



One of the most popular landscape trees in Nebraska is the American sycamore. "The leaves seem to turn different colors each year," said photographer Chris Helzer. "This photo was from the most colorful year I've seen – other years, they tend to be more olive greens, tans or other browns. I'm not sure what made the colors so brilliant."



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NEBRASKAland

October 2014



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A Special
Section on

Waterfowl Hunting Nebraska

PLUS

Shooting from the Sunroom • Nebraska's River Otters
Cooking Crawfish • ATVs at Lake Mac • Trout in the Classroom
Elk Hunt in Western Nebraska • 40 Years a Steward

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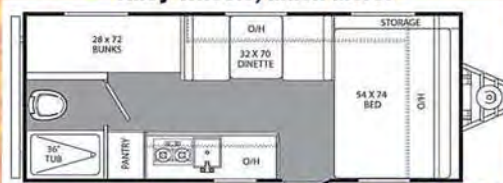
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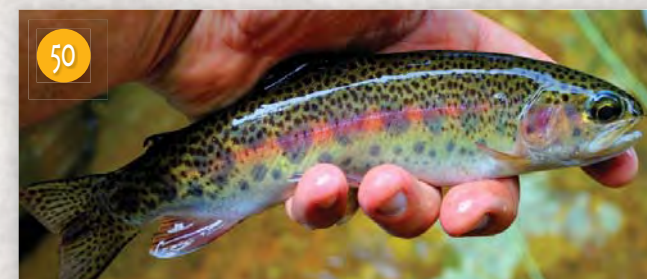
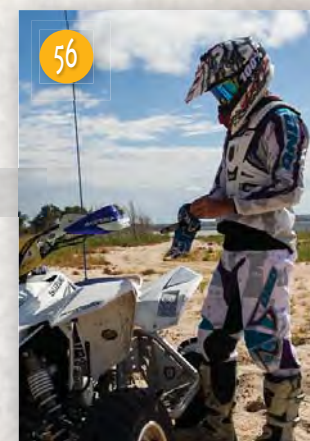
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Cover: A redhead drake loafs on a private pond south of Grand Island. Photo by Rick Rasmussen.

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Black Walnut Uses

By Jenny Nguyen

Black walnut trees are native to North America and are widely found in the eastern United States. Black walnuts were once widely used by American Indians throughout their range for food and black dye made out of the tree's roots. The Dakota, Omaha, Osage, Ponca, Pawnee and Winnebago ate the raw nutmeats plain, with honey or made them into soup. The Omaha and Ponca also mention the black walnut in their "Ishtinike and the Four Creators" legend, indicating their reverence for the tree.

Early Euro-American settlers used the decomposing hulls of black walnuts to dye their hair, clothing, traps, and even turned it into ink. Black walnut wood is also highly prized among woodworkers for its strong, yet pliant, dark-colored heartwood, which is now rare and expensive, and subject to poaching. Historically, black walnut was the wood for making gunstocks, and also furniture, flooring and other wood products. Nuts can be harvested in the fall, beginning late September, October and even into November. Traditional recipes include them in candies, baked goods and ice cream; trees can also be tapped for syrup.

Some sources say that black walnut shells were once pulverized to make activated carbon, a substance used to make gas mask filters during World War II. There are a few fishermen who create a "tea" by soaking rotting hulls in water to drive earthworms to the surface for easy collection.



As black walnuts ripen, the outer husk changes from green to yellowish green or dark brown.

Gardeners, however, should beware: the roots of black walnuts produce a natural herbicide called juglone that may kill or stunt other plants from growing nearby, including tomatoes, potatoes, apples, pears, berries and some landscaping plants. Black walnuts can also be toxic to horses.

For black walnut recipes, look to *Wild Seasons* by Kay Young. ■





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YOUTH MENTOR HUNTS					
Date	Chapter	Location	Date	Chapter	Location
Sep-06	Central NE QF	St Paul	Oct-11	Loup/Platte Ringnecks PF	Alda
Sep-06	Heritage PF	Alliance	Oct-11	Lower Elkhorn Valley PF	West Point
Sep-06	Medicine Creek PF	Maywood	Oct-11	Ponca Creek Ringnecks PF	TBA
Sep-13	Platte River PF	Lexington	Oct-11	Republican Valley PF	Arapahoe
Sep-13	Washington County PF	Blair	Oct-11	Sherman County PF	Loup City
Sep-20	Cody Ringnecks PF	North Platte	Oct-11	Southeast Nebraska PF	Beatrice
Sep-21	Burt County PF	Tekamah	Oct-11	Wachtel fur Immer QF	Arapahoe
Sep-27	Little Blue River PF	Hastings	Oct-18	Antelope Valley PF	Oshkosh
Sep-27	Saline County PF	Wilber	Oct-18	Bazile Creek Ringnecks PF	Bloomfield
Sep-28	Sandhills PF	Ainsworth	Oct-18	Corn Country PF	York
Sep-28	Webster County PF	Blue Hill	Oct-18	Elkhorn Valley PF	Pierce
Oct-04	Dixon County PF	Allen	Oct-18	Great Plains PF	Holdrege
Oct-04	Heartland PF	Tekamah	Oct-18	Lower Platte PF	Ashland
Oct-04	Otoe County PF	Palmyra	Oct-18	Maple Creek PF	Clarkson
Oct-11	Boone County PF	Albion	Oct-18	Prairie Hills PF	Kearney
Oct-11	Cass County PF	Plattsmouth	Oct-18	Rainwater Basin PF	Geneva
Oct-11	Cornhusker PF	Syracuse	Oct-18	Seward County PF	Oak Creek
Oct-11	Custer County PF	Broken Bow	Oct-18	South Central Nebraska PF	Alma
Oct-11	Dodge County PF	Arlington	Oct-18	Southwestern Nebraska PF	Champion
Oct-11	Douglas County - West PF	Tekamah	Oct-19	Cedar River Ringnecks PF	Greeley
Oct-11	Golden Prairie PF	Neligh	Oct-19	Plains Sportsman PF	McCook
Oct-11	High Plains PF	Sidney	Oct-19	Rock Creek PF	Fairbury
Oct-11	Kearney County PF	Minden	Dec-06	Nemaha Valley PF	Humboldt
Oct-11	Lincoln Creek PF	Aurora	Feb-21	Franklin County Covey QF	Franklin
Oct-11	Loup River PF	Ord	Mar-21	Platte County PF	Columbus

BANQUETS					
Date	Chapter	Location	Date	Chapter	Location
Sep-18	Burt County PF	Tekamah	Jan-30	Golden Prairie PF	TBA
Sep-18	Dakota/Thurston PF	South Sioux City	Jan-30	Platte County PF	Columbus
Sep-24	Kearney County PF	Minden	Jan-31	Bazile Creek PF	TBA
Sep-27	Upper Big Nemaha PF	Tecumseh	Jan-31	Webster County	Blue Hill
Oct-10	Cass County PF Youth Banquet	Bellevue	Feb-14	Great Plains PF	Holdrege
Oct-11	Cody Ringnecks PF	North Platte	Feb-21	Little Blue River PF	TBA
Oct-15	Loup/Platte Ringnecks PF	Grand Island	Feb-21	Plains Sportsman	McCook
Oct-18	Oregon Trail PF	Scottsbluff	Feb-21	Ponca Creek Ringnecks	Spencer
Oct-18	Platte River PF	Lexington	Feb-27	Cornhusker PF	TBA
Oct-24	Big Red PF	Bennet	Feb-27	Franklin County QF	Franklin
Oct-24	Custer County PF	Broken Bow	Feb-28	Cedar River Ringnecks	Greeley
Oct-24	Four Seasons PF	TBA	Feb-28	Maple Creek PF	Howells
Oct-24	Western Nebraska PF	Ogallala	Feb-28	Seward County PF	Seward
Oct-25	South Central Nebraska PF	Alma	Feb-28	Southwestern Nebraska PF	Imperial
Nov-08	Prairie Hills PF	Kearney			
Nov-08	Sandhills PF	Ainsworth			
Nov-13	Central Nebraska QF	TBA			
Nov-14	Nuckolls County PF	TBA			



For more contact information & details visit www.NebraskaPF.com

Travelogue

By Jenny Nguyen

Tekamah

Although a small town of a little over 1,700, Tekamah offers plenty of activities to entertain the road-tripper or weekend warrior. Whether you're a hunter, angler, camper, shooter, history buff or shopper, Tekamah will have you returning back for more.

Hunters will find respite and excitement at the **Pheasant Bonanza Hunt Club and Kennel**. In addition to a top-notch dog training program, Pheasant Bonanza offers hundreds of acres of excellent upland game as well as waterfowl hunting. Or come out to enjoy their 20-station sporting clay course, 5-stand, trap or skeet, and then have lunch or dinner afterward at **Roosters**, an on-site restaurant and bar.

Those looking to camp or fish should look to **Summit Lake State Recreation Area**, located just west of Tekamah. Summit offers the newly built Bob Eckdahl Campground with full RV hookups and tent camping. Summit Lake is also a popular destination for swimmers, kayakers and boaters. Anglers will find crappie, bluegill, bass, catfish and walleye in its waters.

For something completely different, sign up for a training course at **88 Tactical Group**. Designed for law enforcement, military personnel and civilians, clients can learn skills in reality behavior-based training, field medicine, bushcraft and receive information on the latest technology and gear. Self-defense and handgun training is catered to both men and women at all levels.

For a history lesson, check out the **Burt County Museum** and the **Historic E.W. Bryant House** in town. The county museum

is currently located at the E.C. Houston House, built in 1904 and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Also on the National Register of Historic Places, the Victorian era E.W. Bryant House is a fine example of Queen Anne architecture and features state-of-the-art amenities for its time. It was built in 1890 by Edward W. and Rose Folsom Bryant; Mrs. Bryant's grandfather Colonel Benjamin R. Folsom was the founder of Tekamah in 1854.

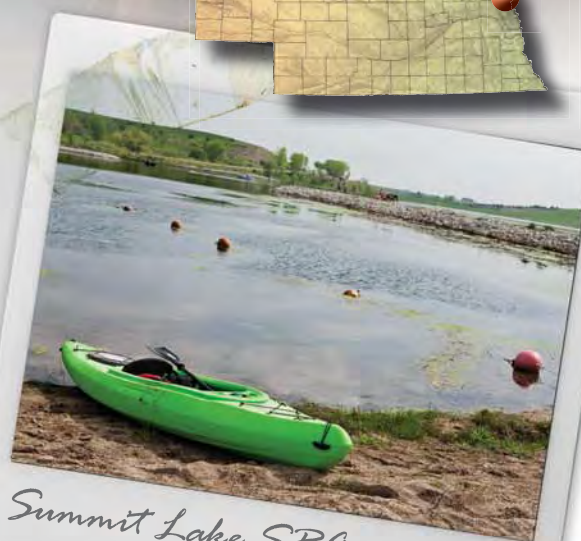
Stop by **Master's Hand Candles Company** for candles, chocolates, fudge, flowers, home décor and gifts. Ladies, reserve a luncheon in their tea room where you and your girlfriends will be served a three course meal. Or have lunch and drinks at **Right Next Door** in town and check out **Slim Profits** gift shop, both owned and run by Susan Hansen. Then hang out with the locals at the end of the day for some food and drinks at **Winner's Grill and Bar**.

For more information, visit Pheasantbonanza.com, 88tactical.com, and Mastershandcandles.com.

Benjamin R. Folsom,
founder of Tekamah

Burt County Museum

Tekamah



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Our October Hunting Trip. Shows tent and car.



1916 - A Thousand Mile Motor Trip - Western Nebraska: "Pretty bad - but beats staying at home!"

A Brief History On the Road in 1916

By John E. Carter, Nebraska State Historical Society

In the first decades of the twentieth century two innovations helped create the American vacation. One was Henry Ford's automobile for everyman, the Model T. Affordable cars meant that average people no longer were limited either by distance or by railroad routes in their travels.

The other innovation was George Eastman's snapshot camera. Photographic historian Beumont Newhall called photography the most democratic of the art forms because it gives everyone a history.

For some people, vacation meant a trip to an amusement park or a leisurely visit to the beach or a tour of historic sites. For the more adventurous, it meant a return to America's wild places.

Nebraskans Ed and Margaret (Maggie) Gehrke were among those attracted to the wild. Ed was a successful builder, known as the "Bungalow Man" in Lincoln. Both had a passion for the outdoors, and in their travels Ed recorded their doings with his Kodak while Maggie kept beautifully written journals.

Beginning in 1914 the Gehrkes would load up their Buick with camping, hunting and fishing gear, plus at least one dog, and head off. In 1916 they made an epic journey that Maggie called their "Thousand Mile Motor Trip through Western Nebraska."

This trip took them from Lincoln to Grand Island, on to Broken Bow, then to Brewster, up to Ainsworth, across to O'Neill, down to Neligh and ultimately home to Lincoln. Today that doesn't seem like much of a challenge. Highways are paved, graded to minimize hills, and dotted with gas



1916 - A Thousand Mile Motor Trip - Western Nebraska: "More trouble."

stations and repair shops. Travelers have GPS or a variety of maps to guide them.

This was not so for the Gehrkes. Roads were dirt paths with routes marked infrequently, if at all. Even good roads could quickly turn into mud bogs that ensnared the Buick. As for repairs, you were on your own.

"Then began the worse roads I have ever motored over," Maggie writes of the route from Brewster to Ainsworth. "We were in the sand hills. For 40 miles we wound in and out, and ploughed thru the sand, or blindly followed wagon trails that forked off in every direction over miles and miles of unbroken prairies with never a sign or a guide to direct us; we were 40 miles from a railroad, no towns and only rarely a homesteader's sod shack - and then the only direction we could get was to 'kinda-keep-to-the-north.' We did. But Lord knows how we ever reached Ainsworth."

But then there was the camping, hunting, fishing, and the sheer adventure of living. A few days after arriving in Ainsworth, Maggie writes: "Oct. 23. The morning dawned a fine 'duck day' - cold and a light snow. The Man and the Dog were away to the lakes early to spend the day, again. I sent off a bunch of post-cards and had a long walk before dinner. . . The Man will have such glorious hunt, for shooting is fine in the sand hills. To bring in forty or fifty ducks is not unusual. We are to have a fine duck dinner if Edward gets home in time."

Every year until Ed's death in 1939, the Gehrkes visited National Parks. How many? All of them, all that existed at the time. Arriving at a park, they sought out the remotest



Julius H. holding several dead birds.



1916 - A Thousand Mile Motor Trip - Western Nebraska: "At Last!" (sign: to Brewster)

corners, places that for that day belonged to them, horizon to horizon. Today we think of the parks in terms of their accommodations, roads, lodging, tours, and the like. For Ed and Maggie, the best place was farthest from that. As with their first Nebraska road trip, they memorialized their experiences in photographs and words.

When Ed died Maggie mostly quit traveling. She lived nearly another 40 years, some spent working at University of Nebraska library surrounded by words. In her later years she organized the thousands of photographs into albums, each image mounted on a black paper page and labeled in white ink.

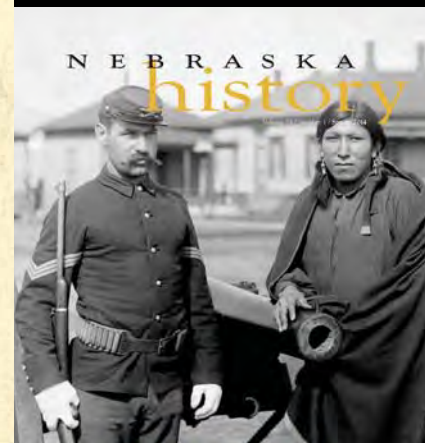
But for whom was she doing all this work? The photos and travel journals had been intended for only two people, Ed and Maggie. As Maggie closed her ninetieth year, that audience was small indeed.

In 1976, two years before Maggie died, a friend boxed

up the volumes of material and donated them to the Nebraska State Historical Society. It was either there or the trash. We can forever be grateful that the materials were preserved. In the 1990s NSHS staff member Jill Koelling began seriously investigating and writing about this collection. In 2009 the Gehrkes became the voice of the American visitor in Ken Burns's documentary film, *The National Parks: America's Best Idea*.

Ed and Maggie were not collecting these materials for us today. They'd probably be surprised that we look at it. But theirs is the voice of every American who claims their birthright in our wild places. ■

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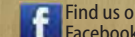


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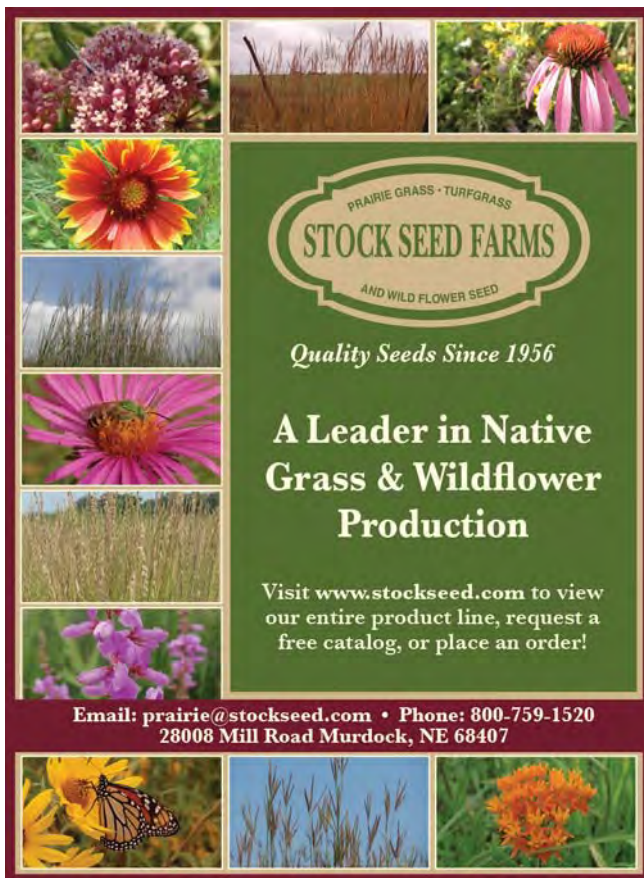
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Nebraska Bird Library

Ruby-throated Hummingbird

Song or calls: Rapid, squeaky, chipping notes in flight. Wings hum.

Description: Metallic green above. Adult male has brilliant red throat and black chin; whitish underparts; dusky-green sides and flanks; and short forked tail. Female lacks red throat; has grayish-white underparts with a buffy wash on the sides. Juveniles are similar to females, but some males have golden cast on upperparts.

Habitat: Migrants can be seen in city gardens or other areas with nectar-bearing flowers. Breeding done in woodlands, orchards, and parks with large trees, flowering herbs and shrubs.

Where in Nebraska: Uncommon to common spring and fall migrant and summer resident in eastern parts of the state. Breeding occurs along the forested Missouri River valley. Vagrants occur in the west.

Fun Facts: The ruby-throated hummingbird flaps its wings about 53 times a second making it seem like they hover. Sexes appear to migrate separately with males first to arrive and depart.

Additional Information: This is the only hummingbird seen over much of the eastern United States. ■

To learn about more birds visit NebraskaBirdLibrary.org.



Best Filters for the Instagram Rookie

By Cristina Woodworth

Say goodbye to lugging your bulky DSLR camera around on outdoor excursions: Instagram's got you covered. Simply download the popular free photo-editing app onto your Android or iPhone and start snapping photos of your camping trips, paddling outings, picnics and other outdoor adventures. Then, pick from 19 different filters to add a little excitement to your pictures.

Here's a breakdown of some of the best Instagram filters to use on your outdoorsy photos to give them a little something special:

1) **Walden:** Increases exposure and adds a soft, yellow tint to pictures. This filter adds unique, aged color to bright photos of activities like hiking, kayaking and biking.

2) **Lo-Fi:** Enriches colors and adds stronger shadows by upping the saturation in the photo. Use this filter to emphasize colors in flowers, grasses and trees.

3) **Sierra:** Adds a soft, faded look. This filter is good for making photos at dusk or dawn look calm and peaceful.

4) **Toaster:** Ages the image by adding a bright spot in the center and a dramatic vignette around the edges. To add a summery feel to photos of picnics and the like, use this filter.

5) **Mayfair:** Applies a warm, pink tone to photos, along with a soft vignette around the edges. This filter puts more emphasis on the center of photos and adds warmth and softness to landscape scenes. ■



This Instagram image of a bike on the MoPac East Trail in Lincoln applies the lo-fi filter to bring out bold colors.



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Wingtips by Wild Bird Habitat

Attracting hummingbirds is fun and easy. They nest along the Missouri and Eastern Platte Rivers but migrate through most of Nebraska beginning in late summer.

Have hummingbird feeders out by August 15th. Change home-made nectar every two days, commercial nectar weekly. Be patient and you will attract hummingbirds.

Contact Nebraska's Wild Bird Habitat Stores for more information where you'll find a large selection of hummingbird feeders and supplies.

Hunters Helping the Hungry

By Teresa Lombard, Hunters Helping the Hungry Program Coordinator

On an early morning last November, 12-year-old Taylor Beetison readied for her first deer hunt. Together with her brother Tristen and dad, Nick, they hunted her grandfather's land near Humboldt. On their first morning, Tristen harvested a white-tailed buck. His deer would provide venison the whole family could enjoy in the coming year. The next morning, Taylor and her dad set out to try again.

Even before they went, Nick shared information with his family about the Hunters Helping the Hungry (HHH) program. Hunters could donate a deer to the program, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission would pay the processing costs and the venison would be distributed to Nebraskans in need.

Taylor and her dad were successful in their hunts. Taylor's first-ever deer was a regal buck that any hunter would be thrilled to take. After checking their deer, they offered it for donation to HHH at Den's Country Meats in Table Rock. Their generosity, and that of other hunters in Nebraska, resulted in more than 19,000 pounds of venison provided to

Nebraskans through food pantries and shelters.

I'm thrilled that Taylor, and others like her, participated in the program last year. Deer donations nearly doubled from the program's first year in 2012. I hope this year more people will consider making a monetary donation to help cover rising processing costs as the program grows in popularity. ■

Learn more about this unique donation-funded program at OutdoorNebraska.com/HHH.



PHOTO COURTESY OF DEN'S COUNTRY MEATS

Sporting Clay Tips

By Dylan Tegtmeier, Nebraska Outdoor U!

Now that sporting clays season is in full swing, you may have figured out which targets give you trouble on the course, so I've created this article to help you. And if you're like Tom Knapp, no targets give you trouble on any sporting clays course, but you should keep reading anyway.

All too often, we get in our sporting clays groove and assume we are following the fundamentals just as well as we're breathing. Granted, people like me sometimes neglect both of those. One of the biggest score card killers on the clays range is moving your gun too fast. Your eyes will focus on the fastest moving object in your field of view, and many times that may be your gun. So start with your gun ahead of the clay, and slowly let the two merge into where your trigger area is.

Ask anyone about their toughest target on the sporting clays range and most of them will probably tell you the curling target, the sliding target or the arching target. These are all generally the same target; they all involve an arcing rainbow path across your field of view and usually you need to shoot the target on or after the peak of the arc. The mistake is leading the target as a dropping target. Most folks underestimate the horizontal travel of this target and miss on the inside of the arc. So lead this target out in front and, if anything, miss on the outside of the arc. But believe me, if you're leading to the outside of

the arc, you won't miss.

With any true pairs on a clays course, you'll be tempted to be distracted by the busyness of two targets crowding your visual. Rabbit pairs are especially crazy. The key to conquering the rabbit pair station is to focus with all your might on the first target. Set your stance halfway between your break points for the two targets, and have the butt of your gun just barely touching your pectoral muscle. When you call for the pull, nothing else in the world matters except that first rabbit. Move your entire torso to swing with the target as you bring the gun up to your cheek then firmly back to your shoulder. After you've broken the first target, firmly adjust your swing to the same speed and direction of the second target.

Visit OutdoorU.org and start your own pathway to exciting and memorable experiences in the outdoors. ■



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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.

October 1
Crow hunting season opens statewide

October 1-31
Paddlefish snagging season

October 3
Dad's Day at the Range
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln, 4 p.m., 402-471-6141

October 3-5
Becoming an Outdoors-Woman Workshop
Halsey, 402-471-5482

October 4-5
Autumn Harvest Art Show
Eugene T. Mahoney State Park (SP), Ashland, 402-944-2523

October 4-5
ATV Jamboree
Lake McConaughy State Recreation Area (SRA), Ogallala, 308-284-8800

October 4-5
Living History Weekend
Fort Atkinson State Historical Park (SHP), Fort Calhoun, 10 a.m.-5 p.m., 402-468-5611

October 4-5
Youth waterfowl hunting season in Zone 1

October 4-December 12, January 31-February 1
White-fronted goose hunting season

October 4-December 16
Duck and coot hunting seasons in Zones 2 and 4

October 4-December 31, January 24-February 8
Light goose hunting regular season

October 4-January 16
Dark goose hunting season in North Central Unit

October 5
Muzzleloader antelope hunting season closes

October 5
Living History Day
Arbor Lodge SHP, Nebraska City, 1-5 p.m., 402-873-7222

October 6, 13, 20, 27
Women wearing pink for Breast Cancer Awareness Month shoot for \$5 per 30 minutes, Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln, 4 p.m., 402-471-6141

October 10
Trick or Treat at the Town
Indian Cave SP, Shubert, 402-883-2575

October 10-12
Scout Jubilee
Eugene T. Mahoney SP, Ashland, 402-944-2523

October 11
Howl in the Hills Night
Hike Wildcat Hills Nature Center, Gering, 7 p.m., 308-436-3777

October 11
Roger G. Sykes Outdoor Heritage Education Complex closes for season, Platte River SP, Louisville, 402-471-5547

October 18-19
Youth waterfowl hunting season in Zone 3

October 11, 17, 18, 24, 25
Haunted Hollow Hayrack Rides
Indian Cave SP, Shubert, 402-883-2575

October 11, 18
Hallowfest
Ponca SP, Ponca, 402-755-2284

October 11, 18, 25
Halloween Decorating Contest
Indian Cave SP, Shubert, 402-883-2575

October 11-December 23
Duck and coot hunting seasons in Zone 1

October 11-26
Firearm antelope hunting season

October 12
Muzzleloader Sign-In and Family Rendezvous
Platte River SP, Louisville, 402-234-2217

October 12
Living History Day
Arbor Lodge SHP, Nebraska City, 1-5 p.m., 402-873-7222

October 13
Columbus Day Game and Parks offices closed

October 13
NRA First Steps Pistol Course
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln, 10 a.m., 402-471-6141

October 14
Families on Target
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln, 11:30 a.m., 402-471-6141

October 18
Living History Day
Rock Creek Station SHP, Fairbury, 402-729-5777

October 18-19
Trick or Treat the Campground
Alexandria SRA, Alexandria, 6 p.m., 402-729-5777

October 18-19
Youth pheasant, quail and partridge hunting season

October 22-January 3
Duck and coot hunting seasons in Zone 3

Bridgeport Hunters Create Motion Decoy

By Eric Fowler

Goose flags, wind socks, kites and other gadgets that add motion to a decoy spread have come a long way in recent years, and now Whiffle Wings, a company from Bridgeport, Nebraska, has added another option to the mix.

Only a slight breeze will cause these decoys to wave back and forth, imitating the whiffling, landing movement made by waterfowl. Greg Wickard and Bill Dean, with nearly 100 years of waterfowling experience in the North Platte River Valley between them, first developed the decoy for snow geese and after finding success there, added Canada goose and mallard duck versions. Mounted on a stake fitted with foot pegs, it can easily be set up in the field or in shallow water. (If the ground is frozen, you'll need to be innovative.)

I shot my first goose nearly 30 years ago from a corn-field pit blind near Sutherland Reservoir. Nearly 5 miles from the South Platte River, we needed to up our odds of catching the attention of geese flying the river we couldn't see without binoculars, so we stapled pieces of black fabric to 1x2s, started waving them and drawing more birds in for a look.

I've been waving flags ever since, but Whiffle Wings adds some motion to the spread without drawing attention to the blind when the birds are close, helping finish the flock. For more information or to order, visit WhiffleWings.com. ■



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Talking Camp Trash

By Eric Fowler

In my campsite, trash has almost always gone in a plastic bag tied to a camper, tent, cooler, tree, picnic table or whatever surface happened to be handy. It's been workable, but good luck literally tossing the trash.

A new product, Trash-Ease, is a convenient option. The powder- and rubber-coated metal frame can easily hang from your picnic table, tailgate or another flat surface, where it will hold a 13-gallon drawstring kitchen bag wide open (33-gallon if you choose the larger version). That makes it easy to pitch the egg shells when you're cooking breakfast. Its lightweight, compact design makes it easier to pack in the camper or truck than a trash can, which would only blow away when the wind eventually kicked up anyway.

Available online at TrashEase.com and from retailers including Camping World and Lowes, Trash Ease runs about \$15. ■



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

NEBRASKAland Visitor



The July issue's winner of the Visitor drawing was Ruth Muldoon of Gladstone, Missouri, who found the **Goldsmith Beetle** on page 4. Readers are encouraged to contact *NEBRASKAland* within 10 days after this issue's publication with the correct page number and name of this issue's "Visitor" – a critter found in Nebraska. We will then gather the correct entries and draw one to win a *NEBRASKAland Magazine* mug. To enter each month, write:

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

Or e-mail:

Tim.Reigert@Nebraska.gov
with "Visitor" in the subject line of the message.

HINT: This issue's visitor is not on page 12, 17, 28, 29, 54, 63 or 74.

The Goldsmith Beetle, Cotalpa lanigera, is a large scarab beetle, up to one inch in length. Coloring varies from yellow to greenish, with a metallic gold tint, and white, wooly hairs on its underside. It is found in the eastern U.S., into central Nebraska, though is not commonly seen. The larvae, which look like large June beetle grubs, live in the soil for up to two years, feeding on roots and organic matter. Adults emerge from the soil and feed on tree foliage. Beetles are most active from dusk to dawn; during the day, they conceal themselves in foliage, using their tarsi (feet) to hold leaves like a tent over their bodies. This may protect them from both the sun and predators.

Special thanks to Julie Van Meter, State Entomologist, Nebraska Department of Agriculture. Visitor image by Chris Helzer

Bugguide.net is a good site for identification.

River Otter Recovery

A rare success story

By Eric Fowler



PHOTO BY BOB GRIER

Sometimes efforts to restore wildlife populations decimated by habitat loss or overharvest by the pioneers who settled this country succeed, and sometimes they don't. The reintroduction of the northern river otter to Nebraska and other Midwestern states that were, for the most part, devoid of this playful mammal for much of the past century is one of these success stories, with recovery in several states rising to the point of allowing harvest for fur.

Extirpated by 1920 in Nebraska, recent studies and nearly three decades of surveys to track the range and population expansion of river otters following reintroduction efforts that began here in 1986 have found otters swimming in nearly all of our major rivers. The growth has been so successful, that the river otter could soon be removed from the list of Nebraska's threatened species.

History

Prior to Euro-American settlement, river otters were common throughout North America, with the exception of Mexico and parts of the arid southwest. They were often mentioned in the log books of trading companies, caught by trappers in search of beavers but happy to add valuable otter pelts to their take. Trappers took as many as 65,000 otter pelts in 1800, but as the fur trade, settlers and the associated development moved west, otter numbers plummeted and by 1904, fur companies bought only 4,500.

Unregulated trapping, not just of otters, but of beavers, which otters depend on for den sites, was the main cause of the demise of otters though much of its range, including Nebraska. Most were gone before rivers and streams were dammed or channelized, further altering their habitat. In other states, water pollution caused both by industrial waste and increased runoff resulting from agricultural development, affected otters directly

and indirectly, poisoning them and decimating fish populations. Until modern times, the last confirmed reports of otters in Nebraska were a dead male found in 1916 in Lincoln Creek in Seward County and tracks found in 1918 on a Republican River tributary in Phelps County. By the middle of the 20th century, the species was extirpated or rare in 14 other Midwestern states and occupied less than three-fourths of its historic range.

the reintroduction effort. Its work would have started sooner, but it wasn't until the 1984 creation of the Wildlife Conservation Fund, which receives contributions from Nebraskans through their state income tax return, that funding was available.

The first otter, an individual provided by Idaho, was released on the South Loup River in Custer County in January of 1986. By 1991, 159 otters, most acquired from Louisiana or



This is one of Audubon's most dramatic images, and one he duplicated in oil and sold copies in England and the U.S. The more appropriate name is river otter, as it is mostly found near rivers.

Efforts to restore river otters began in 1976 and by 1998, 21 states, 10 in the Midwest, had reintroduced 4,018 otters to their former range.

Colorado was among the first states to participate in the program, and work there may have led to the end of a 60-year absence of the species in Nebraska. A female otter trapped in 1977 on Sappa Creek, a Republican River tributary in Furnas County, may have come from Colorado, or she may have been part of a previously undetected remnant population. Four other confirmed otter reports came on the Republican between 1980 and 1985.

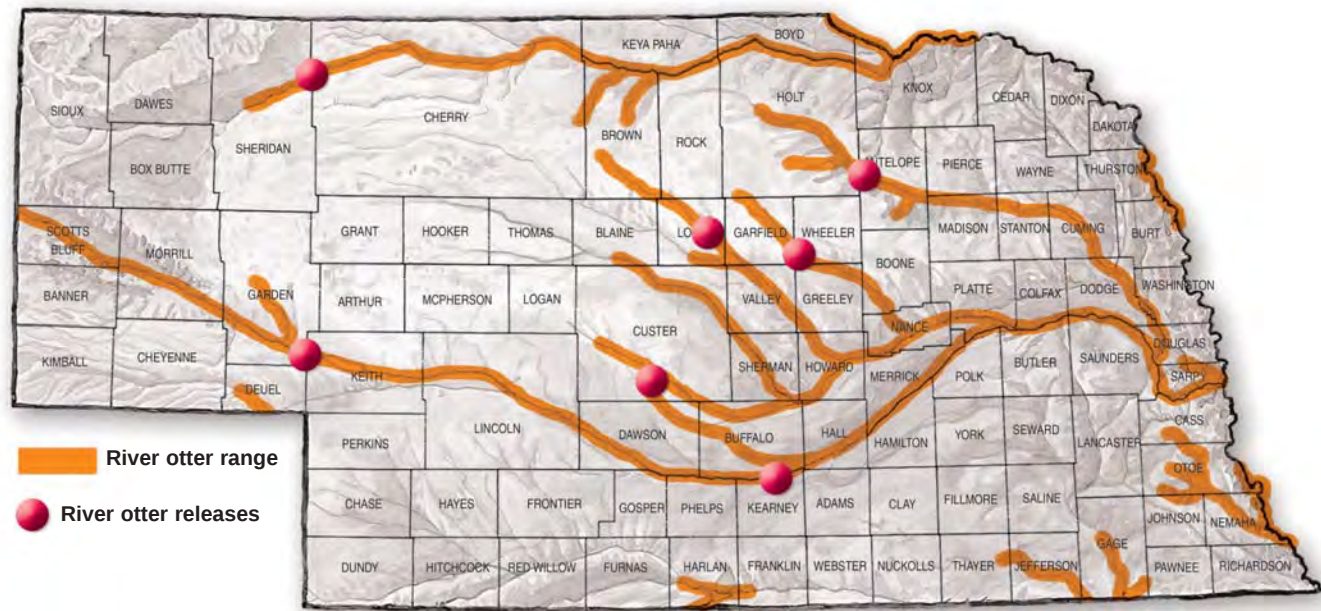
In January of 1986, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission joined

Alaska, had been released there and at six other sites on the Platte, North Platte, Calamus, Cedar, Elkhorn and Niobrara rivers.

Like other predators, young otters disperse to find new, unoccupied habitat when they leave their parents. To track this expansion, Commission biologists have used reports of accidentally trapped otters, road kills, photographs taken by individuals in the field or trail cameras – “anything we could get that proved otters were present in an area,” said Sam Wilson, furbearer program manager for the



SAM WILSON



The range of the North American river otter in Nebraska has expanded greatly from the seven locations where otters were released.

Commission. This work documented the expansion of the otters' range both up and downstream from the release sites and eventually into other rivers, including the Middle and North Loups, Big and Little Nemaha and, since 2010, the Little Blue River in Jefferson County, Plum Creek, a Big Blue River Tributary in Gage County, Pumpkin Creek in Deuel County, and the Republican River in Harlan County.

There have now been four confirmed reports of river otters in the Republican River near Harlan County Lake since 2010, possibly signaling the start of a recovery biologists thought had begun years ago. To conserve resources and preserve the genetic integrity of the population biologists hoped was growing on its own following sightings in the 1980s, no otters were released there.

"As it turned out, it took about 30 years to get another otter confirmation," Wilson said. "In hindsight we probably could have released them there, but we didn't. It was logical at the time."

Wilson won't be surprised by other reports that come on the Republican River between Harlan County Lake and Kansas, which is a possible source of the otters found at Harlan, as well as those found on the Big and Little Blue rivers. It is just one example of Nebraska benefitting from the species

recovery elsewhere. The population that established itself in the Nemaha River basin in the 1990s likely came from Missouri, where reintroduction efforts were wildly successful.

In 2012, biologists used information obtained from a survey of Nebraska trappers to guide a search for river otters in other locations and fill more gaps on the range map. Trappers reported seeing otters or otter sign in 12 counties where there were no previous records. Armed with that information, biologists took to the water and found otters on the Missouri River near Winnebago, Decatur and Tekamah. While plenty of otters had been found in tributaries like the Nemaha and Niobrara, it was the first time the species had been documented on Nebraska's stretch of the Missouri. Biologists also used the survey information to find otters on the Elkhorn River near West Point, the first confirmation on that river below Norfolk.

"We had big gaps where we had what we assumed was good habitat but we didn't have otter records," Wilson said. "Part of that is we weren't actively searching in all of those areas."

And part may be because there aren't people trapping beavers in those stretches of the rivers. Wilson said the Commission appreciates the work

beaver trappers do, especially when it comes to controlling populations that are causing problems. For that reason, it has always accepted the fact that some otters would be caught in beaver traps even when trappers were trying to avoid them.

Those reports have been key in tracking expansion of a mammal that isn't often seen due to its nature: it dens underground during the day and when it is out at night, it is often underwater. "So they're very hard to detect unless you have someone trapping beavers," Wilson said.

That fact alone leads Wilson to believe that there are plenty of miles of Nebraska rivers to be added to the otter range map. The recent report from Lodgepole Creek is an example, pointing to the possibility that there could also be otters on the South Platte River, a major waterway with no recent records. Sandhill lakes could be holding more otters than the handful that have already been found there, including a few far removed from the nearest river or stream.

Research

Following the last release of river otters in 1991, little work was done to study the animal apart from tracking their expansion. But recently, biologists wanted to know more about their home

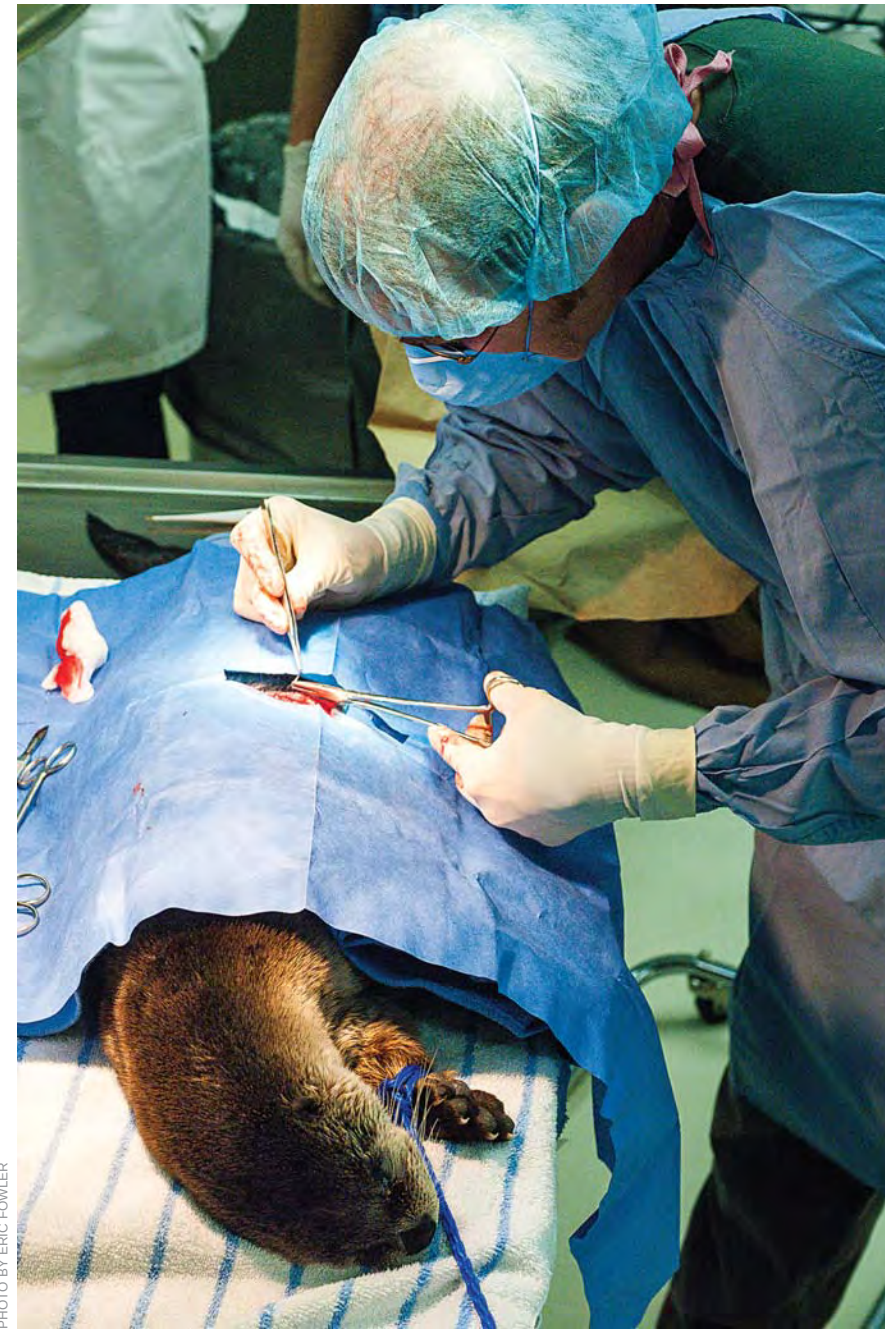


PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Veterinarian Mark Falloon sutures the incision on a river otter after implanting a radio transmitter. Falloon and fellow Lincoln vet Micah Kohles volunteered to help with the surgeries, as did other vets from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

range, survival, dispersal and habitat needs of otters here in the Northern Prairie region of the Great Plains, where little such research into the species had been conducted.

Learning about the habitat needs of the species was especially important in the Central Platte River region, where numerous conservation efforts by the Commission, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, conservation groups and individuals were restoring riverine habitat and could affect

otter populations either positively or negatively.

"We didn't know exactly what types of habitats were most important to otters or where we should focus our efforts for conserving or creating habitat," Wilson said.

So in 2006, a telemetry study was launched on a 20-mile stretch of the Platte River in central Nebraska between Shelton and Grand Island. Individual landowners, The Nature Conservancy and The Crane Trust

Otter Facts

The North American river otter (*Lontra Canadensis*) is a member of the Mustelidae family which, in Nebraska, also includes the mink, weasel, skunk and badger.

Status: Currently listed as threatened in Nebraska.

Size: 35 to 53 inches long, including 12- to 18-inch tail, 11 to 30 pounds, males slightly larger.

Description: Dark brown fur on the upper part of their streamlined bodies, with a gray to brown underside; small ears and a long, tapered, furred tail; short legs with five webbed toes. Dense, oily fur has 10,000 hairs per square inch, which, along with a fat layer under the skin, helps keep otters warm in icy water. Eyes atop their head help them see above water when partially submerged.

Reproduction: Reach sexual maturity at age 2. Females breed in third year. Breeding occurs in March or April but through delayed implantation, fertilized eggs float in uterus for 9 months before implanting on wall, followed by a 60 day gestation. Litters of one to six young, but most often two to three, are born helpless, open their eyes at 3 weeks, emerge from den for first time at 60 days, and can care for themselves at 5 to 6 months. Often stay with family longer, dispersing at 12 to 13 months.

Diet: Mostly fish and crayfish, but these opportunistic feeders also eat amphibians, insects, mammals and birds. Excellent swimmers, otters capture fish by sight and pursuit in clear water, and can use their whiskers to locate prey in murky water. Can stay underwater for up to four minutes and dive to depths of 60 feet at speeds of nearly seven miles per hour.

Habitat: Live in underground dens, often those built by beavers, on the banks of rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, sandpits, marshes and sloughs.

Communication: Vocalize through a variety of sounds, including chirps, grunts and snarls.

Life span: Average of 8 to 9 years and up to 14 years in the wild, 25 years in captivity.



PHOTO BY BOB GRIER

A river otter eats a crawfish in a slough near Lewellen.

allowed Wilson and his crew access to some of the best otter habitat in the region for the study, and foot-hold traps were set in areas rich with sign, including latrines and trails. The traps were modified to reduce injury to the otters, and no bait was used on the traps to reduce the chance of capturing raccoons or other common mammals.

Wilson said the assistance of

Wood River trapper Joe Jack and other members of the Nebraska Fur Harvesters Association was also critical for the study, just as it had been in the recovery of the species. Initial reintroductions were done in sparsely populated areas with little trapping pressure, but at the request of the Commission, trappers voluntarily avoided certain types of

trap sets within 20 miles of the release sites, including body-gripping traps, trapping near beaver dens or lodges and where otter sign was found. As otter numbers rose in the Central Platte region, trappers learned to avoid other locations, especially short crossover trails between rivers or streams and sandpits or sloughs, and shared that insight with Wilson. “They pointed to the exact spots that they’d been avoiding for the last 10 years,” Wilson said. “They’d tell me, ‘I would catch an otter if I’d set my trap here, but I don’t. So if you want to catch an otter, put it right there.’ And we did and we caught otters.”

Trapped otters were transported to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Animal Research Facility, where they were anesthetized so veterinarians from UN-L and the Lincoln Children’s Zoo could surgically implant a shotgun-shell-sized radio transmitter in their

abdomen. Within 24 hours, otters were released in the same location where they were trapped.

The 18 otters that received transmitter implants were located two to four times a week between 2006 and 2009. Additionally, researchers followed the overnight movements of the nocturnal mammals on foot or by vehicle several times during both the winter and breeding season, noting their location every 30 minutes from the time they left their den in the evening until they denned up again the next day.

Locating the animals was not always easy. The range of transmitters in any telemetry study is limited, but the size of the transmitters in this study limited their range under the best conditions. The terrain of the Platte River Valley, which may include several streams separated by sandbars or permanent islands, sloughs on the edge of the river and all bounded by riparian forest further limited the range to much less than could be detected from the nearest road. Using a boat or even canoe to track the animals from the water was often impossible due to low flows. The most limiting factor affecting transmitter range, however, was the fact that otters spend most of their time underwater or underground in dens. All things considered, the range was sometimes as little as 100 meters, and as a result, otters sometimes could not be located for days or even weeks.

But they were located nearly 1,000 times in all, with half of those locations pinpointing exact den or resting sites. It was enough for Wilson to determine the home range – the area in which they spend the majority of their time – to be 2,000 to 5,000 acres, numbers similar to previous research in other states. “It basically consists, in our study, of 5 to 10 miles of the Platte River,” he said. “And then they would pop over to any associated habitat, open water areas like old sandpits, oxbow sloughs or wetlands.” Because they are not territorial, there was plenty of overlap in individual home ranges.

Wilson had hoped to see what the otters did when the Platte dried out in the summer. Ironically, after drying

up in more than one summer prior to the study, it didn’t run dry again until after the field work was complete. But considering the study found that, within their home range, otters used sandpits, stock ponds and warmwater sloughs more than any other type of habitat available, it’s not hard to imagine where they would go when the river did dry up.

In other places where otters have been studied, primarily in the east, the rivers run much deeper than the Platte, Loup and other Nebraska rivers where otters are found. Even when those larger rivers are ice-covered in winter, otters can still access dens on the riverbank.

With highly-variable water levels, the Platte is different. When flows are low in the summer and the depth no more than a few feet, otters can and do get around and find frogs, minnows, crayfish and carp to eat, Wilson said. But in the winter, when so much of the Platte is shallow or frozen, there are few places for otters to forage. “There is some running channel, but it may not be accessible because an otter is not going to chew through 6 inches of ice to get down to a little bit of water,” he said. “During those times of the year, otters really need the open water of sandpit lakes and sloughs.”

Carp or stocked game fish found in many pits and ponds are another draw for the otter, providing a very dependable food source that is easier to hunt in winter or summer thanks to clear water. Beavers create dens in the banks of pits and ponds that are accessible year-round to otters, which typically do not build their own dens. That is just one aspect of a relationship between the two mammals that benefits otters more than beavers. The other is the dams beavers build, which create slack-water habitat in which otters can live and fish.

Otters have no natural predators when they’re in the water. Above it, studies in other states have found they may fall prey to coyotes, bobcats, foxes, domestic dogs, wolves, mountain lions, bears and bald eagles. So sandpits, with den sites, abundant food and cover, especially when iced



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Kent Fricke sets a trap in the outlet of a slough south of Wood River. Fricke trapped and tracked otters for the Commission as part of a research project to determine home range, dispersal, survival and habitat needs of otters on the Central Platte River.

Otter Sign

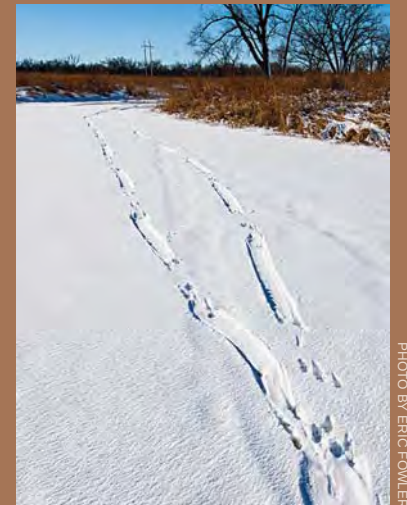


PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Otters run and slide on snow, leaving a Morse-code-like track.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Otter tracks are 2 to 3 inches wide and 2 to 4 inches long.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Otter scat is full of fish scales.



PHOTO BY BOB GRIER

Otters may consume a fish on top of the ice, leaving the head behind.

over, are “perfect habitat for otters along the Platte River,” Wilson said.

In fact, the otters’ affinity for sandpits may prove the primary survey method the Commission has used to track river otters to be unreliable, Wilson said. For decades, biologists have looked near bridges for the distinctive tracks otters leave in snow. The playful critters run for a few steps

and then slide on their bellies, often up to 15 feet, and repeat the process to get where they need to go, leaving a Morse-code like trail of dots and dashes in their wake that is easy to spot.

Wilson said research in northern states had found otters don’t move as often in the winter, especially when it’s cold. As he suspected, the same held true for Nebraska otters. Some never

left the sandpit, or even came above the ice, for weeks.

“It is interesting when you go there in person, day after day for a month, and you can detect an otter under the ice with your telemetry equipment and you know it’s right there, and there’s fresh snow and there’s no tracks. No evidence of it whatsoever. Nothing,” Wilson said.

With a smorgasbord of fish at their doorstep, otters have no reason to leave lakes or sloughs. An efficient predator that some have called “water wolves,” otters have little trouble catching fish slowed by cold. This was plainly illustrated by a female that didn’t move more than 100 yards from her den site in an ice-covered sandpit during an overnight tracking session. A month later, she moved 6 miles during an overnight tracking session, the most recorded by any of the animals studied.

Apart from winter, the study found otters do indeed put on some miles in search of food, a mate, a natal den, or, in the case of dispersing otters, a new home range.

How mobile the animals are was illustrated early in the reintroduction program. A male otter trapped in Idaho and released on the Calamus River in November 1987 was caught in a trap set for beaver on the Platte River in Douglas County 33 days later, 201 river miles away. Another male released on the South Loup River in Custer County in March of 1987 was trapped a little more than a year later in the Missouri River near Herman, Missouri, 700 miles downstream.

Sometimes an otter’s trip up or down river took them back to the same den site. But otters are opportunistic and will den up wherever one can be found. A study in Idaho documented a single otter’s use of 88 different den sites. The 18 otters tracked in Wilson’s study were found in 127 unique dens, and undoubtedly used more.

Two male otters researchers were tracking left the study area. Researchers weren’t able to locate one until they flew the river in an airplane and found it briefly near Columbus, 92 miles from where it was captured, before it disappeared again. Another set



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

A river otter pauses after emerging from a beaver den on the Platte River on the Crane Trust property south of Alda. Three otters, including one that was carrying a surgically implanted radio transmitter, and two beavers emerged from the den.

up a new home range 53 miles to the northeast near Central City, where the presence of otters had previously been documented just once. That male was caught in a beaver trap within that new home range in 2010, four years after its transmitter was implanted. That turned out to be the only documented death of an otter in the study.

Annual survival of otters is high when compared to many small mammals, ranging from 70 percent or greater in states with a legal trapping season to 80 percent or more in areas with no harvest, according to research. Wilson was pleased and yet still somewhat surprised that no otters died during his study, a first for a study sample of this size and duration.

He was also pleased at the results of a companion study that collected otter scat and used DNA analysis to estimate the population density of river otters in the study area at about one every two-thirds of a mile, a number he categorized as “very high.”

Researchers floated the river searching the banks and sandbars for communal latrines, spots where otters leave the water to not only deposit scat but also leave scent markings, a form of communication, that are conspicuous in nature due to their size. Sites were visited twice, two weeks apart, and the DNA testing was used to determine

the number of otters using each latrine and then estimate the number of otters living in the study area.

The resulting data places the otter population in the study area among the highest ever recorded in the country. Wilson said, however, that few studies have used DNA samples to estimate population, so that could factor into the high density. So could the topography of the Platte compared to other rivers.

“A lot of previous studies have taken place in rivers in the East, where you have one deep channel,” Wilson said. “The Platte is really, in some places, six or seven rivers in one. It’s more of a habitat complex than a river, and that’s a qualifier that could account for the high density.”

Future

Wilson isn’t certain what Nebraska’s otter population is, but believes a new study, paired with his research, will allow biologists to soon develop an estimate. Students in the Nebraska Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln are now scouring the state’s rivers for more evidence of otters, using scat surveys and trail cameras to document the presence of otters in a study that will continue through fall 2015.

When biologists have a better idea how many miles of those rivers are occupied by otters, they will use known population densities formulated here and elsewhere to develop the estimate.

Wilson isn’t certain that the otter population is high enough in Nebraska to allow trapping, as Iowa, Missouri, Kansas and other states now do. But he does believe it may be time to consider removing river otters from the state’s list of threatened and endangered species. “With high survival rates and continued expansion, it may be time to focus recovery efforts on other species in more critical need,” he said.

To make those changes is part of “a giant success story,” Wilson said. “If you look at maps from 1970, much of the Midwest was basically devoid of otters. This is a rare type of success, that you can have an animal that’s done so well after being completely gone for so long.

“At least in my mind, it’s a success when an animal comes off the threatened and endangered list. Then your resources are reallocated to the species of plants, animals and insects that really need it the most right now. Otters were there in the past, but now they’re doing really well.”

Through these continued efforts, the river otter will once again be a staple along the waterways of Nebraska. ■



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Kent Fricke releases a river otter into a slough south of Wood River. Fricke had trapped it in the same location a day before and transported it to Lincoln where a radio transmitter was surgically implanted.

40 Years a Steward



An Interview with Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Director Jim Douglas

By Amy Kucera

Q: What are your earliest memories of being outdoors?

I had a lot of curiosity about the natural world as a kid. I lived in a small town in central Illinois that was essentially rural in nature. I spent a lot of time in the woods and the creeks.

But there was a rule, that until I was a certain age, I could only go to the first creek. There were three parallel creeks that were about a quarter mile apart, so I could go down into the first creek when I was 6 years old. But I had to be 8 or 9 before I could go to the second creek – older, wiser. I couldn't go to the third creek until I was about 12. And after I made the third creek and saw all of its wonders, one of my older brothers said, "Well, that's nothing, if you keep going, there's a river."

Q: What inspired you to go down the conservation career path?

My dad was quite a horse person. He was born in Kentucky and later lived in southern Illinois and exercised racehorses. When I was 10, he lassoed my neighbor's wild pony and brought it home as part of a trade and I had Tony the Pony. I kept him out at my uncle's farm a half mile away. By then, I was old enough to help with my uncle's farm chores. I was always interested in taking care of animals.

My dad was a hunter also, so I was exposed early on to hunting and fishing with my brothers and cousin. We hunted rabbits with beagle hounds. When I was about eight, my beagle brought back a young rabbit during the summer. He hadn't killed it, but its skin was damaged so I glued the skin back on using a bottle of LePage's glue. It wasn't the best thing to do, but it was the thought that counted. It was a start.

I had wanted to be a veterinarian. I initially studied pre-vet medicine in Illinois for a couple years but decided to transfer to the University of Montana-Missoula (UM). I had a full-ride scholarship to go to any state school in Illinois, so when I told my dad I wanted him to pay out-of-state tuition

so I could be a wildlife biologist, he didn't seem thrilled.

After some time passed, he did two things that I'll never forget. He said, "If you can work and save \$1,000 per year, I'll pay the rest." This was a big commitment for a factory worker with four kids. He also handed me a book titled, *How to Make a Living at Conservation*. I don't think he'd been in a library since high school. And there wasn't exactly a bookstore on every corner. I still have that book to this day.

At UM, I was in an atmosphere where wildlife and conservation issues of the day were front and center. There were many nationally prominent university professors there. It was an era on the heels of the Wilderness Act and other environmental legislation. The Cooperative Wildlife Research Units were becoming more prominent in wildlife research. The plight of grizzly bears was on the forefront at that point in time, and the Cooperative Research Unit at UM had Frank and John Craighead, who were the leading researchers for grizzly bears at Yellowstone National Park. I cherish my time there. It motivated me to want to continue to be involved in conservation.

Q: Describe how your career aspirations have changed throughout the course of time.

I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do; I just wanted to do something to make a difference in conservation. I had first worked part-time for Montana Fish and Game on an elk telemetry project while I was going to school and was pleased when I had the chance to go to work for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission in 1974. I was in the fisheries division at the North Platte Fish Hatchery and



Jim, cousin Kevin, and Tony the Pony in 1961.



Kevin, Jim and Uncle Leroy after a rabbit hunt in 1966.



Jim and cousin Kevin hold matching pellet guns on Christmas in 1961.

learned more about Nebraska, traveling around the state stocking fish. I can't remember actually charting a course, but I did want to move into different elements of the agency as time moved on. I went into habitat management, then later on into wildlife management, and moved east toward the headquarters between 1977-78. Once I got there and became more familiar with all the operations of the agency and accomplishments that occur because of so many great people, I became even more aware of how dedicated the Commission employees are. There was something about that – it made me want to do my best. It seems as if you do your best, you end up with opportunities to take on other responsibilities and I've been fortunate in that regard.

Later on, I was asked by Director Rex Amack to combine the two divisions of wildlife and resource services and create a plan for the efficient implementation of that combination, and essentially manage both of those as one. It became the new wildlife division in 1995.

I decided for sure that I needed some additional training and education to be the most effective administrator that I could be, and I went back to school every Saturday for two years at Bellevue University to receive my Master's degree in management. And that was, from my viewpoint, extremely valuable when I was named Deputy Director in 2010 and became Director in 2012.

Q: Obviously, you've seen a lot of changes. What is one of the most notable that you've witnessed?

I think that most of the changes in the agency reflect our response to changes in society. Of course, one of the big challenges we have is making sure people are still thinking about getting outdoors and what effect they can have on conservation, the landscape, fish and wildlife. All of the other activities available to people with electronic technology have caused us to change our programming and emphasize some things more than we did at one point in time. Now we think about messaging more in different venues and fashions, offering more hands-on training, outdoor experiences and opportunities, and think more about availability and access to the outdoors, especially for young people.

Q: What are some of the most memorable experiences or moments in those last 40 years?

Well, there is so much. When we reorganized and combined the wildlife and resource services divisions, we

greatly enhanced our capabilities to interact with private landowners on the landscape and to improve wildlife habitat. We put a lot of boots on the ground, to go out and be part of the agricultural community, to work with landowners and organizations to try to influence peoples' decisions to engage in wildlife-friendly practices on the landscape. Having a major part in that initiative is very gratifying to me. I am also pleased to have been a part of the success of our big game program for sheep, elk and deer.

And I'm feeling good about things that are happening right now. We're putting more emphasis on professional and efficient communications, we've changed the way that we identify, hire and train conservation officers, and we've created an integrated workforce mentality where there is a lot more cross-functional training and activity between divisions. We've done a major assessment of the needs of our park system and sought additional resources. We have a plan to reorganize our parks division to bring consistency in regards to management and budgeting. We are also developing more employee-friendly practices and opportunities for engagement, including a new employee orientation program that involves getting some new employees out to meet people and see the great assets of our state.

Q: You've maintained a strong commitment to conservation in your life. How do you inspire others to care for the natural resources?

I think most people actually have the right motivations. Sometimes, they just don't know exactly what to do, or they don't realize that they need to do something. Ask yourself what kind of world you want to live in and leave for your kids. Is it a world that still has areas of natural beauty? Of course you'd say yes to clean air, fresh water, to preserving some of the natural landscape and rivers. How about opportunities to enjoy our outdoors?

If you really want to help, we'll certainly help you find a way. Become a volunteer for us. Kids have just as much fun fishing today as they did 40 years ago and many go for the first time through our volunteer program.

You don't have to be the leader of the state fish, game and park agency to do something about conservation, just be cognizant, do what you can and also support those whose job and mission it is to do something about it every day. ■



Jim's father Newt came to Nebraska for fishing and hunting trips every year for nearly 40 years.

Crawfish

Catch and Cook

Story and photos by Julie Geiser

Nebraskans can enjoy a southern favorite - an authentic crawfish boil.

Nebraskans may not live in one of the southern states where crawfish boils are a beloved tradition, but during fall in Nebraska there is a good supply of crawfish for the taking.

Crawfish – also commonly known as crayfish, crawdads or mudbugs – are smaller versions of lobsters and taste just as good. Collecting crawfish, as I have done since childhood, is an easy process if you know when and where to find them.

The Nebraska Public Power District Sutherland Supply Canal that runs between Sutherland and North Platte is a great place to start, as it is typically

de-watered once a year, usually after the irrigation season has ended, for inspections and repairs of the canal walls.

Look for water holes from the road, then with a pair of hip boots or muck boots, a small dip net, a couple five-gallon buckets and steady feet, traverse down the steep, rocky sides of the canal and inspect these water holes more closely.

Though some holes house only a few crawfish, others can be honey holes. Hitting several holes is sometimes needed to gather enough of the mudbugs to make one meal or feed a backyard full of hungry friends.

From there, it is home to clean and

prepare them for the cooking pot.

Dump the crawfish into a cooler or other large container and wash them off with clean water to remove mud or debris. Some people purge crawfish by giving them a salt bath.

Salt baths are done by placing the crawfish in a cooler then sprinkling about one third to one half of a one-pound can of salt over them. Cover them with water and soak them, then rinse again in water before placing in the pot. Personally, I don't purge crawfish; from all my research it is not necessary.

For cooking, fill a pot half full of water – make sure the water will cover the crawfish during the cooking process. Start heating the water and add spices. There are several spice packets available or make your own spice mixture. I use Zatarain's Crawfish, Shrimp and Crab Boil Bags (one bag per four pounds of crawfish) or my own combination of spices (see page 29 sidebar). Squeeze two lemons in the water as well for four pounds of crawfish.

While boiling the water and spice mixture – about 20 minutes with the lid on the pot – prepare the side fixings that are a must for a crawfish boil: Potatoes, sliced in half if larger than two inches, carrots, frozen corn-on-the-cob, sausage cut in two-to-three inch pieces, garlic cloves and onions cut in halves or quarters. Any favorite sides that can be put into the boiling pot can be used – the sky is the limit here, be creative.

Potatoes and carrots will need to be placed in the pot first as they take



From catching crawfish to the crawfish boil with all the fixings, the process is simple and provides a unique meal for Nebraskans. Melt some butter, get your favorite beverage and enjoy.

longer to cook. The items that do not need as much cooking time, such as corn-on-the-cob, will be last. Cover and boil. Once the potatoes are starting to soften, it's time to add the crawfish. The key is to not allow the sides to get mushy.

Add the crawfish on top of the sides and make sure they will be covered with the spicy water.

Stir with a large paddle or spoon, cover and bring them to a rolling boil as quickly as possible; once they are boiling cook for four or five minutes then shut off the heat.

After the heat is off, put the frozen corn in and stir; this cooks the corn and starts cooling the concoction. Pour a small bag of ice over the crawfish; this helps the shocking process, which stops the cooking.

Stir the mixture and taste a crawfish to test. Overcooking the crawfish will make the shells hard to crack open and the meat over-done. If the texture is rubbery, the tail meat is not done enough. If it's falling apart, it's overcooked.

This is the time when the sides and the crawfish can soak up all the great spice flavors in the water. Pouring

spices over the top of the crawfish does not give the mudbugs their great flavor, soaking does.

I soak them for about 15 to 20 minutes then sample a crawfish for the desired flavor. Those wishing to have a spicier flavor may want to soak them for 30 to 40 minutes.

When the soaking is finished, drain and dump the sides and crawfish into a clean serving platter, trough or do as some in the South and place the meal on a table covered with newspaper for all to pick through and enjoy.

For extreme eaters that want the entire crawfish experience, break the crawfish at the natural spot in the middle, then put your lips on the opening to the body and draw in the juices.

For those of you who only want the tail meat, peel off the first segment of the shell around the tail, then pinch the end to make the rest of the tail meat pop out.

Start the cooking process over again from the beginning if cooking for a large group of people. The spicy water can be re-used, just add more water or remove water to the proper level and add more spices if needed.

The cooking process does take a about an hour, but the meal is well worth the wait. ■



What You'll Need

Tools needed for a crawfish boil:

- Large stock pot (if cooking for a few people)
- Large aluminum pot with lid and basket (for a large group)
- Aluminum or wood paddle/spoon for stirring
- Propane burner
- Large cooler
- Seasonings
- Crawfish
- Lemons
- Ice
- Paper towels and trash bags
- Sides for the meal

Spices for a large cooking pot mixture:

- 1 tablespoon ground black peppercorns
- 1 tablespoon ground coriander seeds
- 2 tablespoons ground cloves
- 1½ tablespoons ground allspice
- ½ pound kosher salt
- 4 tablespoons cayenne pepper
- 2 tablespoons garlic powder
- 2 tablespoons paprika
- 1 tablespoon onion powder
- 1 tablespoon dried thyme
- 1 tablespoon dried oregano
- 6 bay leaves, crumbled

What's Legal

- There is no possession limit on crawfish.
- The possession or use of electrical gear capable of stunning fish is prohibited.
- Anyone over the age of 16 must have a bait dealer's license in order to sell crawfish.
- Crawfish may be captured by hook and line, by hand or by legal fish nets and traps as described below:
 - Baitfish seines of ¼-inch, nonmetallic square mesh only and not more than 20 feet long and four feet deep.
 - Baitfish dip nets of ¼-inch, nonmetallic square mesh. Neither length nor width may exceed 36 inches.
 - Baitfish and bait traps of ¼-inch square mesh material with a length of 24 inches or less, a diameter of 16 inches or less and a throat two inches or less in diameter.
 - Raised minnow traps, with the baitfish removed every 24 hours.



Netting crawfish during times of low water in the canal is easy with a simple dip net; make sure your net is of legal size and material.



PHOTO LEFT AND OPPOSITE PAGE BY DOUG STENKE

To those whose hearts are stirred by the sound of whistling wings and quacking mallards, wildlife is something even more than this. It is not merely an acquired taste; the instinct that finds delight in the sight and pursuit of game is bred into the very fiber of the race. Golf is sophisticated exercise, but the love of hunting is almost a physiological characteristic. A man may not care for golf and still be human, but the man who does not like to see, hunt, photograph, or otherwise outwit birds or animals is hardly normal. He is supercivilized, and I for one do not know how to deal with him.

— Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*

NEBRASKAland Magazine's Waterfowl Hunting Nebraska



A Guide to Where and When to Hunt Waterfowl in Nebraska



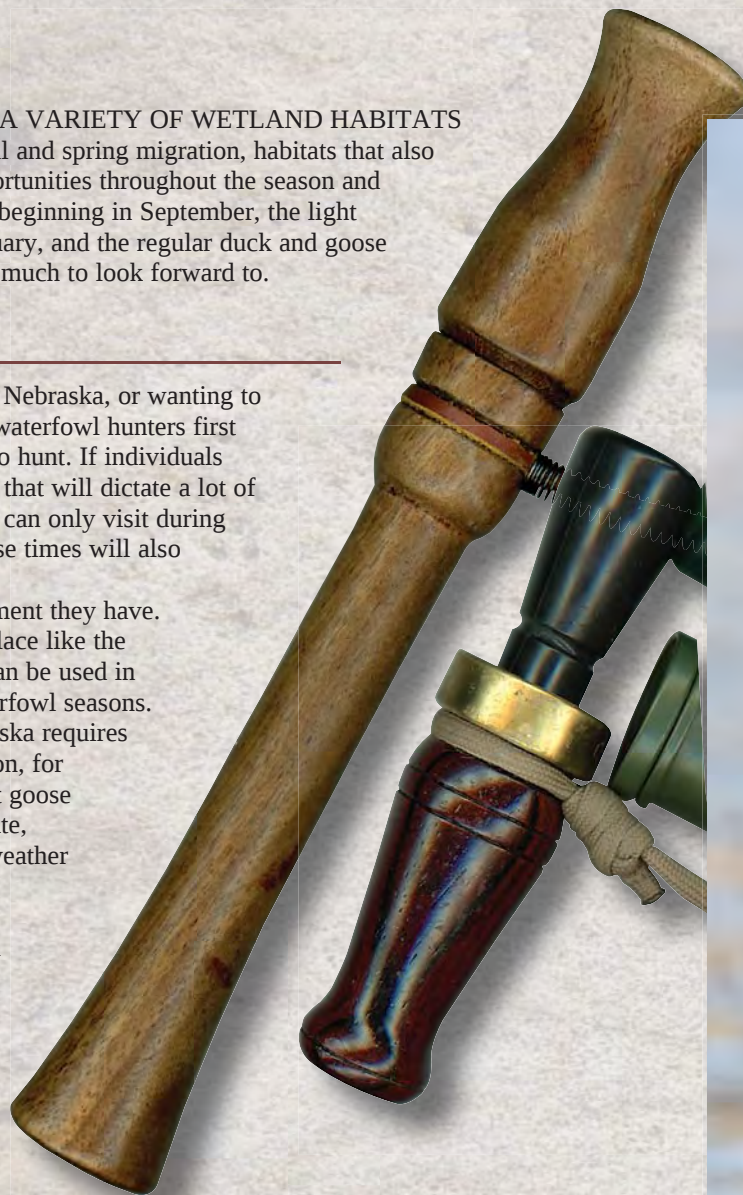
NEBRASKA IS BLESSED WITH A VARIETY OF WETLAND HABITATS that waterfowl use both during fall and spring migration, habitats that also provide for different hunting opportunities throughout the season and across the state. With teal season beginning in September, the light goose conservation order in February, and the regular duck and goose seasons in between, Nebraska hunters have much to look forward to.

Prior Planning

If new to Nebraska, coming from outside Nebraska, or wanting to explore new or different areas of the state, waterfowl hunters first need to consider when and what they plan to hunt. If individuals want a combination waterfowl/grouse hunt, that will dictate a lot of when and where they need to go. If hunters can only visit during Thanksgiving break, or near Christmas, these times will also dictate hunting location.

Hunters should also consider what equipment they have. While a good johnboat is mandatory on a place like the Missouri River, waders or even hip boots can be used in many areas of the state throughout the waterfowl seasons.

Additionally, waterfowl hunting in Nebraska requires a lot of flexibility in both timing and location, for both in the fall regular seasons and the light goose conservation order. Being a mid-latitude state, Nebraska is more subject to the whims of weather than its neighbors to the north and south. A timely cold front can bring in migrating ducks and make for excellent hunting, but a prolonged warm spell wouldn't be good. Also, finding water on the landscape can be as important as hitting the next cold front. Those hunters who can be flexible are likely to have more success.



Rynn Hollrah of Whitney waits for ducks to approach his blind, which was constructed from tree limbs that had fallen after an early blizzard.



A drake wood duck stands on top of a log on a private pond in Hall County.

Successful hunters also have to invest time into scouting areas for waterfowl. While the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission provides some information regarding water conditions for certain areas of the state, hunters need to investigate other areas and gather information on local waterfowl abundance and conditions. The variable weather conditions in Nebraska could also mean that an area that was full of ducks last year may be dry this year, making planning one of waterfowl hunting's most valuable steps.

Waterfowl Harvest in Nebraska

Although a variety of waterfowl migrate through Nebraska, the primary species of waterfowl that hunters encounter are dabbling ducks and Canada geese. In fact, since 1999, 96 percent of the duck harvest in Nebraska has been comprised of dabbling ducks, such as the mallard, gadwall, blue- and green-winged teal, pintail, American wigeon, shoveler and wood duck, and 93 percent of the goose harvest was Canada geese.

Hunters can encounter diving ducks and other geese during regular fall hunting seasons, but if a white-front goose hunt of a lifetime is what you're after, Nebraska is probably not the place to start. However, during the light goose conservation order, millions of snow and Ross's geese will stop in Nebraska before heading north, and Nebraska is one of the leading states in the Central Flyway in light goose harvest during that period.

Breaking down duck harvest in Nebraska requires one more step, and that's separating mallards from the rest of the dabbling ducks. As with other Central Flyway states, Nebraska's duck harvest is comprised of 50-60 percent mallards, with the majority of these being harvested in November. Conversely, dabbling duck harvest other than mallards is late September and throughout October, ending about mid-November. On average, the period in late October and early November appears to be the best for total duck harvest.

Canada goose harvest is primarily large Canada geese, from resident flocks in Canada, the Dakotas and Nebraska. About 20 percent of the Canada goose



PHOTO BY LUKE KATHOL

Ethan Teter of Sargent and Mark Peterson of Taylor hunt ducks and geese in a warmwater slough off the North Loup River near Taylor.

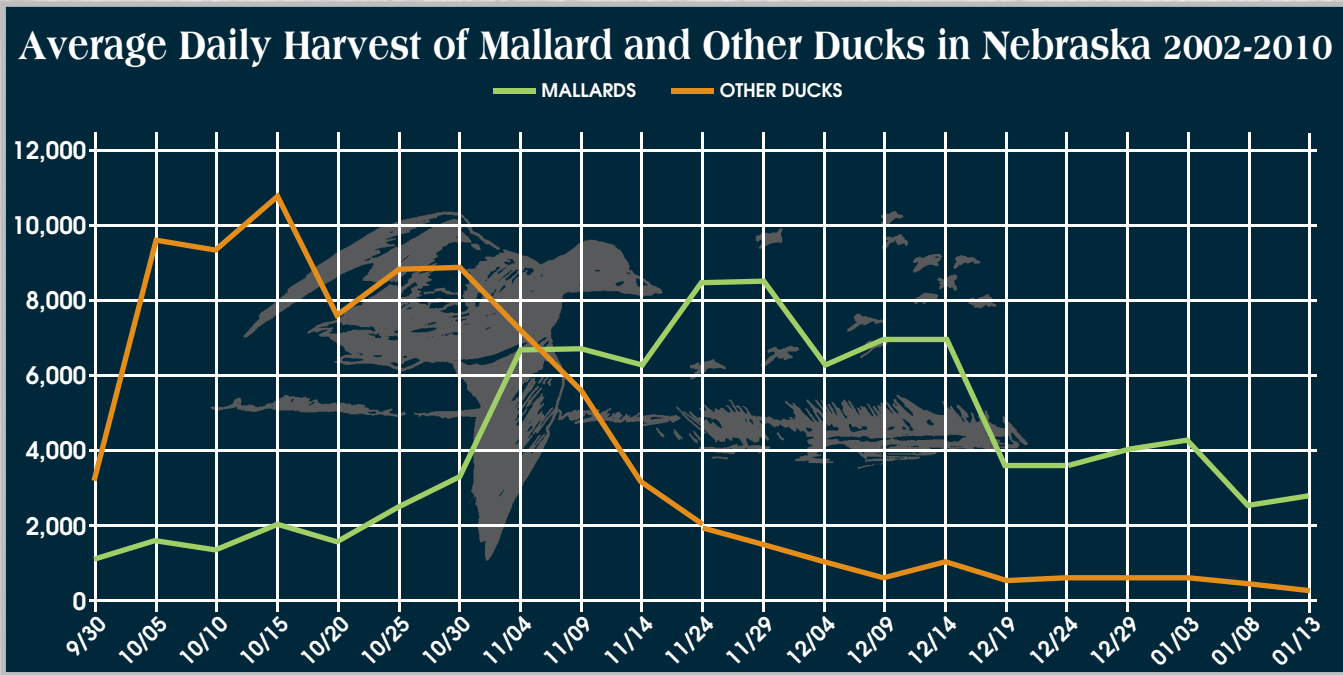


PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

A pair of Canada geese cup their wings toward a decoy spread in Lancaster County.

Approximate migration chronology of light geese during the Light Goose Conservation Order in Nebraska, 2000-2013			
Year	Light Goose Arrival	Light Goose Departure	Peak Migration
2000	February 7	March 20	February 24
2001	March 7	March 22	March 14
2002	February 14	March 22	March 15
2003	March 7	March 21	March 14
2004	February 22	March 8	March 1
2005	February 4	March 8	February 27
2006	February 1	March 8	March 1
2007	February 21	March 11	March 7
2008	February 24	March 16	March 7
2009	February 7	March 21	March 6
2010	March 1	March 14	March 7
2011	February 16	March 18	March 10
2012	February 17	March 5	February 25
2013	February 5	March 19	March 1

harvest in Nebraska is comprised of smaller, Arctic-nesting geese. These geese tend to migrate earlier in the fall than their larger counterparts. In Nebraska, December and January are the key months to pursue Canada geese. For white-fronts and snow geese in the fall, a good generalization would be that white-fronts would tend to follow the timing of dabbling ducks and snow geese. However, the peak for snow geese would typically be an abrupt halt when conditions cause lakes, ponds and most reservoirs to freeze. During the light goose conservation order, the typical peak of migration is the few days prior to or just after March 1.



Waterfowl hunters should attempt to blend into their environment as much as possible, using ghillie suits and other camouflage to hide effectively.

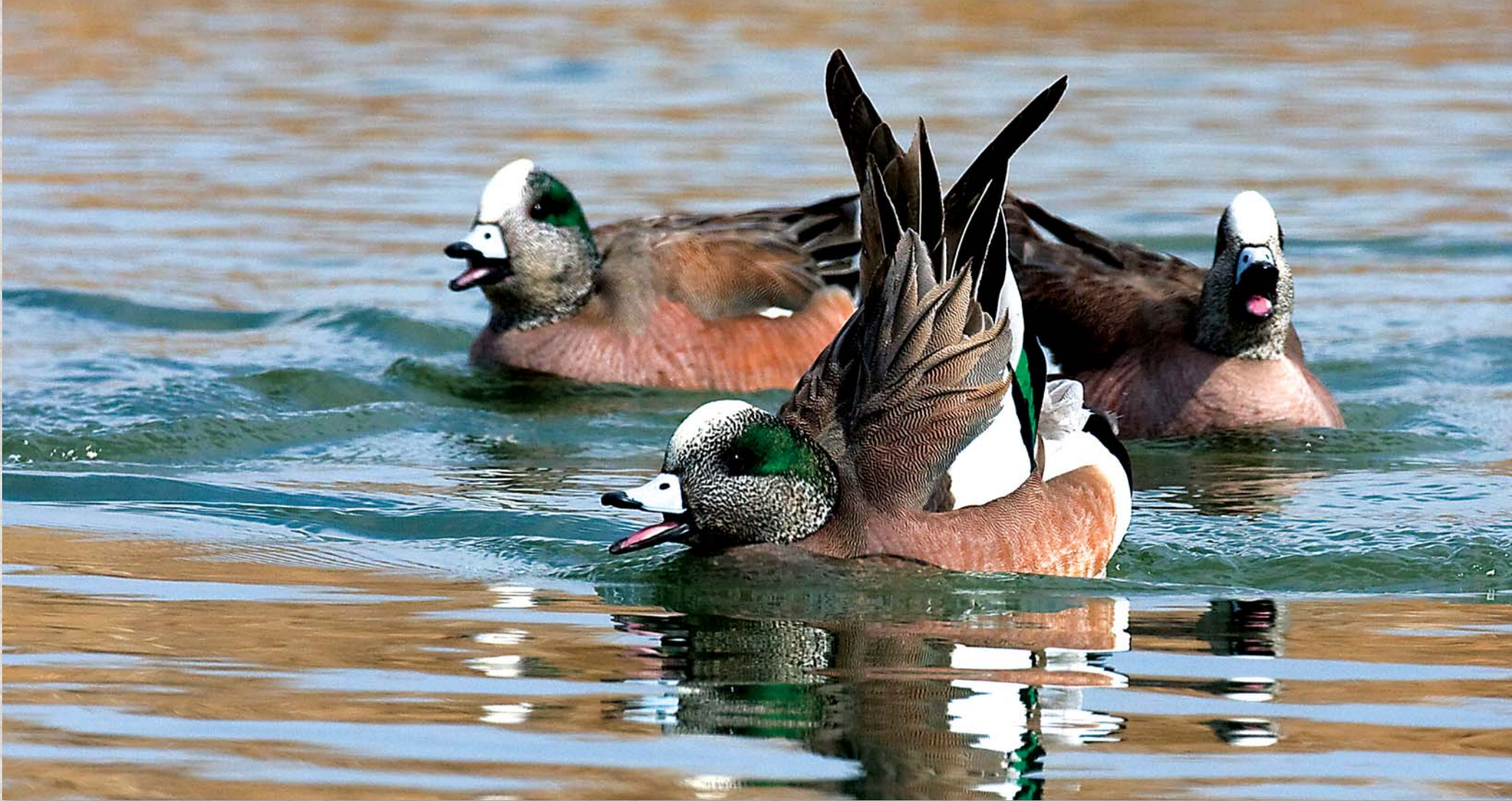


PHOTO BY RICK RASMUSSEN

American wigeon drakes cross a private pond in Hall County.



PHOTO BY RICK RASMUSSEN

A white-fronted goose stands on the ice on a private pond in Hall County.

Pintail drakes fly in formation above Funk Waterfowl Production Area in Phelps County.



PHOTO BY RICK RASMUSSEN



Wetland Habitats in Nebraska

The different wetland complexes in Nebraska provide a variety of experiences for waterfowl hunters during both early and late season hunting. In general, wetland complexes

in the Sandhills, Rainwater Basin, Southwest and Central Table playas and elsewhere are relatively shallow and typically freeze up in November.

The rivers and reservoirs provide late season hunting

opportunities and some portions may have open water throughout most of the fall and winter. A hunter's equipment and the timing of a hunt will determine the type of wetland where they're most likely to find hunting success.





A drake northern shoveler feeds on a lake near Elm Creek.

Sandhills

Habitat: Shallow lakes and marshes. Deeper portions of lakes can be greater than eight foot in depth, likely with emergent vegetation on edges. Bottoms of some lakes/marshes may be solid, others are very soft and mucky.

When to hunt: October and early November.

Primary species encountered: Dabbling and diving ducks, Canada geese.



Mallard drakes and hens return to the Platte River near Lexington after feeding.



Eric Fowler of Lincoln and Ryan Hawley of Gretna hunt ducks on Rice Lake, one of three lakes on the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge open to waterfowl hunting.

Equipment needed: Small boat or canoe recommended.

Public hunting areas: Few. Valentine and Crescent Lake National Wildlife refuges, several wildlife management areas.

Comments: The Sandhills of north-central Nebraska offers a unique hunting experience. A combination waterfowl/prairie grouse hunt is possible. The landscape is relatively undeveloped with few roads and offers a more laid-back hunt with low hunting pressure. However, low hunting pressure can actually be a disadvantage as waterfowl will fly to the next lake and not be disturbed. The vast majority of lakes are privately owned and access may make it difficult to scout for waterfowl. The large ranches may make locating landowners difficult.

A Hunter's Guide

Region	Numbers of Ducks	Numbers of Geese	Hunting Pressure	Public Areas Available	Specialized Equipment
Sandhills	Fair	Fair	Low	Few	Boat
Rainwater Basin	Very Good	Very Good	High	Abundant	None
SW/Central Table Playas	Inconsistent	Inconsistent	Low	Very Few	None
Platte Rivers	Very Good	Very Good	High	Few	Some
Other Rivers	Very Good	Very Good	High in Some	Few	Some
Reservoirs	Good	Good	Fair	Good	Boat
Other Lakes and Ponds	Fair	Good	Mod to high	Fair	Boat

Timely rains fill playa wetlands like these in Perkins County, creating valuable waterfowl habitat.



PHOTO BY DOUG STEINKE

Southwest/Central Table Playas

Habitat: Emergent marshes, typically less than 24 inches in depth.

When to hunt: October and early November, teal in September season for southwest playas.

Primary species encountered: Dabbling ducks.

Equipment needed: Concealment often difficult, given shallow water and lack of tall emergent vegetation. Material for temporary blind or concealment recommended. Blinds on public areas must be removed daily.

Public hunting areas: Very few.

Comments: The Southwest and Central Table playas probably receive the least amount of hunting pressure of all Nebraska wetland types. One reason is that they are dry more than they are wet, but when rains fill up the wetlands, they can provide excellent hunting. The vast majority are in private ownership, so tracking down landowners may take extra time. Like the Rainwater Basin wetlands, concealment from waterfowl can be a challenge. When there is water in these playas, hunters need to take advantage of them as they may be dry for several years.



PHOTO BY LUKE KATHOL

A drake green-winged teal swims across a pond near Overton.

Rainwater Basin

Habitat: Emergent marshes, typically less than 24 inches in depth.

When to hunt: October and early November, teal during September season.

Primary species encountered: Dabbling ducks, Canada and white-fronted geese in fall, snow and Ross’s geese during Conservation Order.

Equipment needed: Concealment often difficult, given shallow water and lack of tall emergent vegetation. Material for temporary blind or concealment recommended. Blinds on public areas must be removed daily.

Public hunting areas: Abundant. Over 90 waterfowl production areas and wildlife management areas in region.

Comments: The Rainwater Basin area is popular, given the amount of public land available and the shallow marshes that allow most hunters to access them with no need for specialized equipment. Hunting pressure can be intense on weekends, but weekdays see fewer hunters. Concealment from waterfowl is probably one of the more challenging issues facing hunters in the Rainwater Basin. Water conditions vary annually, so hunters need to put some time into scouting for water as well as ducks and geese.



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

A drake blue-winged teal feeds in the shallows of Cottonwood Lake State Recreation Area near Merriman.



Dave McDermott and wife Angela teal hunt at Ducks Unlimited’s Verona Complex in Clay County.

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Platte Rivers

Habitat: Flowing water, some backwater areas, sandbars.
When to hunt: November-January.

Primary species encountered: Mallards, other dabbling ducks, Canada geese.

Equipment needed: Decoys may need heavier anchors to deal with flowing water. Extra consideration of the retrieval of shot waterfowl is needed given flowing waters.

Public hunting areas: Few.

Comments: There actually are three Platte Rivers – the North, South and the main Platte – all of which can provide some excellent waterfowl hunting. Most areas along the Platte have been leased and public access is limited. Water flows can vary both annually, as well as daily, and may be somewhat treacherous during icy conditions. The rivers probably have the highest densities of hunters, and waterfowl see a lot of other decoy spreads. Making your spread different from others and proper concealment may help in decoying birds.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Hunters watch for the first flight of Canada geese as the sun rises over the Platte River on a late season hunt near Wood River.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Clint Sejkora of Burchard and Grant Brueggemann of Peru hunt a pumped wetland at Langdon Bend Wildlife Management Area near Nemaha.

River Systems (e.g., Missouri, Loup)

Habitat: Flowing water, some backwater areas, sandbars.

When to hunt: Variable, depending on river, typically October-January.

Primary species encountered: Mallards, other dabbling ducks, Canada geese.

Equipment needed: Decoys may need heavier anchors to deal with flowing water. For the Missouri River, including Lewis and Clark Lake, at least a 16 foot john or other boat is necessary.

Public hunting areas: Few, mostly on Loups and Missouri rivers.

Comments: Other river systems primarily include the Missouri, Loups, Republican, Niobrara, Cedar and the Calamus. Others may be the Elkhorn, Little and Big Blues, Nemahas and Dismal. The vast majority of land along river systems is privately owned – including that under the water, so permission is required. Hunting variable and typically more late season, although hunting wood ducks and other dabbling ducks is possible. River systems in Nebraska can offer excellent waterfowl hunting when conditions are right and offer lower pressure on most compared to the Platte rivers.



PHOTO BY JULIE GEBER



PHOTO BY RICK RASMUSSEN

Left: Wes Gilbert fixes breakfast in the duck boat blind at Sutherland Reservoir. Above: A drake ring-necked duck swims across a private pond in Hall County.

Reservoirs

Habitat: Open water, shallow fringes.

When to hunt: October-January.

Primary species encountered: Dabbling and diving ducks, Canada geese.

Equipment needed: Boat to hunt from, access areas and retrieve downed waterfowl is recommended. Longer decoy cord may be necessary given deeper water.

Public hunting areas: All reservoirs are open to hunting, but some may have a portion of them in refuge. Consult regulations before hunting.

Comments: Reservoirs typically provide better waterfowl hunting after more shallow habitats have frozen, but can offer early season opportunity in the upper ends. Having a boat with blind is probably the best way to hunt reservoirs and provides more flexibility to areas where waterfowl may be. With wind and icy conditions, hunting reservoirs may be more hazardous than other habitats.



Steve O'Hare of Raymond picks up goose decoys after an afternoon hunt on a farm pond near Lincoln.

Watershed Lakes and Ponds

Habitat: Open water, shallow fringes.
When to hunt: October-December.
Primary species encountered: Dabbling and diving ducks, Canada geese, snow and Ross's geese during light geese conservation order.
Equipment needed: Boat to hunt from, access areas and retrieve downed waterfowl is recommended. Longer decoy cord may be necessary given deeper water.
Public hunting areas: Fairly abundant, most are located as part of Salt Valley lakes and through local Natural Resource Districts in eastern Nebraska.
Comments: Most lakes and ponds are privately-owned. Waterfowl abundance can vary seasonally and annually depending on food resources and other factors (e.g., disturbance). Boat blind may be best option to use for hunting the bigger lakes. If not public land, pressure usually light and a small boat or canoe may be necessary to retrieve downed waterfowl.

Other Opportunities

Habitat: Shallow marshes, agricultural fields.
When to hunt: October-April (light goose conservation order)
Primary species encountered: Mallards, Canada geese, snow and Ross's geese.
Equipment needed: Layout blinds, field decoys.
Public hunting areas: Very few.
Comments: Other opportunities exist on other wetland complexes in Nebraska, such as the Todd Valley wetlands in eastern Nebraska or the various creeks. In addition to wetlands, field hunting for mallards and Canada geese during fall and winter can be found. Scouting is the key to find fields. Pursuing snow geese during the light goose conservation order will likely be done from fields. Fields will be privately-owned, so landowner permission is necessary. Field hunting is probably underutilized in Nebraska, and can provide some excellent hunting opportunity. ■

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Waterfowl Hunting Nebraska is written by Dr. Mark Vrtiska, the waterfowl program manager for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Originally from Beatrice, Vrtiska has worked for the Commission since 1999.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

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Spend time with someone who is beginning to appreciate the challenge and adventure that is so much a part of your life. When you do, the reward is a lifetime of unforgettable moments.



RESIDENT AND NONRESIDENT \$5 YOUTH PERMITS

SEASON DATES	TURKEY	DEER – ARCHERY	DEER – FIREARM	DEER – MUZZLELOADER	DEER – YOUTH/SEASON CHOICE
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START PLANNING AT **FiveDollarYouth.org**.

Hunt of a Lifetime

One Nebraska hunter began dreaming of elk hunting when he was a boy. Little did he know that dream would be fulfilled in his home state.

Story and photos by Justin Haag

Kevin Hennecke traveled more than 470 miles from his home near Panama, Nebraska, to the far northwestern corner of the state for a special opportunity in Harrison. It was opening day of elk season and Hennecke was one of the 33 hunters carrying a 2013 bull tag in Nebraska's Hat Creek Unit – an area known for its pine-studded buttes and sweeping grasslands. There was a time when Hennecke would have considered this Nebraska hunt merely a dream.

"I remember reading about an elk hunt in Boys' Life magazine when I was a kid, and thinking, 'Man, wouldn't it be great to travel to another state someday and have an experience like that?'" he said. "I didn't imagine that I'd be pursuing big elk in Nebraska someday."

As European settlers took residence across the nation without hunting regulations in the 1800s, elk were extirpated from 90 percent of their historic range, including Nebraska. Those that didn't get shot took refuge in the mountains to the west.

But thanks to a new spirit of conservation throughout the nation in the 20th century, elk began moving back into the state. Evidence of elk began appearing in the state in the late 1960s. Now, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission wildlife officials estimate a healthy population of more than 2,000 elk in Nebraska, where a hunting season has been in place since 1986.

Hennecke's mind started turning to elk hunting in his home state when one of his former high school students studied elk as a conservation technician for the Commission in the 1990s. Hennecke began applying for permits

and his name was eventually drawn.

Then came his next challenge: Finding a guide and access to private land. While it is possible to kill an elk on public land in Nebraska, most



Hennecke tries to get a bull's attention by using a cow elk call.

hunters seek the help of local guides. After all, drawing a bull tag in this state is considered to be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and hunters figure it's best to improve their odds any way possible.

Hennecke and his guide arrived at a promising hunting area northeast of Harrison well before sunrise that Saturday. The hunters exited their truck to take a listen. Not many minutes went by before they heard the sound – the majestic bugle of an elk. It was enough to get the blood pumping.

After a morning of hiking through the rugged canyons of Sioux County, Hennecke and his guide, while returning to the truck, discovered a wallow in the dirt. The guide told Hennecke that the big indentation in the soil was a sure indicator an elk was there that morning when they arrived, just out of sight.

Although it was Hennecke's first time hunting elk in Nebraska, it wasn't his first attempt at elk. He'd been unsuccessful in attempts to bag an elk in Colorado and Wyoming. He was beginning to wonder if this hunt would have the same fate. The hunter continued to scout the entire weekend without having a bull to show for it.

On Monday morning Hennecke and his guide began pursuing the tracks of 15-20 elk that had crossed a road the previous night. After an hour and a half of tracking, through four canyons, they caught sight of the herd, with two bulls, and set up within 200 yards. Then they crept within 90 yards.

As one of the two bulls finally opened itself up to a possible shot, Hennecke raised his rifle. But the would-be shot was soon interrupted by the sound of movement on the rocks to his right.

When Hennecke turned, there was a sight to behold. What was obviously the dominant bull of the group, known commonly as the herd bull, was moving in to get a look at the cows. The hunter's attention, and his firearm, turned from the smaller satellite bulls to this giant.

"I raised my rifle and waited for him to appear in an opening in the timber between us and him," Hennecke said. "About 10 seconds later he was clear and I shot him from a standing position

Hennecke, a Nebraska hunter education instructor, displays the bull elk he shot in Sioux County, fulfilling a dream he's had since he was a boy.



PHOTO BY KEVIN HENNECKE

in the left side. He hunched and turned 180 degrees and 5 to 10 seconds later I shot him again in the right side, which dropped him."

Hennecke and his guide walked the 80 yards to the bull, took photos and admired him.

"They truly are a big, beautiful animal," Hennecke said.

The bull's six-point rack scored 326 inches with its longest tines 19 ½ inches and an inside spread of 36 inches. Most hunters consider any bull scoring above 300 to be a nice trophy.

"I feel so blessed to have drawn a once in a lifetime Nebraska bull elk tag

and feel just as blessed to get to kill a big herd bull right here in my home state of Nebraska."

It's the stuff of which many a boyhood dream is made, and is undoubtedly the same sentiment of other hunters each year who have the opportunity to pursue this majestic animal in Nebraska. ■



Hennecke hunts the rugged buttes and canyons of the Hat Creek Unit in Sioux County.

Fulfill the Dream

The journey to bag Nebraska's biggest game animal may be born with childhood dreams, but it begins in earnest during the elk permit application periods of late May to late June.

The application for a permit can be made online or by a form downloaded at Outdoornebraska.org. The form also may be obtained by visiting a Game and Parks Commission district office or contacting the agency by phone. Elk hunting is available to Nebraska residents and non-resident landowners, and residents get preference.

The overall odds, which vary by unit, are about 25-to-one for drawing a tag for a bull, and seven-to-one for antlerless. A bonus point system improves the odds for hunters who have applied but have been unsuccessful at getting a permit in the past. For each year a person has been unsuccessful in the drawing, he or she receives an extra entry.

Once permits are drawn for the state's seven elk units, hunters can begin planning their adventure and getting permission from landowners.

Details can be found at Outdoornebraska.org, or in the Commission's Big Game Guide available from permit vendors across the state.

2014 Season Dates

- Firearm Bull
Sept. 27-Oct. 26
- Archery Bull
Sept. 15-Oct. 26
- Private Land Antlerless
Aug. 15-Oct. 26, Dec. 1-31
- Public Land Antlerless
Sept. 27-Oct. 26, Dec. 1-31.

Trout in the Classroom

By Lindsey Chizinski, Fisheries Biologist

“Goodbye, Flapezoid!”
 “Hang in there, Tiny Tyler!”
 “Smell you later, Triton!”
 Hikers on the nature trails at Schramm Park State Recreation Area in Gretna were probably startled to hear these lighthearted farewells echoing from the canyon last May. A peek into the canyon would reveal a group of students seated along the rock ledge that borders ponds built into the hills. Each student held a green and yellow Runza cup and, one by one, slowly poured its contents into the water below their dangling feet. After each cup emptied, students leaned forward and peered into the pond for a glimpse of a tiny rainbow trout, its light colors

exposed against the backdrop of leaf litter on the pond’s floor.
 “Don’t get eaten, Red Stripe!”
 “Stay safe, Captain Sparkles!”
 “Look, ‘Ham’ and ‘Cheese’ are swimming together!”
 The students were wrapping up their school year with the release of juvenile trout they had carefully raised from eggs during the previous three months. They were participants in an aquatic education program, new to Nebraska, called Trout in the Classroom. The program is a unique way to bring lessons about aquatic ecosystems, water quality, life cycles, food webs, fish biology and fishing recreation into the classroom.

Trout are an ideal subject to introduce these topics. The timeline of a trout’s development syncs well with the school year calendar. Eggs hatch and fish grow while school is in session, providing students the opportunity to experience life cycles as part of their lessons. As an indicator species, trout abundance directly reflects the quality of the water in which they live.

Although trout are not thought to be native to Nebraska’s waters (there is evidence of cutthroat trout in the Nebraska Territory, a region that included land north and west of the state’s current boundaries, predating statehood in 1867) and the coldwater habitat that trout require is limited, they are a highly sought species for many Nebraska anglers. Naturally reproducing populations of cutthroat, brook, brown and rainbow trout can be found where there is suitable habitat, primarily in northern and western Nebraska streams. Additionally, rainbow trout are extensively stocked statewide in waters that can support



Fourth- and fifth-grade students from Walt Disney Elementary School in Millard toss fish food to rainbow trout during a field trip to Schramm Park State Recreation Area in Gretna.



This rainbow trout fingerling, hatched and raised in a classroom aquarium, was released by a student into the cool-water canyon ponds at Schramm Park State Recreation Area in Gretna.

seasonal put-and-take trout fisheries during cooler months.

Partnerships

The lineage of Trout in the Classroom can be traced back to the early 1980s with a partnership between Canada’s Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the British Columbia school system. Government biologists trapped salmon from a local river to supply schools with eggs and, after some trial-and-error, students successfully hatched coho salmon in their classrooms.

The hatchery-in-the-classroom concept expanded quickly to the

United States when the University of California Cooperative Extension and the U.S. Department of Education partnered to grant funds to supply California classrooms with coldwater aquariums. Trout Unlimited, a national non-profit organization whose mission is to conserve, protect and restore North America’s coldwater fisheries and their watersheds, joined that partnership to equip even more classrooms with mini-hatcheries.

Partnerships such as these drove the expansion of the program throughout the United States over the next decades. Trout in the Classroom programs are active in 35 states. Most function as a cooperation of schools,

state conservation agencies such as the Game and Parks Commission and local Trout Unlimited chapters or other private conservation organizations.

Trout in the Classroom came to Nebraska via an aquatic educator’s conference in 2012, when Commission staff attended a panel discussion led by educators from Michigan, New York, South Dakota, Idaho and Pennsylvania. Each shared experience with programs in various stages of development, from





PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Students prepare to release rainbow trout fingerlings, raised in a classroom aquarium, into the canyon ponds of Schramm Park State Recreation Area in Gretna.

New York's well established program of nearly 20 years to South Dakota's brand new program in its first season. Their ideas and advice informed the development of a curriculum package tailored to Nebraska's needs.

Nebraska's Trout Unlimited (TU) chapter, TU 710, cooperates with the Commission on numerous stream rehabilitation projects and also puts an emphasis on conservation education. Several members are active as volunteer instructors with the Commission's Youth Fishing Program and promoted Trout in the Classroom and promoted Trout in the Classroom to the board. The chapter agreed to use its education funds to sponsor two classrooms annually and provide volunteers for classroom field trips.

A coldwater aquarium system capable of supporting trout approaches

\$1,000, a prohibitive cost for most classrooms. In 2014, the Nebraska Environmental Trust funded Trout in the Classroom to provide equipment to 50 schools over three years. The Trust awards funds annually with proceeds from the Nebraska Lottery to projects that conserve, enhance and restore the natural environments of Nebraska, and helped to expand the program across the state.

In the Classroom

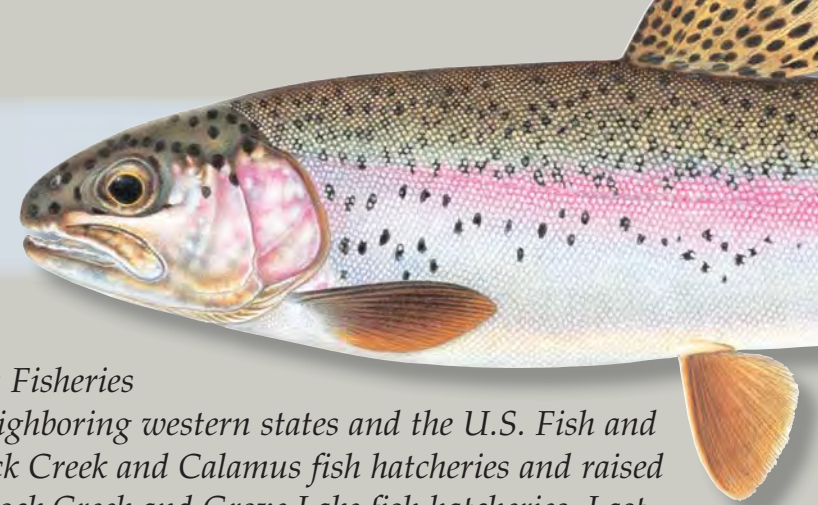
Participating classrooms in the 2014 pilot year were connected to the program through existing partnerships with the Commission. Shon Mosser, fourth-grade teacher at Millard Public School's Upchurch Elementary, Lynne Lyons and Jade Hughes, fourth- and fifth-grade teachers at Millard's Disney Elementary, Julie McKeone, second-grade teacher at Papillion-LaVista Public Schools Patriot Elementary and Steve Schmit, high school agriculture teacher at Osceola Schools, all signed on to be guinea pigs for the program's

first year. Teachers attended a training workshop at Ak-sar-ben Aquarium to learn how to assemble and operate their aquariums. They also learned how to maintain water quality and troubleshoot potential complications in trout rearing. Everyone participated in classroom activities and received certification to teach Nebraska's Trout in the Classroom and Project WILD curriculums.

Each classroom set up its aquariums in early winter, and on February 4 the teachers returned to the Aquarium to pick up their fertilized rainbow trout eggs, just delivered from the Calamus Fish Hatchery. Upon arrival, the fertilized eggs had already developed to the "eyed egg" stage and continued to develop under the students' close scrutiny.

Prior to hatch, the eggs were protected from light exposure with an insulating cover over the tank. This mimics their natural incubation habitat, the redd, where eggs are buried in the gravel of a streambed. The cover could be removed for viewing and students

The Life Cycle of a Rainbow Trout



The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's Fisheries

Division receives rainbow trout eggs from neighboring western states and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Trout are hatched at the Rock Creek and Calamus fish hatcheries and raised to a catchable size of about 10 inches at the Rock Creek and Grove Lake fish hatcheries. Last year nearly 270,000 rainbow trout were stocked into Nebraska waters.

1) Egg

- An embryo develops inside the egg 10-14 days after eggs are fertilized.
- Eggs at this stage are called eyed eggs because the eyes of the developing trout can be seen as two black dots.
- Some eggs turn white during development. These eggs are not fertile and will not hatch.



PHOTO BY BOB HALLINEN
ALASKA DISPATCH NEWS

2) Hatch

- The time of hatching depends on the water temperature. In Trout in the Classroom aquariums, the water is 52° and eggs hatch between 20-24 days after they are fertilized.
- When the eggs are ready to hatch, an enzyme softens the eggshell so that the trout can break through.



NJ DEPT FISH & WILDLIFE

3) Alevin

- Newly hatched trout are called alevins. They have an attached yolk sac that contains all the nutrients they need as they finish developing.
- As their fins develop, they absorb the yolk sacs.
- In nature, the alevin remain hidden in gravel so they are protected from predators. In Trout in the Classroom aquariums, they rest on the bottom of the hatching basket.



CALIFORNIA FISH & WILDLIFE

In addition to supplementing sustained populations in the cool-water streams of western and central Nebraska, rainbow trout are stocked seasonally into warmwater fisheries statewide to provide cool season fishing opportunities. Trout stocked in these waters cannot survive the summer months and are intended to be caught and harvested before the water gets too warm.

4) Fingerling

- 10-15 days after hatching, the yolk sac is gone, and the alevin swim from the gravel or out of the hatching basket.
- At this stage, trout feed on plankton and free-floating organic matter in the water.
- As they grow, they develop markings on their sides called parr marks. These marks help camouflage the young trout in vegetation.
- Most small trout never become adults. Instead, they become prey to larger fish and other aquatic animals.
- Trout in the Classroom fish are released into a natural habitat during this life stage.



CALIFORNIA FISH & WILDLIFE

5) Adult

- Adult rainbow trout eat insects, plankton, crustaceans, fish eggs and sometimes small fishes.
- As trout grow bigger, the parr marks fade and are replaced with the small black spots and a pink band that identify them as rainbow trout.
- When adult trout become reproductive and are ready to spawn, their coloration becomes more intense.



PHOTO BY EUGENE SHULER

6) Spawn

- In a stream with plenty of clean gravel and flowing, oxygen-rich water, the female trout uses her tail to create a nesting area called a redd.
- She releases her eggs into the redd. Then, a male joins her and releases milt to fertilize the eggs.
- Once the spawning is complete, the parents abandon the redd.
- A completed redd will have many layers of eggs and gravel, and as many as 4,000 eggs. ■



PHOTO BY GRAHAM OWEN





Rainbow trout fingerlings, averaging about one inch, swim in an aquarium at Patriot Elementary School in Papillion.

could easily track development of the fragile eggs as they were kept suspended off the gravel substrate in a mesh hatching basket.

Mason Barron, a fourth-grader at Disney, thought that the coolest part of having a trout tank was “when they were hatching and wiggling around in their eggs trying to get out.”

Disney student Chloe Jewell agreed that her favorite part of the experience was “seeing them get out of their shells and swimming with their egg sacs on them.”

Schmit said, “I cannot believe the interest everyone in the building has in these little critters. People stop in all the time to look at our trout!”

Student responsibilities included checking trout daily for any mortalities, testing and keeping records of water quality and maintaining a healthy habitat for their growing fish. Dead eggs or alevin were promptly removed from the aquarium, waste was vacuumed from the gravel bed of the tank and regular water changes were a priority.

Jewell’s favorite responsibility was using a water siphon to vacuum muck from the gravel, although Barron claimed that was the hardest part because “the water was so cold and I didn’t like putting my hands in it.”

During monitoring, students learned that trout are active fish and require high levels of dissolved oxygen. They also learned that cold water contains more oxygen than warm, making the water chiller a necessary piece of equipment. They learned that in

nature, water becomes oxygenated as it churns over rocks and as aquatic plants photosynthesize. In the classroom, an air stone in the tank and the flow of water through the chilling and filtration systems provided sufficient dissolved oxygen.

Students also learned about the importance of pH, a measure of water acidity or alkalinity. Values of pH



A student identifies an aquatic sow bug in a water sample collected from the canyon ponds at Schramm Park State Recreation Area in Gretna.

range from 1 to 14, and a neutral pH (7) is ideal for most aquatic animals. pH can drop too low (less than 6) when fish respire, taking up oxygen through their gills and releasing carbon dioxide into the water, a process that produces carbonic acid in a chemical reaction. Too much carbonic acid can lower the pH of the water. Too many trout in a confined space can cause this pH imbalance. Among other complications, acidic water (low pH)

damages gills and reduces their ability to extract oxygen from water.

High pH can cause problems, too. Alkaline water can strip a fish of its protective slime coat and can also increase the toxicity of other substances. For example, the toxicity of ammonia at a pH of 8 is ten times its toxicity at a pH of 7. Ammonia is continually released into aquarium water as trout process food and create waste. Uneaten food also releases ammonia as it decomposes. McKeone’s classroom learned this lesson as they struggled to lower the pH of alkaline tap water used to fill their tank. Even with the addition of pH balancing chemicals, they lost fish as ammonia built up in their system. “Keeping the pH low enough was a challenge, but it also provided a great learning experience for my students. We learned a lot about asking questions, trying out possible solutions and evaluating outcomes,” said McKeone.

In the aquariums, beneficial bacteria in the filtration system transformed ammonia into nitrite and finally nitrate, an end product that won’t harm fish. When too much waste accumulated in the water, students learned that bacteria could be overwhelmed and fall behind in processing the nitrites into nitrates. High nitrite levels can cause a lethal “brown blood disease” in fish, making their blood unable to transport oxygen. Some classrooms learned the nitrite lesson the hard way after losing fish due to overfeeding.

In addition to learning a lot about chemistry, sharpening observational skills and keeping meticulous records, students also made important connections between classroom trout habitats and natural habitats. They took interest in the things that affect the water quality of those habitats. Activities such as “What’s in the Water,” adapted from Aquatic WILD, and “Sum of the Parts,” adapted from Project WET, helped students identify sources of aquatic pollution and how pollutants get into a watershed, affecting the water and ultimately the organisms living in those ecosystems.

Guided by the Trout in the Classroom curriculum, students also studied rainbow trout life cycles in nature and in hatcheries, aquatic food webs, fish anatomy and Nebraska

fish species. They made fish art and kept journals of the fishes’ activities. They calculated the rate of survival for trout eggs spawned in natural habitat, conducted experiments to investigate the effects of adding excess nutrients to water and graphed the effects of temperature on oxygen levels. McKeone’s class even took their investigations outside the classroom and did comparative studies of water quality using samples from area waterways and city tap water. Schmit developed a unit about the Game and Parks Commission that included a visit from a conservation officer.

Release Day

Classes traveled to Schramm Park State Recreation Area at the end of the school year to visit the cool-water, spring-fed canyon ponds. These ponds remain as a relic from the area’s past life as the Romaine and Decker hatchery. In the late-1800s, the hatchery was purchased by the Fish Commission (now known as the Game and Parks Commission) and, prior to becoming a state recreation area, operated as the first state fish hatchery. In a nod to that history, students released their own “hatchery” fish into those ponds, an ideal permanent home for the fish they’d grown attached to. Even though the trout had a grand new home compared to their tiny tanks, Disney student Zach Mitera, when asked about the most difficult part of Trout in the Classroom, looked down and said, “Releasing them was sad. I’m sad!” He was quickly distracted, though, by other activities.

Alongside the canyon ponds, students picked through water samples and discovered wriggling critters like tadpoles, aquatic sow bugs, scuds and blood worms, a taste of what the trout would be eating in their new homes. They observed adult rainbow trout voraciously swallowing fish feed pellets tossed into the ponds and were amazed at their size and coloration. They noted that the new arrivals would need to be wary to avoid predation by the adult trout.

Everyone fished for sunfish in the old hatchery ponds. Students also had the opportunity to practice casting fly-rods in the tradition of *A River Runs*



Walt Disney Elementary School student Mackenzie Sonier shows off her catch, a bluegill/green sunfish hybrid, made while fishing at Schramm Park’s hatchery ponds.

Through It, the classic trout-fishing novel by Norman Maclean. Each class toured the Ak-sar-ben Aquarium and viewed many of Nebraska’s native aquatic species. Schmit’s high-schoolers got a behind-the-scenes tour. Disney rounded out a full day with some hiking on the nature trails. Lyons said, “The field trip to release the trout, fish, hike, etc. was such a wonderful experience for our students who may not experience [those activities] again. This is a wonderful program.”

After a successful first year, Trout in the Classroom is set to expand in 2015 to another 14 classrooms. Participating classrooms are located in Brady, Crawford, Halsey, Hastings, North Platte, Ogallala, Utica, York and the Lincoln and Omaha metros. McKeone notes that “the most positive aspect the program is that it takes science out of

the text book and makes it come alive for students. Children often struggle to connect classroom science lessons with real world application. Trout in the Classroom gives students an opportunity to apply what they have learned in a real world setting. That doesn’t happen enough.”

The Game and Parks Commission agrees and is so grateful for the partnerships with our teachers, Trout Unlimited, and the Nebraska Environmental Trust for making this program a reality in Nebraska. ■

Lindsey Chizinski has been a fisheries biologist with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission since 2006.



GETTING SAND IN YOUR TRACKS AT BIG MAC



Located 8 miles northeast of Ogallala, Lake McConaughy is Nebraska's largest reservoir providing some of the finest water sports recreation in the state. The area offers camping, several boat ramps, modern restrooms, dump stations, camp pads with electricity, water, vault toilets, picnic tables, fish cleaning stations and concessions with rental boats. The lake also has a spectacular visitor and water interpretive center one-half mile south of Kingsley Dam on Nebraska Highway 61.

Story and photos by Julie Geiser



Brady White of Kearney rides frequently near Genoa but took advantage of Lake McConaughy's sand dunes when he had the chance.

All-terrain vehicles (ATVs) have never been legal on the beaches of Nebraska's state parks. That is, until two years ago when an exception was made at Lake McConaughy after Travis Haggard, executive director of Keith County Area Development, and several ATV enthusiasts had the idea to hold a weekend-long open ride. Approved by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and the Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District, the event is now known as the ATV Jamboree, and its motto is "Get sand in your tracks at Lake Mac!"

The event attracts riders of all ages to the beach, including those from across Nebraska and other states. Due to its popularity, the Jamboree has expanded from one event in 2013 to two events this year – the first was April 4-6. Riders can still register for the upcoming October 3-5 Jamboree.

Open riding of ATVs and UTVs (utility terrain vehicles) is allowed during the Jamboree from the event headquarters at Little Thunder



UTV riders Zach Douglas, Gabbie Bergan, Lee North and Sidney Kelker from Colorado normally ride in the mountains, but come to Lake McConaughy for new terrain. "This is a different world to be on when riding," said North. "The things we ride on are close to trees and are tight areas. It's nice to come ride on the sand for a change." The sandy beaches and areas with dips, ravines and water make for a unique riding experience for those attending the ATV Jamboree.

Campground to Sandy Beach, offering attendees more than 1,000 acres of white sand to ride. Food vendors, dealer displays, a poker run, live entertainment, sand drag races, kids barrel races and a climbing wall provided by New Life Outdoor Adventures will also be part of the weekend.

The Jamboree was made possible by a two-year planning effort from many organizations, including the Ogallala/Keith County Chamber of Commerce and the Nebraska Off-Highway Vehicle Association, which has similar events in Genoa.

Now in the event's second year, Jamboree organizers continually look to expand. "We always need to be looking at ways to improve the experience, which includes new terrain, new events and new participants," said Haggard, who would like to see more organized events and possibly a larger riding area in the future. "I believe that we will see 500 registered machines attending the Big Mac ATV Jamboree if we continue to grow

the event."

The Jamboree also fills up campsites at Lake McConaughy State Recreation Area during quieter times of the year, said Colby Johnson, the area's superintendent. Both events provide a great opportunity to enjoy the area during the off-season, when the large crowds and bugs are gone, and the weather is still enjoyable.

"We are really optimistic about the future of this event," said Brenda Ketchum, president of the Ogallala/Keith County Chamber of Commerce. "So many of the ATV participants stay at the lake and create a village of friends – the atmosphere is infectious."

Only event-registered ATVs are allowed at the Jamboree; ATVs are not allowed at Lake McConaughy during any other time of the year. For details and registration, visit Explorekeithcounty.com.

 View the Nebraska Off-Highway Vehicle Trails Guide.

OTHER PLACES TO RIDE

- **Nebraska National Forest, Bessey Ranger District near Halsey**
Open to ATVs, dirt bikes, dune buggies, jeeps, sand rails, snowmobiles and trucks on designated trails.
- **Nebraska National Forest, Pine Ridge Ranger District, Oglala National Grassland near Chadron**
Open to ATVs, dirt bikes, dune buggies, jeeps, sand rails, snowmobiles and trucks on designated trails.
- **McKelvie National Forest near Valentine**
Open to ATVs, dirt bikes, dune buggies, jeeps, sand rails, snowmobiles and trucks.
- **Flat Rock Riders OHV Park near Sutherland**
Open to ATVs and dirt bikes.
- **Harlan County Reservoir in Alma**
Open to ATVs, dirt bikes, jeeps, sand rails and trucks.
- **Headworks OHV Park near Genoa**
Open to ATVs, dirt bikes and snowmobiles.
- **Arcadia Riverview Recreation**
Open by private landowners to ATVs to use the 13-mile scenic trail between Arcadia and Loup City.

Shooting from the Edge

Story by Jeff Kurrus
Photographs by
Steve Zechmann

*Sometimes good nature
photographs are as close as
your own backyard.*



Each month, the Schramm Park Photography Club meets at Ak-sar-ben Aquarium outside of Gretna where members share photography techniques and their pictures. Some of these members are fortunate enough to find their images displayed at the aquarium, and it was here where I first had the opportunity to see Lincoln photographer Steve Zechmann's work.

Zechmann's images, usually of local species, jumped off the wall to me during repeated trips to the aquarium with my family – to the point where I began recognizing his pictures before ever reading his name. It was then that I wanted to know more about this Nebraska photographer.

Now in his 60s with a wiry stature and deep, scratchy voice, Zechmann

Above: White-tailed deer play in the snow in front of Zechmann's sunroom window.

Right: Canada geese fly above Zechmann's deck as the moon shines in the background.





A white-tailed buck pauses while rubbing his antlers on nearby trees.



A view from Zechmann's deck gives this photographer unlimited opportunities for subject matter.

was raised on a farm in Pierce County. Always a lover of the outdoors, birds became a special interest growing up – an interest that still remains today.

"I was unable to play sports as a youth because of back problems," he said during a recent conversation. Because of this his parents bought him a guitar, then a drum set. When he was around 20 years old he had a friend who had a SLR camera. While intrigued, its complexities

overwhelmed him at the time. "Then, years later, I met a man who owned a SLR but was looking for a drum set. We made the swap and the rest is history."

Nowadays, Zechmann is rarely without his camera, a Nikon D600, and has dedicated his life to being closer to wildlife. He moved to the northern edge of Lincoln a few years ago because of the wildlife diversity there, placing an osage orange branch



A blue jay feeds on peanuts in Zechmann's backyard.



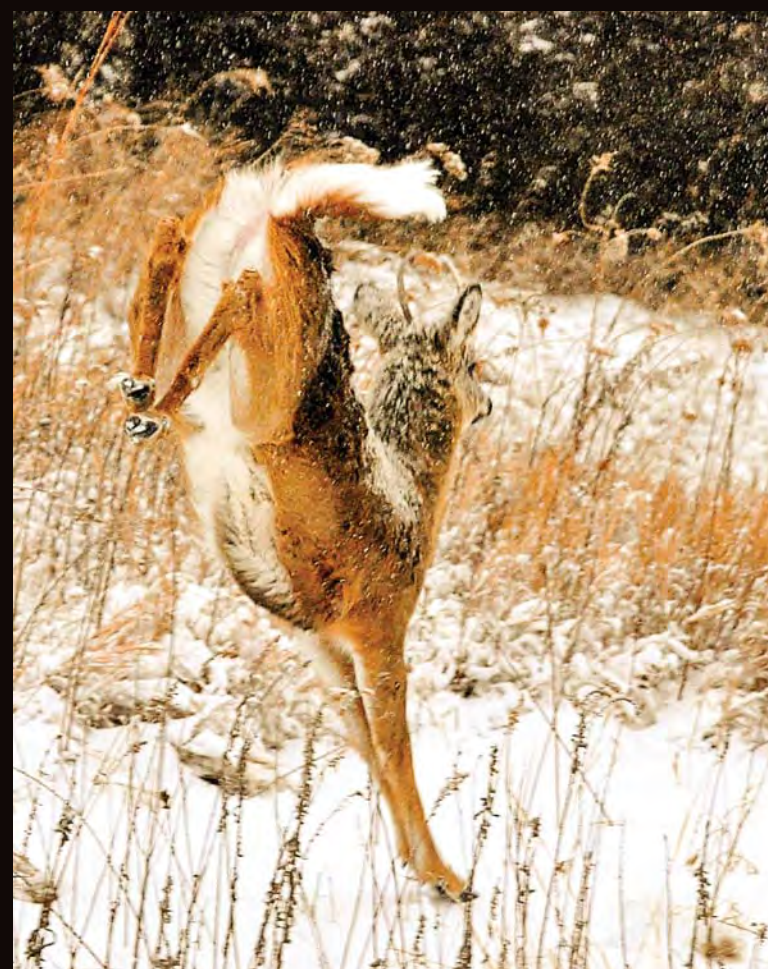
House finches greet each other on a backyard tree branch.

in his berm and attracting various species of birds throughout the year – many of which he photographs from his sunroom on the back of his house. “I slide open my window and am able to capture many wildlife photos from where I sit.”

Always paying attention has made Steve’s work stand out among his peers and to NEBRASKAland Magazine, and we commend him for always striving through his work at the Schramm Park Photography Club and in his sunroom to capture memorable



A painted lady butterfly rests on a flower in Zechmann’s garden.



A white-tailed deer leaps away from Zechmann’s yard.

images of the Nebraska outdoors.

“This has been said by many photographers,” Zechmann noted, “but the ingredients of a successful photo are always the same – focus, composition, perspective, light, the rule of thirds and a subject that stands out.”

It is because of these simple rules that his work stands out to the casual onlooker, or repeat observer, when he shares his latest entry from the backyard or beyond. ■

N View more of Zechmann’s photos.



Special Youth Challenge Hunts

Volunteers make outdoor dreams a reality for deserved youth.

By Julie Geiser

It was a crisp morning when Special Youth Challenge (SYC) hunter Cody Peterson, his dad Dewey, mentors Jack McCullough and Trevor Gotschall settled into their turkey blind, tucked away among the hardwoods on the edge of a hay field in Brown County. At the first sign of daybreak, the sounds of gobblers could be heard as the hunters waited in high hopes of calling one in.

The excitement grew as McCullough and Gotschall answered the two toms still roosting in the treetops, calling back and forth until the pair came running to the hen decoys, ready to spar for the affection of the plastic females.

As the toms tried to gain leverage over one another, a shot came from Peterson. After some whooping, high fives and a short prayer of thanks for a great hunt, they ventured out of the blind to see the morning's quarry. Cody was excited to see his bird and quickly crossed the hay field – as the rest tried to keep up with the speed of his wheel chair.

The smile on Peterson's face said many unspoken words that day; a rewarding part of the SYC program which provides training and specialized equipment necessary to help get youth hunters in the field to achieve their dreams of hunting, as well as the opportunity to make friends and memories that last a lifetime.

Keith Cline, an archer from Long Pine, became involved with SYC after learning about a chapter in Iowa. With many non-profit chapters around the United States, Cline set out to make this program a reality in Nebraska after witnessing the remarkable way it touches peoples' lives. Now, the Christian-based SYC of Northern Nebraska is in its second year of taking youth into the field.

But guns and equipment are expensive and specialized equipment is needed. Currently, .870 shotguns, donated by the Iowa chapter and mounted on a frame called a turret, are used in the blinds. Each shotgun is mounted with a scope that has a small screen and is sighted in with the gun. The screen shows a picture of what the gun is pointed at along with crosshairs to make sure the youth are on target when hunting – it's almost like a video game.

For Peterson's hunt, Cline recruited volunteers and landowners willing to provide places to hunt. Cline then wanted a place to call base camp during the hunt, and approached Camp Witness in Long Pine. "The camp came on board and gave us the facility for free," Cline said. "After that, everything just fell into place and we all worked together to get the chapter started."

Several individuals and churches built and donated 12 blinds; each blind fit two guides, the hunter and a parent or guardian. The blinds are portable, easy to store and move from place to place.

The blinds are so portable that the chapter took them on the ice in January and got some lucky youth anglers out ice fishing. Blinds, however, are only part of the



Mentor Trevor Gotschall and hunter Cody Peterson admire Cody's turkey taken during a SYC hunt in 2013.

equipment needed to accomplish a SYC hunt. Cline said a local machine shop fabricated and donated 12 turrets to the chapter – a major part of the equipment needed.

The safety on the gun is used as well as another stick that the mentor holds. The buttons must be pushed by the mentor and youth hunter for the gun to be able to fire, which gives another aspect of safety for all involved.

Some of the youth using the guns don't have the hand strength to pull a trigger – no problem; these guns shoot with a trigger mechanism that resembles a video game stick with a thumb button on top that, when pushed down, fires the gun.

The screens and sticks are attached to a car battery that powers the system, lighting the screen and making the sticks functional to fire the gun.

Cody Peterson has always liked to be outdoors, accompanying his dad Dewey on many outdoor excursions. Even though Cody has been on several trips, he has never been able to fire a gun and shoot anything until the SYC organized and provided the equipment necessary for him to be the shooter.

"SYC has given Cody the opportunity to get into the field," Dewey said. "Cody has made many new friends in the SYC and he looks forward to each hunt – once one hunt is over he is excited and looking forward to the next one." ■

If you have or know a youth that would like to get out in the field or if you would like to donate to the SYC of Northern Nebraska chapter, visit the SYC website at Sycnebraska.com and go to the contacts page.

There are Pioneers, and There are Pioneers

The mysterious appearance of a white ash tree still puzzles.

By Roger Welsch

I have long dealt with charges from a colleague that I am guilty of pre-emptive plagiarism, stealing his ideas before he has a chance to have them – sometimes by decades and when he was still in grade school. Now it's my turn: I was right in the middle of writing a column about trees, and particularly the bur oak, for this page (I do have witnesses) when my December 2013 copy of *NEBRASKAland* arrived and I found Gerry Steinauer's article about ... bur oaks. Well, there's more than one tree in the forest, and for that matter in Nebraska, including some trees that have strayed far from customary landscapes.

I've been fascinated for years about the constant flux of wildlife, things appearing where they haven't been before, other things that seemed a part of the usual suddenly no longer seen. Some of that, of course, is a matter of changes in my own perceptions: I spent a lot of time in all seasons pounding Highway 30 between Lincoln and North Platte in my youth, not once noting fields full of geese and/or cranes, but once I saw and heard them in the skies of central Nebraska it seemed I couldn't see anything *but* geese and cranes. On the other hand, when I moved to the sandy ground on the Middle Loup near Dannebrog, one of the delights I found here were tiny lizards that danced and raced across the naked sand every time I walked the uplands. Now? Nothing. Not a lizard to be found.

I never saw a groundhog out here until three years ago and now they have become pests. Eagles, wild turkeys, buzzards, whippoorwills ... Never saw them, now I do. There is talk about elk now along the river and mountain lions. A porcupine died on the highway just across the river not long ago and while they once may have been common, now they are rarities. Animals wander, sometimes surprisingly long distances.

Okay, I understand how animals expand or contract the areas they populate as conditions change – climate, human population changes, food and water availability, that kind of thing. But trees? How can we explain the appearance of trees well outside their customary distribution range? Aside from Tolkien's ents, trees tend to be relatively immobile, right? Brule Lakota Sioux elder Richard Fool Bull explained things such as the unusual enclave of bur oaks around Dannebrog, a historical population since they were here (on Oak Creek, for Pete's sake!) when the Danes crossed the river in 1871, as resources deliberately planted and maintained by Native populations long before the white man's arrival. They were food sources, after all, so as tribal people traveled and camped, they quite logically carried seeds (in this case, acorns) and put them where they would be available for later arrivals. Indians didn't just leave everything to chance; they did what they could to assure a continuing source of plant products where they knew they would eventually be camping again. Mr. Fool Bull scoffed at the notion that unusual

expansions of plants like oak trees could be attributed to generations of squirrels carrying generations of acorns hop by hop westward a hundred miles or so from the Ur-tree somewhere along the Missouri River.

But what of more modern mysteries? It may be a small surprise, I realize, but a couple years ago I noticed a small tree crowded under a juniper along our river road that somehow seemed a bit peculiar. The leaves are bigger than I generally see and differently shaped. I leafed (!) through our tree books but the closest I came was a pawpaw tree. Having never seen a pawpaw however I couldn't be sure so I wrote to Justin Evertson, whose title – no kidding – is Green Infrastructure Coordinator for the Nebraska Forest Service and the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum (his business card is three pages long!) and sent some photos. He too was uncertain about what this mystery tree might be and since he was headed out this way, thought he could stop by and take a closer look. He came, he saw, he left still uncertain. But then he, compatriot Bob Henrickson, and old friend Karma Larsen did further research and determined it is a white ash (*Fraxinus Americana L.*, for the scientifically inclined), unusual for the area. Well, that's nice. I intend to cut away the overhanging juniper branches to give it some room and to keep track that it has enough water in this tough environment. I can't help but think it will need all the advantages I can give it.

I have found white oak leaves and wondered about how they got here. I did some scouting and found exactly two white young white oaks on this property, a good mile from the closest possible parent trees in town or along Oak Creek. Still, I can imagine how a stray acorn or two could jump that mile. Along the river I have found escaped irises, hops, and day lilies and while they are something of a surprise, it's easy enough to imagine how a spring flood might wash out a planting and populate a new river bank downstream. But what can I make of this white ash? Justin Evertson says there may be a parent tree somewhere around here and I am looking. But even at that, how do I explain its journey here? It sure wasn't the river. Perhaps someone visiting us drove down to the cabin, hit a bump or brushed that juniper and jarred loose an ash seed that had lodged under a fender or in a bit of mud behind the bumper? And there it was, ready to give a try at pioneering some new ground.

Not unlike the Danes or my own German-Russian people who came far from the Russian Steppes to plant new roots far from their customary soils. I can imagine other people not even noticing that lonely white ash tucked away under the evergreen along the road to our river cabin, but every time I go by it I give it a nod in appreciation of its bravery in defying the elements and going where no white ash has ever gone before. ■



Trail Cam Photo Gallery

As the use of trail cameras has increased, so has the amount of images we receive. To view more of our favorites, visit our new trail camera gallery at NEBRASKAlandMagazine.com and continue to send us your best shots at nebtrailcam@gmail.com.



Steve Clabaugh sent in this image from his farm near Oak.



"This bobcat walked right up to the camera in western Keya Paha county," wrote John Crawford.



"This is a photo of a buffalo that my late dad, Bert Pokorny, got on his trail camera in October of 2008 west of Columbus," shared Chris Pokorny.



This turkey was photographed on the land of Leon C. Bud Gillespie eight miles south of Broadwater.



Ariel McNare sent in this photo of a white-tailed deer from northwestern Cherry County.



Marian Langan submitted this badger photograph from Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center south of Denton.

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2013
AMERICA'S
BEST
BROKERAGES



◀ Duck hunting near Gordon in 1938 was (from left to right) Otto Pribnow, Sr., Floyd Kling, LeRoy Poppe and my father Carl Poppe.

Otto Pribnow and Carl Poppe would take their families to visit the Arnold Kling and Ernest Poppe families near Gordon, Nebraska. The men would also go hunting. Otto and Arnold were brothers-in-law of Carl and Ernest.

– Leroy Poppe,
Scribner, Nebraska

► This is a picture of my father, J. Virtus Sehi, with a huge white-tailed deer he took in Northern Antelope County in 1958. I think he told me that he tracked it for almost 4 miles before taking it. He is standing in front of the Wanek Drug Store (which was right next to our bar, The White Spot) on main street of Neligh with deer draped over the hood of his 1948 Ford hunting car. He would have been 34 years old at the time and he was very proud of that deer.

– John Sehi,
Norfolk, Nebraska



◀ E.E. Quigley killed this prairie rattlesnake when he stopped to open a cattle gate on June 23, 1969 about 4 miles South of Indianola. The snake measured 49 inches in length.

– Stan Quigley,
Indianola, Nebraska

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.

junior journal

interesting notes for readers of all ages

by Lindsay Rogers and Donna Schimonitz

You Stink!

by Aaron Hershberger, Outdoor Education Specialist, NGPC

You stink – I stink – we all stink – at least to many Nebraska mammals. Stink means an unpleasant smell. Many of our native mammals have a really good sense of smell. To many of these same wild mammals, we humans are unpleasant. Therefore we stink.

To put this in perspective we need to understand how important the sense of smell is for many mammals. This can be important stuff to know if you are a hunter, wildlife photographer or just like seeing wildlife.

All of Nebraska's mammals have adaptations that help them find food, avoid danger and communicate with each other. For critters like deer, coyotes, bobcats, raccoons, foxes, squirrels and skunks the sense of smell is one of the more important adaptations for doing these things. Maybe you have heard some old person say "seeing is believing". Well, for many mammals "smelling is believing." You can see this

in the action of a dog any time they stop to sniff a fire hydrant, just before adding some of their own smell to it.

We humans have a decent sense of smell, but we cannot compare to most other wild mammals. For example we humans have 5-6 million scent detectors up our noses – scientists call these "olfactory receptors". Sounds like a lot until you compare that with rabbits that have about 100 million; coyotes who have over 200 million; and deer which have nearly 300 million olfactory receptors. The more olfactory receptors you have the easier and better you can detect the odors and smells that are all around us – even the very faint ones. Coyotes for example can smell mice, one of their favorite meals, running below a layer of snow.

So next time you are out hunting, photographing nature, or simply trying to catch a glimpse of a critter, remember "YOU STINK!" 🦊



Word Search

Find the following words in the block of letters below:

SMELL
OLFACTORY RECEPTORS
ADAPTATION
WIND
COYOTES
DEER
SCENT
ODOR
DETECT
WILDLIFE
AROMA

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NATURE CALENDAR

- Watch monarch butterflies migrate: Mid-September to mid-October
- Elk rut; listen for males bugling: Mid-September through November
- Beavers are busy gathering food and insulating their den for winter: September through November
- Deciduous trees change color and lose their leaves: October
- Listen for owl calls in the afternoon into evening: Early to mid-November



Elk photo by Eric Foster, Raccoon photo by Thinkstock

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WANTED

WANT TO BUY a choke cherry pitter. Also looking for recipes for choke cherry pie and sand cherry jelly. 970-231-6230 bovine_vet24@yahoo.com

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Hungarian Goulash with Venison

American cowboys love chili, but Hungarian cattlemen love goulash.

By Jenny Nguyen

Goulash dates as far back as the medieval ages in Hungary's history. It is a thick soup made of beef, veal or lamb, created and eaten by the cattle herders of Hungary during long cattle drives to European cattle markets. These cowboys butchered extra or weaker cattle on their journey, which provided them meat for their gulyás, which today refers to both the cattlemen and the soup; "gulyás" means "herdsman" in the Hungarian language.

Goulash is often seasoned with Hungarian paprika, caraway and tomatoes. To make the soup thicker, potatoes and vegetables are also thrown in. Our recipe is a simple one that incorporates both traditional ingredients and American influences. It's less of a soup and more of a sauce, perfect over egg noodles and a great way to utilize tougher cuts of venison, especially parts of the hindquarters and shoulders with lots of silver skin and ligament. Serve venison goulash this fall and winter. It will become a family favorite.

Servings: 8

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Cooking Time: 2-3 hours

Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons of vegetable oil, divided
- 2 large onions, sliced
- 2 tablespoons of Hungarian sweet paprika (not regular paprika)
- 2 teaspoons of kosher salt
- ½ teaspoon of ground black pepper
- 3 pounds venison stew meat, cut into small cubes
- 1 can (6 ounces) of tomato paste
- 1½ cups water
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon of kosher salt
- egg noodles (follow package directions)

1. Over medium heat, heat 1 tablespoon of vegetable oil in a large Dutch oven or pot and cook onions until they soften, stirring frequently. Remove onions and set aside.

2. In a medium-size bowl, combine Hungarian paprika, black pepper and 2 teaspoons of kosher salt. Then coat venison cubes in the spice mixture.

3. In the same Dutch oven, add the last tablespoon of



The slow simmering cooking process tenderizes tougher cuts of venison to make silver skin unnoticeable.



Serve venison goulash over egg noodles or with your favorite starches, such as dumplings, potatoes, bread or spaghetti.

vegetable oil. Cook venison until it's brown on all sides.

4. Then add tomato paste, water, garlic and remaining teaspoon of kosher salt. Reduce heat to low. Cover and simmer for 1½ to 2 hours, or until the venison is tender, stirring occasionally. If you want the stew to be thicker, remove the lid and continue to cook over low heat to reduce the sauce.

6. Serve sauce over egg noodles.



Read Jenny's **NEBRASKAland** blog "Midland Musings" to see other stories from this NEBRASKAland regional editor.



PHOTOS BY JENNY NGUYEN

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Squirrel and Cicadas

Last summer I was traveling around Lake Maloney State Recreation Area near North Platte when I ventured by a massive cottonwood tree covered with cicada shells. Intrigued, I took a closer look at the newly abandoned exoskeletons that lined the tree on every branch. Along with the shells there were several cicadas in the molting process, and the ground was scattered with holes where the insects had dug themselves up from their underground homes emerging only for their final nymphal stage – struggling to make their way to the tree to shed their skins.

While curiously inspecting the cicada a squirrel caught my eye from the crotch of the cottonwood; the squirrel stayed motionless as I pulled my camera around to capture some photos. Then in a blink of an eye it scooped up a freshly emerged cicada, ran to a hefty branch and started to consume the cicada.

“What a smorgasbord for this crafty little squirrel,” I thought. For a month or so the squirrel will have a fine cuisine of cicada. They must be tasty because that squirrel kept coming back for more.

Julie Geiser
July 1, 2014



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4 lb. boneless center-cut pork loin roast,
(untied), fat and silver skin trimmed
1 1/2 tsp. kosher salt
1 tsp. black pepper, freshly ground
1 tbs. vegetable oil
8 to 9 slices bacon
1 cup barbecue sauce, purchased

*PREFERRED INGREDIENT:

- Savory: Whisk 2 tbs. Dijon mustard into the sauce.
- Spicy: Stir in 2 tbs. pickled jalapenos chilies (nacho slices), drained and finely chopped, into the sauce.
- Fruity: Stir one 8.25-oz. can crushed pineapple, drained, into the sauce.
- Smoky: Stir in 1 or 2 minced canned chipotle chilies in adobo into the sauce.

Preheat oven to 450°F. Sprinkle pork with salt and pepper. Heat oil in large skillet over medium-high heat. Add pork and brown on all sides, about 6 minutes. Transfer to plate and cool for 10 minutes.

Wrap bacon slices vertically around pork roast; do not overlap bacon. Tie lengthwise and crosswise with kitchen string to hold bacon in place; tuck loose ends of bacon under string. Place on a rack in a roasting pan, tucked-bacon side down.

Roast on rack for 15 minutes. Turn pork over and reduce temperature to 350° F and roast for 15 minutes. Remove rack and return pork to pan, tucked-end side up. Roast, turning occasionally until bacon is browned and an instant-read thermometer inserted in the center of the roast reads 145° F, about 50 minutes. Remove from oven and let stand for 10 minutes.

Skim fat from pan juices, leaving browned juices in pan. Add barbecue sauce and preferred ingredient (*see left) and bring to simmer over medium heat, stirring to loosen browned bits in pan; simmer 2 minutes. Remove strings, carve pork, and serve with sauce. Serves 10 6-oz. portions.



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