

Published by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission since 1926

NEBRASKAland

May 2010



A white-faced cow in Boyd County is the only sign of light on a dreary day in May.
Photo by Jeff Kurrus.

Published by the
NEBRASKA
— GAME  PARKS —

NebraskalandMagazine.com
OutdoorNebraska.org

See You Out There.

NebraskalandMagazine.com

\$4.95



0 5>

INSIDE

The Unnatural History of the Northern Pike
Backyard Birding • Smith Falls - An Oasis on the Niobrara
A Sandhills Branding • Crick Fishin' • Curlews



NEBRASKAland

Volume 88, Number 4, May 2010

FEATURES

12 Tales of an ESOX - The Unnatural History of the Northern Pike
Myths and outright lies about northern pike abound. No matter how it's perceived, there are plenty of stories to back your point of view. TEXT AND PHOTOS BY JEFF KURRUS

20 Backyard Birding - A Love Story
A young newlywed couple learns the ins and outs of backyard bird feeding while discovering the beauty of their new, finely feathered friends. BY JODY KEISNER

22 A Sandhills Branding
Unless you live near a ranch, there's a good chance you've never seen a cattle branding. Here's a quick look at one of the Sandhills' most necessary traditions. PHOTOS BY BILL HAGER

28 Crick Fishin'
Protecting your secret fishing place can be difficult – but keep trying. BY ZANE DICKENSON

32 Long-billed Curlew - Mysterious Shorebird of the Sandhills
Unlike most shorebirds, long-billed curlews nest in grasslands during the breeding season. Research is revealing more about their time in Nebraska. TEXT BY CORY GREGORY

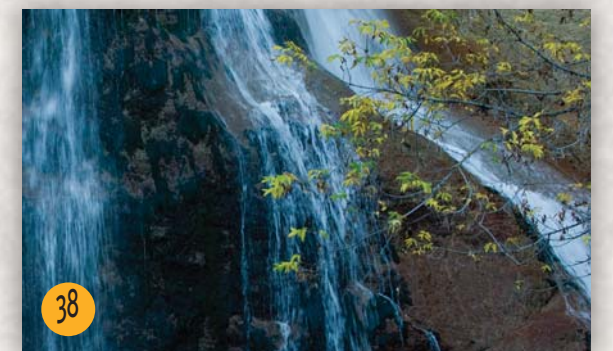
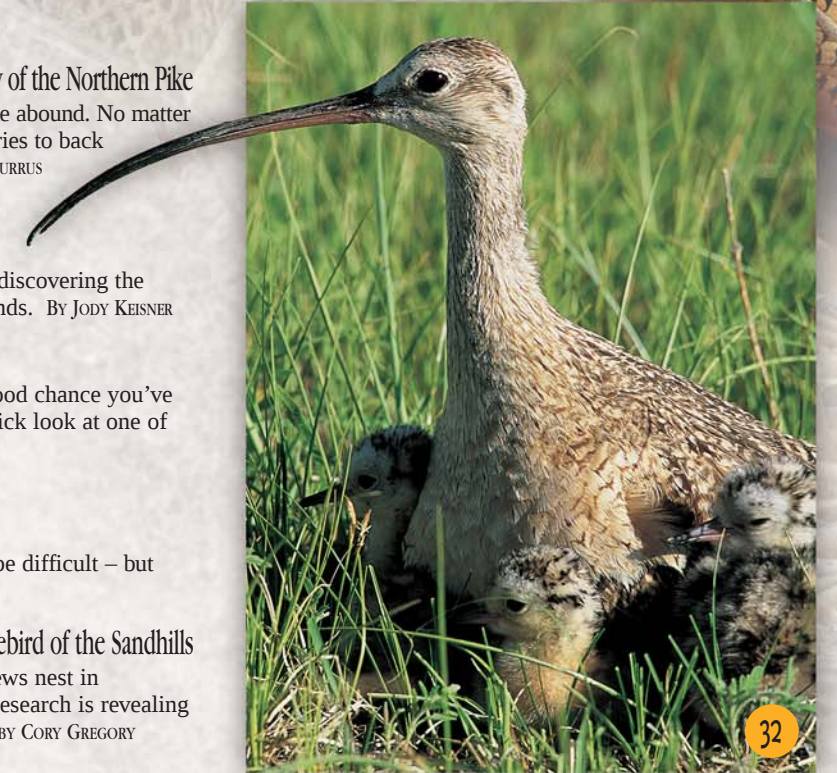
38 Smith Falls - an Oasis Along the Niobrara
While Nebraska comes up on the short end competing in the realm of vertical natural wonders throughout the country, on the Great Plains, Smith Falls's delicate cascade of water over rock is certainly a contender. TEXT AND PHOTOS BY JON FARRAR

DEPARTMENTS

Comment	4
Mixed Bag	6
In the Field	44
Step Outside	45
Outdoor Update	46
Classifieds	48
Portraits from the Past	50

Cover: A northern pike is landed at the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge's Clear Lake in Cherry County. See story on page 12. Photo by Jeff Kurrus.
Opposite: Nonnative but extremely common, ox-eye daisies line Highway 370 between Bellevue and Gretna last May. Photo by Jeff Kurrus.

NEBRASKAland (VOL. 88 / NO. 4, 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

Published by the
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

Director:
Rex Amack

Assistant Directors:
Roger Kuhn, Kirk Nelson, Sam Sidner

Commissioners

Chairman:
Jerrold Burke, Curtis

Vice Chairman:
Mick Jensen, Blair

2nd Vice Chairman:
Ron Stave, Waterloo

Dr. Mark Pinkerton, Wilber
Dr. Kent Forney, Lincoln
Lynn Berggren, Broken Bow
Rex Fisher, Omaha
Mark Spurgin, Paxton
Norris Marshall, Kearney

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:
For advertising information contact
Larson Enterprises
e-mail dave@larsonent.com
or call (515) 440-2810

NEBRASKA GAME & PARKS

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-NEB-
LAND (632-5263), or go online to: NebraskaLandMagazine.com.



We Get Around

I just wanted to tell you that the story you ran about the locked-up bucks my wife and I found (January/February 2010) continues to surprise me. My brother was in Sterling, Colorado, and a friend of his came up and showed him the article. I did not realize so many people get this magazine. Thank you!

Al Nelson
Crofton, Nebraska

It's something that I often forget, but yes, the magazine does travel a bit – NEBRASKAland has subscribers in every state, as well as 16 foreign countries. Apparently there are a lot of former residents and visitors that still want a taste of Nebraska. Thanks again for sharing your story with our readers.
– The Editor

Anglers' Pet Peeves

Jeff – Nice article in NEBRASKAland! I would add a pet peeve that I've had for 20 years: As a bank fisherman, on several occasions I've cast live bait for northerns at DeSoto Bend, Calamus, Grove Lake and others. I leave the bait on the bottom, put the reels in free spool, clip bobbers on the line and wait. Then the hotshots in bass boats cruise by, pitching lures at the bank and retrieving. There are some that feel they have to cover every inch of shore-line. Consequently, if I only had a buck for every time one of these jerks has snagged my line with his lure ... I'd buy us both lunch. Why some people can't respect others and allow some room is beyond me!

John Jordison
Palmyra, Nebraska

One thing that I am always critical of when I am bank fishing is not to get too close to someone else. I make sure to stay at least two casting lengths from

the person next to me if I can, but this doesn't always work if you're in an inlet or outlet area. Just a couple of others:

- 1) If everyone could take an empty plastic bag in and fill it with trash on the way out, we would all enjoy nature that much more.
- 2) Don't leave fish or fish parts on the bank. Pack it out as you would trash.
- 3) If you're an able-bodied angler, don't fish in the handicapped areas. Have a great day in the outdoors, Monte Deatrich Thornton, Colorado

NEBRASKAland Visitor Letters

We want to thank all 194 readers that sent e-mails and letters for last issue's visitor, an American dog tick (Dermacentor variabilis) on page 25 (see page 11 for the winner, rules and next month's hint). Here are just a few of the many wonderful responses we received:

I have found the visitor on page 25 of the April 2010 issue of NEBRASKAland. It is a female American dog tick (Dermacentor variabilis).

What a fitting month to put this arachnid into the magazine. Thanks for the reminder to mix up a batch of homemade insect repellent:

HOMEMADE TICK REPELLENT
(Suggested by the USDA Forest Service)
2 cups white vinegar
1 cup Avon Skin So Soft bath oil
1 cup water
1 T. eucalyptus oil
Put the mixture in a spray bottle. Use spray before going into areas where ticks are apt to be present.

Thanks,
David Gloe
Omaha, Nebraska

I love the new "visitor" contest in NEBRASKAland - it has changed the way I read my favorite magazine! I used to thumb through to take a look at the photos, then go back and read it cover to cover. My new routine has added finding the visitor between those steps.

This month's visitor is a tick located on the green fishing lure near the center

of the photo on page 25.

Thanks for producing such a top-notch publication that highlights the best of Nebraska.

Jeremy Phillips
Seward, Nebraska

Just received my April 2010 issue and had to once again jump on the opportunity to find this month's 'visitor' – the American dog tick camouflaging itself as a dot on the center dry fly.

Have always enjoyed the excellent articles and photography that the NEBRASKAland staff produces. When it arrives each month, it's always the first piece of mail that I seek out to read. Having been a lifelong hunter and angler, I find this month's visitor to be quite timely with spring turkey (ie. tick) season soon to begin. I have utilized much of the information from past issues in my teachings as a NGPC Aquatic and Hunter Education volunteer instructor.

Keep up the excellent work – I'm looking forward to next month's 'visitor' challenge.

Kirk Gunnerson
Lincoln, Nebraska

A female American dog tick (Dermacentor variabilis) is one of the most frequently encountered ticks and is sometimes known as the wood tick. The larvae and nymphs feed on small warm-blooded animals such as mice and birds. The adult American dog tick will feed on humans and medium to large mammals, such as raccoons and dogs.



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

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

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

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

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

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

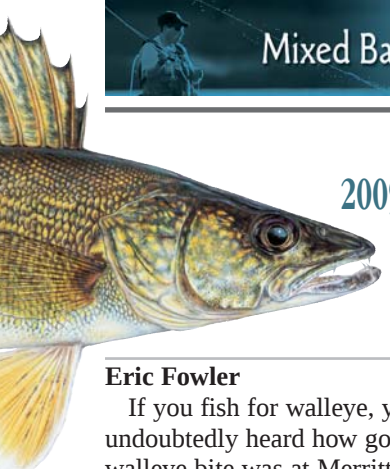
World Wide Web site:
www.OutdoorNebraska.org

Conservation Officers by Region

Panhandle	City	Phone (308)	Northeast	City	Phone (402)
Officer			Officer		
Jim Zimmerman (Sup.)	Gering	763-2940	Tom Zimmer (Sup.)	Norfolk	370-3374
Scott Brandt	Gering	631-0663	Dale Davis	Bassett	760-0712
Heath Packett	Gordon	360-0682	Steve Oberg	Columbus	910-3366
Dennis Thompson	Ogallala	289-0755	Daniel Roberts	Fremont	719-1108
Dan Zuehlke	Ogallala	289-3399	Jon Reeves	Kennard	889-8508
Doug Pollard	Oshkosh	778-7101	Marion Shafer	Norfolk	992-7590
Frank Miller	Valentine	(402) 389-0444	Pat George	O'Neill	340-0787
Dan Kling	Harrison	430-0572	Tim Williams	Neligh	929-0051
			Cory Krause	West Point	380-6410

Southwest	City	Phone (308)	Southeast	City	Phone (402)
Officer			Officer		
Roger Thompson (Sup.)	N. Platte	535-8025	Duane Arp (Sup.)	Gretna	332-2965
Ray Dierking	Brkn. Bow	870-0322	Sean McKeenhan	Ashland	521-0159
George Sund	Cambridge	655-0028	William Krause	Auburn	274-8063
Michael Thome	Cozad	529-8146	Mike Luben	Colton	443-6392
Matt Andrews	Elwood	746-2418	Douglas Kramer	Lincoln	890-6465
Dirk Greene	Imperial	882-0015	Dina Barta	Lincoln	890-6463
Virgil Gosch	McCook	340-2440	Stacey Lewton	Lincoln	890-7140
Dudley Sorensen	N. Platte	530-0016	Levi Krause	Louisville	949-0593
Rich Routh	Rep. City	920-0367	Russell Mort	Nebr. City	209-1506
			Dan Evasco	Papillion	616-5961
			Jeff Clauson	Waterloo	658-7057

South-central	City	Phone (308)	Administration	City	Phone
Officer					
Jerry Pecha (Sup.)	Kearney	865-5327	Ted Blume (Adm.)	Lincoln	471-5531
Jeff Jones	Clay Center	(402) 762-5022	Craig Stover (Asst.)	Lincoln	471-5532
Terry Brentzel	Doniphan	(402) 469-5795	Wes Loos (Asst.)	Lincoln	471-5591
Randy Pomplun	Fullerton	550-0489	Rod Loos (Asst.)	Ogallala	(308) 284-8056
Darin Gress	Hebron	(402) 768-8665	Murray Johnson	Lincoln	471-5003
Dale Johnson	Kearney	440-3847			
Robert Finke	Milford	(402) 947-1363			



2009 a Record Year for Walleye at Merritt

Eric Fowler

If you fish for walleye, you undoubtedly heard how good the walleye bite was at Merritt Reservoir near Valentine last summer. How good was it? From May through August, anglers caught about 74,000 walleyes and took 28,000 of those fish home.

Those estimates were calculated in an angler creel survey conducted at the lake. For comparison, the last creel survey conducted at Merritt in 2006 estimated that anglers caught about 4,800 walleye and kept 1,600. Of the creel surveys conducted since 1991, only 1999 came close to the total catch, with 58,000 fish caught but only 5,200 kept. More fish were harvested in 2009 than in the last seven survey years combined, including the previous record of 7,800 in 2000.

Zac Brashears, a Commission biologist who works and fishes at Merritt and other north-central Nebraska waters, said anglers he spoke with told him the fishing was “the best they’ve ever seen,” especially for fish between 22 and 28 inches in length.

Brashears said several factors played into the record catch. Timely rains and a canal shutdown for repairs meant less water needed to be released for irrigation, and the reservoir dropped only seven feet rather than the normal 20-foot decline. That kept aquatic vegetation, a favorite early-season habitat of walleyes in the lake, flooded all summer, and allowed anglers to target fish in or near that habitat longer. That factor, combined with cooler-than-normal weather, extended a bite that normally tapers off in July well into August.

So what can anglers expect this year? “It would be hard to maintain that catch and harvest rate again in 2010, but fishing should be good again, not only for walleye, but also for a number of other species throughout the year,” Brashears said.

Of course, they do call it fishing and not catching, so you just never know.

See you out there.



PHOTO BY PAT MINGARELLI

What Do Fawns Eat?

Pat Mingarelli

Late spring is a time for an abundance of new life. The trees have taken on a lush green color and wildflowers have begun to bloom. The animal kingdom is bursting with new life as well, including white-tailed deer fawns.

Most fawns in Nebraska are born at the end of May or in early June after a 200-day gestation period. The majority of does give birth to twins, while some give birth to triplets. However, younger does usually have single births. On average, there are 140 fawns born per 100 doe in Nebraska.

At birth, the mothers allow the fawns to suckle not milk, but colostrum. Colostrum is produced by all mammals before they produce milk. It is especially rich in antibodies that are called immunoglobulins, which are normally found in the blood of vertebras. These antibodies provide newborn fawns with their first immunity, since their own immune system is not yet active.

After about 36 hours, the doe begins to produce strictly milk. Deer’s milk is about 10 percent milk fat – a high fat content compared to cow’s milk, which is roughly three percent fat. This high fat milk is needed to help take a fawn from five to seven pounds at birth to the 80 to 85 pounds it will need to be before winter sets in. Milk will be the fawn’s only food source for two to three weeks until it begins to nibble on leaves and grasses.

At one month, a fawn’s diet is mostly vegetation and just partially milk as it transitions into eating an adult deer diet. Nebraska deer survive on native plants, including many wooded plants and non-woody, broad-leaved plants, grasses, sunflowers and a variety of nuts. Also, in some areas of the state corn can make up to 40 to 50 percent of the year-round diet for deer.

Fawns will gradually increase their intake of these foods and, by week 12, a fawn’s stomach is fully developed. Most are fully weaned by that time and are ready for the winter months that lie ahead.

Crow’s Sloppy Joes

Megan Crow

1 lb. ground venison
 ¾ cup ketchup
 1½ Tblsp. prepared mustard
 ½ cup diced onion
 ¼ cup brown sugar
 1 tsp. red pepper flakes
 1 (10.5 ounce) can condensed French onion soup
 ½ tsp. coarse ground pepper
 ¼ tsp. garlic salt
 ¼ tsp. liquid smoke
 Brown ground beef and diced onion. Mix in ketchup, mustard, brown sugar, garlic salt and black pepper. Pour mixture into crockpot and stir in french onion soup, red pepper and liquid smoke.

Cover and cook on low for five hours. Serve over hamburger buns.



NEBRASKA Pheasants Forever & Quail Forever LANDOWNER HABITAT TOURS

May 20, 2010	Grassland Management to Improve Grazing Lands	8:30 to 4:00 - Franklin – Franklin County Fairgrounds
May 22, 2010	Wildcat Hills Tour	9:00 to 3:00 MST - Gering – Wildcat Hills Nature Center
May 2010	Prescribed Burning	TBA - Maywood – Veterans Hall
June 18, 2010	Quail and Pheasant Management	9:00 to 4:00 - Wolbach – Community Center
June 22, 2010	Plant ID and Habitat Management Workshop	10:00 to 3:00 - St. Paul – The Gathering Place
June 24, 2010	Pheasant and Quail Management	1:00 to 5:00 - Humboldt – Fireman’s Hall
June 24, 2010	Quail Management	10:00 to 3:00 - Curtis – Curtis Cattle Company
June 26, 2010	Do’s and Don’ts of Pheasant and Quail Management	9:00 to 2:00 - Alexandria – US Post Office
June 29, 30, 2010	Plant ID and Grazing Management	TBA - Gering – Gering Civic Center
June 30, 2010	Pheasant Management	9:00 to 2:00 - Trenton – USDA Office
July 10, 2010	Plant ID and Habitat Management Workshop	10:00 to 3:00 - Wood River – Derr House
July 14, 2010	Pheasant and Quail Management	9:00 to 4:00 - Tecumseh – Hickory Ridge WMA
July 22, 2010	Prescribed Burning	10:00 to 3:00 - Scottsbluff – North Platte NRD
July 29, 2010	Cedar Tree Removal and Control	10:00 to 3:00 - Burwell – Valley View Campgrounds
August 19, 2010	Rangeland Management	9:00 to 2:00 - Broken Bow – Huckleberry’s Hideout
Sep. 14, 2010	Quail Management	10:00 to 3:00 - St. Paul – The Gathering Place

Landowner Tours for Better Habitat
 WILDLIFE BIOLOGISTS FROM ACROSS THE STATE WILL BE HOSTING A SERIES OF HABITAT TOURS THIS YEAR. TOURS ARE DESIGNED TO DEMONSTRATE HABITAT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES, AVAILABLE CONSERVATION PROGRAMS AND HOW TO CREATE THESE RESULTS ON YOUR OWN PROJECTS.

NEBRASKA GAME & PARKS

PHEASANTS forever The Habitat Organization

QUAIL forever The Habitat Organization

Nebraska Environmental Trust

FOR DETAILS AND TO REGISTER: WWW.NEBRASKAPF.COM

A Look Back - Spring 1956

Jeff Kurrus

Readers in the spring of 1956 were waving goodbye to the sandhill cranes, who had once again passed through on their migratory flight through central Nebraska. As the cranes departed, *Outdoor Nebraska* featured Bud Pritchard's "Wildlife in One Reel," while also writing about some of the same ventures as people do today. In Bruce McCarraher's "Northern Pike?" he wrote, "... it must be assumed that the northern pike exhibits a rather unique place in the North American sport fishery, inasmuch as it is either an extremely popular fish or greatly disliked," which is a similar notion found in this month's article by associate editor Jeff Kurrus, entitled "Tales of an Esos."

Also in that issue, biologists then were asking questions that have resonated in recent times, including George Schildman's "Can We Help the Bobwhite's Plight?" and Dan Heyl's "Have our Pheasants Reached the Bottom?" Plus, the recent history of walleye stocking in Nebraska's western reservoirs was covered, as was programs to improve fishing in Nebraska and nature notes on brown trout.

To read both 1956 articles about two of Nebraska's upland bird species, log on to NebraskalandMagazine.com and click on "A Look Back."

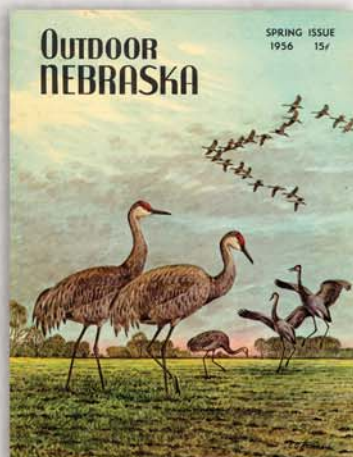


PHOTO BY BOB GRIER

Party With the Stars

Kelsea Nore

When people think of Nebraska, they often conjure up images of wide-open stretches of land. The same can be said of the state's skies, and the north-central part of the state is one of the best stargazing areas in North America, with a very low level of light pollution.

Several years ago, the Prairie Astronomy Club of Lincoln and the Omaha Astronomical Society came

together to create what is known as the Nebraska Star Party, which this year will be holding its 17th annual event August 8-13 at Merritt Reservoir, approximately 27 miles south of Valentine.

This weeklong event welcomes stargazers of every level, and includes a children's program and field classes to educate beginner astronomers. Cletus Baker, publications director of The Nebraska Star Party, said "attendees continue to be amateur astronomers

who bring their own telescopes and a thorough knowledge of the skies, but more and more folks are coming for the opportunity to learn and look through the wide variety of instruments on the field, ranging from binoculars to some of the largest telescopes in private hands."

For more information, visit www.nebraskastarparty.com.

Recycling Fishing Line

The Nebraska Fish & Game Association (NEFGA), in cooperation with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and other local agencies, is launching a statewide fishing line recycling program to help reduce environmental damage caused by discarded monofilament fishing line. Collected line will be sent to the Berkley Conservation Institute (BCI) in Spirit Lake, Iowa, which has

recycled more than nine million miles of fishing line since 1990.

Recycled fishing line, combined with other materials, is used to create aquatic habitat structures that help rejuvenate older bodies of water lacking natural cover essential to the growth and development of healthy fish populations. The fishing line recycling bins are constructed from three-foot sections of white PVC tubing and will be mounted on posts or existing structures near boat ramps and fishing piers. Bins will also be placed in local bait and tackle shops.

The NEFGA is looking to partner with other outdoors-related organizations and retailers to acquire funding to underwrite the costs of constructing, installing and servicing additional fishing line recycling bins.

Anyone interested in sponsoring a fishing line recycling bin should contact Steve Wagle at Steve.Wagle@nefga.org.

Nebraska Outdoor Expo

This year's version of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's popular Nebraska Outdoor Expo will be held

May 15th from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. at the Fort Kearny State Recreation Area near Kearney.

This free family event is designed for everyone from novice to seasoned outdoor enthusiasts and features a variety of activities, including fishing and bowfishing, shotgun and air rifle ranges, a 3-D archery range, kayaking, seminars on a variety of topics, including predator calling, fish cleaning and turkey hunting, and a marketplace where vendors and exhibitors will represent different sectors of the outdoors.

In addition to these offerings, there were also be adult and youth divisions for both the Cabela's Outdoor Challenge event and a s'more eating contest, as well as a Dutch over cookoff where Expo visitors can vote for their favorite recipe.

To find out more about the Expo, log on to its web site at www.NebraskaOutdoorsExpo.org.

There is no cost to attend the Nebraska Outdoor Expo, but an annual or daily park permit will be required on all vehicles entering the park.



PHOTO COURTESY OF NEBRASKA FISH & GAME ASSOCIATION

See You Out There ... But Where?



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

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

Explore the Science of Life



Photo by Carol Rogers

Water Science

Explore, through the School of Natural Resources, how the earth's water is impacted by drought, water rights, toxic algae blooms, and endangered species issues and create solutions to protect and allocate this resource.



University of Nebraska-Lincoln College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources
103 Agricultural Hall • Lincoln, NE 68583-0702 • 1-800-742-8800 ext. 2541
casnr.unl.edu • casnr@unl.edu

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln is an equal opportunity educator and employer with a comprehensive plan for diversity.



Officer's Notebook

Slow to Learn

Many years ago when I was stationed in the Lincoln area, I was assigned to work the south Salt Valley Reservoirs. It was Memorial Day weekend, and I was at Bluestem Reservoir. There was a lot of camping activity and I was in an area on the southwestern side of the reservoir doing routine patrol work. I happened to notice vehicle tracks around a guard post that was meant to keep vehicles out of that specific area.

There were signs posted stating that vehicles were to stay on roadways and in parking lots. The terrain where the tracks led was hilly, with quite a few trees and tall grass. I followed the tracks on foot and hadn't gone too far when I came upon the vehicle along with its owner, who had set up a camp for his family away from the crowd and all the hustle and bustle. I issued him a citation for having his vehicle in an unauthorized area and directed him to remove the vehicle.

The following holiday, Independence Day, I happened to be patrolling the same area and noticed a bright reflection coming from a group of

trees in the vicinity of where I had issued the citation the previous holiday. It was quite away further in from the parking lot where I first saw the tracks Memorial weekend. I didn't give it much thought at the time, but later I was in the area and took a hike to where I'd seen the sunlight reflecting off something. Turned out that it was a windshield – the *same* windshield of the *same* vehicle who's owner I had issued a citation to the previous holiday. He pretty much knew the drill the second time around, so things went a little faster. His only comment was "I thought I hid it better this time."

Before we parted, I advised him that we had one more major holiday left that summer, that I would be working it and I would still have an ample supply of "ticket books" at my disposal. He assured me that he had learned his lesson the second time around.

I made it a point to check Labor Day weekend, but did not encounter my slow-to-learn "friend."

— Jerry Pecha, Conservation Officer, Kearney



Virginia Creeper

Kelsea Nore

"Leaves of three, let them be," is a common warning to those spending time hiking trails or working in the garden. The five-leafed Virginia creeper can cause the same reaction in people who are more partial to the affects of

poison ivy or sumac. The oxalate crystals in the plant's sap cause skin irritation, especially in those who are susceptible to poison ivy. While some may not develop a skin rash, the plant is extremely toxic if eaten. Dark blue berries appear on the vines in the late spring. However, the fruit is not harmful to birds

and other animal wildlife. Virginia creeper also blooms with small white-green flowers in the spring, though it is for the leaves that many choose to

cultivate this plant.

Many use this deciduous plant as ground cover or to create an ornamental cover over fences and outdoor walls. Virginia creeper is dark green in the summer but blushes in several shades of red early in the fall. This perennial grows rapidly, making it an excellent climbing plant, but only if one is willing to put forth the effort to maintain the plant with regular pruning. The tendrils of this vine are 'adhesive-like' (imagine tiny suction cups). There are incidents of the tendrils climbing into the tiny cracks in stone foundations or brick walls. Also, if the plant latches on to other vegetation, such as a neighboring tree, it will invade and take over its host. Be warned – Virginia creeper is not easy to remove. Those wishing to get rid of the plant achieve their desired results only through time and repeated cuttings of the base stem.

The attractive colors and quick growth of the plant are winsome qualities but Virginia creeper is also a very hardy plant. Originating within the borders of its namesake state,

the *parthenocissus quinquefolis* prospers in over 40 states and in Canada. It will grow in full sun and partial shade and can withstand periods of drought. In Nebraska, it will grow just as easily in the Sandhills as it would in a Beatrice backyard. The only question is: Do you want it there?

Can't Beat the Drum

Elizabeth Mack

Nebraska waters are populated with some of the most diverse fish species any angler could hope for, and the freshwater drum (*Aplodinotus grunniens*) is a favorite of many fishermen. The freshwater drum's common names

include sheepshead, croaker, silver perch, gaspergou (goo) and grunter. The croaker and grunter names come from the drum's ability to produce grunting sounds with specialized muscles that vibrate against their swim bladders, a sound associated with spawning activity. Native Americans referred to drum as buffalofish because of how similar their grunts sound to a buffalo.

In addition, drum also possess exceptionally large inner ear bones called otoliths. These marble-sized bony structures assist the fish in maintaining balance. Fishermen often keep these ear bones as good luck pieces, and Native Americans once used otoliths for jewelry as well as currency. Numerous otolith bones have been found around old Indian settlements.

Drum have the largest latitudinal range of any freshwater fish in North America. According the Greg Wagner, Public Information Officer with Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, the freshwater drum was originally found in Nebraska only in the Missouri River and the lower reaches of its larger tributaries. "After stockings in 1936, the freshwater drum became established in waters across the state," Wagner said.

The bottom-feeding drum prefer backwaters or areas with slack current and are primarily active at night. One great spot for drum

fishing, and a favorite of Wagner's, can be found in the lower Elkhorn River near Waterloo, where drum are abundant. Many areas across the state boast an abundance of freshwater drum, including state records of 23- and 29-pounders from the Missouri River just below Gavins Point dam in northeastern Nebraska.

Although some anglers are turned off at the sight of a drum because of their dank smell and mucus lining, the drum has become a popular catch for many commercial fishermen and provides a major source of income. According to Andrew Rypel, a researcher at the University of Mississippi's biology department who has done extensive research on drum, commercial demand for drum is typically low; however, Rypel explains, "because of their high abundance in many waterways, they can make up a very high proportion of a commercial harvest, even though they are not targeted." Commercial harvest in the Mississippi has been over 300,000 pounds each year in the past decade alone.

You may be eating drum and not even know it. Stoller Fisheries in northwestern Iowa processes a high volume of drum, what they refer to as "underutilized" fish. The drum, along with carp and other rarely targeted fish, are regularly used in dehydrated soup bases and as fish stocks.

Once the temperatures begin to warm, freshwater drum will become active and move in schools to shallow waters. If you happen to catch one of these fierce fighters, Wagner recommends frying them up in Cajun seasoning. You won't be disappointed.

Junior Duck Stamp Winner

The Best of Show at this year's Nebraska Federal Junior Duck Stamp Contest was awarded to 15-year-old Emily Tolliver of McCook, whose acrylic painting of a pair of Canada geese was selected from more than 900 entries received from across the state.

Tolliver's artwork was sent on the National Junior Duck Stamp Competition and will be used for next year's Nebraska state waterfowl stamp.

Turpin Time

Dick Turpin

Now I know old newspapers have been used for everything from birdcage liners to fire starters. They can also help freshen up your cooler. Sometimes them coolers get an odor to them. Just take some newspaper, wad it up...stuff that newspaper in there, get it stuffed pretty full and leave that until your next trip. That paper just sucks that odor right out of there.

You can also freshen up your vehicle by using scented laundry dryer sheets. Man, they smell good. What I do with them is place them around my truck on the floor, up in the vents, in the defroster so that air flows through there. This old pickup has a lot of memories for me and the missus. If I get this old thing smelling good again, I might ask her out for an ice cream cone ... take her out for a little ride. ■



NEBRASKAland Visitor Winner and Hint

Last issue's winner of the NEBRASKAland Visitor drawing was Gene Backemeyer of Murdock, who found the **American dog tick** on page 25.

Readers are encouraged to contact NEBRASKAland within 10 days after this issue's publication with the correct page number and name of this issue's "Visitor" – an insect or bug found in Nebraska that just happened to find its way onto one of the pages of our publication.

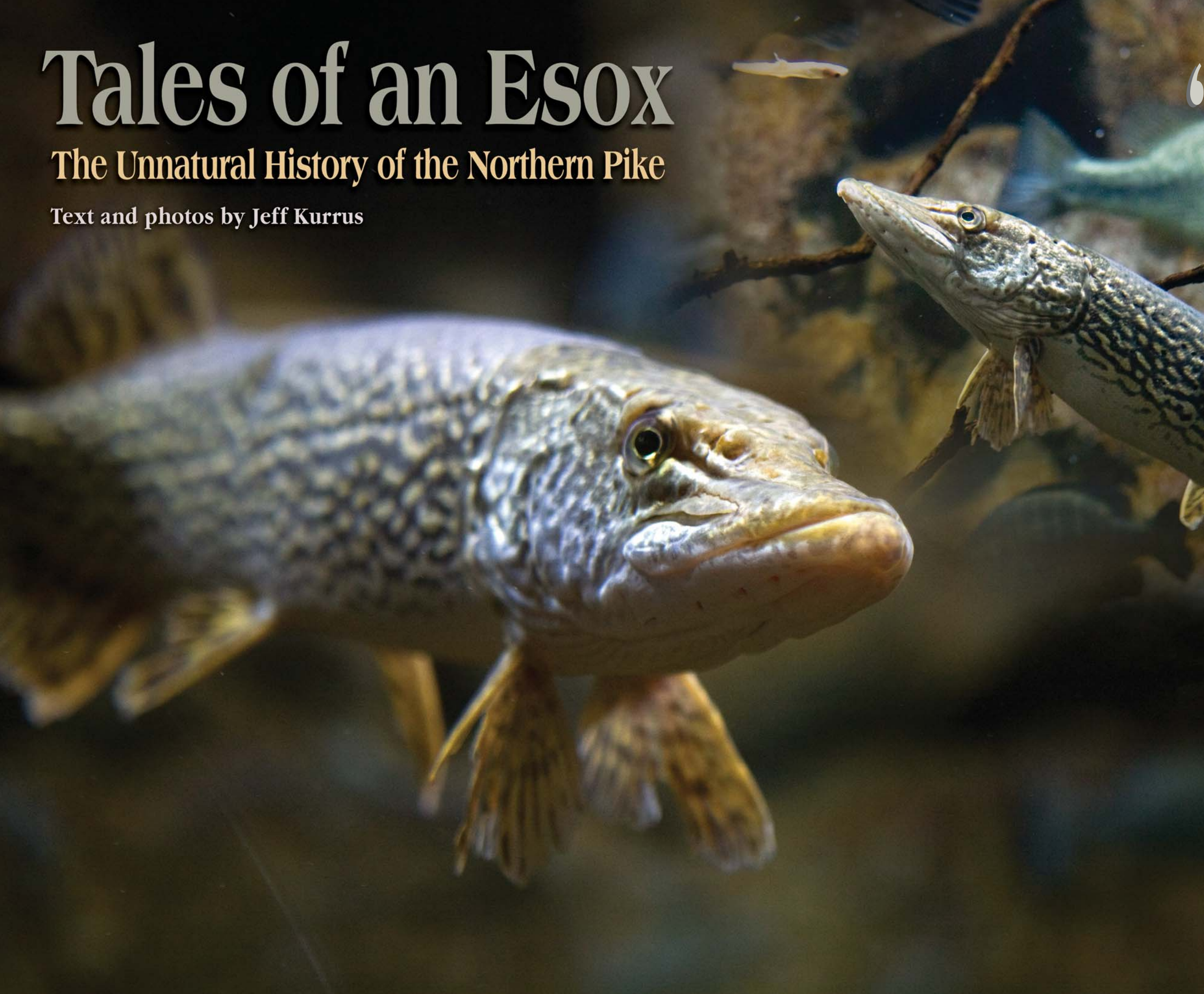
We will then gather the correct entries and draw one to win a NEBRASKAland Visitor mug. To enter each month, e-mail Tim.Reigert@Nebraska.gov with "Visitor" in the subject line of the message or write: NEBRASKAland Visitor 2200 North 33rd Street, Lincoln, NE 68503.

HINT: This month's visitor is not on page 5 or 11.

Tales of an Esox

The Unnatural History of the Northern Pike

Text and photos by Jeff Kurrus



“The Fish of 10,000 casts,” the northern pike (*Esox lucius*) is not. That is reserved for the muskellunge.

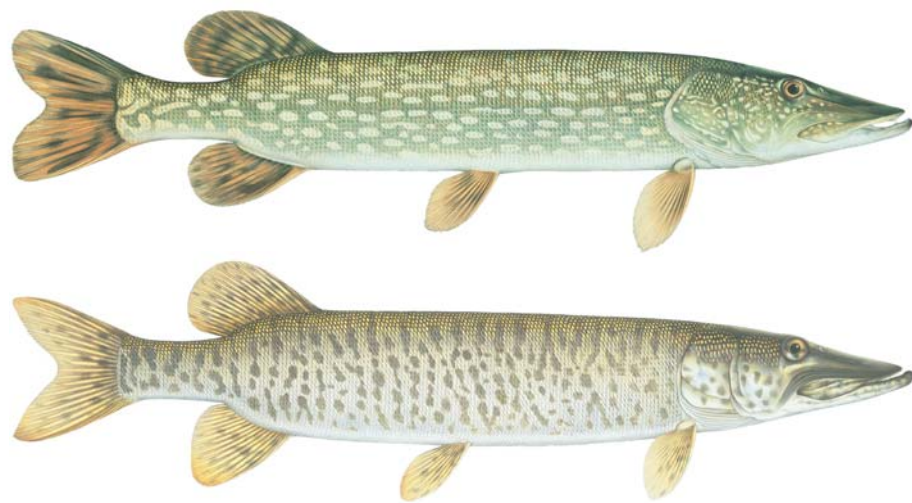
“North America’s most popular game fish,” the northern pike is not. That would probably be the largemouth bass. The northern pike is not even this country’s tastiest game fish, debated among anglers to include bluegill, crappie, walleye or catfish. People will eat northern, but it’s not often listed as the world’s most palatable – a thought that has prevailed for centuries: “His meat is not for the dining table,” wrote a 4th century Roman poet, “but sold at cheap shops smoky with its reeking stink.”

Anglers and pike have not had the friendliest of relationships through the years. While this game fish is known as one of the world’s most adaptable fish, one of few freshwater species to live in both North America and Eurasia, this longtime Nebraska resident is too often spoken about in a negative tone. While anglers celebrate *Esox masquinongy*, the muskellunge, northern pike are much less adored throughout the world.

In Francis Buzzacutt’s 1913 *The Complete Sportsman’s Encyclopedia*, he wrote, “The muskallonge is the largest and handsomest of the Pike family.” However, writer Craig Springer, in a 2007 *Country Living* article, wrote that the northern pike is one of Ohio’s five ugliest fish. A curious observation for two fish so similar to each other.

There are five fish in the *Esox* family – northerns, the muskellunge and the chain, grass and redbfin pickerals – with the “muskie” being most similar to the northern pike having a long, sleek shape; large, cutting teeth; and at least one other trait: “For the most part, the northern pike sometimes rivals the muskellunge himself in size and weight, and, to my way of thinking, is the equal in the latter in fighting ability,” wrote former *Outdoor Life* fishing editor O. Warren Smith in 1935. “After a lifetime of





While the northern pike (top) is often cursed and the muskellunge (bottom) is often revered, the differences between these freshwater predators are minor. First, the fish are patterned different. Second, the northern pike has scales on its gill cover and cheek while the muskellunge does not.

Third, the muskellunge has more pores under each side of its lower jaw. Fourth, the muskellunge grows larger. In Nebraska, the state record northern pike weighed 30-1 and was caught by Steven Morris at Terry's Pit in 1997, while Jarred Haddix's 1992 Merritt muskie weighed 41-8.

fishing, given two fish of equal weight, and in the same environment, there is not the slightest difference in their fighting qualities."

Plus, the differences they do have are minor: First, the markings on both fish are patterned different; second, the northern pike has scales on its gill cover and cheek, while the muskellunge does not. The third distinction is the number of pores under each side of the lower jaw – there are usually five on the northern pike and between six and

nine in the muskellunge.

The last difference is their size. Muskies grow larger than northern pike. In Nebraska, the state record muskie weighed 41-8, and was caught by Jared Haddix at Merritt Reservoir in 1992; while the state record northern pike weighed 30-1, and was caught by Steven Morris at Terry's Pit in 1997. Records from other states are similar, with muskies weighing more than pike. Yet both species still grow to enormous sizes, with the northern



"GREAT SPORT FISHING HERE" reads this 1910 "tall-tale" postcard which features fish, including northern pike, attacking these anglers' boat as they fish.

pike growing nearly three times as large as the Nebraska state record largemouth.

However, the muskie is held in high regard while the northern pike is not, a point that has been echoed for hundreds of years and often resonates today, even though there is good reason it shouldn't.

Legend

While the aforementioned 4th century Roman poet seemingly prefaced the next 1,800 years of *Esox* text by writing "Lucius besieges the complaining frogs in obscure holes among sedges and mud," it was Izaak Walton's 1653 *The Compleat Angler* that is more often quoted regarding the voracity of pike: "All pikes that live long prove chargeable to their keepers," wrote Walton, "because their life is maintained by the death of so many other fish, even those of his owne kind, which has made him by some writers to bee called the tyrant of the rivers, or the fresh-water wolf, by reason of his bold, greedy, devouring disposition."

These thoughts were later supported in Genio Scott's 1869 *Fishing in American Waters*. "It [the pike] preys on any living thing from a duckling to a swallow, and from a mouse to a frog. Everything is game to this wolf of the pond that moves at night, hides in the watery sedges, sneaks upon his prey and devastates and terrorizes the world of the inland seas." With *Esox* being Latin for pike, named from the fish's resemblance to the slim and deadly medieval weapon of the same name, and *lucius* being Latin for "wolf," this predator was perfectly described by early scribes, some of whom must surely have wet a line or two during their days.

However, this fish is so described not only because of its hunting, but also because of its response once it has been hooked: "A Pike whose mouth has been lacerated by a hook, will continue after it with eagerness," wrote Francis Buzzacutt's in his 1913 *The Complete Sportsman's Encyclopedia*. Smith echoed this sentiment 22 years later, saying that the pike would

deliberately seize an angler's line in its mouth to liberate itself. To combat this issue, Smith suggested a gaff, because he admitted that it was next to impossible to land a 20-pounder with a net. However, he also admitted an additional aide to his gaff. "As I said, a strong gaff is better, but do not undertake to gaff a large northern pike without first having administered a sharp blow on the head with a club, or having sent a pellet of lead between the eyes from a thirty-two revolver. I do not like shooting fish, but a large northern pike requires a dose of that medicine."

In Nebraska, there was a time when Smith's advice could have been legally taken (see photo on right). Similarly, today on Vermont's Lake Champlain, it is still legal for two months each spring to hunt northern pike with shotguns, handguns and rifles – an extremely controversial season still prevailing in the northeast.

But to hunt for a fish so known for its hunting probably doesn't seem totally unreasonable to some Vermont residents. "The northern pike has about the same appeal to fisherman as the wolf or the grizzly does to some big-game hunters," wrote Silvio Calabi in 1988's *Game Fish of North America*. "But while the rapacious nature of the two animals is grossly exaggerated, old *Esox lucius*, the waterwolf, is indeed a nasty customer."

Calabi supported his statement by relaying a tale from when he was once fishing in Canada's Labrador River. "I almost stepped on a medium-sized pike that was lying in six inches of water in the lee of a rock; it had a ten-inch brook trout sideways in its jaws. The pike rolled one eye upward, studied me, then deliberately swallowed the trout down before shooting away into the current."

It has been stated in multiple texts that a northern pike will attack anything of reasonable size that moves. And writers throughout history have relayed stories of pike biting mules drinking water and eating small ducks and other birds. Similarly, in Frank Dufresne's 1946 *Alaska's Animals and Fishes*, he stated that, along the Yukon, some Eskimos tell of



THIS 18-POUND NORTHERN PIKE was taken by Burk Wood (right) at Sievers Lake near Ewing in 1900.

remote "devil lakes" where there are monster pike able to swallow not only man but canoe as well. Even to approach these lakes is held to be bad medicine.

It is stories such as this about the pike that transcend legend, carving a reputation of a fish to be so hideous that it must more applicably deemed "mythical."

Myth

How can such a predatory fish come from something as benign as a plant? In the 1550s, biologist Conrad Gesner theorized that pike were bred from what was called "pickeral-weed." In some ponds, the combination of the sun and this vegetation bred "pikes."

Gesner also wrote that the "bones,



NORTHERN PIKE have been featured on magazine covers through the years, including *Outdoor Nebraska*, predecessor to *NEBRASKALAND*. On most of these covers, the pike’s “sinister” ways are repeatedly displayed.

and hearts, and gals of pikes are very medicinale for several diseases, as to stop bloud, to abate fevers, to cure agues, to oppose or expel the infection of the plague, and to be many ways medicinale and useful for the good of mankind.” One of these uses include pike ashes, which were said to serve as an antidote for pain in “shameful places.”

Pike also seem to heal themselves, as Walton chronicled them to have a natural antidote against all poison, which allows them to eat venomous things. It is assumed that this antidote was extremely beneficial to the 267-year old pike spoke about in William Samuels’s 1577 *The Arte of Angling*, a fish that was caught from a lake near Hasleburn, Sweden that measured 19 feet in length and weighed 550 pounds.

For a fish to live that long, mostly because of the constant changing that waters undergo, it must become very adaptive, as pike have proven to be



GROVE LAKE WMA, in northeast Nebraska, is one of the state’s best trophy northern pike lakes.



JEFF CHIN, from Omaha, holds a 42-inch Master Angler pike caught, and quickly released, at Grove Lake WMA last fall.



THE NORTHERN PIKE is known by more than 40 names, including jackfish, snake, the Great Lakes pike, slough shark, gator, slinker and water wolf.

by pulling people into ponds, severing hands, and having infants discovered in their stomachs.

Maybe it was these fears that forced Theodoric, ruler of the Ostrogoths, in 526 to die of fright when looking at markings on a pike's head. Some witnesses claimed he had seen the face of an enemy he had recently executed, which also seems entirely reasonable when one considers what others have viewed when looking at pike.

The pike carries marks on his head which have been linked to the cross,

ladder, hammer, nails, thorns, whips and sponge – all the result of Christ carrying his cross through a brook in which pike lived, wrote Will Ryan in *Northern Pike*. It has also been assumed by some, Ryan added, that these marks were created by the devil to vex God.

“The northern pike's history is studded with tall tales and hints of the occult,” wrote Ryan. The problem that results is deciding what is real and what isn't, and if that question even matters in the first place.

The Other Esox

Sit down with *NEBRASKAland* regional editor Eric Fowler and he'll tell you about his pike encounter at Pelican Lake. Or spend a few moments with fisheries biologist Daryl Bauer to hear his teenage sandpit northern story that has been told and re-told by him since that day nearly 30 years ago (read Bauer's story at barbsandbacklashes.wordpress.com).

Or the stories from those not from this area, including Kevin McMillan, the focus of the May, 2008 *NEBRASKAland* article “At First Pike” who, when first fishing for *Esox lucius*, had a rod-and-reel in one hand and a pair of welder's gloves in another. “What in the hell was that?” he asked after the first pike of the day at the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge kept a spinnerbait for himself, a story he repeatedly recounts to people when he's tells friends of his fishing trip “up North.”

“Chin, I need help,” was the line I spoke to my friend, Jeff Chin, during a fight with a Master Angler northern at Grove Lake WMA in northeastern Nebraska last fall. It was reminiscent of character Chief Martin Brody's line “We're going to need a bigger boat,” in the movie *Jaws*. While we didn't necessarily need a bigger boat, we definitely needed a bigger net, for my “trophy” largemouth bass net did nothing more than fit half of my pike inside of it, showing us what a true Nebraska trophy looks like.

However, many still don't view a northern pike as a trophy. To some, this slimy, foul-smelling snake is a destroyer of worthier fish and tackle, and a frequent interrupter of a good walleye fishing day. At the same time, however, while many anglers curse the appearance of a ghastly northern, they would still revel at the appearance of the legendary muskie.

Canadian biologists say experienced musky fishermen average one hundred angling hours per legal fish. “Like all good monsters,” wrote Calabi, “it [the muskellunge] is fairly rare.” Yet the northern pike is not a rarity, especially in Nebraska.

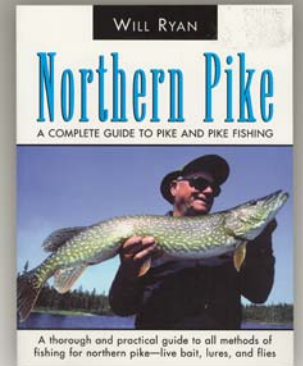
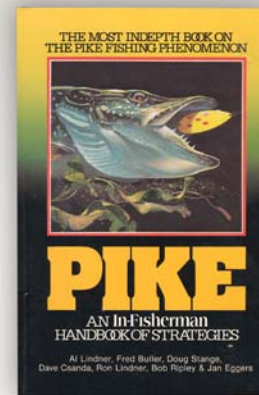
Becoming Close to a Legend

When describing how to catch northern pike, Francis Buzzacutt, in his 1913 *The Complete Sportsman's Encyclopedia*, wrote, “Even a white and red rag will suffice, as they [northern pike] are extremely ravenous, hence are termed the fresh water wolf and will bite at almost anything offered them from a piece of China crockery to bright pieces of jagged tin or colored rag.”

While I do not entirely subscribe to Buzzacutt's tactics, in Nebraska waters I've done little more than fish white, blue and black spinnerbaits for pike. With these lures, I've caught pike above 40 inches, working both deepwater structure and shallow grassy edges like I would for largemouth bass. I've also caught pike trolling with casting spoons and even a topwater prop lure or two. From ice-out into May and later when the leaves begin changing into fall are my favorite times to pike fish. However for die-hards, through the ice is probably the best time.

For more in-depth information regarding catching pike, much more than could ever be written in this publication, take a look at both Will Ryan's *Northern Pike* and *Pike – An In-Fisherman Handbook of Strategies*.

Regardless of how and where you choose to fish for them, remember one bit of advice taken from a 14th century German text that advised anglers to use a line covered with wire due to the pike's sharp teeth, a line very similar to the steel leaders so often associated with northern pike in current times.



There are lakes in the Cornhusker state where anglers can catch a large number of pike, including Box Butte Reservoir and recently renovated Goose Lake. There are other lakes that boast the opportunities of big northern, including Merritt Reservoir, Dewey Lake and Red Willow Reservoir. At the date of press, there were 17 different public lakes that had Master Angler catches in 2009. And that's not even taking into account the possibilities of big fish in the Missouri River. Last year I got into a conversation with a smallmouth angler on the Missouri who told me that just east of Verdel Landing, near Niobrara State Park, it would not surprise him at all if someone caught a northern in the 25- to 30-pound range.

Even though Nebraska is on the southernmost tip of the northern pike's native range, these fish can be readily caught in multiple Nebraska lakes, which means that anglers are much closer than meeting this legend in Nebraska waters than the other *Esox*. Now the only question would be if they would revel it.

I'm convinced they should. Before I

moved to Nebraska, I was a largemouth guy for life. That was, and forever would be, my fish. But my heart doesn't beat the same way for largemouth any more like it does when I'm in pike waters.

So now I'm spending more and more time pike fishing in Nebraska, hunting for a fish whose aggressiveness has been chronicled for centuries. A fish who I don't have to make 10,000 casts for. Not that there's anything wrong with that either. I just prefer to see trophy fish a bit more often than that. Which is exactly what Nebraska offers me. Because, as Smith said in 1935 – and it still rings true today – their fight is the same. And isn't that what it should come back to anyway?

“When someone tells of a big trout or bass, it usually involves something the angler did to the fish,” wrote Ryan. “Fooled it, caught it, lost it, or whatever. When someone tells of a big pike, the gist of the tale almost invariably involves something the pike did.” Proof enough that Mr. Ryan has seen more than his fair share of pike, and even more proof that old *Esox lucius* is good enough for me. ■

Jeff Kurrus, *NEBRASKAland's* Associate Editor, has been with the Commission for three years and pike fishing for seven years. He is pictured here with his trophy Northern Pike caught at Grove Lake WMA in 2009.



PHOTO BY JEFF CHIN

Backyard Birding

A Love Story

By Jody Keisner

A young newlywed couple learns the ins and outs of backyard bird feeding while discovering the beauty of their new, finely feathered friends.

Married just three and a half months, I started thinking that the natural progression of our union should include the addition of a living creature to our home. I was thinking something of the four-legged variety, but my husband Jon proposed we buy a bird feeder. I was skeptical – backyard birding seemed a feeble solution to my pet loneliness and our uninhabited yard. How could a few robins hopping around replace the comfort and love I would get from a dog or cat? A bird wouldn't let you scratch its head or scramble to the door at the sound of your key in the lock. A bird would never lick your cheek or nose, curl up next to your leg at night, or paw your shoulder to wake you up in the morning.

Still, I agreed to give it a try, and the owner of Backyard Birds Inc, a west-Omaha neighborhood store, patiently answered our questions about food and styles of birdfeeders. Other than what I had learned from listening to my parents talk about the myriad of birds that dropped by for a snack at their Fremont farm – a red-bellied woodpecker, a fleet of hummingbirds, a pair of rose-breasted grosbeaks – I knew very little.

Jon and I soon learned from Sandy Seibert, who with her husband began their bird store 17 years ago, that birds, like people, need food, water, shelter and a place to raise their young. We were told to clean the birdfeeder regularly and make sure any food we offered didn't spoil. We'd also need to assure that the bird feeder was positioned away from predatory

animals. Yes, any feeder would tempt squirrels, but we could use safflower seeds since the squirrels didn't like them. We could also purchase what looked like the plastic collar a dog wears after surgery so it wouldn't lick itself, a giant upside down funnel – called a baffler – that would hang below the birdfeeder and block the squirrel from skittering farther up a tree.

Since Jon and I only have one mature tree in the corner of our backyard, we chose a shepherd's hook from which to hang a hopper birdfeeder that had a long enough perch for larger birds such as blue jays and redwing blackbirds as well as smaller birds like finches, chickadees and orioles. We drove home and set up our birdfeeder in the middle of the backyard, a location that insured sunlight for the birds and a spot for us to watch from the kitchen. I crouched behind the table, expecting immediate activity, but there was none.

"Remember," Jon said gently, "we might have to wait several days for visitors."

Three days passed without any action. I was disappointed. It seemed Jon and I had failed at our first attempt to greet the neighborhood wildlife. On afternoon walks, I counted the other birdfeeders in nearby yards and started to see them as competition. Our carefully mowed yard looked barren and unfriendly.

I was standing at the kitchen sink rinsing a cucumber a few days later when I spotted her – a yellow and brown-breasted beauty, orange-beaked, with a carrot crest and a muted golden



PHOTO BY BOB GRIER

tail with flashes of scarlet. I froze. She dipped her head into the safflower seeds, dropping several shells below. "Jon," I whisper-screamed. "A female cardinal! Come see!"

She flew off by the time Jon got to the window, but by then the male cardinal had arrived in all his crimson brilliance. He had a sensational red crest, a black mask over his eyes and a robust, puffed up body. I couldn't take my eyes off of him. He nibbled for a few seconds and then flew into the pine trees in our neighbor's yard. It was all so exciting – a stylish couple visiting our backyard. Maybe they were newlyweds like us.

I soon learned that the female always

breakfasted first, about seven in the morning, while her mate waited on an evergreen limb. They took turns flying to the bird feeder. One perched; one ate. After work, right before Jon and I had our own dinner, they returned. I called Jon to the kitchen every time, but he didn't always come (especially when he was in the middle of paying bills or cleaning the garage). I, however, was hooked.

Within a month, my days had become marked by bird sightings. As soon as I arrived home at night, I went to the kitchen window. I left for work later each morning, so enthralled had I become with the pair. I called Jon at work to give him play-by-play accounts

of what the cardinals were doing. I watched as the male chased the female from branch to branch, ruffling his feathers and peck-kissing her when he caught up. Because we had not yet found a birdbath, I set a casserole dish with fresh water on our patio table. "Hello, pretty bird," I said softly to them through the window, which now had paper streamers hanging in front so the birds wouldn't accidentally crash into it. I began referring to the birds as "our cardinals" when I was in conversation with others. "The neighborhood cardinals," Jon would correct.

One morning I caught sight of the male's dazzling reflection in the bathroom mirror. I froze, toothpaste in

one hand, toothbrush in the other. He swooped down onto the table, stuck his beak in the casserole dish and took a drink. He then perched on the back of a patio chair and started singing, while seeming to look right at me. It was a lovely sound: "Whooit, whooit, cheer, cheer, cheer, cheer." The female joined in from her spot on a branch – a duet. I recognized the song. It was the sweet whistle that had awakened us most mornings since we'd moved into our home, perhaps a love song, a promise of fledglings to come. ■

Jody Keisner is a writer who lives in Omaha. This is her first submission to NEBRASKALAND Magazine.

A Sandhills Branding

Photos and text by Bill Hager

Unless you live on a ranch, there's a good chance you've never seen a cattle branding. Until a few years ago, such was the case with me, with my only reference to the tradition coming from watching cowboy westerns as a kid. Then I was actually invited to a couple.

Many people probably think of branding as an old custom long since passed by, but not only does it still occur in the Sandhills, it's an integral part of life that allows ranchers to readily identify their livestock. It's a process that evolved during the days of open range and gives ranchers a chance to look over their new crop of calves while doing health checks and vaccinations.

One such family whose lives are so intertwined with spring branding is Pat and Wanda Simonson of Seneca, who were gracious enough to invite me to their version of this Sandhills tradition a few years ago.

One of the first things to understand about branding is that it is more than just an opportunity to work calves – it's a social event, a reunion of sorts where friends and family come together to get the job done and catch up on lost time. But while socializing is a part, work is the whole.



Left: A comfortable saddle and well-worn chaps make Jared Simonson that much better at tossing a rope.

Right: Marc Ericksen helps hold a calf on the ground while others brand and vaccinate it.



The setting for the Simonson branding was a little side pasture next to a fenced-off wooded area. The trees blocked the breeze from the north while the sun warmed the cool morning air. Neighboring rancher Jerry Merz readied the propane-fired iron oven that rested on a trailer hitched to his flatbed pickup, while others watched from the edge of the corral.





With a head nod from the iron stove where Michael and Nick Simonson were standing, Hyde Kramer, Martin DeNaeyer and Tim Simonson waded into the pen on horseback and started roping back legs. Soon a cast of more than 20 characters, including ranchers, farmers, a doctor, a lawyer, an accountant, a local businessman, a respiratory therapist, a helicopter pilot, a conservationist, fence contractors and a team of cowboys and cowgirls ranging from elementary through college age were holding calves as other team members gave shots, ear marks and brands. The group efficiently churned out three worked calves every few minutes, and by mid-morning they were driving to the next pen.

Pat and Aaron Simonson had gathered the second group of calves in a wide valley flanked by tall hills, with a grove of old cottonwood trees to the west – a classic Sandhills backdrop. Much like before, the pace was steady, but now some new faces were tossing the rope toward the quick-footed calves. Midway through the second pen, temperatures dropped in the forties and rain began to fall. Yet the work continued, with few even bothering to put on a rain slicker. With more brandings to do than days to do them in, once a date is set they get done no matter what the weather.

Around mid-morning, Wanda, her sister Janice Huber, and a pile of kids and grandkids showed up with a spread of snacks and soda pop. Their timing couldn't have been better – everybody gathered around the tailgate of the pickup and helped themselves.

Wanda and Janice headed back to join a group of neighbor ladies and finish readying the main meal – a mountain of food and desserts to be shared after the work was finished – and soon we were back at it. Newly energized after their break, the group worked quickly and by two-o'clock the propane tank feeding the stove was turned off and this spring branding was complete.

Behind the ranch house, tables and chairs filled space in the old garage out back, and food filled the 30-foot workbench – roasters heaped with roast beef, casserole dishes full of steaming goodness, bowls filled with vegetables, breads and salads. At the table's end were pies, cakes and trays of secret recipe desserts requiring tough decisions be made.

It was standing room only for everyone who ate, drank, told stories, laughed and enjoyed some live entertainment. For some, this was just another day of many, a chance to spend a little time each spring helping friends and neighbors work calves. For others, however, it was a peek into the lives of a ranching community, a chance to experience the tradition and way of life that could only be read about or seen on television.

For me, it was an opportunity to spend time in a place I love and with people I respect – people who I will always owe a debt of gratitude for their willingness to share. ■

Previous pages: Martin (left) and Clayton DeNaeyer crest a hill en route to the day's last pen of calves.

Above: Work begins as riders rope calves while wrestlers wait at the open end of the corral.

Right: Tough are the hands that do this kind of work year after year.



CRICK FISHIN'

By Zane Dickinson

Protecting your secret fishing place can be difficult – but keep trying.

You have to be mentally tough to fish a crick. Although physical prowess isn't much of a factor, you must be prepared to suffer some pain – thorns will scratch you, nettles will sting you, poison ivy will drive you nuts, mosquitoes and horseflies will suck your blood, and you'll ache from contorting your body into agonizing positions. And that's on a good day.

When you go through all that misery to catch a fish, the last thing you want is for someone to find out about it, so it's absolutely imperative that you fish alone. Even the slightest hint that you're going to the crick will bring

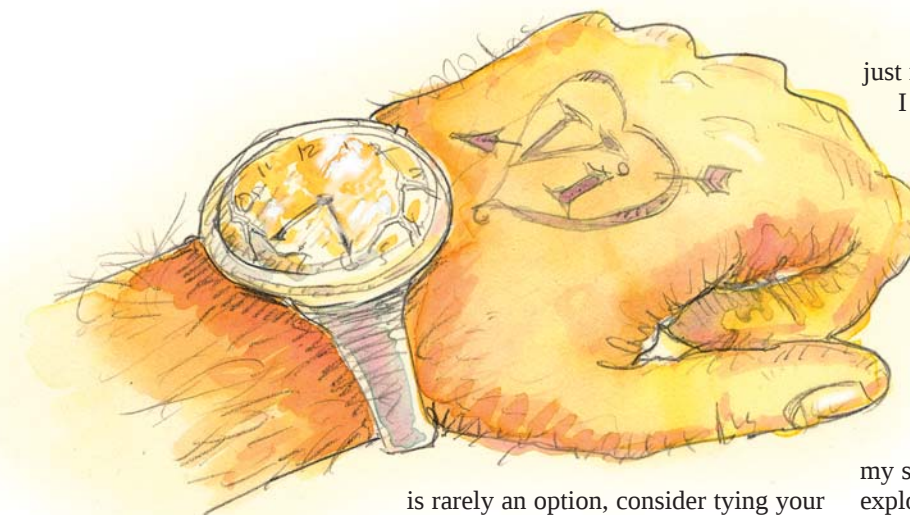
carloads of masochistic friends to your door, and if by some miracle one of them catches a trout, there goes your crick.

Let's say, for example, that your neighbor and occasional fishing partner sees you loading fishing gear into your car. You can't very well tell him you're going golfing – you have to tell the truth and probably take him with you. So in order to prevent prevarication (something all fishermen try to avoid, of course), buy a golf bag, an old driver and some head covers. A telescoping metal rod with the reel topped with a fluffy cover looks just like a No. 3 wood, although the pitch may be different. (Don't even think about taking your good fly rod; you won't be able to use it unless you can roll cast into a teacup while lying on your stomach in a patch of willows.)

In any golf bag you'll have plenty of room for a fishing vest, a can of worms, a few hooks, a snakebite kit and a nice lunch. A pair of golf shoes tied to the bag will fool even the most skeptical neighbor and might even keep you from slipping into the crick, which is an absolute no-no. In crick fishin', even the tiniest ripple will scare every trout within 300 yards, and in some cricks that's every fish. Needless to say, you won't need waders. (I wore a pair once, not because I needed them, but because I had them. When the rose bushes and barbed wire ripped them to shreds and let out the sweat, I cried in relief.)

To be a successful crick fisherman, you have to avoid nosy neighbors, travel light and, above all, be sneaky. Parking your car within a mile of the stretch of crick you plan to fish is a sure sign of an amateur. I once parked too close to my fishing spot and my neighbor and two crick fishin' buddies found my car even though it had a camouflage paint job and was covered with 40 yards of camo-netting under a half ton of pine boughs. They fished out that stretch of crick in one afternoon.

By far the best way to get to a crick is to have someone (a non-crick fishin' person, of course) drop you off before daylight and pick you up after dark, but since this



is rarely an option, consider tying your golf bag to the back of your daughter's bike and waving to everyone you see on your way to the crick. Onlookers will be so astonished to see you on a bike, crick fishin' won't even enter their minds. Bikes are also easier to hide than cars. If you own a horse, your rod can easily be disguised as a polo mallet, but if the nearest polo field is 50 miles away, forget it. Somehow polo and crick fishin' don't seem to fit together anyway.

If you want to outwit other crick fishermen, never tell where you caught a fish or what you caught it on. I know it's difficult not to tell the gang at the barbershop and show pictures, but one slip and it's goodbye fish. You have to take precautions. Take, for example, my last trip to Beaver Crick. (Not its real name, of course.)

With my golf bag packed with fishing gear, a bologna sandwich and a can of soda, I waved to my neighbor Pete as I pushed my daughter's bike out of the garage.

"Nice day," Pete said. "Going fishing?"

"Do I look like I'm going fishing?" I answered pointing to the golf bag.

"Well, yes. Do you always wear that hat with the flies and stuff stuck on it when you golf?" he asked.

"Umm, I couldn't find my golf hat," I said, straddling the bike.

"Why only two clubs?" Pete asked as I went by.

"I'm just going to practice driving. See you later!" I answered, as I wobbled out the drive.

Minutes after arriving at the golf course, my wife Vi drove up. I crawled into the back seat of the car and flattened myself on the floor. Since she was going to her sister's and would pass close to the crick anyway, all I had to do to get the ride was promise to vacuum, cook, wash windows and serve her breakfast in bed for a month. I got a pretty good deal.

As we neared the crick, Vi slowed to 25 mph. I opened the door, Vi jerked the wheel as hard as she could to the left and flung me out. She had this down to a science – we had practiced this once a month for a year and found (two broken arms and one concussion later) that 30 was too fast and 20 was too slow because I couldn't clear the ditch without being recognized. At 25 mph I could usually clear the ditch and land only semi-broken.

As I came to a stop, I knew it was going to be a good day – I hadn't broken my rod,

just my nose and a couple of ribs. Minor inconveniences, as I could still dunk a worm. I hid the golf bag under a bush and checked my watch. Through the cracked crystal I could read 8:30.

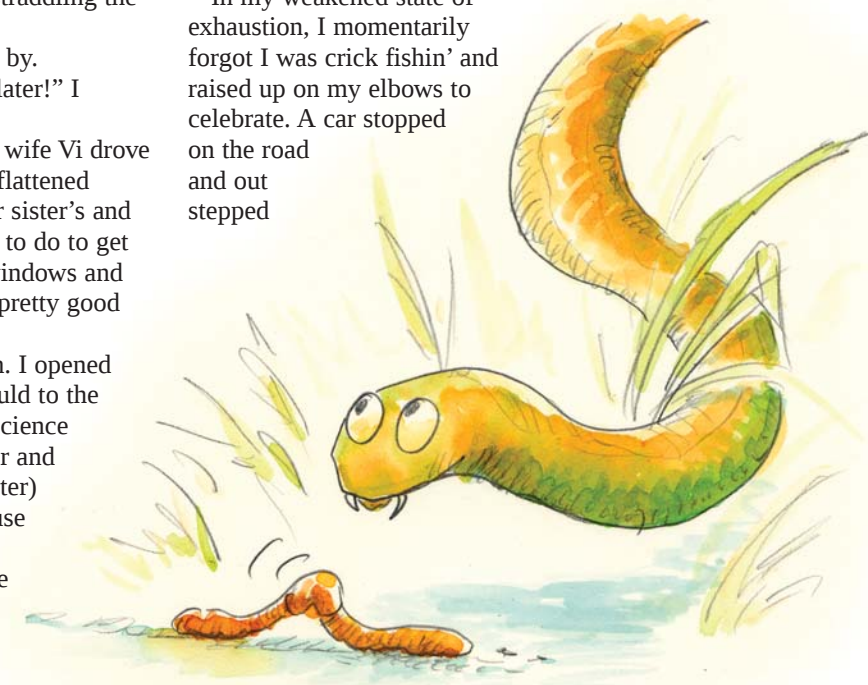
"Ah, great," I said to myself, putting on the golf shoes. Vi said she'd pick me up at three o'clock, which gave me six and a half hours. I laid out my timeline: A half mile to the crick; that's at least an hour, maybe more depending on the number of snakes that are out, unless Miller's bull is in the pasture. Then it's about three minutes – you don't take time to watch for snakes if a Holstein bull is on your tail. Twenty minutes through Johnson's feedlot. Five minutes to eat my sandwich – didn't have to worry about the soda. It had exploded when I landed, and I now barely noticed the shards of aluminum piercing my leg. Forty minutes for each hole, then an hour to get back here. "Yes! Plenty of time," I assured myself.

I beat Miller's bull by a good millisecond, stuck two dried cow patties to my golf shoes so I could slide through Johnson's feedlot quicker, and made it to the first hole with time to spare.

I soon caught two 12-inch browns and stuck them into the back pocket of my vest. At the second hole, I caught nothing after losing my worm when I swatted at a snake. I skipped the third hole, which was full of cows. At the fourth hole I got a "parr." Actually it wasn't, as there were no salmon in that crick – it was a six-inch rainbow that I let go. At the fifth hole, I got a birdie, or rather it got me: A mother blackbird attacked and tangled herself in my hat. She tore off part of my eyelid and it felt like she had eaten my earlobe. Just another day at the crick. I fed my remaining worms to her chicks as a peace offering. At the sixth hole, an aggressive 14-inch brown choked himself on my bologna.

Seventh hole – yahoo! I hooked old Silver, five pounds of Beaver Creek rainbow. I was in ecstasy – three Davids and then Goliath. Life was good.

In my weakened state of exhaustion, I momentarily forgot I was crick fishin' and raised up on my elbows to celebrate. A car stopped on the road and out stepped





Long-billed Curlew

Mysterious Shorebird of the Sandhills

By Cory Gregory

It's dawn on a chilly May morning in the Nebraska Sandhills. I'm huddled on a hillside, knees sinking into the sand, a pair of binoculars pressed to my eyes. In the howling wind I hear the quivering calls of a curlew somewhere off in the distance. My eyes strain to find the bird, and I finally do. I watch it pace back and forth on the still winter-bleached grassland. It takes one last, nervous look around and slyly vanishes into the grass. At the same time, another curlew flushes nearby. "Ah ha!" I think. "A curlew just swapped places with its mate to incubate their clutch of eggs." After more than an hour of stalking and mindless muttering, my patience had finally rewarded me with the location of a curlew nest. But let's back up. What is a curlew?

The long-billed curlew is a shorebird, the largest shorebird in North America. Standing nearly two feet tall, with long legs and neck, it is aptly-named for its nearly foot-long curved bill. The bird's size and long, down-curved bill makes it easily one of the most recognizable of shorebirds. The genus name for the curlew, *Numenius*, comes from the Greek word *Noumenios*, translating as "of the new moon" in reference to their sickle-shaped bills.

The long-billed curlew is one of eight known curlew species in the world, two of which are thought to be extinct. Its close relatives here in North America – the smaller whimbrel (a curlew, although not in its common name) and bristle-thighed curlew – both breed in the Arctic. Of the two, only the whimbrel is seen in Nebraska, and only rarely. The other large shorebirds found in Nebraska that could be confused with long-billed curlews, especially the godwits, all have upturned bills rather than downturned bills. A drive through the grasslands of western Nebraska during the spring breeding season and into the summer, especially along seldom-used highways or single-lane roads crisscrossing the region, is almost certain to provide occasional glimpses of this large shorebird. Usually they will be seen in pairs, and if they have a nest or young anywhere near the road, they are likely to exhibit aggressive or diversionary behavior to drive or lure away the perceived threat. When observed from a distance with binoculars or a spotting scope, they will be seen moving slowly and methodically through meadows and low swales, feeding on grasshoppers and other insects.

Natural History

Long-billed curlews spend three to four months each spring and summer in grasslands from Washington and Oregon in the west, eastward to South Dakota and Nebraska. Most arrive in Nebraska in

Mated curlews share in incubating eggs and brooding young. When the chicks are about two weeks old, though, the chicks become the male's responsibility while the females gather into flocks and begin their southward migration. Males and young follow later, at the end of summer.

Unlike most shorebirds, long-billed curlews nest in grasslands during the breeding season. Research is revealing more about those that nest in Nebraska – where they are found in the state, estimates of their abundance, preferred nesting sites and where they spend the winter.



PHOTO BY JON FARRAR



PHOTO BY JON FARRAR

Long-billed curlews may select nest sites near hay meadows, or high in bordering hills. They depend on their cryptic coloration and the nest being “a needle in a haystack” to avoid predation by raptors and other predators, such as skunks and coyotes.

the early spring, often as early as late-March, while most other shorebirds are still wintering to the south. Even spring snowfalls in western and northwestern Nebraska do not seem to deter curlews from their early spring migration.

Unlike most shorebirds, which typically nest close to water, long-billed curlews nest in rolling prairie uplands and grazed meadows, sometimes far from water. Curlew nests are not elaborate, no more than shallow, grass-lined depressions in the ground. Rather than concealing their nests in thick vegetation, such as the grassland-nesting upland sandpiper does, curlews often nest in exposed sites with only sparse grass cover. It is believed these sites allow curlews to see approaching predators from a distance.

A long-billed curlew’s clutch of four eggs is usually laid

by mid-April. Both the male and female of the pair incubate the eggs, typically with the female covering the eggs for the first eight hours of the day while the male feeds in nearby meadows or upland grasslands. After being relieved at the nest in late afternoon, the female feeds feverishly during the evening hours. The male remains on the nest through the night. The chicks hatch after 30 days of constant incubation and, once their downy plumage has dried, are capable of leaving the nest not long after hatching. Unlike some birds, curlews begin incubation only after the last egg in the clutch is laid, and so all chicks in the clutch usually hatch within a few hours of one another and are led away by the parents into meadows to feed. Parents aggressively defend them by hazing predators or other intruders with steep, screaming

dives, swooping down as close as two or three feet. While adults are mounting such defenses, the blotchy-colored chicks crouch and stay completely still, perfectly camouflaged in similarly colored grass and sand.

After spending two weeks with both parents, the chicks that have evaded hawks, coyotes and other predators are left in the care of the male while the females join other females in flocks, often as early as late-July, before migrating south. Curlew chicks are capable of flight when about 40 days old. As the summer wanes, the males and young gather in small flocks and migrate south to wintering grounds. By mid-September, they will be gone from Nebraska for another year.

Long-billed curlews migrate south to the Pacific Coast,

the Gulf Coast and elsewhere in the southern United States, as well as throughout Mexico. They winter on lagoons and mudflats, as well as dry grasslands and prairie dog colonies. Since the advent of satellite-tracking technology, it is now known that curlews nesting in Oregon travel south to the Central Valley of California and curlews breeding in Nevada fly south to western Mexico. So where do the curlews from Nebraska go? Until recently, very little research had been done on curlew migration from Nebraska.

Curlews in Nebraska

Before the tallgrass prairie was converted to agricultural land, the range of long-billed curlews was much more extensive than it is today and they nested as far east as Michigan, Illinois and Indiana. As mid-continent grasslands were settled, the curlew’s range shrank back to the west – out of Indiana, out of Iowa and, by the late-1800s, out of eastern Nebraska. Prior to that time, written historical accounts suggest long-billed curlews were “an abundant migrant” statewide. As center pivot irrigation spread in the 1970s and 1980s in the eastern and southern Sandhills, and cornfields replaced native grasslands, the number of curlews nesting in the state continued to decline. Unaltered rangeland in the Nebraska Sandhills remains a refuge for this species yet today.

Another probable factor in the decline of curlews was unregulated hunting from the mid-1800s and early years of the 1900s. Although reported to not be as palatable as now extinct Eskimo curlews, early accounts show long-billed curlews were hunted and shipped to markets. Not until the signing of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 with Canada was it illegal to kill long-billed curlews. Still, small numbers of curlews were said to be hunted illegally through the early 1980s in Idaho. Today, the long-billed curlew is considered a highly imperiled species in the United States, and an at-risk species in Nebraska. Although it is not federally listed as threatened or endangered, many experts believe their numbers are still declining due to habitat loss and degradation.

Nebraska Research

To learn more about curlews in Nebraska, researchers from Iowa State University, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission initiated a study in western Nebraska in 2008, funded by a Nebraska State Wildlife Grant. The three-year study will be completed this year, and will play a vital role in better understanding the status and life history of long-billed curlews while they are in this state.

The first aspect of the study was to estimate the number of breeding curlews in Nebraska by conducting extensive roadside surveys during the 2008 and 2009 breeding seasons. Researchers selected areas to survey by randomly choosing townships within the expected curlew range in Nebraska. A starting point on a public road in that township was randomly



PHOTO BY JON FARRAR

Because eggs are not incubated until the last is laid, chicks hatch within hours of one another and are quickly led away from the nest.

chosen. Every half-mile for 20 miles, researchers stopped for five minutes to look and listen for curlews. Each route was surveyed once. During the course of two summers, more than 1,400 stops were made. The results of these surveys are still being analyzed, but when completed will establish a defensible estimate of the number of breeding curlews in Nebraska.

There are still questions to be answered about the curlew's biology, such as what factors affect the survival of chicks and the habitat and characteristics of nesting sites. To answer these questions, researchers are studying the curlews on a much smaller scale compared to the broader, early surveys to determine the population size for the state. Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge in the eastern Panhandle boasts a healthy population of curlews, so it was chosen as a study site.

The researchers' first task was to find curlew nests – no small feat as these mottled, sandy-brown birds blend in exceptionally well with the grassland vegetation of western Nebraska. By spending hours and days watching certain pairs of birds, researchers began to zero in on where they nested. Watching from afar and observing a curlew return to the nest site was the most reliable method to locate nests. Adults are quite secretive, and will not switch incubation duties if there is a threat nearby. Another method to find nests is to “rope-drag” – by simply pulling a weighted rope

between two people, systematically back and forth across the grasslands, researchers are occasionally lucky enough to flush an adult off its nest.

The next step was to capture adult curlews on their nests. After ensuring the curlew is incubating eggs, two researchers would cautiously approach the nest holding a long, rectangular bird net between them. If the curlew flattened down, deciding to rely on its cryptic camouflage to escape detection, the researchers simply placed the net over the nest and captured the bird. If the bird escaped, a second chance was rare, as the next time humans approached the nest, the incubating adult usually flushed before they could get close enough to capture it.

Bird in the Hand

Captured adults were weighed, and both the bill and wing lengths measured. Such information provides crucial data to determine the bird's gender, as females are both significantly larger and heavier than the males. Researchers also clipped a toenail to take a small blood sample for potential, future genetic research. A uniquely-numbered metal band was placed around the leg of each bird captured so that information like longevity and migration routes could be determined if the bird was recaptured elsewhere or found dead. A numbered, green leg band was also attached to

banded birds so they could be visually identified from a distance for the duration of the research season.

Researchers returned regularly to check nests throughout the nesting season. By floating the eggs in a small container of water and observing how high the egg floated, they could determine approximately what day the chicks would hatch. Returning on hatch day, they measured the chicks just as they did adults, and placed similar indentifying bands on their legs. Tiny radio-transmitters were attached on the lower back of many chicks, assuring researchers they could locate those chicks in the following days. To gain as much information as possible about the survival of those chicks, they were tracked daily using a radio receiver and antenna to zero in on the transmitter and chick. Even though analysis of data is ongoing, it is clear that newly hatched chicks can move relatively long distances not long after hatching. One- and two-day old chicks were documented moving nearly a mile and a half in less than 24 hours.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CORY GREGORY

Radio transmitters were attached to chicks to gain information about survival and daily movements. Green leg bands allowed researchers to identify individual chicks from a distance.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CORY GREGORY

Lightweight satellite transmitters were attached to adult curlews to track their southward migration. Nebraska nesting curlews wintered in northeastern Mexico.

Where Curlews Go

Adult curlews only spend a quarter of their year on the breeding grounds in Nebraska. To understand the annual life cycle and array of threats they face throughout the year, it is important to know where the curlews winter. Nebraska researchers used the same tracking technology as used to study curlews in Oregon and Nevada. By fitting two Nebraska-nesting curlews with satellite transmitters, researchers could track them after they left the state. Sandy and Bailey, as the two birds were named, roamed western Nebraska through much of June after they lost their clutches to coyotes. One day Sandy bolted from Nebraska and flew straight to northern Texas in less than 24 hours. Bailey migrated more leisurely, stopping in Kansas and Oklahoma before reaching southern Texas in about a week. Eventually, both curlews settled just south of the U.S. border near coastal lagoons in northeastern Mexico.

This breeding season, the last year of the study, researchers will continue to search for nests and track curlew chicks through meadows of western Nebraska. When all the information gathered from three seasons of field research is analyzed, researchers will have a far greater understanding of the status of these emblematic shorebirds of Nebraska's grasslands, what the threats are to their future, and be able to make recommendations to ensure they continue to prosper at least at their current abundance. ■

Acknowledgements: Cory Gregory is a graduate student at Iowa State University and has spent the last two summers studying curlews in western Nebraska. He would like to thank Dr. Stephen Dinsmore at Iowa State University, Dr. Larkin Powell at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Joel Jorgensen with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Also, he extends his thanks to the Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge staff, the Sandhills Task Force, the US Fish and Wildlife Region 6 staff, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and the seasonal helpers who assisted with the fieldwork.

Smith Falls

An oasis along the Niobrara

Text and photos by Jon Farrar



Falling nearly 63 feet, Smith Falls east of Valentine is the tallest in the state and considered by many the most beautiful.

Each Indian tribe that knew the Niobrara River had its own name for it, most translating as “running water” or “moving water.” Anthropologist George Bird Grinnell, who during his lifetime wore many prestigious hats, wrote in 1906 that the Cheyenne name for the Niobrara was *Hisse youi yoe*, translating as the “sudden” or “unexpected” river. And indeed, for those new to the region, Sandhills rivers do sometimes seem to appear out of nowhere.

Most Sandhills highways run north-south and most Sandhills rivers course roughly northwest to southeast, the same as the alignment of the region’s

dune ridges and valleys; and so today’s drivers come upon Sandhills rivers suddenly, as did the Cheyenne. The landform of the Sandhills is relatively young, and so are its rivers. There are no miles-wide valleys, as found on the lower Platte River, to suggest the river that created the broad valley lies ahead. In the Sandhills, drivers may top a dune ridge and there below is a sparsely wooded, if wooded at all, river, the only suggestion of its presence being a few red cedar or ponderosa pine trees pioneering out into the grasslands, and a yellow road sign with a truck on a steep incline. The Niobrara River is like that on several highways in Sheridan and

northwestern Cherry County.

The Niobrara River roughly defines the Sandhills’ northern edge, and from Valentine downstream to north of Ainsworth, where the river valley begins to widen and is more densely wooded, there are often clues it lies ahead several miles before reaching it. Along that stretch of the Niobrara are other surprises unexpected on the Great Plains – waterfalls. A recent University of Nebraska-Lincoln master’s thesis study completed in 2005 and sponsored by the National Park Service documented 223 waterfalls between Borman Bridge just southeast of Valentine downstream about 35 miles

to the Norden Bridge north of Johnstown. Other falls no doubt occur in that stretch of river but were not mapped because access to survey them was denied. Most of the waterfalls are on the south side of the river. The drop of these waterfalls ranged from one foot to Smith Falls, Nebraska’s tallest, at nearly 63 feet. Located about 12 straight-line miles east of Valentine, Smith Falls is located on Smith Falls State Park (SP).

Only a handful of Nebraska rivers have natural waterfalls, and none can match the height or volume of those on the Niobrara or the Snake River, one of the Niobrara’s principal tributaries.



The Duane and Susan Sattler family of Lincoln read at their campsite while bratwursts sizzle on the grill. Only primitive camping is allowed at Smith Falls State Park to protect the site’s ecological significance.

Most waterfalls in mountainous regions are fed by snowmelt. The source of water for the Niobrara’s falls is quite different.

South of the Niobrara lies the vast Sandhills region, some 19,000 square miles of sand dunes sparsely covered with grasses and other plants of short stature. Most of the dunes formed some 12,000 years ago at the end of the last ice age, when the mid-continent climate turned warmer and drier, but the dunes have been reworked again and again during subsequent periods of drought, some as recently as 650 years ago. This vast dune field is as thick as 800 feet in southwestern Cherry County; and saturated with water, forming the Ogallala aquifer that extends as far south as Texas. About one-fourth of the Sandhills region, nearly 12,000 square miles, drains into the Niobrara River. It is the groundwater of these sands that feeds waterfalls such as Smith Falls.

Along the northern edge of the Sandhills, water leaching slowly downward through the dunes encounters an impervious layer of rock geologists call the Rosebud Formation, and here the groundwater’s downward journey turns horizontal and northward. Between Valentine and the mouth of Plum Creek north of Ainsworth, the Niobrara River has carved down as

much as 300 feet below the canyon rim, through the Rosebud formation, allowing the groundwater to spill out as seeps and springs on the south canyon wall or only a short distance from it. The spring-fed creek feeding Smith Falls is less than one-half mile long from where it bubbles up from the ground to where it spills down to the floodplain of the Niobrara. Because the volume of water stored in the Ogallala Aquifer is so vast, the movement of water through the sands so slow, and because the Sandhills are used principally as range land, not irrigated crop production that can cause the water table to fall, the flows of these seeps and springs has been essentially constant.

The north-facing, south valley wall sheltered from the dissecting summer sun and the cool, damp microclimates created by the seeps, springs and waterfalls have created something of a living fossil bed in the Niobrara Valley for 35 miles downstream from Valentine. The shaded, spring-branch canyons fingering off south from the river are home to 42 northern plant species, relics leftover from the end of the last ice age, plants that could not have survived if exposed to the extreme heat of Nebraska summers.

At Smith Falls there are colonies of paper birch and hybrid aspens, wild



Above: Cool and moist microclimates created by seeps, springs and waterfalls on the north-facing Niobrara Valley wall are home to relic plant communities and species, including the white-barked paper birch, once common across Nebraska at the end of the last ice age. Right: Jeremy and Karen Keller from Ocean Springs, Mississippi walk on the historic bridge at the park that spans the Niobrara River.

sarsaparilla, Saskatoon serviceberry, sedges and other vestiges of a time when climate was cooler and the Nebraska Sandhills were cloaked not in prairie grasses, but in spruce forests and aspen groves. It is also along the moist south valley walls that eastern deciduous forest extends to its westward limit in northern Nebraska. Six distinct biomes merge along the central Niobrara – the northern boreal forest remnants found in the spring branch canyons, eastern deciduous forest, Rocky Mountain forest on the north rim characterized by ponderosa pine, and three types of prairie – tallgrass, mixed-grass and western shortgrass. For that reason the river downstream from Niobrara has been called the “biological crossroads” of North America. An estimated 160 plant species are at the edge of their range in the central Niobrara Valley.

Because of the merging of these biological biomes, Smith Falls SP is an excellent site for birders as well as amateur botanists. About 268 species

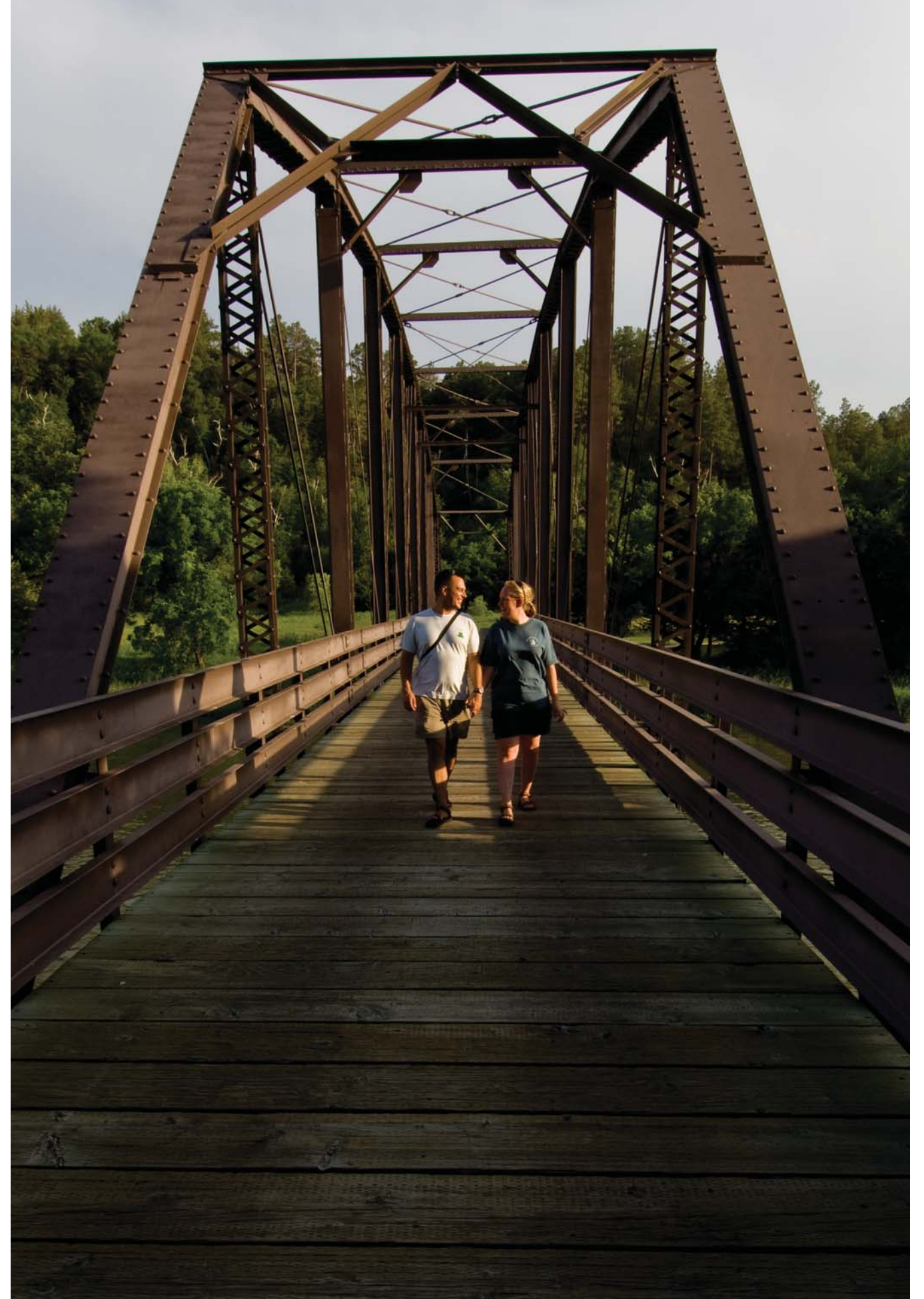
of birds have been reported from the central Niobrara River Valley and nearly half of them nest there. Numerous eastern species are at the western limit of their range, and western species at their eastern limit. Closely-related species from east and west hybridize in the river corridor, among them indigo and lazuli buntings, scarlet and western tanagers, Baltimore and Bullock’s orioles, rose-breasted and black-headed grosbeaks, eastern and spotted towhees and others. Other nearby sites worthy of attention are the Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) three miles northeast of Valentine and The Nature Conservancy’s Niobrara Valley Preserve with headquarters just southeast of the Norden Bridge north of Johnstown.

Little is known of Frederic “Honey” Smith, an early settler for whom the falls was named. Smith filed the first homestead patent on the land in 1896. During this time, six companies of U.S. Army troops were still stationed at the Fort Niobrara Military Reservation east of Valentine to keep the Sioux on

the Rosebud reservation just across the state line.

In 1941 Frederic Krzyzanowski is said to have purchased the land for \$7 per acre, principally for the cattle pasture south of the river valley, not knowing the falls was on the property. Unlike the Snake River waterfall southwest of Valentine, Smith Falls was not easily accessible and received little attention from state geologists, botanists, ornithologists or sightseers; there were probably no ranch wagons gathered by it for Sunday picnics; and few early-day photo postcards made of it to send to relatives back east showing the beauty to be found in Nebraska.

Before 1970, floating the Niobrara River downstream from Valentine was uncommon, and mostly limited to scout groups and local recreationists; as often as not in a homemade, flat-bottom boat or tractor tire inner tube rather than by canoe. All that began to change in the early-1970s when seat-of-the-pants canoe outfitters began taking customers down the river. Putting in just below





Smith Falls State Park is a favorite takeout point and camping site for thousands of canoers, tubers and kayakers each summer.

Cornell dam near the Valentine NWR headquarters made the first day of a leisurely two-day trip conveniently end at Smith Falls, where many canoeists camped for the night. Krzyzanowski apparently enjoyed the occasional visitors and joined them to tell local stories and lore around the campfire in evenings. As canoe traffic increased he would make the rounds collecting an overnight camping fee of twenty-five cents a night.

By the end of the 1970s, and certainly

during the 1980s, the Niobrara River had been discovered, and summer weekend traffic exploded. By the end of that decade, canoeing the river was too often accompanied by trespassing on private land, excessive drinking and other unacceptable behavior. Canoe camps popped up willy-nilly and bank-to-bank crowds on summer weekends transformed the Niobrara into a party river. Use of the Niobrara River below Valentine had to change and it did.

A proposed dam across the Niobrara

near the Norden Bridge for flood-control and irrigation set off a prolonged and heated battle at hearings, in newspapers, in court and in Congress to decide how that stretch of the river would be used in the future. In May 1991, then President George H. Bush signed the Niobrara Scenic River Designation Act. The National Park Service was to administer the 76-mile stretch of the Niobrara downstream from Valentine. No land would be acquired; the designation only established guidelines

for preserving the historical and natural values of the river valley. Use of the river by canoeists and tubers boomed during the 1990s. A national backpacking magazine named the Niobrara one of the nation's top 10 canoeing rivers and Nebraska's "best kept secret" was exposed nationwide. Smith Falls was the most popular site for visitors to stop, and foot traffic lead to erosion threatening the scenic and biologically important area.

Fred Krzyzanowski died in 1988. A September 14, 1991 *Omaha World-*

Herald editorial noted that Krzyzanowski "...and his family have been good stewards and gracious hosts to river travelers. The family has performed a great public service by keeping Smith Falls open to canoeists and others. However, there are no assurances that future owners would keep Smith Falls open to the public." With the cooperation of the Krzyzanowski family, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission obtained a 30-year lease on the 250-acre property with an option to extend it an additional 30 years. Financial support to establish a park came from the Nebraska Game and Parks Foundation and private donations. In May 1992, Smith Falls became Nebraska's newest and eighth state park.

Because of its small size and unique ecological significance, Smith Park was not extensively developed, particularly the south side where the falls is located. To minimize erosion and encourage the recovery of native plants, a mile-long, self-guided nature trail passing through a spring-branch canyon was established on the south side of the river. Aspen trees – a unique hybrid between the eastern big-toothed aspen and the Rocky Mountain quaking aspen – will be encountered along the trail. Volunteers from the Telephone Pioneers of America, financed by a grant from U.S. West, built a 300-foot boardwalk to the falls. Primitive campsites, fire pits, restrooms and a parking area were the only developments on the floodplain and are all on the north side of the river. Above the floodplain and largely screened from the river by trees, a visitor's center, maintenance shop and house for the park superintendent were constructed.

Still, there remained a problem accessing the falls. In Krzyzanowski's time, the county had constructed a hand-powered cable car across the river so his children could cross the river and meet their school bus. That cable car was also frequently used by visitors to access the falls, even after his children no longer need it. Because of liability concerns it was removed. The only way to reach the falls was by canoeing or floating the river, or wading or swimming from the north side. In

October 1996, a historic 160-foot iron truss bridge was moved to the park to span the river and allow foot access from the north side to the falls. The bridge had spanned Verdigre Creek in Knox County before being replaced by a more modern bridge. The bridge is similar in construction to others on that reach of the Niobrara River and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Wheelchair access is now possible from the north side of the river to the boardwalk and the falls.

More often than not, natural and manmade wonders tend to be vertical – Pikes Peak, California's sequoias, the Empire State Building or the lighthouses of Maine. Being a grassland state, Nebraska comes up on the short end competing in the realm of vertical natural wonders, but on the Great Plains, Smith Falls's delicate cascade of water over rock is certainly a contender. ■

The Niobrara River from the launch site below Cornell Dam at Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge to Smith Falls can easily be canoed in one day. There are 23 camping sites at Smith Falls State Park but no RV pads. Reservations may be made a year in advance. Picnic tables, restrooms, a concession and pay showers are on the north side of the river. The park is open from May to mid-November. For additional information: call or write Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Parks Division, PO Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370, 402-471-0641 or 1-900-826-7275 to leave your name, complete address and information request. Visit www.OutdoorNebraska.org for additional park information. For reservations, call 402-376-1306.



Smith Falls is located at Smith Falls State Park, 18 miles east of Valentine in north-central Nebraska. A sign marks the turn-off on State Highway 12.

The Hows of Hiking

Prepare yourself for Nebraska's most understated outdoor activity.

By Tom Scheimo

After an exceptionally long and cold winter, Nebraska hikers are anxious to get back out on trails around the state. Despite the perception of out-of-state travelers on I-80 that Nebraska is flat and exposed, in-state hikers know better: The wealth of outstanding hiking opportunities here has long been one of the state's best-kept secrets. However, that seems to be changing.

Backpacker Magazine featured Nebraska hikes in several of its issues last year, and Summit Post, a world mountaineering and hiking web site, has a growing section on Nebraska hikes and climbs. Hikers in eastern Nebraska will be glad to know the Omaha Hiking Club has a web site listing events for their area, while Panhandle Trails gives trail and event information for hikers in the west (see

Web Sites for Hiking in Nebraska

The following is a list of addresses for web sites that have good information and tips on planning safe Nebraska hikes in a variety of areas across the state.

- www.ngpc.state.ne.us/parks/guides/trails/findtrails.asp
- <http://members.cox.net/omahahikingclub/index.htm>
- www.panhandletrails.com
- www.americanhiking.org/Get-Involved/National-Trails-Day/
- www.trailnote.com

sidebar for addresses). Also, for those desiring to get involved in National Trails Day events (June 5 this year), the American Hiking Society has several area hikes listed. And, of course, the Nebraska Game and Park Commission's web site has a section-by-section interactive map of hiking trails throughout the state.

While many people hike year round in Nebraska, the greatest period of activity generally runs from Memorial Day through November. The greatest concentration of trails are in the southeast and in the Pine Ridge region of northwest Nebraska. Nebraskans hike for a variety of reasons, including fitness and health, experiencing nature at their own pace, increased photo opportunities and as a great activity that allows plenty of time to visit with friends or family.

Both beginner and seasoned hikers should bring a variety of things on their outings. Water, sunscreen, insect

repellent, rain gear or a jacket, a hat, small first-aid kit and a pocket knife are common. Sturdy footwear, in the form of hiking boots or shoes, is important, and in order to avoid blisters, feet should be kept dry. Many use foot powder or take along an extra pair of socks. Some hikers also like to bring a backpack or belt pack, a hiking stick, a camera, and a trash sack to pack out their waste or litter they encounter along the way.

Standard hiking courtesy includes always yielding right-of-way to horse traffic, since the animals spook easily, and obtaining landowner permission before venturing onto private property.

Hiking safety is important, so making sure to bring a map, compass or GPS unit is a wise step. Checking the weather forecast ahead of time can be vital, since hail, lightning, floods or blizzards can all threaten one's health. Wildlife hazards do occur, especially in the form of rattlesnakes, and in parts of the state where mountain lions may be found, some hikers opt to carry pepper spray or hike in groups. Off-trail hiking can also be risky, especially in the form of falls, barbed wire and old wells. Solo hiking increases one's safety risks, so for those going it alone, be sure to notify a reliable person of your exact plans and timetable, so they can contact authorities if you do not show up at the designated time.

But these are only minor duties when participating in one of Nebraska's most underutilized outdoor activities. ■



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Hiking provides some of Nebraska's best views.

Take Me Fishing

National initiative introduces fishing to the mainstream.

By Jeff Kurrus

Phones, laptops and PS3s. Youtube, Google and Facebook. Face it, technology is the world we live in, and it's hard to turn your head and not see something related to the science fiction that our world has become. However, among all of these media outlets so dedicated to our global advancement, recently it's been hard not to notice the Take Me Fishing advertisements that are often book-ended with an ad for something like the latest breakthroughs in televisions.

It's understandable to see ads concerning fishing on the Outdoor Channel or Versus, or in copies of *Field & Stream* and *Outdoor Life*. But in the mainstream? This is a new spin on an age-old passion. One that I'm enjoying seeing.

Take Me Fishing is a program originally created by the Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation (RBFF), which was established in 1988 as part of the Sport Fishing and Boating Safety Act and is administered by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. That act required the Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior to implement a national outreach plan to address recreational boating and fishing participation. The Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council developed the plan and RBFF was created to carry these plans out.

One of RBFF's initiatives was the Take Me Fishing campaign, created to increase the number of anglers on the water throughout the country. As RBFF states, "parents don't frame pictures of their children playing video games and couples don't reminisce about the unforgettable evenings they spent sitting in front of the TV. That's just not how memories are made."

Memories are made on the water, and the Take Me Fishing initiative gets people there with their web site – TakeMeFishing.org.

At TakeMeFishing.org, visitors can view state-specific information concerning their local fishing and boating opportunities. For example, I can do a search near Lincoln and find what walleye lakes are close to the capital city. It is information that I can get from a variety of outlets, but for planning a trip across Nebraska or even to a different state, it's a valuable resource to have all of the information in one spot. In addition, it provides links to purchase fishing licenses and the latest fishing and boating equipment.

Furthermore, Fishington – TakeMeFishing's "Boating and Fishing Capitol of the Internet" – provides online chat rooms, news and events, and information on RBFF's Anglers' Legacy program, which is a pledge anglers take to introduce someone new to the sport of fishing.

That's it. That's all the RBFF is asking. Take someone fishing. It's a pretty simple thought, really, but in today's constantly evolving television and internet world, it's something that often gets left out of everyday life for both kids and adults. Good thing these same media outlets are also being used to advertise something so memorable. Personally, I've never seen an advertisement that

makes me smile as much as those featuring a little kid with what could be his first, or hundredth, fish of the day. It's hard to tell the difference because all the smiles are the same. ■



Controlling the Herds

Big changes in store for 2010 deer seasons.

By Eric Fowler

Having liberalized deer seasons in recent years in hopes of increasing the white-tailed doe harvest and reducing the deer herd in eastern Nebraska and still not reaching that goal, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission is pulling out all the stops this year, even implementing an Earn-A-Buck regulation in some units that will force hunters to target antlerless deer.

But reflecting the diversity that makes Nebraska unique, the 2010 deer regulations, the most complex set ever approved in the state, also aim to either increase or decrease mule deer numbers in western Nebraska, depending on the locale.

Kit Hams, big game program manager with the Commission, said he hopes Earn-A-Buck, which will require firearm hunters in the Elkhorn and Wahoo management units to check in a doe before or while checking in a buck, an expanded October Antlerless season and an increased number of Season Choice and bonus antlerless tags will jumpstart an effort to trim whitetail numbers by 25 percent in the eastern third of the state by 2013.

The new regulations might not have

been necessary had last year's white-tailed doe harvest not fallen 7,000 animals short of the goal biologists had set for all seasons in the Missouri, Wahoo, Elkhorn, Blue Southeast and Blue Northwest units, which cover the eastern third of the state where deer numbers and crop damage complaints are the highest.

Part of that shortfall was pinned on only 1,000 deer being harvested in the inaugural three-day October Antlerless season, 2,500 short of projections, but weather was also a factor: A wet fall delayed crop harvest, giving deer miles of standing corn to hide in during the November firearm season and beyond. In the east, three blizzards in December and January and extreme cold kept many muzzleloader and late season rifle season hunters home. Doe harvest was down in 12 of 18 units across all seasons, and the total statewide harvest fell by 4,000 deer to 76,613.

The Commission is hoping that expanding the October season from three days to 10, opening 60 percent of the state to hunting, and reducing the price of October antlerless permits to \$10 for residents and \$54 for nonresidents will increase participation and trim 10,000 deer from the herd

Not knowing if that projection will ring true, however, biologists also felt it was necessary to add the Earn-A-Buck requirement in the Elkhorn and Wahoo units, a move they had hoped to avoid. To reduce the herd in eastern units, biologists believe does must make up 60 percent of the total harvest. It was 51 percent for all seasons in the Elkhorn unit and 55 percent in the Wahoo unit last year. In both units, only 39 percent of the firearm harvest was antlerless.

A similar program has been used off and on in Wisconsin since 1996, mostly in deer management units in farm country in the southern portion of the state. "It definitely worked," said Keith Warnke, big game ecologist with the Wisconsin Department of Natural

Major Changes for 2010 Deer Seasons

- Expanded area, length and \$10 permits for October Antlerless Season
- Added Earn-A-Buck requirement in Elkhorn and Wahoo units
- Expanded Late Firearm season for Season Choice permit holders
- \$5 Youth Deer Permits
- Added 750 Either-sex firearm deer permits
- Created Mule Deer Conservation Area in Southwest
- Created Statewide Whitetail Buck Permit valid during three seasons

Resources. "Earn-A-Buck increased the harvest of antlerless deer by upwards of 40 percent in most units. In many of those units, we needed Earn-A-Buck to just get the population to stop growing – free antlerless tags and extra days of gun hunting didn't do it."

Earn-A-Buck is not popular among Wisconsin hunters, and Hams expects hunters in the Elkhorn and Wahoo units to have a similar view, even though 54 percent of 14,000 recently surveyed hunters supported the idea. On the same token, 65 percent of archers were not in favor of the October Antlerless season, but Hams said the new regulations will probably have to stay in effect until deer harvest goals are met and, in the case of Earn-A-Buck, could be expanded to other units.

Biologists knew they needed to trim whitetail numbers in the east and were developing plans to do so even before Omaha State Senator Scott Lautenbaugh introduced a bill in the Unicameral that addressed the whitetail issue with drastic measures. Recrafted with the help of the Commission and others and passed in March, LB 836 will give the Commission the ability to create depredation seasons or to extend existing seasons to target deer in problem areas.

Complaints of too many deer are not limited to eastern Nebraska. Two new Season Choice units were created in the west, one along the North Platte River west of Lake McConaughy, and the other along the White River in Dawes County, to help control whitetails. And in some parts of the Panhandle

and north-central Nebraska, an increase in mule deer herds and crop damage led biologists to issue more antlerless permits and bonus tags to allow for mule deer doe harvest.

In southwestern Nebraska, however, mule deer management is more complicated and has led to the creation of a Mule Deer Conservation Area (MDCA) that includes the Platte, Frenchman, Buffalo and Republican units.

Within the MDCA, mule deer numbers are higher in grassland areas than in farmlands, but across the MDCA, the buck-to-doe ratio and the number of mature bucks is below the level biologists would like to see.

To more tightly control mule deer harvest, statewide archery and muzzleloader permits will no longer be valid within the MDCA. Only those with Youth, Landowner or a new three-season permit, valid during Archery, November Firearm or Muzzleloader seasons, will be able to harvest a mule deer. Additionally, mule deer buck harvest is not allowed in the MDCA on the redefined Restricted Statewide Buck Permits. Last year, mule deer could not be harvested on Statewide Buck Permits south of Interstate 80. Biologists also created three new Season Choice areas within the MDCA to allow for antlerless mule deer harvest where it is needed.

"We wanted to limit the mule deer buck take and we wanted to be fairly distributed through the archers, muzzleloaders and firearm hunters so they all have an equal chance of getting a permit," said Hams.

Within the MDCA, archers and muzzleloaders can continue to hunt whitetails at will, and whitetail-only permits will continue to be issued in the four units for the November Firearm Season.

Applications for the drawing of permits in the Republican Mule Deer Buck unit and DeSoto muzzleloader seasons will be accepted through May 7. All other deer permits will be available from Commission permitting offices or online beginning June 14. For more information on the upcoming seasons, pick up a copy of the 2010 Nebraska Big Game Guide from a permit agent or Commission office, or visit www.OutdoorNebraska.org. ■

2009 Deer Season Roundup

Permits and Harvest	2008	2009
Total permits sold	131,392	*132,338
Archery permits sold	16,350	*17,265
Youth permits sold	6,854	*7,230
Non-resident permits sold	12,022	*12,535
Total permits and bonus tags (potential harvest)	217,252	*239,245
Total deer harvest	*80,467	76,613
Whitetail antlerless harvest	*32,397	29,711
Whitetail buck harvest	*36,235	34,768
Mule deer buck harvest	*9,115	8,926
*all-time record		

Deer Hunter Profile	2008	2009
Total hunters	96,337	96,970
Hunters with one permit	68,511	69,119
Hunters with more than one permit	27,826	27,851
No. of permits they purchased	62,875	63,228
Most permits for one hunter	27	22
Average permits per hunter	1.36	1.36
Average harvest per hunter	.84	.79
Female hunters	8,588	9,037
Hunters age 15 and under	9,179	9,537
Oldest hunter	Four at age 95	Two at age 94

Harvest by Permit Type (includes antlerless deer taken with bonus tags)

Type	Permits Sold	Total Harvest	Antlerless	Mule Deer
Firearm	55,302	34,501	20%	19%
Landowner	12,215	7,239	33%	16%
Archery	17,265	7,612	44%	4%
Muzzleloader	14,490	5,929	59%	16%
Youth	7,230	5,472	37%	19%
Season Choice	24,921	15,009	100%	6%

Top Units

Whitetails

Antlerless, all seasons:

- Wahoo, 5,830
- Blue Southeast, 3,535
- Elkhorn, 3,521
- Blue Northwest, 3,271
- Republican, 2,829

Total bucks, all seasons:

- Wahoo, 4,801 (2,089 in November Firearm season)
- Blue Southeast, 3,412
- Elkhorn, 3,491
- Blue Northeast, 3,271
- Republican, 3,205

Percent of bucks age 2½ or older, November Firearm season:

- Sandhills, 88
- Pine Ridge, 84
- Plains, 82
- Keya Paha, 80
- Calamus West, 78
- Buffalo Whitetail, 74
- Missouri, 73
- Republican/Rep. Whitetail, 73
- Statewide Buck, 74
- Loup West, 70

Mule Deer

Antlerless, all seasons:

- Sandhills, 538
- Plains, 456
- Pine Ridge, 377

Total bucks, all seasons:

- Sandhills, 1,274 (910 in November Firearm season)
- Frenchman, 1,429
- Pine Ridge, 923
- Platte, 903
- Plains, 862

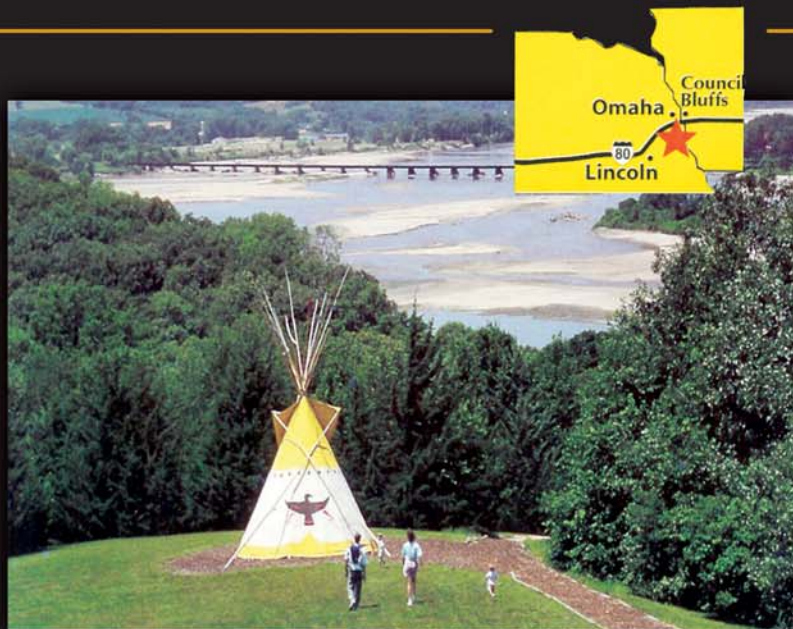
Percent of bucks age 2½ or older, November Firearm season:

- Sandhills, 90
- Statewide Buck, 89
- Pine Ridge, 83
- Calamus West, 79
- Keya Paha, 79
- Plains, 78
- Buffalo, 77
- Loup West, 76
- Frenchman, 72
- Upper Platte, 74
- Platte, 67



Expanded antlerless deer seasons and the new \$5 youth deer permit will make it even easier to take youths hunting this fall.

Cass County IN THE MIDDLE OF IT ALL



- Strategic Air and Space Museum
- Eugene T. Mahoney State Park
- Wildlife Safari Park
- Hiking and Biking Trails
- Seven Golf Courses

For FREE Visitors Information, call 1-800-965-8479
www.visitcasscounty.com

ATTRACTIONS/EVENTS

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.greatplainsracker.com.

SEE CHAUTAUQUA in Columbus, NE June 17-20 in West Pawnee Park. Hear five speakers portray American leaders during the 1930s: Franklin Roosevelt, Will Rogers, Huey Long, Zora Neale Hurston and Aimee Semple McPherson. Music, home tour, cemetery tour, bike ride. www.chautauquacolumbus.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.

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, written health guarantee. Stud service: GRHRCH UN 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: Expecting two litters of Labrador retriever puppies in February and March. Gundog training for all pointers, hunting retrievers and spaniels. Dale and Kris Taylor: (402) 787-2048, www.premiargundogs.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.

HAVE CANADIAN-WHELPED FEMALE PUDEL-POINTER, sired by German import, want to raise pups. Looking for male dog to breed. dfattig@gmail.com

FISH/FISHING

FISH FOR SALE. Catfish, largemouth bass, smallmouth

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

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.

AKC GERMAN WIREHAIRED POINTER pups: "Fur covered hunting machines." Ready April 20th. 4 males, 5 females \$550/\$650 Call (402) 301-3402, email: Tamkelley25@yahoo.com, Elkhorn, NE.

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.fermenterssupply.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.

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 inplaininsight.homestead.com. "The more you buy, the quicker my wife can retire!"

TAXIDERMY

B&B SKULL CLEANING and European mounts. Professional services at affordable prices. Contact Rubin Fields, Omaha, NE, at rfields.otbb@gmail.com or (402) 598-1873

VACATIONS/RESORTS

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.

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.

HIGH PLAINS HOMESTEAD, Home of the Drifter Cookshack & Bunkhouse - An Old-West Cow-Town

Experience the fun!
 Open-air Festivals and more. .

Exeter-Fairmont-Geneva-Grafton
 Milligan-Ohio-Shickley-Strang



www.visitfillmorecounty.org

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.

WINEMAKER'S LOFT at Sage Hill Vineyard: comfortable accommodations fit 4-6 in rustic Rock Creek Valley, Parks, NE. Southwestern Nebraska's most ideal lodging for hunting, fishing, birding and wine touring. (308) 423-2062 or (308) 423-9463, walkers@bwtelcom.net, www.nebraskawines.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.

WANTED

WANT TO VISIT WITH someone about training bird dogs for Quail partridge prairie chickens. Public areas where you can ride horses and camp. Rich Thornton (515) 231 2465, rdfoxtrot@hotmail.com.

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 (515) 440-2810 or e-mail dave@larsonent.com



Prairies

MADE BY HAND

PRODUCT OF U.S.A.

**PRAIRIE PLAINS
RESOURCE INSTITUTE**
AURORA • NEBRASKA

EST. 1980

**Prairie
Plains**
RESOURCE
INSTITUTE

IT'S WORTH THE EFFORT.

Making anything by hand takes time, patience and a commitment to quality. For 30 years Prairie Plains Resource Institute has been restoring Nebraska prairies with over 150 species of Nebraska seed - collected, processed and planted by hand. That same care and attention goes into everything we do - planting prairies, offering outdoor education for all ages and maintaining our 7 Nebraska prairie preserves. Learn more by visiting our website and become a member today!

1307 L Street | Aurora, NE 68818 | 402-694-5535 www.prairieplains.org



◀ Enclosed is a picture I took back in November 1980 or so near McCook.

Pictured (from left to right) are John Rich, Royal Rich Jr., James Rich, Royal Rich Sr., Larry Rich and Harry Rich.

I was the only outsider who was fortunate enough to pheasant hunt with this great family. We're all still hunting with the exception of Royal Sr., who passed away in 1999. What a gentleman he was, and the best wing shooter I've had the pleasure of hunting with in my many years in the field.

– Fred Liedell, Centennial, Colorado



▲ Grouse hunting at Halsey Forest in about 1966 with (from left to right) Chick Houser, Donald Stanley and Donald's father, Dale Stanley. I am the first wife of Dale, who is now deceased.

My son, Donald, was seven years old then. He is now a Federal Park Ranger at Catoctin Mountain Park, Maryland, where Camp David (the presidential retreat) is located.

– Marjorie Wyant, Lincoln, Nebraska



▲ I have fond memories of my grandpa, Charley Holliday, while fishing and hunting in Nebraska. My grandparents were from St. Francis, Kansas, but spent countless hours fishing in Nebraska. Grandpa won the "Big Fish of the Month" sponsored by Rich King's Texaco in St. Francis. This photo was taken in the 1960s, and the northern pike was caught at the Rock Creek Fish Hatchery lake in Parks, Nebraska. Grandpa received a free fishing reel for bringing in this big catch. Grandpa's love for the outdoors has become his legacy through his children, grandchildren and now great grandchildren.

– Kevin Holliday, Shubert, Nebraska



◀ Pictured are my grandmother, Betty Maser, and grandfather, George Maser Jr. This photo was taken in the summer of 1969 at their home in Waverly. My grandparents had just returned home from a weekend at the family cabin on the Platte River near Ashland.

– Kellie Spier, Bennet, Nebraska

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

Free Fishing and Park Entry Day

Saturday, May 22, 2010



Fish anywhere in the state and visit any Nebraska state park or state recreation area for FREE. No park entry or fishing permit required!

As part of **Free Fishing and Park Entry Day**, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission is offering the **13th Annual Family Fishing Clinic** at select state parks and recreation areas:

- Alexandria State Recreation Area (9:30 am – 2:30 pm)
- Chadron State Park (9:30 am – 2:30 pm)
- Fort Robinson State Park (9:00 am – noon)
- Fremont Lakes State Recreation Area – Lake #3 (9:00 am – noon)
- Lake Minatare State Recreation Area (9:00 am – 1:00 pm)
- Louisville State Recreation Area – (9:00 am – noon)
- Mahoney State Park – Owens Marina (9:00 am – 11:00 am)
- Platte River State Park (9:00 am – noon)
- Ponca State Park (9:00 am – 8:00 pm)
- Two Rivers State Recreation Area – Lake #1 (9:00 am – noon)
- Victoria Springs State Recreation Area (9:00 am – 6:00 pm)

For information on specific area events, visit **www.OutdoorNebraska.org** or contact the individual area

NEBRASKA
GAME PARKS

See You Out There.