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NEBRASKAland

December 2015



Hunters find all sorts of ways to pass the time on a slow, cold day in the goose pit. Tom Jasnoch and Jamie Vasa of Ogallala got a laugh at the expense of Jasnoch's yellow Labrador retriever, Abby. Photo by Eric Fowler.

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NEBRASKA
— GAME  PARKS —
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In this issue

NEBRASKAland 2015 Photo Contest

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Prairie Dog Town Tenants • Waterfowl Poppers
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This holiday season, give a year full of fun and memories by giving Nebraska state park, fishing and hunting permits.

And don't forget a NEBRASKAland subscription as a guide for places to go and things to do.



NEBRASKA
— GAME PARKS —

NEBRASKAland Magazine

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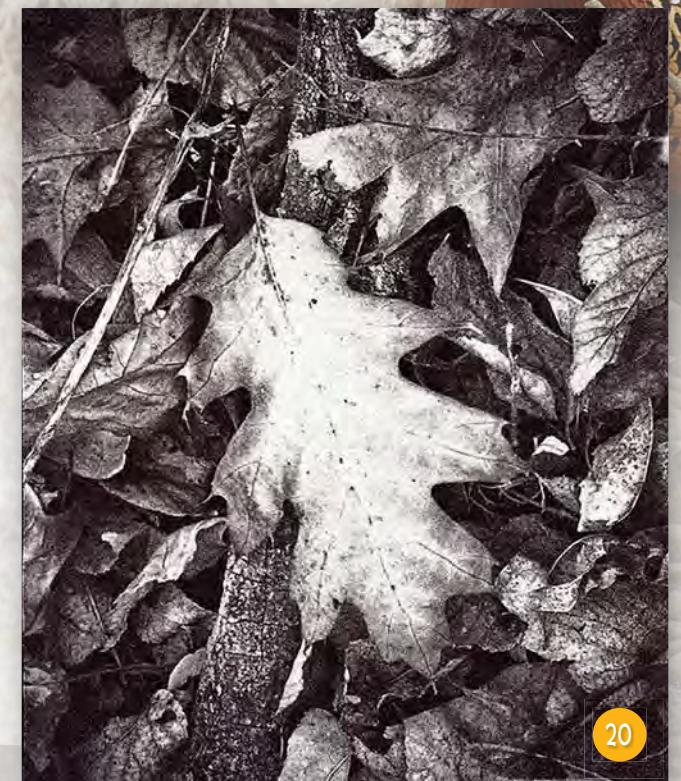
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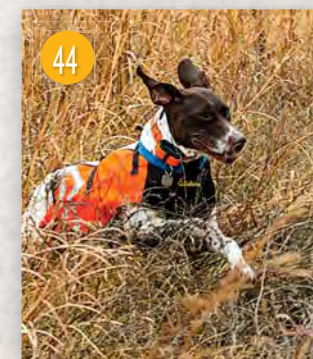
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ON THE WEB...



WHEN YOU SEE THIS SYMBOL IN THE PAGES OF
NEBRASKAland MAGAZINE, VISIT
NEBRASKAlandMAGAZINE.COM AND VIEW OUR INTERACTIVE
DIGITAL EDITION FOR MORE INFORMATION.

Cover: This photo of a downy woodpecker was one of more than 1,000 images submitted to this year's NEBRASKAland Photo Contest. See the story on page 28. Photo by Kelvin Nygren.

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Find more ideas at OutdoorNebraska.org



Steve Frederick of Scottsbluff didn't capture the image of the lighthouse he envisioned when he went to Lake Minatare on a foggy morning in September, but did capture three mule deer bucks out for a morning walk along the lake's northeastern shore.

And Trail Tales Too

Every month we learn something when we read NEBRASKAland Magazine. We are also sending Trail Tales to our grandchildren. It's a big hit for them.

Diane Frohardt, via e-mail



This grasshopper was photographed by Judy Foreman on Nebraska Game and Parks Commission property in Lancaster County.



Outdoor Plates

Kent Mann has hunted white-tailed deer most of his adult life, long enough to know that deer hunters are like fishermen and known to embellishment and overstatement of the truth. His message plate is an ode to those “White Tales.”

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) along with your hometown and a brief description of the interests expressed on your license plate to Eric.Fowler@Nebraska.gov.



This great blue heron was photographed at Prairie Queen Recreation Area in Sarpy County by Justin Pence.

Send your comments to:
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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

North American Porcupine

By Lindsay Rogers

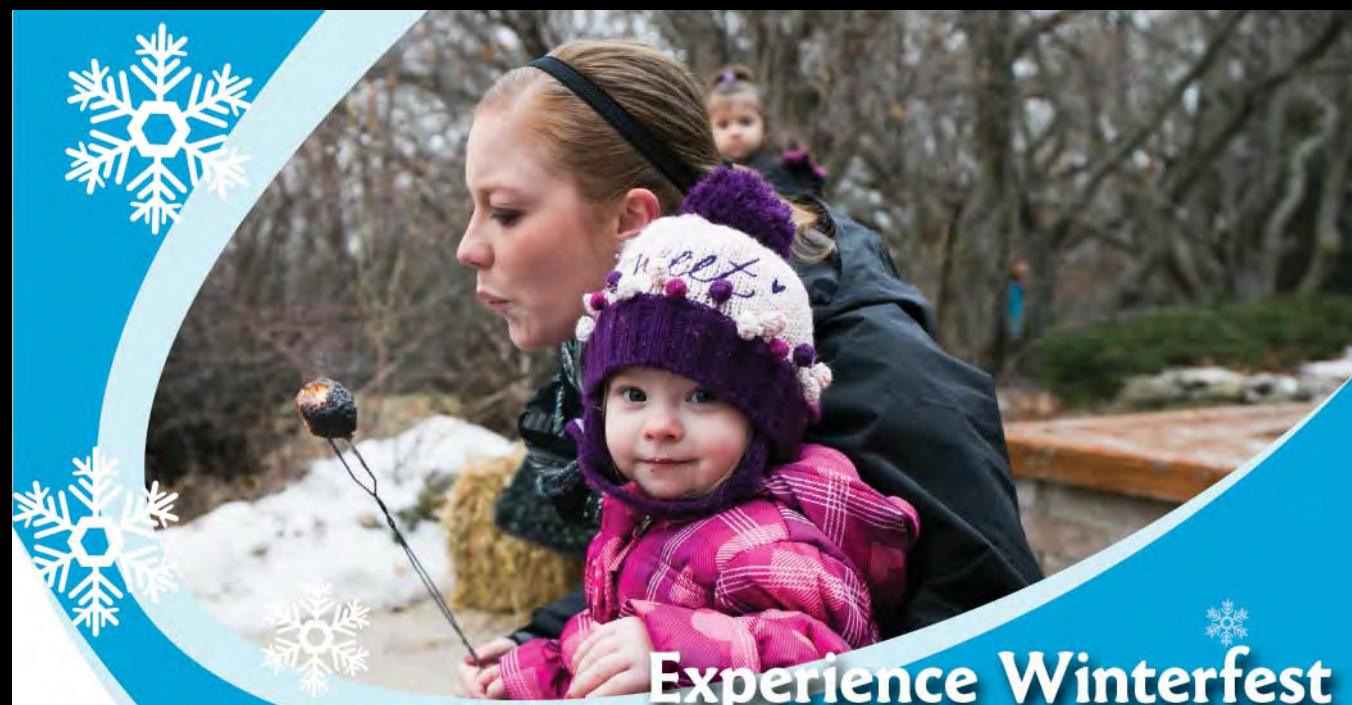
Erethizon dorsatum

Although they have relatively poor eyesight and are slow moving, don't think the porcupine is unprotected. Porcupines are covered by nearly 30,000 quills, each with specialized barbs on the tip to ensure they stick into any offending predator.

Many believe that porcupines can throw or shoot their quills at predators. This myth is not true, but quills release easily from the porcupine once stuck in an enemy. The back, sides and tail are intermixed with both quills and soft fur; their stomach is covered with only hair. These large rodents feed on plant material such as buds, stems and fruit, and are especially fond of the sugary cambium layer located just under the bark of trees. In Nebraska, porcupines are most common in the rocky terrain of the western conifer forests. Eastern expansion has been seen in recent years, with some species being found near the Missouri River. ■

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

PHOTO BY JOEL SARTORE



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Travelogue

By Jeff Kurrus

Platte Valley Parklands

A family can spend the entire month of December driving from one Platte Valley Parkland to the next without ever running out of things to do.

Start inside at Ak-sar-ben Aquarium to see a collection of the state's frogs, fishes and the like, then allow your young ones to spend a little time in the hands-on education room, complete with animal pelts, bones and even games to play.

Next, put on your heavy jacket for a hike through Schramm Park State Recreation Area or nearby Platte River State Park where winding woodland trails greet you once you leave the blacktop. If being outside remains your pleasure, then travel north to Eugene T. Mahoney State Park to ice skate at the park's activity center, sled down the toboggan run or hike through this park's version of the Platte River bluffs.

There is also time for indoor activities nearby at the Strategic Air and Space Museum. Their current exhibit is on display until Jan. 4, 2016, and focuses on the mathematics, science and technology behind the game of football – a Nebraska favorite. Sasmuseum.com

Venture over to the town of Ashland next and visit their line of shops, including the Glacial Till Tasting Room (Glacialtillvineyard.com) and its host of wines, or the Cooper Studio and Gallery to see original artwork.

You must also remember at least one more thing – you haven't eaten yet! Have a bite to eat at Round the Bend Steakhouse (Roundthebendsteakhouse.com) just south of Mahoney, or stay at Mahoney and enjoy The Lodge Restaurant.

For lodging, you can stay at one of Platte River's cabins or at Mahoney for a campground stay, a cabin, a room in the Peter Kiewit Lodge or even in one of the park's new four-bedroom mini-lodges.

Regardless of your plans, set aside plenty of time for your day, or days, in the Platte Valley Parklands.



Strategic Air and Space Museum



A Winter Cabin at Mahoney

Platte Valley
Parklands



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J. Sterling Morton and his newspaper staff in Nebraska City on May 29, 1899.

A Brief History Christmas Trees Opposed by J. Sterling Morton

By Patricia C. Gaster,
Nebraska State Historical Society

J. Sterling Morton (1832-1902) had a distinguished political career in this state, serving twice in the territorial legislature, as territorial secretary from 1858 to 1861, and on two occasions as acting territorial governor. He also served as secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture under President Grover Cleveland from 1893 to 1897. His chief legacy, however, is his promotion of tree planting on the prairies, and upon his initiative, the State Board of Agriculture in 1872 established Arbor Day.

In 1898 Morton established *The Conservative*, a weekly newspaper, in his hometown of Nebraska City to further his economic and political views and to promote agriculture and tree planting. He surely would have applauded the modern advent of the artificial Christmas tree, for on Nov. 23, 1899, he used his newspaper to attack the custom of cutting down



Blocks and other toys at the base of a Christmas tree.

healthy trees for use as holiday decorations. Morton wrote:

"Millions upon millions of the straightest, most symmetrical and vigorous hemlocks, spruces, pines and balsams, will soon be aboard freight cars and going towards cities to be put into homes for Christmas trees, which shall bear tin bells, dolls, bon bons, glass bulbs and all sorts of jimcracks for the amusement of children. The generations following will want for lumber which these Christmas trees would have made."

Reaction in the Nebraska press to Morton's criticism of Christmas trees was mixed. *The Courier* (Lincoln) on Dec. 9, 1899, agreed with him, saying, "The fragrant fir hung with presents, glittering with lights, and surrounded by the beautiful, happy faces of children is a pleasant sight. But it costs the life of a tree and we cannot afford it." The *Kearney Daily Hub* said on Dec. 13: "There are a great many of us . . . who have not stopped to think about it at all . . . and it seems now that attention has been called to the wanton destruction aforesaid, that it ought to be stopped. But he [Morton] shouldn't deprive us of our Christmas trees without offering us something else."

Today, realistic artificial Christmas trees, some pre-lit, and living, potted trees for sale or rent have enabled many to dispense with a cut tree for holiday decoration. Traditionalists can still visit a commercial Christmas tree farm to select a living tree. ■

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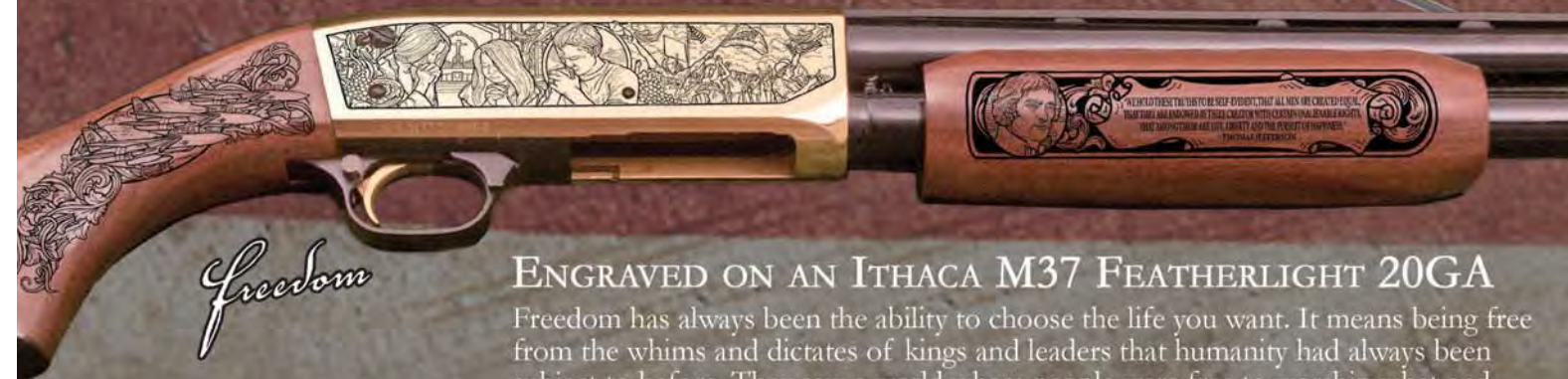
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Peace to the Founding Fathers didn't mean a Utopian world where conflict didn't exist. They were willing to fight and die to defend their rights. They intended to create a country that was strong enough to defend itself without being an aggressor. It meant protecting people's property, whether from other individuals or from the state.



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PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Elks Lodge Seek Hides

By Connor Graham

The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, known as the local Elks Lodge in most small towns, is again accepting donated deer hides from the beginning of the November firearm deer season through the end of the January antlerless deer season.

Donated hides will be shipped to a tannery to be turned into soft leather and made into gloves for veterans who use wheelchairs or used for craft kits that are distributed to veterans at

Veterans Affairs Hospitals across the world as part of the Elks Help a Vet program.

Before the hides can be shipped, they have to have all excess fat, flesh and both heads and tails removed, then table or stock salt must be rubbed into all fleshy surfaces. Volunteers at the drop-off locations do most of this work, but hunters are welcome to do it themselves before dropping off the hides. Care must be taken in the skinning process, however, as even small holes can result in the hide being ruined during the tanning process.

Contact your local Elks lodge for more information. ■

Slabbing for Winter Walleye

By Julie Geiser

When the transition from fall into winter begins and trolling lures such as crankbaits don't produce walleye bites, switch your fishing techniques to slabbing.

Slabs are lead or metal spoons, ranging from ¼ to more than 2 ounces in weight, that come in many different shapes and colors, typically sporting a treble hook. Bomber, Kastmaster, Hopkins, or the John Boy slab, which is locally made in Ogallala, are a few name brands that can be purchased from local sporting goods stores or online.

To rig the slab, tie a barrel swivel to your line and hook it to a monofilament leader tied to the slab. This keeps the line from twisting so when that lunker walleye hits, the line will be strong enough for the challenge.

There are many techniques that can be used to present a slab, but in colder water, vertical jigging from a boat is often the most effective. Drop the slab to the bottom, then raise and lower your rod tip from one to several feet, allowing your slab to rise off the bottom then flutter back down. Repeat this motion until you have a strike. Most strikes occur as the slab falls back to the bottom, so keep slack out of the line so you can feel a bite when it happens.

Fish may sit at the bottom not actively chasing baits. If this seems to be the case, tweak your technique by only lifting the slab 2-4 inches and hold it off the bottom. Let any waves move the bait. If you don't get a hit right away, drop the slab back to the bottom, then lift and hold again.

When fishing slabs, use your sonar to find fish that are relating to structure in relatively deep water. Fish as straight down from the boat as possible, using your electric trolling motor to hold the boat in position and let the fun begin.

Some winter months are mild and allow for many days on the water. If it gets cold and the lakes freeze, drill some holes and pick up slabbing where you left off when the water wasn't frozen.

Slabbing is a productive fall and winter technique at Lake McConaughy, Harlan County Lake, Merritt, Elwood and Sherman reservoirs and wherever walleye swim. ■



PHOTOS BY JULIE GEISER

Nebraska Bird Library

Pine Siskin

Song or calls: Rising "tsee," and harsh "chee" in flight. Song is huskier version of American goldfinch.

Description: Sexes similar. Brown above and pale below with prominent dark streaking overall. Yellow on wings and tail is conspicuous in flight; yellow undertail coverts. Two whitish wing bars; deeply notched tail. Bill is thinner than in other finches. Juvenile is similar to adults but has overall yellow tint.

Habitat: Migrants are found in both wooded and treeless areas, often feeding in small flocks on weed seeds. Breeding occurs in both coniferous and deciduous trees, and in ornamental plantings in diverse rural, suburban and urban settings.

Where in Nebraska: Irregular but sometimes common spring and fall migrant and winter visitor across the state. Occasional summer resident.

Field Notes: Winter range is erratic. May flock with American goldfinches in winter.

Fun Facts: Pine grosbeak adults when breeding develop pouches to carry food to their young. ■

To learn about more birds visit:

NebraskaBirdLibrary.org.



PHOTO BY BOB GRER

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Wingtips by Wild Bird Habitat

Pine Siskin are a northern irruptive bird species that may be abundant one winter in Nebraska with fewer appearing during other winters.

The Pine Siskin's erratic movement across the continent each winter is a response to available seed crops.

Slightly smaller than the House Finch with thicker striping and hints of yellow on wing edges and tail.

Pine Siskin store seed in their crops providing 5 to 6 hours of nighttime energy in sub zero temperatures.

A common bird in steep decline with a 75% population reduction since 1966.

Pine Siskin will aggressively compete with other birds at bird feeders.

Pine Siskin prefer Nyjer thistle seed, hulled sunflower seeds, and white Proso millet.



My Photo Tip: Season's Gift

Christmas lights provide a welcome opportunity for winter photographers.

By Justin Haag

The vibrant scenes of Christmas lights stand out during a time of year known for being dark and gray and provide opportunities for photography. Christmas lights can be photographed during any time of the night, but the best opportunity for an attractive shot comes at twilight. With the evening sky between sundown and nightfall, some details of a building or other subject are still visible and the scene is still dark enough for the lights to stand out. Don't just point and shoot with a camera, though. With such a low light situation, get a noise-free, in-focus exposure by using a low ISO, slow shutter speed and small aperture. A tripod and the use of a cable release or self-timer will be necessary to keep the camera steady. With good timing and a little know-how, a photographer's holiday light photos can be a gift that keeps on giving. ■



Fort Robinson State Park provides a great venue for photographing Christmas lights, as community volunteers join park staff in decorating the many historical buildings creating a festive atmosphere for its annual dinner.

PHOTOS BY JUSTIN HAAG

A Snapping Turtle for Christmas?

By Dan Fogell

Before you go shaking your head and saying “this guy’s crazy,” give this story a chance. How many times have you stumbled across a “lost turtle” in Nebraska? Perhaps one was crossing a road and you stopped to “save” it, or a baby turtle showed up in a very unlikely place leaving you wondering where the heck it came from. Maybe you even considered taking it home as a pet. You would be surprised how often this happens. Box turtles are the most common “rescued” turtles in Nebraska, and I wish I had a dollar for every one that was handed over to me by said rescuers. They have a cuteness about them, and people like to bring them home. But their saviors eventually figure out they make poor captives so they either release them (illegally by the way) or try to get someone else to adopt them. And the fact is that most of Nebraska’s native turtles make terrible pets. While I am not condoning or encouraging collecting turtles for pets, I will simply say that if you are tempted to bring home a “rescued” turtle, then there is one exception to the “terrible pet turtle” rule: the snapping turtle. Here’s why. First, they are very low maintenance. A container that holds water is an acceptable minimal enclosure, though a nice filtered aquarium is better and will be more aesthetically pleasing in your living room. They eat readily and will feed on food pellets, but they will also eat frozen fish, too. In fact you can train them to take food from tweezers (you could also use your fingers, but they ARE still snapping turtles). After a short time in captivity they will even interact with you and recognize you as their provider. They might even beg for food. Mine gets excited every time I enter the room and expects to be fed. Before bringing one home, I offer a few tips. First and foremost, do research. As with any new pet you should know the basics about what it needs for survival. Second, be sure



that you’re willing to take care of one for a long time. They can potentially outlive you. Finally, know the laws. Technically to take a snapping turtle from the wild you need a fishing license, and if you decide to release your turtle at any point, it is illegal to release it anywhere other than where it was captured.

You might still be shaking your head and thinking I’m crazy, but I maintain that snapping turtles are awesome pets ... as far as turtles go. Leave the box turtles where they are, and maybe help them across the road. But if you really want to experience the joy of keeping a native Nebraskan turtle, consider the snapper. ■

PHOTO BY DAN FOGELL

Send Us Your Trail Cam Photos!



John Boitnott captured this trail cam photo of a bobcat and its rabbit dinner near Bruning in Fillmore County.

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

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.

November 29

Families on Target

Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln, 10 a.m., 402-471-6141

November 30

Dad's Day at the Range

Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln, 1 p.m., 402-471-6141

December 1

Bobcat hunting and trapping season opens

December 1-15

Ladies's Day at the Range

Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

December 1-22

Bighorn sheep hunting season

December 1-31

Muzzleloader deer hunting season

December 1-31

Public land and private land cow elk hunting seasons

December 2

Predator Calling Workshop

Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

December 4

First segment of white-fronted goose hunting season closes

December 5

Archery on Fire

Platte River State Park (SP), Louisville

December 5

Fort Robinson Historical Christmas Dinner

Fort Robinson SP, Crawford

December 5, 12, 19

Christmas in the Woods

Ponca SP, Ponca

December 5-Jan. 1, 2016

Light Up the Fort

Fort Robinson SP, Crawford

December 6

Shootout at Salt Creek

Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

December 7, 14, 21

First Steps Pistol Class

Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

December 12

Archery on Fire

Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

December 12

Classic Christmas

Eugene T. Mahoney SP, Ashland

December 12

Jingle Bell Run

Eugene T. Mahoney SP, Ashland

December 12-20

Boyer Chute National Wildlife Refuge deer season

December 14

Ticket sales end for Christmas at the Bowring

December 14-Jan. 5, 2016

Christmas Bird Count

Indian Cave SP, Shubert

December 15

Duck and coot hunting season in Zone 2 Low Plains and High Plains (first segment) closes

December 15

Duck and coot hunting season in Zone 4 closes

December 16

Snipe hunting season closes

December 18-22

Christmas with the Cody's

Buffalo Bill Ranch State Historical Park, North Platte

December 19

Christmas Bird Count for Families

Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

December 19

Christmas at the Bowring

Bowring Ranch State Historical Park, Merriman

December 19-20

DeSoto December Muzzleloader deer season

December 21-23, 26-30

Roger G. Sykes Outdoor Heritage Education Complex open to public, Platte River SP, Louisville

December 22

Duck and coot hunting season in Zone 1 closes

December 23, 28, 29, 30

Discovery Day

Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

December 25

Christmas Day

Game and Parks offices closed

December 28

First segment of light goose hunting regular season closes

December 29

First Steps Pistol Class

Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

December 31

Archery antelope hunting season closes

December 31

Archery, Mule Deer Conservation Area and Statewide Whitetail Buck deer hunting seasons close

December 31

Underwater spearfishing season ends

December 31

Archery fishing season for game fish ends

January 2

Family Yule Log

Platte River SP, Louisville

January 2

Winterfest

Ponca SP, Ponca

January 2

Rifle Fun Shoot

Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

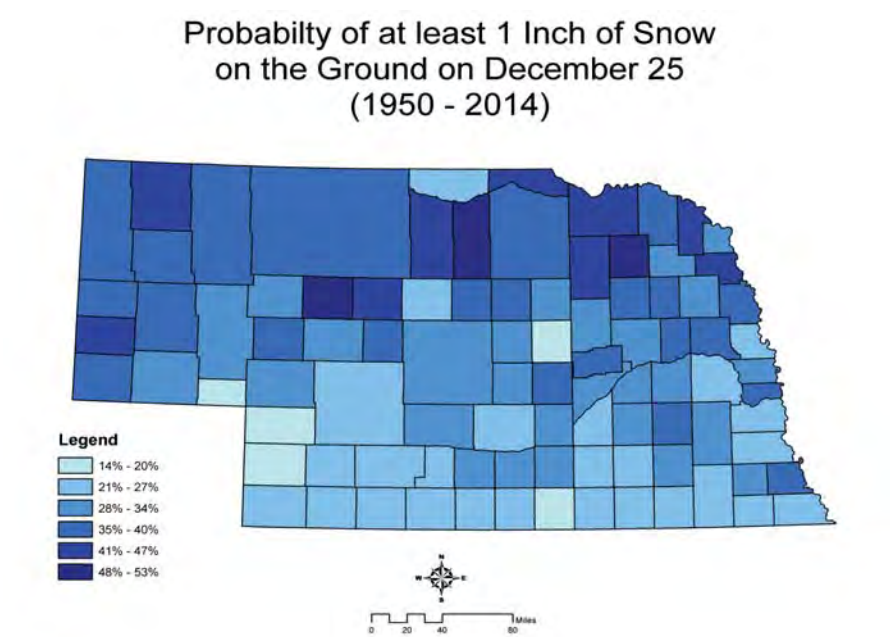
January 3

Introduction to Competitive Archery

Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

January 11

First day of sales for 2016 spring turkey permits



Dreaming of a White Christmas?

By Tony Mucia and Deborah Bathke

Have you ever wondered if this year will be a white Christmas? Waking up on Christmas morning, looking out the window and seeing the bright reflection of snow is a great memory for many. But how likely is it that this Christmas will have snow? Using more than six decades of historical weather records in your county, you can now see the probability of a white Christmas.

For some, a white Christmas may just mean that a few snowflakes are falling. Meteorologically speaking, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) defines a white Christmas as one in which there is an accumulation of at least one inch of snow on the ground. On the map shown here, the darker colors represent a higher probability while the lighter colors represent a lower probability.

The results are similar to what you would expect, with the northern most counties having the greatest likelihood of a white Christmas. Pierce, Hooker and Rock counties boast 49, 52 and 53 percent chance of a white Christmas, respectively. Chase, Deuel, Perkins, Webster and Greeley have less than a 20 percent chance.

To compute the statistics for the map, snow depth data was obtained from the NOAA's Applied Climate Information System for every Christmas day from 1950 to 2014 at stations across the state. These values were then averaged to create a county average for each year. Unfortunately, not every county had all 65 years of snow depth data reported. So to calculate a county's probability, the number of years that had at least one inch of snow on the ground was divided by the total number of years that the county had snow depth data.

Keep in mind that this map only shows the probability based on historical data, not current or future conditions. The actual conditions for 2015 may vary widely from these probabilities because the weather patterns present this winter will determine whether there is snow on the ground or if it will fall on Christmas day.

Note: Tony Mucia is an undergraduate student in the Meteorology-Climatology program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Deborah Bathke is an Associate Professor of Practice, Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, UN-L. ■

NEBRASKAland Visitor

Last issue's winner of the Visitor drawing was Dennis Coats of Hastings, Nebraska, who found the **dung beetle** on page 57. 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 4, 7, 11, 27, or 30.

*The shiny black beetle is a **dung beetle**, (*Geotrupes*). Nebraska is home to more than 50 species, many of which are brown to black, though some, such as the "splendid" dung beetle are quite colorful. Dung beetles are coprophagous, meaning they eat the dung or excrement of other animals. They can be found on all continents except Antarctica, and in all types of habitats. They have a strong sense of smell, which they use to locate dung even across long distances. While all dung beetles feed on dung as both larvae and adults, the means by which they utilize dung separates them into three distinct types: **Dwellers** – live within a pile of dung, burrowing, laying eggs, and feeding within the pile. **Tunnelers** – excavate tunnels below the dung and move dung into the tunnels. **Rollers** – roll dung into a ball, and roll it away from the larger dung pile, to their tunnel.*

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

Intersection of History and Nature

Photos and story by Jay Jilg

I remember, as a young boy, visiting my grandparents' ranch in the Sandhills of rural Rock County. Sometimes my cousins and I would play in the area where the old dump used to be and dig up relics from the past. These little pieces of buried bottles and cans, and the stories they could tell from a time long past, would fascinate me.

When I began photography full time, I was already a history enthusiast and quickly gravitated to the historical processes of photography. I found myself drawn away from digital photography and into processes of the past. I began by making simple silver gelatin prints, and moved back in time to working with bromoil prints, tintypes and salt prints. I even began making my own cameras and lenses.

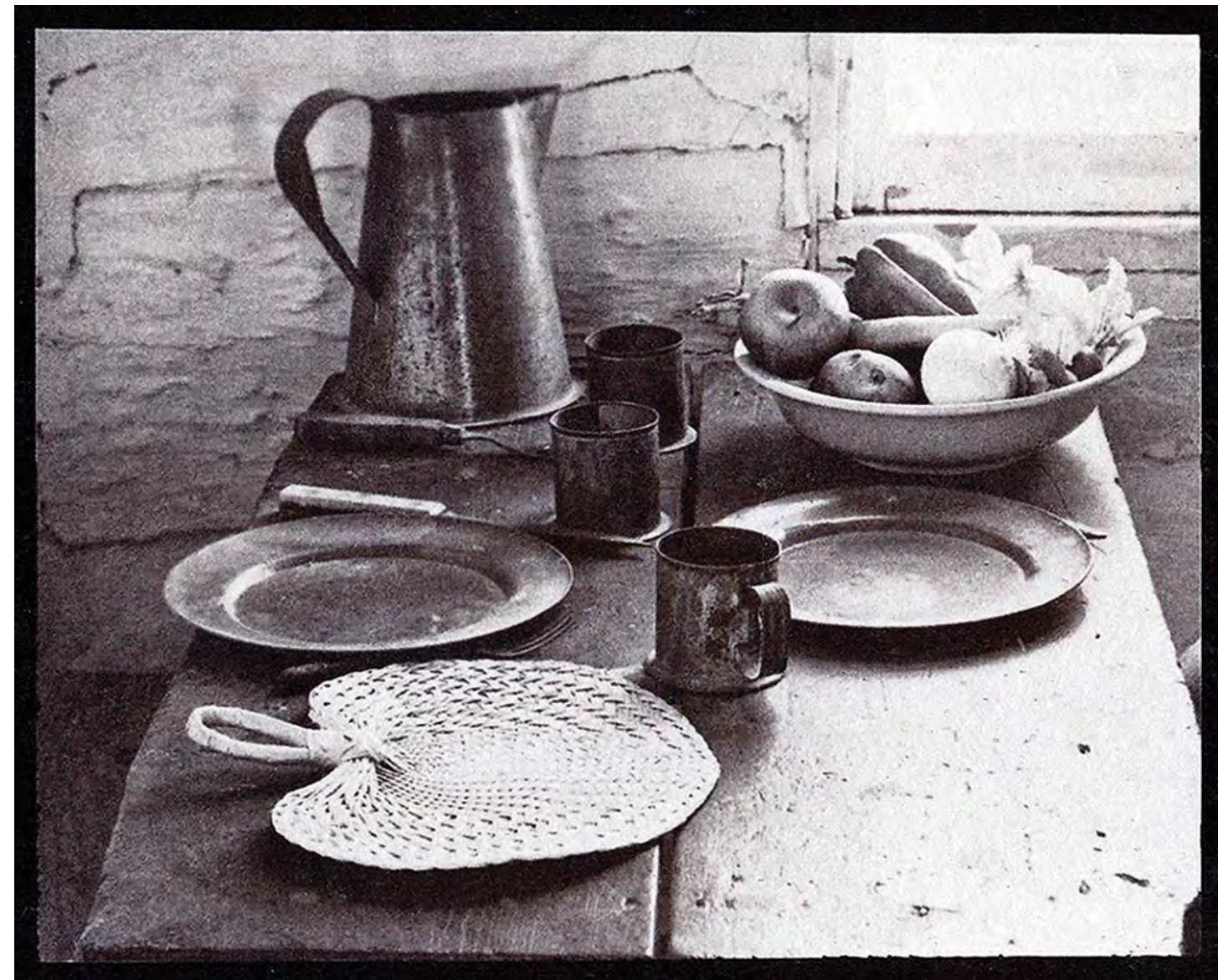


ABOVE: Blue Birds, C-Print, Sioux County

OPPOSITE: Agate Academic, Toned Silver Gelatin Print, Agate Fossil Beds National Monument



I use a number of cameras, from homemade, to large and medium format, in making my negative images. Back in the darkroom, I begin the task of converting the negative glass plate or film into a final image. Because these are historic photography processes, similar to the old survey photographs of the American West, there is not the instant gratification you get with digital cameras. Most of the time I am not even sure what the image looks like until days or weeks later.



ABOVE: Feast, Salt Print, Homestead National Monument

LEFT: Osage Hedgerow, Salt Print, Homestead National Monument

OPPOSITE: Smith Falls, Silver Gelatin Print, Cherry County



Just like the buried bottles and cans on my grandparents' ranch, each image tells a story of what once was. Each is a moment in history that holds untold stories, yet to be unearthed. ■



OPPOSITE ABOVE:
Homestead, Silver Gelatin
Print, Custer County

OPPOSITE BELOW: Burr
Oak, Silver Gelatin Print, Clay
County

RIGHT: Burrowing Owl, Silver
Gelatin Print, Custer County



With many of my photographs, I try to combine the history of the landscape with the people that have utilized it over the years. From photographing Native American Indian artifacts, fossil bed quarries, and old homestead sites, there is always a component of both nature and human intervention on the landscape.

This is Jay Jilg's first photo essay for NEBRASKAland Magazine.



Prairie Dog Town Tenants

What wildlife lives in these unique habitats?

Story by Kristal Stoner, photos by Joel Sartore



The **Golden Eagle** is one of the largest raptors in North America and can be found nesting in western Nebraska. It feeds on a variety of prey, mostly rabbits, squirrels and prairie dogs. Unlike its relative, the bald eagle, the golden eagle seeks wide open areas with very little development.



The **Prairie Vole** is a small mammal, similar to the mouse, that makes prairies its home across the Great Plains. Unlike most mammals, prairie voles are monogamous and will protect their mates, and both parents care for the young.



The **Coyote** is found throughout Nebraska and increasing its range nationally. These mammals form packs and their howling and yipping serve to communicate with family members and to notify neighboring coyotes of their presence.

The **Kangaroo Rat** is actually not a rat or a mouse. More related to the pocket gopher, it has massive hind legs that allow it to leap nine feet at a time. It is primarily a seed eater and has a strong hoarding habit.



Prairie Dog – The landlord of the town.



The **Black-footed Ferret** is a member of the weasel family and is the only ferret native to North America. Prairie dogs are ferrets' main source of food, and they use the prairie dog tunnels for shelter. This mammal is not found in Nebraska, but was once found across the Great Plains. It is now one of the most endangered animals in the world.



The **Red Fox** is an adaptable creature that lives in a variety of habitats including forests, grasslands, mountains, deserts and even suburbs. Their diet is almost as variable as the places they are willing to live: They eat carrion, rodents, insects and even fruit.



The **Burrowing Owl** is aptly named because it nests in holes in the ground. This small owl can dig its own burrow, but often uses one already created by prairie dogs. The burrowing owl is declining in many states and is considered a Species of Greatest Conservation Need in Nebraska.



Pronghorn Antelope are actually not antelope at all, although they appear similar to antelope of the Old World. Pronghorn are among North America's fastest land mammals and can reach speeds of 35 miles per hour and maintain that speed for miles. Not built for jumping, they are often seen going under fences rather than over.

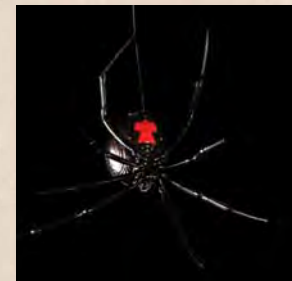
American Bison

once migrated through the Great Plains and changed the landscape in their wake. They grazed vegetation very short, and created a patchwork of prairie habitats that many plant and animal species relied upon.



The **American Badger** is in the Mustelidae family and closely related to weasels, otters and ferrets. This stocky carnivore has distinctive stripes and even though this is a common mammal, it is rarely seen as it is primarily nocturnal. They are well adapted to digging out their own dens, which can have multiple entrances and be over 4 feet in depth.

The **Black Widow Spider** earns its name because after mating, the female may consume the male. There are many species of widow spiders and they are found in temperate regions all over the world, including shortgrass prairies.



The **Prairie Rattlesnake** is famous for its warning system: a series of hollow keratin segments that form a rattle on the end of its tail. The rattle is actually a defense system, because this snake prefers to scare away a threat rather than strike.



The **Striped Skunk** has a wonderful defense system that rarely injures other animals but nonetheless is extremely effective. Skunks can dig their own dens, but if something else, such as prairie dogs, provides a home for them, they will readily move in.



The **Cottontail Rabbit** is highly adaptable and can survive in many habitats, including farms and suburban areas. It is very territorial in defending its home range.

2015 Photo Contest

With more than 1,000 images submitted, the 2015 NEBRASKAland Magazine Photo Contest was a tremendous success. With categories of Wildlife, Flora, Scenic, Recreation and Youth, NEBRASKAland's readers came out in full force, presenting the outdoor beauty of the entire state.

Judged by NEBRASKAland Magazine's staff, paring down the images was difficult. The photographs on the following pages were chosen as Best of Show and first, second and third place for each category.

One final category has yet to be judged. Our Reader's Choice award can be voted on from Nov. 15-Dec. 1 at NebraskalandMagazine.com. The winning photograph will be published in our January-February 2016 edition.

We thank everyone who has made this year's contest such a success, and we look forward to seeing even more outstanding photographs entered next year.

– NEBRASKAland Magazine Staff

BEST OF SHOW

Prowling Swift Fox
Photo by Carla Goranson





FIRST PLACE – Feeding Bluebird
Photo by Don Brockmeier

SECOND PLACE – Downy Woodpecker in the Snow
Photo by Kelvin Nygren



THIRD PLACE – Male Prairie Chickens Fighting on the Lek
Photo by Kevin Hice





FIRST PLACE – Sunset at Martin’s Prairie
Photo by Adrian Olivera



THIRD PLACE – Water Lily at Rock Creek State Recreation Area
Photo by Ronald Allen

SECOND PLACE – Frosty Yucca
Photo by Mike Peterson



SCENIC

FIRST PLACE – Downtown Omaha

Photo by Tyler Roberts





SECOND PLACE – Sunrise Reflected
Photo by Bill Kesler

THIRD PLACE – Age is Beauty
Photo by Joel Jones



RECREATION

FIRST PLACE – Lake Mac Beach Fire

Photo by Bill Kesler





**SECOND PLACE – A Message From
Heaven**
Photo by Brad Goetsch

THIRD PLACE – Catch Summer Before It Snows
Photo by Giri Mohanan





FIRST PLACE – Sparrow
Photo by Emily Morrow

**THIRD PLACE – Sunset Over a Field of Rye in
Northeastern Nebraska**
Photo by Chance Jacobsen



**SECOND PLACE – Rockford
Lake Sunset**
Photo by Mason Bletscher

Leftover Dogs

Story and photos
by Eric Fowler

Two dogs prove what holds true for many found in shelters: Just because someone didn't want them doesn't mean they can't be man's best friend.



Sean Conaway of Omaha takes aim at a chukar partridge pointed by Sadie, his German shorthaired pointer, on a hunt at Oak Creek Sporting Club near Brainard. Conaway adopted the dog from the Great Plains Pointer Rescue.

For many, the next hunting dog, or family dog, must come in the form of a puppy. They want to pick the best dog for them, make that early bond and ensure it's trained as they like.

Too often, those responsibilities and the rest that come with a dog are more than some people can handle. Overwhelmed, they quit on the dog, which then finds itself in a shelter on "death row," hoping someone will give it another chance, or worse yet, roaming the countryside hoping it can find its next meal.

These dogs are the leftovers. Some people are happy to give them a new home. In most cases, they find the problem was with the people who last owned the dog, not the dog. That includes the hunting dogs that supposedly can't. Often, they can hunt. And they come without the price tag and training hurdles that a puppy sometimes does.

Shorthairs

German shorthaired pointers have a bad rep. Yes they are more high strung and have more energy than other dogs. But they are fine pets, family dogs and hunters.

Sean Conaway has two, Sadie and Coco. For the past two years, he's often added a third as a foster home for the Great Plains Pointer Rescue. The rescue is where he found and adopted Sadie in 2014, who has turned out to be a fine bird dog. And Coco, who was a great hunter but retired after she began suffering from seizures, now is happy to jump in bed with Conaway's wife, Dana, when he and Sadie head to the field.

"To me, they're the best family dogs I've had," he said.

And when it's time to hunt, Conaway said it's humorous watching Sadie tap dance around the house, "smiling from ear to ear."

Conaway had no idea what to expect from Sadie when they headed to the field the first time. "Right away you

knew she knew how to work a field," he said. "She covered every inch."

Sadie pointed birds, honored other dogs' points and even reminded herself that she could retrieve after another dog beat her to a bird, all of which told Conaway "She's a trained hunter. She does everything a shorthair should do. I thought that was hilarious. That was the easiest training session I've had."

Pit Bulls

Not long ago, T.J. Yoakum had no use for pit pulls. He stereotyped the dog the same way that many others do: they are bred to fight and bite, and usually owned by thugs.

That all changed on a fishing trip on



T.J. Yoakum of Lincoln takes a rooster retrieved by his pit bull, Little Bear, on a hunt at Pheasant Haven near Elkhorn. Yoakum found the dog abandoned on the Loup River.

the Loup River near Columbus in 2011 with his uncle and cousin. While driving along the river, they came across three pit bull puppies running down the road. They stopped and when Yoakum sat on the ground, one of the puppies jumped in his lap and "claimed" him. Before they got up, the dog had a name: Little Bear, for his grandfather, Harold, who was nicknamed Bear. "I already had a bloodhound named Harold," Yoakum said.

"They were in pretty rough shape," he said of the puppies, which were about 8 weeks old, emaciated, and their

bellies bloated. But they were adorable. So they drove to Columbus and bought some dog food. The puppies inhaled it and then got sick ... in the back seat of T.J.'s car. T.J. and his uncles had planned on staying for the weekend but packed up and headed back to Lincoln.

Yoakum's uncle kept the female in the trio and his cousin the other male. "They're both just awesome dogs," he said.

While mushroom hunting the next spring, he was amazed at both the ability and determination of Little Bear when he tried to jump a ravine and, with no urging, tried again. Yoakum had seen dog jumping events on TV, so he took Little Bear to Pawnee Lake and soon had the dog flying off the end of the dock to retrieve a bottle. They entered a jumping competition in Omaha shortly thereafter and Little Bear won. He's since won several other competitions, and even placed second at a national event in St. Louis in 2014, with a jump that still ranks second in the world.

Yoakum and his uncle are even training their dogs to hunt pheasants. And on occasion, Little Bear, who is out-of-his-mind crazy at jumping events, calms down, dons a sweatshirt and makes hospital and nursing home visits.

"He's the best dog I've ever owned, and truly my best friend," said Yoakum. "Every pit bull I've met has been the nicest dog

ever. My prejudice toward them is totally gone."

That Dog Don't Hunt

Conaway doesn't understand why anyone would abandon their dog. He's heard what they call reasons. He calls them excuses. Some are harder to understand, and stomach, than others.

"For whatever stupid reason, these people would rather just dump them off at the pound," Conaway said.



Yoakum tosses a training dummy for Little Bear at a Super Retriever Series event at Scheels in Lincoln. The dog has excelled in jumping events and currently holds the second longest mark in the world.

Pup in a Box

I helped perpetuate a stereotype a few years ago when I put my 12-week-old lab puppy in a box under my Christmas tree and snapped a gob of photos, one of which ended up on the cover of *NEBRASKAland*. In reality, however, giving someone a dog for Christmas is a really bad idea.

Give a puppy to the kids at Christmas, and it may end up like many of the toys they open, forgotten and neglected. And then guess who's taking care of it. But you should probably plan on training, feeding, walking and cleaning up after it anyway.

And ladies, don't even think about giving your husband a hunting dog for Christmas. Picking a dog is a personal endeavor that should involve the future owner personally visiting the litter and picking what feels to be the best for him. If you're really serious, you might even pick the breeder before puppies are even born. It's not a task you should take on for someone else.

And perhaps most importantly, the perfect dog for you might not be ready at Christmas. Just because it is a hunting breed doesn't mean it will be a good hunting dog. A pet store Labrador retriever may come from stock that hasn't seen the field in generations.

And even if you do find a breeder with a line of dogs you would like, what are the odds that litter will be born Nov. 13? What is the significance of that date? Top trainers say a puppy should be brought home at 7 weeks of age in order to form the greatest bond with their master and, believe it or not, to start their training. Nov. 13 is 7 weeks from Christmas morning.

If you're planning on getting a dog anyway and the stars just happen to align and your pup will be ready Dec. 25, go ahead and wrap one up. Otherwise, wrap up a gift certificate that says "We're getting a dog, let's start looking for the perfect one for us." Then start the search for a reputable breeder or a rescue and pick the dog that's right for you.



hunters. They're not really into it. They go out and they spend thousands of dollars on a dog that doesn't want to hunt and they get frustrated and don't know what to do."

Ford also gets other "crazy calls" from people threatening to shoot their dog if she doesn't come get it. You can sense the disgust in her voice for the niche of hunters who, unlike many who treat their dogs as family, consider their dogs as tools.

Left for Dead?

Yoakum can only guess who would've dumped the litter of pit bull puppies he found, or the survivors anyway, on the Loup River. Or why they did it.

"Maybe they didn't look pit bull enough or weren't big enough," he said. "If they would've left them in a box outside the front door of the vet, they would've had a much better chance than out in the middle of nowhere."

He found another dog, a brindle mastiff, while mushroom hunting this year that he assumed was abandoned. It was taken in by a no-kill shelter in Ashland and now has a new home.

"People shouldn't own a dog if they're not ready for that responsibility," Yoakum said. "Everyone in my family, if we get a dog, it's a life-long commitment. You have that dog until they die or you die.

"At the same time ... I think most people in the world would benefit from having a non-human companion."

Adopt Me

Collectively known as pit bulls, American pit bull terriers, American Staffordshire terriers, Staffordshire bull terriers and other similar breeds were once a favorite family pet in the U.S., and still are by those who know the breed well. Yet because of their undeserved and sometimes sensualized reputation as fighting dogs, they are incredibly hard to place in homes once they arrive at a shelter. One study estimates that 93 percent are euthanized. Another says one in 600 is adopted.

Shorthairs and English pointers fare better in a shelter, but their



Sadie works through the grass in search of pheasants with Conaway and Bobby Nelson on a tract of land enrolled in the U.S.D.A. Conservation Reserve Program and the Commission's Open Fields And Waters Program near Lincoln.

reputation as high-energy dogs and their personalities can also make them difficult to place. "A lot of times the pointer breed will be really susceptible to what we call kennel shock," Ford said. "They start to lose weight or become depressed, and they don't show well.

"They're such social dogs, and if they're not getting all of that exercise and attention they need, they start to deteriorate and then people really won't take a look at them. I try to swoop in there and get them out of there and bring out their best again."

Of the 70 to 80 million dogs owned as pets in the U.S., an estimated 3.9 million enter animal shelters each year. While most are reunited with their owners or adopted, about one-third are euthanized. That number is declining thanks to groups like the Great Plains Pointer Rescue, which takes pointers from shelters in Minnesota, Iowa and Nebraska and sends them to one of more than 20 volunteers who give dogs a foster home until a permanent

home can be found. Nearly every breed of dog has a similar network of local and regional rescue groups, and other no-kill shelters serve any breed.

Conaway has fostered six dogs for the rescue during the past two years. He admits he's almost "foster failed" each time. That's the term coined for those who adopt dogs they are fostering. He and Dana get attached to the dogs and it's hard to let them go, more so for his 11- and 12-year-old children. But if they chose to keep a dog, they wouldn't have room to foster any more, and that would leave the rescue short of a home it needs.

"When you meet the families that adopt these dogs, it makes it easier," Conaway said.

They keep in touch with the new owners, and Conaway is always happy when they send photos of the dogs after a successful bird hunt. "Yep, if someone just gave them a chance they'd have a heck of a hunting dog," he said.

There are no guarantees a hunting

breed adopted from a shelter or rescue will hunt. But the same holds true for a puppy from a well-bred hunting line. Ford admits that some simply don't have the nose or the desire to hunt.

When situations allow, however, Ford asks volunteers like Conaway to take dogs to the field and see if they have the ability and desire to hunt. "If they do want to hunt, we find them a hunting home because that's where they'll be happy," she said.

For the rest of the dogs, Ford looks for people with a sense of humor and energy required to own a shorthair or English pointer, and also a home where the dog will live indoors and be part of the family.

"We're just another option for people to look at," he said. "There are some dogs out there that have already been trained to do what you want. They're great dogs, they're already house trained ... they've got everything under their belt."

Not bad for leftovers. ■

Time Well Spent

What to do in December

In between last-minute shopping and time in front of the fireplace, try to squeeze in these family friendly events across the state to make your holiday season the most memorable yet. ■



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Winterfest Events

Dec. 12

Eugene T. Mahoney State Park

Dec. 5, 12, 19

Ponca State Park

Holiday events are held across the state, including Ponca State Park's Christmas in the Woods and Eugene T. Mahoney State Park's Classic Christmas, where family events, including a visit from Santa Claus, will take place. NEBRASKAland Magazine photographers will be on site to welcome St. Nick as well. Visit Outdoornebraska.org for a full schedule of events at each of these locations.

Archery on Fire

Dec. 5

Platte River State Park

Dec. 12

Nebraska Outdoor Education Center

Join other families for free archery lessons, crafts and campground games on Dec. 5 at Platte River State Park and Dec. 12 at the Nebraska Outdoor Education Center in Lincoln. All equipment will be provided in addition to food and warm beverages.



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

Light Up the Fort

Beginning Dec. 5

Fort Robinson State Park

Fort Robinson State Park will ring in the holiday season with its annual Light Up the Fort and Christmas Dinner on Dec. 5. Community members join in the effort to decorate the park's many historical buildings, which will shine bright that evening through New Year's Day. Each year the annual feast features the menu from a different time in the fort's history, and many attendees get into the spirit by dressing in attire from the period. This year, 1891 is in the spotlight.

Muzzleloader Deer Season

All Month Long
Statewide

Hunters will take to the field this month for deer hunting's muzzleloader season, complete with powder, smoke and hopefully venison roast.

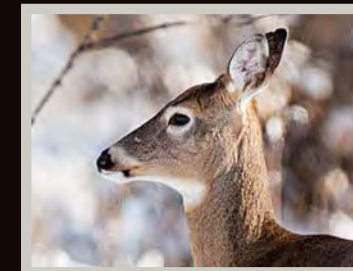


PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

Christmas Bird Counts

Dec. 14-Jan. 5

Statewide

Christmas Bird Counts will take place Dec. 14-Jan. 5. These counts were initiated in 1900 as an alternative to Christmas hunts and there are now more than 2,300 counts worldwide. Nebraska's first count was in Lincoln in 1908 and currently there are approximately a dozen active counts held across the state. Visit Neubirds.org and search under Activities for specific times and locations across the state.



PHOTO BY ROCKY HOFFMANN

Burning Out of Season

Summer, Fall and Winter Prescribed Fires

Story and photos by Gerry Steinauer, Botanist

The flames crept through the green grass, billowing white smoke skyward. Occasionally, they snaked up through the spreading branches of scattered cedars, slowly engulfing them and spewing a distinct oily, black smoke. Drawn by the plume, droves of swallows plunged before the fire, snatching fleeing insects.

This Pawnee County tallgrass prairie burn was not a traditional spring prescribed fire, as it happened on a hot day last August. The encroachment

of eastern red cedars and brush into grasslands and increasingly erratic spring weather has some Nebraska conservationists and landowners burning in the fall, winter and even during the heat of summer.

A Winter Burn

For Rod Christen of Pawnee County, prescribed fire is critical to his ranching operation. In the 1980s, Christen along with his father, Richard,

experimented with burning their native tallgrass pastures. “We were pretty unsophisticated back then, to ignite the fire we pulled a burning tire tied behind a three-wheeler,” said Christen with a laugh. In the late 1990s, they began burning again using more refined techniques and pumper units and drip torches rented from a local grazing association.

Christen now annually burns 150 to 250 acres to set back the cedars, buckbrush, sumac, dogwoods and honey locust invading his pastures and displacing forage. “Prescribed fire is also the only economical way for me to clean up the pastures I rent from people without the means to control woody species,” said Christen. “And using

fire is way more fun than spending all summer on a four-wheeler spraying herbicide. We can’t keep up with the brush by just spraying.”

On Dec. 12 of last year, Christen, along with a crew of seven, burned a 200-acre rented pasture a few miles from his home. “The pasture had old brush piles and a million little cedars that needed burning,” said Christen. “The fire also cleaned off the old grass thatch, which will make for good grazing next summer.”

While the day’s temperatures hovered in the high 30s, the humidity stayed above 50 percent and the winds were only 5-10 miles per hour, the fire was effective. At dusk, with the fire over, still burning brush piles

illuminated the charred skeletons of the cedars.

“Why do we burn in spring? Because that is when we have always been told to burn,” said Kent Pfeiffer, a Northern Prairies Land Trust ecologist stationed in Beatrice who was on the burn that day. “It is tradition, one that arose mostly in other places, such as the Kansas Flint Hills.” There ranchers have been spring burning pastures since the 1880s to promote big bluestem, Indian grass and other summer-growing tall grasses. Yearling cattle are then heavily stocked on the lush grass regrowth. “This fire and grazing system really does not apply to Nebraska where we mostly graze cow-calf pairs and finish fattening

cattle on corn,” said Pfeiffer. Concerns that burning off grass in fall and winter will cause soil moisture loss, winter kill plants, and destroy wildlife habitat have been proven mostly unfounded.

This is not to say that spring burning is not beneficial. Late spring burning, for example, sets back smooth brome, Kentucky bluegrass and other non-native, cool-season grasses that invade prairies and out-compete native plants. Safety is the prime reason both Pfeiffer and Christen prefer fall and winter burning to spring burning. “Winds this time of year are fairly stable, whereas spring winds can shift from one direction to another making fires unpredictable,” said Pfeiffer. “Also in spring, the afternoon humidity often



Smoke lingers during a late January tallgrass prairie and oak woodland prescribed burn in Jefferson County.



Bruce Winter, with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, watches over a summer burn on The Nature Conservancy's Platte River Preserve in Hall County.



The burn crew enjoys the warmth of a still burning brush pile after Rod Christen's December burn.

drops so low that fires become flashy. Burning this time of year is more relaxed. I can actually sleep the night before a fire."

A Summer Burn

Last year, Pawnee County landowner John Hill left 30 acres of his tallgrass pasture un-grazed to build fuels for a late-summer burn. Like Christen, his

goal was not only to hit encroaching woody plants, but also to create a wide, burned-out break for a larger fire the coming winter.

At mid-morning on Aug. 21, Pfeiffer and seven others gathered to assist Hill with the effort. When the burn started the sky was overcast, the humidity was about 65 percent and the wind was feeble. The initial backfire's less than foot-tall flames burned into the

wind at a glacial pace. Around 11 a.m., however, the wind picked up and the sun popped out from behind the clouds, dropping the humidity to about 50 percent and the fire burned with more intensity. When lit, the headfire, pushed by the wind, moved more quickly, meeting the backfire within 20 minutes and ending the burn. While the crew ate lunch, hawks circled high above searching for an easy meal of fire-displaced rodents.

Although the fire was far from a raging inferno, its impacts were deceptively destructive. While relatively few of the pasture's three- to 10-foot tall cedars were consumed by flames, many had their foliage slowly sizzled by the prolonged heat rising from below. In a matter of hours, they would fade from green to a death-defining copper-orange in color. Steam audibly whistling from the heated, sap-filled stems of deciduous shrubs signaled their demise.

In southeastern Nebraska, August and September are the months most suitable for summer burning. "In June and July the grass generally contains too much moisture to burn," said Pfeiffer. "Fire behavior in grasslands is all about fuel

moisture, which is primarily driven by humidity and in summer also by soil moisture content as plants are actively taking up water. If the humidity is over 85 percent, prairie grass generally does not burn well. What is nice about the late summer daytime humidity is that it generally stays above 40 percent. Below this point, prairie fires can burn hot and fast. The air temperature doesn't matter all that much as long as the humidity stays high; we once did a grassland burn when it was over 100° F and it went well."

Under the right conditions, Pfeiffer believes summer prescribed burns could be used nearly statewide. In large prairie landscapes, such as the Sandhills, where wildfires can burn from horizon to horizon, slow burning summer fires may be an effective and safe way to control cedars. "If a fire did escape, it would be easy to catch," said Pfeiffer.

Getting southeastern Nebraska landowners to conduct summer prairie burns, however, has been a hard sell. "For many people, summer fires just seem too strange. Whoever thinks about burning in August? And cattlemen hate to give up green grass," said Pfeiffer. "If it rains or there is good soil moisture, the pastures will green up a few weeks after a burn and provide excellent forage through the fall and into early winter, a time when good forage is hard to come by."

Summer fires have other advantages. High summer air temperatures increase the overall heat of fires, thus having a greater impact on woody plants than burns in other seasons. Also summer flowering and fruiting expends energy reserves reducing the post-fire sprouting ability of deciduous shrubs and trees. The tender, late-season sprouts are also susceptible to winter freeze off. Summer burns are also patchy, leaving plenty of un-burned habitat for wildlife. And because they temporarily stress the dominant warm-season grasses, seedlings of prairie wildflowers have a better chance to establish the following summer, providing long-term benefits to pollinators and other wildlife.

For those Nebraska landowners tied to spring burning, it might be time to break tradition and burn out of season. ■

The Green Glacier

Volatile oils in the leaves of eastern red cedar and their inability to sprout after being top-killed make them highly susceptible to fire. Prior to Euroamerican settlement of the Plains, prairie fires, set mostly by Native Americans, limited cedars to steep, fire-protected stream bluffs and islands, and in the west, rocky outcrops. Nebraska settlers acknowledged their presence with place names such as Cedar River, Cedar Rapids and Cedar Bluffs.

With settlement came the control of wildfires, and cedars began creeping out from their refuges onto adjacent grasslands. After the Dust Bowl, the widespread planting of cedar windbreaks provided an abundant source of the bird-dispersed seeds and a green glacier of cedars began its spread in earnest across our state.

The Nebraska Forest Service estimated that between 2005 and 2010, 25,000 acres of Nebraska grasslands were converted annually to cedar woodlands and 13,000 acres of other woodlands types, such as oak woods, were overtaken by cedars. In the Loess Hills grasslands of central Nebraska, cedar coverage can balloon from five to 90 percent in as little as 25 years. More dire, there are an estimated 300 million cedar seedlings in the state to feed the green glacier in coming years.

Cedar encroachment has severe consequences for both our state's ecology and economy. "Cedars displace native prairie plants, and as little as three to 10 percent tree coverage in grasslands

can cause declines in prairie chickens and other grassland bird populations," said Dr. Dirac Twidwell, a rangeland ecologist with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. When dense, cedars can cut livestock production by as much as 75 percent and become a wildfire threat. Eastern red cedar- and Ashe juniper-fueled wildfires in Oklahoma and Texas, for example, now burn with the catastrophic intensity of California chaparral fires.

Cedar control can be expensive. Mechanical cutting or shredding can cost \$50 to \$1,000 per acre depending on tree density and topography, whereas herbicide control is also expensive and not always effective. A complicating factor, a few years after mechanical and herbicide control, young cedars often reestablish from seed.

Periodic prescribed fire is the only practical way of controlling cedars and is most effective in the early stages of infestation. When stands become tall and dense with little grass fuel remaining below, prescribed fires often lacks the intensity to kill cedars. In the Edwards Plateau of Texas, Twidwell has successfully experimented using prescribed fire under extreme burn conditions to restore cedar- and juniper-choked grasslands.

"The Edwards Plateau is constant cedars. The future of the Sandhills and other Nebraska grasslands will be the same unless we band together and develop strategies for their control," said Twidwell. "No other state has effectively acted in time. Nebraska has a chance to be the first."



Krista Lang sets the headfire during Christen's burn.



Wishing for Woods

A lifelong obsession with trees.

By Stephanie J. Cleary

The first tree I ever loved was a white pine, or *Pinus strobus*, that grew next to our front porch. Branches canopied out to shade our terraced front garden, and the tree grew taller every year – 50 feet tall, taller than my house, taller than the power lines, taller than anything else in our South Omaha neighborhood.

When I was little, I couldn't reach the branches. I'd drag a bucket next to its crackled trunk and jump, hands clasping for a good hold on a long limb. Legs kicking and body squirming, I'd monkey onto a branch, showering twigs and needles to the ground. Older, I learned to jump alone and pull myself into the tree's embrace with just my arms. Always, I would stand a moment on the bottom limb, looking up. Soft, flat needles would brush against my face and tickle my ears. The evenly spaced branches invited me to climb higher. Sometimes I'd climb as far as I could, branches bending under my weight until they were too spindly to support me.

Every summer from third grade on, I was lucky enough to spend a week at Hummel Day Camp. I learned the difference between a red oak (pointy leaves ... like a pin ... pins are like needles ... needles draw blood ... blood is red) and a white oak (leaves are rounded, like they are broken ... brrrrroken ... "brrr" means cold ... cold means snow ... snow is white). Counselors taught us to identify all kinds of trees native to Nebraska. To this day I recognize catalpas, cottonwoods, elms, gingkoes, magnolias, locusts, birches, lindens, ashes, and a forest of other trees. I know that hawthorn berries are delicious snacks for turkeys and that you can't brew coffee with pods from a Kentucky coffeetree. I know that the cottonwood is Nebraska's state tree now, but it used to be the elm.

I never wanted to leave. After that first glorious week, I sought out trees wherever I could find them. I convinced myself that any collection of at least 10 trees was "woods" and 30 trees was a

"forest." It's what any city kid enchanted by trees must do.

Forests are magical places, and I wanted to know them intimately. Hanscom Park had enough trees to meet my requirements. I'd ride my bike down the winding road through its center and speed across the grass to the "forest" on the northeastern edge. The foliage was thick enough to block out Park Avenue, so I was on the lookout for deer and woodchucks. I never saw any. Dewey Park was a disappointment as well. Sure, the thicket of trees could hide me from the tennis players, but no matter how hard I tried to make it "woods," it was just not the real deal.

To my delight, my family started vacationing annually in Black River Forest outside of Hatfield, Wisconsin. This wasn't a child's wish for woods, this was miles and miles and miles of forest. Real animals – porcupines and bears and owls – called this wild place home. The trees stretched their leafy arms in every direction from our cabin. We spotted a deer as we drove the winding path toward the cabin. It froze on the side of the road, then in a flick of white, it disappeared into the wood.

This love affair with trees continued into my adult life. Our last family trip to Hatfield was two decades ago, but I've been ordered to neighboring Fort McCoy for military training several times. Each trip, I pack a lunch and wander around the tree line, greeting the pines, oaks and aspens like old friends.

When we started house hunting, my husband wanted a two-car garage and a finished basement. I wanted a big yard and mature trees. Finally, we found a home in Omaha's Florence neighborhood. My house is great, with huge windows, a big kitchen and tons of closet space. But honestly, the best thing about it is the backyard.

Finally, I have woods. I would have been happy with a couple of tall trees to

shade the yard, but I got so much more than that. All around, pines and ashes and maples reach toward the sky and circle our house. The fence between my yard and my neighbors is lined with mulberry and ash trees. The backyard ends in woods so thick I can't see any of the houses to the north. Sitting on my patio, it is easy to believe that there are no other houses around. This isn't just a copse of trees, it is a wood.

Our first morning in our new home, I stood in the kitchen making bacon and eggs. Movement outside caught my eye, and I nearly dropped the spatula. There, five feet from my window, stood a deer. I froze. I could make out individual spots on her long neck, and her dark eyes had the longest lashes. She looked at me and went back to her own breakfast, munching on leaves.

I know now that three deer call the woods behind our house their home. One of them looks like something out of a hunting magazine. His antlers are amazing. The other is young, smaller than the doe. When we got dogs, I was afraid their smell would keep the deer at bay, but it hasn't. Yesterday the young one stood on my patio and ate petunias out of a big, blue, clay pot. The other two stood by the fence, eating leaves. When they go, it is nothing more than a flash of white through the woods, and a rustling of branches. But they don't go far. This is their home. ■



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

Christmas Gift Ideas

Even more ways to spread holiday cheer to your outdoor enthusiast.

Reviewed by Jeff Kurrus

Throughout the year *NEBRASKAland Magazine* tests a number of products so you don't have to. Here is a list of some of the best we've come across in 2015. ■



Timex's Expedition Sierra Rugged Field Chrono watch has a traditional look that allows me to wear it either in the woods or at a dinner party. Stylish and rugged, the watch is shock resistant, water resistant up to 100 meters and features a night-light. See their complete line of watches, including the Expedition Grid Shock model, at Timex.com.

While my colleague Eric Fowler promoted STABILicers Maxx ice cleats in our November edition, I'm fonder of a little more aggressive ice fishing option – the Hillsound Trail Crampon Ultra. Slipping is not an option in these strap-on versions, and they give me something I've never had before when walking on slick ice – peace of mind. Hillsound.com.



I quickly became a fan of Wood n' Stream boots a little more than a year ago when I started wearing them quail hunting. Then I began wearing them fishing, then bow hunting and now working around the house. With their durability and comfort, they've become my go-to boot for all situations. And now I'm introducing their line of odor-control boots, including a 2,040 gram Thinsulate model, that will be just as important during muzzleloader season as my rifle itself. See their complete line at Weinbrennerusa.com.

With wall and car chargers in every direction, I never would have fathomed any sustained use for the myCharge All Terrain portable unit for my cell phone and iPad. Boy, was I wrong. Compatible with both iPhone and Android devices, this charger has become my go-to on frosty mornings in the deer stand when my phone drains quicker than I need it to. Shop.mycharge.com.



NEBRASKAland Magazine freelancer Mark Harris's coffee table book *Rodeo Nebraska* chronicles Mark's travels across the state – 82 events in 62 separate locations – in search of everything rodeo. And while Mark's photos are the main feature in this 240-page publication, his words are the real star here, guiding the reader into the rodeo world that is so important to so many Nebraskans. Rodeonebraskabook.com.



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▲ Our three pits, with four men each, usually limited out by 10:30 a.m. in the 1970s. Then we would go to this garage and, with everyone helping, the geese were cleaned in a couple hours. We did this for several days over several years with the same crew.
— Roger Boerkircher, Cozad, Nebraska



◀ Pictured is my dad, Homer Clemens, of Neligh, Nebraska, returning from checking his trapline.
Dad carried a 1911 Remington auto 12 gauge and was a crack shot. He always brought home ducks and pheasants he shot while trapping.
Note the year of his license plate [1951]. He bought his first new vehicle ever in 1950.
— Lyle Clemens, Kenesaw, 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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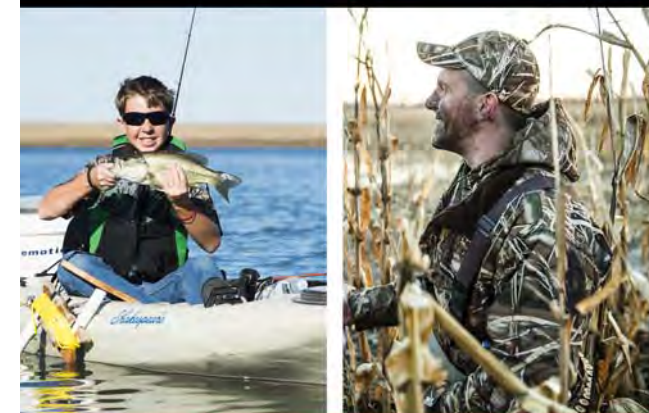


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Bacon-Jalapeno Waterfowl Poppers

An updated version of a go-to recipe.

By Jenny Nguyen

This recipe is not new. Many hunters serve their duck, geese and dove breasts this way, but I did make a couple tweaks. First, I marinated and seasoned the breasts before filling them with cream cheese, jalapeno and wrapping them in bacon. Second, I basted the bacon with a wet mixture of brown sugar and warm spices, such as cinnamon and nutmeg, before taking the poppers off the grill. This gives them a sweetness that pairs well with the bacon's saltiness – I like to call these poppers “meat candy.”

Duck breasts can be cut up into smaller pieces and then butterflied to fill. Goose breasts are much larger and thick, and at times, they do tend to be less tender than ducks, especially breasts from a big Canada goose. I would cut up those breasts into smaller pieces, place them between two sheets of plastic wrap and lightly flatten with a mallet. Not only will this help to tenderize the meat, it will also make the pieces easier for you to fill and wrap in bacon.

I served these poppers at the Missouri River Expo at Ponca State Park in September, and they were a big hit. They were gone as quickly as I put them out.

When making these, resist the temptation to snack at the grill, or there will be none left for your dinner guests!

Servings: 2 appetizers (10 poppers)

Prep Time: 30 minutes

Cooking Time: 10-15 minutes

Ingredients:

- 2 duck breasts or equivalent goose, cut into 10 pieces
- 5 slices of bacon, cut into halves
- Cream cheese
- 1 jalapeno, cored/seeded and julienned (matchsticks)
- 10 toothpicks

Marinade:

- 2 tablespoons of olive oil
- 2 tablespoons of red wine vinegar
- 1 garlic clove, minced

- ½ teaspoon of dried, crushed rosemary
 - Freshly ground pepper, to taste
- Brown Sugar Glaze:**
- 3 tablespoons of brown sugar
 - ½ teaspoon of nutmeg
 - ½ teaspoon of cinnamon
 - 1½ tablespoons of water

1. Butterfly duck/goose. Lay the butterflied pieces between two pieces of plastic wrap, and then lightly pound with a mallet to flatten meat. This will make the meat easier to work with.

2. In a medium size bowl, whisk together olive oil, red wine vinegar, minced garlic, rosemary and freshly ground pepper. Add meat, mix well and marinate for at least 20 minutes. To make the glaze, combine brown sugar, nutmeg, cinnamon and water. Mix well and set aside.

3. Remove the duck from the marinade and fill with cream cheese and jalapeno matchsticks. Then roll everything together with half a slice of bacon. Spear a toothpick through the

poppers to keep everything intact for grilling.

4. Grill (or broil) the poppers until the bacon is cooked on all sides. When they're just about done, baste with the brown sugar glaze. Remove toothpicks and serve.

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



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The Witching Hour

Call it the witching hour, when the sun has long sunk and the moon is the only source of light to illuminate the darkness. In the winter, the wind howls, hounding every bush and tree to sway and moan, like looming shadows marching in. Any creaking and snapping and bumping carries in the bitter blast, and the violent rattling of crunchy leaves, stubbornly clinging to retired limbs or loudly boiling over the forest floor, muffles the world beyond these woods like padded walls. No witches or goblins are in sight, but the woods do come alive with other creatures that love the night.

I am sitting on the icy ground, waiting by the bridge at Smith Falls State Park. My eyes and camera search longingly in the dimming lunar glow. It always amazes me, whether I'm shooting with a camera or a gun, how animals possess the ghostly ability to appear and disappear, seemingly springing and flying from thin air – one moment there and the next, gone.

Jenny Nguyen
January 18, 2014



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Crane Trust scientists recently documented that, during the sandhill cranes' spring migration, a roost near Grand Island on the Trust's Platte River property predictably hosts more cranes than anywhere else in the world. Book your viewing blind tour with the Crane Trust (CraneTrust.org | 308-382-1820) to see a wildlife wonder up close this spring.

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