



A green ash, tucked away at the base of the massive cliff at the Cliffs Picnic Area in the Nebraska National Forest southeast of Chadron, shows off its fall color. Photo by Eric Fowler.



NEBRASKAland Magazine

Published by the  
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

NebraskalandMagazine.com



\$4.95

Published by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission since 1926

# NEBRASKAland

October 2008

## Deer Hunting 101

Fall  
Color  
Nature's best  
palette

Who pays for  
the outdoors?

See Page 34

PLUS

- a DUCK HUNTING tradition
- TROUT FISHING with Warren
- Eat more PHEASANTS
- Leopard Lilies, Hobo Bats and Turpin Time



# NEBRASKAland

Volume 86, Number 8, October 2008

## FEATURES

### 12 Planting the Seed

Duck hunting is a fabric woven into their very existence that has bound these North Platte duck hunters as one with nature on frosty mornings as ducks cup wings over decoys. TEXT AND PHOTOS BY ROCKY HOFFMANN

### 18 Fall Color

From the trail, road, or even the air, this is Nebraska's autumn – the one time of the year that people might not think twice about gas prices, for there seems to be a new color ready to emerge from around every corner. TEXT BY JEFF KURRUS

### 24 Deer 101

Despite what you may have been led to believe, deer hunting with a rifle is not that hard. By following these basic steps there's an excellent chance almost anyone could harvest a deer this year, and there's never been a better time to take up deer hunting in this state. TEXT AND PHOTOS BY ERIC FOWLER

### 34 The Other Nebraska ... and its future

Last September I spent a few days hiking with Chadron resident Tom Scheimo and learned that the future of outdoor recreation is upon us. What I didn't learn was how it was all going to be paid for. TEXT AND PHOTOS BY JEFF KURRUS

### 42 Fly-Fishing with Warren

Fishing western Nebraska's streams, rivers and ponds is a personal passion for Warren Sedivy of Alliance, a certified fishing instructor and quiet ambassador for the sport of fly-fishing. TEXT AND PHOTOS BY BOB GRIER

## DEPARTMENTS

### 10 Mixed Bag

Leopard lilies, hobo bats, fall fishing and Turpin tips.

### 49 In the Kitchen

How to cook pheasants – the original free-range chicken.

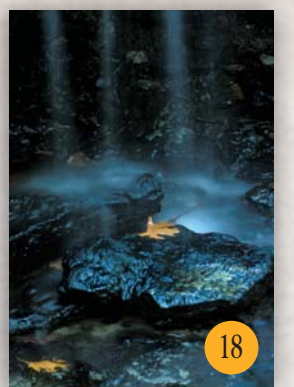
Comment . . . . . 4

Outdoor News . . . . . 6

Classifieds . . . . . 48

Portraits from the Past . . . . . 50

**Cover:** While chasing does during the rut, a white-tailed buck pauses at Indian Cave State Park in Richardson County. Fall is a great time of year to view and photograph deer, other wildlife and spectacular fall foliage at state parks across the state. Photo by Jeff Kurrus.  
**Opposite:** Surrounded by fall color in a Prairie Plains Resource Institute restoration site in Aurora, a katydid rests on a round-headed bushclover flower. Photo by Chris Helzer.



# NEBRASKAland Magazine



Published by the  
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Parks Commission**

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Editor: Doug Carroll

Associate Editor: Jeff Kurrus

Art Director: Tim Reigert

Senior Editor: Jon Farrar

Regional Editors:

Eric Fowler, Bob Grier, Rocky Hoffmann

Circulation: Donna Robinson

Photo Librarian: Sarah Johnson

Marketing/Advertising: Jane Gustafson

For advertising information e-mail  
advertising@ngpc.ne.gov  
or call (402) 471-5481

NEBRASKAland VOL. 86 / NO. 8  
ISSN: 0028-1964 OCTOBER 2008

Published monthly, except for Jan./Feb. and Aug./Sept.  
issues, by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, 2200  
N. 33rd St., Lincoln, NE. Copyright 2008, all rights reserved.  
Please address comments or questions to this address.

Periodicals postage paid at Lincoln, Nebraska, and other  
locations. POSTMASTER: Send all address changes to  
NEBRASKAland, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370.  
NEBRASKAland is available on audio cassette from the  
Nebraska Library Commission Talking Book and Braille  
Service, Suite 120, 1200 N St., Lincoln, NE 68508. (800)  
742-7691. NEBRASKAland Magazine and the Nebraska  
Game and Parks Commission reserve the right to reject  
any advertising not in keeping with the agency mission.

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

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

For address changes and questions about your  
subscription, e-mail [donna.robinson@ngpc.ne.gov](mailto:donna.robinson@ngpc.ne.gov).

## Comment



Wayne Cacek of Burchard sent in these before and after pictures of the “mercy mission” he undertook last spring to help a button buck in distress.



### Good Samaritan

As I was reading a *NEBRASKAland Magazine* earlier this year, I saw the picture of a little fawn that a landowner from Kearney had sent in and thought you might enjoy hearing about an experience I had last spring.

One Saturday morning in June my daughter called while she and her husband were traveling down the highway near Lewiston on their way to Branson. They had seen a deer hung up on a fence and were wondering if I could help it out, so I headed out on what I call a “mercy mission.”

Because I’ve hunted deer since back in the 1950s, I’ve had some encounters that have proved that deer can be dangerous, so I proceeded with caution when I came upon the situation.

It wasn’t an easy task, but I was finally able to get the deer out of the fence without cutting any wire or injuring him any further. He wasn’t cut up any, but his mobility was not the best, so after I freed him, I rolled him on his side, placed his hind legs under him properly so he could get his circulation back to normal, and tried to massage his hind quarters to help him a little. I even patted him on the head to see how alert he was, and he let me know that he was very alert. Ha!

I left him in some fairly tall grass to recuperate and came back to

check on him a few hours later. He wasn’t where I left him, but after I milled around and made a little racket, he popped his head up to see what was going on. He was about 250 yards from where I had left him. From there I let nature take over and went back home.

Hope you enjoy these before and after pictures I shot!

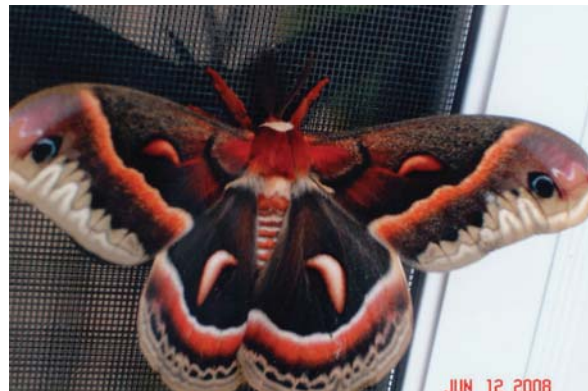
Wayne Cacek  
Burchard, Nebraska

### Big Moth

One morning we saw this insect sitting on our screen door. Its wingspan tip to tip was about three or four inches. My wife took this photo, but we didn’t know if it was a moth or some sort of butterfly. The next morning it was gone. We thought you or some of *NEBRASKAland*’s readers might be able to identify it.

William Eihausen  
Columbus, Nebraska

*Your visitor was a cecropia moth (Hyalophora cecropia), one of the largest moths found in North America. Although common in Nebraska, you don’t often see*



*cecropia moths since they only fly at night. Because the mouths of these moths are not developed, they cannot eat in the adult stage and live only long enough to mate and lay eggs.*

*Female cecropia moths can lay more than one hundred eggs, and the young caterpillars that hatch grow quickly and molt several times throughout the summer. By late summer, the now large caterpillars are ready to spin the cocoon where they will spend the winter before emerging as adult moths the following spring to begin the moth’s life-cycle again.*

- Editor

Statement of ownership and monthly circulation of  
**NEBRASKAland Magazine**  
Owner and publisher: Nebraska Game and  
Parks Commission  
Editor: Doug Carroll  
Headquarters of Publisher and Publication:  
2200 N. 33rd St., Lincoln, NE 68503  
Stockholders, Bondholders, Mortgage and  
Security Holders: None

|                                                       | Average number of copies<br>of each issue during<br>preceding 12 months | Single issue<br>nearest to<br>filing date |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| A. Total Copies Printed<br>(net press run) .....      | 30,643                                                                  | 33,002                                    |
| B. Paid Circulation .....                             |                                                                         |                                           |
| 1. Single-copy sales .....                            | 2,242                                                                   | 2,792                                     |
| 2. Mail subscriptions .....                           | 26,124                                                                  | 25,767                                    |
| C. Total Paid Circulation .....                       | 28,435                                                                  | 28,625                                    |
| D. Free Distribution .....                            |                                                                         |                                           |
| by Mail .....                                         | 4,362                                                                   | 1,972                                     |
| E. Free Distribution<br>Outside the Mail .....        | 344                                                                     | 344                                       |
| F. Total Free Distribution .....                      | 780                                                                     | 2,316                                     |
| G. Total Distribution .....                           | 29,215                                                                  | 30,941                                    |
| H. Copies Not Distributed .....                       | 1,4280                                                                  | 2,061                                     |
| I. Total .....                                        | 30,643                                                                  | 33,002                                    |
| J. Percent Paid and/or<br>Requested Circulation ..... | 97%                                                                     | 93%                                       |

Send your comments to:  
**Doug Carroll, Editor**  
**NEBRASKAland Magazine**  
**P.O. Box 30370**  
**Lincoln, NE 68503**  
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2200 N. 33rd Street  
Lincoln, NE 68503  
Phone (402) 471-0641

### District Office III

2201 N. 13th St.  
Norfolk, NE 68701  
Phone (402) 370-3374

### District Office VI

1617 First Ave.  
Kearney, NE 68847  
Phone (308) 865-5310

### District Office I

East Hwy. 2, Box 725  
Alliance, NE 69301  
Phone (308) 763-2940

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Rod Loos (Asst.) Ogallala (308) 284-8056  
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PHOTO BY SARAH ROBERTS

Sarah Roberts' photo of a male cardinal feeding its mate at the nest won the Wild and Scenic division of the 2008 Nebraska State Fair photography contest.

### Dwight Photographer Wins Wild and Scenic Competition

A photo of a pair of nesting cardinals won this year's Wild and Scenic division of the Nebraska State Fair photo contest. The winning photographer, Sarah Roberts of Dwight, said the picture was one of hundreds taken of the nest.

"My husband Ben and I were sitting in our backyard in May 2007 when we heard a cardinal singing. We started to look around for it and saw a female cardinal fly into a pine tree. We could see that she was hanging around the same area and soon realized that she was sitting on a nest. I set up a blind and over the next couple of days we watched her and the male feeding the babies. We got to observe a lot of interesting behavior that we had never seen before. The most amazing part was when we got to see the male cardinal feeding the female while she sat on the nest, and that's the picture I submitted to the state fair. I used a tripod and shot the picture with a Nikon D50 with a 300mm lens. I probably shot about 500 pictures of those cardinals, and that picture is my favorite that I have ever taken."

Sarah and her husband moved to Nebraska from Ohio in January 2007.

Because she wanted to have pictures of her new surrounding to send back to family in Ohio, the move rekindled her interest in photography, so she started buying photography books and magazines. She started off doing landscape photography, but soon discovered that her favorite subject turned out to be animals and birds. Now she and her husband have several bird feeders filled with various types of bird food in their backyard. To see more of her work, go to [www.RobertsCustomPhotography.com](http://www.RobertsCustomPhotography.com).

### Deer Exchange Program

A new program that begins this fall is intended to unite hunters with people who want to receive deer meat.

The Deer Exchange is a pilot program of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission that is designed to bring together hunters who have deer or deer meat that they are willing to give away and citizens who want to receive deer meat. There is no cost to enter the program, and no money may exchange hands between donors and recipients.

According to Kit Hams, big game program manager for the Commission, the program is designed to help increase the harvest of antlerless deer and to allow more people to

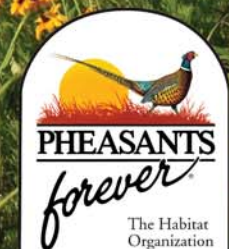
# NEBRASKA Pheasants Forever & Quail Forever EVENTS

### Nebraska Banquet Dates

| Date     | Chapter                  | Location      |
|----------|--------------------------|---------------|
| 09-11-08 | Dakota/Thurston PF       | S. Sioux City |
| 09-18-08 | Burt County PF           | Tekamah       |
| 09-18-08 | Kearney County PF        | Minden        |
| 09-20-08 | Platte River PF          | Lexington     |
| 09-26-08 | Upper Big Nemaha PF      | Tecumseh      |
| 09-27-08 | Cody Ringnecks PF        | North Platte  |
| 10-09-08 | Loup/Platte Ringnecks PF | Grand Island  |
| 10-16-08 | Husker Covey QF          | Lincoln       |
| 10-17-08 | Cass County PF           | Plattsmouth   |
| 10-18-08 | Oregon Trail PF          | Gering        |
| 10-24-08 | Four Seasons PF          | Deshler       |
| 10-25-08 | South Central NE PF      | Alma          |
| 11-08-08 | Webster County PF        | Red Cloud     |
| 11-14-08 | Nuckolls County PF       | Nelson        |
| 11-14-08 | Sandhills PF             | Ainsworth     |
| 11-29-08 | Niobrara Valley PF       | Atkinson      |

### Nebraska Youth Mentor Hunts

| Date     | Chapter                   | Location     |
|----------|---------------------------|--------------|
| 09-06-08 | Cody Ringnecks PF         | North Platte |
| 09-20-08 | Boone County PF           | Albion       |
| 09-20-08 | Douglas County - West PF  | Tekamah      |
| 09-20-08 | Washington County PF      | Blair        |
| 09-27-08 | Loup River PF             | Ord          |
| 09-27-08 | Loup/Platte Ringnecks PF  | Grand Island |
| 09-28-08 | Sandhills PF              | Ainsworth    |
| 10-04-08 | Dixon County PF           | Allen        |
| 10-04-08 | Golden Prairie PF         | Neligh       |
| 10-04-08 | Little Blue River PF      | Hastings     |
| 10-11-08 | Bazile Creek Ringnecks PF | Bloomfield   |
| 10-11-08 | Cornhusker PF             | Syracuse     |
| 10-11-08 | Dakota/Thurston County PF | Walt Hill    |
| 10-11-08 | Elkhorn Valley PF         | Norfolk      |
| 10-11-08 | Logan Creek PF            | Wayne        |
| 10-11-08 | Lower Elkhorn Valley PF   | West Point   |
| 10-11-08 | Ponca Creek Ringnecks PF  | Gross        |
| 10-11-08 | Republican Valley PF      | Arapahoe     |
| 10-11-08 | Southeast NE PF           | Beatrice     |
| 10-12-08 | Dodge County PF           | Fremont      |
| 10-12-08 | Niobrara Valley PF        | Atkinson     |
| 10-18-08 | Antelope Valley PF        | Oshkosh      |
| 10-18-08 | Burt County PF            | Tekamah      |
| 10-18-08 | Cass County PF            | Plattsmouth  |
| 10-18-08 | Corn County PF            | York         |
| 10-18-08 | Custer County PF          | Broken Bow   |
| 10-18-08 | Franklin County Covey QF  | Franklin     |
| 10-18-08 | Great Plains PF           | Holdrege     |
| 10-18-08 | Heartland PF              | Gretna       |
| 10-18-08 | Heritage PF               | Alliance     |
| 10-18-08 | High Plains PF            | Sidney       |
| 10-18-08 | Kearney County PF         | Minden       |
| 10-18-08 | Lincoln Creek PF          | Aurora       |
| 10-18-08 | Lower Platte PF           | Ashland      |
| 10-18-08 | Maple Creek PF            | Howells      |
| 10-18-08 | Mile High PF              | Kimball      |
| 10-18-08 | Prairie Hills PF          | Kearney      |
| 10-18-08 | Rock Creek PF             | Fairbury     |
| 10-18-08 | Saline County PF          | Crete        |
| 10-18-08 | Seward County PF          | Brainard     |
| 10-18-08 | Sherman County PF         | Loup City    |
| 10-18-08 | South Central NE PF       | Alma         |
| 10-18-08 | Southwestern NE PF        | Imperial     |
| 10-19-08 | Cedar River Ringnecks PF  | Greeley      |
| 11-02-08 | Nuckolls County PF        | Nelson       |
| 12-13-08 | Nemaha Valley PF          | Auburn       |



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enjoy healthy, nutritious venison.

"We really need to harvest more antlerless whitetail deer in some parts of the state in order to keep the deer population in check, but I've had numerous hunters tell me that that while they'd like to shoot more deer, they don't need any more meat. With this program, hunters will be able to enjoy more time in the field, help control the deer population and easily share the harvest," said Hams.

Program participants will be brought together via a database on the Commission's web site at [OutdoorNebraska.org](http://OutdoorNebraska.org). It's up to the donor and recipient to make arrangements for the transfer of deer, and the Commission is not responsible for the quality of the deer meat or the failure of either party to follow through with the transfer.

### New Recreation Area Open on Missouri River

Bow Creek Recreation Area, the first property acquired by the National Park Service on the Missouri National Recreational River in northeastern Nebraska, is now open near Wynot.

Located at the mouth of Bow

Creek, this 200-acre property includes approximately one mile of Missouri riverfront, three-fourths of a mile of Bow Creek, bottomland forest, grasslands and picturesque limestone and shale bluffs. The Park Service purchased a portion of the property in 2004 and the rest in 2008.

The area is open to hiking, hunting, fishing and primitive camping. No campfires are allowed and visitors are urged to practice Leave No Trace camping by packing out everything they pack in.

Waterfowl hunters on the area must remove blinds daily. Deer hunters can use a tree stand and leave it in place for the duration of the hunting season, but only one stand is allowed per hunter and must be marked with the hunter's name, address and phone number.

To reach the area from Wynot, follow 586 Avenue 2.2 miles north to 893 Road. Turn right and follow 893 Road and a trail road 1.6 miles to the parking lot. A portion of the property lies across Bow Creek and can be reached by boat or by wading the creek when water levels allow. The nearest Nebraska boat ramp is located two miles downstream at

Brooky Bottom Park. The Myron Grove boat ramp is located across the river in South Dakota.

For more information, contact the Park Service at (402) 667-2550.

### New Ponca SP Campsite

A mock Lewis and Clark encampment was recently completed at Ponca State Park in northeastern Nebraska and is now available for rent to organized groups such as scouts, churches and 4-H clubs.

Built on a remote stretch of the Missouri National Recreational River, this educational campsite features two large wall tents (officer's tents) along with 10 small wedge tents set up in an early 1800s military-style encampment. According to park superintendent Jeff Fields, the campsite offers the opportunity to sense and contemplate what a camp on the Missouri River might have been like in the early 1800s.

"Visitors can experience the sounds and smells of the Missouri River while camping, the same as Lewis and Clark experienced, while learning about our natural and cultural heritage," said Fields.

The riverside site is located on the

park's north addition. Water and restrooms are available on-site, and groups can reserve this campsite up to one year in advance from June through October. The fee is \$11 a night, plus \$1 a person after the initial eight people. Call the Ponca State Park office at (402) 755-2284 for reservations.

### Conservation Officer Awards

The Nebraska Conservation Officers Association (NCOA) recently announced their conservationist, judge and conservation officer of the year awards for 2008.

Scott Lickteig of Auburn, an advocate for trapping and wildlife conservation and an active member of the Nebraska Fur Harvesters Association, won the Conservationist of the Year award for his efforts on teaching youth about fur harvesting and his work with Sam Wilson, the furbearer manager for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

Judge Linda Caster Senff of the 5th Judicial District was named Judge of the Year, an award given to judges or prosecutors in the state who take wildlife crimes seriously when dealing with violators.

Conservation Officer Rick Seward of Ord was given the Loron Bunney Award. A 35-year veteran of the Commission, Seward was rewarded for his efforts in making Calamus Reservoir one of the safest, most law-abiding areas in the state, for the effort he puts out for his popular weekly radio show and for his diligence in seeing wildlife violators brought to justice.

### Hunter Ed Awards

Four volunteer Nebraska hunter education instructors were recently recognized for 30 or more years of service. Those honored were Kenneth Gill of Bloomfield, 31 years; Charles Mahler of Allen, 30 years; Robert Wollenberg of Gretna, 30 years; and Allan Zeitz of Norfolk, 31 years. ■

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PHOTO BY GERRY STEINAUER



## Leopard Lily

**Gerry Steinauer**

Several years ago I saw my first leopard lily (*Fritillaria atropurpurea*) while relaxing at the base of an eroded butte in the Wildcat Hills of Scotts Bluff County, only by chance glimpsing the brownish-purple flowers, mottled with white and yellow, hidden among the prairie grasses. It is likely that in my outdoor wanderings I had passed this well-camouflaged plant before without notice.

The leopard lily, also known as the spotted missionbell and chocolate lily, ranges from Oregon southward to California and east as far as Nebraska. In our state it has been found in four

Panhandle counties and in north-central Nebraska's Cherry County. It grows in ponderosa pine woodlands, rocky mixed-grass prairies and badlands, most often at the base of slopes and in low swales where moisture collects.

In Nebraska, the species is rare and most populations are small, ranging from just a few to less than 100 individuals. This past May, however, I was surprised to see thousands of these flowering plants on silty flats below badland buttes on The Nature Conservancy's Conata Basin Preserve in southwestern South Dakota.

Leopard lilies grow from a fleshy, white bulb and generally reach a height of about eight inches. The leaves are long and narrow, and from their base arise one to three long-stemmed, inch-wide flowers. The name, *Fritillaria*, is Latin for dice box and likely refers to the box-like shape or spotted pattern of the flowers. The flowers bloom in May and emit the pleasant odor of morel mushrooms.

Native Americans relished boiled leopard lily bulbs, although they are

poisonous if consumed in large quantities. The Lakota tribe also pulverized the plant into a salve and applied it to heal ulcerated swellings. In Chinese medicine, several species of *Fritillaria* are used to cure maladies, including cancer.

Finding leopard lilies takes a keen eye and may require a strenuous hike to reach suitable habitats. The effort, however, rewards the successful seeker with plants laden with beauty and history.

## Turpin Time

**Dick Turpin**

Some of you might think this topic is a little extreme but it's important. The hunting boot you hunt in should only be worn in the woods and I'll tell you why. You get up in the morning and go hunting and you get that boot on ... you stop and gas up the pickup ... you walk across that lot ... and it's got a lot of oil and scents on the ground ... different peoples' scents too ... you walk inside ... you get scents in there when you get your coffee ... your boots will gather it all up.

Then you walk in the woods ... a lot of those scents are there and those animals are going to detect you, so my advice is your hunting boots should be kept in some kind of container with maybe cedar boughs ... anything to keep it out of the main street of town.

## Hobo Bat

**Rocky Hoffmann**

In early August, Rick Speck, a Union Pacific Railroad electrician working on a locomotive in North Platte's Bailey Yards, found a mummified bat that he assumed

had dropped out of a narrow opening in the engine compartment. Upon closer inspection, the bat was found to have a wing band with the number A13416 and the letters KY F&W.

After contacting the Kentucky Fish and Wildlife (KY F&W), employees of the local Nebraska Game and Parks Commission office in North Platte were able to find out that an organization called Copperhead Environmental Consulting Incorporated had banded the bat in Bullitt County, Kentucky on May 29, 2007.

Mark Gumbert of Copperhead said that for the past four years the company has worked with the general public to study the bats of Bernheim Arboretum and Research Forest in north-central Kentucky. The project's primary purpose is to bring awareness of the importance of bats and their role in the environment to the general public and to identify the ecological niche of all species found at the site. Gumbert said these goals are being achieved with the help of a coalition of state and federal government agencies, consulting firms and interested individuals throughout Kentucky that have been brought together to participate in the research.

Gumbert said their programs are designed to give the general public hands-on experience with the techniques used for bat research and conservation. Participants receive lectures about different species found



An eastern red bat similar to this one was found dead in North Platte last year.

COURTESY COPPERHEAD ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTING, INC.

## "It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year"

**Daryl Bauer**

Most anglers eagerly await the first warm days of spring when they can shake off the winter's cabin fever and start the "fishing season." I fish year-round, but would have to say that I cannot wait until the day after Labor Day. Now that is an arbitrary date, but I believe it signifies the beginning of some of the best fishing of the year.

Many fish feed heavily in the fall. Winter brings "lean times" for all wild creatures, so fish try to store extra energy in the fall or "fatten up" to prepare. In addition, the development of eggs and milt for the upcoming spring's spawn begins in the fall and fish need extra energy for that development. The amount of prey consumed per day actually increases for some fish species during autumn. Couple this with prey populations that have been steadily depleted throughout the summer, and you have hungry fish with less to eat – that is a prescription for excellent fishing.

The need to build energy reserves makes it more likely that fish will feed on large prey items in the fall. Furthermore, prey fish will have grown to larger sizes by the time September rolls around. That makes fall one of the peak periods when anglers fishing big baits have an excellent chance to catch some of the biggest, fattest, fish of the year.

Water-based outdoor activity declines as soon as September arrives, and that is another reason fall is the best time to fish each year. With less watercraft and less competition from other anglers, autumn anglers seldom have to worry about fish being harvested or bothered. Fish settle into fall routines and are less likely to be spooked or harassed; they are more likely to stay in the same habitats and be caught on the same presentations over a period of days or even weeks. In a year when warm weather extends well into November, the most wonderful fishing of the year can extend clear up to the beginning of the holiday season at Thanksgiving.



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

in the area and their importance, and they are also involved in mist netting activities, including collecting field data on animals captured and taking part in their banding.

In addition, radio transmitters are placed on multiple species, which are then tracked the following day to their respective roosting locations. Descriptions of these roosts assist participants to key in on roost selection differences between various species.

Looking through the group's banding records, Gumbert was able to find out

that the adult male eastern red bat that arrived in North Platte via rail was the only bat captured on an exceptionally cold night. Gumbert said that there is a railroad track within a half mile of the banding site, and he believes that it is likely that the train hit the bat while it was feeding along the railroad right-of-way. Gumbert said it is common for red bats to collide with cars while chasing bugs, and because they are typically roost in foliage trees, it would be rare to find one roosting anywhere on a building, vehicle or train. ■

## Basins Look Ducky



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Kirkpatrick Basin North Wildlife Management Area near York has been dry for at least 10 years, but it was brimming with water in June and still had plenty in August. Duck hunters should find water throughout the Rainwater Basin wetlands this fall following a wet spring. "Some areas are dry or not as wet, so if duck hunters have a specific place they want to hunt, they should probably check it out ahead of time to make sure it's wet – but overall it's looking pretty good," said Randy Stutheit, a Nebraska Game and Parks Commission biologist stationed in Lincoln.

# Planting the Seed

Text and Photos by Rocky Hoffmann

Duck hunting is a fabric woven into their very existence that has bound these North Platte duck hunters as one with nature on frosty mornings as ducks cup wings over decoys.

It used to be so easy. The shotgun stood in the corner behind the pantry door, and was a fast grab on the way out. If Mom didn't happen to check behind the door or notice the gun was missing while sweeping the floor, she assumed we were sitting at our school desks – or at least we assumed she assumed that. Skipping school in those days was also easy and even predictable when the weather turned “fowl.” The teacher quickly learned who the hunters were in her classroom, and although we were counted absent, the mark against us always boiled down to an excused absence in the end. Making up days over the summer months for time missed during the fall duck flights simply didn't happen.

Probably the easiest part of all was finding a place to hunt, which in those days meant just about anywhere we so desired – the river didn't seem to belong to anybody, except to whoever got there first and marked out their territory. Sure, the land along the river was privately owned, but many landowners didn't really care if a couple of kids stuck up a few willows and froze their butts off all day for a bluebill or mallard. Besides, everybody knew everybody then. They also understood that whatever was shot from that willow blind was going to be taken home for supper, and that's probably why Mom allowed the gun to stand in the pantry corner in the first place.

Not so today. Instead, good river bottom or marsh is sacred territory that is sought out, purchased or leased at a significant price and defended fervently against intrusion. Simply being a kid with an old shotgun and a desire to hunt is no longer a ticket to do so. At

the very least, trespassing now results in a sound scolding, and more commonly the local game warden is called in to officially communicate the landowner's sentiments.

Larry and Patricia Golden of North Platte own one of those highly prized duck spots. Consisting of marshland nestled between the North Platte and South Platte rivers, the Golden Points Ranch is a duck and goose hunter's paradise developed by the Golden family primarily for that purpose. Larry and Pat's children grew up there, kicking around barefoot in the river sand in the summer and breaking holes in the ice for mallards in late winter. Son Bernie and grandson Hadley are chasing that

heritage into a third generation.

Both Larry and Bernie recognize how extremely important duck hunting has been to them. It is more than something they do on a Saturday morning. Duck hunting is a fabric woven into their very existence that has bound them as one with nature on a frosty sunrise when a flock cups wings over a few decoys. The Golden family also recognizes the importance of introducing this tradition to youngsters

who may otherwise never get the opportunity to experience such earthy things as the smell of a freshly fired shotgun shell, the sound of geese approaching in predawn darkness, the numbing ache of toes in a leaky boot and the pungent odor of marsh gas mingling with the rich aroma of deer loin frying in butter on an iron skillet.

Most frequent in attendance at the Golden school of duck and goose hunting are Hadley's early teen chums, Kaelin Becker and Ross Rasmussen. Partners all, preparation for the fall hunt begins early at the “Points,” with the gang of five pouring sweat onto blisters during the late summer task of covering the group's four blinds they usually set up – two on the North Platte River and two on a backwater marsh to cover all possible temperature, wind direction, snow and last minute hunting guest situations.

Finding appropriate blind cover is no longer a problem along the once barren Platte River drainages: Phragmites has invaded every square foot of sandbar and every linear foot of riverbank near the confluence of the North and South Platte rivers. This exotic grass, which threatens a hostile takeover of the entire river system from border to border, is nearly the sole vegetative species in this area, so in order to hide a blind in its “natural” surroundings, hunters cover their blinds with it. Although no further damage to the ecosystem can occur by using phragmites for blind cover in areas where it already exists, a real danger arises if hunters transport it to cover blinds on lakes or streams that are currently safe from the invasion. The introduction of phragmites into Sandhills lakes, for example, could be devastating to that ecosystem, and hunters are strongly advised not to



His hammer gun at the ready, Larry Golden watches the sky from his solitary blind across the river from the boys' blind.



Blind building is group effort that usually takes place in the heat of late summer.



Left to right, Ross Rasmussen, Kaelin Becker and Hadley Golden display the bounty of the summer labor alongside of Mac, a yellow Labrador.

cover boat blinds or other trailer-pulled blinds with this invasive plant.

Something good to say about the plant is that it makes excellent blind cover because it is so durable and abundant. On a sweltering day last summer, Hadley, Kaelin and Ross gathered armloads of the tall exotic grass as Bernie separated it from its roots with a harness-supported “weed whacker.” Bernie replaced the steel cutting blade with a plastic substitute as a safety precaution for working in tight quarters.

“The plastic blade is strong enough to raise a welt and a whine, but that’s about the extent of the damage it can cause through a set of waders. It makes quick work out of cutting a boatload of blind cover, and we exercise a lot of caution around the guy running the cutter. Who wants to ruin a pair of waders?” chuckled Bernie.

Larry has promoted himself to the role of advisor during these projects and is good at what he does. In fact,

the boys agree that advice is one thing he is never short on.

“Pick a subject, and he’s got advice,” Hadley said of his grandpa. “The problem is sorting out what is serious advice and what is just thrown out there when he’s messing with us.”

Hadley, Kaelin and Ross often hunt out of one of the river blinds while Larry sits in another blind on the opposite side of the channel. Although there is considerable distance between the two blinds, the boys usually have no difficulty hearing the ongoing commentary coming from the elder Golden. If the ducks are flying, comments concern calling and shooting, whether the boys waited too long to shoot or took them too soon, dog work, staying hidden, decoys, and duck identification. When the ducks aren’t flying, topics are many, varied and shy away from very little. This is when most of the sorting of good advice and not so good advice is important, especially when girlfriends and dating

are part of Larry’s list of discussion items for the day.

One discussion item that the boys always pay attention to, however, is that of safety. Larry and Bernie have made sure that their young hunters fully appreciate that gun safety is their number one responsibility and priority. Guns are carried empty to the blind and are loaded and unloaded with the muzzles safely out of the standup holes. Safeties are checked between flocks and all hunters recognize their personal zones of fire.

“A safe hunt is always a successful hunt,” said Larry as he reminded the boys to unload their guns at the end of one day’s hunt. “They don’t need reminded anymore, of course – I just can’t help myself.”

Larry continued on the subject of safety. “Dogs can be a real concern in a blind full of hunters and guns. Even a well-handled dog can knock a gun over. We’ve just made it a practice not to allow dogs in our blinds.”

Actually, there wouldn’t be much room left for hunters or guns if Bernie’s Labrador and Larry’s Chesapeake were allowed in the blind. Mac is a tall, big-boned yellow Labrador that Bernie picked up for a little bit of nothing and truly loves to hunt, so much so that he sometimes gives voice on the way to a retrieve. His long legs allow him to cover a lot of shallow river water and soft sandbars in a short amount of time. “I can’t recall ever losing a bird over that \$50 dog,” Bernie said. “He’s simply been tremendous.”

Hunter is a huge Chesapeake. “Hunter weighs in at 141 pounds and is gaining,” said Larry. “He’s a marsh mudder, and they haven’t grown a goose too big for him yet.”

Because they’re not welcome in the hunting blinds, the retrievers have their own. In the marsh the dog kennels are on posts above the water level and are also covered with phragmites. The dogs use ramps to enter their kennels, but rarely use them when sent for a retrieve. Although camouflaged from the duck’s eye view, the dogs are able to visually mark most downed birds in front of them and sniff out those that fall in the cattails and phragmites behind them.

Although Mac is Bernie’s dog, Bernie’s job as a railroad engineer keeps him out of the hunt once in a while, and Hadley has learned to handle Mac quite well on his own. All three youngsters realize how important it is to hunt with a trained retriever in this type of an environment where birds could be lost easily. They also have come to cherish the simple enjoyment of hunting with a dog regardless of the situation.

Even if the safety issue of having a dog in the blind could be solved, the issue of begging for blind food would likely result in a pooch’s ejection.



Hadley (front) and Kaelin watch a distant flock of mallards.

When a sharp wind is blowing, it takes a lot of food to stoke the stomachs of three teenage boys from sunrise to sunset, and competition for that food with a slobbering dog would meet some resistance. There is rarely a shortage in the food pantry at a Golden blind, however, and the propane is more often flowing to the griddle than to the heater.

“In days past, we’d fry up a pan full of bacon and eggs, then throw in a stick of butter, flour up some deer steaks and fry them up as well for breakfast.



Kaelin and Hadley gather ducks collected on Hunter's front porch.

Somewhere in mid-January we'd begin trying to restore our cholesterol to more normal levels." Larry said. "Now the boys' moms make up a batch of breakfast burritos, making sure to put in a few healthy ingredients while excluding some of the unhealthy stuff. Actually they are pretty good – easy to heat up and there's not much cleanup involved," he said, before quickly adding, "We still have our deer steaks later in the day."

Larry and Bernie love old double-barreled guns, and Larry especially enjoys collecting and shooting side-by-sides. Hadley hunts with an over-and-under and Kaelin has gone to the more

traditional side-by-side, but Ross still shucks shells from his pump-action single barrel. Pump guns, unlike autoloaders, are "allowed" at Golden's blinds because of their long tradition in waterfowl gunning. Larry, however, keeps the propaganda flowing in an effort to convert Ross to the world of side-by-side shooting. "I think he's weakening," Larry said after an exhaustive filibuster on the enjoyment of shooting a good double gun.

Larry shoots a selection of side-by-sides, including some shotguns with Damascus barrels in which he uses light, hand-loaded steel shot and black powder. "Damascus has gotten a bad

rap in many instances. In fact, the welded iron and steel ribbons that form a Damascus barrel are not only patterned beautifully into the barrel, but they can make a fairly strong barrel as well. Still, only an experienced gunsmith can make proper recommendations for the loads that antique guns can handle," said Larry.

Bernie recalled an incident that occurred early last season when he was out of the blind setting up the floating goose decoys from a boat. "Of course, Dad was advising from the blind when a long string of Hutchies came up the river and headed toward the decoys. They flew right over the spread. Dad picked up his old 16-gauge L.C. Smith,

thumbed back the hammers, and in a matter-of-fact motion, dropped two geese stone dead. We heard about that for a while."

The youngsters, too, are fairly efficient wing shooters, and get a little bit better with each flock. Every duck and goose at which they shoot produces a different angle, speed and distance for them to enter into their memory banks. The boys feel that they learn more from the shots they make than from the ones they miss.

"When I cleanly miss a bird, I'm never really certain where my pattern was, so it's difficult to correct, but when I hit a bird, I know exactly where my pattern was and how I put it there. Just do it

the same way each time – that's the trick," said Kaelin.

Hadley agreed, adding, "It's also more fun to learn from hitting than from missing, because we tend to poke a little fun when somebody misses. Trash talk works both ways sometimes, and a guy had better learn to take a little ribbing around here."

Ross interjected some self-defense for having the only pump gun in the purist double-barrel world in which he hunts. "When they miss twice, they watch the flock fly away. When I miss twice, I still have a third shell with which to redeem

myself. I'd better not miss with that one."

The hunting experiences at the Points are truly memories in the making for Hadley, Kaelin and Ross. Larry and Bernie will capture some memories as well, but it will be the youngsters who will smell, taste, see and hear for the rest of their lives every moment of every first light, every flock, every retrieve and every burrito. Larry has planted the seed, like his dad and granddad did with him and like Bernie is doing now. It will be up to Hadley, Kaelin and Ross to pass it on, and that gets a little more difficult each season. ■



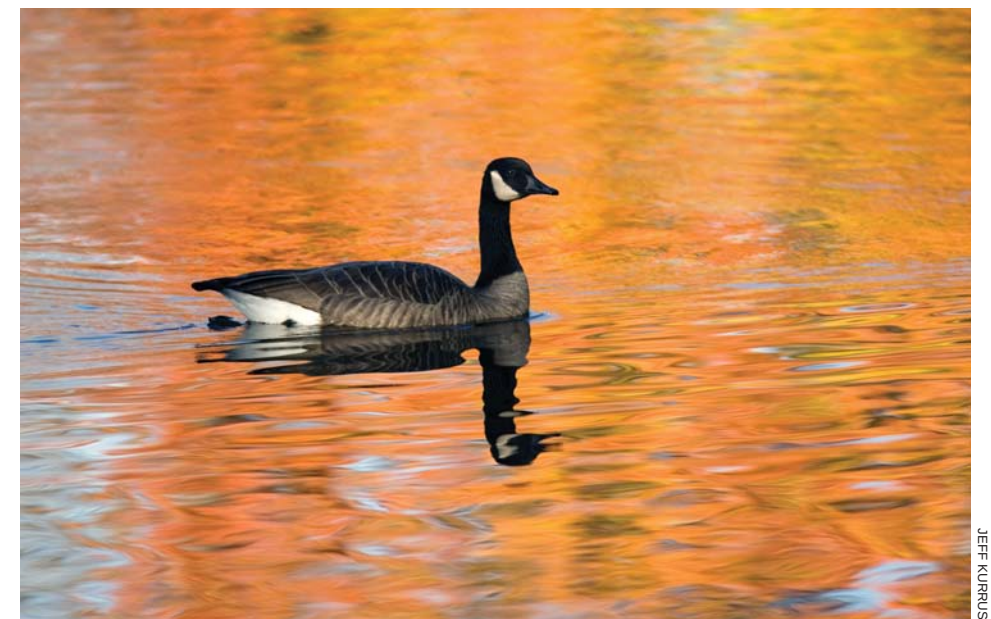
The North Platte River has provided hundreds of hunting memories for generations of the Golden family and their friends.

# Fall Color

## Nature's best palette

By Jeff Kurrus

*From the trail, road, or even the air, this is Nebraska's autumn. It's the remnants of a once hot summer, as well as a reminder of the impending winter to come, the time for early morning hikes when a light jacket and wristwatch are needed – one for the lowering temperature, the other for the afternoon Husker game. It's the time of year when hunters can't sleep, and anglers wait impatiently for good ice, the one time of the year that people might not think twice about gas prices, for there seems to be a new color ready to emerge from around every corner.*



JEFF KURRUS

*Above: A Canada goose swims across one of the old fish hatchery ponds at Schramm Park State Recreation Area as autumn's colors reflect off the water's surface. Left: The red leaves of a northern oak tree shine at Fontenelle Forest's Neale Woods Nature Center in north Omaha.*

JEFF KURRUS



JEFF KURBUS



ERIC FOWLER

*Above left: Sunrise at Stagecoach State Recreation Area near Hickman fills the sky with pink clouds.*

*Left: Freshly fallen leaves add color to the misty blue palette found at the base of the Stone Creek waterfall at Platte River State Park.*

*Above right: Frenchman Creek winds its way through golden ash trees and sandsage prairie on Enders Wildlife Management Area near Imperial.*

*Right: In the midst of changing from green to red in late-September, sumac leaves, one of the first color cues of fall, seem to glow on a rainy day at the Bessey Ranger District of the Nebraska National Forest near Halsey.*



DOUG CARROLL



ERIC FOWLER



ERIC FOWLER



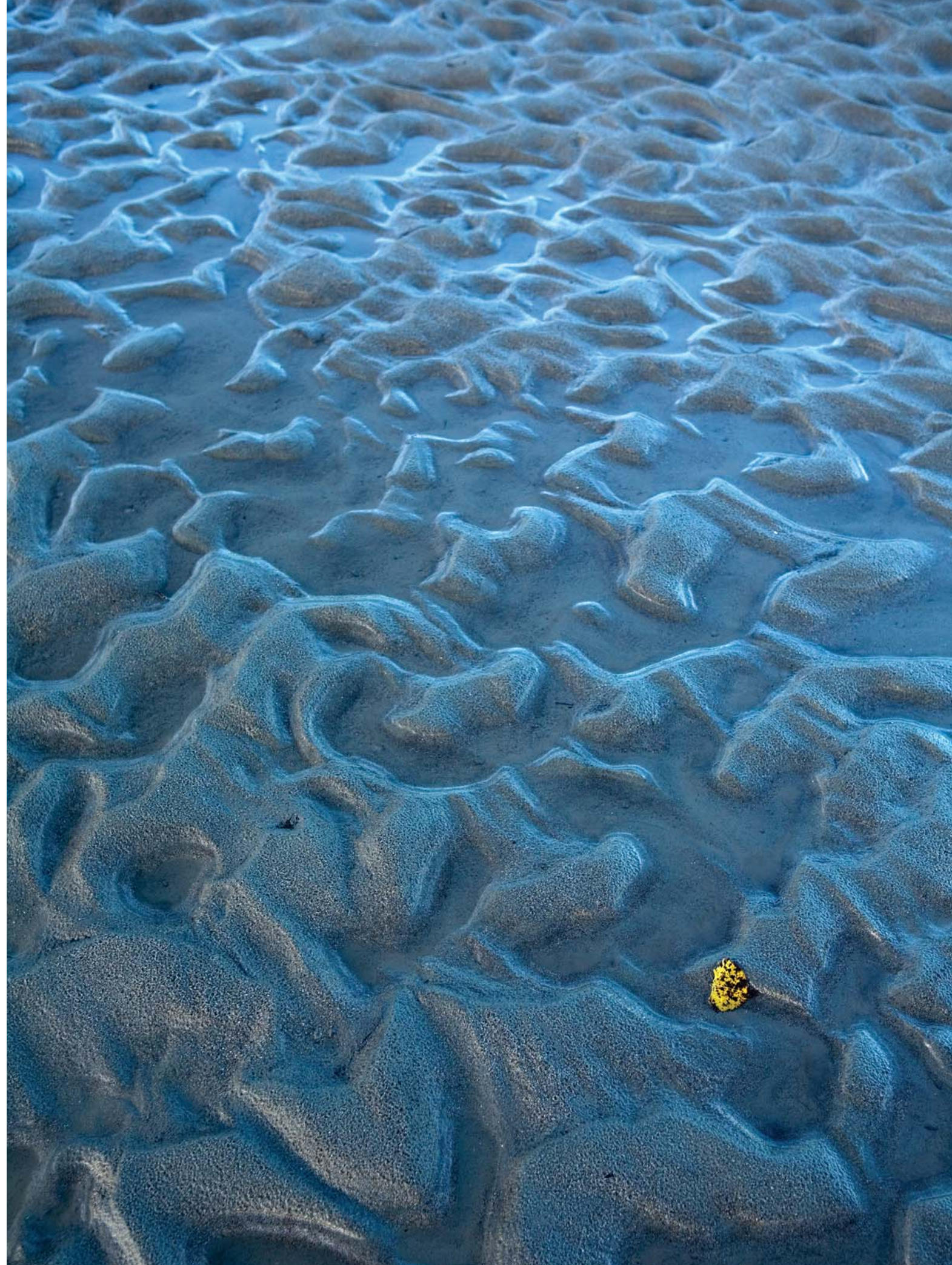
ERIC FOWLER

*Above: Yellow cottonwoods leaves sparkle in the late-day October sun at Lake Minatare State Recreation Area near Scottsbluff.*

*Left: Yellow elm leaves lie on a moss-covered log in a spring branch canyon at Smith Falls State Park near Valentine.*

*Right: A lone cottonwood leaf rests on a Missouri River island at Ponca State Park in northeastern Nebraska.*

JEFF KURRIUS



# Deer Hunting 101

Text and photos by Eric Fowler

**Deer hunting is not as difficult as some people make it out to be. Follow these tips and you may well fill your freezer with tasty venison this fall.**

**A**nyone can shoot a deer with a rifle. Seriously. It's just not that difficult.

In fact, for someone who has never hunted, deer may just be the easiest game to harvest. If you hunt right, you will see a deer long before it sees you, and all you have to do is wait until the deer is standing still, aim your high-powered rifle, which even in the hands of a novice is capable of striking a target within inches of the exact spot at which it was aimed at a distance of 100 yards or more, and squeeze the trigger. To top it off, your target, the deer's heart and lungs, is as big as a dinner plate.

Contrast that with pheasant hunting, where a rooster can flush at your feet at any given moment while you're walking through a field, which can scare even the most seasoned hunter out of their boots. As the bird flies away at any given angle and at speeds of 30 to 60 mph, you have only seconds to set your feet, shoulder your shotgun, take aim and pull the trigger before the bird is out of range.

If you've thought of taking up deer hunting, but have been intimidated by the unknown, I hope that comparison helps put your mind at ease. When you boil it down to the basics, deer hunting is simple. There also has never been a better time to hunt deer in Nebraska, where deer populations, and hence hunting opportunities, have reached record highs. Keep reading and you'll learn just enough to get started. When you're done, go to [www.NEBRASKALandMagazine.com](http://www.NEBRASKALandMagazine.com) and you'll find an extended version of this story with information on getting a permit, hunter education requirements, field dressing deer, hunting public land and how wind can help or hinder your success. Then you can spend the rest of your life fine-tuning your craft. I'll see you in the woods this fall.

Dakota Pitts was all smiles after harvesting his first deer on opening day of last year's November firearm season. Hunting with his father, Mike, near Raymond, he took a small white-tailed buck as it walked through a bean field in front of their stand. "He just walked in front of me and I was like, 'Easy shot,'" Dakota said. Buoyed by success, he told his dad "You'd better get that [knife] sharp because you're going to be needing it every year."



# Equipment

You can spend a truckload of money gearing up to hunt deer, picking up some clothes in the latest and greatest camouflage pattern, a tree stand, scents, optics, guns and ammunition. But there is no need to, especially when you're just getting started.

Assuming you already have a pair of boots and warm clothes, you really only need a few things to hunt deer: a rifle, ammunition, knife and a blaze orange hat and vest. Optional but very valuable pieces of equipment include a rifle scope and binoculars. Most hunters are more than willing to help someone get started in the sport, and if it's your first hunt, you may be able to borrow one or more of these items. If you're certain your first hunt won't be your last and want to get your own gear, start with the basics and build from there.

Just as it does with most merchandise, you do get what you pay for when it comes to hunting equipment. That doesn't mean that cheap won't get the job done.

With rifles, accuracy can increase with price, but there are some very accurate rifles available for less than \$400. Spend more and you may get better materials, workmanship and aesthetics, and an investment that can outlive you and your kids, but there's also nothing wrong with a good, used rifle.

Getting what you pay for may apply more to optics than firearms, where another rule of thumb applies: buy the best you can afford. High-priced optics typically use better glass, providing a clearer picture and making them more functional at first and last light, primetime for hunting. They are also more durable and handle the elements and a little abuse better than cheaper goods.

The cost of ammunition can also vary widely. You don't need premium ammunition for practice or even to harvest a deer, but considering one box of hunting ammo can last several years, the added cost can be justified. With knives, cost also relates to materials and workmanship. If you don't like to sharpen them, buy a good knife that will hold its edge. ■

**Rifle:** There are enough styles (bolt-action, semi-automatic, etc.), brands and calibers of rifles on the market to make your head spin. Adults can't go wrong with a bolt-action in one of two tried-and-true calibers: .270 Winchester or .30-06 Springfield. For youngsters and small-framed women who want less recoil, a .243 will suffice. Add a sling to make the walk to and from the woods easier.

**Rifle scope:** Iron sights are fine for deer hunting at short ranges, but beyond 50 yards, it's much easier to aim with a scope. A 3x9 variable-power scope can be used anywhere from heavy woodlands to open prairies. You'll also need rings and bases to mount it to your rifle.

**Ammunition:** Because of the popularity of these calibers, .243, .270 and .30-06 cartridges can be found in numerous loads, again making your head spin. Most manufacturers print recommendations on their packaging that will help you choose.

**Blaze orange:** Nebraska law requires everyone who hunts deer with a firearm to wear blaze orange on their head, chest and back. The reason is simple – safety. Hunters wearing this color are much more visible to other hunters.

## Lights:

To find your stand in the pre-dawn darkness, you'll need a flashlight or headlamp. The latter is also invaluable for field dressing deer after sundown.

## Binoculars:

These are more of a necessity when hunting mule deer in open country, but can be equally valuable when sizing up a whitetail buck in the woods. A 10x42 roof prism is a good choice. Stay away from compact models, such as an 8x21 or 10x25, unless you plan on hunting only in the woods.

## Knives and Saws:

Once your deer hits the ground, the real work begins: field dressing. A knife with a 4-inch drop-point blade is the best choice for this task. A gut hook is a good option to add. A sturdy knife will open a deer's ribcage, but some hunters prefer to use a bone saw for this task.

# Sighting In

Even if your rifle has years of experience, you need to head to the rifle range before each deer season and make sure it still shoots where you aim. If your rifle is brand new, sighting in is a requirement.

Most gun dealers will bore-sight a rifle and scope you purchase from them with a specialized tool. If you are buying a package, the manufacturer usually takes care of this task. But bore-sighting only ensures that the first shot you fire will hit somewhere on a standard paper target – you must still make fine adjustments to the scope's windage and elevation to get the rifle to hit the bull's-eye. If you put a scope on a bolt-action rifle yourself, you can get it close without the tool. Place it in a steady rest, remove the bolt, look through the barrel at a target and adjust the scope until the crosshairs fall on the spot you see through the barrel.

Once you have the rifle bore-sighted, it's time to head to the range. Your first three shots at a target should be from 25 yards. If you're on the paper, adjust your scope to move the bullet grouping in the direction of the bull's-eye and then fire three more. Once you're hitting dead center, or very close to it, move back to 100 yards from the target.

From this range, you will repeat the process, but your goal here is two fold. First, you want to be able to put three shots in as small of an area as possible. Your rifle and cartridge can both limit your accuracy, but how steady you hold your rifle and how smoothly you pull the trigger are more important considerations. Three shots in a three-inch circle is acceptable for a novice. Three in a one-inch circle is incredible.

Your next goal is to adjust your scope so that while aiming at the bull's-eye, your bullets are striking the target about three-quarters of an inch above it. This is to compensate for the arced flight path of the bullet. At 150 yards, standard .243, .270 and .30-06 cartridges sighted in this way will all hit dead on. At 200 yards, they will hit about 2 inches low, still well within the kill zone.

Gun clubs across the state open their gates to deer hunters for one or more days each fall for a nominal fee. If you don't have a safe place to shoot, take advantage of these opportunities, which are listed on the Commission's web site. The more you shoot, the better you will shoot, and the more confident you will be when you lower your crosshairs on a deer. ■



When you sight in a rifle, start close (25 yards or so) and adjust your sights until your shots are hitting the bull's-eye.

# Deer Hunting Basics

Deer are creatures of habit. For the most part, their lives are spent doing three things: eating, sleeping and walking between the places they eat and sleep. With that in mind, there are three places you can hunt deer: their bedroom, their dining room or on trails linking the two.

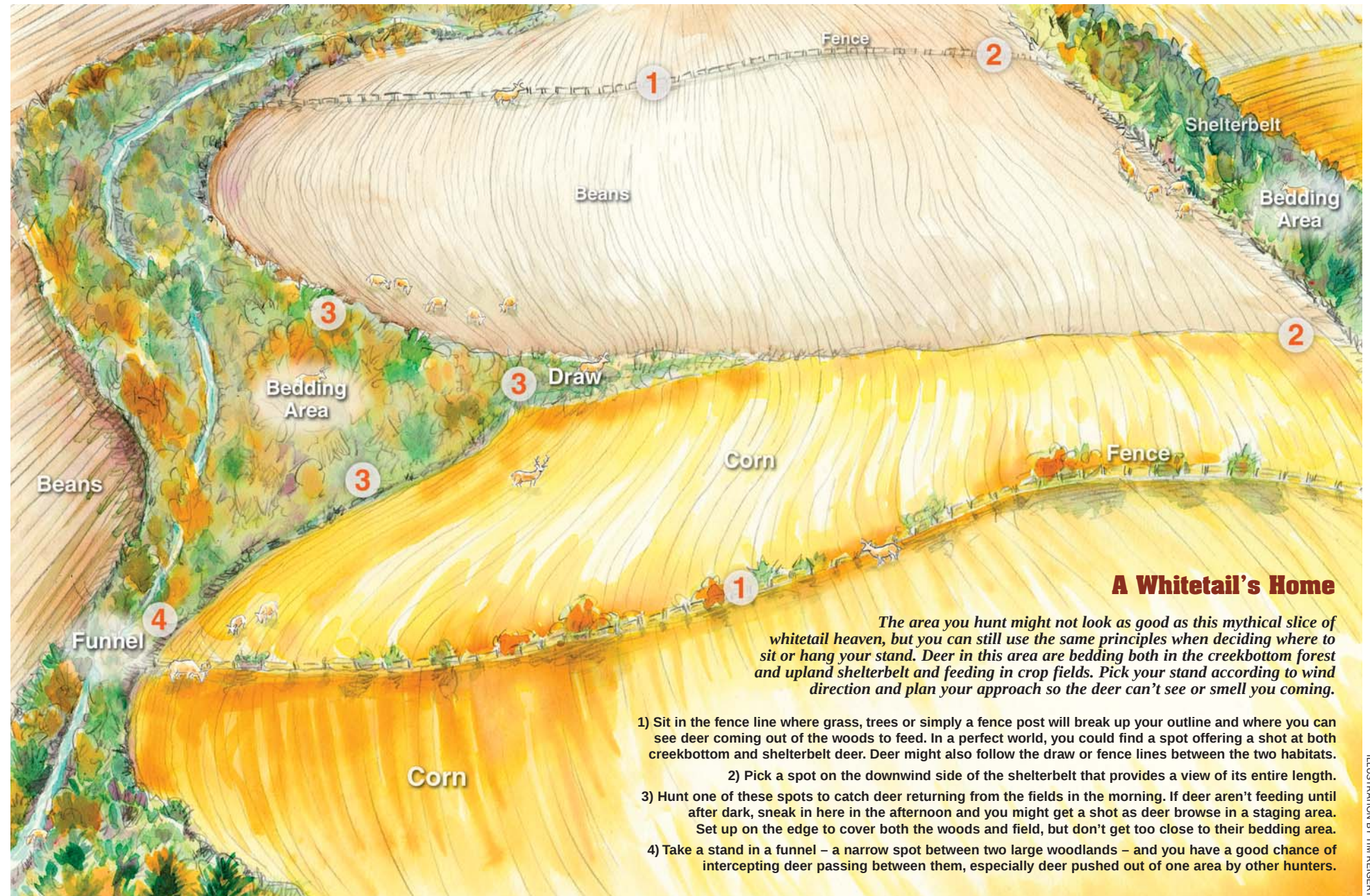
It's not as easy as it sounds, however. Deer are crepuscular, which means they are most active at dawn and dusk. Thankfully, legal hunting hours run from one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset, when deer usually are moving to or from feeding areas. So those hours are best spent hunting feeding areas or trails leading to or from them.

Deer are browsers that like to nip leaves from trees and shrubs, and nibble on tender, green grass. But both white-tailed and mule deer will feed on domestic crops such as corn, soybeans, winter wheat and alfalfa if they are available. That is the case for nearly all whitetails in the state and most of the mule deer as well.

Deer have acute senses of sight, smell and hearing, which means that while you may know where deer eat and sleep, getting close enough during legal shooting hours can be a challenge. To combat this challenge, camouflage clothing helps us blend into whatever landscape we may be hunting simply by breaking up the human outline. It's much more important, however, to limit the amount of movement you make while on the stand or still hunting. More often than not, however, it's a deer's sense of smell that gives it the edge, primarily because deer often smell us before we can see them. Even though in most hunting situations the range of a high-powered provides a buffer against this sense, never hunt upwind of the spot where you expect to see deer.

Nebraska rifle hunters also have another advantage in that their season usually falls during the deer breeding season, also known as the rut. During this time, deer are more active during the day, especially bucks in search of does.

While these basics of deer behavior hold true for both mule deer and white-tailed deer, the habitats the species occupy are different, and so are the methods used to hunt them. Turn the page to find specific tips on hunting both species. ■



## A Whitetail's Home

*The area you hunt might not look as good as this mythical slice of whitetail heaven, but you can still use the same principles when deciding where to sit or hang your stand. Deer in this area are bedding both in the creekbottom forest and upland shelterbelt and feeding in crop fields. Pick your stand according to wind direction and plan your approach so the deer can't see or smell you coming.*

- 1) Sit in the fence line where grass, trees or simply a fence post will break up your outline and where you can see deer coming out of the woods to feed. In a perfect world, you could find a spot offering a shot at both creekbottom and shelterbelt deer. Deer might also follow the draw or fence lines between the two habitats.
- 2) Pick a spot on the downwind side of the shelterbelt that provides a view of its entire length.
- 3) Hunt one of these spots to catch deer returning from the fields in the morning. If deer aren't feeding until after dark, sneak in here in the afternoon and you might get a shot as deer browse in a staging area. Set up on the edge to cover both the woods and field, but don't get too close to their bedding area.
- 4) Take a stand in a funnel – a narrow spot between two large woodlands – and you have a good chance of intercepting deer passing between them, especially deer pushed out of one area by other hunters.

ILLUSTRATION BY TIM REIGERT

# Where to Hunt

If you've never hunted deer, finding a place to hunt should be one of your top priorities. Deer aren't everywhere, so finding a good place to hunt is key to success. You can start in one of two places: public or private land.

There are approximately 800,000 acres of state and federal land open to

hunting in Nebraska. These areas sometimes receive considerable hunting pressure during the November firearm season, but they hold plenty of deer, and plenty of hunters are successful there. Details on these properties can be found on the Commission's web site, in the Nebraska Guide to Hunting

and Public Lands and the CRP-MAP Atlas, which includes maps of public land as well as private land enrolled in the federal Conservation Reserve Program that also is open to walk-in hunting.

While there is good hunting on public land, 98 percent of Nebraska is

privately owned. Some landowners do not allow hunting. Others have leased the hunting rights on their property or reserve their farms and ranches for friends and family during the November season. But many landowners welcome deer hunters, especially those who have trouble with deer eating their crops. All you have to do is find them.

Wise hunters will go for a drive in the country in the morning and evening and look for deer feeding in

fields before they ever knock on a door and ask permission. When they spot deer, they open the plat map they bought at the local courthouse to find out who owns the land and where they live, knock on the door, introduce themselves and politely ask permission. Hunters willing to harvest does will increase their odds of gaining access, especially in areas where whitetail numbers are on the rise.

If you receive permission, let the landowner know what days you plan

on hunting and what vehicle you will be driving. Ask if there will be other hunters on their land, and if they would like you to hunt in a certain area. Whether you harvest a deer on their land or not, thank them when the season is over. A gift and thank-you card is always in order.

It's never too early to start this process, but it can be too late. Start your search in early fall at the latest, not the week before deer season. ■

# Whitetails

Most white-tailed deer live in heavy cover offered by woodlands, and hence, are most abundant along rivers and in forested areas of eastern Nebraska.

The easiest way to harvest a whitetail is to spend an evening waiting for one to arrive at its dining room: a crop field adjacent to heavy cover. Chances are you found one of these feeding areas while you were looking for a place to hunt. All you need to do now is find a spot to sit that is within rifle range of the location where deer most often walk out of the woods and into the field. Don't get any closer than you

have to – the closer you are, the more likely it is that deer will see, hear or smell you and spook. A spot 100 yards away is close enough to offer a clean shot. Look for a tree to sit against that will break up your outline and make you less visible to deer. If that tree is on a hillside overlooking a creek bottom, you will have a commanding view and an easy shot at any deer that walks out of the woods within 100 yards of either direction of your location. If there are no trees, look for other vegetation, hay bales, old farm buildings, machinery or terrain that can hide you from sight.

Deer start moving into crop fields an hour or more before sunset. The first to appear are usually does, fawns and immature bucks. Trophy bucks might not move into the fields until well after legal shooting time. That might be the case for all deer in a heavily hunted area during the season.

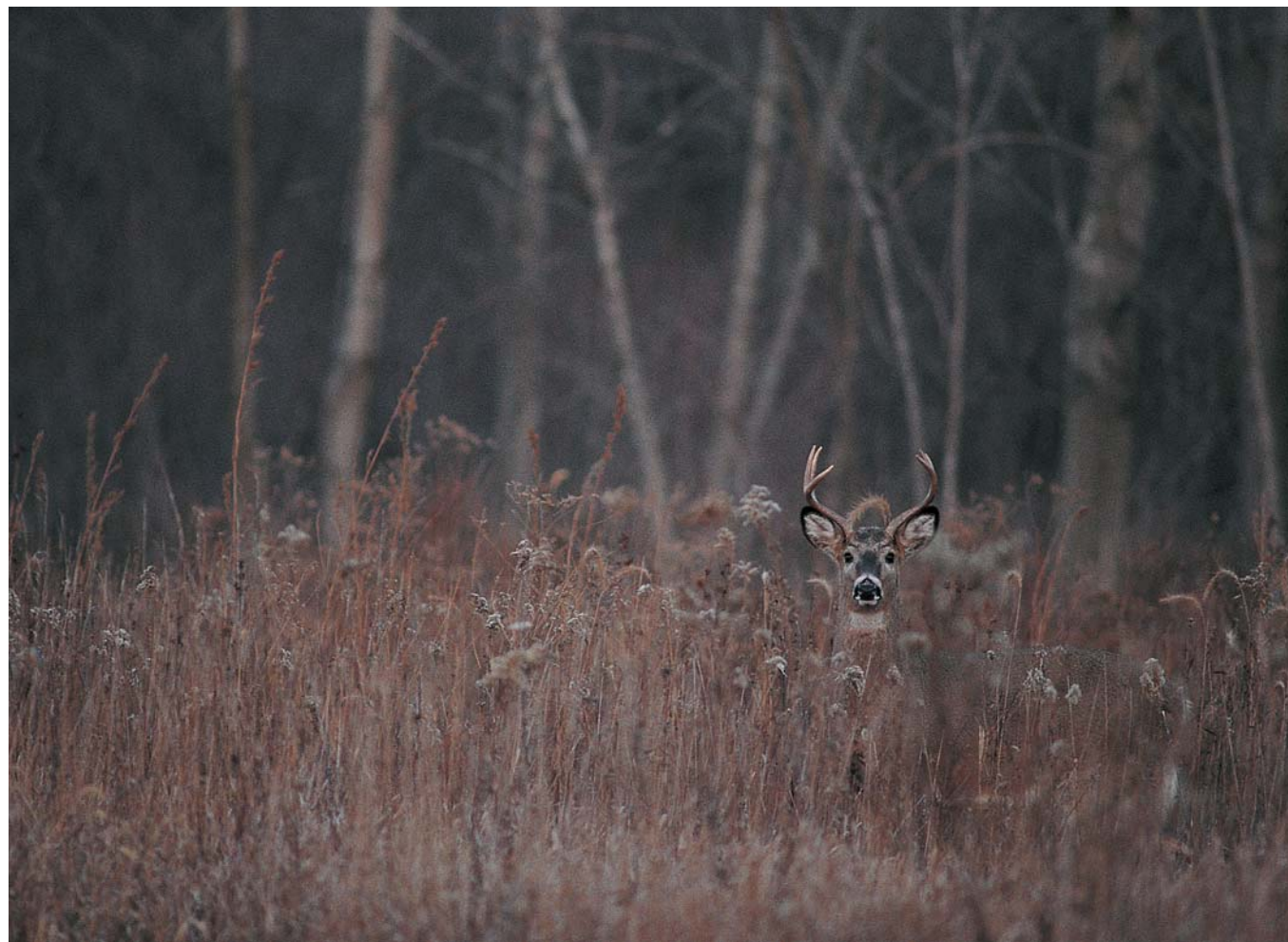
You can hunt crop fields in the morning, too, but you will have to approach quietly in total darkness, wait for shooting light and hope the deer are still feeding. Get to your stand at least 30 minutes before legal shooting time if you plan on hunting in the morning.

Another tactic for whitetail hunting is to hunt in the woods near the spot where deer are leaving the woods to feed. Deer will often mill around on the edge of cover before they walk into an open field. Walk the edges of fields, look for well-worn trails and follow them into the woods a short distance. From the trail, look for places where you could sit or hang a tree stand that provide a clear shot to that trail and possibly others. Don't wait until the eve of the opener to do this scouting, as you could easily spook deer out of the neighborhood.

Most whitetails bed in heavy cover, be it a woodland, tall grass or a cattail slough. Go into one of these areas during the day and chances are all you'll see is a deer waving its white tail at you as it runs away. That doesn't mean you can't hunt bedding areas, but doing so means getting there and on your stand well before first light, while the deer are still out feeding, and waiting for them to come back.

If you do decide to go for a hike in the woods during the day, walk softly and slowly, making as little sound as possible and stopping often to scan the cover for deer. Walk with the wind in your face or to your side so deer won't smell you coming. They might still see you before you see them, but if you're lucky, they will stand up and stare at you for a few seconds before bolting at breakneck speed. Be ready to shoot, and you might just get to.

If you aren't seeing deer in the area you are hunting, but have seen them there in the past, be patient or check other nearby fields. Deer have a home range in which they spend most of their lives. But two studies in Nebraska have found this annual home range can be as small as 170 acres and as large as 1,500 acres – more than two square miles. Most whitetails use the same core bedding area throughout the year and move from there to the best available food source during any particular season. If they aren't where you found them in July, keep looking, because they haven't gone far. ■



Most white-tailed deer bed in heavy cover, be it woodland, tall grass or a cattail slough, and many whitetails, especially mature bucks, may linger on the edge of cover at dusk, waiting until it's nearly dark to move into crop fields to feed. A stand location in these areas is also a good place to hunt in the morning, giving you a chance to catch deer on the way back to their bedding area.

# Mulies

Mule deer prefer wide-open grasslands and are primarily found in the western half of Nebraska, especially the Sandhills, Panhandle and southwestern regions.

One study found that crops made up half of the diet for mule deer in the North Platte River Valley during the fall. So like whitetails, a good strategy is to look for deer in the morning and evening around fields that abut large grasslands. But mulies don't necessarily bed in the same area each day and hence don't always follow trails like whitetails do, which makes it difficult, but not impossible, to find a stand location near a field. Also, a western Nebraska study found the winter home range of mule deer does to be more than three times that of white-tailed does, although the home range of mule deer bucks was actually smaller than that of white-tailed bucks and much smaller than mule deer does.

The technique most often used to hunt mule deer, however, is commonly known as spot and stalk hunting. In theory, it's simple: spend a lot of time looking for deer through your binoculars while driving or walking through mule deer country and then try to figure out a way to sneak within rifle range of one when you spot it. In practice, it's not that simple.

Rather than using heavy cover to conceal themselves, mule deer often bed on an open hillside with the wind to their back, using their eyes and ears to detect danger approaching from downwind and their nose and ears to detect anything coming from behind them. All of a deer's senses are sharp, but if hunters can stay out of sight and prevent their scent from blowing to the deer, they can usually close to within the range of a high-powered rifle.

With practice, mule deer are easy to spot with good optics, especially when they are up and moving in the morning or evening, or during midday when they rise to browse and stretch. When hunting on foot, don't walk on hilltops where it's easiest for deer to spot you. Creep slowly over hills, scanning cover a slice at a time as it comes into view. If you get close enough and the deer is still bedded, a whistle will typically get it to its feet without sending it running. If you happen to spook a mule deer from its bed, you can often take advantage of a fatal flaw in the species behavior. Unlike a spooked whitetail, which will run long and hard until it is out of sight, a mulie will usually bound away for a short distance and then stop and look back at whatever spooked it. Be ready to pull the trigger when they do, and you'll be grilling tenderloins for dinner. ■



While spot-and-stalk mule deer hunting in the wide-open grasslands of southwestern Nebraska, Tim Rowley of Grant uses binoculars to try to spot bedded deer before they spot him. When he does, all that's left is to find a way to sneak close enough for a shot.

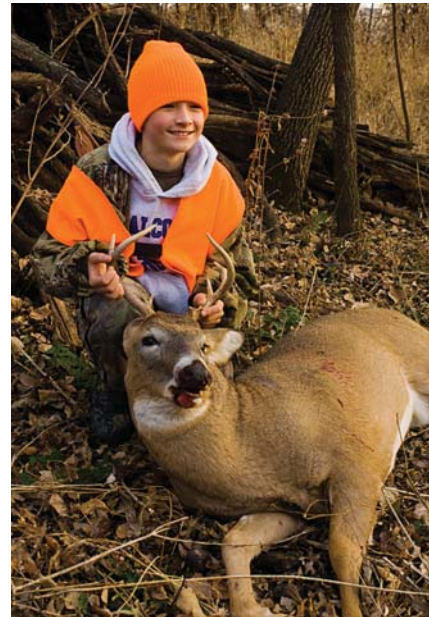
# Opening Day

For died-in-the wool deer hunters, opening day is like Christmas morning. The anticipation makes getting to sleep the night before as difficult as it was when you were a kid wondering what Santa would bring. At least if you can't sleep, it's a lot easier to get out of bed and head for the woods at 0-dark-thirty.

Scouting is part of hunting, and if you have put in your time by opening day, you should have an excellent chance at being successful. If it's your first hunt, don't be picky. Any deer taken in an ethical manner is a trophy, so take the first deer that presents a good shot, buck or doe. Time in the woods and getting a taste of the sport and success are much more important than antler size. Harvesting a trophy is indeed a challenge, and one that many relish, but get a few years under your belt before you start holding

out for a wallhanger.

When your chance comes, relax, take your time, take note of the exact spot where the deer is standing, aim carefully, squeeze the trigger and listen for the tell-tale thump a bullet makes when it strikes the deer's chest. The recoil of your rifle will likely cause you to momentarily lose sight of the deer through your scope, so use that as an opportunity to raise your head and watch how the deer reacts as you chamber another cartridge. Some deer drop in their tracks, some arch their backs and stand still, some kick their hind legs high in the air before bolting and some simply bolt as if they weren't hit at all. If the deer is still standing, take another shot. If it runs, watch closely and note where it runs out of sight. This is a lot to keep in mind for a beginner, so it's good to hunt with someone who can be



Take a camera on your hunt and get a bag shot of you and your deer in the field, especially if it's your first deer, as this was for Dakota Pitts of Lincoln.

your eyes and ears.

Do not assume you missed if your deer runs away. This is fairly common, even for a deer shot directly in the heart. Chances are it will run no more

than 100 yards before it collapses. If the deer runs out of sight, go to where it was standing when you shot and look for drops of blood on the ground. Wait 15 to 30 minutes before you start your search, follow the blood trail slowly and quietly, and you should find your deer. In some cases, you may find your deer injured but alive, so be ready to take another shot.

Some hunters celebrate when they recover their deer. Others pay their respects to the animal and pause for a moment of prayer. Everyone should take time to have a photo taken with their deer, especially if it's their first. Take several photos from different angles. Don't wait until the deer is in the back of the pickup for a photo. Today's digital cameras are so small and light that every hunter should put one in their pack before heading into the field. ■

# Shot Placement

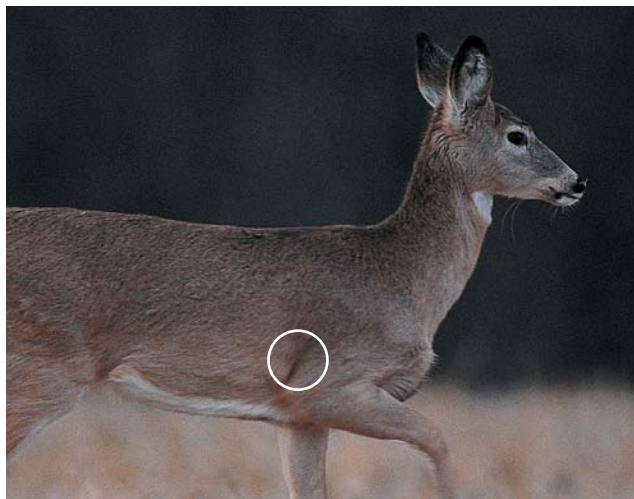
When your chance comes, aim for the epicenter of a deer's vital organs – the veins and arteries at the top of its heart – and you will almost always collect your prize. A

shot to this area cuts off all blood flow and deflates both lungs. It also gives room for error. Shoot a few inches low and you hit the heart directly. Shoot a few inches back and you hit the lungs

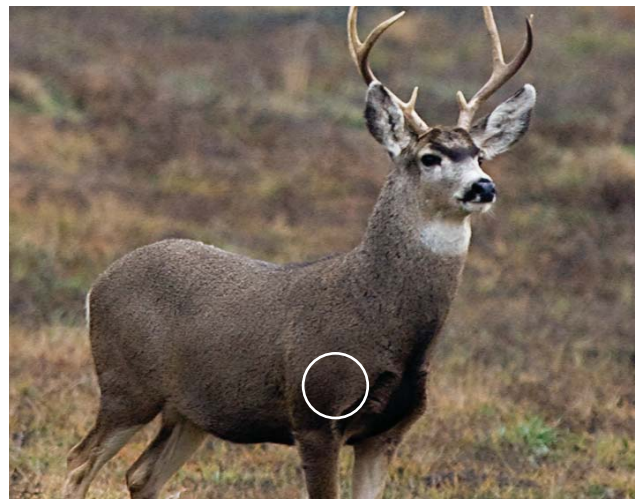
and liver. Shoot forward or high and you still hit both lungs.

Never attempt to shoot a deer in the head or neck – those are simply not ethical or efficient shots. To make a

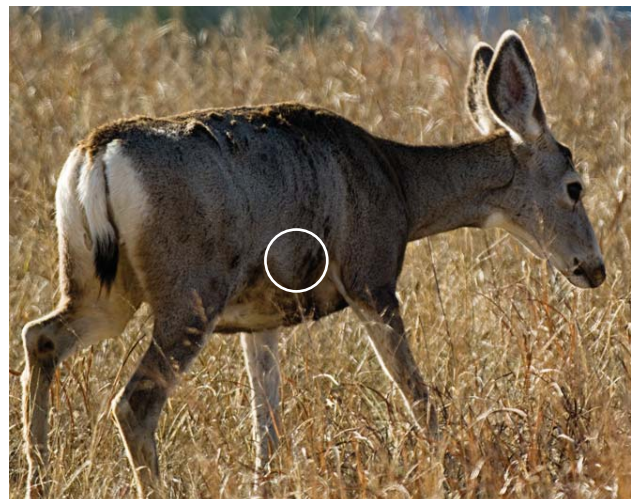
clean kill in those areas, you must hit the brain or spine, which are much smaller than the heart and lung area. Miss by a few inches and you may only cripple a deer. ■



Broadside: Aim for a spot a third of the way up the deer's body on the line formed by the back of its front leg.



Quartering toward: Aim for the front half of the shoulder to both disable that limb and strike the epicenter.



Quartering away: Place your shot a few ribs behind the shoulder.

# Stands

Commercial tree stands and ground blinds can increase a hunter's chances for success, but they aren't a necessity, especially for someone just starting out.

The old adage is that deer don't look up and a hunter 15 feet up a tree is less likely to be spotted by a deer walking down a trail towards him. That's not entirely true – make one false move and a deer will see it, whether you're in a tree or on the ground.

A better reason to use a tree stand is it gets you above shrubs, saplings and other groundcover on the forest floor, allowing you to see and shoot farther, both good things when hunting with a rifle.

There are three basic types of tree stands to choose from. Ladder stands combine a ladder and a seat. They are heavy and can be difficult to carry into the woods, but are easy to set up and climb. Hang-on stands are lighter and easier to pack, but require steps be screwed into or strapped to the tree, a cumbersome process. Climbing stands have platform and seat sections with teeth that can be walked up a tree, negating the need for screw-in steps. They are comfortable, but only work on straight trees without lower limbs. Hunters have also been building stands for years, often wood platforms that can be reached by climbing a ladder or screw-in steps, but weather can deteriorate these stands, making them unsafe and they are not recommended.

Ground blinds do a better job of concealing a hunter's movements and can make hunting on a cold, wet or windy day bearable. But deer notice these changes to their environment, and a blind itself can be as visible to a deer as a hunter would be, if not more so, if it is simply plopped down in the woods on opening day.

Some blinds are extremely portable and can fit in a pack. Others have room for four people, but are large and bulky enough that you won't want to carry them far. If you are hunting private land and want to use a blind, set it up before hunting season and let deer get used to it. If you're hunting public land and would like to use your blind more than once, pile limbs where you plan on hunting and then put your blind behind them to be less obtrusive.

Both blinds and tree stands have disadvantages as well. Once they are set up, a hunter might have a hard time convincing himself that he's picked a poor stand location and needs to move. He might also decide to hunt a stand even if the wind is not blowing the right direction for that stand, a sure recipe for failure.

A hunter can do just as well finding a tree to sit against where he has a good view of a well-worn trail. If it turns out the deer are using a trail 50 yards away, and he can't get a shot from his current location, moving is easy. Some hunters pile limbs and brush around themselves to break up their outline and help conceal their movements. ■



Deer stands get hunters like Ken Bouc of Lincoln off the ground, giving them a better view and getting them out of the direct line of sight of deer. Ladder stands are a bit bulky but are easy to set up and climb into.

# The Other Nebraska... and its future

Text and photos by Jeff Kurrus

Cotton socks. I knew better. I was on my back in the Economy 9 Motel in Chadron, wondering why I was naïve enough to assume I could get by wearing cotton socks for even one day of hiking. Bad idea. And given that I would again be hiking the next morning, it was only going to get worse.

“Why do people hike?” was the logical question that continually came to mind that evening. Unless one is going to or from a duck blind, fishing hole, or deer stand, why would someone spend so much time walking, essentially in a circle? My thoughts repeatedly placed *Hiking* versus *Hook & Bullet* in opposing corners.

Hunting and fishing keep me up at night, and it is pointless to even think about having to set an alarm the night before any activity in the field or on the water. At the same time, I knew that the following morning local hiker Tom Scheimo would be meeting me at sunrise, and I had a good feeling that he wouldn’t need an alarm either. Me, I made sure I set two of them.

## The Next Day

Scheimo and his friend, Larry Olson, led me on a hike down the Bison Trail into Toadstool Geologic Park. The views were other-worldly, and each lunar-like rock formation begged

another question as Olson stopped repeatedly, answering Scheimo’s inquiries of “why,” “how” and “when.”

I trailed behind, voicing my own thoughts occasionally, but for the most part silent on my own hike, tip-toeing on sore feet, taking in Toadstool’s eccentricities and thinking about the dove hunt I had been on a few days prior. Although I had never seen anything similar to what Toadstool offered, I could not get that last hunt out of my mind. Yet with Scheimo and his group of friends, I knew I was in the minority.

Hiking, biking, geocaching – these are the types of activities they do. Few of them ever buy a hunting or fishing permit. So the farther I walked, and the sorer I got, I began to think more and more about the differences between myself and them, wondering where they fit into the future of how people interact with nature. Because the way things are set up now, that is a question that someone is going to have to answer very soon.

## Survey Says

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s (USFWS) 2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, 650,000 U.S. residents and nonresidents 16 years old and older fished, hunted, and/or watched wildlife in Nebraska that year. Of that number, 198,000 fished, 118,000 hunted and 490,000 participated in wildlife-watching activities, including observing, feeding and photographing wildlife – 176,000 who did so away from the home.

At Toadstool, we were that last group. Without a gun or rod and reel in sight, we merely took in the cool September morning after a short drive from town with no other purpose than to see the area’s vistas and wildlife, not unlike many other current outdoor enthusiasts across the country.

In the past 10 years, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission reports that there was a loss of 18,579 hunters and 36,272 anglers in the state, numbers similar to nationwide trends. To combat this, the Commission recently adopted its Recruitment, Development, and Retention (RDR) program, aimed at drawing hunters and



Geocaching is becoming a popular outdoor activity for nature enthusiasts who desire to include the “treasure hunt” aspect with their hiking experiences.



Tom Scheimo, Kathy Bahr and Trudy Scherbarth (front) pause at an overlook at Chadron State Park.

# Mahoney SP is Nebraska's answer for the 21st century outdoor user – nonconsumptive, close to the metropolitan and filled with nature-based recreation for people of all ages.

anglers back into the field. If these numbers continue to decrease, it is inevitable that the cost for hunting and angling-related activities, and quite possibly other outdoor-related activities, will continue to increase.

As it currently stands, the Commission receives a lot of its operating budget through the sales of hunting and fishing licenses. In addition, Nebraska, like all states, also gets an annual apportionment from funds generated by the Wildlife Restoration (WR) Act of 1937 (Pittman-Robertson), which places a federal excise tax on certain hunting equipment – 11 percent on firearms, ammunition, bows, and archery equipment; 10 percent on handguns; and 12.4 percent on arrow components. Those excise taxes are apportioned to each state based 50 percent on the state's area (square miles) and 50 percent on the number of licensed hunters in each state.

Furthermore, the Sport Fish Restoration (SFR) Act of 1950 (Dingell-Johnson) provides funding for sport fish programs through similar excise taxes on fishing equipment, including trolling motors, flashers, and tackle, and the 1984 Wallop-Breaux Amendment adds taxes to motorboat fuel and pleasure boat purchases to fund motor boat access and aquatic education programs. These excise taxes are apportioned back to each state based 40 percent on the state's area (square miles) plus 60 percent on the number of licensed anglers in the state.

In 2006, Nebraska's hunting and fishing permit sales totaled a little over \$14 million. That same

year, there were 171,419 certified hunters in the state and the Commission received \$22.30 from the federal government for each of these hunters; that same year, the number of certified anglers was 194,982, and \$18.78 per angler was received from the government. These totals, combined with license fees, come to approximately \$21 million to preserve the state's natural areas and the programs that support them.

Yet based on the USFWS survey and from what I saw in Chadron, there is a large number of people spending time in the outdoors who are not hunting or fishing. Because many of them are not purchasing these permits, little money from their outdoor pursuits is being directly funneled back toward conservation or the areas they use.

However, is it fair to ask a group like Scheimo's to pay more when they don't need a rod and reel to make their day complete? What happens if we don't and the number of hunters and anglers continues to fall – who will pay for wildlife conservation then?

## Trails

Quite often that week it seemed as if the only thing Scheimo and the other hikers I met would stop for was to take photographs, as if this group had never walked these paths before. Given the number of hiking locations within a 50-mile radius of this Panhandle town – Toadstool Geologic Park, the Gilbert-Baker State Wildlife Management Area, Fort Robinson State Park (SP), the Pine Ridge Trail and Chadron SP – that might be understandable.

But after seeing Scheimo's shoe bottoms for quite some time, I had a good feeling he had ventured down most, if not all, of these. A formidable task, even if considering Chadron SP alone.

This area features 974 acres of land, including a series of paths – the Black

Hills Overlook, Steamboat Butte Trail, Scout Trail and the park's Yellow and Blue trails. The week I visited Scheimo and his group, organized by his creation of the hiking web site [www.panhandletrails.com](http://www.panhandletrails.com), we were often the only ones on the path.

"I just don't get it," he said more than once, pulling a point-and-shoot from his pocket. "Why don't more people here hike?" We spoke repeatedly about his weekday and weekend hikes, many of which he claims occur without seeing another person on the trail.

The Commission's statistics would say that people, in fact, do hike in Nebraska. In 2007, Chadron SP had 204,978 visitors. The area does not allow hunting and most visitors spend their time away from the park's one-acre pond hiking, biking, swimming at the area's pool, picnicking, and camping. But Scheimo's assessment was understandable – hiking through the park on three different occasions that week, we saw only a handful of people.

In contrast, if Scheimo spent his afternoons and mornings at eastern Nebraska's Eugene T. Mahoney SP, he would witness an entirely different scenery of both land and people. Located just west of Omaha, Mahoney SP is Nebraska's most visited state recreation area, and had 1,150,600 visitors in 2007. While one of the reasons for its popularity is its proximity to Nebraska's metropolitan areas, it is also the state's most effective park for alternative users.

No hunting is allowed on the park's 690 acres, and park superintendent Brian Schmidt estimates that only one percent of people fish at Mahoney's two lakes. Instead, visitors spend their time horseback riding, playing miniature golf, hiking, biking, swimming, ice skating in the winter, wildlife viewing, camping and staying in one of the park's 54 cabins, 40 lodge rooms or 149 campsites with family

Toadstool Geologic Park is a mecca for photographers and hikers looking for unique scenery in Nebraska.



Nebraska Annual Park Entry permits allow users to access Commission areas for a variety of outdoor activities.



With views like this in Nebraska, it is easy to understand why some nature lovers choose to participate in activities such as hiking instead of hunting and fishing. Yet what will be their contributions to fund outdoor recreation?

and friends.

Mahoney SP is Nebraska’s answer for the 21st century outdoor user – nonconsumptive, close to the metropolitan and filled with nature-based recreation for people of all ages.

Due to its number of visitors, Mahoney SP also has a very large hand in paying for the rest of the state’s parks and recreation areas. What Nebraska football is to the university’s athletic department, Mahoney SP is to the state’s park system – able to fund itself as well as aid other park projects throughout the state.

In 2007, 136,539 annual park permits were purchased. These \$20.35 permits allowed purchasers to visit any Nebraska state park or recreation area for free the rest of the calendar year. Of those purchasers, 51,912 bought a duplicate permit at \$10.35. Add the 242,500 daily park permits sold for

\$4.35, and the other 9,752 patrons who paid by drop box, the Commission made \$4,258,908 from park permit sales to aid its funding of Nebraska’s SPs, SRAs and state historical parks.

That sounds like a lot of money, a banner year perhaps, especially after selling 2,768 annual permits more than the year before. However, the 2007 totals were 10,728 annual permits fewer than 2003’s totals. Plus, the number of daily park permits sold in 2007 was 10,255 less than in 2006, and 33,078 less than were sold in 2003. What happens if, over time, not only do hunting and fishing participants decline, but state park visitation declines as well?

If this happened, one might assume that there would also be a decreasing amount of money being spent toward outdoor-related expenditures. Yet we all know what assuming gets us.

## Teaming With Wildlife

According to the 2006 USFWS survey, expenditures by Nebraska hunters, anglers, and wildlife viewers totaled \$231 million, \$181 million and \$142 million, respectively. Of that number, equipment expenditures for hunters, anglers, and wildlife viewers totaled \$138 million, \$84 million and \$108 million, respectively – guns, shells and clothes for hunters; rods, reels and lures for anglers; spotting scopes, camera equipment and birding books for wildlife viewers.

While hunters and anglers have always been recognized for their “toys,” wildlife viewers are also spending their share toward outdoor-related materials. Currently, however, there are no additional funds being garnered from

the sale of this equipment similar to those excise-tax structures set up by the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration acts.

The Teaming With Wildlife (TWW) coalition, whose purpose is to secure dedicated funding for wildlife conservation, education, and nature-based recreation, was organized in the 1990s. TWW’s original concept was to place a small (one to five percent) excise tax on outdoor-related items such as binoculars, field guides, hiking and camping gear.

This tax would have only cost the average outdoor user about \$20 annually and would have generated \$350 million for state fish and wildlife agencies, including \$4.2 million for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, but because public support for an excise tax was lacking, the coalition got behind the 2000 Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA), which

would have provided the same amount of funding but was tied to offshore drilling revenues.

Although CARA passed by a 3-to-1 margin in the U.S. House of Representatives and had majority support in the Senate, the bill was never made into law. Despite the setback, the TWW coalition continued to grow from 3,000 organizations in 2000 to more than 5,800 organizations today, and it is known as much for its diversity as its size, including most of the country’s major conservation organizations, as

well as businesses, local nature centers and hunting clubs.

As part of the coalition, the state of Nebraska has 280 participating organizations itself, the fourth most in the country. Some of these organizations include Pheasants Forever, The Nature Conservancy, Audubon Society, Ducks Unlimited, and businesses such as Wild Bird Habitat Stores, Inc. and Calamus Outfitters. The coalition even includes ranching organizations such as the Nebraska Grazing Lands coalition, demonstrating that there is broad



Bike riding near Chadron along the Pine Ridge fills the afternoons of George Ledbetter (front) and his wife, Elizabeth.



Roadside views of western Nebraska provide Scheimo and his group of hiking friends ample opportunities for enjoying nature.

agreement about the need for increased wildlife funding.

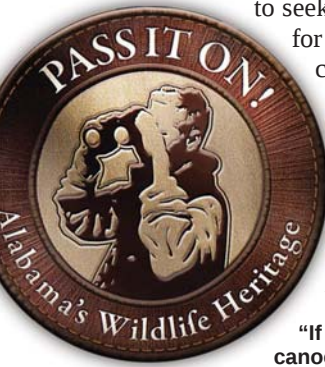
TWW has been successful in securing approximately \$70 million in annual appropriations each year.

Current efforts are also underway to seek dedicated funding for wildlife in climate change legislation or other energy legislation tied to outer continental shelf drilling.

So far, efforts by TWW are immense. But

**“If you enjoy hiking, canoeing or adding one more bird to your lifelist the**

**Wildlife Heritage License is for you,” says the state of Alabama. At a cost of \$10, this contribution receives a three-to-one match on every dollar it raises. Is something similar in Nebraska’s future?**



unless there are secure funding sources set in place similar to the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration acts, will their ongoing efforts, and those of other organizations like them, be enough?

## Crow Butte and a Roadside Sunset

On morning number three of my Chadron trip, I was taken on a private land hike up Crow Butte with Scheimo, and local hikers Michael Watts, Max Franey and Greg Pak. As we scaled the peak, I listened to Pak. I never even heard the first gasp as he ascended. Me, I lumbered much farther behind, only hearing each “Wow!” from his mouth through the sucking-of-air from my own.

The “Wow’s” came constantly: during Franey’s stories about Crow Butte, the

various views from atop the butte, and from the walking trail back. Everything was a fascination to Pak, and each response was supported by the others, each listening to Franey’s stories as he continued the private tour, a tour reminiscent of how many people are spending their outdoor hours.

On that same afternoon before my departure, Scheimo told me that our hike would be short. While I was thinking that it was fine with me if we forewent hiking and went and had a few beers, I agreed for one last walk. The hike was even briefer than expected, a trek starting at the Coffee Mill Butte trailhead on the Pine Ridge Trail with my two-day worn synthetic socks. No more cotton for me.

On the way back to Chadron on Deadhorse Road, Scheimo, Pak and I stopped at a collection of mini-badlands. In photographs these formations appear as if you are looking down at a cavernous landscape from an elevated vantage point. In actuality, the badlands are only a few feet tall and are beautiful. While viewing them, Scheimo and Pak both stopped to photograph as I sat back and pondered – what about a hiking permit or a wildlife viewing sticker for those not hunting or fishing?

But Pak’s “Wow’s” echoed again, interrupting the thought, and I was once again wondering how I could ask people like Pak and Scheimo to pay any more than they already were when Pak, with his digital point-and-shoot held firmly in front of his face, had convinced me of all I need to know about accessing nature from the side of the road?



Greg Pak photographs a sunset from the side of Deadhorse Road in Sioux County.

## Rock of the Bluffs

I just couldn’t wait until the radio picked up 93.3 “Rock of the Bluffs” on my way back east. But before then, I had a little time to rest ... and worry.

After hiking all week with Scheimo, I understood that my ways of accessing nature were probably even more limited than I realized. I also know that the number of people not hunting or fishing may continue to grow.

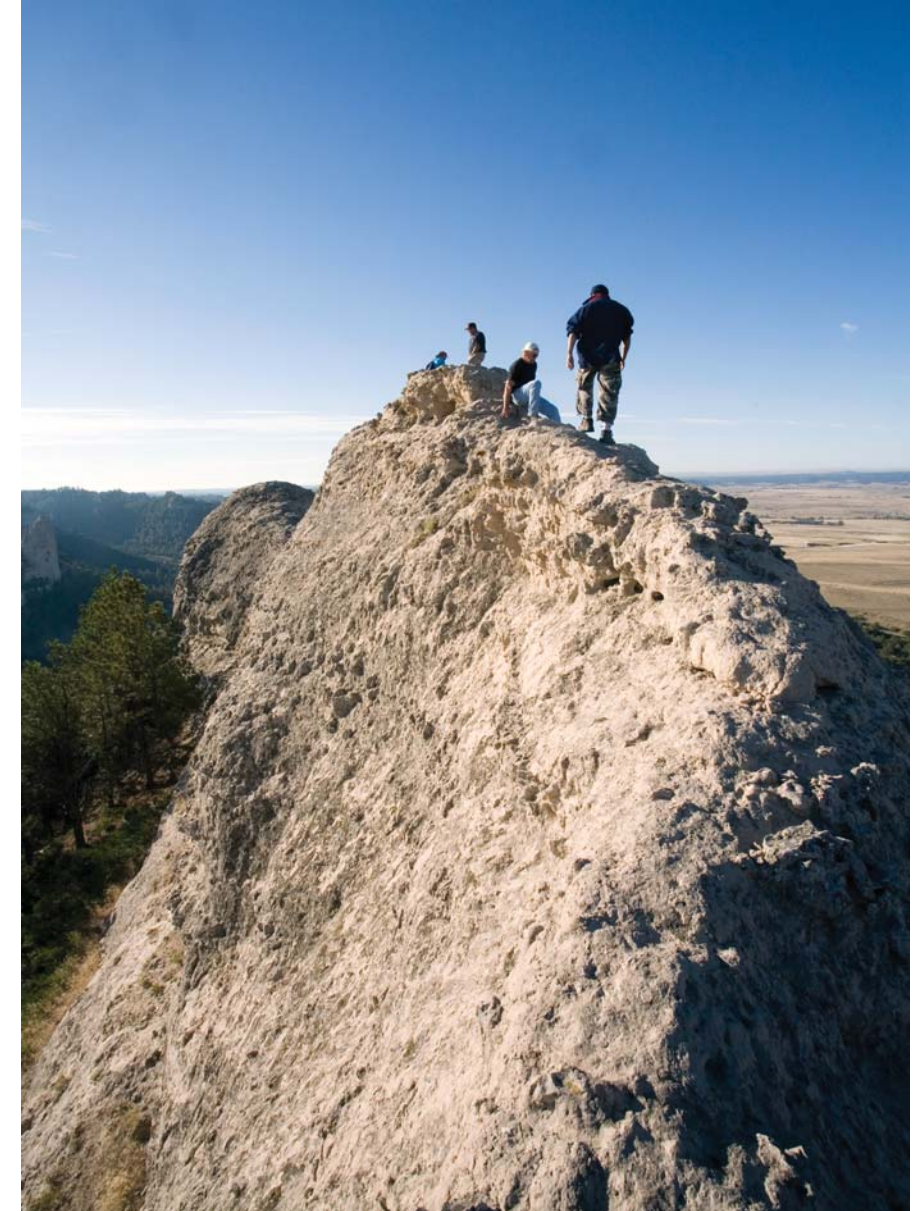
However, hunting and angling licenses, as well as excise taxes on certain hunting and angling-related items, pay for much of Commission’s outdoor-related efforts. Outside of park permit fees, which generate funds to maintain the state’s park system, there is no other direct money being funded back toward conservation from this growing number of hikers, bikers, and bird watchers of the world.

So until there is a dedicated funding source, the only place left to pull from is the generosity of the public. All users can purchase a hunting or fishing permit, which is better than a donation because of the certified fund matched by the federal government. If that permit just happens to be a lifetime hunting/fishing permit for a youngster yet to decide how they will spend their time outdoors, even better.

In addition, Nebraska’s voluntary nongame tax check-off program has benefited outdoor recreation since 1984. Citizens can voluntarily contribute to this program when doing their state income taxes or by making a donation directly to the Commission. The revenues provide vital funding for nongame species and serve as a source of matching dollars for federal grants. Interpretive signs such as those recently placed along hiking trails at Chadron SP were paid for in part through this program.

Furthermore, the purchase of a Nebraska Habitat Stamp, whose revenues are used to support the conservation of public and private lands, would also be beneficial, as well as supporting the passage of a conservation license plate bill in the state legislature to provide a boost to nongame and outdoor recreation.

These options noted, I am definitely not trying to reinvent the wheel here. The Nebraska Legacy Plan was completed in 2006 so that all species of wildlife and plants could be conserved for future generations to enjoy, including



(From left to right) Michael Watts, Max Franey, Tom Scheimo and Greg Pak participate in a private land hike up Crow Butte in Sioux County.

hunters, anglers and nonconsumptive users such as hikers. And, as mentioned before, there are many other organizations who seek these same results.

But will there be enough citizens that voluntarily contribute from their own personal lives and their pockets in order to conserve the lands and programs we now have? We will see.

So I sat there with my shoes off on my ride home, resting my feet as a chorus of Zeppelin rang in my ears. I admired the countryside as I drove, once again thinking about my most recent dove hunting trip. Looking at my watch and my Nebraska atlas, I could be hunting in less than an hour. There were a couple of public spots

within a few miles of Interstate 80, and I still had my shotgun and ammunition in tow. The only question left was whether or not my feet could handle the walk from the parking lot to my spot on the edge of the field. ■

*For more information on Teaming With Wildlife, visit [www.teaming.com](http://www.teaming.com); for more information on the Nebraska Legacy Plan, visit [www.ngpc.state.ne.us/wildlife/programs/legacy/](http://www.ngpc.state.ne.us/wildlife/programs/legacy/). The author would like to give special thanks to Mark Humpert of the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies and Marilyn Tabor of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission for the federal aid information included.*

# FLY-FISHING WITH WARREN

**Text and photos by Bob Grier**

*Fishing western Nebraska's streams, rivers and ponds is a personal passion for Warren Sedivy of Alliance, a certified fishing instructor and quiet ambassador for the sport of fly-fishing.*

For a self-proclaimed “average” fly-fishing enthusiast, the first catch of the day was anything but average – the colorful brown trout that Warren Sedivy of Alliance eventually lifted from the surface of the Niobrara River was beautiful. At six-plus pounds and more than 26 inches in length, the deeply colored male trout had been a handful on Sedivy’s five-weight fly rod and light monofilament tippet as it first ran upstream then down after being fooled by a carefully presented artificial grasshopper.

The trout had had everything in its favor – this stretch of the Niobrara includes a few deep pools separated with shallow, swift water moving through tight twists and turns, including partially submerged tumbleweeds and other natural snags and obstructions the trout could use effectively to throw the hook.

The heavy trout’s strong movements required quick and decisive reactions. As the trout moved upstream, Sedivy followed, at times running along the bank, jumping the narrow stream in places and then wading upstream and down after the trout almost swam between his legs in a quick change of direction.

Landing nets are prohibited on designated trout waters, but by dropping to his knees along a portion of steep, sand bank, Sedivy was able to carefully cradle the trout between his lower leg and the bank, lay his fly rod down and use both hands to gently control the trout’s movements.

“It is important not to exhaust the fish but try to end the fight as quickly as possible,” he said, as he used small forceps to remove the small hook from the fish’s lower jaw. Still kneeling, he turned with the trout held in the water and then carefully raised the trout above the river’s surface for several photos before lowering the colorful trophy to the water and allowing it to swim downstream to a deeper pool.

“This dry fly is called a ‘Stimulator’ and is an easily tied hopper pattern,” he said as he examined the fly’s small, barbless hook and pulled the monofilament leader between thumb and forefinger to check the tippet for damage. “I caught a nearly identical brown trout, almost exactly the same length and weight, on an earlier trip to the Niobrara and the landowner was

surprised to see it released. My wife Jeanie and I are not totally catch-and-release – we enjoy fresh fish after a daylong outing – but a trophy trout like that should be released unharmed and possibly another angler will have the opportunity of a lifetime.”

The Niobrara River in Sioux County is one of many Panhandle fly-fishing destinations for Sedivy and his wife. Their normal quarry includes trout and other gamefish as well as at least one species, *Cyprinus carpio* – the common carp – that is not usually considered too gamefish-like unless the angler is using a fly rod and attempting to land a 20-pound specimen.

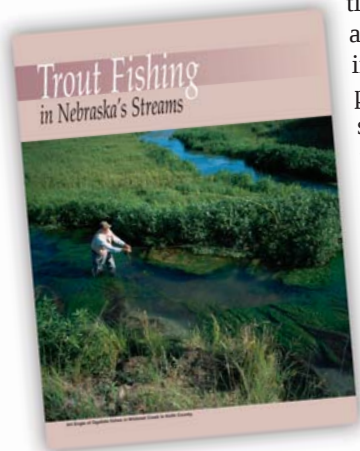
“Jeanie also loves to fly-fish for bluegill, so we try to make trips to Box Butte Reservoir and the Sandhill lakes near Alliance each spring and summer,” said Sedivy, adding that the Panhandle offers quite a variety of fly-fishable waters for both beginning and experienced anglers.

“We fish the Niobrara, Ninemile Creek, Soldier Creek, East Ash Creek, Chadron Creek, Lake Ogallala, Fort Robinson and Chadron state parks’ (SP) ponds, Lake Carter P. Johnson, Smith Lake, Red Willow Creek, Bridgeport State Recreation Area (SRA), the North Platte River and other waters that don’t come to mind immediately. We’re always ready to try new waters. Panhandle fly-fishing opportunities include a variety of fish species – rainbow, brown and brook trout; bluegill, largemouth bass, yellow perch, crappie – even wipers, walleye and white bass. We also enjoy fly-fishing for catfish and carp.

“The upper Niobrara in Sioux County, with the exception of that portion on the Agate Fossil Beds National Monument south of Harrison, is almost completely privately owned,” he said, “and landowner permission is required to fish this area. The upper Niobrara is small and won’t support a lot of fishing pressure, so we try to fish it only once or twice a year, and perhaps not even every year.”

According to Sedivy, the Niobrara offers its best fly-fishing opportunities in the fall, winter and spring. “We’ve fished February and March, for example, and while the Niobrara has frozen in the late winter, recent winters have been open and mild. Daytime temperatures

Brightly colored brown trout of this size are extremely rare in Nebraska and require careful handling and release to give other anglers their own chance at a catch of a lifetime.



For more information about trout fishing in Nebraska, pick up a copy of this publication at your nearest Nebraska Game and Parks Commission office.



A warm winter afternoon finds Sedivy carefully working his way upstream on Nine Mile Creek east of Scottsbluff, using short, accurate casts to entice the stream's browns and rainbows.

during the summer months however, especially July and August, are often more than 100 degrees. The High Plains drought and increased water use in recent years has also impacted the upper Niobrara's trout holding capability, so I think October and November would be the best time to fish the Niobrara.

"The browns definitely like to use the deeper pools and undercut banks. They're by far more predatory than rainbows and want to feed on larger, natural prey such as minnows. A deer-hair mouse pattern sometimes works for aggressive brown trout."

Sedivy is low-key in his approach to fly-fishing. He fishes the smaller streams with lighter-weight fly rods, usually a three-weight and reserving a five-weight for the more open terrain of the Niobrara, where the opportunity exists to hook larger trout. Several small fly-boxes carrying home-tied and commercially available patterns, a few spools of leader material or packaged tapered leaders, a lightweight vest and hip boots normally round out the inexpensive equipment he uses to fish the Panhandle.

"Panhandle streams require stealth and care to prevent spooking wary fish

— watch your shadow — and some anglers even crawl to reach a good spot along a stream. Another tip would be to carefully 'mend' the fly line, trying to keep the presentation as natural as possible. The fly should move with the current. To me, mending the line and a natural presentation are much more important than casting ability. Most of the Panhandle streams are timbered and choked with underbrush, and it is almost impossible to do traditional fly-casting. Normally a short cast and only a few yards of line are needed to fish the streams.

"Almost always I'll use a floating fly

line matched to the rod, usually with a 5- to 7-foot-long, 4X to 5X tippet or tapered leader. Always try to use the lightest leader possible to avoid spooking trout. This is especially important with delicate, natural presentations such as dry flies. In the spring, a dry fly, streamer or small nymph usually works on the small streams. Patterns include size 8 or 10 Muddler Minnows and Clouser Minnows. The streams are not very deep, only a few inches in most areas, and I hardly ever use a weighted fly, although I'll add a very small split shot above the fly for streamers and nymphs, but usually only in slightly

**"The fly should move along with the current. To me, mending the line and a natural presentation are much more important than casting ability."**

deeper water.

"Rather than casting a streamer and retrieving it, I'll try to hold it in a spot in the current, usually above habitat that holds fish, such as an undercut bank, shaded pool or submerged tree trunk. In our Panhandle streams, a streamer held in place is the best technique because of the limited space we have to work with."

Sedivy uses and recommends inexpensive fly rods for the variety of opportunities found in the Panhandle. For northern pike and largemouth bass he occasionally uses a heavier fly rod, up to an eight-weight rod with a

matching, weight-forward floating line, and heavier tippet material. Northern pike fishing usually requires a short section of wire leader above the streamer or other artificial.

Sedivy occasionally pauses while fishing to look under stream bed rocks or lift and inspect small amounts of aquatic vegetation. "It is really important to see the varieties of aquatic life in the stream and try and match them. Take sowbugs, for example. Sowbugs are a very good nymph pattern and it is best to try to match the size of the aquatic insects seen in the streams. At times I'll use nymphs from size 16 down to



Favorite patterns on Sedivy's vest include (clockwise from top left): Clouser Minnow, Muddler Minnow, High-Vis Hopper, Stimulator, Blue Damselfly, Ant, Royal Coachman, Bunny Leach and a Copper John fly in the center.



With rough-hewn mechanic's hands that feature a surprisingly deft touch, Sedivy shows off a fly box that holds a variety of fly patterns suitable for nearly all of Nebraska's fly-fishing waters.

size 20."

Another technique that he sometimes uses is to present two different nymph patterns at one time using a "drop line" tied to the hook of the nymph at the end of the tippet. He often uses a larger, brighter, more "flashy" pattern at the top and a smaller, more natural appearing nymph on the bottom of the tandem. The two flies are usually three to four inches apart. The combination of flash and natural is a subtle presentation trick that occasionally finds success when either one of the two patterns presented alone won't trigger a strike by the fish.

"It's important to let the fish tell you what they like best," he said. "You can often see a preference for either the larger or smaller fly when two different-sized flies are tied in tandem."

For another change of pace, Sedivy frequently adds a small split shot above the two nymphs and uses a floating strike indicator, usually a fluorescent color that can be seen easily, tied slightly higher on the tippet, usually at about one to one-half the depth of the stream. The weighted patterns and strike indicator are helpful to keep the nymphs moving at the current speed for a natural presentation.

"Of course, anytime you can see bugs and insects flying, and trout rising to feed at the surface, it's time to fish dry flies. In the winter and early spring,

midge imitations like a Griffith Gnat, in sizes 18 to 20, are productive, and later on in the spring and early summer, slightly larger, size 12 to 16 Elk-hair Caddis and Royal Coachman patterns are effective dry fly patterns. Another dry fly that works really well is the Blue Damsselfly, especially if you see damselflies on the stream. Summer and fall is hopper time, and patterns like Joe's Hopper, Madam X or the Stimulator are very productive whenever hoppers are seen along the stream."

Hopper imitations are also used tied in tandem, using a "hopper dropper" – a short length of line tied to the floating hopper's hook to keep a sinking nymph or caddis fly pattern moving near the stream bottom. The hopper pattern floating on the stream's surface becomes an effective "strike indicator" when trout pick up the submerged nymph.

"Soldier Creek above Fort Robinson is a favorite Panhandle fly-fishing stream," said Sedivy. "Soldier Creek hasn't really changed significantly in recent years, with brown trout usually found from the Soldier Creek National Wilderness Area boundary above the fort downstream to Lake Carter P. Johnson, and brook trout in the upper portions of the stream. Most of Soldier Creek is overgrown with brush and trees, but there are spots that it is possible to effectively drift a fly from

upstream, especially during the hopper season.

"Brook trout are rare in Nebraska, and small streams like Soldier Creek can be fished out in short order if catch-and-release isn't practiced. These colorful little trout – a one-pound brook trout is a Master Angler Award fish in Nebraska – are too precious and should be released unharmed.

"The abandoned hatchery ponds on the middle fork of Soldier Creek require about a 20-minute hike, and the same equipment and patterns used in Soldier Creek usually work well on the very small ponds."

Ninemile Creek east of Scottsbluff is one of Sedivy's favorites, and he fishes both

the Nine Mile Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and the newer, walk-in public access areas described in the recent Nine Mile Creek article in *NEBRASKAland Magazine* (June 2008), as well as private land on Nine Mile with landowner permission.

"The walk-in access areas are excellent and it is well worth the effort to obtain landowner permission on Nine Mile," he said. "Nine Mile is another stream that can be fished year-round and I've fished dry flies in January on a nice winter day. The spring and summer irrigation season is tougher, but it is possible to still catch trout if the water turbidity is down. Nine Mile's browns and rainbows are small on average, but still provide good fishing. The browns become very predatory as they age – many fly-fishermen are purists and wouldn't fish a nymph, but the same patterns, including hoppers in season, and the dropper-added nymph tied below, are effective on Nine Mile.

"Ponds, including those at Fort Robinson and Chadron state parks and the nearby Chadron city reservoirs, often require different patterns to be effective," said Sedivy. "The Grabel ponds on Fort Robinson are excellent for fly-fishing – the ponds are accessible and open. For pure enjoyment, they are about as good as it gets. A fly-fisherman



Taven Kimmel, 8, (left) and sister Kyah, 6, show off a trout caught at the annual youth fishing workshop in Alliance that Sedivy helps the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission put on.

can go out there and really catch fish. Nymphs, hoppers and dry flies work well, and ant patterns work well because of ants falling from the large cottonwood trees overhanging the ponds.

"We'll also use medium-sized Woolly Buggers, sizes 8 to 12, and the damselfly nymph and Bunny Leech patterns are also effective. Other Panhandle ponds include the Gilbert Baker WMA pond north of Harrison, the Bridgeport SRA and Morrill ponds in the North Platte river valley, as well as some of the Sandhills lakes."

The ponds at Fort Robinson and Chadron state parks, Lake Carter P. Johnson, the Chadron city reservoirs as well as the Gilbert-Baker WMA are regularly stocked with catchable rainbow trout and Sedivy occasionally catches crappie, largemouth bass, bluegill and other species on many of the ponds and Sandhills lakes.

"Jeanie's favorite are the bluegill at Box Butte Reservoir, Smith Lake and other waters that have bluegill. A five-weight rod, poppers – almost anything with rubber legs – as well as Woolly Buggers and dry flies are great fun when the bluegill are hitting."

Sedivy has caught an 8½-pound channel catfish on a three-weight fly rod at Bridgeport SRA in the central panhandle, and more recently, a nearly 20-pound common carp on a five-weight fly rod at the same lake.

"Fly-fishing in the Panhandle provides great fishing," he said as he finished tying on a new fly and placed a well-worn fly box back in his vest pocket. "Fly-fishing is often considered a thoughtful, peaceful pursuit, and at times it certainly is, but catching a feisty, 6½-pound brown trout or even a big catfish on a fly rod offers all the excitement necessary to keep a fly-fisherman coming back for more." ■



Alliance's Eathan Halstead shows off his trophy caught during the 2005 workshop.

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# Eat More Pheasants

*Cream-of-mushroom soup not needed for free-range chicken of the wild.*

By Eric Fowler

If I hear one more person tell me they don't like to eat pheasants, I'm going to scream.

"It's dry," they say.

"How do you cook it?" I ask.

"In the Crock-Pot with cream-of-mushroom soup," they say.

"Why?" I ask. "Is that how you cook your chicken?"

"Well, no."

You get my point. Pheasant is one of the tastiest game birds you can harvest in this state. It does not taste gamey, so please save the cream-of-mushroom soup for game that does. People pay big bucks for free-range, organic chickens that wander the farmyard eating bugs and grain. Sounds like a pheasant to me. I'll go shoot my own, thank you. It's a lot more fun.

I'm a lifetime member of the "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" club. As such, there are two ways I cook pheasants, and both are easy. I'm also a man, not a gourmet chef, so I don't like recipes with lots of ingredients. My first recipe, grilled pheasant, has only two ingredients – pheasants and Italian dressing or barbecue sauce. The second, fried pheasant, has a few more – pheasants, flour, Lawry's seasoned salt, black pepper, milk and eggs.

Preparing the birds for both recipes is the same. If I'm hunting close to home, I don't even have to draw the birds – when I get home I just peel the skin away from the breast, legs and thighs and carve the meat from the bone. If I'm farther from home and transportation laws are in play (a leg must be

attached during transport), I skin and eviscerate the birds for the trip. Whether I'm eating the bird right away or not, I still cut the meat from the bone when I get home, because it's much easier to remove the air that can cause freezer burn from a bag of boneless meat than a whole bird.

One knock on pheasants is warranted – due to the amount of real-estate this bird covers on foot compared to a chicken, the leg and thigh meat is tough. For this reason, you may want to use those cuts in a soup or casserole, where long, slow cooking will tenderize them. I did branch out and cook some white chili using pheasant last winter. Delicious.

As for the breasts, I separate the tenderloin and split the larger chunk of meat in half. If I'm grilling, I marinate these strips in Italian dressing or barbecue sauce for at least a half hour and cook them on a hot grill. As

with any meat, game or not, do not overcook it or it will be tough and dry. Serve the meat with a vegetable and you have a healthy meal.

If I'm frying, I just start dumping flour and spices into a plastic container until the color looks right. I double-coat the meat, dipping it in milk, seasoned flour, eggs and again in flour, and then fry it in a cast-iron skillet of hot Crisco. Smash up a bunch of potatoes, whip up some pan gravy, add a side of corn and you have a high-cholesterol version of a healthy meal. The only drawback to fried pheasant is there are more dishes to do after dinner.

Fried pheasant is one of my favorite meals, and I've met other pheasant hunters who agree. Serve either to someone who thinks pheasant is dry and gamey, and they'll agree ... and never again smother this tasty bird in cream-of-mushroom soup. ■



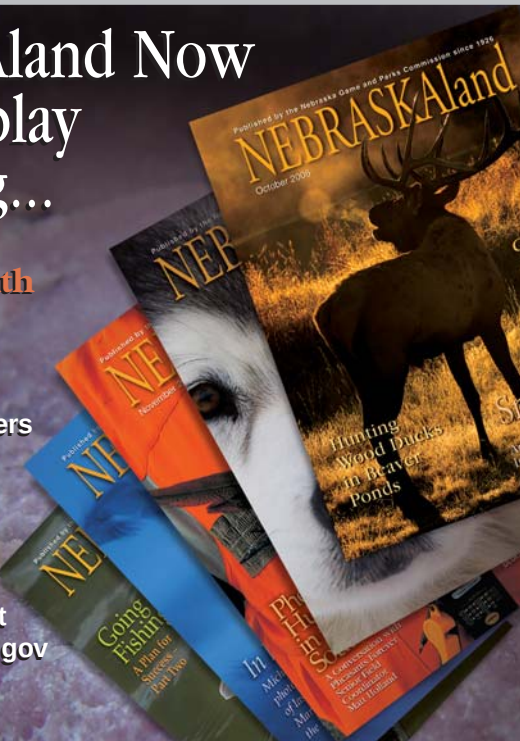
Boneless pheasant fingers, marinated in Italian dressing, grilled and served with corn and potatoes, is an easy and tasty meal.

PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

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## Portraits from the Past



I recently found this picture in my husband's books. Perhaps you might like to use it on your Portraits from the Past page.

Those pictured are (from the left) Bernard Rischling, Warren Rischling, Francis Fixemer and Jack Adams. All the boys were from Geneva, Nebraska, and the picture was probably taken around 1935. No doubt their catch was from nearby Turkey Creek.

My husband was an avid reader of NEBRASKAland Magazine. For many years he received the magazine as a birthday gift from his parents. I continued giving it to him after their deaths.

— Patty Adams, Omaha, Nebraska



This picture is of my younger brother, Tommy Kassube, who is now Thomas Kassube, DDS, of Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

The picture was taken when Tommy was seven years old in December of 1957 on the farm where we lived, three miles southwest of Weeping Water.

Obviously, the coyote was dead and frozen solid. Our dad propped him up to pose for this picture with Tommy and his toy gun.

Our dad would hunt and kill coyotes, cut off their ears, wrap them up and take them to the Cass County Courthouse in Plattsmouth to collect a bounty, which at one time was \$2.00 per pair. I don't know what the payout was in 1957.

Notice the fuel tanks in the background – they were out in the middle of the farmyard. Back then there was no worry about anyone stopping by in the middle of the night and helping themselves!

— Jan Larson, Lincoln, Nebraska



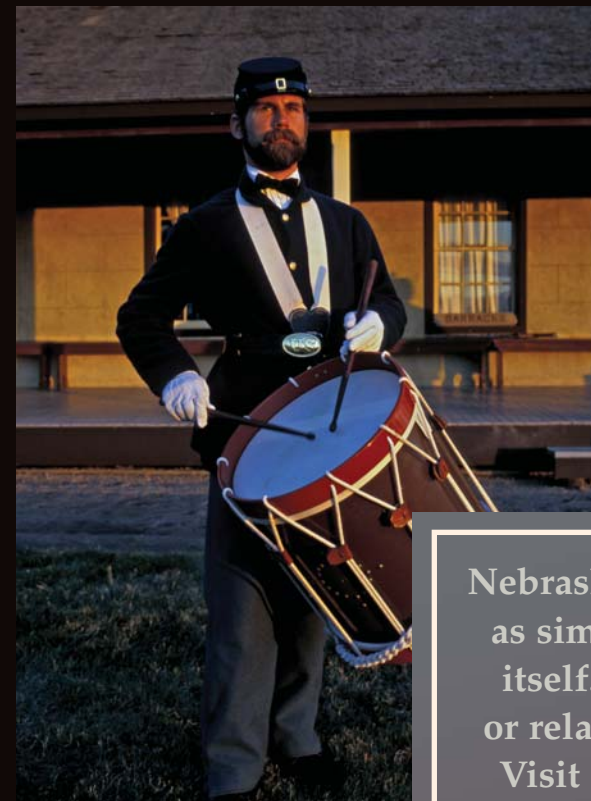
This picture was taken in the late-1940s of my hunting friends Fritz Kramer (left) and Percy Davis from Unadilla, Nebraska. They were cleaning the limit of pheasants we shot the first morning of the season. We hunted on the Ed and Thelma Langdenburg farm near Orleans, Nebraska. In those days (1940s and '50s) a lot of our spare time was spent hunting and fishing. Food for the table, if we had any luck. We hunted pheasants, quail, ducks, geese, squirrels and rabbits, and even had a big roundup for coyotes.

We really enjoy NEBRASKAland Magazine, especially the historical articles. Nebraska has such an interesting history with the Oregon Trail and such.

Keep up the good work.

— Bob Fey, Palmyra, Nebraska

Send contributions to: Portraits from the Past, NEBRASKAland Magazine, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370. Photos should show people enjoying Nebraska outdoor activities, such as camping, boating, hunting or fishing, and must have been taken before 1970. We will give priority to unusual photos or activities. When possible, please include a story about the photograph and identify the people, places and approximate date it was taken. Photos will be returned.



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