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Cover: Smith Falls is a sight to see in late-February. Smith Falls State Park is in Cherry County.

JUSTIN HAAG

This page: Sunrise and ice on a Nebraska wetland near Aurora. To see more photos like this, see story on page 20.

CHRIS HELZER

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magazine

Published by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission since 1926. The Commission is dedicated to the conservation and protection of all the state's natural resources and the people who use them.



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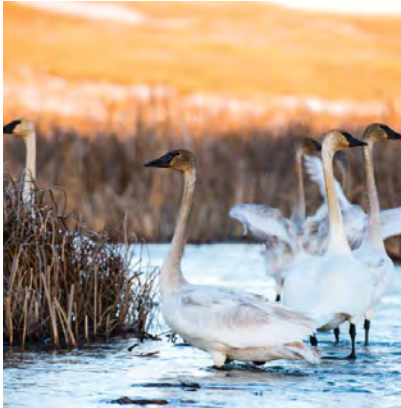
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Rates: \$18 for one year; \$33 for two years; \$44 for three years. Nebraska recipients must add appropriate sales tax. To subscribe call 1-800-NEBLAND (632-5263), or go online to: NebraskalandMagazine.com.

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Trumpeter swans may be found feeding on open water or in fields. ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

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Prescribed Fire Training Workshops

A series of workshops will be held around the state in 2022 to provide guidance and instruction for completing safe and effective prescribed fires. These workshops are for landowners, resource professionals, volunteer fire departments and others interested in burning. No prior burn experience is necessary to participate.

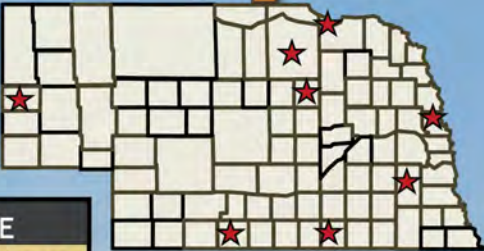
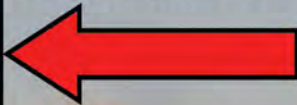


Table with 4 columns: DATE, TOWN, LOCATION, TIME. Rows include workshops in Arapahoe, Ericson, Stuart, Niobrara, Lincoln, Blair, Scottsbluff, and Nelson.

Introduction to Prescribed Fire



Topics include:
Equipment Preparation Techniques
Weather Forecasting
Fire Behavior
Fireline Positions
Safety

Table with 4 columns: DATE, ADVANCED WORKSHOPS, LOCATION, TIME. Rows include workshops for February 16th, February 24th, and March 2nd.

Registration fee of \$10 for basic workshops includes meal and training materials. Visit www.NebraskaPF.com/prescribed-fire/ to register.

Join a Prescribed Burn Association

Prescribed burn associations are a collection of landowners, land managers, and volunteers who pool time, equipment, and knowledge to help each other get prescribed fire on the ground within their communities. There are many existing burn associations across the state and opportunity for new ones to be formed. Contact Brian Teeter at 402-219-2572 or bteeter@pheasantsforever.org to find one nearest you or to start your own.



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Please include your postal address and telephone number. Letters may be condensed and edited. Photographs are also welcome.

WILD TURKEYS

Wild turkeys (*Meleagris gallopavo*) feed along a Platte River slough on a winter evening in Hall County.

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND





McCOY OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE FUTURE OF NEBRASKA GAME AND PARKS

By Jeff Kurrus

Commissioners at the Nebraska Game and Parks appointed Tim McCoy in September to become the agency's new director. "I am honored to be selected as the director of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission," McCoy said. "It is a unique privilege to lead the stewardship of Nebraska's fish, wildlife and park resources and provide diverse opportunities for outdoor recreation."

McCoy has extensive experience in leading the Commission — and has been successful at building positive relationships with sportspersons, partners, state leaders, conservation organizations, landowners and agency staff. He has served as deputy director since July 2012, and in previous roles as the agency's wildlife division administrator and agriculture program manager in Lincoln. He joined Game and Parks in 2002 as a district manager in the wildlife division in Kearney.

"Tim has the education, experience, knowledge, skills and abilities to successfully lead the Commission," said Commission

chairman Dan Kreitman. "As commissioners, we are honored to volunteer with Game and Parks and work directly with Tim, connecting people to our natural resources and supporting conservation in Nebraska."

McCoy grew up on a southwestern Nebraska farm, near Arapahoe, where he developed his passion for outdoor pursuits and curiosity about fish, wildlife and their habitats. He feels a deep sense of responsibility for the resources that Game and Parks manages, McCoy said, and knows these resources are in good hands.

"We are successful and are poised for future success because of our great employees and our partners. They are professional, passionate, skilled, and are the most important assets of this agency," McCoy said. "I look forward to working with all of them to manage our cherished resources and provide abundant opportunities for outdoor recreation that make our quality of life in Nebraska so great."

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and staff welcome Tim McCoy as our director.

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WAITING 50 YEARS TO BE TOLD

By Joel G. Jorgensen

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission occasionally receives animal mounts from individuals who want or need to unload them but do not want to see them go straight to the garbage bin. These donations, if in acceptable condition, can be used for education or to spruce up a public space. Usually the mounts the agency receives possess little or no information about where the animal was harvested or collected, as most are decades old. This was the case for an unusual goose mount that has been in the Lincoln Headquarters for quite some time. In fact, it is not known how or when the specimen got here, but it sat quietly in our building for at least 15 years waiting to tell its story.

It was not until I was looking up some old information in the state’s ornithological journal, *The Nebraska Bird Review*, when I realized a photograph of a purported barnacle goose harvested in Otoe County in November 1968 by Milton Muncie appeared rather similar to our “goosey” office decor. Upon closer inspection, it was confirmed the bird in the photograph and the mount in the office were one and the same.

Barnacle geese are a Eurasian species and, at the time, Muncie’s prize was reported as a Nebraska first. However, records of barnacle geese in North America before the early 2000s were generally dismissed as representing escaped domestic birds because the species is also kept in captivity in North America. This conclusion has been shown to be incorrect as wild barnacle geese that nest in Greenland do, on occasion, reach North America. So, is it safe to conclude the Nebraska specimen is a wild bird? Not necessarily, but possessing its feathers provides the opportunity to find out.

Feathers are composed of keratin and are a product of the environment in which they were produced. This means some atoms and molecules a bird ingests through its diet will ultimately be preserved in feathers a bird grows at specific times. Keratin does not change or break down over time, and certain atoms, specifically isotopes, vary with weather conditions. Stable isotope analysis is a technique where a feather’s signature can be matched to certain areas of the world. In this case, a northerly signature would suggest a wild bird and a temperate signature would suggest an escaped captive bird. Long story short, stable isotope analysis showed that this bird grew its feathers at the northern location in Canada or Greenland, thus suggesting a wild bird.

Is this the end of the story? There is one final twist. Upon review, it was determined this “barnacle goose” was, in

fact, a hybrid. Making absolute conclusions about parent species of avian hybrids can be a risky venture, but plumage characteristics suggest this goose is a barnacle/cackling goose hybrid, with the latter species previously known as the small form of the Canada goose. Interestingly, the goose was harvested in a flock of Arctic-breeding cackling geese, or hutchies, as they are sometimes called. As cackling geese are rarely — if ever — kept as exotic pets in North America, the case for a wild origin of this hybrid bird only grew stronger.

Nebraska has no other accepted records of barnacle geese, but the evidence this bird possessed in its feathers shows wild birds are capable of migrating to our state. It is a story that was just waiting 50 years to be told. A more complete summary of this study is presented in the latest edition of *The Nebraska Bird Review*.

Joel G. Jorgensen is the nongame bird program manager for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.



Scientific analysis of feather samples from this goose harvested in 1968 revealed important clues about its origins. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

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Grand Island, Nebraska



Photo by Rick Rasmussen



Pan-seared northern pike fillets seasoned with pesto and wrapped in pork prosciutto. JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND

PROSCIUTTO-WRAPPED NORTHERN PIKE

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

Servings: 2

Prep Time: 5 minutes

Cooking Time: 10 minutes

Ingredients:

- 2 northern pike fillets, boneless
- 4 slices of prosciutto
- 2 tablespoons of pesto
- Freshly cracked pepper
- 1 tablespoon of olive oil
- Lemon wedges

1. Cut each pike fillet in half to make 4 pieces. Spread pesto on one side of each

piece. Sprinkle freshly cracked pepper on top.

2. Roll each piece of fish and carefully wrap with a slice of prosciutto. Secure with two toothpicks.

3. Heat oil in a non-stick skillet over medium high. Carefully cook each piece of fish to brown the prosciutto on all sides. You can remove the toothpicks halfway to three-quarters of the way through cooking when the rolls can hold their shape. Cook until the pike is cooked through.

4. Serve immediately with lemon wedges.

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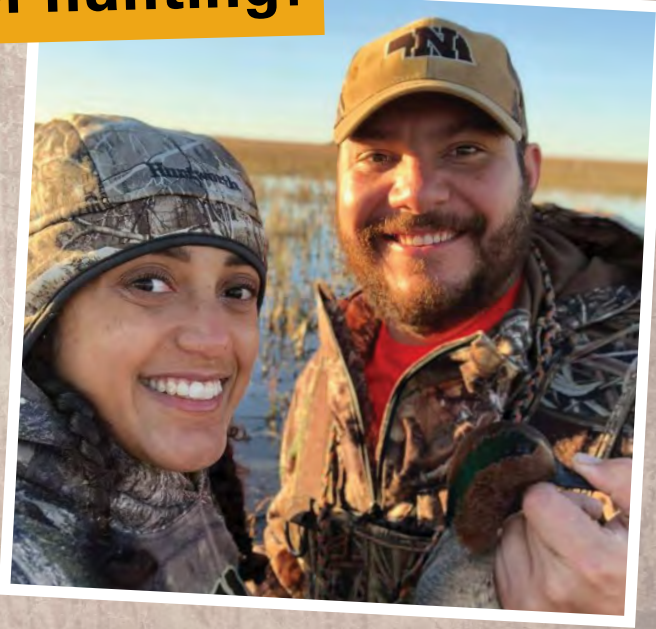
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A Winter Hike

A Great Time to Observe Nature

Story and photos by Chris Helzer

Anyone can hike on a warm day, surrounded by birdsong and verdant meadows of wildflowers. The world is full of sights and sounds. But in the winter? That sounds ridiculous. It's cold outside, the plants are all brown and animals are either hibernating or vacationing in warmer places. What are you supposed to do, tromp through the snow, bundled up like that one kid in that one movie? Well, yes.

Whether you explore the local trail or head out to your favorite state park or recreation area, plenty of animals, animal signs and other winter attractions will make your trip worthwhile. Sure, it's nippy out there, but throw on an extra layer, find that second glove and go see what's happening in the world. Here are four great reasons to leave your cozy home and venture into the cold.

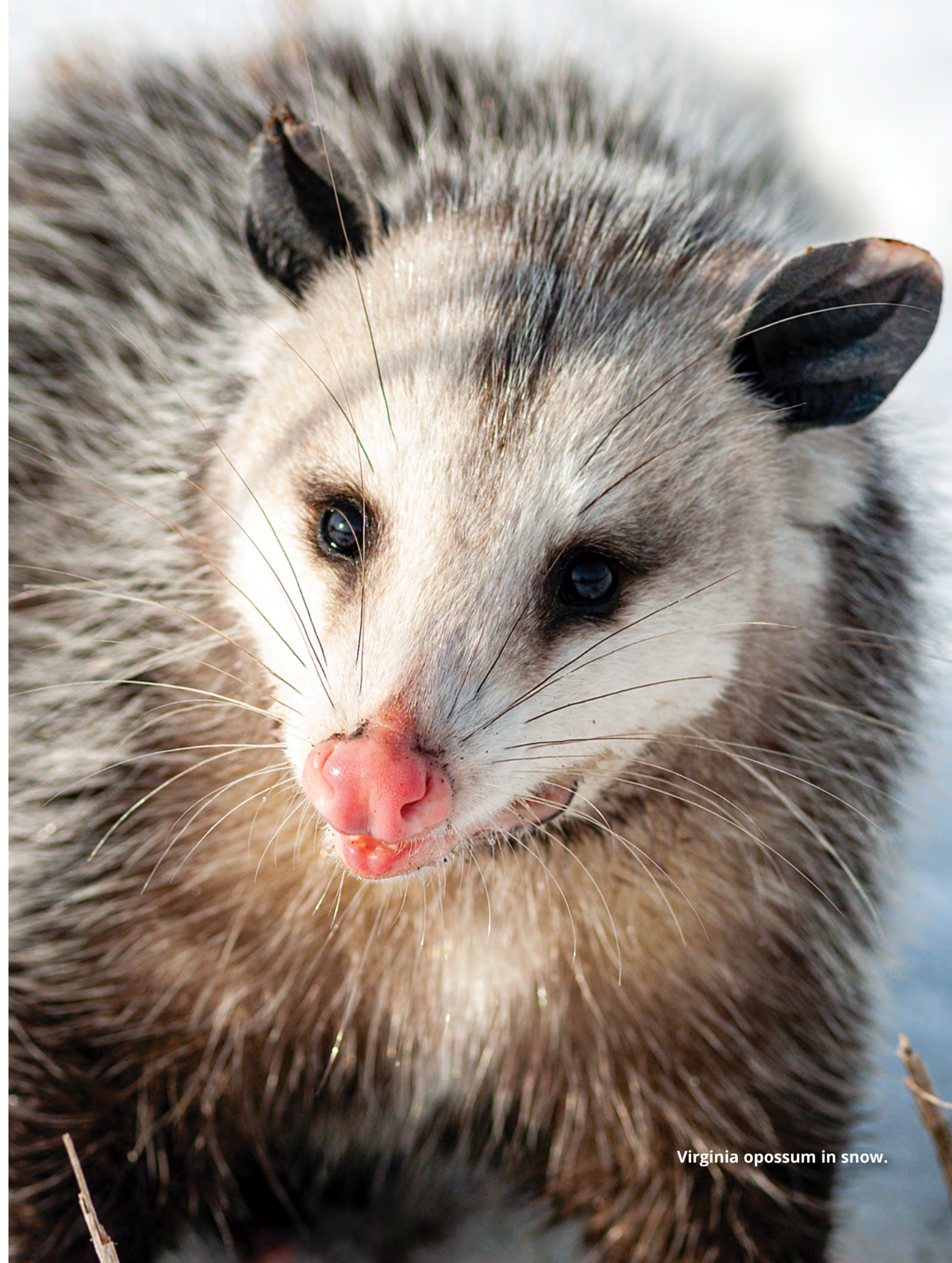
No. 1 Animals

While many animals either migrate out of Nebraska or enter a dormant state during the winter, many others are still active, at least some of the time. Large mammals, such as deer, can sometimes be easier to see in the winter than the summer, in part because the absence of leaves on trees makes it harder for them to hide in woodlands. Coyotes, foxes, opossums and other medium-sized mammals often are out and about, too, especially on warmer days.

Winter brings opportunities to see a different suite of bird species than can be spotted during the rest of the year. Juncos, Harris' sparrows, tree sparrows, Lapland longspurs and bald eagles are just a few species that are either



Water boatman in ice.



Virginia opossum in snow.



Leopard frogs moving beneath ice.

exclusively or more commonly found during the winter. Species like meadowlarks and horned larks establish and defend individual breeding territories during the summer, but form roving gangs during the winter, providing opportunities to see lots of them at the same time.

Despite their reputation as harbingers of spring, flocks of American robins also can commonly be seen during the winter, searching for fruits on eastern red cedar and other trees. Upland game birds, including northern bobwhites, ring-necked pheasants, sharp-tailed grouse and greater prairie chickens, can be flushed up in big groups, depending upon which part of the state you're in.

If you're willing to look a little more closely, smaller animals are around during these months, too. Walking along the edge of frozen lakes and wetlands can sometimes reveal animals either in or under the ice, including numerous insects. Some of these insects become encased in ice because they died and then were captured by the freezing water. Others might simply be in a dormant state, their cells prevented from rupturing by a kind of natural antifreeze produced by their bodies. If you're lucky, you might even stumble across frogs moving around slowly beneath a thin layer of ice, breaking all the rules you learned in elementary school about cold-blooded animals.

Speaking of surprisingly mobile creatures in cold weather, a number of invertebrates stay active during the winter, even



Ant walking on snow.

on very cold days. Examples include some ants, spiders and one species of springtail called the snow flea. Snow fleas are tiny and abundant invertebrates that spend most of their time feeding on organic matter near the surface of the soil, including underneath layers of snow. Sometimes, however, and for reasons yet to be discovered, they'll appear on top of the snow in large congregations, looking like dirty snow when viewed from a distance.

No. 2 Tracks and Other Signs

Spotting animals during a winter hike is fun, but your success often relies upon good fortune as much as outdoor expertise. On the other hand, if you enjoy a little detective work, you can always find signs of animal activity, even if you don't see the animals themselves. Tracks, scat and other animal signs are all over the place during the winter. Fresh snow, of course, provides an especially great opportunity to find clues about animal behavior.

Footprints are probably the easiest way to see what critters are up to. If you have the patience, you can follow a set of tracks for hours, noting where an animal changes direction, where it stops to feed or mark its territory, and — eventually — where it shelters overnight or during inclement weather. If you're lucky, you can even come across evidence of interactions between animals, including large wing prints in the snow at the end of a long trail of mouse tracks.

If you are particularly observant while hiking through the snow, you can learn a lot about the favorite winter foods of various animals. You can often find either neat piles or scattered arrays of empty seed hulls on top of the snow. Combining that evidence with the tracks leading to and from that site can often tell you what kinds of seeds are being eaten by birds, mice or other small creatures.



River otter tracks on ice.



Grouse tracks.

One seed-bearing plant that doesn't get nearly enough credit for its value as bird food during the winter is ragweed. Ragweed pollen can be nightmarish for hay fever sufferers but makes up for that by producing numerous seeds that provide attractive forage for many different bird species through the winter months. It's common to find a mass of songbird tracks scattered around and through a ragweed patch after a snowfall,



Ragweed seeds.



Indiangrass seeds disturbed by a feeding animal.

and if you hang out nearby for long enough, you'll likely get a chance to watch the birds return to finish their meal.

No. 3 Winter Shelters

With or without snow, careful observation can reveal where various animals are sheltering from cold weather. Some are obvious, like the large, matted patches of grass where deer hide out in tall prairie vegetation. Others are more subtle and require a keen eye to discover.

On cold mornings, the burrows of small mammals can sometimes be found by looking for an excess of frost near the entrances. Following tracks through snow, of course, makes that even easier if snow is available. Some mice eschew the underground life and make nests of fluffy seeds, feathers or fur either on the ground or in the branches of eastern red cedar or other trees.

Many invertebrates create winter shelters, too. Some, like praying mantises, build structures to keep their eggs safe until they hatch in the spring. Others burrow inside plant stems or other structures. In some cases, the presence of an insect inside a plant is given away by the "gall" produced as a



Bird tracks in ragweed patch.



Goldenrod galls.



A jumping spider takes winter shelter inside a leaf attached to prairie grass.

into glittering wonderlands. Hoarfrost, advection frost and rime are all formed in different ways, but create similarly spectacular results. Sometimes, magical foggy mornings turn everything in sight white with frost, but even patchy frost in low-lying areas or around ponds or other water sources is worth venturing out to admire.

Snow, especially combined with wind, also can create magnificent displays. Snow drifts make for sore shoulders and backs when they block your garage door or sidewalk, but they sure are pretty out in the wild. In addition to providing a canvas for animal tracks, grass leaves, branches or other structures also can trace fascinating patterns in fresh snow when guided by a strong breeze.

Hiking isn't a three-season activity. Winter may not provide wildflowers, bird song, butterflies or even the red and gold leaves of autumn, but there is still plenty out there to make it worth lacing up your boots. There's a good chance you'll spot some wildlife, and even if you don't, signs of life will be there if you look hard enough. Any day is a good day for a winter hike, but a frosty morning or fresh snow should stimulate you to drop anything you can and head out the door. Spring will come eventually, but in the meantime, enjoy these fruits of winter. [N](#)

Chris Helzer is the Nature Conservancy's director of science in Nebraska and a regular contributor to Nebraskaland Magazine.



Frost on stems on wetland.



Grass leaves and circles.



Chinese mantis egg case in snowy prairie.

response by that plant to the invasion. One of the most common and recognizable of those is found on goldenrod plants. A fly larva spends the winter inside those golf ball-sized masses, waiting to emerge as an adult in the spring — unless parasitoid wasps or woodpeckers get to it first.

Some spiders and moths use silk to build winter hideouts. Silk moths of various species overwinter in cocoons constructed with silk and leaves or other plant materials. Some adult spiders create insulated winter lodging in a similar manner. If you look carefully for small, odd-shaped masses of leaves stuck to grasses or branches, you might find some of those shelters.

No. 4 Patterns

In addition to animals and their various signs, there are lots of other vignettes of natural beauty available to winter hikers. Sunrise hikes after a snow or on a frosty morning are especially great for finding interesting patterns. As an extra bonus, low-angled and low-intensity morning light can produce excellent conditions for photographing those discoveries if you so desire.

Accumulations of frost crystals can highlight the edges of leaves and stems, transforming dull brown landscapes



Cattail seeds on ice.

Outdoor Nebraska

By Renae Blum

A clear, starry sky, a crisp winter hike and an afternoon spent ice fishing — these are just a few delights available to anyone wanting to get outdoors this month. There is more to do than you might think! **N**



Ice fishing at Smith Lake

As conditions allow | Smith Lake Wildlife Management Area

Many Sandhills lakes are good for ice fishing, but Smith Lake is a standout, with a long record of great ice fishing. It's a classic Sandhills lake, relatively shallow with lots of aquatic vegetation — and a very productive fishery, with some big northern pike and largemouth bass as well.

BOB GRIER, NEBRASKALAND



Winter hiking for wildlife viewing

Throughout the month | Statewide

Now is a good time to view wildlife while hiking, especially with fewer people around to spook them off. State parks are always a good bet, as are wildlife management areas and anywhere with water. (Though, you can find wildlife just about anywhere, including your own backyard.) Wear layers, bring binoculars and a journal, and have fun.

CHRIS MASADA



Stargazing

Moonless nights for best viewing
Statewide

Some of the most transparent and crystal-clear starry skies can be seen this time of year, offering a spectacular view for those willing to brave the winter chill. Nebraska's state parks offer some of the darkest skies on the planet, making them great places for stargazing. Dress warm, bring a friend, get a star map and learn your constellations.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

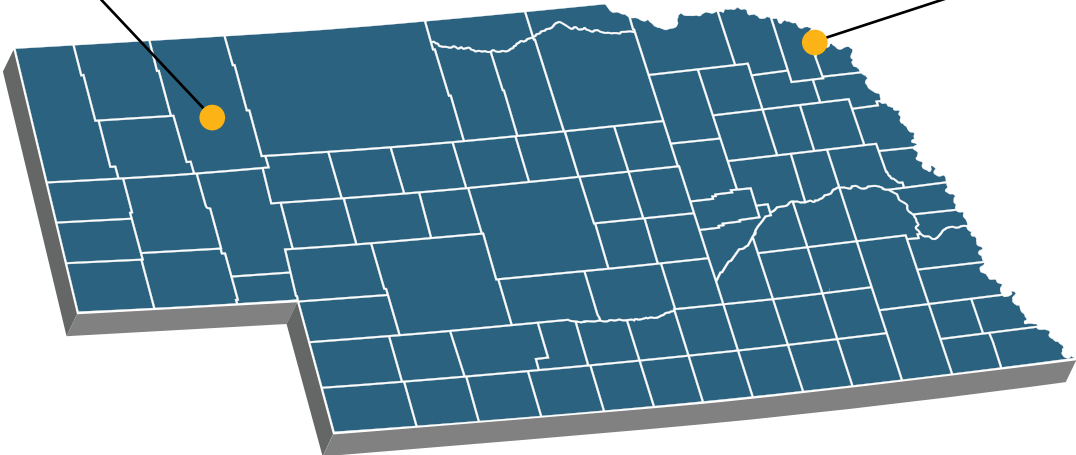


Birds and Breakfast event

Feb. 11-12 | Ponca State Park

Enjoy a Valentine's Day escape at Ponca State Park. This getaway package includes a 30 percent discount on lodging, as well as breakfast and bird tours and counts with experts from the Loess Hills Audubon Society. Learn more at [Calendar.OutdoorNebraska.gov](https://calendar.outdoornebraska.gov) or by calling the park at 402-755-2284.

JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND



Prepare for spring hunting

Throughout the month | Statewide

Spring hunting is on the horizon, and now is the time to do a little dreaming. This could be your year to hunt gobblers in the Panhandle. Start planning now — lock in your vacation days, seek permission for private land access and go through your gear. It can all make a big difference.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



A Historic Gathering

Story and photos by Eric Fowler



My phone almost always rings when whooping cranes show up in the central Platte River valley. A good friend, who simply appreciates seeing the tallest and rarest bird in North America, called in early November. So did another. There weren't just a few whooping cranes on the river: There were a lot of them.

When I had a chance to head west from Lincoln with my camera on Nov. 7, I was rewarded with something that was not just rare, it also was unprecedented: a historic gathering of 46 whooping cranes on the Platte. It was the most recorded anywhere in

North America outside a fall migration staging area in Saskatchewan and their wintering grounds at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on the Gulf Coast in Texas.

On that morning, the birds congregated on the river just a half-mile downstream of the South Alda Road bridge on land owned by the Crane Trust, one of many groups working to manage the river and surrounding landscape for whooping cranes and other species. The Central Platte Natural Resources District viewing deck and roadside at the bridge were filled with birdwatchers

who flocked there to witness the gathering.

Crane Trust staff and volunteers joined me at a Trust viewing blind above the river.

"It's just amazing to see that many whooping cranes all at once," said Colleen Childers of Grand Island after watching and photographing the birds. "We're part of history!"

On several mornings each week in the spring and fall, Childers is above the river in a Cessna, counting whooping cranes on the river and in nearby fields as part of an official survey conducted by Headwaters Corporation for the

Platte River Recovery Implementation Program.

Those flights had documented 11 other whoopers on the Platte that day, including eight at the National Audubon Society's Lillian Annette Rowe Sanctuary near Gibbon and three more on Platte River Recovery Implementation Program property. That single day count of 57, repeated each day Nov. 3-8, was an all-time high on the Platte, topping the previous record of 35 from the spring of 2018 and smashing the previous fall record of 20 in 2019.

The count was roughly 11 percent

of the 506 birds in the migratory population that breeds at Wood Buffalo National Park in Canada and winters in Texas, following a 200-mile-wide migration route between those areas.

A day earlier, the same group of 46 whoopers, representing every bird crews had spotted on the 20 miles of river between Shelton and Doniphan, were spotted in a nearby cornfield.

Mallory Jaymes, a biologist who coordinates the survey flights for Headwaters, said the first whooping cranes to arrive in Nebraska on their southward migration this fall were

A group of 46 whooping cranes, the largest ever recorded on the Platte River in central Nebraska, forage on the river downstream of the South Alda Road bridge, as a flock of sandhill cranes flies overhead on Nov. 7, 2021.



Above: A flock of 37 whooping cranes, part of a larger group of 46 that gathered downstream of the South Alda Road bridge, loaf and play on the Platte River as sandhill cranes feed in a meadow owned and managed by the Crane Trust in Hall County.

Opposite: Colleen Childers of Grand Island and others watch from the Central Platte Natural Resources District viewing deck near the South Alda Road bridge in hopes of seeing whooping cranes return to roost on the Platte River on the evening of Nov. 7.

three adults spotted at Rowe Sanctuary on Oct. 23. Three other groups totaling 19 birds were spotted on Oct. 31. More arrived Nov. 1 and 2, but with survey flights scratched for poor weather, they weren't officially counted until Nov. 3. For nearly a week, 57 whoopers were present on the river. They began leaving under north winds on Nov. 8. The last birds to head south, a family group of two adults and a juvenile, departed Nov. 17.

The survey flights have been conducted daily, weather permitting, since 2001 and from early March to

mid-April and early October to mid-November. Each morning before sunrise, two planes leave airports in Kearney and Grand Island with a pilot and two trained observers, each flying half of the 90-mile stretch of river between Lexington and Chapman searching for whooping cranes. On their return flight to the airports, they fly transects to survey specific wetlands. Observations from the air are confirmed by crews on the ground coordinated by Headwaters Corporation. The surveys are designed to determine how whooping cranes

are responding to land and water management activities in the Platte Valley.

In all, the surveys determined that 88 whooping cranes stopped on the Platte this fall. This established a new record for the fall, topping the previous high of 42 in 2019. The top count in the spring was 120 in 2018. Surveys conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service located additional whooping cranes, bringing the total count to 97, 20 percent of the migratory population and matching the number in the population in 1987.

"We usually get quite a few more whoopers that stop in the spring than in the fall," Jaymes said. "We've had more individuals stop in the spring, but this fall is really the anomaly."

Jaymes said the ground observations can typically identify unique groups of cranes that make it possible to get an accurate count. That became impossible when the birds bunched up this fall. "Usually, they kind of stay within their family groups, and this group just kind of socialized, which was cool to see," she said.

Dave Baasch, the threatened and endangered species specialist with the Crane Trust, said the high daily counts of whooping cranes this fall were due to several factors lining up. Weather conditions delayed the migration and held birds in Saskatchewan. When conditions were favorable, many of them made it to the Platte River at once, and then strong southerly winds kept the birds here.

"It's never happened before, and it's possible that it could happen again, but not highly likely," Baasch said.

The whooping crane was one of

the first species to gain protection under the Endangered Species Act in 1970. The migratory population that passes through Nebraska twice each year had dipped to just 18 individuals in 1945, decimated by hunting and the loss of nesting habitat. The bird had never been abundant due in part to its delayed reproductive maturity and a reproduction rate of less than one chick annually. A record number of nests were observed in Canada this summer, and Baasch said the population could top 520 individuals when surveys are completed in Texas this winter.

A second migratory flock has been established that moves between Wisconsin, part of its historic nesting range that extended across the north-central U.S. into central Alberta, and Florida. A nonmigratory flock was restored in Louisiana. Between the three wild populations and captive birds, there are just 800 whooping cranes in the world.

While the birds don't always stop, the big bend reach of the Platte River in central Nebraska is one of four areas





in the U.S. determined to be critical habitat for the species. The Crane Trust, the Nature Conservancy, the Audubon Society, the Platte River Recovery and Implementation Program, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and others have worked to restore and protect habitat for the birds, as well as for other threatened and endangered species: the interior least tern, piping plover and pallid sturgeon. This work also benefits the roughly 1 million sandhill

cranes that stop each spring and other wildlife, too.

The day after the large group of cranes gathered near the South Alda Road bridge, I found more than 30 whooping cranes a few miles upriver on a stretch that flows between my friend's property and property owned and managed by the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program. I photographed them from a distance until they left to feed in the morning. I returned to the river when they did,

lying in brush on the bank for more than two hours as they loafed and foraged. A few juveniles playfully danced, but most of the birds simply stood facing into the strong north wind. By noon, most of the birds, one family group or small flock at a time, lifted their wings, put that wind to their back and continued their migration; the survey flight found just 17 birds on the river the following day.

I hope to see some of them again this spring. [N](#)

Above: A flock of whooping cranes spreads their wings and takes flight for a short trip across the river channel south of Wood River in Hall County.

Right top to bottom: A family group of whooping cranes shares the river with a flock of American white pelicans.

A quartet of whooping cranes flies over the Platte River.

Adult and juvenile whooping cranes roost on the river at sunrise.



The Blacksmith Shop

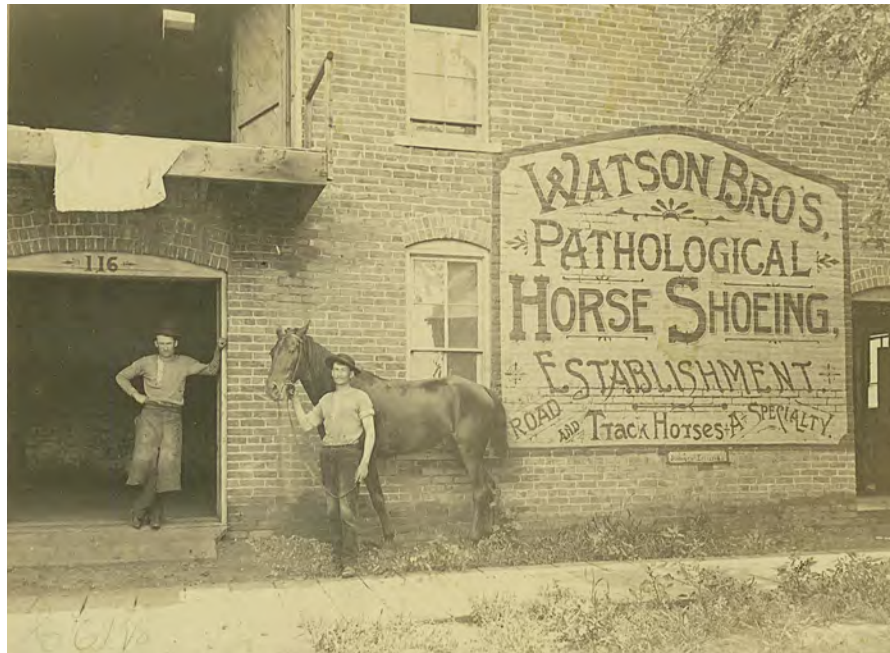
By David L. Bristow, History Nebraska

The blacksmith shop was always one of the first businesses established in any frontier community. It was hard to imagine a world without the clang of a hammer on an anvil. Blacksmithing is an ancient trade, dating back millennia to the time when bronze tools began to replace stone. Before the Industrial Revolution, every iron tool was custom-forged by a blacksmith. Such tools were expensive, and you didn't replace one if you could help it. You had it repaired.

The heart of the blacksmith shop was the forge, where metal was heated so it could be more easily worked. A forge had a bellows to make the fire hotter and regulate the heat. Near the forge stood an anvil of hardened steel, where the blacksmith shaped metal with a hammer and other tools. Curved objects were shaped around the anvil's horn. The anvil's "pritchel hole" was used when the blacksmith punched holes in a piece of metal. Special tools for cutting and shaping metal were attached to the anvil's square "hardy hole."

Mass-produced metal items eventually reduced demand for a blacksmith's custom-made products, but many shops adapted to changing technology. As farming became mechanized, and as newfangled automobiles required frequent repairs, some blacksmith shops evolved into mechanical shops. Others specialized as farriers — shoeing horses and mules — a trade that continues to this day. 

Visit [History Nebraska's website at history.nebraska.gov](http://HistoryNebraska.org).



Written on the back of this photo: "Photo from C.A. Duffield" and "Mr. C. W. Watson, Mr. O.S. Watson. In directory, 1890-91." History Nebraska RG3906-10-35



Polk County, Nebraska, circa 1910. History Nebraska RG2407-02-12



Blacksmith shop at Fort Robinson State Historical Park, 2013. Supplies and equipment were left in place when the army abandoned the fort in 1948. History Nebraska: author photo.



Photo by John Nelson, Ericson, NE, circa 1910. Jensen is probably the man standing in the doorway wearing a dirty leather apron and holding a hammer and punch. History Nebraska RG3906-10-35

Prairie Seeds in Winter

A Photo Exhibition

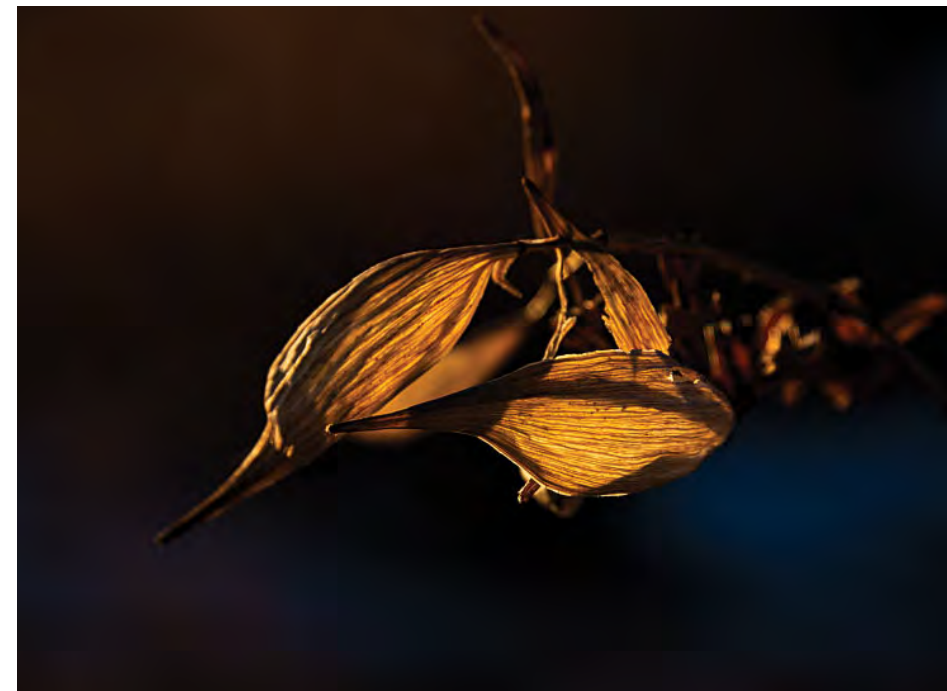
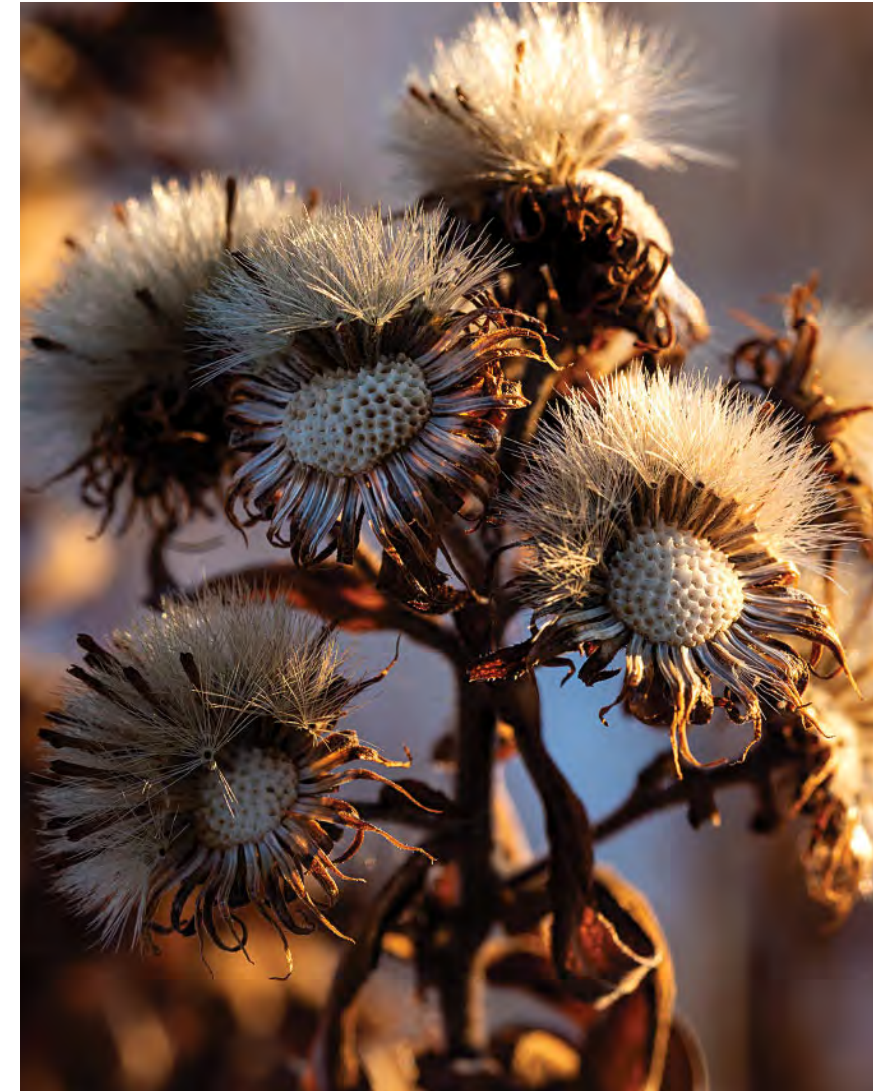
Photos and story by Gerry Steinauer

By autumn, the seeds of most prairie plants have fallen, and with luck, pounding rain, digging animals or winter frost heaving will work them into the soil to await germination. Some seeds, however, are stragglers — held in pods, shriveled fruits or tight bracts to face the elements of winter aboveground. Many of these will fall prey to hungry birds and mammals, and a lucky few will pass through the foragers' gut unharmed and be dispersed about the land. Others will fall onto snow or ice and, eventually, the melt will gently deposit them onto moist soil.

Last winter, I chose prairie seeds as a photographic pursuit. On several calm, often frosty, early mornings and late afternoons, I roamed local prairies and fields seeking photogenic seeds or seed heads. When found, framing them usually forced me down on my knees, butt or belly onto snow or frozen, hard ground. Clumsy gloves tossed aside, I operated my camera barehanded, my fingers turning cold, stiff and red. Fortunately, the excitement of the chase distracted my mind from the cold. Here are the results of my endeavor. 📷

Gold finches and other songbirds relish cup plant's large, nutritious seeds that consist of up to 33 percent protein, 24 percent fat and 9 percent carbohydrates. They also contain vital minerals, including potassium, calcium and iron. Individual plants can produce up to 0.4 pounds of seed, a treasure trove for birds.





Clockwise from top left: Common milkweed grows throughout eastern Nebraska in prairies, pastures and roadsides. Its seeds develop in spindle-shaped pods that split open in late summer releasing the seeds.

New England aster seed heads are commonly sown in eastern Nebraska prairie restorations, and its flowers attract numerous pollinators.

The pods of swamp milkweed sit empty. A major benefit of seed dormancy (see sidebar on page 45) is that it allows time for the wind, water or animals to disperse seed to new, possibly superior, habitats prior to germination.

Prairie rose fruits, called hips, turn from green to bright red as they ripen in late summer and contain several light brown, egg-shaped seeds. The hip's red color attracts sharp-tailed grouse, prairie chickens and other prairie fauna that consume and disperse the seeds.



Above: Papery, inflated husks surround the berries of common ground cherry, also called Chinese lantern. The green, unripe berries can be somewhat poisonous, but the yellow, ripe berries are edible and agreeably sweet with a hint of tomato. Plains tribes ate the berries raw and in sauces. This weedy perennial is common in pastures, roadsides and other disturbed sites statewide.

Left: The flower heads of rigid goldenrod, a member of the aster family, contain many small, individual flowers, each producing a hair-tufted seed. In this photo, most of the heads have shed their seeds.



Right: Maximilian's sunflower seeds are tightly bunched in bract-shrouded heads, the individual seeds resembling miniature domestic sunflower seeds. The plant grows to 6 feet tall and is common in eastern Nebraska prairies. In late summer, migrating monarchs flock to its flowers.

Below: Three wing-like bracts, called valves, encase dock seeds. Narrow-leaf dock valves have toothed edges whereas the valves of many other dock species have smooth edges. Introduced to North American from Russia, botanists first collected narrow-leaf dock in Nebraska in 1935, and it now occurs statewide in low, moist habitats.





Above: The frost-covered seed heads of common sunflower, a widespread annual in our state. A cultivar of this plant is the source of edible sunflower seeds.



Left: Grass seeds, called grains, are enclosed within sets of stiff bracts. The bracts of Canada wild-rye have long, arching awns, which clearly distinguish this species from other wild-ryes.

Seed Dormancy

Seeds are plants' life blood: its agent of dispersal to new habitats, as well as the foundation of its next generation. Seed dormancy is an adaptation to increase seed efficiency by delaying and staggering germination over time, allowing at least some seeds to sprout under conditions favorable for seedling survival and growth.

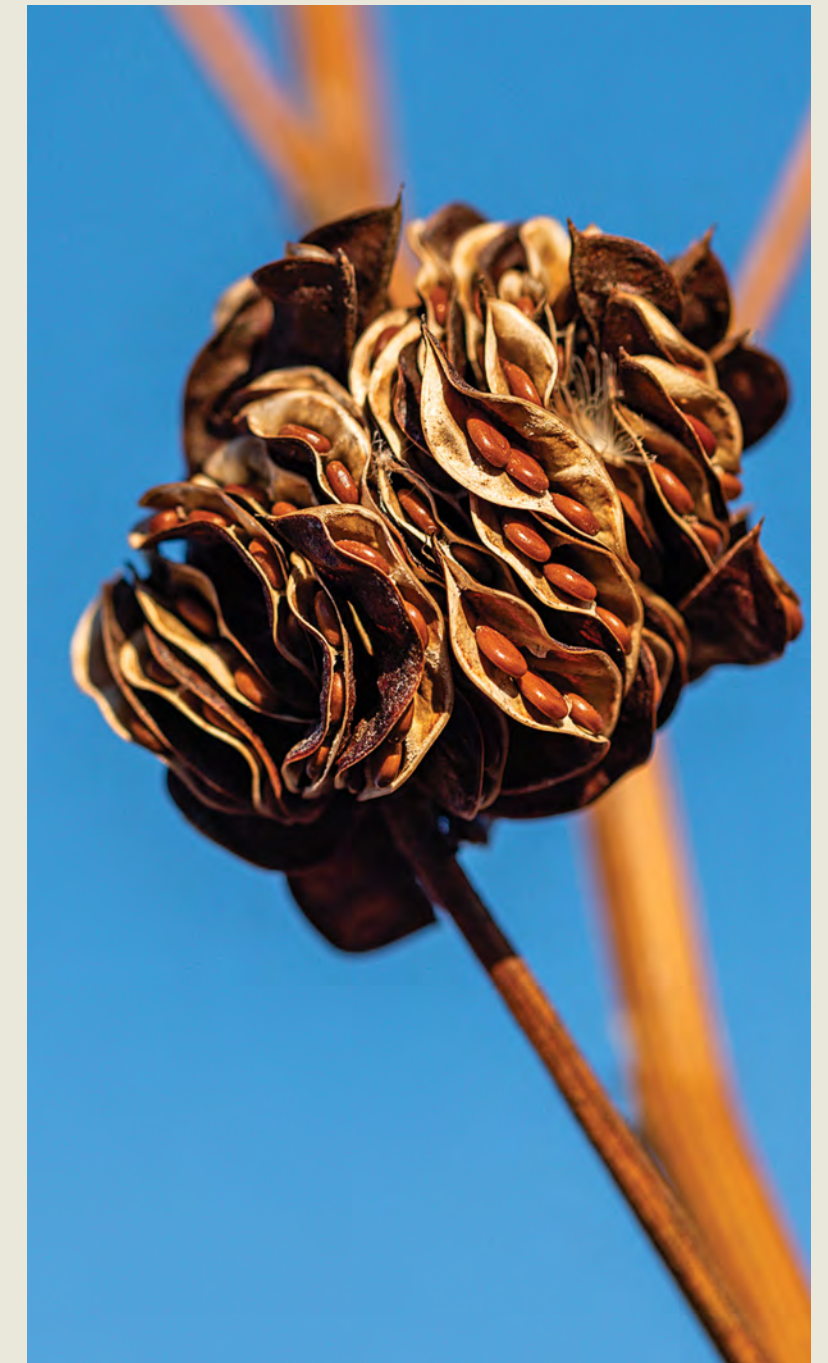
Dormancy provides plants many advantages. Key in our climate, the dormancy of most prairie wildflower and grass seeds are broken by exposure to the cold and dampness of winter. The seed coat softens or chemical changes occur within the seed, allowing the embryo to sprout in spring. Without dormancy, a potential worst-case scenario is that a plant's entire summer bounty of seed sprouts during a warm, wet spell in autumn, and winter's chill kills an entire generation of seedlings.

A far better strategy is for the precious seed to lay dormant in the soil through winter and sprout the following spring, allowing the seedlings to mature under the warm summer sun. Prairie restorationists typically plant seed in fall so it can naturally break dormancy over winter.

Exposure to sunlight breaks the dormancy of some buried seed, brought to the surface by erosion, tunneling animals or trampling by large ungulates. The hard seeds of starry false Solomon's seal and other plants are stimulated to germinate by passing through an animal's gut, where stomach acids or a gizzard's grinding action weaken the seed coat, allowing water uptake and the seed to sprout.

The seed of some plants lay dormant in the soil until stimulated to sprout by favorable events. Researchers, for example, have recently discovered that the heat and smoke of prairie fires chemically weaken the seed coat of some prairie wildflowers, such as buffalo bean and silver-leaf nightshade, allowing their seedlings to take root in fire-bared, sun-soaked soils temporarily free of competition from other vegetation.

The length of time a seed can remain dormant varies by species. Hard-coated seeds, such as



Illinois bundleflower, a common species in eastern Nebraska prairies, produces hard-coated seeds that can remain dormant and viable in soil for decades.

those of the Illinois bundleflower (shown above), a widespread species in eastern Nebraska prairies, can remain dormant and viable in the soil for decades. The longest documented seed dormancy: Researchers sprouted seeds of the narrow-leaved campion that had been buried in Siberian permafrost for an estimated 31,800 years.

Questions for Cory

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

I had the opportunity to patrol the Elkhorn River with Game and Parks Conservation Officer Cory Krause, who is stationed in West Point in northeastern Nebraska. Shortly after getting on the water, we came upon two fishermen in a remote area of the river. As Cory predicted, they did not have valid fishing permits. Cory filled out a couple of tickets and made some calls, and just when I thought this was going to be a textbook citation, the shiny handcuffs came out. Cory had just run background checks, and one of the men had several outstanding warrants in a nearby state. After some more digging, Cory found that he was also in possession of marijuana, neatly hidden in his tackle box.

Cory strapped the offender in an ugly orange life vest, crowned him with a pair of earmuffs and gave him the most awkward boat ride of his life. He was handed over to the sheriff's department, who waited for us by the bridge on Highway 275. After, we sat down for lunch at a nearby restaurant to talk about the morning and Cory's job as CO.

JNW: How long have you been a CO and what interested you?

CK: When I was in the second grade, a conservation officer came to visit my class. He was actually my dad, and I never had a clue at what he did until he came to school and talked. I knew he went out and worked, and wore the uniform and a gun belt, and that was about it until his visit. I decided then that's what I wanted to do. I've been a CO since 2005, and I'm living my dream.

JNW: How long does the process take from applying for the job to actually being out in the field?

CK: You begin by taking a written test that covers a number of things, including biology, wildlife

identification, the equipment you will use and general knowledge of hunting, fishing and trapping. Then you have two interviews after that, which is followed by more testing. It could be five months before you find out if you're offered a position. And then if you're not certified law enforcement already, you have to go to Grand Island to the law enforcement training center for 16 weeks. After that, you go through four months of conservation officer academy and the in-the-field training program. So, if you're not already certified law enforcement, it would be a year until you're on your own.

JNW: What signals or signs do you look for when you approach people?

CK: Those guys earlier, as soon as we got there, I could tell there was something wrong before we even really got into it. And I know the reason why they chose the spot they did. Normally, when I see someone that far off the beaten path, there's something going on. It just happened to be these guys who didn't have fishing permits.

JNW: Why is it important for everyone to follow game and fish laws?

CK: We can't let everybody go that doesn't buy fishing permits because that's what funds our conservation efforts. And it's just a small percentage of the people out there who aren't following the rules that make everyone else look bad. And there's a difference between an honest mistake and blatant violation.

JNW: So whether or not you issue a citation is dependent on circumstances.

CK: Officer's discretion is very important, and I don't need to write a ticket to do my job. Citations can either make or break a person. For example, let's say there's a kid who just turned 16, and he didn't grow up in a family

where they did any fishing or hunting. All of a sudden, this kid decides that he's going to buy his own fishing pole and go fishing, but he goes fishing without a permit because he doesn't know. And here comes the CO to check him. By law, he's in the wrong, but I can make or break him on his outdoor experience.

If I give him the ticket and walk away, he may say, "I'm never doing this again." Or he can become a potential problem for me down the road and become a big violator who will never buy a permit. Or, I can work with him. That can pay dividends down the road. He could be someone who can keep an eye out for me or give another kid a break and help somebody else.

JNW: Have you ever gotten into a dangerous situation?

CK: We don't just handle fish- and game-related situations. There are times when the sheriff's department or state patrol needs help with speeding tickets, DUI, car wrecks and traffic, and we'll assist. To say anything was completely dangerous where I was fearful for my life, fortunately, no. I've had some "oh [crud] moments" though. A few summers ago at one of our small state recreation areas, I ended up in a wrestling match with a guy on the ground. He had drugs, and he wasn't cooperating. It was late at night, I was in an area with poor radio coverage, and I was outnumbered. The only way I could get him in handcuffs was to go to the ground fighting.

JNW: What's a typical work week for you?

CK: It's not a Monday through Friday job. My off days change all the time. We work nights, weekends and holidays. We are busy year-round, and we get home when we're done. If I'm working spot lighters, I won't go out until 9 p.m.



Conservation Officer Cory Krause running background checks on fishing violators on the Elkhorn River near West Point.

JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND

and don't come home until 3 or 4 a.m. And as soon as you get home you get a call — somebody needs something or somebody needs help. Then you go back out for a little bit longer to help. It's a sacrifice, but it has a lot of benefits and those pros outweigh the cons 10-fold.

JNW: Are people usually cooperative?

CK: It depends on how you approach them and how you talk to them. And I'm not here to preach or to lecture anyone. They know they are in the wrong. They're adults, the majority of them are. They know the consequences. So it's a citation, and we go on about life.

I had a guy, a couple years ago, in Stanton County. He shot a deer off the road, landowners caught him, and he tried hiding the deer. He lied to me for 15 minutes, that he never shot the deer, but I had already found the deer that he tried to hide. I just looked at him and

said, "Stop and think about this. You're a grown man. You're trying to lie and my little kids can lie better than you. What is the deal? Why did you feel compelled to shoot this deer off the road? I know you did it, and I'm not going away."

And then he just stopped and said, "I did it."

And I said, "I know you did."

I saw that guy a year later at the boat and sports travel show in Omaha, and he came up to me and introduced his son. He said, "This officer wrote me that ticket for shooting that deer. He treated me with respect, and I was in the wrong." He thanked me for it. What are the odds of being thanked for writing somebody a ticket? Not very often. But it's kind of nice when it does happen. Unfortunately, I met a nice guy at the wrong time.

JNW: What's exciting about this job

for you?

CK: Everything. There's never a dull moment — except writing reports. Having people come up and say, "Hey, we appreciate what you do. We need more officers in this state. We don't see enough of you guys." And being able to have a good working relationship with the state patrol and some of the deputies is a big help. I know they'll always be there. They will come running. It's a friendship as well as a professional working relationship.

I also enjoy going to the elementary schools and library here in town. I'll go and give a program on wildlife, and I can sit there with a group of kids and keep their complete attention for an hour. Many of us COs also teach fishing clinics and boating safety classes.

Like I said, there's more to the job than writing a ticket and making arrests. 🍷

THE MIDDLE OF EVERYWHERE

By Roger Welsch

While some people sniff that Nebraska is “The Middle of Nowhere,” I would argue that we are actually the middle of everywhere. We lie in a transition zone between many features, geographies, climates, economies and periods of history. That puts us in a unique position of having all of those things within reach.

It’s always hard to draw specific boundaries when, in fact, most natural features blend gradually, one into the other. But it could be argued with some reason that Highway 281, 9 miles east of Dannebrog, is a convenient dividing line between the tallgrass prairie, deciduous woodlands and rich farmlands of the east, and the mixed-grass prairie rangelands and hard-scrapple farmlands of the west. This was true even before the white man invaded the continent. In the east, the Pawnee, Ponca and Omaha were village builders, farmers and hunters, while to the west, the Lakota, Comanche and Cheyenne were primarily hunters. Geographic differences are reflected,

too, in the kinds of animals and plants that are common to the east and rare to the west, and vice versa. Our rivers, like the Niobrara, Loup Forks, Platte and Republican, frequently serve as bridges between the two biological regions.

Sometimes I think our backyard is the meteorological dividing line between Arctic blasts from the north and moisture-rich warm fronts from the south, thus setting up the kind of dramatic weather warfare we constantly find ourselves in the middle of. And there sure is something going on with rainfall, huge rain shields advancing across Nebraska only to stop somewhere north of Oak Creek or at the Sherman County line, leaving us high and dry while everyone else at the town café is bragging about 2½ inches in their gauges.

The westward advance of the American frontier stood still on the eastern bank of the Missouri River for almost half a century. Not only was that river a formidable barrier, but there also was the Civil War, ferocious resistance from tribes for whom this was already homeland, and few of the resources available to the East — abundant wood, rock, water and rich farmland. So Iowa became a state in 1846 while Nebraska, a few hundred yards to the west, joined the Union only in 1867, and even then, with serious questions about whether its politics belonged to the North or the South.

There are plants that are common enough in the easternmost Nebraska counties that are already rarities here in



Eastern kingbird CHRIS MASADA

Howard County, only 100 miles to the west. Birdwatchers know that it is not at all unusual for the interface of eastern and western species to be found here, in the center of the Great Plains — plants, birds and even people: To the east, its overalls and seed caps, and west, its cowboy boots and Stetsons. North of the Platte is considered the Northern Plains and to the south, the Central Plains. One half of Nebraska’s population lies east of Lincoln; the rest of us are out here where “there are more cows than people.”

The old joke is that Nebraska is where “the West begins ... and the East peters out.” Maybe it’s not so much of a joke after all. See? “Middle of Everywhere!” And nowhere else I’d rather be.

Roger Welsch is an author, humorist, folklorist and a former essayist for CBS News Sunday Morning. He is the author of more than 40 books and has been contributing to Nebraskaland Magazine since 1977.



Western kingbird. CHRIS MASADA

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KNOW YOUR LANDOWNER

By Jeff Kurrus

Many years ago, a friend told me a story about the time he was granted permission to hunt on private land, and then lost that permission on the same day, after a bobwhite quail hunt. After shooting a few birds, he went and thanked the landowner for her hospitality. Then he showed her the birds. She was mortified at the sight. Their new patch of hunting land was revoked as soon as it was granted.

Keep these tips in mind when thanking your landowner for their hospitality.

1) Don't be in a hurry — Have a conversation without needing to be anywhere. Perhaps the same person that allows you to hunt lives vicariously through your experiences and wants to hear nothing more than a story or two about your day on their place. Or, perhaps they like the thought of hunting but not the finished product. The only way you find

this out is to have a conversation with your host.

2) It's not always alcohol — During these talks, see what your landowner is partial to. Are they a beer drinker? If so, what brand? Or do they stay away from alcohol altogether, and you're better off getting them some other kind of gift?

3) These gifts can come in a variety of makes and models. From a letter written by your child who was allowed to tag along with you pheasant hunting to some prepared game or fish harvested during your visit. The one sentiment that seems likeable by all is a photograph of your success or a pretty image of their place.

With 98 percent of Nebraska's land being privately owned, you're extremely lucky to have a place where you can lock the gate behind you. Make sure your landowners know how fortunate you feel.



A photograph of a landowner's property is an ideal gift when granted permission to hunt or fish. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

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LATE-SEASON RINGNECKS

By Todd Mills

Growing up in northwestern Iowa during the '70s and '80s, chasing pheasants was almost a religion if you loved to hunt. Before the days of set aside acres and conglomerate farm operations, just a simple knock on a farmer's door would most likely lead you to hunting permission success.

My brother was the master at fooling even the wildest of late-season roosters. The colder the better, and if you were lucky enough to have fresh snow on the ground, well that was an added bonus. More than once he'd roust me out of bed, demanding that I get dressed and ready to chase. "Good day to trick them, brother" would usually be the first words spoken. From those days came tactics that I still use today when pursuing January ringnecks.

Temperature Fluctuations

Any change in weather can greatly enhance your ability to get birds to sit tight. Look for days when humidity

is high and moisture is on the way. Something about these conditions makes birds want to sit and not run as much. You want to find deep cover that allows them to escape the elements, and wait until midday to allow them to feed early and get back in the cover. Some of my best pheasant hunts have been after 10 a.m., as they've settled in after putting on the food bag. Work the cover slowly and don't be afraid to search even the unlikely of places.

Change Your Tactics if Needed

When hunting large stretches of cover, the more traditional forms of pushing them usually won't work late season. If they are running and flying out ahead of you, don't be afraid to send a couple of hunters ahead to block. Hunting large, winding river beds when I was younger taught me to abandon a plan early if it's not working. If you have large stretches of CRP, you can zigzag and hopefully confuse them

into sitting and not flying out ahead. Blockers can also work effectively, but make sure they are somewhat hidden as birds will spot them when flying out and change directions.

Trust Your Dog

If your dog has been properly trained, chances are they know way better than you what the birds are doing. So many times, I've hunted with guys who try to control what their dog is doing, constantly trying to make their dog go in a different direction than where she wants to go. Big mistake here. My plan was always to stay on my dog's tail, even if it meant going away from what I thought the birds might be doing. Work your dog into the wind and don't force her to go in a certain direction, but instead follow your dog and keep her at a close distance. More times than not, this strategy has paid off in fooling a cagey rooster.



Trusting your dog's nose is a key to success against late-season pheasants. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



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Grouse Hunting Near Taylor, 1980s.
 I took this picture in the early 1980s. A successful grouse hunting trip north of Taylor, Nebraska. Pictured are Mike Emanuel, Tom Walklin and Steve Wiota.
 – Steve Johnson, Valley

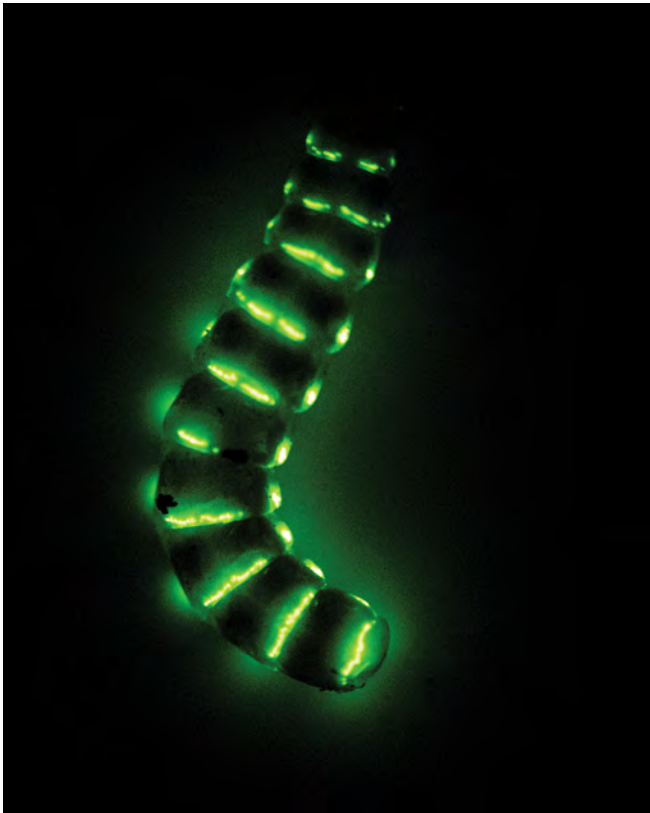


Pheasant Hunting Near Albion, 1999.
 Former Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Assistant Director Bill Bailey (standing) and myself, Lee Rupp (former district III fisheries biologist out of the Norfolk office).
 We had three limits of roosters in 90 minutes in Boone County. Former Commissioner Charles Wright took the photo.
 – Lee Rupp, Monroe



Family Camping Trip Along the Platte River, 1911.
 Taken on family property along the Platte River east of Columbus in either 1910 or 1911. My family was likely celebrating either the Fourth of July or an early 50th anniversary of my great-grandfather receiving a “Bounty Land Grant” from the federal government for that 160-acre parcel of land in April 1862. Included in the picture is my great-grandfather and great-grandmother James and Johanna Haney, my grandfather and grandmother James S. and Alma Haney, great-aunts Lizzie and Agnes Haney, great-uncles Frank and Patrick, uncles Carl and Art, aunt Helen, and my father Bill.
 Of note in the background to the middle right of the family portrait is a wood-burning camp stove with a short smoke stack and pots and pans hanging around a tree trunk, and to the left of the picture is the American flag on a wall tent.
 – Bill Haney, Beaver Lake

Send contributions to: Portraits from the Past, Nebraskaland Magazine, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370. Or e-mail to Tim.Reigert@Nebraska.gov. Photos should show people enjoying Nebraska outdoor activities, such as camping, boating, hunting or fishing, and must have been taken before 2000. We will give priority to unusual photos or activities. When possible, please include a story about the photograph and identify the people, places and approximate date it was taken. Text may be edited and photos adjusted for reproduction. All photos will be returned.



GLOW WORM

By Eric Fowler

Last July, while walking out to turn off the water before I hit the sack one night, I had one of those “What the ...?” moments.

There was something glowing in a flower bed next to my house. The fireflies were out, but this looked different. So I went back inside to grab a flashlight, and when I returned, I found something I had never seen before: a glow worm.

Under the light, the inch-long worm was a yellowish tan with brown spots. Turn out the light and the bioluminescent stripes on its back and spots on its sides glowed as green as a lightning bug’s butt.

After photographing it in both the light and dark the following day in the studio at the office, I passed it on to Shaun Dunn, a natural heritage zoologist and resident insect expert at Game and Parks. Dunn determined it was a female in the genus *Phengodes*, in the glowworm family (*Phengodidae*) of beetles, but couldn’t determine the species, of which there are 23 in the United States

and Canada.

They aren’t commonly seen, Dunn learned. Even as adults, the females are always in the larval form and look like a worm. “I use that term loosely, as they are not worms,” Dunn said. The males morph from a worm into a beetle as an adult. While the females always glow, the males only glow as larvae. Evidence suggests the larvae can turn their glowing on and off, and it is thought that the glow is used to warn off predators, unlike fireflies, which glow to attract mates.

I got the same “What the ...?” reaction from others with whom I shared the glow worm photos. Personally, I was wishing I could have found a few dozen of them. I can’t help but think they would be a can’t-miss bait while night fishing for crappies and bluegills. Maybe next year.

In the meantime, I’ll just have to be happy to have learned something new. That, for anyone and especially me, isn’t hard to do if you pay attention.





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