



Mantled in snow, Sugarloaf near the Dawes/Sioux county line north of Crawford reflects the deep blue of approaching night as the sun's last glow paints the western sky. Photo by Bob Grier.

Published by the
NEBRASKA
— GAME  PARKS —
NebraskalandMagazine.com
OutdoorNebraska.org

Published by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission since 1926

NEBRASKAland

January-February 2010



NebraskalandMagazine.com
\$4.95
0 2>

7 25274 81144 1

INSIDE
Stuck in Nebraska • Birdwood Creek
Pastels in the Pine Ridge • Focus on Pheasants
Ice Fishing at Crescent Lake • Chorus Frogs



NEBRASKAland

Volume 88, Number 1, January-February 2010

FEATURES

12 Stuck in Nebraska

Outdoor recreation is a must for many military members stationed in the Great Plains. TEXT AND PHOTOS BY JEFF KURRUS

18 Pine Ridge Pastels

Throughout Pine Ridge artist Mary Louise Tejada's life there has always been one constant – art. TEXT AND PHOTOS BY BOB GRIER

22 Focus on Pheasants

Proving that pheasant populations could, and would, go up if they had sufficient habitat was one of its goals when the Focus on Pheasants initiative began. That goal has now been met. TEXT AND PHOTOS BY ERIC FOWLER

30 Crescent Lake - Ice-Fishing Family Fun

Ice-fishing on a nearby pond or lake is a wonderful way for families to spend a winter afternoon together. TEXT AND PHOTOS BY BOB GRIER

34 Chorus Frog - Small Frog, Loud Voice

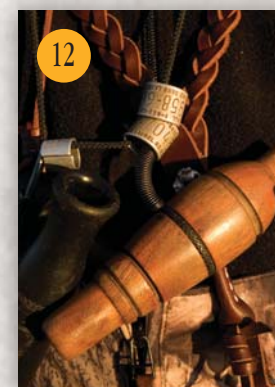
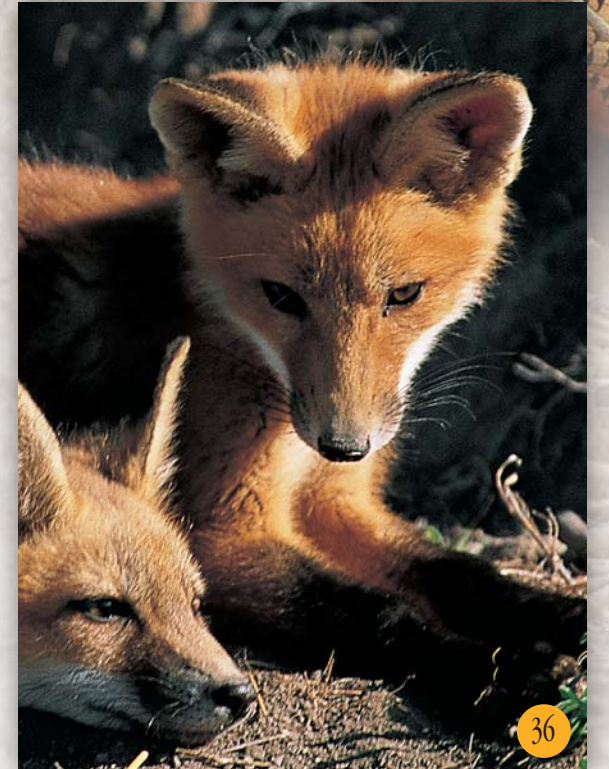
This rarely seen but often heard grassland species is one of the earliest of all amphibians to emerge in the Nebraska spring. TEXT AND PHOTOS BY MICHAEL FORSBERG

36 Birdwood Creek - A unique ecological diversity

A brief look at Birdwood Creek as it courses toward the North Platte River. PHOTOS AND TEXT BY ROCKY HOFFMANN

42 Locked Up

A spur of the moment drive through the woods results in a Good Samaritan encounter and a once-in-a-lifetime experience. TEXT BY DOUG CARROLL



DEPARTMENTS

Comment	4
Mixed Bag	6
Outdoor Update	44
Parks & Places	46
In the Field	47
Classifieds	48
Portraits from the Past	50

Cover: Living alone or in small groups throughout the summer, mature bighorn rams rejoin the ewes and younger rams in late-November and December, their annual breeding season. Here a full-curl ram "lip curls" as he looks for estrous ewes in a herd living in the buttes overlooking Chadron State Park. Photo by Bob Grier. Opposite: A horse exhales warm air during a cold, late afternoon winter day in Burt County. Photo by Jeff Kurrus.

NEBRASKAland (VOL. 88 / NO. 1, ISSN 0028-1964) is published monthly, except for the combined Jan./Feb. and Aug./Sept. issues, by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, 2200 N. 33rd St., Lincoln, NE. Periodicals postage paid at Lincoln, Nebraska, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to NEBRASKAland, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370.



NEBRASKAland Magazine

Published by the
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
Director: Rex Amack
Assistant Directors: Roger Kuhn, Kirk Nelson, Sam Sidner
Information & Education Administrator: Doug Bauch

Commissioners
Vice Chairman: Jerrod Burke, Curtis
2nd Vice Chairman: Mick Jensen, Blair
Dr. Mark Pinkerton, Wilber
Ron Stave, Waterloo
Dr. Kent Forney, Lincoln
Lynn Berggren, Broken Bow
Rex Fisher, Omaha
Mark Spurgin, Paxton

Magazine Staff
Editor: Doug Carroll
Associate Editor: Jeff Kurrus
Art Director: Tim Reigert
Senior Editor: Jon Farrar
Regional Editors: Eric Fowler, Bob Grier
Contributing Editor: Michael Forsberg
Regular Contributors: Bill Hager, Chris Helzer, and Lisa Knopp
Photo Librarian: Sarah Johnson
Circulation: Donna Robinson
For address changes and questions about your subscription, e-mail donna.robinson@nebraska.gov or call (800) 632-5263
Marketing/Advertising: Jane Gustafson
For advertising information e-mail ngpc.advertising@nebraska.gov or call (402) 471-5481

NEBRASKAland Magazine
Copyright 2010, all rights reserved.
NEBRASKAland is available on audio cassette from the Nebraska Library Commission Talking Book and Braille Service, Suite 120, 1200 N St., Lincoln, NE 68508. (800) 742-7691. NEBRASKAland Magazine and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission reserve the right to reject any advertising not in keeping with the agency mission.
Rates: \$18 for one year; \$33 for two years; \$44 for three years. Nebraska recipients must add appropriate sales tax. To subscribe call 1-800-NEBRASKA (632-5263), or go online to: NebraskaLandMagazine.com.

Boxelder Bug
Is it an accident or on purpose? I brushed at the upper right hand corner of page 9 in the December 2009 issue of *NEBRASKAland* several times before I realized that the boxelder bug was part of the page! I've looked through the magazine trying to find a reference to it, but have not succeeded. Cute trick!

Also, is it my imagination or are there more lady bugs than boxelder bugs this year?

We get *NEBRASKAland Magazine* at work, and everyone seems to take a turn reading it. Thanks and keep up the good work.

Enid Cederlind
Phillips, Nebraska

According to senior editor Jon Farrar, there has been an increase in lady bugs this year. But instead of common lady bugs, the ones often being seen are the multicolored Asian lady beetles (Harmonia axyridis), known for their biting ability.

And yes, apparently a boxelder bug (Boisea trivittatus) crawled across the scanner while we were in production of the December issue. This is the first time we've seen this problem and I'm guessing it will probably continue to plague us in the future.

And since you, Enid, were the first one to identify December's "accidental visitor," you will receive a complementary NEBRASKAland Visitor mug.

Readers are encouraged to contact NEBRASKAland within 10 days after each month's publication with the correct page number and name of that month's "visitor."

We will then gather the correct entries and draw one to win a NEBRASKAland Visitor mug.

To enter each month, e-mail tim.reigert@nebraska.gov with "Visitor" in the subject line of the message or write:

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



Near Deer Collision
Just thought we would pass this photo along. It was taken November 27 at the end of our property line, which borders Chalco Hills Recreation Area here in Omaha. We were both standing on our deck when we noticed this buck standing about 60 yards away, so my husband went and got his new camera.

The buck eyeballed us for about 15 minutes so I went to the garage and grabbed some rattling antlers. When I started rattling from our driveway in front of the house, he came a'running and Dennis got this picture. Not knowing the buck was heading my way we almost collided! Dennis then ran through the house and into the garage/driveway and photographed him again as he ran into our front yard and the neighbor's as well. It scared me to death, but was a beautiful sight!

I am a new bowhunter, yet to take a deer, and I could have reached out and touched this one! I hope one day to see one as beautiful as him while hunting! Happy Holidays!

Dennis and Sue Clark
Omaha, Nebraska

Hang'em High
Back in the 1950s when I was attending UN-L, a friend gave our engineering professor, who was from England, a pheasant right out of the field after a hunt. A week later we asked him how he liked the bird. He said he hadn't eaten it yet, as it hadn't fallen off its feathers. He explained that they hung birds by their tail feathers, and when they fell off they were ready

to cook. He called the process "hanging them high."

He also mentioned that in England's old days, after the birds fell they would be rolled in mud to form a ball, which was then put into a fire for an unspecified period of time. When the mud was hard, the baked ball was taken out of the fire and cracked. As the baked mud came off, so did the feathers, and there was the bird ready to eat.

Russ Pargett
Omaha, Nebraska



Love the Magazine
I just wanted to drop a quick line and let you know I love your magazine and can't wait to get my next month's issue. My wife is from Elgin and her parents are retired and have a farm there. We reside in Arvada, Colorado and look forward to visiting every chance we get. Here is a photograph I took of a beautiful sunset over a Thanksgiving weekend. The windmill is on the Durrie Ranch just outside of Elgin.

Thanks,
Steve Gooderham
Arvada, Colorado

Send your comments to:
Doug Carroll, Editor
NEBRASKAland Magazine
P.O. Box 30370
Lincoln, NE 68503
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.

Under federal and/or state law, discrimination is prohibited on the basis of race, color, religion, age, gender, marital status, national origin, disability or political affiliation. If you think you have been discriminated against in any program, activity or facility by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission or want more information, contact the Commission in Lincoln, NE, at (402) 471-0641 or the Equal Opportunity Commission, Lincoln, NE, (402) 471-2024, TTY/TDD (402) 471-4693.

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Offices

Headquarters
2200 N. 33rd Street
Lincoln, NE 68503
Phone (402) 471-0641

District Office I
East Hwy. 2, Box 725
Alliance, NE 69301
Phone (308) 763-2940

District Office II
524 Panzer St., Box 508
Bassett, NE 68714
Phone (402) 684-2921

District Office III
2201 N. 13th St.
Norfolk, NE 68701
Phone (402) 370-3374

District Office IV
301 E. State Farm Rd.
North Platte, NE 69101
Phone (308) 535-8025

District Office VI
1617 First Ave.
Kearney, NE 68847
Phone (308) 865-5310

Omaha Office
1212 Bob Gibson Blvd.
Omaha, NE 68108
Phone (402) 595-2144

Ak-Sar-Ben Aquarium
21502 W. Highway 31
Gretna, NE 68028
Phone (402) 332-3901

World Wide Web site:
www.OutdoorNebraska.org

Conservation Officers by Region

Administration Ted Blume (Adm.) Craig Stover (Asst.) Wes Loos (Asst.) Rod Loos (Asst.) Murray Johnson	Lincoln Lincoln Lincoln Ogallala Lincoln	471-5531 471-5532 471-5591 (308) 284-8056 471-5003	Terry Brentzel Randy Pomplun Darin Gress Dale Johnson Mark Reeves Robert Finke	Doniphan (402)845-2021 Fullerton 536-2987 Hebron (402) 768-2287 Kearney 237-1079 Loup City 745-0662 Milford (402) 761-3537	
Panhandle Officer Jim Zimmerman (Sup.) Scott Brandt Heath Packett Dennis Thompson Dan Zuehlke Doug Pollard Frank Miller Dan Kling	City Gering Gering Gordon Lemoyne Ogallala Oshkosh Valentine Harrison	Phone (308) 436-7561 436-3418 282-2553 289-0755 284-4815 772-9950 (402) 376-1183 668-9456	Northeast Officer Tom Zimmer (Sup.) Dale Davis Ross Oestmann Steve Oberg Daniel Roberts Jon Reeves Marion Shafer Pat George Tim Williams Cory Krause	City Norfolk Bassett Bloomfield Columbus Fremont Kennard Norfolk O'Neill Neligh West Point	Phone (402) 371-6625 273-1700 373-4412 564-5937 721-7852 427-7378 371-2031 336-1588 887-1335 372-6979
Southwest Officer Roger Thompson (Sup.) Ray Dierking George Sund Michael Thome Matt Andrews Dirk Greene Virgil Gosch Dudley Sorensen Rich Routh	City N. Platte Brkn. Bow Cambridge Cozad Elwood Imperial McCook N. Platte Rep. City	Phone (308) 532-9175 872-3078 697-4629 784-4362 785-3025 882-5328 345-2185 532-0747 799-2085	Southeast Officer Duane Arp (Sup.) Sean McKeehan William Krause Mike Luben Douglas Kramer Dina Barta Stacey Lewton Levi Krause Russell Mort Dan Evasco Jeff Clauson	City Gretna Ashland Auburn Colon Lincoln Lincoln Lincoln Louisville Nebr. City Papillion Waterloo	Phone (402) 332-2965 944-4174 274-3789 443-4278 466-9001 483-2358 476-0436 234-2212 873-5684 592-6733 359-5301

South-central
Officer
Jerry Pecha (Sup.)
Jeff Jones City Kearney Clay Center | Phone (308) 865-5327 (402)762-3124 | | |

4 NEBRASKALAND • JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2010

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2010 • NEBRASKALAND 5



← Belted Kingfisher



Red Headed Woodpecker →



← Pheasant



Sandhill Crane →



Gold Finch ↑



Short Eared Owl ↓



Let us show you where to find them.

The Chicken Dance Trail brings you five self-guided birdwatching adventures in southwest and south central Nebraska, with interactive maps, online resources and more. Visit today!



THE CHICKEN DANCE TRAIL

chickendancetrail.com

Red Headed Woodpecker, Pheasant, and Gold Finch photos courtesy of Don Brockmeier



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Open Water Winter Fishing

Jeff Kurrus

Not all fishing this time of the year in Nebraska is done on hard water. Below Lewis and Clark Reservoir's Gavins Point Dam, the water usually stays open the entire winter. Many anglers frequent this area for its walleye and sauger fishing, and their tackle and techniques are manageable for even anglers new to open water winters.

"Spinning gear, 4- to 8-pound test line, and a jig and minnow fished right off the bottom straight below the boat," said Commission fisheries biologist Daryl Bauer. "If the fish aren't inhaling the whole bait, consider putting a stinger hook in the tail of the minnow."

"I would bet there have been more walleyes and sauger caught below Gavins using that presentation than all other methods combined," said Bauer.

River Use Study Underway

Eric Fowler

A January 14 meeting in Omaha will give Nebraskans a chance to voice their opinion on how the Missouri River should be managed.

The focus group meeting, set to begin at 5:30 p.m. at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers office, is one of many scheduled throughout the river basin as part of the Missouri River

Authorized Purposes Study.

The five-year study, authorized by Congress in 2009, will examine the current management of the river as authorized by the Flood Control Act of 1944. The long list of original authorized purposes includes flood control, navigation, hydropower, water supply, recreation and fish and wildlife.

"Every use that is authorized will get a fair shake and they'll look at the plusses and minuses of each one and see if there are any opportunities to make changes for the future," said Gene Zuerlein, Missouri River Program Manager with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

The process could resolve a long running dispute between downstream states, which contend that barge shipping continues to be a viable use of the river's water, and upstream states, which contend the water is more valuable if left in the six large reservoirs for recreation. Additionally, environmental interests would like to see the river, currently contained in a narrow navigation channel, broadened to restore natural function and create fish and wildlife habitat and expanded hunting and fishing opportunities for the people who live near it.

For more information on the study and meetings, go to mraps.org.

November Deer Harvest Down

Hunters harvested 53,641 deer in Nebraska during the November firearm season, according to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, a three percent decrease from the 2008 harvest.

Officials believe a likely reason for the decline was the lagging corn harvest, caused by an unusually wet October, provided plenty of cover for deer. That was especially true in eastern Nebraska, where deer harvest totals were down more than 10 percent.

One of the more interesting reports was from a hunter in the Pine Ridge who reported tracking a deer he had shot and finding it being attacked by a mountain lion. The hunter dispatched the deer, scaring off the cat. The hunter left to retrieve field-dressing equipment and returned to find the deer had been partially consumed and covered by debris.

PHEASANTS FOREVER & QUAIL FOREVER STATE HABITAT MEETING

February 6, 2010 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

SEMINAR TOPICS INCLUDE:

- QUAIL MANAGEMENT AND SUCCESS STORIES
- PRESCRIBED BURNING AS A MANAGEMENT TOOL
- FORMING LOCAL PRESCRIBED BURN ASSOCIATIONS
- HUNTING DOG TRAINING, HEALTH AND CARE
- NO-TILL GRASS DRILLS
- YOUTH MENTORED DOVE HUNTS
- FAMILY OUTDOOR EVENTS
- WIND ENERGY IMPACTS ON WILDLIFE
- NEW MANAGEMENT PLANS FOR WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS
- WHY MID-CONTRACT MANAGEMENT ON CRP LANDS?
- MANAGING YOUR PROPERTY FOR THE "BIG PICTURE"
- UPDATE ON THE 'RELOAD NEBRASKA' PROGRAM
- LANDOWNER HELP DESK AVAILABLE THROUGHOUT THE DAY
- AND 15 OTHER PRESENTATIONS!

For more information or to register:

Registration = \$30 per person, \$40 per person after February 1st, 2010.
Register at www.NebraskaPF.com or by calling 308-428-3062
Registration includes noon meal provided by Skeeter Barnes.



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!



A Look Back - January-February 1995

Jeff Kurrus

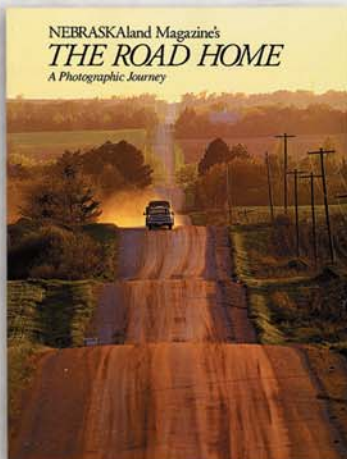
This month marked one of NEBRASKAland's crowning achievements: *The Road Home – A Photographic Journey*.

"Interstate 80 travelers can be forgiven as they whirr across Nebraska with too little time for their urgent missions. Through their windows they snatch only glimpses of Nebraska ... Their maps show them how to get through, not into Nebraska" was written in *The Road Home's* introduction.

NEBRASKAland's staff, including current senior editor Jon Farrar and regional editor Bob Grier, now-contributing editor Michael Forsberg, and former NEBRASKAland writer/photographers Ken Bouc, Don Cunningham and Rocky Hoffmann created a publication that continues to withstand time. In these pages, all of those sights so reminiscent of Nebraska welcome readers at every page – small town football, corncribs, county fairs, pheasant hunting, cottonwoods, sandhill cranes and, of course, big skies.

Turning through its pages nearly 15 years later draws multiple responses – a desire to return to the way things once were, as well as a desire to look around and see what things around us still are.

Hardcover editions of *The Road Home* are still available for \$3 and can be ordered at NEBRASKAlandMagazine.com.



Cold Winter Sunrises

Jeff Kurrus

While it seems logical that it would become warmer as soon as the sun rises on a winter morning, many hunters will tell you that the coldest part of their morning in a deer stand or waterfowl blind is when the sun rises. There's good reason for this.

Between sunset and sunrise, the Earth's surface gathers no solar energy but continues to radiate away its stored heat and the temperature lowers. When the sun comes up at dawn, the incoming solar radiation from the sunlight is weak – it doesn't yet have enough strength to counter all the heat escaping from the surface. As a result, the earth's surface continues to lose heat for some time following sunrise and air temperature continues to fall.

"At some point," says University of Nebraska-Lincoln meteorologist Mark Anderson, "usually an hour or two after sunrise, the accumulated energy from the sun is larger than the heat lost and the atmosphere begins to warm."

An additional factor that could also



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

contribute to hunters' early morning chill is that their body temperature, which rises while walking to their hunting location, begins to lower once they reach their destination and sit down. In addition, sweat can form during these walks and if a hunter isn't wearing some sort of moisture-wicking material,

the sweat can chill the body as it evaporates. In addition, the first response many hunters have when they arrive at their location is to shed clothes, which also cools the body and makes it difficult to warm up again. The best solution to these problems is to wear a minimal amount of clothes while going to your location, then finish dressing once you've arrived.

Deer Jerky Recipe

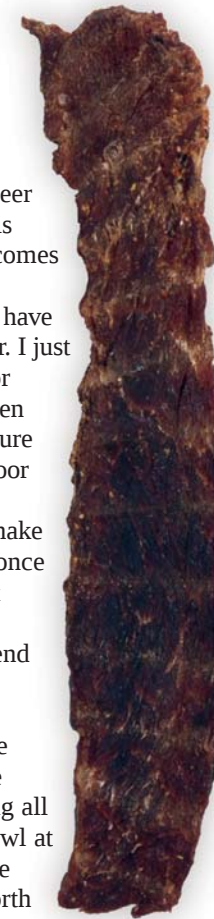
Elizabeth Mack

I have been making this jerky recipe for over 15 years now. I have tried others, and have let our deer processor make his recipe, and none comes close to this.

First, you don't have to use a dehydrator. I just prop the oven door open with a wooden spoon and make sure to line the oven floor with foil.

Second, don't make the mistake I did once and use garlic salt instead of garlic powder. It won't end well.

Third, hand-dip each piece into the seasoning mixture instead of dumping all the meat in the bowl at the same time. The final product is worth the extra effort.



Ingredients:

- 2 pounds venison or other lean meat
- ½ cup soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 2 teaspoons liquid smoke

Directions:

Slice meat about ¼-inch thick. Mix all ingredients in a shallow bowl. Dip each slice in mixture, coating well. Place in 13x9-inch glass dish, pouring any remaining mixture over top. Cover and place in refrigerator 24 hours to cure. Pat dry and place pieces across oven racks. Bake at 155°-175° for four to seven hours, depending on thickness of slices, with oven door slightly open. Store in airtight container.

Pallid Sturgeon Update

Last November, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission fisheries staff, working in cooperation with the Missouri Department of Conservation's Blind Pony State Fish Hatchery, tagged and stocked more than 3,600 endangered pallid sturgeon into the Missouri River near Winnebago, Fort Calhoun and Nebraska City. These 6- to 8-inch-long juvenile fish were spawned from three adult females and eight males collected from the Missouri River last spring and transported to Blind Pony SFH. This was the most successful effort to collect and spawn fish from the middle Missouri River since the pallid sturgeon was listed as endangered in 1990.

In addition to the fish stocked, an additional 11,000 of their siblings will be overwintered at Neosho National Fish Hatchery in Neosho, Missouri and



Outdoor Message Plates

Matthew Schafers of Lincoln loves hunting and was surprised when he found the plate that carries that message wasn't already taken when he made it his in 2000. He's also amazed at the number of conversations the plate sparks with complete strangers who happen upon it in a parking lot.

If you have a unique outdoor message plate you would like to share, or know someone who does, e-mail a photo (high-resolution, .jpg 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.

stocked in the spring. Approximately 90,000 pallid sturgeon, ranging in age from a few days to seven years old, have been stocked in the lower 811 miles of the Missouri River below Gavins Point Dam since the inception of the pallid sturgeon stocking program.

The Commission's fisheries staff is currently planning the 2010 broodstock collection effort (see "Saving a Living Dinosaur" in the April 2009 NEBRASKAland).

GUN DOG TRAINING

All Sporting Breeds

All dogs worked on foot – no horses. Obedience included. Midwest's finest facilities.

Started and trained dogs for sale.

"Training for hunters by hunters."

Wilderness Kennels
Henry Sader-Lincoln, NE
(402) 423-4212

www.wildernesskennels.com

Devil's Den Mulies - One of a kind hunting property, 556 acres, N of Arnold.
Beverly Range - 2,242 acres canyon range N of Trenton; great water, CRP.
Jeffrey Lake Property - 255 acres canyon range, adjoins west side of the lake, south of Brady. Perfect site for home or cabin, recreation opportunities, elk.
South Hills Acreage - Beautiful home on 137 canyon acres, 16 S of Maxwell – elk hunting! 3,300 sqft, 1998 home, yard sprinklers, trap shoot and golf areas.
Big Mac Canyon Pasture - 1,768 acres rough canyons south of Lake McCaughy; good access, yet private; cattle grazing income, big Mule deer.

www.agriaffiliates.com



AGRI AFFILIATES, INC.

... Providing Farm - Ranch Real Estate Services. ...

308/534-9240 **North Platte**

308/234-4969 **Kearney**

308/633-5505 **Gering**

Officer's Notebook

Decoys

Shooting from public roads and hunting without permission can be a problem just about anywhere in Nebraska. When complaints come in from a certain area, conservation officers will encourage the landowner to allow them to set up a decoy operation. We use mounted game animals, and some move electronically while others just stand there. Not just deer decoys either, but grouse, pheasant, rabbit, turkey – even red fox.

There are strict guidelines for a decoy setup: The landowner must sign a form allowing it on their place, the nearby roadway must have a clear field of view from either direction to avoid any road accident and the decoy must have a solid backstop for any wandering bullet or shot. This setup involves the entire chain of command – regional supervisors inspect and approve each site. The setup requires three law enforcement officers communicating by handheld radios – one to operate the marked patrol vehicle hidden nearby, one officer becomes a camouflaged troll beneath a nearby bridge or culvert, often filming the scenario for possible court cases, and the third officer, dressed in fluorescent orange, is backup for both. There is also more required to be done, but I'll keep those as trade secrets.

Running these decoy operations can be dangerous for the officers. Once, in Gage County after a road shooter had blazed away at a deer decoy, the troll shouted from its hiding place for the shooter to drop his firearm. The backup officer, about 100 yards away, stepped onto the roadway, wearing fluorescent orange while waving a flashlight. Meanwhile, the radio officer failed to make contact with the chase truck due to a faulty radio battery. The shooter jumped back into his unmarked light blue van and took off, spraying gravel and nearly running over the backup officer. Meanwhile, the chase vehicle officer sat in the hidden vehicle with a dead radio while the felon made his getaway in a cloud of dust.

Another time, an elderly gentleman and his 21-year old grandson stopped their vehicle to shoot "Ol' Shep," the original Nebraska Game and Parks Commission deer decoy. Ol' Shep was a full-body deer mount, with a fairly nice rack. He was a tired old veteran, having been shot some 30 times and missed over 100 more times. On this occasion the youngster shot Ol' Shep twice. Then the elderly man frantically grabbed the rifle from the boy and said, "Here, let me have that rifle, I'll show you how to shoot that s.o.b!" Gramps then shot Ol' Shep three

more times before being apprehended by our officers.

During one pheasant decoy setup after a heavy snow storm, a car drove by and spotted our fake pheasant in a plum thicket. He slammed on the brakes and did two complete 360's before disappearing into a cloud of snow. When I arrived at the vehicle, I noticed two empty shotguns in the middle seat and shotgun shells scattered all over the dash and floorboard. I asked how was everything? The driver said, "We're just peachy," and the passenger spoke, "Times have never been better."

We've also ran operations at the Homestead National Monument. One day, we set up Ol' Shep and along came the first vehicle. The person stopped, stuck his rifle out the window and aimed. He never fired. He then dismounted and took a kneeling position, aiming the rifle without firing. On this day I was the troll. In full uniform, I approached the comedian and told him to get back on the road. He looked up and said, "Sure, but would you first drive that big buck away from those cows so that I can shoot him?" I turned to look at Ol' Shep and he was surrounded by a dozen dairy cows. One Holstein was even licking Ol' Shep's back. I called in the backup, we drove the cows back to the barn and called it a day.

Some "catches" can even be personal disappointments, as when a shooter took on a pheasant decoy and then turned out to be a man that I'd thrown hay for while in high school. Some are trophies, though. One was the organizer of a locally infamous big-buck contest. He ventilated poor Ol' Shep twice with a magnum from his pickup window. I still grin about that one.

Because of the cell phone age, we also can quickly have a lot of tourists on hand who will try to draw officers from their concealment. I've seen everything from spontaneous tail-gate picnics to various combinations of the Keystone Cops and Chinese fire-drills. Many times a jester will stop, stick their rifle out the window, aim, then yell, "bang-bang," before speeding off down the roadway.

Running decoy operations are always dangerous for the Conservation Officers involved. A great number of road-shooters have been humbled and embarrassed. Some respond with wit and humor. And some are just plain hilarious – just ask Ol' Shep.

– Dan Evasco, Conservation Officer, Papillion



Brent Bollwitt of Lincoln poses with the bighorn ram he harvested.

Lincoln Hunter Bags Bighorn Sheep

A Nebraska bighorn sheep was harvested by Brent Bollwitt of Lincoln on December 8 near Fort Robinson State Park. The full-curl ram was approximately nine years old.

Bollwitt was guided by Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Wildlife Division staff from Alliance and stayed as a guest at Fort Robinson State Park during the hunt. The hunting party observed 15-20 sheep during the hunt.

Fifteen bighorn rams have been harvested in Nebraska over the past 11 years. Bighorns were reintroduced to the state in 1981. Approximately 275 bighorns now live in Nebraska.

Nearly \$700,000 has been generated from the sale of auction and lottery permits for the bighorn sheep program in Nebraska since 1998. These funds have been used for the benefit and reintroduction of bighorns throughout the Panhandle. No bighorn sheep season is scheduled for 2010, due to a small number of younger rams recruiting into the population.

Bollwitt's was the second bighorn harvested in Nebraska this year. John Marsh, a Kansas hunter who purchased this year's auction permit, took an 11-year-old ram on December 1 near Fort Robinson State Park.

The net green score on the Marsh ram was 178%, and the Bollwitt ram scored approximately 175.

Project BEAK

If you are a teacher, student, or just someone who likes to learn interesting and unique facts about Nebraska birds, then you should check out Project BEAK at <http://www.projectbeak.org/>.

Project BEAK is an interactive, web-based curriculum that contains scientifically accurate information about avian conservation, avian form, function and other adaptations that help birds survive, Nebraska's unique avian biodiversity, Nebraska's threatened and endangered birds, plus video clips, interactive games, quizzes and diagrams, additional resources and links, and classroom lesson plans.

The Education Workgroup of the Nebraska Bird Partnership (NBP), in cooperation with Nebraska Educational Television and with funding from the Nebraska Environmental Trust, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Nebraska Wildlife Conservation Fund, designed and created Project BEAK. Members of the NBP Education Workgroup, including teachers, resource professionals, ornithologists, and Educational Service Unit (ESU) staff, assisted in the development and/ or reviewed content for the project.

Turpin Time

Dick Turpin

This tip is for any of you folks who deal with cold weather and zippers.

You get out there and your hands get really cold – you're sledding with the kids ... you got to go to the bathroom ... you're going shopping trying to unlock the car ... you just got to get your keys out. Here's a good deal ... take a split ring and run it through that little hole in the zipper tag and pull it on through. When it comes time and your hands are cold and you can't function very well ... use a split ring. It'll save you a lot of time and frustration. ■



from
unique lodging



to
relaxing retreats



to
outdoor adventure

Take your pick.

Nebraska City
SYRACUSE
and the communities of OTOE COUNTY

www.NebraskaCity.com
800-514-9113

Stuck in Nebraska

Text and photos by Jeff Kurrus

Outdoor recreation is a must for many military members stationed in the Great Plains.

United States Air Force navigator Dustin Owen's head poked out the top of the waterfowl blind in Lancaster County. "We're not very good," he said, referring to himself and his hunting partner. "How many did you kill?"

"None. We messed that one up bad." Moments earlier, six shots had rung out from the blind in the general direction of a small flock of Canada geese. Now Owen was shaking his head. For many hunters, three-and-outs happen more often than desired, but there's always the next volley. For

military members like Owen, however, when and where that next volley might come isn't always known.

They're called "wish lists." People just entering the military are asked where they prefer to be stationed during their service time. While mountain and ocean states often top the lists, very seldom does one receive their "wish," and people often find themselves in an unfamiliar place they never planned to be. At that point, once the last of the necessities are unpacked and the still-filled boxes are crammed into the attic, the question obviously becomes "Now what?" For the outdoor enthusiast, this question is even more important.

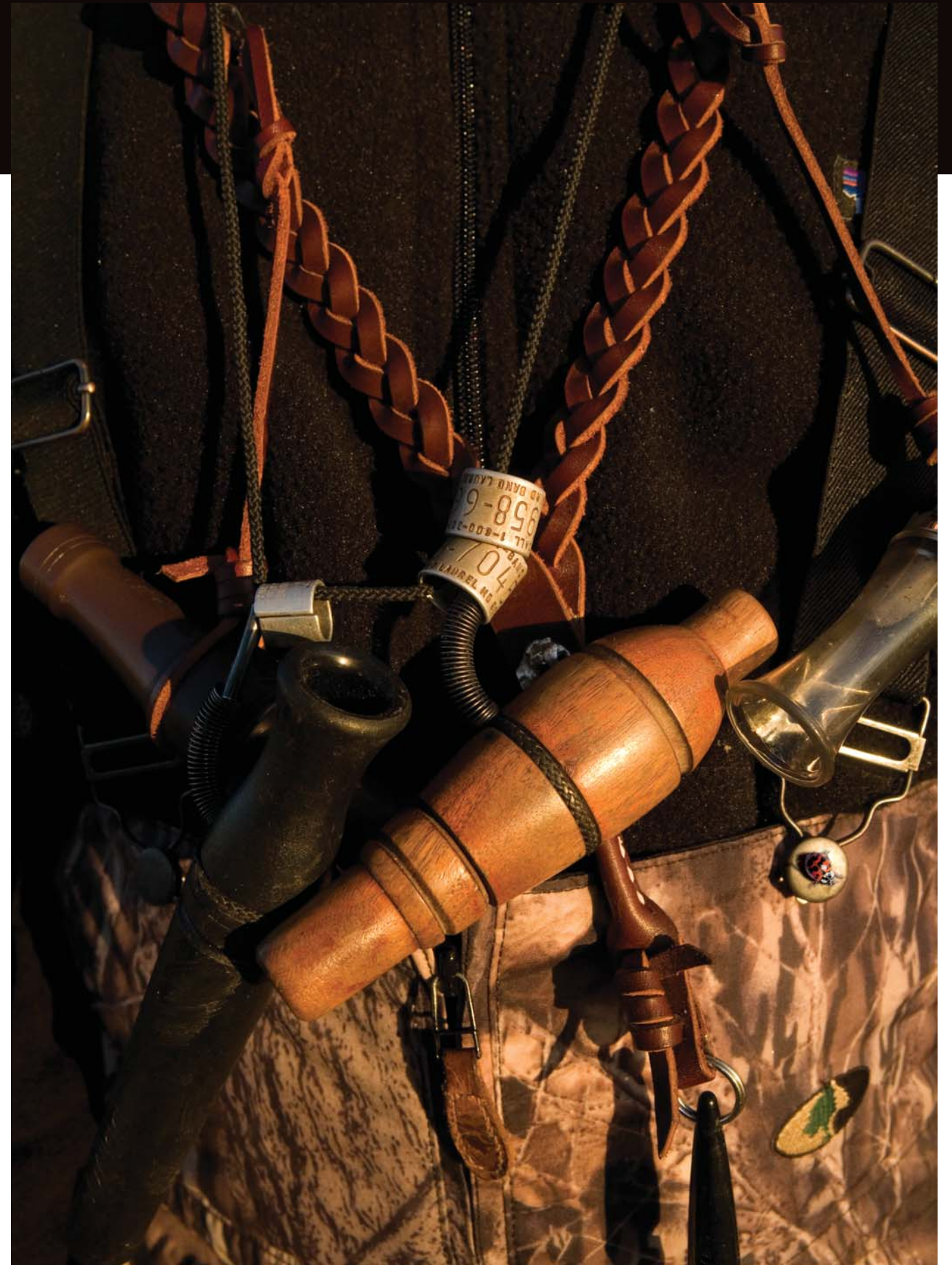
After all, if you've seen one city, you've seen them all. Sure, there is only one Empire State Building and Golden Gate Bridge, but there are a long list of metropolitan areas with river walks, movie theaters, sporting events and other nightlife activities to keep most people pleased in their spare time. Yet for those with a true love of the outdoors, there is a feeling of immediacy that accompanies these transitions, whether it be a serviceman or woman being transferred, or someone from the private sector moving to a new place.

While golf courses will always be there, things like this year's waterfowl season won't be. So new Nebraskans like Owen, who may only be living in their new home for a brief amount of time, often have to quickly find out what their options are.

"I couldn't just not go hunting and fishing when I moved here," Owen said. "These were things I just couldn't



ABOVE: Dustin Owen, an Air Force navigator, breathes cold air during a waterfowl hunt near Valley. OPPOSITE: Owen's lanyard of waterfowl calls and bands reveals this military member's passions during his tenure in the Cornhusker state.



“Our Valley lease was a large cornfield. Our group killed a few geese there, but no ducks at all. Plus, there wasn’t a good place to work our dogs. We just wanted a little bit more.” His new hunting spot has cut wheat for dove, a small pond for waterfowl, and woods for turkey and deer hunting.



Frost covers Owen’s goose decoys during a winter hunt last season near Valley.

put on hold. Hunting and fishing are what I love to do.”

And he’s not the only military person stationed here who feels that way. Each year, Offutt Air Force Base sells approximately 700 permits to fish Base Lake, which is only open to Department of Defense employees. In addition, Offutt also offers classes on bowhunter, boater and firearm safety, as well as canoeing classes, as part of the base’s outdoor recreation education program, managed by Iowa native Jason Ehlers. “We organize hiking trips, pheasant hunts, fishing trips ... you name it,” said Ehlers. “This year we’re going on our first deer hunt through the program and we’ll do two ice-



Casey, a Labrador retriever, watches a flock of geese during a hunt at Schilling WMA with Owen and the dog’s owner, Adam Wahl.



Owen looks out of a goose blind in Lancaster County.

Getting There

For newcomers, these resources are imperative to locating spots to hunt and fish in Nebraska.

Delorme Atlas

It is difficult to come across a hunter or angler whose backseat is not graced by one of these. It helps hunters and anglers find locations, and marks a large amount of the state’s public hunting and fishing spots.

Hunting and Fishing Guides

Published by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, the Nebraska Hunting, Fishing, and Big Game guides all reveal public lands to hunt or fish in the state and the corresponding regulations for those particular areas. The Waterfowl and Boating guides are also handy to have in the glove compartment.

CRP-Map Atlas

This publication reveals public lands for that particular year that hunters can access. Because of the difficulty of finding some of the locations due to being unfamiliar with a new state, it is best to study this guide with a Delorme Atlas close by.

NGPC Web site

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission web site (Outdoor.Nebraska.org) gives the online version of the aforementioned guides, as well as up-to-date news regarding Nebraska’s natural resources. Using the Commission’s web site and print publications, it is evident that there are multiple public areas not owned by the Commission that are open to hunting and fishing, including multiple sites near Omaha.



ABOVE: Owen works with his Labrador, Minnie, at Two Rivers State Recreation Area near Venice. **OPPOSITE:** Minnie makes a retrieve at Two Rivers SRA.

fishing trips this winter. The ice-fishing is especially interesting each year because I've taken 4-year-olds to 74-year-olds on their first ice-fishing trips."

Ehlers, also in the Air Force, briefs incoming servicemen who are "first term" – those airmen right out of high school and into the military. "I cover hunting, fishing, hiking, camping, boating and a list of other outdoor activities," he said. "I make sure I tell them everything I would want to know if I were new at a base, especially about those opportunities close to Offutt because some of these airmen don't have a lot of money."

When he moved here, Owen also learned about these close-to-home opportunities. He found public areas near his home in Omaha – Cunningham Lake and Two Rivers State Recreation Area (SRA) – to work his two Labrador retrievers, Minnie and Bo. His hunting lease was also another option for him.

Hunting leases are often cast in a negative light because many think they take the common, blue-collar hunter

out of the equation due to their cost. However, inexpensive leases can often be found and may be a viable option for some hunters if they can be shared with others. Owen's current lease, which is close to the metropolitan area and also leased by six other military members, is near Two Rivers SRA. Last year's was in Valley. "Our Valley lease was a large cornfield," said Owen. "Our group killed a few geese there, but no ducks at all. Plus, there wasn't a good place to work our dogs. We just wanted a little bit more."

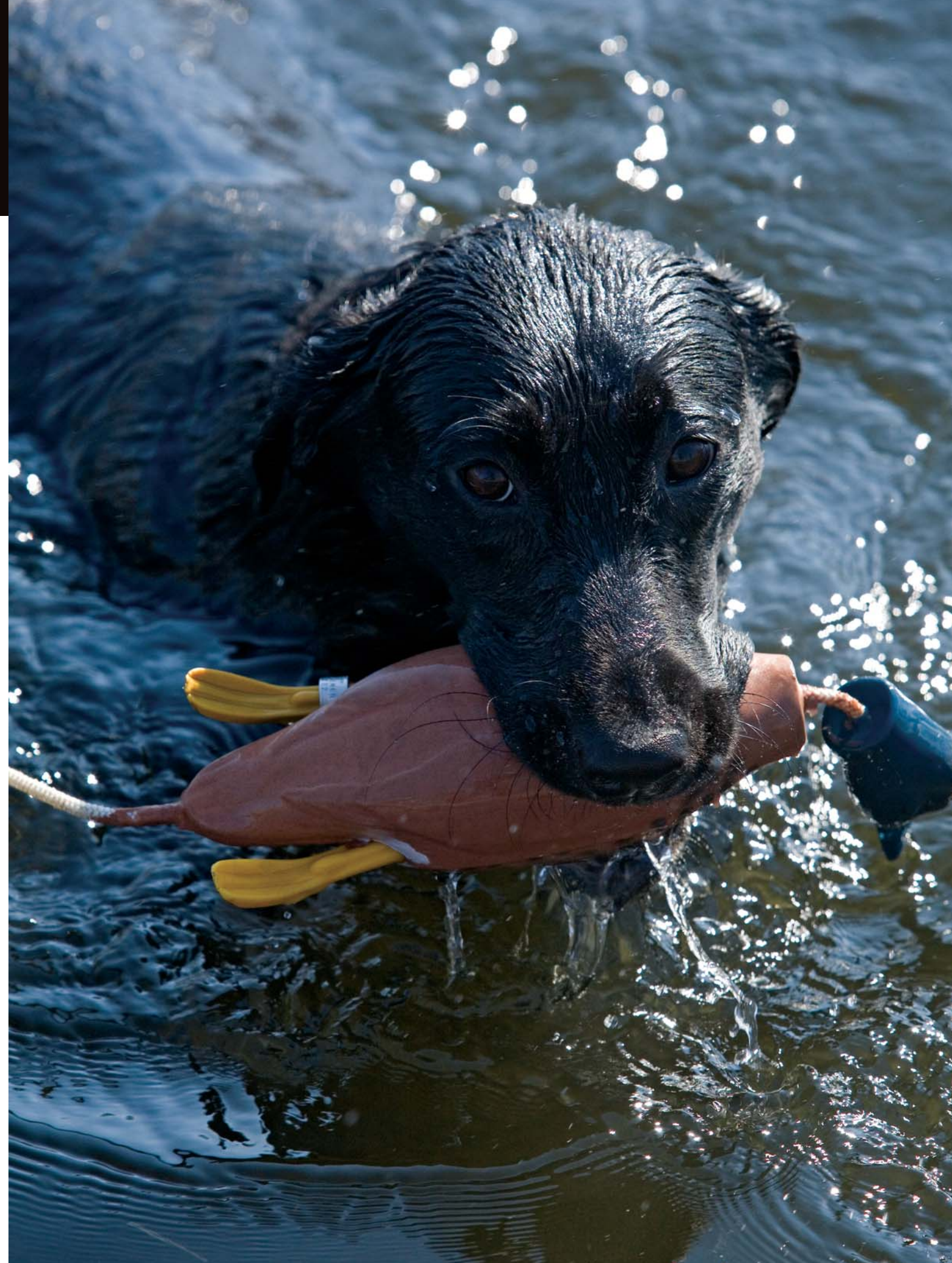
His new hunting spot has cut wheat for dove hunting, a small pond for teal and duck hunting, and woods for turkey and deer hunting. For a few hundred dollars, money he was willing to spend for his own spot, he was able to guarantee he'd have land to hunt. At the same time, however, he didn't stop knocking on doors, which led to more properties to hunt near both South Bend and North Bend. A few more conversations led to him locating land to hunt near Valentine.

He's also dove hunted at Twin Lakes

Wildlife Management Area (WMA) near Pleasant Dale, and hunted for deer at Tobacco Island WMA and geese at Schilling WMA, both near Plattsmouth. At Schilling WMA his hunting partner Adam Wahl, also a military member, would arrive at the blind location at 3 a.m. to make sure he and his partners had a place to hunt at this first come-first served location.

Now that Owen has been in Nebraska for three years, he's figured out some places to fulfill his passion. However, he's at another crossroads – does he want to continue living in Nebraska long-term and be one of the estimated 11,000 military retirees who have decided to spend the rest of their life in Nebraska? Or should he put in for a transfer and take the opportunity to travel and experience a different place with his wife, Lauren?

These are easy decisions for someone who has nothing staked in a place. As for Owen, he'd rather talk about the topic after next hunting season. And maybe even then it wouldn't be a good time to bring it up. ■





Pine Ridge Pastels

Text and photos by Bob Grier

required courses, and the last two years were preparation for a young girl's vocational training. Mary's school only offered three vocations: nursing, teaching or as a secretary. "But I knew I wanted to be an artist.

"There was a wonderful art teacher at the high school and I continued learning to draw and paint until I graduated. While all the other girls looked for jobs in the three professions offered at the high school, I began looking at continuing formal art training. There

were three private art schools in Los Angeles at the time – Otis, Chouinard and the Art Center School, today known as Art Center College of Design. The Frank Wiggins Trade School was free, so that is where I went.

"The art and drawing department taught me to draw everything from small advertisements to billboards," said Mary. "Photography wasn't yet mainstream." Then, in her second year, she got a job with the Raymond Advertising Agency, where she was able to do most of her work in India ink and pencil.

Shortly after, Mary, and the rest of the nation, was thrown a curve. "My Dad, brother and sister and I took a trip into Mexico, and we returned to Los Angeles on December 6th, 1941. The next day, we listened on the radio as President Franklin Roosevelt declared war. The Second World War had begun."

After a brief stint assembling gas tanks for the war effort at Goodyear, Mary interviewed for a job at North American Aviation in the engineering art department. "They asked if I

could read blueprints, and I answered 'Yes.' Then I began night school to learn to read blueprints," she says with a laugh.

Mary met Reynold at North American Aviation, where he was eventually tasked to use his own artistic skills. "He worked in what they called the 'secret room,' where he would render WWII fighters and other aircraft from the engineer's blueprints. He had also drawn a popular comic strip called 'Tailspin Tommy' before the war, and our lives were intertwined around art from the beginning."

Mary was assigned to work as Reynold's assistant as the demands of the world-wide war increased the demand for new airplanes.

"We were married in 1946," she continues, "after Reynold made a trip to New York to determine if there was commercial work for an illustrator and artist." The Browns, including three children born in New York, returned to California in 1950, moving to a rural property in the



Mary Louise finds beauty in her garden (iris in bloom, upper left) and along East Ash Creek, where her pastels capture the rocky bluffs above the stream.

foothills above Pomona.

Reynold's career then took another turn when he was "discovered" by Hollywood, eventually producing nearly 250 movie posters and other art for the movie industry (see "Remember Reynold Brown" in the July 1988 edition of *NEBRASKALAND*).

"Reynold wanted to do western art and the taxes on our

The warmth, grace and experience of a life devoted to art and family are readily apparent to anyone stepping into Mary Louise Tejeda's log home and its spacious wooden studio on the northern edge of the Pine Ridge southwest of Chadron. The walls carry Mary's soft pastels of the Pine Ridge and her late husband Reynold Brown's bold movie poster art and oil paintings.

One of the most striking oils – a young woman in her late teens or early twenties with beautiful black hair wearing a Spanish-inspired, festive blouse with ribbons – captures the eye above a row of file cabinets containing artwork collected over a long and productive lifetime.

The young woman in oil is Tejeda, painted by Brown more than 60 years ago. The model's flashing eyes and smile are as evident today as they were when the portrait was painted as Mary invites visitors into her studio. The dark hair has become luminous silver against the warm wood background – and at 88 years of life, Mary's thoughts, expressions and lively hand gestures are spellbinding in their impact.

"So many wonderful memories," she begins. "When I was a little girl I was always drawing, even before I entered grade school. My dad found out there was a woman that did oil painting that lived nearby, so every Saturday morning she would teach me to paint. I knew immediately I wanted to be an artist."

Mary was born in Los Angeles in 1921, the daughter of a Swiss mother and a father from Mexico. "Mother spoke German and Dad spoke Spanish, and they insisted that as children, we speak both Spanish and German in the home – English was for the outside world."

During her grammar school years Mary's drawings attracted the interest of her teachers and friends and she was soon decorating the classroom's blackboards for the holiday season. Following the eighth grade, Mary went to an all-girls Catholic high school in Los Angeles. "It was a wonderful melting pot," she recalls, "Germans, Italians, Polish, Irish – people from all over the world."

In those days, the ninth and tenth grade were devoted to



Mary Louise's composition of summer fallow and stubble anchored by the foreground bales of straw leads the eye gracefully to the dramatic clouds drifting over the Pine Ridge escarpment.



property in California was jumping by leaps and bounds. One year, we drove east into Montana, Wyoming and Nebraska looking for a place to settle. At the annual Fort Robinson Art Show we met fellow artist Mel Gerhold who introduced us to several Pine Ridge landowners and that was how we came to western Nebraska.

"When I was able to start drawing again, I didn't want to use Reynold's coattails, so I decided to do pastels rather than oil, and signed each piece as Mary Louise Tejada. That was another reason we settled in the Pine Ridge – all of the beautiful landscapes and scenery. I could drive to East Ash Creek, into the badlands and ranch country all around

Summer sunflowers (top) and the morning and evening sky (left) offer ever-changing subjects for the perceptive artist.

us, and find inspiration."

Mary continues to draw daily at 88 years of age, overcoming difficult challenges with her eyesight that include glaucoma and age-related macular degeneration, reducing her ability to see distance in the landscape.

Her daughter

Regina believes it was Mary's strong background that helps her continue to produce her pastels. "Her experience reading blueprints and her solid art foundation helps her compensate for the lack of central vision in one eye and her reduced vision in the other," Regina says. "Lately, she has been able to work from memory, producing drawings after we briefly visit different landscapes. When she is 'spot on,' the drawings evoke something in the viewer that we both felt in the landscape."

Regina and her husband, Jerry Ochoa, moved to the Pine Ridge to be with Mary in 2001 and both women are often seen along East Ash Creek and other scenic overlooks in good weather – Mary in her bright yellow artist's smock and sunbonnet, her easel holding a lovely work in progress.

"Time goes by, and it goes faster and faster," Mary says. "We still go everywhere we can to draw. And I think I've done everything around here, until each new season brings something new and exciting to the landscape." ■

Mary's work is represented by the Silver Eagle Art Gallery, 261 Main St., Chadron, NE 69337; (308) 432-8925.



Mary Louise (left) and daughter Regina share a keen love of art and life. Regina and her husband Jerry moved to the Pine Ridge from California in 2001 to be with her mother.

FOCUS ON PHEASANTS

PROGRAM PROVES BENEFITS OF HABITAT UPGRADES

Text and photos by Eric Fowler

It wasn't long after legal shooting time arrived and the 2009 Nebraska pheasant season began that the first shot rang out across Branched Oak Wildlife Management Area northwest of Lincoln. More shots followed from all corners of the area and continued throughout the day. Pickups, cars and SUVs were parked in every lot around the lake and some had arrived hours before sunrise to stake a claim on the spot they wanted to hunt. With blaze-orange clad hunters in every field, the place looked like a pumpkin patch.

It was a completely different scene than what one would've encountered on opening day just eight years ago. A few people hunted the land around the lake back then, but many had given up on it, tired of spending time and energy hunting there and seldom seeing a rooster pheasant, much less putting one in their game vest.

But the number of hunters wasn't the only aspect of the scene that had changed at Branched Oak. Where there was once row after row and mile after mile of cedar, pine and autumn olive trees dissecting the 4,400 acres of public land surrounding the lake, now there were wide-open spaces and a patchwork quilt of grasses and forbs in different stages of succession, providing much better habitat for pheasants, quail and other grassland birds. Restoring that habitat was the goal of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's Focus on Pheasants initiative when it was launched in 2002. So was restoring bird and hunter numbers. From the sound of things on opening weekend, both goals were accomplished.

BACKING UP THE THEORIES

Similar stories have played out on public and private land around the state in recent years thanks to Focus on Pheasants. When the program, a



Where aged grasslands have been upgraded under Focus on Pheasants, there are now more roosters crowing in the spring.

cooperative effort between the Commission, Pheasants Forever, the USDA Farm Service Agency and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, began, upland game managers had a pretty good idea why the pheasant population in Nebraska was declining: The birds simply didn't have the habitat to meet their needs for each life-cycle stage and thrive.

At the time, the 1.1 million acres enrolled in the federal Conservation Reserve Program provided a considerable

amount of the pheasant habitat in Nebraska. When that program was launched in 1985, farmers converted marginal or highly-erodible cropland into grass. But it took a few years for the grass to become established. In the meantime, forbs, including what many considered weeds like sunflowers, dominated the stands. There was plenty of vegetation for a hen pheasant to nest. At ground level, a pheasant chick could easily move around beneath the plants that protected them from hawks and other aerial predators. And the forbs, including legumes like clover and alfalfa, attracted numerous insects, which provide a significant food source for hen pheasants and are the primary food source for chicks. In most cases, the mix of plants also provided excellent winter cover. During the first few years, CRP fields looked like the idled crop fields enrolled in the federal Soil Bank program in the 1950s and 1960s. In both cases, pheasants thrived and hunters were happy.

Slowly but surely, however, the forbs were crowded out until all that remained were monotypic stands of grass. CRP fields that had been planted to warm-season mixes or switchgrass provided winter cover, something that couldn't be said of brome. These fields still provided adequate nesting cover, but with a tangled web of new and old growth at ground level and much less insect life, they were woeful brood-rearing cover.

Nesting and brood-rearing cover, biologists concluded, was what Nebraska was lacking. On a small scale, biologists had already found that disturbing these aged CRP fields, primarily through disking, and then



A patchwork of wildlife-friendly habitats in different stages of succession are now found where row after row of trees once fragmented aged grasslands on the wildlife lands surrounding Branched Oak Lake prior to work done under Focus on Pheasants.

interseeding forbs, could restore this much-needed cover type and increase pheasant numbers, in some cases dramatically, by providing the birds everything they need. What the biologists wanted was more hard-nosed scientific proof to back it up.

So the Commission and its partners went to work on projects of a much larger scale. It identified several focus areas on both public and private land where intensive habitat upgrades could be completed. In Stanton and Dixon counties, they worked to create 65 acres of early successional habitat per square mile in 16- to 32-square-mile areas that included a high percentage of CRP. Similar efforts would help restore habitat on public land at Branched Oak and Sherman Reservoir wildlife management areas and the Corps of Engineers Harlan County Lake. Organizers of the One-Box Pheasant hunt in Broken Bow performed habitat upgrades in their neighborhood, and many individual landowners across the state did the same with the help of local Pheasants Forever chapters.

Wherever the upgrades were completed, pheasant numbers increased. One of the most dramatic increases was at Branched Oak Lake. In 2002, biologists conducted spring crowing count surveys, which involve stopping at 20 predefined points for set intervals on both the public land and adjacent private land to listen for crowing rooster pheasants. Before work began, they heard only one rooster. Two years later, they heard 300, and since 2006, the total number of crows has been near 400. "We're seeing a lot of birds this year," Kirk Hansen, a biologist working at the lake, said last summer. In the Stanton County focus area, Dale Clark rarely saw a pheasant before disking

and interseeding 320 acres of his CRP, which was mostly brome, providing a flush of sweetclover, red clover and pheasants. "We had a very large bird population," Clark said of the pheasant response to the management.



Work done at Branched Oak Lake has resulted in a significant increase in pheasant broods, often seen sunning themselves on roadsides on dewy mornings.

Three studies in the Stanton County focus area helped quantify and justify the habitat work. In the first, biologists trapped 100 hen pheasants and fitted them with radio transmitters. For two years, they tracked the pheasants,

UPGRADING CRP

The Focus on Pheasants initiative helped show how disturbing aged grasslands enrolled in the federal Conservation Reserve Program and interseeding forbs can benefit pheasants, quail and a variety of other grassland birds and wildlife.

These upgrades are required under newer CRP contracts as part of mid-contract management, with the USDA Farm Service Agency covering half of the cost. But what Focus on Pheasants also showed is that simply meeting the minimum requirements of the contract may not produce the results wildlife professionals wanted to see when they asked that the practice be required. “Minimal effort produces minimal results,” said Jake Holt, who is leading Focus on Pheasants efforts for the Commission and Pheasants Forever.

While conducting a prescribed burn prior to interseeding can meet contract requirements, a burn followed by an application of glyphosate will provide better and longer lasting results.

Biologists recommend burning, shredding, haying or grazing as a pre-treatment to remove plant residue before disking or spraying. This reduces the number of passes required with disking and increases the effectiveness of a chemical application. Burning is an economical option and, if timed correctly, can provide the added benefit of stressing brome and further increasing the effectiveness of spraying. Haying will reduce a landowner’s rental payment, but in instances where fields are hayed for forage, following that practice with an upgrade is ideal.

Disking is effective in setting back grass and may also allow for a greater flush of annual weeds than spraying, but in fields with a history of noxious weed problems, spraying may be a better option.

Landowners with other small grasslands not enrolled in CRP can use some of these same techniques to improve their pheasant habitat.

Simply spraying brome-choked draws with glyphosate will allow the seeds of native grasses and forbs in the soil bank to sprout.

The costs of contracting for this work can vary widely across the state. Landowners who are willing to invest their own time and use their own equipment may receive enough in their cost-share payment to cover direct costs related to fuel, chemicals and seed. They will receive further payment in the form of pheasants and other wildlife.



Average costs per acre of CRP upgrades based on contract work done in Johnson County in 2009.

- **Step 1** Burning = \$7.83 or Shredding = \$12.67
- **Step 2** Chemical treatment = \$21.62, or Disking 2 to 3 passes = \$20.32
- **Step 3** Seeding = \$18.00

pinpointing nesting and brooding sites. Nearly all of the birds had access to both CRP fields that had been upgraded and others that hadn’t.

“Not only did the hens show a strong preference for nesting and raising their broods in the disked and interseeded areas, they raised about twice as many chicks on average than hens that did not use those areas,” said Scott Taylor, head of the Commission’s wildlife research section.

The second study in Stanton County measured the response of other grassland birds to disking and interseeding. Researchers found that the upgraded fields supported a greater number of birds in a greater variety of species, such as western meadowlarks, grasshopper sparrows and dickcissels, and had higher nest densities than aged CRP stands. It did find, however, that two species, Henslow’s sparrows and bobolinks, preferred mature stands.

Another study in Stanton County backed up previous findings from research in Lancaster and Johnson counties – insect abundance and total biomass was higher in disked and interseeded CRP.

In Johnson County, where work began in 2008 to upgrade CRP fields in a new focus area, another radio-telemetry study looked at the habitat selected by 100 greater prairie chickens fitted with radio transmitters. That study found that hen prairie chickens also preferred CRP to other grasslands for nesting. Of those, hens showed a preference for fields that had been disked and interseeded with forbs like alfalfa and red clover, where nesting success was also higher.

TWEAKING THE RECIPE

While biologists knew the value of restoring early successional habitat in CRP fields, convincing landowners to do the work was a challenge due in large part to the fuel, seed and other costs of the upgrades.

Prior to Focus on Pheasants, landowners were not required to upgrade their CRP, even though one of the purposes of the program was to provide wildlife habitat. Focus on

Pheasants was able to show how the upgrades benefit wildlife – and the consequences of not managing the habitat. Because of that, changes were made on a national level that now require new CRP enrollments to be upgraded at least once, and in some cases twice, during the contract, which typically spans 10 or 15 years, and provides cost-share payments for the work. “That was the kind of thing we hoped to achieve,” said Taylor.

Focus on Pheasants also made sure interested landowners could get an up-close look at the work through numerous habitat tours held in the focus areas. During these tours, which will continue in the years to come, biologists explain the many different management practices that can be used.

“People really want a recipe,” said Pete Berthelsen, senior field coordinator for Pheasants Forever in Nebraska. “Tell me what to do, how to do it, how much to use and when to do it, and I’ll go out and do it.”

The recipe used at the outset of the program – disking mature stands of grass and then interseeding legumes – is now one of many used to upgrade



Hen pheasants that nested in upgraded CRP in Stanton County raised twice as many chicks as those which didn’t.



Food plots can be of value to pheasants and other wildlife. But unless your land has sufficient nesting and brood-rearing habitat for pheasants, as is the case on this northeastern Nebraska farm, there will be fewer birds to use them.

CRP. But biologists found that much more effort is needed to set back brome grass and get the results they wanted.

“The smooth brome grass, no matter what we did to it, was eventually going to go back to smooth brome grass,” said Scott Wessel, a biologist in the Commission’s Norfolk office.

Where fields were disked deeply with two, three or even four passes, leaving only black dirt, however, the habitat improvements were greater and longer lasting, and there were rarely problems with erosion, as some had feared. Fields that were only lightly disked returned to solid brome within two years.

At Sherman Reservoir, biologist Mark Feeney has used a variety of techniques to set back brome grass, including prescribed burns, chemical control and disking. Of the 3,290 acres of land around the reservoir, 80 percent was grassland and half of that was brome. The Sherman County Pheasants Forever chapter helped by disking 600 of the 885 acres that have been upgraded there to date.

Feeney found the longest-lasting benefits have been from spraying brome with Roundup or another glyphosate after a killing frost or by conducting a prescribed burn in the fall and then spraying the regrowth with glyphosate in the spring. With the latter “you’re interrupting the plant’s growth process twice in one growing season,”

said Feeney. “It’s a very good effect.”

At Harlan County Lake, Jim Brown, natural resource specialist with the Corps, has a luxury the private landowners working to improve CRP do not – he’s able to break up fields that are 100 percent brome and farm them, replacing those grassland acres by seeding existing cropland to a high-diversity mix of warm-season grasses and forbs, and keeping the mix of 3,500 acres of cropland, 7,900 acres of grassland and 6,200 acres woodland habitat around the reservoir.

Biologists are also using the same techniques to improve warm-season stands of CRP. In 2009, some private land in the Branched Oak area enrolled in CRP-MAP was burned in the spring to remove plant residue and then sprayed in the summer with Select, a herbicide used to control grass that doesn’t harm native forbs. This will set back the warm-season grasses and allow the interseeded forbs to become established.

LEARNING CONTINUES

Focus on Pheasants has been a learning process. Some of the things learned by land managers wasn’t good: At Sherman Reservoir, half of the fields that have been upgraded were reseeded using a mix that included Maximillian sunflower. In many of those fields, this tall, aggressive native



Sweet clover thrived in brome-dominated CRP on Dale Clark's farm in Stanton County in 2004 (above) after being disked and interseeded the previous fall. Just three years later, however, the brome had reclaimed the field, again choking out the beneficial forbs (below). This rapid succession illustrates the importance of aggressive management when setting back brome is the desired result.



perennial has taken over, even though it was a small component of the seed mixture. While the problems aren't as extensive, the plant has also become thick in spots at Branched Oak Lake.

While large dense stands of the Maximillian sunflower provide good winter cover and good brood-rearing cover because of the overhead protection it provides, it can also shade out other grasses and forbs that were planted. To

control the plant, Feeney has gone so far as to have a contractor harvest the seed in the fall, remove enough of the stalks that he can spray the plant during the following growing season, and will experiment with other methods of chemical control this year. Biologists are now recommending seeding rates be cut, especially in the eastern portion of the state.

Land managers also found that fields

where noxious weeds such as Canada or musk thistle were once a problem will have more trouble when disking releases the long-lived seeds of these plants. Clayton Stalling, a biologist in the Commission's Norfolk office, said that before work began in the Dixon County focus area, landowners, county weed boards and Farm Service Agency field staff all talked about the trouble they might have with musk thistle after disking and interseeding. "We knew we were going to have a problem. We didn't quite realize it was going to be the magnitude that it turned out to be," he said.

In most cases, spot spraying, shredding and chopping controlled the thistle without removing the beneficial forbs. "There were two instances where we had to go in and just nuke it, which took out the diversity, just because musk thistle dominated the entire field," he said.

While disking may provide a greater flush of annual weeds than is obtained with chemical control, the latter may be a safer choice on fields with a history of noxious weed problems.

At Harlan, Brown found that three years of cropping worked well to eliminate brome, but wasn't enough to control Kentucky bluegrass, another invasive that can take over grasslands, and is now cropping fields for five years. "We think we didn't crop it long enough to expend that seed source," Brown said.

Unfortunately, biologists also learned that depending on a federal conservation program to provide wildlife habitat has no long-term guarantee. The 2008 Farm Bill cut the nationwide cap on CRP from 39 to 32 million acres. Numerous contracts in Nebraska have expired and the land returned to crops. With no general signup offered, acreage will drop from 1.3 million acres in 2007 to about 900,000 acres this year. The hardest hit region appears to be northeastern Nebraska: Wessel said about half of the 8,000 acres of CRP in the Stanton County focus area have been lost, including many of the 2,000 acres that were upgraded under Focus on Pheasants. As the habitat has disappeared, so have the pheasants that used it. There is no indication



Purple coneflower, black-eyed susan, mare's tail, common and Maximillian sunflower, big bluestem and indian grass are among the 20 to 30 native plants seeded in one field at Branched Oak Lake, providing diversity that is valuable to wildlife.

when a new signup period might begin that could stem the tide of CRP losses. If it doesn't happen soon, Nebraska's CRP acreage will dip below 500,000 acres in 2013 and to a mere 55,000 acres in 2020.

If a new sign-up period does come, many of the things learned in Focus on Pheasants can be put to work. "In my opinion there is nothing you can do for wildlife management where you plant it and just walk away from it and always have good results," said Berthelsen.

"One of the things Focus on Pheasants taught us is that if you wait until year 8 or 10 or 15, it's going to take a lot more time, money and effort to get the kind of wildlife habitat that we want. If you just do a little bit each year and stay on it, it's really quite easy to have good wildlife habitat that produces pheasants and quail and grassland songbirds."

Doing some work each year, whether it's on 10 percent of a field or 30 percent, helps create a patchwork of habitats in different stages of succession, each of which can meet different life-cycle needs of pheasants and other wildlife.

MORE BIRDS TO COME

Part of the success at Branched Oak can be attributed to the removal of 21 miles of tree rows that had been planted in the 1960s to help create edge. At the time, that's what upland game managers felt would benefit pheasants and quail most. Early on, it did. But as the trees grew, they dominated the landscape, spreading into the grasslands and serving as perches for aerial predators that feast on grassland birds and creating many small fields as opposed to the larger ones pheasants have since been found to prefer.

Scott Smathers of Lincoln began hunting around Branched Oak as a teen in 1976. He quit hunting there in the mid-1980s after habitat and pheasant and quail numbers declined. "You saw a few birds, but they were concentrated in a few areas and you had to know where to go," Smathers said. "At one time, probably in the mid- to late-1980s, I knew of one covey of quail on the entire area."

Smathers is once again a regular at Branched Oak, returning soon after



Hen pheasants were captured and fitted with radio transmitters to track their nesting and brood-rearing habits as part of a Focus on Pheasants study in Stanton County.

PHEASANTS FOREVER HOPES TO RELOAD NEBRASKA

Door-to-door sales is a tried and true method of hawking one's wares, putting a product in front of a potential customer who might not know the product exists. Reload Nebraska will use that age-old sales technique with a sales pitch that's hard for landowners to resist: increase your farm income and create pheasant habitat at the same time.

Launched in 2009 by Pheasants Forever, the Reload Nebraska initiative has a lofty goal of establishing and improving 1.1 million acres of wildlife habitat on private and public land across the state, a significant number considering 97 percent of the land is privately owned and much of that is devoted to farming or ranching. The primary component of the \$20 million plan involves employing 40 Farm Bill Wildlife Biologists to develop conservation plans for every landowner in the state.

"We want to be able to sit down with landowners and show them how we can increase their farm and ranch income with the use of the different conservation programs that are available and also provide wildlife habitat," said Pete Berthelsen, senior field coordinator for Nebraska Pheasants Forever.

While increasing habitat and farm income at the same time seems counterintuitive, Berthelsen said research and the high-tech input cost and crop yield monitoring employed in modern agriculture has shown it is possible. The prime examples are field borders adjacent to shelterbelts and streams, where crops often struggle to compete with trees



for moisture, nutrients and sunshine, or the corners of center-pivot irrigated fields that don't get the water the rest of the field does. "Production sometimes drops to the point where you're up-side-down and it costs you more to farm it than what you're producing on it," Berthelsen said.

These areas can be enrolled at any time in a variety of practices under the continuous sign-up portions of the federal Conservation Reserve Program, including the State Acres For Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) and CP33 programs, guaranteeing income. In Nebraska, monitoring found significantly higher numbers of quail, pheasants, dickcissels and field sparrows in fields with CP33 borders than those without. In 2008, spring quail surveys found more than five times as many male bobwhites in the CP33. As Berthelsen likes to say, it's instant wildlife – just add habitat.

Other opportunities include enrolling highly erodible portions of fields or stream buffers, both of which also can improve water quality by keeping soil on the land, and squaring up odd-shaped fields, making them more efficient to farm.

Reload Nebraska builds on a successful partnership between Pheasants Forever, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and the Natural Resources Conservation Service that has employed six Farm Bill Wildlife Biologists since 2004 to provide one-stop shopping for landowners interested in enrolling in conservation programs. That program has proven so popular, however, that there is a 2½ month wait to see one of the biologists. And so far it has served mostly landowners with a passion for creating

wildlife habitat who come looking for help, a group Berthelsen estimates represents just 10 percent of all landowners. Berthelsen believes by expanding the workforce, biologists will have time to seek out landowners who are initially uninterested and sell them on the programs in a conversation over the kitchen table or across the cab of pickup. "By putting more people on the ground ... over a period of four or five years, I think we can get to all 90 percent of the people that would be interested," Berthelsen said.

Reload Nebraska will also create a Landowner Stewardship Fund for each county that can be used to

improve existing habitat, a front where Berthelsen has seen countless opportunities in his travels. One example is spraying a brome-choked plum thicket with glyphosate following a hard freeze. "That's an example of where you don't have to plant anything new, it cost a couple of bucks and some sweat equity, and you can have tremendous quail habitat," he said.

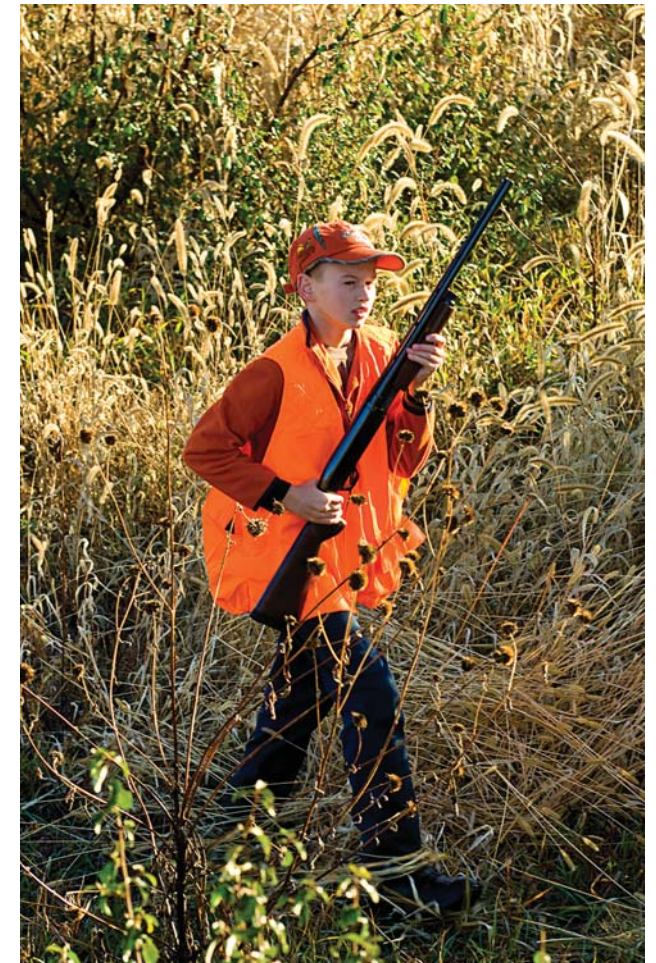
Berthelsen expected to announce three new Farm Bill Wildlife Biologist positions by the end of 2009, and hopes to have four to seven more added by July. But he said the program is not just about hiring people, it's about improving the delivery system of existing conservation programs. This can increase habitat for all wildlife and help reach the goals of the Nebraska Natural Legacy Program, which aims to keep common species common and provide additional habitat for species of concern, including the regal fritillary butterflies and wildflowers Berthelsen has seen in the restored grassland on his small central Nebraska farm.

"It's not just about pheasants and quail," said Berthelsen. By increasing upland game bird populations, he hopes small towns across Nebraska can once again see full motels and restaurants and lines at hunter breakfasts on opening weekend. "We can bring some of those traditions back that will have an impact on rural economies."

Farm Bill Wildlife Biologists

These individuals can help landowners enroll in federal conservation programs. Positions will be added soon in other communities across the state. For an updated list, go to NebraskaPF.com and click the "Contacts" link.

- Bruce Sprague, Tecumseh, 402-335-3316 ext.119
- Jason Sykes, Nelson, 402-225-2311 ext. 120
- Andy Moore, Scottsbluff, 308-632-2195 ext. 122
- Ryan Lodge, Ord, 308-728-3244 ext. 119
- Sara Fulton, Stanton, 402-439-2213
- Kelsi Niederklein, North Platte, 308-534-2360



Fox Lane of Lincoln hunts pheasants at Branched Oak Lake, where early successional habitat provides excellent nesting, brood rearing and winter cover.

Focus on Pheasants work began, well before he went to work as a regional representative for Pheasants Forever in 2008.

Smathers and three other hunters chose to avoid the opening day crowds at Branched Oak this year and hunt on day two. They only took home three birds after a half-day's work, but they were happy, knowing that the high hunting pressure the day before likely pushed many of the birds onto adjacent private land. They knew the birds would return later in the season, and they would, too.

"It's a far improvement over what it had been," he said, adding that it's nice to know that he can count on seeing birds and "my walk's not going to be just a walk."

Commission biologists are taking what they learned at Branched Oak and applying it on other wildlife management areas across the state. While it has always been a part of their land management efforts, an added emphasis is being placed on clearing invasive trees and upgrading grasslands to create early successional habitat.

There are many factors that affect pheasant populations, most notably the weather. But many of those are out of anyone's control. The one thing biologists know they can control is the quality of habitat available to pheasants. To borrow an already overused movie line, they know that if they build it, they will come. ■



The size difference in ears of corn picked from a field bordering a shelterbelt, one ear from each of the first 20 rows, clearly illustrates the decreased productivity of these areas.

Crescent Lake

Ice-Fishing Family Fun

Text and photos by Bob Grier

Families across Nebraska looking for a great winter sport without expensive equipment and travel will find ice-fishing on a nearby pond or lake to be a wonderful way to spend a winter afternoon together.

Growing up in western Minnesota, Neil Powers' fondest memories are "on ice" – playing hockey or ice-fishing each winter as a boy.

When his children became old enough, he and his wife, Amy, introduced their children to ice-fishing. It quickly became a treasured family activity that they look forward to each winter.

Until late-2008, the Powers family home was located on Crescent Lake

National Wildlife Refuge north of Oshkosh, where Powers served as refuge manager until taking a job at another refuge in North Dakota. Located on the western edge of Nebraska's Sandhills, the 45,849-acre Crescent Lake NWR provides several nearby ice-fishing destinations.

"Meagan, then a six-year-old, and her three-year-old brother, Jaden, were really

excited when we talked about going ice-fishing for the first time in late-2007," said Powers. "Ice-fishing can be a great outdoor experience for youngsters, but we wanted to make sure that the all-important first experience on the ice was especially enjoyable. We picked a warmer, late winter day without wind, and the kids really had a blast catching small bluegill and yellow perch on Smith Lake, which is located near the western edge of the refuge."

Ice-fishing can be a low-tech, inexpensive pursuit each winter after safe ice forms on Nebraska's lakes and ponds. Specialized gear isn't required – standard fishing rods with four to six-pound test monofilament line, a few small bobbers or floats, and a handful of small ice-fishing jigs or teardrop lures and wax

worms, available from local bait shops, are very productive. A hand-turned ice auger is probably the most expensive item required, although some ice-fishermen still use a simple, steel ice spud with a chisel-shaped tip at one end to open their fishing holes.

After their first successful ice-fishing trip, a gas-powered ice auger made a perfect family Christmas present, followed the next year by a pop-up ice-fishing shelter that folds up and doubles as a sled used to carry fishing gear and young children across the ice.



Four-year-old Jaden Powers proudly holds up a bluegill taken at Smith Lake.



Neil Powers helps son Jaden remove a small ice-fishing jig from his catch.

Smith Lake (not to be confused with Smith Lake Wildlife Management Area located north of Lakeside) is an approximately 300-acre marsh and open-water complex managed for waterfowl production on Crescent Lake NWR. Like many of the shallow, non-alkaline Sandhills lakes, Smith Lake offers good water quality. With its associated wetlands and surrounding uplands, Smith Lake is the refuge's most productive waterfowl breeding area. Refuge regulations close the lake to public access each year during

the waterfowl breeding season, but the lake re-opens to public fishing access between November 1 and February 15. No boats or floating devices of any kind are permitted, but the lake offers shoreline access for open water fishing each fall until freeze up.

"When we first started, both Meagan and Jaden could watch the small bobber, usually placed on the line to let the small tear drop or jig and wax worm remain suspended about a foot or so above the bottom," said Powers. "They wouldn't even have to reel in the line



Located on Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Smith Lake is 25 miles north of Oshkosh on the western edge of the Nebraska Sandhills. Crescent Lake NWR's Smith Lake is often confused with Smith Lake Wildlife Management Area, another prime ice-fishing destination located in central Sheridan County.



Jaden enjoys fishing inside the family's pop-up shelter as the outside temperatures begin to cool.

on shallow Smith Lake – both almost instinctively began taking several steps back with their fishing rod and that was enough to pull the fish out of the hole. Small forceps or needle-nose pliers are useful to unhook the fish, and after replacing a wax worm, the kids are back fishing quickly.

"It's important to monitor their activities – snacks and hot chocolate help, and if they are obviously getting cold, we can quickly load everything up and head back to home or other warm area. This is where a pop-up or homemade ice-fishing shelter can be very useful. With a shelter, it isn't as important to wait for warmer days without wind."

Powers, Meagan and Jaden usually

begin their winter's ice-fishing after Christmas. "Later in the season we know that there is good, safe ice, and the longer days with sunshine usually provide warmer temperatures in the afternoon, which is when the fish are often biting best. I can leave work an hour or so early and we can be on the ice in about 30 minutes.

"Ice-fishing safety, especially with young anglers, is basic common sense – safe ice of at least six inches of clear, hard ice is adequate, but by waiting until after Christmas, we're usually assured of ice at least one foot in depth. Sandhills lakes and possibly other bodies of water may have springs and "muskrat holes" that can make localized, unsafe areas – that is when experienced

anglers with local knowledge can be very helpful. Safety gear, including a length of rope suitable to help someone that might fall through, provide additional insurance for ice-fishermen who want to be prepared for any emergency. As spring approaches, be sure to test the ice thickness and quality.

"We haven't used ice gripper attachments for the youngsters' snow boots and they get around very well. Other ice-fishing families with young anglers also carry along ice skates, sleds and other "entertainment" if the fishing slows – anything to keep the youngsters active and interested. Dressing in layers is important so the children remain warm, but other than their normal winter clothes, it really isn't necessary to invest in anything specialized."

"Ice-fishing is a great winter activity for families and everyone looking for a winter sport without costly equipment will find it easy to learn," said Powers. "And a tasty meal of fresh bluegill, yellow perch or crappie is a



Neil (with auger) and colleague Steve Knode of Gering bring home the catch and Jaden after an enjoyable afternoon on Smith Lake.

wonderful way to spend a winter evening at home and prepare everyone for another outing on the ice." ■

Editor's note: Nebraska families looking for suitable opportunities to introduce youngsters to ice-fishing close to home can obtain a Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Fishing Guide, which covers fishing regulations and has statewide maps and detailed listings of potential ice-fishing ponds and lakes open to public access. Numerous private land farm ponds and smaller lakes scattered across the state are available by landowner permission.

Maps of Nebraska lakes and additional information about ice-fishing are available on-line at www.OutdoorNebraska.org and by contacting the Commission's district offices. Fisheries personnel and other Commission staff can provide up-to-date fishing reports and directions to good ice-fishing locations in each of the Commission's districts.

"Ice-Fishing 101," which appeared in the December 2007 issue of

NEBRASKALAND, provides additional information on ice-fishing, with recommendations on equipment, fish location, and specific fishing techniques. Back issues of NEBRASKALAND are available at local libraries.

Panfish, including bluegill, yellow perch and crappie, are the most popular species for most Nebraska ice-fishing anglers, although northern pike, largemouth bass, walleye and other species are also caught through the ice.



Bluegill and a yellow perch represent popular panfish available across Nebraska.

Chorus Frog

Small Frog – Loud Voice

Text and photos by Michael Forsberg

This rarely seen but often heard grassland species is one of the earliest of all amphibians to emerge in the Nebraska spring and is a reminder of warm days to come.

If you walk out on a Nebraska prairie in early spring, while snow still lingers in grassy pockets of north-facing slopes and in the shadowed recesses of a farmer's woodlot edge, you may hear a raspy, rapidly repeating "cree-e-eeeek" that rises in pitch like the sound you heard as a kid when you took your Dad's black pocket comb and ran your thumbnail repeatedly down its teeth.

If you hear this sound, go ahead and follow it to its source, which will likely be found in a shallow wetland, farm pond, road ditch or lake. But don't try to walk right to it – once the water is in sight, you must keep your profile low, below the horizon line, and then zero in. Creep quietly toward the

shoreline on your hands and knees. If the sound stops, you stop. When it starts up again, move closer still. As you close in the last few feet, get even lower, sliding on your belly and pushing off with your toes until you are just at the water's edge. When you are so close that the sound is causing your teeth to rattle and your eardrums to pound, you

are close enough.

But don't be discouraged if you still can't see the maker of this sound. Be patient. Stare intently into the new, emergent green growing on the bank. Let your eyes go out of focus. You may see the blink of a golden eye first, or perhaps the tiny, yellowish throat expanding and contracting like someone sucking in and out of a half blown up balloon. There, barely large enough to cover your thumbnail, the tiny male chorus frog will be.

Rarely seen yet often heard, the chorus frog (*Pseudacris maculata*) is a diminutive, smooth-skinned frog whose voice signals the beginning of spring, much like the chainsaw buzz of cicadas mark the dog days

of late summer. It ranges from Canada's Northwest Territories to the Desert Southwest, and from the Central Rockies to the Great Lakes region. In Nebraska, it is found statewide.

At only 1½ inches long, the chorus frog is distinguished from other small frogs, such as cricket frogs and spring peepers, by its long body, short legs

and three dark bands running lengthwise down its back. Their overall color is highly variable, ranging from drab brown to red to bright green. Although a member of the tree frog family, the chorus frog is specifically adapted to grassland habitats and is one of the earliest of all amphibians to emerge onto the Nebraska prairie each spring.

Equipped with a biological "antifreeze" in their blood and tissues that keeps them from freezing to death, in Nebraska chorus frogs have been found emerging from hibernation habitat such as crayfish burrows and from under logs and rocks as early as February. They begin breeding in March and early April, about the time sandhill crane migration is peaking in the state. On a calm evening, the tiny male's breeding chorus sometimes mixes with crane calls and can be

heard even from a distance of a half-mile away.

Once a female chorus frog is bred, she will lay soft, gelatinous eggs in clusters of up to 300 that are attached to submerged vegetation in shallow water near the bank. While water temperature can be a limiting factor on egg and tadpole development, the eggs typically hatch in 14 days, and tadpoles metamorphose into froglets at the end of eight weeks. The quick completion of the frog's growth cycle is an advantage while breeding in wetlands that can quickly appear and just as quickly disappear on these drought-prone Plains.

As adults, chorus frogs are only found in water during the breeding period, which can last into early summer. They spend the rest of their lives in surrounding upland grasslands,

in areas where they can still find moisture. While most chorus frogs are never found far from wetlands, scientists have found some individuals over one-quarter of mile away from water in the non-breeding season.

Chorus frogs sing and feed mostly at night. Their diet consists of a variety of insects and other invertebrates, from tiny ants to moths to spiders. In turn, they also are prey to larger water birds like cranes and herons, game fish like bass and northern pike, and other creatures, including larger frog species, toads and numerous snakes.

Chorus frogs can live five years, but their seemingly long life belies the trouble for amphibians on the Plains and around the world today. By some estimates, half of all amphibian species could be lost in our lifetimes due to habitat loss, water pollution, climate

change and diseases such as chytrid fungus and ranavirus which can wipe out entire populations and is amplified by the effects of environmental degradation.

The continued plowing up and drainage of grasslands and wetland habitats, more frequent and extreme droughts caused by global warming, and persistent use of certain agrochemicals that can pollute surface and groundwater resources are all looming threats for chorus frogs on the Plains.

As species highly sensitive to changes in their environment, scientists here in Nebraska and abroad are increasingly paying close attention to frog and other amphibian populations, monitoring them as environmental indicators to help determine the relative health of our ecosystems that harbor the natural resources and diversity upon which all life depends. ■



As adults, chorus frogs are only found in water during the breeding season.

Birdwood Creek

a unique ecological diversity

Photos and text by Rocky Hoffmann

One of many naturally secreted Sandhills streams, the Birdwood winds its way south and east, sometimes snakelike, from its two branches, both originating in southwest McPherson County and culminating as one at its confluence with the North Platte River between Sutherland and Hershey. Birdwood and West Birdwood account for a mere 50 miles of stream, with each branch siphoning from the sandy sponge and contributing a significant flow below the forks.



Above: Wintering trumpeter swans wait out ice cover on their Sandhills nesting lakes and course the length of the creek daily, searching out its rich forage. Left: A pair of young red fox warm in the rising sun of a den entrance along Birdwood Creek.

Surrounded mostly by lofty native Sandhills prairie, vegetation along the banks of the creek varies considerably, providing an immeasurable value to wildlife. Scattered old-growth cottonwoods are few but distinct, towering above sandbar willow, peachleaf willow, indigo, sumac and plum. Upper reaches are dissected deeply and lined intermittently with Eastern red cedar, where beaver ponds stairstep the creek's path. Cattails and bulrush are common in the marshy meadows.



Above: Near the Birdwood's mouth between Hershey and Sutherland, a floral dissolve from Sandhills sparse grass and buckbrush to sultry Platte River entanglements provides a variety of color. Birdwood is the largest North Platte River contributor east of Lake McConaughy.

Left: Although mule deer (shown) are the predominant historical species to inhabit the Birdwood drainage, they now share the creek with an ever-increasing population of white-tailed deer.

Right: Year-round open water on Birdwood provides a haven for wintering mallards and Canada geese.





In winter, family groups of trumpeter swans stage with puddle ducks and Canada geese along the lower reaches of the creek. By early spring, the swans have returned to their nesting lakes, but sandhill cranes take their place for awhile. Greater prairie chickens and sharp-tailed grouse combine their chorus with songbirds, finding solitude in the higher grounds along with mule deer and pronghorn, while white-tailed deer haunt the rushes and deeper cuts. There are jackrabbits and cottontails as well as red fox, coyotes and bobcats in that balance, all living off and with each other, supported by the lifeblood of this subtle Sandhills stream. ■



Above: Spring migrating sandhill cranes have expanded their reach to cropfields along the lower Birdwood as well as the creek's shallow and open sandbars.

Left: A creek mostly hidden by lofty sand hills shines like a ribbon of silver at last light .

Right: As mystic as the creek itself, a tom turkey provides a fading glance in one of the few woodlots along Birdwood's banks.



Locked Up

Text by Doug Carroll, photos by Kathy Nelson

A spur of the moment drive through the woods results in a Good Samaritan encounter and a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

When Al and Kathy Nelson of Crofton decided to take their new Rhino for a drive on November 11, little did they know what excitement their test drive would bring.

"It's been quite an adrenaline rush," said Al.

Driving across the back of their 520-acre property, the two decided to visit a part of their land that, as Al put it, they "never go."

As the two drove across the head of a draw, they suddenly noticed a strange sight approximately 50 yards away – the bodies of two bucks lying side by side, antlers locked together after an apparent fight to the death.

Stopping the vehicle, they walked up to the fallen bucks and stood over them, examining the scene. Both bucks had lifeless eyes, said Al, and one looked and smelled like it had been dead for several days, its blackened tongue

sticking out the side of its mouth.

Al was examining the tangled antlers, when suddenly Kathy screamed and pointed: "That one's alive!"

Almost imperceptibly, the flanks of the smaller buck could be seen slowly moving in and out as the deer struggled to breathe.

Realizing that they first had to get the bucks untangled if the one had any chance at all to survive, the pair started flopping and twisting the two bucks back and forth, trying to figure out a way to unhook the tangled mass of antlers. All to no avail.

"It was almost like the antlers were welded together," said Al.

Ultimately, the Nelsons had to retrieve a tree saw from their cabin, cut one of the live deer's split brow tines, and break one of the dead deer's jaws to get the two deer apart.



Not once during the entire entanglement process did the live deer budge, said Al – it was just too worn out from dragging the dead deer around. That didn't change even after Al finished sawing the antlers loose: "We finally got them apart and the live deer didn't even move."

After rolling the deer onto its stomach so it could breathe easier, it took a half hour to regain its strength to raise its head at all, said Al. Knowing that the buck probably hadn't drank for several days and had to be thirsty, Kathy went to the cabin and soon returned with some bottled water.

"I thought it was probably stupid and a waste of time," said Al, "but I started pouring the water along the side of his face and after a few seconds he turned his head and started lapping at the water."

Soon it was back to the cabin for more water and a dog dish. Lifting its head slightly, the buck buried its muzzle into the water and drank two full dishes before laying its head back on the ground like a dog.

At that point the couple had spent about 2½ hours getting the deer untangled and giving it some water, so they decided the best thing to do was probably to leave it alone and let it finish recovering on its own. So they went back to the cabin, and after he helped coach a young girls basketball practice in Crofton that night, Al and a couple



of friends went to check on the buck. It was gone.

Al said it was quite an uplifting feeling to think about the good thing he and his wife had done that day, but alas, the story didn't have the happy ending they had been hoping for: The next day Kathy wanted to go back and see if they could find out how the buck was doing, and they unfortunately found it lying dead about 250 yards away from where they had left it. Apparently the ordeal had weakened the buck too much to survive.

"My heart was broken when we found that deer," said Al.

After calling local conservation officer Ross Oestman and explaining the whole situation, the Nelsons found out they could keep the bucks, so they delivered the head and antlers of both deer to a taxidermist, who's going to mount them just as they were first found using the pictures Kathy shot with her cell phone of the two deer locked together for reference.



Avid deer hunters, Al said he and his wife only had regrets for a few seconds after finding the deer, both very respectable animals that would have made any hunter proud. Al said the bigger of the two deer, a perfect 5-by-5, would have scored in the 165-170 range, while the smaller one, which had 11 points, would have scored in the low 130s.

"Both deer were really nice for this area," he said, estimating that the bigger deer probably weighed close to 300 pounds.

Al believes the big buck "probably just worked himself to death" dragging around the smaller buck, which may have lived longer because it wasn't expending as much energy while the big one was alive and moving. He said he'd always hoped to find a pair of bucks locked up like these two, but wished the outcome would have been different for the buck they had tried to save.

"I was hoping that I'd never find it again – that would have been the best story in the world!" said Al.

"It was quite an emotional run." ■

The Wildlife Conservation Fund

Nongame and endangered species need your help – donations accepted!

By Gerry Steinauer, Botanist, NGPC

Scrrounging is a way of life for Nebraska Game and Park Commission nongame biologists – an ornithologist, two mammalogists, a plant ecologist and a botanist (myself). We have learned to look for a couple hundred dollars here and a few thousand there until we find enough piecemeal funds for a project. Nongame species are native plants, wildlife and other organisms that are not hunted, trapped or fished. Although they make up the vast majority of Nebraska's biodiversity, funding for their conservation is seldom straightforward or easy to come by.

By law, the Commission cannot use money from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses on nongame species – it can only be used to directly help game species. Similarly, funds from the sale of Habitat Stamps and Aquatic Habitat Stamps, which are also required to hunt and fish, are used to purchase and manage habitat for game species, although these habitats often benefit native plants and nongame species as well. Which brings us to the Wildlife Conservation Fund, formerly known as the Nongame and Endangered Species Conservation Fund.

The Wildlife Conservation Fund is the Commission's most consistent funding source for nongame projects, primarily research, inventory and population monitoring. The money also helps fund education efforts such as the new Master Naturalist Program, which is designed to train volunteers to provide education, outreach and service for biodiversity conservation.

While license and stamp sales are the Commission's primary funding sources, bringing in several million dollars each year, the Conservation Fund, initiated in 1985, is almost totally supported through



PHOTO BY BOB GRIER

The swift fox (*Vulpes velox*) is on the state's endangered species list.

donations, primarily those made by individuals through the nongame "check-off" box located on state income tax forms. Donations to the Conservation Fund peaked in 1997 at nearly \$120,000, but have been declining since. Last year's donations were \$96,000.



PHOTO BY CORY GREGORY

Donations to the Conservation Fund are helping researchers determine key information about long-billed curlews.

Other funding sources for nongame species conservation in the state include the Nebraska Environmental Trust Fund (NETF), which is supported through

the state lottery, and the federal State Wildlife Grant (SWG) program. NETF funds are competitive, meaning one must write a grant and compete against others to get funds for a particular project. The federal government has awarded SWG funds the last several years, but continued SWG funding is not guaranteed – Congress must appropriate these funds annually and when budgets are tight, conservation funding is often the first cut. Both NETF and SWG grants require matching funds, so Conservation Fund dollars are often used as the match, allowing the Commission to leverage several times over any money that is donated to the fund.

Conservation Fund money is used for those species at greatest risk of disappearing from our state, threatened and endangered species such as the river otter, Topeka shiner and small white-lady's slipper orchid, but also on more common species we are trying to keep from becoming rarer. Examples of recent projects completed with Conservation Fund dollars include a rare plant survey on the central Niobrara River, a study of the recently discovered Platte River caddisfly (see "Platte River Caddisfly" August 2009 *NEBRASKALAND*), and support for the Lincoln Safari outdoor education program.

Another recent effort supported by the Conservation Fund is the Nebraska Long-billed Curlew Satellite Tracking Project, which is trying to identify the previously unknown migration routes and wintering habitat of curlews that breed in Nebraska. Two adult female long-billed curlews, one named Sandy and the other Bailey, were outfitted with satellite transmitters in Garden County in May 2009 and the tracking is ongoing.

Long-billed curlews (*Numenius americanus*) are North America's largest shorebird, standing nearly two feet tall. Named for their long, decurved

bill and "curluoo" call, long-billed curlews have a buff-colored body, tinged with pink or cinnamon, and long, blue-gray legs. Unfortunately, like many grassland bird species, curlew populations are in trouble – in 2007, their rangewide population was estimated at 123,500 individuals. Long-billed curlews nest in the Great Plains and Intermountain West and winter on the Gulf and Pacific coasts, as well as interior sites in Mexico and south Texas.

"Breeding bird surveys show curlews are a declining species with a long-term downward trend," said Joel Jorgensen, nongame bird program manager for the Commission. "Curlews require relatively large unbroken native grasslands for nesting and in Nebraska they nest in the Sandhills and the Panhandle, primarily north of the North Platte River. As native prairie is converted to cropland or developed, curlew habitat is lost."

Breeding curlews arrive in Nebraska from wintering sites by early April and most are nesting by late-April. Females generally lay four eggs in "nests" – lined scrapes on the ground – and both males and females incubate the eggs and defend the nest. The eggs hatch simultaneously and the young leave the nest a few hours after hatching. The chicks mature rapidly and are independent of the adults in about eight weeks. Both adults and young leave their Nebraska breeding grounds on their fall migration by late-August.

Until the tracking project began, the migration route and wintering grounds of Nebraska's breeding curlews were unknown to biologists. "We had one recovery on the Texas coast from a bird



PHOTO BY CORY GREGORY

banded in Nebraska in 1933, but that's it," said Jorgensen.

"It was easy to speculate that our birds headed to the Texas Gulf Coast vicinity, but speculation is one thing and solid data to back it up is another.

"Our curlews spend only a few months on their breeding grounds and the rest of the year they are somewhere else. To develop effective conservation strategies to preserve the birds here, we needed to know where these highly

mobile birds were going the rest of the year," said Jorgensen. "We may be doing everything right in Nebraska, the birds may have adequate breeding habitat and food sources, but if something is afoot elsewhere in their range, our efforts may be in vain. That's the reason for the study."

Cory Gregory, an Iowa State University graduate student, captured both Sandy and Bailey during their nesting attempts and fitted them with transmitters as part of his larger

statewide project to estimate breeding curlew numbers, nest and chick survival, and determine what kind of brood-rearing habitat they require. Along with the Commission, partners in the study include Iowa State University, the University of Nebraska, the Sandhills Taskforce and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

Satellite transmitters, a relatively new technology, use a Global Positioning System (GPS) to track migratory birds. The light-weight, solar-powered transmitters are attached to a bird's

back with a Teflon harness and cause little

impediment to movement. The transmitters attached to Sandy and Bailey sent signals that were downloaded daily by Gregory and Jorgensen and indicated that the birds left Nebraska on their fall migration in June after failed nesting attempts and ended up on the Texas-Mexico border several days later. Both birds appeared to have settled on inland wetlands or lagoons just a few miles from the Gulf of Mexico, but how long they will remain there is uncertain. At the time of this writing, signals had not been received from Bailey's transmitter for several weeks and Jorgensen feared it may have fallen off or become defective.

The Sandhills Taskforce and money from a State Wildlife Grant paid for the transmitters, but Wildlife Conservation Fund money was used to cover the cost of the satellite service, which must be subscribed to on a monthly basis and will likely run several thousand dollars by project's end.

Jorgensen said he was pleased with the study's results so far and happy that they were able to determine where Nebraska curlews are wintering, which ultimately might help biologists protect the species from further decline. He also said that without the Conservation Fund, which he's tapped into for several projects over the past couple of years, the curlew study and others like it might never have happened.

"The Conservation Fund is the only flexible money source I have access to. I don't have to write a grant to get it and I can use it as match to get other conservation dollars. I'm not sure what I would do without it." ■

Donations to the Wildlife Conservation Fund can be made through a check written to the fund and sent to the Commission at P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370.

Contributions to the fund can also be made by using the nongame check-off box found on state income tax forms. All contributions are tax deductible.



A Conservation Two-step

Summit Lake renovations help both fishing and hunting.

By Jeff Kurrus

The reason for a recent trip to 190-acre Summit Lake State Recreation Area (SRA) in Burt County was twofold: to witness ice-fishing on one of the state's most recently renovated lakes, and to view the ongoing habitat work being done to the area.

At a cost of more than \$1.1 million, in 2000 the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and other agencies did an aquatic habitat project at Summit Lake that focused on reducing shoreline erosion and sediment loading, eradicating rough fish, and restocking sport fish.

The restocking effort has led to greatly increased fishing success. The winter morning I visited, a number of anglers from the Nebraska Walleye Association (NWA), along with a larger contingent of other anglers, converged there for a day of ice-fishing.

"We mostly fish for panfish, bass and bluegills," said Todd Connsbrooke, one of the NWA anglers on the water. "When you find bluegill eight inches long and above, the word gets out quick."

Various patches of anglers on the ice proved Connsbrooke true. The part of the lake void of anglers, however, probably contained the most important contingent of people: Volunteers from the Burt County Pheasants Forever chapter, in cooperation with the Commission, were taking cedar trees that had been cut to improve pheasant habitat on the upland grounds surrounding the lake and placing them atop the ice between jetties near the south boat dock. The cedars, which had been degrading wildlife habitat, would provide excellent fish habitat following the spring ice melt.

This conservation two-step had started with the elimination of more than 150 cedar trees from a 30-acre section of the state recreation area by park superintendent Jason Grof. Volunteers then used ATVs to move the trees, some up to 30 feet tall, out onto the 18-inch-thick ice. Anchored by cinder blocks, these brush piles sunk two months later at ice-out and were fished by bluegill and bass anglers throughout the summer.

The Commission and Pheasants Forever also did a controlled burn at Summit Lake last summer to



Nebraska angler Joe McCallister holds a Summit Lake largemouth bass.

improve pheasant habitat, something that needed to be done, said Grof. "If you get a regular cycle of burning, you can keep these cedar trees in check and provide necessary pheasant habitat." Now the area is starting to recover, with a nice stand of big bluestem and other grasses coming back. "I'm also hearing a lot of pheasants and seeing a good many as well," said Grof.

More of the SRA will be burned this spring, but now it's time to fish – many of those 8-inch bluegill are even bigger, and there are more brush piles for anglers to target. If last year was any indication of how the NWA spends its winters, then Connsbrooke and company are probably near the water right now, sitting next to holes in the ice and preparing for a midday cookout on this hard water hotspot. ■



Summit Lake SRA is located 4½ miles west of Tekamah in Burt County. This SRA features hunting, fishing, camping and hiking opportunities.



Pheasants Forever volunteers use concrete blocks to sink recently cut cedar trees at Summit Lake SRA for fish habitat.

Open Fields and Waters

New program helping landowners and outdoorsmen alike.

By Jerry Kane

The Open Fields and Waters Program, a statewide, two-year pilot program of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, first began offering hunting and fishing access opportunities last fall, and it didn't take hunters long to take advantage of it.

"Our first big spike in use was especially noticeable during the November firearm deer season," said Kirk Nelson, an assistant director with the Commission. "It seemed like there were always people using the sites."

The focus of the program is to expand hunter and angler access to private lands by paying landowners to allow walk-in hunting and fishing opportunities on their enrolled land. The program is similar to the current Conservation Reserve Program-Management Access Program (CRP-MAP), but expands the habitat types beyond those enrolled in CRP-MAP, thus increasing opportunities for different kinds of hunting and fishing. For hunting, this program is focused on sites that have high-quality woodland or wetland habitat, which will complement the grassland/upland game focus of existing CRP-MAP.

During the first year of the program,

37,242 acres of land were enrolled, including 371 acres of ponds and lakes and 38 miles of streams. Enrolled acres are published in the Nebraska Public Access Atlas, which also includes other public areas, including CRP-MAP. These atlases are available at Commission offices and from most permit vendors.

"We expect a lot more interest this year since landowners have had a chance to talk about the merits of the program," Nelson said. "These kinds of programs always seem to gain traction in the second year."

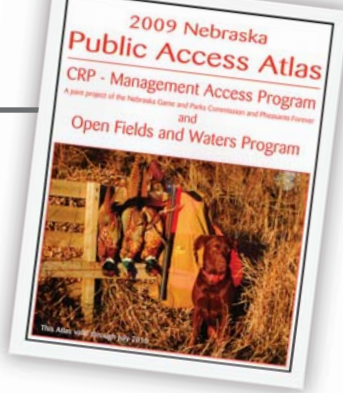
The program is open to landowners across the state, but is targeted toward land near major population centers and makes the assumption that not all access is of equal quality and value. This belief is reflected by larger payment rates being given to landowners who enroll higher quality wildlife habitat into the program where more people live.

A base of 10 acres of mature, deciduous woodland, 10 acres of huntable wetland or 40 acres of coniferous woodland is required to take part in the hunting portion of this program, and payment is based on type/quality of land, its location and the amount of access granted. Because

many landowners might not enroll their land if they have to give up the November firearm deer hunting season, landowners still can enroll acres at a reduced payment if they restrict access during the firearm deer hunting season. This type of arrangement still provides important opportunities for archery and muzzleloader deer hunting, as well as turkey and small game hunting. The program also provides for the enrollment of lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams to create expanded opportunities for anglers.

Of special note is the fact that those who enroll in the Open Fields and Waters Program are afforded protection through the Nebraska Recreation Liability Act, which states that landowners or tenants do not assume responsibility or incur liability for injury to any persons who enter land opened to public hunting and fishing under agreement with the state.

The Commission is enrolling land in this program now, but contracts for the program must be signed by June in order for the land to be included in next year's public access publication. Interested landowners should contact their nearest district Commission office for more information and to sign up. ■



THE NEED TO EXPLORE.

arts | public policy | humanities | environment | social issues



www.prairiefirenewspaper.com

PRAIRIE FIRE | newspaper
the progressive voice of the great plains

ATTRACTIONS/EVENTS

GOT PRAIRIE? We do! Prairie Plains Resource Institute is Nebraska born and dedicated to the people and landscape of the Great Plains. Since 1980 we've been planting prairies, getting kids outside and spending time with people on the land. For beautiful photos, calendar of events or to become a member, visit www.prairieplains.org or call (402) 694-5535.

WILDERNESS SURVIVAL CLASS - Start a fire with the bow-drill method, build a survival shelter, be introduced to primitive traps, cordage, flint knapping, edible and medicinal plants, water location and purification, and much more! Go to www.greatplainstracker.com.

BOOKS/PUBLICATIONS/VIDEOS

EXPLORE NEBRASKA art, history, culture and the great outdoors with a subscription to Nebraska Life Magazine. One year (six issues) for \$21 or two years (12 issues) just \$38. Phone (800) 777-6159, write us at 206 W Norfolk Ave, Norfolk NE 68702-0819 or visit www.NebraskaLife.com. Makes a great gift.

"CRIPPLED BY DOCTORS" by a Nebraska author. True story of 25 operations, 11 months in hospital, died once, ½ of heel amputated. Never told it might happen, but it did. Send \$12 to: Highwater LLC, Box 571, York NE 68467. Price includes postage/sales tax.

DOGS

PLUM CREEK KENNEL. German shorthairs, stud service, puppies and started dogs. Training for all pointing breeds. Specialize in training the handler as well as the dog. Wayne Clark, Percival, Iowa (near Omaha) (712) 529-4238, clarks1@iowatelecom.net.

DUCKDAWG RETRIEVERS - Raising exceptional hunting yellow and black Labradors. Puppies raised in our home. 30 month health guarantee. Stud service: GRHRCH UH DuckDawg's Eba Roll The Dice and GRHRCH UH McMac Magic Eyes A'Smilin MH - the first Grand Hunting Retriever Champions in Nebraska.

www.duckdawg.com Ron Green DVM and Libby Milroy, North Platte NE (308) 534-3659.

AT STUD: GRHRCH UH Platte's TNT Duckdawg Dozer MH. First yellow Labrador in the state of Kansas to earn his Grand, Upland and Master titles. Seventy pounds of muscle, exceptional marker and blind runner Dozer is available for breeding to approved females. Natural breeding requires a brucellosis test on females. Chilled semen available. Stud Fee \$600. Contact owner Tom Phillips at (785) 635-5776 or trainer/handler - Chris Jobman at (308) 249-0707, www.flatlanderkennels.com.

PREMIER GUNDOGS TRAINING KENNEL: Gundog training for all pointing breeds and hunting retrievers. Labrador retriever puppies with 30-month hip and eye guarantees. References gladly given. Dale and Kris Taylor: (402) 787-2048, www.premieryundogs.com.

FLATLANDER KENNELS INC. Bayard, NE Full-time retriever training facility for the serious hunter or AKC and HRC hunt tester. Trainer of Nebraska's first and only GRHRCH's! Super Retriever Series competitor and a member of Avery's Team Waterdog. Training available for all levels of hunt tests and gundogs. Chris Jobman: (308) 249-0707, www.flatlanderkennels.com.

FISH/FISHING

FISH FOR SALE. Catfish, largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, perch, crappie, bluegill, walleye, rainbow trout, grass carp, minnows. Pleasant Valley Fish Farm, 27851 U.S. Highway 83, McCook, NE 69001. (308) 345-6599.

NEBRASKA LAKE MANAGEMENT. Biological lake surveys, fish stocking, rough fish control, lake aeration, algae control, aquatic weed control. Rob Hofpar, Aquatic Biologist, licensed, insured and qualified. (402) 784-6005 Valparaiso - (888) 850-2460 www.nelakes.net.

FOOD/GIFTS/HOME

HOMEBREWING/BEER AND WINEMAKING. Fermenter's Supply, 8410 K Plaza, Suite #10, Omaha, NE 68127. Phone orders only, (888) 655-2739. Advice line (402) 593-9171. www.fermentersupply.com.

CABIN/BUILDING/HOME Design and Construction.

Full-line building materials. Schreier's Lumber Company - Verdigre, NE. "Over 100 years experience" schrlmbr@gpcom.net (402) 668-2624.

PHEASANT FEATHER FRAMED ARTWORK (8x10) Beautiful designs for home, office, special occasion gift or business. Call (402) 650-8770, www.pheathersartistry.com.

GUIDES/OUTFITTERS

CANOE - KAYAK - TUBE RENTALS on the beautiful Niobrara River with Dryland Aquatics at Sparks, Nebraska. Your Niobrara River Specialist. (800) 337-3119. www.drylandaquatics.com. info@drylandaquatics.com.

GUNS/SHOOTING/ARCHERY

GUNS - Browning, Benelli, Winchester, Ruger, etc. 1700 guns, buy-sell-trade (402) 729-6112, Bedlan's, Fairbury, NE 68352. www.bedlans.com.

OUTDOOR EQUIPMENT

IS PERFORMANCE IMPORTANT? For the finest canoes and accessories look to Great Plains Canoe Co., 205 Main, Springfield, NE 68059. Phone (402) 253-2000.

PHOTOGRAPHY

NEBRASKA WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHIC PRINTS. Matted. Go to inplainssight.homestead.com. "The more you buy, the quicker my wife can retire!"

PHOTOGRAPH NEBRASKA - Photography symposium featuring Joel Sartore and Michael Forsberg. Two days, four keynotes, eight breakout session topics. Lochland Country Club, Hastings, Nebraska. February 26 & 27, 2010. Register at www.photographnebraska.com.

VACATIONS/RESORTS

FOR FISHING AND HUNTING accommodations. Guided pheasant hunts. Jefco Inn, South Cornell St.,

Gordon, NE 69343 (308) 282-2935.

THE OLDE MAIN STREET INN. A historic bed and breakfast listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Beautiful dining room with fireplace. Featuring prime rib, buffalo, seafood, homemade soups, chilis and desserts. 115 Main Street, Chadron NE 69337 (308) 432-3380. www.chadron.com/oldemain.

DIAMOND B TROUT RESORT, Orchard, Nebraska. Lodge, cabins, spring-fed lakes, playground equipment, paddleboats. Great for families, groups, hunters. Book your cabin now! Call for brochure (800) 974-3002. www.diamondbtroutresort.com.

MILL IRON V LODGING has modern cabins for your vacation pleasure. We are located near Verdigre, NE in turkey country. Each cabin offers privacy, view and a birdwatcher's paradise. Stay with us for a COUNTRY EXPERIENCE. (402) 668-7488. www.milliron-v-lodging.com. jpeinrem@gpcom.net.

BIG BLUE RANCH & LODGE - Enjoy fishing, hunting, hiking, birdwatching and ranch adventures on 2000+ acre cattle ranch in southeastern Nebraska. Beautiful log cabin, with fireplaces, kitchens & big covered porches, overlooks 20-acre lake. www.bigblueranch.com (402) 730-3643.

ASPINWALL LODGING: Rural farmhouse located near Nemaha among the rolling hills of southeastern Nebraska. Three bedrooms, full kitchen, washer & dryer, TV. Situated close to Indian Cave State Park, historic Brownville, Game and Parks wildlife management areas, Missouri and Nemaha rivers, and much more. Open all year, accepting reservations, brochure available. (402) 883-2788.

HIGH PLAINS HOMESTEAD, Home of the Drifter Cookshack & Bunkhouse - An Old-West Cow-Town is slowly coming alive on the windswept prairie of northwest Nebraska. Rejuvenate your spirit through a wide variety of activities amongst the ruggedness and beauty that is only limited by your imagination. Popular activities include day family outings, bunkhouse cabin overnight stays, hunting, birding, stargazing, fossil hunting and the trails that are available for mountain biking & horseback riding. Great cowboy cookin' at the Cookshack. Visit: www.highplainshomestead.com.

Call: (888) 365-2592.

Classified Rates: 85¢ per word, minimum \$15. Closing: First business day six weeks before issue date. Classified ads are accepted on a first-come, first-served, space-available basis. Classified Ads,

NEBRASKAland Magazine, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370. Telephone (402) 471-5473. Fax: (402) 471-1984. E-mail: ngpc.classifieds@nebraska.gov. Ads are posted online at NebraskalandMagazine.com at no additional charge.

NEBRASKAland Now Offers Display Advertising...

Enhance your advertisement with photos, graphics and color!

Reach thousands of NEBRASKAland readers with your message through our display advertising program.

A limited number of spots are available, so call us today at (402) 471-5481 or e-mail

ngpc.advertising@nebraska.gov



"JIM SHOCKEY IN NEBRASKA"

Good Day, NEBRASKAland readers. As president of the Nebraska Safari Club, I would like to share this exciting news with you: world-renown outdoorsman Jim Shockey will be attending, as an exhibitor promoting his hunting opportunities around the world and as a guest speaker, the upcoming annual **Nebraska SCI Hunting and Outdoors Convention** at the beautiful Embassy Suites in LaVista, next to Cabela's exit 442 at I-80. Shockey will be hosting our Life Member breakfast, which



is open to our members as well as the general public. **We will be auctioning off a guided black bear hunt on Vancouver Island with JIM SHOCKEY as your guide.** This hunt will be filmed and may air on the Outdoor Channel! This is only one of 30 plus hunting and fishing trips that will be up for auction at our Friday and Saturday evening auctions. **The dates for this event are January 15th and 16th** — only two short months away. Come visit SCI and see what we are about and what we support, as well as meet some old friends and make new ones. Check out our web site at **www.nebraskasci.com** for

all of our contact information, as well as to print off registration forms to be an exhibitor or to register for the Life Member breakfast and the two day convention. Bring your wife, daughter or mother. We have a world known furrier and jewelry vendors that will be there, and a ladies champagne event and silent auction as well. There is something to do for the entire family. Please contact me at 402-690-3691 or gossfishing@aol.com with any and all questions. Hope to see you there!

Your Friend in the Outdoors,
Corey Goss
President of Nebraska SCI

YES,
this is
true!

One List You Want to be On!

Get the latest outdoor information and online special offers – sent right to your inbox.

Sign up for our e-mail today at **www.OutdoorNebraska.org**

NEBRASKA
— GAME — **PARKS** —

See You Out There

Follow us on:



Official Nebraska Government Website

NEBRASKA GAME AND PARKS COMMISSION

Wildlife Fishing Hunting State Parks Boating

Guides NGPC Programs Places to Go Licenses & Fees Other

home >>

Outdoor Calendar

Welcome to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

Get eNews Updates Quick Links

News Releases Outdoor Nebraska Radio Outdoor Nebraska Newspaper 2008 Annual Report NE Outdoors Call-In Talk Show Hunter/Angler Recruitment Development & Retention Plan SAND'S Outdoor Sports Assistance Program

Magazine Features

For more information about this great o

Hunting Feature

New Open Fields and Water
Landowners have the opportunity ponds, rivers and streams in the Commission's new Open Fields a be eligible to receive payment for and fishing on those areas.

General Feature

Deer Meetings Scheduled
A Hunters and landowners are invited meeting in December to discuss scheduled in each district of the explain and take questions on a management, deer damage and harvest, trophy management, and

Parks Feature

A Christmas Lottery Opens
The winter season at Eugene T. I Christmas Lottery. Performances Dec. 4-6, 11-13, 18-20, 26, 27-30



▲ Here is a photograph of three of my classmates after a 1970 waterfowl hunt at Mose's Hill slough, located northwest of Holdrege in Phelps County. They were all about 15 years old at the time, and this was their first goose. On the left is Mike Gleason, in the middle is Jeff Bomstad and on the right is John "Butch" Hoxmeier. The boys were shooting Alcan shells bought at Pamida when it was still located downtown.

— Ralph Wall, Lincoln, Nebraska



▲ This is a picture taken in 1950 of myself (LaVerne), age 12, and my brother Bob, age eight. We resided near Surprise, Nebraska.

The eight-pound carp was caught by Bob in the David City Lagoon using snail for bait.

I now reside in Omaha, Bob lives in Ravenna and we both still enjoy hunting and fishing together.

— LaVerne E. Vrbka, Omaha, Nebraska



◀ I caught this big catfish below the waterfall on the south fork of the Nemaha River near Dubois. Years ago the area was called Kinter's Ford and people would use it to get across the river, occasionally stopping in the middle to wash their cars. I found out about the area in 1947 and fished it a lot until 1963, often fishing all night. I don't have any idea how many fish I caught out of there, but it was unbelievable. The river was narrow there and there were three layers of limestone where the water ran over the falls, which were about four feet tall. If you looked at them from the right angle on a night with a bright full moon, you could even see a faint rainbow.

I had hooked this fish the night before, but was unable to land it before it dove under the limestone rock I was standing on and broke the line. So the next night my cousin and nephew came back with me and I was able to hook it again, this time successfully getting it to shore. The fish weighed about 35 pounds and still had my hook and about a foot and a half of line in the corner of its mouth.

Pictured from left to right is my cousin, John Clark; my nephew, Charles Hendrix; and myself.

Before I quit fishing there and the falls were still good, it was nothing to see 15 to 25 people fishing there, most of them leaving with their limit of catfish.

— Don Clark, Falls City, Nebraska

Send contributions to: Portraits from the Past, NEBRASKAland Magazine, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370. Photos should show people enjoying Nebraska outdoor activities, such as camping, boating, hunting or fishing, and must have been taken before 1970. We will give priority to unusual photos or activities. When possible, please include a story about the photograph and identify the people, places and approximate date it was taken. Photos will be returned.

Check for us at tax time!

River Otter, Threatened



Support Nebraska's nongame, threatened and endangered species

Nebraska is home to a diverse mix of wildlife, some of which need our help to survive.

Assist our efforts by looking for the 'A Check for Wildlife' symbol on your Nebraska tax return and making a donation. Or donate directly on our web site.

All donations, big or small, help preserve these native species for future generations.



Piping Plover, Threatened

NEBRASKA
— GAME  PARKS —

Visit us online at
www.OutdoorNebraska.org

See You Out There