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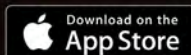


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Volume 98 • No. 7
August-September 2020

Cover: Blake Steinke makes a mid-hunt move to a better location while teal hunting. See story on page 30. Photo by Doug Steinke.

FEATURES

22 COMMON SCENTS

By Ryan Sparks

28 OUTDOOR NEBRASKA

What to Do in August and September

By Renae Blum

30 IN PURSUIT OF THE BLUE DART

Story by Todd Mills and photos by Doug Steinke

36 THE SILVER BUG OF 1896

By David L. Bristow, History Nebraska

38 LARGE MILKWEED BUGS

Story and photos by Chris Helzer

42 DOVE BANDING

Story and photos by Eric Fowler

DEPARTMENTS

6 Your Nebraska

10 In the Field

46 Mixed Bag

56 Portraits from the Past

58 The Last Stop

ON THE WEB

To see additional content including photos, videos and additional articles, visit Magazine.OutdoorNebraska.gov/digital.

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Regular Contributors Renae Blum, Chris Helzer, Chris Masada, Ryan Sparks, Gerry Steinauer

Art Director Tim Reigert
Graphic Designer Mel Severin

Photo Librarian Jaclyn Cruikshank Vogt

Circulation
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Advertising Sales Manager
For advertising information contact
Shane G. Gilster, 402-742-0125
Email: shanegilster@gmail.com

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MISTY MORNING
SUNRISE AT WALGREN

The stone shelter and fishing
pier at Walgren Lake appear
especially scenic as mist
billows from the water

PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

THREATENED AND ENDANGERED: THE SMALL WHITE LADY’S-SLIPPER ORCHID

By Gerry Steinauer

The small white lady’s-slipper orchid (*Cypripedium candidum*) is one of Nebraska’s most bizarre and beautiful wildflowers. A finicky plant, conservationists are exploring methods to manage this orchid’s prairie and meadow habitats to ensure the survival of this state threatened species.

Historically, the white lady’s-slipper ranged over much of northeastern Nebraska, extending westward on the Niobrara River to Cherry County and the Platte River to Lincoln County. Today, it is found in 30 sites in the Loup and upper Elkhorn river drainages.

The long-lived orchid grows as a single stem or in clumps reaching 4 to 12 inches tall. Each stem supports several broad, lance-shaped leaves with prominent parallel veins.

The waxy-white flowers, which bloom from late-May into June, have an inflated lower petal that forms a pouch, the slipper, designed for intricate insect pollination. The narrow, green capsules mature in late summer and contain thousands of tiny, wind-dispersed seeds.

Loss of its prairie habitat and competition from invasive plants, such as non-native smooth brome and reed canary grass, have played a key role in the orchid’s decline. The orchid also appears to be sensitive to long-term livestock grazing as it is known from only one pasture in our state, and there, in Valley County, the plants grow in a wet, hummocky area rarely touched by cattle.

Today, the orchid, and many other prairie wildflowers, are most abundant in meadows hayed in late summer after their seeds have ripened and the plants are mostly dormant. Unfortunately, most Nebraska hay meadows are traditionally cut in mid-summer when grasses are at the peak of growth and nutrient content. This practice eliminates the orchid’s seed capsules and the leaves it needs to restock root reserves for the next year’s growth through photosynthesis. At several



meadows, annual haying has eliminated the lady’s-slipper, but it persists in adjacent, un-mowed road ditches.

I once saw a strange phenomenon: On an otherwise bare, gravel ridge pushed up by a road grader grew hundreds of young lady’s-slippers. Their source: seeds from plants in an adjacent meadow. Historically, flooding and bison grazing and trampling often created similar bare habitats, and I speculate that, free of grass competition, this is where orchid seedlings thrived and grew to adulthood. Such habitats are now rare or non-existent in prairies and meadows. A management scenario to promote similar habitats might include periodic prescribed fire followed by heavy livestock grazing to stress grass regrowth and create openings for lady’s-

slipper seedlings. Late summer haying in the intervening years would allow mature plants to seed and store nutrients.

Another conservation concern is the difficulty of establishing new lady’s-slipper populations. I once tried to move 20 orchids that grew in a meadow and adjacent road ditch near Columbus slated for development. Transplanted to meadows on the central Platte and Elkhorn river floodplains, the plants lingered for a year and then died. The soils at these sites apparently lacked the specific chemistry, moisture content and/or fungi needed by the orchid. Regarding the latter, the white lady’s-slipper grows only in soils harboring certain soil fungi, which aid its roots in absorption of water and nutrients. The plant’s specific habitat needs also make it extremely difficult to establish from seed.

The difficulty of transplanting and seeding the white lady’s-slipper necessitates preservation of its wild populations. In Nebraska, all but one of these occur on private lands, mandating that conservationists work with farmers and ranchers to conserve the species. Only through such partnerships will the rare orchid survive in our state.

PHOTO BY JON FARRAR



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PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

ANTLER OPTIONS

By Jeff Kurrus

Fun with antlers, especially when you involve a young hunter, can occur long after the buck is harvested. Here are some options for your trophy, regardless of its size.

Scoring Antlers

"What did he score?" is the typical question asked after a nice buck has been harvested. The more mass, tine length, and symmetry a deer has, the higher the score. Excellent resources for this process can be found at fieldandstream.com and Boone-crockett.org, the latter even provides an online score calculator. Once you get used to the process, scoring one rack will turn into scoring even more.

Easy European Mounts

Bury the skull in the garden, wrap aluminum foil around the antlers to help with rodents, and come back in a couple months. The skull will decompose to the point that, if it's a warm autumn, you can finish the clean-up portion before winter. For me, this step involves a dedicated Crock-Pot filled with water and a cap full of fabric softener. Once cooked for 24 hours, cut off any remaining pieces of flesh and set outside to dry in the sun.

Once the rack is dry, you have some decisions to make. Depending on the minerals in the ground where it was buried, the skull will have a particular color to it. If you want

the skull bleached white, use hydrogen peroxide for 24 hours and then let it dry in the sun. Quite often, I go with the natural, rustic color that the ground gives the skull.

My last step is placing a couple of dryer lint sheets up the nasal cavity of the buck. As you experiment with this process, you'll find what works for you as well.

It can be messy if you don't allow the bugs to do most of the work for you when the skull is buried, but there's no reason that a buck harvested during the early part of archery season can't be a finished product, like the one pictured, by the time the ground freezes.

Rattling Antlers

Cut a set of antlers at the base, preferably a 4-by-4 or larger. Next, drill a small hole through the side of each of the bases and attach them to each other with thin rope.

Crafts

From writing pens to art, deer antlers can be used for a variety of purposes. Pinterest will give you a starting point for ideas — your imagination will provide the rest.

When a young hunter sees all of the projects that can be accomplished with a set of antlers, there's a good chance that young hunter will want to build even more — thus, a hunting partner long into the future.

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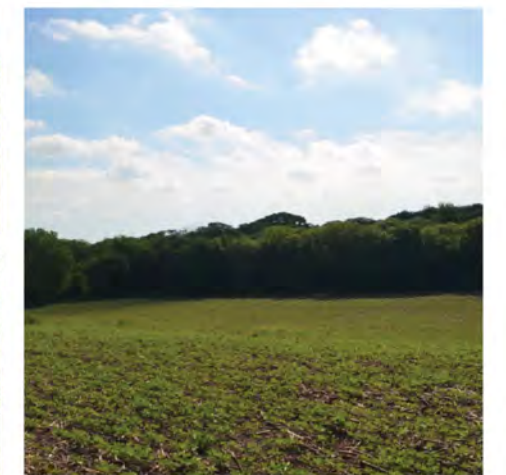
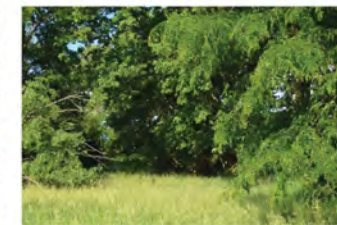
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PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

LARK BUNTING—THE LATE SUMMER SHOWSTOPPER

By Stephen J. Brenner, Nongame Bird Biologist

The Great Plains host a wide variety of spectacular wildlife, especially in the summer when migratory birds are busy establishing territories, finding a mate and raising young. While small birds may not be the most visible or eye-catching creatures on the prairie, the lark bunting is one songbird that is hard to ignore. During the spring and summer months, the male lark bunting is one of the most recognizable North American songbirds, sporting a completely black body contrasted only by a bold white wing patch. Female lark buntings also have a large white wing patch, but their bodies are a more subtle brown with occasional black streaking on their breast and face.

The first thing to know about lark buntings is that they are neither a lark nor a bunting. Lark buntings are in fact sparrows, but given their uniqueness among their taxonomic relatives, we can let early ornithologists off the hook for this apparent misnomer. Lark buntings are an entirely North American species, wintering in the southwestern

states and northern Mexico and breeding as far north as southern Saskatchewan. In Nebraska, lark buntings can be found in the western half of our state during the summer, predominately in prairie habitats, but occasionally they will nest in agricultural fields.

Like many migratory birds, lark buntings are most visible during the early summer months, when males are performing their singing aerial displays. However, August can be a great time to observe this species as they begin a fascinating behavior in preparation for their autumn migration. Lark buntings will form large “post-breeding” flocks, with numbers ranging from a few dozen to a few hundred individuals. They will stay in these flocks throughout their migration and into the wintering grounds. Keep an eye out along fence lines and roadsides for this rather large sparrow as flocks of these white-winged beauties scatter to avoid the perils of fast-moving vehicles. Slow down and take another look as this species begins to flock up for their next major journey.

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YOUNG CORN GROWING IN DRY ENVIRONMENT, GETTY

DROUGHT

By Martha D. Shulski

A prolonged lack of water, low reservoirs and streamflows, parched landscape and burnt crops — something that Nebraskans are quite familiar with. If I were to ask you to tell me your definition of drought and how it affects you, I bet I would get as many different answers as there are magazine subscribers. Drought is often termed an enigma, which was actually coined as such by a prominent University of Nebraska-Lincoln scientist. Why so? Unlike most other natural hazards we experience, drought is difficult to define, monitor, assess when it exactly begins and ends, and often (but not always) creeps into an area with a slow onset. As such, there are several types of drought — meteorological (lack of adequate precipitation), hydrological (low water supplies), agricultural (crop failures), socioeconomic (demand greater than supply), and a new category, ecological (stressed ecosystems). Drought is a normal part of our climate and these dry periods stand out in our climate record. The most prominent of course is the Dust Bowl of the 1930s,

which in itself is a complex study in the interaction of dryness, extreme heat and poor land management practices. Most recently in Nebraska was the 2012 drought, which was the warmest and driest year on record. One familiar way we assess drought in the U.S. is the Drought Monitor (also established at UNL), that has provided a weekly snapshot of conditions for the last two decades. This monitor is in part driven by local reports — impacts felt by those on the ground and close to the “action.” These impacts, much like the definition, are also complex and oftentimes interconnected — increased fire danger, low lake levels, competition for water, water restrictions, habitat changes or even loss. Water is one of our keystone natural resources, the lifeblood pumping through the heart of the Plains. While drought is inevitable, it gives us pause to appreciate return of the rains.

Martha D. Shulski, at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, is the director of the Nebraska State Climate Office.

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PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY

SHARP-TAILED GROUSE KATSU

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

“Katsu” means cutlet in Japanese, and it is equivalent to German schnitzel. Meat — typically pork or chicken — is breaded in Panko, deep fried and served in bento box lunches. Sharp-tailed grouse worked surprisingly well as katsu, as long as you don’t overcook it.

Serve sharpies pink in the center; this bird turns gray easily, and its flavor goes downhill with it. I kept the meat cold until the last minute, and as the breaded pieces hit the hot oil, the Panko quickly browned while the inside stayed cool enough that it didn’t overcook. The meat came out warm, juicy and rosy. About medium, or 140-145 degrees, is perfect with sharptails.

If you can’t find bottled tonkatsu sauce, make your own. Look for a recipe online: It’s little more than a mixture of ketchup, Worcestershire sauce, oyster sauce and sugar.

Servings: 2

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Cooking Time: 30 minutes

Ingredients:

- 2 grouse breasts and 2 grouse legs (skin on or skin off)
- 1 large egg
- ½ cup of all-purpose flour
- 1½ cup of Panko breadcrumbs
- Kosher salt, to taste
- Freshly cracked pepper, to taste
- Vegetable oil for frying
- Bottled tonkatsu sauce, to taste
- Freshly chopped green onion, for garnish
- Cooked jasmine white rice
- Braised or pickled vegetables

1. Season grouse pieces with salt. In a shallow bowl, beat the egg until all whites are no longer visible, and it begins to form small bubbles. Pour flour into another bowl. In a third

bowl, combine Panko breadcrumbs with ¾ teaspoon of kosher salt and freshly cracked pepper to taste.

2. In a medium saucepan or deep skillet, heat 1½ inches of vegetable oil to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. When the temperature approaches 325 degrees, begin breading the grouse: First lightly coat pieces in flour, and then dip in egg and then cover with the Panko mixture.

3. When oil reaches 350 degrees, fry breaded grouse until golden on both sides, flipping halfway through. Do not overcrowd the pan, and fry meat in batches if necessary. Watch the oil temperature carefully, and adjust heat as needed. Drain and rest on a cooling rack. Serve grouse katsu with tonkatsu sauce, rice, chopped green onion and vegetables. Photographed is burdock root kinpira, a Japanese style of braising root vegetables.

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NEBRASKA
— GAME  PARKS —

Common Scents

A No-nonsense Approach to Scent Control

BY RYAN SPARKS

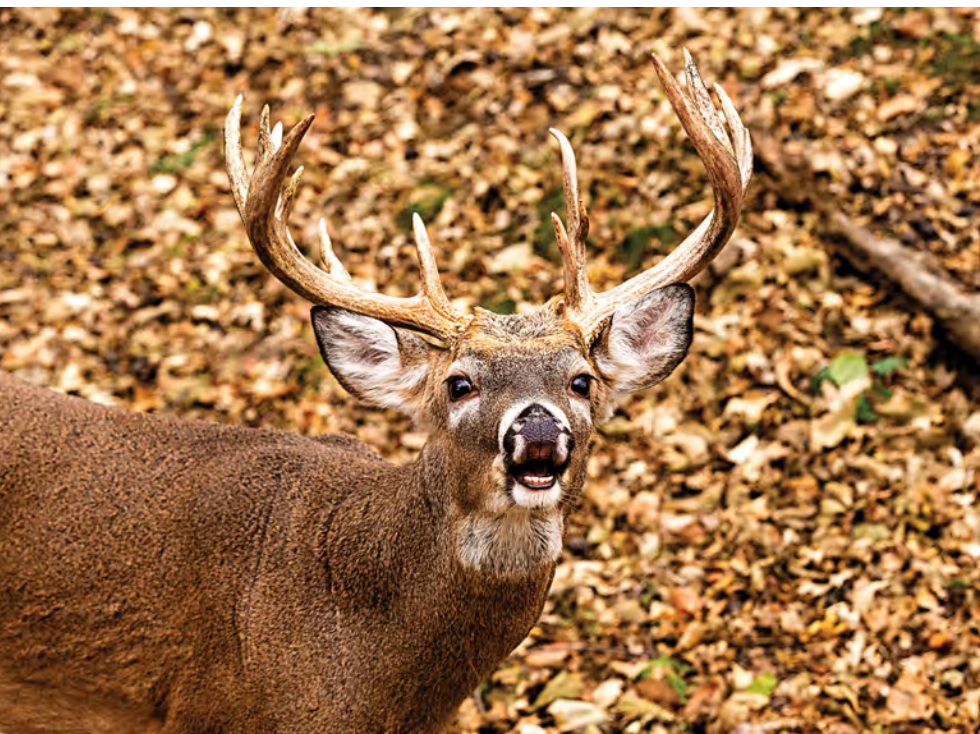


PHOTO BY JEFF KURRIUS

Humans have about two square inches of nasal cavity surface area. By comparison, a white-tailed deer has more than 34. Some experts estimate their sense of smell is 1,000 times better than humans.

Besides Nebraska farmers, no group in the state frets over the weather more than deer hunters. They study barometric pressure, moon phase, temperature and daylight hours, trying to figure out when deer will move and where. Of all these factors, they pay the most attention to the wind, and for good reason. While we experience the world through our eyes, deer live in a world of smell, and the wind is what delivers that scent to their nose.

Humans have about two square inches of nasal cavity surface area. By comparison a good hunting dog, say an English pointer, usually has around 34 square inches. Researchers at Mississippi State University found that whitetails have even more nasal cavity surface area, giving them a sense of smell well over 1,000 times better than humans. Furthermore, scientists say that whitetails can sort through several odors at a time. We might walk into a kitchen and

Deer use their sense of smell to gain information about the world in an unbelievably rich way that is hard for us to imagine. Evolution has refined their sense of smell, particularly the surface area of the nasal cavity.



PHOTO BY RYAN SPARKS

The author doesn't put on his hunting clothes until he arrives at his hunting location to avoid picking up scent from his vehicle on the drive.

smell a freshly baked cake. Deer smell eggs, flour, sugar, butter and milk.

There are hundreds of products marketed to deer hunters that promise to control, contain or eliminate scent. I've seen everything from scent-absorbing clothing to pills that promise to eliminate human odor completely. I've tried a few of these products, and truth be told, no matter how hard we try, we can never eliminate our scent. While there's nothing wrong with using sprays, soaps and special clothing, the best scent-elimination techniques don't come from a store. Getting in the habit of scent control makes you a better hunter, not just because you leave less scent behind, but because it gets you thinking about the way deer experience the world — through their nose.

After many days in a tree stand, I have found a scent-control routine that works for me. Some hunters will think it's overkill. Others will think I don't go far enough. I'll be the first to admit that I still get busted by downwind deer. However, their initial reaction to encountering my scent is often confusion, as if they're not sure what they smell, where the smell is coming from or how far away it is. This confusion gives me extra time before they bolt, and I also believe deer must be closer to me before they realize what's going on. Going through the effort of scent prevention gives me extra time with a deer in range — effort well spent in my opinion. The extra time is often the difference between releasing an arrow and watching a whitetail bound into the distance.



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Bowhunters must pay particular attention to scent and wind in order to go undetected.

A Scent Control Regimen

My scent control process starts well before I climb into a tree stand. Several weeks before bow season opens, I hang my hunting clothes, which I store in a sealed plastic tub, on a clothesline outside. I spray them with a hose until they’re soaking wet and let them air dry. Once they are dry, I leave them outside until I am ready to use them. Along with my hunting clothes, I also hang a T-shirt, socks, sweatpants, sweatshirt and a towel on the line. This is the clothing I wear in my vehicle on the way to hunt. One precaution, make sure your clothesline isn’t downwind of your grill, your neighbor’s fire pit or anything else that might add scent to your clothing.

I store my clothes outside exposed to the elements during hunting season. The reason I do this is based on the concept

of off-gassing. Think of your clothing like a sponge that absorbs and releases scent. When you buy it from the store it smells like the materials and dyes it’s made from. I hose it down to help release these smells and as the clothing continues to hang outside, the smell of fall air replaces the unnatural scent. After a day of hunting, I hang them back on the line to begin releasing my human odor and replacing it with the scent of the ambient air.

I use two pairs of thermal underwear that I rotate. One hunt I wear the first pair, and the next, I wear the second. The clothing touching your body will take on the majority of your scent, so after I’m finished hunting, I hang it on the line, hose it down and let it dry. By rotating and airing them out between hunts, I bring less human scent into the field.

I’ve had friends ask why I don’t wash my clothing with

scent-eliminating detergent. It’s simple — even with scent-eliminating soap I don’t want to put my hunting clothes in a washing machine that has had hundreds of gallons of scented laundry detergent put through it. I prefer the simplicity of a garden hose and a clothesline, but if you really want to use commercially available scent soap, wash your clothes by hand in a rubber tub.

The Morning of the Hunt

The morning of a hunt, I wake up and rinse off in the shower without soap. When I’m finished, I use the towel that’s been hanging on the line to dry off. I believe getting completely dry is important. Have you ever washed your dog and noticed the characteristic wet dog smell? Although we don’t notice it, humans put off a similar smell that gradually goes away as we dry. Drying off with a scentless towel gets rid of that smell immediately.

After rinsing and drying, I use a scent-free antiperspirant. While they sell them at outdoor stores, scent-free antiperspirant is available at most pharmacies and grocery stores. Take note, there is a difference between antiperspirant

and deodorant. I prefer antiperspirant because it stops scent from occurring by temporarily blocking your sweat glands from perspiring rather than trying to neutralize or mask body odor like deodorant. Antiperspirant also works in other places besides your arm pits. Any area of your body that is likely to sweat or smell is a candidate for a swath of antiperspirant.

After showering, drying and applying antiperspirant, I put on the clothing that I will drive in to my hunting spot, including a pair of foam sandals I slip over my socks. By not wearing my hunting clothing while traveling, I avoid taking on scent from my vehicle. I place my hunting clothes in a sealed rubber tub that I put in the back of my truck.

Once I arrive at my hunting location, I change out of the clothes I’m wearing and put on my hunting clothes, including a pair of knee-high rubber boots. I like to walk to my stand with my jacket and other insulating layers in my pack. This keeps me from sweating while walking and climbing into the tree. Once I’m in the stand, I layer up and settle in.

Keep in mind that while you walk to the stand you are leaving a trail of scent behind. This ground scent can alert



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Sporting goods stores have entire sections dedicated to scent control. The author forgoes these products and sticks to a simpler scent-control system that works for him.

One University of Alabama study found that under the right conditions a white-tailed buck can smell a doe in estrous from more than 2 miles away.

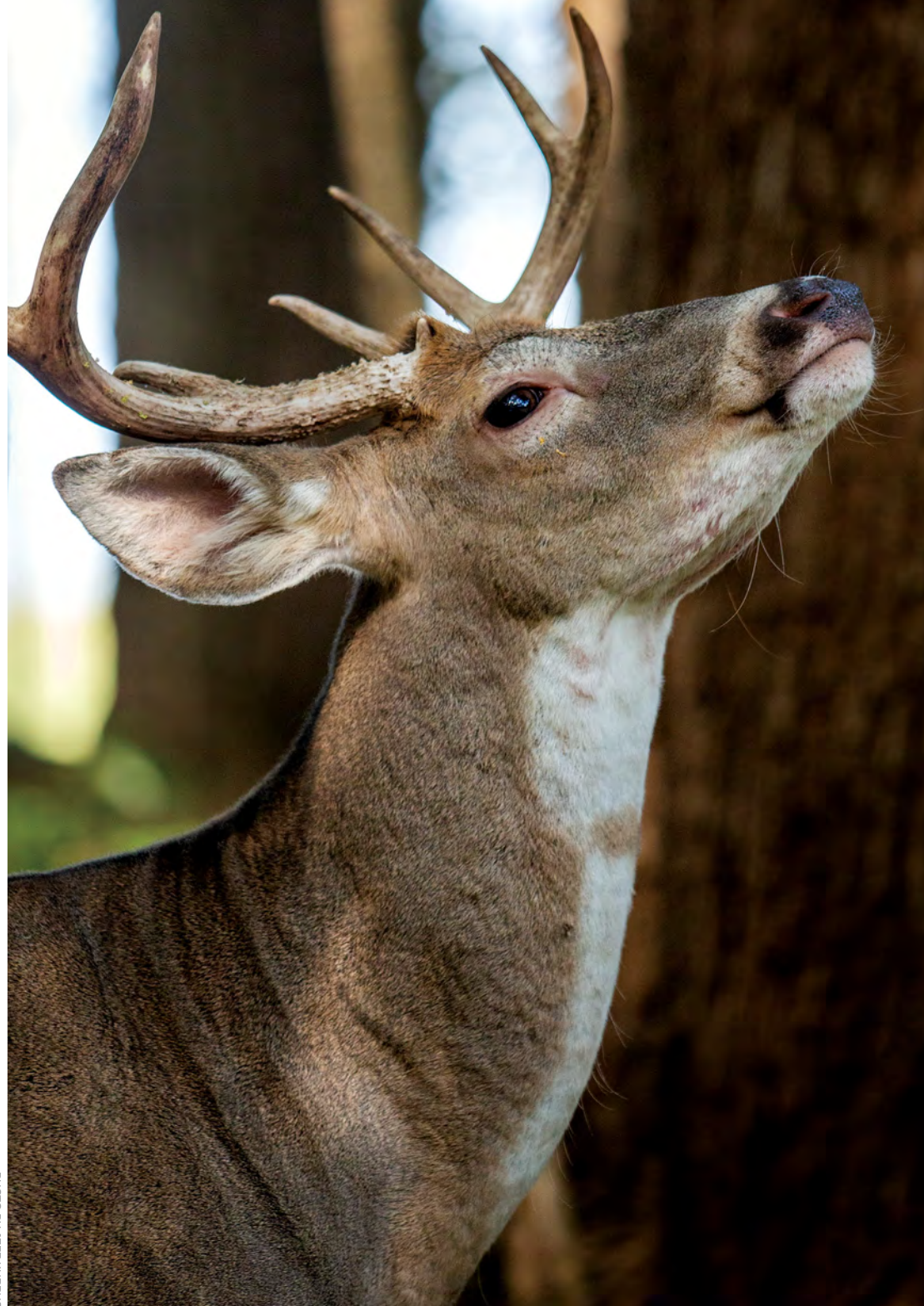


PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS



PHOTO BY RYAN SPARKS

During hunting season, the author suggests keeping hunting clothes outside to remove human odors and replace them with the smell of the woods.

deer to your presence hours after you have passed. Do your best not to touch anything on the way to the stand. Duck under branches rather than lifting them out of the way and be aware of any grass or limbs your clothing might brush against. If you can, avoid it. Also, if possible, try to approach your stand from downwind or away from where you think deer will pass by.

The first thing I do when I arrive back at my truck after hunting is remove my hunting clothes and store them in the sealed plastic tub until I get home and hang them on the line.

Thermals

There's no way to defeat a whitetail's nose, so hunters use the wind to carry their scent away from deer. What many don't realize is that thermal currents also carry scent and can be as useful or as frustrating as the wind. Thermal currents are caused by warming and cooling air. In the morning, as the sun warms the ground, thermal currents rise into the sky, taking your scent with them. In the evening, the air cools and does the opposite.

On calm days, I've had deer directly under my stand that never smelled me. In these situations, thermals are your best

friend. However, they can be frustrating in the evening as they push your scent down towards the ground. You can still use them to your advantage by setting up downhill from a well-traveled trail or along a creek where the thermals will push your scent into the creek bed. Of course, you still need to pay attention to the wind. A steady wind can negate any effect the thermals have on airflow.

I've seen the benefits of these scent reducing practices and think it's worth it. Taken individually, each small thing does little to prevent deer from smelling you, but together these little details add up to real results. While it's not going to allow you to completely disregard the wind, the extra moments I get when a deer walks downwind, or the extra yards of distance I get are worth it. Some hunters go even further, investing in separate washing machines, charcoal lined closets, ozone-emitting devices that absorb human scent and special scent capturing suits. That's too much for me. I prefer no-nonsense, practical methods to reducing my scent. **N**

Ryan Sparks is a freelance outdoor writer and photographer. See more of his work at sparksryan.com.

Outdoor Nebraska

By Renae Blum

These transitional months between summer and fall provide rich opportunities for outdoor exploration and fun. Give any of the following a try this month! 📌



BROOK TROUT CAUGHT IN THE SOUTH FORK OF SOLDIER CREEK
PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

Fish for trout in the Pine Ridge

Throughout the month

The narrow, shallow streams of the Pine Ridge provide some of the state's best trout fishing. Right now is particularly good trout fishing, with abundant grasshoppers to use for bait (or if you're fly-fishing, a hopper pattern works). Trout in these small streams spook easily, so be stealthy.

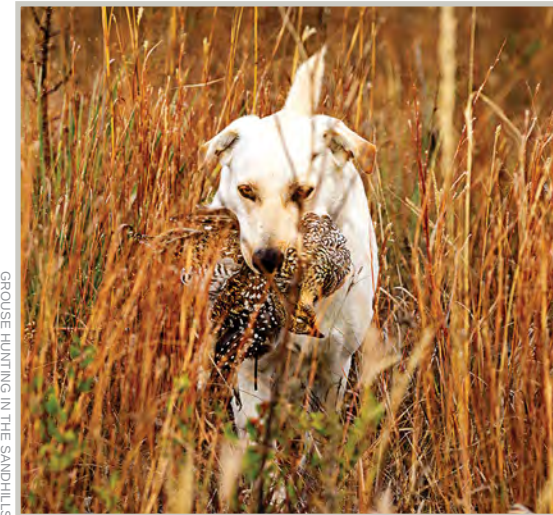
Hunt for edible mushrooms

Throughout the month | Statewide

Diverse mushrooms can be found statewide at this time of year, including puffball mushrooms in grasslands. In the woodlands, chicken of the woods and oyster mushrooms can be found on oaks and other hardwood trees. Look for low, moist areas after a period of heavy rain. For more details and help with identification, use *Mushrooms and Other Fungi of the Midcontinental United States* 2nd Edition by Donald M. Huffman.



CHICKEN OF THE WOODS MUSHROOMS NEAR BRADY
PHOTO BY JULIE GEISER



GROUSE HUNTING IN THE SANDHILLS
PHOTO BY JULIE GEISER

Hunt for grouse in Nebraska National Forest near Halsey

Starting Sept. 1

At more than 90,000 acres, the section of the Nebraska National Forest near Halsey offers spacious and beautiful expanses of Sandhills grassland for grouse hunting (and archery deer hunting). Be prepared for lots of walking; it's smart to get you and your dog in shape well ahead of time, and to bring dog boots or socks for your hunting companion.



KAYAKING ON NIobrARA RIVER AT SMITH FALLS STATE PARK IN CHERRY COUNTY
PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

Float a water trail

Throughout the month | Statewide

Traffic on Nebraska's water trails slows as school resumes, making it a great time to plan a trip. Hit the water Mondays through Thursdays to enjoy even more space to yourself, and bring a fishing rod with you to add more outdoor fun to the experience. Maps and more information can be found at OutdoorNebraska.gov/watertrails.

Dove hunting at Osage Wildlife Management Area

Starting Sept. 1

Osage has long been a popular place for dove hunting. Annually, 50-60 acres of agricultural fields are devoted to sunflower and wheat plantings, which attract numerous mourning doves. Prime hunting spots are next to sunflower or wheat stubble fields, while setting up within flyways between roosting, feeding and watering areas also provide good opportunities.



YOUTH DOVE HUNT
PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

IN PURSUIT OF THE BLUE DART

STORY BY TODD MILLS
PHOTOS BY DOUG STEINKE

As a youngster, I cut my teeth duck hunting on small marshes in northwestern Iowa. Before the days of fancy decoys, acrylic calls, robo ducks and all the rest of modern-day technology, I would not sleep just so I could get to my favorite duck “hole.”

It was there that I experienced my first encounter with this majestic bird that I would later term the “blue dart.” Although it’s been over 40 years since I harvested, or at least tried to harvest, my first teal, I can still recall it like it was yesterday. In early fall of 1977, my older brother, Tim, dragged me to places in the dark that I never thought existed. That morning on opening day, we set out for what would become our favorite hole.

They came in bunches, fast and furious and darting by like mosquitos on a hot summer night. Before I could say a word, my brother said “take-em.” I did and missed, and missed again. My brother loved to joke about that day and my inadequate shooting. I was neither prepared nor experienced in the art of teal hunting, but I knew from that day forward that besides the mallard duck, they would be my favorite pursuit.

I’ve hunted teal on small marshes,

large reservoirs and river systems. Here are some tips for stepping up your game when going after teal.

Find Vegetation and You Will Find Teal

You don’t need much water to find teal. They thrive in flooded grass and marshland where food and resting spots are plentiful. Spend a day or two scouting in late August before the teal season opens and you’re likely to find birds. The Rainwater Basin wetlands scattered throughout Nebraska provide wonderful teal hunting opportunities. Although teal prefer marshes, they will also frequent river systems that have vegetation.

Take a Kid With You

Teal are the perfect education tool for the young hunter. The weather is nice and they tend to decoy almost to perfection with little to no expertise. And since the majority of teal are done moving an hour or two after sunrise, there is no time for the youngster to get bored. Bring plenty of shells and mosquito repellent, though. Fighting



OPPOSITE: Blake Steinke makes a mid-hunt move to a better location in Hamilton County.



ABOVE LEFT: Blake Steinke and Mitch Rother take advantage of a flooded bottom of a cornfield in Hamilton County.

BELOW LEFT: A harvested drake blue-winged teal on Deep Well Wildlife Management Area in Hamilton County.

BELOW RIGHT: Blue-winged teal bank in at Funk Lagoon Waterfowl Production Area in Phelps County.

make sure you care for them in the right way after harvest. Move them to a cool place as soon as possible. And because they are such a small bird, overcooking can happen easily, particularly when grilling.

My favorite recipe is quick and easy. Clean the birds and remove the breast meat. Season them liberally with salt and pepper, and then wrap with a thick piece of bacon and jalapeño. Use a toothpick to keep the bacon attached to the meat. The fat from the bacon helps protect the lean piece



off bugs in early September can be an experience killer for the young hunter. One thing I certainly recommend before the hunt is to practice shooting clay targets to prepare yourself for the quick, darting birds.

Low Budget Hunting

Let's face it. Teal, particularly blue-winged teal, aren't smart. They are the non-conformist of the waterfowl world, breaking most rules that apply to most species of ducks. Gear yourself with a spinning motion decoy, a half dozen decoys (hen mallards will do), and you'll be in business. There are teal calls available, but quite frankly, you won't need them. And if you do use them, use them sparingly when birds are moving away or on the corners.

No fancy blind is needed either. A bucket surrounded by some grass or cattails is all you need for concealment. If they want in bad enough, you can do a lot of things wrong and still not screw it up. Don't forget to bring your retriever here. These small birds are hard to find in grassy areas.

Pay Attention to Cold Fronts

Teal migrate early and fast. Most blue-winged teal have moved through the Central Flyway by the end of September. One dip in temperature, followed by a northwest wind, can send them packing in a hurry. Coupled with hunting pressure, the teal season can be a short one. Time your hunts based on temperature and fronts. However, green-winged teal can be found as late as November. A smaller bird that tends to travel in big bunches can provide some mid-season fun. I've found them on larger bodies of water and river systems as late as mid-December.

Great Table Fare

I love to eat wild game. That has always been a rule I live by. If you are shooting the game, you are preparing the game and you are eating the game. My 15-year-old daughter understands this rule, too.

Not many ducks eat better then teal. If you've had it cooked to perfection, you know what I'm talking about. Since most of these birds are taken when the temperatures can be hot,





of teal from burning and it provides great flavor. My wife thinks this type of waterfowl tastes like a beef filet.

Not much compares to the memories I have from those early days hunting teal. With most seasons opening in October during the hunting days of my youth, often teal had already migrated through by the time you could start hunting. Now, with most states offering a teal season in early September, the opportunities to harvest teal are plentiful. It's a great opportunity to dust off the rust from the long off-season — but be prepared for some quick and fast shooting. More than once the blue dart has humbled even the best of wingshooters. [N](#)

Todd Mills is a former Avian-X and Mossy Oak pro staffer who divides his outdoor time between hunting waterfowl and turkeys.

Doug Steinke is a professional hunting and fishing photographer from Grand Island. To see more of his work, visit dougsteinke.com.



ABOVE LEFT: Blue-winged teal taken off Twin Lakes in Rock County.

ABOVE RIGHT: Kirk Palmer and Mitch Rother wait for shooting time in Hamilton County.

BELOW RIGHT: Kevin Berggren's dog "Limit" retrieves a teal off the west end of Lake McConaughy.

The Silver Bug of 1896

By David L. Bristow, History Nebraska



This metal campaign pin from the Nebraska History Museum requires some explaining today, but its meaning was clear to 1896 voters. Pictured at left is 36-year-old William Jennings Bryan of Lincoln, the Democratic nominee for president. The numbers at right, 16/1, represent the ratio of silver to gold coinage desired by Bryan's supporters.

What a boring issue, right? No wonder Bryan lost! But would you believe that the campaign of 1896 was one of the most impassioned in U.S. history?

Bryan was both revered as a godly hero and denounced as a dangerous radical. The country was still reeling from a severe economic depression, and many farmers felt that banking interests had rigged the economy against them. Opponents accused Bryan of being practically a socialist and warned that he would wreck the economy instead of saving it.

At the center of the fight was the gold standard. There was no federal reserve banking system; the nation's supply of money was tied to the supply of gold. When the economy grew faster than the gold supply, dollars became scarcer and gained more buying power. That was good if you had money or if people owed you money, but bad if you were in debt — as most farmers were.

"You shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold!" Bryan roared in his most famous speech.

Bryan and his followers wanted the government to mint more silver coins to expand the money supply. They wanted to create enough inflation to ease debts and make credit easier to obtain. Republican nominee William McKinley argued that gold made

for a stable currency, which was good for business, and thus good for urban wage workers.

The issue was argued in numerous books, pamphlets, speeches and fistfights. The 1890s saw major droughts, economic depression, massive unemployment, violent labor strikes, lynchings and widespread unrest. In such bitter times, the silver-versus-gold issue became a focal point for people's hopes and fears.

That's the reason for all the gold-and-silver symbolism in 1896 campaign memorabilia. McKinley supporters often wore yellow neckties or "gold bug" pins shaped like this one.

(A savvy manufacturer apparently sold them to both parties.) The stinger, only barely visible here, was a lever that moved the wings.

McKinley won the election and kept the nation on the gold standard. Why did he win? Opinions vary, but historians often emphasize two things. One is that McKinley raked in huge donations from corporations and wealthy individuals, allowing his campaign to massively outspend Bryan. The other is that Bryan and the free silver platform appealed mainly to rural Americans and not so much to urban workers.

The silver platform was dead, but Bryan himself was nominated by the Democratic Party twice more, losing to McKinley again in 1900 and to William Howard Taft in 1908. However, Bryan remained a powerful figure among Democrats for years, and he served as U.S. Secretary of State under President Woodrow Wilson. 



Visit [History Nebraska's website](http://HistoryNebraska.org) at history.nebraska.gov.



Large Milkweed Bugs

Story and photos by Chris Helzer

If you pay attention to milkweed plants during the summer, you'll notice a wide variety of insect species feeding on the nectar produced by milkweed flowers. That nectar is sweet, nutritious and free of the toxic latex found throughout most of the rest of the plant. A much smaller group of insects can be found feeding on the leaves, stems or seeds of those milkweed plants, both dealing with and taking advantage of the toxicity. Those insects include monarch caterpillars, milkweed tussock caterpillars, oleander aphids, longhorned milkweed beetles and both large and small milkweed bugs.

All of those insects have compelling natural history stories, but this article focuses on the large milkweed bug, an insect that is commonly seen, but often misidentified. The uncreatively-named 'large milkweed bug' (*Oncopeltus fasciatus*) is different from two species of 'small milkweed bugs' (*Lygaeus sp.*), and those are different from boxelder bugs (*Boisea trivittata*). It's easy to confuse them with each other, speaking from personal experience, but a few simple visual cues can help you tell them apart.

First, boxelder bugs are much more black than orange when viewed from the top. The orange is mostly an accent color on an otherwise black back. In comparison, both the large milkweed bug and the various species of small milkweed bugs have considerable orange coloration. The large milkweed bug has a longer, more slender body shape and a solid black band across the middle of its back. That contrasts with the black hourglass shape and solid orange 'X' on the back of small milkweed bugs. Got it? This article focuses on the large milkweed bug — the one with the slender body and a black band across the back.

Large milkweed bugs are specialist herbivores on milkweed plants, especially common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*). Milkweed plants produce latex, which is the white



BOXELDER BUG



An adult large milkweed bug, left, and a group of juveniles (nymphs) on the right.

sticky substance you see when you break off a leaf. That latex is toxic to most creatures, but some invertebrates have developed techniques to deal with that toxicity and use it to their advantage. In the case of large milkweed bugs, the toxic chemicals (cardenolides) are stored inside specialized compartments and can be released when the insects are threatened.

The strong orange and black coloration of the large milkweed bug is similar to that of other invertebrates that feed on toxic plants and use that toxicity as a defense mechanism. Monarch butterflies, of course, are in the same category, along with ladybugs and the smaller milkweed bugs mentioned above. Large milkweed bugs pass their toxicity along to their eggs, which are also orange-colored and, apparently, taste really bad.

Both adult and juvenile large milkweed bugs feed mainly

on the seeds of milkweed, which fuel strong growth and reproduction. They will sometimes eat other parts of the milkweed plant — stems, buds or flowers — but they fare much less well on that diet. Adult large milkweed bugs will branch out and feed on nectar from various kinds of flowers. They also have been observed eating monarch eggs, aphids and even others of their own kind, but it’s not clear whether this is out of desperation or a common occurrence.

Like other “true bugs” in the order Hemiptera, large milkweed bugs feed through a straw-like mouthpart called a rostrum. Milkweed bugs insert that rostrum into seeds and inject their saliva into the seed, which basically pre-digests it. They then suck up and consume the liquefied contents of that pre-digested seed.

Large milkweed bugs lay eggs in or on seed pods. When those eggs hatch, the young bugs, called nymphs, have a



From left to right, large milkweed bug, small milkweed bug and boxelder bug. Note the solid black band across the back of the large milkweed bug, the orange X on the small milkweed bug and the much smaller amount of orange on the boxelder bug.



An adult milkweed bug has its rostrum (mouthpart) inserted into a milkweed pod so it can feed from the seeds inside.

similar orange and black pattern, but without full-sized wings. Those nymphs grow and molt four times before becoming adults, a process that takes roughly a month. Adults can’t survive cold winters, so many of them migrate to the south in the fall. A new batch of milkweed bugs then migrates back to Nebraska the following summer.

After hatching, nymphs of large milkweed bugs tend to hang out in gangs on milkweed pods. If the pods are open, they will feed directly from the seeds. However, when the pods are closed, they may or may not be able to poke through the pod and into the seeds within. As they grow larger and more mature, their rostrum lengthens and they’re better able to reach seeds inside closed pods.

During a period when efforts are aimed at increasing population sizes of milkweeds, especially for monarch butterfly conservation, it may seem odd to celebrate an insect that helps destroy its seeds. However, it’s not the large milkweed bug’s fault that milkweed numbers have declined. Milkweed and the various insects that rely upon it for food have coexisted for many thousands of years. Many of those insects have used the toxicity of milkweed latex as a defense mechanism, and they enjoy the benefits of their ability to eat a plant most other insects eschew, not chew.

Plus, how can you not celebrate the large milkweed bug? It injects its spit into seeds to predigest them, uses poison as a weapon and migrates long distances — especially for such a small insect. The next time you see a mass of orange bugs on a milkweed pod, don’t dismiss them as boxelder bugs (which have their own fascinating story, by the way). Instead, pause a moment and admire the bug’s bold coloration and watch it suck the predigested juice out of a milkweed seed. Or, just admire its color. [N](#)

Chris Helzer is the Nature Conservancy’s director of science in Nebraska.

Dove Banding

Story and photos by Eric Fowler

A nationwide mourning dove banding program has been helping biologists monitor population trends of the species while also providing interesting stories of the movement and longevity of this migratory game bird.

The banding program began in 2003. The information it provides, combined with more obtained from the examination of wings of harvested doves, is used to estimate the number of doves in the nation and the age structure and productivity of the population.

That information, as well as hunter and harvest data gathered through the Harvest Information Program since 1999, has been used by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to develop a series of Mourning Dove Harvest Strategy plans, with the most recent

approved in 2017. These plans have been used by the states to set harvest and bag limits within the frameworks established by the Service.

The dove population is declining, but only slightly, in the central part of the country, and nationwide was estimated at 249 million prior to the 2018 hunting season and considered healthy. Since the banding program began, the only change to Nebraska's dove season has been an increase in the possession limit from 30 to 45, in 2015.

Mourning doves breed from southern Canada into Mexico, nesting in habitats ranging from trees to grasslands and crop stubble. They have benefited from urbanization and development and are abundant in cities. Those found in colder



A mourning dove trapped in Nebraska receives a metal leg band as part of a nationwide monitoring program.



Jacob Durflinger, a Nebraska Game and Parks Commission biologist, releases a mourning dove he trapped and banded in southeastern Nebraska in 2019.

climates are among the first birds to head south to winter ranges in the southern U.S., Mexico and beyond, often in large flocks. In Nebraska, as is the case elsewhere, some doves are year-round residents, some nest here and move south for the winter, and some winter here that nested farther north.

They are the most abundant and harvested game bird in the nation, with hunting seasons in all but Michigan and seven northeastern states. Seasons start Sept. 1 in all but South Texas, and in southern states stretch into January. During the 2018-19 season, an estimated 11,600 hunters harvested 189,100 doves in Nebraska. Nationwide, 694,000 hunters took home 10.3 million birds.

From 2003 through 2019, 780,532 doves have been banded, primarily in the states in which they are hunted, with 48,095 returns. That includes 20,101 birds banded in Nebraska and 552 returns.

The most interesting aspect of those returns, according to Jeff Lusk, data and biometry program manager with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, has been the age of some of the doves that have been banded and harvested.

"I wouldn't expect a dove to live past 2 years old, but we have some really old doves being recovered out there," Lusk said.

One dove banded in Jefferson County in August 2010, the same year it hatched, was harvested in Mexico more than seven years later in October 2017. Two other birds banded as adults, one in Johnson County in 2012 and another in Phelps County in 2013, were harvested in the same counties more than six years later and could have been even older. The oldest known dove was harvested in 1998 in Florida, 30 years after it was banded in Georgia.

As one would expect, most birds banded in Nebraska are recovered in Nebraska (421) or in states or countries to our south. The next highest total came from Texas with 56, followed by Mexico with 38.

The country is divided into three dove management units. Nebraska is in the central unit, which runs from the Rocky Mountain States east to the Mississippi River. Lusk said the units include populations that don't overlap, so movement east or west is rare.

"They're not hard and fast boundaries, so sometimes you do get vagrants heading into one of the other management units," he said.

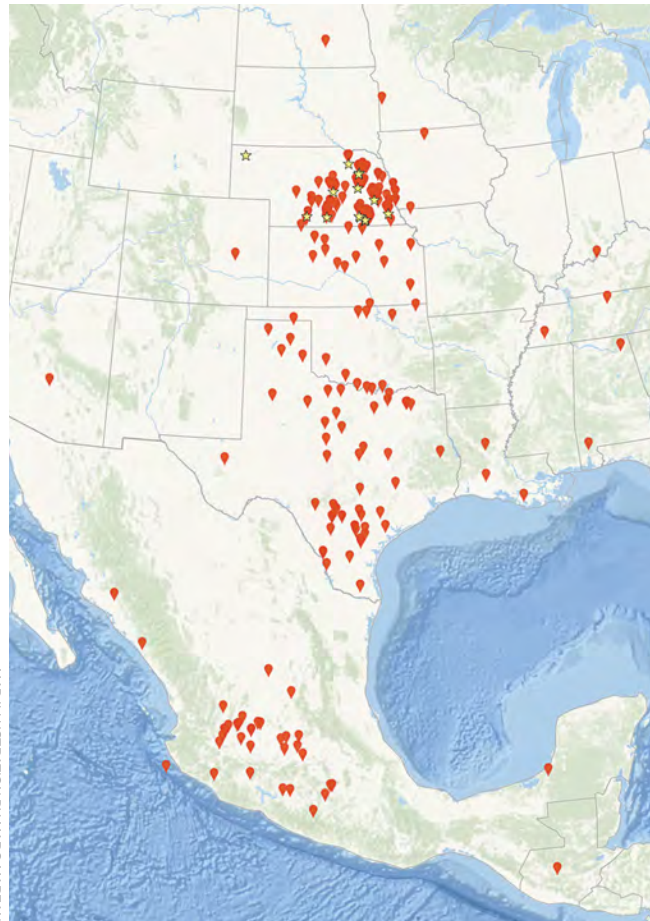
Only six birds banded in Nebraska were recovered in a different unit. A dove banded in August 2012 in Platte County was harvested a month later in northeastern Alabama, 820 miles away. It was one of five recovered in the eastern unit.

Nebraska Dove Banding 2003-2019

Doves banded: 20,101

Recovered 552

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------|
| • Nebraska - 421 | • Arizona, |
| • Texas - 56 | Colorado, Iowa, |
| • Mexico - 38 | Kentucky, |
| • Kansas - 15 | Minnesota, |
| • Oklahoma - 7 | Missouri, North |
| • Louisiana - 3 | Dakota and |
| • Alabama, Tennessee - 2 | Guatemala - 1 |



LEFT: A map shows where doves were banded in Nebraska and where the 552 returns were recorded in North America.

The lone return from the western unit was harvested in 2017 in Arizona, an 850-mile direct-flight in Phelps County, where it was banded the same year.

Other birds opted to keep flying north the following spring. A juvenile banded in 2015 in Johnson County was harvested the following September in Minnesota. An adult banded in 2007 in Frontier County was harvested three years later in southeastern North Dakota.

The distance champion was banded as an adult in Dawes County in July 2003 and recovered six months later in Guatemala, more than 2,100 miles away. Another bird banded in Phelps County in 2005 traveled nearly as far, recovered seven months later on the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico.

"I do keep my fingers crossed each year that we get some recoveries from Central or South America," said Lusk. "But doves, being generalists, probably stop at the first suitable habitat they reach where the temps are warmer than where they came from."

Band returns can give somewhat of a picture of the timing of the migration. Of the 72 birds that were harvested in other states in the same year they were banded, 25 were harvested during the first two weeks of the hunting season. That may lend credence to many hunters' beliefs that doves leave at the first cold snap, which might even fall before the season opener. 



Biologists use walk-in traps baited with millet to capture mourning doves at 18 locations throughout the state. Banding starts in July and ends 10 days before the Sept. 1 season opener.

Doves – A Great Way to Start Hunting

By Eric Fowler

Getting started in hunting can be daunting. Some pursuits require specialized gear. Some require more knowledge or patience than most have to start with. Dove hunting requires none of those. All you need is a shotgun, a few boxes of shells and a bucket to sit on. That makes it a great place for adults to start, and a great way for adults to introduce kids to hunting.

"Dove hunting really can be a good gateway into hunting," said John Laux, upland game program manager with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

Mourning doves are the most abundant game bird in the country and found in all 93 of Nebraska's counties. Their numbers can provide fast action and lots of it in the field, another thing that makes dove hunting attractive. Despite there being a third as many dove hunters as pheasant hunters, more doves are harvested each year in Nebraska than any other game bird thanks to liberal bag limits and plenty of opportunity.

Laux also appreciates the fact that dove hunting takes little prep time and can be done on short notice.

"I tend to take my kids out quite a bit," he said of his 5- and 7-year-olds, who tag along, collect plants, spot incoming birds and "play retriever."

"We normally hunt in the evening over a pond where I know the last hour is going to be pretty good. It's a fairly consistent adventure that you're going to get a lot of action and you can kind of keep the kids interested."

A water source like a pond is one of several good options when

choosing a place to hunt doves, which fly to water to drink in the morning and especially the evening prior to going to roost. Ponds with open shoreline ringed with bare dirt are best. Ponds adjacent to food sources are even better. In the Sandhills, overflowing stock tanks are a great place to sit on a bucket or stool and wait for birds to arrive.

Another option is to hunt a food source. Doves prefer to feed on

hunting pressure that is often found on public lands in heavily-populated portions of eastern Nebraska.

Doves are a small target, and can seemingly fly as fast as and maneuver like a fighter jet, so hunters are wise to up their odds any way they can. That may mean moving to the other side of a food plot or pond if most doves are taking the same approach, which would give you an easier shot. The national

average is five to seven shots per dove harvested. So while dove hunters in the right location will certainly get more shooting than a pheasant hunter, they might also do more missing.

"It can be pretty humbling at times for sure," Laux said.

Other than plenty of shells and a shotgun, the only gear that's really needed is dark-colored clothing or camouflage, which with mild temperatures, means only a T-shirt. "It's pretty

simple, which makes it easy to accommodate youth or other novice hunters," Laux said.

For those who do want to step it up a notch, Laux says decoys can be extremely effective in getting doves closer. He likes to arrange them on a branch where he wants the birds to land on the edge of the pond he's hunting. If there aren't trees, he will bring his own branch. Spinning wing decoys are also effective.

Warm weather and the casual nature of dove hunting are other reasons to go. But for many, the reason to hunt doves is simple: It's the first bird season to open, a chance to train a young dog, to shake off the rust, and a sign that fall is near.



Eli Kurrus and Jake Heard of Gretna take a bubblegum break during a hunt in Cass County. Dove hunting is the perfect introduction to hunting for kids.

seeds on the ground in open areas. Wheat fields, weedy pastures and patches of hemp are good choices. So are the food plots containing sunflowers, millet or wheat that biologists plant with doves and hunters in mind on nearly 60 Game and Parks wildlife management areas around the state. Pick a place with bare ground, as doves don't like landing in tall vegetation. Action can be best early in the morning. If doves aren't flying, hunters can take a walk and flush birds from the food or adjacent cover just like they might a pheasant.

Another place to hunt would be the flight path between a food and water source. These spots can be a good place to escape the heavy

NINE-BANDED HAIRY FOOT? WHAT'S NEXT? SCORPIONS?

By Roger Welsch

If you really want to see some excitement, tell someone who is almost out of control to calm down. Oh sure. That should do it. But I'm getting to the point where I am about to do that, and what's more, it's a woman I am thinking of throwing cold water on. And you know what they say, "Hell hath no fury like a woman ..." Yeah, I know there's that other part about "scorned," but my long experience (twice married, three daughters) instructs me that you can pretty much stop at "Hell hath no fury like a woman ..."

Another thing "they" say is not to mess with Mother Nature, but that is the very woman I am about to mix it up with. Thing is, I don't mind a little variety in my life, some change, a bit of adventure, but more and more I get the impression that there is a disturbance in the force. Some things, for example, seem to have disappeared. Whatever happened to magpies? Or hognose puff adders? I used to see them all the time here.

On the other hand, I grew to be an old man thinking buzzards were creatures of northwestern Nebraska, but now they are regulars here, watching us from the village water tower and even trees in our own backyard. ("Keep moving and you'll be okay," Linda says.) I never saw a groundhog in my life until six or seven years ago, and now I have to kick them out of the way to get to the machine shed. Elk on the Platte? Wolves in Greeley County? I'm still trying to get used to talking about "lions down by the cabin." Lions? Nebraska? What next? Bears and tigers? Oh my.

The only thing that surprises me anymore is that it's getting harder to be surprised. But sometimes I am. I was talking with my friend Jerl a few weeks ago, and he started, "I know this is hard to believe, but ...," and I knew I wasn't going to be surprised. What now? Piranha in the Missouri? Oh ... that's right — old story. They've been finding piranha in the Missouri for years now.

Okay, Jerl, fire away. What is it now?

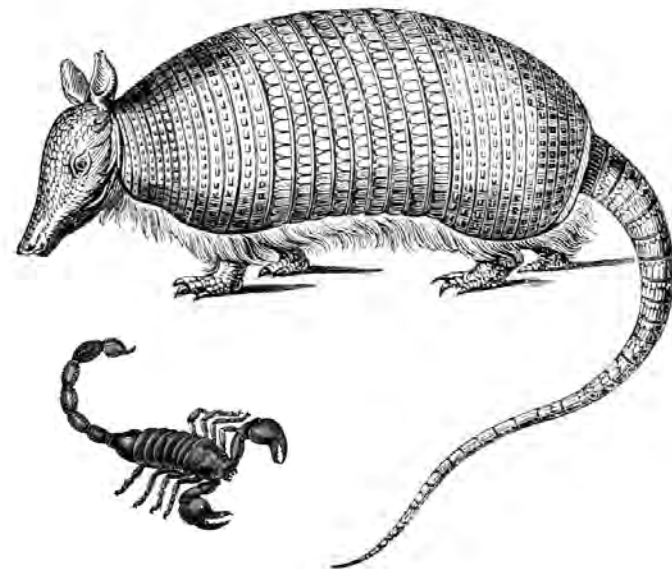
"Last week I ran over an armadillo."

An armadillo. *Dasypus novemcinctus*. Nine-banded hairy foot (obviously a term of endearment). The "little armored one," the translation of armadillo. OK, then I guess I am a little surprised. An armadillo. I had heard hints of such ... perhaps a hoax, said the skeptics. Brought into Nebraska with a load of something from the south, was a possible explanation. The strange looking critters were at home in Nebraska near what is now Orchard 2-3 million years ago, as described by my old friend and colleague Mike Voorhies in his scholarly paper "Fossil Armadillos in Nebraska: The

Northernmost Record." But rumors and reports, prehistoric remains and prank releases have gradually gained credence as reports snowballed. Jerl told me that when he reported his sighting to some Merrick County barflies, they were understandably doubtful (especially in a tavern, especially from Jerl), so he dragged his friends to the site where he had run over the animal and showed them the carcass. And there it was. Dead. An armadillo. (Worth noting is the curious — and fatal — habit of the armadillo of leaping straight up 2-3 feet when startled, which would seem counterintuitive when one finds oneself under a pickup truck speeding along down a country road. I hope Jerl and his pals didn't conduct a close examination of the corpse since armadillos are carriers of, gulp, leprosy.)

Then a Lincoln newspaper had a front page story and photo showing an armadillo running down O Street. Another friend reported one north of Grand Island. And another, and then another. Fake news? Big Foot? Swamp gas? Moonshine? Well, you might think so but then came a report from a friend who looked out her window to find a bizarre, scaly beastie burrowing and digging up her backyard. No one has sighted Big Foot stealing turnips out of a vegetable garden. Swamp gas doesn't tear up a lawn. Nope, it was an armadillo. They are among us.

I'm now beginning to have visions of these curiosities becoming regulars. I can hear Linda now, calling from the kitchen, "Hey, Rog! Come here and look at this. Something strange is digging up the backyard!" Oh great. Something else to worry about in Nebraska. Thanks, Mother Nature. Sorry I brought it up. And oh ... by the way ... <https://bit.ly/38Wxybw>.



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SPOTTED LANTERNFLY MARCHES ON

By Julie Van Meter, State Entomologist
Nebraska Department of Agriculture

The spotted lanternfly (*Lycorma delicatula*) continues to expand its range in the United States. This exotic, invasive insect, first found in the United States in southeastern Pennsylvania in 2014, has now been confirmed in western Pennsylvania near the Ohio border and in several other states including Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey and Virginia.

While spotted lanternfly has not been found in Nebraska, it is important to continue to survey for this pest. The insect feeds on more than 65 different plants, including grapes, fruit trees, oak, walnut and even pines, making it a pest of concern to the state.

Late summer and fall are excellent times to look for spotted lanternfly. Adults will aggregate during this time on the trunks of tree-of-heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*), their preferred host.

The adult spotted lanternfly is about 1 inch long and distinctive, with gray forewings that show black spots at the upper half and narrow black rectangles on the lower half. The underwings are red with black wingtips. Early instar nymphs are black with white spots, but later instars are red with black patches and white spots.

Egg masses are laid on the trunks of tree-of-heaven in the fall, and initially look gray and mud-like. As they age, they turn brown and individual eggs laid in rows within the mass become visible.

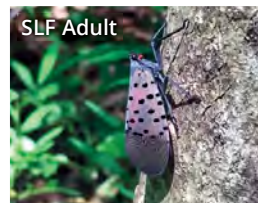
In addition to the insects and egg masses, look for signs and symptoms of an infestation, such as weeping wounds on the tree trunk caused by spotted lanternfly feeding, or an accumulation of honeydew and sooty mold on trunks and near the base of trees.

As with any exotic, invasive pest, early detection is key to effective control. Be vigilant in keeping an eye open for invaders like the spotted lanternfly. If you think you have seen this pest in Nebraska, take pictures or collect a specimen, and report your suspicions to the Nebraska Department of Agriculture at 402-471-2351.



SLF Nymph

LAWRENCE BARRINGER,
PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE, BUGWOOD.ORG



SLF Adult

EMELIE SWACKHAMER,
PENN STATE UNIVERSITY,
BUGWOOD.ORG



SLF Adults

RICHARD GARDNER,
BUGWOOD.ORG

SQUIRREL QUESTIONS

By Jeff Kurrus

Ask yourself these questions before squirrel hunting this season.

What's Cutting?

This is a squirrel hunter's most effective knowledge base. If a hunter knows what a squirrel is eating and at what time, then their success increases exponentially. In Nebraska, squirrels eat a variety of nuts, including acorns and walnuts. A quick midday scout through the woods will reveal what nuts squirrels are cutting at a particular time, as remnants will be scattered on the ground.

Partner or Alone?

There's no quieter way to hunt squirrels than hunting alone. Plus, you're able to stalk or sit for however long you desire with no one else to cater to. However, hunting with a partner is fun. It gives you another set of eyes in the woods and, if a squirrel happens to move itself to the opposite side of a tree, you and your partner can take turns playing dog by walking to the opposite side of the tree in an attempt to get the squirrel to move again. Without a squirrel dog, a partner is the next best option.

.22 or Shotgun?

The jury is always split on this subject, because both have so many advantages. Hunting squirrels with a .22 allows the hunter more range and prepares them for hunting deer with a firearm later in the season. A scoped Ruger 10-22 has improved my rifle accuracy considerably after practicing during many squirrel seasons. Plus, an accurate shot to the head will assure no meat is ruined. However, hunters must always assure there is a safe background due to the extreme distance (more than 2,000 yards) that a .22 bullet can travel if unimpeded.

Shotguns are great guns for kids to learn with, and with a full choke, head shots are attainable at short range. The only drawback is range itself. I've always tried to keep my shotgun range at less than 30 yards, while my rifle limit is around 40. I can shoot squirrels farther than that, but I worry about bullet accuracy much past that range regardless of weapon.

Morning or Evening?

Great days can be had at both times. The advantage morning hunts have is allowing you to enter the woods in the dark and get hidden before squirrels start moving. In the afternoon, slow walks through the woods can be effective as squirrels become displaced if taken by surprise. They'll run up the closest tree they can. Quite often you can wait them out.



PHOTOS BY JEFF KURRUS

YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT IS LURKING IN YOUR FIREWOOD

Tree-killing pests, like the emerald ash borer, hitchhike on firewood and spread insects and diseases that destroy our trees. Keep your backyard, campgrounds and favorite places safe from these pests.

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BUY LOCAL, BURN LOCAL.

To report potential emerald ash borer, contact the Nebraska Department of Agriculture at 402-471-2351.

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A NEW LURE FOR FALL

By Jeff Kurrus

Learn to fish a new lure this fall. Regardless of the fish you're pursuing, by this time of year, fish have seen a variety of lures. Why not learn something new. A close friend started fishing a chatterbait last year for largemouths and, by this spring, has caught several Master Angler fish. The chatterbait has become his go-to lure.

A few years ago, I performed a similar exercise and found how effective Texas-rigged weightless worms can be when fish get a little sluggish. When all else fails, I know I can slow down and pick up a few fish using this technique.

This fall, I'm looking at a new creature bait. I couldn't help but get excited when, during a recent trip to Scheels, I saw a number of unique topwater options. From mice to baby turtles, I chose a spider imitation. And since I bought it, I



can't stop staring at it.

This fall, I'm going to find out if the fish are as excited as I am.

DIY ROD TUBES

By Ryan Sparks

We've all been there. You've got a couple hours to fish after work, but in the rush to get to the water, your rod gets slammed in the car door, your rod guide breaks from bouncing around in the vehicle, or picks up a few new scratches. However, with under \$20, you can build a rod tube that will keep your rods in mint condition for years to come.

The most important material for the rod tube is ABS pipe. It's a common material used for plumbing applications, but it's also used in protective headgear and whitewater canoes. Its durability and low weight make it perfectly suited for a rod tube. First, measure the length of your rod. Many rods break down into sections, and I like to store my rods broken down so they take up less space. Keep in mind that one rod tube can hold up to five rods. I used a 4-inch diameter pipe to make mine, and it holds three rods in their rod socks. Once you have a measurement, buy a piece of pipe that accommodates the length. If the pipe is a bit too long, cut the excess with a saw. The rest is easy. Make sure the pipe is clean and glue the endcaps to either side. Once they are dry, cut a round piece of foam and insert it into either end of the tube for cushion. Mine came from the foam padding in a mail-order package.

At this point, you are either done or can continue with a few customizations. I added a handle by braiding para-cord, drilling two small holes and attaching it with a knot on the inside of the pipe (there are many online instructional videos that demonstrate how to braid para-cord). In hindsight,

I would omit the handle because with no holes, the entire setup is waterproof and you won't have to worry about mildew deteriorating your cork handles. With a marker, label the top of the tube so you know what rods are inside.

Since making my rod tube two years ago, I've had no issues keeping my rods safe.

Materials

- A saw
- ABS specific solvent-cement (glue)
- ABS pipe with a diameter that suits your needs
- 1 closed endcap
- 1 open female-threaded endcap
- 1 male-threaded end plug
- Foam
- Optional: Para-cord, spray-paint, fabric



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THOSE DETESTABLE TICKS

By Justin Haag

Just reading this article about ticks is likely to make skin crawl. These blood-sucking parasitic arachnids are among the creepiest of the creepy, but those who spend a lot of time outdoors are forced to tolerate them.

When populations of the blacklegged tick (*Ixodes scapularis*), commonly referred to as the deer tick, were confirmed in Douglas, Sarpy and Saunders counties in 2019, they joined a list of three other established tick species in the state.

The most wide-ranging and prevalent of tick species in Nebraska is the American dog tick (*Dermacentor variabilis*). It is heavily established throughout most of the state, its range extending into the Panhandle from the east. The lone star tick (*Amblyomma americanum*), can be found in Nebraska as far east as the Gothenburg area. The Rocky Mountain wood tick (*Dermacentor andersoni*) prefers elevations about 4,000 feet, and its range extends into the Panhandle's highest places from the west.

Even though a tick's bite is stealthily painless to its host, it can be fatal — if only rarely. Human risk of disease from these species is not great, but does exist and becomes higher toward the end of summer.

Ticks are frequently associated with carrying Lyme disease, but it is extremely rare in Nebraska. Only blacklegged ticks carry it, and spread of the disease is most common in regions where populations have been long established. Health experts warn, however, that the presence of established populations have heightened concern. A mobile society and warming climate is causing the ticks to expand their range.

The American dog ticks and Rocky Mountain wood ticks are vectors for Rocky Mountain spotted fever, and are known to spread tularemia, especially among small mammals. The lone star tick can cause the latter malady as well as carry heartland virus and pathogens leading to Ehrlichiosis, and

southern tick-associated rash illness.

Ticks are most active in May and June, but can be active year-round. Sometimes the struggles against these eight-legged invaders seem futile, but there are things you can do to lessen the risk of becoming a host.

When in tick country, fashion should not be a priority. To hinder ticks' route to a remote spot on your body and easily spot them in their attempts, it is best to wear long sleeves of a light color, put hair under a hat, tuck pants into socks, and spray tick repellent with permethrin or DEET on shoes, legs and arms. Regular doses of a tick and flea control product with the active ingredient fipronil, which attacks the central nervous system of the little parasites, will help your canine partner stay free of them.

If a tick becomes embedded in skin, experts say to take care to remove it slowly so it has time to free its mouthparts. Squeezing the tick's abdomen may force unwanted fluids into skin. Each measure lessens disease risk.

It is hard to see the good in ticks. It should be noted, however, that ticks provide a valuable food source to many other organisms in the food chain. For instance, wild turkeys like to peck at them and a Virginia opossum, notably proficient at keeping its fur clean as it roams wooded areas,

reportedly eats as many as 5,000 ticks during its lifetime. Ticks also host a variety of other important micro-parasites, and their disease-causing ways help control populations of other animals and keep carrying capacities in check.

No, these attributes do not rank among the cute and awe-inspiring characteristics we often adore in other species, and they certainly do not appeal to us humans on the surface. Regardless, humans probably would not like the effect on the ecosystem if ticks were eradicated — even if we would certainly not miss them crawling up our skin and sucking our blood.



An engorged American dog tick in Dawes County.

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RAPTOR RECOVERY

By Emily Burch

It all starts when the call comes in: a sick or injured hawk, owl, eagle, kite, vulture or falcon has been found, and it needs someone to come pick it up. A volunteer drops everything to drive, sometimes as far as the western edge of the state, to pick up the bird and transport the new patient to the Raptor Hospital outside of Elmwood for evaluation, treatment and rehabilitation. Strong and healthy again, it is released to fly and hunt as a wild creature once more.

Every year this cycle, the Raptor Recovery program, sees and treats around 600 birds from Nebraska and western Iowa. Founded in 1976, it remains the only U.S. Fish and Wildlife-licensed raptor program in the state of Nebraska.

“It’s a lot of work and heartache,” said Denise Lewis, director of Raptor Recovery. “But it’s a lot of fun, too ... and it never gets old to see these birds come in that are so broken turn the corner.”

The Raptor Recovery program is staffed by Denise Lewis and Betsy Finch, the manager of Raptor Rehabilitation, as well as around 100 volunteers. “We’re really proud of our volunteers,” Lewis said. “They drop everything, even on holidays and weekends, to go pick up birds way out in the corner of the state, bring them in for treatment, then drive them back to that far corner for release, getting the family that found the bird involved. There is really no way we

could do this without them.” Still, they are always looking for people to get involved, and can always use donations, especially comprised of food, as the raptor’s diets cost \$80,000-\$90,000 a year.

About 50 percent of the birds are unfit for release after treatment. These enter the Raptor Woodland Refuge in Fontenelle Forest or are placed in zoos and nature centers throughout the country, becoming educators, breeders and foster parents to fledglings. Though unfortunate, these birds play a critical role in bolstering their population and raising the next generation of winged hunters, especially during raptor baby season from March to July when the program sees fledglings who have fallen from the nest or sky, and uses foster parent birds to teach the younglings how to raptor. They also interact with and teach visitors of the Forest, and travel to schools and outreach programs, reaching approximately 20,000 people a year in Nebraska alone.

Come to Fontenelle Forest and meet these incredible birds, or have them come to your school, club or program. And keep an eye out for them when out of doors. If you do happen to come across one injured, talons thrashing on the ground, give it a fighting chance to hunt the skies again. Call the Raptor Recovery hotline at (866) 888-7261, or visit their website at fontenelleforest.org/raptors/injured-raptor/.



GREAT HORNED OWL, PART OF RAPTOR RECOVERY, AT EUGENE T. MAHONEY STATE PARK. PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS



Nebraska Game and Parks biologists shock and net fish from a resting pool in a fish bypass built at Spalding Dam on the Cedar River in Greeley County. The fish were caught and tagged as part of a study to measure the effectiveness of the bypass.

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MAKING IT LAST



My grandpa Charlie Feurer on the right, his uncle Herman Bolz in the middle and Charlie's brother-in-law Ernest Wagner on the left.

It looks like they hunted possums, rabbits and squirrels.

Charlie was probably 20 to 30 years old in the photo, which would date this photo between 1910 and 1920 in the Johnson area.

— David Feurer, Johnson



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 1990. 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. Text may be edited and photos adjusted for reproduction. All photos will be returned.



PHOTO BY GERRY STEINAUER

A FONDNESS FOR DANDELIONS

By Gerry Steinauer

A native of Europe, the dandelion is considered by most in the United States a weed, a frontline enemy in the battle of well-manicured lawn versus disorder, neighborly pride versus slovenliness. My stance in this war is one of conscientious objector: I am morally opposed to killing them. Ask my neighbors.

How and when I developed my fondness for dandelions is unknown, but it certainly was not during my childhood. On many summer mornings, Mom would march us kids out to the yard to uproot our quota of dandelions and other weeds before we could run off and play. I approached this task as a grumbling sandbagger, filling my bucket mostly with hastily picked leaves and flowers, and few roots. I had better things to do than dig dang dandelions.

Perhaps, it was an incident in my early botany career that enlightened my views on dandelions. I had stopped at a Sandhills ranch house to ask permission to do a plant survey and was pleasantly chatting with the rancher's wife when the rancher drove up. He walked in, turned to his wife and said, "What the hell is he selling?" I was a bit rattled.

Thinking fast, she invited me to stay for lunch before I could be booted down the road. It was during her delicious meal of fresh-picked dandelion stems sautéed in a white sauce ladled over boiled potatoes that the grumpy rancher miraculously mellowed and even chatted a bit with me. Most amazing, at meal's end, he grudgingly approved my survey.

Was it the savory dandelion sauce that had tempered his mood and saved my hide? I think so.

As a botanist, I view dandelions as rather harmless in the ongoing struggle between native and non-native plants for control of Nebraska's ecosystems. In frequently hayed or heavily grazed prairies, the perennial can be abundant, manifesting itself by a spring carpet of golden blooms and trailing seed heads. When a disturbance dissipates, however, the plant tends to fade. Unlike many non-natives, such as white and yellow sweet clover and reed canary grass, which I truly despise, the dandelion does not appear to out-compete native plants. For this, I am grateful.

From an aesthetic viewpoint, in green, monotonous urban lawns, I find dandelions a welcome splash of color and beauty. Wildlife also appreciate them. Bees, butterflies and other pollinators consume their nectar and pollen, while rabbits nibble the young, tender flower stems. Recently, in my hometown of Aurora, I flushed a large flock of goldfinches from a vacant lot billowing with dandelion heads. They were eating the seeds.

To dandelion haters whom my words have agitated, perhaps a cup of soothing dandelion tea, made from the roasted roots, will settle your nerves. Or perhaps a dish of battered dandelion flowers fried into crispy fritters will mellow your mood. If those fail, surely a swig or two of sweet dandelion wine will open your hearts to this poor, misunderstood weed.

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