



Alex Helmbrecht of Chadron looks out across the Soldier Creek Valley from top of Red Cloud Buttes at Fort Robinson on a fall afternoon. Photo by Eric Fowler

Published by the
NEBRASKA
— GAME  PARKS —

NebraskalandMagazine.com
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NEBRASKAland

October 2012



Down the road to the **SANDHILLS** *a fall colorspread*

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NEBRASKAland

Volume 90, Number 8, October 2012

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When you see a deer with a rifle, your hunt is just about over. When you see one while hunting with a bow, your hunt is just beginning. TEXT AND PHOTOS BY JEFF KURRUS

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Tracing the history of snipe hunting in Nebraska. TEXT AND PHOTOS BY JON FARRAR

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Bow Creek Recreation Area near Wynot shows why the 59-mile stretch of the Missouri River between Gavins Point Dam and Ponca State Park is so special. PHOTOS AND TEXT BY ERIC FOWLER

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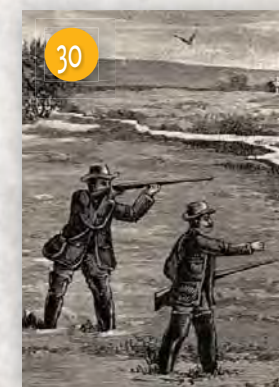
Cover: This long road home looks toward the Dismal River near Seneca in Thomas County (see story on page 20). Photo by Bill Hager.

Opposite: A female Carolina mantis (*Stagmomantis carolina*). In the fall, female praying mantises will lay their eggs on sticks and the undersides of leaves and die approximately three weeks later. Photo by Chris Helzer.

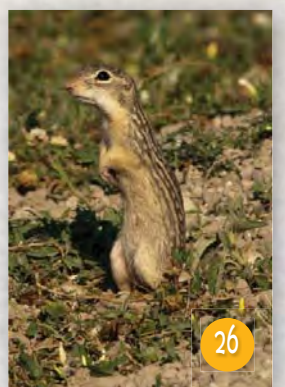
NEBRASKAland (VOL. 90 / NO. 8, ISSN 0028-1964) is published monthly, except for the combined Jan./Feb. and Aug./Sept. issues, by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, 2200 N. 33rd St., Lincoln, NE. Periodicals postage paid at Lincoln, Nebraska, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to NEBRASKAland, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370.



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Comment



Blair Hoary Bat

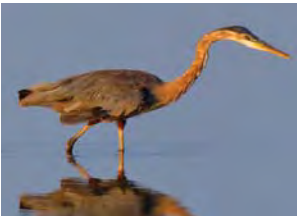
Bats are seldom seen as more than a fluttering silhouette against a fading evening sky – but occasionally they expose themselves for a better look. While back at my parents’ farm near Blair in July, I chanced upon a hoary bat passing the day in an apple tree; huddled and sleepy-eyed in the early morning, distended to dissipate the summer heat at mid-day, and wide-eyed and alert at dusk. I waited and watched in anticipation as it groomed itself in preparation for flight, but as soon as I stepped away for a flashlight, it took the opportunity to begin the night’s foray. It did not return to the same “perch” during the remainder of my visit, but on a few nights thereafter I observed what I wanted to believe was “my” hoary bat coursing the evening sky.

Gordon Warrick
Othello, Washington

Outdoor Message Plates

Lynn Kaufman of Lincoln has a passion for turkey hunting but pursues most of the feathered creatures that can be legally hunted in Nebraska. He’s shown his passion for the sport on his vehicle for more that decade.

If you have a unique outdoor message plate you would like to share or know someone who does, e-mail a photo (high-resolution, JPEG format only, please) of it to Eric.Fowler@Nebraska.gov, along with your name, hometown and a brief description of the interests expressed on your license plate.



Hungry Heron

Here is a three frame series I shot of a great blue heron at Holmes Lake in Lincoln at the end of August. Reminds me a little of the old “flip books” that were popular when I was younger.

Chris Masada
Lincoln, Nebrasksa

Letter from Latvia

Dear *NEBRASKAland*,

I really enjoy the magazine and even more now that live here in Latvia as it gives me news and great articles from Nebraska that was my home until I moved here in 1996. The world’s greatest friend helped me to receive it now that through a misfortune I had to quit subscribing to it.

I sometimes use the magazine to introduce friends here to the greatest state and my former home. Latvia is my homeland and I wish I could introduce it to Nebraska as I have been introducing Nebraska to Latvia.

Inara Buksa
Latvia

Thanks for the Portrait

Thanks so much for putting my pictures and story in the June 2012 magazine [*Portraits from the Past*]. I am informing Dad’s grand kids about it.

I was interested in the Buffalo Bill story [*The Wild West*, page 34]

especially since my dad saw the show in York, Nebraska in 1915.

Yours truly,
Bud Johnson
Lincoln, Nebraska

NEBRASKAland Visitor Letters

We want to thank all 38 readers that sent e-mails and letters for last issue’s visitor, a **blinded sphinx moth** that was on **page 10** (see page 11 for the winner, rules and this issue’s hint). Here are a few of the wonderful responses we received:

The “visitor” is on page 10 on the Mahoney Grille ad. Not sure what it is. I enjoyed the article on the horned lark and the pawpaws.

Ray Fansler
Fairfield, Illinois

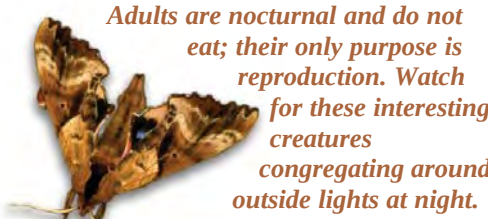
I found your “visitor” on page 10 of the August-September 2012 issue of *NEBRASKAland Magazine*. I believe that the moth, which appears to have a mallard drake on its back, is a blinded sphinx moth. Thanks to *NEBRASKAland* for the article on duck hunting! As a fellow addicted waterfowler, I always appreciate the

Statement of ownership and monthly circulation of NEBRASKAland Magazine		
Owner and publisher: Nebraska Game and Parks Commission		
Editor: Doug Carroll		
Headquarters of Publisher and Publication: 2200 N. 33rd St., Lincoln, NE 68503		
Stockholders, Bondholders, Mortgage and Security Holders: None		
	Average number of copies of each issue during preceding 12 months	Single issue nearest to filing date
A. Total Copies Printed (net press run)	24,138	23,670
B. Paid Circulation		
1. Single-copy sales	3,287	3,297
2. Mail subscriptions	19,739	18,709
C. Total Paid Circulation	23,059	22,041
D. Free Distribution		
by Mail	285	285
Outside the Mail	406	406
E. Total Free Distribution	691	691
F. Total Distribution	23,750	22,732
G. Copies Not Distributed	388	938
H. Total	24,138	23,670
I. Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation	97%	97%

duck hunting articles. I always enjoy the issues of *NEBRASKAland*. There is usually a good history lesson in each issue, as well.

Keith Pittenger
Sarasota, Florida

This beautiful moth is the Blinded Sphinx Moth (Paonias excaecatus), native throughout most of the United States. It is large, with a wingspan of 2½ to 3¾ inches. The forewings (top pair of wings) are mostly brown in color, with tan to black lines and markings. The bottom of the underwings is pink to pinkish-orange, and the insect’s common name comes from the black spot, or eye, on those underwings. The eye has a blue center, but no pupil – a blind eye. Adults emerge in early to midsummer, with larvae appearing shortly after. The larvae are a bright green, with some white and reddish markings, and a spine, or “horn” at the end of their body. Larvae feed on a variety of deciduous tree and shrub species, including linden and willow. Eventually they drop to the ground to pupate shallowly in the soil, emerging as adults the next year.



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

www.bugguide.net is a good site for identification

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

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Outdoor Classroom Opens at Norfolk Office

Eric Fowler

There's a new playground at the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's Norfolk office. There's no bright, plastic equipment or swings, though – this playground is old-school and gives kids a chance to learn about the outdoors while they're having fun doing things as simple as climbing a tree. It's officially known as the Outdoor Classroom and is open to the public and for field trips for school-age kids.

"It's like a throwback to the grove of trees you played in as a kid," said Jamie Bachmann, the Outdoor Education Specialist for the Commission and the National Wild Turkey Federation who designed the classroom. "It's a dirty, buggy place and in an environment where kids can be excited about learning."

Kids can take turns running a hand pump that feeds a model river, showing how water circulates through the landscape. They can test their balance walking along a string of stumps, dig for fossils and bones in the sand, play in a lean-to fort made from limbs and pine boughs, kick back in a hammock, or dance and play music on a xylophone in the Music and Movement area.

A garden tunnel and other additions are being planned. "I don't think it will ever be done," Bachmann said of the project. "We have so many ideas."

The classroom is open to the public during office hours, which are from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays. It can also be reserved by school groups and will, on occasion, host public events. For more information, contact Bachmann at (402) 370-3374, e-mail jbachmann@nwtf.net, or visit the office at 2201 N. 13th St.



Upcoming Events

Here is a list of upcoming outdoor events across Nebraska. For more information about these and other events, visit the calendar page at www.OutdoorNebraska.org.

October 6-7
Autumn Harvest Show - E.T. Mahoney State Park
View some of the finest art in the country from many reputable and nationally known artists from around the Midwest.
For more information, call (402) 944-2523

October 6-7
Ft. Atkinson State Historical Park Living History Weekend
Watch as volunteers portray what life was like at an 1820s military fort from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. each day.
For more information, call (402) 468-5611

October 7, 14
Living History Events
Arbor Lodge State Historical Park.
Call (402) 873-7222

October 13
Star Gazing Party – Fort Hartsuff State Historical Park
Stargazing will commence around 7 p.m. with a presentation by Dan Glomski. Fort Hartsuff's open parade ground and lack of light pollution make it a great place to get a clear view of the stars. Call (308) 346-4715

October 13, 20
Ponca State Park Halloweenfest
Haunted hayrack rides, pumpkin rolling and carving contest, a campsite decorating contest and much more. For more information, call (402) 755-2284

October 13, 19, 20, 26, 27
Halloween Hollow at Indian Cave SP
Haunted Hollow hayrack rides on the days listed above, concessions available. Tickets available beginning Oct. 3 by phone or at park office. A Halloween decorating contest will be held at the park's RV campground on Oct. 13, 20 and 27. For more information, call (402) 883-2575

Send Us Your Trail Cam Photos



Sent by Jerry Reynoldson, this photo was taken on the edge of Valentine. Notice the unusual looking cloud in the sky.

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

NEBRASKA Pheasants Forever & Quail Forever 2012 FALL EVENTS

YOUTH MENTOR HUNT DATES

Date	Chapter	Location
09-01-12	Heritage PF	Alliance
09-08-12	Cedar River Ringnecks PF	Greeley
09-08-12	Central Nebraska QF	St. Paul
09-29-12	Platte County PF	Columbus
09-30-12	Sandhills PF	Ainsworth
10-06-12	Boone County PF	Albion
10-06-12	Dixon County PF	Allen
10-06-12	Golden Prairie PF	Neligh
10-06-12	Heritage PF	Alliance
10-06-12	Lewis & Clark PF	Hartington
10-06-12	Loup River PF	Ord
10-13-12	Bazile Creek Ringnecks PF	Bloomfield
10-13-12	Cass County PF	Plattsmouth
10-13-12	Dodge County PF	Arlington
10-13-12	Douglas County West PF	Tekamah
10-13-12	Elkhorn Valley PF	Pierce
10-13-12	Lincoln Creek PF	Aurora
10-13-12	Logan Creek PF	Wayne
10-13-12	Lower Elkhorn Valley PF	West Pint
10-13-12	Niobrara Valley PF	Stuart
10-13-12	Otoe County PF	Palmyra
10-13-12	Republican Valley PF	Arapahoe
10-13-12	Southeast Nebraska PF	Beatrice
10-13-12	Washington County PF	Blair
10-13-12	Webster County PF	Blue Hill
10-20-12	Antelope Valley PF	Oshkosh
10-20-12	Corn Country PF	York
10-20-12	Cornhusker PF	Syracuse
10-20-12	Custer County PF	Broken Bow
10-20-12	High Plains PF	Sidney
10-20-12	Loup Platte Ringnecks PF	Grand Island
10-20-12	Perkins County PF	Grant
10-20-12	Prairie Creek Ringnecks PF	Central City
10-20-12	Prairie Hills PF	Kearney
10-20-12	Rock Creek PF	Fairbury
10-20-12	Seward County PF	Oak Creek
10-20-12	South Central Nebraska PF	Alma
10-20-12	Southwestern Nebraska PF	Imperial
10-21-12	Cedar River Ringnecks PF	Greeley
10-23-12	Maple Creek PF	Clarkson

BANQUET DATES

Date	Chapter	Location
08-29-12	Kearney County PF	Minden
09-20-12	Dakota-Thurston PF	So. Sioux City
09-22-12	Burt County PF	Tekamah
10-05-12	Upper Big Nemaha PF	Tecumseh
10-06-12	Platte River PF	Lexington
10-12-12	Cass Co. PF Youth Banquet	Plattsmouth
10-13-12	Oregon Trail PF	Scottsbluff
10-20-12	Cody Ringnecks PF	North Platte
10-25-12	Loup-Platte PF	Grand Island
10-26-12	Custer County PF	Broken Bow
10-26-12	Four Seasons PF	Deshler
10-27-12	South Central NE PF	Alma
11-05-12	Central Nebraska QF	Boelus
11-09-12	Sandhills PF	Ainsworth
11-24-12	Niobrara Valley PF	Atkinson



For further contact information or details visit www.NebraskaPF.com

Travelogue by Jeff Kurrus

Culbertson, NE

On October 27, blaze orange will fill fields throughout the state for pheasants. A time-honored tradition for many, the opening of pheasant season is more than over-and-unders and pointers. It's the time spent with friends, the number of birds seen, and the food and drink after the hunt.

Palisade

And there's no better place in the state right now for pheasants than the southwest, specifically in HITCHCOCK COUNTY off Highway 6 between Palisade and Culbertson. "We have abundant Open Fields and Waters sites, lots of CRP, and even some milo stubble for hunters to walk through," said Commission biologist TJ Walker.

Culbertson

Even decent shooters should have the opportunity to limit out in time to get to a small town cafe like the **Bear Cave** in Culbertson and chow down on their signature chicken-fried steak.

Or, take an evening or midday break in nearby **McCook**. "If you're hunting, fishing or even just visiting the southwest," said hunter Scott Miller, "you have to stop at **Mac's Drive-in**. There, place your order through a phone at the table – perhaps the pizza burgers and onion rings."



Then start planning the next weekend...



Starting a Safe Fire

Scott Stuhr

Despite a record drought this summer, you may still feel inclined to build a fire when the temperatures begin to cool this fall. But make sure you do it correctly – choose a safe site to start the fire, using only designated fire pits; make sure there are no flammable plants or objects within 10 feet (or above) the fire pit; and have plenty of water and a shovel nearby to help put the fire out if it gets out of control.

Arrange your fuel in a way that one match will be able to start the fire. **DO NOT USE LIGHTER FLUID OR GAS!** Start with a handful of dry tinder. Add two to three handfuls of kindling, and three or four larger pieces of wood. The smaller you keep your fire, the less chance it has of getting out of control.

Light a match (remembering to completely close the box first) and light as much of the tinder as you can while keeping your hands and face to the side of the fire. Then watch the fire at all times – pay attention to the direction and speed of the wind, as it could blow sparks and burning debris into surrounding areas. If the fire does get out of hand, use the water and shovel to put it out.

When you are done with your fire, make sure it is completely out. Use a long stick to spread out the remaining wood and coals. If you place your hand over the ashes, and can still feel heat, it means that there is a chance the fire could start up again. Stir water and soil into the coals until they are cool. Just because you do not see a flame or smoke does not mean the fire is not burning.

By following these simple steps, you can keep your campsite warm and safe.



Stay warm and safe by building a small, manageable fire, making sure you have water and a shovel nearby.

Harvesting Native Prairie Seed

Chris Helzer

The kind of drought we've had this year might have gotten you thinking about the use of native prairie plants in gardens, wildlife plantings and acreages. Native plants use less water, require less maintenance and provide more benefits to wildlife and pollinators than non-natives do. Of course, it's best to use plants with genetics that are locally-adapted to where you plant them, but the genetic origin can be really difficult to discern when buying plants commercially. Most "native" prairie plants sold in Nebraska are native prairie species, but their ancestors could easily have come from as far away as Oregon or Texas.

One easy way to ensure the local origin of your native plants – and to save money – is to harvest your own seed. Seed harvesting might sound difficult if you've never done it before, but there are really only a few things you need to know and do.

1. Decide which prairie species you want seed from. Are you looking for early season wildflowers? Tall native grasses? Do you have soil that is sandy or silty? Shady or sunny? Do some research to figure out which species you like and that are appropriate for your situation.

2. Find a good place to harvest. Depending upon what part of the state you're in, the first challenge might be to find a prairie to harvest seed from. You may want to ask local biologists from the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission or other conservation organizations for help in finding appropriate sites where you can find the species you want. Be wary of roadsides, especially those along state highways and other heavily traveled roads – the plants growing there very likely came from the same commercial seed sources you're trying to bypass.

Once you find a good site, make sure that you have permission to harvest seed. Many public prairies have rules against seed harvest, or at least require you to get permission, and you obviously need permission before going onto private land.

3. Find out when the seed is ready to harvest. Knowing when the seed is ripe is very important. If you know when your selected plants bloom, you can find them when they're in flower and then keep an eye on them to see when the seed ripens. Deciding when the seed is ripe is tricky, but the hardest part is often figuring out which part is actually the seed. Often, you'll need to break apart pods or seed heads to find the small kernel of seed. Once you find it, you can squeeze it between your thumbnails (or two other hard surfaces) to see if it's still juicy inside. If the seed is juicy or milky inside, it's not ripe. If it's doughy or hard, pick it.

4. Harvest your seed! Depending upon how much seed you need, this is the easy part. For most plants, you can either cut the seed head off or strip the seeds off by hand. If you need a lot of seed, strap a bucket to your waist and go at it with two hands. Finding large patches of the plants you want to harvest can help you maximize efficiency.

5. Prepare the seed for planting. This doesn't have to be difficult, but it is



important. If you were able to strip the seeds off of a plant, you may be ready to go. If, however, you harvested entire seed heads, you might need to separate the seeds from pods or from each other. With small quantities, you can probably do this by hand, or by some simple trick such as scraping the seed between the soles of your shoes and some rough concrete. If you have larger amounts of seed, you can try running it through a leaf mulcher to break things apart. You may want to screen the seeds from the excess plant material, but if you're just going



Jake Hart, a technician for The Nature Conservancy, harvests seed from Canada milkvetch plants in a Hamilton County prairie.

to plant by hand, it's probably not necessary to get the seed particularly clean.

6. Plant it. Planting seed usually works best during the dormant season or early spring. Most native prairie seed grows best when planted at very shallow depths, so just broadcasting the seed and lightly raking a little soil over it works best. Then sit back and enjoy the fruits of your labor.

There are multiple resources available to help you decide which plant species to harvest and how to do it. Most wildflower field guides, including Jon Farrar's *Field Guide to Wildflowers of Nebraska and the Great Plains*, can help you find species that bloom when you want them and that fit your soil type and location. Other information about seed harvesting can be found in *A Guide to Prairie Restoration in Eastern Nebraska* by Gerry Steinauer and others. You can download that guide from <http://PrairieNebraska.org>, and find much more information on prairies on the same web site. Finally, if you want a local-ecotype prairie planting but don't want to harvest the seed yourself, another good option is to contact Prairie Plains Resource Institute (prairieplains.org), which provides prairie restoration as a service.



No Place to Hunt

Jeff Kurrus

For a person new to the outdoors, finding a place to hunt can be a daunting task. With more than 98 percent of Nebraska's land privately owned, the "just find a public spot to hunt" advice can result in a "gee, thanks," response, but it still remains a viable option with the state's more than 300 publicly owned areas. Below is more detail on the public land, as well as a few other options to consider.

Publicly Accessible Lands – Open Fields and Waters, Natural Resource Districts, National Forest Service and other partners of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission have lands throughout the state open to hunting. The Open Fields and Waters program alone has more than 250,000 acres of private land for public walk-in hunting access. Consult the CRP-MAP atlas downloadable at OutdoorNebraska.org/hunting and Click on [Where to Hunt](#).

Special Hunts – Because these hunts are not often included in the Big Game Guide published each summer, there are great opportunities to get in on hunts that some of the general public doesn't know about. Visit OutdoorNebraska.org for more information.

Lesser-Hunted Species – Squirrel hunts are a great way to spend some time afield. Plus, very few people will be hunting for the same quarry. Past the opening day and weekend, dove are another species that can be hunted this month with little fanfare. Find a clean, cut grain field and approach landowners. Or, locate a group of turkeys, bust up the flock, then try to call them back to you.

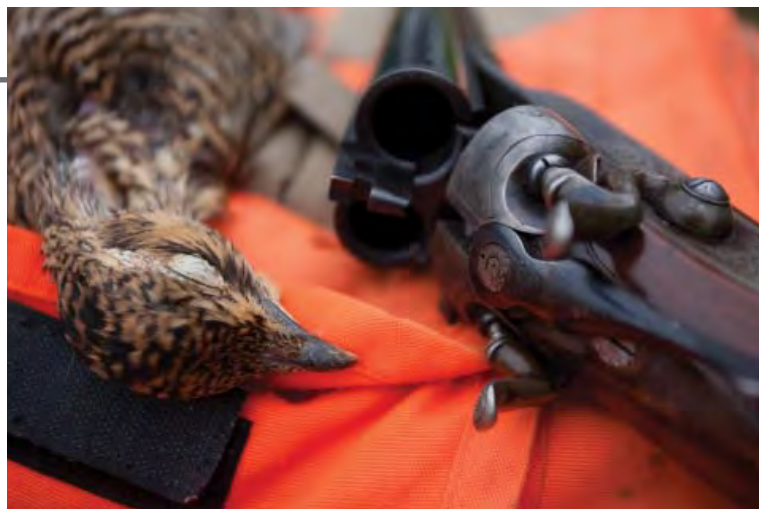


PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Prairie chickens are another seldom-hunted species that can be hunted in certain parts of the state.

Knocking on Doors – Staying away from the opening weekend for most species helps. Also, don't shoot for the moon when you do knock on a door. If you're asking for deer hunting permission, ask for doe with a bow. You must build trust with a landowner. Or if it's upland game, see if a morning or afternoon hunt sometime during the week is an option.

Take a Kid – Walking up to a door asking for permission to hunt for yourself is tough. You'll knock on many and probably only have positive responses sparingly. Take a child along and, leaving your own weapon at home, introduce a novice to hunting.

Knowing your hunting options is paramount. Obviously, if you can hunt during the middle of the week, do so. But pay special attention to hunting those species later on during the season. One of the best dove hunts I've ever had was on October 28, days before the season closed.

Historic Firearm Display

Fort Hartsuff State Historic Park (SHP), in conjunction with the Grand Army of the Frontier (GAF) will present "The Timeline of American Military Firearms 1860-1990" the weekend of October 20-21.

GAF members in period military dress will use a collection of original and reproduction firearms to explain the development of American military firearms starting with muzzleloading firearms of the Civil War and culminating with the modern weapons used in Desert Storm.

On Sunday, October 21 at 2 p.m., Jeff Barnes will give his talk on "Custer in Nebraska: The Royal Buffalo Hunt of 1872."

Fort Hartsuff SHP is located three miles northwest of Elyria on Fort Avenue. For more information, contact Jerry Davenport at (308) 214-0082.



See You Out There... But Where?



Do you know where this Nebraska photograph was taken?
See answer at the bottom of page 11.

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS



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Natural Legacy Project Awarded USFWS Grant

Nebraska's Natural Legacy Project has been awarded \$800,000 from the Competitive State Wildlife Grant Program Fiscal Year 2012 for the grant "Striding toward Sustainability."

This grant from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service will help implement conservation actions to enhance native prairies, woodlands and wetlands for the benefit of at-risk species, while keeping common wildlife species common. Habitat projects will be delivered collaboratively with partners using voluntary, incentive-based strategies. This is the fourth time Nebraska has received one of these grants to help this program, which performs approximately 70 percent of its habitat work on private land.

"The Natural Legacy Project success is due to the support of partners that come together to deliver

habitat projects," said Kristal Stoner, wildlife diversity program manager for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. "The Natural Legacy Partnership Team deserves credit for this grant award since it worked to collaboratively identify good projects and partners that should be a part of the

grant proposal."

The Natural Legacy Partnership has representatives from 24 agencies and organizations that represent agriculture and conservation interests. More than \$5.7 million in funding was available nationwide. Nebraska was one of seven states to receive funding. ■

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NEBRASKAland Visitor Winner and Hint



Last issue's winner of the Visitor drawing was Steve Ferris, of Lincoln Nebraska, who found the **blinded sphinx moth** on page 10. Readers are encouraged to contact *NEBRASKAland* within 10 days after this issue's publication with the correct page number and name of this issue's "Visitor" – a bug found in Nebraska that just happened to find its way onto one of the pages.

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

Or e-mail:

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

HINT: This issue's visitor is not on page 2, 4, 5, or 9.

Desert Dome, Henry Doorly Zoo, Omaha

The Start of the Hunt

Text and photos by Jeff Kurrus

A clear shot of a deer in range isn't always the easiest task for a bowhunter. But waiting for that opportunity sure is exciting.

“When you see a deer with a rifle, your hunt is just about over. When you see a deer when hunting with a bow, your hunt is just beginning.”

With a doe already on the ground, I stood at the base of my ladder stand on last year's opening day, smiling about my good fortune. The smile faded, however, when I saw the buck emerge from the wood edge not 80 yards north of me, lowering his head into a field of beans while I stared above at my bow still hanging in the tree.

I wasn't sure what to do – I was looking at the nicest buck I had ever seen on the hoof, with no weapon in hand. So I made the only decision I could and starting climbing ever-so-slowly back up to my stand. With each step I took, the buck's head emerged from the beans and I would freeze in place until he went back to feeding.

Finally I was back on my platform and, to my disbelief, the buck was still eating. A few minutes later, the impossible happened – he turned and started walking down the wood edge in my direction. I nocked an arrow, turned and lined up shot up in a gap in the brush exactly 12 yards away from me. If the buck continued his course, I had a chip shot. If he changed his route for any reason, things would get more complicated – I had removed very few limbs from the tree I was hunting, deciding it was better to stay concealed and have deer within bow range versus risking being seen by deer too far away to shoot.

Thirty yards ... 20 yards ... 15 ... I drew back as the buck paused behind a plum thicket, my top pin centered on that small opening. I saw a brief patch of white, then brown, enter my sight picture as I waited for the six more inches I needed to make a perfect shot.

A squirrel behind me, however, couldn't wait that long and jumped from one spindly branch to the next, rattling the entire tree behind me. The buck jumped straight up at the sound, twisted in midair and bolted up the trail he came from. In an instant, he was completely out of sight.

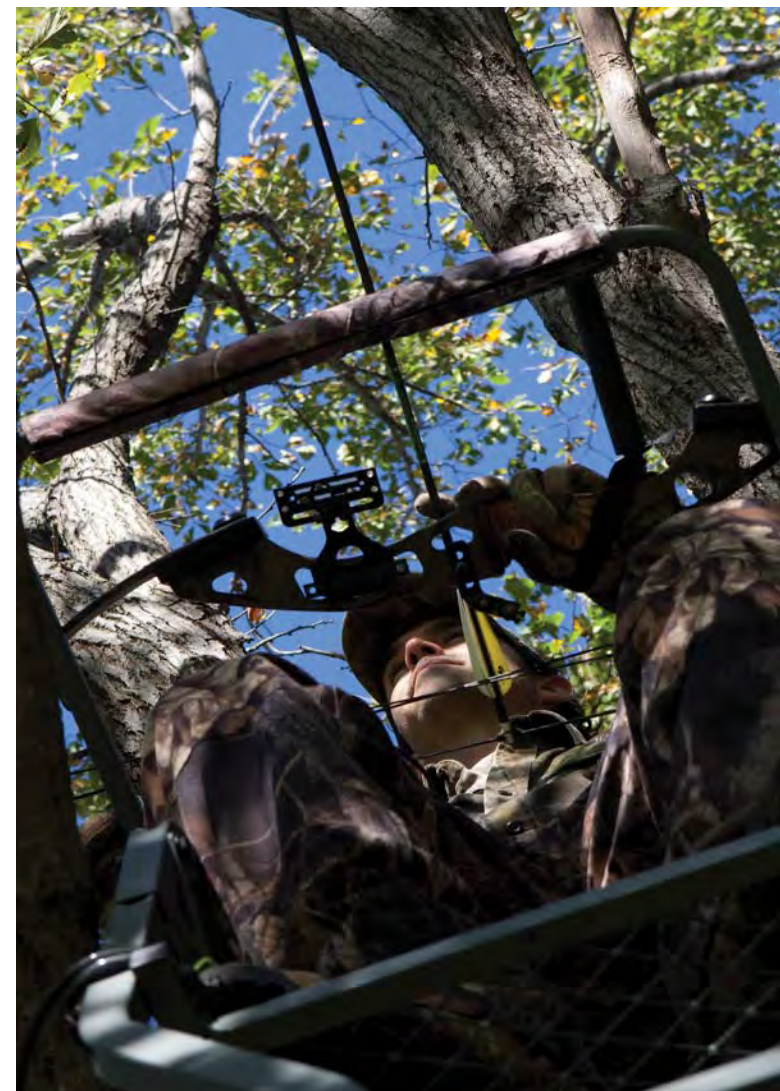
If that deer had stepped into that field while I was rifle hunting, I would have shot, he hopefully would have hit the ground, and my hunt (and story) would have been over. Not with a bow – what I have learned in the two brief years I have been bowhunting is that when you see a deer with a rifle, your hunt is just about over. When you see one while hunting with a bow, your hunt is just beginning.

I got the bowhunting bug a few years ago after knocking on the doors of a couple landowners and them being concerned about me hunting with a gun. “Some bad things have happened,” each told me – a canned response, but one probably carrying some weight as well. But I still didn't want to add bowhunting to my already consuming list of outdoor activities until I looked at Nebraska's big game regulations. There, two notes jumped out at me: 1) Nebraska's bow season lasts from September 15 until December 31, exemplifying a long and mainly warm season for a Southern native whose fear of cold weather has been well chronicled; and 2) Nebraska's bow season is statewide,

not restricting me to any particular area.

Then it clicked: Walking up to a landowner's door was going to become easier when I knew that I had one simple request – doe with a bow. By starting on the ground level, I might be able to get my foot in the door with a simple and safe request for a landowner to consider. Not surprisingly it worked, allowing me to fill my first season with hits, near hits and outright misses. There was the doe at 10 yards whose back I shot completely over; the one I never saw until it was standing less than 15 yards away, staring at me when we finally met eyes; and the doe that only ran 20 yards after a well-placed shot through her vitals.

But it wasn't until the following year that my bowhunting career moved all-in: I got a phone call from a friend telling



Robbie Gaia from Oakland, Tennessee sits in a tree stand in Cass County, waiting for a whitetail to walk by.



Browning beans are a sure sign of the bow season's most enjoyable times - pre-winter, pre-harvest and pre-rut.

me I needed to photograph a deer shot on private land near Springfield. The buck, a 19-pointer shot by teenager Luke Polenz, was a massive deer that had been taken by the youth on family land.

Just two days before, Luke had hunted from daylight to dark hoping a deer would come within bow range. No such luck. The day this buck stepped in range – a deer larger than any he had ever seen – Luke's first arrow flew over the deer's back. The buck bolted, disappearing from sight. That was when Luke, a novice deer hunter only if considering how many years he had hunted, made a veteran move by picking up and blowing a grunt call. Moments later, the deer was back in range and the second arrow found its mark.

The result was a once-in-a-lifetime buck that will keep Luke hunting for, well, a lifetime. And while he was definitely now hooked, his story brought another hunter to the nocks, arrows and pin sights brotherhood. But I can honestly say that it wasn't the big buck that truly hooked me – it was the fact that Luke was 20 years younger than me and was beginning a passion that I had long foregone until that point. It was one of the first times in my hunting and fishing life that I truly felt regrets. So I spent the rest of the season making up for lost memories.

And what fun it was. Two weeks after last year's opening morning (which also became the official opening of squirrel season where I was hunting), a 5-by-5 ran beneath my tree and across the field in front of me. "Eh, eh, eh!" I yelled, but the buck never stopped. Still standing on my platform, moments later I saw movement from the corner of my right eye. A spike walked beneath my stand and stopped to eat grass no more than 10 yards away. I drew my bow back and aimed at the deer's chest. "It's not what you're looking for," said a voice in my head, and I eased my arrow back down. Moments later, another brown movement caused my head to turn. It was a high-rise 4-by-4. "That's what you came for," I thought, drawing on the buck. Seconds later I shot, feet

later he fell over. My hunt that day was over.

But even after this deer, I had another close encounter with a nice buck and a pile of encounters with various animals. Plus, I got to share my bow season with my 64-year-old father. While not shooting a bow yet, he shot plenty of wildlife photos from a ground blind those September and October mornings. "The woods are alive," he told me, and he was right. Raccoons, opossums, field mice, owls, hawks and a plethora of birds fill those moments when deer are not being seen.

And there are so many more possibilities. I am reminded of Eric Fowler's November 2005 *NEBRASKA* land archery story on John Griess and the dazzling portfolio of images from his spot-and-stalk mule deer hunt. Or of a trip with Nebraskan Andrew Voss last year where he hunted the edge of a cornfield, watching a scant, but productive, opening on land near Eagle. Or even the hunt I made with youngster Josh Pflasterer as he chased his first-ever buck with a bow.

On land near Columbus, Josh led me

Other Wildlife

You've heard it before. "I hunt (or fish) to spend time in nature and see wildlife." While hard to understand for nonhunters, those with weapon in hand know this all to well. We hunt for the challenge of making the shot and being at the right place at the right time, but our principal mission is to watch wildlife. And there's no better time to do this than bow season.

From an owl swooping down toward a squirrel to a red fox searching for field mice, there is rarely a quiet autumn day afield. These are the mornings when there is a brief chill in the air that gives way to a sun-filled day, where the prospect of shooting a deer is only slightly trailed by the prospect of seeing everything else. Give me an afternoon with an opossum, tom turkey and two flocks of geese, and I'll give you a time when my regrets are absent despite never lifting my bow.



PHOTO BY LARRY KUFRUS



A ground blind in Cass County is the site of a few successes, and a few more failures, in my bowhunting career.

Josh Pflasterer makes his way to his stand one afternoon last November, just beginning a passion that has the chance to consume him until he is an old man.



PHOTO BY JOSH PFLASTERER

When Pflasterer shot this 5-by-4, his first archery buck, he described a feeling many bowhunters have had: “My heart was pumping so fast I thought it was going to pop out of my chest.”

over rolling hills to a spot deep within a pine draw. “They’ll come right through here,” he told me, “I’ve seen as many as 30 in here.” That afternoon they did not – not even a squirrel was seen – but two weeks later he was sending me photos of his first archery buck, and I was happy for him but once again questioning myself: Why had I waited so long to start bowhunting? And why was I checking e-mails on a perfectly good day to sit in the woods?

These are questions I often have nowadays as I find myself unable to sleep at night. What mysteries await me the following morning? Will they walk by 8:30? If not, they definitely have to walk by 10:00, right? If not then, when? Noon? 2:00? 4:00? Dark? While I haven’t spent my own full day in the stand yet, I can

This fox squirrel, my Cass County nemesis, greets me every morning I sit in the tree stand. If only he knew how much I loathe him.

definitely see how it happens. For each minute I stay in the field, it’s another minute that a memory can become so ingrained I’ll remember it forever. For if they are anything like the memories thus far, there will almost be too many to count. Almost. ■



Mallards from the North

By Jon Farrar

Since 1994, Nebraska has contributed money derived from the sale of state waterfowl stamps to Ducks Unlimited Canada to enhance waterfowl breeding grounds. In total, the state's contribution is now approaching \$1 million.

It took some American hunters decades to realize most of the ducks that cupped wings over their decoys were produced in Canada. The creation of Ducks Unlimited in the U.S. in 1937 and its Canadian counterpart, Ducks Unlimited Canada, a year later, was probably the first significant step in recognizing that fact. Approximately 60 percent of the mallards shot in Nebraska come from the Canadian prairie-pothole region of south-central Canada; and specifically, about 30 percent of the mallards shot by Nebraska hunters come from southern Saskatchewan. In recognition of that, Nebraska is one of 34 states that annually contribute grant money to Ducks Unlimited Canada to protect and improve waterfowl nesting habitat. Nebraska has participated in the program since 1994: Its annual contribution has ranged from \$25,000 to \$140,000 and now totals more than \$950,000 – an impressive milestone for a state with a population as small as Nebraska. Money for the grants comes entirely from the sale of state waterfowl stamps to hunters.

State grants are matched by DU, and that total is matched with funding through the 1989 North American Wetlands Conservation Act, the core component of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. Oftentimes there are other partners, such as Canadian provincial and federal governments, the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority and The Nature Conservancy of Canada. Every dollar from Nebraska grows a minimum of four times by way of matching funds. Often the match is five times and sometimes even more.

“That means, at minimum, the \$65,000 Nebraska contributed in 2012 paid for at the least \$260,000 of habitat work on the ground,” said Dave Kustersky, manager of state grants for DU Canada.

Kustersky said the types of projects the program funds has changed over the years, from initially being directed at individual projects to what he called a “suite of programs” on a particular landscape. DU Canada still

uses land acquisitions and conservation easements to protect wetlands and nesting habitat, but has found it can stretch funding by working with private landowners, particularly by providing direct payments to develop forage and grazing programs benefitting ducks and other wildlife that require wetlands and grasslands near them, as well benefitting the landowner. Canada does not have a farm program like the United States’ Conservation Reserve Program, which pays landowners to return marginal agricultural land to perennial grasslands.

“There never will be enough conservation money to buy our way to protecting enough habitat,” said Kustersky. “We have to look at other tools.” But, he added, all agreements with private landowners for habitat improvement are long-term. “It’s a multiple-year investment,” he said. “It’s not about trying to get a quick gain or looking for that silver bullet. It’s a big task and will take the support of the conservation community at large to make a difference.”

Ducks Unlimited concentrates its conservation efforts on the Prairie Pothole region of south-central Canada, a region extending southerly into the north-central states, but also has projects to the north, in Canada’s Parklands and Boreal Forest regions. Much of the money originating from Nebraska goes to the Missouri Couteau region in Saskatchewan, a poorly drained landscape with numerous glacial pothole wetlands. Kustersky pointed out that these premier waterfowl breeding grounds are also important migration waters for birds nesting in the Arctic. Contributing states have a role in selecting the projects they want their grant money to help fund, and for Nebraska that is southern Saskatchewan to increase mallard production, but all other duck species nesting there, and nongame birds, also benefit.

“The state dollar is what gets the whole thing rolling,” said Kustersky when asked how important state grants were in the big picture, considering all the money from various sources that go to Canada to improve waterfowl habitat. “In total, all states combined contributed about



Approximately 60 percent of the mallards shot by Nebraska hunters are produced in south-central Canada.

PHOTO BY JON FARRAR. BACKGROUND PHOTO BY DUCKS UNLIMITED CANADA

\$2.8 million in 2012. That alone doesn’t look like much considering what DU spends annually in Canada, but leveraged – having another source match that start-up money, and then another source match that, it grows to an impressive number. But for all that to happen, the states have to start the ball rolling with their grants.

“In tough economic times like we’ve gone through the last few years, and rising land values,” said Kustersky, “funding starts to shrink, so it becomes all that more important that we squeeze every bit of habitat improvement out of every dollar available. The longer we put off doing this conservation work, the more it’s going to cost us down the road. That means partnerships like the state funding for Canadian projects is evermore important. When you have less money you want to get your best return, and partnerships are the best place for that.”

In Canada alone, DU has completed more than 8,880 habitat projects, securing 6.2 million acres and positively influencing more than 95 million acres of habitat that not only benefit waterfowl, but other wetlands species.

“This is a program that potentially benefits every Nebraska hunter,” said Mark Vrtiska, Nebraska Game and Parks Waterfowl Specialist. “When we do a wetland habitat improvement project in Nebraska, it’s a good thing for those living near that project, or those willing to drive to get to that site. Those local projects are important, and we will continue to do them, working with partners to multiply the funds available. But with

the grant program to DU Canada we are improving waterfowl hunting opportunities for every hunter in the state, east to west, north to south. That’s why I think it’s a good program from the standpoint of everybody’s dollar has the potential to bring a return to every Nebraska waterfowl hunter.”

“In all these wetland habitat improvement projects,” said Kustersky, “it’s mostly hunters who are footing the bill. They want more waterfowl and they’ve always stepped up to pay for it. But those investments in habitat and breeding grounds are benefitting songbirds, raptors and shorebirds – an enormous array of species. We need to find a way to engage nonconsumptive users of wildlife to get involved in protecting and improving these areas.”

“It’s one of those conservation programs difficult for Nebraska hunters to see because it’s happening in Canada,” said Vrtiska, “but if a Nebraska duck hunter spent a few days in the Prairie Pothole region of Saskatchewan in May, looking at the wetland habitat protection and improvements being financed by this program, seeing wetlands surrounded by good quality nesting cover, the number of ducks nesting there, the broods raised there, they would be even more supportive of this program.”

If a hunter cannot be in Saskatchewan in May, the next best thing is to go online and look at the projects DU Canada is doing with the help of state contributions. Two web sites to start with are: www.waterfowling.com and <http://www.ducks.ca/> ■

The Long Road Home

My Sandhills Ritual

By Bill Hager

Be it an early season trip for grouse or a fall float on a river, the transition from the hot days of summer to the cool, crisp days of early fall is an easy one for me. Grabbing my gear and heading to my roost in the Sandhills has become a ritual of sorts.

Amongst the ever-changing landscape and tempered by weather, the trek down the road to the Sandhills is never boring. Between the colorful foliage and wildlife migrations, this is the season I look forward to most. There is always something new over the next hill or around the next bend.



*Above: Framed against a quiet sunrise, these trusty tools stand ready for another day of harvest in a northern Boyd County field.
Opposite: A young bluebird watches from the top strand of a nearby fence as its migrating flock forages in the grass.*



Above: A mixed palette of color amongst lingering fog near Merritt Reservoir in Cherry County.

Left: A kingfisher alertly watches the river from a perch overlooking the Niobrara River in Brown County.

Right: A group of bull elk blend with the grasses as the landscape takes on the look of fall.





Above: A whitetail doe bends an ear in my direction as she moves to a bedding area in a bale pile in southern Cherry County.

Left: An ash tree in brilliant red dominates the scene in Cherry County.

Right: The bright yellow canopy of twin cottonwoods filter early light over camp on the North Loup River.



Picket Pins of the Plains

Nebraska's thirteen-lined ground squirrel

Text and photos by Jon Farrar

Of the four species of ground squirrels found in the state, the thirteen-lined is the most abundant and is found statewide. The species' traditional habitat was shortgrass prairie, but today they are most common on disturbed lands.

Have you ever been just a little bit embarrassed to be a “Cornhusker?” Do you find it a bit too, well, hmmm, corny? Granted it is better than Nebraska's earlier nickname “The Bug Eaters” but it would be nice to have a more appealing nickname, such as Florida – The Sunshine State; Georgia – The Peach State; New Jersey – the Garden State; or New Mexico – The Land of Enchantment. On the other hand, it could be worse, like Minnesota – The Gopher State.

Minnesota has labored valiantly to shed that nickname, preferring to be called the “Land of 10,000 Lakes” or “The Star of the North,” but has been unsuccessful in banishing “gophers.” The University of Minnesota's athletic teams remain “The Golden Gophers.” Interestingly, Minnesota's widely known sobriquet, a reference to the “striped gopher,” is taxonomically incorrect. The state animal is not a gopher at all but a ground squirrel, the thirteen-lined ground squirrel, and so properly Minnesota should be called “The Thirteen-lined Ground Squirrel State.” Minnesota mammalogists might even insist on “The *Spermophilus tridecemlineatus* State,” as that is the animal's scientific name. Either the common or scientific name would be long enough to wrap around at least three sides of their license plates.

The confusion over names of small mammals that burrow in the ground (and are usually considered pests to be poisoned) is an old one. Three groups of small burrowing

mammals are often lumped together – ground squirrels, pocket gophers and moles. Moles and pocket gophers are rarely seen above ground. Both moles and pocket gophers leave meandering trails of soft earth pushed to the surface as they excavate their underground labyrinth of tunnels. Only ground squirrels are commonly seen above ground.

FOUR SPECIES OF GROUND SQUIRRELS live in Nebraska. The least common is **Richardson's** ground squirrel (*Spermophilus richardsoni*), a species that is rare and reported only from the southern Panhandle. **Franklin's** ground squirrels (*Spermophilus franklinii*) are the largest at about 15 inches long, of which about one-third is a bushy tail. They are grayish in coloration, dappled with muted white and blackish spots. The range of Franklin's ground squirrels closely matched that of tallgrass prairie and so they are much diminished in numbers today. **Spotted** ground squirrels (*Spermophilus spilosoma*), at about eight inches in total length, are the smallest of the four ground squirrel species found in the state. They are most abundant in grasslands, particularly those in sandy soils, and so most common in the Sandhills and Panhandle.

Nebraska's most common ground squirrel, found statewide, is the **thirteen-lined** ground squirrel. Audubon called them leopard-spermophiles, and they have also been known by such common names as striped gophers, picket pins, Federation squirrels, leopard ground squirrels and

One of the thirteen-lined ground squirrels common names was picket pins as when they stand erect they reminded people of the wooden stakes once used to secure a tent or tether livestock.



Richardson's ground squirrel



Franklin's ground squirrel



Spotted ground squirrel

PHOTO BY JONAH EVANS WILDLIFE DIVERSITY BIOLOGIST TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE



squinneys. The name squinney is apparently British in origin, meaning “to peep about” or squint, and a “squinney-hole” is a peep-hole. Picket pins is probably a reference to “pickets,” the pointed wooden stakes once used to secure a tent, tether livestock or mark surveying points. Federation squirrel is a reference to the animal’s stripes suggesting the stripes of the American flag.

Of all ground squirrels found in Nebraska, the thirteen-lined has the most elongated appearance, almost weasel-like, one of their principal predators. Their bodies range in length from six to 11 inches, with three- to four-inch tails. Body weights vary widely with the age of the animal, abundance of food and time of year. Most weigh five to six ounces but a large animal may approach one-half pound just before winter hibernation. Males are slightly larger than females. In overall color they are buff to brown, lightest in coloration on their undersides, and they do have 13 alternating dark and light stripes on their backs, usually broken with spots that perhaps aid in camouflage. When seen standing, the striping cannot help but make one think of the reedlike feather pattern on the breast and neck of **American bitterns**, a



Thirteen-lined ground squirrels are striped, like the feather pattern of an American bittern, a camouflage matching the grasslands where they live.

camouflage ruse to make them blend in with vertical vegetation.

Thirteen-lined ground squirrels are strictly diurnal and especially active on warm days, although they may remain underground on the hottest days of summer. The species’ traditional habitat was shortgrass prairie but they readily adapted to manmade shortgrass habitats such as golf courses, cemeteries, airport lands, parks and mowed roadsides. Roadside

residence offers them the added benefit of spilled grain and squashed grasshoppers and crickets, all preferred thirteen-line food items. Traditionally they prospered where bison and prairie dogs cropped prairie vegetation short. The primary food items in a thirteen-lined ground squirrel’s diet are grass and weed seeds, but a variety of insects are eaten and occasionally young mice and lizards.

In particularly favorable habitat there may be as many as 10 individuals per acre. They typically live solitary lives except when females are with young, and aggressively defend their burrowing and feeding area. The breeding season is usually April, with young born in May after a



The thirteen-lined ground squirrel is more elongated than most ground squirrels, a weasel-like shape similar to one of their principal predators.

28-day gestation period. In the southern reaches of their range females may produce two litters per year, but in Nebraska that would be rare. Litters range from five to 13 and average eight or nine. Young are weaned when six weeks old, and are sexually mature when nine to 10 months.

Although thirteen-lined ground squirrels are known to usurp pocket gopher and prairie dog burrows, they usually excavate their own. An individual burrow usually has two or three entrances and may be 15 to 20 feet in length, with several side passages and chambers used for nesting and storage of seeds and other vegetation. Rarely are they deeper than two feet below the surface. Typically, the burrow turns sharply once below the surface, which some mammalogists speculate may convince digging predators such as badgers that the burrow dead-ended. Unlike prairie dogs, thirteen-lined ground squirrels spread soil from tunnels away from burrow entrances so they are not conspicuous.

In Nebraska, thirteen-lined ground squirrels hibernate from late-September or early-October until about mid-March. During the late summer they work diligently laying on fat, increasing their body weight by as much as an ounce, which is significant considering most average five to six ounces in total weight. They also stockpile seeds in underground chambers. Before going underground for the winter they plug all entrances to their burrow system. In their grasslined

nest they curl into balls with tail and head tucked against the belly. Their respiration is reduced from a usual 150 breaths per minute to about three or four, and their heart beat drops from 200 to 300 per minute to 15. Still, they may lose one-third or more of their body weight before emerging to feed in spring.

Throughout the late-1800s and early-1900s, bounties were frequently offered for killing ground squirrels and “gophers,” particularly at the county level. In 1894, for example, Buffalo County offered a three-cent bounty of ground squirrels and paid \$390 for 13,000 animals killed, the bulk of which was probably pocket money for young boys. Animal control agents at the state and federal levels were often available, at taxpayer expense, to eradicate the problem animals with poisoned baits. Thirteen-lined ground squirrels and their relatives are still the object of eradication programs today for feeding on recently planted and corn and other crops. The dollar value claims of losses are suspect, and often defy common sense. For example, the Buffalo County website from which the above information was taken also states that: “A current (1992) estimate suggests that they [thirteen-lined ground squirrels] cause \$2M in damage to corn crops...” A University of Nebraska-Lincoln “NebGuide” states a similar number but with qualifications as to the species of animals causing the damage: “In

addition, thirteen-lined ground squirrels and **other rodents** cause an estimated \$2 million damage each year to Nebraska cornfields.” Frankly, one has to wonder how that figure was derived. Certainly, any damage to row crops in Nebraska by ground squirrels occurs only on the margins of fields, where they abut grasslands or waste areas with ground squirrels. That same UN-L publication continues with practical advice about controlling ground squirrels: “Nevertheless, eliminating these ground squirrels isn’t the right answer either, as their predation on crop-damaging insects provides an important benefit. Instead, land managers should manage ground squirrel populations at levels where they can be appreciated.”

Today, ground squirrels are mostly ignored because they do not prosper in row-crop fields and are most abundant where no one cares, such as along roads. They are the fodder that feeds and sustains species higher on the food chain and held in higher regard by our kind. Often, at city parks, they become so tame they will take food from the hands of picnickers. Why is it feeding chipmunks in mountain regions is such an endearing and pleasurable experience, but out here on the flat land, our “prairie chipmunks” that fill the same ecological niche here as chipmunks do there, are something to eradicate? Wisdom would suggest controlling them where they are problem, enjoying them where they are not. ■

Saucy Longbills

A Short History of Shorebird Hunting

By Jon Farrar

Shorebird hunting in Nebraska is little more than a historical footnote. Before 1900, the number of shorebirds considered legal game numbered nearly 50, ranging from the largest – long-billed curlews weighing on average about 1.3 pounds – to western sandpipers weighing under an ounce. Among the most popular with sportsmen and men who hunted for the market were the larger shorebirds – curlews, upland sandpipers, yellowlegs, woodcock, and golden and black-bellied plovers. But no shorebird had a larger or more enthusiastic following, and was legal game for so many years, as the snipe. Tracing the history of snipe hunting essentially traces the hunting history of all other shorebirds in Nebraska.

The species of snipe found in North America has been known by assorted names over the years – common, red-breasted, fantail, English, crooked-billed and winter snipe. Most commonly it was called the jacksnipe, and currently, officially, the Wilson’s snipe. By whatever name, snipe have always been one of the most desirable of shorebirds to hunt because they were abundant, considered a more difficult target than other shorebirds, and their creamed breasts on wedges of toast were, and are, an epicurean delight. And, unlike some shorebird species that only pause in Nebraska in significant numbers or for long during their spring migration, snipe pass through from border to border during both their spring and autumn migration and linger when soggy wetlands are available.

“The jacks have come and the sportsmen are all agog over prospective days in the field,” *Omaha*

Bee outdoor writer Sandy Griswold wrote in the April 12, 1896 edition. Griswold started writing for the *Omaha Bee* in 1886 and moved to the *Omaha World-Herald* in 1898, where each Sunday he filled a full page with sporting news into 1929. Those weekly columns are the best record of the history of outdoor sports in Nebraska. Griswold had his hand on the pulse of the average hunter and angler and was a snipe-hunting addict. “There is no game bird which excites the



Snipe have been afforded many endearing nicknames. It was Charles Askins who called them “saucy longbills.”

general interest in shooting circles as this erratic and mysterious little russet colored rover,” he continued in that same column. “Unquestionably the one morceau [morsel] of all feathered game, not excepting even the lordly

canvasback, the rare woodcock or dainty quail, the jack is king of them all. He is a queer little fellow and it is a difficult matter to accurately get onto his incoming and outgoing. ... They are as mysterious and quiet in their arrival and departure as disembodied spirits.

Snipe hunting was considered a gentleman’s shoot, as no more than knee boots were required to walk where they were found. They most often flush as single birds, and their wagging flushing flight presents the sportsman with a challenging target.

“The flight of snipe is swift, vigorous, and usually for the first few yards erratic,” Edwyn Sandys wrote in his book, *Sporting Sketches*, published in 1905. “The bird gets under way smartly and as a usual thing goes boring up-wind in a style rather suggestive of a feathered corkscrew. A series of elliptical zigzags get him to top speed, whereupon his progress steadies a bit and he darts away in something more like a straight line.” Charles Askins, in his 1931 book, *Game Bird Shooting*, compared the accomplished snipe shooter to that of a baseball infielder, requiring perfect and rapid coordination between “vision, mind, nerves, and muscles” when he wrote: “The snipe shot is the infielder of wing shooting. On the ball field the infielder takes a hot, sizzling, short-bounding grass-cutter, and on the snipe marsh the gunner takes a dodging, swerving, corkscrewing atom of game-bird life.”

Charles F. Waterman, in his article “Snipe, Just So” published in the Fall 1985 issue of *Gray’s Sporting Journal*, perhaps captured the mystery that has always accompanied the bird’s flight when he wrote: “The fact is a

BIRD LIFE BY FRANK M. CHAPMAN, 1899



Snipe hunting was considered a gentleman’s shoot, as no more than knee boots were required to walk where they were found. Setters and pointers were used, mostly to find downed birds, and often kept at heel until a bird was shot.

snipe seems to do a great many things just for the hell of it – his objectives concealed somewhere in snipe logic.”

Game Law and Shorebirds

Prior to 1901, when the Nebraska Legislature passed the state’s first comprehensive game law statutes, all shorebirds in Nebraska were legal game, regardless of size or rarity, without limits. The first shorebird to receive any protection was the woodcock, when the 1859 Legislative Assembly for the Nebraska Territory passed a law they could only be hunted outside of their breeding season, from the fifteenth day of July through February. Protecting woodcock only during their breeding season was a pattern that would appear in other game laws for years. During the late-1800s, game birds were seen as a crop to be harvested, and if they were not harvested in Nebraska they would be in some other state. The state legislature

lavished more attention on bounties for wolves, mountain lions and gophers.

The 1877 Nebraska Legislature passed a statute making it “...unlawful for any person to take, wound, or kill any wild bird within this state at any season of the year, or to take or destroy any wild bird’s eggs or nest at any time; *Provided*, That this act shall **not** apply to waterfowls, jack snipes, sand snipes, waders, and woodcocks.” The use of obscure and inaccurate common names for shorebirds such as “sand snipes” and “waders” was only the beginning of decades of confusion as to which species the statutes referred. It was as if state senators did not know there were ornithologists at the University of Nebraska only eight blocks north of the capitol who could have provided the proper names. The best example of that was whether “plover” included the upland sandpiper, more commonly, but inaccurately, called the “upland plover,” a shorebird not of shorelines but of grasslands. Or

did it mean black-bellied and golden plovers? Or killdeer, which are plovers. Such careless language was not confined to the state capitol chambers but appeared in state and federal regulations as well.

Not until 1897 did the Legislature make it illegal to kill “any plover, Wilson, or jack-snipe or woodcock, between the first day of May, and the first day of September of each year...” Outside of the breeding season there were no limits on how many could be killed. That same year, for the first time, it became illegal to ship game birds for sale, but only outside of the open season, which was eight months of the year.

Not until 1900 did the federal government take its first tentative step to stem the precipitous decline of game birds as states were disinclined to accept that responsibility. Passage of the Lacey Act prohibited the interstate transportation of any wild animals or birds killed in violation of state law.

OUR FEATHERED GAME - A HANDBOOK OF THE NORTH AMERICAN GAME BIRDS BY DWIGHT HUNTINGTON, 1903

Only in matters of interstate commerce did the federal government have any law-making authority related to market hunting or selling game animals. The law applied only when game was being shipped into or from a state prohibiting it, but few states did, including Nebraska except during the closed breeding season.

Not until 1901, when the Nebraska Legislature disbanded the Fish Commission and created the Nebraska Game and Fish Commission, did the state have anything approaching comprehensive game laws; albeit absurdly liberal in length of hunting seasons and bag limits. For the first time there were game wardens to

enforce the laws, but only a chief deputy warden, a “travelling deputy” and three other wardens employed seasonally. The open season on snipe and yellowlegs was September 1 through April 15. The “plover” hunting season (that presumably included upland sandpipers) was open April 15 through October as they were summer migrants, most passing south through the state from mid-July to mid-August. The limit was 25 per day and 50 in possession. There was no distinction which species of “curlew” was protected under the game statutes; and whether there was a season on them or not. The state senators included birds such as ptarmigans, even though there

are no native ptarmigan species in Nebraska. And there were omissions: If an animal was not specifically named in the statutes – as godwits and the smaller sandpipers – they apparently were fair game year-round without bag limits.

The 1905 session did little more than extend the snipe and yellowlegs hunting season to May 15. The game law booklet printed by the Commission rounded off species even more in referring to “Jacksnipe and the waders” but not specifying what species were considered waders. An approximation of some of the shorebird species considered game birds, but surely not inclusive, appeared in Griswold’s August 25, 1912 column. Some listed species were not then (or in recent times) anything but rare vagrants in the state, and some common names were as obscure as to species as “plover.” He wrote: “The killdeer plover is still occasionally seen. Greater and lesser yellow legs and sandpipers are also met with in fair quantities, but what latter-day sportsman could identify any of the following birds if he should see one? Northern phalarope, avocet, black neck stilt, Dowitcher, robin snipe (red-breasted snipe), white-rumped sandpiper, Baird sandpiper, Least sandpiper, marbled godwit, yellow legs, solitary sandpiper, long-billed curlew, black-bellied plover, golden plover, killdeer plover, semipalmated plover, ringed plover, mountain plover, turnstone, pectoral sandpiper, red-backed sandpiper, and purple sandpiper. The woodcock is another bird, once very plentiful, but now literally extinct in this state.”

Through all the statute confusion over which shorebird species could be legally shot, though, snipe were always clearly identified, even if by various colloquial names, and remained the most abundant and sought after by sportsmen.

Vanishing Wetlands

In the opening decade of the 1900s, Griswold wrote frequently of the dwindling numbers of gamebirds, that some were destined to vanish entirely unless protected, all the while publishing accounts of big kills by other hunters and on his own hunts.

“But it is not only the geese, brant [snow geese] and cranes that are so rapidly disappearing from the whilom [past] haunts,” Griswold wrote in his November 3, 1901 column, “but the jacksnipe, royal little courser of the air that he is, the curlew, goldenback plover and associate species of waterfowl are about as good as gone. To be sure an occasional day of tolerably good jack shooting may yet be had in favored localities, but the certainty of finding the birds in any numbers on any grounds is decreasing with each recurring year.” In his May 3, 1903 column, he wrote that Omaha sportsmen shooting on the Iowa side of the Missouri River were reporting “to kill 100 jacks on the same grounds every day in the week for three straight weeks. Bags of these dimensions have been the rule, and not the exception...”

Griswold repeatedly pinned the decline of snipe and other wildfowl on advancing agriculture, while maintaining the role of sportsmen had been insignificant, even though “sportsmen” prior to 1900 sold birds in excess of what they could use on the market. In his November 29, 1908 column he claimed the sportsmen who “gets out in the heart of nature’s wilds and sees and hears and reasons for himself is the man to deduct truthful conclusions” for the decline in shorebirds, more so than scientific researchers.

“He knows that it is not the gun that has been the main agent of these birds’ vanquishment and will tell you the farmers’ drains, the sluiceways, irrigating ditches and filled in swails [swales], whereby vast acres of water feeding grounds have been made dry, have killed countless numbers and forever driven away the rest. Fifty years ago the sloppy prairies and queachy bog lands immediately around Omaha were the haunts of innumerable swarms of migratory wild fowl, cranes, geese, ducks and plover. Now but precious few are seen, not because they have been shot off, but because this resting and feeding ground has been made unavailable. Even the smaller sandpipers, killdeers, bitterns and inferior waders, never much shot at are just as scarce and for the same reason. Hundreds of small ponds and streams, once their favorite



Snipe have been called many colorful colloquial names, but most often jacksnipe, common snipe or Wilson’s snipe. Wilson’s is the accepted common name today.

banquet places, are now as dry as a bone and there is no reason for the birds to ever again visit them.”

Not until writing his January 8, 1922 column did Griswold acknowledge sportsmen had played a role in the precipitous decline of shorebirds and other wildfowl, but he still attributed the principal agent of their decline to agriculture: “In regard to the prairie chicken, the woodcock, the plover and the jacksnipe.... I am forced to say, as reluctant as I am, that it is high time for many so-called sportsmen to dodge and wince. The man with the gun must be prepared to bear almost unlimited abuse, or he must betake himself beyond the reach of it. He is, nevertheless, guilty of sundry depredations, sins against the law of universal bird protection ... but they were insignificant compared to the draining of bogs and lowlands, upon which the woodcock and the jacksnipe depended for perpetuation. Reclaim all the wet lands and ditch away the water of ponds and small lakes, and then after it is done, go look in vain for the dowitcher, the yellowleg, killdeer, willet, turnstone or plover, mallard, teal, spoonbill, butterball or widgeon.”

The Migratory Bird Act

During the opening years of the 1900s it became increasingly obvious most states were not paring back the length of hunting seasons and bag limits enough to stem the decline of migratory birds. The federal Biological

Survey (precursor of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) identified Nebraska as one of thirteen states with the most liberal hunting seasons for migratory birds. It was clear only federal regulations could bring the excessive killing to a halt. Sportsmen’s associations and conservationists of a wide stripe saw federal intervention was the only hope. And public sentiment in general was shifting to protection of native wildlife.

As early as 1904, bills were introduced in Congress to assign the federal government full authority to promulgate laws protecting waterbirds, but not until passage of the Migratory Bird Act in 1913 was such a bill passed. That law declared all migratory game and insectivorous birds “to be within the custody and protection of the government of the United States,” and prohibited their killing except as allowed by federal regulations. It granted a five-year “rest period” for all shorebirds except woodcock, snipe, black-bellied and golden plovers, and greater and lesser yellowlegs. Sandhill and whooping cranes, swans, curlews, willets, upland sandpipers and other shorebirds not specifically named could no longer be legally hunted. As important as any other aspect of the act, it allowed no more than a three-and-one-half month hunting season in a year, essentially prohibiting spring shooting for migratory gamebirds. The spring of 1913 was the last legal spring hunting season for waterfowl and shorebirds, at least under federal law.



In the late-1800s and early-1900s, probably no shorebird had a more ardent following of hunters than snipe. Hunting them was a frequent topic of outdoor magazines.



PHOTO BY JON FARRAR

Snipe prefer to feed in soggy soils with short vegetation but occasionally frequent open shorelines like most shorebirds.

The constitutionality of the Migratory Bird Act of 1913 was immediately challenged by two cases in federal district courts. Both ruled the federal government had overstepped its authority. One case was appealed to the Supreme Court, where it languished for years and a ruling never made as to its constitutionality, perhaps by design.

The period between passage of the Migratory Bird Act and implementation of the Migratory Bird Treaty in 1918 was one of the most interesting in the history of Nebraska game law. There were two camps as to the legality of the Migratory Bird Act. The federal government's position was that until

the Migratory Bird Act was ruled unconstitutional it was the law of the land. The other held that as the law was yet to be upheld by the courts, states continued to have the right to set seasons and limits for migratory game birds. Nebraska was a perfect example of the standoff. In the early months of 1913, the state legislature set season and bag regulations for two years as they always had always done (prior to 1970, the Legislature only met in odd-numbered years), but the Migratory Bird Act wasn't passed until after the Nebraska legislative session had adjourned, and state senators would not meet again until early in 1915.

Consequently, state and federal regulations differed on many points, the most significant being whether spring hunting for migratory birds was legal. State game law bulletins varied with federal regulations. Furthermore, the new federal law did not take effect until signed by President Woodrow Wilson in October, well into the hunting seasons as set by the Nebraska Legislature. Under Nebraska law, waterfowl hunting was allowed from September 1 through April 5; and shorebird seasons were open September 1 through April. Federal law closed the seasons on December 15. The true test of whether sportsmen

would adhere to the federal game law came in the spring of 1914.

"It can be seen that the greatest problem which will confront the government in the future enforcement of the new federal game law is the means of educating the people what the law really is," Griswold wrote in his January 4, 1914 column, "and of what effect are the various state laws, every one of which is in conflict with the federal regulations, and therefore confusing to many persons. It will be necessary for each state to repeal its local laws referring to migratory birds and perhaps enact law seasons so prosecution could occur under state courts where convenience would justify such a case, or where state officers wished to prosecute offenders. ... It will doubtless take some more time before the federal law will really be on a sound working basis, first owing to a scarcity of funds for paying officers, and then through inadequate organization."

"I wish to say in regard to the federal migratory bird law that I am sure it will be enforced and shall advise all sportsmen to comply strictly with the regulations," Nebraska Game and Fish Commission Chief Warden Gust Rutenbeck wrote in a letter to Griswold published in the March 8, 1914 edition of the *Omaha World-Herald*. "The fact that the state licenses allow spring shooting has no bearing with this law. I understand there will be sixteen federal wardens in the state during the flight in the spring and the law will be enforced. The federal law supersedes the state law." The Nebraska Game and Fish Commission took the position that only federal wardens could enforce federal laws.

Rutenbeck wrote Griswold in late-April 1913, at the end of the spring migration, that reports from many states "indicate that the general observance of the law this spring has had the effect of causing many wildfowl to resume their former

flight routes, as well as to cause them to remain in many localities for a longer period than known for many years..." In his August 9, 1914 column, Griswold responded that all the reports of dramatic increases in migratory game birds as a result of only one year without a spring shooting season was "...poppy-cock incubated by the press agents of the new federal law, who seem to know no limit to their ridiculous exaggerations over the marvelous benefits this law had brought about. While the law is good and most commendable in most respects, it is most exasperatingly unequal and unjust in a large number of its provisions."

Griswold's commentary on state and federal game laws vacillated from shouting the conservation message from mountain tops to complaining about the paltry seasons and limits allowed, or species no longer considered game birds. His thinking and words were reflected



WILD FOWL SHOOTING BY WILLIAM B. LEFFINGWELL, 1890

Even in the days of muzzle-loading shotguns, it was not uncommon for one hunter to kill a hundred snipe or more in a day.



Snipe probe wet soils with their long, sensitive bills for earthworms and other invertebrates, leaving behind telltale “boring holes.”

in letters from sportsmen published in his question-and-answer column. He frequently wrote of his fond memories of the “good old days” when birds seemed limitless and hunting regulations were excessively liberal if there were any at all, and mourned the passing of those times. He wrote in his February 27, 1916 column: “...our jacksnipe shooting, in this section of the country, is now but a dream and a fable, as the fall shooting is not to be compared with what it used to be in the sweet vernal time. In fact, it is so meager that we might as well forgo the sport altogether. A fall hunt is little more than going through the motions.”

The Migratory Bird Treaty

By most accounts, even though it was almost universally accepted the Migratory Bird Act would be repealed, hunters adhered to it, although most of those evaluations came from federal officials inclined to frost the cake. Supporters of the Migratory Bird Act, seeing it was built on weak legal foundations, went to work finding a

way to protect migratory birds that would be able to withstand legal challenges. Congress had only limited control over states, but had unlimited rights to frame treaties with other nations, and those treaties superseded state law. The ink was barely dry on the Migratory Bird Act before the State Department drafted a treaty with Great Britain (on behalf of Canada) to assume authority over migratory birds, both game birds and insectivorous birds.

The Migratory Bird Treaty with Canada was signed August 16, 1916, and in content was essentially the same as the Migratory Bird Act of 1913. Legislation to implement the treaty was passed in 1918. As with the Migratory Bird Act, the constitutionality of the treaty was soon before the Supreme Court. The court ruled in favor of the federal government, establishing the supremacy of federal treaties over state rights.

By early-1917, Nebraska’s game laws were in compliance with federal regulations – mostly. Under the treaty, the only shorebirds for which states could set hunting seasons were snipe,

woodcock, yellowlegs, black-bellied and golden plover, and rails. Nebraska allowed hunting seasons for snipe and yellowlegs, but apparently not for golden and black-bellied plovers. Because woodcocks were so rare in Nebraska, the state legislature did not set a hunting season for them, even though it was allowed under federal guidelines. State statutes also listed killdeer among shorebirds that could be hunted, even though they were protected under federal law. Season lengths and bag limits were reduced: yellowlegs September 16 through December 15, with 15 allowed daily; snipe September 16 through December, 25 allowed daily; soras (a small species of rails) September 1 through November, 50 daily; and other species of rails September 1 through November with 25 allowed daily.

Once the Migratory Bird Treaty was implemented, and states brought their statutes into compliance, the history of shorebird hunting in Nebraska and the United States begins winding down.

Eventually, even Griswold accepted that many shorebird species once considered game birds would never

be again, there would never again be another spring hunting season for migratory birds, and hunting season lengths would be more restrictive, as would bag and possession limits. In his January 8, 1922 column he wrote: “Owing to the very general interest that has been engendered among almost all classes of people throughout the country in our native song and plumage birds during the past twenty years, coupled with the very beneficial and the very necessary provisions of our national migratory game bird law and the laudable and effective work of numerous ornithological societies and generous individuals, the dangers that were beginning to gravely menace the prolonged existence of our little feathered friends have been largely diminished. And yet, despite all of these ameliorating influences, there doesn’t seem to be anything that can prevent, in time, the total disappearance of such game birds as the prairie chicken, in fact all the grouse family, the upland plover, jacksnipe, yellowlegs and in fact all of their kindreds of the wading character.”

After 1922, Griswold seldom wrote about shorebird hunting. He lived to see the plover season closed in 1926, followed by greater and lesser yellowlegs in 1927.

Recent Times

Even through federal guidelines allowed states to set rail hunting seasons, Nebraska’s game commission closed the hunting season on rails beginning in 1939. In 1941, the federal government removed snipe from the game bird list. Through the 1940s and into the 1950s there were no shorebird hunting seasons in Nebraska.

Snipe were restored as game birds under federal regulations in 1953, and rails returned to the Nebraska game bird list in 1957, but the tradition of shorebird hunting had largely lost its following. There were woodcock hunting seasons in Nebraska in 1957 and 1958, with four allowed daily and eight in possession. There was no woodcock season in 1959. Nebraska Game and Parks Commission game regulation records noted: “As the woodcock is not defined by law as a game bird, a season cannot

be authorized.” Woodcock were considered game birds by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Nebraska could have held an open season but did not, perhaps, because they were not technically considered as such by state game laws. There would not another woodcock season until 1977. There has been an open season on them since.

Today in Nebraska, there are hunting seasons for four shorebirds (if rails are considered as such) – snipes, woodcocks, Virginia rails and soras. Woodcocks are nowhere abundant and so few hunters intentionally pursue them. Most hunters are not comfortable differentiating Virginia rails from other rail species and so do not hunt them. Soras are small and such weak fliers it is a stretch to consider them game birds at all. Of them all, only snipe are sought by a few inveterate, perhaps even eccentric, hunters, who search for them when water conditions are right to attract and hold them during the

fall migration. Once hunted, they can become something of an obsession, as they were for sportsmen more than a hundred years ago.

Edwyn Sandys, in his 1905 book, *Sporting Sketches*, summed up why snipe hunting has always garnered an avid following: “When a bit of brown bird only about eleven inches long can cause a six foot man to do all sorts of crazy stunts I should say the wee fellow at least possessed peculiar powers. That the snipe can make a lazy, heavy sleeper rise at gray dawn and go toiling across weary leagues of bog, morass, and muddy mess for perhaps eight or ten hours at a stretch is a well known fact. That he can make a temperate man drink, a truthful man lie, an accurate man miss, and a good man curse, he has repeatedly proved, while at the same time with a mere wave of a wing he can cause a sinking heart to leap with joyous pride and a weary eye to flash with sudden fire.” ■



PHOTO BY ROCKY HOFFMANN

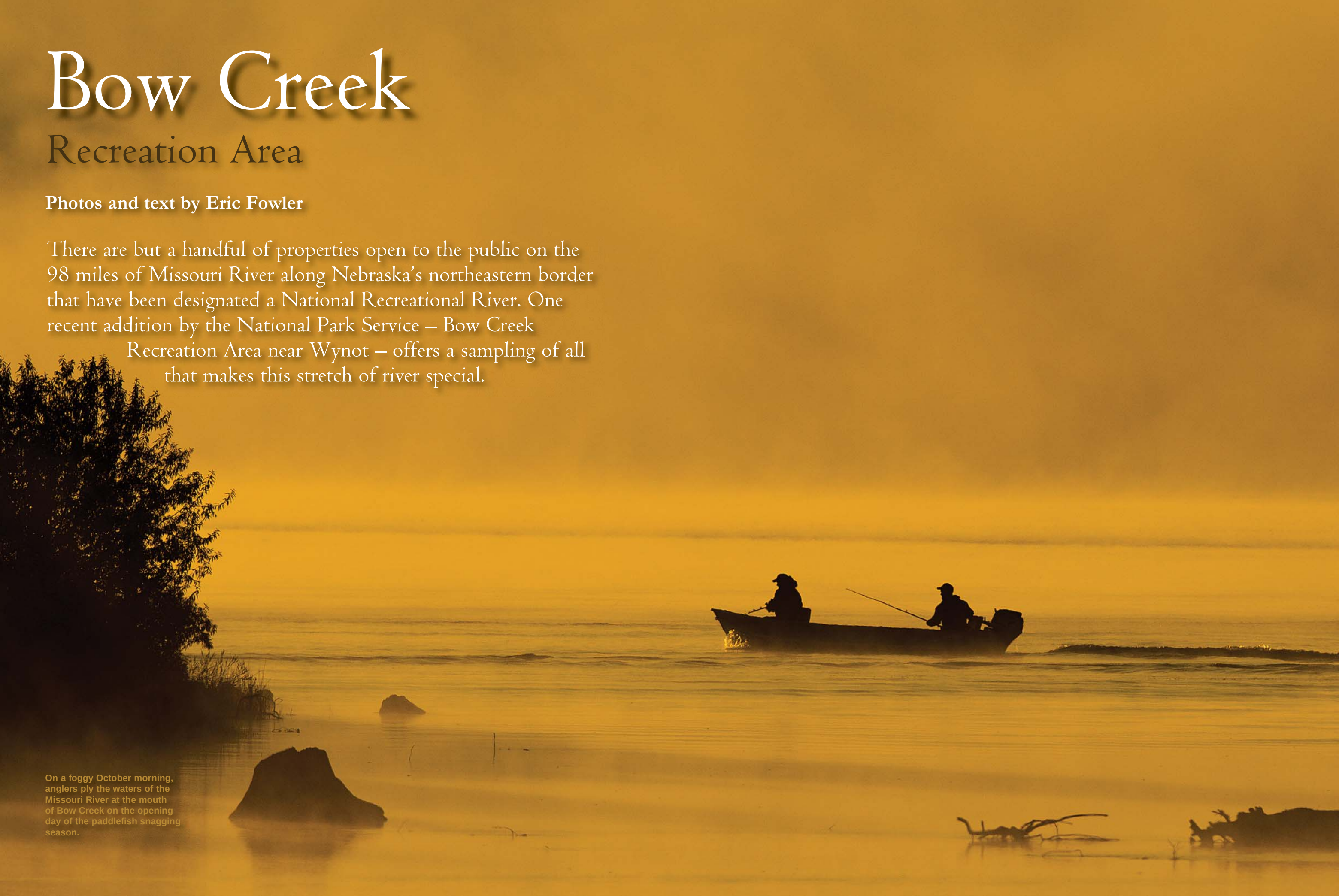
Bow Creek

Recreation Area

Photos and text by Eric Fowler

There are but a handful of properties open to the public on the 98 miles of Missouri River along Nebraska's northeastern border that have been designated a National Recreational River. One recent addition by the National Park Service — Bow Creek Recreation Area near Wynot — offers a sampling of all that makes this stretch of river special.

On a foggy October morning, anglers ply the waters of the Missouri River at the mouth of Bow Creek on the opening day of the paddlefish snagging season.



The National Park Service has been managing the 59-mile reach of the Missouri River between Gavins Point Dam and Ponca State Park as a National Recreational River since 1978. But it wasn't until they purchased 200 acres to create Bow Creek Recreation Area that they actually had some land of their own to manage for the benefit of hikers, hunters, anglers, birders, campers and nature lovers in general.

The area, situated on one of two semi-wild reaches of the Missouri in Nebraska, is named for Bow Creek, a prairie stream that drains 316 square miles of farm country between Crofton and Laurel. Visit and you can explore the last three-fourths of a mile of the creek, or cast for catfish in its mouth, which has moved from where it was in



ABOVE: The early morning sun enhances turning leaves on a fall day near the mouth of Bow Creek, a stark contrast to the still-shadowed cliffs behind them.

LEFT: The Missouri River flows south past the mouth of Bow Creek and then heads east along the forested bluffs toward Goat Island.

RIGHT: A beaver gnaws on a tree along the banks of Bow Creek.



the 1600s when the Omaha Tribe established a village there.

You can also explore about a mile of the Missouri's banks. Above Bow Creek, a massive sandbar and shallow backwaters built by the flood of 2011, and slowly being resculpted by its flows, front the property. Below the creek, picturesque shale and limestone cliffs rise more than 200 feet above the river. If you float in or wade the creek, you can hike to the top of those cliffs for a spectacular view of the area.



For more information on Bow Creek Recreation Area, contact the National Park Service at 605-665-0209, or go to www.NPS.gov and search Bow Creek.

While you're in the neighborhood ...

Camping and Cabins

- Lewis and Clark State Recreation Area, Crofton
- Ponca State Park

Dining

- Murdos Aten Resort, Highway 121 east of Gavins Point Dam
- Argo Hotel, Crofton
- Copper Stop, Newcastle

To reach the creek or the river from the parking area, you will either hike through a restored grassland that was once farmland, or a bottomland forest of cottonwoods that was choked with eastern red cedars and other invasive trees but cleared soon after the Park Service acquired the property. Wild turkeys, white-tailed deer, and pheasants frequent the uplands, and waterfowl the riverfront.

Signs point the way from Highway 12 to the area, a plus if you don't know the winding country roads north of Wynot. The only improvements on the area are the interpretive signs and the parking lot in which they stand. But if you want a little taste of the wild Missouri River, drive in for a hike or a hunt, or paddle or boat in to play or camp on a sandbar, and you are sure to enjoy Bow Creek. ■



ABOVE: Massive chunks of ice left by a late-winter ice jam line the banks of the Missouri River.

LEFT: A cluster of gypsum crystals found below the mouth of Bow Creek was formed by the weathering of pyrite in the 90-million-year-old Carlile Shale visible in the cliffs throughout this reach of the Missouri River.

RIGHT: A white-tailed doe and fawn walk from the bottomland forest toward adjacent cropland on a September morning.



Pittman-Robertson's Effects in Nebraska

The passage of this historic act created the foundation of today's wildlife conservation.

By Doug Carroll

In last month's "Visionaries of Conservation" story (Aug/Sept 2012 NEBRASKALand), we discussed how the United States – a land full of almost unimaginable amounts of wildlife when it was first "discovered" – began the 20th century with a wildlife crisis on its hands: Much of the seemingly limitless numbers of wildlife had been reduced severely (or completely, such as the passenger pigeon) with little to no hope in sight.

Luckily, several of the country's greatest leaders – most of them sportsmen – stepped forward and pushed the need for conservation and funding to protect America's greatest treasure, its wildlife. Although most of the states had established fish and game agencies by early in the 20th century, these agencies were chronically underfunded, understaffed and prone to political interference: The state's hunting and fishing license revenue – usually the only funding source available in each state to protect, restore and manage fish and wildlife resources – was often used to support projects other than wildlife restoration.

Although the need to protect wildlife had been recognized, the necessary funding was largely lacking until 1936, when Key Pittman, a U.S. senator from Nevada, and A. Willis Robertson, a U.S. congressman from Virginia, introduced legislation to take an already existing 10 percent federal tax on sporting guns and ammunition and use it to protect and enhance wildlife populations in each state. When their bill, which included language preventing the use of state license fees by anyone other than that state's fish and game department, was signed into law on September 2, 1937, a stable funding source for protecting wildlife had finally been established.

So just what effect has the passage of the Pittman-Robertson Act had? Seventy-five years after its passage, more than \$6.4 billion has been transferred to the states to enhance and protect the nation's wildlife, as well as to help fund hunter education and safety programs.

Each state's yearly apportionment of P-R funds varies – because the money comes from a federal excise tax, the total amount to be dispersed depends entirely on the sale of items that fall under the excise tax's authority: The more guns and ammunition, etc that is sold, the more excise taxes collected and apportioned back to the states using a formula that, in a nutshell, is based on each state's total land area and number of paid hunting license holders.

Because good hunting opportunities lead to more sporting goods sold, which leads to more money to improve wildlife habitat to increase populations and better hunting opportunities, the amount of excise taxes collected can be impressive: The P-R apportionment for 2011 alone totaled more than \$384 million, of which more than \$79 million went to hunter education programs. Nebraska's portion that year was a little more than \$6.1 million; in 2010 the state

received almost \$7.8 million.

This money is largely what keeps most, if not all, state game agencies in business – without it, many agencies would struggle to even keep their doors open, much less have enough money to do habitat improvements. In Nebraska, virtually all state habitat acquisitions, restorations and maintenance operations are financed in part with P-R funds. The state must pay the full cost of an approved project (generally using license revenue), then apply for federal reimbursement of up to 75 percent of the total expenses.

According to Tammy Snyder, Federal Aid administrator with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, the Commission spends the majority of its P-R dollars to increase its ability to operate, maintain, and do restoration work on state WMA's, manage the state's wildlife resources and their habitats, pay in-lieu-of taxes on state land acquisitions and to do research that will help better manage resources and provide greater hunting opportunity, etc. P-R money that is used for hunter education is used for additional classes and textbooks, etc; shooting range development/enhancement; and programs that work to increase participation in hunting and the shooting sports, including archery.

Although PR funds come solely from firearm users and archery hunters, outdoor enthusiasts who don't hunt, including birdwatchers, nature photographers, hikers, campers and others, also benefit. Nongame wildlife also benefits greatly from projects made possible by the act.

Seventy-five years after its passage, there is little doubt that the Pittman-Robertson Act has probably been more successful than its original supporters ever dreamed it could be. It's a lasting testament to the love and support that hunters have for all wildlife, and its now a fundamental part of wildlife conservation throughout the nation. ■



KEY D. PITTMAN 1872-1940



ABSALOM W. ROBERTSON 1887-1971



from NEBRASKALand's Trail Tales magazine for kids

junior journal

interesting notes for readers of all ages

by Lindsay Rogers and Donna Schimonitz

Outdoor Detective: Scouting

by Aaron Hershberger

If there is a secret to hunting, regardless of whether you use a bow, firearm or camera, it is scouting. Scouting is exploring an area carefully to gain information. You will want to know what kinds of animals live there, what they eat, what they do in the area and where they sleep or hide.

The easiest way to start scouting is to identify potential food sources. Begin by walking the edges of corn and soybean fields to look for tracks leading in or out of the field. Pick one of these trails and follow it. Now the real fun starts. This is where being a detective helps.

For deer, keep your eyes open for areas of thick grass, clumps of cedars or gnarly tangles of thickets and thorns. For turkeys, look for paths through the thick cover that allow them to use their eyes – their best defense mechanism.

Something else to look for is the animal's bedroom. Turkeys rely on tree limbs to provide their overnight protection. Finding a tree with feathers and turkey poop underneath can help confirm that tree is being used for roosting.

For deer, look for thick spots that provide some wind protection and a

view of what lies downwind. Look for melted or compacted snow or matted grass in deer-sized ovals.

You also may find rubs, scrapes and tracks. Rubs are made when a male deer rubs its antlers against a tree trunk. Deer make scrapes by scraping away leaves and grass with their hooves revealing bare dirt.

Tracks often are found around wet, muddy or snow covered areas. Deer tracks look like a divided heart, with the pointed end showing the direction of travel. Turkey tracks usually will show three toes that make an arrow shape – the point of the arrow shows the direction the turkey came from. In the snow, rabbit and squirrel tracks can both look like an exclamation point because of how they jump or hop. If the trail ends at a tree, it likely was made by a squirrel.

You also may find some treasures on your scouting trip – feathers, fur and scat. Scat is the droppings left behind by an animal.

To make your scouting more efficient, you may want to take along a notepad to keep track of your findings and even draw pictures of what it is you find. Be sure to have fun and involve others in your scouting trips.



Wild turkey tracks in snow.

Whose Track Is That?

Anytime of year is a good time to search for animal tracks. In winter, tracks are easy to see in the snow. After a rain, animal paws, hooves or feet sink into mud making them obvious. If you are near a river, pond or lake, look for bird, raccoon and muskrat tracks along the shore.

Check each off this list as you find them.

☐ Rabbit

☐ Squirrel

☐ Song Bird

☐ Duck

☐ Opossum

☐ Dog

☐ Cat

☐ Raccoon

☐ Muskrat

☐ Mouse

☐ Deer

☐ Mink

☐ Other

NATURE CALENDAR

- **Birds migrate south for the winter:** early September through November
- **Elk rut; listen for males bugling:** mid-September through November
- **Beavers gather food and insulate their den for winter:** September through November
- **Deciduous trees change color and lose their leaves:** October
- **Brown Bats gather to mate and hibernate:** mid-October

photo by Jeff Kurnas

BOOKS/PUBLICATIONS/VIDEOS

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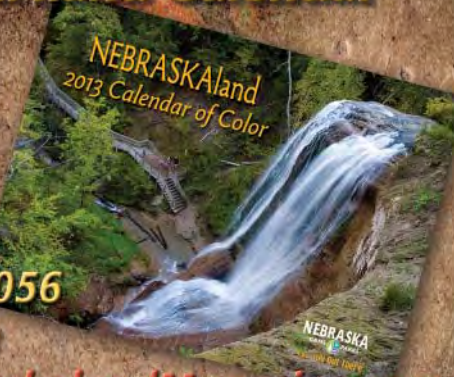
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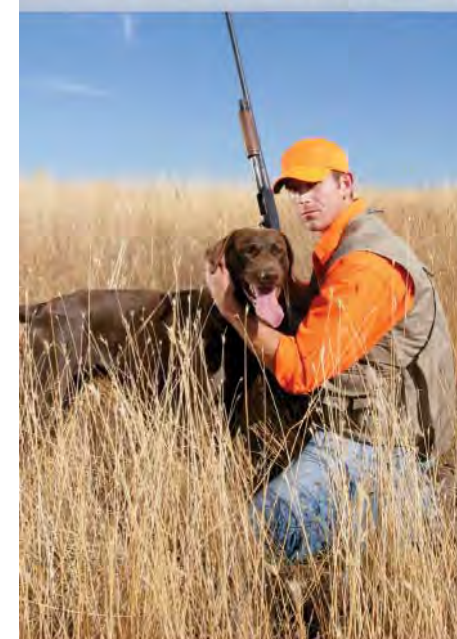
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◀ These photos were taken in Bridgeport in the early 1960s. My father, Earl McGuire (left) and my uncle, Charles Brandt, were goose hunting that day. Later that same day, uncle Charles filled his deer permit with a great western mule deer.

— Gary McGuire, Lisco, Nebraska



▲ Pictured is my father, Charles W. Steele of Fairbury, circa 1950s. Dad fished, hunted and of course trapped for many years in the Fairbury area. This picture was reminiscent of the scene inside our garage when growing up in the 60s ... covered with pelts of many different critters – raccoon, skunk, beaver, coyote, badger, mink and muskrat. One Christmas eve Dad was skinning a civit cat in the basement and ruptured the stink sack – needless to say, Mom was not happy.

— Jim Steele, Omaha, Nebraska



▲ This photo of my grandfather, Vincent Zach (far right), and his hunting buddies was taken near Humphrey in the early 1920s. From left: Joe Froemel, Frank Brockhaus, Ferd Brockhaus, Frank Huettner, and Grandpa look to have enjoyed a good day of hunting cottontails and jackrabbits.

— Eric Zach, Lincoln, 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.

One Great Dog

A Thousand Great Memories

By Eric Fowler

I'll be dogless for the first time in 12 years when I head to the field this fall. And I'm not happy about it.

In May, I had to make the decision pet owners dread and had my black Lab, Nikki, put down. Cancer was getting the best of her. It was no way to live. Anyone who doesn't cry over such things is missing the best part of having a dog.

I had many dogs growing up, but this was my first bird dog. I wish I hadn't waited so long. I didn't realize how much a dog added to the enjoyment of the hunt, how having one could make hunting alone fun. She was a good bird dog with a great nose and endless drive. She would've been a great bird dog if she'd had a better trainer (it was me). I wish I would've kept track of the number birds she retrieved, from the first dove at three months of age through countless geese to the last of many pheasants in January.

But Nikki was more than just a bird dog. She was family. She didn't spend her life in a kennel, coming out only to train or hunt. She had the run of the house, always greeting me at the door with a wag and a kiss when I got home. She was with me through a divorce and other tough times, always able to, at least for a moment, help me forget about everything. She went nearly everywhere with me, and not in a box in the back of the truck (unless she was wet or muddy). For the first half of her life, she sprawled across the front seat and slept with her head in my lap. When I moved up to an extended cab pickup both at home and at work, she had the back seat all to herself. She was so mellow it was easy to forget she was there. She was what a friend called "bar broke" – she could stay in the truck as long as you needed her to. When I'd go for a hike in search of photos, she'd often tag along, always on the hunt. I'd occasionally sneak her into the office, and she'd usually sneak out and wander the halls and look for crumbs on the floor of everyone's office. She decided she liked her bed more than mine later in life, but still joined me shortly before the alarm went off. I wonder how she knew.

I had a hunch the end was coming in December, when she slowed and came to heel toward the end of a walk around a quarter-section of CRP. The dog that wouldn't quit did, and didn't even complain when she was left in the truck as we headed into the next field. I wrote it off to age, but went on a late-season pheasant hunt in Grant in January knowing it might be her last.

The old girl kept getting slower and by April I knew it wasn't age. Blood work and an ultrasound told the true story: she had a massive tumor on her liver. Her days were numbered and, as it turned out, they were few. I had been worried how she would handle retirement when she was no longer able to hunt. Having to write this final chapter to her story was worse.

I didn't want her time to end in a cold vet's office. A



PHOTOS BY ERIC FOWLER

friend had told me about their vet making a house call when their dog's time came. Mine didn't, but I found one that would. We met at the farm pond north of Lincoln where Nikki had retrieved her first and last goose. She loved that place: simply driving by would prompt a dance on the seat. She didn't dance on this day. She didn't even run off and chase the geese when we got there. She just slid out of the truck and lay down. I knew I'd made the right decision: It was time.

We sat on the shore for a while, watched the geese and talked about all of the fun times we'd had, her head in my lap, her brown eyes staring into mine as I rubbed her ears. I'd already shed a gallon of tears that day, and cried a few more after the injection caused her body to go limp. I'd had weeks to prepare, yet it was over so quickly. When I wiped my eyes, it was my turn to make a retrieve. I fetched a bottle of fine whisky and made a toast with the good friends who joined me: "To possibly the best dog I'll ever have." We say that about all of our dogs, my friends and the vet said. A new pup is on the way, but Nikki will be hard to top.

Nikki will have two more hunts. I'll load some of her ashes into shotgun shells, and the first goose that decoys and the first pheasant that flushes this fall will get a dusting of Nikki. Not that I'd ever forget her, but this way a little bit of her will always be out there, in our favorite places, where we did our favorite things.

RIP Nikki. You were a great dog. ■





Dead of Winter

If not for a 1961 Cadillac convertible, this picture wouldn't exist.

I bought the car at an auction, from a farmer's field. It had died long ago, yet there were still signs of life. Flowers sprang up through the bumpers. Mice raced under the dashboard. Raccoons had been learning how to drive in it.

Resisting resuscitation, it took three mechanics, two body shops and thousands of dollars to save that car. Five years later, I hauled it on a trailer to an upholsterer on the Kansas state line to finish the job.

On the drive home that day, just after sundown, I noticed a glow starting to form on the eastern horizon. First pink, then lavender, I see this a few times each winter, especially on a cold, still night at dusk.

But when that great light happens here on the Great Plains, I'm often caught flat-footed. Whether it's the sickly yellow of a hailstorm or a wall of rain the color of a bruise, just what should a photographer choose for a foreground? Power lines? Water towers? A gravel road? Truly, nothing does it justice.

But this night an answer appeared in my windshield just in time; a Saline County cemetery covered in snow. I hurried across a frozen field to get to it before the light vanished. I noticed that many headstones were very old, made from white marble and carved to depict shaking hands, the Dearly Departed receiving a crown.

A low camera angle moved the handshake to just above the horizon, and that lovely pink glow introduced me to John Stowers, age 84.

A few months later, I returned to the upholsterer to pick up the car. A friend had dropped me off so I could finally take it for a spin. It was summer by then, and I slowed past the cemetery. The trees above the headstones were full of life now, waving in the wind, birds singing. The place was still beautiful, certainly. But I knew it would never be as good as that five minutes I once stole from the dead of winter, so I drove on.

And the Cadillac?

Why, it caught fire on the drive home.

Joel Sartore
August 12, 2012



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