slip beneath the ice, the first frogs of the season begin to chorus ... often from the same ponds. In early to mid-March, in nearly every pool, ditch or other shallow water habitat formed from snow melt or early rains, there will be boreal chorus frogs singing their songs. Snow is often still on the ground, continuing to melt into the pools. But when you hear what sounds like fingers running across the teeth of plastic combs coming from every puddle of water you see, you can rest assured that spring is not far off.

Why? For what reason does this seemingly irrational behavior sound like a good idea? Reproduction, of course. The perpetuation of the species. Pools formed by melted snow are not permanent. The small-mouthed salamander must court, mate and lay eggs, and the eggs must hatch and develop before the pools dry out. If they don't, there will be no recruitment for the year. So to improve success, salamanders get into the breeding ponds as early as possible.

Similarly, the **boreal chorus frogs** must breed and tadpoles must metamorphose before pools dry. But these little frogs have an extra element incentivizing them to get an early start: competition. In March they are the only frogs using the pools. But as spring approaches, more frogs and toads will encroach upon their breeding ponds, where competition ensues at multiple levels. Chorusing time, space to lay eggs and food for tadpoles all become scarce resources as more frogs start to breed in the pools. But the



Small-mouthed salamanders prefer cooler to warmer temperatures.

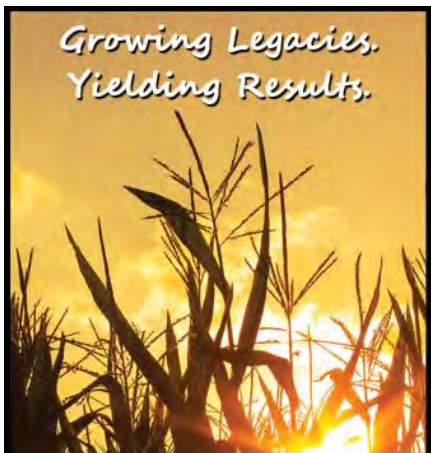


Boreal chorus frogs breed early in the spring.

boreal chorus frogs will have reduced their competition with their late winter head start. By the time other frogs show up, chorus frog tadpoles will already have hatched and started developing, thus obtaining resources before the competition begins. In fact, when some species are just starting to breed, chorus frogs have already metamorphosed and left the water.

Getting out of bed early for the sake of improved reproductive success is a good strategy, but there are some risks and trade-offs. Late season cold spells can refreeze breeding pools, killing breeding adults, eggs and tadpoles. Dry winters can result in no breeding pools at all, and without a backup strategy a full year of reproduction could be lost. These animals have developed these adaptations as a result of harsh conditions on the Great Plains. But as climates change, the future of these species may depend on their ability to adjust their strategies. ■

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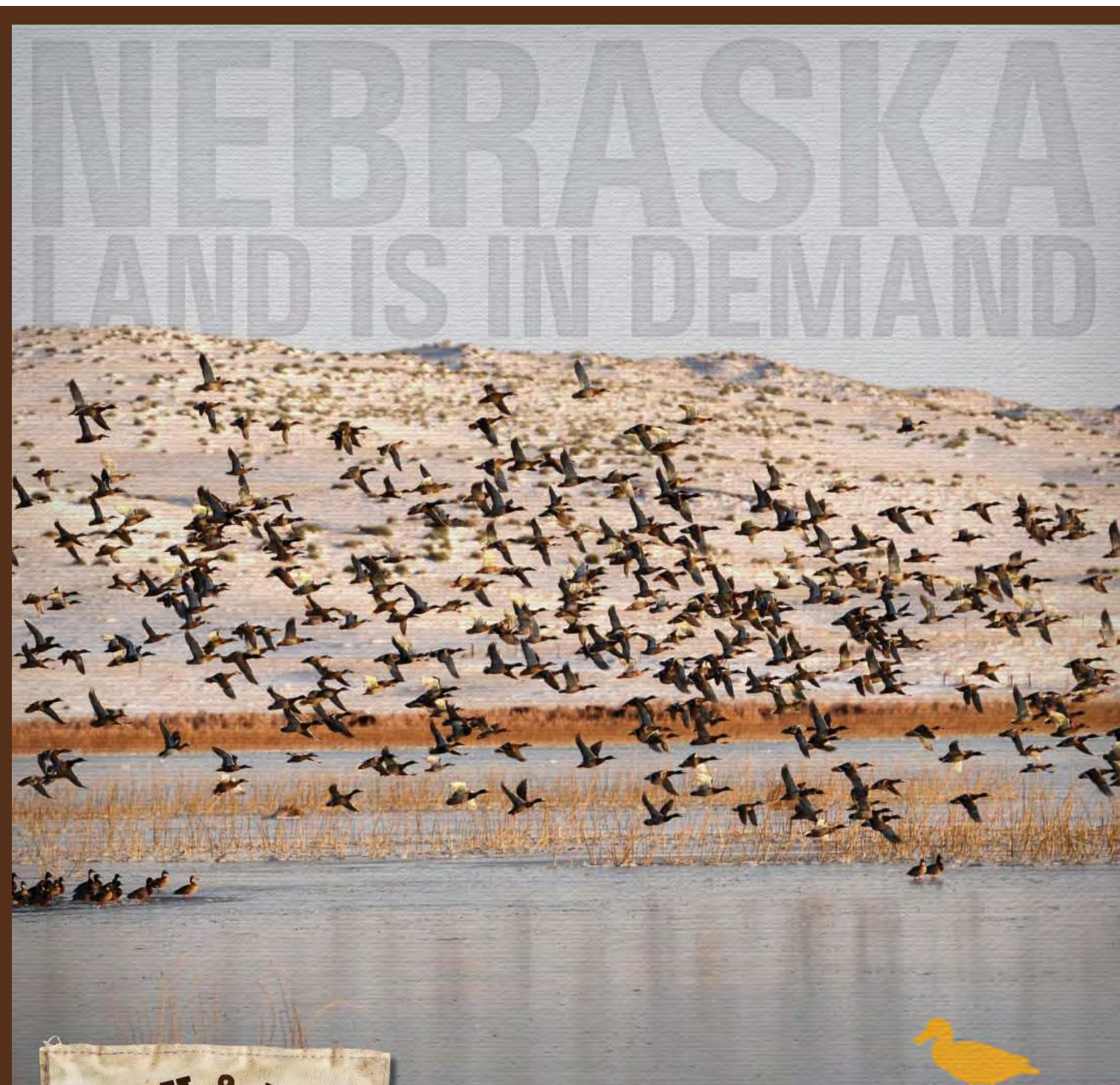
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◀ Attached is a photo of me when I was 10½. I had received my Winchester 16 gauge shotgun for my 10th birthday that July. We visited my aunt and uncle on the homestead a mile north of Shickley for Christmas, 1955. I went hunting with my dad, Frank Johnson, and uncle, Cliff Bahr. This is me proudly holding my first pheasant. The farm cat had to get it's tail in the photo too. I still have the shotgun 60 years later and still do some target shooting, but walking the corn fields is getting difficult. My wife and I have lived on the Gulf coast of Florida for 40 years, but still enjoy frequent visits back to Nebraska to visit family and enjoy the beautiful scenery. I love the photos in NEBRASKAland.

– LeMoyne Johnson, president
Johnson Photomaging, Inc
Bradenton, Florida



◀ Hunts like this occurred at the Ray Pierson goose pits at Lewellen through the 1970s. Most of the time our limit was met by 10 a.m. daily then to his garage to clean them. Every man had a job and we were done in a few hours. Same guys for several years. Great fun. I am pictured in the red vest.

– Roger Boerkircher, Cozad, Nebraska

Send contributions to: Portraits from the Past, NEBRASKAland Magazine, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370. Or e-mail to Tim.Reigert@Nebraska.gov. Photos should show people enjoying Nebraska outdoor activities, such as camping, boating, hunting or fishing, and must have been taken before 1980. We will give priority to unusual photos or activities. When possible, please include a story about the photograph and identify the people, places and approximate date it was taken. Photos will be returned.



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*GRAND ISLAND
NEBRASKA*

photo by Rick Rasmussen, PlatteRiverPhotography.com

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Tea-smoked Canada Goose

A post-season hunting season delight for the dinner table.

By Jenny Nguyen

This is by far one of the more interesting recipes I've attempted. It's a simplified version of zhangcha duck, which is a classic Chinese Sichuan dish usually reserved for special occasions. Though the traditional preparation is difficult, this recipe is simple and quite fun. I had never thought of using tea to smoke meat, and the Sichuan peppercorn rub added a unique flavor to the goose that I've never had before. As far as cooking, dinner was ready within 30 minutes.

Sichuan peppercorn can be found at Asian grocery stores or you can purchase it on Amazon – and with free shipping if you have Prime membership. You can also use duck for this recipe, but adjust the cooking time accordingly. This recipe is also best with waterfowl breasts that still have the fat or skin on them. The fat is the best part; it will take in the smoke flavor well.

Servings: 2

Prep Time: 1 hour

Cook Time: about 30 minutes

Ingredients:

- 1 Canada goose breast, skin on
- Oil
- 2 teaspoon of Sichuan peppercorns (dried prickly ash), seeded and crushed
- Sea salt, to taste
- 2 pieces of star anise
- ½ cup of black tea leaves
- ¼ cup of raw Jasmine rice
- 1 tablespoon of brown sugar
- 2 tablespoon of cilantro leaves, chopped
- 2 scallions, thinly sliced
- 2 servings of cooked Jasmine rice

1. Grind 2 teaspoons of Sichuan peppercorns in a food processor for mortar and pestle. Then with a sharp knife, score the skin of goose breast in a diamond pattern. Be careful not cut into the meat. Rub crushed Sichuan peppercorns and sea salt, to taste, on all sides. Cover and



Tea-smoked Canada goose adds a unique flavor to the meat with little preparation time.

allow the breast to stand at room temperature for 1 hour.

2. In a food processor or coffee grinder, grind 2 pieces of star anise, ½ cup of tea leaves, ¼ cup of uncooked rice and 1 tablespoon of brown sugar and set aside. Heat a cast iron pan over medium-high heat and add 1 tablespoon of oil. When hot, sear goose breast skin-side down for 2-3 minutes, or until browned. Then flip the breast over and sear the other side for another 2 minutes. Remove from heat.

3. Line a wok (or in our case, a tamale/seafood steamer) with aluminum foil. Scatter the tea mixture on the foil. Sprinkle 1 tablespoon of water over the mixture. Lay the rack into the steamer or on the wok. Then lay the goose breast skin-side down on the rack. Turn on the heat to low. After a few seconds, you should start seeing smoke. Cover the wok or steamer and cook for 15-17 minutes for medium rare, depending upon the thickness of the breast. Remember to keep the heat low to avoid burning the tea mixture. Once cooked to your liking, remove the breast and allow it to rest for 5-10 minutes.

4. Mix cilantro into cooked rice. Slice goose against the grain and serve with rice. Garnish with sliced scallion. Sprinkle sea salt over the goose to taste. ■

This recipe and photograph originally appeared on Jenny's Food for Hunters blog at Foodforhunters.com.



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The Sewer Fox

I was off duty and made a bad decision to break my diet and eat some fast food. After picking up my food, I decided to stop in nearby Eden Park in Lincoln to eat my lunch. As I pulled into the parking lot, I thought I saw a set of ears in a nearby storm drain.

At first I pulled up close ... but nothing appeared. I was afraid I had been seeing things. I pulled farther back and waited about 10 seconds and there it was again. I pulled out my camera and marveled at what I was seeing, a red fox.

Thank goodness for bad decisions.

*Dina Barta, NGPC Conservation Officer
March 17, 2014*



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