



A male bluegill guarding its nest in a southeastern Nebraska pond during the spawn stares down a snorkeling photographer. Photo by Eric Fowler.

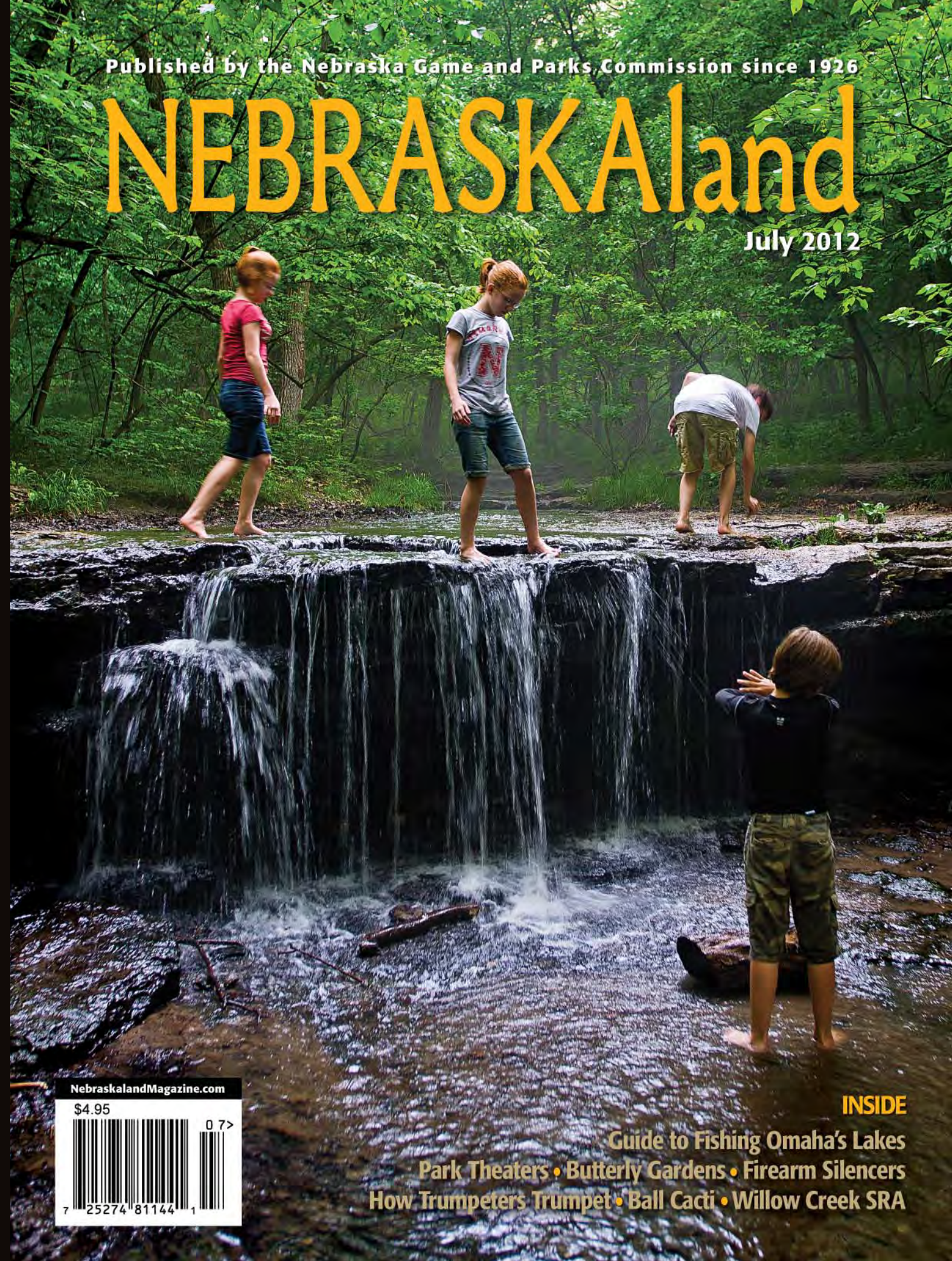
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INSIDE

Guide to Fishing Omaha's Lakes
 Park Theaters • Butterfly Gardens • Firearm Silencers
 How Trumpeters Trumpet • Ball Cacti • Willow Creek SRA



NEBRASKAland

Volume 90, Number 6, July 2012

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Reservoir near Pierce offers fishing, boating, camping and trails. TEXT AND PHOTOS BY ERIC FOWLER

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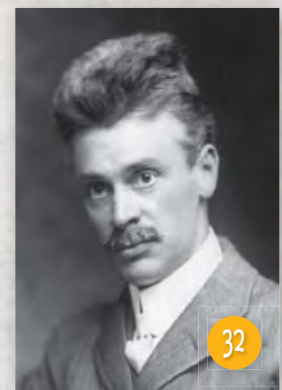
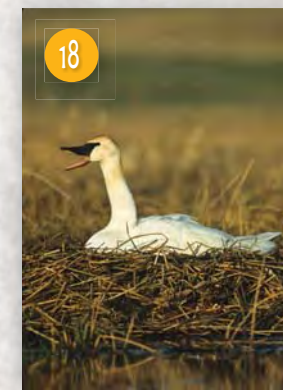
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Cover: (Clockwise from left) Madison and Morgan Kempkes of Omaha and Damian and Devin Thompson of Akeny, Iowa, play in the falls of Stone Creek at Platte River State Park. Photo by Eric Fowler.

Opposite: A road winds through towering ponderosa pines in the Nebraska National Forest south of Chadron. Photo by Eric Fowler.

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Summit Lake Goose Eggs

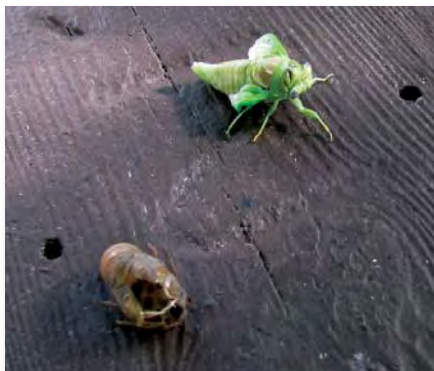
We found this goose nest at the very end of the jetty at Summit Lake this spring.

The goose had made her nest on the very end of the jetty, and we didn't see the pair until we were right on top of them. Both flew off but came back later and Mom even sat by the nest while we were fishing.

Marion Ball
Arlington, Nebraska

Cicada Picnic

I really enjoy *NEBRASKAland* and read it cover-to-cover each month. There are always great articles and fantastic photos about the greatest state in the union! I always get a kick out of finding the Nebraska Visitor as well! I had an interesting encounter with one of these visitors last summer. While my family and I were camping at Calamus



Reservoir we found a cicada on our picnic table in the process of shedding its skin. I took a series of photos as the creature emerged from its shell. I thought you might find it interesting.

Thanks,
Gary Bales
Lincoln, Nebraska

Young Master Angler

Our four-year-old son, Brody, caught his first master angler fish, a wiper, at Red Willow Lake this



past May. The moment was priceless because his brother, Cole, netted it and Brody's mouth was wide open. Their grandparents, Mark and Glenda Fletcher, bought them both a lifetime hunting and fishing license two years ago. Brody was only two and Cole was four! They think it's awesome that they will always have it.

Katie Graham
McCook, Nebraska

NEBRASKAland Visitor Letters

We want to thank all 73 readers that sent e-mails and letters for last issue's visitor, a **Salt Creek tiger beetle** that was on **page 31** (see page 11 for the winner, rules and this issue's hint). Here is one of the wonderful responses we received:

I found the visitor in this June issue on page 31 (upper righthand corner) it looks like a tiger beetle (*Cicindela punctulata*) according to bugguide.com and the article about tiger beetles on page 40 of the same issue.

My family and I REALLY enjoy *NEBRASKAland Magazine*, from the great articles and photography to the fun of looking for the visitor. Each issue always has something of interest for everyone to read. As junior storm chasers, we loved the article on storms this month – thanks!

As a hunter safety instructor I often

uses this magazine to illustrate how the Nebraska Game and Parks system works on much more than just hunting and fishing. It's a great teaching tool!

Randel Schnebel
Norfolk, Nebraska

*Nebraska is home to a unique insect, the Salt Creek Tiger Beetle (*Cicindela nevadica lincolni*); in fact Lancaster County is now the only home of this critically endangered insect. But this ½ inch long, metallic brown to olive green-colored beetle is not the only creature in the state at risk of being lost. Nebraska recognizes 27 plant and animal species as threatened or endangered under the Nebraska Nongame and Endangered Species Conservation Act, and many of these species are also federally recognized. The whooping crane, piping plover and pallid sturgeon are examples of well-known protected species in the state. But others, including the American burying beetle, blowout penstemon, and scaleshell mussel are also at-risk species. The loss of any of these*



Special thanks to Julie Van Meter, State Entomologist, Nebraska Department of Agriculture. Visitor image by Eric Fowler.

www.bugguide.net is a good site for identification

Send your comments to:
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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.

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See You Out There.



www.OutdoorNebraska.org

Worm or Snake?

Dan Fogell

What if I told you there was a snake in Nebraska that was bi-colored – one solid color on its back and one solid color on its belly – and that those colors are purple and pink? Would you believe me? Maybe you’d even like snakes just a little bit more if you knew they came in prettier colors than the boring old earth tones that most Nebraska snakes sport. Well it’s true – in the deciduous forests of southeastern Nebraska, there is just such a snake: It’s small – not more than a foot long – and it’s purple and pink.

There are many snake species in Nebraska that your average citizens – and maybe even avid naturalists – may never see. One of them is the half-purple and half-pink western worm snake. Worm snakes get their name because they look like worms (at least their bellies do) and because they eat worms. They are what we in the business call fossorial. This means they live the majority of their lives underground, which is why naturalists and even those of us who deliberately search for them have a hard time finding one. Like all fossorial snakes, they have small eyes and their scales are extremely smooth and very shiny. They have a bright iridescence in their scales which in a certain light makes them look like they have rainbow colors. I’ve never seen one bite, but to defend themselves they will try to stab you with their unusually sharp tail, which might feel like a bite. Contrary to what some people may say, there are no snakes that have “venomous” tails, so if you’re lucky enough to find a worm snake, just let it stab you. You will be fine.

Just like the invertebrate they are named after, worm snakes prefer moist soil, so when the dry conditions of a Nebraska summer arrive, worm snakes dive deep underground to follow the moisture. But in early spring when rain comes more frequently, these beautiful little snakes may be found under rocks and logs and might even venture out into the open. Their motivation for such risky behavior is breeding – males and females will find each other, breed and then go back underground to find food. Females will lay eggs a few weeks after breeding, usually beneath very large rocks or in some underground chamber. By mid-summer, the tiny baby worm snakes will have hatched. At about an inch and a half long, they are small enough to coil up on a quarter and still leave a little room to see the coin.

Anytime it rains, especially if the rain is heavy, these secretive little serpents may return to the surface to feed on the earthworms that are also out in the rain. To look for one, you’ll have to visit woodland habitats along the rivers of southeastern Nebraska. Search beneath logs, under rocks and even in the leaf litter. If you find what looks like an earthworm, look again – you may have uncovered one of Nebraska’s most handsome snakes.



The western worm snake is one of Nebraska’s prettiest (and most unusual) snakes.

Upcoming Events

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

July 1 - 31 Paddlefish Snagging Applications Period

Apply now for Nebraska paddlefish snagging permit. For more information, pick up a 2011-12 Nebraska state fishing guide.

July 13-15 Fur Trade Days

Visit Chadron State Park and take part in canoe and paddleboat races, among other things. Call the park at 308-432-6167 for more information.

July 14 Lake Maloney “Carp-o-Rama”

Visit Lake Maloney SRA for the first Carp-o-Rama held at this beautiful lake area. Staff will be on hand to offer fishing tips, fried carp samples and more. The event is free, but a park entry permit is required.

July 14 Bighorn Sheep Hike

Come hike and learn about bighorn sheep and research being conducted on them in Nebraska. Preregister by calling the park office by July 7th.

July 15-20 Nebraska Star Party

Want a great view of the night sky? Then visit the 19th annual Nebraska Star Party at Merritt Reservoir. For more information call (402) 376-3320 or visit www.nebraskastarparty.org.

July 28 State High School Bass Fishing Tournament – Summit Lake

7 am - 1 pm. This bass fishing tournament is open to high school students who have registered on The Bass Federation/Student Angler Federation web site at highschoolfishing.org.

For more information, contact Larry Pape at 402-471-5447, larry.pape@nebraska.gov.

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A Look Back - July 1977

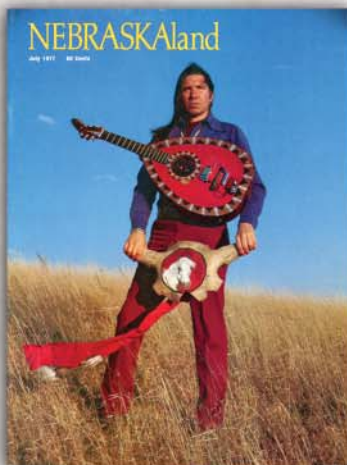
Dominique Worthing

When looking at the July 1977 edition of *NEBRASKAland*, one article stands out immediately: "The Legend of Pahuk" by former staffer Ken Bouc. In it Bouc recounts the little known tale of Neapolis, the would-be Nebraska capitol that never came to pass, and the sacred Pawnee site called Pahuk where it was to be built.

In 1857, legislation was introduced to move the territory's capitol from its then location, Omaha, to a new city called Neapolis. The location picked for the new capitol was along the Platte River, not too far from current-day Fremont. This was not a popular idea in Omaha, and a large number of Omahans opposed the idea, their opposition sometimes becoming violent. Eventually the plan for Neapolis was dropped due to the opposition from many residents.

From an interview with Pawnee ethnologist Dr. M. R. Gilmore, Bouc explains the importance of Pahuk to the Pawnee people as the origin of their medicine men's healing powers. In 1927, several individuals pushed for Pahuk to become a historic site; however, the site was never approved and the land remains privately owned.

To read "The Legend of Pahuk" go to NebraskalandMagazine.com and click on "A Look Back."



Send Us Your Trail Cam Photos



This leaping raccoon image was captured by Matt Lovejoy's trail camera near his Central City home. Sent in by Bill Bolte.

Please submit your trail camera photos by e-mail to: nebtrailcam@gmail.com. Also include any information that will help explain your photo.

Hunters Helping the Hungry Donations

Hunters and nonhunters alike can donate to fund the new Hunters Helping the Hungry program, which encourages hunters to give harvested deer to participating processors to feed Nebraskans in need.

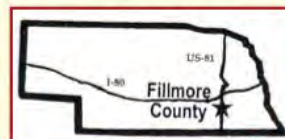
Donations can be made by going to OutdoorNebraska.org or when filling out a big game application form. The following Omaha businesses have already donated a combined \$30,000: the Metropolitan Utilities District, Northern Natural Gas, Tenaska Marketing Ventures, CBSHome, Woods Brothers Realty, HomeServices of America, Inc., and HOME Real Estate, as well as the David Scott Foundation.

Donated funds will cover deer processing and other costs. Hunters Helping the Hungry was created in April with the Nebraska Legislature's passage of LB 928.

Things to see, experiences to try, places to relax, food to eat



www.visitfillmorecounty.org



MILLIGAN— June Jubilee, **June 8-10**
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EXETER—Summer Fun Day, **July 27-29**



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TernCam Back Online

Eric Fowler

TernCam is up and running online for a second year, allowing visitors to keep tabs on a pair of interior least terns nesting on a sandpit near Ord.

The solar-powered camera, a project of the Tern and Plover Conservation Partnership, uploads still photos via cellular phone every second.

The pair has three eggs in the nest. When those hatch, the camera will be moved to another nest, providing viewing into July. To view it, go to www.ternandplover.unl.edu.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER



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Dame's Rocket

Jon Farrar

Move over purple loosestrife and musk thistle – you might have company in the realm of flowering plants brought here from halfway around the world and now running away with abandon where not welcome. Once commonly used in roadside plantings after construction work, dame's rocket (*Hesperis matronalis*) is on the Nebraska Weed Control Association's "Watch List Weeds." Although not a significant problem here yet, it is in states to the east and musk thistle was in Nebraska for years before becoming a problem.

Some now-invasive species, like dame's rocket, were intentionally introduced because of their beauty. Smooth brome from Europe has been extensively used in the U.S. to control erosion along roadways, and reed canary grass used for erosion control in waterways and to increase tonnage of hay in wet meadows. Neither of those grasses, though, provides the quality of forage or wildlife habitat found on

native grasslands. Other non-native and now problem plants – such as leafy spurge – were accidentally introduced.

Steven I. Apfelbaum, ecologist with Applied Ecological Services and author of the *Restoring Ecological Health to Your Land* series, has written of dame's rocket: "Left unchecked, this beautiful, yet lethal plant will wreak havoc on the natural environment, threatening the survival of native plants and degrading habitat and water quality." He notes that dame's rocket appears to produce chemicals preventing or reducing the growth of other plants, enabling it to quickly form dense monocultures within a few years of colonization. Apfelbaum was among the first to raise concerns about the ecological and economic havoc that reed canary grass would likely have on natural landscapes.

In small patches, dame's rocket can be controlled by pulling and burning the plant (if all of the roots are attached). Because it is a short-lived perennial that spreads principally by seeds, annual mowing before seeds are set will probably control colonies.



Herbicides may be required to control it if it has established extensive colonies.

The aggressive advance by invasive exotic plants clearly demonstrates we do not know enough about the intricate relationships in our native plant communities to be tinkering with them. For most exotic species already introduced, it is like closing the barn door after the horse has bolted – the best that can be done is minimizing the damage. Gerry Steinauer's article, "The Exotic Mennace" in the June 2002 *NEBRASKALAND* is worth reading for more information on invasive plants.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Deer Permits on Sale July 9

Eric Fowler

After two years of record antlerless white-tailed deer harvest, including a total of 39,283 taken in 2011, biologists are reducing some, but not all, of the pressure on whitetail does in the 2012 deer hunting season.

Gone in 2012 is the Earn-A-Buck regulation, which required deer hunters in the Missouri, Elkhorn, Wahoo and Blue Southeast management units to check in a doe before they could check a buck during the November firearm season.

Harvest pressure on whitetails will continue through the new River Antlerless Unit, which will target antlerless whitetails on 1,800 miles of riverbottoms across the state. Hunters who purchase this special \$11 permit can follow the season choice framework, which allows them to hunt during any of the seasons – archery, muzzleloader, or firearm – with the

weapon allowed during that season. These permit holders will also be the only hunters allowed to use a firearm during the October 1-10 firearm deer season. The Commission will also continue to issue bonus tags in many management units as well as season choice permits, which have been restructured to match the management unit boundaries.

Statewide archery permits are once again valid in the Mule Deer Conservation Area (MDCA), which

includes the Buffalo, Frenchman, Platte and Republican units. Other special regulations remain in the MDCA to help bolster mule deer numbers.

Permits in most management units go on sale July 9 at Commission permitting offices and online at OutdoorNebraska.org. A drawing was held in June for permits in a handful of high-demand deer units, as well as for elk and pronghorn units. Any permits remaining in those units will also go on sale July 9.



PHOTO BY JEFF KUBRUS

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Not Your Average Nest

Kimberly Stuhr

Move over Big Bird, you're not the only one that has a nest worth squawking about. Our national symbol, the bald eagle, builds a nest that any raptor would envy. A typical nest measures five to six feet in diameter, is three feet deep, and can weigh up to two tons. Now that's a nest.



Celebrate Independence Day at a Park

Nebraska's state parks and recreation areas are great places to visit throughout the year, but they can be especially good locations to celebrate the Fourth of July. What better place to spend the day while waiting for night to fall and the fireworks show to begin?

Special events are planned at three parks: Ft. Kearny State Historical Park will have a living history day showing what life was like in 1860s civilian and soldier camps; Ponca State Park will be having a dutch oven cobbler and ice cream social; and Fort Robinson State Park will have a noon barbeque following the July 4th parade in Crawford.

Vistors to seven state recreation areas will be allowed to touch off fireworks on Independence Day this year: Branched Oak State Recreation Area (SRA) near Malcolm, Fort Kearny SRA near Kearney, Fremont SRA near Fremont, Two Rivers SRA near Venice, Memphis SRA near Memphis, Pawnee SRA near Emerald and Wagon Train SRA near Hickman. Fireworks can be used from 8 a.m. to midnight on July 4 only, and only in designated, signed areas. The use of fireworks elsewhere or at other times on state areas is prohibited.

Only fireworks approved for sale in Nebraska by the State Fire Marshal are permitted and visitors are required to dispose of expended fireworks in appropriate containers. Visitors are also cautioned to use extra care with fireworks when dry conditions and fire hazards exist.

Boyer Chute After 2011

Dominique Worthing

Well suited to survive the 2011 flood, Boyer Chute National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) was one of the first areas along this stretch of the Missouri River to reopen after the floodwaters receded. Trees are down and some still standing are dead, but many valiant cottonwoods are still hanging on. The area's Catfish pier was lost in the flooding and some parking lots and roads are still buried in sand, but the refuge remains.

An aerial view of Boyer Chute NWR from Google Maps shows a swath of sand which tells the tale of where the floodwater spilled over the river's banks and flowed overland: it starts on the north end of the area and covers nearly all of Boyer Bend both east and west of the chute.

As you head down County Road 34 towards Boyer Chute NWR, you can see the full extent of the flooding before you reach the refuge. It starts

as a hazy line on the horizon where black fields give way to nothing but sand. Drifts of the fine sediment pile up against street signs and telephone poles like snow. Strong Nebraska winds frequently pull a layer off the ground and into the air, creating a mini sandstorm.

Parts of the refuge are still closed to driving due to affects of the flooding, but the refuge is again open to the public for day use, including fishing. On one day this spring, down near the water's edge where blowing sand was less of an issue, children ran along sandbars checking their fishing poles, while adults stayed closer to the bank.

A giant tree remains lodged in the middle of the chute, its roots pointing skyward, one of many left there when waters receded. Many more lie on the chute's banks where they were deposited by floodwaters. While the refuge land east of the chute is accessible on foot by crossing the area's bridge, all sections of the road north of the main entrance gate will



PHOTO BY DOMINIQUE WORTHING

remain closed indefinitely.

If you want to see the effects of the 2011 Missouri River flooding, while perhaps catching some fish, visit Boyer Chute NWR. Just 20 minutes north of Omaha, it's a good reminder of nature's power. ■

New Cabins at Medicine Creek State Recreation Area



Four new lakefront cabins opened in May at Medicine Creek State Recreation Area north of Cambridge. Located in the Shady Bay Campground, the fully-furnished, two-bedroom cabins are air-conditioned and feature a covered deck overlooking the lake. Linens and kitchen utensils are provided. The cabins, which rent for \$85 per night plus tax, will be open through Dec. 31 and then reopen on April 1, 2013. Reservations can be made up to one year in advance at OutdoorNebraska.org or by calling 402-471-1414.

NEBRASKAland Visitor Winner and Hint

Last issue's winner of the Visitor drawing was Blake Sears of Crete, Nebraska, who found the **Salt Creek tiger beetle** on page 31. Readers are encouraged to contact *NEBRASKAland* within 10 days after this issue's publication with the correct page number and name of this issue's "Visitor" — a bug found in Nebraska that just happened to find its way onto one of the pages.

We will then gather the correct entries and draw one to win a *NEBRASKAland Magazine* mug. To enter each month, write: **NEBRASKAland Visitor 2200 North 33rd Street, Lincoln, NE 68503.**

Or e-mail: **Tim.Reigert@Nebraska.gov** with "Visitor" in the subject line of the message.

HINT: This issue's visitor is not on page 3, 4, 5, 38, 40, or 41.

Whisperann Lake, Omaha



Willow Creek

Walks and Watersports Rule this Park

Photos and text by Eric Fowler

There's plenty to do at Willow Creek State Recreation Area (SRA) near Pierce, including the usual activities such as fishing and water skiing, but one attraction in particular makes this popular northeastern Nebraska destination unique: an eight-mile-long, crushed limestone hike, bike and horseback trail that encircles the lake and leads to town.

This 700-acre flood control reservoir opened in 1984 and has been drawing visitors in droves ever since. Powerboaters can fly around the eastern half of the lake to their hearts content, but speeds are limited on the western half, providing a retreat for anglers. Walleyes, crappies and channel catfish are the main staples, but anglers may also hook bluegills, largemouth bass, northern pike or some of the recently added wipers and white bass. Seven breakwaters, two accessible to wheelchairs, give bank anglers equal access to deep water.



Opposite: A boat pulls into the dock as the sun sets on a beautiful summer day at Willow Creek SRA near Pierce. Above: The Shoemaker and Grossman families of Omaha enjoy breakfast in the campground, bikes ready to hit the trail.



The modern campground on the lake's southern shore offers 100 pads, most with electricity and all with plenty of shade just a short distance from the beach. A two-year-old equestrian campground offers 10 stalls, each with electrical hookups, a corral and more than enough room to park a horse trailer, a welcome addition to the group horse camp that was already available. After Labor Day weekend, portions of the 900 acres of public land surrounding the lake are open to hunting. Pheasants, quail, cottontail rabbits and dove are found around the lake, and waterfowl on it. Archery deer hunting is allowed, and archers can also hone their skills at the lake's 14-target walk-through archery range.

A few miles of mowed trails crisscross the uplands on the western end of the lake, so there's plenty of room to roam here, whether you're on the water or the trail. ■



Above: Brian and Kerri Edins and their children, Jake and Kallie, are regulars on the limestone trail that leads from their home in Pierce to the lake.

Left: Labs love to retrieve, and Terry Terrill's dog, Mac, is no exception. Try as he may, however, he seldom gets his teeth on a crappie reeled in by his Pierce master.

Right: Casey and Carly Sutherland laugh as Maggie Brahmer jumps from a tube at the lake's swim beach.



Located about 15 miles northwest of Norfolk, Willow Creek SRA has 700 acres of water and 100 camping pads.



How Trumpeters Trumpet

Text and photo by Jon Farrar

Unlike most man-made machines – which are soon obsolete, broken or require updates – most animal designs, flesh and blood machines, are so good they change little over hundreds of thousands of years. The tracheas of trumpeter swans are a case in point. Trumpeters are year-round Nebraska residents, nesting in Sandhills lakes and marshes. They are the largest waterfowl species native to North America and have the loudest calls of all swimming birds.

The trachea is the tube in the throat and mouth of an animal that connects the lungs to the larynx. It is kept open by cartilaginous rings, allowing an animal to breathe, hence it is also called a windpipe. All vertebrates

(animals with internal skeletons) have tracheas, except for a rather obscure group of primitive fish called dinosaurs eels native to the Nile River that gulp air at the surface of the water. It is because of air forced from the lungs and out the trachea that we humans can sing, talk and whistle.

The extraordinarily long necks of swans probably evolved to accommodate what they feed on and where it is found. Trumpeters feed principally on the foliage of aquatic vegetation, both submerged and emergent, and the tubers of plants such as arrowhead and cattail. Like puddle ducks, they extend their necks as far as possible to feed underwater, or tip-up so they can reach a few inches deeper. Their long necks require equally long tracheas, which on the surface might

seem enough to explain the loud and penetrating calls of trumpeters, but as Paul Harvey used to say on his radio program: “And now the rest of the story.”

Measurements of the trachea lengths of different species of swans have been commonly made from preserved specimens, after the trachea had dried and shrunk in length. The following are the best measurements I can find, presumably from fresh specimens of some species with long tracheae: Whooping crane, 58 inches; trumpeter swan, 50 inches; Canada goose, 44 inches; whistling swan, 35 inches; sandhill crane, 23 inches; and snow goose, 14 inches. The trachea of trumpeters is said to be three times larger in volume than expected for a bird of its size.

But length alone does not account for the trumpeter’s hornlike calls. The tracheas of most creatures are rather straightforward affairs, adhering to the principal that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. That principal is flagrantly ignored by trumpeters and some other groups of birds, such as cranes. The tracheas of most swans, including trumpeters, are extraordinarily long, and in addition to the natural curve of the neck have an S-shaped loop in the body. The trumpeter’s trachea is so long it winds through the trumpeter’s breastbone. The difference between the tracheas of most birds and those of trumpeter swans is like the difference between a trumpet and a trombone. The trumpeter’s trachea is similar to the looping trombone, suggesting the species was named for the quality of its calls and not the shape of its trachea, or it would have been called the trombone swan.

But there is more than trachea length and loops explaining the resonant and far-carrying calls of trumpeters. Most animals, including most birds and mammals, have a larynx, “the voice box,” at the top of the trachea with vocal cords. Passage of air through the larynx produces sounds. Trumpeter swans, though, have a syrinx located at the base of the trachea deep within the bird’s breast. This unique, bony structure is surrounded by an air sac. Think of the syrinx and air sac as the resonating chamber of a cello or guitar.

But length alone does not account for the trumpeter’s hornlike calls. The tracheas of most creatures are rather straightforward affairs, adhering to the principle that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line.

Trumpeters can vary the loudness and pitch of their utterances not only by the volume of air passing through the syrinx, but also by varying tension on its elastic, vibrating membranes.

Ornithologists have identified several different trumpeter calls, each meaning something different to other swans. Some calls are aggressive, telling other trumpeters or other species (such as Canada geese and pelicans) interested in nesting in the trumpeter’s territory that that part of the marsh is already claimed. Others calls are used by pairs as recognition calls. Trumpeters have an alarm call when a threat is detected, to warn a mate or young; calls used to maintain family or flock cohesion; and soft, nasally calls uttered with bills closed. Once eggs are down and incubation underway, a pair of swans becomes mostly silent, not wanting to attract attention to the nest, except during the “triumph display.” When the

female (called the pen) leaves the nest to feed after covering the eggs with nest material, the male (the cob) stands guard nearby. When the female returns they usually perform the triumph display – facing each other, quivering their wings and trumpeting loudly.

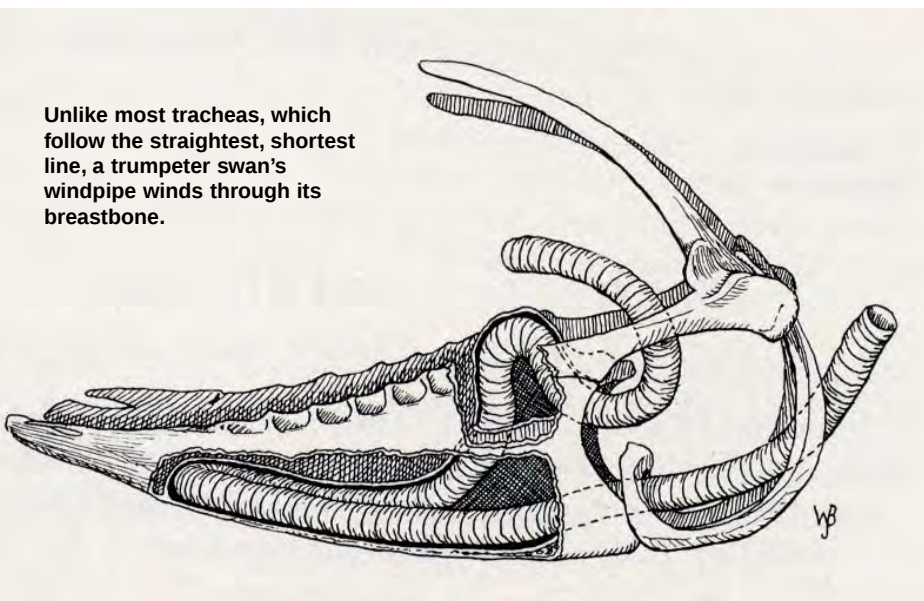
So why do trumpeter swans need to be so loud? Answers are mostly speculation: Some ornithologists suggest the loud, resonant, far-reaching calls are useful in attracting and keeping mates. Others have proposed that the loud calls intimidate predators. That most birds with unusually long tracheae nest in marshy sites where vegetation is dense, so vocal communication is especially important, has been offered as another possibility, but there are many species of waterbirds that nest in the same environments and do not seem to need to trumpet their presence.

The only other swan known to occur

in Nebraska, and rarely, is the tundra swan. It has a distinctive *woo-woo-woo* or *oo-OO-oo* call often compared to that of a snow goose. The principal call of a trumpeter, the one usually heard when they are on the wing, has been described in numerous ways – a hollow, nasal honking; the sound of a French horn; resonant, loud and trumpetlike; a single short toot on a trumpet, repeated and often in series of two to three notes sounding like *do-do-doo*; or a two note call sounding like *oh-OH* with the emphasis on the second syllable. However it is described, once heard it is never forgotten and sends a tingle up the spine of those listening.

As Paul Harvey would say at this point: “And now you know the rest of the story.” ■

To hear a recording of a trumpeter’s call, go to Allaboutbirds.org/guide/Trumpeter_Swan/sounds.



Unlike most tracheas, which follow the straightest, shortest line, a trumpeter swan's windpipe winds through its breastbone.

THE BIRDS OF MINNESOTA BY THOMAS S. ROBERTS



LITTLE THEATERS ON THE PRAIRIE

A visit to Eugene T. Mahoney and Fort Robinson state parks isn't all about fun in the sun. Beat the heat with a stop at one of these state park theaters this summer.

By Dominique Worthing

Nebraska state parks offer tons of fun activities for parkgoers to enjoy, but two parks offer something that many visitors may not be aware of: high-quality theater productions that will entertain the entire family.

At Eugene T. Mahoney State Park (SP) near Ashland, the summer just isn't the same without piano music, chase scenes through the audience, and popcorn being thrown at the villains during melodramas at the Denman and Mary Mallory Kountze Theater. Some 400-plus miles northwest of Mahoney SP, musicals are the ticket at Fort Robinson State Park's Post Playhouse. While most of the performances at these theaters occur during the summer months, preparation for each season is a year round affair.

At Mahoney SP, planning for next season begins before the current season

even starts, and after Thanksgiving writer John Burkhart and artistic director D. Chapelle begin writing the scripts for the upcoming season. Their scripts are finalized by March, when search for actors begins. By April rehearsals are in full swing.

"We have been very lucky over the past 20 seasons to be able to cast some very talented actors from the University of Nebraska – Lincoln theater department," said Chapelle. "Anyone is welcome to audition for the shows, but the schedule for the summer seems to work out better for university students. We perform three shows through the summer on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sunday matinees. During the last part of the season we do two shows a night. For many of them, our shows become their summer jobs as we share a percentage of the ticket sales with the

actors. In the last few years we noticed that a few of our actors were guests at the theater when they were kids."

Audience participation is very important to Mahoney's melodramas – visitors are encouraged to cheer for the hero, sigh at the heroine, boo, hiss, and throw popcorn at the villain, and participate in the traditional intermission sing-along, which includes but is not limited to: "Daisy Bell (Bicycle Built for Two)," "You are my Sunshine," and "I've been Workin' on the Railroad."

"The three words that I think of regarding our production budget are reuse, recycle, and repurpose," Chapelle said when asked about the cost of running the theater. "We are very lucky as far as production costs go, because we are in partnership with Nebraska Game and Parks. Game and Parks builds our sets for us, we paint and decorate, and provide costumes and programs. It isn't easy doing shows that grandkids to grandparents and everybody in between can enjoy, but over the years it's become second nature to us."

Preparations for each season at Fort Robinson's Post Playhouse begin very similarly: Preproduction begins in the fall – season tickets to the Playhouse are popular Christmas gift items, so the creative team is proactive in getting the season lineup polished before the holidays. During the winter and early spring months, Tom Ossowski, the theater's artistic director, visits several states for auditions and callbacks, seeing up to 900 actors at one conference. Once the final choices are made for casting, it's time to purchase the advanced royalties – because the Post Playhouse does not produce original musicals, it must purchase the

Plays at the Parks

Two of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's state parks offer a different type of entertainment than is found at most parks – theater productions. Both offer shows throughout the summer that will entertain the entire family.



Eugene T. Mahoney State Park's Kountze Theater

Over the past 20 years John Burkhart has written ten scripts for the Kountze Theater Melodramas, and D. Chapelle has contributed 39.



Three shows are in rotation this summer:

Goodbody's Gold
Robbers Roost
Peril of the Plains

For performance times/dates and to place a reservation, go to:
www.melodrama.net/park.htm

Fort Robinson State Park's Post Playhouse

Fort Rob's Post Playhouse was founded in 1967 and has performed 170 productions over the years.



Five shows are in rotation there this summer:

Oklahoma
Godspell
Grease
A Year with Frog and Toad
Broadway Gold: A Cabaret

For performance times/dates and to place a reservation, go to:
www.postplayhouse.com

royalties for every show it performs. The actors arrive in the middle of May and rehearsals begin immediately.

This year "Oklahoma" was the first production to open, followed "Godspell," "Grease," then "A Year

with Frog and Toad," and finally "Broadway Gold: A Cabaret."

"We have 80 performances this season," said Ossowski. "Matinees are very popular since people often travel a long distance to get to the Playhouse, and we've even added a Saturday morning performance at 10 a.m. that's geared towards families with younger children."

This year marks the 45th anniversary of the theater program at the Post Playhouse. With more performances than ever before, the Playhouse is making its mark on theater in the western half of the state and continues to be a popular draw.

"Call ahead for reservations," advised Ossowski, "we'd hate to have to turn anyone away." ■

Dominique Worthing is a freelance writer/photographer living in the Omaha area. This is her first contribution to NEBRASKALAND.



It's all about the melodrama as the cast of this year's "Peril on the Plains" tries to discover just "whodunit" at Eugene T. Mahoney State Park.



The guys sing about betting on horse races in this scene from Fort Robinson's Post Playhouse production of "Guys and Dolls" in 2008.

PHOTO BY DOUG CARROLL

PHOTO COURTESY OF POST PLAYHOUSE

The intent of this guide is to provide current and potential new Omaha metro anglers information about locations near their homes where they can fish whenever they have an hour of free time during their busy schedules.

— Dave Tunink, Assistant Division Administrator, Fisheries Division



Quality bluegills are available at many Omaha-area lakes both by light tackle and on a fly, as shown here.

NEBRASKAland Magazine's

Fishing the Metro

A Guide to Omaha's Lakes and Waterways

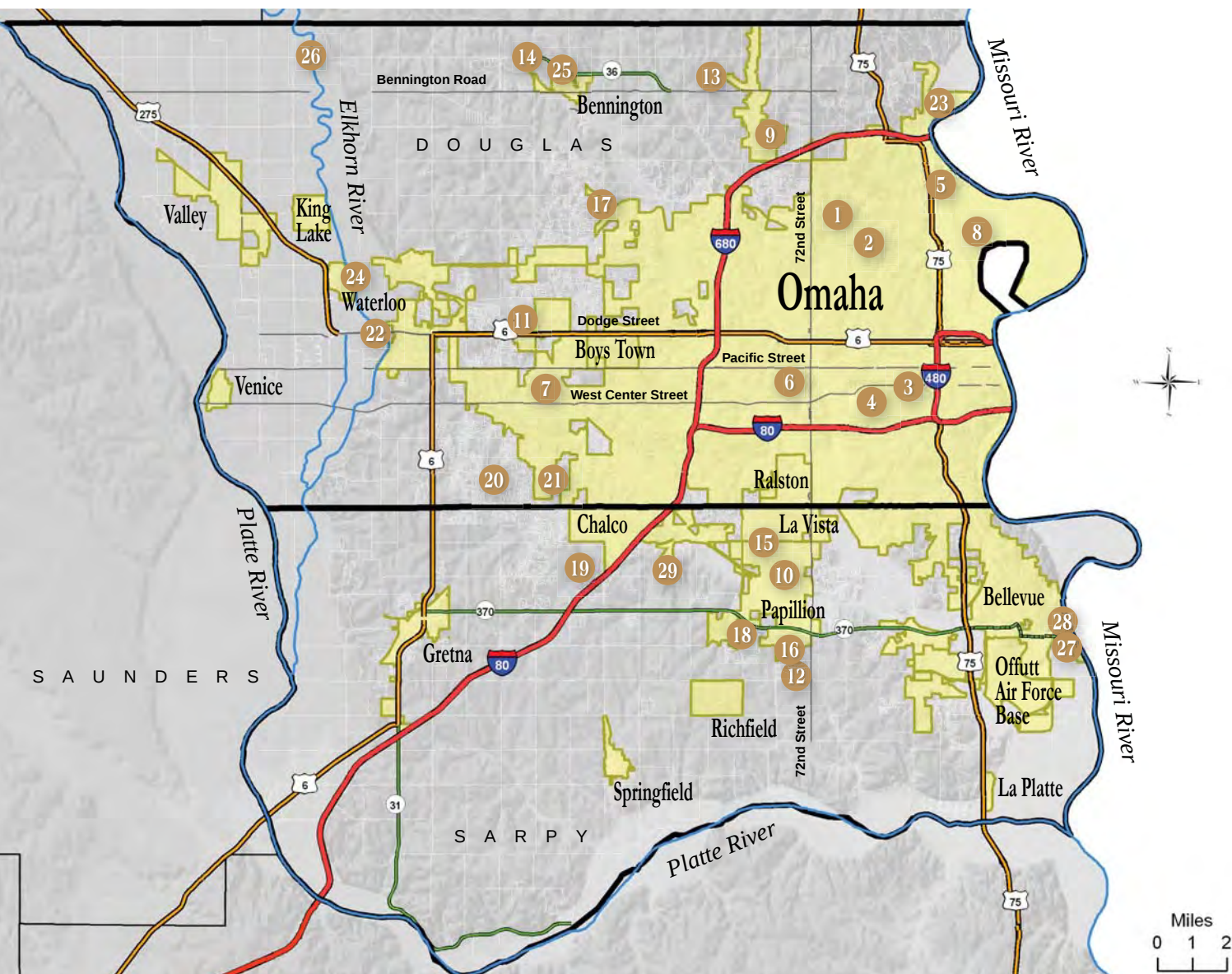
By Jeff Kurrus



Fishing excursions lasting multiple days are some of nature's most pleasureable activities. Yet sneaking out after a long day of work runs a close second. And since so many people live and work in or near Omaha, the purpose of this guide is to provide current and potential metro anglers information about locations where they can fish whenever they have a moment in their busy schedules. For a moment may be all one needs to provide a memory for a lifetime – especially with the excellent fishing in these waters.



Alex Gonzales with a largemouth bass caught on the fly at Walnut Creek Reservoir in Papillion.



MAP BY TRISHA SCHLAKE, NEBRASKA GAME AND PARKS COMMISSION

Note: all locations are approximations

For the Young and Young at Heart

Each of the waters under this subhead have the following special restrictions: Children under 16, adults with a child actively fishing, and adults 65 and older permitted to fish. In addition, only bank fishing is permitted on these waters.

Also, while most waters in the Omaha metro have a 21-inch minimum on largemouth bass, refer to the fishing regulations for the most up-to-date guidelines.

1 Benson Park Pond

4 acres- 72nd Street at Military and Ames Avenue intersection in Omaha. Bluegill, channel catfish, crappie, largemouth bass and seasonally stocked rainbow trout.

Notes: Even though Benson is fished pretty hard, light tackle, including small jigs and spinners, can keep the young ones interested for quite awhile with the panfish.

2 Fontenelle Park Pond

4 acres- 45th Street and Ames Avenue at Fontenelle Boulevard. Bluegill, channel catfish and largemouth bass.

Notes: Poor water quality brought on by filamentous algal growth due to high nutrients makes fish hard to catch, especially once temperatures rise during the late spring.

3 Hanscom Park Pond

1 acre- 32nd Avenue and Center Street. Bluegill, channel catfish, crappie and largemouth bass.

Notes: Excellent water quality and clarity make this a great little pond. Lots of small crappie and catfish are the norm, but some big bluegill can also be found.



Bluegill (pictured), channel catfish and largemouth bass are species usually stocked throughout Omaha. Some waters will also have crappie and seasonally stocked rainbow trout.

4 Hitchcock Park Pond

2 acres- 42nd and Q streets. Bluegill, channel catfish, largemouth bass and seasonally stocked rainbow trout.

Notes: This easy-to-find fishery off Q Street features an underwater shoal where big fish are frequently found, and good shoreline access for wheelchairs.

5 Miller Park Pond

4 acres- 30th Street and Redick Avenue in Omaha. Bluegill, channel catfish and largemouth bass.

Notes: This small pond in north Omaha has good water quality and solid panfishing for introducing youngsters.



Towl Park near West Center and 93rd streets is a small, scenic lake that offers good panfishing, making this destination a perfect spot to take children.

6 Towl Park Pond

1 acre- West Center and 93rd streets (enter at Paddock Road traffic light). Bluegill, channel catfish, green sunfish, largemouth bass and seasonally stocked rainbow trout.

Notes: Towl is a small, scenic lake that can't be seen from West Center Street. If you've never pulled into the parking lot you wouldn't even know it was there. Teach a young one fly rod basics at this lake where the panfish aren't too picky.

7 Walnut Grove Park Pond

1 acre- Q Street across from Millard South High School east of 156th Street. Bluegill, channel catfish and largemouth bass.

Notes: A beautiful setting amongst mature black walnut trees, this little pond is small but a sleeper you must fish.

Fishing For All

Many of the following waterbodies are Omaha fishing staples. However, consider some of the ones you haven't fished before, because there are some gems on this list. Each of these destinations is open to all anglers.

8 Carter Lake

315 acres- In Levi Carter Park at Abbott Drive and Carter Blvd near Omaha's Eppley Airport. Bluegill, channel catfish, common carp and largemouth bass. Features concrete boat ramps, a wheelchair-accessible pier and a **lake contour map** available at **OutdoorNebraska.org**. Open 5 a.m. to 11 p.m.

Special Restrictions- All boats allowed, but regulations specify that the east arm has a no-wake, 5 mph speed limit.

Notes: A rehabilitation project is in full swing at Carter Lake, but while under construction the fishery is already established and open. Carter will be a very productive fishery far into the future, with excellent water quality, improved angler access and increased aquatic vegetation.

Don't shy away from the vegetation during the summer months, however. While more challenging to fish, exploding bass and bluegill populations have made it very worthwhile.



Quality largemouth can be found at multiple Omaha hotspots.



Multiple breakwaters at Glenn Cunningham make this lake a perfect camp-and-fish destination for families in the metro.

9 Glenn Cunningham Lake

390 acres- 96th and State streets. Bluegill, bullhead, channel catfish, common carp, crappie, largemouth bass and walleye. Features concrete boat ramp, camping opportunities, and a **lake contour map** available at **OutdoorNebraska.org**. Open 5 a.m. to 11 p.m.

Special Restrictions- Boats restricted to 5 mph (no wake).

Notes: Renovated in 2007, Cunningham offers anglers the opportunity to catch numbers, with an occasional big fish. Breakwaters (jetties) allow bank anglers to take advantage of fishing-holding structure on both sides of the lake. Walleye and aggressive largemouth bass are available, and the lake is known as a great carp fishery, making Cunningham a great multispecies option in the metro.

There is also an adjacent wetland to Cunningham on the north side of Highway 36. While shallow and sediment-laden, there is bank and john boat/float tube access just north of the Highway 36 and 92nd Street intersection. Lastly, Papio D-4 is also nearby, located on the west side of 92nd Street across the street from the wetland.

10 Lake Halleck

4 acres- East of South Washington (84th) Street on East Lincoln Street in Papillion. Bluegill, channel catfish, largemouth bass and seasonally stocked rainbow trout.

Special Restrictions- Bank access only.

Notes: Halleck is the perfect walk-around lake for folks of all ages. Frequent Nebraska Game and Parks Commission-sponsored family fishing nights are held here due to accessibility and ability to catch fish.

11 Lawrence Youngman Lake

60 acres- 192nd Street and West Dodge Road in west Omaha. Bluegill, channel catfish and largemouth bass.

Features concrete boat ramp and fishing pier.

Special Restrictions- Boats restricted to 5 mph (no wake).

Notes: Officially opened in the spring of 2011, Youngman allows bass anglers to catch a large number of small fish right now with a rare big fish mixed in. However, aquatic vegetation during the spring and summer does make the shallow edges difficult to fish more than a foot beneath the surface. Counter this by looking for fish in deeper water or working weedless baits on or near the surface.

12 Midlands Lake

11 acres- North of Washington and Capehart roads in Papillion's Shadow Lake subdivision. Bluegill, channel catfish and largemouth bass.

Special Restrictions- Boats restricted to 5 mph (no wake).

Notes: Parking is available on portions of the streets adjacent to the lake. While there is no boat ramp, john boat or float tube access is available by a short walk to the lake's edge. Midlands is also adjacent to Shadow Lake.

13 Papio D-4

30 acres- ¼ mile north of Highway 36 and 98th Street in northwest Omaha. Bluegill, channel catfish, green sunfish and largemouth bass.

Special Restrictions- Walk-in access only. Electric and non-powered boats allowed.

Notes: Located just north of Cunningham Lake and Highway 36, Papio D-4 is a newly renovated lake fed by Papio Creek. A perfect float tube lake, D-4 can also be accessed by boat if one is inclined to make the 250-yard drag from the road to the water's edge. Featuring aquatic vegetation, rip rap, flooded timber and excellent water quality, that drag might just be worth it. Or fish it from D-4's two jetties or the walking path surrounding the lake.

14 Prairie View Lake

42 acres- 2 miles west of Bennington at 180th Street and Highway 36. Bluegill, channel catfish and largemouth bass. Features concrete boat ramp and a **lake contour map** available at **OutdoorNebraska.org**. Open 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Special Restrictions- Boats restricted to 5 mph (no wake).

Notes: Gets a lot of boat pressure every day but there are also lots of nooks to find fish by water or walking. A definite largemouth gem just north of the Omaha city limits.

15 Schwer Park Pond

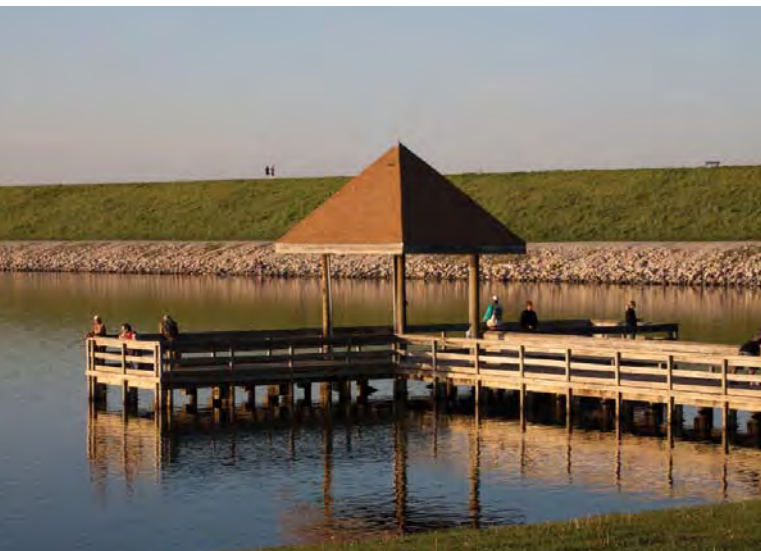
2 acres- West Centennial Road west of 84th Street in Papillion. Bluegill, channel catfish, crappie and largemouth bass.

Special Restrictions- Bank access only.

Notes: Schwer has some nice crappie and largemouth bass,



Because of Lake Halleck's abundant shoreline access, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission frequently uses this lake for its family fishing nights. For more information about this program, visit OutdoorNebraska.org and click on Fishing.



Newly re-opened Zorinsky Lake features a wheelchair-accessible fishing pier.

and nearly all of them are accessible by those willing to walk in the short grass around the lake.

16 Shadow Lake

30 acres- North of Washington and Capehart roads in Papillion’s Shadow Lake subdivision. Bluegill, crappie and largemouth bass.
Special Restrictions- Boats restricted to 5 mph (no wake).
Notes: Shadow features a concrete walking trail

surrounding the entire lake with nearby access to the water. The grass surrounding the lake is tall, but there are some foot trails leading to the water’s edge. There is also parking on the northeastern and northwestern sides of the lake. While there is no boat ramp, dropping a small john boat or float tube in it would be ideal for this urban fishery. Rip rap, aquatic vegetation and bank structure can be found.

17 Standing Bear Lake

135 acres- 132nd and Military streets in north Omaha. Bluegill, channel catfish, common carp, crappie, freshwater drum, largemouth bass, walleye and seasonally stocked rainbow trout. Features concrete boat ramp and a lake contour map available at OutdoorNebraska.org.
Special Restrictions- Boats restricted to 5 mph (no wake).
Notes: Standing Bear is on the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission’s list for future renovation projects. In the meantime, old-timers familiar with the fishery catch some really nice fish here.

18 Walnut Creek Reservoir

100 acres- South of 96th Street and Highway 370 in Papillion. Bluegill, channel catfish, largemouth bass and redear sunfish. Features concrete boat ramp and a wheelchair-accessible fishing pier and island. Open 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.
Special Restrictions- Boats restricted to 5 mph (no wake).
Notes: A lake in its prime, it can give up large numbers or large fish. Early mornings and late afternoons can be spent catching bass on scum frogs and other topwaters, as



A largemouth bass angler fishes multiple cover options at Walnut Creek Reservoir in Papillion.

well as redear sunfish on a variety of small tackle options. Meanwhile, late risers can target the deep woody structure throughout the lake for multiple species. In addition, deep water structure is available near the wheelchair-accessible locales. This lake was designed for fish habitat and for anglers, and it’s a treasure because of this design.

19 Wehrspann Lake

245 acres- 156th Street and Giles Road in southwest Omaha. Blue catfish, bluegill, bullhead, channel catfish, crappie, largemouth bass and walleye. Features concrete boat ramp and wheelchair-accessible pier. Open 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.
Special Restrictions- Boats restricted to 5 mph (no wake).
Notes: It is no surprise that Wehrspann is one of the Metro’s most popular fisheries. With seemingly unlimited shoreline access and fish-structure features, the opportunity to catch multiple fish species at Wehrspann is available during each visit. Plus, a sediment dam on the upper end of the lake provides strong water quality all year long.
There is also an adjacent wetland to Wehrspann on the north side of Highway 370 at the Gretna exit where bank, john boat or float tube access is available for multiple species, including the possibility of bluegill, bullheads, green sunfish and largemouth bass.

20 Whitehawk Lake

30 acres- 192nd and F streets in west Omaha. Bluegill, channel catfish and largemouth bass.
Special Restrictions- Walk-in access only from a small parking lot southeast of the lake.
Notes: Whitehawk is a fishbowl of sorts, with very little structure above or beneath the water. Fish the visible contour breaks around the entirety of the lake for active fish. Lots of smaller largemouth are present, but Whitehawk also has a big fish or two in its waters. A perfect bank lake for the kids, a float tube angler, or two buddies wanting to carry a john boat 200 yards to the water’s edge.

21 Zorinsky Lake

255 acres- 156th and F streets in west Omaha. Bluegill, channel catfish, common carp, crappie, largemouth bass, redear sunfish and walleye. Features concrete boat ramp and a wheelchair-accessible fishing pier. Open 5 a.m. to 10 p.m.
Special Restrictions- Boats restricted to 5 mph (no wake).
Notes: Zorinsky is on its way back after a zebra mussel outbreak closed its gates from fall of 2010 to its official re-opening on April 28, 2012. For the next several years, Zorinsky should have a life similar to other rehabilitated lakes – large numbers of small fish early transitioning to an overall excellent fishery, with the chance to catch all species and sizes within a few years.

River Access

This guide would be incomplete if it didn’t mention river access for those looking to wet a line in moving water. Below are the put-in locales for Omaha’s rivers, including those fish species most commonly caught and any special regulations at each.



Allysa Beyersdorf shows off a largemouth bass caught from Wehrspann Lake as dad Gary looks on.

22 Graske Crossing

Southeast corner of Elkhorn River and West Dodge Road (Skyline Drive exit), accessing Elkhorn River. Common species caught: buffalo, bullhead, channel catfish, common carp, flathead catfish and shovelnose sturgeon. Features canoe launch area. Open April 1 to November 1, 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.

23 NP Dodge Park

11000 North River Road, accessing Missouri River. Common species caught: buffalo, channel catfish, common carp, crappie and flathead catfish. Features concrete boat ramp available for Missouri River access. Open 5 a.m. to 11 p.m. daily.

24 Waterloo River Access

Southeast corner of Elkhorn River and West Maple Road, accessing Elkhorn River. Common species caught: buffalo, bullhead, channel catfish, flathead catfish and shovelnose sturgeon. Features canoe launch area.



Throughout the Omaha area there are multiple fisheries with scenery as nice as the fishing, including Papillion's Schwer Park Pond.

Very Limited Access

Despite its size, the public water jetty at Bennington Lake receives a lot of local fishing attention, and for good reason.

25 Bennington Lake

Public access only permitted on jetty located ½ mile west of 168th Street at the intersection of Highway 36 and Newport Landing. Bluegill, channel catfish and largemouth bass.

Check Back Soon

For the most up-to-date information on the following destinations that are either under construction or repair, visit OutdoorNebraska.org.

26 Elkhorn Crossing River Access

252nd Street and Bennington Road, accessing Elkhorn River. Common species caught: channel catfish, common carp, flathead catfish, and shovelnose sturgeon. Features camping area and canoe launch area. Open April 1 to November 1, **but currently closed for repair**.

27 Haworth Park Pond/River Access

1 acre- Payne Drive north of Highway 370 in Bellevue adjacent to Missouri River. Bluegill, channel catfish and largemouth bass in pond. River access is also present, with the following species commonly caught: buffalo, channel catfish, common carp, crappie and flathead catfish. Features camping area and concrete boat ramp owned by City of Bellevue.

Notes: As of publication date, **Haworth Park is closed** until further notice because of flood damage. Visit the City of Bellevue web site at Bellevue.net for the latest information.

28 Kramer Park Lake

7 acres- North of Highway 370 at Missouri River bridge. Bluegill, channel catfish and largemouth bass.

Notes: As of publication date, **Kramer Park Lake is closed** until further notice because of flood damage. Visit the City of Bellevue web site at Bellevue.net for the latest information.

29 West Papillion No. 5 Lake

135 proposed acres- 126th and Cornhusker Road in Papillion.

Notes: **Construction begins** in summer/fall of 2012 and the fishery is expected to open in 2014. Will feature concrete boat ramp, various breakwaters, underwater shoals, fish attractors, standing trees and abundant shoreline access for anglers. Planned to be a 5-mph no wake lake, this fishery will be stocked with bluegill, channel catfish and largemouth bass.

With reporting by Daryl Bauer, Jeff Chin, Lindsey Chizinski, Jeff Jackson, Jo Momsen, Mark Porath, Steve Satra, Katie Stacey, Dave Tunink and Greg Wagner.

For families wanting a list of Omaha city parks that have picnic shelters, open space and other activities for youth, visit CityofOmaha.org/parks and click on Find a Park.

In addition, while fishing throughout the Metro consider staying at E.T. Mahoney SP, Louisville SRA, Platte River SP, or Two Rivers SRA. While there, take the little ones fishing at waters locaat each of these camping and/or lodging destinations.

Fishing the Metro was printed in the July 2012 issue of NEBRASKAland Magazine, which is published by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Text and photos by Jeff Kurrus. Design by Tim Reigert.

For more information, contact the Commission's Omaha office at 402-595-2144 or Greg.Wagner@nebraska.gov. Additional copies of this publication can be requested by calling the Commission's Fisheries Division at 402-471-5552.

Cover photo: Lawrence Youngman Lake, Omaha

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Silencers

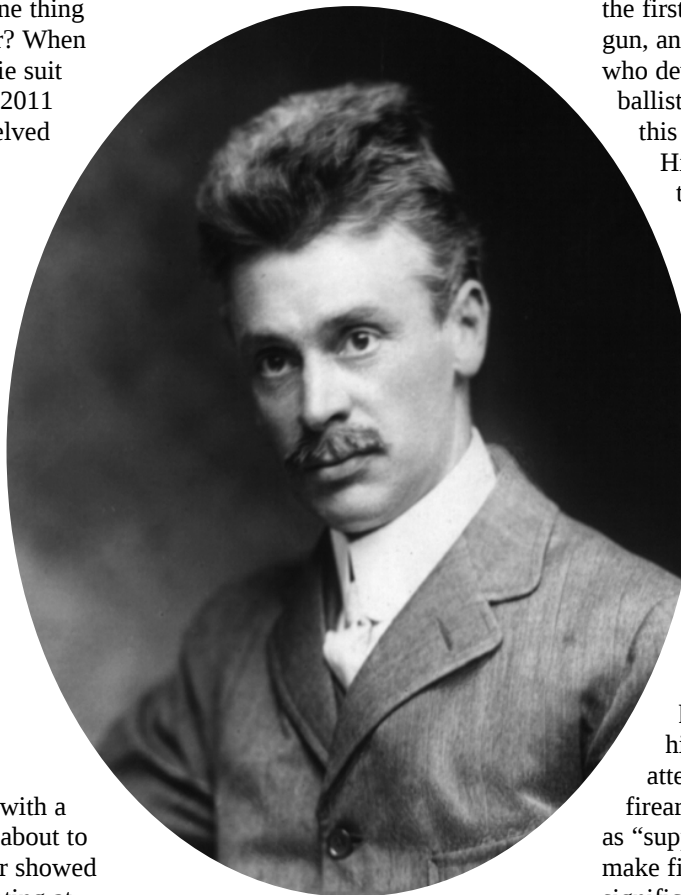
Quiet Firearms for Sportsmen

By Jon Farrar

In the early decades of the 1900s, silencers for rifles and pistols were much touted in outdoor magazines, usually for target practice or dispatching unwanted vermin without disturbing the neighbors.

You ever notice how one thing often leads to another? When I researched the ghillie suit article for the March 2011 *NEBRASKALAND*, I delved a bit into snipers because the British army was the first to use ghillie suits for snipers and surveillance during the Second Boer War (1899-1902) in South Africa. Snipers got me thinking about gun silencers, and so I dug out a long ignored folder labeled “Silencers” out of a file cabinet.

In it was a photocopy of a May 1910 article in *Outer's Book* called “The Silencer's Development” and photocopies of display ads from early-1900s sporting magazines pitching Maxim gun silencers. One advertisement showed a man in his pajamas leaning out an open window, aiming a rifle, with a silencer attached, at a weasel about to invade his hen house. Another showed a man in his living room shooting at a target in his fireplace, a dog sound asleep on the rug at his feet, implying firing the gun was silent (or the dog was old and deaf). Such advertising illustrations suggested the silencers were intended for target shooting or pest control. I've not found an advertisement suggesting they were meant for hunting, but they no doubt were.



Hiram Percy Maxim

A Prodigious Inventor

Hiram Percy Maxim (1869-1936) is generally credited with being the first to invent and commercially market firearm silencers. He was the son of Sir Hiram Stevens Maxim, who invented

the first fully-automatic machine gun, and nephew of Hudson Maxim, who developed high explosives and ballistic propellants. Henceforth in this article, Maxim will refer to Hiram Percy. He graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology with a degree in mechanical engineering at the age of 16. His interests ranged widely – he was among the first to design an automobile powered by an internal combustion engine, founded the American Radio Relay League (ham radio operators), was a pioneer in designing gliders, and his firearm silencer designs were the model for automobile mufflers.

During his lifetime he held 59 patents, but none of his inventions drew as much attention and acclaim as did his firearm silencer, better known later as “suppressors” as they did not really make firing a firearm silent, only significantly reduced the noise level by trapping and slowing the release of gases inside the gun's muzzle. The Maxim silencer consisted of a metal cylinder that screwed onto the gun barrel. Inside the cylinder were small chambers separated from each other by metal rings or baffles, with holes in the center slightly larger than the diameter of the cartridge caliber. The chambers captured escaping gases that created

OUTER'S RECREATION, OCTOBER 1921. OPPOSITE PAGE PHOTO COURTESY U.S. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

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the muzzle blast and also functioned as a flash suppressor. The silencer was also said to reduce firearm recoil, a claim marketed with a photograph of Maxim's nine-year-old, 62-pound son firing a "service rifle with a recoil of 75 pounds." Maxim formed the Maxim Silencer Company in 1908, filing for a patent that same year.

"The sensations of surprise and astonishment with which the shooting world at first received the announcement of an invention claimed to effectively muffle the nerve-racking report of high-power rifled arms, has given place to a feeling of satisfaction now that the device has made good," an unattributed article in the May 1910 issue of *Outer's Book* reported.

Initially, Maxim only made silencers for long guns. A September 1, 1912

article in the *Omaha World-Herald* by outdoor writer Sandy Griswold noted the following: "Because of the power he realized its use would place in the hands of crooks, Hiram Maxim, inventor of the silencer, refused to permit its public sale for use on handguns."

Interestingly, the impetus for Griswold's article was the presentation of a play then showing in Omaha called *Within the Law*: "...there is represented on the stage for the first time in theatrical history a murder by pistol in which there is not the slightest sound at the discharge of the bullet nor the thinnest veil of smoke when the trigger of the revolver is pressed," Griswold reported. "This pistol is causing much excitement and curiosity among the sportsmen and shooters

of the country as there is now a new sporting shotgun in embryo of the same kind."

Griswold wrote that Maxim had designed the handgun silencer specifically for the play and that the Maxim silencer was regarded by police authorities throughout the world as "the deadliest weapon ever conceived because it permits the killing of a person while practically minimizing the possibility of detection of the murderer" Maxim obviously reversed his position, as subsequent advertisements showed silencers built for handguns.

As for Griswold's prediction of silencers for shotguns, that apparently never happened, at least for many years. The principal problem with a shotgun silencer was that many pellets, not just one cartridge, passed

through the silencer. It was probably not until the development of shot cups for shotshells that a shotgun silencer was feasible. Shotgun silencers are used in some European countries today; and improved models are being developed. Most are long and cumbersome, reduction of muzzle blast not significant, and so they are unlikely to be extensively used by sportsmen.

Military Employment

The military immediately showed an interest in the silencer and conducted extensive tests. The *Outer's* article stated that the invention: "...modifies and eliminates the disagreeable and disturbing feature of modern military small arms and renders it possible to so readjust the age limits for military service that hundreds of thousands of fighting units may be added to the service roll; healthy men, long past the age limit for active field service and boys in their teens might in dire emergencies be utilized to man fortifications, leaving the more active troops for the more arduous duties of the tented field." It was also mentioned, tongue in cheek, that with the reduced recoil, firearms could be used by "the more militant of our suffragettes ... without discomfort."

The Army immediately saw the silencer as a valuable tool for snipers. "A cool calculating rifleman of the modern school having the instincts and training of a hunter, and equipped with long range rifle, telescope sights and a Maxim silencer, by taking advantage of natural cover, might easily locate himself in a position where almost immune from danger he could silence

a battery or compel a regiment of the enemy to change position," the *Outer's* article trumpeted. In spite of glowing, but questionable, results from military testing, the silencer failed to be embraced as standard field equipment before and during World War I, although the Army did buy Maxim silencers designed for the U.S. Springfield Model 1903 being used by the infantry at that time.

Quiet-Shooting Sportsmen

One of Maxim's principal pitches to civilian sportsmen was that the sound reduction made target shooting more pleasant and allowed shooting where it would otherwise be objectionable. It was billed as "a gentleman's method of target shooting." It seems Maxim intentionally suggested no uses for a silencer beyond that, knowing buyers would conjure up their own reasons.

The National Firearm Museum in Fairfax, Virginia has the Model 1894 Winchester lever-action rifle equipped with a silencer that belonged to Theodore Roosevelt. Their website noted the Roosevelt estate was on the North Shore of Long Island, and he used the rifle to "clear the estate of varmints" and that his neighbors, such as the DuPonts and the Tiffanys, surely appreciated not hearing the crack of Teddy's rifle while taking their tea.

There was concern by game departments that silencers, also functioning as a flash suppressor, would be employed by poachers but prohibition on their use for hunting apparently was never widespread. Some habitually poor shots might have seen the silencer as a way to get a

second, third or fourth shot at a deer, as the muzzle blast of the first shot would not spook the animal. Walnut-robbing squirrels could also be relatively quietly dispatched in town.

Gangsters

By the late-1920s and early-1930s, the public's attitude toward firearms in general was changing. During Prohibition, gangsters and guns became a public concern and in 1934, the federal government passed the National Firearm Act, which banned short-barreled shotguns and rifles, and machine guns. It did not make silencers illegal but placed a heavy tax on owning one. Interest in them never regained a following among sportsmen after the 1930s, but Maxim was apparently selling enough to justify continuing to advertise in outdoor magazines. Suppressors are banned in some states, but 39 states, including Nebraska, allow private ownership. Permits are issued by the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Firearms, Tobacco and Explosives.

The principal drawback of a suppressor, even the more sophisticated ones manufactured today, is that they only reduce sound: They cannot totally eliminate the crack of a bullet being fired, but makers of modern-day suppressors claim they do make it more difficult for game animals to "read the noise," often allowing a second or third shot be taken.

Judging from ads and articles now appearing in sporting magazines and on the Internet, it seems some hunters are embracing the use of suppressors. What goes around comes around. ■

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Nebraska's Ball Cacti

By Gerry Steinauer, Botanist

During my wanderings afield I'm always subtly pleased to stumble upon one of Nebraska's three species of ball cacti: the purple pincushion cactus, Missouri pincushion cactus, or nylon hedgehog cactus. When not revealed by large and showy (but short-lived) flowers, these cacti can easily elude the botanist because of their relative scarcity, small size and covering veil of prairie grasses. In contrast, Nebraska's three species of prickly pear cacti – little, bigroot and plains – are more widespread, abundant and taller, so more frequently encountered. These cacti have cylindrical or flattened stems divided into segments or pads in contrast to the undivided, round or oblong-shaped stems of ball cacti.

Cacti are adapted to survive in dry environments. Their perennial, evergreen stems are highly modified and thickened for water storage and to conduct photosynthesis, which is accomplished by the leaves in nearly all other plants. Cactus leaves have evolved into spines to limit water loss to parched air and prevent browsing by a variety of animals, from pronghorns



Missouri pincushion cactus

to grasshoppers. The shallow, fibrous roots can absorb moisture from the slightest of rainfalls.

The **purple pincushion cactus** (*Coryphantha vivipara*) is the most widespread, common and largest of our ball cacti, and grows in sandy or gravelly Sandhills and mixed-grass prairie over the western three-fourths of the state. Its stems are solitary, the largest nearly three inches in diameter, often clumped, and sometimes forming mounds. They are covered with tubercles (swollen protuberances), each bearing four brownish central spines surrounded by 12 to 20 white or gray, shorter radial spines. The species name “*vivipara*” means “producing live young” – a reference to the basal tubercles ability to root and form new plants.

In June, one to several large, up to two-inch-wide, flowers appear from the base of the upper tubercles. The many waxy, sharp-tipped, vibrant pink to magenta petals surround a center of yellow-orange anthers and the slightly taller, white, comb-shaped stigmas. Individual flowers last only a portion of a single day and so are rarely seen. In late summer, the green, fleshy, cup-shaped fruits form. The fruits can be up to an inch long and are packed with many tiny, reddish brown seeds in a sweet, edible pulp.

Plains Indians collected the fruit in late summer, eating it fresh or roasting it to burn off spines. The Cheyenne (whose names for the plant were “matahesono” and “mataha”) boiled the fruit either fresh or after drying.

For modern cooks, the smaller fruits of pincushion cactus are less desirable for making jellies, syrups and sauces than those of the larger-fruited prickly pears. Prehistoric Indians in



Nylon hedgehog cactus

southwest Texas also ate the flowers of pincushion cactus, as revealed by its pollen being found in fossilized human excrement. There is no evidence that historic Plains tribes consumed the flowers.

The **Missouri pincushion cactus** (*Coryphantha missouriensis*) when not in bloom is the most inconspicuous of our ball cactus, its stems often barely rising above the soil surface. It grows in rocky, sandy or clayey soils of mixed-grass prairie, often on hilltops and ridges, only in the northwestern fourth of the state, where it is uncommon. The species was first collected from the high hills of the Missouri River, most likely in what is now the state of North Dakota; hence, the name “Missouri,” and not because it grows in the state with that name.

In his 1983 book, *Jewels of the Plains*, South Dakota rancher and botanist Claude Barr wrote that the Missouri pincushion cactus “prepares for winter ... by reducing its volume by half and withdrawing to ground level. With the warmth of spring it quickly becomes turgid and by late-May bears a ring of light straw or orange-tinted blossoms about its center. Its near-white spines are soft and readily handled. This kind occasionally attains a diameter of two-and-a-half inches. It sometimes forms clusters. The flowers arise from the bases of the teatlike extensions [tubercles], and the small, round, green fruits form in summer to

ripen in April of the following year in a charming display of crimson or bright scarlet. These catch the eye of northward migrating birds and soon disappear.” Plains Indians also ate fruits of the Missouri pincushion and the Comanche reportedly used its spines as “instruments to punish unfaithful wives.”

The **nylon hedgehog cactus** (*Echinocereus viridiflorus*) is Nebraska's third species of ball cacti. *Echinos* is Greek for “hedgehog” and *viridiflorus* is Latin for “with green flowers.” It grows in extremely rocky or gravelly mixed-grass prairie in southwestern counties and is rare in the state. I have never encountered this species in the wild in Nebraska – the photo on the opposite page was taken in a South Dakota rock garden. Stems are usually solitary and only occasionally on mature, healthy plants are the stems clumped. These bear low tubercles on vertical ribs,

a characteristic that distinguishes the hedgehog cactus from the pincushion cactus. The dense, varied-colored spines, attractive on new growth, occur in horizontal light and dark bands and sometimes obscure the stem. The name “nylon” refers to the pattern formed by these dense, narrow-rowed spines, which resembles the lines on women's nylon stockings.

Barr wrote “the color of the flowers is an unimpressive yellow-green if the season is warm and dry, but in a cool, wet period it is a clear, pale, and luminous traffic-signal green, startling at first acquaintance.” Unlike the pincushion cactus, the flowers of the hedgehog cactus arise from lower, older parts of the stem. The green, spiny fruits are small, less than one-half-inch tall, and likely unpalatable to human and wildlife alike. Similar to the Missouri pincushion cactus, hedgehog cactus stems shrivel and flatten with the onset of autumn.

The showy flowers of ball cacti make them targets for poaching, which is strongly discouraged as it can reduce or eliminate local populations. Overall, however, human activities may be less a threat to ball cacti than many other Nebraska wildflowers. Their dry, usually sandy or gravelly, often hilly, prairie habitats are mostly unsuitable for farming. Sharp spines spurn grazing livestock. Lastly, adapted to a dry climate, including prolonged drought, these cacti may survive well under future climate change. ■

Gerry Steinauer is a botanist for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and has been writing and photographing for NEBRASKALand Magazine for more than 20 years.



Butterfly Gardens

bringing wildlife into the backyard

Text and photos by Pasquale Mingarelli

“There is always a surprise,” said Verla Shaner, speaking about the butterfly garden she cares for at Heron Haven, a Omaha nature area near her home. “A newly opened flower, maybe a robin digging in the dirt looking for a worm, a wren singing in the Miss Kim lilac or even a butterfly.”

Wherever there is wildlife there are people who try to attract it using various methods, including putting out a salt block to attract deer to hanging bird feeders. But there’s another way that involves a bit more work and passion – planting and cultivating plants that attract wildlife and cause it to stay around. Some people have even transformed their entire yard into a flowering paradise. These people are often those wildlife enthusiasts who are most passionate about Lepidoptera – butterflies.

Butterfly gardens are a great way to bring a little bit of

color and wildlife activity into any backyard. According to Steve Spomer, an entomology research technologist at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln, more than 200 species of butterflies have been recorded in Nebraska. There are also plenty of native and non-native species of plants commonly used in landscaping that these butterflies sip nectar from, so building a butterfly garden seems like a natural thing to do. In addition to butterflies, these plants will also attract hummingbirds, cardinals, goldfinches and many other species of birds.

Building a garden can be easy: One can simply plant zinnias in the corner of a yard that will attract plenty of different species, such as monarchs, painted ladies and cabbage whites. However, a serious butterfly enthusiast might want to place dozens of different annual and perennial plants throughout a backyard landscape.

Nancy Scott of Bellevue has a beautiful butterfly garden that has been certified as wildlife habitat by the National



A monarch butterfly feeds on a domestic sunflower.



Nancy Scott refills a hummingbird feeder, which butterflies also enjoy.



Verla Shaner works at Heron Haven constructing a dry stream bed.

Wildlife Federation. She says if someone is interested in starting a garden for butterflies, they should put in not only flowering plants for the adults, but host plants for the caterpillars as well. Scott plants greenery such as dill, milkweed and

even broccoli as host plants for caterpillars of black swallowtails, monarchs and cabbage butterflies, respectively. She also noted that spraying insecticides will kill off the “good” and the “bad” insects indiscriminately, a fact backed up by UN-L’s guide to butterfly gardens: “It is difficult to have a successful butterfly garden where insecticides are in use.”

Shaner, who transformed a quarter acre of land into a spectacular butterfly garden at Heron Haven, adds that one should not use fertilizers either – she believes they leave salts in the soil and don’t necessarily result in more butterflies anyway.

Shaner says her use of numerous native plants and mulch helps keep

down the need to water. In fact, she built a dry creek bed in Heron Haven’s garden. She did this by placing small-to medium-sized landscaping boulders in two rows roughly two feet apart. Between them she placed a strip of weed-stopping material covered by smaller river rock. These rocks and boulders provide a place for butterflies, which are cold-blooded, to sun themselves. Pathway stepping stones can also fill the same need – just be



Carolina mantis on allium in a butterfly garden.



Nancy Scott began to transform the landscape in her backyard to attract butterflies and other wildlife back in 1986.



Snowberry clearwing hummingbird moth on butterfly bush.

careful when walking on them early in the day.

Although the plants themselves may not need much water, butterflies need moisture on occasion. Scott suggests taking an old pot, filling it with dirt to a couple inches from the top, then burying it. The water that settles in it will not sink into the ground, giving butterflies a place to drink. A birdbath may also be used.

Probably the most importance

decision to make when building a butterfly garden is what plants to include. Native plants are a good place to start, and Shaner recommends coneflowers, sunflowers, phlox, cleome and rudbeckia. As for nonnative plants, she recommends hibiscus, Russian sage, butterfly bush, zinnias, hollyhocks and lantana. Both she and Scott use a mix of perennials and annuals.

To keep flowers blooming Scott says it’s a good idea to deadhead flowers by removing dead or dying blossoms off the stems to encourage additional blossom growth. Shaner and Scott both leave the dead foliage alone during the winter season – this protects the perennials that lay dormant underground, and seeds left in the dried flowerheads provide winter food for many species of birds. The layers of vegetation can also provide protection for caterpillars and mourning cloak butterflies that Spomer says overwinter as adults. He says mourning cloaks can be seen flying around as early as February.



A grey hairstreak sits on a zucchini leaf. Their caterpillars eat bean flowers so they often visit vegetable gardens.

When asked what she and others get out of having a butterfly garden Scott replied: “The joy of the experience and to see wildlife in your own backyard and knowing you were responsible for bringing them. You can see all the movement and the garden feels alive. It’s a fun place to be.” ■

Pasquale Mingarelli is a photography instructor at Metropolitan Community College in Omaha and has appeared in NEBRASKALAND since April 2009.



A skipper butterfly on a zinnia flower.

2012 Nebraska State Park Summer Schedule

Nebraskans have more than 80 state park areas to enjoy this summer. These parks offer a variety of activities for all ages. A park entry permit is required for all vehicles entering these park areas.

- Arbor Lodge State Historical Park (SHP) – Nebraska City, 402-873-7222. Mansion open April 14-Oct. 28, 11 a.m.-5 p.m.

- Arthur Bowring Sandhills Ranch SHP – Merriman, 308-684-3428. Ranch home tours and visitor center open May 26-Sept. 3, Monday-Saturday, except closed Wednesdays, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. and Sundays, noon-4 p.m.

- Ashfall Fossil Beds SHP – Royal, 402-893-2000. Open daily, Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day weekend. Call for additional open days.

- Ash Hollow SHP – Lewellen, 308-778-5651. Visitor center open May 26-Sept. 3, Friday-Sunday, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. and open Monday-Thursday by appointment only. Park grounds open 8 a.m.-5 p.m., April 1-Oct. 31.

- Buffalo Bill Ranch SHP – North Platte, 308-535-8035. House and barn open March 19-May 25, Monday-Friday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.; May 26-Sept. 3, open daily, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

- Calamus State Recreation Area (SRA) – Burwell, 308-346-5666. Fishing tournament dates to be announced; Nebraska Junk Jaunt, Sept. 22-23.

- Chadron State Park (SP) – Chadron, 308-432-6167. Housekeeping cabins available from mid-April to mid-November. Group camp/conference facility and modern campground with showers available. Fur Trade Days, July 13-15.

- Champion Mill SHP – Enders, 308-882-5860. Exhibits open to public Saturdays and Sundays from 8 a.m.-noon and 1-5 p.m., May 26-Sept. 3.

- Eugene T. Mahoney SP – Ashland, 402-944-2523. Restaurant open year-

round. Stargazing, July 27, Aug. 24, Sept. 21, dusk-11 p.m.

- Fort Atkinson SHP – Fort Calhoun, 402-468-5611. Visitor center and buildings open daily, 10 a.m.-5 p.m., May 26-Sept. 3. Living history demonstrations, 10 a.m.-5 p.m., July 2-3, July 30-Aug. 1, Aug. 4-5, Sept. 1-2.

- Fort Hartsuff SHP – Burwell, 308-346-4715. Buildings and grounds open April 1-Sept. 30, 8 a.m.-8 p.m., closed on weekends. Gift shop open May 26-Sept. 3, Saturdays and Sundays, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. or by appointment.

- Fort Kearny SHP and SRA – Kearney, 308-865-5305. Open daily May 19-Sept. 12, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.; 1860s soldier and civilian encampment and living history demonstrations July 4, 7 and Sept. 1-3; Family Fishing Night, Aug. 10.

- Fort Robinson SP – Crawford, 308-665-2900. Museums, restored buildings, modern and primitive camping, cabin and lodging facilities available from mid-April to mid-November. Restaurant open daily from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day weekend. Art Show, July 2-4; Fort Robinson Fourth of July Celebration, July 4; American Paint Horse Association Trail Ride, Sept. 3-8.

- Indian Cave SP – Shubert, 402-883-2575. Family crafts and trail rides available, living history demonstrations, May-October; Brownville Freedom Day Celebration and Fireworks, July 4; Buffalo Cookout and Fireworks, Sept. 1.

- Lake McConaughy SRA – Ogallala, 308-284-8800. Beach Cleanup, July 7; Hobie Tropical Dreams Regatta, July 14-15; Dam Run, July 28; Kites and Castles, July 28; Hobie Mac Attack Regatta, Aug. 31-Sept. 3.

- Merritt Reservoir SRA – Valentine, 402-376-3320. Nebraska Star Party, July 15-20.

- Niobrara SP – Niobrara, 402-857-3373. Modern housekeeping cabins available year-round availability. Horse

trail rides, May 26-Sept. 3; swimming pool open daily, 1-6 p.m., June 2-Aug. 5; swimming pool open on weekends, subject to lifeguard availability, Aug. 6-Sept. 2; buffalo cookout and entertainment July 7, 14, 21, 28, Aug. 4, Sept. 1; Nebraska Humanities Program July 21, Sept. 1; National Park Service programs July 7, 14, 21, 28, Sept. 1-2.

- Pawnee SRA – Emerald, 402-796-2362.

- Platte River SP – Louisville, 402-234-2217. Modern housekeeping cabins available year-round. Tepees and camper cabins also available. Horseback trail rides, swimming pool, craft center, paddle boat rentals available; May 26-Sept. 3; Holiday buffet, July 4, Sept. 3.

- Ponca SP – Ponca, 402-755-2284. Modern and primitive camping available. Housekeeping cabins available May-October. Outdoor education programs Memorial Day-Labor Day; Archery Sight-In, Sept. 8-9.

- Rock Creek Station SHP – Fairbury, 402-729-5777. Visitor center and buildings open daily, 10 a.m.-5 p.m., May 7-Sept. 23.

- Two Rivers SRA – Waterloo, 402-359-5165. Caboose cabins available May 1-Sept. 30.

- Victoria Springs SRA – Anselmo, 308-749-2235.

- Wildcat Hills SRA – Gering, 308-436-3777. Summer day camps at Nature Center, July-August. Nature Center weekend events: Bighorn Sheep Hike, July 14; Outdoor Skills Workshop, July 28; Awesome Amphibians and Rough Reptiles, Aug. 11; Moonlight Hike, Aug. 31

- Willow Creek SRA – Pierce, 402-329-4053.

For more information, contact the individual area (phone numbers shown on this page) or visit OutdoorNebraska.org.

Popular Stretch of Cowboy Trail Reopens

Work will continue this summer to repair damage caused by 2010 Elkhorn River flood

By Eric Fowler

It took 14 years to complete the transformation of all 195 miles of abandoned Chicago & Northwestern Railroad line between Valentine and Norfolk into the Cowboy Trail. But in 2010, just months after the last segment was complete but before the corks could be popped to celebrate the feat, it only took a few days of flooding along the Elkhorn River, albeit flooding of historic proportions, to undo enough of that work to spoil the party.

By summer's end, however, all but one major repair will be complete on the hike/bike trail, which reopened last June with three major detours and a few miles of rough spots. Officials from the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, which manages the Cowboy Trail, as well as the 20 communities along it and the Nebraska Department of Tourism, expect trail enthusiasts from across the country to resume their descent on the nation's second longest rails-to-trails project.

"There is a clientele out there that searches out these trails all over the United States," said Duane Westerholt, state trails coordinator with the Commission. "It's a challenge for them to ride these trails."

Flooding damaged 22 of the 73 miles of the trail between O'Neill and Norfolk that follows the Elkhorn River.

What had been the busiest section of the trail, the segment between Battle Creek and Norfolk, is expected to reopen this month (July). In May, a new bridge was installed across the Elkhorn River between the communities, replacing the aptly named Broken Bridge, which was washed out by the June 2010 flood. A washout upstream of the bridge that chewed away a portion of the bank and 200 feet of trail has also been repaired.

A mile-long segment between Neligh and Oakdale that saw extensive damage to the trail surface and has been open but extremely rough will be resurfaced this summer, as well other sections of trail that saw minor damage that included surface washouts or saw the crushed limestone surface washed away. These segments of the trail will be closed for short periods of time while work is being done. The Commission will announce these closures through news releases and on its Facebook and Twitter pages.

Work has yet to begin on the most heavily damaged section of trail southeast of Clearwater. There, the Elkhorn River chewed away more than 200 feet of the riverbank and adjacent pasture and an 1,100 foot segment of the trail, and washed out two bridges. Westerholt said a consultant will be hired to study the damaged segment and repair options, but no timetable has been set for the work. In the meantime, trail users can bypass the area on a 3.3 mile-detour along county roads and U.S. Highway 275.

Repair work is being funded by the Federal Emergency

Management Agency, the Recreational Trails Program of the Federal Highway Administration, and the Commission's Cowboy Trail Maintenance Cash Fund.

Completing this 195-mile segment has been a priority since work began on the trail in 1996. But the work is far from complete. The abandoned rail line stretches west of Valentine to Chadron. No timetable has been set for work on that segment of the trail. If it is completed, the Cowboy Trail would cover 321 miles, 84 more than the Katy Trail State Park in Missouri, the nation's longest rail trail.

But second place on that list has already generated considerable interest among trail enthusiasts, a few of which traversed the entire completed segment as soon as it was complete in the fall of 2009.

The route traverses two uniquely different ecosystems: the farm country of the Elkhorn River valley to the east of Long Pine and the ranch country of the Sandhills to the west. At Valentine, visitors are treated to an expansive view of the Niobrara River as they cross a quarter-mile long truss bridge.

In communities along the route, trail users will find many plenty to see and do, including small-town restaurants with home-style cooking, an old-time soda jerk, historic train depots and one of two drive-in movie theaters still in operation in Nebraska.

Two of those communities – O'Neill and Neligh – are capitalizing on the health benefits offered by the trail with special markers along the trail to encourage residents to walk for exercise.

"It's good for the quality of life for the people in those communities," Westerholt said. ■



DUANE WESTERHOLT



Tyson Construction crews swing the first of two segments of bridge into place over the Elkhorn River on the Cowboy Trail west of Norfolk.

Getting Families Outside

How the Great Park Pursuit got our family outside and away from the computer last summer.

By Kurt Runestad, teacher and dad

After reading Richard Louv's *Last Child in the Woods* a couple of years ago, I've tried to be more purposeful about getting our kids (daughter Avery is 4, son Owen is 15 months) outside. Several of Louv's points really resonated, particularly his observation that most outdoor play is open-ended and requires creativity, whereas many games, parent play, and certainly all video/online activities, are one-directional, usually resulting in defined outcomes (like a loss or victory). Kids playing outside have to create activities within a much less structured environment, as kids have been doing for generations. Most parents that I know hope that the Internet, texting, and video games will not entirely eliminate outside play from American childhood.

That's why the Nebraska Game and Parks "Great Park Pursuit" (GPP) resonated with me, and why Avery and I (my wife Carly and Owen also participated in several) visited 10 of the 20 parks in the GPP last year. I teach at a local college and get more family time in the summer than during the school year, so the timing worked out perfectly for us. We had a great time doing the GPP!

On a crisp early June weekday, both of the kids and I spent a very relaxing day at Pawnee State Recreation Area for our first GPP outing of the summer. With Owen in a child-carrying backpack, we took a hike to find the GPP post and then continued exploring. We ate some wild raspberries and mulberries, looked for bugs, then went fishing (no luck) and swimming before eating a picnic and heading home, tired but satisfied. Avery chose the pace and activities of the day. Like most 4-year-olds she loves to be in charge, so that was a pleasure for her. And, frankly, for me too – what do I care what we do first, last or at all?



Kurt, Avery, Ella and Cornell at Fort Robinson State Park.

In mid-summer the whole family visited Fort Atkinson State Historical Park near Fort Calhoun, where it was reenactment day; many volunteers were dressed in period costumes, teaching visitors what fort life was like in the 19th century. It was a very hot day, so even the kids got a real sense of how hard that might have been, and Carly and I enjoyed learning about some of the Lewis and Clark-related history of the fort and the area. All of the volunteers were very informative, interactive and kid-friendly. The homemade lemonade (with real lemons!) was a highlight for the kids. Avery was so taken by the experiences we had at Fort Atkinson that when we visited Fort Kearny State Historical Park a month later (it too has a stockade, so looks roughly similar), she asked "Where are all the people who live here, Daddy?" and "Do they have lemonade?"

Each park has its own special memory for our family. Mincks Park in York provided the longest walk from parking lot to post of any of the GPP parks that we visited. We learned what cottonwood trees and seeds were at the Plum Creek Trail near Seward, and Avery has pointed out cottonwood seeds several other times throughout the summer. On Labor Day weekend we caught our only fish of the GPP (three very small bluegill, which we threw back) at Louisville State Recreation Area, after taking a hike along the river where we closely examined a caterpillar, spider, and snail, all on the same dead tree.

Just in case I've made this entire thing sound like a "Leave It to Beaver" perfect family story, let me assure you that doing all of these things with kids as young as ours is challenging. Both kids cried and whined the entire way to Louisville on Labor Day weekend – the longest 50-minute drive of the summer. (My wife, God bless her, took the brunt of it since she was in the backseat with them trying to keep things quiet.) I forgot the sunscreen when we visited Homestead National Monument – ugh, one of the hottest days of the summer. And after a long late-summer day of doing three GPP en route to Colorado, I asked Avery, "What was your favorite thing today? We did three Great Park Pursuits, we had a picnic at Ft. Kearny, you're staying in a hotel with Daddy tonight in Ogallala, and tomorrow we're going to see Lake McConaughy, the biggest lake in Nebraska! What's your FAVORITE thing out of all of those?" She replied, "Watching my movies." (Yes, she gets to watch DVDs on car rides, especially long ones.)

Sigh ... well, there's always next year to get her as convinced as I am.

Thanks Nebraska Recreation and Park Association and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission – we hope you will continue to offer this great program. We also hope that many families take advantage of it. Any motivational tool to help families get outside more and be on our computers less is life-improving and soul-enhancing. ■

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▲ This picture (left) was taken around 1942 at a lake near Pilger. It may have been taken on their senior sneak day or just a weekend outing. From left: my mom, Virginia Musser; Phyllis Krutz; Bob (don't know his last name); and last two other unknown gentlemen. The boat looks a little small for the number of people in it, and I see they are not wearing life jackets. I am a little surprised my mom was in the boat, as she was never very adventurous.

The second photo is of a family outing. I believe it was taken along the Elkhorn River, south of Pilger. This was a fishing and picnicking excursion. I believe the picture was taken by my mom, Virginia Musser Bahm, as she is not in the photo. From left: my grandfather, John Bahm; my dad, Elmer Bahm; a family friend, Orville Strong; my uncle, Leonard Bahm; my uncle, Raymond Hipp; my aunt, Helen Hipp; and my grandmother, Clara Vilmeer Bahm. In front on the righthand side is Orville's wife, Betty Grenz Strong; and my aunt, Mary Bahm Hipp, holding my older brother, Merle Bahm. The photo was taken about 1948.

Even after I, my younger brother and our cousins were born, we all continued to have such picnics and fishing trips along the Elkhorn. Note also in the pictures that they had made use of old bamboo cane poles and so did we.

— James Bahm,
Norfolk, Nebraska



◀ This picture shows us after returning home from Sidney after another super wonderful duck hunt at our blind on the North Platte River, east of Broadwater in December 1973. We shot our limits in just a few hours, as swarms and swarms of birds were always flying in those years. From left: Matt Bartels (9 years old, used a .410 shotgun); Mark Bartels (13 years old, used a 20-gauge shotgun); my brother George Jr.; and myself Bob Bartels.

In those years it was nothing to shoot 500 to 600 birds per season. Very memorable years which we will never forget. Nebraska no doubt was the best state on our midwest region for hunting and seeing birds. Thank you. We read your NEBRASKALAND Magazine all the time.

— Bob Bartels, Sidney, 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.

Snake Bitten

Sometimes I should just keep my mouth shut.

By Jeff Kurrus

“What if she gets bit by a snake?” Laura asked as I told her my and Madeline’s afternoon plans. “Bit by a snake? Are you kidding me?” I asked. “I’m outside all the time and have never been bit by a snake. Actually, I’m not sure I know anyone who has been bit by a snake.”

It was a conversation I couldn’t believe I was still in, one that had started too many minutes before after I telling Laura my plans of taking our daughter Maddie to the swim beach at Two Rivers State Recreation Area after school.

“Swim beach?” she repeated. “By what water?”

“A lake at Two Rivers.”

“Maddie isn’t going to swim in a lake.”

“Huh? Why not?”

“Who do you know who has swam in a lake?” she asked.

“Who do I not know?” I responded. “Every person I know has swam in a lake at one time or another. For that matter, you ski Laura. So you also swim in lakes.”

And that was the clincher – even though questions about snakes would appear moments later, I knew I had her. How could her hand-sanitizing self argue with the fact that she too swims with the fishes.

“Don’t ever come home if she gets hurt,” she finished.

“Yes, Commish,” I replied, walking out the front door. (FYI: the term “Commish” was recently added to the family lexicon because, after being grumpy one afternoon following a long day at work, Laura fined me \$200 for my “negative attitude.” I appealed, but she declared herself commissioner, judge and jury, and my appeal was immediately denied).

When we arrived at the swim beach, there were only two other families there. Maddie took her sand pail, shovel and plastic toy crocodile and went to the water’s edge.

Meanwhile, I pulled out my fly rod and began making casts to the water adjacent to the swimming area. Five minutes in ... really, just five minutes in... a northern water snake began swimming across the water toward the swimming area.

“Look Maddie, a snake,” I said.

“Ooooooooooooooh, a snake,” she replied. “Can you catch it for me, Daddy?”

“I’ll try,” I said, casting a popping bug across the snake and pulling the bait over its back. There was no way I was going to hook the snake until, well, it happened.

“Yay!” Maddie yelled, “Daddy caught a snake.”

“Yay,” I morosely replied.

I reeled the snake in, all the while trying to remember how Dad had taught me how to pick them up behind their head. Remember I apparently did not, however, for as I moved my hand in position it turned and clamped down. Quite immediately I then knew at least one person who had been bit by a snake.

“Sooooooo pretty,” Maddie said, not noticing the blood running down my arm. “Can I hold it?” she asked.

“You can pet it,” I replied, removing the snake’s small, but painful, fangs from my hand. “But I’ll keep holding it.” Minutes later we released the snake with no ill-effects, and we stayed at the park for multiple hours, encountering no other man-eating reptiles.

And good for me that we didn’t. After being fined again for what the Commish deemed a “near moment experience,” I’d have to take out a loan or get a part-time job to keep up with these payments.

By the way, anyone know if Dan Fogell needs an assistant? ■

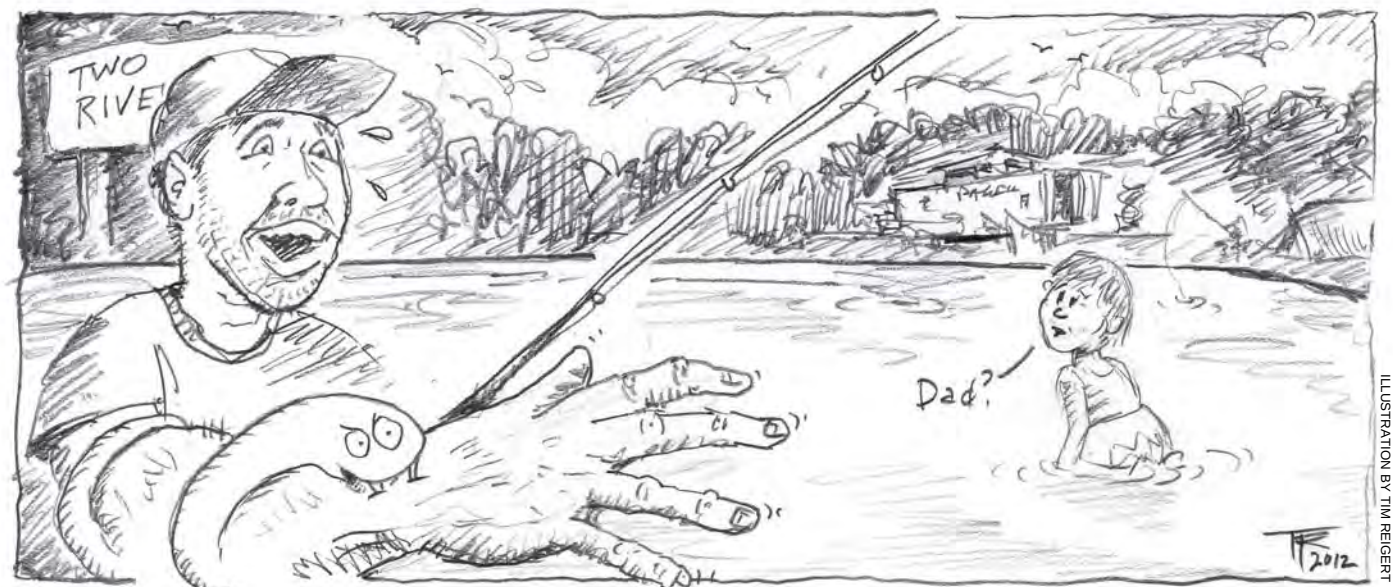


ILLUSTRATION BY TIM REIGERT



As important as rod and reel, my camera has become an essential fishing tool since my beginnings at *NEBRASKAland*. In fact, given the choice of extra lures versus extra lenses, I'll take lenses every time. Because of these choices, I probably have more fishing photographs than any other subject I cover.

However, despite these images, consistent action shots have always evaded me. Hearing of my troubles, old-school photographers passed along stories of "fishing sticks," where caught fish would essentially be connected to a pole and held in place where the photographer could experiment with shutter speeds, f-stops and the like to get the oh-so-right action shot.

But when I photograph anglers, I remember that my partner's principal goal is to catch fish – not monkey around with a photographer. So when I shoot the only request I make is to have the angler let me know when they have a fish on so I can put down my rod and pick up my camera.

Yet this process has had a very slow learning curve because of how fast fish are when they're hooked and jumping from the water. After many trips I still didn't have anything to show my friends. I could tell they were quickly losing confidence and I was feeling the pressure to actually come home with something ... anything.

Finally, after deleting nearly every action photo I had tried to make, I went to Doug Carroll and asked his opinion. I explained that no shutter speed seemed fast enough, and no appropriate f-stop gave a wide enough depth of field to accomplish my goals.

"What if you bounce a soft flash off of the fish?" he asked, and little did I know how that one question would change everything.

My yearly successes turned into monthly, and my monthly to daily. Nowadays, with my camera set on 5.6, 1,000-2,500, with a 400 ISO I can make the photos I want. As long as my Speedlite Flash is also connected and I take a practice shot of my partner in the boat. If it looks nice on them, the fish will also look nice.

Guess who's feeling the pressure now?

Jeff Kurrus
June 11, 2012



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