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Cover: A Maximilian sunflower
head lies in a window of
melting snow at Lincoln Creek
Prairie in Aurora. Many of
Nebraska's "winter" birds visit
this prairie, including Harris's
sparrows, pine siskins and
more. Story on page 48.

CHRIS HELZER

This page: Fresh snow covers
the landscape at Stagecoach
State Recreation Area in
Lancaster 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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Look for red-tailed hawks along roads and highways. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

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Prescribed Fire
Training Workshops

A series of workshops will be held around the state in 2023 to provide guidance and instruction for completing safe and effective prescribed fires. These workshops are for landowners, resource professionals, volunteer fire departments and others interested in burning. No prior burn experience is necessary to participate.

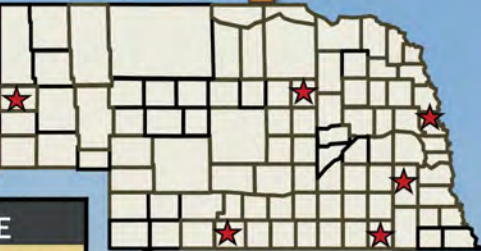


Table with 4 columns: DATE, TOWN, LOCATION, TIME. Rows include workshops in Fairbury, Arapahoe, Ericson, Lincoln, Blair, Scottsbluff, and an online session.

Introduction to Prescribed Fire



Topics include:
Equipment Preparation Techniques
Weather Forecasting
Fire Behavior
Fireline Positions
Safety

Table with 4 columns: DATE, ADVANCED WORKSHOPS, LOCATION, TIME. Rows include workshops in Fairbury, Online, Sidney, and another Online session.

Registration fee of \$10 for basic workshops includes meal and training materials.
Visit www.NebraskaPF.com to register.

Join a Prescribed Burn Association
Prescribed burn associations are a collection of landowners, land managers, and volunteers who pool time, equipment, and knowledge to help each other get prescribed fire on the ground within their communities. There are many existing burn associations across the state to volunteer with and an opportunity for new ones to be formed. Contact Brian Teeter at 402-219-2572 or bteeter@pheasantsforever.org to find one nearest you or to start your own.



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Please include your postal address and telephone number. Letters may be condensed and edited. Photographs are also welcome.



COLD RAIN

Ice-coated honeysuckle berries sparkle in the morning sunshine at Pawnee Lake State Recreation Area in Lancaster County after being doused with freezing rain the previous January night.

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



Wildlife Crimestoppers and Commission law enforcement agents use this Crimestoppers traveling trailer to educate the public on a variety of wildlife-related topics, including the harms of poaching. *JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND*

HELPING WILDLIFE CRIME STOP

By Jeff Kurrus

Helping law enforcement eliminate poaching in Nebraska just got a little easier, thanks to a new program by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's Law Enforcement division and continued support from Wildlife Crimestoppers.

The program debuts in January and allows people to anonymously report those suspected of wildlife violations. "You submit online," said Commission Law Enforcement Assistant Administrator Duane Arp. "Describe the situation and the location. Then answer if you want to be contacted by an officer. You can submit pictures of the violation, and even tell if you're interested in a reward."

The reward money is raised by Wildlife Crimestoppers, the flagship program of the Nebraska Wildlife Protectors Association. Roger Roberts, one of 18 Wildlife Crimestoppers board members across the state, said their mission to protect the state's natural resources is simple. "99 percent of the people in the outdoors are wonderful folks. We just want to help those people anyway we can because the game belongs to everyone. We just want to make sure people can't rob the bank."

"This is a great group to work with and extremely supportive of law enforcement," added Arp. "They ask us what we need to do our job, and they help us with it."

What law enforcement often needs is funding, and Wildlife

Crimestoppers garners this through banquets, raffles, private donations and a number of other ways. This funding goes toward a number of areas, including aircraft details and flight charges, the traveling trailer used by law enforcement at public events and rewards.

In a poaching case a few years ago, Roberts said, an illegal number of dead pronghorn were found in Morrill County but law enforcement had no leads. After a conversation between Arp and the Crimestoppers members, a \$2,000 reward for information was posted in the area the animals were found. Within a day, law enforcement had a suspect.

"We have to rely on the public's interest and care to get involved," said Arp. "Wildlife Crimestoppers helps so much with that."

And now, people will have another option to help others abide by Nebraska's wildlife laws. Once a person fills out the online form at OutdoorNebraska.org/wildlifecrimestoppers and hits submit, the field officer in that county is contacted.

Assistant Division Administrator Travis Shepler, who created the new online site, said, "In today's information age, we're happy to offer a digital option to report wildlife violations. With this form, we'll be able to utilize technology in new ways to collect more accurate and timely information to our conservation officers to assist with their investigations."

With continued support from Wildlife Crimestoppers, this new method will try to ensure that the bank never gets robbed.



NEBRASKA LAND IS IN DEMAND



**OTOE CO, NE - 380 ± AC.
\$1,957,000**

All the essentials to grow, hold and harvest mature whitetail deer are already in place on this property. This property's large timber stands are situated in the middle of fertile crop acres, and with the Missouri River nearby, it provides a great refuge for deer. Food plots, various stands, and Banks blinds are currently in place. Several turkey flocks reside on the property, allowing consecutive day hunts on un-pressured birds. Multiple ponds on the property provide essential water sources for game, and the main pond holds various types of fish. Access to the farm comes from a maintained county road to a gated easement access road. A 1.5-story house sits in the corner of the property and has an outbuilding with laundry and a 3/4 bath to help with scent control. There is also plenty of storage for equipment in the pole barn or recently built steel shed.

**KNOX CO, NE - 2 ± AC.
\$418,500**

This is a must-see! You won't believe this large church-converted to a home! Rare opportunity to own one of the most unique and historic properties in the area. The original church served the community for decades. Conversion to home began in the late 1990s. This acreage is 4 miles from Weigand Marina and Lewis and Clark Lake! The lake area has much to offer for recreational enthusiasts! The home has a two-car tuck-under garage, with a four-stall outbuilding to accommodate storing all your lake and acreage toys and equipment. The soaring ceilings on the main floor reach nearly 11', making way for some truly beautiful cathedral arch windows in most rooms, a large living, dining, and family room with an eat-in kitchen, hardwood floors and sun room, new furnace and roof in 2015. Canning kitchen, laundry, and shop in the basement, all with tons of built-in storage and lots of space! Plenty of room on the large acreage for gardening or an orchard. Do not miss out on your chance to own this beautiful and unique home!



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Bluegill and yellow perch on the ice. ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

DOES WIND AFFECT FISH UNDER ICE?

By Jeff Kurrus

Open water anglers know the advantages and disadvantages of wind. Sight anglers want no wind, shallow-water walleye and wiper anglers want wind-swept shorelines, and clear water casting anglers want just enough wind to break up the surface.

But what about ice anglers? It doesn't seem like wind could affect them, given the gigantic block of ice blocking the wind, but Nebraska Game and Parks fisheries biologist Daryl Bauer said wind is part of a larger story.

"It's the factors along with the wind," he said. Typically, Bauer continued, a north or west wind means the weather is nasty and the fishing slows down. When it's from the south, stable weather and consistent fishing are in order. An east wind is atypical, meaning some sort of strange weather is on the horizon. Be ready for anything, he said.

And this goes for fishing hard water as well. "The biggest thing that changes under the ice is water temperature," said Bauer. "When the water is warmest, the fish are the most active."

So, pay attention to whatever weather patterns generate

warmer water, especially after the mid-winter lull when snow cover on the ice has blocked out the sun's ability to warm the water and also generate oxygen from aquatic vegetation by photosynthesis.

Then, look for those south winds that blow into Nebraska every late winter. They are the first sign of not only an impending spring but also a ravenous bite that will soon occur under the surface of the ice.

Travel Note: If you are planning a trip to a shallow water lake to ice fish, pay attention to the weather conditions before it ices. If it was extremely windy just before freezing, there will be increased turbidity until the water settles. If possible, give these waters a couple of weeks before visiting so you get that beautiful, clear water so often associated with ice fishing.



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Gumbo is a good way to use up strongly flavored game, such as waterfowl. JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND

GOOSE GUMBO

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

Servings: 4

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Cooking Time: 3-4 hours

Ingredients:

- 1 pound of goose (or duck), not including bone weight
- ½ pound of andouille sausage
- ¼ cup of canola or vegetable oil
- ¼ heaping cup of all-purpose flour
- 1 small onion, diced
- 1 rib of celery, diced
- 1 green bell pepper, diced
- 1 carrot, diced
- 1 quart of low-sodium or unsalted chicken stock
- 1 cup of water
- Creole or Cajun seasoning, such as Tony Chachere's, to taste
- About 2 cups of frozen or fresh cut okra
- Kosher salt, to taste
- 4 servings of cooked white rice
- Chopped green onion

1. Heat oil in a heavy-bottomed pan on medium-low heat. When oil warms, whisk in all-purpose flour and cook the roux until its color is between milk chocolate and dark

chocolate, stirring often; this could take up to 40 minutes.

Take browned roux off the heat and allow to cool for 5 minutes. Remember, the roux will continue to brown after you take it off the heat — do not burn it.

2. Preheat oven to 300 degrees Fahrenheit. Add diced onion to the warm roux and turn the heat back on to medium. Sauté for about 5 minutes, or until onion becomes soft. Then add diced green bell pepper, carrot and celery, and sauté for another 5-7 minutes.

3. Meanwhile in an oven-proof pot, bring chicken stock and water to a boil. Gradually stir in the roux and vegetable mixture. Add goose meat and andouille sausage. Stir in Creole or Cajun seasoning to taste. If the roux breaks, don't worry — it will emulsify in the oven. Bring the pot back to a simmer, cover and cook in a 300-degree oven for 2 to 3 hours, or until the goose becomes tender and shreddable.

4. During the last 10 minutes of cooking, stir in cut okra and simmer until tender. The okra will thicken the gumbo — add more or less according to taste. Fish out goose and shred into bite-size pieces and return to the pot. Discard bones, if any.

Season the gumbo to taste before serving. If you serve the gumbo with rice, slightly over-salt the stew. Garnish with chopped green onion.

Your backyard safari



Grand Island, Nebraska

GRAND life

One of the greatest North American wildlife experiences lands here in Grand Island. Watch thousands of sandhill cranes parachute onto the river in the evening, hear them trumpet as they wake to a crisp March sunrise. Moments like these make life grand.

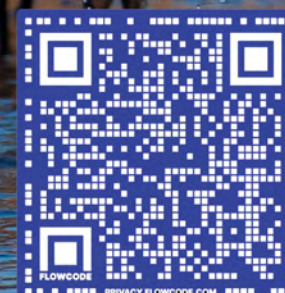


Photo by Rick Rasmussen

Visit [SeeTheCranes.com](https://www.see-thecranes.com)



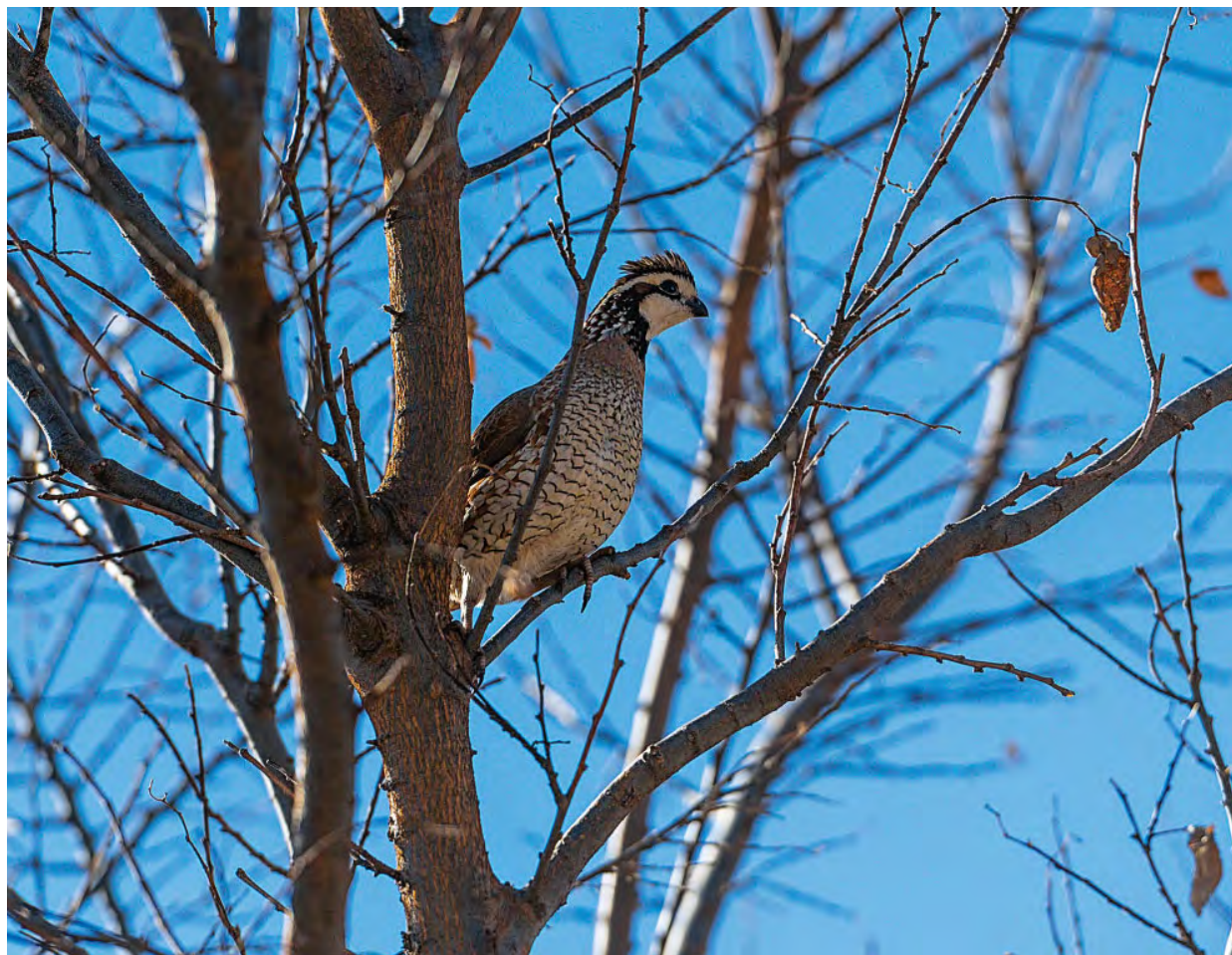
Have Dogs, Will Hunt

Story and photos by Eric Fowler

Mike Plate of Alma takes aim
at a covey of quail he flushed
while hunting a field enrolled
in the Open Fields and Waters
Program in Furnas County.

With pheasant and quail season heading into its third and final month, roughly one-third of upland hunters have packed it in for the year. Not Mike Plate and Aric Werner.

Plate grew up in Kimball, hunting pheasants and quail behind his father's pointers around the Panhandle. Werner hunted pheasants in central Nebraska with his father while growing up in Grand Island, sans dogs.



ABOVE: A bobwhite quail perches in a tree.

OPPOSITE: Aric Werner of Republican City walks through a Conservation Reserve Program field in Furnas County in search of pheasants and quail.





The two, who live in Alma and Republican City, respectively, have been hunting together since they met after Plate moved back from California in 2014. They hunt only a little in Nebraska early, and in recent years, travel to Wyoming or Montana to chase grouse and Hungarian partridge. But come late November, after rifle deer season closes, you will find them combing through grasslands, weedy draws and thickets of south-central Nebraska nearly every weekend in search of pheasants and quail.

The slow start isn't about avoiding the early season rush of hunters. It's waiting for the weather to cool off. "Once it gets cold, those birds kind of move into the cover where you can approach a little bit easier," Werner said.

RIGHT: Mike Plate cradles a double-barreled shotgun.

ABOVE: Aric Werner takes aim at a pair of rooster pheasants pointed and flushed from a thicket by Mike Plate's pointer, Jeb.



You can bet they will be out after a snow, or any moisture. But not if it's bitter cold. They're to the point in life that they don't like the cold any more than their short-haired pointing dogs. And the birds don't need the added stress, Plate said.

With eight pointing dogs between them, five for Plate and three for Werner, they pretty much have to hunt.

"They get fat and my wife gets frustrated because they have so much energy when they get in shape," Werner added. "It gives me a good excuse to get out quite a bit."

"You've got to feed them all summer," Plate added. "You might as well hunt them all winter."



Jokes aside, the two, like anyone who has ever hunted behind a good dog, will tell you watching those four-legged machines work is why they hunt. And why, whether bird numbers are up or down, they will see the season through to the end. 🦋



ABOVE: Aric Werner and Mike Plate hold their day's bag of pheasants and quail.

OPPOSITE: Mike Plate's Llewellyn setter, Rock, holds a point.

Outdoor Nebraska

By Renae Blum

Head outdoors this month and take in the wintry wonderland. You could enjoy some pheasant hunting or ice fishing in the Sandhills. Or head indoors for some rock climbing and time at a state park cabin for Valentine's Day. Read more about these fun options below. [N](#)



Ice fishing at Frye Lake

As conditions allow

Frye Lake is one of Nebraska's best ice fishing spots. A beautiful, quiet location in the Sandhills, Frye Lake also has an abundance of fish, including nice panfish, lots of bass and big crappies. There's a lot of water to fish, so if you aren't catching anything, keep moving and keep drilling holes.

JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

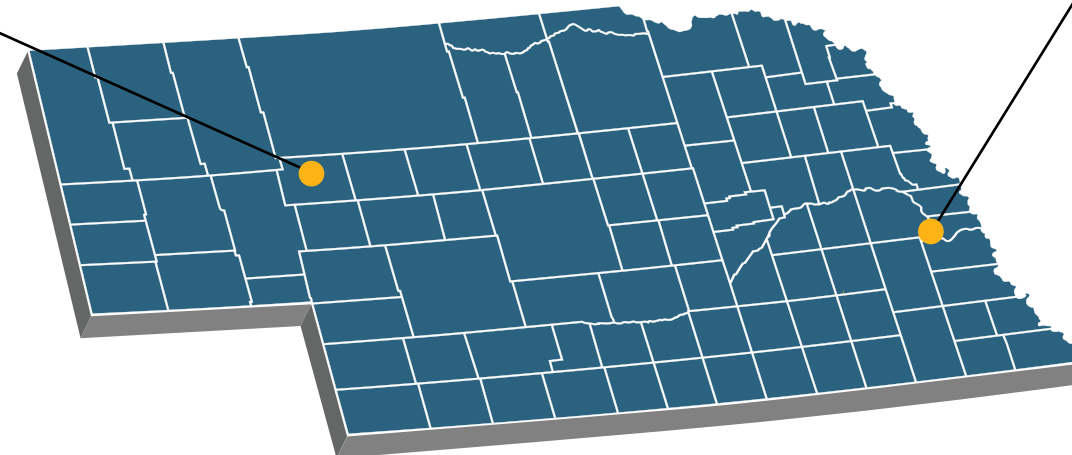


Look for shed antlers

Mid-January to April
Statewide

Looking for shed antlers is a great way to get outdoors this time of year, and it's fun for the whole family. In winter, seek areas where deer concentrate to feed or where they bed down to sleep. Spots where deer have to jump, such as fences, creeks and ditches, are also good spots.

JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND



Rock climbing at Mahoney State Park

Year-round

Stuck inside? Mahoney State Park's Venture Climb is a fun way to spend an afternoon indoors. This state-of-the-art addition to the Activity Center features a 42-foot climbing wall with both auto- and top-rope belays, as well as a bouldering structure. Venture Climb is suitable for both novice and experienced climbers. Learn more at OutdoorNebraska.org/Mahoney.

JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

Spend Valentine's Day at a state park cabin

Statewide

Make Valentine's Day extra special and spend it at a state park! You will enjoy an escape from the crowds in a peaceful, beautiful setting, plus reduced lodging fees at select parks. Check our calendar at Calendar.OutdoorNebraska.gov for special Valentine's Day offers.

JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

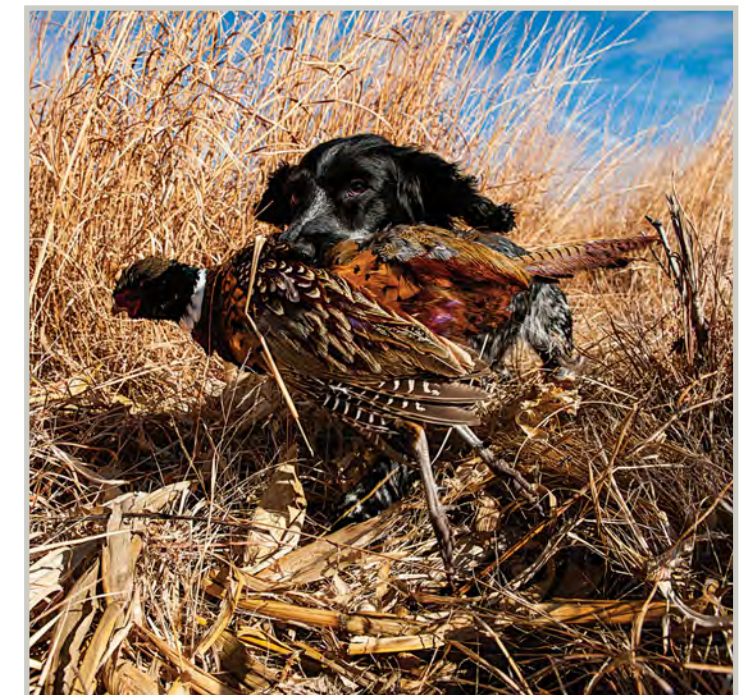


Late-season pheasant hunting

Through Jan. 31 | Statewide

Breathe in the cool, crisp January air and work on your resolution to get more fit with a late-season pheasant hunt. There's still great opportunity because there's less pressure on the birds, and they're concentrated in areas with thick cover. A smaller group is more effective, so just you, your best buddy and a dog or two is perfect.

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



Tapping for Liquid Gold

Story and photos by Renae Blum

The tree sap begins to flow. It looks — and almost tastes — like water. But, after being boiled for an hour, it reduces into what Dan Hejl calls “liquid gold” — syrup he collects himself.

It’s a tradition Hejl looks forward to every year. The Pleasant Dale, Nebraska, man collects sap from the same woods he hunts in, and gifts landowners with a jar of the highly prized black walnut syrup.

Black walnut syrup is similar to the maple kind, but with a rich nutty, butterscotch taste. Hejl’s favorite way to enjoy the syrup is spooned over vanilla ice cream.

“Most people don’t think of black walnut trees when they think of syrup, but in my opinion, they make the most

delicious and uniquely flavored syrup you can imagine,” Hejl said.

Black walnut syrup is also produced commercially, but it’s expensive. And in Hejl’s opinion, it’s far more fun and rewarding to make it yourself. “The results are unsurpassed by anything you can buy in the store,” he said.

Collecting the Sap

You can collect sap from a variety of trees, the process of which is generally the same, but you’ll need a few things to get started:

- 10-40 spiles, 5/16” size
- A cordless drill and bit
- Clean 5-gallon buckets with lids
- A fine-screen strainer
- Clean plastic milk jugs, with 5/8” hole drilled near the top
- A large stainless steel stock pot
- A candy thermometer
- An outdoor turkey fryer
- Cheesecloth
- Clean canning jars

Conditions are right for tapping in late winter and early spring, when daytime temperatures are in the high 30s to 50s, and nighttime temperatures drop below freezing. This fluctuation in temperature causes sap to flow.

Though tapping trees at Nebraska state park areas isn’t permitted, Hejl thinks landowners would be open to allowing it on their property. “Find a private landowner and just ask permission,” he said.

Trees should be a minimum of 10-12

inches in diameter to accommodate a single tap; trees over 25 inches in diameter can handle two or three taps at a time.

Using a 5/16" drill bit, drill a hole into the tree at a slight upward angle, about 3 feet up from the ground. The hole should be 2 to 2½ inches deep for standard-size spiles. Hejl wraps masking tape 2¼ inches from the tip of his drill bit for easy reference. He recommends drilling on the south side of the tree where sap will flow better

because it warms under the sun.

Lightly hammer a spile into this hole until it fits snugly. Sap should start dripping almost immediately. Place a milk jug onto the spile, and then move on to the next tree.

Hejl collects sap daily, removing the jug and pouring the sap through a fine mesh strainer into a clean 5-gallon bucket. This removes any bark or bugs that may have gotten into it. Then replace the jug.

“When I get home, I put the bucket

of sap into the fridge,” Hejl said. “Treat the sap as if it was milk.”

Sap will last about 10 days in the fridge, or you can freeze it until you have time — and enough — to make syrup.

You can tap trees until buds appear on them and leaves are on the verge of forming. This is the end of the season, when you should remove your spiles. According to tree experts, the tree will then heal itself naturally over time from the drilling. If you tap the

same tree again next year, drill about 6 inches away from previous holes.

Making the Syrup

It takes 10 to 15 gallons of sap to make 1 quart of syrup and 40 to 62 gallons to produce 1 gallon. But once you have enough, the process is simple.

Pour the sap into a stainless-steel pot and boil it until the excess water is gone and just sugary syrup remains. Keep in mind, you can add sap



Hejl gathers black walnut tree sap in jugs and pours it through a strainer into 5-gallon buckets.



Dan Hejl checks a spile to confirm sap is flowing.



ABOVE: Hejl pours the raw sap from the jugs through a strainer into 5-gallon buckets.

LEFT: Hejl's favorite way to enjoy black walnut syrup is over ice cream.

JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND

throughout the boil-down phase.

The process takes time and produces a lot of humidity. If you are working with less than 5 gallons of sap, you can use your stovetop; otherwise, complete this step outdoors in a propane turkey fryer or two. If you are running two pots at a time outdoors, Hejl estimates it will take about one hour for each gallon of sap to boil off.

Hejl recommends finishing the boil-down process on your kitchen stove so you can closely monitor temperature

and the final transition from sap to syrup — the tricky part.

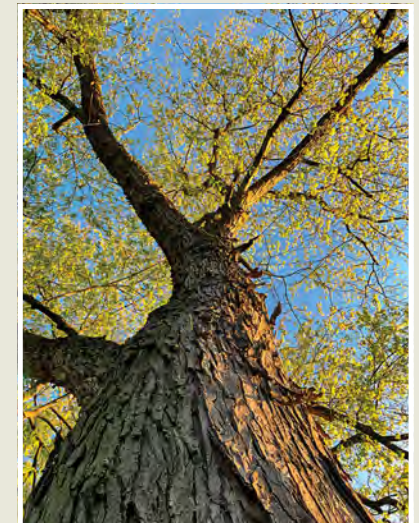
Sap turns to syrup when it reaches 7½ degrees over the boiling point of water, a number that varies slightly depending on where you live. Determine at what temperature water boils at your location, then add 7½ degrees to find the temperature at which your sap will become syrup.

"This is critical, and it happens very quickly once it gets close to that temperature, so monitor it very closely," Hejl said.

Once you've created the syrup, remove the pot from the stove and allow it to cool slightly. Then, pour the syrup through cheesecloth to remove any impurities. Hejl typically runs it

What Kind of Trees Can I Tap?

Any kind of maple tree can be tapped for syrup, yet historically, only silver maples and box elders are found natively within the state, said forester Jorden Smith, who works for the Nebraska Forest Service. "Most syrup production is based on sugar maple, black maple and red maple, and all three of those species really like cool, wet summers with cold, windless winters. Sadly, Nebraska doesn't quite fit that ecotype," he said. "Sticking to our native trees is a better long-term, sustainable syrup supplier."



Silver maple. GETTY PHOTO

Smith said that walnuts and birches can also be tapped, but with a few caveats. Tapping a walnut tree destroys the value of its timber, and birches may be unable to handle the stress of being tapped. Other potential syrup sources, such as lindens, sycamores, elms and hickories, may require a long boiling process, are susceptible to disease after being drilled, or are poor choices for tapping thanks to their scarcity and size.

through clean cheesecloth several times.

The final step is pouring the syrup into jars with lids. Kept in the fridge, the syrup will last for at least a year.

A Fun Pastime

Tapping trees for syrup isn't a well-known hobby, at least in Nebraska. That could be because people either don't know about it, Hejl said, or find the process intimidating. However, once you understand the steps, it's fairly simple, he said.

He recommends this hobby to anyone who enjoys the outdoors and is looking for something new to do.

"I just go out into nature and take what nature wants to give me," Hejl said. "I can't wait for spring to do it again." 🌲



Hejl with the final, packaged walnut syrup.



Why Kearney Will Become a Second Minneapolis

Kearney's Central Avenue, then known as Wyoming Avenue, boasted electric streetcars and miles of wire. From *The City of Kearney, Nebraska*.
HISTORY NEBRASKA

By David L. Bristow, History Nebraska



Front cover of the 1889 promotional book *The City of Kearney, Nebraska*. Kearney long advertised itself as being exactly 1,733 miles from both San Francisco and Boston. That was true along early railroads. HISTORY NEBRASKA, RG3268-11-14

Kearney was booming in 1889 when city boosters commissioned a promotional book *The City of Kearney, Nebraska*. A copy of this boastful, lavishly illustrated book is in History Nebraska's collections.

Divided into brief sections, the book covers topics such as "Why

Kearney Must Become a Railroad Center," "Why Kearney Will Be a Large Manufacturing Center," "Why Kearney Will Become a Second Minneapolis," and others. Most pages also feature beautiful engravings of local scenes.

Kearney was serious. This wasn't even the first time local boosters had

aimed high. In 1870, local resident Moses Sydenham led an effort to convince the federal government to relocate the U.S. capital to the Fort Kearney military reservation, to be renamed "New Washington." Congress didn't go along with the plan, but today the site is a state historical park.

By 1889 Kearney was in the midst of a water-powered real estate boom. The new Kearney canal promised direct waterpower and hydroelectric power to manufacturers. Kearney introduced the first electric streetcars west of the Missouri River and got into the textile business by opening a cotton mill



Illustration from *The City of Kearney, Nebraska*. HISTORY NEBRASKA



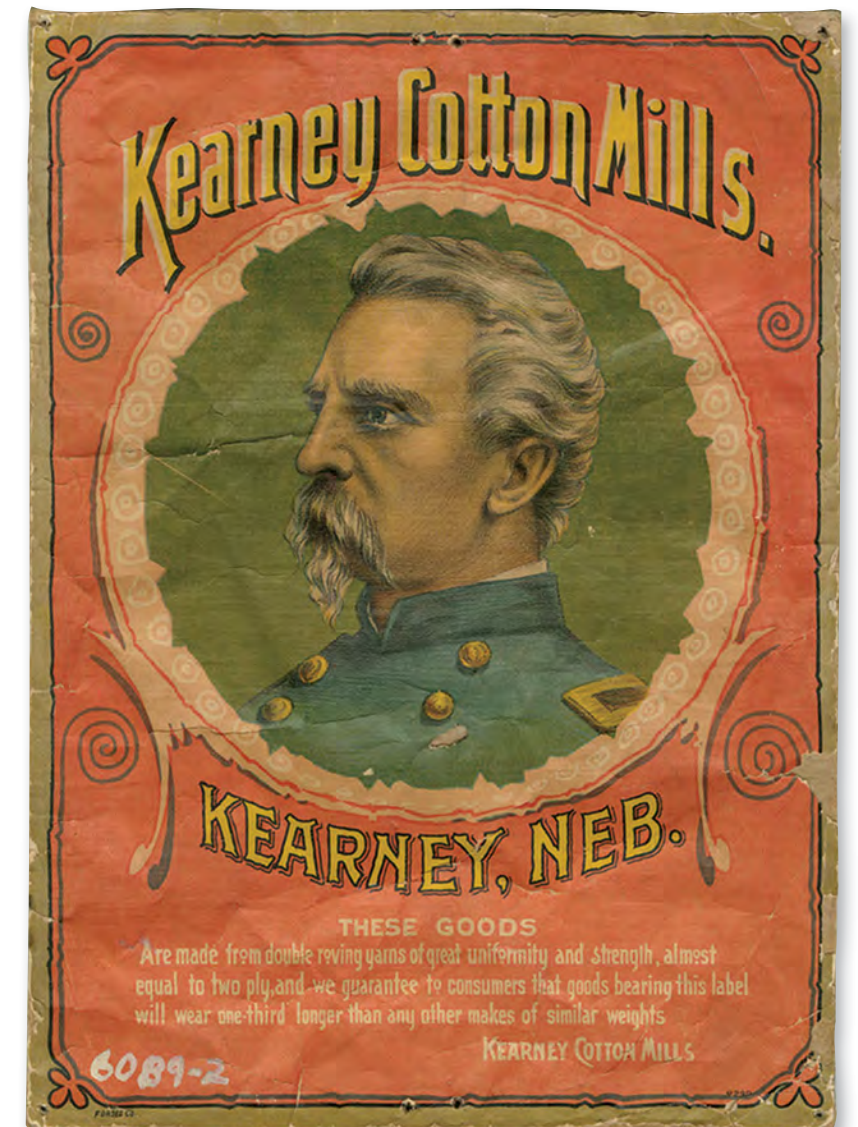
Kearney's early electrical grid used hydropower in addition to coal. Built mainly for irrigation, the Kearney Canal was completed in 1886. HISTORY NEBRASKA, RG2101-1-2

in 1892.

A local resident named Maud Marston Burrows described the Kearney real estate boom in a 1937 speech for the Nebraska State Historical Society (today's History Nebraska). She remembered that the city had "an oatmeal mill, a cracker

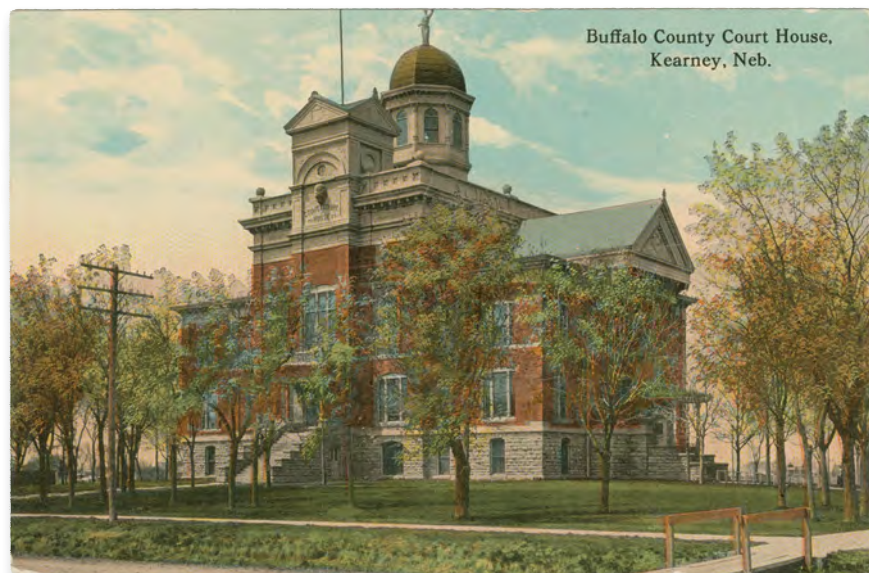
factory, a woolen mill, a candy factory, a bicycle factory that turned out an excellent wheel." (The high-wheel bicycles of the day were often simply called "wheels.")

Work began on a railroad from Kearney to the Black Hills. It got as far as the Custer County town of Callaway



ABOVE: Kearney Cotton Mills ad. HISTORY NEBRASKA, 6089-2

BELOW: George W. Frank lost much of his fortune during the depression of the 1890s, but his grand, red sandstone house remains. From *The City of Kearney, Nebraska*. HISTORY NEBRASKA



Buffalo County Courthouse, built in 1890 and replaced in 1974. HISTORY NEBRASKA, RG2101-2-7

ABOVE: The Kearney Cotton Mill employed hundreds of workers, many of them women and children. Each year, they transformed some 50,000 bales of Texas cotton into 76,000 yards of fabric. In winter, the water-powered mill periodically ground to a halt when the canal froze. The mill declared bankruptcy in 1901.

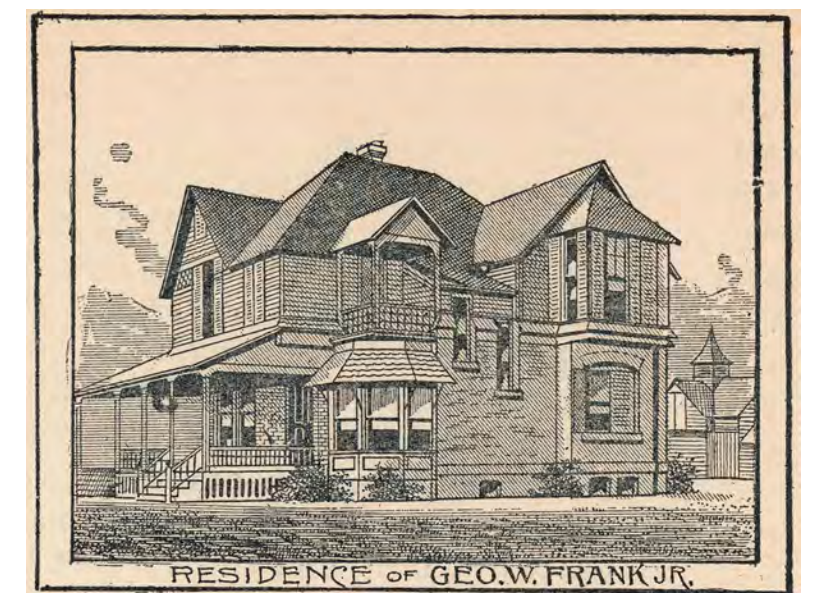
HISTORY NEBRASKA, RG2178-2-7

before the boom collapsed following a nationwide financial crisis and the beginning of a prolonged drought. Burrows said that most of the new homes and businesses in Kearney were heavily mortgaged. Many people lost everything.

The city eventually recovered, but never again would local leaders think

that Kearney was on its way toward becoming a major city. *The City of Kearney, Nebraska*, documents the high-water mark of local ambitions.

A much larger monument to Kearney's boom years stands on the campus of the University of Nebraska at Kearney. A local architect named George W. Frank was among the city's biggest boosters. He invested aggressively but paid the price when the boom ended. He lost much of his fortune, but his grand, red sandstone house remains. One of the first homes west of the Mississippi to be wired for electricity, it is open as the G. W. Frank Museum of History and Culture. [N](#)



Listening for Bats

Surveying and Monitoring Nebraska Species

By Leslie Reed, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Elusive creatures of the night, bats fly silently and erratically in the dark. They hide in nooks and crannies and caves. Because of these ghostly qualities, humans often don't realize when bats are nearby.

A University of Nebraska-Lincoln scientist is working with the U.S. Geological Survey, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and other federal and state agencies to use acoustic detectors to survey bat species and populations in Nebraska to identify where different species occur.

Christopher Fill, a research scientist with the Nebraska Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, has served as the Nebraska coordinator for the North American Bat Monitoring Program since 2020.

"Many landowners don't think they have any bats on their property, because they don't see them," he said. "I conduct bat acoustic surveys all summer, and I hardly ever see them. But if you set out acoustic detectors, you learn bats are out there — you just didn't know it."

As coordinator of Nebraska's bat monitoring program, Fill works with about 100 Nebraska landowners and a crew of volunteers from Nebraska Game and Parks and the university's Master Naturalist program to place bat-detecting acoustic equipment at over 100 locations across Nebraska. The sound-activated detectors identify the presence of bats by recording their calls, which vary by species according to frequency and pattern.

Bat calls normally are outside human hearing range, except when they're frightened or angry. Fill said he's also heard mother bats chirping to their babies in trees, used as maternity colonies during the spring and summer.

"For some bat species, several female bats will rear their

babies together in a tree," he said. "Sometimes as you walk by the tree, you can hear them chatting to each other with high squeaking noises, somewhere between a mouse and a bird."

Fill, who has studied bats in Nebraska for almost 5 years, said about 13 bat species have been found in Nebraska. Most are tree-loving species found in the wooded areas of the eastern part of the state, but some of these also follow the Missouri and Niobrara river valleys into the upper Panhandle near Chadron and the Pine Ridge.

According to the monitoring program, bats are important to the maintenance of healthy ecosystems and, because of their longevity and sensitivity to changes in their environment, are considered to be important bioindicators for ecosystem health. They contribute to agriculture because they consume large numbers of insects during the growing season.

The most common species found statewide in Nebraska are big brown bats, eastern red bats, hoary bats and silver-

haired bats. Three species of bats vulnerable to white-nose syndrome, a fungal disease discovered in North America in 2006, also occur in Nebraska: northern long-eared bats, little brown bats and tri-colored bats. Northern long-eared bats have been listed as a federally threatened species, while efforts are underway to designate all three species as endangered.

Nebraska has been part of the North American Bat Monitoring Program, which also covers Canada and Mexico, since 2015. Last year, Nebraska collected its fewest number of northern long-eared bat calls since the program began.

After spending most of his summer traveling to detection sites, Fill has completed this year's fieldwork and now is



Christopher Fill is Nebraska coordinator for the North American Bat Monitoring Program.

JUSTIN MOHLING, UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-LINCOLN COMMUNICATION



Fill holds an evening bat (*Nycticeius humeralis*).

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRIS FILL

compiling and analyzing data. Although bats remain active in autumn, researchers don't want to interrupt mating, hibernation and migration preparations that occur in the fall.

Fill said initial results for 2022 indicate even fewer northern long-eared bat identifications.

More analysis is required before conclusions can be drawn. Analysis may additionally be hampered from an inability to sample a majority of sites in 2019 and 2020 because of historic flooding and the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The program standardizes the data collection process so that it's uniform and comparable," Fill said. "This allows researchers from across the country to get a better idea of bat distributions, trends and declines along with a better sense of how bats are doing. It's not perfect, but bats are so difficult to study, it's hard to come up with anything that would be."

Fill supplements data collected via stationary detectors with mobile driving surveys using a detector attached to the top of a car, as well as occasional capture surveys.

"After sunset, we'll drive a route between our sampling points, often along gravel and dirt back roads, to collect bat calls," he said. "With this particular detector, we can see and hear the bats when they fly over the car."

In a previous project in 2018 and 2019, Fill set up arrays of acoustic detectors in farm fields, prairies and wooded areas near Homestead National Monument outside Beatrice, Nebraska. In addition to tracking northern long-eared bats and white-nose syndrome, he developed "heat maps" that showed bats' foraging patterns in different landscapes. He found bats are most active along the edges of fields and near wooded areas and streams, which may encourage farmers to retain those landscape features to maximize the insect-reduction benefit they receive from bats. [N](#)

Leslie Reed is the director of public affairs at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Communication and Marketing Department. This is her first appearance in Nebraskaland Magazine.

ARCHERY TURKEY SHOTS

By Julie Geiser

Getting your bow sighted in and choosing a good broadhead are important, but don't forget shot placement when aiming at a turkey this season. A turkey's body is covered with more than 4,000 feathers in multiple layers. Add muscle, cartilage and bone, and you're contending with a thick shield of protection and a small kill zone the size of a softball. Archers will need to study shot placements in order to make a clean kill.

Shot Placement

A straight-on shot through the chest is a high percentage kill shot. If the turkey is facing you, place an arrow between the base of the neck and the beard. The feathers in this area typically form a vertical line that serve as an aiming point. The arrow should break the back as it exits the body, which will cause damage to the heart or lungs. Just be careful not to sever the beard.



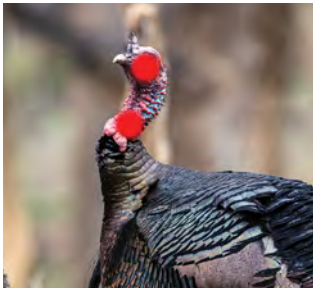
Straight-on shot.
JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

When a bird is standing with its back toward you and its head is up, aim for the spine between the wings; this shot will sever the spine and possibly hit the vitals. If the turkey is feeding or walking with its head down, don't take the shot — be patient and wait for another shot or make a cluck call to encourage him to stand up.



Back shot.
JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

A hit in the head or neck can drop a bird on the spot, especially if you use a broadhead meant for hitting this area, but it also presents a small target. For success, get the bird in close and make the shot while the turkey is still. This shot will either result in a good clean kill or a miss.



Head or neck shot.
JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

If the turkey is broadside, aim for the base of the turkey's wing where the wing connects to the turkey's body

just below the spine. This is a relatively high position on the body, but the shot will pin the wing to the body or break it and hit vital organs.

If the bird is strutting broadside, draw a vertical line just in front of the bird's legs and go up to the point where that line intersects a horizontal line drawn from about 2 inches below the fleshy skin at the base of the neck. Aim at the intersection, which is near the crease formed by the upper wing feathers. A shot in this region will penetrate the vital area for a quick and clean kill.

A vent shot on a strutting gobbler facing straight away offers a presentable shot. Aim here and your broadhead is sure to hit vital organs and may sever the spine.

Taking a quartering shot will depend on how the bird is standing. For strutting or half struts, imagine a horizontal line going back from between the base of the neck and the beard, and a vertical line coming up from the back leg — this intersection marks the vital area. For a bird standing still upright, draw the horizontal line from the beard to meet with the vertical line from the back leg.

Now is the time to prepare for the March archery turkey season. Learn shot placements, practice and hopefully you'll bag that gobbler this spring.



Broadside shot.
JULIE GEISER, NEBRASKALAND



Strutting broadside shot.
JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND



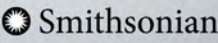
Vent shot.
JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND



Quartering shot.
JULIE GEISER, NEBRASKALAND



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FIVE WONDERFUL WINTER TRAILS

By Renae Blum

Get outdoors this winter and enjoy the invigorating fresh air of a winter’s day on a Nebraska state park trail. These five trails are excellent choices, offering wildlife viewing, shelter from the wind and beautiful, scenic views to appreciate. Bring a friend and take in the unique beauty that this time of year offers.

Turkey Run Trail Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area

Shielded from the winter wind, this 1.2-mile trail at Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area near Gering is a great choice for a walk on a winter’s day. Hikers will see a diversity of topography, including rocky buttes and interesting rock formations, as well as stunning views of the ponderosa pines and the North Platte River Valley. Make sure to check out the layers of sandstone and siltstone in the rock; the trail will let you get a close-up look. There’s a chance to see wildlife, as well: deer, turkey, songbirds and even coyotes or bobcats.

Groomed Cross-Country Skiing Trails Ponca State Park

If you enjoy cross-country skiing, Ponca State Park offers two groomed trails for visitors to enjoy. The first is 1.5 miles and winds through the park’s shooting complex and G8 group tent area. This area is pristine and quiet, with a lot of beautiful scenery and the chance to see deer along the way. The second trail is 2 miles and snakes along the riverfront, offering gorgeous views of the water. It’s very flat, making it

a good choice for beginners. Not interested in cross-country skiing? The park has 22 miles of other trails to enjoy; learn more at OutdoorNebraska.gov/poncatrails.

South Shore Trails Lewis and Clark State Recreation Area

Roughly 4 miles of trails meanders through the South Shore area at Lewis and Clark State Recreation Area. They’re an easy walk and give visitors the chance to see the park’s cedar and oak woodlands, as well as bluffs overlooking Lewis and Clark Lake and Gavins Point Dam. It’s a gorgeous view. Park superintendent Leslie Donner described the trails as a hidden gem. “A lot of people don’t realize we have trails there, so once you’ve tried them, you’re kind of hooked,” Donner said.

Riverview Trail Schramm Park State Recreation Area

The Riverview Trail at Schramm Park State Recreation Area takes only about five minutes to walk, but there’s plenty to see. It runs down to the Platte River and offers the chance to view bald eagles, beaver-chewed logs, raccoon prints in the mud and fish coming up to the shoreline. The trail’s short distance and flat surface also make it ideal for families with young kids or those with limited mobility. If you’d like to extend your trip and try other trails in the park, the Hackberry Trail and Red Cedar Trail, which ramble through the park’s forest, are great choices. The trees offer shelter from the wind, and with fewer leaves on the trees, there’s better visibility to spot wildlife, such as raptors, turkey or deer.

Steamboat Trail Chadron State Park

Chadron State Park’s Steamboat Trail offers stunning scenery, especially when it snows. At 1.3 miles, it takes you through ponderosa pines and curves gently up into the buttes, making it moderately challenging but not a difficult hike. It also takes visitors up to Steamboat Butte, named for its resemblance to the steamboats that once sailed the Missouri River. With scenic views and convenient parking, Steamboat Trail is a perfect choice for winter hiking. When you hike, remember to dress for the weather, bring water, walk with friends, and tell someone where you’re going. For more information about these and other trails, or to see an interactive trail map, visit OutdoorNebraska.gov/HikingTrails.



Steamboat Trail at Chadron State Park offers stunning scenery in the Nebraska Panhandle. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

CRANE VIEWING GUIDE



Iain Nicolson
Audubon Center
at Rowe Sanctuary

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Photo: Marti Phillips



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UNIQUE BIRDS OF WINTER

By Olivia DaRugna, Watchable Wildlife Biologist

While not everyone is excited about the cold and snowy weather of winter, like any change in seasons, the arrival of a harsh weather also means the presence of new birds in the state. Some new species show up in winter after migrating from their breeding grounds in the boreal forests and vast tundra of northern Canada. No matter where you are in the state, you don't have to go far to appreciate the grit and beauty of winter birds.



ROCKY HOFMANN, NEBRASKALAND

Harris's Sparrow

A Great Plains specialty, Harris's sparrows spend their winters in only a few states, and Nebraska is one of them. The southeastern third of the state is an especially good place to see this species. They often show up to bird feeders and in pathways foraging on the ground with other sparrows. They stand out for their large size, along with pink bills and variable black face and bib.



JOEL JORGENSEN

Townsend's Solitaire

While you may long for the musical melodies of birds singing nonstop in springtime, the Townsend's solitaire can offer some reprieve with their sweet song during the winter. This berry-loving bird will sing throughout

winter as a way to defend their patch of fruit-bearing trees. In the western half of Nebraska, watch for an inconspicuous gray bird with a contrasting yellow bar extending down its wings as it flutters to pick a ripe berry off a tree.



JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

Rough-legged Hawk

When this Arctic breeding hawk shows up, you know winter is coming. On drives through the open country, watch for this hawk perched on fence and utility poles. Although variable, look for their dark belly when perched and dark wrist patches while in flight. Their feathered legs, small bill and feet help keep them less exposed to the cold.



GETTY IMAGES

Common Redpoll

While not always a reliable winter bird, when they are here, there are

usually hundreds across the northern half of the state. This tiny finch adds a pop of color to snowy days with its yellow bill, red cap and pink chest. Look for this beautiful bird in sunflower fields and roadside patches. If you're lucky, one may even show up to your bird feeder.



GETTY IMAGES

Pine Siskin

Although they occur year-round, during some winters, flocks of hundreds of siskins can crowd bird feeders. The energy they gain from seeds helps them survive cold nights when they ramp up their metabolic rates. Visit parks with bird feeders, such as Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area, where you may observe over a hundred pine siskins. Look for a heavily streaked, brown bird with yellow in the wings and tail. Listen for their rising "buzz zeeee" calls.

There are many other winter birds to watch for, including gray-crowned rosy-finch and a variety of dark-eyed juncos. Keep your bird feeders stocked and don't be afraid to go out and explore. To learn more about winter birding opportunities, visit NEBirdingGuide.org.

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

NEBRASKA WILDLIFE CONSERVATION FUND
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SNOWBOARDING PARKS

By Jeff Kurrus

Several years ago, I made a decision regarding my Nebraska winters. If I didn't find something to tide me over, freezing temperatures were going to destroy me. Merely sledding with the kids just wasn't going to work.

Put a snowboard in my hand, however, and I started watching the weather forecast for "fresh powder," electing to take my chances upright when my young kids were sitting their way down the hill. And there were hills aplenty.

Try these dedicated toboggan runs throughout the state to add a little variety to your sledding trips:

Eugene T. Mahoney – The dedicated toboggan hill lies on the east side of the Activity Center, featuring multiple runs and even smaller entry points for younger or less experienced riders.

Ponca State Park – Ponca's sled hill can be seen before the turn into the Scout Hill Loop portion of the park.

Chadron State Park – The designated sled hill lies next to the archery range on the west side of the park.

These are not our only parks worthy of carving out your own slopes, as Fort Robinson and Niobrara state parks and Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area have enough rolling hills to create your own snowboarding, and sledding, destinations — as long as you don't mind the walk back up the hill at any of these winter getaways.



Betsy Mayfield, of Omaha, snowboarding down a snow hill at Ponca State Park. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND



The sledding hill at Eugene T. Mahoney State Park also makes for a great snowboarding run. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

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Early sandhills hunts, 1910

This photo shows ducks and grouse from the Edwards Ranch in Cherry County. This picture was taken around 1910. Left to right: Oscar Anderson from Moline, Illinois, Charlie, Joe and Ellis Edwards. Walter Adamson was the grandfather of Marv and me. Our dad, Elvin Adamson, also served as a Game and Parks commissioner and was a state senator. Joe Edwards and Dan Adamson were our great-grandfathers.
– Marge Adamson Harris, Lincoln



Raccoon hunt near Falls City, 1944

My dad, Dale Linderman, with a nice size raccoon he shot with the rifle he is holding (and now I am the proud owner of the rifle, which he purchased at the Western Auto store in Falls City).
The picture was taken on the place they farmed a few miles south of Falls City. Years later in the early '70s, I worked on that same farm but it was on the construction of a dam for the same family that owned it when this was taken.
– Mike Linderman, Buckeye, AZ



Raccoons hunted near Genoa, 1963

My grandfather, Philip Swantek, (whom I was named after) was photographed here in March 1963 with raccoons he had harvested that month. He used the dogs to tree the raccoons and shot them from there.
Grandfather worked on the University of Nebraska farm in Genoa at the time.
– Phil Swantek, Kearney

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.

SKUNKWALK

By Justin Haag

When I began using a camera trap to capture imagery of mountain lions and other nocturnal species years ago, one creature of the night became a frequent photo subject. The striped skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*) is not active during daylight, but it certainly gets around after the sun goes down.

At first, the many skunk photos were treasured. I was excited to capture imagery of any wildlife, and to get photos of skunks without a face-to-rear encounter was a bonus. However, the excitement wore off. Now, I delete a lot more skunk photos than I keep.

That said, one image stood out to me when reviewing a set of photos from last January. Similar to models on the catwalk (or should it be skunkwalk?), these three attractive characters appeared to be strutting for the camera. A little accidental lens flare even alludes, albeit falsely, to the familiar musky odor from the skunks' rear. I was once again reminded of the species' beauty.

Beauty? Skunks? You bet. There is historical financial evidence to back up the notion.

In the early 20th century, skunk attained status of the most prominent fur on the market. The species was amply available to trappers, and a little creative advertising helped make it desirable. Marketed as "Alaskan sable" or "American sable," the attractive fur with its long, glossy guard hairs found its way to the formal wardrobes of countless unknowing women.

In 1919, the *Burlington Free Press* newspaper of Vermont had this:

"According to a correspondent of the *New York Post*, writing from Albany, the prices of 'Alaskan sable' skins have become so attractive that dogs must forthwith cease

to bother the little animals that produce this valuable fur. You would not recognize a skunk skin under this euphonious name which rolls mellifluously from the tongue as 'Alaskan sable.'"

In the 1950s, popularity plummeted. The Fur Products Labeling Act of 1951 required that apparel must be labeled, advertised and invoiced with the actual English name of the animal from which the fur is taken. Apparently, no matter how striking the apparel may be, not many consumers want to be associated with the animal most known for its repugnant odor. Today, skunks can be harvested year-round, and a good pelt sells for about \$4.

The species, regardless of repute, continues to thrive. Omnivorous opportunists that are not picky about what they eat, the skunks' range spans throughout most of North America. The woodland creatures have become well adapted to farms, suburban areas and small towns, and they are largely considered pests.

Solitary animals most of the year, some skunks gather in a communal den

in the winter to stay warm — usually a few females with perhaps a male.

Males are most active during the mating period of mid-February to mid-March. In true Pepé Le Pew fashion, a male travels up to 5 miles per night in search of females. Consequently, this is when you are likely to see — and smell — the most "dead skunks in the middle of the road," made famous in the old Loudon Wainwright song.

Maybe the three skunks in my photo are den mates just venturing out for dinner. Or, perhaps they are a group of supermodels looking for their big break. Whatever the case, I'm glad they made their way down my camera's "runway." Fashionable characters, indeed.



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