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ON THE WEB

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Cover: Roy Swoboda’s “Wonderous Woodies” image won Best of Show in the 2022 Nebraskaland Photo Contest. See page 18. ROY SWOBODA

This page: Sandhill cranes pass in front of a full moon while returning to their roost on the Platte River in Hall County. ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



Nebraskaland
magazine

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



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Red fox pups are born now through April. ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

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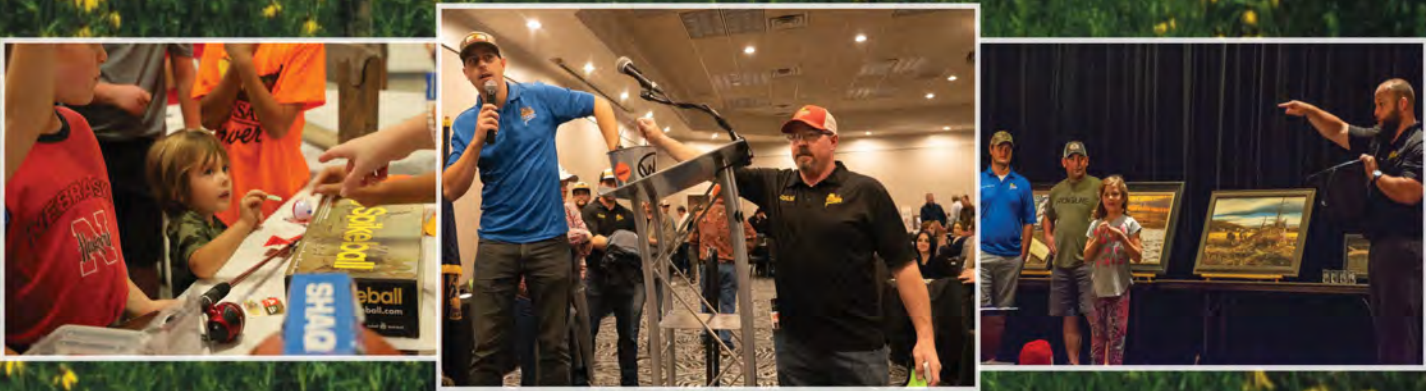
Pheasants Forever and
Quail Forever in Nebraska



2023 Spring Chapter Banquets

Table with 6 columns: DATE, CITY, CHAPTER, DATE, CITY, CHAPTER. It lists the dates and locations for the 2023 Spring Chapter Banquets for various Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever chapters in Nebraska.

For additional events and to find an event near you visit:
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Please include your postal address
and telephone number. Letters
may be condensed and edited.
Photographs are also welcome.



PINTAILS

Pintail ducks perform courtship flights over an ice-filled Platte River in Hall County.

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



Gracie, the author's Labrador retriever, fetches a green-winged teal from the Platte River ice. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

CARING FOR YOUR AGING GUN DOG

By Todd Mills

It's impossible to measure the heart of your hunting dog, or in my experience, your retriever. Even more impossible is measuring when you should shut down your dog, or in some cases, manage them into their twilight years.

No matter how willing the heart is, the body will grow weak. Long gone might be the days of the perfect water entry, or the sunrise to sunset upland hunt. Managing your own expectations and caring for your elderly dog will be the key to extending those days in the field, or at best, enjoying the company of others.

Here are a few ideas to help extend the hunting years for your gun dog.

Keep the Weight Off

Much like us, as your gun dog ages, they burn fewer calories and metabolism slows down. Feeding them the same amount as you did when they were younger will lead to weight gain. As my dogs get into the late single digit years, I'll pick dog food with a lower protein/fat content, especially during the off season. Make sure to consult with your vet as well to determine what the best option might be. Don't skimp when it comes to the quality of your dog's food. Also, determine your dog's body type — shape and size can have an impact on how many calories a dog needs. While most dogs arrive at physical maturity around one, they may not fill out until year five or later.

Rest and Recuperate

Senior dogs take much more time to recover than their younger versions. Giving your dog rest periods in between hunts is crucial to allow them to hunt longer and avoid injury. It becomes imperative that you learn to recognize the signs of when your dog gets tired. Exhaustion may appear in different forms, but normally, you'll see a decline in how aggressive they are when hunting. Sluggish, heavy panting and lack of interest can be a sure sign to put your dog up and give them rest.

Some dogs need more rest than others, so monitor their energy levels each day to determine when it's time to cut them loose again.

Have a Backup Plan

With the exception of 3 months, I've had a hunting dog every day for the last 40 years. I couldn't hunt without one, as it's one of the many joys of my hunting experience. Be prepared to break in a new pup as your senior dog enters the last stage. Not only will that allow you to have a backup if you lose your dog unexpectedly, but also provides some off time for your seasoned veteran. Too many times I've seen hunters wait too long and are miserable hunting without a dog for a year or two. They'll make great companions, and in some cases, the young pup can learn the ropes from the older dog.

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OF LIMPKINS AND SNAILS

By Joel Jorgensen, Nongame Bird Program Manager

A few years ago, if someone raised the possibility of a limpkin reaching Nebraska, an appropriate response would have been “when pigs fly.” That is because, not long ago, limpkins were restricted to Central and South America, the Caribbean and Florida. In North America, any limpkin wandering north of the sunshine state would have been big news. Over the past two decades, limpkins began to increase in Florida and push a little farther north. Still, for the longest time, the idea of a limpkin in Nebraska would still have been unfathomable. It has only been within the last five years that limpkins have done the unthinkable and with each passing year, their story becomes more unbelievable.

Limpkins are an odd, brown waterbird with white spots. The species is related to cranes and rails, and its appearance falls somewhere in between. Limpkins wade in water, somewhat like a heron or ibis, where they hunt for preferred prey, which is predominantly large snails and mollusks. However, the limpkin is unique as there is no other species like it in the world.

In 2017, limpkins were reported in Louisiana with other singletons making appearances in Tennessee and Virginia. In subsequent years, the number of reports north of Florida continued to grow. By 2021, limpkins were found breeding in Louisiana and moving into Texas. Single birds also reached Arkansas, Illinois and even Minnesota. In June 2022, Karen Kader was birding at Chalco Hills Recreation Area in Sarpy County and amazingly discovered Nebraska’s first limpkin. Later the same day, Iowa recorded its first limpkin. Nebraska’s limpkin remained in the state into October and by then, multiple birds had been recorded in Iowa, Kansas and many other nearby states. By late 2022, a limpkin popping up anywhere in the eastern U.S. was no longer unexpected.

At one time, limpkins were at risk of being wiped out in the U.S. because of unregulated hunting and wetland loss. What could explain their recent and sudden break out

from Florida? Could the birds be displaced by widespread habitat destruction or drought in Florida? Or is this a case of a population boom? Limpkins are a native bird, but their story appears to be linked to the rapid spread of an entirely different animal that is, in fact, an invasive species.

One preferred food of limpkins are large apple snails that are native to Florida. However, another nonnative apple snail species has been introduced and has spread rapidly along the Gulf Coast. Limpkins will readily consume both native and invasive apple snails and this new, abundant food resource is likely fueling the limpkin explosion. The invasive apple snails are cold sensitive and have not spread north to Nebraska. However, another large snail, the Chinese mystery snail, has been introduced and has infested some waters in Nebraska and the Midwest.

The limpkin discovered at Chalco Hills Recreation Area spent most of its time in an impoundment where there was an abundant supply of these Chinese mystery snails, and several observers that came to see the limpkin observed it devouring several large helpings of these snails.

Invasive species are generally bad news for native species and ecosystems, and invasive snails are no exception.

The fact that invasive species may be leading to population increases and range expansion of a quirky, albeit interesting, native bird is not necessarily anything to celebrate. What remains to be seen is where this story ends.

If limpkins are now breeding in Louisiana, perhaps they will spread all along the Gulf Coast where there is seemingly substantial, suitable habitat and no shortage of invasive snails. At a minimum, we can likely expect limpkins to become a more frequent visitor to Nebraska. However, if the last two years are any indication, the limpkin saga may still have many more surprises in store. In short, pigs still can’t fly, but limpkins can.

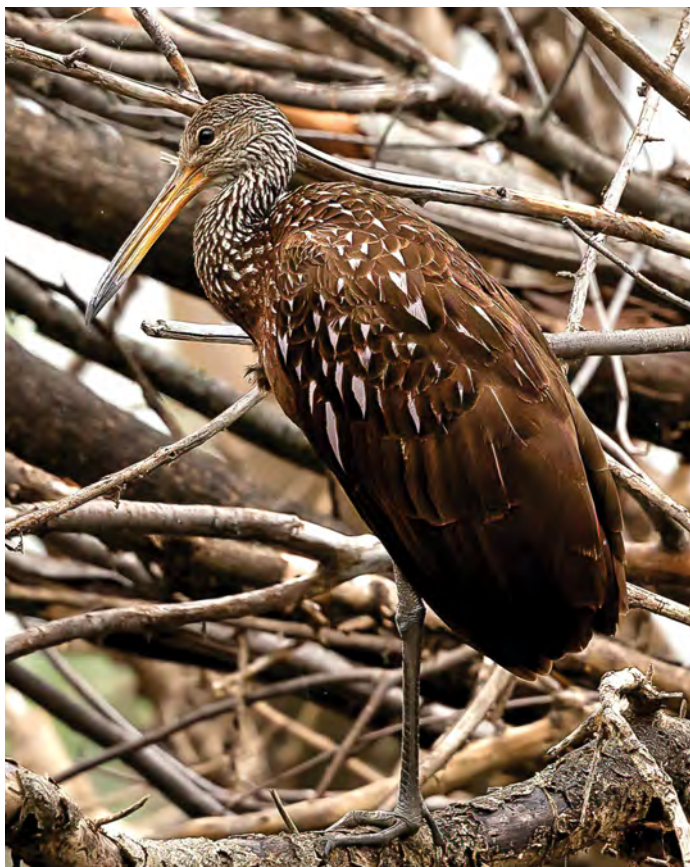


PHOTO BY KAREN KADER

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Look for the Peregrine Falcon image on your Nebraska tax return.





Tough wild turkey thighs become tender after slow cooking in an apricot and bourbon sauce. JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND

APRICOT-BOURBON WILD TURKEY

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

Servings: 4

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Cooking Time: 4 hours

Ingredients:

- 4 wild turkey thighs
- Kosher salt, to taste
- Freshly cracked pepper, to taste
- 2 tablespoons of olive oil
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 2 tablespoons of butter
- 1 teaspoon of fresh thyme leaves or ¼ teaspoon dry
- 1 bay leaf
- 4 cloves of garlic, minced
- ¾ cup of bourbon or whisky
- 2 cups of barbecue sauce (preferably one that tastes more tart than sweet)
- ¾ cup of apricot preserves
- ¼ cup of water
- ¼ teaspoon of cayenne pepper
- 1 teaspoon of Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tablespoon of coarse ground mustard
- Freshly chopped green onion/chives for garnish
- Freshly prepared mashed potatoes

1. Preheat oven to 300 degrees Fahrenheit. Pat wild turkey thighs dry and season with salt and pepper. Heat 2 tablespoon of olive oil in an enameled cast iron pot over medium-high heat. (Do not use bare cast iron because the acidity in the sauce will take on a metallic taste.) Brown thighs on both sides, transfer to a dish and then set aside.

2. Lower heat to medium. Add chopped onion and butter to the pot. Sweat until translucent and slightly browned, stirring frequently. Then add thyme, bay leaf and garlic and stir for 30 seconds. Turn off the burner and carefully pour in bourbon, and then after, turn the heat back on. Reduce until the alcohol is nearly completely evaporated, scraping the bottom of the pot with a wooden spoon. Add barbecue sauce, apricot preserves, water, cayenne, Worcestershire and mustard, and whisk to combine.

3. Return browned turkey thighs to the pot. Transfer pot to the oven and bake at 300 degrees, covered, for 3 to 4 hours or until turkey becomes tender; flip thighs halfway through and add chicken broth or water if sauce reduces too much. Serve thighs over hot mashed potatoes with chopped green onion for garnish.

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2022 Photo Contest

With more than 3,500 entries submitted through Instagram, the 2022 *Nebraskaland Magazine* Photo Contest once again drew a record number of stunning images, forcing us to add an additional category, Invertebrates, to our perennial categories of Wildlife, Flora, Scenic and Recreation.

This year's Best of Show winner, "Wondrous Woodies," by Roy Swoboda of Meadow Grove, was taken on a slough near the Missouri River as dawn was breaking. "I love photographing in Knox County," Swoboda said. "There are so many different landscapes and animals to photograph there. This pair slowly paddled toward me as I waited on the shoreline, a sliver of sunshine truly making the image for me."

We thank everyone who participated and look forward to seeing more of your great photographs in next year's contest.

Keep shooting.

Jeff Kurrus, Editor
Nebraskaland Magazine

BEST OF SHOW

Wondrous Woodies
Photo by Roy Swoboda, Meadow Grove
[@wild.focus.photography](#)

WILDLIFE

FIRST PLACE – Three of a Kind

Photo by Rick Rasmussen, Doniphan

@rick_s_rasmussen



WILDLIFE

SECOND PLACE – Whitetail Watch
Photo by Connie Rathbun, Omaha
@rathbun2682



THIRD PLACE – Walking on Sunshine
Photo by Rick Rasmussen, Doniphan
@rick_s_rasmussen

FLORA

FIRST PLACE – Celestial Purple Poppy Mallow
Photo by Tyler Moore, Omaha
@drtylermoore



FLORA



THIRD PLACE – Fairy Lamp
Photo by Lynette Hahne, Lincoln
@dennishloose

SECOND PLACE – Water Droplet on Western Salsify Seed
Photo by Roger Richters, Utica
@rogerrichters



SCENIC

FIRST PLACE – Chimney Rock — Spire to the Heavens

Photo by Jeffrey Z. Carney, Ashland

@carneyphotography1



SCENIC



SECOND PLACE – Magical Morning at Branched Oak
Photo by Lynette Hahne, Lincoln
@dennishloose

THIRD PLACE – Out of the Past
Photo by Rick Rasmussen, Doniphan
@rick_s_rasmussen



INVERTEBRATES

FIRST PLACE – Close and Personal
with a Paper Wasp
Photo by Sam Williams, Valentine
@pocket.macro



INVERTEBRATES



SECOND PLACE – Lasioglossum Cirque du Soleil
Photo by Tyler Moore, Omaha
@drtylermoore

THIRD PLACE – Bee on Coneflower
Photo by Roger Richters, Utica
@rogerrichters



RECREATION

FIRST PLACE – Duck Blind Kiss

Photo by Joel Jones, Lincoln

@joel_bo_jones



RECREATION



SECOND PLACE – On the Fly
Photo by Derrill Grabenstein, Lincoln
@de_grabenstein

THIRD PLACE – Sunrise Toss
Photo by Jeff Mullinix, Columbus
@popupblindcompany



Outdoor Nebraska

By Renae Blum

Spring has arrived. This month, you can look forward to some marvelous photography and fishing opportunities. Don't forget to prepare for spring turkey season! [N](#)



Photograph Lake Minatare's lighthouse

All month | Lake Minatare State Recreation Area

Lake Minatare's landmark lighthouse was a beacon of hope in the dark days of the Great Depression, built entirely of native stone between 1937 and 1939 by the Veterans Conservation Corps Camp BR-1. Designed to simulate a lighthouse, it is the only such structure in Nebraska. Take advantage of the warm light early and late in the day to shoot a photograph of this unique place. [JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND](#)



Take a boater safety course

All month | Statewide

Boating season is approaching—it's a good time to prepare. If you were born after Dec. 31, 1985, you need to complete a boater safety course. Several class options are available, including an online format, so head to OutdoorNebraska.org/BoaterEducation to sign up.

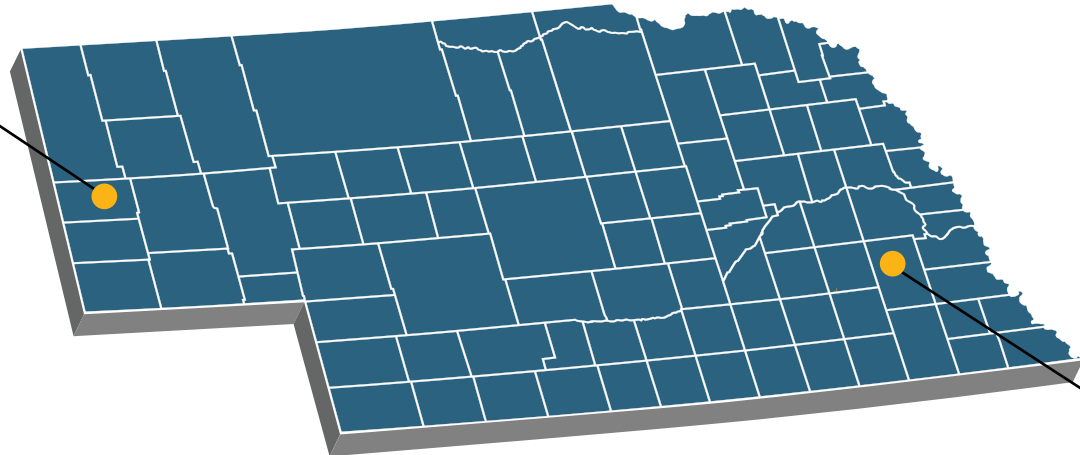
[ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND](#)



Fish for stocked trout

All month | Statewide

Each spring, rainbow trout are stocked in city ponds and state park and recreation area lakes across the state. Get out and take advantage of them! Trout fishing is especially great for kids because they are relatively easy to catch, so bring the family. Find the full stocking schedule at OutdoorNebraska.org/FishStockingReports. [JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND](#)



Prepare for spring turkey season

All month | Statewide

Well ahead of spring turkey season, use the online Public Access Atlas to find a place to hunt or secure permission to hunt on private land. Then get to know your hunting spot by walking it and locating places where turkeys are likely to roost, strut and feed. Also check through your gear, including calls, clothes and vests, and get any replacements early so you're ready to go.

[JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND](#)

View migrating waterfowl at Branched Oak Lake

All month if lake not frozen over

With approximately 1,800 acres of water, Branched Oak is the biggest reservoir in Lancaster County, making it attractive to migrating waterfowl when not frozen over. Vast flocks of snow geese visit in early March, as well as Canada and greater white-fronted geese. Bring binoculars and check it out!

[ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND](#)



Timberdoodles on the Plains

How a forest-dwelling shorebird makes a living in Nebraska's prairies

By Joel Jorgensen and Stephen J. Brenner

Photos by Eric Fowler

As winter's grip begins to loosen in early March, one of the first tangible signs of spring comes in the form of one unusual bird's evening courtship display. Along with first returning flocks of geese, sandhill cranes and a noticeable northward push of bald eagles, the American woodcock is one of our earliest arriving migratory birds, often laying claim to a small breeding site when snow is still on the ground.

Limited information suggests woodcock has expanded its range in Nebraska since settlement by Euro-Americans, but what do we know about these birds and how they use Nebraska's diverse landscapes? And how far west have these birds pioneered? Even though the woodcock is both a game species and a species of conservation concern identified by the Nebraska Natural Legacy Project, there never has been a formal study directed on this species in Nebraska, or anywhere in the Great Plains for that matter. Until now.

A recent study by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, in partnership with Audubon Nebraska, answered some of these questions and also revealed some unexpected findings about this odd but fascinating species.

Migration and Mating

American woodcock, or timberdoodles as they are sometimes called, can best be described as quirky and are something of an oddity among their shorebird relatives. Woodcock are related to birds like snipes, yellowlegs, sandpipers and curlews. Yet all of these other species are typically associated with shorelines, water and wetlands. The woodcock, as the name implies, is in fact a forest or woodland-dwelling shorebird. It has a peculiar appearance with large eyes set back on its head and a long bill, adaptations that help this bird locate its preferred prey — earthworms — which it finds by probing in moist soil.

Woodcock primarily occur in the extensive forested ecosystems of eastern North America. While several

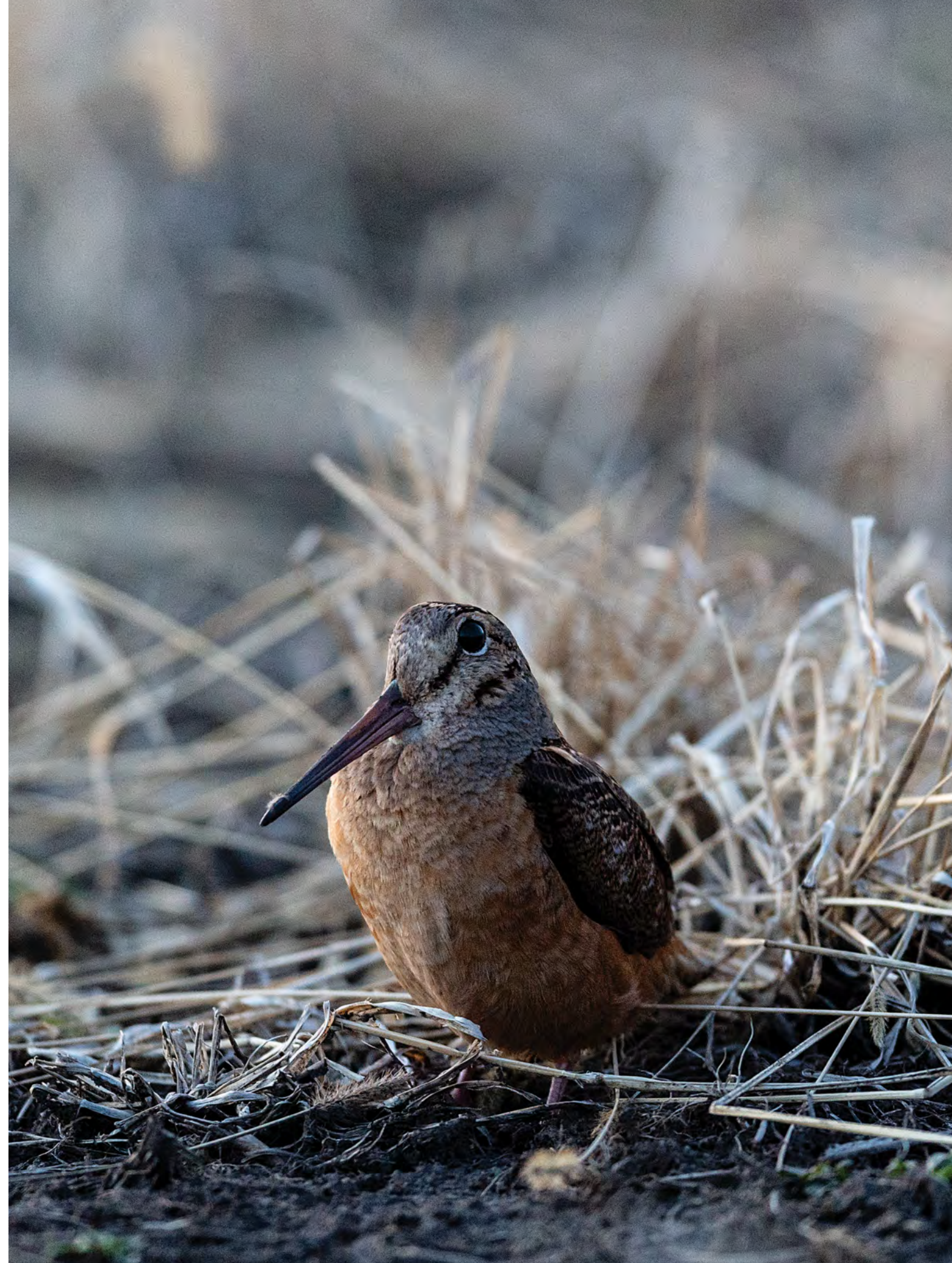
resources and maps still place Nebraska outside of the species' regular breeding and migratory range, the western extent of its range does, in fact, include eastern Nebraska. Despite this westward expansion, woodcock numbers have declined in eastern North America.

Upon their arrival from areas in the southern U.S., males waste no time engaging in a courtship display. Taking place briefly after sunset and often lasting not more than an hour, the display involves the male making elaborate spiraling flights with twittering wings above an open field. The male eventually lands in a bare patch of ground, where it then makes a series of loud, nasally "peent" calls. After calling, the bird once again takes flight and repeats the display. Males may also briefly display in the mornings before sunrise.

The woodcock's spring courtship display is about the only time during the year when this species makes its presence known and allows itself to be detected. Just ask any woodcock hunter about how easy it is to find these birds in the fall: It's a little tricky. Other than when males are displaying, this cryptically colored bird usually stays hidden in dense, shrubby vegetation or woodlands and is generally most active in the morning and evening.

To Catch a Woodcock

Tracking animals to determine their movements and answer questions about habitat use has undergone quite a revolution in the last decade or so. For many years, biologists were relegated to using radio tags that had limited range and required researchers to be relatively close to their subject in order to track the animal and determine its location. Satellite transmitters using GPS technology have greatly improved research capabilities. Not only can an animal be tracked worldwide, location data collected by the satellite tags are sent to a system of satellites that can be downloaded from the comfort of one's office. A shortcoming for many years, though, is that satellite tags were quite large and heavy, two



A male American woodcock performs a courtship display in an open grassland at Branched Oak Wildlife Management Area in Lancaster County.



Joel Jorgensen, nongame bird program manager with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, and Stephen Brenner, an avian ecologist in a partnership position with Audubon Nebraska and the Commission, set up mist nets to capture woodcock at George Syas Wildlife Management Area.



Brenner holds a GPS transmitter weighing just 4 grams that will be fitted on an American woodcock.

characteristics that make it difficult to use this technology on all but large bird species.

Satellite transmitters only recently became small enough to place on a bird the size of an American woodcock. There are strict standards and weight limits that must be followed when placing any type of transmitter on a wild bird, rules that ensure that birds are not harmed or impaired by research. The one drawback of using these small transmitters is that they have limited battery life and can only power the transmission of two dozen or so specific point locations.

Satellite transmitters only become valuable if they can be deployed on a bird, and that requires capturing a woodcock. This is a challenge because of the bird's secretive habits. We trapped woodcock by identifying sites where birds were displaying one evening, returning the next and placing an array of finely-woven mist nets around the display site. Returning birds caught in the nets were immediately removed, and then weighed, measured, banded, outfitted with transmitters and released.

While this scout-and-return method works best for capturing birds in spring, it relies on males returning to the same display location in successive nights to work. If a bird is wary or dislikes changes to his display area, he may find a new location to do his little dance. In addition, the weather needs to cooperate, as wind and precipitation are not conducive for capturing woodcock, and strong south winds might convince a male to migrate north. Such uncertainties are nothing new in wildlife studies, as wild animals rarely, if ever, follow the expectations of the researchers who study them.

Despite these challenges, we not only became competent in capturing woodcock, we were proficient at it by the end of 2022. We focused our efforts away from the Missouri River Valley, trapping birds at wildlife management areas near Lincoln, Norfolk, Genoa and Burwell. During early spring 2021, we captured six woodcock and deployed five satellite transmitters. The following spring, we captured 10 woodcock

and deployed 10 additional satellite transmitters. With the birds released and safely on their way, it was now a matter of sitting back and waiting for data points to roll in.

Should I Stay or Should I Go?

Most migratory birds follow the typical pattern of spending the colder months of the year in one place with favorable conditions and then migrating some distance to breeding areas, where they spend the warmer months. Usually these three phases — wintering, migration and breeding — of a bird's annual cycle are discrete time periods characterized by distinct behaviors. Woodcock, however, appear to blur the lines. Although it might be expected that a woodcock arriving in Nebraska and engaging in breeding activities in spring might be here for the entire summer, data from our satellite transmitters showed this is not always the case.



Brenner holds a woodcock fitted with a GPS transmitter at George Syas WMA in Platte County last April.



The area where woodcock were captured at Yankee Hill Wildlife Management Area is a mix of grassland and shrub habitat. The males were displaying on a mowed area that serves as a maintenance road and fire break.

All of the woodcock we captured in Nebraska remained at or near their capture sites for two weeks or more. After spending some time in Nebraska, a majority of the birds undertook substantial flights to points farther north, generally to the extensive woodland areas of Manitoba, Ontario or northern Minnesota. These are areas where the landscapes resemble the classic forested woodcock habitats of their core range. Of the 15 birds captured and outfitted, 11 of them migrated long distances of 300 to 700 miles in a short amount of time and settled in the north woods for the remainder of the spring and summer.

Woodcock engaging in courtship behavior in Nebraska in March and early April are clearly attempting to breed. However, what became apparent is that these birds almost certainly continued to engage in courtship and breeding activity once they left the state after arriving at northern sites. In addition, research from the eastern and southern U.S. indicates that woodcock in Nebraska in March may have already attempted to breed at points farther south during late

January or February. Thus, woodcock may breed or attempt to breed multiple times and at multiple locations during their spring migration. Nebraska has only a handful of confirmed breeding records, but successful breeding — a nest where eggs hatch and young survive — in the state is apparently an uncommon or possibly a rare event.

Irrigating Woodcock

Four woodcock we tagged remained in Nebraska during the summer and lived in an environment different from the so-called north woods, and quite different from our typical understanding of what habitat is suitable for this species. In eastern and central Nebraska, the landscape is a mosaic of agricultural fields, grasslands and limited patches of woody vegetation. The latter includes hedgerows planted decades ago, as well as trees and shrubs along stream and river corridors and those invading into remaining grasslands.

Perhaps one of the most interesting findings of our study is

that during the summer, woodcock in Nebraska progressively used irrigated agricultural fields. While woodcock routinely use open areas, including fields, as nocturnal roosting sites, our research showed woodcock using irrigated soybean and corn fields during the day when they were likely feeding. This behavior in Nebraska is quite different from what has been observed in previous studies in eastern North America.

So why would woodcock seek out fields with center pivot irrigation in the summer? The two summers we tracked woodcock in Nebraska were very dry, and soils likely became hard. In addition, with waning moisture levels, earthworms likely retreated deep into the soil. In irrigated fields with moist soil, earthworms likely remained near the top, making them accessible to the woodcock and its long probing bill.

Thus, it now appears quite possible that irrigated agricultural fields serve as convenient, albeit unconventional, feeding sites for woodcock choosing to spend the summer in Nebraska. What remains unclear is whether woodcock would

be able to survive in Nebraska during a drought year without irrigation. Why some woodcock travel to points north while others chose to remain in Nebraska throughout their long summer remains a mystery.

Sandhills Outpost and Grassland Troubles

The Nebraska Sandhills is a landscape associated with greater prairie-chickens and western meadowlarks, not American woodcocks. And yet, at an isolated outpost near Calamus Reservoir we were not only able to locate a displaying woodcock, we were fortunate enough to capture this bird and outfit it with a satellite transmitter. Furthermore, this bird remained at this site throughout the summer, and even spent a few evenings roosting in the pristine Sandhills grasslands west of the reservoir. This is certainly a first in the history of woodcock tracking and represents a remarkably western and



Jorgensen and Brenner measure the wing of a woodcock at George Syas WMA before attaching a GPS transmitter.

“Perhaps one of the most interesting findings of our study is that during the summer, woodcock in Nebraska progressively used irrigated agricultural fields. While woodcock routinely use open areas, including fields, as nocturnal roosting sites, our research showed woodcock using irrigated soybean and corn fields during the day when they were likely feeding.”



The male woodcock pictured on page 45 spent time feeding in this center-pivot irrigated soybean field south of George Syas WMA from late June through August last year.

PHOTO BY JOEL JORGENSEN

atypical record for this species. The fact that woodcock occur this far west in Nebraska is perhaps all the evidence that is needed to demonstrate this species has expanded its range here since Euro-American settlement.

At this point in the story, however, some interesting questions arise. What is a forest-dwelling shorebird doing in the largest remaining continuous grasslands in the world? And why are Nebraska woodcock having to select unusual habitats both during migration and during the summer in the first place? Nebraska is many things, but it is hardly ever described as forested, particularly prior to Euro-American settlement and west of the Missouri River.

This apparent woodcock expansion in the Cornhusker state coincides with a similar westward range expansion in

Manitoba during the same period. Our satellite transmitter data show that some birds tagged locally fly directly north to Manitoba, indicating there is a possible link between range expansion in Nebraska and central Canada. However, is the range expansion of the American woodcock something to celebrate, or should it cause concern?

Woodcock populations have indeed declined throughout most of their range as modern forestry and land use practices have reduced the extent of early-successional forests, a key habitat requirement for the species. Expansion in Nebraska has largely been driven by the expansion of woody vegetation west along major river valleys. Woody invasion of grasslands may have provided an opportunity for this species to expand westward in the state, but for grassland ecosystems,



A male American woodcock performs a courtship display and calls in an open grassland at Yankee Hill WMA.

woody encroachment can spell trouble for grassland bird populations, many of which are declining because of habitat loss.

Fortunately, woodcock are unlikely to compete with any grassland species given the rather large gaps between the habitat, forage and environmental requirements of these weird forest shorebirds and grassland birds. Seeing these birds in such an unusual location offers a unique birding experience, but additional westward spread of this species in Nebraska will reflect an additional loss of grasslands. Furthermore, wooded and shrubby areas in eastern Nebraska, including those on wildlife management areas, seem to be offering adequate habitat for this and other woodland species.

A Pioneering Bird

As another winter gives way to spring, woodcock will again return to sites in eastern and central Nebraska to perform their curious courtship display. Certainly a few will try to nest and summer in the state. Woodcock that come to Nebraska are, in many ways, pioneers pushing the limits of their existence, and this research has provided many new revelations and information about the bird, both within the state and beyond.

Keep an ear out early this spring, on the first calm and mild evening just after the sun sets, for a nasally peent and a twittering flight, for the story of woodcock in Nebraska is certainly a unique and fascinating saga. [N](#)

How Nebraska Entered the ‘Radio Era’ a Century Ago

By David L. Bristow, History Nebraska

“This is the era of radio,” wrote Addison Sheldon in the June 1922 issue of *The Nebraska Teacher*. Sheldon was the superintendent of the Nebraska State Historical Society (today’s History Nebraska), and he looked at events with an eye toward history.

“In future ages historians will scan the record to determine when radio transmission became general and popular and will fix the date not far from 1922. During the past months transmission of speeches, concerts, weather and market

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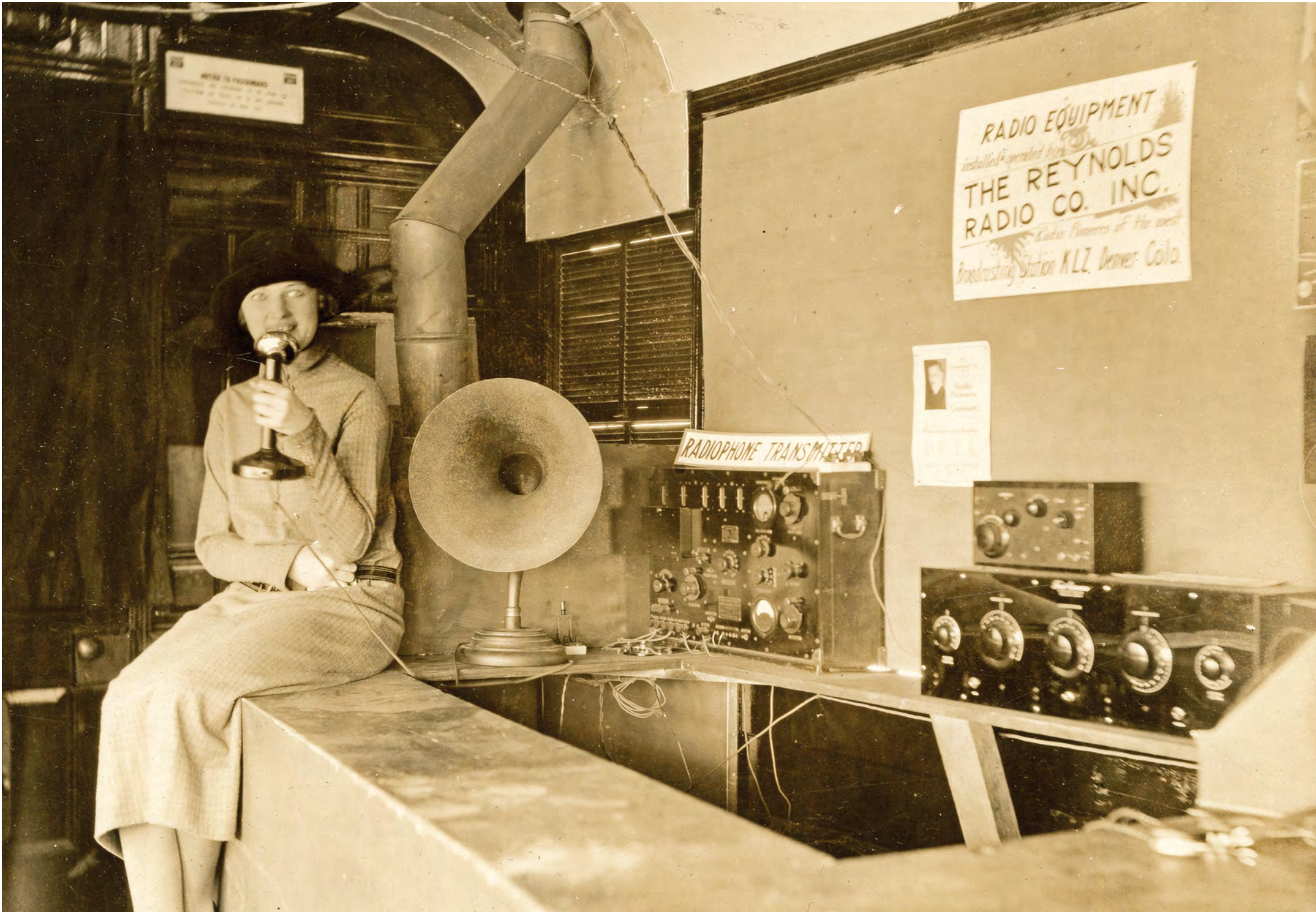
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"Pioneer Radio Manufacturers"

This ad for a short-lived Omaha manufacturer appeared in the October 1922 issue of *Radio News*. [INTERNET ARCHIVE](#), [ARCHIVE.ORG](#)



By 1924, the Burlington Railroad was broadcasting from its “Pure Bred Sires Special” train, shown here in Red Cloud. Railroads sponsored traveling educational exhibits to promote the latest livestock practices and technology; radio further extended their reach. [HISTORY NEBRASKA](#), RG1431-0-4075



The KCGH tower at the hospital in Wayne.
HISTORY NEBRASKA, RG3006.AM

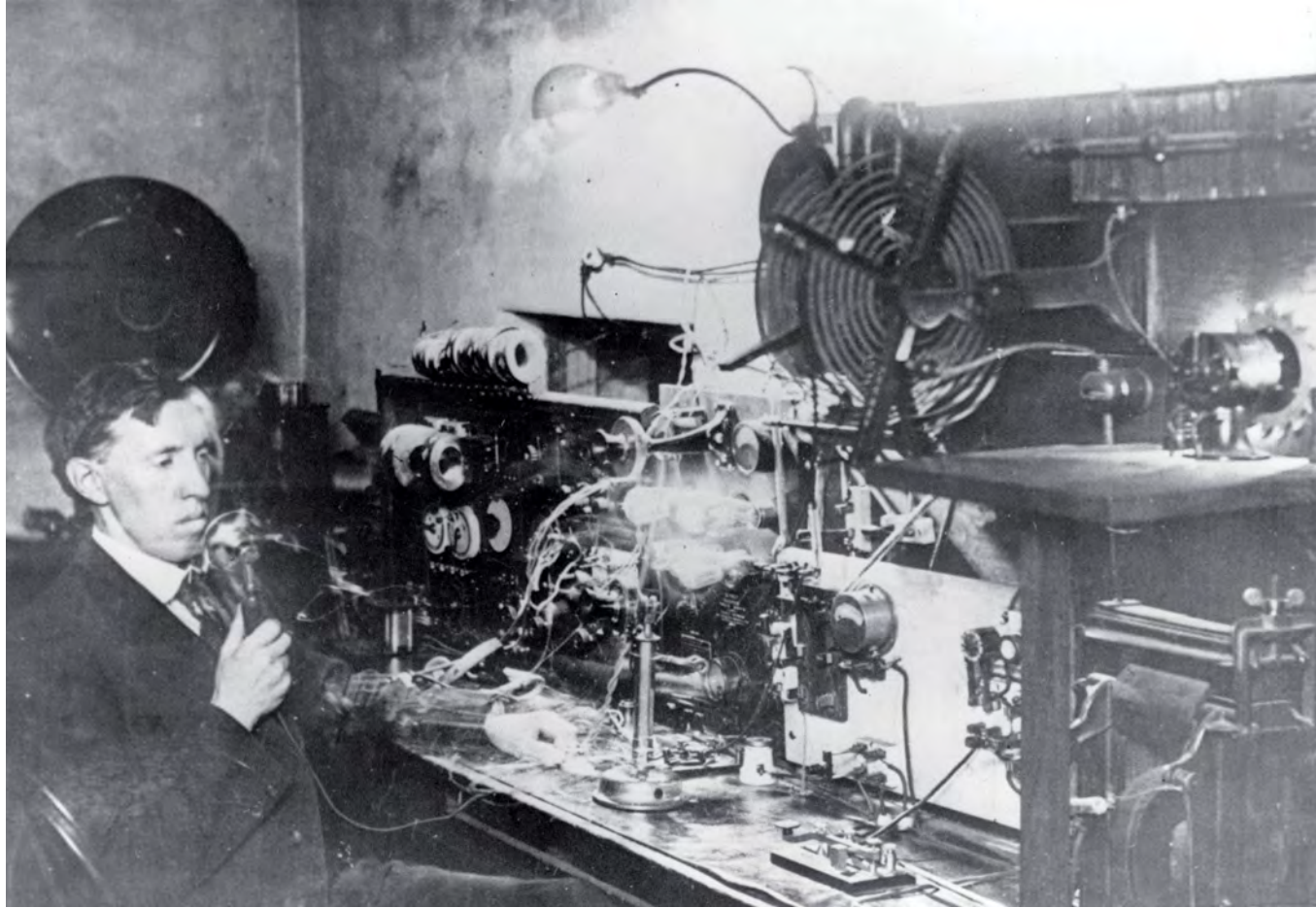
news have spread until scarcely a village in Nebraska does not have its group of radio outfits. Every night communications from the Gulf Coast, the Atlantic and Pacific are caught by enterprising radio experts.”

After years of experimental broadcasting, Nebraska’s first commercial radio stations went on the air in 1922. Who was the first?

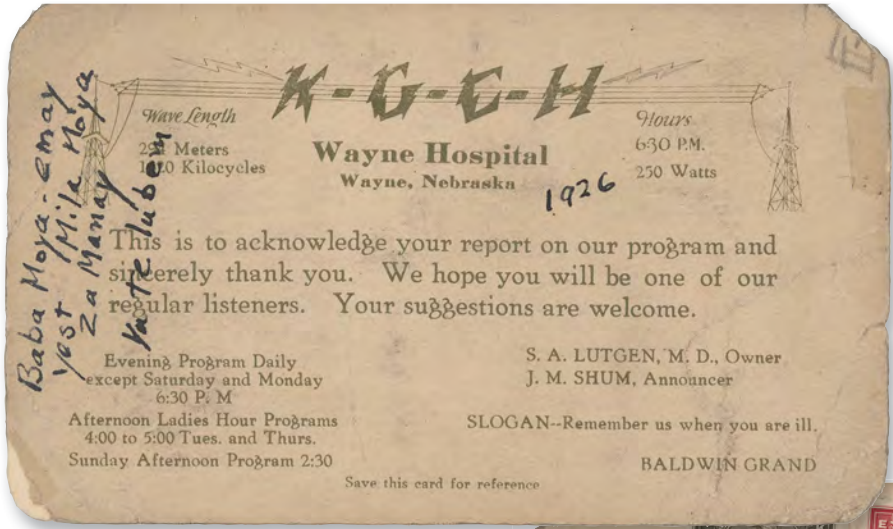
The short-lived Omaha station WOU received its broadcast license on Dec. 29, 1921, but had no regular broadcast schedule. More significant was WAAW, which signed on the air April 19, 1922. Owned by the Omaha Grain Exchange, it broadcasted ag market news and originally had a broadcast radius of a thousand miles.

But Dr. John Jensen, a physics professor at Nebraska Wesleyan University in Lincoln, claimed that Wesleyan’s WCAJ was the “oldest station in Nebraska.” While it was not the first to receive a commercial license, Jensen argued that WCAJ was on the air first, broadcasting market and weather reports under an experimental license as radio station 9 YD starting in October 1921.

The point was arguable, but no one disputed that Jensen was a genuine Nebraska radio pioneer. Before founding WCAJ, he had demonstrated a radio transmitter in his classes in 1905 and put together a radio exhibit for the 1906 Nebraska



John Jensen at the controls of Nebraska Wesleyan’s WCAJ transmitter in 1921 or 1922. HISTORY NEBRASKA, RG2158-0-1626



Early radio fans often collected “QSL” cards from stations they heard. They would write to the station, saying they heard a broadcast on a certain date, and the station would reply with a card like this one. The exchange helped radio stations track their broadcast range.
HISTORY NEBRASKA, 3006.AM

State Fair.

Early radio stations were often founded to promote an existing business, such as a newspaper or an oil company. In Wayne in 1926, Dr. A.S. Lutgen founded radio station KGCH on the grounds of the city’s first hospital — which Lutgen had founded several years earlier. He bought a ship’s “radio telephone” transmitter and hired a young man named Merrill Shum to operate the station.

Shum later recalled that KGCH broadcast daily from 6:30 p.m. “until we ran out of talent.” He supplemented live musical acts with recorded music, plus educational programming by college faculty. He once even broadcasted a Wayne State football game, but without a remote microphone he had to use runners relaying messages from the field to the broadcast booth.

Relatively few people had radio receivers in the early years. Radios were small, battery-operated and could be plugged into headphones or an external speaker. Across the country, manufacturers sprang up to meet the growing demand, including the W. R. Cramer Company in Omaha, which billed itself as “pioneer radio manufacturers.”

As with automobiles and many other new products, a market that began with hundreds of local manufacturers soon consolidated into a few giant corporations. By the end of the 1920s, Radio Corporation of America (RCA) was the hottest tech stock on Wall Street, rising to insane heights until the stock market crash of October 1929. But even the Great Depression couldn’t stop the growth of radio across Nebraska and the nation. 

Breanna Fanta contributed research to this article. Learn more about History Nebraska’s publications, including free history emails, at history.nebraska.gov/publications.



History Nebraska does not have an Omaha-built Cramer radio in its collection, but it has this 1928 Steinite, built in Atchison, Kansas, and owned by a Lincoln man who opened a radio store. HISTORY NEBRASKA, 8003-9

Five Trips to fishing right

By Jeff Kurrus

Nebraska's
Fishing Forecast
is invaluable for
planning your trips.



Not all fishing trips are created equal, nor do they need to be. Some are after-work, two-hour jaunts in the middle of the summer and others are all-day ice-fishing affairs where the mind, and body, are exhausted at day's end. And while each is pleasurable in its own fantastic ways, these aren't the only types of trips to make. Some require windshield time first. Here are my favorites.

The Bite

The message boards fill up every year telling anglers where the crappie

are biting, the bass are hitting and where the wipers are running the shallows. But you can also form your own calendar. Where you caught fish last year most likely will be where you catch fish this year.

Doug Steinke, longtime Nebraskaland contributor, rarely misses the April and May wiper bite out west, concentrating at Harlan Reservoir, Lake McConaughy and all points in between. Fisheries biologist Daryl Bauer sees the muskie bite at Merritt Reservoir the same way, knowing he'll be bank fishing for trophies in May. Personally, I wait for the hottest days of the year in July and

chase channel catfish with topwater plugs at any number of eastern lakes and reservoirs, including newly renovated Conestoga. The lakes have cleared of people but the action hasn't.

More Than the Fish

A trip like this often occurs when family is involved, when a 24-hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week trip is not desired by everyone in the vehicle. But these trips can still be memorable for all.

Do a search at OutdoorNebraska.org for your favorite state park or recreation area. The overwhelming majority have fishable water. Compare amenities with your family members and fish when you can. If you're camping, early mornings are perfect for solo excursions and an opportune time to allow your significant other to sleep in. Then, in the middle of the day, go and sightsee together.

This time of year, the Omaha area — and a destination like Two Rivers Recreation Area just on the outskirts — offers parkgoers opportunities to fish for newly stocked rainbow trout as well as experience unique lodging in one of Two Rivers' train cars. As spring moves forward, lakes like Flanagan and Prairie View can scratch the fishing bug and easily be combined with a trip to the Henry Doorly Zoo or the GoApe course at Eugene T.



Johnson Lake SRA remains one of the premier spots in the state to watch the Fourth of July fireworks show at night after fishing during the day.

JULIE GEISER, NEBRASKALAND



Fly angler Jason Langford holds a wiper caught in the Republican River upstream of Alma.

DOUG STEINKE



Mason and Josie Ley of Wayne play on a floating mat as their grandparents, Dave and Kaki Ley, and Roy Ley of Lawrence, Kansas, relax on Leys’ pontoon boat on Lewis and Clark Lake. This Missouri River reservoir is a great destination for summer fun and sauger and walleye fishing.

Mahoney State Park, where you’ll also have a number of lodging options.

But the metro isn’t the only place to have a fish-and-play trip in Nebraska. Look no farther than visiting Valentine this summer, fishing at the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge, canoeing down the Niobrara River and settling in for the evening at Merritt Reservoir State Recreation Area or Smith Falls State Park. Or, just a few hours east at Ponca State Park, play golf in the morning, visit the on-site water park in the afternoon, and then fish in the evening at the park pond.

You’ll have as much fun not fishing as you will wetting a line.

Stick and Stay

One of the first steps I make in the spring is to view the latest Nebraska Fishing Forecast. With information on 16 fish species in this season’s version, it’s the perfect starting point to decide

the fish you want to chase and what size or amount you want to pursue. Then, simply cross-compare these fisheries with the state parks and state recreation areas in that vicinity for lodging options.

On my list this year:

Merritt Reservoir and Lake McConaughy SRAs for walleye. Merritt remains a walleye hotspot year after year, even more so because of the cabin accommodations on the reservoir. You could fish a month straight and never completely learn McConaughy, and you have a multitude of camping options on site.

In the southwest, look at both Swanson and Elwood SRAs. Both top the wiper list, and Elwood surveyed more 20-inch-plus wipers than anywhere in the state. They also have tent and RV camping areas available.

I could also make arguments for sticking and staying at Branched Oak SRA for channel catfish, Calamus SRA

for white bass and Lewis and Clark SRA for sauger and walleye.

Read the forecast, find the hotspots, and pack your tent.

Road Trip

My first road trip through Nebraska occurred in 2001. With a john boat in the back of the truck, my dad and I plotted a map across the state where we fished, drove, then fished some more. It was five days of pure joy.

But a road trip doesn’t have to last multiple days. A 4-hour drive, starting at 3 a.m., from the metro could give you and a partner 14 hours of daytime fishing and much needed windshield time on an Interstate 80 fishing trip starting at smallmouth hotspot Fort McPherson near Maxwell and ending at Sandy Channel near Elm Creek.

Having participated in multiple trips like this, the goal is to drive to your farthest destination first, finding

water that is manageable for the species of fish you covet. Then, if the fish aren’t cooperating, pretend you’re fishing a gigantic waterbody and move to a new location. But instead of relocating to a new area at a lake, simply grab a drink and some chips at the nearest gas station and head toward home. Stop at the next lake, then rinse and repeat.

One last road trip is a modified version, yet works the same way. Several years back, Dad and I were on another trip, this time to the Black Hills, to trout fish. While we had a multitude of successful days stream fishing for brookies and rainbows, it was the “break up the trip” stop we made to the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge when our afternoon pit stop turned into one of the most memorable trips we’ve ever had.

All the way until sunset, gigantic northern pike chased our buzzbaits across the water, a perfect exclamation point for that road trip.



The Interstate 80 lake system provides the perfect one-day road trip where multiple fish species, including smallmouth bass, can be targeted.

Isolation

Staying in the Sandhills, I have found no better outdoor thrill than driving down a two-track, knowing there’s a gigantic lake over the next hill but worried that — because of its unrivaled beauty and uniqueness — the entire lake will be filled with bank and

boat anglers, each fighting for a spot to fish.

Why wouldn’t there be a long waiting line to fish a lake in heaven?

Then, something even more magical happens. There’s only one other boat on the lake. You have one of the best places in the country to fish all by yourself.

That’s fishing in the Nebraska Sandhills.

I’ve fished at the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge when it was 100 degrees, 0 degrees and every temperature in between. I’ve caught 20-inch largemouth through the ice and 40-inch pike through the summer bulrushes. I’ve trolled for northern at Clear Lake, caught trophy bluegill at Pelican and couldn’t keep largemouth off of my line at Duck.

And the entire time, I felt like my partner and I were the last people on the planet.

If you haven’t felt like the last person on the planet while wetting a line, it needs to be added to your bucket list. There is no boat beside you. There is no sharing.

Everything in the world is yours.

One of these Nebraska fishing road trips will suit you perfectly. Just get in the vehicle and drive. You might even find out that sometimes one type of trip quickly changes to another.

And for good reason. 📍



The Valentine National Wildlife Refuge is one of Nebraska’s best fishing locations because of its isolation and chance to catch quality fish, including bluegills.



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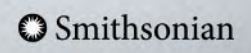
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- Richard Plautz Site: 1.5 miles south of 1-80 Exit 285 (Gibbon)
- Alda Site: 2 miles south of 1-80 Exit 305 (Alda)

There are additional roadside turnouts to enjoy safe viewing located south & east of the Alda interchange on Platte River Drive, and west of Rowe Sanctuary on Elm Island Road.

To learn more call (308) 385-6282 or visit:
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RESOURCES FOCUS ON NEBRASKA’S AMAZING WETLANDS

By Ted LaGrange, Wetland Program Manager

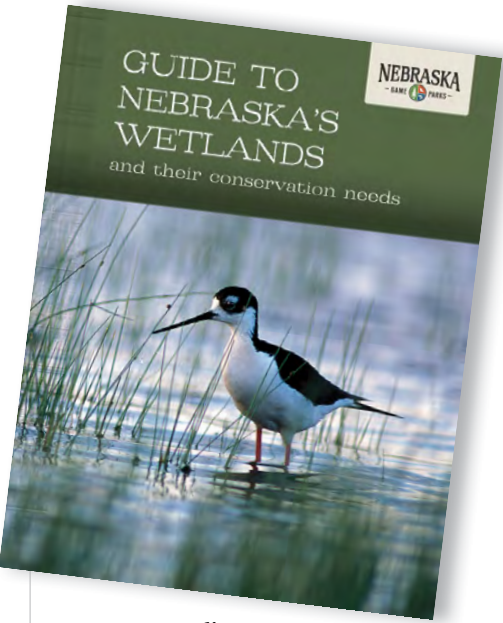
When my oldest child was in elementary school in the 1990s, I was invited to give a class presentation on wetlands. When I asked the students if Nebraska had any wetlands and whether any cool animals lived in them, I was shocked to hear them say, “No.”

They knew more about the Everglades of Florida and the Amazon of South America than they did about wetlands in their own state.

I wanted to fix this and started a project at Nebraska Game and Parks to help address the problem; we wrote and published a wetlands guide and produced an educational video, as well. The project was highly successful, but, as happens, the materials became outdated. At the same time, the ways people consume information changed.

Fast forward to 2019 when a project got underway to update outreach and education products related to wetlands. Our goal was to increase awareness of the importance of wetlands in Nebraska and to grow an understanding of the need for wetland conservation. In addition to updating our Guide to Nebraska’s Wetlands, we also created a new publication for kids called *Wetlandology* and worked with the Platte Basin Timelapse group at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to create five documentary films. They highlight Nebraska’s wetland types: playa, sandhill, saline, riverine and urban, and feature people, places and animals who depend on them to survive.

- We wanted people to know:
- Nebraska has more wetlands than



any surrounding state.

- Wetlands are highly productive and dynamic and are probably best known for the diversity of fish, wildlife and plants they support.
- Wetlands provide important habitat for 50 percent of our birds and plants, 100 percent of our amphibians and fish, a third of our mammals and reptiles, and 70 percent of threatened or endangered species.

Less well known, but certainly as important, are the benefits that wetlands serve in improving water quality, recharging groundwater, sequestering carbon, protecting us from flood damage and providing places to recreate.

In many places, Nebraska’s wetlands have suffered losses and face ongoing threats putting their benefits at risk. We hope sharing these stories about Nebraska’s wetlands will help to improve the conservation of these important areas.

Visit NebraskaWetlands.com to check out these amazing new products and stories. You will be pleasantly surprised by what you discover.

Nebraska Game and Parks and PBT coordinated this project with the Nebraska Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at UNL, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Ducks Unlimited. We also sought input from 45 partner agencies and organizations.



A serene evening scene across an Elkhorn River oxbow wetland at Wood Duck Wildlife Management Area near Norfolk. TED LAGRANGE, NEBRASKA GAME AND PARKS COMMISSION



Image by Bill Koley

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Archery Deer Hunting in Boyd County, 1963
Pictured is my husband, Bill Lewis, with his bagged deer shot on the family farm. Bill and I were high school sweethearts and both graduated from Butte High School. My family and I lived in Butte. Bill and his family lived on a farm between Butte and Spencer. He was a student at UNL when he first hunted with a bow. I think it was 1963, because he bought his bow and other supplies using cream money he received for milking his dad's cows and doing the separating. He enjoyed all kinds of hunting and fishing throughout his life.
– Sandra Lewis, Adams

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



Catfishing the Loup Canal, 1955
These catfish were caught out of the Loup Canal in Platte County in 1955. Pictured left to right are my Uncle David J. Bauman, Grandpa John D. Bauman, known as "Goose," Grandma Laura Bauman, John Sedlacek, and cousin Raymond Bauman. Raymond is the only one alive and currently living in Omaha.
All I remembered my grandma saying was that they "tasted like pure mud."
– Kirk Mournal, Grand Island



UNIDENTIFIED

By Eric Fowler

Nebraskans are nice. That’s what people tell us. It’s something we are proud of.

One of the best parts of my job is meeting nice people while I’m out capturing photos of them enjoying the great outdoors. Ninety-nine percent of the time, when I introduce myself and ask if it’s okay if I photograph them, the answer is “Sure. That would be great.” Conversations about their experiences typically ensue, and often last for minutes. We talk about how their outing is going, where they are from, or how much they enjoy coming to whatever location we happen to be in.

One of the worst parts of my job is keeping track of their names. We try to get the names of everyone we photograph and enter it in the metadata — the fancy name for where information about a photo is stored in the digital file — so if it ever runs in Nebraskaland, we can tell you who they are.

The go-to for much of my 34 years in journalism has been the trusty reporter’s notebook, a 4x8-inch spiral bound tablet that tucks nicely into my back pocket. The problem is I’m a real slacker when it comes to cataloging photos. I literally have stacks of those notebooks in my office, and sometimes when I get around to cataloging a shoot before I put it in our photo library, I can’t put my hands on the right notebook.

I thought I had found the answer a few years ago when I started recording a video of people telling me their names and where they are from. That video would be stored in the same folder on my computer as the still images. There’s no way I could lose that.

I found out the hard way late last year the method isn’t foolproof. I was going through photographs from an ice-fishing trip to the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge from two years ago (I told you I was a slacker). The bite was slow for everyone on Hackberry Lake that day. But I’d seen a family fishing a few hundred yards away go running to check their tip-ups as flags went up more than once, and, bored, grabbed the camera, headed their way and introduced myself.

I seem to recall there were three generations in that party: a grandfather, father, two older kids and two younger ones. The younger ones were having a ball, especially when dad loaded them into the ice sled and spun them in circles.

They had caught some northern pike, and some nice ones at that. Their hot hole was next to the shore with barely a foot of water under 6 or 8 inches of ice. They were using a type of tip-up I hadn’t seen but now own several of. They were Nebraska Nice and great photo subjects. And I have no idea what their names are.

As we all know, technology is great ... when it works. The microphones built into DSLR cameras, you see, don’t handle wind well. And mine was pointing straight into it. I can get Josh and Jaydon out of that recording, but the rest is just noise.

So if you happen to know these folks, please let me know so I can put names with the faces in my metadata. In the meantime, I’ll continue to try and come up with the perfect workflow. Maybe I need to just turn back the clock and order more notebooks.

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