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Cover: A young trick-or-treater gets an up-close look at an animatronic ghoul at Alexandria State Recreation Area's Camp Spook celebration. See story on page 26. ERIC FOWLER

This page: Wearing her fortuneteller costume, Liv Lecher paints a pumpkin during Chadron State Park's Halloween celebration. Read about another Halloween celebration on page 25. JUSTIN HAAG

Nebraskaland magazine

Published by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission since 1926. The Commission is dedicated to the conservation and protection of all the state's natural resources and the people who use them.

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Bridge to the Archway



CORRECTION: The photo of "The 'Birdnerd'" Jason St. Sauver in the August/September issue should have been credited to Brady Karg. We regret the error.

Send your comments and photos to:
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Please include your postal address and telephone number. Letters may be condensed and edited. Photographs are also welcome.

A change once again gripped the landscape, and a rippling ocean of grass returned. Things were quiet past Thedford with the only signs of settlement being barbed wire strung along the gravel roads, one of which we pulled off on, so I could photograph a wind pump.

I was hesitant to delay our arrival any further, but my grandpa said, “I’ve learned that when you see something you like, you should stop. You might never see it again.” When one asks what attracted him to my grandma, he says he saw her painting a picket fence in a bikini.

From Owen Oppenheimer’s unpublished essay, “Love and Death on the Prairie”

JUSTIN HAAG



Pheasants Forever & Quail Forever of Nebraska

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Youth Mentor Hunt Dates 2026-2027:

September:

- 20th: Rock Creek PF- Jefferson County
- 27th: Sandhills PF- Brown/Keya Paha/Rock Counties

October:

- 3rd: Cass County PF
- 3rd: Golden Prairie PF- Antelope County
- 10th: Saline County PF
- 10th: Seward County PF
- 17th: Cornhusker PF- Lancaster County
- 17th: Dakota/Thurston PF
- 17th: Elkhorn Valley PF- Madison/Stanton/Pierce Counties
- 17th: Lewis & Clark PF- Cedar County
- 17th: Logan Creek PF- Wayne County
- 17th: Southeast Nebraska PF- Gage County
- 17th: Washington County PF
- 18th: Douglas County West PF
- 24th: Four Seasons PF- Thayer County
- 24th: Lower Elkorn Valley PF- Cuming County
- 24th: Lower Platte PF- Saunders County
- 24th: Maple Creek PF- Colfax County
- 24th: Southwestern Nebraska PF- Chase County
- 24th: Western Nebraska Ringnecks PF- Keith County
- 25th: Platte County PF

December:

- 5th: Nemaha Valley PF
- 5th: Nuckolls County PF

Banquet Dates 2026-2027:

September:

- 12th: Elkorn Valley PF- Stanton/Madison/Pierce Counties
- 12th: Wild West Women on the Wing
- 19th: Kearney County PF
- 24th: Douglas County West PF

October:

- 24th: Platte County PF
- 30th: Four Seasons- Thayer County

November:

- 6th: Sandhills PF- Brown/Keya Paha/Rock Counties
- 14th: Nuckolls County PF
- 28th: Niobrara County PF- Holt County

January:

- 9th: Western Nebraska Ringnecks PF- Keith County
- 30th: Cedar River Ringnecks PF- Greeley/Wheeler Counties
- 30th: Merrick County PF

February:

- 6th: Webster County PF
- 27th: Oregon Trail- Scotts bluff County
- 27th: Southwestern Nebraska PF- Chase County

March

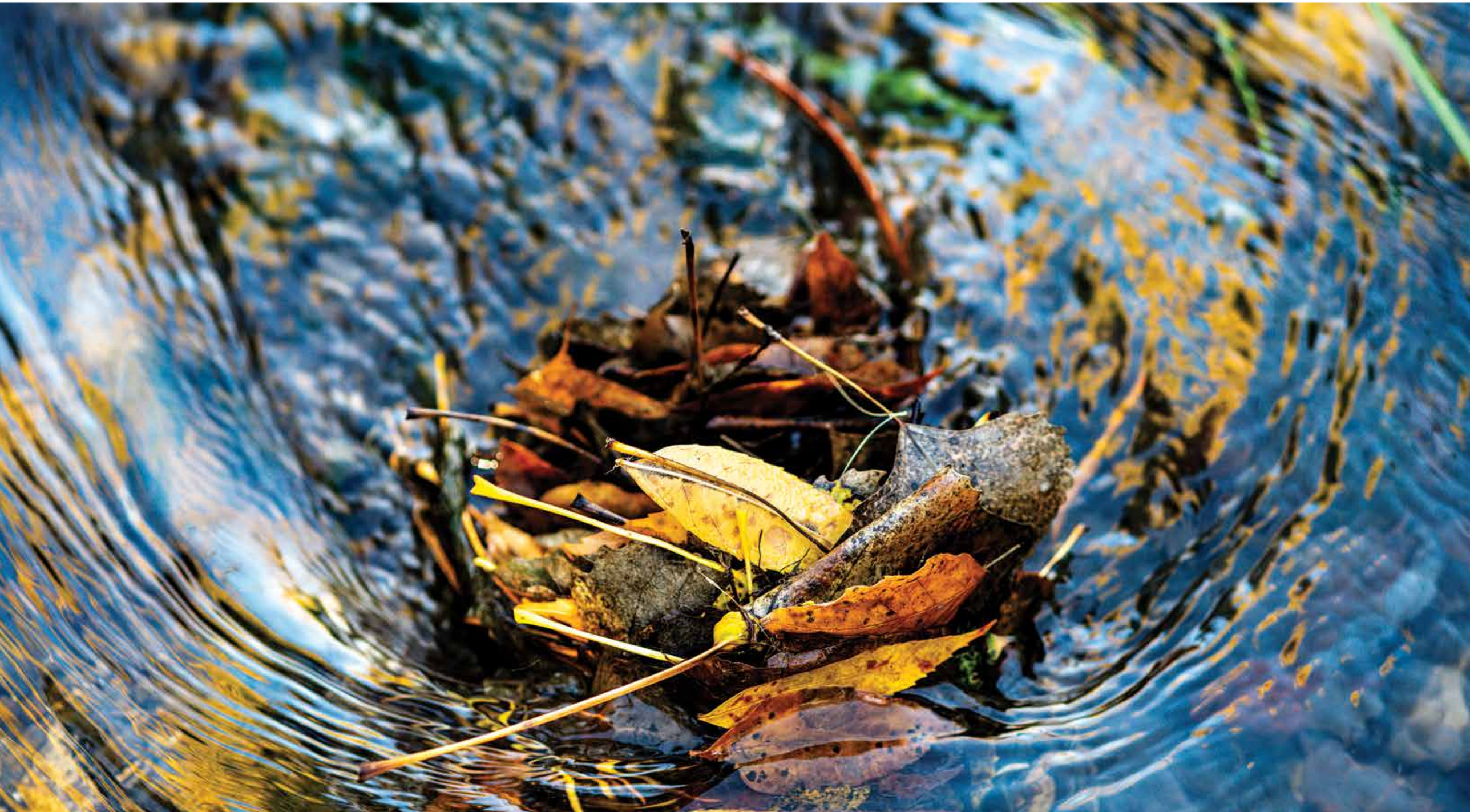
- 6th: High Plains PF- Cheyenne County

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Our mission is to conserve pheasants, quail, and other wildlife through habitat improvements, public access, education, and conservation advocacy.

In the Field

While obviously photogenic, there's more than meets the eye on leaf jams like this one at First Woman Creek in Ponderosa Wildlife Management Area. See story on page 14. JUSTIN HAAG



Autumn Jams

Leaves in streams are inviting to photographers ... and much smaller creatures

By Justin Haag

It's always worth a stop.

When fall arrives, I often find myself laying prone along a Pine Ridge stream photographing leaves that have gathered at an obstruction in the water's flow. The cottonwoods, willows, maples and whatever other trees reside in the area project the diversity of a riparian area at leaf jams through reds, golds and browns, accented by the shimmering rush of the water, in a small package.

These leaf jams, or packs, not only make for nice fall imagery, but more importantly play a role in a stream's health.

As microscopic fungi and bacteria break down the leaves, they become a source of nutrition for the stream's creatures at the lower end of the chain. These macroinvertebrates, such as caddisflies and mayflies, later serve as food for fish, amphibians and birds. Similar to other obstructions in a stream, leaf packets can also function as a place for fish to hide and rest.

As fall turns to winter, these leaves slowly release nitrogen and carbon — essential building blocks for stream life.

Researchers often take a close look at leaf packs to assess a stream's health, as the presence and absence of certain macroinvertebrates can determine how pristine, or degraded, the water is. Some creatures are more tolerant to pollution than others.

Fungi. Bacteria. Macroinvertebrates. Researchers. Photographers. For being such a model of serenity, these little jams have a way of packing in a lot of activity. Be sure to stop and take it all in. Or, just take a picture.



Water flows around fallen leaves caught on an obstruction at First Woman Creek in Ponderosa Wildlife Management Area.

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Campfire Basics

By Greg Wagner

Few outdoor experiences are as timeless as sitting around a campfire. Wouldn't you agree? Whether you are roasting marshmallows for s'mores, staying warm on a cool evening, or simply enjoying the glow beneath the stars, a campfire can become the centerpiece of any camping trip. Learning the principles of building and managing a fire is an essential outdoor skill that combines preparation, safety and respect for nature. Here are the basics to follow:

General Rules & Safety Guidelines

Local Burn or Campfire Bans: Know if a local burn or campfire ban is in effect. All wood and charcoal fires are strictly prohibited.

Permitted Alternatives: Propane or butane camp stoves and grills are allowed even during periods of high fire risk because they don't produce blowing embers.

Containment: Campfires must be kept small, under control and confined exclusively to established fire rings, grills, or designated fireplaces provided at Nebraska state parklands and wildlife management areas.

Site Preparation: Clear away all flammable materials (dry leaves, grass, twigs and brush) for at least 5 to 15 feet around the campfire. Take into account the wind direction.

Firewood: To protect local woodlands from the emerald ash borer and other invasive pests, only burn firewood sourced within 50 miles of your destination. Do not cut live trees or damage vegetation for firewood.

Wildfire Prevention: Never leave a fire unattended. Always keep a metal shovel or rake and a bucket of water or fire extinguisher handy. Stir the coals repeatedly to ensure the embers are completely drowned and cold to the touch before leaving.

Clean Up: Do not leave trash in the fire pit.

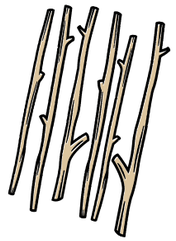
Understanding Fire Materials

A successful campfire depends on three basic fuel types:

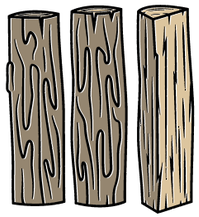


Tinder
Tinder is small, dry material that ignites easily. Tinder helps start the initial flame. Examples include:

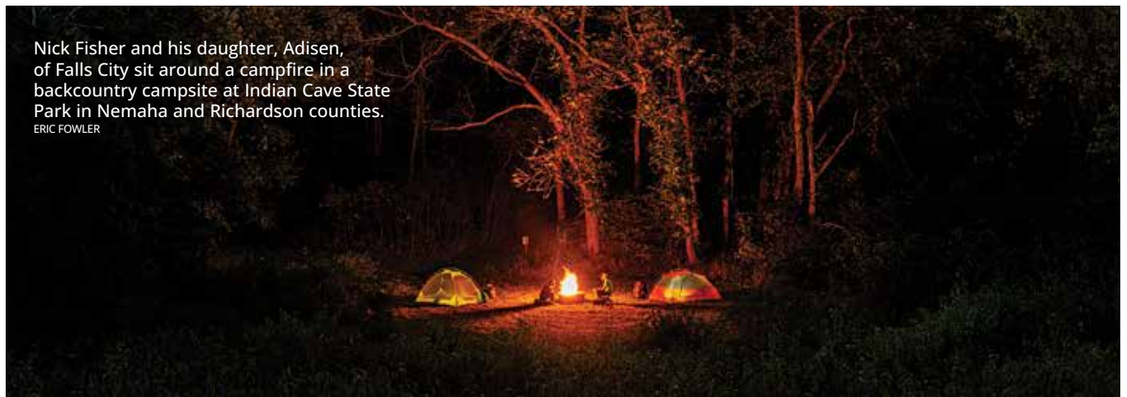
- Dry leaves
- Pine needles
- Bark shavings
- Dryer lint
- Cotton balls coated in petroleum jelly



Kindling
Kindling consists of small sticks and twigs that catch fire quickly after the tinder ignites. Good kindling is dry and roughly pencil-sized.



Firewood
Firewood supplies the main fuel source. It provides long-lasting heat and larger flames. Split logs or cut, thicker branches work well for fuel once the fire is established.



Nick Fisher and his daughter, Adisen, of Falls City sit around a campfire in a backcountry campsite at Indian Cave State Park in Nemaha and Richardson counties.
ERIC FOWLER

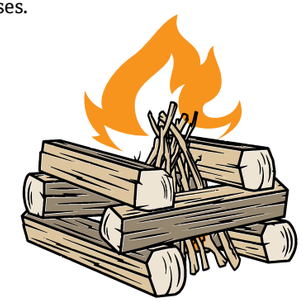
Common Campfire Structures

Different fire layouts serve different purposes.



Tipi Fire
A tipi fire is one of the easiest methods for beginners. This structure allows excellent airflow and creates a strong flame quickly.

1. Place tinder in the center.
2. Arrange kindling around it in a cone shape.
3. Add slightly larger sticks over the kindling.
4. Light the tinder from several sides.



Log Cabin Fire
The log cabin style produces a stable, long-burning fire. This design works well for cooking and steady heat.

1. Start with a small teepee fire in the center.
2. Stack larger sticks around it in alternating layers like a square cabin.
3. Leave gaps for airflow.



Lean-To Fire
A lean-to fire performs well in windy or damp conditions. The larger log shields the flame from wind and helps concentrate heat.

1. Place a large log on the windward side of the fire ring/pit.
2. Put tinder beneath the log.
3. Lean kindling against the larger log at an angle.
4. Ignite the tinder.

Lighting the Fire

Use matches, a lighter or a fire starter like a magnesium system to ignite the tinder. Never use gasoline or other flammable liquids to start or revive a fire. Begin slowly and allow the kindling to catch fire before adding larger wood.

A common mistake made is adding too much wood too quickly. Fires need oxygen, so avoid smothering the flame. If the fire struggles, gently fan or blow air onto the flames.

Once the fire is established:

- Add wood gradually.
- Keep the fire at a small, manageable size.
- Rearrange logs occasionally to maintain airflow.

Cooking Over a Campfire

Campfires are excellent for simple outdoor cooking. Common campfire foods include:

- Hot dogs
- Marshmallows
- Foil packet meals
- Corn on the cob
- Cast-iron skillet or Dutch oven recipes

Allow flames to settle into hot coals before cooking. Coals provide more even heat and reduce burning.

Cooking hot dogs or marshmallows over a campfire is a classic and safe camping tradition, provided you use extendable, long-handled, metal roasting sticks or forks, closely supervise children and cook over glowing coals rather than open flames. It is best to use long-handled, steel cooking tools with rubber handles and heat-resistant gloves when working with food over the fire for safety.

Extinguishing the Fire Properly

The cause of many wildfires — campfires that are not fully extinguished! Follow these steps carefully to properly put out a campfire:

1. Pour water over the fire slowly.
2. Stir the ashes and embers with a shovel.
3. Add more water until all hissing stops.
4. Carefully feel ash to ensure they are cool.

The fire should be cold enough to touch before you leave the area. Remember, if it's too hot to touch, it's too hot to leave.

Pheasant, Cream and Mushrooms

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

This is a wild game version of an Italian-American dish called chicken marsala. It's like making pheasant with cream of mushroom soup from scratch, plus a few more ingredients to elevate the dish. While this recipe requires several additional ingredients and steps than dumping a can of soup over pheasant, there's no comparison in flavor.

Servings: 4
Prep Time: 10 minutes
Cooking Time: 30 minutes
Ingredients

- 4 pheasant breasts
- 8 to 10 ounces fresh mushrooms (pictured are chamshell and shimeji)
- 1 large shallot, chopped
- 3 cloves of garlic, minced
- 2 tbsp. of olive oil, divided
- 1 tbsp. of butter
- ½ cup dry Marsala wine
- 1 cup low-sodium game or chicken stock
- ½ cup of heavy cream
- 2 sprigs fresh thyme
- 1 fresh sage leaf, optional
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- Kosher salt
- Freshly cracked pepper
- Chopped flat leaf parsley for garnish

1. Place pheasant breasts inside a zip-top bag or between two sheets of plastic wrap and pound with a meat mallet to even thickness. Lightly sprinkle salt and pepper on both sides of breasts. Set aside.

2. In a large skillet with a lid, add 1 tablespoon of olive oil and warm over medium-high heat. When the oil starts to shimmer, add the mushrooms and sauté until golden. Remove the mushrooms from skillet onto a plate and set aside.

3. Lower heat to medium or medium low and add shallot. Sauté until softened. Then add garlic and stir for 1 minute — do not brown. Add Marsala wine, scraping the bottom of the pan to release browned bits. Simmer and reduce wine by half.

4. In a different skillet, melt butter and 1 tablespoon of olive oil over medium-high heat. In a wide, shallow bowl, combine flour, ½ teaspoon of salt, and freshly cracked pepper to taste. When the oil/butter is hot, coat pheasant breasts in flour and fry on both sides until golden. Then take off heat.

5. After wine is reduced by half, add stock to the sauce and simmer for 2 minutes. Then turn down heat to low and stir in heavy cream, thyme sprigs and sage. Add browned mushrooms and pheasant breasts to the sauce. Cover and simmer for 5 minutes for cream to thicken and pheasant to cook through. Do not allow cream to boil. If sauce becomes thick, loosen with more stock.

Take off heat and season to taste. Garnish with chopped parsley before serving with pasta noodles, orzo, couscous, mashed potatoes or polenta.







The Fungus and the Fly

Story and Photos by Chris Helzer

I'm going to tell you a story about a fungus that attacks and kills flies in an incredible and somewhat creepy way. Before I do that, I want to be sure you're in the right frame of mind to read this, by which I mean that I want you to feel some empathy for the flies. I say that because I'm pretty sure many of you are already thinking, "Well, good! Flies are super annoying."

Sure, some flies can be super annoying. House flies often come into your home, sample your food and buzz around your head and windows. Deer flies, stable flies, horse flies and a few others can give you a painful bite. Mosquitos are flies, too, and we all know about mosquitos.

However, it is estimated that North America has more than 61,000 species of flies, making flies the most diverse group of insects on the continent. Each of those fly species has its own unique lifestyle and set of roles in the ecosystem, and the vast majority do nothing that should annoy you. For example, flies can be pollinators, predators, parasitoids, decomposers and/or root feeders on plants. Many play one role as a larva and another as an adult. House flies, mosquitos and the other aforementioned annoying fly species are not representative of the astonishing diversity of fly species helping to support life on earth.

In other words, flies are important. As are the fungi out there killing them.



This fly was infected and killed by fungus.

Drone flies are important pollinators for many wildflowers.

I want you to feel some empathy for the flies.

About 50 different species of fungi called Entomopthora (Latin for “insect destroyer”) can attack flies. The assault starts when a tiny spore lands on the body of the fly. The spore produces hyphae, which are kind of like the roots of the fungus, and those hyphae grow and branch out into the body of the fly.

As those hyphae move through the fly, the fungus absorbs both water and nutrients from the fly to support its own growth. More importantly, the hyphae eventually work their way through the fly’s body and into its brain, where the fungus takes control. The fungus-operated brain then tells the fly to climb as high as it can on a plant or other structure. Simultaneously, the fungus/fly creates and secretes a glue-like substance that helps the fly anchor itself to its high position once it arrives.

Stuck securely to the top of a plant, full of fungal hyphae, and having lost control of its own brain, the fly then spreads its wings and dies. Soon afterward, sporangia (fruit-like structures) appear on the outside of the fly and, eventually, release their tiny spores. The fly’s elevated position helps ensure those spores travel as far as possible — hopefully, from the fungus’ perspective, getting picked up by a breeze before they hit the ground. Those airborne spores travel through the air and a few of them will likely land on a fly to start the whole process again.

However, while that’s a pretty good strategy, it’s not the only one the fungus can use to infect more flies. Male flies are often drawn to female flies who have recently died from a fungal attack and when they attempt to mate with them, the dumb guys pick up spores. When those male flies subsequently mate with other living females, some of those spores can infect those females as well.

You can see the results of this creepy, cool interaction in a couple of ways. If you keep your eyes peeled out in nature, you might spot a fly sitting unnaturally still at the top of a plant with its wings spread. If you look carefully, you can often see the sporangia, which can look like white bands wrapped around the fly’s abdomen. I think it looks like a bacon-wrapped fly. My wife thinks it looks like the fly is wearing a diaper. Either way, it’s distinctive.

Other times, you might find dead flies, usually house flies, stuck high up on a window. On closer inspection, you might see a small halo of spores on the glass surrounding the carcass. While you’re wiping those spores off the glass, you can congratulate yourself on finding evidence of the continued success of the Entomopthora fungi.

Are these fungal attacks on the flies of the world a good thing? That’s probably the wrong question to ask. Sure, if some of your local house flies get killed and stop buzzing around your house, you might see that as a positive. More broadly, these fungus-fly interactions are just great examples of the mind-boggling complexity of relationships in nature. Complexity builds resilience, and we all rely upon the resilience of nature for our own survival. Like them or not, we need flies to do all the jobs flies can do. That doesn’t mean we want uncontrolled numbers of them, though. Just like spiders and birds, Entomopthora fungi help us keep fly populations in check. They just do it in a creepier way.



The white bands around the abdomen of this fly produce spores that will disperse and infect other flies.

Stuck securely to the top of a plant, full of fungal hyphae, and having lost control of its own brain, the fly then spreads its wings and dies.

Outdoor Nebraska

WHAT TO DO IN OCTOBER

By Jeff Kurrus

Whether hunting, fishing or witnessing autumn's beauty, go outside for what might be Outdoor Nebraska's best month of the year.



Somewhere New

Many seasons ago, a group of friends landed at Grove Lake in October for a cast and blast day. While the casting was great, the fishing was slow, so I took to the adjacent wildlife management area to dove hunt. That afternoon became one of my favorite hunting memories ever, finding doves immediately, and always serves as a reminder to hunt someplace new this year. Pick a spot on the map and try your luck — whether it's for upland, small game, waterfowl or even big game. Sometimes a simple diversion can introduce an entirely new tradition.

JEFF KURRUS



Fly-Fishing Class

On Oct. 10, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. MDT, join members of the Cornhusker Fly Fishers for a one-day fly-fishing and fly-tying class at Chadron State Park. Participants will learn casting and fly-tying basics, and the class will include all fishing equipment, materials and tools. The cost is $25 per person with lunch and refreshments provided. Participants must be 12 years and older and registration is required at Calendar.OutdoorNebraska.gov. Spots are limited.

JUSTIN HAAG



Roadside Color

An after-dinner drive or walk this month, whether from your house or your campsite, is the perfect way to see fall color in Nebraska's state park system. Look at Ponca, Indian Cave, Platte River and Mahoney state parks in the east and Fort Robinson and Chadron in the west from the seat of your vehicle.

JEFF KURRUS



Fishing the Fall

As fish pack on pounds this fall, make sure you're on the water. I understand that the smell of recently spent shotgun shells is intoxicating, but so is the sight of a rod bending double. Where you find baitfish, you will find bigger fish. Now is not the time to sit in one spot trying to draw a fish to you. Move quickly, either by land or boat, to find lunkers in search of food before winter.

ERIC FOWLER



A Calamus Halloween

Celebrate Halloween at Calamus State Recreation Area on Saturday, Oct. 17, for the park's 38th annual Pumpkin Carvers Event. Activities begin at 9:30 a.m., including pumpkin carving, games and a pumpkin rolling derby on the west side of the shower house area at the Homestead Knolls campground. While a limited number of pumpkins will be provided, visitors are encouraged to bring their own. The celebration concludes after dark with a pumpkin display, decorated campsites and trick-or-treating. Find information on other Halloween events throughout the state at Calendar.OutdoorNebraska.gov.

ERIC FOWLER

Camp Spook at Alexandria

Story and Photos by Eric Fowler

Lorna Thomas, Addison Paul and Layne Wolfe man a guillotine along a haunted walk through the woods in the west campground during the annual Camp Spook Halloween event at Alexandria State Recreation Area.

In 2013, inspired by an event they saw at a lake in Kansas, area residents hosted the first Camp Spook to celebrate Halloween at Alexandria State Recreation Area in Jefferson County.

Just eight recreational vehicles showed up that first year, and not many more the next. The past five years, however, has seen attendance boom, making it the busiest weekend the quiet park sees all year.

Campers now start rolling into the park on Tuesday to snap up the best sites, with some coming from as far away as Lincoln and Kansas. Nearly all the campsites in both of the park's campgrounds are filled with RVs by Saturday morning. Most sport decorations ranging from simple lights, pumpkins and inflatables to animatronic monsters and smoke-filled tunnels of terror, all to the delight of hundreds of trick-or-treaters who arrive from Bruning, Hebron, Meridian and other nearby towns to get an early start on gathering free sweets.



A young trick-or-treater gets an up-close look at an animatronic ghoul gracing a campsite at Alexandria SRA.



Visitors had to walk through a smoky tunnel to get treats at this campsite.



A trail connecting two sections of the west campground at Alexandria becomes a haunted walk through the woods during Camp Spook.



Alexandria SRA has become a hotspot for campers looking to dole out treats and trick-or-treaters wanting to load up on candy.



Not all campsites are decorated with ghouls and goblins. This one carries a theme of Charles Schultz' Peanuts classic television special, "It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown."



Daniel Durflinger and Brent and Layne Wolfe man their butcher's table along the haunted walk through the woods.

Shelia Durflinger of Bruning organizes the event, having taken over for a family member in 2019 after being a participant for a few years. She works with other families to create a haunted walk through the woods on a trail connecting two sections of the park's west campground. There, visitors might find their heart skip a beat when someone jumps out of a bush or from behind a tree, be begged for help from someone strapped in a guillotine or grossed out by the body parts on the butcher's table.

"It's just a lot of fun," Durflinger said. "We've been doing it since our kids were little. They really get into it and like helping, and they liked trick-or-treating. Now they like being the scarers.

"I live in the country, so no one comes to my house trick-or-treating and no one gets to see my decorations, so I take them to Alex for a weekend and let everybody see them."

Whether you enjoy watching smiles on the faces of your children as they roam the campgrounds in costume, or like passing out candy to those smiling faces in front of your camper, Alexandria SRA is a bloody good place to be on a Saturday night in late October.

BEYOND PHEASANTS

ONE GAME BIRD'S IMPACT ON GRASSLAND CONSERVATION

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

Hunters walk across a Conservation Reserve Program field in northeastern Nebraska. JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY

Opening day felt like a holiday. In rural towns, cars lined both sides of Main Street. People traveled from across the state, and across the country, to hunt this iconic bird of the Midwest. Wherever upland habitat existed, swaths of canvas and wool plaid were sure to follow. And the excitement didn't end with opening day. During its heyday, pheasant hunting was as synonymous with Nebraska as Cornhusker football.

It was a fall tradition that brought family and friends together. It gave those who had moved away a reason to come home, and it boosted the economies of small towns. For many, those memories remain vivid, and the nostalgia is still palpable.

While there's no denying the landscape has changed, there is much to reflect on this 100th pheasant hunting season. More than a symbol of our sporting heritage, the ring-necked pheasant has become a measure of the resilience of our native grasslands. These birds remind us that while much has been lost, there is still much opportunity to be had.



Nebraskaland artist "Bud" Pritchard hunts pheasants in the early 1960s. NEBRASKALAND PHOTO LIBRARY



Will Stricker, left, poses with four other hunters, unknown, in the Frederick Hotel in Loup City during one of Nebraska's first pheasant seasons. PHOTO COURTESY OF LARRY JONES

A NATURALIZED BIRD

The ring-necked pheasant is not native to North America. The first successful introductions occurred in Oregon's Willamette Valley in the 1880s, and the bird's popularity as a game species quickly spread across the country. With little regulation at the time, Nebraskans embraced the opportunity, capturing wild pheasants and releasing them throughout the state. By 1892, newspapers reported that the birds had established a foothold in eastern Nebraska, according to Lonnie Shafer, author of "Nebraska Pheasant Introduction 101."

Much like their native habitat in Asia, pheasants flourished in Nebraska's mosaic of small grain fields, native grasslands and wetlands. This blend of diverse, small-operation farms and natural cover created ideal conditions for the birds to thrive. Abundant small fields of grains, such as wheat and sorghum, provided cover and preferred food sources, while nearby grasslands and wetlands offered secure nesting cover, plentiful insects to fuel chick growth and critical shelter during harsh winter weather.

In 1927, the Bureau of Game and Fish — now the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission — established Nebraska's first pheasant hunting season. According to the April issue of "Outdoor Nebraska" that year, each hunter was allowed a limit of five male pheasants in all of Wheeler County and portions of Sherman County, where the birds had become especially abundant. The inaugural season lasted three days, Oct. 6–8, and drew about 2,000 hunters who harvested roughly 5,000 birds.

This noninvasive, naturalized bird continued to succeed across the state, assimilating with the landscape as though it had always been there. Pheasant hunting in Nebraska reached its initial peak in mid-1940s, and, after a steep decline, peaked again in the early 1960s thanks



A ring-necked pheasant stands in a crop field in Dawes County. JUSTIN HAAG



Pheasant hunters return to their vehicles during the 2013 Pheasants Forever Rooster Road Trip. PF representatives hunted Holt and Antelope counties during their visit to Nebraska. JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY

to the federal Soil Bank Program, which paid farmers to idle cropland, resulting in ideal pheasant habitat and the golden years of bird hunting.

But in the decades that followed, land managers began to observe a steady decline in bird numbers, a trend that coincided with sweeping changes in agricultural land-use and farming practices. Populations rebounded following the introduction of the Conservation Reserve Program in 1985, but by the mid-1990s, as those grasslands aged or land was returned to production, pheasant numbers again began to decline. That has continued as enrollment in general CRP, what pheasant hunters know as prime habitat, has dropped from 1.3 million acres in 2007 to 321,000 acres today.

In more recent years, woody encroachment and urban sprawl have also impacted the state's remaining grasslands.

Unbeknownst to early conservationists, this once-exotic, colorful bird would become the poster child for upland conservation.

A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

"We call pheasants an 'umbrella species' because what's good for them is good for others," said Nebraska Game and Parks Wildlife Biologist Bryan O'Connor, explaining that good pheasant habitat also benefits native species such as bobwhite quail, songbirds, grouse, deer, turkey and pollinators.

Upland conservation efforts reach far beyond one game bird, he said, but it's been an uphill struggle.

Advancements in agricultural technology post-World War II, such as genetically modified crops, modern herbicides and the invention of center-pivot irrigation, dramatically increased productivity and transformed the rural landscape. Those changes accelerated in the 1970s under Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz, whose "Get Big or Get Out" philosophy encouraged farmers to abandon small-scale farming to maximize yield through large-scale monoculture. A patchwork of small crop and hay fields and pastures, and the fencelines separating them, was replaced with huge expanses of corn and soybeans.

Furthermore, the encroachment of woody plants also poses a grave and immediate threat to our state's remaining grasslands. The rapid expansion of eastern red cedar has engulfed large areas of prairie and ranchland in short order, deteriorating grassland ecosystems and displacing the grasses and wildflowers grazed by wildlife and livestock.

BERGGREN PHEASANT PLAN

By the 1980s, the alarm bell had been rung, spurring the creation of Pheasants Forever, Inc. in Saint Paul, Minnesota, by a group of concerned hunters and conservationists. A new kind of conservation organization had been born, one with a unique local chapter model that would raise money and decide how funds would be spent in their communities, shared PF Nebraska Senior State Coordinator Kelsi Wehrman.

This grassroots model spread to Nebraska in 1986 with the formation of the Elkhorn Valley PF Chapter. Rightfully nicknamed "The Habitat Organization," Pheasants Forever began working with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission in the early 1990s to develop programs that would restore pheasant habitat and increase hunting opportunities — a partnership that continues today.

Then in 2016, Game and Parks' new Berggren Pheasant Plan expanded existing Focus on Pheasants conservation initiatives on a statewide level. Its second iteration in 2022 also changed how the agency would communicate with the public about pheasant hunting opportunities and included an R3 (Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation) component to help increase hunter participation.

Research was another part of the Berggren Pheasant Plan. In cooperation with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, researchers are helping to prioritize future habitat restoration efforts by increasing their cost-effectiveness and maximizing benefits to pheasants and other wildlife. Since 2016, 141,250 acres, both public and private, have been impacted through the plan.

Still — you would be hard pressed to find a farm bill biologist who would feign blind optimism.

"When you think about the things pheasants need to survive, there are so many things working against them," said John Laux, PF Habitat Protection Programs manager. "Once a welcomed by-product of early agricultural practices, our pheasant population now lives off the scraps of remaining habitat where it's tough to make a living."

According to Laux, the solution is finding those "win-win" conservation actions that simultaneously benefit private landowners and wildlife.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LANDOWNERS

Many landowners care about conservation. That is the simple truth. The reality is, the economic decisions that farmers make today are much more complex than they once were, said Alicia Hardin, Game and Parks wildlife division administrator.

Yet, in a state where more than 97% of land is privately owned, the future of conservation is truly in the hands of landowners. Conservation interests such as Game and Parks, Pheasants Forever, the Rainwater Basin Joint Venture and the Nebraska Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit are focused on connecting with landowners open to collaboration.

Often, these landowners hunted pheasants when they were children and want to see the birds make a comeback. Or a landowner has unprofitable acres that they can no longer farm because the land is too wet or the soil is too concentrated with nitrates, and it makes more sense to enroll it with the Conservation Reserve Program. Some have no interest in hunting, but they want to see wildlife and an ecosystem that's working in harmony on their property, O'Connor said.

Even ranchers who are looking to slow the encroachment of eastern red cedar to maintain quality rangeland for their cattle may often find alignment with conservation goals.

Whether it's working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, a Natural Resources Conservation Service program or one of Game and Parks' programs, biologists try to find ways to help incentivize habitat work.

These are landowners who are asking, "What could we do?" Hardin said. "We're listening to their stories and connecting them with ways that they can do conservation work on the ground. ... It often starts just with their interest because they have a history on that land."

Landowners can also earn income by providing walk-in hunting access by enrolling their lands in Game and Parks' Open Fields and Waters Program. Contracts last one to five years, and landowners receive payment each year for providing this access. Lands located within focus areas of the Berggren Pheasant Plan and/or lands where habitat work is being done may qualify for bonus payments.

"When 40% of surveyed pheasant hunters use OFW properties, providing a place to hunt is critical to sustain pheasant hunting in Nebraska," said Adam Kester, Game and Parks' access program manager. In 2025, the OFW Program provided public access on 471,646 acres of private land, including 91,877 acres of CRP and 30,535 acres of small grain stubble.

Whether it is habitat work or providing access, interested landowners can contact their nearest Game and Parks office to get connected with a biologist.



Marissa Jensen of Omaha hunts with her German shorthaired pointer on Open Fields and Waters land near Crab Orchard. JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY

> ***"As we come to the 100th pheasant season in Nebraska, one truth has remained constant: Our landowners are the heart of this tradition. Thank you for the care you put into your land, the habitat you conserve and the legacy you help carry forward. Nebraska's pheasant season exists because of you."***
>
> — **Alicia Hardin**, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission wildlife division administrator



The first Nebraska Game Commission habitat stamp from 1977 was illustrated by Game and Parks artist Duane Westerholt.

GET YOUR HABITAT STAMP

Why should someone who will never shoulder a shotgun or set foot in the field care about pheasants? Among those who may spend little time outdoors, concerns about disappearing grasslands may seem distant.

Yet the story of the pheasant is about far more than hunting. It is also the story about the health of the land we live on. According to the World Resources Institute, healthy grasslands sustain people in vital ways, including:

- Filtering the water we drink.
- Providing habitat for pollinators that improve crop production on nearby farmland.
- Building healthy soils by cycling nutrients through extensive root systems, and by providing a home to beneficial microbes and fungi.
- Absorbing excess rainfall, slowing runoff into streams and rivers, and helping reduce flood risk.
- Stabilizing soil with deep root systems that prevent erosion, reduce runoff and allow rainwater to soak into the ground and replenish groundwater supplies.

Grasslands are the most threatened biomes on Earth. More than 90% of North America's tallgrass prairies have been lost. "Yet despite all this, grasslands receive disproportionately little protection, funding and attention in global conservation and climate agendas," stated the WRI.

To help conserve Nebraska grasslands, purchase a Game and Parks Habitat Stamp, which funds the conservation, lease and management of wildlife habitats across the state. While hunters are required to purchase an annual stamp along with the purchase of a hunting permit, nonhunters can purchase the stamp as a standalone.



Rooster pheasant, over-under shotgun and 20 gauge shells. JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY



A pheasant flushes for Calandra McCool of Omaha during a Becoming an Outdoors-Woman hunt in Bartlett. Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

A TRADITION WORTH KEEPING

Pheasant hunting is not like sitting for deer on leased property or, if a hunter is fortunate, walking family-owned ground. And it's not dropping thousands of dollars to hunt a trophy bull elk in another state. Upland hunting is something anyone can do: all you need is a shotgun and a pair of boots.

"Upland bird hunting opens up the whole state to you as far as opportunity goes. I can pursue prairie grouse, pheasants and quail throughout different parts of the state for five months out of the year," Laux said. "Fortunately, there are still strongholds of habitat throughout Nebraska and in nearby states that allow people to still have that sense of exploration."

And while Laux no longer has time to scout and sit in a deer stand every morning as a working father with young children, upland hunting still fits in with his "crazy" schedule. He can go walk a field at any time of day for a couple of hours, plus the season is long.

Pheasant hunting is attainable, which makes it worth preserving for bringing along the next generations of hunters. It's a tradition that keeps people connected to the land, and when people are connected to the land, it gives them opportunities to become aware of conservation concerns they would not have known otherwise.

On this 100th pheasant season, Pheasants Forever and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission look forward to a future of securing conservation wins.

"Where can we find common ground to create habitat?" Laux asked. "As the landscape evolves, we have opportunities before us to find innovative ways to provide that habitat, to create those benefits and to ensure the tradition continues."



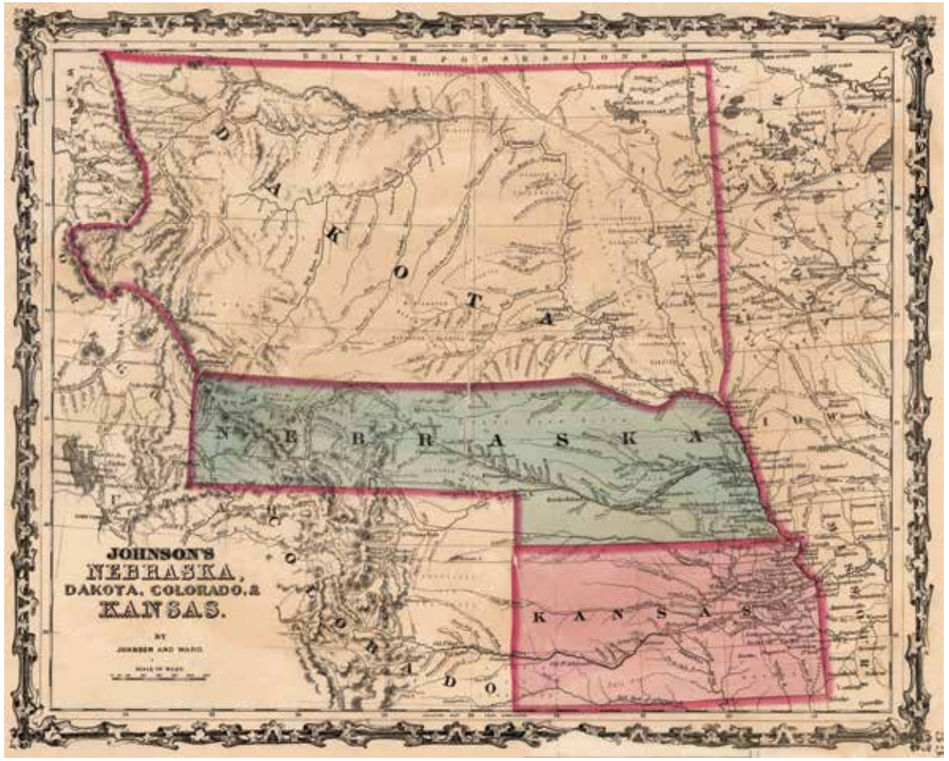
A graphic commemorates the 100th Pheasant Season. It is available as a sticker to all Upland Slam participants.



SHERMAN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.



Nebraska Territory's original boundaries, in 1857, stretched from Kansas to Canada. NSHS M782 1857 R26



The "Long Panhandle" of 1861-1863 stretched nearly to Fort Bridger, Wyoming. NSHS M782 1862 J62

Nebraska's Changing Boundaries

By David L. Bristow, Nebraska State Historical Society

Nebraska's land is ancient, but its boundaries are relatively new. Our borders went through several changes before the state took on its present distinctive shape. Even today, our state line has several odd quirks.

"Nebraska," based on an Otoe name meaning "flat water," began as the name of a river. Native tribes had their own homelands and hunting grounds, which shifted over time as various groups entered the region and competed for territory and influence. From the perspective of the expanding United States, present-day Nebraska was first considered part of Louisiana Territory, then Missouri Territory and then "unorganized territory."

When Congress formally organized Nebraska Territory in 1854, it split off Kansas from what was originally going to be Nebraska's southern portion. These borders were imaginary lines on paper as far as Native peoples were concerned, but the lines were the first step in a process of treaty-making, coerced land sales and dispossession in the new territory. In 1857, government surveyors began formally marking the territory's southern boundary and dividing the land into the square-mile grid that is followed to this day by roads and fence lines.

No one thought Nebraska's expansive boundaries would be permanent. The first slices were carved away in 1861, just before the Civil War began. The founding of Colorado and Dakota Territories left Nebraska with a curiously long panhandle until its western tip was given to Idaho Territory two years later.

Even then, Nebraska maps from the next two decades don't look quite right. Due to a widely copied mapmaker's error, most maps during the first decade of statehood show several western counties that never actually existed. But the early state maps correctly showed the Niobrara and Keya Paha rivers forming part of the state's northern boundary. Present-day Boyd County, Nebraska, was transferred from Dakota Territory in 1882.

The U.S. Supreme Court made further adjustments in an 1892 ruling that led to several border oddities. Officially, the Missouri River forms the state's eastern border. But the river would not stay put. Its alluvial banks eroded quickly, allowing the channel to shift over time. Normally state boundaries follow these gradual changes, but in 1877 the river cut a fresh channel across a bend in the river. Suddenly, a new oxbow lake and a chunk of Iowa land lay west of the river. Nebraska and Iowa both claimed it. The court ruled that in such circumstances the state line does not change. That is why today the most direct route from downtown Omaha to Eppley Airfield passes briefly through Carter Lake, Iowa.

The same legal principle has left portions of Nebraska east of the river surrounded by Iowa — for example, at DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge — and Missouri, across from the town of Peru, and at a few other places. Meanwhile, boaters traveling the length of Lewis and Clark Lake will cross the Nebraska-South Dakota state line multiple times while following the winding channel of the Missouri River, which maintains its legal existence even while submerged in a reservoir.



The new state of Nebraska in 1867. North of the Niobrara, the future Boyd County is still in Dakota Territory, while the counties of the panhandle and southwest represent proposed counties that were never adopted. NSHS M782 1867 M69



The new Boyd County in 1892.
NSHS M782 1892 R15



Detail of an 1878 Omaha map shows the old and new channels at present-day Carter Lake, Iowa. The legal dispute between Iowa and Nebraska dragged on for years. NSHS M78238 1878 R72 C1

Learn more at the NSHS's website at history.nebraska.gov

Beyond the Colorful Canopy

at Indian Cave State Park

Story and Photos by
Gerry Steinauer, Botanist

The leaves of ironwood, a common understory tree at Indian Cave State Park, turn soft golden yellow and rusty brown in late October.



A bloom lingers on an American bellflower, a common wildflower of eastern Nebraska woodlands. Individual plants bloom from July through early October, and this extended bloom period helps ensure pollination.





The beauty of the understory cannot be appreciated from a car or overlook. It must be experienced on foot, walking slowly with eyes alert.



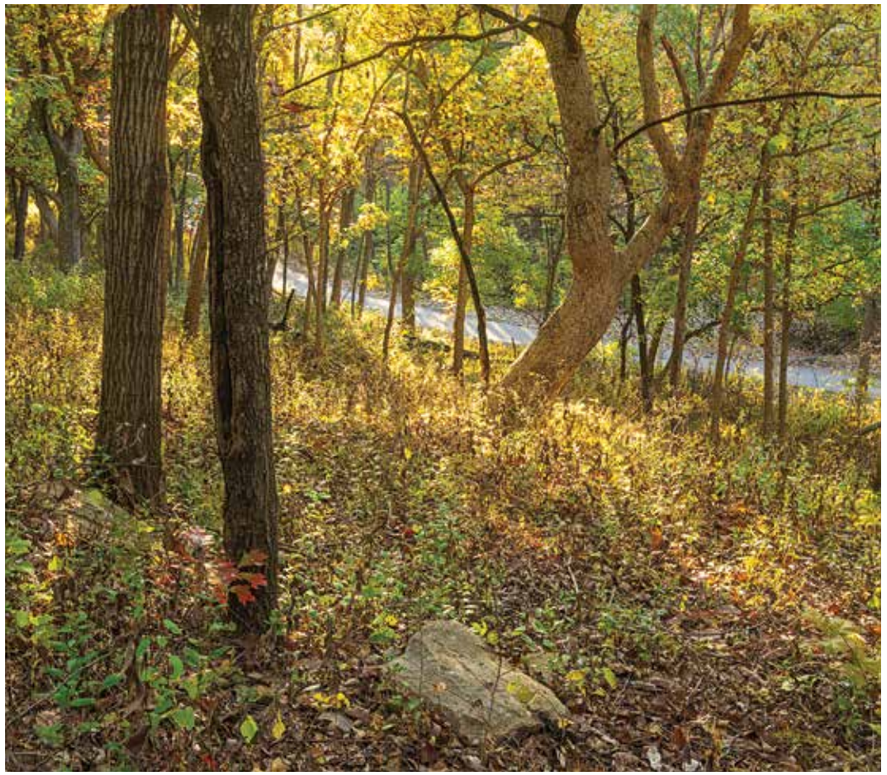
Coralberry is a short shrub growing in southeastern Nebraska woodlands and pastures. Its beautiful red berries ripen in late summer and early fall. They persist on plants well into winter and are eaten by many bird species.



ABOVE: Maidenhair fern is common at Indian Cave State Park, where it forms dense colonies in damp, shaded woodlands. Its name comes from its slender, shiny black stems, which supposedly resemble a maiden's hair.

TOP LEFT: Horse gentian, not a true gentian, is an uncommon wildflower of far eastern Nebraska woodlands. Its berries occur in small clusters in the leaf axils in early fall. During wartime shortages, the berries were dried, roasted and brewed as a bitter coffee substitute.

BOTTOM LEFT: The ripe, fleshy seeds of blackberry lily. Native to eastern Asia and often planted as an ornamental, the plant belongs to the iris family but has large, orange, lily-like flowers. Plants in Indian Cave woodlands likely escaped from plantings around old farmsteads that once occurred here.







OPPOSITE TOP: Wildflowers, shrubs and grasses on the woodland floor at Indian Cave State Park are in their full autumn glory, highlighted by the soft early morning sunlight.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Although often overlooked, the park's tallgrass prairie openings also display a show of autumn hues.

LEFT: Pear-shaped puffballs grow from a decaying log. This small mushroom appears from summer through fall and sometimes into early winter. Its spores are released through the top pore.

October transforms Indian Cave State Park into one of Nebraska's finest displays of fall color, with nearly 2,000 acres of deciduous woodlands blanketing the steep bluffs overlooking the Missouri River.

Autumn's transition begins with the sunshine yellows of ash, walnut and hickory, then gives way to the muted reds and browns of oaks. Visitors arrive from far and wide to take in the grandeur of the tall trees in their full glory. But there is more to see. Hidden beneath the colorful canopy is another layer of beauty: the diverse understory, also in transition.

Like the canopy above, the leaves of shrubs, vines and wildflowers create their own mosaic of color. Nearby hillside prairies display a range of yellows, oranges, bronzes and crimsons, with each color often reflecting a different grass or wildflower. The observant might still find a few late wildflowers in bloom or their ripe fruits still clinging to the plants. Or scan fallen logs and the forest floor, where cooling temperatures signal many mushroom species to emerge. Among the most eye-catching are purplish webcaps, named for the delicate web-like veil covering their gills, pear-shaped puffballs and the large, orange shelves of chicken of the woods growing from the bases of trees.

The beauty of the understory cannot be appreciated from a car or overlook. It must be experienced on foot, walking slowly with eyes alert. When you find a gem, sit down on the soft earth, study it closely and enjoy the moment. Perhaps you pick up a fallen elm leaf, hold it to the sunlight and take in the near-fluorescent colors woven between its netted veins. Or gently squeeze a mature puffball and watch a mist of spores drift from its pore into the quiet autumn air.

The towering trees may draw people to Indian Cave in October, but some of its finest autumn beauty is hidden beneath their branches.

SOME VISITORS DON'T REQUIRE A RESERVATION

Ghost Stories from the Parks

Edited by Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley



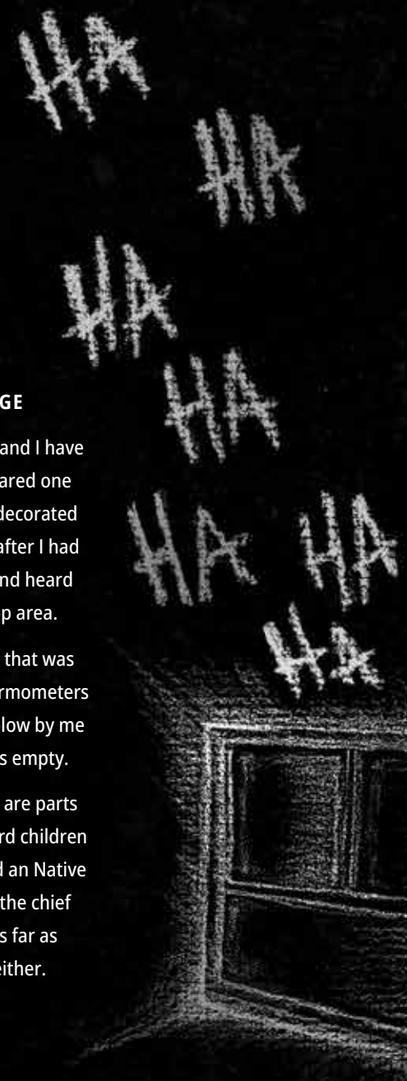
Ghost Walker

CHADRON STATE PARK

My dad passed away Sept. 16, 2009, and my wife and I had rented cabin No. 2 in mid-October. Early one morning, I got up to take our dog out. With my back turned away from the road below, I heard a cough. When I turned in the dim light, I saw a figure walking on the road. He was wearing a dark hat, coat and khaki pants, an outfit my dad wore quite often. I watched in stunned silence as that figure walked out of my sight and behind some trees.

Chadron State Park was one of my dad's favorite places, and we stayed there together on occasion. I even have a picture of him fishing for trout at the pond. I wasn't spooked by what I experienced, only thinking that was Dad's way of telling me he was in a good place.

~ **John Adams,** *Papillion*



Little Kid Laughing

MAHONEY STATE PARK - PETER KIEWIT LODGE

I worked the overnight shift at the lodge for a few years, and I have seen several ghosts, but the one that really chills me appeared one night during the Christmas season when the lodge was all decorated with garlands and Christmas trees. That night near 3 a.m., after I had gotten all my night work done, I was sitting on the couch and heard a crash — followed by laughing coming from the gift shop area.

I went to where I heard the crash and found the garland that was around the window pulled down and a couple of Galileo thermometers knocked over. I heard the laughing again and felt a breeze blow by me but never saw anything. The entire lodge, save for me, was empty.

Most everyone who works at Mahoney knows that there are parts of the park where spirits and ghosts hang around. I had heard children playing before and have seen both Confederate soldiers and an Native American chief standing at the top of the stairs. We guess the chief was from the Otoe tribe, but no one knows which one. As far as the soldiers and children, no one knows who they are either.

~ **Julianna Leighton,** *Administrative Specialist*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY RYAN HOLT

Two Strangers, One Caboose

TWO RIVERS STATE RECREATION AREA

Normally, when I hear a spooky story, I tend to lean on the more skeptical side of things. That said, I've also had my own share of strange encounters that cannot be explained.

Two Rivers is home to 10 of the ever-popular, retired Union Pacific cabooses that have been renovated into a unique lodging experience for folks to enjoy from mid-April until the end of September. Managing these cabooses can be challenging at times, requiring a great deal of time, personnel and resources in addition to a duteous staff to keep them clean and running properly. Among the staff, we have had not one, but two separate housekeepers who believed caboose No. 2 is haunted.

These housekeepers both claimed they had doors close behind them, light switches flicked on or off on their own, heard disembodied whispers and footsteps, and had the ever-present sensation of unease like they were being watched inside the unit.

Two Rivers has been my "home" since 2009, and I have been in that caboose countless times. I have never experienced anything spooky or strange in caboose No. 2. However, these two housekeepers do not even know each other. In fact, they worked at Two Rivers three seasons apart.

It is certainly enough to make the imagination run wild. Is there some old railroad worker dwelling there who refuses to retire? Do we have a spiritual caboose squatter and if so, will one of our brave conservation officers come ask them to leave?

~ **Kirk Pawloski,** *Park Superintendent*





Little Boy Blood

FORT ROBINSON STATE PARK

In early October a few years ago, my family booked two campsites at Soldier Creek Campground, and the fall leaf change was absolutely magical. Almost every evening, we took the road across the creek, using the footbridge as the creek was still flowing pretty good, and walked past the cemetery to do a loop and pass by the new playground.

One evening toward the end of our stay, we had just crossed the footbridge during twilight and were walking under the giant cottonwoods toward the cemetery fence when my 4- year-old daughter looked up and casually asked, "Mom, why does that boy have blood on his face?" She pointed over behind the brambles and trees on the far side of the road. No one else saw anyone.

We hightailed it back to the campground! The next day, we all went to the museum and searched for any little boys that might have died at the fort and came across a few likely little ones. We did not go into the cemetery to inspect headstones, but there may be a poor little boy wandering around the park looking for playmates. N

~ **Katy Kuhnel,** *Creede, Colorado*

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Mixed Bag

Mysterious Millipedes: These invertebrates participate in mass migrations each year, and scientists are not entirely sure why. Learn more on page 56. BRIANNA NUGENT



Millipede Migration

By Brianna Nugent,
Community Science Program Manager



Traveling cherry millipede. BRIANNA NUGENT

Animals migrate to search for food, water or breeding grounds, and iconic species like sandhill cranes and monarch butterflies are familiar. However, the mini migrations that take place on the ground at night during spring, late summer and fall are lesser known. For reasons that still are not completely understood, millipedes have been observed traveling in groups by the thousands under the cover of darkness — something I witnessed for the first time recently.

A Sci-fi Moment

While assisting with bird banding field trips in the fall at Chadron State Park a few years ago, I went outside to enjoy the evening on my first night staying in one of the cozy, rustic cabins. It was a clear night with a slight chill in the air, and as darkness fell, a heavy blanket of deep blue studded with shimmering stars covered the sky. But — as my luck would have it — I couldn't just have this peaceful night play out like I had envisioned.

While attempting to grab something from inside the cabin, I discovered that I had been locked out and my key was sitting on the table. As I was trying to figure out a game plan, I made another discovery: Hundreds of tiny millipedes began marching across the porch, making their way straight for my front door. It looked like a scene from a sci-fi movie.

I eventually got back into the cabin through an open window and found that they had gotten inside. I ended up covering the small space under the door with a towel, and by morning, the porch was completely void of marching millipedes. I released the few that had managed to get inside the cabin.

This bizarre phenomenon sparked a series of questions that sucked me into an internet rabbit hole on all things related to mass millipede movements.

What Triggers Millipede Migrations?

Millipedes are long, cylindrical or flat invertebrates that are closely related to lobsters and crayfish. Their name translates to "thousands of feet," despite most species having less than a hundred legs. Millipedes are harmless to humans and spend their time in moist soils underneath logs and leaf litter, breaking down organic matter and improving soil health. Since they are typically nocturnal with their active window falling between dusk and dawn, you may have never seen one.

Researchers still have a lot to learn about millipedes and their behaviors, but it is believed that certain factors may trigger these migrations. Excessive rain or extreme droughts, breeding seasons, resource competition or habitat disruption are all potential factors that could cause these spikes in movement. As the fall chill begins to set in during September and October, millipedes may be seeking out quarters to hibernate and overwinter, leading to increases in these nightly migrations.

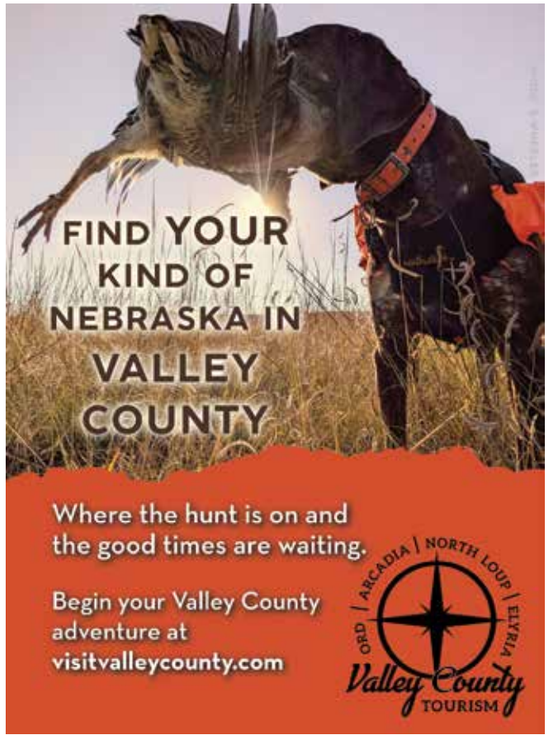
Tips for Keeping Them Out

While I love finding millipedes, I don't necessarily want droves of them in my home. If you've had millipede home invasions, look for entry points, such as underneath doors or other small openings, and avoid using insecticides as they are virtually ineffective in this scenario.

Instead, install weather strips under garage doors to keep millipedes and other insects from seeking shelter in your space.

Also, organic matter that stays moist and can provide shelter, such as leaf litter and mulch, should be moved away from your foundation to deter millipedes from establishing around your home.







Minute Pirate Bugs: More Painful Than an Actual Pirate

By Kyle Koch, Department of Entomology, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

If you're outside in the fall, you've probably experienced it. The painful, relentless bites by some tiny black bug that seems much too small to deliver a bite so terrible. The offenders responsible for so much aggravation in the fall are known as minute pirate bugs. And after a day of dealing with their bites, one can understand why these little bugs have a name that sounds rather villainous.

Minute pirate bugs are only about 5 millimeters long as adults and can be recognized by their oval-shaped, black-and-white body. The bugs have three life stages: egg, nymph and adult. From eggs the bugs will hatch into wingless nymphs, which develop through five instars, each increasingly larger, before maturing into adults. The whole process from egg to adult takes three weeks. Although mostly noticed in the fall, minute pirate bugs are present throughout the growing season, producing multiple generations each year.

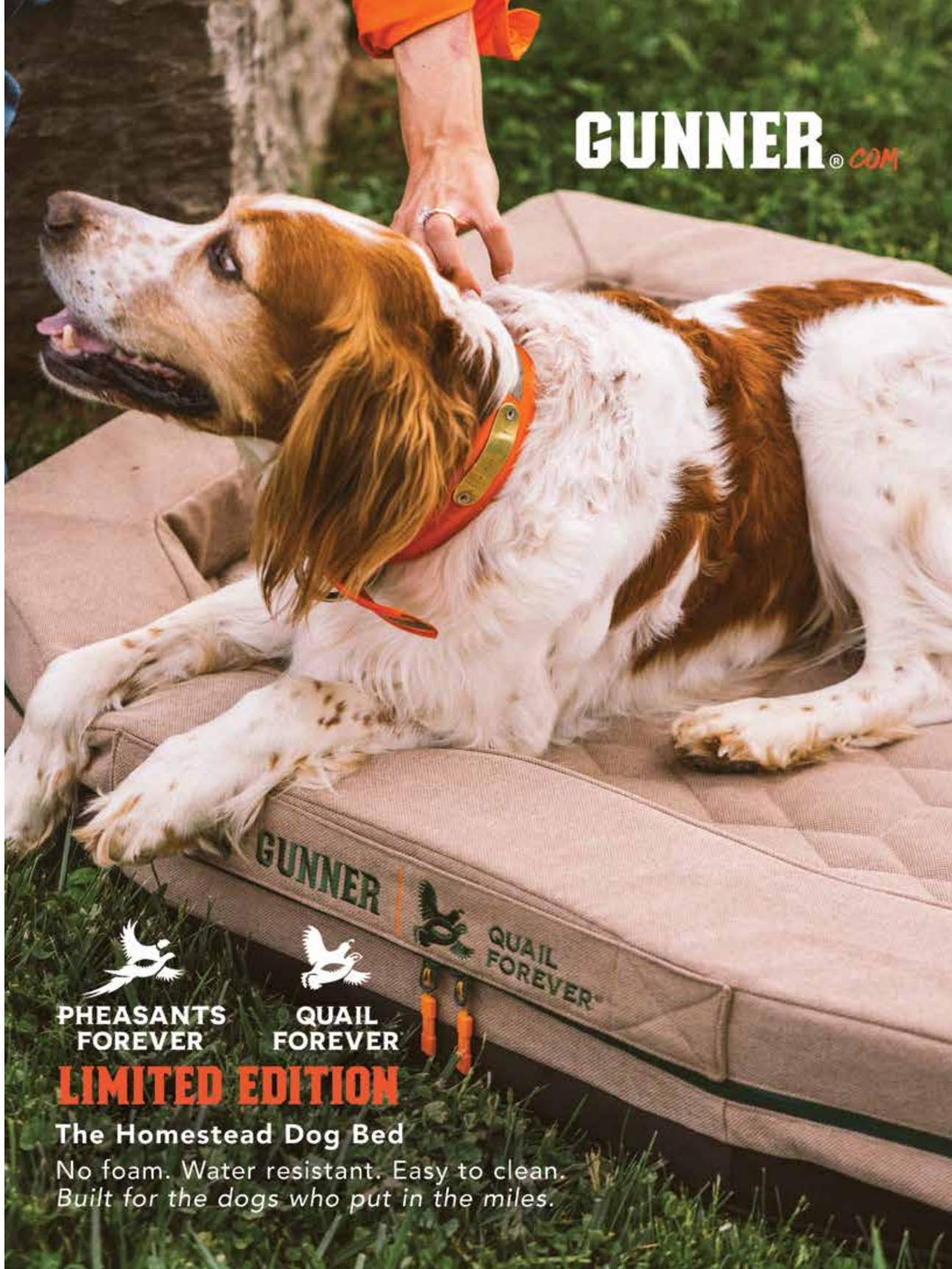
Minute pirate bugs are beneficial as generalist predators in both the nymph and adult stages, feeding on a variety of soft-bodied insects such as thrips, caterpillars, mites and aphids. In fact, some species are even reared and used commercially in some settings as a biological control agent for some common pests. As predators, they are quite aggressive, grabbing and holding prey with their front legs before using their syringe-like beak to puncture and suck out the juices from the prey's body.



Photo by David G. James, Washington State University

However, as fall sets in and prey starts to become scarcer, minute pirate bugs start to wander in search of a meal. Unfortunately, this sometimes leads to these bugs jabbing their beak into the skin of a person. When this probing happens, nothing is injected or ingested, but the physical puncture is what causes the pain.

Because these bites are the result of incidental encounters rather than a specific attraction to humans, insect repellents like DEET do not provide any deterrence for minute pirate bugs. Light colors do seem to be more attractive to minute pirate bugs, so wearing dark-colored clothing with long sleeves may help reduce bites. Luckily, the problem is usually relatively short-lived, and the bugs eventually go away with cooling temperatures.



Nebraska's Conservation Politician — Sandra Scofield

By Julie Thomas

Sandra Scofield describes herself as a farm kid who grew up on a ranch in western Nebraska, where she showed 4-H sheep, played in the creek and hunted for agates and horned lizards. Outdoor explorations were in the form of regular family outings. Her mother taught her about plants and animals while they hiked the Pine Ridge. Her uncle took her trout fishing. And her father often loaded her in the truck to help check cattle in the field. She especially enjoyed following behind his Graham-Hoeme Chisel Plow, which was designed to leave crop residue to manage for wind erosion — and helped to uncover arrowheads.



As the story goes, this farm kid didn't choose a political career — it chose her. While pursuing a teaching degree at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, one required government course assignment sent her to the Nebraska State Capitol to track a bill. While there, she went on a brief tour with the clerk of the legislature and interacted with several senators. Although the bill she picked never made it to the floor for discussion, the experience prompted her to believe she might go into politics when she was older, richer and more well-connected. However, the opportunity came much sooner than she expected.

In 1983, while working as a career counselor at Chadron State College, Bob Kerry tapped Scofield to manage his 1983 gubernatorial campaign in northwestern Nebraska. When Kerry won, he appointed her to fill a newly opened seat in the 49th legislative district.

Then in 1991, the newly elected Nebraska Gov. Ben Nelson asked Scofield to serve in his administration as chief of staff and special assistant to oversee the state's budget and policy offices beginning in 1992.

Soon after, Scofield began her legislative work, encouraged by northwestern Nebraskans who wanted her to introduce a bill for strict mining regulation; these concerned citizens worried that uranium mining might contaminate groundwater.

"I had to educate myself and then educate colleagues on an issue none of us knew anything about," she said.

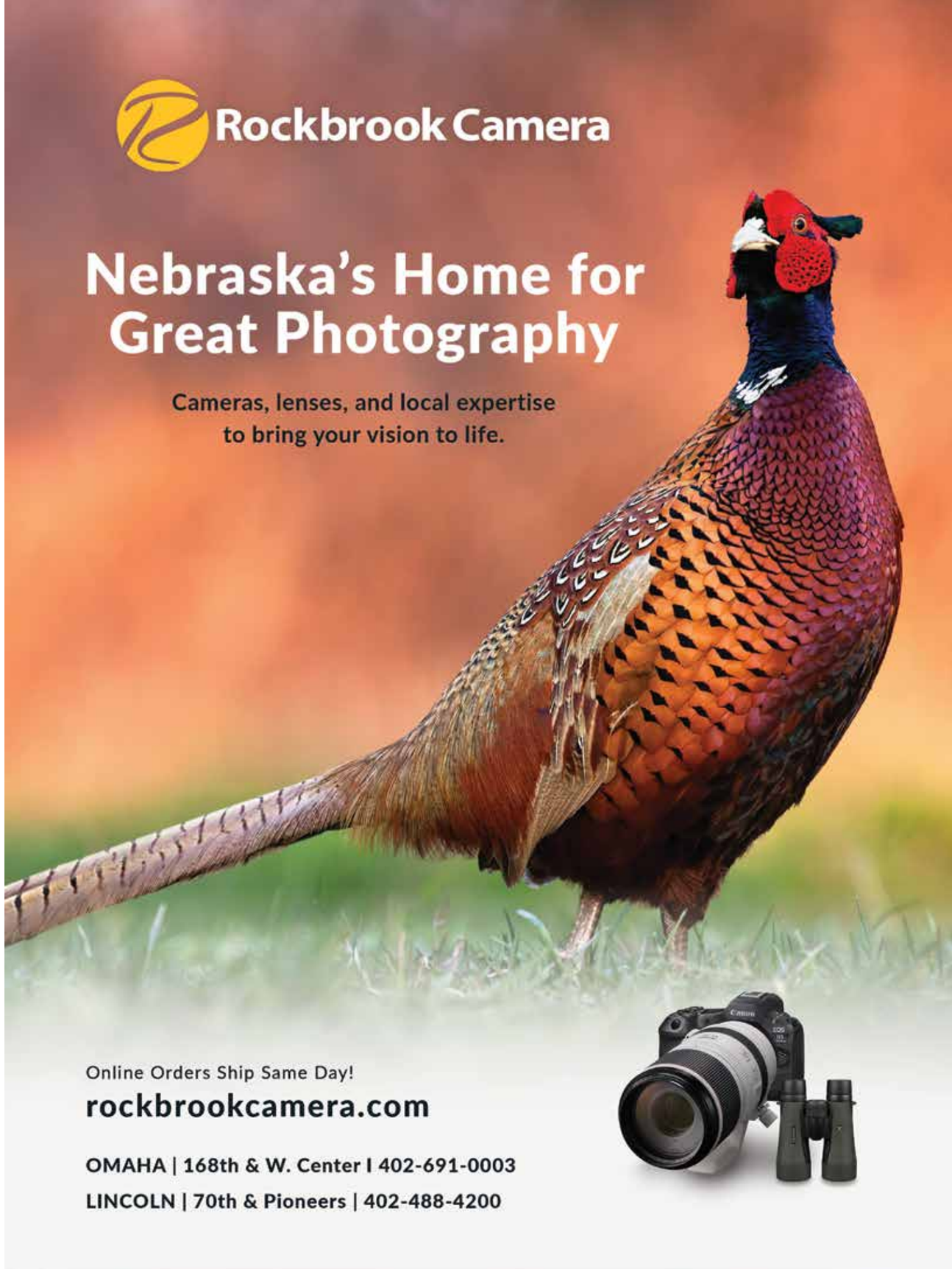
Just as she was learning who she was — and the political role she would play — a news reporter questioned Scofield's concerns by asking, "Are you an environmentalist?"

"Well ..." Scofield answered, "if an environmentalist is somebody who thinks they ought to leave something for future generations, then, yes, I am — but I'd prefer the term 'conservationist'."

In recent years, Sandra was named president of the Friends of the Environmental Trust. This advocacy group is dedicated to preserving the original mission of the Nebraska Environmental Trust, a grant program created in 1992 that receives state lottery proceeds to fund environmental conservation and habitat restoration across Nebraska. The Friends of the Environmental Trust actively works to make sure the NET follows equitable procedures, builds public trust, maximizes grant applications and funding opportunities and reopens funding processes to public scrutiny.

From farm kid to champion conservationist, Scofield shows no signs of slowing down.

Julie Thomas is a University of Nebraska-Lincoln professor emerita and a Nebraska Master Naturalist. To celebrate our history of conservation storytelling, Nebraskaland will feature experts who have made a difference for Nebraska's wildlife and wild places. Without their work, Nebraskaland writers would have fewer stories to tell.



Portraits from the Past

Rockbrook Camera
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Turkey Hunt, 1982 ▶
My grandfather, Bernard Kavan, on his spring turkey hunt east of Linwood in April 1982.

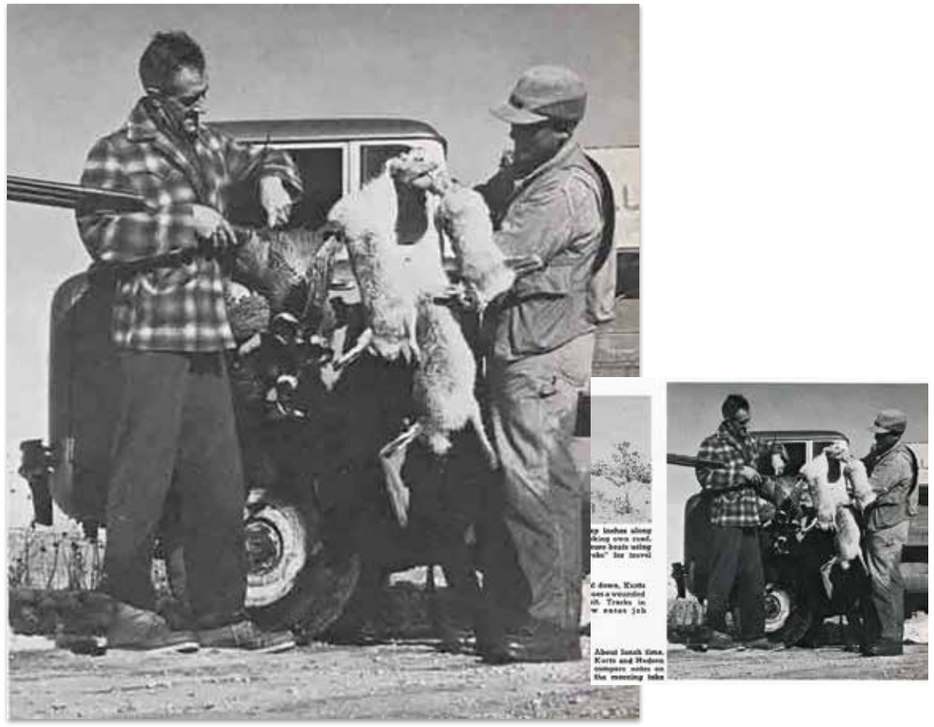


Deer Hunting, 1985 ▶
My grandfather harvested this doe during the rifle season on Nov. 11, 1985. I was only 2 years old in this photo. Pictured is my grandfather Bernard Kavan (left), me and my father, Ray Prochaska Jr.
– Nick Prochaska, Surprise

Send contributions to: Portraits from the Past, Nebraskaland Magazine, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370. Or e-mail to Jenny.Wheatley@Nebraska.gov. Photos should show people enjoying Nebraska outdoor activities, such as camping, boating, hunting or fishing, and must have been taken before 2006. We will give priority to unusual photos or activities. When possible, please include a story about the photograph and identify the people, places and approximate date it was taken. Text may be edited and photos adjusted for reproduction. All photos will be returned. Please send ORIGINALS if possible for best reproduction.



◀ **Trap Shoot, 1920s**
This is a picture of my grandfather, John Wertz (far left), and four other top shooters at a trap shoot. The man on the far right, Miles Maryott from Oshkosh, was a man of many talents. He was a skilled wildlife artist, taxidermist, marksman, outdoorsman and professional baseball player. He also killed the marshal of Oshkosh during a shootout in 1926.
– Jim Wertz, Paxton



Mixed Bag Hunt in the Pine Ridge, 1960s ▲
This is a picture of my father, William "Bill" Hudson and John Kurtz of Crawford, and their take of pheasants and jackrabbits in the Pine Ridge area. This picture and article appeared in Outdoor Nebraska, now known as Nebraskaland magazine, in 1961. My father was an avid outdoorsman who taught his children the same lifestyle. At this time, he was the mayor of Crawford and was later known for the early development of the Hudson-Meng Education and Research Center north of Crawford.
– Michael Hudson, Lake Havasu City, Arizona

Calling all Carvers

By Jeff Kurrus

Shot at Vala's Pumpkin Patch — one of the premier fall festivals in the country — this pumpkin carving is one of the most eye-catching we've seen. Until we see yours. Tag @Nebraskaland in your pumpkin photos on Instagram to appear in a future issue of Nebraskaland.



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