

Published by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission since 1926

# NEBRASKAland

October 2016



Sumac glows red at the Nebraska National Forest near Halsey. Photo by Julie Geiser.

Published by the  
**NEBRASKA**  
— GAME  PARKS —  
NebraskalandMagazine.com  
OutdoorNebraska.org

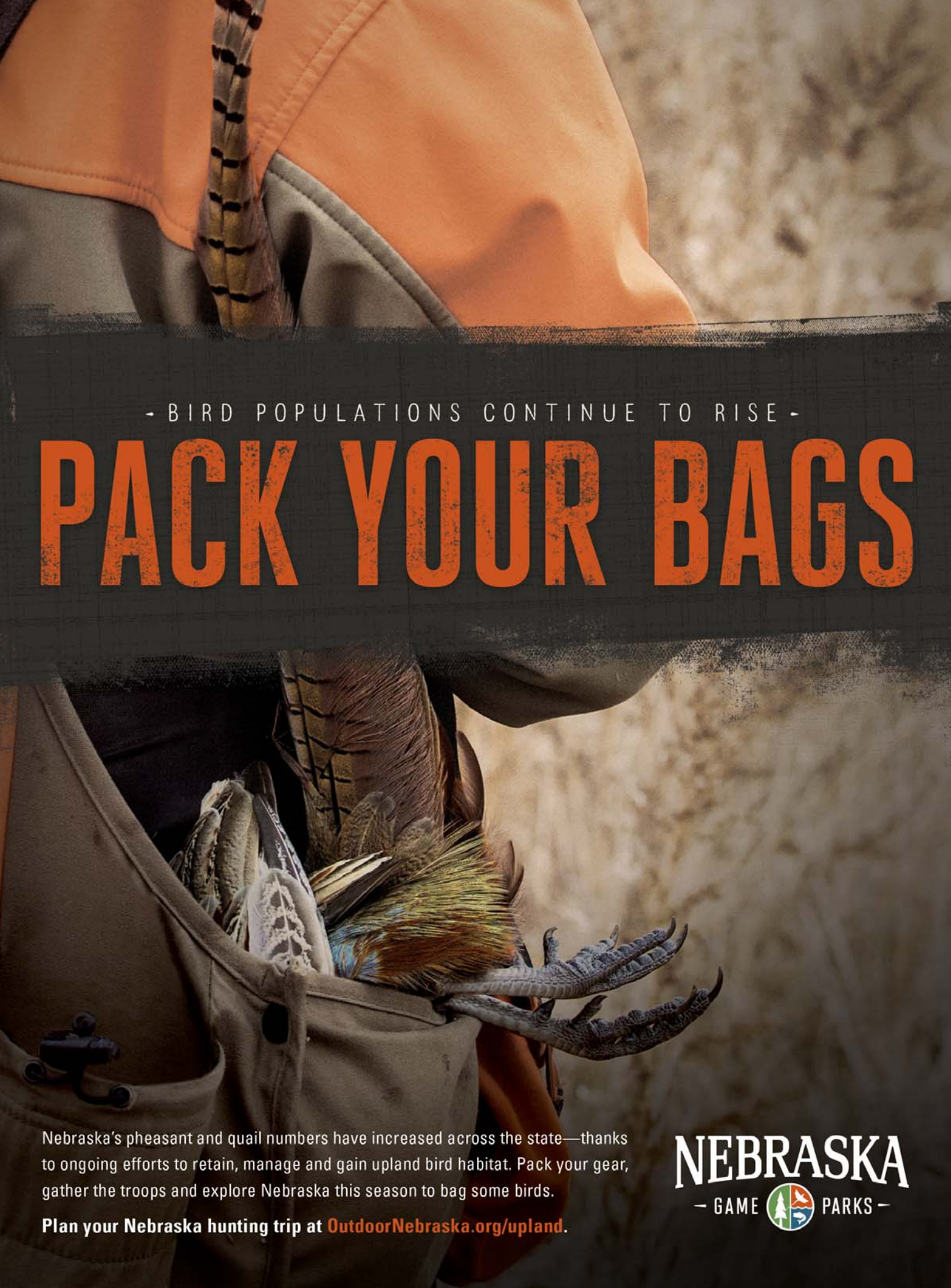
NebraskalandMagazine.com

\$4.95



**INSIDE**

Ice Age Aspens • Olive Creek Lake SRA  
A History of Nebraska Nicknames • Commissioners' Pheasant Hunt  
Time Well Spent • Meat Hunter • Roger Welsch Climbs Nebraska



- BIRD POPULATIONS CONTINUE TO RISE -

# PACK YOUR BAGS

Nebraska's pheasant and quail numbers have increased across the state—thanks to ongoing efforts to retain, manage and gain upland bird habitat. Pack your gear, gather the troops and explore Nebraska this season to bag some birds.

Plan your Nebraska hunting trip at [OutdoorNebraska.org/upland](http://OutdoorNebraska.org/upland).

**NEBRASKA**  
- GAME  PARKS -

# NEBRASKAland Magazine

Volume 94 • No. 8 • October 2016

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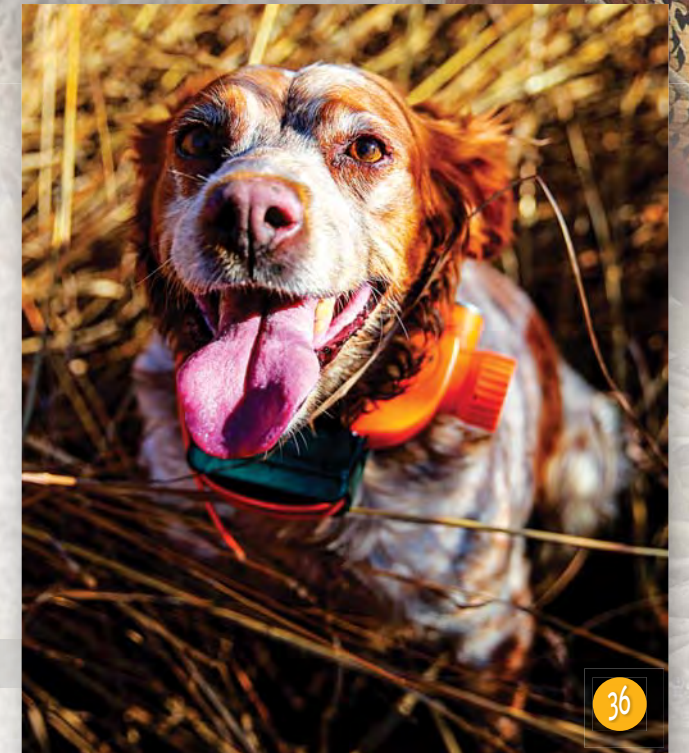
## ON THE WEB...



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**Cover:** Aspens in their fall color tower above the falls at Smith Falls State Park in Cherry County. Photo by Eric Fowler.

NEBRASKAland (VOL. 94 / NO. 8 ISSN 0028-1964) is published monthly, except for the combined Jan./Feb. and Aug./Sept. issues, by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, 2200 N. 33rd St., Lincoln, NE. Periodicals postage paid at Lincoln, Nebraska, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to NEBRASKAland, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370.



36



24



50



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Joni Hart of Gillette, Wyoming, came across this "rainbow scarab," a colorful dung beetle, walking through her alfalfa field in Crawford.



#### Outdoor Plates

Gaylan Abood's administrative assistant thought he hunted so much he should have a plate that quantified it. The Elkhorn man grew up in Lexington shooting rabbits and squirrels with his .22-cal. rifle and now hunts about everything Nebraska has to offer, including quail, pheasant, ducks, geese, turkey, deer and varmints.



Steve Kelsay of Auburn cut his teeth on farm pond bass at a young age, but later turned his attention to walleyes and has since spent many days and dollars chasing "Ole Marble Eyes" on reservoirs in Nebraska and elsewhere.



Tim Roddy of Omaha started hunting in his 20s and quickly became obsessed with training his Labrador retrievers and hunting pheasants and quail. He now counts deer and turkey hunting among his pursuits.

If you have a unique outdoor message plate you would like to share, or know someone who does, e-mail a photo of it (high-resolution, JPEG format only, please) to [Eric.Fowler@Nebraska.gov](mailto:Eric.Fowler@Nebraska.gov), along with your name, hometown and a brief description of the interests expressed on your license plate.



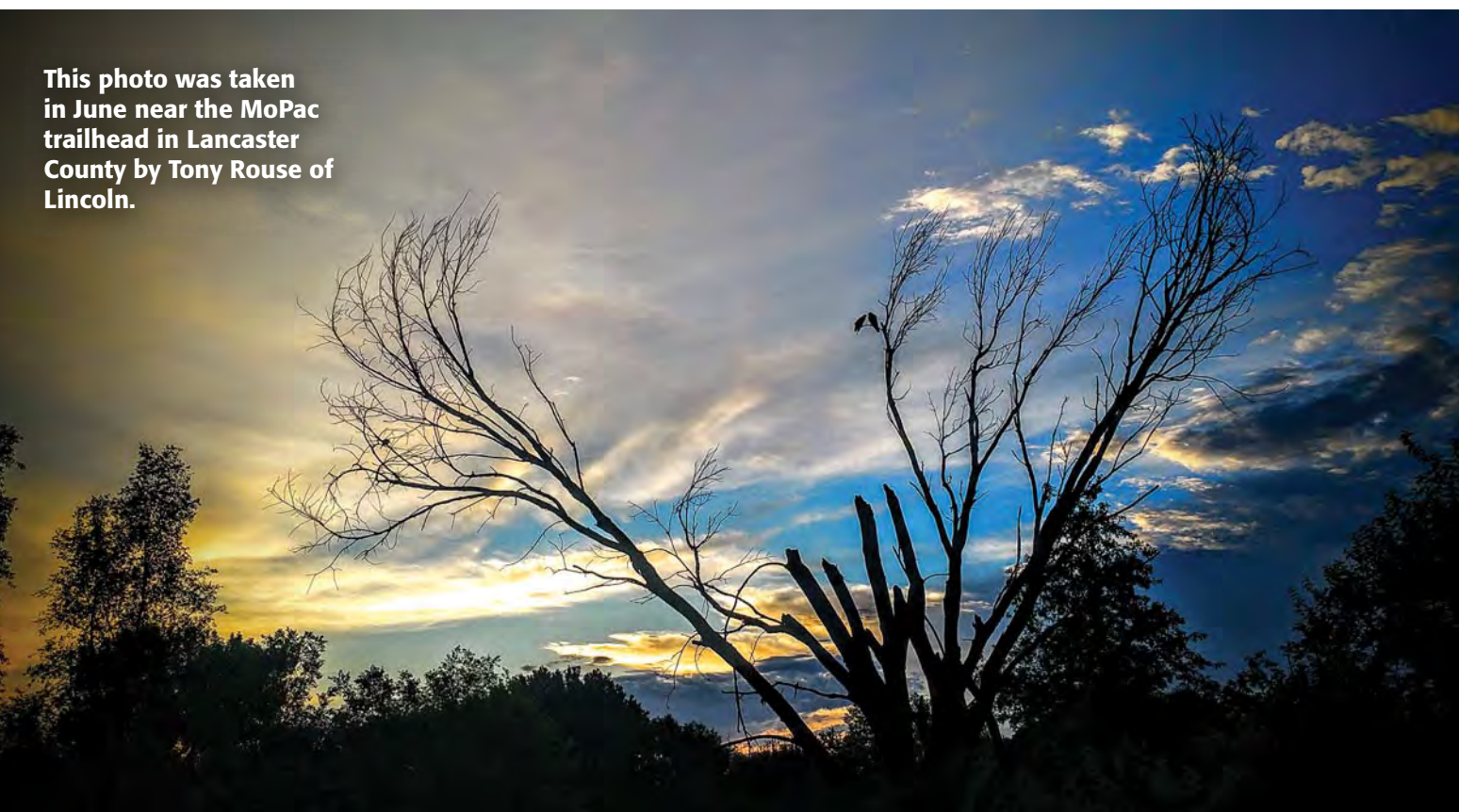
Ron Bilstein of Battle Creek submitted this trail camera photo of a tom turkey in full strut.



Kathryn Katz sent us this image entitled "Friday Night Lights."



Richard Jones submitted this photo of *NEBRASKAland's* March 2015 cover.



This photo was taken in June near the MoPac trailhead in Lancaster County by Tony Rouse of Lincoln.

"I enjoyed a nice outdoor photography workshop led by Eric Fowler from *NEBRASKAland Magazine* in Lincoln. A thunderstorm passed by during the class. When the workshop was over, I was treated to a rainbow. I drove down the street a few blocks to find a small field with a rolled haystack for a nicer foreground for the photo," said George McCoy of Omaha.



Bruce Thiel captured this sunset photo at Holmes Lake in Lancaster County.

# Get HIP!

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Mike Benkis of Omaha photographed these kayakers at Zorinsky Lake.



Colleen Childers of Grand Island took this photo of a bobwhite quail. "This guy stood and posed for me for a good five minutes!" Childers said.



Dan Swanson sent in this image of what he thinks is a bird or bat from a camera in Box Butte County.



In July, Tiara Brown of Omaha snapped this photo of a lone paddle boarder at Zorinsky Lake at sunset.

Share your outdoor experience with us!

#NEGameAndParks

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Statement of ownership and monthly circulation of  
**NEBRASKAland Magazine**  
Owner and publisher: Nebraska Game and Parks Commission  
Editor: Jeff Kurrus  
Headquarters of Publisher and Publication:  
2200 N. 33rd St., Lincoln, NE 68503  
Stockholders, Bondholders, Mortgage and Security Holders: None

|                                                    | Average number of copies of each issue during preceding 12 months | Single issue nearest to filing date |
|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| A. Total Copies Printed (net press run).....       | 21,368                                                            | 21,424                              |
| B. Paid Circulation                                |                                                                   |                                     |
| 1. Mail subscriptions.....                         | 18,163                                                            | 18,047                              |
| 3. Single-copy sales .....                         | 2,224                                                             | 2,255                               |
| C. Total Paid Circulation.....                     | 20,398                                                            | 20,313                              |
| D. Free Distribution                               |                                                                   |                                     |
| by Mail.....                                       | 278                                                               | 278                                 |
| Outside the Mail .....                             | 406                                                               | 406                                 |
| E. Total Free Distribution .....                   | 684                                                               | 689                                 |
| F. Total Distribution.....                         | 21,082                                                            | 21,002                              |
| G. Copies Not Distributed.....                     | 286                                                               | 422                                 |
| H. Total.....                                      | 21,368                                                            | 21,424                              |
| I. Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation ..... | 96%                                                               | 96%                                 |

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# A Mammal Brief

## Southern Flying Squirrel

By Lindsay Rogers,  
Outdoor Education Specialist

### Glaucomys Volans

Contrary to their name, these small mammals cannot fly but rather glide between trees. Found in hardwood forests – like those along the Missouri River in extreme southeastern Nebraska – flying squirrels scamper to the top of a tall tree and leap then glide to the next tree. They are nocturnal creatures and spend much of their day sleeping in cavities and nest boxes among the trees. Like most tree squirrels, flying squirrels are omnivores that eat nuts, seeds berries, insects and occasionally eggs.

Southern flying squirrels are excellent “flyers” due to a large, fur-covered membrane which extends between their forelimbs and hind limbs and serves as their “wings.” They also have a large flat tail which serves as a “rudder.” When they jump from the top of a tree, they extend their limbs to create a parachute, thus the gliding rather than flying.

Young flying squirrels are born naked and remain under their mother’s care for 65 days – an unusually long time for a mammal of this size. Young do not become entirely independent for four months and may stay as a family unit throughout the winter months. ■



PHOTO BY JOEL SARTORE

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# Pheasants Forever & Quail Forever

## 2016/2017 Fall & Winter Events

### Youth Mentor Hunt Events



| Location   | Chapter                   | Date       |
|------------|---------------------------|------------|
| Ainsworth  | Sandhills PF              | 9/25/2016  |
| Alda       | Loup/Platte Ringnecks PF  | 10/15/2016 |
| Allen      | Dixon County PF           | 10/1/2016  |
| Alliance   | Heritage PF               | 9/3/2016   |
| Alliance   | Heritage PF               | 10/15/2016 |
| Alma       | South Central NE PF       | 10/15/2016 |
| Arlington  | Dodge County PF           | 10/15/2016 |
| Ashland    | Lower Platte PF           | 10/22/2016 |
| Atkinson   | Niobrara Valley PF        | 10/15/2016 |
| Aurora     | Lincoln Creek PF          | 10/8/2016  |
| Bartlett   | Cedar River Ringnecks PF  | 10/9/2016  |
| Bartlett   | Cedar River Ringnecks PF  | 10/16/2016 |
| Beatrice   | Southeast Nebraska PF     | 10/15/2016 |
| Bennett    | Otoe County PF            | 10/8/2016  |
| Bennett    | Cornhusker PF             | 10/15/2016 |
| Blair      | Washington County PF      | 10/8/2016  |
| Bloomfield | Bazile Creek Ringnecks PF | 10/15/2016 |
| Blue Hill  | Webster County PF         | 10/8/2016  |
| Brainard   | Seward County PF          | 10/15/2016 |
| Broken Bow | Custer County PF          | 10/8/2016  |
| Cambridge  | Republican Valley PF      | 10/15/2016 |
| Cambridge  | Wachtel Fur Immer QF      | 10/15/2016 |
| Clarkson   | Maple Creek PF            | 10/22/2016 |
| Curtis     | Medicine Creek PF         | 9/10/2016  |
| Hartington | Lewis & Clark PF          | 9/24/2016  |
| Hastings   | Little Blue River PF      | 10/8/2016  |

| Location   | Chapter                  | Date       |
|------------|--------------------------|------------|
| Hebron     | Four Seasons PF          | 10/22/2016 |
| Holdrege   | Great Plains PF          | 10/22/2016 |
| Humboldt   | Nemaha Valley PF         | 12/3/2016  |
| Imperial   | Southwestern NE PF       | 10/22/2016 |
| Kearney    | Prairie Hills PF         | 10/22/2016 |
| Kimball    | Mile High PF             | 10/22/2016 |
| Loup City  | Sherman County PF        | 10/22/2016 |
| Lynch      | Ponca Creek PF           | 10/15/2016 |
| McCook     | Plains Sportsman PF      | 10/22/2016 |
| Minden     | Kearney County PF        | 10/22/2016 |
| Nehawka    | Cass County PF           | 10/8/2016  |
| Neligh     | Golden Prairie PF        | 10/15/2016 |
| Ord        | Loup River PF            | 10/1/2016  |
| Oskosh     | Antelope Valley PF       | 10/22/2016 |
| Pierce     | Elkhorn Valley PF        | 10/15/2016 |
| Sidney     | High Plains PF           | 10/15/2016 |
| St Paul    | Central Nebraska QF      | 9/10/2016  |
| Stratton   | Southwest Prairie QF     | 9/2/2016   |
| Tekamah    | Burt County PF           | 9/10/2016  |
| Tekamah    | Burt County PF           | 9/25/2016  |
| Tekamah    | Douglas County - West PF | 10/8/2016  |
| Walthill   | Dakota/Thurston PF       | 10/8/2016  |
| Wayne      | Logan Creek PF           | 10/16/2016 |
| West Point | Lower Elkhorn Valley PF  | 10/8/2016  |
| Wilber     | Saline County PF         | 10/15/2016 |
| York       | Corn Country PF          | 10/8/2016  |

### Chapter Banquets

| Location     | Chapter                      | Date       |
|--------------|------------------------------|------------|
| Ainsworth    | Sandhills PF                 | 11/4/2016  |
| Alma         | South Central Nebraska PF    | 10/29/2016 |
| Atkinson     | Niobrara Valley PF           | 11/26/2016 |
| Beatrice     | Southeast Nebraska PF        | 10/29/2016 |
| Bellevue     | Cass County PF Youth Banquet | 10/7/2016  |
| Bennett      | Big Red PF                   | 9/24/2016  |
| Bloomfield   | Bazile Creek PF              | 1/28/2017  |
| Blue Hill    | Webster County               | 2/4/2017   |
| Bow Valley   | Lewis and Clark PF           | 1/14/2017  |
| Broken Bow   | Custer County PF             | 2/18/2017  |
| Deshler      | Four Seasons PF              | 10/28/2016 |
| Franklin     | Franklin County Covey QF     | 2/24/2017  |
| Grand Island | Loup/Platte Ringnecks PF     | 10/20/2016 |
| Greeley      | Cedar River Ringnecks PF     | 2/25/2017  |
| Hastings     | Little Blue River PF         | 2/18/2017  |
| Holdrege     | Great Plains PF              | 2/4/2017   |
| Howells      | Maple Creek PF               | 2/25/2017  |
| Imperial     | Southwestern Nebraska PF     | 2/25/2017  |

| Location         | Chapter                      | Date       |
|------------------|------------------------------|------------|
| Kearney          | Nebraska PF/QF State Banquet | 2/11/2017  |
| Lexington        | Platte River PF              | 10/1/2016  |
| Lincoln          | Cornhusker PF                | 2/24/2017  |
| McCook           | Plains Sportsman PF          | 2/25/2017  |
| Minden           | Kearney County PF            | 9/21/2016  |
| Minneapolis, MN  | Pheasant Fest                | 2/18/2017  |
| Nelson           | Nuckolls County PF           | 11/18/2016 |
| North Platte     | Cody Ringnecks PF            | 10/15/2016 |
| Ogallala         | Western Nebraska PF          | 10/8/2016  |
| Scottsbluff      | Oregon Trail PF              | 10/8/2016  |
| Seward           | Seward County PF             | 2/25/2017  |
| South Sioux City | Dakota/Thurston PF           | 9/15/2016  |
| Spencer          | Ponca Creek Ringnecks PF     | 2/25/2017  |
| Sutton           | Rainwater Basin PF           | 2/25/2017  |
| Tecumseh         | Upper Big Nemaha PF          | 10/8/2016  |
| Tekamah          | Burt County PF               | 9/22/2016  |
| West Point       | Lower Elkhorn Valley PF      | 2/25/2017  |
| Wilbur           | Saline County PF             | 1/28/2017  |

For more information visit [www.NebraskaPF.com](http://www.NebraskaPF.com)

# Travelogue

By Hannah Hundley, Nebraska Tourism Commission

## Brownville/Indian Cave

There is an eerie current making its way down the Missouri River. It's rising up along the banks of Nebraska's eastern border and trickling into the towns and woodlands of the area. One of these towns is the beloved **Brownville**, Nebraska. Brownville has embraced its historic duty by preserving many of its original homes and buildings that were constructed when it was just an old port town in the mid-1800s. These include the town's **Carriage House** and the **Train Depot**. One of Brownville's eight museums is the notable **Captain Bailey House**. There are rumors that the doors in the house will not stay closed because it is haunted by the ghost of the old Civil War captain, who was said to be poisoned by a jealous neighbor.

If the restless spirit of Captain Bailey, or any others whose ill fate was sealed on this town's soil, become too much to handle in the wake of Halloween, travelers can drive 16 miles south to **Indian Cave State Park**. Here, visitors will discover unusual geological features and mysterious prehistoric Native American carvings. The park is most remarkable in autumn as it puts on an elaborate show of vibrant reds, oranges and yellows. Families and friends enjoy the park's annual **Haunted Hollow** each October, which includes light-hearted activities such as hayrack rides, a spooky campsite decorating contest, pumpkin carving and games.

Scarecrows and caramel apples aside, these destinations go beyond the typical traditions of the season. Brownville fosters creativity with its many art galleries and bookstores. The **Brownville Village Theater** puts on four plays and one musical every year for those in need of a little drama. As for the wine connoisseurs, **Whiskey Run Creek Vineyard & Winery** sits on four acres right off the town's main street. Their rustic 110-year-old barn makes for the perfect tasting room. For the outdoor adventure seekers, Indian Cave State Park has everything from hiking and biking trails to horseback rides to cross-country skiing and sledding in the winter.

With the rush of a scary story in one hand, and the serenity of falling leaves in the other, it's no wonder visitors are drawn to this area. ■



*The Captain Bailey House*

### Brownville



*Whiskey Run Creek*



*Fall color drive at Indian Cave State Park*



*Halloween at Indian Cave campgrounds*



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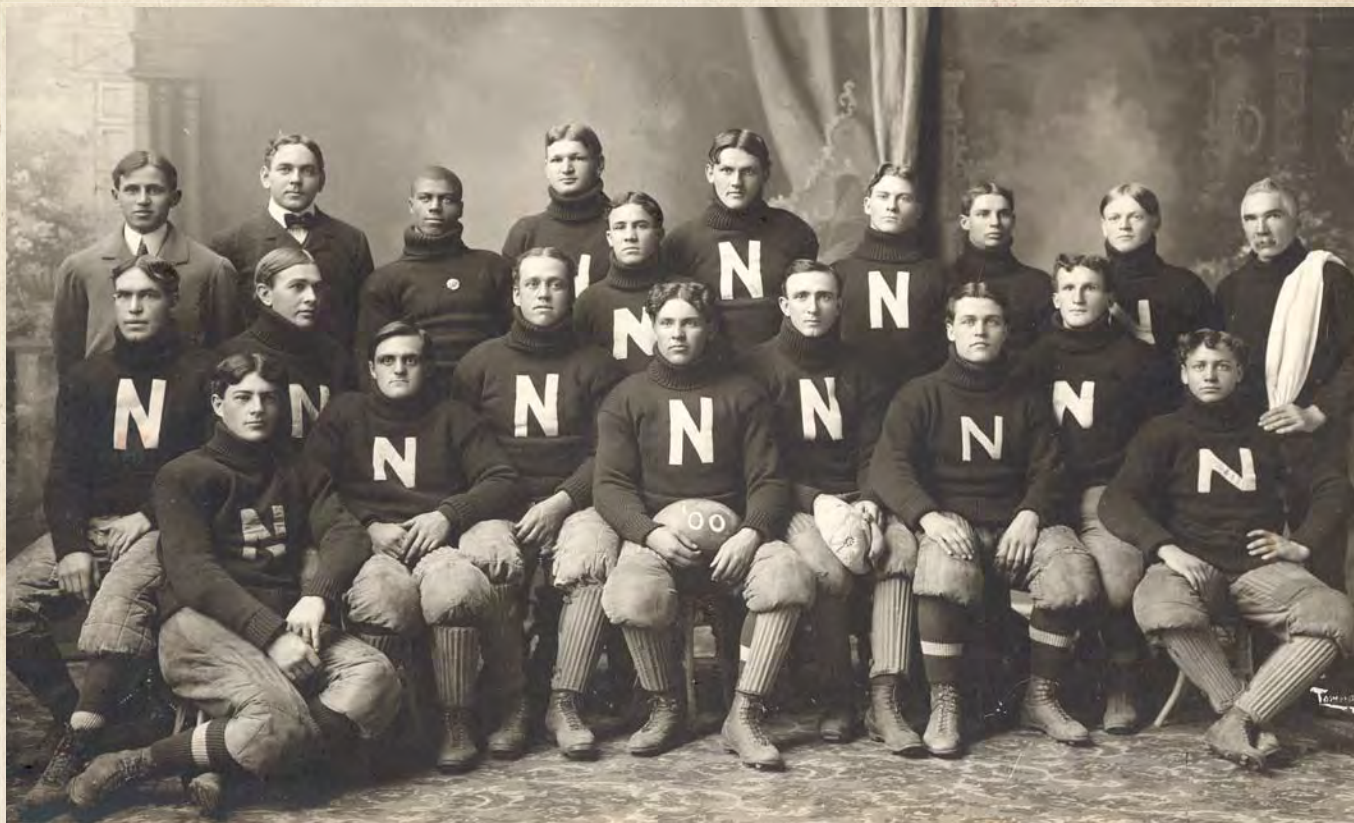
Holiday cards and paper items at "The Next Chapter", next door to The Bluebird.

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The 1900 University of Nebraska football team. No longer the Bugeaters, this was the first NU team to be called Cornhuskers.

## A Brief History Nebraska Nicknames

By James E. Potter, Nebraska State Historical Society

The selection in 2005 of a final design for the Nebraska quarter, winnowed from thousands of suggestions Nebraskans submitted, reminded us of just how seriously we take the symbols and slogans that represent our state to outsiders. Do we want to be remembered for some unique physical landmark, such as Chimney Rock (which ended up being chosen for the quarter), or for some historical milestone, such as the first homestead in the United States or as the home of Arbor Day? Perhaps we'd like to call attention to our political innovations, such as the unicameral legislature or our publicly-owned power system. Is being recognized primarily as a college football powerhouse a plus or minus? Should we present ourselves as looking back into the past, or forward into the future? Similar issues come up each time our license plates are redesigned.

In Nebraska's early years, it had to overcome the label assigned by the early explorers: "The Great American Desert." It soon became apparent that this perception was faulty but even now, we who live here know that not every part of Nebraska is suited by climate or landscape for agriculture, particularly without irrigation. And a New Yorker driving through the Sandhills might think the "desert" label still applies, though we know the region as the world's best cattle country. We also realize that Nebraska is not entirely

flat, but tell that to travelers who never leave I-80.

Nicknames have often revealed how Nebraskans perceived themselves, or were perceived by others. We have been blessed (or cursed) with various nicknames, including "Bug Eaters," "Tree Planters" and "Cornhuskers." Nebraska has had two official state names: "The Tree Planter State" (1895-1945) and "The Cornhusker State" (1945-present). From 1956 through 1965, the license plate carried the motto, "The Beef State," but it was never an official state name by act of the legislature.

Apparently "Squatters" was the earliest nickname applied to Nebraskans, according to a July 21, 1860, article in the *Omaha Weekly Nebraskan*. This term undoubtedly surfaced because many early Nebraska settlers moved onto their claims before the land had been surveyed. Although being called squatters was not very flattering or inspiring, other state nicknames of that era arguably were worse. How about the South Carolina Weasels, the Illinois Suckers, the Alabama Lizards, the Georgia Buzzards, the Missouri Pukes or the Mississippi Tadpoles? Several state nicknames in 1860 were the same as today, for example, the Wisconsin Badgers, Michigan Wolverines and Iowa Hawkeyes.

By the later years of the 19th century, "Bug Eaters" had replaced "Squatters" as the unofficial Nebraska nickname. According to John A. MacMurphy, secretary of the Nebraska Territorial Pioneers Association writing in November 1894, the bug eater appellation may have originated during the grasshopper invasions of the 1870s. An easterner came to Nebraska to visit relatives and, on his return home, was asked about conditions here. According to MacMurphy's



The Lincoln Tree Planters minor league baseball team in 1907. Below, cartoon depicting Lincoln sportswriter "Cy" Sherman reflecting on Nebraska nicknames, from the 1939 Almanac for Nebraskans published by the Federal Writers Project.

account, the man responded, "Oh, everything is gone up there. The grasshoppers have eaten the grain up, the potato bugs ate the 'taters all up, and now the inhabitants are eating the bugs to keep alive." Some newspaperman heard the comment and published it as a joke. Other sources attribute the nickname to the Nighthawk, a bird with a voracious appetite for bugs.

MacMurphy argued that the Territorial Pioneers and other groups should promote "Tree Planters" as the official state nickname "and say goodbye to the Bug-eaters forever." Their efforts succeeded when the legislature, on April 4, 1895, passed a resolution declaring Nebraska "The Tree Planter State" in honor of its role as the originator of Arbor Day. Nevertheless, the University of Nebraska football team used the "bug eater" nickname until about 1900 when Lincoln sportswriter Charles H. "Cy" Sherman started referring to the team as "the Cornhuskers," a name that quickly caught on. At that time harvesting corn by hand, "corn husking," was a central feature of Nebraska life; today it is a quaint and dimly-remembered remnant of our agricultural past. ■



James E. Potter (1945-2016) was the senior research historian at the Nebraska State Historical Society.

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NEBRASKA  
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## Stocking Up

By Paula Hoppe, Certified Master Naturalist

The harvest is upon us, and the combines are out in the field bringing in the ripe crops. Gardens are bursting with produce that we preserve for the coming winter. Wildlife are also taking advantage of this season of bounty, preparing for the leaner days of winter or their coming migration. They spend more time foraging afield, and the open canopies and farmland of fall afford us a clearer look at their habits.

- Fall wildlife viewing can be as easy as looking out your window at the backyard bird feeder. Birds increase consumption as winter approaches, and many of the extra seeds are taken and hidden in “caches” under bark, in needle clusters or even in man-made crevices. Blue jays are able to carry food in their throat in an area called the “gular pouch.” With 2 or 3 in the pouch, one in the mouth, and another in the tip of the beak, they may leave the feeder with 5 or 6 seeds which they secrete away.

- **Eastern fox squirrels** are busy gathering and storing nuts, but you also may observe them gathering leaves. They prefer to nest in tree cavities and will use the leaves to line the nest in preparation for the winter weather to come. If suitable cavities are not available, squirrels may also construct nests (called “dreys”) made entirely of leaves, which can be seen in the tops of trees as the fall progresses.

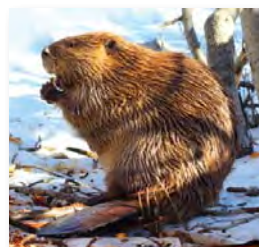
- The **white-footed mouse** has small cheek pouches that can hold close to a teaspoon of food. Prairie voles stockpile as much as two gallons of tubers and roots at a time in underground chambers near their nests.

- Look for **deer** as they are out browsing in the fields and along shelterbelts at dawn and dusk. Acorns are plentiful in the fall, and a favorite, but the main source of food for deer are leaves, twigs and fruits of shrubs and trees.

- **Beavers** are busy stockpiling branches for the coming winter, and the well-worn paths to and from their lodges are easily observed.

- Many animals migrate southward as winter approaches, and increased eating is important to sustain them on their journey. Though we often associate migratory behavior with birds, migrant species are diverse, and include some bats, dragonflies, monarch butterflies and others.

With cooler weather and fewer insects to deal with, fall is an amazing time to get outside and watch as the wildlife of Nebraska prepare for the coming of winter. ■



  
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## Heritage Days Celebration Coming to Washington County

By Renae Blum

Washington County – just north of Omaha – has much to be proud of. First, it has a rich history. Early settlers at Fort Atkinson established Nebraska's first school, farm, hospital and library for the soldiers and their families. The fort itself played a major role in regulating the western fur trade. Then there are the people – strong, warm, friendly and ready to come together to make something great happen.

All of that will be on display during the Washington County Historical Association's inaugural Heritage Days celebration on Oct. 1 and 2, located at Fort Atkinson and in neighboring Fort Calhoun. Produced in partnership with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and many others, Heritage Days will be a weekend filled with food, music, activities for all ages, ways to see and experience the area's early history, and plenty of shows – tractors, quilts, antiques and crafts. Expect hands-on activities, as well.

"We want to make this event as interactive as possible," said organizer Pam Daly.

Early on Oct. 1, guests can take a hot air balloon ride to see an aerial view of the path early settlers took as they followed the footsteps of Lewis and Clark. Living history interpreter Wade Davis will give a presentation using clips from the 2015 Oscar-winning movie, *The Revenant*, about



Cannon firing at Fort Atkinson.

PHOTO COURTESY BOBBANDERSON.COM

fur trader Hugh Glass, who spent time at Fort Atkinson. Other highlights include demonstrations of rope making, candle making, and muzzleloading; a presentation on early meat curing; and performances by the Rivertown String Band.

Activities will take place at both Fort Calhoun and Fort Atkinson State Historical Park, with trolleys shuttling visitors from place to place.

Daly is amazed at how the county and community have rallied together to create what promises to be a signature attraction for this part of the state.

"It all goes back to the original pioneer spirit echoing around here," she said. "That was how people survived, in joining together as a community to create something. We want to show people what that looks like."

To see a full list of the weekend's events, visit [wcHeritageDays.org](http://wcHeritageDays.org).

## Getting Jiggy With It

By Daryl Bauer

As water cools in the fall, baitfish in Nebraska reservoirs school up and begin to move toward deeper waters. Warm afternoons can still pull baitfish shallow, but the general trend is for those baitfish to move toward more stable, deeper waters as fall progresses. A variety of big predator fish follow them, and if you are an angler, you want to be there too.

Some of those baitfish, especially gizzard shad, become stressed and begin to die as the water cools. Vertical-jigging with a variety of artificial baits is an excellent imitation of those stressed, fluttering baitfish upon which walleyes, northern pike, channel catfish, wipers and other predator fish gorge.

The key is to jig as vertically as possible below the boat. Experiment with jigging strokes ranging from only a few inches to several feet. The flutter as the bait falls is usually what triggers fish to bite, so allow the bait to fall freely while still staying in contact with it. When done right, strikes can be detected, but at times on the next upward jig



The author with a channel catfish from Merritt Reservoir caught while vertical jigging.

PHOTO BY DARYL BAUER

stroke a fish will just be there.

A variety of jigging spoons have been favorites for vertical jigging, but blade baits can be equally effective. Do not be afraid to experiment with rattle baits or vertical jigging baits used for ice-fishing. ■

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## Non-toxic Shot for Pheasants

By Jarrod Spilger

Some of Nebraska's best pheasant habitat is located on waterfowl production areas (WPAs) and wildlife management areas (WMAs) which require the use of non-toxic shot.

Steel duck loads will get the job done, but consider downsizing a bit for better results on roosters. Smaller shot sizes, like number 3s, 4s or 5s provide greater pattern density than larger No. 2 shot. Likewise, 3-inch magnums are fine for waterfowl, but a 2¾-inch shell typically holds enough pellets to effectively bag pheasants – with significantly less recoil.

While regular round steel shot used to be the only game in town, pheasant hunters today thankfully have more options, including a trio of non-toxic loads designed specifically for gunning roosters.

The first is Federal Prairie Storm FS Steel. It has a 50/50 payload of round steel and banded Flitestopper steel pellets for improved penetration on heavily feathered birds, like pheasants. The second is Winchester Blind Side Pheasant, which has a full payload of cubed-shaped Hex steel shot for increased knockdown power.

Finally, there's Hevi-Metal Pheasant, which has a 50/50 payload of regular steel and tungsten-based Hevi-Shot pellets. This might be the ultimate option, since the Hevi-Shot component (being denser than steel or even lead) provides maximum penetration and energy, even at a distance.

All three loads are priced similarly and have high velocities ranging from 1,400 to 1,600 feet per second.

Cornfields and CRP tracts may be the obvious places for finding pheasants, but don't overlook those cattail-rimmed wetlands and the grassy uplands surrounding them on WPAs and WMAs in the non-toxic zone. ■



PHOTO BY JARROD SPILGER

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Upcoming Events:

Potter Days - September 2nd-4th

Old Settlers Days - September 3rd-5th

Dalton Fall Festival - September 17th-18th

Oktoberfest and Cruisin' Class Car Show

September 30th-October 2nd

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# Upcoming Events

by Jerry Kane

Contact the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission at 402-471-0641 or visit [outdoornebraska.org](http://outdoornebraska.org) for more information. Visit [huntsafenebraska.org](http://huntsafenebraska.org) for a list of hunter education classes and [boatsafenebraska.org](http://boatsafenebraska.org) for a list of boating safety classes.

**September 30 - October 2**  
Autumn Harvest Art Show  
Eugene T. Mahoney State Park (SP), Ashland

**September 30 - October 2**  
Becoming an Outdoors-Woman Workshop  
Ponca SP, Ponca

**October 1**  
Crow Hunting season opens statewide

**October 1**  
Advance Tickets Sales Begin for Haunted Hollow, Indian Cave SP, Shubert

**October 1**  
Archery Fun Shoot Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

**October 1**  
Critter Corner: Nocturnal Animals  
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

**October 1-2**  
Youth Waterfowl Hunting season in Zones 2 and 4

**October 1-2**  
Living History Weekend Fort Atkinson State Historical Park (SHP), Fort Calhoun

Kayaking a pond at a Becoming an Outdoors-Woman workshop near Halsey.

**October 1-31**  
Paddlefish Snagging season in specific area of Missouri River

**October 2**  
Muzzleloader Antelope Hunting season closes

**October 2**  
Shootout at Salt Creek Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

**October 2, 9, 16, 23**  
Living History Arbor Lodge SHP, Nebraska City

**October 3**  
Haunted Hayrack Ride registration begins, Ponca SP, Ponca

**October 3, 10, 17, 24**  
Outdoor Skills Club Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

**October 4, 11, 18, 25**  
Best Shots Rifle Marksmanship for Ages 10-16 Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

**October 4, 18**  
Women's Introduction to Handguns  
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

**October 5, 12, 19, 26**  
Explore Archery Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

**October 6, 13, 20**  
Explore Archery Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

**October 7**  
Trick or Treat at the Town Indian Cave SP, Shubert

**October 7, 8, 14, 15**  
Mansion Candlelight Tour Buffalo Bill Ranch SHP, North Platte

**October 7, 14, 21**  
Families on Target Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

**October 7, 14, 21, 28**  
Explore Gun Safety Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

**October 8**  
Dark Goose Hunting season opens in North Central Unit

**October 8**  
Light Goose Hunting regular season opens statewide

**October 8**  
White-fronted Goose Hunting season opens statewide

**October 8**  
Duck and Coot Hunting seasons open in Zones 2 and 4

**October 8**  
Fall Harvest Game Day Fort Kearny State Recreation Area (SRA), Kearney

**October 8**  
Halloween is Brewing Eugene T. Mahoney SP, Ashland

**October 8-9**  
Youth Waterfowl Hunting season in Zone 1

**October 8-23**  
Firearm Antelope Hunting season in specific units

**October 8, 14, 15, 21, 22**  
Haunted Hollow Indian Cave SP, Shubert

**October 8, 15**  
Halloweenfest Ponca SP, Ponca

**October 8, 15, 22**  
Halloween Decorating and Costume Contests Indian Cave SP, Shubert

**October 9**  
Rendezvous and Muzzleloader Sight-In Platte River SP, Louisville

**October 10**  
Columbus Day Commission offices closed; Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center is open

**October 11**  
Upland Bird Hunting Workshop  
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

**October 12, 26**  
Bird Walk Lake McConaughy SRA, Ogallala

**October 15**  
Duck and Coot Hunting seasons open in Zone 1

**October 15**  
Pink Pumpkin Walk Indian Cave SP, Shubert

**October 15**  
Jack-O-Lantern Junk and Craft Market Indian Cave SP, Shubert

**October 15**  
Trick or Treat By the Buses Indian Cave SP, Shubert

**October 15**  
Trunk or Treat Calamus Reservoir SRA, Burwell

**October 15**  
Living History Rock Creek Station SHP, Fairbury

**October 16**  
Clear Shot Firearms Concealed Carry Class Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

**October 21**  
Nebraska Game and Parks Board of Commissioners meeting, Ponca SP, Ponca

**October 22**  
Pumpkin Carvers Calamus Reservoir SRA, Burwell

**October 22-23**  
Youth Waterfowl Hunting season in Zone 3

**October 22-23**  
DeSoto October Muzzleloader Deer Hunting season

**October 22-23**  
Youth Pheasant, Quail and Partridge Hunting season statewide

**October 23**  
Archery and Firearm Bull Elk Hunting seasons close

**October 23**  
Antlerless Elk Hunting private land and public land seasons close

**October 25**  
Deer Hunting Workshop  
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

**October 26**  
Deer Hunting Workshop  
Ak-Sar-Ben Aquarium, Gretna

**October 27**  
Duck and Coot Hunting seasons open in Zone 3

**October 27**  
Deer Hunting Workshop  
Chadron State College, Chadron

**October 27**  
Dutch Oven Cooking Workshop  
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

**October 28-31**  
Camp & Treat Red Willow Reservoir SRA, McCook

**October 29**  
Haunted Halloween Hike Night  
Windmill SRA, Gibbon

**October 29**  
Pheasant, Quail and Partridge Hunting seasons open statewide

**October 29**  
Haunted Halloween at the Hollow Ash Hollow SHP, Lewellen

**October 30**  
Dove (all species) Hunting season closes

**October 31**  
Eurasian Collared-dove Only Hunting season opens

**October 31**  
Raccoon and Virginia Opossum Hunting seasons close

**October 31**  
Dark Goose Hunting season opens in East, Platte River, Panhandle and Niobrara Units

**October 31**  
Bullfrog season closes

Pheasant hunting in Holt and Antelope counties.

## NEBRASKALand Visitor



Last issue's winner of the Visitor drawing was Janelle Downing of Norfolk, Nebraska, who found the gypsy moth on page 2.

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 pages 4, 19, 23, 45, or 84.

*The Gypsy moth (Lymantria dispar) is an exotic, invasive species that was first introduced to the U.S. in 1869. A man intentionally brought egg masses to Massachusetts from France and attempted to raise the caterpillars in his backyard. But some escaped and became established in the neighborhood. Although they are not known to occur in Nebraska, they now infest 20 states in the northeast and Midwest. Male moths are brown with feathery antennae, while females are white and unable to fly. Caterpillars have five pairs of blue dots and six pairs of red dots down their back. Caterpillars feed on the foliage of more than 300 species of plants, but especially love oaks. This feeding defoliates the trees, and multiple years of infestations can result in tree death.*

caterpillar

female

male

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



# Aspens

## Ice Age Relicts in Nebraska

By Eric Fowler

If there were a hall of fame for fall color, aspen trees would have been inducted on the first ballot. The tree's ability to turn entire mountainsides shades of yellow, orange and red draws throngs of people to places where the trees grow, especially in the Mountain West.

While not nearly at the same scale, you can see the vivid golden hues of aspens, contrasted against their brilliant white bark, each fall without leaving Nebraska. That fact comes as a surprise to many who assume the patches of yellow leaves they see sparkling in the forest in the fall are simply ash or cottonwoods or other more common trees completing their annual cycle. These small stands are scattered across northern Nebraska, some in seemingly unlikely places. There were once more, many more. Those that remain are relicts that have persisted since the last Ice Age, hanging on as the climate in Nebraska changed.

### Aspen Biology

Two species of aspen trees, members of the deciduous willow or poplar family, are found in North America, growing mostly in dry, colder regions with cool summers. The quaking aspen is the most widely distributed tree on the continent,

growing throughout Canada, in the northeastern United States from the Dakotas east as far south as Indiana and Nebraska, in the Mountain West, mostly at higher elevations, and in other places like the Black Hills. The bigtooth aspen is found throughout southeastern Canada and the northeastern U.S. No native stands are known to grow in Nebraska, and the closest populations are in central Iowa.



Dew glistens on aspen leaves at Smith Falls State Park near Valentine.

Aspens are fast-growing, with both species typically reaching heights of 60 to 80 feet. Quaking aspens have larger trunks, measuring up to 2½ feet

in diameter, compared to 10 inches for bigtooth. The leaves of mature trees are nearly round with toothed edges. Larger teeth on bigtooth leaves give that species its name. The propensity of quaking aspen leaves to flutter and hum in even the slightest breeze are the basis for that species' name. The thin bark of quaking aspen is white or shades of white mixed with gray, green or yellow, with distinctive black

knots and horizontal scars. Bigtooth bark is similar except for its olive-green hue. As trees mature, the bark thickens, especially at the base, and turns gray and rough with vertical grooves, often leaving only the upper reaches of the trunk and small branches white and smooth.

Aspens are either male or female, and produce seed heads called catkins that are pollinated by the wind. In regions where both species are found, they are known to hybridize. But despite being prolific seed producers, the species rarely grows from them. Aspens are a clonal species, sending up sprouts or suckers from a shallow root system that develop into stems or trees. These stems remain connected by the

roots, and entire aspen stands can be made up of a single clone. The largest known clone of quaking aspens is also believed to be the largest organism

Golden aspen leaves glow in the morning sun at Smith Falls State Park. The park and neighboring land are home to 12 stands of a hybrid between bigtooth and quaking aspen.

PHOTOS BY ERIC FOWLER



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

A stand of quaking aspen grows beneath a cliff along West Ash Creek in the Nebraska National Forest near Crawford.

in the world. Made up of 40,000 individual trees, Pando, Latin for “I Spread,” covers about 106 acres on the Fishlake National Forest in Utah and weighs an estimated 13 million pounds. While individual trees can live about 150 to 200 years, Pando is estimated to be 80,000 years old. As older trees die, they fall and make room for new sprouts. The clonal growth makes it difficult to contain or kill the tree, which is considered a weed in some portions of its range.

A pioneering, early-successional species, aspens grow in a variety of soils from sand to rock, doing best

in moist soils, and require plenty of sunshine. They readily colonize areas disturbed by fire or other means. Those same disturbances help maintain a stand, which will respond with a flurry of suckers, the strongest of which weed out the others to become trees. While aspens can dominate an area, they are often replaced by shade-tolerant conifers like pines, which eventually will shade out the aspens.

## Ice Out

Two million years ago, glaciers covered the eastern quarter of

Nebraska, as evidenced by the boulders that litter the countryside. But it was the end of the last Ice Age and the Pleistocene epoch to which Nebraska’s aspens can be traced.

The Wisconsinian Glaciation, the last advance of the Laurentide Ice Sheet that began 85,000 years ago, covered all of Canada and most of the northern United States, barely crossing Nebraska’s northeastern border.

Nebraska was a much colder place then. Forests here, and in points as far south as Texas, were dominated by spruce and other species that now comprise the boreal forest that spans

Canada and parts of the northeastern U.S. When the glaciers began to retreat about 12,000 to 15,000 years ago, the climate warmed and dried, the boreal forest species shifted northward, and Nebraska’s landscape evolved into the diverse mix of forest and prairie found here today. But where boreal species found refuge, they survived.

One such place is the Pine Ridge. Large stands of quaking aspens were once found in the rugged, forested hills of northwestern Nebraska, finding suitable growing conditions in the deep, cool drainages. Periodic wildfires kept ponderosa pines in check that

# Landscaping with Aspens

Aspen trees can provide a colorful addition to the landscape around a home or acreage, but they aren’t right for every yard. Where they do fit, one variety with roots in Nebraska is proving to be a better choice for the climate here, throughout the Great Plains and beyond than others with origins in the mountains.

Because of the way aspens grow, sending out roots laterally that then send up shoots vertically, planting one tree can result in many. For that reason, Justin Evertson, assistant director of the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, said he is hesitant to recommend them as an ornamental landscape tree. “I’ve heard more than one person cursing all of these root sprouts coming up everywhere,” he said. They are better suited for a park, school or acreage, Evertson said, where sprouts can be left to form a stand.

A good variety to plant in Nebraska is Prairie Gold™ Aspen, which was first propagated in the 1970s from cuttings taken from a relict quaking aspen stand near Leigh by the late Allen Wilke, a nurseryman from Columbus. Todd Faller of Faller Nursery in York and others received some of those cuttings from Wilke, and raised and sold them. While a member of the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum board, Faller worked with J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co., a national wholesale nursery in Oregon, to trademark the variety and introduce it in the 2008 Great Plants for the Great Plains program. Schmidt now has exclusive rights to produce Prairie Gold, and returns a portion of the sale of every tree to the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum.

The tree, which can grow 30 to 40 feet high and 15 feet wide, can be planted in anything from moist sandy soil to shallow rocky soils to clay. It appears to handle heat and humidity better than other varieties, and is also more resistant to drought and disease. Faller said he’s sold trees to homeowners in Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, Alabama, Kentucky and Georgia, and they appear to be doing well. “What has been surprising is we’ve put it in areas where people want to have aspen, but they’ve never dreamt of growing aspen,” Faller said. He’s heard it is even doing better on the Colorado Front Range than aspens from that state.

Even with the native varieties, aspens used in the landscape grow better in the drier climate of western Nebraska. ■



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Quaking aspen are among the many trees growing in the five-acre Earl G. Maxwell Arboretum on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln East Campus.



**A relict stand of quaking aspens grows on the edge of Dewey Marsh on the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge in the Sandhills.**

would have outcompeted aspens for sunlight. After settlement, with fires controlled, pines expanded. In the shade of those pines, cottonwood, green ash, American elm, hackberry, willow, boxelder and other deciduous trees replaced aspens in the creekbottoms. Where they weren't outcompeted by other trees, grazing of suckers by cattle, deer and elk has limited regeneration.

Today, scattered stands of aspens are found throughout the Pine Ridge in Sioux, Dawes and Sheridan counties. Buffalo Bruce McIntosh, an ecologist with the Western Nebraska Resources Council, has been working for many years to map and preserve aspens in Nebraska. He believes there are about 40 native aspen stands in the region, including one on land he manages in West Ash Creek. Others are found on public land in the Pine Ridge Ranger District of the Nebraska National Forest, in places like East Ash and Bordeaux creeks. Still more are known

to exist on private land.

There are also several stands of aspens in the region that were planted from cuttings taken from a native clone on the Ponderosa Wildlife Management Area (WMA) near Crawford. Lon Lemmon, who spent 40 years as a biologist with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission on the area before retiring 10 years ago, grew up on the area, where his father and partner ran cattle before selling it to the Commission in 1966. At that time, the aspen stand, located in a draw in the southern portion of the area, contained only five or six mature trees. Lemmon said once cattle were removed, a flourish of suckers sprouted. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, he and others started digging them and moving them to other locations on the Pine Ridge in what he called a "seat of the pants" operation. At least two of those planted stands persist on the Ponderosa WMA, one on Gilbert Baker WMA north of Harrison and one on Metcalf

WMA north of Hay Springs. The native stand has also spread from the bottom of the draw more than 50 yards up the north-facing slope, and now contains numerous stems that cover a half acre. "They can do it pretty good if something don't eat them up," Lemmon said.

Another planted stand is growing on the banks of Soldier Creek on the west edge of Fort Robinson State Park. McIntosh and a team of college students helped the Commission plant about 300 aspens in the drainage following the wildfire that burned through the area in 1989. Only these survived a flood that followed in 1991.

A small native stand is also found on Gilbert Baker WMA, but is suffering from encroachment by pines and other trees. Greg Schenbeck, a biologist with the Commission, said they are making plans to thin competing trees to rejuvenate the stand. At Metcalf, Schenbeck said staff recently found another aspen tree that may be native

and was stimulated and revealed by the wildfire that burned through that area in 2012.

The largest aspen stand in Nebraska covers several acres of Nebraska National Forest property near the Hudson-Meng Research and Education Center north of Crawford. That stand has been fenced to protect it from grazing cattle. With help from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, the fenced area was recently expanded to allow the clone to spread even farther.

State and federal foresters aren't certain of the status of most stands in the Pine Ridge. "They could all stand a little more aspen care," said Fred McCartney, a fuels reduction specialist with the Nebraska Forest Service in Chadron, who has helped a few landowners with cost-share programs to rejuvenate their stands and would like to help with more.

The most visited native aspens in the state grow in a mile-long stretch of the

Niobrara River in and around Smith Falls State Park in Cherry County, a segment that is part of the Niobrara National Scenic River. A dozen stands of these survivors, a unique hybrid cross of quaking and bigtooth aspen, grow in the cool, moist spring-branch canyons on the south side of the river alongside paper birch, another Ice Age relict, ponderosa pines and burr oaks. Some are on private land upriver from the park, others downriver on The Nature Conservancy's Niobrara Valley Preserve. The stands are in poor health, suffering from encroachment and shading by other trees, disease, insects, browsing and warming temperatures. Much work has been done during the last decade to rejuvenate them, and more will come. (See sidebar on Page 32-33.)

McIntosh collected leaves from the Smith Falls aspens, as well as from 11 other stands across the state, one in the Loess Hills at Stone State Park in

Sioux City, Iowa, and one in the Black Hills, for genetic testing completed by a U.S. Forest Service laboratory. The DNA testing found that all of the aspens at Smith Falls originated from a single clone. More recent samples collected for a University of Minnesota study and subjected to more in-depth tests found that there are three genotypes found among the 12 stands, according to Nick Deacon, a post-doctorate researcher leading the study. From this, researchers speculate that the original clone was separated by erosion as the Niobrara Valley deepened, and three remaining clones, which have since been further divided, have been around long enough to develop their own characteristics.

Other scattered stands of quaking aspen persist in places much less hospitable to the species, leaving trees that are much shorter and smaller than those found elsewhere. One is found on the Bessey Ranger District of the

PHOTOS BY ERIC FOWLER



**Short, scrubby quaking aspens grow among soapweeds on a north-facing slope in the Sandhills on the Bessey Division of the Nebraska National Forest near Halsey.**



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Nebraska National Forest in Thomas County near Halsey. The 94,000-acre district is mostly Sandhills, but contains the largest hand-planted forest in the country. In the southwestern corner of the forest, about 20 scrubby aspens, none much more than 10 feet tall or 6 inches in diameter, grow on a north-facing dune. Cattle graze the pasture, but there is regeneration among the stand, with both suckers and young trees present. A similar stand grows on another north-facing slope on private land west of the forest, but has been declining since deep ruts left by grazing cattle severed the clones' roots. Schenbeck stumbled on the stand while conducting grouse research in the 1980s. "I was really surprised," he said. "That's the first one that I even knew about in the Sandhills." Cuttings from one of these stands are believed to have been used to start another near the forest's main campground.

On the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge, there are two stands of aspens. One grows on a flat right to the edge of a marsh near Watts Lake, with two thick stands of small, straight stems, and some larger ones between, the largest of which is about 20 feet tall. The other grows at the base of a south-facing dune on the edge of the Dewey Marsh, with about 80 trees, all 15 to 20 feet in height but of varying age.

Other stands of quaking aspens have been recorded in the Nebraska State Museum from Blaine, Colfax, Holt, Richardson and Thurston counties. The latter was collected in 1944 along a stream that once appeared on maps as Aspen Creek. None are believed to be alive today, presumably lost to pressure from other tree species and agriculture.

The stand in Colfax County grew next to a spring-fed creek in a draw near Leigh. In the 1970s, the late Allen Wilke, a nurseryman from Columbus, took cuttings from the stand, which wasn't far from the farm where he grew up. His son, Evan, visited the stand about 30 years ago. "The trees were probably a foot in diameter and 40 feet tall," he said. "There was a grove of quite a few of them on the east-facing bank of the ravine where they didn't get the hot afternoon exposure." A single standing trunk is all that remains of the stand, but those cuttings Wilke and others propagated

are now sold as Prairie Gold Aspen and now grow in yards, parks and acreages across the country (see sidebar on Page 27).

There are other odd aspen stands in pastures in Cherry and Sheridan counties. There are likely more on private land in the Sandhills and Pine Ridge and elsewhere that have gone unnoticed or unreported.

"Each stand is unique and they've evolved to fit the geology and geography of the area," McIntosh said.

Like most, Robert Kaul, Curator and Research Professor in the botany division at the University of Nebraska State Museum, assumes that most of Nebraska's aspens are Ice Age relicts that have "just hung on for about 10,000 years after the ice melted." But he also wonders if the stands scattered in the Sandhills may have grown from seeds that blew in during one of several occasions during that period when the dunes were actively shifting. "But you know, nobody has any real data on that. It's just a guess," Kaul said.

There may soon be some data to back up the theory, at least for the aspens at Smith Falls. Deacon said the researchers involved in the University of Minnesota study hope analysis of cuttings taken from hybrid aspens at Smith Falls and from bigtooth and quaking aspen stands across Nebraska as well as on the edges of their ranges in South Dakota, Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin will reveal when the hybridization occurred, something that is believed to have happened when the species' ranges overlapped during the Ice Age.

## Time Will Tell

How long Nebraska's aspens will persist is anyone's guess. Across the West, foresters have been noting the decline of aspens for decades, pointing to reduced fire frequency and heavy browsing by elk, deer and other large ungulates. Others say the species expanded with the logging that followed settlement and is simply returning to its pre-settlement level. In recent years, however, the widespread, rapid dieback of aspens, something foresters have dubbed Sudden Aspen Decline, has taken a larger toll. Foresters theorize that



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

(Left) A fallen aspen leaf rests on a rotting log in a spring-branch canyon at Smith Falls State Park. (Above) The white bark of a quaking aspen growing near West Ash Creek in the Pine Ridge carries black scars from injuries.

widespread drought stressed trees, making them vulnerable to pathogens and insects. Affected stands don't seem to be regenerating through shoots like healthy aspen clones normally do.

With warmer, dryer weather predicted as climate change progresses, some worry the die-off will continue and worsen. The University of Minnesota study is testing theories on both aspen species and the Smith Falls hybrid in their greenhouses in St. Paul.

"So the question is, are all of these things just hanging on and maybe on their way out, as some people think, as the climate warms?" Kaul said.

Time will tell. But they are unique enough that some will continue to sustain the few stands there are in Nebraska. And maybe, since they've made it this far, they will continue to provide a golden splash of color to the landscape each fall. ■

# Aspens at Smith Falls

A project that began as an effort to rejuvenate and preserve 12 relict stands of aspen trees in and around Smith Falls State Park grew into something much larger that improved forest and grassland health throughout the park. It also spurred research that can guide future management and is providing interesting genetic background for these unique hybrids.

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission horticulturists began recognizing the problem facing the aspens at Smith Falls, a hybrid between quaking and bigtooth aspens, even before the park opened in 1992. With natural fires controlled, invasive eastern red cedars were spreading through the forest understory and into adjacent grasslands, and in some places ponderosa pines had become too dense. This was the case not only in the park, but throughout the entire Niobrara River Valley, 76 miles of which below Valentine was designated in 1991 as a National Scenic River. The forest is comprised mainly of pine and oak, but a 30-mile reach that includes Smith Falls also includes stands of paper birch, a relict of the boreal forest, one of six ecosystems that meet here in what is considered a biological crossroads. Within that reach, aspens are known to grow only within a one-mile segment from just above the 200-acre park to the bend below it.

Cedars and pines growing beneath and above the aspens inhibited the growth and survival of suckers, limiting regeneration in the stands, most of which consist of only

a few old trees. Commission staff cleared cedars from beneath some stands in the mid-1990s. A decade later, the National Park Service took an interest in the aspens, and a partnership between the agencies and others was born, along with a plan to do more.

Starting in 2008, staff from both agencies, as well as volunteers, used chainsaws to clear cedars and brush from beneath the aspen stands on the park, as well as those on adjacent land owned by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and by Fred Krzyzanowski, who leases the land for Smith Falls State Park to the Commission.

Knowing the aspens and the rest of the forest would benefit from a prescribed fire, the Commission sought and received \$60,000 in grants from the Nebraska Environmental Trust, and additional funding from the Nebraska Forest Service, to hire a contractor to thin unwanted trees that would have made any burn unsafe. A skid-steer-mounted shear and grinder cleared every cedar that could be reached in 2010 and 2011. Additional work was done by hand in places the shear couldn't reach. The work reduced forest density by 50 percent or more. After scratching burn plans for two years because of weather that was either too dry or too wet, a TNC crew was finally able to burn the 65 acres that had been thinned in Smith Falls and another 3 miles of their Niobrara Valley Preserve downriver to Brewer Bridge.

The results of both the thinning and the fire have been beneficial for the aspens, resulting in a substantial flush of suckers beneath the stands. Further work has been done to protect those suckers from browsing deer by erecting fence enclosures beneath the stands. A Park Service-funded study by James Robertson, a graduate student at the University of South Dakota, found that browsing severely limited the growth and survival of suckers that were not protected by fence or slash piles left when the stands were cleared.

But the news is not all good for the Smith Falls aspens. Robertson's study examined the health of 10 of the 12 stands in 2013 and 2015, and found 80 mature trees, including dead or dying trees in all size classes. He found that the smaller, younger stands are stable to improving, but the older trees in larger stands continue to lose canopy and die, presumably the effect of competition for limited resources. Robertson said the conditions are similar to the Sudden Aspen Decline occurring across the range of quaking aspen, especially at the edges of their range, that is believed to be the result of a changing climate.

A recent U.S. Geological Survey study documented warming temperatures in the spring-branch canyons along the river. The cool, moist microclimate in those north-facing canyons has supported paper birch, but that species is also in decline, a problem believed to be caused by drought and warm periods in early spring followed by late freezes.

A study currently underway at the University of Minnesota will help determine if those same weather factors are affecting aspens. Hybrid aspens grown in greenhouses from cuttings taken at Smith Falls, as well as quaking and bigtooth aspens collected elsewhere in the northern Plains, are being subjected to extended drought and late freezes, conditions expected to increase, to see how each species responds. Nick Deacon, a post doctorate researcher leading the work, which also includes a genetic study of aspens from Nebraska, South Dakota, Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin,



Many of the mature trees in aspen stands at Smith Falls State Park are in poor health, losing canopy and dying.



Flagging tape marks an aspen sprout in a stand above the falls at Smith Falls State Park after cedars and other trees were cleared to promote suckering.

said results are expected next year and will help managers know how the stands might react to the changing climate.

Other forestry experts brought into the fray have pointed to other causes for declining aspen health, including oystershell scale, a condition caused by an insect that forms a hard shell on the bark while feeding beneath it.

Work continues to preserve the aspens. TNC crews have been clearing cedar trees throughout their 56,000-acre Niobrara Valley Preserve, and planned to do more thinning in their aspen grove this summer. Commission staff hope they can help conduct additional prescribed burns in the park every 5 or 10 years to both stimulate aspen growth and control cedar regrowth. Managers also hope a thinner, healthy forest void of ladder fuels will help slow a wildfire like the one that burned 74,000 acres of the Niobrara Valley downstream in 2012.

The park is certainly better for the work. "From a recreational standpoint, you couldn't see the forest for the trees," said Mike Groenewold, horticulturist with the Commission. "It was daunting to anyone that might want to walk through there. Now the woodlands are much more open and user-friendly. That will benefit wildlife, too. We've created sunlit openings where grasses and forbs are coming back where they were once too shaded for anything to grow."

No one knows whether the aspens, which survived drastic climate change since the last ice age, will persist. But managers will continue to look for ways to control the things they can.

"Aspens in Nebraska are a unique relict of a bygone era," said Groenewold. "There are so few groves remaining in the central Niobrara River Valley that it certainly seemed worthwhile to try to bring them back or at least sustain what we have left as a representative of this resource." ■



Commission employee Guy McLaughlin installs a fence to protect aspen suckers from browsing deer at Smith Falls State Park.

# On Becoming a Meat Hunter

While many deer hunters pursue trophy bucks, others prefer harvesting young bucks, does and fawns for the fine quality of their meat.

Fatless venison steaks, cut from the hind quarters of a doe.

By Gerry Steinauer, Botanist

I remember it well. It was Thanksgiving morning of my sophomore year of college. I had just arrowed my first-ever deer on my aunt and uncle's place on the Elkhorn River. Back at our house in Millard, when I popped the trunk of my American Motors Ambassador to show the gathered family my harvest, the first words I heard were those of my laughing brother-in-law: "Jeez Gerry, you shot a dog!" Actually, it was a fawn.

Though the critic deflated my festive mood, it taught me a valuable lesson: "If seeking praise, shoot a bigger deer, preferably one with antlers."

For several hunting seasons following, I tried to fulfill those expectations, but was hindered by a bad case of buck fever. Whenever an antlered deer approached my stand, my heart pounded uncontrollably and my mind and body functioned as if seized by delirium tremens. My arrows faithfully sailed high, low or wide, and once even shook right off the rest. Annoyed by the whizzing arrows, the bucks would faithfully trot off, their waving white tails signaling "better luck next time." In my youthful years of bow hunting, I did manage to bag one basket buck at close range and a few does and fawns – I maintained better composure when antlers were not visible.

After graduate school and a few years working out-of-state, I returned to Nebraska and began muzzleloader hunting with my older brother, Bob, in the rolling pastures and woods around our ancestors' hometown of Steinauer in Pawnee County. Bob was a more experienced and skilled hunter than me, and also a verified meat hunter.

Not selective about his quarry, he shot fawns, does or bucks, whatever first wandered into his sights. He was also a more refined butcher and chef of



Large does are a choice target for meat hunters.

PHOTO BY JON FARRAR

venison than me, and under his tutelage I learned these arts. My conversion to meat hunter had begun.

Prior to this, I, like many others, was not a big fan of venison. It was too dry and rangy flavored for my raised-on-beef tastes. Bob's first lesson: when

butchering a deer, remove every last speck of fat from the meat, for it tastes nasty. Luckily, deer fat is located on the outside of the muscle groups, not marbled throughout the meat like on beef, and therefore, removable. On front and hind quarters, for example, using a sharp knife, we separated the muscle groups and cut them from the bone, then tediously trimmed the layers and globules of fat from the meat. The roasts were then wrapped individually in cellophane and then a layer of freezer paper before freezing to prevent freezer burn. Not until thawed and ready for use did we cut the roasts into hearty, thick steaks.

Bob also knew the benefits of a good marinade (see sidebar for our favorite recipe), and I was soon marinating my up-to-an-inch-and-a-half-thick steaks in the spicy brew for up to 24 hours before grilling or pan frying. Poking the marinade deep into the meat with a fork several times during the soaking allowed the acidic vinegars to further break down muscle fibers, increasing tenderness. A good marinade also enhances the meat's flavor, while hiding the last vestiges of that "wild, deer taste." Sometimes I forego the marinade and roll the raw steaks in a mixture of onion powder, garlic powder, poultry seasoning, salt and pepper, forming a thick coating. Prepared in this fashion, the steaks come off the grill with a flavorful black crust that contrasts with a juicy, pink interior.

Another error of my youth: I would fry or grill my lean deer steaks at a high temperature to well-done shoe leather. Again it was brother Bob who

taught me not to cook venison beyond medium-rare or medium. Overcooking the fatless venison makes it tough and brings out the wild flavor. I favor slow grilling at a low temperature over rested charcoals, while occasionally basting the meat with marinade. The result is a juicy, tender steak – "worthy of the finest of restaurants" in the words of one dinner guest.

I now also age my deer, letting them hang in the coolness of my garage for four or five days before butchering. During the aging process, which all store-bought beef goes through, natural enzymes in the muscles break down fibers enhancing tenderness and flavor. If temperatures in the garage rise above 55 F, increasing the chance of bacterial growth, or there is a threat of the meat freezing, I will immediately butcher the animal. I age my deer with the skin off; others leave the skin on. When aged, even the large muscle groups from the

upper legs make good steaks. I cube for stew meat or grind for burger only the meat from the lower legs, neck and scraps.

In recent years, I have found that deer hunting with a gun and bullet, rather than bow and arrow, compensates for my buck fever, and I have managed to bring down a couple somewhat larger bucks – nothing overly praise-worthy. Honestly, I found the meat of these 2½-year-old bucks rather tough and tangy. Like my brother before me, I now target young bucks (1½ years in age), does, and in times of plentiful deer, even fawns, the most tender-meated of all deer. Driven by gastronomical interests,



PHOTO BY GERRY STEINAUER

my conversion to meat hunter is now complete. ■

Gerry Steinauer is a botanist for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and has been writing and photographing for NEBRASKAland for over 25 years.



## Bob's Delicious Deer Marinade

Ingredients:

- ¼ cup soy sauce
- ¼ cup red wine vinegar
- 2 tbsp of balsamic vinegar
- 2 heaping tbsp Dijon Chardonnay mustard (or other mustards)
- 2 tsp Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tsp black pepper
- 3 cloves crushed garlic
- A dash or two of habanero sauce (to taste)
- ½ cup olive oil (add last)

Using a fork, mix the ingredients in a bowl. Place the steaks in the bowl making sure the meat is covered by the marinade. Marinate the steaks from a few to up to 24 hours (keep the steaks refrigerated during the process). Occasionally poke the marinade into the meat using a fork. Once marinated, the steaks can be grilled or pan fried. When grilling, baste the steaks once or twice with leftover marinade. This recipe also works well for grouse, pheasant and other wild game.

PHOTO BY GERRY STEINAUER



Aged, marinated and slow-grilled deer steaks will impress dinner guests.

# Commissioners' Hunt

## Rooster Roundup Shows Bird Numbers on the Rise

*By Jenny Nguyen and Julie Geiser*

Commissioner Robert Allen hunts at Grove Lake Wildlife Management Area near Royal with his black Labrador retriever, Moon, and French Brittany, Cate.

Out to prove that Nebraska still has great pheasant hunting, Game and Parks Commissioners created the “Rooster Roundup” in 2015 to see for themselves the state of public pheasant hunting in Nebraska. Led by the late Commissioner Lynn Berggren of Broken Bow, who was an avid pheasant hunter and a strong proponent of aggressive habitat management for these birds, several walk-in public hunting areas across the state were chosen for this experiment. Commissioners Robert Allen and Dick Bell also joined the effort.

The purpose of the Roundup was to tell a story about

how planting suitable habitat can help increase upland bird populations and thus allow for hunting success on public lands. The commissioners believe in the “if you build it, they will come” concept. Good habitat will hold birds. And if you have birds, hunters will come and continue to pass on the tradition.

Rooster Roundup hunts took place over November and December in 2015. The commissioners traveled to several locations to hunt birds: Sherman Reservoir State Recreation Area (SRA) and Wildlife Management Area (WMA) near Loup City, Davis Creek Reservoir WMA south of North

Loup, Verona Wetlands Complex near Aurora, Grove Lake WMA and CRP lands near Royal, and Elk Point Bend WMA near Ponca. Biologists and habitat managers accompanied the commissioners on these hunts, and they discussed their work to increase bird numbers in their specific areas.

The hunters found success at every location. Furthermore, a recent annual hunter harvest survey confirmed what the commissioners experienced on their outings – that pheasant and quail populations are recovering from the harsh drought of 2012.

“This is an exciting time to be an upland game hunter in

Nebraska,” said Karie Decker, the Commission’s interim wildlife division administrator. “To see such large increases in upland bird harvests shows that our pheasant and quail populations are rebounding and that hunters are taking notice.”

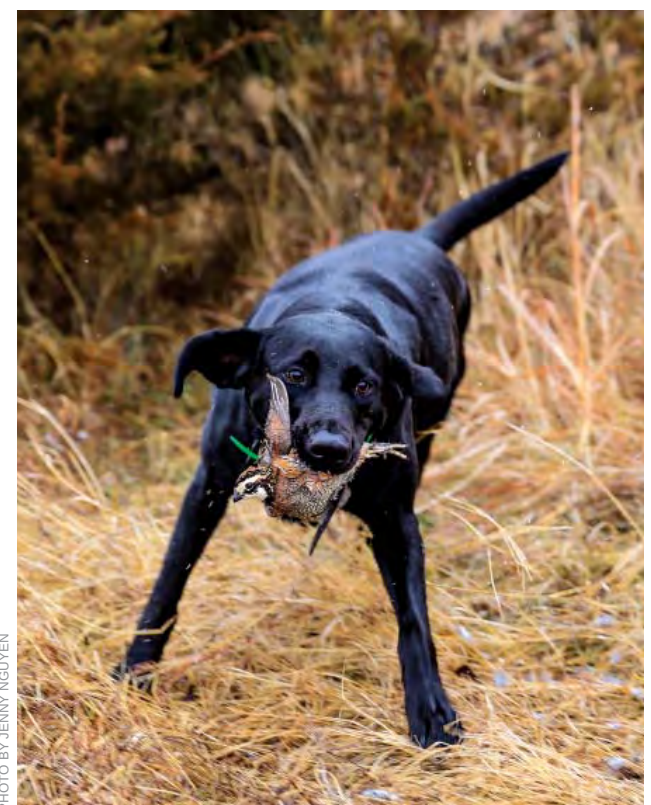
### Good Habitat, More Birds

According to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission’s most recent annual hunter harvest survey, pheasant harvest increased by 26 percent, from an estimated



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN

Commissioner Dick Bell hunts for pheasants at the Verona Wetlands Complex south of Aurora. This Ducks Unlimited property offers nearly 1,000 acres of public access lands.



Commissioner Robert Allen's black Labrador, Moon, retrieves a bobwhite quail at Grove Lake WMA.

PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN

131,423 birds in 2014 to 166,285 in 2015. And quail harvest was up by 73 percent, with 52,947 birds harvested in 2014 compared to 91,147 in 2015. The same survey also showed that resident small-game permit holders increased by 2 percent while nonresident permits spiked upwards by 23 percent.

Populations of pheasants and quail in Nebraska have increased due to several factors. First, most areas of the state experienced relatively mild winters in recent years, which resulted in high overwinter survival. Second, timely rains early in the spring stimulated growth of native grasses and forbs, creating prime nesting cover for both pheasants and quail. Following the hatch, a good number of insects and plant seeds were available for chicks to advance them into adulthood. Finally, this quality habitat provided sufficient cover and food sources, which carried the birds through cold winter months.

The commissioners saw bird numbers consistent with the harvest increases while hunting during the Rooster Roundup. They also saw great habitat. At many WMAs, planting food plots, grazing, light disking, burning and cedar tree removal are some tactics public land managers have used to improve pheasant habitat on their areas. Disturbances such as these create bare ground, stimulate annual grasses and broadleaf plants, and improve habitat diversity, which are key factors in producing and holding pheasants.

"Milo food plots provide a good food source along with cover and winter loafing areas for birds and deer," said Mark

Feeney, the biologist responsible for managing Sherman Reservoir WMA, the location of the Rooster Roundup's first stop on Nov. 10, 2015.

"Milo is a drought tolerant crop that provides needed protein and carbohydrates for upland birds," Feeney said.

This upcoming season is expected to produce similar results. Early reports indicate that 2015-16 overwinter survival was good for upland game in Nebraska, and both April and July Rural Mail Carriers Surveys showed population levels similar to last year.

## Rooster Roundup

At Sherman Reservoir SRA and WMA in central Nebraska, Commissioner Berggren commented repeatedly on the amount of cover, food plots and other plantings he saw. He was amazed by the number of pheasants and quail on the area. Sherman offers about 3,600 acres of public land that not only holds pheasants and quail, but also many turkeys and deer. The commissioners and their guests bagged six pheasants and five quail at this location.

The second Rooster Roundup trip took place on Nov. 13 at the Verona Complex, a Ducks Unlimited property located near Aurora. In just four hours, the commissioners saw at least 15 birds. At lunch in a nearby restaurant, a patron told the commissioners that this was the best pheasant hunting season he has experienced in 10-12 years.

"If you're limited to hunting public ground versus not having access to private ground, you shouldn't have any hesitations," said Commissioner Allen of the hunt in Aurora. "It was perfectly good hunting. You will have the chance to bring home birds."

The hunt at Davis Creek WMA on Nov. 25 was a great example of locals coming together to work toward a common cause: building habitat, increasing pheasants, and passing on traditions. Jim Conn, Pheasants Forever (PF) coordinating wildlife biologist, said management efforts at Davis Creek were made possible by the rallying efforts of passionate locals such as Charles Beebe and John DeRiso, as well as volunteers from the Cedar River Ring Necks PF chapter.

"It's a team effort," Beebe said. "NGPC, Pheasants Forever, and volunteers have all helped by donating seed, drills, equipment and time to make improvements to Davis Creek." And it's all for the purpose of passing on the hunting tradition to others.

The final hunts in the Rooster Roundup series spanned two days, Dec. 16-17, in northeastern Nebraska. On the first day, commissioners hunted Grove Lake WMA and CRP fields near Royal. Minutes into the hunt, they bumped up 30 quail. By the end of the day, six pheasants and six quail were bagged. That day, Commissioner Berggren said he hunted some of the best pheasant habitat he has ever seen.

The last hunt happened the next day at Elk Point Bend WMA, 1,600 acres of public property north of Ponca State Park. Elk Point Bend is a good example of how pheasants thrive in grassland habitats, where managers have blended high diversity prairie restorations and large blocks of annual weeds. Now with early successional habitat, plants such as kochia, Russian thistle, sunflowers, hemp, and foxtail thrive there, and the pheasants love it, according to Scott Wessel, a

Commission northeast district manager.

"Every six feet, there's a roosting site," Berggren said, as he emerged from the end of the field. "There's poop everywhere."

The hunters shot four roosters but must have seen at least 150 birds at Elk Point Bend.

Overall, the commissioners were impressed with the birds and habitat they saw on the Rooster Roundup. They advised that a good dog is essential to hunt public land, "but the opportunity in Nebraska to hunt pheasants is out there," Berggren said.

## The Berggren Plan

The untimely death of Lynn Berggren in February shocked the outdoor community. He was in the midst of serving his final year on the Commission.



Commissioner Lynn Berggren hunts at Grove Lake WMA. NGPC's Berggren Plan was named in his honor.

PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN

“During his tenure as commissioner, Lynn was an ardent supporter and advocate for wildlife conservation, habitat management, and improving opportunities to enjoy the outdoors,” said Nebraska Game and Parks Director Jim Douglas. “Lynn served with passion, dedication and was always looking for innovative ways to better serve the public.”

Though gone too soon, Berggren’s legacy lives on. Inspired by his commitment to pheasants, The Berggren Plan was unveiled by the Commission earlier in 2016 and aims to produce the best pheasant hunting experience possible for most hunters.

To achieve this goal, the five-year plan will work to grow Nebraska’s pheasant populations and increase hunter access to lands with abundant pheasants. Other objectives include increasing the pool of potential pheasant hunters with focus on youth, and improving the funding and policy related to the goal of improving pheasant hunting.

In late July, John Laux was hired as the Commission’s upland habitat and access program manager. This position will help coordinate the delivery of the Berggren Plan and the agency’s other upland game bird conservation efforts across the state. Laux will also work to expand the Open Fields and Waters Program to increase public hunting access

**RIGHT: Mark Feeney, Mike Bell, Butch Smith, Commissioner Lynn Berggren, and Commissioner Robert Allen pose after their upland hunt at Sherman Reservoir.**

**BELOW: Josh Kounovsky pats his black Labrador retriever, Hutch, for a job well done during the commissioners’ Rooster Roundup hunt in northeastern Nebraska. Kounovsky is a NGPC wildlife biologist.**



PHOTO BY JULIE GEISER



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN

on private lands throughout Nebraska. Stationed in Alma where he previously worked as a Commission private lands biologist over the past seven years, Laux is excited about his new role and hopes to hit the ground running.

“We have a lot of great things going on right now in Nebraska. I’m excited to be a part of this comprehensive, science-based effort and can’t wait to see what the future holds for upland game birds in Nebraska,” Laux said.

According to Laux, producing more pheasants in today’s agricultural landscape is no easy task. Modern farming practices and advances in agricultural technology have drastically reduced the availability of suitable pheasant habitat throughout much of Nebraska and other surrounding states.

“We recognize that we can’t increase pheasant numbers everywhere in Nebraska, so we have to be realistic. There are some things we can influence and other things we cannot,” Laux said.

As a result, the Berggren Plan will focus specifically on manageable factors, and work will be concentrated in areas of the state where it will be most effective – where habitat, hunter access, and community support come together.

## Rooster Road Trip

Commission staff look forward to sharing the Berggren Plan with the greater Pheasants Forever community, and they will have a chance this season.

Lynn Berggren’s idea for the Rooster Roundup was modeled after Pheasant Forever’s annual Rooster Road Trip, which traveled to Nebraska in 2013 and 2014. This year, staff from the PF headquarters in Minnesota will return to Nebraska to hunt in November. If the Rooster Roundup results are any indication, Nebraska public lands are expected to show these PF hunters a great time this fall. ■

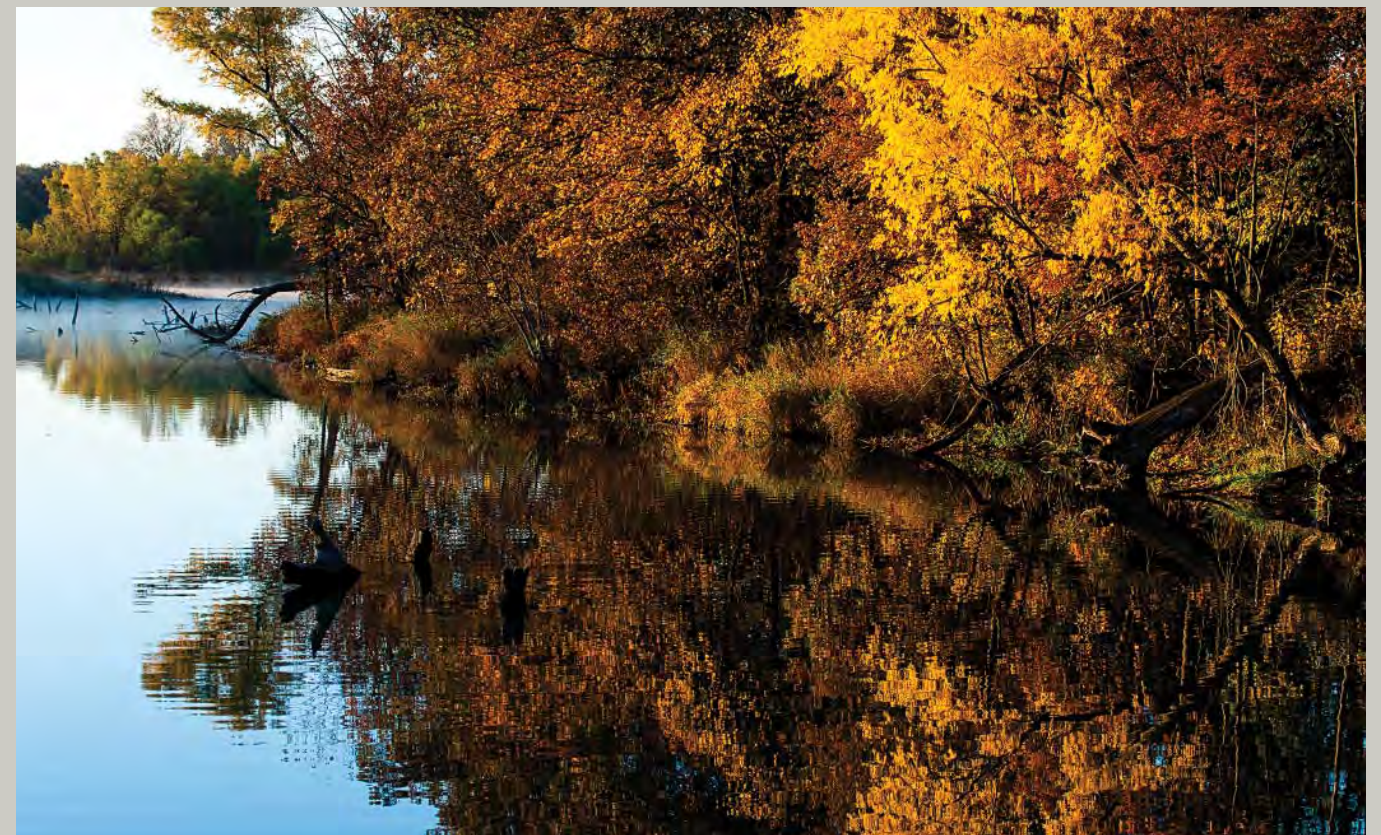
To read the entire Berggren Plan, visit [outdoornebraska.gov/pheasantplan](http://outdoornebraska.gov/pheasantplan). Search for public hunting areas at [maps.outdoornebraska.gov/publicaccessatlas/](http://maps.outdoornebraska.gov/publicaccessatlas/). Follow Rooster Road Trip news in November at [pheasantsforever.org/rooster-road-trip.aspx](http://pheasantsforever.org/rooster-road-trip.aspx).



# Olive Creek Lake SRA

*Photos and story by Eric Fowler*

*Olive Creek Lake State Recreation Area and Wildlife Management Area is a quiet place on most mornings. It's even quieter in the fall. During the summer, it draws visitors from nearby towns like Kramer, Crete, Hallam and Wilber, as well as city folks from Lincoln. Some come for the day and a picnic. Others, including a cadre of Scout groups, come to pitch a tent or park a camper. They have to rough it a bit: there are no electrical hookups at the least developed of the Salt Valley lakes, which is exactly what many are looking for.*



*Above: Fall colors reflect on the lake at Olive Creek Lake State Recreation Area.*

*Opposite: Seeds emerge from a milkweed pod in a grassland at Olive Creek.*

*Come to wet a line on a fall morning and your only competition might be a great blue heron fishing the shallows. But chances are you'll see plenty of anglers. Olive Creek has one of the best largemouth bass populations of all the Salt Valley lakes in terms of size and numbers. It also produces channel catfish and bluegills and has a growing crappie population, all of which are benefitting from the improved water quality provided by a 2001 Aquatic Habitat Program project.*



*Above: Dew sparkles on the web of a banded garden spider in a grassland at Olive Creek.*

*Left: Michael Spellman of Lincoln fishes from a breakwater.*

*Opposite: The sun rises over a snag in Olive Creek Lake.*



*Olive Creek Lake SRA is located 1.5 miles east of Kramer. Draining 8.2 square miles on the south tributary of Olive Branch Creek, this reservoir covers 175 acres. On-site facilities include two picnic areas and two primitive campgrounds. Boating is allowed, but speed is limited to 5 mph. No live baitfish are allowed. A Nebraska Park Entry Permit is required for entry.*



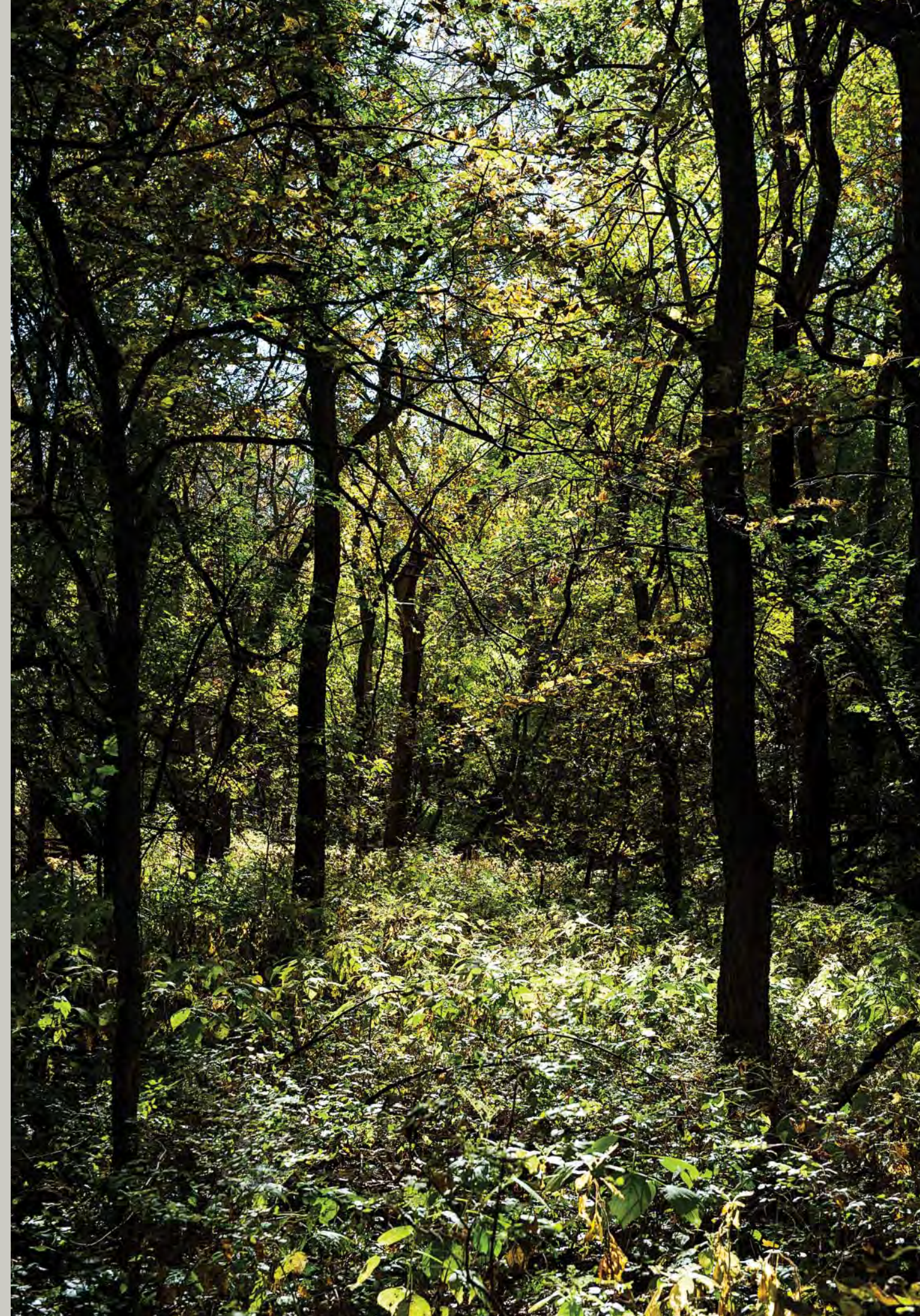
*In the 400-plus acres of grasslands, food plots and tree rows around the lake, hunters pursue quail and pheasants. In the numerous larger woodlots, they're after deer, turkey, rabbits and squirrels. A few pack in a bag of decoys and hunt ducks and geese.*

*Whatever your reason for coming, it's worth it. ■*

*Left: Bobby Nelson of Omaha combs a food plot and brush in search of pheasants and quail.*

*Below: Morning dew glistens on bright red sumac leaves.*

*Opposite: Sun streams into a woodland at Olive Creek Lake SRA.*



# Time Well Spent

## What to Do in October

By Renae Blum

Autumn lovers, this is your month. From putting the finishing touches on your Halloween costume, to sipping a warm beverage and spotting bursts of autumn color, this is definitely a time of year to savor. For a complete list of upcoming events across the state, or for more information on any of the activities listed here, visit [calendar.outdoornebraska.gov](http://calendar.outdoornebraska.gov). ■



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

### Fall Color Viewing

Statewide

Enjoy autumn to the fullest by taking a drive this month to see the spectacular show that Nebraska's trees are putting on. The entire Missouri River corridor is a good place to start, including Indian Cave State Park, Platte River State Park, Ponca State Park, Schramm Park State Recreation Area, Louisville State Recreation Area and Eugene T. Mahoney State Park. Other locations across the state include Merritt Reservoir State Recreation Area, Chadron State Park and Medicine Creek State Recreation Area.

### Learn to Hunt Workshops

Various dates and locations

Learn to Hunt workshops teach strategies, gear and techniques that will sharpen your hunting skills. Four workshops are available, each focusing on a particular game species, such as grouse and deer.



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

### Halloween at a State Park

Various dates and locations

You can celebrate Halloween at a state park almost every weekend this month. Bring the family for costume contests, pumpkin carving, campground decorating, crafts and haunted hayrack rides.



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

### Fall Hunting Seasons

Various dates, Statewide

Late October means the pheasant season opener, and the outlook for upland bird hunting is excellent this fall. Among the many other seasons opening in October are firearm pronghorn and many waterfowl seasons. For a complete list of species and dates, visit [outdoornebraska.gov/huntingseasons](http://outdoornebraska.gov/huntingseasons).

### Special Rates for Parks Lodging

Did you know that Nebraska's state parks and recreation areas offer a 30 percent discount on lodging Oct. 1 through April 30? Special rates are available Sunday – Thursday, excluding holidays. Fall and winter are both beautiful in Nebraska, and guests during these seasons get to see the park in a different, more peaceful light.



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

# Hunting Behind Hounds

By Jenny Nguyen

## Nebraska and Iowa's Foxhunting Club

My summer tan breeches blocked the winter chill like a sieve. Hands trembling, I reluctantly peeled off my insulated riding gloves to tack up my mount, Josie, a beautiful black Paint and Percheron cross; my fat, gloved fingers kept slipping while trying to work with the fine leather pieces of her bridle. It's amazing how difficult tacking up a horse becomes when your heart is trying to beat its way out of your chest. Looking around, it seemed as though everyone else was mounted and ready.

"Dear, aren't you supposed to tack up your horse from the left side?" asked my significant other, standing to the side, smiling and excited for me to experience my first fox hunt, with camera ready.

"Oh – yeah."

"Are you nervous?"

I meekly nodded, but played it cool, and secretly let out a nervous, icy breath as I frantically moved to the other side of Josie. My soul quivered as I made the final adjustments to

her girth before mounting.

Then the trailer door opened and out poured the hounds of the North Hills Hunt (NHH). Their high-pitched, excited cries rang out into the white, February landscape. Curious and constantly working, they moved to and fro between riders and horses, noses to the ground. Some rolled and played in the snow, while others waited intently with eyes shining, ears listening and tails alert, anticipating the huntsman's first command.

While foxhounds are working, or hunting, no one in the field should speak to them, instructed Carine Stava, my trainer and Josie's owner at the Farm at Butterflat Creek, as I watched the scene unfold before me.

The huntsman sat on a bay horse, impressively appointed in a scarlet coat, white breeches and tall, black boots. He held a whip in one hand, his reins in the other, and a golden (brass) hunting horn gleamed while wedged between the buttons of his bright red coat. Other riders, collectively

called "the field," were dressed similarly, either in red or black coats, some decorated with special buttons and collars, depending on rank and gender.

The field moved to the side to give the huntsman and the hounds the right of way. Carine gave me a quick pep talk before leaving me to her working student, who would be my guide for the duration of the hunt. Because it was my first hunt, I would ride with the gate group – a slower-paced group that requires no jumping. Carine, as field master, led first flight, the fastest-moving group that would follow the huntsman's and hounds' every move, and jump over any fences – called coops – as necessary.

And with just two quick notes from his horn, huntsman and hounds moved off, signaling the beginning of the day's hunt. The field followed quietly behind at a respectful distance. It was a scene from a different decade – a different age. Whatever happened in the next three hours, it was going to be unlike anything I've ever experienced in my life.

### Better than Bleachers

Most people don't realize that foxhunting is a spectator sport. Only one person does any hunting, and that's the huntsman and the hounds. Aside from the staff, a few specially appointed members who ride under the direction of the huntsman, the field's job is to basically watch the hounds work, and to stay out of their way as much as possible. It's like watching your favorite sport, but you're following the players on horseback. But, it's a lot more than that – foxhunting is not a leisurely trail ride. It is not a walk in the park. Foxhunting, in the best way that I can describe it, is heart-pounding, "Oh my, God – I'm going to die" controlled chaos, punctuated by breathtaking views of countryside, excellent camaraderie, awesome parties, and at the end of a long morning, truly learning the value of a brave and dependable horse. And after a time, when you finally get over the possibility of dying as you're flying at 40 miles per hour across





PHOTO BY RICK WHEATLEY

North Hills Hunt's pack consists of a crossbreed between American and English foxhounds. Donovan is one of 40 hounds and was named after Donovan Ketzler, former president of the Dehner Boot Co. in Omaha and one of NHH's founding members in 1964.

the plains, catapulting over fences to keep up with the rider in front of you, you'll look up and notice the hounds. Crossbreeds between the American and English foxhound, the North Hills Hunt's hounds are high-energy, hardy and have the stamina to run for hours with few breaks.

"When I first joined the North Hills Hunt, I was so focused on trying to stay on my horse and just keep up!" said David Kruger, a long-time member of NHH. "I honestly couldn't tell you if they had hounds out working – that we were chasing – or if we were all just riding and jumping at what felt like Mach speed. By the end of my first season, as riding became easier, I was able to watch the hounds work and that was when I truly became hooked."

In 2015, Kruger took over as huntsman after NHH's former huntsman accepted a position in California. He grew up hunting pheasants, and his family always kept bird dogs. "It was so amazing to watch them work for hours in the cold, knee-deep snow. I was used to watching only one or two dogs hunt, but to see 30-40 hounds at a time, working as a team, is incredible," Kruger said.

It may take a few seasons to learn all the nuances of hunting, to look ahead and understand what the huntsman is doing, what the hounds are doing, and reading the field and the wind. If you've ever watched a hunting dog work, it is a thing of beauty. But to hear the chorus of hounds, in full cry, on a golden fall or winter morning is a

rhapsody.

Never mind the English countryside. Foxhunting will open up your understanding of the American countryside – its colors, its sounds, its subtleties, and its romance – in ways that only sitting on top of a horse could tell.

## A Coyote for a Fox

At the NHH clubhouse and kennels currently located in Missouri Valley, Iowa, coyotes and foxes that gave memorable chase are immortalized as wall mounts or trophies. Whereas other hunts on the East Coast and overseas chase the iconic red fox, NHH primarily chases the plains coyote, a predator that is much more abundant in

this part of the world.

Though coyotes can be hunted year-round in both Nebraska and Iowa, NHH coincides its hunting season with that of the United Kingdom to keep with tradition: October through March. This is also advantageous for several reasons in the Midwest. During this time of year, the crops have been taken out and the ground is typically frozen, making landowners more apt to allow riders on their property. Furthermore, the cooler weather is much more suitable for the horses and hounds to work.

Foxhunting may be perceived by some as unethical or unfair. (For all intents and purposes, I will continue to refer to the sport as foxhunting.) In truth, it is nothing for a healthy coyote or fox to outrun and outsmart a pack of hounds. And though fox hunters do celebrate a successful kill, it is an uncommon occurrence, and often the old, sick or dying fall into this trap. Several hunts may span between actual kills.

Rather, the thrill of the chase is what keeps the heart racing. To be able to watch the huntsman's skill, to appreciate a well-bred pack of hounds doing what they were born to do, to chase a worthy and respectable opponent, and to be able to witness it all from a good horse – pure muscle and power underneath you – is what brings hunters back year after year.



PHOTO BY RICK WHEATLEY

Coops are placed over wire fencing to allow horses and hounds quick, safe passage between different properties to keep up with game. New member Jennifer Mlocek of Madrid, Iowa, and her horse, Noor, jump over a coop in Cumberland, Iowa.

# Safe Rider Program

By David Kruger,  
NHH Huntsman

The Safe Rider Program runs every August and September, and it is open to everyone. It's a great opportunity for riders to meet the club and learn about foxhunting. The idea came to me once I knew I would be taking over as huntsman for North Hills Hunt. In the past, I noticed that many riders, myself included, would show up out-of-shape physically and mentally at the beginning of each season. Often, our horses were out-of-shape as well after having spent all summer out in pasture.

The Safe Rider Program is offered at no cost and takes place at different riding facilities in the Omaha and Des Moines areas. At the beginning of each session, we usually spend about 30 minutes going over safe riding tips and information about foxhunting. After, we ride in groups, and riders are free to work on areas they feel they need the most improvement. This may include riding different terrain, schooling over various types of jumps, practicing water crossings and more. For prospective members, the Safe Rider Program is also a great opportunity for horse and rider to adjust to riding outside of the ring and with a big group.

We always finish with dinner and old-time foxhunting stories. We meet a few times in August and when September arrives, we kick up the program until the season opens in October. Session dates and times vary from year to year. For more information on the 2017 Safe Rider Program, contact David Kruger, [davidkruger@hotmail.com](mailto:davidkruger@hotmail.com).

# Youth Hunting

By Carine Stava,  
NHH Honorary  
Secretary



The future of foxhunting rests on our youth and it is our responsibility to teach the next

generation about conservation and the love the outdoors. Every season, North Hills Hunt hosts junior hunts to introduce the sport of foxhunting to local youth. This year, junior hunt dates are Nov. 5 and 6.

Junior hunts are slower-paced, and young riders are taught foxhunting basics and etiquette, respect for land and landowners,

riding techniques across fields of variable terrain, animal welfare and to watch for wildlife. Eagles, turkeys, pheasants, owls, rabbits, deer, raccoons, coyotes and foxes are some of the animals they may see. If we do rouse up a coyote – oh, the thrill of the chase!

For more information on youth foxhunting, contact Carine Stava, lcstava@gmail.com.



PHOTO BY RICK WHEATLEY

The author trains at The Farm at Butterflat Creek in Bennington, Nebraska, a hunter/jumper facility that specializes in foxhunting with the North Hills Hunt.

## Breakfast and Brew

As with many sports, alcohol has a special place in foxhunting, and no hunt is complete without breakfast. Called the “stirrup cup,” a small cup of port wine is presented to riders before every hunt, and if we’re lucky, a kind volunteer from the membership may warm the wine with mulling spices, which is especially delicious on a cold, winter morning.

The stirrup cup is an old, foxhunting tradition, but it is also referred to as liquid courage. It is not uncommon to feel nervous before a hunt, and the little bit of alcohol does help to ease the senses and to calm the nervous shakes. Some riders believe that it also helps to numb the impact of an unplanned dismount.

And then during breaks, a vehicle manned by volunteers – dubbed the “whoopie wagon” – provides more drinks, usually beer, and snacks mid-hunt. Many riders also carry a personal flask.

Hunting makes for hungry riders. Being the fair-weather rider that I am, the thoughts that usually go through my head by the second hour of a hunt are: “I’m wet. I’m cold. I can’t feel my feet anymore. Can we go eat now?” This is when hunt breakfasts come into play, and they always taste rewarding after a challenging morning. Always after untacking, grooming and feeding the horses and hounds, we show up to breakfast, often disheveled and tired. Breakfast is usually held in a Morton building or barn and the food is provided by rider(s) who volunteered. Fresh quiches, pasta, beef and noodles, hot soup and hearty chili are popular items during this cold time of year.

Hunt breakfast is also time to

socialize, discuss the morning’s hunt and thank generous landowners for allowing the club access to their property and facilities. And sometimes, we have breakfast at a restaurant where we are able to mingle with the locals and thank them for welcoming us into their communities.

In Burwell, Nebraska, you will find an old picture of fox hunters among an impressive wall of rodeo queens and bull and bronc riders at the Northside Bar and Grill. The Rodeo Inn always greets NHH with a “Welcome Fox Hunters” message on their hotel sign every fall and spring. And we wouldn’t know what to do with ourselves if the chefs at the Sandstone Grill weren’t around to cater our delicious hunt breakfasts and cocktail parties – they cook up some of the best food west of Grand Island.

At my first hunt in Burwell, after I had jumped my very first coops in the field with Carine’s approval, I felt so full of myself that I ordered a basket of calf fries at the Northside Bar and Grill. But foxhunting is a humbling

sport – I haven’t ordered them since.

## The Horse

I’ve talked a lot about the foxes and the hounds, but for me, the true hero is the horse (or pony) that carries you safely across the rough, grassy sea. A good fox hunter is brave, level-headed and has the stamina to carry a rider for miles at high speeds. They will merely shrug at traffic, pay 30-40 hounds running circles around their legs no mind, jump everything you ask them to, go wherever you ask them to and remain calm amid chaos. What’s more, a huntsman’s, field master’s, or staff’s horse can do all those things, but twice better.

Quality fox hunters are rare, and I will go so far as to argue that the best ones also love their jobs. These horses want to be up front and stay with the

action. They attack all obstacles willingly. And their ears perk up when they hear the hounds speak.

Good fox hunters know their job, and if you trust them to do it, they’ll keep you safe and carry out their duties with the utmost sincerity. These horses are rare, beautiful creatures, inside and out. There are few things in the world so honest and pure.

This photo was taken in 1969. One of North Hills Hunt’s founders, Taylor Snow became the hunt’s first master of foxhounds and first huntsman.

PHOTO BY RICHARD VOIGES



PHOTO BY RICK WHEATLEY

Master of Foxhounds David Keffeler of Bennington, Nebraska, raises his stirrup cup to the photographer at last season’s opening hunt in Missouri Valley, Iowa. Opening and closing hunts are two of the most well-attended events of the season.

Nancy Evans (left) of Ashland, Nebraska, and John Kruger and Mary Lynn Forst of Arlington, Nebraska, ride alongside hounds in Persia, Iowa.



## Tally Ho!

To “view” is to actually see a coyote or fox, which I finally did at closing hunt last March. It was the perfect ending to my first season with NHH.

Someone yelled “tally ho” and the next thing I knew, the field master and her horse bolted away. I looked up and

saw the most big, beautiful coyote. And a split second later, realizing what happened, my earnest pony, Harry Potter, who is always looking for any excuse to fly, shot after the field master’s horse like a rocket.

It was a drafty morning in March. My eyes teared behind my Ray-Bans while I held on for dear life as we

galloped into the wind across the cut corn field. The air stung as it rushed past my cheeks. The deafening sound of the wind boomed inside my ears. But the coyote just loped along, unconcerned and almost teasing, as we gained upon his heels, for the hounds were running in a different direction, chasing the trail of another scent. That

coyote escaped into the trees, while another appeared at the top of a hill, gazing down upon us, out of reach.

Huntsman Dave Kruger called back the hounds with a long, mournful note from his horn. The field circled back and took a break at the bottom of a slope, exchanging swigs of warming liquor from flasks that were kept safe

inside our coats. We laughed and talked about how awesome that was, and as we looked up – too late, we viewed another coyote casually padding across the landscape. Someone jokingly said “tally ho!” But no one moved. We just sat on our horses and admired the animal as it disappeared beyond the hill.

## Blessings

Foxhunting is an adrenaline rush, a drug, unlike anything else. It’s cracking good fun, and the thrill of the hunt just becomes part of your blood.

It a sport of pride, guts and humility – pride in honing your abilities as a horseman, the guts to execute those



Foxhounds anxiously wait in the trailer before a hunt in Burwell, Nebraska.

PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN



North Hills Hunt member Pam Stone of West Des Moines, Iowa, serves port to riders during a hunt in Burwell. The “whoopie wagon” team follows the hunt by vehicle to provide emergency support, snacks and libations.

PHOTO BY RICK WHEATLEY

hard-earned skills out in the field, and the humility – and fear – in knowing that you may come off and get hurt, but loving the sport enough to get back on to hunt another day anyway.

English writer James Delingpole wrote in the Telegraph after his hunt last Boxing Day:

“I came home caked in mud, legs like jelly and half-cut on a mixture of sloe gin, cherry brandy and Whisky Mac. And as usual I offered up two silent prayers of gratitude – the first for my having survived another suicidal day in the saddle; the second for my good grace in having discovered – albeit rather late in life – the greatest sport on God’s green earth.” ■

*North Hills Hunt’s mission is to recruit and educate people in the art and science of foxhunting with horses and hounds consistent with IRS 501(c) (3) rules, promote conservation of land and game dedicated to the sport, preserve the traditions of the sport and seek to expand its acceptance, and maintain a viable pack of foxhounds in a fiscally responsible manner. Visit [northhillshunt.com](http://northhillshunt.com) for more info.*



PHOTO BY RICK WHEATLEY

Hunters ride away on a country road in Persia, Iowa, in February 2014.

## Join NHH

By Monte Antisdell, Luke Matranga and David Keffeler, NHH Masters of Foxhounds

The love of horses and hounds led to the development of the North Hills Hunt club in the Loess Hills outside of Omaha. A small group of enthusiastic horse owners, which included Taylor Snow, owner of Snow Co., and Donovan Ketzler, owner of the Dehner Boot Co., were some of its first members. Snow became the first master of foxhounds and the first huntsman.

The North Hills Hunt started in the late fall of 1964 when an unofficial hunt was held at Allan and Ann Mactier’s home in Omaha with just two hounds. The first pack of hounds was obtained in 1965, and in January of 1966, NHH held its first official hunt. In 1968, NHH was recognized by the Masters of Foxhounds Association – the governing organization for foxhunting clubs in the U.S. and Canada.

The sport is called foxhunting but because of the tremendous increase in the coyote population in Nebraska and Iowa, it has become more of the sport of “coyote chasing!”

As a member of the North Hills Hunt, you will establish friendships that will last a lifetime. Whether you become a member to ride your horse or to hunt or to just watch hounds work in the countryside on a beautiful morning, you will love the camaraderie of NHH. NHH has grown from a few riders and their families to over 100 different members. You might find yourself riding next to a general from Offutt Air Force Base, a doctor, school teacher, businessman, housewife, attorney, etc. NHH is dedicated to riding to hounds, combining the traditions of a time-honored sport with Midwest-friendly camaraderie.

# Wandering Elk

*Displaced bulls on the move.*

By Gerry Steinauer, Botanist

It was October of 2015 on the way to a Sandhills grouse hunt. We had just passed Urwiller's Melon Patch on Highway 2 east of Ravenna when my buddy Greg blurted out "Holy %&\* there's an elk!" We pulled over. Sure enough, a few hundred yards away in pasture amongst a herd of Angus cows was a five-by-five bull elk.

Two other cars of gawkers stopped, and though we watched the elk for about 15 minutes in plain sight, he seemed oblivious to our presence, seemingly preoccupied by the cattle. I had heard stories of wandering elk in eastern Nebraska, even once saw hoof prints on a Platte River sandbar near Wood River, but I had never before seen one.

Elk were once common throughout Nebraska, but by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century they were extirpated by unregulated hunting. In the 1950s and 60s a few elk started showing up in northwestern Nebraska, likely drifters from Wyoming herds. From these pioneers our elk population has steadily grown to about 3,000 animals with established herds in the Pine Ridge (our largest population), Wildcats Hills, central Niobrara River valley, upper Missouri River valley and the Loess Canyons of Lincoln County.

"Wandering elk from our western herds can show up almost anywhere in eastern Nebraska," said Kit Hams, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission big game program manager. "A few years ago one was killed in a collision on West O Street in Lincoln and recently one was seen near Omaha. They are usually young bulls. During the rut, the bigger bulls are very territorial and beat up on their young rivals often driving them from the herd. Sometimes they start roaming long distances in search of females, but usually return to the herd once the rut is over."

A most notable elk journey began in late August of 1987 when two young bulls jumped a six-foot high fence at Theodore Roosevelt National Park in far western North Dakota. One carried

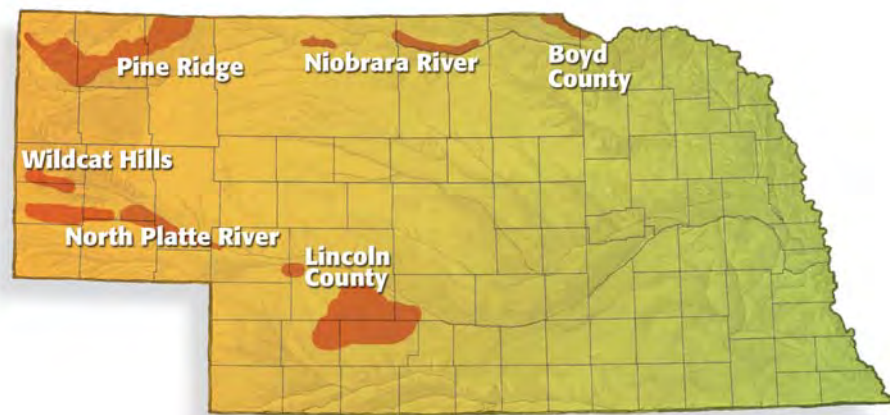
a radio collar so the pair was easily tracked on their over 700-mile trek. They first strayed into north-central South Dakota, where they swam Lake Oahe, before turning northeast eventually reaching Fargo, North Dakota, before hightailing it back to the Park, arriving the following January.

Nic Fryda, a Commission wildlife biologist stationed in Kearney, receives several reports each year of out-of-place elk. "Most calls come in from September through November during the rut. The elk may be around earlier, but stay hidden in unpicked cornfields, where they can cause crop damage."

Over the years, Fryda has observed that the elk often show up in the same general areas, likely the result of the animals following the same wooded stream valleys, such as those of the Platte or Loup rivers, during their eastward ventures. In the fall of 2014, the owner of the pasture where Greg and I saw the elk called Fryda and reported a bull elk, likely the same

individual. He said the elk was chasing and generally harassing his cattle, and seemed especially captivated by one particular cow. When female elk cannot be found, the lustful young bulls will turn their attention to cattle of the female persuasion. Using their antlers, overly zealous bulls will sometimes push and gouge the beef cows in an effort to herd them. Several years ago, an elk in Scotts Bluff County killed two cows by puncturing their lungs. Another problem for ranchers is that, in their herding, the elk will keep thirsty cattle away from stock tanks and other water sources.

Cow elk are occasional roamers. The urge that drives them is unknown, but if several settle in an area new resident herds can establish. Presently a new herd appears to be forming along the Dismal River near Halsey National Forest in the central Sandhills. Wandering elk will likely continue to push the frontiers of their Nebraska range, reclaiming lost territory. ■



Map showing Nebraska's range of established elk herds.



PHOTO BY GERRY STEINAUER



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# Hillier Than Hillary, Tenser Than Tenzing: Nebraska Mountaineering

*Ol' Rog Finds Vertical Nebraska.*

By Roger Welsch

**Y**ou can see it in the set of my jaw, the straining muscles of my well-toned arms, and by the determination in my sky-blue eyes: It's me against gravity and the unyielding verticality of one of Nebraska's alpine challenges. It's me or the mountain. Only one of us will be victorious, only one remain unconquered.

Okay, okay – I couldn't find any photos of my mountain climbing days so Linda and I drove out to the Dannebrog dump and took this picture but it's sort of, kind of, a lot like, what I was in my prime, especially if Linda had used her "narrow-angle" lens like I told her to.

You wouldn't know it by looking at me now but there really was a time I climbed mountains. I summited (that's mountaineering talk) five of Colorado's "14ers," mountains over 14,000 feet in altitude. I climbed alone, which would usually be seen as pretty stupid but I did none of what is called "technical" climbing – ropes, pitons (spikes driven into rock or ice to hold ropes), crampons (spiked footwear for hard ice), sleeping in a hammock slung thousands of feet over open space. None of that. I walked up long paths above the tree line, gasping for air, and pushing my Plains physiology far beyond what it wanted to do. There was a lot of rock and ice, cold and snow, and I truly loved it. Or perhaps echoing Dorothy Parker's famous line about writing, "I hate writing. I love having written." The climbing was agony, but remembering it after the aches had worked off, maybe sitting at our fireplace with a snifter of good bourbon and telling my adventures where there was no one around to check the accuracy of my details, was glorious. And now, in my seniority, the memories of my climbs.

As for Nebraska, my climbing conquests are a good deal more modest, consisting mostly of getting up on backless bar stools and increasingly getting up our own stairs to bed every night. But a couple nights ago I spent some time musing about memorable Nebraska climbs. There is the highest spot in Nebraska, Panorama Point in Kimball County, towering 5,429 feet above sea level (that's more than a mile, folks!), from the heights of which you can see, oh, a long ways. I've been there, and I'm a guy who's afraid of heights, so *you* can do it, too.

I've scaled Happy Jack Hill, which really does have a glorious outlook over the North Loup River, not far from here, above the Chalk Mines at Scotia. (And which I think is the prominence that figures centrally in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Prairie*.) When I was much younger I frequently climbed Sioux Lookout southeast of North Platte and with a lovely view of the Platte Valley. There used to be a much vandalized statue at the summit, but even without



The author mounts an assault on the Dannebrog Dump.

that the view is worth the climb. When I was a geology student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln I climbed and spent a night on top of Scotts Bluff with some fellow students, a truly memorable experience, again with stunning views. Now there's a road to the top and any sissy can get easily to where we struggled with backpacks and camp gear. Still – worth the drive.

Blackbird Hill overlooks the Missouri River not far from Macy on the Omaha Reservation but is sacred in Omaha tribal legend and belief and is not available to the public; a public overlook near the site, however, is available near Decatur. I was fortunate enough to be taken to the Hill on foot by an Omaha kinsman almost 50 years ago.

I recommend these climbs ... okay, hikes ... to anyone who seriously calls himself or herself a Nebraskan, with the usual cautions that even the most gentle of these scarps can be slippery in rain, snow or ice, while some of the western hills still provide burrows for rattlesnakes, and if you have the kind of grace and conditioning I have, sooner or later you're almost certain to suffer a twisted ankle or aching back for your effort.

But like a true storyteller, I've been saving the best of my mountain climbing tales for last. No kidding, I still have bad dreams about this one, am a bit embarrassed, but know



Courthouse and Jail rocks in Morrill County.

how much more embarrassed I could have been if my much overworked guardian angel had taken the day off. I was camped near Bridgeport for some reason I don't recall and, rising at dawn, decided to check on an old Indian legend I had heard about Courthouse Rock. (The same story is told about many other western Plains prominences but I had heard it most often about Courthouse Rock.) The story was that a large band of one tribe (I heard Lakota) had cornered a hunting party of another tribe (in my versions Pawnee) on top of the wedge-shaped sandstone landmark. During the night the trapped, and almost surely doomed party, cut up their clothing and made ropes, and let themselves down the steep southern cliff of the rock, leaving the would-be besiegers surprised the next day when they found they had nothing in their snare.

Watching for snakes, I easily climbed the north slope of the Courthouse, crawled out to the edge of the top, and looked down the long, deep drop to the valley below. First, I was startled to find myself looking directly into two other very intense eyes about 20 feet below me, a golden eagle, the first I had seen. Next I was struck by how high I was above the valley, causing me to doubt the plausibility of the ancient legend. Finally I was stunned by the beauty of the valley below me. Legend or not, the view was worth the climb.

I turned my eyes then to the east and another wonderful sight, Courthouse Rock's companion, Jail Rock. Wow. I sat atop Courthouse a long time admiring the valley and ... Jail Rock. Upon reaching my car, I looked again at Jail Rock. (I could hear a faint voice saying, "No, Rog. Don't do it. *Please* don't be stupid. Get in your car and drive. You did what you wanted to do. Now go home. No. No! No!")

I clambered to the base of Jail Rock. I looked up the deep eroded grooves in its side. Hmmmm ... I think I could climb this. And I did. It was now well past noon and I was hot and sweaty but feeling pretty smug once I stood on the remarkably small, relatively flat top of Jail Rock. I looked back at Courthouse Rock, getting a new perspective and again feeling downright adventurous and accomplished. And over there, toward Scotts Bluff I see ... uh-oh ... a big, angry, growling thunderhead. And it's moving fast. In my direction. Well, uh, time to do something I hadn't given much thought to: getting back down.

There is a thing about climbing. Going up is hard of course, but you can see what is in front of you because there it is, right in front of your eyes. But going down a vertical

cliff means your eyes can't see a thing. You need to see with your toes, a notably poor way to get a perspective. In fact, as I looked around the grooves reaching the top of Jail Rock, I couldn't even tell which one I came up. Sooo ... what if I start down one, and it doesn't reach to the bottom and I am stuck half way, unable to go either up or down? On the other hand, the longer I stand here contemplating my stupidity, the closer the storm is coming, seething with lightning and now ... spatters of huge rain drops on the rock. As dull-witted as I seemed to be at that moment, I could still understand that the longer I stood here, the more danger there was from lightning and the more slippery that vertical rock was getting.

I honestly don't believe I've ever been that frightened in my life except maybe twice when courting Linda and once when meeting her father for the first time (he was at the kitchen table sharpening knives). But I took a chance, picked a possible downward exit, and slowly, painfully, drenched in sweat, fear, and rain, finally reached the bottom, where I used up a lifetime of prayers of gratitude. To this day I try to imagine what humiliation there would have been if



Panorama Point in Kimball County is the highest natural point in Nebraska.

the Bridgeport Volunteer Fire Department had had to raise ladders and ropes and pluck this poor dumb folklorist off of the top of Jail Rock. I have a feeling I would have made the front page of newspapers all over the Panhandle.

The moral(s) of the story is, climb Nebraska. It's worth the trouble. But don't even think about Jail Rock. And if you're as old and out of shape as I am, you'd best restrict your Nebraska mountain climbing to a summer assault on the north face of Panorama Point. ■

*Roger Welsch is an author, humorist and folklorist. He has appeared in NEBRASKAland Magazine since 1977.*



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New Partnership Benefits  
Two Rivers State Recreation Area*Organizations unite to make state parks accessible to those with disabilities.*

By Renae Blum

In the summer of 2015, a team of YouthBuild AmeriCorps members gathered at Two Rivers State Recreation Area and rolled up their sleeves to help make the park more accessible for visitors. From May to August, the young team members built an American with Disabilities Act approved camping pad, repaired concrete in front of the concessions stand and pitched in on smaller projects.

The successful project was the fruit of a partnership between the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, ServeNebraska and the Cornhusker Motor Club Foundation, with the goal of making Nebraska's state parks and recreation areas more accessible to those with disabilities.

The partnership meets common goals for everyone involved. One of Cornhusker Motor Club Foundation's overarching missions is to support tourism in Nebraska, which this partnership achieves. The Foundation has also funded numerous improvement projects for Game and Parks in the past. ServeNebraska encourages volunteerism across the state and supports Nebraska's AmeriCorps members, who spend hundreds of hours every year volunteering in local communities. ServeNebraska Executive Director Cathleen Plager knew that YouthBuild Omaha was looking to give its AmeriCorps volunteers more experience in finished concrete work, and Game and Parks needed concrete help. Everything fit.

Representatives from these groups met last spring to form the partnership, and Plager still remembers the feeling of excitement shared by everyone as the meeting concluded. "We could all see so much potential coming out of this," she said.

The Cornhusker Motor Club Foundation provided \$40,000 to be dispersed over a two-year period, while ServeNebraska coordinated the workforce of AmeriCorps volunteers. The volunteers belong to YouthBuild Omaha, a program of Goodwill Industries of Eastern Nebraska and Southwest Iowa.

"YouthBuild participants are 17 to 24 years old," said Alyssa Beebe, a construction trainer with YouthBuild. "Generally they have not completed high school, so they are working toward getting their GED. When they are not in GED classes, they are on construction sites getting various certifications and learning skills that will help them in the working world."

Making the 20-by-65-foot camping pad and smaller picnic pad was a learning experience for nearly all involved. YouthBuild construction trainer Tom Simodynes coached the



Alyssa Beebe (left) and Francisco Moreno (right) of Omaha put finishing touches on a handicap-accessible camping pad.

group through each step of the process, and two Game and Parks facility maintenance technicians periodically joined the workers.

"The Two Rivers project was different for us because we were working with a lot of time constraints," Beebe recalled. "Concrete sets fast. When that concrete truck shows up, it's game on."

Mike Jelinek, facility maintenance manager for Game and Parks, visited the group from time to time to check on its progress. He was impressed.

"All of them worked very hard," he said. "And the finished product turned out really well."

Seeing the completed project was exciting for the workers. "I know that they were very proud of this," Beebe said. "They brought people out to take pictures and posted photos on social media."

For Beebe and Simodynes, it was rewarding to see how the YouthBuild AmeriCorps workers were affected by the experience. The young people gained real-world working experience, connected with Game and Parks staff and were exposed to a different part of Nebraska – a state recreation area. Many began returning on weekends to camp and swim.

"It was a very impactful project," Beebe said.

With this success in their pocket, staff at Game and Parks, ServeNebraska and the Cornhusker Motor Club Foundation eagerly look forward to their next project together. Whatever it will be, it's sure to make Nebraska a better place for everyone. ■

To learn more, visit: [cornhuskerfoundation.org](http://cornhuskerfoundation.org), [serve.nebraska.gov](http://serve.nebraska.gov), [nationalservice.gov](http://nationalservice.gov), [youthbuild.org](http://youthbuild.org) and [goodwillomaha.org](http://goodwillomaha.org).

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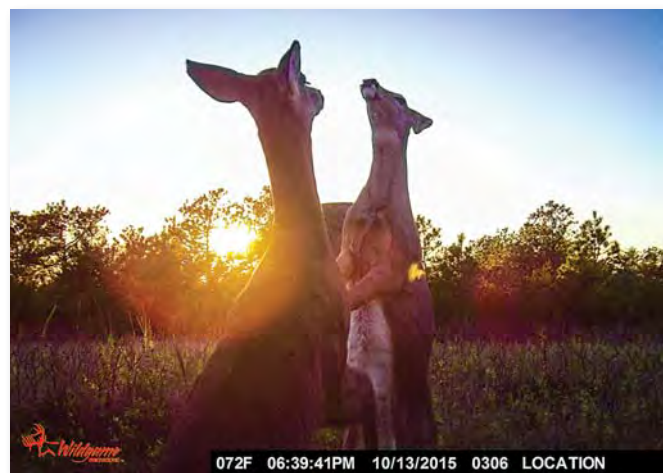
Connor Dethlefs sent in this photo of four white-tailed deer on the Middle Loup near Rockville in Sherman County.



Kris Coburn caught this mule deer buck on camera chasing does in Hayes County.



Bill Bolte sent in this photo of two white-tailed deer fighting on the Robert Rubaha farm south of Central City.



Joss Linse sent in this photo of two white-tailed does fighting west of Springview in Keya Paha County.



TJ Anderson sent in this picture of white-tailed bucks from a trail camera in northern Dixon County.



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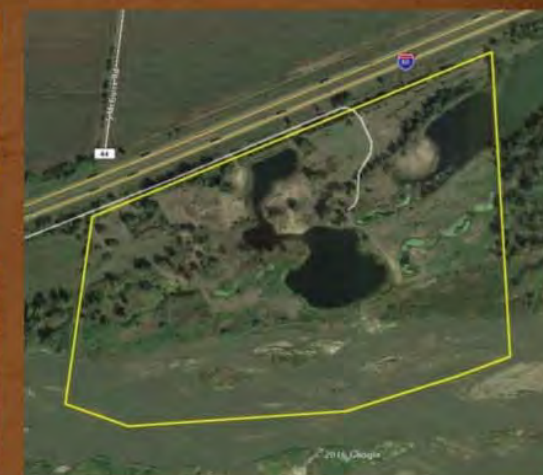


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**Upper Left:** June 29, 1948. My father, Loren Lorenzen, with a nice stringer of black crappies caught from Johnson Lake. The fish were caught on a jig and minnow from the face of the dam. The picture was taken by life-long friend John Hatfield – both from Neligh, Nebraska.

**Upper Right:** August 1959. Pictured is a typical catch of channel catfish from the Elkhorn River in Antelope County with my father Loren (right) and his brother Lyle Lorenzen. The image was taken at Lyle's farm near Neligh. My father would wade the Elkhorn drifting baits along high banks, log jams or drop-offs. The tackle of choice was a South Bend bamboo fly rod.

**Left:** Here is a catch of northern pike, 11 lb and 15 lb, by my father Loren from Branched Oak Lake in August of 1973. He would wade fish with floating Rapalas or Rebels.

A meal of pike was a delicious "fish boil." My father's recipe was simple – bring salt water to a boil, cut pike into chunks, remove the "Y" bones, and add red potatoes and onions.

– Terry Lorenzen, Omaha, Nebraska



Send contributions to: Portraits from the Past, NEBRASKAland Magazine, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370. Or e-mail to Tim.Reigert@Nebraska.gov. Photos should show people enjoying Nebraska outdoor activities, such as camping, boating, hunting or fishing, and must have been taken before 1980. We will give priority to unusual photos or activities. When possible, please include a story about the photograph and identify the people, places and approximate date it was taken. Photos will be returned.

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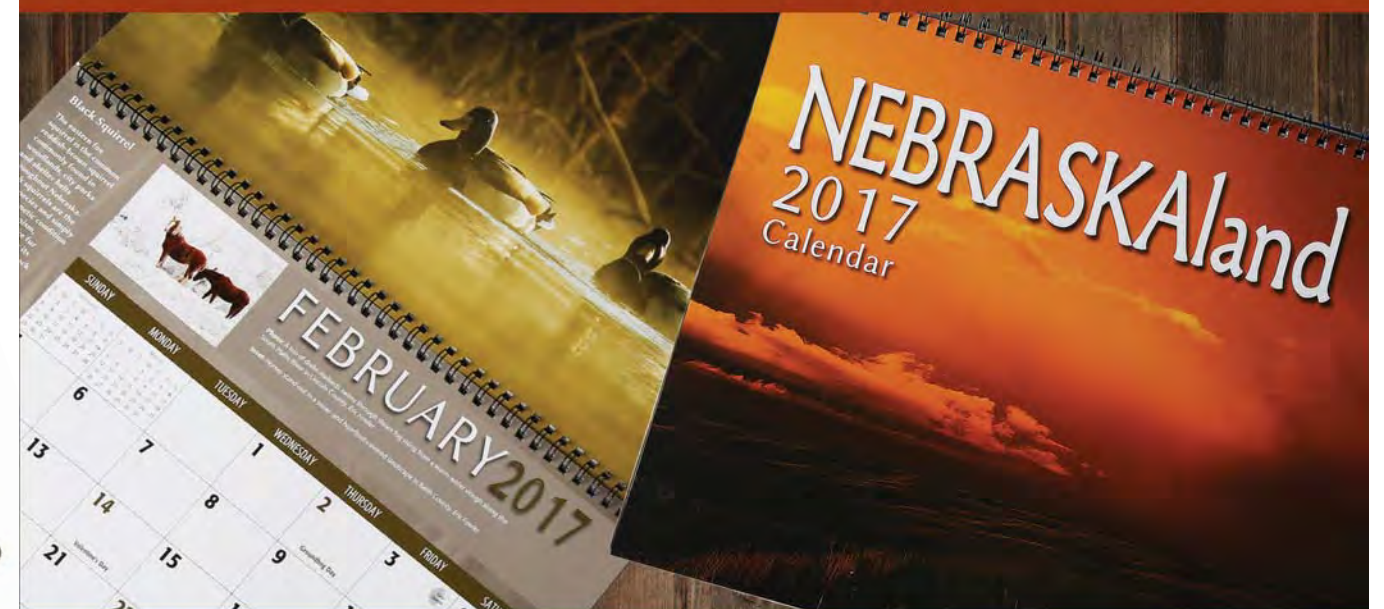


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# Crawfish Bisque

*No lobster? No problem.*

By Jenny Nguyen

I think one of the most underutilized wild food sources in our state is crawfish. Most Nebraskans consider them bass bait, but in other parts of the country, crawfish is a delicacy.

October is the time to catch them, but sadly, I have no tips to give you. Refer back to Julie Geiser's story "Crawfish Catch and Cook" published in our Oct. 2014 issue for helpful hints.

This recipe was inspired by lobster bisque – one of my favorite soups. Crawfish taste like mini lobsters, so I found that it worked great as an alternative. Due to space, I have shortened this recipe to include store-bought seafood stock instead of homemade crawfish stock. The seafood stock will work just as well and save time. But if you're still interested in learning how to utilize the crawfish shells to make your own stock, visit [foodforhunters.com](http://foodforhunters.com) – just search "Crawfish Bisque." If you end up catching only a few crawfish, this soup is also a good way to stretch the meat.

**Servings: 4-6**

**Prep Time: 30 minutes**

**Cooking Time: 1 hour and 30 minutes**

**Ingredients:**

- 1 pound of cooked crawfish tail meat, peeled and deveined
- 3 tablespoons of butter
- 1 large yellow or white onion, chopped
- 1 cup of carrot, chopped
- 1 cup of celery, chopped
- 6 cloves of garlic, minced
- 5 tablespoons of tomato paste
- 5 tablespoons of flour
- 6 cups of seafood stock
- ½ cup of cream sherry
- 1 teaspoon of smoked paprika
- 2 sprigs of fresh thyme
- Cayenne pepper, to taste
- Kosher salt, to taste
- ¾ cup of heavy cream
- Chopped parsley or chives for garnish
- Cracked pepper

1. Heat seafood stock in a separate pan, covered. In a large pot, melt the butter over medium-high heat. Add onion,

carrot, celery, garlic, a pinch of salt and sauté for 5 minutes or until the onions are cooked and translucent. Add tomato paste and sauté for another 1 to 2 minutes, being careful not to burn the paste. Then sprinkle the mixture with flour, stir and sauté for 1 minute.

2. Add the heated seafood stock, cream sherry, paprika, thyme and cayenne to the flour mixture. Cook for 30 minutes over medium-low heat, stirring occasionally to keep the bottom from burning.

3. After 30 minutes, or when vegetables have softened, discard the thyme. Then transfer mixture into a blender and pulse until smooth. Do this in batches to avoid splatter. Return blended soup into the pot and season with salt to taste. If you find the consistency too thick, add more stock to thin out the soup. If you have no more stock, water is okay. Next, stir in heavy cream. Use listed measurements or stir in as much as you would like. Taste for seasoning again.

5. Keep the crawfish tails whole or give them a rough chop. Ladle soup into bowls, and then sprinkle with crawfish meat, parsley and cracked pepper. If desired, warm the crawfish meat in melted butter beforehand. ■

*This recipe and photograph originally appeared on Jenny's Food for Hunters blog at [foodforhunters.com](http://foodforhunters.com).*



The Midwestern version of a classic seafood soup, this bisque is made of Nebraska crawfish meat, savory vegetables, fresh herbs and heavy cream.

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## Imperfection

**P**otos like this don't often make the cut, and for good reason. In an ideal world, the pheasant's mouth is closed and there isn't a patch of grass covering the dog's eye – grass that should have been removed by a more conscientious photographer.

Also, the image was captured in the late morning, away from that golden light that the first hour or two allows and then, just as quickly, takes away, even at the end of October.

However, despite these downfalls, when I came across this image today I couldn't help but get a slight chill. I began to think about the day it was taken, a beautiful Saturday morning during the combined hunting and football seasons, when photo excursions such as these start with jackets and, usually by 11 a.m. kickoff, end with T-shirts.

I also remember the German wirehair pointer's owner, Leo Bowman of Lincoln, who was guiding young hunters on what was the start of their hunting careers. His patience and smile were infectious.

Lastly, I remember the sound of the gravel roads to and from my house after this shoot, how summer's dust in the rearview mirror had all but disappeared and the entire world held such great possibility for that day – even if I had failed to remove that unsightly piece of prairie grass from in front of the dog's eye. For fall was just starting.

Jeff Kurrus  
August 5, 2016



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