



Morel mushrooms are one of Nebraska's greatest (and tastiest) spring treasures. Photo by Doug Carroll

Published by the
NEBRASKA
 — GAME  PARKS —

NebraskalandMagazine.com
 OutdoorNebraska.org

See You Out There.

Published by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission since 1926

NEBRASKAland

May 2011



NebraskalandMagazine.com

\$4.95



0 4 >



NEBRASKAland

Volume 89, Number 4, May 2011

FEATURES

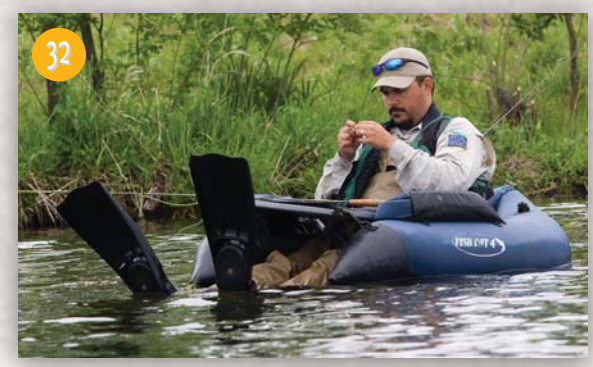
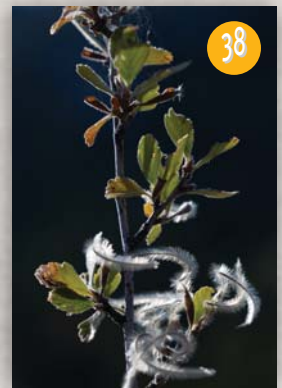
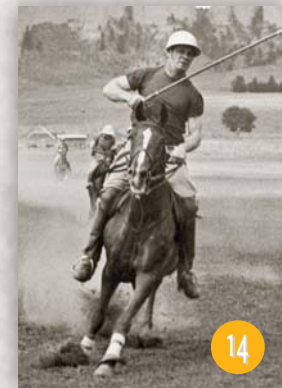
- 14** Fort Robinson - The Country Club of the Army
Frontier fort, Olympic training ground – Fort Robinson has a storied past. By THOMAS R. BUECKER
- 20** The Plains Topminnow
Plains topminnows are one of many native fish species struggling to survive. Text and Photos by MICHAEL FORSBERG
- 22** A Natural Fit
A Sandhills ranch family discovers a creative way to continue living on the land they love. Text and Photos by ERIC FOWLER
- 30** Postcards from Louisville
A few reasons why this quiet, eastern Nebraska state recreation area is worth visiting. Photos and Text by JEFF KURRUS
- 32** In My Belly - Boat, that is...
Float tubes are an enjoyable and effective way of fishing. Here's how to get started. Text and Photos by JEFF KURRUS
- 36** Double-decker
Yellow warblers thwart parasitic cowbirds by entombing eggs. By JON FARRAR
- 38** Mountain Mahogany
This rare but hardy shrub can be found in western Nebraska. By GERRY STEINAUER
- 40** Belles and Bulls
Shooting big elk isn't limited to men. By ERIC FOWLER

DEPARTMENTS

Comment	4
Mixed Bag	6
Nature Notes	44
Outdoor Update	45
Outdoor Business	46
Outdoor Education	47
Classifieds	48
Portraits from the Past	50

Cover: A belted kingfisher perches on a branch after catching a fish from the Platte River. Photo by Luke Kathol. **Opposite:** Dry, windblown sand highlights footprints of people, deer and shorebirds on a wet Calamus River sandbar north of Taylor. Photo by Eric Fowler.

NEBRASKAland (VOL. 89 / NO. 4, ISSN 0028-1964) is published monthly, except for the combined Jan./Feb. and Aug./Sept. issues, by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, 2200 N. 33rd St., Lincoln, NE. Periodicals postage paid at Lincoln, Nebraska, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to NEBRASKAland, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370.





Fox Photo Op

Last winter during some of the heavier snows, my wife Marge and I were forced to walk our dog, a Maltese named Jasper, at Mahoney Park here in Lincoln. Generally we walk him along the bike path just north of Colfax Avenue (the old Rock Island Railroad line) but the heavy snows prevented us from doing that.

Since I got a new camera for Christmas, I decided to give it a try on one of our walks in the park. As we entered the park off of Colfax we began our usual walk up the Shana Bike Trail/Walking Path. We were about 100 yards in when I caught a movement to my north, just south of the bike path in the wild prairie section of the park. It turned out to be a fox, so I started snapping photos of it. The fox was 50 to 100 yards away and did not seem bothered by our presence. It continued to hunt for food as we watched. My guess is the fox has gotten used to people walking the park.

For the next few days we were able to glimpse the fox on our afternoon walks and I was able to photograph and video it on several occasions. We spoke to some folks who frequent the bike path and they say the fox has a den close to the path on the north side, as they see it occasionally. We are hoping to see the fox with a litter of pups this spring as speculation is the fox is female. Hope you enjoy the pictures.

George Lehr
Lincoln, Nebraska

Flooding Story

I thoroughly enjoyed Eric Fowler's "The Other Side of Flooding" article in the April 2011 edition of *NEBRASKAland*.

As an owner of land on the Elkhorn River in Dodge County, I was a firsthand witness to the events and transformations Mr. Fowler so accurately described of the June 2010 flooding – it was if he

had written the article based on what he saw on our property. From the high-bank erosion, to the loss of mature trees, to the creation of new sandbars, the article was spot on. I am sure other folks would concur.

I have been coming to this area of the Elkhorn for many years, and Fowler's article reaffirms my long-held belief that a river is a living, breathing thing, and nature will change it in ways man cannot always control. Although devastating at times, it is also a beautiful thing.

Damon Ott
South Sioux City, Nebraska

Flashback Identified

The photo on page 6 of the April issue looks like the Rex Amack (current director of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission) I knew when I was in the Decoy Carver and Collector club along with Jack Curran back in the 1980s.

David Kettleon
Crosslake, Minnesota

Snow Goose Article

Finally, an objective and heartfelt analysis of the plight of the snow goose. Jon Farrar's "Sky Carp" piece in the March 2011 issue of *NEBRASKAland* is the first I've seen that focuses directly on the sad present state of these magnificent birds. Jon appropriately provided analysis of the problems caused by the burgeoning populations of these birds, while simultaneously lamenting the denigration of the species by so many in the waterfowling world.

Like Jon, I've watched and listened as the majority of waterfowlers seem to have taken the position that the snow goose is suddenly expendable and unworthy of respect. And I fully believe that widespread position is a direct result of the loosening of hunting regulations in an effort to enhance the annual kill, thus reducing widespread deterioration of extraordinarily valuable Arctic nesting grounds.

I certainly don't disagree with the obvious need to reduce the snow goose population. However, the means by

which that objective is now pursued has resulted in the widespread malignment of a magnificent species, and worse, in my opinion, a general deterioration of hunting ethics and respect for wildlife among too many waterfowlers, particularly young waterfowlers.

As one who has hunted ducks and geese for more than 45 years, I pleasantly recall the time when "snows and blues" were considered real trophies. Now I hear and see them not only verbally maligned, but irresponsibly slaughtered like vermin, without regard to the standards of sport hunting or to the respect due all wild creatures.

We certainly have a snow goose population problem. But perhaps there's a better way to solve it. In the meantime, thanks to Jon Farrar and *NEBRASKAland* for presenting the issue responsibly. Snow geese are still the beautiful birds they always were – worthy of respect and worthy of respectful hunting practices by those who pursue them.

Gary Goodpaster
Collierville, Tennessee

NEBRASKAland Visitor Letters

We want to thank all 118 readers that sent e-mails and letters for last issue's visitor, an *emerald ash borer* that was on page 21 (see page 13 for the winner, rules and this issue's hint). Here are some of the many wonderful responses we received:

Hi! I finally found the bug in the April issue – it's mobbing with the birds on page 21. I've never run across one of these bugs before, but based on some Google searching it appears to be an “emerald ash borer.” I love your magazine and I never fail to learn something new in each issue. Keep up the great work!

Scott Cooper
Stillwater, Oklahoma

I found the visitor on the top right on page 21. I had to go through the magazine twice to find it. This April issue is so interesting I can't put it down, when I should be working on my income tax papers.

Marilyn Brennan
Douglas, Nebraska

Finally, after a year and a half of looking at each issue, I have found one of your “Visitors.” The insect is on page 21 in the upper right corner. It's a beautiful green, but it's name doesn't come to me. I moved to north-central Idaho 22 years ago and had missed the *NEBRASKAland* I grew up with. My aunt Retta, the ex-York County Treasurer, gave me a calendar two years ago when I visited my mother. All my friends think I'm a crazy Nebraskan, but I'm just proud to be from Nebraska.

Dennis Tracy,
Grangeville, Idaho

The emerald ash borer (Agrilius planipennis) is an exotic, invasive insect that infests and kills ash trees. Emerald ash borer (EAB) is not known to occur in Nebraska, but can be found in 15 other states, including parts of Iowa and Missouri. The adult EAB is a small, narrow, green beetle, approximately 1/3- to 1/2-inch in length. It is similar in size and shape to the native bronze birch borer, a close relative.

The adult beetles emerge from ash trees in the late spring and early summer. They feed on the ash foliage, mate and lay their eggs in bark crevices. The eggs hatch and the larvae immediately begin to eat their way under the bark, where they feed in the phloem. Their feeding disrupts the movement of water and nutrients through the tree, eventually resulting in its death.

– Julie Van Meter,
State Entomologist,
Nebraska Department of Agriculture.

Send your comments to:
Doug Carroll, Editor
NEBRASKAland Magazine
P.O. Box 30370
Lincoln, NE 68503
or e-mail Doug.Carroll@Nebraska.gov
Please include your postal address and telephone number.
Letters may be condensed and edited for clarity. Photographs are welcome and will be returned.

Under federal and/or state law, discrimination is prohibited on the basis of race, color, religion, age, gender, marital status, national origin, disability or political affiliation. If you think you have been discriminated against in any program, activity or facility by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission or want more information, contact the Commission in Lincoln, NE, at (402) 471-0641 or the Equal Opportunity Commission, Lincoln, NE, (402) 471-2024, TTY/TDD (402) 471-4693.

NEBRASKAland Magazine

COMMISSION

Director Rex Amack
Deputy Director Jim Douglas
Commissioners
Chairman - Mick Jensen, Blair
Vice Chairman - Ron Stave, Waterloo
2nd Vice Chairman - Norris Marshall, Kearney
Jerrod Burke, Curtis
Dr. Mark Pinkerton, Wilber
Dr. Kent Forney, Lincoln
Lynn Berggren, Broken Bow
Rex Fisher, Omaha
Mark Spurgin, Paxton

MAGAZINE STAFF

Editor Doug Carroll
Associate Editor Jeff Kurrus
Art Director Tim Reigert
Senior Editor Jon Farrar
Regional Editor Eric Fowler
Contributing Editor Michael Forsberg
Regular Contributors Bill Hager, Chris Helzer, Lisa Knopp
Photo Librarian Sarah Johnson
Circulation Donna Robinson
For address changes and questions about your subscription, e-mail Donna.Robinson@Nebraska.gov or call (800) 632-5263
Marketing/Advertising
For advertising information contact Larson Enterprises e-mail dave@larsonent.com or call (515) 440-2810

NEBRASKAland Magazine Copyright 2011, all rights reserved. NEBRASKAland is available on audio cassette from the Nebraska Library Commission Talking Book and Braille Service, Suite 120, 1200 N St., Lincoln, NE 68508. (800) 742-7691. NEBRASKAland Magazine and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission reserve the right to reject any advertising not in keeping with the agency mission. Rates: \$18 for one year; \$33 for two years; \$44 for three years. Nebraska recipients must add appropriate sales tax. To subscribe call 1-800-NEBLAND (632-5263), or go online to: NebraskalandMagazine.com.

COMMISSION OFFICES

Headquarters
2200 N. 33rd Street Lincoln, NE 68503
Phone (402) 471-0641

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

District Office II
524 Panzer St., Box 508 Bassett, NE 68714
Phone (402) 684-2921

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

District Office IV
301 E. State Farm Rd. North Platte, NE 69101
Phone (308) 535-8025

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

Omaha Office
1212 Bob Gibson Blvd. Omaha, NE 68108
Phone (402) 595-2144

Ak-Sar-Ben Aquarium
21502 W. Highway 31 Gretna, NE 68028
Phone (402) 332-3901

CONSERVATION OFFICERS

PANHANDLE

Officer	City	Phone (308)
Jim Zimmerman (S)	Gering	(office) 763-2940 (cell) 641-6138
Scott Brandt	Gering	631-0663
Heath Packett	Gordon	360-0682
Nicholas Fix	Ogallala	289-0427
Dennis Thompson	Ogallala	289-0755
Frank Miller	Valentine	(402) 389-0444
Dan Kling	Harrison	430-0572

SOUTHWEST

Officer	City	Phone (308)
Roger Thompson (S)	N. Platte	(office) 535-8025 (cell) 530-3097
Ray Dierking	Brkn. Bow	870-0322
George Sund	Cambridge	655-0028
Michael Thome	Cozad	529-8146
Matt Andrews	Elwood	746-2418
Dirk Greene	Imperial	882-0015
Virgil Gosch	McCook	340-2440
Dudley Sorensen	N. Platte	530-0016
Rich Routh	Rep. City	920-0367

SOUTH-CENTRAL

Officer	City	Phone (308)
Jerry Pecha (Sup.)	Kearney	(office) 865-5327 (cell) 293-3551
Terry Brentzel	Doniphan	(402) 469-5795
Randy Pomplun	Fullerton	550-0489
Darin Gress	Hebron	(402) 768-8665
Dale Johnson	Kearney	440-3847
Robert Finke	Milford	(402) 947-1363
Doug Pollard	Ord	778-7101

NORTHEAST

Officer	City	Phone (402)
Tom Zimmer (Sup.)	Norfolk	(office) 370-3374 (cell) 649-8053
Dale Davis	Bassett	760-0712
Steve Oberg	Columbus	910-3366
Daniel Roberts	Fremont	719-1108
Jeff Jones	Hartington	762-5022
Jon Reeves	Kennard	889-8508
Pat George	O'Neill	340-0787
Tim Williams	Neligh	929-0051
Cory Krause	West Point	380-6410

SOUTHEAST

Officer	City	Phone (402)
Duane Arp (Sup.)	Gretna	(office) 332-2965 (cell) 521-0194
Sean McKeenhan	Ashland	521-0159
William Krause	Auburn	274-8063
Mike Luben	Colon	443-6392
Dan Zuehlke	Cortland	806-9084
Douglas Kramer	Lincoln	890-6465
Dina Barta	Lincoln	890-6463
Stacey Lewton	Lincoln	890-7140
Levi Krause	Louisville	949-0593
Russell Mort	Nebr. City	209-1506
Dan Evasco	Papillion	616-5961
Jeff Clauson	Waterloo	658-7057

ADMINISTRATION

Officer	City	Phone (402)
Ted Blume (Adm.)	Lincoln	471-5531
Craig Stover (Asst.)	Lincoln	471-5532
Wes Loos (Asst.)	Lincoln	471-5591
Rod Loos (Asst.)	Ogallala	(308) 284-8056

Nebraska Wildlife Crimestoppers 1-800-742-7627

NEBRASKA GAME & PARKS
www.OutdoorNebraska.org

4 NEBRASKALAND • MAY 2011

MAY 2011 • NEBRASKALAND 5

Night Songs

Dan Fogell

It isn't just the birds that fill the air with songs every spring. Spring is the season that frogs and toads give a nocturnal vocal performance rivaling that of their daytime avian counterparts. Every available pool of water seems to be a stage for this after-dark glee club. Large crowds of males hoping for the opportunity to mate gather in ponds, marshes, and even roadside ditches to serenade females. Peeps, chirps, trills, and croaks fill the evening air, and the louder the song, the more likely the amphibian crooners are to pass on their genes to the next generation.

Eleven species of frogs and toads call Nebraska home, each with its own unique song and performance schedule. The annual concert opens up with the boreal chorus frogs in very early spring, usually sometime around the end of March. These tiny frogs have a big voice that sounds like fingers running across the teeth of a comb. Next up are two leopard frogs – the northern leopard frog making its long, snoring sound followed by a few short croaks, and the plains leopard frog with a series of chuck-chuck-chucks followed by the same croaks. A couple of toads take the stage in late-April and May. American toads ring out a long, musical trill that sounds like they're



Gray treefrog

whistling and humming at the same time, while Woodhouse's toads cry out a loud WAAAAAAHHH like a baby crying for a bottle. Blanchard's cricket frogs sing in May as well, making a rik-rik-rik sound comparable to a couple of pebbles banging against each other. The next three frogs, like Gene Kelly, prefer to sing in the rain. The Great Plains narrowmouth toad has a high-pitched WAAAAAAH song that sounds like a bleating lamb. Plains spadefoots have a loud, baritone song of repeating WAAH...WAAH... WAAHs that can be heard up to a mile away. And on the rainiest of nights, Great Plains toads belt out a metallic ratta-ratta-ratta tune that sounds like a riveter. Gray treefrogs sometimes sing from their arboreal roosts sounding like night-time warblers with a short, high-pitched trill. And finally, that last song before the amphibian curtain comes down for the year belongs to the bullfrog. Their indisputable, throaty, jug-o-rum ballad is a sure sign that summer has arrived.

Frogs and toads end their performances just in time for the next cast of vocalists – insects such as cicadas, katydids and crickets – to take the stage during midsummer. But they leave behind a legacy ... thousands of tadpoles that will help ensure that the amphibian choral society will return next year and for years to come.



American toad

Upcoming Events

Here is a list of upcoming outdoor events across Nebraska. For more information about these and other events, click on the calendar at www.OutdoorNebraska.org.

April 30

- **Living History Days – Fort Atkinson State Historical Park**
Each weekend from April-October.
Contact: John Slader
402-468-5611
ngpc.fort.atkinson@nebraska.gov

April 30

- **Arbor Day Commemorative Tree Planting – Arbor Lodge SHP**
Contact: Arbor Lodge SHP
402-873-7222
ngpc.arbor.lodge@nebraska.gov

May 4

- **Family Fishing Night – Scottsbluff/Gering Area**
Bring the family and learn to fish at Terry's Pit from 6-8 p.m.

May 21

- **Free Fishing and Park Entry Day – Statewide**
Fish anywhere in the state or visit any state park or state recreation area for free. For information about specific events offered on this day, see ad on inside back cover of this issue.

May 28

- **Niobrara State Park Buffalo Cookout**
Enjoy an evening of food and entertainment at Niobrara State Park's Group Lodge. The cookout begins at 6 p.m., all you can eat, cost is \$9 for adults and \$6 for children. A free educational program will follow the cookout. Tickets must be purchased by noon on the day of the cookout.
Contact: Niobrara State Park
402-857-3373
ngpc.niobrara@nebraska.gov

June 4-5

- **Rock Creek Trail Days – Rock Creek Station State Historical Park**
Buffalo Stew Cookout and Program, \$9 for adults and \$6 for children ages 13 and under.
Contact: Rock Creek Station SHP
402-729-5777
ngpc.rock.creek.station@nebraska.gov

NEBRASKA Pheasants Forever & Quail Forever LANDOWNER HABITAT TOURS

Date and Time	Tour Topic	Date and Time
April 5, 2011	Conducting Mid Contract Management on CRP for wildlife	9:00 am to 4:00 pm - McCook - Chief Motel
April 21, 2011	CRP Mid Contract Management	9:30 am to 3:00 pm - Ogallala - Lake McConaughy Visitor Center
May 21, 2011	Wildflower Walk	11:00 am MST - Gering - Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area
May 21, 2011	Pine and Cedar Tree Thinning	1:00 pm MST - Gering - Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area
June 2, 2011	Wetland Management Workshop	1:00 pm to 4:00 pm - Merna - Merna Community Center
June 4, 2011	Youth Habitat Tour of the Loess Canyons	8:00 am to 5:00 pm - North Platte - Nebraska Game & Parks Commission
June 8, 2011	Pheasant Management Workshop	9:30 am to 3:00 pm - Trenton - USDA Office
June 9, 2011	Sandhills Prairie & Wet Meadow Management & Plant ID Tour	8:30 am to 4:00 pm - Bartlett - Sandhill Seasons Guest Ranch & Hunts
National Pollinator Week Events		
June 21, 2011	Pollinator Habitat and Plant ID Tour	9:00 am to 3:00 pm - St. Paul - The Gathering Place
June 22, 2011	Pheasant & Quail Management	10:00 am to 3:00 pm - Broken Bow - One Box Gun Club
June 23, 2011	Prescribed Burning and Diverse Seeding Results	1:00 pm to 5:00 pm MST - Scottsbluff - North Platte NRD
June 23, 2011	Making Wildlife Cost-share and Incentive Programs work for You	1:00 pm to 5:00 pm - Syracuse - 1st National Bank & Trust
June 24, 2011	Improving Habitat for Pheasants and Quail	5:00 pm to 9:00 pm - Grand Island - Heartland Public Shooting Park
July 7, 2011	Prescribed Fire & Managing for Wildlife in the Niobrara Valley	8:30 am to 4:00 pm - Stuart
July 13, 2011	Dakota County Twilight Habitat Tour	5:30 pm to 8:30 pm - Dakota County
July 14, 2011	Quail Management Workshop	9:00 am to 3:00 pm - Sargent - Myrtle Hall WMA
July 29, 2011	Restoring an Oak Savanna	9:30 am to 3:00 pm - Schuyler - USDA Office
August 4, 2011	Management of CRP Reenrollments and Mid Contract Management	9:00 am to 3:00 pm - Franklin - Franklin County Fairgrounds
August 5, 2011	Pheasant and Quail Management	9:30 am to 3:00 pm - Wahoo - USDA Office
August 9, 2011	Pheasant Management Workshop	9:30 am to 3:00 pm - Branched Oak - Dog Trial Area on Branched Oak WMA
August 18, 2011	4th Annual Rangeland Management Workshop	9:00 am to 3:00 pm - Oconto - Pressey WMA
August 18, 2011	Prescribed Burning Results on Grasslands	9:00 am to 3:00 pm - Red Cloud - Trailblazer RC&D

Landowner Tours for Better Habitat

WILDLIFE BIOLOGISTS FROM ACROSS THE STATE WILL BE HOSTING A SERIES OF HABITAT TOURS THIS YEAR. TOURS ARE DESIGNED TO DEMONSTRATE HABITAT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES, AVAILABLE CONSERVATION PROGRAMS AND HOW TO CREATE THESE RESULTS ON YOUR OWN PROJECTS.

FOR DETAILS AND TO REGISTER: WWW.NEBRASKAPF.COM

A Look Back - May 1994

Jeff Kurrus

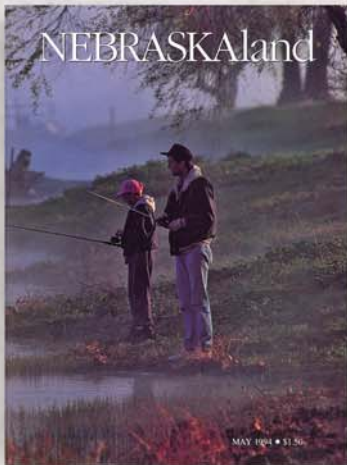
Last month I made a plea for Roger Welsch to write more for *NEBRASKAland Magazine*. However, in this request I dropped the “c” from his last name, probably alienating me even more from Roger. This month, I will attempt to convey this same message to former *NEBRASKAland* regional editor Rocky Hoffmann (two n’s, I got it), whose work is missed since he stopped writing for the magazine.

But what I didn’t fully realize at the time was how far Hoffmann’s knowledge about outdoor topics went. Not until I, in a fit of narcissism, decided to find out what was being written about in *NEBRASKAland* in May of 1994, the month I graduated high school.

That month, Hoffmann was writing about Rock Creek SRA and “Belly Boats.” The curious part of Hoffmann’s latter article is that this month I have my own version of a belly boat article, complete with my own list of advantages for fishing from these vessels much like my former colleague’s.

It is simply another reminder that while I was still asking for gas money from Mom, this *NEBRASKAland* writer was already writing about more subjects than I could ever cover in a lifetime.

To read more about “Belly Boats” visit NebraskaLandMagazine.com and click on “A Look Back.”



Nebraska Waters at Risk from Asian Carp

Elizabeth Mack

Asian carp were introduced into the U.S. from Asia in the 1970s to control phytoplankton in lakes, but they eventually made their way into natural waters – with disastrous results. If not carefully managed, the carp can spread at a lightning pace and, according to fisheries biologists, are now in Nebraska waters. Fish sampling conducted last year from the Loup Power Canal below the Columbus power plant show Asian carp to be one of the most abundant species.

Native species often are negatively impacted once Asian carp are introduced into their waterways, with channel catfish, walleye, bass and crappie the most affected. Once waterways are invaded with Asian carp, they will compete with native fish for food, as they can consume up to 20 percent of their body weight daily. They have little value as a food source in the U.S. and, because they feed on plankton, are almost impossible to catch.

The majority of the Asian carp threatening Nebraska are silver and bighead carp. Jumping silver carp have been known to cause serious injury to boaters, anglers and skiers who have been hit by the flying fish, as the adult fish can weigh anywhere from 20 to 40 pounds. Bighead carp usually don’t jump, but can grow to 100 pounds or more.

Nebraska and South Dakota are both concerned about what will happen if Asian carp continue to spread. Biologists fear if they get established above Gavin’s Point Dam on the border of South Dakota, they could then continue up the system towards Fort Randall Dam in South Dakota and up the Niobrara River towards Spencer Dam. Once Asian carp infiltrate water systems, they are almost impossible to control, according to Jeff Schuckman, Commission fisheries biologist for northeastern Nebraska. “Removal efforts don’t work well, such as netting or shocking. The only control measures that are successful are keeping them from infiltrating other areas.”

Young Asian carp look similar to gizzard shad that anglers use for bait, so moving them out of one area into another can create an infestation with catastrophic results. Strict regulations are intended to prevent people from moving the fish around; it’s illegal to release fish in public waters that did not originate in the same body of water. In addition, baitfish regulations below Gavin’s Point Dam for both Nebraska and South Dakota prohibit anyone from transporting collected baitfish outside of this Missouri River area. Gavin’s Point Dam is one area biologists are keeping their eye on, as Gavin’s Point is a barrier for all those fish. So far it seems to be working. “We also have education pamphlets for the public to show them the difference between young Asian carp and gizzard shad. At this point it’s a big education and regulation effort,” said Schuckman.

The high water on the Missouri River in 2010 created ideal spawning conditions downstream for bighead and silver carp, and their population exploded.

“They are there to stay,” said Schuckman. “We are not going to be able to eradicate them, so we’re just going to have to live with the presence of Asian carp, and educate and regulate where we can to keep people from spreading these things around.”

It’s something to keep in mind when using live bait for fishing – without the help of responsible anglers, the situation could quickly become much worse.

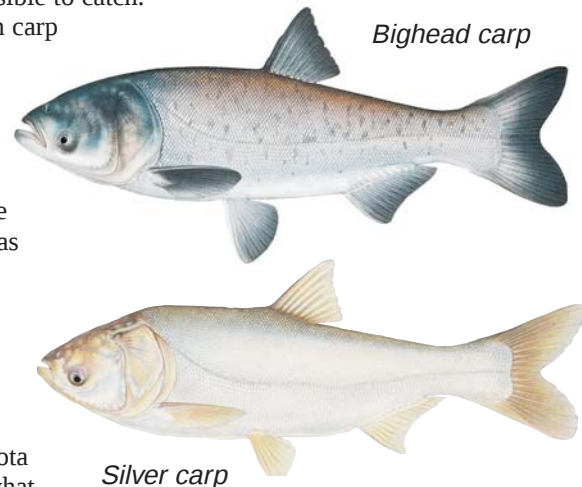
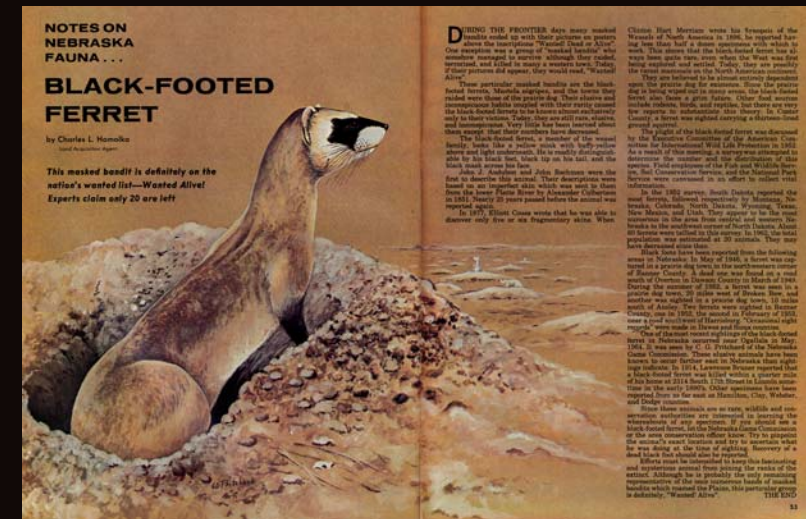


ILLUSTRATION BY JOE TOWELLER

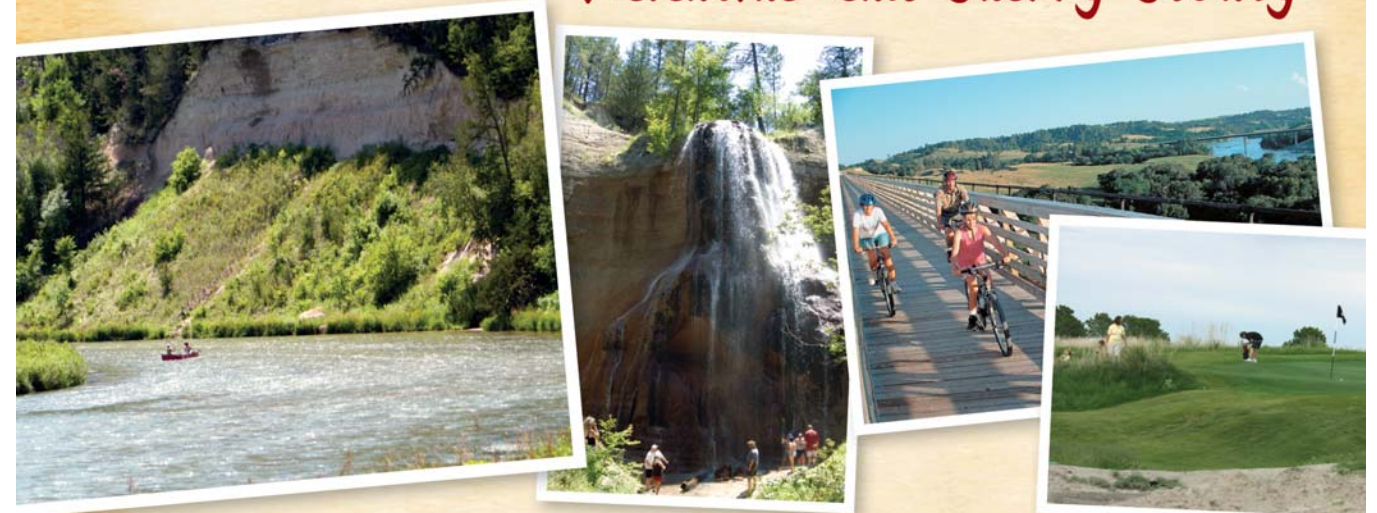
Nebland Flashbacks



This August 1967 issue of *NEBRASKAland* included a black-footed ferret in its ongoing “Notes on Nebraska Fauna” feature. Illustrated by then current staff wildlife artist C. G. “Bud” Pritchard, each focused on one of Nebraska’s many species of wildlife. The feature later expanded to include Nebraska flora as well and was illustrated by both former *NEBRASKAland* artist Michele Angle Farrar and Nebraska wildlife artist Neal Anderson, a two-time winner of the Federal Duck Stamp contest.

VISIT NEBRASKA’S VACATION OASIS

Valentine and Cherry County



- Canoe, tube or kayak the Niobrara River • Visit Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge
- See Smith Falls State Park, Nebraska’s tallest waterfall • Shopping, dining, camping and lodging
- Tour the Arthur Bowring Sandhills Ranch at Merriman • Fishing, skiing, camping, sailing at Merritt Reservoir
- Visit the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge • Hunting, fishing, hiking and birdwatching
- The Prairie Club Golf Course • Deer Creek Golf Course

For more information: Cherry County Tourism • PO Box 201 • Valentine, NE 69201
800-658-4024 • www.VisitValentine.com

THE OLD ANGLER'S ALMANAC®

BY DARYL L. BAUER

(For the months of May and June)

First off, you can't go wrong picking a place this time of the year and fishing because May and June are the best times to fish for a variety of species. But if you are going to force me to choose favorites, I'll try.

• Catching Numbers - Big Water

I am going to lean on walleyes here at Lake Minatare in the west. For numbers of fish, including eating-size walleyes and a shot at some bigger fish, Minatare walleye fishing would be hard to beat this year.

• Catching Numbers - Small Water

I'm going to do a combo here for largemouth bass. Take a look at Wolf-Wildcat and Burchard in southeastern Nebraska or Maskenthine, Buckskin Hills, and Powder Creek in northeastern Nebraska. If one isn't producing for you on a particular day, drive down the road and start fishing the next. But I doubt you'll need to do that.

• Catching Big Fish

Flatheads on the Loup or Tri-county canal system would be good picks, or how about trolling some crankbaits for big flatties on reservoirs like Sherman, Branched Oak or Harlan – yes, I said trolling crankbaits for flathead catfish. Just make sure to get those baits down banging on the bottom. However, with the timing I would stay with the walleye theme. There may be some 'eyes swimming in McConaughy right now that will challenge our hook & line state record. Since the water has rebounded, fishing has gotten tougher at McConaughy, but those fish are still there and May/June will likely be one of the best times to catch them. Whitney and Merritt would be other top picks for some 25-inch+ walleyes this year.

• Trying Something New

Grab a fly rod and target bluegills in shallow water. This would be one of the periods when a fly rod may be the best tool for catching bluegills. I must note that if anglers are cherry-picking the big male 'gills off their spawning

beds while doing this, selective harvest should be the order of the day – turn those big, parental males loose and keep a few smaller males and females for a meal of fresh bluegill fillets.

• Not Caring What You Catch

Sherman would be a good choice for crappies, walleyes, flatheads and some white bass too. I would also suggest the combo trip theme again. There are parts of the state where a person has a lot of different options, a lot of different waters to choose from, and again in May/June you could fish a different body of water each day, fish for a different species each day, and catch fish every day. Merritt is an excellent multi-species fishery by itself, but if a person were in that area he or she could also spend a couple days fishing the Valentine Refuge lakes or Big Alkali for even more variety. A day trip east of there also would put a person on some of our best trout streams (e.g. Long Pine, Plum Creek). Or, in the North Platte area a person can be on several reservoirs for walleyes, white bass, wipers and maybe even some pike, shift to Interstate lakes for bass and bluegills, and still be close enough to take advantage of the Lake Ogallala trout fishery.

• Best Bet

Man, don't make me pick just one! For May/June, take as much time off as possible, travel as much of the state as possible and F-I-S-H! If I had to pick one, that Merritt/Valentine refuge lakes combo would be darned hard to beat. A person could target some big walleyes and maybe even a muskie on Merritt; slip over to the refuge lakes and have a blast catching largemouths and pike, and then find some huge black crappies and some channel cats at Big Alkali.

Stay tuned for Bauer's Dog Day Fishing Spots in the July edition of NEBRASKALAND.

"The best time to fish is when you have time to fish." — D.L.B.

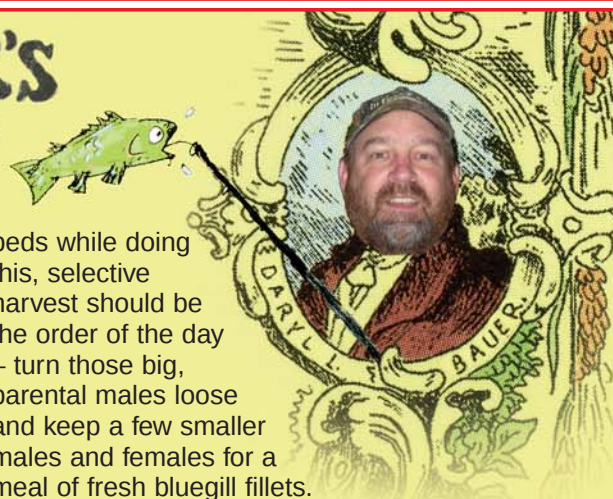


PHOTO BY JON FARRAR

Killdeer are probably the most evident shorebird in Nebraska and among the first to arrive in the spring. Some linger to nest and rear young, others continue north.

Watch Your Step

Jon Farrar

Killdeer nest statewide in Nebraska and are perhaps our most common, at least most commonly seen, shorebird. Like most shorebirds they are usually found near wetlands, and in the killdeer's case a "wetland" may be anything from the shoreline of Lake McConaughy to a rain puddle in a wheat field. More than any other shorebird that passes through or nests in Nebraska, they have come to tolerate the invasion of man and his reshaping of the landscape. Killdeer might be found nesting on the graveled rooftops of commercial buildings in downtown Omaha, on crushed limestone parking lots, golf courses or the margins of

graveled roads; so watch where you step if you see a shorebird that looks like the one in the photograph. Young leave the nest as soon as the last egg in the clutch is hatched, so it is not unusual to see recently hatched chicks – like fuzzy marshmallows on stilts – running down county roads and trail roads.

Killdeer are among the earliest shorebirds to arrive in Nebraska, often as early as late-February but more typically in March. Their nest is a simple scrape, a shallow depression just deep enough to keep eggs from rolling out; often lined with larger pieces of gravel, weeds or other bits of debris presumably to make the mottled eggs better camouflaged. They nest from early May well into June. The usual clutch size is four.

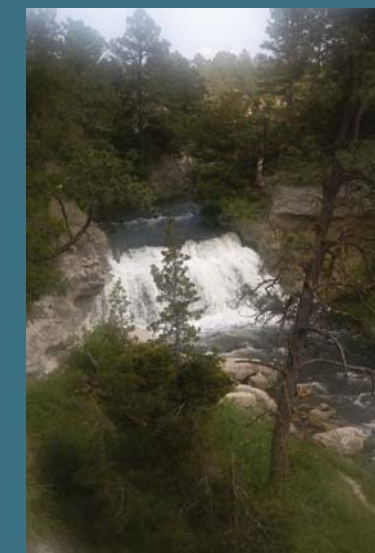
Outdoor Message Plates

David Weber of Lincoln doesn't let the fact that he prefers traveling on his motorcycle affect the passion for fly fishing he advertises in his plate. He just packs 4- and 5-piece rods and breathable waders alongside the rest of his lightweight, compact gear for his moto-camping trips around Nebraska in search of trout, bass, bluegill and pike. His BMW R1200GS will get him to any lake he likes.

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.



See You Out There ... But Where?



Do you know where this Nebraska photograph was taken? See answer at the bottom of page 13.

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Killdeer are particularly adept executing the "broken-wing display" where a parent bird holds one or both wings away from the body, dragging them on the ground while hopping away from a predator or intruding human, a ploy designed to convince the threatening creature that a bird with a broken wing is an easier meal than eggs or young hidden in the grass. Once the parent has led the threat far enough away it stops its plaintive calling, pulls its wings in and flies away.

June 20-24

Chadron State College
Wildlife Short Course
 AGRI 460/560 • 2 Credit Hours
 Study of wildlife identification, behavior and management with classroom and field exercises.
 To find out more, contact Dr. Teresa Zimmerman:
 tzimmerman@csc.edu or 308-432-6373

csc.edu/ag
 1-800-CHADRON

CSC
 CHADRON STATE COLLEGE

Officer's Notebook

Two-Wheel Patrol

Not long ago a few officers were issued motorcycles and bicycles to be used for patrol and public relation events such as outdoor expos and other things that conservation officers do. When I first started riding the bicycle I had lots of people asking who I worked for and doing a double take as I rode by in the parks. I handed out citations to some folks who were surprised, to see me, to say the least. One such group was at Holmes Lake in Lincoln – I have friends who live on the downstream side of the dam and let me park my patrol truck in their drive while I patrol the lake via the bicycle. When I first started my patrol one day I could see three fishermen who looked like they were fishing for catfish along the dam. I decided to check them last just because they had a long way to walk back to their cars.

I had pedaled almost all the way around the lake, checking fishing permits and listening to stories of the big ones that got away, when I realized that my catfishermen on the dam were packing up. I pulled out my binoculars and could see that they were hiking to the parking lot, so I jumped on the bicycle and caught up to them just as they were getting off the hiking trail.

I knew something was wrong by their faces the minute they saw who was on the bike. I did a long wave from around 50 feet away and nobody waved back – a nonverbal way of saying “oops.” They had a few fish over their limit, so after the tickets were written I had five catfish to haul as evidence. At that point I was wondering how to get the fish to my truck, but as it turned out, an off-duty Lincoln police officer was fishing and saw the whole thing go down. He agreed to keep the fish with him until I returned with my truck. That was good, because my next step was to call Lance Armstrong for an opinion on biking with fish.

My other story has to do with the motorcycle – I was patrolling Olive Creek State Recreation Area, where we get lots of calls regarding the illegal take of bass and bluegill. Fully marked, I ride to a side of the lake where several folks are fishing. When I pulled up on the motorcycle, just feet from where they were fishing, several looked up at me. I even heard one ask his friend if he thought I was a warden. The friend looking right at me replied “No way.”

I just sat on a nearby picnic table and waited a few minutes until I could tell who was fishing before walking over and asking to see their fish and fishing permits. Now I have their attention, and the same person who said “No way” is having one heck of a time getting rid of some illegal-size fish. It's a good thing they were bluegill and not catfish like with the bicycle story.

– Stacey Lewton, Conservation Officer, Lincoln

Parks Commission, Nebraska State Archery Association, Lincoln Prairie Bowmen Archery Club, Golden Arrow Archery Club of Omaha, Saunders Archery and several volunteers.

All top-five individual finishers qualified for the national tournament, as well as Lincoln North Star and Omaha Mater Dei Academy high school teams and Lincoln Pound's middle school and elementary teams.

North Platte Good Place to Live

A Nebraska city has been tabbed one of the best places in the nation to live.

American Cowboy, a western-lifestyle magazine, recently released its fourth annual list of “Best Places to Live The West” and North Platte was one of the top 20 listed.

“This year's entries truly live up to the Western ideal of places embodying the rugged, free spirit of the Western version of the American Dream,” said DeAnna Jarnagin, Associate Publisher of *American Cowboy*. “They're places where you can experience authentic cowboy culture, spectacular scenery, a true dose of history and a really, really good steak.”

Major criteria for selection include outdoor appeal, historical significance, regional ranching activity and tourism. Editors also considered population, average land price, average household price, median age and number of western events held throughout the year.

To check out the complete article in the April/May issue of *American Cowboy*, go online to <http://americancowboy.com/travel/trips/texasoklahoma-great-plains>.

Local DU Chapter Recognized

The Burt/Washington County Chapter of Ducks Unlimited was recently named one of DU's Top 100 Chapters list, reserved for chapters that raise up to \$100,000 in grassroots income for DU's conservation mission.

The Burt/Washington County Chapter is one of more than 2,700 DU chapters nationwide. DU's grassroots system has become a model for other conservation organizations worldwide and has helped conserve more than 12 million acres of waterfowl habitat.

Top Fishing Equipment Brands for 2010

Southwick Associates' AnglerSurvey.com announced the brands and products anglers purchased most frequently in 2010. This list has been compiled from the 31,082 internet-based surveys completed by anglers who volunteered to participate last year in AnglerSurvey.com polls.

• Top **rod** brand: Shakespeare (12% of all purchases)

• Top **rod and reel combo** brand: Shakespeare (23.6% of all purchases)

• Top **reel** brand: Shimano (19.4% of all purchases)

• Top **fishing line** producer: Berkley (12.8% of all purchases)

• Top **hard bait** brand: Rapala (25.7% of all purchases)

• Top **fishing knife** brand: Rapala (22.4% of all purchases)

• Top **soft bait** brand: Zoom (13.3% of all purchases)

• Top **spinnerbait** brand: Strike King (16.7% of all purchases)

• Top **hook** brand: Eagle Claw/Lazer Sharp (28% of all purchases)

• Top **sinker** brand: generic (29.7%), Water Gremlin (12% of all purchases)

• Top **fly rod** brand: LL Bean (25.6% of all purchases)

• Top **fly reels** brand: Orvis (17.5% of all purchases)

• Top **fly combo** brand: Pflueger (6.5% of all purchases)

• Top **fly line** brand: Rio (32.1% of all purchases)

• Top **fly leader** brand: Rio (31.2% of all purchases)

• Top **fly tying material** brand: Wapsi (14% of all purchases)

• Top **fish finder** or **sonar** brand: Humminbird (34.7% of all purchases)

• Top **tackle box** brand: Plano (45.5% of all purchases)

• Top **landing net** brand: Frabill (33.4% of all purchases)

Wildcat Hills Nature Camps

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission is sponsoring four camps for children at the Wildcat Hills Nature Center in western Nebraska this summer.

The camps are: Creepy Crawlies, for pre-kindergarten children ages 3-5 accompanied by a parent or guardian, on June 1 from 9-11:30 a.m.; Little Bobcats, for students who just completed kindergarten and first grade, June 7-8 from 9-11:30 a.m.; Wildcat Explorers, for students who just finished the second and third grades, June 14-16 from 9 a.m.-noon; and Trees of Nebraska, for students who just finished the fourth through sixth grades, June 28-30 from 9 a.m.-noon.

Advance registration and payment are required and some camps have enrollment limits. Registration forms are available at the nature center, located south of Gering. For more information, contact the Wildcat Hills Nature Center at (308) 436-3777 or ngpc.wildcat.hills@nebraska.gov.

Turpin Time

Dick Turpin

I don't know how many times I've been camping and I've looked down to find the grill I want to cook on is a little bit dirty. Here's a good tip if you forget that wire brush. Just take some tin foil ... tear off a batch and get a ball ... oh, maybe the size of a tennis ball or a softball... something like that, and just rub off your grill with that. Takes it right off. So if you forget your wire brush when you go camping ... use a small ball of tin foil.

Finding Bald Eagles

If you happen to be out and see a bald eagle nest or what you think may be one, please email Commission bird biologist Joel Jorgensen at joel.jorgensen@nebraska.gov or call him at (402) 471-5440. ■

NEBRASKAland Visitor Winner and Hint

Last issue's winner of the *NEBRASKAland* Visitor drawing was George Schneider of Liberty, Illinois who found the **emerald ash borer** on page 21. 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 bug found in Nebraska that just happened to find its way onto one of the pages of our publication.

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 5 or 45.

NASP Results

Gabe Collins of Nebraska City and Roxanne Hyland of Oakland-Craig had the high overall scores at this year's National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) state tournament.

Collins led all boys with 276 points and Hyland led the girls with 271.

The event, held at the Lancaster Event Center in Lincoln, drew more than 400 elementary, middle school and high school archers from 17 schools. The sixth annual tournament, the largest youth archery event in the state, was the culminating event in the state for NASP, a physical education curriculum

that has spread across the nation.

The top-scoring seniors, Chris Haase of Oakland-Craig at 265 points and Lupe Rodrigues of Nebraska City at 240, each earned a \$600 Saunders Scholarship.

“The enthusiasm, sportsmanship and courtesy the archers, coaches and volunteers bring to this tournament every year is awesome,” Match Director Jim Tubbs said. “Being able to be part of this tournament from the beginning, with 165 archers to more than 400 this year and last, says a lot about the program.”

The state tournament was made possible by the Nebraska Game and

FORT ROBINSON

THE COUNTRY CLUB OF THE ARMY

By Thomas R. Buecker, Curator, Fort Robinson Museum

In the tradition of the United States Army, the lifestyle and easy-going reputation found at certain military posts led veteran servicemen to informally bestow them with characteristic nicknames. In Army circles, training at the elite, yet challenging, Fort Riley Cavalry School was commonly known as “the life of Riley.” In more recent years, the Presidio of San Francisco, with its attractive setting and facilities, was deemed “the country club.” In another era, this capricious title was also applied to Fort Robinson in northwestern Nebraska.

Fort Robinson, established in 1874 to protect the Red Cloud Indian Agency, was a key military post during the Plains Indian wars. In the 1870s it was the scene of dramatic events, including the death of Crazy Horse and the tragic Cheyenne Outbreak. Because of the conspicuous role it played in the Indian wars, by the turn of the century Fort Robinson was known as a famous post that had secured its place in western American history.

Fort Robinson, unlike other western forts, was not abandoned when the frontier passed but continued on for a number of years as an active troop station. With hundreds of soldiers in garrison, diversions were necessary to occupy the men during off-duty periods. Typically those activities included various forms of outdoor recreation and sport. Many officers and enlisted men enjoyed hunting and fishing, and team sports such as baseball and football were played and watched with considerable enthusiasm. But because Fort Robinson was primarily a cavalry station, horse-related sports such as racing and polo also drew strong participation and interest.

All of this changed during World

War I. The acceptance of the tank and truck notwithstanding, the U. S. Army still needed lots of horses. No longer used as a troop station, in 1919 Fort Robinson became a Quartermaster Remount Depot. In this new role, men at the post received, conditioned and issued horses for the mounted services. Besides a change in duty, the post also witnessed a change in appearance: Many of the older adobe and frame buildings from the cavalry days were removed as new stables and horse handling facilities, newly painted white with green trim, appeared. In what were the last decades of the horse cavalry, the post took on the appearance of a Kentucky horse farm.

With the advent of automobiles, the horse gradually became less essential to mainstream Americans, particularly the growing urban majority. To many citizens, riding, jumping and other equestrian activities were viewed as recreational, almost elitist pursuits. Likewise the horse, once an integral adjunct of the U.S. Army, was considered almost obsolete by continuing mechanization. For many years, however, leisure activities at Fort Robinson continued to center around the animal.

Many found duty at the Robinson Quartermaster Depot a coveted assignment. With a smaller troop component, adequate and comfortable housing was available for both officers and enlisted men. This, plus the refreshing western climate, made the post an exceptionally desirable place to live. One, perhaps overzealous visitor, called Fort Robinson a perfect summer retreat, where the “. . . longing to leave . . . isn’t simply overpowering.”

As a whole, the Army personnel stationed at Fort Robinson were excellent, knowledgeable horsemen.

As a whole, the Army personnel stationed at Fort Robinson were excellent, knowledgeable horsemen. As one officer recalled, the place was “horsey,” where people seldom discussed anything but horses – a veritable horse heaven.

— Thomas R. Buecker



Riding to the hounds was a common recreation for officers. By 1933, the pack contained 20 hounds; mostly French staghounds with some English fox and Welsh hounds. In the absence of foxes, the hounds trailed a coyote skin dragged through the riverbottoms.



NEBRASKA STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY RG1517 PH1-23

In addition to regular horse shows and jumping competitions, races around a nearly two-mile long track were regular events at the fort. Some of the finest thoroughbred horse stock in the country were bred and raised at Fort Robinson.

As one officer recalled, the place was “horsey,” where people seldom discussed anything but horses – a veritable horse heaven. Officers were expected to ride while conducting their daily duties on the post and reservation. Upon arrival at Robinson, horses were issued to each officer and to all family members who desired mounts. All of this was expected at a place where hundreds of fine horses milled in pastures and there were sheltered feeding areas and stable corrals. Some of the finest thoroughbred horse stock in the country were bred

and raised there.

During the 1930s, the equestrian sports of racing, competitive jumping and other mounted contests were the standard fare for both officers and enlisted men. The Army urged officer participation in all forms of mounted sports to provide exercise and good training. For the enlisted men these sports encouraged and maintained interest in horsemanship and fostered unit *esprit de corps*. Some form of mounted activity was always available and Crawford residents and other

civilians regularly came out to watch and frequently to participate.

In the twentieth century, polo became the true equestrian sport in this country. The Army encouraged officers to play to improve their equestrian skills. As a result, the sport became popular at Army posts across the country. Polo play began at Fort Robinson in 1903, when the Tenth Cavalry post team won the department competition and a number of open championships.

Although polo declined at Fort Robinson after 1910, interest in the sport was revived in the 1920s. The post team played Army teams from Fort Meade, South Dakota; Fort Warren, Wyoming; Fort Logan, Colorado; and civilian teams from Denver, Colorado Springs and Hot Springs, South Dakota. At times, officers from affluent families brought their own polo ponies with them when assigned to Fort Robinson. Polo, however, was a gentlemen’s game, requiring careful observation of rules and consideration for safety of the players – it might not have been altogether popular in the enlisted ranks. Perhaps the post newspaper correspondent summed it up best when he wrote: “Can it be that the reason enlisted men don’t go in for polo is it’s a game with too much horse play?”

Along with polo, the Army saw the benefits of participation in hunt club activities. Riding to the hounds was seen as “bold riding,” giving officers experience in cross-country travel. With the arrival of Major Edwin Hardy as post commander in 1932, the Soldier Creek Hunt Club was organized. Hardy, an avid rider and outdoorsman, was master of the hunt. Two other officers with short-handled whips served as whippers-in to keep the hounds on the scent. By 1933, the Fort Robinson pack contained 20 hounds; mostly French staghounds augmented with English fox and Welsh hounds. The pack was officially recognized by the Masters of Foxhounds Association of America.

Due to the lack of foxes in the post vicinity, Hardy’s hunts were “drag hunts.” The trail of a pursued animal was simulated by dragging a coyote



NEBRASKA STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY RG1517 PH45-25

Polo was a popular equestrian sport in the early 1900s. The Army encouraged officers to play and improve their horsemanship.

hide through the creek and riverbottoms near the post and the dogs would follow the scent. Biweekly hunts were held on Wednesday and Sunday mornings, with hunt club membership open to post and local residents. The hunts often ended at the Wood Reserve (today’s Soldier Creek Wilderness Area) cabin west of the fort, where breakfast was served to all riders.

As could be expected, horse shows and competitions became an important facet of Fort Robinson life. After World War I, American officers followed the European lead where exhibition style, off-road riding and jumping were predominate sports of Army officers. By 1930, post horse shows became regular features on the Fort Robinson calendar. Besides providing excellent training and a boost to post morale, horse shows attracted hundreds of spectators to view the work of the remount service.

Such shows were frequently held in conjunction with “Quartermaster Day,” the annual celebration of the

establishment of the Quartermaster Corps. “Gymkhana,” or mounted games, where the enlisted men competed in mounted wrestling, relay races, and musical chairs, were always on the program. Equestrian skills were demonstrated in the mounted potato race, where men used pointed poles to pick potatoes from one bucket and race 50 yards to deposit them in a second.

The main features were the jumping events. Open jumping required two circuits around a course with four jumps, each three-and-one-half feet high. Competitive classes were held for both male and female riders. Hunter-jumper classes were added in 1937, and later shows brought classes for wrangling horses and cow ponies. Businesses in Crawford often closed during the exhibitions and private horses were accommodated free of charge at the post for civilian participants.

Besides horse shows and hunts, recreational riding was popular. With the rise of automobile travel, horseback riding for most Americans largely

became recreational. The rugged buttes around the post made riding exciting and aesthetically pleasing. In 1932, riding classes began to better prepare the enlisted men to perform their remount duties. Sensing an interest, Major Hardy organized a ladies riding class, to teach both how to ride cross-country and make moderate jumps.

During the remount period, one social institution common to all Army posts also existed at Fort Robinson: A favorite off-duty hangout that contributed to the post’s “country club” lifestyle was the officer’s club, the exclusive, private club for officers and their guests. Housed in the former commanding officers quarters, it was the scene of parties, dinners and other social activities. Two annual events keenly followed by radio at the club were the running of the Kentucky Derby and the Army-Navy football game. Derby day saw considerable wagering among the officers, some receiving inside information “from officers who knew prominent horses of Thoroughbred racing.”



An officer's cabin was built on the fort's Wood Reserve in 1934, complete with a large living room, guest bedrooms, sleeping porch and Spanish balcony.

In 1934 an impressive officer's cabin was built from logs on the post Wood Reserve. Complete with a large living room, guest bedrooms, sleeping porch and Spanish balcony, it became a popular retreat for post officers and visiting dignitaries. A small swimming pool, light plant and stable with quarters for attendants, completed the complex. Constructed as a Civil Works Administration project, the officer's cabin was the scene of countless parties and barbecues.

Fort Robinson was also a desired station for the enlisted ranks. Officially the post provided an excellent place for enlisted men inclined toward animal husbandry, but other perks came with duty there. With a small number of officers on staff, noncommissioned officers were housed in vacant officers' quarters. The soldiers had their own on-post social outlets with the enlisted men's and N.C.O. clubs. They also had their own recreational cabin in the Wood Reserve and participated in local league sports through the Fort Robinson Athletic Association, in addition to the aforementioned equestrian competitions.

Other "club-type" amenities were available and popular. In the 1920s, a nine-hole golf course was laid out north of the main post. By the mid-1930s, new concrete tennis courts were built for the officers and their families with a new court near the barracks added for the enlisted men. A concrete swimming

pool, costing \$5,000, was also opened, and although it had no shower or dressing facilities, proved a welcomed recreational addition. Additionally, a skeet range was built, as trap shooting became a popular pastime. With a variety of recreational outlets available, life at Fort Robinson in the 1930s stood in sharp contrast to the frontier post of 50 years earlier.

Because of its small garrison and non-combat mission, an easy-going, casual lifestyle developed at Fort Robinson. To outsiders, it might appear like a military post, but for soldiers stationed there, it did not seem like a regular Army post. The relationship between officers and enlisted men was

more informal than that found at larger posts where combat soldiers were stationed. Less emphasis was put on military bearing and uniform appearance. Even the enlisted men's mess hall looked more like a fancy restaurant than a mess hall.

This country club lifestyle and associated amenities made Fort Robinson an irresistible rest area for Army chiefs of staff, Washington politicians – even for some celebrities of the day. Major General Charles P. Summerall made stops at the post to fish and ride in the hills during his term as chief of staff. In 1936, Colonel J.J. Johnson, the chief of Remount, spent a month at the officers' cabin. Likewise, quartermaster generals and chiefs of the cavalry and artillery branches enjoyed the social life and pleasant atmosphere at the post. General Johnson Hagood, the Seventh Corps commander, spent much of his time at the fort fishing. During this period, reservation waterways were stocked by the federal Bureau of Fisheries, which operated a hatchery at Crawford. Additionally, the Army created ponds on Cherry and Soldier creeks that were periodically stocked with bass and trout. On a 1935 Thanksgiving Day outing, three officers reportedly caught 120 trout in three hours.

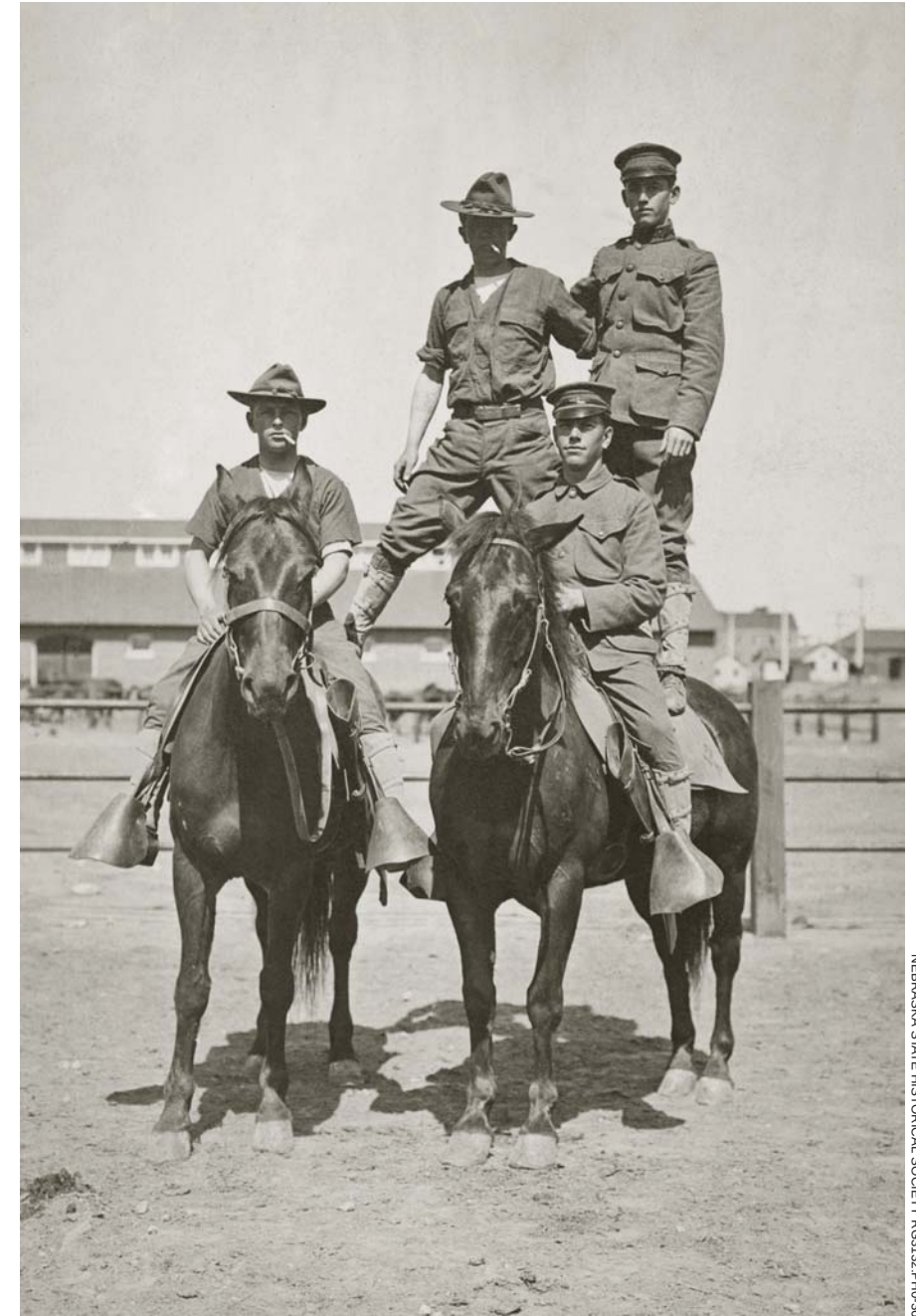
Prominent civilian visitors during the 1930s included sculptor Gutzon Borglum, who came to the post as a

guest of post commander Major Sumner Williams on breaks from his Mt. Rushmore project. Another frequent visitor was Pierre Lorillard, head of the Lorillard Tobacco Company. Lorillard, a knowledgeable horseman, was also a reserve colonel in the Quartermaster Corps and put in part of his annual active duty time at Robinson.

The epitome of success for Fort Robinson as a world horse center came in 1935. The year before, Captain William Bradford, captain of the United States Olympic Equestrian Team, visited Fort Robinson. Hosted by Major Hardy, Bradford was impressed with both the pleasant climate and the facilities found at the post. In June 1935, the U.S. equestrian team came to Fort Robinson to train for the 1936 Berlin games. Fort Robinson was in the national spotlight, as the best of America's horsemen and horses rode and jumped there. Fort Robinson reached its zenith as an equestrian center as thousands attended special exhibitions put on by team members. Unfortunately, the team only won one medal at the 1936 games.

After Berlin, summer Olympic training at Fort Robinson continued for the next three seasons. As the 1939 session ended, however, war clouds appeared in Europe and there was no 1940 Olympic Games. During World War II, the Army dismounted its cavalry branch, effectively removing a key mission of Fort Robinson. Work with pack mules and K-9 war dogs replaced much of the horse activity. Although the world of fine horses and easy lifestyle briefly returned after war's end, the days of the country club were over, as well as the fort's use as a remount center. In 1948 the old post was abandoned by the Army, eventually to become Nebraska's largest state park.

In its last several decades as an Army post, the mission and lifestyle at Fort Robinson dramatically changed from its turbulent beginnings during the Plains Indian War. Ironically, in an era when Fort Robinson became a "country club," horse use by the Army was in an inevitable decline. As such, Fort Robinson remained one of the last



Fort Robinson was also a desired post for enlisted men during the early 1900s. Like the officers, much of their Army life and recreational time revolved around horses.

vestiges of the "old Army" between the wars, before the Army bid farewell to the horse. Today, many of the same types of recreational activities found when Fort Robinson was called "The Country Club of the Army" are available to park visitors. In this sense, a proud tradition of the old Army continues. ■

While not quite the equestrian hotbed it once was, Fort Robinson is still a horse lover's paradise. Encompassing some 22,000 acres with many miles of

trails and fire service roads to ride, Fort Robinson State Park even offers a nice campground dedicated to horse owners, complete with newly remodeled horse barns and stalls that can be rented by the night (you'll need to bring your own feed and hay). Don't own a horse? Not a problem – the park offers trail rides from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day weekend using its own string of horses. For more information call the park at (308) 665-2900 or e-mail ngpc.fort.robinson@nebraska.gov.



A favorite equestrian event held at the fort was jumping competitions, requiring two circuits around a course with four, 3½-foot-high jumps.

The Plains Topminnow

Text and photos by Michael Forsberg

Dry Creek, a small groundwater-fed stream in the Nebraska Sandhills, belies its name. Dry Creek quietly drains a watershed of rumpled hills north of Burwell before emptying into the northeast end of Calamus Reservoir.

Last June I sat hunched over on a hunter's stool, knee deep among fallen logs in its cool waters and shading my eyes from the noonday sun as I tried to photograph the plains topminnow (*Fundulus sciadicus*), a native fish with an uncertain future that is about the size of a pen cap and is endemic to the Great Plains. My photography tools included a wide-brimmed hat, wading shoes, polarized sunglasses and an underwater point-and-shoot camera with remote flash. I looked like I was going to the beach.

The plains topminnow is 1½ to 2½ inches long and is rather plain looking at first glance – olive brown in color with bronze reflections and faint blue-green crosshatching. But during spawning in early summer, the males color up to a beautiful orangish-red. Topminnows feed near the surface and aquatic insects make up an important part of their diet. They prefer clear cool water, quiet pools and shallow slackwater areas with little noticeable current along rivers and streams.



Slackwater areas such as this one along Dry Creek provide quality habitat for the plains topminnow.



Plains topminnows forage near flooded timber in Dry Creek near Burwell. Endemic to the Great Plains, topminnows are one of several native fish species whose populations are shrinking.

Dry Creek is an important habitat for this fish, which once ranged through much of Nebraska's river systems and the central Plains states. The largest distribution of the minnow is centered in Nebraska. The state holds roughly two-thirds of the historic plains topminnow records dating from the late-1930s, yet based on recent sampling efforts in the last decade, only about a third of these historic locations still hold topminnows today.

The plains topminnow represents the struggles of an increasing number of native fish species in the Great Plains whose range and populations are shrinking. Alteration of

habitat and flow regimes through dams and water diversion construction, water pollution from agricultural runoff, and the spread of exotic species such as the western mosquitofish (*Gambusia affinis*), which can outcompete native minnows, pose great challenges for their survival.

Today, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission biologists and University of Nebraska – Kearney researchers are studying the species to update the minnows' range, population trends and learn more about their life history. Topminnows collected from source areas such as Dry Creek have been developed into broodstock and are being released in both key historic locations and new areas in efforts to help restore populations.

The first two days of photography yielded few results other than a sunburn and being the center of attention for a

herd of cattle coming in to drink. But around high noon on the third day, as puffball-shaped clouds raced overhead, the tea-stained water started to flash as if there were small mirrors reflecting light from beneath. The topminnows had moved in.

They were feeding along the submerged base of a log heavy with vegetation next to my feet. Each time they turned in the water their scales shimmered in the sunlight before they retreated back into the shadows. I lowered the camera gently into the water and finally, a band of these tiny little fish swam through the frame and into the light of day. ■

To see more of Mike Forsberg's images, visit his web site and online gallery at www.MichaelForsberg.com.

A Natural Fit

Tourism Now Part of Family Ranch

Text and photos by Eric Fowler

A Sandhills family discovers that marketing the natural resources on their ranch makes it possible for the entire family to continue living on the land they love.

Through the ups and downs that are inherent to the farming and ranching business, it can be tough to support one family, much less two. Work more ground, or work the ground you have harder, is often the only way to make ends meet.

So what happens when the kids decide they don't want to follow their classmates to the big city in search of bigger and better things? The kids that want to stay home and continue the family's legacy on the land, and do it now, rather than waiting until the folks retire?

Here's a story about one Nebraska family, the Switzers, who figured out how to make it all work on their ranch northwest of Burwell. Not only did one of the

cut hay and raise a few crops. They owned nature. And people would pay to experience it.

Coming Home

Bruce and Sue Ann Switzer raised their children, Adam and Sarah, on the same land that Sue Ann's great grandfather, Alfred Scherzberg, claimed and homesteaded under the Kincaid Act in 1904. Adam didn't really want to leave home when he graduated from high school in Taylor in 1992, but at the time the cattle business was bleak and the grass could only handle enough cows to support one family.

"He never wanted to leave home, but agriculture wasn't in

a very pretty state at that time and he knew Sue Ann and I were just barely making it," said Bruce. "We encouraged him to go on and get a job because things were so sour."

So Adam headed off to a technical school for two years and then worked construction, traveling to jobs here and there, living in motels during the week, then coming back to the ranch, where he had a little farmhouse of his own to call home, on weekends. Often he'd wake to find deer or turkeys in his yard, something he never saw from his motel window. One of those mornings in 2000, he decided he'd had enough.

"I got to get out a little bit," Adam said of his time away from home. "But I was just tired of taking orders. I finally just decided to come home, whether [Dad] liked it or not. This is where I wanted to be, on the ranch."

One of Adam's last construction jobs

Sarah Sortum and her guests enjoy a hilltop view of the Switzer ranch during a jeep tour, an idea she got after taking an African safari. Calamus Outfitters received the 2010 Outstanding Nature Tourism Award from the Nebraska Department of Economic Development.

was building a high fence to contain elk for a pay-to-hunt operation. That planted the seed for an idea he thought could provide the ways and means to stay home: start an outfitting business, but without the fences. He talked the idea over with his parents and they weighed it against how much grass and how many cows it would take for him to make a living. "I said, 'Adam, we know what the cows will do for us,'" Bruce said, alluding to the financial uncertainty that was part of ranching. "Go for it."

So Adam began marketing his new endeavor, Calamus Outfitters, and remodeling the ranch house that had belonged to Sue Ann's late brother.

That house, across the driveway from his parents', would be the lodge where the deer, turkey and pheasant hunters who had filled Adam's calendar for the upcoming seasons in the fall of 2001 would stay. Then the day that changed everything for so many in this country happened – September 11. "They all cancelled," Adam said. "They couldn't fly with guns, and some didn't feel comfortable leaving home."

Their startup plan turned on its ear, the Switzers scrambled to find another customer base to get them to the next fall. They devised a plan to offer tanking, tubing and canoeing trips down the Calamus River and began marketing their lodge to anglers using Calamus

Reservoir, just across the road.

They soon found their lodge, with room for 20 in five bedrooms, five baths, a kitchen and great room, was just what families were yearning for. "After 9/11, everybody started to do stuff



Calamus Outfitters is located 16 miles northwest of Burwell on Highway 96. For more information, go to CalamusOutfitters.com.





Dave Christensen of McPherson, Kansas, searches for deer with Adam Switzer in the hills north of Calamus Reservoir during muzzleloader season last December. Guided deer hunts are so popular that the Switzers hire another guide to help handle all their clients.

more as a family across the country,” Sue Ann said. “They stayed close to home and they did stuff together all of a sudden. And here we were, we had the facility already set up. There it was, ready for the whole family. It was just an accident, probably.”

The lodge proved to be so popular that the Switzers went to work on two school houses Sue Ann’s brother had moved from the river to the property when the reservoir was built. Joining them together, they had another five-bedroom cabin open in 2003. “And gosh, we were still turning people away,” Sue Ann said. “We didn’t even have to advertise. They were just here.”

Four small, pre-built cabins were added in 2004. The summer business, including lodging, river trips and horseback rides, was packed. So was Adam’s hunt calendar, with folks coming from across the state and country to hunt white-tailed and mule deer, pheasants, waterfowl and turkeys. Business was booming, and then another opportunity presented itself.

A contingent from the National Audubon Society’s Rowe Sanctuary and state tourism officials paid a visit to Calamus Outfitters in 2004. Tens of thousands of people visited Rowe and other spots along the Platte River each spring to watch the sandhill crane migration, but some of those folks would surely be interested in other birdwatching opportunities nearby, they

said – why don’t you offer birders the opportunity to watch prairie chickens boom and sharp-tailed grouse dance on their mating grounds?

Bruce, a prototypical Sandhills cowboy right down to the boots, Stetson and handlebar moustache, found it hard to believe people would pay to see the courtship rituals of the two species of prairie grouse they had on their ranch. “I knew they were there and I did enjoy hearing them, but I never sat down and watched them,” he said. “I never took the time.”

But in the spring of 2005, with help from the folks at Rowe and using the same school buses they used to ferry tankers and tubers to and from the river as photo blinds, they began offering guided tours to chicken and sharptail leks. And just like Adam’s hunts, what started small has grown each spring and drawn people from around the country, often with Bruce as their guide.

“I was skeptical, but I was sure wrong,” Bruce said. “They made us aware that we have something. I really enjoy it. It raised my awareness on other birds, on all birds, especially grassland birds.”

Another Homecoming

Grouse viewing was the first move Switzers made toward catering to birdwatchers and others simply looking



Matt and Wendy Sheffield and their children, Lainey, Sophie and Sawyer, float the Calamus River through the Switzer Ranch in a horse tank.

for opportunities to explore new landscapes. Their daughter’s decision to move home was the second.

Like Adam, Sarah headed off to college after high school and then to work elsewhere, but really wanted to come home. In the fall of 2006, while working on the management team of a guest ranch in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, with her husband, Mark Sortum, they decided to do just that. At the time, neither one of them had a job lined up, but knowing the ranch and outfitting business could provide at least part-time work for Sarah made the move possible. “We were going to figure out the rest later. It was a real smart decision,” Sarah said, with a hint of both sarcasm and truthfulness.

Mark landed a job as a high school science teacher in Sargent. Sarah began looking for new and innovative ways to manage the family’s land to benefit both the ranch and the outfitting business.

The interest in birds led to the realization that some native grassland bird species that called the Switzer’s and neighboring ranches home were in

decline. Which led to the realization that their land, while in relatively good shape, was not as healthy as it could be. “If your end result is for the species, well, it’s their habitat that needs to be there,” Sarah said.

So the family looked at their grazing rotations to see if things could be changed to improve the diversity and health of their grassland, and they began to address the number one threat to those grasslands: the spread of eastern red cedars. Sarah and Adam saw the need to use prescribed fire to control cedars and improve grassland health, but it took a year to sell their parents on the idea. Not only did they have to help them overcome the fear of fire many people have, they had to convince them of the need to not graze the pasture they wanted to burn for a year. Leaving grass to burn instead of letting cows eat it is a foreign concept to most long-time ranchers, but it doesn’t mean you have to graze fewer cattle: “When you look at this from a bird’s point of view, if you leave one patch of grass, well, you can graze another



The day after the Switzers conducted their first prescribed burn, it was business as usual for meadowlarks (pictured) and other grassland birds, including sharp-tailed grouse that danced on their burned lek.

patch of grass heavier than you usually would because there are also birds that like that short grass,” she said.

When they finally conducted their first burn last spring, the wind quickly

took the backfire over the fire break and they ended up burning the adjacent pasture and many of the cedar trees in it, not the one they had intended to. Despite that, Adam and Sarah planned



Steve and Dana Coleman of Ossining, New York, watch a prairie chicken lek with Bruce Switzer. The Colemans' main reason for visiting Nebraska was to cross the sandhill crane migration off their life list, but found out about Calamus Outfitters when they were planning their trip and added it to their itinerary. "It's just as amazing as a National Geographic special," said Dana.

on burning again this spring and their parents, who saw how quickly the pasture recovered and how good it looked once it did, even while letting cattle graze it, supported them. "It didn't kill a lot of the bigger [cedar] trees, but it must have killed a million of them that were a foot tall," Adam said.

Many of those bigger trees died

anyway last fall when the Switzers partnered with a neighbor to rent a tree shear. But there are more pastures with cedars to clear. Along with two neighbors, the Morgans and Prices, they have formed the Gracie Creek Landowner's Association and are developing plans to integrate conservation measures into their

operations to improve the grassland on the 50,000 acres they share that are now part of the Greater Gracie Creek Landscape Important Bird Area (IBA).

That IBA project is part of an international effort led by the National Audubon Society to identify the areas that are most important for maintaining bird populations and to focus conservation efforts on protecting these sites. Biologists identified 26 such sites in Nebraska, but the Gracie Creek IBA is the only one on private land.

Surveys have identified 215 bird species in the Gracie Creek IBA, including long-billed curlew, upland sandpiper, burrowing owl, grasshopper sparrow, bobolink, swainson's hawk, loggerhead shrike, lark bunting and bald eagle. Last year, Sarah organized volunteers that fanned out and found 27 prairie chicken and sharp-tailed grouse leks while covering just half of the three ranches. She hoped a similar effort would cover the other half this spring, and looks forward to comparing this baseline data to future surveys that follow conservation efforts.

"We're interested in seeing if those

numbers change over time," she said.

A grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust that received preliminary approval in early 2011 could help speed conservation planning and work in the IBA, and expand it to include another 50,000 acres in the upper reaches of the Gracie Creek watershed. The effort doesn't focus only on grass and birds – the three ranches are also managing for blowout penstemon, a state endangered species. That includes having University of Nebraska-Lincoln researchers reintroduce the plant to blowouts on their land, and developing grazing systems that encourage blowouts. The health of Gracie Creek is also a concern – the installation of center pivots and drainage tile in the upper reaches of the stream changed its hydrology, speeding its flow and causing downcutting of the stream in the lower section, affecting hay meadows there. "That stream didn't spread out like it used to," Sarah said. "It just got in that channel and went right on down, really fast."

With the help of the Sandhills Task Force, weirs were installed in recent years to slow the stream, but landowners from across the watershed have begun discussions with a hydrologist on what more could be done.

Nebraska's "Africa"

The IBA designation has drawn more attention and business to Calamus Outfitters. So too has an offshoot that began in 2009: the designation of most of the ranch as the Switzer Ranch and Nature Preserve. That idea grew from a trip that Sarah and Bruce took to Namibia on the southwest coast of Africa that same year that was sponsored by the World Wildlife Fund and the Grassland Foundation, a non-profit foundation based in Lincoln working to advance the creation of protected grasslands while looking for innovative ways to improve the well-being of people who live on the Great Plains.

Namibia has developed a burgeoning, nature-based ecotourism business. People come from around the world to see its vast, unspoiled and, in many places, unfenced landscape and abundant wildlife. Realizing that



The Switzers use school busses as viewing blinds on both prairie chicken (pictured) and sharp-tailed grouse leks. "The prairie chickens never disappoint," said Bruce.

expenses often outweighed revenue, ranchers there discovered they could supplement their income nicely by conserving, promoting and sharing the natural resources on their land. Neighboring landowners have worked together to form freehold conservancies managed for the greater good of the landscape and wildlife. That's a big switch from the time when landowners thought too much wildlife competed with their goats and cows, Sarah said.

"There's a lot of things that they're selling over there," Bruce said, "Wildlife viewing, hunting and then just the landscape – you know, the beautiful vistas and stuff."

"At first we thought, 'Well, yeah, but it's Africa. It's the mystique of Africa.' But you know what? Those people from Long Island that left this morning [after watching the prairie chickens in March] they were just as enthused about what they saw here as what Sarah and I saw when we were in

Namibia."

The trip inspired the Switzers to do more on many fronts, including the inspiration Sarah got while on a safari. She returned home and added Jeep tours of the Sandhills to the offerings, providing guests the opportunity to venture farther into the ranch and further from civilization, and to sip a glass of wine while they're there. And with the help of a partner they've since tested and hope to expand outfitted camping trips. Dubbed by some as "glamping" (short for glamour camping), all guests have to do is paddle and hike their way through the ranch between campsites in the "middle of nowhere," where tents and dinner are waiting. "They didn't see anybody or anything besides wildlife and grass for those two days," said Sarah.

Sarah is now one of five members on the Grassland Foundation's advisory board, and the only one without Ph.D. after her name.



A hot breakfast is standard for birdwatchers and hunters at Calamus Outfitters, which will also provide a home-cooked dinner to hunters and other guests upon request.



Bruce Switzer helps move his neighbor's cows home after they spent the summer grazing on his ranch. While the ranching operation has changed as Calamus Outfitters has grown, the ranch is still a priority for the Switzers.

Learning and Teaching

In nearly all the offerings at Calamus Outfitters there are educational messages to share, including the history and inner workings of the ranch, the Sandhills ecosystem and how they work together.

"A lot of that was built out of having so many people here that we talked to that didn't have a clue on a lot of levels where their food came from, and didn't know how the land was managed," Sarah said. But part of it also has grown from the family's greater appreciation

for the plants and wildlife on their land and their own desire to learn more.

"I've been trying to learn the names [of species], but what I also love are the stories and how they connect," Sarah said. One of her favorites is how the yucca is pollinated only by the yucca moth, which lays its eggs in the plant's flower. When the eggs hatch, the larvae feed on the plant's seeds. "That's a huge symbiotic relationship that hardly anyone knows about. We can go out there, and if it's the right time of year, you can have somebody

eat the flower off the plant while you're explaining how the Indians used it to make footwear and baskets and how it contributes to the overall ecosystem. That's a whole new experience instead of just telling someone, 'There's a soapweed.'"

Still a Ranch

While Calamus Outfitters has grown by leaps and bounds during the past 10 years, ranching is still the number one breadwinner and top priority for the Switzers.

"There would be no outfitters without the ranch," Adam said. "The ranch is kind of the priority. We take care of that first."

But the growth has led to major changes on the ranch, too.

"This is the first year there isn't a cow on the place, the first year we haven't calved out a cow," Bruce said.

The family began moving away from the typical cow/calf operation several years ago, a move driven partly by cattle markets, but mostly by time. Grouse viewing and spring turkey seasons both coincided with calving seasons, which meant that when birders and hunters were on the ranch, checking cows and other chores started at 3 a.m. and continued after serving breakfast to the guests.

"Adam, every year, was just getting busier and busier with his birding and spring turkey hunts, and every year I kept getting a little older," Bruce said. "I couldn't take care of a cow/calf operation by myself anymore."

The Switzers now rent some of their grass to neighbors during the summer and graze yearlings the rest of the year. "I kind of miss it," Bruce said of calving. "Adam and I were talking the other day and he kind of misses it too. I guess if it's in you, it's in you. It's just hard to give it up."

While there are many Nebraska families running businesses that cater to hunters, anglers, birders, canoers and other outdoor enthusiasts, "I don't know of anybody who's crazy enough to do all this," Sarah said with a laugh.

"I still don't know what we've done," Adam said.

The family has overcome the pitfalls of running their business, which unlike some others, is year-round. They work odd hours and nearly every weekend, which means they seldom get to go to church on Sunday. The only days they are closed are Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas, but because part of what they offer is good old-fashioned Nebraska hospitality, they've had hunters join them for Easter and Thanksgiving dinner on more than one occasion.

The Switzers learned to work together long ago, and being able to do so, and having the labor pool, is part of what allows them to do so many different things. The ranch could get by without Calamus Outfitters, but Adam, Sarah and their families couldn't. "It's a significant part of our operation because two more families live here and wouldn't be if we didn't have

Room for More Nature-based Business

While eco-tourism might be a relatively new concept, Nebraskans have been selling nature for more than 100 years. The state's outdoor recreation offerings have grown considerably from those Platte River duck hunts.

VisitNebraska.gov, the state's tourism web site, lists 53 guest ranches with lodging, 106 businesses catering to hunters and anglers, and 21 offering birdwatching. Tom Tabor, ecotourism consultant with the Nebraska Department of Economic Development, said there's room for many more. "We have a lot of things to offer, and it's a way that people can make a pretty good income if they're willing to share their land."

Tabor sees plenty of untapped potential in wildlife watching and backcountry hiking and camping. He pointed to the Sandhills Guest House at Lakeside, where Clint and Jean Anderson's guests can watch long-billed curlews, stilts and other shorebirds from a floating blind, go on guided nature hikes, or sleep under the stars at a remote campsite.

While Nebraska doesn't have mountains like Colorado or lions and cheetahs like Africa, "I just think there are opportunities out there that people are missing out on," Tabor said. "We need to change our perception about what we have here."

Tabor can help farmers and ranchers start a nature-based business. For more information, contact him at (402) 471-7755 or Tom.Tabor@Nebraska.gov.

this," Sue Ann said.

That includes five grandkids, ages 7 months to five, the fifth generation to live on the ranch. "They're why we're doing this," Bruce said last spring, as four got back to the business of playing in the dirt under his front porch after going with him to check cows.

"Are you my whipper snapper or are you my pard'?" he asked Sarah's oldest, Emmett,

now age four.

"I'm your pard'," Emmett replied.

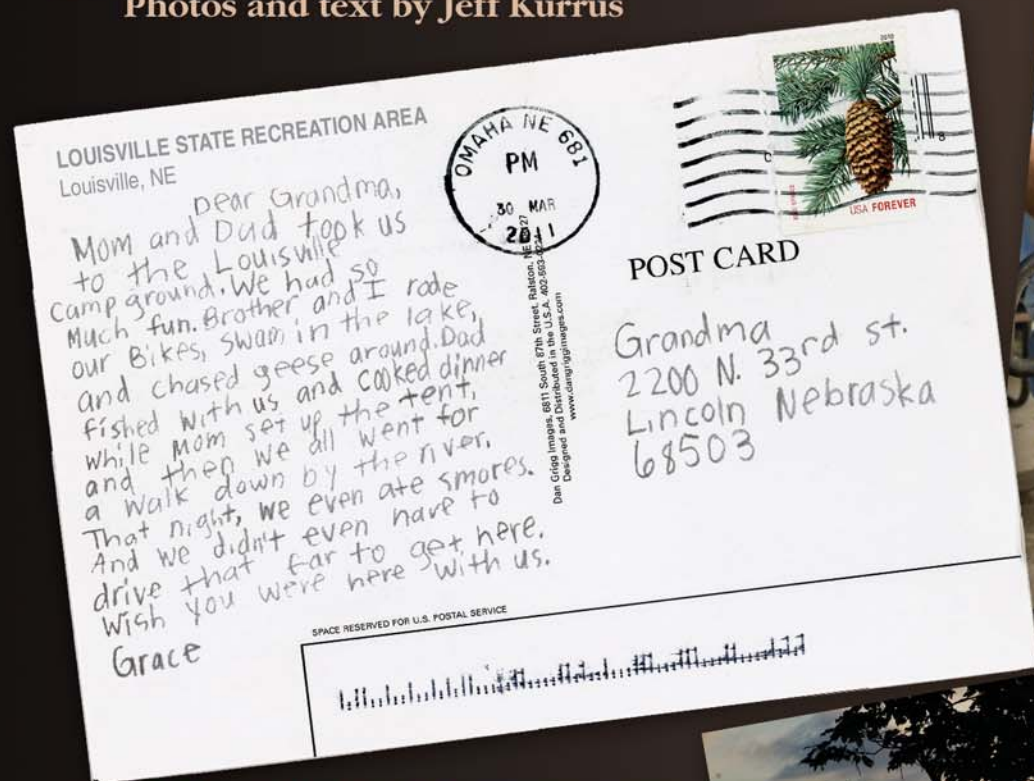
"I'm your pard', too,"

chimed the others.

Thanks to nature, everyone's home. ■

Postcards from Louisville

Photos and text by Jeff Kurrus



Originally this particular *NEBRASKA* story was going to focus on Alex Gonzales' use of a fly rod to catch bluegill. After following him on a trip last year to eastern Nebraska's Walnut Creek Reservoir, it became apparent that the story should not be limited to that particular technique – doing so would diminish the fact that Gonzales catches fish (a lot of them) using a variety of tools that don't take lessons from "A River Runs Through It" to learn.

First, and most importantly, Gonzales was fishing from a belly boat, otherwise known as a float tube. From this portable, one-man flotation device, he navigated the lake with a pair of flippers strapped to his feet, catching bluegills and crappies on seemingly every cast before getting to where he really wanted to fish.

All of these transit fish were caught on ultralight spinning tackle. Making casts toward the bank, to nearby flooded treetops sticking out of the water, and even into open water, Gonzales went few casts without catching a fish or at least getting a strike on the small, 1/8-ounce spoon he was using.



Above: Along with largemouth bass and bluegills, crappies (pictured) are a fish often caught by light tackle anglers in Nebraska lakes. Opposite: Alex Gonzales fly-fishes from his float tube at Walnut Creek Reservoir.

Once he arrived at his destination, an area on the southeastern side of the lake, Gonzales stepped out of his belly boat, picked up his fly rod and started fishing shallow water. "I work shallow water because I'm trying to sight-fish in the spring," he said. "If aquatic vegetation is present, I'll fish the weed edges and open spots in the early morning and late afternoon for the best action."

Because bugs are seemingly everywhere in the summer,

Gonzales' lure options are immense, but he spends most of his time fly-casting wet flies, including pheasant tail or hare's ear nymphs, or dry flies when he's observing fish on the surface or during an insect hatch, including elk-hair caddis and foam poppers in sizes 12 and 14 for bluegills. He'll also fly-cast 1/80-ounce microjigs and wooly buggers for crappie, catching many bluegills and bass on these as well.

Regarding color, Gonzales' choices cover the entire prey fish gamut. "Because big bluegills are predators with a capital P and love minnows, my favorite spoon color is silver. When jigging, I use a blood-red body with a chartreuse tail pattern. When fly-fishing, I use natural colors, including olive, black, and brown, but will also use flies with some orange and yellow in them."

Because fly-fishing is his primary technique, most of his day is spent with various fly patterns in shallow water. "Once the fly or popper gently lands in the water," said Gonzales, "all I do is strip a little line, from three to 10 feet, and then pause from one to 10 seconds. The pause allows the lure's rubber legs and marabou tail to pulsate in the water. When I see the first twitch of the line, I set the hook."

Using this technique as he moved up and down the bank, Gonzales caught fish everywhere he went. If he was catching bluegills smaller than he liked, he moved to a new spot. While he was well pleased with the size of fish he was catching at Walnut Creek that day, with multiple fish measuring more than nine inches, he will resort to other tactics if necessary.

"If nicer fish aren't shallow yet, I'll move back into deeper water and fan cast jigs and small spoons with my spinning tackle," he said. Using a count-down method, he jigs his lure through various depths until he finds fish. Some of this fishing is done from the bank, but most of it is done from his belly boat, which allows him to access spots he can't get to from shore and fish good-looking habitat from a variety of angles.

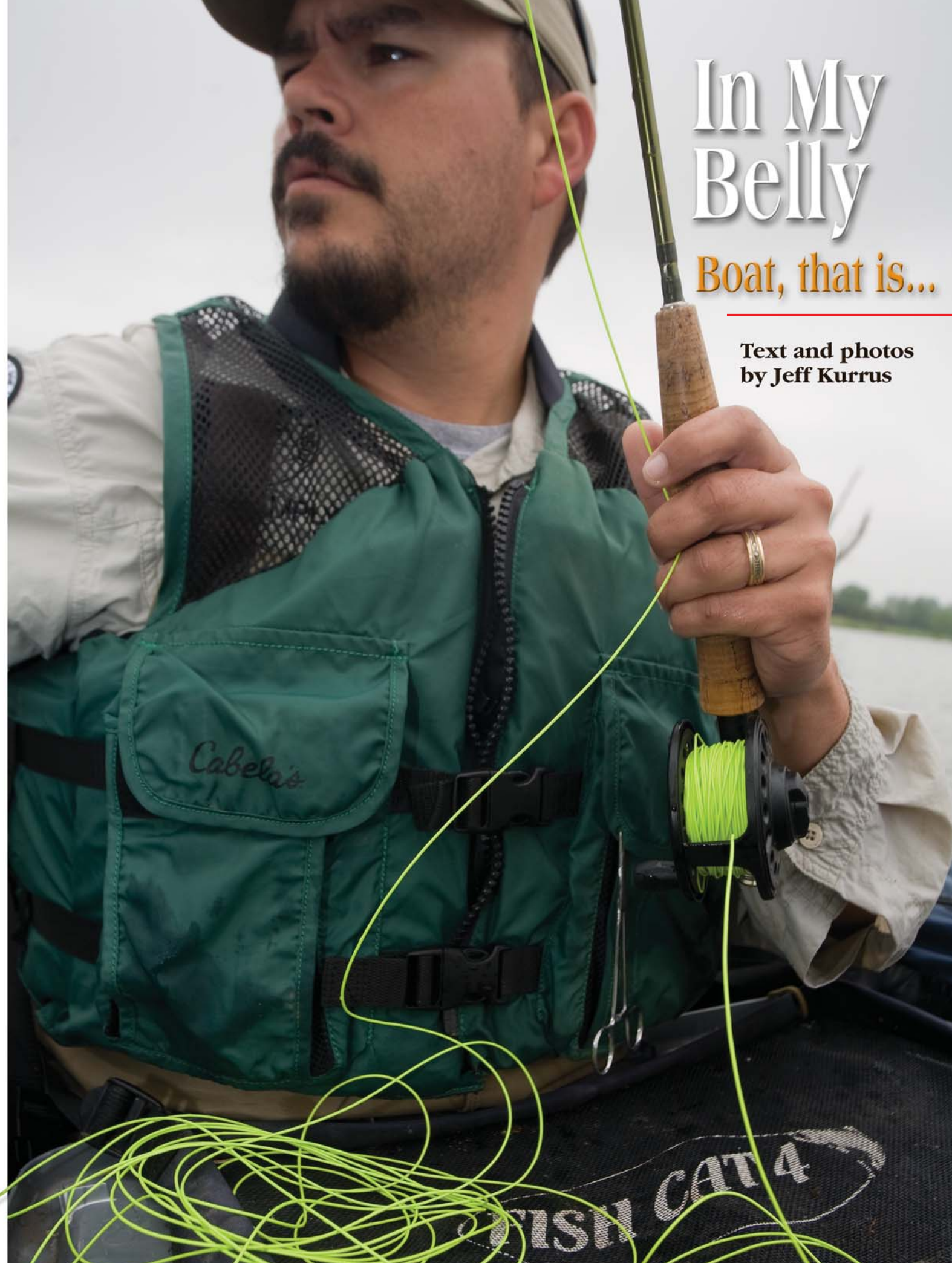
"The maneuverability of a belly boat is one of its best attributes," he said. "While it's not the fastest craft on the water, you can cover a lot of water without ever putting your rod down."

"There's nothing better than fishing from a belly boat," added Commission fisheries biologist and belly boat lover Daryl Bauer. "You're stealthy and can get much closer to fish this way. Those bass in small waters know everything that is going on when you're fishing from the bank or boat. In a belly boat, you're more like a big duck or goose. You're less a threat." Bauer was a major influence to Gonzales' transition to the world of float tubes, as was friend and fellow angler Roger Flanders.

In My Belly

Boat, that is...

Text and photos
by Jeff Kurrus



Tube Pickin'

Float tubes start near \$100 and come in a variety of styles, including traditional, round innertube look-a-likes that allow you to sit inside of them and u-boat shaped vessels that are open in the front. They will all suffice regarding fishability, but those higher in price will have a more durable covering (most are made with nylon), more space for the angler to sit, more storage compartments, and may have a hydrodynamic back for easier navigation.

"For one of the less expensive models you probably won't be disappointed," said Bauer, "but I would suggest you find one that has a flotation bladder that is easily replaced." While a retailer can promise the durability of a bladder, and Bauer supports that some can withstand more wear and tear than others, replacement of the bladder is inevitable if you use your belly boat often.

In addition, some of the higher quality float tubes have more than one bladder. "For safety reasons, this is a good quality just in case one of your bladders busts while fishing," said Bauer. "You'll still have flotation, often in the back rest, and this will give you more peace of mind as you maneuver back to shore."

Lastly, consider how far down in the water you want to be when you fish. The lower the seat on a float tube, the less visible you are. However, casting and basic maneuvering may be compromised. In contrast, a float tube with a higher seat will be more comfortable and easier to fish from, but will make you a little less stealthy.



"Flanders, who unfortunately passed away in 2009, was a Nebraska Fish & Game Association (NEFGA) member and diehard belly boat fly-fisherman," said Gonzales. "At the time I scoffed at fly-fishing and didn't own a belly boat. Yet he told me to drop my preconceived notions that all fly anglers were stuck up, and assured me of the fun I could have catching bluegills from a belly boat. After my first trip with him, I was convinced of both."

Now, Gonzales fishes two or three times a week from his belly boat, and in really good weather will fish seven days a week. His experience definitely shows – using his own advice, he caught and released at least 100 fish at Walnut Creek by lunchtime during our trip together, including crappies, bluegills and largemouth bass on a public lake within minutes of Omaha. All without another belly boat on the water and a constant smile on his face.

Gonzales is a regular contributor to the NEFGA's online outdoor forums at nefga.org. The NEFGA is a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting Nebraska's outdoor pursuits through community, involvement and education. NEFGA features an online forum where the latest fishing and hunting reports, gear reviews, and other outdoor topics posted by some of the most passionate outdoor people in the state can be found.



What's in My Belly?

Just like any outdoor passion, spending a lot of money is easy if one so desires. However, if you're the type of angler who just wants to catch fish without taking out a loan to do so, belly boating is an excellent option. Here are some items you need:

- **Waders** – You'll want these when the water is cool. Look for those designed for land-based trout anglers. As the water warms, stocking foot waders are also serviceable.
- **Spinning rod/reel and/or fly rod/reel combos** – Tell a retailer exactly what you're looking for. If you're unsure, tell the person that you're starting to fish from a belly boat and your principal interest is to catch as many fish as you can, regardless of size. They will be able to recommend something for you.
- **Flippers** – Flippers move you across a lake. Make sure they fit over your wader boots before purchasing.
- **Life jacket** – Don't break the law and be smart. A lifejacket must be attached to your vessel (yes, even a belly boat) while on the water, but go ahead and do yourself a favor by putting one on while you fish.



Opposite: Gonzales releases a bluegill while fly-fishing. Above: Spinning gear allows float tube anglers to fish light tackle for various panfish species. Above, right: Purchase a floating tackle box to carry bass and bluegill flies.

- **Ultralight tackle and a carrying case** – Start with a combination pack of tube jigs. A good beginner assortment for panfish and bass are $\frac{1}{16}$ - to $\frac{1}{32}$ -ounce jigs.

- **Flies and a carrying case** – Purchase both topwater and sinking flies in a variety pack. Also find a carrying case that floats.

- **Pliers and line clippers** – Buy a pair that comes with either a flotation device or lanyard.

For most anglers, many of these items are already within arm's reach. But if all of this is new to you, visit an outdoor retailer. If they're worth their weight at all, they'll point you to the best deals for the money.

Double-decker

Yellow warblers thwart parasitic cowbirds by entombing eggs.

By Jon Farrar

Last May, the 25th to be exact, Breeding Bird Atlas Project coordinator Wayne Mollhoff was looking and listening for evidence of breeding birds near the North Loup River north of St. Paul in Howard County. In a roadside clump of dogwood, about seven feet above the ground, he found a yellow warbler nest, but not your run-of-the-mill yellow warbler nest. This one measured seven inches top to bottom, roughly twice the height of an average nest for the species, and contained just one egg. Wayne was almost certain why

the warbler had built a “double-decker nest.” He checked the nest a month later – it was empty and appeared to have been abandoned for some time. While conceivable that the warbler had finished laying its clutch of eggs and the young had fledged, Mollhoff doubted it.

Since Mollhoff had the necessary state and federal permits he salvaged the nest and his suspicion was later confirmed when now retired Nebraska Game and Parks Commission forensic biologist Dave Oates x-rayed the nest: Five brown-headed cowbird eggs were in the original nest and the warbler had built a new one on top of the them and started a new clutch of her own eggs.

Brown-headed cowbirds are what ornithologists call “brood parasites.” They do not build their own nest, incubate their own eggs or care for their own young. Rather they lay their eggs in the nests of other species where, at least often enough to keep cowbirds plentiful, surrogate parents raise the cowbird young. If there are already eggs in the host’s nest, the female cowbird frequently ejects or damages them, ensuring her eggs will be the first to hatch if the host birds lays more eggs and incubates all. If the young of both species hatch, the larger cowbird chick typically demands and receives the lion’s share of food brought by parent birds and the biological offspring may perish. Species of flycatchers,



Two-story yellow warbler nest found near the North Loup River last May.

finches, vireos and warblers are the most often parasitized, as are bobolinks. Mollhoff said that of 60 yellow warbler nest records in his file, at least 10 had been parasitized by cowbirds. Old World cuckoos are also brood parasites but are specific to the species of host nests. If you are of an etymologic nature, that practice is the origin of the words cuckold, cuckolding and cuckoldry, all being references to an unfaithful wife. American species of cuckoos occasionally lay eggs in a nest other than their own.

Ornithologists long ago noted that host birds such as yellow warblers will build a new nest atop cowbird eggs deposited in their original nest. Thomas Nuttall, a naturalist with the Townsend expedition that crossed Nebraska in 1833, wrote in *A Popular Handbook of the Birds of the United States and Canada*, published in 1891: “It is amusing to observe the sagacity of this little bird [a yellow warbler] in disposing of the eggs of the vagrant and parasitic Cow Troopial [brown-headed cowbird]. The egg, deposited before the laying of the rightful tenant, too large for

ejection, is ingeniously incarcerated in the bottom of the nest, and a new lining place above it so that it never hatched to prove the dragon of the brood.” Nuttall also noted finding three-story nests.

Numerous theories have been advanced as to why cowbirds evolved to leave the rearing of their young to host species. Cowbirds (there are several species) appear to have originated in South America. When cowbirds arrived in North America, large herds of prehistoric grazing mammals roamed the North American continent, a geologic time period ending about two million years ago, and the birds principally fed on insects stirred up in the soil by the hooves of these large ungulates, as well as insects found on the animals themselves. In historic times, brown-headed cowbirds no doubt followed

the vast herds of bison, hence their early-day common name of buffalo bird. Because they make their living taking advantage of constantly moving herds, settling in long enough to mate, build a nest, lay eggs, incubate eggs, and raise chicks to flight was not a good reproductive strategy. Courtship and egg laying can both be done, well, on the run.

“It was probably at that [prehistoric] period that the Cowbird acquired the habit of accompanying the grazing herds, which were wandering continually in search of good pasture, water and shelter, in their season migrations and movements and to escape their enemies,” Otto Widmann is quoted as speculating in Arthur Cleveland Bent’s *Life History of North American Blackbirds, Orioles, Tanagers, and Allies*, 1958.

“As the pastoral habit of the bird

became stronger,” Widmann continued, “it gave rise to the parasitic habit, simply because, in following the roving animals, the bird often strayed from home too far to reach its nest in time for the deposition of the egg, and, being hard pressed, had to look about for another bird’s nest wherein to lay the egg. By a combination of favorable circumstances this new way of reproduction proved successful, and the parasitic offspring became more and more numerous. In the course of time the art of building nests was lost, the desire to incubate entirely gone, paternal and conjugal affection deadened, and parasitism had become a fixed habit.”

Widmann’s theory is unlikely to either be incontrovertibly confirmed or refuted. Even if not the proper explanation, it is plausible in addition to being a good story. ■



X-ray of nest showing five brown-headed cowbird eggs sealed off by the yellow warblers.



Warblers, such as the yellow warbler above, along with flycatchers, finches and vireos, are common hosts of cowbird eggs.

Mountain Mahogany

A Rare but Hardy Shrub of the West

By Gerry Steinauer, Botanist,
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

Mountain mahogany (*Cercocarpus montanus*) is an iconic shrub of the mountain west; a plant few know by name but have seen dozens of times in movies of the old west – a dusty, slicker-clad cowboy riding his saddle horse through dry chaparral. Though a prominent plant westward, mountain mahogany is an uncommon shrub on the high plains of Nebraska, growing on only on a few rocky, Panhandle escarpments.

Four species of *Cercocarpus* grow in the western United States. The Nebraska species is usually referred to simply as mountain mahogany, but other common names include true, birch-leaf and alder-leaf mountain mahogany. *Cercocarpus montanus* ranges from southern Montana to southwestern Oregon, south to Baja California and northern Mexico, and eastward to the Texas Panhandle. An adaptable shrub, it grows at elevations varying from 4,000 to 10,000 feet, where annual precipitation ranges from 10 to 26 inches, in association with alpine shrublands, pine forests, oak woodlands, chaparral and sagebrush.

Mountain mahogany is at the extreme eastern edge of its range in Nebraska. On the Pine Ridge of Dawes, Sheridan and Sioux counties it grows at only a few sites, no more than small patches scattered over a few acres. It is more common on the Wildcat Hills of Scottsbluff and Banner counties, and most abundant several miles south of the Wildcat Hills on an unnamed escarpment near the headwaters of Greenwood and Hackberry creeks in Banner and Morrill counties. Here thickets spread to cover more than a hundred acres.

Mountain mahogany is a three- to eight-foot-tall, multi-stemmed shrub in Nebraska, but may attain small-tree stature on favorable sites farther west. Its stems are usually no more than two inches in diameter and covered with a thin, smooth bark. Although, deciduous in Nebraska, in regions with a mild

climate it is occasionally evergreen.

On Panhandle escarpments, mountain mahogany grows on steep slopes with dry, shallow, rocky soils. Its extensive roots spread wide and deep seeking scarce moisture and contain nitrogen-fixing bacteria in nodules similar to legumes, adding fertility to otherwise infertile soils. On parched, sun-exposed south- and west-facing slopes it forms open thickets of shorter plants; but on moister east- and north-facing exposures, growing in the company of chokecherry and skunkbush sumac, it can establish tall, nearly impenetrable thickets. Stunted, scraggly, scattered ponderosa pines and Rocky Mountain junipers are often found growing among the mountain mahogany. Below the shrub canopy there usually is a sparse cover of purple three-awn, grama grasses and needle-and-thread.

Mountain mahogany flowers in late-May and early June in our region and fruits in July and August. Though a member of the rose family, the small, wind-pollinated flowers lack petals and are rather inconspicuous to the eye. They occur singly or in small clusters of up to 12 on the upper portion of two-year-old stems. The fruit is a hard, cylindrical achene (a small, dry, one-seeded fruit) coated with short, villous hairs. The name *Cercocarpus* is Greek for fruit and tail, which describes the more than two inch long, hairy plumes (persistent styles) attached to the achenes. South Dakota rancher and self-trained botanist Claude Barr wrote of the plumes in his 1983 book *Jewels of the Plains*, that mountain mahogany:

In Nebraska, mountain mahogany is known from only a few sites in the Pine Ridge, the Wildcat Hills in Scotts Bluff and Banner counties, and in an unnamed escarpment south of the Wildcat Hills.



MULE DEER in a mountain mahogany thicket in the Wildcat Hills. Mule and white-tailed deer browse the leaves and young stems throughout the year.

PHOTO BY BOB GRIER



MOUNTAIN MAHOGANY thickets in rocky escarpments south of the North Platte River may spread to cover more than a hundred acres. The band of dark green from left to right in the middle of this photo is mountain mahogany.

“...remains an unobtrusive but pleasant novelty until fall, when its plentiful seed plumes draw attention. The long glossy plumes, which are spiraled, feathery and light-reflecting, become more conspicuous as the leaves are shed in late fall, and at length serve as whirling parachutes to disperse the heavy seeds to no great distance, the shrub’s only attempt at propagation.”

Mountain mahogany is a valuable wildlife plant. Mule and white-tailed deer browse its leaves and young stems throughout the year, and the

stems provide critical winter browse. Dense stands provide excellent escape, fawning and winter cover for deer. Mountain mahogany is prominent in the summer diet of bighorn sheep in areas of the Rockies. In the Wildcat Hills, the shrub is found within the range of one of Nebraska’s reintroduced bighorn sheep herds, but a 2005 fecal pellet analysis study in the Wildcat Hills, found that the sheep consumed little of the shrub, possibly because thickets there are old, not having been rejuvenated by fire for

decades.

When top-killed by fire, mountain mahogany vigorously resprouts. First-year sprouts can reach 1½ feet in height and bear unusually large, tender and nutritious leaves. In addition to the leaves, browsers generally eat only succulent, first-year twigs as they are easily digested and higher in protein compared to older, woody stems. Another benefit of prescribed fires is removing dead stems, making the entire plant accessible to browsers. A prescribed fire is planned for the

spring of 2012 on the Cedar Canyon Wildlife Management Area, which is used by bighorn sheep and contains extensive mountain mahogany thickets. The prescribed fire will reduce pine and juniper densities on the escarpment (bighorn sheep prefer more open habitats to densely wooded sites) and revitalize mountain mahogany for big game browsing.

There is no evidence Plains Indians used mountain mahogany for medicine, tools or building materials, possibly because of its limited distribution and



THE SMALL, DRY FRUIT of mountain mahogany is attached to two-inch-long, spiraled plumes that carry them on the wind to sites where they might germinate.

abundance in the region. Some western tribes, however, used the plant extensively – southern California tribes used its hard, dense wood for arrow tips, spears, fighting clubs, digging tools and carved pipe heads. The Navajos used mountain mahogany extracts to treat stomach ailments, reportedly including sickness from overindulgence of venison, and to

speed postpartum recovery. Chewing mountain mahogany leaves from a deer-browsed plant was thought to bring luck to Navajo hunters. Recently mountain mahogany has been promoted as a drought- and heat-tolerant, water-wise landscaping shrub. Perhaps someday this “pleasant novelty” will grace the lawns of western Nebraska towns and cities. ■

Belles and Bulls

By Eric Fowler

Kirsten Holscher posted some photos on her Facebook page last fall that no other 12-year-old girl in Nebraska could: bag shots of her and the 5x7 bull elk she harvested in the Pine Ridge near her home in Crawford. Four other girls nearly matched her feat, except that they were age 13. The success rate for the girls in that age bracket? 100 percent, a tad higher than the statewide elk success rate of 61 percent.

The girls were five of 39 female elk hunters that took to the field in Nebraska last fall to partake in a sport that might be considered a man's game

to some. But it's not – women make up one of the fastest growing segments in shooting sports nationally, a fact that no doubt has helped fuel a recent rise in overall hunting permit sales. And they're no stranger to elk camp.

Nebraska is no exception, especially when it comes to big game hunting. Of the 118,500 people who hunted deer, elk, pronghorn and turkey in Nebraska in 2010, approximately 10,000 – 8.4 percent – were female. In 2002, around 6,000 women made up 6.5 percent of Nebraska's big game hunters. That's a 67 percent increase in just nine years in a sport that also saw a 25 percent

increase among male participants.

Many factors have played into the rise in numbers among both male and female big game hunters, including the increased availability of permits and game and the reduced minimum age for deer and turkey hunting. Nebraska Game and Parks Commission education programs like Becoming an Outdoors Woman, Outdoor Skills Camps and the Archery in the Schools Program have certainly sparked interest among women.

But in some cases, including the increase in female elk hunters, who held 15 percent of the Nebraska's 272 tags compared to 4 of 77 in 2002, it simply comes down to a woman's decision to try something new.

That was the case for Rebecca McFarlane of Hubbard who, like Holscher, drew an elk tag the first time she applied, a feat in itself. McFarlane has hunted since she was a girl growing up on the family ranch in California. She bow and rifle hunts for deer in Nebraska and has hunted big game in South Africa. Yet while she has accompanied her husband, Brian, on elk hunts in Colorado many times, she hadn't hunted elk herself.

"I don't really have a good reason for not trying it earlier," she said. "It was probably the cost – we had three kids going off to college."

She now has a hunt to remember: trips to Chadron on three straight weekends, having her husband call a small bull within 12 yards the one day she didn't take her bow into the field – "I didn't go out without my bow again" – and finally harvesting her trophy with a rifle, all while undergoing chemotherapy and radiation treatments for cancer.

"It was really a good, good hunt for me," she said. "It was awesome."

"A lot of the women are like, 'Holy cow. You went hunting for an elk. How'd you do that?' To me it's just no different



Rebecca McFarlane of Hubbard harvested her bull in the Bordeaux Unit near Chadron.

than hunting a deer. Except that they're bigger. Yea, they're a lot bigger. Especially when you walk up to them.

"I can't explain it to them," said McFarlane. "I think either you have it or you don't, that desire to go out and want to do that. For me it's that I can go out and nobody bothers me. It's so peaceful to me, whether I'm hunting with a rifle or hunting with a bow."

"Going out, just to get a break from everyday life and the stresses of that, I just really enjoy it."

For Holscher, it wasn't even her first elk hunt. That came a year earlier, when she harvested a cow on a youth permit in Wyoming.

"I've always wanted to shoot an elk," she said. "Having my dad [Kurt] and grandpa always getting elk tags made me want to get one."

Kirsten and Kurt didn't have far to go to hunt. They started scouting a few miles from their house in the fall and put some bulls to bed the eve of the

season opener. With bulls bugling on both sides of the road on opening morning, they simply went after another bull when another hunter spooked their initial target. With the second bull within range and her rifle resting across a backpack on her dad's lap, she ended her hunt before the sun had even been up an hour.

"We went over and looked at him and just one look I could see that it was the bull of my dreams," she said.

In reality, it would be the bull of anyone's dreams, boy or girl.

Kirsten ran all the way back to their vehicle where her grandparents were waiting. Grandpa had bet grandma that she wouldn't get her elk.

"We knew she would get one," Kurt said.

"She did everything right. She was pretty excited. I was just happy to be able to tag along. It was a pretty neat experience for a father to have a 12-year-old girl shoot an elk." ■

Apply Now for Permits

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission authorized a record 294 elk permits for 2011. That's nearly six times as many as were issued 10 years ago, and speaks well for the health and growth of the state's elk herd.

While 61 percent of hunters filled their tag last year, a relatively high success rate compared to other states, the chances of drawing a permit were not nearly as good. About 2,300 people applied for permits in 2010, and the overall odds of drawing a once-in-a-lifetime bull permit were 1 in 25. The odds of drawing a cow permit are much better, as good as 1 in 4 in some units.

Elk permits, as well as most pronghorn and deer permits in a handful of units, are issued through a drawing. Applications will be taken from May 16 through June 3 online at OutdoorNebraska.gov, by mail or at any Commission permitting office.



Kirsten Holscher harvested her bull in the Hat Creek Unit near Crawford.

Nebraska's Diverse but Vexing Sedges

Although hard to identify, sedges are important plants across the state.

By Gerry Steinauer, Botanist, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

As the Commission's only botanist, I am often good-naturedly harassed by the wildlife biologists with whom I work for my perceived less-cool, more-nerdy profession. They have gone so far as labeling me with nicknames – botany-boy, friend-of-the-fern and blossom. Revenge, oh sweet revenge, comes on botany field days while in prairie or marsh I ask an unsuspecting wildlife biologist to identify a particular sedge (nondescript, grasslike plants). Invariably, they stall, stammer, blush then mutter “I don't know.” Take that wildlife-boy! Friend-of-the-ferret!

Wildlife biologists, however, have plenty of company as sedge species are numerous and notoriously difficult to identify. Sedges belong to the family Cyperaceae and genus *Carex*. There are an estimated 2,000 species worldwide – 480 in North America and 81 in Nebraska alone. They are distinguished from other genera of the Cyperaceae, including the spike-rushes, bulrushes and nut-sedges, by the presence of perigynia, baglike structures surrounding the seeds that are absent in the other groups. The perigynium acts as a flotation device to aid seed dispersal and may protect seeds from mold and fungal infections.

Sedges are similar to grasses (family Poaceae) in general appearance. They differ from grasses, however, in flower structure and by having solid, triangular stems (“sedges have edges” being a useful rhyme in identification) and a leaf sheath (the lower portion of the leaf) that envelops the stem. In contrast, grasses have often hollow, round stems and split, open leaf sheaths, such as on corn. Sedge species are identified mainly on the shape and details of the fruiting spikes, seeds and perigynia. Therefore, plants bearing ripe seed and well-developed perigynia are usually needed for positive identification, along with a good hand lens. Even botanists struggle to identify some sedges.

Sedges are cool-season plants with most growth, flowering and fruiting occurring in the spring. Many sedges spread vegetatively by rhizomes (underground lateral stems with buds that produce new shoots) forming loose to dense colonies, while others are fibrous-rooted plants growing in

tight clumps. Sedges vary considerably in size: The marsh-inhabiting **rippgut sedge**, for example, grows up to four feet tall and can form robust colonies, while the delicate, prairie-inhabiting **needleleaf sedge** rarely tops six inches in height. Several sedges are rare in the state, including **mud sedge**, a northern species known only from a single fen (a groundwater-fed wetland with peat or muck soils) in Cherry County. Others are widespread, such as **bottlebrush** and **woolly sedge**. All of our sedges are native species except ditch sedge, a European species collected only once in Knox County.

Most Nebraska sedges grow in wetlands, including the aptly named **brown bog**, **Hale's meadow** and **fen tussock sedge**. In meadows, sedges can contribute significantly to hay crops. Eastern Nebraska's deciduous woodlands are home to many species. At Indian Cave State Park or Fontenelle Forest one might easily encounter 10 or more flowering species in the spring, including **Hitchcock's**, **few-fruited** and **Davis' sedge**.

Some sedges are adapted to prairies. A moist, southeastern Nebraska tallgrass prairie may have five or six species; including **Bicknell's**, **yellow-fruit** and **sun sedge**, which is common in prairies statewide, though rarely noticed due to its diminutive size and early flowering. On dry Panhandle prairies one may encounter only two or three species.

Blackroot sedge, named for its mass of black, wiry, sod-forming roots, is common in the Panhandle. It is a protein-rich, prime forage species, especially in spring when at peak growth. A Panhandle rancher once told me: “It's what makes my cattle fat.” Blackroot is also favored by bison, bighorn sheep, black-tailed prairie dogs and other native grazers. Like many sedges, its seeds are eaten by small mammals and birds.

To many Nebraskans, sedges are an unknown and overlooked group of plants likely mistaken for grasses. To wildlife biologists they are an enigma to be avoided if possible. For botanists, they are a diverse and challenging group of plants and respected constituents of the state's floral communities. ■



Brevior's sedge, shown in fruit, is a common sedge in prairies and meadows nearly statewide.

PHOTO BY CHRIS HELZER

A Burning Question

What's in YOUR Pallet (of Firewood)?

By Julie Van Meter, State Entomologist, Neb. Dept. of Agriculture

The Memorial Day weekend unofficially kicks off the summer camping season. Many people will be packing up tents or firing up motor homes and heading to state parks and private campgrounds in Nebraska and other states. Vehicles will be packed tight with tents and sleeping bags, coolers and lawn chairs, bikes and grills. What about firewood? Are you planning to take firewood with you when you camp? Would you reconsider if you knew you might be introducing an invasive insect to your favorite campground?

Firewood has recently become a hot button issue in the battle against invasive plant pests. Many damaging insects and diseases can be transported from infested to non-infested areas through the movement of firewood. Emerald ash borer (EAB) is one example; others include gypsy moth, Asian longhorn beetle and thousand cankers disease of walnut trees.

The emerald ash borer is a 1/8- to 1/2-inch-long, metallic-green beetle originally from Asia. The larvae feed under the bark of ash trees, damaging the phloem of the tree and creating S-shaped galleries. This damage prevents the movement of water and nutrients throughout the tree, eventually causing the tree to die.

Symptoms of an EAB infestation include branch or crown die-back, bark splitting, and suckering, which occurs when sprouts or shoots grow up in a cluster on the trunk or base of the tree. EAB adults create a 1/8-inch, D-shaped exit hole in the ash bark as they emerge from the tree. EAB typically require one year to complete a life cycle, and it may take a few years of EAB infestation before symptoms appear in a tree.

EAB has not yet been found in Nebraska, but has been confirmed in 15 states since its discovery in the United States in 2002. Infested states include Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, Ohio,

Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia and Wisconsin. Ontario and Quebec, Canada also have EAB infestations. Many infestations are known to be the direct result of firewood movement, as EAB larvae can reside in firewood cut from infested trees and emerge later after the firewood has been transported to a previously non-infested area.

The United States Department of Agriculture has enacted a quarantine regulating the movement of hardwood firewood from EAB-infested areas to non-infested areas. Similarly, because of concerns about thousand cankers disease, the Nebraska Department of Agriculture enacted a quarantine in 2010 prohibiting the movement of hardwood firewood from Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Tennessee, Utah and Washington into Nebraska.

The Nebraska Forest Service estimates that Nebraska is home to more than 40 million ash trees. Look at the trees around your house, your school, and your favorite campground. How many of these trees are ash? Each of these trees is at risk of infestation by EAB, should it be introduced to our state.

None of us want to be responsible for bringing EAB, or any other invasive plant pest, to Nebraska, so take these easy, commonsense steps to prevent it. Leave your firewood at home and purchase locally harvested and produced firewood at your destination. Don't bring firewood back home with you when you finish camping, either – leave it for the next camper. It's a cheap price to pay to help make sure our state's trees stay as healthy as possible.

If you think you've found an EAB-infested tree, contact the Nebraska Department of Agriculture at (402) 471-2394. ■

For more information, visit www.emeraldashborer.info.



S-shaped galleries caused by EAB larvae feeding under the bark of an ash tree.

An adult EAB, approximately 1/8 to 1/2-inch in length. Adults are active from late-May through July, with peak emergence in June. After emerging from the ash tree in spring, they feed on ash foliage, mate and lay their eggs in ash bark cracks and crevices.



An ash tree showing crown die-back, a symptom of an EAB infestation.

PHOTO BY JULIE VAN METER

BOTTOM TWO PHOTOS – MICK SKWAROK, WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, TRADE AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

The Lingering Effects of Drought

Dry conditions can affect trees long after moisture returns.

By Mark Harrell, Nebraska Forest Service, University of Nebraska

The drought that spanned Nebraska most of the past decade seems to have ended, but its effects on our trees can still be seen. It takes several years for a tree to fully recover from the damage that dry soil causes to roots, and during this time the tree is more susceptible to a variety of problems.

During periods of drought (and even during the first couple of years of recovery), a tree's root system is not able to supply its foliage with all the water it needs for photosynthesis, so less energy is captured from the sun and the tree is not able to fully carry out all of its functions.

One consequence of the reduced energy is a drop in the production of cellulose – one of the primary materials used in building new plant tissue. This causes trees to produce fewer, smaller leaves and shorter stems, making the canopy look thinner and more open than normal.

The drop in energy also causes a reduced production of defensive chemicals, making the tree more susceptible to a wide variety of diseases and insect pests. Insect borers, bark beetles and stem and root diseases all benefit from drought stress because of the weakened tree defense it causes. One pine disease that has been a larger problem in the last few years because of the recent drought is Diplodia blight, which has killed branches of and, in some cases, entire drought-stressed Austrian pines.

Some of the common defensive chemicals produced by trees include phenols, coumarins, lignins, tannins, and resins: Phenols can kill insects and fungi; coumarins inhibit the growth of fungi; Lignins and tannins make trees more difficult for insects to digest; and tannins can also be toxic. Resins, found mostly in conifers, deter insect feeding and inhibit the growth of fungi. Reduced amounts of any of these

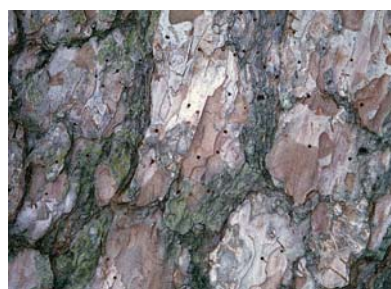


An Austrian pine in Kearney killed by Diplodia blight after being stressed by drought.

chemicals favor insect pests and pathogens and can lead to larger amounts of damage if the tree is attacked.

Drought can also affect the association that trees have with beneficial soil fungi. These fungi, known as mycorrhizal fungi (myc means fungus, rhiz means root), grow in close association with tree roots. In normal years, trees rely on the fungi for the absorption of most of the water and minerals that the trees need. The structure of mycorrhizal fungi makes them more effective in absorbing minerals from the soil, and their abundant growth can increase the surface area of a tree's root system by 500 percent or more. In exchange for the water and minerals, trees provide the fungi with energy in the form of sugars. This symbiotic relationship is a relatively inexpensive way for trees to significantly expand their root systems, and can be very beneficial to trees during times of short-term drought when fungal strands can probe the soil for water far beyond what a tree's root system could do on its own.

Prolonged periods of drought, however, can cause this arrangement to



Bark beetle holes and chewed pine sawyer beetle oviposition sites on a Scotch pine indicate some of the damage that can be done to a tree as a result of drought.

PHOTOS BY MARK HARRELL

break down – as soil becomes too dry, even the fungi are not able to pull up the full amount of water a tree needs, resulting in reduced photosynthesis, less captured energy and smaller amounts of sugar produced and provided to the fungi. This results in a reduction in the volume of mycorrhizal fungi growing around the tree's roots, further reducing the amount of water that can be absorbed and causing a chain-reaction that can continue to get worse until the tree ultimately dies.

If soil moisture conditions improve, the process reverses itself slowly and the tree's root system and mycorrhizal fungi begin to grow again, but this process of regrowth may take several years before the tree's root system and mycorrhizal fungi reach their pre-drought size.

The recent drought may have ended, but only time will tell for sure. In the meantime, we need to take steps that will promote good tree health and help our trees recover. These include providing additional water during dry periods, mulching with wood chips, and controlling insect pests and diseases as needed. With a little extra care at this time, we will likely be able to enjoy our trees for many years to come. ■

For more information on trees and tree health, visit the Nebraska Forest Service website at www.nfs.unl.edu.

Lost in The Wilderness

Being prepared makes for a much safer outdoor adventure.

By Tom Scheimo

There's an old saying, "Those who fail to prepare, are preparing to fail." This certainly applies to any serious hike, as I once found out the hard way.

New to Chadron a few years ago, I decided to try a winter hike on Chadron State Park's Black Hills Overlook Trail. Instead of consulting a good forest service map or a topo map, I relied on a simple map that was devoid of any accurate references or distance points. Arriving at the park two hours before sunset, I thought the three miles indicated on the map would be a piece of cake. Things went downhill from there.

While Chadron SP's trails are now well-marked, such was not the case then. The hike was taking longer than anticipated, and lengthening shadows from the approaching sunset and the absence of trail markers en route led me to a hasty, and unwise, shortcut attempt. Reasoning that the park's canyon system led out to Chadron Creek, I assumed I could simply descend to the canyon floor and follow it out to the parking lot.

Three things complicated this plan: First, there was thick and tangled brush throughout the canyon. Second, deep snow complicated problems with the brush. Third, while the last hour of sun illuminated the canyon's rim, long dark shadows were

already reducing visibility within.

The hike out took 30 minutes past sunset. I lucked out, stumbling to freedom in the cold night with just a few new cuts. Had this hike taken place just west in the larger expanse of the national forest, I might not have been so fortunate. To avoid such mistakes, thorough preparations must be made.

It's better to avoid getting lost than to try to find your way out later. Here's how you do that:

- Make a complete study of the area you are going into. A detailed and accurate map is a must – know the terrain with all its landmarks, distances and where good roads are that border the area. A real compass is also essential – GPS units can be helpful, but sometimes malfunction. Create a plan that allows plenty of time for your venture. Make sure you let a reliable friend or local official, such as the local sheriff, know of your plans and when you expect to be back. Trailnote.com offers this service free.

- Check the weather before you go and be ready to postpone your trip if necessary. Severe weather can be deadly. Plan to stay with your route, and be prepared to go back if you cannot.

- Take all necessary equipment with you in case you get lost or run into unexpected problems. This would include a first-aid kit, waterproof plastic tarp (5x7 is good), food bars, plenty of water, sunscreen, hat, waterproof jacket, flashlight and batteries, matches or reliable lighter, knife, whistle, a good marker to leave notes, signal mirror and insect repellent. Pepper spray is a good idea if you think hostile animals could be a problem. Cell phones might be a help, but are often "out of range" in remote areas. A hiking stick can come in handy. In addition, take a friend – solo ventures into the wilderness carry additional risks.

- After making these preparations be sure to frequently

check your map against where you are. Then, if you start to find yourself in unfamiliar territory, you will not be far from your last known reference point. Your compass should help guide you back.

If you follow the tips above, you may never have to deal with being lost. However, if you find yourself lost for whatever reason, here are some tips that should help resolve your problem:

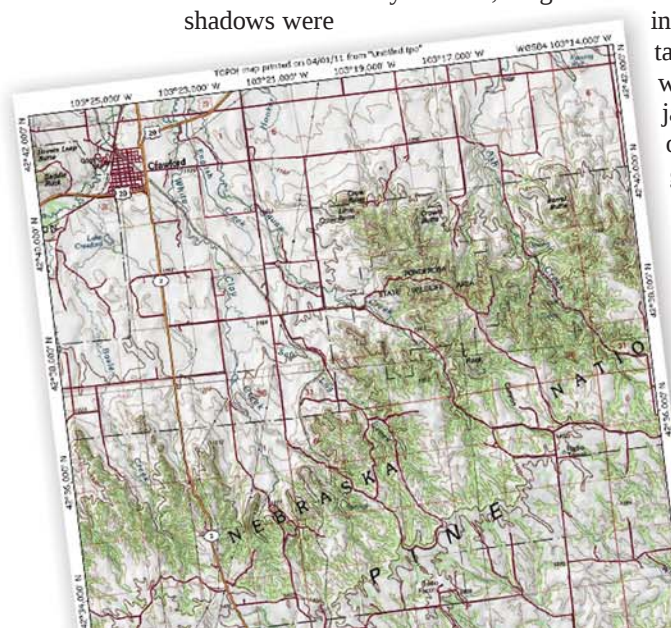
- At the first sign of being lost, stop and take time to assess your situation. When was the last time you knew exactly where you were? What landmarks do you recognize? Is there safe high ground nearby you can see from?

- If it is dark or storming, find or make shelter as soon as possible. You need a shelter where you can be dry and warm. Avoid any location that could be flooded. Making a fire is a good idea, so long as you do not start a forest fire. A fire can also act as a signal. If you have brought a metal pan or cup, you can boil water to purify for drinking.

- If you have shared your wilderness plans with someone reliable, help should be on the way within a day. Getting lost even deeper in the wilderness will make rescue attempts difficult, so don't venture from where you are at unless you have a sure route back to a known landmark and use your marker to leave notes behind you for rescuers.

Being prepared helped minimize a "lost" situation in 2009 for one of our hiking groups in Dawes County – hiking on the Pine Ridge Trail east from the West Ash trailhead, we lost the marked trail due to storm-downed trees obscuring trail junction signs. By simply consulting our maps, then backtracking, we were able to hike out without any real trouble.

By making careful preparations for your wilderness outing, you greatly increase your chances for a wonderful adventure. ■



ATTRACTIONS/EVENTS

WILDERNESS SURVIVAL CLASS - Start a fire with the bow-drill method, build a survival shelter, be introduced to primitive traps, cordage, flint knapping, edible and medicinal plants, water location and purification, and much more! Go to www.greatplainstracker.com.

BOOKS/PUBLICATIONS/VIDEOS

EXPLORE NEBRASKA art, history, culture and the great outdoors with a subscription to Nebraska Life Magazine. One year (six issues) for \$21 or two years (12 issues) just \$38. Phone (800) 777-6159, write us at 206 W Norfolk Ave, Norfolk NE 68702-0819 or visit www.NebraskaLife.com. Makes a great gift.

DISCOVER NEBRASKA HISTORY and its culture with a membership to the Nebraska State Historical Society. Membership includes *Nebraska History* and *Nebraska History News*, quarterly for \$40/annually or save \$10 and get two years for \$70/annually. Call 1-800-833-6747 or (402) 471-3270 and mention Code N2, or visit www.nebraskahistory.org. A membership makes a great gift!

SHAHER'S NEBRASKA PHEASANT HUNTING ALMANAC celebrates Nebraska's 2011 Pheasantennial, the 100th anniversary of the ring-necked pheasant and more. A unique book and gift. Black and white edition: \$20.00, Color edition: \$35.00. Send check or money order to Lonnie Shafer, PO Box 404 Exeter NE 68351. Email: Exeter.shafer@yahoo.com or call (402) 266-4401.

NEBRASKAland

For Visa or MasterCard orders call
1-800-NEB-LAND
(632-5263)

GUN DOG TRAINING

All Sporting Breeds

All dogs worked on foot – no horses. Obedience included. Midwest's finest facilities.

Started and trained dogs for sale.

"Training for hunters by hunters."

Over 4,000 Dogs Trained!

Wilderness Kennels
Henry Sader-Lincoln, NE
(402) 423-4212

Since 1968

www.wildernesskennels.com

DOGS

PLUM CREEK KENNEL. German shorthairs, stud service, puppies and started dogs. Training for all pointing breeds. Specialize in training the handler as well as the dog. Wayne Clark, Percival, Iowa (near Omaha) (712) 529-4238, clarks1@iowatelecom.net.

DUCKDAWG RETRIEVERS - Raising exceptional hunting yellow and black Labradors. Puppies raised in our home. 30-month, written health guarantee. Stud service: GRHRCH UN DuckDawg's Eba Roll the Dice and GRHRCH UH MacMac Magic Eyes A'Smilin MH. The first Grand Hunting Retriever Champions in Nebraska. www.duckdawg.com Ron Green, DVM and Libby Milroy, North Platte, NE (308) 534-3659.

PREMIER GUNDOGS TRAINING KENNEL, Inc: Nebraska state licensed gundog training kennel specializing in training programs for waterfowl and upland hunting retrievers, spaniels, pointing Labradors and all gundog pointing breeds. Dale-Kris Taylor (402) 787-2048 www.premiergundogs.com.

FLATLANDER KENNELS INC. Bayard, NE Full-time retriever training facility for the serious hunter or AKC and HRC hunt tester. Trainer of Nebraska's first and only GRHRCH's! Super Retriever Series competitor and a member of Avery's Team Waterdog. Training available for all levels of hunt tests and gundogs. Chris Jobman: (308) 249-0707, www.flatlanderkennels.com.

FISH/FISHING

FISH FOR SALE. Catfish, largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, perch, crappie, bluegill, walleye, rainbow trout, grass carp, minnows. Pleasant Valley Fish Farm, 72645 U.S. Highway 83, McCook, NE 69001. (308) 345-6599.

NEBRASKA LAKE MANAGEMENT. Biological lake surveys, fish stocking, rough fish control, lake aeration, algae control, aquatic weed control. Rob Hofpar, Aquatic Biologist, licensed, insured and qualified. (402) 784-6005 Valparaiso - (888) 850-2460 www.nelakes.net.

GET YOUR HUNTING/FISHING PERMIT online today! Don't wait until tomorrow to go outside with the family. Log on to www.OutdoorNebraska.org and click on *Purchase a Permit under Licenses and Fees*.

FOOD/GIFTS/HOME

HOME BREWING/BEER AND WINEMAKING. Fermenter's Supply, 8410 K Plaza, Suite #10, Omaha, NE 68127. Phone orders only, (888) 655-2739. Advice line (402) 593-9171. www.fermenterssupply.com.

GUIDES/OUTFITTERS

CANOE - KAYAK - TUBE RENTALS on the beautiful Niobrara River with Dryland Aquatics at Sparks, Nebraska. Your Niobrara River Specialist. (800) 337-3119. www.drylandaquatics.com, info@drylandaquatics.com.

OUTDOOR EQUIPMENT

IS PERFORMANCE IMPORTANT? For the finest canoes and accessories look to Great Plains Canoe Co., 205 Main, Springfield, NE 68059. Phone (402) 253-2000.

VACATIONS/RESORTS

THE OLDE MAIN STREET INN. A historic bed and breakfast listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Beautiful dining room with fireplace. Headquarters for General Nelson Miles, Wounded Knee Incident, 1890-91. 115 Main Street, Chadron NE 69337 (308) 432-3380. www.chadron.com/oldemain.

DIAMOND B TROUT RESORT, Orchard, Nebraska. Lodge, cabins, spring-fed lakes, playground equipment, paddleboats. Great for families, groups, hunters. Book your cabin now! Call for brochure (800) 974-3002. www.diamondbtroutresort.com.

BIG BLUE RANCH & LODGE - Enjoy fishing, hunting, hiking, birdwatching and ranch adventures on 2000+ acre cattle ranch in southeastern Nebraska. Beautiful log cabin, with fireplaces, kitchens & big covered porches, overlooks 20-acre lake. www.bigblueranch.com (402) 730-3643.

PLANNING A VACATION? Why not spend it at a Nebraska state park? With more than 80 state park and recreation areas across Nebraska to choose from, you can enjoy a campground or cabin and enjoy activities such as fishing, swimming, camping and hiking. Call (402) 471-1414 for reservations or go online at www.OutdoorNebraska.org and follow the Parks link.

WANTED

WANTED - VOLUNTEER INSTRUCTORS. Interested in making a difference? Get involved in teaching the next generation of hunters. Contact Mike Streeter at mike.streeter@nebraska.gov or call (402) 471-6134.

Classified Rates: 85¢ per word, minimum \$15. Closing: First business day six weeks before issue date. Classified ads are accepted on a first-come, first-served, space-available basis. Classified Ads, NEBRASKAland Magazine, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370. Telephone (402) 471-5473. Fax: (402) 471-1984. E-mail: ngpc.classifieds@nebraska.gov. Ads are posted online at NebraskaLandMagazine.com at no additional charge.



**Prairie Plains
MADE BY HAND**

PRODUCT OF U.S.A.

**PRAIRIE PLAINS
RESOURCE INSTITUTE**
AURORA • NEBRASKA

EST. 1980



**Prairie
Plains**

RESOURCE
INSTITUTE

IT'S WORTH THE EFFORT.

Making anything by hand takes time, patience and a commitment to quality. For 30 years Prairie Plains Resource Institute has been restoring Nebraska prairies with over 150 species of Nebraska seed - collected, processed and planted by hand. That same care and attention goes into everything we do - planting prairies, offering outdoor education for all ages and maintaining our 7 Nebraska prairie preserves. Learn more by visiting our website and become a member today!

1307 L Street | Aurora, NE 68818 | 402-694-5535 www.prairieplains.org

Explore the Science of Life



Environmental Restoration Science

Explore, through the School of Natural Resources, how soil and water resources are impacted by pollutants, population changes, human activities and natural agents and learn restoration techniques to restore, preserve and protect our environment.



University of Nebraska-Lincoln College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources
103 Agricultural Hall • Lincoln, NE 68583-0702 • 1-800-742-8800 ext. 2541
casnr.unl.edu • casnr@unl.edu

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln is an equal opportunity educator and employer with a comprehensive plan for diversity.



Photo by Steve and Bobbi Olson

WE ARE "GRAZING LAND LOVERS" THROUGH AND THROUGH dedicated to the enhancement of grassland by creating public awareness and improvement of the grazing lands in Nebraska. NGLC's focus is to provide voluntary technical assistance and educational opportunities on grazing land management. Healthy Nebraska grazing lands translate directly into forage for livestock, habitat for wildlife, economic benefits for landowners and rural communities, and clean water for much of the Great Plains.

We offer consultation and educational programs to provide training on the value of grassland stewardship and mentoring programs that allow grassland management to be handed down to the next generation of farmers and ranchers. Call us now to find out how you can join others on our quest to preserve Nebraska's grasslands.

402-426-2033 • www.nebraskagrazinglands.org



▲ Waterfowl hunting on the North Loup River around 1929. Pictured from left to right are Vic Dobish, Bill Dobish (standing on the car), Jerry Hupanak, George Dobish and Ed Lukasiewicz (my grandfather), all from Farwell, where grandpa owned a hardware store.

— Michael Yearley, Lincoln, Nebraska



▲ This is a photo of my cousin, Steve Topil (right), and me taken in October 1968. Steve and I were 15 and 16 years old, respectively, at the time. We had just completed a successful duck hunt on a farm pond north of Rising City. Steve used a Long Tom single-shot 12-gauge while I had a Stevens model 940C single-shot 20-gauge, which I still own today.

Steve's dad, the late Joe I. Topil, introduced us to hunting. We still live in Rising City and occasionally enjoy a duck hunt together.

Every month I look forward to the next issue of NEBRASKAland Magazine.

— Hank Topil, Rising City, Nebraska



◀ This picture was taken in 1967 after my father, Dave Hansen (far left) and partners returned from a typical hunt at the Plattsmouth Waterfowl Refuge. His hunting group consisted of three other men, Carol, Vic Johnson and Sal (left to right), all of which worked at the old Swift & Co. packing plant in south Omaha. Following the closure of Swift in Omaha, my dad opted to transfer to the Glenwood, Iowa, plant, thus Forney Refuge became his new hunting grounds. Just becoming old enough I then began hunting with my father and even after shooting our limit at Forney time after time, he still insisted there was no place like Plattsmouth. I believe forging hunting memories with close workmates may have had something to do with that opinion. I would enjoy learning the last names of Carol and Sal, should any of your readers know or would like a copy of the picture.

— Keith Hansen, Manhattan, Kansas

► This was in the early 1920s on a ranch west of Wayside, 25 miles northwest of Chadron.

The photo shows my husband's father, Ira A. Felz, with his horse "Dandy" and a coyote. Ira A. got money for coyotes and lived on his ranch for 58 years. His grandson, Howard, now owns it.

I certainly enjoy NEBRASKAland Magazine. The black on the picture is from an old album. My late husband, Ira, did a lot of hunting in Nebraska for antelope, deer and duck. He even got a bobcat with his bow and arrow. I even got a buck deer over on Wolf Point.

— Frances Felz, Clearmont, Wyoming



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.

Free Fishing and Park Entry Day

Saturday, May 21, 2011



Fish anywhere in the state and visit any Nebraska state park or state recreation area for FREE. No park entry or fishing permit required!

As part of **Free Fishing and Park Entry Day**, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission is offering the **14th Annual Family Fishing Clinic** at select state parks and recreation areas:

- Alexandria State Recreation Area (9:30 am – 2:30 pm)
- Fort Robinson State Park (9:00 am – noon)
- Fremont Lakes State Recreation Area – Lake #3 (9:00 am – noon)
- Louisville State Recreation Area – Lake #1 (9:00 am – noon)
- E.T. Mahoney State Park – Owens Marina (9:00 am – 11:00 am)
- Platte River State Park (9:00 am – noon)
- Ponca State Park (9:00 am – 8:00 pm)
- Two Rivers State Recreation Area – Lake #1 (9:00 am – noon)
- Victoria Springs State Recreation Area (9:00 am – 6:00 pm)

For information on specific area events, visit
www.OutdoorNebraska.org
 or contact the individual area



See You Out There.