



A Woodhouse's toad (*Bufo woodhousii*) soaks up some sunshine after digging itself into the ground to escape a chilly April wind on a Nature Conservancy site that had recently undergone a prescribed burn near Wood River. Photo by Chris Helzer.



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April 2008

Fishing with TOM OSBORNE

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THE FOUNDATION

NEW CABINS AT PONCA

THE CAMOUFLAGED INCHWORM

GROUSE VIEWING



NEBRASKALand

Volume 86, Number 3, April 2008

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Whether it's fly-fishing for salmon in Alaska or taking some boys to a Lincoln area farm pond, former Nebraska football coach Tom Osborne loves fishing. TEXT AND PHOTOS BY ERIC FOWLER

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With Nebraska's turkey numbers at an all-time high and the opportunity to purchase three spring hunting permits, there has never been a better time for a new turkey hunter to be in the field. TEXT AND PHOTOS BY JEFF KURRUS

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This "inchworm" takes extreme measures to hide itself from predators. TEXT AND PHOTOS BY CHRIS HELZER

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Prompted by the banning of live decoys for hunting, many Nebraskans began making their own decoys, some for profit. TEXT AND PHOTOS BY JON FARRAR

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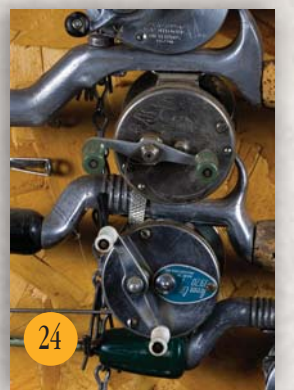
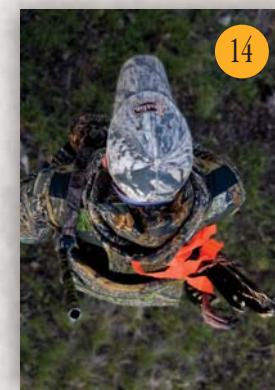
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Cover: Tom Osborne fly-fishes at a farm pond during an outing with two young partners last August. See story on page 10. Photo by Eric Fowler. **Opposite:** A long-tailed weasel wears its summer coat of light brown and yellow in Sheridan County. Its diminutive size belies its fierce hunting abilities. Photo by Bob Grier.



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Comment



Steve Zechmann
 of Lincoln sent
 in these
 photographs of
 a raccoon
 determined to get
 into a neighbor's
 bird feeder. It was
 unsuccessful.



Determined Raccoon

I took some pictures in my
 backyard that I thought you might
 be interested in. One evening when
 I got home I looked out my back
 window and noticed a raccoon
 trying to get up on my neighbor's
 birdfeeder. Sometimes he would look
 around to see if anyone was watching.
 He kept stretching, hoping to be able
 to reach some sunflower seeds. As
 he was trying to get the seeds out, a
 deer walked up. The deer looked at
 the raccoon as if to say, "Are you
 crazy or what?" Finally the deer
 walked away. The raccoon continued
 his efforts until he got both feet on
 the base of the feeder, at which
 point he was holding himself up
 with only his front feet. Finally he
 got all four feet on the feeder and
 kept trying to extract some seed. He
 hung there for around 10 minutes
 before he finally let go and dropped
 to the ground. I haven't seen him
 back since and can only assume that
 he realized it wasn't worth the effort.

Steve Zechmann
 Lincoln, Nebraska

Leucistic Canada

I enjoyed the leucistic crane story
 by Eric Fowler in the March issue. I
 harvested this leucistic Canada
 goose northwest of Bridgeport in

December 2006. It was with five or
 six normal geese and it was "hard to
 miss" as well. I was not aware of
 the word "leucism" and like most,
 referred to it as partial albino. Do
 you know if leucism in Canada
 geese is as rare as in sandhill
 cranes? I don't know if you can see
 it, but its nails look like white
 opaque plastic. I'm originally from
 Sidney, but have lived in Austin,
 Texas since 1974, when I was in the
 USAF and assigned to the (then) air
 base located here. I'm a longtime
 subscriber of NEBRASKAland and
 look forward to every issue. I come
 back "home" almost every fall to hunt
 around Kearney with my brother-in-
 law, Dick Harr, and around Sidney/
 Bridgeport/Lisco with my brother-
 in-law, Keith Stone, who is the fire
 chief in Sidney.

Michael Wright
 Austin, Texas



Michael Wright's leucistic Canada goose.

Yes, leucism is probably about as
 rare in Canada geese as it is in
 sandhill cranes.

-Editor

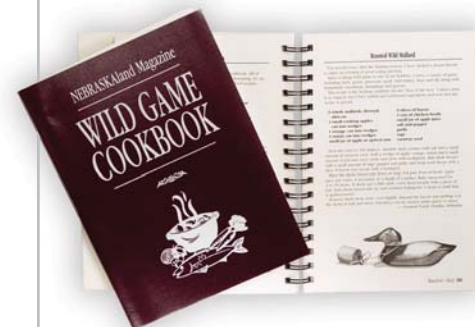
Wild Game Cookbook

I am trying to order the wild game
 cookbook from the web site but
 cannot find it. Is it out of print?

Dawn Ruben
 Baltimore, Maryland

Many of our past special issues,
 including our cookbooks, are still
 available through our gift catalog.
 Go online to NebraskalandGifts.com
 and click on Bargain Cabin to find
 our most recent cookbook. Other
 cookbooks can also be found by
 clicking Publications.

- Editor



Corrections

The story about leucistic cranes
 in our March issue should have
 described whooping cranes as North
 America's tallest bird species.

Also, Mayberry Lake Wildlife
 Management Area was incorrectly
 identified as a State Recreation Area.

- Editor

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PHOTO BY SAM WILSON

Wildlife biologists prepare to load some of the 69 wild feral hogs that were killed near Harlan County Reservoir on February 23.

Feral Hogs Removed

A record number of feral hogs were killed on February 23 during a wildlife management operation that one biologist called "a great success."

A total of 69 pigs, including more than 25 adult hogs, were killed near Harlan County Reservoir to keep them from becoming a threat to domestic and wild animals, crops and wildlife habitat, according to Sam Wilson, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's furbearer specialist.

Commission biologists and conservation officers conducted the operation with the help of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and USDA APHIS Wildlife Services, which provided manpower from its Kansas and Nebraska offices, as well as a professional gunner, who shot the pigs from a helicopter. Prior to this hunt, more than 57 other feral hogs had been removed from the area since 2000, including 17 that were killed this past January.

"We believe we were successful in removing more than 90 percent of the pigs in the area," Wilson said. "We are hopeful that this population can be completely eradicated and we will continue to cover the area looking for sign."

The slain hogs tested negative for

pseudorabies, swine brucellosis and porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome (PRRS), but one hog had had swine influenza in the past.

In addition to the threat of disease, feral hogs cause damage to crops and the ecosystem across the country to the tune of \$800 million annually. Wilson said a feral hog killed near Genoa in January of 2007 tested positive for pseudorabies and is an example of the threat feral hogs pose to the economy in Nebraska.

"We are extremely interested in help from the public pertaining to future observations of feral pigs in this or any other area of the state," said Wilson. "It is illegal for members of the general public to shoot feral hogs, so if anyone sees wild or feral pigs, we would like them to immediately call the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission at (402) 471-5174."

Mountain Lion Shot in Scottsbluff

A mountain lion was shot and killed by a Nebraska Game and Parks Commission conservation officer near a Scottsbluff residence on February 7.

The 100-pound male, estimated to be 1 to 2 years old, was shot on the north side of town and was the sixth confirmed sighting in the Scottsbluff

area in the last 12 years. Scottsbluff is located just north of ideal mountain lion habitat in the Wildcat Hills.

According to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's Mountain Lion Response Plan, any mountain lion found within city limits of a municipality will be lethally removed when it can be done safely.

The cat was first observed about two hours before it was shot. Conservation officers, biologists and local law enforcement officials were unsuccessful in an attempt to sedate the cat with a dart gun so it could be removed and euthanized, so it was put down when it moved to an area where it could be safely shot.

Mountain lions are native to Nebraska but were extirpated by the end of the 19th century. Despite annual reports since the 1950s, no confirmed sighting was made in the state until the 1990s. In 1991, a deer was found killed by a mountain lion, and shortly after that, a hunter shot an adult mountain lion near the town of Harrison in Sioux County.

For more information on mountain lions in Nebraska, go to the Commission's web site at www.OutdoorNebraska.org, click on Wildlife, then Wildlife Species.

COURTESY OF PHEASANTS FOREVER



Pheasants Forever has two prescribed burn units available for use.

Prescribed Burn Help Available From PF

Pheasants Forever (PF) now has two Mobile Prescribed Burn Units (MPBU) available for use by people wishing to do a prescribed burn, and hopes to add a few more units in the coming years.

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prescribed burn associations around the state, we hope to be able to provide one of these units for each of them," said Peter Berthelsen, the organization's Senior Field Coordinator for Nebraska.

There is no cost associated with the use of the units, which can be checked out through PF's state office in Elba, but the person checking out a MPBU is responsible for bringing it back in good shape, said Berthelsen.

Each unit is designed to contain all the equipment necessary to conduct a prescribed burn and is housed in an enclosed trailer that can be hooked to a vehicle and driven to a burn location anywhere in the state. For more information, contact PF at (308) 754-5339 or go to www.NebraskaPF.com.



ERIC FOWLER
Last year 50 active bald eagle nests were found in Nebraska - a new record.

Nesting Bald Eagle Number Sets New Record

The number of active bald eagle nests in Nebraska increased to a record 50 in 2007, up from 45 in 2006, according to Joel Jorgensen, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's nongame bird program manager.

Jorgensen said the number of breeding pairs has been increasing steadily since the first successful modern nesting near Valley in Douglas County in 1991. Bald eagles bred historically in Nebraska, but were extirpated by the turn of the 20th century.

"A couple nests went unmonitored and there are probably a few nests that have not been discovered," Jorgensen said, "so there are probably more than 50 active nests."

The bald eagle recovery is one of the great success stories of wildlife conservation. Bald eagle numbers in North America dropped to dangerously low levels in the 1950s and 1960s due to DDT and other similar pesticides, leading to their listing as an endangered species. After receiving state and federal protection, and with the banning of DDT and other similar chemicals in 1972, bald eagle numbers slowly began increasing.

There were an estimated 417 breeding pairs in the lower 48 states in 1963, and now there are approximately 10,000. The Nebraska increases mirror trends throughout much of the species's North American breeding range.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service removed the bald eagle from the list of threatened and endangered species in June 2007. The bald eagle currently remains state-listed as "threatened," but increasing breeding numbers serve as an impetus for the Commission to evaluate its status within Nebraska's borders.

"Perhaps the only downside to the species recovery is the challenge that comes with monitoring more and more nests," Jorgensen said. "The increase continues at such a rate it is difficult to keep track and to find persons with the time to make observations." Bald eagle nest monitoring is carried out by the Commission, other cooperating agencies, and volunteers.

Monitoring efforts, as well as other Commission programs focused on bald eagles and other nongame wildlife are supported by Nebraska's Wildlife Conservation "checkoff" Fund. Taxpayers are encouraged to look for the peregrine falcon symbol near the bottom of their state tax form and to make a contribution when completing their state income tax forms. ■

Turkey Business

Turkey regulations have undergone numerous changes over the years.

By Jeff Kurrus

It is estimated that there are more than 100,000 turkeys in Nebraska and the state had its highest spring turkey harvest, 18,001 (including shotgun, archery and youth), in 2007. "We likely have room for 50,000 hunters, maybe even more," said Nebraska Game and Parks Commission big game program manager Kit Hams. "We just don't have the hunters."

In 2007, 26,973 hunters purchased a spring turkey permit. In an attempt to recruit additional hunters, 2008 will be the first

Nebraska spring turkey season without a minimum age requirement for turkey hunters. It is just another step to make turkey hunting more available in a state where turkeys continue to increase.

Turkey numbers were not always so abundant, however, nor the seasons so liberal. Through the years units were opened, then closed, then re-opened. Seasons were lengthened, then shortened. Shooting times were altered. Rules were changed.

The following is a timeline of Nebraska's major spring turkey permit changes through the years, supporting the notion that there has never been a better, or easier, time to hunt spring toms in Nebraska.

1964- Despite Nebraska holding its first official turkey season in the fall of 1962, its first spring season was held April 18-26, 1964, with hunting only permitted in the Round Top (Pine Ridge area) and the Niobrara (Brown, Cherry, Keya Paha and Rock counties) units. One gobbler was allowed, and turkeys had to be checked in after the kill. Seven hundred fifty permits were



Since Nebraska's first spring turkey hunting season in 1964, regulations have frequently changed through the years.

authorized to hunters 16 years of age or older and the total harvest was 130 gobblers. Legal shooting hours were from one hour before sunrise to noon. Shotguns, 10 to 20 gauge, and long bows were legal.

1966 - The spring gobbler season was expanded to 16 days, April 23-May 8. Shooting hours were one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset, and hunters were allowed two permits for the first time.

1969 - Only one gobbler in the spring was allowed.

1975 - The first spring archery season was held in limited units, lasting 23 days, April 1-23. The 289 archery permit holders bagged 21 birds. Longbows were no longer legal during the regular shotgun season, and no hunter could obtain more than one shotgun permit and one archery permit for the spring turkey season.

1977 - The spring shotgun season was expanded to 23 days.

1978 - Hunters 14 years of age or older could apply for a spring permit.

1979 - Shooting hours for all

spring seasons were set at one-half hour before sunrise to sunset.

1984 - Second permits were available for shotgun and archery seasons in unfilled units. Unlimited spring archery permits were open in certain units in eastern and southeastern Nebraska.

1987 - Spring turkey hunting was open statewide. Mandatory check-in was no longer required.

1996 - Hunters 12 or older could apply for a turkey permit.

2000 - Spring permits were available online for archery and Northwest turkey units.

2001 - All turkey hunting permits were available online.

2003 - Unlimited spring archery permits were available statewide.

2004 - Unlimited spring shotgun permits were issued in all units for the first time.

2005 - Youth turkey permits were offered for the first time, with a longer shotgun season available for hunters age 12-15.

2006 - All shotgun permits were valid statewide. Hunters could fill two shotgun permits in eastern Nebraska.

2007 - Three permits were allowed for the first time for the 37-day spring shotgun and 57-day archery seasons.

"Our data shows that turkey populations have tripled or quadrupled in the last five years," said Hams, which has directly affected the liberalization of recent turkey regulations. "Turkey hunting's current status is as good as it gets. It's never been easier to get a permit or harvest a turkey in Nebraska. It's outstanding." ■

Fishing With Tom

Text and photos by Eric Fowler

Whether it's fly-fishing for salmon in Alaska or taking some boys to a Lincoln-area farm pond, former University of Nebraska football coach Tom Osborne loves fishing.

Considering he has been a teacher of sorts for most of his life, it made sense that Tom Osborne began a late-summer fishing trip last year giving two boys some instruction.

"Look behind you and you'll see there are some plugs on those rods, the kind of long things?" the former University of Nebraska football coach told the boys on the drive from Lincoln to a nearby farm pond in his SUV, which had a hand-held GPS unit, fishing pliers and a bottle of Jack's Juice garlic oil bait spray on the console. "We'll throw those out there on top of the water and if we can get those bass to

come up and hit 'em, it should be kind of fun to see because they'll take it right up on the surface.

"If we can't catch them that way, then I've got a

couple of other rods rigged up and we'll try some plastic worms and see if they'll bite those. They'll usually do one or the other, we hope."

"We're here already?" said Christian Wilke, Osborne's 8-year-old grandson, when they arrived at the pond.

Christian and 9-year-old Josiah Brown, — Jo Jo for short — each grabbed a pole and followed Osborne, who carried the rest of the tackle, to the weathered johnboat he leaves on the bank. Moving a bit slower than he did when he roamed the sidelines, Osborne, 71, went back to his SUV to pull on a pair of hip boots and grab his fly rod as the boys explored the shoreline. When he returned and the boys were on board, he gave them another lesson before shoving off. "What you do is cast it out and kind of jerk it in like that, okay?" he said, tossing one of the plugs along a weedline. "It looks like a frog jumping or swimming in the water."

Grabbing the oars, Osborne rowed to the middle of the half-acre pond. He spent most of the next two hours tying on new lures, taming a backlash and taking weeds and fish off hooks. When needed, he sprinkled in other fishing lessons between small talk throughout the morning, all with the patience one might expect from someone with master's and doctoral degrees in education psychology, and all in his trademark, monotone voice.

"Reel faster with it, make it look like a minnow," he told one of the boys.

"You don't always have to throw it in the same place," he told the other later. "You can throw it in different places. But don't throw over in the moss."

"You don't want to put a big bend in

your rod or it breaks," he said as one of the boys reeled in a pile of moss.

"Throw it out like that, and let it sink to the bottom," he said after tying a rubber worm on one of their lines.

"Keep your rod tip up, just like that."

"When it goes under the water it looks like a crawdad," he said after tying a new crankbait on a different pole. "You don't have to twitch that one, just reel it in."

Wincing slightly and without saying a word, at one point he even pulled a hook out of his hand, the result of a young angler not paying attention to his line, as they sometimes do.

And, of course, he handed out praise for good casts and when fish were caught. "That's a nice one," he told Jo Jo after he reeled in the first and biggest fish of the day, a largemouth that would have tipped the scales at about five pounds.

"Thank you," Jo Jo said.

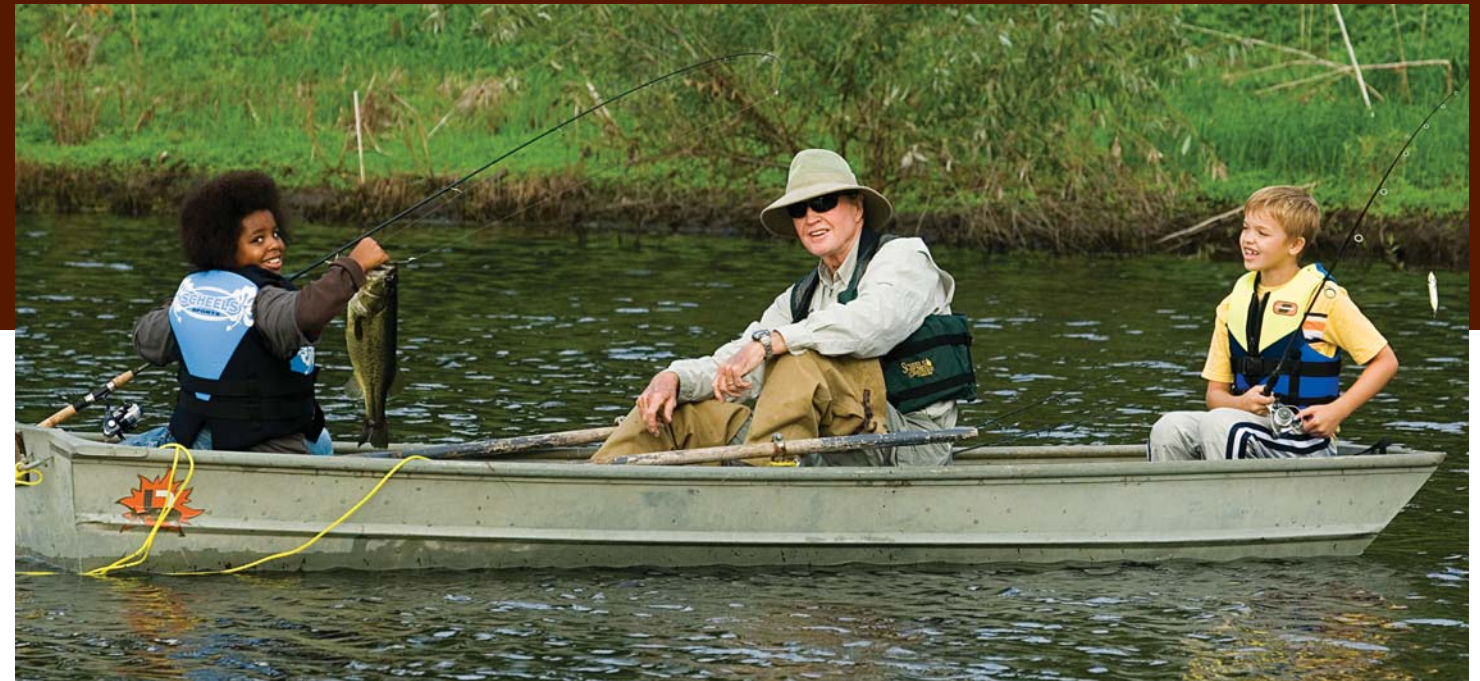
"How'd that feel on the end of the line?" Osborne said after the fish was released.

"It was pretty hard to yank in."

"That was big," said Christian.

Osborne grew up in Hastings. When his dad went off to serve in World War II, he moved to St. Paul with his mother and brother to live with his grandparents. An uncle who liked to hunt and fish lived across the street.

"He would take me occasionally and I really looked forward to that," Osborne said. "Probably most of the fishing we did was for catfish in the Loup River. And there were some ponds around we would do some



Brown holds up a largemouth bass, the first and biggest fish caught on a trip to a farm pond last August with Osborne and Wilke.

bluegill and bass fishing in.

"I remember that Johnson Lake had just been formed about that time and it had really good fishing when it was new."

Osborne caught the fishing bug during that time and has been infected with it ever since. "Maybe early on you're interested in catching lots of fish," he said. "But I think the thing that fascinates me more is getting a fish to strike a lure. It isn't so much landing the fish or even playing the fish. I'm just kind of fascinated by the process of getting something that does not think like a human to strike a lure. And sometimes it's pretty tricky."

He's fished across Nebraska and the United States. From a cabin he once owned at Lake McConaughy, he would fish for white bass, walleye and rainbow trout, which he also pursued in Lake Ogallala and the irrigation canal and North Platte River below it. The fly rod is his tool of choice, and he's cast to trout in rivers and streams across Nebraska, and to bass and bluegill in waters closer to home, including a sandpit near Central City where he has a new vacation cabin.

Trout and salmon are his favorite quarry. When he has the chance, he trolls for the latter in Lake Oahe in South Dakota. "Most of the fishing I do is fly-fishing, but I do kind of get a

kick out of trolling for salmon up there," he said. "It's a little tricky to find them and they're powerful and big fish." Annual trips to Alaska with family include fly-fishing for king and sockeye salmon, arctic char, grayling and trout. He's also chased trout in such exotic locations as a pond on his acreage near Lincoln and at Holmes Lake in Lincoln with Christian and Jo Jo.

Wherever he's fishing is a good place to be. "There usually aren't a lot of



Osborne gets a fishing rod ready.

really ugly places to fish, particularly if you're talking about trout, salmon or other coldwater species, and even the farm ponds," Osborne said.

But the Hastings native has never been able to fish as much as he would've liked. He played football at Hastings College and then professionally for three years. He coached college football for 36 years at Nebraska, the last 25 as head coach, before stepping down following the 1997 season. He then served three terms in the U.S. House of Representatives. Now he's back at the university as athletic director. None of those careers has left much time for fishing.

When he was coaching, "Football brought fishing to a dead standstill for about six or seven months. I mean, you didn't do anything," Osborne said.

"I could remember always wanting to go fishing in the fall. You know, I had always heard that the trout fishing, fly-fishing, was really good in late-September and October, and for almost 40 years I was never able to do that."

Before returning to the university last October, Osborne was finding more time to fish. "I've probably done more fishing this summer than I have in 40 years in any summer," he said. "It's been kind of nice to have more flexibility."

Sixty-hour work weeks will make it



Josiah Brown casts as Tom Osborne watches and Christian Wilke fishes from the front of the boat during a fishing trip last summer.

“I think the thing that fascinates me is getting a fish to strike a lure. It isn’t so much landing the fish or even playing the fish. I’m just kind of fascinated by the process of getting something that doesn’t think like a human to strike a lure. And sometimes it’s pretty tricky.” - *Tom Osborne*

tougher to get away. “Hopefully it will slow down a bit in the summer, but you really don’t have an off-season,” he said.

Osborne doesn’t think he’s the only one who doesn’t fish enough. Kids don’t either, he said. He’s concerned about the sedentary lifestyle of Americans, especially children, and the problems that leads to, including obesity. He’s concerned about the amount of time kids spend watching television, surfing the Internet and playing video games, not to mention the violent and even sexual nature of the latter.

people well.”

Even in sports, of which he’s always been a big supporter, things have changed radically. “There’s an awful lot of pressure on kids to specialize early and parents are now tuned in to college scholarships before a child’s even played anything in high school,” Osborne said. “I think there’s some benefit to playing a wide variety of sports early on because you really don’t know, when you’re 7, 8 or 9 years old, what you’re going to be best at, what you’re going to be most interested in.

“The more competitive situations you’re in, the better suited you are later

fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters and uncles to interact than sitting in front of the television.”

There are other obstacles that keep youths from picking up a fishing pole. One might be location: Kids who live where there isn’t a nearby place to fish don’t gravitate to fishing like those who live where there’s a pond or lake a bike ride away. And some kids don’t have anyone available to take them fishing.

Osborne works with Jo Jo in the TeamMates Mentoring Program, which matches youths with a volunteer who can provide them with guidance and inspiration. Osborne and his wife, Nancy, started the program in Lincoln in 1991. It now serves the entire state, reaching more than 3,000 students in grades four through 12.

He’d be happy if it were easier for mentors to take kids fishing, but because of liability issues, TeamMates is primarily a school-based program. Only with permission from parents and with another adult present can mentors meet kids at places like a movie theater or fishing pond. It’s an unfortunate fact of life in today’s twisted world, where dangers lurk in places they shouldn’t.

Adults have their own distractions that prevent many from fishing – hectic work schedules, the Internet, cell phones, PDAs ... even golf.

Osborne has played the game, especially when he was coaching. But those golf outings were part of the job and cut into off-season free time he would have rather spent with family or fishing. “It’s not that I’m opposed to it,” he said. “I just find that it’s very difficult to both fish and golf.”

While Osborne truly enjoys fishing with friends and family, including a daughter who is an avid fly-angler, fishing is also his escape. Often, the places he fishes offer solitude. “In my



Osborne takes a photo of Wilke and a nice crappie.

When Osborne was growing up, he couldn’t wait to get out of school, even though it typically meant going straight to football, basketball, track or baseball practice instead of a fishing hole. “So you just didn’t go home and sit in front of the Game Boy or a Playstation or in front of the computer or television set,” he said. “As a result, we do have a lot more inactivity now, and it certainly hasn’t, I don’t think, served our young

on to handle stress or competition, whether it’s high school athletics, college athletics or just an adult in the business world.”

More time spent indoors or online means there’s less time for outdoor activities such as fishing.

“Hunting and fishing activities are really wholesome as far as a family experience and family bonding,” he said. “It’s a much better way for



Wilke and Brown jump from the boat to dry ground after Osborne pulled them ashore at the end of the day.

previous life, both as a football coach and then in Congress, I was constantly surrounded by people. I found that fishing afforded me an opportunity to get away, do something I enjoyed, something that was totally fascinating and engrossing to me. I think it’s important to have a change of pace, not to be doing the same thing over and over again, all the time, every day.

“I’m sure some people, if they went fishing this morning, would be thinking continually about the next business deal or the next appointment. But when I’m fishing I’m totally focused on what I’m doing and it’s a diversion.”

Finding a balance between his desire to both spend time with family and escape can be difficult, Osborne admitted. “Given the opportunity, I would fish 14 or 15 hours a day and I might do it 6 or 7 days a week, and that’s not healthy either,” he said. “You have to find a balance.”

Osborne has lent his time to many worthy causes, both personally and professionally. He helped create a Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program initiative for the Platte and Republican river valleys that can both

save water, improving stream flows and reservoir levels, and increase habitat for wildlife, especially pheasants. He’s lobbied on behalf of Lake Ogallala’s trout population in hopes that adequate oxygen levels can be maintained. He even taught a fly-fishing course to youths attending the first Nebraska Outdoors Expo in Kearney last May.

He hopes the latter and similar efforts can help stem a decline in the number of people who hunt and fish. “Obviously, if you don’t have the clientele coming on, it does not bode well for the future,” he said. “Most of our wildlife habitat and lake renovation projects are paid for by Game and Parks, and much of that money comes from hunting and fishing licenses. So even those who count themselves as being environmentalists, who are not particularly keen on hunting and fishing, may find that a lot of the habitat enhancement that benefits wildlife begins to go away if you don’t have adequate numbers of hunters and fishermen.”

Fishing isn’t all about fishing. The nature of the sport leaves plenty of time to talk about life, too.

“Did you play baseball this summer, Jo Jo?” Osborne asked on that cool August morning last summer.

“No,” Jo Jo said.

“Are you still playing football?”

“Yeah.”

“What do you play, with some kids in the neighborhood?”

“I play on a team.”

“Do you play tackle football or flag football?” asked Christian.

“Tackle,” Jo Jo replied.

“Do you wear helmets and shoulder pads and everything?” Osborne asked. “Yeah.”

“That’ll be quite a deal. I’ll have to come and watch you play.”

Thanks to cell phones, fishing isn’t necessarily the escape it once was. It depends on priorities. Osborne took one call on his while he sat in the boat, but chose to let it ring when others came. “We’re too busy,” he said.

He found time to make a few casts with a spinning rod when he wasn’t helping the boys, but didn’t pick up his own fly rod until more than an hour into their outing. He didn’t catch a fish, either. “I was terrible,” he told the boys.

It didn’t matter. He was spending quality time with his grandson and Jo Jo. And he was fishing. ■

Ready... Set ...Turkey!

Text and photos by Jeff Kurrus

With Nebraska's turkey numbers at an all-time high and the opportunity to purchase three spring hunting permits, there has never been a better time for a new turkey hunter to be in the field.

The following is a crash course for the beginning turkey hunter. With the turkey population at an all-time high, resident permits at \$24, and a plethora of hunting locations available, you should kick yourself if you don't turkey hunt this year.

But are you too late if this is your first time? Not at all. Although the spring archery season opened March 25, the spring shotgun season doesn't open until April 12, which gives you all the time you need to prepare for your first spring gobbler season. Here's how.

Scouting

Scouting is the most important aspect of this entire process. To begin, take a nice drive a week or two before opening day, cup of coffee in hand, and glass from the roads for turkeys during the midmorning hours near wildlife management areas (WMAs) that have timber or near private land where attaining permission might be possible. If this doesn't work, travel within a



Finding areas where turkeys are traveling before opening day is a big step toward finding a good place to hunt.

quarter mile of a potential roosting site – generally an area with large trees, such as cottonwoods – during the last half hour of daylight and use an owl, coyote

or turkey yelp call to try and provoke a response from a turkey, a method known as shock gobbling. “Once you hear birds,” said Nebraska Game and Parks Commission big game program manager Kit Hams, “be there one morning one half hour before sunrise to pinpoint roosting location. Once you see or hear turkeys, you're halfway there.”

Other scouting methods include walking through woodlands and open fields looking for turkey sign such as turkey feathers, which can often be found near roost sites. Looking for scat, tracks, water and food sources is also another strategy for hunters. Adult turkeys eat acorns, berries, insects, grain and small reptiles through the year. They will scratch the ground in search of food, and these areas are often easily visible to hunters.

Preseason scouting also involves determining the best spot to set up. A good hunting site offers concealment from a turkey, but not so much that the hunter must make a lot of noise getting ready to shoot. While a turkey's



In Nebraska, turkey hunting opportunities have never been better. Turkeys can be found in every county of the state.

excellent hearing is usually ignored, its vision is not (see sidebar, page 18). So camouflage becomes a big factor for many hunters, who often spend way too much money trying to blend themselves into their surroundings. It's not necessary. What is necessary is remaining as still as possible when turkey hunting, which is why hunting a spot that doesn't require you to bury

yourself in concealing branches or grass is just as important as the camouflage itself.

Many hunters use ground blinds as a means of camouflage. Ranging in price from \$20 to \$400, a blind allows a hunter to make movements with their hands when using a slate or box call that might otherwise be seen by an advancing turkey. Another, more

inexpensive option, is a makeshift blind, much like the one described in the August/September 2007 *NEBRASKAland* article entitled “Tools of the Trade.” This article gives simple steps that nature photographers use for camouflage that can also be used by hunters.

In addition, pay attention to hearing obstructions (i.e. running creek water),

Turkeys Through the Spring

While cold weather and snow might delay the start of the breeding season, turkeys will begin to break away from their winter flocks when the period of daylight begins to lengthen in the spring. During this time, gobblers will put on weight, mainly so they do not need to feed as heavily during the breeding season.

A tom will also separate in an attempt to establish dominance, doing his best to eliminate competition. “If you continue to get beat, and beat and beat, are you going to keep coming back for more punishment?” asked Jeff Rawlinson, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission outdoor education specialist. Flocks also break up as different food sources become available, and some researchers believe an instinctive need

for genetic diversity may be another reason why toms break away from their family groups.

Toms will begin to gobble and strut early in the spring, said wildlife ecologist Lovett Williams, and get geared up because of temperature. But the hens are keying off of the lengthening of daylight. During the early part of the breeding cycle, most toms will already be with hens.

This is the time of the year when jakes are known to quietly come to a call, since doing so gives turkeys lower in the pecking order a better chance to breed and avoid punishment by a more dominant bird.

“Gobblers will concentrate on strutting when they have a hen in sight, for there's no need to gobble when you can see

what you're looking for. They'll probably only do five percent of their gobbling when a hen is in view versus when a hen is not in view,” said Williams. Gobbling will pick up again later in the season when the hens start tending their nests. Toms might even travel together, with one dominant bird and lower pecking-order birds accompanying him.

A second breeding peak occurs near the end of the season. “By this time, most hens have been bred and toms will try to mate with as many hens as he can before the breeding ends,” said Rawlinson. A hunter still in the field at this time might see odd situations, such as a lone tom with eight hens.

“It's just nature's way of making sure all of the breeding takes,” said Williams. At the same time, toms will be lighter

than they are the rest of the year and their testosterone levels begin to decrease.

The most important aspect of this is trying to read what stage of the breeding season is occurring. That way, adjustments can be made to maximize the chance of harvesting a tom. “Turkey hunting works much better if you develop a bag of tricks coinciding with that particular part of the season,” said Rawlinson.



blind spots and travel lanes that can be seen from your location but don't offer a clear shooting lane.

At least you won't have to worry about the wind for your first turkey hunt. You should hope for little or no wind since high wind can prevent turkeys from hearing your call or vice versa. Unlike deer hunting, it doesn't matter if the turkeys are downwind of your blind location. Like the old adage says: If a turkey could smell as good as it can see, no one would ever kill one.

Loads, Calls and Decoys

Despite what many manufacturers may lead you to believe, you should spend a lot more time finding a good place to hunt and then choose the correct shotgun, loads, calls or decoys. While opinions will obviously vary, many hunters use their regular 12-gauge shotgun with either No. 5 or No. 6 lead shot and a modified, improved modified or full choke when they go turkey hunting. If hunting in an area that requires nontoxic shot, No. 4 steel and No. 6 tungsten are also acceptable loads. These will deliver a fatal shot to the head or neck which, given the bird's thick body plumage, is where you should aim. Any shot lower might simply wound a turkey, and because it can run faster than 25 miles per hour, winging it will do nothing more than start a very long race that will likely have disappointing results.

"If you're shooting out to 40 yards," said *Turkey & Turkey Hunting*

Magazine editor Jim Schlender, "and have patterned your gun with a good choke tube, any turkey load should do the job." When finding out where your gun shoots, use a piece of typing paper and some type of stable rest. Also,



Slate calls are an effective option for new turkey hunters.

bring along padding for your shoulder and earplugs.

"I look for a minimum of four hits on bone and 12 total hits on the head and neck when I'm patterning my gun," said Hams. "Too often turkey hunters shoot loads that are too heavy and flinch when they pull the trigger, altering their shot." For example, a 12-gauge, 3½-inch turkey load has the recoil of a .458 Winchester magnum, a famed elephant gun caliber. Even a 2¾-inch load (with 1¼ ounces of shot) is like shooting a .338 Winchester magnum. "If your gun kicks too hard when hunting," Hams said, "use a slip-on recoil pad."

Opinions also vary on calls and calling. Turkey calls are usually broken down into three categories – mouth, box, and slate – and each comes with

advantages and disadvantages. Mouth, or diaphragm, calls are self-explanatory. Their most obvious advantage is that they keep the hunter's hands free, allowing the opportunity to call a bird within shooting range with a finger

close to the trigger. However, some hunters find it difficult to master diaphragm calls.

Box and slate calls are both easier alternatives for the rookie hunter, taking much less time to master than mouth calls. Competent yelping sounds can be made in less than 10 minutes out of the box. Furthermore, box calls can make both hen and gobbler calls.

Both box and slate calls do have their disadvantages, however. Most box calls won't work in the rain, and the same

is true of slates. Plus, some larger box calls can be a bit cumbersome to carry. Yet box calls do have one very strong advantage: When turkey hunting afoot, stopping every 100 to 200 yards to call, a box call will produce a very loud sound that can trigger a response at a distance. But for versatility, said Schlender, "I like slate calls. Instead of carrying 10 calls around with you, try bringing one slate call and three or four strikers."

"New hunters need to get away from the concept that they have to be a champion caller," said Rawlinson. "The best turkey hunters I know are the best woodsmen I know. To be successful, put time into scouting. That's the biggest investment to be made. If a tom wants to go in one direction, you're probably not going to call him in. If the



Tom turkeys challenge each other for dominance of a flock, a fact that hunters with decoys can use to their advantage.

tom already has hens, why would he respond to you?"

Calling in turkeys is actually one of hunting's most unnatural acts. A hunter tries to entice a tom turkey to come in by emulating the sounds of a female. If the tom had his way, he would never move toward a hen. That's why he's doing all of that gobbling and strutting in the first place. With something this loud and this pretty, he thinks, the hen should come to him.

"You can get toms fired up with yelps, cuts and cackles. These are the

sounds that sell calls on commercials and television shows. But one of the best things a hunter can do is learn the soft calls. Purrs, clucks. I've seen more toms come to these calls than to anything else," said Aaron Hershberger, Commission outdoor education specialist. "Turkeys make little noises all day long, noises that will make a caller seem realistic if you can learn them. In an area with heavy hunting pressure, I've called in turkeys with a simple purr, even to the point that the person I'm with can't hear me doing it.

But the turkeys can. They'll just slowly walk in.

"Most hunters won't do it, though," continued Hershberger. "Videos say to call loud and often. Not that you shouldn't learn the yelps and cackles. You should. But I bet there are some birds out there that can get off the roost, and then point in every direction. 'That's a box call over there; mouth call over there,' and can list both make and model. Try what other people aren't doing. I've seen a four-year-old call in toms with a push-button box

The Have-to-Have List

It is an outdoor retailer's responsibility to tell you what they think you need to have for any hunting or fishing passion. However, that is not *NEBRASKAland's* responsibility. We can only tell you what you have to have to turkey hunt.

"If I only had \$200 to spend on turkey hunting supplies and was starting from scratch," said Hams, "I'd buy a \$100 pair of binoculars and a \$100 single-shot shotgun. Then I'd try and find another 20 bucks for a turkey call with a good CD with it." Add a Nebraska public land guide and a CRP-MAP atlas, both free of charge from the Commission and select retailers, and you're good to go.

The binoculars are especially important for a new turkey hunter driving roads and walking WMAs before the season

scouting for turkeys. Locating turkeys is a hunter's first step, and there is no better way to do so than by using an adequate pair of binoculars.

Camouflage is the other big purchase for new hunters, but it doesn't have to be. A brown and green pair of pants and shirt, along with a \$10 floppy hat that covers some of your face, will suffice. Camouflage is a good idea, but you don't have to get carried away with buying a ghillie suit for tomorrow's hunt. If a turkey is coming your way and that ghillie suit moves, that turkey is just as likely to spook as if you were sitting next to a tree in a flannel shirt. Main point: It doesn't take a high credit limit to be a successful turkey hunter.

That said, hunters should stay away from white, red and

blue clothing. Avoiding these "turkey colors" will help prevent hunter accidents in the field. Hunters should also stay away from fleece as an outer layer because of aggravating plants such as beggar's ticks. Hunters should tuck their shirts into their pants, their pants into their boots and spray all clothes, especially creases, with insect repellent for ticks. A final pack list would contain a point-and-shoot camera, dry socks, a seat cushion, water, some sort of high-energy food and orange flagging for transporting your kill.

That's about it. The list should be small, and most items can be purchased at an army surplus store. For the new turkey hunter, there is only one thing you absolutely have to have – a permit. And there are plenty of those to go around.





On a spring morning, tom turkeys strut in an effort to attract hens for breeding.

call, one of the easiest calls to learn. And this is after other box, slate and mouth calls weren't doing the trick."

If you plan to use a call, great. But don't think that louder is always better, or that lots of calling will provide more birds. Talk to experienced callers, listen to a turkey calling CD, or, best of all, pay attention to birds when you hear them in the field.

Also, if you decide to turkey hunt at the last minute and just now bought your permit online, don't feel as if you have to have a call to be an effective turkey hunter. For your own enjoyment, however, learn how to use one at some point. If not for anything more than trying to do what we've wanted to since we were kids – talk to animals

and have them talk back.

As far as turkey decoys are concerned, thoughts vary considerably on their necessity when hunting. Few hunters would say that decoys never attract gobblers, or that decoy strategies at certain times don't work well. When speaking with most seasoned hunters, it all comes down to one aspect: preference. If you've never turkey hunted before, here are some starting points for making your decision.

"Using or not using decoys all depends on location," said Hershberger. "If I'm in an open area, say a cut crop field or pasture, then I'll often use them. In woodlands, I'm usually not concerned."

If turkeys have come to decoys before

and watched a comrade go down at a similar-looking spread, then there is a good chance that they might not want to be part of a repeat occurrence. They may use their ground speed to run in the opposite direction. Others fall in love with decoys, Hershberger said, and will sprint toward the spread. "Just know the area you are hunting and, if possible, try to find out how much it has been hunted."

Hershberger has heard of early-season hunters using large numbers of decoys, up to a dozen, to lure birds in to a location by implying safety in numbers. Others will use a single hen and jake decoy early in the year to simulate the early breeding season, since toms are still trying to establish

dominance and viewing this jake might force a confrontation.

As the season moves on, and a pecking order has been established, a jake decoy may not entice birds. Instead, it might intimidate them. As far as decoy placement is concerned, not much thought is needed for shotgun hunting, except leaving an open area where a safe and killing shot can be made.

"Turkey hunting usually requires hunter movement from one spot to another," said Hershberger. "Find something light and portable, and always remember when setting up a decoy to keep safety in mind. Make sure you can see people approaching from all angles and if you are sitting

against a tree, then the tree needs to be wider than your shoulders."

Day of the Hunt

A roost site will be used repeatedly if undisturbed, so how close to approach a roost site falls under two schools of thought. One, arrive at the woods extremely early, well before legal shooting time, and sneak as close as you can to a roost site in hopes of getting a shot at a turkey leaving the roost. Or two, arrive close to shooting time without coming within visual sight of a turkey roost.

Both hens and toms will leave the roost early and loudly, usually before sunrise, although they might linger later in wet or cold weather. Even on the roost, both toms and hens will often be vocal, giving hunters a fair chance at locating them.

How much the tom gobblers determines how close he is to hens. If he was somehow separated from the hens the night before and you can place yourself between him and the hens, you're in a pretty good position. If he has roosted close to hens, you might not hear him gobble at all.

If a tom sees hunter movement, he will probably stop gobbling and walk in the opposite direction once on the ground. The one thing you don't want is for those birds to change roost sites in the evening if spooked in the morning. If undisturbed, it is likely those birds will go back to the same place that evening.

Once on the ground, hens will begin feeding in fields as the toms strut, trying to attract as many mates as possible,

and breeding with as many hens as he can.

At this point in the morning, hunters will often try to sneak closer to turkeys they can hear but not see. This is not a good idea. One, stalking within gun range of an animal with a turkey's vision and hearing will leave nearly all hunters frustrated with that "almost" feeling. Two, sneaking toward a turkey in full camouflage might actually make you the hunted if you're not the only turkey hunter in the woods. It is usually unproductive and always unsafe, especially on public land.

By mid-morning, the dominant hen will often decide which direction the flock will go. A hunter might continue to call during this time because this dominant hen could become curious and want to investigate a potential adversary. A tom might also follow if he isn't getting enough attention in the first place.

When they are ready to lay eggs, hens will begin to separate from other turkeys during the late morning or middle of the day. They don't want to be harassed by toms, and even when not disturbed, might run away from other turkeys to find their own private nesting ground.

With many hens now absent, toms will find themselves alone and restless, giving hunters one of their best chances to call in a turkey. By walking and calling, hunters can indicate to toms that hens are on the move. "A hunter should know that there are more techniques for turkey hunting than just setting up on the edge of a field," said Rawlinson.

By late afternoon, hens and gobblers

Turkey Vision

One of the turkey hunter's biggest challenges is stalking a quarry that sees so well – a turkey can see 50 times the amount of movement that a human can detect. If humans can see one inch of movement at 50 yards, a turkey can see $\frac{1}{50}$ of one inch of movement at 50 yards.

Turkeys also have a 300-degree range of vision, and can see out of both sides of their head simultaneously. And while limited in the number of hues it can see compared to humans and monkeys, a turkey can see multiple colors, including red, green and yellow.

What does all this mean for hunters? "They are used to looking for ground predators," said Hams. "They are used to looking for shapes that don't fit in and shapes that are moving when they shouldn't." Try to move only when the tom is not looking or is screened by foliage, and set up for your shot before the bird gets to your shooting lane.



Why So Many Turkeys?

Conditions have to be right for any species to increase in abundance, and they have been right for turkeys in Nebraska the past couple of decades. First, in 1985, the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) came into being, establishing an abundance of nesting cover. Second, coyote numbers have taken a big hit from mange in recent years. Despite hurting spring fishing, Nebraska's long drought has also helped turkey numbers. "The easiest way to wipe out a turkey population is three years of wet, cold springs," said Hams. Plus, Nebraska has good roosting habitat, especially in the eastern part of the state. Turkeys are also big, and when young poults go up a tree, it's hard for raptors to knock them off. Finally, turkeys like corn, and Nebraska has plenty of that.





Attaching orange flagging is the safest way to transport a harvested turkey.

slowly start moving in the general direction of their roost site, with toms gobbling to let hens know where they will be for the evening. Position yourself on the path between a traveling tom and the roost site, and hope the turkey walks within 30 yards of your location, well within shooting range. But is this turkey, with its eight-inch beard, the one you are after?

“People put way too much emphasis on beard length,” said Schlender. “It’s almost irrelevant.” By the time a turkey is two years old, it can easily have a

triangle-shaped but not sharp, 3/4-inch spurs. By the time he’s three, that spur might be an inch or a little bit more with a better defined point. After that, it’s going to be pointy with a little bit of a hook to it, and can go grow to two inches. Yet after a turkey is about three years old, it’s difficult to determine age at all. Plus, there is always the opportunity for the spurs, like the beard, to be broken.

You probably won’t be able to look at all of this before pulling the trigger, however, so leave the investigating for

10-inch beard. With an older bird, that beard may be worn down from a variety of factors, including the beard freezing and breaking off, dragging it on the ground when feeding or simply living day-to-day.

“It won’t ever be much longer than 10 inches,” added Schlender. “But when a person says they didn’t shoot a turkey because its beard wasn’t big enough, that’s absolute foolishness.”

While determining the age of a turkey by its beard length is impossible, looking at spur length can provide better answers. In the north and Great Plains, a two-year-old tom (most hens do not grow spurs) will have blunt,

after the hunt, knowing that any turkey on the ground is a trophy. The best you can hope for is a shot at close range, with the tom’s head and neck fully extended.

Once you celebrate your trophy, take a few photographs of your first bird using the tips found in “Capture the Moment” at OutdoorNebraska.org under *Hunting*. Bottom line: A picture taken afield when the bird is fresh will always be much better than one taken in the back of the truck.

When transporting the turkey, wear an orange hat or place orange flagging on the bird. While most turkeys don’t walk upside down, three feet off of the ground, hunters have been shot transporting their bird over their shoulder from the field to the vehicle. Be safe.

After the Hunt

With your first wild turkey sitting in the freezer or the fryer, now is just as good a time as any to think about purchasing your second turkey permit. Quite often a day or two after a big, loudmouth tom is killed, other turkeys in a given flock will begin to fight for pecking order.

Have you seen the videos when multiple toms are jumping on the dead body of a just-killed tom, or beating the decoy senseless with their spurs? They have seen a vulnerable situation and taken advantage of it. This is the time when a hunter should be back in the woods, when the new big tom on the block wants to show the entire woods who’s king.

That’s also your best bet to learn



Tyler Huffaker, left, Trevor Huffaker, Jeremy Jepson and turkey hunting newcomer Jake Dizmang compare notes after an afternoon turkey hunt near Bassett.

about turkey hunting. Reading articles and watching television shows is helpful, but never believe everything you see. “I often hear hunters say ‘I won’t kill birds if I don’t call them in,’” said Rawlinson. “Reality says you probably aren’t killing many birds then. A lot of hunters think that’s the way it’s supposed to be, but I have seen turkeys coming to a call much less frequently than the hen going to the tom.”

Spend time in the field. And while this article is a start, it definitely isn’t a tell-all. Wingbone, suction yelpers or tube calls weren’t discussed; nor were the strategies covered when hunting

with a partner. There is still a lot more to learn. Killing a bird can be accomplished, but it should not be a necessity. As a good friend once told me, “I hunted for an entire turkey season and never got a single shot. But I have never in my life had so much fun in the woods.”

“Fun” is the right word when referring to turkey hunting, especially right now in Nebraska where their numbers are so plentiful. “I can’t imagine we’re going to have turkey numbers like this forever,” said Hams. “People should take advantage of it now.” And isn’t this year just as good a time as any? ■

The author would like to note the following resources concerning wild turkeys: Kit Hams, Aaron Hershberger, and Jeff Rawlinson of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission; Jim Schlender, editor of Turkey & Turkey Hunting Magazine; Dr. Lovett Williams, wildlife ecologist and author of Wild Turkey Hunting & Management; the National Wild Turkey Federation; Jim Casada, freelance writer and avid turkey hunter; and Trevor and Tyler Huffaker, Nebraska turkey hunters.

Where and When to Turkey Hunt

While there were relatively few birds in the eastern part of the state 20 years ago, the largest number of turkeys and turkey hunters now reside there. There are few public lands in eastern Nebraska that don’t have turkeys, but turkey numbers increase even more the farther one gets from the major metropolitan areas. That said, Douglas, Sarpy and Washington counties still have a lot of turkeys harvested each year due to good nesting habitat and plenty of trees along the Missouri and Platte rivers for roosting.

Other counties that boast some of the state’s highest turkey numbers include Pawnee and Johnson in the southeast, Knox and Holt in the northeast, Furnas and Harlan in the southwest, Webster and Nance in the central

part of the state, and Dawes and Sheridan in the Panhandle. Turkeys can be found in every county in Nebraska. “Many of our counties have public land and it is fairly easy to find a private landowner who would like to have the local turkey population reduced,” said Hams.

Overall, Nebraska’s 2007 spring turkey harvest was in the top 25 percent of the entire country, a huge rise from when birds were reintroduced to Nebraska in 1959. And with spring archery, shotgun and youth seasons, people have lots of time to hunt birds, which makes finding suitable ground even easier for hunters.

“Hunting on opening weekend isn’t necessary for success. If the area you want to hunt is busy on the weekend, consider

hunting during the week,” said Hams. “Toward the end of the season, half of the people have harvested their turkey and the rest are done for the year. Late-season hunters almost always have the turkey woods to themselves.”

Turkey hunting, at least in Nebraska, just isn’t a crowded affair. It’s less crowded than duck, pheasant and especially deer hunting. “It’s the least crowded public event you’ll find,” said Hams. “You’re more inclined to see mushroom hunters than turkey hunters. Actually, while I shot two turkeys myself last year and my son called in more birds than I have in my entire life, I don’t know if we saw, other than two hunters on opening weekend, another person in the woods all season. And we hunt public land.”



Turkeys can be found in every Nebraska county, but their prime range includes most major river drainages and the Pine Ridge.

The Camouflaged Looper

This “inchworm” takes extreme measures to hide itself from predators

Text and photos by Chris Helzer

As an ecologist, I think a lot about the complexity of the natural world. Even so, I am often amazed by the adaptations that animals and plants have developed. I found one particularly surprising example on a summer day near Wood River last year. I was trying to photograph some native bees when I noticed a small movement out of the corner of my eye. A small inchworm was making its way up a purple prairie clover plant. At first, I was impressed by how much the purple spikes on its back looked like prairie clover flowers. As I looked closer, something struck me as odd. I reached out and tugged very gently on one of the spikes. Sure enough, it popped right off. The inchworm’s spikes didn’t just look like prairie clover flowers, they WERE prairie clover flowers!

I photographed the inchworm and e-mailed some friends to see if anyone had ever seen anything like it. Though most were as baffled as I was, I eventually learned that I’d found the larva of *Synchlora aerata*, otherwise known as the

“Camouflaged Looper” or the “Wavy-lined Emerald.” The inchworm and green moth it eventually turns into is one of more than 35,000 species of Geometrid moths found around the world. While most inchworms are well camouflaged, this one takes extreme measures to hide itself from predators.

As I had noticed, the camouflaged looper is named for its incredible ability to disguise itself by attaching pieces of plant to its back. More specifically, the

inchworm bites off pieces of the particular flower it’s feeding on and uses gelatinous “spit” from its mouth to glue the flower pieces to spines on its back. The “spit” also helps stiffen the flower parts and keep them looking fresh. When parts fall off or start to look dried out, they are replaced. When the inchworm begins feeding on a different kind of flower, it discards the previous disguise and replaces it with pieces of the new flower.

I found a great article written by Dr. Miklos Treiber of the University of North Carolina and published in 1979 by *The Journal of the Lepidopterists’ Society*. In his paper, Dr. Treiber described the process by which the inchworm puts on and maintains its costume, but also the methods he used to test the inchworm’s abilities (and patience). He would periodically remove some or all of the flower parts from a captive inchworm’s back to see how quickly they would be replaced. He also moved the inchworms from one type of flower to another to watch them change their disguise. Dr. Treiber reported that while the inchworms were rebuilding their costume, they kept eating. They would alternate between bites of food and bites of costume. On some flowers, the inchworms used different parts of the flower for its disguise than they used for food.

The defense mechanism of the camouflaged looper and other caterpillars is an adaptation probably most useful for hiding from hungry birds. Most caterpillars have some level of camouflage, including some that look like bark, twigs, thorns, and even bird droppings, but very few can alter their appearance over time. Scientists figure the camouflaged looper’s ability to change disguises allows it to have a much more varied diet than other caterpillars because it isn’t restricted to eating only those flowers or plant parts that it resembles in appearance.

The day after I found my first camouflaged looper, I went back to the same spot to see if I could find more. I did find one, but not in the way I expected. This time the one I found was impaled on the beak of a predatory bug! Apparently, their disguise isn’t foolproof.

Invertebrates make up more than 80 percent of all living species on earth. Scientists have discovered and described more than 1.7 million species of insects, but estimate that



Purple prairie clover is a native legume and common wildflower found across much of Nebraska.



A camouflaged looper inches its way up a stem toward the bloom on a purple prairie clover plant. Its back is adorned with prairie clover flower parts it has clipped and attached to its body.

there are still 8 million species waiting to be discovered. It seems incredible that there are that many species we have not yet found. On the other hand, if they are like the camouflaged looper, they could be hiding right under our noses! ■

Also known as spanworms, measuring worms, or loopers, inchworms get their name because of their “looping” gait. This occurs because, unlike many other caterpillars, they are missing “legs” from the middle portion of their body. Instead of rippling evenly along like caterpillars that have a full set of legs, inchworms “inch” along by alternately stretching out and grabbing a stem with their front legs, then bending their bodies and bringing their back legs forward.

Chris Helzer lives in Aurora and is an ecologist with The Nature Conservancy. He has been a contributor to NEBRASKALAND since October 1994.



This predatory bug was apparently not fooled by the looper's clever disguise. It appears the looper may have been in the process of replacing its disguise when it was killed.

A ROD AND REEL LEGACY

Text and Photos by Rocky Hoffmann

What started as a desire to help anglers became a fascination with the working parts of reels and led to a rod-and-reel collection that probably rivals any other in Nebraska.

Even at a very young age while growing up in Scottsbluff, Bill Horst knew he wanted to work with kids in some meaningful capacity. “I guess I did just that, and it was every bit as rewarding as I hoped it would be,” Horst recently said while reflecting on his 42 years of teaching, coaching, counseling and administering in school systems across two states.

“Coaching and counseling were my most passionate commitments to young people. It gave me a real opportunity to shape their lives, and mine as well, in a very positive way,” Horst said as he sat at his workbench in Arnold last winter, slowly turning the handle of an old Zebco fishing reel.

Horst is likely remembered by hundreds of adults for touching their lives as youngsters in one way or another. Some of them remember him as coach, others as a principal. Others will think of him simply as the guy who fixed their broken fishing reel or rewrapped a rod that was falling apart. Bill Horst passed away recently with warm memories of those past experiences and a shop full of memorabilia, including a collection of more than 500 rod-and-reel combinations.

His love of fishing was created during his early days on the North Platte River

near Scottsbluff. “It started with a cottonwood limb, grocery string and a safety pin. I guess you could say I was one of the first of the barbless fishermen, but that old safety pin, bent just right, hooked plenty of suckers and chubs for me.”

Following college, he chased a teaching and coaching career across Nebraska and Wyoming. In doing so, he chased fish in every mountain stream, Sandhills lake and interstate sandpit along the way. Fishing was always

important to Horst, and during his travels he realized how important it was to many people, especially kids.

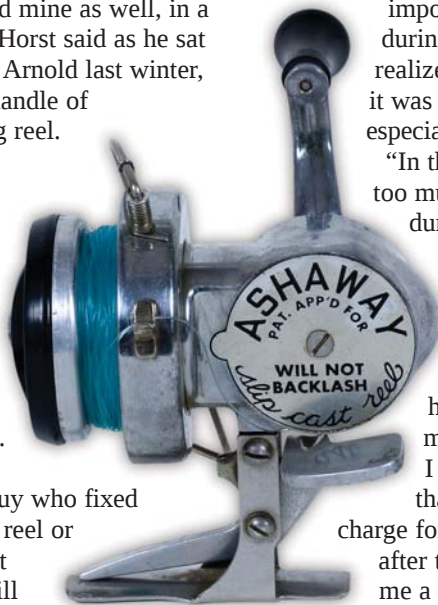
“In the early 1970s, I had too much time on my hands during summer break,

and I sought spiritual guidance on how best I could use that time. I asked

Him to provide me a hobby that would help me benefit others, and I promised in return

that I would never charge for what I did. Not long after that, someone handed me a broken reel and asked if I thought I could fix it. Something told me I probably could, and since that time, I’ve repaired every type of

rod and reel imaginable. That’s where all this began,” said Horst, referring to the rod-and-reel combinations lining the walls and ceiling of his shop.



Milled from a solid block of aluminum, this Ashaway reel is a classic open-faced reel from the 1930s.



Posing in his shop not long before he passed away recently, Bill Horst of Arnold is surrounded by the more than 500 rods and reels that he collected and rebuilt during the past 35 years.



Pflueger's unique "gingerbread" engraving pattern and red jewel marked their higher-quality reels.

Horst never accepted a dime for the reels he made work again. All he ever asked of his "customers" was that they bring in their "junk" reels for parts.

"Some of those old reels they brought in were pretty interesting relics, and instead of robbing their parts, I put them back together. Other rods and reels they gave me needed little or no repair at all, so when I got this shop, I began

hanging them up. I'm certain each and every one has a great story to tell."

Horst was always fascinated about the workings of reel parts, and he would spend hours, even days, studying the moving parts until he figured out what every little piece was designed to do. Once he had that understanding of a reel, he knew immediately what he needed to do to solve its problem, even if



Two early Vomhof fly-fishing reels. Raised pillars on the left reel marks it as the oldest of the two, manufactured in about 1900.



A thumb opening cut into the housing of a promotional Great Lakes reel allowed the angler control of the cast and catch.

meant building parts.

Horst said it was extremely interesting to see how rods and reels progressed over the years, from fly reels that only held line on a spool to level-wind casting reels such as the old Pfluegers, to closed-face spinning reels, then open-faced ones and many innovations in between. Reels have been manufactured to keep up with fishing line advancements and vice versa, he said, with probably the biggest impact to recreational fishing occurring as a result of the development of monofilament fishing lines.

Horst pulled a few rods and reels down from the wall and laid two on his workbench.

"These little reels are among the very first fly-fishing reels that were made either by Vomhof or are copies of Vomhof by Pflueger. They were made in the early 1900s. The older example has raised pillars and was made about 1901. Both have wood handles and one has a weight that serves as a multiplier."

Horst turned his attention to two other reels, each with a familiar appearance.



Manufactured under the name of the Zero Hour Bomb Company, these were the first Zebco reels.

"These are the first reels manufactured in the name of the Zero Hour Bomb Company in 1937. That's where Zebco got its name, and it was named in honor of a \$5,000 loan that the Zero Hour Bomb Company made to the fellow who started Zebco. Actually there are three variations of these originals. I have two of them, and the only difference is the color of the spinner head inside the casing. I have the tan and red ones, but I'm looking for the black one."

Another rare find in Horst's collection is a Bronson reel that features a push-button release on the back of the rod grip that runs through the handle, into the reel and releases a pin that allows the reel to let out line during a cast. It is the only example of this particular reel that Horst has seen in his 35 years



Classic level-wind casting reels mounted on steel and glass rods are just part of the Horst collection.



Simulated bone-handled, pistol-grip rods were fancy accessories for level-wind reels.



Bronson's push-button release on the handle reflected a truly integrated rod and reel.

of collecting. Bronson no longer makes reels, and Horst believes this integrated reel was manufactured in the mid-1950s.

"Now this is the Ashaway, one of the very first open-faced spinning reels. It is all aluminum. Even the body was milled from solid aluminum. It is a fine reel, and the only other one of these I've seen is in the reel collection at the Pioneer Village Museum near Minden. It is an absolute classic reel probably made sometime in the late-1930s."



Pictured above is Ocean City's answer to the open-faced spinning reel. Made with a simple and light design, the metal wing on the front of the reel served as the line pickup bail when engaged.



that he picked up at a garage sale in Ogallala. It's unique because it is integrated with a telescoping rod. The rod and reel is one piece and can be shortened to fit neatly behind the seat of a truck or added to a backpack. Horst used it just to see how it worked, and said its name was an apt description. Horst said Zebco's first open-faced reel was a small stand-alone reel called the Zebco Ultralite, which he also had. About the time Zebco came out with the Ultralite model, all major reel manufacturers were getting into the open-faced reel business.

Level-wind casting reels were old-time favorites, and it's likely that the most recognized of all these types were those in the Pflueger line. Pflueger produced several level-wind models over the years, and their gingerbread-pattern engraving distinguished upper level Pflueger reels, as well as the red glass jewel stud set on the outside of the reel body.

In addition to reels, Horst was equally interested in fishing rods. His collection included poles made of cane, split bamboo, steel, glass and modern composites. He learned to repair split bamboo rods when the glue holding them together separated, and he recalled that the tips of these poles were very fragile.

"They would outright break or they would be broken because they stuck out too far and got slammed in cabin doors or hit tree limbs. That's why most all bamboo poles came with an extra end section for replacement."

Horst said that steel rods, on the other hand, could take a lot of punishment. They were also short, many not more than five feet long, he said. As tough as they were, they were also fairly light action – heavy but whippy, he said, adding that you could cast a lure a long distance with one if you didn't backlash your old level-wind reel in the process.

"Even the rod handles were unique.



These pistol grip handles resemble bone, and are real attractive. I have three of them and have various reels on them. One is an old fly reel original and is a nice combination although they didn't really go together in the first place. Those old fly reels resemble the Pflueger line of casting reels, but you notice that a level wind is not part of the reel. The reel serves as a line holder, and the fisherman had to guide the line onto the reel himself."

Horst said the transition in fishing equipment has been fast paced, and fishing has had a tremendous influence on most people's lives.

"The sport has been very good for Nebraska, and especially good for kids. I know, because I was one. And because I was a kid who grew up in the Panhandle, I need to throw this in: Our western Nebraska

This fluted wood shipping and carrying case protected all sections of the split bamboo fly rod it held.



Although blocky in appearance, Zebco named this the "Ultimate Fishing Machine," incorporating a reel and telescoping rod.

streams are being destroyed, along with rivers and lakes in other parts of the state, because of excessive groundwater pumping and it just breaks my heart. There isn't a better pastime for young or old alike, and it's simply a shame to destroy any part of that heritage. We simply have to find a way to manage our water where it can be used for farming and other needs while making sure that there is plenty left over for fish and wildlife." ■



Zero Hour Bomb Company was engraved on Zebco's first line of reels.



Diane and Bill Horst pose at the bench where he repaired hundreds of reels over the years.

NEBRASKA MADE

By Jon Farrar, Larry Peterson and Gary Zaruba

Prompted by the banning of live decoys for hunting, many Nebraskans began making their own decoys, some for profit.

The federal banning of live call birds for hunting in 1935 sent most wildfowlers scrambling for other ways to lure ducks and geese within shotgun range. The only alternative was artificial decoys. Although aesthetically unappealing compared to those of the early 1900s, commercial decoys were available in the 1930s and 1940s, but few hunters could afford to buy them during the Great Depression and war years. Inexpensive papier-mâché decoys would not come into widespread use until after World War II. All those circumstances produced an expected outcome—small companies sprouting up to make their fortunes in decoys, and hunters making their own from materials at hand and free.

The commercial production of decoys was not new in Nebraska. “The Korker Duck Decoy is out, and it is a magnificent work and will receive the hearty endorsement of all appreciative hunters,” *Omaha Daily Bee* sportswriter Sandy Griswold wrote in the February 18, 1894 edition. The Korker was made of “closely woven drilling, water proof and moulded in the form of a duck, with a filling of fine cork ... and the painting is artistic and life like.” That same year, William W. Roberts of North Bend patented a novel cloth decoy with a “collapsible skeleton frame” of wire that opened, closed and locked similar to an umbrella.

And there were other Nebraska decoy makers, such as Fox Decoys who made a reversible goose decoy that could be converted from a Canada goose to a snow goose and back again, manufactured by Steve B. Reynard of Grand Island. His decoys were touted in an April 1901 *Field and Stream* advertisement as “...portable—may be taken apart and packed in small space. Is made of indestructible material, not

affected by frost or water. Will stand any amount of wind.” In addition to mail orders, Fox decoys were hawked by agents in Chicago and St. Paul, Minnesota. The Shell Decoy Company of Omaha advertised plans for hunters to make their own “super-light” decoy shells in the April 1901 issue of *Field and Stream*. Other enterprising Nebraskans also applied for decoy patents, such as Joseph R. Geisinger of Grand Island. In 1927, Geisinger patented his spread-winged duck and goose decoys, made of canvas over a wire framework and stuffed with straw, that moved along parallel wires to create the appearance of landing birds.

Little is known of these early-day Nebraska decoy makers. Some may have received a patent but never marketed a decoy. Some Nebraska decoy makers had short-lived success, such as Albert T. Candy of Kearney. Sears, Roebuck and Company briefly marketed Candy’s decoys in 1953, but when the contract was canceled after one season, Candy’s company closed its doors.

While relatively few Nebraska decoy makers prospered commercially, the number of waterfowl hunters who fashioned waterfowl lures for their own use were legion. Some hunters simply counterfeited the designs and materials of commercial decoys. Others improvised, cutting fence posts into foot-long lengths, splitting them, attaching a head cut from scrap lumber and crudely painting them to simulate their intended quarry. Perhaps the most popular homemade decoys in the early 1900s were silhouettes. Whether made from sheet metal and painted black, or from the ends of fruit crates and painted with three or four colors to suggest a mallard, they were used everywhere from Loup River sandbars to North Platte River meadows.

The decoys appearing on the following pages are most of the pre-1970, Nebraska-made commercial decoys known to the authors; and a sampling of a few makers who produced relatively few decoys for their own use. Others, no doubt, are waiting to be found in attics and haylofts.



PHOTO BY JON FARRAR

Lundgren’s straw-stuffed canvas decoys were still being used in western Nebraska in the 1980s, testimony to their durability.

Lundgren

John Albert Lundgren (1880-1964) was the son of a Swedish artist. His family immigrated to America and settled near the Platte River in Kearney County, where he lived the rest of his life. He was probably the most prolific of Nebraska’s commercial decoy makers in the mid-decades of the 20th century. Lundgren began making canvas-covered Canada goose decoys for his own use in the 1920s or 1930s. His floater decoys had a wooden baseboard to which a wire body framework and the wooden head and neck were attached. The roughly shaped head and neck were made of separate pieces of wood, so the grain ran lengthwise on both, and were joined by a dowel. The base of the neck was attached to the baseboard by two nails. Heavy canvas was cut in a pattern and sewn to fit over the wire armature and attached with staples. Relatively few floaters were made and finding one today in good condition is rare.

Most decoys manufactured by Lundgren were canvas-covered, Canada goose field decoys, or “stick-ups.” Patented in 1941, these decoys were stuffed with dry, long-stemmed wheat straw. Lundgren developed a machine to tightly pack the straw in the canvas shell before sewing it shut at the tail. Completed stuffed shells were dipped in a vat of animal glue and allowed to dry. Once dry they were painted white, then black, and the feather pattern was painted “in accordance with the plumage of the bird to be simulated.” Finishing paint was lampblack, burnt umber, turpentine and linseed oil. The feather pattern was applied with a rubber washing machine roller on which Lundgren etched a feather pattern. Canada stick-ups were made in feeding and high-head postures, with heads turned in different positions.



PHOTO COURTESY OF LARRY PETERSON

John Lundgren, above, was an avid wildfowler, hunting ducks and geese each fall on the Platte River. His canvas decoys were widely copied by other Nebraska hunters.



Lundgren made relatively few Canada goose floating decoys. Canvas was stretched over the wood, wire and sheet metal body and painted with a feather pattern.

Lundgren's patent application states: "It is one object of the invention to provide a decoy which will closely resemble the birds to be attracted and serves very effectively to entice them close enough to be shot from a blind," and that they would be "...light weight, natural in appearance, and of sturdy construction." Each decoy came with a square tube stake that fit in an opening on the bottom of the decoy, allowing them to be set in fields or on sandbars and not turn in the wind. A wire loop extended beyond the canvas body on the tail so they could be hung to dry and away from rodents when not in use. Lundgren goose decoys in good condition have the patent number stenciled on the bottom. Canada goose field decoys weighed about 4½ pounds.

Western Nebraska hunters were still using Lundgren's field

decoys in the 1980s, attesting to their durability when cared for properly. The decoys were offered for sale by national sporting goods outlets, such as the renowned Abercrombie & Fitch, and could be ordered by mail from hardware catalog dealers in the 1940s, at which time they sold for \$36 to \$40 per dozen. They were popular not only in Nebraska but also along the East Coast. In addition to goose decoys, Lundgren made mallard field decoys, probably in limited numbers, which are rare today. He continued to make decoys through 1958.

Many Platte and North Platte river hunters imitated the construction and materials of Lundgren's field goose decoys. Some produced hundreds of decoys but did not enter commercial production, probably in part because of Lundgren's patent. Typically the shaping of these counterfeit goose decoys was

less refined than Lundgren's birds, more lumpy and usually with inferior painting detail.

K&W Decoy Company

Commercial waterfowl hunter Ralph Kohler of Tekamah, and his longtime hunting partner and waterfowl call maker, Monte West, started the K&W Decoy Company in 1957. Kohler and West were dissatisfied with the quality and durability of commercial decoys available in the 1950s, especially those made of papier-mâché. Their solution was to manufacture their own. Ralph was a tool and die maker, owned a machine shop, and fashioned the aluminum stamping dies for the decoys.

The material used for the decoys, a resin-impregnated forming board (as used for suitcases and luggage of that time), was shaped after softening in a steam cabinet to make the material pliable, then formed between the male and female dies under 200 tons of pressure. The bodies were formed in halves, as were the head-neck sections. After cooling and hardening, the halves were stapled together and the seams covered with gauze and water resistant adhesive. A rugged leg framework was attached to the bodies on sturdy steel plates. K&W decoys could be purchased in two styles, with the standard H-frame support, or with more expensive life-like legs and feet. The decoys were painted with an airbrush using templates. Any hand painting on a K&W decoy suggests they are not in original condition. Early decoys manufactured in Tekamah were not labeled, but Kohler said later decoys had "K&W Decoy Company" rendered as an impression on the bottom.

There are no records of how many K&W decoys were manufactured at the Tekamah plant. The shop was capable of producing as many as 500 decoys per day but probably never achieved that volume. K&W decoys were not sold through retail outlets. All sales were factory direct. Canada goose decoys were far and away the most popular of K&W's decoys. In addition to standard-sized Canadas, a small Canada decoy (called "the Hutch" and made on a snow goose body) and a large Canada model with an oversized breast, nicknamed the



K&W decoys were manufactured in Tekamah from 1957 into 1962, and at Bridgeport from 1968 until 1972. While at Tekamah, three models of Canada geese, white-fronted geese, "snow" and "blue" geese, and two mallard decoy models were produced.



PHOTO COURTESY OF RALPH KOHLER

Ralph Kohler, one of the co-founders of K&W decoys, was a tool and die maker and owned a machine shop in Tekamah. He made the aluminum stamping dies for all the decoy models. A resin-impregnated forming board was shaped between the male and female dies under 200 tons of pressure.

Mae West, were sold. Kohler said the largest market for K&W Canada geese was the Chesapeake Bay area. White-fronted goose decoys, and both white- and blue-phase snow geese, were made, as were full-body field mallards. About 200 mallard floaters were produced and sold but not formally marketed because Kohler and West never found a way to seal the body seam and prevent the decoys from leaking. The most rare K&W decoys today are the Mae West and floating mallards. In the late-1950s, a dozen goose decoys of any species with the H-frame legs sold for \$64, and those with realistic feet and legs were \$78 per dozen. Mallard stakeout decoys sold for \$34 per dozen.

Kohler and West closed the decoy factory in 1962. Kohler

found it impossible to carry on with his commercial hunting operation, the machine and welding shop, and decoy manufacturing at the same time. In 1968, Art Johnson and other partners purchased the company and equipment, moved it to Bridgeport and manufactured K&W decoys until 1972. As the same dies were used, it is probably impossible to distinguish between decoys manufactured in the two factories.

FolDuck Decoys

A folding decoy was manufactured in Broken Bow during the late-1930s by Parke F. Keays, the managing editor of the *Custer County Chief*. Plumage patterns were printed on canvas on the newspaper's presses, and the rest of the assembly work was done in Keays' garage. The canvas cover was stretched over a galvanized wire framework that collapsed flat onto a board. When erected, the decoy resembled a pup tent in shape. A cork panel was attached to the wood base to add buoyancy. Mallards were the principal species manufactured, but other species may have been made in small numbers. The decoys were designed for use on dry land or water.

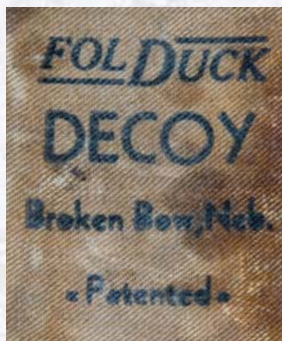
FolDuck decoys were similar in concept to the popular folding decoys manufactured by the Acme Folding Decoy Company (1895-1907) and Wm. R. Johnson Decoy Company (1910-1960s). A dozen FolDuck decoys sold for \$10.50 in 1941. FolDuck decoys were advertised in national sporting magazines of the time. Keays' 1941 patent stated: "My invention relates to improvements in ducks for hunting purposes and the principal object in view is to provide an inexpensive, lightweight device of this character which will not sink and is collapsible into compact form for porting or shipping." A dozen decoys folded to a 6-by-15-by-18-inch cube.



Silhouettes (also called profiles or shadows), such as these made by Louie and Walt Engberg of Monroe, were popular homemade decoys. Some were fashioned from wood salvaged from fruit crates. Others were made of sheet metal and painted black.



The canvas covers for FolDuck decoys were printed on the *Custer County Chief* newspaper presses in Broken Bow.



In a letter, Keat Keays, Parke's son, recalled helping fashion the decoys: "I was in junior high school and we had an assembly line in our garage. Dad and some of the printers at the *Custer County Chief* printed the decoy profiles on canvas. Mother cut the canvas profiles out of the square blocks of cloth and then stitched a left and right profile together but with the imprint on the inside. All of us turned the result so that the imprint was outside. The beaks were particularly hard to do. Someone bent a wire profile and also two wires that fit on a wooden platform. The result was that the wire profile would slide on the two pieces on the wooden platform so that the decoys could be folded or erected as desired. The decoy was too heavy to float on the wooden platform so about a 3/8-inch sheet of cork had to be attached to the bottom and a paraffin layer was added before the canvas could be installed."

Douglas Decoys

During the World War II years, the Douglas Manufacturing Corporation in Crete, whose principal product was voting booths and metal ballot storage containers, entered the decoy business. Douglas folding field decoys were similar to the Johnson folding decoy first marketed in 1910, with two halves

attached at the top and spread at the bottom into a tent-shape when in use. Mallards were the only species produced. Douglas advertising touted their "New Improved All Metal Folding Decoy" as "Finished in natural duck colors . . . Folds Flat. No Bulk. Saves Space. Moves with wind or water . . . Practically indestructible."

The collapsible decoys were 16½ inches long, 7½ inches high, 3½ inches wide at the bottom when spread, and weighed about one pound. A round "rod with stem insert inside decoy, holds duck in position and controls side movement of decoy." There was some variation in the plumage painting during the five years the decoys were manufactured. Douglas decoys were sold in sets of eight drakes and four hens at a retail price of \$10 per dozen. Production ceased when the building housing the decoy works burned.

Schlemmer

Frederick Schlemmer (1887-1976) was born in Rogers, Nebraska and moved to North Platte in 1918. He owned an automobile repair shop in North Platte and was a dedicated waterfowler. Like many hunters along the Platte River, he found commercial decoys too expensive, not effective or not durable and decided to make his own. Apparently Schlemmer made decoys in the 1920s.

The number of decoys Schlemmer made is not known, but because of the number found by collectors it appears he may have also made them for other hunters. Even though the lead weights attached to the bottoms of his decoys were marked



Douglas collapsible decoys were manufactured in Crete during World War II. A set of eight drakes and four hens sold for \$10.

"Pat. pending" with a number and his name, it does not appear he ever received a patent, perhaps because patents for similar decoys had previously been awarded. Schlemmer apparently only made mallard decoys. His decoys were fashioned of heavy canvas, stuffed with kapok and tacked to a wooden bottom board. The canvas was hand-painted with a basic mallard plumage pattern using oil paint. The significant variation in both shape and painting adds to their folksy appeal. Interest in Schlemmer's decoys is primarily regional.

Scott

Samuel Sigsbee "Sig" Scott (1898-1976) was born in North Platte. For most of his life he worked as an engineer at the Pacific Fruit Express plant in North Platte, a firm making ice for the Union Pacific Railroad. Scott probably began making his own decoys when the use of live call birds was outlawed in 1935. Prior to that time Scott kept flocks of both mallards and Canada geese as live decoys. Other than a few used as part of a display in a Gambles store and sold for \$5 apiece, he is not known to have marketed his decoys. It is estimated he made about 500 decoys.

Like most other regional decoy makers of his time, Scott designed his own decoys and improvised his construction materials. His first pattern was made from a commercial Canada goose decoy cut in half. From those halves Scott cast plaster molds, then modified the molds to make the decoys more bird-like to his eye—widening the body and adding details such as depressions in the head for the eyes. Scott



Frederick Schlemmer of North Platte made kapok-stuffed canvas mallard decoys with wooden bottom boards during the 1920s.

made decoys in at least 12 postures, including feeding, preening, alert and with heads turned various ways.

Scott's decoys were made from red rosin building paper, a material used as a moisture barrier between sheeting and siding on houses. The construction paper was torn into one-inch strips, dipped in a paste made of flour and water, and pressed into the molds. Nine layers were applied and allowed to air dry before the half-shells were removed from the molds. Head, neck and body halves were molded as a unit. A quarter-inch-thick, wooden centerboard cut from a fruit crate was fit-



Samuel Sigsbee Scott of North Platte made decoys from the 1930s into the 1950s. The bodies were formed from strips of red rosin building paper, dipped in paste and formed in molds.



Although Scott made mostly Canada goose decoys, he also made a limited number of mallard floaters.

ted vertically in the decoy cavity where the two halves joined. Lead balance weights were attached on the inside of the centerboard on floating decoys to keep them upright in water. Field decoys had a metal plate on the belly into which a metal stake could be inserted. The two decoy halves were nailed to the centerboard and the seam covered with more strips of red rosin paper, then covered with unbleached muslin saturated in flour paste. After drying, the decoys received several coats of white shellac and were ready to paint. Scott's wife, Ruth, painted the decoys, blending a few basic pigments to create light and dark variations on the body, over which a simplified feather pattern was painted. The quality of painting is considered excellent for homemade decoys.

Most of Scott's decoys simulated large Canada geese, but he also made small Canadas. Perhaps Scott's most innovative design was a "flying" Canada goose decoy made with outstretched neck and tin wings. The flying decoys were mounted on metal stakes of different heights to suggest geese landing. He made a limited number of mallard floater decoys. Scott's only attempt to mark his decoys was to stamp the let-

ters "SSS" on the lead balance weight inside floating decoys. Scott continued to make decoys through the 1940s and perhaps into the 1950s. Because Scott made relatively few decoys compared to more prolific decoy makers such as Lundgren, they are rare finds. The interest in Scott decoys is mostly regional, and outside of Nebraska they generally do not fetch high prices.

Forney

Apparently Vic Forney of North Platte only made decoys for his own use. They were of a high quality and surely would be sought by collectors had he been more prolific and better known. Forney began work for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission seining crew in 1950, and ended his career in 1970

working at the North Platte fish hatchery. Most of Forney's decoy work was probably done during the 1950s, and perhaps into the early 1960s.

With the exception of solid-wood mourning dove decoys made in the 1970s, all known Forney decoys are diving ducks. His duck decoys had either wooden bodies (apparently not hollowed), or cork bodies with ¾-inch baseboards. The type of wood he used is unknown but the wooden decoys are lightweight. Forney attached the heads to the bodies with a dowel and glue. The decoys were not rigged with keels, but had lead ballast weights on the bottoms that he poured in a mold he fashioned. The anchor line was attached to a screw eye near the front of the decoy bottom. Known Forney decoys were not marked with his name.

Black

Cyrus "Cy" Black (1871-1962) moved with his family from Illinois to Kearney in 1875, where they founded the Island Dairy and Celery Farm. As a young man, Black was an amateur baseball manager, later a scout for the St. Louis Cardinals and credited with discovering Baseball Hall of Fame center fielder Richie Ashburn. Baseball great Stan Musial visited



Vic Forney of North Platte fashioned solid wood mourning dove decoys in 1975 when Nebraska again had a hunting season.



During the 1950s, and perhaps into the 1960s, Vic Forney made decoys (apparently only diving ducks) for his own use. Shown above are a pair of his wood-bodied scaup and goldeneyes, and a canvasback pair with cork bodies and wood baseboards.

Black's barn and purchased both duck and goose decoys. Black was a hunting guide, skilled taxidermist and an artist who sketched and painted wildlife.

Black's decoy production began with plaster casts of mounted waterfowl from which he had iron molds cast at a Colorado foundry. Metal lath, a mesh used in plaster and stucco walls, was pressed and pounded into the molds. The two halves were removed from the molds and wired together on early production birds but later were welded. The head and neck was formed separately and attached to the body. Joints were smoothed with a mixture of sawdust and dissolved celluloid. The entire decoy was draped with burlap from gunnysacks and impregnated with linoleum paste. Black salvaged 8-by-10-inch negatives from a photography studio, cut them into small pieces and soaked them in lye water to remove the emulsion. The remaining celluloid was then dissolved in ace-

tone and brushed over the decoys. Black's field decoys had detachable legs with a U-shaped piece of No. 9 wire that slipped into the underside of the decoy, and rubber feet cut from inner tubes. Black used a limited palette of raw umber, ivory black and white oil paints.

Black made decoys from the 1920s though the 1950s. Most were Canada geese but he also made a limited number of snow geese and mallards, and at least one pintail. Even though Black formed his decoys in molds, no two are ever identical. In the 1950s, "lesser Canadas" sold for \$22 a dozen and larger Canadas for \$26 a dozen. Most decoys were sold by word of mouth, but Black also sold decoys out of a truck and wagon in towns along the Platte and North Platte rivers; and had a commercial sales outlet in Bonesteel, South Dakota. In addition to decoys, Black made duck and goose calls of the same celluloid material used in his decoys.

Cole

Joe Cole lived in Kearney, managed the local theater and one in Loup City, and made furniture and cabinets. He moved to Iowa in 1949. While in Nebraska he hunted waterfowl on the Platte River. Each of his decoys was stamped with the month, year and a unique decoy number. A July 1946 decoy, for example, was stamped "7-46-149" meaning it was the 149th decoy he had made. Because of the number of decoys known to exist, it is likely he made more than just for his own use, but unlikely he made hundreds of decoys. Only duck decoys are known to exist, and as expected, most are mallards.

Cole's decoy bodies were fashioned by gluing together seven layers of ¾-inch pine boards, the wood probably salvaged from fruit crates. The centers of all but the top and bottom boards were cut out to create a hollow, lightweight bird. The head, cut from ¾-inch dimension lumber with an



Most decoys made by Cy Black of Kearney were Canada geese, but he also made mallard decoys and at least one pintail, perhaps a prototype.



Joe Cole lived in Kearney in the 1940s. His hollow-bodied mallard decoys were made by shaping and gluing seven boards.

additional piece of wood glued to the sides for cheeks, was attached to the body with two wooden dowels. Cole decoys were slightly oversized and beautifully painted. Had he produced more, and lived on the East Coast or Great Lakes region, they would probably be highly sought by collectors.

Rex Decoys

Manufactured in the late-1950s and early-1960s by Avery Scott and Paul Covington in a rented store in Morrill, Rex Decoys were extensively advertised nationally. The decoys were made of 1/16-inch thick latex, and were inflated by blowing into a valve. A December 1963 *Outdoor Nebraska* article compared the latex to the type used in “rubber dolls, balloons, and girdles,” and described the manufacturing process as follows: “Liquid latex is poured into a plaster of Paris mold and allowed to harden for about five minutes. Since latex only hardens when in contact with a substance that absorbs moisture, the thickness of the decoy can be regulated. The remainder of the latex is poured off to be used later, and the part adhering to the mold has the consistency of butter. The mold is then set aside to cure or harden for 24 hours.” Each mold was made from a balsa-wood model hand-carved by Covington. The company’s advertising claimed the decoys were: “Custom Made – Hand Painted – Hand Finished” All decoys were made about 10 percent larger than life-sized.

Rex Decoy advertising copy was blatantly boastful and typical of the 1960s: “Lures ‘em in . . . Pulls ‘em Down like the real ones used to do.” “Made by hunters for hunters who want the very best. REX BRAND is an absolutely new idea in decoys. An outstanding achievement in the field of hunting that has taken 12 years to develop. They are unusually life-like in appearance. So completely deceptive that it is difficult to distinguish them from Live game, even

at short distances.”

Rex decoys apparently were manufactured in Canada geese and mallards only, although a brochure notes the company “will provide other species on request.” They were made for use as stand-up field decoys or floaters. “Amazing life-like rubber feet reinforced with heavy wire,” metal stakes and keels were sold separately for \$1 in 1958. Canada geese were offered in “5 different models” with 14 different head positions. A Canada decoy weighed about two pounds with feet. In 1958, a dozen goose decoys sold for \$95 per dozen, mallards for \$55 per dozen. Unfortunately, the latex rubber deteriorated over time and with exposure to the elements.

Henderson

Joe “Bud” Henderson grew up on a farm in Custer County, moved to California during World War II to work, and



Rex Decoys produced miniature decoys to use as salesmen’s samples and for advertising displays in sporting goods stores.



Rex Decoys in Morrill manufactured inflatable latex goose decoys during the late-1950s and early 1960s. The decoys could be rigged for use on both land or water.



Joe Henderson of North Platte produced this “flying” goose decoy in the 1940s or 1950s. The decoy was restored by Gary Zaruba. Henderson also made a flying decoy that could be mounted on a post, and its wings made to move by pulling a rope.

returned to Nebraska after the war, settling in North Platte and working for the Union Pacific Railroad, retiring as an engineer. He began waterfowl hunting along the Platte and North Platte rivers during the late-1940s and making decoys for his own use. Henderson and his hunting friends probably made stick-up Canada goose decoys but none are known to exist today. It is not known how many he made.

Henderson made at least two flying Canada goose decoys. One had spread wings and two eyelets on the back to which snaps could be attached. A length of cable or heavy wire passed through the snaps and was stretched between two posts. The flying decoy could be released to glide downward, or pulled to simulate a landing goose. Henderson’s second flying goose was made to mount on a post or stout stake. Pulling on a rope would flap its spread wings.

Long

Jesse Long homesteaded in the Sandhills northeast of North Platte, and moved closer to the river in about 1900. In addition to hunting big game in Wyoming, he was an inveterate waterfowl hunter. His grandson, Larry Long, believes Jesse and his hunting cronies began making Canada goose decoys in the 1910s and deployed them on sandbars on the North Platte and Platte rivers. He made two types of stick-up Canada goose decoys—canvas stuffed with straw, similar to the type John Lundgren commercially marketed in the 1940s; and canvas over a wire mesh.

Long’s wire mesh decoys were unique in construction. The body form was fashioned from metal lath,

the expanded metal sheeting commonly used in plastering during those decades. To prevent the body shell from being crushed or losing its shape, a circular 3/4-inch board was positioned mid-body and anchored to the metal lath with a strip of 1 1/2-inch galvanized metal sewn to the metal lath with wire. Another strip of metal was sewn with wire along the spine of the decoy. The head and neck sections were fashioned entirely with metal lath. A tail section made of metal lath and a thin galvanized metal plate was attached. Once the goose was shaped, it was covered with a light canvas and painted. There was a galvanized plate on the belly with a slot into which a U-shaped part of welded No. 9 wire “legs” could be inserted. Because of the light canvas used, and the propensity for metal lath to rust, few decoys in good condition have survived.



Jesse Long and his hunting partners made goose decoys in the 1910s by stretching canvas over bodies formed from metal lath, an expanded metal used in plastering.



By blowing through a 30-foot-long rubber hose, a hunter could make a Call-D-Coy mallard or Canada goose head move and issue a call to lure passing birds within range.

Call-D-Coy

Usually considered a novelty decoy by today's collectors, the Call-D-Coy, designed and sold by Neal J. Lynch from St. Paul, Nebraska, was marketed nationally as a game animal lure in the 1960s. At some point the distribution center, and probably the company, was moved to Kansas City, Missouri.

The principal behind Call-D-Coy decoys was to produce a duck or goose call right from the decoy's mouth. The idea was not new, as a cork decoy that quacked was marketed during the 1930s and 1940s by Boutin Products of Minneapolis. To accomplish this, Lynch modified G&H goose shell decoys and plastic Quackers full-bodied mallard decoys by inserting a calling device connected to a 30-foot rubber hose in the neck of the decoys. The "patented lung" built into the decoys expanded and produced a call when the hunter blew into the white plastic mouthpiece on the other end of the tubing. The passage of air down the tube also moved the modified decoy



Sporting Specialties' wicker Canada goose decoys were made in Hong Kong, but designed and painted by Wayne Barber of Norfolk



Call-D-Coy advertised extensively. This appeared in the October 1960 *Sports Afield*.

heads up and down to create lifelike motion. A template was included from which a one-inch-thick board could be cut to be attached to the bottom of the shells allowing them to be used as floaters. Call-D-Coy also manufactured a varmint lure using a jackrabbit decoy that produced a wounded, squealing call. An October 1960 *Sports Afield* advertisement listed prices as ranging from \$16.50 for a small duck decoy up to \$19.95 for a large goose decoy.

Sporting Specialties

It is not known when Wayne Barber, owner of Norfolk's Sporting Specialties Sporting Goods Store, first produced and marketed his Canada goose decoys. An advertisement for them appeared in the October 1961 issue of *Field and Stream*. Apparently most were sold locally and at regional sports shows and goose calling contests. Although designed for field use, the wicker decoys are usually considered novelty decoys today and sought by designers.

Barber's decoys were fashioned in Hong Kong of woven rattan (the stems of any of several climbing palms of tropical Asia used extensively in wickerwork furniture), making them extremely lightweight. There were at least four different designs—a shell with detachable head, full-bodies in two sizes, and a full-body with a circular hole in the belly. A basic Canada goose plumage pattern was spray painted on the decoys in Barber's garage. Steel-shaft legs, with sliding webbed feet, were sold to support the decoy in the field. Because of the material from which they were constructed, and the relatively small production, mint examples are uncommon and fetch reasonably good prices.

Hoffmann

Gail Hoffmann of Omaha was representative of the many Nebraska waterfowlers who produced decoys in considerable quantity for their own use. With money tight, and a substantial

spread essential to hunt the Missouri River, Hoffmann obtained discarded cork insulation for bodies from Railway Fruit Express. Heads and necks were essentially silhouettes cut from dimension lumber. Both bodies and heads were cut with a coping saw. A long bolt passed through the body and attached the head to the body, along with glue. A small piece of tin was inserted between the head and body, and under the bolt nut on the bottom of the decoy. A hole in the bottom tin was used to attach the anchor line. The bottom of the body was tarred. Neither keels nor bottom weights were used. Typically the entire decoy was painted a flat black. Cross-links from tire chains were used for anchor weights on his later decoys. Hoffmann began making decoys in 1937 and continued until World War II, when he was in the armed services. He resumed making them after the war, until about 1956. Pre-war decoys were smaller with rounded bodies, post-war larger and more square in shape. His total production was probably about 200 mallard decoys.

Wood

Perhaps the most unusual Nebraska-made decoy to survive through the years was made by Walter C. Wood of Sumner in about 1920 or earlier. Wood's son, Walter Wood, of Broken Bow, thought his father made "perhaps" a dozen decoys for his own use. Only one is known to exist today. The hand-carved wooden head has an exaggerated spatulate bill, suggesting the decoys were shovelers. The body is fashioned from cattail or bulrush, bound with wire, and reminiscent of the earliest known North American decoys—11 canvasback duck decoys made of bundled tule stems and found in Nevada's Lovelock Cave in 1924. Those decoys were made by the Paiute tribe and are approximately 2,000 years old. ■



From the late-1930s into the 1950s, Gail Hoffmann of Omaha produced about 200 mallard decoys using discarded cork from insulated railway cars. Originally the decoys were painted black.

Some information for this article came from two books with author's permission: *Canvas Decoys of North America* by Archie Johnson, published by Decoy Magazine, 1994, available from Decoy Magazine, POB 787, Lewes, DE 19958 for \$29.95 plus \$3.95 shipping, www.decoymag.com; and *North American Factory Decoys – A Pictorial Identification and Reference Guide* by Kenneth L. Trayer, Reprint Publishing, 2003, available from author, 314 Little Creek Road, Lancaster PA 17601, \$69.95 plus \$5 shipping, www.factorydecoys.com. Collectors loaning decoys are credited with the photographs. For more information see past NEBRASKALAND issues: "John Lundgren, Decoy Maker," November 1993; "Cy Black's Counterfeit Canadas," November 1995; and "Sig Scott's Homegrown Decoys," December 1997.



Walter Wood of Sumner is only known to have fashioned about a dozen decoys but they are perhaps the most unique from Nebraska, with bodies made of bundled and wired cattail or bulrush. The spatulate bill identifies the decoys as shovelers.

Making the Good Life Better

By Doug Carroll

Created in 1983, last month the Nebraska Game and Parks Foundation celebrated 25 years of truly making the good life better for outdoor enthusiasts across the state.

The Nebraska Game and Parks Foundation represents a joining of hands between the public and private sectors. It is a foundation committed to improving the quality of life for Nebraskans. The Foundation is open to every citizen of the state. The pennies, nickels and dimes of school children are as important as help from our most successful corporate enterprises. It's going to be the good helping hand the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission needs now and for the years to come."



JON FARRAR

Former Nebraska Game and Parks Commission director Eugene T. Mahoney.

Thus spoke Eugene T. Mahoney, former director of the Commission, upon the March 15, 1983 creation of the Foundation. More prescient words have perhaps never been written. Created to help the Commission enhance outdoor recreation opportunities in Nebraska, the Foundation is still going strong 25 years later and its many successes have provided untold enjoyment for thousands of people across the state. The story of the Foundation's creation and contributions to the quality of Nebraska's outdoor resources is too much to cover in just a few pages and was well-chronicled in Jon Farrar's "Building Tomorrow's Outdoor Recreation" in the November 2006 issue of *NEBRASKALAND*, but here's a brief look at what it has been able to accomplish, what it plans to do in the future, and how you can help make the good life better.

Established as a way to help the Commission fund projects it otherwise wouldn't be able to afford (state funds cover well below 20 percent of the agency's overall budget), the Foundation accepts tax-deductible contributions of cash, corporate gifts, personal property, life estates and real estate and uses these gifts for projects that all Nebraskans can enjoy. Some of these projects have been as simple as lighted tennis courts at Fort Robinson State Park or road resurfacing at Ponca State Park, while others have been a lot larger, such as

funding modern cabins at Platte River State Park. Probably the largest, and best-known, project that the Foundation is to be thanked for is E.T. Mahoney State Park, the crown jewel of Nebraska's park system.

Through the Foundation, the initial purchase of 425 acres of land was made at a cost of \$539,000, and additional land was later purchased for \$132,000. In all, some 80 percent of the money required for the \$14 million showcase was raised by the Foundation through private donations, and the Foundation's efforts with E.T. Mahoney State Park continue to give – money earned by the park now helps support other state parks across Nebraska.

One of the Foundation's newest success stories is the Youth Lifetime Permit program, which began in 2005. This program allows some Nebraska residents under the age of 16 to buy lifetime hunting and fishing permits at half the regular price, with the Foundation paying the other half.

The first year the program started, a small number of permits were offered on a first-come, first-served basis at sports shows in Lincoln and Omaha, as well as at the Sidney and Kearney Cabela's stores. Foundation members were pleased that demand was high –

OPPOSITE: The majority of the money used to build Eugene T. Mahoney State Park was raised by the Foundation.

ERIC FOWLER



The Foundation is needed more than ever if the Commission is to continue to provide the services and outdoor recreation opportunities that its constituents demand and deserve.

all of the specially priced permits sold out in just a few hours – but felt that this format didn’t do a very good job of spreading opportunity around the state.



The Foundation’s funding of half-price lifetime permits has raised a lot of money for the Commission.

As a result, in 2006 the program changed to its current format, a series of drawings at Commission events, sports shows, and local conservation banquets across Nebraska. In 2006 and 2007, children in 80 of Nebraska’s 93 counties won permits.

The Youth Lifetime Permit program accomplishes two very important goals for the Foundation: It’s a powerful tool for recruiting youth into a lifetime of hunting and fishing, and perhaps more importantly, it allows a relatively small initial investment to generate funding for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission for years to come. Here’s how: By paying half the cost of the permits, the Foundation makes a direct contribution to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission that is matched 100 percent by the winner’s half of the permit cost. In addition, because the number of hunting and fishing permits sold by a state is used to compute how much federal excise tax money is received, every Foundation dollar spent



Many of the improvements made to popular Ponca State Park in northeastern Nebraska have been made with money donated by the Foundation.

ERIC FOWLER



DOUG CARROLL

Money raised by the Foundation was instrumental to building modern cabins and other conveniences at Platte River State Park.

on permits ensures Nebraska will qualify for a larger portion of excise tax money collected on the sale of certain outdoor equipment.

In 2006 and 2007, the Foundation funded 846 half-price permits, directly contributing \$145,969 to the Youth Lifetime Permit Program. Through the means described above, a conservative estimate is that this initial investment will secure at least \$783,285 for the state, in addition to the interest on the principal over the next 20 years and

beyond. For 2008, the Foundation is purchasing \$70,000 worth of half-price permits for distribution across the state.

Throughout its history, the Nebraska Game and Parks Foundation has generally been a very low-profile group, despite its long and impressive history of raising money and supporting Commission projects for the greater good of all Nebraskans. In these days of ever-increasing costs and ever-tightening governmental budgets, the Foundation is needed more than ever if

the Commission is to continue to provide the services and outdoor recreation opportunities that its constituents demand and deserve. To that end, the Foundation is trying to raise its profile by promoting the work it’s been doing and looking for greater participation and contributions by all Nebraskans in helping fulfill its worthy cause. Which brings us back to Mahoney’s quote at the beginning of this article: “The Foundation is open to every citizen of the state. The pennies, nickels and dimes

of school children are as important as help from our most successful corporate enterprises. It’s going to be the good helping hand the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission needs now and for the years to come.”

To find out more about the Foundation or to make a donation, visit its web site at www.nebraskagameandparksfoundation.org, call (402) 593-4617, or write to them at P.O. Box 27347, Omaha, NE 68127-0347.

What's So Special About a Campfire?

Choosing the proper wood can enhance your campfire experience.

By Tom Keith

One of the things I've always enjoyed most about camping is the campfire. It doesn't matter what season, what time of day, or what the weather is, the first thing I do when I set up camp is build a fire.

The campfire has a certain magic of its own that is important when you are camping. It is the gathering place where all of the people you are camping with come to eat, drink coffee and make plans for the day. Later that evening, they meet there again to rehash everything that happened during the day and plan for the next.

It's the place where the kids feel safe, especially at night when the rest of the unfamiliar outdoor world with all of its strange noises is cloaked in darkness.

It's a place where you can warm your hands and feet, where wet clothing and boots can be dried, and where smoke from the fire will help protect the campers from biting and stinging bugs.

Campfire smoke smells wonderful and, like Hoppe's No. 9 gun solvent, has a distinctive odor that makes you think of being outdoors wherever or whenever you get a whiff of it. In my opinion, if someone made a woman's perfume that smelled like a campfire, it would take over the market.

To really make the camping trip enjoyable and worth remembering, add the delicate aromas of coffee boiling, bacon, potatoes, onions and fish frying, or steaks grilling above glowing coals. Perhaps it's just me, but it seems like anything cooked over a campfire tastes better than it would cooked on a kitchen stove. My dogs think so too – they always get to sample the roasted hot dogs, barbecued chicken and grilled burgers we enjoy in the evenings when we're camping.



Sitting around a campfire roasting marshmallows or just visiting ranks near the top of many people's favorite summertime activities.

Every camper should take it upon themselves to insist that each of their children and grandchildren spend at least a few evenings each year sitting around the campfire hearing and telling ghost stories and roasting marshmallows.

One of the secrets of building a great campfire is choosing good wood to feed it.

The best firewood gives off good heat, is easy to burn, easy to split, gives off little smoke and few sparks.

Here are some of my favorite woods to use.

- **Apple** burns slowly and steadily when dry, with little flame but good heat. Smells good.
- **Ash** is a very good-burning wood, producing good flame and heat.
- **Birch** produces good heat and smells good, but burns rather quickly.
- **Cedar** is good when dry. It pops and snaps, burns easily and produces a medium heat while giving off a pleasant aroma.

- **Cherry** burns slowly with medium heat and smells good.
 - **Hard Maple** burns well and produces high heat.
 - **Soft maple** burns well and produces medium heat.
 - **Walnut** burns well, produces medium heat and smells good.
 - **Hickory** produces high heat and is easy to burn.
 - **Red and white oak** produce high heat and little smoke.
- Seasoned wood with a moisture content of 15 to 20 percent burns best. Unseasoned wood provides less heat because some of the energy stored in it is needed to vaporize the water and drive it off. If you must use green wood, the smaller you split it, the better it will burn.

Camping with the family can be one of the least expensive and most enjoyable activities available to you. Look for more information about camping in Nebraska at the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's web site at www.OutdoorNebraska.org. ■

PHOTO BY DOUG CARROLL

Rites of Spring

A whole lot of dancin' and boomin' goin' on.

By Jon Farrar

The marshalling of a half-million sandhill cranes on the central Platte River in March seems to have captured the state's wildlife-viewing spotlight, but there are other rites of spring well worth watching. Among the best are courtship displays of sharp-tailed grouse and greater prairie chickens, collectively called prairie grouse.

Beginning in March, male prairie grouse begin gathering on display grounds called leks – sharptails on dancing grounds and prairie chickens on booming grounds – to attract and mate with hens. Each male stakes out a small territory on the lek and defends it with dancing, calls, displays, threatened aggression and, occasionally, full-blown battle. Display is most intense in mid- to late-April when hens visit, but the males may continue to gather and half-heartedly display through June.

Male prairie grouse come to display grounds in both the morning and evening, but the most vigorous displays are in the morning. Both species arrive on their leks before the first hint of light, so plan on being in the blind at least an hour before sunrise. It is wise to locate blinds in daylight before attempting to find them in the dark. While grouse will probably return to the grounds if flushed early, it disrupts courtship and should be avoided. And there is no greater magic on the Great Plains than huddling in the dark and listening to prairie chickens boom or sharptails cackle and stamp their feet



A male sharp-tailed grouse struts his stuff on the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge south of Valentine in Cherry County.

as they walk to the grounds in the dark. If you arrive later, observe the grouse from a distance with binoculars or a spotting scope. If there are already people in the blind when you arrive, assume it is full and do not disturb them. Proper grouse viewing protocol calls for staying in the blind until displaying grouse have left, often two to three hours after sunrise.

Dress warmly. You can always shed layers of clothing, and in April the nights are often chilly, especially in north-central and western Nebraska.

Displaying male prairie grouse are amazingly tolerant of observers in nearby blinds, but for the best display keep noise and observable movement to a minimum. If you are taking photographs, put your camera on a tripod so your lens is not constantly poking in and out of the viewing port, and drape a scarf or other garment over the lens to seal off the opening around the lens.

A list of public lands with viewing blinds follows. There are also private

grouse viewing outfitters in the state. Google "grouse viewing Nebraska" to find them.

- **Burchard Lake Wildlife Management Area**, Pawnee County. Five miles north and five miles east of Burchard. Greater prairie chickens. Two blinds, each holding four to five people on a first-come, first-served basis. Personal blinds not allowed. For additional information call (402) 335-2534.
- **Valentine National Wildlife Refuge**, Cherry County. Two blinds, one on a prairie chicken lek, one on a

sharptail lek. Each blind holds three people. Personal blinds not allowed here or at Crescent NWR. For additional information call (402) 376-1889 or (402) 376-3789.

- **Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge**, Garden County. One blind on a sharptail lek, available only during April. Blind holds two to three adults. For reservations or additional information call (308) 762-4893.
- **Nebraska National Forest, Bessey Ranger District**, Thomas and Blaine counties. Three blinds, two on sharptail leks, one on a prairie chicken lek. Each holds four people. First-come, first served. Personal portable blinds allowed. For location of blinds and additional information call (308) 533-2257.

- **Samuel R. McKelvie National Forest** southwest of Valentine in Cherry County. Although no blinds are provided, visitors are allowed to view displaying grouse from a distance or with personal blinds. For more details, call (402) 823-4154. ■

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New Mini-Lodges at Ponca State Park

New lodging options at park will be open year-round.

By Eric Fowler

Two new mini-lodges will open at Ponca State Park (SP) this spring, the first of 17 new lodging options planned for the park and the first that will be open year-round.

The four-bedroom mini-lodges are fully modern, equipped with free wireless internet access and cable television. Kitchens include a range, microwave, full-sized refrigerator and dishwasher. Each bedroom has a queen-sized bed and a sink. Two full bathrooms, a patio and a great room with a wood-burning fireplace round out the 1,524-square-foot floor plan. A geothermal heating and cooling system will keep the mini-lodges comfortable year-round.

These are the first lodging additions to the park since 14 "cozy," 576-square-foot, two-bedroom cabins were built in the 1950s and 1960s. The water systems of those cabins were not designed to handle Nebraska winters, so they are only open from April through mid-November, but they are booked most weekends during that time and most weekdays during the summer.

"The cabins we have now are okay, but the biggest problem with them is size," said Jeff Fields, superintendent of the park. "They're pretty small, so they don't accommodate a lot of people. The new mini-lodges will accommodate family reunions, businesses and other groups that want bigger, more modern facilities."

There is a growing demand: the park drew 749,250 visitors in 2007, more than double the 2001 count, thanks in part to many improvements and the activities it offers, including a popular naturalist program.

Construction on a third mini-lodge will begin this spring. That two-story, four-bedroom unit will be available in 2009, possibly sooner. A basement will eventually be finished, adding



The new mini-lodges at Ponca State Park are located near the visitor center.

two more bedrooms that guests can rent for an additional fee. Eleven more two-story mini-lodges are planned in this phase of park expansion, with work continuing as funding becomes available.

The first three mini-lodges are being funded by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's proceeds from the Nebraska Outdoor Recreation and Development Act. Jim Swenson, regional parks director, said the agency hopes to build the rest with private funding. Already, the Nebraska Game and Parks Foundation and the Peter Kiewit Foundation have made sizable contributions.

Work will also begin this year on three "green" cabins that will showcase environmentally friendly construction, including straw bale walls and recycled materials. The Nebraska Environmental Trust, Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality, Land and Water Conservation Fund, Nebraska Public Power District, Better Ponca Foundation, Cornhusker Motor Club Foundation and the Commission have committed \$380,000 for the \$600,000 project, enough to cover the cost of the two, two-bedroom

cabins expected to open in 2009. The Commission is looking for partners to fund the third cabin, which will have four bedrooms.

Anyone interested in contributing to the work at Ponca SP can contact Swenson at (402) 471-5499 or Jim.Swenson@ngpc.ne.gov, or go to NebraskaGameAndParksFoundation.org.

Reservations for the new facilities won't be taken until they are completed, but they are expected to fill fast. The mini-lodges will rent for \$253 per night with a two night minimum during the summer and on weekends. The park's existing cabins rent for \$78 per night. Reservations can be made up to a year in advance by calling the park at (402) 755-2284, calling (402) 471-1414 or going online to OutdoorNebraska.org. ■



Covering 2,166 acres of forest and bottomland along the Missouri River, Ponca State Park is located 2 miles north of the town of Ponca on Spur 26E.

Portraits from the Past



This photo from 1969 is what I call "A good week's work." The photo shows (from left to right) Jeff Seholl, Lowell Harris, Wes Beck Sr. and Wes Beck Jr. The Treeing Walker coonhounds in the photo are (from left to right): Lady, Jubal, Maggie and Lucky. We did 90 percent of our hunting on the Platte River and creeks in the Central City area.

— Lowell Harris, Central City, Nebraska



This photo was taken in February 1955, in Boyd County southeast of Butte. My grandfather, Jesse Lewis, trapped coyotes for decades, burying chicken manure and spreading chicken feathers near each set of traps, making the coyotes dig for their meal. Though he primarily raised cattle, he spent a significant amount of time trapping during the era when there was a bounty on coyotes. He loved telling the story of catching three coyotes in one set of traps. One thing that could always be counted on near dusk was the chorus of coyotes around the farm, but sadly, the mange epidemic has apparently taken a toll in that area. During the recent firearm deer season we did not see or hear a single coyote the entire week.

— Graig Kinzie, Lewellen, Nebraska



This is a picture of my dad, Gene Kehr. He is with a deer that he shot in 1959 in the Sandhills, 60 miles south of Nenzel on the Harden Ranch. The deer was a 5-by-5 buck with a 28-inch spread that measured 160½ inches, which put him 16th that year in the trophy books. My brother Chuck was five in this picture and Dad was 28. Dad also killed a 7-by-7 trophy whitetail on the same ranch in 1964. This ranch was also where all of us boys killed our first deer.

— Tom Kehr, Buffalo, Wyoming



This picture shows my grandfather, Charley Peck (right), and an unknown friend duck hunting on the Platte River, probably in the Brady/Gothenburg area in the late-1920s or early-30s. Notice the homemade tin shell decoys, wooden silhouettes and the live decoy!

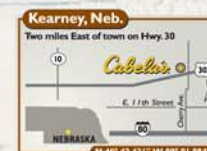
— Alex J. Kufeldt, Kearney, Nebraska

Send contributions to: Portraits from the Past, NEBRASKALAND Magazine, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370. Photos should show people enjoying Nebraska outdoor activities, such as camping, boating, hunting or fishing, and must have been taken before 1970. We will give priority to unusual photos or activities. When possible, please include a story about the photograph and identify the people, places and approximate date it was taken. Photos will be returned.



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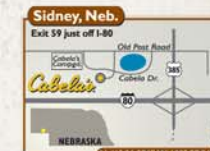
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