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magazine

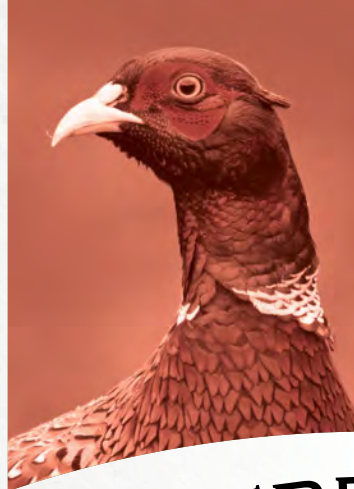
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Cover: Trevor Johnson of Doniphan hauls out decoys after a waterfowl hunt near Grand Island in Hall County. This image, "Clean-up," recently won first place at the Association for Conservation Information's annual conference in the people category of the photo competition. Learn more at Nebraskaland.com.

JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

This page: A fall color leaf on private land in Sarpy County.

JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

Nebraskaland magazine

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Common loons visit large lakes and reservoirs.

CHRIS MASADA, NEBRASKALAND

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Northern Prairie Skink



JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

Box turtles are considered one of the most heavily trafficked animals in the United States. Simply put, many of these animals are poached from the wild and exported across the country or shipped out internationally for food, medicine or for wealthy collectors for their novelty and beauty.

In our October issue of the magazine, you may have noticed there was an eastern box turtle on the cover. Although not native to Nebraska, turtles, and many other reptiles, are often found in areas that are atypical for them. Many times people will pick up these animals while on vacation in different states, keep them as pets, and then decide at a later time to release them back into the wild.

The eastern box turtle is native to the eastern part of the country, but was found in Sarpy County when its photo was taken. This leads us to believe it probably was a pet brought from another state and later released into the wild.

Nebraska does have one native terrestrial turtle, and that is the ornate box turtle shown here.

Send your comments and photos to:
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or email Jeff.Kurrus@Nebraska.gov

Please include your postal address and telephone number. Letters may be condensed and edited. Photographs are also welcome.

**TRAIL THROUGH
THE BLUFFS**
An aerial photo shows a
trail running through the
forested bluffs at Indian
Cave State Park.

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



Preserve your hunting season by taking care of your feet. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

HUNTING FEET

By Jeff Kurrus

Sore feet have kept many outdoor enthusiasts, myself included, from getting out of bed. Follow these tips to have more time afield and less time making excuses why you can't go hunting the next day because you're convinced the "I can't go because my feet hurt" response won't play well with your buddies.

Start with non-cotton socks as a base layer. Cotton absorbs moisture and its fibers can put microincisions on the foot. On a Pine Ridge hike in 2006, I butchered my feet so badly wearing cotton socks that I had to try something new. At the time, I went to full synthetic or wool socks and most recently, have started wearing CEP's Hiking Light Merino socks almost exclusively.

Wearing high- or low-tops boots is a matter of preference, but they must be waterproof. Even if you're upland hunting or don't plan on walking far or into deep cover, dew-covered ground makes for soaked feet.

If the temperatures are colder, place a pair of foot warmers

in between your base layer of socks and a wool or synthetic outer layer. The days of three and four pairs of socks are over. The toe warmers keep your extremities in good shape, and this combination of materials keep my feet warm in sub-zero temperatures ice-fishing each winter.

If and when your feet get wet, because this will eventually happen, immediately change socks and boots. I carry a pair of thick cotton socks to soak the moisture from my feet and then reapply the same steps: non-cotton base, toe warmers and wool outer layer.

Then, after your adventure, make sure to have a pair of cotton socks and sneakers in the vehicle to change into. The cotton will soak up any moisture your feet have taken on, and the sneakers provide lighter footwear to go to the diner or driving back to the house.

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Marinated quail smoked with lemon halves. JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND

SMOKED QUAIL

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

Servings: 4

Prep Time: 8-24 hours

Cooking Time: 1 hour

Ingredients:

- 8 whole quail, skin on
- 2 lemons, cut in half

Yogurt Marinade

- 8 ounces of plain Greek yogurt
- 8 cloves of garlic, minced
- 2 teaspoons of dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon of dried basil
- Grated zest of 1 lemon
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 1 tablespoon of olive oil
- 1½ teaspoons of kosher salt, plus extra

Basting Sauce

- ¼ cup of olive oil
- ½ teaspoon of dried oregano

- ½ teaspoon of Hungarian paprika
- ½ teaspoon of dried basil
- ¼ teaspoon of garlic powder

1. With kitchen shears, remove the backbone from each quail. Turn them breast-side up and flatten with the palm of your hand to break the wishbone, thus spatchcocking them. This preparation will allow the quail to sit flat on the smoker grates and help them cook evenly.

2. In a bowl, combine marinade ingredients. Transfer spatchcocked birds to a zip-top bag and pour in the marinade. Massage the bag to evenly distribute the marinade and refrigerate for at least 8 hours but no longer than 24. Flip the bag occasionally. Take the quail out

of the refrigerator 1 hour prior to cooking.

3. Preheat smoker to 275° Fahrenheit. Meanwhile, brush excess yogurt marinade off each quail and lay them on a cookie sheet or large plate. Sprinkle a small amount of salt over the quail.

In a small saucepan, combine the basting sauce ingredients and heat until warmed through.

4. When your smoker is ready, brush each quail with the basting sauce. Lay the birds onto the smoker along with 2 halved lemons, close the lid and smoke for 1 hour at 275°.

After the hour and before taking the birds off the smoker, baste them again with leftover sauce. Serve immediately with smoked lemons on the side.

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Artifacts of Autumn

Story and photos by Chris Helzer

Hiking a prairie or wetland in November can feel like visiting a museum dedicated to the previous growing season. Relics and reminders of that season are all around, some well-preserved and others not-so-much. Most of the vibrant autumn hues that are characteristic of September and October have dulled, but there are still plenty of treasures to reward an observant wanderer.

Bright colors are rare in November, but not nonexistent. For example, rose hips, the tart



ABOVE: The fruits (hips) of wild rose provide flashes of bright color in November prairie.

LEFT: This late blooming black-eyed Susan flower didn't quite finish flowering before a hard freeze ended its season.



Indiangrass seeds, backlit by evening light. The hairs and awns help grab onto passing animals or hikers.



fruits of those thorny plants, look like small, red light bulbs against a dull brown background. An even more scarce and sublime find is a freeze-dried flower. Late in the season, especially after a shot of rain, some short-lived plants will make a quick and desperate attempt to bloom and produce seed before cold temperatures end their life. If a hard freeze hits while those blossoms are still open, much of the flower color is preserved for at least a few weeks.

After most leaves have dropped and stems have dried, an

abundance of seeds can still be found on plants or scattered around the nearby landscape. Windblown seeds in particular, typically with big feathery plumes attached to them, often get hung up on neighboring plants. Those pappi (plural of pappus, the technical term for many of those feathery plumes) catch the light and glow attractively, especially early and late in the day.

Even the pods, capsules and husks that hold (or held) seeds are attractive. Seed heads often stand in stark



ABOVE LEFT: The feathery pappus on many wind-dispersed seeds allow them to travel on the breeze, but also catch easily on other plants.

ABOVE RIGHT: Common milkweed seed at Lincoln Creek Prairie in Aurora.

BELOW RIGHT: Fingernail-sized seeds of entire-leaf rosinweed.





ABOVE: Common milkweed seed pods silhouetted against a sunrise at Lincoln Creek Prairie.

LEFT: Invasive narrow-leaf cattail seedhead releasing its seeds. Those seeds can travel long distances, colonizing new wetlands far from its parent plant.

contrast to their surroundings, adding pleasing accents to the increasingly muted landscape. Upon close inspection, the complex architecture of each structure is eminently functional but also beautiful — like a finely crafted piece of furniture.

Don't give up on the season just because the leaves have

fallen and the nip in the air is starting to feel like a full-blown bite. A November hike might provide glimpses of hardy animals sticking around for the coming cold or others just showing up from places where winter is even more frigid. If you're especially observant, though, and can tune in to the late autumn ambience, you'll discover much more. Artifacts

from the recent past abound, providing reminiscences of the just-completed growing season but also promises of those to come. [N](#)

Chris Helzer is the Nebraska Director of Science for The Nature Conservancy and is based in Aurora.

When he isn't searching for obscure subject matter to photograph and write about, he conducts research and captures lessons from the Conservancy's land management and restoration work.

Chris is a regular contributor to Nebraskaland Magazine with his first story appearing in 1995.

Outdoor Nebraska

By Renae Blum

November is a big month for deer hunting, of course, but there’s so much more to do. Find some time to enjoy fishing, bird feeding, camping and stargazing, too. 🦌



Hunt mule deer in the Pine Ridge

Season dates vary

The Pine Ridge is big country, and it has some big deer, too. Set your sights on the Pine Ridge this fall and spend some time scouting to find the best spots. Plenty of public access land is available. Hunting food sources can be good in the morning and evening, and during midday, hunt the timber where bucks may be chasing does.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



Feed your backyard birds

Throughout the month | Statewide

You can make a big difference for your backyard birds by feeding them this winter. Black oil sunflower seeds and Nyger thistle seed are great options. Try different feeder types to attract different kinds of birds, and make sure to leave out some water as well. Remember to keep seeds fresh and clean your feeders.

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



Try late-season camping

Throughout the month | Statewide

Late-season camping offers great wildlife watching and fewer crowds; give it a try this month. This time of year, Nebraska Game and Parks offers a \$5 discount on all types of camping, except primitive camping. Water services at several parks are winterized beginning in mid-October, so RV users should contact parks to confirm service. ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

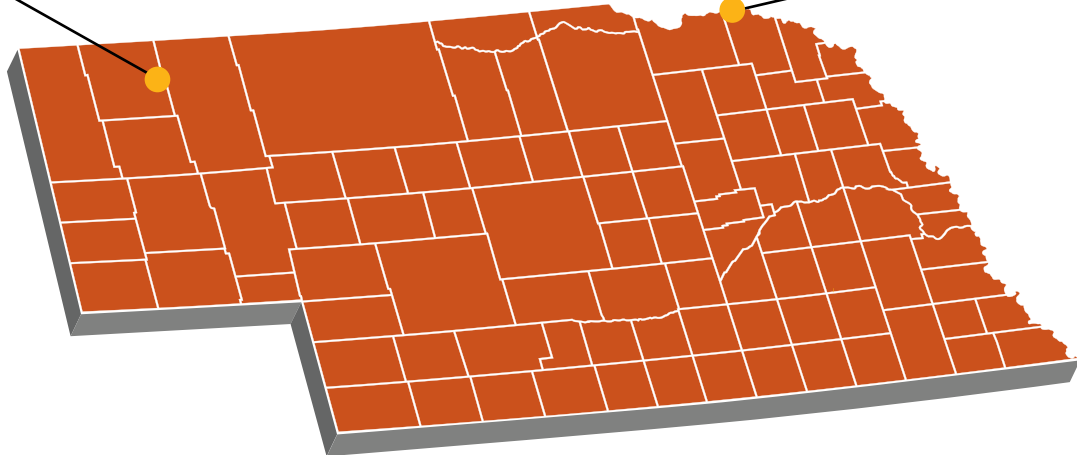


Fish for walleye and sauger at Lewis and Clark Reservoir

Throughout the month

Fishing slows down in November, but as one of Nebraska’s larger reservoirs, Lewis and Clark has plenty of opportunity this month. The lake has a decent walleye population as well as other game fish. Try vertical jigging using jigs and slap spoons, and keep a constant watch of your depth finder.

JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND



Watch the Leonid meteor shower

Peak is Nov. 17-18 | Statewide

Take the opportunity to enjoy some stargazing this month. The Leonid meteor shower will be visible Nov. 3 to Dec. 2 and reaches its peak Nov. 17-18, when you can expect to see 10-15 meteors per hour from a dark sky location. You can view meteors as soon as it’s dark, but the best viewing is after midnight until dawn. Dress warm and bring a blanket or lawn chair.

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



FLAMES ON THE NIOBRARA

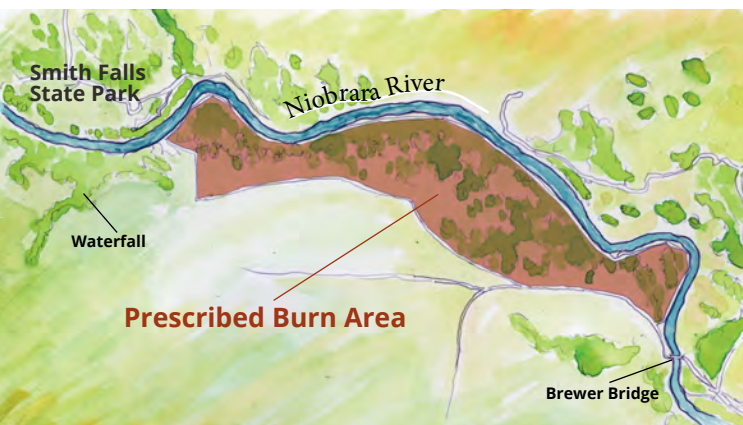
the story of a prescribed burn

By Gerry Steinauer, Botanist

My introduction to the central Niobrara River Valley came in 1984 when, fresh out of college, I interned on The Nature Conservancy's Niobrara Valley Preserve located east of Valentine. My job on the recently-acquired preserve was to design and build nature trails, help move cattle between pastures on horseback, and fix windmills and fences, along with other miscellaneous ranch duties.

On evenings and weekends, I explored. For a kid from the outskirts of Omaha that didn't travel much while growing up, the 56,000-acre preserve was terra incognita. I hiked rocky canyon rims, deep-shaded woods and prairie-covered dunes, and swam and fished in the cool, sandy waters of the Niobrara. This young botanist was also enthralled by the valley's rich flora: More than 600 plant species are found on the preserve alone. By summer's end, the preserve had its hooks in me.

Throughout my 32-year career with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, I have taken every opportunity



The prescribed fire unit included 450-acres of the Niobrara River's south bluff on The Nature Conservancy's Niobrara Valley Preserve in Cherry County, Smith Falls State Park bordered the unit to the west. TIM REIGERT, NEBRASKALAND



The prescribed fire moves through a thinned ponderosa pine stand on the flat south of the river bluff. The trail road that served as the south fire line is visible in the upper right corner of the photo. CHAD BLADOW

to return to the preserve, whether it be to conduct plants surveys, help with workshops or assist with prescribed burns. Case in point: In December 2021, I received an email stating that a prescribed burn was planned for the next day, and help was needed. That evening, I packed my fire gear, and the next morning, I was on the road early for the long drive north. This is the story of that burn.

THE BLUFF ECOSYSTEM

The burn unit was the bluff on the south bank of the Niobrara River between Brewer Bridge and Smith Falls State Park. Thousands of canoers, kayakers and tubers float past these bluffs each year as they occur within a popular 76-mile

stretch of the Niobrara designated as a National Scenic River. Here, the bluff rises sharply from the river. Its moist, low slopes are cloaked with deciduous woodlands of bur oak and a lesser abundance of hackberry, basswood and ironwood. Deep side canyons cut by spring-fed streams dissect the bluff and harbor rare, glacial-relic stands of paper birch and aspen trees. And ponderosa pine woodlands and Sandhills dune



Flames creep through an oak grove as darkness settles on the valley. GERRY STEINAUER, NEBRASKALAND

prairie are interspersed on the dry, sandy upper bluffs, the latter extending southward to the horizon.

As has happened throughout Nebraska, Euroamerican settlement has affected the native Niobrara landscape. One consequence of settlement, fire suppression has allowed eastern red-cedar, ponderosa pine and other woody plants to proliferate to unnaturally high levels. Studies of fire scars in the growth rings of live old trees and the stumps of long-dead trees dating back to the late 1600s show that, prior to settlement, wildfires occurred in the valley on average every five to 15 years. Frequent fire maintained treeless prairies; open, vigorous woodlands; and savannas, prairie with scattered trees. In addition, the wide-burning fires periodically consumed downed wood, fallen conifer needles and other fuels, keeping fire intensity low to moderate.

Not allowing fires to burn regularly has led to an over-accumulation of fuels. Now, when wildfires do start, they can burn hot, as happened during the drought-stricken summer 2012, when lightning strikes set the Niobrara valley ablaze, charring more than 76,000 acres and destroying miles of livestock fence and several homes.

Beginning in the early 2000s, the conservancy hired contractors to cut and pile cedars and smaller pines on the bluffs near Brewer Bridge and elsewhere to combat the abundance of trees and fuel. In March 2014, they conducted

a prescribed fire on these bluffs; the aim was to consume the dry tree piles and ground litter and kill uncut young cedars and pines. Unfortunately, I had other obligations that day and missed the burn.

In the years following that burn, the conservancy cut additional cedars and pines from the bluffs, but the conifers would not go down without a fight. New seedlings sprouted and quickly grew to saplings and, if left unchecked, cedars and pines would again choke the bluffs in a matter of decades. Now, while trees were young and most vulnerable to heat and flame, was the time to hit them again with fire.

THE FIRE

Late in fall 2021, the central Niobrara valley was prime for prescribed burning. There was no snow on the ground, and it was unseasonably warm.

On the morning of Dec. 9, I was among the 15-person burn crew that gathered in the parking lot near Brewer Bridge.

The early arrivals milled about in small groups sipping coffee, talking and joking, while the latecomers organized their gear and donned their bright yellow and dull green, fire-resistant Nomex clothing. Represented were staff of The Nature Conservancy, Game and Parks, Northern Prairies Land Trust and Turner Enterprises, Inc., as well as several volunteers. They were a tight-knit group, most having burned together in the past. When all were ready, Chad Bladow, the conservancy's prescribed fire coordinator and burn boss for this fire, huddled the crew together for a briefing, and the mood turned serious.

Maps of the burn unit were passed out, and Bladow reviewed the ignition pattern, possible danger areas and the day's weather. He then assigned each member to one of four teams and assigned line bosses, his trusted field lieutenants, to lead each team. Three teams would light the fire using drip torches, fuel-filled metal canisters with long spouts from which fuel drips across a burning wick and onto the ground. The fourth team would patrol the fire breaks in all-terrain



Nebraska Game and Parks Commission wildlife biologist Cassidy Wessel, left, and retired Commission employee Marilyn Tabor, right, patrol the south fire line. GERRY STEINAUER, NEBRASKALAND



The resinous bark of ponderosa pines is easily ignited during burns. Winds can carry embers from these hot-burning trees across fire lines posing the danger of spot fires.

CHRIS HELZER, THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

vehicles and pickups equipped with water tanks and pumps. Their critical job was to prevent flames from creeping across or jumping the break. Radios were passed out to provide vital communications as the teams spread out and the burn progressed.

With the meeting over, the crew crossed the bridge in a caravan of vehicles and lumbered up the two-track trail to the prairie flat above the bluff. With the wind out of the north, the burn would start here on the downwind side of the unit's east end, with the trail road, which ran the length of the two-mile-long unit serving as the south fire break.

With Bladow orchestrating from the front seat of his four-wheel-drive pickup, one crew started lighting the backfire directly off the trail. The fire burned slowly into the wind, creating a blackened fire break. Another crew followed the first, filling in unburned gaps and widening the blackened area. Lighting the backfire along the south line took several hours and was mostly uneventful. Only once did tension fill the air.

About noon, as the fire burned through a ponderosa pine stand near the trail road, the resin-soaked bark of several trees caught fire. The crackling flames quickly climbed their trunks, sending embers skyward. These trees needed to be quickly extinguished or the wind might carry embers over the trail road and outside the burn perimeter. The call for help went out over the radio, and the dirty work began. First, crew members pushed through the heat and smoke of the flaming trees and doused them with streams of water. With the flames extinguished, they used heavy rakes to break still-smoldering bark from trunks and limbs to prevent the trees from reigniting.



The bark of a ponderosa pine was charred during the prescribed burn.
GERRY STEINAUER, NEBRASKALAND

Despite the crew's rapid response, a few embers landed across the trail road, igniting small fires in dry grass beyond. Before these "spot fires" could grow and intensify, waiting crew members snuffed them out.

Spot fires are an expected part of prescribed burns, especially those including hot-burning, ember-producing cedars, pines, brush piles or tall grass, and on days when low humidity allows the errant embers to easily ignite dry grass or dead wood. Skillfully, our crew, like all trained fire crews, predicted and was prepared for the spot fires.

With the flaming pines extinguished, the crews lighting the backfire continued to work westward. One could now gaze eastward and see a towering smoke plume rising near the river. The south line secured with a wide, fire-blackened buffer, the third crew had started lighting the headfire at the base of the bluff in the unit's northeast corner. Pushed by the wind and burning upslope, the fire sent a wave of heat ahead, pre-heating and drying the fuels, intensifying the flames and sending many smaller cedars and pines to the afterlife.

At this point, I was on the ridgetop, tasked with the duty of protecting a plastic deer blind set on short wooden poles by lighting a fire around its perimeter, a practice known as blacklining. The grass around the blind had been mowed, but blacklining would add protection. As I drove a utility vehicle into the unit from the southwest, thick smoke began to block my path as I neared the blind. When I peered down the ridge, I saw flames heading my way: The crew lighting the fire along the river had advanced farther than expected. I reversed course, leaving the blind to fate.

Trained in Fire

Chad Bladow was raised in the small town of Hankinson, North Dakota. He spent his childhood summers on his grandparents' nearby farm and lake-side cabin where he roamed the land, camped, fished and developed a love of nature.

In 1996, while pursuing a degree in wildlife and fisheries from the University of North Dakota, his venture into prescribed fire began when he interned for a semester in Florida and helped burn pine woodlands. After college, Bladow was hired by The Nature Conservancy to manage preserves in southern Indiana, including helping with prescribed burns, mainly in oak woodlands. By 2002, he had acquired enough training and experience to become a conservancy burn boss, allowing him to lead prescribed fires on their lands. By 2010, Bladow had met the rigorous standards required to become a federally certified burn boss, the pinnacle of the position. This level of fire leadership requires extensive knowledge of fire behavior in a wide range of plant community types, topography

and weather; leadership and planning skills; and the ability to maintain one's cool under pressure. Bladow began traveling from Indiana to the Niobrara Valley Preserve to lead burns, and in 2018, he accepted the position of prescribed fire coordinator stationed at the preserve. His duties now included planning

central Nebraska," said Scott Wessel, a Commission wildlife biologist stationed in Norfolk. Most ranchers and other landowners throughout the state have little or no experience using prescribed fire and need leadership and guidance to get fire on the ground, Wessel said. "Chad has a knack for understanding



Chad Bladow leads a prescribed burn on the Niobrara Valley Preserve.
CHRIS HELZER, THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

and leading prescribed burns on conservancy preserves throughout the state and helping other conservation groups and private landowners in the northern Sandhills and Niobrara River valley plan and conduct prescribed burns. "Chad has been great helping us implement prescribed fire in north-

a landowner's comfort level with fire, and if they are uncomfortable, helping them work through their concerns. He has that rare balance of confidence and humility needed for his job," he said. To date, Bladow has helped conduct prescribed burns on 15,000 acres of prairie and woodland in north-central Nebraska.

By late afternoon, the crew lighting the backfire had reached the unit's west boundary. They then turned north and lit along a mowed break that snaked down a gentle slope of the bluff, tying the fire off to the river. Soon, the crew setting the headfire would also reach this point, encircling the unit with fire. Behind them, the backfire and headfire were merging high on the bluff, like the sides of a slowly closing zipper, and extinguishing themselves.

In the dimming light of sunset, crew members set fire in the last unburned patches of oak timber low on the bluff that the headfire had passed by. Slowed by the evening chill, their flames crept across the forest floor, casting a pale, eerie glow onto the sprawling branches above. When the last of these fires petered out, darkness enveloped the bluff. The burn was complete. The crew dispersed for a good night's sleep, except for a lone sentinel who stayed late into the night to patrol the burn perimeter.



Niobrara Valley Preserve assistant manager Carson Schultz examines an unscathed aspen in June after the burn. The tree is caged to prevent deer browsing.

GERRY STEINAUER, NEBRASKALAND



Hairy puccoon flowers bloom in a now open stand of bur oak and ponderosa pine. Fire-killed eastern red-cedar saplings and the stumps of cut cedars are visible in the center of the photo. GERRY STEINAUER, NEBRASKALAND

POST-FIRE

Last June, I hiked the bluff with Bladow and Carson Schultz, assistant manager at the preserve, to view the results of the fire. To our delight, many young cedars and pines had died in the burn. Many of the dead still clung to their slow-cooked foliage, now brownish-orange, but where the fires burned hot, these saplings were skeletons of charred stems and limbs.

In the oak woodlands, the fire had top-killed many smaller, shade-producing ironwoods and hackberries. Although these trees would eventually re-sprout, more sunlight was now reaching the forest floor, allowing wildflowers to flourish. Only a few aspen saplings had been top-killed, but these, too, would re-sprout.

And the deer blind? The short, mowed grass below the blind, somewhat miraculously, never caught fire and the

blind survived.

At day's end, we sat on a high hill and gazed down on a bluff that hardly resembled its pre-restoration state: The tree cutting and fires had done their job. Low on the bluff, the oak woods were now open, and the high slopes were cloaked with oak and ponderosa pine savanna. The fuel level was visibly reduced, making the bluff ecosystem more resistant to future wildfires. This one-time intern glowed with satisfaction. 🌱

Nebraska's Civil War Flags

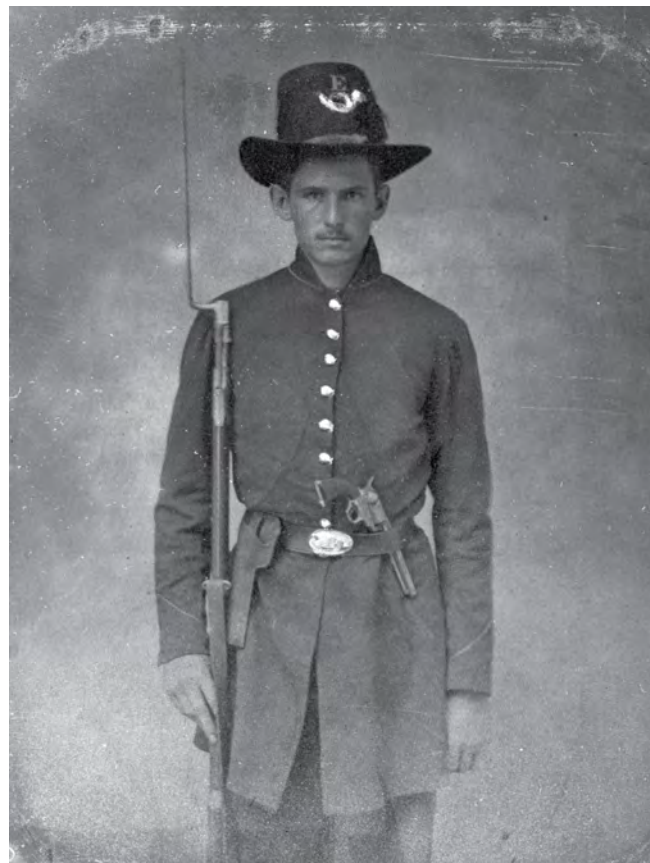
By David L. Bristow, History Nebraska

As we approach another Veterans Day, here are three flags belonging to the first soldiers to formally represent Nebraska in the U.S. Army.

Nebraska Territory had only about 9,000 men of military age when the Civil War began, but it sent more than 3,000 of them into the Union armies. The First Nebraska Infantry Regiment fought in two major battles in 1862, playing a crucial role at the Battle of Fort Donelson and fighting bravely at Shiloh.

Later, mounted as cavalry, the two Nebraska regiments guarded overland trails in Nebraska's Platte Valley. Statehood followed two years after the end of the war. [N](https://www.history.nebraska.gov/)

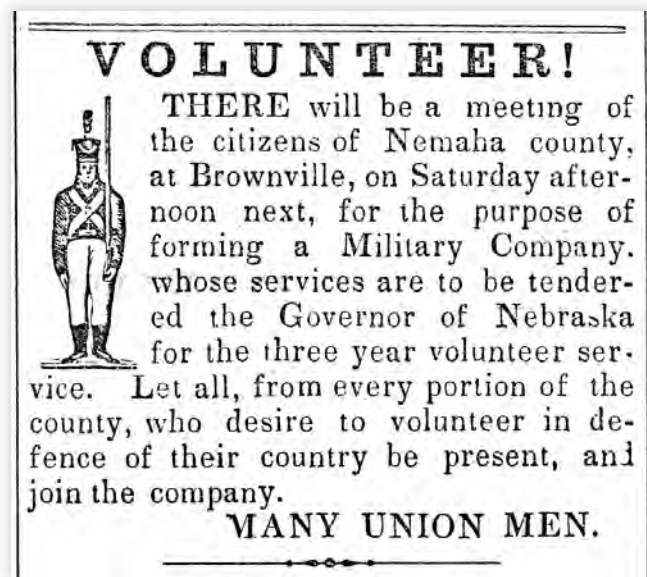
Visit History Nebraska's website at [history.nebraska.gov](https://www.history.nebraska.gov/).



Pvt. James Hutton, age 19, Co. E, First Nebraska, circa 1861.
HISTORY NEBRASKA, RG2057-40



In 1863, the First Nebraska was mounted as a cavalry regiment. It served in the Platte Valley from August 1864 until it was mustered out in July 1866. HISTORY NEBRASKA, 8611-4



This ad appeared in the Nebraska Advertiser (Brownville), on May 23, 1861. The Brownville company traveled by steamboat to Omaha City, where it was mustered into the First Nebraska Regiment.



Much of this 35-star flag has disintegrated and is mounted on a black backing for protection. Battle honors were commonly stitched on regimental colors. This First Nebraska flag bears the names of Milford, Donalson (sic), Shiloh, Corinth and Cape Girardeau. Under the heading "1st Regt. Nebraska Cav." are Chalk Bluff, Sycamore, Red Bank and Jacksonport. HISTORY NEBRASKA, 7135-389-(1)

Flag of First Nebraska Regiment, Company A, 1861. States and territories organized recruits into thousand-man regiments, and young men from the same town usually filled hundred-man companies. Company A was organized in Plattsmouth.

Mrs. O. F. Johnson sewed the company's flag. It was said she had the only sewing machine in town. Many years later, the flag came to History Nebraska in fragile condition. Its blue field is all but gone, and at some point, its remaining 26 stars were mounted to a new backing — and not very neatly.

Mrs. Johnson's stripes are a bit uneven, but we assume she placed her 34 stars with more care. The U.S. had 34 states after Kansas joined the Union in January 1861. During the war years, new U.S. flags added stars for Kansas, West Virginia (1863) and Nevada (1864), but did not — as a matter of principle — subtract the 11 seceded states from the Perpetual Union. HISTORY NEBRASKA, 2046



Fog From Above

Photos and story by Eric Fowler

Flying above fog gives you a new perspective of these clouds on the ground.

Sunlight reflects off the Platte River between Shelton and Gibbon as sandhill cranes roost on the river and snow geese fly above it in March 2018. A grain elevator in Hayland and power plant in Hastings are visible in the distance.

We have all, on occasion, had our heads in the clouds. I'm not referring to our tendency to daydream. I'm referring to those cool mornings when our world is shrouded in mystical fog.

On rare occasions, I've been lucky to have a photo flight scheduled on one of those mornings. In such cases, fog can be a blessing and a curse. The Federal Aviation Administration says you can't take off in fog. The person who made that rule obviously wasn't a photographer. It's not that bad, I say. Follow those runway lights and let's get above it. You need to be able to turn around and land if something goes wrong, they say. I suppose that's wise.

Twice I've waited at an airport for fog to clear. A few other times, my pilot and I have taken off and found fog on our flight path.

The view from above shows you that fog is indeed stratus clouds resting on the ground as opposed to their typical low-level altitude that doesn't exceed 6,500 feet. Sometimes fog appears as a blanket. Sometimes it's more like the ground is littered in cotton balls, the space between them varying from some to none. Other times, it stretches out in bands across the landscape.

If there's a slight breeze, you can see how it clings behind trees and hills or is strung out in wispy streaks. This explains why, as you move through fog on the ground, or it moves past you, the density can vary from zero to pea soup.

Each time I've photographed fog from above, it has been concentrated in river valleys, where fog likes to form.

Whatever valley it is in, flight plans are always tossed out the window. We can always stop for more fuel. I will chase fog as long as the light is good or the sun slowly shrinks the fog bank until it disappears, and it's time to get back to work. It's always good while it lasts. 🌫️

Wispy streaks of fog blanket cropland between shelterbelts and trees along the Platte River southeast of Fremont in August 2019.





Grain elevators rise
above fog covering
the southern edge of
North Bend.



TOP LEFT: Fog fills the Missouri River Valley to the height of the Plattsmouth Toll Bridge and Burlington Northern Railroad bridges in September 2020.

BOTTOM LEFT: Sandhill cranes fly above the fog and trees along the Platte River in Hall County in March 2018.

TOP RIGHT: Fog clings to the lowlands along the Elkhorn River near Nickerson in June 2011.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Fog wafts through the riparian forest along the Platte River at Schilling Wildlife Management Area and Missouri River near Plattsmouth in September 2020.



Disappearing Act

Story and photos by Chris Helzer

I was on the way out to The Nature Conservancy's Platte River Prairies when the preserve manager, Cody Miller, called.

"Hey, have you ever seen a spadefoot toad?"

"Just once," I said, "but never along the Platte. You got one?"

"Yep," he said. "I saw it hopping away from the mower, and so I moved it to safety. It wasn't the kind of toad I expected! I'm holding it until you get here."

Fifteen minutes later, I arrived to find Miller holding the little spadefoot gently in his hand. The spadefoot, of course, wasn't interested in sitting for a portrait. While a grinning Cody watched from above, I scooted around on my belly in the mowed grass, trying to get the spadefoot to stop hopping long enough for my camera to focus. I wasn't having much luck.

Finally, I grabbed the toad and stuck it on top of a mowed-off pocket gopher mound, sure it would once again hop away. Instead, it sat perfectly still, and I quickly snapped a few photos before I noticed that its back feet were shuffling discreetly in the loose soil. That's when my brain clicked into gear, and I realized what was happening.

The plains spadefoot is colloquially called a toad, but several characteristics, including its smooth, moist skin, make it more of a frog. They're rarely seen because they spend most of their lives underground, emerging only during or after rainstorms to mate and lay eggs in puddles. The adults then dig themselves back into the earth and their tadpoles try to grow up before their puddle evaporates.

As Cody and I watched, the spadefoot in front of us slowly started

to sink into the gopher mound. It sat fully upright and slowly rotated as its hind feet worked the soil from beneath its body. Within three minutes, the toad had been completely swallowed up by the earth, leaving almost no sign it had been there. It was mesmerizing and magical to watch.

I took lots of photos of the spadefoot as it gradually disappeared. In the moment, I wrestled with whether to switch to video but decided to stick to still photos. Afterward, I briefly considered digging the spadefoot back out to see if it would repeat the performance on video, but I quickly dismissed the thought, and we left the little guy alone in his subterranean hideout. [N](#)

Chris Helzer is The Nature Conservancy's director of science in Nebraska.

The Plains Spadefoot

The plains spadefoot toad is the only spadefoot toad in the state. Look at the rear foot of the toad and you will find a keratinized spade on it which no other toad or frog in the state has. It allows them to dig into sandy soils.

The plains spadefoot ranges from southwestern Canada, throughout the Great Plains of the western United States and into northern Mexico.



The "spade" on the rear foot of a Great Basin spadefoot is similar to the plains spadefoot's. PHOTO: ALAN ST. JOHN

Photos 1 – 5: The spadefoot toad descending into a gopher mound.



After the Shot

By Ryan Sparks

I can vividly recall the two animals I've shot and didn't recover. The memories still give me a gut-wrenching feeling of loss and remorse. The first loss was a Montana mule deer I tracked with a friend for several hours before falling snow made it impossible to continue. The second was a Nebraska white-tailed buck. I searched for him for three days, but never found him. He's still the biggest buck I've ever seen.

There are many hunting skills that are necessary for a successful hunt, but we usually focus on the ones that are needed before the trigger is pulled or an arrow is released. Whether you're hunting elk, antelope, mule deer or whitetail, what you do after the shot can greatly affect your chances of recovering the animal.

Analyze the Shot

The first thing to do after a shot is to mark your location. That's easy if you are hunting from a tree stand, but not so much if you are stalking antelope or mule deer. Stick an arrow in the ground, use flagging tape, create a pile of rocks or mark the location on your GPS. This marker will provide you with a reference. Next, make a mental note of where the animal was standing. If you have your phone, take a picture of where the animal was from your shooting position.

Next, replay the shot in your mind. Ideally, you should know where you hit the animal, but with how fast modern bows are or feeling the recoil of a rifle while looking through the scope, sometimes it can be hard to tell.



Reading a blood trail can tell a hunter a lot about where they hit the animal, making the tracking effort more successful. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND



Reading the landscape after a shot, and moving slowly, are effective methods to finding downed animals. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

Additionally, shots often occur in low-light situations.

If you can't tell where you hit the animal, think about how it reacted to the shot. If the animal hunched up, it might indicate you hit too far back, perhaps in the liver or intestines. If the animal favors a side, it could indicate you hit a leg or broke a shoulder. Usually on a perfect shot — lungs and heart — an animal runs away at full speed, not much different than if you had missed. However, a heart-shot animal will often “mule-kick,” but that isn't always a sign of a good shot. Knowing how to read an animal's body language could provide clues to where your bullet or

arrow entered.

On a perfect shot, 30 minutes is a good amount of time to wait before tracking. Generally, a well-hit animal will die within 15 minutes, but it's good to add extra time. Liver shots require 2-3 hours of waiting, and anything farther back, you should wait 6-12 hours. You are waiting because if left unpressured, the animal eventually will lie down in heavy cover.

If you don't wait, at least two unfortunate things can happen. One, you can bump the animal from cover and it can run hundreds, if not thousands, of yards away on its adrenaline. Two, if not hit in the heart or lungs, the slow

trickle of blood that formed a meager trail might be eliminated completely due to clotting. Both of these can prevent you from finding the animal at all later, so wait as long as you can.

Tracking

The next step is to go to the location where you shot the animal and look for sign. Inspect the ground and search for blood. If you are bowhunting, look for the arrow. If blood on the arrow or ground is gritty and dark purple or black, you probably hit the liver or intestines. If there is green material or bile, you hit too far back on the animal near the

colon or stomach. Solid red blood could mean a heart or lung shot, and lighter pinkish blood that sometimes contains tiny bubbles indicates a lung shot.

Now reassess. Does what you're seeing confirm what you thought about your shot placement? Based on this sign, decide if you should start tracking or wait. You don't want to bump an injured animal from its bed. This will leave a smaller blood trail and lower your chance of success. The farther an animal gets from the shot site, the harder it will be to find.

If your shot placement looked good, you waited 30 minutes and the arrow or blood at the site of impact is positive,



After the shot, give the deer ample time before tracking. RYAN SPARKS

it's time to track. However, too many people get ahead of themselves in the anticipation of finding the animal and destroy sign along the way. Take your time. Find blood one spot at a time and

go from there. Sometimes, even good shots will leave sparse blood trails. Don't just look on the ground. Look for blood on branches, leaves, grass and brush. Think about what side you shot



Marking blood trails with tape or flagging allows the hunter to return to the last spot they saw blood. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

the animal and use that to guide your search.

Every time you find blood, mark it with flagging tape, toilet paper or by dropping a pin on your GPS. There may be times you will get off the trail and need to find your way back and start over.

No matter where you hit the animal, there will be some sort of sign: tracks, blood, disturbed vegetation, etc. The key is to be patient and persistent. Pay close attention to the tracks of the animal. Look at the size of them and the distance apart from each other. I once tracked a buck that ran off with several does after the shot. With a meager amount of blood to follow and the tracks eventually going different directions, I figured out which way the buck went by comparing the stride distance.

Another way to track a wounded animal is to read the landscape. An

animal will usually, but not always, take the path of least resistance until it reaches an area where it feels safe, such as thick cover or a bedding area. That means they will usually travel downhill, avoid steep creek crossings or jump fences if they can. Often, the easiest way for an animal to travel is on an existing game trail. There is an art to tracking and like anything else, you get better at it with practice.

If all else fails, and you think there is a danger of spoilage, gather as many people as you can and do a grid search of the area. Ask the neighbors if you can search their property. See if there is someone in your area with a blood tracking dog. The most important thing is to do everything you can to recover the animal. Don't give up.

The last thing to consider is when you do find the downed animal, always approach carefully, ideally with the wind in your face and from a position where the animal cannot see you. If an animal is on a steep hill, approach from below because if it is still alive and tries to flee, going uphill is much harder and will give you a better chance at a follow-up shot. Get close enough to make sure the animal has expired before you let your guard down.

Exceptions to the Rule

Everything in hunting is situational, and tracking is no different. There are several situations where you might have to disregard the wait times mentioned previously. If I make a shot in the evening, that will require tracking in the dark. I might check the forecast to make sure there is no chance of snow or rain and wait until the next morning for better light. Of course, if it's hot or I'm hunting in an area with lots of coyotes, I stick to my regular wait times and proceed as usual in the dark.

There are also times when it's more ethical to start tracking right away because you are losing the opportunity to find the animal, like when it's raining or snowing. While it's usually best to



Sometimes, blood trails — even after a well-placed shot — are hard to come by. The next step is to locate trails for clues. JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND

wait, there are no clear-cut rules to every situation. If you have to push a tracking job, it's best to have two people: one person looking for sign and the hunter looking ahead for the animal and at the ready to make a follow-up shot. Treat tracking as if you are hunting — be quiet and move slowly.

Of course, the best thing you can do to guarantee the recovery of an animal is to practice your shooting, know your limitations and only take high-percentage shots. Do everything in your power to make a clean, ethical kill. Still, there are times when things go wrong.

Bad shots happen. Sometimes, animals jump the string or turn suddenly just as you are pulling the trigger. Both arrows and bullets can deflect off branches. When that happens, remember these tips to increase your chances of finding game. It all comes down to the time you wait, how much effort you put into finding sign, and how you interpret what you find. 📍

Ryan Sparks is a writer and photographer originally from Cass County. To see more of his work visit sparksryan.com.

From Field to Freezer

By Ryan Sparks

Some hunters travel less than an hour from their home to hunt, while others plan special hunts across the state for deer, antelope and elk each season. The first time I killed an animal over a day's drive from home, the reality of the situation set in — now what? Taking care of meat in the field and getting it home in a timely manner requires advanced preparation and logistical planning. Here are the best practices for getting meat from the field to your freezer.

Field Dressing

First, consider how you will handle the animal in the field. If you shoot a deer in an open area, that might simply mean field dressing the animal and loading it into a vehicle for the drive home. However, if you are miles from the truck, hunting in steep country or in a place where 4-wheeler access isn't allowed or feasible, dragging out an entire animal isn't an option. In these situations, the best solution is to quarter the animal in the field and haul it out on your back.

My favorite approach to quartering an animal is called the "gutless" method. I prefer it because it cools the animal down quickly, doesn't expose the meat to innards or hair and is easier to accomplish when you are alone. All you need is a sharp knife



A portable processing kit is an invaluable tool, especially for those who hunt in remote areas. RYAN SPARKS

and a few game bags. There are many videos online that do a good job of explaining how to perform the gutless method, and the overall concept is simple: Skin the animal on one side, removing the front and hind quarters, backstrap and neck meat. As you remove each quarter, place it in a game bag and hang it, preferably in a shady spot with good air circulation.

Then flip the animal over, and using the skinned hide to protect the meat from dirt and debris, repeat the same process on the other side. In the end, you will have four quarters and a game bag containing the backstraps, tenderloins, neck meat and other trim meat. You can then open the carcass to remove the heart, liver, kidneys or anything else you'd like to keep. The process is the same, whether you're skinning a pronghorn, whitetail, mule deer or elk. Keep in mind that in Nebraska, it is unlawful to separate a deer or antelope carcass into smaller sections than quarters before checking the animal.

Once you have the animal quartered, it's time for the pack out. With a small antelope or deer, this can usually be accomplished in a single trip depending on the size of your backpack, but larger animals will require multiple trips. Once you have the meat back to your vehicle, you need to decide how you will get it home without spoiling. This should be a consideration long before you pull the trigger or release an arrow.

Long Trip Home

You have three options to prevent meat from spoiling on the way home: traveling with a small chest freezer, using several coolers or dropping off the animal at a processor and having them ship the meat to you. I prefer to process an animal myself to

avoid the expense of overnight shipping (or making the long return drive), but if you are unprepared, a processor might be your best option.

I recommend bringing the meat home in coolers or a freezer. I've done both ways, and choosing one method over the other will depend on the specific situation.

If you're looking at a multi-day trip home and have the extra space for a freezer, it's a nice option. Small chest freezers are usually big enough to freeze entire quarters, so you don't have to worry about processing until you get home. Just be sure to have plenty of extension cord to plug in the freezer at hotels, campgrounds or gas stations. Throwing a blanket over the freezer will add insulation and keep the sun from directly hitting the freezer.

Most often, though, I bring meat home in coolers. If you have a huge cooler that can fit an entire quartered animal, that's great, but most people don't have one. This space limitation means you will have to cut the meat into large muscle groups, bag it and then preferably freeze it before you take it home.

Airbnb and Vrbo are great options for processing animals because you have a full kitchen, including a fridge and freezer. On trips like these, I bring a vacuum sealer, freezer bags and a 6-inch boning knife — I worked as a butcher for 3 years, and those items are the basics. Saws and larger knives can be handy, but not necessary. I prefer cutting the meat into large muscle groups and bagging any trim separately to grind later. Freeze everything before placing meat in coolers for the journey home. If you prefer to butcher meat on your truck's tailgate, hotel and motels generally have freezers they will allow you to use at a cost, as do meat processors.

Short Trip Home

If you are within a day's drive of home, freezing the meat isn't as great of a concern. In this case, dry ice is a great choice. Dry ice is readily available at grocery stores, some gas stations, as well as farm and ranch supply stores — call ahead. Place your meat in the bottom of the cooler with the dry ice on top, separated by a piece of cardboard. This will keep the dry ice from touching and damaging the meat. Anytime you use dry ice, be sure to crack the cooler or open the drain port at the bottom so pressure doesn't build inside the cooler.

Wet ice is also an option, but it melts and will eventually soak the meat. If you use wet ice, place it on the bottom of the cooler with something above to separate it from the meat. Open the drain in the bottom of the cooler to drain melted ice water. Freezer packs also work well, and I often use frozen water bottles if I have the chance.



Know When Not to Shoot

The most common mistake in the early season is shooting an animal too far from the truck where it's difficult to retrieve meat and cool before spoilage occurs. In this case, pulling the trigger or releasing an arrow isn't ethical. Think about those factors before you shoot. If you are unsure, don't take the shot.

Making the right choices in the field, knowing how to efficiently quarter and pack out game, being prepared with the necessary tools and having a game plan to get the meat home safely are the keys to enjoying game meat all year long.



If you want less hassle, and heartbreak, know when to shoot. The top image should always be a no-no, and the bottom one isn't much better. Be patient and get a broadside shot. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND



After being quartered in the field, meat is hung in game bags. RYAN SPARKS

SOUP' ON! SOUPÇON!

By Roger Welsch

I once met a man who wouldn't eat soup. He said he didn't like it. I stood there staring at him until he finally snapped his fingers to see if I was still alive. How can you not like soup?

Feeling a little uncertain about myself, I checked for a definition of "soup." Might just as well try to find a definition for "food." Is there anything that can't be made into soup? I've had cold berry soup with farm workers in northern Finland and hot chokecherry soup on the Omaha Reservation in Macy, Nebraska. I've had corn soup and pumpkin soup with the Pawnee, duck blood soup with Linda's Bohemian tribe and buffalo soup with the Lakota. (Out of discretion, I won't reveal which tribe treated me to dog soup.) There's onion soup, cheese soup, potato soup, fish soup, chicken soup, vegetable soup, mushroom soup, split peas, beans, leeks and ramps, etc. etc. etc. My mother made Schnitzsupp' from dried mixed fruit (Schnitz). Ambrosial! Rabbit soup, turtle soup, beer soup, oxtail soup....

I was once faced with the prospect of making chicken soup for a tribal celebration for 400 people. I asked my friend Clyde Sheridan how many chickens I would need, and he looked at me in bewilderment. I've come to understand his confusion. To make chicken soup for 400 people, you need 400 chickens. Or four chickens. Either one. Does it make any difference? Same with buffalo. How many buffalo does it take to feed buffalo soup to everyone at a Lakota Sundance? I guess, as many buffalo as you happen to have. I once watched Pawnee cooks making beef soup in a huge cauldron that must've held at least 50 gallons. They stirred it with a wooden canoe paddle. They had no recipe. "Clean and dice one cow. Add

pounds of assorted pasta and bushels of available vegetables. Boil. Stir frequently. Serve."

And that's another thing: Soup is the great social leveler. There's no discussion about who gets the fine cuts of loin and who gets neck bones. Make soup and everyone gets everything. Same with chickens. Who wants a drumstick? Who wants a neck bone? With soup, it's "one cup or two?" I used to imagine that Omaha powwow cooks cut up meat for soup with a chainsaw or dynamite. As my father had



it, "It's all cow." His mother, my grandmother, kept a "pot au feu," or pot on the fire, a big cast iron pot on the back of the cook stove, ever bubbling, and always ready to accept any offerings from leftovers to trimmings, crusts or crumbs. What did it taste like? Well, like Grandma's pot au feu!

Soup is the perfect food, for camp fire and cabin or banquet hall, two guys in a canoe or 400 Omahas at a handgame. For sure, it's the soup du jour.

Roger Welsch was an author, humorist, folklorist and a former essayist for CBS News Sunday Morning. He was the author of more than 40 books and contributed to Nebraskaland Magazine from 1977 until his recent passing on Sept. 30, 2022.

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PRAIRIE PARKS

By Olivia DaRugna, Watchable Wildlife Biologist

Despite drought conditions statewide, there was still beautiful fall color to see at various natural areas throughout Nebraska, including Ponca and Indian Cave state parks in the eastern part of the state. But for those looking to extend their fall color viewing into November, look no further than the state’s prairie parks.

Even after the leaves have fallen, the grasses in these areas give visitors a longer color season until everything is replaced by winter white.

Rock Creek Station State Historical Park — Enjoy



Rock Creek Station State Historical Park near Endicot.
ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

expansive views of tallgrass prairies. The dried, orange grassy fields bring a feeling of warmth to the cooler weather. Start on the trail that begins near the visitor center and head south through the prairie. A closer look in the grasses reveals some hidden gems — dried seedpods, birds’ nests that were once camouflaged in the green grass of summer, intricate spider webs still clinging to dried stems of grass and wildlife trails that deer and other mammals frequently use.

At adjacent Rock Creek Station State Recreation Area, 13 electric camper pads are available for visitors.

Rowe Sanctuary — More than 200 plant species highlight the restored tallgrass and mixed-grass prairies of Audubon’s Rowe Sanctuary. The vast diversity of plant species creates a mosaic of fall colors and shapes. Visit during early morning and around dusk when the grasses are aglow with the sun’s

light. Enjoy a close-up look of Nebraska’s native prairie along the cutback trail (0.7 miles) that starts at the Iain Nicolson Audubon Center. The trail meanders through the prairie and alongside the Platte River.

An 8-minute drive away, Windmill State Recreation Area welcomes campers with 69 electrical camper pads and 20 non-pad, basic sites.

Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area — Wildcat Hills is where the pines meet the prairie. Take a walk among the pine forests or continue to enjoy the oranges of November with swaths of prairies speckled with yucca.

After a stay at one of the area’s 12 basic campsites, take a drive from Wildcat Hills to Fort Robinson State Park. The prairies on this drive become more beautiful as winter approaches, with the grasses turning from green to varying shades of yellow, reds and browns. Watch for pronghorn grazing in this vast prairie along the way.

Fort Robinson State Park — Upon arrival, take a scenic drive up through Smiley Canyon and enjoy the contrast of bluffs and prairies, where horses graze and the sounds of pinyon jays can be heard and seen among the stands of yellow grass.

Overnight stay options abound at Fort Robinson State Park, from group lodging in buildings once used for housing soldiers stationed at the fort to 102 electrical sites and 28 basic camp sites.

Merritt Reservoir State Recreation Area — Merritt is a great jumping off point to explore the Sandhills prairies. The wide-open landscape offers views like no other and, arguably, fall is the most beautiful time to visit. The yellow, orange, red and brown hues of the rolling grass-covered dunes must be enjoyed in-person, as a single image cannot capture the beauty and depth of this vast prairie. The willows in the wetlands between the dunes add a pop of red to this landscape.

With numerous camping options over several campgrounds, enjoy spectacular Sandhills sunsets before settling in around the fire for some stargazing. Then, the next morning, take the Merritt Dam road on the north side of the reservoir to continue your adventure to the Samuel R. McKelvie National Forest.

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PLUS THE TROUT

By Jeff Kurrus

Fall stockings of put-and-take rainbow trout draw anglers out of the house for a holiday season meal, but where this autumn ritual gets really interesting are those lakes where top-notch fisheries already exist. There, you'll have no idea what's fighting on the other end of the line.

Lakes

Grove Lake – The trophy northern pike in this northeastern Nebraska lake near Royal are just as excited about fall trout stockings as anglers, and as they put on weight for the impending winter, they give anglers a much larger option along with newly stocked rainbow trout.

CenturyLink Lake – Located at Eugene T. Mahoney State Park between Omaha and Lincoln, this 10-acre lake remains a multispecies hotspot. “I’m always telling people about CenturyLink,” said Nebraska Game and Parks Commission fisheries biologist Daryl Bauer. “This is a good fishery without the trout. Nice crappie and largemouth bass. Good catfish, too.”

Halleck Lake – Staying in the metro, Papillion’s Halleck Lake is a “there’s no telling what you’ll catch” fishery, said Bauer. From big largemouth bass, channel catfish and an occasional muskellunge, trout anglers might just run into a fish of a lifetime.

Bessey Fish Pond – “Forget about the trout,” Bauer jokingly said about this Nebraska National Forest at Halsey hotspot. “Go after the bluegills and big catfish.” But also keep the recently added rainbows in mind as well.

Carter P. Johnson – One of many angling options at Fort Robinson State Park in Sioux County, anglers will find nice largemouth bass striking the same lures used for rainbow trout — as long as the lures being used are the right ones.

Baits

While “the right lures” are a matter of opinion in fishing, much like the proper political affiliation or baseball hitting technique, there are definitely some wrong lures. “If you’re fishing dough bait or Powerbait,” said Bauer, “you’re probably only catching trout.” Instead, when fishing this list of lakes, tie on in-line spinners like roostertails and size No. 8 husky jerks, which will be about

3 inches long. These lures give anglers multispecies options.

“Throw a spinner, and there’s no telling what you’ll catch,” Bauer said — especially when you’re fishing these lakes. To see the full list of put-and-take rainbow trout stockings, visit OutdoorNebraska.org/fishstockingreports.



The opportunity to catch bluegills and put-and-take rainbow trout is just another reason to fish CenturyLink Lake. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

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WHOSE NEST IS THIS?

By Alie Mayes, Community Science Education Specialist

Birds make nests to raise their babies, and do not use them outside of breeding season. Different birds make different types of nests, and during this time of year, the falling leaves will uncover a range of shapes and sizes. The construction of each nest corresponds with species-specific factors, including bird size, clutch size, time and energy needed for nest building, and the availability of cover, warmth, habitat and resources.

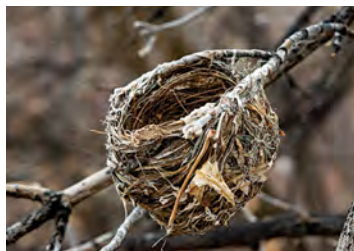
For example, bald eagles are known for their huge nests, which they return and add to year after year. Eagle nests typically measure 5-6 feet in diameter and 2-4 feet tall, but they can be significantly larger. The largest bald eagle nest recorded weighed a shocking 2 tons.

In stark contrast, the smallest nest we have here in Nebraska is that of the ruby-throated hummingbird. These thimble-sized nests seem fairy-inspired, made with whimsical materials such as thistle seeds, spiderwebs and lichens. When complete, these cup nests are only approximately 2 inches wide and 1 inch deep.

So, how can you identify the nest you find? Unless the birds or eggs are present, this can be tricky business. However, there are a few clues to help narrow down the field.

Hanging Nests

When trees shed their leaves, one nest many people notice is the woven hanging “socks” of orioles. Often suspended from the edge of branches, these nests are designed with strands of grass, vine, hair and even manmade materials, such as twine and fishing line.



An orchard oriole's hanging nest.
JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

Cup Nests

Cup nests are a very common form of nest. When trying to determine what species built a cup nest, there are three clues that can help: size, materials and location. For example, a barn swallow builds a 3-inch cup nest made primarily of mud and lined with feathers. The nest will be found attached to a manmade



Barn swallow's cup nests on a bridge. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

structure such as a barn.

On the other hand, a brown thrasher creates a slightly larger 3.5-inch cup nest of twigs, leaves, dead grass and rootlets. They hide their bulky nests in the branches of bushes, with preferences for bushes with thorns.

Platform Nests

Platform nests are the style of choice for birds such as ospreys, bald eagles and herons. The platforms are constructed by layering twigs and branches. Materials such as grass or feathers are sometimes added to soften and insulate the structure. Platform nests can be found in trees, cliff edges or on manmade structures including wooden platforms that are placed to encourage nesting.



A bald eagle's platform nest in a tree.
ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

Cavity Nests

Cavity nesters place their nests inside a chamber of a tree, rock face, chimney or bird house. Primary cavity nesters are the birds that can excavate their own home. A great example of a primary cavity nester is the woodpecker.



A woodpecker's cavity nest in a tree. ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

Secondary cavity nesters, which are birds that use already excavated chambers, include chickadees, kestrels, wood ducks and others. The nest placed within the cavity can vary greatly. For example, mountain bluebirds make a shallow cup of grass in their cavity. The house wren takes a more “stuffed” approach, packing in twigs between the eggs and entrance for extra protection. These birds may also welcome the presence of spider sacs in their “house” design. When the spiders hatch, they help eliminate pests such as mites.

If you are interested in learning more about identifying bird nests, visit NestWatch.org. It also is home to NestWatch, a community science project that invites participants to report nest-related data from their backyards to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

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Rabbit hunting, 1969
 This photo was taken on our family farm near Poole in December 1969 of Bob and Dale Luce. Dale lives in Columbus.
 Every year, I travel to Nebraska to hunt pheasants in the fall and during a normal year, turkeys in the spring.
 – Bob Luce, Sierra Vista, Arizona



Pheasant hunting, 1976
 This is my older brother, David Houtwed, who was so good with a rifle and shotgun his nickname was “Riflemen” when he was in high school. These two roosters were just a few that flushed at the wrong time. I’ve watched him shoot many skeet out of the air with his .22 rifle. It was not uncommon to see David hit coyotes on the run with his 25-06 at 400-500 yards. I would not trade the days I spent hunting with him for anything you could give me. We grew up in Ruskin where the hunting was plentiful, and we never missed a chance to bag pheasants, quail, coyotes and deer as we looked forward to the seasons like a great Husker fan waited for football.
 – Kevin Houtwed, Grand Island



Duck hunting, 1978
 This is a picture of my father Don A. Daubert. Dad grew up in Omaha and still lives there today. The location is a marsh in south-central Nebraska. His love of hunting was sparked by his uncle, Bernard Danowskie, in the 1950s. Dad still loves to duck and turkey hunt to this day. His love of hunting has spread to his sons, Doug and Mike. Several of his grandkids love to hunt with Grandpa as well.
 – Mike Daubert, Omaha

Waterfowl hunting, 1929
 This photo was taken in 1929 in Atkinson. Shown right is Donat Seger, and left is his son Johnny Seger.
 – Chuck Leiningen, Atkinson

Send contributions to: Portraits from the Past, Nebraskaland Magazine, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370. Or e-mail to Tim.Reigert@Nebraska.gov. Photos should show people enjoying Nebraska outdoor activities, such as camping, boating, hunting or fishing, and must have been taken before 2000. We will give priority to unusual photos or activities. When possible, please include a story about the photograph and identify the people, places and approximate date it was taken. Text may be edited and photos adjusted for reproduction. All photos will be returned.



THE PHOTO I DIDN'T KNOW I WANTED

By Chris Helzer

Sometimes, a photographic opportunity just presents itself, and all I have to do is take advantage of it.

I take a lot of crab spider photos. A good portion of my life is spent looking at flowers, both for work and on my own time. Crab spiders like to sit in ambush on flowers, waiting for insects like bees, flies or other flower visitors to come by. As a result, I spot a lot of them, and it's hard to resist photographing a little spider with its long front legs extended wide, ready to snap shut on unwary prey.

Sometimes, I'm lucky enough to spot a crab spider that has just captured a fly, bee or some other food item. I have to photograph that scene quickly because spiders usually like to slip beneath

a leaf or flower petal to hide while they eat. That's a smart tactic for the spiders but not great for photographers.

On this particular day, however, that hiding behavior worked out for both the spider and me. I'd spotted a crab spider and its captured fly on the lip of a shell-leaf penstemon flower. By the time I got my camera out, the spider had taken its prey into cover. While that ruined my initial plan, when I peeked inside the flower to see where my subject had gone, I perked right up. The spider had framed itself perfectly for the shot I hadn't known I wanted.

I took it, and the photo has become one of my favorites.



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