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magazine

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Volume 97 • No. 9
November 2019

Cover: Spencer Holzfaster's Labrador
Wriggs retrieves a mallard drake
during a hunt in Lincoln County.
Photo by Doug Steinke

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PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

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Emily Burch, Littleton, Colorado
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Double Rainbow Near Sutton



Send your comments and photos to:

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Correction: On page 8 of the
October issue, the woodpecker was
misidentified. It is a red-bellied
woodpecker. We regret the error.

DOUBLE TAKE

A whitetail doe and her fawn cautiously walk through a clearing as they travel to their nightly feeding area in Lincoln County.

PHOTO BY JULIE GEISER



THREATENED AND ENDANGERED: THE WESTERN PRAIRIE FRINGED ORCHID

By Gerry Steinauer

The western prairie fringed orchid (*Platanthera praeclara*) historically grew in moist tallgrass prairies and wet meadows ranging from southern Manitoba south to Oklahoma, including much of the eastern half of Nebraska. European settlement, however, had an immediate impact on this sensitive species.

An 1889 account from Kansas stated that “once school children brought armfuls of the curious [orchid to their teachers] ... now they are seldom seen.” An 1898 Nebraska account notes the orchid “was common in wet valleys of the sandhills ... also in [the tallgrass prairie region], where, however, it is a disappearing species.” Since then, loss of its prairie habitat, heavy livestock grazing, herbicides and invasive plants have stressed the plant to the point where it is now listed as both federally and state threatened.

The perennial orchid begins growth in early May and the plant commonly reaches heights of 20 to 30 inches. Its 3- to 5-inch-long leaves are somewhat thickened with prominent parallel veins. The lower lip of the large creamy white to greenish flower is divided into three feathered lobes with the other smaller petals and sepals forming a hood above. An up to 2-inch-long nectar spur extends back from the lower petal. The few to up to 25 flowers that occur along the elongate inflorescence begin blooming in mid-June to early July, depending on weather and location, with southern plants flowering first.

The specialized flowers are designed for one purpose: pollination by a few select species of nocturnal hawkmoths (sphinx moths). Near dusk, the orchids release a sweet fragrance to attract the wide-ranging moths. The white-fringed lip directs the moths to the spur with its rich nectar deep within. The moth, while hovering in front of the flower with its long tongue extended to feed, brushes against two pollen-bearing structures called columns. At this moment, two sticky balls of pollen become glued to the moth’s eyes or head. When the moth leaves the flower, the columns rotate, exposing the stigma (receptive female structure) for pollination by a next visiting, pollen-carrying moth. A decline in hawkmoths may be another reason for the decline in orchid populations.

In 2012, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission resurveyed 65 prairies in eastern Nebraska and the Sandhills where over the last few decades a total of 1,385 western prairie fringed orchids were observed during prior surveys.

We found a total of 595 plants at only 21 (32 percent) of the sites. For the record, 2012 was a particularly droughty year, and individual orchid plants may not flower in such stressful years. Instead, these vegetative plants either do not produce above ground growth or send up only one or two basal leaves, which when concealed among the prairie grasses, are nearly impossible to detect during surveys.

The sharp decline of the western prairie fringed orchid in Nebraska’s tallgrass region in recent decades is distressing. Hopefully, healthy populations of this beautiful and intriguing species can be maintained in the semi-wilds of the Sandhills.

Gerry Steinauer is a botanist for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.



PHOTO BY GERRY STEINAUER

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PHOTO BY CHRIS HELZER

DON'T MESS WITH OIL BEETLES

By Chris Helzer

Among all the crazy life stories of all the crazy insects in the world, the oil beetle ranks as an elite. The oil beetle is a plant-feeding insect in the blister beetle family. As with other blister beetles, the oil beetle produces a toxic compound called cantharidin that is used to protect its eggs from predation. In addition, when an oil beetle feels threatened, it secretes a yellow substance from its leg joints (of all places) that contains enough cantharidin to cause immediate swelling and blisters to the skin of potential predators. Don't mess with oil beetles, people.

However, blister-inducing yellow goo is only a small part of the oil beetle story. Oil beetles also go through a unique process called hypermetamorphosis as they move from egg to adult. Instead of hatching out of an egg as a slow fat grub, oil beetle larvae are called triungulin, and look like tiny little silverfish. It's these speedy triungulin that take the oil beetle story over the top.

Shortly after hatching, oil beetle triungulin cluster together and emit a chemical that mimics the pheromone of a female solitary bee (a bee that raises broods individually, as opposed to in a colony with a queen, workers, etc.). Passing male bees, sensing the female pheromone, descend upon

the mass of triungulin to mate with it. Instead, the speedy larvae crawl up onto the male bee and hang on tight. When that male bee finally meets and mates with an actual female bee, the triungulin quickly transfer to their new ride and hitchhike back to the female's nest.

Once they arrive, the triungulin hop off the female and proceed to eat all the bee larvae in the nest, along with the pollen and nectar the female had supplied her babies with. Once they've destroyed the bee nest, the triungulin transform into the kind of grub-like larvae usually associated with beetles, and from there they pupate and turn into herbivorous adult oil beetles.

If you ever find yourself reaching toward a fat flightless black beetle, think carefully before you pick it up. If it's an oil beetle, you might soon find yourself suffering from painful blistering skin. While you apply salve to your throbbing fingers, though, remember that it could be worse. At least the beetle's larvae aren't going to invade your home as a swarm of baby-eating marauders!

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

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CANADA GEESE IN A FEBRUARY BLIZZARD IN SARPY COUNTY PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS.

BLIZZARDS

By Martha D. Shulski

In Nebraska we experience a wide range of hazardous weather events. The throes of winter are approaching soon, and with it comes the possibility of a blizzard. For travelers, campers, hunters and anglers on the ice, such high impact storms can be dangerous if not deadly.

Blizzards are characterized by reduced visibilities (less than a quarter mile) due to falling and/or blowing snow. As such, there must be sustained winds or frequent gusts on the order of 35 mph or greater. When it's winter and there's a hefty breeze, this combo generally leads to low wind chill temperatures with a risk of cold exposure to humans and animals.

Blizzards impacting Nebraska generally gain strength as low pressure systems move east out of the Rocky Mountains, sometimes termed Colorado Low. While eastern North Dakota experiences the highest number of blizzards on average in the U.S., we have our fair share of several per year.

Perhaps you remember the March 2019 storm that impacted the Plains? Western and Central Nebraska felt the brunt of the cold side of this storm with road closures, cattle

losses and wind damage. Sometimes a series of these events results in a doozy of a winter season.

Some seasons that stand out in our weather history are 2009-10 and 1948-49. The Schoolhouse Blizzard of 1888 (named so because of its deadly toll on schoolchildren trekking home in the absence of warnings) even spawned the formation of a Greater Nebraska Blizzard Club in 1940.

Now, of course, we have eyes from space (satellite), ears from the ground (radar) and detailed weather forecasts from trained meteorologists who can time, track and measure the intensity of these winter storms. Research has even shown that naming storms results in people paying closer attention to those warnings.

If blizzard conditions are in the forecast, be sure and take precautions. And if you're like me, enjoy nature's spectacle from a warm shelter and wait until the storm passes to venture outside.

Martha D. Shulski, at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, is the director of the Nebraska State Climate office.



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VENISON TOURTIERE

By Ryan Sparks

While living in Canada I was introduced to tourtière, a French-Canadian meat pie. In Quebec, tourtière is traditionally part of the Christmas and New Year’s Eve meal. These days it’s made with a mixture of pork and beef, but traditionally it was made with wild game like deer, moose, and caribou. When I tried it for the first time I immediately knew it was perfectly suited for venison. It is usually served with a sweet tomato relish or jam. I’ve also included a recipe for my version. I would be cheating you out of some fun if I didn’t mention the French-Canadian tradition of using the leftover pastry to make pets de sœur, a pastry filled with butter, brown sugar, and maple syrup, which is rolled, sliced, and baked and whose rough translation is “nun’s farts.”

Servings: 6 generous

Ingredients:

Pastry

- 2¼ cups all-purpose flour
- 1¼ teaspoons salt
- 1 cup unsalted butter, still cold and cut into cubes
- 4-6 tablespoons ice water

Filling

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 pound ground venison
- ½ pound ground pork
- Salt and pepper to taste
- ¼ pound cremini mushrooms, finely diced
- 1 onion, finely diced
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- ¼ teaspoon ground clove
- ¼ teaspoon nutmeg
- 1 teaspoon allspice
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 small potato, grated
- ½ cup white wine

Assembly

- Flour, for rolling
- 1 egg yolk

Sweet Tomato Sauce (directions to follow)

- 14 ounces canned tomatoes and their juice
- 2 tablespoons white sugar
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- ¼ teaspoon mustard powder
- ¼ teaspoon cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper (optional)
- Salt and black pepper to taste

Directions:

Pastry

In a large mixing bowl or food processor, combine the flour and salt. Cut the butter into the flour mixture with your fingertips or a pastry blender until mixture resembles coarse meal. Do not overwork. Stir in enough ice water to make the dough come together.

Divide dough in half. Flatten each half into a round disc. Wrap in plastic wrap and refrigerate for one hour.

Filling

Heat a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add olive oil and butter. Add the meat a third at a time, allowing it to brown. Season the mixture with salt and pepper. When small bits of caramelized meat start to form, add the mushrooms, onions, garlic, spices and grated potatoes. Reduce the heat to medium and continue cooking for 5-10 minutes.

Add the white wine, scraping the bottom of the pan to remove the tasty meat bits. Reduce the heat to low and continue cooking until all the wine has evaporated. Taste the

tourtière filling and adjust the seasoning and spices as you like. Let cool completely.

Assembly

Preheat the oven to 450 degrees. Lightly flour a work surface and roll each pastry round into an 11-inch circle approximately 1/8 inch thick. Using one pastry, line a 9-inch pie plate. If the pastry is too soft, put it in the freezer for five minutes.

Add the tourtière filling and cover with the second pastry round. Crimp and seal the edges with the tines of a fork. Brush the pastry with lightly beaten egg yolk and score the top with a knife to allow steam to escape while baking.

Bake for 15 minutes at 450, and then reduce the temperature to 350 and bake until the crust is golden brown, about 35 minutes. Cover it with foil if the top browns too quickly. Let rest for 10 minutes before serving. Serve with sweet tomato jam.

Sweet Tomato Jam

Add all the ingredients to a small saucepan and bring to a quick simmer. After the tomatoes have cooked for five minutes, crush them with a whisk or wooden spatula. Turn heat to low and continue to simmer, stirring occasionally for 20-30 minutes until it has slightly thickened. Taste for seasoning and refrigerate.

Ryan Sparks is a freelance outdoor writer and photographer. See more of his work at sparksryan.com.



Lessons from Cat Country

STORY AND PHOTOS
BY JUSTIN HAAG

Thanks to research in the Pine Ridge, we are gaining knowledge about one of Nebraska's most criticized, treasured and, of course, misunderstood repatriates – the cougar.

Referred to as mountain lion, cougar and several other names, *Puma concolor* has become one of the most discussed wildlife species in the state. For all of that talking, though, it seems there is always a need to dispel a few myths and provide accurate information to the public regarding the species.

Historical accounts of the species in Nebraska, while sparse, date back to the Stephen H. Long expedition of 1819. Along with so many other species, cougars disappeared from Nebraska with Euro-American settlement. Not only did early settlers slay predators at every opportunity, more importantly they killed the predators' prey. The decimation of deer and other prey species in the late 1800s and early 1900s surely made Nebraska a less desirable place for mountain lions to live.

The return of the mountain lion, not coincidentally, arrived at about the same time Nebraska was realizing the return of a flourishing deer population. As the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission began offering plentiful antlerless-only permits tags and bonus tags in the 1990s to manage the burgeoning deer population that was once nearly extirpated,



cougars also found harvest opportunities of their favorite prey in Nebraska and began showing up to the party. The first modern confirmation of a mountain lion in Nebraska came in 1991, marking the cats' expansion from large populations in bordering states where cougar and prey populations had recovered because of protection by game laws.

In discussions of mountain lion numbers, biologists are quick to point out that cougars do not adhere to any arbitrary borders and Nebraska's cats are part of a larger population that extends to the Black Hills of South Dakota, the Rocky

Mountains of Colorado and Wyoming, and other points west.

In 1995, the Nebraska Legislature classified mountain lions as game animals. A provision in state statute allows individuals to kill mountain lions if they are threatening their lives or property.

Game and Parks has established management programs that meet those statutory obligations and are designed to curtail negative interactions between humans and the cats, and has gone to great lengths to gain public input about the species, usually not having to work too hard to get it. It

▲ Mountain lion anatomy makes it an efficient ambush, or stalking, predator, and it prefers to hunt in areas of dense cover. Adult cats can bound 40 feet while running and can leap 15 feet into a tree, but their small lungs are not efficient for long chases. Speed comparisons lend clues to their diet. A cougar can "exit the chute" at 50 mph, but cannot sustain that pace for long. In comparison, the rarely preyed upon pronghorn, with their big throats and lungs, can sprint more than 60 mph at long distances over an open plain while the favored forest-loving white-tailed deer tops out at about 30 mph.

seems everyone has an opinion on this species, ranging from “get rid of them” to “just let them be.”

To help guide management decisions about the species, Game and Parks has opted to take a scientific approach rather than an emotional one. Biologists recognize the mountain lion as an important part of Nebraska’s biodiversity, but also strive to employ management strategies to maintain resilient, healthy and socially acceptable populations in balance with available habitat and other wildlife species over the long term.

In 2015, Game and Parks ramped up its research efforts under the direction of Sam Wilson, furbearer and carnivore program manager. By capturing mountain lions and equipping them with GPS tracking collars, researchers have gained new insight into how this species is spending its time in the Pine Ridge. The research has not only given Nebraska officials a better idea of how many cats are in the area, but also what they’re eating and how they are using the terrain.

By using both the revered and well-established mark-recapture survey method coupled with modern genetic surveys, Game and Parks has gained confidence in its population estimates in the Pine Ridge. Remarkably, those two methods came up with exactly the same number of cats when the most recent population estimates were tabulated in 2017. Both survey methods arrived at 59 individuals in the Pine Ridge of Sioux, Dawes and Sheridan counties.

The population estimates and number of collared cougars in the Pine Ridge provide a safeguard against overharvest when hunting recommendations are made. Biologists do note, however, that the population is always fluctuating. Mountain lions reproduce, die and move in and out of the state.

Based on Game and Parks research, individual cats with tracking collars have traveled as far as 20 miles in one day. They have established breeding ranges in the Pine Ridge, Niobrara Valley and Wildcat Hills, but with individual females documented in southeastern Nebraska, Iowa, Missouri and Tennessee, it is possible that cats will expand their home ranges into other territories. Nebraska contains highly suitable habitat along creeks and rivers from border to border.

Getting the Picture on Pumas

The following material has been obtained with invaluable assistance from Game and Parks’ wildlife division employees, some who have moved on to other positions since the photos were taken. Certain imagery was captured with camera in hand, while some of the photos were snapped by a high-resolution camera trap system with external trigger and strobes.

Regardless of which side of the mountain lion issue one stands, it seems there are no shortage of misunderstandings about this elusive species. Thanks to the research in Nebraska and elsewhere, we are continuing to answer questions that will help all gain a better understanding.



▲ Fresh mountain lion kill sites are usually not difficult to identify. This cat, photographed by camera trap in Dawes County, killed a mule deer in the upper right of the photo and dragged it under the pine tree at the left. She then covered it with snow, pine needles and other forest debris to create a cache. Canids, such as coyotes on the other hand, are much more sloppy eaters, scattering bones around the area and not attempting to conceal the remains. A mountain lion typically kills about one deer per week, or may consume a number of smaller prey such as porcupines, coyotes and turkeys.



◀ This is the first cat photographed with the camera trap system, thanks to a tip of her location from Game and Parks wildlife staff in March 2015. My hair may have stood on end when I returned to the site and pulled up the images for viewing. From the timestamp on the digital photos, I learned that she returned about 45 minutes after I got the camera set up and left the scene. Thankfully for me, mountain lions typically keep their distance from people.



◀▶ It's hard to believe an animal that looks like this may grow into something capable of bringing down a bull elk, isn't it? Mountain lion kittens, also correctly referred to as cubs, are born at just over one pound with a spotted coat and blue eyes. They get bigger. Adult female mountain lions typically weigh in at 85-110 pounds, while toms are 120-180. They measure 7-8 feet from nose to tail and 2-3 feet in height at the shoulder.

Researchers tag the kittens when they are four to five weeks old – any earlier and they put the kittens at risk, any older and they are hard to catch. The kittens are surprisingly docile during the process. Dens are sometimes found tucked under picturesque rock overhangs such as this one, but more frequently under the entangled branches of downed trees. The spotted fur, which fades out over their first year, makes for effective camouflage.



Nebraska has three documented populations of mountain lions with reproduction, and cats often wander to other parts of the state. Most of the state's telemetry research on the species has been conducted in the Pine Ridge of the state's northwestern corner.

◀ For this 2016 photo, Game and Parks biologist and cougar researcher Linsey Blake helped me push, pull and drag about 100 pounds of photo equipment over a long stretch of downed, burned timber in the Pine Ridge. It was one of our first success stories in capturing camera trap imagery with this system, and not the last time the researchers would go out of their way to assist my goal of documenting their project.



▲ People often mistake tracks of large dogs for those of mountain lions. Note that this cougar track in the Sioux County snow has no evidence of claw marks. Unlike canid species, the big cats walk with their claws retracted so they are rarely visible in prints.

▼ In 2015, Game and Parks staff members Mallory Irvine, Laura McHale, Todd Nordeen, Micah Ellstrom and Greg Schenbeck stand near the first cougar to be trapped, immobilized and collared for research in the Pine Ridge. Researchers employ traps or dogs to capture mountain lions for collaring. The traps are designed to do no harm to the animals. When treeing a cat with dogs, researchers dart the animal and take care in getting it down. Sometimes, a staff member must climb a tree and lower the immobilized cat off a limb into a safety net.





◀ Mountain lions are extraordinarily stealthy and rarely seen in the wild, known to typically flee or stay hidden when they sense humans. Fatal attacks do happen on rare occasion, though, and as this species re-establishes its range and humans increase development within the same areas the occasional encounter is sure to ensue. People living in or visiting cat country are wise to learn about the species, how to respond appropriately to their presence and best methods for protecting domestic animals. Dispersing young males, which are learning to hunt and establish a territory, are the most usual suspects when encounters occur with livestock and people.

This uncollared cat, photographed in Sheridan County, apparently watched me as I followed a dragline in the snow to find a deer it had cached at a creek bottom. Little did I know, until hearing some scurrying, that it had had been watching me approach its food. I watched the cat as it hurried from its resting place to the top of the canyon and saunter away on the ridgeline above. The indentation in the snow where the cat had been resting was just 15 steps away from me. The cat did what almost all of them do in similar situations – chose to abandon its groceries and flee human presence. I got this photo later that night after anxiously setting the camera trap near its food cache atop the frozen creek.

In Case of an Encounter

Because of cougars' secretive nature and low density, they rarely interact with humans. In the rare event of an encounter, follow these guidelines.

- Do not approach a mountain lion.
- Leave the animal an avenue of escape.
- Stay calm, move slowly.
- Back away safely if you can. Do not turn your back to the lion or start running.
- Raise your arms or backpack to appear larger.
- Lift up your children to prevent them from running.
- If you are being attacked fight back. Mountain lion have been successfully driven off with bare hands. Use rocks, or whatever you can get your hands on. Try to remain on your feet or get back up if knocked down.



◀▶ Take note of the ear tags in these two photos. While the tags are the same, the cat has certainly changed from one photo to the other. Researchers occasionally have multiple experiences with individual mountain lions. I photographed this one with Sam Wilson in August 2015 while it was being tagged as a four-week-old kitten, and 17 months later when it was captured and collared a few miles away as a young adult.



◀ Cougars rarely cooperate with normal working hours. Here are Game and Parks employees Linsey Blake, Maria Baglieri and Greg Schenbeck collaring a tranquilized mountain lion at 12:46 a.m. in the January 2017 darkness. As of this writing, 14 cougars were carrying working collars in the Pine Ridge. Researchers have installed collars many more times than that, though. The total number, which has been as high as 17, fluctuates as transmitters become inoperable, cats die and researchers laboriously capture and recollar cats.



▲ Cougars are usually solitary animals – loners. Look closely, though, and you will see two mountain lions in this photo – the tagged mother cougar in the foreground, which had lost its tracking collar, and one of its two kittens in the background. Trail camera photos of female cougars with kittens nearing dispersal age have garnered a lot of attention on social media in recent years, especially if the kittens are old enough that people wrongly assume they are adult cats “hunting in packs.”

Female cougars reproduce at 2-3 years old and may do so at any time of the year – most often in warmer months. The litters average 2-4 kittens, as younger females usually give birth to smaller litters. Kittens stay with their mothers for about a year and a half, so, at a glance, can appear to be adults toward the end of that period. Figure in a 90-day gestation period, and it works out to a litter of kittens about every two years for each female if nature allows. Frequently, though, the kittens do not survive, and the female will become sexually receptive ahead of that schedule. In fact, toms are known to kill kittens, especially those they did not father, in order to trigger the female back into breeding.



▲ Linsey Blake and I placed a video camera trap near this kitten while its collared mother was away from the den. If mom is away, mountain lion kittens often chirp as the video showed. Not a lot of research exists for mountain lion hearing, but videos such as this beg questioning whether the mother cougars’ ears are specially tuned to hear the frequencies being emitted by the kittens’ chirps. To the unknowing human, the chirps seem to be from a bird. See the video at NebraskalandMagazine.com.



▲ Male cougars create a small mound using available dirt and other materials, known as a scrape. This provides an elevated post for the cat to mark its spot with urine. Scrapes provide a way for toms to communicate with females, their potential mates, and to warn other competing or intruding toms of their presence. Because male lions are so territorial, direct interactions often result in violence and perhaps death to the weaker male. Scrapes allow communication and declaration of territory boundaries without the risk of direct interactions.



HOLDEN BRUCE, AT RIGHT, AND GUIDE DERIC ANDERSON, SEARCH FOR COUGARS IN SIOUX COUNTY IN 2014 DURING NEBRASKA'S FIRST OFFICIAL MOUNTAIN LION HUNT.

Why a Hunting Season?

By Sam Wilson, Wildlife Biologist

The Nebraska Game and Parks' management goal for mountain lions is to maintain resilient, healthy, and socially acceptable mountain lion populations that are in balance with available habitat and other wildlife species over the long term. Mountain lions are a native species and part of the heritage of our state, so we want to ensure they are around for generations to come; however, our challenge is to manage both the biological and the social aspects of having mountain lions in Nebraska.

We manage populations of game animals such as mountain lions through harvest seasons. Deer, elk and turkeys are just a few examples of game animals thriving with careful management that includes hunting.

Game populations are evaluated annually to determine what, if any, harvest should be allowed. The basic premise is that when populations increase, harvest levels can increase, and when populations decrease, harvest can be reduced or stopped. Management through hunting may benefit the health of the species by reducing the probability of disease events, territorial conflicts, and starvation which may occur more often when population levels are very high. Hunting

also ensures the population is maintained at an acceptable level for the people living in the area.

Mountain lion population estimates in the Pine Ridge have increased dramatically over the last few years, from 22 total animals (kittens and adults) in 2014 to 59 during the 2017 survey. By 2017, estimates of mountain lion density (the number of animals in a given area) was much higher in the Pine Ridge than densities in most western states with a harvest season.

At the same time the population estimates increased, we began experiencing problems with livestock depredation. Public input from people living in the Pine Ridge area indicated that the population level was above what many landowners were willing to accept. A carefully regulated harvest season, with a limit on the number of mountain lions harvested, allows Game and Parks to meet the management goal of maintaining a resilient, healthy, and socially acceptable population in the Pine Ridge.

This is the same proven strategy that has allowed other game species to thrive in Nebraska and ensures mountain lions will remain in our state for generations to come.

►► Predators' effects on biodiversity are often misunderstood, as they are perceived as bloodthirsty killers that only take from the scene. While the cats no doubt kill many deer and other animals, potential benefits from their existence must also be realized. For instance, as a matter of efficiency cougars often first prey upon easily targeted ill or weak animals. Consequently, the herd may benefit from improved genetics and reduced disease transmission. In addition, recent research in the West has shown that mountain lion kills can be beneficial to many other species. At this site in Sheridan County, black-billed magpies and golden eagles feasted on a cached white-tailed deer – still leaving some for the cat to eat, of course.





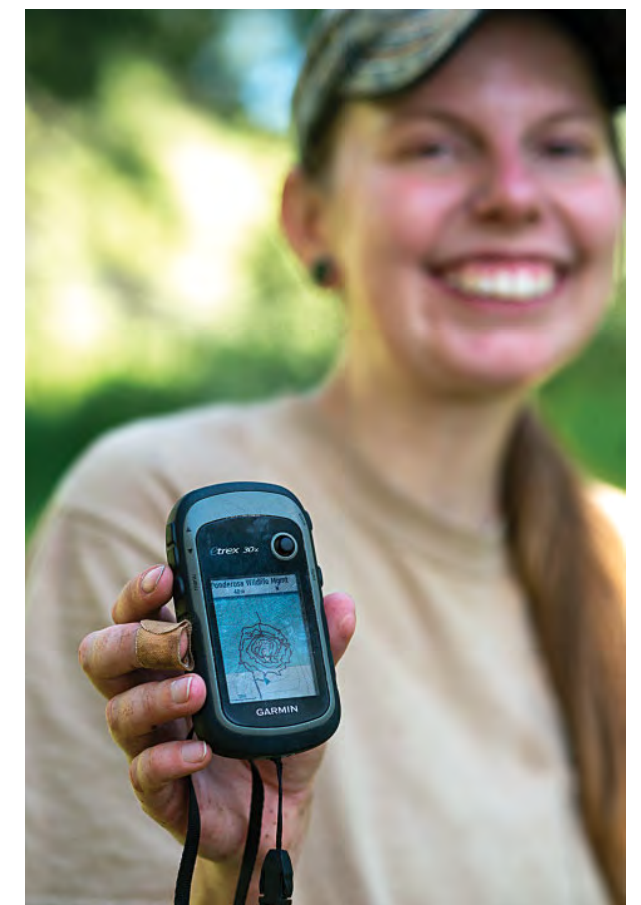
Five genetic surveys of the Pine Ridge, dating back to before the collaring project began, have been extremely valuable for making population estimates. Karen DeMatteo (at left with Linsey Blake) has taught her dog, Train, to be proficient at finding mountain lion scat. Whether he's in Nebraska or Argentina, he's good at it. Upon collecting the scat (right), samples are swabbed and sent to a lab for genetic analysis. DeMatteo, Train and Game and Parks staff hiked 321.75 miles this year over rugged Pine Ridge terrain (above). From those extensive searches researchers have the opportunity to obtain DNA from all cougars in the region at a given time, aside from kittens in dens.





The researchers get plenty of exercise examining clusters, which by nature are often in extremely rugged terrain. Game and Parks employee Lauren Toivonen (right), who joined the project this year, shows off the carefully created tracks on her GPS unit after investigating a site in Dawes County. Until researchers find evidence, they closely examine each nook and cranny of an area 100 meters in diameter with a path spiraling from the center of the cluster. While Toivonen's path in the photo may look simple on the GPS unit, it included a steep sandstone ridge on its east side and a barbed-wire fence that was crossed eight times – not to mention a large patch of poison ivy. Studying mountain lions and their clusters takes the researchers to some of the most remote, beautiful, but difficult-to-access places in the Pine Ridge in many kinds of weather.

While more than 75 percent of the prey evidence found at the Nebraska cluster sites have been of deer, the hair of which Maria Baglieri is studying (above), occasionally the monotony is broken by the discovery of another species such as bighorn sheep (opposite), as Linsey Blake and Baglieri are examining. Despite traversing territory with plentiful livestock, less than 1 percent of the prey evidence discovered by Nebraska's researchers have shown evidence of cougars preying on cattle or other domesticated animals.





◀ A mountain lion investigates a rock cranny in the Pine Ridge. At a quick glance, the tail is a feature that effectively differentiates the appearance of a mountain lion (especially a young one) from a bobcat, the smaller wildcat species in Nebraska. At 2-3 feet long, the cougar's long, muscular dark-tipped tail makes up about 40 percent of its body length and provides counter balance while climbing and during quick turns over uneven terrain. The bobcat's tail, in contrast, makes up less than 10 percent of its body length at five or six inches.

Learning into the Future

Nebraska's mountain lion research is scheduled to continue. Critical to that research is the cooperation received from farmers, ranchers and other landowners in the study area. Whether it is allowing captures, cluster examinations or trail cameras on their property, landowner support and input is always welcome to the efforts and aids the research.

"Our mountain lion management and research could not be successful without their help and cooperation," Wilson said.

Even though Game and Parks has gathered a wealth of information about this remarkable species, there is certainly more to learn. By combining a variety of methods, both researchers and the greater public can learn about a species that gets a lot of attention by many but is rarely seen. [N](#)

Landowners should immediately contact their nearest Nebraska Game and Parks Commission office if they find or suspect livestock losses from mountain lions.

Outdoor Nebraska

By Renae Blum

Put on a jacket and get outdoors! You'll find plenty out there to refresh your senses and make memories, including wildlife viewing, hiking and fishing. For details on the events listed below, visit Calendar.OutdoorNebraska.gov. 



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

Go on the Bighorn Sheep Hike

Nov. 2, 10 a.m. | Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area

This hike is your opportunity to explore the habitat of the Wildcat Hills' bighorn sheep, with the chance at spotting them in their natural surroundings. Staff will use radio telemetry to try to pinpoint the bighorns' location. It might be a long hike, so come prepared with water, weather-appropriate clothing and hiking shoes, and expect to hike uneven ground with tall grass.

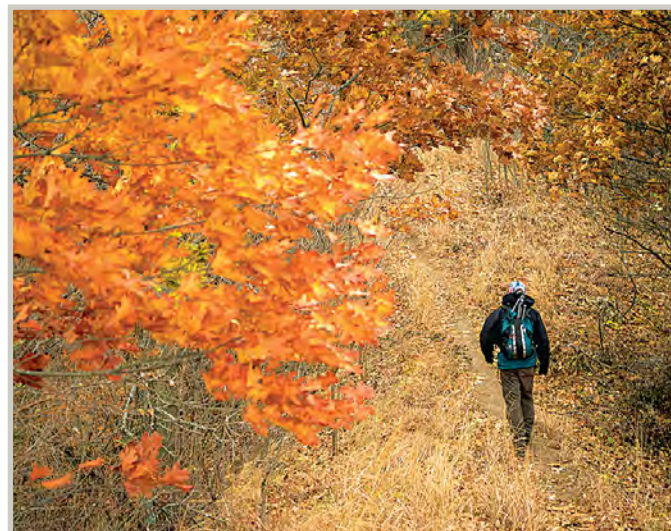


PHOTO BY MIKE FORSBERG

Hike a wooded trail

Throughout the month | Statewide

November is a good month for hiking. With foliage receding, you'll have a clearer view of the many species of wildlife out and about at this time. Also, no need to worry about nettles, gnats or ticks, but it remains a good idea to wear blaze orange on these hikes.

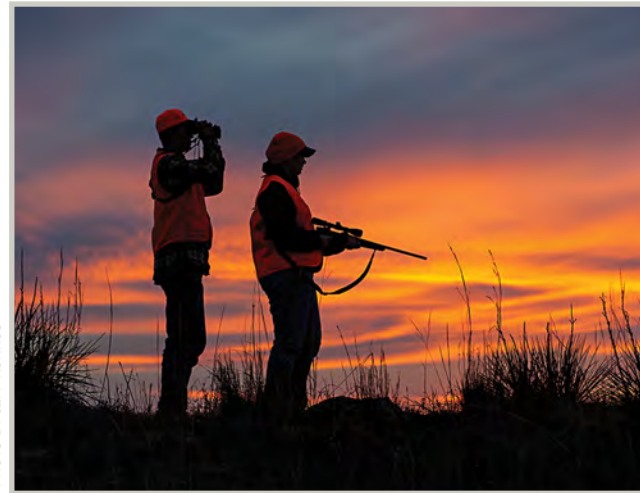
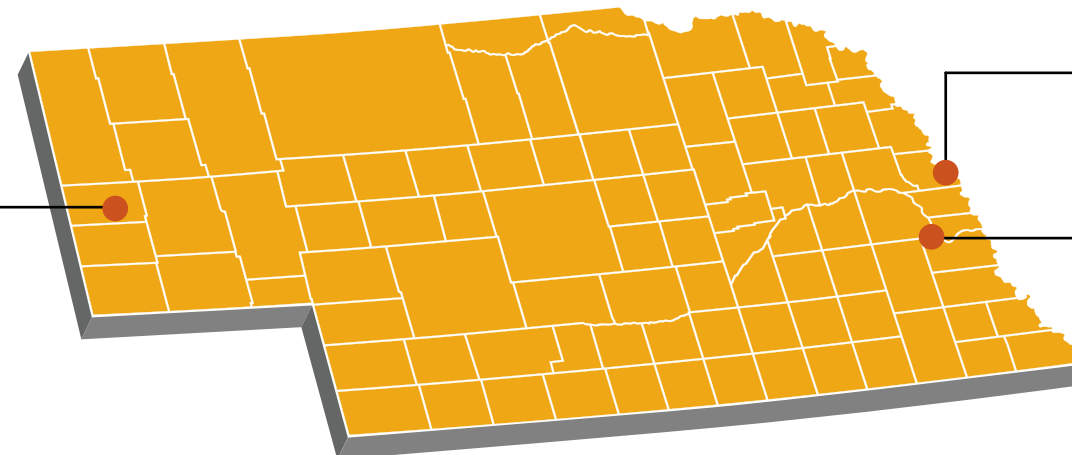


PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Work on the Take 'em Hunting challenge

Throughout the month | Statewide

With multiple hunting seasons in play, including deer, turkey and pheasant, now is a great time to take part in the Take 'em Hunting challenge. Introduce, or reintroduce, someone to hunting, snap a photo and share it with Game and Parks for the chance to win prizes. Learn more at OutdoorNebraska.org/takeemhunting.



Candlelight Tour

Nov. 2, Fort Atkinson State Historical Park

River Valley Artisan Craft Market

Nov. 2-3, Eugene T. Mahoney State Park



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Fish for trout

Throughout the month | Statewide

Catch pan-sized rainbow trout where stocked, and fish for rainbow, brook, brown and cutthroat trout in flowing, spring-fed streams that do not freeze. Catch all four species of trout found in Nebraska, and you can earn the Nebraska Trout Slam. See OutdoorNebraska.org/troutslam for details.



STOCK PHOTO

View woodpeckers in your backyard

Throughout the month | Statewide

To attract these beautiful birds, offer suet in special feeders or net onion bags at least five feet from the ground. Adding a bird bath and other kinds of food, such as peanuts and sunflower seeds, will make your backyard even more attractive.



The Beauty of Brown

Photos and Story by Justin Haag

I had never really noticed how distinct the changes the seasons bring to our Nebraska hardwoods and plant life until a November trip to Florida many years ago.

After several days in the lush landscape of the Sunshine State, my travel partners and I arrived in Omaha by airplane and set out toward home on I-80. We were subjected to an incredible contrast of color to what we had seen just hours before – a landscape primarily dominated by browns instead of greens.



Towering cottonwoods (above) in Box Butte County take on a new artistic appeal after their leaves have fallen.

Similar to the surrounding landscape, the camouflage coat of the white-tailed deer (opposite) changes with the season. The reddish-brown hair of spring turns grayish-brown in the winter.



A rainbow over the Republican River in Red Willow County seems especially colorful after the leaves have fallen.

Admittedly, the return to the Midwest seemed like a heavy dose of blah compared to the vibrant scenes we had just witnessed down south. In addition, it was quite dissimilar to the scene the same vegetation had given us just weeks and months before. For then, those green trees and plants were busy using light and water to convert carbon dioxide to oxygen and the sugar they need to live and grow.

With winter coming, though, all of that vegetation knew it would not have enough light and water to keep the food factory going, so it shut down after one last treat of vibrancy. As chlorophyll broke down, those greens turned to fantastic yellows and reds and masked closure beneath a façade of brilliance.

Later, a leaf or two fell. Soon, they blanketed the ground, becoming brown and leaving nothing but spindles of bark above. Those trees and plants had entered their annual slumber waiting for spring's alarm clock to wake them, as it seems had our senses. The stages come slowly enough to save us from startling. We get our doses of color in snowfall, ice and evergreen trees.



The propeller-like seeds of the green ash tree stand ready to be carried by the winter wind.



The late afternoon sun casts shadows from Pine Ridge landforms in view from Metcalf Wildlife Management Area.



Frost adds sparkle as a pair of Canada geese (opposite) wade in the mist of the North Platte River near Melbeta.

Of course, this is an annual process – a progression as Nebraskan as that corn that is husked each fall. Throughout Nebraska, we’re entering that brown stage once again. Take to it with an attentive eye – it can be beautiful. 🍂



Having served its purpose under the lush cover of green leaves, a long-abandoned nest seems more vulnerable come winter.



A common sight at Nebraska’s wetlands, the distinct seed heads of cattail have attracted many photographers.

The Birth of the South Omaha Stockyards

By John E. Carter, History Nebraska

By 1870 the cattle industry in western Nebraska was booming. Thousands of head of Texas cattle came either to meet the railroad for transportation to Chicago markets or to be driven farther north to meet the demands of military posts and Indian reservations.

During this decade large ranches grazed cattle on huge tracts of government land. The high-quality grasses produced high-quality beef, and demand for this Nebraska product grew. By 1880 ranchers clamored for a stockyard in Omaha. They were tired of their animals losing weight by traveling the extra 500 miles from Omaha to Chicago. Lost weight meant lost profits.

In 1883 Wyoming rancher Alexander Swan came to Omaha to encourage local entrepreneurs to establish a stockyard. The location was perfect. Omaha was surrounded by plenty of grass and corn, and the Missouri River provided both ample water and a swift moving stream to haul waste away – a stark contrast to the slow-moving Chicago River that regularly backed up with rank sewage, creating an immense

health hazard.

Swan assembled a group of investors and acquired land in what would become South Omaha. What began with a single farm exploded into a huge enterprise. By the end of the decade South Omaha was established as a major meat center, and by 1956 Omaha was the largest meat producing city in the world.

For something this big, very few pictures survive of its birth. Here are a few that do survive.

It is hard to imagine the speed of the stockyard's progress. It began with the Frank Drexel farm (top right). The farm encompassed 10 acres of land; the farmhouse, marked with the arrow, served as the first exchange building.

Things moved at a breakneck pace. In 1886 developers erected the elegant Stockyard Exchange Building. Between 1885 and 1887 four major meat packers – G. H. Hammond (1885), Fowler Brothers (1886), Armour-Cudahy and Swift (both 1887) – established major plants adjacent to the stockyards.



The Frank Drexel Farm, ca. 1888. History Nebraska RG1085-24-11



Grading the land ca. 1887. History Nebraska RG1085-77-1

In the photo at left, one gets a good sense of the frenzy of building from the photograph of construction crews grading the land in what would become the large pen areas. On the horizon on the right of the image, one sees the array of newly-built houses and stores, the birthing of the City of South Omaha. To the left, the smokestacks and substantial industrial buildings locate the packing houses.

The crews are using horse-drawn bucket scrapers to bury an immense 8-foot-square wooden sewer. One of the advantages of Omaha was its proximity to the Missouri, and a structure like this would be necessary to deal with the waste produced by the huge volume of livestock to come.

The railroads were key to the success of the stockyards, and both the Burlington and Union Pacific developed lines into South Omaha. In addition to horse-drawn scrapers, crews brought in dirt on a line of railroad flatcars. On the last car, a blade was positioned that was attached to a thick rope running under the dirt and across all of the cars. When the cars were in position the rope was pulled by a locomotive, drawing the blade forward and neatly scraping the cars of their loads. Stockyards construction was thus accomplished with a mix of traditional methods and new technology.

South Omaha has long been known as a place of muscle and sweat; it was born of the same stuff – all of this was going on

in a five-year stretch. It is no surprise at all that South Omaha became the hub of an exploding Nebraska meat industry. [N](#)

This article was adapted from a piece that historian John Carter (1950-2015) wrote for Nebraska History magazine in 2013. Visit History Nebraska's website at history.nebraska.gov



The stockyards in 1925. The Livestock Exchange Building completed that year still stands. History Nebraska RG1085-7-15

Pike Almondine

Story and Photos by Ryan Sparks

I stumbled across this recipe while surfing and fishing North Carolina's Outer Banks. A woman selling freshly caught fish out of her home recommended the black-bellied rosefish her son had caught that morning. Having never heard of the fish before, I asked her how she would cook it. She rattled off a list of ingredients, but being in a remote area with no grocery store we told her we didn't have much to work with. Without a thought she went into her kitchen and gathered everything in a sack and gave it to us. I have her to credit for the recipe. It has changed a bit since then, but the bulk of the

recipe is hers. It will work with any flaky white fish, but it's perfect to show off the boneless "backstrap" cut filleted from a pike (see pages 60-61).

Servings: 4

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Cooking Time: 25 minutes

Ingredients:

- 4 tablespoons olive oil
- 6 tablespoons butter
- Half a red onion, diced
- 6 garlic cloves, minced
- 4 russet potatoes, thinly sliced
- 1 pound green or yellow beans, ends trimmed
- ½ cup slivered almonds



Pike are one of the most underrated fish swimming in Nebraska. They are the complete package – fun to catch and delicious on the table.



Taking the top fillet from a pike isn't something most anglers are familiar with, but anyone who tries it quickly realizes the genius in this technique.

- ¼ cup half and half
- 4 boneless "backstrap" (tail pieces will also work) pike fillets, patted dry and salted
- Salt and pepper to taste

1. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F. Toss the potato slices in a large bowl with 3 tablespoons of olive oil, arrange them on cooking sheet and sprinkle with salt. Bake the potatoes for 10-15 minutes until they are cooked through.

While you wait for the potatoes to cook, bring a large pot of salted water

to boil and blanch the green beans for two minutes. Remove them to an ice bath to stop the cooking and set aside.

In a sauté pan, melt 2 tablespoons of butter over medium heat and cook the red onion until it softens. When it begins to look transparent, add the garlic, slivered almonds, and blanched green beans. Cover and turn the heat to low.

In a frying pan or skillet, place 1 tablespoon of butter with 1 tablespoon of olive oil over medium-high heat. When the butter has melted, place

the pike fillets in the pan and let them cook until most of the fillet has turned white and the bottom has browned, approximately 8 minutes. Carefully flip the fillet and turn the heat to low.

By now the potatoes should have finished cooking. Place them on the top rack of the oven and turn the broiler on high. Watch them until they start to crisp.

Remove the fish to a plate and pour the remaining juice into the sauté pan with the green beans, adding the half and half and an additional three

tablespoons of butter. The gelatin released from the fish will bind the sauce. Place the potatoes on a plate and top with green beans and a pike fillet. Season the sauce to taste and then pour it over the fish, making sure to include the almonds, red onion, and garlic. [N](#)

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

Cleaning a Pike to Remove Y-bones



The author prefers to eat small- to medium-sized pike because their flesh is firmer. It's also best to release large fish for other anglers to enjoy. Pike like the one shown here are delicious to eat.



1. Begin by making a downward cut behind the head until you feel your knife touch the spine, then turn the knife and follow the spine until you reach the dorsal fin.

2. Once you have removed the top fillet you can see the Y-bones in the center of each side fillet. In this photo, the tip of the knife points to the Y-bones. The Y-bones are the small intricate bones that cause many anglers to disregard pike as a good eating fish. As you can see, they are easy to identify and work around.



3. Starting near the head, run your knife along the outside of the Y-bones, working down along the belly and continue toward the tail until you reach where you removed the top fillet.

4. The Y-bones end as you approach the tail. With practice you will be able to feel where they end with your knife. When you reach this point, fillet the meat from the tail as you would on any other fish, removing the skin from each cut.



5. You will now have two boneless tail fillets, two boneless side fillets, and the prized top fillet. Notice the two cuts to the left of the image. These are the rib sections containing the rib and Y-bones. Simmered in liquid, you can flake the meat from the bones leaving no waste from the fish. This flaked fish is perfect for tacos, fish cakes, or any other way you can use flaky white fish.



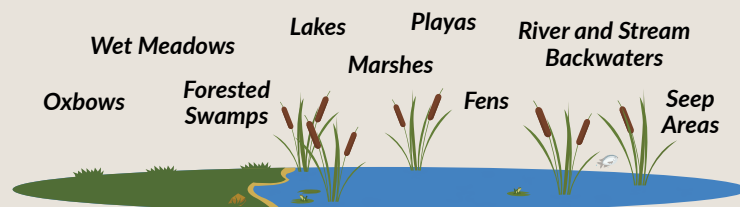
Clean water? Flood protection? Wildlife habitat?

Not without wetlands



With waterfowl seasons upon us, duck and goose hunters certainly appreciate the value of wetlands. But wetlands do much more than provide habitat for ducks and geese. One of the most productive ecosystems in the world, wetlands host a variety of plant and animal species. They also provide numerous other benefits, including slowing runoff to reduce flooding and filter pollutants and recharge groundwater, making their preservation important to all of us.

Nebraska has diverse wetlands across the state, in every county. There are many types of wetlands:



! Over the past 250 years, wetlands have declined at an alarming rate, mostly due to land conversion.



Only half the world's wetlands remain intact.



Today, only 65% of Nebraska's wetlands remain intact.



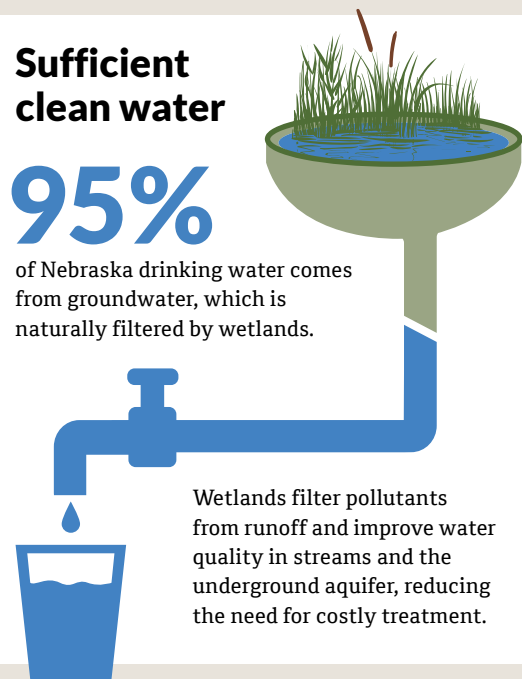
Only 10% of the Nebraska Rainwater Basin playa wetlands remain intact.

What we lose...

Sufficient clean water

95%

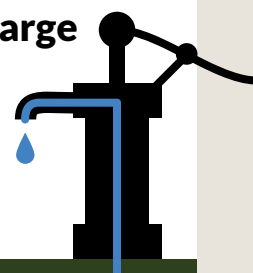
of Nebraska drinking water comes from groundwater, which is naturally filtered by wetlands.



Wetlands filter pollutants from runoff and improve water quality in streams and the underground aquifer, reducing the need for costly treatment.

Groundwater recharge

Many wetlands slowly release water into the ground to recharge groundwater. Sandhills and playa wetlands recharge a significant portion of the state's Ogallala Aquifer.



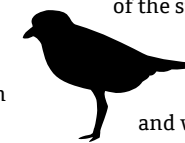
...when we lose wetlands:

Diverse wildlife

Nebraska is unique in that it possesses three major wetland complexes – the Sandhills, the Rainwater Basin, and the Platte River – that are of international importance to wildlife. Wetlands play an important role by providing habitat for threatened and endangered species.

70%

of the state's threatened and endangered species, such as piping plovers and whooping cranes, depend on wetlands.



90% of the continent's sandhill crane population uses the Platte River for roosting habitat.

Nebraska species relying on wetlands:

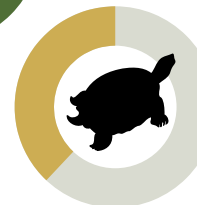


100% of amphibians

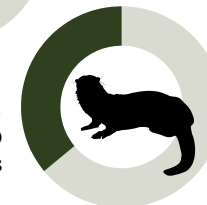


50% of birds and plants

38% of reptiles



36% of mammals



Revenue in tourism and hunting recreation

Streams and wetlands are major economic drivers because of their role in hunting, fishing, recreation, and agriculture. In the Rainwater Basin landscape, every acre generates \$20 per year in revenue.

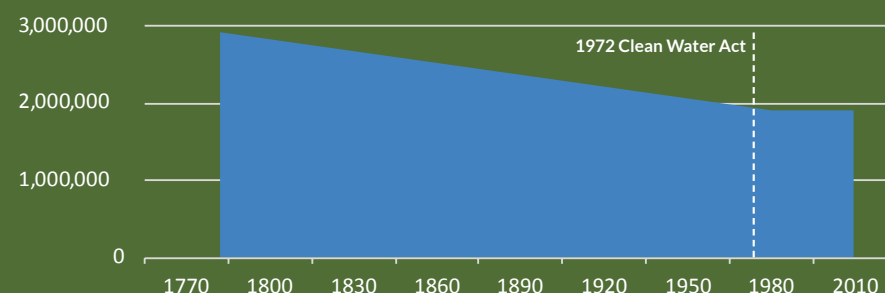


Protection from disaster

Wetlands hold water, making flooding and soil erosion less likely.



Estimated acres of wetlands in Nebraska



Because of the Clean Water Act, the Farm Bill, State Title 117, and other federal, state, and local protections, we have effectively slowed the rate at which we are losing wetlands.

Conservation Programs

Wetland conservation programs like the USDA's Wetland Reserve Easement Program (WRE, formerly called Wetlands Reserve Program or WRP), provide alternatives for flood-prone cropland, helping producers reduce input costs and maximize net farm income. There are numerous other voluntary incentive programs for wetland conservation provided by federal, state, and local agencies. More than 100,000 acres have been conserved over the past 25 years, through a variety of methods including protection, restoration, management, inventory, research, and education.

We need to continue to conserve wetlands and maintain the funding for conservation programs or we will see a rapid decline once again.

LEARN MORE AT
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PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NEBRASKA TOURISM COMMISSION

VISIT NEBRASKA CITY

By Erin Lenz, Nebraska Tourism Commission

An exceptional town with loads of history and natural beauty, Nebraska City can easily fill a weekend getaway.

First stop at Arbor Day Farm, which offers a long list of activities, including seasonal apple picking, a discovery ride through the woods and the Apple House Market full of delicious treats. New in 2019 is TreeTop Village. Also, make sure and take a tour through Arbor Lodge State Historical Park – the original estate of J. Sterling Morton, the founder of Arbor Day.

At Kimmel Orchard, pick your own peaches, apples and pumpkins or browse the Apple Barn for local, seasonal canned goods and treats. North of town on Highway 75 is Union Orchard, where you can take home a pie, apple turnovers and apple-smoked sausage.

For history, step back in time at the Kregel Windmill Factory Museum, and visit the only original intact windmill factory museum in the U.S. This museum houses over 1 million artifacts including the original equipment used in the production of the “ELI” windmills.

Then immerse yourself in the adventures of Lewis and Clark at the Missouri River Basin Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center, where the whole family can enjoy hands-on exhibits, live re-enactments and hiking trails. Or stop at the Nebraska City Museum of Firefighting and view one of the largest (and oldest) collections of fire equipment in the state.

With so much to do in Nebraska City, you’ll need to stay a night or two. Lied Lodge and Conference Center at Arbor Day Farm offers beautiful lodge-style rooms with a gorgeous

view of the grounds. Or stay overnight in a 130-year-old Victorian-style home at Whispering Pines Bed & Breakfast, where you can relax on the old-time porch swing, soak in the outdoor hot tub or slumber in your room’s king-size bed. Delicious homemade breakfast favorites include farm-fresh egg frittata and orange-pecan crusted French toast.

For larger groups, check in to Camp Catron & Retreat Center, where Eugene’s Adventure Course is open to the public. This Girl Scouts facility offers a 16-element adventure course that is nestled among the trees. The top level takes visitors up 35 feet.

Head downtown for lunch at The Keeping Room and shop in the boutique afterward for clothing, jewelry and décor. Then stop for a drink at Dinty Moore’s, one of Nebraska’s oldest historical bars with interesting Prohibition-era stories to tell. Timber Dining Room in the Lied Lodge serves breakfast, lunch and dinner, where you can look forward to menu items such as orchard oatmeal made with Arbor Day Farm apple cider or a Waygu burger for dinner.

While the fall season is one of the most beautiful times to visit Nebraska City, there’s magic in the winter. Take the Holiday Trolley Tour of Lights to see Nebraska City’s light display or experience Arbor Lodge Mansion in its most festive, holiday splendor.

Whether you’re visiting one of the museums in the summer, picking apples in the fall or cozying up to a good book at a bed and breakfast in the winter, Nebraska City is perfect for every season.

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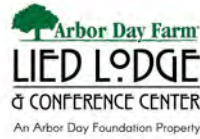
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FIVE MUST-DOS FOR DEER SEASON

By Aaron Hershberger

To experience the most from this year's firearm deer season, here are the five things you have to do.

1) Find the does. The bucks are doing just that and so should you. Being 100 yards or so downwind of several travel routes to/from bedding areas can mean success in seeing the deer you have been thinking about. Just be cautious not to hunt in or too near the bedding area, which could send all deer out of the area.

2) Rattle, rattle and rattle some more. It's surprising how few rifle hunters take the rattling antlers to the woods. Just be ready to shoot when deer do sneak in looking to tussle.

3) Hunt longer. Arrive early and stay as long as you can. To do that you have to be warm and comfortable. Bring hand and foot warmers, a thermos

of coffee/hot chocolate and never forget plenty of snacks. If you don't have a permanent blind, use a pop-up with some extra orange on it. Then you can even add a portable propane heater.

4) Share your passion. Take someone with you, even if it's just to observe. Hunts are meant to be fun, and spending time with those you care about ensures there will be memories beyond the shots fired.

5) Get pictures, or better yet, some video. Living in the digital age you are never far from your picture-taking, film-making device, so capture these



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

events while you can. The 2019 firearm deer season only happens once.

Aaron Hershberger is an outdoor education specialist with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

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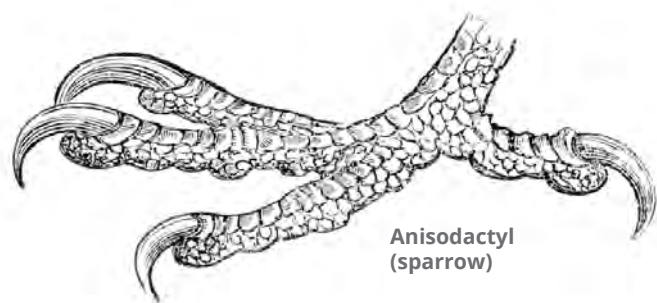
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WALK THIS WAY

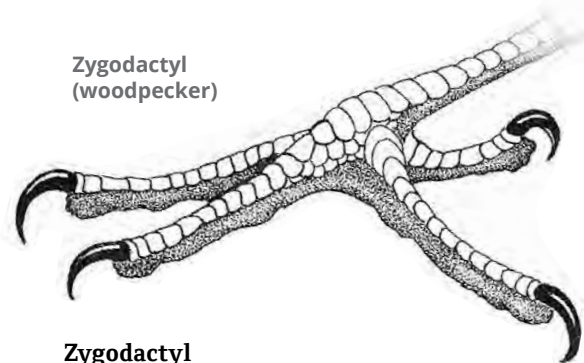
By Monica Macoubrie

Just like the shape of its bill, a bird's feet can tell us a lot about its ecology and the habitat in which it lives. Birds do a lot with their feet – they can perch, walk, preen, feed, carry/hold objects and even swim. These animals are considered digitigrade, meaning they generally walk on their toes, not their entire foot like people do. Most birds have four toes, or digits, while some species only have three. These digits are arranged in many different ways.



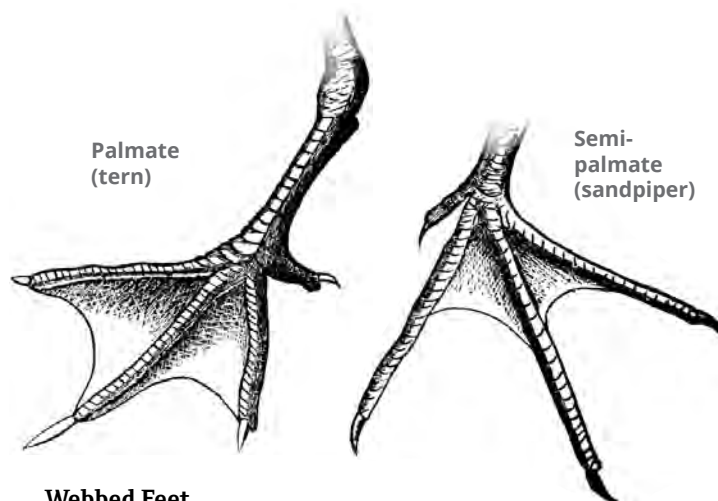
Anisodactyl

This is the most common digit arrangement of perching birds, seen in robins, sparrows, jays and wrens. On these toes the first digit (like your big toe) faces backward and the other three digits face forward. These feet are extremely flexible, and all four digits are independent. A tendon on the backside of the ankle automatically flexes and locks the toes around a perch, such as a branch. This is why you don't see birds falling out of trees when they are sleeping.



Zygodactyl

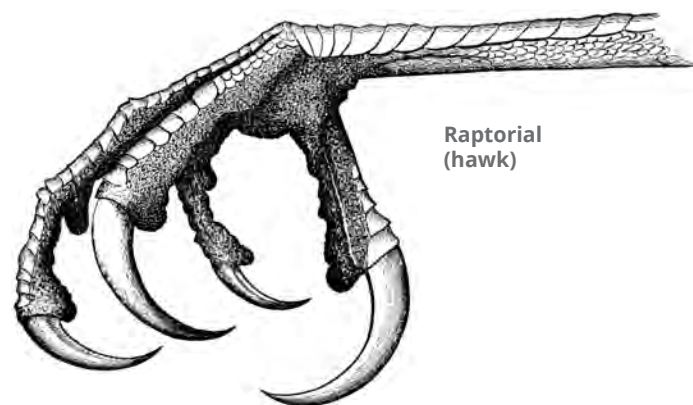
Zygodactyl feet resemble the letter "x." Here, digits one and four face backward while digits two and three face forward. This foot shape is common in woodpeckers and owls. The shape of these feet helps these birds climb up and down and along the trunk of a tree. Owls use these feet to hold onto their prey while eating, and also to help them perch. One really neat characteristic is that zygodactyl birds can rotate the fourth digit forward if they choose, giving them more toes to grab onto their food.



Webbed Feet

The term "webbed" actually covers many different kinds of birds and bird feet. The most common type of webbed feet is palmate. In palmate feet, digit one is backward and digits two, three, and four are connected by webbing. This webbing is like a paddle for a canoe – it helps steer the bird and propels them in the water. This is common in ducks, geese, gulls, terns, loons and other aquatic birds.

Birds like herons, sandpipers and plovers have semi-palmate feet. This means that the webbing is just reduced compared to that of true aquatic birds. Here, these birds are more waders than actual swimmers. The large surface area of their toes helps them walk on soft surfaces near the water's edge so they can forage for food.



Raptorial

Like the name implies, raptorial feet are found on raptors or birds of prey, such as eagles and hawks. The toes on these feet are called talons. All talons, no matter the size, are curved with sharp claws used to capture, kill and carry prey. This is one reason raptors are such lethal hunters.

In the world of birds there are many other kinds of feet. However, the ones described above are the most common to Nebraska. A bird's feet can teach us so much about the birds themselves.

Monica Macoubrie is an outdoor educator with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

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STORIES OF STONE

By Roger Welsch

Long ago on the hill behind our home here on the Middle Loup River, I found a “mano” – a perfectly round, abraded, clearly well-used stone for grinding and pounding. It is about the size of a slightly small hamburger bun, a perfect fit for my hand. It’s granite, a stone never found around here, except in the form of artifacts like this, identified for me by an archeologist as “pre-Pawnee,” a tool from a Plains tribe here before the Pawnee as such.

When I handle ancient tools like these I wonder who used them and how they lost them. I imagine that there was some concern when valuable tools and weapons like these were lost, but such losses must have been inevitable. An arrow or spear point carried off by a wounded animal, perhaps, or like blades and scrapers, lost in the messy process of butchering. Tools were lost when lodges caught fire or were perhaps destroyed in storms, floods or enemy raids. Sometimes, I’m sure, items were simply dropped and lost. Items like large mauls or even small grindstones like the one now on our fireplace mantle might have been left at work sites for later use, perhaps at a campsite that was only visited periodically, because it couldn’t have been easy hauling around stones and rocks when the only transporting carriers were dogs and humans.

While I do wonder who the people were who made, used and somehow lost stone artifacts, the question that really fires my wonder is how the materials came to be where they are not often found as a result of natural occurrences. Especially here where I live, on the Central Plains. How did the granite that was eventually worked into a mano come to be here, far from natural sources of granite?

Well, my guess is that the stone might well have come from the outwash or moraines dumped here by Pleistocene glaciers. The great ice sheets did dump piles of rock here, some that originated in far northern Canada, including granite like that in the grindstone, but also fragments of pipestone and flint too. The same minerals and rocks show up in washouts in rivers like the North Loup, also the product of the Ice Age glaciers. But rarely in quantities, qualities, sizes, or predictable locations to make the manufacture of tools, weapons, or ritual items like pipes in the number we still find.

So what happened when the best flint knapper in a Pawnee village needed basic materials to make points, blades, awls or scrapers? When an old man of the Omahas made it known that he sure would like to have a good piece of pipestone so he could replace the pipe the band needed for spring ceremonies but that was lost or broken two winters ago? Someone had to go get flint or pipestone.

This would be an opportunity for a few young men, perhaps



more like boys, to prove themselves, to serve their people and to find adventure. They would need at least one person of experience who knew where such materials could be found ... pipestone at the quarries in what is now Minnesota, flint to the southeast in Kansas or far more distant, and far more dangerous mines to the northwest in what is now Wyoming. The venture would require great courage and strength; the small company would pass through territory other tribes might be guarding zealously, where other young men were eager to make their own names by driving out trespassers. The travelers would have to be resourceful: while they would be sent on their way perhaps with a new pair of moccasins packed with dried meat, tallow and berries tied on a thong around their waists, they would have to find and secure their own for many weeks.

Then they would labor at the quarries to find and break loose the best possible materials – laborious and dangerous work. And then, perhaps the most harrowing part of the expedition, the return home, now laden with pounds of stone “blanks,” rocks weighing perhaps several pounds, carried hundreds of miles while again moving as quickly as possible through severe and perhaps hostile geography. Think about that a moment: four or five people living off the land, far from home, now laden with dead-weight burdens, on foot, and standing on the banks of one of North America’s largest rivers, the one we now call “Missouri.” They must now cross that immense river, probably in a clumsy “bullboat,” a bowl-like craft quickly crafted from a buffalo hide and willow withes – with rocks.

The contingent was surely welcomed home with great celebration. They had accomplished the nearly impossible. The community supply of vital materials was replenished. And oh, there would be many stories told around the lodge fires for moons to come.

And that’s what I think about when I handle ancient stone tools, weapons or pipes. What stories those things could tell around lodge fires! Lacking that, I hold them in my hands and imagine the stories on my own.

Roger Welsch is a folklorist, humorist and author who lives in Dannebrog.

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Antique Guide



This is my dad, Leo Kautzman, and me (on the way to school) in 1965, with our previous night's harvest from setting lines. He and my mother, Lois, were proprietors of the local meat market. They worked long, hard hours Monday through Saturday, but, being a religious man, he went to the Church of the Elkhorn River every Sunday that he could, as well as many evenings! The big fish was a 12-pound, 5-ounce flathead.

– Tim Kautzman, Elkhorn



I took this picture in 1979 of our son, Ryan, at age 4. He is with his dad, Mick Gill, and our golden retriever, Jake. They were cleaning frog legs and Ryan was surprised when the frog jumped in his hand. They hunted pheasants with Jake for many years on our farm. We still spend time enjoying hunting and fishing there near Fairbury.

– Doris Gill, Fairbury

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. Text may be edited and photos adjusted for reproduction. All photos will be returned.



PHOTO BY GERRY STEINAUER

GETTING BY

By Gerry Steinauer

In early September, I was checking the plums on our tree in the side yard when I noticed sap had dripped from a wound on the trunk, forming a stalactite shape with great colors. “Pretty neat,” I thought. “I should take a photo of that.”

Located low on the trunk, the sap was shaded from the warm, photogenic morning and evening sunlight and even the harsher mid-day sun. My problem: how to get light onto the sap to make its varied colors shine?

I tried my camera’s flash, but the light was too intense, making the tree bark far too bright. My next thought was to reflect sunlight onto the sap. I had recently lost my reflector, so I grabbed the first, next best thing I could find that would direct sunlight onto the sap – my Nebraska Game and Parks 25-year service award from a dresser top.

Shaped in the form of Nebraska, it had a shiny metallic

front. While I worked the camera, my wife reflected a narrow stream of sunlight off the Panhandle onto the sap. No go. In the photos, the sap had an odd shine. A remote flash with a soft box was probably the solution to my problem, but I do not own one. I would have to photograph the sap in the shade.

My other problem was the background, our lawn washed-out in bright sunlight. This needed to disappear. In my closet hung a dull, green Game and Parks T-shirt. Perfect.

I draped this over the back of a lawn chair to form a shaded, neutral background and took my photos. They turned out decent, not spectacular, but it was the best I could do with the tools at hand and I “got by.”

Gerry Steinauer is a botanist for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

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