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NEBRASKAland

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A variegated meadowhawk pauses flight at Holmes Lake in Lancaster County.
Photo by Chris Masada.

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INSIDE

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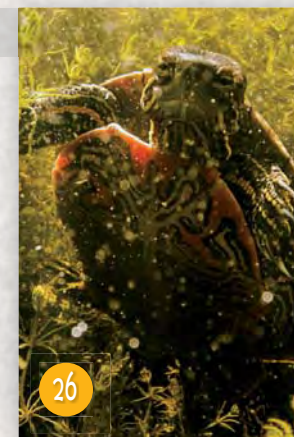
The New Outdoor Education Center

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ON THE WEB...



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

Cover: Purple gayfeather blooms at Branched Oak Wildlife Management Area in Lancaster County. Photo by Jeff Kurrus.

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Dick & Jane versus Outdoor Nebraska

As a young boy growing up in Nebraska, I had three interests and reading wasn't one of them. These three interests were fishing, hunting and Nebraska Cornhusker football.

By the time second grade rolled around, my parents, both former school teachers, became concerned about my reading (or lack of) and discussed this concern with my teacher. At the conference they found out that my reading was at a bare minimum and that I had little to no retention of what I had read. When I was brought in for "questioning" they found out that I had no interest in reading about Dick, Jane or their dog, Spot.

Time for new tactics, my parents now decided to take me to the local public library to check out three books at a time, and after reading them I would receive a nickel for each book. Then it was back to the library for three more. Now they had me reading, but still little to no retention was occurring.

Then in the spring of 1960, my father happened to bring home the current edition of *Outdoor Nebraska Magazine* from his office, and from the minute I saw it I was "hooked, line and sinker." My mother came up with a plan. I was given *Outdoor Nebraska* and told to read one article of my choosing and any words I didn't know I was to ask. When I finished the article I returned the magazine to my parents. The next evening they would ask me which article I had read and proceed to quiz me. Next, they would check off the article in the table of contents. This process was repeated until every article, including the classified ads, were checked off. If I completed the task before the next issue of *Outdoor*



Last fall, the Heusinkvelt family of Crete was able to get together to photograph four generations of animal mounts. Their results were quite impressive, to say the least.

Nebraska my father would bring that new issue home. So basically I would read it cover to cover every month.

By testing time in fourth grade my reading scores were above average and my reading retention had skyrocketed. Now, as a retired public school teacher, I still seldom read a book, but I do read a variety of magazines and newspapers cover to cover and I never miss an issue of *NEBRASKAland Magazine*.

So if your son or daughter has trouble reading or reading retention, try my parents' remedy. It worked for me.

Thanks to *Outdoor Nebraska/NEBRASKAland Magazine*.

Rick Crosier

DeWitt, Nebraska

A Funny Redhead

I enjoyed the poetic and informative article on woodpeckers by William Beachly in the May 2014 issue. It reminded me of a lucky photo I took several years ago when birding at the Prairie Loft Center in Hastings. I'm not sure why this red-headed woodpecker decided to stick its tongue out at me, but it made me laugh.

Paul Dunbar

Hastings, Nebraska

Chokecherry Question

In the recent issue of *NEBRASKAland*, there is a recipe for chokecherry jelly. It does not tell when to add the jello pectin to the mixture. I would like to know.

Thanks,

Dennis Heying

via e-mail

Hi Dennis,

My apologies for the omission. Pour the strained chokecherry juice into a large saucepot, then add pectin and butter and bring to a full rolling boil, stirring constantly.

Jenny Nguyen

Correction: In the June 2014 issue of *NEBRASKAland Magazine*, the back cover photo is a Plains spadefoot toad.

The spadefoot is the only toad found in Nebraska that has vertically elliptical pupils.

Thanks to herpetologist Dan Fogell and biologist Keith Geluso for their assistance with this re-identification.

-Editor



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Please include your postal address and telephone number.

Letters may be condensed and edited for clarity. Photographs are welcome and will be returned.

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Tick Precautions

By Julie Geiser

Summer is here and so are ticks. These eight-legged pests rest on low-lying brush and vegetation, using their forelegs to catch a ride on passersbys after using complex sensory organs to detect carbon dioxide, scent and body heat of an unsuspecting host.

Dressing properly will help eliminate the chance of getting a tick. Light colored clothing allows you to see them easier, and wearing a long-sleeved shirt and long pants to reduce the skin area exposed to ticks helps. Also, tuck your shirt into your pants and pants into your socks – this will keep the ticks on the outside of your clothing. When outside, stay in the center of paths, avoid sitting on the ground and conduct frequent checks if you are in the woods, grasslands and brush areas.

Tick checks should include a visual inspection of clothing and exposed skin – followed by a full-body examination: Check the scalp, behind and in the ears, behind body creases including armpits, the groin area and the back of the knee and nape of the neck, as these are areas ticks favor.

The mouthpart of a tick, or hypostome, has reverse harpoon-like barbs, designed to penetrate and attach to skin. Once attached, a tick will secrete a cement-like substance onto the skin, fastening the tick firmly to its host – then it will begin to draw blood from its host. It is important to remove the tick as soon as possible; it must feed on a host 36

to 48 hours before it can transmit disease.

Though rare, if there is any illness, it usually starts with a rash three to 30 days after the bite.

To properly remove a tick, use fine point tweezers or a tick removal tool to grasp it by the head or mouth, and gently pull the tick out. If you must remove the tick with your fingers, use a tissue or leaf to avoid contact with infected tick fluids. Do not grab the tick by the body, as doing this may cause it to secrete fluids to its host.

Once the tick is removed, wash your hands and disinfect the tweezers and bite site. It is a good idea to make your own tick removal kit including fine point tweezers, antiseptic and a roll of clear tape or a small baggie to seal ticks in. Keep the tick in case an illness occurs; it can then be tested for disease.

If you don't like harsh chemicals, try this homemade tick repellent. Use 1 cup white vinegar, ½ cup Avon Skin-So-Soft oil, ½ cup water and 1 tablespoon eucalyptus or tea tree oil. Combine ingredients in a spray bottle and shake well, as ingredients will separate if you don't. Apply directly to the skin and repeat about every hour. Avoid getting it on clothing as the mix is oily. ■



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Nebraska's 2014 Habitat Tours

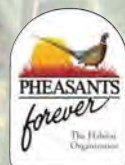


Wildlife Biologists from across the state will be hosting a series of Habitat Tours this year. Tours are designed to demonstrate habitat management practices, available conservation programs, how to create the best results on your next habitat project and much more.

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Tour Topic	Date and Time	Starting Location
Bobwhite Quail habitat needs workshop & habitat management.	June 11, 2014 11:00 am - 2:30 pm CST	Alexandria Community Center 506-510 Nebraska 53 - Alexandria, NE
What's the Buzz about Pollinators?	June 19, 2014 10:00 am - 2:00 pm MST	Mid-Plains Community College 1324 Broadway - Imperial, NE
Panhandle Pollinators: A closer look at pollinators and how they affect you!	June 19, 2014 9:00 am-1:00 pm MST	Wildcat Hills Nature Center 210615 Hwy 71 - Gering, NE
CRP Upgrades with High Diversity Seed Mixes, SAFEs and Pollinator Habitat. What is it supposed to look like?	June 19, 2014 10:00 - 2:00 pm CST	Rosemont Trap Club Rosemont, NE
Developing seed mixes for your habitat project	June 25, 2014 11:00 am - 3:00 pm CST	USDA Service Center 36465 Hwy 34 - Trenton, NE
Benefits of Prescribed Fire	June 26, 2014 5:30 - 9:00 pm CST	Curtis Cattle Company 223 Center Ave - Curtis, NE
Pollinator Habitat Past & Present	June 26, 2014 9:00 am - 2:00 pm CST	Lexington Public Library 907 N Washington - Lexington, NE
Where are all the Pheasants?	June 27, 2014 12:00-4:00 pm CST	UNL West Central Research & Extension Center • WCREC Auditorium 402 W State Farm Rd - North Platte, NE
Prairie & Wetland Restoration in Eastern Nebraska	July 10, 2014 5:30-8:30 pm CST	Tekamah Memorial Park 613 N 13th St - Tekamah, NE
Lake Wanahoo Wildlife & Wildflower Walk	July 19, 2014 9:30 am - 1:30 pm CST	Lake Wanahoo; Main Boat Ramp Wahoo, NE
Upgrading & Managing CRP & WRP for Grassland Birds, Pollinator Habitat & Plant ID	July 24, 2014 11:00 am - 4:00 pm CST	Williams Cabin: from Fullerton: 4 miles South on Hwy 14 to Rd. Z turn East, 2 miles to Rd 19, turn North go 1/3 mile
CRP Mid-Contract Management Activities	July 24, 2014 9:00 am - 2:00 pm CST	One Box Gun Club 79681 Road 435 - Broken Bow, NE
Sandhills Plant ID Tour	August 7, 2014 10:00 am- 2:00 pm CST	Myrtle Hall WMA 82267 445th Ave - Sargent, NE
Northeast Nebraska Focus on Pheasants Efforts	August 14, 2014 12:00 - 3:00 -pm CST	Adamson Project : 6 miles West of Verdigre & 5 miles South, Intersection of 518 Ave & 876 Rd
Rangeland Management	August 21, 2014 7:00 - 9: 00 pm CST	Mid-Plains Community College 2520 S E St - Broken Bow, NE
The Critical Role of Pollinators	September 19, 2014 7:00 - 9:00 pm CST	Lewis & Clark Visitor Center 100 Valmont Dr. - Nebraska City, NE



For more tour details & to register, please visit:

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Travelogue

By Jenny Nguyen

Wayne, America

Home of the Wayne State College Wildcats, Wayne is a small town in northeastern Nebraska that has a college town feel. **Wayne State College** offers **outdoor art displays**, an **arboretum** and the newly renovated **Willow Bowl** where graduations, weddings, sporting events, music and theatrical performances, outdoor gatherings and other community events take place. Wayne State College is also home to the recently renovated **Fred G. Dale Planetarium** and the **Norstrand Visual Arts Gallery**, which are both open to the public.

If you're looking for outdoor activities, Wayne has many city parks, two campgrounds and **Bark Park**, a fenced recreation area for dogs that is located along the city's **walking/biking trail** that runs along the east side of town from South Main Street to the WSC campus. And for those with green thumbs, check out **Garden Perennials** located just south of town on Highway 15. There, you will find a beautiful daylily and perennial plant nursery owned and operated by Gail Korn.

Then take a stroll down **Wayne's Commercial Historic District** to visit unique shops like **Rustic Treasures**, a resale thrift and consignment store, **Peppers Purses Boutique**, **Swans Ladies Apparel** and more. Don't forget to visit the **Wayne County Museum** and the **Veterans Memorial** nearby.

Looking for a place to eat? Check out **Geno's** for mouthwatering steaks, **La Momias** for authentic Mexican, the **Magic Wok** for

Chinese and **Vel's Bakery** for donuts and catering. **Max Bar and Grill** serves \$1.50 burgers on Mondays while the **White Dog Pub** is a favorite hangout for locals and college students. For a pick-me-up, look to the **Coffee Shoppe** and **Miss Molly's Coffee House** for some seriously good java and eats. Offering free Wi-Fi, art exhibits, live entertainment and activities throughout the year, Miss Molly's is a favorite spot among Wayne State students.

Wayne's must-see event of the year is its annual **Chicken Show**, held July 11-13 in 2014. This will be the event's 34th year and will feature three days of chicken-themed contests, a parade, arts and crafts, music, food and much more. Wayne's other featured event is the annual **Battle on the Nebraska Prairie Rugby Tournament** each spring; there will be a fall tournament this year, too.

For more information, visit Waynene.org, Wsc.edu, Gardenperennials.net, Missmollyscoffeecompany.com, Chickenshow.com and Marchmadnessrugby.com.



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The Chicken Show



Lots of good shops

Super Tag and Combo Lotteries

By Jane Gustafson

Hunters looking for unique opportunities – and the envy of their peers – should check out the lottery options currently offered by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

A total of four multi-species lotteries are open, each featuring a combination of big game permits that offer a great Nebraska hunting opportunity.

New this year is a multiple-entry super tag lottery that is open to both residents and nonresidents. The lottery includes one elk, one deer, one antelope and two turkey tags; multiple entries are allowed at \$10 each. The lucky winner of this lottery will have the 2014 and 2015 hunting seasons to fill all tags. The tags are good during any open season with the appropriate weapon.

A single-entry super tag lottery for Nebraska residents is again being offered as well. It also features one elk, one deer, one antelope and two turkey

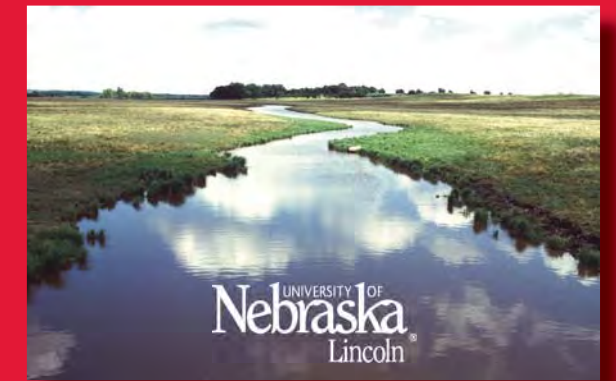
tags, and is good during the 2014 and 2015 hunting seasons. The cost for a single entry is \$25. Nebraska hunters who have already drawn a once-in-a-lifetime bull elk permit are eligible for both lotteries.

Also new in 2014 are two multi-species combination lotteries. A combination lottery is being offered to residents, and a separate multiple entry lottery is offered to nonresidents at a cost of \$10 per entry. Each combination tag includes one deer, one antelope and two turkeys, and is valid during the 2014 and 2015 seasons.

Complete details on all lotteries can be found on pages 5 and 7 of the 2014 Nebraska Big Game Guide, available in print or online at OutdoorNebraska.org.

The application period for all lottery options runs through July 4, 2014. The lucky winners for all tags will be drawn on July 11 at the Commission meeting in Niobrara. ■

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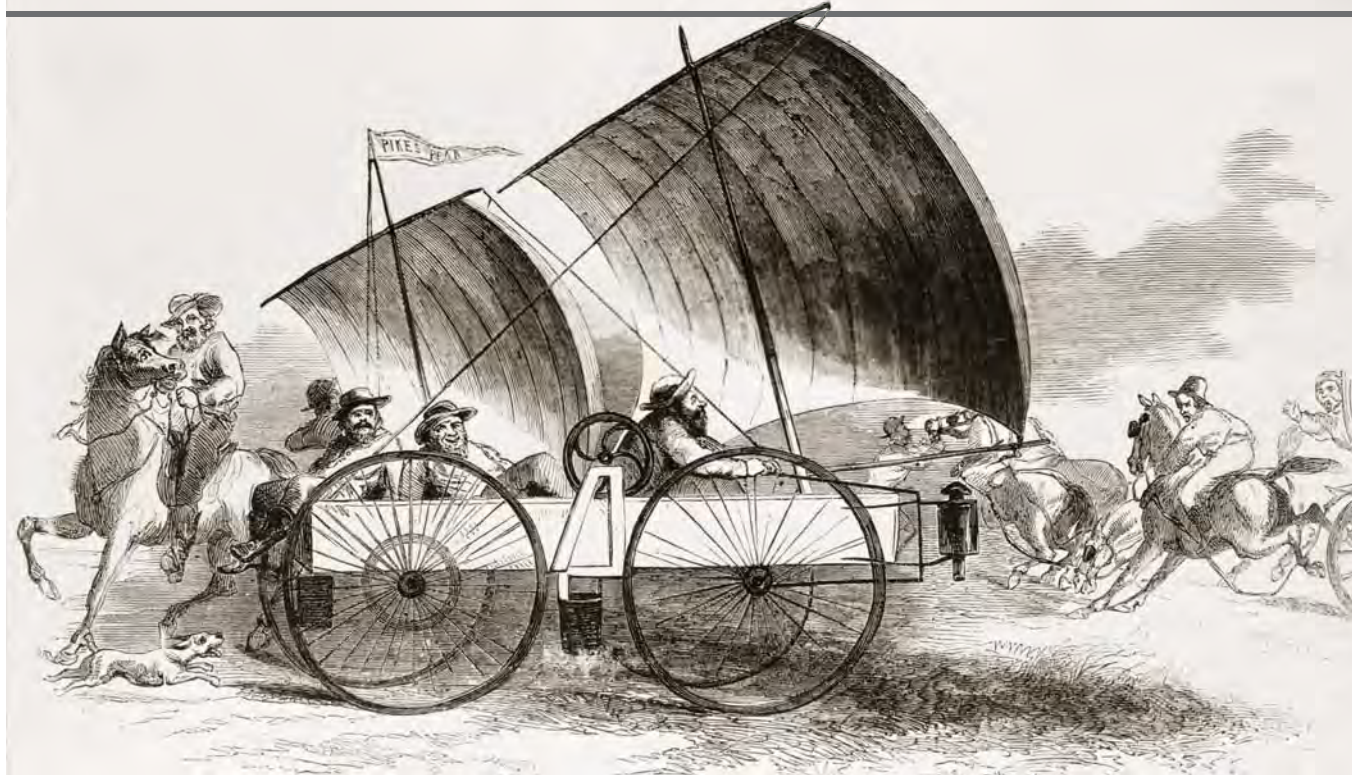
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This artist's conception of Samuel Peppard's wind wagon as it was departing Fort Kearny in May 1860 appeared in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* on July 7 of that year. NSHS RG1576-2.

A Brief History Sailing Through Fort Kearny in a Wind Wagon

By Patricia C. Gaster, Nebraska State Historical Society

Samuel Peppard's wind ship was one of the most unusual vehicles in the history of Great Plains transportation. Designed by its inventor to carry freight, the craft in its trial run followed the Oregon Trail to Fort Kearny and then turned westward up the Platte River, reaching an ignominious end near what is today Fort Morgan, Colorado.

Peppard, a 27-year-old millwright, and his crew had learned in trial runs that the vehicle would be hard to control. At one time it even became airborne for a short distance. Yet, about May 10, 1860, Peppard and his crew sailed out of Oskaloosa, Kansas, with 500 pounds of cargo, headed for the goldfields of present-day Colorado. A few days later they entered Nebraska via the Independence-St. Joe Road southeast of Rock Creek.

Files of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* tell of the strange ship. "The Wind Ship of the Prairies: Fort Kearney, May 27, 1860," sent by a

Leslie's correspondent to his paper from Fort Kearny, said:

"The ship hove in sight about eight o'clock in the morning, with a fresh breeze from N.E. by E.; it was running down in a westerly direction for the fort, under full sail across the green prairie. The guard, astonished at such a novel sight, reported the matter to the officer on duty, and we all turned out to view the phenomenon."

The vehicle was described as "a very light built wagon, the body rounded in front, something in shape like a boat, to overcome the resistance of the air. The wheels are remarkably light, large and slender, and the whole vehicle strongly built. Two masts somewhat raked carry large square sails, rigged like ship's sails with halyards, braces, &c., &c. In front is a large coach lamp, to travel by night when the wind is favorable; and it is steered by a helm attached to the fore wheels. A crank and band wheels allow it to be propelled by hand when wind and tide are

against them."

About a week later the ship was sighted 100 miles west of Fort Kearny by A. L. Frizzell of Iowa, who on May 31 noted the appearance of the "sail wagon" in his diary. Attaining speeds of 15 miles an hour, Peppard cruised to within 100 miles of Denver before his invention was demolished by a small tornado.

The voyage had taken three weeks, but only nine days were spent in actual travel. He and his crew rode on into Denver by more conventional transportation powered by four-footed draft animals. ■



Fort Kearny as it appeared in 1864. NSHS RG2012-4-9.

Roll on in ...



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Tree School

By Amy Kucera

"We need to find a tree that's serious about this," Jack Phillips said jokingly while collecting acorns last fall along a wooded trail outlining Pioneers Park in Lincoln. The bur oaks he walked beneath are tall and magnificent – and becoming increasingly rare.

"The old bur oak is on the edge all the time," Phillips said. "We should treat the species as if it were endangered, looking at the age of populations now."

The collected acorns, minus the ones nibbled on while in search, will be used for future planting and educational purposes at the New Tree School, an exploration in trees with emphasis on the natural systems approaches to sustainable tree care, which he founded in 2003.

Phillips began his career in ecology "slumming around western Syria and the West Bank" in the 1980s, noting once richly forested areas of the Mediterranean region had been nearly all together destroyed, replaced by the hand-planted monoculture of almond trees along the landscape. "It forced the question, 'When is a forest not a forest?'" Phillips said.

As a graduate student in Cairo, he decided to skip an afternoon class to take a nap on a carpet within a Medieval mosque. When he awoke, he was surrounded by a teacher and his students, as if no one noticed him, they continued on their lesson, speaking a language he did not know.

In this moment, a revelation occurred, in which he discovered the power of immersion as education and paired it with his palpable passion for nature and desire to teach, a path he continues on today.

"It is about learning through intimacy, by becoming what you are studying," he explained. "Through this immersion, the experience is the root of knowing."

After studying with renowned plant pathologist Alex Shigo, he developed the New Tree School in order to encourage the planting and preservation of native trees effectively and economically, as well as to share his discovery of deep ecology through immersion. This would include the development of community and volunteer tree planting projects, tree health and safety evaluations, tree inventories and biological surveys, native landscape and urban nature center design, as well as through creative arts such as literature.

In an ode to the oak nation, his recent book published by Praire Fire Press, *Bur Oak Manifesto: Seeking Nature and Planting Trees in the Great Plains*, is a collection of essays weaving his ecological experience with language and culture to reveal a mystic glimpse of an ancient ecosystem, and the power of human connections to protect the vital and vanishing wild.

A lively storyteller and educator, often quoting naturalist Henry David Thoreau, Phillips has a remarkable sense of the significance of native trees on the landscape.

"Trees contribute to our sense of place," Phillips said. "Find a big wild tree, and spend time there. Meet there with your friends." ■



Jack Phillips, founder of the New Tree School, collects acorns in Lincoln last fall.

PHOTO BY AMY KUCERA

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

Nebraska Bird Library

Baltimore Oriole

Song or calls: Variable song consists of clear and flute-like whistles in short, distinct phrases.

Description: Adult male has black head, throat, back, and black T-shape on orange tail; underparts and rump are bright orange; orange shoulder patch on wing and single white wing bar. Female has greenish-brown faintly streaked back and orange-yellow underparts.

Habitat: Wooded river bottoms, upland forests, shelterbelts, farmsteads and partially wooded residential areas with tall shade trees.

Where in Nebraska: Common spring and fall migrant and summer resident across the state.

Fun Facts: Young male Baltimore orioles do not achieve adult plumage until the fall of their second year.

Additional Information: Once considered along with western Bullock's oriole to be one species, the Northern Oriole. Apparently hybridizes with Bullock's Orioles where ranges overlap. ■

To learn about more birds visit:
NebraskaBirdLibrary.org.



PHOTO BY ROCKY HOFMANN

No Moccasins

By Dan Fogell, Herpetologist

Let me get this out there right away: all snakes can swim. And pretty well at that. That being said, every snake in the water is not a "water moccasin." Water moccasins, which are more correctly called cottonmouths, are not big fans of cold weather. You'll have to travel to Missouri or Oklahoma to find the nearest cottonmouths, and as you continue south and east they become more common. But they definitely do not occur in Nebraska. What we do have here are water snakes – snakes that spend a lot of time in and around lakes, ponds and streams but are not venomous.

Nebraska is home to three different species of water snakes: the northern water snake, Graham's crayfish snake and the diamondback water snake. If you visit nearly any state wildlife area that has lakes or ponds, you will most likely see a northern water snake. The other two species are restricted to the

southeastern corner of Nebraska. Water snakes eat fish, frogs and tadpoles that they catch along the water's edge. They are active during the day, although on very hot summer days they may become more nocturnal.

There are some easy ways to tell that the snake you're watching swim is not a cottonmouth. First, water snakes swim with only their heads above the water. Cottonmouths usually have most, if not all, of their bodies floating on top of the water as they swim. Water snakes have small, narrow heads with no distinct neck while cottonmouths have large heads with a very distinct neck. Cottonmouths have a dark stripe on their face that passes through the eye and is bordered by white lines, while water snakes lack these stripes. And if you feel like getting really close, cottonmouths have a "pit" – or a hole between their nose and their eye (as do all pit vipers) as well as elliptical pupils. Water snakes don't have a pit and have round pupils.

Now that we've cleared this up, there's no need to perpetuate the myth



Cottonmouth



Northern water snake

about moccasins in Nebraska. And more importantly, there's no need to kill water snakes under the theory that they are moccasins and that they can kill people. Simply watch them from the shore, or from your boat, and let them swim wherever they want. ■

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Wingtips by Wild Bird Habitat



If you have large mature trees adjacent to open areas then you can attract the beautiful

Baltimore Oriole with it's sweet summer song to your yard by offering oranges and grape jelly. Get more information from the Wild Bird Habitat Stores. Nebraska's largest selection of Oriole feeders.

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Orchard and
Bullocks Orioles



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.

July 1

Archery fishing of game fish is allowed statewide through December 31. Underwater spearfishing of game fish allowed in specific waters through December 31 (see page 20 of 2013-2014 Fishing Guide)

July 1-14

Paddlefish snagging permit application period

July 2-4

Western Wildlife Art Show Fort Robinson State Park (SP), Crawford, 308-665-2900

July 4

Independence Day All Game and Parks district offices and service centers closed

July 4

Fourth of July Barbecue Fort Robinson SP, Crawford, 308-665-2900

July 4

Final day to apply for Nebraska Super Tag and Combo lottery permits

July 4-6

Living History Fort Kearny State Historical Park (SHP), Kearney, 308-865-5305

July 5

National Park Service Outdoor Event Niobrara SP, Niobrara, 402-857-3373

July 5

Dutch Oven Cobbler and Ice Cream Social Ponca SP, Ponca, 402-755-2284

July 5, 12, 19

Buffalo Cookout and Nebraska Humanities Program Niobrara SP, Niobrara, 402-857-3373

July 5-6

Living History Fort Atkinson SHP, Fort Calhoun, 402-468-5611

July 6

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

July 7, 21

Pistol League Platte River SP, Louisville, 402-471-5547

July 7-11

Association of Conservation Information Conference Nebraska City

July 8

Family Fishing Event Johnson Lake, Fremont, 6-8 p.m.

July 8-9

Shooting Skills Camp Cozad, 402-471-5547

July 9

Family Fishing Event Holmes Lake, Lincoln, 6-8 p.m.

July 9

Beyond Becoming an Outdoors-Woman (BOW) Rifle Clinic, Platte River SP, Louisville, 402-471-5547

July 10

Family Fishing Event Halleck Lake, Papillion, 6-8 p.m.

July 11

Nebraska Game and Parks Board of Commissioners meeting, Niobrara

July 11

Nebraska Super Tag and Combo lottery permit drawing

July 12

Bighorn Sheep Hike Wildcat Hills Nature Center, Gering, 308-436-3777

July 12

First Shots Clinic Platte River SP, Louisville, 402-471-5547

July 12

Carp-O-Rama Lake Maloney State Recreation Area (SRA), North Platte, 8 a.m.-1 p.m.

July 12

Archery paddlefish season opens

July 12-13

Hobie Tropical Dreams Regatta Lake McConaughy SRA, Ogallala, 308-284-8800

July 13

Fur Trade Days Regatta Chadron SP, Chadron, 308-432-6167

July 14

Remaining big game hunting permits may be purchased, beginning at 1 p.m. Central Time, through the close of the seasons

July 15-17

Outdoor Skills Camp Platte River SP, Louisville, 402-471-5547

July 15

Family Fishing Event Skyview Lake, Norfolk, 6-8 p.m.

July 16

Beyond Becoming an Outdoors-Woman Rifle Clinic, Louisville, 402-471-5547

July 16

Family Fishing Event Pawnee Park East Pond, Columbus, 6-8 p.m.

July 18

National Park Service Campground Program Niobrara SP, Niobrara, 402-857-3373

July 18-19

Beyond BOW Niobrara and Missouri River Kayaking Trip, Niobrara SP, Niobrara, 402-857-3373

July 22

Family Fishing Event Bowling Lake, Lincoln, 6-8 p.m.

July 23

Family Fishing Event Benson Park Pond, Omaha, 6-8 p.m.

July 23

Beyond BOW Rifle Clinic, Weeping Water, 402-471-5547

July 26

Kites and Castles Contest Lake McConaughy SRA, Ogallala, 308-284-8800

July 26

Kite Day Niobrara SP, Niobrara, 402-857-3373

July 26

State High School Fishing Tournament Merritt Reservoir SRA, Valentine, 402-376-3320

July 26

Campfire Christmas in July Indian Cave SP, Shubert, 402-883-2575

July 26

The Dam Run Lake McConaughy SRA, Ogallala, 308-284-8800



An I-80 Hotspot

By Julie Geiser

Pioneer Village is only a 12 mile drive off of Interstate 80. From Exit 279 take Harold Warp Memorial Drive (Nebraska Hwy 10) south to Minden and go back in time to discover how America was made through advancements in machinery. The 20-acre village has 28 buildings to house over 50,000 pieces of irreplaceable history.

Guests are invited to visit the old steam carousel, and see 17 historic flying machines of days past. Car enthusiasts will enjoy the world's oldest Buick – a 1902 Cadillac – as well as a 1903 Ford designed by Henry Ford, in addition to 350 antique cars, all displayed in the order they were built. There are 100 antique tractors plus an original art collection to view.

Visitors also have an opportunity to see the Pony Express Relay Station, the original Elm Creek Stockade, a one-room school house and a blacksmith shop. Tourists can step into a general store, as well as a toy store, filled with the goods of yesteryear. Only a slight detour away, Pioneer Village reveals an important part of our nation's history. ■



PHOTO BY BOB GRIER

Children of the Platte

Nebraskan Michael Gutzmer sent *NEBRASKAland* an essay entitled "Children of the Platte River." At the beginning of his memorable story he writes: "A few Christmases ago, my then eight-year-old Wyatt and I were driving out to our cabin underneath snow-covered branches for an overnight stay when he said, 'Dad, this is the road to paradise.' I couldn't have said it better."

His essay is a chronicle of his family's time on this ancient river, where tales of Witchey Island, building

forts and childhood imaginations are born – and remain – for the rest of a person's life, as Michael bares witness to himself: "On an airplane stranded on the tarmac in Chicago, or stuck in traffic in Denver, a vivid memory of a Platte River sunrise, a bullfrog sounding his territory in a Platte River backwater or the smell after a rain in a riparian forest can bring a moment of sanity back into our stress-filled world." ■

 Read Michael's essay.

NEBRASKAland Visitor



Last issue's winner of the Visitor drawing was Dan Kaup of West Fargo North Dakota, who found the **Imported Longhorned Weevil** on page 43. Readers are encouraged to contact *NEBRASKAland* within 10 days after this issue's publication with the correct page number and name of this issue's "Visitor" – a critter found in Nebraska. We will then gather the correct entries and draw one to win a *NEBRASKAland Magazine* mug. To enter each month, write:

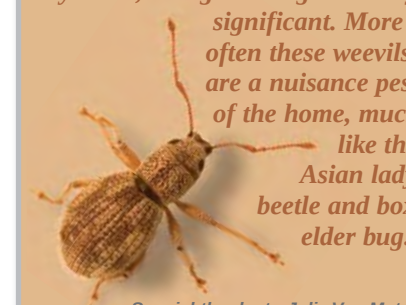
NEBRASKAland Visitor
2200 North 33rd Street,
Lincoln, NE 68503.

Or e-mail:

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

HINT: This issue's visitor is not on page 6, 7, 9, 16, 51, 53 or 60.

The Imported Longhorned Weevil, as its name implies, is not a native insect. It is originally from Japan, and was first reported in the United States in 1929. It can now be found throughout much of the eastern U.S., into Nebraska and Kansas. Adult weevils are about ¼ inch long, tan to gray in color and pear-shaped. These weevils are all females and reproduce without mating. They lay eggs in the soil, and the resulting larvae feed on roots of many types of plants. Adults feed on foliage, including soybeans, though damage is rarely significant. More often these weevils are a nuisance pest of the home, much like the Asian lady beetle and box elder bug.



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

Bugguide.net is a good site for identification.

A World-class Act

The Playhouse at Fort Robinson

Text and photos by Mark Harris

One spring morning well before Nebraska's tourist season, the cast of Fort Robinson State Park's Post Playhouse Theater awoke to the sharp crack of nearby rifle fire. Actor and musician Dan Denton grew up in Kansas so he's familiar with western ways, but men blasting targets cavalry-style from the backs of galloping horses still registered as odd.

The shooting competition was one of many cultural changes Nebraska's sparsely populated Old West country presented to Denton and his fellow performers, but a summer acting gig at Fort Robinson is coveted.

Janet McWilliams, star of "Annie Get Your Gun," remarkably resembles the Annie Oakley seen in historical photos, but as a vegetarian from Philadelphia, that's where the likeness ends.

"If you love meat, Nebraska is really the place for you,"

she said laughing. "It took me a while to acclimate."

But small sacrifices at the Fort are offset by better things.

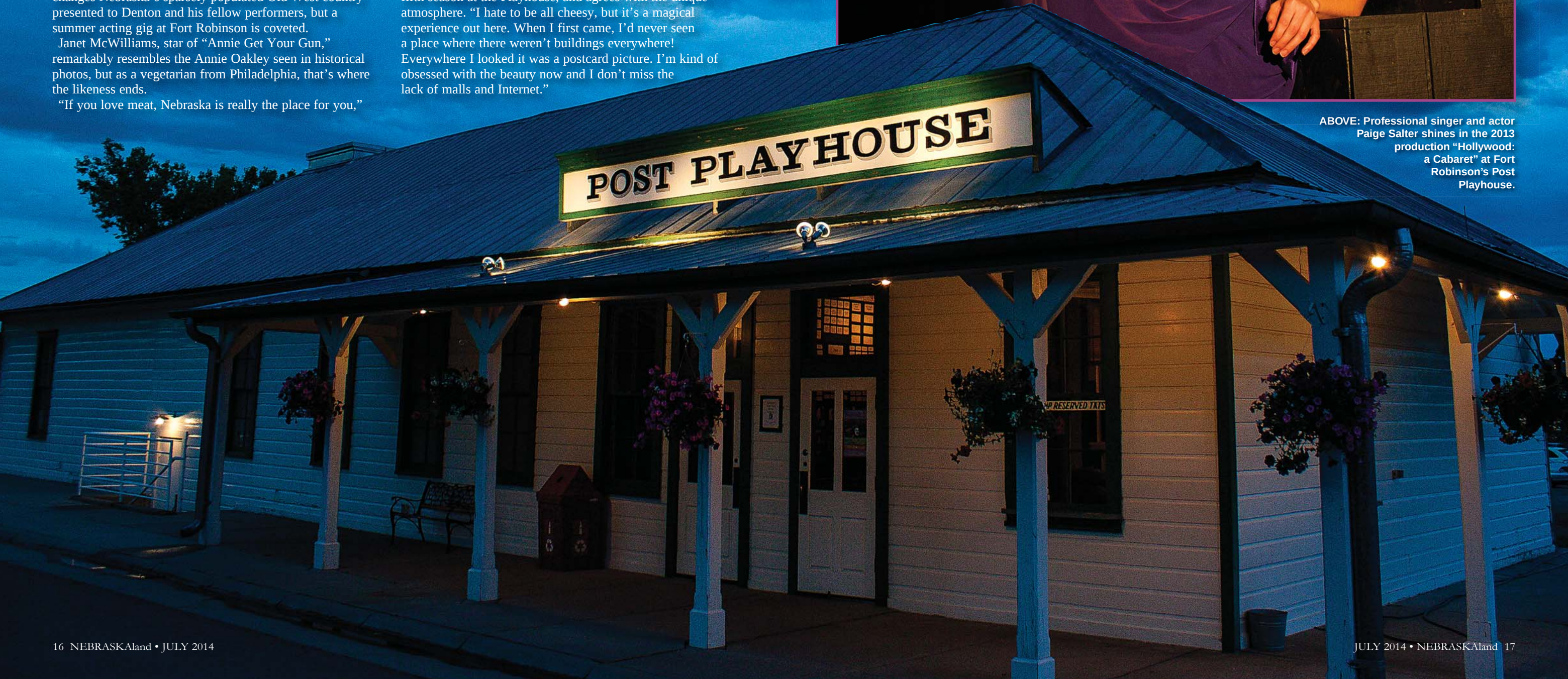
"On the East Coast, people are always in a rush and nobody has time to sit and talk to you," McWilliams said.

"Here, everyone wants to know who you are and what you're doing. It's hard to train yourself to slow up and calm down like western Nebraskans."

Paige Salter from Chattanooga, Tennessee, is in her fifth season at the Playhouse, and agrees with the unique atmosphere. "I hate to be all cheesy, but it's a magical experience out here. When I first came, I'd never seen a place where there weren't buildings everywhere! Everywhere I looked it was a postcard picture. I'm kind of obsessed with the beauty now and I don't miss the lack of malls and Internet."



ABOVE: Professional singer and actor Paige Salter shines in the 2013 production "Hollywood: a Cabaret" at Fort Robinson's Post Playhouse.





TOP LEFT: Janet McWilliams (left) stars as Annie Oakley in the 2013 production of “Annie Get Your Gun,” along with actor, singer and choreographer Jorie Janeway.

LEFT: Janet McWilliams and Sean Barrett made the cut from over 1,500 who applied to be one of the Playhouse’s 35 elite professional cast, crew, musicians and staff.

BOTTOM LEFT: Sean Barrett, Jorie Janeway and Travis Fankhauser of Chadron bring characters to life in “Seussical the Musical.” Local kids are cast and mentored for productions requiring children.

RIGHT: Crisp choreography comes from weeks of rehearsal.

Remoteness is a recurring topic with actors used to bustling cities. “I had to take four flights to get here and I was a bit unsettled on the last one, a little 12-seater,” McWilliams said.

Artistic director Tom Ossowski was hired in 2007 and the Post Playhouse has thrived since his arrival. Ossowski’s passion for musicals is the impetus behind the Playhouse’s status as a nationally sought-after acting venue and a regularly packed house. Part of the winning formula is finding great talent. An average season will employ 17 professional actors, six musicians, five designers, six staff and some talented locals.

Culled from around 1,500 nation-wide Post Playhouse applications per year, those that surface at the top bring serious game. Every winter, Ossowski sorts through online submissions at the rate of 100 per day, but only about 50 get the call to audition in

New York City.

How do people get the part? “Personality,” said Ossowski. Each actor brings a specific “package” to an audition. It’s about figuring out who one truly is and then perfecting that into something one can transmit into very short auditions. Jorie Janeway, an actor, singer and choreographer from Connecticut, has her package pinned down.

“I’m a crazy, quirky, weird character actor. It took me years to figure that out,” she said. “I was just being generic and I wasn’t getting cast.” One day a mentor came to her and said, “Knock it off! You’re funny. Be funny!” Weird works – now she gets parts.

Janeway remembers her first lonely year auditioning in New York City. “I didn’t have anyone to go to auditions with, but there are hundreds of people you see over and over again and it becomes a community for you.” And the tightly-woven singer/actor

community becomes a haven for those struggling for parts. Apartments are shared and word-of-mouth spreads, but when those who know about the Post Playhouse speak to those who don't, Fort Robinson's isolated setting suspends belief. Crawford, Nebraska?

"It's almost impossible to convey how big of a deal it is to those who don't know," said Janeway.

"In auditions, you can tell when they walk in the door if they might have a chance," said Ossowski. "They are given 90 seconds to make their impression, but I can sometimes tell within 10." Lauren Turner, star of the 2013 musical "Always... Patsy Cline," was one of those standouts.

What was her package? "I can belt out a song," she said.

When not involved with a production, she works in a New York piano bar serving drinks and singing. "I love living and working in the city, but it's really difficult because the rent is stupid expensive." She found Fort Robinson remarkably converse to New York City, and it was a welcome switch. "You can see the stars! It's so beautiful and fun here. When you're done rehearsing after a 12-hour day it's like 'Woo-hoo!'"

Another 2013 transfer, Matt Meckes from Allentown, Pennsylvania, is a musical director and actor for the Post Playhouse. He auditioned his piano playing online via Skype, which is slowly altering how musicians try out in the industry. He leans towards strange and crazy roles. "People think actors spend our entire lives trying to be other people, but in reality you have to know yourself really well in order to do this."

Meckes has been playing piano since age three. If you think a weekly piano lesson and an hour of practice per week may land your offspring a musical career, think again. "I played hour after hour of classical piano as a kid and learned lots of other instruments," he said. This relentless pursuit to improve, to pursue what they love, is universal among those who succeed in the theater industry. You either stand out or go home.

Regardless of talent, however, there is a limit to how old or young these twenty-something actors can portray themselves. When a production calls for parts at either end of the age spectrum, the locals step up. From Chadron, Alliance, Scottsbluff and other points near and far, there is a pool of talent to work with. Two Post Playhouse board members, Wally Seiler and Marge Rotherham, both retirees, are perennial character actors.

"Wally and Marge are like our summer grandparents," said McWilliams. "They have us over for dinner."



LEFT: The theater's driving force, artistic director Tom Ossowski (front), poses with Playhouse members Jorie Janeway, Lauren Turner, Dan Denton and Matt Meckes.

RIGHT: Diana Becker, Mariah Ciangiola, Kelly Karcher and Paige Salter bring song and hilarity to the colorful production of "The Marvelous Wonderettes."



These two, and many others in the community like them, make their appreciation clear to the cast and crew. "People here are so amazing," Turner said. "They bring us food and make us feel like we belong here."

In a region where prairie dogs outnumber people, unsuspecting tourists are pleasantly astonished during opening acts, but the locals know. "Local" has a broader meaning out here, and four-hour round trips to attend musicals are no big deal. Before tourist season starts cowboy hats dot the audience. Then come the vacationers and the season sells out. The stage designers are pros as well; there are no walk-ons here, and colorful stage scenes set the tone well before opening act as intimate crowds mingle cheerfully. Entire sections of seats can be taken by family trees, right down to second cousins once removed, all gathered for reunions at the Fort.

"The differences are so stark compared to the huge venues I've worked," McWilliams said. "You get to be so close to the audience. I love it! What we do is not about money, it's about entertaining people. It's like getting back to the basics at the Playhouse. You're being invited into a family here."

Some here will have long careers and some won't, but aspirations are united. "I just want to be working for the rest of my life," Turner said. "I've been dreaming since age five about being on a Broadway stage and I'm never going to give up that dream."

Wherever the future takes each of these hard-working performers, one thing is clear: all feel fortunate to have crossed paths here, and the Post Playhouse will remain one of the fondest memories they will forever hold. ■

Mark Harris is the Associate Director of the University of Nebraska State Museum. Mark has been photographing since 1992. This is his second story in *NEBRASKAland Magazine*.

Visit the playhouse at Postplayhouse.com

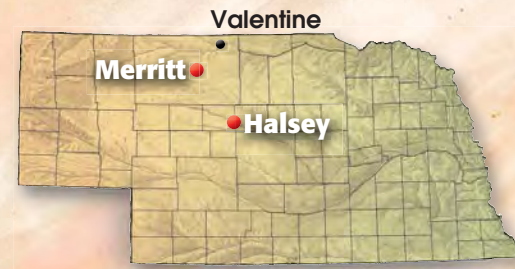


N See more of Mark's Post Playhouse photos.

Stars in the Sandhills

Text and photos by Justin Haag

Come out to the Sandhills in Cherry County and you will be likely to see more stars than you've ever seen in your life. That's because these are some of the most clear and dark skies in the country. And for one week in late summer, this is home to the Nebraska Star Party.



As reliable as stars emerging in a clear night sky, astronomers have been appearing in the sandhills of north-central Nebraska each summer for the past two decades, in pursuit of a spectacular view not commonly found in most parts of the nation.

At Merritt Reservoir State Recreation Area in Cherry County, visitors, along with their wide array of telescopes, converge for the Nebraska Star Party. It's a week-long event that unites people of diverse backgrounds who seek a common goal – the best possible view of the night sky.

Tom Miller of Lincoln, one of the founders of the Nebraska Star Party,

Martin Hrdlicka of Montgomery, Illinois, readies his Celestron 11-inch high definition telescope for an evening of observing the gems of the night sky.



Stars shine brightly over Merritt Reservoir on a night dark enough that reflections of constellations can be seen on the water's surface.

said the event's beginnings can be traced to when he and four others had just returned from a star party in Texas. With their increasingly busy lives, they knew such a drive would probably be out of the question in future years so they sought to build something similar closer to home.

After looking at a map detailing the nation's darkest places, they narrowed possible sites to Halsey, 78 miles south of Valentine and Merritt Reservoir, 27 miles southwest. Miller and another astronomer drove west under cloudy skies to choose the location. While both locations were fine choices, he said, the short walk from the vehicle at the Snake River Campground at Merritt Reservoir sealed the deal.

"We tried to find our way around,"

Miller said. "With the clouds and everything, it was extremely dark. We couldn't see our vehicle or the road in front of us. I said, 'Man, this is it.'"

A close-knit group of nearly 100 astronomers would gather there in 1993, and the event "went public" a year later. Last year marked the Star Party's 20th year.

It's that void – the big black space on the dark sky map – that fans of the night sky are increasingly challenged to find as lands are developed – especially at points east.

Jim Hopkins has made the day-long drive from his home 35 miles south of Chicago for 10 years straight and says he'll keep coming to the party as long as he's "able to walk." Where he lives, common telescopes are able to

show only the brightest stars. Having attended star parties at other places, he avows the Sandhills’ nights are as dark as those at any place in the nation.

Additionally, unlike the eastern U.S., the humidity in north-central Nebraska is low. Dry air provides a better view and is better for the equipment. At other locations, the high dew point increases the likelihood water will cover the telescopes and end the night’s viewing prematurely.

Merritt Reservoir also has other activities for when the sun’s shining. The lake and surrounding area is a scenic destination for fishing, boating, canoeing, wildlife and general serenity. Even though not many areas are immune to light pollution these days, the large Sandhills cattle ranches serve as a buffer to encroaching development.

“This is what the sky looked like before the pioneers trailed across here in their covered wagons and how the



The Strategic Air and Space Museum’s inflatable space shuttle slide is a popular attraction for youth at the Nebraska Star Party’s children program at Valentine.



Jim Hopkins of Plainfield, Illinois, enjoys a sunset over the main gathering place of the Nebraska Star Party at Merritt Reservoir. Hopkins sets up at the same exact location each year to observe the night sky.

Native Americans saw the sky – before Thomas Edison invented the light bulb,” said Eric Balcom of Omaha, star party coordinator.

Balcom said the number of star parties in the United States has grown from about 10 to 100 since he became involved in the early 2000s, resulting in more competition for attendance. Nebraska’s attendance last year was about 250, far more than its first year but less than its peak of nearly 500.

He said people may find star parties larger than Nebraska’s, but none more welcoming. It prides itself on being

a family-oriented, beginner-friendly event. Of the 250 who attended last year, about 40 percent were newcomers. Prizes, such as telescopes, are geared to appropriate ages. Activities such as a field school for beginners and programs for children help people feel at home and advance astronomy’s popularity.

Big-name speakers also are a draw. In 2013, Nebraska astronaut Clayton Anderson was the event’s featured guest and speaker. This year, NASA astrophysicist Fred Espenack, known by many as “Mr. Eclipse,” will greet attendees.

During the day, participants enjoy programs and visiting. Through the years, Miller said he’s met an incredibly varied group of people – “everyone from circus clowns to brain surgeons.” He likens it to a family reunion.

Regardless of the event’s beginner-friendly nature, the attendees are serious about what they do. In the event of a cloudless sky, many stay up all night for viewing. Pity the fool who shines a flashlight or camera flash in the peak of darkness requiring everyone’s eyes to readjust.

To use terminology understood by

even the most amateur astronomers, the party’s future still seems bright. Officials are even exploring the possibility of taking the formal steps to become officially recognized as an International Dark-Sky Park.

Regardless of whether or not it receives the designation, attendees know that they will be hard-pressed to find a better place to set up their telescopes. When it comes to dark skies, the Sandhills’ star will always shine bright. ■

 Visit the official Nebraska Star Party website. This year’s event runs July 27-August 1.

Pulse of the Plains

Text and photos by Michael Forsberg

Just as blood courses through our veins, water pulses through the Great Plains, giving lifeblood to the heart of our continent. Water is a lifeline that sustains migrations and drives the rhythm of the seasons. Water is an enabler and a transporter, a force that encourages restoration and renewal.



A rancher draws water from a well at an old schoolhouse in eastern Colorado.



It seeps into every nook and cranny. It rages in torrents. It whispers.

It builds cloud towers and drives our weather. It quenches our thirst and strengthens our resilience. It promotes diversity. It sculpts our landscapes. It cycles nutrients in our soils. It makes frogs sing.



OPPOSITE TOP: Campers get muddy on a Platte River sandbar near Louisville State Recreation Area.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: A boreal chorus frog sings for its mate in a prairie wetland.

ABOVE: A diminishing water hole on the Platte River traps fish during summer drought in Buffalo County.

RIGHT: A drop of water hangs on a barbed wire fence after a rain.





LEFT: A bluegill and largemouth bass cruise the shallows of a Platte River backwater at Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary.

BELOW: Lightning strikes as a summer thunderstorm rolls through the Sandhills in Grant County.

OPPOSITE ABOVE: Heavy dew clings to a spider's web at sunrise in a tallgrass prairie.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Shadows embrace after the storm has passed eastward on the plains.

Its character is in almost every story on the prairie, sometimes the hero and sometimes the villain. Water gives and it takes away. Water fills us with wonder. We pray for it and we curse it. It makes us hurry, then forces us to wait.

It is the silvery thread that knits us to the land in a perpetual circle of drought and flood, heat and cold, life and death. We fear having too much of it, or more often, not enough. It offers clarity. It feeds us.

Water is spirit. Water is hope. Water is community. It defines our relationship with the land, which in turn, defines part of who we are here in Nebraska. ■



Turning Ten



By Amy Kucera

More than 52,000 visitors in two days. Nearly 1,000 volunteers. Over 100 hands-on exhibits. Sixteen trolleys. Three locations in one park. Two world-record holders. One decade.

As the Missouri River Outdoor Expo reaches a number of milestones, perhaps the most notable is the countless memories created each year at Ponca State Park.

Located along the Missouri River near Ponca, the park transforms into a busy city – Nebraska’s fourth largest during the event – accommodating thousands of outdoor enthusiasts of all ages, interests and skill levels.

The prairie becomes a parking lot

as guided shuttles run continuously throughout the weekend, transporting visitors to three locations within the park: the Missouri National Recreational River Resource and Education Center, Eric Wiebe Memorial Shooting Complex and the Missouri River.

“We have received comments in our visitor surveys comparing the Expo atmosphere to a state fair – a state fair for the great outdoors,” said Park Superintendent Jeff Fields. “The event has grown large enough that you can’t see and do everything in a single day.”

In 2004, a grassroots effort to create the Missouri River Outdoor Expo was underway, establishing an

advisory board comprised of Nebraska Game and Parks Commission staff, community members and volunteers dedicated to organizing the event.

The Better Ponca Foundation and the Commission have since partnered with hundreds of sponsors, exhibitors and volunteers to grow the annual event, which aims to introduce or rekindle interest in natural resources and outdoor recreation through hands-on experience.

“Since the onset of the event, all the activities have been free to the public, thanks to the generous financial and in-kind support of our partners and sponsors,” Fields said. “They are a vital part of our success.”

Mark Rettig, Niobrara State Park superintendent, guides Missouri River Outdoor Expo visitors on a boat tour of the Missouri River at Ponca State Park.

Resource and Education Center

A hub of activity, the Resource and Education Center is surrounded by a variety of exhibitors, from a live raptor display to a rock climbing wall. Dog competitions coincide with that of lumberjacks, as attractions simultaneously awe the crowds. Tours of a park mini-lodge pair with wine and cheese tasting. A kid’s cook-off



invites youth to try new recipes. At the nearby pond, fly-fishing, bowfishing and kayaking share the water with regular anglers – some are seasoned veterans while others are experiencing each activity for the first time.

Inside the center, a large insect and snake display, a gift shop and exhibit wing featuring the Missouri National Recreational River are popular stops before journeying to the next location.

Missouri River

A gravel road becomes the main walkway for guests visiting the vendors along a portion of the unchannelized river bordering the 2,400 acre park. As it goes, the namesake of the Expo can be as unpredictable as the weekend’s weather. In 2011, the Missouri River flood temporarily moved exhibitors, including the 1800s heritage encampment, from their home on the riverfront. They have since returned, however, the same cannot be said

for the campground’s cottonwood trees, which were removed for safety reasons after a windstorm proved their demise last fall. Though a line denoting the flood’s high water mark on a single stump is all that remains of the former treeline, the location’s lively atmosphere is not at all affected by a change in scenery.

Scheduled attractions at the riverfront include “Armless Archer” Matt Stutzman, who made the Guinness Book of World Records for the longest accurate shot – 230 yards – at the Expo in 2011. Additional interactive exhibits at this location include a fossil dig, field dressing clinics and Missouri River boat rides.

The Eric Wiebe Shooting Complex

As one of the original founders of the Missouri River Outdoor Expo, Conservation Officer Eric Wiebe was



World-record holding archer Randy Oitker aims six arrows to hit six targets at once.



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

The Expo has a variety of hands-on activities suitable for all ages, such as the exhibit featuring live fish of the Missouri River.

instrumental in the early development and success of the event as an active member of the Expo advisory board.

Wiebe was well-known in the area for his dedication to hunter education, mentored youth hunts and shooting sports. After he lost a hard-fought battle with cancer, his family made a generous contribution for improvements and additions to Ponca State Park's shooting range, also known as the "Shooter's Village" during the Expo weekend.

From the family's initial donation, a fundraising campaign generated more than \$50,000 regionally. Dedicated in the spring of 2012, the Eric Wiebe Shooting Complex enhances the Expo

experience. The Complex features all-weather ranges for pellet gun, archery, muzzleloader, .22-caliber rifle, shotgun, slingshot, tomahawk and atlatl, and continues the heritage of hunting and shooting sports through guided first-hand participation.

Additional attractions at this location include world-record archer Randy Oitker, cowboy fast draw shooting and aerial archery.

In a prelude to Expo weekend, area fifth graders are invited to the School Day Invitational held the Friday before the event, when park staff and volunteers provide a variety of interactive outdoor activities for youth. Last year, the event drew in more



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Beginners and professionals alike are welcome at the Eric Wiebe Shooting Complex, also known as "Shooter's Village."

than 1,000 youth from 22 schools to experience 45 exhibits.

The Expo has come a long way since its inaugural weekend when cold and rainy weather put a damper on attendance. Mother Nature notwithstanding, many participants saw the potential of the event and have returned every year since. The crowd size has steadily increased, proving the popularity of the Expo experience. In both 2012 and 2013, weekend visitors numbered more than 52,000.

"We designed a logo for the event that includes the statement 'An Outdoor Family Tradition' because that is the atmosphere we want to create," said Jim Swenson, interim parks division administrator for the Commission. "It is evident when you observe three or four generations of families, and even the family dog, participating in the various events. Seeing parents and grandparents passing along their outdoor traditions is extremely rewarding."

Last year, more than 900 volunteers, many from the city of Ponca (population 1,081), ensured the event

went off without a hitch. They receive an official Expo hat and t-shirt for their efforts, highly coveted items that are often seen and worn with pride.

"Without their overwhelming dedication and support, this event would not be possible," Fields said.

In 2012, the Missouri River Outdoor Expo was the recipient of the "Excellence in Conservation" award from the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

Always the third weekend of September, this year the Expo is scheduled for September 20-21, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. both days. The event is a unique opportunity to join thousands of people who come together to celebrate, and perpetuate, one common legacy: Nebraska's outdoor heritage. ■

For more information, visit: Missouririverexpo.com.



View the Missouri River Outdoor Expo photo gallery.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Children dig for treasures in front of the Missouri National Recreational River Resource and Education Center.

Nebraska's Largest Classroom

Throughout Nebraska, school students grades 4-7 are invited to participate in the Outdoor Discovery Program, as it provides youth with additional opportunities to participate in numerous hands-on adventures in the outdoors.

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

Last year, more than 5,300 kids participated in events including the Expo School Day Invitational at Ponca State Park (SP), Outdoor Discovery Days at Platte River SP, Scottsbluff, Fort Kearny State Historical Park and the Niobrara SP Rendezvous.



For more information, visit Outdoornebraska.gov/ODP/FamilyDay.asp.

Wagon Train State Recreation Area

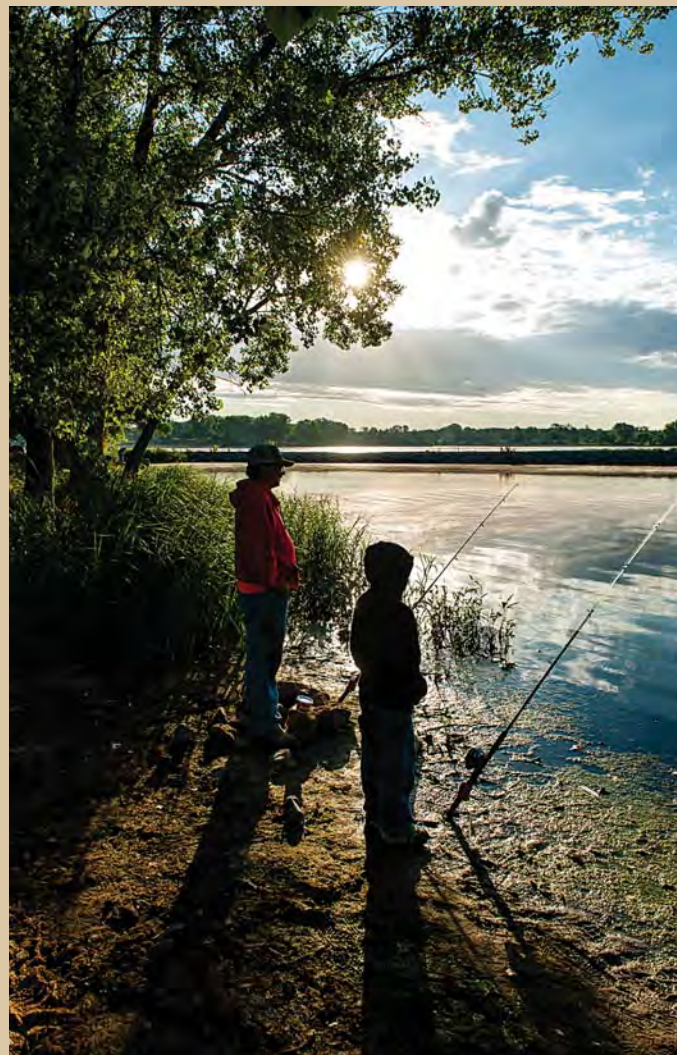
Photos and text by Eric Fowler

You can't water ski or open up your personal watercraft and fly across the lake at Wagon Train State Recreation Area, but that's exactly why many people visit – that and the superb fishing, camping and scenery.

With only a 5 mile-per-hour limit, Matt and Amy Ludwig of Adams and many others find Wagon Train Lake to be a perfect spot for kayaking.

Located just east of Hickman, the 1.5-mile long, 315-acre reservoir is one of a dozen recreational lakes in the Salt Creek watershed surrounding Lincoln.

Hardwoods line the banks of the reservoir, stretch beyond it in bays and line Wagon Train Creek above it. Much of the 747 acres of land around the lake, which also includes native and restored prairie and cedar forest, is a wildlife management area home to turkeys, deer, pheasants, quail,

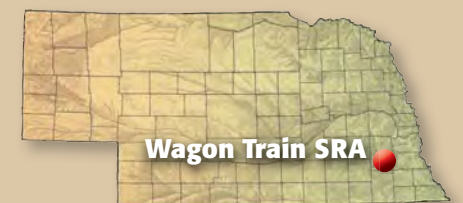


LEFT: Robert See, Jr. and his son, Jacob, of Lincoln, fish from the bank in Area 1 on a still morning.

RIGHT: Claire and Jeff Valder, Chris, Annika, Stephanie and Daniel Kuchar, Leslie and Travis Pillen and Kyle Eley and relax around a campfire at Wagon Train.

squirrels and other creatures of interest to hunters and wildlife watchers.

Completed in 1962, Wagon Train is one of four reservoirs that have been restored through the Aquatic Habitat Program, helping create an excellent fishery that boasts largemouth bass, crappie, bluegill and channel catfish, as well as a few trophy muskellunge. Rarely will you not find



Wagon Train SRA, a 315-acre Corps of Engineers reservoir with 746 acres of public land, is located 2 miles east of Hickman.



a boat on the lake or an angler casting from the dam or breakwaters on its shores.

The fishing makes the Area 2 RV campground on the lake's east side one of the most popular camping destinations in eastern Nebraska. The 28 spots there are full almost continuously from Memorial Day through Labor Day weekend. There are 80 other sites where folks can pitch a tent or park a camper for those who don't need electricity. Most are in the creek-side camp in Area 3 on the east, and a dozen are on the point overlooking the lake from the west at Area 1.

Kayakers flock to the lake, and a new launch site at Area 6 on the southeastern corner of the dam makes getting in and out of the water easier. And on a hot summer day, the swim beach in Area 3 is filled with kids of all ages.

For whatever their reasons, people who come to Wagon Train can count on one thing: a relaxing, peaceful day on the water. ■

Tornado Changes Face of Park

A tornado tore through Wagon Train State Recreation Area last October, leaving a mess of toppled trees, twisted picnic shelters, demolished outhouses and overturned campers in its path.

No one was hurt, but the twister took a bite out of the amount of shade available in the park's two tent camping areas. In Area 1 on the west side, only three trees were left standing. In Area 3 on the east, about three-fourths of the trees were destroyed.

"It's not going to look the same as it did for a long, long time, but it doesn't seem to have slowed the public down. We had a nice crowd for Memorial Day," said Jay Woltemath, superintendent of the park.

Woltemath said volunteers were instrumental in helping clean up the park following the storm and in replanting 80 trees in the campgrounds. A 5k run hosted by the city of Hickman raised \$5,800 for the effort.



PHOTO BY AMY KUCERA

TOP LEFT: The Area 3 swim beach is a busy place on a hot summer day, with some stragglers sticking it out until after sunset.

RIGHT: White-tailed deer browse along the shoreline in the bay on Area 1. Hunters and wildlife watchers have 1,064 acres of land and water to hunt or explore.



Shocking Flatheads

Text and photos
by Jeff Kurrus



A flathead catfish at Branched Oak Lake is measured by Cameron Dupue (left) and Scott Aden. The lake is a world class flathead fishery, with more than 20 percent of the fish surveyed weighing 20 pounds or greater.

This summer, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission will be completing a five-year study on flathead catfish at Branched Oak Lake north of Lincoln. During the study, fish have been caught by electrofishing, fitted with a plastic tag connected to their dorsal fin and released. Recently, I had the chance to sit down and talk with Fisheries Biologist Jordan Katt about what the Commission now knows about this top-notch flathead fishery, and what remains a mystery in so many ways.

Jordan, tell me about the history of Branched Oak as a trophy flathead fishery.

In 1999 and 2000, the Commission stocked 5,820 flatheads that were three to 12 inches long in Branched Oak to help control white perch. Along with the stocking, a catch-and-release regulation was implemented for flathead catfish.

Why do a tagging study?

We knew there was a “good” flathead population in the lake, but we really didn’t know much more than that. By doing this study, we are getting information about how many fish are in the population, what the size distribution is, what the growth rates are and where they are hanging out in the reservoir. We also attached radio transmitters to some flatheads in 2011 and 2012 to monitor movement patterns and habitat use.

From your results, how fast are the flats growing?

It appears they either grow really fast or really slow. For instance, we have age 3 fish that are anywhere from 7½ to 21½ inches. Most of those age 3 fish are closer to the lower end of that range but it’s still a huge size range for fish that are the same age.

We have also been able to look at the size range of the stocked fish. The majority of these fish are over 26 inches now. This really illustrates the importance of the catch and release regulation, considering these fish have been in the reservoir for more than 13 years now.



For the past five years, Commission biologists have fitted Branched Oak flatheads with tags. If the fish are re-caught by anglers or Commission surveyors, biologists are able to measure population, size distribution, growth rates and fish location.

How many flats do you estimate are in the lake?

From our numbers, there are only around 5,800 flatheads out there, but there is a high percentage of large fish. We estimate that 30 percent of the population would qualify for a Nebraska Master Angler Award (32 inches and longer). Twenty percent of the population is estimated to be over 20 pounds, and 12 percent is estimated to be over 30 pounds.

Outside of catch and release, why is this such a good flathead fishery?

During the mid-2000’s drought, the lake level was several feet low for a number of years. Willows began growing on the exposed shorelines and when the lake filled up, these flooded willows began providing ideal habitat for flatheads. Most of the big flatheads we sample are coming from these areas with flooded willows.

But you also sample near the dam and riprap jetties.

We do, and see a distinct size difference between the jetties and the timber. Big fish are in the timber and smaller fish are on the riprap. This is likely because of what the different sizes of flatheads are eating. The small fish are primarily eating crayfish, and crayfish are found in the rocks. The large fish are eating other fish, and the timber provides plenty of cover for those fish to ambush their prey.

I don't hear people talking about flatheads at Branched Oak a lot. Why do they seem to garner more secrecy than other fish?

I think there are a couple reasons, one being that Branched Oak is so close to a large population base in Lincoln and anglers keep their successes quiet. The other is much of the fishing for the flatheads takes place after dark, so an angler isn't



From 2010-2013, Commission crews captured 2,524 flatheads, of which 1,933 were tagged, 459 were recaptures and 74 were below minimum size (9.8 inches) for tagging. Anglers during this same time period reported catching 60 tagged fish.

going to be as visible to the rest of the lake as someone fishing during the day. However, the flatheads can be caught by all folks. The common techniques are fishing with live bait under floats and either trolling or casting crankbaits.

What did you learn from using the radio tags?

We had three categories of fish: The roamers, who were constantly moving; the homeboys, who never moved; and the pillagers, who'd stay in an area for, say, a month, then move to a new area and hang out for a while. Overall, the small fish were the homeboys and the larger fish were the roamers and pillagers. We haven't been able to identify why some fish were roamers and why others were pillagers.

What's next?

The tagging part of the study will be over in 2014, but we will still be doing some sampling out there, just not as often. It will likely be once a month from June to September. This is because we see different sizes of fish during different times of the summer. This will allow us to get an accurate representation of the population. I think the reason this population is so good is because of the catch and release regulation. These fish need time to grow to these large sizes, and the only way to give them that time is by making sure they stay in the lake.

And have the flats helped the white perch problem?

The white perch problem is a tough one. They have proven to be very prolific and even with the great flathead fishery, white perch are still abundant. We know that flatheads and other predators such as walleyes and wipers eat white perch, especially when gizzard shad aren't readily available during certain times of the year. So our



A flathead is released by Commission surveyors back into Branched Oak. The lake remains a world class fishery most notably because of its catch and release regulations.

management strategy is to keep as many predators in the lake as possible through restrictive harvest limits. What this has created is a unique trophy fishery for the predators in the lake.

As far as the flatheads, they're doing just fine. ■

If an angler catches a tagged flathead, leave the tag in the fish and send the length of the fish to Jordan.Katt@Nebraska.gov. He will compile the information for that fish and send it back to the angler.



See a video of Jordan Katt and his crew electrofishing at Branched Oak Lake last summer.



Dupue, Aden and Jordan Katt use an electrofishing boat to draw stunned fish to the water's surface. They then net the fish into their boat, where they will be measured and weighed. If the caught fish is already tagged, the crew will record the tagging information. If not, they will tag the fish and release it back into Branched Oak Lake.



A Grand Opening

The New Outdoor Education Center

Shooters fill 32 stations in the archery range at the new Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Outdoor Education Center in Lincoln.

Text and photos by Eric Fowler

Not long ago, Helen Boosalis Park in northeast Lincoln was a quiet, 60-acre woodland along Salt Creek where deer, turkeys and other wildlife lived. Today, it is home to a new state-of-the-art indoor archery and firearm shooting range and outdoor archery range that will expand the opportunities for Nebraskans to try their hand at shooting sports, and provide advanced shooting programs that may someday even help produce an Olympian.

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Outdoor Education Center at 44th and Superior streets opened to the public in May. A partnership between the Commission, the City of Lincoln, the Easton Sports Development Foundation and other partners, the \$2.8 million, 17,700-square-foot

center features a 25-yard, 10-lane firearm range and a 25-meter, 32-lane archery range that will be open to the public five days a week, 50 weeks a year.

The center is a giant step forward from the outdoor archery range the city and Commission created at the park in 2006. That 12-position target range is being improved and expanded to Olympic dimensions, with targets to 70 meters. A 20-station walk-through field course popular among hunters and 3D shooters remains as well.

The center will also be home to the Commission's Hunter and Boating Education staff and programs. Volunteer instructors will be able to access the ranges and the center's three classrooms on nights and weekends. "It's just like a rec center for the hunting and shooting sports," said Jeff Rawlinson, head of the Commission's outreach programs.

The firearm range is one of only eight indoor ranges in Nebraska. The benches on five of the 10 shooting lanes will be adjustable, making it possible for anyone, including youth and people with disabilities, to shoot. An automatic target retrieval system allows shooters to position their targets at any range out to 25 yards. The steel bullet trap was built to handle any firearm people might bring to the range.

At most indoor ranges, space is at a premium. But this one was built with added space behind the benches for coaches, parents, scout leaders or anyone else keeping an eye on the shooters. And if a parent doesn't want to be inside the range, they can still watch through large windows from the lobby. "It's not something you see every day at indoor shooting ranges," Rawlinson said. "A lot of times they enter a door and no one ever sees inside. We're trying to make the

average parent and group leader much more comfortable with shooting sports, and this is one way to accomplish that."

The center's 32-lane archery range makes it one of the largest in the Midwest. And for shoots that don't require more than 15 meter targets, the firing line can be flipped 90 degrees to make room for 45 archers. Target bags sit atop wheeled carts that make distance changes easy.

Like the firearm range, there is room to spare behind the firing line for spectators, coaches and shooters waiting their turn, and modular walls on the adjacent classrooms can be opened to provide even more space when needed, making it the perfect venue for large tournaments. Already, it has won the bid to host one of three Indoor National Field Archery Association Midwest Sectional Tournaments in March 2015, which will draw up to 200 archers from Nebraska and six



An automated target retrieval system allows shooters at any of the 10 stations on the firearm range to choose their distance.

other states. A bid to host the association's 2015 national tournament is pending. The center will also be home to shooting events for the Cornhusker State Games in 2014 and the State Games of America in 2015.

The outdoor archery course has already hosted several 3D shoots, and volunteers and staff are working to bring other events to the center. Rawlinson said he can see the Commission someday teaming with Lincoln Trap and Skeet, the range's neighbor, to host large shooting events. "The indoor-outdoor footprint gives us tons of flexibility as to what we can accomplish out here for the shooting sports," he said.

While the ability to host events will be nice, Rawlinson said the mission of the facility will be teaching people to shoot, providing advanced programs to improve their skills and keeping them shooting.

Programs will be offered for beginners, especially families and scouting, 4-H and other youth groups, but folks can also simply walk in and rent a gun or bow and, with direction of range supervisors, try it out on their own as well. Other programs will build on existing introductory ones such as the National Archery in the Schools Program presented by the Commission in more than 200 schools across the state, and additional offerings by the Commission, the City of Lincoln and other organizations.

One advanced program is already slated for those bitten by the shooting bug: The Junior Olympic Archery Development program. Jan Robertson, a USA Archery Level 4 instructor, one step below Olympic coach, will lead the class, moving from a similar post at Prairie Bowmen, a Lincoln club. With both recreational and competitive aspects, Robertson said participants can set the bar as high as they want. "When we find someone who is really interested in developing skills, then we take it a step further with some personal coaching or small group coaching where we really get into all of the subtleties of what's called the national training system."

The Outdoor Education Center is the sixth Easton

Foundations Affiliate Archery Center in the country, with others in Florida, Utah, California, South Dakota and Michigan. Three more will open this summer or next spring in Michigan, South Dakota and Georgia. Three are owned and operated by the Easton Foundations, while others are partnerships with cities, universities or organizations. Three other centers will have a firearm range.

Expanding access to archery and developing Olympic-class archers is the goal of the Easton Foundations and why they fund programs to help clubs, schools or organizations buy equipment and pay from 10 to 30 percent of the cost of developing shooting centers such as this. Easton helps with everything from building design to developing a business plan, and then will help bring the top coaches in the country to the centers to train coaches from around the state and region so they can expand shooting opportunities elsewhere.



Jillian Dicke of Waverly takes aim at the archery range during the center's grand opening June 7.

"It's a way for people who want to get involved in archery to come to first class facilities across the country and learn what it takes to be in the Olympics," Doug Engh, Easton Foundations Outreach Director, said of the affiliate program. "But we recognize that a lot of people aren't interested in the Olympics. They want to learn bowhunting or field archery or anything else. We're cool with that. That's all part of it. Fling arrows down range, that's what we want to see."

The Easton \$611,000 grant provided the lion's share of the matching funds needed to acquire nearly \$2 million from the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Program, which redistributes proceeds from an excise tax on firearms, ammunition and other hunting and shooting equipment to the states. Another \$78,000 in private grants helped build the center. Only 3.5 percent of the cost of the facility came from local funding: \$28,000 was from hunting permit sales and \$70,000 from boating license revenue.

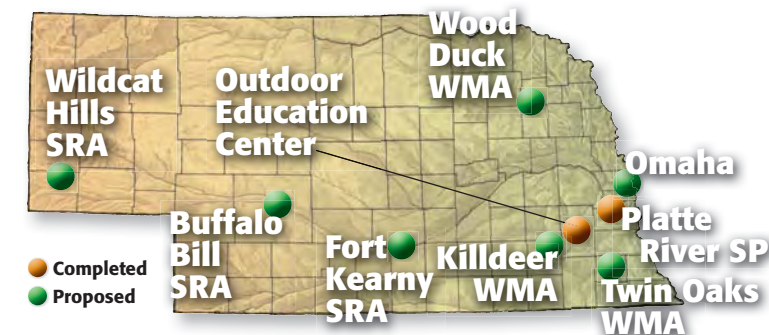
Rawlinson said the center will help connect new shooters with other organizations or clubs such as the Isaac Walton League or Prairie Bowmen, where they can continue to develop their skills and "find a niche they can continue for the rest of their life. That's the beauty of shooting sports."

The center is opening at a time when interest in the shooting sports is booming. Sales of firearms in 2013 were up 77 percent from 2009. Bow and arrow sales were up 58 percent in the same time. Some of the growth in archery, especially among youth, can be attributed to the *The Hunger Games* books and movies. Katniss Everdeen, the bow-yielding heroine of the series, first appeared on the big screen in 2012, and between 2011 and 2013, individual memberships in USA Archery doubled. Sales of youth equipment jumped 20 to 30 percent following the first installment. Growth continued with the sequel, *Hunger Games: Catching Fire*, released last November, and two more films, *Mockingjay Parts 1* and 2, are scheduled for release this November and next.

Interest in the sport hasn't bypassed Nebraska. Hundreds of people braved single-digit temperatures to shoot in the Commission's Archery On Fire promotion at Platte River State Park last November. The number of schools participating in the National Archery in the Schools Program is up 24 percent from 2012 and the 2014 state tournament in March climbed from 400 to a record 640 shooters.

While a handful of full and part-time staff will run the center, volunteers will be critical to its operation, just as they are to the Commission's boating, hunting and fishing education programs, as they have been to maintaining the outdoor range at Boosalis Park since it opened. Rawlinson isn't worried about finding enough help. "There are a lot of people that are passionate about hunting and the shooting sports and want to be a part of this facility," he said. "It's exciting. I've had a lot of people call me and say, 'Hey. Are you guys going to need any volunteers?'"

The center is another step in the Commission's plan to provide Nebraskans more places to shoot. For years, they have built modest archery and shotgun ranges at state parks, recreation areas and wildlife management areas around Nebraska, including a rifle sight-in range at the Valentine Fish Hatchery and a rifle range at Pressey Wildlife Management Area that hosts the annual Nebraska



High School Small Bore Rifle Silhouette Championships. The Commission has also provided grants to assist in the construction of private indoor and outdoor ranges.

But it has raised the stakes in recent years. Its biggest venture to date had been the Roger G. Sykes Outdoor Heritage Education Complex, which opened in 2011 at Platte River State Park. That range features a 10-station, 60-yard small-bore firearm range, a 14-station, 40-yard archery range, a 5-station trap range and a 10-station, 10-meter indoor air rifle range. A similar shooting complex in the planning stages at the Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area south of Gering will add a sight-in range and should open sometime in 2015. Two more are tentatively slated for Fort Kearny State Recreation Area and Buffalo Bill State Recreation Area in the coming years. An indoor/outdoor center similar to the one now open in Lincoln is planned for Omaha. Work is also underway to construct a rifle sight-in range at Killdeer Wildlife Management Area (WMA) near Lincoln, with plans to build other sight-in ranges at Twin Oaks WMA near Tecumseh and Wood Duck WMA near Stanton.

"Hunting and the shooting sports are directly tied to this agency's mission," Rawlinson said. "Our ability to manage the state's natural resources is directly linked to hunting, fishing, shooting sports and the revenue they generate."

"And this facility serves as a major milestone in providing recreational and educational shooting sports activities for recruitment and retention of hunters and shooting sports enthusiasts." ■

INDOOR RANGE HOURS: Monday, Tuesday, Friday: 12 a.m. - 8 p.m.; Saturday: 10 a.m. - 8 p.m.; Sunday: Noon - 6 p.m. Closed Wednesdays and Thursdays.

Firearm Range: Fees: \$20/hour/lane; \$12/half-hour/lane; \$5/youth 15 and under. **Small-bore gun rental:** \$5.50/person with 25 rounds. **Annual Pass:** Individual \$325, Family \$400.

Archery Range: Fees: \$10/hour/lane; \$3/lane Youth 15 and under. **Bow Rental:** \$2.50/person for bow and arrows. **Annual Pass:** Individual \$250, Family \$300.

OUTDOOR RANGE: Open daily, year-round, sunrise to sunset. **Fees:** \$3/hour. Youth 15 and under/Free. **Annual Pass:** Individual \$40, Family \$60.

TOTAL SHOOTING SPORTS PACKAGE: Annual pass for all ranges. Youth \$100. Individual \$450, Family \$575.

CLASSROOM USE: \$75/day, \$200/banquet with use of archery range.

Note: Visitors may bring their own firearms, bows and ammunition.

Stuck in the Weeds

A guide to Nebraska's invasive plant experts.

By Karie Decker, Assistant Wildlife Administrator

Think controlling or managing invasive plants on your property is a daunting task? You're not alone. There are an estimated 450 non-native plants in Nebraska. While only a fraction of those are considered invasive, new harmful plants threaten to cross our borders each year. We currently have 12 noxious weeds listed by the Nebraska Department of Agriculture: Canada thistle, leafy spurge, musk thistle, plumeless thistle, purple loosestrife, spotted knapweed, diffuse knapweed, saltcedar, phragmites, Japanese knotweed, giant knotweed, and the most recently listed, sericea lespedeza (pictured). While these noxious weeds generally represent our most troublesome plants, there are many other invasive plants that give us grief. Luckily, there are a multitude of experienced folks in our state willing to help. Whether you're a landowner concerned about a new weed in your pasture, or a homeowner in Omaha trying to get rid of leftover purple loosestrife, options are available.

First, we have the **Nebraska Department of Agriculture (NDA)** that houses the noxious weed program. The folks there are certainly experts in their field, and full of knowledgeable tips to help with your concerns. They can also help you better understand our state's laws on noxious weeds, which residents are required to follow. Start with their website: Nda.nebraska.gov/noxious_weed/index.html.

Also at the state level, the **Nebraska Weed Control Association** is a non-profit organization comprised of representatives known as weed control authorities in county government. The purpose of the Association includes advancing the interests of agriculture in the improvement of Nebraska's weed control program; promoting a comprehensive weed control program concerning uniformity in services and charges, explaining proper chemical usage and product quality and control; and actively participating in legislative measures concerning weed control. Neweed.org.

The **Nebraska Invasive Species Project** helps to provide information statewide about aquatic and terrestrial invasive species, and is a source for invasive species contacts and other resources. The project manager also coordinates activities of the Invasive Species Council; a diverse group of federal, state, non-governmental organizations and landowners that help guide management of all invasive species statewide. Neinvasives.com.

Because it makes sense to group invasive plants by regions of the state that share similar habitats, weed management areas were formed. These organizations bring together landowners and private, city, county, state and federal managers in a geographical area to coordinate efforts and expertise against common invasive weed species. Nebraska currently has 13 weed management area groups, all of which can be found at Neweed.org/Wma.aspx. And, actually, there's a new over-arching group that helps increase



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

efficiency by maintaining communication across these areas – the Nebraska Weed Management Areas Coalition. Be on the lookout for great information coming from this group.

In addition to weed management areas, UN-L Extension staff scattered across the state can provide invaluable help, assisting with everything from farms and ranches to communities and local economies. To find staff in your area, visit Extension.unl.edu/officeslist. In fact, some important invasive plant research and education is being conducted by this group at the West Central Research and Extension Office in North Platte: Westcentral.unl.edu.

Narrowing down even further are our weed control authorities. Each county has a designated weed control authority and county weed superintendent and can be located at Neweed.org/Control.aspx. These folks are responsible for administration of noxious weed control laws at the county level.

Identifying, preventing, and controlling invasive plants doesn't have to be done alone. We are lucky to live in a state that invests in helping organizations and landowners with a difficult, and oftentimes expensive, task. I have contacted nearly everyone on this list, and each was more than willing to go the extra mile and help with my invasive plant questions. If you're not so internet savvy, try calling the NDA Noxious Weed Program Manager at (402) 471-6844, or the Nebraska Invasive Species Project Coordinator at (402) 471-3133. Either way, next time you find yourself stuck in the weeds, refer back to this guide to help get you out. ■



Visit the Nebraska Department of Agriculture website for more information on the state's noxious weed program.

Antlions

The relentless, and sometimes violent, doodlebug.

By Chris Helzer, Eastern Nebraska Program Director, The Nature Conservancy

“Antlion” is a tough name for an insect, and one that is well-earned. The ½-inch long antlion larva excavates a cone-shaped hole in sand or other loose soil, and then buries itself just below the bottom of the cone, leaving only its impressive mandibles (jaws) showing. Then, it waits.

Eventually, a passing insect (often an ant) will get a little too close to the edge of the cone and slip in. A cascade of loose sand, dislodged by the unfortunate creature's misstep, carries the insect inexorably down the slope to the waiting jaws of the antlion. When it reaches the bottom of the cone, the poor insect is violently attacked and bitten, and then pulled beneath the surface to die. If, by some chance, the insect is able to start crawling back toward the rim before it's caught, the antlion will throw mouthfuls of sand to trigger a small avalanche, which carries the insect back to the waiting jaws of doom. Besides being big and sharp, those jaws also contain a venom that both paralyzes and liquefies the innards of prey. Once the prey is immobilized, the antlion quietly sucks out the liquefied contents of the body and then flings the hollow corpse from the cone and prepares the trap for the next victim.

While “antlion” is a great name for this terrifying little creature, humans have given it another one that would surely mortify the antlion if it found out (if antlions were capable of being mortified). That secondary name is “doodlebug.” For an ambush killer that lies in wait beneath the earth and lunges out at prey sliding helplessly to their death, “doodlebug” seems rather inappropriate. Calling an antlion “doodlebug” is like nicknaming the leader of a rough biker gang “cutie pie” or calling a big strapping cowboy “daisy.”

The doodlebug label comes from the winding trails made by larvae as they search for an appropriate place to build

their pits of death. The seemingly aimless, wandering trails resemble the mindless scribbling of a bored high schooler in the margin of their notebook. It's a bug, and it doodles. I guess.

The irony of the doodlebug name is that it was given because of the actions of the larvae, which are about as scary as



ANTLION adults look more like a damselfly rather than the larvae (above).



Antlion dens are cone-shaped depressions in fine, loose material.

an insect can look and act. If you were going to give a namby pamby name to antlions, you'd be more justified to base that name on the adult phase of the species. Adult antlions look somewhat like a damselfly, but are very weak flyers, and barely manage to flutter feebly about looking for a mate. They certainly do not look like a creature that would inspire much fear among its fellow invertebrates.

Names aside, antlions are common throughout much of Nebraska, and

are probably living somewhere near you. Be on the lookout for little cone-shaped depressions in dry crumbly soil, especially around the base of buildings or naturally-occurring cliffs or overhangs. If you find one, feel free to grab a nearby ant or other small invertebrate and drop it into the cone. Don't worry, you won't have to listen to any screams of terror as the poor creature slips to its sure and violent death. But only because insects can't scream. ■

PHOTOS BY CHRIS HELZER



▲ The morning after the night before. From left: Roy Patterson, Lew Landmesser, Dr. Hanna, Ford Curtis, John Springman, and Frank Harris.

These are all businessmen from Ansley, Nebraska in the late 1920s. Note the cane fishing poles.

My dad, Verney Ansberry, used to fish with John Springman and Frank Harris, and they dragged me along to the South Loup River where I think most of the mosquitoes lived.

I knew all these men except Doc Hanna; I'm 82 now and still fish the South Loup River.

— Larry Amsberry,
Ansley, Nebraska

► The attached photo was taken at Woods sand pit in Schuyler, Nebraska in 1951. Pictured from left to right are Milford Svasek, Don Salak (my father-in-law) and Bob Bernhiesel.

My husband Dave and I are avid readers of the magazine and would love to see an old photo of his dad enjoying the Nebraska outdoors in an upcoming issue.

— Jennifer Salak
Omaha, Nebraska



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

Salt Creek Tiger Beetle

Captive rearing program makes strides.

By Eric Fowler

After three years with little to show for their efforts, researchers may have cracked the code to rearing endangered Salt Creek tiger beetles in captivity.

In early May, 148 tiger beetle larvae were released at three saline wetlands along Little Salt Creek north of Lincoln. Another 25 larvae were released later or will be studied at the Henry Doorly Zoo which, along with the Lincoln Children's Zoo, helped raise the insects. The total was far above the previous high of 27 larvae produced in 2011-12 by the program, aided by staff from the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

The larvae were produced by 15 pairs of adult Salt Creek tiger beetles captured last spring and taken to the lab, where they bred and laid eggs in petri dishes filled with special saline soil. Researchers transferred 332 larvae to tubes, another record, and kept them in rearing chambers where they were fed fruit flies and crickets until they were released in May.

The insects, one of the rarest in North America, will live underground as larvae until next May or June. Then, they will emerge as adults and feed and breed for 6 to 8 weeks before they die.

Volunteers from the Master Naturalist Program will be monitoring the larvae, which wait in the mouths of their burrows and ambush insects that walk by. Whether the burrows are open or closed and changes in size helps researchers track survival and growth, said Mike Fritz, natural heritage biologist with the Commission.

Surveys in 2013 by UN-L researchers found just 365 adult Salt Creek tiger beetles in the three remaining wild populations, all of which are located along a seven-mile long stretch of Little Salt Creek. Listed as endangered in 2005, the population has ranged from 115 in 1993 to 777 in 2002.

The captive-reared larvae will help



Steve Spomer of the University of Nebraska and Mike Fritz of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission transplant Salt Creek tiger beetle larvae into a saline wetland.

build the wild populations. Next year, researchers hope to release larvae into saline wetlands where beetles were once found, eventually expanding the number of populations to six.

"It's encouraging," Bob Harms, a Grand Island-based USFWS biologist overseeing Salt Creek tiger beetle recovery, said of this year's success in the rearing program. Getting the proper mixture of sand, soil and salinity to use in the lab, critical to egg development and larvae survival, was the key. Researchers had tried several mixtures, even taking soil from saline wetlands where tiger beetles were found. The right mix was found after they brought a similar species of tiger beetle into the lab, presented it with many choices and "let them choose which soil they wanted," Harms said.

Researchers will continue to tweak the process in hopes of finding even greater success. Fritz has deployed 10 sensors that monitor soil temperature and moisture from the surface to 36 inches to help further define the needs of the species both in the rearing chambers and in the wild.

Also in May, the USFWS announced a revision in the amount of habitat

critical for the species' recovery. While the 1,110 acres now deemed critical is less than the 1,933 acres listed in 2010, it does expand the coverage, all of which is in Lancaster and Saunders counties, from Little Salt and Rock creeks to include Haines Branch and Oak creeks. Only 35 acres of habitat currently hold beetles, a fraction of the 20,000 acres of saline wetlands that historically were found in the region but lost to urban and agricultural development and stream channelization.

Harms said the critical habitat designation will protect the creeks and wetlands from development, but there will be little affect on private landowners. Grazing around the wetlands and farming on adjacent sites can continue. More importantly, the designation will guide conservation efforts and could boost funding for habitat restoration, conservation easements, land purchases and beetle reintroduction on sites where landowners are interested.

"It's bigger than the Salt Creek tiger beetle," Harms said. "It's protecting the saline wetland ecosystem, and the Salt Creek tiger beetle is our rallying insect." ■

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Squirrel with Salsa Verde

Mexican-inspired slow-cooked squirrel served with cilantro-lime rice and fresh avocados.

By Jenny Nguyen

A widely available wild game, squirrels have offered many young hunters hours of escape in the woods before the lure of bigger game. They taste somewhere between a lighter meat such as rabbit and a darker, more flavorful meat such as dove. Because squirrels' diets consists of mostly nuts, specifically black walnuts in Nebraska, squirrel meat sets itself apart from other upland game for its nutty, buttery and sweet taste. Squirrels are best slow-cooked or braised, but are also tasty fried.

Nebraska has a relatively long season for hunting squirrels, running from August 1 to January 31. The bag limit is 7, you can hunt them just about any time during the day, and the ammo to hunt them is inexpensive. For all these reasons, squirrels are the ideal game in my book.

Servings: 2

Prep Time: 30 minutes

Cooking Time: 5½ hours

Ingredients:

- 2 squirrels, broken down
- 2 tablespoons of butter
- kosher salt and freshly cracked pepper
- 1 cup of chicken broth
- queso fresco cheese
- 1 large avocado, sliced

Tomatillo Salsa Verde

- 8 medium tomatillos, husked and rinsed
- 1 to 2 jalapeño peppers, stems removed
- 4 large garlic cloves, peeled
- 12 sprigs of fresh cilantro, roughly chopped
- quarter of an onion, chopped
- ½ cup of water
- 1 teaspoon of kosher salt

Cilantro-Lime Rice

- 1 cup of uncooked long grain rice, rinsed
- 2 cups of water

- 1 tablespoon of olive oil
- zest of 1 lime
- ½ teaspoon of kosher salt
- 3 tablespoons of chopped cilantro

1. To make salsa verde, place tomatillos, jalapeños and garlic in a rimmed baking pan. Broil until jalapeños are roasted, garlic is browned and tomatillos turn a blotchy black. Garlic will brown faster – take it out before it burns. Allow ingredients to cool, and then add tomatillos (and their juices), garlic, jalapeños, salt, cilantro and ¼ cup of water into a blender. Pulse until smooth, and then pour into a bowl. Mix in chopped onion and set aside. Add more salt to taste.

2. Dab squirrel pieces dry with paper towels, and then season well with salt and pepper. Melt butter in a skillet over medium-high heat and brown squirrel pieces on both sides. You don't have to cook the meat through.

3. Move browned pieces of squirrel into a slow cooker. Pour in the chicken stock and about ¾ of the salsa verde,

reserving the rest to serve on the side or for tortilla chips. Cook on low for 5 hours or until squirrel is tender. Then serve squirrel over cilantro-lime rice with queso fresco cheese crumbled on top and fresh avocado slices on the side.

4. To make cilantro-lime rice, combine rice, water, oil and salt in a heavy pot. Boil on high uncovered until the water reduces down to skim the top of the rice, then reduce heat to low and cook covered for 15 minutes. Then take off heat and keep covered for an additional 5 minutes. Finally, toss in cilantro and lime zest. ■

This recipe and photograph originally appeared on Jenny's Food for Hunters blog at Foodforhunters.com.

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



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN

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The Dance Hall

Hitting the blinker at the intersection of Norden Road and Apple Street, the unincorporated village of Norden's only crossroad, I smile wryly at my entrenched city reflexes. I've seen only one lonely ranch truck in two roundtrips totaling 100 miles along scenic Norden Road. Legendary in these remote regions of northern Nebraska, Norden's population will swell by 300 times come nightfall – the same factor as Woodstock. Sure, the population is only three, but the math still works. In the distance stands the unimposing structure where calm will become crazy.

Since 1931, folks within a broad rural radius have gathered together at the Norden Dance Hall. High wheat-colored crossbeams frame a sprawling dance floor smoothed by decades of sliding boot soles. Every other summer Saturday here, the smell of hamburgers and the sound of humans fill the air. Night breezes slowly cool the hall through open windows, but it's hot. Sweaty dancers don't care; they smile and swing to the live band. It's not a fixed rule, but I gauge the span of relationships by measuring smiles shared. Some young couples throw down impressive swinging moves and are given wider berths as if creating their own kinetic force field. Choreography is the general rule; you can't merely bust a random move at country dances, so that mercifully leaves me out. It's loud. I limit my nearness to the twangy band like one would to a cracked nuclear reactor, for fear of permanent damage.

Almost imperceptibly, all couples move counterclockwise around the floor, spinning like planetary systems within a greater revolving galaxy. And like the center of a galaxy does, this place pulls. The Dance Hall is the focal point up here, yet regardless of its intense vibrancy, it somehow remains distant and obscure to outsiders, still to be discovered.

Mark Harris
August 24, 2013

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