



A young garter snake pokes its head out of some grass after surviving a prescribed burn by staying beneath a piece of tin at Oak Glen Wildlife Management Area. Photo by Dillon Hardinger.

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INSIDE

Wipers • The 1913 Omaha Tornado
Doves at the Doorstep • Swanson Reservoir SRA
Elk Capture • Nighthawks • Roger Welsch's Tracks and Scat



NEBRASKAland

May 2013

FEATURES

18 Tornado of 1913 - Omaha's Easter Storm of Destruction
Few people had any warning when a tornado-laden storm struck and caused mass destruction. By MARGIE LUKAS

22 Wipers - Chasing the Devil Fish
Disdain turns to appreciation as a "walleye guy" learns to appreciate the challenge of chasing wipers. TEXT AND PHOTOS BY DOUG STEINKE

28 Common Nighthawk
A grassland ground nester, the common nighthawk has also been known to nest in cities on flat-graveled roofs. TEXT AND PHOTOS BY MICHAEL FORSBERG

30 Swanson - Sometimes Down but Never Out
An irrigation reservoir dependent on the vagaries of the weather, Swanson Reservoir always has much to offer. TEXT AND PHOTOS BY ERIC FOWLER

36 Bagging the Big Ones
A helicopter capture crew helps biologists with elk and bighorn testing and monitoring project. By JUSTIN HAAG

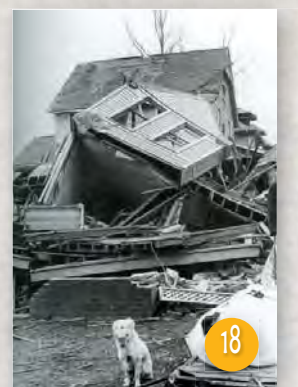
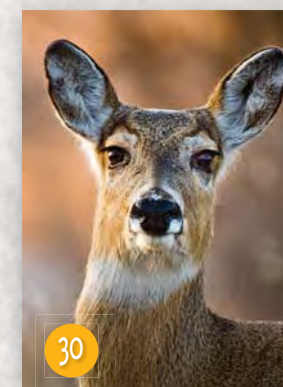
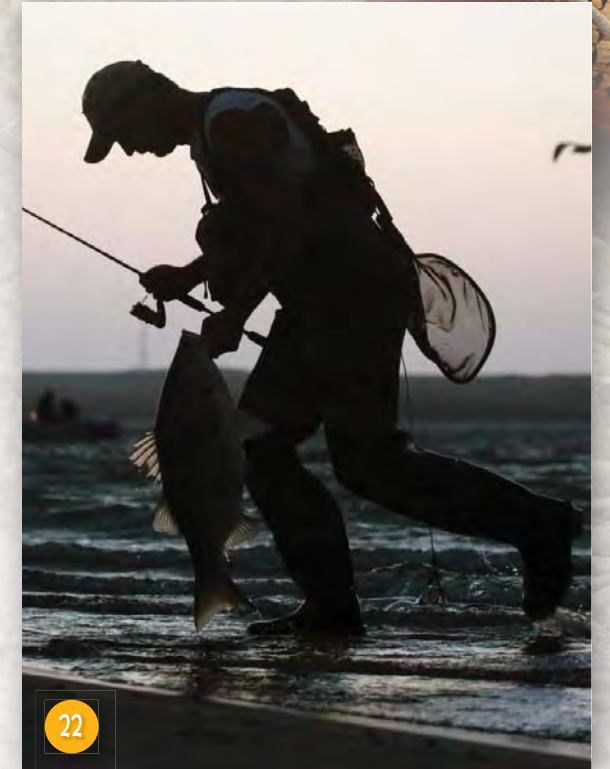
40 Doves on the Doorstep
A chance occurrence results in a front row glimpse into the life and times of a mourning dove family. TEXT AND PHOTOS BY BILL HAGER

DEPARTMENTS

Comment.....	4
Mixed Bag.....	8
Outdoor Business.....	44
Classifieds.....	46
In the Kitchen	48
Page 49	49
Nature Notes	50
Portraits from the Past	52
The Last Stop.....	54

Cover: A purple pincushion cactus flower blooms in the Sandhills north of Grand Island. **Opposite:** A damselfly sits on a blade of grass with early morning dew covering its body. Photos by Luke Kathol.

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Black Squirrel

I had a chance to harvest a black squirrel last year while hunting south of Minden and recently got it back from my taxidermist. I remember reading a story about black squirrels a few years ago in *NEBRASKAland Magazine*.

I live in Minden and there are a lot of black squirrels in town. They are also starting to get further out in the country. I harvested this one about 10 miles southwest of Minden. Thought this would be a good picture to share with others. I enjoy reading the magazine every month. Thanks.

John Hlavinka
Minden, Nebraska

Whoopers

Wanted to share this photo (below) that I had sent to Joel Jorgensen (the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's Nongame Bird Program Manager) while reporting the sighting of these five whooping cranes. I work as a deputy sheriff with Howard County and while on a call observed the birds land on the Middle Loup River near Centura High School.

I knew they were rare, as I always look for them in flocks of cranes – I bet I've looked at thousands of migrating sandhill crane flocks in hopes of seeing a white whooping crane in the flock. These are the first whooping cranes I have ever seen and it was exciting.

Mike Hoff
Elba, Nebraska



A Hunting Bond in the Great Nebraska Outdoors

This is a story of three young Nebraskan men with a deep love of the great outdoors and a passion for the vast hunting opportunities Nebraska offers. The friendship began several years ago when Brian Piernicky, Erick Wickman and I found ourselves working together in Chadron and discovered a mutual love for the outdoors and hunting. Working around our busy work and family schedules, we began taking advantage of the hunting opportunities northwestern Nebraska had to offer, ranging from spring turkeys to squirrels, doves, waterfowl, big game with various types of weapons and starting over with spring turkey hunting again.

Eventually Brian moved to southwestern Nebraska to begin a new career, but with his move came new hunting opportunity. Brian located some prime turkey hunting property,

which gave us a chance for a friendly reunion and the opportunity to archery hunt Nebraska's quality gobblers. Late-March found the three of us in our blinds near McCook, bows in hand and listening to the loud rumble of turkeys gobbling in two nearby roost trees, a sound loud enough to send shivers up your spine.

The first day led to great encounters and some near misses, which was no fault of the turkeys, but we reaped success (and then some) on the second day, bagging four toms. To top it off, I later found out my bird will be the new Nebraska state archery record for Merriam turkeys, according to the National Wild Turkey Federation (NUTF) – a great feeling since Erick already had the Nebraska shotgun record for the Rio Grande sub species. An even better feeling was the fact I still hit the turkey after accidentally shooting an arrow through Erick's expensive ground blind, which he later forgave me for.

All in all, it was a very special day as this was my first turkey and my first successful bow hunt. The state record is nice, but good times with good friends in good ol' Nebraska is more important to me than any record ever will be. I will always be thankful for the memories and friendships I have gained while exploring the great Nebraska outdoors.

Bryan Linegar
Chadron, Nebraska

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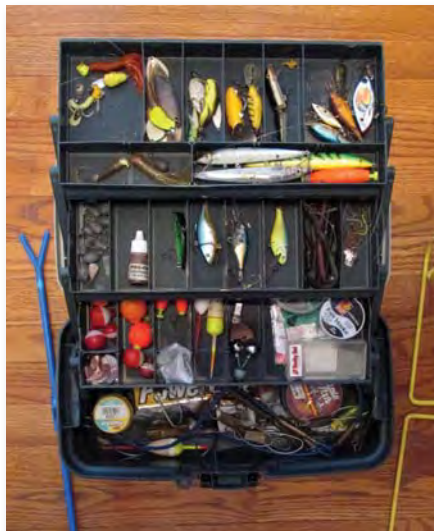
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Litter Experiment

I read about your litter experiment in the April issue of *NEBRASKAland Magazine* and want to commend you for putting forth the effort of picking up trash during your fishing travels.

What a great idea – all you need is a small plastic bag and to pick up any trash you wander upon. It's not much, but a little bit every time adds up.

I've turned my son onto this idea and he's now managed to fill his entire tackle box with fishing equipment, including a rod holder, stringer, lures, weights, many hooks, a spool of fishing line, power bait and bobbers.

I always take a plastic grocery sack with me and fill it up with very little effort. Many of my fishing buddies now do the same. I encourage everyone to pass the word on.

Monte Deatrich,
Thornton, Colorado

NEBRASKAland Visitor Letters

Well, this was definitely a tough one. Of all 42 readers that sent e-mails and letters for last issue's visitor, only one identified it correctly – a **stilt-legged fly** on **page 9** (see page 17 for the winner, rules and this issue's hint). Here are some of the wonderful responses we received:

First of all, thanks for the mug – it's displayed in my office for all to see. I finally got drawn after all these months of looking for the visitor in your great magazine. This month it's on page 9 and appears to be sitting on the tent of the couple looking out the entrance

at their visitor. I don't believe it's a mosquito – if it is, the folks in the tent may want to buy more insect repellent.

Steve Tyler
Omaha, Nebraska

I have found the visiting insect in the April issue of your magazine. It is sitting on the tent up in the corner of page 9. It seems to be a Stilt-legged fly. I didn't find much information about this critter, but the scientific name I saw most often is *rainieria antennaepe*s, and they seem to like damp places where there is detritus to eat. I shall have to watch for these this summer, as I don't know that I have ever seen one before.

This issue has some great photos and interesting articles in it. My husband found the instructions for making a blind and the info on turkeys helpful. And I enjoyed the article and photos about old elevators. The healing plants article is right up my alley ... I have saved it for later.

Solveig Knott
Grand Island, Nebraska

The visitor is on the top of page 9. I do not know its identity. Do you have any instructions on how to use www.bugguide.net, that is suggested on page 5 as a good site for identification. I go there often to try to figure out the visitor and seldom come away with any success.

Also, I see Jon Farrar is not listed as Senior Editor any longer under magazine staff. Is he retired?

Lonnie Shafer
Exeter, Nebraska

Lonnie: www.insectidentification.org is another good site. Senior editor Jon Farrar retired last November after 42 years with the Commission.

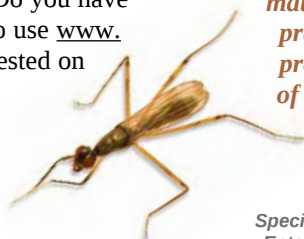
– Editor

It's really hard to admit that I have never been able to find the hidden bug, but when *NEBRASKAland* arrived yesterday, I did make that comment. My daughter, who was visiting from Norfolk (the one in Virginia – pronounced NAH-fk, or something like that), asked what I meant. I

explained. She asked if they were in the ads and I told her they could be anywhere. She took the magazine and in less than two minutes, pointed to the ant/termite-like insect at the top of page 9. In the words of Charlie Brown, "AARRRRGGG!"

Suzanne Beerthius
Alexandria, Virginia

Stilt-legged flies are members of the family Micropezidea. They are a true fly, in the same order as house flies, mosquitoes, crane flies and horse flies. This insect gets its common name from its very long legs. Stilt-legged flies often hold their front legs up so they look like antennae, in what is believed to be mimicry of a wasp or ant. This behavior is likely a defense mechanism. They also have a somewhat narrowed abdomen, again likely intended to appear wasp- or ant-like. Little is known about the feeding habits of this family of flies. The larvae are maggots, and usually feed on decaying vegetation, though some species will eat specific plants or even dung. Adults likely also feed on decaying vegetation or organic matter, though some are predaceous. Adults may be present throughout most of the summer. They prefer moist habitats, so watch for them near water or wooded areas.



Special thanks to Julie Van Meter, State Entomologist, Nebraska Department of Agriculture. Visitor image by Chris Helzer.
www.bugguide.net is a good site for identification

Send your comments to:
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Please include your postal address and telephone number.
Letters may be condensed and edited for clarity. Photographs are welcome and will be returned.

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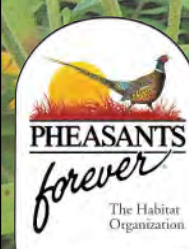
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Youth Bass Tourney Returns

Jeff Kurrus

On July 27 the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) will host one of the year's most intriguing outdoor events for both its participants and the general public – the 3rd Annual Nebraska State High School Fishing Tournament.

On that day at Harlan County Reservoir in south-central Nebraska, two-person teams of Nebraska 9th through 12th graders will compete for a spot in the regional bass



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

fishing tourney boat captain Bill Warrick of Blair at Summit Lake SRA. this fall.

The event starts at 6 a.m. with a rules and safety meeting and the competition ends at 1 p.m., followed by a weigh-in. There is no cost to participate if you register before the tournament date, however, all anglers 16 years of age and older must have a current Nebraska Fishing Permit. In addition, there is no admission fee for spectators at this event, which is definitely worth watching.

"Not only is fishing a fun hobby," said the NGPC's Larry Pape, "but this is a great opportunity for high schoolers to be involved in a competitive sport beyond traditional athletics. Competitive fishing is growing in popularity in high schools and colleges around the nation, and some colleges even offer it as a sanctioned sport with scholarship opportunities. Participation in Nebraska has more than doubled in two years, and there is room for more."

For more information on the event and instructions on how to register, visit fishingnebraska.wordpress.com, or call Larry Pape at (402) 471-5447. ■

Outdoor Discovery Program

Outdoor fun awaits families at the Family Outdoor Discovery Program at Fort Kearny State Recreation Area on May 11. This spring celebration of Nebraska's outdoors is free and runs from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Among the activities available for all ages and experience levels are shooting sports (shotgun, 3-D archery, aerial archery and air rifle), kayaking, fishing, dog field activities, campground games, sling shots and trapping. In addition, you can compete in a s'mores eating contest, learn about Nebraska's mountain lions and pot plants for Mother's Day. Participate in select activities for a chance to win gift cards.

All of the activities are free, but a park entry permit is required is required to enter. ■



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Upcoming Events

Here is a list of upcoming outdoor events across Nebraska.

For more information about these and other events, visit the calendar page at OutdoorNebraska.org.

May 4-5
2nd Annual Outdoor Cooking Camp Weekend
Ponca State Park, 402-755-2284

Living History Weekend
Fort Atkinson State Historical Park, 402-468-5611

May 4
Catfish Tournament
Lake McConaughy State Recreation Area, contact Darrell Morrow at 308-778-5879

May 11
Outdoor Discovery Program
Fort Kearny State Recreation Area, 308-865-5305

May 12
Mother's Day Buffet
Ponca State Park, 402-755-2284
Fort Robinson State Park, 308-665-2900

May 18
Summit Campground Grand Opening Event
Summit Lake State Recreation Area, 402-468-5611

May 18-19
Western NE Bass Tournament
Lake McConaughy State Recreation Area, contact Matt Vollman at 407-659-2358

Walleye Tournament
Lewis and Clark State Recreation Area, visit NebraskaWalleye.com for more info.

May 18
Free Park Entry/Fish Day Events
No park permit of fishing permit required this day, and special events will be held across the state. Visit the calendar page at www.OutdoorNebraska.org to see what's happening in your area.

May 19
Walleye Tournament
Lake McConaughy State Recreation Area, contact Troy Bosard at 308-255-2105

May 19
3D Archery Shoot at Lake Mac
Lake McConaughy State Recreation Area, contact Dennis Dahlkoetter at 308-289-6509

May 23
Growing Up WILD Educator Workshop
Southeast Community College, Lincoln Campus 6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. Registration required. Contact lindsay.rogers@nebraska.gov

May 25-27
Memorial Weekend- "Living History" at the Fort
Fort Kearny State Historical Park, 308-865-5305

June 1
Run Wild 10K and 1-mile run
Eugene T. Mahoney State Park, visit NebraskaWildlifeFund.org for more info.



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Boating Safety – A Few Reminders

By Olivia Johnson

As the temperature rises, boaters all over Nebraska are anxious to hit the water. Whether you've been operating a motorboat for years, are new to the activity or are just a passenger, keeping a few simple things in mind while you're on the water can make your experience safer and more enjoyable. (Not to mention help you avoid unwanted fines!)

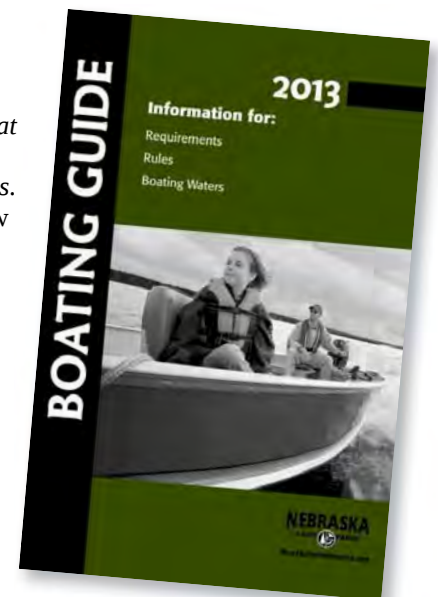
In order to operate a motor boat, all persons born after December 31, 1985 must be at least 14 years of age and have successfully completed the Nebraska boating safety class and be in possession of the certification card. Classes are held frequently throughout the state for a very minimal fee. Go to BoatSafeNebraska.org to sign up and view class dates/times in your area. Once you receive your certification card, it is good for use in all states and Canada.

Every vessel must have one wearable flotation device per person on board, plus one throwable flotation device. Children under 13 in a boat and jetskiers must wear a lifejacket at all times. *Fact: Most boating-related fatalities are due to drowning and can be prevented by wearing a lifejacket.* Nebraska Boating Law Administrator Herb Angell said, "In this day and age with modern technology there's no reason why people don't wear lifejackets. They're comfortable, stylish, and don't get in the way of any activity. Even people wanting a tan can wear a fanny pack-style inflatable lifejacket."

Just like driving a motor vehicle under the influence of alcohol, it is illegal to operate a motorboat with a blood alcohol content (BAC) of .08 or higher.

"Sometimes fishermen don't consider themselves to be boaters," said Angell. Regardless of purpose, all motorboat operators must follow the same laws. *Fact: The Game and Parks Fisheries Division completed a survey that showed 60 percent of anglers fish from boats.*

These are only a few friendly reminders and this list is not comprehensive. For additional, detailed information, pick up a copy of the 2013 Boating Guide, or view it online at <http://outdoornebraska.ne.gov/boating/pdfs/boatguide.pdf>. ■





Mixed Bag

Travelogue

by Carol Henderson

Fremont

The weather is warm, the sky is blue, let's head to Fremont...

Enjoy the great outdoors: Tucked among thick stands of cedar, willow and cottonwood next to the **Platte River, Fremont Lakes State Recreation Area**, aka "The Lakes," offers wide expanses of ankle-deep sand for castle-making and simple relaxing around 20 sandpit lakes, as well as a designated water-skiing lake for when you want the wind in your hair. The area has plenty of camping spots available, good fishing, ample bird-watching opportunities and miles of tree-lined hiking trails to enjoy. <http://nebraskastateparks.reserveamerica.com>

For a thrill: If you're ready for a break from all that camping, fishing or bird-watching, make a reservation for an airboat ride. The 10 passenger airboat features a NASCAR engine and plenty of ear protection for riders. brysonsairboattours.com

Fremont is not all about water, however – take time to check out the city's sophisticated side...

Getting started: The **old Post Office** on Broad Street has plenty of literature about the area, but the building alone, featuring terrazzo floors, high ceilings and classic architectural touches, is worth a stop itself. Note: The building is closed on weekends. Information about the area can also be found at visitfremontne.org.

Must see: The **May Museum**, home of the **Dodge County Historical Society** at 1643 Nye Street features a massive white-columned portico and was once the residence of Theron Nye, one of Fremont's founders. Color-drenched gardens and a replica of the Nye's first log cabin home are also situated on the expansive grounds. The hour-long, docent-led tour does not disappoint (and might remind you of a fictional grand house called Downton Abbey). Admission is just \$5 for adults and \$1 for students to visit one of America's grand houses. maymuseum.com

Don't miss: Fremont's **downtown** is still a vibrant shopping destination for furniture, bakery treats, gifts, clothing and fine dining. But Fremont is perhaps best known as eastern Nebraska's Antique Capital. Four large stores offer an amazing array of books, furniture and memorabilia. Allow plenty of time to peruse each one.

Dining: My lunch stop was at **J's Steakhouse** for one of Nebraska's best hot roast beef sandwiches. Real mashed potatoes, thin slices of tender roast beef and fresh green beans sautéed in butter with shallots and bacon. Creamy, crunchy crème brulee for dessert ... oh my!



Airboat rides

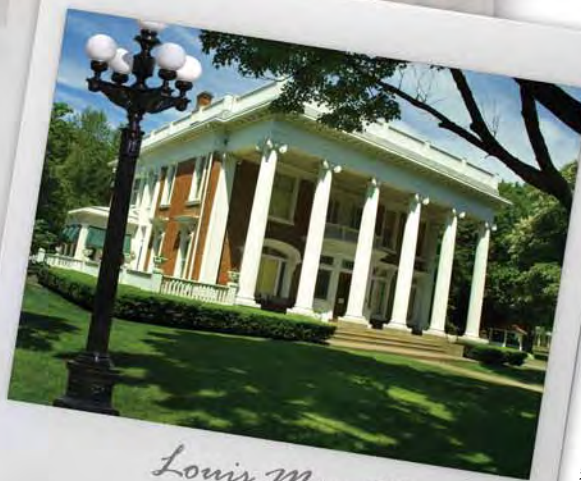


Fremont



Sailboarding at the lake

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS



Louis May Museum

PHOTO BY RADER PHOTOGRAPHY



Send Us Your Trail Cam Photos!



Amy and Richard Burdine sent in this picture of three bobcats on their property near Lewellen. The third cat is hard to make out – only part of it can be seen on the left side of the log.

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

By the Numbers – Hunter Education in 2012

By Olivia Johnson

Each year volunteers play an important role in providing hunter and bowhunter education courses and events for youth across Nebraska. Last year proved to be no exception. Below are some noteworthy facts and figures from 2012:

- 511 classes and field days were held by volunteer instructors on behalf of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Of those, 364 classes were for firearm education and 147 were for bowhunter education.
- 1,339 instructors were involved in teaching these events.
- 14,460 hours were donated by these instructors. Valued at \$21 an hour, that's \$303,660 worth of time donated.

Both the number of active instructors and number of hours donated increased from 2011 to 2012.

A total of 8,917 people attended these classes and field days, with 6,980 at firearm events and 1,812 at bowhunting events. ■



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Little Bluestem - Nebraska's State Grass

Gerry Steinauer, botanist

The shortest bill in Nebraska Legislative history reads “Little bluestem known as *Andropogon scoparius*, is hereby declared the official state grass of Nebraska.” The vote on this 1969 bill was likely unanimous, for what Nebraska senator would oppose honoring little bluestem – a hardy, productive yet beautiful prairie grass native to every county and legislative district in the state?

Beyond Nebraska’s borders, little bluestem (now named *Schizachrium scoparium*) ranges far and wide across most of southern Canada, throughout all the Lower 48 states and extends south to central Mexico. Variability in phenology and growth form allow this adaptable grass to inhabit a variety of climates and plant communities, including northern woods, everglade flatwoods, mesquite shrublands and, of course, prairie.

A warm-season perennial grass, little bluestem most often grows in tight, erect clumps, reaching three feet in height on favorable sites. Below ground, dense and fibrous roots penetrate to depths of four to eight feet while searching for precious moisture. On wetter sites it may form an open sod with short rhizomes (horizontal underground stems) connecting small tufts.

In Nebraska’s eastern tallgrass prairie, little blue is abundant but plays second fiddle to big bluestem and Indian grass. In our dry Panhandle prairie, blue grama, needle-and-thread, and blackroot sedge outrank little blue in abundance. It is in our central loess mixed-grass prairie and Sandhill prairie where our state grass rises to prominence. Here, on shallow soils, steeper slopes, and ridge tops it often forms thick stands, with wildflowers and other prairie grasses surviving only in narrow gaps between bluestem plants.

As an abundant forage grass, little bluestem pumps untold dollars into our state’s ranching economy. When at peak



growth in early summer, little bluestem’s leaves are tender, nutrient-rich and much sought after by livestock. As the seeds mature in late summer, the foliage becomes dry and coarse, with nutrient levels and palatability dropping. When not sufficiently grazed or occasionally burned or hayed, little bluestem plants accumulate excessive old leaves and stems that thwart livestock from reaching the new growth.

The autumn foliage of little bluestem is a striking purple-red, and many writers and photographers have succumbed to the allure of bluestem-cloaked hills and plains. “The red of the grass made all the great prairie the colour of wine-stains.... And there was so much motion in it; the whole country seemed, somehow, to be running,” penned Willa Cather in *My Antonia*. Cather’s classic 1918 novel is based on her childhood in the mixed-grass prairie country of Webster County and the “red grass” of which she writes is surely little bluestem. If the renown Cather chose to honor little bluestem with such fine prose, certainly it deserved the title of “official state grass of Nebraska.” ■



PHOTOS BY CHRIS HELZER

Nebland Flashbacks



In the February 1967 issue of *NEBRASKALAND Magazine*, this photo ran with an article on the Lincoln Children’s Zoo. When the zoo first opened in 1965, the only sound Leo had was just a mechanical roar. Later his recording was changed to: “Hi, boys and girls! I’m Leo the Paper Eating Lion. Paper! Paper! Paper! I just loooove paper!” Does anyone remember what the dummy in the jail used to say? Send us a letter or e-mail.

State Recognized by DU

Ducks Unlimited recently recognized the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) for significant contributions to conserving waterfowl breeding habitat in Canada. The award commemorated NGPC’s milestone \$1 million investment in critical nesting habitat in Canada.

“The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission recognizes the critical value of Prairie Canada for waterfowl that migrate through Nebraska,” said NGPC Director Jim Douglas. “None of this would be successful without our great working partnership with Ducks Unlimited Canada and the contributions and support from our duck hunters with funds from the Nebraska waterfowl stamp. The ability of DU Canada to leverage funds and efficiently put conservation on-the-ground benefits all of Nebraska’s waterfowl hunters.”

The state grants program was started

by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies to support migratory bird conservation, and contributions are matched by DU Inc. and DU Canada, as well as the North American Wetlands Conservation Act. Through this match, Nebraska’s \$1 million investment has resulted in \$5 million in conservation work being done in Canada. ■

CRP Signup

From May 20 through June 14, landowners can offer to enroll land in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Those with CRP contracts expiring this September may also submit offers.

CRP rental rates have risen in many Nebraska counties, some considerably, so contact your local Farm Service Agency for more information. Accepted contracts for this CRP signup will begin October 1, 2013. ■



Run Wild 10K

To help celebrate National Trails Day and Nebraska’s wildlife, on June 1 Eugene T. Mahoney State Park is hosting numerous outdoor activities, including two “Run Wild” races – a chip-timed 10k race and a 1-mile children’s fun run for runners 12 years and younger – where participants are encouraged to dress like wild animals.

Registration proceeds support the Nebraska Wildlife Conservation Fund, one of the primary sources of funding for research and education about Nebraska’s at-risk species. Prizes will be awarded to race winners and for best costume. The 1-mile registration includes a free children’s t-shirt and a pass to the park’s wave pool. In addition, each group of young runners from the same address will get the book “Have You Seen Mary?” by *NEBRASKALAND*’s Jeff Kurrus.

No registrations will be accepted the day of the event, and registration costs go up the closer you are to the May 24 deadline. For more information or to sign up (each participant needs to be signed up individually), visit NebraskaWildlifeFund.org. ■

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A Plum House

Jeff Kurrus

“Where there are plum thickets, there are quail,” a bird hunter once told me, and he was right. Plum thickets provide multiple purposes for bobwhite quail and are too often in short supply, with the rising price of corn and some farmers’ ever-increasing desire to plant fencerow to fencerow.

First, plum thickets grow soft, fleshy fruits consisting of sugar that provides high levels of energy for birds during the month of September. But it’s more important what they do the rest of the year – providing shade for hens and their broods, as well as cover against predators. Although plum thickets can be five to 12 feet tall and provide perches for raptors, their thick structure makes these thickets virtually inaccessible to those raptors despite the bare ground underneath.

However, these thickets still need to be maintained. First, fire should be used to manage them, as a plum thicket full of grass has little or no value for quail. Second, they should be much larger than you probably think – a bare minimum of 1,500 square feet in size, three to five feet in height, and away from trees.

But instead of trying to establish a new thicket, which can take about 10 years, we should first work toward maintaining the thickets we currently have in our fencelines and field edges by using better management tactics today. ■



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Great Park Pursuit

By Olivia Johnson

The increasingly popular Great Park Pursuit is back in action in 2013. This outdoor adventure encourages awareness of Nebraska’s various outdoor recreation opportunities as well as a healthy lifestyle.

Venture to as many of the 20 Great Park Pursuit locations across Nebraska as you like between May 1 and September 16. Once at a designated site, search for a special nature impression and trace it with a pencil onto a Park Page. The more impression tracings you collect, the better chance you have at winning a prize! A new prize system will be going into effect this year that will include even more prizes.

How to join the fun:

- Gather your friends and family to create a team, and then register online.
- Choose one of the designated parks on the GPP website and print the official Park Page.
- Follow the clues on the Park Page to locate the park’s nature impression.
- Continue visiting other GPP locations.
- Mail in your completed Park Page(s) to be entered in prize drawings.

For more detailed information and to register, go to the Great Park Pursuit’s website: negpp.org. Also be sure to ‘like’ the Facebook page, as it’s the place where new information is posted first. ■

Summit Lake Campground Grand Opening

On May 18, Summit Lake State Recreation Area near Tekamah is hosting a grand opening for its newly constructed Bob Eckdahl Campground.

Activities for all ages will be available from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., including a bounce house, train ride, face painting, pony rides, a fishing clinic and outdoor games. A hotdog cookout will also be available from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., followed by speakers and a ribbon-cutting ceremony. In the evening a live auction will be held at the nearby No Wake Bar and Grill to help raise funds for a new wheelchair-accessible fishing pier and a new shower house at the lake.

The new campground, which features 19 camping pads with 50 amp electrical hookups, was named for the park’s longtime superintendent, who passed away in 2007. The new campground, as well as upgrades to the 11 sites already existing at Summit Lake SRA, was funded by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, the local NRD, the Burt County Recreational Preservation Committee, and local donors.

If someone would like to donate to the live auction or the projects themselves, contact Jason Grof at 402-374-1727. ■

Junior Duck Stamp Winner

Best of Show at this year’s Nebraska Junior Duck Stamp Art Contest was awarded to Clair Rush of Tecumseh.

A 17-year-old student at Johnson-Brock High School, Rush’s colored pencil drawing of a wood duck pair was selected from nearly 400 entries received from all across the state. Her drawing was then entered in the National Junior Duck Stamp Competition that was held April 19 at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, W.Va. The winner of the national junior duck stamp competition received \$5,000, a trip to

the nation’s capital along with a parent and/or art teacher, and their artwork will be used to make the 2013-2014 Junior Duck Stamp. Proceeds from the sale of the Junior Duck Stamps, which cost \$5, support conservation education across the country.

Junior Duck Stamp designs are judged in the K-3, 4-6, 7-9, and 10-12 grade groups, from which three first place, second place and third place winners, as well as sixteen honorable mention awards, are chosen. The Best of Show is then chosen from the first place winners from all age groups.



Information for next year’s contest will be posted on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service internet homepage at duckstamps.fws.gov. ■

Natural Seeding

Natural resource officials in northwest Nebraska are turning to one of the oldest forms of seed dispersal to replace some of the countless trees and shrubs that were burned in the 2012 Pine Ridge forest fires.

Blocks containing seeds of native trees and shrubs soon will be fed to the region’s wild animals, which are expected to “deposit” the seeds in remote areas of the region’s rugged landscape.

Shelley Steffl of Chadron, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission wildlife biologist leading the effort and pictured at right forming seed blocks, said the project is intended to move seeds to the most remote areas of the Pine Ridge and complement future forest rehabilitation efforts.

Eight hundred of the blocks have been created. The blocks contain seeds for 12 native species of trees and shrubs, including deciduous varieties such as Rocky Mountain maple, and conifer species, like ponderosa pine. The ingredients are listed on a biodegradable label that quickly falls apart when exposed to moisture.

Steffl said one of the greatest challenges of the project was coming up with a recipe that contains the right ratio of molasses and livestock mineral to keep the blocks from falling apart.

A grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust was used to help with a portion of the funding needed for the project. The blocks are available to landowners for \$3 per block. Landowners who want to be placed on a list for the seed blocks may contact Steffl at 308-432-6190 or visit the Upper Niobrara White Natural Resources District, 430 E. Second St. in Chadron. ■



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

See You Out There... But Where?



Do you know where this Nebraska photograph was taken?
See answer at the bottom of page 17.

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

State NASP Results

Devin Sobotka of Lincoln Southeast High School set a state record with 290 points at this year's Nebraska National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) state tournament held March 23 in Lincoln en route to winning the boy's title, while Kora Shedenhelm of Omaha Mater Dei Academy repeated as the top girl scorer in the meet with 284 points.

The tournament drew 460 elementary, middle school and high school archers from 23 schools and was this year's culminating event in the state for NASP, a physical education curriculum that has spread across the nation.

The following teams qualified for the NASP national tournament May 10-11 in Louisville, Ky., by winning a state championship or meeting a score requirement:

High School Division – Omaha Mater Dei Academy and Lincoln North Star; Middle School Division – Lincoln Pound; Elementary Division – Lincoln Pound.

In addition, all top-five individual finishers in each division also qualified for nationals. ■

Take Pride in America Day

Take Pride in America Day, a nationwide effort to encourage volunteers to improve parks, lakes and wildlife areas, will be May 4 this year and officials at Branched Oak and Verdon Lake state recreation areas (SRA) are looking for volunteers at each of those areas.

At Branched Oak SRA, volunteers are needed to paint, pick up litter and prune or remove trees that have grown in unwanted areas. For more information or to register for the event, which runs from 9 a.m. to about 4 p.m., call 402-783-3400.

Some of the work needed at Verdon Lake SRA includes cutting trees, chipping wood, cleaning and painting restrooms, picking up trash, cleaning grills and painting and repairing picnic tables. This event also runs from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., and lunch will be provided. For more information or to register, call Indian Cave State Park at 402-883-2575. No park entry permit is required for volunteers at either location. ■



PHOTO BY DOUG CARROLL

Outdoor Cooking Camp at Ponca State Park

Enjoy a delicious and educational weekend during the 2nd Annual Outdoor Cooking Camp scheduled for May 3-5 at Ponca State Park.

The interactive camp includes a variety of specialty courses with hands-on instruction, as well as the opportunity to meet fellow cooking enthusiasts during a barbeque and bonfire, group cookout and wine and cheese social.

Courses include campfire cooking, wild game sausage making, smoking meat and backyard BBQ, grilling

techniques, fish preparation, canning venison, jerky making and dehydration, making strawberry preserves and dutch oven cooking.

Special nature-inspired programs for youth run concurrent with adult courses and include campfire cooking and safety, food art, a wild edibles hike and more.

Camp cost is \$50 for adults and \$35 for youth 12 and under, which includes instruction in all courses, program food and materials, and five meals. A discount of 30 percent off all



lodging is available to camp participants, as well as a gift shop discount.

For more information or to register, contact the park at 402-755-2284. A park entry permit is required. ■

PHOTOS BY ERIC FOWLER

After the Spawn

Daryl Bauer

Right now the walleye spawn is winding down on most Nebraska waters. Although some Nebraska anglers believe the spawn period offers their best opportunity of the year to catch walleyes, especially big walleyes, I believe they are wrong. Admittedly, the concentration of spawning walleyes on the face of the dams on most Nebraska reservoirs gives anglers an opportunity to fish where there are a lot of adult walleyes. Out of all those fish, there will be a few that will take a bait, usually the smaller male walleyes, but occasionally one of the big girls. However, most walleyes during the spawn period have things other than feeding on their minds.

Once spawning rituals are finished, walleyes need to begin feeding to replenish energy reserves. They need to eat. Couple that with the fact that the amount of natural prey is at its lowest point during the spring, and you have the perfect scenario for the best walleye fishing of the year: Hungry, active fish searching for limited prey. Some of the best walleye fishing each year for both numbers of fish and for big fish starts after the spawn and lasts into early summer.

After completing spawning, walleyes scatter throughout Nebraska reservoirs. With the numbers of natural prey at a minimum, walleyes will feed on a wide variety of prey, mostly small fish. At this time walleyes may be found from one end of a water body to the other, from shallow water to deep water and everywhere in between. Anglers should try to cover lots of water, check a variety of depths and habitats, and use a variety of presentations to find and catch post-spawn walleyes. Early in this period, it is typical to catch a walleye here and there from a variety of areas and on a variety of baits. Later on fishing patterns will become more consistent as the walleyes form schools and feed more consistently in predictable areas.

All of the traditional live bait, trolling presentations and lures will catch walleyes from post-spawn right into summer. Many of those tactics are very effective ways to cover water and find fish. But keep in mind, especially immediately after the spawn, that waters will still be relatively cool and that many species of prey most likely will be found in shallow, warmer water. So look for active walleyes in relatively shallow water, and in cover and habitat that may be more effectively fished by casting jigs, crankbaits and swimbaits. ■

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS



Logan Moore of Roca with a walleye caught at Johnson Lake.

Turpin Time

Dick Turpin

Here's a couple tips for when you're outdoors so you can enjoy yourself fishing and not get pestered.

To repel mosquitoes:

- Use fabric softener sheets (the Buoyant brand). Just wipe on and go.

- Take one vitamin B-1 (Thiamin Hydrochloride 100 mg.) tablet a day April through October

For stings/bug bites:

- Household ammonia is great for stopping the itch of bug bites and the pain of stings. Get a small container, like one that eye drops come in, fill it with household ammonia, and keep that with you fishing.

For tick removal:

- Don't ever use a match or nail polish – those things will likely get the tick to regurgitate infected fluids. Use tweezers (on the head, not the body) and gently pull straight upward. ■



NEBRASKAland Visitor Winner and Hint



Last issue's winner of the Visitor drawing was Solveig Knott of Grand Island, Nebraska, who found the **stilt-legged fly** on page 9. 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 bug found in Nebraska that just happened to find its way onto one of the pages.

We will then gather the correct entries and draw one to win a *NEBRASKAland* Magazine 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 page 2, 6, 7, or 50.



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A woman stares at the aftermath of the 1913 Omaha tornado.

Tornado of 1913

Omaha's Easter Storm of Destruction

By Margie Lukas

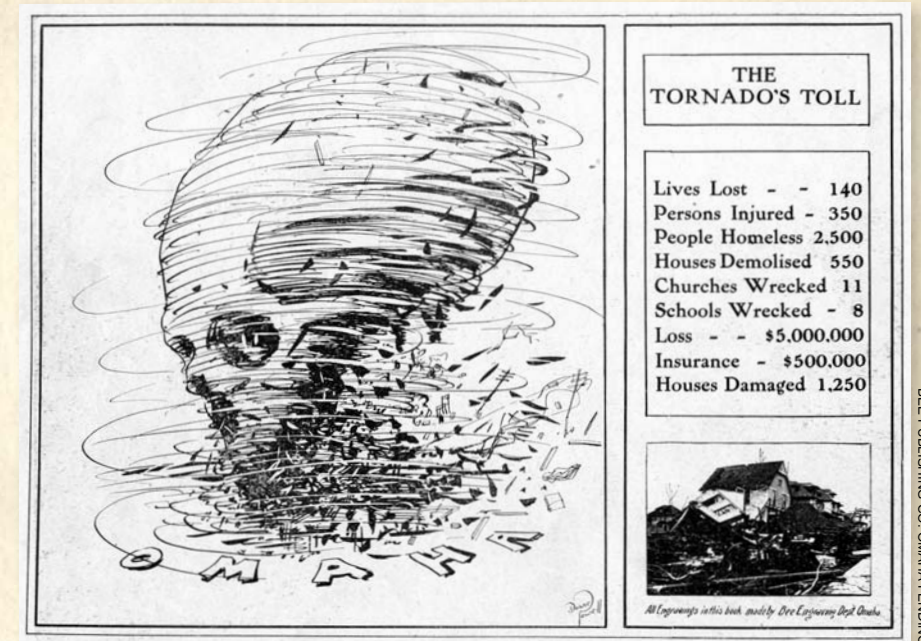
Omaha, 1913: James C. Dahlmen, "Cowboy Jim," was mayor; ice and coal were delivered to homes; potatoes sold for 15 cents a peck; and riding the street car cost a nickel.

March 23rd of that year, Easter Sunday, began "balmy" with the sun often breaking through the cloud cover. By evening Omaha would suffer what the National Weather Service calls, "The darkest day in Nebraska severe weather history." At least seven tornados would move across Nebraska and Iowa, injuring hundreds and killing seven people in Ralston, 20 in Council Bluffs, and 140 in Omaha.

It was an era before civil defense sirens and Doppler radar screens. Most Omahans were just sitting down to their Easter dinner and were caught without warning when the twister struck at 5:45 p.m. Others heard the tornado's rumbling approach minutes before its arrival, and one man described to an Omaha Bee newspaper reporter that the air just before the tornado hit was "a lurid brass-yellow luminous atmosphere."

Crossing the city diagonally, the massive F4 twister touched down around 50th and Center and headed northeast. The path of destruction was nearly a quarter of a mile wide and four and a half miles long, destroying one of Omaha's most densely populated areas. Homes in lower regions, as well as expensive mansions on the hills such as Joslyn Castle, were heavily damaged or destroyed. The Omaha Bee said of the twister: "It invaded the hovel and palace, the dwelling of the wage worker, and the mansion of his employer."

A.L. Green, who worked at Orkin Brothers' department store, told a reporter: "It came like a rushing and roaring torrent of water. It came from



This graphic, originally published in the Omaha Bee, paints a horrific picture of the Omaha tornado with its skull imagery and its statistical information following the storm.



This postcard from Omaha's devastating tornado reads, "As tornado appeared after passing 38th St. Omaha, Mar. 23rd- 1913."



This panoramic photo shows homes on the southwestern edge of Omaha along Leavenworth and 49th streets, including this one blown from its foundation. Twelve people lost their lives in this vicinity. On the hill at right is the University of Nebraska Medical College building.

Four coffins with tornado victims lay on a flatbed wagon following the Idlewild Pool Hall collapse at 24th and Lake streets in Omaha.

the south and passed right by us to the east. I went to my attic window immediately afterward and saw fires bursting forth from homes along the path of the storm. I could see five fires burning at once, three to the south of me, one southeast and one northeast.”

As many as 50 fires broke out in the aftermath. Most homes were heated by woodstoves, fireplaces or coal-fueled boilers. When these were destroyed, burning embers blew and the frame houses, now reduced to kindling, were ignited. Even stoves that remained standing were smothered in debris, which ignited. Ruptured gas lines were another source of fire. So many calls came to the fire department the firemen could not respond to them all. The streets were buried in trees, poles and debris, forcing firefighters to pick their way through on foot, carrying their hoses on their backs. Most of the homes where fires broke out – often with people trapped inside – were smoldering heaps in a few short hours.

Ambulances and hearses met the same obstructions as the fire department, and the injured and dead were carried out on makeshift gurneys. All lights were out, so through the night rescuers used torches to search for victims, despite the threat to their

own lives from ruptured gas lines.

An estimated 600 to 800 homes were left in rubble. Another 2,000 were severely damaged. The homeless count was in the thousands. Hastily-painted signs on scrap wood were tacked to demolished buildings, telling the homeless where they could go for food and shelter. Trinity Cathedral opened its doors and took in 300 women and children. Methodist Hospital at 36th and Cuming had many of its windows blown out but continued to receive victims, filling its hallways with injured people.

One of the locations with the highest death toll was Idlewild Pool Hall at 2307 N. 24th St. The establishment was destroyed and the owner and 13 customers were killed by falling debris and smoke inhalation. Pictures taken the next day show a crowd of what might be 200 onlookers, standing around the site in heavy coats and hats as body after body is pulled free. Some of the bodies were carried to Obee’s Funeral Parlor, others to what is now the Black Heritage Museum at 22nd and Lake. Across the street from Idlewild, Nathan Krinski, his wife and all five of their children perished in their home.

That Monday, the morgues were

grisly places as crowds came looking for loved ones. Bodies were stretched out across the floors, many of them so broken and burnt they were unrecognizable. Throughout the day people continued to press through, hoping not to find their loved ones. Even those who couldn’t identify bodies, who still had hope their loved ones lived, left grieving over what they’d seen. Hospitals experienced the same flocks of anguished people demanding to see those brought in, hoping to find family members still alive.

When the funerals began a few days later, the morgues had to coordinate the times so there were enough hearses and so the cemeteries could handle the workload. Pictures from back then show long lines of black hearses, drawn by horses plodding toward final resting places. ■

Nebraska Educational Television has produced a documentary titled “Devil Clouds: Tornadoes Strike Nebraska” that will air May 2 at 12:00 a.m. on NET2, as well as on May 29 at 9 p.m. on NET1/HD. Or watch online at <http://netnebraska.org/interactive-multimedia/news/devil-clouds-tornadoes-strike-nebraska>.



WIPERS

Chasing the Devil Fish

Photos and text by Doug Steinke

As a walleye tournament guy, I hated wipers for the wasted time their strikes could cost me. My opinion changed, however, once I started targeting these powerful fish.

For 20 years I only fished for walleyes – I was a walleye tourney guy. The loads of bait and tackle I sorted every spring on the dining room table (much to my wife’s dismay) were specially devised to catch the glory fish, the good fish. But there was a bad fish that also roamed the waters I plumbed with lures – a white devil fish with no respect for natural law. The wiper.

Some fishermen will tell you the



Chris Jackson was one of the pioneers in developing techniques for consistently catching large wipers at Lake McConaughy.

wiper will eat all the other fish in the lake and hates tackle as well. Panic would often ensue once the word “WIPER!” was called out on a “walleye” boat, because you knew there was a good chance after it hit your outside trolling rod that it would take the lure and scream away with the line, swimming in a sideways, twirling movement intent on entangling all four of your rods, even attacking your neighbor’s boat head-on as well (Ok, that may be a stretch), only to somehow get off the line. The next 30 minutes of valuable tournament time would then be spent untangling the mess of lines, rods and lures, muttering “Those bleeping, devil fish.”

However, after realizing how much fun fighting wipers was (at least when walleye tournament money wasn’t on the line!), I decided to see what it would take to catch them on a regular basis and my attitude towards them quickly changed. While chasing walleyes is largely finesse fishing, wipers are pure power fishing, with no tip-toeing or finesse about it.

So with the help of a few accomplished wiper anglers, what follows is some “inside” information on how to consistently catch these amazing fish from ice-out to ice-up. There are some obvious techniques, but I’ll also touch on some that are a little out of the box.

March/April

At a time when most people are concentrating on the nightly walleye spawn, you should be searching the shallows during the day for wipers.

The key to finding wipers after ice-out is warm water. The warmer the water in early spring, the more likely it is to attract baitfish and the predators that are sure to follow. But where do you find it?

“During March and April you want to find calm water – you don’t want wave action,” said North Platte native Chris Jackson. “With wave action this early in the year, what you get is a mixing effect where the warm shallow water is mixing with cooler,

deeper water. That doesn’t mean you can’t catch fish on windy days, it’s just smarter to target the calmer water. For example, say you have a 20 mph northwest wind – I look to fish the northwest corners of bays or the north side of the lake.”

The exact water temperature plays a huge role as well. “A surface temp of 50 degrees is my magic number,” said Jackson. “If I get on the water in the morning, and my locator reads 45 degrees and the air temp is going to be reaching 70 degrees that day, then I know it is only a matter of time before we will start catching fish. Conversely, I’ve had the complete opposite work against us. While we were catching fish in calm conditions, a south wind started

and blew waves into the area we were fishing. Within an hour our surface water temp dropped below 50 degrees and the bite died.”

Following Jackson’s advice, friend Rich Turch and I set out on Lake McConaughy on a mid-April day to see if we could duplicate his past success. He didn’t lead us astray – we started catching wipers on jigs, but by far the most productive lures we used were stick baits and the hands down winner was a No. 10 Rapala X-Rap in olive, purple and blue colors. There really wasn’t a wrong way to retrieve it – you could impart a “reel-pause-reel” action or a steady retrieve. The important thing was to keep searching and looking for calm, warmer water.

Usually where we found one fish, others were with it.

Jake Latendresse, past owner of Al and Dee’s Cedar Vue store at Big Mac, has discovered a not so conventional pattern on that lake as well. Four years ago we were talking about early-season fishing and he told me about a fly-fishing pattern he had discovered, “Doug, it is like fishing for bonefish in the Florida Keys,” he said, just before giving me the details.

“Spring fishing can be divided up in two parts, early and late. Early spring wiper fishing can start much earlier than most anglers might think. Conventional wisdom gets everyone going in early May, but I have caught wipers with fly gear as early as March



Whether you cast or troll it in shallow or deep water, my most versatile “go to” bait for wipers in all seasons is the No. 10 Rapala X-Rap in purple, blue and olive.



Three ways to catch wipers: Fish stickbaits in shallow water, as shown by Rick Turch; fly-fish using minnow-imitating flies, such as a clouser minnow, with Jin Choi; and troll crankbaits at night, with Mike Reilly.

17th. That was an exceptionally warm spring and, as you can probably guess, we were catching them in two to five feet of water. Late spring usually starts on Cinco de Mayo (May 5th). The first time we had one of those unbelievable days was, in fact, May 5th, and we landed 30 wipers over six pounds,” said Latendresse.

The key to unlocking the wiper mystery, he said, is a combination of four variables similar to any fishing success: location, depth, presentation and color. “It took us four or five hours to find the fish (the day he and his buddies caught all the big wipers). We hunted along bank ledges, in the rocks, even in the trees. We eventually got lucky and bumped into a six-pound wiper on an inside corner of a sandy, prominent point,” he said, which followed along the lines of Chris Jackson’s advice. “Basically the location offered a calm, warm, shallow water area that was tight to a deep saddle along the feeding shelf. I believe the inside corner position offered an ambush and cornering effect. But even more microscopically, 90 percent of the fish we landed came in the transition zone as the fly would drop off the edge of the small shelf.”

The retrieve is just as important as the location, said Latendresse. “It needs to be a sustained stripping action, but allow the fly to fall all the way to the bottom on the initial cast. I believe it replicates a minnow darting in a linear direction, trying to run from predators, and the wipers key in on that. So, I’d cast onto the shelf, let it fall and just start stripping 12 inches at a time in a sustained motion. We tried dozens of flies among an array of colors, sizes and shapes, but the most successful color, shape and size became very clear – a chartreuse and white clouser minnow. Hands down, it outperformed every fly, spinner, jig and crankbait in the early spring.”

May/June

As the month of May rolls around, Davis Creek Reservoir near the town of North Loup provides another great wiper bite. Each year starting in April, water from the Loup River is diverted into the reservoir for summer irrigation

needs, raising the lake level as much as 40 feet by early June. As the water rises it inundates the emerging vegetation and willows surrounding the lake and the baitfish head for this cover, followed by the lake’s wipers. As opposed to early spring, May into June is the time to look for wave action into steep points and shoreline breaks or cups. A jig and crawler, plastic grub, spinnerbait or X-Rap are my lures of choice at this point. It’s really easy to develop a pattern on Davis Creek because there are so many bays and fingers. If you are catching fish on an inside cup of a southwest-facing point with submerged willows, there are many similar geographic areas at Davis Creek to fish.

June/July

As late spring into summer arrives, alewives, the major sources of a wiper’s diet at Lake McConaughy, start to spawn. At Big Mac, one of the most effective ways to catch wipers is dip-netting alewives. An important note here is that you cannot use a cast net until July 1, but the use of a dip net is permissible. Simply net the alewife when they are spawning in the rocks (easier said than done), hook the fish behind the dorsal fin and throw it out on an 18-inch leader with an egg sinker. Sometimes you can also be successful simply by letting the bait swim with very little weight. In a boat, drifting a live alewife along the dam or

off of sand points can be deadly.

On days when shallow baitfish are nowhere to be found or he doesn’t want to bother with live bait, avid fisherman Greg Wright of Alda keeps a back-up plan. “Top-water and spinner baits are my go-to bait on Big Mac in June once the alewife spawn starts on the dam and rocky points,” he said.

“Most people who target wipers during the summer do so because of the fish’s ability to fight and the chance to be a part of one of the iconic top-water feeding frenzies the fish are known for,” said Wright. “This bite is typically centered around McConaughy’s other forage fish, gizzard shad. When that is my goal, my time in the boat is focused towards overcast days or periods of

low light (dawn and dusk) on sunny days, especially in July. Nebraska’s frequent evening thunderstorms cut many evening bites short, so I like to watch the forecast or focus on the morning for guaranteed action.

“Wipers and white bass often feed together during the summer, and while white bass are fun, they don’t offer the excitement of the 10-pound plus hybrids,” said Wright. “For that reason, being picky in bait selection and school selection is important. I bring binoculars and scan for large groups of feeding gulls and terns near bays and shorelines adjacent to the deeper main lake. These birds often indicate where shad are pushed to the surface by feeding predators. In some Nebraska



Blake Steinke casts a spinnerbait onto a break along a shallow sandbar. Wipers routinely push schools of bait against these sharp breaks near sundown at Lake McConaughy.

Common Nighthawk

Text and photo by Michael Forsberg

A hike through a shortgrass prairie in early summer can lead to interesting surprises. I was on a ranch near Kimball and had just crested a small hill to scan the horizon for pronghorn does that might be giving birth to their fawns. I set my backpack down on a rocky knob, pulled out my binoculars and took one, then two, steps forward when suddenly a dark, slender bird with falcon-like wings exploded off the ground at my feet.

I had nearly stepped on a nighthawk and her two eggs, which were so well camouflaged that they were barely detectable against the pebbled soil where they lay. In fact, when I looked back down after watching the bird angling away in a low zigzag flight across the prairie, I couldn't find the eggs again even though I knew they were cradled in pebbles just inches away.

The common nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*) is part of the goatsucker family, a reclusive group of birds more often heard than seen. They include the nighthawks and nightjars, with names like the common poorwill, whip-poor-will and chuck-will's widow. These are mysterious birds that exist in the shadows, can hide in plain sight with their cryptic coloration, and primarily make their living hunting winged insects at night or on the edges of day.



Common nighthawks prefer to build their ground nests on flat-pebbled ground near healthy grasslands, where insects are plentiful.

With nicknames like the “bullbat,” “pisk” and “will-o’wisp,” the common nighthawk is the largest of three nighthawk species found in North America. Its genus name, *Chordeiles*, loosely translates to “music in the evening.” Its loud *peeeent*– like call, given in flight, can easily be heard far across the prairie or high above the city on a summer evening.

The common nighthawk is an aerial specialist that can sustain long flights hunting the flying insects, ranging from tiny ants to large moths, that are its prey. Crepuscular – meaning active at dusk and dawn when light levels are low – the nighthawk is most active at twilight, but will also feed on cloudy days or at night in urban areas where the bright lights of a city or outdoor stadium attract swarms of night-flying insects.

Weighing in at less than three ounces, the nighthawk is more than nine inches long with a wingspan of nearly two feet. Its large eyes allow it to hunt in low light. Although its beak is small, its mouth gapes wide when inhaling prey on the wing. Like falcons and swifts, its slender body, long wings and slightly notched tail allow it great aerial maneuverability in the windy, open country where it resides. Often described as having an erratic, bounding flight, the nighthawk can appear bat-like on the wing.

Darker above and lighter below, nighthawks are cryptically-colored with intricate patterns of blacks, golds, browns and grays. These earth-tone colors so closely resemble the bare branches of the trees, weathered fence posts or surface of the ground where they prefer to perch or roost that they can hide in plain sight while at rest during the day.

The common nighthawk's range extends from high desert grasslands to coastal floodplain to certain urban settings across most of the United States. In Nebraska its range extends nearly statewide. Long-distance migrants that winter in South America, common nighthawks move south in flocks as days grow colder and insect populations wane. During fall migration their numbers in Nebraska usually peak in early September and they are gone



Cryptically-colored, with intricate patterns of blacks, golds, browns and grays, common nighthawks so closely resemble the bare branches of trees, weathered fence posts and ground that they can often hide in plain sight while at rest during the day.

by mid-October. In the spring, they usually show up in large numbers around mid-May.

During breeding season, territorial males can be heard flying across the sky at dusk, calling out with nasally, single-noted *peents*, or seen buzzing the air with their spectacular display dives, showing off for their respective mates.

Nighthawks are ground nesters that find flat-pebbled surfaces where they can create a simple scrape in the ground in which to cradle the eggs. In the countryside they nest in or near healthy grasslands where insects are plentiful. But they have also become city dwellers where flat-graveled roofs of buildings serve as nest sites, sometimes even nest colonies, providing easy hunting access to the insects drawn to city lights and billboard signs at night.

Both parents share incubation duties and the raising of the young. The female lays one to three mottled eggs, which will hatch in 16-22 days. The young are fed a steady diet of insect protein and grow quickly. They are capable of simple flight by 10 days and fledge in less than three weeks.

The common nighthawk has been declared the 2013 Bird of the Year by the American Birding Association, giving needed attention to this species and its life history, which in

some aspects are still poorly understood, especially on its wintering grounds.

Today the common nighthawk, like many other open-country birds, is declining in many parts of its range. Scientists point to continued grassland habitat loss in the country, a shift from older tar and graveled roofs to smoother rubberized surfaces in the city, continued insecticide use that decreases its food source, and collisions with cars as they hunt along roadways, as the reason. In Canada the common nighthawk is a threatened species. In the U.S., it is listed as a species of special concern in several eastern states.

While watching a baseball game under the lights in Lincoln last summer, I happened to look up and see a pair of nighthawks spiraling up in ascending circles. After reaching a certain altitude in the darkness, they would fold their wings and dive towards the splash of light over the ballfield, the loud, buzzing *whoosh* of air rushing through their wings as they pulled up sounding like someone unzipping a huge zipper on a coat. I doubt anyone else noticed the birds, but to me the big show was not out on the diamond. It was up in the twilight sky. ■

Swanson

Sometimes Down but Never Out

Text and photos by Eric Fowler



The swim beach on the south end of Trenton Dam is one of the busiest spots at Swanson Reservoir on any summer weekend.

Tucked away in southwestern Nebraska, Swanson Reservoir State Recreation Area has plenty to offer, especially if you're into hunting and fishing. Those attractions, combined with the lake's clear waters, a shady campground and sand beaches, draw folks from near and far.

Many come from neighboring towns, including Stratton at the lake's upper end, Trenton at the dam, and McCook, located a few miles down the road. Even more come from Kansas, 12 miles south of the lake, and Colorado, especially Denver, four hours to the west. Even so, the lake

can rarely be considered busy, even when the walleye, white bass, largemouth bass and other fish in the lake are really biting. And lately they have been.

Swanson's Birth

Covering 5,000 acres at full pool, Swanson is the largest of the four Bureau of Reclamation reservoirs in southwestern Nebraska that arose from a desire to both develop an irrigation system for the area and to prevent another catastrophic flood like the one that ravaged the Republican

River Valley in 1935 and killed 110 people. Authorized by the Flood Control Act of 1944, Swanson Reservoir was completed in 1953.

Built on the Republican, Swanson catches the runoff from 8,600 square miles in Colorado, Kansas and Nebraska, and combined with Enders, Medicine Creek and Red Willow reservoirs on the river's tributaries, it helps irrigate 45,000 acres of cropland in the Frenchman-Cambridge Irrigation District.

There probably won't be much water to deliver this year, however. Swanson filled nearly every year through the



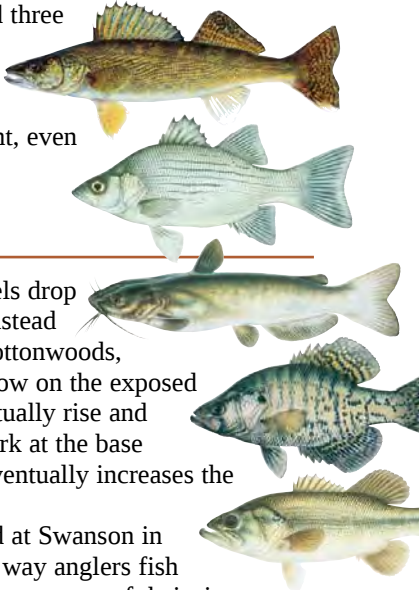
Nik Johanson unhooks a largemouth bass caught from the flooded trees in the upper end of Swanson Reservoir on a picturesque spring evening.

early-1980s, but with inflows from the Republican reduced due to extensive groundwater development in the basin, the reservoir has only filled three times since then, the last time being in 1997. The irrigation district is planning on using what water it can this summer as drought and legal wrangling between Kansas and Nebraska over the Republican's water continues, which means lake levels could approach the record low set in 2002. But even if that happens, Swanson will still be the biggest lake in the neighborhood – a mile wide and three miles long, with roughly 2,500 surface acres. And the lower water levels should make the fishing, which has been excellent, even better.

Finding the Fish

When irrigation reservoir levels drop and stay there for a few years instead of coming back up each year, cottonwoods, willows and other vegetation grow on the exposed lakebed. When lake levels eventually rise and flood the trees, it provides a spark at the base of the aquatic food chain that eventually increases the number of game fish at the top.

This is exactly what happened at Swanson in recent years, and it changed the way anglers fish the lake. In years past, anglers spent most of their time looking for fish on underwater points and other structure, such as the dam, or they searched for schools of shad in the open water during the summer and the accompanying open-water predators that fed on them, such as walleyes, white bass and wipers. For the past few summers, however, anglers who wanted to find fish needed to head into the trees that were still flooded. With multiple species spread out amidst more than a thousand acres of flooded trees, fishing could be tough, but it was great for the fish, increasing productivity, survival and growth of all species in the lake, especially **walleye, white bass, channel catfish, crappies** and **largemouth bass**.



FISH ART BY DUANE RAEYER, UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

A few thousand acres of clear water draws boaters from near and far to Swanson Reservoir each summer.



50 Years at Swanson

Nearly 50 years ago, when Mel Campbell was looking for a place to settle down and raise his family, he chose Stratton – largely for nearby Swanson Reservoir and the hunting and fishing it offered. He never left.

Campbell had moved from one construction job to the next for about eight years after finishing high school, but when his first child was about ready to start school and he was offered a job at the Stratton co-op, he and his wife decided to put down roots there.

"This happened to be one of the best hunting and fishing spots around," said Mel.

He had plenty of background knowledge on Swanson, having fished there since the day it opened. "I was in high school over in Curtis," Campbell said. "We made little pilgrimages down here. Played a little hookey and did a little fishing. We couldn't miss the opening."

The last three of their seven children were born in Stratton. Any "down time" Mel had was spent fishing and hunting. "It takes a lot of fish and white-tailed deer to feed seven kids," he said.

Campbell taught all of his children to fish and hunt, both for fun and food. None were hooked by the fishing bug harder than daughter Nancy (Campbell) Christensen, who now lives in Imperial and uses her days off from work to fish as often as possible with her now-retired father.

"If we're not fishing we're talking about fishing,"

Nancy said. "We'll fish one day and the next day we'll call and rehash it for a half hour."

Nancy's husband, children, brothers, sisters, and nieces and nephews might think the two are a little too into fishing. "We stay too long," she said sheepishly.

Nancy keeps a log of their trips and catches. The two are competitive on that front. "We each have our days. Most of the time it's pretty close, fish for fish, but some days are a butt kicking," she said with a laugh.

Their fishing is different than when she was growing up. "We didn't have a boat until I was in high school," Nancy said. "We fished from the bank and we did a lot in our waders. And a lot of fishing off the dam – we lived off the dam."

And the lake is different now. Mel said it used to refill each year following the irrigation drawdown. Now there are times when it stays down for a few years, allowing trees to grow in the lakebed. When the water rises and floods those trees, that's where you'll find the fish, along with Mel and Nancy.

With Mel at the helm and Nancy sitting on the bow pushing aside tree branches, the pair plows into the midst of the thickest stands, dropping jigs and minnows into holes and usually coming out with a basket of crappies, bluegills, white bass or walleye, throwing back a few largemouth bass and catfish in the process. "We call it bushwhacking," said Nancy.

Prior to last year, annual fish sampling by Nebraska Game and Park Commission biologists has pegged Swanson as one of the top four walleye lakes in the state as far as number of fish. Last year it dropped to ninth, but numbers still remain very good.

"The good news is that 80 percent of the fish in that walleye population are 15 inches or more," said Caleb Huber, a North Platte-based biologist who manages Swanson, referring to the excellent chance of catching keeper-sized fish.

Good **walleye** fishing tends to draw a crowd, and Swanson was no exception. "The word got out on how good the walleye fishing was there, especially back in the trees, and people came from a long ways away to catch them," said Tyler Nelson, Swanson SRA's superintendent.

A similar story can be told of white bass, Swanson's bread-and-butter fish, with numbers better than most lakes as well as a good chance at a big fish. The lake is also managed to maintain a relatively small number of large wipers (white bass/striped bass hybrids), but last year's sample included more 20-inch-plus wipers than any other lake in the state.

On the catfish front, Huber said his crew sampled more

channel catfish in the lake last year than biologists have since 1999, including plenty more than big enough for a fry pan. Swanson Reservoir also offers anglers a chance at a blue catfish, more of an open-water predator than channels. Stocked there for the first time in 2008, the blues are now in the 18-inch range, and in the years to come, biologists expect a unique trophy fishery to develop.

While biologists don't specifically sample the lake for crappies, they know the species has been doing very well following the lake's rise. So have largemouth bass, a species more dependent on shoreline cover and not often found in great numbers in the state's irrigation reservoirs. But bass fishing has been so good that like walleye anglers, bass enthusiasts have been traveling long distances to throw top-water and spinner baits in the flooded timber. "The largemouth fishing has been crazy there," Huber said. "We've had angler surveys down there the last four years, and some guys were catching and releasing 60 or 70 bass a day."

Fishing starts picking up at Swanson in early spring, when catfish start becoming more active and begin slurping up any food they can find along windswept shorelines or where the

Mel and Nancy's fishing usually starts in the spring along the dam. They don't fish often in the heat of the summer, but when they do it's often at night from the dam. "We catch walleyes, and when they move out the white bass move in," Mel said.

"We used to catch white bass by the bucket," said Nancy. "We were always hungry for fish."

The father and daughter duo hit it hard again in the fall when fish move back into the shallows, often drifting or vertical jigging for walleyes and crappies. If the lake doesn't ice up, they might even drag the boat out and fish on Nancy's birthday in January.

Like others who frequent Swanson, there's plenty to like about the fishing. "It's got a lot of variety," said Mel, and his daughter agreed. "It's a good ol' lake," she said.



Nancy Christensen shows off a crappie she pulled from the flooded trees last May at Swanson Reservoir, where she has fished with her father, Mel Campbell, since she was old enough to hold her own fishing pole.

Good enough that Nancy would prefer to stay tight lipped about the fishing. "I don't brag about it 'cause I don't want 'em coming here," she said, smiling.

Of course, they do keep coming, just like her father has for 50 years.



More than 4,000 acres of land surrounding Swanson Reservoir are open to hunting. The cottonwood forest at the upper end of the lake is prime white-tailed deer and turkey habitat.

river enters the lake.

Next up are walleye, which begin their pre-spawn feeding binge in April near the dam. After the spawn, walleyes spread out throughout the lake. Lately they’ve been heading where most of the food is: the flooded trees. That’s also where the lake’s crappies will be found most of the year, but in the spring and fall that bite can be good along the dam.

There are a large number of gizzard shad in the reservoir, and in June and July, when game fish start feasting on the young-of-the-year shad, fishing can be tough. Some anglers cruise the lake, watching their sonar for schools of shad, and then cast or troll for the white bass and walleye that follow them. In late summer, anglers can usually follow flocks of gulls feeding on shad chased to the surface and have good luck casting or jigging for the white bass suspended below them. Catfishing is typically good at the west end of the reservoir in mid- to late summer, too.

Fish move back into the shallows and the bite picks up in the fall. Last summer it was very good for crappies on the dam. It’s not often that the lake freezes solid enough to ice-fish, but when it does, ice-fishermen are often rewarded with walleyes and crappies.

With water levels expected to fall once irrigation season begins in June, Swanson will likely be a different fishery by summer’s end. Huber expects anglers to find fish along the edge of the trees that remain submerged, but once the water recedes beyond the tree line, anglers will need to revert to tactics they haven’t used for a few years – targeting underwater structures. Fish should be concentrated, though, Huber said, and finding them might not be hard. Which is good and bad: “When those fish get sucked out of the trees it makes them easier to catch,” Huber said. “But while

anglers will be successful, we’ll probably see a drop in fish numbers.”

Eventually the lake will rise again, just as it always has, and the cycle will be repeated.

Room to Relax

At the end of a day on the water, many anglers retreat to the Spring Canyon Campground at Swanson, where they are joined by others who simply come to play in the water, riding personal watercraft, water-skiing, swimming or sunbathing. Located in the southeastern corner of the reservoir, Spring Canyon offers plenty of shady spots near both the swim beach – a very popular spot on a hot summer day – and Good Life Marina, the lake’s concessionaire that features a store, restaurant, gas, permits and bait and tackle. When the lake is up, boaters can tie up to docks in the bay next to the marina. Across the lake, the Macklin Bay Campground offers a hilltop view of the reservoir. Combined the two campgrounds offer 54 gravel RV pads with electricity, and another 150 without.

As they do at other irrigation reservoirs, some people eschew campgrounds and park their camper or pitch their tent at the water’s edge. The long stretches of beach near Trail 3 and Trail 7 are popular spots among this crowd.

There will be much more elbow room in those areas this summer, thanks to Commission crews who brought in heavy equipment this past winter to grub out the trees that grew on the lakebed during the last drawdown. Approximately two miles of shoreline were cleared around Trails 3 and 7 and between the swim beach and Spring Canyon Campground. That will leave plenty of room for boaters to take a break



The shady Spring Canyon Campground is popular among lake visitors.

from a day of water-skiing. “They opened up a lot of space,” said Nelson.

Last summer’s drawdown left three of the lake’s boat ramps out of service, but the one off Trail 3 remains in service and is expected to stay there all summer. A breakwater built alongside that ramp the last time the lake was down will help protect it from the westerly wind, making getting off the water easier when a summer thunderstorm blows in.

Hunting Opportunities

Most of the 4,000 acres of public land surrounding the reservoir are open to hunting, including portions of the SRA and the 2,800-acre Wildlife Management Area. In reality, there is more land to hunt than that thanks to the lake not filling in recent years.

The upper reaches of the former lakebed has ideal habitat for white-tailed deer and wild turkey. Work began in 2005 to remove Russian olive, Siberian elm, eastern red cedar and saltcedar, all invasive trees, to make it even better habitat.

“Those invasive trees really outcompete a lot of our more desirable native vegetation,” said Chad Taylor, district wildlife manager for the Commission. “We were cutting Russian olives out here before it was the cool thing to do.”

The result is a cottonwood savannah with mature trees big enough to hang a tree stand on and a healthy grassland beneath them. The project, which started on the west end of the property and continues east towards the dam today, is being done with the help of the National Wild Turkey Federation.

There is also plenty of wildlife habitat surrounding the lake. Most of the hills above the lake’s high-water mark are native mixed-grass prairie, and on the south side one can find a piece of Sandsage prairie, a biologically unique landscape that has been greatly reduced since settlement. The Mule Deer Foundation has helped fund projects to improve those habitats, and in several areas dryland wheat, milo and alfalfa are grown by sharecroppers, who leave

the Commission’s share in the field at harvest as wildlife food and cover.

The land around the lake draws plenty of hunters from Denver, especially those in search of deer and turkey. Nelson has also run into plenty of deer hunters from the southeastern United States. Taylor said some people may consider hunting pressure to be heavy, but not the out-of-state hunters he’s talked to. “I guess it just depends on what you’re used to,” he said. Apart from the firearm deer season and the opening weekend of pheasant and spring turkey seasons, however, “It’s really easy to find a sizable chunk of land to yourself,” said Taylor, “and there are some pretty good-sized areas where if a guy wants to get out and hike he can really get away from it all.”

There is also good pheasant and quail hunting around the lake, but the lake’s WMA doesn’t get nearly as much

pressure as does the private CRP in the area that enrolled in the Commission’s Open Fields and Waters program. Pheasant hunting at Swanson should get even better in the future thanks to several projects being planned through the Commission’s Focus on Pheasants initiative and Pheasants Forever’s Habitat Share program. Small game hunters will find no shortage of rabbits or squirrels around the lake, and hunters at Swanson have excellent success on waterfowl, whether hunting from a shore blind or a boat blind in the shallows. “Even when the lake is down, it’s still a huge body of water and holds quite a few birds,” said Taylor.

Still Lots to Do

So while the water may be down at Swanson this year, the number of things people can do is not. It will continue to draw folks from near and far in search of fish, game and fun. ■



White-tailed deer are a prime draw for hunters visiting Swanson.

Bagging the Big Ones

By Justin Haag

A helicopter crew helped wildlife officials capture Nebraska elk and bighorn sheep this past February, and data obtained from the tracking collars placed on the animals should help new management strategies take flight.

Hunters who have drawn a tag for elk or bighorn sheep know it can sometimes be a challenge to track down these prized big game animals, so for a recent wildlife management project the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission wildlife biologists used a helicopter wildlife capture crew to “bag” some of them.

Armed with tranquilizer darts and net guns, this past February the crew of California-based Native Range Capture Services buzzed the steep hillsides of the Fort Niobrara Wildlife Refuge and the buttes of Fort Robinson State Park on consecutive mornings in search of elk and bighorns, respectively. The crew captured five elk on the first day of the project and nine bighorns the next.

Capturing animals from a helicopter requires experience and a variety of skills for the three-man flight crew. The pilot must locate and then get and stay within gun range of the fleeing animals while simultaneously navigating the rugged, tree-studded country they call home. While this is happening, the gunner leans from the cockpit with one foot on the helicopter’s landing skid, taking aim while the craft is moving up and down and side to side.

Once the animal is down, the pilot lands close to the animal if there is level ground. That was rarely the case in the Nebraska captures, where rough terrain required the pilot to hover on a hillside close enough for one of his crew mates to bail out. If there was only one animal down, the handler would get out and begin work with the animal

while the pilot and gunner left to capture another animal, if needed. If a second animal was captured, the gunner exited the helicopter to complete the ground work while the pilot returned to the first location. The gunner and handler can swap jobs and often do.

Mark Shelton, the New Zealand native who was the pilot for February’s operations, said animal safety is a paramount concern during their projects. One of the greatest challenges, he said, is identifying from the air the animals biologists want to capture. The pilot must develop a keen eye for indicators such as horn or antler growth and numbers on existing collars.

“Out of a group of sheep, there are usually only one or two that are the right sex or age or have the right collar for what you are targeting,” he said.

What happened once the animals were down was different for elk and sheep. The elk were captured using a tranquilizer gun, while the sheep were captured by a small net fired out of a customized single-shot, break-action pistol. The net gun wasn’t used with the much bigger elk, as they are too dangerous to handle while conscious. After fitting the elk with a blindfold, the handler attached an ear tag and GPS

Donnie Wickerham of Native Range Capture Services hobbles a cow elk that had been sedated by a tranquilizer dart shot from a helicopter at Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge in February. Five elk were captured and fitted with GPS tracking collars that will allow biologists to monitor the herd currently roaming the refuge and surrounding private land.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

Hanging from a helicopter piloted by Mark Shelton, David Rivers of Native Range Capture Services takes aim at an elk on the Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge in February.

tracking collar to each animal and took a hair sample for later genetic testing before injecting a reversal drug to counteract the sedative.

A lot more work was involved with the bighorns. After capturing a sheep – and sometimes two – in the fired net, the helicopter landed and the handler hurried to untangle and blindfold the sheep to calm it. It was then loaded into a special bag, tethered to the helicopter and airlifted to a processing station at the base of the Red Cloud Buttes, an option possible because of their smaller size and preferred because of the additional tests biologists wanted for the sheep. At the station, Commission personnel, veterinarians and 10 students from Chadron State College took hair, blood, fecal and saliva samples for later analysis, fitted them with ear tags and GPS or conventional radio collars, and turned

them loose. All of the elk and bighorns made it through the process without injury.

Todd Nordeen, district wildlife manager for the Commission’s Alliance office, said he was pleased with the results of both projects, noting that they will help biologists better manage the two species in their respective regions.

Nordeen said between 150 and 200 elk may be living within a 50-mile radius of Valentine, but nobody knows for sure how many there are. The six collared elk in the area – one had been captured and collared two weeks prior to the helicopter effort – are now “moles” that will allow biologists to locate those animals from the ground or air and count any others that are with them. This will give officials a better idea of how many wild elk are living around Fort Niobrara. Some of the captive elk the refuge housed for

decades have already been removed and fences lowered to wildlife-friendly heights. When the wild elk population reaches a certain threshold, the remainder of the captive elk will be removed and the refuge will be opened to elk hunting. It has already been opened to some deer hunting.

As for the bighorns, the population around Fort Robinson has struggled in recent years because of bouts with *pasteurella pneumonia*, so tracking the sheep more closely will help officials monitor the herd’s health. About half of the area’s 30 to 35 sheep, which numbered as many as 130 less than a decade ago, now have tracking collars.

“Over time we’ll analyze all the data these collars are giving us and use it to help identify such factors as movements, distribution, home range, population levels and herd health,” said Nordeen.

The cost of the \$14,000 project was shared between the Commission, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and conservation organizations such as the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, the Nebraska Big Game Society, and the Iowa Foundation of North American Wild Sheep.

Bighorn sheep and elk are native to Nebraska, but lost their presence in the state between the 1880s and early 1900s. Elk started making their way back into Nebraska’s Pine Ridge from Wyoming in the 1960s. Reintroduction efforts for bighorns began at Fort Robinson in 1981 and sheep have since been reintroduced to other locations in the Pine Ridge and Wildcat Hills. ■

To see video of the bighorn and elk capture project, go to [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com) and type Nebraska elk and bighorn trapping in the search box.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

The Native Range crew returns to the processing station at Fort Robinson with two bighorn sheep slung beneath the helicopter. The sheep were tested for disease and fitted with radio collars and ear tags.



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

Commission staff, veterinarians and Chadron State College students work with a bighorn ewe at the processing station at Fort Robinson.

Doves on the Doorstep

Text and photos by Bill Hager

As luck would have it, last August a pair of doves built a nest in a potted house plant left out on our front porch. What followed over the next couple of weeks was an enjoyable and educational experience.

The first egg hatches and a mourning dove chick emerges.



Only three days after the nest was built, there were already two small, off-white eggs in it.

In late-August of last year my wife, Patty, set one of our house plants out on the front porch with the intent of bringing it back inside a few days later. The orchid must have had something special about it, however, as the next morning we noticed a bird nest had been built in the pot overnight.

Turned out the nest belong to a mourning dove, probably one of the many birds that frequent our backyard bird feeders. It seemed odd that a bird would be building a nest so late in the year, but after doing some research we found out doves can have up to six clutches per nesting season.

Since the plant and nest were only a few feet from our front door and within arm's reach of the doorbell button, I moved a potted fig tree outside to help conceal the nest from direct view of people coming on and off the porch.

Anxious to see what would happen, we started peeking through the front window whenever we thought about it to check the nest. On the second day there was already an egg; by the third, there were two. Now that we had eggs we started counting off the days until they would hatch. Doves typically take 14 days to hatch.

In addition to the mini-jungle I had built on the porch, I stationed a camera near the front window so I could snap a few pictures of the nest area each day. It appeared both the male and female were tending the nest.

As the days went by, the night-time temperatures continued to get colder and I was concerned when I would



Two weeks after the second egg was laid, both hatched. Born with only small, hairlike feathers, the chicks would remain perfectly still for long periods of time in their nest.



The chicks grew amazingly fast – ten days after hatching, the young doves were already about the same size and coloration as their parents.



Fifteen days after hatching, the chicks started leaving their potted plant nest and exploring the world around them.

peek out the window in the morning and see the nest unattended. While checking the nest one morning I noticed the neighbor's cat stalking around the porch below the table where the orchid pot sat. With the nest only a few feet off the ground, I figured it was only a matter of time before Ol' Chloe would be on it. In a neighborhood full of loose cats



As the young mourning doves finished fledging they started perching on the railing during the day, only returning to their nest at night. Although they were now nearly fully grown, one of the parents would still often join them in the nest at night.



Three weeks after hatching, the youngsters were completely on their own.

and children, it had been my goal to divert attention from the porch, but now, within days of the anticipated hatch, I needed to do something to protect the nest. So I built a temporary 4-foot-high fence enclosure around my small porch jungle, leaving an opening on one side for the doves to enter and exit. I also talked to my neighbors, giving them a head's up as to what was going on, showing them some pictures of the doves on the nest and asking them to please keep their cats and kids away from it for a few more weeks.

With that done, we felt pretty good about the doves being able to complete their task of pulling off another clutch.

A few days later we witnessed the hatching and soon had two very large baby doves. Over the next few weeks the

young chicks developed and grew quickly on their parents' "milk" – a regurgitated secretion from the lining of the parents' crop that is gradually replaced by seeds. I found it interesting how quiet and inactive they were in the nest, and how the adults would sit on them both day and night even when the chicks were nearly full grown. After several weeks the chicks began leaving the nest, perching on the porch railing during the day and in the nest at night. They also spent time on the ground near the porch, beneath some bushes. Throughout this post-fledge period we watched the young doves mature. We were not the only ones watching, however, as there was always one parent on the neighbor's roof, providing stationary overlook and daily feedings.

Eventually the dove family blended into the flock of about 30 doves that fed daily from our feeders and stayed around the rest of the fall and winter.

In addition to what we learned from reading about doves, we also learned a few other things from being around them so much: The adult on the nest tolerated me being within inches of it as I built the jungle and erected the fence; and juvenile doves appear to be very flight proficient almost immediately, whereas other bird species, such as robins and western kingbirds, take more time to learn how to fly.

Like other occasions where birds have nested in and around our yard, this was an enjoyable and educational experience to watch.

Next time, however, we hope we won't need a fenced jungle on the front porch. ■

What's Your Life Worth?

Self-inflating life jackets provide compact, comfortable answers to excuses for PFD haters.

By Eric Fowler

Nationally, about three-fourths of all people who die in boating accidents die from drowning. Of those, 85 to 90 percent likely would have lived had they simply been wearing a life jacket. Last year, five of the eight people who died in Nebraska boating accidents drowned. None of the drowning victims were wearing a life jacket.

It's a safe bet that none of those victims planned on drowning. That's why Herb Angell, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's top boating safety officer, recommends all boaters wear a life jacket while on the water even if regulations don't require them to (although a boat must carry one lifejacket per person onboard, only children age 12 and under, water skiers, tubers and jet skiers must wear them while on the water).

And Angell has heard all of the excuses for not wearing them: "They're too hot. They're too scratchy. They're uncomfortable. They're messing up my tan lines ... Just every excuse you can think of."

The self-inflating life jacket takes those excuses away, Angell said, and is becoming more popular every year. "It's comfortable, it's kind of stylish – I think it's the answer people were looking for," he said.

There are three basic styles of the product starting at around \$80. The most popular is worn over the shoulders like a horse collar, with a strap to hold them around your torso. Another style integrates that same premise into coats or vests designed for hunters and anglers. The third is a belt pack style that is worn around the waist and requires the air bladder to be pulled over your head after it inflates.

The life jackets are inflated by a built-in CO2 cartridge and can

be repacked and recharged. Some inflate automatically when immersed as water dissolves a small tablet and triggers the firing mechanism that releases the gas. Automatic models can also be inflated by pulling a ripcord, which is the only way manual models inflate.

The automatic models, excluding the belt pack, provide one benefit the manual versions do not: they will inflate and turn a person upright who has been knocked unconscious. "We hear people say, 'Well, I'm a good swimmer,' but even Olympic-type swimmers would drown if they got knocked unconscious," Angell said.

Good swimmers could also succumb to hypothermia and drown before they can make it to shore if they go overboard in cold water, which can drain your energy in a matter of minutes. The rest of us might not make it to shore on a hot summer day. That's why Angell wants everyone to wear a PFD, whether it's an inflatable or one of many styles of inherently buoyant foam vests, while on the water.

While they have only recently gained popularity, self-inflating life jackets were patented in 1928 by a U.S. inventor. They were soon standard issue for U.S. and English airmen, who dubbed them the Mae West, for the resemblance they gave the wearer to the buxom blonde actress.

A 1966 Herter's catalog offered a cigarette package-sized self-inflating life preserver for \$2.97. Cabela's Inc, Nebraska's homegrown outdoor retailer, has carried them for decades and offers five models in its current branded line. Yet Dan Schoening, Cabela's floatation product specialist, said it wasn't until the U.S. Coast Guard approved the auto-inflating models about 15 years ago that sales of the product really took off. "It seemed like customers were hesitant to buy a life jacket that required them to manually inflate it with the pull of a cord if they were in the water," said Schoening.

Self-inflating life jacket sales have really taken off in the last three years, something Schoening attributes to the visibility of the product, especially among professional

anglers and others wearing them on TV.

Self-inflating life jackets are only approved for boaters age 16 and older, and they are not recommended for tubing, kayaking, jet skiing, water skiing or other cases where the chances of getting wet are good, or for people who can't swim.

But Angell is happy to see more boaters wearing them. "It's great for fishing or for just cruising around," he said. "Sometimes you even forget you have it on. But they work and you can bet your life that they'll keep you afloat." ■



Herb Angell is such a believer in self-inflating life jackets that he took a plunge into Lincoln's Holmes Lake with his hands cuffed behind his back and his ankles tied with duct tape to demonstrate their reliability. Two seconds after he hit the water, the device had inflated and brought him back to the surface.



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Something Tastes Fishy

What fish should we be eating?

By Jeff Kurrus

The best-tasting fish has long been debated among consumers, but which is the best one for you to eat? Because that's debatable as well, here are several findings worth considering the next time you're thinking about health and fish. First, however, a little background: Using nutritional information from the web site Self Nutrition Data (nutritiondata.self.com), I took a look at some of the most consumed fish in Nebraska, a list that included largemouth bass, carp, yellow perch, sunfish (pumpkinseed), rainbow trout, northern pike, and walleye. I stayed away from crappie for one reason: I couldn't locate any serving sizes consistent with the other species detailed.

Serving sizes, by the way, brought up another issue with this search: In my quest for uniformity, an 85-gram serving size was chosen because it was the one measurement used for the majority of the fish listed, yet it equals about ¾ of a cup. That isn't a whole lot of fish. Just something to keep in mind as you read the numbers and estimate how many fish fillets you have at a setting.

Lastly, all the information presented is from raw fish. Whether you broil, boil, fry or bake it, keep in mind that any oil you're making the fish swim in drastically changes things as well. Enjoy the findings:

- **Calories:** walleye-69, northern pike-75, sunfish (mixed species)-76, yellow perch-77, channel catfish-81, largemouth bass-97, rainbow trout-101, carp-108
- **Saturated Fat:** northern pike-0g, sunfish-0g, walleye-0g, yellow perch-0g, carp-1g, channel catfish-1g, largemouth bass-1g, rainbow trout-1g
- **Cholesterol:** northern pike-33mg, channel catfish-49mg, rainbow trout-50mg, carp-56mg, sunfish-57mg, largemouth bass-58mg, walleye-60mg, yellow perch-77mg
- **Sodium:** rainbow trout-26mg, northern pike-33mg, channel catfish-37mg, carp-42mg, yellow perch-53mg,



Northern pike are tasty and good for you, with fewer calories than nearly all Nebraska game fish.



Grilled fish are a healthier alternative to fried fish, regardless of species.

- largemouth bass-59mg, sunfish-68mg, walleye-84mg
- **Protein:** channel catfish-14g, carp-15g, walleye-15g, largemouth bass-16g, northern pike-16g, sunfish-16g, yellow perch-16g, rainbow trout-17g
- **Calcium:** (% of daily recommendations): walleye-0%, channel catfish-1%, carp-3%, northern pike-5%, rainbow trout-6%, largemouth bass-7%, sunfish-7%, yellow perch-7%
- **Vitamin C:** (% of daily recommendations) walleye-0%, channel catfish-1%, sunfish-1%, carp-2%, yellow perch-2%, rainbow trout-3%, largemouth bass-3%, northern pike-5%

In addition, here are some additional findings comparing store-bought fish to their natural brethren.

There are considerably more calories (115 versus 81) in farmed versus wild catfish. Plus, the wild version has a bit more protein (14 versus 13 grams), less sodium (37mg versus 45mg), and less fat (2g versus 6g). However, farmed catfish does have slightly less cholesterol (40mg versus 49mg).

Farmed versus rainbow trout results are similar to catfish, with the farmed version having more calories (117 versus 101), more fat (5g versus 3g) and slightly more sodium (30mg versus 26mg) and protein (18g versus 17g).

Comparing one of the market's most purchased fish, farm-raised salmon, and Nebraska's most coveted wild fish, walleye, there is no comparison. One, walleye has considerable less calories (69 versus 177) and fat (1g versus 11g). However, walleye does have more cholesterol (60mg versus 47mg) and sodium (84mg versus 50mg) but less protein (15g versus 17g) than salmon.

So there you go – something to think about before you head to the water this year. Catch-and-release fishing is fine, even preferable in some places and situations, but this information might help you decide what to bring home should you prefer catch-and-eat fishing. ■

The Voodoo of Doodoo

Uncovering the mysteries of scat – a different kind of reading list!

By Roger Welsch

One of the real joys of living in the country and along a Nebraska river is keeping track of heavy traffic – not on the nearby highway, but on the two-rut road down to our river cabin. Tracks in snow, dust or mud (I remember the days of muddy roads!) show quite vividly that we humans are the least of this small plot of land's many inhabitants. In fact, I have learned to get out early after a snowfall to do my track identifications because only a few hours after a snow or rain there are so many tracks and paths that it is impossible to tell who was going where ... raccoons, deer, possums, skunks, turkeys, coyotes, fox, rabbits, squirrels and the owners of a lot of tracks I have yet to identify.

Tracks and, well, uh ... other "sign" of animals passing through, if you catch my drift. Raccoon leavings reveal vividly what wild fruits and berries are in season. Coyote scat tells other stories – lots of stories, in fact. I always get a laugh out of Mr. Coyote's gifts left right in the middle of the river road: hair, feathers, bones, grass, seeds, teeth ... is there anything a coyote won't eat?

As I've written here before, these days I am fascinated by a family of crows that occupies the area around our home place, but after two years of careful observation I am as baffled by them as ever. Sometimes my somberly dressed crow friends come on the run when I head for the bottom road with scraps for them; other times they don't bother with my offerings until many hours later. One day they'll greet to me like a long-lost friend; the next day they flee in panic as if I were their worst enemy.

Another crow mystery is that I have never seen their droppings anywhere in the area where I throw scraps for them, so I wrote my brother-in-crowdom, Michael Westerfield, and asked him what crow poop looks like. He helpfully suggested I park overnight under a crow roost tree and said I would soon get the answer to my question. Turns out crows pretty much repaint, as it were, any area beneath where they chose to sit a while.

While I am going to "pass" on Westerfield's suggestion, I also recall a time our rural mail carrier was driving his route when a bald eagle flew low and slow over him and saluted him with a, ummm, "paint ball" demonstration. After the mailman was done with his own deliveries (of a different kind, luckily!), he parked in front of the town tavern and invited us all to view the avian work of art on his car. It was indeed wonderful to behold.

During our conversation I mentioned to Mr. Westerfield that someone should write a book to answer questions like mine, you know ... a field guide of sorts. Then, as I considered this possibility, I remembered that while searching the web for even the most obscure bits of information, I always find to find what I'm looking for. In fact, as often as not, I find more than I'm looking for.

So I looked.

And sure enough, I found some web sites specifically designed to identify wildlife scat (look on Google for "Animal Tracking Scat Analysis," "Scat, Droppings, and Feces Identification Key," or "Scat Identification Photo Albums").

Also, as it turns out, there's no shortage of field guides precisely like the one I imagined in a fanciful moment. Really – there are books about animal poop. Is this a wonderful world or what?! So, if you have the same kind of perverse curiosity I do, look for: "Scats and Tracks of the Great Plains" by James C. Halfpenny; "Mammal Tracks and Scat: Life-Size Tracking Guide" by Lynn Levine and Martha Mitchell; "Animal Tracks" by Olaus J. Murie and Mark Elbroch (this is a Peterson Field Guide and is up to the quality we expect in those publications – including excellent photos rather than drawings, which are used in the other guides); "The Encyclopedia of Tracks and Scats" by Len McDougall (a larger format book and therefore not as convenient as a field guide); and an utterly useless book unless you are trying to identify walrus, wombat, or plankton poop, but with a title I can't resist – Matt Pagett's "Who Shat That? A Pocket Guide to Poop Identity."

I can imagine other possible directions for those of us with this, er, basic interest in wildlife. My sporting friends all belong to organizations that promote their particular interested ... Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, Eternal Trout, Bottomless Breadsticks, that kind of thing ... so maybe we scat fans should organize and promote our pursuits. How long will it be before Cabela's markets decoys guaranteed to lure rare species into providing new specimens for scat hunters? When will we see a movie like "The Big Year" about the first scat scout to find armadillo poop in Nebraska, or complete a life-list of 500 certified scat identifications? Or how about this – I like Westerfield's book 'An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Crows' because it includes a CD of crow calls. Need I say more, other than "Ewwwww???"

(Well, yes, I do need to say one more thing – all joking aside, don't try this at home, and if you do pursue the science of poopology, at least be careful: Wear gloves, use tools and wear protective glasses and a nose and mouth mask when sorting around in critter poop. This is risky business because of the pathogens in it. What's more, biologists warn to never tamper with raccoon poop because even skin contact can lead to serious health problems. On the other hand, I am sure that there are many of my readers (wife Linda comes to mind) who need no warnings to leave poop right where you find it. To some, that inclination seems to come naturally. ■





Detecting Invasive Insects

Survey traps to be used at state parks to look for potential pests.

By Julie Van Meter, State Entomologist, Nebraska Department of Agriculture

Invasive species are a serious threat to Nebraska and could potentially cause millions of dollars in damage to the state's agricultural, landscape and natural resources. The Nebraska Department of Agriculture's (NDA) Entomology Program conducts annual surveys across the state to monitor for the possible introduction of invasive species. The earlier an invasive species is detected, the better the odds that it can be successfully eradicated, or that a management plan can be developed to limit its impact.

State parks and campgrounds are often targeted for pest surveys because they have a relatively high risk for inadvertent invasive pest introductions. Visitor vehicles and firewood are prime pathways for the introduction of invasive species, and the more visitors, the higher the risk. Therefore the NDA will set and monitor various insect traps across the state in 2013, including at select state parks and campgrounds. These will include traps for emerald ash borer, gypsy moth and thousand cankers disease of black walnut. Visitors may notice some of these traps while exploring their favorite park or camping area, but while they may cause a few second looks, the traps pose no danger to humans.

Emerald ash borer (*Agrilus planipennis*) is an exotic beetle from Asia, first discovered in the U.S. in 2002. It attacks all species of ash trees (*Fraxinus spp.*), and larval feeding under the bark can kill the tree within five years. The spread of emerald ash borer (EAB) is often associated with the movement of infested firewood, which puts campgrounds at high risk for introductions. EAB is now known to infest 18 states, including Iowa, Kansas and Missouri, plus parts of Canada. It has not yet been found in Nebraska, but due to recent finds in the Kansas City area, nearly 400 traps will be set in Nebraska as part of a joint trapping program between NDA and the USDA.

EAB traps are very large, bright purple triangles resembling box kites, and are hung high in ash trees. The traps are baited with an attractant and coated with a sticky substance that 'traps' the insect on contact. Traps will be set starting in April and will remain up until late-August.

Another invasive species of concern here is the **European gypsy moth** (*Lymantria dispar*). Gypsy moth caterpillars feed on a wide variety of broadleaf trees, and repeated infestations can weaken and kill trees. The moth infests states east of, and including, Wisconsin and Illinois. The species is not established in Nebraska, but hitchhiker moths are occasionally caught in traps. Females will lay eggs on many things, including vehicles, outdoor furniture and firewood, and adults are known to hitchhike on vehicles, which makes parks and campgrounds a prime target for surveys. This year NDA will set and monitor approximately 900 traps statewide. Traps are made from wax-covered cardboard, are about 10 inches long by five inches tall, and triangular shaped. Traps will be placed in deciduous trees in April and remain until fall.

In 2006, a new pest killing black walnut trees, **thousand cankers disease of black walnut** (TCD), was identified in Boulder, Colorado. Since then, it has been found in most states



PHOTO BY DR. MCCARTHY

west of Nebraska, and also North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Virginia. TCD is a pest complex involving the walnut twig beetle (*Pityophthorus juglandis*), which carries a fungus (*Geosmithia morbida*) that causes cankers that ultimately kill the walnut tree. The beetles carry the fungus on their bodies, and when they emerge from logs and firewood, spread the fungus to uninfested trees. Black walnut is a valuable timber and nut wood in the state, and the nuts are also an important food source for Nebraska wildlife. In order to protect Nebraska's walnut resource, NDA enacted a quarantine prohibiting the movement of some walnut products, including green wood, burls and logs, and all hardwood firewood from known infested states. Lindgren funnel traps, which look like a series of black funnels suspended from a pole or tree, will be used to monitor for the beetles.



KENNETH E. GIBSON, USDA FOREST SERVICE, BUGWOOD.ORG

In addition to the NDA quarantine prohibiting hardwood firewood from states known to be infested with TCD, the federal government has quarantines in place regulating firewood from areas infested with EAB and gypsy moth. NDA encourages the use of locally harvested firewood for campfires and asks that campers not bring wood with them – get it when you arrive and leave behind any firewood you don't use.

These simple steps will help protect our state from the introduction of invasive species. For more information on NDA's plant pest surveys, please visit its web site at www.agr.ne.gov. ■

This is Julie's third article in NEBRASKALAND Magazine. She also writes the "Visitor" on page 5.



WILLIAM A. CAROTHERS, USDA FOREST SERVICE, BUGWOOD.ORG

THE GREAT PARK PURSUIT

VISIT PARKS. BE ACTIVE. WIN PRIZES.



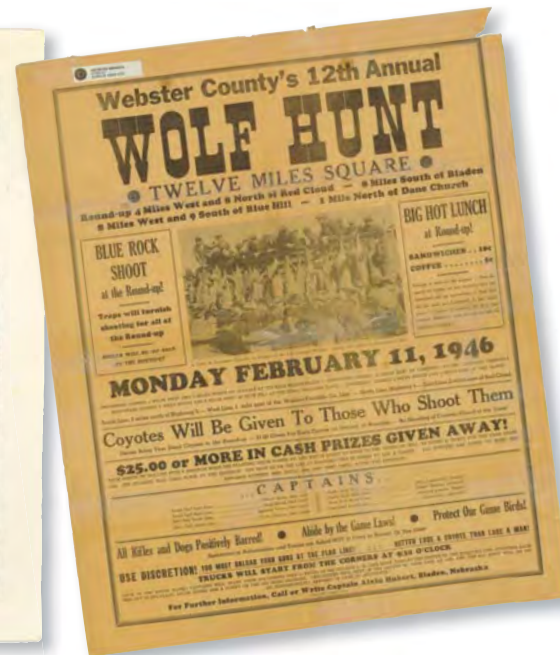
A NEBRASKA OUTDOOR ADVENTURE

May 1 - Sept. 16, 2013



Register online at www.NEGPP.org





▲ In your April 2011 "Portraits from the Past" department there was a poster (right) advertising Webster County's 12th annual wolf hunt. This picture of me and my dad, Stine Lukas, is with a coyote that Dad got on that hunt in 1946. I remember they would take us out in stock trucks and let everyone off a little ways apart. It was the biggest hunt of all, as I remember. I only made it about halfway to the roundup and got a ride the rest of the way. I guess it was Dad's lucky day, as he also won \$10 at the roundup. That was a lot back then. My brother, Charles, now has the Winchester Model 12 that Dad is holding. It is still like new, and they were one of the best.

— Larry Lukas, Lincoln, Nebraska

► Enclosed is a photo taken in 1944. From left to right are my uncle, Frank Johnson; my father, Walt Johnson; and a neighbor, Doyle Carr. The picture was taken at the Johnson homestead, located three miles northeast of Newport in Rock County. The two dogs are English springer spaniels.

My father was an avid outdoorsman and harvested a nice mule deer buck in 1999 at the age of 95.

— Jack Johnson, Bennet, 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.



Kearney

OUTDOOR DISCOVERY

Family Day • 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

May 11, 2013 • Fort Kearny SRA • Kearney, NE



Enter drawing for half-price youth lifetime hunt/fish permits!

*Free Fun for the Whole Family

Archery • Kayaking • Bowfishing
Fishing • Fish Cleaning and Cooking
Hunting Demonstrations • Air Rifle
Shotgunning • Outdoor Crafts
Camping Experience • Trapping
Family Friendly Competitions

and Much More!

Free hot dogs for lunch!
S'mores eating contest!



Visit our website for more fun opportunities at
www.OutdoorNebraska.ne.gov/ODP

*Park Permit Required



See You Out There



Something to Shoot For – Fun

Growing up in Nebraska, I've been exposed to a variety of outdoor sports, but through my youngest offspring last year I was exposed to another when Kiley decided she wanted to try trapshooting.

You should first know that while Kiley has been exposed to the outdoors as much as her brothers – her first deer (a buck bigger than any I've ever taken, as she's quick to point out) was shot while sitting on my lap – she had not had much experience with a shotgun. So it was a learning experience, to say the least.

When she broke only five out of 50 "rocks" at her first meet, she didn't seem overly concerned, as she hadn't had much practice. Being of a competitive nature, however (for better or worse, it's a family trait that's not going away anytime soon), her eyes got a little wet after shooting an identical score the second week and I could tell she was wondering if this was a good idea after all. She slowly got better, however, and her scores started creeping up. By no means was she challenging for top honors, but at least her name was no longer at the bottom of the scoring list.

Then came time for the big meet all young Nebraska trapshooters look forward to – the Cornhusker Trapshoot aka "state" or "Doniphan," for the town where the meet is held. Literally thousands of youths across the state, as well as some beyond its borders, spend weeks preparing for this annual event. Kiley was understandably nervous about shooting on such a big stage so, believing her biggest problem was overthinking things, I printed out four simple suggestions the night before and taped them to her stock of her gun.

She kind of laughed the next day when she saw what I had done, but didn't seem to pay much attention to it when it came time to shoot. I watched her miss the first couple of targets and start to get frustrated. Finally she took her first real look at the sheet, nodded to herself and broke the next rock. She looked at the sheet again, waited her turn and powdered the next target. Turning, she looked back at me and grinned as I gave her a thumbs up.

Now, I'm not going to say she broke every other target she shot at that day – my advice wasn't THAT good, it essentially was a simplified version of what her coaches had been telling her all spring – she finally stopped worrying so much about failing and started enjoying the challenge of shooting a moving target. She'd hit several rocks in a row, then look back at me and smile. She'd miss some and shrug. Mostly she had fun, which, after all, is what shooting and being outside is all about.

I know where we'll be this spring. Hope to see you at Doniphan.

Doug Carroll
April 2, 2013



FREE Fishing and Park Entry Day

Saturday, May 18, 2013



Fish anywhere in the state and visit any Nebraska state park, state historical park or state recreation area for **FREE**.
No park entry or fishing permit required!

A number of park areas across the state will have fishing clinics and other events going on.

Visit our website for a complete listing of events, locations and times.



For information on specific area events, visit
www.OutdoorNebraska.org

NEBRASKA
— GAME PARS —

See You Out There