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Oglala National Grassland, Sioux County.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

This page: Sunflowers are silhouetted by the setting
sun at Merritt Reservoir State Recreation Area in Cherry
County.

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

Nebraskaland
magazine

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



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Cicadas are buzzing this month. MIKE FORSBERG, NEBRASKALAND

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EQUIPMENT

Habitat tools like no-till grass drills and prescribed burn equipment are available through local chapters across the state. No-till drills are funded in partnership with local PF and QF chapters, The Nebraska Environmental Trust and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

In addition, statewide habitat programs and costshare assistance through your local chapter might be available. For more information and access to these options, visit our website at:

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



MILKWEED AT KIOWA
The sun rises over swamp
milkweed at Kiowa Wildlife
Management Area near
Morrill.

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



Participants of citizen science at Indian Cave, Denton Prairie, and Chadron State Park Bioblitz. RENAE BLUM, JUSTIN HAAG

BIODIVERSITY IN STATE PARKS

By Alie Mayes, Community Science Specialist

Do you remember the awe of exploring nature as a child? Many of my favorite memories stem from discovering the plants and animals that lived in nearby state parks. Flipping logs to discover what lived underneath. Sneaking up on frogs and turtles basking near the edge of the water. Constantly asking my parents, “What’s this?”

A new project from Game and Parks hopes to connect park-goers with the child-like wonder of taking a closer look at nature around them. The project, Biodiversity in State Parks, is an invitation to slow down, look closely and to share observations of the plants, animals and fungi you find in your favorite state park area.

With more than 70 locations to visit — state parks, state recreation areas and state historical parks — Nebraska’s Park System has something for everyone, including a variety of activities and amenities and a diversity of habitats to explore and wildlife to view.

What is Biodiversity in State Parks?

Biodiversity in State Parks is an effort to learn more about the animals and plants that call our state parks home. To do this, we are utilizing community science. Community science, also known as citizen science, refers to research projects that include community volunteers. For Biodiversity in State Parks, we are asking volunteers to upload their wildlife observations to the app iNaturalist.

After creating a free account, users can make wildlife observations by uploading “evidence” in the form of photos or audio files, such as bird or frog calls. This evidence allows

sightings to be verified. This is especially important in the case of rare species, species recorded in new locations and species of conservation importance. All observations made within the boundary of a park area will count toward this project.

Tips for Making Quality Observations

You can take images directly through the app, but it may be helpful to take pictures and upload them later. This lets you pick the best images to upload. Here are a few other tips:

- Because you can upload multiple photographs for each observation, include different angles.
- Frame your image — it can be helpful to crop an image to make it clear what the reviewer is focusing on.
- Always complete the “What did you see” field. If you know something is an oak tree, but are unsure what kind, type or select “Oak Trees” from the list. iNaturalist has a helpful feature that generates a list of possible identifications. This is a helpful tool that may allow you to narrow down your choices.
- Be respectful — getting a good photo is never worth negatively impacting wildlife.

Whether you’re participating in a naturalist program, attending a bioblitz event or just hiking the trails, you can contribute to science and learn more about the biodiversity in Nebraska using iNaturalist as you explore your Nebraska state parks this summer. For more information about using iNaturalist, visit inaturalist.org/pages/getting+started.

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During low water situations, looking for frogs near lake edges is an exciting activity for kids. With net in hand, places like Two Rivers State Recreation Area, seen here, are prime locations for discovery. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

LET’S GET LOW

By Jeff Kurrus and Monica Macoubrie

Fill a balloon with air. Then let out half of it. That’s what many Nebraska lake shorelines look like this time of year. Either drawn down for irrigation or drought stricken, these shorelines aren’t eye-appealing. At least not for adults.

But for kids, a few extra feet of exposed shoreline is beautiful, especially considering that their eyes will be glued to the sand below.

What They’ll Find

From frogs and fish to shells and rocks, there are endless possibilities for discovery in the sand. Old and new fishing lures, tadpoles and marble-sized toads, a walk through the sand will bring any number of surprises. Digging in the sand can also bring observations of invertebrates such as worms, beetles or snails. In certain areas, kids could stumble on historical artifacts such as arrowheads or pottery fragments. These discoveries can spark curiosity and wonder about the stories behind them.

What They’ll Need

A net is a must. It is a teacher and classroom all by itself. Nothing is more fun than watching a kid try to catch significantly faster fish with a hand net. If the netting is smaller, then there is a better chance to catch minnows and even tadpoles.

Also bring a small container of some sort. It’s not worth catching something if you can’t look at it for a little while before releasing it. This curiosity will encourage children to ask questions, leading them to discover so much more right at their feet.

What They’ll Learn

The lessons are endless. Tadpoles will begin to grow legs, or morph, at different sizes; those fish fry are not all “minnows,” some are small versions of the big fish you’re catching; leopard frogs are wicked fast; there are crayfish in your lake; there are also fossils; and there are some beautiful rocks to be discovered as well.

A kid’s interest will vary considerably from your own. The great part about the low water is that both of you can pursue the passions of your choice — whether it’s your late afternoon jaunt to catch dinner or your child’s desire to catch just about anything. Exploring shorelines can teach children about the impacts of human activity in the environment as well, as they may encounter erosion or litter, which can lead to discussions about conservation and stewardship.

By engaging with nature in this way, kids can foster a sense of wonder and respect for the world around them, setting the foundation for lifelong appreciation of the environment — whether the shorelines are eye-appealing or not.

When boating, remember to:

 CLEAN

 DRAIN

 DRY







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RYAN SPARKS

CAJUN PIKE CAKES

By Ryan Sparks

Pike get a bad rap. Not because they aren’t delicious, but because of their pesky Y-bones. There is a technique to filleting pike that leaves you with five boneless fillets, but an easier method is to fillet them normally and make pike cakes. By gently poaching the fillets and then flaking the meat from the bones, you’re left with a pile of flaky white fish that makes my favorite pike dish.

Think of pike cakes as a template rather than a strict recipe. You can substitute almost anything in the recipe (including what type of fish you use), and they will still turn out great. For this variety, I went with a Cajun-inspired recipe using the “holy trinity” of bell peppers and onion. I made these pike cakes with the rib meat from three pike. That’s a lot of good fish that would have otherwise been wasted. Try this version first and then play around with your own pike cake recipe.

Servings: 4 (makes 6 pike cakes)
Prep Time: 20 minutes
Cooking Time: 15 minutes
Ingredients:

- ½ pound cooked, flaked pike

- 1 egg
- 1 cup crushed saltine crackers (a little more than half a sleeve)
- ¼ cup finely diced green bell pepper (about half a small bell pepper)
- ¼ cup finely diced red bell pepper (about half a small bell pepper)
- ¼ cup finely diced white onion
- 2 tablespoons mayonnaise
- 1½ teaspoons Cajun seasoning
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- Mixed salad greens
- 3 tablespoons butter
- Lemon wedges (for serving)

Remoulade Sauce - makes 1½ cups

- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 3 tablespoons coarse mustard
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon chopped parsley
- 1 tablespoon Louisiana-style hot sauce
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 2 green onions, minced
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ⅓ teaspoon cayenne pepper

1. Start by gently poaching your fish in water. Chicken stock, white wine or even milk (my personal favorite) will also work. When the fish is just cooked through, transfer it to a plate to cool.
2. While the fish cools, mix all the other ingredients (except butter, mixed greens, lemon wedges and remoulade sauce) in a bowl.
3. When cool to handle, flake the flesh from the bones. Be thorough. Add boneless fish to the bowl with the rest of the ingredients and mix thoroughly.
4. Grab a handful of the mixture, turning it your hand and slightly squeezing while simultaneously pressing with your thumb. This method creates perfectly sized and shaped fish cakes.
5. When your cakes are formed, melt the butter in a nonstick pan over medium heat. When it begins to foam, add the cakes and cook on each side for five minutes or until they are perfectly browned.
6. Place the cakes on a bed of mixed greens, top with remoulade sauce and serve with a lemon wedge.

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NEBRASKA

— GAME  PARKS —

Much To Do In July

By Nebraskaland Staff



The Buttes at Sowbelly Canyon, in Sioux County's Pine Ridge, contribute to a picturesque afternoon in the Panhandle.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

*O*f course it's hot. It's July.
But if you can just get past the urge to stay near air conditioning and venture outside, there are so many things across the state to see and do.
Here are a few of our favorites. **N**



LEFT: Watch a sunrise and catch a fish like Brooklyn Phelpes of Bellevue with her sister, Taylor. While some of the best times to fish can still be in the heart of sun and sweat, nothing beats an early morning on the water — regardless of the month.

JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

ABOVE: If you do miss the sunrise alarm clock, there's nothing wrong with a midday fly-fishing venture — as seen here with Vance Haug of Chadron fishing for trout at Sowbelly Creek in Sioux County.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

RIGHT: A mule deer doe and fawn stand on railroad tracks in Dawes County. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND





LEFT: A closer look at the flowers blooming this late in the year will reveal pollinators that have much less concern for you than their current activity. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

ABOVE: An afternoon drive in western Nebraska reveals a rancher working in a hayfield with Roundtop Butte in the distance. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

TOP RIGHT: Laila Jones Fairgood (front) and Preyah Fairgood from Omaha ride ponies at Eugene T. Mahoney State Park — where there is always some new adventure to explore — near Ashland.

JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

BOTTOM RIGHT: A turkey vulture perches on a dead pine tree at Ponderosa Wildlife Management Area in Dawes County, reminding viewers there is always something interesting to see in the outdoors.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND





TOP LEFT: A house wren perches on a limb near Sand Creek in Oglala National Grassland in Sioux County, an excellent location for summer birders. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

BOTTOM LEFT: A late-day stroll near the 1909 Officers Quarters at Fort Robinson State Park will show you the history and present-day beauty of the park. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

ABOVE: A grass spider stands on a beaver pond filled with ramshorn and bladder snails, moss and rushes — a reminder that sometimes all we need to see this time of year is right at our feet. ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

Outdoor Nebraska

By Renae Blum

It's summer — and the outdoors is calling. Have you ever been to a bioblitz or foraged for wild raspberries? Try something new this month, and bring the family! 📍



Pick wild raspberries

Time frame varies; usually starts late June in the south and early July in the north | Eastern third of Nebraska and the northern tier of counties across the state

Next to wild strawberries, wild raspberries are Nebraska's tastiest wild fruit. Found on a thorny shrub, wild raspberry grows in partial shade on the edge of woodlands, fence lines or road ditches. They ripen from a whitish-green to red to a dark purple; harvest them in the latter stage. This is a good activity to enjoy while you're out doing other activities, like fishing or hiking. LEXI CHRISTENSEN

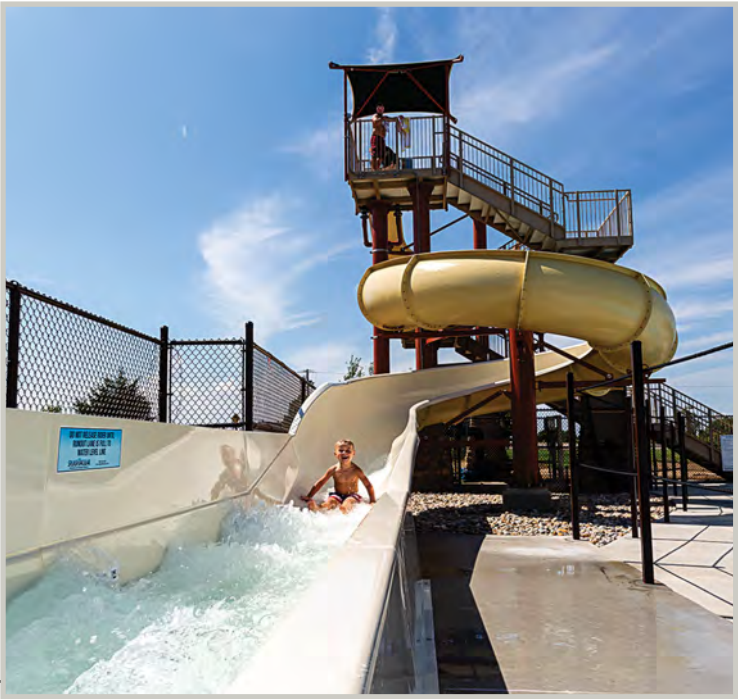
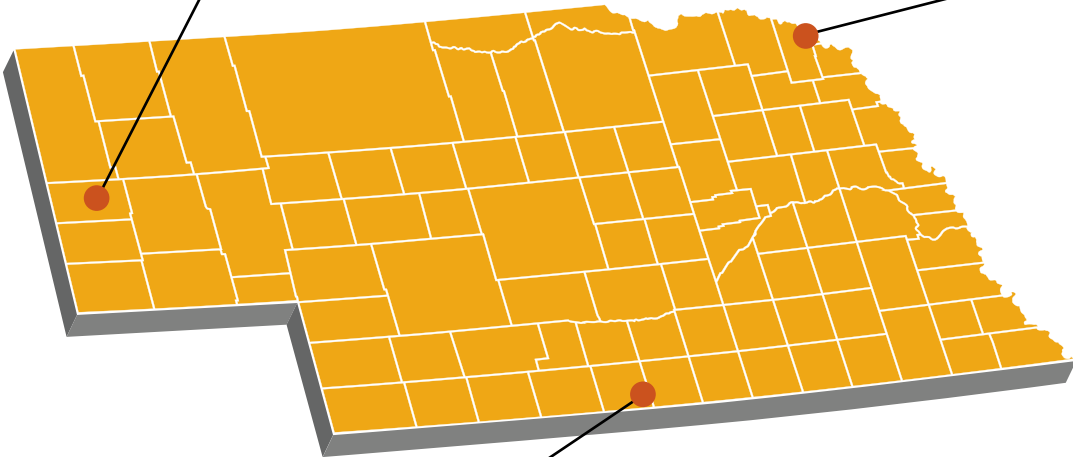


Participate in a bioblitz

Evening of July 19 and morning of July 20 | Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area

Discover the amazing diversity of animals and plants that call the Wildcat Hills home. People of all ages are invited to join natural resource professionals as they search the park for creatures, including birds, insects, small mammals and reptiles. This data will help researchers learn about the area — while you get to have fun interacting with experts and discovering wildlife. Bring sunscreen, bug spray and hiking boots. For more information, call the Wildcat Hills Nature Center at 308-436-3777.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



Visit the aquatic center at Ponca State Park

Pool hours begin Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day weekend | Ponca State Park

Ponca State Park's aquatic center is the perfect opportunity to cool down with family and friends. The facility features a heated zero-depth entry pool, 172-foot-long water slide, climbing wall, diving board, spray features, pool games such as basketball and volleyball, and a concession area. The pool is open 1-6 p.m. Monday to Thursday and 12-6 p.m. Friday to Sunday. Stop by to relax after hiking the park's 22 miles of trails or enjoying educational activities led by naturalists. JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND

Fish for white bass and wipers at Harlan Reservoir

Anytime in July; peak time is usually late July and August | Harlan County Reservoir

Harlan is full of white bass and wipers right now — in fact, it's one of the best spots in the state for both. Anglers can expect to see wipers up to and over 20 inches, and white bass up to and over 15 inches. Most white bass and wiper fishing is done from a boat — though shoreline fishing is possible, too. Fisheries biologist Daryl Bauer advises keeping a little distance and casting to the fish, rather than roaring right into the middle of them. Also, look for the gulls; they'll be feeding where the fish are located.

JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND



Photograph deer with fawns

June and July | White-tailed deer found statewide; mule deer in western half of the state

Fawns are typically born in June, giving photographers a unique chance to get a family portrait in July. Look in any expanse that you frequently see does; once the fawns are up and moving around with mom at a couple weeks of age, they'll use those spaces, too — typically feeding areas next to thick security cover. Be patient and don't pressure the deer by trying to get close. Position yourself in places they might travel past, rather than trying to sneak toward them. And remember that if you find a fawn alone, don't move it. Mom is often not far away, even if she is gone for hours at a time.

BOB GRIER, NEBRASKALAND



Wet vs. Dry

Story and photos by Ethan Freese

If you've visited one of Nebraska's many wetlands in the past year, there's a good chance that you may have come across a landscape that was anything but wet. A dry wetland might be a discouraging sight if you're a waterfowl hunter or birder, but wet and dry cycles are a natural process for many wetlands in the Great Plains, a region known for both deluge and drought.

I had the chance to witness these changes firsthand while working with the Platte Basin Timelapse and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission on the Wetlands of Nebraska project between 2020 and 2023. During the project, I produced a film and photo essay about playa wetlands in Nebraska.

Nebraska is home to four complexes of playa wetlands, including the Rainwater Basin. Playas are wind-formed wetlands that are often circular in shape and are located on flat, farmed landscapes. Due to a heavy layer of clay in the soil, playas pond water on the surface from rainfall,



A small playa wetland in southwestern Nebraska in August 2020. Playas receive all their water from precipitation, resulting in water levels that vary dramatically from year to year depending on the weather.



Smartweed blooms at sunrise in a playa wetland. The flowers and seeds of smartweed are a valuable source of food for pollinators, waterfowl and a wide variety of other wildlife.



Nestled within a pocket of thin green sedges and grasses, a northern leopard frog finds refuge at sunset. In these playa landscapes, cattle help to graze vegetation, unintentionally creating depressions in the soil where water pools and new life emerges. DAKOTA ALTMAN

snowmelt and overland flow. Because they are largely reliant on precipitation, water levels in playas can vary dramatically from year to year.

In spring 2020, Nebraska was still in the midst of a relatively wet period. Almost every wetland I visited was full of water and hosted an incredible diversity of birds. As the season progressed, I watched as the annual procession of waterfowl stopped over in Nebraska’s wetlands. Starting with northern pintails and snow geese, the cast of birds gradually changed to blue-winged teal, northern shovelers and an eclectic mix of shorebirds. One of my more memorable experiences occurred in April 2020 when I belly-crawled across a large mudflat in the Rainwater Basin to photograph a flock of American white pelicans as they seined for food in the murky water.

As the project progressed, drought gradually began to take hold across the state. In March 2020, we installed a timelapse camera at North Lake Basin Wildlife Management Area, a large playa wetland in the Rainwater Basin near Utica. When the camera was installed, there was no shortage of water, and we donned our muck boots to get to the old windmill where we mounted the camera. As the year progressed, the wetland



Soil cracking in the Rainwater Basin in August 2020. These large cracks that form in dry conditions help recharge groundwater when wet weather eventually returns.



American white pelicans were a common sight in the Rainwater Basin in the spring of 2020, when water levels were still relatively high.

gradually dried until there was no water within the entirety of the camera’s view. With this disappearance of water, an abundance of plant life, including smartweed, barnyard grass and coreopsis, flourished on the recently exposed soil.

Through the fall and winter of 2020, the wetland remained dry and was passed over by waterbirds on their fall migration. However, in spring 2021, a large precipitation event quickly brought water back to North Lake Basin. The abundant seeds produced the previous fall provided fuel for the thousands of migratory birds that stopped over on their migration. If wetlands don’t periodically dry out, many of the plants that provide a critical food source for wildlife would disappear.

The cyclical nature of playa wetlands is also important for amphibians. In permanent bodies of water, fish will eat the eggs of frogs, toads and salamanders. Because playas periodically dry up, most playas do not have fish, making them an ideal habitat for amphibians able to wait underground for wet conditions to return.

Even when wetlands are dry, they still provide valuable habitat to a suite of wildlife. In August 2020, a small team from the Platte Basin Timelapse and Nebraska Game and Parks traveled to southwestern Nebraska to photograph and film the aptly named Southwest Playas. During our trip, most of the wetlands were dry and, at first glance, they seemed



A Leconte’s sparrow perches on a patch of smartweed in the Rainwater Basin. The abundant seeds found in dry wetlands are an important food source for migratory birds like this passerine.



An abundance of migratory waterfowl stopped over at North Lake Basin Wildlife Management area near Utica in March 2020. Less than six months later the wetland was almost completely dry.



Smartweed and sunflowers bloom on a dry playa in southwestern Nebraska. While at first glance dry wetlands might seem like barren wastelands, closer inspection reveals a rich diversity of life.

devoid of life. However, when we got out of our vehicles and started to explore the wetland on foot, we were quickly drawn to the abundance of wildflowers and pollinators on the parched playa.

Bees and hoverflies filled the air with frantic buzzing as they visited the light pink blooms of smartweed and vibrant yellow sunflowers that added color amongst the dry grasses that carpeted the ground. The countless insects undoubtedly provided the area’s pheasants and other grassland birds with a reliable food source that summer.

Take the time to appreciate wetlands even when they aren’t wet. It’s a good reminder that even though dry conditions present a number of challenges to people and wildlife, those challenges have resulted in resilient ecosystems that are well adapted to the dramatic weather of Nebraska.

Whether wet or dry, wetlands provide beauty and life. 

For more information on the Wetlands of Nebraska project visit NebraskaWetlands.com



A northern pintail drake performs a courtship display for a nearby hen. In dry years, land managers will pump water into select wetlands to ensure habitat is available for migratory waterbirds.

Fort Robinson Turns 150

By David L. Bristow, *History Nebraska*

Longtime Fort Robinson Museum curator Tom Buecker used to say that the most common question he heard was, “Where’s the fort?” Visitors expect to see a stockade, but like most Great Plains forts of its era, Fort Robinson was built without outer walls. It started as a tent camp 150 years ago and grew to become one of the largest military installations on the northern Plains.

The Army sent more than 900 soldiers from Fort Laramie to northwestern Nebraska in March 1874. Their tent camp



Spotted Tail, an important Brule Lakota chief (third from right) at breakfast in the home of Maj. J.W. Paddock at Camp Robinson, July 18, 1877. Maj. Paddock is in the center, and Spotted Tail’s wife and daughter are at left.

HISTORY NEBRASKA, RG5899-9-2



This 1875 view is the earliest known photo of Camp Robinson, renamed Fort Robinson in 1878. Though it lacked a permanent outer wall, in the early days it had a temporary stockade made of stacked cordwood — which gradually disappeared into the camp’s stoves. HISTORY NEBRASKA, RG5895-0-7

was soon named in honor of Lt. Levi Robinson, who had been killed earlier that year by Native Americans from nearby Red Cloud Agency. The first post commander was Captain Arthur MacArthur — the father of Gen. Douglas MacArthur of World War II fame.

The soldiers had come to protect Red Cloud Agency, where the U.S. government distributed annuity goods to Lakotas in fulfillment of an earlier treaty. Tensions were mounting as Lakotas resented continued encroachments into their territory.

And things were about to get a lot worse. Later that year, Lt. Col. George Custer led an expedition that confirmed rumors of gold in the nearby Black Hills. When the Lakotas refused to sell the land, the U.S. launched what became known as the



LT. LEVI ROBINSON

Great Sioux War of 1876. The famous Lakota war leader Crazy Horse surrendered his band of followers at Camp Robinson in May 1877. In September, Crazy Horse was killed while trying to avoid being imprisoned in the camp’s guardhouse.

The following year saw another tragedy at the post, this time involving a group of Northern Cheyenne who had escaped from their reservation in Indian Territory (Oklahoma) and were trying to return to their homeland in present-day Montana. The army captured Chief Dull Knife and 149 of his followers and locked them in a barracks without food or fuel, hoping to pressure them to agree to go back to the reservation.

On the night of January 9, 1879, the



An 1877 view of Camp Robinson, showing buildings that framed the southwest corner of the old parade ground. The long building on the left is barracks; to its right is the guard house where Crazy Horse was killed.

HISTORY NEBRASKA, RG5899-3-3



Officers Quarters at Ft. Robinson

The 1874 officers' barracks on Fort Robinson's old parade ground, shown in the late 1880s and today (below photo). The Black children are either the children of servants or of the soldiers of the all-Black Ninth Cavalry. HISTORY NEBRASKA, RG1517-93-47A



Undated photo of the Eighth Infantry in their barracks. HISTORY NEBRASKA, RG1517-119-2

Cheyennes broke out of the barracks and, using weapons they had hidden, shot the guards and held off the other soldiers in a running fight known as the Cheyenne Breakout. Most of the Cheyennes were recaptured or killed.

While some of the buildings from that early era remain, others — such as the guardhouse and the Cheyenne Breakout barracks — have been reconstructed on site based on archeological excavations. Today, it's common to see bundles of sage left by Lakota visitors on the Crazy Horse marker in front of the guardhouse. And every January, the Northern Cheyenne hold a ceremony at the Fort to honor their ancestors.

These stories and photos provide a glimpse of the Fort's earliest years, but barely scratch the surface of its long history. Fort Robinson was home to African American "Buffalo Soldier" regiments in the 1880s and 1890s, trained cavalry horses as an Army Remount Depot following World War I, and became a prisoner of war camp and war dog training center in World War II. Today, Fort Robinson is a popular state historical park where visitors enjoy the outdoors while experiencing many layers of the past. 📍

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



Part of a nearby Arapaho village northwest of Camp Robinson in 1876 or 1877. A child's "play" tipi stands next to the main lodge. Little girls often played "house" in the tipis they made under their mothers' supervision.

HISTORY NEBRASKA, RG5899-6-2



With Camera in Hand

There is more than one shot to make during a hunting trip

Story and photos by Jeff Kurrus

Anyone who has hunted with me knows that I'll have a camera in hand as often as my gun.

I have such a fear of missing a good photo — because of all the ones I have already missed — that I'm willing to concede a shot from my barrel to focus on a shot from my SLR.

The scenario was no different this day on a Cass County quail hunt.

It was my son's first hunt for bobs, and I wanted

to make sure I chronicled it for the family photo album — which we still have in leather-bound, 1970s-style form.

But to do so effectively — and to hopefully help you in your quest of pursuing game and preserving memories at the same time — I had to shoot as many different aspects as I could in the morning.

And I needed to do so before my son's 11-year-old legs completely left him for the day.

Here is what I came up with.



ABOVE: Jerry Beck, Ryan Sparks and English setter, Willie, walk a gravel road in Cass County.
LEFT: Eli Kurrus walks through a field in Cass County during a foggy morning quail hunt.



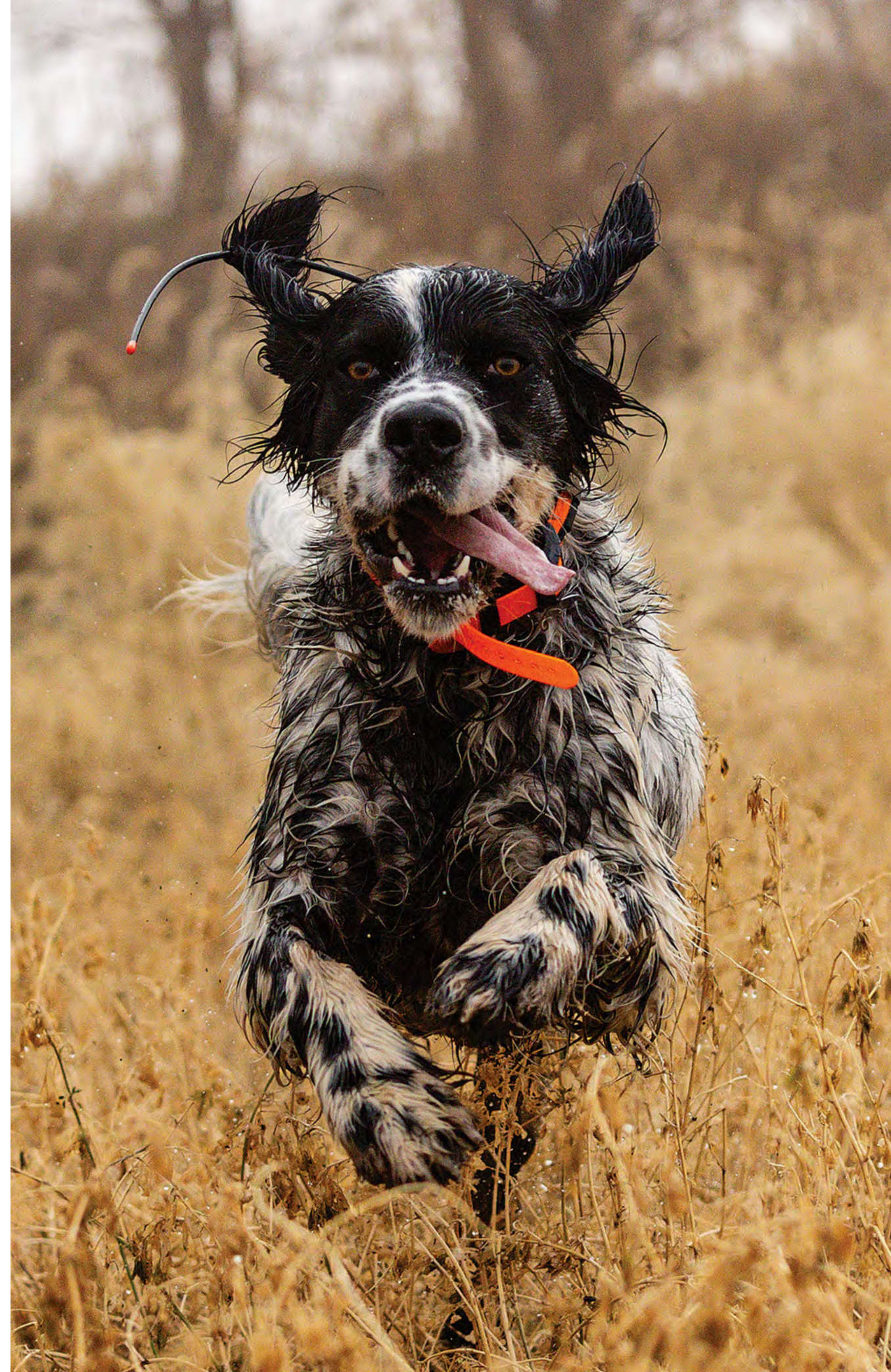
This hunting season, every once in a while, trade your gun for your camera — even if it's your cell phone. There is nothing like sitting down after the long grind of another hunting season and remembering those days in the field.

It's just a little bit easier to remember when you have some pictures to help you do so. 📷

LEFT: Bobwhite quail droppings in a field indicate where birds have been feeding.

BELOW: Jerry Beck (right) hunts beside Eli Kurrus as a bobwhite quail flushes from the grass near Beck's English setter, Willie, during the hunt.

RIGHT: Willie quail hunts in Cass County. Always include a photo of dogs from your hunt.



Marbleseed

An Admired Plant

By Gerry Steinauer, Botanist

When appearing as a guest on podcasts or radio shows, I am often asked, “What is your favorite plant?” I suppose the interviewer thinks this is a great icebreaker and that I will have a pat answer. I don’t, however, and there’s always an uncomfortable pause as I ponder.

The problem is that I don’t have a favorite plant. Nebraska has more than 1,500 native plants. How would I pick just one? Furthermore, as a botanist, I find the question somewhat socially inappropriate, like asking a parent, “Which is your favorite child?”

Being polite, I eventually provide the interviewer with the answer they seek, saying that my favorite plant is a beautiful orchid or one of our state’s few threatened or endangered plants, allowing them to relax.

Then comes the standard follow-up question: “Why is it your favorite plant?” And the lies continue. “Oh, it is so stunning, so rare, so ... whatever.”

Ok, I’m exaggerating a bit.

Although I don’t have a single “favorite” plant, there are many native plants I greatly admire. Unlike what

you might expect, most of these are not rare or super showy plants, but rather the salt-of-the-earth type. One such plant is the perennial marbleseed (*Onosmodium molle*).

One reason I admire this plant is its folksy name, marbleseed, which



Marbleseed flowers bloom in June, attracting bees and butterflies as their primary pollinators. GERRY STEINAUER

accurately describes its roundish, hard seeds. I can imagine dusty, barefooted kids branding it with this name as they played with handfuls of its seeds in the prairie outback behind their sod house. The plant’s other common name is false gromwell which, by comparison, I find rather boring.

Also admirable, marbleseed is an extremely hardy plant. It grows in upland prairies throughout the state, excluding the Sandhills and southern Panhandle, but thrives in very dry, gravelly or rocky hilltop prairies where only the tough survive. In addition, its coarse, hairy leaves make it unappealing to grazing livestock, allowing it to flourish in overgrazed pastures where most other wildflowers succumb to the constant nipping of hungry mouths.

Then there’s the plant’s elusive beauty, starting with its leaves, which are rigid, have prominent veins and are covered in dense, bristly hairs, giving them a distinct texture and strong lines. I find the leaves to be the most photogenic of our native plants, especially when covered with dew early on a summer morning.

Another artistic aspect of marbleseed is its overall form. Arising from a stout, woody root, it often grows as stiff, multi-stemmed clumps reaching 3 feet tall. In hard-grazed pastures, these clumps stand out like sculptures ascending above the short grass, unbending to strong prairie winds, as if placed there by a wandering artist.

Finally, consider the flowering heads that emerge in June as dense clumps that gradually unfold into agile arches resembling a scorpion’s tail. The individual flowers consist of five hairy, greenish, sharp-pointed sepals surrounding five whitish-green petals fused into a tube. Protruding from this tube is a long stinger-like style that persists well after the petals have fallen. Styles are the stalks on which the pollen-collecting stigma sits.

While the flowers are rather drab, I view the spiraled flower heads, with their arrangement of sharp sepals, tubular petals and projecting spiky styles, as abstract floral art, as if nature used geometry, rather than colorful, showy petals, to create beauty. Nature is strange that way.

After heaping all this praise on marbleseed, I might have convinced myself it’s my favorite plant. But honestly, I admire all the native plants that grace Nebraska’s landscapes — even the ones with boring names. 



A robust marbleseed plant grows in a prairie restoration along the Platte River of Hall County. CHRIS HELZER, THE NATURE CONSERVANCY



A controlled prairie fire cleared away the thatch, exposing a cache of marbleseed seeds hidden by a rodent. The heat from the fire also caused the seeds to darken from white to tan. CHRIS HELZER, THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

Elijah

finding your place

Story and photos by Eric Fowler

Some people live their entire lives searching for some place, any place, where they feel comfortable. It didn't take Elijah Riley that long. Late in high school, when he picked up a bow and arrow and headed to the woods, is

when he knew.

"I felt like for a long time I didn't know my place in the world," said Riley, soon to be a senior at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, "but getting back in nature has helped me find that."

And a whole lot more.

Introductions and Reintroductions

While growing up fishing and camping with his family near Lincoln, Riley remembers how his dad would announce, "We got groceries," when they left the lake with a stringer full of channel catfish in hand.

"I never really put two and two together on what 'groceries' meant until I was older," Riley said. "We were putting food in the fridge."

He learned more outdoor skills in Cub Scouts, from building a campfire to paddling a canoe. He feverishly watched YouTube and outdoor reality shows on the History and Discovery channels. *Swamp People* was a favorite of his.

"I was wanting to do everything I was watching and thinking that was the coolest thing in the world," he said. He fished often in middle school and walked more than one patch of tallgrass looking for pheasants, thrilled by the hunt despite never downing a bird.

Then, like time is for many teenagers and young adults, the outdoors took a backseat to Riley's everyday life. Most of his high school years were filled with studies and sports until multiple knee injuries — and the subsequent recoveries — halted his playing career. Competing on the Lincoln High trap team his junior year, participating in Cornhusker Boys State and a job at Scheels introduced him to people who knew much more about hunting and



Riley shows off a largemouth bass he caught at Camp Cornhusker in 2012.



Riley scans the sky while hunting geese near Lincoln.



Riley shows Henry Robert-Innocent and other Malone Center students how to cast during a field trip to a private pond near Lincoln. “I would say a lot of the populations that I want to work with are the minority kids that don’t have a chance to engage in this type of thing,” Riley said. “The big goal down the line is to make this so any kid who wants to engage in this sort of thing can do it at no cost, because I feel that is going to be the best way to meet them where they are and give them the opportunities.”

fishing than him. Some of those people became mentors, sharing their knowledge and pulling him back in.

Riley bought a used bow on an online marketplace and had many unsuccessful deer hunts on public land near Lincoln. Still, he was hooked.

“I think it was how much time I spent in the woods with nothing happening,” Riley said. “There were a lot of times where it was just anticipation, and every time a squirrel would bark or run up and down a tree, I’d think it was a deer, and I would start getting the shakes.”

Seeing his passion, an uncle who had quit deer hunting took Riley under his wing and guided him on a rifle hunt that ended in his first deer. “The feeling I had once I was down on the ground with that deer was the most surreal and overtaking feeling I think I have ever had,” he said.

He has since hunted, fished and backcountry camped in several states, and he even fished in Costa Rica. “I would say the biggest reason I like these things and engage in them is I get a surreal feeling in myself, just like peace and calmness, when I’m in nature. It’s a good chance to reset and just find yourself in the world again.”

Big Gumdrops Outdoors

One day in high school, Riley and his friends were sitting in class giving each other goofy nicknames. “Shorter and fluffier” than he is today, his friends tabbed him with Big Gumdrops, a name that stuck.

In 2019, Riley began Big Gumdrops Outdoors, posting videos of his hunting and fishing exploits on YouTube, TikTok and



Riley and Masiey Ratliff watch Maya James show off a bluegill she caught.

Instagram. “I had the idea, the vision, that I’m creating this stuff so other kids who look like me are able to see someone that’s in the industry and doing it, and they feel comfortable and confident to go out and do it themselves,” he said.

However, Riley had little engagement to his videos. So, in 2023 he pivoted to hands-on education. Riley and other members of the Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences club at UNL had worked with the Malone Community Center in Lincoln on a series of educational sessions, including wildlife identification and calls, ecosystems and agriculture. Staff asked if they could do more, and when Riley returned from studying abroad in Costa Rica in 2023, he developed an eight-week summer program.

With the help of friends and Malone staff, kids learned about wildlife, the food chain, ecosystems in Nebraska and conservation storytelling. They learned about camping and took a field trip to set up tents, build a fire and make s’mores. They helped clean up trash around Holmes Lake. And they learned about fishing, later taking another field trip to a private pond near Lincoln where every kid who went caught a fish. During the spring semester, he worked with the Lincoln Community Learning Center to put on after-school programs at three Lincoln schools.

Riley is working with the Malone Center again this summer. “We have a lot of kids who love going outside and love being outdoors but don’t really have the education or the parental guidance to learn or experience what is right in their backyard of Lincoln,” said Cristian Clinton, youth supervisor at the center.

“Elijah loves doing what he does. He does great with the kids. He takes his time with the lesson plans, so being able to see that and then see the kids gravitate toward the lessons and the things that he’s teaching them is just something that we loved and want to continue doing here at the Malone Center. He’s left a lasting impression on some of our kids for sure.”

Next Steps

Riley is working to establish a nonprofit through which he will deliver these environmental education programs, and he has even grander aspirations. He hopes within three years he can have the program in every elementary, middle and high school in Lincoln, and that some of the younger students who



Riley and Kyndall Hudson help Jeremiah Davis and Monnie and Adonis Garrett and other students set up a tent during an after-school program at Everett Elementary School in Lincoln.

A Lasting Impact

Hunters and anglers are predominantly white, making up more than 77 and 75 percent of the participants, respectively. African Americans make up 11 percent of hunters and anglers nationally. Just 4 percent of African Americans hunt and 12 percent fish, compared to 6 percent and 17 percent of whites. Participation among Hispanics also trails whites, while a greater proportion of Asian Americans hunt and fish.

Elijah Riley’s work could help change those numbers in Nebraska. But even if it doesn’t, it will make a lasting impact for those he’s teaching and mentoring.

participate will become mentors when they get older. From there, he hopes to expand to schools in Omaha and beyond. Eventually, he hopes the program will grow to the point that it can be his full-time job — his career.

His enjoyment of the outdoors and the pleasure of seeing kids enjoy his programs are what drives him. That was evident during a fishing trip he took with the Malone Center students last summer, when all 14 kids caught a fish, most of them their first. Riley, with the help of fellow UNL students, managed the chaos with patience and ease.

“It was just so much fun to see their excitement,” Riley said. “That right there reminded me of all those times when I was a kid, catching fish with my dad and just being on the highest level, on cloud nine, just excited. And seeing those kids go through that same thing re-sparked those emotions, and it makes me happy.” 📍

Hunt Testing Dogs

By Todd Mills

The first real gun dog I'd ever owned cost me \$50. A buddy of mine knew I'd been looking and knew of a litter with just one pup left. His recommendation and the owner telling me the puppies were born in a barn in the middle of January was all it took to get me to pull the trigger.

Although I had no clue on what I was doing, I knew somebody who did. That same friend who told me about the litter offered to help train my dog. What started as a quest to train a \$50 farm dog has now turned into a love affair. The fascination with training dogs still burns inside me some 35 years later.

I was enamored with the idea of competing with my dog, so I decided to enter the hunt test world with my second Lab. It was an excruciating process, filled with constant failure and countless ups and downs. What came from it, however, was a deeper understanding of my dogs — not only how to train them, but also how to understand and relate to them in stressful and overwhelming situations. The ability to keep a dog under control, in the most competitive environments, taught me invaluable lessons for working with them during actual hunting scenarios.

Here are a few of the lessons I learned.

Todd Mills of Gretna dog trains his Master Hunter Labrador retriever, Gracie, at the Missouri Valley Hunt Club in Douglas County.

JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

Anatomy of a Hunt Test

Although AKC and HRC are slightly different organizations, the hunt test levels they offer are similar. We'll focus on AKC here. There are currently three different titles (Junior, Senior and Master) with each level higher offering more challenging obstacles. It's not so much a competition against other handlers and their dogs; rather, each dog is assessed on its individual performance.

Judges will score dogs based on marking, retrieving and delivery to hand. Also, they will score steadiness, control, response and trainability. In some cases, especially at the Master level, the test can be set up to create absolute chaos for the dog and handler.

Obedience Matters

If you're incapable of keeping your dog under control, hunt tests aren't for you. If any aspect of training is skipped over and not repeated almost daily, your dog will certainly fail under the lights. Basic commands of sit, here and heel are a must. Use a whistle with all your training and get them accustomed to sitting and coming to that instead of your voice.

Provide distractions, such as gunshots, to tempt them to break the rules. Only after your dog is completely steady in any and all circumstances can you move forward. Also, make sure you train in a variety of weather conditions and terrain. If your dog becomes too accustomed to the same property, it becomes a safe place. Provide as much distraction and variety as you can so your dog can perform in any and all conditions.

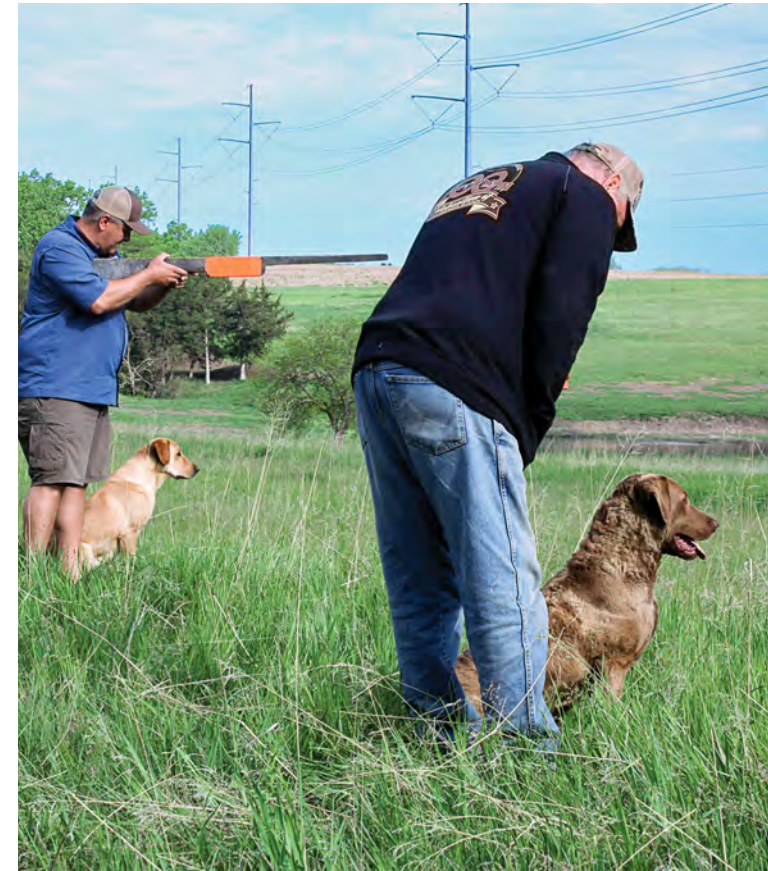
From Test to Field

Although running a dog in a hunt test is valuable, without strict boundaries, it doesn't always translate back to the field. Hunting situations can create all kinds of ways for your dog to cheat. Hunting with other dogs can create chaos, especially if the other dog is not steady.

However, it doesn't mean you can't do both; it just takes some restraint and control. Forego shooting during those first hunts and focus on handling and controlling your dog. This will pay dividends for both a test dog and a hunting dog. The ability to control your dog in almost any situation is not only rewarding, but can avoid some potentially dangerous situations when dealing with current, big bodies of open water and working with other dogs.

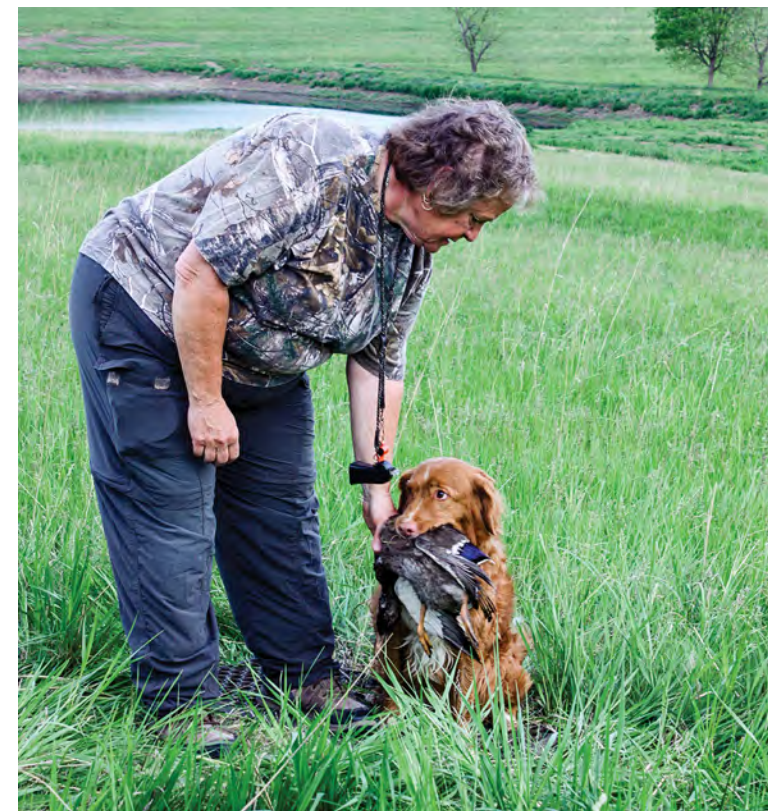
Your dog may need some slight tuning up when you return to hunt test season, but when done correctly, the test dog is capable of doing things most other dogs and owners can't. 

Currently, there are four clubs in Nebraska that host retriever hunt tests: the Missouri Valley Hunt Club in Valley, Nebraska Dog and Hunt Club in Unadilla, Central Nebraska Retriever Club in Grand Island, and the West Nebraska Retriever Club in North Platte. Find one near you to watch and understand how they are run, or visit entryexpress.com and hrc.dog for more information.



Pat Baughman, from Chapman, prepares to honor his dog while Barry Brandt, from Unadilla, handles.

TODD MILLS



Handler Susan Norras, from Pleasant Hill, Missouri, receives a bird to hand at a recent hunt test.

TODD MILLS

All I Have is Time

Nebraska's 96-year-old deer hunter: Shorty Hahn

Story and photo by Jeff Kurrus

Ninety-six-year-old Dwayne "Shorty" Hahn sat on a couch in the family's hunting lodge in Hordville, his eyes closed as I approached. Then he turned his head and smiled. "I was napping," he said, urging me to sit beside him so we could talk about his life of hunting.

"Shorty, how are you today?" I asked.

"Pretty good ... considering my age." He grinned as he said it, both matter-of-fact while also getting the joke.

Shorty started hunting in 1962 when he was in his early 30s, a reminder that it's never too late to start a lifetime passion, which he has continued for a simple reason. "I like to watch the sun come up and the sun go down," he said.

When asked about what else thrills him, or if he even gets nervous anymore when he sees a nice buck, he shook his head. "No." Even when he shot his biggest buck — a 13-pointer — a couple of years ago? "Noooo. After 60 years ... I don't think so. Noooo."

We discussed the nuances of hunting, from his ability to still field dress his own deer — "You get used to it" — to the knife he uses when skinning. "I use one from the '50s. We got a lot of knives, but I use that old one. Got good steel."

With his hand now resting on my arm, like we were old friends, Shorty and I hopped from topic to topic — from *Nebraskaland Magazine* and fishing to how he's never

seen a bobcat while hunting. He then asked about my family.

"How old is your dad?"

"76," I answered.

"76," he repeated. "Oh. Just a kid."

He then told me his thoughts about deer hunting. "I got a little propane burner. I don't have any fancy clothes. Just work clothes. Old pair of pants. I'll hunt morning and night. I see most of my deer in the morning. Animals move about the same [as they always have]. You don't have to be there when it's dark. You can't see when it's dark anyhow. I park my pick-up about half a block from the stand. Deer here follow the same path every year ... most between 7:30 and 9 o'clock. I don't worry about the time."

When asked if he's ever taken a shot he wanted back, his answer was quick and self-assured. "No. No. I got to have a clean shot, or I won't shoot."

He hunts every day of the firearm season unless it gets too cold. "I get a little bit fussy when it gets cold. I don't stay really long. If I haven't seen anything by 9, I'll go home."

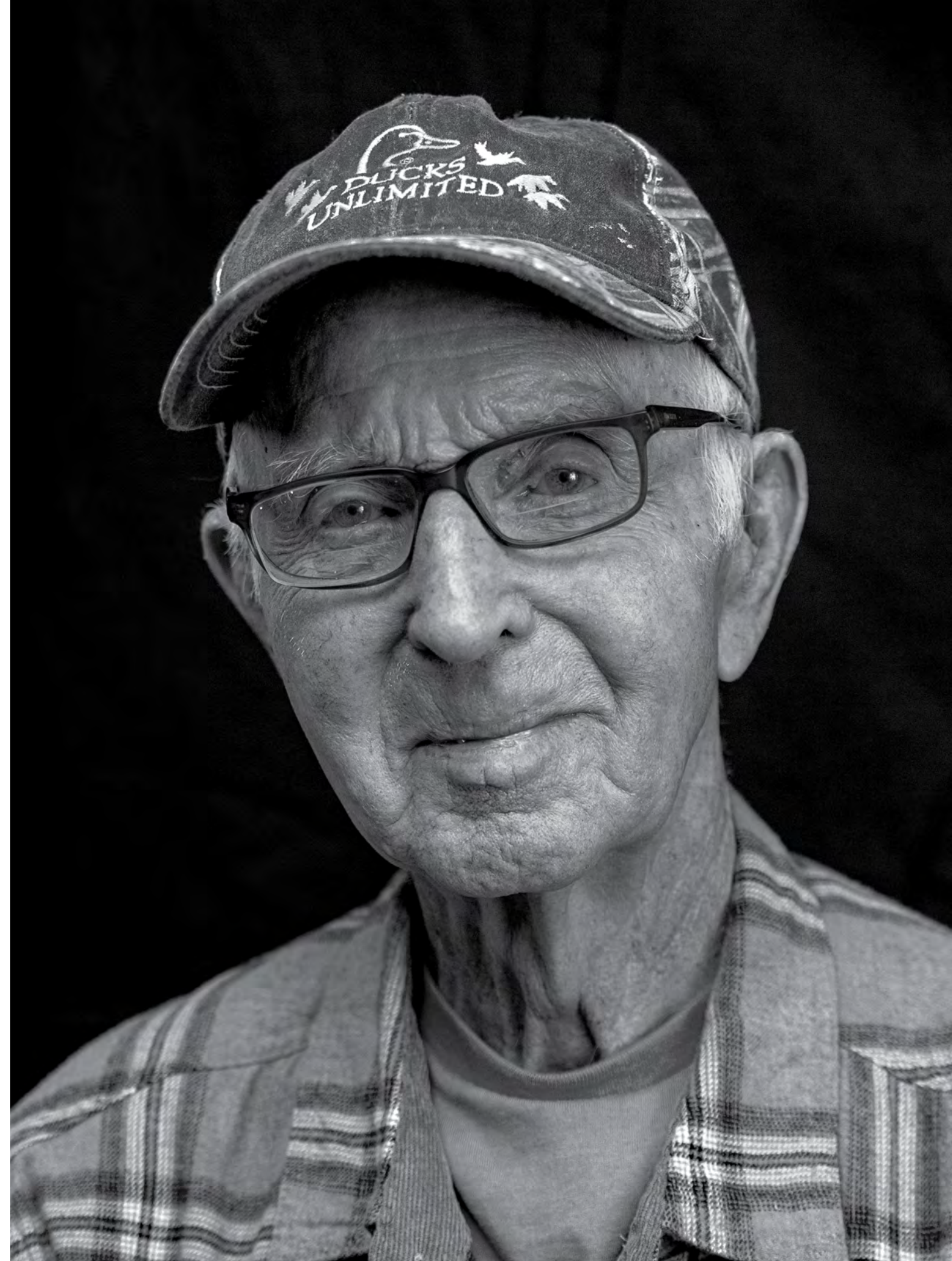
Last season, at the age of 95, Shorty saw four or five bucks early in the week that were all "keepers."

"But I waited, see. I don't want to spoil my fun right away."

"You have time," I said.

"All I have is time," he said with a smile. 

Nicknamed because he was the smallest of three brothers, Shorty — at 96 years old — is one of Nebraska's oldest deer hunters. Since the first time he hunted in 1962, he has always shot the same 1945 Winchester .270. "I pull it out of the safe and go deer hunting." JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND





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COPE’S GRAY TREEFROGS

By Monica Macoubrie, Wildlife Education Specialist

Meet the Cope’s gray treefrog (*Hyla chrysoscelis*), a captivating amphibian found across eastern North America. Sporting subtle grays and greens adorned with intricate patterns on its skin, this arboreal frog is celebrated for its adaptability and enchanting calls. Despite its small size, this treefrog plays a vital role in the forest and wetland ecosystems where it lives.

Appearance

When considering a treefrog, our minds often envision vibrant colors that mirror the lush foliage and flowers of the rainforest. In Nebraska, the Cope’s gray treefrog’s striking appearance blends seamlessly with its arboreal habitat.

Usually ranging 1.5 to 2 inches long, this amphibian displays a muted spectrum of gray or green tones along its dorsal (upper) surface. Its skin is often decorated with intricate markings, varying from dark blotches to elaborate arrangements of lines and spots, offering effective concealment amidst tree bark and foliage. A distinctive dark mask extends from the snout to the eye, accentuating its expressive appearance.

Large, adhesive toe pads enable the Cope’s gray treefrog to effortlessly climb and cling to various surfaces, aiding its arboreal lifestyle.

Behavior and Special Adaptations

In Nebraska, Cope’s gray treefrogs exhibit fascinating behaviors and possess special adaptations that enable them to thrive in diverse environments. These amphibians are predominantly nocturnal, seeking refuge in shaded areas or tree cavities during the day and emerging at night to forage. Their cryptic coloration and markings provide effective camouflage against predators such as birds, snakes and mammals.

Cope’s gray treefrogs are renowned for their remarkable climbing ability on various surfaces, including tree bark and foliage. Their adhesive toe pads also facilitate efficient hunting, as they can quickly snatch insects and other small invertebrates from vegetation.

Furthermore, these frogs possess specialized vocal sacs that allow males to produce loud, melodious calls during the breeding season, serving to attract potential mates and establish territories.

During winter, Cope’s gray treefrogs experience a remarkable adaptation known as crypsis, where they undergo a process called cryoanesthesia. As temperatures drop, these amphibians enter a state of dormancy and seek shelter in

leaf litter or soil. They accumulate glycerol and glucose in their tissues, which act as a natural antifreeze to prevent ice crystals from forming within their bodies. In this frozen state, their metabolism slows dramatically, allowing them to survive freezing temperatures until warmer conditions return in spring.

Distribution and Habitat

The Cope’s gray treefrog inhabits a variety of habitats across the state. From the sprawling prairies to the lush woodlands and wetlands, these adaptable amphibians can be encountered in a range of environments. They demonstrate a preference for moist habitats near water bodies such as ponds, marshes and slow-moving streams, where they find ample opportunities for breeding and foraging. However, they are also known to thrive in suburban gardens, parks and agricultural areas with suitable vegetation and moisture levels.

Despite their versatile nature, habitat loss and fragmentation due to urbanization, agriculture and land development pose significant threats to their populations in Nebraska. Conservation efforts aimed at preserving and restoring their preferred habitats are crucial for ensuring the continued presence of the Cope’s gray treefrog throughout the Cornhusker State.

Reproduction and Lifecycle

In Nebraska, the lifecycle and reproductive habits of the Cope’s gray treefrog follow a seasonal rhythm intertwined with the state’s climate. Breeding typically occurs from late spring to early summer, with males congregating near water bodies, filling the night air with their melodious calls to attract females. The call of the Cope’s gray treefrog resembles a series of high-pitched trills or peeps, adding to the soothing nighttime chorus in Nebraska’s wetlands.

Upon successful mating, females lay their eggs in shallow water, attaching them to submerged vegetation or debris. These eggs hatch into tadpoles, which undergo metamorphosis over several weeks, eventually emerging as miniature froglets.

Environmental factors such as temperature and precipitation play critical roles in determining the timing and success of reproduction.

Conservation Status and Threats

In Nebraska, conservation of the Cope’s gray treefrog faces a complex array of threats amidst efforts to preserve its populations. While currently categorized as a species of



least concern on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List, these amphibians confront significant challenges that warrant attention. Habitat loss and fragmentation due to urbanization, agricultural expansion and land development pose primary threats to their survival. Wetland degradation and pollution from pesticides, herbicides and runoff further degrade their breeding habitats and impact water quality, jeopardizing their reproductive success.

Additionally, climate change presents an emerging threat, altering precipitation patterns and temperatures, which could disrupt breeding cycles and habitat suitability. These cumulative stressors highlight the urgency of conservation efforts to safeguard Cope’s gray treefrog populations in Nebraska.

Collaborative initiatives involving government agencies, conservation organizations, researchers and local communities are essential to implementing habitat restoration, monitoring programs and education outreach to mitigate these threats and ensure the long-term viability of this species in the state’s ecosystems.

Community Science and Engagement

Community science plays a vital role in monitoring and conserving Cope’s gray treefrog populations in Nebraska. Through community science programs, volunteers can contribute valuable data on frog distribution, abundance and habitat preferences through frog call surveys, habitat assessments and population monitoring initiatives. These efforts not only provide scientists with important information for research and management but they also foster a deeper connection between people and nature. Community scientists become ambassadors for the Cope’s gray treefrog, advocating for its conservation and inspiring others to take action to safeguard Nebraska’s natural heritage for future generations.

“FrogWatch USA is a nationwide program working to help volunteers learn about wetlands and conserve amphibians by recording frog calls. To find training with a chapter near you, visit akronzoo.org/frogwatch-use-chapterlist. You could collect and contribute data that helps the Cope’s gray treefrog for years to come.

FROM THE LAKE TO THE TANK

By Jerry Kane

Each year, thousands of visitors to the Nebraska State Fair enjoy the 6,000-gallon aquarium at the Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Encounter exhibit. Many folks make the aquarium their first stop when they get to the fair.

They see common fish, odd-looking fish, bigger fish and smaller fish. They see fish they’ve caught and fish they wish they could catch. They see invasive fish and fish that don’t occur in their part of the state.

“We have a lot of different fish species that inhabit Nebraska waters from north to south and east to west,” said Tony Barada, Game and Parks’ fisheries management assistant division administrator. “We’re trying to provide the diversity of fish that’s in Nebraska both in our lakes and reservoirs and in the rivers and streams.”

Curiosity may be what draws people to the aquarium to see about 150 fish representing 35 species. “We try to get fish species that folks will likely encounter while fishing in Nebraska,” said Brad Eifert, south central district fisheries supervisor. “We select for larger specimens as the awe factor is greater. It is the State Fair, after all, and we only want to display purple ribbon quality fish.”

The fish come primarily from Johnson Lake and several Interstate 80 Lakes. Several trout species are taken from the Commission’s hatchery system. “‘Where do the fish come from’ is the most often asked question from parkgoers,” said Eifert. “It is easier to collect them closer to Grand Island

if possible. Most are swimming in public lakes just days before the fair. And we try to release most back to where we collected them.”

During the week leading up to the opening of the fair, which occurs on a Friday, fisheries biologists collect fish from reservoirs, lakes, rivers and hatcheries. Most of the fish are captured by electrofishing, a method in which specialized equipment administers an electric current in the water to temporarily stun the fish.

Others are at the fairgrounds preparing the aquarium for deliveries of fish. Between Monday and Thursday, staff have to collect fish, transfer them from boats to hauling tanks, deliver them to the fair and transfer them to the aquarium.

“The aquarium provides a unique opportunity to view how fish maneuver around and react with each other in their underwater environments,” said Eifert. “Each species tends to find its own niche within the confines of the aquarium, and while we do see some predation, most tend to agree to get along during their two-week stay.”

In all, about 15 Game and Parks fisheries staffers are involved in the effort. They also are available to answer questions about the fish during the fair’s 11-day run in Grand Island, which ends Sept. 2.

“It’s a team effort and it takes a lot of coordination, especially from our staff stationed at our Kearney office,” Barada said. “In the end, it’s a pretty cool product.”



A channel catfish swims in the aquarium at the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission’s Outdoor Encounter at the Nebraska State Fair in Grand Island. JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND

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THE NATURE OF THINGS

By Monica Macoubrie, Wildlife Education Specialist

One day, my 5-year-old posed a question that stumped me: Since our dogs fart, do other animals?

Here's what I found out.

Mammals

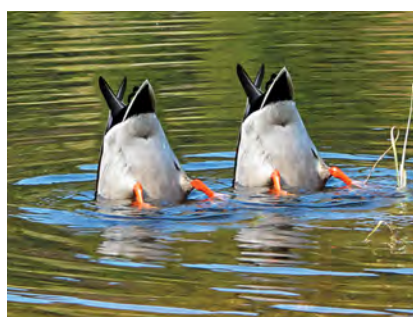
In mammals, flatulence is primarily a by-product of digestion. Microorganisms within the digestive tract break down ingested food, resulting in the production of gases such as carbon dioxide or methane. Furthermore, the elongated intestines of mammals, coupled with their slow digestion, result in fecal matter lingering within the digestive tract for extended periods of time. Consequently, gases generated at any point along the mammalian intestines have ample time to accumulate before reaching the end.



The **American bison**, once numbering in the millions across the Great Plains, have the digestive system of a ruminant, relying on fermentation in their multi-chambered stomachs to break down tough grasses. As a result, bison are known to produce copious amounts of methane gas. While this gas is primarily expelled through burping, the occasional release of wind is not uncommon.

Unlike other mammals of similar size, **bats** have a relatively short gut, resulting in reduced intestinal tissue and less food retention within their

bodies. This adaptation minimizes weight, thereby making flight less energetically demanding. With such a shortened gut, food traverses the entirety of a bat's digestive tract in a brief span of 15-30 minutes. This rapid transit time may imply that bats have insufficient opportunity for flatulence to accumulate.



Birds

Unlike mammals, birds do not possess a separate large intestine where gas could accumulate and be expelled. Instead, their digestive tract consists of a relatively short intestine leading to a cloaca, a common opening for digestive, urinary and reproductive purposes. This efficient design allows birds to extract nutrients quickly from their food, minimizing the fermentation processes that produce gas in mammals.

Additionally, birds have a specialized digestive process that involves the use of a gizzard to grind food and the secretion of gastric enzymes to break down nutrients efficiently.

Insects

Insects possess both an anus and a digestive tract, referred to as the gut by scientists. Several journals have observed that insects generate gas as a byproduct of digestion, which is then absorbed into their hemolymph, or blood, before being released through spiracles. Spiracles are tiny openings in



the insect's exoskeleton that facilitate respiration and gas exchange.

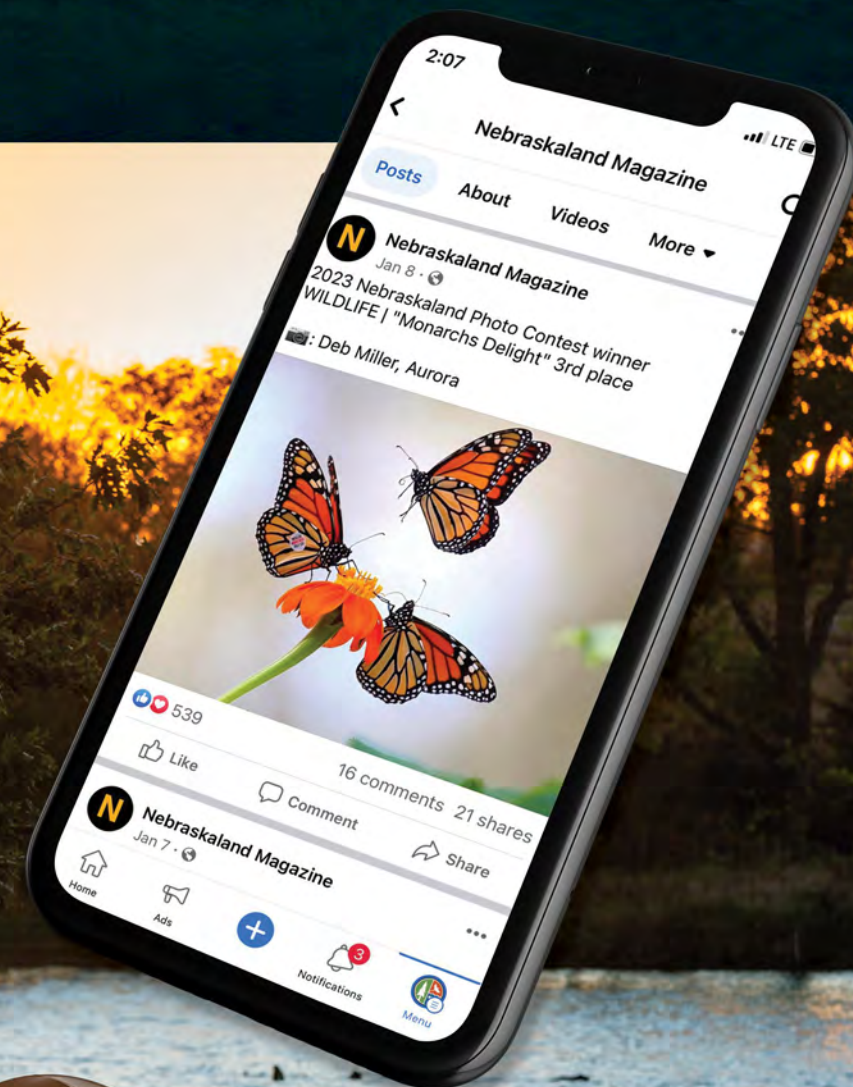
Remarkably, evidence of insect flatulence has been found preserved in amber, akin to the scenario in *Jurassic Park* where a mosquito is trapped in tree sap. Gas bubbles can be seen emanating from the anuses of these preserved insects, providing compelling evidence of gas-producing gut microbes at work.

Termites, despite their size, are prolific gas producers due to their unique digestive systems. Within the termite gut resides a complex community of microorganisms. Remarkably, termites are estimated to be among the top contributors to methane emissions globally, rivaling even the methane output of ruminant livestock. Their collective flatulence holds significant implications for climate change and ecosystem dynamics.

So, to answer my 5-year-old's question, other animals do indeed fart.



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Deer hunting near Niobrara River, 1958

Our dad with his 6x6 mule deer buck taken with a 65-pound Ben Person longbow. Shot near the Niobrara River in Sheridan County in December.
 – Stuart Hardin, Gordon



Trout fishing at Keystone Canal, 1988
 This picture from September 1988 is of Lacey and Jason Miller holding the trout their dad, Ike Miller, helped catch. The rainbow trout were caught in the Keystone canal. The one Lacey is holding was a Master Angler Award, weighing 6 pounds and 10 ounces and 25 inches long.
 – Patty Miller, North Platte,



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



Pronghorn hunting near Berwyn, 1968
 This is a picture of my grandfather, James O. Ward, and my great uncle, Glendale Ward, after a successful antelope hunt near Berwyn in Custer County.
 – Jason Ward, Fremont



Waterfowl hunting near Tekamah, 1987
 East of Tekamah, right on the Missouri River, Don Blodget's farm. Birds were falling straight down into the blind.
 From left: Joe Ficenec, Jr.; Sean Rensch; Paul Jessen and son, Chad; Pat Rensch; Drew and Andy Sibbernson. Sean's dad, Dick Rensch, is the shadow taking the picture — lucky we had a camera. Pete Jessen could not make it that day. Notice the Grand Wagoneer in the background. The boys were all about 8 to 9 years old.
 – Andy Sibbernson, Omaha



Horticulturist Steve Brey scans the trees in a Cass County Forest. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

A FOREST SONG

By Jeff Kurrus

Steve Brey walked through the Cass County forest, eyes scaling up and down seemingly every tree he saw. “Bur oak,” he mumbled, taking a few more steps before pointing once more. “Ash.” Then, “Walnut.”

Watching him methodically identify trees was like listening to a guitarist playing a song at your request by memory.

The lack of effort was amazing.

I had originally talked Steve, since retired but at the time a Nebraska Game and Parks Commission horticulturist, into visiting this patch of woods for a story on how hunters can become better hunters by knowing which trees are which, pinpointing when squirrels and even

deer will visit particular areas because of the mast they produce.

So on this day he helped me identify trees by leaf and bark formations, tying placards to their branches for easy identification later. There wasn’t a tree we passed — common or otherwise — that he couldn’t identify, and I shot photographs of everything on our path.

Yet this photograph is the one I constantly return to from that day. Of an expert gazing at his surroundings, 50-plus years of his mastered craft effortlessly emerging from every look from his eyes.

While there was no guitar in sight, the sound of music seemed to resonate from the woods all around him.

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