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Cover: Vince Gewinner, of Weeping Water, designs his wooden lures to be more than artistic. They are made to catch fish. Story on page 32.

JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

This page: A pair of Canada geese wade in the North Platte River as fog rises on an icy morning near Melbeta.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

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2024 Spring Chapter Banquets

Table with 6 columns: DATE, CITY, CHAPTER, DATE, CITY, CHAPTER. It lists the dates and locations for 2024 Spring Chapter Banquets across various Nebraska chapters.

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Photographs are also welcome.*



PETROGLYPHS

Elk, buffalo and other symbols adorn the walls of the cave for which Indian Cave State Park is named. The exact origin of the etchings is unknown.

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



The hunting season for Eurasian collard-dove is long, running Oct. 31, 2023 — Aug. 31, 2024. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

NOT DONE SHOTGUNNING

By Jeff Kurrus

There are years when I don't want to put down my shotgun, even in late winter or early spring. Fortunately, in Nebraska, I don't have to. While many bird hunters have put away their pumps, semi-autos and over-and-unders, waiting until the spring turkey opener, there are still a few transition hunting seasons to keep you gunning until that first gobble.

Eurasian Collared-Dove — When you find one, you'll find more. During the winter months, the Eurasian collared-dove that have stayed around have found food and thermal cover. Ride roads to scout these birds, which often will inhabit farmsteads and, on first appearance, might be mistaken for pigeons. The season is open Oct. 31, 2023 — Aug. 31, 2024.



Crow — I'm always reminded of the old-timer who once told me about his efforts of calling in crows. "I could get every crow in the county in the farthest tree I could see. Not a single one came

within shotgun range, but it sure was fun." The season lasts from Jan. 13 — March 14, 2024. Electronic calls are allowed, as are any firearm or archery equipment.

Coyote — More than a decade ago, while on a Sandhills coyote hunt with Chris Pokorny from Omaha, I watched my host use electronic callers, head-to-toe snow camo and a long-range tripod and rifle set-up while coyote hunting. But the hair-raising moment came during our last set of the day when we walked into a thicket adjacent to a small, grass field and he had a shotgun in his hand.

"When he comes, he'll be right on top of us," Pokorny said. And while we didn't get a shot that day, coyotes have always stuck with me as one of early spring's most exciting quarries. Coyotes can be hunted year-round.

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FROM THE MARSH TO THE STAGE

By Todd Mills

It's one thing to call in ducks from a blind, but to compete and earn a championship title, competitive callers have to excel at a much higher level. After a few years of attending classes, exchanging audio files with other callers, obsessively watching videos and driving my wife crazy by blowing nonstop in our basement, I entered the world of competition calling.

In 2011, I competed in the Nebraska State Duck Calling Championships and finished in the top five of the open division. The winner that day was a young man from Schuyler, Nebraska, named Nick Brichacek. Although I was satisfied by my routine, I couldn't help but admire Nick's skill. I wasn't even close.

To culminate his calling career, in November Nick won the World's Championship Duck Calling Contest in Stuttgart, Arkansas, adding to his already impressive three top 10 finishes at this competition and his three Nebraska State Championships.



While Nick Brichacek is a world champion duck caller, he also hunts Canada geese. PHOTO COURTESY OF NICK BRICHACEK

To reach that pinnacle in the duck calling world, you have to be exceptionally good. Below are a few suggestions from Nick on how to transition from the marsh to the stage.

How Did You First Get into Competition Calling?

I had been driving my mom crazy since I was 5 watching and listening to calling in the basement of my house. At 13, my dad took me to the Duck Callers Association of Nebraska calling classes in Omaha. That August I competed in the Nebraska State Hunters division and have been doing it since.

What's the Major Difference Between Calling Ducks and Competition Calling?

Contest duck calling has to do with what the judges are looking for, while calling ducks is what Mother Nature gives you. Best part about contest calling is it keeps you sharp year-round. Just like sports, you always practice before the big game. Duck calling is no different. Although contest calling requires a different level of calling, it allows you to be prepared for any hunting situation.

Any Advice to Someone Looking to Get on Stage?

Find a mentor and get as much stage presence as possible. Hit as many contests as you possibly can and always practice with a purpose.

How is Competition Calling Judged?

Although there are different types of contests, the mainstream format is used at the World Calling Championships. With a routine lasting 90 seconds (red light coming on at 80 seconds), you'll present your routine in front of an audience. Five judges seated behind a curtain will score, with the high and low scores thrown out, leaving the top three scores as your accumulated total.

Top scores will advance to the second and third rounds when a winner will be determined. Although each contestant will have a slightly different routine, you're required to present a hail call, feeding chuckle and comeback call.

Several calling forums are available, including duckhuntingchat.com and refugeforums.com. In Nebraska, Nick is currently hosting Grand Passage Sportsman, which hosted the state calling contest this year, as well as offering calling classes.

When boating, remember to:



CLEAN



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DRY



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A venison roast from the hindquarter corned for St. Patrick's Day dinner. JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND

CORNEd VENISON

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

I finally made corned venison last year and was pleasantly surprised by how simple the process was. The roasts turned out tender with that recognizable corned meat flavor. If you are hoping to have corned venison ready by St. Patrick's Day, make sure you start the process about a week ahead. This is not a recipe to think about at the last minute.

I corned the top, bottom and eye of rounds, which are located in the hindquarters, and I separated each muscle. The brine was able to penetrate throughout the cuts, giving me edge to edge pinkness. Although not aesthetically pleasing, a little gray in the middle is still safe to eat if this happens. Using thicker, larger cuts may require longer brining time.

Corned venison goes well with boiled cabbage, potatoes, carrots (not pictured) and horseradish cream sauce. I did not include a recipe for the sauce because there are loads of them online. Store leftover cooked corned venison submerged in the boiling water; venison is lean and will dry out in the refrigerator if you do not do this. Waterfowlers can try this recipe with goose breasts.

Prep Time: 6-7 days

Ingredients:

- 3½ to 5 pounds of venison round roast(s)
- Horseradish cream sauce
- Cabbage, cut into wedges
- Red potatoes

Brine

- 1 gallon of water
- 1 cup + 3½ tbs. Morton's Coarse Kosher salt
- 5 tsp. pink curing salt (Prague powder #1)
- 3 tbs. McCormick pickling spice
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 1 stick of cinnamon
- 1 tsp. ground ginger
- ½ tsp. red pepper flakes

1. Combine brine ingredients in a pot and bring to a boil. Take brine off the heat, and when cool, chill in the refrigerator until cold. Next, add the venison roast and completely submerge it in the brine. Use a heavy plate to weigh down the roast if needed. Brine in the refrigerator for 6 days.

2. When you are ready to cook the corned venison, rinse the roast with cold water. Then submerge the roast in a large pot of fresh water. Simmer the venison until tender, about 2 hours.

3. You can boil the potatoes and cabbage in the same pot, but do not add them too early because they will become mushy. Red potatoes, depending on size, take 20-30 minutes to become tender, and cabbage takes about 10 minutes. Slice the corned venison against the grain and serve with horseradish cream sauce.

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NebraskaWildlifeFund.org

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





Do Cranes Sleep?

*Story and photos by
Eric Fowler*

Do sandhill cranes sleep? On their bellies? In a wooded creekbottom? From what we know about the cranes that stop in the Platte River Valley in Nebraska each spring, none of those ideas seem to make sense. It certainly didn't to Chris Helzer of the Nature Conservancy, whose tip on this seemingly odd behavior spurred me to spend two days in a photo blind last spring and find out that some cranes do, indeed, sleep in the woods. Well, at least sort of.

Several years ago, Helzer had noticed sandhill cranes were spending time in the woodlands on their property along a stream that was once the south channel of the Platte River south of Wood River. Curious, he had Karen Hemberger, a long-time volunteer from Hastings, set up trail cameras to see what they were doing. After those cameras captured video of the birds on their bellies, Helzer thought: "That seems weird, but really cool."

"Everything I've heard about cranes was that they spent most of their time in the open so they could see predators coming. So, I was surprised, in the first place, that they were in the trees. And then when I saw them lying on the ground and how hard it was for them to get up, then I was really surprised. It seemed like they were making themselves really vulnerable to potential predation."

With tips from TNC staff and some scouting, I found a spot the cranes were

Sandhill cranes feed in the south channel of the Platte River in Hall County.



A sandhill crane cups its wings and glides in to join the rest of the birds in the creekbottom.



using along the stream, which you could also call a slough. Disconnected from the river at the upper end long ago, it is fed entirely by groundwater and flows intermittently depending on the season and the year. Last spring, it was not flowing, only holding water in low spots. To the north is a privately owned pasture. To the south is a native lowland tallgrass prairie laced with wet meadow swales the Nature Conservancy acquired in 2007. A decade ago, they cleared brush and smaller trees from the creekbottom, leaving cottonwoods and other larger trees, to create a savanna-type habitat. The stream bed sits about 8 feet below those grasslands, and 3 feet below the bottomland prairie and forest it winds through. The muddy banks of the stream in the spot I chose were littered

LEFT: A crane dances in the stream.

OPPOSITE: A crane looks skyward at other birds flying past.





Cranes scratch their heads as they preen in the creekbottom.



A crane tips its beak down to its neck as it rests in the grass along the stream.



An adult and juvenile crane pause along the stream mere feet from a deadfall.

with crane tracks, and the grass with feathers and down.

On both of my visits in mid- to late March, many cranes had already left their roost on the Platte a half mile north of me and were feeding in crop fields and wet meadows on both sides of the stream when I arrived at sunrise. They continued to leave the river in waves as I set up my blind on the south bank of the creek and settled in for the day.

Cranes started arriving late in the morning on my first visit and early in the afternoon on the second, dropping in a few at a time at first and then in bunches. I watched as they loafed in the grass and preened their feathers. A few at a time, they walked down to the stream to drink or probe the mud

with their long beaks for invertebrates and plants. One sat down in the water and took a bath. The birds seemed to wander back and forth across the bottom, individually or in family groups. Temperatures were in the 50s both days with nary a cloud in the sky. On the first day, when south winds gusted to nearly 40 mph, some birds took cover next to willow thickets growing on the south edge of the bottom.

On both days, birds were resting, including on their bellies, soon after arriving. The birds appeared to be much more at ease on my second visit, however, when winds were much calmer. Some pecked at the grass, which by now had been beat down by their presence during the previous

few weeks, possibly eating insects. A few danced, something I'd seen little of a week earlier. An hour or so after the birds arrived, most were resting, some on their bellies, some standing on one leg, the other tucked up in their belly, and others on two legs. Whether they were upright or lying down, some cranes had their heads turned and tucked beneath a wing, some had their bill pointed down, resting on their upright neck, and others simply rested with their head up and eyes closed, revealing the tiny white feathers on their eyelids. Some stood in the creek as they slept.

The cranes that were lying down got there slowly and awkwardly. The proportions of a bird's leg and foot bones differ greatly from ours. The

thigh and knee of cranes and other birds are hidden by the feathers on their bellies. The joint we see between their two longest and most visible bones is actually what would be our ankle, known as the hawk joint. The lower of those two bones is comparable to the long bones in our feet, between our ankle and toes. To sit, the cranes dropped backward on that hawk joint, and then settled their bodies forward onto the ground. I watched some birds wander for a bit, examining the ground here and there before picking a spot to lie down. One bird, upon finding that spot, turned in a circle like a dog might before settling down.

There were always some cranes on alert, and the heads of those resting snapped to attention when



Cranes loaf in the creekbottom, most resting on their feet with some lying on the ground.

a strange sound or the call of alert birds gave warning. Birds on their bellies sometimes simply lifted their heads when alerted. Other times, they were on their feet in a split second in an effortless motion, unlike their lumbering efforts to lie down, and much quicker than what Helzer had seen in their videos.

“That was like watching some kind of robot that hasn’t been perfected yet,” he said.

The birds left en masse late in the afternoon on my first visit, presumably startled by something. They stayed

into the evening on the second, leaving in bunches until the last of them departed an hour before sunset, heading to the fields and meadows one last time before returning to their river roost.

In the Woods

More than 1 million sandhill cranes stop along central Platte River each spring. They are most often seen roosting on the widest, most open, segments of the river at night, and feeding and loafing in wide-open crop fields and wet meadows during the day.

There are five subspecies of sandhill cranes in North America. Two, the lesser and greater, are migratory. These are the birds we see in Nebraska, all heading from their wintering grounds in the southern United States and Mexico to their breeding grounds scattered across the northern U.S., Canada, Alaska and into Siberia. Among the two migratory subspecies are four breeding populations, each with their own habitat preferences. The common view that cranes only use open spaces was adopted because many of the birds that stop here do.

But that is not the case.

“Sometimes when you see weird stuff like that, it’s actually because we’ve made generalities to the mid-continent population as a whole,” said Andy Caven, the Vice President of North America Programs with the Crane Foundation who spent nine years working on the Platte with the Crane Trust. “Some of those way western birds, the lessers, will deal with willow thickets and stuff like that a little bit differently because the only place where there’s water in the landscape is shrubby stuff.”

Conservation photographer Michael Forsberg began his career with Nebraskaland Magazine and has photographed the birds across North America. Some of the greater sandhill cranes, he said, especially those of southern Canada and western Minnesota, nest in deep wetlands with more cover than birds nesting on the Arctic tundra. “They’re taller birds that are maybe more comfortable in situations that have more woodlands,” Forsberg said.

“Sandhill cranes, besides just being really resilient, I think they use a lot

more different types of habitats than people give credit for. They definitely have their preferences, but they will make whatever works work. They need grasslands and wetlands, but I’m not sure they’re as picky as people think.”

Forsberg captured the photos for his first article on cranes that appeared in this magazine in 1996 along the same stream a mile to the east. The birds I watched filled a 60-yard-wide gap between larger trees and had a clear flight path in and out from both the north and the south, a site similar to the one Forsberg chose.

From my blind, I had a narrow field of view of a short stretch of the stream, and none of the birds I saw were actually “in” the woods as much as next to them, walking within a few yards of thickets and grass-choked deadfall. I had, however, seen signs of cranes using areas with more cover. Forsberg had a different view and watched birds, after they dropped into the opening, walk up and down the stream, even through wooded sections. He also saw them wander to and from the adjacent prairie. I didn’t

see that movement from my blind, but it could have been happening, as there were birds in the prairie to the south and the pasture to the north each time I visited. Cranes that spend the day in fields and meadows along the Platte might land close to a road, but they don’t typically stay there when a car passes. The closest road to the section of stream where I spent my time is 200 yards to the north, and it is traveled by far fewer crane watchers than others in the region during March. That alone



A crane rests next to the stream, bill tucked under a wing, balancing on one leg with its other tucked beneath its breast feathers.



After weeks of hosting cranes, grass in the creekbottom was littered with feathers and down.

could explain why these birds like the spot. While working on his book, *Great Plains: America’s Lingerin Wild*, Forsberg said the places he saw the most wildlife weren’t always the best habitat. “You know where they were? They were in the places that were the most quiet and had the least amount of us,” he said.

Sleeping

So were the cranes I watched sleeping? Anne Lacy, Director of Eastern Flyway Programs with the International Crane Foundation in Baraboo, Wisconsin, has been studying cranes since 2000 and uses that term loosely. “I want to be careful about

the word sleep, because when I think of the human form of sleep, where we are literally zonked out and dreaming, I don’t know if cranes do that,” Lacy said, noting she prefers to use words like resting and loafing to describe the behavior. “They might rest, but I think it’s more of shutting down half of their brain because the littlest noise and, ‘Boom!’ they’re awake and aware.”

Lacy visits the Platte each spring and has watched from bank blinds in the evening and early morning hours as birds roost in the river. In the dark, she said, those birds are always on alert, and she wonders if those with their heads tucked under their wings might be doing so more to conserve

body heat than rest. “But when they go out in the morning and find their foraging fields, they’ll get a bite to eat, and then they will find a place to loaf and/or ‘sleep’,” Lacy said. “The predators that try to make snacks out of a crane are more active at night than during the day, so they can afford to shut down a little bit more during the day. And they’re usually in a crowd of their compatriots, and if somebody twitches, by god, nobody is looking around saying, ‘Hey, what’s going on?’ They’re all up in the air, and they’re gone. There’s always that situational awareness, even though their head is tucked and they’re on the ground and their eyes might even be closed.”

All is Well

Cranes were likely using this stretch of the stream creek long before Forsberg photographed them there. Helzer can’t say for sure if they are using it more since the habitat was improved, but he would like to think so. He sees birds in other places he was told he wouldn’t when he started working in the valley 30 years ago, including prairies where their heads barely rise above the tall grass. He was happy to learn cranes using this woodland stream wasn’t as odd as he initially thought, and that they could stand up much quicker than what he had seen were a bobcat or coyote to jump into the fray. “That makes me feel better,” he said. 

Outdoor Nebraska

By Renae Blum

This month, bird migration offers some wonderful outdoor opportunities. But you can also enjoy trout fishing at Lake Ogallala, hunting snow geese and more. Read on for details. [N](#)



Hunt snow geese

Season dates vary | Statewide

Participate in the light goose conservation order for a fun, challenging hunt. Nebraska is a vital spot that sees hundreds of thousands of snow geese pass through on their way north to nesting grounds. Watch the weather forecast and keep an eye on where water is thawing. Also, make sure to handle and prepare your harvest correctly to help ensure a delicious meal. See more details at [NebraskalandMagazine.com](#); search for the article “Light Geese are Delicious and Deserve Respect” by Greg Wagner. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

Fish for trout at Lake Ogallala

All year | Lake Ogallala State Recreation Area

Trout are a cold-water species, so they’re a good choice for anglers this month while waters are still chilly. Opportunities for rainbow and tiger trout can be found at Lake Ogallala. The lake was renovated last fall and restocked with trout, which have likely grown to a good size at this point, said fisheries biologist Daryl Bauer. Try your favorite bait to catch one this spring. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



See courting displays of sharp-tailed grouse

March 1 to May 1 — peak dates are March 15 to April 15
Niobrara State Park

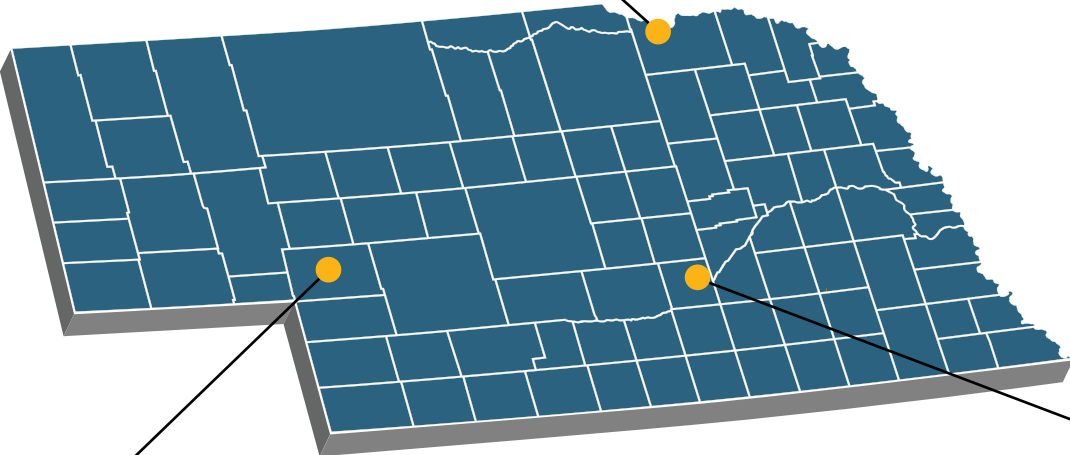
Experience the natural wonder of the sharp-tailed grouse’s mating dance. Niobrara State Park’s viewing blind can hold up to 12 guests; reserve a spot by calling the park office at 402-857-3373. To view this sunrise ritual, you can stay overnight at one of the park’s fully equipped cabins or electric campsites. Use promo code “SHARPTAIL24” on our reservation system — [nebraskastateparks.reserveamerica.com](#) — for a discounted rate on weekends. Weekdays are pre-discounted during the off-season. ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



View northern painted turtles

March throughout the summer | Statewide

One of the most common turtles in Nebraska, the northern painted turtle can often be found sunning itself on rocks and logs along the edges of ponds and lakes. Turtles cannot produce their own body heat like mammals, so they rely on other sources to stay warm. Venture to a lake or pond to spot one — or several — painted turtles. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



Start your sandhill crane driving tour from Mormon Island

Numbers peak mid- to late March | Mormon Island State Recreation Area

Mormon Island State Recreation Area is a great basecamp for viewing sandhill cranes, with electric camping options to stay overnight. While you may not see sandhill cranes in the park itself, many options are close by, including the Crane Trust Nature and Visitor Center, about 5 miles west of the park. Another great viewing spot is Platte River Drive, which can be accessed 3 miles south of the park. Stop by the park kiosk to grab a detailed map of driving routes for viewing cranes. For more information, call the park at 308-385-6211. ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



Beautifully Functional

The Work of Wooden Lure Carver Vince Gewinner

Story and photos by Jeff Kurrus

Wood-carved praying hands for his mother and obscene gesturing fingers for his father. This is the talent, and personality, of Weeping Water creator Vince Gewinner. Yet despite the multitude of carvings he's made — from recurve bows and backwoods utensil sets to keychain ceramics and home décor — his current passion is homemade fishing lures.

But they're not fishing lures to set on the shelf. They are not the equivalent of wooden waterfowl decoys. They are the opposite. Once they have been constructed, painted, and eventually dry, they are immediately wet again in search of everything from smallmouth and largemouth bass in Nebraska to muskies in Canada.

As long as they swim straight.

Then and Now

"You need to see the first lures I carved," Vince grinned from the workshop behind his home, pulling two wooden crankbaits from a nearby shelf and even a Zara Spook stick-bait imitation hanging on the wall. "I tried the spook first. It doesn't work worth a crap."

Mal-shaped with childlike paint jobs, they are a far cry from what he is creating today, but still provide motivation for how far he has come in such a short time. He began carving fishing lures by hand less than two years ago.

"I first made lures I had fished with during my life, imitating ones I used as a kid," Vince said. "Then, the more I learned, the more I began to create my own." A process that took him a couple days in the beginning can now be completed

in a couple hours. The speed and precision of this work being shown with a lure brought to him just the day before that he carved five different times to reveal his step-by-step process.

Everything about the lure he made in less than a day — from its shape to its eventual painting — was night and day from his first wooden creations.

Yet these lures still aren't perfect, and for him that might be the best part. Today's seeming perfection is tomorrow's "what if we made this change," knowing full well that there might be a misstep or two along the way.

Trial and Error

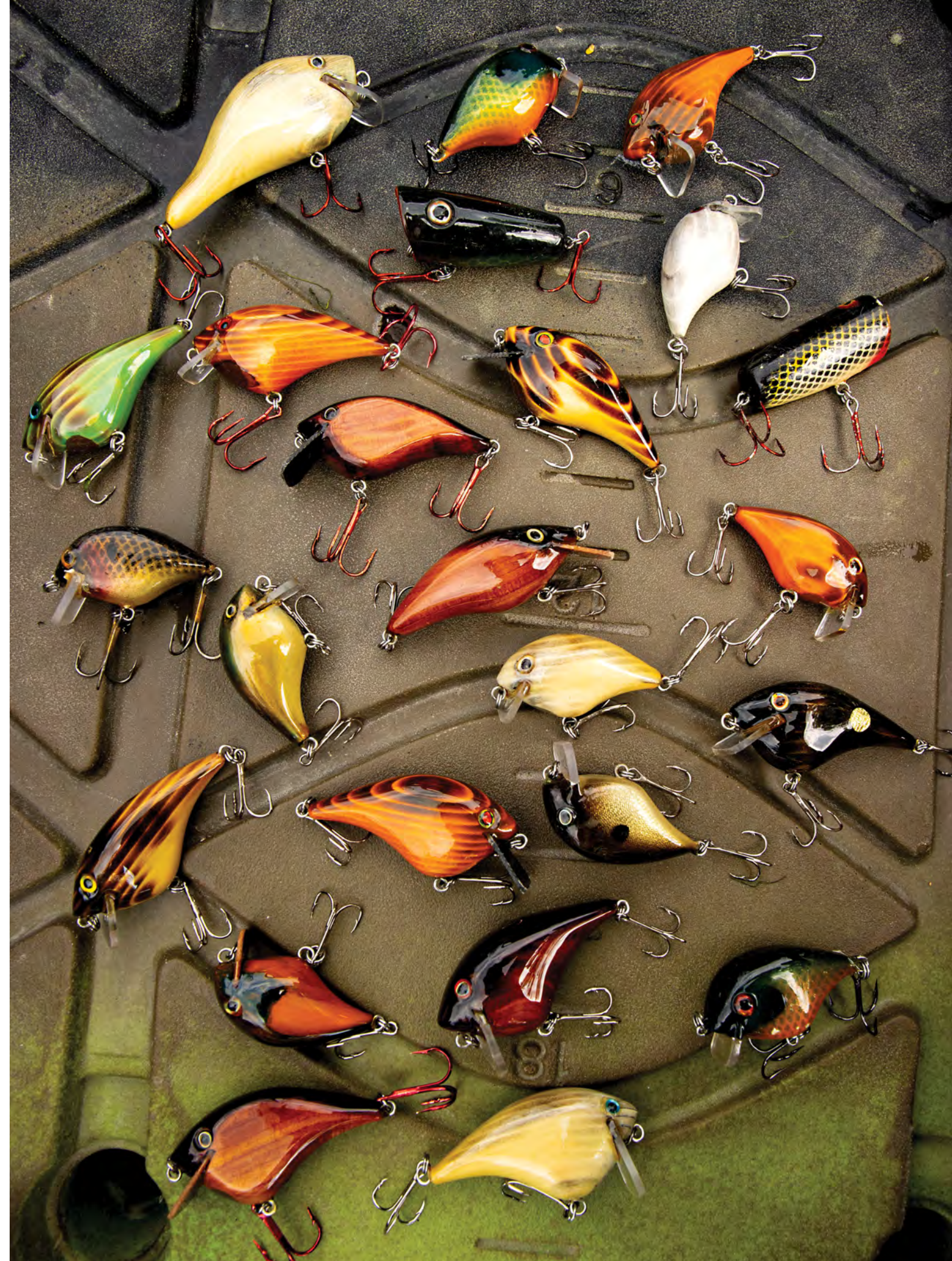
Vince is in constant trial-and-error mode, except for one aspect. He does know what will make a lure pretty. "It starts with looking for grain in the wood that will make a cool design or uniformity." He demonstrates this by laying a piece of wood on his workbench. "See that knothole?" he asks.

"That will look very cool."

From there, he uses a bandsaw to cut out and sand the pattern until it's in the general shape he desires. Then he



Above: Vince Gewinner holds a largemouth bass he caught on his homemade lure at Verdon State Recreation Area. Opposite: While Gewinner's wooden lures look as if they should be placed on a mantel somewhere, their combination of paint and wood grain dazzling to the eye, he continues to design these lures to catch fish.





From his kayak, Gewinner catches a largemouth bass from a kayak with a set of homemade wooden fishing lures at Verdon State Recreation Area.

begins his measurements — yet not from any sort of fancy, high-dollar tool.

“I stole a protractor from my kids when they were little,” he said, “and I’m constantly using it.” This is evident in how this elementary school math device constantly twists in his hands while he marks his newest lure with a pen.

He makes a series of measurements based around the centerline of the lure, noting the lip slot and where the weight will be added. After drilling a hole for the weight, which makes the lure easier to cast and helps it to sink when reeled, he takes a No. 7-sized split shot and hammers it flat, fitting it

in a hole just beneath the lure’s lip. “You have to experiment with this part a bit,” he said.

This remains the overarching suggestion of Vince’s process. While he would be the first to tell you he has formulas, and that his process has become more refined, he continues to watch videos and use around-the-house items, like his wife’s food scale, in an effort to make even nicer, more balanced, lures.

From here he uses a belt sander and file to remove any sharp points the lure might still have. Next comes sandpaper and then a piece of leather with rubbing compound. “That

makes the surface of the lure like glass,” he said. “Do you need to do that? Probably not. But I want it to look good.”

Painting comes next, and this is when the project really starts to take shape despite Vince’s most impressive miscue in his process. “I’m not very good with my paint,” he said with a knowing grin. “Because I don’t write down my paint mixtures. I should probably get a little better there.”

This statement becomes increasingly comical as Vince’s lures are seen, each matching the intended species precisely. If it’s a fish imitation, it looks exactly like that fish. However, sometimes he decides the grain of wood will be nicer than



Gewinner's first two homemade lures are a far cry from what his fine, but working, art has now become.



One of Gewinner's favorite tools when making lures is a protractor.



Gewinner uses a hammered-down split shot to provide the weight his lures need for casting.



What took Gewinner days to create when he first started can now be done in hours.



An attractive wood grain can be used to create a beautiful fishing lure.



This northern pike imitation has never met Gewinner's swimming standard, but the fish haven't seemed to mind.



Gewinner's topwater lures, like this one, can be used for any fish, from largemouth bass and northern pike to muskies.

anything he could paint. With these, he simply dips the lure in spar urethane and allows the wood's natural color to remain. These are some of his prettiest.

Once the lure dries, Vince adds wire ties, hooks and eyes. Then it's ready to test.

Testing Facilities

Where else would a talented wood carver test the practicality of his latest creation? A backyard swimming pool, of course. "I spend a lot of time at the pool," he admitted.

Once Vince's lures have been designed, and painted, he ties them on a rod and puts them to work in the pool, but not without a fair warning before he casts. "I can't make any guarantees this will swim." Like all crankbait anglers, he's looking for a lure that wobbles seemingly uncontrollable as it swims but also in a straight line.

Minor adjustments can be made to help the lure, such as adjusting the lure's tie eye, but sometimes they just



After designing his lures, Gewinner takes them to their testing site — his backyard swimming pool.

don't swim.

In these circumstances, Vince has a backup plan, as shown with a pair of pliers after several unsuccessful attempts at creating a beautiful, yet productive, fishing lure. He cut the line of the most recent lure he was testing and tossed it aside. "Put it on a keychain," he said with a laugh. "I need to do some work on this design to get it to swim right."

When the lures do pass his swim test, they are allowed a spot in the most coveted spot of all — the tackle box.

What's Next

Wherever his mind takes him, and these ideas quite often come while he's on the water testing his latest set of lures.

Maybe he'll experiment with making deep divers, but he knows the complications they present with a longer lip. Plus, he doesn't fish with them much and doesn't make lures to gather dust on the mantel.

Perhaps he'll turn his creativity to using more types of woods. While cedar is the easiest to work with, Vince has made lures using a variety of woods including pine, balsa and poplar. He's also carved walnut cut for firewood and oak from a whiskey barrel.

Or he could go down his father's route, who used to make his own maple stock muzzleloaders.

"I have a lot of ideas," Vince said. And a lot of options for someone of his patience and talent. As long as whatever he makes — a lure, bow, or something in between — can pass the ultimate test.

Being ready for the field. 

On a New Level



There's a different level of excitement that arises when catching a big fish on public water. I always imagine these fish seeing hundreds of lures a year, so my pride swells a bit when my rod bends after hooking into a lunker.

I found out last summer that my pride swelled even more when fishing with a homemade crankbait. Easy to cast and retrieve, I quickly understood Vince's joy when feeling a fish strike one of his lures. And it didn't take long either, as I caught several nice largemouth bass on both Nebraska and Minnesota waters last summer.

One of Vince's disappointments — a northern pike imitation — also saw the water last season. This lure doesn't have the same wobble that his other, more refined, lures have. But the fish didn't seem to care.

Because if it looks like a pike — and this lure most certainly does — it must taste like a pike.

Found at an Estate Sale

A Trophy from the Year Nebraska Banned Girls' Basketball Tournaments

By David L. Bristow, *History Nebraska*

Jim Brogden was browsing an estate sale in Acworth, Georgia, when he noticed this beautiful trophy. It tells a story not only of a basketball team, but also of a generation-long reaction against girls' and womens' sports.

Brogden bought the trophy and took it home. He knew nothing about it except the inscription:

O C H S
Invitation Tournament
GIRLS BASKET BALL
1922
Won by Filley
1923 No Tourney
1924 Blue Springs

An online search led him to a History Nebraska blog post, where he saw his trophy in a series of photos from Blue Springs, Nebraska. He wondered how a Nebraska basketball trophy made its way to Georgia, and he began to think that it belonged in a Nebraska museum. He soon donated it to History Nebraska. We have pieced together the story of the trophy and of the girls who won it a century ago.



The 1924 Blue Springs High School girls' basketball team with their coach, Miss Shotwell (second from right). History Nebraska has not been able to match names to faces, but the players are guards Mabel Bolender, Iva Peck and Lucile Davis, and forwards Helen Tays, Gladys Jenkins and Fern Lynxweiler. HISTORY NEBRASKA, RG3372-4-27

OCHS stands for Otoe Consolidated High Schools, which hosted an invitational girls' basketball tournament in Barneston on Feb. 22-23, 1924. With "very snappy players, and team work to perfection" in the words of the Beatrice Express, Blue Springs defeated all their opponents to win the round-robin tournament. They even defeated a team from Hanover, Kansas, that had not lost a game in four years.

With no shot clock and a jump ball after every basket, games were low-scoring affairs. Blue Springs defeated

Barneston in the tournament final 15-12, but Barneston got its revenge later that season. In March, Blue Springs starting guard Lucile Davis broke her wrist in practice. She missed the season finale, in which Barneston defeated Blue Springs 8-7 and advanced to the state tournament. Blue Springs ended the season with a record of 17-2.

Less than a month after the Otoe County tournament, the Nebraska High School Athletic Association voted to abolish the girls state basketball tournament after 1924 and to bar girls' teams from entering any state, district or county

basketball tournaments in the future. Association members voiced "protests against girls' competitive athletics in general."

The move was part of a long national backlash against women's sports. The University of Nebraska had already disbanded its women's basketball team — coached by the formidable Louise Pound — after the 1908 season. In 1924, the university hired Mabel Lee to head its women's physical education department. Lee promoted intramural sports and recreation, but actively opposed all intercollegiate play.

ALL PHOTOS ON THIS SPREAD:
After winning an invitational tournament on Feb. 23, 1924, the Blue Springs players posed for a series of photos with their trophy.



HISTORY NEBRASKA, RG3372-4-25



HISTORY NEBRASKA, RG3372-4-23



HISTORY NEBRASKA, RG3372-4-26

She believed that highly competitive, “mannish” play was harmful to women.

Cornhusker women’s basketball was reintroduced as a varsity sport for the 1974-75 season. The Nebraska girls’ state high school basketball tournament resumed in 1977.

How did the trophy make its way to Georgia? Jim Brogden bought it at the estate sale of Stan Vasey. Brogden learned that Vasey was the son of the Vyril M. (Viets) Vasey of Wymore, Nebraska. We don’t know how or why she came to possess the trophy. Born in 1914, she was only 10 years old at the time of the tournament, and she grew up and went to high school not at Blue Springs but at Union Center, between Wymore and Lewiston.

What became of the Blue Springs players? The team consisted of guards Mabel Bolender, Iva Peck and Lucile Davis, and forwards Helen Tays, Gladys Jenkins and Fern Lynxweiler.

We found no definite information on Lucile Davis and limited information on Iva Peck Lawrence — all we know is that she lived in Omaha as of 1944, and in Montebello, California, in 1950. But three of the remaining four lived exceptionally long lives.

Mabel Bolender Gerwick married and had at least two sons and lived her life in Gage County, dying in Beatrice at age 76 in 1983.

Helen Tays Turnbull married, was mother to six children, and worked at Sunrise Bakery in Beatrice. She died in Lincoln at age 98 in 2005.

Gladys Jenkins McPheron married, had a daughter and worked as a teacher. She taught for 16 years for the Department of Defense in Korea. She lived to be 100 years old, dying in Lincoln in 2006.

Fern Lynxweiler Barker was the last surviving team member, dying in 2011 at age 103. Fern married, had two children and worked as a legal secretary in Lincoln. Her obituary noted that she became a world traveler and was honored for her extensive volunteer work at Bryan-LGH Medical Centers in Lincoln. The obituary also identifies her as “a standout on the Gage County girls’ championship basketball team.” The story of the Blue Springs team was still being told proudly into the 21st century.

We can only imagine what the former Blue Springs players thought in the 1970s when their granddaughters’ generation saw the revival of the girls’ state basketball tournament and the growth of opportunities for female student athletes under Title IX. They may have wondered why it took so long. [N](#)

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



HISTORY NEBRASKA, RG3372-4-27

Unearthing Treasures

Rockhounding in Nebraska

Story and photos by Renae Blum

Over 35 years of searching Nebraska for rocks, minerals, fossils and artifacts, Charles Wooldridge's biggest find wasn't even his. It was his dog's.

Wooldridge — who goes by “Wooly” and lives in Lincoln — was in the north-central Sandhills, trying unsuccessfully to relocate an earlier find. And then his dog Hank, a 7-year-old Plott hound, began barking and wouldn't stop. Hank was standing on a stump sticking out of the creek — later determined to be the largest petrified stump ever found in Nebraska. The 3.73-ton specimen will be on display at Ashfall Fossil Beds State

Historical Park starting this spring.

That's part of the addiction of his hobby, Wooldridge said. Big finds don't happen all the time, but just often enough to convince rockhounds across the state to spend hours, even days, searching for something special.

The Pull of Rockhounding

Rockhounding — or the act of searching for rocks, minerals, artifacts and fossils — has many appeals, Wooldridge said. There's the chance to be out in nature, to enjoy searching for something big, much as anglers, hunters or mushroom hunters do.

Rockhounding also has an element of competition to it. “It's kind of like fishing,” Wooldridge said. “Fishing is an activity that you do together, but it's an individual



competition. You're trying to catch the best fish you can; you're trying to find the most beautiful agate you can.”

It also has social benefits, making it a great family activity. It's easier to open up and talk freely while working side-by-side, Wooldridge said.

Rockhounding is also a relatively inexpensive hobby, and one that's open to all ages. “You can be 8 or 80,” Wooldridge said, adding, “When somebody finds something really neat, everybody shares in that celebration. Everybody's excited for what was found. So it's a really cooperative, competitive sport.”

Rockhounding in Nebraska

Wooldridge often hears skepticism about the idea of rockhounding in Nebraska — people doubtful that the state has anything to offer.

“In general, in some places in Nebraska, that's true,” he said. However, there are plenty of opportunities if you know where to look, he added. There's petrified wood all over the state, and Nebraska is rich in Ice Age fossils. Rivers and streams are known to be great spots for rockhounding, and Nebraska has nearly 80,000 miles of them.

“Virtually there are things to find



Above: Charles “Wooly” Wooldridge of Lincoln displays an Ice Age bison tooth he just found along the Big Nemaha River in southeastern Nebraska. Top left: Donitte Stiles of Lincoln holds up a honey agate she discovered during her first rockhounding excursion.

everywhere if you know where to look,” Wooldridge said.

Wooldridge spends a lot of time looking for agates, especially Lake Superior agates and Fairburn agates. He also finds petrified wood, jaspers, gypsum, quartz crystals, and various kinds of fossils and artifacts.

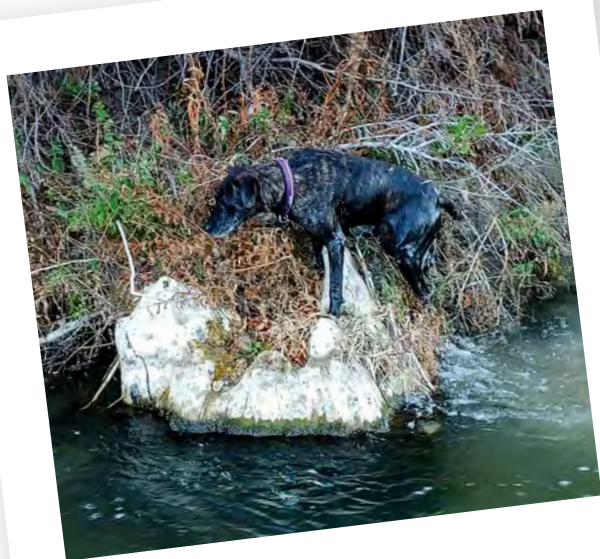
The challenge is that there are very

few public lands open for rockhounding in Nebraska. For example, it's not permitted at Nebraska's state park areas or wildlife management areas. (See the sidebar on page 47 for more details.)

The good news is, many landowners are open to allowing rockhounding on their land, Wooldridge said. He

advises looking at county plat maps to find landowners you can contact to ask permission. Respecting private property is an absolute must for rockhounds, Wooldridge said.

With permission in hand, you're free to search some of Wooldridge's favorite spots in Nebraska. Among these are the north and south branches of the



Charles Wooldridge of Lincoln snapped this photo of his dog, Hank, discovering the largest petrified stump ever found in Nebraska. Wooldridge was rockhounding in the north-central Sandhills at the time.



Corey Beer of Lincoln holds up a 4,000- to 8,000-year-old knife he just discovered along a gravel bed in southeastern Nebraska.

Big and Little Nemaha rivers, Long Pine Creek and Bone Creek in north-central Nebraska, and the Crawford area in the western part of the state.

Other locations Wooldridge recommends include the Oglala National Grasslands, the Big and Little Blue rivers and their tributaries, and the Platte River and its tributaries.

A Rockhound's Toolkit

For a good day of rockhounding, you'll need a few things. A walking stick is important; Wooldridge uses a gem scoop for this, a sturdy, long-handled tool that allows him to retrieve rocks without bending over. You'll also need something to carry your finds. Wooldridge likes a turkey hunting vest since it distributes weight evenly across the shoulders, but a backpack or bag also works.

If you need to chip something out of



Members of the Lincoln Gem and Mineral Club look for rocks, fossils and artifacts along the south fork of the Big Nemaha River.

Five Finds Worth Keeping

Wondering what to look for? Here are some of the things Wooldridge finds most often.

Lake Superior agates

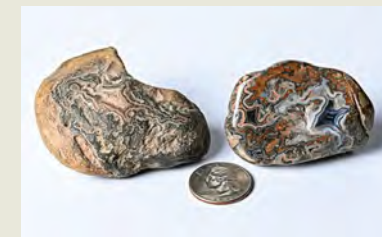
These beautiful gemstones are highly sought after and were carried here during the last Ice Age, from glaciers originally located north of Lake Superior. They are banded and are typically red and white, but can also be blue, pink, orange or black.



A Lake Superior agate with an amethyst interior, found in southeastern Nebraska.

Fairburn agates

The northwestern corner of Nebraska is known for Fairburn agates, which are typically red, yellow, pink and black, and are very colorful. They feature a striped "fortification" pattern resembling holly leaves, and are good for cutting and polishing, as are Lake Superior agates and petrified wood.



Rough and polished Fairburn agate, found in northwestern Nebraska.

Pleistocene ("Ice Age") fossils

Fossil teeth and bones from ancient mammals can be found throughout the state. These include ancient bison, horses, camels, elephants and other mammals. These animals lived here during the Pleistocene epoch, from approximately 2.6 million years to 11,000 years ago and were buried by ash, silt, dirt or sand.



A mammoth tooth, an Ice Age fossil, found in south-central Nebraska.



A fossilized elephant tusk, an Ice Age fossil, found in north-central Nebraska.

Gypsum

Gypsum, including the variety called selenite, typically appears as clear crystals assuming a range of shapes and sizes. Gypsum is a soft mineral that can be scratched with your thumbnail — that's the easiest way to tell it apart from other

minerals. Wooldridge typically finds gypsum in south-central and southeastern Nebraska.



A piece of gypsum found in south-central Nebraska.

Silicified ("Petrified") wood

Found across Nebraska, petrified wood ranges in color from black to brown, white, red and yellow, with browns fairly predominant. The original trees fell and were covered by ash, loam, dust, silt or sand. Saturated conditions and the lack of oxygen in buried sediments kept the wood from rotting. Then, silica precipitated from groundwater replaced cell walls and filled void spaces in the wood.



Piece of root with black opal interior from the largest petrified stump found in Nebraska, from the north-central part of the state.



Stem of petrified wood found in western Nebraska.



Visitors browse items for sale during the Lincoln Gem and Mineral Club's annual gem show at the Sandhills Global Event Center.



Charles Wooldridge of Lincoln holding Lake Superior agates and honey agates found along the south fork of the Big Nemaha River.

a host rock, a rock hammer is useful. Look for a purpose-made rock hammer made from tempered steel, like an Estwing. And basics like a broad-brimmed hat, sunglasses, sunscreen and bug spray are good to have.

How to Get Started

If you're interested in trying rockhounding, Wooldridge's first piece of advice is to join a local club. There, you can learn more about what's available in your area and potentially go on outings with the group.

Also, "talk to some old-timers," Wooldridge said. "There are a lot of old-timers throughout the state that still do rockhounding. Find someone to take you out."

Gem shows and swaps are another good place to start. At these events, you can peruse items for sale and talk to vendors. Gem shows will also have displays of particularly impressive finds.

"Lincoln and Omaha have really



Mike and Donitte Stiles of Lincoln hold a rock containing fossils (left) and a fossil bone (right) that they discovered on a gravel bed. It was their first time rockhounding.

good gem shows, and there's also a really neat four-day gem swap in Crawford," Wooldridge said.

He recommends two books: *Minerals and Gemstones of Nebraska: A Handbook for Students and Collectors* by Roger K. Pabian and Allan Cook (1976), and *Record in Rock: A Handbook of the Invertebrate Fossils of Nebraska* by Roger K. Pabian (1970). Both can be downloaded for free from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Digital Commons.

A Day in the Field

On a sunny October day, Wooldridge and fellow members of the Lincoln Gem and Mineral Club spent a day rockhounding along the Big Nemaha River. The group was mostly quiet, carefully picking their way along the gravel bed. Every so often, someone would shout out "Laker!", signaling that they'd found a Lake Superior agate, and everyone would stop to

Rockhounding Rules and Regulations

- Respect private property rights and do not trespass. Obtain permission before collecting on any private lands.

- Rockhounds are allowed to collect rocks and agates — but not fossils, artifacts or meteorites — on U.S. Forest Service lands in Nebraska without a permit, for personal, hobby and noncommercial use only. This includes the Nebraska National Forest, the Oglala National Grasslands and Samuel R. McKelvie National Forest. You may remove no more than 25 pounds of rock per day and up to 250 pounds per year. Selling your finds is not allowed, nor is digging. For other uses of rock material, such as landscaping or rock gardening, contact the Nebraska National Forests and Grasslands Supervisor's Office at 308-432-0300, as a permit may be required.

- Rockhounding also is allowed on the 5,100 acres in Nebraska managed by the Bureau of Land Management. Noncommercial collection of rocks, petrified wood, and common invertebrate and plant fossils is allowed, but you may not collect artifacts or vertebrate fossils. Only gather invertebrate fossils and plant fossils not of scientific interest in reasonable amounts for personal use. You can also collect up to 25 pounds of petrified wood per day, not to exceed 250 pounds per year.

While rockhounding is legal on BLM lands in Nebraska, it's important to point out the public may not always have access to these lands. BLM-managed lands in Nebraska consist of small, isolated parcels scattered across the state and legal access to them is extremely limited, as they are typically surrounded by private land with no public roads, trails or adjoining lands to reach them. It's up to you to know where you are — use maps, GPS or a landownership app to avoid trespassing. You can find a map of Nebraska's BLM properties at blm.gov/maps.

- Collecting materials is not allowed at Nebraska's state park areas or wildlife management areas. It is also not permitted at national wildlife refuges or lands managed by the National Park Service, including national monuments.

- Not sure if rockhounding is permitted at a particular site? It's your job to know; always do your research first and ask permission if needed.

- Mine Safety and Health Administration regulations make access to private pits, quarries and mines unlikely or impossible.

admire it.

The biggest find of the day belonged to Corey Beer of Lincoln, who spotted a 4,000- to 8,000-year-old knife. "That's by far the best artifact I've ever found," Beer said. "I'm over-the-top thrilled."

As the day stretched into late

afternoon, people began to pack up for the day — but not Beer. Watching him still busy looking, Wooldridge commented, "When you start finding things, it's hard to quit."

It's all part of the adventure for a rockhound. 📍

FEWER GRIP-AND-GRINS

Story and photos by Jeff Kurrus

Everyone does it. I know I do. “Hold the fish up and smile.” The picture is taken, and then we add it to the long line of photos that look exactly the same.

Strive for a bit more with your photography this season during your fishing trips through Nebraska. It only takes five minutes away from your fishing to add something creative to your portfolio. Here are a few options.

New Angle

Bag shots are unavoidable, but take an extra second or two to lower or raise your camera angle to create something unique from the rest of your images. No fish is needed to make an interesting photo, but the presence of one sure doesn’t hurt.

Show the Day

Take a quick walk away from your partner when the light

is at its most stunning, and photograph the day. You’ll be back fishing as soon as that gorgeous sky changes.

While You’re Away

Before you climb back in the boat, capture a photo or two of your partner fishing. If you get lucky, a fish on the line is a bonus.

Tackle Me

Rods, reels and other gear make great photo subjects. These images are great conversation starters years later when you see them again.

Just the Fish

Close-ups of fish in the hand are a great mix to a photo spread. Again, search for unique angles to compliment the traditional grip-and-grin bag shot.



Lower or raise your camera angle for a unique picture.



Take a picture of your partner before climbing in your boat.



Take a few steps back to capture the day.



Tackle boxes and other gear make great photo subjects.



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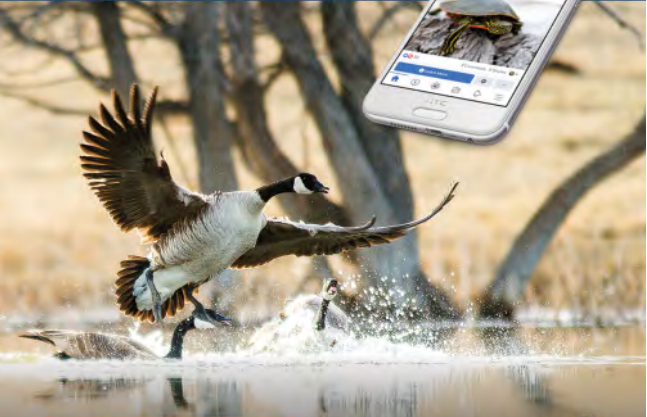
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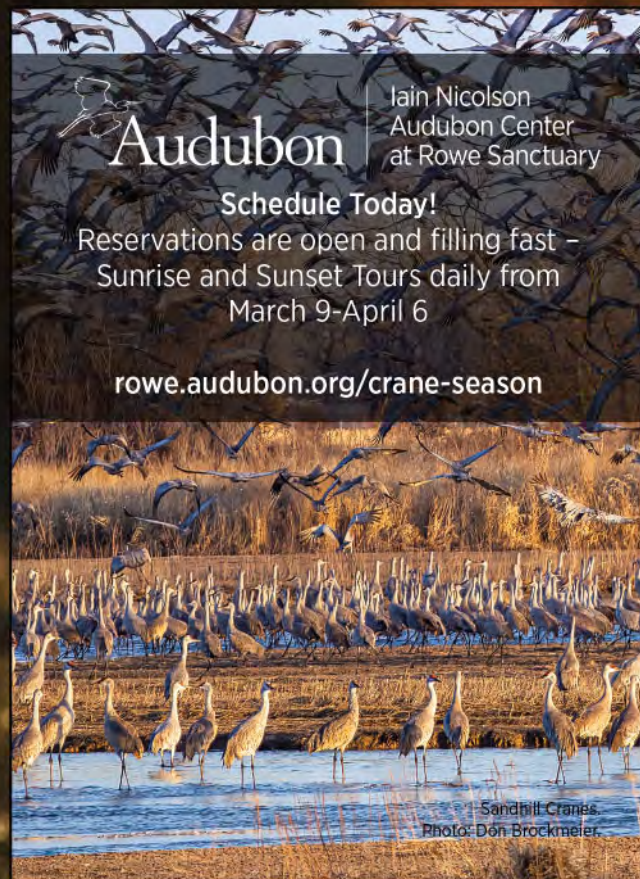
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Sandhill Cranes
Photo: Don Brockmeier



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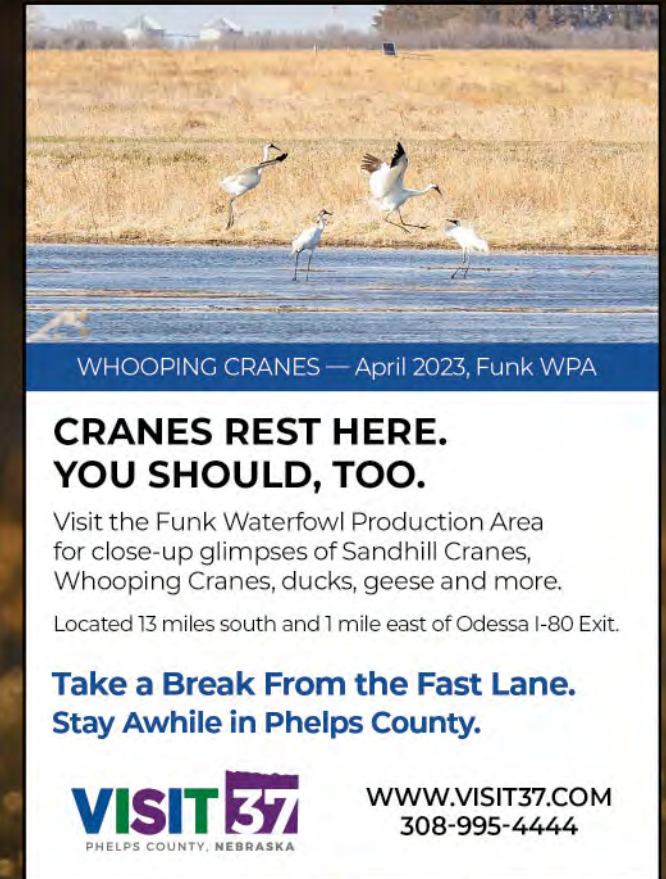


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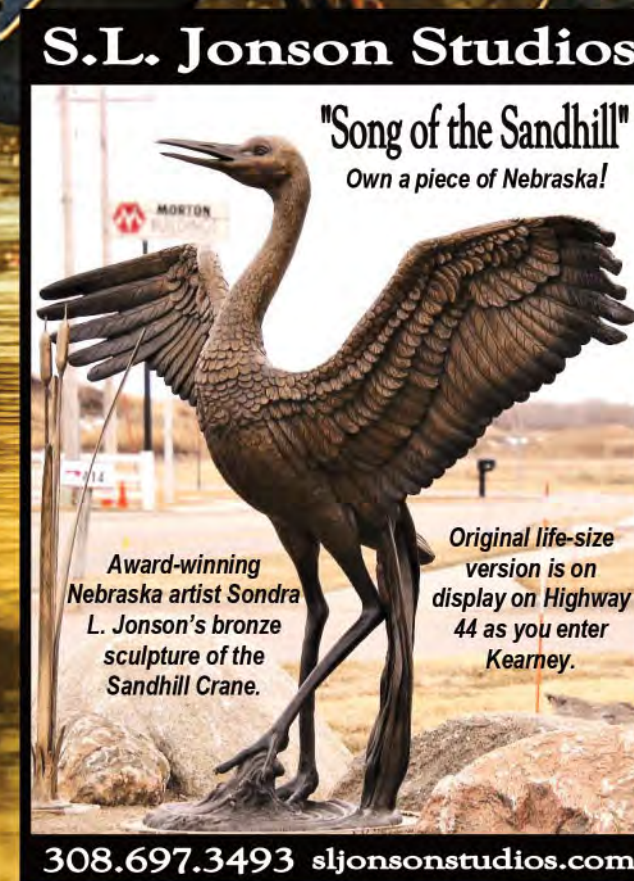
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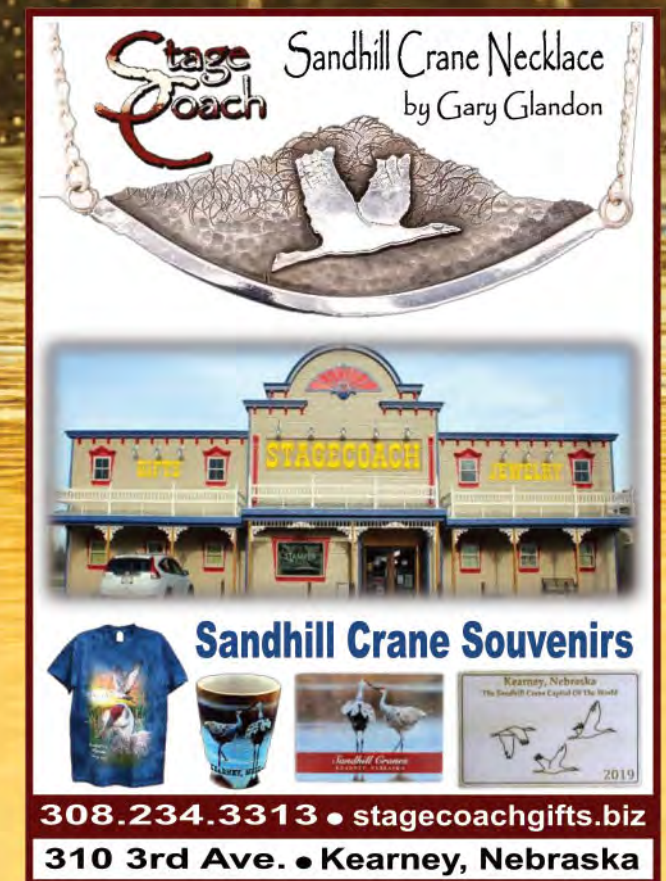
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DON'T FORGET THE DUCKS

By Eric Fowler

When it comes to birdwatching in Nebraska in March, sandhill cranes get most of the love. But many don't realize that a few miles south of the Platte River in the Rainwater Basin there is an equally impressive gathering of millions of ducks.

The Rainwater Basin includes nearly 400 wetlands, ranging in size from a few to more than 1,000 acres, scattered across 21 counties in south-central Nebraska that provide critical habitat for migratory birds. Of those, 93 are U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service waterfowl production areas and Nebraska Game and Parks Commission wildlife management areas open to the public for wildlife viewing and photography in the spring.

Moist-soil plants like smartweed and barnyard grass sprout from the clay soils in or on the edge of these shallow, seasonal playa wetlands. When water floods that vegetation, waterfowl feast on the seeds and loaf and rest in the cover it provides. They also feed on abundant invertebrates and plant tubers in and around the water.

An estimated 8.6 million ducks and

geese and 600,000 shorebirds stop here each spring. That includes 50 percent of the mid-continent snow goose populations, half of the mid-continent population of mallards and 30 percent of the continent's northern pintails.

As far as the ducks go, Jeff Drahota, a wildlife biologist with the U.S. Wildlife Service Rainwater Basin Wetland Management District, said every species of duck found in the flyway, including divers like redheads, will stop in the Rainwater Basin for a few days or a week, depending on habitat conditions, to refuel for their northward migration. Mallards show up first, typically in mid- to late February, followed by pintails. Medium-sized ducks like gadwalls are next, and smaller ones like green-winged teal arrive last. The timing of their arrival depends on the weather in the region, as the birds follow the spring thaw northward, waiting for wetlands to thaw and snow to melt before arriving. Likewise for their departure.

"In terms of the best time to see the most species is probably in that middle of March to the end of March,"

Drahota said. "If you want to see the most ducks, it's probably that peak of migration, which tends to occur a week or two after the snow geese show up.

"So if you want to see mass amounts of pintails, you've got to be fairly early but you're not going to see a whole lot of other species."

When the migration is at its peak and food and water are plentiful, Drahota noted you might find 5,000 to 10,000 ducks per acre on these wetlands, with numbers on a single marsh approaching 500,000. Although they are at times hidden from sight, feeding beneath flooded vegetation, he has seen wetlands holding so many ducks "you couldn't see the water."

Plenty of geese might also be in the basins when duck migration peaks, with the occasional mass of up to 1 million snow geese using a single wetland.

In any given year, where ducks are found will depend on where there is water. In dry years, water will be pumped into certain wetlands to ensure habitat is available. That may be the case this spring, as drought left most basins dry last fall. Find which wetlands are pumped in the "wetland habitat conditions report" at OutdoorNebraska.gov.

Three recommended areas have viewing decks or towers: Funk and Massie WPAs and Ducks Unlimited's Verona Complex. Father Hupp WMA has a waterfowl blind that is open to birdwatchers. And Lake Seldom on the edge of Holdrege has a hiking trail on the west side. Many other wetlands are bisected or bordered by roads and typically offer good viewing opportunities; they include: Clark, Gleason, Harvard, Hultine, Johnson and Smith WPAs and Greenhead, Kissinger Basin, North Lake Basin, Sacramento-Wilcox, Sora and Straightwater WMAs.



Bill Koley

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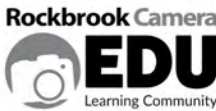
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Northern pintail and mallard ducks flock to Johnson Waterfowl Production Area, a wetland in the Rainwater Basin in Phelps County. ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



Crappie fishing near Columbus, 1963

My older cousin Mark Schelby from Merced, California, (right) and me (left) with a nice stringer of crappie. This was in 1963 on one of his family trips to Nebraska. We were fishing in Wagner's Lake in Columbus. My mother, Pat Lemke, cooked them in cracker crumbs as she always did.

Of course, my dad "Buzz" helped us catch them, clean them and took the picture. My dad had us put our bait on, and if our lines got tangled up, he always made us fix them. He also taught us how to tie the correct knots and to throw back some of the fish.

– Mike Lemke, Garden City, Kansas

Deer hunting near Lisco, 1985

Pictured is me and my son, Chad, taken on Chad's first deer hunt in November 1985 on Don and LaDonna Loxterkamp's farm, eight miles north of Lisco. Chad died on July 18, 2022.

– Leo Gusman, Bridgeport



Canada goose hunting near Alliance

My cousin Pete Stout of Kearney and I, from Lincoln, embarked on a Sandhills goose hunt southeast of Alliance after Christmas 1998 when we were both 12. A large flock had gathered on an open sandhills alkali lake. Pete's dad, Bob Stout, scared the flock up from the other side, while Pete and I hid among the frozen cattails. We successfully downed these two geese, which led to an exciting retrieval on the frozen marsh ground surrounding the pond. The local, three-legged ranch dog helped us locate our geese, but that didn't prevent us from breaking through thin ice and pulling the ranch dog out of knee-deep water more than a few times. This photo was taken when we made it back to the pickup. Pete and I grew up hunting together and continue an avid passion for hunting to this day.

– Mike Manning, Lincoln



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 2000. We will give priority to unusual photos or activities. When possible, please include a story about the photograph and identify the people, places and approximate date it was taken. Text may be edited and photos adjusted for reproduction. All photos will be returned.



Hairy four o'clock plant in bloom. GERRY STEINAUER

THE MISSING MEMORY CARD

By Gerry Steinauer

Like other nature photographers, I often return to a prairie or woodland for another round of photographs. Sometimes it is because Mother Nature does not cooperate — the light is bad or it is too windy to take close-up photos. Other times, the subjects do not cooperate. They won't sit still, or I'm unable to creep close enough. Lastly, I occasionally do something that is mechanically boneheaded with my camera that results in poor photos or no photos at all. The latter happened last June.

Dawn broke on the final day of my visit to a Sandhills ranch with ideal conditions for plant photography: warm sunlight, little wind and vegetation cloaked in dew. I was excited, maybe too excited. I grabbed my camera and rushed out the door and up a nearby prairie-covered dune in search of photographic opportunities. Soon, low on the dune, I found a hairy four o'clock in full bloom. I had never before photographed this uncommon wildflower.

I captured images of the plant for about 10 minutes and, satisfied, moved on. Over the next hour or so, I climbed over that dune and to the crest of the next, occasionally stopping to photograph other flowers. Perched on the hilltop, I was ready to call it quits and decided to scroll through the photos and view my morning's work.

I was shocked to find there were no photos — because there was no memory card in the camera.

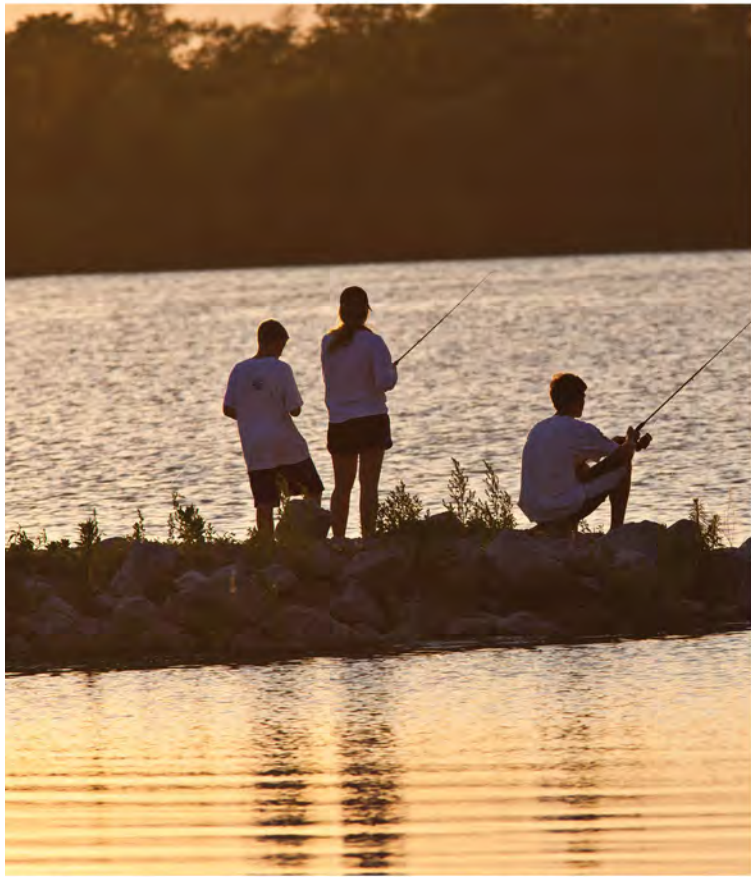
Spewing a few cuss words, I quickly realized I did not replace the card the last time I downloaded photos from my camera to the computer. In my rush that morning, I forgot to check the camera to make sure it contained a memory card. I hate to admit it, but this was not the first time this has happened.

Most gut wrenching was the fact that my cherished hairy four o'clock photos were now nonexistent. I needed to reshoot the photos, but the sun was rising fast, the light quickly losing its warm tone. If I did not hurry, the photos would be washed out. It was at least a quarter mile back to the plant and one big question remained: Could I find it in this sea of grass?

I pulled a memory card from my bag, popped it into the camera and started hoofing it. Luckily, when I returned to the vicinity of the four o'clock, I was able to follow my footsteps through the still-dewy grass back to the plant. My new photos turned out fine.

A photographer should feel no shame in having to return to a site and recapture photographs. Stuff happens. It is part of the game. But to forget a memory card? C'mon.

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