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NEBRASKAland

January-February 2017



A one-antlered bull elk watches as four others in his bachelor group practice sparring skills, something they may use in the next breeding season, in a Sandhills pasture near Nenzel on a January evening. Photo by Eric Fowler.

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Travel to Nebraska City • A Year Outdoors
Shooting Photos with Camera Phones • River Otters

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NEBRASKAland Magazine

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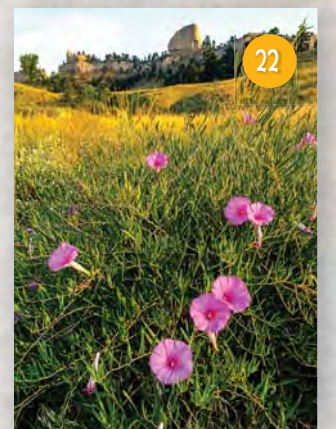
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THROUGHOUT 2017, NEBRASKALAND MAGAZINE WILL BE PUBLISHING A NUMBER OF ARTICLES ASSOCIATED WITH THE STATE'S 150-YEAR CELEBRATION. LOOK FOR THIS LOGO THROUGHOUT THESE PAGES TO READ ARTICLES ASSOCIATED WITH NEBRASKA'S RICH HISTORY, AND VIEW OUR INTERACTIVE DIGITAL EDITION FOR MORE INFORMATION.

Cover: A male cardinal perched in a redbud tree south of Grand Island in Hall County. Photo by Rick Rasmussen.

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Mike Beelaert of Orchard photographed this white-tailed buck and doe on Nov. 9 near the Niobrara River in northern Holt County.



Karen Kader of Omaha captured this photo of egrets at Lake Wanahoo last April.

90-year-old Visitor Winner

Dear Mr. Reigert –

What a pleasant surprise arrived in my mail yesterday – your letter and the *NEBRASKAland* mug – in response to my entry in the "Visitor" contest in the November issue of *NEBRASKAland Magazine*!

I am indeed a nonagenarian, but still very active and for that I am deeply grateful.

I have no idea how long we (my late husband and I) have been subscribers to the magazine but it's been years. I see the magazine has been published since 1926 – that makes it 90 years old, too!

At any rate, thanks for choosing me to be a winner. I'll keep looking for the "visitor" in future issues!

Gratefully,
Adelene Vock
Nebraska City, Nebraska

Adelene, It was my great pleasure informing you that you had won the visitor mug contest. We thank you and hope you continue reading NEBRASKAland for many more years.

Tim Reigert, Art Director



14-year-old Cheyanne Graves of Aurora shot this white-tailed buck on the opening weekend of the firearm season. Send your deer-hunting images to nebtrailcam@gmail.com for possible inclusion in a future issue of *NEBRASKAland Magazine*.



Kelly Keogh of Springview calls this photo "Foggy Autumn Morning Overlooking the Niobrara River." The photo was taken at the Fort Niobrara Wildlife Refuge.



Aaron and 6-year-old AJ Beckman sent this camera trap coyote image from Madison County.



Paul Julian of Hastings took this photo of joggers at Hastings Lake in Adams County.



Congratulations to Nathaniel Johnson for his image "Looking for the Sun," the winner of the Reader's Choice Award for the 2016 NEBRASKAland Magazine Photo Contest.



Sabrina Nicholson of Curtis took this photo of horses and sunflowers south of Moorefield. "I was out trying to capture the wildflowers when I saw these beauties!" Nicholson said.



Outdoor Plates

While it may require more thought to interpret than others, the plate Neal Kratochvil of Columbus has on his truck shows his passion: "Want to Hunt." Regardless of how many new vehicles, or license plates, Kratochvil has, his message remains the same.

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

Corrections: In the December, 2016 issue on page 18, Alexandra Mayes, who is holding Creighton Scott's artwork, is misidentified. We regret the error.

Send your comments to:
Jeff Kurrus, Editor
NEBRASKAland Magazine
P.O. Box 30370
Lincoln, NE 68503
or e-mail Jeff.Kurrus@Nebraska.gov
Please include your postal address and telephone number. Letters may be condensed and edited. Photographs are also welcome.

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A Mammal Brief

River Otter

By Lindsay Rogers

The river otter (*Lontra canadensis*) is the largest member of the weasel family in Nebraska, ranging from 35-52 inches long. It weighs from 11-30 pounds, with males weighing more than females. Several Nebraska species look like the northern river otter, including mink and beaver. Although they're also in the Mustelidae family, mink are significantly smaller.

The range of the northern river otter extends throughout Canada and the United States. They are found along waterways, lakes and wetlands. In Nebraska, river otters can be found along all major river systems.

River otters are opportunistic and will eat foods that are most available. Fish make up the greatest portion of the otter's diet, followed by crayfish. Other foods include amphibians, insects, small mammals and birds. In clear water, river otters use their excellent swimming ability to capture fish by sight and direct pursuit. In murky water, they use their whiskers to locate prey by movement.

River otters communicate using several methods. Vocalizations include chirps, growls, whistles and screams. They also communicate through scent marking using a pair of scent glands located at the base of their tails. And finally, they communicate through body language, including touch and posture.

River otters tend to be active at night, although in undisturbed areas they may be active during the day. Anyone fortunate enough to observe an otter in the wild will not likely forget its playful, inquisitive nature or its graceful swimming ability. ■



Lindsay Rogers is an outdoor education specialist with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

PHOTO BY BOB GRIER

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Prescribed Fire Training Workshops

A series of workshops will be held around the state to provide guidance and instruction for completing safe and effective prescribed fires. These workshops are for landowners, resource professionals, volunteer fire departments and others interested in burning. No prior burn experience is necessary to participate.



Basic Workshops

DATE	LOCATION	TITLE AND DESCRIPTION	ADDRESS	TIME
January 18th 2017	Neligh	Prescribed Fire Basics — Learn why, when and how to plan and complete a safe and effective prescribed fire.	UNL Extension Office 501 Main St. Suite 9B • Neligh	9:00 AM - 4:00 PM CST
January 19th 2017	Wayne	Prescribed Fire Basics — Learn why, when and how to plan and complete a safe and effective prescribed fire.	Wayne State College Student Center E 14th St. • Wayne	9:00 AM - 4:00 PM CDT
January 24th 2017	Scottsbluff	Prescribed Fire Basics — Learn why, when and how to plan and complete a safe and effective prescribed fire.	North Platte NRD 100547 Airport Road • Scottsbluff	9:00 AM - 4:00 PM MST
January 26th 2017	Lincoln	Prescribed Fire Basics — Learn why, when and how to plan and complete a safe and effective prescribed fire.	Lancaster County UNL Extension 444 Cherry Creek Road • Lincoln	9:00 AM - 4:00 PM CDT
February 1st 2017	Gibbon	Prescribed Fire Basics — Learn why, when and how to plan and complete a safe and effective prescribed fire.	Rowe Sanctuary 44450 Elm Island Road • Gibbon	9:00 AM - 4:00 PM CDT
February 17th 2017	Burwell	Prescribed Fire Basics — Learn why, when and how to plan and complete a safe and effective prescribed fire.	Scared Heart Parish Center 747 I Street • Burwell	9:00 AM - 4:00 PM CDT

Advanced Topics

January 24th 2017	Curtis	Firebreak Preparation and Planning Multi-Landowner Burn Units— Learn about planning multi landowner burn units and the necessary firebreak preparation for a safe and successful burn.	Martha Jo's Café 118 Center Ave. • Curtis	5:30 PM - 9:00 PM CDT
February 2nd 2017	Broken Bow	Constructing your Prescribed Burn Plan — Learn the different components of a prescribed burn plan and how to develop your plan to maximize safety and effectiveness during your prescribed fire.	Tumbleweed Café 850 East S Street • Broken Bow	6:00 PM - 8:00 PM CDT
February 16th 2017	St. Paul	Burn Plan Writing — Learn how to write a sound and effective burn plan for your Conservation Reserve Program acres.	The Gathering Place 612 Howard Ave. • St. Paul	5:30 PM - 8:30 PM CDT
March 2nd 2017	Imperial	Using Prescribed Fire for CRP Management— This evening workshop will cover how to use prescribed fire as an option for mid-contract management in your CRP fields. Prescribed fire is one of the approved practices that can be effectively used in CRP fields.	Mid Plains College 1324 Broadway • Imperial	5:30 - 8:30 PM MST
July 10th 2017	Bennington	Fire Seasons, Frequency, and Vegetation Response - Learn how the season and frequency of your prescribed burns affects vegetative response of your grasslands.	Glacier Creek Preserve 14810 State Street • Bennington	9:00 AM - 1:00 PM CDT
August 15th 2017	TBD Near Lincoln	Growing Season Burns — Observe and discuss techniques and results of utilizing a growing season burn on your property. Weather dependent, a live fire event will occur.	TBD—Register with an email address and we will send you updates on the event	10 AM - 4:00 PM CDT

Registration fee of \$10 includes meal and training materials. Visit www.NebraskaPF.com or call 308-850-8395 for more information and to register.



Travelogue

By Hannah Hundley, Nebraska Tourism Commission

Nebraska City

A new year means new Nebraska adventures! Travelers are eager to embrace the chill of these winter months and make their way to **Nebraska City**, home of **Arbor Lodge State Historical Park and Arboretum**. Arbor Lodge encompasses more than 65 acres of hilly, wooded land at the edge of the city, just a few miles west of the Missouri River. The park is full of unmatched beauty, even under a blanket of snow.

Arbor Lodge is the original estate of J. Sterling Morton – the founder of Arbor Day. It was on this property that Sterling and his wife initiated their vision for a greener, more tree-filled world. It is estimated that nearly 1 million trees were planted around this area and throughout Nebraska on the first Arbor Day in 1872. The historic mansion where the Morton family lived is still in use today. With its 52 rooms of authentic furnishings and countless historic artifacts, visitors love touring this timeless home or renting it out for special occasions.

Just beyond the Mansion's doorsteps, thousands of trees make up the **Arbor Day Farm Tree Adventure**. Guests can hike the two-third-mile wood-chipped trail, following the South Table Creek into the heart of the forest. After crossing over two rustic timber bridges, guests will find themselves at the base of the 50-foot tall Exploratory Tree House, which they can climb and look out among the vast stretch of wooded wonders. The winter season is an ample time for bird watching and photo opportunities with snow-draped tree canopies overhead.

After enjoying a brisk day of outdoor adventures, travelers can retreat indoors and warm up with a little hot cocoa and some shopping in the **Apple House Market**. Guests can sample red, white and fruit wines made with grapes and other fruit grown in the orchards and vineyards at the farm.

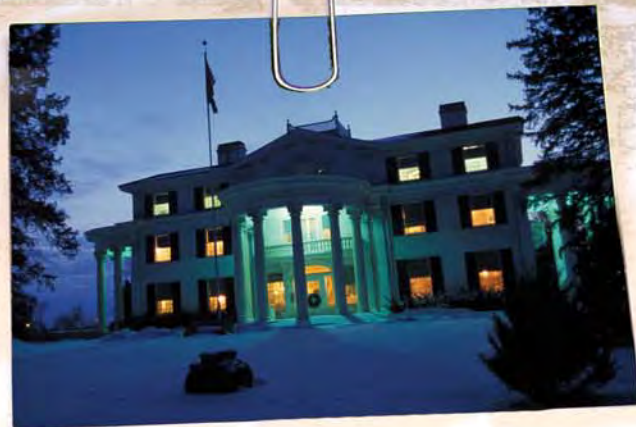
Less than a mile away from the Arbor Day park grounds is the **Lied Lodge & Conference Center**. With an onsite restaurant and lounge, timbered guest rooms, and an Olympic-sized indoor pool and spa, this grand lodge makes for the perfect weekend getaway. Many couples choose Nebraska City as their Valentine's Day destination. The Lied Lodge offers an anniversary package, which includes an intimate dinner for two, an overnight stay and a deluxe breakfast the next morning.

Between the refreshing amenities, countless outdoor activities and the peaceful stillness of nature, Nebraska City is the place to be this season. ■

Adirondack-style entry hall at Lied Lodge

Nebraska City

Statue of Morton, the founder of Arbor Day



Arbor Lodge in winter

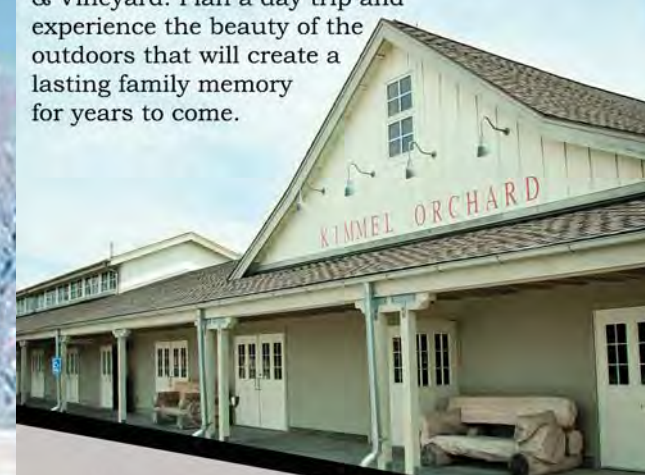


Apple House Market at Arbor Day Farm



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A Brief History Touring a Nebraska Brewery in 1877

By the Nebraska State Historical Society

Small, local breweries have become increasingly popular in recent years, although a look into Nebraska's past reveals that the idea is not new. Many towns, including Grand Island, had them in the 19th century. One reason was that the lack of refrigerated transport systems precluded shipping unpasteurized beer long distances from large, distant breweries. In Grand Island's case, the community's strong German heritage was another reason that a brewery would be well-supported. The editor of the *Grand Island Times* on April 12, 1877, reported on his tour of the city's State Central Brewery, "through the kindness of its proprietor George Boehm."

"We first went into the cellar, which is 22 x 56 feet, where we found 35 hogsheads with a capacity of 250 barrels, nearly all full of the creamy liquid undergoing the different stages of fermentation. Everything was arranged systematically, and kept scrupulously neat and clean. In order to keep the temperature of the cellar up to the desired point during the summer months, a rack has been built in the center calculated to hold twenty tons of ice. A glance at the thermometer, which Mr. Boehm watches carefully, showed the mercury to be down

[to] almost freezing, in which temperature it is expected to keep it, if 850 tons of ice he has on hand will do it. The last hogshead that we inspected, and which was almost large enough for a dwelling house, contained Bock Beer, which is about twice as strong as the ordinary article, and much older, the quality of which the boys will have an opportunity of tasting on Bock Beer day, May 1. Near the ice rack were piles of kegs of beer that had 'gone through the mill' and

were ready for market. Thinking that it might be interesting to the many who drink this healthful beverage, we asked Mr. Boehm to tell us the *modus operandi*."

Boehm proceeded to describe the beer-making process, pretty much the same as today except for the convenience afforded by modern equipment. Barley was mixed with water and left to sprout, then dried, roasted, and ground, producing malt. The malt was boiled and the resulting liquid drawn off, strained, boiled again with hops, cooled, and then fermented. "Once into the fermenting tubs, it stands from 17 to 20 days, after which it is again racked off into hogsheads, where it stands 3 or 4 weeks or longer, when it is again racked off into kegs and is ready for use."

The article more fully described the State Central Brewery's plant: "The main building is about 30 x 60 feet, two stories high, with a large addition on the west side devoted to horse power used in grinding malt and running large force pumps. In the main part is the furnace and kettle, mash tubs and cooler, and the hoisting apparatus for raising kegs from the cellar. Mr. Boehm informed us that he used 350 kegs, and his business was increasing to such an extent that he would be compelled to order more shortly. At present he has at least 10,000 gallons of beer on hand ... In bringing the establishment to its present state of perfection, he has expended about \$12,000, and will continue to improve as time progresses. He superintends every department himself and his reputation is that of one of the best

brewers in the state. It will repay anyone to visit the brewery and 'take it in,' as we did, and we guarantee them a pleasant time and courteous treatment." ■

Visit the Nebraska State Historical Society's website at Nebraskahistory.org.

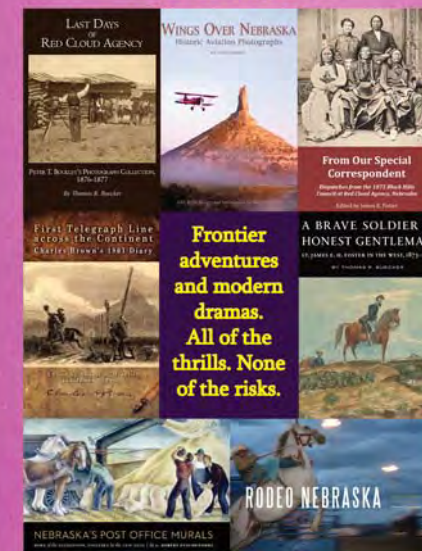


Fremont Brewing Company Lithograph, undated.



Mattes Brewery, Nebraska City, 1900. The large wagon is loaded with beer kegs, the smaller one with beer cases containing bottles of "Otoe Chief" beer.

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A 150-Year Story

By Renae Blum

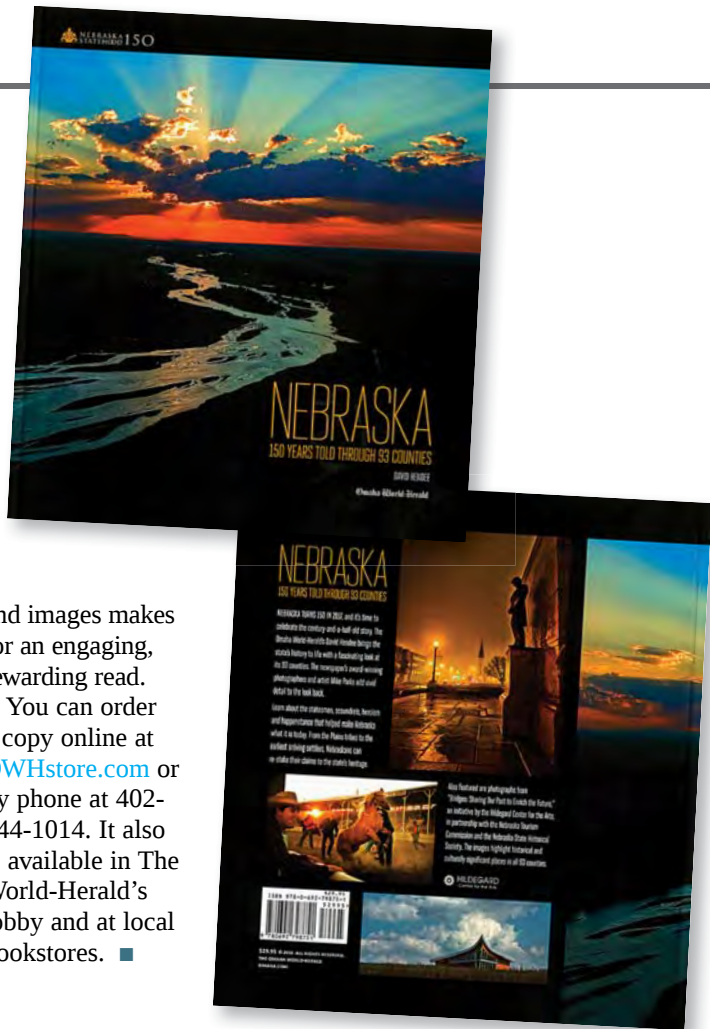
Nebraska became a state on March 1, 1867, and this year will celebrate its sesquicentennial. In honor of this milestone, the Omaha World-Herald has come out with a new book, “Nebraska: 150 Years Told Through 93 Counties,” by World-Herald reporter and editor David Hendee. This handsome coffee table publication illustrates our state’s story through an appealing mixture of words and images, going county by county, starting with Adams and ending with York. Nebraska’s counties are its “building blocks,” Hendee writes, and deserve our particular attention as a unique way of understanding where we live and where we came from.

The first thing you notice upon opening these pages are the photographs. Colorful and dramatic, they bring life to events, people and places that the reader may not be aware of. Equally stunning is Hendee’s reporting. He devotes equal attention and journalistic skill to every county, digging into the facts behind famous legends and well-known stories, people and places. You’re certain to come away surprised by what you’ve learned – for example, that there’s a tree in Ponca State Park that was a seedling in 1644, making it two centuries older than Nebraska. This dive into storytelling through words



and images makes for an engaging, rewarding read.

You can order a copy online at OWHstore.com or by phone at 402-444-1014. It also is available in The World-Herald’s lobby and at local bookstores. ■



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NEBRASKA
GAME & PARKS

Snow Goose Guns

By Jarrod Spilger

Spring snow goose season provides Nebraska waterfowlers more time afield. However, it takes specialized guns to bring down high-flying snows. Here are some ways to trick out your shotgun to save the tundra.

Unplugged gunning of spring snows is allowed during the conservation order, so you aren't limited to only three rounds as during the regular season. Magazine extensions can up your shot count to seven, eight or even 10 rounds. Carlson's (choketube.com) offers affordable extensions for many popular shotgun models. So do RCI-XRAIL (xrailbyrci.com) and Nordic Components (nordiccomp.com), including hard to find extensions for Benelli's Super Vinci.

A fast-shooting semi-auto will make the most of all those extra shots. Plus, there's the added benefit of reduced felt-recoil, especially with gas-operated models. That's an important consideration when rapidly firing multiple magnum rounds.

After nearly two decades of spring hunting, long-lived snows have become extremely wary. Shots are typically long, even when birds decoy. Improved Modified or Light Full chokes provide tighter patterns than Modified or Improved Cylinder. They also perform better with high-velocity loads



Common upgrades for snow goose guns include high-capacity magazine extensions and long-range choke tubes, such as these from Muller, Rob Robert's, and Carlson's.

and larger steel shot sizes, like BB or BBB, than a true Full choke. A Full choke can actually over-constrict high-speed non-toxic loads and create erratic, blown patterns. Try specialty tubes, such as Carlson's Cremator Long Range, Muller's Passing, or Rob Roberts' T3, for better downrange performance.

The ultimate snow goose rig may be Mossberg's 930 Snow Goose. This gas-operated semi-auto is ready to go right out of the box and features white camo and a 13-round magazine extension. ■

PHOTO BY JARROD SPILGER

Hunters Helping The Hungry

Donate cash or a deer to help reduce hunger in Nebraska

(The program pays for the processing)

Learn more at OutdoorNebraska.org/HHH

Feeding Birds

By Julie Geiser

The placement of feeders and seed type will determine the type of birds you will attract to your feeders. There are two things to consider when you wish to discourage certain types of birds at your feeders: food and feeder.

Stop offering the food that the pest birds seem to consume most eagerly. For blackbirds this may be corn or mixed seed. For doves, it's mixed seed, containing milo, millet, wheat, and other grains. To discourage house finches, shorten the perches on your tube feeders, or order a special house-finch-



Black-capped chickadee on a tube feeder.



A Northern cardinal on a platform feeder.

proof feeder that has the feeding holes below the perches. Goldfinches and siskins will hang upside down to feed, but most house finches won't.

As for feeders, stop offering food on the ground or on large platform feeders to discourage doves and blackbirds. Tube and satellite feeders are hard for them to negotiate. To discourage house finches, offer a limited amount of black-oil sunflower seed in a small satellite feeder, one that chickadees, nuthatches, titmice and goldfinches can visit one at a time. Goldfinches, siskins, and other finches love thistle or niger seed and black-oil sunflower seed. ■

PHOTOS BY JEFF KURRUS

Where impressions exceed expectations

They come as they have for thousands of years to this stretch of the Platte River—more than 500,000 cranes in all. Now, as never before, you can experience the wonder of North America's great sandhill crane migration on these rare Crane Trust lands in Wood River, Nebraska.

Immerse yourself in this captivating and rare ecosystem, which is home to the largest herd of genetically-pure American bison in Nebraska and the largest sandhill crane roost on the Platte River.

Private cottages and suites, heated VIP blinds, meals and more are included in our all-inclusive packages. Photography workshops, fat biking, kayaking and other excursions are also available to take your experience to the next level.

Reserve your experience today.
308.382.1820
CraneTrust.org

Expired and Used Tags

What to do with those big and small game permits and stamps?

By Julie Geiser

As all big game hunters know, you must have a permit before legally hunting in Nebraska. Once you harvest, check in your deer, elk or antelope, and process the meat, some hunters wonder what to do with that expired big game permit.

According to Duane Arp, assistant division administrator in the law enforcement division for the Commission, "Once an animal is checked in and after the hunter has returned home, they do not have to retain their permit, and the hunter can throw it away or save it if desired."

During the nine-day firearm deer season in November, hunters must check in their deer at a check station; this includes archery deer hunters that hunt in this season. At the check station hunters will be given a metal seal that is typically placed in the ear of a doe or on the antlers of a buck. The seal does not have to be kept with the deer; however, the seal is proof of legal harvest. The paper permit is cancelled and given back to the hunter after the

appropriate information is filled out and recorded. Arp recommended keeping the seal either on the antlers or with the mount if the deer is to be mounted.

After the firearm season big game hunters need to use the Telecheck system to check in big game.

Telechecking is simple and available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by calling the toll free number at 844-279-4564 or by going online at OutdoorNebraska.org/Telecheck.

Once an animal is checked, Arp said, "Nebraska Game and Parks has the necessary information for management and enforcement purposes, so hunters no longer need the big game permit."

Some people throw their permits away; others shred them as permits have the hunter's name, address and other information on them, while other hunters choose to keep their permits for nostalgia, a reminder of the hunt perhaps.

Arp has seen many permits over the years and stated that: "Many hunters collect permits and stamps. The collection of the federal waterfowl stamp is a great example of collectors and many displays of past stamps. Some collections have sold for monetary value. Many hunters have collected permits and stamps over the years for different reasoning; sentimental reasons to illustrate the number of years he or she has supported the sport, comparison in costs, and comparison in design could be a few examples." ■



Hunters collect permits for a variety of reasons, including nostalgia, cost-comparison and to view designs through the years.

PHOTO BY JULIE GEISER

Experience Winterfest in Nebraska's State Parks



Rekindle the fun of being together.
Find events and details at OutdoorNebraska.org/Winterfest

NEBRASKA
— GAME  PARKS —

Upcoming Events

by Jerry Kane

Contact the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission at 402-471-0641 or visit OutdoorNebraska.org for more information. Visit huntsafenebraska.org for a list of hunter education classes and boatsafenebraska.org for a list of boating safety classes.

January 1

First Day Hike

Ponca State Park (SP), Ponca; Platte River SP, Louisville; Chadron SP, Chadron; Eugene T. Mahoney SP, Ashland; Buffalo Bill Ranch State Recreation Area (SRA), North Platte; Fremont Lakes SRA, Fremont; Wildcat Hills SRA, Gering; Ash Hollow State Historical Park (SHP), Lewellen; Fort Kearny SRA, Kearny; Buffalo Bill Ranch SHP, North Platte.

January 1

Light Goose Hunting Statewide light goose hunting season closes

January 4

Growing Up WILD Workshop Lincoln

January 1-5

Christmas Bird Count
Indian Cave SP, Shubert

January 7

Concealed Carry Class

Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

January 8

Shootout at Salt Creek

Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

January 8

Duck and Coot Hunting

Duck and coot hunting seasons close in Zone 3, Low Plains and High Plains Units

January 9

Spring Turkey Hunting First day of spring turkey hunting permit sales

January 9-29

Duck and Coot Hunting

Duck and coot hunting seasons in Zones 2 and 3, High Plains Unit

January 14

Cold Day, Warm Hearts

Eugene T. Mahoney SP, Ashland

January 15

Deer Hunting

Youth, Landowner, Season Choice and River Antlerless, and Gifford Point WMA deer hunting seasons close

January 19

Crow Hunting Special Public Health Hazard Order crow hunting closes

January 19

Growing Up WILD Workshop Lincoln

January 20

Dark Goose Hunting Dark goose hunting season closes in North Central Unit

January 20

Commission Meeting

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission meeting, Lincoln

January 20

Crow Hunting

Crow hunting season opens statewide

January 21

Sausage Making Class

Fort Atkinson SHP, Fort Calhoun

January 25-February 12

Light Goose Hunting

Statewide light goose hunting season

January 25

Growing Up WILD Workshop Chadron

January 26

Growing Up WILD Workshop Omaha

January 26

Project WILD and Aquatic WILD Educator Workshop Chadron

January 31

Hunting Seasons Close For:

November late doe/fawn antelope, fall turkey, pheasant, quail, partridge, grouse and squirrel

February 4

Birds and Binoculars

Eugene T. Mahoney SP, Ashland

February 4-12

White-fronted Goose Hunting

White-fronted goose hunting season

February 5

Cowboy Poetry and Music Jam

Bowring Ranch SHP, Merriman

February 10

Growing Up WILD Workshop Lincoln

February 12

Dark Goose Hunting

Dark goose hunting season closes in East, Platte River, Panhandle and Niobrara units

February 13

Light Goose Light Goose Conservation Order hunting begins

February 11

Pheasants Forever State Habitat Meeting Kearney

February 28

Cottontail and Jackrabbit Hunting Cottontail and jackrabbit hunting seasons close

February 28

Hunting and Trapping Seasons Close For: Bobcat, raccoon, Virginia opossum, long-tailed weasel, mink, red fox, gray fox and badger hunting and trapping seasons close

Attention Educators!

By Lindsay Rogers

Today, children are more likely to know Pokémon characters than native plants. They are more likely to spend spare time indoors than outside, and they're more likely to feel uncomfortable outside than their parents' generation. Yet, countless studies have shown that children who spend time outdoors develop better problem solving skills, increase their ability to focus and show improved academic performance. Additionally, children who spend time in nature are usually more physically active, less stressed and display better social-emotional skills.

However, when looking at many early childhood programs and elementary classrooms, we see little learning taking place outside. Often, teachers lack the confidence to take groups of children outside because they have not been trained to integrate nature into their curriculums.

The goal of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's Growing Up WILD Program is to help early childhood educators engage their students in learning through nature and the outdoors. Educators who attend a Growing Up WILD workshop will gain the necessary skills to take children outside for meaningful learning experiences. Additionally, workshop participants receive the *Growing Up WILD: Exploring Nature with Young Children* curriculum and activity guide which is filled with interdisciplinary, age-appropriate lessons that utilize nature as an integrating concept.

To learn more about Nebraska's Growing Up WILD Program, visit Nebraskaprojectwild.org; to find an upcoming workshop, click on "View Scheduled Workshops." Follow the Nebraska Project WILD page on Facebook for updates, ideas and other related resources. ■



PHOTO BY LINDSAY ROGERS

Lucy Wacker challenges herself to climb as high as she can while visiting Lewis & Clark State Recreation Area near Crofton.

NEBRASKAland Visitor

Last issue's winner of the Visitor drawing was Peg Haenfler of Sidney, Montana, who found the **Southern black widow spider** on page 12.

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 critter found in Nebraska. We will then gather the correct entries and draw one to win a NEBRASKAland 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 15, 21, 41, 45, 49.

Nebraska is home to the **Southern black widow** (*Latrodectus mactans*) and the **Western black widow spider** (*L. hesperus*). The female southern black widow is very distinctive, with a shiny black body and red hourglass shape on the underside of the abdomen. The hourglass of the Western black widow may be less distinct, appearing like two triangles or even a blotch. Males typically lack the hourglass shape, though may have red spotting, and are smaller than females. These spiders are reclusive, preferring protected spaces such as wood piles, storage areas and garages. Black widow spiders produce a web to entangle prey. Once a fly or other insect is caught, the spider rushes down to wrap it in silk and inject it with venom. The venom contains a neurotoxin, which can be damaging to humans, though deaths are rare.

Special thanks to Julie Van Meter, State Entomologist, Nebraska Department of Agriculture.



Camera Phones

By Eric Fowler and Jeff Kurrus

The staff at *NEBRASKAland Magazine* occasionally takes some time off, and sometimes we find ourselves staring at an amazing photo opportunity without our professional digital SLR cameras. A few years ago, that meant we had no chance of capturing it. Developments in cell phone camera technology, however, have changed all of that.

The sensors, lenses and software that drives these cameras are capable of creating images with quality that can rival those from cameras costing thousands of dollars. In addition, enhancing camera phone-made images with various filters, colors and HDR effects have made them user and viewer friendly.

However, these “phone” cameras still have limitations. They don’t have the optical zoom of a digital SLR or even a point-and-shoot. And the digital zoom, which uses software to zoom or simply crops an image, makes them inferior for work that typically requires a telephoto lens, such as wildlife photography. The flash is also a problem because of its small size and location and relation to the lens. And the lenses aren’t as tack sharp as the Nikon and Canon lenses of today or the Zeiss’ lenses from days gone by.

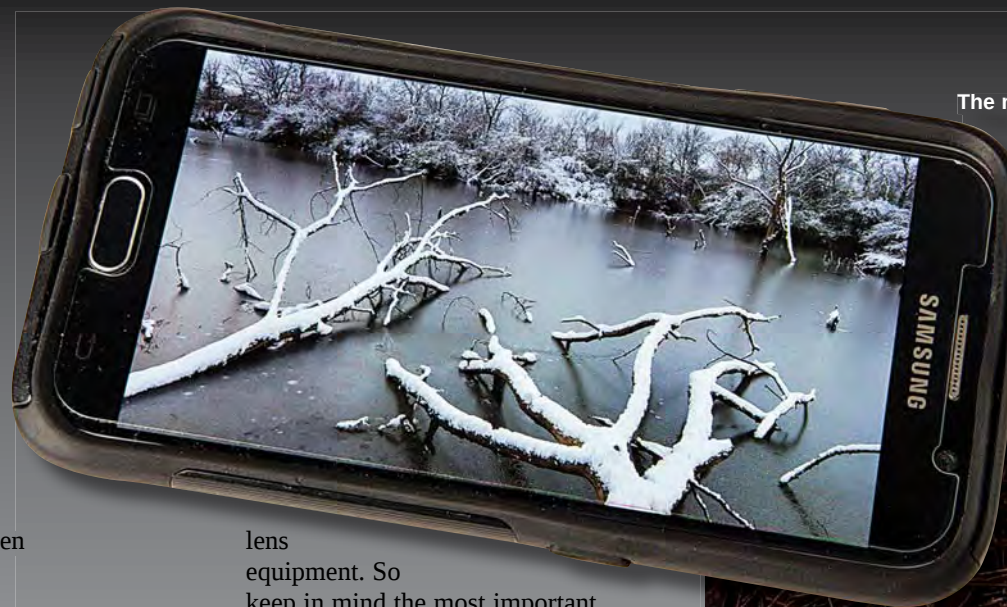
Yet, basic rules of photography still reign supreme when trying to create images with a camera phone. Having nice light and a unique composition can make images captured with a

Phones have changed in many ways, and one of those that outdoor enthusiasts can capitalize on is their cameras.

phone just as interesting as those taken with a digital SLR.

On the following pages are a few images we’ve taken with our phones, ones that each of us have no doubt shown friends and families with the same pride as we have with our long-

lens equipment. So keep in mind the most important photography tip of all: the best camera is the one you have at the moment. And thanks to our phones, we all have one. ■



The resolution, features and image quality of cameras in smart phones has improved exponentially in recent years. The Samsung Galaxy S6 that captured this snowy scene at Branched Oak Lake boasts a 16 megapixel image.

A nice rainbow trout caught on a fly rod at Two Rivers State Recreation Area near Yutan. Samsung Galaxy S5.

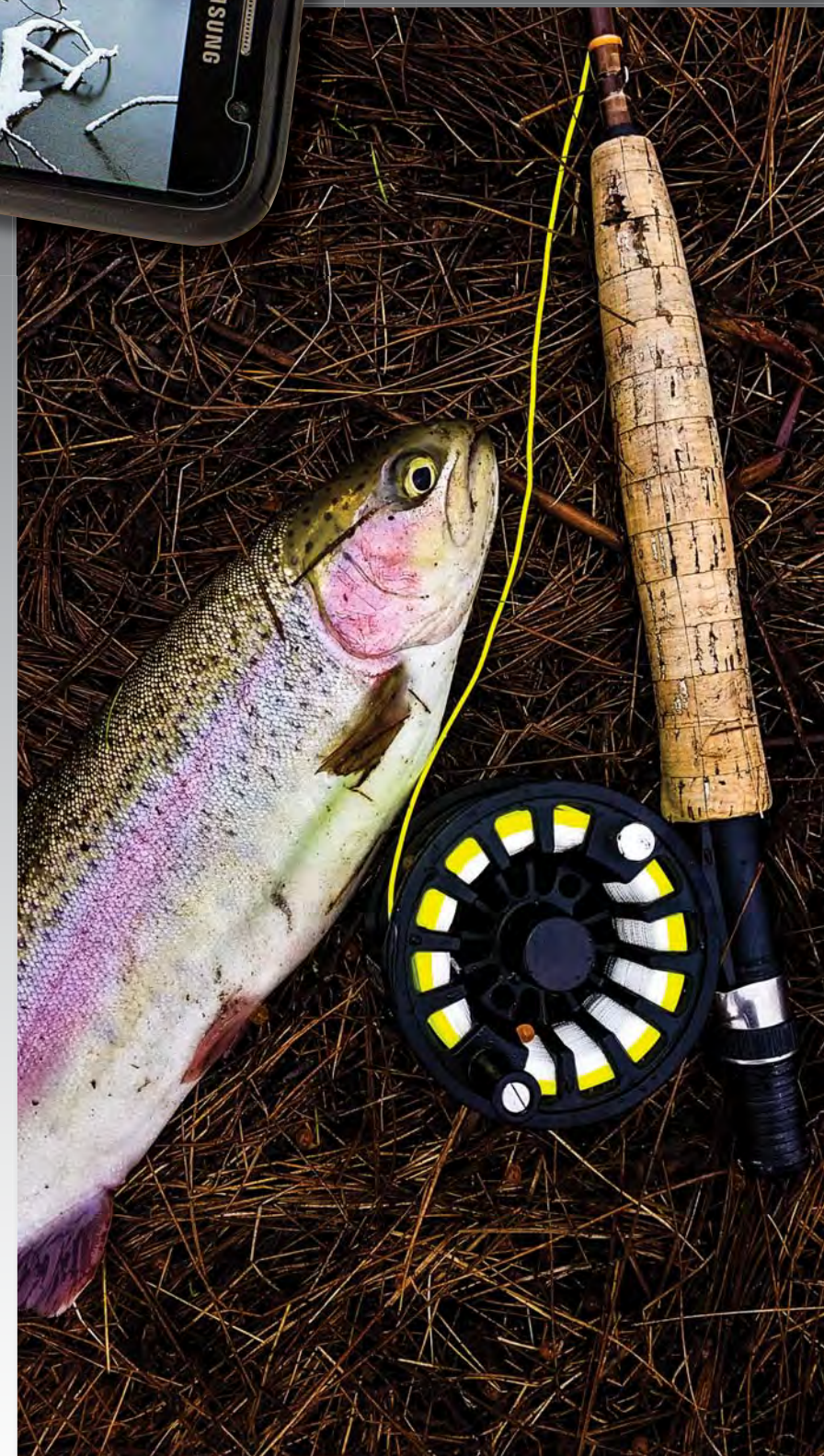


PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN

LEFT: Fort Atkinson State Historical Park in Fort Calhoun hosts a period luncheon. The meal was completely prepared by open-hearth cooking. iPhone 5.

ABOVE: Water towers stand tall at Fort Robinson State Park in Crawford. iPhone 5.



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

ABOVE: A quick limit of pheasants on a late-season hunt warrants a quick photo to send to friends. Samsung Galaxy S6.

TOP LEFT: Dew glistens on a trumpeter swan feather left on the bird's nest at Cottonwood State Recreation Area in Cherry County. Samsung Galaxy S6.

LEFT: Sunset over Cottonwood State Recreation Area, an image captured using the panorama mode. Samsung Galaxy S6.



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

ABOVE: Fossils are still being unearthed in the Hubbard Rhino Barn at Ashfall Fossil Beds State Historical Park near Royal. iPhone 5.

LEFT: Eli Kurrus is all smiles as he holds up a rainbow trout at Two Rivers State Recreation Area. Samsung Galaxy S5.

OPPOSITE, TOP: The setting sun backlights Rosinweed in a prairie at Pawnee Lake State Recreation Area. Samsung Galaxy S6.

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM: During an early-morning run at Eugene T. Mahoney State Park near Ashland, this photograph of an adult and child fishing was captured. Samsung Galaxy S5.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN

ABOVE: Clouds reflect the sunset above Bull Canyon in the Wildcat Hills in Banner County. Droid Mini.

LEFT: Rain during a kayaking trip on the Missouri River near Running Water, SD. iPhone 5.



PHOTO BY CHRIS MASADA

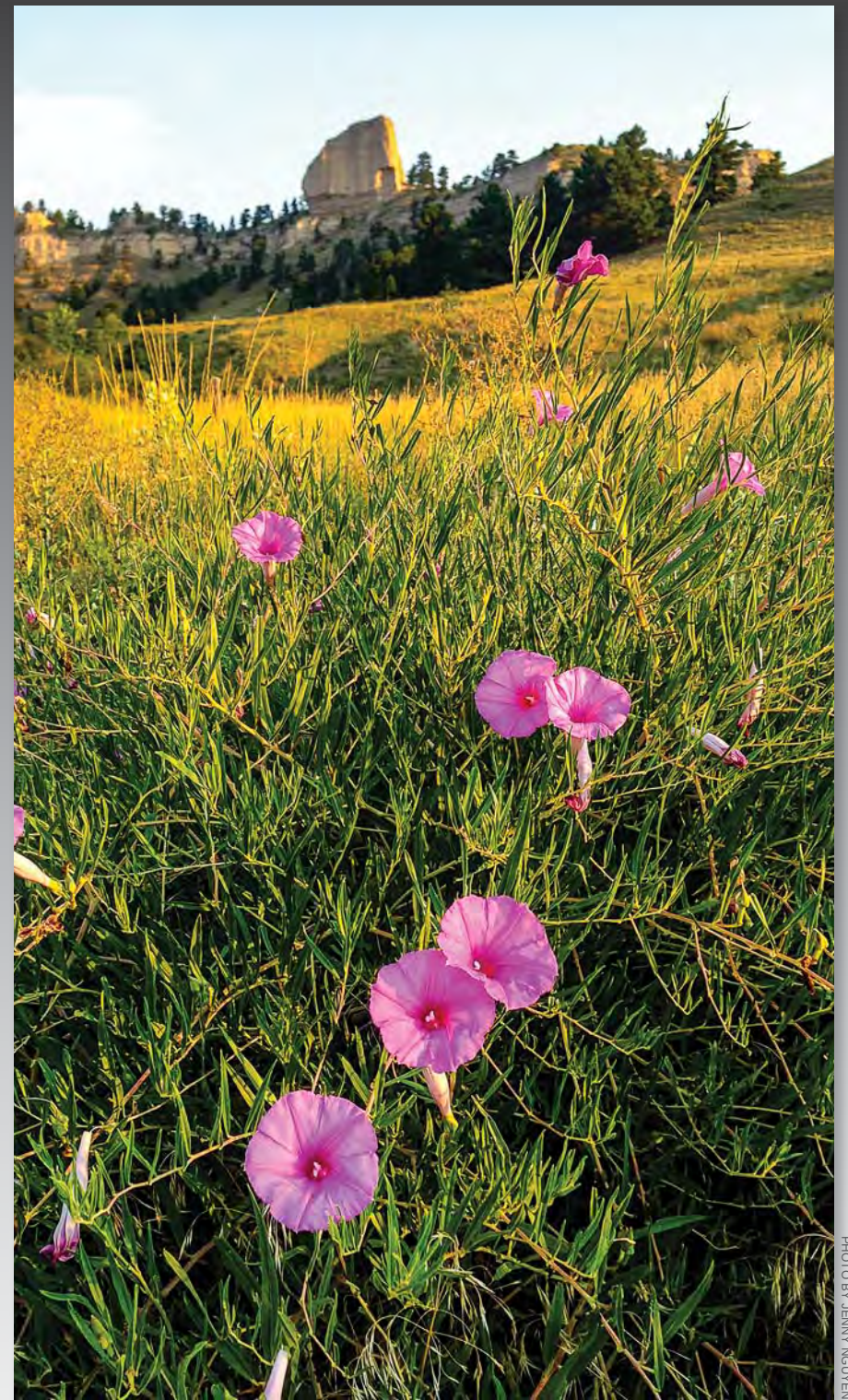


PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN

LEFT: Sandstone caps on clay pedestals are captured in the waning late afternoon light in the Badlands of Nebraska. iPhone 6 Plus.

ABOVE: In the summer, blooms of bush morning-glory grow alongside Highway 20 near Crawford. They greet visitors traveling to Fort Robinson State Park. iPhone 5.

Time Well Spent

What to do in January and February

By Renae Blum

Nature is dressed in her winter colors, providing a spectacular view for those staying at a park cabin or lodge. Chilly though it might be, the outdoors holds plenty of rewards in January and February: hunting, ice fishing, sledding, ice skating and walks in pristine, quiet landscapes. For a complete list of upcoming events across the state, or for more information on any of the activities listed here, visit Calendar.OutdoorNebraska.org. ■



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Discover Ice Fishing Clinics

Various dates and locations in January

Learn the basics of ice fishing or pick up a few new tips at free ice fishing clinics at Lake Wanahoo State Recreation Area in Wahoo and Yanney Park Lake in Kearney. Ice anglers of all skill levels can receive guidance on techniques, equipment, bait and safety. These events are particularly suitable for beginners and families. For dates and the latest information on these clinics, visit the Family Fishing Nebraska page on Facebook.

Valentine's Day Specials

Eugene T. Mahoney State Park and Ponca State Park

Escape the typical hustle and bustle and spend Valentine's Day in a relaxed, private setting. Mahoney State Park will offer a dinner and lodging package, with special rates and a romantic meal. Ponca State Park will also offer special rates, as well as a complimentary breakfast for those who have cabin reservations. Valentine's Day also coincides with Ponca's Great Backyard Bird Count, during which citizen scientists are encouraged to record all the birds they see, making Ponca a particularly appropriate Valentine's destination for bird watchers. For more information or to make a reservation, call 402-471-1414.



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN

First Day Hikes Jan. 1

Ash Hollow State Historical Park, Buffalo Bill Ranch State Historical Park, Chadron State Park, Eugene T. Mahoney State Park, Fremont Lakes State Recreation Area, Platte River State Park and Ponca State Park

Celebrate the start of a new year by taking a stroll through some of Nebraska's most beautiful landscapes. These guided hikes are the perfect opportunity to burn off holiday calories, reconnect with family, get outdoors and explore new – or familiar – places.

Winter Lodging at Chadron State Park

For the first time ever, Chadron State Park will have several lodging options open all winter long. This gorgeous park in the western part of the state offers a great spot for a remote winter getaway, and guests are invited to bring ice fishing equipment, cross country skis or snowshoes and explore. For information or to make a reservation, call 402-471-1414.



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

Open Hunting Seasons

Various dates

Make sure to get out and hunt before several seasons close at the end of January, including fall turkey, pheasant and grouse. Light goose and dark goose hunting is also available, as well as duck hunting in different parts of the state. Get in your season's choice deer hunting before Jan. 15.



PHOTO BY DON CUNNINGHAM



Nebraska is home to wide-open prairies, deciduous forests and the iconic Sandhills. These varied landscapes host diverse plant and animal species – and they lend themselves to diverse opportunities for those who love the outdoors, too.

Whether you are interested in ice fishing, deer hunting, catching crawdads, camping, hiking or attracting hummingbirds to your backyard garden, this special section provides those who love the outdoors with a month-by-month guide to a sampling of all there is to do outdoor in Nebraska. It's not a complete guide – that would fill a book – but it's a place to start for anyone who loves spending time outdoors in Nebraska.

NEBRASKAland Magazine's A YEAR OUTDOORS



A 2017 Guide of What to Do and Where to Go in Nebraska

NEBRASKA
— GAME  PARKS —

Nebraska's outdoor recreation options are diverse and almost endless, stretching from border to border and numerous enough to fill every weekend of the year. From ice fishing, hunting, sledding and hiking in the winter to those dog days of the summer, when the fishing, camping, or paddling of a Nebraska river can be at its best, there is never a moment in Nebraska where a person can honestly say, "I just can't find anything to do in the outdoors."

On the following pages are some of our favorite activities throughout the year, a month-by-month checklist of special moments and new adventures just waiting for you to try.



JANUARY

January 1

- Participate in a First Day Hike at a Nebraska state park (SP). Guided hikes will be organized in several state parks. Visit Outdoornebraska.org/winterfest for a complete list.



Mid-January

- See if you can spot trumpeter swans concentrating in wintering areas around the state. While they spend most of their time in secluded locations on private land, the majestic birds can sometimes be found at Lake Ogallala and Calamus Reservoir state recreation areas (SRAs). The birds are skittish, so watch from a distance.



- Look for white-tailed deer in areas with thermal cover, including evergreen trees and big bluestem grass.



- Take a youngster ice fishing for the first time. Go on a warm weekend and you can find plenty of holes cut by other anglers that are still open or easy to open with a hand auger.
- Renew your hunting, fishing and park permits for the new calendar year.
- Give a tax deductible donation to the Wildlife Conservation Fund on your tax form or at Shopoutdoornebraska.ne.gov.



At the Computer

- All year – Visit NebraskaBOW.org to Register for a Becoming an Outdoors-Woman workshop. BOW workshops are a place where women of all backgrounds and ages gather to learn more about the outdoors in a non-intimidating, friendly environment.
- Early March – Visit Outdoornebraska.org for spring turkey hunting workshop dates.
- May – Sign up for a Fun Run at a Nebraska State Park.
- Early June – Visit Outdoornebraska.org for Outdoor Skills Camp information.
- Late July – Visit Outdoornebraska.org for a complete list of small and big game fall hunting seasons.
- Late September – Visit Outdoornebraska.org for a list of scheduled deer hunting workshops.
- Early October – Look for trout stocking dates across the state at Outdoornebraska.org.
- Mid-October – Visit Outdoornebraska.org for a list of Halloween activities planned at several state parks.

FEBRUARY

Mid-February

- Pick a spot for sandhill crane viewing, as these majestic birds begin migrating through Nebraska and the central flyway to their northern breeding grounds in the upper United States, Canada and as far north as Siberia. Cranes can be viewed at the following locations: Crane Trust Nature and Visitor's Center near Alda, Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary near Gibbon, Fort Kearny State Historical Park (SHP) and SRA, Buffalo Bill Ranch SRA, and North River Wildlife Management Area (WMA). Birds remain in central Nebraska until mid-April. For more viewing locations, visit Nebraskaflyway.com.



- Grab your camera as millions of ducks and geese flock to wetlands across Nebraska. To find the highest concentrations, check the wetland condition report at Outdoornebraska.org/waterfowlchecklist.



- View eagles concentrating on lakes, reservoirs and rivers that have ice and open water as they follow the early movement of waterfowl heading north. Viewing areas are available at Lake Ogallala and the J2 Powerhouse near Johnson Lake.

- Put out backyard bird feeders to attract resident and migrating birds.



- While hiking through Nebraska forests, look for white-tailed deer antler sheds along game trails, in ditches and near fences. Antlers can be gathered at public and private lands throughout Nebraska. Be sure to ask permission before entering private property.

- Take a drive through the Loess Canyon area south of Brady and Maxwell to view and photograph cedar waxwings, mountain bluebirds, Townsend's solitaires, robins, and turkeys in canyon areas with cedar trees.



- Dust off your bow for the upcoming spring archery turkey season. Visit Outdoornebraska.org for season dates.



MARCH

Early March

• Retrieve your rod and reel as catfishing begins in reservoirs after ice-out. Fish deadbait with winter-killed gizzard shad you can pick up from windswept shorelines, especially from a north-facing side on a warm spring day, or in the upper ends of reservoirs where shallow water warms the quickest. Top spots include Lake McConaughy and Calamus Reservoir, but any reservoir can be productive. Check out the fishing forecast at Outdoornebraska.org to find the ones with the best catfish populations.



Mid-March

• Mark your calendar as Two Rivers Trout Lake is open for the season. Fish can be caught on fly rod and spinning tackle.



• Attend the Harlan White Pelican Watch, March 1- April 15 at Harlan County Reservoir. Bird watchers and photographers will enjoy these tours. For more information, visit Harlantourism.org.

• View migratory birds at Ponca State Park's Marsh Madness event.



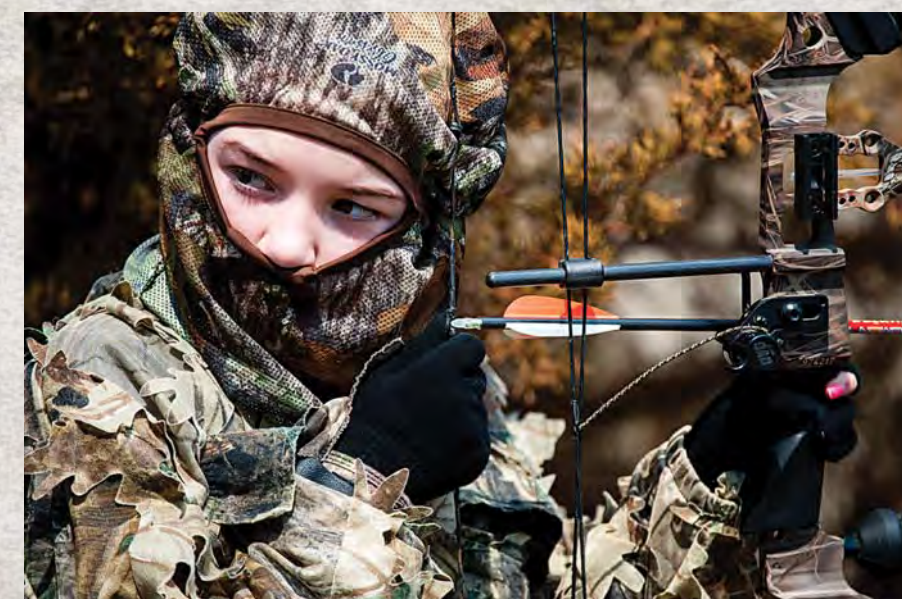
Applications

Visit Outdoornebraska.org for more information regarding the following application periods:

- March - Apply for permits for the June archery paddlefish season.
- June - Deer, antelope, and elk draw unit application period.
- July - Apply for permits for the October paddlefish snagging season.
- August - Send reservations in for waterfowl blinds at Clear Creek WMA near Lewellen. The drawing is the first week of October.



• Look for sales on hunting and fishing equipment at outdoor retailers and online auctions and second-hand sites.



• Take a kid hunting. There is no age requirement to hunt turkeys in Nebraska and permits are reasonably priced for youth under 16 years of age.



APRIL

Early April

- Pattern your shotgun for the upcoming spring turkey season.
- Head out to Box Butte, Calamus, Lake McConaughy, Merritt and Sherman reservoirs and Harlan County Lake to catch spawning walleyes at night casting or trolling crankbaits on the dam faces.



- Try your luck at spotting a whooping crane – the famously elusive species arrives in Nebraska at this time of year. Your best bet location-wise is the Platte, Loup or Niobrara rivers. Report any sightings to Game and Parks (402-471-0641), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (308-379-5562), or The Crane Trust's Whooper Watch hotline (1-888-399-2824). Emails may be submitted to joel.jorgensen@nebraska.gov.



April to early May

- Spend a sunrise watching the unique courtship dances of sharp-tailed grouse and prairie chickens, and listening to the sounds that accompany the display. Public viewing blinds are available at Burchard Wildlife Management Area, Valentine National Wildlife Refuge, Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge and the Nebraska National Forest-Bessey Ranger District.



Late April or early May

- Fish for white bass as this open-water predator starts spawning at reservoirs around the state. Fish instinctively swim upriver to spawn, making any place where water flows into a reservoir the best bets to cast jigs on light line. Locations include Lonergan and Otter Creek inlets at Lake McConaughy and the North Platte River above it when water is high; Gracie Creek inlet and the Calamus River above Calamus Reservoir; canal inlets at Sherman, Davis Creek and Sutherland reservoirs and Lake Minatare, Lake Maloney and Johnson Lake.

Late April

- Begin catching largemouth bass along areas with emerging vegetation, along drop-offs and rip-rap areas of lakes and ponds. I-80 Lakes give ample opportunity for bass anglers. Camp at Windmill SRA near Gibbon, which has six lakes to fish, or at Mormon Island SRA near Grand Island, which has perfect spring camping and bass fishing.



- Pick up nightcrawlers after a spring rain to use for fishing.



- Look for morel mushrooms after early spring rains or snow followed by warm, sunny conditions with night temperatures above 50 degrees. Sunny, south-facing slopes can produce mushrooms early in the season. Moist wooded areas near dying or dead elm or ash trees, old apple orchards and timbered areas along rivers and streams are good places to find morels. Recently burned woods have been cited as good producing areas as well.



- Plant pollinator gardens that have blooming flowers from June until the frost to support monarch butterflies and other pollinators.
- View shorebirds, including ibises, at Buffalo Bill Ranch SRA, sandhill lakes and playas and the Valentine Wildlife Refuge. Pelicans can be found at Calamus Reservoir SRA, Lake Ogallala SRA, Sutherland Reservoir SRA, Lake Maloney SRA and Harlan County Reservoir.
- Turkey hunt or fish on an Open Fields and Waters area.



MAY

Early May

- Begin planting large, landscape pollinator plantings either in the spring or fall. Spring pollinator plantings may be seeded from April through mid-May. Pollinator mixes include a wide diversity of plants to ensure the bees, butterflies, moths and beetles that rely on them have food throughout the season.

Fall seeding using pollinator mixes can also be sown from November through the winter. Visit Nebraskapf.com to learn more about pollinator mixes and find a Farm Bill biologist near you for more information.

- Find crappies on their spawning beds as this spring bite begins.



Mid-May

- Attend the Outdoor Expo at Fort Kearny SRA. The event showcases the state's vast number of fun outdoor activities, meeting the needs of anyone interested in the outdoor lifestyle, regardless of age or experience.



- Take note – it's piping plover nesting season, and during this time portions of the beach at Lake McConaughy will be closed to keep the area safe for this endangered species.



- Organize the spring's first fish fry with family and friends, who will all suggest that more fishing trips are in order after tasting pan-friend fillets.

- Look for Free Park Entry and Fishing Day.



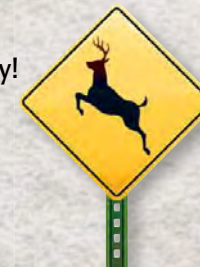
Late May

- Catch bluegill on spawning beds with a flyrod and popping bug.



- Bowfish for carp in various waters, including rivers, ponds and lakes/reservoirs across Nebraska.

- Drive carefully! Deer herds are dispersing.



- Experience history at Ashfall Fossil Beds.

- Visit a Nebraska state park as the summer season kicks off on Memorial Day weekend.



- Watch for turtles crossing roads as females migrate to lay eggs.



- Visit a bird-banding station, including Wildcat Hills SRA and Chadron SP, in coordination with the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies. Visit Birdconservancy.org for more information.

- Grab your binoculars, as more than 90 percent of the world's buff-breasted sandpiper population are staging in the eastern portion of the Rainwater Basin. During their peak migration, this shorebird and others, including Hudsonian godwits, greater yellowlegs and Wilson's phalaropes, visit wetlands and the shorelines of rivers, streams and ponds throughout the state.

- Fish flooded timber that rings western reservoirs. Irrigation reservoirs are usually full this time of year, recharging after irrigation drawdown from the previous summer.



- Visit Niobrara State Park for buffalo cookouts, Humanities Nebraska programs and National Park Service programs.



JUNE

Early June

• On the first Saturday of the month, walk, bike or run on one of Nebraska's many trails, including the Cowboy Trail, in celebration of National Trails Day. Then, continue this trend throughout the rest of the year.

• Catch carp using a fly rod on mulberry imitations in Platte River systems.

• Visit Rock Creek Trail Days at Rock Creek Station State Historical Park.



• Enjoy the camping season as it enters full swing at one of Nebraska's many state parks or recreation areas open to camping.

Mid-June

• Head to a shotgun range to sharpen your skills before fall hunting seasons begin.



Late June

• Put out trail cameras along game trails for upcoming deer season.

• Spend a summer day lounging on a sandbar. There are numerous state parks and recreation areas and wildlife management areas across the state on the Platte, Loup, Niobrara and other rivers that provide public access points. With water being diverted for irrigation, river levels are low, leaving plenty of places to park your lawn chair.



• Walk through a prairie and photograph wildflowers. You can find wildflowers blooming in prairies throughout the state from mid-April until the cold sets in by November, but for the most variety, go in June.



• Swim at the aquatic centers at Eugene T. Mahoney and Ponca state parks, or at the pools at Chadron, Fort Robinson, and Platte River state parks.

• Tube, kayak, or tank down a river throughout the state, including the Niobrara, Calamus and Elkhorn.



JULY

Early July

• Check the outdoor calendar at Outdoornebraska.org for July Fourth celebrations at various parks statewide.

• Hunt for edible wildflowers, including purslane, prickly-pear cactus pads and fruit, and wild grapes. Read Kay Young's book *Wild Seasons* for more information.



• Watch for great blue herons fledging. Their rookeries are easily identified as a grouping of large nests in the tops of tall trees near water, including Lake Ogallala SRA and Jeffrey Lake WMA.

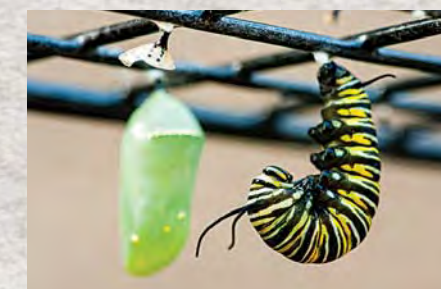


• Tune your bow and start shooting for the upcoming archery deer and fall turkey seasons.



Late July

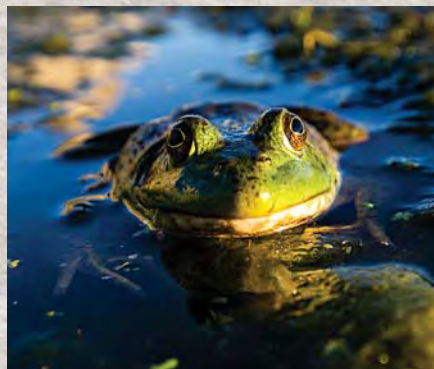
• Stargaze at Merritt Reservoir State Recreation Area, one of the nation's top locations for viewing the night sky.



• Find monarch butterfly eggs on milkweed plants, and track their metamorphosis from egg through the caterpillar stages to a butterfly. The entire process takes about 4-6 weeks for the monarchs laying eggs in Nebraska.



• Build a sand castle at Lake McConaughy's annual Kites and Castles event.



AUGUST

Mid-August through October

- Catch a bullfrog with a youngster. Walk the banks at night with a bright flashlight and have one person shine the light into a frog's eyes while the other person grabs the frog.

Late August to Labor Day weekend

- Visit the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's Outdoor Encounter, including an aquarium, shooting gallery, archery range and many interactive activities at the Nebraska State Fair.



August to September

- Find gulls feeding on schooling baitfish and jig for white bass below them at reservoirs such as Lake McConaughy, Calamus and Enders.



- Boat and fish at Calamus Reservoir SRA and tank, tube or canoe the Calamus River.



- Prepare for upcoming hunting seasons by looking at trail camera photos, sharpening knives, gathering shells and cartridges and researching new recipes.

- Go for a hike with a butterfly guidebook in hand, as thousands of swallowtails, painted ladies, monarchs and numerous other butterfly species complete their life cycle in the native prairies of Nebraska.



- Introduce a youngster to hunting by chasing squirrels in mature forests statewide.

SEPTEMBER

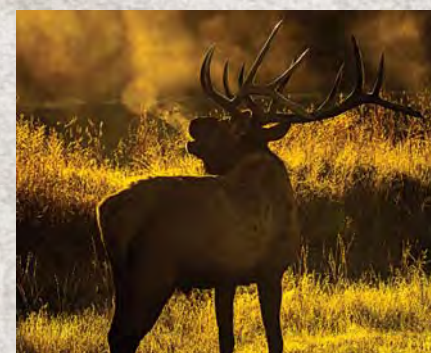
Early September

- Visit Grove Lake in northeastern Nebraska for a combo trip of mourning dove, squirrel, white-tailed deer, rabbit, pike fishing and fly rod trout fishing at Verdigre Creek.



- Early September – Find a public location that has doves on it.

- Fish the fall walleye bite at lakes across the state, including traditional hotspots Lake McConaughy, Merritt, Sutherland Reservoir, Lake Maloney and Sherman Reservoir state recreation areas.



Mid-September through October

- Visit areas with elk populations to hear the majestic elk bugle. Elk let out these calls as challenges to other bulls during the breeding season. Good places to hear them are from high points along county roads in the Pine Ridge and Wildcat Hills, especially near crop fields where herds are feeding at night.



Late-September through October

- Go clamming if southwest reservoirs are lowered for maintenance on boat ramps, shore lines and docks. Locations include Lake Maloney Reservoir SRA, Jeffrey Lake WMA and Johnson Lake SRA. Clams can also be found in the Tri-County Canal system if water levels are drawn down, and provide an interesting meal when purged several days before cooking.



- Net crawdads if there are water draw-downs on the canal system, which normally stretches from Paxton to North Platte. Visit Nppd.com for draw-down dates.

- Attend the Missouri River Expo at Ponca State Park, where more than 85 hands-on outdoor activities are featured.



- Put out feeders to attract migrating hummingbirds.



- Get yourself and your dogs in shape for upcoming upland and waterfowl seasons.



OCTOBER

Early October

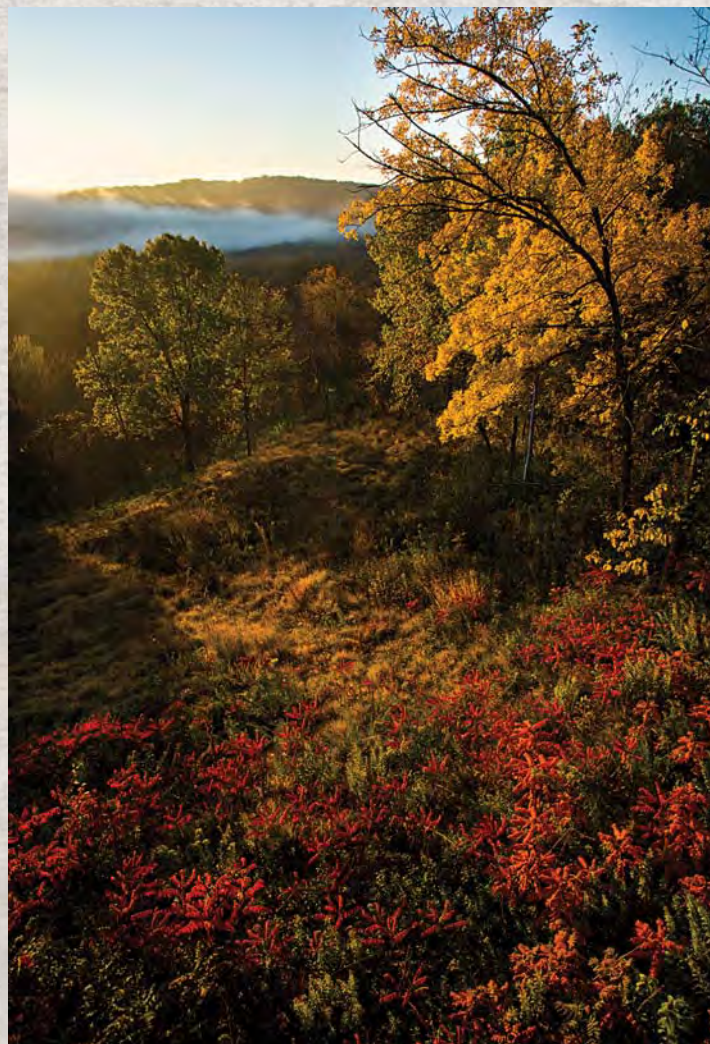
- Look for mushrooms, including turkey tail, chicken of the woods, giant puffballs and oyster, as well as black walnut, hazelnut, chestnut and hickory tree nuts, in eastern Nebraska in the fall.

Late-October

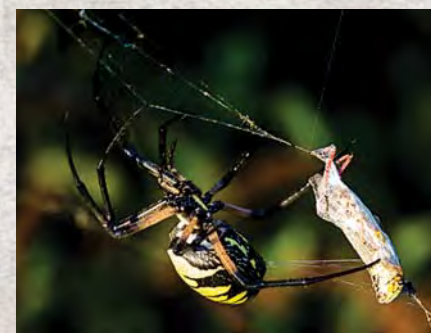
- Check out the schedule for youth pheasant hunts across the state. Visit Nebraskapf.com for details.

- Sight in rifles for deer season.

- Go on a drive to see autumn's arrival. Fall colors are cascading across the state from the northwest to the southeast, particularly along the Missouri River corridor. Hotspots for hikers, bikers and vehicle viewers include Ponca, Indian Cave, Eugene T. Mahoney and Platte River state parks. Fort Kearny Hike/Bike trail, Johnson Lake SRA trail, Smith Falls SP and Fort Robinson SP also have spectacular displays.



- Book a state park cabin at a 30 percent discount Sunday-Thursday from Oct. 1 to April 30 (excluding holidays). Cabins are available year around at Mahoney, Platte River, Ponca, Lewis & Clark, Niobrara and the duplex units at Chadron. Contact the state park reservation call center at 402-471-1414 or online at Outdoornebraska.org.



- Photograph garden spiders and webs on hikes and in your own backyard.

State Historical Parks

Throughout the year, Nebraska's nine historical parks host a number of events, including living history demonstrations. For a complete list and more information, visit Outdoornebraska.gov/statehistoricalparks/

**Arbor Lodge
State Historical Park**
2600 Arbor Ave., Nebraska City, NE 68410-0015, 402-873-7222

**Ash Hollow
State Historical Park**
P.O. Box 70, Lewellen, NE 69147-0070, 308-778-5651

**Ashfall Fossil Beds
State Historical Park**
86930 517th Ave., Royal, NE 68773-5052, 402-893-2000

**Bowring Ranch
State Historical Park**
Hwy 61, Merriman, NE 69218-0038, 402-684-3428

**Buffalo Bill
State Historical Park**
2921 Scouts Rest Ranch Road, North Platte, NE 69147-0070, 308-535-8035

**Fort Atkinson
State Historical Park**
201 S 7th St., Fort Calhoun, NE 68023-0240, 402-468-5611

**Fort Hartsuff
State Historical Park**
82034 Fort Ave., Burwell, NE 68823-9801, 308-346-4715

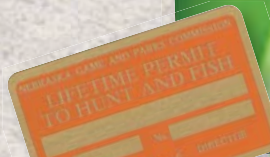
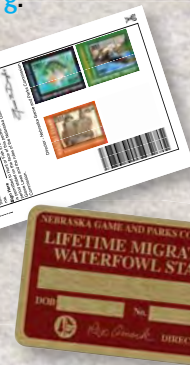
**Fort Kearny
State Historical Park**
1020 V Rd, Kearney, NE 68847-9804, 308-865-5305

**Rock Creek Station
State Historical Park**
57426 710th Rd., Fairbury, NE 68352-5550, 402-729-5777

NOVEMBER

Early November

- Order hunting and fishing permits and NEBRASKAland Magazine subscriptions online for holiday gift giving at Outdoornebraska.org.



- Get tickets for Fort Robinson's Historical Christmas Dinner held the first Saturday in December.

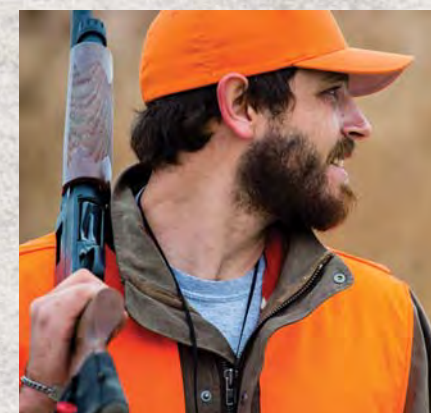


Mid-November

- Drive carefully – the deer rut is underway.
- Fish coldwater streams for trout in the Panhandle and Verdigre Creek in the northeast and fish for largemouth bass chowing down before winter statewide.



- Choose a bird to hunt, including ducks, geese, pheasants, prairie chickens and even crows.



DECEMBER

- Visit the Sandhills for grouse hunting and ice fishing at the Nebraska National Forest near Halsey.



- Ice skate at Eugene T. Mahoney State Park's outdoor rink.



- See bighorn sheep in rut in the Pine Ridge, including at Fort Robinson and Chadron state parks.



- Bring a sled, skis or snowshoes and take advantage of Nebraska's snow-covered parks.



- Purchase a Nebraska Habitat Stamp. Monies from habitat stamp sales keep wildlife management areas going in Nebraska for hunters, bird watchers and photographers.

- Help conservation efforts by participating in Christmas Bird Counts across the state. Find more information at Outdoornebraska.org.



- Celebrate the season at a Nebraska state park. Several state and historical parks are decorated for the holidays and offer seasonal activities this month, including the Light Up the Fort event at Fort Robinson State Park and Winterfest, at Ponca and Eugene T. Mahoney state parks. Visit Outdoornebraska.org for more details.

A Year Outdoors was written by Julie Geiser, photographed by the NEBRASKAland Magazine staff and printed in the January-February 2017 issue of NEBRASKAland Magazine, published by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

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#NEGameAndParks  



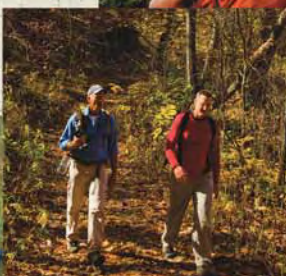
EXPLORE YOUR STATE PARKS.

In Nebraska's state parks, an adventure waits over every ridge and around every bend. Moments wait to be had and memories beg to be shared. This year, get outside and discover seventy-seven parks and enjoy unlimited experiences. No matter what you choose to do outdoors—it'll be time well spent.

To get inspiration for your park adventure, visit OutdoorNebraska.org/Explore.

NEBRASKA
— GAME  PARKS —

 Share your images with us



Riding Through History

By Kylie Kinley, Nebraska State Historical Society

Butch Springgate is the grand champion of Nebraska's biggest scavenger hunt.

If you've driven on a Nebraska highway, you've played it yourself.

But while you might have passed one or two of Nebraska's historic markers, or even stopped by a couple dozen of them, Springgate has you beat.

He's been to more than 500.

On a motorcycle.

"We like to say that the

motorcycle is closer to the horse and buggy days because you aren't in an air-conditioned car, and you get to travel the back roads," Springgate said. "So we make a point of doing that."

Springgate, who lives in Fremont, has spent the last eight years visiting historical markers on his Yamaha motorcycle. Sometimes he brings along friends, but

he's visited many markers alone.

The only markers he hasn't seen are the handful that local organizers and the National State Historical Society have put up since last summer. He'll visit those this summer and fall.

Springgate's first marker was the Massacre Canyon marker near Trenton in Hitchcock County, which he visited in late 2008. Springgate is a quality control technician for 3M in Valley, so using long weekends, and at the longest, nine-day trips, his quest has been continuous except for a year he took off because of shoulder surgery. He has logged 20,000 miles of riding, and his longest historical marker ride was 1,500 miles.

Springgate's dedication to record-keeping and staying organized has made his summer-centered hobby last all year long.

"My winter activity is putting everything into books and getting things updated," he said.

Springgate meticulously documents all of his rides and subsequent adventures. He has a growing collection of binders with photos of every single marker, along with where and when they were taken. He also has a map with black dots for the locations of every marker and silver dots for every marker he's visited.

But the photos in the binders don't show the adventures that lead to a successful marker find.

One of the worst roads Springgate

PHOTOS BY ERIC POWELL



Springgate's binders of markers.



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

Butch Springgate of Fremont has visited more than 500 historical markers across the state of Nebraska. Springgate travels during three seasons for this passion, then organizes all that he has seen and learned in a collection of binders at his home.

has ever traveled was on the way to see the Grand Duke Alexis marker in Hayes County.

"It's two and a half miles of no-maintenance roads. I'm going one mile per hour, holding my feet out and bouncing," Springgate said. "So we're riding through baking flour-type dirt eight inches deep. It moves like water waves and covers us. Then, covered up by this dirt are rocks a little smaller than a volleyball. We made it to the marker, and when we got back, I said, 'I've never done this before, but I am kissing the pavement.' And we did. We actually kissed the pavement."

But Springgate assures that the ride to a historical marker is worth it – no matter what.

"I was glad we got to it, though," he said. "Nice rolling hills and farmland. No traffic, very quiet."

Other adventures include a snapped clutch cable, seeking shelter from a tornado under the tables of a Gordon



PHOTO COURTESY OF BUTCH SPRINGGATE

Springgate and his Yamaha motorcycle are pictured near Chimney Rock in Morrill County.



This historical marker at Fort Robinson State Park chronicles the history of Barracks Row.

Pizza Hut, and a muddy wipeout on a lonely road in Webster County.

During the latter, Springgate was on a solo journey and searching for a historical marker at a cemetery.

“The road was dry and arid,” Springgate said. “I was looking up trying to see if the cemetery was on the next hill, and I wasn’t looking at the road. And then suddenly I hit

wet clay.”

The bike went sideways, and both Springgate and his motorcycle were thrown into the mud.

“I couldn’t lift the motorcycle, so I was stuck,” he said. He had no cell phone reception, so he walked two miles to the nearest farm. No one was home.

So he walked two more miles. No one was home there either. But just as he turned away from the door, a pickup pulled into the driveway – where it immediately stopped.

“I was in all-black leather with a do-rag and just covered in mud,” Springgate said. “I took off my jacket and helmet and put them in a little pile and walked out to the pickup, which had just stopped in the driveway. I explained what had happened and said, ‘So I kind of have a problem.’ The farmer looked me from head to toe and said, ‘Yes, you do, son.’”

The farmer and his teenage sons got Springgate’s bike unstuck with the four-wheeler, and then even accompanied him to see the marker.



This historical marker, detailing the history of a German prisoner of war camp during World War II, is located in Fort Robinson State Park in Dawes County.

“To anyone who might hear my story, I would urge them to, if at all possible, visit the markers and not just read about them on their phones,” Springgate said. “Nebraska history comes to life when you are reading the marker story while standing on the actual location of the historical event.”

The farmer said he hadn’t even known it was there.

He was also impressed with Springgate’s navigational skills.

“This county has been in a drought for two years and somehow, son, you found the only mud puddle in the county,” he said to me,” Springgate related. “After feeling mad and embarrassed, and getting covered in mud, his humor made getting back on the road a lot less stressful.”

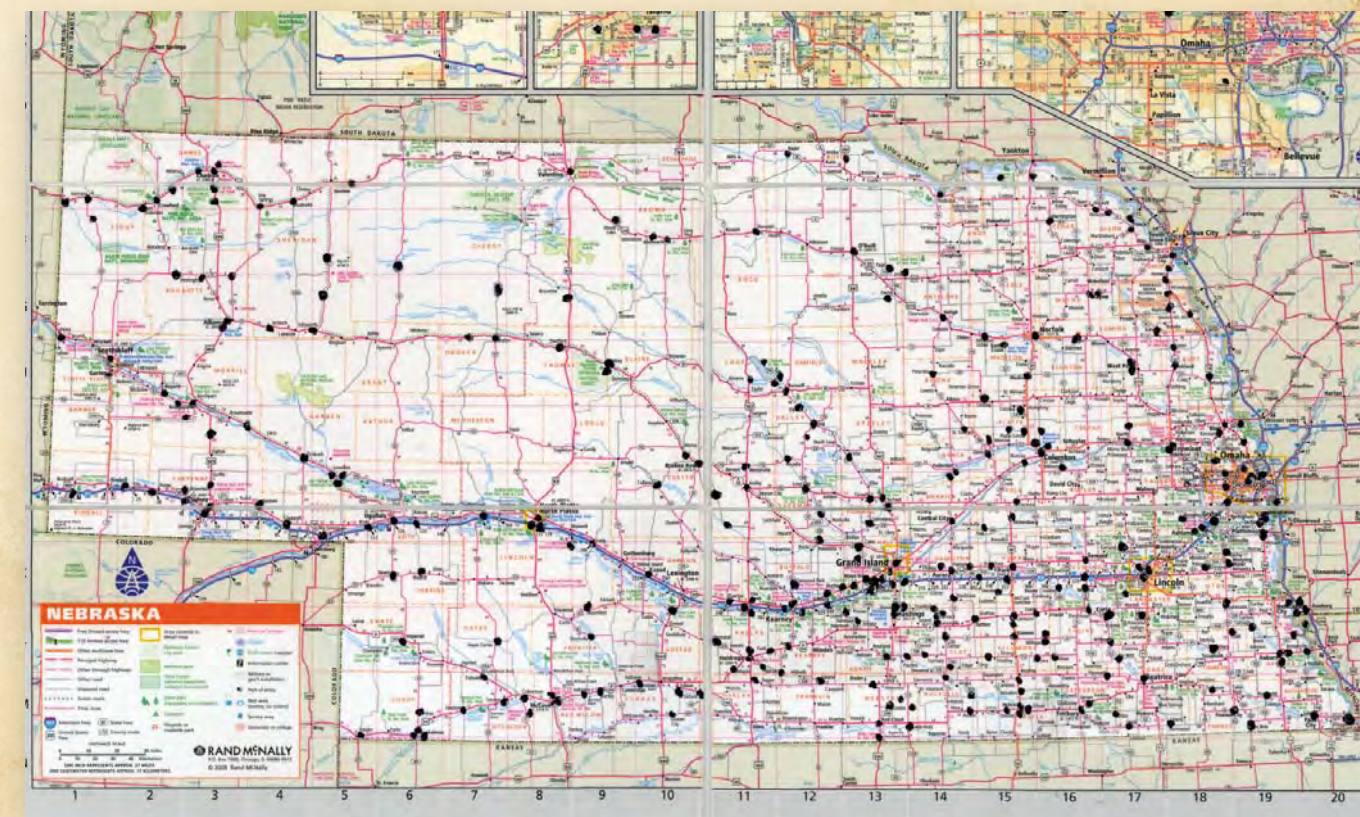
He still has a mud spot on his gear that he couldn’t wash out.

“That clay is real permanent,” Springgate said.

But the Webster County farmer isn’t the only one who doesn’t know about the history in his backyard. Springgate hopes to use his hobby to encourage others to get out and explore



Historical markers are located in all corners of the state, including this one in Papillion.



Springgate uses a map of Nebraska to pinpoint each historical marker location, and the more than 500 he has visited, statewide.

Nebraska's history.

"To anyone who might hear my story, I would urge them to, if at all possible, visit the markers and not just read about them on their phones," Springgate said. "Nebraska history comes to life when you are reading the marker story while standing on the actual location of the historical event." His best example is the Republican River Flood of 1935 marker in Furnas County.

"Reading the marker narrative and looking behind the marker at the horizon, then turning around seeing the opposite horizon distance, really gives you scale of how vast and deep the flood was where you are standing. Awesome experience," Springgate said.

Springgate said one of the markers that touched him the most is the Rebecca Winters marker in Scotts Bluff County. Winters died from cholera en route to Utah in 1852. Lacking wood or stone, a family friend took the rim of a wagon wheel and etched her name on it. Visitors can still see the wagon rim tombstone today.

"I can't imagine leaving your loved one like that," Springgate said. "These people were in the middle of nothing."

Springgate doesn't just take a photo and leave. He carries a knife to clear away weeds and debris if a marker needs it.

"Then we read the marker, thank the servicemen if that's applicable, and if it's a cemetery, we say a little prayer. We try to be as respectful as possible," Springgate said.

Springgate's motorcycle is not just connected to his love of his history. It's also connected to a deep sense of patriotism.

"I had a full Uncle Sam suit – I even cut my beard like Uncle Sam's – that I wore with American flags on my bike," Springgate said. "People in the parks would stop what they were doing to put their hands over their hearts. They were even saluting me. I was so humbled at that. I just get chills even talking about it now."

He is also a member of the Patriot Guard Riders.

"You wear a patch on your upper

left of your jacket, and one time a mother comes up to me and thanks me, and I'm like, 'No, thank you for what your son does and what you and your family do,'" Springgate said. "As part of the junior high and high school crowd, I was one of the worst ones for saying, 'The war is terrible and the military is terrible.' As I got older, I thought I needed to make up for it, so I joined the Patriot Guard. I was never a protestor, but in my mind I was cruel. I see these young people now and I'm inspired by them."

Springgate's interest in meeting people and hearing their stories has led to a strict no-GPS policy. He and his friends rely on maps and local guides.

"If I can't find one, I check in at the local gas station. They seem to know everything," Springgate said. "When I bring in the maps, a whole group tries to help. People ask me, 'Why don't you just use GPS?' and I tell them, 'I wouldn't have met you if I used GPS.' We want to do it low-tech and meet people."

Springgate said he often seeks police



The Fort Omaha historical marker is located in northern Douglas County on one of Metropolitan Community College's campuses.



Springgate said one of the markers that touched him most is the Rebecca Winters marker in Scotts Bluff County.

officers, firefighters, postal workers and sanitation workers to help him find a marker if it's missing. Springgate has also been responsible for finding a marker that was later restored to public view.

The O.K. Store marker in Hall County was moved because of State Fair Park construction. When Springgate tried to find it and failed, employees spent three weeks trying to locate it. When they did, they called him and he came back out to take a photo. They've since re-installed the marker.

"They said they were embarrassed it had gotten shuffled to storage," Springgate said. "They said they would put it up because of me, and later they called and said they had. I just thought, 'Wow, I made a difference.'"

Finding a marker moved or missing does happen occasionally. Nebraska's historical marker program is the result of several programs working together. The first state-sponsored

Nebraska historical marker was dedicated at Fort Calhoun on May 21, 1961. Other markers were installed to commemorate the Oregon Trail or other local history events and places. However, the Nebraska legislature decided in 1957 that recognizing Nebraska's historic sites uniformly and accurately was important for both historic record and tourism. The Nebraska legislature passed a bill that helped shape the program into what it is today. Local initiatives identify, create and fund the markers, while the NSHS edits and works with a foundry to make the markers, and the Nebraska Department of Roads installs the markers.

The markers are made of white or silver text on a dark blue background with the seal of the State of Nebraska and the words "Nebraska Historical Marker." The markers range from large signs with two posts to one-post signs that lay nearly flat on a pedestal. Their costs range from \$1,750 to \$5,100

depending on size.

"The majority are in really good shape," Springgate said. "It makes me very disappointed when I see bullet holes. There was gang graffiti on one in Douglas County that wasn't six months old. But some are just gorgeous, the way they take care of them. Some have spotlights and flowers and flags or white lattice fences."

Springgate's bike is in the shop to get it ready for more marker hunting this summer.

"The group of guys I ride with, we always talk about how 'it's the journey, not the destination,'" Springgate said. "Me, I like to have a destination. But my destination doesn't have to be set in stone."

He's right.

His destinations are set in aluminum. ■

2017 marks Nebraska's 150th anniversary as a state.

PHOTO BY BUTCH SPRINGGATE

PHOTO BY ALEX WILES



14-year-old's Elk a Record

A bull elk harvested by a Seward girl near Crawford in September is not only the new non-typical record for Nebraska, it also ranks 16th in the all-time world records maintained by the Boone and Crockett Club.

Story and photos by Eric Fowler

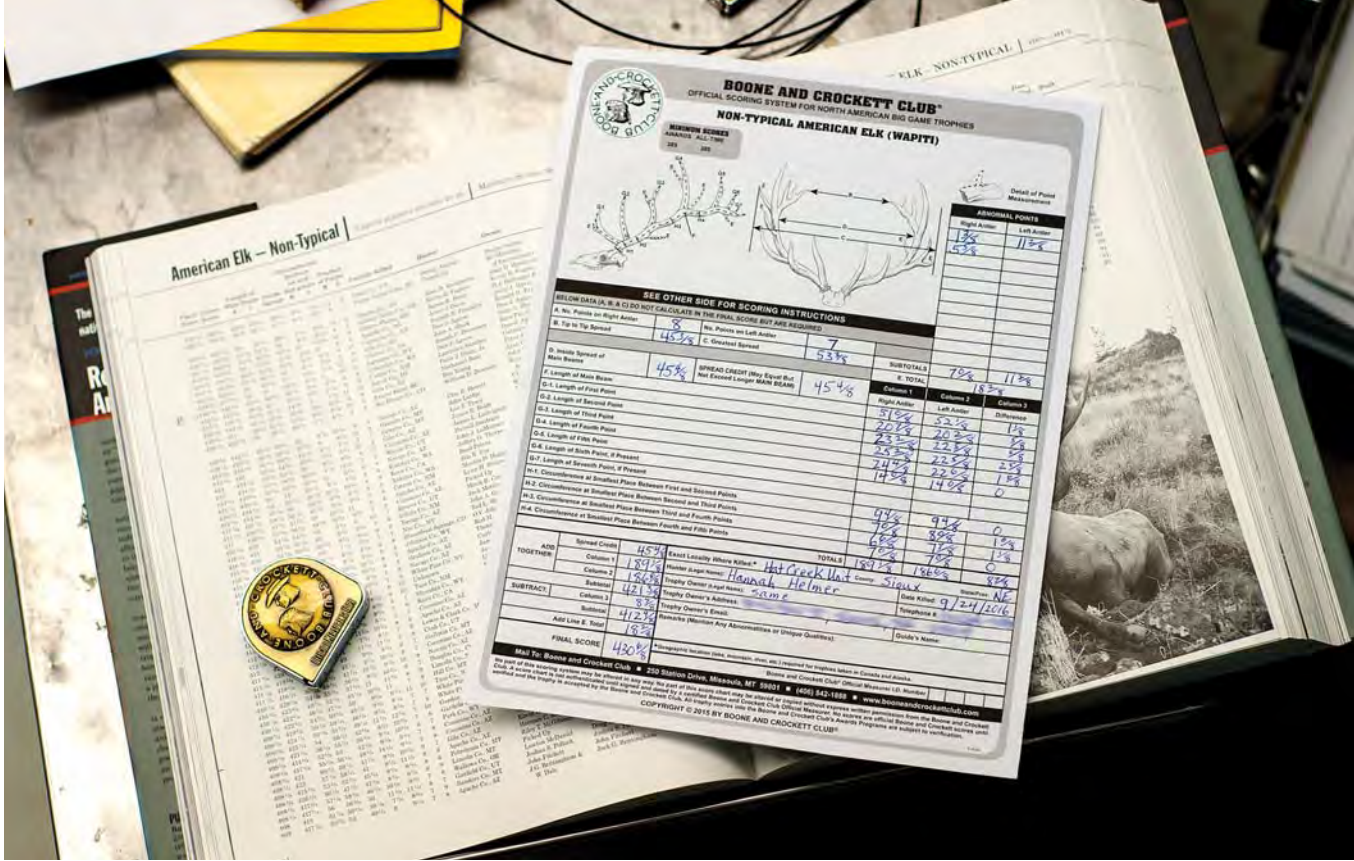
Hannah Helmer's bull was officially scored at 430 6/8 on November 30 by Nebraska Game and Parks Commission wildlife biologist Randy Winter. That topped the previous mark of 409 7/8 taken by Dana Foster of Ogallala in Garden County in 2008. The 14-year-old and her father, Joel, watched the process. She repeatedly posed for photos with the antlers as a steady stream of people stopped to see the world-class trophy, continuing a busy two months after the story of her hunt and photos went viral.

"It was really cool," Hannah said. "It's never happened to me before."

It hasn't happened to many, and few likely figured it would happen in Nebraska. The top 20 of non-typical American elk listed in the 13th edition of *Records of North American Big Game* is dominated by mountain states. Nebraska will be the third state that doesn't fit that description, joining Pennsylvania and North Dakota, and will match Colorado, Idaho, Utah, Wyoming, Washington, and New Mexico, all of which have one entry in the current non-typical top 20. Arizona has seven. Scores are calculated by adding a series of measurements of the length and mass of an animal's antler beams and points.



Hannah Helmer of Seward was all smiles after harvesting what would become the new Nebraska state-record non-typical American elk in the Pine Ridge near Crawford on the opening morning of the firearm elk season September 24.



When Randy Stutheit of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission completed the official score sheet for a bull elk harvested by Hannah Helmer of Seward, he opened the 13th edition of *Records of North American Big Game*, the records maintained by the Boone and Crockett Club, to find its score of 430 6/8 put it 16th in all-time list of non-typical American elk.

Once native to the Plains, elk were extirpated from Nebraska by the 1880s, food for hungry settlers. By 1900, they were gone from 90 percent of their historic range, with fewer than 100,000 remaining in the Mountain West. In the late 1960s, elk from Wyoming became established in the Pine Ridge near Chadron. There are now between 2,000 and 3,000 found in the state, mostly in the Pine Ridge, Wildcat Hills, Niobrara River Valley, and the Loess Canyons south of near North Platte. Annual hunts have been held since 1995. Hannah was one of 14 to draw a general bull permit in the Hat Creek Unit. In all, there were 111 bull permits and 210 cow permits issued to the general public and landowners in Nebraska in 2016.

"I think this is a very big deal for Nebraska," said Winter. "A lot of people don't even think of Nebraska when they think of elk, let alone Boone and Crockett-class animals of that size. I think it's going to surprise sportsmen all over the place when they see a Nebraska elk making the top 20 in the all-time Boone and Crockett records."

Joel Helmer said they were simply hoping to get Hannah a good bull and have a good hunt. They called a small 5x5 bull to within 50 yards on opening morning, but Hannah wasn't able to get a clear shot. A half hour later, Joel's friend blew on his elk call when the bull stepped into a clearing, and when this 8x7 bull stopped and bugled its reply, Hannah made a perfect shot to its vitals at just over 200 yards.

Her father, an official scorer for Boone and Crockett who has harvested two bulls himself, knew the elk was huge but didn't tell Hannah how big until after the shot. They had watched the bull from more than 1,000 yards the night before, and were way off when they guessed it would be in the 350 class. "His body was so stinking big that I wasn't

thinking 400," Joel said. "You don't even want to think 400 class. That's ridiculous."

When they saw it that morning, "I about came unglued I was shaking because I just knew he was world class at that point."

Hannah admits she had thought her dad's 260-class bull was big, and knew this was much bigger. "I was just trying not to focus on that, though. I was just trying to focus on getting where I was supposed to shoot him."

"It seemed so unreal," Hannah said of the moment that followed. "I'm like, I can't believe that I shot this."

Joel had been applying for a Nebraska elk permit every year since 2007, and had been putting his two sons in as well. This was the first time he entered Hannah in the drawing. It was only the second big game animal she'd harvested, the first being a white-tailed buck in 2015.

Hannah's smile in the field photos, and again when the scoring was complete, tells the story. So does her father's. "As a lifelong hunter, this is the best thing that's ever happened to me and I didn't even shoot it. I'd rather she did."

Joel had green scored the bull at 428 1/8 inches after the hunt. The score could change again. Hunters who harvest trophies of this class are invited to the Boone & Crockett Club's triannual Big Game Awards event, the next of which will be held in 2019, to be scored by a panel of judges. She may well headline the Generation Next banquet at the convention, an event held to recognize the youths who harvest the top new entries in the record books.

This is definitely one of them. As a Boone and Crockett official simply put it when Winter called to give him the news on the score: "Wow." ■

Wading In

Learning to Fly fish in Nebraska

By Ryan Sparks

Fly fishing presents a unique set of challenges, one of which is the stereotype that it's only for trout. Nebraska has a plethora of fly fishing opportunities that are only limited by your imagination and ingenuity. Every fish in your local waters can be caught with a fly rod. Here's how to get started.

When most people think of fly fishing, they imagine an angler wading in a blue-ribbon

trout stream, fussing over which fly most accurately resembles the insects hovering in the air. While there is nothing wrong with this mental image, it is unfortunate that most people never experience fly fishing because of complicated jargon or the belief that fly fishing is only for trout and takes place in locations far from home. Those who are willing to break away from these

misconceptions will find that Nebraska has a number of wonderful fly fishing opportunities.

Gearing Up

A common reason many people never fly fish is because they are intimidated by the equipment. I remember my first attempt to purchase a fly rod. The salesperson bombarded me with terminology about rod weight and length, line types, leader taper, tippet material and casting techniques. Needless to say, I was overwhelmed and resigned myself to going home and

doing my own research. I eventually ordered a beginners fly fishing kit, and over 10 years later I can frankly say that fly fishing is much simpler than it is often made out to be.

To get started fly fishing in Nebraska, keep things simple. Start with either a 5 or 6 weight rod, a good middle-of-the-road rod that can be used for anything from bluegill to northern pike. The “weight” of a rod does not mean how much it weighs, but rather, it corresponds to the weight of the line it is designed to cast. Unlike conventional fishing where the angler catapults a heavily weighted lure, fly anglers use the weight of the line to cast their flies. Fly lines come in line weights ranging from 1-14, which correspond to both the size of the fly you intend to use and the size of the fish you are targeting. For example, a 5 weight rod would be paired with a 5 weight line and so on.

Trout anglers often agonize over which size leader to use. A leader is the nearly invisible transition of line connecting the fly to the fly line. Luckily, for the vast majority of fish in Nebraska, tapered leaders and tippet are not necessary. If you use 10-pound test for the bass at your local fishing hole, use 10-pound test as your leader material. Seven feet will usually suffice. Not only do you not need to worry about what leader to use, but you will find that the monofilament line spooled on your bass reel is much



When most people think of fly fishing, they imagine anglers trout fishing in places like Colorado, Montana and Alaska. Yet great fly fishing can occur right here in Nebraska.

PHOTO BY DOUG STEINKE



Terry Kruse shows that getting the correct leverage on a fish in current doesn't always mean “rod tip high.”

PHOTOS BY DOUG STEINKE

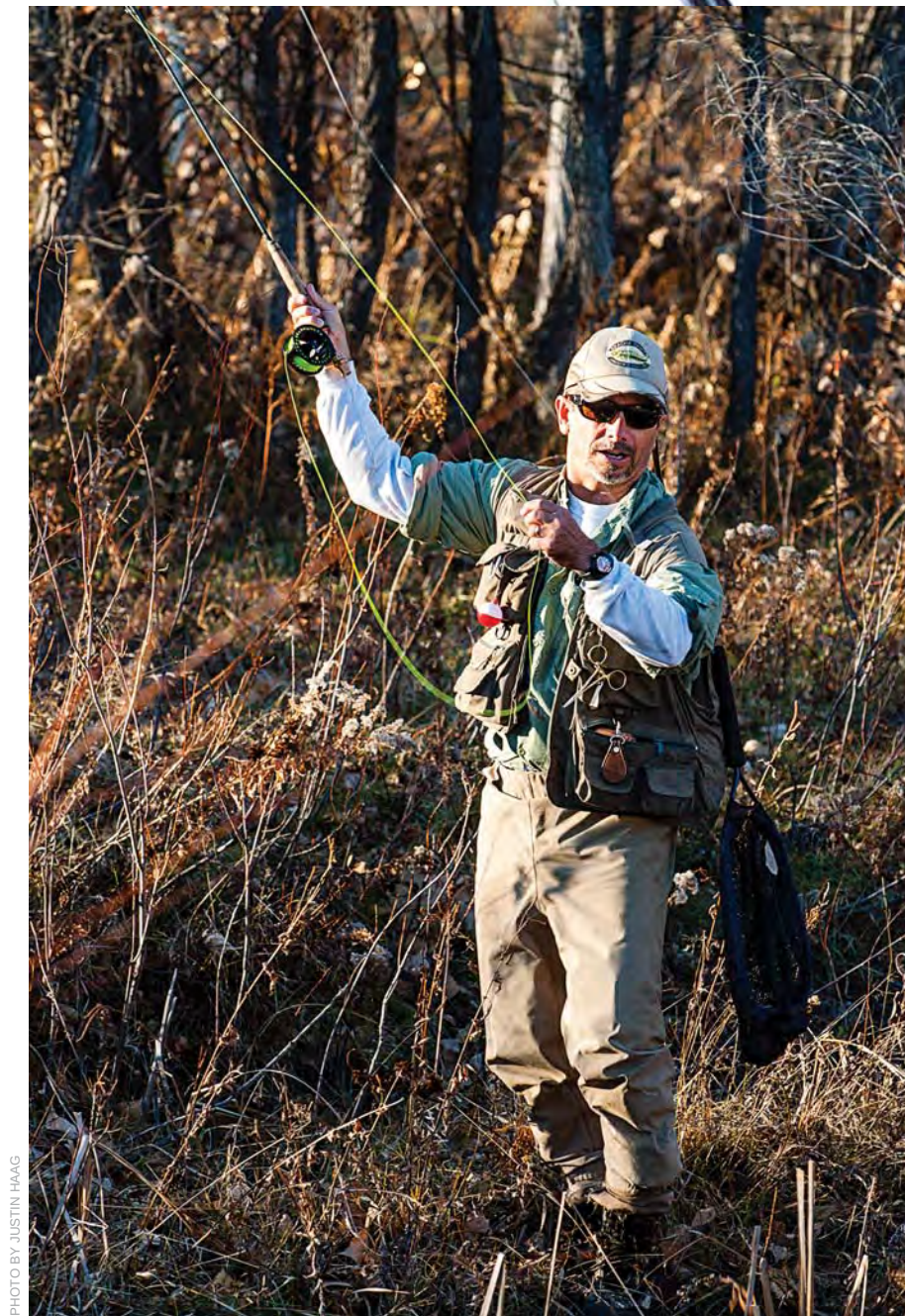


PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG
Scott Johnson fly fishes for trout at the Soldier Creek Wilderness Area in Dawes County.

less expensive than pre-made tapered leaders and spools of tippet. Once you become more comfortable with fly fishing you can begin making your own leaders that are customized to the species you are targeting and the waters you fish.

Casting

Perhaps the No. 1 reason people are intimidated by fly fishing is the anxiety of learning to cast. Yet, learning to cast is one of the great pleasures of fly fishing, for a good caster is rhythmic and makes it look effortless.

A bad caster is dangerous, cracking the fly line like a whip and wrapping themselves and anyone around them in a tangle of line. However, once you understand what a fly rod needs to do in order to make a proper cast, learning becomes much easier.

Fly rods need to do a number of things to work correctly – bend, abruptly stop and travel in a straight line. When the rod bends during a cast, it loads energy into the rod which is later transferred to the fly line. This transfer occurs when the rod is stopped at the end of a cast, allowing the line to

shoot through the air and lay out on the water in a straight line. Most beginners focus too much on the movement of the rod and don't pay enough attention to abruptly stopping the rod. You can power the rod as hard as you can, but all your effort is wasted if you can't transfer the energy to the fly line. The second error that most beginners make is not moving the rod tip in a straight line; if your rod tip moves straight, so will your line. If it dips and arcs, your line will follow and soon become snarled in the trees and grass behind you.

The plain truth is that you aren't going to learn to cast by reading about it: find an open area where you

can practice. A lake or pond with an open area along the shore is perfect, but a grass lawn or field also works great. It is also sensible to leave the fly off at first, and practice with just the fly line to make sure you don't inadvertently hook yourself.

The basic overhead cast consists of two motions, a backward cast and a forward cast. Begin by stripping around 15 feet of line off your reel and putting it in front of you. Next, lift the line off the ground using your forearm and then, using your wrist, flick the line behind you and continue to move the rod back until it is in line with your ear. At this point, make an abrupt stop and pause for a moment to allow the line to unfurl behind you. Starting out, it is helpful to watch the line in order to perfect your timing. Once the loop in your line has straightened out behind you, make a smooth acceleration forward and stop the rod again when it is in



PHOTOS BY JEFF KURRUS



Learning the basics and practicing is the key to becoming a successful caster. The basic overhead cast consists of two motions, beginning with the fly line in front of the caster (left), moving into a backward cast (middle) and back into a forward cast (right).

line with your target. Every other cast you make while fly fishing is a variation on this basic cast. Once you are proficient at an overhead cast, you can move on to a roll cast, double haul and shooting line.

Getting on the Water

Now that you understand the basics of casting, learn to fly fish on a body of water you are familiar with. If you know a spot where you have consistently caught bluegill or bass, those same fish will be just as willing to take a fly. Starting out, keep your fly selection very simple – buy a handful of woolly buggers for general use, and a few specialized flies for the types of fish you enjoy catching. The woolly bugger has probably caught more fish species than any other fly in existence. I have personally caught bluegill, crappie, bass, trout, walleye, pike, catfish, and even carp on a woolly bugger. Once you become accustomed to casting and catching fish on your woolly bugger, you can branch out and try other flies. Below, you will find a species-specific guide to the most



A fly angler's box will contain a number of flies specific to various scenarios, collected over a series of years.

PHOTO BY DOUG STEINKE



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Alex Gonzales fly fishes for bluegill at Walnut Creek Recreation Area in Sarpy County near Papillion.

common fish you will encounter in Nebraska. Remember, if it can be caught, it can be caught on a fly rod.

Bluegill

Bluegill are present in nearly every body of water in Nebraska, and their aggressiveness makes them an easy catch for anglers. As warmer weather heats the shallows, bluegill begin to move toward shore. When water temperatures near 60 degrees, bluegill can often be found at the first major drop-off along shallow areas. Use a weighted fly, such as a woolly bugger or swimming nymph, and count the fly down as it sinks through the water column. When the fly reaches the desired depth, begin retrieving the fly with short, quick strips. Watch the tip of your fly line for any movement that indicates a strike.

Remember the depth at which you catch each fish and repeat along the

length of the drop-off.

As water temperatures climb into the 70s, bluegill will begin to spawn. At this time, fish can be found in very shallow water, often in less than a foot. Hyper-aggressive males guard their spawning beds, and virtually any cast that hits the water will produce a fish. This is the perfect situation to learn to fly fish because even novice anglers can have great success.

My favorite technique during the spawn is to use a floating foam spider in combination with a small bead head fly such as a hare's ear or a pheasant tail nymph. Tie the nymph off of the bend of the hook of the spider so that it suspends just off of the bottom. Bluegills will either slash the spider off of the surface or take the nymph encroaching on their bed. If the fish take the nymph, the spider will be pulled under the surface, effectively acting as your bobber. Huge numbers of bluegill can be caught during the spawn, but only the largest fish need to be put "on the reel." Continue to "strip" in line to land the fish, pinning the line against the rod handle with

your finger as you go.

Bass

Largemouth bass are an aggressive species that are happy to eat anything they can fit in their mouth. Often the key to catching bass is simply to get a fly in front of them and make it look alive.

Bass are similar to bluegill in that they will move to the first major drop-off adjacent to spawning areas as warm spring air begins to heat the water. Bass will usually be the first fish in a body of water to spawn, with bluegill and other species moving in afterward, often taking up the same beds made by bass. The largest bass will be the first to spawn as water temperatures approach 60 degrees.

Smaller bass will continue moving in as water temperatures climb. The same tactics used for bluegill will work for bass; just upsize your presentation to make your offering more attractive. A streamer-style fly seven inches long is not too large for bass. Bunny leeches, deceivers, Clouser minnows and the ever present woolly bugger are all effective flies for bass.

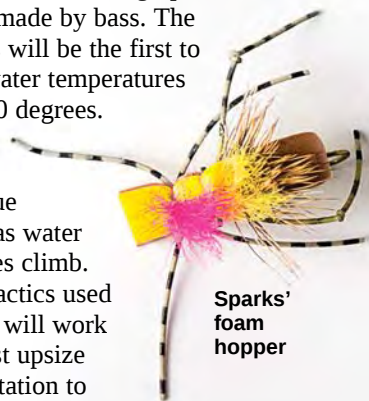
When the dog days of summer arrive, there's no more exciting way to fish than casting topwater flies to shaded areas along the shoreline. Dahlberg divers and deer hair poppers are both productive fly patterns. Don't be surprised when a large bass explodes on your fly, creating a huge disturbance on the water and inhaling your fly off of the surface.

Crappie

Often ignored by fly anglers, crappie are a prime example of a species more readily caught on the fly. Crappies prefer to "eat up," attacking their prey from below. If you look closely at the shape of a crappie's mouth, you can actually see how they are built for this style of feeding. Their jaw line rises upward at a steep vertical angle, extending until parallel with their eyes. This aids them in feeding as they



Royal wulff



Sparks' foam hopper



Woolly bugger



PHOTO BY DOUG STEINKE

What starts as an inexpensive fly rod and reel combo quite often turns into a vehicle that looks like this – rods and reels for every situation, waders and wading boots, nets and a host of other gear.

track baitfish above them. Fly anglers have a natural advantage because flies sink slowly and can be suspended at a desired depth for extended periods. Additionally, flies glide through the water, just like natural forage species – nothing in nature crashes vertically through the water. Detecting strikes while the fly is dropping is easy; just watch the tip of your fly line for any movement. If it twitches, set the hook quickly. Once you have caught a few fish you should be able to pinpoint the exact depth in the water where fish are suspended. Crappie can be very color selective, so having a large variety of colors can sometimes be the key.

Trout

While you won't find trout in every body of water in Nebraska, they are closely associated with fly fishing for a reason. Trout are the number one species in the world pursued with a fly rod. Fly fishing was created with trout in mind, and originally evolved to meet the needs of the trout angler.



Cohen's baby bird

Casting weightless dry flies like elk hair caddis or parachute adams that imitate hatching insects and float naturally on the current of a stream or river is the quintessential picture of fly fishing.

On heavily pressured water, wild trout can be extremely picky and catching them is a feat of technical ability. In places trout are stocked, they can be extremely naïve and are easily caught.

Most of the trout found in Nebraska are stocked, and your best bet at catching them is to check the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's stocking schedule. Doing so not only gives you a good location to try, but also provides a reliable window of time to pursue this otherwise elusive fish.

Many people rush to arrive as fish are being dumped in the lake, and they do catch a few fish with this strategy. However, it is usually best to wait a day or two for the trout to acclimate to their new environment.

Once they have settled in and begin to get hungry they are more easily caught. Stocked fish are conditioned to eating food pellets on the surface from their rearing in fish

hatcheries, so big dry flies are usually the ticket.

Try a stimulator or a royal wulff, and if the trout aren't willing to eat on the surface, tie on a flashy woolly bugger or a bright colored San Juan worm. Don't forget that trout make great table fare. Perhaps nothing is better than the smell of a freshly caught trout cooking over a campfire.

Putting It All Together

Not only is fly fishing fun, immersive and challenging, but it can also be more effective than conventional fishing in certain situations. Learning to fly fish will give you another trick up your sleeve when fishing conditions are tough. Keep this in mind, and know that learning to fly fish does not mean abandoning whatever form of fishing you previously enjoyed. Instead, it should enrich the fishing you already do. I constantly find myself using fly fishing tricks in my conventional fishing and vice versa. In the end, fly fishing is just another form of fishing – one that is infinitely enjoyable and can become a lifelong passion. ■

Ryan Sparks is a freelance writer and photographer who can be found trying to catch anything that swims with a fly rod or chasing after his pointer, Tippet. His writing and photography can be found at Flywatermedley.com.



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Conservation Corner

Movement of Trumpeter Swans in the Sandhills

Commission researchers use GPS to follow an at-risk species.

By Mark Vrtiska, Ph.D., Waterfowl Program Manager

As we busted through the thick cattails and bulrushes along a private Sandhills lake, we were instantly surprised as the family group of trumpeter swans was right in front of us. The surprise appeared mutual, as the swans hesitated for a moment – I'm sure wondering just where the heck the big airboat had come from – and then swiftly scattered in different directions. We swung the boat around, and went after one of the adults. He managed to juke us once, but on the second pass I managed to swing the dip net over his head and pull him in the boat.

The capture of this trumpeter swan was part of a Nebraska Game and Parks Commission project examining swan movements from breeding areas in the Nebraska Sandhills to wintering areas there and in other parts of the state, and the places they stop in between. Additionally, little is known about fidelity to wintering and



PHOTOS BY ERIC FOWLER

Above, left to right: Mark Vrtiska, Heather Johnson, and Zac Brashears band trumpeter swans in the Sandhills. Below: A GPS neck collar is fitted to a swan.

breeding sites. Information obtained from the study will assist managers in conserving habitat for trumpeter swans, a tier-one species in the Nebraska Natural Legacy Project.

The project began in July 2014 when three adult female swans were captured and fitted with neck collars equipped with solar-powered Global Positioning System (GPS) transmitters. The project has continued with an additional 23 swans being captured and fitted with the special neck collars. The GPS collars allow for accurate locations of swans as they move about on their often remote habitats.

Initial indications are that the movement of swans depends on whether the swans have had young during the breeding season or are non-breeders. Non-breeders appear to move more and farther than breeding swans. The most significant movement was a non-breeding swan that wintered near the Kansas-Oklahoma border near the town of Buffalo in northwestern Oklahoma in 2015, 400 miles from where it was captured.

Collared swans wintered on a



number of different rivers and creeks in Nebraska. Swans wintered on the Snake, South, Middle, and North Loups, North and central Platte, Calamus, and Dismal rivers. Swans also used Boardman, Blue, Brush, Goose, Gordon, Gracie, James, and Whitehorse creeks and Calamus Reservoir. The females returned to their respective breeding wetlands in early February and resided on or near those sites through April. ■

Mark is the Waterfowl Program Manager with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.



How You Can Help

The Commission's swan study was funded by the Wildlife Conservation Fund, the agency's primary money source for nongame and at-risk species inventory, research and management projects.

The Conservation Fund is supported primarily through donations. You can learn more about the fund or make a tax-deductible gift at Nebraskawildlifefund.org.

Donations can also be made through the nongame "checkoff" box located on state income tax forms.



Sleep-in Quail Hunting

Hunters may want to take their time when hunting cold winter mornings — the birds do.

By Jeff Kurrus

As winter nights get colder, bobwhite quail coveys offer the protection these birds need to survive. Coveys will average 14 birds in the late fall and early winter, and their numbers begin to decrease afterward to about 10 birds by February. The birds will congregate, tails in and beaks out, so they can see ground predators approaching from all directions. This system also allows equal thermal protection for each bird. But what does this mean for hunters?

The birds may stay in these tight formations until well after daylight. When they do eventually move, it will be to feed in nearby fields, their movements spreading their scent across

the snow, ice and grass. It is only once these birds begin to move that a pointing dog has a legitimate chance at locating a covey.

This is the reason that many seasoned quail hunters are sitting in a coffee shop around sunrise when they're planning to hunt instead of fighting what could be the equivalent of looking for a needle in a haystack. They will let the sun rise for a couple of hours, and then enter the field around 9 or 10 a.m. after birds have not only moved and left scent, but have also given them time to leave tracks.

Any bird hunter who has hunted in the snow allows the dog to work a bit slower, and a bit longer, where there

are fresh bird tracks. Which, in turn, leads to more covey rises and a dog that stays interested even longer by getting into birds quicker.

So now is the time to sleep in. Be a little lazy and have that extra cup of coffee. If you can hold out until mid-morning, you will witness more covey rises during your late-season quail hunting trips. ■

For more information on quail hunting or to get your 2017 permit, visit Outdoornebraska.org.

Left to right: Bobwhite quail and quail tracks, hunter Brian Sparks shooting, and English pointer Jake, all in Cass County.



PHOTOS BY JEFF KURRUS

Burls

A Peculiar Wood Oddity

By Mike Groenewold, Horticulturist

All things in nature interest me, especially peculiar oddities that sometimes defy explanation. In my work as a horticulturist, arborist and forester for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's parks division, I often like to think of myself as a scientist, knowing for the most part that there is sound science that explains how, why and where trees grow. And then again, sometimes I like to observe trees, and especially wood, from a purely aesthetic perspective, knowing there might be some unexplainable reasons why trees and their wood are so beautiful.

OK, it's true, I can get a little nostalgic about wood. I blame it on my dad, who injected sawdust in my veins at a young age when he taught me how to drive my first nail. Since then I have cut, glued and sanded wood into many useful and not-so-useful objects. I like to think of it as a passion; on the other hand, my wife believes I have a slight addiction. "You just have to make something out of wood every winter, don't you!" As of yet, I have not sought counseling and continue to hoard scraps of wood like my wife does shoes.

Burls are one of the peculiar wood oddities that I enjoy observing during my work assisting our park superintendents in managing their woodlands and landscapes. We often see them growing on cottonwood and other species throughout the state. Burls are bulbous protrusions occurring on branches, stems or trunks in many sizes, and some are quite large. A burl develops on a tree undergoing some form of stress such as an injury, virus or fungus. Environmental factors or hormonal imbalances are also possible causes.

Burls are always covered with bark and usually contain sound wood. Inside a burl the structure always illustrates contorted growth patterns that give the wood beauty and even value to some species. Wood turners in particular collect burls to fashion beautiful bowls and vases on their lathes. Burls do not appear to harm a tree, and as of this writing, I know of no proven theory for what causes these wood oddities.

Recently I encountered one of the largest burls I have ever observed in our Nebraska parks. Tim Boyle, superintendent of Johnson Lake State Recreation Area, called my attention to a particular cottonwood (pictured above) after inspecting his campgrounds for possible hazardous trees. As beautiful and useful as they are, trees, like all living things, decline in old age and their dead branches and stems can certainly

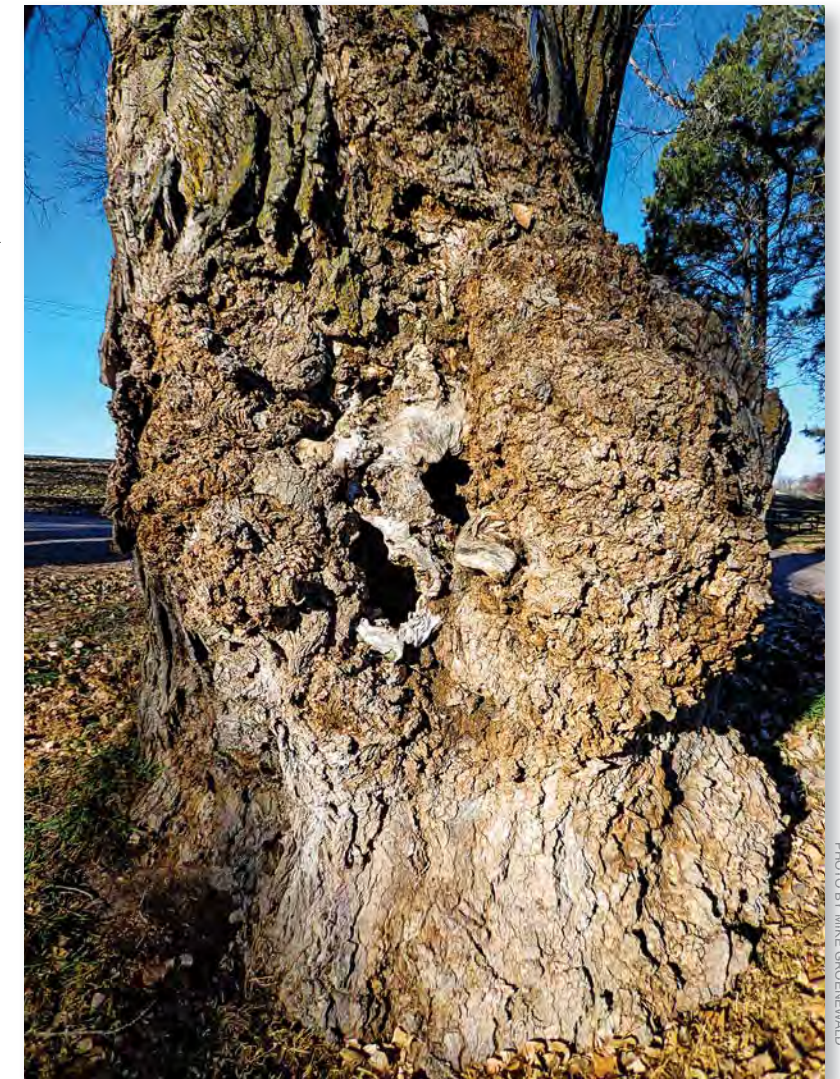


PHOTO BY MIKE GROENEWOLD

This large burl was recently discovered on a 65-year old cottonwood at Johnson Lake State Recreation Area near Lexington, Nebraska, and additional burls have been discovered on trees at this park.

threaten the life and property of our park visitors. Upon arrival to examine this tree, I immediately noticed the large, beautiful burl that had swollen the tree's basal diameter to nearly six feet. It was an awesome organism, but unfortunately this one exhibited obvious evidence of decay. Sad to say, after admiration and photos I began to safely fell this tree with our largest chainsaw to safeguard the adjacent campsites.

As Tim and Jennifer, his helper, began to haul away the chunks of wood I had cut into loadable pieces, I once again turned nostalgic wondering what I could chisel out of these big hunks of wood. However, I soon returned to my senses knowing the wood was far too large for me to handle and haul away to my tiny workshop, but maybe next time. ■

Mike Groenewold is Park Horticulturist with the Commission. Mike has led the Park Landscape Services Program since 1989 and is an avid woodworker.



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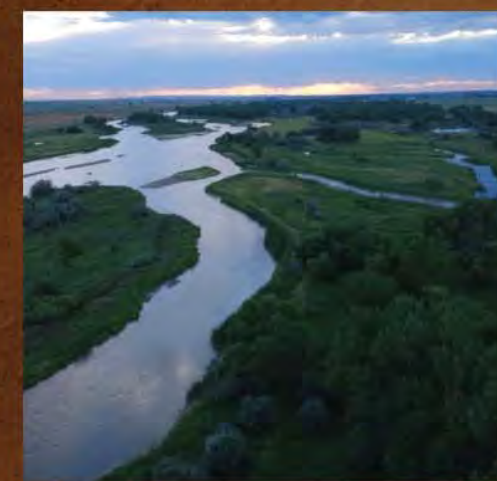
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Lifers in the Dead of Winter

For some bird species, Nebraska is the southern part of their migration from the great north.

By Mark E. Davis

A rare bird alert last winter sent birders from across the state to search Omaha's Forest Lawn Cemetery hoping for a glimpse of a rare bird in Nebraska, the pine grosbeak.

For Clem Klaphake, it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Klaphake, a dedicated birder from Bellevue, doesn't often respond to these alerts. He knows they can end in frustration. But he had to give this one a try, despite the size of the cemetery. This time, luck was on his side. He and dozens of other birders enjoyed opportunities to see the grosbeak, which stayed into late January. For Klaphake, it was a lifer – the first time the 75-year-old had seen the species.

"I'll probably never see one again," Klaphake said.

As the jet stream sweeps cold air from Canada to Nebraska, many birders retreat to the indoors to enjoy watching hardy backyard birds that flock to feeders outside kitchen windows and patio doors.

Year-round residents, including the northern cardinal, downy woodpecker, black-capped chickadee and tufted titmouse, flock to feeders filled with black oil sunflower seeds and suet. Migrants from the north, like the dark-eyed junco, white-throated and white-crowned sparrow and purple finch join in.

Many birders use the time reading, researching birds online or organizing photos and notes from the previous year. For them, the passion for birding doesn't fade; it just moves closer to home.

But Klaphake knows the freeze of winter brings many opportunities to see wonderful birds otherwise unavailable in the state. And his first stop during winter's freeze are spots with open water.

Along with Canada geese and other waterfowl, recent sightings of trumpeter swans and an occasional tundra swan have been exciting birders visiting Carter Lake, near Eppey Airport in Omaha. They'll stay as long



PHOTO BY MARK E. DAVIS

A white-crowned sparrow perched on a branch. The winter months are the best time to see white-crowned sparrows, which live in Canada during the summer months.

as they have open water, he said.

Bald and golden eagles also congregate near open water. While some are now nesting in the state, many others migrate south, following waterfowl and wintering at spots such as Branched Oak Lake, near Lincoln, Sutherland Reservoir State Recreation Area, just 30 minutes west of North Platte, Gavins Point Dam on the Nebraska and South Dakota border near Yankton and Lake McConaughy/Lake Ogallala near the dam.

There were 118 documented eagle nests in the state in 2016, according to Klaphake. Those numbers don't include nests that may go undocumented on private land, he said.

Despite a warm fall leading up to this winter, there are no guarantees for numerous sites with open water, said Joel Jorgensen, Nebraska's nongame bird program manager.

"Things can change quickly," Jorgensen observed.

When the water freezes over, you can wait and dream of spring. Or you can search pine rows for owls, including snowy owls; or winter finches, including white-winged crossbills that feed exclusively on white spruce cones. Rough-legged hawks come down from

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE OMAHA WORLD-HERALD



Three trumpeter swans glide through the water at sunset at Levi Carter Park in Omaha on Jan. 6, 2013. At this time of year, waterfowl flock to open water as they migrate through the area.

Canada to hunt the prairies along with other resident raptors. It's also a good time to see Harris' sparrows and pine siskins – the only time they visit this far south, according to Jorgensen.

Jorgensen suggests frequenting parks that feed birds during the winter, such as Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area, near Gering.

About 85 million Americans participate in birdwatching, according to the most recent National Survey on Recreation and the Environment by the USDA's Forest Service.

And the sport, whether active or passive, is growing thanks to technological advances in communication and photography.



PHOTO BY MARK E. DAVIS

A pine siskin feeds on black oil sunflower seeds at a feeder. Winter is your best chance to see pine siskin, which migrate to the Midwest during the winter months.

shared and assistance is given to birders looking for help with species identification.

Klaphake also enjoys joining friends at their homes to watch feeders, drinking coffee and hot cider and plan trips in the coming months.

His best advice for the winter months: "If you don't go out and look, you're not going to see anything." ■

Mark E. Davis is a native Nebraskan who studied journalism at the University of Nebraska and is a novice, but devoted, birder.



Many Canada geese are year-round residents of Nebraska – many more migrate south to the state to take advantage of open water.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE OMAHA WORLD-HERALD



PHOTO BY MARK E. DAVIS

A male downy woodpecker perching on a limb on a sunny winter morning. Downy woodpeckers are year-round residents of Nebraska.

► Pictured is Doyle Shaffer (left) from Millersburg, Ohio, and myself. We were home on leave from the U.S. Air Force and spent October 1953 hunting ducks on Stinking Water Creek north of Enders. Not pictured is my dad and brother who helped us get our limit of 20 mallards.

I have purchased a Nebraska hunting license every year since I was 16 – I am now 84.

– Stanley Spahn, McCook, Nebraska



◀ I was 25 when this picture was taken on Thanksgiving, 1971. We had been hunting in the early morning on the Platte River near Lisco in Mike Dutko's pit blind. Mike was a well-known Lisco waterfowl hunter who was featured in the March 1967 NEBRASKAland Magazine. The goose population made hunting more of a challenge than compared to today. In fact, in December of the following year the daily bag limit was reduced to one.

After this hunt, we returned to the house, cleaned the geese and settled in to watch the "Game of the Century" with No. 1 Nebraska defeating No. 2 Oklahoma for the national championship. That made this day one of the most memorable dual sporting events in one day. My sons, Brant and Kevin, and friends from the Lincoln-Omaha area have come back to hunt with me every year since the 1980s.

Over the years, NEBRASKAland has featured many great stories and photos representing our state extremely well. I have been a pleased subscriber for 40 years. Keep up the great work.

– Terry Hamaker, Lewellen, Nebraska

See the 1967 story with Mike Dutko online –click here.



◀ This is my dad, Clynard Harmon, and my uncle, Charlie Brown, at Morrill where we lived. Uncle Charlie farmed near Westerville. Uncle Charlie and family visited most years in the fall for deer hunting – or pheasant and duck hunting. This was 1953.

My husband's work took us out of state for a few years – but when he retired from Mobil after 30-plus years in St. Louis, Missouri, we moved back to "the good life" in Nebraska.

– Naomi Brunz, Sutherland, 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. Text may be edited, photos adjusted for reproduction. All photos will be returned.

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Venison Loin with Wild Mushroom Salad

Treat your dinner guests to a taste of the woods.

By Jenny Nguyen

My brother, Ngoc, came out to visit me in November. As a Californian, he's had little opportunity to enjoy wild game, so I promised him that we would feast. But I also didn't want to spend hours cooking in the kitchen while there were other things to do and see near Omaha.

On the night he arrived, I served this dish along with a charcuterie and cheese board, French bread and chilled rosé wine. Cooked to medium rare, this venison loin and mushroom salad recipe is simple, light and will allow your dinner guest(s) to truly taste the venison. Ngoc has also never had morels before, so this dish was a small taste of wild Nebraska. (In case you're wondering, the mushrooms were dried, and I've been saving them for a special occasion such as this, but any mushroom will do.) And if you're making this dish in the spring, perhaps you can also find wild dandelions and asparagus to truly make this a completely hunted and foraged meal.

Sorry about the vague measurements. For recipes like these, I use what we have on hand and stretch the ingredients as necessary. Nothing has to be exact – season to your liking.

Servings: 4

Prep Time: 1 hour

Cooking Time: 30 minutes

Ingredients:

- Venison loin, about 2 pounds
- Kosher salt
- Fresh coarse ground pepper, to taste
- 1 tablespoon of olive oil
- 1 package of mixed greens with arugula
- Thinly sliced red onion
- 1 tomato, diced
- French vinaigrette (Brianna's brand)
- Goat cheese, optional
- Morel mushrooms or other, fresh or dried
- Splash of cognac, whiskey or brandy
- Shallots, thinly sliced
- Chives, chopped
- Butter
- Steak sauce, optional

Directions:

1. Remove all silver skin from venison loin. Allow meat to rest at room temperature for 1 hour prior to cooking. This will help the meat cook more evenly, especially if you're aiming for medium rare. If using dried mushrooms,

pour boiled water over mushrooms. Mushrooms should reconstitute in about 20 minutes. Drain and pat mushrooms dry before cooking.

2. Pat venison dry with paper towels. Sprinkle kosher salt and pepper all over loin. Over medium high heat, heat olive oil in a pan large enough to accommodate meat. When oil is nice and hot, sear venison loin for about 2 minutes on all four sides, plus the two ends, to get a nice crust all over. You'll have to use tongs to keep the loin upright while searing. Once browned, loosely wrap loin in foil to rest for 5 minutes. (Cooking times may vary depending on loin size.)

3. In the same pan, add butter. Add sliced shallot and cook until soft, about 2-4 minutes. Add mushrooms and sauté until mushrooms have given up most of their moisture and are slightly browned, 5-7 minutes. Add a splash of cognac, whiskey or brandy and cook until alcohol is mostly evaporated. Take off heat, season with salt and pepper and chopped chives. Add a little more butter.

4. Toss greens, tomato, red onion and French vinaigrette. Taste and add salt, pepper and sugar to your salad as necessary. Crumble goat cheese with a fork (your hands will melt the cheese and make it too gooey) and sprinkle on top of salad. Slice venison loin into medallions and serve with the salad and mushrooms. ■

This recipe and photograph originally appeared on Jenny's Food for Hunters blog at Foodforhunters.com.



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN



A Grand Island Traffic Jam

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Ice Tracks

This photo marks one of my first attempts at landscape imagery as a *NEBRASKAland* photographer, a shot before sunrise at Box Butte Reservoir State Recreation Area in early February 2013. There's nothing special about it, and to my knowledge it's never been used for anything but this article. There's something about the scene, however, that always seems to catch this ice angler's eye as he's scrolling through our collection of images. It is especially eye-catching on a late November day as I eagerly await ice to form and pave the way for another season of my favorite winter activity.

With one look, it makes me think of the many sounds I've come to cherish: the irregular revving of a two-stroke engine as another hole is drilled. The scraping of a sled being pulled across the ice. The crunching of the cleats as they do their best to grip the slick surface. Laughter between friends and relatives as it travels over the expanse of frozen water. And, yes, even the popping sound of that ice expanding and contracting that is always sure to result in wobbly knees for the hard-water rookie.

While this photo conveys evidence of such cherished human activities, it also expresses the certain serenity of winter mornings. This time of year, one surely savors quiet beginnings in the crisp, cold air which has a way of clearing the mind with each breath. The way sunlight reflects off the ice and snow and alerts the senses. The way such quiet seems to amplify any sounds that nature serves up – perhaps the honking of geese, the howl of a coyote or the whistle of the wind.

Most of all, this image marks the beginning of another day at a place I love. It's a place where young and old race to flagged tip-ups to see what's on the other end of the line. It's where a mess of panfish or walleye will be harvested with various degrees of luck and skill to be later shared at the contrasting warmth of a dinner table. In the end, it's just a photo from one of Nebraska's many places available to enjoy our tradition of pursuing game fish below the surface, whether on hard water or soft.

Justin Haag
Nov. 30, 2016



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