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NEBRASKAland

December 2017



Hoarfrost decorates a tree branch at the Thompson Natural History Preserve in Chadron.
Photo by Justin Haag.

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INSIDE
Nighttime Photography • Canada Geese – A Photo Essay
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Travel to Broken Bow • Time Well Spent

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NEBRASKAland Magazine

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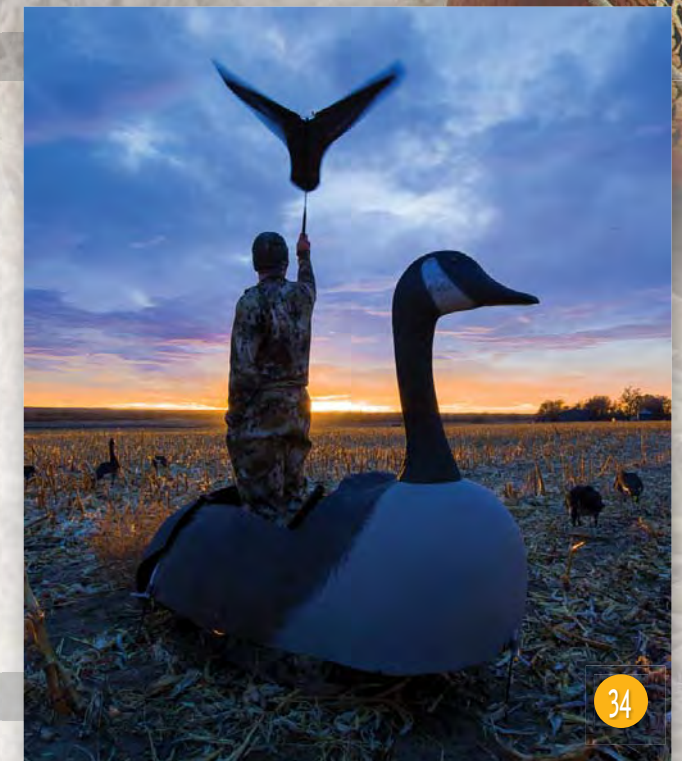
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Cover: This photo of Schramm Park State Recreation Area's old fish hatchery building (seen from the canyon ponds above) was shot near midnight in February of 2016. See page 24 for more nighttime photos. Photo by Zach Hanson.

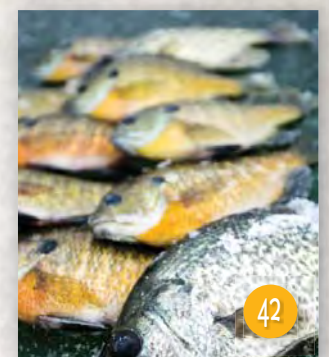


THROUGHOUT 2017, NEBRASKALAND MAGAZINE WILL PUBLISH ARTICLES ASSOCIATED WITH THE STATE'S 150-YEAR CELEBRATION. LOOK FOR THIS LOGO TO READ ABOUT NEBRASKA'S RICH HISTORY AND VIEW OUR INTERACTIVE DIGITAL EDITION FOR MORE INFORMATION.

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"This picture was taken in the early morning as the sun started peeking through the trees in my neighbors' yard. It was such a beautiful morning and a beautiful sight," said Margaret Foster of Lincoln.



Chris Clay took this photo of a bumblebee at Heron Haven Nature Center in Omaha.



Congratulations to Tom Shield for winning the "Wild and Scenic" photo competition at the Nebraska State Fair with this sandhill crane image taken between Kearney and Gibbon.



Opening day 2017 four-man limit in the Rainwater Basin with Devin Heusinkvelt, Wade Backstrom, Jackson Ellis and Carson Jones.

Casey Mitchell from Lincoln took this photo of an active fox den in the middle of the city. He saw mom, dad and nine kits.

Nebraska Friendly

I'm writing to *NEBRASKA*land to tell you how much I enjoy it. I first subscribed to the magazine in February after I decided I was coming to Nebraska to watch the eclipse. I thought it might give me some tips on what to do and see in Nebraska. It did, as we enjoyed an outing at Rock Creek Station (Homestead, too) after reading about it in your magazine. Even though our vacation has come and gone I plan to renew my subscription to your magazine.

However, what I really would like to say is thank you to the people of Nebraska. My wife, youngest daughter (17) and myself traveled to your state to watch the eclipse. While we stayed at a hotel in Kearney on Aug. 21, we watched the celestial event from Ravenna Lake in Buffalo County.

We also took part in the town of Ravenna's festivals, from the bands to the vendors. And yes, we spent money! We enjoyed the small-town atmosphere, charm and hospitality to the utmost maximum.

We spent a total of nine days in your lovely state. Nebraska is so big! We logged nearly 1,900 miles traveling from the Omaha airport and back again seeing such sights as Homestead to Fort Robinson to Smith Falls and everything in between.

I was surprised at how friendly Nebraskans were and how they were willing to help or give advice on what to do and see to a stranger. Even the police officer that pulled me over for speeding in Ogallala ended up offering advice about Ash Hollow. It turns out that by the end of our stay we could actually tell who was a native to Nebraska and who was not, simply by their friendliness.

You put "southern hospitality" to shame. We also learned of your new state motto, "Nebraska. Nice," and found it to be perfectly fitting.

Mike Sausser and family
Schuylkill Haven, Pennsylvania



Bruce Thiel of Lincoln shared this photo of Mayberry Lake in Pawnee County.

Hides for Vets

The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, known as the local Elks Lodge in most small towns, is again accepting donated deer hides from the beginning of the November firearm deer season through the end of the January antlerless deer season.

Donated hides will be shipped to a tannery to be turned into soft leather and made into gloves for veterans who use wheelchairs or used for craft kits that are distributed to veterans at Veterans Affairs Hospitals across the world as part of the Elks Help a Vet program.

Before the hides can be shipped, they have to have all excess fat, flesh and both the head and tail removed. Then table or stock salt must be rubbed into all fleshy surfaces. Volunteers at the drop-off locations do most of this work, but hunters are welcome to do it themselves before dropping off the hides. Care must be taken in the skinning process, however, as even small holes can result in the hide being ruined during the tanning process.

Contact your local Elks Lodge for more information.

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

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Mixed Bag

A Mammal Brief

Eastern Chipmunk

By Lindsay Rogers

Easily identified by the five solid stripes on their back and reddish-brown rump, the Eastern chipmunk (*Tamias striatus*) is found throughout most of the eastern United States, including eastern Nebraska. The only other chipmunk species in Nebraska – the least chipmunk (*Tamias minimus*) – is found in the northern Panhandle.

The Eastern chipmunk is a primarily ground-dwelling squirrel which feeds on seeds, nuts and fruit. Their diet is supplemented by insects, earthworms, slugs, bird's eggs and mushrooms. They will carry food in their cheeks and often cache or store food throughout their range. They do not hibernate, but rather enter a state of torpor where they will sleep for several days or weeks but wake to feed throughout the winter months. During their active periods in the winter they will feed on cached food. They are extremely vocal and can be heard making a series of chirps or their high-pitched alarm call. ■



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

PHOTO BY JOEL SARTORE

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The Nebraska Wildlife Conservation Fund works to connect people and nature through education, research and habitat restoration. Learn about the fund, the projects it supports and how you can help online at:

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Look for the Peregrine Falcon image on your Nebraska tax return.



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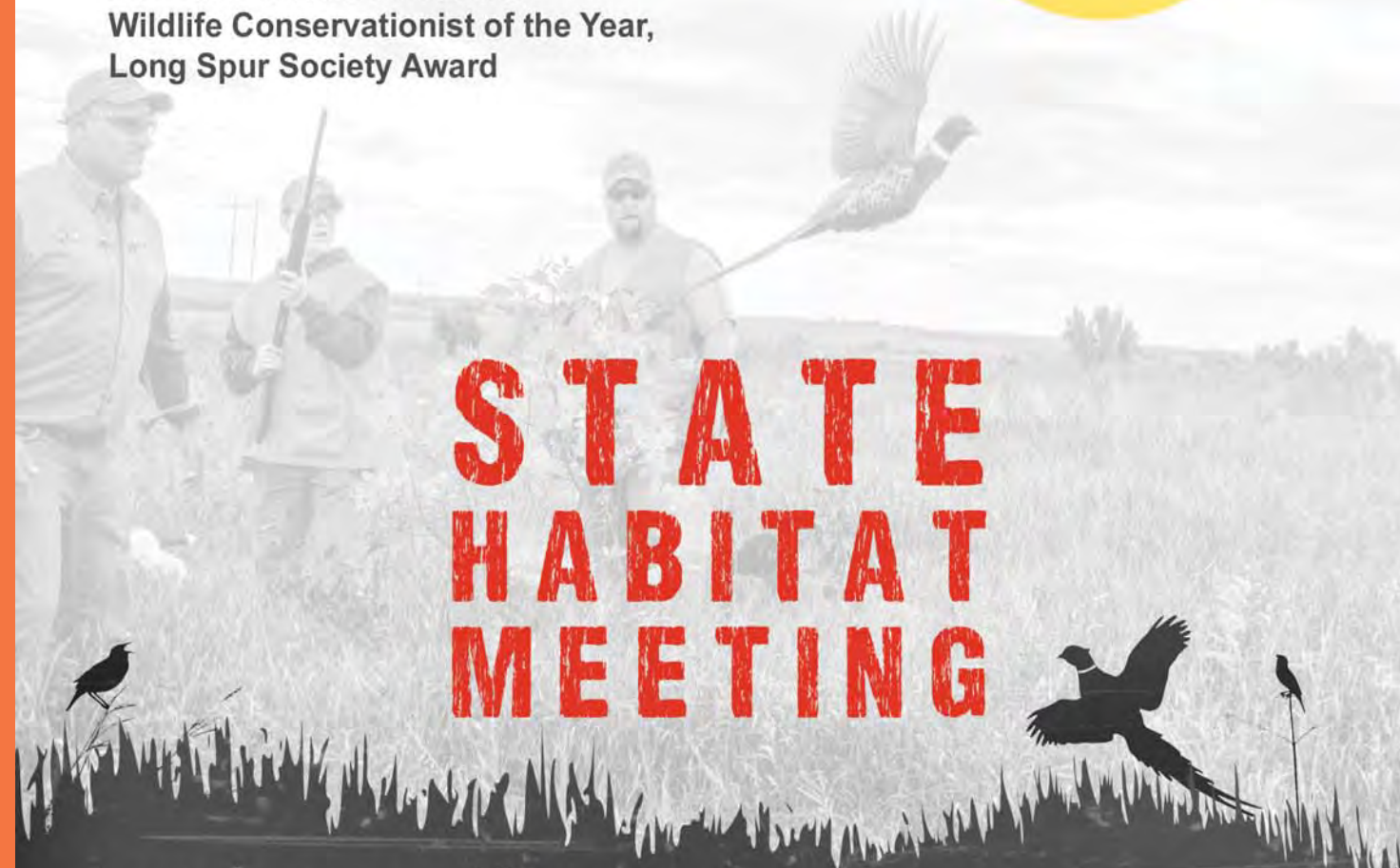
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Visit Broken Bow

By Brenna McFadden, Nebraska Tourism Commission

Broken Bow is a historic town that continues to thrive and look to the future with its motto “Rooted. But not standing still.” Named by a settler who found a broken bow in a field at the site of a former Indian camping ground, this small and vibrant community offers unique places to stay and eat as well as providing fun activities for the whole family.

If you are planning to visit while you are traveling along scenic Hwy. 2, make sure you book yourself a place to stay at the Arrow Hotel. Traditional values and incredible hospitality go hand-in-hand at this elegant Western style hotel. Though it was built in 1928 and is listed on the National Registry of Historic Places, it has all the modern-day conveniences you could ask for, including Wi-Fi, cable television with HBO and in-room coffee service. The Arrow Hotel can also provide a fun and relaxed dining atmosphere at the Bonfire Grill and Pub located in the lobby. This is a one-of-a-kind hotel experience that is sure to create fond memories.

The Arrow Hotel is located just off the city square, so you can spend time admiring the local shops, and if you are lucky you can take part in the Third Thursday concert festivities! Live music, food and drinks, shopping, games and much more take place every third Thursday of the month in the Downtown City Square. It is a great time for the community to come together and welcome visitors from all over with plenty of small-town charm and liveliness. One of the outstanding stores unlike any other that folks will encourage you to visit while you are strolling around the city



The Arrow Hotel, and its Bonfire restaurant in its lobby, provide a relaxing getaway for travelers through Broken Bow.

square is Ortello Dale, the home away from home store. This store has a family atmosphere and specializes in unique gifts and home décor.

If you have an interest in art be sure to browse some of the beautiful pieces found at the Wild Rose Gallery. This gallery features regional artists and is dedicated to providing a place for artists to display and promote their work while also educating the public in the arts.

This small yet growing town has much to offer and is continuing to bring in new and exciting additions to the community. With a great town square, beautiful park and recreation areas, a new sports facility and a new add-on to the Arrow Hotel, this is definitely a flourishing community that is sure to stun while you visit. So, start planning and pack your bags for a weekend getaway to Broken Bow. ■

While in the Area

Other places to stay, eat at and visit in Broken Bow:

- Dowse Bunkhouse
- Kinkaider Brewing Co.
- Legends Neighborhood Grill
- Prairie Grounds Café & Gifts
- Tumbleweed Cafe
- Sylvester's Bar and Lounge
- Melham Park
- Custer County Museum
- Pleasure Lanes
- Boneyard Creation Museum



Broken Bow's Melham Park.



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View of the Collier Ranch
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A Brief History

"Women, High Living, and Diamonds" for Omaha's Bartenders

By the Nebraska State Historical Society

Omaha in 1886 boasted about 150 saloons manned by a host of bartenders who ministered to the city's thirst for beer and hard liquor. The *Omaha Bee* on Sept. 26, 1886, noted the "many things, interesting and curious, that might be written about the Omaha bartenders."

The *Bee* noted that each saloon usually employed two men behind the bar. However, "not more than a score ... are first-class bar tenders."



This little shack was said to have been the first saloon in Palisade, Nebraska. The story is that it was located across the tracks because local women had petitioned town officials to prohibit a saloon in town. Local men honor the shack's history in this 1915 photo. NSHS RG5339-6



In 1930s Scottsbluff, "high living" included Storz beer and a game of pool. NSHS RG2528-6-22



Omaha bar, 1910. NSHS RG3542-95-17

A first-class bartender, according to the *Bee*, should have a number of attributes. "He must not only be a machine, [but] an accurate machine at that – able to compound a list of drinks as long as your arm – putting together the proper ingredients in the proper proportions. He must be a close student of human nature, affable and agreeable under all circumstances and at all times ... If a customer is sleepy and stupid, the man behind the bar must possess the ability to give him a decoction which shall open his eyes and make him feel wide awake and ready for business; if he, on the other hand, [is] unable to sleep and in need of rest, the bartender must call to his aid the magic of his art and give him something to soothe his nerves and insure him a night of sweet sleep."

Bartenders were not paid high salaries, noted the *Bee*. "Twenty dollars a week is the amount earned by the majority of Omaha's best drink-mixers. A few are paid \$100 a month and one or two perhaps a trifle over that amount."

Although wages were not high, bartenders had the reputation of spending freely. They were said to be "well-dressed, gentlemanly fellows, who live well and know how to spend their money. A bartender who saves his money is a very rare exception. The majority of this class of men prefer to spend it on women, high living and diamonds." ■

Visit the Nebraska State Historical Society's website at nebraskahistory.org.



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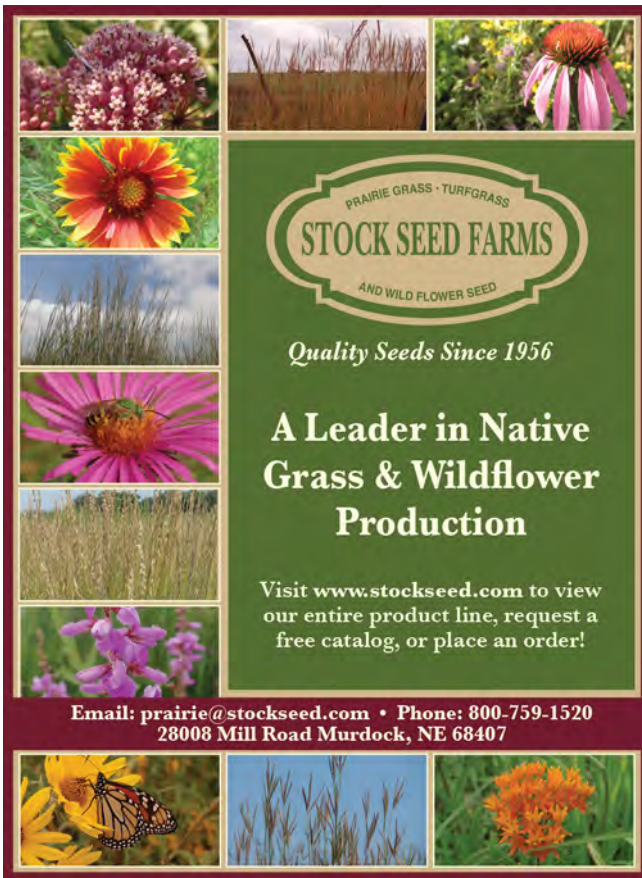
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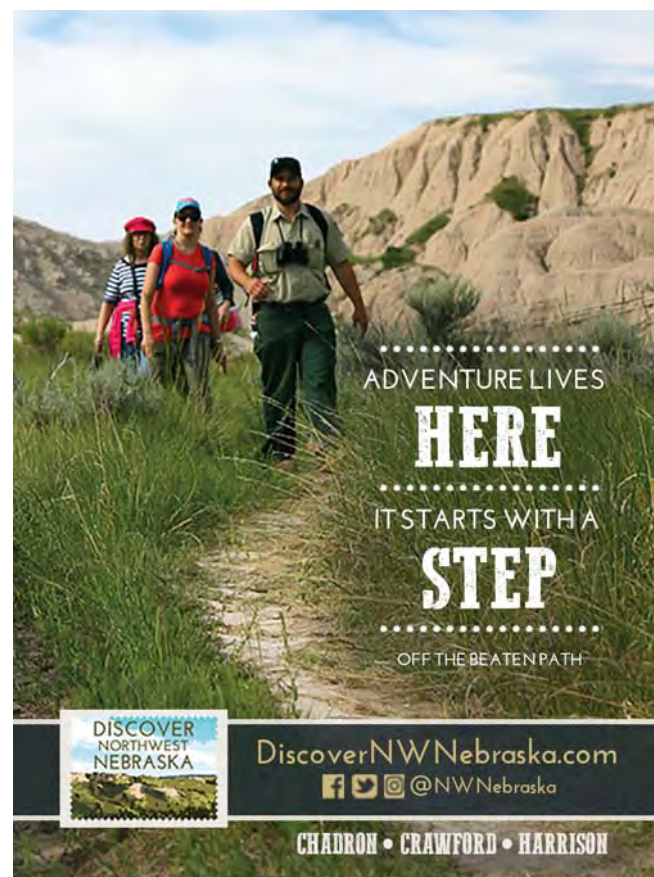


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Sustaining America's Diverse Fish and Wildlife

By Kristal Stoner, Wildlife Diversity Program Manager

In October, Nebraska Rep. Jeff Fortenberry announced he would introduce legislation that would fund conservation and habitat restoration projects across the United States. Called the Recovering America's Wildlife Act, the legislation would use existing revenues from minerals and energy taken from federal lands to fund projects aimed at preserving and restoring habitat for imperiled species. Up to \$1.3 billion annually would be allocated to state wildlife agencies.

"The Recovering America's Wildlife Act is an exciting new policy approach to wildlife management and care for our natural resources," Fortenberry said. "This legislation will help at-risk species before they require the expensive, restrictive measures required by the Endangered Species Act. This smarter approach, using the existing state wildlife action plans, will create the conditions for preservation, conservation, and new economic dynamics."

Our nation's wildlife and wild places are at risk. Nationally, more than 12,000 species have been identified as threatened with extinction. In Nebraska, nearly 90 species are considered threatened with extinction, and an additional 680 are declining and warrant concern.

This is not the first time Americans have faced a national wildlife crisis. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many species were in steep decline or on the brink of extinction. Elk, bison, bighorn sheep, black bears – even white-tailed deer – had all but disappeared across the country. Realizing the gravity of the problem, Congress took issue. In 1937 and again in 1950, Congress funded game species conservation with an excise tax on firearms, ammunition and archery, fishing and boating equipment. These funds, paid by the sportsmen and women who purchased sporting equipment, were directed to habitat conservation projects and research. These conservation and research projects over time led to the recovery of our game species, many of which are still thriving today.

Unfortunately, the current system was not designed to conserve the entire array of our nation's biodiversity. There are thousands of species under state management jurisdiction that are not hunted or fished that have no comparable sustainable dedicated funding source in place to support their conservation.

A group called the Alliance for America's Fish and Wildlife is working with Fortenberry, other elected officials and many other groups to face this rising fish and wildlife



Congressman Jeff Fortenberry, middle, speaking with Nebraska Game and Parks Commission biologists Gerald Mestl, left, and Kristal Stoner, right, about the introduction of the Recovering America's Wildlife Act.

crisis. Representatives from the outdoor recreation retail and manufacturing sector, the energy and automotive industries, private landowners, educational institutions, conservation organizations, sportsmen's groups and state and federal fish and wildlife agencies are all part of the alliance – and all are invested in the future of our fish, wildlife and wild places.

In August, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission passed a resolution supporting the Alliance for America's Fish and Wildlife efforts to diversify and expand funding for the thousands of animals and plants that make Nebraska their home. Twenty-three other states have passed similar state resolutions.

"We can't adequately address the changing needs of our constituents or the needs of all Nebraska's fish and wildlife with the resources we currently have," said Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Director Jim Douglas. "This funding source will ensure that future generations can enjoy thriving fish and wildlife populations."

In Nebraska, the Recovering America's Wildlife Act would have tremendous impact. It would fund three key areas essential to the continued success of at-risk species: habitat projects, research, and education efforts.

If the Recovering America's Wildlife Act were to pass, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission would work with private landowners across Nebraska to cooperatively improve habitat for these declining species in a proactive, voluntary manner. Commission biologists would work on public areas to manage wild habitats for both people to enjoy and for declining species to thrive. The agency would be able to support urban habitat development including pollinator gardens and green space, both of which are becoming increasingly important to wildlife. ■

Santa Claus Is Coming...

By Jeff Kurrus

On Dec. 9 at Eugene T. Mahoney State Park, Santa Claus will make an appearance from 1:30-4:30 p.m. at the Peter Kiewit Lodge. Photographs with Santa will be provided by

NEBRASKAland Magazine, and participants will also be able to decorate cookies, make Christmas cards for our soldiers overseas and create holiday crafts. ■



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

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Hit More Quail

By Jarrod Spilger

Nebraska bobwhite quail numbers have been trending upward recently, thanks to good weather and improved habitat conditions. That means upland hunters will likely encounter a few coveys while out chasing pheasants this fall. Quail are always a welcome surprise, but they can be difficult to hit.

That's because quail are fast and have an unnerving tendency to erupt from beneath one's feet and fly in every direction. The answer to hitting more speedy, close-range quail is spreader loads.

Spreader loads use specialized wads to disperse the shot pattern more quickly than a standard load. For older shotguns with fixed full chokes, spreaders can help open up patterns without altering the choke or barrel. They can also be used with more open chokes for really wide patterns, which is especially useful when hunting over pointers.

Since most quail are taken while hunting pheasants, I often use a mid-range choke tube and initially load up for roosters. If quail appear, I'll simply shoot the heavy pheasant load on the covey rise. I then load up with spreaders and go after the singles. If I'm targeting quail specifically, I'll use spreaders



PHOTO BY JARROD SPILGER

right away.

Two of the best spreader loads I've tried are made by Polywad and Kent. Polywad's Spred-R line is available in 12-, 16-, 20-, and 28-gauge in shot sizes 6, 7.5, and 8. To order, visit polywad.com or call 800-998-0669. Kent's spreader load is only available in 12-gauge with number 8 shot. It can be ordered from Huntstuff Online, huntstuff.com, 757-482-3800. ■

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Wild Edibles - Broad-leaved Arrowhead

By Julie Geiser

As the weather turns cold most edible plants will succumb to winter's wrath and will have to wait for the return of spring to begin a new life cycle.

But for now, one food source can still be found: the arrowhead plant, or wapato (*Sagittaria*), grows from a tuber that is buried deep in the mud.

Arrowhead Leaves

Arrowhead is an aquatic plant that grows a long-stalked, arrowhead-shaped leaf that can range in size depending on the type of arrowhead. There are many different species of arrowhead; the most commonly harvested is the broad-leaved arrowhead. As its name states, the leaf shape looks like an arrowhead with a point at the tip and two long lobes that point downward, forming a sagittate or arrowhead.

The leaves can vary from 3 inches to more than 3 feet in length. They can be narrow or over a foot wide, and plants can differ in size when growing next to each other. The vein pattern of the plant starts where the crease in the lobes come together and goes outward to the leaf edge. The leaves grow over the water and can be a few inches to several feet above water.

In the summer the wapato has a three-petaled flower that blooms on a spike separate from the leaves. During late summer the flowers turn into small green balls. These balls turn brown in fall and break apart to release small, winged, floating seeds.

Arrowhead Tubers

If you look up the history of the wapato you will see images of Native Americans in the frigid water trying to loosen tubers from their muddy grasp. These tubers are shaped like a potato, and they can be pea-sized to the size of an egg, with larger plants producing larger tubers. Tubers grow at the end of the stem of each plant. Each tuber will have a pointed, curled piece sticking out of one end. The wapato tuber will not have any roots protruding from it and will vary in color from purple to reddish-brown to cream colored depending on the water they grow in.

One plant that could be mistaken for the wapato is the arrow arum (*Peltandra virginica*), which is an aquatic plant. It also has an arrowhead-shaped leaf but is easy to identify.



As its name states, the leaf shape looks like an arrowhead with a point at the tip and two long lobes pointing downward, forming a sagittate or arrowhead. The leaves grow over the water and can be a few inches to several feet above water.

PHOTO BY JULIE GEISER

The arrow arum's leaves have smaller lobes and are smooth along the outer edge. The leaf veins are arranged in two rows along opposite sides of a main vein. This plant can make you sick if eaten.

Collecting Arrowhead Tubers

Collecting tubers should be done starting in late fall when they are full-grown and the plant starts to die and turn brown. In areas where water does not freeze, the wapato can be harvested all winter or when there is no ice. They can also be collected in early spring, but they will shrink and die soon after that. Do not collect plants that are growing in stagnant, standing water.

Getting the plant out of the mud takes some work and waders or hip boots, and is done by using a potato hook or three-tined garden rake and raking back and forth, moving the top layers of mud to release the tubers. If the tubers are ready to collect, they will float to the surface.

Collecting can also be done with bare feet by moving the mud and feeling the tubers and releasing them. While this method is more fun, it is a wet and muddy job.

Preparing Arrowhead Tubers

To prepare the tubers, remove the skirts with your fingers and rinse them. Cut off the end with the shoot and the opposite end where the tuber was attached to the stem or rhizome. Then peel it like you would a potato, trying not to waste too much flesh. Once peeled, boil them for about 30 minutes, drain the water and use them like potatoes, alone or in dishes that call for potatoes. They can be cold-stored, but only for a month or less. ■

O Christmas Tree!

By Julie Van Meter
State Entomologist, Nebraska
Department of Agriculture

While there are many Christmas tree farms in Nebraska, a large number of the cut Christmas trees sold here are grown and harvested in other states such as Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan. Some of these states are under federal quarantine for plant pests that can travel on Christmas trees.

Inspectors with the Nebraska Department of Agriculture (NDA) visit Christmas tree sales lots across the state in November and December to ensure all federal quarantines are being followed. The inspectors verify that the trees were properly inspected and certified prior to shipment to Nebraska, and also inspect the Christmas trees to confirm that no quarantine pests are present.

The quarantine pests of most concern are gypsy moth (*Lymantria dispar*) and pine shoot beetle (*Tomicus piniperda*). Neither is currently found in Nebraska.

Gypsy moth is present from the New England states west, to parts of Wisconsin and Illinois. This moth lays egg masses on the trunks of trees, including Christmas trees.

The eggs hatch out in the spring, and the caterpillars feed on deciduous plant foliage. The loss of foliage weakens the trees and over time can result in tree death.

To prevent its establishment in Nebraska, NDA monitors for gypsy moth through inspections of nursery stock and firewood, in addition to Christmas trees, and conducts an annual statewide trapping program.

Pine shoot beetle is a small beetle that can infest all species of pine trees, including Christmas trees. Adults can overwinter in twigs, or near the base



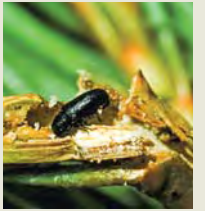
Gypsy moth egg mass.

PHOTO COURTESY OF FERENC LAKATOS, UNIVERSITY OF SOPRON, BUGWOOD.ORG

of the tree. This pest can be found from the New England states west to Minnesota and Iowa. NDA inspectors check nursery stock and Christmas trees to monitor for the presence of pine shoot beetle.

If you purchase a Christmas tree that was not grown in Nebraska, make sure to dispose of it properly. Christmas tree recycling sites that chip or burn the trees are an excellent means of disposal and reduce the risk of any unwanted pests emerging from the trees and becoming established in Nebraska.

The risk of either of these pests emerging while the Christmas tree is in the house is virtually non-existent. There is also no concern of these pests causing damage to the home itself or threatening human health. ■



Larger pine shoot beetle.

PHOTO COURTESY OF E. RICHARD HOEBEKE, CORNELL UNIVERSITY, BUGWOOD.ORG

YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT IS IN YOUR

LURKING FIREWOOD



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

PREVENTION IS KEY:

- Buy locally-harvested firewood.
- Ask a park ranger or campground host about where to get local firewood when you travel.
- If you brought firewood in from another area, BURN IT! Don't leave it, don't take it with you.

BUY LOCAL, BURN LOCAL.

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



NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
ANIMAL & PLANT HEALTH PROTECTION



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.

December 1
Bobcat Hunting and Trapping
season opens

December 1-3, 8-10, 15-17, 22-23
Christmas at the Mansion
Arbor Lodge State Historical Park,
Nebraska City

December 1-31
Cow Elk Hunting Season
Private and public land

December 1-31
Deer Hunting
Muzzleloader Deer Hunting Season

December 2
Archery on Fire
Platte River State Park, Louisville

December 5
Learn to Hunt Predators
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor
Education Center, Lincoln

December 8-10, 15-17, 22-23
Christmas at the Cody's
Buffalo Bill Ranch State Historical Park,
North Platte

December 9
**Nature's Gifts: Decorations from the
Great Outdoors**
Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area, Gering

December 9
Christmas at the Bowring
Bowring Ranch State Historical Park,
Merriman

December 9-17
Deer Hunting
Boyer Chute National Wildlife Refuge

December 9, 16
Christmas in the Woods
Ponca State Park, Ponca

December 10
White-fronted Goose Hunting
first segment closes

December 16
Snipe Hunting
season closes

December 16
Yule Log Festival
Platte River State Park, Louisville

December 16
Christmas Bird Count
Indian Cave State Park, Shubert

December 16-17
Deer Hunting
DeSoto Muzzleloader Season

December 19
Duck and Coot Hunting
season closes in Zones 2 and 4

December 22
Bighorn Sheep Hunting
season closes

December 26
Duck and Coot Hunting
season closes in Zone 1

December 30
Winterfest
Ponca State Park, Ponca

December 31
Archery Antelope Hunting
season closes

December 31
**Archery Deer and Statewide Whitetail
Buck Hunting**
seasons close

December 31
Light Goose Hunting
first segment closes

*"Christmas at the Cody's"
is an annual celebration.*

*Duck and goose hunting with
Ethan Teter of Sargent on a
warmwater slough off North Loup River
near Taylor.*

Send Us Your Trail Cam Photos!



Paul Janning submitted this trail cam photograph of a coyote running on private land near Spalding.



Mike Beelaert of O'Neill shared this image from a camera set up by Bobbie Harte on Beelaert's land on the Niobrara River.

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

NEBRASKAland Visitor



Last issue's winner of the Visitor drawing was David Powers of Omaha, Nebraska, who found the **army ant** on page 53.

Readers are encouraged to contact *NEBRASKAland* within 10 days after this issue's publication with the correct page number and name of this issue's "Visitor" – a critter found in Nebraska. We will then gather the correct entries and draw one to win a *NEBRASKAland* mug.

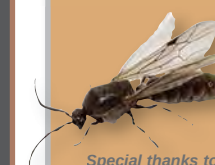
To enter each month, write:

NEBRASKAland Visitor
2200 North 33rd Street
Lincoln, NE 68503

Or e-mail: Tim.Reigert@Nebraska.gov with "Visitor" in the subject line of the message.

HINT: This issue's visitor is not on page 4, 14, or 21.

*North America has at least twelve species of **army ants**, and one species, *Neivamyrmex nigrescens*, has been found in Nebraska. An army ant colony is large, with potentially tens of thousands of individuals. The colony does not make a permanent nest, but moves as a unit across the landscape, primarily at night, using temporary shelters and searching for food. Army ants are voracious hunters, feeding on any unlucky insect or even a small animal that they come across, and they particularly like other ants. They raid ant colonies, killing the adult ants, and carry off the larvae and pupae for food. Female army ants do not possess wings and make no nuptial flight. Instead, the males are winged and fly to the female to mate. Army ants can be found across a wide range of habitats, including prairies, woodlands, and even suburban areas.*



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



Night Lights

Story by Renae Blum
Photos by Zach Hanson

The St. Derooin cemetery at Indian Cave
State Park in Richardson County.
Nikon D750, Samyang 14mm f/2.8.
Exposure: f/2.8, ISO 3200, 30 seconds.

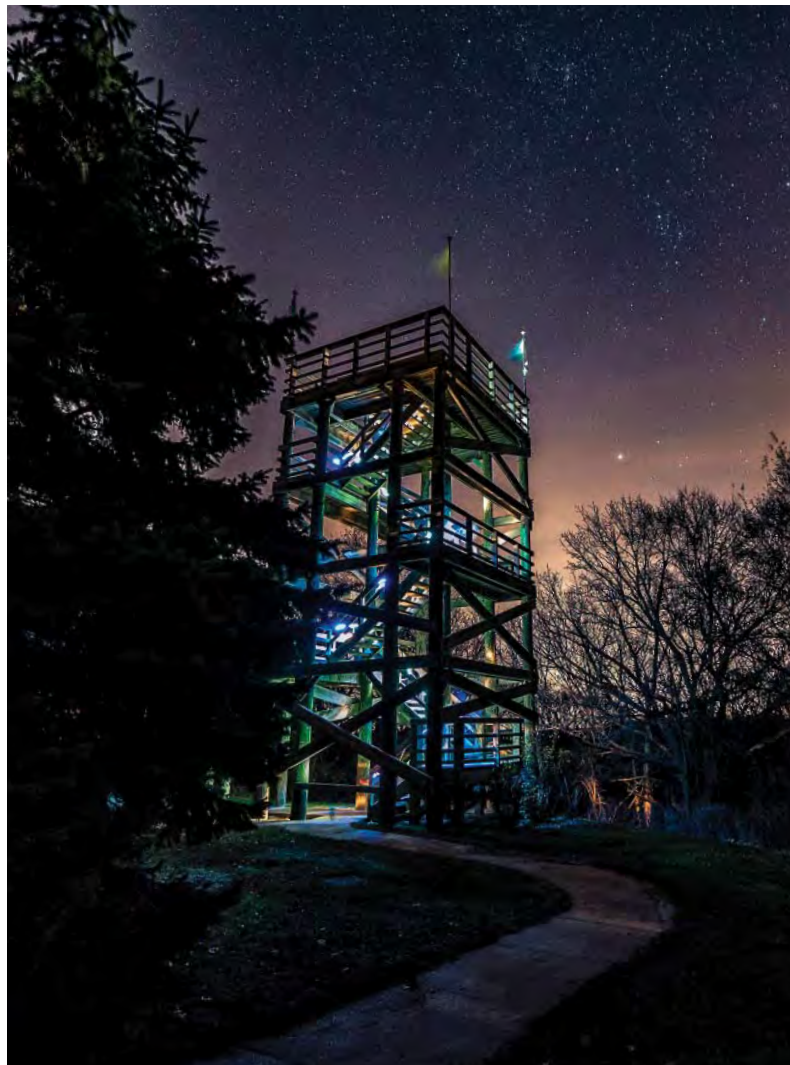


Time slows down when you're shooting photos at night. A single shot can take half a minute to produce, so there's plenty of time to think, to plan the next image, to look up at the stars and appreciate the serenity of the moment.

"It's my sanctuary," says Zach Hanson of Omaha. The 39-year-old funeral director and father of two fell in love with night photography several years ago during a camping trip, and now uses his hobby as a way to de-stress from the pressures of the day.

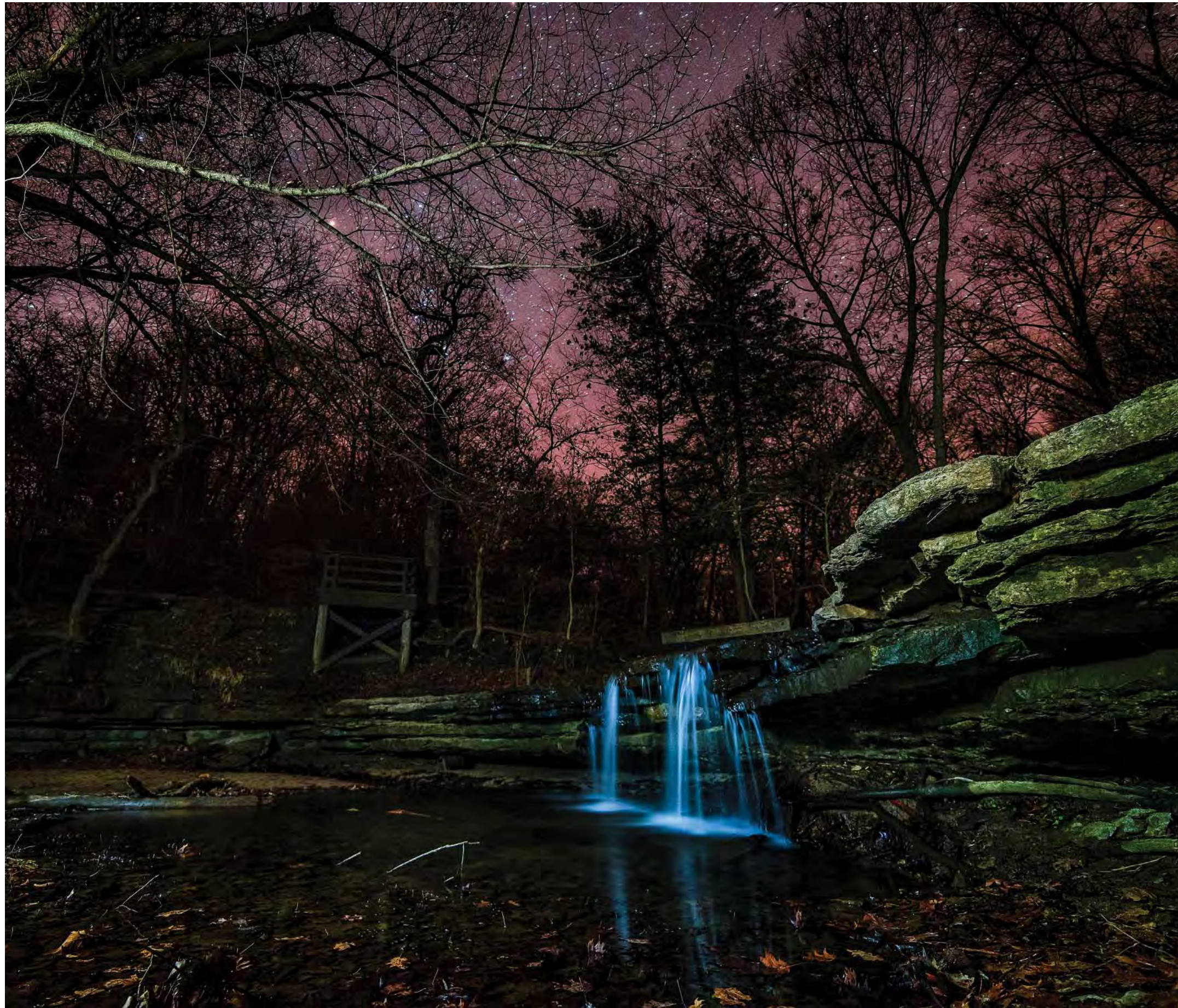
"This is my therapy," Hanson says. "When I go out at night, I find peace in it."

Hanson is self-taught, and takes pride in his hands-on methods. For example, to darken particularly harsh light in the foreground, Hanson will continuously move his hand or another object in front of the light while the camera exposes the image, a technique he picked up from a video about dark room techniques. It might be quicker to use a filter, combine separate images or perform these actions afterward in Photoshop, but Hanson prefers his "old-fashioned" style.



Above: Children with flashlights climb the Daugherty Tower at Platte River State Park. Nikon D750, Samyang 14mm f/2.8. Exposure: f/3.5, ISO 2000, 25 seconds.

Opposite: Waterfall at Platte River State Park. Nikon D750, Samyang 14mm f/2.8. Exposure: f/2.8, ISO 6400, 30 seconds.



Taking Pictures at Parks

Many of Hanson's photos are taken at state parks and recreation areas. He recommends them as safe places to go when shooting photos at night.

If you'd like to do nighttime photography at a state park or recreation area, please remember the following:

- Before heading out, you need to contact the park superintendent in advance to let them know you are coming, and to discuss any special considerations (restricted areas, ongoing construction, events or activities, known hazards, etc.).
- You will need a valid park permit if you are driving a vehicle into a state park area.
- Do not enter or take photographs in campground areas.
- Remain on trails or other publicly accessible areas.
- Prepare for cooler temperatures and use caution when walking in low visibility.
- Use a minimalist approach to avoid disturbing wildlife.
- Practice Leave No Trace principles. ■



Above: Light painting at Schramm Park State Recreation Area. Lights in the foreground were created by Hanson shining a flashlight straight down at his feet as he walked; the light painting was created with a headlight. Nikon D750, Samyang 14mm f/2.8. Exposure: f/3.5, ISO 3200, 30 seconds.
Opposite: Enjoying a campfire at Indian Cave State Park. Nikon D750, Samyang 14mm f/2.8. Exposure: f/3.2, ISO 4000, 25 seconds.



To his surprise, Hanson regularly receives calls at work from people who have been inspired by his photos. “Last week, somebody from a different state tracked me down to say that she had lost her passion for photography, and she saw a picture of mine and it rejuvenated her,” Hanson says. “Having people seek me out because of my pictures was never something I set out to do. I started doing this just for my own therapy, and it just turned into something a little more than I ever thought it would be.” ■

To see more of Zach’s work, visit him on Facebook at Zach Hanson Photography.

Above: This image of the Platte River at Louisville State Recreation Area was taken about an hour after sunset. Nikon D750, Samyang 14mm f/2.8. Exposure: f/3.5, ISO 1250, 25 seconds.

Zach Hanson lives in Omaha, works as a funeral director and has been shooting night photography for three years. He was previously featured in NEBRASKAland as the first-place winner in the “Recreation” category of the 2016 NEBRASKAland Photo Contest. This is his first photo essay for the magazine.



Zach’s Night Photo Tips

- For equipment, a tripod and a remote shutter release are the main essentials. An optimal lens is wide-angle and fast, with a large aperture.
- You may not need expensive equipment to make pictures you’re proud of. “One of my first shots at night that I really loved was taken with a basic DSLR, a kit lens, and a tripod from Costco – so a \$400 camera and a \$49 tripod. And it’s still one of my favorite nighttime shots,” Hanson says. For astrophotography, he recommends a Samyang 14mm 2.8 lens: “It’s one of the cheapest you can buy but it’s amazing at night.”
- For lights, he has been known to use Tiki torches, lanterns, flashlights, headlamps – whatever is on hand.
- Set your camera on manual for full control of your aperture and shutter speed.
- Choose your ISO based on the amount of light available. “In western Nebraska, you won’t have to bump up your ISO because of how much light is available from the stars. But closer to Omaha or Lincoln, you have to shoot a little higher to make those stars pop, and I’ll often turn down highlights in post to get rid of some of that city light,” Hanson says. “It can be hard to see stars in a city photo if you don’t do that.” He’s comfortable shooting up to an ISO of 6400 on his full frame camera (a Nikon D750); on his old crop sensor camera, a Nikon D3200, an ISO of 1600 was his limit.
- Most of Hanson’s shots are between 25 and 30 seconds. After about 30 seconds, the camera will pick up the movement of the stars and produce star trails. Stars may start to streak after 20 or 25 seconds on a crop sensor camera.
- If you’re shooting stars, focus your camera on them to get them as sharp as possible.
- Hanson uses the PlanIt! and PhotoPills apps to plan his shoots. The apps include a dark sky map, a sun/moon finder, visualizations of the Milky Way, and times of sunrise/set and moonrise/set, among other features.
- Foreground is important. Choose a location with something in it – a tree, a barn, a waterfall, etc. – that will draw the eye. You don’t necessarily need to light this area of the picture; sometimes silhouettes are just as interesting.
- Keep safety in mind when choosing a location. Hanson sticks to state parks and recreation areas, and goes with others when possible. ■



Time Well Spent

What to Do in December

By Renae Blum

Don't let chilly temps stop you from getting outdoors and having fun this month. There's still plenty of hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities, not to mention a lot of fun holiday-themed park events. For a full list of Game and Parks events across the state, visit Calendar.OutdoorNebraska.gov. ■



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Wildlife Viewing Throughout the month

Statewide

Bighorn sheep are currently in rut – come out to Fort Robinson and Chadron state parks for a chance to see it. If you're interested in wildlife that is a little easier to spot, consider participating in a Christmas Bird Count event. Contact an Audubon center near you for more information. Also, stay tuned to the Nebraska Game and Parks calendar page for additional bird watching events.



PHOTO BY BOB GRER

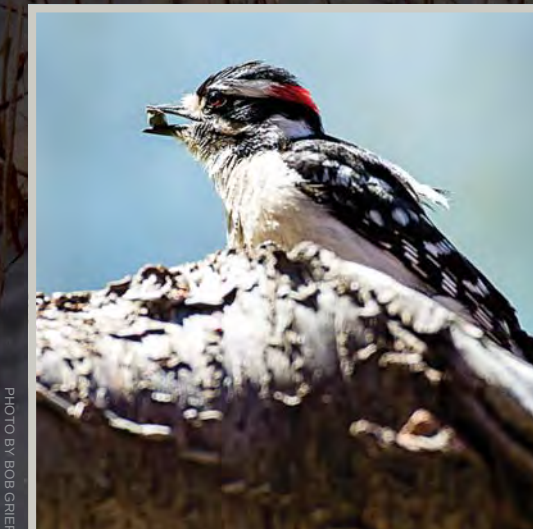


PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN

Late-season Pheasant Hunting Throughout the month

Statewide

There are still plenty of birds out there, and some of the most exciting, memorable hunts are still ahead.

To increase your success during this time of the year, think and hunt a little differently. This could include simple things like working the cover in an opposite direction than usual, hunting at a different time of the day, or even just beginning at the spot in the field where you normally end. Be sure to wear plenty of orange and avoid any unnecessary loud noises that would alert the birds.

PHOTO BY MICHAEL SPEED



Watch the Geminid Meteor Shower

Dec. 14-17 Statewide

You can view this bright, intensely-colored meteor shower anywhere with clear, dark skies Dec. 14-17. During the peak on Dec. 14, you may see more than 120 meteors per hour. "This is one of the strongest meteor events during the year, and one to which most enthusiasts look forward," commented Monica Macoubrie from the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN

Celebrate the Season Throughout the month

Statewide

Make the holidays unique this year – celebrate at a state park! Enjoy ice skating, holiday crafts, a Christmas meal, hayrack rides, a yule log scavenger hunt and more. See details at OutdoorNebraska.org/winterfest.

Sesquicentennial Events Throughout the month

Statewide

To wrap up the year-long celebration of Nebraska's sesquicentennial, attend the play *SNOWCATCHER* Dec. 3-4 at the Tassel Performing Arts Center in Holdrege. Written and performed by Becky Boesen, this live performance was inspired by the Schoolchildren's Blizzard of 1888, and gives a voice to both the victims of the storm and to the children of today who are searching for a place to truly call "home." Find more information and other sesquicentennial events at ne150.org/calendar.





The Leopold Tingle

Canada Goose Hunting in Nebraska

Story by Dr. Mark Vrtiska

Photos by Joe Braun and Doug Steinke

“My notes tell me that I have seen a thousand geese this fall. Every one of these in the course of their epic journey from the Arctic to the Gulf has on one occasion or another probably served man in some equivalent of paid entertainment.”

– Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*

In his classic 1949 book *A Sand County Almanac*, Aldo Leopold, the father of wildlife conservation, asked: “What is a wild goose worth? I have a ticket to the symphony. It was not cheap ... but I would forego the experience for the sight of the big gander that sailed honking into my decoys at daybreak this morning. I saw him, I heard the wind whistle through his set wings, as he came honking from the gray west, and I felt him so that even now I tingle at the recollection. I doubt not that this very gander has given ten other men a symphony ticket’s worth of thrills.”

However, around the time Leopold’s book was first published, harvesting a Canada goose in Nebraska was a

newspaper-worthy event. Even after laws and regulations came to protect them after market hunting had decimated their populations, Canada geese remained a highly prized species of waterfowl.

But the legal protection coupled with strictly managed harvest and the immense restoration effort of local populations by state wildlife agencies completely changed the status of the Canada goose.

By the time Bob Devaney arrived to coach football at Nebraska and collected the program’s first national titles in the early 1970s, the harvest of Canada geese in Nebraska was averaging a little over 12,000 geese. By the time his successor, Tom Osborne, had

collected three more titles in the 1990s, the harvest of Canada geese had grown to around 72,000. Now, that average has exceeded 100,000 in the last few years.

The easiest part of hunting Canada geese nowadays is that they can be found across the state. After that, trying to match wits with a flock of geese becomes an investment in scouting and locating, setting decoys, concealing yourself or blinds, knowing the weather and the art of calling.

When the match goes in favor of the geese, which it does often, its hard lessons are learned. But when you win the match, you know and understand the tingle Leopold expressed. ■

Blake Steinke is flagging at a distant flock of geese out of a vintage 1970-80s oversized fiberglass goose decoy in Garden County.

PHOTO BY DOUG STEINKE



These Canada geese (above) are making an early lift-off just after sunrise from the wetlands north of Lake Cunningham in Douglas County.

Gene Miller's dog, Lucy (left), wrestles with a large Garden County Canada goose.

Late-season temperatures well below zero means extra decoy work for Ryan Brentzel and Doug Biemiller (opposite) goose hunting on a warmwater slough in Garden County.



Gene Miller enjoys sitting outside next to his dogs Lucy and Creame. It is a more intimate experience and, speaking from past experience, the incoming geese barely notice his presence.

PHOTO BY DOUG STEINKE



PHOTO BY DOUG STEINKE

Justin Gill's black Lab, Bella (right), retrieves a red tarsal banded goose on the Platte River in Dawson County.

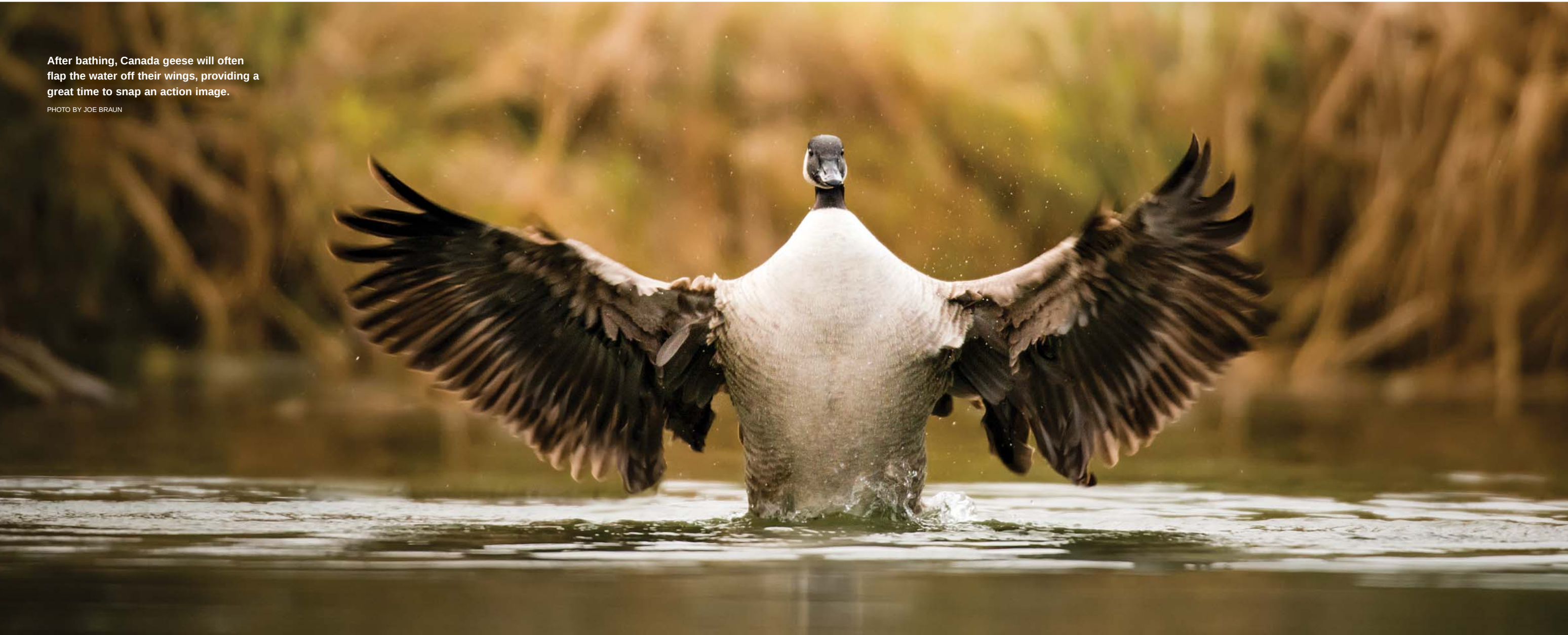
Tweaking the floater spread for Andrew Schlueter (opposite) is more enjoyment than work.



PHOTO BY DOUG STEINKE

After bathing, Canada geese will often flap the water off their wings, providing a great time to snap an action image.

PHOTO BY JOE BRAUN



Crappies and Walleyes

Through the Ice

By Jeff Kurrus and Julie Geiser

For many first- and second-year ice anglers, there quickly becomes a desire to catch larger and more varied species of fish. Here are a few tips to shorten that learning curve.

For many first- or second-year ice anglers, catching bluegills becomes a doable endeavor after a little time spent with a flasher of some sort and a power auger to increase the angler's maneuverability. But there remains a desire for many of these anglers to catch larger fish, like crappies and walleyes, beneath the ice even though they don't know how to get started.

Here are those answers – sort of.

Crappies

"Folks ice fishing for bluegills won't do a whole lot different than what they're doing right now," Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Fisheries

Biologist Daryl Bauer said. "Because crappies are larger than bluegills, a bigger bait would be a start." Baits include ice fishing spoons, Swedish pimples, and a minnow head itself.

In many waters, Bauer said, bluegills and crappies will be cruising the same habitat. However, where there is significant vegetation, bluegills will be more partial to that habitat while crappies will lean toward some sort of structure or suspended in open water.

These fish can be active any time of the day, but they'll often become more aggressive in the evening or after dark. Anglers can spot these fish on a flasher by their tendency to appear from below the bait and move upward toward it.

Walleyes

"Walleyes are tough," said Bauer. "You can definitely catch them in many of our reservoirs, but there are so many baitfish, like shad and alewives, that are cold-water stressed all winter long and they make easy food for walleyes."

To have a chance at these finicky fish, generally it's a low, light bite with jigging spoons or rattle baits. Look for points and drop-offs and cut a number of holes in an area, making sure the lure presentation is different for each of the holes. For example, have stationary rods at various depths and one or two jigging rods to give movement. Once the fish become active, naturally match the presentation because the windows for success with these fish can be small, so be prepared to make adjustments quickly when the bite does start.

Before You Fish

Because ice fishing for species like crappie and walleye is often a game of hide-and-seek, if possible become familiar with a body of water before ever fishing it. Check out the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's lake maps section at OutdoorNebraska.org/lakecontourmaps. These maps, which cover more than 125 waterbodies in the state, reveal contour changes and structure, and can be used to help pinpoint fishing locations before an angler ever sets foot on the ice. ■



Gwen Bergstrom from North Platte holds a nice walleye from Lake Maloney.



Crappies and bluegills caught through the ice from a Sarpy County farm pond.

Hunting Across Borders

Haidar Kazem of Alvo is the typical Nebraska hunter. His story, however, is not so typical.

Story and photos by Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

“People are always looking for time to themselves,” said Haidar Kazem of Alvo. “Hunting is my time to myself.”

Half a mile in from the parking lot was Haidar’s hunting spot at Pawnee Lake State Recreation Area (SRA). Weighed down by his gear, a Thompson/Center .50 caliber muzzleloader and bulky winter clothes, we slowly made our way through the grass and trees. He spoke briefly with steaming breath.



Haidar Kazem of Alvo looks across Pawnee Lake near Lincoln before a waterfowl hunt.



A button buck presents an opportunity to Kazem during a muzzleloader hunt at Pawnee Lake State Recreation Area.

“I just enjoy being outside. Look at this frost shining on the ground – it’s beautiful,” he whispered.

The dying yellow-green grass of early December sparkled like diamonds under the beam of Haidar’s headlamp. As our boots crunched across a frozen meadow, he pointed out two oval-shaped indentations in the field. Still warm, those areas were without frost – we must’ve just scared off two bedding deer with our progress.

Warm sweat turned into an instant chill by the time we reached the edge of a bean field. If Haidar was to shoot a deer that day, it would be a long haul dragging it out. That’s one of the challenges of hunting public land, but Haidar seemed to do pretty well. He’s been successful many times before.

“People might think this is crazy, but I have not bought meat from the store in nine years. We buy hotdogs for the kids, but that’s it,” he said.

Thirty minutes before legal shooting time, a healthy doe wandered within 20 yards of Haidar’s muzzleloader, but all he could do was watch her feed. She

stayed for 15 minutes before jumping into the woods, white tail flagging.

She must’ve heard other hunters approaching, for when light broke the horizon, gunshots rang all around us. Endless V’s of ducks and geese flew overhead, and Haidar half wished he was at the lake with his duck call instead.

With a cold front coming in, the temperature was dropping quickly. Finally around 9 a.m., two young deer came wandering along the edge of the bean field toward us. One lost interest and fell away toward the woods. The other deer approached, and as Haidar reached for his muzzleloader, it spooked and ran across the field.

For a split second, Haidar considered shooting his quarry on the run, but thought better of it. Fortunately, the young animal made the fatal mistake of stopping to look back at us, broadside. Haidar made the shot, and smoke filled the air – in classic muzzleloader fashion – obscuring both our views. As it cleared, we saw the deer buck. He bounded straight for the trees.



A blood trail left by the button buck that Kazem successfully shot at Pawnee Lake SRA.

We waited for a moment in silence. Then Haidar looked at me and raised his hands to eye level.

“My hands are still shaking,” he said. “Ah, it never gets old.”

An impressive blood trail across the bean field, through a meadow and over a small ditch led to his button buck lying a short distance into the forest.

Deer hunting doesn’t allow for much conversation, but now with the less delicate work of cleaning and dragging the deer out ahead of us, Haidar and I could finally talk freely.

In many ways, Haidar Kazem exemplifies the average American hunter. A true locavore, a Cabela’s shopaholic and an earnest outdoorsman, Haidar loves everything about hunting: the early mornings, the scouting, the opportunities to pass down knowledge to his children, and just simply being outside and watching nature at work – he doesn’t care if he goes home empty-handed. Haidar’s type can be found in any field, in any county, in any state, but his story is by no means ordinary.

Haidar’s roots began in Syria where he hunted as a boy and teenager. His experiences there and his subsequent immigration to the United States, where he would continue hunting, has

given him a broad perspective on what it means to be a sportsman.

See All That Game

In 1999, Haidar Kazem immigrated to the United States with his parents, two sisters and one brother. His parents, originally from Iraq, escaped from Saddam Hussein in the late 1970s; three of his uncles had been previously captured and killed under Hussein’s regime.

“So my dad married my mom, and he said, ‘We’re going to have a honeymoon and we’re going to Syria,’ and then they never went back to Iraq,” Haidar said. They left lots of family behind, who are still living there.

Growing up in Syria, life “wasn’t as bad as what you saw on TV.” Although the political climate in the Middle East has deteriorated in the last 20 years, for most of Haidar’s childhood, Syria enjoyed more freedoms than anywhere else in the Middle East. And hunting was a part of his young life, but it was different.

“People hunted year-round in the Middle East, and they don’t care if it’s mating season or not mating season,” said Haidar. Oftentimes, many of the animals that people shot did not end up

on the dinner table.

The story of how his family ended up in Nebraska is sitcom-worthy. After all the paperwork and formalities, U.S. immigration asked Haidar’s family where they wanted to go.

“We didn’t know anything about the U.S., so they gave us a map and said we could pick a state,” Haidar said, shaking with laughter.

“And it gets better. I told my dad, ‘How about Nebraska?’ So my dad looked at the map and said, ‘It’s in the middle of the country, right?’ And I said, ‘Yeah, dad. It’ll be great! We could go to New York in like 6 hours and go to California in about 4 hours.’ You just can’t picture how big the country is, even if you’ve read about it, until you actually live in it. So we got here and it’s not even close to what we thought, and we were like, ‘Oh, [crap].’

“But then I saw all the game in Nebraska, and I didn’t want to go anywhere else.”

A Hunter’s Education

Haidar was 18 when he came to the United States. Within two months of moving to Nebraska, he began fishing.

“I didn’t speak any English, so it was very difficult for me to understand the

“I didn’t speak any English so it was very difficult for me to understand the laws, the limits on the fish and the size, number of rods – all that stuff.”

laws, the limits on the fish and the size, number of rods – all that stuff. That was one of the most difficult things to learn when I got here. I hated all the laws at first,” he said.

Because Haidar didn’t get the chance to finish high school before he left Syria, he and a friend decided to enroll with the Pine Ridge Job Corps in Chadron to earn their degrees and to improve their English. While in Chadron, Haidar learned how to pour concrete and was also given the opportunity to learn how to hunt.

“The area there is cool. It doesn’t look like most of Nebraska. We were

exposed to wild animals there, and I talked to the staff and they mentioned hunter education class. ‘You want to do that?’ they asked me. And I asked, ‘For what?’ ‘To hunt.’ And at that moment, hunting was glued into my head.

“What? Absolutely!” I said. So from there, I started reading about hunting.”

Haidar began trapping in Chadron. The first time, he returned to his trap – meant for coyote – and found what he thought was a turkey.

“I walked up close to it, and this thing stunk! And I thought: this is not a turkey. I walked for two miles with it in my hands – it bit me once – to



Kazem drags his deer out at Pawnee Lake SRA during snow fall. The distance from where the deer fell to his truck was about one mile.



Sam Tawfek of Lincoln hunts ducks and geese with Kazem in early December at Pawnee Lake SRA.

show to one of the instructors. He told me that it was a turkey vulture and that they eat dead animals. No wonder why it stunk. I left my trap hidden underneath a tree, but these birds can smell – I thought that was insane. So we let it go. The next day, I caught another one. So after that I gave up on trapping.”

Pheasant hunting was Haidar’s first hunting experience, and since then, he has hunted everything from deer to waterfowl to upland and small game. His gun dog, Sitka, is a part of the family; Haidar had as many photos of his German shorthaired pointer on his iPhone as he did of his two children. All the while, his understanding of the American style of hunting has grown. For to be a true sportsman, conservation must be equally appreciated.

Conservation

While selling wild game meat in the United States is illegal, waterfowl, for example, presents big business opportunities in the Middle East, Haidar said. Thousands upon thousands

of ducks and geese are captured and sold on the market by businessmen who buy exclusive rights to private and mostly government-owned marshes and ponds all season long from November through March.

“Iraq has some of the biggest marshes in world, which provides a good wintering ground for waterfowl that migrate from Europe,” said Haidar. “These companies feed ducks with milo and wheat which they spread onto the water. And they have nets sitting in the water with a rope system that closes in on the birds. They do not allow hunters there. No shotguns. Believe it or not, a single mallard can sell for about \$21-25. At the market, these birds are sold alive with their wings clipped and their feet tied up. It’s sad.”

Flamingos, whooping cranes, herons – anything that flies – it dies, said Haidar. Electrofishing is frowned upon but people still practice it.

“We used to have lions, tigers and cheetahs – we read about them in the old stories and poems that were written 800-1,000 years ago. They are all gone now. We still have hyenas – they’re not aggressive like African hyenas, but

when people see them, they just shoot them. They don’t even eat them. In areas where people don’t respect the law, there’s no game left.”

Today, the Persian fallow deer is nearing extinction in the Middle East, but despite some conservation efforts and public pressure, people still shoot them. The Saudi gazelle was declared extinct in 2008.

“After a while, I realized what’s happened in the Middle East and why we don’t have animals there,” Haidar said. “And the same thing happened here when the first settlers came, but people woke up and they knew that they needed to do something about it and they did. I realized: Yeah, all these laws and regulations are a pain in the butt, but your kids are going to hunt eventually, not just you.”

A Family That Hunts Together...

Like any proud father, Haidar couldn’t help but talk about his children. His 8-year-old daughter, Nasreen, and 3-year-old son, Yakub,

are exposed to hunting the Nebraska way. His wife, Chrystal, is Nebraska born and raised.

“The first time I took my daughter dove hunting, my wife said it was way too early to take her. She was 4 years old at the time, and I asked Nasreen: ‘Do you want to go early in the morning when it’s dark still, or do you want to do daytime?’ And she said, ‘I want to do the early time.’ So she got up at 4 a.m. with me, and I still remember that day we went out and she cheered me on every time I shot something: ‘Go Dad!’ And the other hunters kept giving us funny looks. ‘Go Dad, shoot it!’” Haidar said. “She got to keep a bird to play with it.

“I have a picture of my daughter before duck opening day, and she had her camouflage clothes on, which she slept in so she could be ready to go in the morning,” said Haidar, smiling.

He is teaching Yakub about hunting in the same way.

Wild Game International

Not surprisingly, from one person who eats a lot of wild game to another, the conversation will inevitably steer

toward food. Haidar uses venison like he does beef. Pheasant, turkey, quail and waterfowl substitute chicken.

“We do a little bit of Middle Eastern, some American and Mexican dishes. I like Mexican food. My favorite thing to do with scrap meat is tacos. We also make kofta, which is Middle Eastern. It’s basically ground meat grilled on a stick, and it’s really good with deer meat,” Haidar said.

That night, Haidar made “chicken” pot pie with snow goose, but he prefers this dish with pheasant and turkey.

His friend Sam Tawfek of Lincoln, who went duck hunting with us the next morning at Pawnee Lake, makes an excellent Iraqi dish with slow-roasted duck or goose on top of rice pilaf with onions, almonds, raisins and peas.

Haidar eats most wild game, but because he is Muslim, he does follow certain dietary restrictions.

“There are different kinds of Muslims. And Shia Muslims, which is what we are, we don’t eat rabbits. Honestly, I don’t even know why. No one has ever been able to explain that



Kazem and his daughter, Nasreen Kamoona, hunting teal near Utica.

to me. Sam’s not Muslim, so he can eat it. I can pretty much eat most game, but I also can’t eat crow – anything that eats meat.”

While food is one common denominator across all peoples and cultures, the many ways – traditions – in which that food is prepared makes us who we are, even with wild game. It was eye-opening to exchange different ideas on how to cook the very same animals.

Perspective

With all the gutting done, Haidar made two trips to drag out his hunting gear and deer at Pawnee. About halfway back to the parking lot, a soft, powdery snow came falling down. Like a blanket of silence, all became quiet. There was no wind, and Haidar kept looking back onto the landscape to appreciate the view.

Watching him take in the scenery, it’s hard not to contemplate the thought process of someone like Haidar who has come so far – not only geographically but also spiritually. Hunting with him gave me the gift of a different perspective, which made me feel even more thankful of how blessed we are in this state.

Every small turn in Haidar’s life has led him to the Nebraska outdoors, and it’s heartening to know that there’s no other place he’d rather be. ■



This ring-necked drake duck flew into Kazem’s sights and dropped.

The Holiday Seasons

And a time for every purpose.

By Roger Welsch

This time of year is often referred to as the “holiday season,” but for a folklorist with a special interest in traditional foodways, which is to say ME, November and December are like a cultural laboratory where all the petri dishes are in full flower. It’s a time when I almost giggle at the thought of living in Nebraska, imbedded as it is in dramatic seasonal changes and garnished with an ethnic patchwork. For one thing, we have once again survived harvest; I’m not a farmer other than in the sense that living here we are all farmers, but I get some sense of the ferocity of harvest ... I’ve always thought of it as a “campaign,” complete with monster moon machines lurching across fields and down roads, everything in a rush, eyes always to the skies. Down through time this has been the point in the year when Nebraskans from Pawnee and Omaha to Linda’s Czech relatives could assess how well the crops had done, how much was in the cellar and silo, should livestock now be taken for the larder, whether that be buffalo or hogs.

And a time for thanksgiving, long before that holiday had been established or observed. I may be wrong ... Linda reminds me that I have been now and again ... but I see the holiday of Thanksgiving as the truly American national holiday. Whatever our historical, racial, cultural, or religious backgrounds, on this one day we all sit down at roughly the same time for approximately the same meal. And eating together is a long-standing human way of establishing peace, acknowledging relationships, and establishing trust. So we eat and drink – probably too much, but that’s also traditional – watch a football game (which, by the way, the Pilgrims did, too!), and consider all this common to us as Americans.

And then precisely a month later, we reverse course and consider our differences, religious, cultural, ethnic, regional, and familial. Or maybe how we are the same even in being

different, whether we see this time of giving, love, light, and joy as Christmas, Hanukkah, or solstice. I have celebrated the day(s) with meals of carp and potatoes, lutefisk and lefsa, handgames and frybread, dredl and menorah, glogg and kringe, ham and yams, drums from a kiva and a deer dance where an hour earlier a Catholic priest had celebrated Mass. And more, the menu determined by a family’s specific heritage, memories, faith, and history. You know the routine: I’m sure I could ask each and every person reading this

“What do you do for that ... you know ... December holiday of giving and light?” And you’d know exactly what I am asking for. And every response would be different. Louise Pound, in a very early work on Nebraska folklore, wrote something like, “No reason to describe what a Nebraska pioneer [Christmas] celebration is like because everyone knows what it is.” Well ... yes and no. I know how MINE goes. We don’t even all agree on when to open presents! Christmas Eve? Christmas Eve DAY? Christmas morning? (Or like me, shake, rattle, inspect, deduct, and know what’s in each package

a week before.)

Some Christmases of 40 years ago, however, stick in my mind as true representations of the holiday brought to a fine, maybe even perfect, edge. Some friends of mine owned a small-town tavern, known well outside its immediate neighborhood for fine steaks at reasonable prices. As usual, the owners, husband and wife, closed the place for Christmas Day. Sort of. Or more precisely, they OPENED the place for the day; the cash register didn’t open. The kitchen was as busy as ever, the taps were running, the bartender was pouring drinks, a regular played the piano, the place was jammed, you couldn’t hear yourself think for all the talking and laughter. Plates were piled high, glasses were full. And all the regulars were in their usual booths, perched on their special bar stools.



The clientele was special, however. One could almost say “select.” Not exactly elite, but A-list. Because for this one day of feasting and celebrating, Dick and Beth’s specific invitation was for “drunks, derelicts, and everyone nobody likes.” (Dick liked to joke that I cost him stamps for three different envelopes because my name showed up in all three categories.) Oh, some of the fancier folks in the county showed up but they came with the understanding that they would be rubbing elbows, singing carols, sharing a booth, and laughing with ... well, people they might not have thought they had much in common with the rest of the year. On that day we were ALL “drunks, derelicts, and everyone nobody likes.”

And the food carried steaming from the kitchen was more than matched by what came through the front door of the tavern. Women brought cakes, cookies, pies, breads, canned fruits and jellies, each in keeping with their family tradition, and men brought in for bragging rights their special preparation of the autumn’s hunt and harvest – smoked fish, barbecued ribs, venison and elk jerky, goose sausage, bear steaks, head cheese, turtle eggs ... Now and then someone passed around a jug of homemade chokecherry wine or – a special treat! – a jar of a forbidden fruit – moonshine! And this folklorist sat there bedazzled by what he was seeing: a celebration of individuality, but within a matrix of community celebration. And within Dick and Beth’s very

special idea of what Christmas should mean. It was amazing. There was no other feeling in that large room or long day other than love.

On those Christmas days were we celebrating the birth of Jesus or the miraculous endurance of the lamp oil in the Temple? Or the great U-turn of the sun in the winter sky promising the return of spring? Or ... what? I came away from those celebrations with the feeling that we had just paid respects to all those ideas and events. Including “peace on earth, goodwill to men.” We had in fact celebrated not just our own understanding of the season but all of them. And the true fellowship of us all, no matter what our differences otherwise. We had acknowledged the unity of our nation at Thanksgiving, but on those Christmas dinners for “drunks, derelicts, and everyone nobody likes,” we recalled that even as unique individuals ... in some cases, VERY unique individuals, we’re all still in this together. ■

Roger Welsch is an author, humorist, folklorist and a former essayist for CBS News Sunday Morning. He is the author of more than 40 books, including his most recent “Why I’m an Only Child and Other Slightly Naughty Plains Folktales” available from University of Nebraska Press.



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Valentine NWR Update

Renovations planned for many Sandhills lakes.

By Eric Fowler

With the construction side of a major project to remove and keep common carp out of the Sandhills lakes on the Valentine National Refuge complete, the next phase – actually eliminating the carp – will begin in late 2018 with the renovation of three lakes, including Pelican Lake.

Native to Europe, bottom-feeding carp stir up sediments and cloud the water, hampering the growth of the aquatic vegetation that is the base of the food web, and the growth and productivity of sight-feeding gamefish, including the bluegill, yellow perch, black crappie, largemouth bass and northern pike that thrive in Sandhills lakes. Carp found their way onto the refuge in the 1930s when a ditch was dug from Gordon Creek northwest of the refuge to alleviate low water.

Nine of the 36 lakes on the 71,516-acre refuge in Cherry County are open to fishing. In the 1970s and 1980s, rotenone, a chemical that kills gill-breathing organisms, was used to remove carp from the seven fishing lakes where they were present. The waters quickly cleared and the refuge developed into a world-class fishery renowned for producing trophy panfish.

The nature of Sandhills lakes, with cattail-lined shores and adjacent marshes, however, made it difficult to kill all of the carp in a lake, and the ditches and creeks connecting the lakes allowed carp to find their way back in. That was most recently seen in Hackberry Lake, where carp reappeared

soon after a 2004 renovation.

Duck and Rice lakes were carp-free prior to these early renovations and remain that way. West Long Lake has remained carp-free since it was renovated in 1976. All three continue to produce quality panfish and largemouth bass. Biologists have found that when carp populations reach a certain level, the body condition of gamefish begins to decline. In the other fishing lakes – Watts, Pelican, Hackberry, Dewey, Clear and Willow lakes – carp levels were at or well above those levels when work began.

Biologists and engineers have been working together on the current project, a cooperative effort between the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, its Aquatic Habitat Program and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), to find a way to keep carp out of the refuge lakes once they are removed.

New or redesigned water control structures on the outlets below each lake will keep fish from moving upstream into a lake, even during periods of high water, and to allow FWS personnel to manage water levels. Channels were dredged between the outlets' main lake bodies to insure maximum drawdown prior to a renovation. The key piece to this puzzle is a barrier constructed on the stream below Willow Lake, the last lake in the system, which will prevent carp from finding their way onto the refuge from private lakes to the northeast.

Separated from the other lakes, Watts Lake was the test subject for the process. Work began there in 2014, and when it was renovated in 2015, managers were able to lower the lake 3 feet, drawing the water out of all of the vegetation to all but insure a complete kill of carp and cutting chemical costs in half. Growth rates of the bass, bluegills, perch and crappie stocked following the work have been excellent, and anglers began pulling keeper-sized fish from the lake this year.

Biologists expect the same at the rest of the refuge lakes. "They were phenomenal fisheries in the 1970s and 80s, and we think this work will get them back to that potential," Commission Fisheries Biologist Zac Brashears said.

A top-down approach to renovation is tentatively set to begin in August or September of 2018 with Pelican, School and Whitewater lakes. The latter two lakes aren't open to fishing, but because of their connections to those that are and the presence of carp, they are being renovated. Work will continue in 2019 at Hackberry Lake; 2020 at Dewey Lake, and wrap up in 2021 with Clear; McKeel, another non-

fishing lake; and Willow lakes. The staggered schedule will insure anglers always have several lakes to fish.

Current length limits on pike and bass are planned to be rescinded starting this winter on Pelican Lake to allow anglers to harvest them with legal methods. Additionally, Commission biologists will trap, net and electro-fish lakes to collect gamefish and transfer them to other area lakes. The same process will be followed on the other lakes prior to their scheduled renovation.

Following renovations, the Game and Parks Commission is proposing to allow only five bluegills in a 15-panfish daily limit to create a trophy bluegill fishery on Pelican Lake. They will also propose new pike length limits with a 24-inch minimum or no minimum with one fish over 34 inches on lakes where they are present.

Because northern pike can affect the abundance and size structure of gamefish species, they will not be restocked in Hackberry and Pelican lakes, where they are currently present. Those two lakes, as well as Duck, Rice, West Long and Watts – the upper lakes in the system – will be managed for bass and panfish. Dewey, Clear and Willow lakes will be managed for pike, bass and panfish.

Fish and anglers won't be the only beneficiaries to the project. Aquatic vegetation and invertebrate abundance, as well as waterfowl and shorebird use of the refuge, are expected to increase as well. An Environmental Protection Agency grant will fund a study that will look at the effects of common carp, and the benefits of eliminating them, across these environments. ■



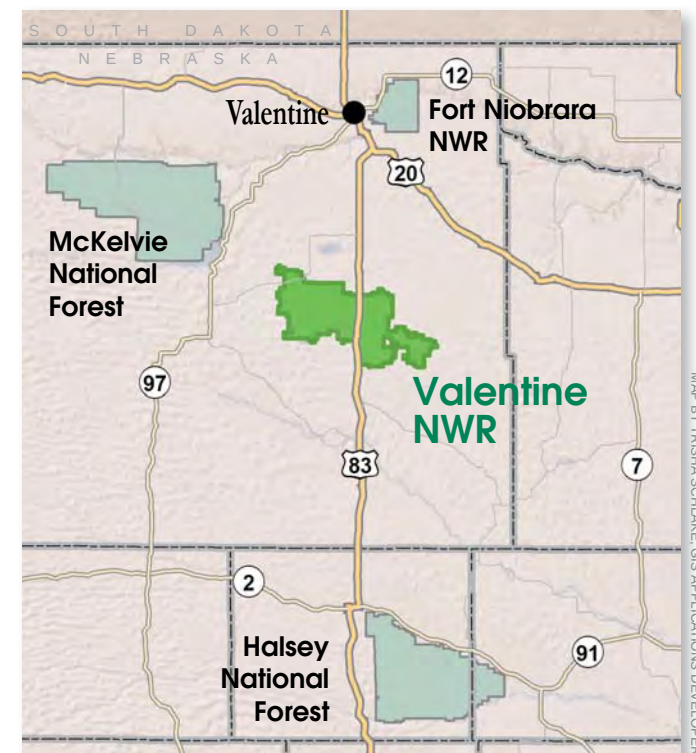
PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Water control structures, such as this one in the ditch between Hackberry and Dewey lakes, have been installed in the outlets to most refuge lakes. They include solar-powered rotating drum screens that keep vegetation from clogging the outlets. The map below shows the general area around the refuge.



PHOTO BY ZAC BRASHEARS

Fisheries managers believe with carp removed, refuge lakes will again be capable of producing trophy bluegills like this 11-incher sampled on Duck Lake.



MAP BY TRISHA SCHLAKE, GIS APPLICATIONS DEVELOPER

The Most Secretive of Skunks

An Eastern spotted skunk found at the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge.

By Cara Pesek

As soon as he saw the roadkill on the side of Highway 83 in the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge, Melvin Nenneman was pretty sure he was looking at something special.

Nenneman, a wildlife biologist with the refuge, made a U-turn so he could investigate. What he found was indeed special. It was an Eastern spotted skunk – a small, rare skunk with spots instead of stripes down its back that in Nebraska is considered a Tier 2 species of greatest conservation need. It didn't appear the skunk had been there for long – it was curled up and looked like it was sleeping.

"I've worked here for 15 years and I'd never seen one of these animals alive or dead," Nenneman said.

Few people have. Since 2009 there have been only four confirmed sightings of spotted skunks in Nebraska, all in the northern part of the state, said Mike Fritz, a biologist for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Several other unconfirmed reports trickle in each year, too, including two in southeastern Nebraska this past spring. Still, fewer Nebraskans see spotted skunks each year than they do endangered whooping cranes, Fritz said.

Biologists surmise that populations of spotted skunks – like many other species – declined when white settlers moved into the Great Plains and began hunting and trapping them. Their numbers rebounded some in the 1930s and 1940s when the landscape was dotted with small farmsteads that provided good habitat for the species. Spotted skunks, which eat grubs, grasshoppers and small mammals, often lived under outbuildings where mice were also present; when Fritz was growing up near Falls City, Nebraska, he remembers his father mentioning a spotted skunk living under his granary.

In the 1950s and 1960s, spotted skunks again began to decline, but biologists aren't exactly sure why,



The Eastern spotted skunk is considered a Tier 2 species in Nebraska.

Fritz said. They suspect it may have had something to do with changing agricultural practices and vanishing habitat.

"It's just a mystery," said Kristal Stoner, wildlife diversity manager for the Game and Parks Commission. "We don't really know why they started to decline, but they did."

But how much, no one is quite sure. Spotted skunks have small home ranges, they are extremely secretive and they're rarely active during the daylight hours, which makes them difficult to study, said Fritz.

Nenneman's skunk could shed some light on this mysterious species. After his discovery, word of the roadkill skunk on the Valentine Refuge spread among skunk researchers. Robert C. Dowler, a professor of biology at Angelo State University in San Angelo, Texas, eventually contacted Nenneman to ask if he could use DNA samples from the skunk for a research project. The spotted skunk's carcass made its way from the refuge to the Game and Parks Commission headquarters in Lincoln, and eventually to San Angelo.

There, Dowler was in the midst of a three-year study looking at the genetic range of the spotted skunk. There

are three subspecies of the Eastern spotted skunk – among them the Plains spotted skunk, which historically could be found from Minnesota south to Texas, including in Nebraska – and Dowler wanted to see if the three were genetically distinct. Preliminary results show that the Plains spotted skunk was indeed genetically distinct from spotted skunks found elsewhere in the country.

There is still much more to learn about the spotted skunk, and Dowler, Fritz and other biologists are calling on the public to help. Anyone who believes they see a spotted skunk in Nebraska should call Fritz at 402-471-5419. The fact that spotted skunks are found from time to time despite their secretive nature suggest they may not be quite as uncommon as previously thought.

"These records indicate we still may have some very small populations out there," Fritz said. "It's just that no one is out there to see them."

Fritz, Nenneman and other biologists, for their part, will continue to keep an eye out for out-of-the-ordinary roadkill.

"As a biologist, I'm always looking at dead stuff on the road," Nenneman said. "Keep your eyes peeled. You never know what you'll see." ■

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◀ I am an 85-year-old resident of Johnson, Nebraska, sending you this 1940 picture of my classmate Jack Lintz (our graduation 1950) for your request of Portraits from the Past.

Many years ago, our small rural town had a lake, called Johnson Lake, located just south of the railroad tracks on the west side of Highway 105. Each summer, local kids and other kids from miles away enjoyed a fishing contest. Winners of the biggest fish in their age bracket received a prize from the Johnson Sportsmen Club.

Jack Lintz is pictured with his fish and his grandfather, Don Parker. Some years later nature took its course and with the help of a dredge, the lake turned into farm ground.

I enjoy NEBRASKAland Magazine.

— Inez Gebers, Johnson, Nebraska.



► The two men in the photographs are Daryl Calkins (Chadron) and Dan Kelly (Alliance). They have been best friends since childhood. Their time together has revolved around hunting and walleye fishing. Dan died of cancer last April. A lot of great stories have been told the last few months of all the hunting and fishing adventures they have been through together.

The picture to the right was taken on their last hunt before both were deployed to Vietnam in November 1966.

The picture above was taken after they were out of the service, graduated from CSC, and were married and busy raising families in Chadron and Alliance.

Both have fished, hunted and trapped in western Nebraska since the 1960s. It was the hunting and fishing opportunities that brought them both to Chadron to attend college. Their love of the outdoors has been passed to their children and grandchildren.

— Eric Calkins, Chadron, Nebraska



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

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Pheasant and Sausage Quiche

An easy wild game breakfast pie.

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

This is, hands down, one of my favorite pheasant recipes. If you have guests over for the holidays and need to feed breakfast to a large crowd, quiche is the way to go. Cook the sausage, pheasant and shallots beforehand and allow the spinach to thaw and drain overnight. Assemble quiches the next morning and bake. Think of it as a breakfast pie.

Prep Time: 20 minutes

Cooking Time: 1 hour and 30 minutes

Servings: 8 (2 pies)

Ingredients:

- 2 deep-dish frozen pie crusts or your favorite recipe
- 2 large shallots, thinly sliced (about 1 cup)
- 1 tablespoon of butter
- 2 skinless, boneless pheasant breasts
- 6 ounces pork breakfast sausage
- Olive oil
- 10 ounces of chopped frozen spinach, thawed
- 8 large eggs
- 2½ cups of heavy whipping cream
- Generous pinch of ground nutmeg
- Kosher salt
- ¼ teaspoon of cayenne pepper
- Freshly cracked pepper
- Red pepper flakes
- Zest of one lemon, finely grated

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit. Allow frozen pie crusts to thaw for 10 minutes and then prick holes all over the bottoms and sides with a fork; this helps to prevent the crust from rising in the oven. Bake crusts in the oven for 15 minutes, or until cooked through and lightly golden. Set aside cooked crusts and lower

oven temperature to 325 degrees.

2. Brown pork breakfast sausage in a pan over medium-high heat. Break up the sausage with a wooden spoon. Remove cooked sausage and drain on paper towels.

3. Add more oil to the pan if necessary. Pat pheasant breasts dry with a paper towel and sprinkle salt and pepper all over. Brown the breasts in the pan until just cooked through, about 3-4 minutes on each side. Cut cooked pheasant breasts into small cubes and set aside.

4. Clean out the pan if it gets too “gunky.” Lower heat to medium and melt 1 tablespoon of butter. Cook sliced shallots in the butter with a pinch of salt until lightly browned, but do not burn. Remove and set aside.

5. Squeeze out as much liquid from the spinach as humanly possible. To assemble the quiches, spread a quarter of the drained spinach at the bottom of each pie crust, followed by layers of divided cooked shallot, pork sausage

crumbles, pheasant cubes, another layer of spinach and then more shallot.

6. To make the egg mixture, whisk together 8 eggs, 2½ cups of heavy cream, a generous pinch of nutmeg, ¼ teaspoon of cayenne pepper and 1 teaspoon of salt. Pour and divide the egg mixture between the two quiches. Place quiches on a rimmed cookie sheet(s) and bake gently at 325 degrees for 55 minutes.

Serve quiche slices warm or hot with freshly cracked pepper, red pepper flakes and some lemon zest sprinkled on top. ■

This recipe and photograph originally appeared on Jones Dairy Farm’s website at jonesdairyfarm.com.



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Winterfest

Some traditions are passed down, while others are picked up by circumstance. Since photographing for *NEBRASKAland*, Winterfest at Ponca State Park has turned from work to an annual after-Christmas outing for my husband and me: flying fruitcakes, cozy campfires, spicy wassail, a fun yule log race and woodland sprites complete with fairy dust ... When the yule log is found, listen for sleigh bells ringing. You'll hear local volunteer Brad Conrad and his Gypsy Vanner horse coming down the snowy lane.

The yule log is delivered and all teams gather around a crackling campfire. The winners saw off disks from the log and add them to the blaze. Our sprite recites a winter blessing, and while all stand to listen by the warmth of nature's "hearth," Ponca State Park truly becomes a winter wonderland.

Looking back at several years of photos, I see many repeat faces. Winterfest has become a holiday tradition for many other families, too. Make it yours this year on Dec. 30.

Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley
Oct. 31, 2017



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