



A deer mouse looks up from a restored sandhill prairie at The Nature Conservancy's Platte River Prairies near Wood River. Photo by Chris Helzer.

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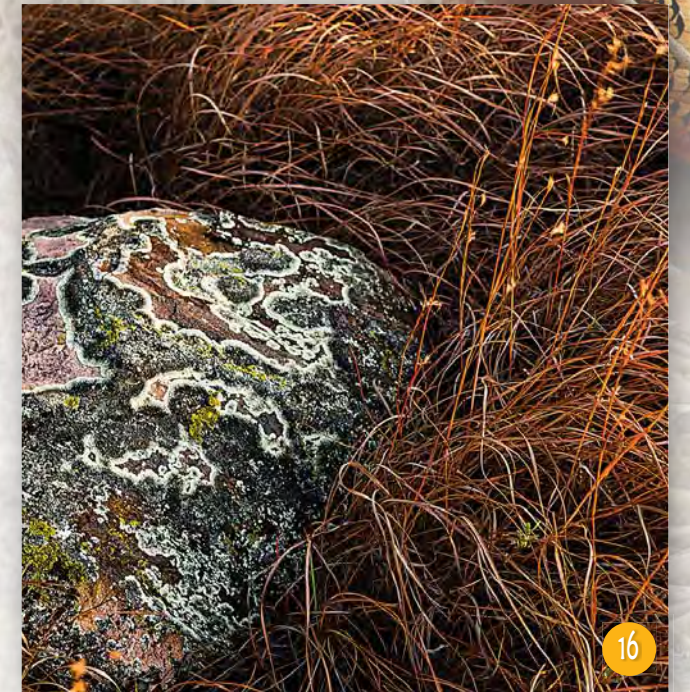
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Cover: Daisy, a female Chesapeake Bay Retriever, retrieves a drake Northern pintail during a Rainwater Basin waterfowl hunt in Fillmore County. Photo by Zach Cunningham.

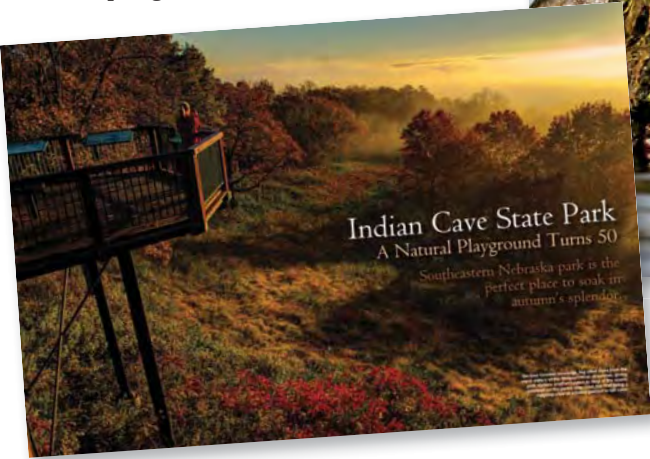
Opposite: The stove in Delbert Rathman's hunting blind cranks out a tasty breakfast every day, and keeps burning to take the edge off a cold morning. Read the story on page 36. Photo by Eric Fowler.

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Indian Cave

I really enjoyed your feature on Indian Cave in the October issue. I have a real fondness for that park as I feel I helped to make it a park. When I was in high school, I worked two summers there before it was a park. We were the first work crews to go in. We cleared the roads of dead, fallen trees one season. The next year we began putting up boundary fences. It was hard work in the heat but I look back on it now as a good experience. Rod Kehlenbeck
Springfield, Nebraska



Turkey Hunting with Dogs

Enjoyed the short excerpt on turkey hunting with dogs. Ken McEwen and I used to use our Labs quite often for turkeys in southeastern Nebraska.



Chris Masada of Lincoln took this photograph of muskrats at Holmes Lake in Lincoln.

While hunting pheasants and quail down south we would often run into turkeys. Many times we actually got points from our Labs on turkeys buried in the tallgrass prairie. My Lab Blaze especially loved to retrieve downed turkeys. We have many fond memories of those hunts. The Labs also helped

find birds that were crippled that we would have lost. Steve Tyler
Omaha, Nebraska

Snake at the Lake

This summer my son and I went out to Burchard Lake to do some bass fishing. We were driving in just west of the boat docks when we saw a large snake on the road. I thought it was a bull snake at first but as I got out of the truck to see, I was shocked. The hair on the back of my neck stood up just for the sound this guy was making. Tim Horner
Lincoln, Nebraska

Visitor

Looks like someone’s going to have escargot with plank grilling. Is that not a snail on the left plank on page 48? What a variety of articles in your magazine. It seems to get better every month! G. E. Dave Fuller
E-mail

Hungry Frog

While fishing, my grandson, Josh Bornschlegl, saw a bullfrog and wanted to catch it. With a pole, small hook and



The other day we found this female imperial moth in our driveway. – Marion Ball, E-mail
a piece of cloth he dangled the tidbit in front of this “master angler” frog, who watched it for a couple of seconds and then attacked it. I don’t know who was more startled. Thanks for all you do for promoting our state. Larry Bornschlegl
Hastings, Nebraska



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

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Advertising Sales Manager

For advertising information contact
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COMMISSION OFFICES

Headquarters/Southeast District Office
2200 N. 33rd Street Lincoln, NE 68503
Phone 402-471-0641
Northeast District Office
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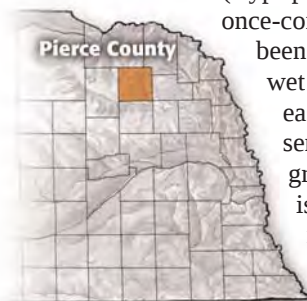
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Roadside Orchids

By Gerry Steinauer, Botanist

Rare plants are not always found in pristine native habitats. In Nebraska, the Highway 13 right-of-way in Pierce County is home to the state's largest known population of the threatened **white lady's-slipper orchid** (*Cypripedium candidum*). The



once-common orchid has been driven from its wet meadow habitat in eastern Nebraska by its sensitivity to livestock grazing and haying and is now found in only a few relatively disturbance-free sites.

The beautiful lady's-slipper can attain a foot in height, and often grows in tight, multi-stemmed clumps. The lower petals are fused, forming the namesake slipper-shaped pouch. The blooms can be seen mid-May through mid-June. The fruit is a capsule containing thousands of microscopic seeds which are wind and water dispersed.

Orchid Survey

Though biologists have known of the existence of the Highway 13 orchids since the 1990s, the first comprehensive survey of the population was conducted by staff of the Nebraska Department of Roads and the Nebraska Game and Park Commission in May of 2011. This year in June, additional areas of the right-of-way were examined. The surveys were conducted during the orchid's peak bloom as non-flowering orchids are difficult to find among tall grasses.

Nearly 500 orchids were found to be scattered along a six-mile stretch of the highway. The grassy right-of-way receives little mowing and is not grazed, and though not ideal habitat, the orchids survive there. Sometime in the past, the orchids likely established here by seed from plants in nearby meadows. Orchids still exist in a single hayed meadow bordering the right-of-way and none are known from adjacent grazed meadows. Plants do not occur in the right-of-way where it borders cropland. Perhaps hot, early summer winds blowing off the then bare fields make the adjacent right-of-ways unsuitable for orchids, or herbicide drift from the fields have killed plants.

Conserving a rare plant in a highway right-of-way is challenging. Knowing the exact location of the orchids, however, allows the Department of Roads to avoid the plants



From this image we can see why it is called "lady's-slipper."

when mowing, spraying noxious weeds and doing maintenance work. In 2012, an early spring prescribed burn, prior to orchid emergence, was conducted on a 2-mile stretch of the right-of-way containing the lady's-slipper. The fire reduced accumulated plant litter that can hinder orchid growth and set back non-native grasses, especially smooth brome, which competes with the orchid and other prairie plants growing in the right-of-way.

In the future, additional prescribed fires will likely be conducted in the right-of-way to benefit the orchids. Also, the Highway 13 orchids may someday serve as a source of plants or seeds for establishing new populations in more natural habitats. For now, the white lady's-slippers continue to survive along Highway 13; in today's human-altered landscape they cannot be choosy about where they call home.

Wildlife Conservation Fund

The Wildlife Conservation Fund is the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's primary funding source for inventory, research and management of Nebraska's plant and animal species of concern, such as the white lady's-slipper, as the monies the Commission receives from the sales of hunting, fishing and trapping permits and habitat stamps fund only game species projects. An added benefit, the Conservation Fund allows the Commission to secure other monies for species of concern, such as U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service State Wildlife Grant dollars, by providing the required match. Other recent Conservation Fund supported projects include a swift fox census in Panhandle grasslands, a study to determine bat migration patterns in southeastern Nebraska, and a study to identify timber rattlesnake distribution and woodland habitat needs in the southeastern corner of the state.

The Wildlife Conservation Fund is supported primarily through donations, and you can learn more about the fund or make a tax-deductible gift to the fund at NebraskaWildlifeFund.org. Donations can also be made through the nongame "check-off" box located on state income tax forms. ■

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Travelogue

by Amy Kucera

Cabins for “Hunters”

This autumn, retire to one of our state park or recreation areas after a long day of hunting with your camera or other weapon of choice. Here are a few to destinations to consider on your next road trip:

Book a cozy cabin at **Niobrara State Park** in **Niobrara** and awake to a spectacular sunrise over the confluence of the Niobrara and Missouri rivers. The National Audubon Society has designated the park an “Important Bird Area,” where more than 250 species have been sighted. The nearby 4,500-acre **Bazile Creek Wildlife Management Area** also provides ample wildlife viewing potential and is open to deer and waterfowl hunting.

Continue on Highway 12 to **Lewis and Clark Lake State Recreation Area** near **Crofton** for excellent hunting and fishing opportunities, and rustic, log-style cabins as an overnight oasis. Waterfowl, small game, and deer hunting are permitted.

Moving southwest to **Medicine Creek Wildlife Management Area** near **Cambridge** will provide some of the finest mixed bag hunting in the state,

with deer, upland game and waterfowl hunting available. Just south, the recently built cabins at **Medicine Creek State Recreation Area** provide the comforts of home.

Take it back a century at historic **Fort Robinson State Park**, where you won't forget your stay in the former cavalry officer's quarters in the exquisite **Pine Ridge** countryside. In all directions is publicly accessible hunting land, including **Ponderosa** and **Peterson wildlife management areas** to the east.

Visit OutdoorNebraska.org for up-to-day information on hunting regulations in each of these publicly accessible areas.



Wildlife viewing



Lewis and Clark Lake cabins



View the Public Access Atlas for more hunting and viewing locations.



and game hunting

Five Free Camping Apps to Try

By Cristina Woodworth, Freelance Writer

Going camping used to mean unplugging from all the technological gadgets of everyday life. However, smartphone apps have enhanced the outdoor experiences of many users, including the **Nebraska State Parks Pocket Ranger** (Droid and iPhone) app. Here are a few others to explore next time you're sitting around the campfire.

- **101 Camping and Outdoor Recipes** (Droid): Say goodbye to hot dogs on a stick. This app features everything from frying pan cookies to honey mustard grilled chicken.
- **AllTrails** (Droid and iPhone): Find a nearby hiking trail in your area and examine its length, difficulty and rating by other app users.
- **Knots Guide** (Droid): How do you tie that bowline knot again? Click on this app for helpful instructions, complete with photographs, for more than 80 different knots.
- **Google Sky Map** (Droid): Don't question any longer what stars or planets are above your campsite. Point your device upward and view an interactive map of constellations and galaxies – a perfect companion for stargazers. ■



Campsite Setup

By Nebraska Outdoor U!

While most campsite basics seem like common sense, it is surprising how many folks nowadays overlook them. Here's a small list to run through when setting up camp:

- **Fear the flood.** If the grass is greener in the low lying spot, it could be because water funnels there when it rains. It would be wise not to set up camp on that spot.
- **Watch out for widow-makers.** If there are a lot of dead tree branches on the ground and many more dead branches above your campsite, you'd be wise to take these hints and set up camp elsewhere, because a good rain or strong wind could bring more branches down out of that tree.
- **Positioning yourself downwind** is for hunting, not camping. If the weather forecasts north winds all weekend, don't pick a campsite on the south side of your fire pit, because the wind will blow all your smoke and possibly some ashes right in your front door.
- **Thievery in the woods.** Though it might seem nice to camp right next to the water, this is usually a common raccoon highway. Simply look for tracks and don't leave any food or sweet smelling items out at camp, as raccoons, opossums and skunks have a sweet tooth and might pay you a visit.
- **Have fun.** Do things that everyone will enjoy, tell stories, relax and soak up the beauty and peace of the outdoors.

For more information about camping, equipment and outdoor experiences, check out Nebraska Outdoor U! at OutdoorU.org and click on the YouTube link at the bottom of the page. Get outside and see what the Nebraska outdoors has for you. ■

Let the Fall Games Begin

By Julie Geiser

Turn your cabin or campsite into a friendly playing field this fall with the following games:

- Have a “Find the Biggest Pinecone” contest.
- See how many different fall colors you can find.
- Make a camp scarecrow from old clothing and fallen dead leaves.
- Spend an hour before your trip researching what's at a particular park or recreation area, then create a scavenger hunt. For even more fun, especially at a place with a lot of families, invite other campers to join the game.

Visit us at OutdoorU.org for more information. ■



ILLUSTRATIONS BY TIM REIGERT





A family outing near Custer County, 1889.

A Brief History The (Shot) Gun That Won the West

By John E. Carter, Nebraska State Historical Society

Historians talk about the guns that won the West and conjure up a Colt revolver or a Winchester lever action rifle. But neither of these were the gun that won Nebraska.

I can see the hackles rise on the necks of modern recreational shooters who favor the cowboy action tradition, but in Nebraska the simple utilitarian shotgun, like the one we see in the photo above, was the firearm of choice.

A shotgun could be used to harvest game from large animals to small fowl. If you needed a weapon for personal defense, which most people did not, a shotgun was a perfectly adequate tool for the task.

But don't take my word for it. Be the historian yourself. In 2000 the Nebraska State Historical Society received a grant from the Library of Congress to digitize and place online

the Solomon D. Butcher collection of over 3,000 photographs taken between 1886 and 1912. You can find the photographs on the Library's amazing American Memory website. Just Google "Prairie Settlement" and you will easily find it.

Go to the keyword search and look for "rifles," "pistols" and "shotguns" and see for yourself.

Butcher's photographs are a good sampling of what Nebraska looked like in its formative days. He photographed both homesteaders and ranchers at a critical time.

If you are interested, you can also check out hunting, fishing and other outdoor activities. Enjoy this powerful window on Nebraska's past. ■

For more information, go to the Nebraska State Historical Society's website at Nebraskahistory.org. Solomon Butcher's 3,000-photo "Prairie Settlement, Nebraska" collection is available at the Library of Congress American Memory website, Memory.loc.gov/ammem.

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Getting the Picture on Swift Fox

By Justin Haag

As North America's smallest wild species in the dog family, perhaps it's not surprising the swift fox can be overlooked. Thanks to a pilot project that hopes to gain momentum this fall, however, researchers are hoping to learn even more about these often elusive mammals.

In October, trail cameras baited with skunk scent were placed at points throughout 24 of the state's westernmost counties. The project, led by Lucia Corral, a doctoral degree candidate at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, is the primary component of her four-year study of the swift fox and other wild canids in Nebraska.

The swift fox, not much larger than a housecat, is at home in the Panhandle's shortgrass prairies. There, they spot predators from a distance and retreat to their earthen dens. An abundant supply of insects and small mammals keep adults and their pups fed.

With this joint project of the Nebraska Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Corral hopes to answer why swift foxes have not chosen to occupy what seems to be suitable habitat

in other parts of the state, particularly the southwestern corner.

Swift foxes inhabit grasslands from South Dakota to Texas, yet are found in just 40 percent of the area that they once called home. In the 1930s, control programs for predators nearly caused swift foxes to go extinct. A good portion of swift foxes' historical range also has been developed for agriculture and other purposes. They are also food for larger predators such as coyotes.

The region being studied is bordered on the east by Sheridan, Grant, Arthur, Lincoln, Gosper and Furnas counties. Placing dozens of cameras lured with skunk scent in the project's 26,000-square-mile region is no small task. To lessen the burden, Corral recruited help from students studying wildlife at Chadron State College and UN-L. The students from western Nebraska are a major asset to the project not only for their legwork, but also because they have obtained access to private lands near their homes.

The Nebraska Wildlife Conservation Fund is helping fund the research through its nongame checkoff program, and additional funding will be sought in the coming months from the Nebraska Environmental Trust.

When complete, data will have been collected for fall and spring – two periods of 10 consecutive days each.



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

With a good start this fall, the project will begin in earnest in the spring and wrap up sometime in 2017.

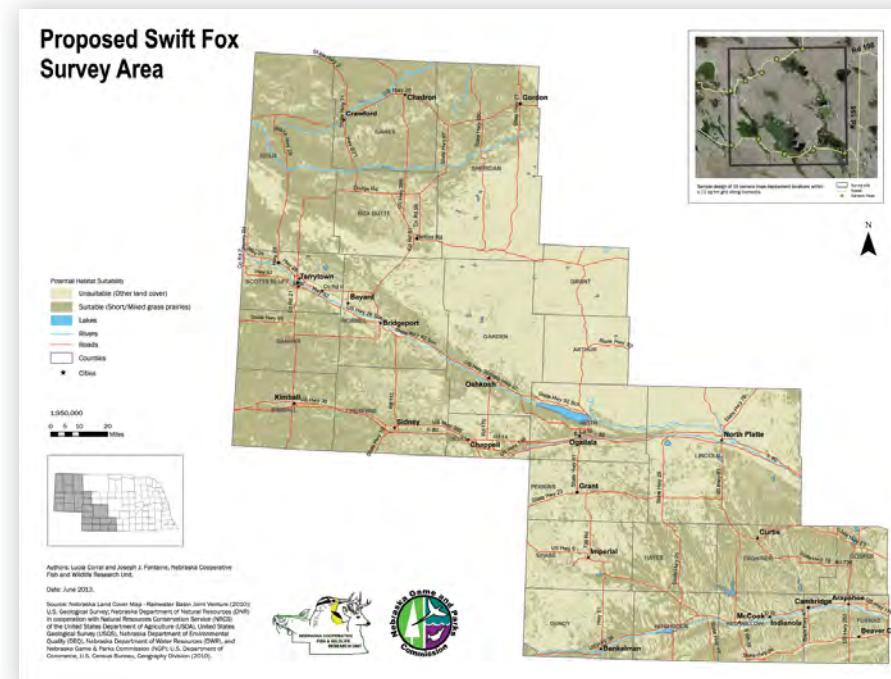
The photos obtained from the trail cameras will not only offer clues about the presence of swift foxes, but also will garner information about other species that may be affecting their population.

In addition, to get to the scent stations, the foxes and other animals pass through contraptions with brushes that obtain a fur sample. DNA from the hair will be used to learn about the foxes' genetics.

Corral, a native of Guatemala, began studying the swift fox after coming to the United States as an international Fulbright Scholar. She is hoping the research will result in better management decisions for swift fox and other canid species.

Teresa Frink, who leads the wildlife management program at Chadron State, said the project is giving her students invaluable hands-on experience in wildlife management. It will also complement swift fox studies her students have completed in recent years.

By collaborating with Sam Wilson, the Commission's furbearer and carnivore program manager, the Chadron State students have set and monitored scent stations in northwestern Nebraska. Aside from similar scent stations placed in the recent past, however, no extensive swift fox studies have occurred in Nebraska since a pair of UN-L researchers used traps and radio collars to examine the species in 1991, Wilson said, making him excited to have this data. ■



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Nebraska's Map Turtles

By Dan Fogell, Herpetologist

To Missouri River boaters they are a familiar sight. Basking on logs, stumps and sandbars and diving whenever they are approached, map turtles are the most common turtles on the river. Primarily river turtles, map turtles also live in oxbow lakes, ponds and reservoirs near large rivers where they feed on a variety of foods including mollusks, arthropods, worms, fish and even fruits and seeds. They have enormous, paddle-shaped back feet that easily propel them through strong river currents.

Nebraska has two varieties of map turtles: the **false map** and **Mississippi map** turtles. Both are similar in general appearance with an olive green to light brown colored skin and carapace (top shell), a low-spined keel down the center of the carapace, numerous thin yellow lines on their head, neck and legs, and markings on the carapace that look like the contour lines on a topographic map – which is how they got their common name. The differences between them are subtle.

False map turtles have two wide yellow stripes on top of the neck that extend to the head and then angle behind the eyes, but not far enough to curve around the bottom of the eye sockets. This allows the smaller yellow stripes on the neck to extend all the



FALSE MAP TURTLE



MISSISSIPPI MAP TURTLE

way to the eye and actually contact the eye socket. But on the Mississippi map turtle, the wide yellow stripes curve all the way around the back and bottom of the eye so that the smaller yellow lines cannot contact the eye socket.

Another feature of Mississippi map turtles, though not always, are eyes with a completely white iris that have no line passing through it, while the false map turtle nearly always has a line through the iris – which is usually gold to light brown rather than white. Mississippi map turtles have only been found along the lower reaches of the Missouri River south of Nebraska City, but false map turtles are found

throughout the Missouri River and its associated waterways from Rulo to South Dakota.

During winter, map turtles bury into soft substrates under the water to hibernate, emerging when warm spring weather arrives but sometimes basking during winter months if air temperatures are warm. Male map turtles are smaller than females and are easily distinguished by their exceptionally long front claws, which they use to hold on to mates. Breeding occurs in the fall but females will not lay eggs until the following summer.

Like all turtles, map turtles dig nests – usually on sandy banks with low-growing plants but sometimes in completely open areas. Interestingly, female false map turtles return to the same nesting sites every year, which also happen to be their own hatching sites – a behavior known as natal homing and also seen in sea turtles. Eggs hatch later in the same year, and hatchling turtles often stay buried for a few days while they absorb the last of the nutrients from their yolk. ■

Dan Fogell is an instructor at Southeast Community College. He has contributed to NEBRASKAland since 2006 and is the author of A Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians of Nebraska.



PHOTOS BY DAN FOGELL

Affects of EHD

By Eric Fowler

Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) was not the problem this summer that it was in 2012, when it killed about one-third of the state's white-tailed deer. But deer hunters will continue to see the effects of the disease this fall, possibly even before they get to the field due to permit reductions in most units for the November Firearm and other seasons.

By comparing harvest data from the 2012 deer seasons to others, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission biologists estimated the number of deer that died from EHD ranged from 17 to 45 percent in all management units except the Frenchman in southwestern Nebraska.

In order to allow the white-tailed herds to slowly rebuild, firearm deer permits were reduced 10 to 20 percent in all deer management units except Frenchman Whitetail, Plains and Upper Platte. Additionally, Season Choice Area permits were cut 10 to 40 percent and bonus antlerless white-tailed tags were eliminated from many firearm and season choice units, as well as archery, muzzleloader, youth and Statewide Buck permits, a 60 percent reduction overall.

Kit Hams, the Commission's big game program manager, said most hunters will see the same number of deer as last year. Severe drought concentrated deer at remaining water sources in 2012, contributing to the EHD die-off. With more normal rainfall this year, "deer should be redistributed across

the landscape," Hams said.

Hunters harvested 60,830 deer in Nebraska in 2012, down 30 percent from the year before. Hams said it will take three to five years for deer populations to recover. "Having said that, we're looking at quite a few areas where we don't want the number of deer we had in 2011," he said, adding that landowners who still feel their deer population is too high should continue to allow hunters to harvest white-tailed does.

The November Firearm Deer season opens November 16. With the reduction in permits, some units are expected to sell out earlier than last, when 14 of 22 units were filled before opening day. Permits are available at Commission offices and online at OutdoorNebraska.org. ■



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

This season, most hunters should see the same number of deer as in 2012.

Exploring Nebraska's Biodiversity

By Lindsay Rogers, Wildlife Education Specialist

Nebraska is a biodiversity rich state. We are home to more than 450 species of birds, 95 mammals, 106 fish, 61 amphibians and reptiles and nearly 1,500 plants. In addition, there are more than 28,000 species of insects and thousands of crustaceans, arachnids and mussels.

Some of this biodiversity is represented with a 30-foot long photographic mural entitled "Explore Nebraska's Biodiversity" currently featured at the Lincoln Children's Museum until November 17. The exhibit features 102 different native species, with each photo ranging in size depending on their biomass in the ecosystem. Although elk

are large animals, there are relatively few of them in our state. So, their image is small. Grasshoppers, on the other hand, are small, but there is a large number of them living in Nebraska. So, their image is large.

In addition to the wall mural, there are several hands-on components at the exhibit. Visitors can compare their "wingspan" to that of Nebraska bird species, see if they're as tall as a prairie plant, or inspect bones, furs and insects with magnifying lenses and microscopes.

The exhibit was created by the Nebraska Natural Legacy Program with funds from the Nebraska Environmental Trust. Visit LincolnChildrensMuseum.org for more information. ■



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

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.

November 1 November Late Doe/Fawn antelope hunting season opens

November 1 Hunting and trapping seasons open for raccoon, Virginia opossum, long-tailed weasel, mink, red fox, gray fox and badger

November 1 Muskrat and beaver trapping seasons open

November 1 Most 2014 annual permits and stamps available for purchase at OutdoorNebraska.org

November 4 Woodcock hunting season closes

November 4 Tickets go on sale for Historical Christmas Dinner at Fort Robinson State Park (SP), 308-665-2900

November 9 Virginia and sora rail hunting season closes

November 11 All Game and Parks offices closed in observance of Veterans Day; Ak-Sar-Ben Aquarium open

November 15 First segment of crow hunting season closes

November 16 Special Public Health Hazard Order crow hunting opens

November 16-24 November firearm deer hunting season

November 17 Fort Robinson SP longhorn and buffalo sale, Crawford, 308-665-2900

November 29-December 1 Cornucopia of Crafts, Eugene T. Mahoney SP, Ashland, 402-944-2523

November 29-February 28 Winterfest, Ponca SP, Ponca, 402-755-2284

Send Us Your Trail Cam Photos!



Marian Langan sent in this photo of a badger at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center, south of Denton in Lancaster County.

Please submit your trail camera photos by e-mail to: nebtrailcam@gmail.com. Also include where you're from and any information that will help explain your photo.

Where to Bury the Rest?

By Julie Geiser

From big game animals such as deer to small game and waterfowl, many hunters have the same question – where do I dispose game animal carcasses? “The best way to address this is check with your local city or town to see what the regulations for disposing of game carcasses is for each different jurisdiction,” said Jeff Hoffman, assistant wildlife division administrator with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

Joel Davies of Waste Connections of Nebraska from Lincoln said, “We would prefer the animals be bagged and placed in curbside containers to prevent our staff from having to handle the carcasses – our hydraulic trucks should be left to handle this kind of disposal.”

Private landowners can also dispose remains on their land, but the Nebraska



There are options for disposing game animal remains in Nebraska, but none that allow the dumping of carcasses on public areas, including state recreation or wildlife management areas.

Department of Environmental Quality (NDEQ) would prefer they be buried at least four feet below the surface of the ground and 300 feet away from ponds, springs or lakes to lower the possibility of spreading a disease.

To see more of NDEQ's recommendations, visit Deq.ne.gov/Publications/pages/06-201. ■

Turpin Time

By Dick Turpin

Just as antlers represent the memory of a successful deer hunt, spring turkey hunters enjoy displaying the bird's beard. Here's a little craft idea that preserves that gobbler's growth – a turkey beard memento.

Take that casing you shot that bird with and punch that primer out on the top with a long nail and hammer. It leaves you a good hole to put your strapping in because that's the next thing you're going to do.

Tie a loop knot in it and leave yourself enough loop to make a hanger with it and then you're going to take a little piece of wire or a long nail or something and you're going to shove



this loop down into the casing out through the primer hole.

Next you're going to get a little dowel plug as a spacing thing and push it down against the knot, then what you do is fill the rest of the shell with five minute epoxy and you've got yourself a little piece of memorabilia.

I wonder if an old turkey like me could grow a beard that long? ■

See a video of how to make a turkey beard memento.



A Dubious Distinction

According to the Farm Services Agency, Nebraska led the nation in the amount of land converted to cropland in 2011 and 2012 by 102 percent to the next closest state. In 2012 alone, 54,876 acres were converted from grassland to cropland – an alarming rate concerning the future of the state's flora and fauna. ■

See You Out There... But Where?

Do you know where this Nebraska photograph was taken? See answer at the bottom of page 15 (right).

NEBRASKAland Visitor

Last issue's winner of the Visitor drawing was Lonnie Shafer of Exeter, Nebraska, who found the **terrestrial snail** on page 48. 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 5, 7, 15, 34 or 35.

*This creature is a bit different than previous visitors. It is not an insect, but a mollusk, related to clams. It is a **terrestrial snail**, living on land instead of in water. Snails can be found virtually worldwide, and have staying power – snails have been found in the fossil record going back more than 500 million years.*

Snails are an important part of a healthy ecosystem. Snails feed on plants, fungi, and other organic debris, which recycles organic matter and assists with soil formation. They are also an excellent source of calcium, often eaten by birds that need calcium for egg shell formation. Terrestrial snails can be found across Nebraska. Look for them

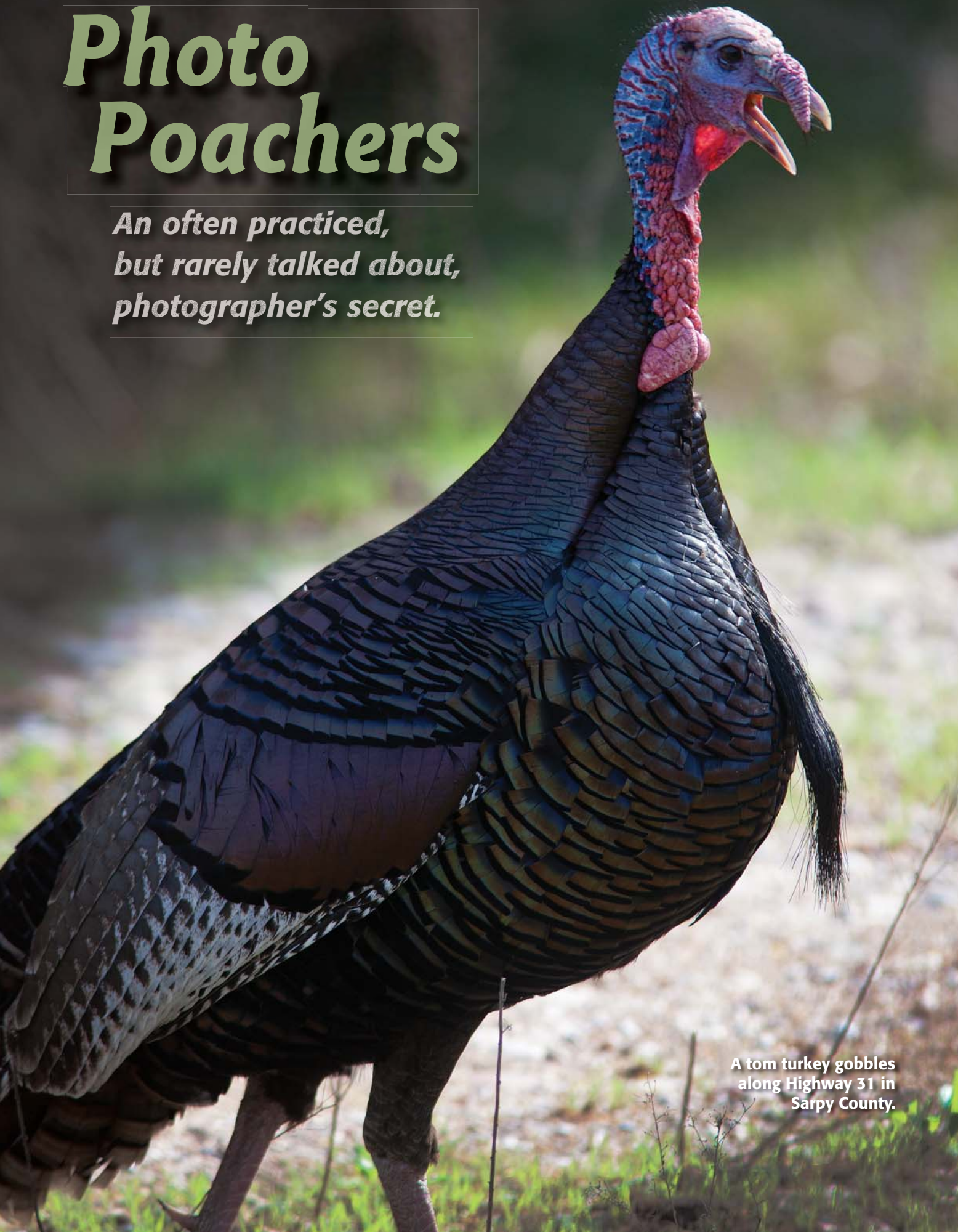
in protected areas under logs or vegetation where the humidity is relatively high.



Special thanks to Julie Van Meter, State Entomologist, Nebraska Department of Agriculture. Visitor image by Chris Helzer. www.bugguide.net is a good site for identification

Photo Poachers

An often practiced, but rarely talked about, photographer's secret.



A tom turkey gobbles along Highway 31 in Sarpy County.

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

A white-tailed doe raises her head in an attempt to smell a roadside photographer at Ponca State Park.

By Jeff Kurrus and Eric Fowler

Find 10 photographers, and four of them will admit to shooting wildlife, scenics or some other subject from the blacktop. Talk shop over a couple of beers and nachos one day after sunset, and that number will increase to 10 out of 10. "Oh yeah, there was this absolutely beautiful sunrise I couldn't pass up one morning," the story will start, and conclude with the photographer reasoning, "Well, everybody does it."

Photographers shoot from the road, and for good reason. Some of Nebraska's most scenic spots can be found roadside – from Brownlee Road in Cherry County to various spots along highways 2, 20, 275 and beyond. Plus, many wildlife species, including white-tailed and mule deer, have grown accustomed to the thousands of vehicles that pass by them each day.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

The sun sets over the North Platte River at Ash Hollow State Historical Park near Lewellen. The road may be a two-track trail, but your vehicle is the quickest way to get to a vantage point with an interesting foreground when a good sky is brewing.



Strange mailboxes and decor can make great photo subjects. This mailbox was found alongside a gravel road north of Lynch in Boyd County.

PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Despite being in Nebraska for only a short time each year, sandhill cranes may be the state's most popular species to photograph from the road.

With more than 96,725 miles of public roads in Nebraska, including nearly 10,000 miles on Nebraska's state highway system, there are roadside photographic opportunities statewide. However, not all public roads and the photographic opportunities they safely present are equal.

For example, an average of 41,242 vehicles crossed the Platte River Bridge on Interstate 80 between Lincoln and Omaha each day in 2012. While there could certainly be some great photos to be had at this spot, it obviously would



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

A jackrabbit readies to bolt toward a ditch in Dawes County. Able to reach speeds of 40 miles per hour, jackrabbits can exceed the speed limit of many roads.

Bighorn sheep can often be seen from the highways and dirt roads around Fort Robinson State Park and Crawford. Stay in your vehicle and they sometimes seem to pose for the camera.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

A Blanding's turtle crosses a paved road at Merritt Reservoir State Recreation Area in July. Loss of habitat and a high number of predators has caused Blanding's turtles to be considered endangered in Nebraska.

not be the safest place to stop for them.

A better place would be a narrow ranch road in the Sandhills, where you wonder if you would see another car if you waited all day. But whether you're on a busy highway or in remote corners of the state, you still need to exercise caution.

Therefore, keep these tips in mind when photo poaching:

- Pull completely off the highway when you see an image you want to capture. Or better yet, drive a bit farther and look for a county road to turn onto.
- Never stop near a hilltop, where traffic coming from behind could easily rear-end your vehicle.
- If you're slowly cruising back roads in search of wildlife, always be courteous and pull over and let other vehicles pass.
- Don't block driveways.
- Use your vehicle's hazard lights when you stop.

There are some roads where it is impossible to safely stop for a photograph. So don't. Instead, use a common sense approach to road hunting with your camera. What you want to go home with is a beautiful photo, not an accident report. ■

On the High Line

By Lisa Knopp

In August my 21-year-old daughter, Meredith, moved to Manhattan, New York, for graduate school. In late-September, I visited her. For four days, we explored the island on foot – Chelsea, Greenwich Village, Soho, Little Italy, Chinatown, Koreatown, Spanish Harlem (where Meredith lives) and the Upper West Side, where she goes to school. Everything was paved and gray, or so it seemed – the only nonhuman creatures I notice were pigeons, sparrows and dogs, and most of the trees, shrubs and flowers we saw were growing in pots. Yet the crowds and streams of people were the most diverse and dazzling I’d ever seen.

On my last afternoon in the city, Meredith took me to the High Line – an elevated spur of the former New York Central Railroad which had been converted into an aerial greenway. In the 1930s this track had been the ingenious solution to a vexing problem: the high number of traffic and pedestrian accidents at street-level railroad crossings on Manhattan’s crowded Lower West Side. The 13 miles of elevated tracks passed through the center of blocks rather than over 10th Avenue, and the trains tunneled *through* the second or third stories of such buildings as Bell Laboratories, Western Electric, the Nabisco factory and various refrigerating companies and meatpacking plants.

Because of the growth of interstate trucking and the related decrease in rail traffic in the 1960s, the southern portion of the line was abandoned and demolished. In 1980, the last train ran on the High Line. Local property owners wanted the weedy, neglected tracks demolished, but preservationists successfully fought to save this remnant of Manhattan’s industrial past. On June 8, 2009, the High Line opened to the public as a city park.

Meredith said several of her new friends had raved about the High Line as a good place to hike and spend an afternoon. When she said “hike,” I figured I should change out of my khakis and ballet shoes into jeans, tennis shoes and a hat. “You’re good just the way you are,” she assured me.

We took the subway to 14th Street. There at the end of the street was a 30-foot-high ribbon of steel and concrete held aloft by big steel columns, all topped with a wispy cloud of green. We climbed the stairs and stepped onto a path made of wide concrete paving planks that suggested a rail bed, lined on each side with a thin strip of trees, shrubs and flowers. The rusty pieces of the track had been left in place as a reminder of the park’s history. Some views opened up to the immediate neighborhoods –

the Meatpacking District, West Chelsea and Hell’s Kitchen – while others offered spectacular views of more distant sites: To the west, the remains of Pier 54 and the Hudson River; to the east, a massive and turreted Gothic Revival building, an Episcopal seminary, with the Empire State Building rising above it in the distance.

Our fellow “hikers” strolled along the path, stopping to listen to the little jazz combo, the tuxedoed cellist or to stand in long lines for the restrooms. Some hikers basked in the late-September sun at the Diller – von Furstenberg Sundeck, while others bought ice fruit pops, coffee, pastries, gelato, tacos, art and jewelry from vendors set up in the Chelsea Market Passage, that part of the former Nabisco factory through which the trains once ran. “Hiking” gear included high heels and sandals, suits, dresses and shorts. “This is how New Yorkers hike,” quipped Meredith. “It’s so grounded, so earthy.”

Most hikers had their sights set on the distant river; The Standard, High Line Hotel, which straddles the High Line; or the young women in swimsuits, raucously partying on a nearby rooftop. Many photographed the brash gold billboard just feet from the railing, an advertisement for a parking garage that advised us to “stop praying . . . God’s too busy to find you a parking spot.” While these surroundings were indeed fascinating, there was something nearer that drew my attention: Approximately 300 plant species grow on the High Line, most of which are New York natives that had thrived along the derelict tracks. I stopped to admire the light blue-purple petals of the wild petunias, the crimson blossoms and puckery leaves of firetail mountain fleece, and the brilliant orange-red foliage of grace smokebush. But with the exception of an elderly couple in Birkenstocks and a group of about a half dozen Japanese, no one else seemed to be paying much attention to the plants.

In the Gansevoort grasslands at the southern end of the park, the point where the tracks end abruptly because of the 1960s demolition, I photographed Meredith sitting on a bench in a small grove of birch trees while wearing her hiking gear: a purple turtleneck, a brocade scarf loosely knotted near her neck and knee-high leather boots. Just as we turned to head north again, a clump of rust-colored grass with fluffy, silvery seed heads grabbed my attention. “Little bluestem,” I whispered, “what are you doing here?” Back home in Nebraska this prairie grass seemingly grows everywhere – at Pioneers Park, on the University of



Little bluestem growing in Nebraska.



An aerial view from Gansevoort Street to West 13th Street, looking south of the High Line.

Nebraska-Lincoln and Omaha campuses, in curbside gardens in my neighborhood or in a construction site near my house where it will soon to be replaced with fescue grass.

I wanted to tell the other hikers about this remarkable prairie grass. I wanted to tell them how its dense fibrous root system plunges five to eight feet, which makes it relatively drought resistant, and that it’s nutritious forage for grazers, both native bison and introduced cattle. I wanted to tell them that little bluestem willingly grows on moist soil, where it forms an open or loose sod mat, and on drier or rockier soils and in heavily grazed areas, where it grows in well-spaced bunches. During the growing season, the plant’s basal shoots and foliage are blue-green; in the autumn, the grass is coppery, with silvery seed heads and fuzzy spurs. Willa Cather wrote that when the autumn sun fell on little bluestem, “the red grass made all the great prairie the color of wine stains.”

Later I would read that while little bluestem is most prominent in the Great Plains, it also grows in each of the lower 48 states except Nevada and Oregon. Little bluestem, a New York native, had grown wild near the abandoned tracks of the High Line.

As I knelt down for a closer look, I thought about what solace the presence of this prairie grass might provide for people who’d moved from the Great Plains to Manhattan. At the High Line, those transplants can enjoy the hardiness and delicacy of Nebraska’s state grass and its nearby prairie associates – big bluestem compass plant and prairie

dropseed. At the High Line, they can imagine themselves under bigger skies and with far fewer people, buildings, billboards, excellent restaurants and cars.

It’s good that places such as the High Line exist. When I meet someone who has recently moved to Nebraska from some eastern place and I see a longing in her eyes for the hillier, wooded landscape of her former home, I take her to the arboretum at Arbor Lodge, the Nebraska City estate of J. Sterling Morton, founder of Arbor Day. There we walk in shade cast by beech, bald cypress, tulip poplar, and horse chestnut – each one so out of place, each one so lovely to a displaced Pennsylvanian or Virginian.

Since my daughter seems to have found the place on earth where she belongs and since the reality of 1,300 miles separating us may well become unbearable for me, someday I, too, may move to New York City. Then, on autumn days I’ll climb to the High Line, that thin ribbon of wildness in the sky, and remember where I came from and how at summer’s end, my home place was once covered with grass the color of wine. ■

Lisa Knopp is an award-winning American essayist and author of introspective short stories, essays and creative nonfiction. She teaches creative nonfiction at UN-O and has been contributing to NEBRASKALAND since 1992.



RAISING TROUT

A NEBRASKA STOCKING STORY

Text and photos by Jenny Nguyen

It is just another day for Joe Cassidy, fish culturist supervisor at the Grove Trout Rearing Station in Royal, making his rounds along the East Branch of Verdigre Creek and stocking 200 nicely-sized rainbow trout for local anglers to enjoy.

Stocking Verdigre Creek is a weekly chore for Cassidy and others at the rearing station, but it is just one of many public and private ponds, lakes and streams statewide that will receive more than a quarter of a million trout from the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission this year alone. Still, Nebraska would hardly be considered a trout fisherman's paradise. Due to a lack of proper coldwater streams and habitat, opportunities for serious anglers to fish for truly wild trout are limited.

But it would be a mistake to discount these species for that reason. Although not the most prized fish in Nebraska, trout have always been here, for nearly as long if not longer than Nebraska has

been a state. As one of the earliest fish to be introduced and stocked, trout do have a story and place here.

THE OLD DAYS

In the summer of 1873, that story began. A Union Pacific locomotive, on course to haul live fish from New Hampshire and Massachusetts to California, crashed at the bridge over the Elkhorn River east of Fremont, dumping a United States Fish Commission carload of 300,000 exotic fish, including brook trout, into the Elkhorn River. This stocking, although unintentional, would be the beginning of an ongoing effort to bring more trout fishing opportunities to Nebraska.

In 1881, the Gretna Fish Hatchery, the state's first and now a museum at Schramm Park State Recreation Area, was purchased by the Nebraska Fish Commission. Daryl Bauer, Commission fish and wildlife program manager, said,



Depending on size requests and stocking date, Grove Trout Rearing Station can grow trout as quickly as one inch per month with heavy feeding and optimal water temperatures between 60 and 65 degrees Fahrenheit.



The original building that was the first of the state's hatcheries, the Gretna Fish Hatchery was located at the current Schramm Park State Recreation Area.

"As soon as we had that hatchery, we were raising trout and stocking them." A year later, brook trout were introduced into streams near South Bend, North Platte and Sutton, and a pond north of Omaha, as recorded in *A History of Nebraska's Fisheries Resources* by David J. Jones. Rainbow trout were introduced in 1886, brown trout in 1889 and cutthroat trout in 1904.

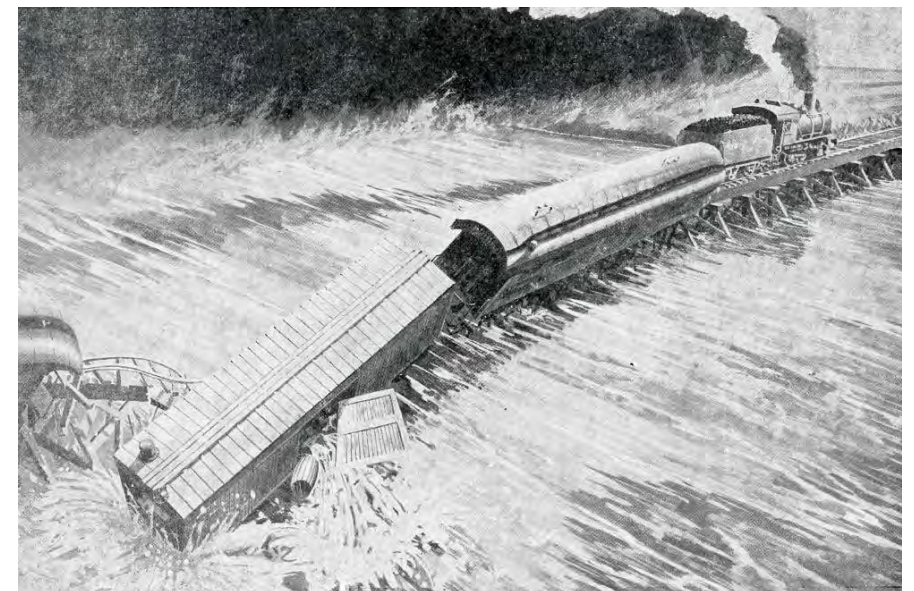
Additionally, lake trout, native to Canada and the Great Lakes, were also introduced to Nebraska in 1886. Flipping through the yellowed pages of Jones' 1963 book, Joe Cassidy chuckled as he pointed to a section about this fish.

"Lake trout can grow to huge sizes, but a lot of times when you catch them in Canada, you catch them in 80 to 90 feet of water. And here, they were stocking them in a Sandhills lake that

was probably only about 8 feet deep," said Cassidy, clearly amused. "A lot of stocking didn't make sense. They also used to stock brook trout in some of the craziest places. There was no scientific method to stocking back then."

That was only one example of the state of fisheries science, or the lack thereof, at the time. Technology was primitive and major challenges included figuring out how to raise the fish, keeping them alive and hauling them to the lake or stream where they would be released.

Dean Rosenthal, assistant administrator in the Commission's Fisheries Division in charge of the fish production section, said that the lack of a commercially prepared trout diet and proper aeration would have been a couple of the limiting factors to fish



Frank Holub's illustration of the train wreck that derailed on the bridge over the Elkhorn River near Fremont in 1873.



Rainbow trout eggs incubating at the Calamus Fish Hatchery.

health, survival and growth rates.

Actually getting fish in the water was also a challenge due to the lack of established roads in most areas. Fish were then hauled by train and horse-drawn wagons. “They were transported in milk cans and water aeration was done by hand using a can to dip and pour water,” said Rosenthal.

Since then, technology in trout production has improved considerably. “We’re state-of-the-art now,” said Bauer. “Everything is regulated, monitored and treated – whatever needs to be done to maximize production. Those guys in fish culture, especially in

trout production, have been doing it for so long that they have it all figured out. It’s come a long way.”

THE EGG TRADE

Trout now reproduce naturally in some streams where water is cold enough year-round and proper habitats exist. In East Verdigre Creek, brown trout are thriving, and perhaps a “little too well,” said Cassidy. “Browns sometimes will dominate rainbows and outcompete them for food and habitat, because we used to get a lot of natural rainbow reproduction, too.”

In Long Pine Creek, browns are reproducing consistently and rainbows have also been successful. Both species are also reproducing in numerous streams in the Pine Ridge and the North Platte River Valley. Rosenthal said that Bordeaux Creek and other streams in the Pine Ridge also have reproducing populations of brook trout. Still, these areas are remote to the majority of the state’s residents. For that reason, the Commission raises and stocks trout in many more waters, including those in urban areas to meet angler demand for trout.

Like other game fish species in Nebraska, the thousands of trout eggs the Commission hatches each year come from a variety of sources, including trades with other states. “We’ll trade other species of fish in return for those trout eggs,” said Rosenthal. “With the federal system, what we do in return for getting trout eggs is provide assistance to the Gavins Point National Fish Hatchery during their paddlefish and pallid sturgeon collection.”

Once in hand, eggs are taken to the Rock Creek Hatchery near Parks and to the Calamus Fish Hatchery near Burwell. Except for a few Pine Ridge streams that receive 5-inch fish, most trout stay in a rearing station until they are 9 to 11 inches in length, big enough to go straight to a frying pan. Rock Creek raises their fish all the way to keeper-size, before they are stocked in

waters throughout western Nebraska. Trout hatched at Calamus head to Grove when they reach about 3 to 4 inches in length and head to eastern Nebraska waters when they are grown.

Statewide trout stocking plans are organized by fisheries biologists each year. Depending on each individual request for the number and size of trout, and the location and date of the stocking, the hatcheries and rearing station must raise the trout accordingly in order to make each delivery date. “We’re raising fish out here for 18 months down the road,” said Cassidy. “We don’t want them too big because then they take up too much room and too much food and the cost is expensive. We also don’t want them to be too small because then people don’t want to catch them.”

URBAN FISHING

The highly anticipated trout stockings that happen every October and spring are always crowd pleasers. In recent years, the number of trout stocked in urban areas has increased dramatically. “This helps us recruit kids and other people who haven’t fished in the past,” said Cassidy. “And that’s kind of coincided with all the family fishing clinics we have now. Little towns love this urban trout thing, especially South Sioux City comes to mind. They go crazy about it. Since

we started doing it, some schools have integrated it into their curriculums. The kids will go out and adopt a lake and do some studies on it.”

A lot of the trout strains used, especially for the rainbows, are purposely chosen because they’re not as wild, making them easy to catch. Additionally, these urban waters do not stay cold enough to keep trout alive year-round, and about 80 percent of all trout stocked are caught by anglers. Most of the ones that aren’t caught die when the water warms. But in some lakes, like Grove Lake, trout become food for other toothy game fish like northern pike and even a few others survive to a larger size.

PRESENT CHALLENGES

As well-oiled of a machine as trout production has become, the program isn’t without its challenges. Water flow, especially, is now as low as it has ever been due to drought and an increasing number of surrounding irrigation pivots. Being spring and creek fed, Grove Trout Rearing Station and Rock Creek Fish Hatchery now have to look to liquid oxygen injection and aerators to supplement the water going through their facilities.

“Before, we had so much flow that we never had to worry about oxygen,” said Cassidy at the Grove Trout Rearing Station. “Even if the



Doug Kapke pipes out dead trout hatchlings at the Calamus Fish Hatchery.



The rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) is identified by the pink lateral band.



The brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*) is identified by the small black spots on the entire tail, dorsal fins and side, and by the pink lateral band.



Brown trout (*Salmo trutta*) are marked by prominent spots, often red or orange and accented with halos.



Cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkii*) vary widely in size and coloration.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING “NATIVE”

The history of trout in Nebraska is an ambiguous one. Since the rainbow trout is native only to the rivers and lakes west of the Rocky Mountains, brown trout came from Europe, and brook trout originated from eastern United States, only the cutthroat could have been native to Nebraska. Yet while David J. Jones lists the cutthroat trout as a native fish in his book *A History of Nebraska’s Fisheries Resources*, this claim is still up for debate, even among biologists.

Early records of fish were anecdotal, found in both technical and non-technical literature. The earliest reference to trout in Nebraska came from the journal entries of the Lewis and Clark Expedition as

they passed through what is now northeastern Nebraska in August of 1804. “At a point just south of the present location [of] Sioux City, the expedition collected fish ... Lewis and Clark listed them as pike, bass, salmon, red-horse, catfish, and a perch,” wrote Jones, suggesting that the “salmon” that Lewis and Clark collected were trout.

In 1880, Samuel Aughey, Professor of Natural Science at the University of Nebraska, “reported catching a cutthroat trout from both Aowa Creek and Bow Creek, small tributaries of the Missouri River now located in Dixon County,” continued Jones.

In an unpublished 1942 thesis by R.E. Johnson, Jones found what the author claimed were reports of early settlers in the White River region and near Long Pine Creek catching what they thought were cutthroat trout.

“But where in time does one draw the line on what was ‘native?’” asked Daryl Bauer, Commission fish and wildlife program manager. “Prior to Euro-American settlers tends to be the popular definition, and that is fine, but if you start looking for records of ‘native’ fish back then, it is hard to figure out what fish were present. Early records describe fish and may give names to some, but they were not the same names we use today and there were few drawings, no photographs and very few voucher specimens. If you ask other biologists, I am sure you will get different opinions.”

Even with all the anecdotal evidence, the possible existence of an early northeastern Nebraska trout specimen sitting somewhere in the Smithsonian basement, and the possibility that fish could have moved long distances up and down the Missouri watershed before dams were built, said Bauer, the native status of cutthroat trout in Nebraska remains inconclusive.



Keeper-size rainbow trout are stocked in East Branch Verdigre Creek in Royal every week, year-round.

oxygen was low, it didn't matter because the water turned over a lot. Now with low flows, temperature goes up and the ability for the water to hold oxygen goes down." Not only that, September being the driest month of the year is also when Grove rears the bulk of its fish in order to make the October trout stockings. During these hotter and drier months, staff must strategically handle the trout in order to reduce stress on fish, preserve fish health and prevent disease outbreaks.

Other challenges include an increasing number of FDA restrictions on the types of drugs that can be used to treat fish, staff reductions, and predators such as blue herons, kingfishers, osprey, raccoons and mink. "Twenty years ago, a stocking challenge was finding remote stocking locations in the Pine Ridge or Sandhills, traveling through pastures, blowouts and streams," said Cassidy. "Today's challenge is maneuvering the fish stocking trailer through city traffic."

THE FUTURE FOR TROUT

After several years of no stockings, cutthroat trout, possibly the state's only native trout (see sidebar on page 26), are now being raised and stocked again in Nebraska waters. Presently, Blue Creek in the North Platte River Valley and the White River in the Pine Ridge will receive cutthroats raised at Grove in 2013. If anglers take a liking to the fish and the trout do well, more waters could receive fish in future years.

Furthermore, a trout stream enhancement plan is currently underway with the goal of increasing the quantity and quality of trout fishing opportunities in those coldwater streams identified in the Commission's booklet, *Trout Fishing in Nebraska's Streams*. Nebraska may not have the abundance of trout habitat like those in New York or Montana, but there are some existing coldwater streams in the state that are conducive to holding trout. The Commission's objectives include enhancing these existing streams, improving access to both public and private coldwater streams that are already open to public fishing, and increasing the availability of private coldwater streams to public fishing through the Open Fields and



Matt Lundstrom from Omaha trout fishes in Long Pine Creek. He has been coming to Long Pine since he was 6 years old. He is now 30.

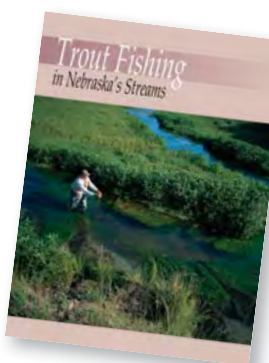
Waters Program or purchasing them using available or new funding sources.

A CONTINUING HERITAGE

Although not considered a prime trout fishing destination, trout fishing in Nebraska represents its own set of ideals. It's an example of the mindset and mission of Nebraska fishery in a nutshell: to provide as many unique fishing opportunities to as many people as possible. Whether you are a beginner or an experienced angler, Nebraska

trout fishing serves a higher purpose than just being an easy, fun catch. Sure, it's a meal and a good time, but it exists as an easy way to encourage folks, young and old, to stay connected to the outdoors and to keep this Nebraska heritage alive. ■

 Read "*Trout Fishing in Nebraska's Streams*."



Folding Steel

Visit the Lincoln County Historical Museum and you might see metalsmith William Fanter creating Damascus-bladed knives much like metalsmiths have for centuries.

Text and photos by Julie Geiser

The legend of Damascus steel has intrigued historians and metalsmiths for centuries. Gleaming Damascus swords were said to be able to cut a piece of silk in half as it would fall to the ground and chop through normal blades or rock without losing its edge. Intrigued with this history, William Fanter of North Platte began teaching himself how to forge metal in

1982 and Damascus in 1985, yet his blades were far from Damascus quality. But they soon would be.

“My first attempt was a very crude looking blade that I cut from a piece of steel with a torch and ground down,” Fanter said during a blade-making session in the Lincoln County Historical Museum’s Two River Blacksmith shop, a building he purchased in 2003 and has been working from ever since. Nowadays, however, Fanter has the process down to a fine art.

For a current project, Fanter is using two metals – rake teeth and leaf spring. Because rake teeth has a high carbon content and leaf spring has low carbon content, the two metals can be combined to create a desired blade that is both hard and durable. He starts with four alternating layers of metal – two layers of rake teeth and two layers of leaf spring – and places them in a 2,350-degree furnace, or forge, to heat.

When the metals have a golden-buttery glow from the



ABOVE: Fanter cleans the hot metal after hammering it with a steel brush to get any debris or slag off the metal, then flux or borax is generously sprinkled on the hot metal to seal any joints off from oxygen.
OPPOSITE: Tongs are used to hold the cut billet while Fanter gives the blade its curves with his hammer and anvil.

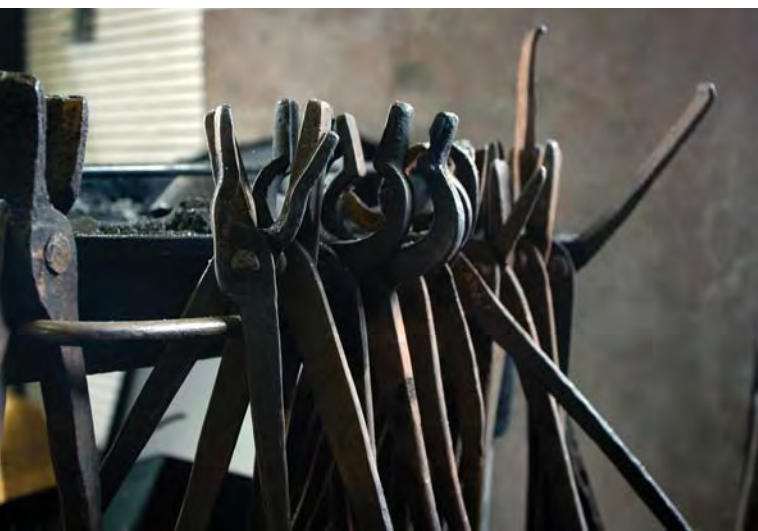
forge’s temperature, Fanter uses a device known as a trip hammer to combine the metals together. As the heated metal, or billet, is hammered it stretches and bends. If Fanter sees that the billet is becoming too bent in any direction, or if too much hammering is producing weak spots in the metal, he switches from the trip hammer to an anvil and a hand-held hammer, which is what the early smiths would have used for the entire hammering process, to straighten the billet.

“It’s really nice to be able to heat up some metal and hammer it out for about an hour or so,” Fanter said, speaking of the process as a stress reliever. “You’re usually better off than when you started.”

After each hammering, Fanter removes the hot metal

debris, or slag, with a steel brush, then generously sprinkles flux or borax on the hot metal to seal any joints or folds from oxygen. He then places the billet back into the fire to be heated and hammered until it is three-eighths to one-half inch thick.

Fanter then cuts the billet in two pieces, grinds one side of each piece until shiny, and welds both together – shiny sides touching – in a process called folding. Once the metal is folded, forging is repeated for the amount of folds he wants. For this blade, Fanter will fold the billet seven times – giving the blade a total of 512 layers (see sidebar on page 33). Modern-day bladesmiths have at least 300 layers per blade – the minimum amount of layers for a Master Smith rating with the American Bladesmith Society.





The finished blades with their custom-made handles are truly amazing pieces of work. Each blade has its own unique, beautifully etched Damascus pattern.

The billet is then hammered on the anvil until it's one-quarter inch thick, and both sides of the metal are ground until all the low places are even. The billet is cut an inch over the desired blade length, and anvil-hammered again to form the knife curves and tang, or handle, of the blade.

Once the blade is hammered into a final shape, Fanter uses a flat sander to smooth the metal. It is heat treated in a kiln at 1,450 degrees and given an oil bath to quench the hot blade, provide flexibility and harden the metal. The final heating process of tempering, when Fanter heats the blade to around 450 degrees for an hour or two depending on the blade's size and thickness, removes brittleness and imparts toughness in the newly-formed knife.

With the blade now ready for its finishing touches, Fanter hand sands and etches the blade to create the beautiful Damascus patterns. To etch the blade, Fanter places it in an acid mix of five parts water to one part ferric chloride for about eight minutes, then soaks the blade in a baking

soda and water solution to neutralize it. The acid eats at the low carbon metal faster than the high carbon metal which brings out the Damascus patterns. Fanter checks the pattern to see if he likes it, and repeats the etching steps as needed.

With the blade completed, Fanter adds a custom-made handle from antlers, ivory, bone or decorative woods. By the time the blade reaches its final destination, Fanter will have about 40 hours in this particular project. Some blades will have upwards of 90 hours of craftsmanship in each finished piece.

"As a bladesmith, you eat, sleep and live knives," Fanter said. Always thinking of new designs, it has become an inseparable part of his life, "Sometimes I even dream about them at night.

"There is a great sense of accomplishment that comes from making every blade," Fanter said, as there should be for the collection he's creating. ■



Fanter, standing in front of his blacksmith shop, holds the billet he is working on. A leaf spring, rake tooth and other metals used to create his one-of-a-kind blades lean against the shop door.

The Origins of Damascus

Damascus made from ingots of wootz steel is the form of Damascus that has caused so much interest and controversy over the centuries. As early as 300 B.C. wootz sword blades were made popular in India and the Middle East. Wootz was extracted from raw iron ore and melted in tightly sealed crucibles along with carbon bearing material, such as charcoal, woody biomass and leaves. During the heating process, the metals absorb carbon from the charcoal and/or plant material resulting in an alloy that, when cooled, slowly produces a material with visible crystalline structure of varying carbide contents. Forging the material into a cast sword blade altered the crystalline structure into the waving or water pattern that Damascus steel is known.



An Equation for Folding Steel

To receive a Master Smith rating from the American Bladesmith Society, each blade must have at least 300 layers. When Fanter started his most recent blade with four layers, two each of rake teeth and leaf spring, each fold doubled the layers:

- 1st fold – 4 metals x 2 = 8 layers
- 2nd fold – 8 x 2 = 16 layers
- 3rd fold – 16 x 2 = 32 layers
- 4th fold – 32 x 2 = 64 layers
- 5th fold – 64 x 2 = 128 layers
- 6th fold – 128 x 2 = 256 layers

The Grass is Sometimes Greener

An Out-of-State Deer Hunter Finds a New Home

Text and photo by Jeff Kurrus



ROBBIE GAIA of Oakland, Tennessee, found a new home during a 2012 white-tailed deer hunt in Nebraska.

“It’s different up here,” said lifelong friend Robbie Gaia after his first afternoon of firearm deer hunting last November. “Rolling hills, wide open land – I just don’t see that back home. But I also don’t see a wind that never stops blowing, even at nightfall, and a cold that instantly turns your fingers numb when you take your gloves off.”

All are attributes of a place I had been trying to convince him to hunt for years. But each season, a nice rub or scrape on his leased land in Tennessee would keep him from doing so – until he took the plunge last November. However, it wasn’t your typical out-of-state hunting trip in search of a big buck. He elected a doe hunt instead, mainly because of its price.

But we both knew this hunt would never be about big buck bag shots. For him, it was about seeing the places that I had told him about for years. For me, it was scouting places for him even more than myself, and hoping each second that his gun would go off before mine. For both of us, it was about spending time with a lifelong hunting partner, and adding to 30-plus years of stories told and re-told, this time in person instead of over the phone.

On the afternoon of our second day of hunting in Cass County, however, I was getting nervous. Neither of us had seen a deer and each minute without a gunshot made my fingernails even shorter – until I squeezed the trigger on a small buck imagining Robbie’s smile two ridges over. The next morning he returned the favor shortly after sunrise on a doe standing broadside, and then watched does the rest of the morning without the first thought of shooting.

“It’s different up here,” he repeated on the hike back to the truck. “You just have so many good places to hunt on

private land,” he said. “You can’t find these back home.”

Tell that to some hunters in Nebraska, and they’ll remind you it’s hard gaining access to any portion of the 98 percent of the state that is privately owned. But that’s how an outsider can provide a unique perspective. “Ninety-eight percent,” he said. “Wow, that’s a big number. Even more reason to knock on doors. You’re bound to have someone grant you permission.”

Especially in a place, I added, where white-tailed deer are often seen as a nuisance. But landowners have been burned before, so just because deer are eating crops doesn’t mean you’re going to gain permission.

It’s a numbers game ... and a reputation game. You have to go in the off-season in plain clothes and ask to hunt, I told him. Then tell them they don’t have to worry about any bullets flying because you prefer to bow hunt. On top of that, no bucks are needed, because does will suit you just fine. After this start, keep your nose clean and there’s an excellent chance you’ll get invited back to hunt with the weapon of your choice.

All this did was make Rob shake his head as we reached the truck, put away our gear and slowly drove down a farm road to retrieve his Nebraska trophy. Then I completely floored him.

“Plus, when you hunt in Nebraska,” I said, “your food plots are already planted.”

He looked out the window at the leftover corn stalks to his right and the harvested beans to his left and smiled – the kind of look one gets when they’ve just begun a relationship with a person, or place, that will continue for a very long time. ■

 See more information on the state’s season choice doe permits and their availability.

Another Year at the Sandbar Grill and Café

Text and photos by Eric Fowler

At age 84, with a full set of artificial knees and hips, Delbert Rathman rarely misses a day in his Platte River sandpit blind. But having put plenty of birds in the freezer, he's not afraid to pass on the chance to take a goose and just watch them fly by.

Nearly every morning, from the day duck season opens to the day goose season closes, Delbert Rathman is in his blind on a Platte River sandpit south of Wood River. It's a quarter mile hike from where he parks, most of it through a pasture. For the rest, he may slog along the shallow edge of the lake, dragging his gear in a floating sled, or take the high road through cattails. He sets out 100 or so decoys, floaters in the deeper water and full bodies and shells in the shallows or on a sandbar. He usually has company, but on many days he does this work alone. Sometimes he even shoots a bird or three. Other times, he just calls the birds into gun range and watches them fly away, cooks breakfast, shoots the bull with whoever joined him for the day and heads home for lunch.

In most ways, Rathman is just like

a select few of the thousands of other waterfowl hunters in Nebraska who are passionate about the sport to the point of addiction. But he is far ahead of nearly all of those hunters in two categories: age and hardware. He's been hunting this stretch of the Platte for the past 60 of his 84 years, and he's doing it with a full set of artificial knees and hips.

Life of a River Rat

Rathman was born on February 20, 1929, in a rural farmhouse on the Platte River south of Alda. His father, half Danish and half German, was born on a farm northwest of Grand Island, but was conceived in Germany, giving him a free boat ride to America in the 1880s. His mother was also born to German immigrants, some of the earliest homesteaders in the Grand Island area.

One of seven children including a sister who died at birth, Rathman's parents didn't speak English. "Das schmeckte ziemlich gut," he said as he finished his last sip of coffee on a January morning in the blind last winter, German for "That tasted pretty good."

"I couldn't talk English when I started school," he said. "It was all German. I couldn't even count to 10."

His family moved to Alda briefly when Rathman was a boy, and then to another riverside farm a few miles west and closer to Wood River, where he lived for 30 years. He worked and played on the river so much his friends

dubbed him "River Rat" in high school, a nickname he still carries.

Rathman started hunting pheasants, waterfowl and coyotes with his father, a professional trapper, when he was about 12. He didn't get to hunt over them, but he remembers his father's call ducks, kept as farm pets and used on the river to pull in birds, a practice banned in 1935. He learned to shoot with a Winchester Model 12 16 gauge. He's always been good shot, even besting the state's top trapshooters as a young man.

But he's not built like he was when he was throwing hay bales around as a teen and entertaining an offer to play

minor league baseball for the Brooklyn Dodgers Oklahoma farm team in 1947. Corn prices were high enough that two truckloads would buy a new pickup, so he stayed on the farm, helped his father paint houses on the side, and played town team ball.

Rathman was a farmer, but had plenty of other jobs, including painting with his father and then on his own. He even raised thoroughbreds and raced them at Fonner Park from 1958 until the early 1980s.

"I didn't get married 'til I was 34 because I liked to hunt too well," Rathman said jokingly. "I was too busy."

The secret to hunting as much and for as long as Rathman has is, of course, an understanding wife. Jan and Delbert will celebrate their 50th anniversary November 16. Not only is Jan understanding, she adds the sense of humor of a stand-up comic when talking about her beau's hunting addiction.

Jan said she didn't know Delbert hunted or gambled when they married. On their honeymoon in Las Vegas in November of 1963, he was a perfect gentleman, spending every moment with her and not one at the tables. Back home, Jan's mother was burned in an accident and ended up in the hospital,



Delbert Rathman scans the sky for geese while setting out decoys in front of his sandpit blind near Wood River last season.

“Back in them early days, in the ‘40s and ‘50s, you’d shoot a lot of ducks,” Rathman said. “And every time a bunch of ducks came in you’d say, ‘See if there’s any geese coming’ before you’d shoot the ducks.”

and Delbert insisted they go home to be with her. On their way home, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. They stopped to watch the news, but Delbert continued to urge Jan to get home to her mother. It wasn’t until they pulled in the driveway that Jan learned about Delbert’s other love.

“He picked up the suitcases and takes them in the house and he sets them down and he goes out the back door, gets his gun and his waders and away he’s gone. And I haven’t seen him since in the fall,” she said, eliciting laughter from the waterfowl hunters gathered at her dining room table last February for post-hunt cocktails and hors d’oeuvres, a tradition they’ve dubbed Happy Hour. “It took me a little while to get used to it, but I finally accepted it. What else can you do?”

“I do like that he can do it, I really do,” she continued. “I’m glad that he’s well enough that he can get out there and do that kind of stuff because if he

was just sitting in here in the house I’m afraid we’d kill each other. Only I don’t shoot, so I’d have to use a knife or a rope or something.”

Ten years younger and recently retired as a rural mail carrier, Jan said she has to put up with Delbert more in the summer. “He’s pretty good. He just lays around and doesn’t get in the road. He keeps busy, too. He can fix anything, do anything ... he can paint anything and one of these days he’s going to start painting for me. But there’s always another season that comes that he can’t do it.”

Delbert pointed out that he did give up deer and elk hunting after he married, giving in to Jan’s pleas to “stop shooting Bambi’s mommy and daddy.”

When she tried to convince him that geese mate for life and shooting one meant the other would be alone, he told her, “I know – that’s why I shoot both of them.”



Rathman blows his call at a passing flock.



Rathman packs a cell phone to the blind, texting and talking with other hunters up and down the river to keep tabs on the geese.

Game Changers

After spending a few seasons not far upriver, Rathman has been hunting the same piece of ground for 60 years. Plenty has changed in waterfowling and the Platte in that time.

“In the early ‘50s, you could stand on the bank and see all the way across the river,” he said. “You’d see a few trees on the towheads, but not very many. Now it’s nothing but trees and grass.

“And it used to be shallow. You never needed chest waders. You never found a deep stream and there wasn’t very many places deeper than your knees.”

Rathman isn’t wearing chest waders these days for two reasons. He doesn’t need to wade that deep to set out decoys in the sandpit and “it’s too hard for me to get them on and off,” he said with a laugh.

The sandpit Rathman hunts now didn’t exist when he started hunting here: it was a byproduct of the construction of Interstate 80 in 1962. However, the din of the traffic whizzing by, more of it each year, still isn’t enough to drown out the sound of a distant Canada’s honk.

A flood filled in part of the lake in 1967, but dredging and the construction of a dike have kept the river mostly

at bay since. Floods have taken three or four of Rathman’s blinds, and the ever-changing river has necessitated the relocation of others in order to hunt near water. Moving a blind often meant redesigning it, and they have grown with time. Rathman used to be proud of his simple 4-by-8-foot “hunting” blinds, calling the cavernous haunts of other hunters “party blinds.” Now he has one of those, too, with plenty of extra room for gear, but not going so far as building a “kitchen” in the back. No, Rathman’s stove is still at his feet, letting him cook, call and shoot from the same seat. An old friend liked Rathman’s cooking so much he dubbed

the blind the Sandbar Grill and Café.

What he shoots has certainly changed. “Back in them early days, in the ‘40s and ‘50s, you’d shoot a lot of ducks,” Rathman said. “And every time a bunch of ducks came in you’d say, ‘See if there’s any geese coming’ before you’d shoot the ducks. And you were lucky to see a bunch of geese in a week. Nowadays, you look and see the geese coming and say, ‘See if there’s a bunch of ducks coming.’ It’s just turned around.”

Rathman remembers seeing goose numbers start to climb in the early 1980s and says they haven’t stopped climbing since. Duck hunting was at

its peak in the early 1970s. It can still be good, he said, but only for a few days “and that’s it. It’s over. I don’t know where they go. Maybe they’re out west, but they’re not here, and I don’t know what the deal is.”

He’s watched other game populations rise from his river blind, too. “There used to be very few deer and you’d very seldom see one,” he said. “And there were no turkeys.”

Having plenty of both now has certainly contributed to the increase in the price of river land and hunting leases. Recently the landowners where Rathman hunts have begun charging for the rights. Few people paid for leases when Rathman started hunting. If landowners didn’t hunt the river

themselves, they had friends who did. “There was still a blind every quarter mile or so, just like there is now,” Rathman said.

“I had a chance to buy river ground the next field over,” he said. “He tried his darndest to sell it to me for darn near nothing and I didn’t buy it. There were two or three places I could’ve bought ... but, I thought, who wants river ground? That would’ve been money well invested.”

That regret is up there with not knowing what happened to the wooden

decoys he used when he started hunting with his dad. And selling the Cyrus Black goose decoys he had when he started hunting. Made in Kearney from wire and burlap and highly sought after collectibles today, Rathman sold his Blacks more than 20 years ago to buy a spread of the latest and greatest decoys. “Them decoys is worth a lot of money and here I got rid of them. I got rid of a lot of them.”

Rathman has hunted through the move to steel shot and seen the introduction of acrylic duck and goose calls, high-priced flocked head decoys, neoprene waders, Gore-tex rainwear and more. But one thing that hasn’t changed is his passion for waterfowling, which is

enough to get him out of bed every morning, sometimes as early as 4 a.m., without an alarm.

He’s shared his passion with more than one young hunter, including Bill Gideon, who shot his first goose from Rathman’s blind at the age of 20. That introduction is now spilling down generations. Several times each season, Gideon’s sons, Matt and Chad, who are as enthusiastic about the sport as Rathman, host him in their blind or sit in his, often joined by their kids. “We’re still getting tips and tactics,” Matt said.

Those tips include how it’s important to set decoys facing into the wind when it’s really blowing, but any direction when it’s not, and to shoot the farthest bird in the flock with your first shot, because the close one will still be close for your second.

“We learn something every time,” Chad added.

In Dog Years

Age has slowed Rathman a bit. Until he turned 70, he only hunted in a blind he’d built on the river. But common sense told him the blind on the sandpit was a shorter walk that didn’t require wading through moving water or a boat ride.

He has plenty of company in the blinds on weekends, but rarely on weekdays. Rathman sold his farm and retired in 1994. The rest of the crew still has to work. Jan would prefer he didn’t hunt by himself, but doesn’t stop him.

“I guess it’s just the toughness in the old German,” he said. “I do most of this to keep myself in halfway good shape so I can live a little longer. All these guys I hunt with say they’ll never get to my age and hunt. They say ‘We’ll never make it.’”



Both up there in years, Rathman and his black Labrador retriever Buddy aren’t afraid to go after a downed goose in the cattails.

Rathman tells them if they take care of themselves like he has, they will. “I never did smoke in my life and I think that had a lot to do with it,” he beamed. “And my mom told me when I was 15 or 16 ‘I’d just as soon you drink a beer as drink pop.’ So I never did drink pop, but I never drank that much beer either. I think that had a lot to do with my health.”

Yet he hasn’t had a perfect bill of health. Between 1994 and 2001, Rathman had both knees and hips replaced and added triple bypass surgery for good measure. He’s also had surgeries to repair carpal tunnel syndrome in both hands and a double hernia.

But other than arthritis, he’s fit as a fiddle. At a recent physical, Rathman’s doctor said he was as healthy as a 60-year-old. “I’ll hunt ‘til the Lord takes me away,” he said. “Or when Buddy dies. Then I might quit, too.”

Buddy, Rathman’s black Labrador retriever, is 9 or 10 years old and will likely be his last dog. Rathman gladly adopted him from an impatient Colorado pheasant hunter who was fed up with the dog not honoring his

pointer and didn’t appreciate Buddy’s retrieving ability. “He does good for his age,” he said. “He’s probably retrieved 300 geese or more out of this blind.

“He’s got 3 years left in him. Me? I don’t know.”

Rathman is ready for the day when his time on earth ends. He’s picked out his casket – an American flag and bald eagles on one end, a black Lab holding a mallard in its mouth on the top, and lined with camouflage cloth. The pallbearers, his nephews, will wear camouflage shirts. He expects many attending the funeral will wear them too, just like they did for his 80th birthday party.

Until that day comes, “I’ll be coming down every day with the dog and cook. I don’t care if nothing’s flying. Then I’ll go home at noon or 1. And I’ll do that every day.”

And sometimes, if you’re 84 and you’ve taken untold numbers of ducks and geese, when a flock of 75 lesser Canada geese circles the blind twice before sunup, gliding mere feet over your head on one pass, you just let them keep flying. “I don’t shoot a lot of them,” Rathman said. “I just like to watch them.” ■



With one goose in the water and another on its way, Rathman keeps firing at a passing flock.



Saving What's Left

A call for environmental education.

By Joel Sartore

It's the 1880s in the Platte River Valley. The man doesn't look like much. He's barely five feet tall, in his 20s and of modest means. He's had a big day though, and has made a fateful decision; to spend real money to have a formal studio portrait made with his two prize possessions: a 10 gauge shotgun and the whooping crane he's just killed with it.

Even then, the whooper was rare, and odds are this guy knew it. Before photography was even invented, large birds were targeted heavily by market hunters hoping to sell their oversized primary feathers for writing quills, but by the late 1800s the "white crane" was so rare that this one was simply shot as a trophy before someone else got it farther up the flyway. The Tragedy of the Commons would eventually reduce this most elegant of species to just 21 birds in the wild.

If you take a look at early hunting regulations, it's not hard to see how they came so close to extinction. Wildlife was viewed as inexhaustible at first, with shocking possession limits, if there were limits at all.

But that was way back when, a time when there were virtually no laws protecting our nation's wildlife. We've made a lot of progress since then. Perhaps too much progress.

While our hunting rules are mostly where they need to be these days, those of us who spend our lives afield know that habitat loss is the ultimate driver of extinction. In the recent wake of \$7 corn, the conversion of prairie and even woodlands to row crops in our state has accelerated mercilessly, creating damage no hunting regulations can repair.

So what can?

A Natural Renaissance.

Today each generation is less connected to the land than the one before. Kids spend hours each day sitting in the dark, hypnotically staring at glowing screens. You can't blame them really. They can't miss what they don't know about, and they certainly won't rally to save it.

My parents made sure I didn't miss out. Between my mother's love of birds and my father taking me fishing or hunting nearly every weekend, I learned to appreciate Nebraska's forests, meadows and streams, along with every living thing in them. How many children today have the same experience?

Getting your kids outside, whether it's to hunt, fish, camp or just walk, is critical from this day forward. This means that parents must be willing to turn off the siren song of electronics now and again. Without at least a passing understanding that we're all connected to the natural world,



and how our actions affect the bigger picture, it'll soon be game over.

The truth is, when we save nature, we're actually saving ourselves. We need pollinating insects to produce crops. We need grass and trees to filter our water and air. The list goes on. But there's no time to lose.

From here on out, it will take an educated, energetic populace to treasure and preserve what's left of nature. A good start would be mandatory environmental education in schools, and that should include field trips, something children will remember years after the bell rings.

A revival is possible at any age, though. Look again at that elegant bird draped over a young man's back. Its ghostly call still resonates, to me at least.

Perhaps that Victorian era hunter has done us an enormous favor after all. ■

Joel Sartore is an environmental photojournalist for National Geographic Magazine and a Fellow of the National Geographic Society. You can see his work at JoelSartore.com and PhotoArk.com.

Venison Taco in a Bag

A wild game, no-mess version of the crunchy taco.

By Jenny Nguyen

There are certain foods that I hesitate to eat in public, and crunchy tacos are one of them. They fall apart in your hands, the filling always finds a way onto your (white) shirt, the grease and salsa dribble all over the place, and let's not forget the mountain of dirty napkins that accumulate before your eyes. It's completely barbaric – or maybe it's just me.

For all those reasons, this is why I love this recipe. You get all the flavors of a crunchy taco, but in a disposable, no-mess tortilla chip bag. It's perfect for dinner, lunch, parties, tailgating, and yes, even deer camp. For me, it's a nice change from all those hotdogs and hamburgers I normally eat at outdoor gatherings.

And the great thing about using venison for taco meat is that you don't have to deal with the hassle of draining any fat. Considerably lower in fat, calories and cholesterol, ground venison is much healthier than ground beef. Of course, please mind your taco toppings if you are worried about eating healthy – and that goes for other dishes, too. Eating healthy doesn't count when you take something as lean as venison and cook it in a whole stick of butter.

So for this hunting season, mix up your camp menu and try Venison Taco in a Bag. It's easy and quick, perfect for all your impatient and hungry hunting friends after they come back from sitting in their blinds. They could even take the bags to eat while hunting, but I'm not sure how the deer in the area would feel about being able to catch the scent of their late uncle buck again – gloriously wafting in the autumn breeze like once before, but this time accompanied by an unsettling bouquet of chili powder, paprika and continued crunching.



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN

Servings: 4

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Cooking Time: 10-15 minutes

Ingredients:

- 1 lb. of ground venison
- 1 tbs. of vegetable oil
- 1 tbs. of chili powder
- ½ tbs. of ground cumin
- 1 tsp. of cornstarch
- ½ tsp. of kosher salt, plus more to taste
- ¾ tsp. of paprika
- ½ tsp. of ground coriander
- ¼ tsp. of dried oregano
- cayenne pepper, to taste
- ½ cup of water
- 4 single-serving bags of Nacho Cheese Doritos, or your favorite variety of tortilla chips
- Taco fixings: salsa, shredded cabbage, crumbled queso fresco cheese, chopped cilantro, diced tomatoes, diced onion, diced avocado, etc.

Directions:

1. In a small container, combine taco spices: chili powder, cumin, cornstarch,

salt, paprika, coriander, oregano and cayenne pepper. Mix well and set aside. Or, if you're really pressed for time, or just lazy, you can use a ready-made taco seasoning packet from the store.

2. In a medium skillet, heat 1 tbs. of vegetable oil over medium heat. Add ground venison and cook until browned.

3. Next, stir in seasoning mix and ½ cup of water to the skillet. Simmer until almost all the liquids have absorbed and evaporated, stirring often. Then take off heat and adjust seasonings. Keep in mind all the salt that's already in the cheese, chips and salsa.

4. Snip off one side of each Doritos bag. Finally, add venison taco meat and all your favorite taco fixings. ■

Jenny Nguyen cooks, fishes and most recently dove hunts.



Helping Deer and Drivers

Interstate 80 fence project reducing deer collisions along Platte River corridor.

By Eric Fowler

With both the breeding and hunting season underway in November, deer have more on their mind than watching for cars, making it the worst month for deer vehicle collisions and road-killed deer in the state. But thanks to a Nebraska Department of Roads project that built fences and six wildlife underpasses along 4.3 miles of Interstate 80 on both sides of the Platte River, the odds of hitting a deer with your vehicle in that stretch have been reduced dramatically.

A University of Nebraska-Lincoln study of the \$1.4 million project looked at 14 years of deer-vehicle collision data and found the number of deer killed per mile along that busy stretch of interstate between Exit 426 (Eugene T. Mahoney State Park) and Pflug Road dropped from 72 per year to just five per year after the fence was completed in 2011, an 82 percent reduction. Additionally, the number of deer-vehicle collisions dropped 52 percent.

The area, with its wooded bluffs along the river, also happens to have some of the highest deer densities in the state. “Lots of cars and trucks going fast do not mix well with deer,” said Scott Hygnstrom, a wildlife damage specialist in the UN-L School of Natural Resources and coordinator of the research project led by student Aaron Hildreth.

The study also deployed 16 infrared game cameras to document how deer responded to the construction of the fence and underpasses. In the 3½ years the cameras were active, they captured 12,532 images of deer, 11,901 in underpasses and 631 moving around the ends. The cameras also photographed raccoons, Virginia opossums, coyotes, red fox, bobcats, striped skunks, badgers, house cats, groundhogs, eastern cottontail rabbits, Canada geese, wild turkeys, great blue herons, barred owls and even mice.

Hygnstrom said the movement around the ends of the fences was not surprising, and that data also shows that deer-vehicle collisions increased in those areas as well. “That means we may have some modifications to do to those fences like maybe adding a wing to the ends to divert deer away from the road,” he said.

The number of deer using the underpasses declined after the fence was completed, but Hygnstrom said that is likely due to an outbreak of epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) in 2012 which killed about one-third of the white-tailed deer in the area.

Nationally, the number of vehicles on the roads and the collisions with wildlife is increasing each year with 1.4 million such accidents reported in 2009. About 150 people died and vehicle damage was estimated at \$1.1 billion. Nebraska reported nearly 13,000 deer-vehicle collisions in 2011, up 324 percent from 10 years earlier



This white-tailed buck picture was one of 12,532 images of deer captured during a study on the I-80 fences and underpasses.



Canada geese were among 16 species of wildlife photographed by trail cameras during the study.

and one for every 104 licensed drivers, twice the national average.

Hygnstrom hopes to work with the Department of Roads to identify other stretches of highway in the state where the number of deer-vehicle collisions is high and develop a threshold on where measures to warn drivers or keep deer off highways might be warranted. In the case of this stretch of I-80, the fence was effective and worth the cost.

“Without question it saved thousands of dollars in damage to personal property and may have even saved human lives, not to mention the number of deer’s lives,” he said.

“Our data back up this conclusion, and the testimonials of people I know who drive back and forth between Omaha and Lincoln have all said there aren’t deer dead along the roadway anymore. For me this has been really a feel-good project that has provided a great public service to the people of Nebraska.” ■

PHOTOS COURTESY OF UNL SCHOOL OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Photographing the Other Fall Color

The rich colors of prairie shine long after the last leaves have fallen.

By Eric Fowler

Fall can be a magical time for photography. But when the last of the golden leaves fall from the trees, some photographers find themselves wishing for a white Christmas ... or Thanksgiving or any day for that matter ... and waiting impatiently for spring and the return of green to the forest.

But wonderful fall color can be found long after the leaves fall. In fact, the trees aren’t even the first vegetation to put on an autumnal display. Native grasses win that race, and prairies can provide stunning photo subjects well into winter.

“Grasses hold their gold color pretty well – native ones, anyway – well into the winter unless they get squished down by snows,” said Chris Helzer, an ecologist with The Nature Conservancy and also a nature photographer. “Big bluestem and little bluestem are probably the best for the nice rich

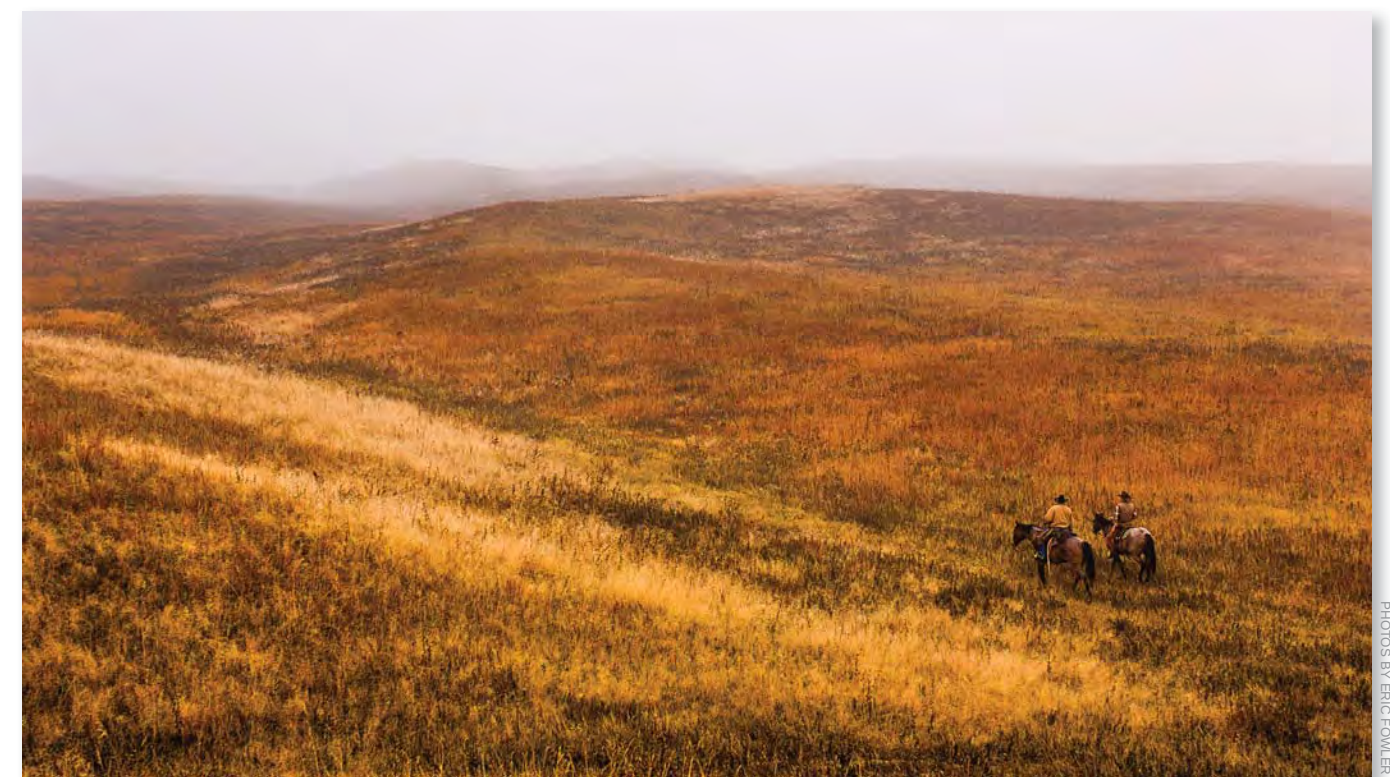
reds, but Indiangrass, switchgrass, and even prairie cordgrass also have good color. Forbs such as round-headed bush clover and sunflowers – and many others – provide good texture as dark, interestingly-shaped accents.”

Native grasses can be especially colorful when soaked with morning dew and can glow when backlit by the early or late-day sun. Large ungrazed Sandhills pastures and places like the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge provide a seemingly endless canvas of color. But the smaller native and restored grasslands Helzer manages along the Platte River in central Nebraska, remnants of tallgrass prairie managed by the National Audubon Society in southeastern Nebraska, sandsage prairie in southwestern Nebraska, mixed grass prairie in the Panhandle, and even a small patch of native grasses in the city can provide interesting photo subjects.



The reds of big bluestem.

So instead of waiting for the first snow to fall, grab your camera and find a prairie – for fall color isn’t over quite yet. ■



Bruce Switzer and Bob Price cross a foggy Sandhills prairie north of Calamus Reservoir.

PHOTOS BY ERIC FOWLER

BOOKS/PUBLICATIONS/VIDEOS

NEBRASKA WILDFLOWERS. It's back. Out of print for 21 years, the second edition of Jon Farrar's *Field Guide to Wildflowers of Nebraska and the Great Plains* is now available. This 6-inch by 9½-inch paperback is a must have for anyone interested in learning more about wildflowers in Nebraska and the Great Plains region and makes a great gift. Richly illustrated with color photography and ink drawings. To order this publication or to learn about other great gift ideas, visit NebraskalandGifts.com or call (800) 742-0056.

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◀ This pheasant hunt took place in 1965 north of Litchfield. My dad Myron, Uncle Oliver, friend Maurice Sullivan and I harvested seven or eight birds on the first walk of the morning. Typically we would hunt until noon and then heat up canned stew for lunch.

▲ So this is what a grouse looks like. It was fall of 1967 and my dad Myron, Uncle Oliver, friend Maurice Sullivan and I made our first trip to Halsey forest. Myron was told there were plenty of grouse and would be a good way to extend the hunting season. As is typical to most newcomers, we got lost on our first walk through the hills. We pitched a tent in the campground, but later advanced to a motor home on weekends for the next 25 years.

◀ My sisters Ann, Karen and I hold up an 11-pound walleye our dad Myron caught at Harlan County Dam. Dated July 4, 1961, the trailer in the background was Uncle Oliver's parked at Jack & Bill's Marina. Jim Bishop Sporting Goods in Republican City had a biggest fish contest and dad received a fillet knife for second place that year.
— Lynn Berggren, Vice Chair, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Broken Bow, Nebraska



► This is the way pheasant hunting was in 1963. We got our limit in pheasants during the morning hunt opening day. This picture was taken in Hartington. The man on the right hand top corner was Paul Moody of Hartington. He, with his two sons, hosted a group from Omaha for the weekend. I am pictured middle row, second from the left. I was 25 at the time.
— Larry Maschka, Omaha, 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.

The Warmest Place on My Body

Drastic times call for drastic measures.

By Jeff Kurrus

With the opening of pheasant season on October 26 this year, many hunters will be protecting their dogs, and themselves, from the perils of warm-weather hunting. As both dogs and hunters pant, there will be many wishes for the colder days of winter ahead.

Except from me.

Being an upstanding Southern gentleman, I have exhaustedly, probably to your chagrin, accounted in the pages of NEBRASKAland my lack of desire to step into the outdoors when the temperatures fall below my tropical standards. And while this should definitely be understandable to those snowbirds who winter in states below the Mason-Dixon, I also have one more reason for my disdain for all things frozen: January 15, 2007.

Before daylight that morning, I was sitting in the well-heated truck with University of Nebraska-Lincoln assistant baseball coach Andy Sawyers on the land of Kevin Brandl near Columbus. We had worked for weeks trying to line up a day when he could break away from off-season workouts, and despite the weather we were not going to cancel our hunt — weather that dropped six inches of snow the night before, featured sub-zero temperatures and added 30-mph winds for good measure.

“What do you think?” asked Andy.

“It’s your call,” I said, praying for bacon and eggs at a local diner instead. “We’ll see how your dog does. I’ll be fine.” But I was lying, and not even for the reason I originally thought.

Not 100 yards into our walk, I was already sweating as I tried to keep up through foot-high snowdrifts. But my camera gear was not as warm as my batteries froze up immediately.

Because I was less than six months into my tenure at NEBRASKAland, failure was a huge motivator on a day-to-day basis. When I began at the magazine, I was given two rules by our staff. One, stay out of the office. There are no photos to be made in the office. Two, when you come back to the office, you better have photos or you won’t get to leave the office again.

But with a frozen camera, I was done before my day had even started and the conditions didn’t act as if they were going to let up anytime soon. So I pulled the batteries from the camera and put them in my pocket. No luck. Then I held them in my pocket with still no good fortune. But Andy’s pointing Lab Drake was all over birds from the get-go, so I had to repeatedly remove my hands pretending to take pictures with no thought of interrupting Andy’s one chance to hunt this season.

Until a childhood deer hunting idea came to mind.

Every little boy learns where the warmest part of his body is during those frosty deer stand mornings, and uses this area



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

as a last resort in extreme circumstances for the rest of his life. So if it was a good enough spot for frigid finger tips, it would be for camera batteries as well. So I placed them in my boxer briefs and prayed for the best.

Andy’s dog continued to work and I continued to follow, which is the last strategy any photographer uses when covering an upland hunt. If possible, you must stay even with your story subject or even in front of the person, angling out of shotgun range but trying to catch a shot of a bird between the hunter and the camera lens. It makes for a lot of jogging and high-stepping, but it’s part of the game when covering an upland hunt. No one wants to repeatedly see photos of the back of a hunter.

But there was no reason for this level of hustling, as I could only pretend to take pictures ... and sweat.

“Sweat,” I thought, and while this will be an unfortunate thought for you it was golden for me. I reached in my pants, pulled out the batteries, and put them in the camera and hit the switch.

The camera fired up immediately. Game time. So for the next 8 hours I made more than 1,000 photos of Andy’s hunt, from angles I found interesting to mock-ups that art director Tim Reigert had drawn for me, shots he had never seen in our publication before. Even today, it’s one of my most memorable shoots ... for even more reasons than frozen batteries.

Nowadays when the temperature drops this time of year, I remember that it can always be a little bit colder. Both by my memories from this hunt as well as the tiny, but sensitive, spot on the bridge of my nose that appeared after that 2007 hunt with Andy reminding me of this fact.

Frost nip. A sensitive spot of skin I still watch closely on sunny summer days and freezing winter ones, and a reminder that I had absolutely no idea what I was getting into that day when I stepped from the truck. In more ways than one.

And if my camera batteries could speak, I’m definitely sure they would agree as well. ■



Not Too Close

Getting close to wildlife is the object of many photographers ... and for good reason. Publications throughout the world are falling in love with GoPro and camera trap technology, and some will pay handsomely to those photographers who repeatedly deliver in-your-face images.

But there remains a right way to do it. It's an idea that I have learned from the ideals of photographers like Michael Forsberg, who spends an exhaustive amount of time making sure he makes photos we want to see without invading the space of animals beyond reason.

These are ideals that I think of each time I'm showing the photo to a group of students or aspiring outdoor photographers. The opossum, frozen in its most famous defense mechanism, is a creature I can easily teach to by telling about its life as North America's only marsupial and its thousands of years on this continent.

So, in one respect, it's the type of photo I'm proud of: an image that our next generation of learners as well as the readers of *NEBRASKAland Magazine* can learn from. But I also remember the images I usually don't show viewers of this opossum, the ones where I moved in too close, causing it to bear its teeth because its first defensive stand obviously wasn't enough for this rabid photographer.

I wasn't in camouflage and I wasn't in a blind. I was using the mammal's protective strategies against itself, knowing that if I immediately ran at the creature it might just do what I wanted it to do – freeze.

But now, through the work of Forsberg and others, I've learned that there's a better way to photograph wildlife – that the “as close as possible” game is one that all photographers must judge when trying to capture that oh-so-perfect image.

Because our purpose is to preserve wildlife, not terrify it.

Jeff Kurrus, Editor, NEBRASKAland Magazine
September 6, 2013



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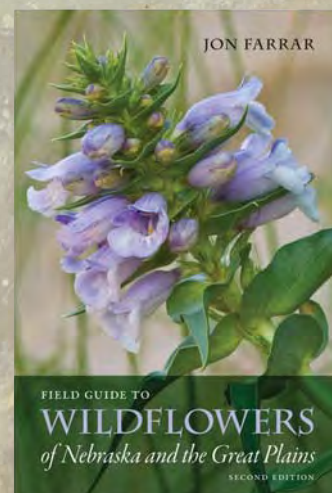
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Address _____

City/State/ZIP _____

Date of Birth: Month ____ Day ____ Year ____ Sex ____ Height ____

Weight ____ Hair Color ____ Eye Color ____

TYPE OF PERMIT(S) _____

Name _____ Last 4 digits SSN _____

Address _____

City/State/ZIP _____

Date of Birth: Month ____ Day ____ Year ____ Sex ____ Height ____

Weight ____ Hair Color ____ Eye Color ____

TYPE OF PERMIT(S) _____

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NEBRASKA PARK PERMITS

QTY	PARK PERMIT TYPE	FEE	TOTAL AMOUNT
_____	Annual Park Permit`	\$25	_____
_____	Duplicate Park Permit	\$12.50	_____

HUNTING AND FISHING PERMITS

QTY	PERMITS & STAMPS	2013	2014	TOTALS
_____	Resident Hunt and Fish Permit	\$40.00 ☐	\$40.00 ☐	
_____	Resident Hunt Permit	\$14.00 ☐	\$14.00 ☐	
_____	Resident Fish Permit	\$28.50 ☐	\$28.50 ☐	
_____	Resident Fur Harvest Permit	\$16.00 ☐	\$16.00 ☐	
_____	Nonresident Fish Permit	\$60.50 ☐	\$60.50 ☐	
_____	Nonresident 2-day Hunt	\$56.00 ☐	\$56.00 ☐	
_____	Nonresident Hunt Permit	\$81.00 ☐	\$81.00 ☐	
_____	Migratory Waterfowl Stamp	\$5.00 ☐	\$5.00 ☐	
_____	Habitat Stamp (required with all hunting permits)	\$20.00 ☐	\$20.00 ☐	
_____	Lifetime Hunt Permit.....	see previous page		
_____	Lifetime Fish Permit	see previous page		
_____	Lifetime Hunt and Fish Permit.....	see previous page		
_____	Lifetime Fur Harvest Permit.....	see previous page		
_____	Lifetime Habitat Stamp	\$400.00 ☐		
_____	Lifetime Nebraska Waterfowl Stamp	\$100.00 ☐		

Prices include agent issuing fee where applicable. No sales tax on permits and stamps.

TOTAL PERMIT ORDER \$ _____

Enter this total on the PERMITS and STAMPS line below.

Gift Items *Enter totals for gift items below on line A*

Nebraska residents please add state and local sales tax on the following items.

QUANTITY	ITEM NUMBER	ITEM DESCRIPTION	COLOR	UNIT PRICE	TOTAL AMOUNT

Mail order form with your payment to:
NEBRASKAland Gifts
P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370

PAYMENT METHOD

☐ Check ☐ Money Order ☐ VISA ☐ MasterCard

Credit Card Number _____

Security code (3 digits on back of card) _____

Expiration Date _____

Daytime Phone _____

Shipping and Handling Charges for Mail and Fax Orders		
\$0.01 – 0.99	\$0.70	
\$1.00 – 4.99	\$2.50	
\$5.00 – 10.99	\$3.95	
\$10.01 – 25.00	\$5.95	
\$25.01 – 50.00	\$7.95	
\$50.01 – 75.00	\$10.15	
\$75.01 – 100.00	\$10.95	
\$100.01 and over.....	FREE	
Shipping and handling not required for subscriptions.		
For overseas shipping please call about extra mailing fees that may apply.		

(A) GIFT ITEMS \$ _____

SHIPPING & HANDLING CHARGES \$ _____
See accompanying text box

SUBSCRIPTIONS \$ _____

SALES TAX \$ _____

PERMITS & STAMPS \$ _____

TOTAL ALL ITEMS \$ _____

For additional orders provide information on another sheet of paper. Please provide complete mailing information for items to be sent to additional addresses.

Order online at **NebraskalandGifts.com** (more items available online - some 90% off!)

A FAMILY TRADITION
GOING STRONG
IN NEBRASKA



Share the hunting experience you enjoy with your kids—for less. All hunters 15 and under can get Nebraska deer and turkey permits for only \$5. Hunting in Nebraska also means:

- Youth deer permits that are good for whitetail or mule deer in most units.
- No minimum age for turkey hunters.
- A long turkey season.
- Up to 2 youth turkey and 2 youth deer tags per hunter.

DEER

Various Seasons
Open through **Jan.18**

TURKEY

Archery and Shotgun
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See You Out There