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magazine

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Nebraskaland

Volume 98 • No. 9
November 2020

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PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

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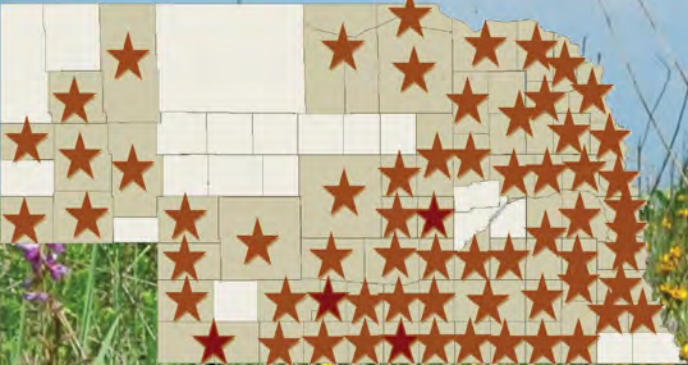
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and telephone number. Letters may be
condensed and edited. Photographs are
also welcome.



@laceyfiorelli, Custer County
Barn Near Anselmo

FALL-COLORED FALLS

Water cascades over a beaver dam on Clear Creek, a tributary to the Platte River in Polk County south of Columbus.

PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER



STICK BAITs FOR SUCCESS

By Brian Robinson

Traditionally, stick baits such as Husky Jerks and Rogues are deadly when used early and late in the season. I have found this to be particularly true in some areas and have found a few tips that really help catch fish.

For the most part, I lean toward sticks that suspend, like the above mentioned weapons. I've found that having a variety on hand will help you dial in what the fish want. Some days they want 3-inch baits, some days 4½-inch. Every bait has a different wobble, roll and appearance at rest while suspending. Pay attention to these aspects and let the fish tell you what they want.

Finding the right cadence is also important when using sticks. I will usually cast out, rip them down a few

cranks, then completely stop them. Then try to figure out if I should reel slowly, twitch the bait or reel a couple times and stop it again. Pay attention to when the fish strike; is it on the pause or right when you start cranking again? Once you find the right cadence, you can be kept busy.

Dressing your hooks is also an option. A few lures come with this style hook, but for the ones that don't, I have tied a few hooks with mylar and feathers, adding flash to the presentation. Once again, let the fish tell you if they want a flashy bait, or one that's a bit dull and slower.

Use these tips, find a pattern that works, and you'll be amazed at how many different species of fish will strike a well-presented stick bait.



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PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY

FIVE WINGSHOOTING TIPS

By Jeff Kurrus

'Tis the wingshooter's favorite time of the year. With quail, pheasant and waterfowl seasons open, why wouldn't it be? Keep these tips in mind this month:

Know the loads you're shooting. Pellet count, energy and velocity are big deals when wingshooting. The more you know about what you're firing from your gun, the better you can make adjustments when you're afield. It's much easier to diagnose your problems of the day when you know what loads you're firing.

Shoot the same gun. Being comfortable with a gun never hurts. I've seen seasoned hunters shoot a 50-year-old Remington 1100 much better than their younger contemporaries shooting the latest and greatest. The main reason: that old timer has been shooting that same 1100 for 50 years.

High dollar doesn't mean high success. I've been hunting for more than 35 years and have been at *Nebraskaland Magazine* for nearly 15 years. I've photographed hunters of all skill levels and pocketbook sizes, and not one time have I come home after an upland or waterfowl hunt and thought the hunter's high-dollar gun or shells were the reasons why they shot so well.

The price of shotgun shells varies dramatically, from

a few dollars a box for lead field loads to more than \$40 a box for some waterfowl loads. Again, find what works for you by researching and journaling, and pay attention to the ballistics numbers on the box instead of the price tag beside it.

Shoot. I stayed away from sporting clay ranges for years because I was under the impression that because the clays slowed down each second they flew, it would hinder me when shooting at birds that never slowed down in the air. I was wrong. What a really good sporting clay course can reveal is what shots you consistently miss, and which ones you should be looking for when hunting. Plus, it allows you to shoot that same gun over and over, becoming more comfortable with each pull of the trigger.

Shoot With Good Shots. I think one of the greatest attributes to my shooting skills is being on dove fields as a kid with guys who shot well. Watching birds fall around me, then picking up a .410 for the first time and going 2 for 50 made me realize I had a lot of work to do. To this day, shooting beside a good shooter makes me up my game, helping me limit my shots to birds in killing range and making sure every shot counts.

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PHOTO BY JONATHAN NIKKILA

CALLING FALL TURKEYS

By Jarrod Spilger

While it’s no secret spring gobblers are susceptible to calling, many hunters may not realize fall turkeys can also be called.

The key to calling fall turkeys is knowing which turkeys you’re talking to. There are two basic types of fall flocks: hens with poults and gobbler-only bachelor groups.

To call hens with poults, yelps will certainly work, but also make some contented feeding sounds like purrs and soft clucks to simulate a family group peacefully foraging.

Another essential fall sound is the kee-kee-run, an assembly call often used by young turkeys that get separated from the flock. It says “where are you” and can vary in loudness and intensity depending on how desperate the lost bird feels. The high, whistle-like kee-kee actually sounds like “doi, doi-doi-doi” followed

by a couple yelps at the end to complete the run.

Boxes and slates easily replicate realistic yelps, clucks and purrs, but I personally have to use a mouth call to make kee-kees. It takes some practice, but is well worth the effort when a troop of turkeys comes strolling into shotgun range looking for that missing member of their flock.

Dealing with gobbler-only groups can be trickier. In fall, the focus is on survival, not breeding, so these bachelor flocks of mature toms and year-and-a-half-old jakes are ultra wary. Use deep, coarse, drawn-out gobbler yelps to fool them. Maybe throw in a few purrs periodically, but be subtle. You don’t want to blow the birds out of the woods, only peak their curiosity in the hope that they come investigate.



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PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

WHEN LIQUID TURNS TO SOLID

By Martha D. Shulski

A thick glaze of ice on the landscape. Bent trees and downed power lines. Hazardous road conditions. What does this make you think of? Your answer is probably freezing rain. Precipitation takes on many different forms throughout the year and these are determined by the state of our atmosphere.

One type in particular is quite unpleasant when you're caught outside in it. As the name implies, this type of rain is unique in that it freezes on contact. The reason is more than just a chilly surface around you. The air above you plays a significant role.

Think of a cylinder stretching above your head all the way through the atmosphere. When that cylinder has a shallow layer of sub-freezing temperatures near the ground, a deep layer of warm temperatures that are above freezing, then another shallow cold layer to cap the cylinder, that is when freezing rain occurs. The precipitation can begin their

fall as either rain or snow, pass through a warm layer and then a second cold layer before meeting the surface. Water drops freeze on contact in this environment. You'll find this setup to occur in a narrow strip in advance of a warm front associated with a low pressure system moving through during the colder time of year (fall, winter and spring).

Another setup that causes freezing rain is when the surface is near freezing, but not saturated, and some of the rain droplets evaporate as they near a surface. Evaporation causes cooling to a point below freezing, and this can confound new weather forecasters when they receive reports of freezing rain, yet the air temperature is above or just at freezing. Regardless of the cause, freezing rain is a dangerous condition hampering travel and our comfort.

Martha D. Shulski, at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, is the director of the Nebraska State Climate office.

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PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY

VENISON “MEATBALL” SLIDERS

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

I had an unsuccessful rifle season last year, so I decided to attempt deer hunting with a muzzleloader in December. I am a self-proclaimed “meat hunter,” so a season choice tag gives me “the best bang for my buck” — except that I wasn’t looking for a buck. It turned out that I got one anyway.

As I turned “her” over, I realized that she was a “he.” It was the first time I had ever shot a male deer, and recalling an Instagram post that I had seen about a deer testicle sandwich earlier that week, I became inspired. My husband winced as he watched me take more of that deer home than he would’ve.

If you enjoy rocky mountain oysters, or I guess “prairie oysters” in these parts, then you’ll enjoy deer testicles — the taste is similar. The deer was young, so sliders, and not a whole sandwich, was the way to go.

For those who haven’t tried this odd delicacy, the flavor is mild, like minced chicken breast, and the texture is soft and light.

Makes: 2 sliders

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Cooking Time: 15 minutes

Ingredients:

- 2 deer testicles
- 2 to 4 tablespoons of Italian-style seasoned bread crumbs
- 2 to 4 tablespoons of marinara sauce
- Shredded mozzarella cheese, to taste
- 2 King’s Hawaiian Sweet Rolls, split open
- 2 teaspoons of olive oil
- Red pepper flakes, to taste

1. With a sharp knife, cut through the tough outer membrane of each testicle. Carefully peel away the soft

interior. I don’t know what it’s like on older deer, but these were extremely delicate, and a tad tricky to peel away from the membranes. I used the edge of my knife to gently scrape them out.

2. Place each testicle between two sheets of plastic wrap and gently flatten them.

3. Spread out half the breadcrumbs onto a plate, lay the testicles on top and pour the rest of the breadcrumbs on top to coat.

4. Heat olive oil in a pan. When it begins to shimmer, fry the coated deer testicles in the pan until golden on both sides. It will firm up as it cooks.

5. Line a small baking sheet with foil. Assemble the bottom halves of each roll with a fried testicle, mozzarella cheese, marinara sauce and red pepper flakes. Leave the tops of the rolls off, crust-side facing up. Broil until cheese melts and bread becomes toasty. Enjoy and try not to burn your tongue.

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Calamus

The Off-Season

Photos and story by Eric Fowler

During the summer, Calamus Reservoir is bustling with activity. Anglers ply its waters, and boats and personal watercraft buzz across its surface. Campgrounds are filled with RVs, and people stake claim to their own stretch of white-sand beaches.

The 5,200-acre lake, located northwest of Burwell, gets a bit quieter when school begins in August, picking back up on Labor Day weekend and again in mid-October for the annual Halloween activities. After that, things really slow down, and through the remainder of the fall, winter and most of the spring, you might have the entire lake to yourself.

You might have to share the land around the lake with a hunter or two, but with 5,000 acres, you won't know it. In the surrounding riparian woodlands and sandhills uplands and the winding

Calamus River and its many backwater oxbow wetlands in the wildlife management area above it, hunters can find deer, turkey, grouse, pheasants, quail, dove, ducks and geese.

Birders can find plenty of nongame species to watch on the property, deemed an Important Birding Area by the National Audubon Society. Thousands of American white pelicans stop in the spring and fall. In the dead of winter, hundreds of trumpeter swans may be scattered around the lake but mostly on its upper end and in the river above. Hundreds of bald eagles flock to Calamus, often sitting on the edge of ice next to open water between flights to pick up dead gizzard shad.

Far from any big city, the highways here are less traveled, and the night sky is dark. It's quiet here in the off-season, but for many, there is no such thing as too quiet. [N](#)



Common mergansers swoop in to land in an oxbow wetland on the Calamus River at Calamus Wildlife Management Area.



The Calamus River winds its way through the wildlife management area above Calamus Reservoir in Loup County.



TOP LEFT: Fall color emerges from the fog in a lowland prairie on the southwest side of Calamus Reservoir.

TOP RIGHT: American avocets feed in the shallows of the reservoir.

BOTTOM: A kayaker photographs American white pelicans loafing on a shallow bar in the upper end of the reservoir.





ABOVE: The setting sun paints a reddish hue on a stump inundated when the reservoir was filled and left exposed by the annual drawdown.

RIGHT: A pair of trumpeter swans glides over the lake.

LEFT: The soil cement reinforcement on Virginia Smith Dam allows anglers to walk troll for walleyes during the spring spawn.



Jim Gross of Lincoln hunts quail with his yellow Labrador retriever, Duke, in the uplands around Calamus Reservoir.



Outdoor Nebraska

By Renae Blum

November is rich with hunting opportunities, but that isn't the only thing to do outside. Fishing, wildlife viewing and park visits can all add up to a month filled with great outdoor memories. **N**



WILD TURKEYS
PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Harvest your own Thanksgiving turkeys

Throughout the month | Statewide

Put something “wild” on the holiday table — serve a wild turkey or two that you harvested yourself. Not only does it give the non-hunter in the family the chance to try wild game, it's also a great conversation piece. Remember that you can easily combine a wild turkey hunt with any other hunt, especially a deer hunt, and you're allowed two birds of either sex on one permit in Nebraska.

Fish for trout at Lake Ogallala

Throughout the month

A good trout fishery year-round, Lake Ogallala offers the biggest trout in the state, up to 8 pounds and perhaps more. And unlike some species of warm-water fish, cold-blooded trout stay active and catchable into November. Bring a variety of baits and try your luck for a large trout!



RAINBOW TROUT
PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

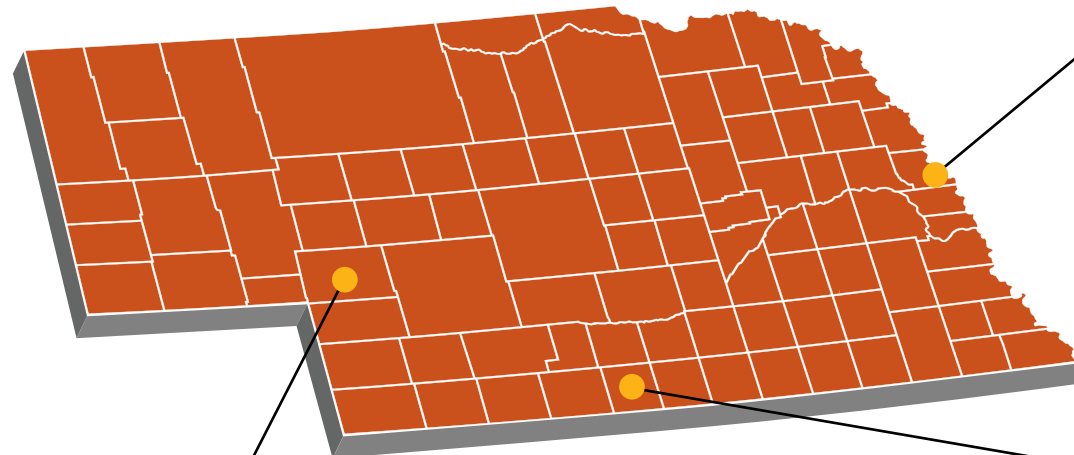


HARRIS SPARROW — PHOTO BY CHRIS MASADA

View and photograph Harris's sparrows

Early November | Eastern Nebraska

With distinctive black and chestnut markings, the elegant Harris's sparrow stands out. Look for this large sparrow in plum thickets along rural roads or in brushy areas on the edges of woodlands. Harris's sparrows respond especially well to “pishing,” or imitating a bird's “psh-psh-psh” call to draw them out of the brush. If you're not easily embarrassed, give it a try!



Go waterfowl hunting in Harlan County

Throughout the month

A stopover for migrating birds, Harlan County offers good waterfowl hunting opportunities. For best success, scout ahead of time to find where birds are likely to roost and feed, and set up your decoy spread to mimic the activity you see. Hunting the backwater areas of Harlan County Reservoir may give you an excellent chance at getting closer to birds.

What To Do in November



THE SUTLER STORE AT FORT ATKINSON SHIP
PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY

Go on a scavenger hunt at Fort Atkinson

Year-round | Fort Atkinson State Historical Park

Even if the fort interior is closed and there's no living history going on, you can still have a good time exploring Fort Atkinson. The park's two scavenger hunts, with a history and nature focus, will take you throughout the grounds looking for answers, watching videos via QR code, and noticing things you might not otherwise. Pick up the scavenger hunt sheets at the fort's west gate.



A BLACK LAB RETRIEVES A DUCK — PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY

FINDING THE RIGHT DUCK CALL

BY TODD MILLS

I remember getting my first “real” duck call. It was a gift from a friend, and I couldn’t wait to give it a try. After several failed attempts to make it sound like a duck, I realized that maybe it wasn’t the right call for me or maybe I just wasn’t very good at blowing it.

It was then that I went on a search to find the right call for my skill level and my budget. I forged ahead and found myself learning everything I could about calls and, most importantly, how to make the right sounds with the call I was using. It became apparent that not only was the duck-call world full of different shapes and varieties, but it seemed everybody had a different opinion of what call worked best.

When working outdoor shows for several years, without a doubt the question I got asked the most was: “What duck call should I buy?”. You may have had this same question.

The following is a checklist if you are looking for a call or are considering buying one for someone else. After all, with the holidays fast approaching, what duck hunter wouldn’t want another call to add to their collection?

Material is Important

When choosing a duck call, you must first decide on the type of material you’re going to use. Duck calls basically come in three materials: polycarbonate,

acrylic and wood.

The basic difference between acrylic and polycarbonate is the molding process. A polycarbonate call will not last as long but also will be cheaper. Acrylic is a very dense material and will last longer and allow you to produce more volume through the call. Wood calls can provide great sound, but are not as versatile or durable.

Bottom line here is your budget. My personal recommendation — purely based on investment — is for any beginner to start with a polycarbonate call. No need to spend over \$100 on a call when you’re not even sure how to blow it yet.

Single Reed or Double Reed?

First mistake I ever made when diving into the duck call market was buying a single reed for my first call. I got talked into it by a sales rep and was fascinated by the sounds he could make with it. Unfortunately, I couldn’t make the thing sound anything like he did. For the beginner, I would highly recommend a double-reed call. A double-reed call doesn’t take as much air flow and will make the basic sounds you need to call ducks. It will not, however, allow you to ring loudly. Single-reed calls allow for louder, higher notes and require more air flow to operate. Intermediate to advanced

Duck calls come in many shapes and varieties. It is a hunter’s job to find which calls work for her or him.



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

callers are more suited for a single-reed call, but either can work depending on the area you are hunting.

What Terrain are You Hunting?

Seems strange that a duck call choice can be made on what type of terrain you are hunting, but different set-ups and water areas require different sounds. For example, I hunt a lot of open water and public areas. When dealing with large bodies of open water with other hunters around you, being able to blast a “hail call” to attract high-flying ducks can be advantageous. A single-reed call may be best for you in this type of setting. When hunting smaller, private waters, you won’t need an attention-getter call. Softer, raspier notes with a double-reed call might be best here.

Keep Your Call Clean

Much like your gun, calls need to be maintained. When hunting river areas, sand can build up inside the call around the reed. After each hunt you should pull the call apart (if it’s a single mold) and run hot water through it. Make sure all small particles are removed. Leave the call open overnight to dry. Reeds will need to be changed periodically as well. When the reed turns a brownish, milky color, it’s time to change it. Numerous times I’ve opened someone’s call and the reed is brittle and the edges dirty. You don’t want that. Keeping your call clean will allow it to keep from sticking and provide a smooth, open chamber for air flow.

When I first started hunting back in the 70s, there were only a few duck-call manufacturers. Obviously, that’s not the case now. The types of calls and brands can be overwhelming. Find the call that fits your needs the best. Some come with a beginner calling video, which can be extremely helpful. Most importantly, once you decide on a call, spend time learning the right sounds to make. 



Polycarb Single Reed Teal

Acrylic Double Reed

Custom Wood, Single Reed — Polycarb Insert

Acrylic Single Reed Open Water

Polycarb DU Double Reed

Custom Acrylic Single Reed

Acrylic Single Reed Competition

Original Single Reed Wood

Custom Single Reed Wood

PHOTOS BY ERIC FOWLER

How a Nebraskan Helped Invent the Modern Livestock Industry

By David L. Bristow, *History Nebraska*

Today we take for granted that the livestock business involves large feedlots, management based on nutritional science and use of the latest technology. A Nebraskan named Thomas Benton Hord was an innovator who helped create the modern livestock industry. From his beginnings in the open-range era, Hord became, arguably, Nebraska's first modern cattleman.

Hord started out during the Western cattle boom of the 1880s. He worked with partners and Eastern investors to build large herds on the unfenced ranges of Wyoming and Nebraska. Survival was a challenge. A severe winter in 1886-1887 decimated herds, and a financial panic in 1893 led to years of economic depression and low livestock prices.

Meanwhile, relations between cattlemen and homesteaders

became violent in parts of Wyoming. During the "Johnson County War" of 1892, cattle barons hired gunmen to go after alleged rustlers. One of Hord's foremen, Mike Shonsey, was involved in the killing of two men; the following year Shonsey shot to death another man who came seeking revenge. Shonsey then fled to Nebraska and spent the rest of his life working at Hord operations in Central City and Clarks.

With the end of the open range, cattlemen began to think of ways to raise large numbers of animals within limited boundaries. Based in Central City, Hord began operating ever-larger feedlots for cattle and sheep. By 1903, his operation had 13 feed yards and 18,000 acres of crops. In a typical year, Hord finished 10,000 cattle, 10,000 sheep and 7,000 hogs, feeding them 8,000 tons of hay and a million bushels of corn. He was



The Thomas Hord feedlot near Neligh, Antelope County. History Nebraska RG4232-2-20

said to have the nation's largest cattle feeding operation.

Historian Jim Potter researched Hord's business records and uncovered not only the operation's large scale, but also its innovativeness. Potter writes that Hord used "practices that seem modern even today. Each feedlot encompassed from 10 to 15 acres and had its own windmill to water the livestock. The cattle were fed a specific ration, largely shelled corn, in an amount that they 'will eat up clean, leaving nothing to be used for the next meal that has been slobbered over and made unpalatable.'

"Hord also took advantage of available technology. Each separate feeding facility was connected by telephone to the main office at Central City so Hord could keep in touch with his foremen. His key employees participated in a company profit-sharing plan in addition to receiving a salary. Purchase of grain used in the operation, only part of which was grown on Hord land, injected an average of \$300,000 per year into the regional economy. In 1905, Hord reported shipping a thousand carloads of cattle to market by rail, most going to Chicago."

At a time when factory production was growing rapidly, Hord applied an industrial mindset to the livestock business.

He has had many imitators. When he died in 1910, he was hailed as Nebraska's most successful livestock entrepreneur.

Search "Thomas Hord" at history.nebraska.gov to find Jim Potter's complete article and more photos. [N](#)

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



Mike Shonsey at Central City, probably soon after the Johnson County War. History Nebraska RG4232-5-11



Cowboys, who worked for Thomas Hord, at dinner at the 77 Ranch in Wyoming. History Nebraska RG4232-1-10

Ahead of Their Time

Story and photos by Eric Fowler

Blaine Dorn and Kobe Clevenger scan the sky for Canada geese while hunting from layout blinds in a corn field near Enders Reservoir in Chase County.



There might be a few high school kids who hunted more than Blaine Dorn and Kobe Clevenger. Or harder. Or more passionately. But there can't be many.

From the start of the archery deer season in September through duck and goose seasons to the end of goose season in February, these two members of the Chase County High School class of 2020 in Imperial hunted every chance they could. They were back in the field for the spring turkey season, first with bows and then shotguns. They spend the summers fishing or bowfishing.

"I'd rather be hunting than doing a lot of things," said Blaine.

Kobe said, "I like the challenge and the adrenaline you get from it."

Don't bother talking to them about the latest video games, though. Neither has much use for them. "I'd rather build fence than play video games," said Blaine, who does plenty of that in his job at a feedlot near Wauneta. "It's much more fun being outside than it is sitting on a couch."

Their passion is understandable. Both were raised in hunting families and started at a young age.

"I don't remember the first time my dad took me duck hunting, but I know I wasn't very old," Blaine said.

His father, Chad, has a better recollection, recalling Blaine was about 4 years old when he built a brush blind so he could take his son turkey hunting. Blaine shot his first turkey the following year with a .410 shotgun. "When he was younger, he could do hen clucks with his voice really good," Chad said. "In the late season when the birds would get call shy, I could take him along and he would do it with his voice, and he could call in birds for us." Pheasants, waterfowl and deer followed.



Chad and Blaine Dorn and Clevenger laugh at a video Blaine captured of his father harvesting a turkey.



Dorn and Clevenger take a pair of geese they decoyed while hunting a corn field near Enders Reservoir.

Kobe's father, Kelly, got Kobe a shotgun for Christmas when he was 8 or 9. "We started pheasant and dove hunting," he said. "Then when he was 13, he shot his first deer and that kind of took over a little bit. He's hunted turkeys and ... you name it, they've hunted it."

Classmates and friends since pre-school, the two started hunting together with their parents when they were still in grade school. Once they turned 16 and could drive, you could bet that when they weren't in school, at sports practice or

working, they were hunting.

At that point, "We served a little bit less of a function in the hunting process," Kelly said with a laugh and understanding that most teens would rather spend time with friends than family.

"It quickly moved from wanting to go every once in a while to every moment he could possibly go."

"That's all they talk about," Chad said.

And when they talk hunting, they do so with a knowledge

that belies their age. The feeding patterns of deer, ducks and geese; how switching locations and decoy spreads can keep you ahead of wary, late-season geese; and how commercial hunting and leasing has changed the game are topics not lost on them, even in their short hunting careers. They take care of the ground people allow them to hunt and help the landowners with chores or anything they ask of them.

"Blain has got a big passion for all of it, fishing and hunting and everything," Chad said, "and he's pretty good at



Clevenger watches for turkeys from a ground blind along Frenchman Creek near Wauneta.

it. He’s learned a lot over the years.”

He learned some of that watching his father and grandfather, Gene Bartels, who operates an outfitting business, Kripple Duck Adventures, guiding deer, turkey, waterfowl and pheasant hunters. Started in 2003, the business was mothballed a few years ago when family obligations, including activities Blaine and his siblings were involved in, took priority. Blaine helped with that business, serving as a turkey guide for the first time when he was 14.

Blaine restarted that business and started guiding a few waterfowl and turkey hunters when he was a sophomore. One client, a representative of The Allen Company, manufacturer of hunting and fishing equipment, brought a film crew along, and Blaine is now featured in promotional video on the company’s YouTube channel.

Kobe helps out with the guided duck and goose hunts, help that is needed when you’re working with a 16-foot cargo trailer loaded with 12 dozen full-body duck decoys and 24 dozen full-body and shell-goose decoys and layout blinds. “Usually if it’s just the two of us, we kind of have to limit ourselves to what we put out because we’ve got to think about how many we’ve got to pick up,” Blaine said.

That collection of gear grew from an opportunity in the “backyard” of the Dorn’s rural home near Wauneta. Kobe’s grandfather, Harold Nordhausen, owns farm ground across



From left, Clevenger and Blaine and Chad Dorn watch for turkeys from a high vantage point above Frenchman Creek.



Clevenger and Blaine and Chad Dorn leave the Frenchman Creek bottom with a gobbler in hand.

the road. “It was always full of geese so we figured we’d better start hunting them,” Blaine said. The boys’ grandparents started accumulating goose decoys, a collection Blain said they were fortunate to have been able to take over. “We kind of got handed a lot of the stuff that you need to be successful in it, and then just kind of ran with it I guess,” he said.

“And now we’re building 16-foot pits,” said Kobe, who lives in Imperial.

While the two spend most of their time hunting together, they take their brothers and fathers along, too, when they want to go, which isn’t nearly as often as the boys want to hunt.

College will cut into the time they have to hunt together in the years to come: Blaine headed west to Torrington, Wyoming, and Kobe east to Lincoln. They were back home

Labor Day weekend trying to sneak within bow range of mule deer in the pastureland around Wauneta and Imperial. They will meet back there whenever they can. Blaine plans on returning to the area after college, starting a welding business and growing the outfitting business.

Their parents are all right with their son’s chosen hobbies, even though being gone so much can cause some tension at home.

“It caused a little stress every once in a while,” Kelly said. “It was a good trade-off. He was outside and experiencing all of that good stuff, and it was a lot better than the alternatives.

“There’s a lot worse things a kid could be doing,” Chad said. “The kids hunting and fishing is just a great thing.” 

Reflecting on the Crown-tipped Coral

By Gerry Steinauer

One morning last July, I was riding in a UTV down a trail at Indian Cave State Park with ecologist Krista Lang, when I blurted out “Stop, stop, stop!”

What had I seen? What had so excited this botanist? There, deep in the oak woods, growing on a log, was a beautiful crown-tipped coral mushroom. One of our missions that day was to photograph mushrooms, and this was a perfect specimen — fresh, big and immaculately shaped.

But there was a problem. The mushroom was in dense shade under shrubs, and I needed light on the subject to prevent a dull photo. Luckily on this day, this sometimes forgetful botanist had remembered his reflector. Portable, lightweight and collapsible, hand-held reflectors are used to

... you guessed it ... reflect light onto shaded photo subjects. In canopied forests and other habitats with tall vegetation, they are a must for close-up photography of insects, wildflowers or mushrooms. They also can provide fill light to reduce shadows and hence reduce overall contrast in an image.

My reflector, purchased online for less than \$20, has reversible gold, silver and matte-white surfaces to reflect varying colors of light. For the crown-tipped coral, I chose the gold surface to bathe the mushroom in a warm light that enhanced its tan color.

While I ran the camera, Lang, standing about 10 feet away, used the reflector to catch and aim a shaft of sunlight that had pierced the canopy onto the mushroom. The mushroom

was cast in a soft and more natural light than if I had used my camera’s flash.

That day, the reflector came in handy on several photo opportunities. Thank goodness I had remembered to throw it in the car that morning.



A reflector is used to redirect sunlight onto a pumpkin flower in the author's garden.

Nebraska’s Coral Mushrooms

Two words best describe the bizarrely-shaped coral mushrooms — “really cool.”

Their name, no surprise, reflects their erect, branching fruiting bodies’ resemblance to coral. Spores develop on the surface of the branches, whereas on typical toadstool-shaped mushrooms, the spores develop in gills or pores on their lower surface.

Chance Brueggemann, ecologist and resident mushroom expert stationed at Indian Cave State Park, knows of three species of coral mushrooms that grow in eastern Nebraska. He said the crown-tipped coral is the most common of the species. This spring-through-fall growing mushroom is distinguished by its whitish to yellowish, loosely clumped branches that are crowned with a cup-like depression bordered with three to six points. Though never abundant, he observes them most often growing on rotting hardwood logs near creeks, but also on logs in moist, wooded ravines higher on slopes.

The crowned-tipped coral is edible and is said to have a mild, woodsy flavor with a slight peppery aftertaste. Mushroom connoisseurs prefer it as a salad garnish, in soups, crispy fried and made into croutons. Brueggemann has tried them once. “It had a strange, chewy, noodle-like texture, but I sautéed it in too much butter and drowned the flavor.” He is committed to continue his culinary experimentation with the mushroom.

Also found in our state, the strict-branch coral grows on or near dead stumps, logs and branches of both deciduous



The strict-branch coral (*Ramaria stricta*).

and coniferous trees. Its light tan-to-brown branches form a tight upright clump. Interestingly, the form that grows on hardwoods tends to be a bit more orange in color and is less bushy than the form that grows on conifers. Brueggemann said these might be two distinct, but similar-appearing species. The mushroom’s pungent, anise-like odor and bitter taste make it poor table fare.

The handsome clavaria is found in Asia, Europe and North America, including Nebraska. It is identified by its thick base and pinkish branches that fade to yellow with age. Unlike our other corals, it grows from soil, not on dead wood, under deciduous and occasionally conifer trees. Mushroom hunters beware: This species is slightly toxic, and if consumed, can result in a stomach ache and other associated, unpleasant issues. Though toxic, it is used in traditional medicines in parts of the world.

Brueggemann is on the lookout for the magenta coral, which grows nearby on the wooded Missouri River bluffs in Iowa, but has never been found in Nebraska. One mushroom expert’s image of this elegant mushroom is of a “tiny set of purple antlers, cast aside on a bed of moss under oaks and hickories.”

“It would be a great find,” said Brueggemann. “I just need to be at the right place at the right time.”



Clavaria zollingeri is commonly known as the violet or the magenta coral.



PHOTO BY GERRY STEINAUER

Just Around the Corner

An Adventure Story

Story and photos by Jeff Kurrus



There are 53 marked graves at the New Pennsylvania Cemetery east of Gretna.

I needed a break. I had been sitting on a bucket for two days coaching 11-year-old softball players. Any sort of adventure, even a small one, was going to do me some mental good. So I went for a drive. This has been a long-standing mode of decompression in the Kurrus family going back to my parents when I was a kid. What was different on this day, however, was I was armed with the Explore Nebraska History app — a tool that would change these drives forever.

I came across the app by accident,

while looking for additional information on the New Pennsylvania Cemetery historical marker near my home and hoping history.nebraska.gov would be able to tell me something. The site encouraged me to download the app.

This is when my adventure began.

The app divided the state's historical markers into categories. The Stories category allowed me to see what markers were in my area, making any day-long or multi-day trip as close as I wanted to drive. For example, when

I pulled up my hometown of Gretna, 51 historical markers landed within 20 miles, with the New Pennsylvania Cemetery being just 1.31 miles away.

I started to drive. My first stop was at a rest stop just west of Gretna on Interstate 80 — The Great Platte Valley. In the distance, nothing impressed me: a cellphone tower, big machinery and crop fields. But I still couldn't help but think about some of the words on the marker: *"The Pawnee and Oto established large earthlodge villages near here ... By the late 1850s, it was estimated that 90% of all traffic which crossed the Plains followed the Platte ... The famous Pony Express followed the Platte Valley, as did the first transcontinental telegraph line."*

So I made a note to myself to further my research on the Pony Express, seeking to learn who had written the quintessential book regarding this short-lived phenomenon in American history.

The next closest site, according to my app, was at Eugene T. Mahoney State Park — the Prehistoric Burial Site marker. I had driven by this marker a hundred times before, not once allowing this line to resonate: *"Archaeological evidence indicates that the bodies were exposed to the elements until only bones remained."*

The bones were buried later in a communal graveyard. The practice of cemetery burial by these prehistoric people indicate their deep regard for the afterlife."

By this point in the day, with the light fading, I caught myself speeding to read one more marker before I headed back to my real world. The Ox-Bow Trail welcomed me in Ashland, marking the route that carried thousands of settlers West beginning in the 1840s and a quick history lesson on a body of water that had been an afterthought for years. *"Just west of here was an important ford across Salt Creek, where limestone ledges form a natural low-water bridge."*

Before I finished my drive home, I refreshed the app and was given an entirely new set of markers a short distance away, including the Armour and Company Icehouse northwest of Memphis. The discovery was a well-needed escape for me.

The following afternoon I needed another short adventure after we couldn't throw strikes. I found myself at the New Pennsylvania Cemetery just east of Gretna. I read the marker, as I had the others on my brief adventure, but then went even farther and started walking through the cemetery.

Headstones from the 1800s littered the area, some fighting to stand upright and others leaning against the closest tree. Then I saw a small row of five headstones, each equal in height and symmetry, and I reluctantly walked toward them.

Between the 1870s and the early 1890s, A.J. and H.F. Rishel tried to start or extend their family, yet at least five times they lost a child — from birth all the way through 7 years old. With an 11-year-old, 8-year-old and 1-year-old, each with their own distinct personality, of my own, I couldn't help but realize my own sports stupidity, where throwing strikes and catching

pop flies didn't mean as much as it did 10 minutes before.

What filled my thoughts now were questions. Who were these people? Did they have other kids who lived? Were the parents buried there? If not, why?

Upon returning to my house, I found myself researching the Gretna Public Library and ancestry.com looking for answers as well as other knowledge about those buried there.

I came to find out 72 people are buried in the New Pennsylvania Cemetery, yet only 53 are marked. In a sense, I had visited two mass gravesites in the past two days, with a lot more questions than answers in my mind.

It was an adventure in the truest sense of the word. It was mysterious, thought-provoking and intelligent. And it was in my own backyard.

Or, as far as I wanted to drive across Nebraska. 



The Prehistoric Burial Site marker in Eugene T. Mahoney State Park is within eyesight of cabins and the park's mini-lodges.



The New Pennsylvania Cemetery is a remarkable display of Nebraska history in my own backyard of Gretna.

THE INDIAN CALENDAR: BUT HOW DO I REMEMBER OUR ANNIVERSARY?

By Roger Welsch

Maybe I should have titled this essay “The Indian Almanac,” because the “calendar” for Plains Indians before the arrival of the white man held a lot more information than our modern, conventional wall calendars do.

The idea of “time” for the modern Nebraskan has only recently narrowed down to hours and minutes; there wasn’t much of a need for second-by-second precision, or for that matter day-by-day, on either side of the frontier for pioneers nor Indians. But for the tribes, there was nonetheless a need to know when certain religious festivals should be held, the right time to prepare for the twice annual buffalo hunts, and the optimum times to plant and harvest crops or wild foods.

Some tribes, for example the Pawnee, were particularly interested in astronomy and knew far more about celestial events than the average Nebraskan today. They kept track of the appearances of the morning and evening stars, phases of the moon, positions of constellations, and where the sun would be in the sky at any particular time of the day and year — things most Nebraskans have little need to pay attention to today, and therefore scarcely do.

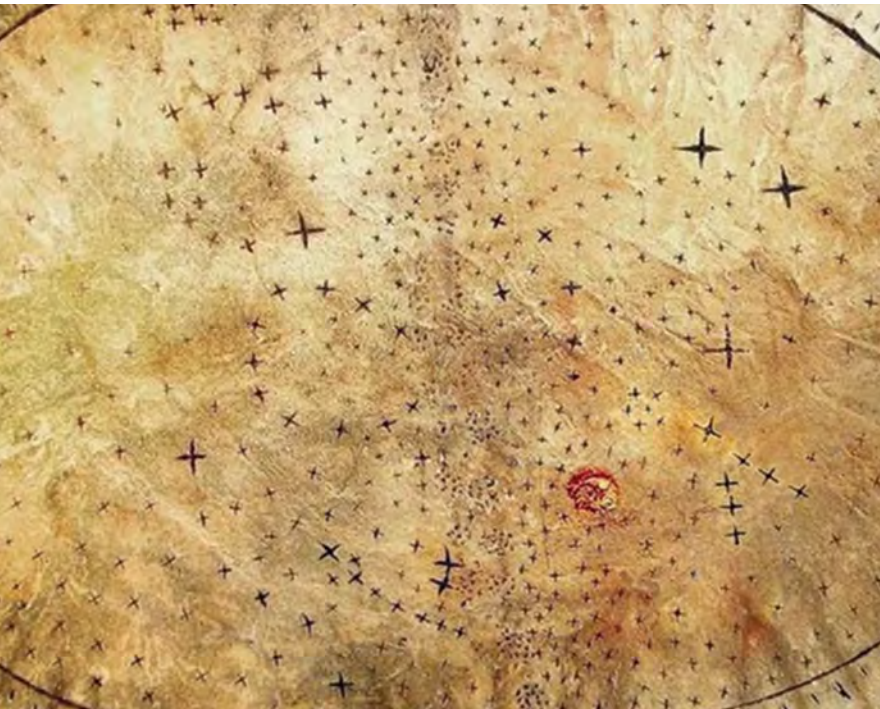
They watched the various stages and conditions of plants for information about what they could expect was going on

with other plants, or with their neighbors, the “four-leggeds.” As Melvin Gilmore noted in his important book, *Uses of Plants by the Indians of the Missouri River Region*, “Goldenrod as ... a sign in their floral calendar. They said that its time of blooming was synchronous with the ripening of the corn; so when they were on the summer buffalo hunt on the Platte River or Republican River, far from their homes or fields, the sight of the goldenrod as it began to bloom caused them to say, ‘Now our corn is beginning to ripen at home.’” And they watched the movements of animals — migrations, nest and lodge building, molting and shedding — for indications of when and where different foods would be most abundant or prime for harvest.

Plains Indians, even farming cultures like the Pawnee or Omaha, were often on the move. Imagine, then, one Pawnee telling another when he would like to meet him the next year to exchange pipestone for flint. Or a chief of one band arranging with another for the villages or bands to convene to renew their cultural relationships. And maybe provide courting opportunities for the young people and gossip forums for elders. One could simply say the two would come together just below the forks of the “Plenty Potatoes River” (Loup) shortly after the “Birds That Look At The Sky” (sandhill cranes) left the area, when the turkeys were hatching their broods, or when the planting moon was brightest. Those observations would have provided plenty of information for a successful meeting.

Arrangements like that might take more patience than we have today, but that’s a good reason, I suggest, for us to consider slowing down and paying less attention to the tyranny of calendar and clock, even — or especially — in these days of constant scrambling. Maybe we should ignore clocks and calendars now and then. “Meet you on the patio sometime tomorrow about the time the sun is eight fingers above the western horizon.” That would do it. Or how about, “Let’s get everyone together for a campout at the big lake on the broad water when the ironweed is in bloom and the moon is full.”

Roger Welsch is an author, humorist, folklorist and a former essayist for CBS News Sunday Morning. He has been contributing to Nebraskaland Magazine since 1977.



A nearly 300-year-old Skidi Pawnee Indian star chart on hide. The vertical line in the center represents the Milky Way.

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NEBRASKA'S BUCKS & BULLS

By Eric Fowler

If you hunt big game, you can appreciate a trophy buck or bull. To go with each is a story: was it effort, good fortune or a mix of both that led to the harvest? If you like that type of story, you will want to read *Nebraska's Bucks & Bulls: The Greatest Stories of Hunting Whitetail, Mule Deer, and Elk in the Cornhusker State*.

Released in September by the University of Nebraska Press, the book by Joel Helmer of Seward tells the stories behind 68 of the top trophy white-tailed and mule deer and elk harvested in Nebraska since the modern era of big game hunting began in 1945. There is a story from that first deer season, and the details behind 24 current and former state records and one former world record. With each story there is a photo.

Helmer didn't have to dig too deep to find the information for one of the stories he tells. He was there in 2016 when his daughter, Hannah, then just 14 years old, harvested what is now the state-record 426 7/8-inch non-typical elk in the Pine Ridge in northwestern Sioux County. That trophy inspired him to write the book.

The stories run the gamut, from first-time hunters who lucked into a trophy some will never see in the wild to

seasoned veterans who spotted their buck or bull while scouting, or through a kitchen window, and never gave up hope of getting into gun or bow range when the season arrived. Helmer also tells us about the hunters, their background, experience and other things he gleaned mostly from in-person interviews with the hunter or, in the case of decades-old trophies, their surviving family members. And he weaves in some geography and natural and cultural history to add another layer of depth to the stories.

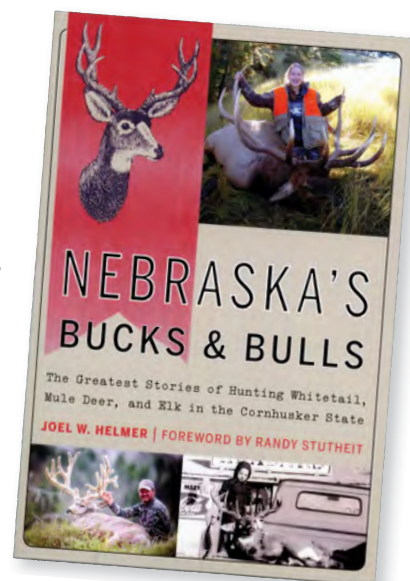
For a few trophies now in the hands of collectors, the hunter and their story is unknown, and Helmer relied only on what he could glean from the Boone & Crockett Club and Pope & Young Club score sheets. As an official scorer for both clubs, Helmer knows what separates many of these trophies from the rest, and includes those scoring highlights, as well

as where the animal ranks in the state and national record books.

Randy Stutheit, who curates the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's Big Game Trophy Records Program, wrote the forward for the book. The records program began in 1962 and includes 3,986 whitetails, 2,196 mulies, 177 elk, 190 pronghorn and 8 bighorn sheep that meet the minimum scoring requirements.

By comparison, more than 2 million deer and 2,700 elk have been harvested in the state. Stutheit appreciates the stories, especially those of the early trophies. "The stories told by the hunters present a fascinating history of deer and elk hunting through those decades," he wrote.

Entertaining and informative, this collection of stories will serve as an important chapter in the larger story of big game hunting in Nebraska and preserve the stories for generations to come. It is available from the University of Nebraska Press online at Nebraskapress.unl.edu/ bison-books and at other retailers.



The story behind Mike Lutt's hunt in Sioux County in 2014 that led him to this 232 2/8 non-typical mule deer is included in *Nebraska's Bucks and Bulls*.

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MAKE SAFETY A PRIORITY EVERY DEER SEASON

By Julie Geiser

Most hunters think that an accident won't happen to them, but anyone who has fallen from a tree stand thought the same thing. Those who have had the misfortune say that it happened so fast they had no time to react. At the end of the day, returning home safely should be every tree-stand hunter's top priority.

Falls account for the vast majority of injuries and deaths that involve tree stands. Although modern tree stands are made better than ever before, accidents remain possibilities. Keep yourself, your family and friends safe this deer season by following a few simple guidelines.

- 1. Inspect all equipment before the season. Check all welds, nuts, bolts, cables and straps to ensure everything is in good working condition.
- 2. Most falls happen when climbing up or down the stand. Every time you leave the ground, use a life line and full-body harness. Installing a life line takes only minutes, and it can save lives. Always attach yourself to a tether at the top of the stand if not using a life line.
- 3. Always have three points of contact when climbing up or down a stand: two hands and foot or two feet and one hand.
- 4. Clear all debris at the bottom of the tree. Taking this precaution will provide a safe base for the bottom of a ladder

- stand and minimize injuries if a fall should occur.
- 5. Know your personal limitations. If you are tired or, if weather conditions make climbing a tree stand unpredictable, hunt from the ground.
 - 6. Pull any gear up to you with a rope or haul line. Predetermine the length you need to safely pull a bow or rifle up to you once you're tethered to the tree.
 - 7. Keep a light easily accessible, whether it's a cap light or headlamp, to quickly illuminate your way when needed.
 - 8. Know and practice the 3 R's: recover, relief and rescue. At a safe distance close to the ground, practice and attempt to recover and return to a stand by pushing off the tree or swinging back to the stand. Know how to use the suspension relief device on full-body harnesses.
 - 9. Leave a hunt plan with a spouse or friend. Hunt plans let family or friends know where you're hunting and when you plan to return. Make a map of the area and mark where your stand is, which will make it easier for others to find you in case of an emergency.
 - 10. Keep a cellphone in a pocket close to your body, safely secured and easily accessible if a fall occurs.
 - 11. Finally, don't take unnecessary chances and use common sense. If something doesn't feel right, don't do it.



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

A photograph of a young woman with blonde hair, wearing a white baseball cap and a red shirt, smiling and holding a large green fish. The background is a bright blue sky with white clouds. Overlaid on the image is a large red letter 'N' logo for the University of Nebraska. Below the logo, the text reads: 'SCHOOL OF NATURAL RESOURCES', 'SEEK YOUR ADVENTURE', and 'GO.UNL.EDU/SEEK_ADVENTURE'.

A composite image for Chadron State College. On the left is the college's logo, which features a stylized eagle head in profile, colored maroon and white. To the right of the logo is the text 'CHADRON STATE COLLEGE' in a bold, black, sans-serif font. Below the logo and text is a photograph of three students (two men and one woman) walking up a set of concrete steps in front of a brick building. To the right of the photograph, the text 'Picture Yourself Here' is written in a large, elegant, cursive script. Below this, the words 'Affordable Rates' are in a bold, black, sans-serif font, followed by '\$7,656' in a very large, bold, maroon font. To the right of the price, 'per semester*' is written in a small font. Below the price, the text 'Includes In-state Tuition, Fees, Room and Board' is in a bold, black, sans-serif font. At the bottom of the advertisement, a maroon banner contains the text 'Apply today at csc.edu/apply' in a white, bold, sans-serif font. Below the banner, in a small font, is a disclaimer: '*Numbers based on the 2020-2021 academic year's cost of attendance. In addition to these fixed costs, there are variable costs. Students will need to plan for expenses such as books, supplies, transportation and personal expenses. The total amount of these variable costs will depend upon individual taste and lifestyles. All costs are subject to change without notice by the Nebraska State College System Board of Trustees.'

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GRACEE GIDEON, PHOTO BY CHAD GIDEON

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Former commissioner Lynn Berggren, left, and Larry Rutar, right, after a walleye trip to Harlan in the spring of 1968. The friendship continued with a goose hunt that included Lynn’s son, Pat (middle), near Kearney. The traditions of hunting and fishing with the Berggrens has grown, even in the absence of Lynn, with sons Kevin and Pat.

– Larry Rutar, Grand Island



Pictured is my brother, Bob Knerl, upon returning from his duck blind near Ponca State Park in November of 1958. He was unable to overcome the urge of stopping at our home and proudly showing the Canada goose that he had just shot to my two sons: Kelly, age 2; and Jeff, age 8. This photo was taken in the doorway of our home in Ponca as my wife would not allow Bob farther entrance with his boots and the dead goose. Thanks for a great magazine!

– Phil Knerl, Ponca



Taken on a cold, snowy Saturday morning in January 1962, my brother, Ron Ayers, with a jackrabbit shot while hunting an open field southwest of Norfolk.

His shotgun was a bolt action, full-choke 28 gauge. We walked an open field when the rabbit jumped and ran. It made the mistake of not running off, but stopped within gun range of Ron’s shotgun. The rest is history and a great stewed rabbit over homemade biscuits.

This was his first wild game shot. He was 14 years old, and I was 10.

I have hunted and fished in Nebraska for over 55 years — great magazine, great memories, great state.

– Reg Ayers, York



This was my dad’s, Harry Newill, houseboat up at Gavins Point Dam in the 1960s. There were gobs of houseboats then; the dam was completed in 1957. The other picture is of my mom, Ruth Newill, catching a fish while on the houseboat.

– Paula Stromquist, Oakland

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



JAILHOUSE SPIDER

By Chris Helzer

I spent a wonderful five years of my childhood in the Nebraska panhandle. My memories of those times are of fresh air, wide-open spaces, fishing, exploring and good friends. I also remember the natural landmarks of the area. I particularly remember driving past Chimney Rock and scrambling around on Courthouse and Jail Rocks.

A couple autumns ago, I traveled to Gering for a conference and organized my trip so I'd have time to stop at Courthouse and Jail Rocks on the way. I hadn't been on site since I was about 9 years old. Not surprisingly, when I arrived, there were aspects of the site that matched my memories and others that didn't. I had a strong sense of familiarity as I walked around, but I was also pretty sure the rock formations were a lot bigger back in the late 1970s.

This was the first time I'd visited the site as a photographer, and I quickly realized how difficult it was to get both rocks in the same photo. Even with my wide-angle lens, I was having trouble finding locations from which I could see both Courthouse and Jail Rocks. Unhelpfully, the sun was dropping quickly toward the horizon, giving me a very limited time window. As I scrambled around, trying to frame a perfect shot, I had a sudden realization that I was wasting a great personal experience.

Rather than enjoying the nostalgia of revisiting a childhood haunt, I was using up all my energy trying to take a photograph that would look just like thousands of others already taken. I stopped and took a breath and re-evaluated.

First, I took a few minutes to just look around and soak

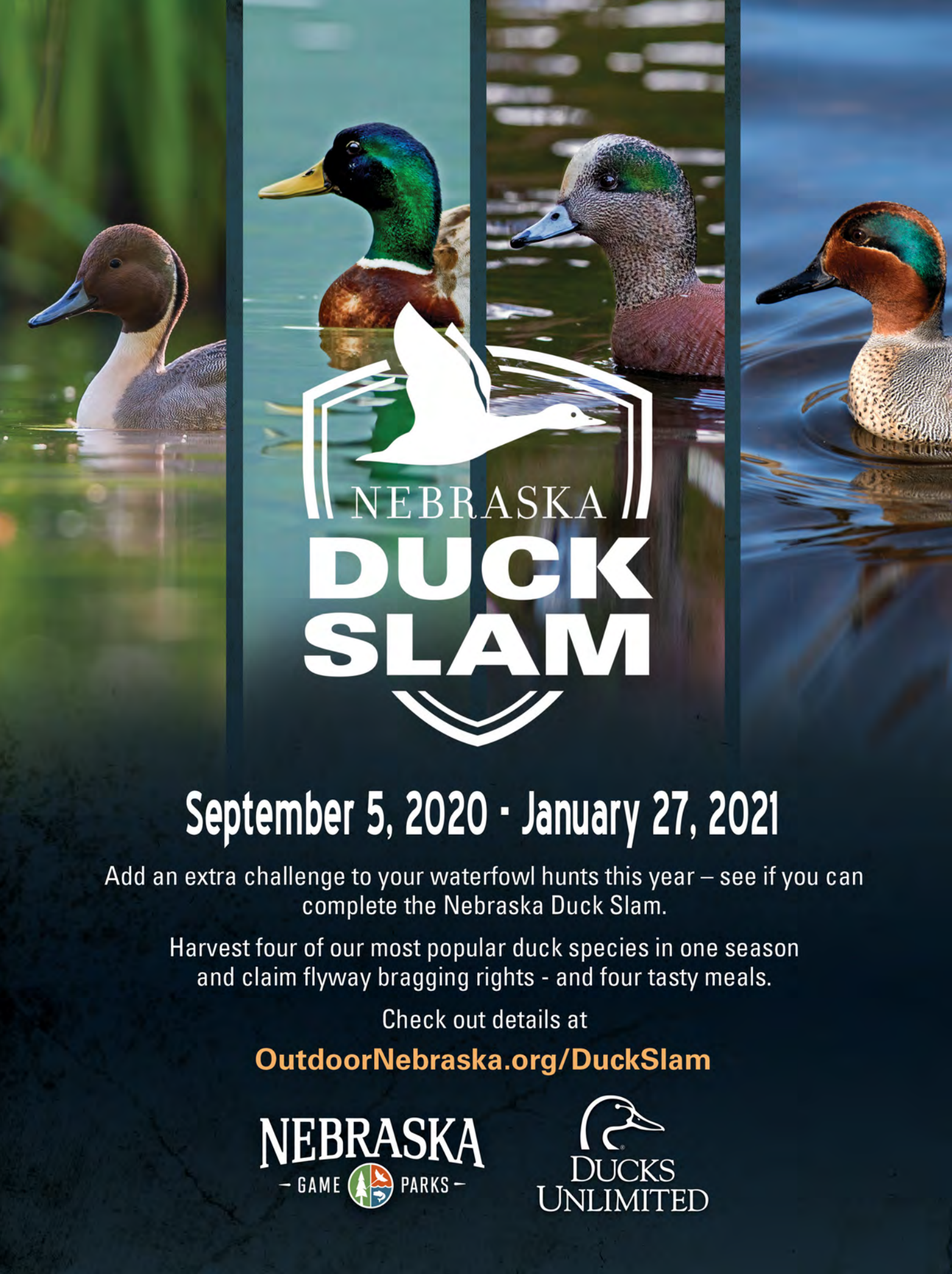
in the place. I let my mind flow back to my childhood and enjoyed the memories of being there as a kid. One of those includes me standing below Jail Rock and looking up at a golden eagle on its nest. Now to be clear, maybe there was a golden eagle nest and maybe there wasn't, but I remember one being there, so I enjoyed thinking about it.

After that very pleasant pause, I came back to the present and decided to spend the rest of my allotted daylight pursuing photos I actually enjoy taking. For me, that tends to be photos of flowers, bugs and other small things. Almost immediately upon making that decision, I started to see spiders. I photographed a great little nearly-translucent spider on its web down in a draw. As I was crawling back up the hill, I spotted a big black-and-yellow garden spider and sighed with happiness.

I took a few close-ups of the large spider before realizing that I might still be able to come away from this visit with a photo that represents my own personal take on Courthouse and Jail Rocks. I got my wide-angle lens back out, begged the spider to stay put while I moved very close to it and got my shot.

A spider hanging in front of a national landmark is a pretty good representation of how I see the world. Also, because you can't see its web in the photo, it looks a lot like a giant spider is cartwheeling down Courthouse Rock, which makes me giggle a little. Regardless, it was the perfect capstone on a great trip down memory lane. Maybe the next time I visit, I'll be able to find an attractive little grasshopper or tiger beetle!

PHOTO BY CHRIS HELZER



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