



The rising sun illuminates the underside of a sandstone cap at Toadstool Geologic Park in western Nebraska. Home to many interesting structures, Toadstool's landscape was formed by an erosion process millions of years in the making. Photo by Justin Wambold.

Published by the
NEBRASKA
— GAME  PARKS —

NebraskalandMagazine.com
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NEBRASKAland

May 2009

All My Life

five-year-old
Patrick Carpenter
has fished
since he could
walk

PLUS
Old Spaces
Patch & Powder
Buff-breasted Sandpipers
Science Camps for Kids
Family Fishing Nights
Expo at Fort Kearny





NEBRASKAland

Volume 87, Number 4, May 2009

FEATURES

12 Buff-breasted Sandpipers - Shorebirds of the Uplands

Infrequently seen because they are rarely found near water, these unusual shorebirds stop in the Rainwater Basin each spring. TEXT BY JOEL JORGENSEN, PHOTOS BY JON FARRAR

20 All My Life

An experienced angler, Patrick Carpenter loves to fish and has been doing it his entire life – all five years of it. TEXT AND PHOTOS BY JEFF KURRUS

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Hands-on learning and direct interactions with researchers and scientists set this science camp apart. TEXT AND PHOTOS BY BOB GRIER

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Abandoned farmsteads and delapidated buildings scattered across the landscape of Nebraska's western half provide a glimpse of Nebraska's early days. TEXT AND PHOTOS BY BOB GRIER

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A muzzleloading turkey hunt. PHOTOS AND TEXT BY JEFF KURRUS

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Special fishing events held weekday nights throughout the summer promise plenty of fun for the whole family. BY DOUG CARROLL

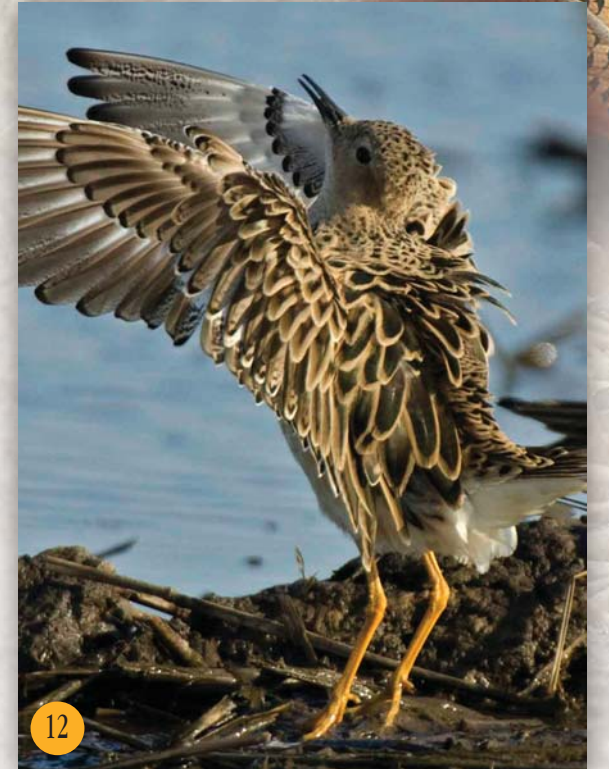
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Cover: Like any other five-year-old, Patrick Carpenter likes bullfrogs, football and cartoons. What makes him different is that he has been fishing since he can remember. See story beginning on page 20. Photo by Jeff Kurrus.

Opposite: This narrow beardtongue (*Penstemon angustifolius*) was found in a high meadow on the north side of the Niobrara River near Nenzel. Photo by Bill Hager.

NEBRASKAland (VOL. 87 / NO. 4, ISSN 0028-1964) is published monthly, except for the combined Jan./Feb. and Aug./Sept. issues, by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, 2200 N. 33rd St., Lincoln, NE. Periodicals postage paid at Lincoln, Nebraska, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to NEBRASKAland, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370.



NEBRASKAland Magazine



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NEBRASKAland Magazine

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Rates: \$18 for one year; \$33 for two years; \$44 for three years. Nebraska recipients must add appropriate sales tax.

To subscribe call 1-800-NEBLAND (632-5263), or go online to: NebraskaLandMagazine.com.

Now and Then

During the past 40-plus years, *NEBRASKAland* from time to time has changed its appearance to stay abreast of advancing trends. Artists, photographers and writers have come and gone throughout the years and have taken their individual styles with them.

A few weeks ago my father gave me some old *NEBRASKAland* magazines that were stored at his house for a rather long time. Well, wouldn't you know it, the magazines were from January through March 1971, December 1971, and December 1977. I have been a subscriber to the magazine for years and the stories and photos are as good now as they were back then! Thank you for such a fantastic magazine that provides hours of enjoyable reading and outdoor information about the wonderful state we live in. As an avid turkey hunter, I really enjoyed April's edition of the magazine and the great article on turkeys.

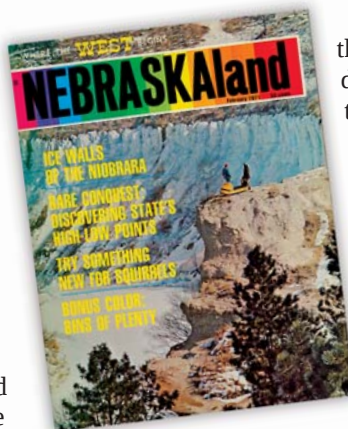
Todd L. Bouton

Lincoln, Nebraska

Trespassing Laws

As a longtime subscriber to *NEBRASKAland Magazine*, a supporter of numerous conservation organizations and an avid outdoorsman, I am very disappointed to read various articles such as Aaron Hershberger's "Nebraska Canoeing" (April 2009) that promote recreation on Nebraska's rivers and never once inform the reader of the need to respect private property and not break the law by trespassing during their activities.

My wife and I own property on a Nebraska river and have had to deal with numerous people who believe the river is "public property." We discovered a three generation fishing party on our property who, when confronted with their trespassing, responded that as long as they were in the river they were not trespassing. Additionally, individuals believed that



they could run ATVs up and down the river because they thought it was "public property."

I believe it would have been very appropriate for Aaron's article to explain the activities which would be considered illegal trespassing by canoeists passing through private property such as stepping out of their canoe and touching the riverbed, landing anywhere on private property to picnic or relieve themselves or stopping and playing on sandbars in the middle of the river. My belief is that the majority of the public does not understand the limitations of using Nebraska's rivers legally without trespassing on private property. To assist in improving relations between landowners and individuals wishing to enjoy the rivers, you could provide a great service by reminding your readers of their legal responsibilities to respect private property.

Steve Groeteke

Doniphan, Nebraska

You bring up a good point, and one which we have discussed several times in the magazine. Unfortunately we don't have the room to discuss trespassing laws in depth in every article we run. In short, riverbeds and their banks belong to the owner of the land through which the water flows. Canoeists may portage around fences and other obstructions, but are responsible for property damage. Except at designated public campsites, landowner permission is required to walk, picnic or camp on private property.

— Doug Carroll, Editor

Hull Lake

The article on Hull Lake (March 2009) triggered many childhood memories for me. I grew up near Butte and spent many days in the late-50s and early-60s fishing Hull Lake with my two brothers. We were fortunate to have two great uncles and an aunt who lived within walking distance of the lake, including Ray Haney, who was mentioned in the article.

My great uncle, Charles Kinzie, lived for many years in a cabin about 50 yards north of the lake. Largemouth bass and

bluegill were the usual fish we caught. A couple of years we were able to catch rainbow trout, which were stocked in the lake. Spring and summer fishing included dusting our socks heavily with sulfur powder to avoid chiggers, which were a bank fishing menace.

During recent years, my two sons and I have gone ice-fishing at Hull, where they have had to endure my childhood memories of fishing the lake.

Gary Kinzie

Ainsworth, Nebraska

Martin's Reach

The March issue of *NEBRASKAland Magazine* contained an article and pictures by Eric Fowler regarding Martin's Reach Wildlife Management Area. The text and pictures were great, and both Eric and the editors should be complimented for a job well done.

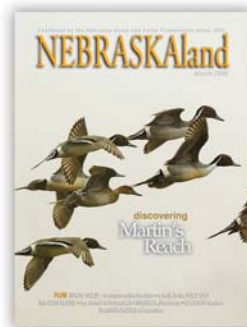
Your magazine may have covered the Martin brothers' monument at

some time in the past. It is south of the main channel of the Platte River on the Alda bridge road in Hall County. I mention this because it is an area that is prime sandhill crane viewing, and my wife and I have even seen a whooping crane in this area.

Thank you for a good article.

Carl R. Throckmorton

Hastings, Nebraska



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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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PHOTO BY CHRIS HELZER

Metamorphosis

Chris Helzer

Growing bigger seems to come easily for most creatures. Essentially, you eat more and you get bigger.

But growing can be a much more complex process when you're living inside a hard exoskeleton. Most insect species get around the problem by going through a process called "complete metamorphosis" in which the larva hatches out of an egg, grows larger, retreats into a pupa and transforms into an adult (this is the caterpillar-to-butterfly process).

In that case, only the soft-bodied larva grows, and the adult is the same size from the time it emerges from the pupa until it dies. That makes growing much easier but means that the insect is soft and vulnerable for much of its life.

The other major strategy, used by about 12 percent of insects – including grasshoppers, mantids, dragonflies and true bugs – is to go through "incomplete metamorphosis." In this process, a nymph hatches from its egg looking almost exactly like a miniature adult. Over the next weeks, the nymph will grow larger, but will have to shed its exoskeleton between four and eight times before reaching its adult size. Each stage of growth is called an "instar." Other than an increasing body size, the major visible changes between instars

A fifth instar differential grasshopper nymph (*Melanoplus differentialis*) emerges from its old skin. This species is common in tall grassland but has also become a serious pest in cropfields. Most grasshoppers, however, are not pests but are an important part of grassland ecosystems.

are that the wings and antennae grow longer. Because nymphs don't have fully-formed wings, only the adult insects can fly.

Shedding one exoskeleton and exchanging it for another is more complicated than it might seem at first blush. In order to remain protected as much as possible, the nymph has to grow its next exoskeleton before shedding the old one. As a first step, the old exoskeleton separates from the underlying layers and the gap is filled with fluid. The nymph then grows a new exoskeleton beneath the old one. Once the new one is completed it's time to molt.

First, the nymph takes in as much air as it can to swell its body, and contracts its muscles to force the outer skin to split – usually along the back. It then squirms and squeezes out. Once out, the insect puffs itself up again and expands the new exoskeleton to its full size.

Over the next several hours the new exoskeleton will harden and darken in color. After the final molt, the insect emerges as a fully-formed adult, able to fly, mate and eat.



ILLUSTRATION BY TIM REIGERT

Valentine Checklist

Jeff Kurrus

It's not enough to bring rods, reels, lures and a boat to the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge in May when fishing for northern pike. These are the definite necessities, but after spending the last couple of springs at the refuge I have come across a number of other items necessary for success. The refuge has

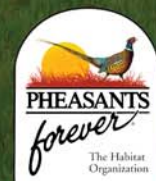
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WETLAND RESTORATION AND MANAGEMENT		
JUNE 9, 2009	12:00 TO 4:00	CURTIS - CURTIS CATTLE COMPANY
RANGELAND MANAGEMENT AND CEDAR CONTROL		
JUNE 10, 2009	10:00 TO 2:00	FRANKLIN - FRANKLIN COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS AG PAVILION
QUAIL MANAGEMENT AND GRASSLAND MANAGEMENT		
JUNE 18, 2009	11:00 TO 3:00	ST. PAUL - THE GATHERING PLACE
QUAIL MANAGEMENT AND PRAIRIE WILDFLOWERS		
JUNE 19, 2009	9:00 TO 2:00	ST. PAUL - THE GATHERING PLACE
WETLAND RESTORATION AND MANAGEMENT		
JULY 16, 2009	10:00 TO 2:00	ALMA - ALMA CITY PARK
IMPROVING HABITAT FOR PHEASANTS		
JULY 21, 2009	10:00 TO 2:00	HICKORY RIDGE WMA - EAST PARKING LOT
IMPROVING HABITAT FOR PHEASANTS		
JULY 23, 2009	10:00 TO 2:00	BRANCHED OAK WMA - DOG TRIAL AREA
IMPROVING HABITAT FOR PHEASANTS		
JULY 24, 2009	11:00 TO 3:00	ST. PAUL - THE GATHERING PLACE
QUAIL MANAGEMENT		
AUGUST 21, 2009	9:00 TO 3:00	BROKEN BOW - HUCKLEBERRY'S HIDEOUT
RANGELAND MANAGEMENT		
SEPTEMBER 16, 2009	4:00 TO 6:00	GRAND ISLAND - HUSKER HARVEST DAYS
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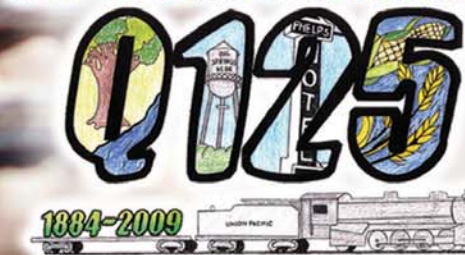


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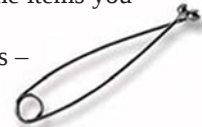
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given up 40-inch pike the last two years, yet during each trip our group has battled elements that we weren't fully prepared for. If you're planning a pike fishing trip up there (and everyone should fish the area at least once in their lifetime), here are some items you should bring along:

- Jaw spreaders and pliers – Trophy pike don't like to open their mouth so you can retrieve your lure.
- Anchor – The hills around many of the refuge lakes are not high enough to thwart the wind. If you do find fish, hold your spot with an anchor.
- Extra trolling battery – With a near constant wind, don't rely on one battery to get you through a long day. Bring a backup.
- Depth finder – These Sandhills lakes are not very deep, which makes dropoffs, where you find them, all that much more important. Use a depth finder to locate dropoffs and the ambushing pike they're likely to hold.
- Camera – No cell phone cameras, please. A nice image captured with even a simple point-and-shoot will make friends say, "And you caught that in Nebraska?"
- Steel leaders – You're trophy pike fishing when you're at the refuge. You have to have these.
- Waders – Probably the most important item of all. When your anchor won't keep you still, and your trolling batteries are almost dead, drift to the bank, put on a pair of chest waders and wade as far as you can into the water to fish the dropoffs with your feet firmly on the ground. The wind can do nothing to control you then.



The State of Birds

In March, United States Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar released the first ever comprehensive report on bird populations in the United States. Information for the report was compiled from surveys conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Geological Survey (including the annual Breeding Bird Survey) and data gathered through volunteer bird census programs such as the

National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count.

The reports showed that nearly a third of the nation's 800 bird species are endangered, threatened or in significant decline due to habitat loss, invasive species and other threats. Sixty-seven species are currently federally listed as endangered or threatened, and an additional 184 species are ranked as "species of conservation concern" because of their small distribution, high threats or declining populations. Far and away the most threatened species were those found in Hawaii or requiring ocean habitats, but grassland bird species were the third most threatened of the nine habitat types ranked in the report.

Of the 46 recognized grassland-breeding birds, 48 percent are species of conservation concern, of which four are federally listed as endangered. Half of the grassland bird species are "declining significantly." Among the grassland species in sharp decline are eastern and western meadowlarks, bobolinks, short-eared owls, mountain plovers, lark buntings and several species of native sparrows and longspurs. Several grassland game birds – lesser and greater prairie chickens, sharp-tailed grouse, northern bobwhites and northern pintails – have also shown steep declines in abundance.



PHOTO BY JON FARRAR

Upland sandpipers have declined in abundance as grassland meadows were plowed and converted into cornfields.

The conversion of grasslands to cropland continues to be the principal, but not only, reason for the decline of grassland bird species. While the Conservation Reserve Program added hundreds of thousands of grassland acres in Nebraska, they were not suitable habitat for all grassland bird species; and as contracts in that federal farm program expire, even those grassland acres are vanishing.

"Just as they were when Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring* nearly 50 years ago, birds today are a bellwether of the health of land, water and ecosystems," Salazar said. "From shorebirds in New England to warblers in Michigan to songbirds in Hawaii, we are seeing disturbing downward population trends that should set off environmental alarm bells. We must work together now to ensure we never hear the deafening silence in our forests, fields and backyards that Rachel Carson warned us about."

To read the entire report go to <http://www.stateofthebirds.org>.

Aquatic Skills Camp

For the second year in a row, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission will team up with Nebraska 4-H to host an Aquatic Skills Camp this summer.

Open to youth 14 to 18 years old, the camp will be held June 22-25. The first day will be spent at the State 4-H Camp near Halsey learning water safety and earning Basic Boating Safety certification, then participants and their gear will be transported to Calamus Reservoir, where they will learn how to water ski, operate jet skis, surf on wakeboards, and use kayaks.

Evenings will include some of Nebraska's best fishing, campfires and other camp favorites. Participants need to bring their own sleeping bag and Type-3 Personal Flotation Device. The workshop is limited to 20 campers and costs \$358.

For more information, go to <http://4h.unl.edu/camp/>.

A Fishing Alternative

Matthew Marx

When the desire to catch a fish, any fish, is larger than repeatedly casting for

largemouth bass with no luck, take a break from the big boys and panfish instead.

Start by using an ultralight spinning reel and a 1/64-ounce jighead with a two-tone green, curlytail grub. This lure is far too light for heavier baitcasting gear, but with a spinning reel and six-pound-test line, 20 foot casts can be regularly made. If this distance isn't enough, switch to a 1/32-ounce jighead. However, an angler will usually miss more fish with the bigger lure.

Fish this lure around the crooks of fallen trees, fingertip ends of submerged branches or shallow points. Let the lure sink to the desired depth, usually two or three feet, and use a steady retrieve to get the curlytail wiggling. When the fish grabs the lure, gently set the hook with a quick tug instead of the mouth-ripping hookset used for big bass.

Any fish in the lake will hit this lure, including bluegills, crappies and even catfish. Have a pair of needle-nose pliers handy. Many bluegill and crappie mouths are too small for big fingers, a good problem to have shortly after deciding that the bass fishing was not as productive as desired.



Cooper Wins Duck Contest Again

An entry by Bethany Cooper of Banner County High School, last year's winner, was again chosen Best of Show





Outdoor Message Plates

J.D. Avery of Omaha, chairman of the Ducks Unlimited chapter in Valley, would like everyone to follow the instructions on the message plate he's displayed since 1995.

If you have a unique message plate you would like to share, or know someone who does, e-mail a photo (.jpg format only, please) of it to Eric.Fowler@Nebraska.gov along with your name and hometown.

at the Nebraska Junior Duck Stamp Art Contest.

Cooper's acrylic painting of a drake wood duck was selected from more than 650 entries received from across the state. Her entry will be used to create the 2010 Nebraska

Waterfowl Stamp and was sent to the national competition to be held in Washington, D.C.. The winner of the national competition will receive \$5,000, a trip to Washington, and have his or her art used to make the 2008-2009 Junior Duck Stamp. Proceeds from the sale of Junior Duck Stamps, which cost \$5, support conservation education.

Information for next year's contest will be posted on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's internet homepage at <http://duckstamps.fws.gov>.

Free Park/Fishing Day

This year's Nebraska Free Fishing and Park Entry Day will be observed Saturday, May 16. On this day no fishing license is required anywhere in the state, and the public can visit any state park or state recreation area without having to purchase a Nebraska Park Entry Permit.

As part of this event, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission is offering the 12th Annual Family Fishing Clinic at select state parks and recreation areas across the state. This is also the date for the Nebraska Outdoor Expo, which will be held at Fort Kearny State Recreation Area near Minden.

Trapshoot

The 40th Annual Cornhusker Trapshoot will be held April 30 - May 2 at the Nebraska Trapshooting Association's home grounds in Doniphan. Last year 1,681 shooters competed in the meet, making it the largest of its kind in the nation. Traditionally open only to students in the seventh through 12th grades, this year's meet has been expanded to include sixth-grade students, and organizers expect to set a new record for participation this year. The event is free to spectators, and in addition to watching the competitors, attendees can visit the booths of a variety of shooting vendors that will be on hand and displaying a variety of wares.

Ponca BOW Workshop

Building on the success of the annual Becoming an Outdoors - Woman workshop held every each fall at the State 4-H Camp near Halsey, this year the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission is hosting a similar, yet smaller, BOW workshop at Ponca State Park, located in northeastern Nebraska.

Open to women 18 years of age and older, the Ponca BOW workshop will be held May 29-31 and is limited to the first 25 participants to register. Activities covered at the workshop include archery, an introduction to firearms, beginning shotgunning, bird banding and identification, camping and outdoor skills/safety, dutch-oven cooking, kayaking and lake fishing.

Participants will stay in tents provided by the organizers, and all equipment needed for the classes will be provided. The cost of the workshop is \$125, which includes instruction for all sessions, program materials, use of equipment and all meals. For more information, go online to www.NebraskaBOW.com.

While there, you can also check out information about next fall's BOW workshop in Halsey, which will be held October 2-4, and the slate of Beyond BOW classes that are being offered this year, including a basics of outdoor survival class that will be held June 12-14 at Lake McConaughy.



Great Park Pursuit

After a successful inaugural year in 2008, the Great Park Pursuit will return with more sites and outdoor adventures in May 2009. The Nebraska Recreation and Park Association, along with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, partnered to develop the program with the goal of encouraging a healthier lifestyle for participants while increasing awareness of Nebraska's nature-rich outdoor recreation opportunities. This year's program will be sponsored in part by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

The Great Park Pursuit revolves around a challenge to visit park sites throughout Nebraska. Participants follow clues to collect nature-based impressions from posts hidden in each of the selected parks. Prizes and entry into drawings are based on the number of tracings collected.

While participants become registered for a free two-night cabin stay at a Nebraska state park of their choice with just one tracing, the more sites that participants visit, the more opportunities they have to win the free cabin stay or other prizes that are offered: Participants who visit seven sites will be entered one time in a drawing for grand prizes; those who visit 10 sites will be entered three times; and those who visit all 15 sites will be entered five times and will receive a free 2010 Nebraska Park Entry Permit.

A kickoff event for this year's Great Park Pursuit will be held May 16 at the Nebraska Outdoors Expo that will be held at Fort Kearny State Recreation Area (SRA). Other special events will be held June 20 at Pioneers Park in Lincoln, July 25 at Walnut Creek in

Papillion and August 8 at Calamus SRA near Burwell.

Sites for this year's Great Park Pursuit include Pioneers Park in Lincoln, Indian Cave State Park (SP), Platte River SP, Walnut Creek Lake and Recreation Area in Papillion, Lewis and Clark Landing in Omaha, Scenic Park in South Sioux City, Cowboy Trail near Norfolk, Calamus SRA, Bessey Ranger District of the Nebraska National Forest near Halsey, Fort Robinson SP, Central Park in Alliance, Ash Hollow State Historic Park, Kelley Park in McCook, Stolley Park in Grand Island and Pawnee Park in Columbus.

Barbs and Backlashes

Jeff Kurrus

Nebraska Game and Parks Fisheries Biologist Daryl Bauer recently started the "Barbs and Backlashes" blog on the Commission's website at Outdoor.Nebraska.org. "You

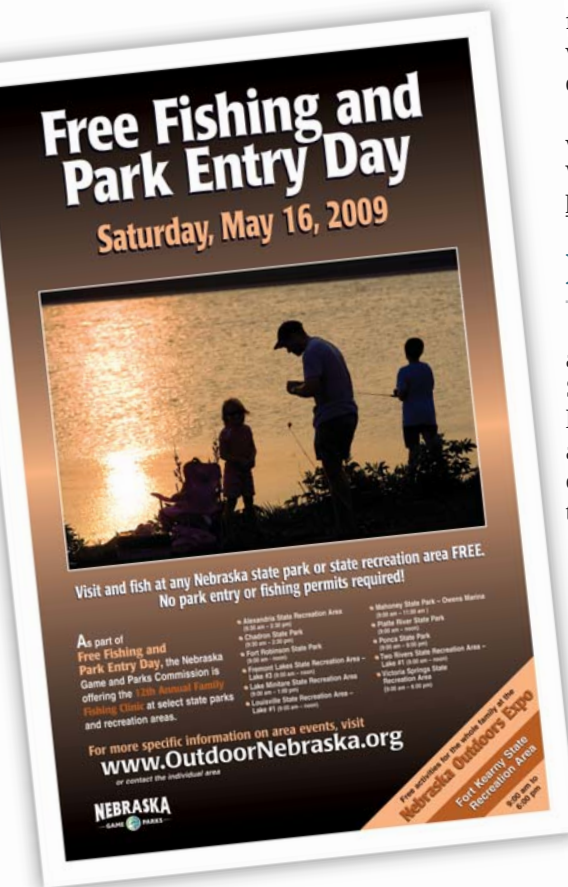


Daryl Bauer

can expect me to ramble on here about a variety of topics related to fish and fishing in Nebraska," said Bauer on his first entry. "As a biologist I like to take a logical, 'science'-based approach to fishing. You can expect me to weave in information on fisheries science, fish anatomy and physiology, aquatic ecology, limnology and more. Hopefully that will not be overwhelming, hopefully it will make sense, and hopefully it will help folks catch more fish!"

Bauer's enthusiasm for fishing, specifically in Nebraska, makes him one of the most enjoyable voices to hear throughout the state regarding this passion. At the end of his first blog, Bauer penned the following: "I wrote down something he [a friend of Bauer's] said during [a] conversation because he absolutely nailed it; his quote describes what I hope this blog will accomplish - "teaching problem-solving skills, not giving away the answers."

Readers of his blog might just walk away feeling like his problem-solving skills teach so much more than answer giving every could. ■



Buff-breasted Sandpipers

Shorebirds of the Uplands

Text by Joel Jorgensen

Photos by Jon Farrar

An unusual shorebird in that it spends little time on watery shorelines, the buff-breasted sandpiper has other unusual characteristics, such as the males strutting their stuff for females on display grounds. Most of the buff-breasted sandpiper population pauses each spring in the Rainwater Basin.

It's past midnight in the middle of May and I'm in stocking feet, standing alone in a recently planted York County cornfield. There are flashes of lightning on the western horizon and in my hand I'm holding the largest fish net sold by Cabela's. I know its six-foot metal handle is a lightening rod if the storm heads my way. I keep walking. There isn't another person around so I'm not likely to be asked to explain what I am doing. On the Discovery Channel, great adventures in wildlife research take place in the jungles of South America, Africa and Asia, or on the tundra above the Arctic Circle. Why would a wildlife biologist choose to wander around corn and soybean fields at night in central Nebraska and consider it an adventure? The answer – to catch a buff-breasted sandpiper, a migrant shorebird that briefly stops in Nebraska each spring.

Buff-breasted sandpipers, buffies for short, are shorebirds about the size of a robin that winter in southern South America and breed in the Arctic. They are long-distance migrants, with some birds traveling more than 18,000 miles in a single year. Even though the primary migration route of buff-breasted sandpipers is through the Great Plains, they are infrequently observed, in part because, unlike most other shorebirds, they are seldom found near water. In the 1970s, York County farmer and birder Lee Morris discovered large numbers of buffies in agricultural fields while planting corn. Morris farmed in the Rainwater Basin of south-central Nebraska, a flat landscape with numerous shallow, freshwater wetlands. Those wetlands are an annual stopover for millions of waterfowl and other migratory waterbirds. Buffies, though, occupy terrestrial habitats of short or sparse vegetation, such as heavily-grazed pastures and agricultural fields.

That buff-breasted sandpipers are shorebirds not found on shorelines is only one of their atypical characteristics. Similar to prairie-chickens and sharp-tailed grouse, the buff-breasted sandpiper is a true lekking species (leks are display grounds where groups of males display to attract females) – the only North American shorebird that has this mating system. Buffies engage in courtship displays and other social interactions during their stopover in the Rainwater Basin.

The “double-wing courtship embrace” is the male's

primary lek display, during which the male holds both wings outstretched and marches in place while tipping its bill upwards and making a barely audible *tik, tik, tik* sound. The undersides of a buff-breasted sandpiper's wings are satiny white, sharply contrasting with the bird's rich buff color. Occasionally males perform this display with no other birds in the vicinity, but usually it is initiated when another bird wanders close by. Females, sometimes two or three at a time, will stand in front of the male and be “embraced” by his outstretched wings.

The “single-wing flash” or “wing-up display” is also frequently observed during their stop in Nebraska. During this display a bird raises one wing in the air and waves it back and forth, a motion that from a distance looks like a white flag flashing in the wind. This display is most often given when other birds are flying in the vicinity, and appears to communicate where birds are congregating. Relative to most other shorebirds that have distinctive, loud calls, buffies are quiet, perhaps because their elaborate wing displays are a substitute for calls.

A Vagabond Existence

Buffies are present in significant numbers in Nebraska from about May 10 through May 23. By late-May, the number of buff-breasted sandpipers drops off rapidly as the birds continue their northward migration. Little is known of their route to the Arctic once they leave the Rainwater Basin. There are no known, key stopover sites in the Dakotas or prairie provinces during spring migration. Buff-breasted sandpipers reach their summer home on the Arctic coastal plains of northwestern Canada, Alaska, and possibly Siberia by early-June, where they have a very short time to mate, nest and raise young before the brief summer wanes.

Once on their nesting grounds, males establish leks

In a display called the “double-wing courtship embrace,” males spread their wings, tip their bill skyward while uttering a *tik, tik, tik* sound, and march in place.





Each captured bird is fitted with an aluminum identification band and color-coded plastic bands that allow researchers to identify individuals at a distance.

and display to attract females to mate. Males contribute nothing more than sperm to raising young. Females are tending nests in late-June. By mid-July chicks are emerging from eggs and adult males are already migrating southward. If chicks escape a host of Arctic predators, they fledge in a little less than three weeks and begin their passage south in August. By late-September and October, the buffies have returned to their wintering grounds.

During their autumn migration, buffies again pass through the Great Plains but their migration corridor is wider. Only

small numbers are observed in the Rainwater Basin during their southbound migration. From both a historical and contemporary standpoint this is not surprising, as appropriate habitat is limited in late-summer. Vegetation in the Rainwater Basin landscape, whether corn or prairie, is at its peak and is too tall to be attractive. Juveniles wander even wider, with a few being found on each coast almost every fall.

A Species in Peril

The buff-breasted sandpiper is a bird of conservation concern. The species never fully recovered from unregulated sport and market hunting in the late-1800s and early-1900s, and habitat destruction and the unregulated use of highly toxic pesticides may have also contributed to their decline. Because of their status, the fact that a large proportion of the

world's buffy population stops in the Rainwater Basin during migration assigns Nebraska an important role in contributing to their conservation. Migration stopover sites that shorebirds depend on are now recognized as crucial to sustaining populations. Changes in stopover habitat, such as the loss of a particular food resource, can negatively affect populations. The Rainwater Basin has been transformed over the past two centuries from a prairie plain where herds of wild grazing animals roamed to an agricultural powerhouse producing millions of bushels of corn and soybeans each year. In order

to find out how buff-breasted sandpipers are using today's Rainwater Basin landscape, and the role their Nebraska stopover plays in the species' annual cycle, avian biologists recognized the need to capture and track some by attaching leg bands and radio transmitters. Planning such a project is relatively easy, but carrying it out was another matter.

Commission nongame bird biologist Joel Jorgensen stalks through soybean and corn fields in the dark of night, occasionally turning on a spotlight to locate resting sandpipers and capturing them with a dip net.



Key anatomical measurements, such as wing length and weight, are taken of each captured bird. They are also outfitted with tiny radio transmitters that allow researchers to track them during their stopover in Nebraska.





The flat, intensively farmed land of York County seems an unlikely location to find shorebirds, but it is the preferred stopover for buff-breasted sandpipers. Before settlement they were probably drawn to grasslands closely cropped by bison and prairie dogs.

Elusive Study Subjects

So how do you catch a small, brown bird in the middle of a cornfield in the dark of night?

In short, it’s a systematic process that involves carrying a large fishing net, walking about 50 feet, briefly turning on a spotlight to sweep the field in search of birds, then repeating the process time and time again. Having put birds to bed after sunset increases the chances of finding them later, but actually catching the birds is difficult. Many factors can cause the effort to fail – for instance, if the birds are able to recognize the human form behind the light, either by sight or sound, they flush before a net can be dropped over them. Some nights the odds are stacked against you, such as a dead calm night with a full moon – it’s difficult to sneak up on birds when you’re throwing a shadow and every step results

in crackling crop stubble.

Other times conditions are favorable, but circumstances are wrong. For instance, while making a promising approach on a single buffy you might see another another bird close by but off to the side. Because it’s impossible to keep a direct light on both birds, usually one bird, both, or all birds close by flush.

All the buff-breasted sandpipers captured for this study were caught either by me or by John P. McCarty and L. LaReesa Wolfenbarger, professors at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) and co-researchers on the project. Once a buffy is caught, we carefully attach a small radio transmitter to feathers on its back. The transmitters we use for this study are small, weighing only tenths of an ounce, so they don’t impede flight or other activities. When the bird molts later in the year, the radio transmitter falls off.

We also place a metal identification band and a set of unique colored bands on each bird’s legs for identification, weigh it and measure key anatomical features such as wing length. After a bird is processed, we release it in the same field where it was captured. As many fields as possible are searched each night. If the number of birds found is encouraging, the search may go on until 3:30 in the morning. Other nights, birds may leave the fields after sundown and the search wraps up before midnight.

A night of catching birds finishes with a return to fields where a bird was radio-tagged earlier that evening. The radio receiver is turned on to check for a *click, click, click* as the transmitter sends its signal, indicating the bird is still in the field. The last known location of each bird is left on the voicemail of our technician, UNO student Jonas Grundman, who, at about the same time our night search

ends, gathers his gear and drives to the spot where the birds were last located. His task for the next several hours is to track the position and movements of the birds with a radio receiver.

What We Have Learned

The study began in 2004 and was funded with a State Wildlife Grant and support from the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Our initial work was to determine how many buffies stop in the Rainwater Basin during spring migration and what habitat they used. We genuinely did not know what our results would show us.

The first phase of the study revealed 20,000 to 40,000 buffies paused in the Rainwater Basin. Surprisingly, those numbers were larger than the estimated size of the entire population, suggesting previous estimates were too low and that nearly all of the world’s buff-breasted sandpipers stop in the Rainwater Basin during their spring migration. We also learned that buffies are five times more likely to be found in soybean stubble than corn stubble. They also seem attracted to fields recently worked by farm implements, perhaps explaining their attraction to cornfields, as corn is being planted during their time in Nebraska.

The second-phase of our research took place from 2006 through 2008 and was again funded by UNO and a State Wildlife Grant, as well as Wildlife Conservation Fund dollars. We caught 13, 7 and 10 buffies in 2006, 2007 and 2008, respectively. While the number of birds captured is small, the information we acquired from our work has been important.

Through our measurements of captured buffies we learned



Shorebirds other than buff-breasted sandpipers, such as American golden-plovers, also pause in spring on agricultural land.



When buff-breasted sandpipers first arrive in Nebraska and on hot, windy days during their stay, they often seek shallow pools of water where they drink, bathe (above), and preen.

they are fat when they arrive in the Rainwater Basin during spring migration. During most of the year, a male buffy weighs 1.9 to 2.3 ounces, but the average weight of the males we captured was 3.1 ounces. Stored fat is their migration fuel, so when buffies arrive in the Rainwater Basin they essentially have a full tank of gas. This tells us that birds do not need to gorge in Nebraska to continue their

northward migration. As these birds make their annual migration from southern South America, they are apparently “fattening up” somewhere south of the Rainwater Basin. Before we put our first transmitter on a bird, we assumed we would track individual birds for a few days from field to field and in the process gather information about how they used the landscape. We were surprised to find our birds did not remain in the area for any length of time: Radio-tagged birds usually left the Rainwater Basin in less than 24 hours. In 2007 and 2008, we rented an airplane to cover a larger area and locate radio signals with greater efficiency. Even then we confirmed birds were leaving after a short period of time. Although they do not linger long in the Rainwater Basin, our research shows buff-breasted sandpipers do feed in agricultural fields. Loosely organized flocks of 20 to 50, or occasionally a few hundred, are found together. They most often feed in the morning and are least active during midday. In late-afternoon or early evening, particularly on warm days, these upland shorebirds frequent spots of standing water to drink and bathe. Migrating birds typically seek water as soon as they arrive in Nebraska. After five to 10 minutes at the water’s edge the birds seem to be refreshed and engage in courtship displays. After as little as 30 minutes the buffies usually return to fields to feed or rest. We know buff-breasted sandpipers stop in agricultural fields in the Rainwater Basin today, but were they pausing there before European settlement transformed the landscape? While we lack any hard evidence, we are able to make some reasonable guesses. At one time, the Rainwater Basin was a



The presence of female buff-breasted sandpipers often elicit displays from males, even before the birds arrive on their Arctic nesting grounds. The bird in the back is doing the “wing-up display,” which is often used to attract birds flying by.

nearly flat region of prairie grasses. There were more wetlands than today, and areas disturbed by native ungulates such as bison. Those heavily-grazed patches were probably suitable stopover sites. Perhaps even more important were short-cropped prairie dog colonies that would have been present. Prairie fires, albeit unpredictable, may have also provided stopover habitat for buffies and other shorebirds. While the buffy is unique, other shorebirds also are found in agricultural fields: American golden-plovers and Baird’s sandpipers frequently are seen in the same fields. These two species have ranges and migrations similar to buff-breasted sandpipers. Historically, Eskimo curlews, now extinct, also accompanied this suite of upland shorebird species pausing in Nebraska. Early literature identifies the Rainwater Basin as an important stopover site for the curlew. Evidence suggests that the basin, a landscape defined by its shallow wetlands, was, and is, also an important stopover for birds that infrequently use wetlands.

Implications

If a species’ critical habitats or food resources vanish or are altered, that species is at risk. The future of migratory shorebirds can be threatened by habitat alteration or loss at critical stopover sites. This is true even though birds pause at a site for only a few days or weeks during their annual cycle. The Atlantic Coast population of a shorebird called the red knot is a classic example. This species has a migration and range similar to the buff-breasted sandpiper, but along the Atlantic Coast. Their key spring stopover is at Delaware Bay in New Jersey, where they feed on horseshoe crab eggs. The horseshoe crab population there has been devastated by unregulated hunting and overharvest. As a result, red knot numbers have declined precipitously and the population may become extinct within a decade. The scientific link between the decline of crabs and red knots is strong, underscoring the importance of stopover sites. Avoiding listing a species as threatened or endangered is in the interest of everyone. Recovering species is costly and not an effective, long-term strategy to maintain wildlife populations. Comprehensive action before a species has declined to the point of needing government protection is a more cost-effective and feasible long-term strategy. Only a few years ago, there was growing concern that buff-breasted sandpipers were edging closer to becoming listed as a threatened or endangered species. It was at that time that the question “Does anyone even know what a buff-breasted sandpiper is?” was raised at a Nebraska Game and Parks Commission meeting when funding for our initial research project was the topic. Even though it was rhetorical,



A seemingly headless male sandpiper displays for a nearby female. Buff-breasted sandpipers are considered “lek” birds, much like sharp-tailed grouse or prairie chickens, where males gather on traditional grounds and display to attract females.

it was a legitimate question – few people had ever heard of a buff-breasted sandpiper. Our ongoing research has contributed significantly to the conservation of this species. Based on our studies, the estimate of the world’s population has been revised upward and we have documented the importance of the Rainwater Basin during the species’ 18,000-mile annual journey. While our research identified no specific threats to the species, we also do not have a complete understanding of its relationship to agriculture. The buff-breasted sandpiper is still a species of conservation concern, but our research suggests that we do not have the elements for a scenario similar to the red knot’s at Delaware Bay. Oddly enough, most of our data about buff-breasted sandpipers came from wandering around a York County cornfield in the middle of the night in stocking feet with a spotlight and a giant fishing net. ■

Editor’s note: The researchers wish to acknowledge the cooperation of landowners who allowed access to their property for the study. John P. McCarty and L. LaReesa Wolfenbarger contributed to the writing of this article.

All My Life

Five-year-old Patrick Carpenter has been fishing since he could walk

Text and photos by Jeff Kurrus

It was a good sight to see as I drove out of Fremont Lakes State Recreation Area (SRA) – a grown man fishing with a young boy. But something was different here – the young boy was not fishing with a bobber and there was no Snoopy pole. He reeled his lure, a soft plastic worm, to the end of his rod and made a cast toward the bank, his lure landing inches from its edge. He slowly moved his hands up and down, bouncing the

worm along the bottom as he stared in its direction, readying for a hook set. It was not the typical behavior usually associated with a five-year-old.

Watching Patrick Carpenter and his grandfather, David, fish is pure delight. It is a combination of boy and man, but also of partner and partner. The duo fishes a number of lakes in eastern Nebraska and western Iowa, including Two Rivers SRA's trout lake, and various others for bluegill and

largemouth bass. "I like the bass fishing because it keeps him moving," said David. "It keeps him interested. Having a kid bored is the worst thing."

Patrick was rarely bored that day. An occasional rest to look in a tackle box was as close as he got, along with a glance of disdain when grandpa had a fish on and he didn't. "Is that a good one?" the boy asked as his grandfather pulled in a bass.

"Not bad."

"You took my spot," the five-year-old said. "I want to measure the fish."

"Okay," said David.

Patrick pulled the metal ruler from one of the bass boat's portals.

"Put his nose forward like I told you," said David.

"He's 14 and a half inches," Patrick said.



David Carpenter hooks a fish as grandson Patrick looks on.

"Okay, release him back into the lake."

Patrick did so, then wiped his hands on his pants and picked up his rod again.

"I have three kids and two grandkids," David said. "They've all been in the boat since they were two. When Patrick was little, he would fall asleep in the boat. When he woke up, he'd start fishing." As David spoke, Patrick alternated between casting, sitting, or staring at all the happenings around the lake – the family picnicking on the bank, the high, bright sun, and the local Canada geese flying by.

"Patrick, let's go over here," David said, obviously knowing when his fishing partner was being taken over by the five-year-old. "It's good to keep him moving," he said. "When we're out here, he'll also catch frogs. We'll put an artificial frog on his line and let him cast toward bullfrogs on the bank. If he catches one, he'll play with it in the livewell until we release it."

"I want to catch a turtle," Patrick called out.

"There's always something to do on the water," David said.

"I want to fish with the baitcaster," Patrick said.

"Okay," David said, "come here."

Patrick walked to his grandpa's end of the boat and accepted the baitcaster – a boy just a few years from diapers working with tackle many grown men have difficulties with.

"Cast it really slow," David said. "Remember, you have to hold your thumb on the spool. Press the button, hold your thumb on there, and take your thumb off when you cast it. Before it hits the water, put your thumb back on the spool."

Patrick battled between listening and just wanting to do it. "If you don't do that," David warned, "you'll have a mess."

Patrick cast and the lure went about 15 feet. He reeled in and cast again, with the lure landing close to the same spot. He continued to cast as David watched. "I've been working with him a little bit all the time. He gets frustrated because he can't cast it as far when the brake is tight."

David turned to Patrick. "We'll loosen it up a bit and it will go farther."

The youngster continued to cast, his attempts reflective of perhaps the best way to introduce kids to fishing. Watching a bobber is great, but keeping a child in motion by casting gives them one more activity to do in the boat.

"Hey, Patrick," David said, interrupting the boy's next attempt and pointing toward the bank. "Is that a lure in that tree over there?" he said.

"Where?" Patrick asked, no longer interested in fishing.

Grandpa pointed again, using the boat's trolling motor to move in the lure's direction. Arriving, grandpa helped Patrick cut the crankbait off the tree limb and then handed it to him. "You can add that to your tackle box," he said.

"Yippee," Patrick responded, a solitary word exemplifying how David Carpenter is introducing his grandson to fishing. ■



Five-year-old Patrick holds up grandpa's largemouth bass caught at Fremont Lakes SRA.



Patrick gets ready to heave a cast while bass fishing last summer.

Science Camps for Kids

at Wildcat Hills Nature Center

Text and photos by Bob Grier

“Tuesday the Badlands were awesome! We walked around the Badlands and discovered lots of bones lying around the site. The rocks were millions of years old. They were also real slippery, so you couldn’t step in some places without falling. They found the whole skeleton of an oreodont. Only the skull was showing. We learned about layered and pink rocks.”

— Journal entry, Danielle,
June 20, 2008

Young students interested in science have the opportunity to participate in hands-on learning and a rich variety of experiences and interactions with

researchers and scientists each June as part of the continuing series of High Plains Science Adventures offered to Panhandle sixth- through eight-grade students.

Sponsored by the National Park Service (including both nearby Scotts Bluff National Monument and Agate Fossil Beds National Monument) and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, these annual camps’ nearly weeklong activities are built around timely and interesting science-based topics.

In 2007, participants in the “Water, Water Everywhere” science camp looked at the continuing drought on the high plains, including everything from historical water uses in the North Platte River Valley to current water uses and conflicts. In last year’s “Paleontology, Can you Dig It?” science camp, students excavated and preserved 32- to 34-million-year-old fossils and traveled the recently established “Fossil Highway” (see sidebar on page 25) from the Wildcat Hills Nature Center northward to the famed Mammoth Site at Hot Springs, South Dakota, with stops at Agate Fossil Beds National Monument and the University of Nebraska Trailside Museum at Fort Robinson.

The theme for this year’s camp, which will be held June 22-26, is “Buggin’ Out on the Prairie – Entomology and Botany of the Short Grass

Prairie,” during which students will examine the intricate relationship between insects and plants of the prairie.

“There are so many unique and rewarding opportunities built into the science camp activities each year,” said Anne James, naturalist at the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission’s Wildcat Hills Nature Center located south of Gering. “The five-day camps and the participation of paleontologists, meteorologists, hydrologists, entomologists, botanists, scientists and wildlife biologists, as well as the really diverse resource centers, parks, museums and educational facilities available here in western Nebraska, let camp organizers and sponsors create educational activities that are both fun, educational and memorable.”

The science camp activities are available to about 40 students each year, and each participant is sponsored by a regional science teacher for the students’ strong interest in the sciences. Camp organizers have a waiting list each year for enrollment.

“There are established state and national groups initiatives that fit well into the philosophy of each year’s camps,” said James, “including ‘Children and Nature in Our Parks,’ ‘No Child Left Inside,’ ‘Nebraska Prairie Partners’ and others. The goal is to get students outdoors learning about science and reconnecting with nature based on curriculum standards.”

During the 2007 “Water, Water Everywhere” camp, for example, student activities included studying high plains weather patterns through history, visiting the Farm And Ranch Museum to look at early irrigation development, “setting” irrigation tubes on supply canals, studying the relationship between surface and groundwater irrigation systems and water treatment plants, and conducting water quality studies on Nine Mile Creek east of Scottsbluff. Students also were able to fish with Commission-certified fishing instructors – for many students their first and only opportunity to go fishing.

The visit to Nine Mile Creek for the

water camp gave instructors from the North Platte Natural Resource District and the Nine Mile Creek Project, as well as Commission fisheries biologists, a chance to present diverse looks at one of western Nebraska’s best cold-water streams. Aquatic entomology studies of the creek, including netting and identifying macro-invertebrates, were conducted with the help of resource professionals, and landowners explained the stream’s history as a hand-dug irrigation spill canal that eventually became a perennial stream and important fishery through changes in the region’s groundwater table and the continued use of large, sand-bottom irrigation supply canals above the creek.

The importance of streamside habitat and controlling invasive plant species was also covered during the trip to Nine Mile: Students were told about projects to remove Russian olive trees and other invasive species, such as salt cedar, and helped plant trees such as cottonwood and ash which stabilize and protect fragile stream banks while

lowering stream water temperatures to trout-supporting levels.

Another portion of that year’s science camp involved a trip to Scotts Bluff National Monument, where historic images of the North Platte Valley revealed the early river valley without trees and other vegetation. Following a visit to the national monument’s museum, park rangers accompanied the group to the top of the bluff to view the present-day river valley, a scene dramatically different than that represented in the late-1800 images that the students had just seen.



Cooperatively developed, funded and operated, the Wildcat Hills Nature Center south of Gering in Scotts Bluff County is a museum, interpretive center and educational facility.



Science campers hike to University and Carnegie hills above the Niobrara River, site of Agate Fossil Bed National Monument’s famed bone beds of Miocene Era life from 20 million years ago.



Kim Ward of Mitchell adds to her journal entries during a visit to UN-L’s Trailside Museum at Fort Robinson State Park.



Small teams of students prepare to excavate 32- to 34-million-year-old fossils on private land in the North Platte River Valley. Tortoises, camel jaws and oreodont skulls were excavated, preserved in plaster and will be displayed at the Wildcat Hills Nature Center. Below, two camp participants takes water samples from Nine Mile Creek.

“Then we went to the Scotts Bluff Monument and we got to hike down it. During the hike, I learned it was made of sandstone, and when it gets touched it erodes away. I learned something about the Monument that I never knew before, I learned that there is a

layer of ash. I thought that was really cool, because I didn’t think that ash came into Nebraska.”

– Hayley, June 20, 2008.

Last year’s “Paleontology, Can You Dig It?” camp included significant firsts for the young science students, including the opportunity to find and excavate 32- to 34-million-year-old

fossils such as large tortoises, camel jaws, squirrel jaws, dung beetle balls and oreodont skulls (a prehistoric sheeplike animal).

The fossil discoveries, excavation and preservation steps were conducted with Shane Tucker,

Highway Salvage Paleontologist for the State Museum in Lincoln. All excavations were

conducted on private land with landowner permission, and the fossils that were found will be displayed at the Wildcat Hills Nature Center in the future.

“We found lots of turtle shells and we also found a camel jaw and an oreodont jaw that I found hidden in the soil. On Thursday, we hiked up to University and Carnegie Hill (at Agate Fossil Beds National Monument) and on Friday, we made shark tooth necklaces from real shark teeth.”

– Kelly, June 20, 2008

After unearthing the fossils and preserving the finds in plaster, the paleontology campers traveled to Agate Fossil Beds National Monument on the Niobrara River, where the group stayed overnight before traveling along the Fossil Highway. The monument’s museum was the perfect place to watch Ben Stiller’s recent movie “Night at the Museum.”

“Monday (today) I met my team, the Bear Dogs, at the Wildcat Hills Nature Center. They were Taylor, Britany, Keeley, Anne, Jessica (group leader) Stephanie, Tracie and Kim. We learned about where some fossils were found, like at highway constructions. It was presented by a paleontologist, Shane Tucker, and after dinner, we learned about GPS (Global Positioning System) and then we went to private property to excavate turtle fossils.”

– Shaylen, June 20, 2008

At UN-L’s Trailside Museum at Fort Robinson State Park, new displays featuring “Clash of the Titans” – the fossils of two interlocked mammoths found north of Crawford – were another highlight of the Fossil Highway before the group continued north to visit the Mammoth Site in Hot Springs, where it was able to learn from Dr. Larry Agenbroad, the site’s director and chief paleontologist.

“We geocached using a GPS, and talked to a guy named Ray (Ray Boice, one of the principal architects of the Fossil Highway) about two sabertooth tigers who died in battle stuck together.”

– Trent, June 20, 2008



The UN-L Trailside Museum at Fort Robinson State Park includes the “Clash of the Mammoths” display (background) that shows two Ice Age Columbian bull mammoths just as they were found and excavated – locked in combat more than 10,000 years ago. The full-sized mammoth in the foreground was also unearthed near Crawford.

“Each camp participant, either in a small group or individually keeps a journal or diary of each day’s activities and at the end of the camp the journals, photographs taken by the students, and other information is entered onto a science camp website (<http://class-rooms.esu13.org/hpsa/>) where students can discuss their experiences,” said James. “The journal entries can range from whimsical to highly imaginative mini-novels about subjects the young students learned about and found interesting.

“One of the catch phrases that we’ve utilized is the evolving ‘Citizen-Scientist’ concept – conducting scientific observations while working under the direction of a scientist. We conduct science education from a hand’s on perspective – discoveries that can shape lifelong attitudes about the importance of science and the natural world,” said James. “This annual events camp will hopefully spur an interest in science and some of our campers will hopefully

become scientists in the future. Service learning, where education is intricately connected to a community service project, is also a part of every camp we conduct. Grant funds from Learn and Serve America and the National Park Service, along with local donors, provide the majority of the funding for the camp.

“The 2009 camp, ‘Buggin’ Out on the Prairie,’ will generate plant and insect collections, prairie biodiversity studies and a section working with entomologists and range specialists as well as shortgrass prairie restoration at Scotts Bluff National Monument as a community service project; which all link directly to the local high plains and give the students a sense of place.” ■

For additional information on the High Plains Science Adventure camps, please contact Anne James at the Wildcat Hills Nature Center in Gering, Nebraska at (308-436-3777) or anne.james@nebraska.gov.

Fossil Freeway

Rather than a true roadway, “Fossil Freeway” refers to paleontology corridor that runs from the Wildcat Hills of Gering up to the Black Hills and Badlands of South Dakota.

Within this corridor lie world-class fossil finds and geologic wonders that offer a variety of attractive destinations for visitors with even a brief interest in science and history.

Some of the best places to visit within Nebraska’s borders include Chimney Rock, Scotts Bluff National Monument, Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area, the Trailside Museum at Fort Robinson State Park, Agate Fossil Beds National Monument, Toadstool Geologic Park and the Hudson-Meng Bison Bonebed.

It's EXPO Time!

Photos and text by Doug Carroll

Come join the fun at the 2009 Nebraska Outdoor Expo! This third annual expo will be held from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. on May 16 and promises to be bigger and better than ever at its new location – Fort Kearny State Recreation Area near Kearney. All activities at the expo are free to the public, and because it's being held on Free Fishing and Park Entry Day, Nebraska State Park Entry Permits are not required.

Designed for novice or experienced participants of all ages, some of the highlights of this expo include a fish cleaning and cooking clinic, camping displays, Nebraska history reenactments, kayaking, air rifles, a youth and adult shotgun shooting contest, turkey hunting and dog training seminars, a Kids Discovery Dome, a 3-D archery trail and many other displays and activities.

In addition, exhibitors will be on hand displaying and selling outdoor sports merchandise, and there will be a drawing for multiple half-price youth lifetime hunting, fishing and habitat permits. For more information regarding the expo, go online to www.NebraskaOutdoorsExpo.org.

See you out there!



Deanna Panwitz of Hastings shoots a dart gun as Nebraska Game and Parks Commission biologist Dustin Darveau watches.



Dustin Teichmeier of Merna studies a tank of fish.



Marie Mejia shows off her hat at the archery shoot.



McKenzie Cuba of Twin River Elementary takes part in a wildlife habitat demonstration.



Under the watchful eye of experienced boaters, Expo participants try their hands at kayaks and canoes.



NGPC's Lyle Huston instructs James Chamberlain of Kearney at a trapshoot station.



Jesse Gruber of Amherst proudly shows off the bluegill he caught – his first fish.



Commission biologist Brad Newcomb lets an Expo visitor hold a softshell turtle.

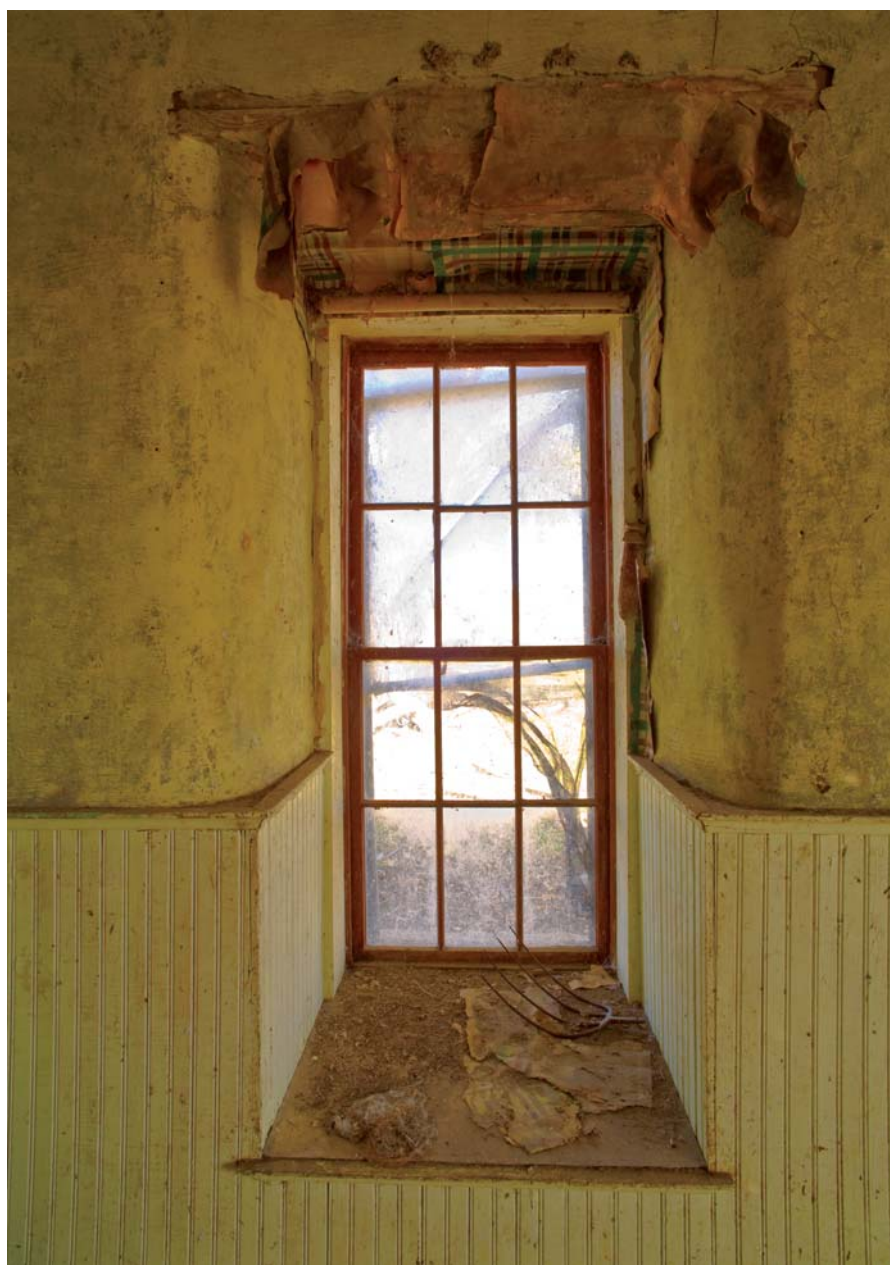
Old Spaces

Photos and text by Bob Grier

Sod, rock, logs and wood – the drier High Plains of western Nebraska is dotted with a few surviving homes of the first pioneers and the early farming and ranching settlers that followed. Many of the homes glow with a beautiful patina that time alone awards. A few still offer a glimpse of their early occupants and, not surprisingly, some of the era's solidly-built structures continue to shelter later generations of Nebraskans. But in the abandoned spaces there are spirits, beauty and even mystery to discover.



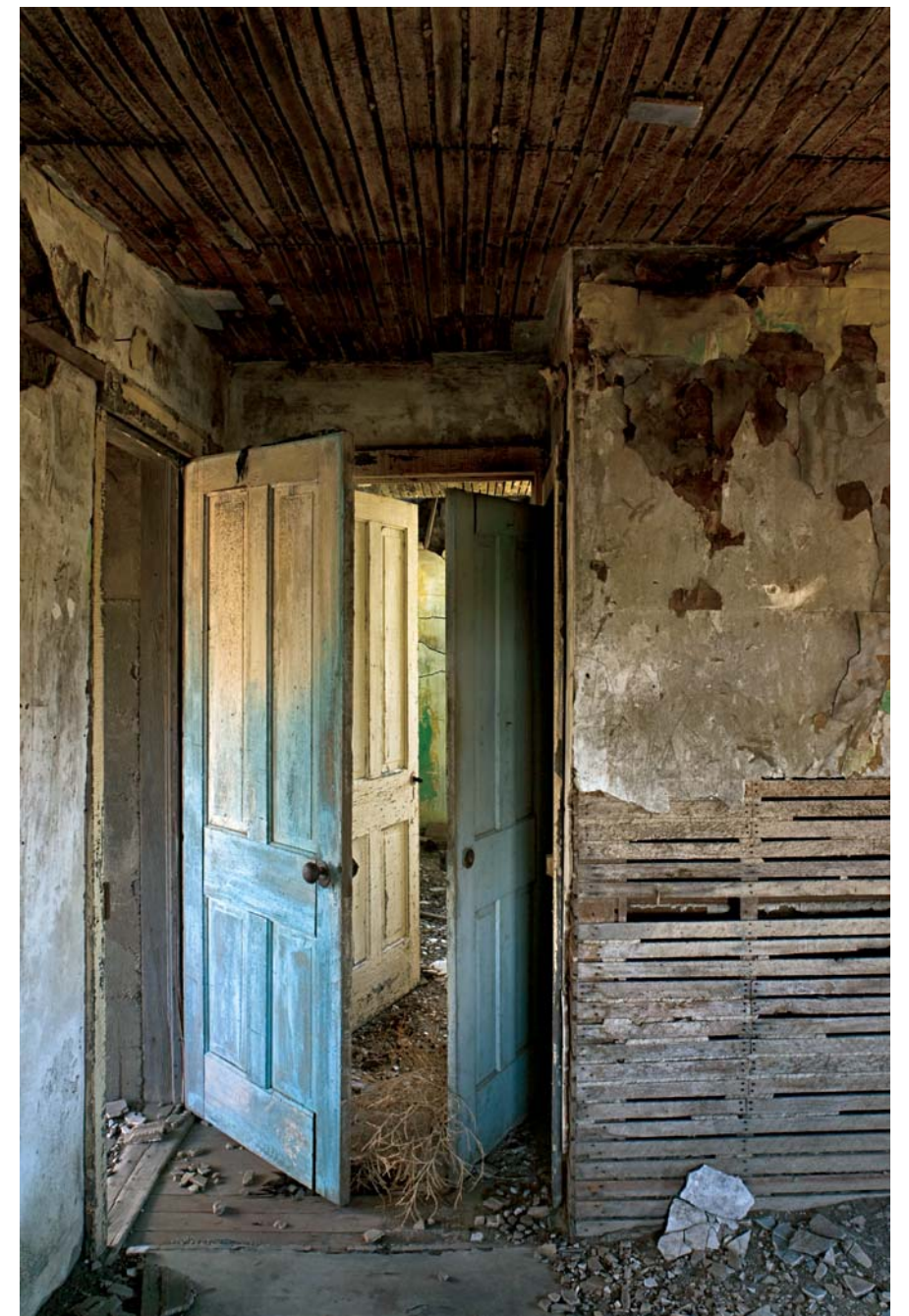
One of a beautiful two-story sod home's windows (below) glows with its builder's skill and its owner's pride. The building's thick sod walls were carefully carved and plastered, and hints of a more recent wallpaper and curtain still remain. The entire room, an entryway leading from the front door, includes a lovely white staircase with a built-in China cabinet and the detailed woodwork extends through a wide doorway into the home's spacious living room – large enough by pioneer standards to be a very welcoming room for community dances and family gatherings. The large room includes a collapsed sod wall on its east side as well, more than a hint of the inevitable fate shared by most abandoned soddies.



Rock and wood – A patient construction of local rock (above) and one of the original “pre-fabricated kit” homes sold by Sears, Roebuck and Co. between 1908 and 1940 (left) can be found on high ground above the North Platte River in the central Panhandle. The rock home includes a covered porch extending from the front wall to add living space and the home’s inhabitants painted that part of the wall a light turquoise color well ahead of the popularity of modern architecture’s “southwest” style. Sears offered 147 styles and sold between 70,000 to 75,000 of their kit homes that buyers were able to customize. Across the county road from this one stands another with exactly the same floor plan – it remains inhabited today.



“Three Doors” – An exterior blue door and two interior doors remain open as a welcoming or threatening gesture, depending on the visitor’s intent. County sheriff departments bemoan the vandalism to abandoned and empty spaces but, like the continuing impacts of weather and time, it is nearly impossible to prevent. This two-story sod house’s roof was removed by high winds this spring and the spirit and spirits found in this unique room will quickly, completely and perhaps more honorably, fade into history.



“Buffalo Sod” – An eroding sod wall (above) resembling a bison bull trapped within a wall of concrete blocks looks wistfully out the room’s only window. The decaying and collapsing roof will continue to allow the sod to weather and wither, promising the extinction of this patient and quiet bull. The “Little House on the Prairie” (left) is becoming smaller as its rock and concrete foundation splits and shifts and the home’s rooms continue to collapse.

*O*ften we quickly assume stewardship of treasured discoveries, such as this two-story sod house northwest of Alliance. The owner mentioned the house was his grandmother's – "We stopped our combines each year while harvesting wheat to handpick a few currents still growing around the house." I've photographed the soddie through the seasons, including the interior rooms ("Three Doors" shown on the previous page), and closeups of white rocks and clay used to chink the exterior sod walls over the years. Sadly, high winds in early March of this year removed the home's roof and the leaning sod walls will soon return to prairie. ■



Patch & Powder

Text and Photos
by Jeff Kurrus

On a turkey hunt last year near Beatrice, Lloyd Warren reaffirmed that just because a person has a great place to hunt doesn't necessarily mean that all hunts will end with a bird in hand.

Lloyd Warren from Beatrice walked to the blind in the dark, daylight delayed by a thick patch of clouds that had moved into the area. Yet he didn't need light to know there were turkeys in the area. The world echoed with gobbles.

He separated from his son, James,

who disappeared while Lloyd set two decoys near the blind, one in a cut beanfield and one on a lake dam. Gobbling persisted. One, two, three – at least four different birds sounded off from the patch of woods across from him. Lloyd reentered the blind.

"They'll come right out of those woods," he whispered, pointing to the patch the birds echoed from. "You can barely see it, but if a person wanted to kill one of those birds off of the roost, you could do it easily." Lloyd had set his blind more than three hundred yards away from where the turkeys had roosted. The first bird entered the field. Then the second. In moments at least 12 birds stood in the field, blue and red heads glowing in the dark. This was going to be an easy hunt. "I'm not going to call as long as they keep coming,"

Lloyd whispered. 150 yards, 120 yards, then 90 yards. Then a turn, changing the entire day in seconds.

"We might be able to head them off," Lloyd said when the birds, now failing to respond to his call, disappeared from sight. Within seconds, the 63-year old hunter and his double-barrel muzzleloader floated through the myriad of trees. He hiked up, over and through a number of valleys and draws, crouching throughout, staring to the north and anticipating a turkey sighting with each step, hoping for at least a few

minutes that he wouldn't see one until he got in proper position.

He moved from brush pile to brush pile, only pausing after seeing three deer on the far end of the field. "If those deer spook in the turkeys' direction, we're done," Lloyd said. The deer eased south as Lloyd set up on the edge of the last brush pile. "They will either go straight or cross the ditch and move this way." Lloyd waited. Then he saw the first turkey moving toward a fence line that divided his land from public walk-in land on the other side. One turkey after the other moved across his line of sight on the opposite ridge as Lloyd purred on his box call. Gobble. Again with the box call. Again a response.

Despite the replies, the turkeys continued heading away from him to the west. Except one. The tom eased his way down the hill, closing the distance to Lloyd's brush pile. All the tom had to do was cross the creek bottom, venture up to the top of the hill, and Lloyd would have his shot. He waited for several minutes, calling again but now not receiving a response. Finally, he topped the hill. The creek bottom was empty.

"Where did that turkey go?" he asked.

Minutes later he met James to compare notes. "I had birds around me all morning," James said. "I just couldn't get any close enough."

Lloyd shared his own story as they walked back to the truck for a midday snack. Passing by the blind where he had started the day, he looked down. "That's fresh," Lloyd said, eyeing a turkey track within 60 yards of the blind. "Had to be right after I left."

Over the next hour, father and son shared tailgate tablefare, the usual outdoor banter filling the air in front of fence post backrests. Then James stood up, searching for his set of binoculars and glassing the valley below. "There isn't a turkey down there," Lloyd told his son.

James sat back down. "Stick."

Ten minutes later, Lloyd jumped up, running to the truck for his own glasses. "Looks like a jake," he said, scanning the same valley. In seconds, the two were making their way back to their blinds.

It was an hour before Lloyd saw his first wildlife again from the blind – a mottle-colored deer that nearly knocked over one of his decoys as it ran in his direction. It was another hour before he saw another turkey, this time three gobblers making their way down a ridge behind his blind.

With each scratch across the slate, one of the gobblers responded. Then the birds disappeared into a creek bottom and once again failed to come out the other side. He moved again, this time near a small farm pond, and set up his blind for another half-hour before hearing James shoot, which prompted a cell phone call. "Ten- to 12-inch beard," Lloyd said, repeating his son's message. "Good job."

Thirty minutes later, with afternoon drawing ever shorter, Lloyd found himself once again easing out of a blind toward a group of birds that were failing to respond to his calling and were standing on the opposite side of one of the brush piles on an upper field.

The great thing about hunting is the plans first drawn in dirt and concocted with a series of points and head nods. This plan was much like many in the woods and, like all of them, was a good one. Lloyd was to make his way down a ravine, always



TOP: James poses with his turkey.
BOTTOM: Lloyd's blackpowder supplies.

keeping the group of five turkeys on the opposite side of the brush pile. His movements were then set in motion. He was quiet, calculated, but not aided by the sudden, momentary absence of a Nebraska wind, which ironically ceased its blowing for the purposes of his stalk.

"Hmm," Lloyd responded after he turned the corner of the brush pile and saw no turkeys. Then, giving him one last shot, a gobbler's head emerged from grass on the walk-in property. Lloyd, still hunkering

as he stalked, crossed over the fence and closed ground on the bird, which was 50 yards away from the fence's edge. Thirty more yards and Lloyd would have a shot. He topped

the hill, muzzleloader in ready position. But there were no turkeys. Lloyd paused. "Where did he go?" he asked. Five hundred yards away, entering into another patch of woods, ran five turkeys. Fifty yards had turned into nearly half a mile. On this day, "outmatched" was an understatement.

Lloyd then made his way back to James a half-hour before sunset, seeing his son's bird for the first time. He shook his head, swore friendly profanities, and smiled.

On the opening day of turkey season in Nebraska, a state which offers some of the nation's best turkey hunting opportunities, Lloyd Warren never fired the first shot even though there was a little more daylight left.

But as far as he was concerned, that was okay. "Look, we don't hunt birds going to roost," Lloyd said. "Sitting next to a roost right at sunset, that isn't hunting."

And with all the plans, all the stalks, and all the calling, how could one argue with his logic? ■

Lloyd Warren pauses during a stalk to use his slate call in an attempt to call in a turkey.

Family Fishing Night

by Doug Carroll

Last year the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's fisheries division held a series of "Family Fishing Night" events at several lakes in the Lincoln and Omaha area that were well received – hundreds of anglers young and old, novice and experienced alike, attended the events and had a great time catching fish and visiting with fisheries biologists and other anglers.



PHOTO BY DOUG CARROLL

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Director Rex Amack landed a whopper while helping at one of last year's events.



PHOTO BY DOUG CARROLL

"I have to clean the grass off so the fish can see my lure," said Dylan McCurley of Lincoln.



PHOTO BY DOUG CARROLL

Kaye Knight of Lincoln watches her line intently while fishing with granddaughter Chloe Nore.



PHOTO BY DOUG CARROLL

Family Fishing Night is just that – a night to get away from distractions in your life and enjoy quality time with loved ones.

This year the Commission's Youth Fishing Program will again be sponsoring these monthly events at some lakes in the Omaha and Lincoln areas. On these nights an Urban Fisheries trailer will be available so fisheries biologists can loan out fishing equipment and advice.



PHOTO BY DOUG CARROLL

Five-year-old Lily Jansen of Lincoln shows off a nice bluegill.

Fishing Schedule

The following is the list of Family Fishing Nights scheduled for 2009. See you out there!

• Omaha- May 20	Wehrspann Lake	6-8 pm
• Lincoln- May 27	Pawnee Lake	6-8 pm
• Omaha- June 2	Prairie View Lake	6-8 pm
• Lincoln- June 9	Holmes Lake	6-8 pm
• Papillion- June 17	Halleck Park Lake	6-8 pm
• Lincoln- June 24	Bowling Lake	6-8 pm
• Omaha- July 7	Zorinsky Lake	6-8 pm
• Lincoln- July 14	Holmes Lake	6-8 pm
• Omaha- July 22	Standing Bear Lake	6-8 pm
• Lincoln- July 29	Wildwood Lake	6-8 pm
• Papillion- Aug. 4	Walnut Creek Lake	6-8 pm
• Lincoln- Aug. 11	Holmes Lake	6-8 pm
• Omaha- Aug. 19	Wehrspann Lake	6-8 pm
• Lincoln- Aug. 26	Bowling Lake	6-8 pm
• Omaha- Sep. 1	Standing Bear Lake	5-7 pm
• Lincoln- Sep. 8	Holmes Lake	5-7 pm
• Papillion- Sep. 16	Halleck Park Lake	5-7 pm
• Lincoln- Sep. 23	Bowling Lake	5-7 pm



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Scott Bullinger holds up his son Jarrett's largemouth bass. Family fishing nights are a great way for families and friends to spend time together in a relaxing atmosphere.

PHOTO BY DOUG CARROLL



A father rebaits a hook as he and his family enjoy the last rays of sunlight on a gorgeous summer evening.

There is no cost to take part in these events, but anglers 16 years and older must have a valid 2009 fishing license. In addition to the fishing nights, the Commission is also sponsoring a Carp-O-Rama fishing event at Pawnee Lake just west of Lincoln on June 27. The event will be held from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. and features instruction on how to catch, clean and cook carp. ■



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

A simple worm and a bobber was all that was needed to bring a largemouth bass and smile to Mace Fowler.

Tackle Loaner Program

In addition to the Family Fishing Night events it puts on, the Commission also provides fishing equipment through a fishing tackle loaner program that is available at 16 Nebraska state park (SP) and state recreational areas (SRA) across the state. Easy-to-cast Zebco 33 rod-and-reel combos, hooks, bobbers, weights, other tackle and sometimes bait are available at no charge for park guests at these locations. While children are given priority to use this equipment, adult newcomers are also encouraged to borrow the tackle and give fishing a try at the following public areas:

- Alexandria SRA (Jefferson County)
- Branched Oak SRA - Area 1 and 4 campgrounds (Lancaster County)
- Calamus Reservoir SRA (Garfield County)
- Chadron SP (Dawes County)
- Dead Timber SRA (Dodge County)
- Fort Kearny SRA (Kearney County)
- Fort Robinson SP (Sioux County)
- Fremont SRA (Dodge County)
- Lake McConaughy SRA (Keith County)
- Lewis and Clark SRA (Knox County)
- Louisville SRA (Cass County)
- Mahoney SP (Sarpy County)
- Medicine Creek Reservoir SRA (Frontier County)
- Pawnee SRA (Lancaster County)
- Platte River SP (Cass County)
- Ponca SP (Dixon County)
- Victoria Springs SRA (Custer County)
- Willow Creek SRA (Pierce County)

For more information on Family Fishing Nights and the Tackle Loaner Program, call Andrea Faas at (402) 332-3901 or go online to www.OutdoorNebraska.org.

New Antlerless Deer Season Set for October

By Eric Fowler

When asked to harvest more whitetail does – and given the tools to do so – in 2008, Nebraska deer hunters took home 32,387 antlerless deer, 9,700 more than in 2007.

While that met the statewide goal Nebraska Game and Parks Commission biologists had set when they crafted last year’s deer seasons, still not enough antlerless deer were harvested in the Blue Southeast, Elkhorn and Wahoo management units, where complaints of crop damage by deer are increasing.

So for 2009, biologists moved to Plan B, creating a special three-day antlerless season October 9-11 in Season Choice areas 18, the boundary for which has been redefined, and 21. Combined, those areas cover the eastern end of the state between South Sioux City and Kansas, as well as land within three miles of the banks of the Platte River east of Central City. An unlimited number of tags will be issued for this season, during which hunters can use firearms, muzzleloaders, bows or crossbows, and biologists hope another 3,500 antlerless deer will be harvested.

“That’s where most of our deer complaints are, so we do feel we have too many deer in those areas,” said Kit Hams, the Commission’s big game program manager.

Hams said that in looking at data from past Nebraska seasons, as well as harvest strategies used by states with even more whitetails than we have, at least 50 percent of the annual deer harvest must be does to maintain

population levels in our eastern deer units. To significantly reduce the herd, does must make up at least 60 percent of the harvest. In 2008, antlerless deer made up 52 to 55 percent of the harvest in the three units in question.

The Commission was liberal with antlerless permits last year, providing bonus antlerless tags with more permits than ever – nearly 86,000 in all – and lengthening antlerless seasons for some hunters. Biologists feared issuing bonus



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

tags would cut into permit sales, but sales actually increased to a record 131,392 permits, thanks in large part to the addition of nearly 6,000 deer hunters. Biologists weren’t sure how many people would want to harvest a second deer, considering that 70 percent of the state’s deer hunters only buy one permit each fall, so Hams was pleasantly surprised to see archery antlerless harvest increase

Top Unit? Wahoo!
Hunters in the Wahoo Unit harvested a combined 11,828 deer in all seasons in 2008. For comparison, the statewide deer harvest in 1963 was 10,999.

by 2,280, muzzleloader by 1,923, landowner by 1,628 and youth by 1,620.

While many of those bonus tags were filled in the Blue Southeast, Elkhorn and Wahoo units, which together accounted for almost half of the state’s antlerless harvest last year, biologists felt the new October season was the best next step to meet herd reduction goals in those units.

“If the deer complaints decline, that’s our measurement of true success,” Hams said. If that doesn’t happen, the next move may include restricting the number of either-sex permits available or reducing the price of antlerless permits.

“We need people to harvest more does in some areas, but we’ve avoided forcing people to do something they don’t really want to do,” Hams said. “What we’ve tried to do so far is create opportunity for people to harvest more does. If hunters are interested in a trophy deer, they should consider passing on yearling bucks and those smaller than ones they’ve shot before and help us out by shooting antlerless deer.”

For this year, the Commission authorized an additional 5,100 antlerless permits and more bonus tags for Season Choice areas, with increases coming in 12 of those 21 areas. In most cases, those changes are being made to increase doe harvest. In the Blue Northwest, Calamus East, Keya Paha,

Youth and Apprentice Hunting

About 1,200 youths were able to hunt deer in Nebraska for the first time in 2008 thanks to a new regulation that reduced the minimum age from 12 to 10.

Another 1,515 hunters obtained the new Apprentice Hunter

Education Exemption Certificate, allowing them to try hunting before passing a Hunter Education class. Forty percent of the certificates were issued to youths under age 18, including 193 to 12-year-olds.

The number of young women in

the field appears to be growing. Fourteen percent of deer hunters age 15 and under were females, compared to 8 percent of all hunters. Nineteen percent of the exemption certificates were issued to females.

Reversing the decline in the

Loup East and Loup West units, the additional Season Choice permits will offset reductions in either-sex permits for the November firearm season, which were made in order to increase the number of mature bucks in the herd.

That hasn’t been an issue in most corners of the state. As biologists set seasons to target whitetail does, it has taken pressure off bucks, allowing more of them to mature and grow into trophies. This in turn has allowed hunters to be selective and pass on young bucks. The net result last year was two-thirds of the whitetail bucks harvested in the state were age 2½ or older, another record and twice the percentage as 20 years ago. When there are more older bucks harvested, there are also more surviving the season that could reach trophy status.

Regulations designed to increase mule deer populations in some units, either by prohibiting the harvest of mule deer does or limiting buck harvest, are paying dividends. The 2,603 mulie does harvested in 2008 was 230 more than in 2007, yet was still the second lowest since 1982, and the mulie buck harvest was a record 9,113. Still, biologists are adding one more regulation to protect mule deer: Statewide Buck permit holders will not be allowed to harvest mulie bucks south of Interstate 80. This is expected to decrease mule deer buck harvest by 250 in the Frenchman, Platte and Republican units.

Some wondered whether a new regulation allowing the use of scopes in the statewide muzzleloader season would encourage more hunters to try the frontloading season. Instead, the number of muzzleloader permits sold dropped by 878 to 15,199, the lowest number in the past 10 years. Conversely, the regulation may have improved hunter success, as the number of bucks harvested increased by 93 to 2,956. ■

number of hunters and anglers is a priority for the Commission. “We’ve got to continue to attract new participants, whether they be adults or youth,” said Jeff Rawlinson, head of the Commission’s Hunter Education and Outreach programs.

2008 Deer Season Roundup

It's starting to sound trite, but it's true: Nebraska's deer hunters have never had it better. With more deer comes more opportunity to hunt them, and in 2008 it also led to record harvests in many categories. More records could fall this year. For details on the coming seasons, pick up a copy of the 2009 Nebraska Big Game Guide.



Records Set

Permits sold	up 2,100 to 131,386
Total deer harvest	up 12,000 to 80,467
Potential deer harvest, including bonus tags	217,252
Whitetail antlerless harvest	up 9,700 to 32,397
Whitetail buck harvest	up 1,700 to 36,235
Mule Deer Buck harvest	up 550 to 9,115
Non-resident permit sales	up 700 to 12,022

Hunter Profile

Total deer hunters	96,337
Hunters with one permit	68,511
Hunters with more than one permit	28,826
(number of permits they purchased)	62,881
Most permits for one hunter	27
Average permits per hunter	1.36
Average deer harvested per hunter	84
Female Deer Hunters	7,644
Youths age 10 and 11 who were able to hunt thanks to new minimum age	1,200
Hunters age 15 and under	8,457
Oldest deer hunter	Four at age 95

Harvest by Permit Type

(includes antlerless deer taken with bonus tags)

Type	Total Harvest	Percent Antlerless	Percent Mule Deer
Firearm	37,442	22	20
Landowner	7,637	37	15
Archery	7,440	41	3
Muzzleloader	6,946	57	16
Youth	5,654	41	18
Season Choice	14,710	100	5

Top Units

Whitetails

Antlerless, all seasons:

Wahoo, 6,544
Blue Southeast, 4,389
Elkhorn, 4,292

Total bucks, all seasons:

Wahoo, 5,284 (2,153 in November Firearm season)
Blue Southeast, 4,128
Elkhorn, 3,822

Percent of bucks age 2½ or older, November Firearm season:

Pine Ridge, 84
Sandhills, 82
Blue Southeast, 74
Plains, 74
Republican/Republican Whitetail, 74
Statewide Buck, 74

Mule Deer

Antlerless, all seasons:

Sandhills, 429
Pine Ridge, 417
Plains, 401

Total bucks, all seasons:

Sandhills, 1,498 (2,153 in November Firearm season)
Frenchman, 1,234
Pine Ridge, 999

Percent of bucks age 2½ or older, November Firearm season:

Sandhills, 87
Pine Ridge, 82
Plains, 81
Statewide Buck, 80
Keya Paha, 76
Calamus West, 71

Interview with Fishing Legend Hank Parker

A professional angler gives his tips for fishing Nebraska waters.

In February, radio/video producer Ralph Wall and fisheries biologist Daryl Bauer, both with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, interviewed nationally-known fishing legend Hank Parker during his recent trip to Nebraska. The following is an excerpt from that interview, originally broadcast the second week of February on stations across the state that carry the Commission's *Outdoor Nebraska* radio show.

DB – Hank, we were talking earlier that some of our best bass waters are smaller bodies of water, pits and ponds. Those are just our best bass habitats. You've got some good tips, some excellent tips, for fishing those smaller waters.

HP – About 70 percent of all the fishing that's done throughout this country is done in lakes of 10 acres or less, so there's a lot of farm pond fishing and a lot of lures that are designed to be very successful in small bodies of water. I have found personally that downsizing is a big thing – instead of using a big 6- or 8-inch crankbait, use a three-inch or even a two-inch. Go to a much smaller bait that displaces a lot less water. You know, when fish live in a small area, they're very familiar with their surroundings. When you go in there with a radical approach, you tend to intimidate more than you do entice them into hitting the lure, so I think downsizing is a big key – smaller line and smaller lures.

RW – Hank, I'm sure if something is not biting, you're just experimenting and going through everything in the old magic tackle box, but specifically, what do you like to start with when you're out there tossing?

HP – Well, you know, there are so many baits out there with rattles in them and they make these baits that have a lot of vibration, and that's primarily for off-colored water and aggressive fish and bigger bodies of water. I prefer when I'm fishing ponds



Hank Parker

PHOTO COURTESY WWW.HANKPARKER.COM

to use lures that do not rattle. I use smaller baits with smaller blades that displace less water. You know, a beetle spin – a little beetle spin – is probably one of the most productive all-around lures for catching bass in ponds of anything that I know of.

DB – You can almost always catch something on a beetle spin.

HP – People think: Well, you know, I'm bass fishing, I don't want to throw that – that's for panfish. Some of the biggest bass I know of caught – I know of a 13-6 that was caught in a little pond in South Carolina on a beetle spin. So I don't ever discard that beetle spin. I think that that's one of the best ways to start. Then I like soft plastics and smaller grubs, and little artificial crawfish are very deadly in ponds as well.

RW – A lot of people love walleye in this state. Anything there you would pass along?

HP – I've fished with some of the best walleye fishermen in the world, and I always get a thrill to watch how technical these guys are on little simple rigs, but probably the one walleye

story that has been the most favorite for me is there's a new technique in bass fishing that came from California called drop-shotting. Drop-shotting is not really new at all to walleye fishermen. I was doing a show with Gary Roach, who is known as Mr. Walleye – he's from Minnesota – but I was going to show him this drop-shotting technique, and I caught four or five fish on it. He caught four or five in the process. He showed me his rig, his little Lindy rig with a hook that was so similar to drop-shotting. So you can take a bass drop-shot rig, put a little two-inch Gulp minnow on it, and be very effective at walleye fishing just as if you were bass fishing.

DB – That's a good point. A lot of times, the anglers get zeroed in on this technique for this particular species, but a good technique can be adapted and work great for other species, too. Guys just don't experiment enough and try those things. So it's a good tip to keep in mind, especially in a place like Nebraska, where we've got so many different species, so many variety of waters – try some different things. You never know what's going to work.

HP – Yeah, I would highly recommend, on some of the reservoirs that have smallmouth and walleye alike and if you're fishing primarily for walleye, is to try that little drop-shot rig with that little two-inch Berkley Power smelt and you may end up catching a bonus smallmouth while you're catching your walleye. ■

To listen to the rest of the 15-minute interview, go to OutdoorNebraska.com and click on Fishing, where more information about Hank Parker and a link to the interview can be found.



A Woman's World

Male Wilson's phalaropes brood and rear young.

By Jon Farrar

There are three North American phalarope species. Red phalaropes have coastal migration routes and are rare in Nebraska. The migration routes of red-necked phalaropes are also along the east and west coasts, but they are regularly sighted in Nebraska in the spring. By far the most common of the three species in the interior are Wilson's phalaropes – small shorebirds migrating through the midcontinent twice a year. Some linger to nest in the north-central Sandhills lake country and the Panhandle, and during good-water years are known to nest in the Rainwater Basin.

Phalaropes favor, but are not restricted to, slightly alkaline wetlands. They are conspicuous because of their peculiar feeding behavior – kicking their legs and spinning rapidly like whirligigs in shallow water, often in groups, to lift small aquatic prey from the bottom. To facilitate this, their toes are lobed, an unusual anatomical feature among shorebirds. That characteristic is only the beginning of the Wilson's phalarope's exceptions to normal. If

there are bird species where females have equal rights, Wilson's phalaropes are surely the best example.

Unlike most bird species, female Wilson's phalaropes are larger than the males, and during the breeding season have a brighter, more striking plumage than do their more cryptically-colored mates. Polyandry is the phalarope's mating arrangement, meaning the female may have more than one mate during a breeding season. Courtship begins during the spring migration. In reverse of some other waterbirds, such as pintails, where several drakes pursue one hen in aerial courtship chases, up to 10 female phalaropes pursue one male attempting to win him as a mate. Once a pair bond



PHOTO BY JON FARRAR

Because male phalaropes incubate eggs in ground nests, their plumage is subdued.

is established, the female defends her male from the advances of other females. Other courtship displays are also initiated by the female.

Once on the breeding grounds, the pair bond is maintained only long enough – seven to 10 days – for a full clutch of eggs to be deposited in the nest. The nest, constructed by the male, is little more than a circular depression scraped into the surface of the ground and sparsely lined with grass if anything at all.

As if all this were not enough of a role reversal, once the eggs are laid, the female leaves and the male incubates and cares for the young hatchlings until they are self-sufficient. During the breeding season, males, not females, develop brood patches – featherless tracts on the breast so the adult's skin warms the eggs during incubation. Female phalaropes may court other males and occasionally lay a second clutch of eggs. Most females, though, because they have no parental responsibilities, begin their southward migration to wintering grounds on the Argentine pampas soon after the male begins incubation. Once the brood is self-sufficient the males migrate, and still later the young-of-the-year birds fly south.

For the phalaropes, it truly is a woman's world. ■



PHOTO BY JON FARRAR

The opposite of most birds, female phalaropes are larger and more brightly colored than the males.

Close Encounters with Humankind

Chance encounters with rattlesnakes and what to do if you get bitten.

By Bob Grier

Prairie rattlesnakes have their own way of managing close encounters of the human variety and it is surprising how few hunters, hikers, wildlife and landscape photographers, rock collectors and others that spend long periods of time in this snake's habitat have been bitten. I know of someone bitten twice in less

than two years, but fortunately the bites were "dry" – without venom – and were easily managed at the local hospital without complications.

Prairie rattlesnakes inhabit most of western Nebraska but even in the badlands of the northern Panhandle, a rattlesnake encounter is rare enough to be memorable. In nearly forty years of

climbing, hiking and photographing throughout Toadstool Park north of Crawford, I still haven't seen a rattlesnake within the area, and the very few that have made their presence known on the nearby grasslands and gumbo were either found on prairie dog towns or seen – dead or alive – on Sioux or Dawes county roads.

Not so for the section of land around Chimney Rock south of Bayard, one of the few areas where I expect to see prairie rattlers on every trip during the spring, summer and fall. One evening quite a few years ago the plan was to photograph Chimney Rock with a full moon rising in the eastern sky, requiring a mile or better hike from the parking area and trail head southeast of the famed spire and covering the same distance back to the vehicle after dark.

On the first leg of the hike, I stopped to photograph Chimney Rock from its base. This only took a minute or two, but turning to retrieve the camera bag lying on the ground I vaguely heard what a noise that sounded like a grasshopper taking flight. But there was something slightly off-key in the sound and a closer look revealed a

Move away from the snake to avoid a second strike, try to confirm the type of snake if it is still visible, and move slowly and calmly with as little exertion...

dust-colored rattlesnake lying in the well-worn trail less than two steps beyond the camera bag. The remainder of the planned hike was quickly terminated at the thought of re-crossing the same pasture in the dark.

Rarely have I heard prairie rattlers issue their buzzlike sound, and most of those times the cautionary rattling of the snake's unique tail was a well-taken warning that any closer movement wouldn't be wise or tolerated.

Prairie rattlesnakes are normally docile and lack any of the aggressiveness often seen when a television host gets down and dirty to let the videographer film a spitting cobra, a belligerent black mamba or one of the lesser known venomous snakes in Africa or Australia. The loudest buzzing I've ever encountered was certainly more aggravated than aggressive – two very lively prairie rattlers buzzing in a duet as they moved quickly to their den on the edge of Oregon Trail wagon wheel ruts southwest of Scottsbluff.

Scotts Bluff National Monument on the North Platte River, specifically the paved hiking trail to the summit, is another area where humans and

rattlesnakes often interact and snake bites are usually a yearly occurrence. It's not unusual to find a rattlesnake soaking up warmth from the black tar trail surface on a cool spring or summer evening while speed walkers out for exercise walk past in the dark, moving rapidly side-by-side on the narrow trail without flashlights.

It is not always the cool evening air of an early summer that brings snakes and people together. A good friend and hunting partner years ago laid down on a rocky slope just south of Toadstool Park to call coyotes on a chilly mid-December morning only to find himself eye-to-eye and a few feet from a not-so-dormant prairie rattlesnake.

Despite these stories, rattlesnake bites are actually rare, and the chances of them resulting in a human fatality are even rarer. While first-aid information is available in manuals and on the Internet, neither are usually available when needed.

Current first-aid recommendations for snakebite, given by medical and emergency-response practitioners in areas where rattlers are often encountered, requires no equipment or

training and can be distilled into a few common sense responses: Move away from the snake to avoid a second strike, try to confirm the type of snake if it is still visible, and move slowly, calmly and with as little exertion as possible to a vehicle and drive or ride to the nearest medical facility. If you're accompanying someone that has been bitten, take charge of the situation to keep the victim calm.

Most first-aid responders caution that snakebite treatments once believed to be helpful, possibly even necessary – including cutting and suction, applying tourniquets and ice packs – have proved to be ineffective and even dangerous. Fortunately there are few places in prairie rattlesnake country where medical facilities are not available within minutes, if not hours.

Don't let the threat of a chance encounter keep you from enjoying the outdoors. Simply avoid situations where a snake encounter is more likely, wear adequate footwear, including snake boots or chaps if necessary and practice preventive caution – just like most of the prairie rattlesnakes I've encountered over the years. ■



Despite their fearsome reputation, prairie rattlesnakes are actually quite beautiful and not nearly as deadly as some people have been led to believe.

PHOTO BY BOB GRIER



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▲ This is a photo of (left to right) my dad, Gene Stille, his three brothers – Jerry, Ben and Roy – and Ben's son, Steve. Jerry was home on leave from the Army, and Ben and his family were visiting from California. All four brothers were raised in Nebraska and loved to hunt and fish. Dad and Roy lived in Alliance all of their lives, and always fished and hunted in the area. I'm not sure, but I believe this photo was taken in 1943 or 1944.

– Joanne Morgan, Gering, Nebraska



▲ This picture was taken in 1944 in Crookston. My dad, Lester Jordan, was 49 years old and I, Dick Jordan, was eight. These farm horses were outfitted with insect blankets and their names were Prince and Duke. Our family farm was located about five miles from the Rosebud Indian Reservation on the South Dakota border.

– Dick Jordan, Albany, Oregon



◀ This is a photo of my father, George, mother, Rita, and myself, all of King Lake, proudly showing our deer taken near Crawford.

The photo was taken on the main street of Waterloo in 1960.

We hunted the ranches of Ben Ward and his brother-in-law, Roy Mansfield.

– Terry Holst, Valley, Nebraska



◀ This picture was taken on Thanksgiving in 1959. I was about 16 at the time and ran that old Ford all around the Wilcox area hunting for birds. I did have a little help, as my dad, Ron Sr., who was a rural mail carrier, would point me in the right direction. I shot these ducks with my new Winchester Model 12 pump at the Sacramento-Wilcox Game farm. Pictured with me is my cousin, Lynn Adam, who now farms in the Loomis area. I enjoyed hunting at the game farm and around Wilcox for many years.

– Ron Melbye, Waverly, Nebraska

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