



Eastern gray squirrels feed below a bird feeder next to a woodland home in Nemaha County. Photo by Eric Fowler.

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NEBRASKAland Magazine

Volume 94 • No. 3 • April 2016

FEATURES...

24 Watch Your Step

PHOTOS AND STORY BY ALEX WILES

32 The Crappies of Spring

BY JUSTIN HAAG

34 Sandhills Speedsters - The Quarter Horse

STORY AND PHOTOS BY MARK HARRIS

40 Phlox - A Nebraska Sampler

BY JAMES H. LOCKLEAR

44 A Place of Bounty - Wood Duck WMA

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JENNY NGUYEN

46 The Nation's Best - Turkey Hunting in Nebraska

BY NEBRASKALAND MAGAZINE STAFF

52 Time Well Spent - Unusual Places to Stay Overnight

BY RENAE BLUM

54 An Expo for the Outdoors

BY JULIA PLUGGE

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Mixed Bag - Eastern Mole, Travel to Landmark

Country, Pershing for President, Upcoming Events 8

Wilderness Workshop - Photo Tip..... 60

Page 49 - Roger Welsch's "A Perfect Place"..... 61

Outdoor Business - Lynn Berggren 62

Nature Notes - Prairie Crabapple..... 65

Portraits from the Past 68

In the Kitchen - Three Goose Recipes 72

The Last Stop - A Fishing Photographer 74

ON THE WEB...



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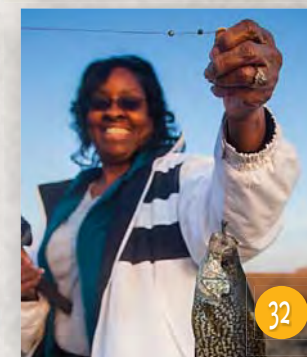
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24



34



32



65

Cover: Catching crappie, like this one from a Sarpy County farm pond, is a spring tradition statewide. To read more, see page 32. Photo by Jeff Kurrus.



Thank You, Nebraska

I'm from northern Minnesota, but my mother is originally from the Norfolk area and my aunt and uncle live there. I've been visiting them and hunting pheasants in Nebraska whenever I can for nearly 30 years.

The attached picture is from a great day of hunting last Nov. 23 near Madison – a great day of hunting in Nebraska made possible by the graciousness of a private landowner allowing me to pursue my passion and obtain a renewable food resource!

Thanks for considering the photo, thought it might be nice as a celebration of hunting if there is ever room in an upcoming issue.

Sincerely,
Tim Kresien
Hibbing, Minnesota

Access Granted

Great article on getting permission to hunt and fish. For years I hunted grouse north of Springview. Even after many years of hunting I always had to go through much of the permission process again. This would cost a lot of time I could have been hunting, as they might not be home or would have to ask their spouses.

That changed after I did what I taught my students in Hunter Education class. Fill out and sign a Nebraska Hunter Identification card and give it to the landowner. Include your name, address, phone number and vehicle license number.

After I did this, a phone call a few days before I wanted to hunt was all it took. It even got me on land that I could not get on before I used the card. Now I hand them the card and then introduce myself.

John Ross
Pender, Nebraska



A frosty morning southwest of Rockville. Photo by Darlene Dethlefs.



Piebald Mule Deer

He is a bit of a celebrity in this area and everyone was hoping he made it through the rifle season. I couldn't find him for quite awhile, and then one day I spotted him all proud with his first antlers.

Sabrina Nicholson, Curtis, Nebraska



Outdoor Plates

Al Thomas has a plate for both of his great passions: bird hunting and bird carving. Inspirations for the latter come from the former for the retired art teacher from Omaha.

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.

Prairie Dog Supporter

Dear *NEBRASKAland*,

On behalf of Wachiska Audubon Society, the local chapter of the National Audubon Society, I would like to thank you for your recent article in the Dec. 2015

NEBRASKAland Magazine entitled "Prairie Dog Town Tenants." This article gives Nebraskans a great insight into all of our native wildlife that inhabit prairie dog towns and how important these towns are to all the different species.

Jessica Umberger
President, Wachiska Audubon Society



Jake Kroeger captured this photo of a hawk near a deer carcass east of Schuyler.



Paul Julian's photo of a bald eagle at Harlan County Reservoir.



Jack Irons sent in this trail cam photograph of tom turkeys from behind his home south of Brock.

Aaron Beckman captured this camera trap photo of a red fox urinating on a log in Knox County.



Only in China

I wanted you to know just how much I enjoyed your recent magazine story "Europeans, Cranes and a Daughter." That was extremely well done. You are so fortunate to have a daughter who shares your passion. I know what that is like because of my relationship with my son.

As I read the story I couldn't help but remember my last trip to China where I saw their red-crested cranes, cousins of our sandhill cranes. I was in the city of QiQiHar on a medical mission. One day our hosts announced they were taking us to a bird sanctuary to see their cranes. We were told we needed to get there by 10:00 because that was when the cranes flew and I wondered, just how did they know the cranes would fly at exactly that time.

We arrived at the sanctuary, walked about a mile on a boardwalk through a marsh to an area where 400 or so people were waiting. It was then I found out how they knew when the cranes would fly. That was when their keepers let them out of their cage. The keepers walked up to the enclosure with buckets of birdseed and opened the gate. The cranes followed them down a path to the water where they took off, flew in a half-circle and landed. Then they followed their keepers back to the cage where they were fed birdseed and waited until the next group of tourists came to watch them fly.

Only in China.

David Fowler
Ogallala, Nebraska



Gary Panzer photographed these two bull elk about 30 miles north of Scottsbluff.



For Your Mature Citizens

Please continue publishing articles like "Europeans, Cranes and a Daughter," "The Missouri River through Lewis and Clark Lake" and "Out-musseled" in the March issue. The other "outdoor" magazines – *Field and Stream*, *Outdoor Life* and *Sports Afield* – have gone to one-page attention getters, resulting in minimal information. Articles cited above cover the topic in depth so the reader actually learns something about the topic. I know the millennials' attention span is short when it comes to printed material, but we "mature citizens" enjoy reading in-depth articles.

Bruce A. Block
Puyallup, Washington

Correction: In the March issue, it was stated that melodrama performances at the Mahoney Park Theater take place year-round. However, the melodrama season starts on May 27 and ends Oct. 23 this year.

Through April 10, Medicine Wagon Productions puts on three full-length plays that are not melodramas – so no throwing popcorn please.

For a complete winter schedule each year, visit Melodrama.net/story2.

-Editor

Send your comments to:

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

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A Mammal Brief

Eastern Mole

By Lindsay Rogers

Scalopus aquaticus

If you were to spend your life tunneling underground you would definitely need large, shovel-like webbed feet with sizeable claws to help dig. You would not need eyes. Combine those two characteristics and you have the eastern mole. This tubular-shaped species has thick fur which is darker in northern locations and more silver or tan in southern areas. Unlike most mammal species whose fur lays in one direction, the fur of the eastern mole does not lay in any direction which helps facilitate both forward and backward motion in its narrow tunnels. Their extremely large front feet have webbing between the toes to help push soil as they dig. They are often found in the moist loamy soils of the eastern United States. Their westward expansion is thwarted by more rocky soils. These insectivores feed primarily on worms and insects. They have huge appetites and can eat 25-75 percent of their body weight daily. ■

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



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Travelogue

By Justin Haag

Landmark Country

Appropriately dubbed "Landmark Country," the state's western Panhandle has served as eye candy for generations of travelers in the North Platte valley – among the most notable being the westward emigrants of the 1800. In modern times, the Panhandle's Twin Cities region – **Scottsbluff** and **Gering** – has become not only a great "stopping point along the way," but a destination for travelers looking for a nice blend of city amenities and natural attributes.

With the many wildlife management areas, a federal wildlife refuge, and numerous properties of the Platte River Basin Environments, hikers, hunters and other nature lovers revel in thousands of acres of land open to public access. The many buttes and escarpments of the **Wildcat Hills** provide beautiful scenery and are an important component of the Fossil Freeway, a corridor rich with paleontological history between the Nebraska Panhandle and the Black Hills of South Dakota.

Similar to those travelers of the 1800s, modern day nomads can't miss sight of the **Scotts Bluff National Monument** towering 800 feet above the cities below. On a clear day, one standing at the monument's summit can see approximately 100 miles away.

Another great view of the North Platte valley can be found at **Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area and Nature Center**, 11 miles south of Gering. The nature center is under construction for a big expansion project (see related story on page 58), but people can still enjoy the spectacular scene from the SRA's four miles of trails through rugged terrain, or by enjoying a picnic at one of the park's unique stone shelters.

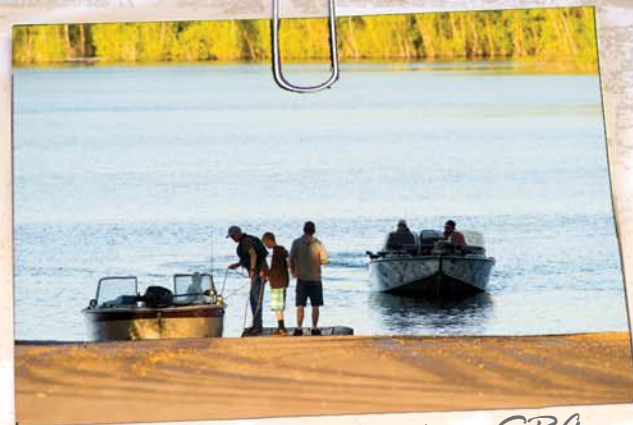
Speaking of views from high places, be sure to visit the famed 55-foot lighthouse at **Lake Minatare State Recreation Area** northeast of Scottsbluff. The lake, located on the

North Platte National Wildlife Refuge, attracts anglers of walleye and many other species – along with countless other water lovers. Both RV and primitive camping sites are available at the lake, which is open mid-January through mid-October.

Other popular attractions in the Twin Cities include the **Legacy of the Plains Museum**, **Riverside Discovery Center zoo**, and the historic **Midwest Theater**. Authentic ethnic cuisine can be found throughout the region, in addition to a wealth of fast food and family restaurants. From the unique **Barn Anew Bed & Breakfast** to nationally recognized hotel chains, lodging is plentiful.

Community celebrations – including Labor Day weekend's wildly popular **Old West Balloon Fest** introduced in 2015 – keep the valley hopping throughout spring, summer and fall. Gering's **Oregon Trail Days** lays claim to being Nebraska's oldest "continuous" celebration, marking its 95th year this July.

With so many sights to see and things to do, travelers who visit Nebraska's Landmark Country won't want to leave – regardless if they were planning to take their covered wagon farther west. On the Web: Visitscottsbluff.com



Boating at Lake Minatare SRA



Class at Wildcat Hills Nature Center

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Lt. John J. Pershing (seated, center) with cadet battalion officers at the University of Nebraska, 1895. Pershing served as a military instructor at the university from 1891 to 1895. RG2378-18-03

A Brief History

Pershing for President in 1920

From the Nebraska State Historical Society

Many Nebraskans know that Nebraskan William Jennings Bryan was a serious contender for president in 1896, 1900, and 1908, but they probably don't know that adopted Nebraskan Gen. John J. Pershing also tried for the highest office in the land in 1920. Like most professional soldiers, Pershing lacked a permanent residence, but he had lived in Lincoln from 1891 to 1895 and graduated from UNL's law school in 1893. He also established the Pershing Rifles, a military fraternal organization for college-level students, in 1894. It is the oldest continuously operating U.S. college organization dedicated to military drill.

Pershing's success as supreme commander of the American Expeditionary Forces in World War I carried over to political popularity. Thousands of people lined Fifth Avenue in New York City when he returned to the United States from Europe and celebrated him as a hero. When approached with the possibility of running for president, Pershing consulted long-time friend and Lincoln lawyer (and future Vice President of the United States) Charles Gates Dawes before consenting to run.

Dawes and mutual friend, Mark Woods of Lincoln, established a "Pershing for President" boom in Nebraska.

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Gen. Pershing inspects an honor guard in London, Aug. 8, 1919.

Pershing's supporters faced a daunting task: build a statewide organization before the April 1920 presidential primary. Rival candidates Leonard Wood, former Chief of Staff of the United States Army, and Senator Hiram Johnson were far ahead.

The strategy for capturing the 16 Nebraska votes at the Republican convention was to present Pershing as a "favorite son" candidate and rely on voter loyalty to a fellow Nebraskan. Nebraska voters went to the primary polls on April 20, 1920. The final tally found Johnson the victor with 63,262 votes; Wood, 42,385; and Pershing, 27,669. Nebraska's "favorite son" carried only Lancaster County by the slim plurality of 35 percent and was second choice in another 10 counties near Lancaster. Pershing's name never appeared before the Republican convention, which nominated Warren G. Harding for President. Harding went on to become the 29th President of the United States.

A number of factors were responsible for Pershing's failure. Cautious and reserved by nature, he did little personal campaigning and was often indecisive at crucial moments. His localized campaign lacked the organization and financing necessary to upset rival candidates, who had entered the contest earlier and with more resources.

Pershing served as U.S. Army Chief of Staff from July 1921 to Sept. 1924, when he retired from military service. He spent his remaining years serving on commissions and



Pershing (left) in Lincoln, Nebraska, with his own relatives and those of Governor Samuel McKelvie (back row, third from left), on New Year's Day, 1920.

traveling. He died in July 1948. He never lived in Nebraska again, but his presidential bid demonstrates the connections Lincoln had to the national political stage during this time period. ■

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

Public Mushrooms

By Jeff Kurrus

When first-timers consider hunting morel mushrooms on public land, they think river properties. So let's go there first. The following river-adjacent properties are excellent locales for spring morels.

- Eugene T. Mahoney State Park
- Indian Cave State Park
- Louisville State Recreation Area
- Platte River State Park
- Schramm Park State Recreation Area
- Two Rivers State Recreation Area

However, rivers aren't the only locations where morel mushrooms can be abundant. When you're contemplating morel hunting, think about old-growth forest and creek edges. Once you widen to these parameters, the following public areas come into play:

- Branched Oak State Recreation Area
- Burchard Wildlife Management Area
- Grove Lake Wildlife Management Area
- Pawnee Lake State Recreation Area
- Twin Lakes Wildlife Management Area
- Yellow Banks Wildlife Management Area

But this short list is merely a start. Once you visit these, broaden out your search to other similar-looking places throughout the state to find one of nature's most delectable dinners. ■



PHOTO BY DOUG CARROLL

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Snakes in Trees

By Dan Fogell

There I was, listening to a pair of blue jays screaming at the top of their lungs while frantically flapping around high up in a cottonwood tree. I'm not a birder, but everybody knows what a blue jay is, so I know I got the species right. But I don't know males from females because they look the same, so I assumed they were a couple of males fighting for the privilege of some lovely lady's company.

But then I saw something I know a little more about: a snake. A large black rat snake to be precise. It maneuvered through branches and finally descended to the ground where, of course, I had to catch and play with it. Picking it up while trying to avoid a bite is always challenging, but once secured I noticed that it had recently eaten. And when I say recently, I mean like a few minutes ago. It turns out that those blue jays weren't combatting males but were a pair, defending their chicks in their nest. I have to say... they lost this battle.

Black rat snakes, also called black snakes, pilot snakes and western rat snakes are well known for their climbing skills. Their body is even shaped to improve their talent for vertical ascent. Imagine chopping a snake in half (try not to enjoy it TOO much). In cross section, most snakes are round, or somewhat oval. But black rat snakes have a cross section shaped like a slice of bread: rounded on top with corners on the bottom. Those corners can grip vertical surface features and help propel the snake nearly straight up trees, walls, and other structures. As a result, even though they are called "rat snakes" they subsist on a diet of adult birds, chicks and bird eggs.

Obviously, by virtue of their common name they are black in color and virtually patternless, though sometimes with a little red or white mixed in between their black scales. But only as adults, and as adults they are one of Nebraska's largest snakes – often approaching seven feet in length.

When they hatch out of eggs they



Black rat snakes will climb trees in search of food, including birds, chicks and bird eggs.



While juvenile black rat snakes will sometimes have white mixed in between their black scales, within two years or so these blotches darken to their adult black color.

are strongly patterned with dark grayish-brown blotches on a light gray background, though they are no less arboreal. They just use smaller trees and bushes to climb in and hunt.

In fact, the difference in color offers them a little camouflage in the brush while they are small and rather defenseless. Within two years or so, however, the blotches and background tend to darken to the adult black color. Then they start moving into bigger trees.

Black rat snakes are not the only snakes that climb. In fact most snakes can, though they usually don't, and some are better at it than others. In

Nebraska I have seen garter snakes, water snakes, brown snakes and even rattlesnakes up in trees. Most of them were probably not up there for food, so it's hard to know why an animal with no legs would opt to leave the safety of the ground. Maybe to avoid predators, or to thermoregulate out on the branches. Or maybe just simple curiosity.

Whatever the reason, snakes climbing in trees seems unnatural. But they do it, and in Nebraska the black rat snakes are the best at it. And the next time you hear a couple of birds that won't stop screaming from high up in a tree, look up. Maybe you'll get a surprise. ■

Bug Banter

Black Walnut Trees in Danger

By Julie Van Meter
State Entomologist, Nebraska
Department of Agriculture

Nebraska's black walnut trees (*Juglans nigra*) are at risk from a pest called Thousand Cankers Disease of Walnut (TCD). This pest has not been found in Nebraska, but threatens the state's black walnut trees.

TCD is caused by a combination of the walnut twig beetle (*Pityophthorus juglandis*) and a fungal disease (*Geosmithia morbida*). The beetle is native to the southwest U.S., where it is a minor pest of Arizona walnut (*Juglans major*). The fungal spores are carried on the body of the beetle, and infect the tree as the beetle tunnels through the bark. Each infection site becomes a small canker. These grow and coalesce, creating very large cankers which girdle

the tree and ultimately kill it.

The walnut twig beetle is very small, and because of their small size, their exit holes are extremely difficult to see on tree bark. It is easier to look for the disease symptoms, which include yellowing and thinning of the tree canopy, and wilting of foliage. Dark cankers form under the bark, around the tunneling of the beetle, and may cause a dark stain on the bark surface. It is difficult to differentiate many of these symptoms from other causes, such as drought.

The native range of black walnut extends from the east coast through the South and Midwest, to the eastern edge of the Plains states. In Nebraska, black walnut can be found in the eastern part of the state, primarily in riparian areas. This includes forests along the Missouri River, and rivers and streams leading into the central part of the state.

Black walnut is a very important part of the native ecosystem in Nebraska. The nuts are utilized by many animals, from squirrels to turkey to deer, for

Presented by



food.

Insects, including the caterpillar of the Luna butterfly (*Actias luna*) feed on walnut foliage. Additionally, black walnut contributes economically to the state through the harvest of both timber and nuts. Should TCD become introduced to Nebraska, the results could be devastating.

Firewood is recognized as an excellent means of transporting damaging plant pests from one location to another, and walnut firewood could easily bring TCD into Nebraska. Infested logs and burls are another potential pathway for disease spread.

Because of this, the Nebraska Department of Agriculture (NDA) has enacted a TCD quarantine, prohibiting the movement of certain items, including walnut trees, wood, and all hardwood firewood, from known TCD infested states. The full text of the quarantine and a list of specific regulated articles can be found on the NDA website at www.agr.ne.gov.



By Paula Hoppe

- Adult toms average about 18 pounds, but can weigh up to 30 pounds. Adult females average 10 pounds.

- Hens lay one egg a day. A complete clutch averages 10-14 eggs, and only after all are laid will the 28-day incubation period begin.

- Young turkeys, or poults, are first



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN

brooded on the ground. During this time, mortality can be 50-70 percent due to weather or predation. Thus, communication between the hen and her poults is very important. Turkeys have an extensive vocal repertoire of about 20 different sounds, which poults

- As summer progresses, family groups of hens and their poults begin to flock together as protection from predators. Usually, tom turkeys remain aloof or in small groups of two or three. ■



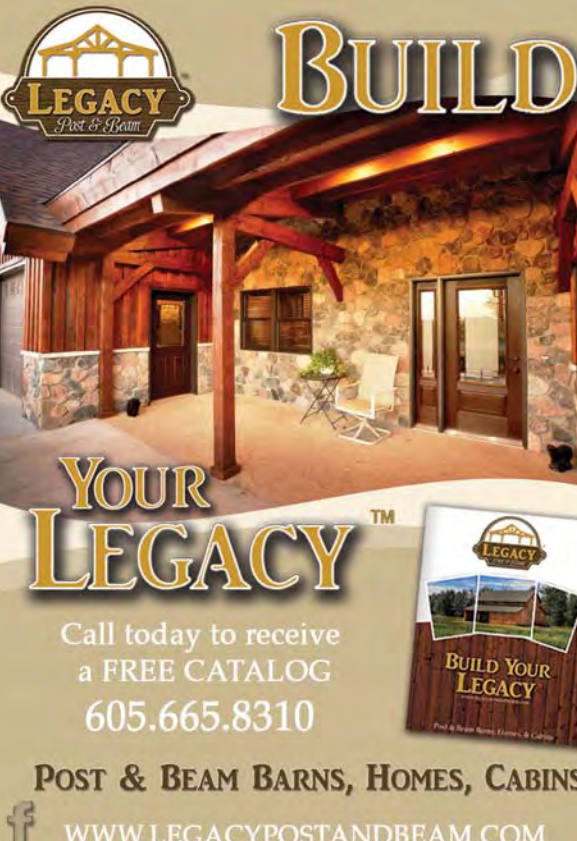
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From Your Window

By Adam Jones, Watchable Wildlife Biologist

As you look out your window in the early spring you may notice an influx of birds and other animals coming home with the sounds of renewed songs, buzzing and chatter. Spring weather brings to your yard some of the largest concentrations of animals of the entire year.

Birds such as vireos, flycatchers and goldfinches are some of the first birds to arrive, heading north from their wintering grounds now that the weather is warming, days are longer and food and water sources are more plentiful.

Eastern red and hoary bats can also be seen, migrating short distances from Kansas and Missouri. But other mammals, such as the big-brown and silver-haired bats, never left. They have been hiding in caves and buildings. Red fox, raccoons and opossums, along with mice, emerge from dens to forage for food.

Many insects, such as lady beetles, mourning cloaks and mosquitos appear from rocks, holes in the ground, woodpiles or cracks in your homes. You may also observe butterflies and bees collecting nectar from a variety of flowers, including pasque flower, juneberry and chokecherry. You will also see many species of ants mining for food in the soil while, near a lake or pond, you may see mayflies and damselflies.

In the evening, if you are near water sources such as ponds, ditches or wetlands listen for the distinctive call of the chorus frog. They have just returned to the surface from beneath the frozen ground or under rocks. They are very loud for their small size and have a rattling call that sounds like running your finger over a comb. The Woodhouse's toad, small-mouth salamander and tiger salamander can also be viewed.

Bullsnakes, ring-necked and garter snakes emerge from their winter dens to sun themselves as soon as it is warm enough. They are not alone, as some snakes hatch in the winter, so you will find adults and young foraging on early spring insects and small mammals.

To enhance your experience enjoying the vast array of wildlife gathering during this exciting time of year, keep a set of binoculars handy, start a sketchbook of interesting sightings or have a camera ready for those unexpected moments. ■



Woodhouse's Toad

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS



Opossum

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS



Tiger Swallowtail Butterfly

PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

Nebraska History Museum Re-opens

By Nebraska State Historical Society

After an 18 month, \$8 million renovation, the Nebraska History Museum in Lincoln will reopen to the public on Friday, April 1, 2016. We're looking forward to a weekend of activities featuring Nebraska's rich music, dance and storytelling heritages, and new exhibits to include:

- "Nebraska Unwrapped: Selections from the Collections" includes a wide range of materials the Nebraska State Historical Society (NSHS) holds in trust for the people of the state. Artifacts range from a 1,000-year-old hoe made from a bison scapula, ancient corn kernels, to the grasshopper plow that helped settlers break the sod in the 1870s. Noted Ponca Chief Standing Bear's head ornament, the sewing box given to former slave Ruth Cox by Frederick Douglass, First Lady Maxine Morrison's "Mad Men"-era inaugural gown, and the hood worn by a Nebraska Ku Klux Klansman connect

Hand cornhusker from 1933 National Corn Husking Championship.



visitors to the stories of Nebraskans both notable and notorious.

- "Photographers and the Plains Indian" is an exploration of how photographs influence Americans' perceptions of Plains tribal people and how both photographers and their native subjects used early photographs

to convey particular meanings.

- "Nebraska's Enduring Quilt Heritage: New Acquisitions" looks at quilts that tell stories of migration, politics and events both joyous and memorial. Featured quilts were added to the museum holdings over the last 10 years, many not previously displayed.

- "American Dreams in the Cold War: Photos by Barbara and Ralph Fox" chronicles mid-century moments including news, commercial and personal images by the husband/wife team from the 1950s-60s.

Because all of our permanent exhibitions had to be disassembled in order for the necessary installation of vapor barriers, we'll be offering a variety of more temporary exhibits as we work to create an exciting new long term experience that will immerse visitors in the 12,000 years of Nebraska's human stories. We'll also be offering hands-on educational offerings for all ages as our new History Learning Center is developed.

In addition, because this is a project funded with public dollars, the museum will also unveil a 1 percent for Art public project, "Inside Outside," on the front of the building facing Centennial Mall. This project depicts some of the artifacts the museum holds in trust for the people of our state.

Opening Weekend Events

In addition to the museum's new exhibits, the following events will also take place opening weekend.

- Ribbon-cutting and Remarks from Governor Pete Ricketts: Friday, April 1, 5:15 p.m. Russell Rock and Jeanine Centuori, artists who created "Inside Outside" on the building exterior, are also expected along with other dignitaries.
- Free Family Fun Days: Saturday, April 2 and Sunday, April 3, 1-4:30



World War II-era jacket of Ruth Diamond Levinson.

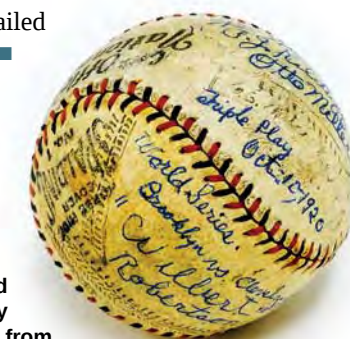
p.m. Hands-on history, music, dance and talks from a variety of cultural traditions.

Continuing Programs

Public programming will continue after opening weekend. A general museum tour will be available daily at 2 p.m. beginning April 4. No advance reservations required.

Family activities, curator chats, movie screenings and more will be offered each Saturday and Sunday afternoon.

Join *NEBRASKAland Magazine* editor and children's book author Jeff Kurrus who will present "The Tale of Jacob Swift" at 2 p.m. Saturday, April 16. Visit Nebraskahistory.org or call 402-471-4782 for the detailed schedule. ■



Unassisted triple play baseball from 1920 World Series.



Fort Atkinson is where grizzly-mauled frontiersman Hugh Glass confronted John Fitzgerald, one of the two men who left him for dead.

Upcoming Events

by Jerry Kane

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

April 1
Basic Archery Instructor Training
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

April 1-10
Cranes and History
Fort Kearny State Historical Park (SHP), Kearney

April 1, 8, 15, 22, 29
Explore Archery
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

April 2
Archery Fun Shoot
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

April 2
Crittter Corner
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

April 2
Outdoor archery range closed to public, Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

April 2-3
Platte River Art Show
Eugene T. Mahoney State Park (SP), Ashland

April 4
Spring Turkey Hunting Workshop
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

April 4, 11
Centerfire Challenge
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

April 5
Light Goose Conservation Order closes in Rainwater Basin and West zones

April 5
Women's Introduction to Handguns
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

April 5, 12, 19, 26
Best Shots Rifle Marksmanship for ages 10-16
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

April 5, 12, 19, 26
Outdoor Skills Discovery Program
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

April 5, 19
Ladies Day at the Range
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

April 6
Statewide crow hunting season closes

April 6, 13, 20, 27
Introduction to Gun Safety and Technique
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

April 7
Spring Turkey Hunting Workshop
Ak-Sar-Ben Aquarium, Gretna

April 7, 14
.22 Pistol League
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

April 7, 14, 21
I Can Camp Series
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

April 7, 14, 21, 28
Explore Archery
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

April 9
Spring youth shotgun turkey season opens

April 9
Angry Cow Trail Run
Rock Creek Station SHP, Fairbury

April 14-17
Coalition of Historical Trekkers
Fort Atkinson SHP, Fort Calhoun

April 15
Light Goose Conservation Order closes in East Zone

April 16
Spring shotgun turkey season opens

April 16
Hooked for Life Kids Fishing Event
Swanson Reservoir SRA, Trenton

April 16-17
Spring Muster
Fort Hartsuff SHP, Burwell

April 18
Application period begins for bighorn sheep lottery permit

April 22
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission meeting, Chadron

April 29
Arbor Day
Game and Parks offices closed

April 30
Indoor archery range closed to public, Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

April 30
5th Annual Outdoor Adventure
Indian Cave SP, Shubert

April 30
Living History
Fort Atkinson SHP, Fort Calhoun

April 30-May 28
Roger G. Sykes Outdoor Heritage Education Complex open on weekends, Platte River SP, Louisville



A father and son fish from the dock at the Outdoor Discovery Program at Fort Kearny State Recreation Area.

Bowfishing for Carp

By Dylan Tegtmeier

If you're like me, maybe you're not the best fisherman in the world, but you're pretty good at archery, and you love a good fried carp. Then bow fishing is the sport for you. There are many bow fishing kits you can buy at sporting goods stores but it's rare to find these for less than \$50. Again, if you're like me and you're creative and hate spending money on something you can make, you could easily make your own bow fishing kit for less than 10 bucks! Imagine watching a 15-year-old kid row his kayak up to the dock toting a stringer of 11 carp, and across his lap sat an old bow with a rusty tin cup where the stabilizer should be with a string coming out of it going up to an old hunting arrow. Yep, that was me not but a couple years ago, and here is how I did it.



The author poses with a carp he shot from his kayak.

First and foremost, you'll need an old bow to use as your bow fishing bow. Next just find a bolt that will fit the stabilizer hole, usually a 5/16 X 24 size bolt will work. Next find a container to hold your fishing string. I used a rusty old tin can for this, but you could use the bottom half of a pop bottle or even a plastic cup. And just drill a hole toward the top of the container where your stabilizer bolt will fit through and screw your stabilizer and cup onto your bow. Now you need some bow fishing string, which you could buy a good 25 yards for 10 bucks, or you could use any other light weight string that you think could hold a monster carp. Just tie one end of the string to the bolt that is screwed into your bow and tie the other end to your bow fishing arrow. I would suggest buying a bow fishing arrow. They're already rigged up for the task and are much safer than making your own arrow.

But if you really want to make your own bow fishing arrow, you'll need an old hunting arrow, a light washer with a diameter twice that of your arrow, a bow fishing arrow tip, and some duct tape. Start by drilling out the center of the washer so your arrow can easily slide through it. Then drill a smaller hole on the edge of the washer where you will attach your bow fishing line. You've just made your arrow slider, now you'll need a slider stop. Depending on the type of arrow rest you're using, this can be tricky. If you've got a whisker biscuit or drop away you shouldn't run into many problems. I just wrapped an inch-wide section of duct tape around the nock end of my arrow until it was stacked thick enough that the slider couldn't come off. Now, with your stopper and slide on the arrow, screw your bow fishing tip to the end, and you are ready to go. You may want to add some weight to your arrow to make it fly slower. With any bow fishing, the arrow doesn't need to go very fast, in fact, it's best if it doesn't fly at warp speeds because any damage or knots in your string or apparatus will cause very dangerous situations if you're shooting too fast. To add weight to your bow fishing arrow, just put some sand in the shaft and screw your tip back on. Always remember to only work with what you feel safe with.

Visit OutdoorU.org and start your own pathway to exciting and memorable experiences in the outdoors. Get outside and see what the Nebraska outdoors has for you. ■

See the step-by-step process of making your own bowfishing equipment.

NEBRASKAland Visitor



Last issue's winner of the Visitor drawing was Lucas Kleinschmit of Fordyce, Nebraska, who found the **burying beetle** on page 38.

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

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

Or e-mail:

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

HINT: This issue's visitor is not on pages 20, 23, 24-31 or 70.

Burying beetles (*Nicrophorus* sps.), a type of carrion beetle, feed on dead animals. These large black beetles with orange banding on their elytra range from 0.5 to 1.5 inches in length, depending on species. There are 11 species of *Nicrophorus* beetles in Nebraska, including the Margined burying beetle (*N. marginatus*), shown, and the American burying beetle (*N. americanus*), which has been on the Federal Endangered Species list since 1989. Burying beetles are important to the environment, helping recycle organic material. Scent organs on their antennae help to quickly locate fresh dead animals. They then literally bury their food by excavating under it, to protect it from other insects and animals. Females stay in the underground chamber, tending the larvae that feed on the dead animal until the larvae pupate and emerge as adults.



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

Watch Your Step

Photos and story by Alex Wiles

There's a whole world at your feet, with color and complexity unmatched at our own scale. This world is visible to you, if you look closely, and provides a spectacle that will continue to impress the deeper one delves. Sadly, this world is often overlooked by those who either do not know of its existence or are fixated on things much larger and higher up. When I moved to Nebraska several years ago I fell into this same trap, dwelling on the larger elements of nature and ignoring the goldmine of biodiversity that lives on a much smaller scale.

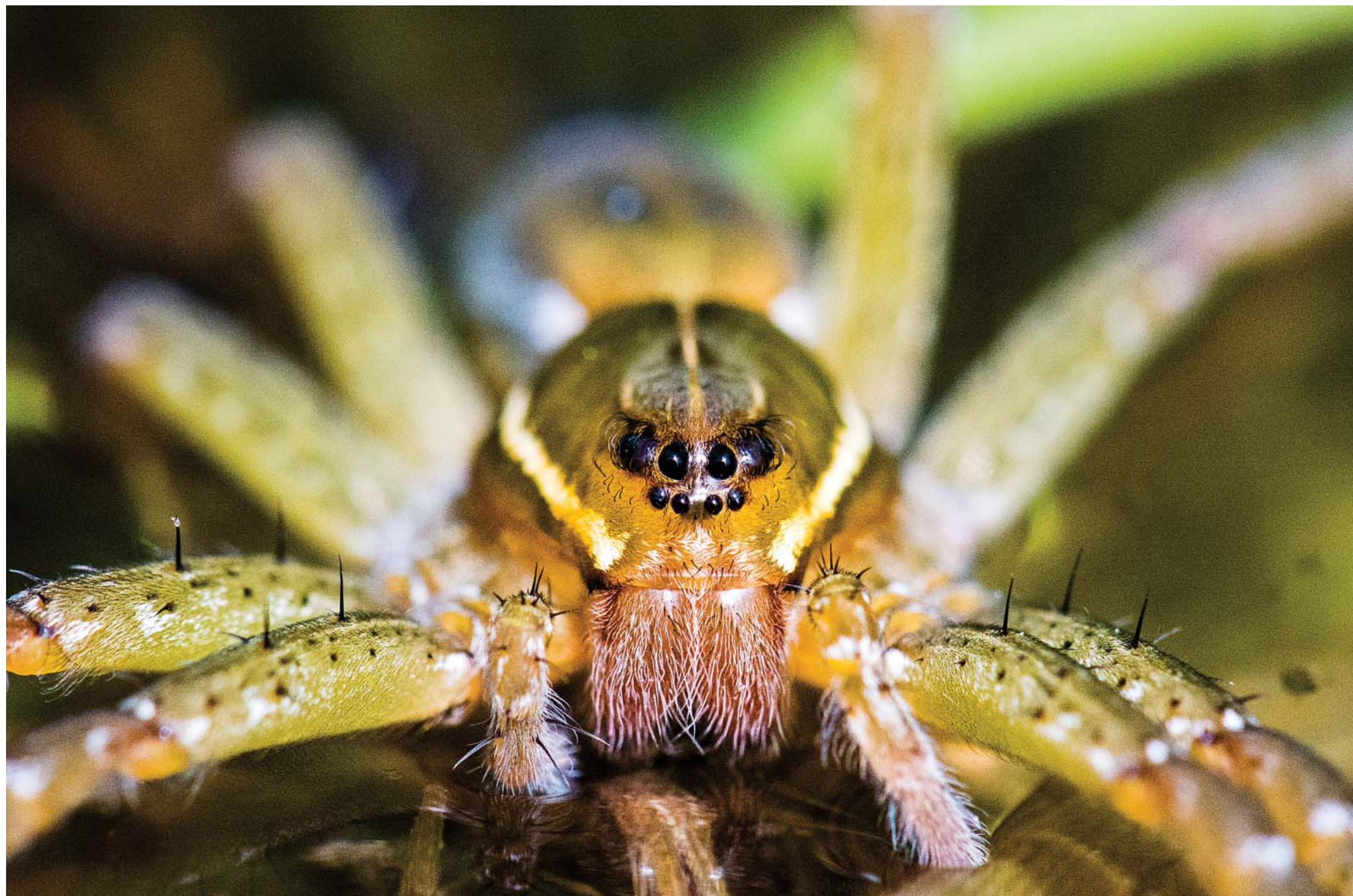
A red milkweed beetle (*Tetraopes tetraphthalmus*) peers out over the edge of a leaf. By ingesting milkweed, these beetles become distasteful and potentially toxic to predators, a defense mechanism also employed by monarch butterflies.



Digging Deeper

I have always been fascinated by reptiles and amphibians, which I consider a key part of the unnoticed microcosms at our feet. It was during my time searching for these animals, though, that I couldn't help but notice all of the other aspects of their environments that make life possible. The insects, spiders, flora and fungi in these areas seemed to have no limit to their diversity and I continually discovered things that I knew absolutely nothing about. The more I looked, the more I felt as though I were missing the bigger picture and focusing on only a small piece of the puzzle. Digging deeper (literally and figuratively), I developed a new fixation: trying to find and identify every piece that I could and form a deeper understanding of this ecological network.

While everyone may not have the time or an interest in searching for the small species that are the basis of an ecosystem, you would be surprised at how much you can see just through casual observation. Insects alone make up 80 percent of the animals in the world, and there are over 10,000 species that can be found just in the state of Nebraska. With these odds, the casual observer is sure to find something new and interesting on a regular basis. All it takes is a good pair of eyes (or a magnifying glass) and curiosity. Insects are not the only things that can be encountered on these small-scale safaris. Fungus, though not something that people generally identify as glamorous, can be found almost everywhere. There is such a vast array of colors and shapes that mushrooms and other fungi display, it's hard not to deem some of them at the very least interesting, if not beautiful. Even certain species of plants can be easy to miss if not looked at closely. Keep your eyes peeled and if you see something familiar, take a closer look and you may be surprised with what more you will find.



▲ Six-spotted fishing spiders (*Dolomedes triton*) possess excellent vision, which helps them hunt aquatic animals such as other invertebrates, tadpoles and occasionally small fish.

► Fungus is an integral part of the nutrient cycle in an ecosystem, helping to decompose organic materials and return them to the earth. They can also prove to be very interesting, such as these dead man's fingers (*Xylaria polymorpha*) that eerily resemble their namesake.





◀ Bridging the gap between the micro and macro worlds, amphibians have an active role in both. This American toad (*Anaxyrus americanus*) is excellent at his job of pest control, yet also falls prey to larger mammals, birds and even fish. They are very sensitive to fluctuations in water quality so it is important to pay attention to their health, because it may just indicate issues that can affect us as well.



▲ Hunters abound even in the insect world. This spotted lady-beetle (*Coleomegilla maculata*) is beautiful, but also helps keep other smaller insect numbers in check.

▼ Life at this small scale has developed a plethora of novel ways by which it can grow. Metamorphosis is one of the most drastic changes any life form on this planet can go through and is what will eventually allow this caterpillar (*Hypena sp.*) to sprout wings and fly.



A Place for Everything

I've often heard people complain of the presence of insects, spiders, reptiles, and other small animals, questioning their mere existence and usefulness to the world. While there are any number of unique roles that these organisms play, the vast majority of them serve as an excellent source of food and are the very basis of a giant web of life. This miniature world is at the forefront of supplying energy to the world at our level. Many of these animals and plants are considered a nuisance, but we would be lost without them in some capacity, so we might as well enjoy what we can about them and marvel at their uniqueness.

Another important benefit frequently overlooked is that the species that make up this microcosm are known as indicator species. They are at the forefront of change in an environment and their decline is often our first sign of any negative impact that is occurring. Because they are so small and intimately linked with the soil and water, they are highly susceptible to changes, whether natural or human caused. Frogs, for example, have been shown to be sensitive to chemical pollution in waterways. The chemical atrazine that runs off of crops and into waterways can even change a male frog into a female. This is just one of the many instances where small species that are easy to overlook may end up sending us critical warnings while we can still resolve the problems.



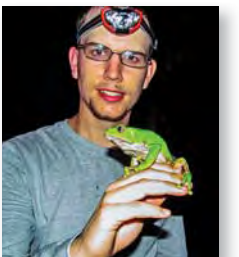
◀ This group of insects shows a colony of large milkweed bugs (*Oncopeltus fasciatus*) at various stages of development. The young are called nymphs and are smaller versions of the adults, gradually turning darker red and black as they age.

▼ Caterpillars come in a wide range of appearances, some of which can easily be seen as comical. This banded tussock moth caterpillar (*Halysidota tessellaris*) does not have to hide its gaudy appearance because, like many caterpillars, it eats toxic plants that make it dangerous to eat.

The Little Things

The further you look into the seemingly mundane parts of nature, the more surprised you may find yourself at how rich and complicated it can be. By all means, enjoy the big mammals, birds, trees and other natural giants around us. Just be aware that you may be missing out on some of the most interesting parts of life that take place right under our noses. After all, it's the little things in life that mean the most. ■

Alex Wiles is an animal care specialist at Fontenelle Forest near Bellevue while he pursues a career in conservation photography. This is his first appearance in NEBRASKAland Magazine.



The Crappies of Spring

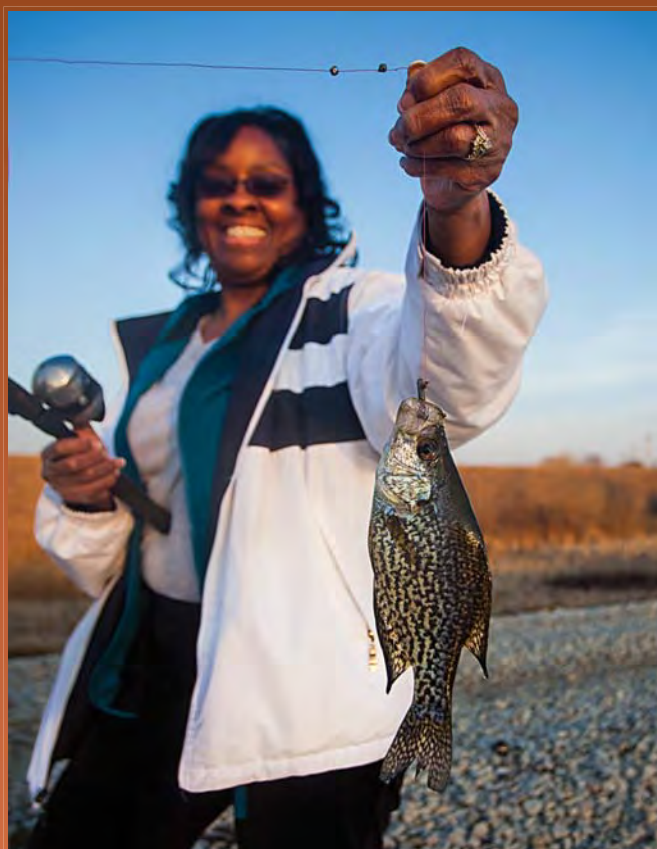
When spring arrives, both crappies and anglers can be found moving into the shallow.

By Justin Haag

For most of the year, crappies are roving creatures difficult to track down. There one day, gone the next, as the saying goes. But for a period each spring, as the water warms up, their behavior becomes more predictable. They make their annual move into the shallows and anglers follow.

Spring Feast

A common misconception among anglers is that these highly sought-after fishes are spawning as they enter the shallows shortly after ice-out, but reproduction comes later. As the water warms, so does activity among small insects, crustaceans and other aquatic life. It's this smorgasbord of nutrition that attracts the hungry crappies. They're there to eat – which makes them much more vulnerable to being eaten.



Crappie can be found throughout the state, including the farm pond in Sarpy County where this crappie was caught.

As water temps reach the low 60s, crappies begin to spawn. While their nests are often found on sandy or gravelly bottomed areas with cover, the nests aren't as apparent as sunfish which sweep the bottoms clean. Males, which can become nearly all black during this time of year, stick around to guard eggs and newly hatched fry. These males are aggressive and much easier to catch than females.

The Catch

Because crappies are “on the hunt and fight” in the spring they're usually quick to bite, providing a great target for all ages of anglers fishing from boat or shore.

While one can find success by investing heavily in “artificial” methods, one ageless approach may still be the best – a small minnow dangling beneath a bobber. For as long as humans have been putting minnows on a hook, crappies have been biting on them.

Because the crappies will most likely be swimming near structure, such as submerged trees and other vegetation which hold prey and provide protection, it's beneficial to use a heavier line – strong enough to straighten a stubborn snagged hook by pulling. Crappies aren't known to be great fighters, so a hefty hook isn't necessary.

Worms and other live bait can also prove productive, as can artificial baits such as Berkley Gulp Alive. Anglers who don't mind casting among the obstacles will get strikes on marabou jigs, curly tails, spinnerbaits and basically any other lure that mimics a minnow, crayfish or small insect.

In late spring and into summer, as crappies move to deeper water, one can use a slip-bobber to reach the depths and increase the size of bait to match growing forage. Because crappies often suspend themselves at various depths, an electronic fish-finder comes in handy. Anglers without the aid of electronics often find success by lowering bait by trial-and-error or casting artificials with the countdown method – letting the lure sink at various counts until they get a strike.

Where to Go

Crappie can be found in Nebraska waters from east to west, north to south. Small- to medium-sized reservoirs tend to provide some of the best crappie fishing. Despite the varying habitats in the state's crappie waters, they're not hard to find in spring if one knows their behavior.

“Crappies are crappies wherever they swim,” said



John McIntyre of Wahoo holds up a stringer of crappie near a pier at Wanhoo State Recreation Area.

Daryl Bauer, a fisheries biologist for the Game and Parks Commission. “Behaviors will be very similar, but they may be applied in different ways depending on the habitat.”

In larger reservoirs, they will move into bays and coves where there might be woody cover. In Sandhills lakes they behave the same, but sans bays and woody cover they feed among bulrushes and cattails, perhaps deep into the cover. For sandpits and interstate lakes, the previous year's submerged vegetation in northwest corners may be best, Bauer said.

The Commission's 2016 fishing forecast lists Wanhoo State Recreation Area as the site receiving the most crappie per survey net, with a great majority of those fish being between 8-10 inches. Others with good numbers of crappies topping eight inches included Wehrspann Lake in south Omaha, Branched Oak Reservoir near Raymond, and Island and Blue lakes north of Oshkosh. For those seeking big crappies, Bauer lists Branched Oak, Czechland, Wildwood, Olive Creek, Burchard, Sherman, Plum Creek, Midway and Hackberry as best bets.

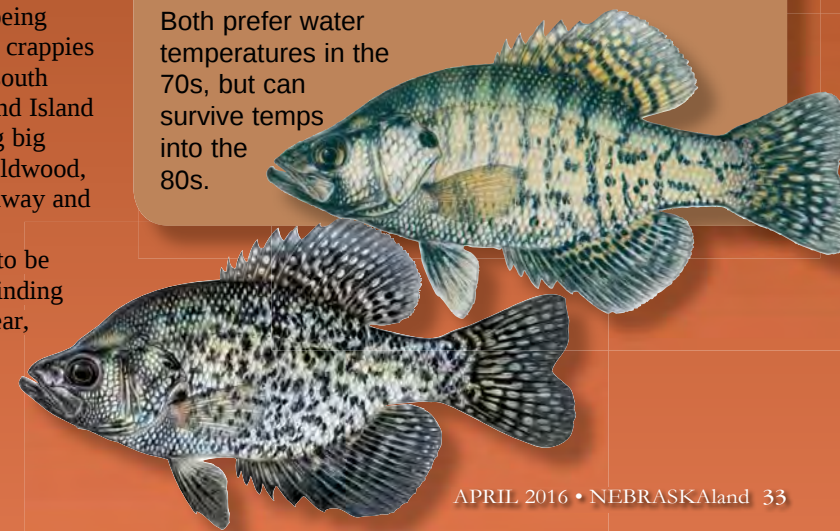
If an angler resides in Nebraska, there are likely to be crappies not far away. Whether people have been finding success by returning to the same spots year after year, or they are new to the fishing game, a trip to the shallows this spring is sure to yield positive results – yes, crappie ones, not crappy ones. ■

A Black and White Issue

The Differences Between Crappies' Subspecies

Both black crappies (*Pomoxis nigromaculatus*) and white crappies (*Pomoxis annularis*) can be found in Nebraska's waters. Probably because of the names, many are quick to judge if it's one or the other by looking at how much black is present on their scales. Because lightness and darkness of appearance for both varies by location for each subspecies, one must look at other indicators. Black crappies have seven or eight spines on their dorsal fins while whites have just five or six. Whites have dark vertical bars on their sides and a single black spot near each gill, while blacks have a more speckled appearance. While both can be found in various degrees of water clarity, whites don't mind a murkier environment.

Both prefer water temperatures in the 70s, but can survive temps into the 80s.



Sandhills Speedsters

The Quarter Horse

Story and photos by Mark Harris

Speeding by pastures along Nebraska's roads, most don't wonder about scattered horse herds – a horse is a horse. But nestled within grassy pockets of this state are phenomenal animals honed to perfection over many generations. Tailored by training, splendid by design, these are Nebraska's equine athletes, the quarter horses.

Near the town of Ericson in sprawling hills split by the clear, sandy-bottomed Cedar River, a quiet horse-breeding powerhouse creates

hundreds of future superstars per year – the Pitzer Ranch. Here, a dozen studs, all related to one legendary stallion born in 1961, impregnate 350 to 400 mares annually. Half are artificially inseminated; Mother Nature lacks precision, so recipes are written for 21st century horse herds. Regardless of how they came to be, beginning in May, lanky little foals arrive wobbly but vigor-filled.

In days past, all these horses would be destined for ranch work or rodeo competition, but the Pitzers are shifting with the times. “There are fewer true



Young quarter horses' personalities determine their life paths. Those with the desire to sprint and a penchant for training will become rodeo competitors and may sell for up to \$150,000.

horsemen than there used to be,” said Jim Brinkman, grandson of ranch founder Howard Pitzer. “These days we’re looking for those that act like a Labrador puppy.” Riders’ skill levels are more variable than older days. “Horses need to be gentler,” Brinkman said. “Compare it to lap dogs versus coon dogs.” Today’s quarter horse market calls for personality above all. Great Plains cattlemen don’t rely as heavily on horses to control their herds as they once did. Zippy all-terrain vehicles are replacing the ranch horse.

Despite this shift, basic Pitzer-horse elements haven’t changed.

Individual differences in biomechanics, personality, and training set their paths in becoming hobby horses, ranch workers or competitors. Nothing is random in producing quality quarter horses. “You let the horse tell you what it wants to be,” said Brinkman. “If they’re good at certain things you go that way. Some want to be sport horses and some want to be family pets – the trail horses.” Everyone in the Pitzer family rides new horses regularly, looking for traits. The most exceptional are destined for the rodeo circuit: calf roping, barrel racing, steer wrestling or team roping.

As quarterbacks and linebackers perform only one position career-long, so do rodeo horses. It’s big business, especially team-roping events which dot the country year-round. The roping community’s competitor base is huge and so are the prize winnings. “Spending \$50,000 on a horse is no big deal to some folks because they may win it all back the next weekend,” Brinkman said. A fully trained roping horse, a “finished horse” as they’re called, sells for up to \$150,000. A good trail horse is much less, but still costs as much as a new pickup truck. Equestrians want quality, and the Pitzer



Located near the town of Ericson, Nebraska, the Pitzer Ranch produces and trains up to 400 quarter horses per year. Some will become family pets, others will work cattle and in the rodeo arena some will become legendary.



Thoughtful breeding produced this week-old foal. Recipes are written for 21st century quarter horse herds.

brand name is respected in riding circles. “Riding is entertainment for most folks out west,” said Brinkman. “They don’t go to the mall or the movie house. They ride.”

New colts are scrutinized and some are selected to join a small group that might become studs. Mares are often purchased to keep bloodlines fresh, but better Pitzer fillies are kept around to breed one day. Certain physiques

and personality make the cut, but trainability trumps physical qualities. As in people, the best athlete in the world must train well to perform at an elite level. Breeding for color is a factor, too; buckskin, roan, palomino and gray are current best sellers.

Contrary to typical western movie scenes, training is a loving process. Foals have first human contact at three to four months old when they are



Days old and innocent, this youngster ventured too close to the cameraman. Mother is coming to nudge him away . . . repeatedly.

caught and led around the training pen for 20 minutes. Other than occasional hoof trimmings, this is their only close human interaction for two years, which is when school begins.

All new horses get the same start. Standing in the center of a small round pen, the trainer urges the horse to run perimeter circles. The horse first learns to “WHOA!” as the trainer throws his arms up and cuts off the horse’s path. Once the stop command is understood, the next stages follow with much petting and rest in between. Trained in sequence to tolerate a halter, then a saddle blanket, a saddle, and finally a

rider, a novice learns it all within only two hours.

Lanky, mild-mannered trainer, Clayton Schlenger, said rest is a horse’s best reward. “I like to let them almost fall asleep in there so they think it’s easy,” he said. Though a horse occasionally goes ballistic, said Schlenger, “Once I get on top they realize it isn’t that big of a deal.” Arena riding quickly follows, and soon Schlenger and beginner are out riding the hills. “I like to make their first day a big one,” he said. Trainees are set loose with the herd after their epic day to be left alone for another year when

ranch training will begin.

During ranch training, individual quirks are exposed and trainers alter horses’ behaviors accordingly. “Every horse is different,” Schlenger said. “Some are afraid of the rope. Heck, some are afraid of cattle!” What is the best part of a horse’s day? “Sleepin’!” he said. “The point when you’re done riding them.” All colts and fillies get the basics in ranch work, but those displaying superior abilities or eagerness to work will move on to specialty rodeo training.

Pitzer offspring owners have the chance to show what their horses are

made of every year at the Pitzer Horse Ranch Invitational. Every September, seventy-some horses and their owners come from around the U.S. to compete in a series of diverse events. Most are standard rodeo speed events, but the biggest spectacle is the Ranch Trail Course. Like a back-country steeplechase mixed with ranch tasks, the course is designed to test the physical and mental limits of horse and rider.

As horses arrive by trailer in the early morning mist, they call out to each other. Whinnying at full throat is not just heard, it’s felt. Deep chests



Clayton Schlenger leads new horses through a calm and loving training sequence with much petting in between. Two-year-old novices progress from never being saddled to riding in the pastures all within one day.



As times have changed, so have breeding practices. Today's horses need to behave more like a Labrador puppy.

release trumpeting vibratos through flared nostrils, and then they wait prick-eared for responses. This is a homecoming for most of these horses; their mothers are here.

The obstacle course changes yearly, so contestants never know exactly what to train for, but one quality is always needed: speed. One by one they compete – load a massive log onto a trailer, cross the Cedar River, traverse a small wooden bridge, skip through a pile of dead trees, jump a ditch, splash through a marsh, drag a caged goat from point to point (goat looking equally confused at each turn), cross the river once more, then push through a metal gate next to a fire-spitting branding-iron oven. Add full-on sprinting between each challenge and that's a ranch trail course. Men compete against women on this course – the horses are the stars.

Lakota Pappan of Steelville, Missouri, took second place on her red roan barrel-racing horse. As if running for its life, Lakota's horse attacked each obstacle fearlessly and with attitude, just as great quarter horses should. Receiving my compliments, Lakota smiled, patted her mare's neck and beamed, "She's my baby." That gesture sums up everything I have ever witnessed about horse folks and their horses.

Pitzer horses are born to run and destined to be loved, and within this arrangement between animals and humankind, some animals will become legendary. ■

Mark Harris is the Associate Director of the University of Nebraska State Museum.

TOP: Horses watch their kin compete as riders socialize at the Pitzer Horse Ranch Invitational, the ultimate test of a ranch horse's skill and speed.

MIDDLE: Women compete against men in the ranch course and this is fair; the horses are the stars. Lakota Pappan and her horse thump across a wooden bridge at a gallop. They will take second place.

BOTTOM: The chaotic power of a horse sprinting through water is remarkable. Horses and riders are equally determined; this is what they love.





PHOTO BY NEAL S. RATZLAFF

PRAIRIE PHLOX is associated with the tallgrass prairies of Nebraska and typically blooms beginning in mid-May.

Phlox

A Nebraska Sampler

By James H. Locklear

The wooded hills of Omaha's Lauritzen Gardens are a world apart from the windswept heights of Scotts Bluff. Separated by 400 miles and 3,600 feet of elevation, the only thing these places would seem to have in common is that they occur within the borders of Nebraska. But they do share a botanical connection. Both places are adorned with phlox.

The genus *Phlox* is composed of about 60 species of wildflowers which, with two exceptions, are all native to North America. These species are related to one another by the distinctive shape and structure of their flowers. Termed *salverform*, a phlox flower has a long slender tube that spreads abruptly into five petal-like lobes.

Phlox species occur in an amazing array of habitats across North America, from southern forests to alpine meadows and from desert grasslands to the Arctic Coast. And they often *own* these habitats, in an ecological sense. In a number of plant communities, a species of *Phlox* is one of the more common wildflowers present and in some cases so abundant (and showy) that ecologists designate it as a principal indicator species of that plant community.

The genus has two centers of diversity, an eastern one in the Appalachian Highlands and a western one in the Rocky Mountains and Great Basin. Located in the middle of the country, Nebraska has a modest but respectable total of six species, two easterners and four westerners.

Eastern Phlox

Where I work at Lauritzen Gardens in Omaha, **timber phlox** (*Phlox divaricata*) is one of the joys of an early spring walk in the woods. This species is a familiar sight in deciduous forests and woodlands from the Atlantic Coast to the eastern edge of the Great Plains. In Nebraska, timber phlox mostly clings to the wooded corridor of the Missouri River where it occurs in oak-hickory forest.

Timber phlox is a spring ephemeral, meaning it flowers in early spring as trees begin to put out their new leaves, then goes dormant as the canopy fills in and shade increases on the forest floor. It usually begins to bloom around mid-April in eastern Nebraska. The flowers are sometimes said to be blue, but the color is more of a violet-purple.

Our other easterner is **prairie phlox** (*P. pilosa*), which also reaches the western limits of its range in Nebraska. A species of grassy savannas in the eastern United States, it is associated with tallgrass prairie in the Midwest. It blooms later than timber phlox, typically beginning around mid-May. The flower color tends toward pink, but can range

from rose-pink to white with the center or "eye" of the flower often a slightly different hue, either darker or lighter in color.

Some early descriptions of the tallgrass prairie mention encounters with vast fields of prairie phlox, stretching off to the far horizon. Today, prairie phlox is limited to scattered remnants of this once-oceanic grassland, including a number of tallgrass preserves in eastern Nebraska.

Western Phlox

You can still experience horizon-to-horizon sweeps of grassland in the Nebraska Sandhills and much of the Panhandle, and these plant communities harbor their own suite of phlox species.

Plains phlox (*P. andicola*) is a somewhat shrubby, tufted plant (up to 4 inches tall) that prefers sandy soils. It occurs in the western part of the Nebraska Sandhills and in the sandsage prairie region of southwestern Nebraska. It also occurs in association with outcrops of sandstone bedrock in the Nebraska Panhandle.

Plains phlox typically begins flowering in May and in years of abundant precipitation will produce a scattering of clean white blossoms well into the summer. It can spread into small colonies from its underground stems, but more often just pops up in open spaces between clumps of prairie grasses.



PHOTO BY JIM LOCKLEAR

TIMBER PHLOX in Nebraska are found in the wooded corridor of the Missouri River in oak-hickory forests.



PHOTO BY JON FARRAR

PLAINS PHLOX are found in the western part of the Sandhills and the sandsage prairie region of southwestern Nebraska.

Alyssum-leaf phlox (*P. alyssifolia*) is another Great Plains species. While common in and about the nearby Black Hills of South Dakota, this is Nebraska’s rarest phlox, limited to Dawes County in the far northwest corner of the state. It is a plant of rocky bluffs, ridges and badlands.

Unlike the more upright plains phlox, alyssum-leaf phlox grows as a mound of stems and shoots (3-4 inches tall) that radiate out from a central crown. The leaves are small but not as narrow and needle-like as many of the western species. The flowers are relatively large and showy, purple to pink in color, and produced in abundance in late spring and early summer.

The Nebraska Panhandle is famous for its dramatic geology, with iconic landforms like Courthouse Rock and Crow Butte. It is in these settings that **Hood’s phlox** (*P. hoodii*) flourishes. Hood’s phlox is a mat forming species, but its leaves and flowers are considerably smaller than alyssum-leaf phlox and its stems shorter (2-3 inches tall), resulting in a more compact, low-profile plant that can hunker down out of the wind and maximize the scant moisture available in such dry habitat.

When not in bloom, a Hood’s phlox plant is a rather nondescript carpet of interwoven stems and tiny, needle-like leaves. But during the height of its spring flowering season, it will be blanketed with sparkling white flowers. Hood’s phlox is the most widespread of the western species, ranging from the Great Plains through the Rockies into the Pacific Northwest. Throughout most of its vast distribution

it is associated with sagebrush shrubland, where it is part of a thin understory of low-growing wildflowers and grasses. In my opinion, the beauty of Hood’s phlox is much more favorably displayed on the rocky top of Scotts Bluff.

One of the ways phlox deal with really tough environments is to simply go small. **Moss phlox** (*P. muscoides*) is a case in point. The shoots of this cushion-forming species are very short (2 inches or less) and the



PHOTO BY JIM LOCKLEAR

ALYSSUM PHLOX are common in the Black Hills of South Dakota and is Nebraska’s rarest phlox.

leaves are very small and so crowded and closely pressed against each stem that a plant could easily be mistaken for some kind of moss. Until spring, that is, when the silvery foliage all but disappears beneath a profusion of tiny white flowers.

Moss phlox has a limited range in Nebraska, primarily the southwestern part of the Panhandle in the Kimball Grasslands. Here it occurs in rocky habitat where the sandstone bedrock of the Ogallala Group is exposed on upland divides and on bluffs and other broken topography. Moss phlox thrives in this dry, windswept habitat where it is often the most common species among the array of cushion and mat-forming plants that turn these “barrens” into miniature gardens in the spring.

Pollinator Magnets

Most phlox species are highly attractive to pollinating insects. Nectar produced at the base of the flower tube compels butterflies and moths to unfurl their threadlike proboscises and probe the flower, picking up pollen in the process. Western species have smaller flowers with shorter tubes and are important pollen sources for native bees. As these insects move from flower to flower they transfer pollen grains and facilitate the fertilization needed to produce the next crop of seed.

Timber phlox is an important floral resource for a variety of insects in early spring, with documented visitors including 14 species of butterflies, six moths, three flies and nine bees. Twenty-three different species of butterflies have been observed visiting prairie phlox, including a number that are now imperiled due to the destruction and fragmentation of tallgrass prairie. Five different species of ground-nesting solitary bees have been found to forage on the flowers of moss phlox.

Along with rewarding insect visitors with nectar and pollen, many phlox species lure potential pollinators to their flowers through the use of olfactory signals – what we consider fragrance. To the human nose, the fragrance of phlox flowers resembles cloves, honeysuckle, lilac and even vanilla. The strength of fragrance seems to vary between species. In the Kimball Grasslands region of Nebraska, where large colonies of moss phlox occur, you can often smell the plants before you see them.

From the Wild to the Garden

The Reverend Charles Simmons Harrison (1832-1919) was a Nebraska minister with a passion for “the floral world.” He established a nursery in York around 1876 that would eventually have clientele throughout the United States. He developed many new varieties of garden phlox, as well as iris and peonies. In 1906, he published *A Manual on Phlox*, a booklet packed with information on growing phlox along with admonishments to plant flowers, well, everywhere. “Adorn the farm home,” promised the



PHOTO BY JIM LOCKLEAR

HOOD’S PHLOX flourishes in Nebraska’s Panhandle region and is the most widespread of the western species.



PHOTO BY JIM LOCKLEAR

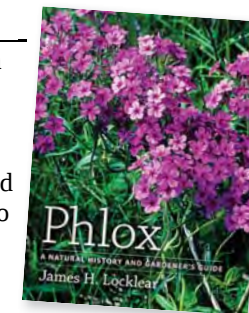
MOSS PHLOX thrives in tough environs like the Kimball Grasslands in the southwestern part of the Panhandle.

theologian-nurseryman, and “your young girls will be cultivated ladies and your boys gentlemen instead of boors.”

The reverend’s zeal for phlox in the garden was sparked by an almost otherworldly vision from the wild. He recounts a wagon trip across the tallgrass prairie of Minnesota that found him awash in prairie phlox. “One day I drove through a garden of thousands of acres of wild Phloxes. I never can forget the scene. All around I was greeted with those happy, smiling faces, and all the air was incense laden. Far as the eye could reach I was surrounded by those great masses of loveliness. I was in raptures.”

Thankfully, wild gardens of phlox can still be found in Nebraska. ■

Jim Locklear is director of conservation at Lauritzen Gardens in Omaha. He is author of the book, *Phlox: A Natural History and Gardeners Guide*, published by Timber Press in 2011. He was surprised and happy that the publisher chose a photo of prairie phlox for the cover of the book, which Jim took at Dieken Prairie not far from his home in Lincoln.



A Place of Bounty

Story and photos by Jenny Nguyen

Wood Duck Wildlife Management Area in Stanton County is a beautiful place to visit and enjoy year-round.

Wood Duck Wildlife Management Area (WMA) has just about everything. Created by centuries of flooding and the erratic movements of the wayward Elkhorn River, the area features over 1,800 acres of wetlands, oak woodlands, eastern riparian habitat, and to the west, a slice of Sandhills-type prairie that is rare in eastern Nebraska. This Stanton County jewel is one of the state's most diverse WMAs, capable of holding such

species as Blanding's turtles, bald eagles, burrowing owls, jackrabbits, ornate box turtles and prairie chickens as well as unique plant species such as marsh marigold and wild rice. Healthy stands of cottonwood trees support a thriving population of wood ducks, the area's namesake species bestowed in 1966 when the first 223.5 acres were purchased.

Hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities abound from fall through spring. Wood Duck's cattail marshes

and small pools offer migrating and breeding waterfowl such as blue-winged teal, mallards and puddle ducks an ideal place to stop and rest. About 15 white-tailed deer were harvested out of Wood Duck WMA during the 2015 November rifle season, and the WMA's oak woodlands hold turkeys. Rabbit hunting is favorable due to recent tree clearing and the availability of brush piles, while grasslands that were once crop ground now hold pheasants and some quail. Walk the treelines in the

more open areas of the WMA and you may kill a few doves. But as popular as Wood Duck WMA is to hunters, the area's recreational opportunities don't end here.

Spring brings a different kind of life – the promise of fruit in late summer and early fall. White bouquets of elderberry flowers grow fragrant along road ditches and trails in May, while foliage on hibernating trees begins to sprout. Wild plum thickets fully develop in summer, showing off small, olive-like green fruit. Grape vines grow wild along the Elkhorn's oxbows, tendrils whipping, wrapping and reaching the tallest points of host trees. Morel mushrooms may be found growing in the woods' sandy soil.

Wood Duck's oxbow lake, once called Loe's Lake, offers some fishing, including bullhead, carp, bluegill, sunfish and bass, while catfishing is good on the Elkhorn River.

Fruit picking is a highlight for many locals in late summer and fall, when the skins of juicy, sun-ripened wild plums turn from orange and yellow to blush-red. Grape vines burden low bushes with heavy canopies, laden with clusters of inky black fruit ready to be cut with old pocket knives to take home for grape jelly and juice. Song and game birds love elderberries, while two-legged browsers may prefer to make pies, jam or wine. Gooseberries are abundant, too.

The summers also mean playing in the sandy Elkhorn River, to cool and wash off dog-day itches. Frogs and toads hide under the shade of bright green vegetation, not waiting to be caught by inquisitive girls and boys.

Though Wood Duck is mostly flat and does not boast the great vistas and views of other WMAs, the fiery sunrises and sunsets that reflect upon the marshes are sights to behold. Its seemingly misplaced wedge of Sandhills is big enough to make you feel like you're out in the real thing. ■

Top: Daisy fleabane can be found at Wood Duck Wildlife Management Area in Stanton County.

Middle: A young opossum climbs a tree to get away from the photographer.

Bottom: Elderberries ripen in late summer and fall. They can be used to make all kinds of desserts, beverages and preserves.



Cain Johnson of Norfolk fishes for largemouth bass in the oxbow lake at Wood Duck Wildlife Management Area in Stanton County.

The Nation's Best Turkey Hunting in Nebraska

By NEBRASKAland Magazine Staff

There has never been a better time to turkey hunt in Nebraska. With a long season, plentiful public land and three permits allowed per hunter, the glory days are here.

Nebraska has the best turkey hunting in the nation – with a long season, plentiful public land and three permits per hunter – as well as diverse terrain and habitat. From farms to forest, turkeys can be found in all 93 counties with the state featuring three subspecies – Merriam's, Easterns and Rios. Regardless of where you plan to hunt and the type of birds you're chasing, scouting must be done to find roosting areas, strutting grounds and travel routes. Here is what you're looking for.

Scouting

To pinpoint roosting locations, glass areas during the late afternoons for turkeys or use locator calls, such as

crow calls, to see if a tom will respond. On follow-up scouting trips, slip quietly into an area in the afternoon and look for tracks, droppings and feathers, and always listen for gobblers in an area. Stay until after dark, then slip back out to not disturb birds.

To find strutting grounds, listen for turkeys in the mornings. Once you're close to these spots, look for drag marks from a tom's feathers on the ground. You can also analyze scat. Droppings shaped like a "j" will be a tom, while straight scat will be a jake. Hen droppings will be in a clump and, during the spring, where there are hens there will be toms.

Finding travel routes are important for times when the birds fly a different direction off the roost, roost in a

different area or you miss a shot. Scout hard to pattern birds and their travel routes to and from the roost, strutting grounds, loafing and feeding areas. Hunt travel routes during the mid-afternoon; get comfortable and use a blind to hide movement when possible or move slowly through an area looking and listening all the time.

Farms

Many farms where people hunt turkeys consist of grain fields and shelterbelts. Because moving is at a minimum in areas like these, hunters should place themselves near a roosting or feeding location. Scout birds on afternoons before the hunt and also talk to the landowner, who may be able to pinpoint roosting locations as well.

When hunting birds from the roost, keep your distance to at least 75 yards away and, if hunting with more than one person, place each hunter on opposite sides of the roosting location to increase the likelihood that one of you gets a shot. For if the tom is with hens, then there's a good chance he's going to follow them wherever they go.

However, if you can get the tom to respond to you early, even if he doesn't come your way, hold your ground because he won't forget you're there. This is when a hen decoy comes into play. He'll swing back your way, probably in the midday when his hens leave him to lay eggs, and you'll have a chance at calling him in.

Conversely, if the tom is with a breeding flock and won't budge, try interrupting the boss hen with challenge calls. She may just get mad



Jennifer Sorensen peers out the window of a tent-blind while hunting turkeys northwest of Naper in Boyd County.

PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER



A tom turkey pokes his head out from behind a tree in Sarpy County.

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

enough to bring the group with her along with a gobbler you're after. You might also be able to use this technique by gobbling at the group of birds, which may force the tom to temporarily leave the flock to challenge a nearby rival.

The most important aspect to remember when hunting farms is location. Food is everywhere, so putting yourself near a food source isn't good enough. Place yourself near the roost or in the direction that birds go when they leave the roost, and you'll find turkeys.

Locations to Hunt: Farm-hunting locations exist in most areas of the state, especially the east and central. Knock on doors and you'll eventually find a farmer who will allow you to hunt.

Hills and Canyons

The best part about hunting hills and canyons is the amount of space you have the opportunity to cover. These locations are perfect for buddy hunts and for those hunters who love



Roger Christianson (left) visits with his guide, landowner Randy Schommer of Chadron, during a Pine Ridge turkey hunt.

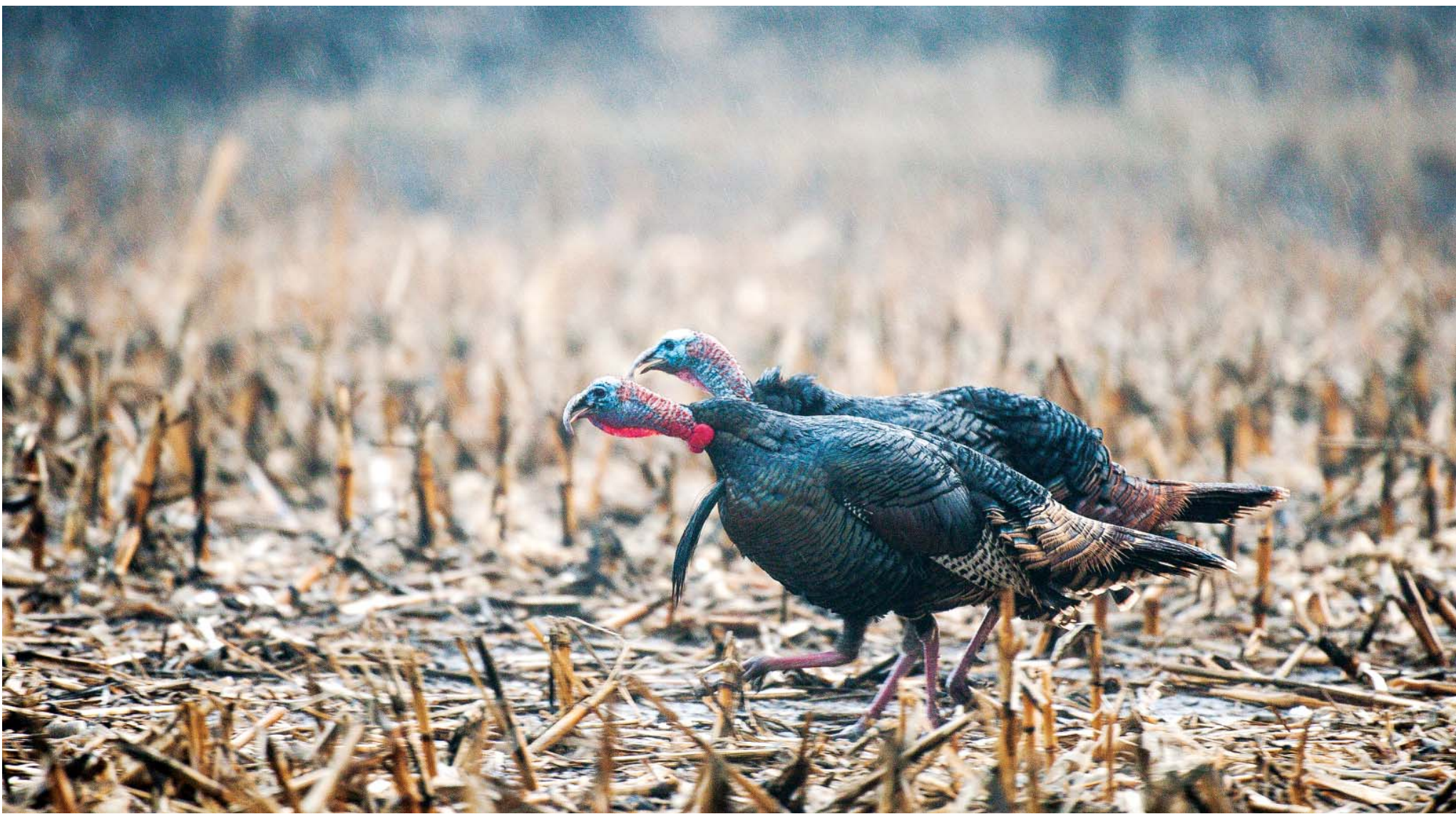


PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Tom turkeys move across a cut corn field near Wahoo.

to move. Glass for birds from high vantage points, yet never walk the ridge lines, as turkeys will spot human silhouettes and head the other direction. Keep just below the ridge line and yelp every 30 yards or so. If yelping doesn't get a response, try a locator call and hope for a gobble back. However, keep in mind that canyons often echo and carry sounds more efficiently than other landscapes. Toning down your call may be in order.

Glassing for bird locations will allow you to see the direction birds are headed so you can get in front of them for an ambush as long as you stay unseen from their watchful eyes. If spotted, turkeys will be over several hills and disappear before you know it.

If you get in front of birds and set up a decoy to call a tom in, be prepared to move if he hangs up because he's with other hens, comes to a fence line or has to go downhill. If possible, try to lure him in to going uphill.

Locations to Hunt: The Loess Canyons located in south-central Nebraska have ample hill and deep canyon hunting. In Lincoln County, more than 8,825 acres of land is open to the public for hunting as part of the Open Fields and Waters Canyon Access Initiative. Hunters also flock to the Pine Ridge and Wildcat Hills regions of the Panhandle, which feature thousands of acres of public land.

Forest

The forest hunt is unique because it is a test of patience, even more so than hunting farms. You will know when turkeys are on the ground, but because of the woody acoustics, it may be tough to pinpoint exactly where birds are when they start responding to you. Because of this, you will have to move extremely slowly when hunting in the woods, for birds will quite often work their way around you – later in the

season they may completely circle you – before coming within gun range.

If you move quickly, you'll probably see birds, but it will be their backsides as they are running away. A couple of good options for hunting in the woods are focusing on decoy placement and where you set up. Try to place your decoys in areas that the sun can hit on your decoy on clear days. In these open areas, where toms will often scratch for food, travel through and strut, these decoys are rays of sunshine for toms that are all alone and in desperate need of company.

When breeding is at its peak, use a hen and jake decoy combination; mature gobblers seldom tolerate a jake putting the moves on any hens in the neighborhood. Luring a two- or three-year old bird is easy using this approach – these may not be the dominant bird in the area but may still be a nice long-beard that is looking for a hen that the dominant male hasn't

claimed.

Also be sure to match the camouflage of the area you're hunting as well; if possible, use a blind. Creek corridors, which feature deciduous trees, often attract high turkey traffic while small groups of gobblers can be found in upland pines and cedars. Also think about setting in an area where there are big thickets or small hills where you can change location, even if it's not a long distance, to fool a bird that is hesitant to coming in to your decoys. This is where camouflage becomes a big key as well.

Locations to Hunt: Some of the most popular notable areas of the state for pursuing turkeys is in the timbers of national forests and adjacent wildlife management areas and private property. Turkeys can be found in the Samuel R. McKelvie National Forest near Valentine, the Pine Ridge Ranger District near Chadron and the Bessey Ranger District near Halsey.



Two tom turkeys walk the border of Chadron State Park and the Nebraska National Forest attempting to attract hens.

Turkey Hunt Now

Nebraska's turkey hunting opportunities are among the best in the nation. Not only are turkeys abundant, with populations in every county, but the permits are affordable and unlimited in quantity. In addition:

- Good hunting opportunities are available on more than 500,000 acres of public and public-access land.
- Nebraska's spring season is among the longest around. Archery season opened March 25. Youth shotgun season opens April 9 and the regular shotgun season

begins April 16. All seasons close May 31.

- At \$23 for residents and \$95 for nonresidents, permits are affordable. Plus, youth age 15 and under can buy a permit for just \$5.
- Spring hunters are allowed up to three permits, good for one turkey each.
- Hunters have high success and satisfaction rates.
- The northwestern region of the state provides opportunities to hunt the highly sought-after Merriam's subspecies.

River Bottoms

River bottoms provide unique challenges to turkey hunters, as well as some benefits. Knowing where birds are roosting gives you an idea of possible locations to set up. Look for tracks on sandbars to see if birds have a travel route across the river. If there is any natural cover, put a blind or a series of blinds along the routes or make natural blinds from branches and weeds to hide in when you're ready to hunt.

If you're trying to lure a big tom across the river, hope you're upwind of a bird so your calls reach him. Use a hen and jake decoy in the early season, placing them on sandbars when possible while using one of your

aforementioned blind locations. If no sandbars are available, set decoys up in a clearing along the edge of the river so they are in view from the other side of the river. Using a blind will conceal movement and allow for a more comfortable hunt.

Glassing a river bottom for turkeys can be productive mid-morning to afternoon – turkeys will fill their craw with gravel and get a drink in river bottoms before moving on to roost for the night or traveling to breeding or feeding areas.

If on the move, use the bank of the river to sneak up on a tom. You may need to throw on some hip or muck boots to travel in the river bottom along the bank ridge, but use this edge to your advantage to conceal movement. Use the bank to call from or crawl up onto the bank to get in place for a perfect shot.

Locations to Hunt: From the Niobrara River in the north to the Republican in the south, and the Platte in between, it is often said that Nebraska has more miles of river than any other state. There's no doubt a river nearby if you're hunting in Nebraska.

With ample terrains to turkey hunt, along with affordable permits and the opportunity to shoot three bearded turkeys during the spring season, these are the glory days of Nebraska turkey hunting. ■

Turkey Breeding

By Julie Geiser

Pre-breeding and Flock Dispersal

Winter flocks are made up of three groups: hens and female offspring, older toms and jakes. Gobbling and hen noises increase as pecking orders are established in each flock and flocks disperse. Now is the time to challenge boss hens and toms.

Call toms with hen yelps and fighting purrs or rattles. Dominant hens will belt out yelps and sharp cuts – duplicate her and challenge her dominance, hoping a tom will follow her to the fight. Less dominant toms will fall for hen calls and jakes will chase virtually any hen sound.

Breeding Phase

Winter flocks have broken up and most breeding will occur with minimal gobbling. Hunting can be frustrating as big toms get henned-up and don't respond to calls. But once hens start tending to nests, more gobbling will occur and so will opportunities.

Don't call aggressively. Set up close to a roosted tom and yelp softly as he hits the ground, hopefully before live hens get to him.

As the season progresses and hens are nesting, keep gobblers interested with sweet yelps, clucks and subdued purrs.

Post-breeding

This second season is considered the best time to call in a wary tom. Most hens are incubating eggs while toms are eager to breed; lusty gobblers will respond to almost any hen call.



PHOTO BY JULIE GEISER

A hen turkey and her poults fly into a tree in Lincoln County to roost for the night.

Time Well Spent

Unusual Places to Stay Overnight

By Renae Blum

Hotels are nice, but sometimes you need to ditch more traditional options and stay in – let's say, an Indian tipi or a remodeled caboose. These are just a few unique lodging options you can find at a Nebraska state park or recreation area. Read on to learn about some options sure to pique your curiosity. ■

Historic Lodging

Fort Robinson State Park

Fort Robinson is full of history. An active military post from 1874 to 1948, the fort was the site of the tragic Cheyenne Outbreak, the last great gathering place of the Sioux Nation and a World War II POW camp. Today, quarters where the fort's officers and soldiers slept have been converted into lodging for park visitors.

You can stay in the 1909 enlisted men's quarters, or in the former officers' quarters, which date from 1874 to 1909. These

options sleep between two and 20 people. Comanche Hall sleeps up to 60 people, making it perfect for a family reunion or other large group. All options have kitchens, baths and bedrooms; larger cabins also feature living rooms. Cabins are furnished with blankets, towels, stoves, refrigerators, silverware and cooking utensils. Lodging is available from April 1 through Nov. 30. To make a reservation to any of these destinations, call the Nebraska State Parks reservation call center at (402) 471-1414.



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

Cabooses

Two Rivers State Recreation Area

All aboard! These 10 donated Union Pacific cabooses have found new life as lodging quarters at Two Rivers State Recreation Area. It's a great option for families with kids who are looking for a memorable vacation experience. Up to six people can stay in a caboose, with two bunk beds in the rear of the caboose and two mattresses in the cupola. The kitchenette contains a stove, refrigerator, sink and cabinet space. The cabooses are air-conditioned and have a modern bathroom and shower. You can enjoy your meals outside on the deck, which is outfitted with a picnic table and grill. The cabooses are available from April 15 through the end of September.



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Tipis

Platte River State Park

Forget tents! My six-year-old self would have jumped at the chance to sleep in an Indian tipi, pretending I was Pocahontas. Platte River State Park has four canvas tipis for guests to stay in, each with enough space for six to eight people. A genuine tipi rested on the ground, these are situated on steady, even wooden platforms with a fire ring, grill and pit toilet nearby.

The "Hay Bale" Cabins

Ponca State Park

Yes, you read that right – cabins made (partially) from straw. Densely-packed hay bales form the insulation for the two cabins' outer walls. Primitive though it might seem, this style of insulation is actually quite efficient. It's part of an overall effort to make these cabins as "green" as possible. Other green elements in these cabins include geothermal heating and cooling, recycled building materials and eco-friendly lighting and wastewater treatment.

The cabins have two bedrooms with queen-sized beds, a modern kitchen and bathroom, a dining area, a big-screen TV, cable, wireless Internet, a gas grill and an outdoor deck. Bedding, towels, cooking utensils, dishes and tableware are provided. The two cabins are open year-round.



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

An Expo for the Outdoors

Celebrating 10 Years at Fort Kearny

By Julia Plugge, Outdoor Education Specialist

It started as a simple event with community members teaching kids about the outdoors. Now, 10 years later, the Kearny Outdoor Expo has grown to a three-day celebration connecting thousands to the great outdoors. With the goal of wanting to empower youth, the first two days of this year's expo will educate over 2,500 fourth, fifth and sixth grade students about fishing, archery, kayaking, camping, outdoor cooking and other activities, while also teaching about Nebraska's fish and wildlife species. Steadily expanding each year, now over 115 pre-registered classrooms will travel as far as 200 miles for this fun, interactive day at the park.

On Saturday, the public day has become the headline event for more than 30,000 outdoor lovers of all ages. Over the past nine years, the Expo has expanded to more than 50 hands-on learning activities and featured exhibitors. The event has evolved into a memorable experience for the entire family, as more than 300 volunteers make this event possible.

We are excited to bring the community together every May to revel in the wealth of outdoor opportunities we have right here in Nebraska. ■



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

A boy eats a s'more at the Fort Kearny Outdoor Expo, one of the many "hands-on" activities the event has to offer participants of all ages.



The Fort Kearny Outdoor Expo is located at Fort Kearny near Minden, and will become one of Nebraska's largest towns on the weekend of the Expo, May 5-6.



PHOTO BY JULIE GEISER

Youth work up the climbing wall at the Fort Kearny Outdoor Expo.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Tatuana Zamudio of Kearney shows a fish print she made at the 2012 Fort Kearny Outdoor Expo.

Outdoor Discovery

Throughout Nebraska, school students grades 4-7 are invited to participate in the Outdoor Discovery Program, as it provides youth with additional opportunities for numerous hands-on adventures in the outdoors. In addition, these activities are designed to correlate with Nebraska's state educational standards in science, history, math, reading and writing.

These opportunities include engaging in shooting sports, fishing, archery, outdoor cooking, kayaking, wildlife identification, scheduled demonstrations, live animal displays, camping games and more.

Below are the dates for this year's Outdoor Discovery events:

Platte River State Park: April 13-14
 Scottsbluff Trails West YMCA Camp: April 26-27
 Fort Kearny State Recreation Area: May 5-6

For more information on the Game and Parks Commission's outdoor education programs, visit Outdoornebraska.gov/ODP.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Conservation Officer Mitch Johnson shows participants the basic paddling strokes before they hit the water at the Kayaking exhibit at the 2014 Expo.



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Saturday, May 7

10th Anniversary

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- Archery
- Kayaking
- Bowfishing
- Shooting
- Camping Skills
- Outdoor Cooking
- Climbing Wall
- Crafts
- S'mores

Park Permit Required



Find out more at FortKearnyExpo.com

Wildcat Hills Projects Bring Excitement

The Panhandle park has a new shooting complex and is undergoing an expansion to its nature center.

By Justin Haag

Big developments are underway at the Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area and Nature Center south of Gering. Not only is there a new shooting complex at the park along Highway 71 south of Gering, but the nature center is in the midst of a large expansion to its building. Both are expected to be a big draw for the park, which already attracts thousands of visitors each year.

The new shooting complex boasts a range to sight in high-power rifles, as well as stations for target shooting with .22 caliber rifles and archery equipment. Also included is a five-stand shotgun range and a building that houses an indoor air rifle range.

It is opening to the public on a fee-based system, as well as providing a safe and comfortable place for educational programs. It has been designed with youth groups and families with children in mind, expanding capacity in the region for

learning programs and competitions.

The expansion to the Wildcat Hills Nature Center, which serves as headquarters for the Game and Parks Commission's educational programs in the region and the 700-acre Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area, is expected to be complete late this summer or fall. It will add 8,720 square feet, more than doubling the size of the existing 5,300-square-foot structure.

Highlighting the nature center expansion, when staff moves back into the building from their temporary location at the park's shop to the south, will be exhibit space and a large multipurpose room, both of which are sure to be a popular venue for many events and educational activities. In addition to providing a more adequate area for the array of nature education programs at the center, groups will be allowed to rent the facility for a variety of events such as meetings, conferences and weddings.

An upper level will be added to the

building, featuring an observation deck for visitors to fully enjoy the spectacular view of the rugged evergreen-studded park and the North Platte Valley below.

The exhibit spaces will highlight the region's rich wildlife and plant resources, including displays that interpret the region's unique geology and paleontological history. The new displays will complement the center's existing trove of educational resource material and will entice guests to experience the park's extensive trail system. Mounted bird and mammal displays, an outdoor bird viewing area and an offering of some live amphibians and reptiles entertain many school groups and other visitors each year. ■

The projects were made possible with capital development funds appropriated to the Game and Parks Commission, along with a wealth of matching partner funds provided from donations.



Construction at the Wildcat Hills Nature Center is more than doubling the size of the existing structure and providing space for many uses, including exhibits.

STUDIO 20
ARCHITECTURE

CONCEPTUAL ARTWORK BY STUDIO 20

from NEBRASKAland's Trail Tales magazine for kids

junior journal

interesting notes for readers of all ages

by Lindsay Rogers and Donna Schimonitz

A Tale of Two Turtles: Western Painted and Ornate Box

Ryan Ruskamp, Conservation Technician

Have you ever gone to your favorite fishing hole and seen that little turtle sitting on the log enjoying the sunny afternoon? Chances are this was a western painted turtle.

The western painted turtle is an aquatic species, which means it spends most of the time in water. These turtles can grow 8 to 10 inches in length. They are found throughout Nebraska and prefer to live in calm or slow-moving waters containing abundant vegetation. This species is a very opportunistic feeder, which means it will eat a

variety of foods it comes across, including insects, fish, frogs, plants, or carrion (rotting meat).

The top shell of turtles is called a carapace, and the bottom shell is called a plastron. The painted turtle gets its name from its very colorful plastron, which can be red or orange; this is its most defining characteristic. The carapace on this turtle can be olive green to black in color and is sometimes covered in moss, depending on where it lives. This turtle also has legs striped in red and yellow.

The ornate box turtle is another species of turtle that can be found in Nebraska. Unlike the western painted turtle, this turtle is terrestrial, which means it spends most of the time on land. The ornate box turtle is the only entirely terrestrial turtle species in Nebraska. One of the really neat things about the ornate box turtle is that it can close its shell tight by using muscular hinges on the plastron. When it is closed, the shell resembles a box. This is how the ornate box turtle got its name.

Ornate box turtles can grow up to 6 inches in length and have a yellow and brown shell. Male box turtles

have red eyes as adults; females have brown or green eyes. These turtles feed mainly on insects, flowers and fruits. They will also occasionally eat carrion. They will look through cow pies while foraging for insects. This is important to the prairie because they break up the cattle droppings to allow the grass to grow where the cow pies were.

Ornate box turtles were very common throughout Nebraska. Because of agricultural use and habitat loss over most of their range, they now can be found mostly in the Sandhills.

The ornate box turtle and western painted turtle are two of the native turtle species found in Nebraska. 🐢

Plastron of painted turtle by Justin Haag



NATURE CALENDAR

- Coyotes bear young: May
- Listen and look for Plains Leopard Frogs: mid-March through late summer
- Watch for Water Sliders (insect) on streams and ponds on warm days: mid-March through late summer



Male ornate box turtle by Jeff Kurris

Name That Turtle

Identify three other turtles found in Nebraska.



Justin Haag



Jenny Nguyen



Jeff Kurris

ANSWERS: Blandings', Softshell and Snapping

My Photo Tip: HDR Photography

Use high dynamic range photography to open up landscape photos.

By Jenny Nguyen

Imagine. There's a beautiful sunset or sunrise in front of you. The clouds are highlighted, showing gorgeous purples and pinks. The foreground is bathed in warm light and illuminated just right. You want to capture the moment by taking a photo.

If you shoot in Auto mode, there's no telling what your photo will look like. But let's say you'd like your foreground to be in focus, so you pick an AF point somewhere in the foreground and take the photo. After reviewing, you'll quickly realize that what you're seeing on the camera LCD screen is nowhere close to what your eyes are seeing in front of you; while the foreground is adequately exposed, your sky has been completely washed out. So you might try to expose for the sky, but then the exact opposite happens. Though your sky is exposed correctly, your foreground is now hidden in a big blob of indeterminate shadow.

We've all been there. Why isn't your camera seeing a scene the same way your eyes do? There's a simple answer for that – cameras are nowhere near as advanced as our eyes, as far as being able to simultaneously adjust to a wide range of lighting conditions in a single environment. To compensate for this lack of adjustability, high dynamic range (HDR) photography has become a go-to technique for many.

HDR photography is taking two or more images of various exposures and merging them together to get one perfectly exposed image. To do this, you will need a tripod and editing software, such as Photomatix, Easy HDR or Photoshop. My

Canon 5D Mark III has decent built-in HDR capability that is quite easy to use. I tell the camera to take three different exposures of the same scene, and then it instantly gives me the final blended image in jpeg format.

If your camera doesn't have this capability, adjust the exposure value (EV) compensation feature on your camera to manually take three photos of the same scene. Underexpose the first photo, choose an exposure that's in the middle for the second photo, then overexpose the first photo.

For example, this final picture taken at Niobrara State Park is actually three images merged together. The first image was taken at EV -1, the second at EV 0, and the third at EV +1. By blending all three exposures – either with a HDR-capable camera or with HDR software on your computer, the result is an image that retains details in both the sky and foreground. This is also a good technique for taking photos inside buildings to find a happy medium between harsh light streaming through windows and dark interiors. The real estate industry loves HDR photography.

But as cool and useful as HDR photography is, it does have its place. Not all scenarios require this technique. There are too many HDR photos floating around on the internet that don't even look like they were taken on planet earth, made worse by the tendency of many photographers to over edit. This is just one technique that can help you close the gap between what you see in real life and what you can show in a photo. Use it wisely. ■



A HDR blended image of Niobrara State Park at sunset in Knox County. The three images used were taken at EV -1, EV 0 and EV +1 at f/11.

The Perfect Place

The river is my neighbor.

By Roger Welsch

I have long argued that when it comes to Nebraska weather, averages mean absolutely nothing because this “hulking giant” as one distractor once called the state I love is about exciting extremes, not boring averages. So, even while early visitors saw this as the Great American Desert – and with good reason, because it sure didn't offer the kind of rainfall they were used to in their homeland! – we are defined in large part by our water. There is the Missouri on the East; they called her the Old Harlot because she changed beds so often.

Down the spine of our state is our namesake, the Nebraska, now mistakenly called the Platte. (Just to get this straightened out, let's change the name of the river back to the Nebraska or change the name of the state to Platte.) The perversity of that river found expression in the remark that the Platte is a river that runs upside down – sand on the top, water on the bottom. I write this in hopes it will wind up in your hands on a nice, warm day because today great blocks of ice are piling up at bends and bridges, backing up water onto roads and into front yards.

When I bought my patch of Nebraska with its quarter mile frontage on the Middle Loup, known to this day to the Pawnee and Omaha as the Plenty Potatoes River because of the abundance of food along its banks, I explored the wetlands, sloughs and edges, making plans for what I presumed would be a lifetime of enjoying the river as my neighbor. I found one perfect place where a huge old cottonwood bent out over the water. I eased into the river and found that under that tree was an eight-foot deep pool, perfect for diving and swimming. So, I hung a rope out off the tree and over the water, anticipating what memories I and my children would find here on summer afternoons. When I returned weeks later, I found the rope hanging over a sandbar that stretched out a hundred yards to the nearest water. I would have considered the effort wasted except for the fact that only a few weeks later I came back to the spot again to find the river back at my bank. But the tree was gone, torn out of the ground and carried off in a raging flood, now replaced once again with quiet water and white sand.

For 30 more years I kept a journal in which I recorded on each visit to the river where the channels and islands were, and how the banks were building or dissolving. The lesson was clear: like everything else in Nebraska what seemed

transient was permanent; what was clearly ephemeral never changed. My river never went dry but then again its vagaries were never predictable. What some might think to be the most boring river on earth – “middle” is in its name, after all – surprises me again and again. As I wrote this in the dead of winter, I think of warm days “butt-bouncing,” lying back in the cool, shallow waters and drifting slowly down stream, every now and then my keel making contact with



the clean, white sand bottom. Or, I can wonder if again this spring I will see gigantic slabs of ice slamming into the highway bridge, piling up in huge walls, blocking the water and sending it over the banks, threatening my old log house in the bottom ground.

Even in flood, my river gives up the unexpected. Once an ice gorge blocked the entire river just below my ground, piling ice against my old cottonwood trees to a height of eight or 10 feet. The next spring I amazed visitors by taking them down to the river where the ice had now melted and the river was again placid and pointing to beaver gnawed bark 10 feet above the ground, remarking simply, “We probably should get out of here before it gets dark and those giant Nebraska beaver come back to finish this job.” ■

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



Remembering Lynn Berggren

Nebraska Game and Parks Commissioner Passes.

By Jerry Kane

Lynn Berggren, a Nebraska Game and Parks Commissioner from Broken Bow, passed away Tuesday, Feb. 16. He had represented District 6 (21 counties) on the commission since 2007.

"During his tenure as commissioner, Lynn was an ardent supporter and advocate for wildlife conservation, habitat management, and improving opportunities to enjoy the outdoors," said Nebraska Game and Parks Director Jim Douglas. "Lynn served with passion, dedication and was always looking for innovative ways to better serve the public. He will be greatly missed by Nebraska's citizens and the Game and Parks family."

Berggren strongly believed that outdoor recreation made life great in Nebraska. He was dedicated to improving Nebraska's natural resources, ensuring that the state had the best wildlife habitat management practices, and



Commissioners Lynn Berggren (right) and Bob Allen share a meal of pan-seared pheasant. Lynn (below left) hunts at Grove Lake Wildlife Management Area located near Royal.

creating fishing access and parks opportunities for all.

Pheasants were one of Berggren's passions. He initiated efforts for reviving Nebraska's pheasant populations and played a large role in the commission's new pheasant planning initiative.

A champion for all outdoor users, Berggren especially welcomed new hunters, anglers and youth. He helped improve facilities and access to fishing across Nebraska, such as a handicap-accessible access improvement project at Johnson Lake in 2015.

Berggren shared his passion for the outdoors with others every chance he got. He heavily promoted all the good things about outdoor recreation, especially family time and memories created through fishing and hunting. He blogged about fishing with his friends and family, pheasant and waterfowl hunting excursions and his love for outdoor recreation, always advocating for people to go enjoy the outdoors and take a kid with them.

Douglas said Berggren was a sincere and genuine person, and a great representative who listened to sportsmen and women and shared their ideas on conservation, hunting and angling at the commission. He was a leader in his community, supporting and maintaining the vibrancy of the Nebraska One Box Pheasant Hunt and many opportunities for youth outdoor recreation.

Berggren was in his final year serving on the commission.

Berggren is survived by his wife, Jeanne; son, Pat and his wife, Tristan; son, Kevin; daughter, Becky; and grandchildren Katelyn and Kaleb. ■



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN

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Prairie Crabapple - a Species on the Edge

This little tree now appears to be rare in our state.

By Gerry Steinauer, Botanist

A cloudy, dreary day last April found me hunting mushrooms at Indian Cave State Park. Although having trudged up and down steep wooded hills for nearly an hour, my bag contained but a single, lonely morel and my enthusiasm waned. Then, cresting a ridge, I spied a small, white-flowering tree across a grassy opening. Could this be the rare prairie crabapple? It was. Mushroom hunting forgotten, I returned to my car for my camera with a quickened step.

Also called the Iowa crabapple, *Malus ioensis* ranges across the Midwest growing in the partial shade of open oak woods and woodland edges. In Nebraska it prefers limestone-derived soils and is limited to southeastern counties along the Missouri River, the exception being two isolated populations along the Niobrara River in Brown and Holt counties. Native Americans made use of the hard, yellow, waxy-skinned apples and may have deliberately or accidentally moved seed to establish these far-flung populations.

A coarse shrub or small tree reaching 20 feet in height, prairie crabapple has reddish brown to gray bark, which is thin and fissured, and crooked branches armed with stout 1.5 inch-long thorns to dissuade browsers. The main stem is often surrounded by a thicket of basal sprouts that are especially thorny. The sprouting habit and thorns make it an undesirable ornamental; although, domestic cultivars have been developed, one being the Bechtel's Flowering Crabapple. Our native crabapple is distinguished from common ornamental crabapples from Eurasia by its shallow-lobed leaves, more prominent thorns and larger, up to 1.5 inch-wide, yellowish fruits.

Prairie crabapple's sweetly fragrant, white to rose-pink flowers open in early spring, and the fruits ripen in September and October. They are best harvested in late autumn after the leaves have fallen and can be stored for weeks before use. Eastern tribes buried the bitter, acidic fruits over winter to mellow their flavor; a valuable practice passed on to early settlers who used the apples to make cider, jelly and preserves. Few birds and mammals eat the fruits.

In his 1973 book *Woody Plants of the North Central Plains*, Kansas botanist H. A. "Steve" Stephens wrote that the prairie crabapple was "fairly common in southeastern Nebraska." Unfortunately, this little tree now appears to be rare in our state. Due to fire suppression, many of our once open oak woods have developed thick subcanopies of fire-



Prairie crabapple petals range in color from white to rose-pink; although, I have only seen white-flowered individuals at Indian Cave State Park.

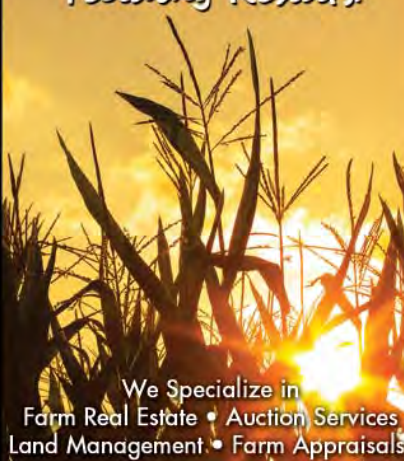


To dissuade browsers, prairie crabapples are armed with sharply-pointed, sometimes branched thorns (modified twigs).

intolerant hackberry, ironwood and rough dogwood, and are now too shady for the crabapple. Historically, Native Americans and early settlers frequently set fire to the woods limiting tree densities. Over the last decade, I have encountered only five prairie crabapples in Indian Cave's nearly 2,400 acres of woodlands. The species is, however, notoriously hard to find unless in bloom.

The consistent use of prescribed fire in oak woodlands can thin tree densities enhancing habitat for the crabapple. This practice is now underway at Indian Cave, but few other woodlands in the region. So for now, the prairie crabapple remains: a species living on the edge. ■

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These photos of my uncle Everett "Fuzzy" Stilwell were taken sometime between the 1930s and 1950s. The picture with the hides and coyote head skins was taken on the Valentine Wildlife Refuge southwest of Valentine where Fuzzy stayed when he trapped for the Refuge. As I recall, he was paid so much for every coyote head skin he turned in. He did on many occasions have the talent to call in coyotes; he could make a call like a rabbit in distress, and it would attract coyotes in, which he then shot.

When he trapped for the government, he stayed in a bunkhouse on the east side of the Refuge buildings. In the off season, when he wasn't trapping for the government, he worked for a rancher during the haying season. In between, he hunted and fished and literally lived off the land. He had a jeep which had a flatbed, and he built a small camper in which he kept a sleeping bag, fishing gear and guns and ammo.

The Omaha World-Herald did an article on him in the 1950s in which he was referred to as "The Viking of the Sandhills." Fuzzy spent his life in Cherry County and was the eldest of 15 siblings. He never married, but after the World-Herald article, he had at least two proposals from ladies who wanted to marry up with him.

— Fran Crowe
McCool Junction, Nebraska

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What to Do With All That Goose

Three goose recipes that will take care of snacks, lunch and dinner.

By Julie Geiser

By the time April is here many goose hunters will have a freezer full of goose meat. Finding different ways of preparing that meat can be a challenge in many households. At our house we love goose hunting and goose meat – from big Canadas to snags taken during the Light Goose Conservation Order.

Goose jerky is a hit with everyone. Mix your own spices or order them like we do from suppliers like LEM for a variety of jerky flavors.

One of my favorite comfort foods is a creamy goose roast made in the crock-pot. The meat will melt in your mouth and is a quick and easy way to prepare a savory meal.

Corned goose is another delicious way to prepare goose. Use it for Reuben sandwiches, casseroles, or chip meat gravy over toast or mashed potatoes. Serve sliced pieces as an appetizer or a snack with cheese and crackers, or chop corned goose in a blender to incorporate into your favorite dip. Corned goose will also freeze well, ready for those last-minute meals, picnics or gatherings.

Goose Jerky

Prep Time: 9 hours

Cooking Time: 2.5 hours

Ingredients:

- 5 pounds of goose meat
- 1 LEM seasoning package or 4 ounces of homemade

seasoning to process 5 pounds of meat

1. Wrap the breast meat separately in wax paper and freeze until it is slightly frozen; this will make it easier to slice the breasts into thin, uniform strips.

2. Cut meat across the grain into 1/8-inch strips with a sharp knife or electric slicer. Add water to seasonings, following directions on the package. Place the strips of meat into the marinade for at least 8 hours; overnight is better to get good flavor.

3. Remove the strips from the marinade and place on a cookie sheet. Place in a 200 degree oven and leave the oven door cracked open. Bake for 1 hour and 15 minutes per side or until desired texture and dryness is reached. Or you can use a dehydrator. Store jerky in baggies. Refrigerate or freeze for later use.

Goose Breast Roast

Servings: 4

Prep Time: 20 minutes

Cooking Time: 6-8 hours

Ingredients:

- 2 goose breasts
- 6-8 slices of bacon
- 1 cup of carrots, thinly sliced
- 1 cup celery, thinly sliced

- 1/2 cup of onion, chopped
- Lemon pepper, season salt, Mrs. Dash or your favorite seasonings to taste
- 1/2 cup instant coffee granules
- 1 can cream of mushroom, chicken or celery soup

1. Cut the silver skin off the goose breast, turn breast on its side and cut a pocket into each breast. Using 1/4 cup of instant coffee granules per breast, rub the granules inside the pocket and on the outside of the meat. Season each breast inside and out with remaining seasonings.

2. Next, stuff each breast with as much of the carrots, celery and onion as you can, then wrap each breast with 3 or 4 slices of bacon, overlapping the bacon as you go to hold the bacon ends in place. Use toothpicks if needed.

3. Place breasts with the cut or pocket-side up in a crock-pot, and then cover with a can of your favorite cream soup. Add more carrots, celery and onion on top of the soup. Cook on high for about 6-8 hours (depending on the crock-pot used) or until meat is tender and falls apart with a fork.

Corned Goose

Servings: 1 goose breast makes 3 Reuben sandwiches

Prep Time: 7 days

Cooking Time: about 2 hours

Ingredients:

- 4-6 goose breasts (sliced in half to reduce thickness, optional) or 8-10 duck breasts
- 2 1/2 tablespoons of Tender Quick
- 1 tablespoon of brown sugar (add more for a sweeter taste)
- 1/2 tablespoon of ground mustard seed
- 1/2 tablespoon of ground bay leaves

- 1/3 tablespoon of black pepper
- 1/2 tablespoon of ground paprika
- 1/2 tablespoon of ground allspice
- 1/2 tablespoon of garlic powder

1. Begin by cutting the silver skin off the meat.
2. Mix all the spices in a blender. Then place meat in a 1 gallon plastic baggie. Coat the meat with the spices and shake well; be sure that all meat is covered with spices.
3. Place the baggie in the refrigerator and cure for 7 days. Make sure that bag is lying flat – no meat should overlap. Squeeze or move meat pieces and flip the bag over once a day during the 7 days.

4. After seven days bake the meat in an oven bag. Cut holes in the top of the oven bag and use flour in the bag as the oven bag directions state. Place meat in the oven cooking bag and cook at 325 degrees for 1:45 to 2 hours. Remove meat from the oven bag immediately or the meat will get mushy. Slice and eat or freeze. ■



PHOTO BY DOUG STEINKE

PHOTOS BY JULIE GEISER

N See a video on how to prepare corned goose.





A Fishing Photographer

Rods, reels and tackle ... and camera.

This is the checklist for a fishing photographer, one who doesn't know if they are on the clock until something happens. That "something" is usually active fish. As a photographer who loves to shoot fighting fish, I would not always suggest April as the best time when largemouth bass images are the desired choice.

May and June are usually the top months for this, as the frequency of catches, and opportunities for action shots, increase. Yet last April, while fishing at Papio D-4 lake in north Omaha, the fish provided a month's worth of action photos by lunchtime.

Fish repeatedly slammed into our spinnerbaits and crankbaits, as the often-stated declaration "There he is ..." was voiced by my fishing partner.

I'd put down my rod and reel, move to a float cushion in the john boat's flatbottom, and go to work.

In an effort to not put any additional stress on the fish, set-up shots are not encouraged. I shoot what I can, all the way to the angler's hand, then trade my camera back for my rod-and-reel and get back to fishing hoping, almost immediately, that my fishing gets interrupted once again.

Jeff Kurrus, Editor
March 3, 2016



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