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The Wildcat Hills in the Nebraska Panhandle have evident beauty, but sometimes getting off of the main road is the best way to see them. These sandstone outcroppings are near Scottsbluff. Photo by Rick Houchin.

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Indian Cave – 50 Years in the Making • Cardinal Flower
Plank Grilling • A Mountain Lion Timeline



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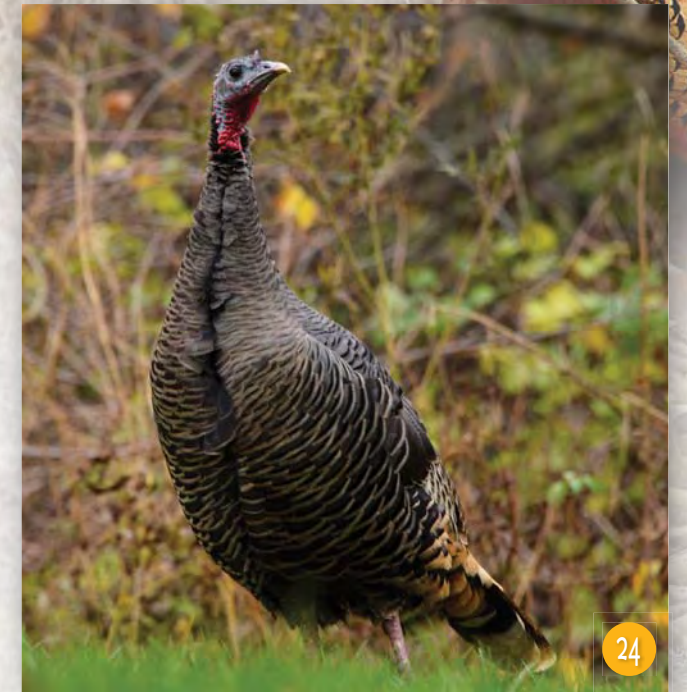
ON THE WEB...

Trail Tails Magazine - Fall 2013

EDITED BY JERRY KANE, LAYOUT AND DESIGN BY DONNA SCHIMONITZ

Preview *NEBRASKAland Magazine's* award-winning children's publication at NebraskalandMagazine.com.

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Cover: One morning I walked down to the Platte River in Hall County and heard a noise in the tree behind me and saw these two raccoons watching me. To learn more about raccoons, turn to page 6. Photo by Rick Rasmussen. **Opposite:** A white ash and oak seedling provide a rainbow of color to the forest floor at Indian Cave State Park in Richardson County. To see more on Indian Cave, turn to page 32. Photo by Eric Fowler.



This red fox was photographed by Kevin Fortina near Valley, Nebraska.



Black and Red Fox Squirrels?
We have seen a black fox squirrel with a red tail at our bird feeders –and more recently a “half and half” (above) as we like to call him. We also get a kick out of watching Cooper’s hawk fledglings make futile passes at the squirrels in our yard.
Stanley Jensen
Lincoln, Nebraska

The Mushroom Quest
While hiking in the woods near Verdigre, Nebraska, my husband and I spotted a large, orange mushroom (above, right) that brightened up the forest floor. The 10-inch beauty was growing from the underground roots of an oak tree. Since we had never seen that type of fungus before, we took several pictures and tried to identify it on several mushroom experts’ websites.
From what I learned, it is commonly known as sulfur shelf, chicken of the woods, or the chicken mushroom. Even though it flourishes in hardwood forests throughout North America, it is a rare find for some mushroom hunters. During the summer and fall, it is most likely to be found on deciduous trees, stumps, logs and roots. It also grows on cedar, pine or other conifers. This



mushroom can sometimes weigh up to 50 pounds or more.
Michelle Hutchson
Blair, Nebraska

NEBRASKAland Visitor Letters
We want to thank all 36 readers who sent e-mails and letters for last issue’s visitor, an **oriental cockroach**, that was on **page 54**. See page 15 for the winner, rules and this issue’s hint.

I enjoyed the black and white photos by Mr. Forsberg. Color doesn’t always provide the best way to see a subject, and I thought his images were intimate and revealing. Thank you.
Solveig Knott
Grand Island, Nebraska

Enjoyed the article on Royal, Nebraska. My son-in-law and daughter and family live near there and we have done lots of hunting and fishing in the area. Next time you are out that way, stop in at Randy Erb’s bait shop and check out his chain saw sculpture.
Janelle Downing
Norfolk, Nebraska

We recently moved to Indiana but are continuing our *NEBRASKAland* subscription since we grew up in Nebraska and were residents of Fremont for the past 38 years. Our granddaughter helped me find this month’s visitor. It will be fun

teaching our grandchildren all about their parents’ home state using your magazine.
Freda Hocking



I tried for more than 40 years to get an eagle picture and finally got a couple on the Middle Loup River.
Victor Powers, Broken Bow, Nebraska

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This shiny black insect may be familiar to many of you, but you probably won’t admit that to your neighbors. It is an **Oriental cockroach** (*Blatta orientalis*), which, while not native to the United States, has become widely distributed and is found in Nebraska. The **Oriental cockroach** is nocturnal, preferring dark habitats, and is a scavenger feeding on a wide variety of organic matter. It can be found outside in damp, shady areas, often under debris, while inside it is most commonly found in basements or crawl spaces, or under sinks, where moisture levels are high. **Oriental cockroaches** are dark brown to black in color, and roughly 1 to 1½ inches in length, with females being larger than males. Females have functionless wing-pads, while males have wings covering only ¼ of their abdomen; both are apparently unable to fly. They are good runners, though, with strong, well-developed legs. Females produce eggs in an egg case called an **ootheca**, which is approximately the size and shape of a dried kidney bean, and contains 15-20 eggs. They carry the ootheca around on their body for a day before depositing it near a food source. Nymphs hatch out, begin to feed, and will go through several molts before emerging as adults.



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

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Please include your postal address and telephone number.
Letters may be condensed and edited for clarity. Photographs are welcome and will be returned.

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Raccoon Behaviors

Amy Kucera

Whether it's running down a tree head first or standing on hind legs to inspect an attractive aroma, raccoon behaviors can be fascinating to observe. Though easily identified by their distinctive black mask and ringed tail, witnessing a raccoon in the wild can pose a challenge due to their nocturnal nature.

In the city, however, the odds of catching a glimpse of these mammals are considerably greater. With a population density and life expectancy higher than that of their country counterparts, urban raccoons have quickly adapted and thrived in the midst of the metropolis. Since they have the dexterity to unlatch doors and open containers, it is customary for these omnivores to dine at garbage bins where their access to food is plentiful, and will often become the exclusive source of nourishment.

It was once believed that raccoons had the human-like tendency to wash their food before eating it. Rather, the perceptive hairs surrounding their claws increase in sensitivity while immersed in water and they use this method to explore and identify objects.

In the Midwest, raccoons mate primarily during late



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

winter. After a gestation period of around 62 days, a litter is born, usually comprised of two to five young known as kits. Since male raccoons do not assist with caretaking, kits will remain with their mother in a protected area until they are old enough to forage on their own. Urban raccoons will often use attics, garages, chimneys and basements as den sites and will teach their young their trademark technique of dumpster diving.

As a survival skill, raccoons will often elude their pursuers by traveling through streams and climbing trees. In the city, since their only major predator is the automobile, they have subsequently learned to avoid busy streets and highways, and will teach their young how to safely cross the road. These resident raccoons don't use traffic lights, however, for they are colorblind.

In Nebraska, prior to 1940, raccoons were common only in the eastern third of the state. They have since greatly expanded their reach and can now be frequently found in all 93 counties. As they continue to colonize in cities, they have become a notorious neighborhood nuisance to some, yet they remain a treasured resource to others. During the 2011-2012 season, Nebraskans harvested an estimated 177,171 raccoons at an average price of \$10.09 per pelt. This value is projected to continue on the upward trend this season, making this furbearer a viable economic activity for hunters and trappers.

Regardless of their location within the landscape, raccoons are intelligent creatures with a unique ability to adapt under modern circumstance. This makes observing them a worthwhile experience, one that may leave the viewer just as curious as they are. ■

Send Us Your Trail Cam Photos!



Bob Caldwell captured this image when the Missouri River flooded seven miles south of Nebraska City in 2010. The camera and feeder were ruined but the SD card survived.

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

NEBRASKA

Pheasants Forever & Quail Forever 2013/2014 Fall & Winter Events

YOUTH MENTOR HUNTS					
Date	Chapter	Location	Date	Chapter	Location
Sep-07	Central NE QF	St Paul	Oct-12	Webster County PF	Blue Hill
Sep-07	Platte County PF	Columbus	Oct-13	Niobrara Valley PF	Stewart
Sep-22	Burt County PF	Tekamah	Oct-19	Antelope Valley PF	Oshkosh
Sep-28	Douglas County - West PF	Tekamah	Oct-19	Big Red PF	Lincoln
Sep-28	Heritage PF	Alliance	Oct-19	Corn Country PF	York
Sep-28	Lewis & Clark PF	Hartington	Oct-19	Cornhusker PF	Syracuse
Sep-28	Little Blue River PF	Hastings	Oct-19	Great Plains PF	Holdrege
Sep-28	Washington County PF	Blair	Oct-19	High Plains PF	Sidney
Sep-29	Sandhills PF	Ainsworth	Oct-19	Kearney County PF	Minden
Oct-05	Dixon County PF	Allen	Oct-19	Lincoln Creek PF	Aurora
Oct-05	Golden Prairie PF	Neligh	Oct-19	Loup/Platte Ringnecks PF	Alda
Oct-05	Loup River PF	Ord	Oct-19	Lower Elkhorn Valley PF	West Point
Oct-05	Saline County PF	Wilber	Oct-19	Lower Platte PF	Ashland
Oct-12	Bazile Creek Ringnecks PF	Bloomfield	Oct-19	Maple Creek PF	Clarkson
Oct-12	Boone County PF	Albion	Oct-19	Medicine Creek PF	Maywood
Oct-12	Cass County PF	Plattsmouth	Oct-19	Mile High PF	Kimball
Oct-12	Cody Ringnecks PF	North Platte	Oct-19	Otoe County PF	Palmyra
Oct-12	Custer County PF	Broken Bow	Oct-19	Prairie Creek Ringnecks PF	Central City
Oct-12	Dakota/Thurston PF	Walthill	Oct-19	Prairie Hills PF	Kearney
Oct-12	Dodge County PF	Arlington	Oct-19	Rock Creek PF	Fairbury
Oct-12	Elkhorn Valley PF	Pierce	Oct-19	Sherman County PF	Loup City
Oct-12	Heartland PF	Tekamah	Oct-19	Southeast Nebraska PF	Beatrice
Oct-12	Republican Valley PF & Wachtel fur Immer	Arapahoe	Oct-19	Southwestern Nebraska PF	Imperial
Oct-12	Seward County PF	Oak Creek	Oct-20	Cedar River Ringnecks PF	Greeley
Oct-12	South Central Nebraska PF	Alma	Nov-10	Nuckolls County PF	Nelson
			Dec-07	Nemaha Valley PF	Humboldt

BANQUET					
Date	Chapter	Location	Date	Chapter	Location
Sep-04	Kearney County PF	Minden	Jan-24	Golden Prairie PF	Neligh
Sep-12	Dakota/Thurston PF	South Sioux City	Jan-24	Platte County PF	Columbus
Sep-19	Burt County PF	Tekamah	Jan-25	Bazile Creek PF	Bloomfield
Sep-21	Big Red PF	Lincoln	Jan-25	Great Plains PF	Holdrege
Sep-28	Upper Big Nemaha PF	Tecumseh	Jan-25	Lewis & Clark PF	Bow Valley
Oct-11	Cass County PF Youth Banquet	Plattsmouth	Feb-15	Maple Creek PF	Howells
Oct-12	Oregon Trail PF	Scottsbluff	Feb-15	Rock Creek PF	Fairbury
Oct-19	Cody Ringnecks PF	North Platte	Feb-22	Cedar River Ringnecks PF	Greeley
Oct-19	Platte River PF	Lexington	Feb-22	Little Blue River PF	Hastings
Oct-19	Prairie Hills PF	Kearney	Feb-22	Seward County PF	Seward
Oct-23	Loup/Platte Ringnecks PF	Grand Island	Feb-22	Southwestern Nebraska PF	Imperial
Oct-25	Custer County PF	Broken Bow	Feb-28	Cornhusker PF	Lincoln
Oct-25	Western Nebraska PF	Ogallala			
Oct-26	South Central Nebraska PF	Alma			
Nov-07	Central Nebraska QF	Boelus			
Nov-15	Nuckolls County PF	Nelson			
Nov-15	Sandhills PF	Ainsworth			
Nov-30	Niobrara Valley PF	Atkinson			



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Travelogue

by Amy Kucera and
Jeff Kurrus

Halloween

If the blaze of orange you see in the distance isn't a hunter, it could very well be a jack-o'-lantern glowing at one of these popular Halloween-time destinations.

The possibilities are endless for pumpkins and people alike at **Vala's Pumpkin Patch** in **Gretna** starting September 20. Witness a pumpkin shoot a quarter-mile, get lost in the corn maze, walk through a haunted house or participate in one of the many other holiday activities. Visit ValasPumpkinPatch.com for more details.

In addition, don't miss the 15th Annual Halloweenfest at **Ponca State Park** in **Ponca** on October 12 and 19. Enjoy hand-cranked apple cider while your little one competes in pumpkin rolling, carving or campground decorating contests. The hair-raising highlight is the Haunted Hayrack tours at dusk.

Ride reservations begin October 7 at 8 a.m. Be sure to call early as reservations for the rides fill up fast. Or, you could take a chance at the **Indian Cave State Park** Haunted Hollow Hayrack Ride and campsite decorating contest (see page 39 for additional information).

But these are not the state's only Halloween destinations. One family spot to consider is the **Bloom Where You're Planted From Farm** in **Avoca** and its not-so-scary characters and kid-friendly games for all ages. Or the **Bellevue Berry and Pumpkin Patch** in **Papillion** which features an Old West ghost town, a play area for kids and the Ranch of Terror and its two-plus hours of fright-filled attractions starting September 21. Visit RanchofTerror.com for more information. ■



Vala's Pumpkin Patch



Campground at Ponca State Park

Ponca State Park

Vala's Pumpkin Patch

Indian Cave State Park



A Backyard Photo Reminder

Bob Grier, retired **NEBRASKA**land regional editor

Feathers floating to the ground like snow caught my attention from our kitchen window in Alliance. Following the trail upwards through a tree revealed a rare guest to our back yard, a juvenile Cooper's hawk, patiently pulling feathers from a smaller bird.

Grabbing a 35mm digital single lens reflex and newly acquired 400mm f5.6 telephoto lens, I slowly moved in its direction. The hawk paid little attention to the approaching camera as I moved almost directly under the perch.

No matter where you call home, wildlife photography opportunities are always close at hand. Be observant, and you too might one day find feathers floating to the lawn like snow. ■



A Cooper's hawk feeds on a small bird in an Alliance neighborhood tree.

Safely Carry Your Firearm

Dylan Tegtmeier, Outdoor U!

Whether in the field or at the range, firearm handling should be done properly at all times. There are multiple options to choose from, each specifically designed to keep everyone safe in the field.

The two-hand, or ready, carry offers good muzzle control and allows you to get into shooting position quickly. Use this carry when others are in front of or behind you. Never use it when someone is on the same side that the muzzle is pointed.

The cradle carry is a comfortable

way to carry a firearm, but this position is not as secure as a two-hand carry. Use this carry when others are behind or in front of you, but never to the side where the muzzle is pointing.

The elbow, or side, carry is a safe method when walking in open terrain. This method may be good for walking at the range, but when out hunting in thick cover, branches can catch the gun. Use it when others are behind or to your side, but not when they are in front of you.

The sling carry method frees up your hands for other things, such as scanning terrain with binoculars.

When walking, one hand should grasp the sling to keep the firearm from slipping off the shoulder. This is a poor method when walking on difficult terrain or in heavy brush.

Be responsible and use the proper firearm carry for whichever situation you find yourself in. And always remember, practice safety first and keep your finger off the trigger and your action open until you are ready to shoot.

Visit us at OutdoorU.org for more information. ■



Two-hand (ready) carry



Cradle carry



Elbow (side) carry



Sling carry

A Brief History — A Nebraska Cowboy Tells How to Drive Cattle

David Bristow, Nebraska History Magazine

Cattleman James H. Cook first came to Nebraska in 1876 when he helped drive a herd of cattle from Texas. In 1911 he recalled driving 2,500 head of longhorns from Texas to Dakota Territory:

“Our experience in getting as far as the North Platte River in Western Nebraska was the one common to those who ‘drove the trail’ in those days—high water, stormy weather, stampedes of both cattle and saddle horses, hunger at times and great thirst, as well as a few other discomforts which aided the cowboy in rounding out his full measure of whatever he might choose to call it – misery or joy.

“We crossed the South Platte and North Platte Rivers a few miles east of the town of Ogallala. From there we drove over to Birdwood Creek, then to the head waters of the Dismal and Loup rivers and on north through the great chain of shifting sand hills that are now so well known.”

But how did they do it, day after day? Cook explained in a 1907 interview:

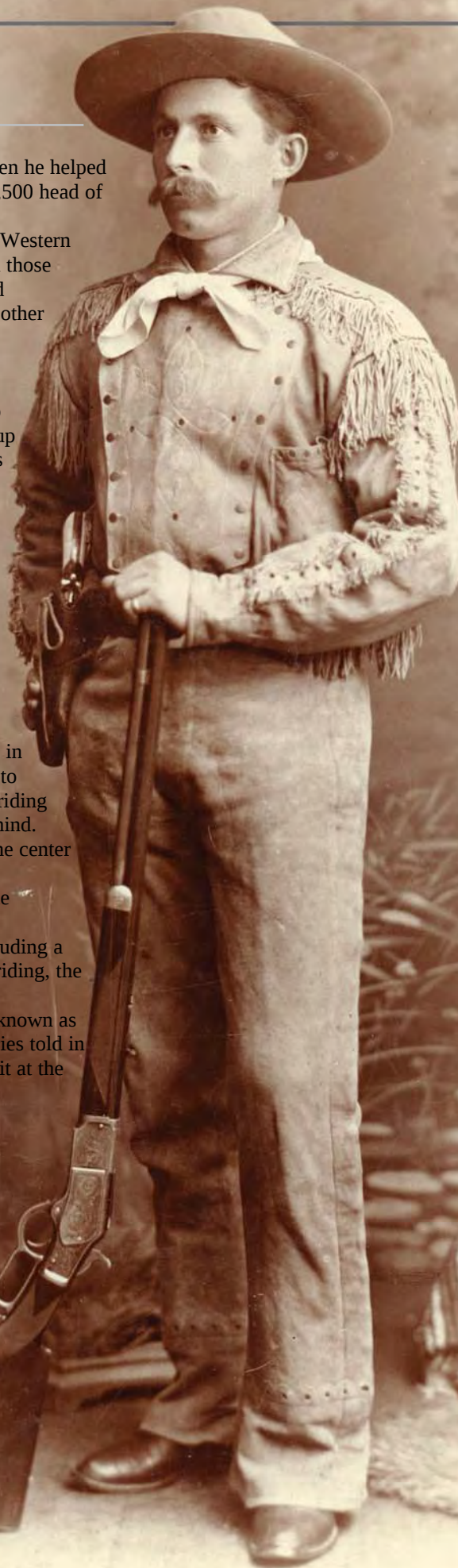
“The right way to drive these cattle was to run them in a long, narrow column which tapered toward the front end to half a dozen in width. On each side and some distance in rear of the leaders, or ‘pointers’ as they were called, was a single driver, and these two foremost drivers were called respectively right and left ‘point’ drivers.

“Behind these on either side and nearly midway of the column were the right and left hand ‘swing’ drivers; in rear of these at the proper distance were two more ‘swing’ drivers, and in the rear of the column were two ‘drag’ drivers whose duty was to bring up the laggards. The drivers kept the cattle in column by riding from their stations rearward till they reached the driver next behind. Two opposite drivers riding backward and pressing in toward the center overcame the tendency of the stock to spread out...

“In this way two thousand cattle could be held in compact line extending two or three or more miles in length.”

And this was done by a crew of only about a dozen men, including a foreman, cook, and horse wrangler. Because of the exhausting riding, the owner provided six to 10 horses per man.

Cook settled on a ranch in Sioux County in 1887; today it is known as Agate Fossil Beds National Monument. His is one of many stories told in *Nebraska Cowboys: Lives, Legends, and Legacies*, a new exhibit at the Nebraska History Museum in Lincoln. ■



RG3484.1.SFJ0551.2 JAMES H. COOK. TEXT AND PHOTOS FROM THE NEBRASKA STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY



HARPERS WEEKLY 1867-10-19_3> — FROM HARPER'S WEEKLY, OCTOBER 19, 1867

Warm-weather Precautions for Canines

Trent Leichter, Pheasant Bonanza

Keep these tips in mind when working your dogs throughout the still warm days of early fall. They may just save your best friend's life.

1) Exercise your dog(s) before you start the hunting season, especially the warm weather seasons such as grouse, dove and early pheasant. Taking walks helps but actually working your dog in a field is the best because they travel at least 3 to 4 times the distance you do during a hunt.

2) If you have multiple dogs it is beneficial to rotate them out during a hot day. When they're not working, place them in an insulated and/or well-ventilated dog crate, box or trailer. Park in shade if possible or have a fan system set up on the kennel. I have had customers' dogs overheat in the kennel and pass away. Lastly, if your dog is wet make sure you dry him/her off before kenneling because the wet coat will not allow the skin to breathe properly.

3) Read your dog. Do not push them too hard and make sure you carry plenty of water with you and water frequently. When they slow down, put them up and give

them water.

4) I have seen dog(s) go down before and thankfully we had access to wet/chilled soil that we packed in the arm pits and the underneath of the dog until a vehicle was dispatched. Some handlers say rubbing alcohol serves the same purpose but I have not had to use it. If you follow all of the precautions you will hopefully never get to this point of treating heat stroke. ■

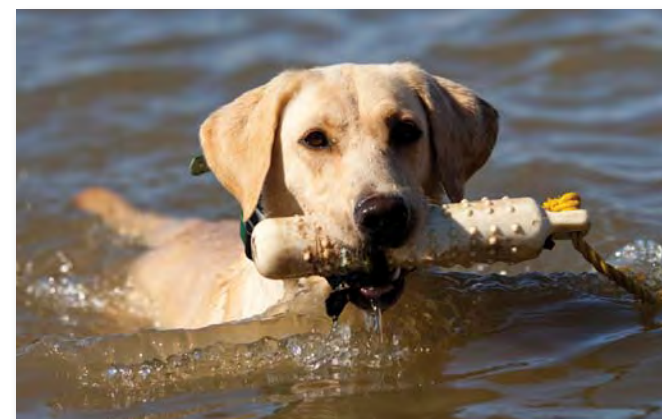


PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Super Bait Storage Ideas

Brian Robinson, Field Expert

If you're like most anglers, you've heard of some of the new so-called super baits. The baits I refer to are soft plastics such as Berkley Gulp!, Gulp! Alive and Trigger X. They come in many bait profiles, sizes and colors to fit many different fresh and salt water applications. Just like any other bait, they're not the magic fish-catching answer all the time. But there are times when they do shine.

The problem these baits present is properly storing them. They are most commonly sold in plastic zip-lock storage bags, or sometimes jars that have screw-on lids. These jars are often anything but leak-proof. The plastic bags are a better option, but only if you successfully get them closed. As we all know, this is not always the case.

Let's look at Berkley's Gulp. This bait is made of biodegradable material that absorbs the liquid that it's sold and stored in. This liquid is essential to the bait's fish catching ability, storage and general life. Leave the bait on your hook and out of the package when you're finished fishing and you'll be looking for a very sharp knife to remove it.

Companies such as Plano are now coming out with plastic storage

containers that are leak-proof and designed to specifically store the baits mentioned here. Another good option is to peruse your favorite department store, locate the kitchen aisles and find a leakproof container to your liking. I have found that these containers are built heavier, and truly do stay leak proof. The added bonus is that you can store most all of your Gulp in the same container. Because they are biodegradable and made of different material than other soft plastic baits, the colors do not bleed and discolor other baits in the same container. They all share the same liquid, and when you have a container with different baits, you have a variety to choose from at any given time. I've stored pink, white, yellow and black baits in the same container and have yet to have a problem.

With this storage system you'll be able to customize what baits you have with you, and maybe more importantly, what size container to carry with you. I have a larger container that stores them all in my boat, but if you're fishing sandpits or backpacking to a remote location, a smaller container may be more desirable.

One important aspect to mention here is not to store other baits in the liquid with the Gulp. Baits such as Mr.

Twister, regular Berkley Power Bait and other basic plastics are not built to perform the same way as Gulp. The same can be said for Trigger X.

A big advantage of this system is always having the liquid to put baits back into and recharge them. And if you're looking for fishing tips with Gulp, this system makes it easy. When you have a fish rip a piece of Gulp in half, or it's simply falling off the hook from being used, don't throw it away. These pieces can be used later, even if they're a small fragment of their original size. When times get tough trolling crankbaits, I will tip the forward hook with a piece of Gulp for added color or attraction. While fishing a jig/minnow combination, I will often apply a tiny piece of Gulp after the minnow has been baited. And while using slab spoons I will tip one of the trebles with a piece of Gulp. The list goes on.

Do these super baits really outfish live bait as they claim? Not always, but in the instances when they do, it's good to have plenty with you in the right type of storage these baits require. ■



Hunter Orange Facts

Jordan Tate, Freelance Writer

As the firearm deer hunting season approaches, every hunter entering the field should have one thing in common, an abundance of hunter orange. Nebraska hunters are required by state law to wear a minimum of 400 square inches of hunter orange, visible on their head, chest and back as a precautionary safety measure while firearm and muzzleloader deer hunting.

Fall turkey hunters also fall under the same requirements during Nebraska's 9-day November firearm season, and hunter orange is also recommended for small game and upland game hunters as it helps hunting partners as well as other hunters better see you.

Here are a few other orange notes:

- Hunter orange was patented by Randall S. Moyer in October of 1988.
- Deer cannot see hunter orange because they lack red-sensitive cone cells in their eyes and cannot distinguish this color like humans can.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Firearm and muzzleloader deer hunters in Nebraska must wear hunter orange, but it is also highly recommended for upland game hunters to wear hunter orange.

- In Arkansas, hunter safety green, or fluorescent chartreuse, is an acceptable color of hunter safety clothing during the fall hunting seasons.
- In Alabama and Connecticut, if hunting from a tree stand more than 12 feet above the ground, hunter orange clothing is not required.

- Alaska, Arizona, California, Idaho, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, Oregon and Vermont do not have state hunter orange regulations in effect; rather it is recommended that hunters wear hunter orange clothing during the appropriate hunting seasons. ■

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Turkey Hunting with Dogs

Jordan Tate, Freelance Writer

Of the 8,362 turkeys harvested during Nebraska's 2012 fall turkey season, very few were probably taken with help from man's best friend. In the 44 U.S. states that have fall turkey hunting seasons, 30 of these states, including Nebraska, allow the use of dogs to find turkeys during a hunt. However, many fall turkey hunters in Nebraska have never heard of using dogs to hunt turkeys, but using them creates a strategical advantage that many hunters argue cannot be duplicated.

According to the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF), a typical hunting strategy suggests that a dog should roam 100 to 200 yards ahead of the hunter, trying to locate a flock of turkeys for their master. Once a turkey flock is found, the dog charges through them, barking and scattering the flock in all directions. Then, a good turkey dog will wait at this spot, allowing the hunter to quickly locate the position of the commotion.

The hunter's next step is to hunker down and hide their dog, using a canvas bag or other camouflage cover, near the flock's original location. Once settled, it is recommended that the hunter should start to call the turkeys back. The NWTF suggests the hunter should immediately begin using basic calls hoping that a lost turkey will wander back to their original position. Because it is the fall season, many turkeys will group together, and all turkeys are fair game to harvest. After only a few minutes of calling, the hunter should remain very alert because the turkeys could return to this spot quickly. This gives the hunter a great chance at a bird, and a well-earned reward for their four-legged hunting companion.

However, a hunter must remember that while on public land there is always a possibility that others may be hunting on the same ground. Turkey hunters using a dog should be aware of other hunters in the area, as well as respect land boundaries, while chasing their Thanksgiving bird. ■

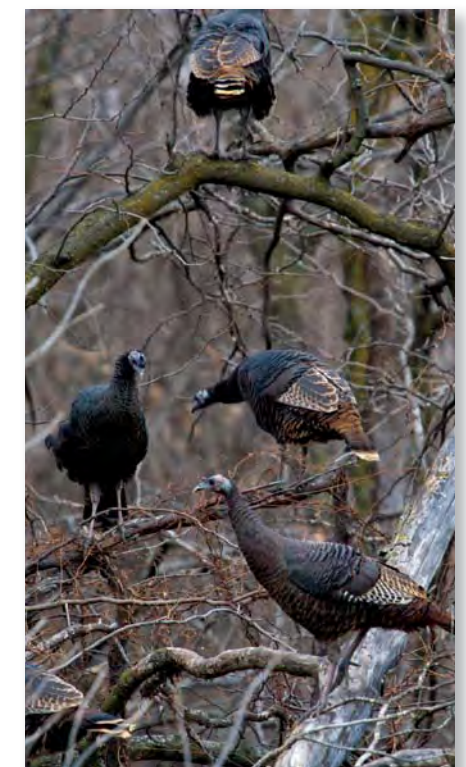


PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

When fall turkey hunting with dogs, birds will often fly to a nearby tree when their flock is busted by a dog before re-flocking on the ground below.

Hunters Helping the Hungry

Kara Wessel, NEBRASKAland Intern

The Hunters Helping the Hungry program is entering its second year. This program provides pure ground venison to Nebraskans in need and is funded entirely by tax deductible donations.

Highlights of changes this year:

- Hunters may offer a deer to the program with the start of the archery season on September 15.
- Budget allows for processing twice as many deer as last year.
- Processor quotas will be increased if supported by cash donations and donated deer.
- There are 22 locations to donate a deer – two of these include new processors.

Successes from the first year of the program include:

- 213 deer donated by 188 hunters to 22 different participating processor locations.
- 16 charitable organizations distributed 11,536 pounds of venison.
- Hunters contributed \$62,000 while purchasing permits between May 2012 and June 2013. Over \$30,000 more was donated by businesses and individuals.

To learn more, including how to donate and the locations of participating processors, visit OutdoorNebraska.org/HHH or email Teresa Lombard, Hunters Helping the Hungry program coordinator, at teresa.lombard@nebraska.gov. ■

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Upcoming Events

by Jerry Kane

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

October 1

Crow hunting season opens statewide

October 1-10

River antlerless deer hunting season for legal firearms, but not Season Choice, landowner or youth permits

October 1-31

Paddlefish snagging season

October 4-6

Becoming an Outdoors-Woman Camp Halsey, 402-471-5482

October 5

Project WILD Workshop Spring Creek Prairie Audubon, Denton, 402-471-5363

October 5

Dark goose hunting season opens in North Central Unit

October 5

Duck and coot hunting seasons open in Zones 2 and 4

October 5

White-fronted goose hunting season opens

October 5

Light goose hunting regular season opens

October 5

Homemade Living Day Ponca State Park (SP), Ponca, 402-755-2284

October 5-6

Autumn Harvest Art Show Eugene T. Mahoney SP, Ashland, 402-944-2523

October 5-6

Living History Weekend Fort Atkinson State Historical Park (SHP), Fort Calhoun, 402-468-5611

October 5-6

Youth waterfowl hunting season in Zone 1

October 6

Muzzleloader antelope hunting season closes

October 11, 18, 25

Haunted Hollow Hayrack Rides Indian Cave SP, Shubert, 402-883-2575

October 12

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

October 12

October late doe/fawn antelope hunting season opens

October 12

Duck and coot hunting seasons open in Zone 1

October 12, 19

Hallowfest Ponca SP, Ponca, 402-755-2284

October 12, 19, 26

RV Campground Halloween Decorating Contest Indian Cave SP, Shubert, 402-883-2575

October 12-27

Firearm antelope hunting season open

October 13

Muzzleloader Sight-in and Family Rendezvous 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Platte River SP, Louisville, 402-234-2217

October 13

Family Rendezvous Platte River SP, Louisville, 402-234-2217

October 14

Columbus Day Game and Parks offices closed

October 18

Nebraska Game and Parks Board of Commissioners meeting, 8 a.m., Nebraska City

October 19-20

Youth pheasant, quail and partridge hunting seasons open

October 19-20

Youth waterfowl hunting season in Zone 3

October 19-20

DeSoto muzzleloader deer hunting season

October 23

Duck and coot hunting seasons open in Zone 3

October 26

Howl in the Hills Night Hike Wildcat Hills Nature Center, Gering, 308-436-3777

October 26

Pheasant, quail and partridge hunting seasons open

October 27

Archery and firearm bull elk hunting seasons close

October 27

Private and public land antlerless elk hunting seasons close

October 28

Dark goose hunting season opens in East, Platte River, Panhandle and Niobrara units

October 30

Dove hunting season closes

October 31

Raccoon and Virginia opossum hunting seasons close

Portable Cell Phone Chargers

Julie Geiser

Having a cell phone with you afield is a matter of safety. Accidents, dead boat motors or being lost in the Nebraska back country are all excellent reasons to have a cell phone. But you also need to have a portable cell phone charger.

While they come in different sizes, most fit easily in a pocket, day pack or dry bag and are able to recharge the average smartphone one to six times before needing to be recharged themselves. The units I tried cost \$8, which provided one charge, and \$22, which allowed four charges, making these portable lifesavers great when in the woods or on the water. ■

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Kosman Receives President's Award



Hod Kosman of Scottsbluff was recently recognized with the highest honor given by the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) – the President's Award.

Kosman accepted the award on behalf of the Platte River Basin Environments (PRBE). Jim Douglas, WAFWA president and director of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, recognized Kosman for his many years of conservation efforts. Kosman was honored with the President's Award during WAFWA's annual meeting July 19-24 in Omaha.

Kosman and other sportsmen created PRBE in 1989 with the help of several partners, including Game and Parks. PRBE works to preserve, conserve, enhance and restore wildlife habitat and natural areas within the North Platte River basin and adjacent drainages through long-term commitment, steadfast reliance on good science and volunteers.

PRBE's other partners are the Nebraska Game and Parks Foundation, Nebraska Environmental Trust, Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, Wild Turkey Federation, Peter Kiewit Foundation, Oregon Trail Community Foundation, Dow Chemical, Doris Duke Foundation, Toyota Field and Stream, University of Nebraska, Partners for Fish and Wildlife, Partners for Conservation and North American Wetlands Conservation Act. ■



Commission director and WAFWA president Jim Douglas presents the award to Hod Kosman this July in Omaha.

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Turpin Time

Dick Turpin

Before a little rubbery flap came along, there was a day that jelly and pickle jars could be hard to open. That technology has found its way into outdoor applications as well. Here's a handy little tip: be sure you have one of these little rubber mats with you, especially those of you who shoot bigger bows of 60, 70 and 80 pounds. Those arrows really go deep into the targets.

They make the mats to take off jar lids and everything else. Boy, they really help when it comes to gripping that arrow out of there. Just a little twist is all you'll need. ■



See You Out There... But Where?



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

PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

NEBRASKAland Visitor Winner and Hint

Last issue's winner of the Visitor drawing was John Helzer of Aurora, Nebraska, who found the **Oriental cockroach** on page 54. 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 bug found in Nebraska that just happened to find its way onto one of the pages.

We will then gather the correct entries and draw one to win a *NEBRASKAland* Magazine mug. To enter each month, write: **NEBRASKAland Visitor** 2200 North 33rd Street, Lincoln, NE 68503.

Or e-mail:

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

HINT: This issue's visitor is not on page 4, 5, 24, or 47.

CHADRON STATE PARK IN DAWES COUNTY

Something to Brag About

Sharing the experience expands the tradition

Photos by Doug Steinke, text by Mark Vrtiska

Waterfowlers are a determined lot of hunters willing to share their expertise with anyone who will listen. The sound of an exaggerated competition-like hail or rapid feed call is nice, but what hunting partners want to see, and will tell their friends about, is if a caller can turn a flock of geese toward the decoys or convince that lonesome greenhead that he has compatriots on the water below.

A quiet, well-mannered dog with an unquenchable drive for retrieving is the companion of choice, one which will sit quietly in a corner until released to attack any downed bird ... as long as the dog retrieves with a soft mouth. Lastly, one's own shooting prowess will always come into play, and the hunters most enjoyable to be around are those who shoot well but don't comment on how well they shoot.

The one thing a hunter should comment on, especially during the slow times in the blind, is the hunt itself. We all know why we love to waterfowl hunt – winter sunrises, the sound of whistling wings and the smell of gun powder – but we also love to learn all we can about the subject. For the more we learn about our quarry, the more we can pass on to our hunting partners in order to educate and protect this passion we love so much. ■



TOP: A Labrador retriever carries a Ross's goose through an Adams County cornfield. This Ross's goose likely came from the main breeding colony above the Arctic Circle in central Canada. In distinguishing between Ross's geese and white-phase snow geese, look no further than the bill. Ross's geese have a shorter, stubbier bill, lack the "grinning patch" found on snow geese, more of a straight edge of feathers at the base of the bill and can have various quantities of caruncles – warty-like protuberances – at the base of the bill.

BOTTOM: Mallards loaf on the edge of a warm water drainage. Mallards are the most harvested duck in Nebraska, comprising 55 percent of all ducks since 1995. Most mallards shot in Nebraska are hatched and raised in Canada.





TOP LEFT: Pintails, known for their elongated tail which can measure one-fourth of the drake's body length, are an elegant flyer throughout their North American range, which includes Nebraska. While they were once one of North America's most abundant ducks, their numbers have declined since the 1950s because of loss of wetland and grassland habitat in the Prairie Pothole Region, their primary breeding area.

OPPOSITE LEFT: Kevin Berggren of Broken Bow carries two blue-winged teals after an early morning hunt in Dawson County. Surveys of Nebraska migratory bird hunters by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimate Nebraskan duck hunters spent a combined 240,000 days afield, and an average of \$815 spent per hunter, but don't tell your spouse that.

TOP: Decoys are vital equipment for many waterfowlers, and can range in price from less than \$40 to more than \$600 per dozen. But regardless of price, if the decoys are not in the right spot and you're not well hidden, even the most expensive decoys, loudest calls and best layout blinds won't help. Lots of scouting – watching not only the fields the birds are using but the location in those fields – is the key to deciding where to place your setup.

LEFT: Nebraska winters about 40 percent of the large Canada geese in the eastern tier of the Central Flyway. The Platte River system typically holds about one-third of the total number of waterfowl wintering in Nebraska each year.



TOP LEFT: Recent surveys from Arkansas and Missouri indicate that duck hunters place more importance on passing along the traditions of waterfowl hunting and the opportunity to see ducks than actually harvesting ducks.

OPPOSITE LEFT: Biologists can determine not only the species of the duck they're looking at from the wing, in this case a blue-winged teal, but also the age and sex of the bird.

LEFT: Since the 1970s, the number of waterfowl hunters in the United States has declined about 40 percent. A major ramification of the decline is the loss of revenues – used to protect wetland and upland habitats – associated with the Federal Migratory Bird Hunting Conservation Stamp (i.e., the Duck Stamp). Potentially, over \$125 million, and 100,000 acres of habitat, could have been garnered since 1995 from stamp funds alone if trends in waterfowl hunters had maintained.

TOP RIGHT: Two redheads pitch toward a decoy spread on the central Platte River. Redheads are well-known for laying their eggs in the nests of other ducks, and are the most common diving duck species in Nebraska's harvest.

Cardinal Flower

A Charismatic Though Rare Wildflower

By Gerry Steinauer, Botanist

On an August day in the late 1990s in a central Platte River backwater slough, I stumbled upon a colony of wildflowers with spikes of striking scarlet blooms. Though I had never before encountered this plant, the distinct flowers were a dead giveaway to its identity. The plant was cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*), a member of the bellflower family (*Campanulaceae*), whose name was inspired by the red robes worn by Catholic cardinals.

Cardinal flower most commonly grows in marshes, wet prairies and woods in eastern and southern states. In Nebraska, it is known from only a few sites in the Republican River and central Platte River valleys, and these populations represent the extreme northern edge of the species' Great Plains range.

Flowers and Pollination

Cardinal flower is a perennial that can grow up to 5 feet tall. The erect, light green stems often grow in clusters and are lined with lance-shaped leaves that reach 6 inches

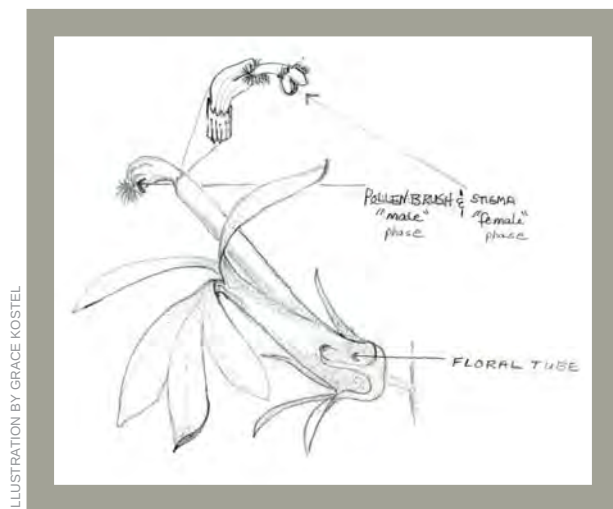


ILLUSTRATION BY GRACE KOSTEL

A MALE AND FEMALE phase of cardinal flower blossoms.

long. The flowers, an inch in length or longer, have five petals with bases fused to form a nectar-storing tube. The unfused portion of the top two petals flare outward while the upper portion of the lower petals form a three-lobed lip. Cardinal flower blooms from August through September with the lower blossoms of the densely flowered spikes blooming first. The flowers are scentless and attract pollinators with color alone. The fruit is a capsule containing copious tiny chestnut or light brown seeds that are wind-dispersed.

The grayish-white reproductive organs are located atop a narrow stalk that rises above the flower. When an individual flower first blooms, it is in the male phase and the five anthers fill with pollen. A tiny brush of hairs, located behind the anthers, pushes pollen out of the anthers when a pollinator presses against the stalk. The pollen dispersal last five days, then the flower shifts to the female phase. At this time, the two-lobed stigma – the pollen receiving structure also located atop the stalk – spreads open. When pollen is deposited on the stigmas, it penetrates downward through the stalk and eventually reaches the ovary below, where fertilization occurs. Having alternating male and female flowering phases promotes pollen exchange among plants, known as outcrossing, and guarantees the offspring greater genetic diversity and fitness.

Cardinal flower is Nebraska's only native wildflower with pure red blooms. Most plant species with red and orange flowers are adapted for hummingbird pollination as the birds have an innate attraction to these colors, hence why hummingbird feeders are red. Cardinal flower's floral tubes angle upward and outward from the stem, a design that provides hovering hummingbirds easy access to the dilute nectar stored deep within the tubes. The flower's anthers and stigmas, which are held above

the floral tube and nod downward, are perfectly placed for pollen transfer by feeding hummingbirds. When a bird visits a flower in the male phase and thrusts its lengthy, narrow bill into the floral tube to lap nectar with a long-forked tongue – that can flick at a rate of 10 times per second – pollen is brushed onto its head. When the bird later visits a flower in the female phase, the pollen is deposited onto the receptive stigma.

The ruby-throated is the only species of hummingbird present in the Republican River and central Platte River valleys when cardinal flowers bloom. The species is at the western edge of its range here and its numbers are low, and therefore is likely an inefficient cardinal flower pollinator. Larger, long-tongued butterflies, such as swallowtails, and day-flying moths, also drink nectar from and pollinate cardinal flower as their wings contract and transfer the pollen, and they may be the primary pollinators.

Introduction to Nebraska

Native plants are dispersed to new regions primarily through agents of nature – their seeds are blown by the wind, carried by water, transported in the gut of birds or lodged in mammal fur. Nebraska's cardinal flower populations, however, may be an exception. Ethnobotanist Melvin R. Gilmore speculated that the Pawnee Tribe introduced the plant to the Republican and Platte valleys.

"This species is peculiar in its situation in Nebraska, in that it is found in some isolated areas, all within the ancient domain of the Pawnee Nation. These areas are far distant from any other region in which the species is found. ... the presence of this species in the Pawnee country may be due to introduction by Pawnee medicine men. This explanation is suggested in view of the value placed on the mystic powers attributed to the species by that people. One use of this plant was in the composition of a love charm [made from the plant's roots and flowers mixed with ginseng, wild columbine, wild parsley, and red-earth paint]," wrote Gilmore in his 1919 book *Uses of Plants by the Indians of the Missouri River Region*. He noted that known cardinal flower populations in Nebraska were near old Pawnee villages.

Gilmore did not say whether he thought the Pawnee scattered cardinal flower seed into wetlands or grew the plant in gardens. Native Americans were known to have cultivated Indian-tobacco (*Lobelia inflata*), a close woodland relative of cardinal flower, in gardens. In the mid-1800s, for example, the Crow Tribe was growing the plant for use in religious ceremonies in Montana's Yellowstone River Valley, several hundred miles west of its current range. Recently, ecologists have successfully sown cardinal flower seed in central Platte River wetland restorations, demonstrating its ease of establishment. Whether cardinal flower was introduced to Nebraska naturally or by the Pawnee may never be known.

Medicinal Values

Many Native American tribes also valued cardinal flower as a medicinal plant. A root tea was used to treat stomach



PHOTO BY CHRIS HELZER

CARDINAL FLOWER in full bloom in a restored wetland on the Nature Conservancy's Platte River Prairies in Hall County.

aches, syphilis, typhoid and worms, and a leaf tea was used for colds, croup, nosebleeds, fevers and headaches. Colonists and settlers used cardinal flower and other *Lobelias* in medicines to treat asthma, nerves, coughs and other ailments, as well as an emetic.

Recently, it was discovered that cardinal flower and other lobelias contain lobeline and other similar alkaloids. These compounds, when ingested, have effects comparable to nicotine, causing excitement and paralysis of the nerves, and likely explain cardinal flower's use as a medicinal plant. Lobeline is an active ingredient in modern cough medicines, over-the-counter smoking cessation products and respiratory stimulants used to relieve bronchial spasms. Due to its effect on dopamine levels in the brain, it has the potential to treat amphetamine and other drug addictions. In high doses, however, lobeline is toxic, as the compound's likely function in plants is to dissuade herbivores through poisoning. The symptoms of over consumption, similar to those of nicotine poisoning, include nausea, paralysis, rapid but weak pulse, coma and even death.

Upon close inspection, it is obvious that the cardinal flower's beauty and elegance extends well beyond its showy plume of blossoms, to the details of its intricate floral design, complex chemistry and interactions with other species. It's sad, however, that this charismatic wildflower is rare in our state and known to so few Nebraskans. ■



THINKSTOCK

A RUBY-THROATED hummingbird pollinates a cardinal flower.



Mahoney's Wild Side

Photos and text by Michael Forsberg

Perched high on the Platte River bluffs, Eugene T. Mahoney State Park sits equidistant between Lincoln and Omaha, the two largest population centers in the state. The park consistently ranks as one of the three most visited attractions in Nebraska, with its first-rate lodge and cabins, aquatic center, theatre, horseback rides, toboggan runs and 70-foot tall observation tower. In 2012, Mahoney had more than one million visitors pass through its gates. But beyond the entrance and its myriad amenities, there is another side of Mahoney – a quieter, wilder side.



*A raccoon left its mark (opposite) along a wooded creek bottom.
A white-tailed deer (above) grazes on late season grasses near the woodland edge.*

This wild is most apparent in autumn after the summer crowds have retreated, when you can hike the Railroad Trail at dawn traversing oak-covered bluff tops with views of the river and come eye level with a bald eagle surveying the floodplain below, or look up through the canopy to see huge flocks of whitefronts and snow geese arrow overhead following a watery path south on migration.



*A migrating robin (opposite) gorges on the ripened fruit of a crabapple tree.
A coal train (above) just beyond Mahoney's eastern border snakes along Salt Creek near its confluence with the Platte.*



wild turkeys marching through the forest, or watch white-tailed deer emerge into the open parkland at day's end. The trails never venture far from a road, cabin or other man-made structure, but they can quickly reveal the wild spirit that still lingers in the land.

*M*ahoney is one of several properties that stitched together help protect the integrity of important habitats along the Lower Platte River corridor, from remnant oak-hickory woodlands along the bluffs to cottonwood islands and wide braided channels on the river floodplain. These places harbor rare species and provide safe passage for international migrants, protect our water resources and open spaces, and provide us all an opportunity to appreciate our natural heritage and connect us to the world beyond ourselves. ■

On a misty afternoon in October, you can walk the Margre's Village trail contouring the woodland-prairie edge before heading into the woods, shuffling through damp layers of fallen leaves following coyote tracks to watery pockets and ravines where fall warblers flit like winged spirits among the old oaks. Or you can simply wander onto a path just outside your cabin or campground in the evening, listening intently for



E.T. Mahoney State Park

Mahoney State Park stretches across 706 acres of Platte River bluffs and is located 3 miles east of Ashland in Cass County. Seven miles of hiking trails traverse easy and moderate terrain, connecting day users and overnight guests with Mahoney's wilder side.

A wild turkey (above) foraging in the forest understory pauses while waiting for the rest of her brood.

Fallen leaves (right) provide a colorful carpet on the hardwood forest floor.



Why Trapshoot?

A Question and Answer

By Dave Tunink, Trapshooting Coach

Junior and senior high trapshooting is one of the fastest growing competitive activities in Nebraska, as shown by the continued increase in attendance at the Cornhusker National Trapshoot held annually in Doniphan the first week of May. This organized meet, which began in 1970, is currently the largest youth trapshooting competition in the world. In 2013, the event had a total of 2,253 shooters.

In Nebraska, there are four organized youth trapshooting conferences – Eastern Cornhusker, Mid-Nebraska, Central and Western – that provide a structure to conduct meets at area trap ranges, as well as offer youth a place to compete against each other on both an individual and team basis. In 2013, the Eastern Cornhusker conference, the largest in the state, celebrated its 25th year of existence with 1,385 registered

shooters. The success of these conferences are the result of many hours of volunteer time by conference board members, shoot directors, club personnel, coaches, parents and participants.

The following are some frequently asked questions by new and potential shooters:

What is trapshooting?

Trapshooting is a shotgun event first developed in the 1700s to extend practice for bird hunting, and actually used live pigeons as targets. Today, shooters fire at 4¼-inch clay targets thrown from a trap house at a height of 9 to 9½ feet and speed of 42 mph.

The trap house, located at the center of the range, oscillates through a set field of five stations. Therefore, the

shooter knows the general area that the target will be thrown.

In competition, trapshooters will shoot events from a distance of 16 yards, measured from the shooter's position to the front of the trap house. In the handicap event, participants stand farther from the trap house depending how well they shoot, shooting at distances of 18 to 25 yards based on their scores in the singles event.

What do I need to get started?

A shooter is required to have eye protection, whether it be prescription or tinted shooting glasses. Ear protection is also essential, from simple foam or fitted ear plugs to ear muffs. Shooters should invest in a shotgun but generally

they can borrow one for the first couple of practices to see if they enjoy the sport. Many new shooters start by using their father's or grandfather's shotgun. Shotgun shells range from \$5.50 to \$8.50 per box depending on the brand. A shooting vest or shell bag is also recommended.

What is the cost of range fees?

The normal cost is \$3 to \$4 per round of 25 targets. Most shooting clubs provide youth trap teams a discounted rate for practice rounds. As a member of a club, the cost for individual practice rounds will be cheaper.

Where can I find a range?

There are many trap ranges across the state. Websites, including the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission at OutdoorNebraska.org and National Shooting Sports Foundation at Nssf.org include a search for area trap ranges.

What type of shells do I need?

Shot size is restricted to no more than No. 7½, but shooters can also use No. 8 shot as it is smaller in size.

High velocity shells aren't necessary. For the 16-yard event, light trap loads – 1½ oz., 1,145 feet per second – work great. A shooter can also use loads that are 1,190 feet per second. It is important to reduce the recoil, especially for young shooters. If one were to shoot 300 or more targets in a day, the lighter loads will be appreciated.

Who is there to help with safety?

Safety is a number one priority on the trap range. With school club teams, at least one parent or coach is present with each squad during shooting. For new shooters, coaches are right behind them while they are shooting until we are confident that they have learned shotgun safety. From the beginning of the season, shooters and their parents

are informed that their child may be disciplined to enforce range safety rules.

Instructors will teach that a shooter's gun action is always open until they are ready to shoot, with their barrel pointed down range. A finger is placed on the trigger only when they are ready to call for the target, and shooters are not allowed to move from one station to the next with a shell in the gun.

At what age can I begin?

It depends on the individual and their mental maturity. Most students begin competing in the 6th grade. By the end of the season, major improvements in their shooting ability, as well as an increase in confidence, can be seen.

How do I choose a gun?

For trapshooting, a break action shotgun is recommended for beginners since there are fewer moving parts. Pump shotguns would be second. Semi-automatics are fine if you keep them clean, as their operation helps reduce recoil. However, during competition a shooter is not allowed to eject shells on the ground so a shell catcher must be used.

Some shooters use a field shotgun to shoot trap, but it is a disadvantage to do so. Field guns are built to shoot flat, which means that half the shot pattern is above where the shooter points and the other half is below.

What is the difference between a 20 and a 12?

Gun fit is the first thing that a trap coach assesses with a new shooter, next checking the length of the stock, eye position on the comb and whether the shooter is canting the shotgun – the barrel should be vertical, not tilted. Trap shotguns have longer barrels than field or skeet guns, giving them a smoother swing to the target. Some start with a 20-gauge, but new trapshooters should go with a 12-gauge shotgun instead. It is a misconception that 20 gauge shotguns have less recoil. Shorter stocks can be purchased for several gun models and adjusted to fit as needed.



Kristyn Kocsis of Marian smiles after a successful round at Doniphan.

Will trapshooting lead to shooting better in the field?

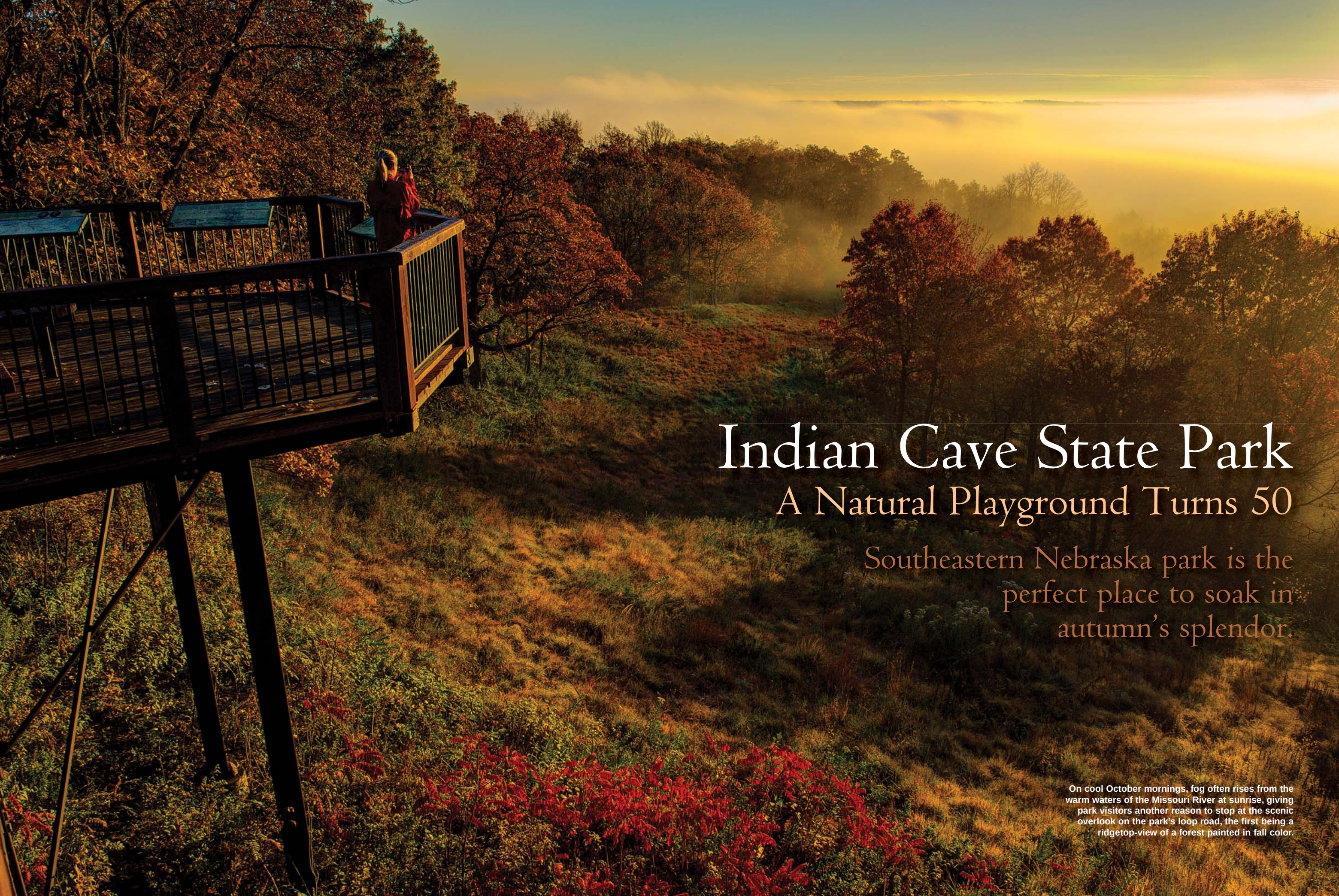
The more you shoot, the better you will be, but since trapshooters start with the shotgun mounted, it is different than hunting in the field. The best practice to improve field shooting is going out to a nearby sporting clays range and practice without the shotgun mounted and with targets coming from various angles and speeds. One may be a very good trapshooter, but sporting clays can humble even the best.

Trapshooting is a great sport that anyone can be involved in. It teaches not only gun safety and handling skills, but personal responsibility as well. It's also a chance for youth to meet others and enjoy a friendly competition. ■

Dave Tunink, a fisheries biologist for the Commission, is a certified NRA/USA Trap Shooting Coach with the Lincoln Pius trap team since 1998, and became head coach in 2005. During this time, members have placed often, including two individual 16-yard champions, one individual handicap champion and 2013 overall high team champion. He also leads the youth trapshooting event for the Cornhusker State Games.



The annual Cornhusker National High School and Junior High School Trapshoot, held at Doniphan, Nebraska.



Indian Cave State Park

A Natural Playground Turns 50

Southeastern Nebraska park is the perfect place to soak in autumn's splendor.

On cool October mornings, fog often rises from the warm waters of the Missouri River at sunrise, giving park visitors another reason to stop at the scenic overlook on the park's loop road, the first being a ridgetop-view of a forest painted in fall color.



Doug Masat of Lincoln and Jim Reynolds of Salina, Kansas, hike the Hardwood Trail on the east end of the park last October.

Text and photos by Eric Fowler

For most of the year, Indian Cave State Park is a quiet, sleepy little park, tucked in the forested bluffs above the Missouri River in the southeastern corner of Nebraska. When fall arrives, however, bringing shades of yellow, orange, red and purple to the woodlands, that all changes – or at least in parts of the park, anyway – as visitors arrive in droves to soak in the autumn splendor by day and scream their way through the Halloween festivities at night.

Nature

The crescent shaped park straddles the Nemaha-Richardson County line and comprises the lion's share of one of the largest oak woodlands in the state – 7 miles long and stretching up to 1½ miles from the edge of the Missouri River valley. But this isn't like other forests farther up the Missouri or Platte rivers that are dominated by burr oak, which often simply fades to brown in the fall. At Indian Cave, black and red oak, along with shagbark and bitternut hickory and white ash, all at the northern or western edge of their range, join species more common in Nebraska like green ash, pawpaw, dogwood and cottonwood to put on a colorful display that in some years makes the park look more like the Missouri Ozarks. Other species of trees in the forest are Chinquapin oak, black walnut, Kentucky coffee, American and red elm, ironwood and redbud, which puts on a show each spring with a flush of rosy pink flowers.

Only recently has the forest become so expansive. When Lewis and Clark came upriver in 1804, only the riverbottom and the creeks leading to it were timbered. The rest of the fertile loess hills were prairie, which William Clark said was "rich but parched with frequent fires."

Soon after, most of the trees in and near the valley were cut to feed the boilers of steamboats that plied the river. By the time railroads made the steamboat obsolete, settlers had controlled the fires that kept trees in check, and they grew with vigor



Elk are among the ancient petroglyphs etched in the wall of the sandstone outcropping that gives Indian Cave State Park its name.

wherever the land wasn't farmed.

Fire recently returned to the forest. Since 2007, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission staff has been using prescribed burns to control shade-tolerant trees and shrubs like dogwoods, ironwood, hackberry and elm, as well as garlic mustard, a non-native invasive plant.

"The problem is when it gets overly dense and shady, we start losing the native grasses and sedges and wildflowers in the understory," said Gerry Steinauer, a botanist with Commission. Also, oaks, which require substantial sunlight as saplings, cannot survive. "We're trying to open up the woodlands so we get the next generation of oaks."

Some areas have been burned annually since 2009, others one to three times, and 1,700 acres were blackened last spring. Garlic mustard is also being attacked by chemical and mechanical means, as is sericea lespedeza, another non-native invasive. Already, remnants of prairie have begun expanding on the ridgetops, benefitting flowers like Indian paintbrush and blue-eyed grass. In the understory, purple milkweed, prairie plantain, May apple and maidenhair fern are spreading.

The work will benefit the diversity of wildlife found in the park. More than 130 species of birds breed in the woodlands, including some like the pileated woodpecker, red-shouldered hawk, Carolina wren and Kentucky warbler, all more common in deciduous woodlands to the south and east. In the spring, birders could check more than 100 species off their life list in a day.

Elk and wolves no longer roam the area as they did 200 years ago, but white-tailed deer and wild turkeys are common at Indian Cave. Other forest inhabitants at the northwestern edge of their range include the gray squirrel, the eastern cousin of the brown fox squirrels, and the southern flying squirrel, a nocturnal creature that soars from tree to tree on "wings" of skin that stretch between its front and back legs.

An addition to 347 acres of bottomland on the park's northeastern corner in 2000 added to the river frontage and wildlife value. A pair of bald eagles has nested in cottonwoods there since 2011. A restored 20-acre wetland draws migrating waterfowl. Partially filled with silt in recent floods, work to improve the wetland is planned for 2014.

History

The ancient cave that gives the park its name is just one of the historical attractions at the park. But actually it is more of a hollow beneath a sandstone ledge than a cave. Reportedly used by trappers and outlaws, ancient



Indian Cave State Park is located 10 miles south and 5 miles east of Brownville on Nebraska Spur 64E.



Yellow lady's slipper orchid is a rare plant species that is expected to increase in abundance as woodland habitat at Indian Cave becomes more.

PHOTO BY CHRIS HELZER

petroglyphs etched in the cave's walls may provide the earliest evidence of man's presence at the location. Which Native Americans created the artwork, which include elk, buffalo and abstract symbols, is not known. And many have been obscured by modern-day vandals.

Before the white man arrived, Otoe Indians lived in villages along the river, growing corn and other crops and traveling west to hunt buffalo and other game. They ceded the land to the



Park wrangler Denny Crawford leads Sage Pentland of Wymore on a horse ride during Indian Cave State Park's Outdoor Adventure last April.



A handful of the 120 tent camping sites at Indian Cave that come with picnic tables and fire rings are found on a ridge-top clearing that stretches 200 yards from the park's main road.

U.S. Government in an 1830 treaty. That same year, the government created the 125,000-acre Nemaha Half-Breed Reservation between the Big and Little Nemaha rivers for homeless offspring of trappers and natives, including Yankton and Santee Sioux, Omaha and Iowa, as well as orphaned Indians.

Joseph Deroin, the son of a French trader and his Otoe wife, staked his claim on the reservation in the 1830s and began operating a trading post there in the 1840s. By 1853 – the year before Nebraska became a territory – the post became known as St. Deroin, with aspirations of the town's ferry site making it as prosperous as St. Louis. In 1858, Deroin was shot trying to collect a debt from one of the white squatters who moved into the area. The influx of whites led to both the dissolution of the half-breed tract in 1861 and the growth of the town, which peaked at 200 residents and 20 businesses in the 1870s. Losing the Nemaha County seat to Brownville stemmed the growth,

and the coming of the railroad in 1903 reversed it. A flood took most of what was left of the town in 1911.

The walls of the school, which closed in 1944, were all that remained of St. Deroin when the Commission acquired the first parcel of land for the park in 1963. Restoring the school, rebuilding the sutler's store, and other improvements laid out in the original plans for the park like campgrounds and roads had to wait until creation of the State Park Entry Permit in 1978.

Today

Each October, St. Deroin is on the half-way point of one of the spookiest hayrack rides in Nebraska. Held annually since 1996, the park's one-way loop road is transformed into the Haunted Hollow and filled with zombies, witches and ghosts that lurch from the darkness. A cadre of volunteer spooks, including area high school and college students, make the event

possible. Last year, 3,000 people joined the fun on the five nights it was held.

Another must-see on an October Saturday are the campsites vying for best of show in the annual Halloween decorating contest. Aspiring ghosts, super heroes and ballerinas can also trick-or-treat their way through the camp. During the day, youngsters can carve pumpkins, see how far they can roll them down a hill or partake in other crafts at the park's museum.

The 134 sites in the Ash Grove and Hackberry Hollow RV campgrounds fill up fast on weekends from mid-September through October. Other than that, only on Memorial Day weekend will you want to arrive early if you didn't reserve a site. Even if the campground is full, park staff will find a place for you to park for the weekend.

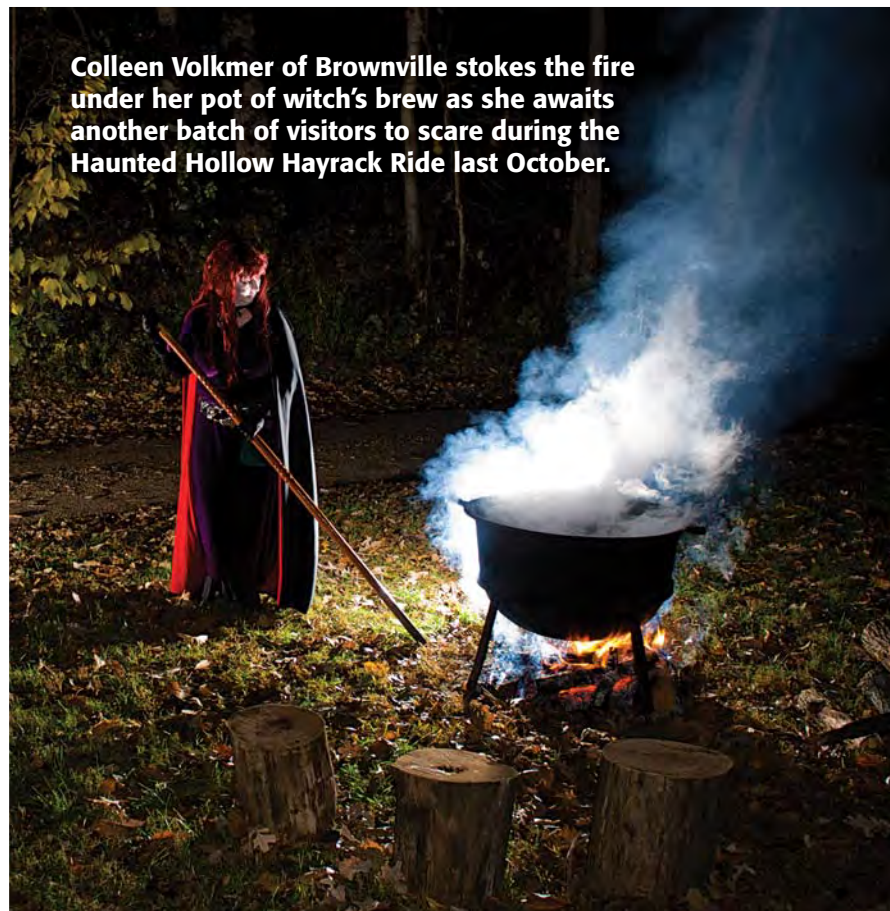
Likewise, while the 120 primitive sites with picnic tables and fire rings might fill up, the park never runs out of room for tent campers. Those looking to really rough it can hike or bike to one

of 18 backcountry campsites, nine with Adirondack shelters, scattered along the 22 miles of trails that wind through the park. Those sites are first-come, first served, but don't often fill up, even in the fall.

Many of the trails, ranging from three-fourths of a mile to 7 miles in length, aren't for the meek. There is more than 300 feet in elevation change from the park's highest point to the riverbottom, and some of the trails seem to cover that in short order, making them a popular training ground for Boy Scout troops preparing for greater ascents in the mountain West.

If you have a horse, you can ride on 16 miles of the trails and park it for the night in one of 12 corrals in Indian Cave's horse camp. If you don't have your own mount, trail rides are offered on weekends and holidays from Memorial Day through October.

If a hike in the steep hills isn't your thing, follow the level trail to a viewing deck on the bottomland wetland.



Colleen Volkmer of Brownville stokes the fire under her pot of witch's brew as she awaits another batch of visitors to scare during the Haunted Hollow Hayrack Ride last October.

And you can absorb plenty of nature driving the 8 miles of roads in the park, including the one-way loop that twists and turns its way down to St. Deroin and returns in a deep ravine under the forest canopy.

Anglers can wet a line in the Missouri River and have a chance at channel, flathead or blue catfish. "It's good fishing if you know where to go," said Larry Weyers of Beatrice, who with his wife, Ann, spends four weeks a year as a volunteer campground host at the park. Weyers targets flatheads, especially in the spring – "I have more fun catching them," he said – but his biggest fish to date is a 60-pound blue.

If plans and construction advance as hoped, by next year anglers will have an option to the swiftly flowing river. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is planning to construct a 20-acre backwater on the riverbottom just below the park's boat ramp that is as likely to hold crappie and largemouth bass as catfish.

The park is open to archery deer and turkey hunting from November 1 to the close of the season, and draws

hunters from near and far. During the late firearm antlerless season, which starts December 26, hunters can pack muzzleloaders or shotguns into the woods to try and bag a white-tailed doe. Once the leaves fall from the trees, hunters mostly have the park to themselves. Things stay quiet there until spring, when a different type of hunter descends on the park in search of morel mushrooms.

A mushroom hunting contest headlines an annual spring event that began in 2012: the Indian Cave Outdoor Adventure. The April event lets visitors learn about outdoor activities like archery, muzzleloading and Dutch-oven cooking. The Morel Mile and 5k Mushroom Runs were added in 2013. Next year's event, set for April 19, adds a glow-in-the-dark Easter Egg Hunt.

Other than the addition of a few events and modern conveniences, little has changed at the park during the past 50 years. "It's quiet," said Jan Alexander, who has worked at the park since 1998. "We don't have anything high tech, but that appeals to most of the people who do come here."

Many of the improvements originally planned for the park, which some envisioned would draw visitors from Omaha and Kansas City and all points between, never materialized. But many who visit the park surely are grateful for that. Had plans come to fruition, the trails and roads that take visitors into the forest, immersing them in nature, would have been much more crowded. And much less peaceful.

"We just love it over there," said Weyers. "I just enjoy the outdoors. If you like the wildlife, the turkey and the deer, you'll sit there and the deer will walk right through your campsite if you're quiet and don't move. And you'll have turkeys walk right by the camp. I've seen silver fox and red fox, and the coyotes howling ... and you can hear coons all night long. And you wouldn't believe the different kinds of birds. We take bird feeders along."

Those birds might be the noisiest thing in the park. Except on an October weekend, when screams fill the woods. ■

For more information, contact the park by calling 402-883-2575, e-mail ngpc.Indian.Cave@nebraska.gov or go to OutdoorNebraska.gov.

Fall Events

October 11: Haunted Town in St. Deroin

October 12, 18, 19, 25 and 26: Haunted Hollow Hayrack Rides, Pumpkin rolling contest, etc.

October 12, 19 and 26: Halloween Campground Decorating Contest

Heritage Program, Museum

Weekends and Holidays, Memorial Day Weekend through October, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.



Watch blacksmithing, candle dipping, and the making of Granny's Lye soap near the old log cabin, see broom making in the St. Deroin Sutler's store, or visit the 1908 schoolhouse. The museum details the natural and cultural history of the area and offers crafts for kids. The Pioneer Longrifles club holds shoots on the first full weekend of each month, May through November.



Indian Cave Outdoor Adventure

April 19, 2014

Archery, muzzleloading, morel mushroom hunt, 1-mile and 5k runs, Dutch-oven cooking, crafts, art show, glow-in-the-dark Easter Egg Hunt.



Elissa Huebert of Omaha and her children, Bryce, Ethan and Tessa, watch Joan Keighley of Reserve, Kansas, hand-dip candles last April.



From Top: Ghosts in St. Deroin school during Haunted Hollow. Judy Crawford and Granny's Lye Soap. Pioneer Longrifles member Chuck Miller of Plattsmouth helps Zack Ottemann of Johnson shoot a flintlock pistol. Runners on the course in the Morel Mile.

Two for Fall

By Daryl Bauer, Fisheries Biologist

Fall is my favorite time of year for open-water fishing. However, with the abundance of baitfish, the autumn bite can be a challenge on some Nebraska waters as fish begin feeding to prepare for winter and the spawn to come next spring.

Although many outdoor enthusiasts put their rods and reels in the closet when the fall hunting seasons open, those who keep fishing are rewarded with some of the fattest fish of the year. Depending on the body of water, habitat conditions and species being pursued, a variety of baits and lures can be productive in the fall, but there are a couple of presentations that I consider to be classics, tactics that will produce big predator fish until the water freezes.

Go Big or Go Home

I am a believer in “big baits for big fish,” and this strategy is most true in the fall. One reason is that all of the natural prey has grown during the summer. Predator fish will select larger

prey, if they are available, simply because they will get a greater energy return.

Throughout the fall, baitfish, and the larger sport fish that feed on them, can be found in relatively shallow water. That is especially true early in the season, but it also applies on sunny, warm afternoons through late fall. Anglers can look for concentrations of baitfish in the back of bays and in shallows near deep water.

Those baitfish can be imitated with a variety of artificial lures, including bucktail jigs, swimbaits and crankbaits. But remember to super-size those lures to match the larger sizes of the baitfish.

Crankbaits, in particular, are hard to beat. As well as looking like the real thing, the vibration of crankbaits feels like natural prey to predator fish. In autumn, cast or troll crankbaits six inches long or more. Neutrally-buoyant baits like Rapala Husky Jerks or Smithwick Rogues are particularly effective as the water begins to cool, as they can be fished slower as the water gets colder while still maintaining their running depth.

Big swimbaits are a good shad imitation to use in the fall.



Bucktail jigs are old-fashioned baits that still work well on Nebraska reservoirs.



Size #15 Flat Raps are not too big.



Blade baits work well for vertical jigging.

“When I go fishing in the fall, I take along two types of lures ... big and bigger!”

Easy Meals Flutter

While a handful of reservoirs have alewives, gizzard shad are the primary prey in many Nebraska waters. Both are open-water baitfish species that become stressed when water temperatures begin to cool. As fall progresses, they move toward deeper water, where temperatures are more stable, and large predator fish follow. However, even in deeper water, many of those baitfish begin to die. As they flutter toward the bottom, walleyes, white bass, wipers, pike, muskies and even catfish lurk below and pick them off.

There are a variety of artificial baits that imitate the behavior of dying baitfish and are particularly effective in the fall, especially late in the season. Slab spoons are heavy, compact lures designed specifically for vertical jigging, and they are excellent imitations of cold-stressed baitfish.

Examples include Bomber Slab Spoons, Bass’n Bait Company’s Rattle Snakie Jigging Spoons or Reel Bait’s Fergie Special. Blade baits, such as the Heddon Sonar or Silver Buddy and tail-spinners like Mann’s Little George or Reel Bait’s Lytle’s Secret

Tail Spinners, are other baits that are excellent imitations of stressed and dying shad or alewives.

The deep-water, vertical-jigging bite in the fall is a boat-angler’s sport. Typically, schools of baitfish, and larger predator fish, are spotted on sonar units. Those fish are usually holding near creek channels, steep drops and underwater humps.

Once fish are located, the key is to maintain the boat’s position – usually using an electric motor – as vertically as possible above the school without dropping an

anchor that could spook the fish.

One of the aforementioned jigging baits is then dropped to the bottom. Raise the bait up several feet, then drop the rod tip and allow the bait to flutter back to the bottom. Repeat the motion until a fish is hooked. Watch the line for bites, but most fish will take the bait as it falls and often be hooked on the next jigging stroke.

By using these techniques, you might find yourself unsure of what you should pack for your next

outdoor excursion this fall – guns and shells, or rods and reels. Well, you know what my answer will be: both. ■

Daryl Bauer is a fisheries biologist with the Commission, as well as Fish and Wildlife Program Manager. He holds over 70 Nebraska Master Angler Awards for 13 different species, and over 20 In-Fisherman Master Angler Awards for eight different species.



Big channel catfish are predators, too. Using a slab spoon, this one was caught and released at Merritt Reservoir last fall.

All About Antlers

A look at whitetail headgear

By Jordan Tate and Jeff Kurrus

Antlers, particularly those of white-tailed deer, are the rave of both the print and digital outdoor world. Simply type “bucks” into a Google images search and you’ll get a dollar sign or two and a few pictures of professional basketball players from Milwaukee, but most of what you see will be big antlered deer, mostly whitetails. In Nebraska, the interest is no different, with the state garnering a national reputation for growing huge bucks.

White-tailed deer, and the antlers they carry, have never been more of an obsession to both hunters and outdoor enthusiasts. But not everyone knows how these antlers form or why some

bucks are bigger than others. That’s where we come in.

The Growing Season

During the autumn rut, bucks attempt to mate with as many does as possible. Because of the amount of energy it takes to stay reproductively motivated for so long, bucks will lose a tremendous amount of weight, with estimates ranging from 30 to 40 percent of their total body mass. In addition, when the rut concludes, the buck’s testosterone levels drop dramatically, causing the deterioration of the connective tissue between the antler and pedicle, or antler base, on the skull. The antlers are then cast, or

shed, usually between December and March in Nebraska. From this point, bucks spend the next six weeks or more resting and regaining muscle and body fat lost during the rut.

As days get longer in the spring, the buck’s testosterone level also rises, and a new set of antlers rapidly grows from the deer’s pedicles. While experts vary on how much animal antlers can grow in a day – accounts range from one-eighth inch to one-half inch in whitetails and one inch for elk – one fact is agreed upon: it is the fastest example of bone growth in nature.

During this time they are covered with fine hairs known collectively as velvet, a soft material containing an extensive capillary network that supplies the growing antlers with blood, oxygen and minerals essential for growth. Warm to the touch, these velveted antlers are sensitive and susceptible to breakage.

While growing, antlers will temporarily borrow minerals from the buck’s internal bone structure, a process known as resorption. Bones, including the ribs and shoulder blades, will contribute to the calcium needed

for antler growth and be replenished by the fall.

A deer’s antlers begin to harden, usually in August or September in Nebraska, as testosterone levels increase and bucks use them for fights and displays of dominance that will come as they vie for does during the November rut.

When the mating season is over, the entire process starts anew. Well, almost anew. Antler growth in some respects is comparable to that of trees. Some years are just better than others, and for many reasons.

Rack Facts

- In most cases, typical white-tailed deer antlers begin growing out a buck’s head in a backward motion, then quickly change direction and sweep forward as we commonly know.

- Bucks will usually shed their antlers around the same time, but sometimes an antler will remain intact for hours or days after the first antler has been shed.

- Because of a hormonal imbalance, one in several thousand does will grow antlers.

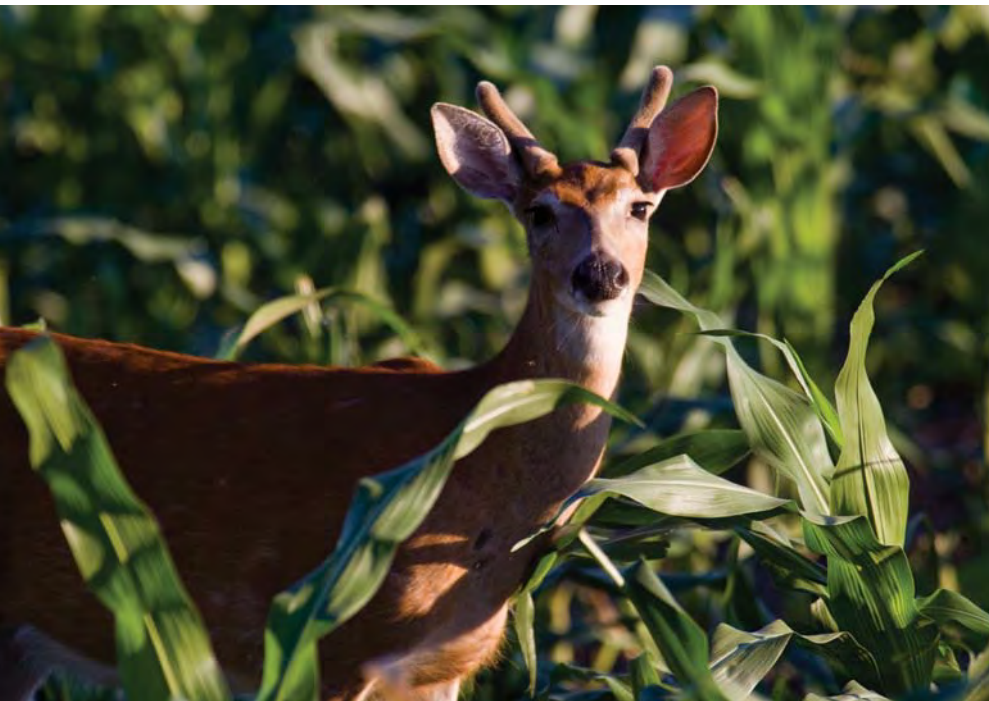
- Because antlers are rich in calcium and other nutrients, they are often eaten by other animals, primarily rodents, following shedding.

- White-tailed bucks are classified as typical or non-typical. Typical antlers are symmetrical on both sides with points growing straight up off main beams. Non-typical antlers are asymmetrical and can have points growing in any direction.

- The deterioration of connective tissue between the pedicle and antler that results in antler shedding, caused by a bone cell known as an osteoclast, is one of the fastest tissue deteriorations in the animal kingdom.

- A cactus buck, one who remains in perpetual velvet, suffers from a condition known as cryptorchid caused by abnormal testicular production or injury.

- Dominant bucks in northern regions often shed their antlers earlier than younger deer, perhaps because of their post-rut physical condition.



ABOVE: White-tailed deer antler growth in Nebraska begins in March or April. OPPOSITE: By early September growth has ceased as bucks begin to rub their velvet-covered antlers on trees, shaping their newly created bones into fine points.



Antlers or Horns?

In Nebraska, there are three antlered game species: white-tailed deer, mule deer and elk. There are also two with horns: bighorn sheep and pronghorn. In these antlered species, head gear is shed annually, branched and made of bone. Conversely, horns are grown for a lifetime, unbranched, and are

closely related to hair and skin. The pronghorn, however, combines factors from both. First, the pronghorn has a small branch unlike a typical horn. Second, the outer covering, called a sheath, is shed each year while the inner horn grows for a lifetime.



BIGHORN SHEEP



PRONGHORN



ELK

Antler Color

Antler color is an often talked about subject with no definitive answers. Some research says it depends on the tree species a deer rubs. For example, if a buck chooses a pine tree to rub, this tree could

darken his antlers. Others point to lighter-racked deer receiving more sun exposure, while the amount of oxidized blood left over following velvet shedding has also provided researchers reasons why antler color varies. Even genetics and the age of deer has been cited as possible answers. Regardless, hunters and outdoor writers continue to debate the subject, further confirming the fascination with all things antler.



DARKER ANTLERS



LIGHTER ANTLERS

Diet, Genes, Age and Injury

Following the rut, bucks replenish themselves with a bevy of nutrients, including protein, calcium phosphorous and vitamins A and D. The top crop in this land of corn is a nice source of energy to get deer through a cold winter, but does little for antler growth. And if bucks don't receive an adequate amount of nutrients to replenish themselves post-rut, their bodies will

direct all resources toward keeping them alive first, growing antlers second.

In this example, antler growth will suffer in mass, main beam length, and total number of points grown. Also, because antler growth is so rapid, even a few days without enough to eat could hinder antler size.

However, even with optimal nutrition, antler growth will never exceed genetic potential. When it comes down to it, a buck is who his family is – but he'll only be that way

for so long.

At 10 months, a buck will begin growing his first antlers, from spikes to a three-by-three or small four-by-four. Typically, even a 1½ year old spike is fighting against bad genetics or an inadequate food source, for larger antlers can be grown even in that small time period. A year later, at 2½, a buck will achieve 25 to 35 percent of his potential antler development, with his maximum potential occurring between 5 and 7 years of age. Bucks lucky



Shooting a nice buck should never be seen as a commonplace occurrence. With the amount of problems that can occur on a yearly, if not daily, basis for a white-tailed deer and his antler growth, any buck harvested should be considered a trophy.

and smart enough to live longer than this will see their antler mass increase but tine and beam length decrease. Throughout their entire lives, even one marginal year of nutrition can affect maximum growth, and even one isolated injury can affect antler growth for a lifetime.

If injury to a deer's body does occur, resources will be diverted from antler growth. Injury to the pedicle can cause

deformity to the antler or stop antler growth entirely. If broken during the velvet stage, a buck could die from blood loss and will most certainly have inadequate growth that particular year and potentially future years. Injury to a buck's testicles could also temporarily, or permanently, hurt a buck's antler growth.

In short, the big buck you're chasing with a weapon, camera or a pair of

binoculars is a prize when you see him, and an example of a true trophy in nature because he and his body have gone through the rigors to make his antlers as nice as they are. So take a few extra moments, and stare at him a bit longer, when you see him this fall. He definitely deserves it. ■

Jordan Tate is a freelance writer who lives in Lincoln.

Beyond the Concrete

By Sam Anderson

In the darkness, an owl waits. Its perch, a sign reminding motorists to drive slowly, glows back at us in the headlights.

Out amid the cicada song, shortly after sunset, my wife and I stood in a field near the edge of Omaha at Chalco Hills Recreation Area searching for owls. Slowly, I let the glow of my two flashlights drift from branch to branch, seeking out any empty knots in the trunks, any variations in the wood that might have been feathers. Behind me, Deanna skimmed through her iPad, playing examples of owl calls so I would know what we were listening for. Of the few species of owls that hold permanent residence in Nebraska, I most enjoyed the soft *whooping* of the **eastern screech owl** and the more confident *hoot, hoo-hoot* of the **great horned owl**.



THINKSTOCK PHOTOS



The purpling sky grew black, and the full moon shone fat and orange through the trees above us. Gnats swarmed

the glass of my flashlights, twinkling in the darkness inches from my face. I stepped forward, scanning along the branches. My shoes crunched lightly through the dry brown-green grass at our feet. I crept to the edge of the longer, waist-high grass.

Suddenly, we both jumped when an irritated shriek – *chirawp – chir-ch-chirawp* – sounded from a bird in a nearby tree. Our flashlights darted back and forth, trying to pinpoint the source of the sound. It chirped at us once more, still unseen as our bobbing circles of light swept the trees and grass around us. As abruptly as it had begun, the squawk disappeared, and the silence filled in quickly with the cicadas and crickets all around us.

In that moment, I began to wonder what exactly had brought me there, wandering in the woods at night. The closest I had come to nature hiking since old family vacations was the short trek around our suburban block to the mailbox. I suspected suddenly that the shrieking bird, hidden away, knew I did not belong.

Tufts of feathers protrude from above the reddish eye-shine. I shut off the headlights and flipped on the hazards as the car rolled to a stop along the side of the road.

Owls adorn our house. We have a replica of Hedwig – Harry Potter’s snowy owl companion – hanging in our office. Our bookshelf is home to a pair of black stylized statuettes that look most like great horned owls. Deanna likes seeing the bookend statues together because it is believed that these owls mate for life, which is one of the things that we can both respect about owls and hope to embody ourselves. Deanna has owl jewelry and an owl desktop buddy that dances and hoots for her when she plugs it into her laptop.

Even her teacher’s bag is adorned with an owl perched upon a branch against a blue damask sky. This bag was the first thing I saw when she came through our garage door, cradling in her hands something hidden among paper towels. She had the same look on her face normally reserved for when I have given her jewelry or a book she has been wanting.

“Look what I found!” she exclaimed.

Within the wad of paper towels, she held a lump of thick, gray hair. When she saw my confusion, she added, “It’s an owl pellet! I’ve dissected dozens of these in science class but never found one in the *wild*!”

“The wild? This is Omaha. We don’t have ‘wild’ here.”

“Sure we do! I mean, an owl left this present for me right on my car!”

“Owl vomit is a present to you?” I pondered suddenly that I may have been trying too hard on birthdays and holidays. “How do you know it’s even from an owl?”

She set her bag down on the coffee table and joined me on the couch with the pellet still in her hands. “See that sliver, there?” From one side of the lump, a tiny, cream-colored shard of something poked out. “It’s a rodent bone. Other raptors, like eagles or hawks, can digest bones. Owls *can’t*.”

Knowing her for the science teacher I married, I sighed heavily and said, “I suppose you want to cut it open?”

Her wild-eyed grin widened. “For science! Let me just put it in the microwave for a bit to sanitize it first.”

She was out of the room before I could protest, but somewhere deep inside of me, my curiosity wanted to join her upstairs.

Through the windshield, I can only see its beak. I cannot hear its call.

Raptor is the classification given to birds of prey, such as eagles, falcons and owls. Their pellets, also called castings, are a vital part of their digestive system and overall health. Anything the bird cannot digest becomes wrapped tightly in what closely resembles a gigantic grayish or brown cotton ball that is later regurgitated. The casting process allows them to purge any impurities that they may have in their bodies. Without these castings, a raptor would quickly become ill from the bacteria that grow within its food. If a raptor in captivity is fed only meat with no fur or feathers, it is unable to form pellets, and will likely become too ill to be

released into the wild.

The bird, turning away from our intrusion, spins its head toward the field. Its neck bobs back and forth. Quietly, we open the car doors and step out onto the road.

“And you’re sure this thing will be okay on our table?” I stared, only slightly horrified, at the paper towel Deanna had set out on the table. In the kitchen, the microwave beeped at us to signal that the pellet had been prepared for dissection.

Deanna simply rolled her eyes at me, removed the thumb-length pellet from the microwave and placed it on the paper towel. Her fingers worked gently, delicately feeling for any natural cracks that she could exploit in order to pull the wad of hair apart. She felt around the small bone protrusion she had noticed before. Tiny, lint-like hairs clung together, and every pull made the wad look more like a dark gray cotton ball, until finally tufts of the hair came loose from the main body of the casting. Slowly, she pulled at the shard of bone. A thin rib slid out, and she set it gently on the towel. Other pieces of bone followed: chunks of a tail with hair still attached, an errant vertebra, a few more ribs. When she uncovered part of a skull, the empty eye socket stared back at us.

“This must have been a small mouse; look at the size of the skull.” She removed more hair, delicately freeing the teeth, which looked like tiny bone combs. The pile of loose cottony bits grew. Beneath the skull, claws poked out at us. Deanna sucked in a breath. “Look at that,” she said. As she pulled at the fur, more of the digits became apparent, revealing an entire paw, the bones still set perfectly beside one another. My initial apprehension disappeared at the sight of the tiny paw, still preserved and fully intact. Enchanted by the process, I whispered beneath my breath for her to keep going.

After she had dug through the remaining hair and uncovered the rest of the treasures the owl had left for us, Deanna looked up at me and said, “We only live two blocks away from Chalco Hills. We should go owling – tonight.”

Its wings spread wide and full with the feathers tipped outward like long fingers. Dark stripes can be seen in the blinking orange light from my car.

I remembered why I was out there. Some part of me wanted to find another pellet or even glimpse an owl in its nest. Deanna and I walked farther into the hollow. We skirted the long grass, keeping our lights on the trees. The air was still hot and humid. The glint of opossum eyes shone back at us from within a thick bush. We kept searching the trees until a voice came over the park’s loudspeaker. “The park will close in twenty minutes. Twenty minutes until closing.”



“Should we go?” I asked. Deanna looked back at me, and even through the darkness, her disappointment at not having seen an owl was apparent. “If you want to.”

“Well, I guess we still have some time.”

Farther down the trail, another opossum spooked us as it rustled the long grass beside us. As we caught sight of its tail disappearing into the bushes, I realized how easy it is to forget

that wildlife lives just down the street from my house. I’m always so busy with work and school that I never notice how much life exists beyond the concrete.

At 10 minutes until closing, I elected to push just a little farther. Suddenly, off the side of the path, I caught the tiniest glint of yellow eye shine in a patch of brush. In the beam of my flashlight, four eyes shone back at me. There, underneath a small tree, a doe and her fawn nestled in the grass. I stared at them, and in that moment, everything else around us faded away. Perhaps we were not meant to see any owls that night, but we would still have the memory of this moment and its peacefulness. The doe blinked back at me, and I apologized for shining my light on them and interrupting their rest.

Five minutes after closing, we decided to head back to the car. Considering that we were not experienced in the art of owl-spotting, a squawking bird, a pair of opossums, and a mother deer with her fawn seemed like acceptable alternatives. Off in the distance, we could hear the sounds of what we thought might be owls, but they refused to come out for us.

At the car, I promised Deanna that we could try again another night, that maybe we had come out at the wrong time. “They’re probably out hunting. They’d have been roosting at sunset maybe,” I said. She smiled, but the disappointment was heavy in her eyes. I felt it too. On the road back to the entrance, we saw a park manager pulling his truck onto the side trails to move along any stragglers. We slowly rounded a bend in the road, and Deanna put her hand up to my shoulder. I saw it seconds after she did.

Perched atop the 15 MPH sign, with its reddish eye-shine glinting back at us in the headlights, a great horned owl opened its beak to complain about the silver Hyundai that had spooked its quarry. Before I could think, I had pulled the car off to the side of the road, shut off the headlights, and flipped on my hazards. The orange pulse lit up the field every few seconds. We stepped out of the car, abandoning the engine clicks and air conditioning of the world from which we had come, and watched as the owl spread its wings. Without a sound, it dove headlong into the tall grass after its unseen prey, leaving us to strain our eyes against the darkness, hoping for one last glimpse or hoot. ■

Sam Anderson is a writer living in Omaha. This is his first essay in NEBRASKAland.



Plank Grilling

A new way to push the flavor of food on the grill.

By Julie Geiser

I love grilling, and I'm always looking for new ways to push the flavor of different foods. One of my favorite methods is plank grilling, a simple technique that gives meat and veggies an impeccably moist, smoky taste.

Plank grilling is easy – begin with a clean, untreated piece of wood that is at least ¼ to 1 inch thick. I prefer a plank that is thicker so it can be reused several times. Planks can be purchased in the grilling section of most stores, online, at specialty stores, or you can make them yourself through your local lumberyard to customize fit and desired wood. Cedar and apple are woods of choice, but oak, maple and cherry are good for planking as well.

To start, the planks must be soaked prior to grilling to prevent them from catching fire. You want the board to burn a little but you don't want it to incinerate. The smoldering wood creates the smoke that will give your finished dish its great flavor. Submerging the planks overnight in a kitchen sink, bucket or cooler will ensure that the planks are completely saturated before being thrown onto the hot grill. Recommended soaking time for the planks is 2 to 6 hours.

A trick I quickly learned was to soak my planks in warm water; this helps to open up the pores in the wood, aiding in the saturation process. Using warm water to dissolve your favorite spices is another trick to enhancing flavor. For a different twist, try adding white wine, beer, whiskey or apple cider and fresh herbs to the water for a flavorful soaking solution.

Almost any type of meat can be plank grilled. My favorites are fish, chicken, turkey breasts and pork chops, but I have been known to plank grill elk and deer steaks as well. Meats can be marinated ahead of time or seasoned before being placed on the plank – it's your choice; prepare the meat as you normally would before grilling.

Along with meat, I like to grill



Plank grilling works well with a variety of foods, including meat, fruit and vegetables.

veggies and fruit with my meals. Creating a bed of orange and apple slices along with fresh veggies for the meat to sit on top of is sure to add flavor. Beds of onion, mushrooms, fresh sage and other spices are also options. If you prefer, place the meat directly on the plank and garnish the tops and sides of the meat instead.

To cook, pre-heat the grill to around 300 degrees Fahrenheit – try to keep the temperature constant for the duration of the grilling time. Using a grill thermometer will help keep temperatures even.

Pick one side of the soaked plank to be the top and pat it dry. Lightly coat the top surface with olive or vegetable oil. You can also rub the top of the plank with sea salt, garlic and fresh herbs during this step for extra flavor. Finally, load the plank with your ingredients of choice.

Once the grill is up to temperature, place the loaded plank on the grill, close the lid and cook. For fish, plank grill for about 15-25 minutes. For beef, depending on how you like it done, grill it about double the time you normally would. Keep in mind that the

thicker the meat, the longer the grilling time. Do not turn the meat over on the plank; it will cook completely as is.

Keep the grill lid closed to capture smoke from the plank and to retain heat. Although it is tempting to open the grill lid several times, just peek in every so often to see if the plank is on fire. While you don't want to stop the plank from smoldering, you want to keep it from catching into flames. Keep a spray bottle close and apply just enough water when needed to extinguish any flare-ups.

When the food is grilled to your taste, transfer the plank from the grill using hot pads to a cookie sheet, cooling rack or serving platter. You can eat directly off the plank, which will also serve as a great conversation piece for guests. ■

Julie Geiser is a regional editor of NEBRASKAland Magazine. She is originally from North Platte, Nebraska and enjoys life outdoors.



PHOTO BY JULIE GEISER

A Mountain Lion Timeline

After years of research, Nebraska's first mountain lion hunting season will begin in 2014.

By Jeff Kurrus

In January of 2014, Nebraska will open its first mountain lion hunting season after years of research by Nebraska Game and Parks Commission biologists. But Nebraska's relationship with this apex predator spans more than 100 years, from the time in the early 1900s when this species, native to Nebraska, was extirpated because of unregulated hunting, trapping, poisoning and decimation of prey species. Below is a timeline of what has followed.

1900s – Mountain lion prey species, including white-tailed deer, slowly recover because of protection offered by game laws.

1960s-1970s – Mountain lion receive protection as game animals in most western states.

1990s-2000s – Mountain lion populations expand in the Black Hills of South Dakota.

1991 – Mountain lion shot in the Pine Ridge of northwestern Nebraska, marking first documented presence in recent decades.

1991-present – Nebraska Game and Parks Commission documents 92 instances of mountain lion presence outside of the Pine Ridge population.

1995 – Nebraska Legislature adds mountain lions to statutory list of game animals, affording protection for species under game laws.

2004 – Nebraska Game and Parks Commission adopts the Mountain Lion Response Plan detailing the Commission's processes for various mountain lion situations and identifies criteria for confirming presence of mountain lions in Nebraska.

2006 – Resident female, which had been ear-tagged in the Black Hills by researchers with South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks, documented in Pine Ridge.

2007 – First evidence of reproduction by mountain lions in Nebraska is documented by trail camera photographs of kittens as well as a roadkilled kitten. This signifies to biologists that a resident population is present in Nebraska.

2008 to present – Presence of mountain lion kittens documented each year in Pine Ridge.

2009, 2010 and 2013 – Presence of female mountain lions documented in Scotts Bluff County.

2010 – The Commission begins conducting research to assess the number of mountain lions in the Pine Ridge and to estimate suitable habitat across the state. Using scat detector dogs, eight males and five females are detected in the Pine Ridge.

2012 – Scat surveys detect six males and eight females in Pine Ridge, and the Commission estimates 15 to 22 total mountain lions in the Pine Ridge, depending on the effects of historic wildfires in 2012.

2012-2013 – Female mountain lions documented in

Cherry County.

2013 – Genetic evidence from the Niobrara River Valley indicates a resident population is present.

2013 – Commission approves Nebraska's first mountain lion season.

2014 – Nebraska's inaugural mountain lion hunting season will take place. Up to four mountain lions may be harvested next year in Pine Ridge, the area of the state with the most established population. The Prairie Unit, which covers the largest portion of the state, will have an unlimited harvest quota.

Four units have been defined to manage mountain lions, although only two will be open to hunting in 2014. The Keya Paha and Upper Platte units, located in areas determined to have suitable mountain lion habitat in the north-central part of the state and southwestern Panhandle respectively, will be closed pending more population data, while an unlimited number of mountain lions may be harvested in the Prairie Unit, which mostly consists of agricultural land and makes up the remainder of the state not included in the other three units. The Pine Ridge, Keya Paha and Upper Platte units have the same boundaries as the deer management units that go by the same names.

The objective for the Pine Ridge Unit is to provide a harvest opportunity while allowing a slight to moderate reduction in the mountain lion population. The Pine Ridge Unit will have two seasons, with harvest quotas of two mountain lions each. The first season is Jan. 1-Feb. 14. One permit will be issued by auction to a Nebraska resident or nonresident and one will be issued by lottery to a resident. Each may hunt with dogs. The first season will close immediately once the quota of two mountain lions or sub-quota of one female is met. The second season in the Pine Ridge Unit is Feb. 15-March 31. There will be 100 lottery permits, which allow hunting without dogs, available to residents. The season will close immediately once the quota of two mountain lions or sub-quota of one female is met.

The objective of the Prairie Unit is to provide unlimited hunting opportunity in the part of the state that is unlikely to establish a breeding population of mountain lions. The season is open year-round and an unlimited number of permits are available. Permits will cost \$15. Hunting with dogs is allowed only Jan. 1-March 31 and the use of traps or bait is prohibited while hunting mountain lions.

The application period for the Pine Ridge Unit is Sept. 3-30. Applications for the Prairie Unit will be accepted Dec. 16, 2013-Dec. 31, 2014. The nonrefundable application fee is \$15. ■

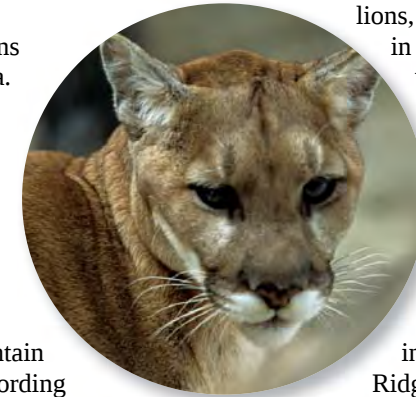


PHOTO BY JUSTIN WAMBOLD

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▲ This photo is of my dad, Clarence Stiehl (right) and Charles Kadlec (left) hunting ducks and geese at Walgren Lake south of Hay Springs.

This was taken in about 1932 after a successful hunt. There was not a limit to the number of ducks you could shoot. I counted 32 ducks and one goose in the photo. I remember hunting ducks with them in the 1940s and we would sit in a duck blind around the lake and hunt the ducks as they took off from the lake and landed. Cloudy and stormy days were always the best. The lake had thousands of ducks and geese every fall and they would stay until January or February and would continue south for the winter. There were so many ducks that they could keep the water from freezing. Now there are very few ducks that migrate through the flyway and stay for very long.

– Gary Stiehl, Colorado Springs, Colorado



▲ Pictured is my dad, Hilbert Helgenberger, with some snow geese he shot in 1957. Dad and our neighbor, Harry Smeal, shot the geese on Pebble Creek on Harry's property near Snyder. Dad said a storm blew in that day and forced the geese down on the creek.

– Curt Helgenberger, Scribner, 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.

Please Don't Say "Boo"

Why I Can't Wait for November.

By Jeff Kurrus

It's a wonder why I deer hunt at all. I'm scared of the dark, heights and most things that crawl through tall grass. However, being a father forces me to put on a brave face for my four and one-year olds, which has led me to traipse through waist high cattails looking for turtles and pull up rocks hoping a snake shoots out so we can catch it. I can name a hundred other things I'd rather do.

The direct cause for these fears is one person – my father. The earliest known story I remember him reading to me was Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," whimsical bedtime fodder for any seven year old. Or when he introduced me to the finger knives of Freddy Krueger and his Elm Street shenanigans.

These stories, and the imagination that is created with them, eventually led me to what was probably my lowest moment. While living in San Angelo, Texas, shortly after Laura and I were married, I fell asleep watching John Carpenter's "In the Mouth of Madness." While I can truly claim – no polygraphs necessary – that the movie did not scare me, I woke up not knowing what was real and what wasn't. Every time I opened my eyes I became more scared that I was part of someone else's dream, and my paranoia continued to increase. "Laura," I called out, who had fallen asleep on the couch. "I need you to help me."

"What?"

"Can you come hold me?"

"Huh?"

"Come hold me. I'm scared to open my eyes and need to feel something real."

On most days, she would have seen this as nothing more than a ploy for a hug. But she must have heard the fear in my voice, and she was able to stifle most of her giggles as she crossed the room and held me as if I were a child.

Since that night, and my re-acclimation to the physical world we live in, she has warned me against all scary movies because I will annoyingly curl up too close next to her at night when we turn off the lights and refuse to check any 3 a.m. sounds we hear for the next couple of weeks.

This month is always interesting in our house as daylight continues to shorten and I spend more and more time in the field. I can remember, more than once, counting the number of feet from a flashlight while walking to the duck blind, and I am constantly looking over my shoulder when sneaking to the deer stand. But my unfortunate imagination is not limited to these times afield.

One time, while pheasant hunting in Kansas, our group stayed with a woman we nicknamed "The Chicken Lady" for the large amount of ceramic roosters she had in her kitchen.



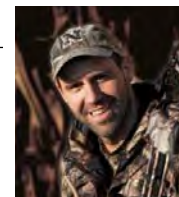
ILLUSTRATION BY TIM REIGERT

This is the room I mostly stayed in during my visit because an adjoining living room had just as many ceramic dolls, all smiling for no good reason with blank, lifeless eyes. Thank God the third room over didn't contain clowns. I might have passed out dead on the spot without ever firing a shot that week.

So while many of you will dress up yourselves, or your kids, this month for any number of Halloween activities, I'll be right there beside you wearing a mask of my own.

And while I might say "boo" to your little one to further along the holiday spirit, I certainly hope no one will do it to me. I might not be able to take it. ■

Jeff Kurrus is the editor of NEBRASKAland Magazine. Originally from Memphis, Tennessee, he started with the magazine in August of 2006. His goal is to somehow become a native Nebraskan.





Leftovers

We all have to make tough choices in life. And there are times when choosing the photos to fill the pages of *NEBRASKAland* can be tough. You see, for every story in *NEBRASKAland*, there are only so many pages. And on each page, you can run only so many photos. And in a story on the Platte River, for example, you really only need one photo of the sun rising over the river.

So what if you happened to capture several great images of a sunrise on a particular day when the light was simply magical? Or if you captured great sunrise images on different days? You simply pick the best one, a task that sometimes involves flipping coins or arm wrestling with editors, and you eat the rest. Not with barbecue sauce. And not with some fava beans and a nice chianti. No, they are served plain, and can be hard to swallow.

We don't just eat photos of sunrises here at *NEBRASKAland*. We eat sunset photos, photos of kids playing in our state parks, of grown men hunting and fishing, of bugs on flowers, of deer in the woods, of great random photos we stumbled upon while on the way to shoot others ... and the list goes on. We're left hoping that someday, someone will find a need for some of the others, the leftovers. It's the nature of the beast. When your goal is to showcase Nebraska in photographs, you keep shooting and sort them out later.

Still, you're often left wishing you could run more photos. But every time, you're thankful you got paid to capture them in the first place.

See you out there, hopefully when the light is sweet, so I can make more leftovers.

*Eric Fowler, regional editor, NEBRASKAland Magazine
August 20, 2013*



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