



Rachel Wachter of Lincoln carries her compound bow during an archery hunt at Oak Glen Wildlife Management Area in Seward County. Photo by Jeff Kurrus.

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NEBRASKAland

November 2018

In this issue
The Rut

**Myths, Facts and
 How to Hunt**

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NEBRASKAland Magazine

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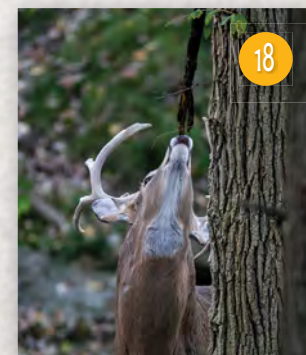
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ON THE WEB...

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Cover: A white-tailed buck is in the midst of rubbing the last of the velvet from his antlers as his body prepares for the rut. Story on page 18. Photo by Jeff Kurrus.

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Instagram Featured Photo

Jessa Karlberg (@cinch920) of Sumner took this image of a roundup in central Nebraska. Follow us (@nebraskaland) and tag us in your photos to be featured in an upcoming issue.



Eric Wellman of Lincoln took this photo of Smith Falls last autumn.



Pam Anderson calls this photo "After Glow," which was taken at Yankee Hill Wildlife Management Area near Lincoln.



Karen Smith of Omaha shared this photo of a male cardinal taken at Chalco Hills Recreation Area.

Send your comments to:
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or e-mail Jeff.Kurrus@Nebraska.gov
Please include your postal address and telephone number. Letters may be condensed and edited. Photographs are also welcome.

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PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

NEBRASKA'S THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES

By Melissa Panella, Wildlife Biologist

Nose to the wind, stealthily still, he looks onward cautiously while trying to avoid the threat he hears nearby. The moment he senses that he's been discovered, he bolts out of sight, far enough away to seek the safety of cover. Many of us, or perhaps our pet dogs, have felt the excitement of seeing a red or gray fox's fluffy tail and perked ears as it runs across a park or even our lawn, but fewer of us have had the opportunity to catch a glimpse of the species known as the **swift fox**, *Vulpes velox*.

The swift fox is a state endangered species that constructs dens, or modifies burrows of other animals, to use as earthen shelters year-round in the shortgrass prairies of western Nebraska. It is much smaller than its wild canine cousins in the state; in fact, it can claim fame as the smallest native canid in North America. Most adult swift foxes weigh little more than 5 pounds, significantly lighter than the average dog.

Indeed "swift," they may run at speeds up to 40 mph. Their diets consists of wild berries, seeds, mice, insects, and other small prey. Some farmers enjoy seeing them, largely because much of a swift fox's diet consists of pests to agriculture.

Fur records from the late 19th century indicate that swift foxes were once a common part of the

wildlife community in the Great Plains. But over time, unregulated harvest, loss of habitat, poisoning and a disruption in the food web likely as a result of too many potent pesticides, led to a decline in numbers of swift fox.

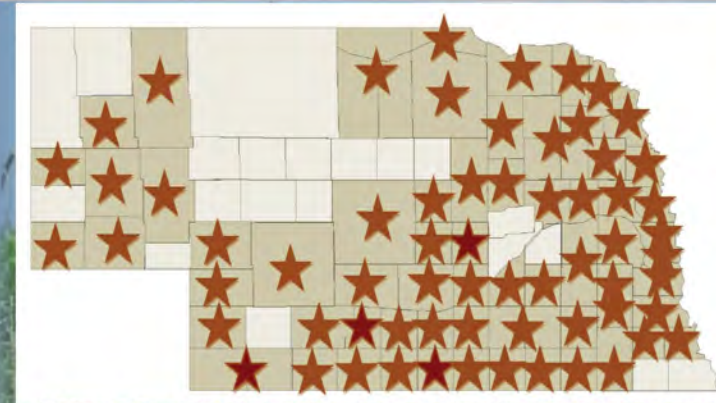
Biologists have been monitoring swift foxes in Nebraska to better understand their locations and behaviors. On-the-ground conservation projects include the removal of invasive trees and shrubs from the prairie, prescribed fire and strategic grazing plans, which are all actions that maintain healthy grasslands and can also benefit long-term ranching operations in western Nebraska.

Drivers can reduce the number of mortalities of foxes by using caution in areas where they are known to live. Swift foxes are vulnerable when they are scavenging roadkill, either on the roadway or in adjacent ditches. It is also important to release any swift foxes that are accidentally trapped and follow all trapping regulations.

Swift foxes were extirpated from parts of their native range, but conservation efforts in Nebraska and elsewhere, including Montana, South Dakota, and southern Canada, are helping to restore them in the Great Plains. ■

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Travel to Cass County

By Erin Lenz, Nebraska Tourism Commission

Soak up the last bits of fall and transition into the holiday season in Cass County. Enjoy all that nature has to offer, try Nebraska cuisine and learn about the rich history of this county.

Explore

Take in the colors, sights and sounds of fall in one of the many nature-filled spaces of Cass County. Bike, hike or view wildlife on the 25-mile, crushed limestone MoPac Trail. Head to Eugene T. Mahoney State Park and stay in one of their many cabins or the Peter Kiewit Lodge that boasts stunning views of the Platte River Valley. Ice skating is a must starting in mid-November and make sure to spend the first snow of the season at Mahoney State Park at the large sledding hill. Mountain bike or bird watch on the miles of beautiful trails offered at Platte River State Park and enjoy the great outdoors.

Do

Learn about one of Nebraska's finest writers, Bess Streeter Aldrich, by touring her home in Elmwood. Hear more about her writings, get a history of her home and a taste of what life was like when she lived there from 1922-1946. Make sure and stop by Nov. 24 through December for the Journey into Christmas exhibit at the home. History takes flight at the Strategic Air Command and Aerospace



Above, glamping cabin at Platte River State Park. Below left, the Tribal Kitchen and Marketplace in Weeping Water.

Museum, where you can explore 300,000 square feet of exhibits such as the temporary *Game On: The History and Science of Gaming* exhibit. See a variety of aircrafts and space crafts and take a ride on their flight simulators. RSVP to the museum's Veteran's Day program on Nov. 11 and help honor America's military veterans. Make a trip to Elmwood on Nov. 24 for the Elmwood Holiday Extravaganza and enjoy a light parade, craft show and more.

Eat & Drink

Relax and enjoy the vineyard ambiance at Slattery Vintage Estates. Sip on a glass of Nebraska wine like James Arthur's 2 Brothers white wine or Whiskey Run Creek's Apple Raspberry fruit wine and take home a bottle of your favorite. Not too far away from Slattery is Union Orchard's Country Store and Farm Market. Sample additional Nebraska wines or choose from a wide selection of cheeses, baked goods, popcorn, jams and jellies. Drink local craft beer surrounded by fields of hops at The Hop Yard in Plattsmouth. Sit down with a coffee and warm cinnamon roll and enjoy breakfast or lunch at Tribal Kitchen and Marketplace in Weeping Water.



Stay

Surround yourself with nature and have a relaxing and luxurious stay in the new glamping cabins at Platte River State Park. Not interested in glamping? Book a room at Bankers House Bed and Breakfast and stay in an old Queen Anne Victorian home built in 1883.

Shop

With Christmas right around the corner, pick out a special gift at one of these stops. Head to Bakers Candies and find a gift for your friend with a big sweet tooth. Buy their signature chocolate meltaways, chocolate fudge, chocolate-covered potato chip clusters and more.

Sticking to the theme of food gifts, The Jerky Factory in Plattsmouth sells hand-sliced and seasoned-to-perfection, high-quality jerky, perfect for a tasty gift.

Located on I-80, pick out a one-of-a-kind authentic antique or older collectible at Platte Valley Antique Mall.

While most of Grandpa Snazzy's in Weeping Water is a theatrical rental shop, the front 30 feet of the historically restored Victorian building is dedicated to a coffee house and gift shop with unique gifts and antiques. ■

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A Brief History

Horse Railways

By History Nebraska (Nebraska State Historical Society)

Before electric streetcars, many cities used horse railways. They appeared in several Nebraska cities in the 1880s during a statewide urban real estate boom. In Hastings, for example, the owners of one of the new subdivisions boasted street cars on three sides of their land, and the cars on one line bore the sign “Dawes and Foss Addition.” Similar situations prevailed at Beatrice, Columbus, Nebraska City, Norfolk, Grand Island, Kearney, Red Cloud, South Sioux City, Wymore, and York.

The promotion of horsecar lines was not limited to real estate salesmen and investors. News items and editorials indicate that rival towns viewed expanded street railways as a matter of civic pride. In Nebraska’s small cities, adequate patronage for a street railway was provided, if at all, by a park, an important institution, or perhaps a railway station some distance from the business district. In Omaha, Norfolk, Red Cloud, and Wymore, the principal railway stations were at least a mile from town. In fact, the horsecar lines in Norfolk, South Sioux City, Wymore, and Red Cloud had little else to justify them.

As a passenger clambered aboard a horsecar (usually at the front platform) the driver held the horses still, and the passenger was expected to drop his nickel or celluloid “check” into the fare box. As the car lumbered along, an occasional passenger would “pull the bells” and prepare



As seen on Kearney’s Central Avenue in 1891, electric streetcars began to replace the horse-drawn kind, but horsecars continued to be used for many years. History Nebraska RG2178-20

to alight. In Omaha two bells meant “stop immediately” (even in the middle of a block); one bell meant “stop at the next crossing.” The car seats, made of wood, were benches paralleling the sides of the car, thus causing each passenger to look across the car into the faces of passengers seated opposite him. Early cars were without heat (though in winter they did have straw on the floor).

Horses were usually used in pairs. The day was divided



Horse-drawn streetcars in Lincoln, ca. 1881. History Nebraska RG2158-798c

into three shifts with the assignment of about 14 miles for each team. Faster transit was constantly being sought. Horsecars were operated irregularly or not at all in various Nebraska towns after 1889. One was operated north of Lincoln to Belmont as late as 1906. In Nebraska City the

last horsecar made its final run to Morton Park during Chautauqua week in 1910. In Red Cloud they continued to meet all the trains until 1918. ■

Visit History Nebraska’s website at history.nebraska.gov.



“Don’t this make you think of home.” Nebraska City, ca. 1910. History Nebraska RG3267-1-12



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Options for November Anglers

By Jeff Kurrus

Fish pack on weight in the fall to prepare for the winter and the following spring spawn. At the same time, their metabolism begins to slow as the water cools. This makes November a great time to catch fat, beautiful fish.

Traditionally, fish begin moving closer to deeper water where they'll spend the winter. Above them in the shallows, the wind adds to the turbidity of the water, which along with the lowering temperatures, affects their activity.

Because of these factors, anglers should look for fish by vertical jigging in or near deeper water. "On a reservoir, vertical jigging with a baitfish imitation is great because alewives and other baitfish are becoming stressed because of the lowering temperatures," said Daryl Bauer, the Nebraska Game and Parks fisheries outreach program manager. The raising and lowering of jigs mimics the action of these fish, while allowing anglers to leave it in the face of the fish longer. Fishing slow – unless the fish dictate otherwise – is the key.

Another option for November is fishing for coldwater species like trout.

"Our streams can be great in November

because the fish don't react as much to the cold," said Bauer. Places like Lake Ogallala can be hotspots to catch fish with traditional trout fishing gear, including spinners and flies.

This time of the year can be a true transition time for fish, but it doesn't have to be for anglers. Whether you fish for warm or coldwater species, start by looking for stable areas in their environment. When you find those, you'll find fish. ■



Daryl Bauer holds a channel catfish he caught during the fall at Merritt Reservoir while vertical jigging.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DARYL BAUER

Oktoberfest

October 5, 6, 7, 2018

Fall Events

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November 23, 2018

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Upcoming Events

by Jerry Kane

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

November 1
Late Doe/Fawn Antelope season opens

November 1
Raccoon, Opossum, Long-tailed Weasel, Mink, Red Fox, Gray Fox and Badger hunting and trapping seasons open

November 1
Muskrat and Beaver Trapping season opens

November 3
Turkey Trot
Wildcat Hills Nature Center, Gering

November 3
Candlelight Tour
Fort Atkinson State Historical Park (SHP), Fort Calhoun

November 3-4
River Valley Artisan Craft Market
Eugene T. Mahoney State Park (SP), Ashland

November 5
Woodcock Hunting season closes

November 5
Tickets on Sale for Historical Christmas Dinner
Fort Robinson SP, Crawford

November 5, 7
Growing Up WILD Educator Workshop
Lincoln

November 9
Rail Hunting season closes

November 10-11
Autumn Harvest Art Show
Eugene T. Mahoney SP, Ashland

November 10-18
Deer Hunting firearm deer and restricted statewide buck seasons

November 16-18, 23-25, 30
Christmas at the Mansion
Arbor Lodge SHP, Nebraska City

November 27
Bighorn Sheep Hunting season opens



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Safety First

By Jeff Kurrus

For those afield this month, hunter orange is the greatest asset to staying safe. "Since the introduction of blaze hunter orange," said Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Hunter Education Coordinator Jackson Ellis, "hunting incidents have gone down about 80 percent."

Hunter orange is required for all deer hunters in Nebraska, including archery, during the nine-day November firearm season. Hunters must display at least 400 square inches on their chest, head, and back.

It is also recommended for upland game hunters, as well as non-hunters recreating.

Some other ways to stay safe this hunting season include:

- When climbing a treestand, wear a safety harness or fall arrest (or lifeline) system, making sure you're connected to the tree the entire time.
- Stay away from homemade stands by purchasing one approved by the Treestand Manufacturer's Association.
- When shooting, identify your target and make sure you have a safe backdrop. A bullet shot over a 45 degree angle can travel well over a mile.

- Use technology to your advantage by having a charged cell phone with you and letting someone know where you're hunting at all times. ■

UNL Hunting Equipment Rental

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln is now offering hunting equipment rentals at its Outdoor Adventure Center to any registered student on campus. In addition to bike, hike, camping, climbing and paddling gear, student hunters can now rent pop-up blinds, layout blinds, turkey decoy or waterfowl decoy combinations from the university for a small fee: \$3 per day or \$6 per weekend (3 days).

The equipment is available through a grant partnership between the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) and the Cabela's Outdoor Fund.

Micaela Rahe, an R3 (Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation) coordinator with NWTF and the Nebraska Game and Parks said, "We had two focus groups with college students in the spring of 2018, and one of the barriers they noted to participating in hunting and shooting sports in college was gear cost and storage."

While rentals are currently only available to UNL students, coordinators are considering options to expand availability to the public. Rahe recommends following the Collegiate Hunters of Nebraska on Facebook for more information on collegiate hunting and shooting sport opportunities. ■



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Burke Named to National Pheasants Forever Board

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

Jerrod Burke, Nebraska Game and Parks Commissioner from 2005-2015, has been elected to Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever's National Board of Directors. Composed of 17 members, the board meets quarterly and oversees the operation of Pheasants Forever, Inc. and Quail Forever.

A devoted landowner, farmer and hunter, Burke has had a long and fruitful relationship with "The Habitat Organization." His family farm was homesteaded in 1888, and since then, the Burke family has continued a tradition of integrating agriculture with land stewardship and wildlife habitat conservation.

Farming alongside his father, brother, and more recently, his son, Logan, Burke's partnership with Pheasants Forever has not only allowed them to pursue diverse habitat projects on their 4,500-acre property, but also help bring attention to nearby public lands for improvement.

The family's efforts have been recognized by the Nebraska Pheasants Forever 3 Million Acre Award. With this "dream-come-true" appointment on the PF Board, Burke's partnership with the organization has come full circle. ■



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

NEBRASKAland Visitor



Last issue's winner of the Visitor drawing was Butch Gathye of Gretna, who found the **minute pirate bug** on page 11.

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 7, 13, or 17.

*The **minute pirate bug** (Orius sp.) is a very small, oval-shaped insect, approximately 1/8-inch in length and black with white markings. It is a predaceous insect, feeding on thrips, aphids, small caterpillars and even insect eggs. The minute pirate bug can be found across the state on flowers and foliage from spring through fall, waiting for prey. Occasionally these ferocious predators even bite humans, inserting their piercing, sucking mouth part right into our skin! The bite can be very painful, but the insect injects no venom, spreads no disease, and does not feed on our blood. Injury is minor, and usually no worse than a mosquito bite. Because the minute pirate bug is a beneficial insect, and as no practical control measures exist, attempts to manage the insect are not recommended.*



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

the RUT

Story and photos by Jeff Kurrus

Look online, or watch outdoor television, and you're bound to see or hear someone talking about "the rut," one of nature's most intriguing rituals as bucks and does appear more and more across the landscape.

When exactly the rut takes place and precisely how deer – particularly whitetails – behave then is a source of great debate. Millions of dollars are given to rut research each year, with universities and other cooperatives pouring resources toward understanding this phenomenon to help hunters see more bucks in the field.

Hunters after trophy bucks will try to position themselves where they think they have the best chance at seeing the biggest animals during the rut. Many hunters think the rut is the one-week period during Nebraska's firearm season when bucks are moving most. But many archery hunters are convinced it's the week before. Other hunters would argue with both of these times, stating that one should get in the woods a couple of weeks before the firearm season, while a select group of people often hunt the "second rut," which they think occurs later in the year.

Who's right? Well, they all are. With that in mind, let's discuss the constants, myths, and what you can do to advance your white-tailed deer hunting experience during the rut.

The white-tailed doe is the object of obsession for every able-bodied buck during the rut.



the CONSTANTS

Connected to the shortening of daylight, or photoperiod, a buck's testosterone levels increase in the fall. With this increase, a buck can breed anytime from its velvet shed in early autumn to its antler drop in late winter. The velvet shed is also the beginning of the creation of "rubs" for deer, where the buck will rub his antlers and forehead – for scent distribution – on trees and bushes in an effort to attract does.

A doe, however, will go into estrus – or become sexually receptive – in a much shorter timeframe of 2-3 days when her body contains the precise amounts of luteinizing hormone, estrogen, and progesterone, writes researchers from the Deer Lab at

Mississippi State University. These hormones will again be present roughly 28 days later.

Because some does go into estrus earlier than others, bucks will respond with additional movement in search of these smaller number of does in what many researchers have labeled the "pre-rut" period. During this time, bucks will continue to visit rubs, but will also begin making scrapes – locations on the ground where they will paw with their hooves and antlers and urinate.

A scrape is usually associated with a low-hanging limb or branch that the buck will break with his antlers or even bite, while continually depositing scent from his forehead, preorbital gland and mouth in an

Rut Stages

While not consistent across the board, most research lists these as the stages for the rut.

Pre-rut – rubs and scrapes are appearing. Deer are moving, but are more concentrated on food sources and are reactive to increased hunter movement.

Seeking – as photoperiod decreases and testosterone levels increase, younger bucks are starting to chase.

Chasing – this is what many refer to as "the rut," where buck activity is at its highest as more does have come into estrus and bucks, even mature bucks, are on the move in search of them.

Tending – while some bucks will remain with does that have been bred, other bucks will travel in an effort to find another doe in estrus. It's the feast or famine portion of the deer hunting season.

Post-rut/Second rut – most does are bred by now. Plus, hunters have invaded and deer are wary. However, roughly 28 days after their last estrus cycle, unbred does once again become the focus for bucks. And the chase, albeit shorter than the first, begins again.

A buck deposits scent from his forehead above a scrape in Cass County.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

increased effort to attract does.

During this time, bucks can also increase their home range in search of does, and often exhibit behaviors uncharacteristic of the traditionally wary species by spending hours on foot. In a study conducted by Texas A&M-Kingsville, a healthy buck can spend 6.75 hours per day trying to find does in estrus.

Because of this movement, researchers at the same university found that bucks can lose – from the pre-rut to the post-rut – 24 percent of their body mass.

However, despite all of this time afoot by bucks, a doe only remains in

estrus for 24 to 72 hours, giving bucks a very small window of opportunity.

At this time, bucks will often "tend" to does, remaining as close as they can while she's receptive. If she isn't bred during this period, approximately 28 days later the doe will go through estrus again, contributing to what many call the "second rut."

The main constant during the rut is that nothing is constant. Because does come into estrus at different times, buck behavior changes from day to day and year to year. When she's ready, he has to be ready too.

A buck trails a doe at Neale Woods in northern Douglas County.

MYTHS and LEGENDS

The rut is one of the most, if not the most, talked about subjects in the outdoor world. Do an online search, take a look at the magazine shelves or turn on an outdoor television program and facts about the rut are everywhere, yet certain myths and legends continue to prevail.

The myths and facts below represent the most up-to-date information regarding what we think we knew about the rut and what research has actually stated.

Myth: The moon phase affects when most does are bred.

Fact: From 1999-2006, Penn State University, in conjunction with the Pennsylvania Game Commission, checked 3,507 road-killed does with fetuses, cross-referencing the median date of conception with the date of the full moon. Their results showed that regardless of the date of the full moon, the median date of the rut was around Nov. 13 for adults and Nov. 25 for fawns (a period sometimes referred to as the second rut). Similar results have been reached at various universities and cooperatives.

Myth: A scrape is created, and maintained, by one buck.

Fact: Once created, a scrape can and will be visited by multiple bucks living in the same region. Most scraping, notes a long list of sources, occurs at night and nearly always occurs before peak breeding begins.

Myth: The rut is dictated by cooler weather.

Fact: Photoperiod, or the length of daylight, is the primary contributor to the rut. Think of areas of the country where “cooler” weather is much less extreme than Nebraska’s (e.g. Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi) where bucks still go through the rut.

Myth: The rut is the same length of time each year.

Fact: While the rut may occur during the same general time period each year, the factors determining its length will vary. The closer the buck to doe ratio is 1:1, the smaller the rut

period will be, or the greater distance the deer might expand his home range.

Myth: All does go into estrus at relatively the same time.

Fact: Does will go through estrus at different times during the fall, forcing hunters to find one more reason they need to be in the woods another day. In a study by the Florida Fish & Wildlife Commission, in which 300 hunter-harvested does were examined, the earliest date a doe was bred by a buck was June 22 and the latest date was April 18 of the following year. In our northern state, this window is much smaller – yet still a window nonetheless.

Myth: Bucks go through an October lull, where their movements are at a minimum.

Fact: In a Pennsylvania study featuring GPS-collared bucks, there was no evidence of decreased movement during this time period. While the sample size was small, similar results were found in other studies, including in Maryland. In this study, GPS-collared bucks moved an average of 1½ miles in a 24-hour period. By October, this distance increased to 2 miles per day and up to 2½ miles per day during the peak time of the rut.

Myth: All fawns begin breeding their second year.

Fact: With proper nutrition and body size (i.e. 80 to 90 pounds for northern deer), 7- to 8-month-old doe fawns can reproduce. These does are quite often the reason for the second rut later in the deer season.

Myth: Small bucks don’t breed does.

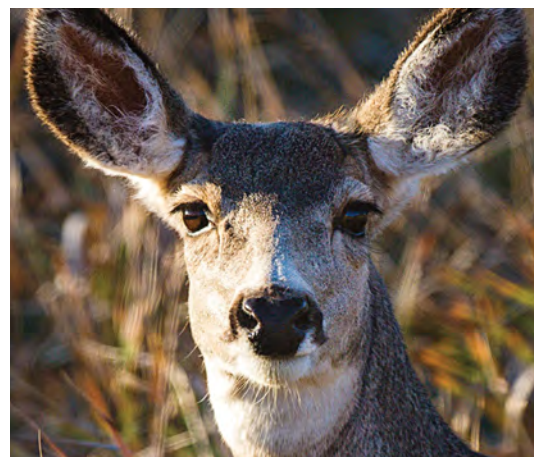
Fact: Just like the myth stating that a spike can never become a big-antlered buck, this myth is also false. While smaller bucks are at a disadvantage because older bucks will push them out – as well as research from Mississippi State University that states that estrus does will often choose larger-antlered deer – small bucks are also capable of breeding does.



The full moon was thought to affect when most does are bred, but research says otherwise.



Cooler weather does not dictate the rut. The photoperiod, or length of daylight, is the primary contributor.



Some fawns can breed their first year and are quite often the reason for the “second rut.”

PHOTO BY CHRIS MASADA

PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG



White-tailed bucks can be active from the time they shed their velvet until late in the year, after Nebraska’s firearm season.

inside INFORMATION

Dusty Schelbitzki has spent 14 years working check-in stations for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, and on average spends hundreds of hours afield each year hunting deer. He sees many of the same hunter patterns every year.

“Hunters will come into the check-in station early saying they’ve seen minimum deer movement,” said Schelbitzki. “But moving times vary. The reason a big buck gets big is because he adjusts his behaviors to you. If you go in and hunt two hours in the morning and two hours in the

evening, he knows or has learned.”

There is never a better time during the deer hunting season than now. During the rut, hunt from sunrise to sunset. “Deer are constantly moving during this time,” said Schelbitzki. “If you’re not seeing deer, there’s a chance that a buck has found a doe close to estrus. Once he’s bred her, he’ll be on the move again.”

In an effort to see more deer or hunt more phases of the rut, many have taken to archery hunting, spending a large amount of time in the field a week or two before the firearm season, a step that

All Day Checklist

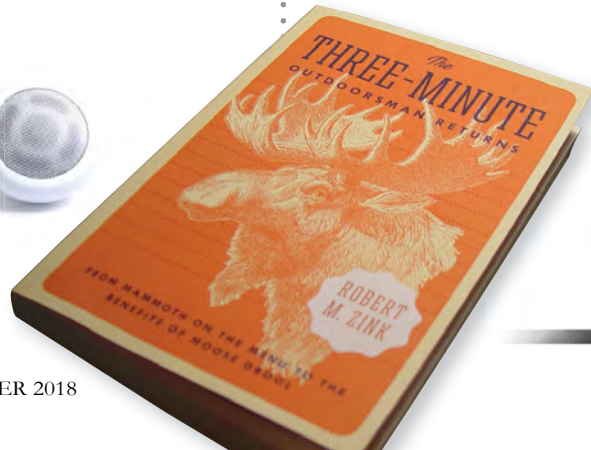
Charged Cell Phone – Check emails, plan a vacation or simply recap the Huskers’ football history through Wikipedia. Just make sure your phone has enough juice for the day.

Food – High energy, protein foods keep you sharp and ready for the long day.

Comfortable Seat – Some platforms on the market aren’t good for sitting more than an hour or two, much less a full day. Find a reliable seat for the duration. A camouflage boat cushion is a viable option.

Paperback Book – If everything else fails, carry a book in your back pocket and read.

Earbuds – One hunter I know has multiple 150-class bucks to his credit, and usually has in earbuds when he hunts. He’s convinced he’s missed out on hearing several deer during his time in the woods, but listening to his favorite podcasts while he hunts has also allowed him to remain in the stand longer.



Schelbitzki said has great benefit. “Big bucks are on the move during this time to see if does are in estrus. They’ll also be territorial, so calls can be effective because bucks want other bucks out of their area.”

Yet Schelbitzki also cautions that all deer differ. “There are no set patterns during the rut,” he said. “Deer will start their rut behaviors at various times, and while some may cover miles during this time, others will barely move out of their back door. It just depends on what he has there for does.”

To adjust to this randomness, Schelbitzki reiterated to try an all-day event. “It’s a mental drain,” he said, “but it’s one way to change up your pattern. The more time you’re in the stand, the more deer you’ll see.”

The most fascinating aspect of deer rut research is that the information is ever-changing. Yet there are always two constants: If you are not seeing deer, you will always wonder if you were there at the right time, yet you will always know when that right time is – it’s when you can go. ■

JP Wachter of Lincoln firearm hunts from a ladder stand at Oak Glen Wildlife Management Area in Seward County.

Rubs, Scrapes, Young and Old

In research noted by Quality Deer Management Association, areas with mature bucks featured 10 times as many rubs as areas with yearling bucks. Yearling bucks lack the scent-marking characteristics of mature bucks. These mature bucks, according to research from the University of Georgia, can make 1,000 to 1,200 rubs per year. Other research states that an average whitetail makes between 300 and 400 per year. Bottom line: they rub a lot.

In addition, mature bucks will begin making scrapes two months before does are bred, up to 85 percent of all scrapes, while yearling bucks made only 15 percent as many scrapes and none more than one week before the first doe was bred.



Time Well Spent

What to Do in November

By Renae Blum

As we approach Thanksgiving, take a moment to step outside and appreciate the outdoors – something we can all be thankful for. Here are a few ways to enjoy your time outside. To learn about fun park events you and the family can take part in, visit Calendar.OutdoorNebraska.gov. ■

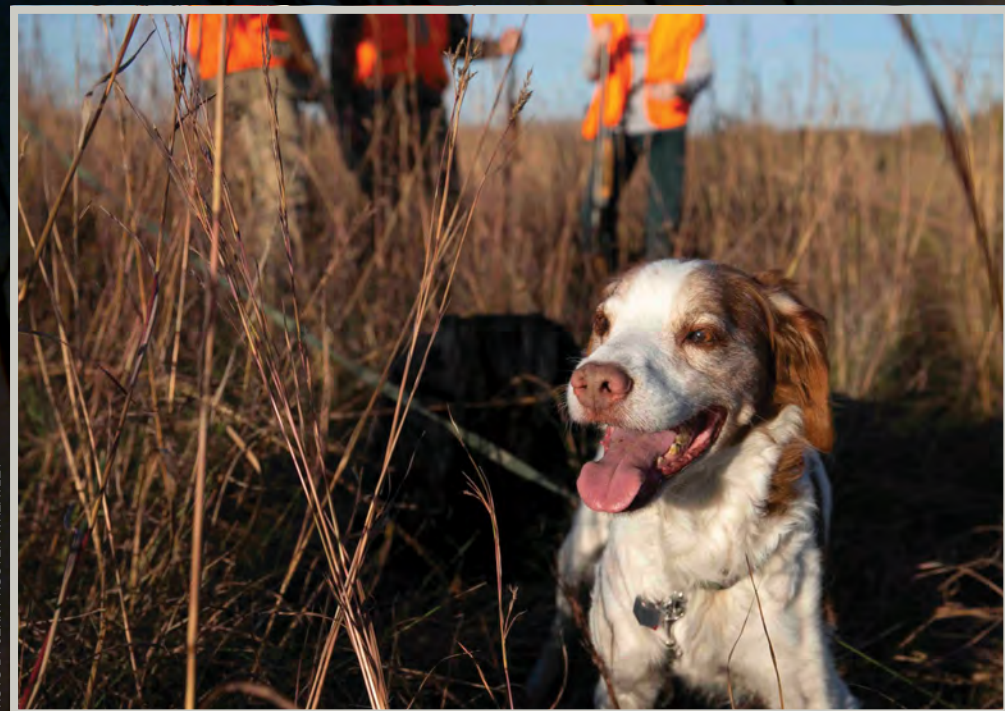


PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY

Fall Hunting

Various dates

Statewide

Nebraska hunting seasons are in full swing, with a range of choices and opportunities for hunters. This month, take to the field for seasons such as firearm deer, archery deer, turkey, pheasant and grouse. Permits are available online at OutdoorNebraska.org or at any Nebraska Game and Parks permitting office.

River Valley Artisans and Craft Market

Nov. 3-4

Eugene T. Mahoney State Park

Get an early start on holiday shopping with handmade arts and craft items! About 40 vendors will be displaying and selling a variety of unique works, including glass jewelry, handcrafted soaps and lotions, crocheted dish towels, recycled signs and beef jerky. New this year is a “make it and take it” booth, where guests can decorate and take home coasters. While you’re here, enjoy a tasty lunch at the park’s popular restaurant, Caddy’s Parkside Grill. Find more information at Calendar.OutdoorNebraska.gov.



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Stay in a Cabin

Throughout the month

Various locations

From October to April, cabins and lodge rooms at state parks and recreation areas are available to guests at a 30 percent discount, Sunday-Thursday and excluding holiday time periods. Contact the state park reservation call center at 402-471-1414 or online at OutdoorNebraska.org.

Prep Your Gear for Ice Fishing

Throughout the month

Statewide

Before ice-up, make sure your gear is ready to go. Fisheries biologist Daryl Bauer recommends that you check that your hooks and auger blades are sharp, and take a look at your line. “Now is the time to replace monofilament and fluorocarbon lines,” he says. “The ‘super’ lines last a lot longer, but if you are using any of those for ice fishing you may want to fill spools or replace those lines as well.” Also, take inventory of your other ice fishing gear – outerwear, sleds, creepers, skimmers, heaters, pliers, etc. – and make sure you are good to go, making repairs and modifications as necessary, Bauer added.



Start Off Your Holiday Shopping with an Outdoor Gift

Throughout the month

Statewide

This year, give someone you love the opportunity to spend time outdoors and make memories all year long on fishing trips, weekend campouts or early morning hunts. State park, fishing and hunting permits can be ordered online at OutdoorNebraska.org or purchased at any of our offices. *NEBRASKAland* subscriptions and the 2019 *NEBRASKAland* calendar also make great gifts.

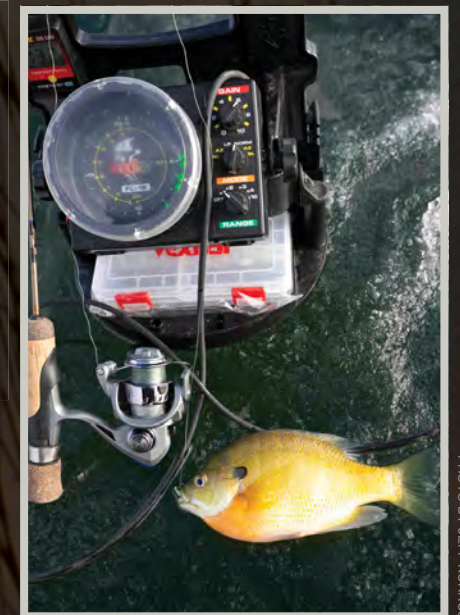


PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

AN UPLAND SLAM

...IN TWO DAYS

By Jeff Kurrus

Nebraska offers a unique variety of upland hunting opportunities.

The ultimate challenge? Bringing home a mixed bag of birds. Can you do it?

Only one way to find out.



Starting this fall, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, along with Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever, introduced the Nebraska Upland Slam. The concept is simple: harvest four birds – northern bobwhite quail, ring-necked pheasant, greater prairie-chicken and a sharp-tailed grouse – in Nebraska for an official certificate, pin, bragging rights and the chance to win prizes, including

Bob St. Pierre of Pheasants Forever looks over a rooster pheasant he shot in southwestern Nebraska. Photo by Doug Carroll.



Sharp-tailed grouse flush from a Sandhills prairie near Valentine. Photo by Eric Fowler.

a Browning Silver 12-gauge shotgun. *NEBRASKAland Magazine* wants hunters to take this a step further – try to accomplish this feat in two days. It can be done, but it will take some work. Start your planning right here.

Four Species

Northern bobwhite quail: Oct. 27, 2018 – Jan. 31, 2019 – Quail are at their highest populations in decades. In 2017, harvest was 44 percent higher than the 5-year average. Bobwhite quail are considered an “edge species,” meaning they can be found in areas where two or more habitats converge.

For example, where grasslands abut cropland or woodland habitat.

“During fall and winter, bobwhites don’t stray far from woody cover,” said Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Upland Habitat and Access Program Manager John Laux. “Another important habitat element is bare ground – many grasslands are too dense for quail.” Many hunters work their dogs along weedy ditches, fencelines and other marginal cover containing native shrub thickets or downed trees. “Aerial imagery is a great scouting tool for quail hunters,” said Laux. “You can locate woody escape cover along field edges and

really dial in where you need to spend your time afield.” Bobwhite densities are highest in southeastern Nebraska and west along the southern border with Kansas. That being said, quail populations have expanded into many other regions of the state (minus the extreme northwest) in recent years following several consecutive mild winters and improved habitat conditions.

Ring-necked pheasant: Oct. 27, 2018 – Jan. 31, 2019 – Ring-necked pheasants can be found in a mixture of habitats – ranging from open grasslands to wetlands to cropland fringes. Nebraska’s most sought-



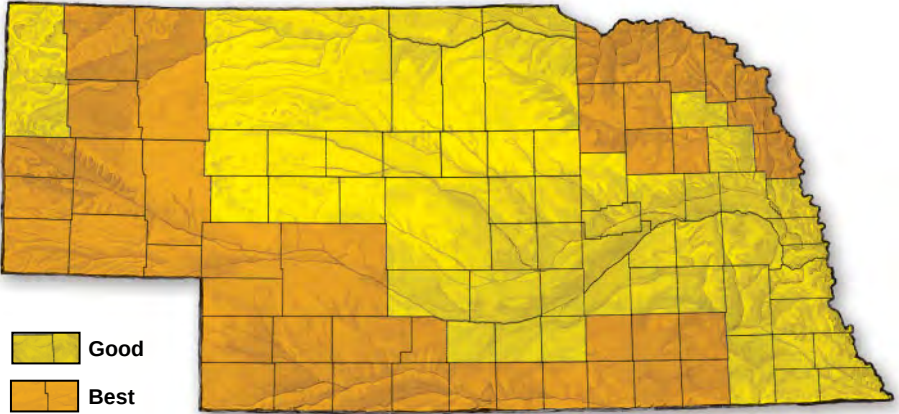
A rooster pheasant moves through short grass near Grabel Ponds at Fort Robinson State Park. Photo by Justin Haag.

after upland game species, pheasant populations are reliant upon proper habitat – undisturbed grasslands – and need this type of habitat on a large scale to maintain its numbers. Continued conversion of grassland to cropland and more efficient farming practices have greatly reduced the availability of pheasant habitat in many areas of the state. In recent decades, lands enrolled in CRP have become increasingly important to pheasants, especially in eastern Nebraska. Hunters should also focus on weedy pastures, unfarmed draws, and tall wheat and milo stubble fields. According to Laux, Nebraska’s highest pheasant densities can be found in southwestern Nebraska and portions of the panhandle. “These landscapes have quite a bit of CRP and are very diverse in terms of other cover types,” said Laux. “Crop rotations here include winter wheat, and this provides additional nesting cover for pheasants.” Most public hunting opportunities within these regions occur on private lands enrolled

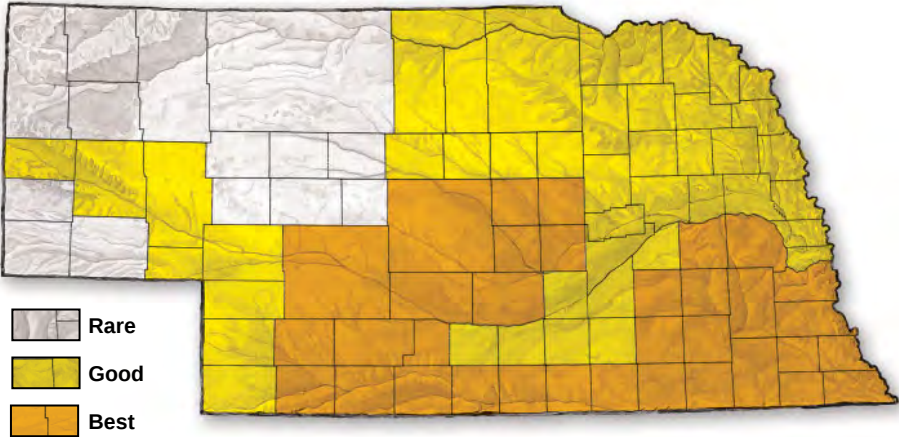
in the Commission’s Open Fields and Waters Program (OFW). Historically, Hitchcock, Hayes, Chase, and Perkins counties have offered some of the best pheasant opportunities in the Southwest. The southern panhandle (Cheyenne, Deuel, and Garden counties) also supports good pheasant numbers, and public access opportunities have been expanded in this region over the past several years. **Greater prairie-chicken:** Sept. 1, 2018 – Jan. 31, 2019 – Prairie-chickens prefer large tracts of undisturbed grasslands often with gently rolling topography but do occur in landscapes intermixed with cropland (more so than sharpies). This species tends to avoid trees and other obstructions and is typically more abundant in diverse grasslands with a high forb content. Like quail, chickens (and grouse for that matter) also tend to avoid dense grasslands. If you find yourself struggling to pick your feet up, you likely need to look elsewhere. Hunters typically walk the “tops” of ridges and use the topography to

their advantage. Although big running pointing dogs are often preferred for hunting wide open grasslands frequented by chickens and grouse, some of the most successful hunters have their dogs work close, creating more of a stalking than flushing mentality. Hunting prairie grouse early in the season is recommended as birds are more dispersed and tend to hold better for dogs. The central and eastern Sandhills represent the core of the prairie-chicken range in Nebraska, but some more isolated (and huntable) populations occur across southern Nebraska as well. In 2017, most of the Sandhills region experienced a widespread drought but prairie grouse populations are beginning to rebound following abundant precipitation throughout much of 2018. **Sharp-tailed grouse:** Sept. 1, 2018 – Jan. 31, 2019 – Sharptails can be found in higher, choppy dunes of the west-central Sandhills and their distribution extends out into portions of the panhandle as well. In many instances,

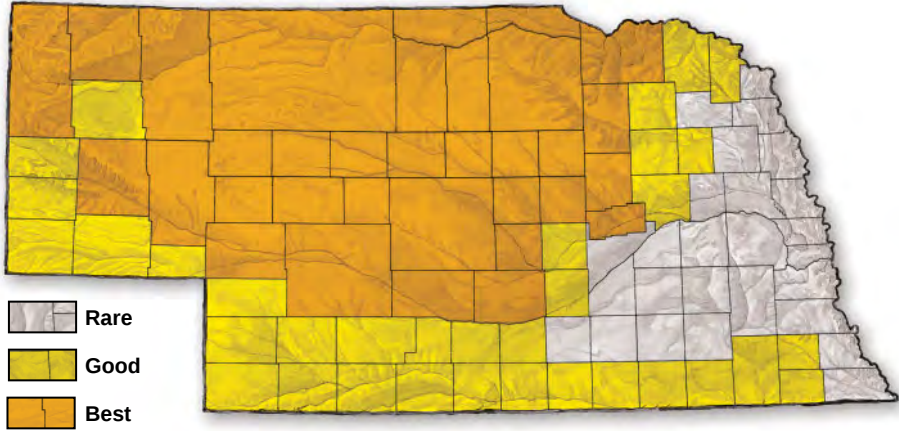
they can be found in the same habitat as prairie-chickens but are often a little more tolerant of woody vegetation. In the winter, sharpies bunch up and are often found in large thickets or linear tree rows. Higher proportions of grouse are found west of Highway 83 in the Sandhills, including Samuel R. McKelvie National Forest, Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), and even into the Pine Ridge region. Sharpies can also be found on some OFW lands in the southern panhandle as well. **Equipment** Dress in layers. To accomplish an upland slam in two days, 20 days, or something in between, being prepared to walk long distances is key with or without a dog. Have a base layer of non-cotton materials – such as polyester or a synthetic – with boots suited for these distances. Because grouse and chickens typically garner the most distance covered during



Pheasant Hunting Opportunities



Bobwhite Quail Hunting Opportunities



Grouse Hunting Opportunities

an upland hunt – with many hunters covering multiple miles during a day – it’s important to be ready for long days afoot. Drinking water is a must – for you and your dogs. Gun choice is also an important component to accomplishing the

upland slam. Because of these distances when hunting grouse and chickens, some hunters will carry lighter shotguns – such as a 20- or 16-gauge. Regarding loads, lead No. 6’s are a great universal load, but hunters



Ryan Sparks of Ontario – who grew up in Louisville, Nebraska – shows a bobwhite quail to his English pointer Tippet during a hunt in Cass County. Photo by Jeff Kurrus.

should also have lead 7½'s or 8's in their orange vest if a covey of quail are found.

Hunters should also bring a separate vest with steel only. Some areas – notably the Valentine and Crescent Lake NWRs where grouse are often found – require nontoxic shot. Steel No. 3's are a good multispecies load, and No. 6's are excellent for bobwhites when carrying a 12-gauge.

Planning Your Trip

There are probably a handful of areas within the state where all four upland

bird species could be encountered on a single hunt. Below I've provided a list of those premier honey holes – just kidding Realistically, there are quite a few places where 3 of the 4 coexist but you're likely going to have to travel to get that last bird.

North-Central Sandhills – State and federally-owned lands near Valentine provide some excellent mixed bag opportunities. The choppy uplands at Valentine NWR support a good mix of chickens and sharpies, and the dense cattail marshes offer a decent chance at a bonus ring-neck. Sharp-tails tend to dominate the bag farther

west at Samuel B. McKelvie National Forest and Merritt Reservoir Wildlife Management Area (WMA). Bobwhites are the challenge up here – you *might* find a handful of bobwhites around Merritt Reservoir but a better bet is to travel south and east to find some woody cover at the National Forest near Halsey or around Calamus Reservoir.

Western Sandhills/Panhandle – Out west, you're inevitably going to have to travel south or east for a chance at a bobwhite but don't overlook these upland hunting opportunities. Crescent Lake NWR is home to good

in moderate densities throughout the region but some of the best public land opportunities will be on some of the larger OFW tracts in Chase, Perkins, Lincoln and Hayes counties. Bobwhites are more prevalent to the east – target some of the OFW lands east of Highway 83 in Red Willow, Frontier, Furnas, Gosper and Harlan counties. Medicine Creek WMA near Cambridge and Harlan County Lake near Alma also support good numbers of bobwhites intermixed with some ring-necks. You'll likely have to travel a ways north to find your sharpies – look at Crescent Lake NWR, Halsey National Forest, or some of the OFW lands in the southern panhandle.

Southeastern Nebraska – This is prime quail country intermixed with some pheasant opportunities and even a bonus chicken. There are some excellent quail numbers on many of the state-owned WMAs and OFW lands throughout the region. To find a prairie-chicken here, focus on the larger tracts of open grasslands (which are limited in this region) in Thayer, Jefferson, Gage, Pawnee and Johnson

counties – and keep in mind you need a special grouse permit if you hunt east of Highway 81.

Regardless of how long it takes, completing an upland slam is a major accomplishment for a hunter, but it shouldn't be the only goal. Nebraska truly has some unique upland hunting opportunities in nearly every corner of the state and the best part is, many can be found on public lands. "The upland slam is meant to bring awareness to our excellent mixed bag opportunities, and also highlight our state's great public land resources that are available to everyone," said Laux.

After you purchase a small-game license and harvest your first bird, create an account at OutdoorNebraska.org/UplandSlam and submit a photograph and details about your first bird. Then continue to log back in and document your success. For more information on public places to upland hunt, visit OutdoorNebraska.org/PublicAccessAtlas. For information on the East Zone grouse permit, call 402-471-5410. ■



A prairie-chicken lands in a Sandhills meadow. Photo by Eric Fowler.

TWYLA HANSEN

THE INTERSECTION OF NATURE AND POETRY

By Renae Blum

“It was miles to anywhere and the center of our universe.” This is just one of many lines Nebraska State Poet Twyla Hansen has written as an ode to her childhood, growing up on her family’s small farm in northeastern Nebraska.

“I spent a lot of time outdoors,” Hansen says. “We didn’t have a television at that time. It was just a time to absorb the outdoors and the wildlife. I played in the fields and the barns and the pastures and made friends with all the animals.”

Today, she refers to a famous quote by Willa Cather to help explain why nature is such a presence in her work now: “Most of the basic material a writer works with is acquired before the age of 15.”

Hansen’s first book, *How to Live in the Heartland*, published in 1992, centered around the outdoors. “Ever since then I’ve always had poems about the outdoors,” she says.

Poems with titles like “Camping Along the Platte, Late June,” or “Watching the Perseids,” one assumes, would be pretty straightforwardly about one thing. But while many of Hansen’s poems begin with a description of an outdoor experience, they often lead into deeply personal musings on universal themes, such as the loss of friends or family members, the nature of change, religion, and the search for meaning.

“It’s not just about the outdoors,” she says. “It’s observations of nature that work their way into a creative narrative.”

With nature as a springboard, Hansen has found that she can tackle “all the big topics that have been written about,” such as change, loss and love. Through her poetry, Hansen has also found an avenue to advocate for causes she’s passionate about, such as conservation and protecting endangered species.

“You hear, ‘nature is dead,’ but I don’t believe that. You can’t ignore nature; this is our home, this is where everything comes from. So that’s my argument in my next book I’m working on,” Hansen says.

Hansen didn’t always know she could write. Spurred by an interest in plants, she earned a bachelor’s degree in horticulture and a master’s in agroecology. While working as a grounds manager at Nebraska Wesleyan University, Hansen took advantage of the free classes available to her as an employee, and was bitten by the writing bug during a poetry class.

She was also inspired by the down-to-earth writings of Nebraska poets Ted Kooser and William Kloefkorn. Unlike

the poetry by “dead European guys” she’d been exposed to growing up, “I could relate to what they were writing about,” she says. “I thought, ‘Wow, people can write about ordinary things. Maybe this could work.’ Sometimes that’s all it takes, is someone showing the way.”

Hansen is the first woman to serve as the Nebraska state poet. Her five-year term ends this year. Throughout her career, she has published seven books and nearly 250 individual poems in a wide variety of periodicals. Since 1993, Hansen has also traveled across the state many times giving poetry presentations through the Humanities Nebraska Speaker’s Bureau.

Aside from her busy professional life, Hansen enjoys spending time at home with her husband, Tom. “We have about an acre of land on the north edge of Lincoln, and it’s a wildlife habitat. So to me, I’m living with nature,” she says. “It’s a major part of my life.”

Hansen’s newest book, *Rock • Tree • Bird*, was published by The Backwaters Press in 2017. The following are a selection of her poems from that work. ■



LANE PHOTOGRAPHY

The Heron Is My Mother

There is stillness on the creek
below the footbridge where I stand,
though the water moves and leaves
bend in the wind along its banks
while birds cling to branches.

Today, in mist, I can barely see the heron
farther down, standing in the dark shallows,
a creek formed from others running into it,
then flowing together to cut its steep banks,
covering them with grass.

The heron
waits patient for the next small morsel
to nourish her, for the unfathomable signal
when she will gather her wings and disappear.
No matter how much I cry out to her,
she cannot hear.

Nor will she hesitate,
even when her eye catches mine
now so far in the distance. It will be
her time, and she will simply leave.

(first published in *South Dakota Review*)

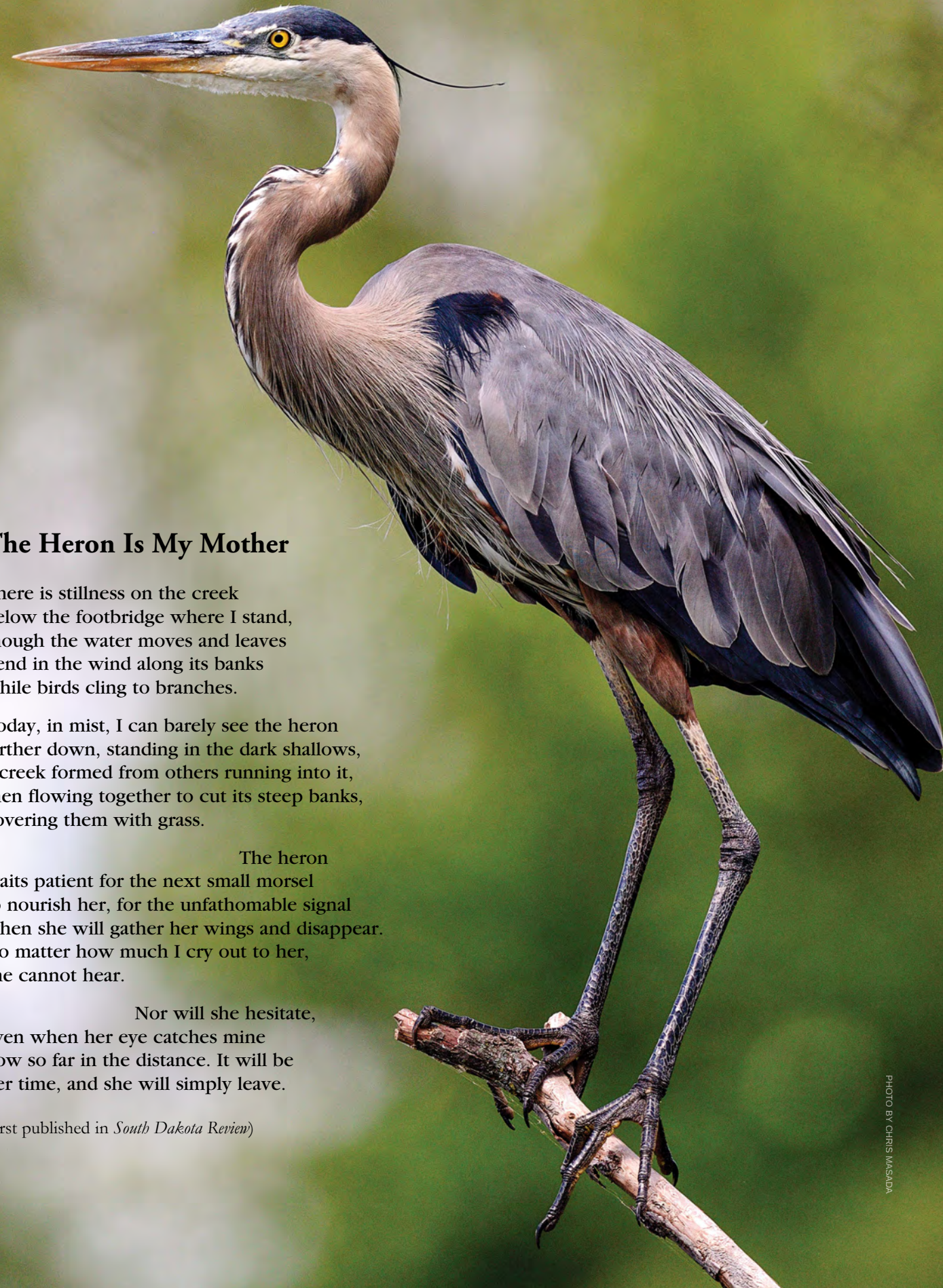


PHOTO BY CHRIS MASADA

How to Feed the Birds

Early morning, pull on boots, down, hat, and mittens. With arms full, step out back into snow, greet gusts straight from Saskatchewan, crunch-step on the empty shell mulch.

Fill each feeder—thistle, black-oiled, safflower—check the upside-down hanging suet as a woodpecker rattles hur-ry hur-ry up the ladder of trunk, and a chickadee-dee-dee seconds.

It's seven above: by degrees the sun muscles into day. With an ungloved hand, swish out the water in the heated dish, empty, refill, retreat to the house quick.

Rub your fingers above the stove, its warmth from the trees you planted. Watch the pine for movement, for the owls that might be nesting, their hoots of homing you've heard after dark.

Note the evergreens—the lofted bird hotels, the thicket now bare, revealing last year's nests. Watch for fur or feathers, tracks leading to the compost pile, now emptied of last night's scraps.

The birds return—black-capped, red-crowned, ladder-back, their blues and russets and golds. Even the sparrows, brown and nameless, bunch in approval. It's ten above: the fire pops and snaps.

Count your riches as you gaze toward the empty playhouse, swings and see-saw, until you hear the squeals and chatter, perceive their dim movements, the children who are now grown. Without blinking, stare until the sun

reflected off snow waters your eyes. Abandon the notion that you own one single thing.



PHOTO BY MATT ALBERTS



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER



PHOTO BY CHRIS MASADA

Flight

Not far off I-80 in central Nebraska
the last pinks of sunset go soft,
and overhead, waves of sandhill cranes
swell with melodious conversation.

They are returning from nearby fields
to overnight on the river; since late
afternoon we’ve stood in anticipation,
bundled on an old railroad bridge.

On approach, they slow their wingbeats,
extend their slender legs into the water,
give their feathers one more flap,
fold them against their ample bodies.

In the mass they are not alone, yet each mate
somehow knows the other’s distinct voice—
this vigil in the dark—digesting the day’s meal
for the lengthy journey ahead.

With the naked eye, there’s only restlessness
in the frigid channel. Through field binoculars
the group is animated, chattering, nervous,
the cacophony blunting all thought of speech.

I focus on one crimson mark on one small head.
A stiff breeze strokes the back of my neck.
If I move now so much as one muscle,
I might erupt into flight.

Fog

The fog comes as a surprise, forms in silence
overnight, so when you part the curtain
a white blur muffles the known world.

Moving through, no escape, every last
green leaf dotted silver, last night’s
moisture glistens on grass tips,

until you cross the footbridge and stop:
below is a world that most will miss,
vehicles in a rush to somewhere else,

fifty yards down the creek a heron
poises in shallow water perfectly still,
grassy banks lined with tracks of deer,

on the far side a dozen wild turkeys
cross a mowed clearing one by one
to fence line and then to field to forage,

and overhead, in this ground-cloud, calls
of Canada geese come in for a landing
which you can hear but not yet see,

because this old planet still has a few tricks
in its bag, a monkey wrench or two to make
us pay attention, to slow down, as drivers

do, the whine of tires on pavement muted,
and as you turn back the fog clears, yet
all day you hold this other world close.

(first published in *Panophy: A Literary Zine*)



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

*All poems copyright ©Tnyla M. Hansen
Poems from Rock • Tree • Bird (The Backwaters Press, 2017)
2018 winner, Nebraska Book Award in Poetry, Nebraska Center for the Book
Winner 2018 WILLA Literary Award, Women Writing the West
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Diving Nebraska

By Cara Pesek
Photos by Eric Fowler

As Dean Hollis began to think about how he wanted to spend his retirement, his thoughts kept returning to the water.

Hollis grew up in Florida “on, in and under the water.” When a career with ConAgra brought him to landlocked Omaha, he continued to spend time scuba diving, swimming, boating and water skiing. When he retired as Conagra’s Chief Operating Officer in 2008, he imagined opening a tiki-themed dive shop with Adirondack chairs in the storefront of a shopping center.

After spending a career in business, though, Hollis couldn’t open a shop without first doing his research. He talked to hundreds of dive shops, and as he did, he began to revise his plan. The small shop he envisioned grew larger and larger. The services it offered multiplied.

In 2009, he opened DiVentures, a full-service scuba shop at 4303 S. 121st Plaza in Omaha. There, customers can become scuba-certified, rent and buy equipment, take swimming lessons and book scuba trips to places like Cozumel, Cuba, Fiji and the Galapagos. “You won’t find a scuba shop like this anywhere in North America,” Hollis said. “It’s a one-stop shop.”

Nearly a decade after opening,

DiVentures certifies more scuba divers than any other shop in North America, Hollis said. After realizing Omaha had a shortage of swimming schools, Hollis began offering lessons for both youth and adults.

Now thousands of students learn to swim at DiVentures each year, first becoming acquainted with the basics of water safety and, in many cases, eventually becoming scuba-certified. Hollis has expanded from one location to six throughout the Midwest. In the process, Hollis has become a player in both local and international aquatic awareness, education and conservation efforts.

On the surface, the success of DiVentures may seem strange. A bustling scuba school in the most landlocked state in the nation? To Hollis, though, the success of DiVentures makes a lot of sense. Surveys have shown that over 40 percent of people would like to learn to scuba dive, Hollis said. Less than 1 percent actually do. Naturally, the opportunities to learn are slimmer in places like Nebraska, which lack pristine beaches and clear lakes, than in places situated on large bodies of water. There was a need, and Hollis was happy to fill it.

Just as Hollis didn’t plan to open

Scuba instructor Ron Gorake leads students Andrew VanVooren and Allison Schubert of Lincoln and Kenzi Schneringer of Callaway in lessons at DiVentures.





Dean Hollis grew up “on, in and under the water.” In 2009, he founded DiVentures.

a chain of swim and scuba schools, he didn’t plan to become an aquatic conservationist. Shortly after DiVentures opened, Hollis began organizing dive trips for his scuba students. The divers were interested in the fish and other aquatic creatures they saw beneath the water, so Hollis began inviting marine biologists and researchers from the places they visited to talk about the species and

ecosystems the divers got to see. These talks were a hit, Hollis said. The divers were rapt. They asked questions. Inevitably, one of those questions was “what can I do?” Visiting a place – even just once – and seeing an underwater environment that most people don’t, had a strong impact on many of the divers. “It’s hard to convince someone to conserve something they haven’t seen,”

said Hollis. They had seen the fish, the sea turtles, the coral reefs. Now they cared about them. Hollis saw an opportunity here, too. He began working more closely with the biologists and researchers who had talked to his students, and he found opportunities for divers to aid researchers in their conservation efforts.



Thousands of youth and adult students take swimming lessons at the DiVentures Omaha location each year.



DiVentures offers swimming lessons, scuba certification, equipment rental, travel packages and much more.

DiVentures divers have tagged sea turtles, hammerhead sharks and great white sharks so researchers can track these animals and learn more about their migration habits and other behaviors. DiVentures staff are working with the Henry Doorly Zoo in Omaha on a coral propagation program, in which divers there will painstakingly place coral on the ocean floor. These trips make divers feel like they’re helping do their part. Additionally, Hollis has found that his customers value once-in-a-lifetime experiences like these over just about anything they could buy. “Do you want to buy something, or do you want to tag a great white shark?” Hollis asked. “How many people would love to say they tagged a great white shark?” All of these things – the research trips, the talks, the act of experiencing underwater landscapes – help amplify the message of conservation. “All those little barks turn into one big roar,” Hollis said. Locally, Hollis is involved in education and conservation efforts, too. DiVentures participated in the 2018 Missouri River Outdoor Expo at Ponca State Park, conducting a program introducing visitors to snorkeling and scuba diving.

Additionally, DiVentures donated funds to help renovate the Aksarben Aquarium at Schramm Park State Recreation Area. The renovated aquarium and nature center will open next year as part of the Venture Parks project, which aims to bring innovative and unique features to four different parks along the Platte River: Schramm Park State Recreation Area, Louisville State Recreation Area, Platte River State Park and Eugene T. Mahoney State Park. The Venture Parks program is funded in large part by private donors, like DiVentures. “Dean (Hollis) has built a culture where his customers are curious, they’re engaged with the natural world, and they’re inspired to help conserve an environment that is important to them for future generations. That mission is really parallel to ours,” said Jim Douglas, director of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. DiVentures may not be the small, tiki dive shop that Hollis initially envisioned running in retirement. But he’s doing what he loves, he’s helping others do the same, and his business is inspiring Nebraskans to learn and care about ecosystems they might not otherwise see. “It’s pretty neat to be doing this from Omaha,” Hollis said. ■

Rock Steady

Respect for rocks.

By Roger Welsch

If you have followed my previous Page 49 efforts in *NEBRASKAland*, you may know I am a sucker for a pretty rock. I’ve been stuck in the Paleolithic era since I was a little kid. The principal reason we have to replace washing machines and dryers around here is because of what Linda calls “Rog’s R.I.P. (Rocks-in-Pockets) Syndrome.” My idea of heaven is the rock pile at a Nebraska gravel pit. So I was surprised last summer when I saw requests from our Game and Parks folks that people stop putting painted rocks, often with what I guess were meant to pass as inspirational messages, in various recreation areas around the state. Why would anyone paint a rock? Frankly, I’ve never encountered a rock that wasn’t already inspirational pretty much as it lay there in the water, or sun, or ... well, a Nebraska gravel pit rock pile. I’ve certainly never seen one that needed cosmetic painting to be interesting.

Consider for a moment the chemical constituents of most rocks – calcium, iron, magnesium, phosphorous, potassium, zinc, sodium ... minerals. Know what else is made of things like that? Us! We are, after all, of the same origins, whether you are of a biblical bent (Adam = earth אָדָמָה), scientific (see above), or lyric (“...we are stardust, we are golden...”). Diamonds, emeralds, shiny rocks, round rocks, big rocks, little rocks ... All the same stuff more or less.

For 65 years of my long life, however, I have associated with Indians and so I’ve had a chance to see life from vantage points not always common in the mainstream culture. A rose may be a rose may be a rose, but a rock is not always a rock. Try this one on for size: rocks are not just like us in being made of the same gathering of minerals in different combinations, but in the minds of some of my best friends, they are also like us in that they are living entities. I know ... not an easy idea to accept, especially for those – way too many in my opinion – who spend their hours, days, and lives in a culture that doesn’t even consider trees to be living beings.

Not to mention sentient! When I am with Pawnee, Lakota, or Omaha friends and we gather plant materials, we often talk with the plants to explain why we are injuring it, that we appreciate the sacrifice, will take no more of it than we need, that what we are doing is for a good purpose, and of course that we are grateful. This point of view says not so much about the things around us like trees and rocks, but about us and how we see ourselves in relationship to and with those “things.”

Now, if you can imagine being a tree hugger like me, take another step and try to get your head around showing that kind of respect to a rock. As a fellow being, I guess it depends on how integral one considers him or herself to be with what is around us, whether that be animal, plant or mineral.



Jan Simek, in an unnamed cave, examines prehistoric cave art.

It is easy to understand that we put words and symbols we want to last well beyond our “all too mortal flesh” – tombstones, runes, hieroglyphs, for example, or statues, or even entire carved mountains, but what are we to make of things carved into stone that we not only no longer understand but ... that might not have been intended for us to read anyway?

I have recently encountered some remarkable examples of these expressions, of other-directed messages, or ... ?

Jan Simek of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Anthropology Department has reported some remarkable observations and conclusions in his work in rock “art,” especially in caves in eastern states. (And thanks to old friend Ben Swadley for passing this information along to me!) Prof. Simek has found “messages” painted on or carved onto deep cave walls and ceilings that are oriented in such a way that they can’t possibly be seen or “read” by human observers. That is, they were not installed with the intention of someone in the cave to see them. Perhaps with a perspective that could only be grasped by “someone” further way from the wall or overhang than is possible for anyone to achieve. Or in some really stunning examples, “messages” that are mirror images intended not for someone facing the images but, well...er... behind them? Simek’s conclusion: The messages aren’t meant to be read by someone in the cave or outside the rock. They are meant for the spirits inside the rock!

How’s *that* for a kick in the fanny?

So the next time you pitch a rock into the pond or decide to improve on it by painting a bit of doggerel on it, please think again and consider the sensitivities of what’s inside that rock! ■

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 and has been contributing to *NEBRASKAland Magazine* since 1977.



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Venison Chili

Cooked with red wine, this is the best chili you will ever taste.

By Ryan Sparks

I would venture to say this is not only the best venison chili you will find, but the best chili you will ever taste, period. It differs from other chili recipes in its red wine base. Don't spend a fortune on the wine, but get a robust variety like malbec or cabernet sauvignon that will hold up to the spices. Serve with a dollop of sour cream and corn bread. As with most chili, it is even better the next day.

Servings: 8-10

Prep Time: 20 minutes

Cooking Time: 1 hour

Ingredients:

- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter
- Red onion, chopped
- 4 cloves garlic, crushed and minced
- 4 tablespoons dark brown sugar
- 3 cups red wine plus more for deglazing
- 4 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 4 tablespoons tomato paste
- 4 cups unsalted chicken stock
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- ½ teaspoon cayenne pepper plus more if you like your chili spicy
- ½ teaspoon chili power
- 10 slices bacon, diced
- 2 pounds ground venison
- 2 cups black beans, cooked and drained
- Salt to taste
- Sour cream

1. Over medium heat, melt the butter in a large pot or Dutch oven. Stir in the onion and garlic, sautéing until the onions start to become translucent, about 5 minutes. Stir in the brown sugar and sauté for several more minutes. Then stir in the red wine, vinegar, tomato paste, chicken stock, cumin, cayenne pepper, chili powder, and salt. Simmer until the mixture is reduced by half, about 45 minutes.

2. While the wine base is reducing, add the bacon to a large cast iron pan over medium/high heat. Cook the bacon until browned and then



PHOTO BY RYAN SPARKS

push it to the back of the pan. Add a quarter of the ground venison, stirring and breaking lumps with a wooden spoon between each addition. Adding the meat gradually allows the excess water and liquid to evaporate, which is key for the meat to caramelize properly. Once the meat is cooked, add a quarter more of the meat, stirring and breaking lumps as you go. Repeat with the remaining meat. When the meat is cooked and no lumps remain, set a timer to 10 minutes and keep cooking the meat, stirring from time to time. You want the meat to caramelize and even become crispy in spots. Golden bits of meat will stick to the bottom of the pot, which you will deglaze with

wine later. Watch over the pan as you don't want the meat to burn.

3. Add a large splash of wine to the pan. With a flat wooden spoon, scrape all the brown bits from the bottom. Push the meat around and make sure you scrape it all off. By the time you're finished, the wine will have evaporated. Be careful not to let the meat stick to the pot again – lower the heat if necessary. Stir in the beans and toss together. Taste for salt.

4. Once the wine base has reduced by half, mix everything together and let it simmer for another 20 minutes. ■

Ryan Sparks is a regular contributor to NEBRASKAland Magazine.



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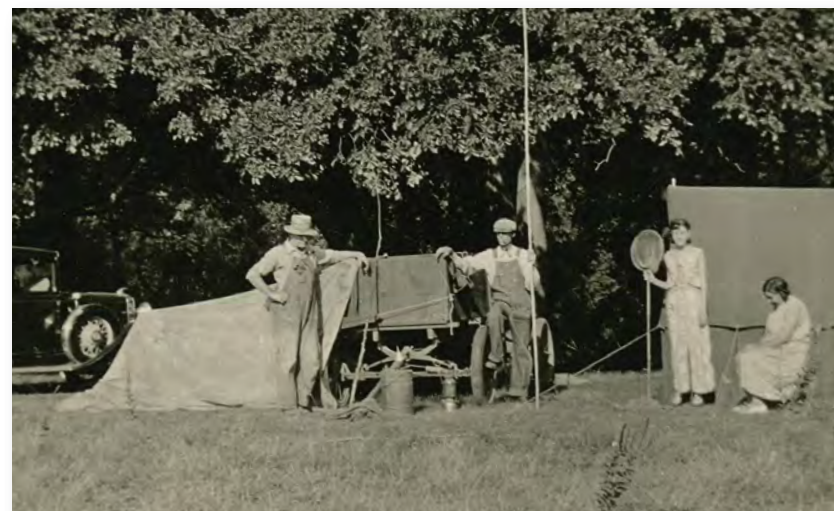
► Appearing in the 1968 issue of The Western Horseman magazine was my father Albert Simants (right) with Ray Henry, my brother-in-law – both from the North Platte area.

This was from the Letters section of the magazine and was referencing an article “Last of the Cody Wolves.”

On a ranch 18 miles from North Platte, the men were on the fall roundup when they saw a coyote and gave chase, finally getting a rope on him. He is alive in the picture, but frightened, so he laid down and tried to hide.

My dad owned hounds and had hunted coyotes many times. At one time, coyotes were a real problem to ranchers and newborn calves. There used to be a bounty for them in Lincoln County.

– Shirley Sawyer, McCook, Nebraska



Our mother Doris holds a net. Also pictured are her aunt Annie, uncle Martin and her father, Frank.



Camping in the Sandhills, 1927.



Grandma Emma Murphy and Aunt Annie Peters showing off their fish.

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



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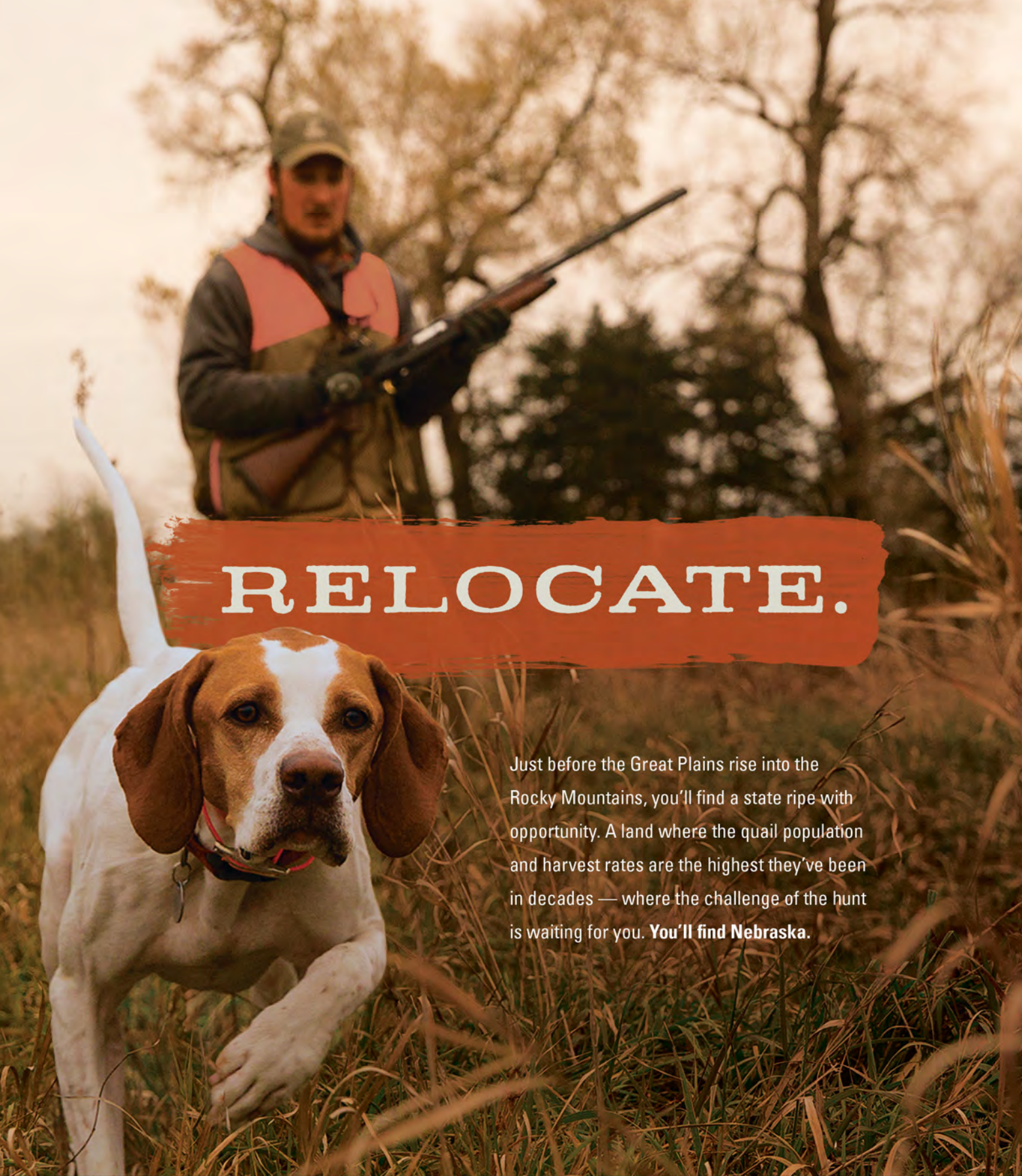
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Education is the backbone that supports the entire structure. In 2018, the Nebraska chapter supported various local activities, including high school shooting sports. We also initiated our Take a Kid Outside program, the first of what is to become an annual event.

We have also worked with Safari Club on a national level to support the American Wilderness Leadership School near Jackson, Wyoming, which equips educators worldwide with essential tools and knowledge on promoting outdoor activities.

Protection of the hunter is another reason to join. Safari Club International monitors legislation in Nebraska and nationwide that affects sportsmen, and stands ready to act at a moment's notice. If litigation is necessary, our team is second to none in fighting for sound scientific-based management and sustainable-use conservation. We support legislators locally and nationally who work to protect hunting and other outdoor activities.

Conservation of habitat and wildlife is also an important mission to our members. Throughout the years we have supported many Nebraska conservation projects, such as



The Nebraska chapter of Safari Club International holds events throughout the year.

river otter recovery and Smith Falls access. We were also among the original sponsors of bighorn sheep reintroduction. We look forward to continuing a long relationship with Nebraska supporting wildlife and habitat.

On a national level, Safari Club International has funded and supported wildlife conservation throughout the world. We have worked with many countries to develop and implement programs that support wildlife management and to increase opportunities for everyone to enjoy the outdoors.

But most of all, many join us for the fellowship. Our events — sporting clays, dinner parties, presentations — have fostered lifelong friendships and hunting partnerships.

We invite you to join us on Jan. 25-26, 2019, at the Beardmore Event Center in Bellevue for our annual convention and expo. We will have exhibitors from many countries, and there will be something for everyone. More details coming soon!

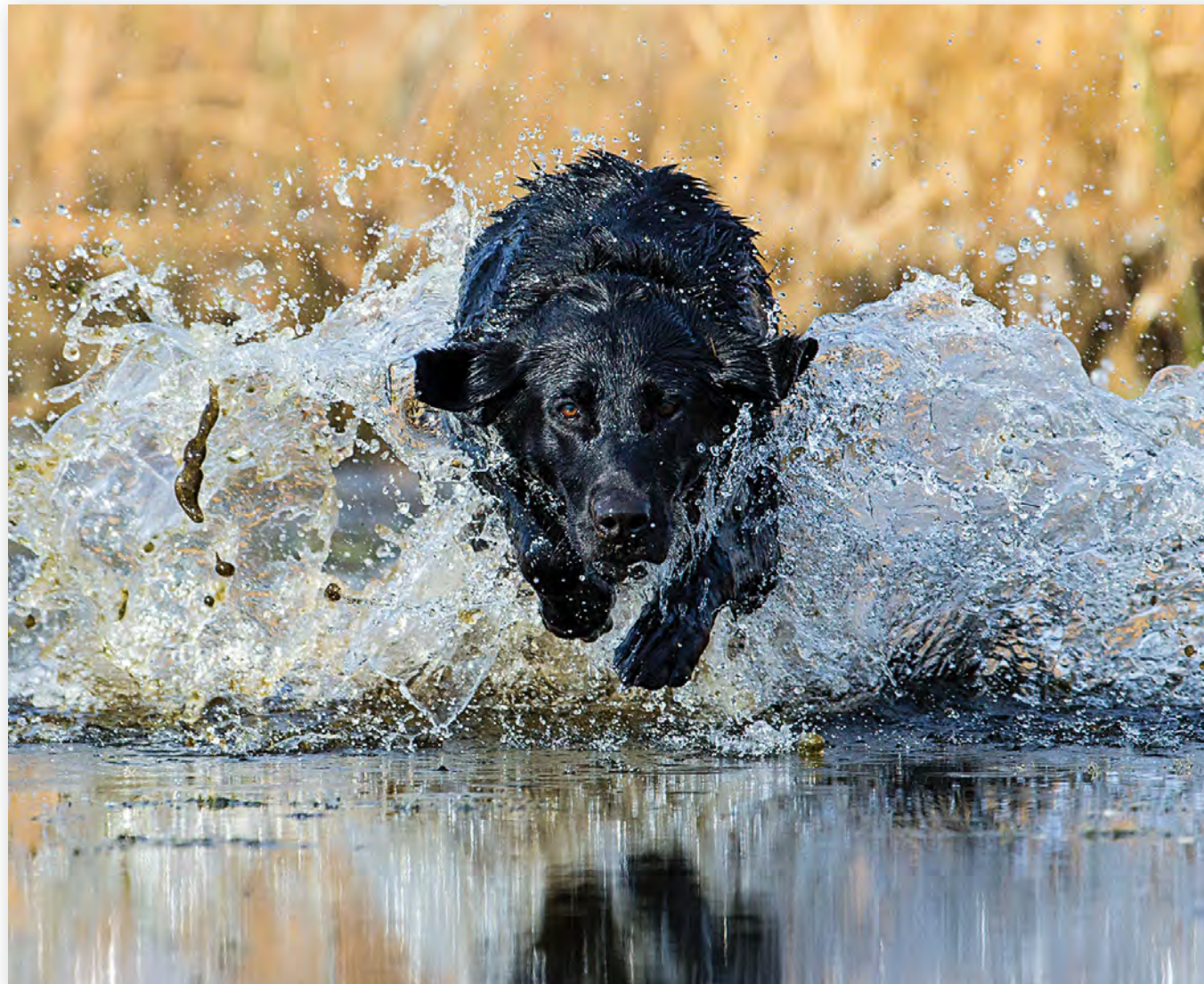
For information about the Nebraska Chapter of Safari Club International, contact Mary Middleton at 402-214-8270 or nebraska.safariclubint@gmail.com.

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Dogged Work

There is no better time to work than when a dog wants to play. This was the case when making photos of Todd Mills's Labrador retriever, Hope, following a waterfowl hunt last season.

The first rule of dog photography is to lower yourself to the dog's eye-level. The second rule is to keep clicking until your cards run out of memory.

Rarely will dogs run out of patience before you do, which makes them so much better than human models, who start to stare at you a bit funny when you ask them to walk up and down a trail for the fifth time. "Make sure you're smiling," you'll add.

A dog doesn't need to smile for you to know she's happy.

The shoot is a constant switch of shutter speeds and

focal distance, trying to capture all the movement and intensity inherent in any good hunting dog. But you don't want *too* much movement or *too* much intensity; you also want to *stop* water droplets exploding in all directions.

The great part about a shoot like this is that it's never perfect. There is always just a bit more – or less – movement than I want.

But this imperfection is a good reason to once again head for the duck blind with a hunting buddy with an enthusiastic, photogenic, and patient dog/model.

Good thing is the model is hoping for the same thing. ■

Jeff Kurrus
October 1, 2018



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