

Nebraskaland
magazine

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Nebraskaland

INSPIRING OUTDOOR ADVENTURE SINCE 1926

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2026

2025 PHOTO CONTEST

See page 16

PLUS
First Issue of Nebraskaland in 1926 • Hunting Late-Season Does
Pawnee State Recreation Area • Chief Standing Bear
Showy Partridge Pea • How Cold Air Boosts Sound



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information, visit
NebraskalandMagazine.com

Cover: Jeffrey Z. Carney, of Ashland,
won Best of Show in the 2025
Nebraskaland Photo Contest for his
image entitled "A Final March Toward
Migration." See page 16.

This page: A rooster ring-necked
pheasant stands atop a row of hay
bales east of Chadron.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

Nebraskaland
magazine

Published by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission since 1926. The Commission is dedicated to the conservation and protection of all the state's natural resources and the people who use them.



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CORRECTION — Nebraskaland Magazine strives to promote safe and responsible outdoor recreation. Our December 2025 cover missed the mark, featuring a hunter walking along railroad tracks — an activity that constitutes trespassing. We regret the error and will work to uphold the high standards readers expect in our publication.

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PRESCRIBED FIRE
WORKSHOPS

2026 BASIC WORKSHOPS

- JAN 06 Central City| 9:00 am – 3:00 pm CST
@ Merrick County Historical Museum
JAN 08 Lincoln| 9:00 am – 3:00 pm CST
@ Nebraska Extension in Lancaster Co.
JAN 20 Scottsbluff | 9:00 am – 3:00 pm MST
@ North Platte NRD
JAN 21 Ericson | 9:00 am – 3:00 pm CST
@ Ericson Fire Hall
JAN 23 Bloomfield | 9:00 am – 3:00 pm CST
@ Bloomfield Community Center
JAN 27 Thedford | 9:00 am – 3:00 pm CST
@ Upper Loup NRD
JAN 29 Holdrege| 9:00 am – 3:00 pm CST
@ Phelps County Ag Center
FEB 03 Tekamah| 9:00 am – 3:00 pm CST
@ Tekamah City Auditorium
FEB 20 Stapleton| 9:00 am – 3:00 pm CST
@ Stapleton Community Center
(this workshop will have a fire demo)

2026 ONLINE WORKSHOPS

- FEB 10 2026 Prescribed Fire Refresher
9:00 am – Noon CST
FEB 17 Weather Forecasting
for Prescribed Fire
2:00 pm – 4:00 pm CST
RSVP Visit our webpage or scan the QR code
for workshop details and registration

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN
PRESCRIBED BURNING,
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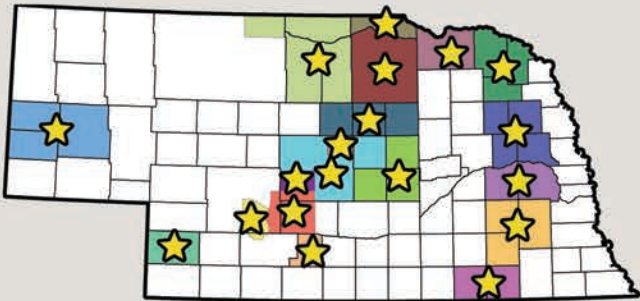


These workshops are for landowners, resource professionals, volunteer fire departments, and others interested in burning. Learn the basics of applying prescribed fire to the landscape. No prior burn experience needed to participate.

\$10 registration includes materials and lunch.

Questions? Contact Ashley Yost or Rob van Lieshout:
402-637-6829 | ayost@pheasantsforever.org or
315-761-7121 | rvanlieshout@pheasantsforever.org

NebraskaPF.com/RxFireWorkshops



Contact Brian Teeter at 402-219-2572 or bteeter@pheasantsforever.org to find one nearest you or to start your own.

JOIN A PRESCRIBED BURN ASSOCIATION

Prescribed burn associations are groups of landowners, land managers, and volunteers who share their time, equipment, and expertise to support each other in implementing prescribed fires within their communities. Nebraska has many established burn associations where people can volunteer, as well as opportunities to form new associations where there is a need.

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FROSTY PINES

Heavy frost covers ponderosa pines along the scenic loop drive at Chadron State Park.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



A herd of white-tailed does feed in a Lincoln County cornfield. JULIE GEISER, NEBRASKALAND

HUNTING LATE-SEASON DOES

By Julie Geiser

For those still looking to fill their freezer or just can't get enough of being outside, the January antlerless deer season fits the bill. After the rut, deer will focus on feeding and putting on fat to survive the winter. Hunters, too, should shift their focus to achieve late-season success.

Food and Water

Standing crops and agricultural fields with waste grain or winter wheat are good areas to find deer. Also, look for oak trees and other browse that deer depend on during this harsh season. Finding open water is another place to locate deer or deer sign during winter.

When to Hunt

During early, cold mornings, deer typically won't use up energy to move around, so sleep in. Afternoons or evenings are the prime times to hunt in the late season as deer will be more active, moving from bedding to feeding areas, finding a drink or simply stretching their legs. However, get in place before the deer start moving to avoid spooking them. Knowing when they move depends on the weather and how much scouting you've done beforehand.

Weather

When severe weather is approaching, deer will be driven to feed. Digestion generates body heat and deer will search out food sources before and after weather patterns. So they don't expend precious energy, deer will browse on twigs, bark and other natural foods close to bedding areas.

Deer will seek shelter from wind in hilly areas, ravines, and they will bed down on slopes facing the sun to keep warm. Cedar-covered areas provide good shelter from wind and snow and provide warmth, especially when the sun is shining.

Locating Deer

Finding groups of does can be somewhat easy, as they will travel to and from bedding and feeding areas in the same patterns unless spooked. If there is snow on the ground, locating signs, such as tracks and scat, becomes much easier.

Hunting tactics this time of year centers, more than ever, on food and shelter. As long as you're willing to brave the cold, focusing on these necessities will increase your odds of finding deer.

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A great horned owl perches on a dead tree at Bassway Strip Wildlife Management Area in Buffalo County.
ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

GO OWLING

By Olivia DaRugna, Wildlife Diversity Biologist

Owls are one of the earliest nesting birds in Nebraska, and now is a great time to listen for them. Great horned owls (*Bubo virginianus*) and barred owls (*Strix varia*) call to mates and hoot to defend nesting territories throughout the winter. Great horned owls may begin laying eggs as early as late January, and barred owls nest as early as the first week of February.

While dawn and dusk can be the most productive times to view owls, there are opportunities to observe these nocturnal birds any time of day. With no leaves on the trees in winter, owls are more visible as they perch on branches. Take a closer look at those dark clumps in the trees. What might appear to be a squirrel nest could actually be an owl.

Even if you can't see an owl, you can often hear them. Listen for the various owl calls from hoots to squawks to barks. The great horned owl is recognizable by its low "hoo hoodoo hooo hoo" song. The barred owl is unmistakable by its "Who cooks for you? ... Who cooks for you all?" hoot.

Owling Do's and Don't's

- Keep your distance and do not disturb an owl's natural behavior and activity. If an owl is fidgeting, repeatedly staring at you or changing position, you're too close. Use binoculars, a viewing scope or watch from the comfort of your vehicle.
- Do not feed owls.
- Do not use electronic playback, especially if you suspect

that owls might be nesting or on territory. As winter marches on, vocal activity will naturally pick up, and these devices will be unnecessary.

Where to Go Owling

- To view barred owls, visit eastern Nebraska parks with mature woods around riparian habitats, such as Ponca and Indian Cave state parks, Schramm Park State Recreation Area and Rock Creek Station State Historical Park at dawn or dusk.
- Great horned owls often are observed in neighborhoods, city parks and state parks. Try Branched Oak and Enders state recreation areas.
- Short-eared owls (*Asio flammeus*) are an open-prairie dwelling species that are most often observed in winter and early spring when there is little snow cover. For best chances of viewing this stealthy, nomadic species, visit less developed areas with grassland habitat, such as Kiowa, North Lake Basin or Jack Sinn Memorial wildlife management areas.
- During the day, look for snowy owls (*Bubo scandiacus*) in open fields or near large water bodies. Typically, there are a few to over a dozen snowy owls that wander into Nebraska each winter.

To discover more birding locations, visit birdtrail.outdoornebraska.gov.

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A Scottish soup made with pheasant. JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND

COCK-A-LEEKIE SOUP

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

Known as Scotland’s National Soup, cock-a-leekie is a simple dish of leeks, chicken and barley — and it’s just as satisfying made with pheasant. Traditionalists include prunes, which I have done here to add extra sweetness to the pheasant stock. However, if you think prunes are ghastly, skip them.

The version I enjoyed for lunch at a little cafe on Loch Lomond included rice. I liked the rice, so I’m including it, too.

Servings: 4-6
Prep Time: 15 minutes
Cooking Time: 2 hours
Ingredients:

- 1 whole pheasant, quartered
- 1 onion, halved
- 2 ribs of celery, cut in half
- 1 whole head of garlic

- 1 bay leaf
- 10 cups of water
- 2 large leeks, washed and white- and light-green parts coarsely chopped
- 2-3 tsp. chicken bouillon
- ½ cup of uncooked white rice
- ½ cup of quick barley
- 6 prunes
- 1 cup of shredded carrot
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- Minced chives for garnish
- Butter

1. In a pot, combine pheasant, onion, celery, bay leaf and water. Rub the garlic head to remove loose papery layers, and then cut off the top to reveal its cross section. Drop trimmed garlic head into the pot and bring contents to a simmer. Simmer partially uncovered for 1 hour and 30

minutes, or until pheasant becomes tender. Skim off foam.

2. Then discard onion, celery, garlic and bay leaf. Remove pheasant from the pot, and when cool enough to handle, pick off meat and shred into bite-size pieces and set aside.

3. Add chicken bouillon, chopped leek, shredded carrot, rice, barley and prunes to the pot and simmer for an additional 30 minutes. If soup becomes too thick, thin with more water and bouillon.

4. Right before taking soup off the heat, add shredded pheasant meat to warm through. Season soup to taste. Serve hot soup with chopped chives and a pat of butter on top. There should be one prune in each bowl. Cock-a-leekie is usually served with brown bread.

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NEBRASKA
— GAME PARKS —

2025 PHOTO CONTEST

This year's Nebraskaland Magazine Photo Contest was once again a thrill for our staff to witness. Viewing scenes across our great state through the eyes of others is such a stunning way to cap off another year in the outdoors.

This year's Best of Show winner, "A Final March Toward Migration," by Jeffrey Z. Carney of Ashland, was taken at the Crane Trust in Hall County.

"On this night, I put down my long telephoto and picked up a 35mm wide-angle lens to try and capture the moment we were all witnessing. It was a scene I had not experienced during other migrations By the next afternoon, most of the area's cranes were gone." *(Read the rest of Carney's story on page 66.)*

While the Nebraskaland staff has seen thousands of sandhill crane images before, the depth of the cranes and the beautiful colors behind them were mesmerizing.

We thank everyone who participated in this year's contest and look forward to seeing our wonderful state through your eyes next year.



Jeff Kurrus, Editor
Nebraskaland Magazine



BEST OF SHOW

A Final March Toward Migration, Hall County
Jeffrey Z. Carney, Ashland

WILDLIFE

FIRST PLACE — Meridian, Cherry County
Rex DeBord, Chadron





THIRD PLACE — A Bobwhite Song, Hall County
Colleen Childers, Grand Island



SECOND PLACE — The Challenger, Thomas County
Brad Mellema, Grand Island

MACRO

FIRST PLACE —
Dragonfly Double,
Hall County
Rita Flohr, Grand Island



MACRO

SECOND PLACE — A Drone Fly Close-Up, Frontier County
Don Brockmeier, Eustis



THIRD PLACE — Corn Kernel and a Jumping Spider, Lancaster County
Molly Boyd, Lincoln

RECREATION

FIRST PLACE — Foggy Fishing at Iron Horse Lake, Pawnee County
Ellen Hanzlicek, DuBois



RECREATION

SECOND PLACE — Just Getting Started, Perkins County
Matt Zvolanek, Ogallala



THIRD PLACE — A Campfire Night at Ponca State Park, Dixon County
Tiara Brown, Omaha



SCENIC

FIRST PLACE — The Meandering Middle Loup,
Hooker County
Jeffrey Z. Carney, Ashland



SCENIC

SECOND PLACE — Barn Storming, Butler County
Brandon Hammons, Creston



THIRD PLACE — Still Life in Swedeburg,
Saunders County
Colette Rathke, Wahoo

Outdoor Nebraska

By Jeff Kurrus

Whether in the field, your comfy chair or the Turpin Outdoor Education Center, there is plenty to keep you experiencing nature during two of the most exciting months of the year. **N**



Ice-fish for Rainbows

All Month Long | Statewide

Catching put-and-take rainbow trout through the ice is just one more reason to visit destinations throughout the state. A list of these stocked waters can be found at OutdoorNebraska.gov after searching Fish Stocking Database. These fish can be caught using the traditional ice-fishing techniques. They tend to strike quickly, so anglers will need to pay attention whether dead-sticking or jigging. On the lure and gone in a flash, these fish add a species to locations like Grove Lake in Antelope County, where largemouth bass, bluegill and northern pike can also be found along with these aggressive fighters.

JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

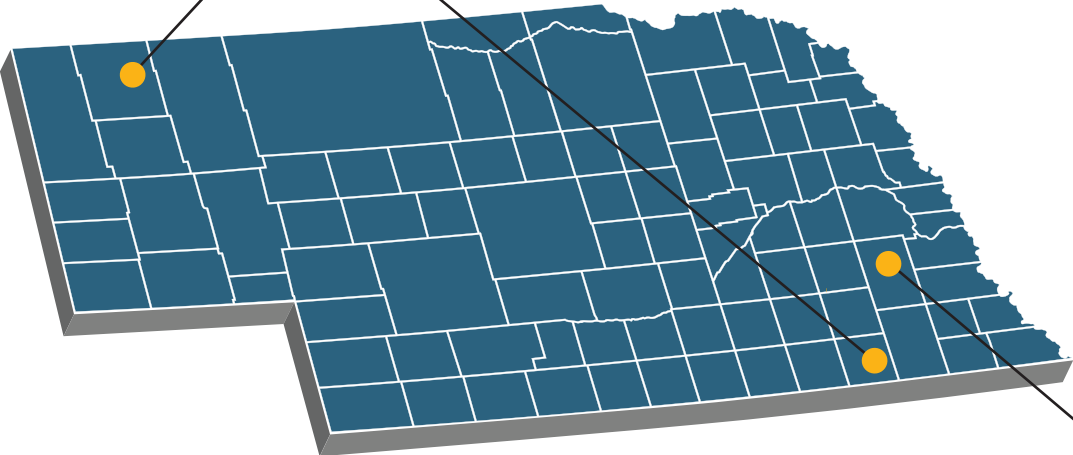


First Day Hikes

Jan. 1 | Various Locations

Start the year off on the trail at one of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's First Day Hikes. These guided events across the state educate participants about the winter season and the flora and fauna that call these locations home. From the vistas at Chadron State Park to the prairie and wooded views at Rock Creek Station, these hikes are an essential way to start your new year happy and healthy. A valid 2026 Nebraska state park vehicle permit is required for entry. Visit Calendar.OutdoorNebraska.gov for more information.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



Visit a Virtual Classroom

Various Dates | Online

"Discover the hidden lives of Nebraska's owls in this hour-long program exploring the biology, behavior, and unique adaptations of our native species." This is the introduction to the Jan. 15 online class offered by educators from the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Another class, The Science of Squirrels, will be Feb. 12. These online classes take place throughout the year and are free to the public, but you must register in advance through the event listing found at Calendar.OutdoorNebraska.gov.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

Late-season Small Game

Watch the Weather | Statewide

You can mark the weather forecast. Every winter, it seems, a random two- or three-day warm-up blows through Nebraska and provides highs in the 40s and 50s. Hot today, cold tomorrow, these days are perfect for returning to the field with a shotgun in hand to hunt for rabbits, squirrels or even pheasants. Not only are these afternoons comfortable, a lot of life will be in the field; game animals seem to notice the weather as well and take advantage of the milder temperatures, making them easier targets for hunters.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



Cosmic Archery

Jan. 2, 3:30-8 p.m.; Jan. 3, 12:30-5 p.m.
Turpin Outdoor Education Center

Perfect for the entire family, Cosmic Archery at the Turpin Outdoor Education Center in Lincoln features black lights, music and glowing targets. Equipment is provided and beginners are welcome. Reserve your group under one registration and choose from a group check-in time. Group reservation is for a one-hour activity period. Limited capacity available.

DAVID WOLFE



PAWNEE

State Recreation Area

Photos and story by Eric Fowler

Ben Vaneperen of Lincoln makes a turn on his personal watercraft at Pawnee State Recreation Area.



If you want to hop in a boat or on a personal watercraft and go fast, there aren't many places to visit in southeastern Nebraska. Yet Pawnee State Recreation Area is one of those spots, making it a busy place on a summer weekend. But it is also a quiet place most times, drawing families to its campgrounds, sunbathers to its beaches, anglers to its water and hunters to its woodlands. And all just a short drive from Lincoln.

The 780-acre lake is the second largest of the eight Salt Valley lakes managed by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and built in the 1960s by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for flood control. The lake's two campgrounds offer nearly 200 sites, 68 with electrical hookups, all with plenty of shade. Lakeview, located on the north side, is the largest and lives up to its name, with tent sites on the water's edge. Area 3 includes RV and tent sites next to the Middle Creek inlet. A group camp there is popular among Scouts.

Large day-use areas on the east and west sides of the lake draw plenty of folks from the capital city and other nearby communities. Both include sandy swim beaches, and there are two shelters and plenty of picnic tables and grills for those who like dining outdoors on a summer day.

Mowed trails and service roads wind through the 1,150 acres of parkland and wildlife management area surrounding the lake. Popular among hikers, bikers and horseback riders,

the trails and roads nearly encircle the entire lake, with the only gap being 580 yards along Northwest 126th Street. But don't let that stop you from making the 7-mile hike.

Along the way, you might spot deer and other wildlife in the woodlands, or shorebirds along the lake's edge. In the late winter, when ice comes off the lake, there could be as many as 100 bald eagles feasting on gizzard shad that couldn't handle the cold, a sight that draws photographers from Lincoln and other nearby communities.

Anglers can find blue, channel and flathead catfish, saugeye, and crappies, including some big fish, as well as bluegills at Pawnee. Kids can also keep busy catching white perch and bullheads from the bank.

With no centerfire rifles or handguns allowed, archery and muzzleloader deer hunters are drawn to the area, and squirrel and rabbit hunters have plenty of critters to pursue. Even waterfowl hunters have room to put out a spread of duck or goose decoys on the lake.

The lake's shotgun range, located in Area 1, is a popular place among shooters wanting to get tuned up for the hunting season or just learning to shoot. An archery range in Area 3 gets plenty of use as well.

Pawnee has an interesting distinction of being both busy and quiet, perfect both for relaxing away from the crowds, no matter the season, or jumping right in the middle of the summer fun on the water. [N](#)



ABOVE: Pawnee Lake, fed by Middle Creek, is located north of Emerald in Lancaster County.
OPPOSITE: Snow falls on a trail leading through the woodlands at Pawnee State Recreation Area.





OPPOSITE: Amanda, Joshua and Victoria Walls of Omaha enjoy dinner by lantern light in their screen tent in the Area 3 campground.

BELOW: Jimmy Rawhouser of Columbus and his son, Lane, watch as his nephew, Jimmy, reels in a bullhead.

RIGHT: Jonah Phillip, Foster Pierce and Jaydon Phillip of Lincoln play on the swim beach in Area 1.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Crew Loos of Roca rides his scooter through the Lakeview Campground.



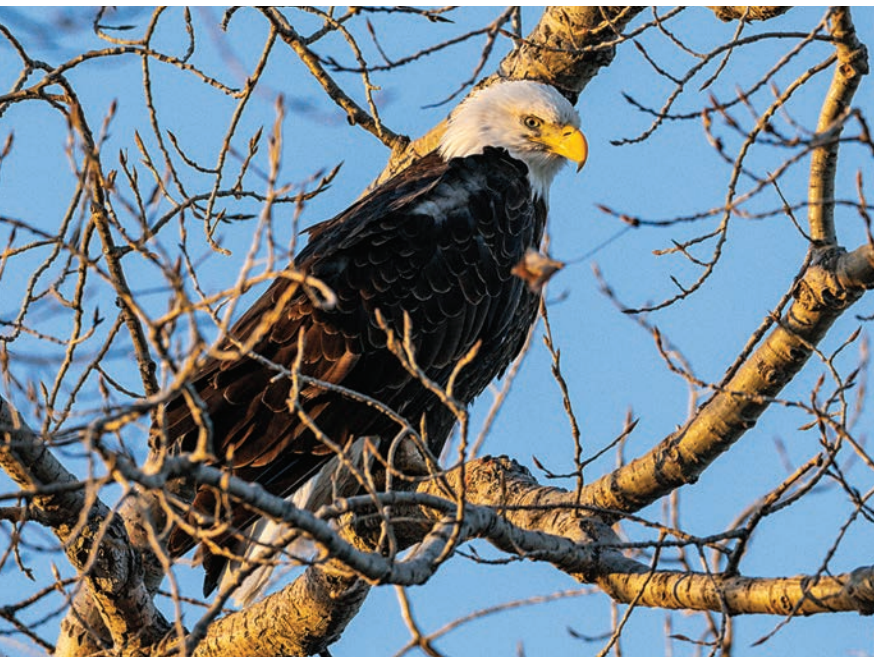


LEFT: Kenzie and Brianna Kesselring of Garland ride their horses down a trail in Area 2.

BOTTOM LEFT: A bald eagle perches in a tree in Area 1. The lake is a favorite stop for eagles in the spring.

RIGHT: Kobie Hill and Caleb Bruhn of Lincoln head back to their vehicles following a morning duck hunt.

BOTTOM RIGHT: A family fishes from the bank near their campsite in the Lakeview Campground.



Chief Standing Bear and the Declaration of Independence

By David L. Bristow, Nebraska State Historical Society

A statue of Chief Standing Bear stands in the U.S. Capitol, and Lincoln's newest high school is named in his honor. The Ponca leader is celebrated for an 1879 court case in which he successfully challenged the government that was holding him prisoner.

In *Standing Bear v. Crook* (1879), Judge Elmer Dundy ruled for the first time in a federal court that “an Indian is a person within the meaning of the laws of the United States.” As we commemorate 250 years of American independence in 2026, it's timely to look at the role of the Declaration of Independence in this famous Omaha trial.

The Ponca had never been at war with the United States and had never sold their land near the mouth of the Niobrara River. Nevertheless, the government forced them to move to Indian Territory. There, they suffered from hunger and disease.

In the dead of winter, Chief Standing Bear led a group of Poncas on foot back to Nebraska, where they were arrested and held at Fort Omaha by Gen. George Crook.



A later photo of Standing Bear. NSHS RG2066-PH5-1



Standing Bear, his wife and one of his sons, 1870s.

NSHS RG2066-PH5-2

Aided by Omaha attorneys, Standing Bear took the unprecedented step of suing the federal government in court. This was the first time a Native American had done so. He sought a writ of habeas corpus, a concept from English common law that prevents unlawful imprisonment. The government had not charged the Poncas with a crime but insisted that no Ponca could leave the reservation without permission.

Federal attorneys even argued that Standing Bear had no right to challenge them in court. As a Native American, they said, he was not the kind of “person” that was meant when the law spoke of the rights of the people.

As in most trials, many of the arguments were technical and legalistic. But Judge Dundy got to the heart of the matter in his ruling. He noted that the federal attorney had



Standing Bear, November 1877. This portrait was made during a visit to Washington D.C. and is the basis for the statue at the U.S. Capitol. NSHS RG1227-PH2-2



Judge Elmer Dundy. NSHS RG2411-PH0-142

explained the history of habeas corpus in English law. The attorney had demonstrated that habeas corpus had always applied only to the “free subjects of the kingdom” and not to everyone.

Dundy dismissed this argument. “I have not examined the English laws ...,” he said, “nor have I thought it necessary to do so.” Even if the federal attorney was correct, English laws “will appear at a disadvantage when compared with our own ... that whilst the Parliament of Great Britain was legislating in behalf of the favored few, the Congress of the United States was legislating in behalf of all mankind who come within our jurisdiction.”

Dundy did not address the question of citizenship or restore the Poncas’ land, but he ordered General Crook to release the Poncas. Standing Bear and his followers

had chosen to separate themselves from the rest of their tribe, and that decision must be respected, Dundy said, because — and here he referenced the Declaration — they “have the inalienable right to ‘life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness ...’.”

Dundy did not argue that the Founders had Native Americans in mind when they wrote those words. In truth, colonists had wanted to move deeper into the Native American’s territory beyond the Appalachians, and resented the British government for trying to stop them.

But once Americans embraced the principles of equality, self-government and inalienable rights, people who were not protected by existing laws began to argue that so-called universal principles ought to include everyone. Over time, this proved to be a powerful argument.

Standing Bear and his friends went on a speaking tour after the trial. His interpreter was Bright Eyes (aka Susette La Flesche), a young woman of the Omaha tribe who became a powerful speaker in her own right.

Bright Eyes had a knack for distilling in a few sentences the essence of America’s founding documents. One of her main themes was that the central purpose of constitutional government is its protection from arbitrary power. In her introduction to a book about Standing Bear’s case, she said she wanted the American people to hear the Poncas’ story because, “The people are the power which move the magistrates who administer the laws” — which is about as succinct a definition of democracy as one could ask for.

“It is a little thing,” she continued, “a simple thing, which my people ask of the nation whose watchword is liberty; but it is endless in its consequences. They ask for liberty, and law is liberty.” 📖

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



Inshata Theumba (“Bright Eyes”), also known as Susette La Flesche Tibbles. NSHS RG2737-PH0-9



Because a federal court tried the case, the trial was held at the U.S. Post Office and Custom House building. Built in 1870, it stood on the southwestern corner of 15th and Dodge streets in Omaha.

NSHS RG2341-PH0-247

ONE HUNDRED YEARS

L A T E R

The first issue of Nebraskaland Magazine debuted in June 1926 under the Outdoor Nebraska moniker, with conservation being as important then as it is now.

By Jeff Kurrus

The predecessor of Nebraskaland Magazine, Outdoor Nebraska, was first published in June 1926 with the following mission:

"The Bureau of Game and Fish takes pleasure in presenting to the citizens of Nebraska the first number of Outdoor Nebraska.

It is the purpose of the department to publish this bulletin from time to time for two reasons:

(a) To inform the sportsmen and other citizens of the state who are interested in the work of the Department just what is being done.

(b) To inculcate a greater appreciation for the wild life and the natural beauty of Nebraska."

Let's look back on what Nebraskans considered important a century ago.

CONCERNS OF THE DAY

Prairie chickens: "There were some things which the breaking plow took from us that can never be returned. One of these things was the prairie chicken. He had to give way to the plow which year after year turned under more and more sod. Today, there are very few of these native birds left in eastern Nebraska, so few that they are almost a curiosity." — From "The Pheasant in Eastern Nebraska"

The future of waterfowl hunting: "With the growing occupation of the continent, the increase in the number of hunters, and the disappearance of great areas of marshes and waters through drainage, the adverse effect on the supply of migratory wild fowl became more and more evident." — "Our Migratory Wild Fowl and Present Conditions Affecting Their Abundance," Edward W. Nelson

Habitat loss: "We can go on and exploit all our natural resources if we wish, let the wild life and natural beauty of

Nebraska become a thing of the past, or we can conserve these things and pass them on to our children and our children's children. It all depends on what we do today."

— "State Recreation Grounds for the Future," Frank B. Connell

The need for game preserves: "WITH the population increasing rapidly, low lands being drained, prairie lands being broken into farms, the problem of conserving wild life grows more and more difficult. ... The Nebraska Bureau of Game and Fish has come to the conclusion that the only answer to this important problem is adequate game preserves for both animal and bird life, and therefore quite extensive plans are being made along this line."

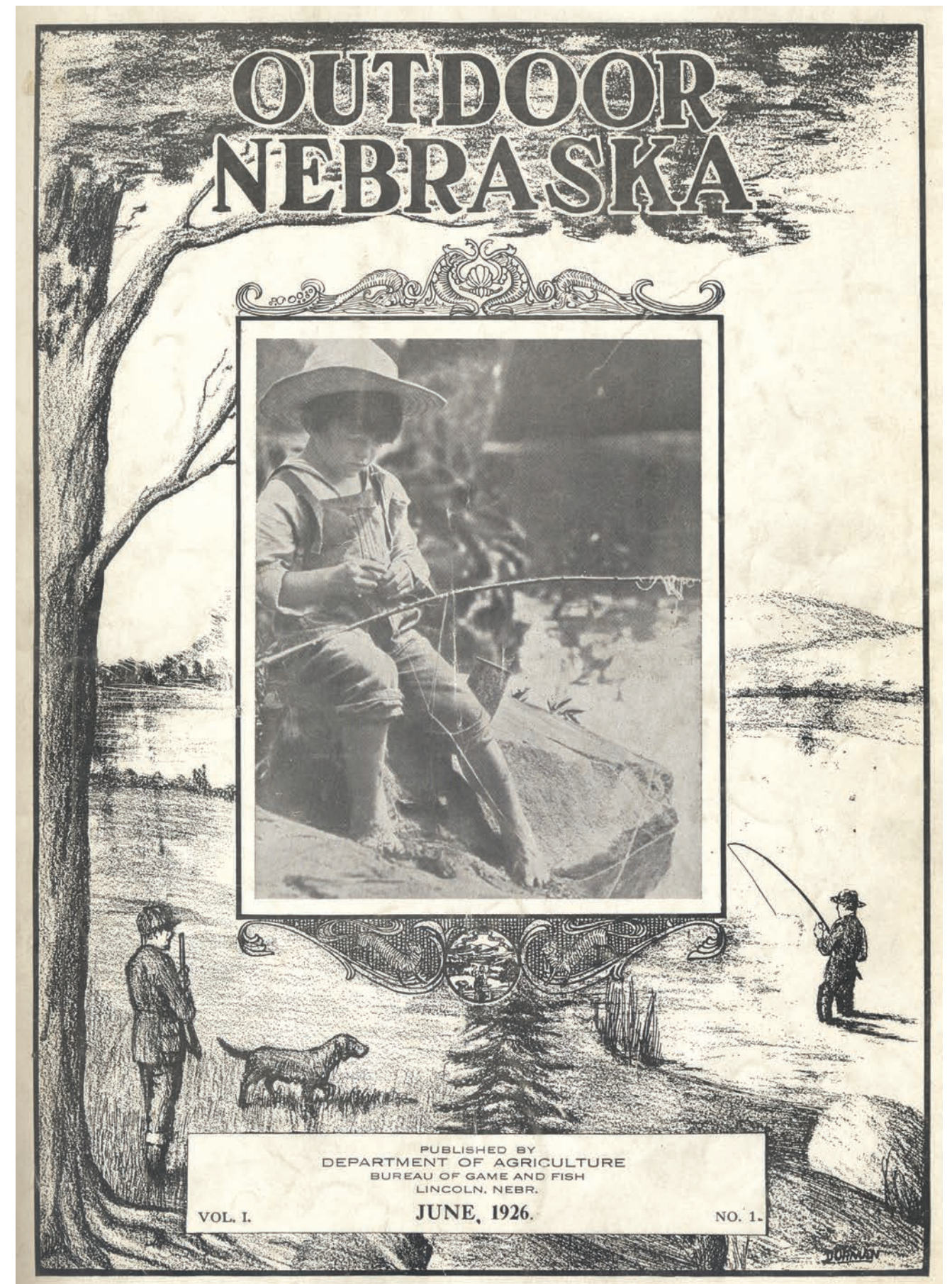
Conservation officers: "The average Game Warden of today is a sincere sort of a fellow, serious-minded in his work and generally willing to overlook an innocent mistake. His job is a thankless one, his work hours never cease once he has taken the oath of office; he can't satisfy everyone and he shouldn't try."

Entertainment: And what outdoor publication doesn't need an essay on frogs, written by "A Young Norwegian": "What a wonderful bird the frog are. When stand, he sit, almost. When he hop, he fly, almost. He ain't got no sense, hardly. He ain't got no tail, hardly, either. When he sit, he sit on what he ain't got, almost."

These older editions are reminders that conservation, and getting people interested in the outdoors, will be the focus long into the future. However, there is one oversight in this first edition. This magazine would not go on to be published from "time to time." It has faithfully informed Nebraskans for 100 years, with many more years to come. 



*Celebrating 100 Years of
Nebraskaland Magazine*



The first cover of Outdoor Nebraska magazine, published in June 1926. NEBRASKALAND ARCHIVES

Showy Partridge Pea

A WILDLIFE FAVORITE

Story and photos by Gerry Steinauer, Botanist

often include showy partridge pea (*Chamaecrista fasciculata*) in prairie and other planting mixes. This pioneering annual is inexpensive and usually establishes in the first year, adding bright color to the landscape while providing an early source of pollen for hungry insects. Its large, nutritious seeds are also a favorite of wildlife.

Preferring sandy soils, partridge pea grows on dry shorelines, open woodlands, prairies and disturbed sites across the eastern half of Nebraska. As its name suggests, it has striking, bright yellow, pea-shaped flowers that bloom from July into September. These blooms are followed by flat, green pods that darken, twist and eventually spring open, tossing seeds several feet. The seeds usually germinate late the following spring, though many remain dormant in the soil for years.

Partridge pea often thrives in the first few years of plantings but fades as perennial grasses and wildflowers take hold. Only scattered plants and seeds usually persist without management. Prescribed fire, haying or livestock grazing can rejuvenate stands by setting back competing perennials, exposing bare soil and letting sunlight reach the ground, stimulating germination and seedling growth. Fire, in particular, can produce especially lush stands, a bonanza for wildlife. Its heat helps break down the hard seed coat, while the nutrient-rich ash acts as a natural fertilizer.

Deer browse the foliage in late summer and early fall, and pheasants, bobwhite quail, greater prairie-chickens, turkeys, mallards, songbirds and rodents all feed on the protein- and carbohydrate-rich seeds, which are low in fiber and easily digestible. Many pods stay closed and hang on the stems through winter, providing food during a stressful time when other seeds are buried beneath snow.



Partridge pea seed harvested with a combine and cleaned for planting.

Some landowners, especially in the South, are choosing to “go natural,” planting partridge pea and other native legumes instead of corn, milo or alfalfa in wildlife food plots. Unlike crop food plots, partridge pea doesn’t require annual planting — just occasional disturbance, like harrowing or light disking, to rejuvenate the plants. These plots with dense upper foliage over bare ground offer ideal brood-rearing cover for pheasant and quail chicks.

Partridge pea also supports pollinators. Its flowers don’t produce nectar to attract pollinators; instead, they have anthers of two colors. Yellow anthers produce reproductive pollen, while purple anthers produce “food pollen” that attract bumble bees, honeybees and other long-tongued bees that can access the pollen.

Another clever ploy: Orange-red glands on its leaf stalks secrete nectar all summer, drawing sweet-toothed ants that patrol and protect their food source, as well as the plant from leaf-eating insects.

If you want an inexpensive, easy-to-grow plant that supports wildlife and pollinators, partridge pea is hard to beat. [N](#)

Partridge pea showing buds and open flowers.



A REGAL BIRD

Royalty? Perhaps not, but ferruginous hawks are an iconic species of the American West

By Justin Haag



A ferruginous hawk keeps watch over its surroundings from atop a utility pole in Dawes County. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

The word regal is used to define something so magnificent or dignified that it's fit for a monarch, or resembles one. One of the state's hawk species is so highly thought of that it bears the name *Buteo regalis*.

The ferruginous hawk wears its crown without trumpets and fanfare. Its mottled appearance can make it hard to distinguish from other hawks.

The species of western North America that, in Nebraska, primarily ranges only in the Panhandle, is what you can call "a big deal," though. With a wingspan of almost 5 feet, it's the largest of big hawks known as buteos and, therefore, the largest of the hawk species.

The much more common red-tailed hawk has rounder, shorter wings, a distinction that helps identify the bird

in the air. The bald eagle and golden eagle aren't much larger than the ferruginous.

The species has a range of color morphs but is named for the hue of the feathers on its legs and shoulders — ferruginous is a word that references the rust of iron. It joins the golden eagle and rough-legged hawk as the only raptor species in America with feathers down to their toes. Most others are only partially feathered and not as suited to the cold.

The birds are well adapted to hunt the open prairie. They often perch on utility poles, dead trees and other high vantages to survey the landscape. Comparable to other hawks, they have outstanding eyesight, estimated to be about eight times better than that of humans.

They primarily feed on small mammals but have been known to kill and fly off with larger species, such as jackrabbits. They've even been observed standing near the holes of prairie dogs and other small mammals waiting to ambush the unsuspecting prey when they emerge. As a distinction from other hawks, they will run down prey on foot.

After performing a courting display of aerial acrobatics, ferruginous hawks build large nests, about 3 feet high and 3 feet across. Further solidifying the hawk's reputation as a species of the West are accounts of it using bison bones in nest construction when the big beasts roamed the plains in vast numbers. The nests can occur as high as 65 feet or down to ground level.

The species is among those listed for greatest need of conservation in Nebraska, where the total population is estimated to be 200 to 400. There are fewer than 4,000 breeding pairs in the United States.

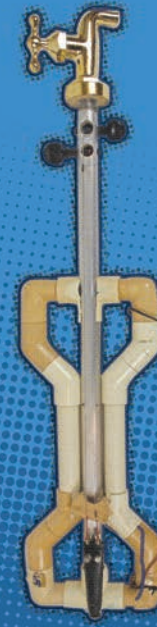
The bird's scientific name did not always bear its regal distinction. It was first called *Falco ferrugineus* in the 1830s by the curator of a German museum who received a specimen from California. It was later discovered that name had already been used to describe another raptor species of Brazil. Official naming rights then went to the next on the list — a keeper at the British Museum received skins of birds from Mexico and had given it the *Buteo regalis* epithet in 1844.

No, you won't see this hawk riding a royal carriage over the western Nebraska countryside. From its throne high above, though, *Buteo regalis* looms large to small mammals and keeps watch over its prairie kingdom.

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HOW COLD AIR BOOSTS SOUND

By Monica Macoubrie, Wildlife Education Specialist

Winter in Nebraska transforms the landscape into a world of snow-covered fields, frozen lakes and crisp, clear air. But beyond the visual changes, winter also affects the way sound travels, influencing how animals communicate, hunt and evade predators.

In the winter, air is denser due to lower temperatures, which allows sound waves to travel farther and with greater clarity. This is why on a still winter night, the call of a distant coyote or the hoot of a great horned owl might seem eerily close. Without the humidity and thermal turbulence of summer, sound waves experience less distortion, creating an almost amplified effect.

Silent Snow

Freshly fallen snow does more than just create a winter wonderland — it also acts as a sound absorber. The complex, airy structure of snowflakes scatters and dampens sound waves, creating that peaceful, muffled hush after a big snowfall. This can be great news for small animals like rabbits and voles, making it harder for predators to pinpoint their location. But as snow compacts or forms an icy crust, it starts to reflect sound instead, suddenly amplifying every crunch, rustle or tiny movement. A scurrying mouse beneath the snowpack might be hidden from sight, but to a sharp-eared owl, it sounds like a dinner bell ringing from below.



In the winter, beavers drum their tails on the ice, sending vibrations through the water to communicate.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

Ice Drums and Tail Slaps

Nebraska's beavers are known for their impressive engineering skills, but they also have creative ways of communicating in winter. When their ponds and streams freeze over, beavers can no longer slap their tails on open water to warn their family of danger. Instead, they adjust by drumming their tails on the ice, sending vibrations through the water below. These sound waves travel efficiently under the frozen surface, alerting their colony without drawing unwanted attention from predators above.



A black-tailed jackrabbit huddles in deep snow, hoping to stay silent to evade predators in North Platte.

ROCKY HOFFMAN, NEBRASKALAND



This white-breasted nuthatch from the Pine Ridge relies on calls to stay in touch with other birds while foraging.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

Bird Calls on Ice

Even when the trees are bare and the landscape is frozen, Nebraska's winter birds keep singing. Chickadees, cardinals and nuthatches rely on their calls to stay in touch while foraging. Since sound waves can travel farther through cold air, their whistles and chirps can carry over greater distances than in the summer. Plus, with no dense foliage to block the sound, their songs can echo across snowy fields with surprising clarity. If you hear a cardinal's bright, cheerful call on a cold morning, it may be reaching much farther than you realize.

Predator Playlist

For hunters who rely on their ears, winter presents challenges and opportunities. Without rustling leaves and buzzing insects, it's easier to focus on the subtle sounds of prey. But the muffling effect of snow means predators must fine-tune their hearing. Owls have an edge thanks to their silent flight and disc-shaped faces that funnel sound directly to their ears. A great horned owl can detect the faintest scratch of a mouse moving beneath the snow and strike with pinpoint accuracy — even in total darkness.

Foxes, too, have incredible hearing and are known to make acrobatic pounces into the snow, guided entirely by sound.



In winter, sound travels farther in the cold so a single coyote howl can seem much closer than it actually is.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

Howling Through the Frost

Coyotes are Nebraska's winter vocalists, their calls carrying for miles across the frozen plains. In winter, they use their long-distance howls to coordinate with pack members, defend territory or even attract a mate. Because sound travels farther in cold, still air, a single howl can reach animals much farther away than it would in summer.

Foxes and owls, too, benefit from this extended range, allowing them to call to mates or warn away intruders over greater distances.

Winter in Nebraska may seem quiet at first, but it's actually a season filled with sound — just in different ways. The frozen landscape creates a world where some sounds travel farther, while others disappear into the snow.

Animals must adapt to be heard — or stay hidden. Whether it's the amplified howl of a coyote, the muffled rustling of a rabbit underneath fresh snow, or the perfectly tuned hearing of an owl hunting in the dark, winter's acoustic world is just as alive and active as any other season — if you listen closely enough.

OUR PHOTO CONTEST HISTORY

By Jeff Kurrus

The June 1970 edition of Nebraskaland Magazine accepted entries for the “Nebraskaland Festival of Color Photo Contest,” a first in its history. In the categories of scenic, wildlife, events, outdoor recreation and people, the magazine’s editors outlined an exhaustive list of submission rules as well as guidelines for a winning photograph. Complete with an entry form for participants to cut out like a newspaper coupon, the editors ended with this proposition: “Study the contest rules again. Then, start the entries pouring in. The judges are waiting.”

For the grand prize winner, the contest offered: A Frontier Airlines flight from “that airline’s terminal nearest winner’s home to Omaha, tour starting point, and back again at the journey’s end,” two weeks’ use of a 1971 air-conditioned automobile from Hertz Rent-A-Car of Omaha, lodging at Holiday Inns “throughout Nebraskaland,” and \$500 expense money.

In March 1971, the contest winners were announced in a 12-page spread. “Nebraskaland’s Festival of Color Photo Contest promoted such a tremendous response that the judging team was literally up to its elbows in excellent photography,” wrote Dick H. Schaffer, editor of the magazine and a member of the final judging panel. “And, the 1,300 entries from camera buffs proved both a joy and an agony.”

“There were so many top-notch photos with tremendous creativity and imagination,” Schaffer continued, “that we were really hard-pressed to pick a winner.” Given Schaffer’s positivity about the contest’s response, it was somewhat surprising that there was no photo contest the following year. However, it does make perfect sense, because only color

prints and slides were accepted during those days, and the magazine’s staff promised to return all 1,300 entries to their respective owners. On top of a generous grand prize, the cost of labor probably took significant time to recoup.

However, Nebraskaland Magazine gave the contest another go in 1972 — this time, with a much more subdued advertisement. Winning photos were to be published in May 1973, with first-place winners receiving a bound volume of Nebraskaland’s 1972 issues plus a two-year subscription to the magazine.

The result? These winners were hard to find — the May 1973 edition included no photos, and the winners were listed in a small box toward the back pages.

Following the 1972 contest, there would be no photo contest until 2014’s Beautiful Nebraska special issue. Because of advancements in technology, the photo selection

process by this time had become much easier, as slides and prints were replaced by JPEGs and TIFFs, and an online form replaced the written cut-out of the 1970s.

Despite the photo contest’s sporadic start, one similarity does thread together the years. The selection process continues to be challenging, and next year will provide another bevy of photographs from across the state. We won’t take a year, or 40, off — because there’s nothing more delightful than seeing our wonderful state through the eyes of our readers.

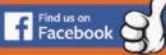


The March 1971 issue of Nebraskaland announced winners of the first photo contest. NEBRASKALAND ARCHIVES

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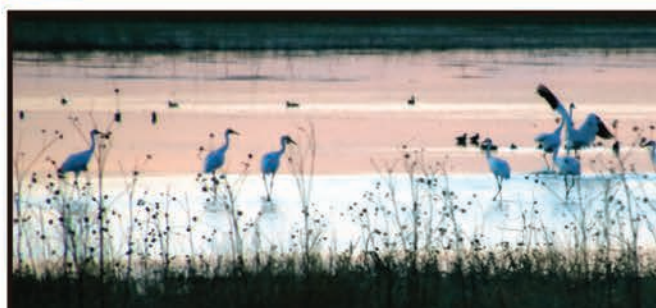




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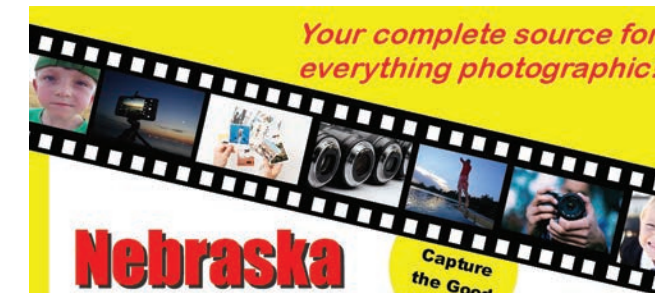
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WHERE DO INSECTS GO IN WINTER?

By Monica Macoubrie, Wildlife Education Specialist

Insects are organisms that are ectothermic, or cold-blooded, which means they cannot produce their own body heat like mammals or birds. In order to survive and thrive in climates that can be as unforgiving as Nebraska, insects have developed several strategies to deal with frigid weather.

Diapause

Rather than hibernation, insects have their own version of this life-saving tool known as diapause. Insects that prepare for diapause, such as woolly bear caterpillars, will try to seek some kind of shelter for the winter, similarly to hibernating mammals. These shelters could be under rocks, in tree trunks, leaf litter or in burrows underground just a few inches beneath your feet.

Migration

One approach that insects employ is migration. For example, monarch butterflies in Nebraska are known to fly thousands of miles every year to venture to the same areas of the oyamel fir forests in the mountains of central Mexico. This microclimate is heavenly for these butterflies as temperatures don't get too hot nor too cold, and the area provides the butterflies the right amount of humidity to live until they can return north in spring. Eventually, the children or grandchildren of last year's monarchs will return to Nebraska.

Freeze Avoidance

When cold temperatures stay for long periods of time, insects utilize a freeze avoidance strategy. Some species of insects will enter a "dry" hibernation state, when they purge all the food and water in their bodies. This prevents ice inside their bodies from forming, which is deadly.



Although most adult praying mantises die during the late fall and early winter, females leave behind a foamy-looking egg case, known as an ootheca.

JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND

Other species can produce cryoprotectants, such as glycerol and sugar, to reduce the lethal freezing temperature of their bodies. This concept is similar to the antifreeze found in your car. Many insects use this strategy if they are overwintering as larvae.

Some species of grubs will burrow deeper into the soil to escape the cold. Other insects have a heavy, waxy coating on their exoskeletons that protects against ice formation.

Overwintering as Nymphs

Not many insects are active in the winter, but the nymphs of dragonflies, mayflies and stoneflies can live under the ice in ponds and streams. These insects actively feed and grow all winter to emerge as adults in early

spring. Some species may stay in the aquatic larval stage for several years.

Overwintering as Eggs

A few insects lay eggs that can survive the winter, such as the praying mantis. Although most adults die during the late fall and early winter, the females leave behind a foamy-looking egg case, known as an ootheca, on rocks, twigs, stems or even on the sides of buildings or fences. Inside the egg case are dozens or hundreds of mantis eggs that can survive the winter due to the foamy insulation. As the weather warms in the spring, young mantids emerge.

Even during a time when we don't see them, we can appreciate the cleverness of insects.



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Fishing with my father, 1999 ▶

Out on Goose Lake with the best fishing buddy a kid could ask for — my dad, Joe Janousek, of O'Neill. Every cast in this johnboat was a lesson and a laugh, whether we were landing bluegill or battling a northern pike. These are memories I'll always cherish. Thanks for the fishing bug, Dad!
 – Ryan Janousek, O'Neill



Coon hunting in Fairbury, 1979 ▲

My uncle, Mike Leonard (left), and my dad, Charles Steele, and his bluetick coonhound, Pat. My uncle grew up in Fairbury but moved to California around 1960. He used to come back every year in November to watch his nephews deer hunt in the mornings. At night, he would coon hunt with my dad. This was a great night hunting as there were many chases and memories made. My dad has passed away, and my uncle, now in his late 80s, doesn't make it back to Nebraska much, but takes Nebraskaland Magazine to keep up with all things going on in Nebraska.
 – Ken Steele, Holland



Deer hunting in Valentine, Circa 1973 ▲

From left: Larry Hansen (me), Mike Loofe, Chris Loofe and Bob Wingert. This picture was taken after a great hunt in the Valentine area.
 – Larry Hansen, Wayne

Goose hunting near Rulo, 1974 ▶

Mel Knopp Jr. (left) hunting with an unidentified Goodyear coworker. Both Canadas and snows were harvested. Mel was my dear old childhood hunting buddy in Lincoln. Unfortunately, he passed away in November 2013 at 58 years old. I ran into these photos recently and thought Portraits of the Past would be a great tribute to Mel.
 – Jeffrey Obrecht, Cheyenne, Wyoming



Send contributions to: Portraits from the Past, Nebraskaland Magazine, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370. Or e-mail to Jeff.Kurru@Nebraska.gov. Photos should show people enjoying Nebraska outdoor activities, such as camping, boating, hunting or fishing, and must have been taken before 2000. We will give priority to unusual photos or activities. When possible, please include a story about the photograph and identify the people, places and approximate date it was taken. Text may be edited and photos adjusted for reproduction. All photos will be returned. PLEASE SEND ORIGINALS IF POSSIBLE FOR BEST REPRODUCTION.



A lone sandhill crane flies above the Platte River, providing one final memory for a family in a viewing blind. @CARNEYPHOTOGRAPHY1

SHARING THE MIGRATION WITH FAMILY

By Jeffrey Z. Carney

Experiencing Nebraska's sandhill crane migration has been on the "bucket list" of my brother-in-law and sister-in-law, Jeff and Judy Willour of Omaha, for decades.

After spending most of March 2025 hosting migration photography workshops at the Crane Trust near Alda, I extended my stay another night so I could share one of nature's greatest spectacles with them.

This trip was going to be emotional for many reasons. The biggest? Judy is living with multiple myeloma, a blood cancer. "After my diagnosis," Judy said, "I decided to live my life in the present, in nature, and with family. That's very important to me."

Our evening in a blind along the banks of the Platte River started slowly. It was frustratingly slow. There were no cranes for more than two hours. The sun was setting fast. I was beginning to wonder if the area's record migration — about 1 million migrated through the 80-mile stretch of river on their journey north this season — was going to elude us. It was late March after all, and a strong south wind would push the remaining cranes out of the area.

Despite the record numbers, Jeff recalls me lowering our expectations. "Sometimes the cranes just do not cooperate," I had told them.

Then, suddenly, the power and emotion of nature were on full display. Small groups of cranes began to appear from all directions. They were returning to the river for the night after

feeding in nearby cornfields. Their calls were deafening. The sky and river sandbars were becoming crowded. Of course, from a photographer's perspective, all of this had to happen after the sun had set. Fortunately, the clouds and reflections of blue hour light provided a beautiful backdrop for a few, fleeting moments.

I had my camera equipment with me to document the evening. But this night was different. I put down my long telephoto and picked up a 35mm wide-angle lens to try and capture the moment we were all witnessing. It was a scene I had not experienced during other migrations.

The roost had literally grown to the point that the cranes were about 10 feet from our blind. As if the evening needed any more drama, we had to crawl out of the blind in total darkness so we didn't disturb the cranes.

It was a long, quiet walk back to the truck. Once in the cab, we smiled, hugged and shed a few more tears.

"I brought my binoculars and a spotting scope with me," Jeff said. "But I quickly knew I had to put all of that down and live in the moment. The sounds. The smells. It was amazing. Like nothing I'd ever experienced."

Then, nature intervened again. By the next afternoon, most of the area's cranes were gone. A strong south wind blew through the Platte River Valley, sending most of the cranes on their way north. But through our photographs and shared memories, the evening lives on for our family.

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