



Fresh snow and a rustic log cabin combine to create a picturesque scene at Indian Cave State Park.
 Photo by Doug Carroll.

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 Joel Sartore's Six Birds from Six Inches
 Michael Forsberg's Natural History of the Cardinal
 Honey Bees • Backyard Bird Feeding • Ice Tourney at Merritt
 Roger Welsch's Groundhog Daze • Ice Safety



NEBRASKAland

Volume 89, Number 10, December 2011

FEATURES

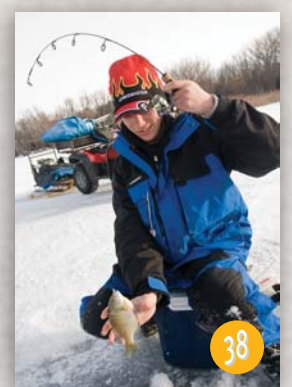
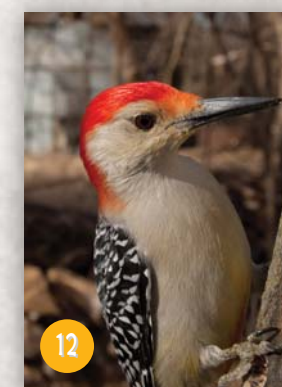
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Cover: In the late-1800s and early decades of the 1900s, documenting a good hunt was important enough to spend time tidily arranging the bag of birds, or even taking them to the local photography studio for professional photographs. See story on page 20. **Opposite:** The yellow eyes of a brown thrasher shine bright while feeding in Hall County. Photo by Rick Rasmussen.

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Trail Camera Deer

Attached is a photo from my trail camera that I thought might work for the magazine, as I love seeing wildlife pictures in *NEBRASKAland*. I thought it was a very unique picture.

The does appear to be about 10 yards from my camera and the lighting and background is really nice. I just wish I knew what they were looking back at. This was taken along the Middle Loup River near Comstock.

Scott Baldwin
Grand Island, Nebraska

Deformed Robin

The last weekend of October, we must have had at least 100 robins visit our yard . . . no joke, no exaggeration. I have a good size, heated birdbath and the robins came and went all day to



take a bath or get a drink. I was hoping they would at least stay one more day since we had been forecasted 70 degrees, but to my disappointment they started their journey late Sunday or early Monday.

When I looked at my photos I noticed one robin with a beak deformation. I have never seen a robin with a cross beak before. It must not bother him very much because he did look very healthy.

Marion Ball
Arlington, Nebraska

Joel Jorgensen, Nongame Bird Program Manager for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, replies: "Deformed bills or other structures, while rare, do occur with regular frequency. Often birds with these inflictions do not survive long in the wild. However, occasionally a deformed bill does not interfere with normal behaviors such as feeding or preening. This appears to be the case with this bird, it has a deformed bill but obviously has been able to get by and survive."

NEBRASKAland Visitor Letters

We want to thank all 111 readers that sent e-mails and letters for last issue's visitor, a **milkweed bug** that was on page 14 (see page 11 for the winner, rules and this issue's hint). Here are some of the responses we received:

I can honestly tell you that I've never seen a milkweed bug north of Johnstown as shown on the map on

page 14 of the November 2011 *NEBRASKAland* issue!

But, then, that map is older than I am!

Ken Fankhauser
Kearney, Nebraska

My daughter Logan would like to submit large milkweed bug – *Oncopeltus fasciatus* – for the contest this month.

Logan is six years old and has been looking at the pictures and the magazine for about a year. The past few months (1st grade) she's been able to read portions of the magazine and she asked me about last month's bug so I explained the contest and she followed through. I did help with the search but she identified the "leads" so to speak.

Logan has gone to the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge, Ontario, South Dakota and other places on fishing trips. She loves nature and has a lot of curiosity.

Thanks for the contest.
Logan Consbruck
(Todd Consbruck -father)
West Point, Nebraska

I just recieved my copy of *NEBRASKAland Magazine* today. I was reading the very interesting article on Wood Lake when a camping and fishing friend of mine called . . . We talked a while and all of a sudden I looked at the map on page 14 and saw the visitor. I do not know what it is, but I probably wouldn't want it crawling up my arm. It is orange and black from what I can see. It is an insect with six legs and two feelers. This is not one of my garden bugs as far as I know. You have a great magazine. Keep up the good work.

Del Sukstorf
Fremont, Nebraska

There is a large milkweed bug (*Oncopeltus fasciatus*) just north of Johnston on page 14. They look like boxelders bugs, don't they?

Rob Mercer
Stanton Nebraska

I found this month's *NEBRASKAland* visitor on page 14 on the map. It's a large milkweed bug.

We have enjoyed your magazine for many years. My husband grew up in Amelia, south of Atkinson, and we still love visiting the wonderful state of Nebraska!

Jan Small
Vermillion, South Dakota

The large milkweed bug is a very colorful insect, found throughout much of the United States. This insect, Oncopeltus fasciatus, is in the Hemiptera family (true bugs) and is related to squash bugs and boxelder bugs. Milkweed bugs feed on milkweed plants, primarily buds and seeds, and actually ingest toxic compounds found in the plant. This makes the insect very unpalatable! The bug's bright reddish-orange and black coloring advertises that it is toxic. An animal that ignores that warning and eats a milkweed bug may get sick and throw up. Milkweed bugs go through incomplete metamorphosis, which means that young, immature bugs look similar to adults. When the bugs first hatch, they don't have wings and are bright orange. The young will molt several times, gradually developing wings and reproductive organs, before reaching adulthood. It is common to see large groups of bugs together, especially on a nice warm fall day; but they quickly scatter when threatened.



Special thanks to Julie Van Meter, State Entomologist, Nebraska Department of Agriculture. Visitor image by Chris Helzer.
www.bugguide.net is a good site for identification

Send your comments to:
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or e-mail Doug.Carroll@Nebraska.gov
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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See You Out There.



www.OutdoorNebraska.org



PHOTO BY LINDSAY ROGERS

Organize an Outdoor Festival

Lindsay Rogers

Today, children ages 8-18 spend an average of 7.5 hours tuned-in, logged-on, or plugged-in to some sort of electronic media every day. Now more than ever, it is important as parents, teachers, and citizens that we help our children get up, get active, and get outside. This idea may sound simple, but getting outside and engaged in the outdoors is a daunting task for many parents. Even more daunting is the idea of putting on an entire festival designed to connect families with nature and outdoor sports. It was this exact problem which drove the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission to develop the Outdoor Families Event Trailers. Interested in GPS and geocaching?

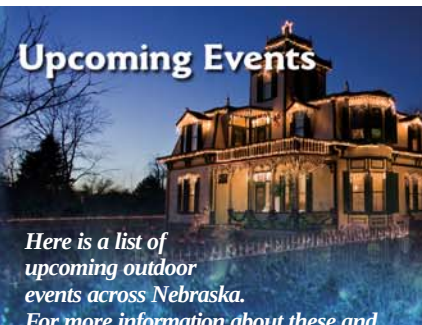
Want to try fish printing? Ready to compete in a beanbag toss? The 12-foot trailers are filled with 18 different activities all related to nature, outdoor sports and having fun outside.

The goal of these trailers is to provide parents, schools, churches, Boy or Girl Scout troops, and hunting clubs access to the equipment needed to host a family outdoor festival or youth event. Each of the trailer's activities provide groups with supplies, equipment, and directions.

"The trailer was completely stocked and well organized. We could set-up each activity with ease. This is a great outdoor 'adventure' for any group ready for a fun and easy to organize outdoor festival," noted Chris Thody, who checked-out the trailer for her family reunion.

The trailers were developed through a partnership between the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and Nebraska Pheasants Forever, with funding from numerous conservation organizations.

Three trailers are located around Nebraska, and checking them out is free! Most supplies for all 18 activities are provided. To learn more, visit www.nebraskaoutdoortrailers.org.



Upcoming Events

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

December 3

Fort Robinson State Park's 17th Annual Historical Christmas Dinner Caroling begins at 6 p.m., followed by dinner and entertainment. After the dinner, guests enjoy turning the Christmas lights on for the first time. Tickets go on sale Nov. 7, 2011 at 8 a.m. A park entry permit is required. Call (308) 665-2900 ngpc.fort.robinson@nebraska.gov

December 14

Ponca State Park Annual Christmas Bird Count

This event coincides with the Audubon Society's national Christmas Bird Count. Amateur and expert bird watchers are invited to attend this event. A free chili feed will be served at noon. Contact the park office for more information. A park entry permit is required. Call (402) 755-2284 ngpc.ponca@nebraska.gov

December 16-19

"Christmas at the Codys"

Buffalo Bill Ranch State Historical Park 5:30-8 p.m. The 1886 mansion, 1887 horse barn, log cabin and other outbuildings all have exterior lights. The mansion will have 18 lighted and decorated Christmas trees and decorations in the interior. There will be a large lighted and decorated Christmas tree in the barn where visitors can make their own ornament to hang on the tree. Santa Claus will be there for the children, Buffalo Bill will talk to visitors, and music will once again flow from the old piano in the mansion. Outside there will be roasted chestnuts, hot apple cider and cookies. Draft horse-drawn hay rack rides will also be available, weather permitting. Admission is \$5 per person at the door, children 12 and younger are free. Park entry permit required. Call (308) 535-8035 ngpc.buffalo.bill@nebraska.gov

PHEASANTS FOREVER & QUAIL FOREVER STATE HABITAT MEETING

February 4, 2012 at the Ramada Inn, Kearney

SEMINARS FOCUSING ON SUCCESSFUL PHEASANT AND QUAIL MANAGEMENT AS WELL AS A WIDE RANGE OF WILDLIFE, YOUTH AND HABITAT MANAGEMENT PRESENTATIONS

2012 Topics Include: Prescribed Fire, Pheasant Management, Quail Management, Landowner Help Desk, Reload Nebraska Update, Expiring CRP contract Options, New Habitat Partnerships, and many more, over 30 presentations total!



For more information or to register:

Registration = \$30 per person, \$40 per person after February 1st, 2012.

Register at www.NebraskaPF.com or by calling 308-428-3062

Registration includes noon meal.

If you have an interest in learning more about how to increase wildlife numbers on your property, this is the one meeting you need to attend!



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

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

It's Back!

The Field Guide to Wildflowers of Nebraska and the Great Plains

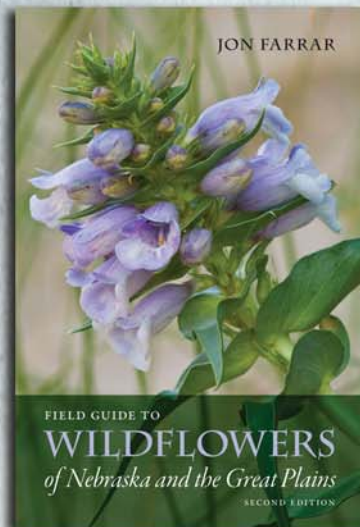
Second Edition

Out of print for 21 years, this classic, time-honored favorite has now been updated and reprinted.

This 6 by 9 1/8 inch paperback is a must-have for anyone interested in learning more about Nebraska's wildflowers.

To order your copy, go to NebraskalandGifts.com or call 1-800-742-9956.

Note: This guide will not be shipped until January, but can be preordered.



A Prescription for Burns

With leadership from Ben Wheeler, coordinating wildlife biologist, the newest prescribed burn association supported by Pheasants Forever was recently formed in the state. The 'Custer Prescribed Burn Association' was formed at a meeting in Broken Bow and intends to work with landowners in Custer and Valley counties to implement safe and effective prescribed burns on the landscape. More details about the association and its officers can be found at <http://www.nebraskapf.com/PrescribedBurning.aspx>.

This brings the total to nine local prescribed burn associations being supported by Pheasants Forever with equipment, training and infrastructure support. Since 2008, those prescribed burn associations have now conducted 267 prescribed burns on a total of 20,218 acres. Pheasants Forever hopes to be able to assist in the formation of one more local prescribed burn association to bring the total to 10 associations throughout Nebraska, with the intention that this 'momentum' can carry forward on its own with more safe and effective burn happening with landowners across the state.



Bull Elk Season Sets Record Harvest

Nebraska's bull elk hunting season closed October 23 for the majority of the state, with a record 91 bulls harvested. Only the Boyd Unit, where three bull permits were issued this year, remains open. As of early November, 80 percent of the hunters who drew a bull or an either-sex 2011 Nebraska elk hunting permit have shot a bull.

Twenty-seven cow elk have also been harvested, with the cow elk season open through December 21 for every elk unit but the Boyd Unit, where six cow elk permits were authorized this year. Elk hunters in the Boyd unit can hunt through December 31 for both cows and bulls.

There were a record 2,544 elk applications this year, with 294 permits issued. All available permits sold for the second year in a row because of statute changes that allow landowners to draw a cow tag without affecting preference points for bull permits. General elk permits are restricted to Nebraska residents only, but landowner permits are available to both residents and nonresidents. For information about next year's elk permit, pick up a copy of the 2012 Big Game Guide when it becomes available next spring.

Outdoor Message Plates

Bruce Grupe of Kearney fell in love with the scenery and serenity of grouse hunting in the Sandhills when his late-father took him on his first hunt there at age 12. He's been every year since – 27 and counting, including recent years with his English field cocker, Misty, and has shown his love for the sport on his message plate since 1993. His brother's plate is 3 GROUSE.

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



Got Milk – Snakes?

Dan Fogell

How does the rhyme go ... red on yellow, kill a fellow ... red on black, venom lack? Or is it red on black, friend of Jack? The rhyme is supposed to let people know if the red, black and yellow snake they are looking at is a harmful coral snake or a harmless kingsnake. The rule is that if the red and yellow bands on the snake touch, then the snake is venomous. If the red and black bands touch, then it's a harmless snake. This is the first poem I ever memorized, just in case I ever encountered a coral snake. Not because I was afraid of coral snakes, but because I needed to know how I was going to catch it. You can just grab a kingsnake and if it bites, so what? No venom. But coral snakes require strategy, maybe even some tools, so I needed to be ready. It would be well beyond my childhood years before I finally ran into my first coral snake, but I remembered the poem. And I caught the snake safely.

Red, black, and yellow snakes – affectionately known as tricolored snakes – are unique to the Americas. They occur from Canada to Argentina and there are dozens of different kinds, but most people just divide them into two categories: coral snakes, and coral snake mimics. Mimics are animals that gain some protection from predators simply by looking like a poisonous or venomous animal – known as the model. So the poem tells you whether you are looking at a model or a mimic. Or does it? As it turns out, that poem works fairly well if you encounter a coral snake in Florida, Texas, Arizona or elsewhere in the United States, but in Central and South America the rhyme is useless because there are many harmless snakes whose red and yellow bands touch, and even some coral snakes whose red and black bands touch. To make matters worse, some snakes are red, black and white instead of red, black and yellow. Luckily, here in Nebraska there are no coral snakes, so there is no reason to memorize the rhyme. But there ARE "mimics," and they are called milk snakes – secretive, tricolored serpents that are very close relatives of kingsnakes.

Why the name milk snake? They're not mammals; they can't produce milk for their young; what's with the name? As grassland snakes, they are commonly found in pastures and around barns where farm animals are kept, and so a myth was fashioned: These multi-colored snakes will drink milk from a cow's udder. And thus the milk snake got its common name. It truly is a myth by the way, for two reasons: Milk snakes lack the throat muscles needed to suckle milk from an udder; and like all snakes, they just don't drink milk. They can be found all over Nebraska and we are lucky enough to have three different kinds: red milk snakes, pale milk snakes and central plains milk snakes.

Unless all three are side by side, identifying one can be difficult. And because they're all the same species, they will hybridize with each other – making identification even more challenging. But there are general characteristics of each that can help. Red milk snakes occur in eastern Nebraska. They have a mostly red head and nose with some black speckling on the nose and a thin black band behind the head. Pale milk snakes are in northwest and north central Nebraska as well



Pale Milk Snake



Red Milk Snake



Central Plains Milk Snake

as the Sandhills. They are aptly named because of their pale orange and cream or white bands. Their black bands are thin, and their noses are white, with some black flecks. The central plains milk snake from southwest and central Nebraska has a black head and nose with some white flecks on the nose and a white band behind the head. Sometimes the black bands merge together on the back and completely cover the red bands.

So if you run into one of these beautiful tricolored jewels, there's no need to remember the poem – at least not here in Nebraska. And with three different types and a statewide distribution, Nebraska has definitely got milk snakes!

Ragweed

Chris Helzer

I'm not exactly sure how it happened, but lately I feel like I've become the defender of all the underdogs of the outdoor world. Within the last couple of years, I've written articles in this magazine singing the praises of such detested species as thistles, hoary vervain, grasshoppers and spiders. Now you've read the title of this article and you're thinking, "Surely he's not going to tell me how great ragweed is?! No one can possibly think ragweed has any positive attributes..."

Sorry to disappoint you – I am indeed going to attempt to change your opinion about ragweed. Oh sure, it's the major cause of hay fever, and about a quarter of you reading this are just now recovering from a miserable couple months full of sniffing, sneezing and itchy eyes. Sure, a single ragweed plant can release as many as a billion (with a b) pollen grains into the air. Can't we all just get along?

Ok, I'll give you the hay fever thing. Allergies are no fun. (In my case, I'm a grassland ecologist who's allergic to grass pollen. How pathetic is that?) But can we really dismiss any positive value from ragweed just because of one little annoyance? If you think about it, there are lots of examples where we put up with negative aspects of something because of the greater good. Pepper makes us sneeze, roses have thorns, and colonoscopies are a good idea, but...

To establish what we're talking about, there are actually four species of ragweed in Nebraska, and another two species of bursage that are in the same genus. Of those six species, however, three are the most widespread and are really the subject of this article: **common ragweed**, **western ragweed** and **giant ragweed**. Common and giant ragweeds are annual plants, but western ragweed is a perennial that spreads by both seeds and rhizomes (underground stems).

The primary contribution ragweed makes to the world is its seed production, because those seeds are extremely nutritious to wildlife. Small mammals and birds, in particular, feed heavily on ragweed seeds in the late

fall and into the winter. The most high profile species tied to ragweed seed is the **northern bobwhite**. Quail biologists have long known the value of ragweed to bobwhites, and lament the fact that seed availability decreases quickly as winter comes on – mostly because other wildlife species are eating them too. In fact, it's not hard to find on-line advertisements selling ragweed seed for wildlife food plots (\$7-\$10 per pound, in case you're interested). If you doubt the attractiveness of ragweed seed, walk out in the snow this winter – and look at the tracks of mammals and birds around any ragweed plant sticking up above the snow.

So maybe ragweed can feed a few birds and mice, but surely it's a real pest in pastures, right? Well, actually ragweed plants have a lot of nutritional value to cattle, but they produce a couple of chemicals that deter cattle and other grazing animals from eating the leaves. As a result, ragweed is rarely grazed by cattle except very early in the growing season and, in fact, has a strong reputation as a nasty pasture weed. I guess that's true if we're defining anything that isn't grass as a weed, but I'd like to think we're all a little more progressive than that (especially the readers of this magazine).

The real question is whether or not ragweed OUTCOMPETES grass, thus decreasing the amount of available forage for cattle. I would argue no. My experience, which I grant you is mostly in the eastern half of the state, is that ragweed plants are opportunistic space-fillers. When grasses are heavily grazed, their root systems shrink because they don't have enough leaves to produce food to support those roots. That opens up space for ragweeds and other similar plants to move in. Because they're not grazed by cattle like the surrounding grasses, those plants often look even more abundant than they really are.

It's easy to see why a rancher would assume that ragweed plants are "taking over" the pasture, but they're really just taking advantage of the resources the weakened grasses can't use. If the grasses are given a break from grazing and can re-grow both leaves and roots, the ragweeds and other opportunistic

plants give way quickly under that renewed competition. A good test of this is to build a small enclosure (e.g., a few cattle panels wired together) in a pasture and watch what happens over a year or two. Typically, the grass within that enclosure will regain its vigor and the ragweed and other opportunists fade rapidly. Even the perennial western ragweed diminishes in abundance, and the remaining plants are dwarfed by the much more competitive grasses. This is why broadcast spraying of ragweed in pastures results in only a short-term decrease in ragweed plants (at best) before the plants come roaring back. Without a change in the grazing practice that led to abundant ragweed in the first place, ragweed is still going to be the best adapted plant to the growing conditions in the pasture. In addition, broadcast herbicides knock out a lot of other plant species that will likely NOT come back, decreasing both the habitat and forage value of the pasture, along with the number of potential competitors to the ragweed.

You're coming around, aren't you? You hate it, but you're gradually coming to the realization that (AH-CHOO!!) ragweed isn't the evil plant you thought it was. Instead, it's a wonder plant for wildlife and isn't really a competitor to (SNIFFLE) livestock forage. Sure, it's not the most attractive plant around, but corn isn't exactly the Christie Brinkley of the plant world either, and yet we put millions of acres into the ground each year. Live and let (AH-CHOO!!) live, I say. Gesundheit.

Chris Helzer is an ecologist for The Nature Conservancy. When the pollen count is sufficiently low, he enjoys writing about and photographing aspects of nature that no one else cares about.



BACKGROUND PHOTO BY CHRIS HELZER. QUAIL PHOTO BY RICK RASMUSSEN

When to Shoot

Jeff Kurrus

Last year, during muzzleloader season, I patiently watched a deer walk more than one hundred yards down a heavily timbered draw, only to then take a bad shot just five yards from having a wide-open, 35-yard broadside shot.

It never ceases to amaze me how many not-so-smart moves I make in the field even though I know better. But I also know that these moments keep happening less frequently.

I figure that the same must happen to many of you. Therefore, the following photos are just a quick reminder of when, and when not to, shoot. It's a simple concept, really, but I sometimes find myself in need of a refresher course as well.



A bad shot, even with a rest. Free-handed, and the gun gods should take your weapon away.



Not a smart shot. Before these deer leave, they have to stand up. Be patient.



Clear kill zone and safe background. A shot you could take with your muzzleloader.

PHOTOS BY JEFF KURRUS

Check It Out

Throughout the year, various outdoor items and tools either cross the desks of or are suggested to *NEBRASKAland Magazine* staff members as items to check out that might be of interest to our readers. Many of these are gimmicks of little interest, but two recent items are worth passing along:

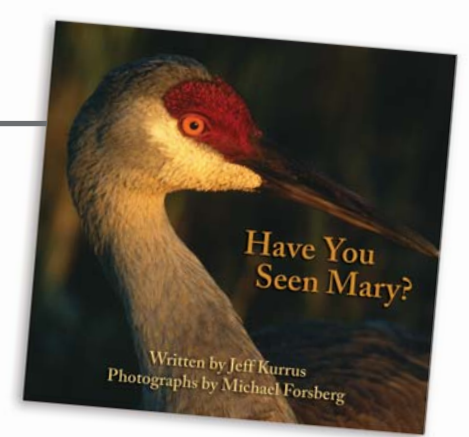
Smoking Gun Jerky, a relatively new business located in Lincoln, makes a superb, low-salt liquid marinade that is great for making jerky out of virtually any type of meat, or can be used in hamburgers and as a grilling marinade for steaks. Located at 443 North 48th Street in Lincoln, the liquid marinade

can be used by itself or mixed with other ingredients to create a variety of tastes. For more information, call 402-467-6315 or visit smokinggunjerky.com.

Another Nebraska-made product worth checking out is the **BurrPaw**, made in Papillion.

Designed to be used like a mitten, the BurrPaw is designed for fast and effective removal of stubborn stickers and burrs from clothing, gear and pets. The BurrPaw rolls up for compact storage and can easily be cleaned and reused over and over again.

For more information or see a short video of the BurrPaw in action, visit www.burrpaw.com.



New Crane Book for Kids

NEBRASKAland Magazine's Jeff Kurrus has teamed up with contributing editor Michael Forsberg for a beautiful children's photographic picture book about a sandhill crane's faithful search for his lost mate on the Platte River during spring migration.

Accompanied by gorgeous photos, *Have You Seen Mary?* entertains and educates readers about these fascinating birds in an easy to read style.

To order a copy, go online to NebraskalandGifts.com or HaveYouSeenMary.com.

NEBRASKAland Visitor Winner and Hint

Last issue's winner of the *NEBRASKAland* Visitor drawing was Lesa Bargmann of Bancroft, Nebraska, who found the **large milkweed bug** on page 14. Readers are encouraged to contact *NEBRASKAland* within 10 days after this issue's publication with the correct page number and name of this issue's "Visitor" – a bug found in Nebraska that just happened to find its way onto one of the pages of our publication.

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 3, 5, 30, 31, 33 or 45.

Six by Six

Six Birds, from Six Inches

Photos and text by Joel Sartore

When I was a kid, John James Audubon was my favorite artist – I absolutely loved the way his animals were drawn from his observations in nature, without the aid of a camera. His birds especially looked as if they could fly right off the page. Perhaps most importantly, Audubon showed the habitats various species depended on, which at the time was a groundbreaking thing for an artist to do.

As a natural history photographer for *National Geographic* magazine, I've always had Audubon in the back of my mind. I've sought to emulate his style, though with very limited success – usually when I photograph species in the wild they're too far away to use anything but a long lens. I've felt lucky enough just getting things in focus.

Then along came an assignment from *Geographic* on animal migrations. Here was a chance not only to work close to home, but to do something different with migratory birds, moving beyond the obligatory shots of mallard ducks or clouds of snow geese.

I'd been feeding birds for years on my little acreage near Walton. From time to time I'd experiment with small, remotely-triggered, noiseless cameras near my feeders. My first such attempt several years ago was of a red-bellied woodpecker going after peanut butter suet that I'd tucked into an old tree limb. I got one frame I liked, which led me to believe that a series of close-up, yet wide-angle, shots of birds was indeed possible if done at either feeding stations or nest sites. With this story on migrations, my chance to be Audubon-esque had finally arrived. I called the project “Six Birds, from Six Inches” just because I liked how catchy that sounded, plus any more than that would be way too much work.



I started with American goldfinches at our Walton farm, where my family had already been feeding them thistle seed. I simply moved a feeder to a pasture by the farmhouse, knowing the finches would alight on nearby thistles while they waited their turn at the feeder. A small flash hidden inside a bit of white cloth provided softened highlights.

An **American goldfinch** on thistles at historic Waveland Farm near Walton.



Next I moved on to the Baltimore oriole. I'd heard Steve and Cheryl Eno, who live north of Lincoln, were avid feeders of many species including orioles, which came to oranges the Enos put out. As before, I placed the camera just above the feeding station and aimed it at a limb on which the birds could wait their turn to feed. This provided the Audubon look that I wanted – a well-lit subject in the foreground surrounded by its preferred habitat of forest edge.

Following the oriole, I did the same thing with eastern bluebirds in a garden behind Gary and Margo Larson's acreage. Then I moved on to nesting sites for the cliff swallow and the interior least tern, with the help of Dr. Mary Bomberger Brown, a world-class ornithologist who runs the Tern and Plover Conservation Partnership. Friends Amy Bruce and Brian Lehmann took turns manning the remotes when I couldn't be there.

A **Baltimore oriole** north of Lincoln at the home of Steve and Cheryl Eno (above).

An **eastern bluebird** at an acreage garden belonging to Gary and Margo Larson, also north of Lincoln (opposite top).

Cliff swallows (opposite bottom) under a bridge along a gravel road in Lancaster County.



The last species I tried was a red-headed woodpecker near the visitor's center at Audubon's Spring Creek Prairie. Marian Langan and Gordon Warrick were kind enough to allow me and my friends, Clark DeVries and Beau Wichtendahl, to set up scaffolding and attach my little camera to a branch near the nest hole in a partially dead tree. After a few evenings of watching the nest through binoculars, radio trigger in hand, I ended up with the shot you see here.

This kind of photography is not for everyone, nor should it be. In the case of nesting birds, I worked with qualified biologists who helped me keep disturbance to a minimum. Our first priority was to do no harm. We chose nests with chicks that were old enough to tolerate a bit of disturbance at camera set up and take down time, yet young enough not to be able to fly from the nest prematurely. Finally, each picture took a minimum of 40 hours to get, all of it sitting and watching from a hundred yards away, looking through binoculars, radio trigger in hand. When you seek to reinvent the wheel, patience is a virtue.

Interior least tern and chicks photographed with the help of Dr. Mary Bomberger Brown of the Tern and Plover Conservation Partnership at a mine owned by Western Sand and Gravel Company near Inglewood.



Red-headed woodpeckers at Audubon's Spring Creek Prairie near Denton.

As it turns out, so is thick skin. After all that work, *Geographic* liked the pictures but didn't have the space in the migrations article to run any of the bird portraits, other than a single, postage stamp-sized cutout of the bluebird. This is the first time these photos have been published anywhere. ■

*Joel Sartore is a contributing photographer for National Geographic magazine, speaker and author of several books. His most recent is a book entitled **Let's Be Reasonable**.*

To see more of his photographs, visit www.joelsartore.com.



A Chilling Assignment

By Eric Fowler

I fell through the ice at Holmes Lake in Lincoln last winter. Actually, I jumped through it. On purpose. All so I could give you, our readers, a first person account of how to get yourself out of just such a situation. I'm not sure if that makes me dedicated or stupid. You be the judge.

So here's the one insightful bit of news that I gleaned from my little experiment: Don't get yourself in that situation. The water under ice is cold, and your body won't like it.

Other than that, there's not much I can tell you about my experience that holds up in the real world with any degree of certainty. I had hoped to tell you in detail how easy or difficult it was to pull myself out of that hole. I even carried the ice picks that are recommended gear for ice anglers and others who venture onto frozen pond in the winter months. But I didn't use them. I hit the 38-degree water, crawled out, jumped into the Zodiac raft that waited to ferry me back to shore, slipped into a trailer, stripped off my wet clothes, dried off, put warm dry gear on and was done.

In the real world – your world – it won't be that easy. Because unlike

myself, you probably won't be wearing a life jacket when you fall through. My plunge took place under the watchful eye of the Lincoln Fire and Rescue Department's Dive-Rescue Team, which was conducting an ice-rescue training exercise and wouldn't let me have my fun without a PFD. That PFD kept me from going completely under when I broke through, reducing the shock that comes when cold water hits your head. It also held me higher in the water, making it easier to get my torso on the ice and crawl out. So I guess I can tell you that wearing a life jacket on the ice is a good idea.

The other thing I had going for me, which most of you won't, is I was only wearing jeans and a light, insulated jacket. Most ice anglers and hunters will be decked out in coveralls and a heavy parka that will soak up 50 pounds or so of water when submerged. Some people won't be able to pull their own weight out of the water, much less the extra.

And once out of the water, I didn't have far to go to dry off and warm up on this warmer-than-average February day. If I'd had a half mile walk through sub-zero wind chills, things might have been much different.

A video I saw on the Web a few years back inspired my experiment.

You want to talk dedication? Go to YouTube, search for Gordon Giesbrecht, and watch "Survival in the Ice – Part 1." This Canadian professor skis into a hole in the ice, pulls himself out and then gets back in and stays there, talking about each step his body is going through until he's about to pass out from hypothermia and his safety crew pulls him out. Now that's dedication.

Before my "Polar Plunge" day arrived, I'd thought about going in a second time with coveralls on to compare the difference in difficulty. I'm sorry to say that while I certainly appreciate all of you readers, I'm just not as dedicated as Giesbrecht, and I can live with that. Shoot, my feet started getting cold when I got to the lake and my thoughts shifted to "What have I gotten myself into?" When I hit the icy water, all I could think about was getting out as fast as I could (think moving like a cat with its tail on fire). Once out, I just wanted to go home.

I expected worse ... much worse, in the scale of both difficulty and coldness. But I had the deck stacked in my favor. Will you?

P.S. – If you want to see a video of my icy plunge, go to OutdoorNebraska.org and search "Ice Rescue." ■

Almost every winter, somewhere in Nebraska, someone falls through the ice and drowns. Often the victim is a hunter or an ice angler who simply didn't take the proper precautions.

Brad Thavenet, Lincoln Fire and Rescue captain and commander of the department's dive and water rescue team, said his team responds to an average of one ice rescue call each winter, some ending tragically. Hang around the bait shops, he said, and you'll hear other war stories from anglers who have pulled themselves out of the ice.

Thavenet thinks years of education have led outdoorsman to be prepared, making it more likely they will be able to save themselves if they do fall through the ice. "Guys are taking a lot more of that to heart," he said.

If you haven't heard these tips and are planning on doing some ice-fishing, ice skating, hunting or simply taking a stroll on your favorite neighborhood lake this winter, here are some things to keep in mind.

How Much Ice is Enough?

0-3 inches: Keep off

4-5 inches: Ice Fishing and Skating/250 lbs.

6-7 inches: Snowmobile or ATV/1,100 lbs.

8-11 inches: Light car or truck/3,500 lbs.

12-14 inches: Medium truck/8,000 lbs.

These numbers apply to clear, blue lake ice, the kind that forms when temperatures plunge on a calm night. Late-winter ice that is honeycombed from the freeze and thaw cycles that come with rising and falling temperatures can support only half as much weight. Ice covered with snow should be viewed with caution: Snow insulates the ice from the cold air and ice under it won't be as thick.

You can also rely on two old sayings:

"Thick and blue, tried and true - thin and crispy, way too risky."

"When in doubt, don't go out."

Be Prepared

Even if the fishing report says there's more than enough good ice, you should always be prepared in case you fall through. Why? Springs flowing from the lake bottom can weaken ice above them, leaving an inch of ice surrounded by a foot of ice, and you might be unlucky enough to find such a spot. Drill test holes to check thickness and use a staff, spud or your feet to sound the ice in front of you and gauge thickness. Also remember that the ice won't be as thick at the end of a warm sunny day as it was at the beginning.

Build or buy a set of ice picks to hang from your neck or parka that can be used to help pull yourself out of the ice if you fall through. Also, pack some rope in case you need to help pull someone else out. While few people wear one on the ice, a life jacket can be of the utmost importance. It will keep your head above water, reducing shock, make it easier to get out of the ice, and it will keep you from sinking and drowning if you can't. Believe it or not, you'll be alive long after you pass out, and someone might still be able to save you.

Think About It

Don't be too hasty in your effort to save someone. If they fell through, you could too, and there's no need for two obituaries. Use a rope or tree branch to extend your reach so you don't have to approach the spot where they fell through. On a residential lake, a ladder might be handy and is a great choice, as it provides reach while spreading your weight across a large area of ice.

Thavenet said to use even more caution before

attempting to rescue something such as a dog, a common story behind people falling through the ice. "My Lab weighs a heckuva lot less than I do," he said. "What makes me think that I'm going to get out that far before I go through?"

If You Fall Through

Don't panic: Get your head above water, catch your breath and stay calm. The initial shock of the cold will go away, and you should have at least 20 minutes to get yourself out before hypothermia sets in and you physically can't.

Retrace your path: Get your arms up on the ice and face the direction you came from. The ice supported you to that point, so it should do so again on your retreat.

Kick like a dolphin: Kick your legs simultaneously to push yourself onto the ice. If you can't picture what I'm talking about, look for some YouTube videos of dolphins, seals or killer whales launching themselves onto the pool deck at Sea World.

Pick yourself: If you can't pull and kick yourself out of the hole, grab the ice picks you brought and you should be able to pull yourself out. If you didn't bring any, your car keys might give you enough grip to free yourself.

Freeze: If, Heaven forbid, you can't get yourself out of the hole, get your forearms wet and hold them to the ice. If it's cold enough, they will freeze to the ice and prevent you from slipping under it when you go unconscious. While this sounds morbid, it may save your life as you will still be alive for some time after you pass out.

Roll with it: Once you get out of the hole, don't stand up. You breaking through weakened the ice for several feet around the hole and you now weigh a lot more than you did thanks to all of the water your clothes soaked up. Unless you want to try to get out of the water again, roll like a log until you're a good distance from the hole. From there, move to a crawl and get to your feet only when you're confident the ice will hold you.

Quit shivering: Cold water saps heat from the body 25 to 30 times faster than air. Get back to your vehicle, house or a campfire as quick as you can, shed your wet clothing and get warm. If you figured the fishing had to be better on the opposite side of the lake from the parking lot, this can be the critical point in your adventure. If you're in the water or are wet and out of it long enough, you are at risk of hypothermia and need medical attention as soon as possible. In the short term, warm up slowly, not right by the heater or fire.



Even when you're prepared for and expecting it, a plunge into icy water is quite a shock to your body.

PHOTOS BY DOUG CARROLL

Collecting Old Hunting Photographs

By Jon Farrar

Photographs courtesy of Thomas G. Weynand

In the late-1800s and early-1900s, in the days before Kodak Instamatic and Polaroid cameras, back when digital meant fingers on your hand, documenting a good hunt was important enough to spend time tidily arranging a day's bag for a photograph or even taking it to the local photography studio.

The Internet has made it possible for people sharing interests to find each other unlike any form of communication preceding it. That was what happened to Thomas G. Weynand in California and me about five years ago.

It seemed we were interested in the same thing – photographic images of early-day hunting. My interest was narrower than Weynand's, not passing beyond the borders of Nebraska. Over a period of a year or more I was repeatedly outbid by Weynand on online auctions. Even when I went above the self-imposed limits of my wallet, more often than not he was the bidder who bested me, although at the

time I had no idea who he was.

Finally, I couldn't stand it any longer. I e-mailed him and asked: "What in the heck are you doing with all those photographs?" As I was more interested in having quality scans of the images for publication than actually owning them, and since I was often the one running up the price on Weynand, I proposed a deal – I wouldn't bid against him if he'd let me scan the Nebraska photographs and grant me rights to reproduce them, and I would also pay half of whatever his winning bid for that photo had been.

He was not particularly interested in that proposal, but we continued to correspond, and eventually he provided

me with scans of images I was interested in, and they were subsequently used for illustration for historical hunting articles in *NEBRASKAland Magazine*. We stayed in touch, sporadically, and about nine months ago I asked if he was interested in a photo spread in *NEBRASKAland* showcasing some of his best Nebraska images. He was. The obvious companion for the images was his thoughts on collecting, so a question-and-answer session ensued. It follows, and sheds light on why Weynand collects what he collects and what he believes makes a photographic image collectable.

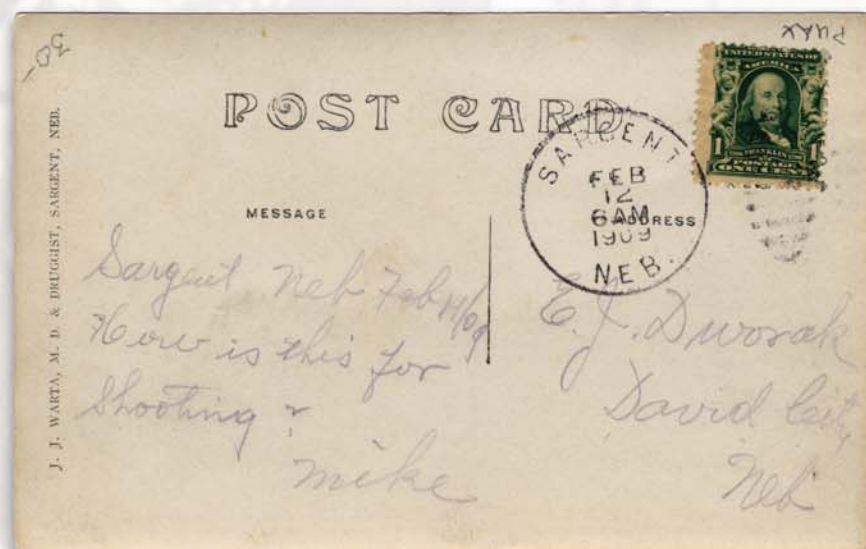
NEBRASKAland: Why do you collect?

Weynand: I think I collect because it is in my genes – I have always collected something and I've always had an appreciation for anything artistic. Advertising and photo images are an art form. From the late-1890s to about 1930s was the golden age of illustration. The artwork on shell boxes and sporting advertising during this period is just spectacular, classics, and the items are

This real photo postcard, left, was mailed from Chapman on February 2, 1912, when spring waterfowl hunting was still legal. The two hunters on the right were proud enough of their bag they took it to a Grand Island photography studio to have their hunt documented.



Leschinsky
GRAND ISLAND



In 1903, Kodak introduced its No. 3A Folding Pocket camera, designed to use postcard-size film. Photographs could be printed on heavy stock and mailed. Photo postcards remained popular into the 1920s. The photo shown here was mailed February 12, 1909, from Sargent. Writing on the front of the card indicates the duck hunt was on the Middle Loup River.

lot of boxes from him, and I have been collecting them ever since.

NEBRASKALand: What do you collect? What content? Are you interested only in bird hunting photos?

Weynand: I collect vintage sporting collectibles such as shotgun shell boxes, shotgun shells, gunpowder tins, advertising, books on waterfowl hunting and trapshooting items, as well as historical images. My main interest in photos is bird hunting photos, primarily waterfowl hunting images. I have fished around the town of McCloud in northern California and hunted waterfowl in the Klamath Basin [northern California and southern Oregon] for over 30 years, and so I'm particularly interested in the history and vintage photos from this part of the country, the Pacific Northwest. I'm

mainly interested in images from the United States.

NEBRASKALand: Do you have a cut-off year beyond which you are not interested in such photos?

Weynand: I am not interested in photos past around 1930 or so, even though I do have some. Times were changing. It's just not the same. Something about the earlier photos, the clothing, old cars, vintage guns, old boats, live decoys, dogs and the incredible bags, they are just from a different era. The lifestyle was very different, and that is just one of the things that make this time period so interesting.

NEBRASKALand: In old photographs it is obvious hunters spent more time setting up the scene than hunters do today. Why do you think that is, beyond the obvious, that photographs

today are so much more common and casual than they were 100 years ago?

Weynand: Hunters have always taken pride with their game when they were successful in the field. There are a lot of days when the shooting is marginal. It's always great to have a photograph of the best hunts of the season. Back in those days getting your picture taken was new and exciting. Life was also slower paced back then. They took the time setting up the picture by hanging birds on walls, poles, cars, or going into town to the local studio. Life is much faster paced now. All you have to do is hold up your birds and have someone snap a number of photos with a digital camera. How many hunters today would have their picture taken on main street in front of the local sporting goods store, with their birds hanging all over their vehicle?

Anything going on in the photo is interesting to look at. It was just such a

different time period and lifestyle. Having the photos really enhances having my other sporting collectibles. Without the photos I would just have shell boxes, shells, gunpowder tins and advertising to look at. When I look at the photos of what life was like back in the days when those items were used, it brings my whole collection to life.

NEBRASKALand: About how many old hunting photographs have you collected?

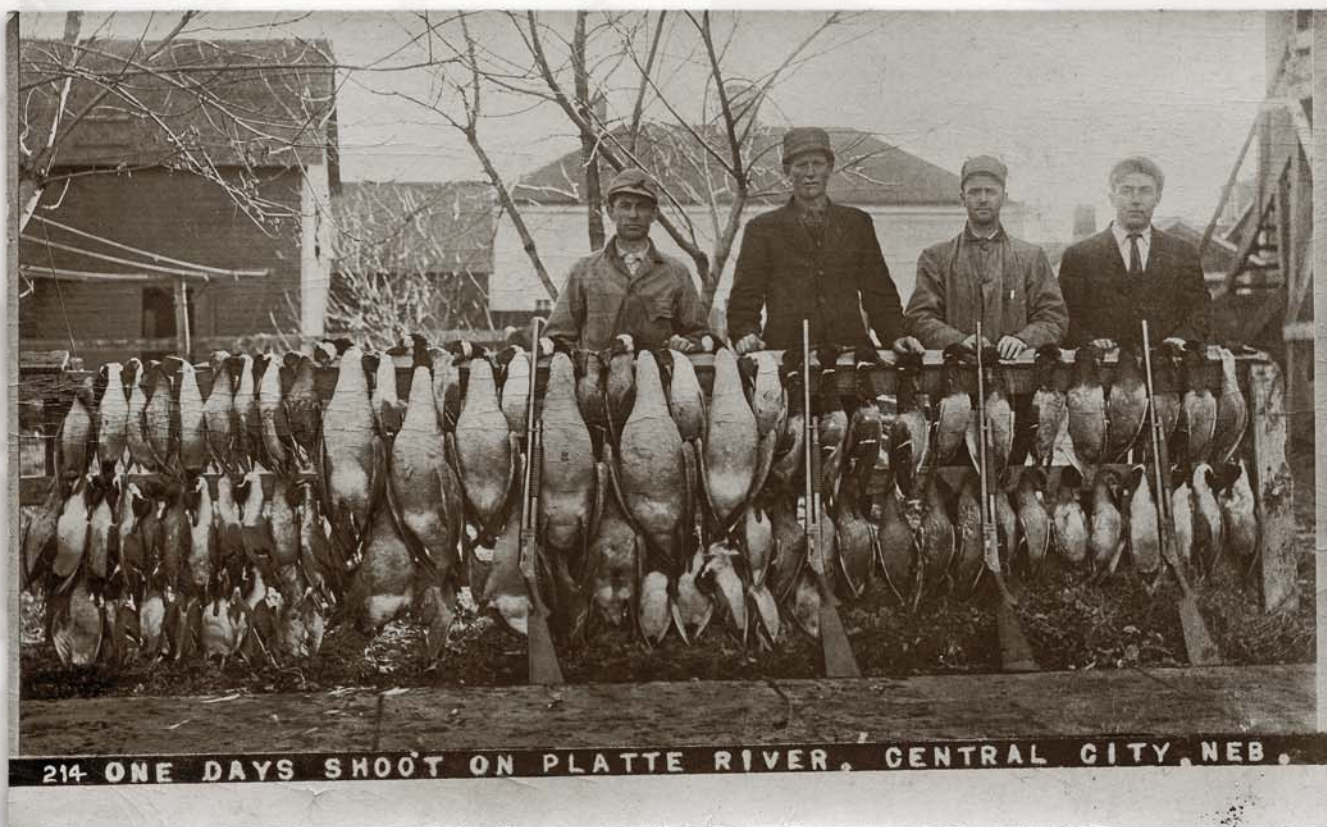
Weynand: I have more than 200 vintage bird hunting photos, mostly waterfowling. They range from photographic prints, real photo postcards, cabinet cards [photograph prints mounted on heavy paper board, usually measuring about four-by-six inches, large enough to be viewed from across the room when displayed in a cabinet.] imperial cards [oversized cabinet cards], glass slides and stereoviews.



Hunters in a photo postcard mailed from Fairbury on September 27, 1919 decorated their automobile with enough ducks it could have been in a parade. That year hunters were allowed 25 ducks daily and 50 in possession.



Three hunters show off their bag of ducks in Shelton's town square on this real photo postcard. The date of the postal cancellation is not legible. The date, location and names of people pictured increases a photograph's value.



The only information on this unmailed and undated photo postcard appears under the photograph. Spring waterfowl hunting was legal until passage of the Enabling Act of the Migratory Bird Law in 1918, and the central Platte River was a favored hunting location.

NEBRASKALand: Can you see changing trends in hunting and photography in your collection?

Weynand: Before the golden age of real photo postcards, photographic images were on cabinet cards, imperial cards and stereoviews. Prior to 1898, postcards were mostly commercial advertising. By an act of Congress on May 19, 1898, publishers of privately mailed postcards were granted permission to sell cards to the general public. Most of the cards were souvenir or greeting cards. All cards had an undivided back for the address only. Around 1900, real photo postcards began coming into use. On December 24, 1901 the cards went from being called a "private mailing card" to being called a "postcard." Real photo postcards were rapidly picking up popularity. Still, one side of the card was for the address only. Some white area had to be left on the photo side for the message (as on the photo postcard shown on page 20). Postcards with a divided back were finally permitted on March 7, 1907. The divided back allowed the message and address to be on one side of the card and the other side could be just for the image. This is when postcards really steamrolled into popularity, especially real photo cards. Later on, with the coming of the affordable camera, the telephone, World War I, the influenza epidemic and changing times, the demand for postcards declined drastically. Real photo cards were one of the few postcards that continued in popularity because of their true presentation of the life and times. The golden age of real photo postcards ran from around 1900 into the early-1920s. [Real photo postcards had their beginning in 1903 when Kodak introduced its No. 3A Folding Pocket camera designed to use postcard-size film. Almost overnight people were mailing personalized postcards.]

NEBRASKALand: What makes an old photograph collectible? Is there a correlation between how desirable a photograph is and what it is going to cost a collector, but what makes one image more desirable than another?



Hamel & Miller,

Lexington, Neb.

Judging from the nuptial plumage of the drake pintail in the above photograph, this "cabinet card" from a Lexington studio was probably taken during spring migration.

Weynand: A lot of things make a photograph collectible. For someone to want it they have to feel a connection to something in the photograph. Photographs with a wider appeal bring higher prices because more people are interested in them. A photograph from some small town may not sell for much because not that many people are looking for them. But an old street scene with old cars, horse and buggy, people – something going on besides

just a row of buildings – is more desirable. Photographs with just people posing, nothing else in the photo, usually don't sell for much. There is just no connection. Waterfowling photos are quite popular. Many show bags that were quite liberal compared to today. The sport of waterfowling is rich in heritage and tradition. There are a lot of hunters today that enjoy these old photographs of an era gone by. Waterfowling images are enhanced by



An obviously posed photograph shows Mrs. George Sawyer in her Sunday best, pretending to hunt ducks on Enders Lake in Brown County where she lived when younger. The Sawyer's ranch was on Pelican Lake, now part of the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge.

large bags, people, clothing, vintage guns, dogs, old cars, boats, live decoys, wooden decoys, duck calls and such things of that period.

What collectors call provenance – information about the photograph, the date, place, names of people and other information – also makes photographs more valuable. Such information makes old photographs more than just old photographs, they become history.

NEBRASKALand: Where do you find your photographs?

Weynand: The best places to search are on-line auctions because it's so convenient to search for them at home on your own computer. The next best place to find vintage photos is at postcard and paper shows. I have also found them at gun shows, antique stores, street fairs and flea markets.

NEBRASKALand: Do you have a preference for a professional studio photograph?

Weynand: I do like professional studio photos. They are usually quality photographs and very well staged. Most cabinet cards are marked with the

photographer, city and state, which is nice to know. Amateur outdoor photos can be just as good, though, and often have more information about the photo. Some of the amateur photos are fun just for the sake of realism. And, some of the real photo postcards, although unmarked, were taken by professional photographers and are quite good. [The O'Neill Photo Company produced and marketed thousands of postcards with Nebraska scenes, particularly views of small town main streets. Some were mailed and postmarked months or even years after the photograph was made and are not always a reliable way to date the photograph.]

NEBRASKALand: What do you do with the photographs you've collected?

Weynand: I have framed some of the very best imperial cards in my collection. The rest are in albums and protective sleeves. The first photos I've had published were real photo postcards in *Hunting and Fishing Collectibles Magazine*. I recently had my first article published on the "Miller Photo Company" in the Fall 2011 issue of *California Waterfowl*. The illustration

was seven waterfowling images by Charles Miller. His photographs are some of my favorites. And I worked as an advisor on a book published this fall: *They Came to Shoot, A History of California Duck Clubs and Wetland Conservation*, by retired fish and game biologist Frank Hall. The book contains numerous waterfowling photos from my collection. I enjoy having my photos published so others can enjoy them too.

Weynand said his father was a hunter and sparked his interest in both hunting and fishing. He has been a hunter and fisherman since the early 1970s, slowing down in recent years but "still getting out occasionally for nostalgia's sake." Collectors or other sharing Thomas G. Weynand's interest in field sports of old can contact him at: tgweynand@aol.com.

Waterfowl or grouse photos are the most common. A photograph of a hunter with a day's bag of quail, right, is highly unusual. Writing on the bottom of the photo reads: "After a quail hunt in Neb."



The Northern Cardinal

Text and photo by Michael Forsberg

*Two days of an icy prairie fog
and every blade of grass, and twig,
and branch, and every stretch
of wire, barb, post and staple
is a knot or a thread in a lace
of the purest white. Out walking,
it is like finding your way
through a wedding dress, the sky
inside it, cold and satiny;
no past, no future, just the now
all breathless, then a redbird,
like a pin prick, changes everything.*

— Ted Kooser, HOAR FROST
(published by permission of the author)



A few years ago a pair of northern cardinals built a nest and raised two clutches of chicks in the clematis-covered trellis of our front porch, much to the delight of our family. Our girls, highly protective of the young brood, even taped up a sign that announced to the postman, newspaper carrier, solicitors and friends “Please Use Side Door! Red Cardinals Nesting.”

If ever there was a bird in the Midwest that provides an instant delight to our eyes, it is the male cardinal with its scarlet crest and showy-red plumage. The female, more cryptic in color with just hints of rose on its tail, wings and crest, is equally beautiful.

The northern cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*), large billed and long tailed, is a stout bird more than eight inches long with a nearly 12-inch wingspan. Although conspicuous in appearance, the cardinal is somewhat secretive in its habits, usually the last one to occupy the bird feeder at twilight and the first one lurking about in the morning, rustling leaves in the tangle of a wooded ravine.

Its traditional habitat includes brushy edges along prairie, as well as both riparian and open woodlands. As woodlands have moved farther west, some colorful woodland bird species have moved west as well, funneling into the shaded cities where they find refuge and breeding in urban forests, residential areas and both native and ornamental plantings.

Originally a bird of the southern and eastern states, the cardinal began moving northward and westward nearly a century ago. Once more migratory in nature, it now can often be found residing year-round in many places. The increase in bird feeding has helped the species expand its range northward, adapting to the reliable food source and more moderate climates in sheltered urban areas. Today the cardinal's range stretches from the eastern half of the United States to the Great Plains, parts of the desert Southwest and into Central America as far south as Guatemala.

In Nebraska, naturalists noted them only in southeastern Nebraska in 1900. Today the northern cardinal occupies habitats throughout the eastern half of the state, but it has also extended its reach west along river valleys, into the

North Platte River watershed in the panhandle as far as Garden County and perhaps beyond.

In the winter cardinals gather in loose flocks and can feed communally. During the breeding season, usually beginning in early April in Nebraska, males establish territories and use a variety of different songs, each with its own purpose, to attract a mate.

The cardinal's nest is well concealed but usually sits less than 10 feet off the ground and is often found in brushy shrubs, thick tangles of overgrown vines and evergreens. The nest is cup-shaped and usually built in just a few days by the pair working in tandem. Tightly woven with twigs, grass and other plant fibers, their nests are lined with finer grasses or hair. Eggs are laid anywhere from a day to a week after the nest is built.

Both parents share incubation and feeding duties, and the eggs hatch after 12-13 days. The chicks fledge at about two weeks. The adult male will continue to feed the fledglings as they learn to forage on their own, while the female often goes back to the nest to incubate another clutch of eggs. A

cardinal can have as many as three to four broods a year.

Cardinals are opportunistic feeders. Their diet is primarily plant-based, consisting of seeds, grains and fruits, but also includes a host of insects. By contrast, the young are fed an all-insect diet until after they fledge. Like its allies, grosbeaks and buntings, cardinals' beaks are stout, cone-shaped and very strong, capable of cracking hard-shelled seeds. Any veteran bird biologist or mist netter can attest to the strength of a cardinal's bite.

In the wild their average life span is only one to two years, but researchers once recaptured a banded wild cardinal that was nearly 16 years old, and one lived 28 years in captivity.

A century ago, cardinals, goldfinches and other colorful songbirds were not protected from capture and often were sold as caged birds for their beauty and song. Fortunately today they, like other songbirds, are legally protected from such practices, leaving the cardinal free to roam the open woodlands and prairie edge, lifting us up with its cheerful “*chew chew chew twi twi twi*” song and splash of color as year-long residents here in the heartland. ■

Let's Talk Bees

A busy keeper shares his wisdom

By Margie Lukas

It's a cold spring day when I enter the office of the Adee Honey Farm in Cedar Rapids. Sam Rutten, the manager, gives me a cautious look – he's not wanting any sort of article written that's going to mean the bother of phone calls. He's not selling, he's not buying, he's not advertising: He's busy. But Sam's a good-natured man, and with the record set straight, he lifts a package of cigarettes from the clutter on his desk, pulls smoke into his lungs and settles back to talk bees.

The farm's hives are just returning from the west coast, a semi-trailer load arriving every few days. The bees have spent the winter pollinating almond groves in California and berry farms in Washington. It's a practice common to bee operations across the country – shipping bees during the winter to growers who need pollinators.

Last summer Sam managed more than 5,000 hives, but

with the flooding in South Dakota – another Adee Honey location – he's expecting extra hives to arrive this year, perhaps up to a 1,000 more. This means finding suitable habitat where they will have enough wildflowers for pollen and nectar, as well as an adequate water source. In the past he's traded with farmers, setting his hives in their pastures in exchange for honey. Finding landowners wanting to make the trade was easy. "I knew all the farmers," Sam said, "and they knew me. I just knocked on their doors." Now many farms have been sold to larger operations and the owners generally live offsite. Locating them isn't always possible, and larger tracts of land that were once used for pasture or left idle are now being put into beans and corn – especially corn, to meet the growing demands for ethanol production. Gone are thousands of acres that once held clover and any number of wild blooms.

In the warehouse, dead bees litter the windowsills and empty hive boxes, known as supers, reach to the ceiling. A hive consists of three or four supers, each containing ten frames. The frames are flat plastic sheets outlined in a honeycomb pattern. Bees use the outlines as a base and build up on them with wax secreted from glands on the sides of their bodies. The hexagonal pattern assures no space is wasted within the hive, and the cells are used both to store honey and raise brood. Not yet cleaned for the approaching season, many of the frames are grungy, with sticky dark beads strung along the outer surfaces. It's propolis, a bee glue that begins as resinous substances gathered from trees. Bees chew it, mix it with their saliva and use the compound to strengthen their hives, sealing them against wind, cold, rain and insect invaders. It's believed propolis even helps to ward off diseases.

A queen separator – a screen too narrow for the large queen bee to pass through – is placed between the lower and upper supers to keep her from entering the top ones. Her confinement in the lower boxes insures the top ones contain only honey, which can then be extracted without destroying the brood. Over the summer a healthy hive will fill each of these upper supers with as much as 70 pounds of honey, which is why Sam says, "All beekeepers have bad backs." Given the number of hives he harvests, his lumbar concerns are easy to understand.

Before we leave for the yard where his bees are being unloaded, Sam introduces me to his "pets" living in the alley behind the shop – a hive he's rescued from under the eaves of a grade school in Bartlett. The principal, concerned for



PHOTO BY DOUG CARROLL

During a worker bee's short life, it will visit nearly a 1,000 flowers and produce only about $\frac{1}{12}$ of a teaspoon of honey.



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

The bees are sluggish in the cool air, allowing Sam Rutten to look for a queen without the need of a veil.



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Supers, or hive boxes, reach to the ceiling in the warehouse, waiting for the return of the hives and a new season.

students' safety under the threat of the growing swarm, called him for help. He climbed a ladder, found the queen and brought the hive back with him. Moving a hive is relatively simple – once a queen has been moved into a new box, the majority of the colony will follow her scent into the new container.

It's a short half-mile drive out of town to where the trucks are arriving

and being unloaded. Long lines of hives stretch down the lot like garden rows, each shipment kept separate from the next until they've been counted and tended to. The top is pried off each hive so it can be checked for healthiness and food supply. Of the truckloads returned so far, only 17 hives are dead – a low number; most years the losses are higher. Because the bees have just endured the stress of the trip and the

fields are not yet in bloom, any hive without an adequate honey supply to get them through the lean weeks ahead will be fed syrup. Only then will they be loaded onto Sam's smaller truck and taken to working locations. Throughout the summer he'll check each hive every couple of weeks. With so many hives and the difficulty of finding adequate sites, the bees will be scattered over a 50-mile radius. "And for the record," Sam quips, "gas prices are killing me."

To open a hive and disturb it enough to show a queen, Sam fills a smoker with grass he's collected from ditches after the county has mowed. He's fond of work that has him outside on summer days, and he enjoys honey he's "jarred up," but his affection for the bees goes deeper: "Bees are like other animals – you treat them good, and they'll be good to you." He's even suspicious of beekeepers needing full-body suits. He thinks that could be a tip-off that the bees they're working aren't being treated with respect. "You don't respect the bees," he said, "you'll make them mean." Which is one reason he's shaved the full beard he wears from fall to early spring and trimmed eyebrows that during the winter challenge those of the retired *60 Minutes* commentator Andy Rooney.

Bees don't like gnarly hair because they get their feet caught in it. Sam grins, "Might be hair reminds them of bears." They also don't like dark colors, which is why beekeepers wear light-colored clothing.

With the smoker lit, and neither of us even wearing veils, Sam gives the guard bees at the front of a hive a few ineffectual-looking puffs of smoke and pries the top off with his crowbar. A multitude of boiling bodies show themselves, and a thin ribbon of color lifts into the air around us. With a shiver I ask about killer bees, but he assures me they don't survive this far north. A few can invade a hive now and then, but that meanness – given the short life of bees – is quickly bred away.

With the day's cooler temperature, the bees are sluggish and Sam's confidence is infectious. A half dozen buzz around our hands and one lands on his face, but soon those inquisitive few lift away.

The queen is the mother of all bees in the hive and because of her long body is easy to spot amongst the smaller, stubbier worker bees. When the hive finds her failing, it breeds another. The evidence of a waning reign is something even beekeepers can see: the occurrence of a disproportionate number of large drone cells – cells that contain an unfertilized egg that will hatch into a male bee.

When a queen is failing, a few select larva are fed throughout their larval stage on royal jelly – a concentrated substance of B vitamins and amino acids. In contrast, future worker bees are fed bee bread, a mixture of pollen, honey and digestive enzymes. Royal jelly stimulates the ovaries, but there will be only one surviving queen – the first to hatch searches for other queen cells, tears open a corner of each protective wax covering, and kills her rivals. The old and failing queen is often exterminated through a process known as "balling," in which worker bees cover her until she overheats and dies.

A healthy queen lays up to 2,000 eggs a day, and the length of her life can vary. In some places it's believed a



PHOTO BY DOUG CARROLL

Bees build cells for producing brood and storing honey on commercial foundations.

queen can live up to six years; Sam believes his queens in Nebraska have a reign of about three years. Worker bees quickly wear out their wings and die within three to six weeks, thus the need for a constant brood to maintain the 60,000 to 80,000 bees in a typical hive.

Of that number, drones make up a very small percentage of the total population. They do no work and do not even possess stingers to help defend the hive. Their sole purpose is to mate with a queen on her maiden flight, after which she stores the sperm in her body and uses it to fertilize her eggs. Needed only in the spring and summer, when food sources become a concern in the fall, drones are refused entrance to the hive and without a food supply soon die.

Worker bees do just that: work. During the course of their short lives, they produce only $\frac{1}{12}$ of a teaspoon of honey and will visit a thousand flowers to do so. Pollen is collected on their stiff hairs when they brush against a flower's anthers and is combed into pouches on their hind legs. Nectar is extracted through their long, tube-like tongues and stored in their stomachs. Once back in the hive, the nectar is regurgitated. The process removes much of the water. When the water content has been further reduced to about 17 percent through "fanning" – air movement created by the worker

bees beating their wings – the cell is capped. Capped honey can last indefinitely.

Sam slides the frame he removed back into the warm super. He's shown me his operation and he's busy, but no visit to an apiarist would be complete without asking about CCD: Colony Collapse Disorder. The term refers to the sudden death of a hive, often its complete disappearance, with no clues left as to the fate of the bees. Scientists now believe there isn't just one cause, which unfortunately means there isn't just one solution: Poisons, fungicides on orchard crops, mites, loss of habitat – including CRP land with regulations that called for the spraying of thistles – are all believed to be part of the problem.

But Sam is hopeful – new CRP regulations encourage landowners to seed plants that favor not only honeybees, but bumblebees and butterflies as well. The search for better pesticides, ways to educate the public, and other solutions are global.

All of which helps assure Sam that he'll be tending bees far into the future. ■

Margie Lukas is a freelance writer living in Omaha. Her most recent NEBRASKALAND article, "Father's Barn," appeared in the November, 2009 issue.

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Rutten uses smoke to quiet the guard bees at the bottom before opening the hive.

Just a Good Dog

Text and photos by Eric Fowler

When Jack Bender finally decided to spend the extra money to get “a good dog,” he got that and more – he found a hobby that allows him to “hunt” year-round and has led to new friendships and a healthier lifestyle.

When it was time for Jack Bender to get a new vizsla pup a few years ago, all he wanted was a good hunting and house dog. What the Columbus man ended up with was a national field trial champion and a new hobby. That he ever entered the dog in a field trial is happenstance.

“I’ve had vizslas since I was 13 years old,” Bender said. “I had vizslas before I knew what a vizsla was, but what I found out later when I looked back at all of the pictures is I had a vizsla in 1966.”

That was only six years after the breed, maintained for centuries by

Hungarian noblemen but only first brought to the United States in 1950, was recognized by the American Kennel Club. It also wasn’t long after that another Nebraskan, Hank Rozanek of Schuyler, bought his first vizsla – a female that ended up being a national champion and a member of the breed’s Hall of Fame. So did its son, and two other dogs that came out of Rozanek’s Rebel Rouser kennel. The line also produced numerous national champions in the years since, including Bender’s Rebel Rouser Wimp ET.

“All I ever did was hunt, and I kept buying these vizslas and paying \$100, \$150, \$300,” Bender said. “I always



Jack Bender of Columbus looks for a bird in front of a point by Wimp, his national champion vizsla, last January.



Bender wears his love for vizslas and Wimp on his pickup.

secretly wanted a Rebel Rouser, but I was never going to pay Hank that kind of money for a dog (nearly \$1,000), until finally one day I just broke down and said, ‘That’s enough, I’m going to go buy me a good one.’”

It was 2003 when Bender and his son picked out a male pup from Rozanek’s kennel and named him Wimp, recycling the name of a beagle that Bender had when he was a boy. Bender worked on the basics of obedience and handling with the dog, and when it was six months old, he took Wimp on his first hunt.

“We pull out in this field and open the truck, he jumps out and is on point in about 10 seconds on a covey of quail,” Bender said. Throughout his first pheasant season, Wimp “worked like a million bucks,” showing his instinctive ability to point and retrieve. At that point, Bender barely knew what a field trial was. That would soon change.

“The biggest mistake that Jack made was inviting a friend of his to go hunting with him,” Rozanek said.

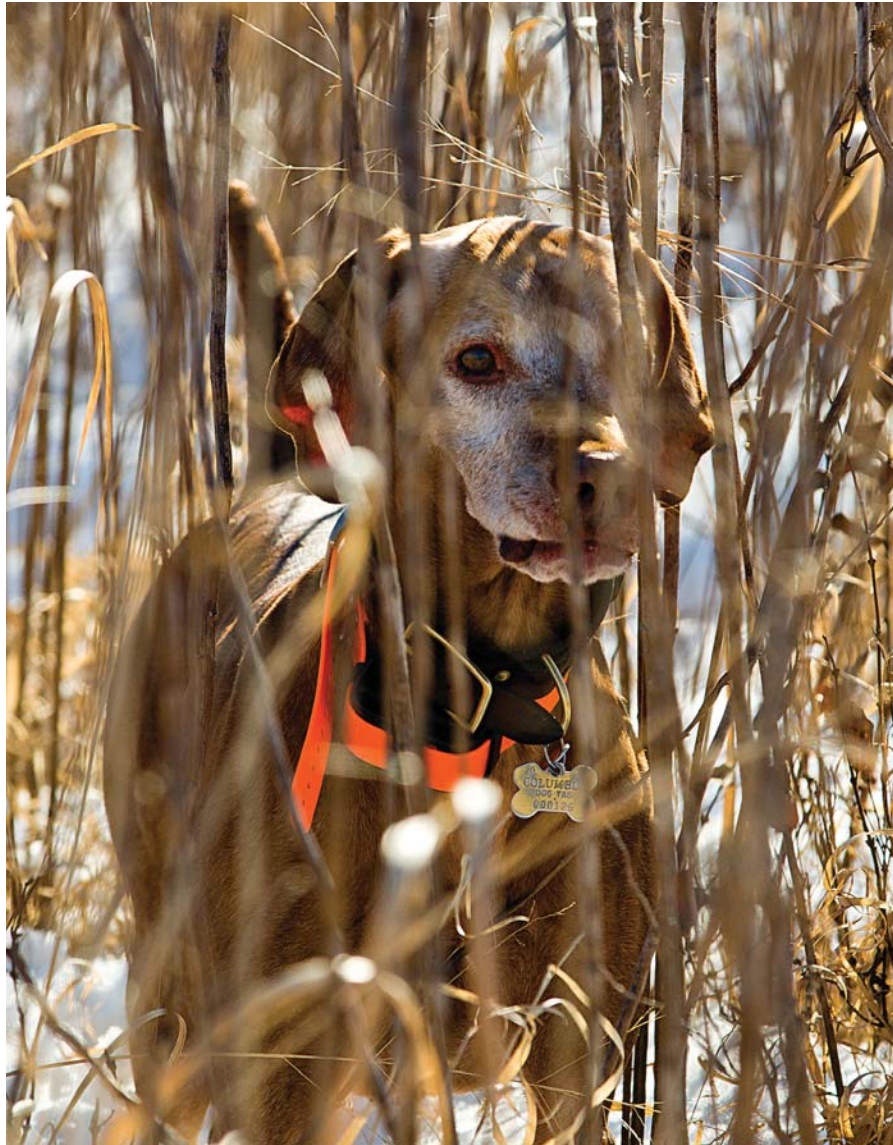
Years earlier, that friend had spent a summer working for Rozanek, who for

50 years has trained dogs both from his home and from a camper in the Sandhills in the summer. Bender’s friend learned enough that summer to know a good dog when he saw one, and urged him to enter Wimp in a field trial, which he did in 2004 when the dog was nine months old.

A similar turn of events had taken place 50 years ago when Rozanek hunted with a friend who urged him to enter his first vizsla, Dutchess, in a field trial. Like Rozanek, Bender was initially uninterested in the idea, but finally conceded and entered Wimp in

a field trial at Branched Oak Lake. Rozanek was there to see the dog win its first ribbon. “I was just proud as a peacock and Hank goes, ‘That little yellow ribbon just cost you \$30,000,’” Bender said. “And I said ‘Why’s that?’ He said, ‘Because now you’re hooked and you’ve got to buy a horse and a truck to pull the trailer and all of the saddles and bridles and all that stuff – \$30,000 will start you out pretty nice.’”

Rozanek was right ... Bender was hooked. He started taking Wimp to field trials on weekends, learning



Wimp holds point in tall grass on a hunt last January.

quickly that by doing so, “hunting” season lasted all year. “I was born and raised on a horse and I love to watch bird dogs run,” said Bender.

Wimp started strong in the stakes for young dogs, but when it was time to move up a class, things got tough. Wimp regularly found birds, but he also got overly eager at least once at nearly every trial, failing to hold point and flushing the bird before it was time. Dogs that bump birds don’t win ribbons or trophies.

“I was too nice to him and treated him like my kids,” Bender said. “He’d screw up and I’d get a little disappointed at him, but I never scolded him or whipped him. I’d forgive him and say, ‘Well you screwed up. You’ll get it the next time.’”

After a few years of mediocrity, Bender was ready to give up. “I was just worn out. I was doing all this work and the dog just wasn’t listening.”

Rozanek had watched the two work and knew the problem: “You’ve got to get serious with that dog and get his attention,” he told Bender. Not one to physically abuse his dog, Rozanek gave Bender another technique to try: Lay the dog on the ground and spin him in a circle three times. “He’s going to think you’re killing him, but you ain’t even hurting him.”

When Wimp failed to hold point on his second find at the next trial, Bender did just what Rozanek told him, producing a look that seemed to say “What the hell was that all for?” Bender said. “But the dog commenced

to have three finds on the way back to the clubhouse and has never bumped a bird since.”

Wimp started winning field trials again, and in 2008, at the last trial Bender planned on entering the dog in that year, he won, giving him the points required to earn his Field Champion and Amateur Field Champion titles from the American Kennel Club. He did so wearing dog boots to protect the pads he’d run off the week before, a factor that drew doubting laughs from the judges but did nothing to slow the dog.

With that, Bender retired Wimp from the field trial circuit, sold his horse and tack, and focused on hunting. But he missed it so much that he brought Wimp out of retirement and entered an AKC Gun Dog Championship for all pointing breeds at Fort Robinson State Park in May 2010. After a disappointing showing, he was going to quit trialing again, but changed his mind when he found out the vizsla national trails would be at Fort Robinson that same fall.

Wimp did well at regional trials that summer, but Bender didn’t head west with high expectations last October. So he was thrilled when Wimp scored high enough in the first series to be among the 12 dogs called back for the second. After a fast start with three finds on quail, Bender started to worry when Wimp wasn’t finding chukars that had been planted on another portion of the course. When Wimp finally found a bird and went on point, he had to hold it longer than he should have thanks to the gunners, who had lost interest and were lagging behind.

“This chukar’s getting nervous getting ready to run,” Bender said. “And the bird was about five feet from the edge of a cliff and I didn’t know how far the cliff went down, if it was five feet or 10 or 20 feet.” When he flushed the bird and the gunners downed it, Bender said he told Wimp, “Well, Bud, you’d better have some wings because I think you’re going to fly here.” The drop wasn’t far, however, and when released Wimp dove over the edge and seconds later came back with the bird. “He did a blind retrieve and then just finished a beautiful race.”

With that, Bender sat down and cried. When someone asked him why,

Bender told him it was because Wimp had just performed better than he ever had. “And he said ‘Well, we don’t cry at field trials.’ I told him I was a little different.”

Bender returned to the clubhouse for the awards ceremony, thinking Wimp had a good chance getting a judges award of merit or even a fourth place, but nothing more. “A lot of people travel every weekend all over the United States to do this and I go two or three times a year in the spring and two or three in the fall and I’ve only been at it six years,” he said.

When all places had been announced except first, Bender said he was getting mad, thinking Wimp was shut out. Then the gentleman that had told him there’s no crying at field trials turned around and said, “Bender, get ready to start bawling.” Then they announced Wimp as the National Amateur Champion.

Bender passes all of the credit for the championship to Wimp and Rozanek, who didn’t train Wimp, but trained Bender and has become a friend. “Hank could do more with a vizsla in five minutes than I could in 20 years,” he said.

“He told me a lot of that stuff, especially what I was doing wrong. “He’d ask, ‘Why did you do that today?’ And I’d go, ‘Do what? I have no clue what I’m doing. I’m just out here following my dog around.’”

Wimp, on the other hand, “was a natural at everything,” Bender said. “He would’ve won a championship five years ago if I would’ve known what I was doing.”

Now getting long in years for dogs, Wimp is relaxing on Bender’s couch and still hunting, but is mostly retired from trials. Bender turned down an invitation to take Wimp to this fall’s vizsla championship trials in Illinois, but will enter him in a national trial next spring at Branched Oak Lake near Lincoln.

Bender is again busy on the field trial circuit, now with Rebel Rouser I’m a Little Wimp, also known as Little Hank, a two-year-old dog that came from Wimp and one of Rozanek’s females. Hank is also working the show ring, with promise to be a champion in both venues.

Bender and Rozanek, or Big Hank as



Wimp brings a bird to Bender’s hand, showing the versatility of vizslas, which have the ability to both point and retrieve.

Bender calls him, work together training Little Hank several times a week. “I honestly think he’s going to be better than his daddy,” Bender said. “I’m not as stupid as I was before and Wimp was such a good dog he overcame all my stupidity. But Hank has taken a lot more interest in this one. He knows this is a lot more dog and he’s pretty excited about him.”

Bender considers himself one of the luckiest men in the dog world to have a friend with as much knowledge as Rozanek has. It’s one of many friendships that have grown from his new hobby and one of the reasons Bender figures he won’t retire again. That and his need to stay active to deal with a chronic pain condition.

“I met a lot of great people and had a lot of fun. When I quit, I just laid down in my chair and did nothing and got to be 300 pounds. So now I’m out training dogs every day and riding horses again and it all helps with the pain.

“I’d find something to do, but these dogs are a lot of fun. And they’re always going to be in my life, so I might as well do something with them. I’ll probably do it for as long as I can.” ■

Field Trial Basics

Dogs have a set amount of time to locate and point as many birds as possible. In some events, they also retrieve the birds after they are flushed and shot. How well a dog performs determines its score, and the dog with the highest score among other dogs entered in an event wins the trial or advances to another round. Birds are pen raised and released prior to an event. Handlers, judges and gunners follow on horseback in most trials, but some are walking trials. Some trials are breed-specific and there are divisions for amateurs and professional trainers and dogs of different ages. The top dogs at field trials earn points toward titles such as Field Champion, which not only give the dog’s owner bragging rights but also carry weight in breeding circles, showing the dog is a capable hunter.

A Spectacle On Ice

By Jeff Kurrus

I quickly learned, much like my calcutta experience, that ice-fishing tournaments are different than ice-fishing trips. The slightest tap from a fish could be the difference between going home with your pride (and wallet) intact, or going home cold, cashless and fishless.



Anglers at Merritt Reservoir await the gunshot start of the
Cork Thornton Memorial Ice-Fishing Tournament.



Anglers sprint to their pre-fished spots at the start of the tourney. Ice skates, golf shoes and ice-climbing crampons are all tools of the trade for these runners.



While strict competition is the name of the game at this tournament, never tell that to its teenage competitors.

The night before last year’s Cork Thornton Memorial Ice-Fishing Tournament, friends and strangers alike sat down for a pre-tournament dinner at Cedar Canyon Steakhouse in Valentine. Talk was loud, past triumphs even louder, until Steve Isom, the tournament’s director, began the calcutta, an auction of sorts where bidders could “buy” each of the tournament’s 20 teams with the hope of winning more than they paid depending on how well their team does. Although cash prizes would be awarded to the top teams, as well as for the biggest bass, bluegill, perch and crappie, even more money stood to be made from the auction, especially for those teams that “bought” themselves.

When the team auction began, hands repeatedly raised as favorites were quickly chosen. A few other teams were able to buy themselves with little fanfare, as either those in the room had either seen them fish before unsuccessfully or were unfamiliar with them.

During those moments when teams were inexpensive to buy, I got in on the action, picking up wayward pairs that no one else was claiming. In my meager attempt to entertain myself, I also bid on the team of Scott and Monte Mares, two friends I met while writing the December, 2008 *NEBRASKALAND* article “The Next Hole.”

The Cork Thornton Memorial Ice-Fishing Tournament is held at Merritt Reservoir each winter, with most participants using the town of Valentine as home base for dinner and socializing.



Buckets of fish are collected by tournament director Steve Isom at 2 p.m. following the competition and then weighed.

Little did I know, however, that I was committing a sin: I quickly learned that their stock was already going to be high, and while I initially found it humorous that my initial betting on them had canceled their quiet, barely finger-raising attempts to purchase themselves, I immediately saw on their faces that my actions were not well received.

The bidding quickly increased, and the Mares’ stock rose way above what the brothers wanted to pay for themselves. I sank lower and lower in my seat and tried not to have any direct eye contact with the brothers as another team bought the rights to them. That was my best move of the night.

The next morning I said little more at the Boardman arm of Merritt Reservoir, where the actual tournament was being held. Seeing a starting line of four wheelers and runners lining up next to each other, I got out of everyone’s way. For good reason – at this point of time, just as was the night before, everyone thought they could win. It would be hours later before everyone started relaxing and settling into the comfort of a warm winter day, finding it just as satisfying to spend time with new and old friends as catching fish ... well, almost.

With a shotgun start, runners in golf shoes, track shoes, ice skates and very slippery boots took off in a mad dash from the starting line in an attempt to claim their chunk of ice homestead-style – by planting a flag at their pre-fished spot. If a team had a runner in the tournament, they were allowed to leave the starting mark five minutes before the four-wheelers, so with one quick boot heel through the ice at their pre-fished location, anglers could be fishing even before the first four-wheeler flashed by.



There is absolutely no telling what drew this expression from this angler. On a festive day like this one, everyone seemed to go home in good spirits, even those with empty pockets.



Vexlars, augers, four-wheelers, rod-reel combos and equipment sleds are towed around Merritt during this well-known winter tournament.



LEFT: Zack Cox catches a bluegill in a shallow water cove. He and his partner, Tristen Cox, placed 10th in this tournament, proving there's not a lot of wiggle room for the older anglers in this competition.

BELOW: Isom (right) counts fish at the Merritt Trading Post, the location of the weigh-in. Interested anglers, friends and family await the results off-camera.



Tom Mehrens (left) and T.C. Colvin won last year's Cork Thornton ice tournament with 12.44 pounds. Mehrens also won the big bass award with a fish weighing 3.64 pounds. They hope to return to this winter's tournament in January.

I quickly learned, much like my auction experience, that ice-fishing tournaments are different than simple ice-fishing trips: The slightest tap from a fish could be the difference between going home with your pride (and wallet) intact, or going home cold, cashless and fishless. So throughout the morning, I spoke only when spoken to – my second good idea of the weekend.

Teams slid fish from ice holes to bucket holes in hopes of not being seen, while others spent as much early time on four-wheelers changing spots as they did fishing. Some fished in less than two feet of water, while others fished in more than 20. Crappie were targeted by some, bluegills were targeted by more.

For the first four hours, there was more whispering than talking, yet by the end, the warm winter day had most teams, even those whose buckets were empty, grinning at their good fortune of having such a nice day to be on the ice.

At 2 p.m., Isom picked up all the fish buckets and the teams were left wondering if they'd be in the money. Except those whose buckets were empty – they loaded their sleds and tried to analyze what had gone wrong. These analyses sometimes started with hard-to-start augers and Vexlar fish finders needing batteries, then spiraled in all directions. All ended with the same question: Where are we eating dinner?

For those in the money – and even for the few fishless anglers – the weigh-in was one part high drama, another part old news. If teams checked in a one-pound bluegill, they knew they're going home with money. Yet there was still an anticipation to each weigh-in, as anglers, friends and family crowded around Isom and his crew to hopefully receive their payment, both monetarily and socially.

After awards were given and a few lies were told, teams began to file out of the Merritt Trading Post and back onto Highway 97. As they passed Merritt Reservoir some teams high-fived and re-played their victories, while others shook their heads and talked about what could have been. Nearly everyone was discussing how they would do it all different this year. ■

For more information on this year's tournament, scheduled for January 28 (rules meeting and auction) and January 29, contact Steve Isom at 402-376-1988.



Tournament Results

Teams

1st Place Team
12.44 pounds
T.C. Colvin/Tom Mehrens
Valentine

2nd Place Team
12.07 pounds
Dave Fehlhafer/Don Cox
Doniphan/Mullen

3rd Place Team
11.5 pounds
Doug Hesse/Zach Nadolski
Valentine, Lincoln

4th Place Team
10.05 pounds
Mark Young/Scott Grooms
Valentine

5th Place Team
10.04 pounds
Mike Morrison/T.C. Buechle
Valentine/Wood Lake

Big Fish

Largemouth Bass
3.64 pounds
Tom Mehrens

Bluebill
.60 pounds
Mike Morrison

Yellow Perch
.90 pounds
Marcus Dryak

Crappie
1.28 pounds
Dave Fehlhafer



Backyard Bird Feeding

Tips for attracting a variety of birds to your yard this winter.

By Jon Farrar

It is that time of the year when people are deciding if they are going to feed winter birds. Most people who winter feed are old pros and need no advice, but for beginners there are many things to consider.

What to feed is usually the first question. Knowing what birds you want to attract will give you the answer, and many online sites provide that information. One of the better is run by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology at: www.birds.cornell.edu/. Navigating through this site to get to winter bird feeding information is a bit tedious: Google “winter bird feeding cornell” as a shortcut. However, if you’re interested in birds you should check out the Cornell Lab web site.

Until you do your own browsing, here are a few tips about winter feeding birds from assorted sources. First, do not buy the premix bird foods at your grocery store – they are often heavy on milo or red millet because those grains are cheap, and skimpy on preferred seeds. Most birds will scratch milo and millet out of the feeder to get to the sunflower seeds. Black-oil sunflower seeds are better than the larger, striped sunflower seeds, as they have thinner shells and are higher in fat. The Cornell folks recommend sunflower seeds for chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, finches, cardinals, grosbeaks, sparrows and jays. Jays and doves (including the exotic Eurasian collared dove that has spread across the state in recent years) will also eat corn. Feed cracked corn rather than whole kernel corn and you will also attract finches and sparrows. Cardinals are fond of safflower seeds. Woodpeckers, chickadees, titmice and nuthatches go for suet. Ask the man behind the meat counter for the cakey, kidney fat. Put out nyger seeds (also sold as niger and thistle seed) to attract finches, particularly goldfinches. Raisins, sliced apples, oranges and berries are popular with robins, bluebirds and waxwings.

For nyger seed use one of the tube-type feeders that has small enough openings that the seeds do not spill out and large-billed species cannot get to them, but are still large enough that finches and siskins can extract the seeds. Hopper-style feeders are best for seed mixtures and larger seeds. To discourage squirrels from raiding your hopper feeder, mount it on top of a slender pole far enough away from trees or structures for a squirrel to jump. Cones or other devices may need to be mounted on the pole to defeat persistent squirrels. Many wintering birds, such as native sparrows and juncos, are ground feeders and are often seen under hopper feeders gleaning the spillage. These birds will also come to a tray mounted close to the ground or even on a deck rail.

Birdfeeders make excellent bait for bird-eating predators, so don’t be surprised if a sharp-shinned hawk takes up residence near your feeding station. Free-ranging cats can kill a surprisingly large number of small birds, ground feeders in particular. While trees and shrubbery are attractive to



PHOTO BY ROCKY HOFFMANN

A black-capped chickadee sits on a homemade birdfeeder made from hail screen and attached to a tree with a zip tie.

winter birds, be sure any ground-feeding stations are at least 10 feet from any cover a cat could use to get within striking range. Also, do not place feeders too close to large windows to avoid lethal collisions, or hang a silhouette of a flying hawk in the window.

Open water for drinking and bathing can be as attractive to wintering birds as food. A shallow, easily cleaned birdbath is best but you can improvise with other shallow containers, such as a garbage can lid or small rubber water or feed pans sold for dogs and livestock. Check your local farm supply store for the latter. Electric heaters will keep the water open.

A few years ago there was quite a fuss that winter feeding birds was altering the migratory habits of some species, encouraging them to winter farther north. The Cornell people dispute that, particularly if feeding is not started until the peak of migration is over. And if for some reason you must stop feeding, do not worry, the birds will find other feeding stations and natural seed sources. ■

from NEBRASKAland's Trail Tales magazine for kids

junior journal

interesting notes for readers of all ages

by Lindsay Rogers and Donna Schimonitz

The Invasion Is Under Way

by Karie Decker

Nebraska Invasive Species Project

Around the world, invasive species are moving into places where they don’t belong. These raids can mean major headaches for both wildlife and people. When biologists talk about invasive species, they mean living organisms (such as plants, animals, fungi and bacteria) that spread outside their native areas to new ones. When this happens, these invasive species compete with native plants and animals for food and resources. This competition is bad for native plants and animals; they often can’t compete and end up dying! So really, invasive species are plants and animals that are not from here and cause damage to our environment.

Unfortunately, there are a lot of them. Nebraska has 114 invasive species – 74 plants (including 9 noxious weeds), 4 birds, 1 amphibian, 3 mammals, 15 insects,

and 17 aquatic species (including 7 fish).

Hitchhiking Experts

Invasive species may be the world’s greatest hitchhikers. About half of all invasive species get moved by accident. Insects can hide in logs that are shipped around the United States, a weed’s seeds can get stuck in your muddy shoes when you fly home from a beach vacation, and mussels and other water organisms stick to boats and get a free ride to the next lake. Many invasive species also are introduced when people release their unwanted pets into the wild. If you no longer want your goldfish or other pet, don’t release it into the wild!

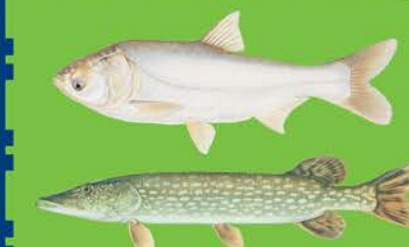
What Do I Do If I See An Invasive Species?

If you see an invasive species, report it to the Nebraska Invasive Species Project – www.snr.unl.edu/invasives.

Which ones are invasive?



Great-tailed Grackle vs. Starling



Silver Carp vs. Northern Pike



Tiger Beetle vs. Emerald Ash Borer

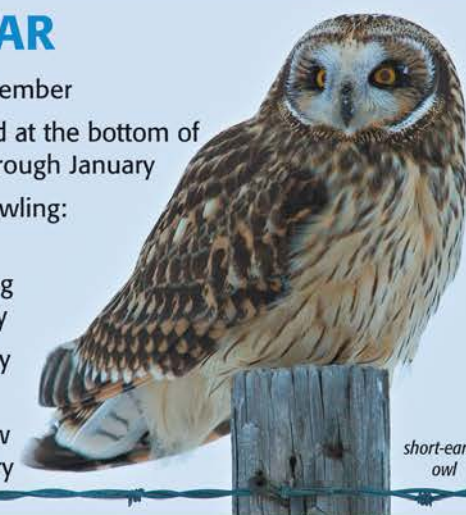


Musk Thistle vs. Platte Thistle

Invasive Species: (European) Starling, Silver Carp, Emerald Ash Borer and Musk Thistle

NATURE CALENDAR

- **Owls** courting: throughout December
- **Beavers** feed on reserves stored at the bottom of lakes and ponds: December through January
- **Coyotes** breeding; listen for howling: January through February
- **Red-tailed hawks** soaring along highways: January into February
- **Groundhogs** breeding: February
- **American goldfinch males** begin molting into bright yellow breeding plumage: late February



short-eared owl

BOOKS/PUBLICATIONS/VIDEOS

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A black and white photograph showing a man in a cap and work clothes standing next to a wooden building. The building's exterior wall is covered with numerous fish, likely salmon, hanging vertically in rows. The man is holding a small object in his hands. The ground is dirt and there are some debris or tools near the building.



▲ During the winters of 1939-40 and 1941-42, Ben Denson and his wife bought the trapping rights for the Carver Ranch and trapped on lakes owned by the Carvers.

The Densons lived in a sod house owned by Clarence and Jessica Phillips about 25 miles north of Whitman. The wooden building in the background was a porch attached to the sod house and covered a well that had a hand pump.

– Lynn Phillips, Mullen, Nebraska



This picture, from summer 1971, was taken at our campground at Crystal Springs. The catfish were taken from the Little Blue River near Fairbury. There was a big natural spring (that is still present) at the park that we would put our fish in until we were ready to clean them. We have many pictures of this particular catch, with each of the fishermen taking turns trying to hold up this massive group of cats, but this picture with several of the kids holding it up is a family favorite. There were several people fishing, but the main "characters" were Keith Brown (my father), Jim McKay and Dick Shotsman.

Pictured from left are: standing; unidentified, Barry McKay and Patti McKay. Holding stick: Blane Brown (my brother), unidentified, Dennis Shotsman, Pete Brown (hiding below the stick – my other brother), Dennis McKay, Roger Love, Karen Brown (my sister) and Dicky Love.

– Chris (Brown) Thody, Martell, Nebraska

How to go from cute, little rodent to ugly demon with just a few hours of digging.





During one November outing, a large buck approached while I was hunting from the ground. I first spotted him following a doe through the timber and gave him a challenge grunt with my call. He stopped, looked my way, then headed toward me. A deep-banked creek lay between us as he stopped again on the opposite edge, looking for the challenger. A stream of light from the setting sun filtered through the trees onto his neck and rack. That backlit buck is an image I will carry with me as long as I am alive.

The buck jumped 10 feet down into the creek, and I could hear him walking below me as he tried to find a way up the steep embankment. Seconds dragged by as I tried to slow my racing heart and prepare for the shot. Movement to my left caught my attention and his rack appeared only eight yards away. At eye level it was incredible to see such a large deer so close, but in a flash he was gone, giving his signature whitetail snort and waving goodbye with his tail. His senses – sharpened by thousands of years of evolution – had detected a predator close by.

Although obviously disappointed, part of me was satisfied with the conclusion – knowing he is still out there to skirt my dreams is worth as much as to have arrowed him. The close meeting of prey and predator are as important as when prey falls. To hunt is to experience both.

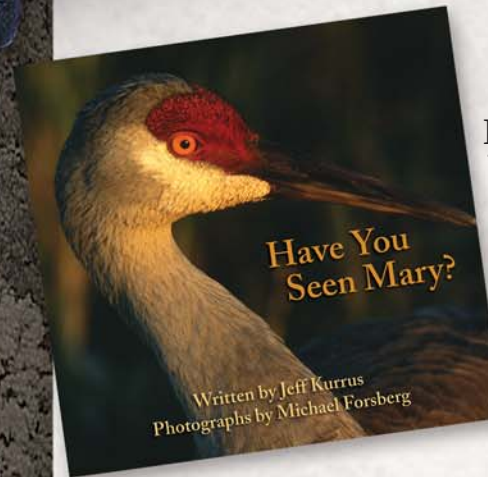
I used to think killing a large buck like this would be the pinnacle of hunting, but long ago realized the hunt is more than the kill. The kill is intrinsic to the hunt, but not the reason for it. I have a choice of being an observer of nature or a participant that absorbs himself in the process of prey and predator. In my role of predator I seek inclusion, not merely observation. This connection is why I hunt.

Matt Houska
November 4, 2011



NEBRASKAland

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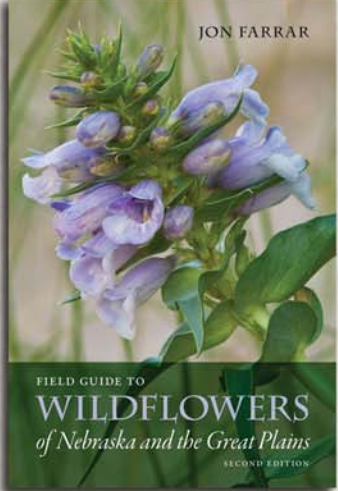
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(16-45 years old) \$300	(16-45 years old) \$446	(16-45 years old) \$699	(16-45 years old) \$300
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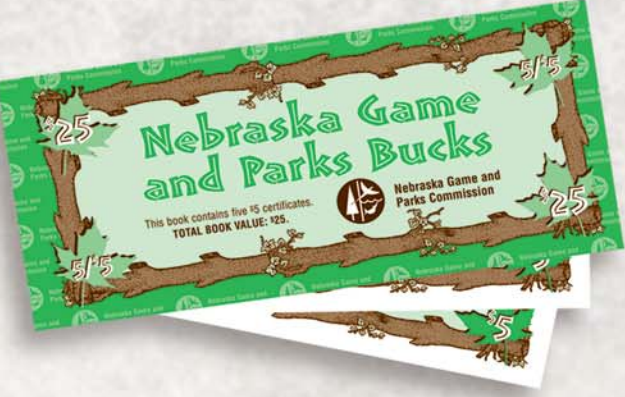
PERMIT	Price
Resident Hunt and Fish Permit	\$40
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Resident Fish Permit	\$28.50
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\$25 MIS-1919

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Weight _____ Hair Color _____ Eye Color _____

TYPE OF PERMIT(S) _____

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_____	Lifetime Fish Permit	see previous page		_____
_____	Lifetime Hunt and Fish Permit	see previous page		_____
_____	Lifetime Fur Harvest Permit	see previous page		_____
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PAYMENT METHOD

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Credit Card Number _____

Security code (3 digits on back of card) _____

Expiration Date _____

Daytime Phone _____

Shipping and Handling Charges
for Mail and Fax Orders

\$0.01 – 0.99	\$.070
\$1.00 – 4.99	\$.250
\$5.00 – 10.99	\$.395
\$10.01 – 25.00	\$.595
\$25.01 – 50.00	\$.795
\$50.01 – 75.00	\$10.15
\$75.01 – 100.00	\$10.95
\$100.01 and over	.FREE

Shipping and handling not required for subscriptions.
For overseas shipping please call about extra mailing fees that may apply.

(A) GIFT ITEMS \$ _____

SHIPPING & HANDLING CHARGES \$ _____
See accompanying text box

SUBSCRIPTIONS \$ _____

SALES TAX \$ _____

PERMITS & STAMPS \$ _____

TOTAL ALL ITEMS \$ _____

For additional orders provide information on another sheet of paper. Please provide complete mailing information for items to be sent to additional addresses.

Order online at **NebraskalandGifts.com** (more items available online - some 90% off!)

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www.OutdoorNebraska.org/OpenFields