



A prairie wild rose pokes through matted grass on a south facing slope overlooking Merritt Reservoir in Cherry County. Photo by Bill Hager.

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GOLF WEEK 2012

NEBRASKAland Magazine

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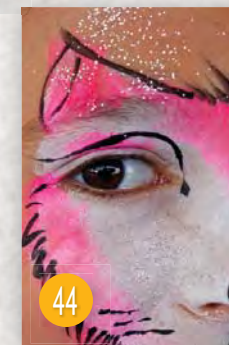
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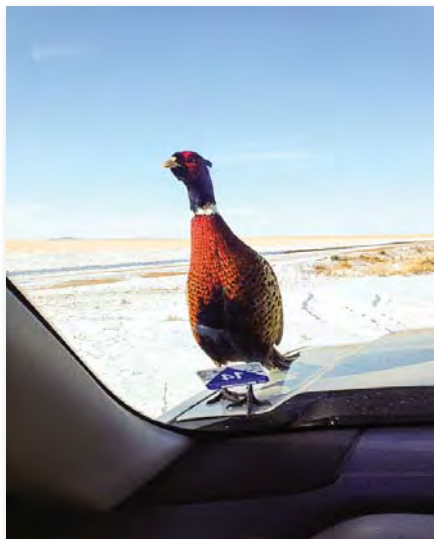
ON THE WEB...



When you see this symbol in the pages of NEBRASKAland Magazine, visit NebraskalandMagazine.com and view our interactive digital edition for more information.



Cover: Horses greet the sunrise from their pasture at Fort Robinson State Park near Crawford. See story on page 24. Photo by Jenny Nguyen.



Pet Pheasant

I have raised many pheasants, but I never had one like this one. He would eat out of my hand and follow me around the farm wherever I went. One day when I got in my pickup to leave, he jumped on my hood.

Keep up the great work!
Darrin Duba
Ogallala, Nebraska

Loaded Grandpa

Had to send this photo of my 87-year old father that my brother brings down from South Dakota to go crappie fishing every year. Over the years, it's been increasingly hard for him to walk the shore or get in the boat. We found the solution for easy loading, just have him sit in loader and into the boat and



Elwood "Mick" Dede gets loaded before fishing with son (left) Terry Dede and great-grandson Brody Smith of Norfolk.

then back the boat into the lake. Plenty of crappie were caught that day and added to more memories of fishing and hunting with my father.

Pictured (left) are me, my father Elwood "Mick" Dede, and his great-grandson Brody Smith.

Terry Dede
Norfolk, Nebraska

Destination: Missed

Just read and enjoyed the "Destination: Nebraska" article from the March 2014 issue. I think you missed a few: Callaway's Kite Festival over the Labor Day weekend, Nebraska City's Applejack Festival in September, and in my hometown of Hastings, Prairie Loft's Flatwater Music Festival at the end of June.

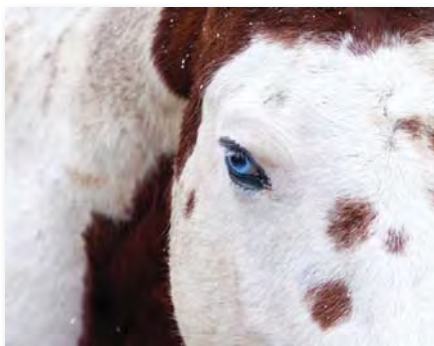
Kathy Rysiew
Hastings, Nebraska

Ole' Blue Eyes

Would you please give the information below to Jenny Nguyen? She might be interested in how Bandit came to have blue eyes and their historical significance.

Horse traders call blue eyes in a horse "glass eyes," and a horse with glass eyes brings a higher price in the sale barn. Forgotten in the bid calling and gavel-pounding of the auction ring is the true value of a pinto pony or horse with those rare, blue eyes.

A descendant of the Spanish Barb brought to America in the 1600s,



the pinto is our first wild mustang. Indians in Nebraska lands first captured their wild mustangs from 1700-1725 and began breeding for stamina, camouflage and hunting ability. They found these qualities in a blue-eyed pinto having both ears brown and with brown across the top of the head, sort of a cap. Plains Indians called it "Medicine Cap." U.S. Calvary dubbed it "War Bonnet."

The Sioux, Cheyenne, Blackfeet and Comanches thought the blue-eyed pinto with a medicine hat was sacred, giving the warrior great power in battle. They aggressively bred for this war horse.

There are no pure pintos left. Even the term "pinto" means something different in our language today. But the strain endures. When you are privileged to look into the clear blue eyes of a brown and white pinto with pink skin having some semblance of a medicine cap, like that of Bandit, you are richly and with rarity, rewarded a true glimpse into history.

Brenda Flinn
via e-mail

Visitor Origin?

It looks like the visitor insect this month is a robber fly (diogmites) on page 30.

This is a fun activity every month, and I invariably learn about all kinds of other bugs during my Google search. Several minutes of learning usually follows the "Ooooh, what is *that* bug?" when I'm looking through lists of candidates.

I apologize if you've covered this recently, but I think people would find it interesting if you had a small article about the origin of this contest. I've always wondered how long you've been doing this, who came up with the idea and why, and if the prize has

always been a mug.

As always, you all do a great job with the magazine. I love the digital edition as well!

Scott Cooper
Stillwater, Oklahoma

Thank you Scott for your kind words. We have been doing this contest since a box elder bug first appeared in the December, 2009 issue.

The idea originated from our contributing editor Michael Forsberg. If I remember correctly, he mentioned seeing it in another magazine (perhaps Scientific America?) where they used the same image (an ant?) and hid it every month for readers to find.

We thought about this and decided that we like to make things hard for ourselves and so we wanted to do a different bug/critter every issue and then draw a winner from entries for a prize – which has been a mug.

The very first mugs were done at Walmart and had the box elder on them and said "NEBRASKAland Visitor" on them (see accompanying image). These were not ideal and so we decided to use the same NEBRASKAland mugs from the Gift Catalogs – first the black ones, and now the ones with the ram's head.

Thank you again for writing and for reading NEBRASKAland Magazine.

Tim Reigert
NEBRASKAland Art Director

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 for clarity. Photographs are welcome and will be returned.

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NEBRASKA GAME & PARKS

Killer Flowers

By Chris Helzer

Thistles, despite their reputation with many landowners, are not all noxious weeds. In fact, half of the 10 thistle species in Nebraska are native wildflowers, and both the native and non-native species are of great value to many insects and wildlife species. Thistle flowers are one of the most important sources of nectar for pollinator insects. For example, goldfinches, other birds and numerous insect species rely on thistle seeds as a major food source. While thistles might not be the most popular of plants among people, they are a universal bonanza of goodness for animals. Or at least that was the story I told everyone until I started finding evidence of something a little less friendly.

Over the last couple years, I've been noticing quite a few dead and dying insects stuck to the lower portions of thistle flowers, especially on Flodman's and wavy-leaf thistles. At first, I thought the insects were being impaled by the numerous spines on that part of the plant, but they weren't. Instead, they were trapped by a very sticky substance on the surface of the flower itself. The more I've looked, the more dead insects I've found. Ants are by far the most common victim, but I've also seen flies, bees, spiders and others.

Because I'm a scientist, I've been wondering if thistles gain any evolutionary advantage from having

sticky flowers. It's possible the death of all those insects is just an unfortunate accident, but I suspect not. After discussing this with several colleagues, there are two theories I like best, though there are lots of other possibilities.

The first theory is that the stickiness helps prevent ants from stealing nectar from thistle flowers. Because ants like to eat nectar but don't carry pollen to other flowers, they essentially steal nectar from thistle flowers without providing anything in return. Trapping those ants before they crawl up to the nectar might help ensure an abundance of nectar for insects that actually provide pollination services. The second theory is that the adhesive

Two ants and a bee are stuck to the sticky portion of a Flodman's thistle flower in a Hamilton County prairie. The ants were probably trapped on their way toward the nectar-producing portion of the flower. The unfortunate bee likely saw the underside of the flower as a safe place to spend the night out of sight from predators.

substance helps deter attacks from beetles, flies or other seed-eating insects trying to lay eggs on or burrow into the thistle head. It would make sense that a thistle would benefit from trapping those insects before they can get to the seeds.

Regardless of why the flowers are sticky, I've had to change the story I tell about thistles. Now, I explain that thistle flowers are both a provider of bountiful food and a perilous death trap. And really, that's a better story anyway. ■

PHOTO BY CHRIS HELZER

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Mixed Bag

Travelogue

By Amy Kucera

Aurora: Tour a Prairie Town

Located a few miles north of Interstate 80, Aurora invites travelers to slow down and explore the unique history and attractions in this charming prairie town.

The **Twin Cottonwoods Memorial** is all that remains of the trees that were a landmark at the site that was platted and named Hamilton County seat in 1871. Constructed in 1884-85, the **Hamilton County Courthouse and Square** includes a historic bandstand and Veteran's Memorial walkway.

The **Plainsman Museum** focuses on the history of central Nebraska from 1860-1950 and includes a replica sod house and log cabin, miniature main street reproduction and agricultural building that houses a large collection of vintage farm machinery, horse-drawn implements and automobiles.

The **Edgerton Explorit Center** teaching museum, built in honor of famed inventor and former resident Dr. Harold Edgerton, inspires all ages to have a hands-on experience through live science demonstrations.

The **Prairie Plains Resource Institute** has been celebrating the land and its people since 1980 and recently planted its 10,000th acre of high-diversity local ecotype prairie. Their beautiful **Charles L. Whitney Education Center**, a remodeled barn featuring classrooms with lab space, library, gallery and more, is on its final phase of construction on the **Griffith Prairie Preserve**.

Three city parks, **Refshauge**, **Cole** and **Streeter**, also offer a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities.

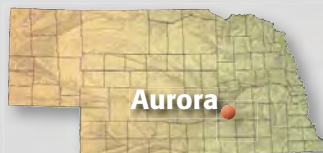
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This historic barn became the **Charles L. Whitney Education Center**.



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Dog Etiquette

By Cristina Woodworth

House pets are allowed at all Nebraska State Park campgrounds, but it is the responsibility of pet owners to be sure they are aware of all policies and regulations before they visit an area.

State parks have restrictions on which buildings and cabins pets are allowed to enter. Pets cannot be left unattended and must be restrained by a leash at least 6 feet long. Be sure to check that your pet's identification tags include contact information and all shots are up to date.

Avoid high-use times at campgrounds if your pet isn't well-accustomed to meeting strangers and other animals. This would include summer weekends, holiday breaks and during other special events at state parks and recreation areas.

Introduce yourself and your pet to your campsite neighbors when you arrive. Let them know that your pet is well-behaved and won't cause any problems during their stay. See if they have any concerns, such as allergies, that might make you use extra caution with your pet during your stay.

Find the nearest 24-hour veterinarian or animal hospital to your campsite just in case something happens. After your trip, you should also thoroughly check your pet for ticks or other insects they might have picked up over the weekend. ■



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Dutch Oven Tips

By Nebraska Outdoor U!

Dutch oven cooking not only provokes thoughts to colonial day cooking, but its results are unrivaled around the camp fire. Here are a few tips to get you started.

- When purchasing a Dutch oven, look for ovens that are pre-seasoned and have a lip/brim on the lid so you can remove the lid without letting any coal slide into your food. They should also have three legs, which will allow your oven to set steady and level with coals under it.
- Never use soap when cleaning your Dutch oven, because it will remove the seasoning. Do not use metal utensils, as they could scrape the seasoning off; a good wooden spoon works best.
- Use the size of your oven as a guide for the amount of charcoal briquettes you need to cook with. Place two more than the size of the oven on top and two less on the bottom at 300 degrees Fahrenheit. Example: a 12-inch oven should have 14 briquettes on the top and 10 on the bottom; this will allow the food to cook evenly. Then add a brick on top and bottom for every 25 degree temperature increase.
- When baking breads, pizzas or pies, place a tortilla in the bottom of the oven to prevent scorching.

- If steam is escaping out of your Dutch oven while cooking, you are either cooking with too much heat or your lid is not properly seated. This will result in dry or burnt food. Try reseating your lid or removing some coals to remedy this problem.

- It is wise to cook over hot coals instead of an open flame, because not only are the coals a much more efficient heat source, they also tend to not leave a black film of creosote on your cook ware.
- To cook top notch, flavorful meats in a Dutch oven, start by adding oil, bacon or other high fat content to the bottom of your oven, then add meat and use this hot oil to sear the meat on all sides to lock in the natural flavor. Then drain off the fat drippings and continue seasoning and cooking your meat to perfection.

Join our community at OutdoorU.org. Hone your skills, set goals and challenge your friends. ■



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS



Employee Paul Wilson pulls himself hand over hand to the power plant, bringing a hand line for a telephone cable car to rescue the men.

A Brief History The Republican River Flood of 1935

By David Bristow, Nebraska State Historical Society

Flood waters rushed down the Republican River Valley on the morning of May 31, 1935, after a day of torrential rains. Eyewitnesses described a wall of water three to eight feet tall, moving 10 miles per hour when it passed Trenton. Soon the river was running bluff-to-bluff. More than a hundred people died before the waters subsided two days later. It remains one of the worst natural disasters in Nebraska history.

Some of the most dramatic photos of the flood come from the Nebraska Power & Light Company plant in McCook, where forty men were trapped on the roof. The first warning came at 4 a.m., when workers were called in to fill sandbags to protect the power plant. As the hours passed, the men couldn't keep up with the rising water.

"Word was received from the chief dispatcher's office that the water had risen at a rate of two feet in 10

minutes in Culbertson," plant worker Louis B. Wolf recalled. Even so, local businessmen pleaded for the men "not to let the plant go down regardless of what happens."

So the men stayed. They shut down power to the city at 10:50 a.m. As the water rose, some men climbed to the roof, but others were trapped inside. The men on top tore a hole in the roof so everyone could climb up. "We saw a crowd of people on the banks some 400 feet away, our wives, mothers, fathers and friends," Wolf writes. "Under normal conditions, we could have conversed, but the loud roar of the water made it impossible."

The swift current prevented anyone from swimming to shore. But how long would the building withstand the torrent of water?

Someone came up with a plan to use the power lines that connected the plant to dry land. First, someone shot the insulators off one of the wires. "To this, a large rope was attached and we on the roof pulled it to the power plant," Wolf writes. "A telephone cable car and land-line were brought over on the rope so that we could pull the cart to and from the land."

"Two men were thus transferred from

the roof to the land. As we were about to start the third man the water washed out the poles and the employee [Robert French] on the H frame near the plant dived into the flood. By his skillful swimming, he succeeded in reaching a point near land about one-fourth of a mile below, where he was thrown a rope and rescued."

There were no more rescue attempts that day. The men waited on the roof until the water receded the following day. Then they "waded out to a sandbar near the cooling tower, a large boat was brought to us and from then on, trips were made taking seven or eight men each time until we were all landed safely on land."

Many other flood stories don't have such a happy ending. Marlene Wilmot's two-volume history, *Bluff-to-Bluff: The 1935 Republican Valley Flood*, is full of eyewitness accounts of homes and lives lost, close calls and daring rescues. To prevent another such flood, the federal government built six dams (five in Nebraska) on the Republican and its tributaries to provide flood control, irrigation and recreation. It's something to think about next time you're boating or fishing at one of southwestern Nebraska's reservoirs. ■

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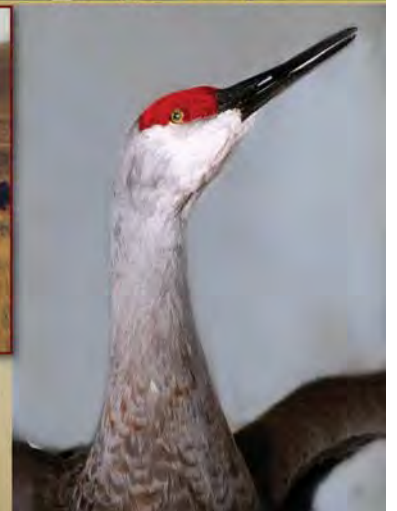


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Southern Flying Squirrel

By Tim Riley

The southern flying squirrel is found in the eastern deciduous forest along the Missouri River from the far southeastern corner of the state north to Nebraska City (see range map on right). Although considered endangered and protected in Nebraska, their populations are considered healthy in many eastern states. Nebraska is considered to be on the periphery of the range of this species.

"This fact combined with their need for mature mast producing woodlands means that Nebraska has probably never been critical for the species's overall population," said Sam Wilson, furbearer and carnivore program manager for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. "What decline there has been is likely due to deforestation for conversion to agriculture, firewood, building materials, etc. But again, this is not likely a species that had a historically large presence in our mostly prairie state."

Research that has been conducted has been limited due to the fact that the overall population is secure and a few of the larger habitats they likely depend on are mostly stable, including the western edge of several species of oaks and hickories in eastern Nebraska at Indian Cave State Park and the Missouri River bluffs near Rulo.

Nebraska can never expect large populations of flying squirrels unless the loss of habitat is dramatically reversed and forested areas are expanded. ■



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Neighborhood Nesting Mallards

By Mark Vrtiska, PhD

Mallards are a ubiquitous species of wildlife, and each spring, reports of hens nesting near houses or in gardens come into our offices. Urban environments sometimes provide suitable nesting cover. If you discover a mallard has a nest in your yard, please observe these rules:

Leave them alone. The hen, nest and eggs are federally and state protected. Do not attempt to touch, move or capture the hen or ducklings. While

against the law, the results of such attempts also often result in negative consequences for the hen, nest or ducklings. Unfortunately, urban areas are not a good choice for mallards to locate their nest and hatch their eggs. Let nature take its course and perhaps a better choice will be made by the hen next spring.

Do not place water, food or other material near the nest site. Water dishes and food only serve as attractants to other species of wildlife or people to



Mark Vrtiska removes duck eggs near a house in Lincoln as a mallard hen looks on.



PHOTOS BY JEFF KURRUS

the nest site.

Mallard eggs typically hatch after 28 days of incubation. If the nest is in a confined area, provide an escape route by leaving open a gate to allow ducklings to exit. ■

Man Cave

By Julie Einspahr

My husband, Ron Einspahr, has a man cave in a building right outside of our back door. He has decked it out with trophy deer, fishing equipment and racing memorabilia. In addition, his family owned Clint's Tavern in Hildreth for three generations, so the man cave has fluorescent beer signs, a tavern sign and commemorative beer mugs hung around the ceiling among other collectibles. It also has a TV system that projects onto a retractable 96-inch screen and a second smaller TV. There is a fully stocked bar with antique soda fountain bar stools, and between the man cave and house is a small patio with a smoker, gas grill and hot tub.

Do you have a man cave photo to share? Submissions must be outdoor-related to be considered. Please send high-resolution images to jenny.nguyen@nebraska.gov



nebraska.gov, along with your name, a brief description of your man cave, your city or town of residence, and best contact information. ■

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GAME & PARKS

Produced in part by a grant from the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. www.Outdoornebraska.org



Mike Streeter takes aim at the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's Outdoor Education Center firearm range.

Outdoor Education Center Opening

By Eric Fowler

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Outdoor Education Center, the state's newest indoor shooting park, will open to the public June 7.

Located in Helen Boosalis Park at 44th and Superior Streets in Lincoln, the new 17,700-square-foot center features a 25-yard, 10-lane firearm range; a 25-meter, 32-lane archery range; and three classrooms, all of which will be open to the public 50 weeks a year. An existing outdoor range at the park includes an Olympic target range and a walk-through course.

The center will also be home to the Commission's Hunter and Boating Education programs. Staff will be housed in offices there, and volunteer instructors will be able to access the building on nights and weekends for their classes.

Those classrooms will also open to the archery range, providing room for the spectators that will show up to watch the regional and national archery tournaments the range is expected to host.

The Outdoor Education Center is a partnership between the Commission and the City of Lincoln, with additional funding provided by the Easton Foundation.

Hourly fees will be charged for both ranges. Annual individual and family passes are available to one or both ranges. The classrooms and ranges can also be rented for special group events or banquets.

For more information on the Outdoor Education Center, go to OutdoorNebraska.org and visit the Education page.

Education by the Numbers: 2013

Thanks to all the volunteers who make hunter education and safety possible in Nebraska. Here are a few numbers to show their benefits:

- 1,403: Number of volunteer instructors, with 75 new firearm hunter education instructors and 38 new bowhunter education instructors.
- 521: Hunter education classes, with 6,423 firearm education and 1,667 bowhunter education students certified.
- 13,274: Hours worked by volunteer instructors.
- \$278,758: Value of volunteer time. ■

Camp Tips

By Nebraska Outdoor U!

As we all head out camping this summer, here are a few tips and tricks to try out while you are enjoying the great outdoors:



- Repel mosquitoes by tossing some sage on your camp fire. A few stocks of sage will produce a pleasant smelling smoke for you to enjoy, but this smoke is an amazing mosquito repellent too.

- Wash your clothes at camp using a plunger and a five gallon bucket. This works a lot like mixing Kool-Aid in a pitcher. You need to cut out the inner cuff of the plunger and cut four 2-inch squares out of the bowl of the plunger to allow water movement. Then, if your bucket has a lid with a hole in it, you can slide the plunger handle through the lid and place the lid on your bucket to wash your clothes.

- Use an empty laundry detergent bottle as a water dispenser for washing your hands. If you're really creative, you can rig up a soap and paper towel holder on this too.

- Old tic tac containers make perfect spice containers. Just label them with a piece of tape and they will stack away nicely in your cooking department.

- Try crescent rolls on a stick. Just wrap the dough around a stick of your choice and cook it over the fire.

- Use a used plastic Folgers coffee can to hold toilet paper. Just poke a hole through the lid and the bottom so you can loop a rope through, cut a slit in the side to feed the toilet paper through and then hang this rope loop on a tree branch while you take care of business.

- Bring foam floor tiles for your tent floor. Whether you sleep on an air mattress and like something softer than roots and rocks to walk on, or you sleep on the bare floor and like a bit of insulation from the cold ground, using those colorful foam floor tiles from your preschool days in your camping arsenal is genius. And they stack well in your car.

Live your outdoor life. Join the Nebraska Outdoor U! community at OutdoorU.org. Hone your skills, set goals and challenge your friends. ■

Nebraska Bird Library

Rose-breasted Grosbeak

Song or calls: Sharp, squeaky "eek." Long, liquid, robin-like song.

Description: Very large, grayish-white triangular bill. Male has black head and back; rose red breast; white underparts, wing bars, and rump. Rose red wing linings are visible in flight. Female is brown and sparrow-like; white eye stripe; yellowish wash on streaked breast. Yellow wing linings are visible in flight.

Behavior: Mating pairs appear affectionate during courtship, with birds often touching beaks.

Habitat: Relatively open deciduous forests on floodplains, slopes and bluffs. Does not require dense understory as does black-headed grosbeak.

Where in Nebraska: Common spring and fall migrant and summer resident in eastern Nebraska. Hybridizes with black-headed grosbeaks in western Nebraska.

Fun Facts: The male rose-breasted grosbeak participates in nest incubation for about one-third of the time, while the female sits overnight. When the parents switch turns they sing quietly to each other and the male continues his song even after he is incubating. The male also tends fledged young while the female builds a second nest. ■

To learn about more birds visit:

NebraskaBirdLibrary.org.



PHOTO BY JON FARRAR

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27 counties of Southwestern Nebraska
www.chickendancetrail.com

Nebraska's Central Flyway
Birding through Central Nebraska
www.nebraskaflyway.com



Bald Eagles Relocate

By Eric Fowler

A pair of bald eagles that has nested at Lake Wanahoo State Recreation Area since 2011 has built a new nest a mile north of their old one, a move that will open a bit more water to anglers this summer.

The eagles' original nest was located southeast of the boat ramp in trees that lined Sand Creek and were flooded when the reservoir was built. The birds had the place to themselves that first year and part of the second, as the lake didn't open until April of 2012. When it did open, the area around the nest was closed to all public access, from December 1 to July 15, in accordance with the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, which prohibits killing or even disturbing eagles, including

those on a nest. In three years at the site, the pair fledged five young.

Last October, the birds built a new nest in the wetland complex north of County Road O, which crosses the inlet to the lake. In January, the nest blew down, but in just a week, the pair had the nest rebuilt, and by early April, they were tending to an unknown number of chicks (eagles typically lay from one to three eggs).

Joel Jorgensen, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's nongame bird program manager, said he wouldn't want to speculate as to whether the pair moved to get away from the activity at the lake. "Eagles sometimes just move



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

to a new nest."

"The new site is potentially the most visible nest in eastern Nebraska, so we do want to make sure, because it's so close to the road, that people stay out of the exclusion zone and that they're not walking out there to get photos."

The closure will limit some waterfowl, turkey and upland game hunting opportunities open to youth through the Commission's PATH Program, and some fishing below the wier on the inlet. But most anglers will surely trade the latter for the 30 or so acres of timber in which they will now be able to jig for crappies and cast for bass.

There were 102 active bald eagle nests in Nebraska in 2013. ■

Rodiek with his trophy pike, which he released.



Big Mac Pike

By Eric Fowler

Northern pike have been swimming in Lake McConaughy since biologists stocked them around the time the reservoir on the North Platte River began filling in 1941. But judging by fish sampling data, angler reports and the 10 pike that topped 36 inches in length or 10 pounds to qualify for Master Angler there in 2013, the current population may be the best since.

That doesn't mean there are a lot of the toothy critters in the lake. "[The pike population] is low compared to walleye and other game fish species, but there are still enough that people who want to target them can, at certain times of the year, find them and have success," said Darrol Eichner, fisheries biologist for the Game and Parks Commission.

Jamie Vasa of Ogallala holds a 37-inch northern pike caught July 2013 while trolling spinnerbaits and crankbaits over submerged trees at Lake McConaughy.

The rise, Eichner said, can be attributed to years of declining water levels that led to a new record low lake level in 2004 and thousands of acres of trees, brush, cockleburrs and smartweed growing on the exposed lakebed. When the lake began refilling and that structure was inundated, the handful of brood fish in the reservoir took advantage of ideal spawning conditions, especially in 2008 and 2009.

As long as the lake stays high enough to keep bays full and trees flooded, that's where anglers should start to



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

look for these structure-oriented fish. The best bites Eichner heard of last year were the following: in the heat of summer, when anglers were boating up to 30 pike a day trolling over the tops of submerged trees; a fall bite along the face of Kingsley Dam; and a year-long bite in Otter Creek Bay. ■

Softshell Turtles

Dear NEBRASKAland readers,
We found the following facts about softshell turtles interesting. We hope you do too.
Sincerely,
Mrs. Elvers's Kindergarten Class,
Bess Streeter-Aldrich Elementary

- There are two types of softshell turtles in NE, the smooth and spiny softshell.
- Softshell turtles live almost always in the water, but they do not have scales.
- When hunting, they bury themselves in the sand in the bottom of the water, with only their eyes and nose exposed.
- All turtles, including softshells, are cold-blooded vertebrates.
- A softshell turtle neck is really long to help defend itself.
- A softshell turtle moves well in water because of the shape of its shell and because it has front and back webbed feet.
- Softshell turtles hibernate in the mud, under the ice, during winter.
- They breathe from their butts.
- Turtles do not have teeth.
- Softshell turtles can grow to about 20 inches long. ■



PHOTO BY DAN FOGELL

Heavy Recycling

By Justin Haag

Jake Rodiek of Chadron created a buzz across the state and beyond when he caught, and released, what experts say could have topped the state's record northern pike. If Rodiek would have harvested the fish and had it examined by Game and Parks officials, his name might be in the record books.

Killing fish is not what Rodiek does, though. During the past few years, Rodiek has become a proponent of Recycled Fish, a national organization that promotes catch-and-release. To spread the message of selective harvest, Rodiek has spoken to groups of college students, sports show attendees and Cabela's shoppers about the benefits of letting the big ones go. The big fish lay more eggs and pass on better genetics. What's a good example of selective harvest? Of the 2,500 fish Rodiek estimates he landed last year, he kept nine perch. Few catches have given an opportunity to spread the message like the monster pike, though.

Rodiek hooked the 45-inch northern in public water in northwestern Nebraska on January 28. He said the lunker put up an unconventional fight, zipping a lot of line from the tip-up at first, but then rolling over – literally because of previous monofilament entanglements and hooks still attached to the fish. When Rodiek reached below the 12 inches of ice to pull it from the eight-inch hole, he removed its hooks, took a few measurements and snapshots, and released the fish. "Even before I got it out of the water, I was saying to myself, 'It's a nice fish but it's definitely going back,'" he said.

Daryl Bauer, Game and Parks fisheries biologist, said the weight of pike varies greatly and it's hard to be certain if Rodiek's fish exceeded the record. At least one chart says the fish's length and 27½ -inch girth would have put it at about three pounds heavier than the state record. But the record, which has stood since 1997, was two inches longer.

Regardless, Rodiek may have gotten more attention because he released the fish than if he had kept it. News of Rodiek's catch spread quickly on *Field & Stream* and *NEBRASKAland* websites and countless social media and message boards. His fishing partner that day, Jason Clark of Papillion, helped the story go viral by shooting and posting a video of the catch.

Rodiek, a native of Amherst who recently graduated from Chadron State College, became an assistant superintendent at Chadron State Park in 2013. While a college student, Rodiek spearheaded the school wildlife club's annual ice fishing tournament at Box Butte Reservoir State Recreation Area, where he also spread the Recycled Fish message. He and his fellow students distributed live-release bags for fish to be kept breathing until after weigh-ins so they could be released.

Not having his name attached to the state record doesn't bother him, he says. He knew the rules when he released the fish and likes having a chance to catch it when it's bigger. He's most pleased about the attention brought to the Recycled Fish cause, hopefully inspiring others to follow his lead.

And where exactly was the big pike caught? Count *NEBRASKAland* among the media who have honored Rodiek's request to not release the name of the lake where the fish still swims. He's afraid of the pressure it would bring to the body of water.

In the Recycled Fish spirit of conservation, keeping our mouths shut seems to be the least we can do. We'll be waiting to see how big the fish is, and what is done with it, the next time it's caught. ■

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.

May 1
The Great Park Pursuit begins, statewide, Negpp.org

May 1-3
Cornhusker Trap Shoot Doniphan, Cornhusker-trap.com

May 3
Catfish Classic Fishing Tournament
Lake McConaughy State Recreation Area (SRA), Ogallala, 308-284-8800

May 3
Kids' Fishing Day
Valentine State Fish Hatchery, Valentine, 10 a.m., 402-376-2244

May 3
Take Pride in America Day Cleanup at Verdon Lake SRA, Verdon, 9 a.m., 402-883-2575

May 3-4
Living History
Fort Atkinson State Historical Park (SHP), Fort Calhoun, 402-468-5611

May 3-4
Toast Wine Festival
Eugene T. Mahoney State Park (SP), Ashland, 402-944-2523

May 3-4
Becoming an Outdoors Family
Camp for hearing impaired, Platte River SP, Louisville, 402-471-5547

May 7, 14, 21, 28
Beyond Becoming an Outdoors-Woman
Handgun class, Platte River SP, Louisville, 402-471-5547

May 8-9
Outdoor Discovery Program
Fort Kearny SRA, Kearney, 308-865-5305

May 9
Outdoor Educational Rendezvous Niobrara SP, Niobrara, 402-857-3373

May 10
Fort Kearny Outdoor Expo
Fort Kearny SRA, 308-865-5305

May 10
Lymphomathon
Eugene T. Mahoney SP, Ashland, 402-944-2523

May 10
Family Fishing Event
Fort Kearny SRA, Kearney, 308-865-5305

May 10
Take Pride in America Day Cleanup at Branched Oak SRA, 402-783-3400

May 11
Mother's Day Buffet
Ponca SP, Ponca, 11 a.m.-1 p.m., 402-755-2284

May 11
Mother's Day Buffet
Fort Robinson SP, Crawford, 10:30 a.m.-2 p.m., 308-665-2900

May 16-18
Beyond Becoming an Outdoors-Woman
Explore Fort Robinson, Fort Robinson SP

May 17
Run Wild
Eugene T. Mahoney SP, Ashland, 402-944-2523

May 17
Wildlands Day
Wildcat Hills Nature Center, Gering, 308-436-3777

May 17
Free Fishing and Park Entry Day No fishing or park entry permits required this day

May 17
Barbecue and Kids Fishing Derby
Fort Robinson SP, Crawford, 308-665-2900

May 17
Kids' Fishing Day
Victoria Springs SRA, Anselmo, 10 a.m.-6 p.m., 308-749-2265

May 17-18
Living History
Fort Atkinson SHP, Fort Calhoun, 402-468-5611

May 19-June 6
Eligible landowners may apply for one elk permit.

May 23
Roger G. Sykes Outdoor Heritage Education Complex
Open house, Platte River SP

May 24
John and Susan McNeill Musical Performance
Niobrara SP, Niobrara, 402-857-3373

May 24
Official opening of summer state park activities

May 24-26
Living History
Fort Kearny SHP, Kearney, 308-865-5305

May 24-August 10
Roger G. Sykes Outdoor Heritage Education Complex Open daily, Platte River SP, Louisville, 402-471-5547

May 24-September 1
Horseback Trail Rides
Niobrara SP, Niobrara, 402-857-3373

May 24-26
Buffalo Burgers
Indian Cave SP, Shubert, 402-883-2575

May 25
Sidewalk Chalk Art
Niobrara SP, Niobrara, 402-857-3373



Bicycling for Tacos

By Cristina Woodworth

There may one thing that cyclists around Nebraska love almost as much as riding their bikes: Mexican food.

Omaha's weekly "Taco Ride" and Lincoln's "Nacho Ride" have continually grown in popularity over the past several years, with the Omaha ride averaging between 700 and 1,000 people every Thursday evening.

Taco Ride participants leave from the Wabash Trace Nature trailhead in Council Bluffs and ride about 10 miles to the Mineola Steakhouse for tacos and drinks. The ride takes place year-round.

Similarly, the Nacho Ride leaves from the East Mopac trail off of 84th Street in Lincoln every Tuesday around 5:30 p.m. Cyclists ride about 10 miles to the One Eyed Dog Saloon in Eagle to gorge on giant plates of nachos. The Nacho Ride usually runs from early May to mid-October. ■



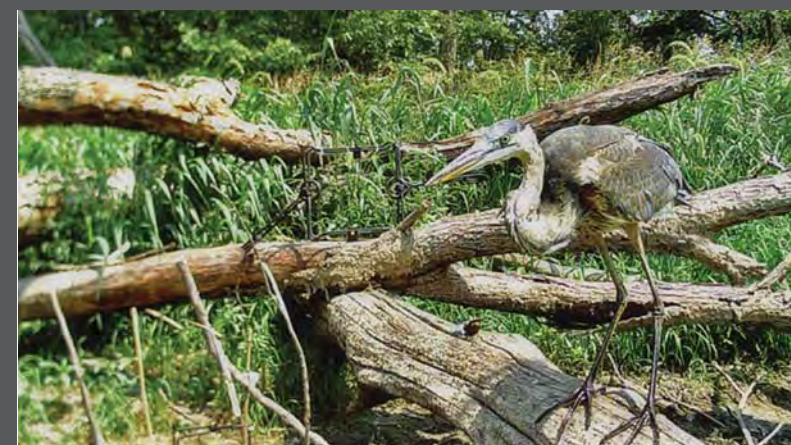
"Tacos? We'll be right over."

Rediscovering the Prairie

By Amy Kucera

From eastern Montana to the western edge of Missouri, Robin Walter and Sebastian Tsocanos will traverse the 1,370 miles between these Great Plains states this summer – entirely on horseback. With scheduled stops along the route, including a ride in Nebraska from the Sandhills to Lincoln, they aim to bring public attention to the critical role of grassland conservation in North America. Join their journey at Rediscovertheprairie.org. ■

Send Us Your Trail Cam Photos!



This heron was captured on Shane and Nancy Claeys's farm pond in northwestern Washington County in August.

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

NEBRASKAland Visitor



Last issue's winner of the Visitor drawing was Rob Mercer of Stanton, Nebraska, who found the **robber fly** on page 30. 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 Magazine* mug. To enter each month, write:

NEBRASKAland Visitor
2200 North 33rd Street,
Lincoln, NE 68503.

Or e-mail:

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

HINT: This issue's visitor is not on page 7, 8, 9, 11, 21, or 36.

*This orange and black insect with bristly legs is neither a mosquito nor wasp; it is a **robber fly**, in the family Diptera. This robber fly is of the genus Diogmites, possibly *D. neoternatus*. There are roughly 1,000 species of robber flies in North America, and several are common in Nebraska. Robber flies prefer dry, open habitats such as prairies and open woodlands. They are predaceous and considered to be beneficial, because they feed on other insects. Robber flies catch insects in flight, and use their piercing-sucking mouthparts to inject saliva into their prey. This saliva paralyzes the prey and breaks down their insides. The robber fly is then able to suck up the now liquefied contents of the prey.*



Special thanks to Julie Van Meter, State Entomologist, Nebraska Department of Agriculture. Visitor image by Eric Fowler

Bugguide.net is a good site for identification.

BIGHORNS

A Life on the Edge

Text and photos by Justin Haag

To survive, the bighorn sheep relies heavily on its footwear. But slipping is just one danger facing this species in Nebraska.

A bighorn sheep lives life on the edge from the day it's born. It all starts when bighorn ewes choose ledges of cliffs to give birth, the best places to keep fawns safe from predators.

That steep terrain provides the first line of defense against bodily harm for the rest of the bighorns' lives. Lambs learn to scurry up and down the cliffs in the first few weeks of life, a remarkable sight. With split hooves specially adapted for climbing, bighorns can easily traverse terrain that other species wouldn't dare, especially in a hurry. Among North America's big game, only mountain goats do it better.

The secret is in the hoof's design. A close look reveals roughened pads toward the rear that conform to the terrain, and cleated outer edges good for snagging rock protrusions. As those cleated edges break off, new growth replaces it.

Nebraska's Panhandle, a native range in which sheep have been reintroduced, is rugged but not quite as extreme as the terrain native to some herds.

Do the nimble critters ever slip?

Certainly.

The sandstone, or "butte rock," of their Panhandle ranges affords good traction but can easily break away if subjected to too much force.

Thankfully for the sheep, the fall is usually not high enough in Nebraska's buttes and canyon walls to cause mortal damage to the sturdy animal's dense bone structure.

"It does happen, but we haven't witnessed that to be the cause of mortality in our herds, although we have suspected it in a few incidents," said Todd Nordeen, Game and

Parks northwestern district wildlife manager. "They're good at getting around our landscape."

In the upper elevations of the Rocky Mountains, sheep scurry up and down rock-solid cliffs made of firmer material, such as granite. While the granite is less likely to break away, a slip during a chase from a predator can result in a deadly fall of hundreds of feet.

Wildlife officials quickly point out that the greater threat to the Nebraska herds is disease transmission potentially triggered from interactions with domestic sheep. The primary

culprit, *pasteurella pneumonia*, has reduced some populations by as much as 50 percent following an outbreak. Some bighorns have had bouts in recent years with epizootic hemorrhagic disease, more commonly known as EHD, similar to Nebraska's deer populations.

Many of the sheep captured near McGrew during the Game and Parks' collaring and relocation project in February (see page 46) had hoof sloughing, a deformity that is a

symptom of EHD. The good news, though, is that the sheep were healthy at the time of capture, indicating that they were able to fight off the malady. That bodes well for herd genetics.

The introduction of diseases carried by domestic sheep is just one way man has taken a toll on bighorn populations throughout history. Overhunting and habitat loss were big reasons for the species disappearing from the state in the early 1900s. An occasional sheep also becomes road kill.

Another potential threat to bighorn populations that wildlife officials are watching closely is the natural return of the cougar to the state. Cougars, along with coyotes, bobcats and golden eagles, are considered natural predators to the bighorn and other Nebraska ungulates. Two radio-collared sheep in the Pine Ridge have died, one in 2007 and another in 2013, from this age-old predator-prey relationship between cougars and ungulates, officials have confirmed.

"Outside of disease events, bighorns probably experience an estimated 10 to 15 percent natural mortality which involve slips, road kills, old age and predation," Nordeen said, noting that no substantial data exists for how Nebraska's bighorns die.

Regardless of how some perish, the bighorns and their growing Nebraska population can hold their hooves high. They have proven to hold their own while scampering around the state's most rugged terrain. ■



A Bighorn's hoof.



Bighorn sheep fawns scurry up and down a steep rock formation in Sioux County under the watchful eye of an ewe with a tracking collar.

Good Life, Great Rides

Nebraska Horse Camps and Trails

By Amy Kucera

From a moonlit ride along the riverside, to a deep canyon descent into forested bluffs, witnessing the beauty of Nebraska from the saddle is an exhilarating experience. With accommodations for both the two- and four-legged, the following locations offer a glimpse of the myriad of riding opportunities to be had throughout the state, which include diverse terrain, unique wildlife viewing opportunities and the wide horizon lines that make Nebraska worth riding.

Remember, trail and camp availability is subject to change. In many locations, reservations, fees and a park entry permit may apply. Certified weed-free hay is required at certain locations. As always, be sure to call before you haul and leave only your hoofprints behind. ■

NORTHWEST

Fort Robinson State Park (SP), Crawford*

There's room to roam with more than 20 miles of trails in the exquisite Pine Ridge scenery of the park's 22,000-plus acres. Once a quartermaster remount depot, at one time holding 12,000 horses for mounted cavalry regiments, boarding is available in the historic stables. Stay overnight in the fully-furnished former officer's and enlisted men's quarters, dating from 1874 to 1909. Modern and primitive campsites are also available.

Pine Ridge National Recreation Area, Chadron

Trek through the incredible beauty of the Pine Ridge region amongst buttes and ponderosa pines covering 80 miles of trails managed by the U.S. Forest Service. At the Roberts Trailhead and campground, primitive camping and corrals are available. The Outrider Trailhead, located north of Chadron State Park's main entrance, includes primitive camping and corrals, as well as access to Black Hills Overlook Trailhead, Forest Service Road and Deadhorse Road and Trailhead. Additional Trailheads include East Ash, West Ash, Coffee Mill, Soldier Creek, Spotted Tail and Strong

(*Denotes NGPC properties)



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN

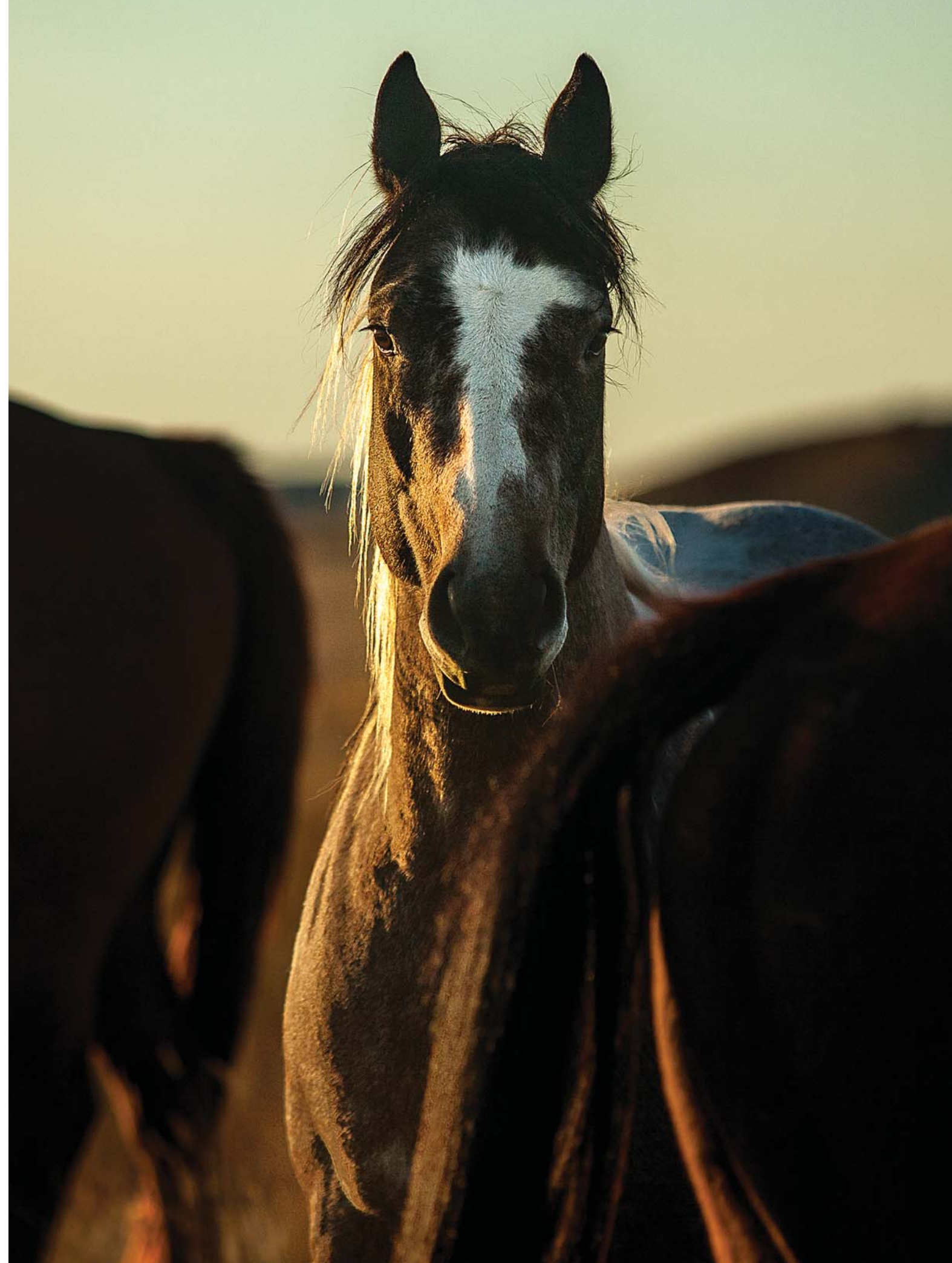


PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN

There is room to roam at Fort Robinson SP, with more than 20 miles of trails in the Pine Ridge scenery at Nebraska's largest state park.

Canyon. The nearby Chadron Creek Ranch Wildlife Management Area (WMA)* provides more open riding possibilities and primitive camping.

Soldier Creek Wilderness Area, Crawford
The 7,794 acres of Pine Ridge escarpment operated by the U.S. Forest Service consists of ponderosa pine covered ridges with areas of native grassland on 15 miles of trails, in addition to open riding. Primitive camping available.

NORTH-CENTRAL

Big Canyon Inn and Trail, Springview
Enjoy scenic vistas and wildlife viewing opportunities while

traversing through the 20 miles of trails along high bluffs, deep canyons and clear streams that wind through Niobrara River country. Camp in comfort nearby the corrals and large barn, which is complete with loft, restroom and kitchen facilities. Bed and breakfast accommodations are also available.

Larrington's Guest Cottage and Trails, Springview
Stay in a modern cottage with fully-furnished rooms that overlook a Niobrara River canyon trail in a remote surrounding. Barn and corrals available.

Samuel R. McKelvie National Forest, Valentine
Ride the Merritt Reservoir and stay at the Steer Creek primitive

horse camp, named for the nearby stream. With more than 116,000 acres of forest open to riding, numbered windmills prevent you from getting lost.

Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail, Norfolk to Valentine
The nation's largest rail-to-trail conversion has 195 of 321 miles completed on a spectacularly scenic stretch. Many communities along the trail offer camping along the route.

NORTHEAST

***Lewis and Clark State Recreation Area (SRA), Crofton**
Travel 6.5 miles of heavily wooded and scenic trails overlooking Lewis and Clark Lake. The designated

campground includes corrals and primitive camping with restrooms.

Discovery Trails Ranch at Devil's Nest, Bloomfield
The historical hideout of Jesse James includes more than 1,100 acres of open riding on varied terrain along Lewis and Clark Lake. Primitive camping with showers and restroom available.

***Niobrara SP, Niobrara**
Open riding on 120 acres at the designated primitive equestrian camp delivers spectacular scenery and wildlife viewing opportunities on the confluence of the Niobrara and Missouri rivers. One mile of trail is designated for horseback and 2.1 miles of the Railroad Bridge Trail located nearby.



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN

Riding the scenic trails in the state is an activity suitable for both young and old.

Turkey Creek Ranch, Newcastle
Ride through more than 20 miles wooded ravines, open prairie and spring-fed streams along Missouri River bluffs. Primitive camping and furnished cabins available, including a beautifully secluded spot overlooking the Missouri River.

***Willow Creek SRA, Pierce**
Trot along 8 miles of trail around the lake. Both modern and primitive equestrian camping available at this peaceful setting.

CENTRAL

Bessey Ranger District of the Nebraska National Forest, Halsey
With wildlife and windmills abound on 90,444 acres of gently rolling Sandhills combined with 20,000 acres of hand-planted trees, Nebraska's largest forest is a unique riding experience near the Dismal River. The Natick and Whitetail horse camps offer a primitive camping experience with stalls and corrals.

Bader Memorial Park, Chapman
With 270 acres of diverse property that includes 7 ponds, enjoy a ride through the tallgrass prairie, wetlands and cottonwood forests near the Platte River. Primitive and modern campsites available at this picturesque park.

Switzer Ranch, Burwell

Take a scenic Sandhills stroll on more than 10,000 acres of the working ranch along the Calamus River. The Calamus Outfitters offer guided rides, an indoor riding arena and horseback lessons at the ranch. Modern cabins and primitive camping are available for overnight stays with corrals and water available.

SOUTHEAST

***Branched Oak SRA, Malcolm**

Meander through the open grasslands for spectacular views of the lake and surrounding wilderness of the park, encompassing 5,595 acres and over 3 miles of horse trails in the Salt Valley. The newly constructed equestrian camp features modern and primitive camping, an accessible mounting ramp, hitching posts and corrals, as well as a mounting block to assist people with disabilities. The Branched Oak

Marina and restaurant on site is open seasonally.

Camp Moses Merrill, Linwood

Explore 6 miles of horse trails on 568 acres along the high bluffs south of the Platte River. Stay at the modern campground, owned and operated by the American Baptist Church.

***Indian Cave SP, Shubert**

Journey high above the Missouri River on over 13 miles of trails. The designated equestrian camp offers horse corrals, a picnic shelter and primitive camping. Additional trails are opened during competitive trail rides held each summer at the park.

***Pawnee Lake SRA, Emerald**

Travel more than 1,800 acres, including 6 miles of trail, along the second largest lake in the Salt Valley. Modern and primitive camping available.

***Rock Creek Station State Historical Park (SHP), Fairbury**

A former Pony Express site, ride 6 miles of trails in the historic park where they celebrate Rock Creek Trail Days the first weekend of June. Stay at the adjacent Rock Creek Station SRA for primitive and modern camping with horse corrals available.

PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

***Two Rivers SRA, Venice**

Located near seven sandpit lakes along the Platte River, this popular destination for outdoor enthusiasts offers modern and primitive camping, including a night in a restored Union Pacific caboose.

SOUTHWEST

***Swanson Reservoir SRA, Stratton**

After a day riding (and fishing), cozy up at the Spring Canyon Campground for modern and primitive camping or go for a luxurious night at nearby Lakeview Lodge, complete with large common room, kitchen and stone fireplace.

Opposite: Riders cross the bridge over Rock Creek toward the reconstructed Oregon Trail outpost at Rock Creek Station SHP.

Above: Fred and Karen Steffen of Crofton ride horse trails at the South Shore Area at Lewis and Clark SRA.

Right: Barb Simmons (left) of Bellevue, a member of the Eastern Nebraska Driving Society, gives carriage rides around the horse camp at Two Rivers SRA.

 View the Nebraska Horse Trails Guide for complete information and more great locations to ride.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

—The Tower of the Four Winds—

By Erin Solheim

Wind is an omnipresent power that has a forgotten significance in our lives. In many ways wind holds us captive. But without this magnificent and unseeable force, life would be impossible.

My personal connection with wind began as a youth at the Tower of the Four Winds, the top of my little world in Blair, Nebraska. Learning about the science and symbolism of why wind is important, I became deeply interested in the significance of wind.

First, there is the science. We can't see wind, albeit for the dust that sometimes assaults us, but there's an uncanny effect air flow has on this planet. Earth's many life forms rely on elements such as carbon dioxide and oxygen, and would be helpless without the wind to move these elements.

Without it, rain from the oceans couldn't make the journey necessary over mountains and into the Heartland. The convective flow of wind, with cool air being pushed under fronts of hot air, moves rain clouds nearer crops in the Great Plains. Wind also takes a large role in the reproduction of many of the world's plants. The pollen and seeds from trees and other plants could not find enough fertile land wherein to root without wind. A world without wind would be stagnant.

Wind is dangerous and compelling, especially in the central United States's Tornado Alley. Add a winter storm and the worse sort of weather is created. Uprooting trees, spreading wildfires – wind can turn any storm dangerous. But it also has a practical interest, particularly in Nebraska. It can be utilized as an alternative form of energy used to help electrify not only our state, but the world.

There is also a religious significance to wind documented throughout history. Greek and Egyptian religions have separate wind gods, with many of these gods specializing in inspiration of some sort. Aeolus, for example, is the Greek wind god that would send his servants, the directional winds, to bring divine inspiration to artists and important members of society. The English Romantic poets sentimentalized ancient archetypal representations of wind, such as in Percy Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind." And Plains Indian oral histories, with ties to the land of Nebraska, hold some of the most interesting wind stories ever encountered.

In Blair, the Tower of the Four Winds is the name of the giant cross located in Black Elk-Neihardt Park. From this point, one can see across the valley, over the Missouri River and into Iowa. The world looks enormous from such a perspective. Watching the sun rise and set there has been one of the most beautiful, silent joys of my life.

The giant cross and the mosaic pedestals representing each cardinal direction are spread out on a circular paved walking trail and commemorates author John G. Neihardt and the subject of his highly acclaimed book *Black Elk Speaks*, which recounts the tales of Oglala Lakota holy man Black Elk and preserves the history, visions and traditions of Black Elk's tribe.

Everything in this park holds a special symbolism,

including the "hoop of the world" represented by the many circular symbols found throughout the park. The directional pedestals, for example, embody a passage in *Black Elk Speaks*:

"[T]hese four ribbons hanging here on the stem [of a pipe] are the four quarters of the universe. The black one is for the west where the thunder beings live to send us rain; the white one for the north, whence comes the great white cleansing wind; the red one for the east, whence springs the light and where the morning star lives to give men wisdom; the yellow for the south, whence come the summer and the power to grow."

Because of its physical location, the park has seen its share of wind activity. Some of the most tortuous winds I've ever experienced have been at the top of this hill. In every season, the winds here have been powerful and whispered to me small secrets of meaning. With constant reminders through the art of the statue and pedestals, it's difficult for me to forget the symbolism and purpose of this park.

In Neihardt's letter to the park board in 1973, he said that "I sincerely approve of the Black Elk-Neihardt Park with its symbol of Universal Man stretching his arms over the Missouri River Valley. This will be one of many inspiring signs of a new social ascent. Black Elk longed for this day to come." In many ways, the culture of Blair has been silently motivated by this statue overlooking us. As Professor Bill Thomsen, artist and minister who inspired the tower mosaic and pedestals, said, "The tower symbolizes what we have been writing about and dreaming about for so long, trying to weld people together in peace and compassion."

But in many ways, the Tower of the Four Winds hasn't seen many admirers other than the families that come to walk the perimeter and enjoy the view. For many native Blairites, the cross statue seems unimportant – only a small part of the scenery that seems as if it has always existed. But it would be foolish to disregard what both Neihardt and Thomsen had in mind when they created their work as inspired by Black Elk: to change the world with peace and inspiration.

As much as the Tower of the Four Winds has gone unnoticed through the lives of many affected by it, it has become my personal haven. I only wish that everyone would stop to appreciate this pinnacle of Nebraskan soil and inspire others to rethink the other unnoticed and omnipresent powers that are all around us. There's another quote from *Black Elk Speaks* that easily summarizes what I've learned from this park; it is a prayer from Black Elk for us:

"Grandfather, all over the world the faces of living ones are alike. In tenderness they have come up out of the ground. Look upon your children with children in their arms, that they may face the winds and walk the Good Road to the Day of Quiet." ■

Erin Solheim is a freelance writer living in Omaha. This is her first essay in NEBRASKAland Magazine.

The Tower of the Four Winds is located in Blair's Black Elk-Neihardt Park.

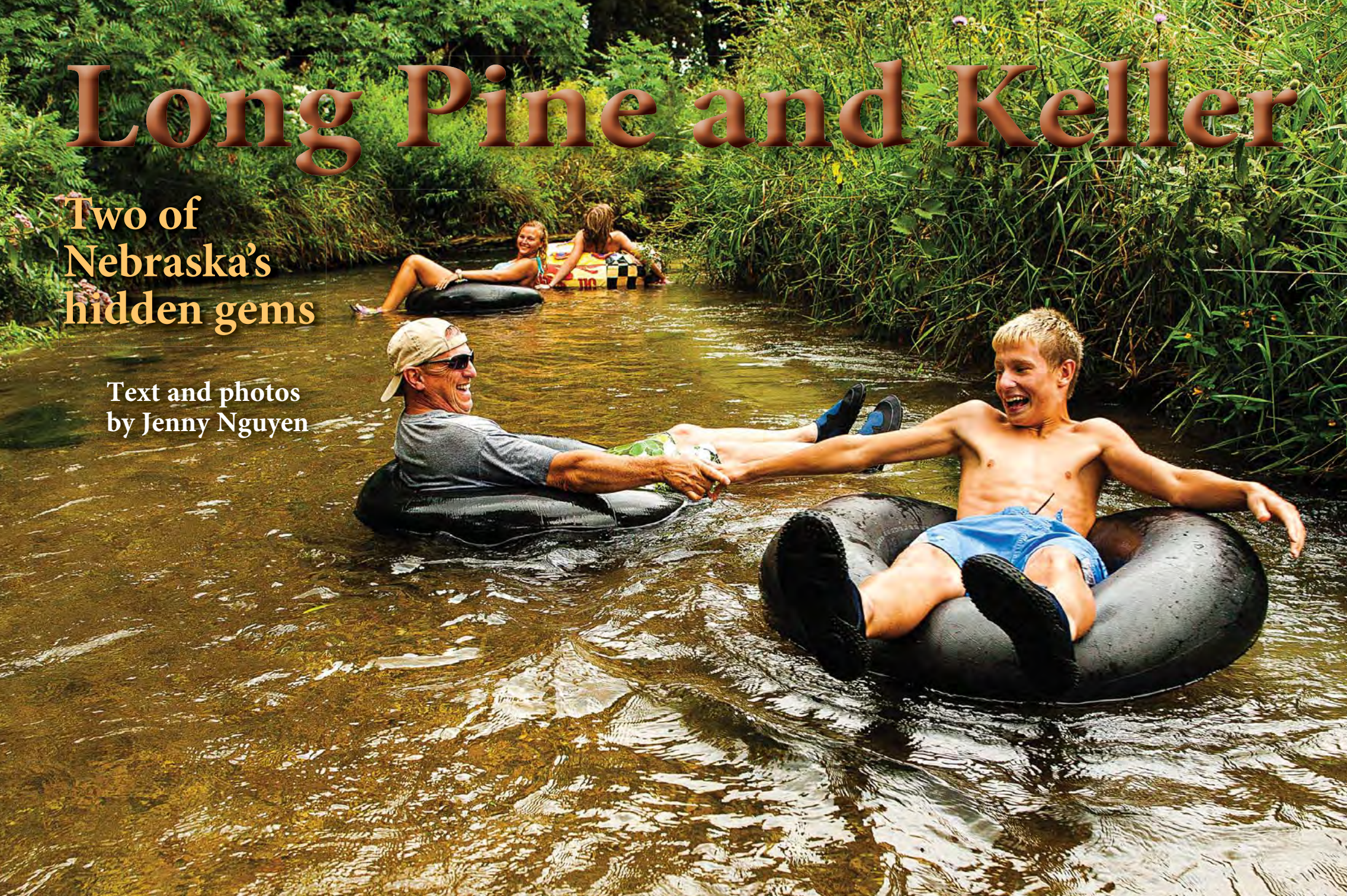


PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN

Long Pine and Keller

Two of Nebraska's hidden gems

Text and photos
by Jenny Nguyen



Caroline, Ava, Ron and Hayden Rech from Blair tube at Long Pine State Recreation Area in Brown County.

If you're going to camp at one, then you might as well swing by the other. Located just 12 miles apart, Long Pine and Keller state recreation areas (SRA) are often thought of as sister-parks to Ainsworth and Long Pine locals. Tucked away where corn ends and pines and gullies grow, both areas are secret diamonds in north-central Nebraska along Highway 20. You either have been going for years, or stumbled upon them while on your way to somewhere that you no longer remember – because your rest stop, now new discovery, turned out to be that much better than your original destination.

Long Pine SRA

"It's a little gem that's hidden," said Janice Rech from Blair, who has been coming to Long Pine SRA for years and now camps with her husband and children. "People from around here know about it, but most of the state doesn't even know that it's here. It hasn't changed in 20 years."

With a tent pitched only inches away from the picturesque Long Pine Creek, Rech and her family enjoy coming out to the peace and relaxation of the outdoors. They arrive every summer to tube on Long Pine Creek, sleep under the

stars, catch their limit in trout and make s'mores and memories with family and friends. During these busy months, laughter and the sounds of park-goers having a good time ascend from every campsite, along with curls of campfire smoke and a happy bark or two from four-legged companions.

Long Pine SRA has been managed by the Commission since the early 1960s, and since then has offered a quiet sanctuary where back-to-basics campers can truly escape. Although its 29 campsites have no electrical hookups, campers have little risk of spending their weekends next to any noisy, tricked-out RVs. Furthermore, the SRA

Long Pine Creek and Water Laws

By Gene Zuerlein, Assistant Division
Administrator, Environmental Services Division

Long Pine Creek is a south bank tributary to the Niobrara River that runs through the state recreation area. Long Pine and Pine Glen wildlife management areas are also located along its banks. Not only is Long Pine Creek one of the top two trout streams in Nebraska, the creek is historically significant in that the first ever instream flow appropriations under Nebraska water law were granted for it in 1989 after the Legislature passed LB 1106 in 1984.

The appropriations amount to 50 cubic feet per second in the upper reach and 60 cubic feet per second in the lower reach. The purpose of the scientific justified flows is to sustain the natural reproducing rainbow and brown trout populations, which are highly sought after by anglers.

According to Jeff Schuckman, northeast fisheries manager for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, flows in our streams are dictated by precipitation and groundwater seepage. Instream flow appropriations only exist on 2% of Nebraska's fishable streams and rivers, so they are very important in sustaining these public trust natural resources for all citizens. The instream flow appropriation on Long Pine Creek helps fish and wildlife and ensures people will be able to enjoy this resource for many years to come.

totals 153 acres and also features short hiking trails, year-round trout fishing, and is a great place for picnicking and wildlife viewing. For those trekking via the Cowboy Trail, Long Pine is a great place for cyclists and hikers to stop and rest for the night.

In addition to naturally reproducing brown and rainbow trout, Long Pine Creek is supplementally stocked with 900, 10 to 11 inch, rainbow trout per year in lots of 300 before

Long Pine and Keller state recreation areas are located just 12 miles apart in Brown County, and are both perfect rest stops on the way to and from the Sandhills – or destinations in themselves.





three big holidays – Memorial Day, Fourth of July and Labor Day. Fishing is great year-round, but the creek is busiest during the weekends in warmer months, both with fishermen and tubers. For the angler seeking solitude, weekdays are best, while fall and winter trout fishing can also be pleasant.

Additional fishable sections of Long Pine Creek can also be found at Long Pine Wildlife Management Area (WMA), a 160-acre section adjacent to the SRA open to hunting.

Keller SRA

If you get off Highway 20 and drive north on 183, you'll find Keller SRA just 9 miles out. Hugging nearly one mile of Bone Creek, Keller totals 197 acres and is nestled among rugged bluffs and oak, pine and cedar trees. Camping and fishing are big draws here, but with additional amenities than Long Pine SRA. Keller was first opened in 1986 and offers 25 all-weather camp pads with electrical hookups, primitive campsites and day-use amenities.

Dustin Craven, a Nebraska resident originally from Arkansas, commented on the area while visiting with wife Lindsay and son Hunter for the first time. "It reminds me of camping in Arkansas and a little bit of Colorado," said Craven. "When you're in this area, it's like you're out of

Nebraska. It's different from the rest of the state."

Keller is also known for its five fishing ponds offering both warm- and cold-water fish species, including largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish and trout; catfish are stocked every other year. Access to ponds 1 and 2 is available north of the park from the county road west off Highway 183. Anglers can access ponds 3, 4 and 5 via a footbridge that provides a scenic view over Bone Creek.

In addition to the SRA, 640 acres of wildlife management area abuts the park on its southern edge. Keller School Lands WMA, added in 1985, is an additional gem among hunters and wildlife viewers who will find a bounty of small and big game. ■

 View the Keller SRA brochure for specifics on park amenities.

Bill Flesher – Campground Host



Longtime campground host Bill Flesher often brings his woodworking art for visitors, especially kids, to see at Keller SRA.

Some visitors come out to picnic or fish for the day, while others stay for the weekend. And then there are those special few who return year after year. Bill Flesher is one of those few, returning every year to Keller SRA since 1986 as a campground host. "When we implemented the Campground Host Program, Bill and his wife Barb were one of the first to step forward and take on the duties. Barb passed away last year so Bill is by himself now," said Dave Harlan, park superintendent at Keller.

As a longtime camp host, Bill is known among Keller visitors for his love of woodworking, a hobby he started shortly after retirement in 1962. "The wife said, 'If you retire, you got to have something to do because you're not going to be hanging over my shoulder all the time,'" said Bill, chuckling.

The Fleshers would often show up in their RV, filled with Bill's handmade, realistic renditions of trains and vintage automobiles for the entire park to see. "He makes about every piece of his projects from wood and most of the woods are exotic from South America," said Harlan. "They are a real hit for kids."

Although Barb is now gone, Bill, now 81, will continue to return to Keller every summer to carry out his camp host duties. Responsibilities include greeting campers and answering visitor questions, being accessible to campers for comments and complaints, assisting in campground registrations and reservations, performing park maintenance duties, contacting park staff and law enforcement in emergencies and providing other much-needed support to park staff.

Thanks to volunteers like the Fleshers, parks such as Keller SRA receive the help they need during busy months.

 Find for more information on the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's Campground Host Program.

Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish and trout can be caught at Keller SRA's five ponds.



At Long Pine SRA, the Rice family, with dad Kyle, son Kolbi, grandfather Larry and grandmother Linda, make s'mores while park superintendent Dave Harlan looks on in the back.

The Redheads

By William Beachly

It was one of those winter days that remind us of purity and essence, when vision seems clear yet distances are illusory. Cross-country skiing through a foot of soft, fresh powder in the absolute stillness of Indian Cave State Park where we were the only human intruders, my wife spotted something in the middle of the untracked whiteness of a clearing: something dark, small and moving. As we slowly approached, its red head seemed like a totally new and unnatural color in a world of gray and white, save for the contrasting deep blue of the vaulted sky.

The woodpecker had evidently landed there, not realizing the snow depth, and could not find enough air beneath its wings to take off. It seemed exhausted, though we could see no emotion in that dark eye. On that day, in that lighting, its colors were so bright it seemed not to belong as a natural object. Yet the woods there were as likely to be the work of this bird's ancestors, and similar birds that carry and cache seeds, as the many other environmental forces that created this wonderland of oak and hickory.

With clumsy, mitten-bound hands, I gently lifted the bird from the snow and placed it in the hood of my wife's parka, and we silently swished ahead. Minutes later, the bird must have warmed up, and with a flurry it emerged from the hood and took flight, a spirit released, into the edge of trees with confident, purposeful, powerful strokes. I envied those strokes as I attempted to keep my slow, rhythmic motion through the snow and was reminded of a similar episode of resurgent life witnessed by the young Loren Eiseley when he

was growing up in Lincoln.

It was a childhood memory retained "as bright as yesterday" in the "unseen artist's loft" of Eiseley's mind. He had found a woodpecker, apparently dead on the ground, behind his house and picked it up to admire its red head and black-and-white feathers. It might have contacted an electric line and been stunned, but only temporarily, because it revived and hopped to the corner of the house. There it "began to ascend in true woodpecker fashion – a hitch of grasping feet, the bracing of the tail, and then, wonder of wonders, the knock, knock, knock of the questing beak against our house ... somewhere amidst the obscure timber loft of my head that persistent hammering still recurs. Did it stay because it was my first glimpse of unconsciousness, resurrection, and time lapse presented in bright color? I don't know."

The red-headed woodpecker is a member of one of the most specialized orders of birds, the Piciformes. Their X-like toe arrangement is diagnostic and critical to their firm grasp of tree trunks, but it is in their head that we find anatomical specializations for excavating cavities in wood to both retrieve hidden insects and create nesting holes. Their heavy beak has a shock-absorbing articulation with the skull, while the peculiar, muscle-sheathed horns of the hyoid bones operate a tongue capable of extending four times the length of the beak. The red-feathered hood is worn by both male and female, and plays a role in species recognition because woodpeckers don't "sing" like passerines, and probably

in aggressive defense of nest cavities (imagine that red head and formidable beak zooming straight at you). Drumming is typically a declaration of territory and may be done by both sexes of a mated pair. Studies have shown that their aggressiveness helps them compete for limited nest cavities against the likes of European starlings that have so impacted our native bluebirds. Because bluebirds cannot excavate cavities on their own, they depend on woodpeckers that continually make new holes to nest in.

In many ways, redheads have benefited from the spread of suburbs in Midwestern towns where a variety of non-native oaks are planted in well-spaced arrays. Meanwhile, our native oaks that once occurred in open savannas or scattered along stream banks have been encroached on by fast-growing elm and ash trees with smaller, wind-borne seeds. Woodpeckers are good



PHOTO BY ADRIAN OLIVERA

A banded red-headed woodpecker at Audubon's Spring Creek Prairie in Denton, Nebraska.

at exploiting "mast years" when big-seeded trees produce acorns, hickory nuts or walnuts in abundance and they hoard and cache this bounty. Since the last Ice Age, oaks, beeches, and American chestnut provided many opportunities in Eastern woodlands for seed-caching species like jays and woodpeckers, just as mature pine forests in the west offered abundant pine nuts. The red-headed woodpecker seems to be an edge-dweller whose native range followed the Prairie Peninsula eastward. But over the last century, disease and harvesting of these hardwoods has shifted the balance toward shade-tolerant softwoods such as maple that do not have hard seeds suitable for caching.

Early reports of red-headed woodpeckers in Nebraska were mostly from the southeastern or northwestern counties, but now the bird may be found nesting statewide. This trend no doubt can be attributed to the spread of trees along rivers and in farmyards, coupled with the abatement of prairie fires. However, there is increasing evidence that suppression of the fires that created the oak-savanna ecotone in eastern Nebraska is hurting redheads. All hole-nesting birds depend on a resource of dying mature trees, and the incipient ash disease could result in a temporary opportunity for additional nests, however this would only be one aspect of their overall requirements and wouldn't guarantee a population increase. In fact, many birds that rely on insects during the nesting season, such as redheads, can find that their anticipated resource boom came too early as a result of climate change.

This pattern has been documented already in birds of European forests and the Missouri Ozarks. The redhead typically nests in June, later than its relative the red-bellied woodpecker, and could face a scarcity of insects during the critical time it needs to feed its nestlings. Annual bird counts show that red-headed woodpeckers have declined sharply in the Midwest since the 1970s, while the red-bellied woodpeckers, favoring more dense forest growth, have steadily increased.

The red-headed woodpecker is a remarkably adaptable species. It can employ short-distance migration to track resources, and can oftentimes complete a second nesting effort in the summer if its first nest fails. I would like to see this magnificent bird inspire all of us to consider the re-creation of the bur oak savanna of times past. Pawnee Prairie Wildlife Management Area presents one such opportunity, and perhaps those corners left by center pivots could create a multitude of other areas where a bur oak could be planted. There would, no doubt, be other native species that would benefit as well. ■

William Beachly is a biologist at Hastings College. His last NEBRASKAland article, "Sojourn at Rock Glen," appeared in October, 2011.



ARTWORK BY MICHELE FARRAR

The red-bellied woodpecker tongue (pictured) has a hard, barbed tip for impaling larger insects and coated with sticky saliva for gathering small insects. Conversely, the red-headed woodpecker's tongue is not barbed. Instead, the red head has hairlike processes on its tongue possibly adapted for a more general diet, which includes flying insects during the summer.

Pound for Pound

Fighting Nebraska's Fish

Text and photos by Jeff Kurrus

LARGEMOUTH BASS are one of Nebraska's most popular sportfish, even though other fish, pound for pound, are better fighters.

Joining an ongoing debate in the angling world is easy. From arguing the best rod and reel combos to how to appropriately cook any number of fish species, finding a fellow angler with whom you can agree to disagree has never been simpler. But a quick search through one of the web's many angling forums will reveal one debate that has raged on as long as any other – what game fish fights the hardest?

A fish's biologic makeup, especially body shape, and genetics have a lot to do with how hard a fish fights. No one knows this better than Nebraska Game and Parks Commission fisheries biologist Daryl Bauer, recipient of 126 Nebraska Master Angler awards covering 16 species of fish.

Bauer uses his biology background to his advantage when catching any number of fish species throughout the state, and has some interesting information to share about why certain fish fight the way they do.

Channel/Flathead Catfish

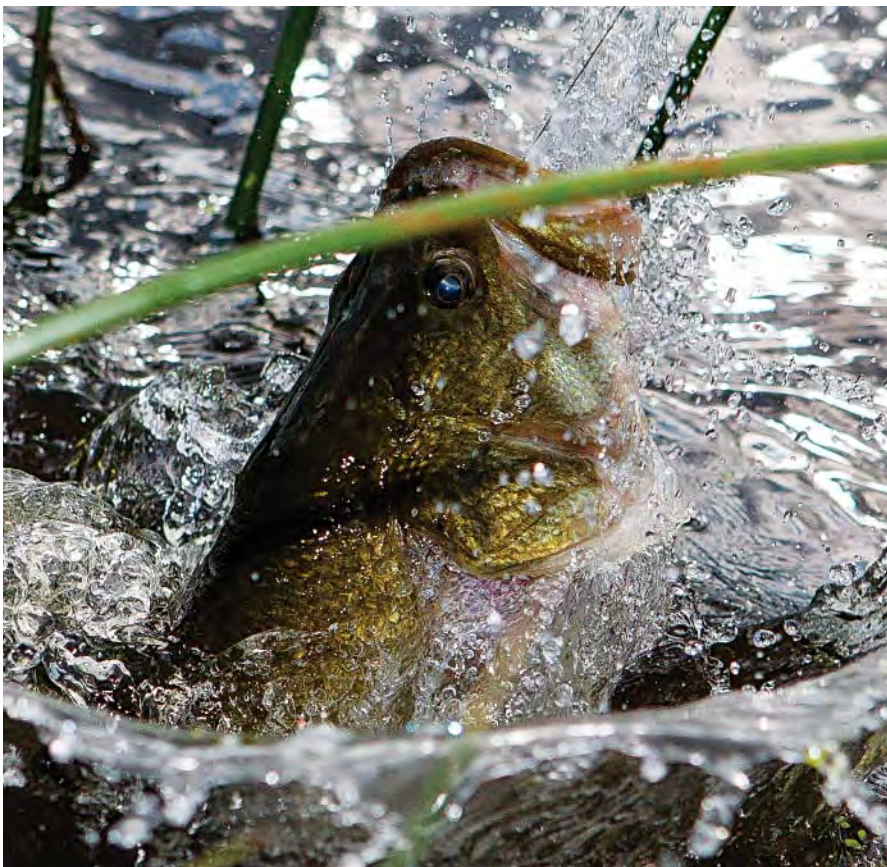
"Catfish are bulldogs," said Bauer. "When they start shaking that head back and forth, you're in for a fight." As a river species, a catfish is known for its extreme endurance and prolonged battles.



Daryl Bauer, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission biologist, has caught 126 Master Angler fish, receiving his fair share of experience landing this state's trophy fish species.



CATFISH, like this flathead surveyed at Branched Oak Lake, offer some of Nebraska's most sustained fights.



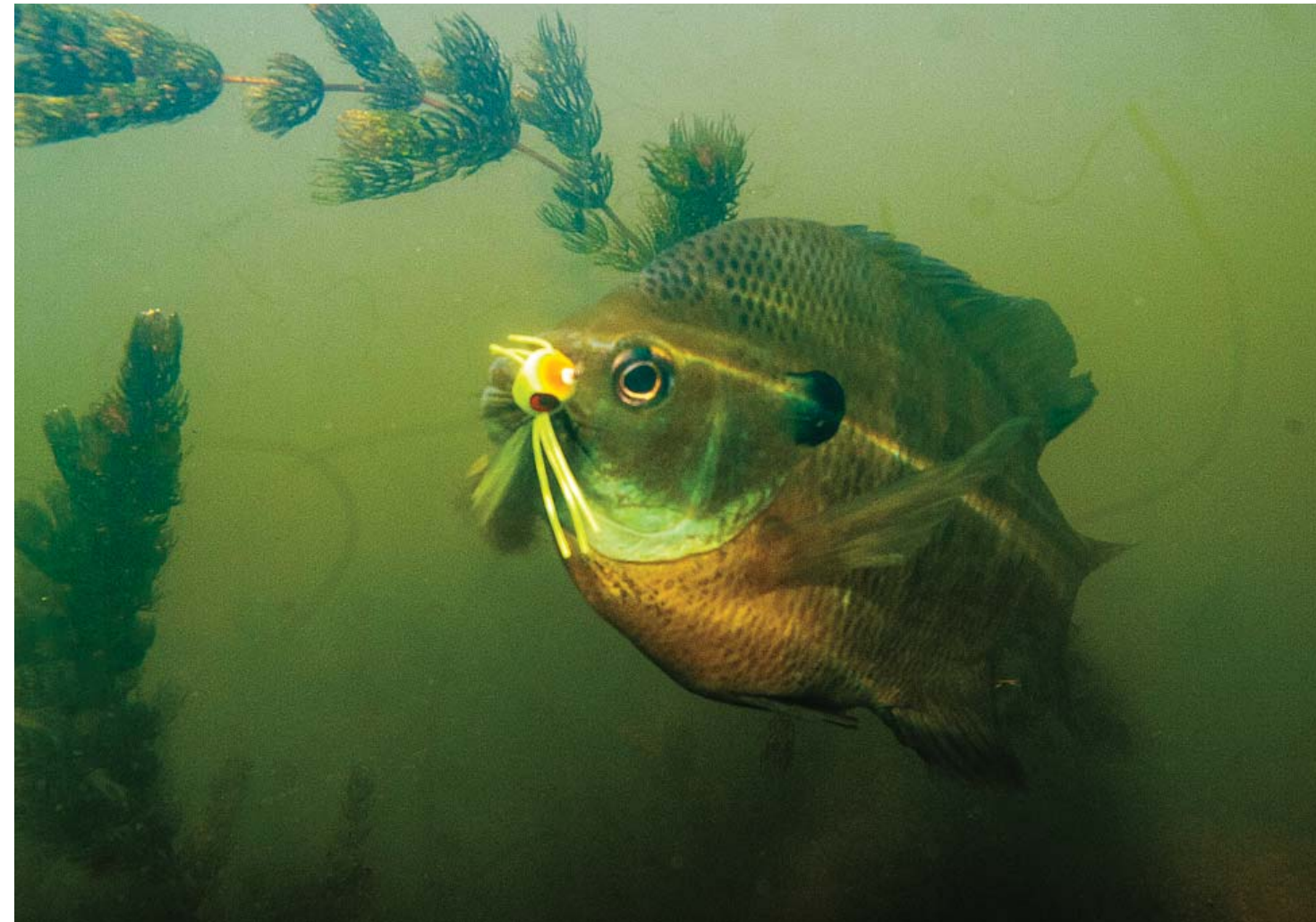
THE BIG DRAW WITH LARGEMOUTH BASS is how they will often rise to the surface when fighting, putting on an aerial show for anglers.

Often staying deep, an angler will feel strong head shakes without many quick-burst escape attempts. It's not that their moderately streamlined body can't move quickly, it's just that their makeup determines a different way to fight.

"Catfish are more vascularized," said Bauer. "They have more blood in their muscle tissue, allowing them to fight aerobically versus anaerobically" (See sidebar on page 43). "The more aerobic a fish is, the longer the fight will last."

Genetically, their riverine background also creates an endurance fighter that can cover long distances when hooked, and even in still water this fish will look for current to feed and spawn. However, a catfish caught in the Missouri River is still going to fight better, pound for pound, than one caught at your local farm pond because they are constantly using their muscles in a river habitat.

There aren't many differences between channel and flathead catfish. Channels have an overbite that allows them to pick up food from the bottoms of lakes while flatheads have an underbite conducive to their desire to



BLUEGILLS are acrobatic fighters who use their body shape to maneuver through vegetation to escape predators and anglers.

feed looking upward. Regardless of which one is hooked, an angler better hold on tight, especially if it's a big fish.

Largemouth/Smallmouth Bass

For many anglers, the mystery behind fishing is often not knowing what's on the other end of the line. But largemouth bass, America's most popular sportfish, often provide anglers the added excitement of being able to see some of the fight above the water's surface – however short that fight might be.

"Because they have white meat, they get tired quick," Bauer said. Bass are anaerobic fighters: they have short bursts of energy and then have to rest. But these short bursts can be magical. "It's a natural behavior for a largemouth bass to jump," said Bauer. "They don't know the difference between a hook and a bluegill caught in their throat, which is where the jumping comes into play. They are trying to rid themselves of it."

But what about the smallmouth, you ask? "Ounce for ounce and pound for pound, the gamest fish that swims," some have written of one of the most celebrated

fighting fish there is. "While there's not a lot a difference between and largemouth and smallmouth," said Bauer, "a smallmouth's ancestry as a river fish and body shape do make them better fighters than largemouths."

Bluegill/Crappie

"When you're panfishing, you're always fighting against the fish's flat side," said Bauer. "The resistance is because of the fish being perpendicular to you." With white meat like a bass, panfish fights are extremely short. If you're looking for an endurance fighter, this isn't it – unless you're casting an ultralight.

Crappie do differ slightly to bluegill because their body shape is not as rounded, and they are more prone to swim like an open-water fish capable of longer runs.

Northern Pike/Muskellunge

"Bluegills and northern pike are at the extremes of the body shape continuum," said Bauer. "While bluegill are built to pull you in circles, pike are built for drag racing."



NORTHERN PIKE are meant for drag racing, using short, quick bursts of energy to evade anglers.



RAINBOW TROUT could be, pound for pound, Nebraska’s best fighting fish.

These short, quick bursts of energy are all determined by this fish’s streamlined body shape and its white meat. They fade quickly because of the lactic acid they build up after each run, and need to rest much like a person who has just run a sprint. By the time they get near the boat, they will often have built up enough energy for one last massive head shake. If an angler can weather this storm, the fish will be landed.

Walleye/Yellow Perch

These excellent-tasting, white-meated, open-water species fish are more prone to display short bursts when fighting. However, walleye are known for their head shakes, with experienced anglers knowing that larger arcs of the shake translate to larger fish. “When people tell me that walleye aren’t great fighters,” said Bauer, “I usually needle them by saying you have to catch one more than 15 inches to respect their fighting ability.” But both of these species still can’t be compared to any of Nebraska’s red-meat species, including wipers.

Wipers/White Bass

“Because open water is safe for them, wipers are known for their big runs,” said Bauer. Made of red meat similar to a catfish, wipers offer epic fights. There will be little jumping from this fish, and finding cover is not a desire – getting as far away from danger as possible is. While a bit broader, white bass are similar to wipers except for one critical difference: “At times when you’re catching both,” said Bauer,

“you can immediately tell the difference as soon as you set the hook, because the wipers will usually make that initial run.”

Rainbow Trout

“Catching a big rainbow trout is fantastic,” said Bauer. And for good reason. Rainbow trout are a red-meated river fish, resulting in the perfect combination of strength and endurance. With the ability to migrate upstream long distances to spawn, rainbow trout are similar to catfish in how they stay down, but also compare to wipers with their long, powerful runs. Known for their aerial maneuvers when small, they jump less as they age. But the underwater runs remain part of one of freshwater fishing’s most prized fights.

Not all fighting fish are equal, but the task with trying to come up with a scientific answer to “What is Nebraska’s best fighting fish?” is daunting. There are just so many factors to control when evaluating the pound-for-pound strength and swimming speed between fish. But that still won’t stop anglers from comparing fish. So while the debate for favorite fighter will continue as long as lines are getting wet, the answers to why they fight the way they do remain just as fascinating. ■

Body Shape

Bluegills and northern pike are at the extreme ends of the body shape spectrum in Nebraska waters. Because of the northern pike’s slender build, they receive very little resistance when moving through the water, allowing increased speed. Other species, including largemouth bass and wipers, are in the middle zone of the fish list, while a bluegill’s round build doesn’t allow for tremendous burst speed, but it can maneuver quickly and at extreme angles to escape in dense vegetation.

An Aerobic Workout

While many body processes differ between fish and humans, some, including aerobic versus anaerobic respiration, are similar. To translate this to fish, let’s first look at humans and exercise. Aerobic exercise – think running for an extended amount of time – leads to an increased breathing and pulse rate as your body pumps oxygen to your muscles through your blood to sustain energy. Anaerobic exercise – think running sprints – doesn’t require the body to continue blood flow to muscles. A short burst of energy is all that is needed. Fish with a larger respiratory and circulatory system have more blood in their muscle tissues, giving them the ability to fight aerobically, which results in longer fights. These dark-meat species include channel catfish and rainbow trout. In addition, these fish also have more stored energy in fats and oils in their bodies, contributing to their increased stamina. However, these fish can only fight hard for so long before they suffer from respiratory or metabolic acidosis. A fish that fights itself to this point would be “played out.” Other fish such as walleye have less blood flow through their muscle tissue. These species will put up short, intense fights, but tire quickly and take longer to refuel. These battles start strong but often end suddenly.



WALLEYE are not known as great fighters, but trophy fish can still put up a battle with their propensity for head shaking when hooked.

Runners Gone Wild

Text by Kristal Stoner, photos by Jeff Kurrus

Last June, nearly 200 people participated in the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's "Run Wild" event to help threatened and endangered species. On May 17, participants can once again celebrate Threatened and Endangered Species Day by running or walking for wildlife at Eugene T. Mahoney State Park near Ashland. A 10K, 5K and 1-mile fun run are available, with participants receiving a T-shirt and pool pass to Mahoney's aquatic center. Proceeds benefit the Nebraska Wildlife Conservation Fund, which works to save Nebraska's wildlife and wild places, with special emphasis on Nebraska's threatened and endangered species. Register now at RunWildNE.org.



LEFT: Derek Bierd of Omaha participated in last year's Run Wild 5K donning a horse's head.
BELOW: Educational items, including bird claws, live animals and archery tutorials, were enjoyed by all ages.



Participants were able to get their face painted before the races.



Runners began the 1-mile fun run at last June's "Run Wild" event in a blur of costumes and color.



Ethan Hardin of Lincoln warmed up before his run.



Gabrielle Stoner (left) and Megan McCormick (right) of Lincoln were all smiles before the race.

Bighorn Intrastate Transfer

When looking for bighorn sheep to supplement one Nebraska herd, officials didn't have far to go.

By Justin Haag

Among Nebraska Panhandle's rocky buttes and canyon country, it's only appropriate to surpass milestones.

During five different occasions, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission officials have looked to other states and Canada to find and capture bighorn sheep to release in their reintroduction efforts. In February, they didn't have to leave their home state to do it.

Game and Parks contracted a helicopter crew to capture 26 sheep at the Hubbard Gap region of the Wildcat Hills which were moved by agency staff to Fort Robinson State Park and the Bighorn Wildlife Management Area (WMA), to the west and east of Crawford, respectively. Staff members moved the sheep, five of which were rams, to their new homes in three livestock trailers.

The project marked the first to move bighorn sheep from one area of Nebraska to another. The 26 sheep were among the latest to be fitted with tracking collars and ear tags to help agency staff keep tabs on the animals' location and better manage their populations. Fourteen others were captured, collared, tagged and released back to the Wildcat Hills. Samples taken from the animals help biologists better determine the herds' health. An additional 26 bighorns at the Cedar Canyon WMA south of Gering were captured, processed and immediately released back to that location.

Bighorn sheep were native to the butte country of the Nebraska Panhandle, but disappeared from the landscape in the early 1900s because of disease, habitat loss and unregulated hunting.

A herd was reintroduced to Fort Robinson in 1981, where it was released after several years of captivity. Release efforts in 2001, 2005, 2007 and 2012 have resulted in a sheep population that resides in areas of the Pine Ridge between Harrison and



Chadron State College students Riley Garey of Curtis, at left, and Jody Mitteis of Ashton lead the stretcher carrying bighorn ewe from the helicopter to the processing site.

Chadron, and the Wildcat Hills south of Gering and east to McGrew.

Todd Nordeen, the Commission's northwestern district wildlife manager, said the species has thrived in most areas, but has struggled in others. The fact that the sheep populations in Nebraska are now able to supplement struggling herds with sheep from another area of the state is a success story in itself, he said.

"We've had our ups and downs with disease issues and so forth, which has set back some of these populations," Nordeen said. "Fortunately, down in the Hubbard Gap region of the Wildcat Hills those sheep have done better than the ones at Fort Robinson."

The success of herds in the Wildcat Hills prompted Game and Parks to offer one bighorn hunting permit for 2014, the first time since 2011.

Prior to the captures, the two bighorn herds in the Wildcat Hills were estimated at 210 animals, while the three herds in the Pine Ridge numbered 175. Before the new arrivals, the Fort Robinson herd had dwindled to an estimated 27 sheep.

The sheep are doing well after the move, say those who are tracking them. It's another success story in Nebraska's effort to establish free-ranging bighorn sheep populations in areas they historically roamed.

But the project wasn't easy. Game and Parks wildlife staff members in Alliance prepared for months. Contributions from nearly a half dozen conservation organizations helped finance the projects while volunteers aided in the transfers.

The animals were caught by a California-based helicopter crew. Animal and human safety is always paramount as the pilot steers the aircraft over and around obstacles to get a shot for the gunner, who stands ready with one leg inside the cockpit and one out. As the net flies from the rifle and over each running sheep, wildlife officials are one step closer to reaching objectives.

It is, after all, through the helicopter crew's help and the work of countless others at lower altitudes that Nebraska's big game conservation efforts continue to soar. ■

Travel Nebraska with the Passport Program

The Passport Program returns with new tours this summer.

By Angela White, Media/Public Relations Manager, Nebraska Tourism Commission

A single book can take you from one of Nebraska's most unique grocery stores to one of its most exquisite hotels this summer.

The Circle C Market, built and run by students at Cody-Kilgore High School, and Magnolia Hotel, a boutique hotel that will remind you of something you could find in New York City, are two stops on the Nebraska Tourism Commission's 2014 Passport Program.

The Passport Program began in 2010 and has hosted over 200 stops around Nebraska, featuring attractions, restaurants and lodging facilities from all parts of the state. This year the program will feature 80 stops, on 10 themed tours, including new tours on top quilting destinations, patriotic and military sites and one that will outline the history of transportation in the state. The program allows participants to experience things they may not otherwise, says Kathy McKillip, Nebraska Tourism Commission Executive Director.

"Almost 20,000 people participated in the passport program last year. It's a fantastic way to encourage locals and visitors to get out and explore new places and create new memories," said McKillip. "In fact, 97 percent of participants reported

that they visited sites they never knew existed."

The program targets the peak season for traveling, with the program beginning on May 1 and ending on September 30. Participants receive a passport book in which they acquire stamps from each stop. Prizes are given to those who complete all the stops on an individual tour or a mix of stops from all the tours.

For each completed tour, participants receive a Nebraska Passport T-Shirt. For 20 completed stops, an individual can receive 20 \$1 Nebraska Lottery Scratch tickets, for 40 completed stops, a digital picture frame and for all 80 stops, a Pebble Smartwatch.

In addition, anyone who completes all 80 stops or shares their experience online and sends it in with their book will be entered into a drawing for a 60-inch Plasma TV. All participants 19 and older who turn in a book with at least one stamp will be entered into an additional drawing for 300 \$1 Nebraska Lottery scratch tickets.

Passport books can be pre-ordered by sending an email with contact information to info@nebraskapassport.com or picked up at any designated passport stop when the program begins May 1. ■

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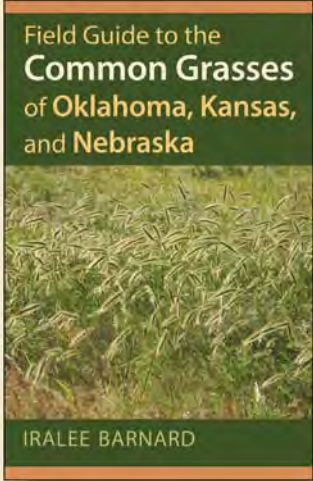
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Iralee Barnard

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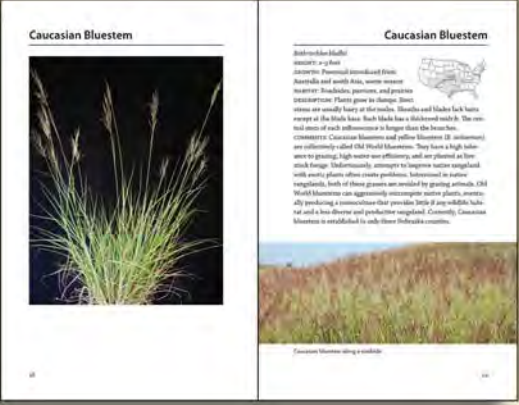
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As the Twig is Bent

So goes this proverbial saying about how early influences effect a child.

By Roger Welsch

Last summer my buddy Mick called to say that he was coming out to spend a day at our 19th-century log house in the river bottoms, which was nothing new since he has done that often over the last 40 years. What was unusual this time was that he was bringing along his 7-year-old grandson, Xavier. I know how to keep Mick amused: build a campfire, throw on some buffalo liver, make sure there’s cold beer in the cooler, pull up a couple camp chairs, problem solved ... but Xavier is a kid who is growing up in the city. His life revolves around television, the web, video games, cars, museums, school, a refrigerator, flush toilets ... you know, those things some people call civilization.

I’ve had some experience with this kind of thing, trying to convince a city kid about the pleasure of going flushless in the wilderness, that yes, out here in the middle of nowhere we just step behind a tree whenever nature calls, as it were, solve the problem. But what of all the other things in his world? What should Mick and I be doing to make sure he wasn’t bored out of his mind during his hours here? My children sometimes threatened contacting social services when I insisted we spent blizzardy nights in the cabin, listening to the wind howl, stoking the stove, hauling wood in and ashes out, and trying to think up more names of who we’d have supper with if we had a choice of anyone from American history. Oh, I guess we had fun, but there was also some relief in their voices when it was time to load up the van and head back to Lincoln.

But somewhere along the line I had forgotten what those of you who know and love the outdoors already have figured out: Mick and I didn’t have to do a thing to keep him busy. Our biggest problem was convincing him that he would have to bring any new discoveries to us to wonder over because we were not going to get up once again and make our way down to the slough to identify yet another bug, rock, flower or dinosaur bone. (Note: Xavier assured us that every bone he found that day, and there were a lot of them, were indeed dinosaur bones.)

And at the end of the day we had to convince the X-Man that yes, it really was time to go home, that really, his mother expected him home by bedtime, that no, he couldn’t stay just one more hour (while at the same time assuring him that he is welcome any time and for darn sure would be spending many more hours in the river woods before he became an old man like Mick and me), and that yes....

And here was the good part for him: he was perfectly welcome to take home the antler, rocks, interesting sticks, the raccoon skull, colorful leaves and odd pieces of iron he had found and accumulated in a pile at the campfire. And



we assured him that of course his mother would be pleased to display it all prominently in the front room.

At first Mick tried the old routine of “You can take *one* rock, *one* bone and *one* stick home,” but quickly caved in as he realized that oh, what the heck, okay, the antler. And yes, the old .22 cartridge casing. Okay, the cicada shell he found on the porch railing. And the Kentucky coffee bean pod. But no, *not* the deer poop that Uncle Roger says are “smart pills.”

Uncle Roger has bought a veritable library of nature books for the boy because I think while curiosity like his is natural enough and complete enough that it doesn’t need a LED screen or interpretive plaque to make it worthwhile, I also know that fertile ground like Xavier’s mind is the perfect place to plant the seeds of a love of nature and learning that will bear a rich harvest later in life. I know it worked for me. Never mind (and I’m sure Xavier doesn’t) that he got home with a tick attached in a particularly disturbing place on his torso, or that he got a minor burn from a hot wienie stick, or that he arrived home so dirty he had to take two baths, or that he was so tired he slept all the way home. Xavier didn’t need any books, tools or equipment to discover the wonder of nature. For him it was as obvious as a new bicycle under the Christmas tree.

Nor did he need to know what the lesson plan said he was supposed to learn that day or how it would help him make a living or what the bottom line for that day’s lesson was. What was important to him, his grandpa Mick and his Uncle Roger were the last words he said as he piled into Mick’s pickup truck for the long trip home to his mother with his scientific inventory of bones, rocks, sticks and other treasures: “Grandpa, this was my best day ever!” ■

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



BOOKS/PUBLICATIONS/VIDEOS

NEBRASKA WILDFLOWERS. It's back. Out of print for 21 years, the second edition of Jon Farrar's *Field Guide to Wildflowers of Nebraska and the Great Plains* is now available. This 6-inch by 9½-inch paperback is a must have for anyone interested in learning more about wildflowers in Nebraska and the Great Plains region and makes a great gift. Richly illustrated with color photography and ink drawings. To order this publication or to learn about other great gift ideas, visit NebraskalandGifts.com or call (800) 742-0056.

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◀ Pictured is my Dad, Ron Mack, with some mallards that we shot in the late 70's west of Petersburg. This was a common scene for my brother and I, as we spent nearly every fall weekend with Dad hunting in and around the Sandhills. Dad loved hunting around Petersburg his entire life and passed that passion on to his children and grandchildren. He recently passed away at nearly 80 years old and I can safely say that I never met anyone who could outshoot him and his Browning A5.

— Randy Mack,
Paoli, Pennsylvania

▲ Attached is a picture of my grandfather William Burton Brandt after a successful hunt. This was the second annual Broken Bow one box hunt in 1962. The hunters in the picture are (standing, left to right) Senator Leroy Bahensky from Palmer, Senator Boots Gottschalk from Columbus (the two standing on the right are the guides that I could not identify). The three kneeling are (left to right) Senator Bill Moulton from Omaha, my Grandfather William B. Brandt from Unadilla and Senator Julius Burbach from Crofton. My Grandpa Bill loved the outdoors and hunting. My best memories when I was young were him and my father cooking fresh caught fish over an old woodstove. I now take my three boys fishing and we cook fish on that same old woodstove.

— Barry Brandt, Unadilla,
Groundhog Capital of Nebraska

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

Stretch Your Morels with Pizza

Morel Mushroom, Leek and Shallot Pizza.

By Jenny Nguyen

For many in Nebraska, springtime means morel mushroom hunting, a honeycomb-like fungus that is prized by cooks and mushroom hunters everywhere. Morels were one of those items that I drooled over at my local Whole Foods store in California but could never afford, dried and sold in 1 ounce packages for as much as \$25! At the store, I would look at them longingly through cellophane – these wrinkly little brown things that held so much promise. Then I would sigh and put them back on their hook to continue my shopping, but this time trying extremely hard to pretend that I never saw them.

Then I got to Nebraska to learn that people can collect them by the bucket, which made me flip a little – just a little.

Servings: 4

Prep Time: 30 minutes

Cooking Time: 30 minutes

Ingredients:

- 4 to 5 large morel mushrooms or equivalent, sliced into bite-size pieces
- 1 large shallot, sliced thinly
- 3 tablespoons of butter
- 2 to 3 sprigs of fresh thyme, snipped
- splash of dry white wine
- 1 leek stalk, white and light green parts sliced and washed thoroughly
- 1 clove of garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons of artichoke antipasto or spread
- sliced fresh mozzarella cheese, to taste
- grated Parmesan cheese, to taste
- 1 teaspoon of chives, chopped
- salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste
- thin crust pizza crust, homemade or store-bought.



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN

1. Heat oven according to store-bought pizza crust directions, or for your own homemade pizza dough recipe. Heat 1 tablespoon of butter in a medium sauce pan over medium heat. Add sliced leeks, garlic, salt and pepper to taste. Cover and cook for 7-10 minutes, or until leeks are tender. Stir occasionally and do not burn.

2. In a sauté pan, heat 2 tablespoons of butter over medium-high heat. Add sliced mushrooms to hot butter and sauté for 2-3 minutes, or until mushrooms begin to soften, stirring frequently. Add shallots, thyme and a splash of white wine and cook until wine evaporates and shallots begin to caramelize, stirring frequently. Add salt and pepper, to taste. Take off heat and set aside.

3. Evenly spread artichoke spread onto pizza crust. Lay mozzarella slices over the spread, then cooked leeks and morel mushroom-shallot mixture. Grate Parmesan cheese over pizza and cracked pepper, to taste. Then bake pizza accordingly or until cheese is fully melted and pizza crust

is cooked.

Tip: I used Trader Joe's Artichoke Antipasto, but any artichoke spread will do. Buy a spread/dip with artichokes as the main ingredient, not a chip dip that's made with mostly cream. You can also make your own artichoke spread by tossing together some chopped canned artichokes (drained), minced garlic, lemon juice, extra virgin olive oil, salt and pepper. Or if you don't like artichokes, pesto will work.

4. When pizza is done, grate more Parmesan cheese on top and sprinkle chopped chives over pizza. Slice and serve.

This recipe and photograph originally appeared on Jenny's blog Foodforhunters.com.

Read Jenny's NEBRASKAland blog "Midland Musings" to see other stories from this NEBRASKAland Regional Editor.





Wind and Wire

Photography has the unique power to move us and hold us still, all at once. The same could be said for wind and wire.

In a wave of westward settlement that occurred on the Great Plains in the late 1870s, the first windmills dotted the landscape just as barbed wire debuted and soon stretched across the wild expanse — quintessential components of the American frontier contained in the steel of rotating blades and razor edges. Both technologies dramatically altered the homesteader's relationship to the land, one vastly different from the Plains Indian tribes already inhabiting the area.

Although these pioneer emblems have stood strong for many generations, the Great Plains has certainly changed. In less than 150 years, these grasslands would become an endangered landscape.

Luckily, a step outside my door will still find me in native prairie. It is in these rare remnants where photographs become moments to harvest solitude and history. In this instance, it is the twisted fence that now confines only an old Aermotor wailing softly in the frost.

Amy Kucera, Associate Editor
March 6, 2014



WE GROW DREAMS



Nebraska Ranch & Farm Land — Plant, grow, harvest and then start all over Land grows the crops and livestock that feed us, the trees that shelter us and the whitetails that unite us. Whatever you plant, whatever you harvest, we'll grow with you. At Whitetail Properties, we grow dreams!



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Loving (and protecting) Where We Live

Preserving and protecting Nebraska

Our state has extraordinary beauty, and Nebraska Public Power District is dedicated to protecting it while meeting the energy needs of our customers.

Here are just a few things we do:

- We meet current environmental regulatory limits and emission standards at our power generating facilities.
- We monitor and test air, water and soil at our facilities across the state.
- We consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and other agencies to protect the integrity of the environment.
- We manage wildlife habitat around our facilities along the Missouri, Niobrara and Platte Rivers.
- We evaluate the proposed area for wetlands, migratory bird flight patterns and threatened endangered species before any construction.
- We generated electricity that was more than 40 percent carbon free in 2013.

NPPD wants to assure a quality of life for Nebraskans, now and for future generations. Our customers are our neighbors and friends. Nebraska is our home.



Plan your summer outdoor adventure at one of our public recreation areas

NPPD provides reliable electricity for a large portion of Nebraska, but did you know some of the best outdoor recreation areas in the state are near our power generating facilities? We invite you to visit these recreational locations, many of which are conveniently located just off Interstate 80.



Lake Maloney State Recreation Area

The 1,650-acre reservoir is a popular place for fishing, skiing and boating. The lake is located along Highway 83, five miles south of the I-80 exit at North Platte. The Outlet Recreation Area has camp sites, boat ramps/docks, a fish cleaning station and shower house.



Sutherland Reservoir State Recreation Area

Located three miles south off I-80, Sutherland Reservoir is a popular spot for picnicking, boating, swimming and fishing. Primitive campsites are located on the east and west sides of the lake, while a private camping area with electrical hookups and a nine-hole golf course are located along the north shore.



Lake Ogallala/Sutherland Supply Canal

Located below Lake McConaughy, Lake Ogallala and the Sutherland Supply Canal are among the top trout fisheries in the state. Lake Ogallala is formed by the Keystone Dam on the North Platte River, which diverts water into the canal. The area is also a favorite among bird watchers. Bald Eagles can be seen perching in trees and fishing open waters.



North Platte/Kearney Canal Trails

North Platte's riding and hiking path winds through the south side of town along our North Platte Hydro tailrace. The Kearney Canal Trail stretches from Cottonmill Park, where our Kearney Hydro Plant is located, to the University of Nebraska-Kearney campus.

STOP AQUATIC HITCHHIKERS

Invasive aquatic species, like Zebra Mussels or Asiatic Clams, can clog water intakes at our power generation facilities, causing reduced power production and costly repairs. Remember to clean, drain and dry your gear after use.



Nebraska Public Power District

Always there when you need us