



A horse-drawn mower is covered in snow near Hickman. Photo by Brad Moser.

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NEBRASKAland

March 2015



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Crane Viewing
 Roadside Fossils
 Restoring a Prairie
 Helping Vets Hunt
 Tall Tale Postcards
 A Big Year for Birding
 A Beginner's Guide to Fishing

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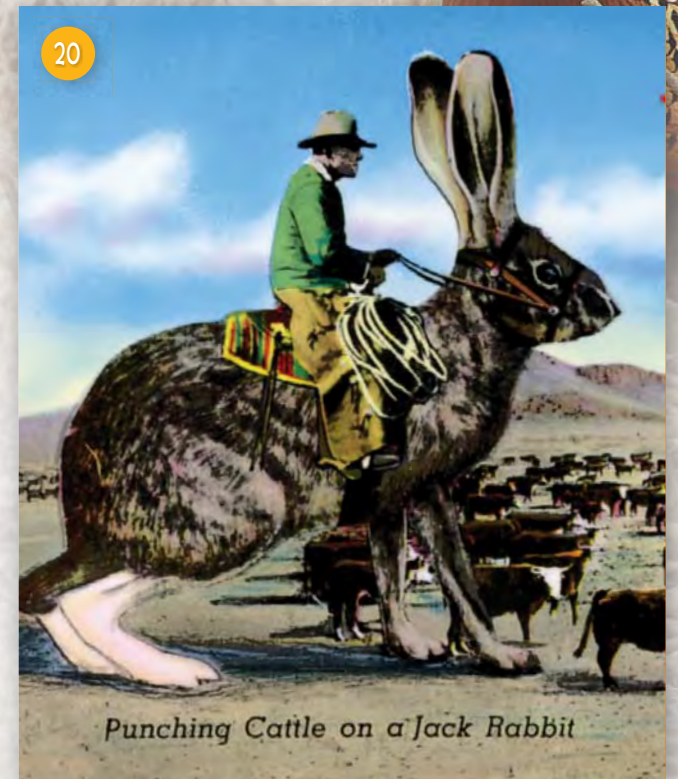
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Punching Cattle on a Jack Rabbit



Cover: This month, sandhill cranes will fill the Central Platte River Valley, bringing visitors worldwide. Photo by Rick Rasmussen.



Otters

I had to laugh when I saw the “Other than Otters” article by Eric Fowler in the December issue of *NEBRASKAland*, and read about his frustrations of getting a picture of an otter. I snapped these pictures with my phone of an otter that I encountered last summer while fishing a secluded Sandhills lake. The otter was apparently very curious as to what I was because he would swim straight toward me, stop, look at me for a bit then turn around and dive and swim out farther, only to repeat this process. Every time he swam in to check me out he would get a little bit closer, until finally he would approach to within about 10 feet of me. After getting a good look at his teeth I really started to debate how close I wanted to let him get!

Scott Buss
Via email

Interesting Article

I have been reading *NEBRASKAland Magazine* for the past three years. I have enjoyed the articles about Native Americans. I especially liked the piece in the December issue about Crazy Horse. As a Native American myself, I am proud of our heritage and am so glad to see an article about my ancestors and their spirit written in such a positive light.

Talia Villalpando,
Ponca Tribe of
Nebraska
Norfolk, Nebraska



Michael Seay and his son, Bradley, found success pheasant hunting on walk-in land near Sidney.

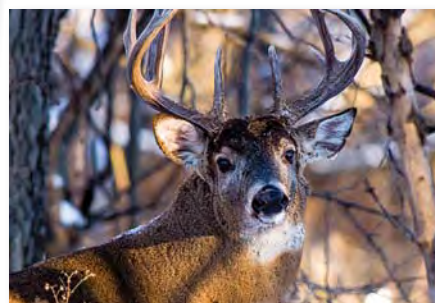
Public Land Christmas

As an out-of-state reader of your publication for years, I wanted to share with you this picture of my son and I after a successful afternoon of pheasant hunting on walk-in land near Sidney. I moved to western Nebraska in February to work for Cabela’s and my son is home from his first semester at UN-L and this was our first opportunity to pheasant hunt together. It was a very special Christmas gift for me!

Michael Seay
Via email

Thanks to Ami Sheffield

We appreciate the recent collection of photos sent to our office, including these two white-tailed deer.



Outdoor Message Plates



Frank Condello of Lincoln has a simple credence when it comes to fishing. “If it’s wet, I fish it.” If you have a unique outdoor message plate you would like to share, or know someone who does, e-mail a photo (high-resolution, JPEG format only, please) of it to Eric.Fowler@Nebraska.gov, along with your name, hometown and a brief description of the interests expressed on your license plate.

Correction: In the January-February 2015 issue we mistakenly inserted the wrong text with the license plate. Above is the corrected version. Correction: On page 26 in that same issue, Lindsay Brown was misidentified in the caption.

–Editor

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

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A Mammal Brief

Kangaroo Rat

By Lindsay Rogers

Found in western Nebraska, Ord’s kangaroo rats prefer to live in areas with sandy soil and their nest consists of a burrow in the ground. As their name suggests, kangaroo rats have extremely large hind legs which are used to hop similar to a kangaroo and are well adapted to arid conditions.

Kangaroo rats are nocturnal and feed on seeds and dry vegetation. They are related to pocket mice and kangaroo mice and all species in this family have a small fur-lined pocket or pouch inside their mouth where they store food. ■

This Ord’s kangaroo rat was photographed two miles from Wood Lake in Cherry County.



PHOTO BY JON FARRAR

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March 06	Nemaha Valley PF	Johnson
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March 07	Heartland PF	Omaha
March 07	Lincoln Creek PF	Aurora
March 07	Lower Elkhorn Valley PF	West Point
March 08	Boone County PF	Albion
March 13	Rock Creek PF	Fairbury
March 13	Wachtel Fur Immer QF	Eustis
March 14	Heritage PF	Alliance
March 14	Dixon County PF	Ponca
March 14	Loup River PF	Ord
March 19	Elkhorn Valley PF	Norfolk

BANQUET DATES		
DATE	CHAPTER	LOCATION
March 20	Logan Creek PF	Wayne
March 21	Mile High PF	Kimball
March 21	Otoe County PF	Syracuse
March 21	Sherman County PF	Loup City
March 21	Washington County PF	Blair
March 27	Lower Platte PF	Ashland
March 28	Dodge County PF	Fremont
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March 28	Saline County	Wilbur
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April 11	Cass County PF	Plattsmouth

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Travelogue

By Jeff Kurrus and Amy Kucera

Tecumseh

A home base, whether for fishing or hunting, must have all the qualities of home, which is why the southeastern Nebraska town of **Tecumseh** is the perfect for spring snow goose hunting.

Located about an hour and a half northwest of Missouri's **Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge**, this area of the state is a stopover point for thousands of snow geese each spring.

It's also home to a number of eateries, including **Frazier's Cafe**, serving delicious home-cooked meals, including the cod fish dinner or the local favorite, chicken-fried steak.

Walk along the old bricks of the historic downtown town square to see the **Johnson County Courthouse**. The Romanesque, Classic Revival-style building was completed in 1889 and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Continue your step through time at the **Ramsey Family Fountain**, a restored 1938 soda fountain complete with antique furnishings. It specializes in old-fashioned frozen favorites and has a unique photographic tribute to the Johnson County veterans.

Bring home a gift from **Liz's Flower Shop**, which features a wide assortment of home decor, and visit southeast Nebraska's oldest floral shop, **Tecumseh Floral and Gift**, established in 1950.

Then get back on the road to find snows. With a conservation season that doesn't close until April 15 in the east zone,

Tecumseh becomes the perfect home base for taking an occasional break during your trip down south.

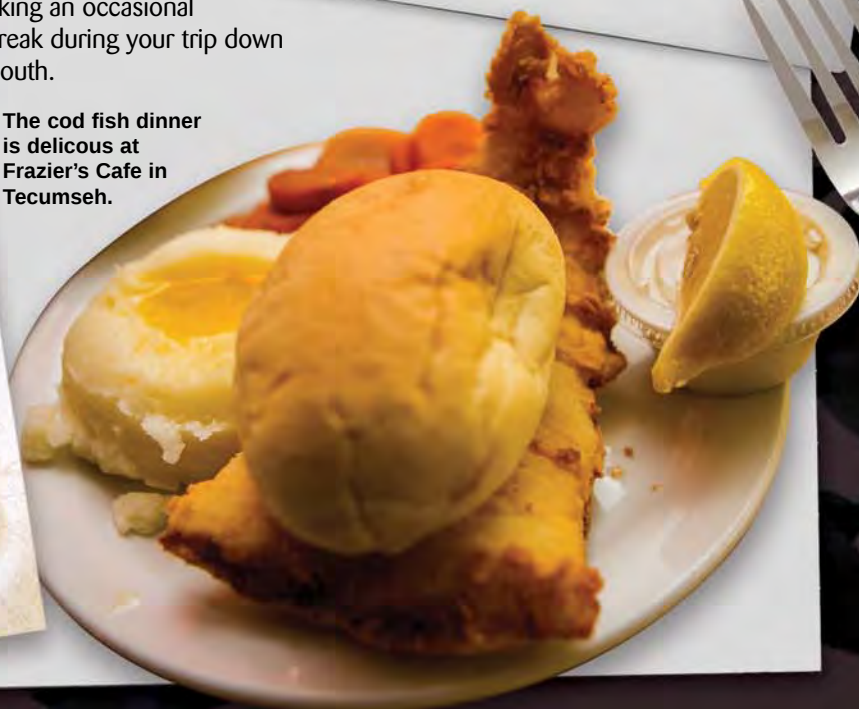
The cod fish dinner is delicious at Frazier's Cafe in Tecumseh.



Ramsey Family Fountain



Liz's Flower Shop



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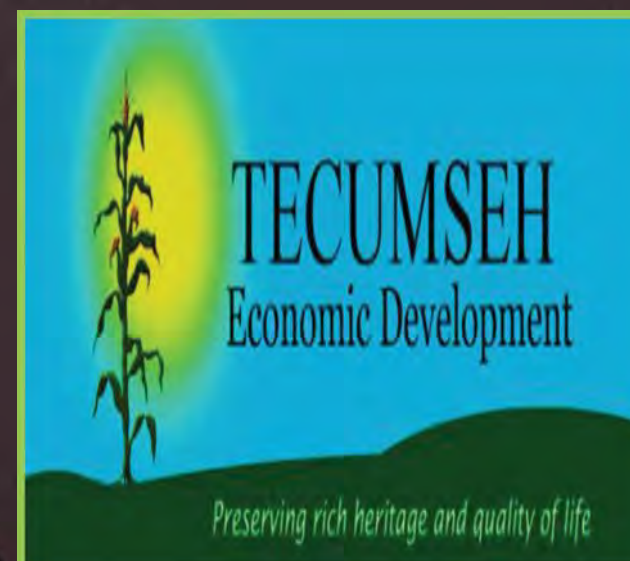
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A Brief History The Ruins Along Highway 2

By David Bristow,
Nebraska State Historical Society

Highway 2 through the Sandhills is one of Nebraska's most scenic drives. Deep in the Sandhills lakes country, near the tiny town of Antioch, stand desolate, oddly-shaped concrete ruins visible from the highway – as if Antioch had once been a much larger city, or home to some inexplicably large enterprise. And that's pretty much what happened during World War I when Antioch became a potash boomtown.

Potash is a potassium compound that was used as a fertilizer additive, especially in the Cotton Belt. It was also used to manufacture various products such as glass and soap. Before World War I, the United States imported most of its potash from Germany. Normally it sold for \$8 to \$10 a ton,



The ruins of the potash plant at the former town of Hoffland, Sheridan County, Nebraska, July 9, 1955.

but during the war, the price soared to more than \$150 a ton. When alkaline lakes in the Sandhills were discovered to have potash, a new industry was soon underway, resulting in the construction of 10 huge plants that could each produce 100 tons of potash per day.

The lakes were on state-owned school land that was leased to a private company, and rumors spread of favoritism and dirty dealing. The Nebraska state land commissioner and the secretary of state responded with a press release in which they stated that they would tolerate no delays in the project because "our country needs the product for munitions." That was false – potash wasn't used in munitions – but the story was widely believed and tended to shield the project from

criticism. ("So much for patriotism," complained the *Alliance Semi-Weekly Times* after debunking the press release.)

In true boomtown fashion, the Sandhills potash industry rose and fell quickly. Various companies struggled for control of the industry, but the war's end re-opened the import market and the Nebraska plants were soon priced out of business. Their ruins stand as a testimony to the wide-ranging and unpredictable effects of war and international commerce.

Look for a historical marker along Highway 2 just west of Antioch. There you can pull off the road and observe the ruins to the north of the highway. From there, if you're heading west, it's only 15 more miles to Alliance. ■

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Antioch became a potash boomtown during World War I as seen by this July, 1917 image by Van Graven Alliance.

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Indoor Birding

By Callie Rietfors

Take birdwatching online: from your computer, you can stream live camera feeds of diverse North American birds. With each season, view different species' mating, nesting and feeding behaviors.

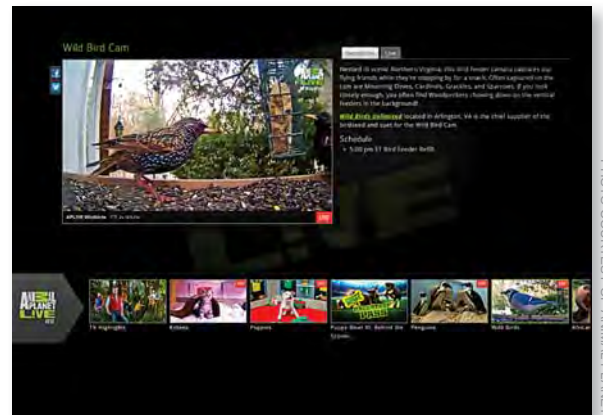
Here are a few available sites:

- The Cornell Lab of Ornithology has a variety of bird cams, featuring such species as barn owls in Texas; great blue herons and red-tailed hawks in Ithaca, New York; and their latest addition, great horned owls in Savannah, Georgia. Cams.allaboutbirds.org/
- The Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary hosts a crane cam which allows viewers to watch sandhill cranes roosting on the Platte River in Gibbon, Nebraska. Ustream.tv/channel/rowe-sanctuary-s-crane-cam
- Watch peregrine falcons from two cameras at the Nebraska State Capitol, with close observation of the nest box, or check out the falcon

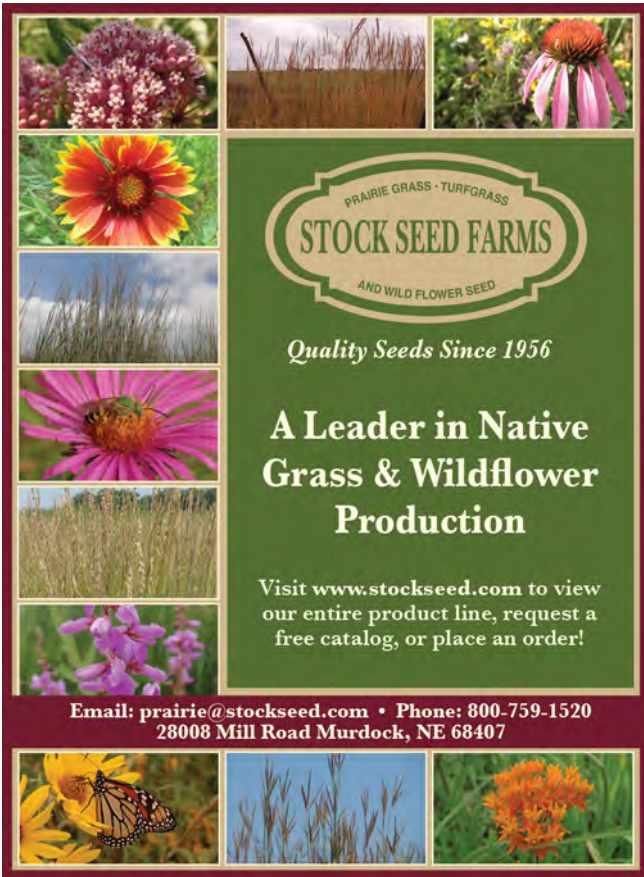
cameras returning in March to Omaha's Woodmen Tower. Neblandvm.outdoornebraska.gov/2013/07/peregrine-webcam-click/ or Falcons.woodmen.org/falcon_cam.cfm

- Between November and March, watch trumpeter swans in Monticello, Minnesota. (Viewers must use Internet Explorer.) Monticellofiber.com/swancam.cfm
- Check out Bella, an Allen's hummingbird that has built nests in the same southern California ficus tree since 2005. Bellahummingbird.com/
- Two cameras offer different viewpoints for watching adult bald eagles Ozzie and Harriet at their southwestern Florida nest. The eagles have nested here for October through April since 2006. Dickpritchettrealestate.com/eagle-feed.html#

- Returning in early February, Ventana Wildlife Society's wild California condor cams capture the birds feeding in Big Sur. Ventanawild.org/condor_cam/
- Animal Planet's wild bird cam in northern Virginia provides observation of its feeders' common visitors: woodpeckers, cardinals, sparrows, mourning doves and other locals. Apl.tv/bird.htm ■



Bird cams, such as this one by Animal Planet, give an up-close look at various species continent-wide.



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Snow Goose Tips

By Mark Vrtiska

Keep these things in mind as you snow goose hunt this spring:

- Movement in the decoys – you’re trying to emulate thousands of geese, so the more movement you can introduce into the spread, the better.

- Concealment – these geese have been shot at for about six months, they’ll spot things and you need to make sure your blind(s) are well concealed or you’re well hidden.
- About 30 percent of snow geese coming through Nebraska are blue

geese. I’d mix in a few into my spread.

- Use full body decoys near the “hole” where you want them to land.
- Do something different. Again, these geese have seen a lot of decoys and heard a lot of calls. Try something different or unique. ■



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER



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Your Next New Boot

By Robbie Gaia and Jeff Kurrus

Kamik, a Montreal-based footwear company, has come out with American-made neoprene boots known as the Elements Collection you should try.

One model of boots, the Coldcreek, is lightweight and comfortable for even long-walking distances. The base provides great durability and traction while the waterproof upper provides flexibility. – RG

The Huntsman (pictured) is now my go-to winter walking boot for sledding, upland bird hunting and ice fishing. Their rubber-patented bottoms keep my feet dry and I trust their durability near barbed wire and crampons. The last pair of rubber boots I had split by the end of hunting season, but this boot is just hitting its stride with twice as much wear. – JK



For more information, including additional styles, visit Kamik.com.

Collaring Mountain Lions

By Jerry Kane

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission field staff have begun efforts to capture and collar mountain lions.

This effort is the beginning of a four-year research project.

Game and Parks plans to place GPS tracking collars on seven to 15 mountain lions captured in the Pine Ridge, Wildcat Hills, Niobrara River Valley and elsewhere across the state.

Anyone who observes or captures an image of a lion on a trail camera should call Game and Parks immediately at 402-471-0641. Timely reports from the public will assist in locating animals for this project and help biologists learn more about this elusive species. ■



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

Nebraska Bird Library

Harris's Sparrow

Song or calls: Song is series of quavering whistles: two notes on one pitch followed by two more on another pitch.

Description: Sexes similar. Breeding adult has black crown, face and bib; pink bill; and grayish cheeks. Upperparts are buffy brown with black streaking; white belly with dark streaking on sides. Winter adult has blackish crown; buffy cheeks; throat may be all black, show white flecks, or have a white band; and flanks are buffy. Immature is similar to winter adult but has less black.

Habitat: Migrants and wintering birds prefer areas with shrubs, low trees and tall weedy plants. Found in rural, residential and urban areas, often near streamside woodland edges.

Where in Nebraska: Abundant spring and fall migrant in eastern Nebraska, and common farther west. Regular winter visitor in southern parts of the state. Joins mixed flocks of other sparrows during the winter.

Fun Facts: The largest sparrow in the United States. Found in Nebraska during winter and migration, it is the only bird that breeds in Canada and nowhere else in the world. ■

To learn about more birds visit NebraskaBirdLibrary.org.



PHOTO BY ROCKY HOFFMANN

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Wingtips by Wild Bird Habitat

The Harris's Sparrow is only found in the Great Plains of North America.

First identified by John James Audubon at Council Bluffs, NE and named after Edward Harris of Pennsylvania, Audubon's traveling companion.

Breeds in the upper Great Plains of Canada, winters in the Central and Lower Great Plains of the U.S.

Forages on the ground by scratching with its feet as do all native sparrows to turn up seeds.

Common around backyard bird feeders in Nebraska during the winter months.

Ground style bird feeders attract native sparrows and other ground foraging birds.



Turkeys Get One-way Trip to Montana

By Justin Haag

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Nebraska reintroduced wild turkeys from other states to its landscape after the big birds had been extirpated decades earlier during the nation's westward expansion. The reintroduction was so successful that turkeys have again become common border-to-border, and Nebraska is now able to return the favor to another state.

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission led an effort in February to trap wild turkeys on a ranch near Whiteclay in northern Sheridan County for relocation to Montana. The turkeys were held overnight and picked up by Montana state wildlife staff for release in the Great Falls area.

A total of 91 birds were caught, 61 birds in the morning and 30 in late afternoon. The total included 13 males.

Nebraska Game and Parks lured the birds to three roughly 400-square-foot netted enclosures and closed each door with the pull of a cord. Agency staff, along with a cadre of volunteers largely consisting of Chadron State College students, then processed the birds. After each bird was chased down and caught in the enclosure it was checked

Micah Ellstrom, northwest district wildlife manager for public lands, holds a turkey to be boxed and sent to Montana.



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

by a veterinarian and placed in a cardboard box, made just for the job by the National Wild Turkey Federation. The boxes of birds were stored in a livestock trailer until the journey west.

"Although they can be tricky to catch in the enclosure, the birds usually become rather docile once caught," said Todd Nordeen, the Nebraska Game and Parks big game research manager leading the effort. "They won't fight much when hanging by their feet and they do not even try to move around much in the cardboard boxes."

Nebraska has used wildlife from other states for reintroduction efforts of a variety of species within its borders, including bighorn sheep that were captured in Montana and brought to Nebraska. Nebraska was able to return the favor to Montana by providing wild turkeys. It's just the latest example of interstate cooperation to assist the range-wide conservation of a species.

Nordeen said Montana's state wildlife division is seeking turkeys with characteristics of the Merriam's subspecies. The distinct wide white band found across the tail feathers of those birds is predominant among northwestern Nebraska's turkey population. ■

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Crane Trust scientists recently documented that, during the sandhill cranes' spring migration, a roost near Grand Island on the Trust's Platte River property predictably hosts more cranes than any other anywhere in the world. Book your viewing blind tour with the Crane Trust (CraneTrust.org | 308-382-1820) to see a wildlife wonder up close this spring.

GRAND ISLAND
NEBRASKA

photo by Rick Rasmussen, PlatteRiverPhotography.com



Upcoming Events

by Jerry Kane

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

March 3
Prescribed Burn Workshop
Burning tree piles, Guide Rock Community Center, 120 W. Douglas St., Guide Rock, 6-8 p.m.

March 4
Lake and Pond Management Workshop
Lower Platte South Natural Resources District, 3125 Portia St., Lincoln, 6 p.m., 402-476-2729

March 6-31
Fort Kearny State Historical Park visitor center open for crane viewing and history, Kearney, 308-865-5305

March 7
Leprechaun Chase 10K
Eugene T. Mahoney State Park (SP), Ashland, 4 p.m., 402-944-2523

March 7
Bird Banding
Ak-Sar-Ben Aquarium, Gretna, 9 a.m., 402-332-3901

March 7
Youth Fishing Instructor Training
Ak-Sar-Ben Aquarium, Gretna, 9 a.m., 402-471-5591

March 7
Spring Turkey Hunting Workshop
Ak-Sar-Ben Aquarium, Gretna, 1 p.m., 402-471-5547

March 12
Prescribed Burn Workshop
Fire weather, Homestead National Monument, 8523 W. Neb. Hwy. 4, Beatrice, 1-5 p.m.

March 12
Lake and Pond Management Workshop
College Park, 3180 W.

U.S. Highway 34, Grand Island, 6 p.m., Go.unl.edu/Glpondworkshop

March 14, 29
Archery 101: Know Your Bow
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, 4703 N. 44th St., Lincoln, 4-6 p.m., 402-471-6141

March 17
Spring Turkey Hunting Workshop
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, 4703 N. 44th St., Lincoln, 6:30-8:30 p.m., 402-471-6141

March 18
Lake and Pond Management Workshop
Nebraska Extension Office, 8015 W. Center Road, Omaha, 6 p.m., Go.unl.edu/Omahapondworkshop

March 18
Prescribed Burn Workshop
Firebreak management, Ponca State Park, 88090 Neb. Spur 26E, noon-3 p.m.

March 20
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Meeting, Columbus, 8 a.m.

March 28
National Archery in the Schools Program State Tournament
Lancaster Events Center, Lincoln, 8:30 a.m.

March 25
Archery and youth archery spring turkey hunting season opens

March 31
Trapping seasons close for muskrat and beaver

Meteor Showers

By Cristina Woodworth

One of the best ways to experience nature’s true wonders is to stand beneath a black expanse of sky and gaze up at a meteor shower. With more than 10 major showers viewable throughout the year, stargazers have ample opportunities to catch one of earth’s very own light shows. Here is your guide to the basics of meteor showers, when they are easiest to see and the best places to view them across Nebraska.

What causes a meteor shower?

During a meteor shower, there are a higher than average number of meteors visible that all appear to radiate from a particular place in the sky. This happens when the Earth passes through a meteor stream. These streams usually originate from comet nuclei, which is a ball of ice with grains of dust and rocks embedded in it. As the ball nears the sun in its orbit, the ice evaporates, rocks and dust are released and the comet eventually disintegrates entirely. The comet debris gradually spreads out around the orbit, forming a meteor stream.

When is the best time to view meteor showers?

There are about a dozen reasonably large meteor showers per year that can be viewed from anywhere in the world, including Nebraska. Meteor showers are annual events and come at the same time each year. However, because the meteors are not uniformly distributed about the orbit, the strength of a shower can differ from one year to the next. An important factor when trying to view a meteor shower is the moon phase. The visibility of a shower is greatly reduced by a bright moon since meteor showers are usually most active in the few hours before dawn. Meteor showers are much harder to see anytime before midnight.

Where are the best places to view meteors?

To see meteor showers, you should find a dark place away from city lights. In particular, you should avoid places where lights are bright in the East since that is where you will normally be looking for meteors.

Which meteor showers are easiest to see?

Meteor showers vary from a relatively few meteors per hour to quite large numbers. Those with

perhaps 30 or fewer per hour are not likely to be as impressive and sometimes are only apparent if you actually count the meteors. Others have a lot more so those are the ones to go for. There are predictions each year of the strength of some of the showers so it is a good idea to look for them to find a shower that is worth getting up early, or staying up late to see. ■

Thanks to Edward Schmidt, University of Nebraska-Lincoln physics and astronomy professor for the scientific information for this story.

2015 Predicted Major Meteor Shower Calendar		
Active Dates	Meteor Shower	Predicted mtrs/hr
Dec. 28-Jan. 12	Quadrantids	120
April 16-April 25	Lyrids	18
April 19-May 28	Aquariids	40
July 17-August 24	Perseids	100
Dec. 4-Dec. 17	Geminids	120



NEBRASKAland Visitor



Last issue’s winner of the Visitor drawing was Jenny Deutsch of Omaha, who found the **bedbug** on page 13. Readers are encouraged to contact NEBRASKAland within 10 days after this issue’s publication with the correct page number and name of this issue’s “Visitor” – a critter found in Nebraska. We will then gather the correct entries and draw one to win a NEBRASKAland Magazine mug. To enter each month, write:

NEBRASKAland Visitor
2200 North 33rd Street,
Lincoln, NE 68503.

Or e-mail:
Tim.Reigert@Nebraska.gov
with “Visitor” in the subject line of the message.

HINT: This issue’s visitor is not on page 7, 12, 19, or 43.

Bedbug. Just hearing the name makes most people’s skin crawl. Until recently, the bed bug (*Cimex lectularius*) was just a reference in a bedtime saying “... and don’t let the bed bugs bite.” Unfortunately, bed bug populations have risen recently, spreading with our highly mobile society. Bed bugs do feed on humans, with bites causing skin irritation and redness, but the bugs do not transmit diseases. A bed bug starts life as a small white egg, about the size of a pinhead. After hatching, nymphs go through five instars before reaching adulthood. Adults are about the size of an apple seed (up to one-fourth inch in length) and reddish brown. Their body is oval and flat, unless they have recently fed. Then they look more elongate and puffed up. Bed bugs are not limited to “dirty” locations; they can live anywhere humans live.

Special thanks to Julie Van Meter, State Entomologist, Nebraska Department of Agriculture. Bugguide.net is a good site for identification.



Tall Tale Postcards

By Margaret Lukas

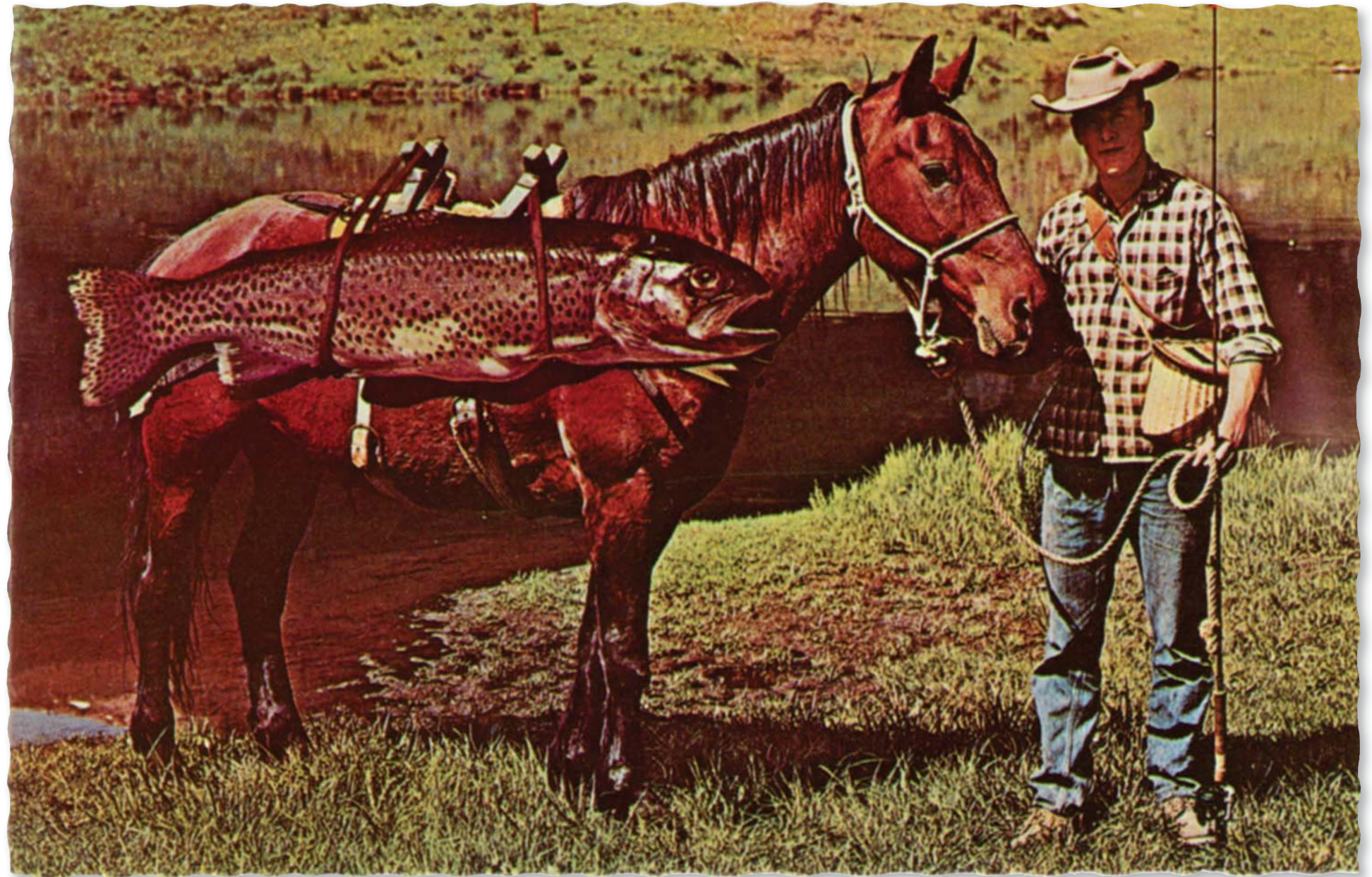


Americans have always loved their lore, finding fascination in tall tales such as Paul Bunyan and Babe, his blue ox. There was also Pecos Bill, who used a rattlesnake as a lasso to pull a tornado out of the sky, riding that twister until he'd petered it out. In that spirit of western humor, the exaggeration postcard was born.

The cards were introductions into some of the earliest photoshopping. This was just before, through, and

after World War I. An age before Twitter and e-mails. Postcards were a way of conveying simple messages cheaply and without the need to write much. The "tall tale" postcards, most popular in small towns and rural communities, also carried with them a sense of regional pride, bragging rights and comedy when the reality of the times was often far different.

Though some manipulated negatives, photographers usually created the cards by



This generic card doesn't list a location. The back reads "An Average Catch in These Parts? Packing out a giant Rainbow Trout can sometimes be a real chore. This beauty was one of the largest ever caught in this part of the country."

altering the images. Two pictures were taken, a wide shot and a close up. The subject – a vegetable or grasshopper, for instance – was shot close up, cut out and glued over a wide shot of a wagon or train car. Then the photographer simply took a third shot of the combined two.

While the cards are alike in the use of exaggeration,

various artists had their specialties. One of the first producers was William Martin of Kansas. He began producing exaggeration postcards in 1908. His cards mainly featured local crops – ears of corn the size of wagons, pumpkins the size of railroad cars and potatoes large enough for one to feed a community. He established the Martin

Post Card Company in 1909 and produced seven million cards the next year.

F.D. Conard became known for manipulating images of giant grasshoppers. Kansapedia credits his inspiration to a grasshopper plague that descended on Kansas in 1935. "When a swarm of grasshoppers descended on Garden City," the Kansas

Historical Society wrote, "Frank 'Pop' Conrad had a vision." In his images, men appear to be in physical contact with the insects, fighting them hand to hand, a grasshopper on its hind legs reaching over the head of its human opponent, delivering blows with its front legs. Other images show grasshoppers milking cows



The back reads "Nebraska The Cornhusker State." This card, although possibly older, was printed with a bar code on the back so is still being used today.



TOP: "A Heavy One" is written on the front. The back reads simply "Archer King, Table Rock, Neb., Publisher."

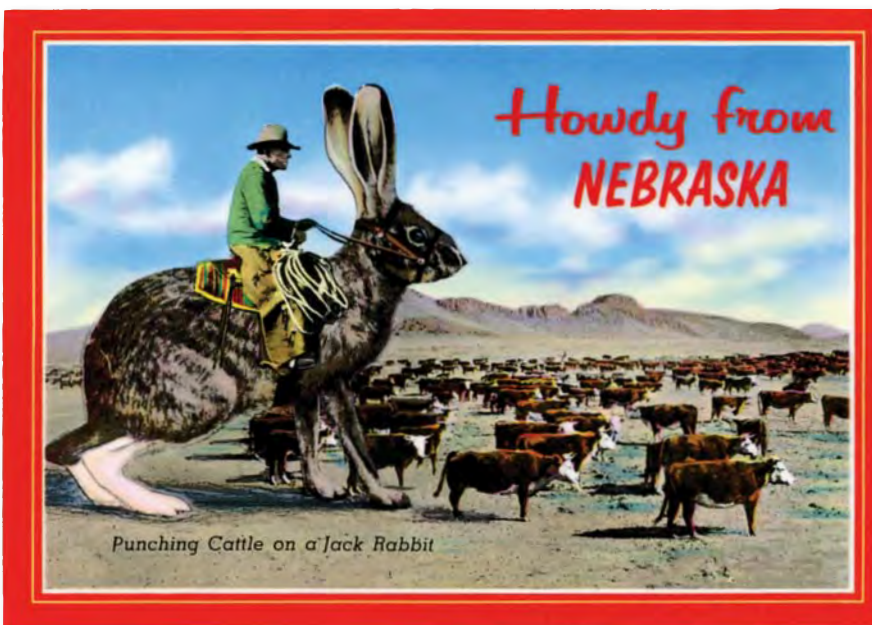
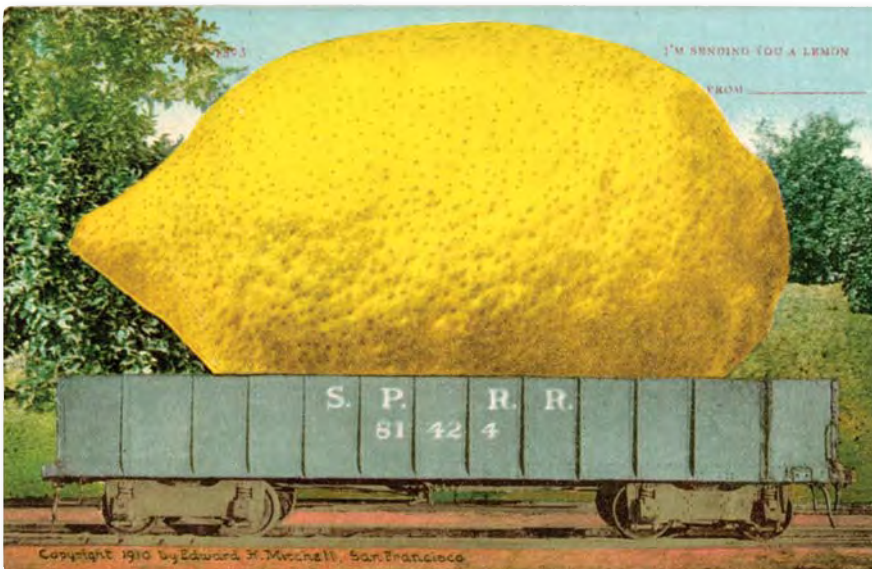
MIDDLE: This (very generic) card reads "I'M SENDING YOU A LEMON FROM _____," with Copyright 1910 by Edward H. Mitchell, San Francisco.

BOTTOM: "Howdy from NEBRASKA" (no doubt worked for other states as well), with "Punching Cattle on a Jack Rabbit" on the front. The back reads "And out here in the West they do punch cattle. Some of them do it on Broncs and, even as you can see, some of them do it on the lowly Jack Rabbit."

and cowboys rounding up cattle on the backs of saddled grasshoppers. "Lucky," those cowpokes because they never ran out of mounts, and the grasshopper's reputation promised that it would "eat anything."

Alfred Stanley Johnson, who did the majority of his work between 1909 and 1935, became known for creating scenes in which people are shown with massive crops, such as a man pushing a wheelbarrow with a single potato or carrying a cabbage so large he can only manage the weight of one.

Other artists featured the elusive jackalope or such mythical creatures as the fur-bearing fish (yes, it's said, some lakes are that cold). And you've heard about the "one that got away?" A popular image on exaggeration postcards was that of a fish ridden like a bronco or several times larger than a boat occupied by a single hapless man. The fish is rearing up out of the



"Bringing in the Sheaves, A common scene on a Nebr. farm" is a well done card, especially for its copyrighted date of 1908. Back reads "Published by the North American Post Card Co. Kansas City, U. S. A."

water, and the look on the fisherman's face matches that of Roy Scheider in Jaws when he turns to Robert Shaw's character Quint and says, "We're goin' need a bigger boat."

Often after postcards were printed, a town or state name was superimposed over the image. These postcards, referred to as "generic cards," allowed the same image to be sent to different regions with different state names. Sometimes the location was written in script by an artist, and sometimes a name was simply stamped on. Another popular image

was, and still is, postcards of U.S. maps where Texas or Florida are shown exaggerated to five or six times their true scale.

The cards are bits of history and nostalgic, not just for the pictures on front, but for the cryptic bit of news on the back. I hold one dated 1938 that reads; "I can't remember how long ago it was that I wrote. I thought I would send a card to let you all know that I am still among the living. Exams start tomorrow. My last exam comes June 4th."

Another is sent to a name in Schuyler in 1911. At that time, no street

addresses were needed. The card reads in part, "We are all well so far [no punctuation] child died in town of dipitria [sic] so I am in fear if the sickness will spread. From Nettie."

Each of these cards, from front to back, has a story to tell. And good news for collectors is that these cards can be purchased fairly cheaply. Yet it's doubtful this will be the case in just a few short years as their popularity continues to increase. ■

Margaret Lukas is an author living in Omaha. Her debut novel, Farthest House, was released in 2014.

FIRST BITE

a beginner's fishing guide

Story and photos by Jenny Nguyen

Learning how to fish isn't as complicated as it seems. With a few pieces of equipment and some basic knowledge, anyone can be successful on the water.

Anyone can learn to fish, but it would seem otherwise when you did not grow up around it. Rod length, line test, spinning reel, baitcaster, spincast, soft bait, crank bait, stink bait, jigs, spinners, spoons – just wading through the vast availability of fishing gear and terminology can make a person's head spin. But fear not, neophyte, because fishing isn't as complicated as it seems. I, too, did not start fishing until recently, and once I realized that it only took a few basic pieces of equipment and knowledge to learn how to fish, the world of fishing did not seem so confusing anymore.

In addition to learning about equipment, you also need to know which species to target. To begin fishing, don't go out looking for muskie or walleye on your first try. It can get complicated quick. Learn the basics by catching panfish first, which include bluegill and other sunfish like redear and green sunfish, crappie, white bass, small trout and channel catfish – species that are tasty, widely available throughout Nebraska waters, and relatively simple to catch from the shore.

N See more information identifying Nebraska's fish species.

Equipment

Rod and Reel

Although serious anglers will have specialized rod and reel combos for each species, even panfish, it is often impractical for a beginner to go out and buy several rods on his or her first visit to the sporting goods store. At these retailers, you will have the option of buying a combo rod and reel package that manufacturers have put together, or, if you know what you're looking for, you can buy the rod and reel separately to build your own outfit. To start out, choose a 6- to 7- foot light action spinning rod and reel combo, or a 6- to 7- foot light action spincast (closed faced) rod and reel combo.

These two rod and reel combos are ideal for all-around panfishing, including easy casting.

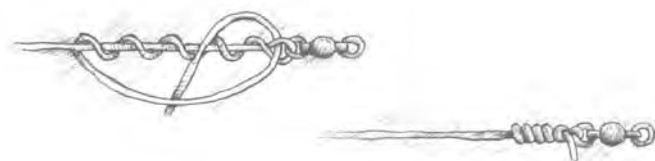
To catch catfish in a lake or pond, choose a 6- to 7- foot medium to medium-heavy action baitcasting rod and reel combo. Though a baitcasting outfit is more ideal for catching bigger fish, a quality medium to medium-heavy spinning rod and reel combo can also work for catching smaller, eating-size cats.

Line

Fishing line is measured by how much weight it can hold. The bigger the fish, the heavier the line you will need, and vice versa. Because panfish are relatively similar in size, you can usually get away with using the same line for most species. I've caught bluegill, trout, crappie, white bass and even small largemouth bass on 4-pound and 6-pound test line on a light action spinning rod and reel combo. However, when targeting bigger bass and catfish, use at least 8-pound line test or heavier on your medium to medium heavy rod and reel.

As far as the type of line to use, stick with monofilament line for now, which is a general, all-purpose line that can be used in a variety of situations. It works beautifully with panfish. As you become more advanced and begin to seek bigger fish, then more expensive and technical lines such as fluorocarbon and braided can be explored.

Once you have chosen your fishing rod, reel and line, ask a store representative in the fishing department to spool your reel, or ask them to show you how to spool your own reel at home by using the arbor knot.



The **improved clinch knot** is one of the most widely used fishing knots. It provides a good method of securing a fishing line to a hook, lure or swivel.

ILLUSTRATION BY TIM REIGERT



Author Jenny Nguyen catfishing on the Missouri River.

PHOTO BY SCOTT WESSEL



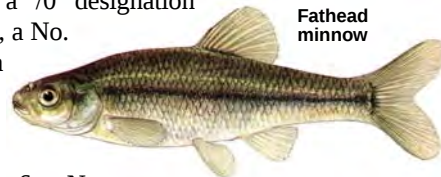
Rainbow trout can be caught on worms in Long Pine Creek and at other locations across the state.

Live Bait and Hook Sizes

Despite the vast availability of fishing lures, trout, bluegill, bass and catfish can all be caught on nightcrawlers or red worms. Red worms are smaller and more suitable for the smaller mouths of bluegill, which tend to nibble and steal bigger pieces of bait.

When using live bait, hook size is an important consideration. Too big, and fish may not be able to get the hook into their mouths. Too small, and fish may swallow the hook too deeply to be removed. For worms, choose baitholder hooks, which will keep bait firmly in place. While a book chapter could be written about hooks and their sizes, let this be a mere introduction. Smaller hooks are designated by larger numbers. For example, a No. 32 hook is much smaller than a No. 2. However, once a hook is larger than size No. 1, a “0” designation is added. For example, a No. 5/0 hook is larger than a 1/0.

Choose No. 8 to No. 4 baitholder hooks for bluegill, No. 6 to No. 4 for crappie and trout, and No. 8 to No. 4 for white bass. To catch catfish, No. 1 or No. 2 hooks are suitable for smaller, eating-size catfish out of a pond or lake, but choose bigger,



Fathead minnow

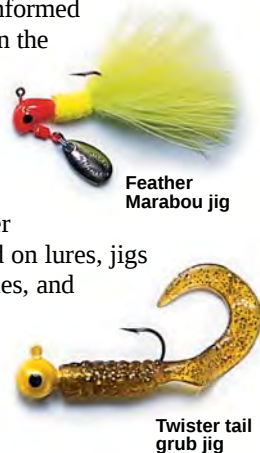
heavier size hooks like 4/0 or 6/0 for fishing river catfish.

Although crappies will eat worms, they actually prefer live minnows, which can be bought in bait shops. Use minnows no larger than 2 inches. However, stay informed on the latest bait fish regulations found in the 2015 Nebraska Fishing Guide.

Lures and Stink Bait

Fish are unpredictable. One day they’ll go crazy for one lure, and another day they won’t care for it. To get started on lures, jigs can be used to fish for a variety of species, and as far as panfish are concerned, crappie anglers can benefit greatly from the use of jigs. After one summer and fall on the water, feather Marabou jigs and soft plastic twister tail grub jigs quickly became my go-to lures. White and chartreuse colors have worked best for me, but the rule of thumb is to stick with lighter colors on clear days and darker colors on cloudy days. These color patterns will allow fish to see your lure against the contrast of the sky.

In addition to the twister tail, soft plastic jigs come in a variety of shapes and colors that imitate grubs, worms, crayfish, minnows, leeches and other prey. Other “dressed” jigs can be adorned with hair, tinsel, plastic fibers, nylon and mylar. Plain jigs show only a hook with a round lead



Feather Marabou jig

Twister tail grub jig

PHOTOS BY KEN BOUC

ball head near the eye, where line is tied, often painted in fluorescent colors. These can be used to hook live and plastic baits – experiment to see which shapes, colors and combinations work best for you.

Besides worms, catfish can also be caught with stink bait, a foul, smelly concoction that can be spread onto dip bait worm lures to entice catfish. Cut bait from oily fish can also be used instead of worms on a hook. Or, just go buy some mackerel at an Asian grocery store.

Bobbers, Weights and More

A few other items to throw into your tackle box would be bobbers, weights, swivels, beads, pliers and nail clippers for cutting line. Choose small bobbers for panfish; round or spring stick bobbers are easy to use. When using worms, having a split shot weight on your line will help keep your hook and bait at the desired depth; choose from sizes BB to 5 for panfish. To bottom fish for catfish and in some cases trout, you will need to fish with a sliding sinker rig (see sidebar), which will require heavier weights (sinkers), beads and swivels. A fishing net will help you safely lift caught fish from the water, and pliers will help remove hooks from a fish’s mouth.

While catch and release will be required by rules in many cases and voluntarily practiced in many others, eating fish is also a desire for many. In this circumstance, keep fish in the water on a stringer while fishing, then immediately put them in a cooler on ice and get your fillet knife ready. Lastly, always keep antibacterial wipes and rags handy as well.

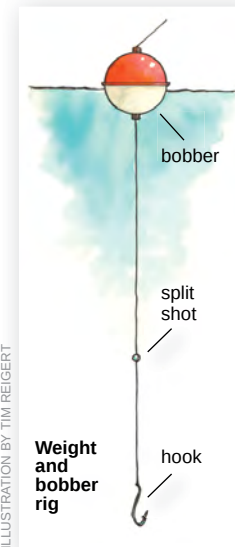


ILLUSTRATION BY TIM REIGERT

What to Know Before You Go

Fishing Rigs

To catch bluegill or similar fish, the worm, hook, weight and bobber rig is the most dependable route. To do this, tie a No. 8 to No. 4 baitholder hook to the end of your line (see illustration) then attach a split shot weight about 6

inches above the hook. Attach the bobber above the split shot, depending on how deep you want your bait under the water, and then finally bait the hook with a red worm or small piece of nightcrawler.

To fish for crappies on live minnows, use the same rig for bluegill, but instead use a No. 6 to No. 4 baitholder hook. Clip the bobber a couple feet above the hook and bait the hook with a live minnow. Hook it through the back, but not through its vertebrae. A split shot should be placed a few inches above the hook to keep the minnow from swimming to the surface. Crappies can also be fished with jigs. Try a feather marabou jig or a crappie tube jig. Or, you can also hook a live minnow onto a plain jig.

Reels, Explained

The fishing reel is the component that holds the line. It is also built with a rotating handle to allow the angler to retrieve the line and, hopefully, the fish. There are three basic types of reels to choose from: spincast reel, spinning reel and baitcasting reel. The type of reel to choose will depend on what is most comfortable for you.

A spincast (closed face) reel is exactly what its name suggests – the spool that holds the line is entirely enclosed and line is released by pushing a button with your thumb. The spincast reel is ideal for beginners and younger anglers, as it does not require as much coordination. Because the spool is enclosed, line tangles happen less frequently.



The spinning reel is an example of an open face reel, and is mounted on the underside of the rod and features a completely open spool. Because there is no button to release the line during a cast, anglers have to use their index finger to hold the line against the rod. Although a little bit of good timing and coordination is required to use the spinning reel, it is easy once you get the hang of it. Spinning rods are also more efficient when casting lighter line and bait for panfish.



The baitcasting reel is ideal for catching bigger fish, such as catfish and trophy largemouth bass.

Mechanically, they are a tad more complicated than the other two reels, with a horizontal spool that sits in a partially enclosed case and built with a braking system that controls spool speed and helps prevent “backlash,” provided that the reel was set up properly; “backlash” is when line gets tangled up inside the reel, caused by the spool revolving faster than the line is going out. Benefits of the baitcasting reel are its durability, ability to hold more line and heavier line for catching bigger fish. Because of the way it’s built, the baitcasting reel also has fewer tendencies to twist and tangle line when used correctly, unlike the spinning reel.



PHOTOS BY KEN BOUC

 See the 2015 Nebraska Fishing Guide.

Sliding Sinker Rig

The sliding sinker rig can be used to bottom fish for catfish and a variety of other fish. It allows fish to tug onto bait without being spooked from the resistance of your line. To set up a sliding sinker rig, cut a 12- to 18-inch piece of line off your main line to use as a leader. Slip a sliding sinker (weight) on to the main line and tie a swivel to the end. If you think your swivel can get lodged into the sinker eye (which can cause more resistance and spook fish), thread a bead between the sinker and swivel. Next, tie your leader to the other end of the swivel and then tie the hook to the leader. Bait the hook, cast and allow bait to sink near the bottom.

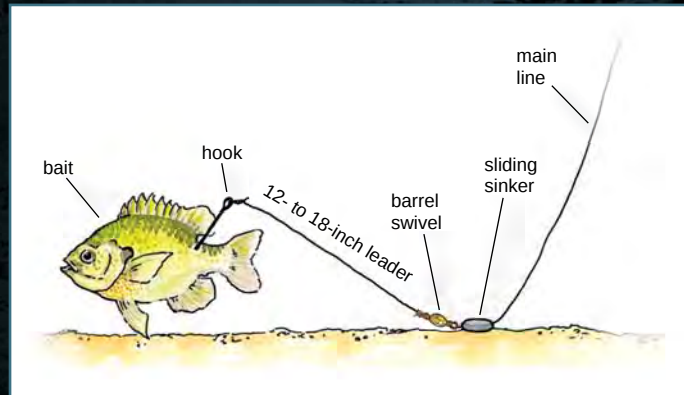


ILLUSTRATION BY JIM REIGERT

Trout stocked in small ponds can be caught on a variety of baits and lures, depending on their mood for the day. I've caught stocked trout on jigs, spinners, worms, plastic bait and marshmallows, and they are usually easy to catch.

The best way to catch white bass is to use jigs and spoons. Use a feather marabou jig or a plain jig with a worm or plastic grub. White bass tend to travel in schools at different depths, depending on the time of year. To fish from the shore in the spring and summer, look for surface activity as white bass roam the open water to chase and feed on baitfish. Find the school, and you may reel in fish after every cast.

To fish for catfish, use a sliding sinker rig (see sidebar) to bottom fish. Bait the circle hook with a nightcrawler or cut bait. Using the same sliding sinker rig, you can also use dip bait lures that are designed to hold stink bait.

Setting the Drag

After you've rigged up your fishing rod, you will need to set the drag. The drag is a mechanism on your fishing reel that determines how much resistance the fish will feel when it pulls on the line. The proper drag setting will be tight enough to tire the fish when it fights, but not so tight that the line breaks. While drag locations differ from reel to reel, in general

the drag on a spincast reel is above the thumb button. On a spinning reel, the drag knob is located at the top of the spool. On a baitcaster, the drag star is located near the handle on the side.

The drag is measured in pounds and set by the breaking point of your fishing line, not by the size of the fish. As a starting point, the drag should be set to 25 percent of your fishing line's breaking point. For example, if you have 8-pound test fishing line, set the drag to 2 pounds. Most people will learn to set the drag by feel, and you will too.

How to Cast

Before you begin fishing, learning how to cast properly will save you time (and embarrassment) on the water. To practice, attach a practice plug the same weight as you plan to fish with at the end of your line and practice casting in your backyard or other open area.

To cast a spincast (closed face) reel, pull out or reel in line so that the lure or plug hangs 6 inches from the tip. While holding the fishing rod with your dominant hand with the reel facing up, push and hold down the thumb button with your thumb and then bring the rod tip back to the 11 o'clock position. Swing the rod forward towards your target with one smooth motion, and then release the thumb button when your rod tip reaches the 2 o'clock position to allow line to come out with the momentum of your swing and weight of your line and lure.

To cast a spinning reel, pull out or reel in line so that 6 inches hangs from the tip. Hold the rod with your dominant hand so that the reel is below the rod. The reel foot should go between your ring and middle finger. Then turn the handle so that the line roller is directly below your index finger and then grab hold of the line against the rod with the crook of your index finger. Flip open up the bail with your other hand, a thick half-circle wire that secures the line when closed. Point the rod tip toward your target, then smoothly swing the rod back to vertical and allow the rod tip to flex behind you before propelling the rod forward again. Once the tip reaches halfway to your target, release your index finger to send the line and lure flying as you follow through to 3 o'clock. The motion should come from your elbow and wrist, not your shoulders. Allow a moment for your lure or bait to sink, and then close the bail to stop more line from coming out.

To cast a baitcaster, it's important to first study any literature that came with your reel to understand its components. Also, modern baitcasters will look slightly different from each other and older models. Once you've set the drag correctly, as described previously, locate the spool release button (thumb bar), spool tension knob and brake. Turn the brake all the way off, then adjust the spool tension knob just enough so that your lure and line comes out smoothly and slowly when you push the spool release button. If your lure and line comes out too quickly, the tension is too loose and your line will backlash, causing a tangled mess called a bird's nest. If it's too tight and barely any line comes out, you obviously won't be able to cast far. Having your line too tight versus too loose, however, is an excellent place to start. Once you get the right adjustment on

the tension knob, turn the brake up to 50 percent.

Once properly adjusted, begin with a sidearm cast, which is easier for beginners. Push the spool release button to unlock the spool, while maintaining pressure with your thumb over the spool so that line doesn't come out until you're ready. Let out a few inches of line, then with a smooth back and forward cast (do not whip like a spinning rod), slightly ease up your thumb pressure on the spool to control or "feather" the line's speed as it comes out. Right before your lure hits the water, place your thumb back on the spool to control the line. Cast with a practice plug first – it will take a while to master the baitcaster.

 To see these casts in action, visit the Commission's YouTube page.



Kelly Corman of Bassett teaches his wife Jen how to fish at Keller State Recreation Area by Ainsworth.



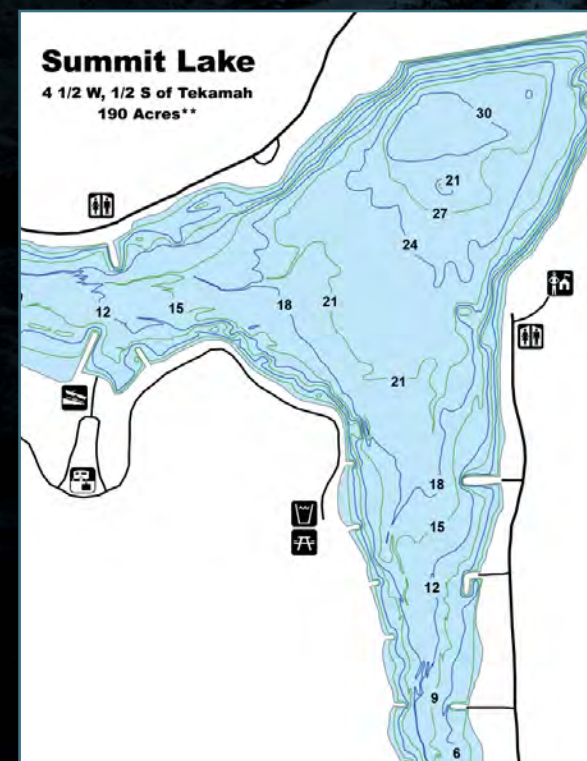
Sam Roskeland from Battle Creek fishes at Niobrara State Park's Father's Day Fishing Tournament.

Lake Map Reading

Knowing how to read a lake map will help you determine where to fish. Using Summit Lake near Tekamah as an example, look at the map key first to identify all the symbols and lines. For fishing, contour lines, the green and blue lines on this map, are most important. Contour lines allow you to imagine what the bottom of a lake looks like, as far as depth and its underwater features.

Contour lines simply designate different depths of water, and can tell you where gradual slopes, islands, holes, points, drop-offs, etc., are located to help you make educated guesses on where fish may or may not be feeding and spending time. The bold numbers represent the depth along a specific line in feet. The closer the lines are together, the steeper the depth change; the farther apart, the more gradual the depth change. Depressions, bowls, holes and islands will be indicated by circular contour lines, and all of these places will hold fish at various parts of the year.

Locating shallow water is also key to reading lake maps, as these locations often include vegetation and a variety of fish food that draws in gamefish.



See Nebraska Game and Parks Lake Mapping Program.

Where to Fish

Refer to Outdoornebraska.org to find a public pond or lake near you. If you have access to a private farm pond, some of the best fish come out of them, too.

When fishing from the shore of a lake or pond, look for cover such as logs, stumps, fallen trees, docks, brush and rocks, which provide game fish shelter and protection from predators. Good places to fish include breakwaters and rocky riprap shorelines. If you know where underwater structures such as weed beds or sunken objects are located, search for fish in those areas.

On a lake map (see sidebar), find underwater shelves, points and sandbars that gradually extend into deeper water. Drop-offs are also great places to fish for species like largemouth bass.

In open, flat areas with no structure, species like yellow perch, bluegills, walleyes, white bass and channel catfish can be caught in reservoirs because these areas are loaded with natural fish food. In ponds, also look for channel catfish in deep holes and near dams, levees and where ponds are fed by creeks.

View NEBRASKAland's fishing destination picks of the year.

When to Fish

When to fish is both a simple and complicated question. Obviously, the best time to go is when you can, but there are so many variables it is hard to generalize. In early spring, bright, warm, windless mornings might be ideal. Prior to storms and fronts, and mornings and evenings, can also be prime. But it's also trial and error. The best thing you can do is keep a small journal of when fish have been the most active and inactive for you, and for which species, because they all function a little differently depending on the weather.

How to Fish

Setting the Hook

Once you have cast, keep the line fairly taut so you can feel the fish strike whether you are casting and retrieving with a lure, bottom fishing or have your bait sitting below a bobber. Once you feel a strike, you then need to set the hook, meaning to force the hook into the fish's mouth so that it can be reeled in. For panfish, one sharp snap with the wrist is all it takes. Do not use too much force when fishing for panfish or the hook may rip through their paper-thin mouths. Bigger fish such as catfish will require more force to set the hook.

When do you set the hook? Look or feel for these common signs: when your bobber is pulled under water, you hear and feel line being pulled out from the spool, a thump on the line, or when your rod tip quickly taps and bends. A cautious fish may bite or bump into the bait lightly without taking it into its mouth. As a beginner, it is best to wait until you feel the weight of the fish before setting the hook. It may take



Justin Harms from South Dakota poses with a channel catfish at Keller State Recreation Area near Ainsworth.

some practice to tell the difference between a fish striking and your hook catching on snags or the movements of water current.

Reeling in Fish

To reel in panfish, keep your rod toward the fish at all times with the tip up at a 45 degree angle. Panfish are relatively simple to reel in, there aren't too many tricks.

Bigger fish, however, pull harder and are tougher to reel in. When you have hooked a large fish that wants to swim away, let it swim and allow the drag to tire out the fish. Keep your rod tip pointed up at 45 degrees until the drag stops buzzing, indicating that the fish has stopped and the time for you to work. Pull your rod back toward 90 degrees or vertical without moving the handle, although the tip will be bent with the weight of the fish. Then reel in as you move your rod back toward 45 degrees, keeping the line taut the entire time. Repeat this process to get the fish in closer. If the fish wants to swim, allow it to swim. But once it stops, reel in again with the pump and reeling motion as before. Don't let the fish rest – the point is to tire it out.

Landing a Fish

Once you have the fish reeled in, proper care must be taken to avoid injuries to you, others and the fish, especially

if practicing catch and release. For panfish and other small fish, carefully lift up the fish by hand or with a landing net. Gently, but firmly, hold the fish around the belly to remove the hook from its mouth with pliers. In all the excitement, be careful not to hook yourself or others. Place fish on a stringer or in a cooler if you plan to keep your catch, or immediately return the fish back into the water.

A landing net is highly recommended for removing catfish from the water. Catfish have sharp spines on their dorsal and pectoral fins that can puncture your skin, which will cause swelling and irritation.

Taking a Bag Shot

Holding a fish for a photograph differs for each species of fish, but there are some general rules. Don't put your hand in a northern pike, walleye or catfish's mouth, but feel free to hold a largemouth bass, sunfish or white bass by its lip.

Regardless of fish species, try to support the weight of the fish when handling it by placing one hand beneath its belly and make sure you do the one thing that too many anglers fail to do when having their picture taken with their fish: smile.

View the 2015 Nebraska Fishing Forecast.

Filleting a Panfish



Gutting a Whole Fish (Trout)



How to Clean Panfish

Filleting a Panfish

Most people like to eat fish filleted. When filleting panfish, meat is removed from the skin and bones on both sides of the fish to get two pieces of meat. You can do anything with fillets – deep fry, pan fry, bake or cut them into pieces to put into fish chowder.

Step 1. With a sharp fillet knife, make a long cut behind the gill cover and pectoral fin until you hit the vertebrae. Then using the sharp point of your knife, open up the fish's back by closely cutting along the dorsal fin.

Step 2. When the blade is level with the vent (anus), cut through to the other side of the fish and continue to cut until you reach the tail fin, but leave the skin at the end attached.

Step 3. Then continue to fillet the meat from the vertebrae, being careful not to cut through any bones. Follow the contours of the ribs and cut through the skin along the anal fin.

Step 4. Next, flip the flap of meat over. Using the attached skin near the tail fin as an anchor, fillet the meat from the skin. Check fillet for bones, rinse with cold water, keep cold and repeat on the other side of the fish.

Gutting a Whole Fish

Some fish, such as smaller trout, are better left whole. Trout have small pin bones that are time-consuming to remove if filleted. You can remove them with tweezers on bigger trout, but it's not worth it on pan size trout.

Step 1. Remove scales by scraping the back of a knife against the fish's skin. Although not necessary, I like to scale trout for frying or grilling to achieve edible, crispy skin.

Step 2. Then turn the fish over on its back. Slice the jaw on both sides and free the gills, but do not completely cut them off the trout.

Step 3. Cut through the abdomen starting from underneath the jaw to the anus. Then grab the loose jaw and gills and pull the innards out.

Step 4. Scrape out the bloodline along the spine with your thumb. Rinse trout under cold water. ■

Clam & Fish Chowder



medium-high heat, add chopped onion to the bacon grease and cook until translucent, about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Next, add ½-cup of dry white wine and reduce by half. Then add diced potatoes and celery.

Clam and Fish "Try Pots" Chowder, inspired by the novel *Moby Dick*

Prep Time: 15 minutes
Cooking Time: 40 minutes
Ingredients:

- 4 slices of thick-cut bacon, chopped
- 1 large yellow onion, chopped (about 2 cups)
- ½ cup dry white wine, like chardonnay
- 2 large Yukon gold potatoes, peeled and cut into ¾-inch cubes
- 2 celery ribs, diced
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 tablespoon of fresh thyme, or 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 ½ teaspoons of kosher salt
- ¼ teaspoon of freshly ground black pepper
- ¼ teaspoon of Old Bay seasoning
- 2 (10 ounce) cans of whole baby clams
- ½ pound of firm white fleshed fish fillets, cubed into bite size pieces
- 2 cups heavy cream
- 4 to 8 tablespoons of unsalted butter (optional)
- 3 tablespoons of corn starch
- 2 tablespoons of fresh Italian flat-leaf parsley, chopped
- 2 ears of sweet corn, lightly roasted over the grill or broiled, and sliced off the cob
- Crusty bread

2. Add the juice from the canned clams to the pot. Add water if vegetables are not covered. Then add Old Bay, bay leaf, thyme, salt and ground black pepper. Bring to a boil, and then lower heat to medium and cook covered until potatoes and celery are nearly tender, about 10-15 minutes.

3. In a small saucepan, heat the cream until steamy, but not boiling. Whisk in corn starch and then stir cream mixture into the chowder pot; keep chowder at a simmer. Next, add the fish pieces, half of the bacon pieces and clams. Simmer for 10 minutes, or until fish is cooked through and chowder reaches desired thickness. (Use larger, firmer fillets from fish like wiper, walleye, catfish or paddle fish – meat from smaller fish like crappie and bluegill are too delicate.)

4. Mix in butter, if desired, to make chowder richer. Stir in fresh chopped parsley and roasted corn. Adjust seasoning with salt and pepper. Garnish chowder with bacon bits before serving. Serve with crusty bread and the rest of the chilled chardonnay.

1. In a Dutch oven, or large pot, render bacon and then drain on papers towels. Over

See Rainbow Trout Stuffed with Clementine and more fish recipes.

A Big Year

Our Family Goes Birding

By Kristal Stoner, Wildlife Diversity Program Manager

Birding is one of those great pastimes that take just moments to learn and get started, but that you can spend a lifetime mastering. My idea to challenge my family with a “Big Year” revealed unexpected competitive spirit, took us to new places and was a fun learning experience for all of us.

I could feel the cold seeping through the knees of my coveralls, but I remained still, kneeling in six inches of snow. I was cheek to cheek with my 9-year-old daughter Gabrielle as we concentrated on the tree in front of us. Our breath hung in clouds before us in the crisp January air, but we remained quiet. “Look right there,” I whispered, and quickly pointed. “See where the tree makes a ‘Y’? Look just below that ... wait ... it went behind the trunk. Keep watching.” We were waiting to see a brown creeper; a small brown bird that spirals around tree trunks. At this moment, I appreciated how this bird earned its name. “Right there!” I held my breath as the bird appeared.

“I see it!” Gabrielle exclaimed. “Number 14!” A moment later, it flew across the creek. I quickly turned to watch Gabrielle’s eyes follow the bird as it left. Victory! I knew she had seen it.

It was important that we both see the bird to count it for our Family Big Year. Our goal was to compile a list of all the different bird species that our family identified throughout one year. We got the idea from the book and 2011 movie *The Big Year*, but to make sure it was a family activity, a bird could be counted only if two members of our family saw or heard the bird. We made the additional rule that the bird must be living free and in the wild; domesticated birds do not count.

It was easy to get started. Birds are everywhere if you just start looking, and equipment was not necessary (although binoculars and a field guide are helpful). We were able to quickly get the first dozen birds in one day right in the middle of Lincoln.

Birding as a family turned out to be fun for many different reasons. Gabrielle was driven by the challenge to see 100

birds in one year and felt rewarded every time she got to write down another bird on our list. Her passion became apparent one day as we stood along the edge of a lake watching a mix of shorebirds dart around searching for food.

“Mom, I see all of them ... what are they?” Gabrielle demanded as she scanned the birds.

Now I like to call myself a birder, but I certainly have much to learn. “I’m not sure.” I pulled my book out and was preparing for a learning moment about using a field guide, but Gabrielle’s distress interrupted me.

“Mom! You need to learn your shorebirds!”

My youngest daughter, Mira, loved the adventure of exploring new places. Since we wanted to get to 100 birds that meant that we made a point to visit different habitats throughout the year. We took a short walk in Wilderness Park in January looking for winter birds. We visited Lewis and Clark Visitors Center near the Missouri River to find warblers during spring migration. We stopped at some shrubs along the roadside to listen for Harris sparrows one evening just outside of town. We even walked along a bike trail in the dark hoping for a screech owl. We didn’t always find new birds, but we always found something.

My husband enjoyed the competition and tried to add birds to our list before I could. Always the hunter, he was proud to add number 50, a ring-necked pheasant. I received many calls while he traveled, “I see another avocet! Does it count?”

Nope. When birding solo, it can’t be a Family Big Year bird. The American avocet eluded us most of the year, but we finally found one while vacationing in Wyoming.

Our 8-year-old nephew joined us one early morning, and he was drawn to birding technology. We were in the woods, so we were frequently seeing and hearing the Eastern wood pewee. This little bird doesn’t have flashy colors, but it does



ON A COLD DAY AT THE PARK, Kristal Stoner and her children Gabrielle and Mira watch for birds and listen for the sound of their calls. When birding with children, don’t let equipment get in the way. Accept that there may be an occasional binocular strap in the way, and swap out real binoculars for more colorful, creative toilet paper versions.

have a loud, distinctive call. We used a birding app so we could quickly see what the bird looked like, play its recorded call and then match it to the real bird in the woods.

We all learned identification and observation skills this year. On a summer day morning on the way to work, I had my 6-year-old daughter Mira with me when I saw a great egret in Holmes Lake. We stopped and approached the edge of the water very cautiously. Over the year, I had realized that binoculars can be frustrating for children. It is hard for them to hold the binoculars steady and keep a bird in view, so Mira usually preferred to use her own binoculars that she proudly made from toilet paper tubes. Today, however, it was just the two of us and a big, white, slowly moving bird which provided the perfect opportunity to practice with Mom’s binoculars.

“Keep your eyes on the bird. Don’t move your head and bring the binoculars up to your eyes.” I waited until I believed she was actually looking at the egret rather than the treetops.

“Mom ... it has an orange beak,” Mira whispered. I smiled. Not only was she viewing the bird through the

binoculars, but she was picking up on the clues to help identify the bird. You never know how long a bird is going to pose for you, so after the first glance at the overall color, we then take a second look at the chest, back, head, legs and tail for different colors and patterns. The bill can be helpful both in color and shape. The relative size of the bird can be difficult, but we found that we could talk about whether it was sparrow-sized, robin-sized, crow-sized or hawk-sized. We would use all these details to try to figure out what birds we were looking at together.

“Good look Mira! But what color are the legs?”

We were successful last year, and had a grand total of 108 birds. Most were in Nebraska, but we also birded in four other states. Now I have a family of birders who actively seek birds and identifies them, rather than passively watching.

This became apparent one summer afternoon when I was watching a common grackle in our backyard. Gabrielle came up to me and asked, “Is that a regular one or a great-tailed grackle?” I kissed the top of her head, smiled and asked, “What do you think?” ■

Birding at the State Parks

Eugene T. Mahoney State Park

Mahoney's diverse recreational opportunities provide something for everyone, including birders.

- Cooper's hawk
- Turkey vulture
- Red-bellied woodpecker
- Eastern kingbird
- Tree swallow
- Red-eyed vireo
- Chipping sparrow
- Brown-headed cowbird



Cooper's hawk

PHOTO BY ROB PALMER



Wild tom turkey

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Platte River State Park

The trail along Stone Creek provides the best opportunity in the state to see and hear the Louisiana waterthrush. Listen for its loud musical song and watch for this small warbler in the stream constantly bobbing its tail along with other local denizens.

- Wild turkey
- Barred owl
- Red-headed woodpecker
- Eastern wood-pewee
- Carolina wren
- Tufted titmouse
- Blue-gray gnatcatcher
- Louisiana waterthrush
- Scarlet tanager



Indigo bunting

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Indian Cave State Park

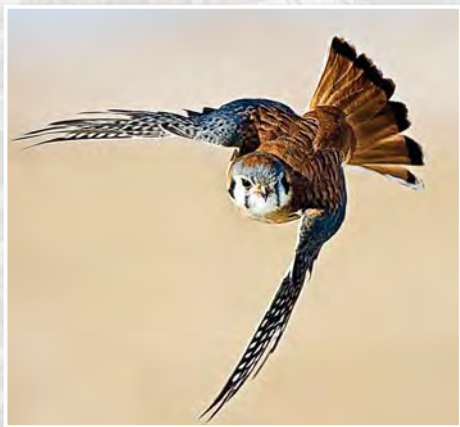
Indian Cave offers terrific opportunities to see and hear several southeastern species, such as the Acadian flycatcher and Kentucky warbler, whose range barely reach Nebraska.

- Pileated woodpecker
- Great-crested flycatcher
- Acadian flycatcher
- Wood thrush
- American redstart
- Kentucky warbler
- Summer tanager
- Indigo bunting

Ponca State Park

Wooded bluffs, unchannelized Missouri River and floodplain prairie all in close proximity provide opportunities to see a diversity of species in a small area. Watch for interior least terns fishing in the Missouri River and if you are spending the night in one of the parks cabins, open up the windows and be serenaded by whip-poor-wills and possibly barred owls.

- Interior least tern (Missouri River)
- Bald eagle
- Whip-poor-will (calling at night)
- Ruby-throated hummingbird
- Eastern bluebird
- House wren
- Rose-breasted grosbeak
- Eastern towhee



American kestrel

PHOTO BY ROB PALMER

Fort Robinson State Park

The mix of open high-plains prairie, escarpments, upland pine and riparian forests provide ample opportunities to see a diversity of species. Be sure to check out Carter P. Johnson Lake for waterbirds.

- Western kingbird
- Lazuli bunting
- Black-billed magpie
- Mountain bluebird
- Yellow warbler
- Western meadowlark
- House finch
- Bullock's oriole



Red-winged blackbird

PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

Chadron State Park

The parks fine forests provide habitat for many western species which have a very limited distribution in the state. Western Tanager is a show-stopper. Do not discount "burns" as being productive areas to find birds. Woodpeckers, nuthatches and other cavity nesting species often prefer burned areas.

- American kestrel
- Common nighthawk
- Hairy woodpecker
- Western wood-pewee
- Pygmy nuthatch
- Violet-green swallow
- Western tanager
- Spotted towhee



Yellow warbler

PHOTO BY LUKE KATHOL



Eastern towhee

PHOTO BY RICK RASMUSSEN

Niobrara State Park

From rivers to rolling hills, the park's diverse habitats provide ample opportunities to see various birds. The small number listed here are merely a few of the many resident species.

- Downy woodpecker
- White-breasted nuthatch
- Field sparrow
- Red-winged blackbird
- Orchard oriole
- American goldfinch

Restoring a Family Prairie

Returning wildflowers and wildlife to the land

Text and photos by Gerry Steinauer, Botanist

I have always wanted a prairie of my own to care for and manage. Lo and behold, five years ago I was fortunate enough to marry Grace Kostel, a fellow botanist, prairie enthusiast and owner of a 43-acre tallgrass prairie on her family farm in Charles Mix County, South Dakota – a short three-hour drive north from our home in Aurora.



A diversity of seeded native wildflowers and grasses now grow in a former smooth brome stand near where the sod house once stood.

Like most tallgrass remnants, our prairie had suffered its share of hard use since the land was settled and was in rather poor condition when Grace purchased the farm a few years earlier from her mother Lucille. Grace had long wished to restore the wildflower-laced grassland of her youth and together we decided to undertake the task.

The Prairie's History

The prairie has been in Grace's family since 1895 when her great-grandparents, Anna and Ferdinand Wagner, homesteaded the land. The young Czech couple began their marriage in a sod house placed on the prairie above a small creek. Anna described the soddy to her granddaughter Lucille as "cramped, dirty and at times mouse- and snake-infested." It was their home for three years, until Anna convinced Ferdinand to build a more livable wood frame house on a rise across the creek. Like all homesteaders, early on they labored at breaking sod on their 160-acre plot of grass using a horse-drawn plow. They grew mainly corn, but also pumpkins, to feed their livestock and themselves. Our prairie survived as a pasture near the house for the work horses and a few milk cows and beef cattle.

Anna and Ferdinand worked the farm until after WWII when their middle son Henry took over. In 1961, after her husband was killed in a farm accident, Lucille, along with Grace and her younger sister, moved onto the farm with their bachelor Uncle Henry. The prairie became Grace's playground where she rode horses, chased butterflies amid the tall grass and caught tadpoles from old, rain-soaked buffalo wallows. On walks in the prairie, Henry would pick young buffalo bean pods or dig wild onion bulbs for Grace to eat. He taught her the names of prairie plants and, most importantly, instilled in her his love of prairie.

In the late 1970s, following the advice of the county extension agent, Henry seeded several grazing-stressed areas of the prairie to smooth brome, a popular European forage grass. "He thought he was just adding another grass to his prairie," said Grace. "Uncle Henry had no idea how aggressive brome was." In a few years he was regretting his decision and helplessly watched the as the brome spread



Purple prairie coneflower was one of the first wildflowers to reappear in the prairie after the annual haying was stopped and the prairie was burned.



Henry Wagner along with young Grace and her cousin Wayne Wegleitner after a successful fishing trip in the early 1960s.

promoting the spring- and fall-growing brome and Kentucky bluegrass, another non-native cool-season grass. When Canada thistle and musk thistle, both noxious weeds, began to spread through the prairie, it was sprayed several times with herbicide and the wildflowers took it hard. In 2010, when Grace and I began managing the prairie, they and the native grasses were hanging on by a thread.

Our first task was to stop the annual haying to give the surviving prairie plants the entire summer to grow, replenish depleted roots, and, for some, a chance to flower and set seed. In late April of the following year, with a burn crew composed of friends, we set fire to the prairie. The brome and bluegrass were well into their growth, and defoliation from the prescribed burn set them back.

That summer, after a year's rest and a single burn, the prairie murmured with signs of returning life. In June, on a slope near the driveway, a colony of purple prairie coneflower bloomed. Lucille swore she had not seen coneflowers in the prairie for decades. These perennials likely survived the years of haying as small, few-leaved plants, choked by brome

through the prairie, displacing his cherished wildflowers and prairie grasses. At the time, techniques to check brome's spread, such as spring prescribed fire, were unknown in the area.

When Henry retired in 1979, Lucille bought the farm from him. Grace had grown and left home and, with her horses also gone, Lucille leased the prairie as a hay meadow. In the decades that followed, annual July mowing stressed the summer-growing native prairie plants while further

and too weak to flower. Long-bracted spiderwort, plains goldenrod and slender beardtongue were among other wildflowers to show themselves. In late September curing bluestems and side-oats grama again splashed the prairie with their autumn shades of red and yellow.

We have now found more than 60 native plant species in our recovering prairie. Expected species, such as poison milkvetch, compass plant, Indian turnip, downy gentian, and rough gayfeather, however, are missing, likely eradicated over the years. We had seen them in other local prairies, road ditches and pioneer cemeteries, evidence they still survived in the area. Their natural recolonization in our prairie seemed improbable since no seed likely remained in the soil and there was slim chance that seed

from nearby populations would find its way to our prairie across miles of intervening crop fields. So we decided to seed the species into our prairie.

Seeding Lost Species

On summer and fall days we walked nearby prairies and roadsides harvesting ripe wildflower seed, tossing it into five-gallon buckets belted to our waists. The seed was dried for a few weeks on tarps spread on our garage floor. The tight seed heads of some species, such as sunflowers, were rubbed against a sandpaper-covered board to release the individual seeds. All seeds were combined into a rich mix.

Our first seeding occurred four winters ago during Christmas, near where the old soddy had stood. In

preparation, the previous October, I sprayed a house-sized patch of brome with the contact herbicide glyphosate. At the time, the cold-hardy brome was still green and growing and herbicide susceptible, while the few surviving native plants had been frost-bitten and were now dormant and glyphosate immune. Two weeks after spraying, and unknown to my mother-in-law, I borrowed her riding lawn mower and shredded the withered brome. After raking away the litter, I sowed the seed, then drove the mower over the plot to firmly press the seed into the bare soil to increase germination.

Good rains came the following spring and prairie seedlings sprang from the earth. The plot is now home to stiff sunflower, compass plant, rough gayfeather and other wildflowers previously absent from our prairie. Stiff

sunflower, rigid goldenrod and a few other more hardy species are spreading beyond the plot into the prairie. Hopefully in time, more will follow.

Some frown upon using herbicides to restore prairie, but often there is little choice. Seedlings of prairie plants struggle to establish in dense brome and bluegrass sod, and by killing or stressing these grasses with herbicide the native seedlings have a fighting chance. Without some type of disturbance, even dense native grass sod can stifle wildflower seedlings. Heavy livestock grazing in late summer or fall can set back grasses, reduce litter, and expose soils in preparation for late fall or winter seeding. The summer following seeding, additional grazing can further stress grasses reducing competition for seedlings. We have mowed areas of brome



Big bluestem, a dominant grass of the tallgrass prairie, has responded well to prescribed fires and stands are expanding in areas previously occupied by smooth brome.



Seeded compass plants are now well established in several areas of the prairie. A member of the sunflower family, its flowering heads can reach over six feet in height.



Grace Kostel, the author's wife, sows wildflower seed onto a badger mound on a warm winter day. The seeds of most prairie species require extended exposure to cold and moisture to break dormancy and germinate therefore restorationists often seed in fall or early winter.

in late summer using an ATV-pulled shredder, and then sprayed the more herbicide-vulnerable brome regrowth in late October; this followed with winter seeding with no other site preparation. Using this method, fewer wildflowers have established compared to our Christmas planting where the seed was pressed into bare soil. We have also scattered wildflower seed onto the bare soil of badger mounds and randomly about the prairie.

Our prairie has now been burned four consecutive springs. The Kentucky bluegrass is significantly reduced, but the deeper-rooted and tougher smooth brome still carpets large swaths of the prairie. Brome is the nemesis of prairie managers throughout the upper Midwest. When treated harshly with fire, grazing and herbicide, brome may be weakened, but is often difficult to kill. It initiates growth in early spring, flowers and sets seed by June, is semi-dormant through the heat of summer, and greens up again in autumn. Emerging early, it drains the soil of moisture and nutrients needed by later emerging native plants. Unlike native species, the non-native brome has no natural pests and disease stressors in North America to limit its growth and reproduction. And, as if it needs more ammunition, some believe brome is allelopathic, releasing chemicals from its

roots into the soil that inhibit the growth of other plants. We have settled in for a long and drawn out battle with brome. With the aid of spring and fall prescribed fire or grazing, native grasses can gain the upper hand, but a few years without this stress and brome returns in force. Areas of our prairie have few native grasses remaining to compete with the fire-weakened brome allowing it to persist there in abundance. Eventually, we may interseed these areas with natives to provide competition. Last October, the neighbors and I installed an electric fence around the prairie, and in November and December it was grazed with eight of their cows and 13 horses. Our hope is that fall and spring grazing will impact the brome more than prescribed fire. Fire-scorched brome can resprout and be growing again in a week or two, while heavy grazing puts a more prolonged stress on the plants. Occasionally we still discover a plant species new to our prairie, a sign of continued healing. The prairie's now-richer flora and more varied vegetative structure has attracted wildlife. We commonly glimpse rare regal fritillary butterflies flitting about on summer afternoons in search of nectar-filled wildflowers. A grassland-dependent species, the

fritillaries' larvae feed solely on violets, and prairie violets now abound in our prairie. On dewy June mornings, the tall grass hums with the boisterous song of male bobolinks, red-winged blackbirds and dickcissels defending their territories from rivals in melodic fashion. This past summer we saw our first brood of young prairie chickens, and in winter, sharp-tailed grouse are occasionally present as well. Restoring our family prairie has demanded many trips to the farm to dig musk thistles, mow fire breaks, and undertake other tasks, but for us it is a labor of love. Overly optimistic at first and frustrated at times, we now measure success in small increments – a bit less smooth brome here, more compass plants there, a louder clamor of summer birds. We are heartened by the thought that Uncle Henry would appreciate our efforts. For more information of restoring prairies see “A Guide to Prairie and Wetland Restoration in Eastern Nebraska” available online at prairienebraska.org.

 See more photos from this story.



The rare regal fritillary butterfly is one of the many wildlife species recolonizing the prairie as native plants recover. Its larvae feed solely on violets.



This past November, horses graze a smooth brome-dominated area of the prairie. Spring and fall livestock grazing can stress this non-native, cool-season grass giving native plants a chance to grow.

Roadside Fossils

Highway Paleontology

Text and photos by Mark Harris

The University of Nebraska State Museum has had a long fossil-finding collaboration with the Department of Roads, one that continues to open roads to our ancient history.

Long ago, near what is now Kimball, a giant tortoise took its last steps. Nearly 80 years of age, he had grown to 350 pounds. Seven million years later, giant machinery bumps into his fossilized shell. He lies in the path of progress; a new road will cross the ancient river valley which was his home. Close behind a rumbling road grader walks Shane Tucker, scanning disturbed earth for signs of Nebraska's past.

Weeks later, dug up and wrapped

for transport, the tortoise won't budge against a Bobcat loader's horsepower. The tires spin uselessly. Reinforcements come; there is no resisting the added might of a front-end loader, and on a drizzly morning in a landscape the tortoise would not have recognized, he is loaded into a truck bound for Lincoln.

Any sizeable dug-up area in Nebraska will likely reveal a fossil. Some are eureka moments, but more likely they are unnoticed small



Shane Tucker holds the lower jaw from a "bone-crushing dog," excavated and sunlit after eleven million years underground in Cherry County.



Working late along Nebraska Highway 71 near Kimball, highway paleontologist Shane Tucker excavates a 7-million-year-old shin bone from barrel-bodied rhino.

bones or fragments tossed aside with the dirt. Tucker, paleontologist for the University of Nebraska State Museum's Highway Paleontology Program, doesn't miss the small stuff. Walking a cut bank in dwindling evening light alongside Highway 71, Shane stops and reaches down. "Found a frog's leg," he says, holding a toothpick-sized bone pulled from where it had lain for millions of years.

Full-time highway paleontological programs are incredibly uncommon, but Nebraska is fossil rich and the Nebraska Department of Roads has a long-standing culture of preserving our natural history. Established by law in

1959, it was the first program of this type in the nation and is supported by a mixture of state and federal funds. Fossils collected from state right-of-ways belong to Nebraska's citizens and are cared for by the University of Nebraska State Museum. Studied by students and researchers from around the world, these remnants shed light on projects focusing on evolution, climate change and Nebraska's prehistoric past.

Tucker knows which regions will more likely yield fossils, but finding them is a combination of pure chance and grinding dawn-to-dusk work. Checking 150 to 200 highway projects per year, Tucker and his

student assistant may juggle several excavations at once, all hundreds of miles apart. Discoveries are prioritized and some won't be revisited until years later. Extraordinary localities need safeguarding, some requiring camping expeditions in remote areas for weeks at a time.

At it for 15 years, Tucker has stories to tell of snakes, bobcats and other Nebraska wildlife quietly conducting their business around him. Mother Nature shrugs at Tucker during stifling heat, fist-sized hail, blizzards, demoralizing wind and mud-stuck trucks. Busier roads add traffic stress. The vast majority of travelers zip past,

never to know what's being dug, but a curious few stop with thoughtful questions springing from true interest. Tucker likes sharing what's known about the find and digging in the dirt can be lonely work, so they are welcome.

Tucker's easygoing nature serves him well in recurring conversations.





Bumped into by road crews near Kimball, this 7-million-year-old giant tortoise shell receives final excavation by Shane Tucker.



Shane Tucker covers an ancient tortoise with a plaster field jacket in preparation for transport to UN-L's State Museum.

"No, I'm not hunting for artifacts, archaeologists do that. I'm a paleontologist looking for fossils. Nope, it's a Columbian mammoth; the woolly kind lived farther north." Nebraska's mammoths were far less hairy and bigger than woollies – more majestic.

"No, it's not a dinosaur, we don't find those here." During the dinosaur era, Nebraska was covered by inland sea as deep as our state capitol. Seventy to 80 million years ago, imposing predators such as the mosasaur swam here – 40 feet long, reptilian, with a jaw full of dagger teeth.

Nebraska's Panhandle is a fossil hotspot. Craig Lind, the area's highway district engineer, has worked with Tucker for years. "Everyone looks at Shane's projects positively; we know it's important in preserving our history," said Lind, who often assigns workers to ensure Tucker has all he needs. "People are eager to get that assignment. They want to be part of the discovery," he said.

Some sites are legendary, such as when huge metal blades revealed a 23-million-year-old riverbed near Gering. Flush with fossils – 60 species in all – it included camels, tapirs, bear dogs and three-toed horses. Without Shane's trained eyes following loud, dusty machines, most sites would remain anonymous. "Equipment

operators have their mind on where the dirt goes," he said. "When I spot something, then work comes to a brief halt and sometimes things get tense. Contracted operators think their project might be shut down, but I explain that I only need to work a small area and that they can keep working just up the road."

Moods shift as Shane explains what they're looking at and operators'

concern turns to fascination. "Discoveries have never stopped a highway project," says Shane. "It's a cooperative effort and road crews always find a way to work around us."

After transport to the lab, Shane and his students remove soil and stabilize fragile fossil material to become part of the vast, internationally-recognized collections in the University of Nebraska State Museum. Many are on exhibit in Lincoln's Morrill Hall on UN-L's city campus.

During colder months, Tucker speaks to organizations statewide, leaving both kids and adults awestruck by our distant past. But it's springtime Shane craves: diesel engines, dusty roadsides and that new species that might pop up.

"It's extremely rare for a bone to become a fossil in the first place," he says, "then to be the first person to see it after thousands or millions of years – that's exciting. I feel forever tied to those fossils and I want to find more." ■

Mark Harris is the Associate Director of the University of Nebraska State Museum.



Department of Roads employee Lucky Franklin transports the giant tortoise shell to an awaiting truck as Tucker inspects its underbelly.

Nebraska's Cranes

and your guide to their migration

By Julie Geiser

Every March and April, an estimated 70,000 visitors travel to the Central Platte River Valley of Nebraska to view the sandhill crane migration. During their visit, bird watchers, nature lovers and other tourists have the chance to view the feeding and courtship rituals of three different species (lesser, greater and common) of more than half a million sandhill cranes. Lucky crane watchers might even get a glimpse of one of the endangered whooping cranes along with large numbers of waterfowl during what is considered one of nature's greatest wonders.

The major migration of cranes to the Platte River Valley occurs in what could be explained as an hourglass shape when charted on a U.S. map. The narrow stretch of the Platte River and surrounding wetlands and cornfields provide a crucial staging area where birds rest and put on body fat for the remainder of their journey to breeding grounds that range from northern North America to Canada, Alaska and northeastern Siberia.

When the cranes visit this small piece of the Platte, visitors flock to Grand Island and Kearney, filling educational centers, hotels, and restaurants. These and other attractions become home bases for first- and long-time visitors interested in witnessing this once-in-a-lifetime phenomena every single year.

Here's your start to this year's migration.

The Audubon Rowe Sanctuary

The Audubon Rowe Sanctuary near Gibbon includes nearly 1,900 acres of land and is dedicated to the conservation of sandhill cranes, whooping cranes and other migratory birds along with habitat utilized along the Platte River. Education services are provided year-round to the public at Rowe's Iain Nicolson Audubon Center, which includes classrooms, educational displays, a viewing area along the river and reservable viewing blinds. Rowe

Sanctuary is also a popular meeting place for guided crane tours.

According to Rowe director Bill Taddicken, approximately 17,000 people visited the center last year during the six-week crane season, including guests from 52 different counties and all 50 states.

At Rowe.audubon.org, learn how to plan your trip and view links to local motels, visitor bureaus and other attractions in the area.

Fort Kearny State Historical Park (SHP) and State Recreation Area (SRA)

The visitor center at Fort Kearny State Historical Park starts crane watchers off with information about cranes and their migration as well as crane viewing etiquette, a slide presentation and maps for self-guided tours.

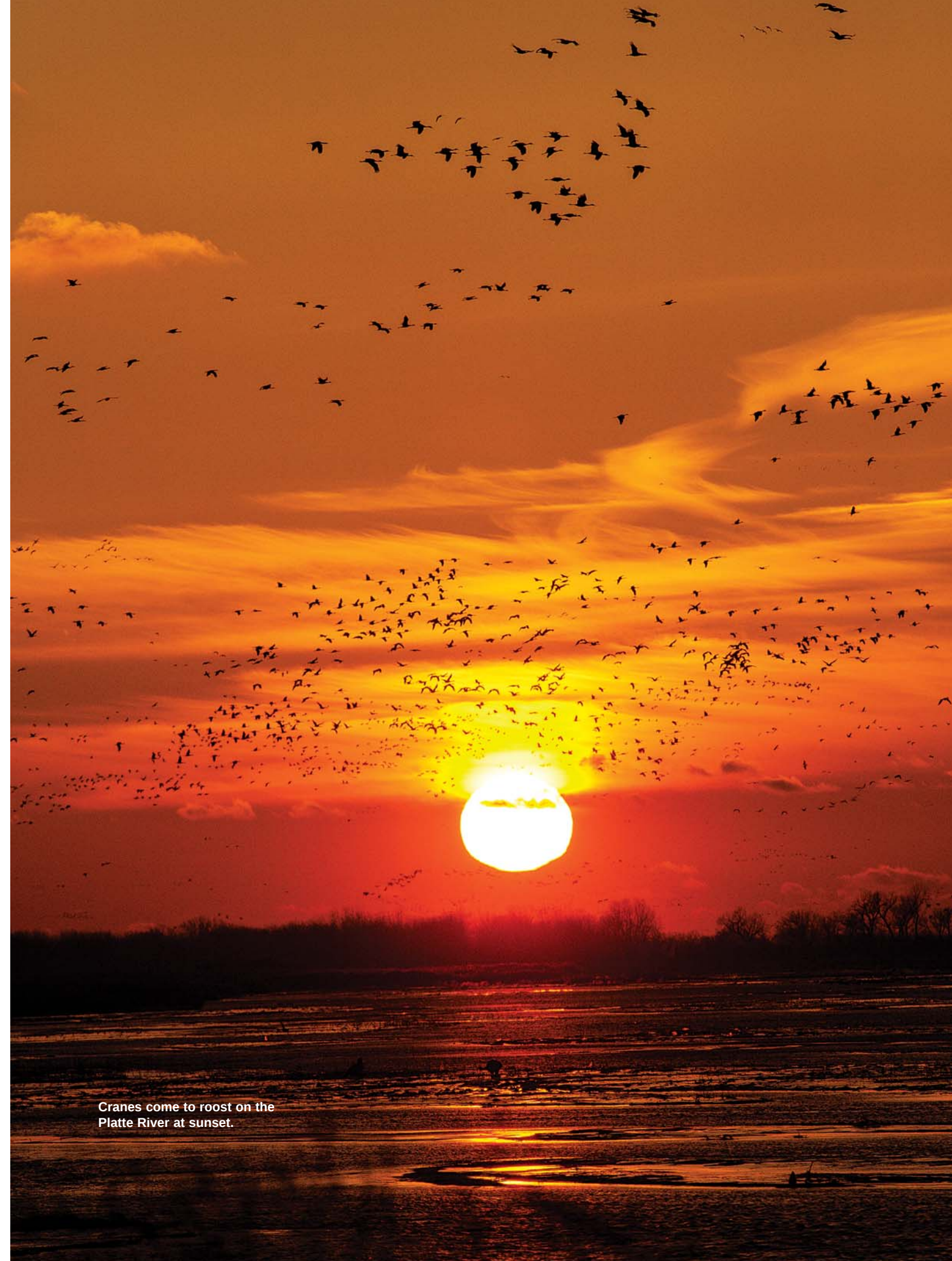
Opening March 6 to April 6 just for the crane season, the visitor center will see an estimated 3,000 people. Outside the crane season, the visitor center at the state historical park is open on weekends after May 1, and is open every day after Memorial Day through Labor Day.

Some visitors make their way to Fort Kearny State Recreation Area and camp for a couple of days, while others simply hike the trail to the old railroad bridge for crane viewing.

Guided trips at Rowe Sanctuary will be conducted from March 6 to April 11. Reservations are required to use the blinds that house about 32 people at a time for great panoramic views and photos of cranes and other birds on the river.



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN



Cranes come to roost on the Platte River at sunset.

PHOTO BY JULIE GEISER



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Rowe Sanctuary's Iain Nicolson Audubon Center features a gift shop, lecture rooms and a wide-angle view of the Platte River.

The bridge spans the width of the Platte River and is a perfect place to view cranes in flight and witness beautiful sunrises and sunsets along with the more than the 300-500 visitors who will visit every day during crane season. Visit Outdoornebraska.org and click on Parks for more information.

Crane Trust Nature and Visitor's Center

Just off I-80 near Alda sits the Crane Trust Nature and Visitor's Center. The Crane Trust is a non-profit organization dedicated to the protection and

maintenance critical habitat along the Big Bend Region of the Platte River Valley for whooping cranes, sandhill cranes and other migratory birds. In 2012, the Crane Trust acquired the Nebraska Nature & Visitor Center. "Our main focus is habitat, and working with our partner organizations to keep the tallgrass prairies and wet meadows as they functioned historically, and keeping the river valley free of vegetation," said Brice Krohn, senior director of the Crane Trust. "Without this type of land management the migration wouldn't be what it is now." Calling itself the "Spring Migration Headquarters," the Crane Trust manages seven blinds for morning and evening tours from February 28 to April 5, and welcomes donors, special interest groups, photographers and the general public. In addition to the blinds, the center includes a butterfly garden, art gallery, wildlife displays, a gift shop and interactive touch screens that give visitors a glimpse of the migration any time of the year.

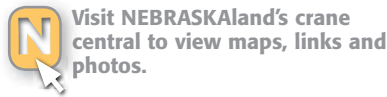
PHOTO BY JULIE GEISER



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Buffalo Bill Ranch State Historical Park and State Recreation Area

Additionally, a series of walking trails run through 240 acres of prairie and river habitats. Along one of the trails is a 35-foot observation tower offering expansive views of the valley and twin footbridges along the river. Two new cabins draw folks from around the country and nation to spend the night and enjoy the blinds. In 2014, 42 genetically pure bison were relocated to the Trust from Crawford. Researchers will study the effect the bison have on the landscape in comparison to the cattle that grazed the land before, and will observe the integration of bison and cranes. Each year, between 25,000 and 30,000 people from all 50 states and 50 different countries visit the Trust, which continues to find creative ways to increase visitors both during and outside of spring migration. For more information on the Trust, including hours throughout the year, visit Cranetrust.org. For visitors wanting less-crowded viewing opportunities, the North Platte area is a great place to observe cranes. Biologists estimate 160,000 cranes use the river valley between North Platte and Sutherland each season. Buffalo Bill Ranch State Recreation Area in North Platte offers two blinds for birders. The first blind is a renovated horse trailer in a meadow fitted with Plexiglas windows and seats. This blind holds 15 people and is available on a first-come, first-served basis at no charge. The second blind is located along the river a short hike from a nature trail connected to the state recreation area campground. Visit Outdoornebraska.org and click on Parks for more information ■



Visit NEBRASKAland's crane central to view maps, links and photos.

Unguided tours at crane viewing locations, such as the Kearney Bridge, give viewers the ability to do activities on individual timelines.



Other Crane Viewing Hotspots

If you're looking for new places to venture during migration season, first take a look at Martin's Reach Wildlife Management Area near Wood River. You may need waders to access this area, but your walk will be less than one third of a mile in. Located by the Platte River, this could be your own private viewing locale. There are no blinds, but you may have the place to yourself to watch thousands of cranes return to this major roost. Also, ride gravel roads adjacent to Interstate 80 to see cranes feeding and loafing in fields and meadows. You might find your own private spot a stone's throw from everyone else.

A Turkey Hunt for Warriors

Story and photos by Jeff Kurrus

A scratch on a box call, a respond from a bird. Scratch. Gobble. Scratch. Gobble. But each time the response was farther and farther away. “We need to get on the opposite side of him,” said Tim Cahoy, a volunteer guide from O’Neill, to fellow hunter and guest Travis Marshall who quickly, but silently, followed.

When they stopped this time, Tim scratched again. Gobble. Another scratch. Gobble. But there was something different this time. The bird was getting closer. Even before Tim could call again, the bird was interrupting him, belting out that heart-pumping, cacophonous sound that turkey hunters know so well. Before they knew it, the bird was 50, 40, 30 yards, running as if being chased from behind.

Boom! The sound of Travis’s gun

also echoed and then, surprising all of us, the bird turned and bolted through the woods, uninjured.

After a couple of common obscenities, Tim and Travis looked for feathers and blood, quickly determining that the extra full pattern on the shotgun, combined with the running bird, was the reason for the miss. But those facts still weren’t going to help the potential problem once we arrived back at camp. For Travis was an Army Green Beret, and the others back at camp may not let him live this one down.

Travis and five Special Operations brethren were guests on the land of Ron and Eileen Schmit, staying in their guest house for their first-ever Nebraska turkey hunt. Yet even as first-timers in this state, these young men had seen far more than many of us



Guide Tim Cahoy works a box call in an attempt to draw a tom turkey within shooting range.

would see in a lifetime. These were all combat-injured soldiers who had spent a significant part of their adult life fighting in the Middle East.

The guest house had a dorm room atmosphere, as each ribbed the others about their wounds like college kids would do about a recent basketball game. But instead of making disparaging, yet humorous, remarks about each others’ jumpshots, these friends took time to poke fun at the eight bullet holes in one of their backs, or the “two feet” of intestines still left after one of them had been hit by an explosive device. It was no holds barred, even when I entered the room. One soldier, Trevor Peterson from New York, asked if I worked for *Cosmopolitan*, the famous women’s magazine.

The conversation was edgy, not unlike what you would see in a military movie or documentary, but it was also real. This is what needed to be remembered later that evening.

These soldiers had come to O’Neill through the Wounded Warriors Program started by Ken Barnard, who seeks opportunities for injured military personnel to hunt throughout the country. Ken and Tim had met in 2011 when Tim was guiding in South Dakota, and Ken had come along with a couple friends on a deer hunt that year. After the hunt was over, the

outfitter that Tim worked with had found out what Ken did for wounded soldiers so they decided to invite two for a turkey hunt. Since then, Tim has been involved with several of these trips, known as “patriot hunts.” Together, as they would hunt both turkey and pheasant, they had found passion in being able to give back to those who had sacrificed so much.

Tim had come back from these hunts and talked with different friends and community members about them. Everyone who heard what these hunts were about wanted to get involved. Soon after, Ron and Eileen offered their land for one of Ken’s patriot hunts, where these six men visited for a three-day visit last spring.

The soldiers were guided by a group of locals, including Tim, Randy North, Mason Heiss, Dustin and Gary Wollenburg, and Rod Ludemann to hunt birds across the rolling hills of Holt County. And while the hunts were just as interesting as any other Nebraska turkey hunt, the conversations throughout the day

were even more fascinating. It was storytelling at its finest.

“I grew up next to a military base,” said Jason Thomas from Alabama. “From my youngest days I remember watching troops jumping out of airplanes. So I’d make my little forts and I had my play guns. Jumping out of those planes was what I wanted to do since I was a little boy. Then, when I saw the movie Rambo, it was all over. My career path was already decided.”

We learned about the brother-like love of the soldiers for the F-14 Tomcat, a military airplane that will soon be retired by the United States government. “That one is going to hurt really bad,” said more than one of them who knew all too well how important these planes were to their missions. Missions that, as they state it, they do quietly and modestly. “The Navy Seals talk about doing it,” said Marshall, “we just go ahead and do it.”

The jokes and stories continued throughout the day, but the mood changed quickly at the after-hunt ceremony dinner, when the guests

described what it meant to them for the time dedicated by the landowners and guides setting up these hunts. They honored Ron and Eileen Schmit with a U.S. flag that had flown over one of many military bases in Afghanistan.

Then everyone turned their attention to Ken, whose support has become so important to the more than 500 soldiers who have participated since 2007. “He’s talked more than one soldier off the ledge,” said David Hargitt from Indiana.

And this fact was quite evident after seeing the outpouring of support, and love, among a group of strangers spending a few days hunting turkeys last spring in northeastern Nebraska. ■

Thanks to Tim Cahoy for his reporting on this story.

 Learn more about the Patriot Hunts Program.



Landowners Eileen and Ron Schmit accept an American flag that had flown over a base in Afghanistan as a gift from the green berets who had the opportunity to hunt on the Schmit’s land for turkeys last April.



Cahoy and hunter Travis Marshall watch turkeys on a field edge in Holt County before getting within shooting range of a tom.

Learning the Subtleties of the Prairie

Moving to Nebraska cultivates an appreciation of the Great Plains.

By Ariana Brocious

I knew the prairie existed, vaguely, in the back of my mind, had heard mention of the wonder of the Sandhills and the thrilling cacophony of birds on the Platte River during spring migration. But in the beginning I hardly gave such places credence. It pains me to admit I lived in Nebraska for nearly a year before I ever really ventured out to explore it. Born, raised in and still enchanted by the Sonoran Desert of southern Arizona, I'd spent my mid-twenties seduced by the golden aspen and the tumbling diorama layers of western Colorado's mountains before moving, somewhat reluctantly, to Lincoln. Arriving to the plains in late January, I immediately felt sure nothing in this flat, desolate landscape could compare to the heart-soaring glory of ascending a 12,000 foot peak, still snow-covered in mid-June, nor the sweet, aromatic air and unexpectedly verdant views of the desert following a summer monsoon.

During those first few months, on the phone with other western friends, I secretly scoffed at the "subtle beauty" of the plains that Nebraskans talked about. Sure, we'd say, that's just a nice way of admitting nothing here inspires like the red rock, craggy peaks, powder bowls and wild coastlines of other places we idolized. I dreamt of driving west all the time, while hardly leaving the confines of Lincoln and Interstate 80.

Early in my time here, I wrote about my unsettling sense of loss living away from the mountains: "A native Nebraskan told me he couldn't bear

to live among them; they make him claustrophobic. I nodded agreeably, but couldn't disagree more. Here, without them, I feel there's nothing grounding me, standing watch over me, no place to moor my mind and body. I worry the next whirlwind could blow me away."

When I finally found people who understood how I felt about these lands, I was ashamed of my myopic mindset. And even when I finally did make it out among the blue grama and Indian grass at a preserve just south of Lincoln, it took time to appreciate. I quickly delighted in Nebraska's big skies, finger-painted with the sweeping, sculpted cloud sunsets like those in Arizona, but other features took time to reveal themselves. I knew not to expect any big topography, but initially still looked for familiar things, such as canyons and valleys. And I found them, carved into rambling loess hills in Nebraska's southwestern corner. The land divulged other familiar things, too; spindly yucca plants along country roadsides, cactus tucked under patches of big bluestem in the Sandhills and the cooing melodies of the mourning dove.

Soon enough, and with due credit to those patient enough to guide me, I began to see the heartland differently. Even more surprising was to experience this transition in winter, a season I often dread. In a dry and particularly cold year, I wandered curiously, admiring patches of dried milkweed pods nearly perfectly preserved on desiccated vines. I saw the sun set and moon rise over the same wide, icy Platte River. Walking among some of the last remaining virgin prairie in the

southeastern part of the state, I found my eye drawn to the ground, searching for minor notes in the symphonic play of subtle – yes, subtle – auburn, butter, indigo, cream and ash-colored grasses sashaying in the unceasing prairie winds.

Mountains consume the frame. They dominate the horizon and pull your eye up, up, away from the ground. Like other striking scenery, they demand little from the observer; they're easy to admire. Here on the plains, I've learned to readjust my focus, zooming in to notice the details, the quilted light on the clouds, the delicate blossom of the Chinese lantern, the thorns on the locust trees. So much so that when I returned to my desert home for the holidays, I found myself startled at the overwhelming nature around me – a sensory overload of details here, there, everywhere.

I know Nebraskans, and many Great Plains residents, tire of this trope. Of the sense of surprised wonder, the loudly-stated realization of outsiders upon discovering flyover country isn't actually empty. And I expect that they know and love this land in a way I never will, because it's not my home.

A part of me will never stop missing the shimmering dance of aspen leaves on an alpine lake, or the way purple shadows walk across the lap of desert mountains. But I'm gaining a deep appreciation for this new place I've landed, and how the people here connect with their homeland. And I'm grateful to be granted space among this big, wide-open country to learn and live for a while. ■

PHOTO BY MIKE FORSBERG

Grandfather Time

A tale of two Ottos.

By Amy Kucera

When I first met Otto LeRoy, he was volunteering his time with youth at the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska office in Lincoln. He instantly reminded me of my own Grandfather – though mine was just as Czech as he was Ponca – both had a wide grin and a short stature, enjoyed the outdoors, music, visiting and dancing. In fact, they even shared the same first name. We also had much in common and became good friends.

He was thin, with a wide grin and deep, booming voice. His graying hair was just long enough for a short ponytail. It was routine he would visit the office each morning, greeting me with an enormous coffee cup in hand. "Hello, Miss Amy." Talk would soon turn to the latest local newspaper headlines. Or the Oklahoma Sooners. Or the Lincoln Indian Center where, as a veteran, he was active in the Gourd Dance Society and Color Guard. He had enlisted in the Navy in 1963 and was honorably discharged four years later, after serving on the USS Canberra. Though he never once mentioned it, he had received the National Defense Service Medal, three Bronze Stars, Vietnam Public Campaign Medal and Vietnam Gallantry Medal.

During coffee one morning, he invited me to join him at an upcoming powwow at the University of Nebraska. When the sunny Saturday arrived, I walked my bicycle through the campus and found him on the outer rim of a crowded circle with a seat saved for me.

"Where's your shawl?" he said as his smile brightened.

I laughed. "I'm not dancing today, Otto."

As the spring afternoon went on, he would continue to share with me stories of his cultural experiences, as the sound of drumbeats filled the grounds. Food smells of warm frybread mixed with the burning of sage grass. Beaded jewelry, bells and shells on the colorful regalia of passersby competed for our attention with those moving within the dance arena.

"Everybody, Intertribal!" the master of ceremonies announced, calling out an invitation for everyone to dance.

Otto motioned for me to join him. I shook my head.

"Oh, c'mon!" he said in a low tone.

Not one to disrespect an elder, I found myself moving with him toward the forming circle. My feet shifted awkwardly, but it felt good to be a part of the dance.

The sun lowered slowly behind us as dancers continued their turns on the flattened grass. Suddenly, an eagle feather fell to the ground. It was a solemn moment. The eagle feather is sacred, shown the highest respect and honor at all times. Though each dancer makes every effort to ensure it is properly secured, it can still happen to fall.

In an instant, the arena director moved to protect the



PHOTO BY JON AUGUSTINE

Otto LeRoy at his last Gourd Dance at the Indian Center in 2013.

feather until the drum song stopped. As a veteran and elder, Otto was chosen to give a blessing. The entire crowd stood in silence. A humbled man then spoke of his sorrow that it had happened, asked for forgiveness and in an act of respect and appreciation, he gave Otto the eagle feather.

"This is a beautiful feather," he said upon return to his seat next to me.

"It certainly is," I marveled.

When the drum started up again, Otto suddenly leapt from his chair.

"This is a good song! I've got to dance!" He smiled and readied his feet.

"Here, hold this for me," he said. "And don't drop it!"

I sat there paralyzed. As I recalled, *The Bald Eagle Protection Act* stated the possession of an eagle feather by a nonnative person carried a fine up to half a million dollars.

My grip tightened. The song lasted longer than any song I could remember. When he finally returned, he brought with him an old, familiar grin. "Gee, you were white to begin with, but now you really look pale!"

We were making dreamcatchers with the Ponca Circle of Youth when Otto joined us at the table. "They said the cancer is spreading." He shrugged his shoulders. "By the way, there's a gourd dance at the Indian Center in two weeks." He smiled. "Bring your shawl."

It would be a dance held in his honor. When I arrived, it was standing-room only; the crowd flowed out into the doorways, as his many friends and family were there to wish him well. Otto danced every song.

"It's good to see you, Miss Amy."

Though it would be the last time I would see him dance, it wouldn't be our final visit. Less than two weeks later, I would find him resting under the shade of the tall pine trees overlooking the Niobrara River Valley at the Ponka Indian Cemetery. As the buffalo graze the nearby grasses softly shifting under the prairie sky expanse, I go to visit him, just as I still do with my own grandfather, after the same fate took him to rest just a few hills down the road.

Now, whenever I am invited to dance, I recall a number of people who took the time to teach me how. Two were Ottos. And though they came from different backgrounds and bloodlines, they shared the same name, love for life and land in which to forever call home. ■

The Tools of Eugene Cromwell

Genoa man proves a new passion can start at any time in life.

By Jenny Nguyen and Jeff Kurrus

What will we be doing in 20 years? The question is simple if one doesn't consider what they were doing a mere 10 years ago, the day-to-day now that was not even a radar blip back then. Yet we were faced with this question when we met Genoa resident Eugene Cromwell, whose antique tool collection, relics of bygone days and country life, was on display for us during a trip to his hometown.

Each painstakingly cleaned, sorted and numbered, they hung like fossils in a museum. Mangled wrenches, oil cans, pitchforks and plows, drill bits of every shape and size – collecting, cleaning and displaying old tools and furniture became Gene's obsession, a hobby he picked up when he turned 50 and one that he fervently continued upon his wife's passing.

Now in his 90s, the collection still drives him. Gene continues to go out to the old tool shed to scrape and polish, to knock off years on unwanted objects so beaten with time, to give each a home. Why do you do this? "It's just something to pass the time," he replied in quiet modesty. Though the man revealed little, his collection was more than capable of speaking for itself.

While our current hobbies often disappear after the end of a gun barrel or rod tip – Gene gives excitement to think that there's no telling what's around the corner for each of us in this world. New friends, new purpose, new passions – the world is still a mystery, if only we keep our eyes open long enough to not let it slip by. And we thank Gene for that. ■



Wooden pitchfork that Eugene restored.



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

This plow plane, as well as the one pictured on the previous page, both belonged to Eugene's grandfather, who had used them as a boy. Eugene's grandfather passed away in 1913.

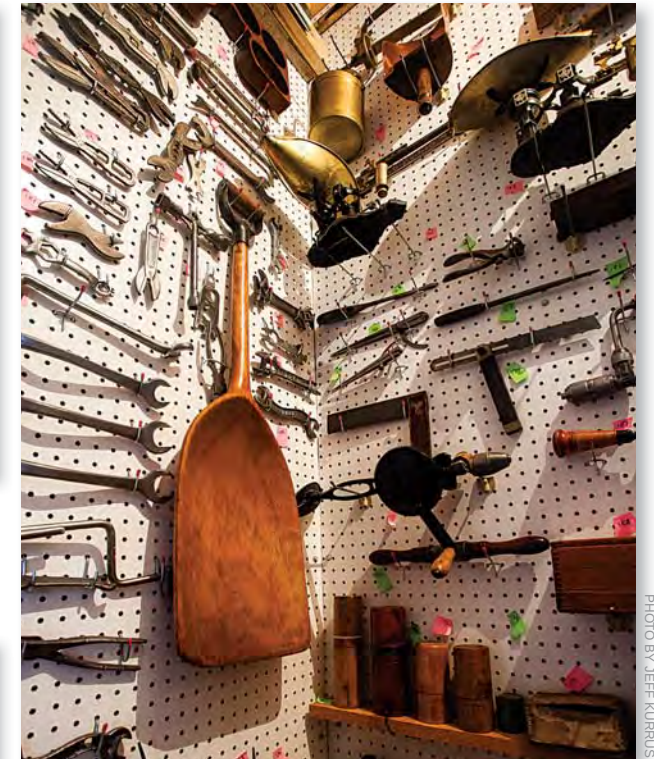


PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

This assortment of tools includes a wooden scoop shovel.



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN

Oil cans and other antiques line the shelves of Eugene's collection.



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Eugene sits at his work bench restoring a plow plane.



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN

This drill, along with a horse, was used to plant wheat or rye.



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN

These blocks and tackles were used as a pulley system to lift heavy objects.



▲ This picture is of my brother, Leo Marek, who farmed four miles south of Exeter, now deceased. There were two small ponds in his pasture. You could sneak up the dam and pop over the edge. There were so many ducks on the pond they were shoulder to shoulder. The pond was completely covered with the ducks. Together we shot the ones he is holding in the picture. This was in 1958 about corn picking time.

— Don Marek,
West Des Moines, Iowa



Send contributions to: Portraits from the Past, *NEBRASKAland Magazine*, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370. Or e-mail to Tim.Reigert@Nebraska.gov. Photos should show people enjoying Nebraska outdoor activities, such as camping, boating, hunting or fishing, and must have been taken before 1980. We will give priority to unusual photos or activities. When possible, please include a story about the photograph and identify the people, places and approximate date it was taken. Photos will be returned.



▲ The photo was taken in the fall of 1973 of Uncle Royceton Jones and his nephew, Steve McDonald, with a Vizsla named Lady. Taking a break from work and football, these two would sneak off to enjoy the camaraderie and beauty of the Nebraska countryside near Bennett. Uncle Royceton made sure his nephew Steve was educated in the rules and techniques of bird-hunting (and fishing in the summer months) – a love that Royceton passed on to his own sons, and nephew Steve passed on to his.

— Donna J. McDonald, Lincoln, Nebraska



◀ Bounty from a short afternoon of fishing at Dead Timber Recreation Area near Scribner in June 1968. Pictured (L-R) with great-Uncle Gus Legband of rural Snyder are Roger, Fred, and Jim Spath (myself) of Webster. All of the bullheads were literally caught a few feet off of the bank. Uncle Gus was an avid fisherman who loved taking his grandchildren and grand-nephews to Dead Timber and was almost speechless that day that so many could be caught so close to the bank. He could only surmise that a school of fish was swimming by at the time. Adding to the feat was the fact Uncle Gus spent most of the afternoon untangling lines.

— Jim Spath,
North Platte, Nebraska

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Rainbow Trout Stuffed with Clementine

Asian-inspired grilled whole trout.

By Jenny Nguyen



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN

Grilled trout stuffed with orange and finished with ginger scallion soy sauce.

Grilled is my favorite way to eat whole trout. I like the slight char, when the skin becomes crispy and smoky. It's a satisfaction that is equivalent to the crust on a perfectly grilled steak, the crunchy bits on properly rendered bacon, or the brown, buttered edges on heated toast. You don't get this when you bake or smoke fish. It's the hot coals and grates that do the trick.

A couple years ago, I read in a *Bon Appétit* magazine about stuffing snapper with tangerines. I stowed the idea away in my head, which resurfaced last summer after a few successful trips of trout fishing. Using clementines/mandarins ("Halos" or "Cuties"), these little oranges gave the trout a subtle sweetness. And the finishing ginger and scallion soy sauce added an Asian flair that paired well with the citrus. This was probably the best trout I've ever prepared.

Servings: 2

Prep Time: 30 minutes

Cooking Time: 5-10 minutes

Ingredients:

- 2 whole pan size trout, scaled and gutted
- kosher salt, to taste
- 2 green onions, 1 chopped and 1 sliced in half lengthwise
- peanut oil for brushing
- 1 clementine orange, peeled and segmented

Ginger Scallion Sauce

- 2 tablespoons of peanut oil
- 3 green onions, white and light green parts minced

- 1 tablespoon of fresh ginger, minced
- ¼ cup of low sodium soy sauce
- ¼ teaspoon of sesame oil
- 1 tablespoon of rice vinegar
- 1 teaspoon of white sugar
- 1 Thai (bird's eye) chili, thinly sliced

1. Prepare grill to high heat. In a small saucepan, combine peanut oil and 3 minced green onions. Warm up mixture for a couple minutes, but do not brown. Pour green onion mixture into a small mason jar, along with other sauce ingredients. Shake well before use.

2. Rinse trout under cold water and pat dry with paper towels. Brush the skin and cavity with oil, and then sprinkle lightly with salt. Stuff cavities with clementine wedges, sliced green onion and a drizzle of ginger scallion sauce.

3. Clean grill grates and brush oil over grates before cooking. Lay down stuffed trout and cook for 3-5 minutes on each side until slightly charred and cooked through. Cooking time will vary. Drizzle ginger scallion sauce over fish and garnish with chopped green onion before serving. Tip: When eating, mash up the tangerine/clementine wedges to release juices on meat. ■

This recipe and photograph originally appeared on Jenny's Food for Hunters blog at Foodforhunters.com.

 Read Jenny's *NEBRASKAland* blog "Midland Musings."



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Mystery in the Snow

I was taking an early morning hike through a snowy prairie in my hometown of Aurora when I found this print in the snow. It was clearly made by a bird, but what kind?

To my untrained eye, it appears the print was made by a bird that was unable to recover from a dive before it hit the snow. I think I can see two places where the feet of the bird dragged through the snow – once at the trailing edge of the wings and once at the “head” of the print – before it regained the air. The linear scuff to the left is as intriguing as the bird print itself because it was likely made by whatever the bird was chasing. My initial guess was that the print was made by a small raptor chasing a sparrow or other small bird, but upon reflection, I don’t think the wingspan (10-12 inches) was large enough for even the smallest of Nebraska raptors. It seems more likely a couple birds were chasing each other around while feeding on seeds from nearby plants.

I’ll never know what really happened to create those prints in the snow, but I’m grateful to have had my imagination stoked by it. Seeing the actual event might have been much less interesting!

Chris Helzer, December 22, 2014



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