



A bison stands in the falling snow of a spring storm at Fort Robinson State Park. Photo by Justin Haag.

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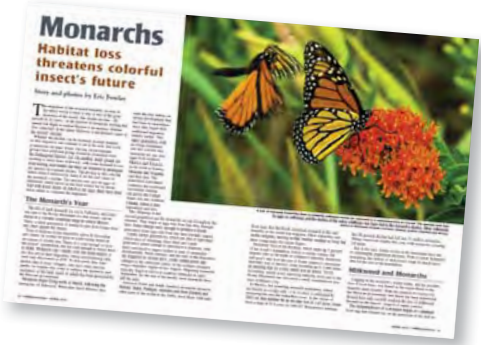


Hailee Schievelbein, 17, of Omaha won “Best of Show” in the 2015 Nebraska Junior Duck Stamp contest with her colored pencil drawing of an emperor goose. The piece was among more than 500 entries from across the state that were judged in Gering on March 27.

 Read the blog post “How Great Though Waterfall Art” for more information and the results from the 2015 Nebraska Junior Duck Stamp contest.



Ivy Daniel Forbes captured “rush hour” along the Platte River near Kearney during sunset.



Monarch Praise

I just read Eric Fowler’s article on monarchs in the April edition of *NEBRASKAland Magazine*, and I want to tell you it’s the best, most accurate, and most beautifully illustrated piece of writing I’ve seen so far!

The newspaper coverage seems to be lacking in correct details, but you’ve said so much so well and have quoted the best people who really know about monarchs.

Rosemary Thornton
Lincoln, Nebraska

Your April article regarding monarchs is a real inspiration to me. I immediately enrolled in the Monarch Watch project and ordered two plots of milkweed native to my area. I’m

retired on 50 acres along the Calamus and have noticed the past few years a decline in both milkweed and monarch butterflies. Thanks for the great article.

Bill Ihm
Via e-mail



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Buffalo Cookout at Niobrara State Park

By Jenny Nguyen

Travel back in time at one (or all) of Niobrara State Park's Buffalo Cookouts this summer. On select Saturday evenings from May through September, come enjoy buffalo burgers, homemade coleslaw, beans and ice cream with fellow park-goers and locals while listening to folk songs, tales and re-enactments of Nebraska history. Entertainers include American folk musicians John and Susan McNeill, poet and musician Michael McDonald, Woody Guthrie history and songs performed by Kathryn N. Benzel and Mike Adams, a humanities program on American explorer Jean Baptiste Charbonneau by Darrel Draper, and a Ponca Cultural Night presented by Ponca Warrior Society dancers, buffalo skinners, tool makers and storytellers.



Buffalo Cookout dates are May 23; June 20, 27; July 4, 18; August 1; and Sept. 5. Cookouts are at the cookout shelter and serving begins at 6 p.m. Cookout tickets are available for purchase at the park office, adults (13 years and older) \$12 and children \$8. Register before the cut-off limit and signup time; you must register before noon on that Saturday. Programs are free and will follow immediately after serving. A minimum of 25 persons is required to hold cookouts. For additional information about programs, call Niobrara State Park at 402-857-3373. ■

Upcoming Events by Jerry Kane

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

April 30 to May 1-2
Cornhusker Trap Shoot
Doniphan, cornhusker-trap.com

May 1
Explore Archery
Nebraska Game and Parks
Outdoor Education Center,
Lincoln, 6-7 p.m., 402-471-6141

May 1-2
Toast Nebraska
Eugene T. Mahoney State
Park (SP), Ashland, 1-10 p.m.,
402-944-2523

May 2
Take Pride in America Day
Cleanup at Verdon Lake
State Recreation Area (SRA),
Verdon, 9 a.m., 402-883-2575

May 2
Grand Opening
1891 Officers Quarters opens,
Fort Robinson SP, Crawford,
10:30 a.m. 308-665-2900

May 2
Grassland Bird Bonanza!
Sherman Reservoir SRA,
Loup City, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.,
308-745-0230

May 2-3
Living History
Fort Atkinson State Historical
Park (SHP), Fort Calhoun,
402-468-5611

May 2-3
Outdoor Cooking Camp
Ponca SP, Ponca,
402-755-2284

May 2-3, 22-24
Pioneer Longrifle
Rendezvous Indian Cave SP,
Shubert, 402-883-2575

May 4, 11, 18
Firearm Introduction to
Safety and Marksmanship
Nebraska Game and Parks
Outdoor Education Center,
Lincoln, 6:45 p.m., 403-471-
6141

Riding the Rails

Nebraska's Cowboy Trail

Story and photos by Jenny Nguyen

One hundred ninety-five miles, 11 companions, 7 days, 2 flat tires, and 1 ukulele: that's what it took to ride the Cowboy Trail.

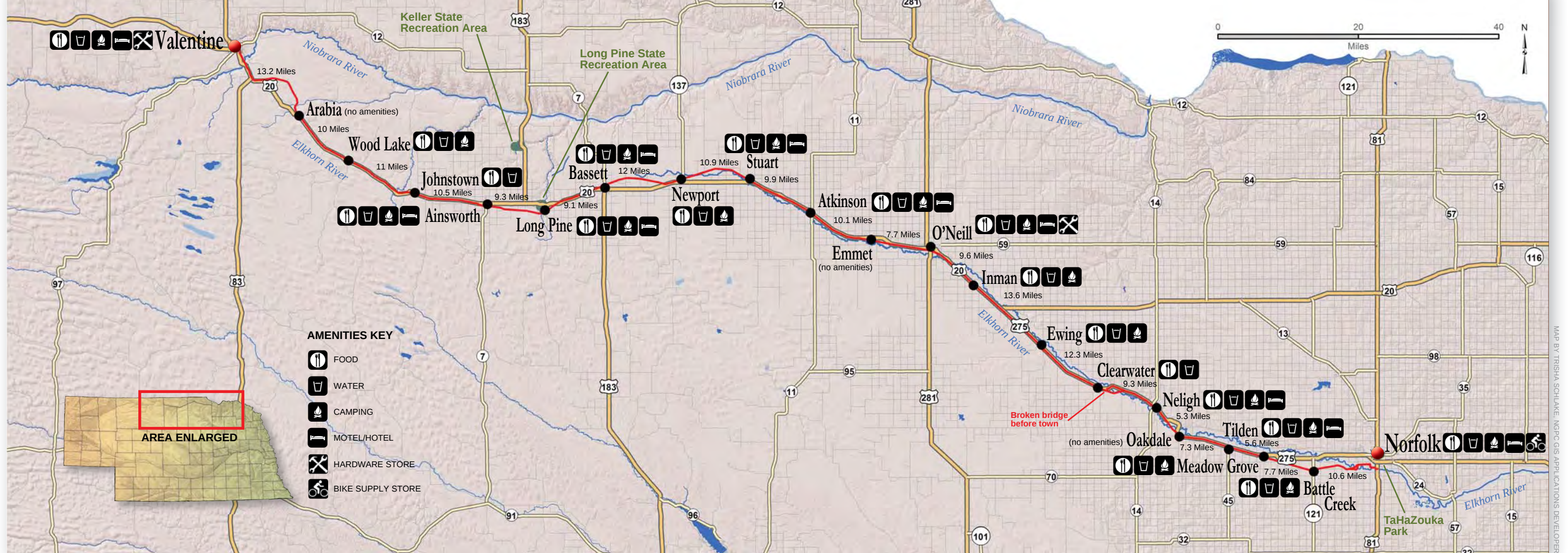
“But ... that's halfway across the state,” I said, panic quickly taking over after receiving the assignment to pedal the Cowboy Trail from *NEBRASKAland Magazine* editor Jeff Kurrus in the early spring of 2013. “I don't even own a bicycle!”

I had just moved to Nebraska a few months prior to join the magazine staff. At that point, I had only been on a bicycle a handful of times in my life, and the thought of pushing along a 195-mile long dirt path on two skinny tires, in the middle of nowhere, made

me ill.

My coworker and friend, Jamie Bachmann of Norfolk, must have felt intensely sorry for me, because she volunteered to go with me even though she had a husband, two boys and a garden to care for at home. Turns out, Jamie used to ride competitively and (thank God) knew how to fix a flat tire. Her eldest son loaned me his mountain bike.

Neither one of us knew much about the Cowboy Trail. Trying to get in shape was one thing, but the logistics



The author picks wild asparagus along the trail east of O'Neill.



We stopped at Long Pine State Recreation Area to camp for two nights. Tents were pitched by Long Pine Creek, bicycles scattered all about, and smelly bike shorts hung on a makeshift clothesline.

man on the trail looking for asparagus with his young granddaughter, too. When we finally arrived in O'Neill, we met up with the others and rode into town to have lunch at the **Blarney Stone**. Guinness was on tap and it tasted so good.

Bob, Jamie and I set up camp at **Carney Park**, which also had showers, flushing toilets and full hook-ups for Carine and Larry's camper. We had dinner that night at **Tia Zia**, a Mexican restaurant in town. Verna and Jim

bunked at the **Super 8**. It would be Nancy's last stop with us, and I was sad to see her go. Our group was now down to six.

Light rain came down that night, and I remember waking up to a loud, eerie chattering of birds in the trees above my tent. It was as if the tent was surrounded by jungle, and the time was 3 a.m.

Monday, May



Area (SRA) to do some fishing and hiking. So when we reached **Long Pine**, I led us off the trail and took Main Street north through town. Jim and I bought fresh strawberries at **Anderson's Market**. Dave Harlan pulled into the parking lot and told us that we were welcome to use the **Crew Quarters Bunkhouse** to shower that evening.

Leaving Long Pine, we turned left onto Eighth Street and took the winding road down to the SRA. Having set up camp, Larry was there waiting for us at the bottom of the hill at the bridge. He helped us with our bikes as we hopped over the railing to reach the

campground. We would've had to ride over a steep hill and around to enter through the park's entrance if Larry had not found this short cut. Unfortunately, Verna had to leave us that afternoon to prepare for BRAN. Out of 11 riders that started out in Norfolk, only five would make it to the end.

Camp at Long Pine SRA was picturesque with abundant wildlife, thick pine trees and a cold, fast-flowing crystal clear stream. Songbirds of all colors visited our camp, while curious turkeys lingered nearby. I pitched up my tent over soft spring grass and felt relieved to know that we didn't have to ride the next day. Jim made a makeshift clothesline under the picnic shelter to hang our smelly bike shorts. Bob took out some Spam and crackers, which Jim and I devoured because we were so hungry. Carine decided to pass on the snack and fell asleep under the sun in her comfy camp chair instead. Larry took us to the bunkhouse in town to shower before dinner.

Nebraska Powwows

A Celebration of Nations

By Amy Kucera

Just as the sun pulses over the prairie horizon to signal the dawn, the powwow drum beat heralds dancers to rise and move toward the center of the powwow circle.

Led by honored elders, veterans and tribal members holding flags and eagle staffs, the grand entry begins as the grounds soon fill with the vivid colors of intricately woven regalia.

The men lead the lively procession, wearing horn caps and headdresses, porcupine hair roaches, feathered bustles, bone breastplates, beaded cuffs, buckskin fringe and ribbon shirts. They are followed by women with eagle plumes fastened into finely braided hair and feathered fans gripped in hands, while others move in brightly beaded gowns and crowns, vibrant fringed shawls and jingle dresses shining in the sun.

As the children enter, the drum beats are accompanied by voices echoing in song with the chorus of beads, bells and shells ringing in unison.

A mix of excitement and pride swells and carries dancers into the evening, as they swirl around the circle and drift between the past and future, just as the smoke of sage and cedar that scents the summer night. ■

Emily Little Hoop awaits her turn to participate in the youth traditional dance category at the annual Fort Robinson Intertribal Gathering in the Pine Ridge region of northwestern Nebraska.

DEATH AMONG THE FLOWERS

Ah, the life of a butterfly ...

Story and photos by Chris Helzer

“Oh look! There’s a pretty flower! Mmmm ... sweet nectar!”
“Woo Hoo! Another pretty flower! Mmmm ... sweet nectar!”
“And another one! Mmmm ... sweet nectar!”
“Ooh! That’s an extra pretty one! Mmmm ... sweet ... Hey! What the ...?”
AAAAUUGHH!

And once again, nature reminds us that the world is not all sweetness and light.

In the Africa savanna, crocodiles lie hidden in watering holes, knowing their patience will be rewarded because their prey animals have to drink eventually. All the crocs have to do is wait.

In Nebraska prairies, there are no crocodiles. As far as you know. However, there are crab spiders,

praying mantises, ambush bugs and numerous other tiny predators that employ the same deadly strategy. Instead of water, the intended prey of these little killers needs nectar and pollen. The predators just have to sit on or near a pretty flower and wait. They’ll come alright. They’ll come ... Mmmm ... sweet nectar!

If you look carefully as you walk around a prairie, you’ll be surprised at how many tiny predators you can find. Some, such as crab spiders and ambush bugs, sit right on flowers; their success

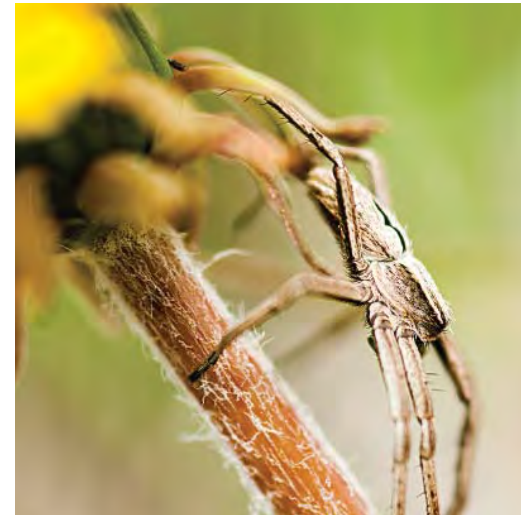
Left:



Left: A praying mantis nymph on blazing star. Mantids can grab prey with astonishing speed.

Middle, right: This fuzzy crab spider is a very common hunter in grasslands but is rarely noticed because of its excellent camouflage.

Bottom: A jumping spider sits quietly beneath a flower in a Platte River wetland.



Left: A windflower in sand prairie along the Platte River turned out to be a great place for this crab spider to catch a fly.

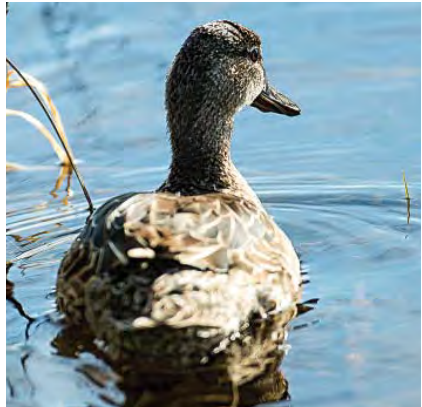


A great blue heron stands near the entrance of Cottonwood Lake State Recreation Area near Merriman.

An Easy-to-Reach Sandhills Lake

Just off the pavement a half-mile east of Merriman, Cottonwood Lake is certainly easy to access. It always tugs at my steering wheel for a brief stop as I’m driving down the scenic byway. The park is managed by the superintendent of Bowring Ranch State Historical Park, another popular tourist attraction just north of Merriman.

From my previous stops, I had already learned that Cottonwood Lake is a first-rate location for birding. A blue heron rookery is near the lake, and its mixture of marsh, open water and trees attracts a wide variety of avian species and other wildlife. Trumpeter swans are among the species that have nested there.



A hen blue-winged teal swims in the shallows.

After a simple Dad-style supper, we took a walk. The lake is listed at 60 acres, and it was every bit at capacity and more as the wet spring had pushed water over the banks in many places. The

plant life was lush and thriving. A Sandhills lake is

Baked Venison Ziti

Lone bag of venison burger, meet your fate.

By Jenny Nguyen

If you're a deer hunter, you're probably reaching the bottom of your freezer by now. All the loins and steaks have been eaten, and now you're left with scraps from the neck and quarters. These cuts will usually be turned into ground meat, to be made into Memorial Day hamburgers, Sunday Italian meatballs and weeknight meatloaf. And if you really know what you're doing, you might even turn most of your deer into sausage. I like ground meat fine, but I can't say that it is my favorite. I would much rather use these cuts for kebabs, stew meat or keep them as larger roasts for slow cooking. Though I'm prejudiced, I cannot deny ground venison's versatility and creative possibilities.

I have made almost everything under the sun with ground venison. Aside from the exception of a quality juicy beef burger – which simply can't be beat – I can't say that I really miss ground beef. Ground venison can do anything that ground beef can. And what's more, it's lean and better for you. Don't you just hate having to drain beef taco meat, or that pool of fat sitting at the bottom of your meatloaf pan? Gross. You won't have this problem with ground venison.

