



Spiderwort glows in the afternoon sun in the tallgrass prairie at Rock Glen Wildlife Management Area near Fairbury. Photo by Eric Fowler.

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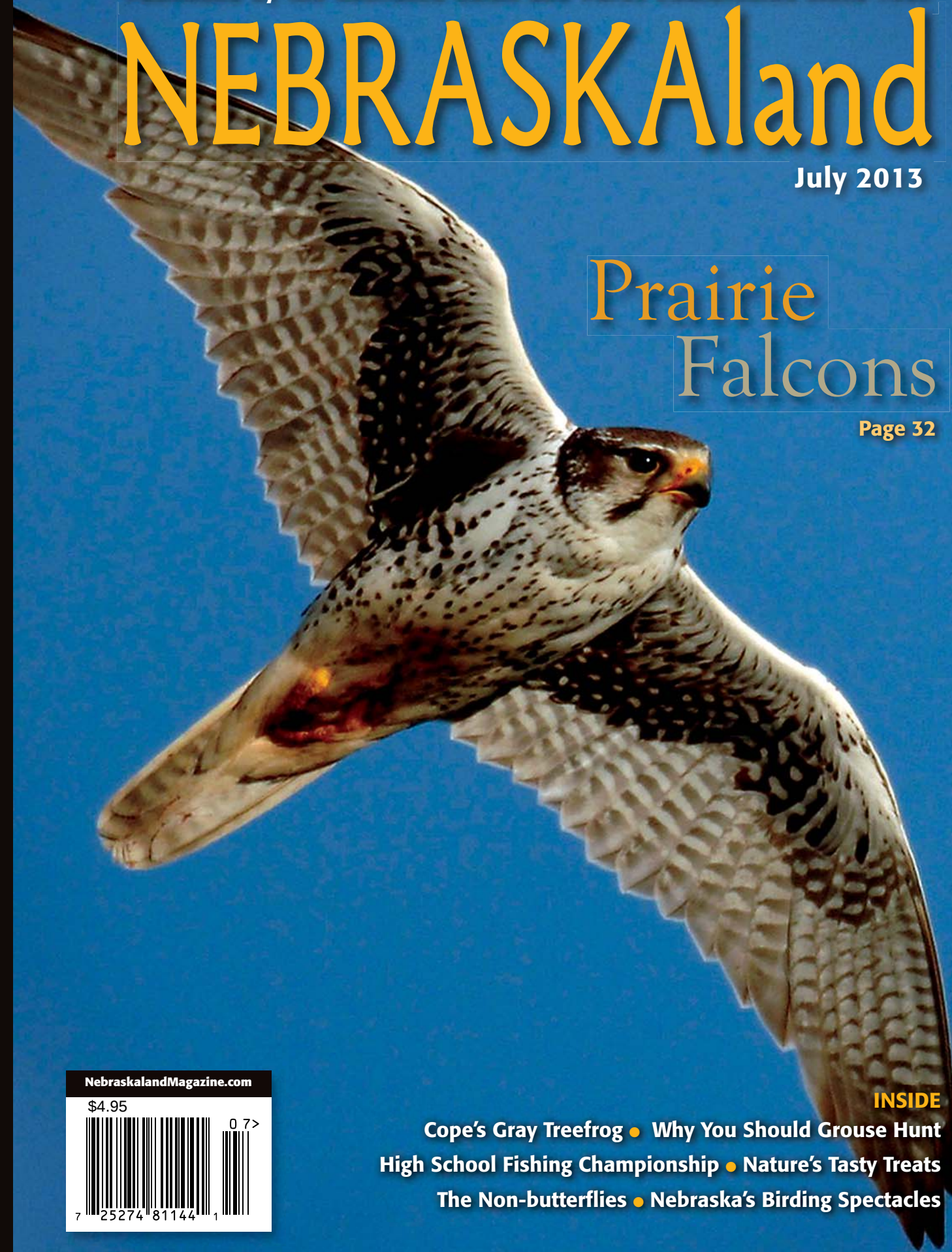
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NEBRASKAland

July 2013

Prairie Falcons

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Cope's Gray Treefrog • Why You Should Grouse Hunt
High School Fishing Championship • Nature's Tasty Treats
The Non-butterflies • Nebraska's Birding Spectacles



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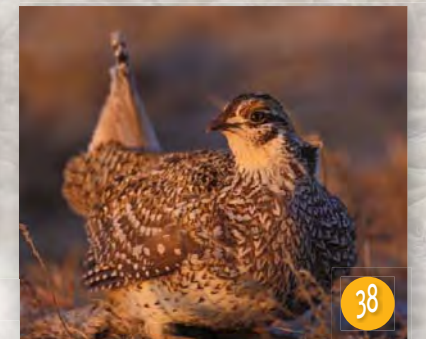
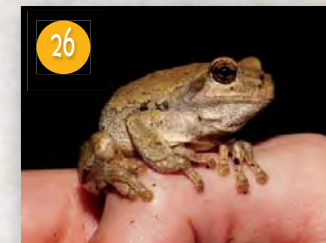
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ON THE WEB...

Earth Home

BY JODI KEISNER

A writer remembers growing up in the most peculiar of homes – an underground earth home. Visit NebraskalandMagazine.com to read this essay.

Cover: A prairie falcon (*Falco mexicanus*) is a medium-sized falcon of western North America. It is about the size of a crow with a wingspan of about 16 inches.
Opposite: A lone violinist contributes musical flavor to the Saturday Farmer's Market in downtown Lincoln. Photo by Bill Hager.

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The Best Hunt Of My Life

It has nothing to do with the size of the head, but the reward of the hunt. I have more than one nice deer hanging on the wall, but nothing compares to the joy of being with my 10-year old grandson getting his first deer. It started with his shock and awe after hitting the water-filled milk jug at 60 yards with the very first shot from his rifle. The ferociousness with which the jug blew up built up his confidence in the ability to hit where he aimed and also emphasized the destructive abilities of his gun.

Following that was the time spent building a lifelong bond in the blind and the climax, a yearling doe at 100 yards, when our adrenaline peaked. I told my grandson this was a lot further than what we practiced. Like a seasoned veteran he said, "Grampa, I can get him."

With the rifle resting solidly, he took careful aim and pulled the trigger. The next instant, that moment of a lifetime that can never be recreated or duplicated now showed on the boy's face – a look of disbelief, surprise, excitement, joy and pride as the deer dropped on the spot.

We bumped knuckles, high-fived and hugged. Never pulling the trigger myself, it was already the most successful deer season I have ever had, starting with the most memorable and best hunt of my life.

Doug Reznicek,
Rising City, Nebraska

Arrival Of Cranes

Living in Kearney my wife and I look forward to the arrival of the



cranes. We drive miles of roads "craning" and hoping for the elusive whooper. Haven't seen one yet!

Took this photo by a sand pit SW of Gibbon along I-80. Cranes, white fronts and Canada's visiting about the flights ahead.

Jim Shuey
Kearney, Nebraska

Questions For God

Hello to all at *NEBRASKAland*,

I wanted to take a moment to write a note of thanks to Jeff Kurrus for his article "Questions for God." It struck a particularly sensitive chord with me today. This morning we learned that a friend of ours had lost her battle with cancer. She was barely 37 years old and the mother of two boys, too young to be dealing with feelings their family has had to face today. Later today I had a conversation with another friend whose pre-school age daughter is dying of a brain tumor, similar I suppose to Cayden's. They are doing everything they can to keep her comfortable and share as much "life" as they can with her in the days they have left together.



Paul Pack, of Lexington, photographed this squirrel in Lexington.

A day of too many questions.

I didn't expect therapy when I opened my mailbox tonight to find my *NEBRASKAland Magazine*, but when I got to page 49 that is what I found. I commend Jeff for having the courage to put such intimate feelings down and sharing them with so many. The depth of his thought and use of his words made it easy to see the struggles that his mind has had with one of life's most difficult situations. His empathy was genuine. Anyway, his paragraphs created a bit of a refuge where I could let my emotional guard down a bit and just feel better knowing someone else has some of the same questions for God. Today I thank him for sharing that with me.

Andrew Bahl
Monett, Missouri

NEBRASKAland Visitor Letters

We want to thank all 38 readers who sent e-mails and letters for last issue's visitor, a **tarnished plant bug**, that was on **page 38**. See page 13 for the winner, rules and this issue's hint.

"Life on Soapsuds Row" was different and very good. The visitor is a beetle found on page 38 on the young lady's bow. Good issue.

Al Rose
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Great concealment! I am not sure what it is, but looks like what we kids used to call a stink bug. Enjoyed the life on soapsuds row article. What a hard life that would have been. I complain when my wife wants me to carry the laundry down the stairs.

Thanks again for a great issue.
Ron Decker
Spokane Valley, Washington

One of your better camouflage placements! Jaci would not even realize she had a chinch type bug (Lygaeidae family) on her bow! (page 38) I did not catch it the first time through.

Ron Macomber,
via e-mail

You may have seen this small brownish insect hiding on the plants in your garden or around your house; it is the tarnished plant bug (Lygus lineolaris) in the order Hemiptera, identifiable by the crossed wings and piercing-sucking mouthparts. The bug overwinters as an adult, hiding in leaf litter and vegetation. When temperatures begin to warm in the spring, they emerge to feed and mate. Eggs are laid, hatch and nymphs emerge. These nymphs will feed and grow, going through several instars before maturity. This bug goes through incomplete metamorphosis, meaning there is no pupal stage – nymphs look like small adults, appearing a bit more mature with each molting. Adults are up to one-quarter inch in length, brown with mottling of white, black, yellow and red. Nymphs are mostly green. There are roughly three generations a year in Nebraska.



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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Fourth of July Destination: Seward

By Olivia Johnson

Growing up within 20 miles of Seward, I always took for granted being able to celebrate Independence Day in “America’s Small Town Fourth of July City” each year. Seward was simply where my family celebrated the holiday, and it wasn’t until I got older that I realized how significant this celebration, put on by the town of just over 6,000, was.

This year Seward celebrates its 145th annual “old fashioned, small town celebration.” The event typically draws 40,000 visitors, with the day’s events starting early in the morning and not slowing down until everyone gets settled in at their favorite viewing spot for the big fireworks show at around 10 p.m.

Depending how early you want to begin your day, there are plenty of events to keep both locals and visitors occupied. Some of the most notable include craft, art and classic car shows, a pet parade and contest, concerts, quilt exhibits, a wild-west shootout, patriotic programs, historic exhibits, various food choices and a large parade.

When the sun sets and the giant firework salute begins, spectators gather in and around Plum Creek Park to see the show, and they’re never disappointed as the assortment of pyrotechnics illuminates the sky in front of them.

So grab your family, friends, some sunglasses, a few lawn chairs and head to Seward. It’s well worth the trip and you won’t be disappointed. Take my word for it – I’m a local. ■



PHOTO BY BOB GRIER

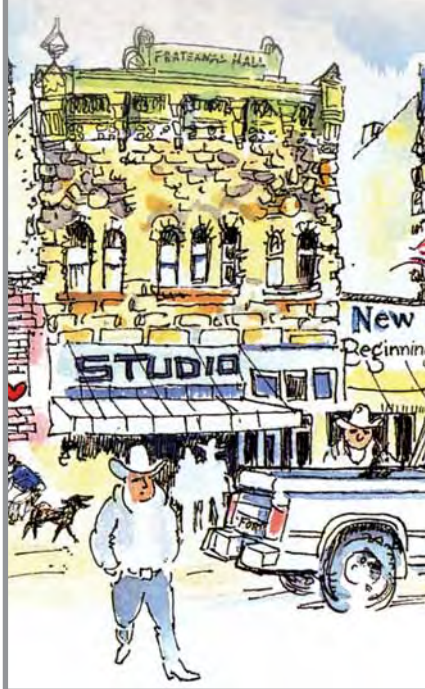
A Look Back – July 1996

By Olivia Johnson

In her article “Why Nebraska?” (July 1996, pages 32-41), Audrey Hulburd, an artist from California, took us on a visual journey across small town Nebraska in the 1996 issue of *NEBRASKAland*. After time spent as a tour guide, she discovered that the friendliest people she encountered were all proud Nebraskans.

The curious artist set out on her journey to draw, paint and see what Nebraska’s small towns had to offer. Her illustrations depicted her travels through Valentine, Minatare, Gordon, Auburn, Crawford and Neligh, to name a few. Some of her artwork included a depiction of main street in Valentine, a feedlot near Minatare and the Crawford Livestock Market.

“With new technology, people can live somewhere based on the quality of life, not on how close they’ll be to a big-city market,” she states. “Maybe it is a sense of belonging, having an identity or being connected.” Her artwork makes it clear that as an outsider, the only way to really experience small town Nebraska is to see it firsthand.



Send Us Your Trail Cam Photos!



Dave Schwartz of Aurora was fortunate enough to capture this owl photo near Elm Creek. He thought it lucky to get a fairly decent picture that is not blurred with a trail camera.

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

2013 Habitat Tours

TOUR TOPICS	DATE & TIME	TOUR LOCATION
Cedar Tree Removal for Recreation & Wildlife	May 16, 2013 9:30 am - 2:30 pm	Camp Moses Merrill 2849 Rd 31 • Linwood, NE
Wildflower Hike	May 18, 2013 10:00 am-11:00 am MST	Wildcat Hills Nature Center located 6 miles south of Gering, NE
Understanding the birds and the trees: Where does quality habitat come from?	June 18, 2013 8:00 am - 1:00 pm	Summit Lake State Recreation Area • Tekamah, NE South boat ramp, near the beach and picnic area
Chapter helps Improve habitat on Local Wildlife Management Area	June 19, 2013 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm	Triple Creek WMA (South of Palmyra)
Pollinators and Pollinator Habitats	June 20, 2013 9:00 am - 3:00 pm	Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center 11700 SW 100th St • Denton, NE
Pollinator Research Efforts on CRP	June 20, 2013 9:00 am - 2:00 pm	Franklin County Fairgrounds Franklin, NE
Southwest Nebraska Area Habitat	June 21, 2013 10:00 am—2:00 pm MST	Mid-Plains Community College 1324 Broadway • Imperial NE
Co-existence of Pheasants, Quail & Agriculture	June 27, 2013 10:00 am - 3:00 pm	Lexington Public Library 907 N Washington • Lexington, NE
Turkey Habitat & Management	June 27, 2013 10:00 am - 3:00 pm	Myrtle Hall WMA 82267 445 th Avenue • Sargent, NE
Managing your CRP and other wildlife habitats	June 28, 2013 11:00 am - 4:00 pm	UNL West Central Research & Extension Center WCRC Auditorium • 402 W State Farm Rd • North Platte, NE
Habitat Management & Restoration for Upland Birds	July 9, 2013 10:00 am - 3:00 pm	Nebraska One Box Shooting Complex Broken Bow, NE
Making your farm or ranch operation work with wildlife	July 9, 2013 9:30 am - 3:00 pm	Red Will 4-H Building 1400 West 5 th • McCook, NE
Habitat Hayrack Ride: CRP Upgrades and Long Term Management	July 11, 2013 2:00 pm - 8:00 pm	886 Rd and Hwy 15 NE of Hartington, NE
Fire in the Pine Ridge	July 11, 2013 9:00 am - 2:00 pm MST	Chadron State Park shelter by the fishing pond • Chadron, NE
Range Management	July 11, 2013 9:30 am - 3:00 pm	North Platte Community College 1101 Halligan Drive • North Platte, NE
Upgrading & Managing CRP for Grassland Birds, Pollinator Habitat & Plant ID Tour	August 15, 2013 11:00 am - 3:00 pm	Smith Family Ranch • 48832 Ave. 894 Rd Holt County • off Hwy 281, NW of O’Neill
6 th Annual Rangeland Management Workshop	August 16, 2013 9:00 am - 3:00 pm	Mid-Plains Community College 2520 West Hwy 2 • Broken Bow, NE

Landowner Tours for Better Habitat!

Wildlife Biologists from across the state will be hosting a series of Habitat Tours this year. Tours are designed to demonstrate habitat management practices, available conservation programs, how to create the best results on your next habitat project and much more.

Like Nebraska PF on Facebook

For more tour details & to register, please visit:

www.NebraskaPF.com or call Pam at 308-850-8395



Travelogue

by Olivia Johnson

Nebraska City

Bursting with history and natural allure, Nebraska City's unique charm is not duplicated by any other community in the state. Although well known for its annual **Applejack Festival** in September, a trip to this river city offers numerous other attractions that make it an ideal destination on a summer day.

Start by visiting **Janie's Confections** for a cup of coffee and a homemade cinnamon roll. Then head to **Kimmel Orchard and Vineyard** to pick some fresh fruit, including apples, cherries, peaches, raspberries and plums on their 90 acres.

Next, check out one of the most famous and historic sites in the city – **Arbor Lodge**, former home of J. Sterling Morton, founder of Arbor Day. After your tour through the mansion, cross the road to visit **Arbor Day Farm**, a great destination for families. While the kids check out the 50-foot high tree house, grab a glass of hand-crafted wine made on the farm.

Two additional stops should be the historic **Mayhew Cabin** and **John Brown's Cave**, two famous parts of the Underground Railroad that are recognized today by the National Park Service.

As the day heats up head for some indoor sites. Visit the **Kregel Windmill Factory Museum**, which just opened in April. Also, don't forget the **Nebraska City Museum of Firefighting** to learn about the evolution of firefighting and safety.

When you're ready to slow down and grab a bite to eat, give **Johnny's Corner Café** a try, and be sure to order one of their specialties, the chicken noodle soup, which is a slightly different, homemade twist on this classic.

Finish your trip with a stroll through **Steinhart Park** to enjoy one of the pillars of Nebraska City – arboreal beauty.



Arbor Day Farm

PHOTOS BY NATE JOHNSON



Janie's Confections



mayhewcabin.org 402-873-3115
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Nebraska City



Steinhart Park



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

In the Weeds

By the OutdoorU Staff

Some of us may find late summer a tough time to fish shorelines for bass because of all the aquatic vegetation snagging our lures. But this vegetation is usually chock-full of aggressive, hungry bass. An excellent way to target these bass is by using top-water frogs, a weedless frog-shaped lure you can easily pull over and through any vegetation. If you've never fished with them before, you'll find the lure works best with a fairly stiff rod (medium or medium heavy) and braided line that doesn't stretch. Cast into any thick cover, including moss beds, cattails, bulrushes and logs. Close does not cut it.

If you are fishing from a boat, cast the frog onto the bank and "hop" it into the water. If you're fishing from the shore, work your frog through the weeds. A good retrieve usually entails pulling the frog a few feet and then pausing before the next pull, simulating the motion of a swimming frog. The key is to pause when the frog is over an opening in the vegetation. Often bass will follow the frog as you reel it through the thick vegetation, waiting until the lure is in an opening to attack, so be prepared. The strike will be Jaws-like.

Once the fish strikes, give a very firm hook set to drive the bait's weedless hooks through the fish's mouth. Then, as the fish tries to head deep into the vegetation, keep your line tight to maximize your chances of landing the fish.

Visit OutdoorU.org and start your own pathway to exciting and memorable experiences in the outdoors. Get outside and see what the Nebraska Outdoors has for you. ■

It All Stays Here

Jeff Kurrus

The first question that usually arises following an auction is the commonsense one: where does all the money go? For the Nebraska Big Game Society (NBGS) and its April 2013 annual meeting, the question was no different – especially when the prize of the night, a Nebraska bull elk permit, was purchased by Lincoln resident John Jacobson for \$21,000.

"It all stays in Nebraska," said NBGS administrator Jon Thomas, "as does all the other money we raise." The "we" are the 25 members who pay dues each year to the NBGS as well as the annual meeting attendees, this year 150 people, who participated in a silent and live auction for any number of outdoor-related items and trips, raising more than \$40,000 that goes directly to our state's big game resources.

The NBGS, in collaboration with the Commission and the Nebraska Environmental Trust, have installed watering systems for bighorn sheep, elk and white-tailed and mule deer in needed areas in the western part of the state. In addition, the NBGS has worked with the Nebraska Land Trust on conservation easements on private land to ensure these tracts remain undeveloped in perpetuity, and provided scholarship opportunities to students in the wildlife management program at Chadron State College. Along with other conservation groups, NBGS has also supported Commission capture and research efforts with bighorn sheep and elk this past year. And these are just the beginning.

With the goals of education and scientific research, the NBGS will continue to work with the Commission and other organizations to ensure the future of Nebraska's big game herds. "The NBGS has worked closely with us on wildlife conservation projects with excellent results," said Commission Northwest District Manager Todd Nordeen. It is a relationship that hunters and wildlife viewers throughout the state should hope continues.

For more information on the NBGS, visit NeBigGame.org. ■



PHOTO BY ERIC POWELL

A Brief History – Long Pine Postcard

David Bristow, Nebraska History Magazine

Long Pine, Nebraska, became a tourist destination in 1910 with the founding of Long Pine Amusement Park, later known as Nebraska's Hidden Paradise. Long Pine State Recreation Area (SRA) is adjacent to town, and Keller Park SRA is nine miles north.

Some travelers bought picture postcards to commemorate their visit. The Nebraska State Historical Society has a number of these in its collections; others circulate through antique shops and online merchants.

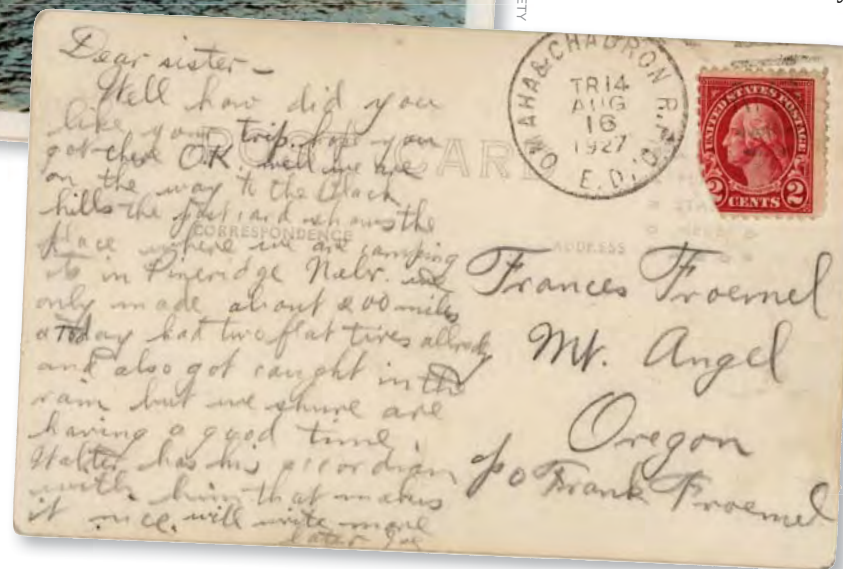
In 1907, the U.S. Postal Service began allowing personal messages on the address side of postcards. This was the beginning of “divided back” postcards, and their brief and sometimes pithy messages can make the back of the card as interesting as the picture side.

Postmarked August 16, 1927, by the Omaha & Chadron R.P.O. (Railway Post Office), this card is addressed to Frances Froemel, Mt. Angel, Oregon:

Dear sister—

Well how did you like your trip. hope you got there O.K. well we are on the way to the Black hills the post card shows the place where we are camping its in Pineridge Nebr. we only made about 200 miles today had two flat tires already and also got caught in the rain but we shure are having a good time. Walter has his accordion with him that makes it nice. will write more later Joe

Though Joe was traveling by automobile, he deposited his postcard in a Railway Post Office car at a train depot, either in Long Pine or somewhere along the way to Chadron. He was mistaken about the town name—distracted, perhaps, by the many adventures of early auto travel. ■



The Mighty Acorn

Mighty oaks from little acorn grows, the saying goes, but how mighty? Oak trees can grow more than 80 feet tall with a trunk diameter to six feet in a life that could span more than 300 years. All from

an acorn weighing less than a quarter ounce. ■



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER



Brian Kudym of Papillion with a channel catfish caught at Two Rivers State Recreation Area Lake No. 4 near the swim beach.

The Cooler Way to Keep Minnows

By Justin Haag

While trying to keep minnows alive

aboard my kayak a few years ago, I discovered that I needed something other than the bulky trolling bucket that had served me well aboard larger vessels.

After a search of the Internet message boards, I found a simple design featuring a soft-sided cooler and a portable aerator. I wish I could credit the designer, but that information has since been lost in the deep seas of cyberspace.

If you're shopping for a cooler to create a bait tank such as mine, you will want to find a model with a hard plastic insert that holds water and at least one large storage pocket. The only work required on my model was drilling a hole near the top of the insert. After slipping the aerator pump in the pocket and running the air hose through the hole, I was ready to fish.

Complete with a shoulder strap, my cooler has proved to be a convenient set-up, both when fishing from the kayak and hiking along the bank. It even came with a removable plastic divider suitable for separating various baits – minnows and leeches, for example. A couple of frozen water bottles floating in the tank keep bait swimming right-side-up during a day's outing.

Of course, some kayak fishermen have become much more elaborate with their bait storage set-ups. A number of designs, both custom and mass produced, employ a pump and plumbing to circulate water through the bait tank from below the kayak.

While those systems certainly look attractive, I've found that my cooler conveniently keeps minnows frisky on summer afternoons for a fraction of the cost. With the large number of coolers on the market, an angler is sure to land a model that suits his needs. ■



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

More Than Fishing

At NEBRASKAland, we're always looking for new reasons to visit our parks. It's not very tough when there are so many activities at each. Here are just a few:

- Two Rivers State Recreation

Area - At Lake No. 4, the family can play at the beach while you catch channel catfish within feet of sand castles. Or, you can lounge lakeside while your little one reels in a nice eater for dinner.

- Fort Robinson State Park - There is no charge to borrow backpacks from the activity center containing helpful tools and field guides for exploring the park's 22,000 acres with your children. The binoculars inside the packs will bring the park's bison, longhorns, pronghorn, deer, grouse and bighorn sheep within better view, while a magnifying glass and insect net are helpful for studying some of the smaller creatures.

- Lake McConaughy - For a real thrill, experience spectacular views 500 feet above the water with Big Mac Parasailing at Martin Bay, then calm down at 17 Ranch Winery in Lewellen with walls adorned with turn-of-the-century photos. Finish the day in front of a campfire on the beach without a care in the world. ■

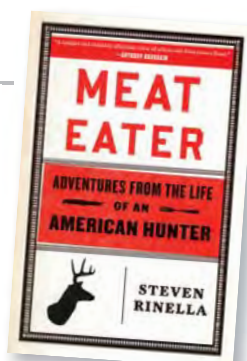
What You Should Read

Jeff Kurrus

I want to learn something when I read, regardless of what I read. I also want my author to be writing about something they know about. With Steven Rinella's *Meat Eater*, I get both. The subtitle, *Adventures from the Life of an American Hunter*, doesn't tell the whole story. Along with his tales from the field, Rinella also provides historical and biological information on the species he encounters, practical how-to's and reflective thoughts and opinions that keep the pages turning.

But the main reason to spend a few hours with this book is that you'll trust him. He's hunted turkeys in Montana, squirrels in Michigan, and everything in between – and his descriptions ring true during each outdoor venture.

Overall, this book is a welcome surprise for any hunter who's had more than shooting on their mind while afield. ■



Another Great Reason to Fish Nebraska

Several Nebraska anglers have already won gear, gift cards and a \$5,000 shopping spree. Register, get details online at cabela's.com. Contest dates: May 4 – July 7, 2013

Upcoming Events

by Jerry Kane

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

July 1

Archery fishing of game fish is allowed statewide through December 31

July 1

Underwater spearfishing of game fish allowed in specific waters through December 31

July 1-14

Paddlefish snagging permit application period

July 2-4

Wildlife Art Show
Fort Robinson State Park (SP), Crawford, 308-665-2900

July 4

Independence Day
All Commission district offices and service centers closed

July 4

Fourth of July Barbecue
Fort Robinson SP, Crawford, 12 p.m. 308-665-2900

July 4, 6

Living History
Fort Kearny State Historical park (SHP), Kearney, 308-865-5305

July 5

Super Tag Lottery
Final day hunters can enter the lottery for \$25. Visit OutdoorNebraska.org to enter.

July 6

Buffalo Cookout
Niobrara SP, Niobrara, 6 p.m., 402-857-3373

July 6

National Park Service Outdoor Event, Niobrara SP, Niobrara, all day, 402-857-3373

July 6-7

Living History
Fort Atkinson SHP, Fort Calhoun, 402-468-5611

July 7

Fish for Millions
Final Day of Promotion

July 7

Sidewalk Chalk Art
Niobrara SP, Niobrara, 10 a.m., 402-857-3373

July 7-12

Outdoor Skills
Extreme Hunting and Fishing Camp, State 4-H Camp, Halsey, 4h.unl.edu/web/4hcamps/summercamp

July 8

Pistol League
Platte River SP, Louisville, 402-234-2217

July 8

Big Game Hunting Permits
Remaining permits on sale at 1 p.m. Central Time

July 9

Family Fishing Night
Johnson Lake, Fremont, 6-8 p.m.

July 10

Family Fishing Night
Holmes Lake, Lincoln, 6-8 p.m.

July 10

Beyond Becoming an Outdoors-Woman
Rifle and muzzleloader class, Platte River SP, Louisville, 6-9 p.m., christy.christiansen@nebraska.gov or 402-471-5547

July 11

Family Fishing Night
Lake Halleck, Papillion, 6-8 p.m.

July 12

National Park Service Campground Program, Niobrara SP, Niobrara, 7 p.m., 402-857-3373

July 12

Hobie Fleet 61 Regatta
Lake McConaughy State Recreation Area (SRA), Ogallala, 308-284-8800

July 12

Stargazing
Eugene T. Mahoney SP, Ashland, dusk-11 p.m., 402-944-2523

July 12-14

Fur Trade Days
Chadron SP, Chadron, 308-432-6167

July 13

Buffalo Cookout
Niobrara SP, Niobrara, 6 p.m., 402-857-3373

July 13

Bighorn Sheep Hike
Wildcat Hills Nature Center, Gering, 308-436-3777

July 13

Keep Keith County Beautiful Beach Cleanup
Lake McConaughy SRA, Ogallala, 308-284-8800

July 13

First Shots Workshop
Platte River SP, Louisville, 6-9 p.m., christy.christiansen@nebraska.gov or 402-471-5547

July 14-20

Outdoor Skills Camp
Eastern 4-H Center, Gretna, <http://4h.unl.edu/web/4hcamps/summercamp>

July 16

Family Fishing Night
Skyview Lake, Norfolk, 6-8 p.m.

July 17

Beyond Becoming an Outdoors-Woman
Rifle and muzzleloader class, Platte River SP, Louisville, 6-9 p.m., christy.christiansen@nebraska.gov or 402-471-5547

July 17

Family Fishing Night
Pawnee Park East Pond, Columbus, 6-8 p.m.

July 19-21

Beyond Becoming an Outdoors-Woman
Kayaking trip, Niobrara SP, Niobrara, 402-857-3373

July 20

Buffalo Cookout
Niobrara SP, Niobrara, 6 p.m., 402-857-3373

July 23

Family Fishing Night
Bowling Lake, Lincoln, 6-8 p.m.

July 24

Beyond Becoming an Outdoors-Woman
Rifle and muzzleloader class, Platte River SP, Louisville, 6-9 p.m., christy.christiansen@nebraska.gov or 402-471-5547

July 24

Family Fishing Night
Benson Park Pond, Omaha, 6-8 p.m.

July 26

Nebraska Game and Parks Board of Commissioners meeting, 2200 N. 33rd St., Lincoln, 8 a.m.

July 26

National Park Service Campground Program, Niobrara SP, Niobrara, 7 p.m., 402-857-3373

July 27

Nebraska State High School Fishing Tournament
Harlan County Reservoir, Alma, 7 a.m.-1 p.m., 402-471-5447

July 29

Kites and Castles
Lake McConaughy SRA, Ogallala, all day, 308-284-8800

July 31

Beyond Becoming an Outdoors-Woman
Rifle and muzzleloader class, Platte River SP, Louisville, 6-9 p.m., christy.christiansen@nebraska.gov or 402-471-5547

Running in the Shade

Jeff Kurrus

In July, with Nebraska temperatures climbing in the 90's, runners will often seek tree-covered paths instead of pounding pavement. Therefore, here are a few canopied routes in the Platte and Missouri River bluffs to try:

- Eugene T. Mahoney State Park - Running through 7 miles of trails, much within view of the Platte River, can provide seclusion close to the city.
- Indian Cave State Park - There are 22 miles of trails with climbs for even the most seasoned runners.
- Platte River State Park - While less extensive and vertical than Indian Cave, Platte River's trails offer a waterfall and challenging loops through 10 miles also popular with cyclists.
- Ponca State Park - Similar to Indian Cave, runners will be challenged with steep climbs along 20 miles of connected trails.
- Schramm State Recreation Area - Schramm's gentle hills over 3 miles of trail are a welcome relief to the midday sun.

Runners, we need your feedback. This list focuses on eastern Nebraska, but we'd love to hear about your favorite wooded trail runs across the state. Email me at Jeff.Kurrus@Nebraska.gov with your submissions. ■



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Wildcat Weekend Series

Justin Haag

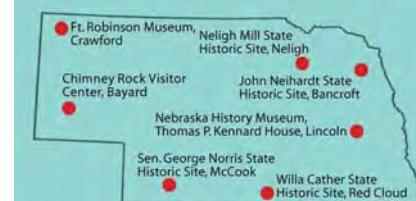
The Wildcat Hills Nature Center south of Gering is giving nature lovers unique opportunities to experience the outdoors during its Wildcat Weekend series.

Four events remain in the popular series of events. Participants will have the opportunity to see bighorn sheep during a hike at 9 a.m. July 13. On August 10, people are encouraged to gather for an astronomy program at 8:30 p.m., which will be highlighted by the Perseids meteor shower. On September 14 at 9 a.m., the topic will turn to the birds, as participants will hike to learn about the avian life of the area. The final event in the series will be the "Howl in the Hills Night Hike" on October 26 at 7:30 p.m., in which participants will learn about the "creatures that go bump in the night."

The events are free and open to the public. A valid park permit is required for vehicles entering the area. ■



Take a Road Trip to Nebraska's Past



Visit nebraskahistory.org



1-800-833-6747

NEBRASKAland Visitor Winner and Hint



Last issue's winner of the Visitor drawing was Shirley Condon of Lincoln, Nebraska, who found the **tarnished plant bug** on page 38. 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 3, 5, 7, 34, 35, 36, 37 or 47.

My New Favorite Place

Kayaking Near Niobrara State Park



By Lindsey Chizinski, Photos by Dina Barta

Despite being born and raised in eastern Nebraska, I saw little of the state until I had opportunities to travel it as a student researcher with the University of Nebraska and as a participant in the annual Bike Ride Across Nebraska. With both experiences I discovered areas that are now my favorite places to be, but somehow in my travels I missed Niobrara State Park (SP). The park, established in 1930, is located just outside the town of Niobrara near the northeast edge of the Sandhills at the confluence of the Niobrara and Missouri rivers. Last summer I visited for the first time on a bike and returned

for a second trip with a kayak. With both trips, my list of Nebraska favorites lengthened.

A bicycle tour of the Sandhills with friends and family led our group to Niobrara SP, where we spent the night in the primitive campgrounds on the bluffs overlooking both rivers. Our secluded campsite was tranquil, and the view was breathtaking. It was ideal for our small group of weary travelers.

Just two weeks later I returned to the park for the annual Becoming an Outdoors-Woman (BOW) kayaking trip on the Missouri River. During this trip, 28 women tent camped in the park's modern campground, where

shade trees and cool breezes from the river countered 100-degree heat. The campground was an ideal spot for a large group outing, still scenic but not as secluded.

Participants from across the state, Iowa and Kansas gathered to meet new friends, enjoy the beauty of northeastern Nebraska and challenge themselves on the water. Though we all had very different backgrounds and skill levels as kayakers, we shared enthusiasm and a sense of community as we paddled together and told our stories. Several ladies are avid outdoorswomen and shared tales that varied from hunting turkey to running long-distance on gravel roads. A mother of four shared her adventures of home schooling her children. A nurse told her tale of conquering a battle with cancer that led to a new life of archery, motorcycles, tattoos and, of course, kayaking. Along with other biologists and naturalists, I met a runway model, a journalist, a farmer and even a belly dancer.

The annual kayak trip is coordinated by Dina Barta, a Nebraska Game and Parks Commission conservation officer of 21 years and a native of Niobrara. Barta's love of her hometown is evident every time she speaks of it. When I posted photos on Facebook of our bicycle tour to the area, Barta excitedly commented on every photo that contained a landmark of her youth. She started the kayak trip five years ago because she wanted to share her home and heritage with other women.



Angel Hecht of Wamego, Kansas, gets caught up in the fray as kayakers regroup in a backwater on the Niobrara River.

Mary Snowdon of Niobrara paddles to join the other kayakers who stopped for a break along the bluffs of the Missouri River.



But she hasn't done it alone. Along with Suzanne Ridder of the Parks Division, other Commission staff and local friends, a planning group mapped the course on the ever-changing waters of the rivers. Recent years of flood and drought have required the group to chart a different path each year.

Last year's route on the Niobrara started at the Mormon Canal Bridge over Highway 12. We paddled about 6 miles to the boat ramp at Bazile Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA). Because of the drought, the water was shallow, and at times our kayaks

beached. No one minded hopping into the relatively cool water to get past those stretches, and we had a friendly competition to find the deeper channels that allowed passage. I discovered paddling a kayak through the reeds at the confluence of the two rivers was my favorite place to be in the sweltering summer heat. With sunblock slathered on and drinking water stowed at my feet, the heat didn't even register.

It has become a BOW kayak trip tradition to eat at Ole's after the first day of kayaking, so after a shower that evening we headed into Niobrara for a



Author Lindsey Chizinski of Lincoln takes a break from paddling to chat with a friend.



Above: Commission staff and BOW participants pause for a group photo after having lunch on the banks of the Missouri River.

Below: Carly Salak of Lincoln cools off during a water fight with another kayaker.

sirloin steak – a perfect post-paddle meal. After dinner, some of us wandered next door to the laundromat, which also houses a small thrift shop. I picked up some gingham curtains that now hang in my kitchen and are a cheery reminder of my time in Niobrara.

To beat the heat, we got an early start on day two. Shortly after sunrise we arrived at the Sunshine Bottoms Missouri River boat ramp, about 45 minutes northwest of the park, and unloaded our kayaks. Although significant improvements to the area were recently completed through the Commission's Angler Access Program, Sunshine Bottoms still showed evidence of damage from the 2011 flood. Watermarks several feet high were very visible on the trees in the parking lot.

Once on the river, we alternated between lazy floats downstream in a chain of kayaks connected with our paddles or feet and fast-paced races where we tested and honed our paddling skills. We kept our eyes peeled for bald eagles, and hollered greetings to folks who waved from

their docks. We even shared lunch with a kayaking duo we encountered in the middle of their several-day trek. After nearly 15 miles, we took out at a private residence near the Verdel Landing WMA boat ramp in the early afternoon.

Before heading back to camp, the Blue Moon Resort welcomed us with air conditioning and cold beverages. Then Mark Rettig, Niobrara SP's superintendent, hosted a buffalo cookout at the group lodge where we were treated to a historical reenactment by Cherrie Beam-Clarke with the Nebraska Humanities Program. Beam-Clarke told stories in the voice of an Irish settler about Nebraska life in the mid-1800s. We closed the night back at camp, sharing our own stories around the picnic table, this time with a second dinner of cowboy casserole and chocolate cake prepared in a Dutch oven by Commission staff.

Several of us agreed while talking during our second dinner of

the evening, which we definitely earned after a long day of paddling, that being on the river allowed us to visualize what this country must have looked like in its native, unsettled beauty. It was spectacular. We all understood why Barta wants to share her heritage, and felt lucky to be a part of it. I occasionally hear from native and out-of-state acquaintances that Nebraska doesn't offer much. Those who believe this must be missing the places like Niobrara SP and the small, thriving communities that neighbor them. I challenge anyone to maintain

that opinion after a day or two spent paddling the rivers, camping under pine trees in the park and visiting the local haunts of Niobrara. ■

To learn more about Nebraska's Becoming an Outdoors-Woman Program, visit OutdoorNebraska.org or call 402-471-5482.



Wild Gooseberries and Currants

Nature's Tasty Treats

By Gerry Steinauer, botanist

When I was a kid, my uncle Bill once picked a pail of wild gooseberries from woods in Pawnee County. Clueless what to do with them, he gave them to my mother. She baked them into what was probably a very good gooseberry pie, but I did not care for it. It was too tart for my tastes. Of all the possible gifts our candy store-owning uncle might furnish – he brought bitter fruit.

My next encounter with gooseberry pie occurred about 20 years later when my brother brought one to Thanksgiving dinner. Hesitantly, I tried it, and to my surprise, found it delicious; and my now adult tastes have since craved this delicacy.

North American gooseberries and currants belong to the genus *Ribes* and are similar in characteristics, except gooseberry stems have spines and prickles, whereas currant stems are unarmed. Six *Ribes* species are native to Nebraska. These shrubs grow up to six feet tall and have alternate, roundish leaves with three to five palmate lobes. The fragrant flowers, hanging in clusters or singly among the leaves, bloom April through June with showy petals white, green, yellow or pinkish in color. The fruits, a globe-shaped, fleshy berry, appear July through September and ripen to hues of black, purple or red, with the withered flower often persisting at the tip.

Hairy-stem gooseberry (*R. hirtellum*) and northern gooseberry (*R. oxycanthoides*) grow only in northwestern Nebraska and are uncommon in our state. Missouri gooseberry (*R. missouriense*), our most abundant and widespread gooseberry, is found in low, open woods and grasslands over the eastern half of the state. Wax currant (*R. cereum*), with leaves that emit a spicy-citrus odor when rubbed and become waxy with age (hence the name), inhabits dry gravelly slopes and canyons in the Panhandle. Buffalo or golden currant (*R. odoratum*), with yellow cinnamon- and clove-scented flowers, is common on hillsides and woodland edges, often on sandy soils, over the western two-thirds of Nebraska. American black currant (*R. americanum*), with golden resinous dots on

the underside of the leaves, regularly grows in low woods and sloughs nearly statewide.

All our *Ribes* berries are edible, though some are more so than others. Kay Young, Nebraska's foremost connoisseur of wild plants and author of *Wild Seasons – Gathering and Cooking Wild Plants of the Great Plains* favors buffalo currant berries as our tastiest and juiciest, ranking them just above the American black currant berries in flavor. Whereas, gooseberries can be a bit sour even when ripe, though still tasty.

For Plains Indian tribes and early white settlers, gooseberries and currants, along with wild strawberries, plums, chokecherries, serviceberries and raspberries, were the only available fruit. Indians enjoyed gooseberries and currants fresh, cooked, juiced or dried. Some tribes used currants, along with larger amounts of chokecherries and serviceberries, in pemmican – a winter staple of dried and pounded meat and berries to which melted buffalo fat was added. They sometimes

cooked *Ribes* leaves with meat and dried the leaves for tea. Settlers ate gooseberries and currants fresh, preserved and cooked into flavorful pies, jellies and jams. In the 1960s, while gathering information for her book, Young interviewed many direct descendants of settlers. They commonly told how their parents underutilized the abundant gooseberries for want of costly sugar to sweeten the fruits for cooking.

Young's book includes savory recipes for ripe and under ripe gooseberry jelly; buffalo currant jelly, jam and syrup; traditional and custard gooseberry pie and buffalo currant pie among others. Missouri gooseberry fruits, generally larger than currant fruits, can be used in cooking either ripe, under ripe or in combination. When using under ripe fruits, she recommends choosing large, light green berries (at first, the berries are small and dark green, then enlarge and fade to light green before ripening to a purple-black). For jelly, the under ripe berries are often preferred because they contain sufficient pectin to jell on their own, whereas ripe berries



GOOSEBERRIES are delightful in preserves and pies.



A BUFFALO CURRANT IN FLOWER at Valentine National Wildlife Refuge in Cherry County.

require adding commercial pectin. Only the sweet, ripe, black to purple-black currants are eaten fresh or cooked.

As a child in the 1930s, Young picked wild Missouri gooseberries from a prairie remnant on her family's acreage near Lincoln to satisfy her father's love of gooseberry pie. "For Dad, all good days started with a slice of gooseberry pie for breakfast," said Young. She still visits an often fruit-laden gooseberry bush in woods near Lincoln when she is not using berries from transplanted bushes in her own backyard.

Missouri gooseberry and buffalo and American black currant plants are also commercially available. They are easily established, make an attractive ornamental and wildlife relish their fruits. Young recommends planting them in well-drained, sunny locations and frequently watering. She, however, prefers to grow wild Missouri gooseberries, which are more resistant to the mildews that can plaque domestic varieties. In flavor and cooking characteristics, Young finds the fruits of wild gooseberries and currants and garden varieties similar. Both make tasty treats, either fresh off the bush or cooked. ■

Traditional Gooseberry Pie *From Kay Young's Wild Seasons*

- Pastry for a 2-crust 9-inch pie
- 3 cups under ripe (green) gooseberries
- 1½ cups granulated sugar
- 3 tbs. quick-cooking tapioca
- ½ tsp. salt
- 2 tbs. butter or margarine

Roll out the pastry and arrange the bottom crust in the pie pan; set aside.

In a medium pot, crush 1 cup of the gooseberries. Stir in the sugar, tapioca, and salt, then set this aside for about 5 minutes to allow the tapioca to soften in the gooseberry juice. Cook, stirring constantly, until the mixture thickens.

Put the remaining gooseberries into the pie shell and pour the thickened filling over them. Scatter pieces of margarine or butter over the surface, then place the top crust over all and seal the edges. Make a 2-inch slit in the top crust to allow steam to escape during baking. Bake at 450 degrees for 10 minutes, reduce the temperature to 350 degrees and bake about 30 minutes longer or until the crust is lightly browned. Makes 6 to 8 servings. If possible, serve slightly warm.



It's in Their Hands Now

Text and photos by Jeff Kurrus

The future of fishing can be seen on Nebraska's waters as teenagers compete in the annual high school fishing state championship.

Zach Madsen (left) and Matt Neiburg of Blair gear up before winning the 2012 Nebraska High School Fishing State Championship at Summit Lake State Recreation Area.

Corbin Baumfalk of North Platte concentrates while fishing the state championship.

Boat captain Kent Priel assists competitor Dijon Roberts, both of North Platte, with a largemouth bass from Summit Lake that helped Roberts and teammate Tel Pyzer to a fourth-place finish.

Camron Armstrong laughs with daughter, Ashley, while taking a break during 2012 tournament action at Summit Lake.

Andrew Phelps (left) and Connor Pudenz from Papillion enjoy a moment before the start of the 2012 tournament.



To know a great bass angler when you see one, you need to watch one thing – their hands. Sure, lure selection, fishing location and technique are paramount to catching fish, but the hands are where the money is. Watching someone slightly twitch a topwater lure to create just the right amount of action, or navigate a crankbait through a stump bed with subtle hesitations during their retrieve, or even know the difference between the feel of their soft plastic lure hitting a blade of

grass and a fish picking it up is what separates those who are average and those who are really good.

But what happens when everyone on the water seemingly has these skills? Then you have one of Nebraska's most intriguing outdoor competitions and spectator events – the Nebraska High School Fishing State Championship. Last year, the tournament was held at Summit Lake State Recreation Area near Tekamah, and 16 two-

person teams competed in a seven-hour, five-fish limit format for prizes, bragging rights and a spot in the regional tournament that summer at Lake Dardanelle, Arkansas. The competitors did not disappoint.

One of these teams was Dijon Roberts and Tel Pyzer of North Platte, who spent the majority of their time fishing underwater structure in the lake's south arm, flipping weedless plastics into underwater timber knowing that one big fish

may be enough to win. A nice fish finally came, a largemouth weighing nearly three pounds and good enough to put them in fourth place in the tourney.

Meanwhile, Drey Urbanovsky, of Lincoln, and Ian Malmstrom, of Roca, caught bass after bass on the lake's east side, but few were large enough for the tourney's 15-inch minimum. It was nearly impossible not to root for them as well, for each fish garnered an excited hook strike, a fierce grab of the net and then a temporary sigh as another fish under 15 inches came to the boat. They finished in second place.

But these weren't the only teams to watch. It was easy to cheer for 2011 state champion Adam Diehl and partner Ashley Armstrong from North Platte and the list of other competitors as they navigated Summit's waters on a day when the lake was being a bit stingy with its fish. Only seven of 16 teams caught keeper bass.



Drey Urbanovsky (left) of Lincoln, partner Ian Malmstrom of Roca and boat captain Ryan Pashby of Lincoln release a fish into Summit Lake on their way to a second place finish.



Adam Diehl of North Platte, the 2011 state and regional champion, fell short in his attempt to regain the Nebraska title in 2012.

One team did find some answers on the water that morning using crankbaits near underwater structure: Zach Madsen and Matt Neiburg of Blair weighed in 9.01 pounds for their five-fish limit and won by more than three pounds. But they weren't done. Following in the footsteps of 2011 state champions Adam Diehl and Drew Bailey, Madsen and Neiburg won the regional tournament at Lake Dardanelle in Russellville, Arkansas. Their last effort was a fourth-place finish in the national championship at Beaver Lake in Rogers, Arkansas.

Later this month at Harlan County Lake, teams will again compete for the Nebraska state championship and a spot in the regional tournament at Lake Texoma in Pottsboro, Texas on October 5, with anglers from Arkansas, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas. If history has anything to do with it, Nebraska's winner will be one to contend with later this year. But they'll have to win here first – which will be no small task. ■



All fish caught at the Nebraska High School Fishing State Championship are released by the competitors, as seen here by 2012 winners Neiburg and Madsen.

This Year's Tourney

The Third Annual Nebraska High School Fishing State Championship is July 27 at Harlan County Lake. Each two-person team, with a non-fishing adult coach on board, will fish from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m., with a weigh-in to follow.

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission does not charge to participate or attend the tournament, but all anglers 16 years or older must have a current Nebraska fishing permit. There is a \$25 per student fee collected by the Bass Federation Student Angler Federation.

For more information, including instructions on how to register, visit FishingNebraska.wordpress.com.



Where to Start?

In the pages of *NEBRASKALAND Magazine*, we talk a lot about bobber fishing when introducing kids to the water. While this remains a solid tactic to getting your youngster fishing, my fishing career began a bit differently.

My earliest memory of fishing is with a baitcasting reel in-hand, working out my latest backlash so I could attempt another cast to a spot near the bank – not just any spot, but a specific spot that my dad had told me held fish. Because like fishing Nebraska's farm ponds, bass fishing in Mississippi ponds is all about hitting your spots time and time again.

As I learned how to throw my lure exactly where I wanted it, I was also encouraged to fish a variety of lures. I went through my "worm man" phase, a nickname bestowed by dad and my cousin, Mike, another frequent weekend companion on the water. Then I transitioned to crankbaits because

I could fish water fast, then to spinnerbaits because of how fast I could fish water at a variety of depths during a single cast. Then came Carolina-rigging plastic worms, slow-rolling spinnerbaits and dancing a fluke across the water's surface.

By being able to experiment with more experienced anglers in the boat, and eventually fishing with my friends and even by myself on ponds and then larger lakes, I developed a skill from both learned and applied knowledge – all of which was recorded in journal records I hold to this day.

Not once is there mention of a bobber in these journals, again showing that there's more than one way to introduce a kid to fishing and create a lifetime passion at the same time.



Cope's Gray Treefrog

By Olivia Johnson
Photos by Dan Fogell

This little herp is becoming more prevalent in Nebraska – especially in the southeast.

When one thinks of treefrogs, the mind usually wanders to an exotic place such as a rainforest. But, as many southeastern Nebraskans have noticed, we have a treefrog species dwelling in our own backyard. The Cope's gray treefrog (*Hyla*

chrysoscelis), also known as the western gray treefrog, calls a wide and growing area of Nebraska its home.

Although the name says it's gray, this frog can also be found in a variety of other colors, including green, brown, and white, according



The Cope's gray treefrog's range in Nebraska is primarily in the east with scattered occurrences in Lincoln, Knox, and Hall counties. Westward expansion will increase as trees continue to line waterways.

to herpetologist Dan Fogell: "Temperature calls for color changes, but a recognition of background can also cause the change.

It's also possible for these frogs to have a pattern that changes or goes away."

Like any treefrog, the Cope's lives only in ecosystems where water is available, such as near lakes and ponds. It can also carry out its breeding in temporary pools of water. They're found primarily in southeastern Nebraska,

including the following locations:

Louisville State Recreation Area (SRA), Schramm Park SRA, Two Rivers SRA, Schilling Wildlife Management Area, Fontenelle Forest, and Hummel Park in



Large toe pads help identify this diminutive fellow.



Omaha.

"We've also found them along the South Dakota border in Knox County, and also as far west as North Platte," said Fogell. "Trees along the rivers are now very dense compared to past history, and continuous riparian forest means continuous treefrog habitat."

In these areas, they can often be found clinging to windows and doors on homes in the evening or early morning.

One of the most limiting factors of the Cope's distribution is spring breeding habitat. Tadpoles hatch in late-April and early May, and they must have a relatively constant pool of water for about two months while they morph into frogs.

Those hoping to spot a Cope's gray treefrog should be on the lookout during the spring and summer months. They can be seen hopping around late summer and early fall. Once fall sets in, however, the frogs will bury themselves for the winter.

"The Cope's is one of only a few species that have a natural antifreeze component in its tissues that prevents it from freezing solid during long bouts of cold and freezing temperatures," said Fogell.

It's just one more reason to look for this fascinating frog whose range continues to expand in Nebraska. ■



The Cope's gray treefrog starts life as an egg laid on the surface of a shallow pond or other small body of water. The tadpole (top left) is born about five days later and morphs (top right) into an adult at about 45-65 days of age, at which point it moves to nearby trees and shrubs to feed on various insects, mostly at night (above). Adults gather to breed (below) in the springtime, with the males grouping together as they call (right) to attract females. Eggs are laid in batches of 10 to 40, and the life cycle begins anew.



It Takes a Village to Raise a Shooter

The Eric Wiebe Memorial Shooting Complex

By Jenny Nguyen

In late 2009, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission lost mentor, friend, and dedicated Conservation Officer Eric Wiebe to cancer. In addition to being well-known in the Ponca region for his active role in hunter education, mentored hunts and the shooting sports, Wiebe was one of the founding members of Ponca State Park's widely popular Missouri River Outdoor Expo. At the Expo, Wiebe was a key figure in developing the event's "Shooter's Village." His legacy will live on in the village that now carries his name.

Wiebe's family donated \$5,000 to improve and expand the existing shooter's complex at Ponca in 2010.

Park staff then launched a fundraising campaign that raised more than \$60,000 for the project, which was dedicated as the Eric Wiebe Shooting Complex on May 19, 2012 to honor his contributions to the park and surrounding community. Construction of the two-year project was completed entirely by Commission staff and community volunteers.

"He helped develop the shooting range for the Expo," said Park Superintendent Jeff Fields. "So when he passed away, we thought it would be a great thing to improve on that – he always talked about adding permanent shooting pavilions and storage buildings to further formalize the area."

The Shooting Complex

The shooting complex features covered ranges, including an eight-station archery pavilion; an archery range with 3D targets of anything from elk and bighorn sheep to frogs and dinosaurs; two shotgun ranges including a beginner's

Boy Scout Troop 430 from Omaha passes under the Eric Wiebe Shooting Complex memorial sign.

PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN

New Developments

Aside from Lincoln Shooting Park, two other shooting complexes are also opening in the coming months.

Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area: Slated for completion in 2014, the new shooting facility will complement many of the area's existing Nature Center programs. Currently in its design phase, the new range will allow novice shooters to learn how to shoot .22-cal. rifles, trap sporting clays, air rifles and archery.

Osage Wildlife Management Area: Scheduled to be completed this summer, Osage will offer hunters a shooting range to sight-in their rifles.



Ponca's Assistant Superintendent Jennifer Wolff helps Brogan Jones at the .22 rifle range. Park staff are always available to teach during scheduled shooting times.

range and a more advanced hunter's range; .22-cal. rifle and muzzleloader shooting pavilions; and an indoor range with paper targets for pellet guns. While the archery ranges are open year-round, all other ranges are open only during scheduled times in spring, summer and fall.

This year, plans for a new pellet gun range are also in the works. Sponsored by the Nebraska and Iowa chapters of the Friends of the NRA, the future outdoor, eight-station range will provide more opportunities and elbow room than the existing structure.

Focus on Novice Shooters

About half of the shooters who went through Ponca's shooting programs last year were either novices or had never held a gun before. Most of them were simply park visitors who wandered in. "A lot of it is pretty spontaneous. That's what we want," said Fields.

The site also provides both firearm and bowhunter education classes to the community, tying in directly with the Commission's Recruitment, Development and Retention (RDR) Plan, which includes the development of shooting programs, ranges and hunting as part of its mission to get more Nebraskans involved in the outdoors. According to Commission Hunter Education Coordinator Jeff Rawlinson, Ponca's shooting complex was designed for just that.

"The families you find at Ponca aren't generally the ones that would want to come out to a club range or commercial shooting range or something like that. It's intimidating. But at Ponca – a state park – there's nothing intimidating about it," said Rawlinson. "Park staff members are continually developing programs to entice those families, young kids and schools to come out and go through programs designed to involve novice shooters safely and permanently,



Staci DaSilva of Sioux City, Iowa, delights in her success on the shotgun range under the tutelage of Don Andersen.

and have them walk away having experienced all aspects of being able to do shooting activities and being excited about it. And with that location, they go back out there and do it again."

In addition to hosting visitors from all over Nebraska and neighboring states, the complex also receives newcomers from other countries. Superintendent Jeff Fields recalled teaching a group of 20 from India. "They were young couples, and both the females and the males shot. We had a language barrier, so it was interesting to teach beginners shotgun without being able to communicate verbally," said Fields.

To maintain the safety of all park-goers, no outside firearms are allowed at the Eric Wiebe Shooting Complex. Firearms, ammunition and equipment are all provided by the park at minimal fees. "All ranges except archery are open to shooting during scheduled times only," explained Fields. "During these scheduled times, everything is done by us. The range is open, but we are also there instructing and maintaining range safety, too. If people have shot before, we just help to make sure they are doing the right thing."

The Future for Shooting Ranges

Nebraskans can soon expect more shooting ranges like Ponca's to open across state. The Commission's shooting range plan includes the need for "more development of educational shooting facilities as well as rifle ranges for hunters who need a place to sight-in," said Jeff Rawlinson.

Not only is the focus on existing state parks, there is a strong push to develop shooting facilities in more urban areas, like in Lincoln. The new Lincoln Shooting Park, expected to debut in the summer of 2014, is being built "right in the community where people live," said Rawlinson, "where kids and families can ride their bikes out to learn hunting and shooting skills."

Overseeing many of these projects is the Commission's East Region Parks Manager Jim Swenson. Recalling his boundless shooting experiences as a boy, he said, "Times have changed, making it difficult for youth to enjoy a similar experience. At those venues we can provide kids and



The archery range lets shooters practice on targets set at a variety of distances.

parents with access and opportunity to go and 'plink,' while reinforcing safety and responsibility."

It's a scene Eric Wiebe would sure be proud to see. ■

Eric Wiebe Shooting Complex Project Donors

National Rifle Association (NRA), Friends of the NRA (Nebraska, South Dakota and Iowa chapters), Scheels, Better Ponca Foundation, MROE Expo Board, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Nebraska Conservation Officers Association and numerous private donors from the community.



Eric Wiebe

Prairie Falcons

Text and photo by Michael Forsberg

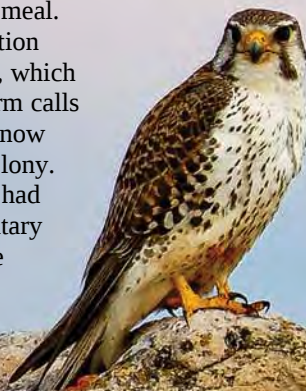
On the edge of a prairie dog town in western Nebraska, a prairie falcon flies low and fast with its back to the rising sun, contouring the ground like a stealth fighter until it zeroes in on its unsuspecting prey. The force of impact and its long, razor-like talons kill the bird instantly. The meadowlark didn't even see it coming.

As the falcon plucks its prize, a tall and formidable long-billed curlew suddenly comes on the scene. Territorial and fierce during nesting season, the curlew relentlessly dive bombs and shrieks at the falcon to drive it away. In return, the falcon screams back at the curlew with its shrill *kreeeeee*, clearly agitated but reluctant to leave its morning meal.

A moment later the commotion draws a coyote onto the stage, which instantly raises a series of alarm calls from the prairie dogs that are now on full alert throughout the colony. Finally, the prairie falcon has had enough and flies off to its solitary perch on a nearby butte where

it started its morning. The only sign left behind this circle of events are a few yellow meadowlark feathers in a tuft of buffalo grass. Such is a typical summer morning for a prairie falcon on Nebraska's high plains.

Falcons are the sports cars of the bird world. They are compact, acrobatic and powerful flyers with long, pointed angular wings, sleek round heads and dark mustachioed stripes. Their short, strongly-hooked beaks are specifically engineered to kill quickly by biting prey through the neck, and their long, curved, razor-sharp talons are designed for holding and knocking down prey. They are fast and highly skilled predators.



The prairie falcon (*Falco mexicanus*) is one of four falcon species in Nebraska. Pale brown above and mostly white below, they are only slightly smaller than

their much rarer kin the peregrine falcon, and measure between 16 and 20 inches long with a 35- to 43-inch wingspan. Their harsh "kree-kree-kree" call can be heard far across the grasslands and rimrock country they call home.

The prairie falcon breeds across the western half of North America from the prairie provinces of Canada to northern Mexico and east to the Great Plains. The highest nest site was recorded in Colorado's Rocky Mountain National Park near Trail Ridge Road at an elevation of nearly 11,000 feet.

In Nebraska, the prairie falcon has breeding populations in the western Panhandle where lone buttes and rocky escarpments provide cliff nest sites in places like the Wildcat Hills, Pine Ridge, the North Platte River Valley and the Niobrara breaks near the Wyoming border.

Prairie falcons also move through Nebraska each year using the

Great Plains as a migratory pathway, and sometimes are spotted across the state. In one satellite telemetry study focused on seasonal movements of prairie falcons nesting in southwestern Idaho, research revealed the birds moved three times during their annual cycle between their nesting grounds, summer hunting grounds in the Dakotas and western Nebraska, and wintering grounds in the Southern Plains. In each case their movements were dictated by key prey species including ground squirrels, which were only seasonally available. In this way, prairie falcons were relying on and connecting food webs and landscapes across thousands of miles throughout the year.

Wherever they are encountered, prairie falcons require large tracts of grassland to hunt the birds and small rodents that make up the majority of their prey. These highly tuned aerial predators can chase down birds on the wing or come in low just above the ground using vegetation and terrain to their advantage to stay hidden until the last possible moment before attack. In summer, their diet includes both

birds and mammals. In winter, their diet shifts mainly to birds because the majority of rodents become inactive and wait out much of the winter below ground.

On nesting grounds, prairie falcons re-establish pair bonds and often return to the same territories year after year. Nest sites are usually south-facing and are simple scrapes in recessed pockets of rock on inaccessible ledges on cliff faces with overhangs that ideally provide shade during the hottest parts of the day.

In Nebraska, two to five eggs are typically laid in April, and young are hatched in early June. Prairie falcon mates share nest duties, but most of the incubation and brooding is done by the female, which, as in other raptors, is larger than the male. The male does most of the hunting and protects the nesting territory and the airspace above from intruders. Eggs are hatched in about 33 days and the chicks are fledged in about five-and-one half weeks. Both parents continue to care for the chicks until they are strong

flyers, and they can remain in the area with their parents until fall migration.

For the prairie falcon, success at the nest is closely tied to the abundance of prey and the quality of habitat where it resides. Although the chance of a chick surviving its first year is less than 50 percent for most raptors, those that do make it to adulthood have a good chance of living for years to come, equipped with the finely-honed skills a raptor needs to survive in the harsh yet beautiful wide open spaces of the Great Plains. ■

Michael Forsberg is a professional nature photographer and contributing editor to NEBRASKALAND. To see more of Mike's images, visit MichaelForsberg.com.



The Non-butterflies

“...moths have serious self-esteem issues, and skulk around – mostly at night – so they can avoid running into other insects.”

— John Shuey, Director of Conservation Science, Indiana Field Office, The Nature Conservancy.

Text and photos by Chris Helzer

Butterflies get all the attention. I suppose that makes sense. After all, butterflies are big and pretty, float gracefully through the air and provide a service to humanity and the world by pollinating flowers. Right? Moths, on the other hand, are dirt-colored, fuzzy little bugs that bang themselves into lights all night. Or so you might think.

In reality, moths and butterflies are more similar than they are different, and it can be difficult to tell them apart. Generally speaking, most moths have stout, furry bodies, drab-colored wings with zigzag or swirled patterns, hold their wings out to their sides at rest, are active mostly in the evening or at night and metamorphose inside of silken cocoons. Butterflies tend to have long, slender and smooth abdomens, brightly-colored wings that fold behind them at rest, are active during the day and metamorphose in a chrysalis. (In addition, moths also tend to have either a frenulum or jugum linking their forewings and hindwings together, and superposition eyes instead of the apposition eyes of butterflies ... but everyone knows that, right?)

However, there are plenty of fuzzy, drab-colored butterflies in the world (most skippers, for example). Butterflies often bask in the sun with their wings out to the side, and some (skippers again) hold their wings at rest in ways that make them resemble moths. Additionally, many moths are actually very colorful and those species tend to be active during the day. In fact, in every category listed earlier there are exceptions. However, in Nebraska, if you see

a moth/butterfly and you want to know which it is, the surest clue is to look at the antennae.

If the antennae are fuzzy, it's a moth. If the antennae are smooth with a small “club” at the top, it's a butterfly.

General Differences Between Moths and Butterflies		
	 Moths fuzzy	 Butterflies smooth and clubbed
Antennae		
Bodies	stout/fuzzy	slender and smooth
Coloration	drab and camouflaged	colorful
Metamorphose	in a silken cocoon	in a chrysalis
Active	at night	during the day
Resting wing position	out to the side	folded behind
*There are exceptions to almost every one of these.		

One of the ironic things about the scant attention paid to moths is that there are about 10 times more moth species than butterflies. Worldwide, there are about 160,000 species of moths compared to only 17,500 species of butterflies. In the U.S., the difference is even more striking, with only about 750 species of butterflies but at least 11,000 species of moths. No one knows how many species of moths are in Nebraska, and few probably care. But they should.

LEFT: A yucca moth is the only pollinator of the yucca, or soapweed plant.

OPPOSITE: Luna moths on a fence post at Platte River State Park.





LEFT: A tiger moth south of Wood River.

BELOW LEFT: A sphinx moth on a cottonwood tree.

BOTTOM: A moth caterpillar on pitcher sage at The Nature Conservancy's Deer Tract on the Central Platte River.

While moths are largely dismissed by most people, they contribute to the world in several important ways. First among those contributions is their role as pollinators. Flowers that rely on moth pollination usually have white or pale colored flowers that reflect moonlight and a strong scent to help attract moths. These flowers often open in the late afternoon or evening to be synchronized for nighttime pollination. Many evening primroses, for example, attract night-flying moths as their primary pollinators, though they are probably visited by other insects as well. The story of the strongest relationship between a moth and a plant, however, is that of the yucca moth. Not only is the yucca moth the only pollinator for the yucca plant, it actually picks up the pollen, carries it over to the ovary, and stuffs it inside to fertilize the flower. Then the moth lays its eggs in the ovary so the larvae can eat some of the young seeds as they develop.

While pollination is important, the most significant ecological contributions of moths are made when they are still in their larval stage. We tend to think of moths as adults, but most of their life is spent as caterpillars. Those caterpillars are major herbivores on a wide variety of plants. Some feed on garden plants and are considered to be pests (e.g., tomato hornworm, codling moth, corn earworm, cabbage looper). The rest are an important part of the back and forth battles between wild plants and herbivores that help keep populations of both in check.

Moth larvae are also a major food source for many other animals. Because they are soft-bodied, slow moving and full of protein, they are the perfect prey for a wide variety of creatures, ranging from birds to ants. If you are a fan of game birds such as quail and pheasants, you've probably heard about the importance of soft-bodied insects for those young birds. A high proportion of those soft-bodied insects are moth caterpillars.

Of course, moth larvae don't just sit around and wait to be eaten. Many are very well camouflaged in terms of coloration, shape or both. Inchworms, for example, are moth larvae that often look like a plant stem, and can be really hard to see when they're holding



TOP LEFT: Crocus geometer moths mating in Sarpy County.

TOP MIDDLE: A bilobed looper moth on hairy puccoon at a Platte River prairie.

BOTTOM MIDDLE: A sphinx moth showing the eye spots on its wings at Niobrara Valley Preserve.

BOTTOM: A cecropia moth in rural Sarpy County.



still. Other moth larvae have loads of long, stiff hairs that help deter at least some of the smaller predators (such as ants) that have a hard time getting through those hairs to find something to bite. Some of those hairy caterpillars, including the white-marked tussock moth larvae, can even detach their sharp bristles so that they stick in the mouth of potential predators – just like little porcupines. Many moth caterpillars also have chemical defenses that range from merely tasting really bad to poisons and venoms that can do serious damage to poor critters looking for a meal.

Adult moths can be adept at avoiding predation as well, especially in terms of camouflage. There's a good reason most moths are not brightly colored. However, my favorite example of predator avoidance is by adult tiger moths, which can detect the echolocation signals of bats and take evasive action to avoid being caught.

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of moths is that many species migrate long distances each year. Many moth species (and butterflies too) can't survive the winters in Nebraska and other locations to the north of us. Yet we see those species every year because they migrate north each spring from warm southern locations and then breed here in Nebraska. Sometimes, those moths and butterflies produce multiple generations here before the winter kills the last of them off.

Migratory moths ride wind currents to get here, but they don't just fly up into the air and let the wind carry them where it will. Scientists have found that moths will wait until wind conditions are just right before migrating, and that while riding the wind they can adjust their flight trajectories to go where they want. That's pretty impressive for a tiny little insect with a tiny little brain. There are numerous species of moths and butterflies that migrate to the state each year, but the most famous (infamous?) is the army cutworm that can be a real pest when it shows up in large numbers.

Army cutworms can damage alfalfa, wheat, and other crops – particularly in the early spring – but may be more recognizable as adult miller moths that can invade houses and other buildings in large numbers. Those adult moths are primarily a nuisance because of their mere presence inside houses. They don't eat or reproduce indoors.

Millers aren't the only moths that can be irritating to have around. Webbing clothes moths chew holes in our clothes, and the Indian meal moths eat food right out of our pantries. However, for every moth species that causes us problems, there are many more that are innocuous, if not downright useful to have around.

As pollinators, herbivores, and food sources they play major roles in the functioning of Nebraska's ecosystems. You might not think about them very often, but you'd sure miss them if they were gone. ■

Where, How, and Why You Should Hunt Prairie Grouse

By Eric Fowler and Jeff Kurrus

If you're not primed for this year's prairie grouse season, I know why. Of all the outdoor activities you participate in, you've bypassed this one because you don't know the first thing about grouse or grouse hunting. The good thing is, after you spend a few minutes reading this, you'll know enough to get started. Then the real learning begins.

Who

Because there are so many ways to hunt grouse, this is an all-ages activity. You can spend your day walking in the high dunes of the Sandhills or walk the shorter hills in the tallgrass prairies of southeastern Nebraska, or simply place yourself on a flight line and pass shoot.

What

There are two types of prairie grouse that can be hunted in Nebraska: the **greater prairie chicken** and **sharp-**

tailed grouse. Both species prefer open, treeless grasslands. Known for their mating displays in the spring, neither migrates and both can handle very harsh winter weather.

Greater prairie chickens are found in the Sandhills, southwestern and southeastern Nebraska. They prefer undisturbed, larger tracts of native tallgrass prairie but can also thrive in areas with a mix of planted grassland and cropland, which is why conservation reserve program (CRP) lands often hold birds. In the Sandhills they are more likely to be in the lush meadows or in the low hills next to them.

Sharp-tailed grouse are found in the Sandhills and Panhandle in Nebraska. They prefer large unbroken expanses

of short- and mixed-grass prairie with small pockets of brushy cover.

When

The prairie grouse season begins each year on September 1 and runs through January 31. Because of the warmer temperatures that usually mark the start of the season, hunters are encouraged to keep their dogs, and themselves, hydrated as they hunt.

Where

There are two hunting zones for prairie grouse in Nebraska. In the West Zone, a small game hunting license and habitat stamp are required. The daily bag limit is three grouse and the possession limit is 12. The majority of public-land harvest takes places in the



Sharp-tailed Grouse

PHOTO BY ROCKY HOFFMANN



Greater Prairie Chicken

PHOTO BY ROCKY HOFFMANN



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Hunting grouse gives the chance to walk native grasslands like those on the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge in the beautiful Sandhills (pictured), eastern Nebraska's rare tallgrass prairies and areas of mixed-grass prairie.

Sandhills on the McKelvie National Forest, Valentine and Crescent Lake national wildlife refuges and the Bessey unit of the Nebraska National Forest.

In addition, prairie chickens can be found on Open Fields and Waters lands in southwestern Nebraska, particularly in Chase and Lincoln counties, and around the southwestern reservoirs including Medicine Creek and Red Willow. In the Panhandle, sharptails can be found on Open Fields and Waters tracts in Sheridan and Dawes counties, and on National Forest Service lands in the Pine Ridge and Oglala National Grassland.

Lastly, wildlife management areas in the central Nebraska loess hills, including Davis Creek, Pressey, Calamus and Sherman Reservoir, have fair grouse hunting. Wherever you go in these areas of the state, hunting pressure is low.

In the West Zone, look for hills with the best cover and plant variety. Often the north sides of dunes serve this purpose because they are more protected from the summer sun and hold moisture better. In the Sandhills, seek high, choppy dunes with denser grass cover for sharptails. Areas with plenty of poison ivy, wild rose and buckbrush are also hotspots, as grouse relish their berries in fall and winter. People also hunt the thick-grassed valleys for prairie chickens in the Sandhills.

In the East Zone, east of Highway 81, a small game hunting license and habitat stamp are required, but an additional, free permit is also needed that allows the harvest of three prairie chickens over the entire season. Much of the harvest comes from areas in Otoe, Johnson, and Pawnee counties, namely denser-grassed CRP lands with ridgetops, and hunting pressure is minimal.

Why

Prairie grouse are an underutilized game species in Nebraska. Compared with pheasants, bobwhite quail and mourning dove, grouse rank last on both overall harvest and number of hunters. But they can be successfully hunted with or without a dog using a variety of tactics.

How

Typical gun sizes are 20 to 12 gauge. If shooting steel shot, use No. 4's. With lead, No. 4's or 6's will do.

There are many ways to shoot a grouse, but the main objective is to learn their daily habits and adjust your hunting strategies to accommodate these habits. Here are a few options:

- Using a subtle, zig-zag approach looking for small grass pockets and wind-protected slopes is a very efficient way of locating sharp-tailed grouse. Then, once you do, remember these spots for similar hunting conditions in the future.

If you're hunting in a group, lining up and talking in a straight line, like many parties do for pheasants, doesn't work well for grouse hunting.

- Hunting low grasslands and meadows for prairie chickens is an easy walk for old, or very young, legs. Spread out from your hunting partners at least 40 yards away and work slowly at your own pace.

- With a lot of scouting, a hunter can find the flight path between feeding in cropland and hilltops where they are roosting and pass shoot birds. This type of hunt won't last much more than an hour, but can give a good start to a very successful day.

- Hunting over homemade decoys can be successful if a regular flight line can be found and a hunter has a backdrop, such as a cedar tree, to place the decoys so they can be seen. The more grouse in the area, the increased chance that birds will come within shotgun range.

Grouse hunters often walk more than pheasant hunters, but it's not a flushing



Mike McDaniel, of Flower Mound, Texas, smiles after a retrieve of a prairie chicken by his American water spaniel, Coco, in Johnson County.

approach. Many of the most successful hunters have their dogs work close and do more stalking than walking.

However, regardless of your approach, with a 20 or 12 gauge in your hand and a pocket full of steel No. 6's or lead 4's, you really can't go wrong. Unless you don't try grouse hunting at all. ■



MAP ILLUSTRATION BY TIM REIGERT

THE BIRDS

OMAHA'S VERSION OF A HITCHCOCK CLASSIC

By Pasquale Mingarelli

Thousands of purple martins fly to their roost near the University of Nebraska Medical Center Kiewit and Clarkson towers in midtown Omaha at dusk.

PHOTO BY PASQUALE MINGARELLI

“The layer upon layer of martins overhead is reminiscent of the World War II movie *The Memphis Belle’s* depiction of the skies over Europe filled with bombers. The scene is surreal.”

Shortly before dusk on every evening from mid-July to mid-September, purple martins fill the skies over midtown Omaha, all converging near the University of Nebraska Medical Center’s Kiewit and Clarkson towers in numbers as large as 65,000 at their peak in August. The layer upon layer of martins overhead is reminiscent of the World War II movie *The Memphis Belle’s* depiction of the skies over Europe filled with bombers. The scene is surreal.

As the martins circle above birders and curiosity seekers below watch the spectacle. Many spectators gather on the grassy knoll west of the towers on 44th Street, spreading blankets and lawn chairs with heads tilted upward to watch North America’s largest swallow. The birds dive bomb like missiles just feet above the street as they make way to their roost. It’s Omaha’s version of central Nebraska’s sandhill crane migration each spring, with thousands of birds filling the air in all directions.

Joel Jorgensen, nongame bird program manager for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, says it is typical for martins to stage at localized areas, often in cities, before they head to South America for the winter. He says it is not clear why the birds have selected this particular spot. During May and June they nest in much small colonies in open areas, often near water.

The iridescent, bluish purple male usually arrives in the nesting area first.



PHOTO BY PASQUALE MINGARELLI

Spectators gather west of the University of Nebraska Medical Center’s Kiewit and Clarkson towers on 44th and Farnam streets in Omaha to view the purple martin roost.

He then attracts a gray, purple and white colored female before the two select a nesting site. The nest will then be made of mud, grass and twigs where the female lays two to seven white eggs.

She then incubates the eggs for about 15 days before they hatch. Both parents feed the chicks a wide variety of flying insects, including Japanese beetles, stink bugs and June bugs. Even though martins are occasionally touted as natural controllers of mosquitos, they are not known to eat that insect pest.

The chicks are fledged in about four weeks’ time. However, they will continue to depend on their parents for food and training for an additional two weeks. Shortly after, the chicks are able

to feed themselves and, in Omaha’s case, begin to stage before migration.

Unfortunately, gathering at the Omaha Med Center does not come without risk for some birds, as some crash into the tower windows each year and die. To lessen the possibility of this the center has put up banners and placed UV reflective decals in the windows. Facilities manager Doug Stringfield also educates facilities staff about the species.

Education is a good thing. Because for whatever reason, thousands upon thousands of birds will be back in Omaha this summer. So we might as well learn about them. It will make the spectacle that much more amazing. ■

OTHER BIRDING SPECTACLES ACROSS THE STATE



Bald eagles at Lake Ogallala SRA.

Bald Eagles – In the winter, visit Lake Ogallala State Recreation Area (SRA), the J-2 hydroelectric plant near Lexington and Gavin’s Point Dam to view bald eagles.

Prairie Grouse – April is the best period to watch these birds boom, but March and May can also be good. The key to finding them is picking a nice spring morning with little or no wind. Grouse can often be heard before they are seen, so use internet sources to familiarize yourself with their sounds. There are also several commercial viewing operations throughout the state.

Snow Geese – Primarily in central Nebraska, snow geese can be seen moving north during the spring but can be here and gone in a week depending on weather. In the past Mormon Island SRA has held thousands of birds.



Prairie chickens at Switzer Ranch near Burwell.



Snow geese at Mormon Island SRA.

PHOTOS BY ERIC FOWLER

Sericea lespedeza

Nebraska's newest noxious weed.

By Karie Decker, Mitch Coffin, and Brent Meyer

For those unfamiliar with this invasive plant, the name itself can be difficult. Sericea lespedeza is a perennial that grows well in grasslands and pastures, as well as along roadsides and drainage areas. It is mainly found in southeastern and south-central Nebraska, though it has the potential to invade grasslands statewide.

The herbarium record shows that sericea lespedeza was first collected in Richardson County in 1974 but has spread to 3,000 acres in Nebraska. This woody legume, originally imported from eastern Asia from the late 1800s through the mid-1900s, was introduced into the United States for livestock forage, wildlife food and habitat, and for erosion control.

As with many invasive species, learning to identify it is half the battle. The plant grows generally 3 to 4 feet tall and can be identified by its alternate leaves. Lower leaf surfaces tend to have short hairs. Stems are straight, slender and grooved, and can have short hairs. Flowers, which bloom in late summer, range in color from white to cream to light yellow.

Sericea lespedeza can be not only challenging to pronounce, but to get rid of as well. It is an extremely aggressive invader of open areas. Dense monocultures of thickets are formed due to its ability to sprout from root crowns. Established plants will reduce or eliminate competing native vegetation, impacting native ecosystems and reducing carrying capacity for livestock (it is not palatable to most livestock).

A combination of two or more control methods, including mechanical and chemical, is the best approach when controlling sericea lespedeza.

Existing infestations spread rapidly through seed dispersal, which can be carried by wildlife, livestock, contaminated hay, vehicles and equipment. Continued monitoring and follow-up are essential for maintaining and reducing infestations.

Everyone's cooperation is needed in spotting and preventing new infestations. Early vigilance and



Sericea lespedeza grows in southeastern and south-central Nebraska, but has the potential to invade grasslands statewide.

action will prevent the huge cost of controlling large stands of sericea lespedeza. Making sericea lespedeza a noxious weed statewide will help county weed authorities educate landowners on how to identify sericea lespedeza, making them better prepared to spot new infestations and eliminate small infestations before they become widespread.

In addition to sericea lespedeza, Nebraska has 11 noxious weeds: Canada thistle, leafy spurge, musk thistle, plumeless thistle, purple loosestrife, spotted knapweed, diffuse knapweed, saltcedar, phragmites, Japanese knotweed, and giant knotweed. The addition of sericea lespedeza to the noxious weed list will aid in efforts preventing its spread beyond southeastern Nebraska.

If you have questions about controlling sericea lespedeza or any of Nebraska's noxious weeds, contact a county weed control superintendent or the Nebraska Department of Agriculture Noxious Weed Program Manager at (402) 471-6844. ■

Karie Decker is an Assistant Wildlife Division Administrator for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Mitch Coffin is the Noxious Weed Program Manager with the Nebraska Department of Agriculture. Brent Meyer is the Lancaster County Weed Superintendent.

PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER



from NEBRASKA's Trail Tales magazine for kids

junior journal

interesting notes for readers of all ages

by Lindsay Rogers and Donna Schimonitz

Watching Wildlife

by Kristal Stoner, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

Do you see it? It's right there! Crouch down and look through those trees...it's moving along the stream!

Have you ever been outside when suddenly you saw a wild animal? It is an amazing feeling to see a wild animal in its natural habitat.

Watching wildlife is easy. Wildlife lives everywhere! You can find wildlife in town and in the country, on land and in the water, flying through the sky and underground. All you have to do is slow down and start paying attention to find wildlife.

You don't need special equipment to watch wildlife, just your eyes and ears and sometimes your nose. A pair of binoculars is often handy. Many people like to bring their cameras along to "capture" the animals they see with a picture. Field guides can also be useful when watching wildlife. Some people like to

keep a journal, so they can remember all the animals they have seen.

A good place to start watching wildlife is your own backyard or the park. Look in the trees, under rocks, in the water and in the grass.

Try watching wildlife during all seasons. In Nebraska, winter is a great time to watch birds. You can see bluegill guarding their nest in the spring. On a hot summer day, look for insects such as butterflies. In the fall, when farmers harvest corn, deer are much easier to find.

Watch wildlife both day and night. On summer nights, look for bats chasing mosquitoes in the evening. At night, owls are calling and raccoons are active. At sunrise, birds start singing.

Watching wildlife is fun and challenging and is something you can do anytime, anywhere. Go outside... watch and listen...what do you find? 🦋



photo by Tom Keith

A sentinel fox squirrel is perched in a tree to chatter in alarm of a possible predator.

Summertime Search

Head outside to find these nature items. When you find them, check them off the list.

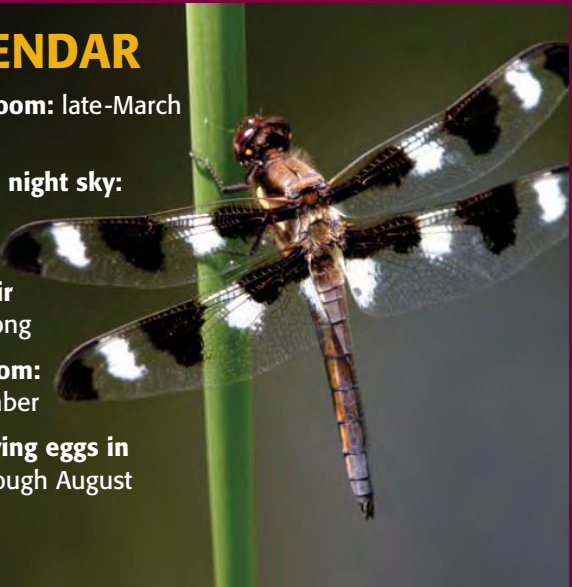
- ☐ flower blooming
- ☐ songbird looking for food
- ☐ squirrel climbing a tree
- ☐ hawk soaring in the sky
- ☐ seed, acorn or nut
- ☐ bat flying in the evening sky
- ☐ turtle basking in the sun
- ☐ insect under a log
- ☐ roly-poly "bug"
- ☐ animal scat (poop)
- ☐ white-tailed deer
- ☐ fish in a pond or lake
- ☐ anthill with lots of ants
- ☐ dragonfly
- ☐ firefly



dragonfly and ant photos by ThinkStock

NATURE CALENDAR

- **Woodland plants bloom:** late-March through June
- **Fireflies light up the night sky:** June through August
- **Watch for birds carrying food to their young:** all summer long
- **Prairie plants in bloom:** June through September
- **Dragonflies busy laying eggs in open water:** July through August



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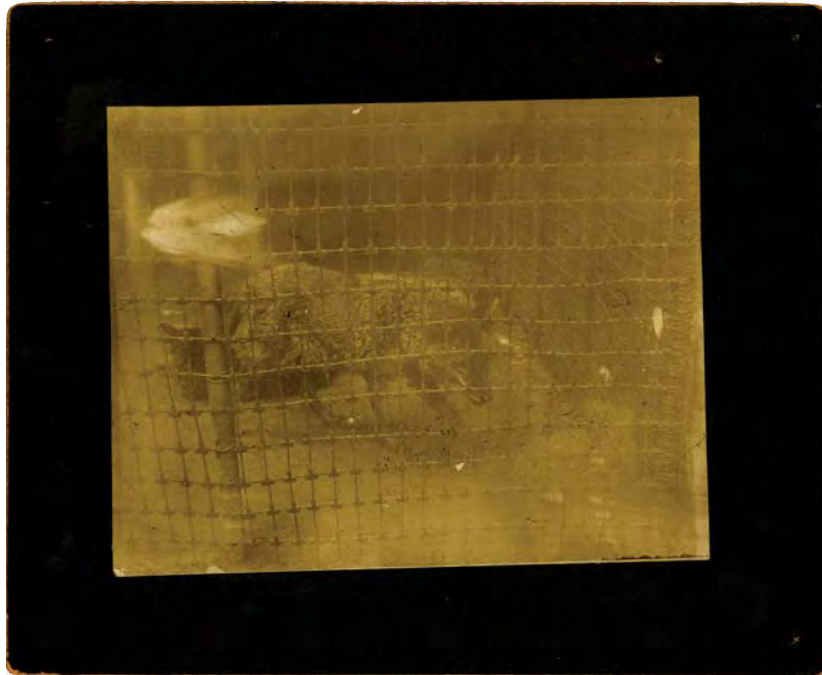
▲ Photos taken near Pilger in 1974. Good old days when pheasant hunting in Nebraska was incredibly good. Pictured from the left are Jack Meikle from Michigan, my son-in-law Russell Zuroski from Blair, my son Andy Vinckier from Papillion, Pete Feldman from Michigan and myself, Mick Vinckier, from Papillion. Also hunting with us were Joe Zangaro, a Michigan state patrolman, Bob Murphy from Arkansas, a local farmer, a western rancher and three other friends.

Birds were taken before noon, not on opening day, with the help of three wonderful springer spaniels and a golden lab.

The six of us had many great days in several Nebraska areas in the mid-1970s. The second photo is of myself, Mick Vinckier, also near Pilger.



– Mick Vinckier, Papillion, Nebraska



◀ I bought this matted photo at a flea market in the basement of Pershing Auditorium back in the 1980s when they held them there.

I bought many old Nebraska postcards from a gentleman who, I assume, must have been local as he had so many.

On the back is written in pencil "Bear at the Riverside Park in Omaha." But these are obviously wolves.

I seem to remember him saying this must be from the early 1900s.

I think I see another wolf in the background lying down just behind the standing wolf.

Here is what I found on the web about the park back then...

"Almost from the beginning, Riverview Park has had an association with animals. In 1896, park officials added a collection of animals to the park. A moose was bought for \$150, a bear for \$25 and fish were moved in for \$1.00 (City Planning Dept., p. 18). In 1964, the park was leased to the Omaha Zoological Society as the site for Henry Doorly Zoo. Text written by Lynn Sullivan, September 2003."

source: omahapubliclibrary.org

– Joleen Weygint, Lincoln, 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.

Rules of the Last Cast

A good reason not to catch a fish.

By Jeff Kurrus

I'm not sure when it started, probably as a small child when Dad told me that any true fisherman couldn't catch a fish on their last cast. "Why?"

"Because what if you would have caught one on the next cast?"

The answer seemed simple enough for him, so it would work for me as well as a child and now as an adult. Therefore, I always announce my forthcoming last cast.

This act allows each fish in the lake to know that I will soon be leaving, and, if interested, they should immediately swim in the direction of my last effort. If a fish is caught, or hooked and lost, or even felt, then another cast is immediately warranted.

But a last cast can also be interrupted by a gust of wind, blowing the attempt away from an appropriate fish-holding spot. It can also be erred when my lure collects aquatic vegetation on its way back toward the reel, a fish splashing at the surface, an improperly timed sneeze by my boat mate, the buzz of a fly, the buzz of a mosquito or even the buzz of a lure zinging a bit too close to my ear.

Because of these possible distractions, it is permissible to make multiple "last casts" with multiple lures, as well as multiple rods – another good reason why boat lights are a must for any angler's vessel. However, if you're in a pinch and forced to only make one last cast, you must do it perfectly.

There cannot be a backlash or an entangled set of trebles. The cast must be the perfect trajectory, in a perfect spot, using a perfect lure, with a perfect retrieve. What one wishes all casts in life could be.

Having announced this cast aloud for many years, I have seen that this act is also infectious. "Last one," "My Final Attempt," and so forth has been voiced by fellow anglers. And if the goal in life is to leave something to others, then encouraging a person not to catch a fish to end the day is just as good as

any of life's small amount of hopes and dreams.

Fish deserve to know when they can go back to their regular feeding, and the angler deserves to truly understand that the joy of fishing isn't in catching a fish with every cast. It's the ever-so-brief amount of quietness when you first notice, right at nightfall, the beauty around you. For the last six hours you've been so concentrated on the

next cast that you've too often failed to notice why you're there in the first place. Having a last cast allows you to do that.

For no place is a better one to depart at the close of a calming, orange day than water that has turned to glass. Until that lure is thrown, interrupting the sheet for ever a moment, a sheet whose perfect center begins where your day just ended. ■

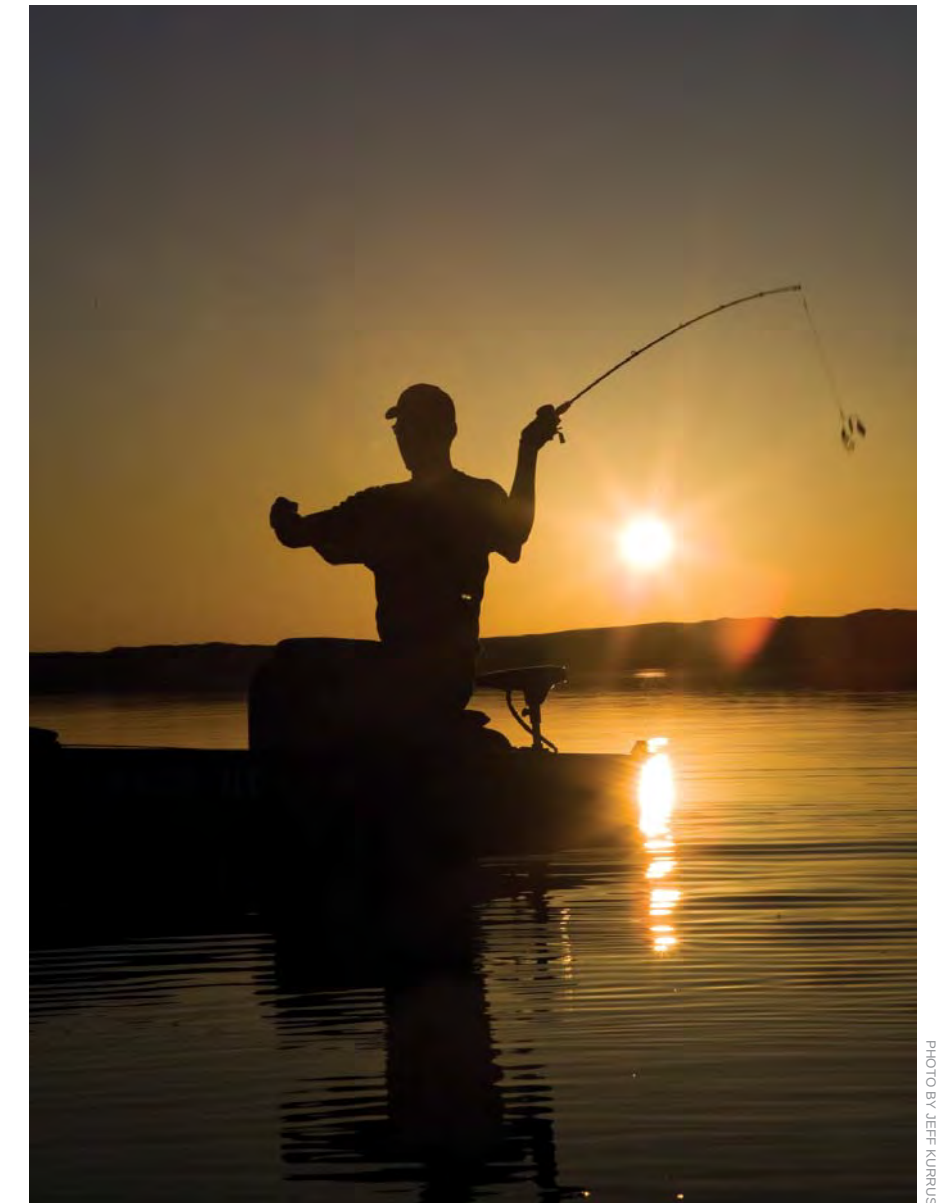


PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS



The Renaissance Man

In a farmer's field just north of Western, Nebraska, an abandoned Russell #2 sawmill sat defeated. It hadn't cut a thing since WWII. Sensing the coast was clear, a Chinese elm had grown up defiantly through the blades, and prairie grasses had conspired to hide all three tons of frame from the world, as if waiting for the right person to come along.

To Wilfred DeVries, this was the stuff of dreams.

He was born in 1933, to a Cortland carpenter. They built houses together. They both loved wood, and spoke of owning a sawmill someday.

In the Depression, you made do with what you had, and nobody had much. Houses and barns were recycled right down to the nails. Machines were run to exhaustion, then saved for their pieces, each of which was studied, organized and used again. Understanding the value of parts is crucial when you're a Renaissance Man.

And so that rusting pile of iron became a pleasure for Wilfred to resurrect. In 1991 he pried it away from the Earth, towed it home, and started in. He poured new Babbitt bearings out of lead and tin. He filled in missing teeth on the original 52-inch blade. He sandblasted its cast iron frame with the heart-shaped pattern, then painted it fire engine red. It only took two years to run his first log.

Since then, that old mill has never refused a tree, cutting nearly every species Nebraska has offer. Maple, hackberry and linden all run through just fine with help from a salvaged Caterpillar engine brought in to help turn the belts.

There have been a few unpleasant surprises though, mainly because some trees know how to keep their secrets. A bullet lodged in a cottonwood broke off one blade tooth. A glass insulator in a ponderosa pine took a few more. The worst was a horse shoe concealed in the limb of a red oak. That one stopped the blade cold, but not for long. Nothing that couldn't be fixed, Wilfred assured. And besides, it's all worth it.

Wife Audrey now has a room adorned with ¾-inch paneling of walnut, American elm and white ash. Son Clark milled foot-wide pin oak beams to hold up his porch. Daughter Anne used mulberry and creek willow to trim her new house. Son Charles made an osage orange base for a vintage school bell, and a canon.

Wilfred is 79 now, with hair the color of a late-winter snow. He's had one knee, a hip and a shoulder replaced with modern joints made of metal and plastic, all on the right side. He'll do the other side if he lives long enough.

Of course, he's already made plans for what happens when he's not around to run the sawmill anymore.

He's giving his body to medical science, of course, so they can study the parts.

"That's really gonna be fun," he grins. "But what will they do with all that hardware?"

Joel Sartore
December 10, 2012



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