



Many morel mushroom hunters heed the old-time advice and head to the woods "when the lilacs bloom." These two beauties were found in Knox County at the end of the first week in May. Photo by Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley.

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The Oglala Grassland

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Travel to North Platte • Bioblitz • RVs at State Parks
Masters of the Hunt – Field Trial Dogs • Alkali Milkvetch

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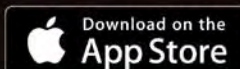
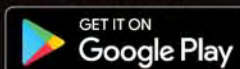
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NEBRASKAland Magazine

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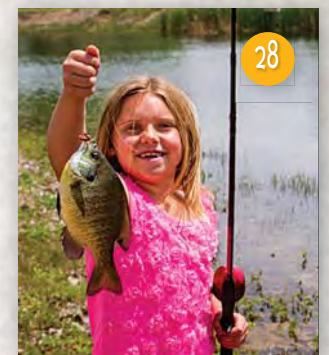
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ON THE WEB...

To see additional content including photos, videos and additional articles, visit magazine.outdoornebraska.gov/digital

Cover: A young swift fox looks out over the short grass of Sioux County. The swift fox is among the many remarkable species that call the Oglala Grassland home. Photo by Justin Haag.

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Instagramer @life_unbound posted this photo: "It took everything in her to sit on the side of the bank and watch John Paul fish. Normally she's right there next to him, or swimming in the fishing hole – but that water was just too dang cold."



Richard Jones shot this image of the moon south of Gothenburg with a Nikon P900.

Lake Wanahoo Fishing

I'd like to thank the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission for producing an excellent fishery at Lake Wanahoo. This fishery has provided an amazing opportunity for many new metro-area anglers and has even provided a rare opportunity for trophy-class northern pike fishing in eastern Nebraska. Thank you for enacting a catch and release only policy on northern pike that is allowing for this treat in a heavily-fished region. Recently, Greg Ernst and I had the opportunity to allow three young fisherman (Weston Walsh of Omaha, Blake Yarborough of Elkhorn and Micah Spies of Elkhorn) to catch their first-ever fish through the ice, and in addition to many crappie and bluegill, they each had the opportunity to catch their first northern pike. In fact, Micah, age 5, caught the first fish of his life, a nice crappie, and then minutes later, landed a 14-pound giant of a pike! What a way to start your fishing career. Photo shows Micah Spies with his 39-inch, 14-pound second fish of his life.

Chris Pokorny
Elkhorn, Nebraska



Bart Torbert wrote, "My wife and I live southeast of Crawford on Pine Ridge. We call our place 'Shaggy Hills Ranch.' Over last night, we had freezing fog move in. It created a nice display of hoarfrost."

Nature Journaling

Great feature this month with Renae Blum on discovering the outdoors through nature journaling. I really enjoyed it.

Best regards,
Bobby Hurt
Cordel, Georgia

Roger Welsch's Fire

Please inform Roger Welsch how much I enjoyed his column in the March 2018 issue of NEBRASKAland. I have enjoyed his humorous columns in NEBRASKAland and other magazines, but I thought this one was particularly sensitive and insightful.

Mary E. Blake
Sent via e-mail



Dennis Loose shot this red fox image in his southwest Lincoln backyard.



Paul Pack took this image of a ring-billed gull at Johnson Lake in Gosper County.



Suzie Walgren sent in this image of the moon. It was taken using a Tamron 150-600 on a Canon 5D MIII body. This is a composite of two shots.

Send your comments to:
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Please include your postal address and telephone number. Letters may be condensed and edited. Photographs are also welcome.

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Mixed Bag

A Mammal Brief

Eastern Cottontail Rabbit

By Lindsay Rogers

By most accounts, there are 35 subspecies of the eastern cottontail. Nebraska is home to two cottontail species – *Sylvilagus floridanus mearnsi* and *Sylvilagus floridanus similis*, the common name for both is conveniently "eastern cottontail." One species, *Sylvilagus floridanus mearnsi*, is found in the eastern quarter of the state. The other, *Sylvilagus floridanus similis*, is found in the western three-fourths of the state.

Both species are herbivores that feed on grasses, clover and ornamental flowers in the summer and twigs, bark and buds of trees and shrubs in the winter. Both cottontail rabbits and white-tailed deer will feed on twigs in the winter. A careful observer can tell the difference by looking at how the twig was bitten. Because rabbits have both upper and lower incisors they will make a clean bite. White-tailed deer lack upper incisors, forcing them to tear off the twig.

Eastern cottontails can be found in a wide range of habitats, including meadows, orchards, open woodlands and urban areas. Their range is between 5-8 acres depending on food availability. They are a solitary species coming together only to mate. ■

Lindsay Rogers is an outdoor education specialist with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

May is Nebraska's International Migratory Bird Month

Events held statewide

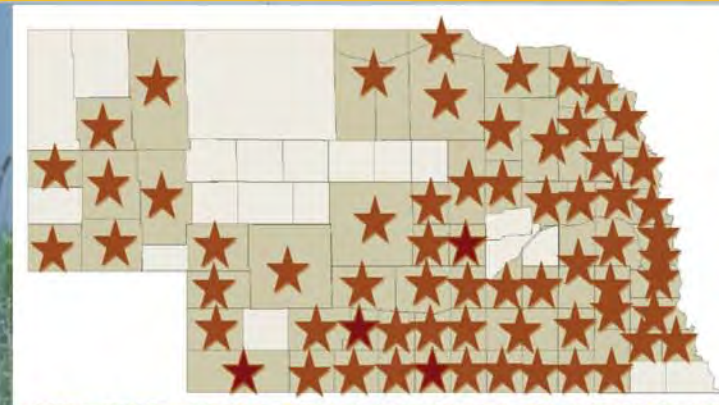


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Visit North Platte

By Brenna McFadden, Nebraska Tourism Commission



North Platte, located in Lincoln County, is a town rich with the history of one of the most colorful figures of the American Old West, Buffalo Bill Cody. Come explore the places of lore where rodeos offer great entertainment and other adventures abound.

Do

With so much history in this town you may find it hard to decide what not to visit while you're spending time in North Platte. The Golden Spike Tower offers a bird's eye view of the World's Largest Railroad Classification Yard. Stop here first to get an idea of all the possibilities this town has to offer. Some of the more notable attractions include the Buffalo Bill State Historical Park, the Lincoln County Historical Museum and Cody Park. Be sure to put *NEBRASKA*land Days in your calendar on June 13 – it is an event you won't want to miss!

Eat

Pals Brewing Company produces and serves homebrewed beer, incredible cheese curds and house-crafted pizza. If you are interested in a nice breakfast and lunch spot you can swing by the Espresso Shop. North Platte is also home to restaurants that serve unique and interesting cuisines – the Canteen Bar & Lounge and Tempura Japanese Restaurant are just two of the local favorites.

Stay

If you're looking for a cozy escape, Li'l Bit Country Cabin is where country meets city. This peaceful cabin on the edge of town is nestled in the pines between large gardens and a rustic wildlife sanctuary. Want more of a larger hotel experience? The Best Western, Comfort Inn, Hampton Inn and recently renovated Holiday Inn Express are great options, too.

Shopping

North Platte offers a unique shopping experience. You can visit Nebraska's largest souvenir and western gift store and an Old West Museum all at the Fort Cody Trading Post. If you are feeling adventurous you can spend all day at the Grain Bin Antique Town which features 15 historic grain bins filled to the brim with antiques. You won't find an experience like this anywhere else.

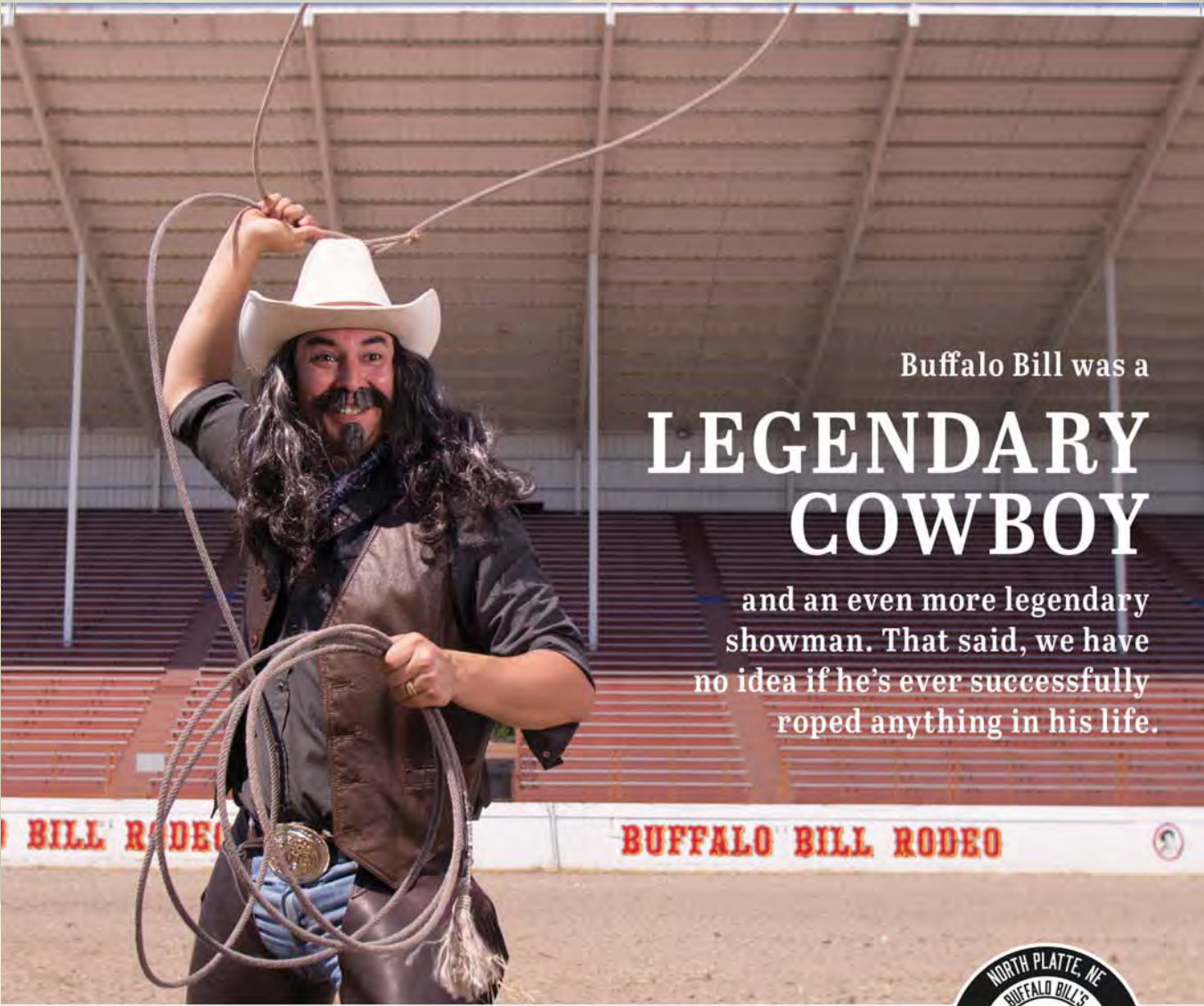
Explore

Dusty Trails offers a variety of activities ranging from horseback riding, tanking, kayaking, canoeing or just hanging out at a petting zoo. If you're looking to soak up some sun, head south of town to Lake Maloney, a popular spot for boating, fishing, water sports, camping and family fun. If you are a mountain biker then you are in luck, for Potter's Pasture has some of the best mountain bike trails around and they are suitable for riders of any ability. ■



Visitors at Buffalo Bill Ranch State Historical Park.

PHOTO BY JULIE GEISER



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A Brief History

Muddy Nebraska

By Patricia C. Gaster,
Nebraska State Historical Society

It’s small consolation if you ever get stuck in the mud, but the fact is Nebraska has come a long way since pioneer times in the development of its public roads and highways. A glance through pioneer reminiscences and the spring issues of early newspapers provide plenty of evidence that good old-fashioned Nebraska mud was one of the principle obstacles in the way of spring travel here. Covered wagon emigrants, beating their way to Oregon, California or Utah, frequently had trouble with the muddy Nebraska leg of the long journey, almost always undertaken in early spring. The trails became so badly rutted that wagons could not pass, and new roads had to be marked out. This accounts in part for the fact that the Oregon Trail may be several miles wide in certain parts of the state, notably

southeastern Nebraska. In territorial times, roads were little better than trails and when the ground thawed out in the spring they usually were impassable. Rural roads were not the only ones afflicted by the spring thaw. Villages and city streets suffered in equal or greater proportion. An editorial in the *Dakota City Democrat*, April 13, 1861, issue may be considered typical: “Last week this city was visited by shower after shower of April rain that reduced



The Elmer Ball family, Woods Park (Custer County), 1886. NSHS RG2608-1069



Stuck in the mud near Bancroft, ca. 1910s. NSHS RG3334-1-56



Mud wasn’t just for backroads. Here’s the old state capitol (on the site of the present capitol) in about 1898. NSHS RG2158-12-20

the condition of our streets to the consistency of paste. Pedestrians worked them up into a still worse condition ... until the upper surface for two feet deep, was of the primitive nature of brick. Stilts, and other pedal appendages, adroit jumping, and the aquatic knowledge of sturgeons, were in much requisition.” Even the proud city of Omaha was afflicted with mud. The *Omaha Daily Bee*, on May 28, 1881, reported that a team of horses pulling a grocery wagon had recently been rescued from a mudhole near 14th and Douglas streets. An unsuccessful attempt to eliminate the hole had been made by city workmen, who filled it with soft mud and then smoothed dirt over the top. But when a team of horses “touched the reconstructed mudhole, they sunk to their shoulders in soft mire. The efforts which they made to get out only sunk them deeper. ... After struggling in the pit for about an hour a sufficient crowd collected to raise one of the horses bodily and remove it to firm ground. The other horse was taken out after much difficulty. It was badly strained in the process and its harness nearly ruined.” The *Bee* noted, “The matter created considerable indignation.” ■

Visit the Nebraska State Historical Society’s website at history.nebraska.gov.




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Catch and Release

By Julie Geiser

Many anglers enjoy taking home what they catch to eat, while other anglers release every fish they catch. If you choose to release fish you catch, remember that proper care and handling is vital to survival.

There are many reasons to catch and release fish: A fish may be too small and does not meet the minimum size required by state laws; the fish may be legal in size but too small for the angler to clean; or the fish species may not be the angler's preferred fish to eat. It is also good etiquette to release trophy-size fish, which are rare. Practicing catch and release of big fish will provide another lucky angler with a great experience in the future. To properly catch and release fish, follow these guidelines:

- The less you handle the fish, the better off it will be. Be particularly careful of the mucus coating or slime on a fish. This coating protects fish from infection, so the less you remove, the better. If you need to handle the fish, wet your hands first; this will cause less slime to come off the fish. If possible, keep the fish in the water when removing the hook.

- Rubber mesh nets also tend to be less harmful to fish. Netting a fish prevents dropping them in a boat or laying them on the ground and can help you get the fish back into the water faster.

- To hold a fish, firmly grip behind the head with your thumb on one side and your fingers on the other side, holding the gills shut. Use your other hand to hold the tail. Never hold a fish by the eye sockets or inside of the gills if you intend to release the fish.

- Remove the hook gently with needle-nose pliers by twisting the hook shank while pushing it toward the bend. Remove hooks if at all possible, but if removing it will cause more harm to the fish, then consider harvesting that fish.

- Cutting the line and leaving the hook in should be your last resort. If the line is cut and the hook is left inside the fish, the old school of



A smallmouth bass (*Micropterus dolomieu*) caught on a woolly bugger fly is handled carefully prior to releasing.

thought was to cut the line as close to the hook as possible. It is now believed that by leaving several inches of line attached to the hook, the trailing line will lever the hook to the side and allow the fish to continue feeding and give it a better chance of survival.

- Sometimes a fish is so exhausted from a fight that even though it is alive, it can't move water through its gills fast enough to recuperate. You can revive fish by moving the fish through water, headfirst, to force water into its mouth and gills; do not swish a fish back and forth as water entering the gills from the rear can be damaging. Support the fish by placing one hand under its belly, keep it upright. Hold the mouth open with your other hand if necessary, provided that it is not full of sharp teeth, making sure you are not blocking the gill flaps. The fish will revive in most cases and swim off on its own when ready.

- To preserve the memory of a fish, take photos before releasing it. If your fish qualifies for a Master Angler Award you can still receive the award for released fish. Land, measure and release the fish in the presence of a witness or take a photograph to verify your catch. Then fill out the Master Angler application stating you released the fish, along with the witness' signature or a photo. Do not weigh the fish; measuring a fish's length is quicker and requires less handling.

- Replica mounts are popular for those wanting a fish hanging on the wall, even after catch and release. These fiberglass forms can be created to look exactly like the fish you caught without sacrificing the actual fish. Take photos of both sides of the fish and from different angles. Also measure the fish from the tail to the tip of the snout, and get the circumference around the widest part of the fish for the taxidermist.

We can have larger fish in our waters if we give them the proper amount of growth time, good habitat and moderate fishing pressure – and use catch and release. It is one way to make a difference. ■



A 14-inch fiberglass yellow perch replica mount by Coast to Coast Fish Mounts.

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

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Mixed Bag

Tree Diversity

By Steve Brey, Horticulturalist

With emerald ash borer about to ravage our state and eliminate one of our most widespread and common native trees, the green ash, tree diversity is imperative.

Dutch elm disease took the American elm out of our pallet of plantable trees starting in the 1960s. Every village, town and city used this iconic tree as a street and park tree. Because of our love for this tree, we couldn't get enough of it, and that was a big mistake. Along came Dutch elm disease, which for the most part, wiped out the entire American elm population. We learned a valuable lesson: diversify, diversify, and diversify.

The problem is we did not heed our own advice, and because of this we are now facing another monumental problem of removing ash trees. Entire neighborhoods, or in the case of our state parks, entire campgrounds were planted back to ash after we lost our elms. That was understandable, as ash is a native tree; this species is very tough and able to withstand harsh growing conditions. But there was no excuse for over-planting.

A useful guideline for tree planting is the 10-20-30 rule, proposed by Dr. Frank Santamour at the U.S. National Arboretum. The 10-20-30 rule, also called the 10 percent rule, basically states that in any one area the tree population should not contain more than 10 percent of one species, 20 percent of one genus and 30 percent of one family.



Tree diversity throughout the state will be key in the coming years to prevent disease outbreaks.

If we follow this guideline now and in the future, we may not be faced with catastrophic losses when another insect or disease problem occurs. As an example, if you have 100 trees growing in one of your campgrounds you should have no more than 20 different kinds of oaks or 20 maples.

Reducing trees to 30 percent of any given family becomes a little more difficult. Some experts have proposed the idea of no more than 5 percent of one species planted in any given area. Many of our campgrounds have cottonwoods that pre-date the campgrounds themselves, and these old giants are coming to the ends of their lives. This turnover will give us a chance to diversify these areas so we do not repeat history.

Therefore, no more than 20 percent of any one genus should be planted in a given area. This concept is far from perfect, but it is a start to diversifying our campgrounds. ■

PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER



Explore the Outdoors

Saturday, May 12

12th Annual

9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

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- Bowfishing
- Kayaking
- Camping skills
- Shooting
- Climbing wall
- Dutch oven cook off
- S'mores
- 6,000-gallon aquarium and touch tank
- Fast draw competition
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- Kids Outdoor Discovery Zone
- Golf USA SNAG Driving Range
- Scavenger hunt



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Bug Banter

By Julie Van Meter
 State Entomologist,
 Nebraska
 Department
 of Agriculture

The European gypsy moth (*Lymantria dispar*) is an exotic, invasive forest pest not currently found in Nebraska. This pest was first introduced into the United States in Massachusetts in 1869, and it has since spread to include most of the northeastern U.S., west into Wisconsin and Minnesota, and south to Virginia.

Gypsy moths overwinter in the egg stage; egg masses are light tan and may contain up to 600 eggs. Egg masses are usually deposited on tree bark, but can



Gypsy Moth Egg Masses.

PHOTO COURTESY OF KARLA SALP. WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, BUGWOOD.ORG

also be found on items such as vehicles and outdoor furniture. Eggs hatch in early spring and the hungry caterpillars begin to feed. Gypsy moth caterpillars are hairy and have a distinct series of five pairs of blue dots followed by six pairs of red dots on their backs. The caterpillars go through several instars before pupating in early summer, with adults emerging in early- to mid-summer.

The adult male gypsy moth is brownish-gray, with black markings and feathery antennae. The adult female is white with black markings and larger than the male. While males are good fliers, females do not fly.

Gypsy moth caterpillars feed on numerous plants, including oaks, birch, hawthorn, linden, willow, plums, pine, spruce and even cedar. Defoliation stresses the tree, and repeated infestations make the plants more susceptible to secondary attack by other insects and diseases.



Gypsy Moth Caterpillar.

PHOTO COURTESY OF USDA APHIS PPQ, USDA APHIS PPQ, BUGWOOD.ORG.

The Nebraska Department of Agriculture Entomology Program conducts surveys for gypsy moth each year, setting several hundred delta traps across the state. Traps are set by late June, and remain out until September. High-risk sites for introduction include nurseries, campgrounds and rest stops, and major travel routes.

In addition to trapping, the Nebraska Department of Agriculture staff also inspects regulated articles such as nursery stock, firewood and Christmas trees for evidence of gypsy moth infestations and to ensure compliance with the federal gypsy moth quarantine. ■

If you suspect you've found a gypsy moth caterpillar or adult in Nebraska, take photos or collect a specimen. Then contact the Nebraska Department of Agriculture at 402-471-2351 or agr.plant@nebraska.gov to report the possible sighting.

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Tree-killing pests, like the emerald ash borer, hitchhike on firewood and spread insects and diseases that destroy our trees. Keep your backyard, campgrounds and favorite places safe from these pests.

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- Buy locally-harvested firewood.
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- If you brought firewood in from another area, BURN IT! Don't leave it, don't take it with you.

BUY LOCAL, BURN LOCAL.

To report potential emerald ash borer, contact the Nebraska Department of Agriculture at 402-471-2351.

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Upcoming Events

by Jerry Kane

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

- May 1**
Family Fishing Event
Terry's Pit, Terrytown
- May 2, 9, 16**
Becoming an Outdoors-Woman Archery Series
Platte River State Park (SP), Louisville
- May 4**
Outdoor Educational Rendezvous
Niobrara SP, Niobrara
- May 5**
Take Pride in America Day
Verdon Lake State Recreation Area (SRA), Verdon
- May 5**
Family Fishing Event
Red Willow Reservoir SRA, McCook
- May 5-6**
Living History
Fort Atkinson State Historical Park (SHP), Fort Calhoun
- May 5-19**
Lilac Walk
Arbor Lodge SHP, Nebraska City
- May 7**
Linking Literature and Science: Insects and Pollinators
St. Thomas Lutheran Church, Omaha
- May 9**
Youth Fishing Instructor Certification
Fort Kearny SHP, Kearney
- May 11-12**
Sip Nebraska Wine and Craft Beer Festival
Eugene T. Mahoney SP, Ashland
- May 12**
Fort Kearny Outdoor Expo
Fort Kearny SRA, Kearney
- May 12-13**
Cowboy Ultra Race
Cowboy Trail, Valentine

- May 13**
Family Fishing Event
Riverside Discovery Center Pond, Scottsbluff
- May 13**
Mother's Day Buffet
Ponca SP, Ponca; Platte River SP, Louisville

- May 15**
Northeast District Birding Day
Davis Creek Wildlife Management Area, North Loup

- May 18**
Stargazing
Eugene T. Mahoney SP, Ashland

- May 19**
Free Fishing and Park Entry Day
No fishing or park entry permits required this day

- May 19**
Bill Morris Memorial Fishing Derby
Ponca SP, Ponca

- May 19**
Free Bird!
Mormon Island SRA, Doniphan

- May 19**
Wildcat Hills Wildlands
Wildcat Hills SRA, Gering

- May 19**
Scavenger Hunt
Fort Kearny SRA, Kearney

- May 21-June 1**
Eligible landowners may apply for one elk permit

- May 22**
Family Fishing Event
Holmes Lake, Lincoln

- May 24**
Family Fishing Event
Halleck Lake, Papillion

- May 24**
Family Nature Club
NGPC Outdoor Classroom, Norfolk

- May 25**
Take Aim at Summer
Platte River SP, Louisville

- May 26**
Migratory Bird Day
Indian Cave SP, Shubert; Lewis and Clark SRA, Crofton

- May 26**
Early-Bird Bird Watching
Niobrara SP, Niobrara

- May 26**
Bird in the Hand Program
Niobrara SP, Niobrara



Morel mushroom hunting and family fishing are two favorite May events in Nebraska's outdoors.

- May 26**
National Park Service Event
Niobrara SP, Niobrara

- May 27**
Sidewalk Chalk Art and Bird Program
Niobrara SP, Niobrara

- May 28-Aug. 12**
Summer Season at Roger G. Sykes Outdoor Heritage Education Complex
Platte River SP, Louisville

- May 31**
Spring turkey seasons close



Lure of the Year – Buzzbaits

By Jeff Kurrus

Sometime last spring I had a conversation with longtime friend and fishing diehard Monte Mares of Seward.

We were discussing our favorite lures and he told me that he loved to fish small crankbaits in the spring but, from then on, used buzzbaits. "The fish just can't stand it!" he wrote me.

This last line kept me up at night last spring as I fumbled through my tacklebox, my eyes always coming back to the pile of buzzbaits that I often fished. But not often enough I soon learned.

After taking Monte's advice, I caught more Nebraska Master Angler fish, and saw others catch more Master Angler fish, than I have in years. Nearly all of these fish came off of buzzbaits, including me catching three different species that were all Master Angler fish – multiple largemouth bass, northern pike and channel catfish.

On different public lakes, I watched all three of these fish species hit white buzzbaits on the chase. The catfish was especially memorable as it, and its slightly smaller brethren I caught a short time later, ran more than 20 feet to attack my noise-making lure on top.

For specifics, it's no different than using any other lure. Adjust the retrieval speed, whether or not it is twitched as it moves, or the color. Also take a look at its size and sound. I've seen days when the loudest, clackiest buzzbait was the ticket, and others where subtlety was the key.

Regardless of what you choose, make sure you do make a choice by always having one tied on your second or third rod and reel.

Then hold on when you get a strike. For if you're like me, you'll only know one thing for certain when the fish hits – it's a big one. ■



PHOTOS BY JEFF KURRUS
This Master Angler northern pike was caught on the east end of Pelican Lake at the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge in Cherry County.

NEBRASKAland Visitor



Last issue's winner of the Visitor drawing was Steven Faust of Lincoln, Nebraska, who found the paper wasp on page 25.

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 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 2, 11, 17, 19, or 37.

Several species of paper wasps (*Polistes* spp.) are found in Nebraska, including *P. metricus*. They can be distinguished from bees by their thin "wasp" waist. While coloration varies across species, their biology is very similar.

Paper wasps are semi-social insects. Mated females overwinter in crevices or under bark, then emerge in the spring. They select a protected site, such as under the eaves of buildings, and build a small nest made of chewed wood fibers and saliva arranged into a comb of hexagonal cells. Then they lay eggs, producing non-reproductive female workers. These workers take over nest expansion, food collection and rearing of offspring; the reproductive female continues to lay eggs. Males are produced later in the season to mate with newly emerged reproductive females.

Paper wasps feed on other insects, primarily caterpillars, and are considered beneficial insects.



Special thanks to Julie Van Meter, State Entomologist, Nebraska Department of Agriculture.



Grassland Greatness

Story and photos by Justin Haag

When people are looking for wide-open spaces, it is hard to beat the beautiful grassland in the northwestern corner of Nebraska.

Flowering gumbo lilies and alkali milkvetch decorate the Oglala National Grassland at sunrise.



Water flows along an ephemeral stream at Toadstool Geologic Park following a spring thunderstorm.

Travelers to the northern Panhandle often find fascination with the buttes and forested regions of the Pine Ridge. Just north of there, though, is a land that is more subdued but equally enchanting: the Oglala National Grassland. Once visitors enter this landscape mostly void of trees, they realize there is plenty to be seen – and not much to get in the way of seeing it. Be it a herd of pronghorn charging across the wide-open prairie, the flight of the peculiar looking long-billed curlew, or just horizon stretching as far as one can see, most want to stick around a while and return later.

The Oglala National Grassland covers 94,480 acres of public land intermixed with private north of Harrison and Crawford managed by the U.S. Forest Service. Named for the Sioux tribe of this region, it is one of 20 national grasslands that are primarily located on the High Plains east of the Rocky Mountains. The property is far from the largest on the list, but when combined with the immense 597,178-acre Buffalo Gap National Grassland on the other side of the Nebraska-South Dakota border there is more than 1,000 square miles of open territory to explore free of charge.

Born out of the Great Depression and Dust Bowl, the federal government purchased national grasslands at above market value to both help struggling farmers and ranchers and to reclaim landscapes damaged by the agriculture practices of that era. They were then leased for grazing.

A scene of grasslands and badlands, with an occasional prominent landform rising above them, the mixed grass

prairie sprawls northward from the edge of the Pine Ridge to the border. After the rain falls, lush green grass stands in remarkable contrast to the chalky white badlands interspersed among it.

One of Nebraska's premier attractions is located within the Oglala Grassland: Toadstool Geologic Park. The moon-like surface of this area, with its sandstone features intricately carved by centuries of erosion, has long fascinated visitors. Despite the popularity, the only traffic jam visitors might encounter on the dirt roads leading to and traversing the grasslands is a cattle drive.

Pronghorn Country

Containing Nebraska's largest expanse of public land in pronghorn habitat, the Oglala Grassland draws a lot of attention from hunters – especially those who like to spot and stalk.

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission aerial surveys show an average of nearly five pronghorn for every square mile in the area, and the combined harvest on public and private land here is greater than any other Nebraska unit. The land also is home to mule deer, whitetails and sharp-tailed grouse. The Forest Service has established a public blind to view the displaying grounds of sharptails in the spring.

While this high and dry region is not known for deep waters, numerous stock ponds do well with enough rain and



A long-billed curlew lands in the shortgrass prairie in the Oglala National Grassland.



Prairie coneflower blooms on the Oglala National Grassland north of Crawford.

snow and provide fishing and early-season duck hunting opportunities. Three reservoirs – Rock Bass, Agate and Boardgate – are targeted for panfish and largemouth bass.

A Rocking Place

Big game, birds and fish are not the only quarry here. Other prizes lie “beneath the surface.”

Volcanic ash that fell over the land millions of years ago is responsible for landforms that boost the grasslands’ appeal. It is also responsible for gumbo – the clay-heavy soil that turns the surface into a grease-like tire-spinner with a little precipitation.

Among the clay soils are rocks that washed down from the rising Black Hills ages ago and are now attractive to collectors. Rock hounds come from afar looking for prized finds that continue to surface, including Fairburn,



A red fox peers from behind a pile of downed trees in Warbonnet Creek valley north of Harrison.



A garter snake moves near a watering hole on the Oglala National Grassland west of Toadstool Park.



Ponderosa pine trees are obscured by early morning fog along Cottonwood Road in Sioux County.

Getting Out There

- The Forest Service’s Motor Vehicle Use Map, available at the district headquarters in Chadron or online, is key to identifying public land and knowing which roads are open to driving.
- The gumbo soil becomes nearly impassable after rain – regardless if you have two-wheel drive or four.
- Toadstool Park has a primitive camping area with picnic shelters and vault toilets for a small fee. The remaining federal property allows dispersed camping, and vehicles may park within 300 feet of roads.
- The openness of the country means there is not much shade, nor cover from wind, rain and hail. Cell phone service is limited so GPS units and maps prove helpful.
- More information at fs.fed.us.

prairie and blue agates, the latter being Nebraska’s state gemstone. Collecting is allowed on federal land, except Toadstool Park, with some regulations.

The soil has also preserved countless fossils with clues to life millions of years ago. Visitors might see the fossilized shell of a prehistoric turtle protruding from the Toadstool Park area, where other fossils such as entelodonts and hyaenodonts have been unearthed. Only fossils of small invertebrates and plants may be collected, though, and strict regulations apply for them.

One of the region’s largest fossil discoveries is presented at the Hudson-Meng Education and Research Center, an enclosed fossil dig of 600 Alberta Culture bison. Another, two mammoths that died with tusks locked in battle, is displayed at the Trailside Museum of Natural History at Fort Robinson State Park.

Biologically Unique

The expansive prairie here is one of the largest intact grasslands remaining in Nebraska and is identified as a Biologically Unique Landscape of the Nebraska Natural Legacy Project, the state’s wildlife action plan.

The plan identifies four plants and 12 animal species in the area as either threatened or endangered, including the diminutive swift fox, ferruginous hawks and Barr’s milkvetch.

Plant communities found here are western floodplain terrace grassland, silver sagebrush shrub prairie, greasewood shrub prairie and northwestern mixed-grass prairie. Intermittent playa wetlands support waterfowl in the spring. Prairie bird species love the western wheatgrass, little bluestem and other grass species.

Colonies of prairie dogs support a variety of wildlife while the badlands create a home for species

such as the mountain short-horned lizard. Creeks and intermittent streams provide critical habitat for other species, such as red fox.

Visitors are sure to see another large mammal: domestic cattle. The federal property is grazed by permits with the Sugarloaf Grazing Association, a group of about 30 nearby ranchers. Working with the association, the Forest Service uses grazing to knock back species such as crested wheatgrass, a non-native introduced after the Dust Bowl.

Paths Off the Beaten Path

Hiking, bicycling and horseback riding are gaining popularity on the grasslands. The Bison Trail, a three-mile hike between the Hudson-Meng Center and Toadstool Park, has received attention in several national publications.

The Forest Service also is working with advocates of the Great Plains

Trail Alliance, which has mapped a 1,500-mile hiking and biking route from Texas to Canada. There are plans this year to mark a new trail through the grasslands leading to the famed Mickelson Trail of South Dakota’s Black Hills.

On the Frontier

The area’s ghost towns of Orella and Montrose often capture the imagination of those who enjoy frontier history.

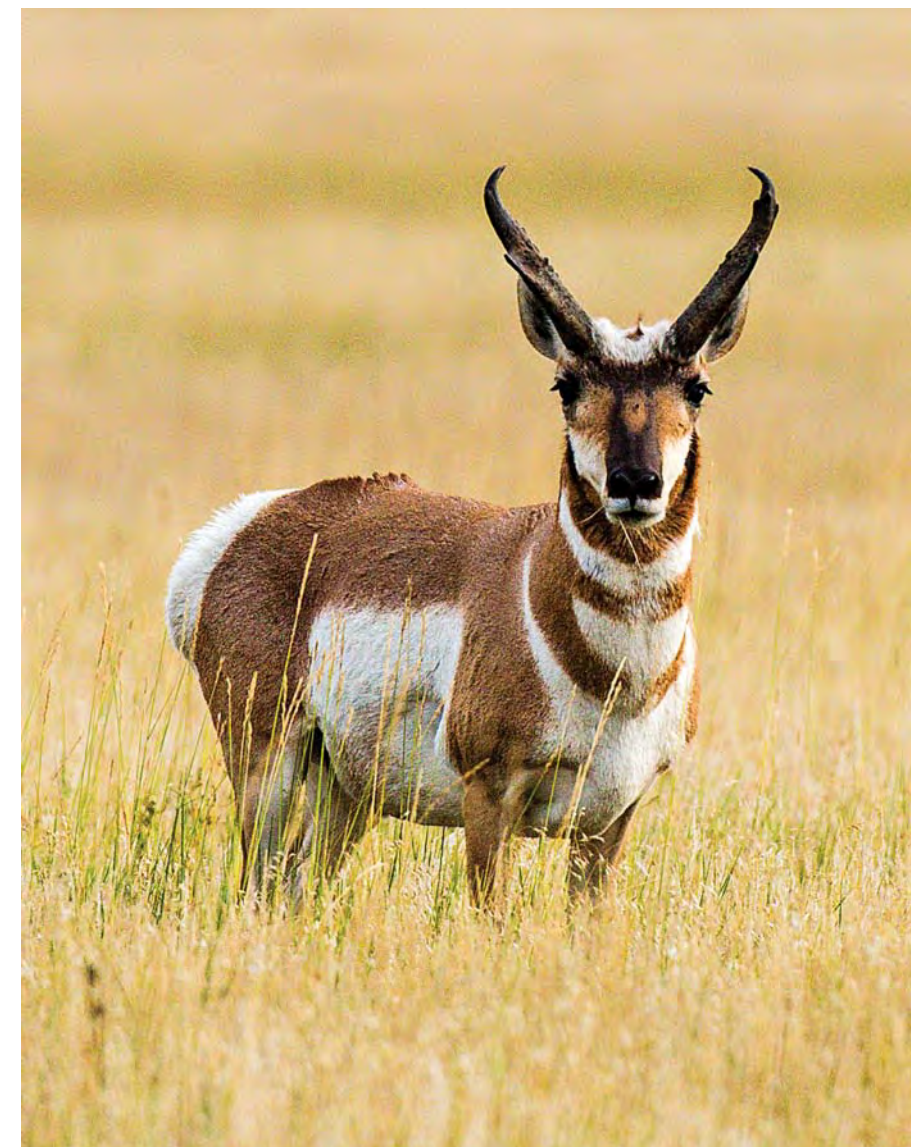
Near Montrose is the Warbonnet Battlefield Monument and Cody Yellow Hair Monument. They memorialize a conflict involving “Buffalo Bill” Cody and Yellow Hair, a Cheyenne warrior, in 1876. The picturesque and well-maintained

Immaculate Conception Catholic Church and cemetery is also a popular stop.

Visitors can get another taste of the Old West at the Drifter Cookshack and High Plains Homestead. The only restaurant in the area, it offers lodging and more under the guise of a frontier town.

With such diverse offerings in a distinctive setting, visitors to the grasslands are sure to leave with memories unlike any they will get anywhere else – and for a small investment. In this enchanting country, countless treasures await those who get off the highway for a closer look. ■

To see more photos from this story, visit magazine.outdoornebraska.gov/digital.



A buck pronghorn stands in a pasture on the Oglala National Grassland.

Time Well Spent

What to Do in May

By Renae Blum

Just on the cusp of summer, May is the perfect time to get excited about being outdoors and staying active. Great fishing continues, as well as spring turkey season. Read on for more ideas of things to do this month. For a complete list of upcoming events across the state, or for more information on activities listed here, visit Calendar.OutdoorNebraska.gov. ■

See Fossil Digs at Ashfall Fossil Beds State Historical Park

Starting Memorial Day weekend

Ashfall Fossil Beds State Historical Park

Ashfall Fossil Beds State Historical Park, located 2 miles west and 6 miles north of Royal, is one of the few places in the world where the public can watch a live fossil dig. Paleontologists are still uncovering new finds at the site, where hundreds of skeletons of extinct rhinos, camels, three-toed horses and other vertebrates are buried in volcanic ash.



PHOTO BY JON FARRAR

Starting Memorial Day weekend, paleontology students will be on-site conducting digs that visitors can watch. The park is also open on a more limited basis starting May 1. During your visit, make sure to stop at the interpretive displays and the fossil preparation laboratory, where you can ask the paleontologists about their work. Learn more and plan your visit at ashfall.unl.edu.



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Visit Crawdad Creek Throughout the month

Platte River State Park

Enjoying nature is truly a hands-on experience at Platte River State Park's new Crawdad Creek feature. At these series of shallow ponds, kids can dip their toes in the water, feel mud run through their fingers, or catch a crawdad, dragonfly, tadpole, reptile or fish.

The new attraction is part of Game and Parks' Venture Parks complex, which greatly expands opportunities for visitors at four parks, including Platte River. More attractions are opening this summer. Learn more at OutdoorNebraska.gov/ventureparks.



PHOTO BY DOUG CARROLL

Cornhusker Trapshoot

May 3-5

The home grounds of the Nebraska Trapshooting Association in Doniphan

As one of the nation's longest running and largest tournaments of its kind, with about 2,500 junior and senior high competitors annually, the Cornhusker Trapshoot is a unique experience for any onlooker. Keeping in mind the sound of thousands of rounds of shotgun shells exploding; the talking, clapping and cheering of friends, family, teammates and coaches; and the smell of spent gunpowder mingling in the air with grilling burgers, funnel cakes and barbecue, trapshooting coach Joel W. Helmer describes the experience as "an event like no other."



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

Events Celebrating Nebraska Bird Month

Throughout the month
Statewide

From the eye-catching northern cardinal to the melodious western meadowlark and stately bald eagle, Nebraska is home to more than 400 species of birds. Help us celebrate them all at one of the many statewide events honoring Nebraska Bird Month, including birdwatching walks and tours, family festivals and educational sessions. Get details at nebraskabirdmonth.org.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Free Fishing and Park Entry Day

May 19

Statewide

Don't have a fishing permit or park entry permit – or know someone who doesn't? On May 19, you're invited to come out and reel in a fish or visit a state park, recreation area or historical park – no permit required. Nebraska Game and Parks will also be celebrating the day with fun events for the whole family; see our calendar for details.

Field Trial Dogs

Masters of the Hunt

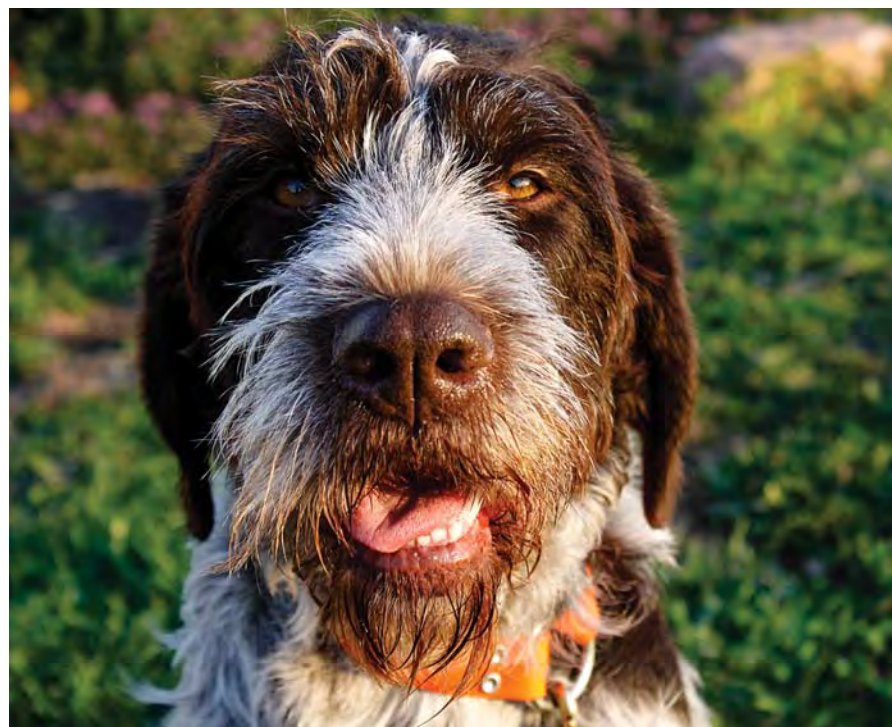
Story and photos by Mark Harris

Two wiry bird dogs sprint crisscross patterns through frosted brown Nebraska grasslands. Two dog handlers follow distantly, double-barreled shotguns cracked open over their shoulders. Close behind them, two judges bundled for the cold ride horseback and observe.

Back at the starting point, dozens of restless dogs sniff the air, their olfactory systems flooded with a magnitude of information we cannot imagine. Their eagerness is palpable; soon they will run and hunt, too, which is their deepest desire.

The pointing breeds are here. German shorthaired and wirehaired pointers, setters, Brittanys, vizslas, Weimaraners and a few others trained to lock up at the smell of certain birds.

Far afield, one zigzagging dog freezes in place. “Buster has one,” proclaims the dog’s handler. Fifty yards out, the speckled brown and white German shorthaired pointer stands unmoving on point, eyes locked on an area of tall grass. The second dog notices Buster and snaps to a stop. She is far from Buster’s patch of grass and cannot smell the hunkered-down



Tilly, a master-level German wirehaired pointer, waits her turn to hunt. In a hunting test she will either pass or fail. In field trials her skills are judged against those of other dogs.



Master-level bird dogs set out to be judged by men on horseback near Humboldt. Professional dog trainers, Ethan Pippitt, left, and Tate Martinsen annually travel the regional hunting test circuit, honing the skills of their clients’ dogs.

quail within, but she is trained not to interfere. These dogs are masters.

Buster’s handler pulls a starting gun from his pocket and slowly walks the grass in front of Buster. The dull staccato of a fleeing quail’s wings breaks the silence and is followed by a harmless pop from the starting gun. As the bird flies free, Buster must not flinch or move until commanded to heel at his handler’s side. Later in the live-fire area, quail will be shot and retrieved but Buster never knows what will happen next, intensifying the challenge of perfect behavior. This is a hunting test and the judges are taking notes.

Organized by local hunting dog clubs and sanctioned by several national organizations, the most prevalent being the American Kennel Club, hunting

tests and field trials unfold every year across the U.S. wherever game birds live. Field trials are competitive, but in a hunting test, the dog either meets the standard or fails.

Separated by age and ability – typically juniors, seniors and masters – hunting tests are scored in six categories: hunting, how appropriately and efficiently the dog covers ground; bird finding; pointing, intensity without flinching is key; trainability, the dog’s listening skills and obedience; retrieving; and honoring, which is to stand still when another dog is on point.

Ethan Pippitt of Pretty Prairie, Kansas, calls hunting tests “the ultimate measure of a bird dog.” Similar to many in the master class,

Pippitt is a professional trainer who travels the national circuit with clients’ dogs, striving to bring them to the highest level. “Nowadays the master level dogs are primarily run by professionals,” he said. “Commonly only half will pass.

“Training is about developing the dog’s natural ability,” Pippitt said. “Obedience is a huge part of the entry work. Then I shape retrieving ability, introducing dogs to birds and guns before we ever hit the field. Pointing comes naturally if the dog is developed correctly. It’s largely bred in.”

Pippitt often trains dogs in two stages, training a juvenile for a few months and then continuing the following year with more finished work. Some people may hand their

dog over for 10 total months, paying thousands of dollars. “I get dogs from Washington to Maine,” he said. “They want their dogs to be proven.”

While hunting tests measure against strict benchmarks, field trials evaluate your dog in competition with others. Judging criteria is similar – field trial competitors must show a strong desire to hunt, covering ground with speed, boldness and intelligence. A well-trained dog often looks back at its handler for guidance. The subtler a handler’s instructions the better; yelling rates poorly. All but the puppies must point. Intermediate dogs must stay on point until the bird flushes, and high-level dogs must remain motionless until the gun is shot and then move only when commanded to retrieve or heel.



Bottom Left: Cowboy, a Deutsch-Drahthaar, warms up with a training dummy. **Top Right:** Faith, an English setter known for her stylish points, signals the scent of a quail, top left, at the National Shoot to Retrieve Association's field trial near Waverly.



Event campgrounds come alive as field trial events begin. Dozens of dogs emerge as handlers unload kennels stacked in pickup beds and trailers. Many spent the night here. Event staffers begin planting disoriented pen-raised quail in the fields, to be replenished throughout the day.

Randomly paired, two dogs and their handlers join the horse-mounted judges at the field trial's starting point. Unleashed dogs hit the field like a cannon shot. Often the hunters also ride horses. Dismounting as they near the pointing dog, one hunter holds the reins while the other flushes and shoots.

These hunters are not in it for prize winnings – there isn't much to be won unless you reach the national level. But local and regional championships will eventually pay off. Dogs with winning

titles have prestige and their puppies bring top prices – one reason so many send their dogs to professional trainers.

Jim Douglass of Columbus does it the old fashioned way, training his own dogs and competing in up to 18 field trials per year. Saddling his horse at dawn alongside six raucous, booger-eyed English pointers, he gestures to one dog and cautions, "You can interact with any of these except that one."

Hunting is all that Douglass' dogs do and the veterans are superb. His youngsters show promise, but not much more ... a rabbit might be chased. "The pups don't have to do nothin'," Douglass said jokingly. "It's all about potential. A great dog will learn to look where the birds more likely are. If there is a tree line, the dog should hunt all of

it. If there are patches of thick cover, they should hit every patch."

Douglass, like many others, often straps a GPS tracking collar onto his less dependable dogs in case they run off. "I once tracked a dog six miles in the Sandhills after it took after a deer," he grinned. There is some danger involved when dogs run this hard and wide. Last year, one of Douglass' 5-year-olds died from a heart attack while hunting. "These are high-strung animals," he said. "They run really hard, and there is also the risk of getting hit on the road or caught in a trapper's snare. I kiss my dogs on the head each time they go out because I may not see them again."

The line between pet and bird dog can be fuzzy and relationships vary dramatically. Tate Martinsen,



Above: A hunting dog's nose unlocks a sensory world we cannot imagine.
Opposite: The shotgun is just a prop in this portion of the hunting test. As the quail flee and a starter pistol is fired, the dog must remain perfectly still.

a professional bird dog trainer from Humbolt, South Dakota, allows his six vizslas to live indoors with him and his wife. "Some of them lie on my lap," he confessed. "It can become a little chaotic, but if they get too rambunctious I just kick them into the yard. We have a kid coming so we'll have to start some sort of rotation system." The dogs' emotional attachment is sometimes evident if they lose sight of Martinsen while hunting. One of his best, Milo, used to backtrack in near panic if he lost visual contact, but then he adopted a quirky method of checking back to spot his master in deep cover – standing tall on his hind legs like a kangaroo.

On the other end of the attachment spectrum is Douglass. Asked if his dogs ever come indoors, he replied, "Oh no, no, no. They smell like hell. You'd never get a woman in here!" He added, "Some of the field trial dogs don't humanize real well. They just want to hunt."

Oversized lapdogs Martinsen's may be, in the field they transform to match the desire of Douglass' less civilized dogs. Any decent hunting dog shows intensity, but there is no comparing Martinsen's or Douglass' animals to your neighbor's dog. One simple difference is stamina. "These are high-level athletes," Douglass said. "In

championship rounds they run a solid hour. During the off-season I exercise them on backroads from horseback or ATV."

As a pheasant hunting guide, Martinsen often notices the difference between his expert dogs and those more ordinary. "My dogs pay attention while the other guys may have to shout 10 times to get theirs to respond," he said. "And most don't retrieve as well, dropping or playing with the bird, needing prompts to bring it back."

Sloppy retrievals are scored poorly by Gene Larsen, a pointing dog judge from Exira, Iowa. Larsen and his strawberry roan horse, Cher, have been judging so long that he doesn't need to guide her. "She just follows the dogs," he said. "I tell people that for these events you need two things: a dog and a sense of humor, because one day the dog is gonna make a fool out of you. I once saw a dog climb a tree to get a quail!"

Larsen receives no pay for judging, only travel expenses. "I just like getting outdoors, being with good people and watching great dogs work." That is what most of these folks will tell you. They are adrenaline-seeking outdoorsmen and women with a love of hunting birds and a penchant for creating excellent canine hunting partners.

These are bird dog lovers. ■



All Creatures Great and Small

By Renae Blum

For at least a few minutes, a surprised prairie rattlesnake was a minor celebrity. A circle of onlookers stared intently at it, snapping cell phone pictures, as herpetologist Dan Fogell quickly plopped a baseball cap onto the hissing reptile.

“So he’s going to get comfortable,” Fogell said, explaining for the crowd that snakes prefer to lay covered with something touching their backs.

Thirty seconds later, he asked the crowd if they were ready for him to take the hat off, and received a chorus of enthusiastic yeses.

This wasn’t just a wildlife viewing opportunity; this snake, as well as 105 other species observed that day, was recorded by its admirers for science.

The event was a bioblitz, an event that has become popular throughout the world and is taking off in Nebraska. During a bioblitz, natural history specialists and, often, members of the public, set out in a specific area with one goal: to find and identify as many species of living things as possible during a short period of time, usually 24 hours.

“It’s like a biologist’s party,” said Sam Droege. Droege works for the U.S. Geological Survey, and together with colleague Dan Roddy invented the idea of the bioblitz in 1996. Their aim was to help staff of a small urban park

in Washington D.C. learn about the wildlife that inhabited it.

It was an idea born out of necessity: the park didn’t have the funds to pay for specialists to do a survey. So Droege and Roddy concocted an event that would lure specialists out on their own time, coaxing them out of their offices with the promise of unfettered exploration.

“Everyone gets to do what they loved when they started out learning about biology, which is to go out in the field and find stuff,” he said. “They’re not constrained by following a prescribed protocol.”

Bioblitzes aren’t just fun for the professionals. Go to one, and you’ll see kids happily tromping through weeds and muck to find creeping and crawling things, and adults whose eyes shine like a child’s as they study new discoveries.

It goes back to the idea of exploration, said environmental educator Deborah Anderson, who helped organize a statewide series of Nebraska bioblitzes in 2016. “We think of an explorer as somebody who’s going into uncharted territory, and that’s not true. You can explore your own surroundings. The biodiversity that’s in Nebraska is amazing, and I don’t think that everybody is aware of that.”

Nebraska’s biodiversity was on full display at Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area’s first bioblitz last July. Over the course of one Friday night and Saturday morning, volunteers identified about 140 species living in the area’s rocky landscape, including roughly 40 species of birds; 65 plant species, with more than 40 species of blooming wildflowers; and 30 species of invertebrates (insects and spiders). Among their findings were two bighorn sheep, four little brown bats, two American kestrels, a jumping spider and an errant six-lined racerunner that made its way into the nature center just as the event started.

The event was structured, as many bioblitzes are, into a series of sessions led by natural history specialists, which participants can pick and choose to

Volunteers like Amber Schiltz (left), Alisha Heelan and Ariel McNare identified more than 200 species of plants, animals and insects at the Chadron State Park Bioblitz last September. Bioblitzes have only started to take off in Nebraska in recent years.

attend as they wish: reptiles at 1 p.m., followed by trees, then wildflowers, and so on. Along the way, participants get to watch biologists at work and learn more about the wildlife they study and the work they do.

Amber Schiltz, Nebraska wildlife education coordinator for the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, has spearheaded three bioblitzes in the Panhandle since 2016, including those at Wildcat Hills. Several parents have told Schiltz that they pulled their kids out of school for the afternoon so they could attend a bioblitz (in light of this, she plans to change future schedules so there’s no skipping school).

“Kids want to be scientists because of this,” Schiltz said. “For me, it’s so exciting to hear these things, and to know that these events that happen just once a year are that influential to these kids.”

While bioblitzes are designed to be fun, real science is involved. While a bioblitz cannot provide a full census of everything living in a particular area, the data can

help identify thriving, disappearing or missing species; document rare or unusual species; and provide fodder for future research. And park staff walk away with a better understanding of what’s flying, crawling, growing, swimming and walking about on their grounds.

No matter how results are used, people are going to show up, it seems.

This year will mark Chadron State Park’s third bioblitz, and the venture has been a success for the park, said superintendent Gregg Galbraith. “It just keeps getting bigger and bigger, and as long as people are interested it’ll keep growing,” he said. ■

Upcoming Bioblitzes

Homestead National Monument of America, May 19
Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area, July 20-21
Chadron State Park, Sept. 14-15
Indian Cave State Park, Sept. 21-22

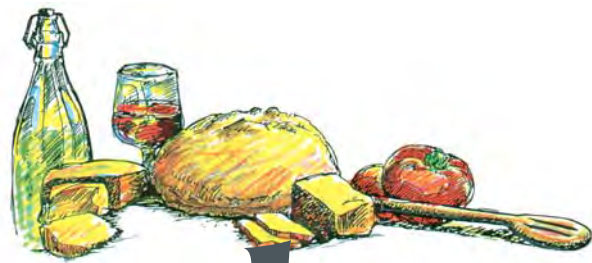


Participants in Indian Cave State Park’s first bioblitz in 2017 went on walks with biologists to help identify as many species of living things in the park as possible.

PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG



The Nebraska Table



Native foods and recipes from some of the best

By Ryan Sparks

From the sweltering heat of summer to the still and tranquil cold of winter, Nebraska's seasons are always in flux. Most Nebraskans think they understand these seasons well. However, many overlook activities and ingredients that extend beyond the traditional division of spring, summer, fall and winter.

Nebraskans can look forward to a variety of other seasons – deer hunting season, morel foraging season,

garden planting season and fishing season, just to name a few. For those who care to look for them, our state presents a wealth of unique flavors. By slowing down and appreciating the natural fruits of the land, you can unearth local food and discover new passions that were hiding in plain sight. These seasons and flavors root us in the place we call home. Whether catching a few fish for dinner or roaming the spring woods for morels, exploring the seasons gives you a true taste of Nebraska.

In this spirit, throughout the year *NEBRASKAland Magazine* will highlight the ingredients and meals of the Nebraska Table. We will examine the seasons through the eyes of a forager, gardener, a hunter and angler, and a chef as they share meals that represent Nebraska's food culture. Each segment will contain recipes from Abigael Birrell, former executive chef at Lincoln's Hub Café and expert on Nebraska's edible landscape; Jane Sparks, a lifelong Nebraska gardener and cook; Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley, an avid hunter and author of the wild game blog *Food For Hunters*; as well as Clayton Chapman, renowned chef and owner of The Grey Plume in Omaha. Keep an eye out for the recipes to come. They may lead to a new understanding

Foraging expert Abigael Birrell shares her nettle pesto recipe on page 40. Toss it with warm pasta and top with grated Parmesan cheese.

PHOTO BY RYAN SPARKS



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Nebraskans look forward to a variety of seasons, including morel mushroom foraging in the spring.

of the good life you thought you already knew.

We begin this series with **Abigael Birrell**, a Midwest native hailing from Kansas, who acquired a taste for wild food at an early age. After graduating from the University of Kansas, she attended culinary school in New York where she became the head chef at NYC's acclaimed Candle Café. Birrell then took her culinary skills to New Zealand, Australia and Washington where she gained an appreciation of farming and community-based food culture before taking over as executive chef at Lincoln's Hub Café.

After moving to Lincoln, Birrell acclimated to Nebraska's edible landscape, learning the native wild foods in the area.

"To me, eating local means not just eating food that was grown here but also learning about and sourcing the ingredients that *belong* here," she wrote in one of her frequent contributions to *Edible Omaha*. Birrell is passionate about experiencing Nebraska through foraging. From our interview, I was excited to learn what wild edibles Nebraska has to offer.

Tell me about yourself. How did you first get interested in wild foods and foraging?

I was fortunate to grow up with 180 acres of native Kansas prairie as my backyard. My mother has always worked in environmental education and is currently the director of Prairie Park Nature Center in Lawrence, so we spent a lot of time taking long walks in the woods and prairie. We'd look for mulberries, puffballs, spring onions and tiny wild strawberries while she'd quiz me on the names of the plants and trees we passed.

I have an early memory of her quoting the Ursula K. Le Guin novel *A Wizard of Earthsea* while we were out walking. There is a passage where the elder wizard is explaining to the young hero that he will never really know a plant until he knows it in all its seasons – root, leaf and flower by sight, scent and seed. That idea really stuck with me.



Nettles – the general term used to describe about 40 plants from the *Urtica* genus – are readily found in spring and summer markets yet remain on many people’s “to avoid” list. There is, of course, the “stinging” descriptor, and that tends to elicit fear in the minds of many home cooks.

Later on, when I became a chef, that early experience of hunting for wild foods formed the basis for the kind of ingredient-driven cooking that I do.

Why should someone learn to forage?

It feels like a superpower to be able to look at the landscape around you and find delicious food. The act of foraging requires slowing down and paying attention to the details of life around us. It can start a process of seeing the landscape you thought you knew with fresh eyes.

A simple walk in the park will turn into an adventure as you start to become familiar with the wealth of tasty weeds, berries, flowers and trees that we are unwittingly surrounded by.

What are some wild foods in Nebraska that most people overlook or don’t know about?

I sing the praises and possibilities of nettles to anyone that will listen. They are one of my favorite foraged foods and one that is abundant all over Nebraska. The multitude of uses for nettles never ceases to amaze me. Cook it like spinach, make it into pesto, dry it into nutritious tea, steep it in water to make a powerful fertilizer for your garden. Purslane is another favorite green of mine as well. It is full of omega-3 fatty acids and makes a delicious addition to mixed green salads.

Is it possible to forage year-round?

Nebraska has three great seasons of foraging possibilities. The spring brings morels, wild asparagus and nettles; summer has mulberries, wild plums, walnuts, purslane and milkweed; and the autumn has puffballs, oyster mushrooms and chicken of the woods (wild mushrooms).

In the depths of the cold Nebraska winter, the best thing to do is to enjoy your well-stocked larder, full of the fruits of your earlier foraging.

Are there ways to preserve what you forage? If so, what are some year-round staples in your larder?

A dehydrator is a wonderful tool to help preserve the bounty of your foraging. I usually dry a few bunches of nettles to mix into herbal tea blends. If you are lucky enough to find a bumper crop of morels, the dehydrator comes in handy for preserving them. I’ve also made jams and shrubs out of mulberries that I’ve collected. Shrubs are a type of drinking vinegar that was popular in colonial America and is currently experiencing renewed popularity. I make a syrup with apple cider vinegar, sugar and mulberries and add it to sparkling water or cocktails.

Below is Birrell’s recipe for foraged nettle pesto as well as the spring recipes of the other contributors – Jane Sparks, Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley and Clayton Chapman – who we will highlight in future issues. Be sure to pick extra nettles and hang them in a dark, dry place or use a dehydrator to preserve them for Birrell’s nettle tea next winter.

Foraged Nettle Pesto

Yield: 4 cups

- 6 cups fresh nettles
- ⅓ cup toasted pine nuts or walnuts
- ½ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- ½ cup roasted garlic
- 2 to 3 lemons, juiced
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1½ cups extra-virgin olive oil

Fill a large stockpot with water and bring to a boil. Using tongs, submerge nettles for 1 to 3 minutes, depending on size and age of nettles, to remove the sting. Larger and older leaves should be cooked 2 to 3 minutes longer. Remove and plunge into a bowl of ice water for 1 to 2 minutes. Remove the nettles from the ice bath and squeeze out the excess liquid.

Place all ingredients except olive oil in a food processor and blend. Slowly add oil in a steady stream until emulsified. Taste and adjust seasoning. Nettle pesto will keep for two weeks in the refrigerator or up to six months in the freezer.



– Abigail Birrell

Dakota Harvest Lamb Saddle with Spring Peas, Nebraska Ramps, and Breakfast Radish

The saddle is my favorite part of the lamb. It is traditionally the cut from the back of the eighth rib all the way to the hind leg and consists of the loin and the tenderloin. This recipe includes both cuts, but also includes the rack. If you would like to substitute out just the rack or



PHOTO BY RYAN SPARKS

just the loin for this recipe, please feel free to do so. Ramps are a wild spring onion that grow near water in damp forest areas. They are my absolute favorite ingredient in the world to work with.

Dakota Harvest Lamb

Yield: 4 servings

- 12 ounces lamb loin, removed from saddle bones
- 6 ounces lamb tenderloin, removed from saddle bones
- 4 lamb chops
- ⅛ ounce whole fresh rosemary or about a 1- to 2-inch whole sprig
- 1 ounce neutral cooking oil
- 3 ounces whole unsalted butter
- Kosher salt to taste
- Fresh cracked black pepper to taste

Pre-heat oven to 350 degrees. Season all of the lamb meat generously with kosher salt and black pepper. In a sauté or cast iron pan, add the rosemary and sear the lamb on medium heat until golden brown. You may have to brown the meat in stages because of the size of your pan. The process should take about 2 minutes per side and about a minute or less for the tenderloin.

Once the meat has a nice crust, place meat on a sheet tray and brush with 2 ounces of the unsalted butter and place the rosemary on top. Roast the cuts of lamb until the internal temperature reaches about 138 degrees, which should only take between 5-8 minutes in the oven. You want the final temperature to be about 140-142 degrees before you eat.

Pulling the lamb at 138 degrees allows the meat to rest and carryover cook the remaining degrees needed. Once cooked, keep warm until ready to serve.

Vegetables

- 1½ cups spring peas, blanched
- 12 ramps, split between the bulb and the leaf
- 8 breakfast radishes, quartered
- 1 whole garlic clove, skin on
- 1 ounce neutral cooking oil
- 3 ounces whole unsalted butter
- ½ ounce water
- 1 ounce George Paul red oak vinegar (Nebraska produced)
- ¼ cup fresh chives, minced
- Kosher salt to taste
- Fresh cracked black pepper to taste

In a medium sauté pan, add the neutral cooking oil. Heat to medium and add the garlic clove and ramp bulbs along with the breakfast radish. Sauté the vegetables until they have a little bit of golden color. Add the butter and allow it to foam, which usually takes a minute. Add the peas, season to taste with salt and pepper. Add ½ ounce of water and continue to cook until the water evaporates by half. Add the ramp leaves followed by the vinegar and chives. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

– Clayton Chapman





PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY

Pheasant Back Mushroom and Wild Turkey Meatloaf

Yield: 6 servings

- 2 pounds freshly ground wild turkey (leg, thigh and/or breast meat)
- Oil for sautéing
- 10 ounces of fresh and young pheasant back/dryad's saddle mushroom
- 1 small onion, finely diced
- 1 carrot, finely diced
- 1 stalk of celery, finely diced
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
- 4 sprigs fresh thyme, leaves removed and chopped
- 1 tablespoon fresh flat-leaf parsley, chopped
- ½ cup seasoned bread crumbs
- ½ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- Kosher salt, to taste
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1½ cups ketchup
- ⅓ cup packed brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon dry mustard
- Hot sauce, to taste

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. With the back of a knife, scrape off the pores underneath the pheasant back

mushroom(s), cut off the stem if it's hard, and then finely dice mushrooms. In a large skillet, heat 1 tablespoon of oil over medium-high. Once hot, sauté mushrooms until the pieces have given up most of their moisture and turned slightly golden but still feel tender, about 10 minutes. Add a pinch of salt and chopped thyme leaves toward the end. Transfer mushrooms to a large bowl and set aside.

Coat the same pan with more oil. This time, add the onion, carrot and celery and a pinch of salt. Sauté vegetables until onion softens, about 5-7 minutes. Then add garlic, Worcestershire sauce and tomato paste, and then sauté for another 30 seconds. Transfer vegetables to the bowl with the mushrooms and allow mixture to cool.

Once vegetables and mushrooms have cooled, add ground turkey, parsley, breadcrumbs, 1 teaspoon of salt, cheese and ground black pepper to the bowl. Combine with your hands. Spray a standard 9-by-5 loaf pan with cooking spray. Evenly spread turkey mixture into the pan. In a small bowl, combine ketchup, brown sugar and dry mustard. Spread a layer on top of the turkey meatloaf, reserving the rest for serving. Bake in a 350-degree oven for 1 hour, or until internal temperature reaches 160 degrees. Allow meatloaf to rest for 15 minutes before slicing and serving with leftover sauce on the side. This meatloaf can be made a day ahead and reheated; it is easier to slice when chilled.

— Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley



PHOTO BY RYAN SPARKS

Spring Garden Salad

Spinach, radishes, peas, and green onions are often the first garden vegetables in spring. This salad has all the vibrancy of spring with a bit of winter's hardness.

Salad

Yield: Per person

- 2 cups spinach
- 2 small radishes, sliced
- Green onion, sliced thinly for garnish
- ¼ cup blanched garden peas
- 1 slice cooked and crumbled bacon
- 1 7-minute boiled egg, sliced

Vinaigrette

Yield: 1½ cups

- 2 cloves garlic, finely diced
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard

- Pinch of salt and black pepper
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 2 teaspoons white wine vinegar
- 1¼ cups extra-virgin olive oil

You can complete this step in a food processor or by hand. To make the vinaigrette, combine garlic, mustard, salt, pepper, lemon juice and vinegar. As you mix, slowly add the olive oil until you get an emulsion. Once all the oil is added, check the dressing for taste. This dressing keeps very well in the fridge.

To assemble the salad, mix the spinach, radishes, peas and bacon in a large mixing bowl. Slowly pour the vinaigrette over the salad until coated. Plate each portion and top with egg slices and green onion.

— Jane Sparks, author's grandmother



See the author's additional Morel Risotto recipe by visiting magazine.outdoornebraska.gov/digital.

Alkali Milkvetch

and its strange, mysterious scent

By Gerry Steinauer, Botanist
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

One July evening two years ago, I picked a paper bag full of ripe alkali milkvetch seedpods from a prairie on our southeastern South Dakota farm and then placed them on a table in our enclosed front porch. The seeds would be sown into a prairie restoration that winter.

The next morning when I came downstairs the house reeked with a pungent, garlicky, sulphurous odor. Not good. When my wife came downstairs her face took on “the look.”

“What is that smell?” she demanded.

“I don’t know,” I responded with presumed innocence.

Minutes later, a thought hit me. I quietly opened the porch door. “Dang!” Shutting the door behind me, I went to the table and stuck my nose into the bag of pods. My senses swooned from the scent of selenium.

Alkali milkvetch in fruit in a prairie on the author’s South Dakota farm. Uncommon among Great Plains milkvetches, the pods are triangular in cross-section and hang in pendulous clusters.



PHOTO BY GERRY STEINAUER

An Obligate Selenophile

Belonging to the pea family, alkali milkvetch (*Astragalus racemosus*) ranges over the western Great Plains from Saskatchewan to Texas, typically growing on clay, shale, gypsum, chalk or sand soils rich in selenium. In Nebraska, the plant has a patchy distribution, occurring along the lower Niobrara and Missouri rivers in the northeast, the Republican River in the southwest and in the northwestern Panhandle. Here, it grows in dry prairies, primarily on outcroppings of Pierre Shale. The grayish-black shale, formed from muds deposited in marine waters 70 to 80 million ago, weathers to a sticky clay rich in selenium.

Alkali milkvetch is among a small group of plants known as “selenium hyperaccumulators” or more poetically “obligate selenophiles” that grow almost exclusively on seleniferous soils. These plants contain compounds that confer selenium resistance, allowing them to accumulate the

element into their tissues. Alkali milkvetch, for example, contains up to 15,000 parts per million (ppm) of selenium. Nebraska’s other obligate selenophiles are princesplume (*Stanleya pinnata*) and two-grooved milkvetch (*A. bisulcatus*). Not surprisingly, they also grow mainly on Pierre Shale.

Some sunflowers, asters and mustards growing on seleniferous soils can accumulate up to 50 to 100 ppm of the element, while some forage grasses and crops can accumulate up to 20 ppm. Most plant species cannot grow on these soils, while some exhibit stunted growth.

Selenium is physically and chemically similar to sulphur, thus the sulphurous odor. It is an essential micronutrient for animals, necessary for DNA production, the immune system and other functions, but is toxic at higher levels. Plants are the main source of selenium in animal diets. Though not essential for plants, in some species selenium, at low doses, protects against stresses such as cold, drought and exposure to toxic metals in the soil.

Selenophiles concentrate selenium in their sensitive young leaves and flowers as protection against herbivores, such as grasshoppers, prairie dogs and livestock; though generally avoided by livestock, starving animals forced to feed on the plants suffer from selenium poisoning. After flowering, the selenophiles transfer the element from their withering blooms and leaves to their seeds – protecting them and young seedlings from herbivory. The plants, including the seeds, vaporize selenium as dimethyldiselenide (the stench in our house) perhaps as a warning to potential grazers.

Amazingly, a few insects have evolved a selenium resistance and feed on selenophiles. The larvae of a seed



PHOTO BY GERRY STEINAUER



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

Alkali milkvetch in flower on a prairie hillside near Sugar Loaf Butte in Sioux County.

beetle and a seed chalcid wasp, for example, eat the seeds (as they develop within the pods) of two-grooved milkvetch and princesplume with no apparent ill affect. In a seleniferous area of Colorado, a species of diamondback moth was recently discovered that lays

its eggs on and “voraciously feeds” on princesplume leaves.

Since the distressing experience in our house, I have come to appreciate the odor of alkali milkvetch. When near plants in open prairie, I find their smell light and pleasant, not pungent.

A whiff of selenium also reminds me of the plant’s ingenuity – the ability to accumulate a toxin to protect against the hazards of nature.

By the way, now when collecting alkali milkvetch seedpods, I store them in the shed. ■

Alkali Disease

In his book *Dakota Flora – A Seasonal Sampler*, South Dakota botanist Dave Ode relates the following story of how scientists unravelled the mystery of selenium poisoning in livestock.

In the late summer of 1856, several cavalry companies arrived at the newly established Fort Randall on the Missouri River in Gregory County, South Dakota (located about 15 miles west of our present day farm). Over the next few months, many of their horses became ill, some died; symptoms included loss of hair from their manes, hoof sloughing and swelling of the throat and jaw. From this incident, the Fort’s medical doctor T.C. Madison wrote the first clinical description of a type of selenium poisoning which later became known as alkali disease.

During the late 1800s, ranchers and farmers in central South Dakota and a few other areas of the state continued to lose livestock to the disease; they blamed alkali water – thus the name “alkali disease.”

Researchers at South Dakota State College spent years proving that alkali water was not the culprit, but they still could not pinpoint the cause of the disease. With the onset of the severe drought of the early 1930s, grass forage became limited and livestock were forced to consume selenium-accumulating plants. The disease worsened. Finally in 1934, scientists determined that selenium poisoning was the cause of alkali disease and another livestock disease known as the blind staggers, where afflicted animals walk with an unsteady, staggering gait, often running into objects and appearing blind.

Acute selenium poisoning in livestock from eating alkali milkvetch and other obligate selenophiles is uncommon because the plants are so unpalatable. Chronic selenium poisoning of the alkali disease type results from animals ingesting grasses and other plants containing moderate levels of the element.

The Blues and the Nemahas

Story and photos by Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

In 2002, the Game and Parks Commission conducted a survey to find out more about Nebraska's river anglers. Fishing in the Missouri and Platte rivers predictably scored high, but the survey also showed that angling opportunities in smaller rivers and streams should not be dismissed.



"Rivers are so dynamic, always going up and down, and fish populations follow those trends," said Fisheries Biologist Tony Barada. In drought years, the Blue and Nemaha rivers can experience water depletion. When that happens, fish are forced to move downstream; fish that don't make those movements die. When bigger rain events occur, the fish recolonize.

Channel catfish are the third most preferred fish in Nebraska, following walleye and largemouth bass. While the majority of catfish are taken out of the Missouri and Platte rivers in southeastern Nebraska, a 2002 angler survey showed that river anglers are also looking for catfish in lesser known streams. In fact, 40 percent of southeastern Nebraska anglers fished in rivers and streams other than the Missouri and Platte rivers when targeting catfish.

The four largest interior rivers in southeastern Nebraska are the Little Blue, Big Blue, Little Nemaha and Big Nemaha. These rivers have long been popular among catfish anglers. However, little is known about the current state of fisheries in these river systems.

Because of the high demand of lake and reservoir fishing, the management of southeastern Nebraska streams has not been a priority, said Tony Barada, a fisheries biologist in the southeast district. He and Fisheries Biologist Aaron Blank set out to change that in 2013, when they began a 4-year project to learn as much as they possibly could about the Blue and the Nemaha river systems. Not only was the goal to monitor and index catfish populations, but also to learn more about the overall fish community in all four rivers, both native and invasive.

"We know people are fishing in these areas, and we know they're important locally," said Barada, "but we don't have much data on our catfish populations. The Nemahas are also directly connected to the Missouri River, which is a hotbed for aquatic invasive species. We need to figure out what is going on in these river systems."



Southeastern Nebraska fisheries biologists indexed catfish populations in the Big Nemaha, Little Nemaha, Big Blue and Little Blue rivers from 2013 through 2016. Catfish were marked with T-bar anchor tags. The Commission encourages anglers to report tagged fish. This information will help biologists understand catfish movement and migration.

Sportfish Dollars

As a sportfish with dedicated funding from permit dollars and excise taxes on fishing equipment, the channel catfish was the number one species to index. But with the way conservation usually works, what's good for one species is usually beneficial for many others.

"There is so much more happening in these rivers. Sampling is intensive work, so since we were there, we wanted to collect as much data as we could," Barada said. "And even in the four years we did this sampling, we still wished we could've collected more data."

Sampling occurred at six locations on the Big Blue River, five in the Little Blue, four in the Big Nemaha and five in the Little Nemaha – all dependent on where there was suitable access and permission from landowners. Barada and Blank's team set out baited hoop nets and also used electrofishing at each site. Each captured catfish was run through the gamut: They were measured for length and weight, and one pectoral spine was removed from each fish for age and growth analysis – cross sections of these spines

can be observed under a microscope to approximate a fish's age.

Each catfish was also tagged. To piggyback on a 10-year Missouri River catfish study conducted by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Barada wants to find out how these fish are moving by comparing where these fish were tagged to where they may be caught by other research groups or anglers, since all catfish can be migratory. However, out of the nearly 1,000 tags Barada's team has put out, they've only had about 10 calls from anglers. He encourages more anglers to call back.

"Either anglers aren't seeing the tag, they just don't report it or not many of these fish are being caught. But the people who do report the tags are really intrigued," Barada said. "These fish can travel considerable distances compared to fish that sit in a reservoir. We tagged some near Fairbury on the Little Blue River, and a man caught one by Hebron during a high water event. It's kind of cool to have these conversations with our river anglers."

Catfish populations in the Blues and Nemahas are doing "fairly well." "I think our rivers are overlooked as far as opportunities for catching catfish in our state, especially in



Barada set out hoop nets baited with rotten cheese to sample fish in the Big Nemaha River by Tecumseh.

the southeast. We have many reservoirs that we stock every year or every three years, but our river systems are really productive. They’re self-sustaining populations that naturally reproduce,” Barada said.

Although there is potential for larger catfish (including large flathead and blue catfish) to migrate up the Nemahas from the Missouri River, Barada observed that these smaller river systems are producing higher densities of “eater-size fish” in the 8- to 14-inch range. And for the most part, sampling showed both higher densities of catfish and native fish communities in the Nemahas than the Blues. Barada speculates that this difference is due to fragmentation; migration in the Blues is much more difficult for fish due to dams, whereas the Nemahas have remained completely free flowing, aside from a few natural waterfalls.

“Past studies have shown that our Nemahas act as nursing grounds for the Missouri River, and we saw evidence of this in the abundance of smaller catfish,” said Barada. “The Blues, which eventually connect and flow in to Tuttle Creek Reservoir near Manhattan, Kansas, are more dissected and fragmented by low-head dams, so they’ve been isolated from the big river. Fish can only migrate during really high water events, so I think the populations suffer because of that.”

Fishing and Access

A fisherman who goes out with a little bit of knowledge about river fishing should be successful. Most of the river anglers Barada has bumped into do fairly well. River fishing is different because anglers have to learn how to read the river, and the way a river looks can change depending on the season and/or year, and whether the water is high or low that given year. This can be intimidating to a novice, so Barada suggests fishing in the summer when the water is low.

“Some of the most fun fishing I’ve had is going out to Little Blue East Wildlife Management Area in the summertime – there’s a couple-mile stretch of river – and wading the river and fishing individual holes. When the river gets low, fish have to seek refuge in certain areas. Find some woody debris or snags in the river. All you need is knee-deep water, and you can flip your night crawler in there and be really successful,” Barada said.

But as decent as the fishing can be, public access remains a challenge. While access on the Little Blue River is satisfactory, access to the other three river systems is spotty, mostly in the form of city parks and turnoffs. Landowners may be willing to give permission to fishermen, but be sure

to be respectful of their property.

“It would be nice to get more public access, but that’s difficult. It takes money,” Barada said.

The Open Fields and Waters Program (OFW) has been beneficial in providing additional angling access on certain stretches of these rivers, but these areas are under contract and may change on an annual basis. Check the latest Nebraska Public Access Atlas for the most up-to-date information on WMAs and OFW properties.

Invasive Fish

Other captured fish species were identified, measured and counted, including natives such as longnose gar, shortnose gar and shovelnose sturgeon in the Big Nemaha River. However, because the Nemahas are undammed, they do have more issues with aquatic invasive species moving up from the Missouri. Invasive species such as silver, bighead, grass, and common carp were found in both Nemaha rivers.

The verdict is still out on how these invasive carp species will affect the river’s aquatic communities. Barada and Blank did not sample any juvenile bighead or silver carp, which is promising, suggesting that the fish might not be spawning in these smaller streams.

“There are so many unknowns with invasives,” Barada said. “They can compete with native filter feeders, and they can take up a significant amount of biomass in a system. I don’t think they’ll directly compete with channel catfish or flatheads, but they may impact other native species such as chubs, minnows and buffalos.

Therefore, a cascading effect could be felt.”

Fortunately, Barada and his crew did not find any zebra mussels in the Nemahas. Unfortunately, these mussels are projected to arrive from the Missouri, because of the free-flowing connection, at some point.

Habitat and Water Issues

One thing that did surprise Barada and Blank was seeing how degraded the habitats were along these rivers: water quality, quantity and bank erosion are major concerns.

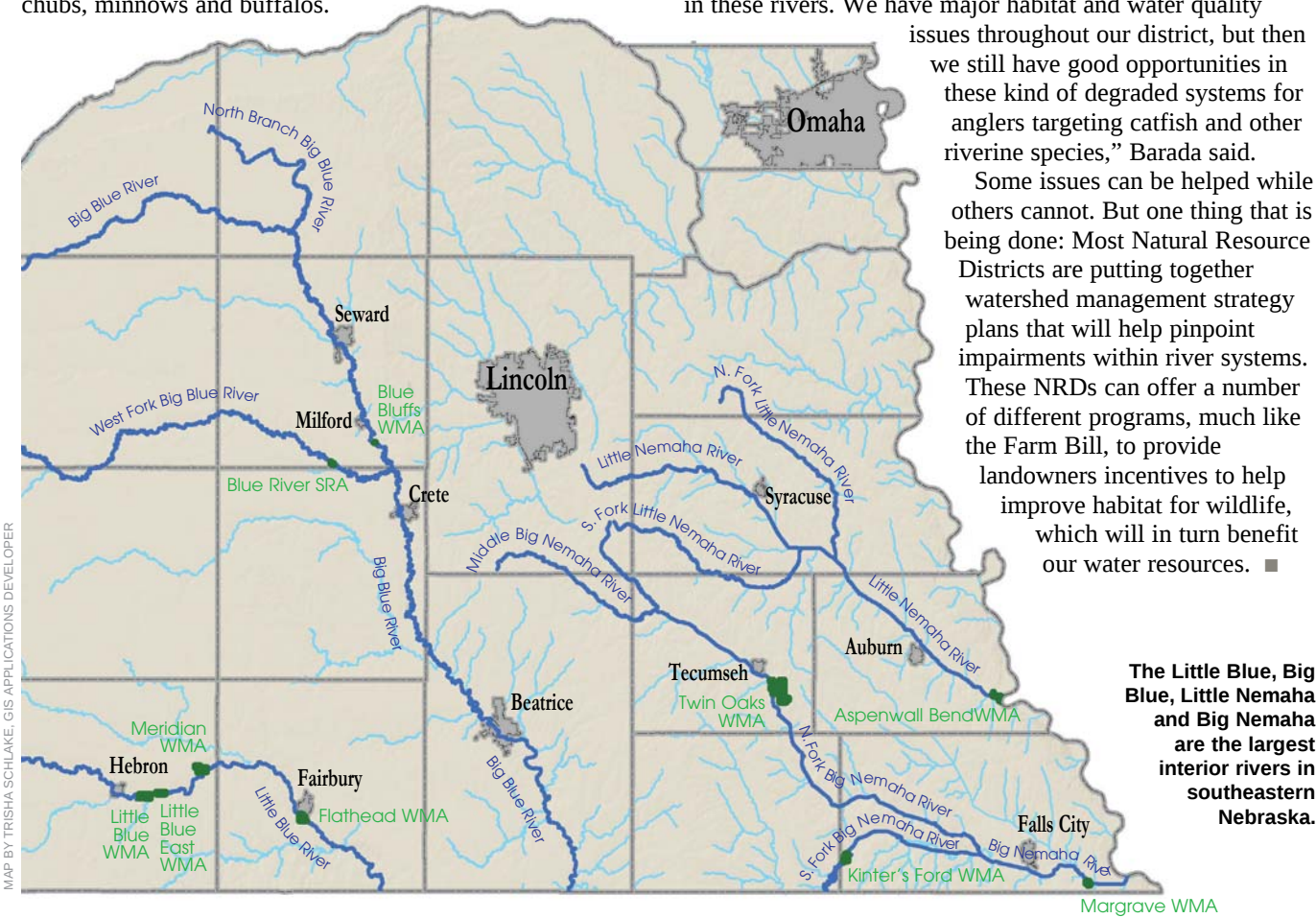
According to the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality, the Blue and Nemaha watersheds are some of the most impaired in the state. This poor water quality is highly correlated with the amount of row crop agriculture – and potential for runoff – in the area.

In addition to water quality issues, some of these rivers, specifically the Little Blue River and the Big Nemaha River, can experience major water quantity issues as well. Reestablishment of catfish populations will occur in time when sufficient water returns to the system, but negative impacts to catfish and the entire aquatic community are obviously experienced under extremely low or dry river conditions.

Still, despite these impairments, Barada believes that the recreational opportunities that these rivers systems provide are considerable. Catfish are hardy fish, tolerant of stressful conditions.

“We can now paint a picture of most of what is going on in these rivers. We have major habitat and water quality issues throughout our district, but then we still have good opportunities in these kind of degraded systems for anglers targeting catfish and other riverine species,” Barada said.

Some issues can be helped while others cannot. But one thing that is being done: Most Natural Resource Districts are putting together watershed management strategy plans that will help pinpoint impairments within river systems. These NRDs can offer a number of different programs, much like the Farm Bill, to provide landowners incentives to help improve habitat for wildlife, which will in turn benefit our water resources. ■



The Little Blue, Big Blue, Little Nemaha and Big Nemaha are the largest interior rivers in southeastern Nebraska.

RVs at State Park Areas

Be surprised by how many places recreational vehicles have to go.

By Margot DesRocher

Many Game and Parks attractions have sites catering to recreational vehicle users during their outdoor pursuits. Here is a list of some of the best places for RV recreational opportunities in Nebraska.

Alexandria State Recreation Area (Jefferson County) – 40 sites with 30-amp electrical hookup, 5 sites with 50-amp electrical hookup and 8 sites without electricity. The campground offers water, modern restrooms, a playground and dump station.

Box Butte Reservoir SRA (Dawes) – 14 camping pads with 30- and 50-amp electrical hookups. The park also has water and vault toilets.

Branched Oak SRA (Lancaster) – 305 camping pads with 30- and 50-amp electrical hookups, as well as 28 camping pads without electricity. The area includes 15 electrical sites for those camping with their horses.

The lake has five shower houses, modern restrooms, dump stations and playground equipment.

Buffalo Bill Ranch SRA (Lincoln) – 23 camping pads with electrical hookups. Of these, 18 sites have 30-amp hookups and 5 sites have 50-amp hookups. Vault toilets are available. There are water hydrants throughout the campground.

Calamus Reservoir SRA (Loup, Garfield) – 132 pad sites with 30- and 50-amp electrical hookups spread over three different campgrounds. Shower houses are available at Homestead Knolls, Nunda Shoal and Valley View Flat campgrounds. All three areas offer mature shade trees, water and modern restrooms, and each area is within walking distance of the lake. A dump station is available at Little York Point. Additionally, RV and camper camping is permitted in the parking lots of the Valley View Flat and Hannaman Bayou campgrounds in designated spots.

Chadron State Park (Dawes) – 70 camping pads with 30-amp electrical hookups, as well as 18 primitive sites. Amenities for campers include showers, a dump station, laundry, picnic tables, grills and a playground.



Matt DeFreese holds his daughter, Darbie, as he cooks a hot dog over a fire at Mormon Island SRA in Hall County.

PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Conestoga Lake SRA (Lancaster) – 25 camping pads with 30- and 50-amp electrical hookups, as well as 8 camping pads without electricity. Water, vault toilets and a dump station are available.

Danish Alps SRA (Dakota) – 34 gravel pads with electrical hookups and 2 cement pads with electrical hookups, as well as 7 gravel pull-through pads with electrical hookups and one ADA cement pull-through pad with electrical hookups. All electrical campsites have 30- and 50-amp hookups.

Additionally, Danish Alps offers an equestrian campground with 26 gravel pads with electrical hookups and three ADA cement pads with electrical hookups. There are also 22 tent camping sites. Campers have access to water, modern restrooms and showers.

Dead Timber SRA (Dodge) – 17 electrical spots with 30-amp hookups. Water and vault toilets are available. There is no dump station on site.

Enders Reservoir SRA (Chase) – 42 camping pad sites with 30- and 50-amp service at each site. Showers, modern restrooms, water, grills, picnic tables and shelters, a fish cleaning station and dump station are available.

Eugene T. Mahoney SP (Cass) – Two campgrounds offer 149 camping pads with 30-amp electrical hookups. Some spots also offer 50-amp service and 7 offer water and sewer service. Drinking water and modern showers and latrines are available at both campsites. The park also offers a coin-operated laundry and dump station.

Fort Kearny SRA (Buffalo, Kearney) – 94 camping pads with electrical hookups. Of these, 28 are 50-30 amp and 66 are 30 amp. Additionally, 26 camping pads are available without electricity.

There are showers and modern restrooms, plus a trailer dump station. Stately cottonwood trees, some more than 100 years old, shade much of the camping area.

Fort Robinson SP (Dawes, Sioux) – Three campgrounds cater to a wide range of styles, each offering sites suitable for RVs and a majority with ample shade. They are the Red Cloud Campground with full hookups, the Soldier Creek Campground with a wide variety of sites ranging from pads with electricity to primitive tent sites, and the Equestrian Campground, with electricity and conveniently located near stalls for boarding horses.

The park also offers group camping. In all, there are 100 pads with both 50-amp and 30-amp sites available. Modern restrooms, laundry, showers, water, a dump station, picnic tables and shelters are all on site.

Fremont Lakes SRA (Dodge) – 190 hard-surfaced pads with 30-amp electrical hookups, as well as 12 non-pad sites with electrical hookups. The campground is situated among mature shade trees. Showers, modern restrooms, water and two dump stations are available.

Indian Cave SP (Nemaha, Richardson) – 134 units with 30-amp electrical hookups (22 of which also have 50-amp capability). Showers, modern restrooms, a laundry facility and a dump station, as well as picnic tables and grills, are available for RV guests.



David Beasley sits in front of his RV at a lakeside campground at Alexandria SRA in Jefferson County.

PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Johnson Lake SRA (Gosper) – 113 pad sites with 30- and 50-amp electrical hookups. Modern restrooms, a dump station and shower house are available. Reservations are accepted.

Keller Park SRA (Brown) – 25 camping pads with 30-amp electrical hookups, as well as 10 non-pad sites without electricity. Restrooms, a dump station and water are available.

Lake McConaughy SRA (Keith) – Three modern campgrounds with more than 208 pad sites with 30- and 50-amp electrical hookups and 30 full-hookup sites, with more becoming available throughout 2018. Also available are coin-operated shower facilities, modern restrooms and two dump stations.

Lake Ogallala SRA (Keith) – 82 camping pads with 30- and 50-amp electrical hookups. Primitive camping is available on the west side of Lake Ogallala at several areas. Water and primitive restrooms are available.

Lake Wanahoo SRA (Saunders) – 24 grass pads with 50-amp electrical hookups, 50 gravel pads with electrical hookups and 60 tent camping sites without electricity.

A playground is located on the west side of the park in the electrical

campground. Modern restrooms are available, as are coin-operated showers.

Lewis and Clark Lake SRA (Knox) – More than 150 electrical sites with 30- and 50-amp electrical hookups and more than 100 primitive campsites. Campgrounds include showers, picnic tables, fire pits, nearby water spigots (not hookups), dump stations and a playground. Camping is available year-round, however modern facilities operate from April-October, weather permitting.

An equestrian camping area with corrals is also located in the south shore area. Water is available but there is no electricity.

Louisville SRA (Cass) – 223 camping pads with 30- and 50-amp electrical hookups. Newly upgraded camping facilities include showers and restrooms. Campers also have access to water, a dump station and a playground.

Lake Maloney SRA (Lincoln) – 56 pads with 50-amp hookups for lakeside camping. Coin-operated showers, dump stations, water, two boat ramps and vault toilets are on site.

Medicine Creek SRA (Frontier) – 72 camping pads with 30- and 50-amp



Campers enjoy a lakeside view of the sunset at Merritt SRA in Cherry County.

electrical hookups. All campers have access to modern restrooms, showers, a dump station, vault toilets and nearby concessions.

Merritt Reservoir SRA (Cherry) – Offers numerous camping options over several campgrounds. There are 38 sites with 30- and 50-amp electrical hookups and 18 standard sites without electricity in Cedar Bay Campground; 21 electrical sites with 50-amp hookups in Willow Cove; 10 electrical sites with 50-amp hookups in West Beeds; 10 electrical

sites with 50-amp hookups in Beeds and 10 electrical sites with 50-amp hookups in Boardman.

Water, modern restrooms and showers are available to campers, and there is a dump station on site. Additional camping spots are available at the Merritt Trading Post.

Lake Minatare SRA (Scotts Bluff) – The modern Lakeview Point Campground, located near the iconic lighthouse, has 52 gravel pads with 30-amp electrical hookups, modern

restrooms and showers. Butte View Campground has 49 sites with 50-amp electricity.

Mormon Island SRA (Hall) – 34 camping pads with 30- and 50-amp electrical hookups are available, with access to showers, a dump station and laundry.

Niobrara SP (Knox) – 76 camping pads with 30- and 50-amp electrical hookups. Drinking water, modern restrooms, coin-operated showers, dump station, picnic tables and grills are included in the RV areas. Wi-Fi is available at the modern shower facility.

Pawnee Lake SRA (Lancaster) – 68 camping pads with 30- and 50-amp electrical hookups, as well as 34 camping pads without electricity and 97 non-pad sites without electricity. The campground offers water, showers, modern restrooms and mature shade trees. A dump station is available at the area.

Ponca SP (Dixon) – 93 camping pads with 30- and 50-amp hookups. Campgrounds include showers, picnic tables, fire pits, nearby water spigots (not hookups), a dump station and a playground.

Red Willow Reservoir SRA (Frontier) – 48 camping pads with 30 and 50-amp electrical hookups are available, as is access to showers and a dump station. Willow View Campground also offers a panoramic view of the lake.

Riverview Marina SRA (Otoe) – Campers at Riverview Marina State Recreation Area have a choice of pad sites with electricity or more primitive non-pad sites. The area offers 24 camping pads with 30-amp electrical hookups, as well as 50 non-pad sites without electricity. The area has modern restroom facilities with showers.

Rock Creek Station SRA (Jefferson) – 25 camping pads with 30-amp electrical hookups. The campground has a modern shower and



RV campers relax around the fire at Indian Cave State Park in Richardson County.

restroom building for those who are registered to camp. Water and a dump station are available.

Rockford Lake SRA (Gage) – A shaded campsite offers 30 camping pads with 30- and 50-amp electrical hookups, as well as 2 camping pads without electricity and 40 non-pad sites without electricity. Water and vault toilets are available, but showers, modern restrooms and a dump station are not.

Stagecoach Lake SRA (Lancaster) – 30 camping pads with 30- and 50-amp electrical hookups, as well as 50 non-pad sites without electricity. Water and vault toilets are available.

Summit Lake SRA (Burt) – 13 non-electrical pad sites and 30 electrical pad sites. Water, vault toilets, shower house and a dump station are available.

Swanson Reservoir SRA (Hitchcock) – 67 camping pads with 30- and 50-amp electrical hookups spread over two campgrounds – 17

are at Macklin and 47 are located at Spring Canyon Campground. Both offer modern restrooms and showers. Two dump stations are on site.

Two Rivers SRA (Douglas) – 143 camping pads with 30- and/or 50-amp electrical hookups (12 pads have water hookups), as well as 64 camping pads without electricity. The area offers modern restrooms with showers and an RV dump station.

Victoria Springs SRA (Custer) – 21 camping pads with 30- and 50-amp electrical hookups, as well as 60 non-pad sites without electricity. Water, modern restrooms, showers and a dump station are available.

Wagon Train SRA (Lancaster) – 28 camping pads with 30- and 50-amp electrical hookups and 80 non-pad sites without electricity. Water, vault toilets and a dump station are available.

Willow Creek SRA (Pierce) – 101 electric pad sites in the main

campground, with 64 sites having 30-amp service and 37 with 30- and 50-amp service. The campground offers a water fill station, modern restrooms, showers and laundry. The dump station is located in Pierce at the courthouse.

Windmill SRA (Buffalo) – 69 camping pads with 30- and 50-amp electrical hookups. The area offers water, two modern restrooms and shower houses, a dump station and laundry. ■

Camping is available year-round at each of these areas; however, modern facilities operate from April-October, weather permitting. Primitive and tent sites are available at each of these areas as well.

For questions regarding American with Disabilities Act accessibility, contact the Parks division at the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission by calling 402-471-0641.

For any additional questions, please visit OutdoorNebraska.org/parks.



Nebraska's state park system visitors are encouraged to bring their dogs, as David and Anita Cass of Lincoln did with their pet at Two Rivers SRA in Douglas County.



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Take a Kid Outside Day

The Nebraska Chapter of Safari Club International (SCI) is sponsoring a free event for all youth called "Take a Kid Outside Day." SCI is partnering with the Prairie Bowman Association and others to sponsor this youth event.

It will be held June 9, 2018, from noon to 5:00 p.m. at Pheasant Bonanza in Tekamah, Nebraska. Parents are encouraged to join their kids for a great afternoon of fun.

Educational, hands-on outdoor classes include archery, fishing and casting, shotgun shooting, habitat talks and much more.

The Nebraska Chapter of Safari Club International is dedicated to conservation and hunters' rights. First for hunters, Safari Club International focuses on litigation for not only hunters' rights but also for scientific and sustainable conservation throughout the globe.

We also believe in the importance of maintaining a connection between youth and the great outdoors, whether it's hunting, fishing, shooting sports or animal science. Our goal is to provide opportunities for kids to increase their confidence and knowledge through outdoor sports and learning. ■

For more information and to RSVP, contact Mary Middleton at 402-214-8270 or nebraska.safariclubint@gmail.com.



Fishing is one of several interesting outdoor activities for youth at "Take a Kid Outside Day."

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◀ I am sending you this photo of turkey hunting around Atkinson, Nebraska, in 1967.
Left to right are Pete, Randy Kruse, Bob Duennerman (myself), and Ernie. I cannot remember Pete and Ernie's last names, but they were Randy's cousins I believe.
I am now living in Apple Valley, California, and am 83 years old, but was originally from Grand Island.
— Bob Duennerman, Apple Valley, California

► Bob Colling, right, and I display a limit of pheasants we harvested the last day of about 1969, north of Kearney. Bob was a professor of mathematics at, then, Kearney State College, and I was an assistant pastor at St. James Catholic Parish. Pheasants were abundant in those days, and we went on hunts whenever our schedules permitted. We lost Bob last year. He was a good teacher and parishioner, a wonderful family man and a faithful friend. Many fond memories remain.
— Father Bernard Berger, Crawford, Nebraska



◀ This photo was taken on opening weekend 1959 southwest of Comstock on the farmstead where my mother grew up. Pictured are my grandfather Frank Janulewicz, my brothers Glenn and John, my father Wendell, and me.
Bagged my first pheasant that day with my grandpa's Bay State single shot .410 shotgun.
— Bruce Hovie, North Platte, 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. Text may be edited and photos adjusted for reproduction. All photos will be returned.

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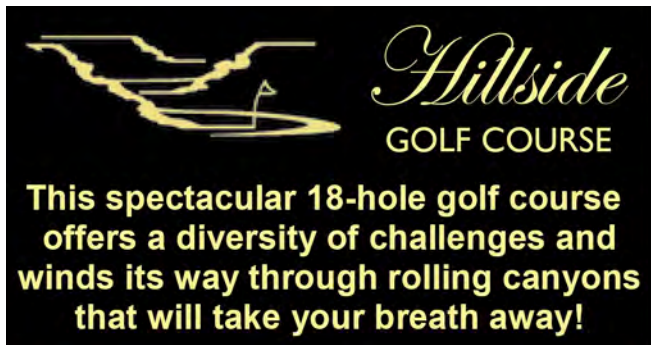
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Night Trains and Time Machines

The best photos come early and late in the day, and it usually pays huge dividends to stay on site. While getting photos for this month's article on the Oglala National Grassland, I opted for a solo camping trip in the comforts of my tent cot.

While I could have opted to camp free of charge at pretty much any location on the federal property, I chose to pay the \$5 for the campground at Toadstool Geologic Park with its luxurious vault toilet. It was during the week, and I was the only one at the campground. Seemingly the only person for miles, for that matter.

The grasslands are a great destination for a group venture, but there is something special about being on such a wide-open, sparsely populated landscape alone. Each sound from the prairie's wildlife seems amplified. The absence of trees and artificial light make for a great view of the night sky.

There alone, my mind turned to what it must have been like when the nearby ghost towns of Orella and Montrose were populated. When "Buffalo Bill" Cody and Yellow Hair traversed the landscape. Back even farther when those mammoths and Alberta Culture bison, which have given us such magnificent fossils, were roaming the land. When volcanic ash was moving in from the West and creating the base for those nearby toadstool formations, or when those prized agates were washing in from the rising Black Hills. A trip to the Oglala Grassland is like a venture in a time machine.

Then, every once in a while, you get a reminder you are not alone. Trains moving north and south on a route that includes Crawford and Ardmore, South Dakota, rumble by. No matter how serene a location in our state may seem, the presence of humans is never too far away. Somewhat comforting, somewhat annoying, but present nonetheless.

One of my favorite photos can be attributed to the area's great view of the night sky, its fantastic landforms – and that train line. It wasn't until I got back to my computer on another night that I realized the light from the distant train was illuminating the background as I was lighting the foreground.

The result was an image with a mix of the past meeting the present – much like the Oglala Grassland itself. Yes, night or day, it's a special place. ■

Justin Haag
March 26, 2018



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