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June 2019



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Nebraskaland

Volume 97 • No. 5
June 2019

Cover: A great blue heron at Holmes Lake in Lancaster County.
Photo by Chris Masada.

FEATURES

20 TRAVELING THROUGH A WATERSHED

Story by Katie Larsen
Photos by Michael Forsberg

28 OUTDOOR NEBRASKA

What to Do in June
By Renae Blum

30 NEW OPPORTUNITIES IN LEARNING

Schramm Education Center
Story and Photos by Jeff Kurrus

38 SOD HOUSES ON GLASS PLATES

By History Nebraska

40 THE FIRST 99

Story and Photos by Justin Haag

46 BOWFISHING

Story by Rich Porter
Photos by Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

DEPARTMENTS

- 6 Your Nebraska
- 10 In the Field
- 50 Mixed Bag
- 60 Portraits from the Past
- 62 The Last Stop

ON THE WEB

To see additional content including photos, videos and additional articles, visit Magazine.OutdoorNebraska.gov/digital.

PHOTO BY CHRIS MASADA

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Title and Description	Starting Location	Date & Time
Grassland Bird Banding Workshop: Join us as we work with a certified bird bander to capture songbirds utilizing mist nets. Participants will have the opportunity to watch and release birds. Learn how PF/QF works to enhance habitat to benefiting a variety of wildlife, including grassland birds.	Heron Haven 11809 Old Maple Rd Omaha, NE 68164	May 11 9:00 AM - 11:30 AM
Bird Day at Fort Atkinson: Enjoy a full schedule of events relating to birds of Nebraska including bird talks, a bird habitat tour, building bird houses and "suet cones", and even a migration game. Bring your own sack lunch and find out how to get involved with birds. All ages welcome.	Fort Atkinson SHP 201 South 7th St Fort Calhoun, NE 68023	May 18 8:00 AM - 12:30 PM
Food Plot Establishment & MCM Techniques: Tour will focus on methods of establishing food plots and demonstrate techniques implemented for CRP's Mid-Contract-Management including burning, chemical suppression, disking and interseeding wildflowers. A follow-up session is planned on September 19th from 5 to 7pm to evaluate results.	Beede Outdoors 837 S 16th Rd Unadilla, NE 68454	June 6 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM
Conservation Contractor Work Opportunities: Tour will highlight opportunities to become a conservation work contractor and learn about additional contractor opportunities. Hear about biological benefits to the projects and an in depth look at wildlife management techniques promoted by local biologists.	Curtis Comm Center 301 Garlick Ave Curtis, NE 69025	June 11 11:00 AM - 3:00 PM
Grazing Lands & Prescribed Fire: This tour, in partnership with the Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition, will feature producers with 30+ years intensive grazing management and topics on profitability, prescribed fire, cedar control, landowner burn associations, and more. Free lunch provided. Evening meal to follow. Pre-register deadline June 5.	Moore/Shamrock Ranch 35800 Rd 748 Wallace, NE 69169	June 12 8:30 AM - 5:00 PM
Intensive Grazing Management: This tour will feature the working ranch of the Russ Sundstrom Family. Topics include mob grazing, prescribed fire, cedar management, wildlife and more. See how the Sundstrom family incorporates wildlife benefits along with ranching practices, profitability and more. Lunch provided.	Sundstrom Family Ranch 33260 Brady Moorefield Rd Moorefield, NE 69039	June 13 9:30 AM - 1:00 PM
The Do's & Don'ts of Mowing Ditches & the Like: Where row cropping is the dominant landscape use, this tour will focus on the importance of non-ag acres including ditches, grassed waterways, and other odd pockets and necessary improvements for added wildlife, pollinator, erosion, and water quality benefits.	ENREC UNL Extension 1071 County Road G Ithaca, NE 68033	June 18 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM
Family Nature Night: It's Pollinator Week! Join us for a night of fun learning about pollinators, habitat, and much more! Stations will be set up to make crafts and learn about Nebraska's plants and animals. Be prepared to get your hands dirty by making a pollinator ball to take home and plant in your garden.	Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center 11700 SW 100th St. Denton, NE 68339	June 19 6:00 PM - 8:30 PM
Corners For Wildlife: Profitability, Resource Conservation, & Wildlife Habitat: More return on your investment, less water and pesticide use, and more wildlife. Come learn how enrolling some of your operation into this program can be a win-win. With Pollinator Week also on the calendar, we will be making a stop at a local pollinator site.	Trotters West Parking Lot 2990 S E Street Broken Bow, NE 68822	June 20 3:00 PM - 7:00 PM
Pints & Pollinators: Join us for an evening of pollinators and cold beer. We will be talking about pollinator habitat and the importance of pollinators while enjoying locally brewed beer from Lazy Horse Brewing & Winery. We will also take a tour to look at some of the pollinator habitat on site and see what it is that makes good pollinator habitat.	Lazy Horse Brewing & Winery 211 Road 20 Ohiowa, NE 68416	June 20 5:30 PM - 8:00 PM
Monarchs in the Classroom: Learn about the importance of pollinator habitat for Monarchs and how you can incorporate this iconic butterfly into your grade school classroom curriculum for hands-on activities and civic science.	North Platte NRD 100547 Airport Road Scottsbluff, NE 69361	June 26 9:00 AM - 2:00 PM MST
Take and Taste Thursday: Take some time out to join us for an evening of Nebraska wildflowers and pollinator education. Plant ID, Make & Take Project, beverage and food tasting will round out the evening's activities.	USDA Service Center 706 East 5th St. Imperial, NE 69033	June 27 4:30 PM - 8:00 PM MST
Improving your Grassland through the use of Prescribed Fire: Tour will highlight how Prescribed fire can be beneficial in improving grassland for wildlife and grazing. It will highlight the RCPP Grassland program and the benefits that farmers can have from using it.	Johnson Comm. Center 509 Main St Alma, NE 68920	June 27 5:00 PM - 8:00 PM
Managing the Eastern Sandhills for Profitable Ranching & Quality Wildlife Habitat: Tour will highlight challenges ranchers face with eastern redcedar encroachment. Best management practices for both wildlife and ranching will be showcased along with prescribed fire results. Working Lands For Wildlife program options will be discussed.	Johnstown Fairgrounds North Main St Hwy 20 Johnstown, NE	June 27 11:00 AM - 3:00 PM
Monitoring Wildlife on Your Property: Come learn how to conduct wildlife surveys (focused on game birds) to monitor how populations are doing on your property. We will go over several different types of surveys you can use on your farm and head to the field to try one out.	USDA Service Center 1202 S Cottonwood St North Platte, NE 69101	June 29 7:30 AM - 10:00 AM
Wetland Conservation Along the River: Riparian wetlands are home to a wide variety of wildlife. Join us to learn about different techniques to improve wetland wildlife habitat and programs that can assist with the costs and design of wetland projects. During this workshop, we will be touring several local wetland habitat projects.	Ord USDA Service Center 1614 N 28th Street Ord, NE 68862	July 9 1:00 PM - 5:00 PM
Wetland Restoration and Management in the Rainwater Basin: Join us for an evening of good food and great conservation. We will discuss some of the wonders of the Rainwater Basin wetlands, restoration benefits, and proper management. In addition we will close out the event with a tour of a beautiful restored wetland.	3725 E 82nd St. Hastings, NE 68901	July 16 5:30 PM - 8:00 PM
Cover Crop Tour in Southwest Nebraska: Will cover crops work in your operation? Join us for a tour of cover crops in SW Nebraska and learn how they can fit into your farm or ranch operation. Many cover crop topics will be covered including grazing, wildlife use, soil health, NRCS programs, and much more.	4-H Building 1400 West 5th Street McCook, NE 69001	August 28 10:00 AM - 3:00 PM
Monarch Tagging at Lake Wanhoo: Join us for a Monarch Butterfly tagging event at Lake Wanhoo where you will have the chance to catch, tag, and release monarch butterflies, weather permitting. This is a family friendly event.	Ron Larsen Day Use Area 1651 County Road 16 Wahoo, NE 68066	September 8 1:00 PM - 3:00 PM

Workshops are FREE!
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Please contact Ashley at Asnelson@pheasantsforever.org or 308-850-8395 if you have questions.



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Tom Shield, Kearney
Damselfly

OPPOSITE: Sam Raetz, Omaha
Bison at Fort Niobrara Wildlife Refuge

Arlin Hunter, Papillion
A Duck Blind Sunrise South of
Schuyler on the Platte





Karen Kutz Smith, Omaha
Red-breasted Nuthatch



Karen Linot, Gibbon
Ice Drop



Kirk Noller, Kearney
From the Trail Cam



Karen Kutz Smith, Omaha
Barred Owl

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

FORT ROBINSON RADIANCE

A magnificent sky complements blooming silvery lupine (*Lupinus argenteus*) as donkeys graze near the Cheyenne Buttes at Fort Robinson State Park.

PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

THREATENED AND ENDANGERED: THE PIPING PLOVER

By Melissa J. Panella

Though smack dab in the middle of the country and far from any ocean, Nebraska is positioned perfectly along the flyway of many shorebird species. Some of the shorebirds that visit the state are seeking high quality wetlands where they can stop and refuel during their long migrations. Others stay longer, finding Nebraska to be a suitable place to raise a family. One of the shorebird species that breeds in the state is the threatened piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*).

In Nebraska, piping plovers historically nested on midstream sandbar habitat primarily on the Missouri, Loup, Elkhorn, Niobrara and Platte rivers. Presently, piping plovers also nest on human-created habitats such as sand and gravel mines. The male piping plover chooses locations above the normal high-water line to make multiple shallow cup-like depressions in the sand known as scrapes. The female of the pair then chooses her favorite scrape where she will lay her eggs. These riverine locations offer the resources the plovers need during their nesting season.

Piping plovers display interesting behaviors during nesting. Males defend their territories from other males and intruders. They exhibit a start-stop running style that looks a bit like a game of chase. Males court the females with their displays and calls. Both parents share the duty of incubation and work together when a potential predator is sighted. Piping plovers are known to skillfully feign a broken-wing

injury to lure a predator away from a nest.

Fluffy piping plover fledglings are up and running several hours after hatching. The adults stay close by, and the young are known to crowd underneath a parent for security. The chicks forage in the soft substrate close to the water's edge where they find invertebrates. For the young, it is all about growing stronger, mastering flight and survival in preparation to fly south for the winter. Piping plovers banded in Nebraska are often spotted along the Gulf Coast where they overwinter.

Piping plovers became threatened because of alteration to their on-river habitat, invasive species, loss of wintering habitat and other threats. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission has partnered closely with the Tern and Plover Conservation Partnership led by Dr. Mary Bomberger Brown to conserve the threatened piping plover and the endangered least tern, which overlaps in many of its basic habitat requirements. The Tern and Plover Conservation Partnership has built solid working relationships with industry, homeowners and multiple cooperators to protect these threatened and endangered birds that now find off-river nesting habitat at sand and gravel mine operations and lakeshore housing developments. To learn more about this partnership and ways to share the sand with terns and plovers, please visit ternandplover.unl.edu.

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PHOTO BY CHRIS HELZER

BEE MIMIC ROBBER FLIES

By Chris Helzer

It seems like predators already have all the advantages they need. Most have some combination of size, speed, strength, big teeth/claws, and/or venom. If you're a small, relatively defenseless creature, all those predatory features are enough to strike fear into your heart. Allowing a predator to also look exactly like something harmless is a step too far.

Robber flies are among the scariest of predators (to small insects). They are super fast flyers with huge eyes and quick-acting venom that paralyzes and then liquifies the insides of their prey. Robber flies can take down prey much bigger than themselves, often knocking that prey right out of the air like a surface to air missile. Most robber flies don't bother concealing themselves because they don't need to. They can sit on a prominent perch and just wait for prospective prey to fly by.

It's completely unfair, then, that some big robber flies have all the traits of normal robber flies but also look just like

bumblebees.

Imagine being a small invertebrate, flying from flower to flower, just trying to eat enough pollen to survive. As you fly, you're constantly scanning the air for birds and aerial insect predators, scanning nearby vegetation for robber flies and other threats, and before you land on a flower, you check carefully for crab spiders, assassin bugs, praying mantids, and other potential ambush predators lying in wait for you. Life is scary and frenetic.

Then one day, you go through your entire checklist, avoid all threats while in the air, and just as you're landing on a big sunflower, you do a final scan for predators.

"Let's see, nothing hiding underneath the flower, no spiders camouflaged on top of the flower, just a little weevil on the left and a big harmless bumblebee on the right. Nothing to worry..." BAM!

Life isn't fair at all.

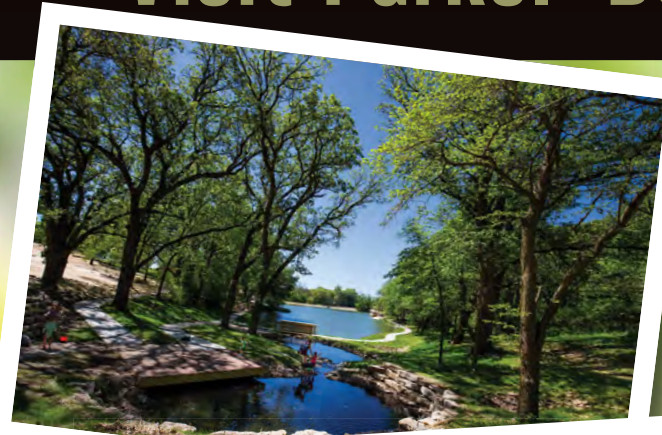
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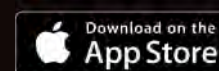




PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

IS THE CONSERVATION ORDER HELPING?

By Jeff Kurrus

The Light Goose Conservation Order was enacted to reduce populations of lesser snow and Ross's geese that were causing damage to sub-Arctic habitats. The order hasn't met its intended objectives, but one reason into why may be reflected from a recent study by a team of wildlife biologists – including Nebraska Game and Parks' Dr. Mark Vrtiska.

A key piece in reducing light goose populations was not only to increase the overall harvest of geese, but really increasing the harvest of adult females. Healthy, adult females are the primary drivers of the population given that they lay and incubate eggs and then help raise goslings. Those females that build sufficient fat and protein reserves during spring migration are more likely to nest and raise more young. Obviously, there's no way to identify male or female geese while flying, but harvesting enough healthy (i.e., geese with abundant fat and protein reserves) geese would work. The question is – what geese are being harvested?

To answer that question, researchers compared birds harvested over decoys and those hunted using jump-shooting

tactics in Arkansas, Missouri, Nebraska and South Dakota in the springs of 2015 and 2016. The team found that during the order, adult lesser snow and Ross's geese harvested over decoys had less fat than counterparts randomly collected through jump shooting. Essentially, snow and Ross's geese in poorer body condition are more vulnerable to harvest than healthier birds when hunted over decoys. Individual geese that are in poorer body condition likely have more willingness to respond to decoys that may signal food availability.

Because at least 70 percent of the light geese harvested during the order are over decoys, there are implications to the effectiveness of the order. In addition to an insufficient amount of harvest, harvest of individuals exhibiting poorer body condition suggests that the order primarily removes individuals from the population that would die of natural mortality at later stages of migration or may not reproduce. Thus, the order in turn actually may be aiding light goose populations than contributing to their reduction.



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TURKEY AND CHIPOTLE FRIED TACOS

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

This recipe is an homage to all the cheap Burger King and Jack-in-the-Box fried tacos I ate as a teenager, except my version will actually taste good. You’ll get all the crunchy, greasy goodness your heart desires, along with a spicy, real-meat turkey filling hunted by you – nothing like the gray “meat” paste the King and Jack used in theirs. These tacos will be so tasty your family and friends will gobble them up as fast as you can make them.

I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again: Turkey legs and thighs are not “dog food.” Although tough, they are flavorful and nothing a bit of heat, moisture and time can’t tenderize. Much like hunting, patience is also key to cooking wild turkey successfully.

Servings: 20-25 small tacos
Prep Time: 6-8 hours
Cooking Time: 1 hour and 30 minutes
Ingredients:

- 2 turkey legs and 2 turkey thighs
- 8 cloves of garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon of salt, plus extra
- ¼ teaspoon of cracked black pepper
- 1 teaspoon of chili powder
- ½ teaspoon of cumin
- 2 cans of beer
- 1 small onion, peeled and halved
- 1 tablespoon of olive oil
- Half a grated onion
- 2 tablespoons of tomato paste
- 1 to 2 chipotle peppers in adobo sauce, chopped

- 2 tablespoons of chopped cilantro, leaves and stems
- Shredded romaine lettuce
- Shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- 20-25 corn tortillas
- Corn or vegetable oil for frying
- Hot sauce/taco sauce

1. Remove thick areas of silver skin from turkey legs and thighs. Combine minced garlic, 1 tablespoon of salt, cracked pepper, chili powder and cumin, and then rub it all over turkey. Place turkey in a slow cooker and pour in enough beer to submerge the meat completely. Add a halved onion and cover the slow cooker with foil. Place the lid on top of the foil – foil will prevent steam escaping. Cook on low

for 6-8 hours or until meat becomes tender. Remove meat from bones and finely shred. Remove all pin bones.

2. In a skillet, heat 1 tablespoon of olive oil over medium heat. Add grated onion and cook for 2-3 minutes, or until softened. Then turn up heat to medium-high and then add the shredded turkey meat with chopped chipotle peppers in adobo sauce and tomato paste. Sauté until meat is warmed through and slightly toasted. Take off heat and add chopped cilantro, salt and pepper to taste. Add more spicy adobo sauce from the can if desired. Set meat aside.

3. In a skillet, heat 1 to 2 teaspoons

of vegetable/corn oil over medium heat. Lay corn tortillas into the warm oil and flip back and forth to warm through; warming the tortillas in oil helps to moisten it, which prevents it from cracking when assembling tacos later. Stack warmed tortillas in a bowl and keep warm. Add more oil to the pan as necessary.

4. Fill warmed tortillas with about 2 tablespoons of the shredded turkey mixture and fold over the tortilla, gently pressing down the taco to encourage it to keep its shape. Lay all assembled tacos on a cookie sheet. When done, place the cookie sheet in the refrigerator for 30 minutes to firm up tacos.

5. In a cast iron skillet, heat enough oil to 350 degrees to shallow fry tacos – do not fill your cooking vessel more than 1/3 of the way up to prevent oil from boiling over. Once oil is heated, gently drop cold tacos into the oil and fry for 2 to 3 minutes on each side; do not overcrowd the pan and be careful of splatter. When crispy, remove the fried tacos with tongs and tip to drain out excess oil. Rest on paper towels.

6. Once tacos are cool enough to handle, carefully open up the tacos without cracking the spine, and fill with shredded romaine lettuce and cheddar cheese. Serve with your favorite hot sauce.





Traveling Through a Watershed

A conversation with Mike Forsberg

STORY BY KATIE LARSEN
PHOTOS BY MICHAEL FORSBERG

From a mid-river sandbar camp, the Milky Way rises and small towns glow in the distance along the Platte River miles downstream of Columbus, Nebraska.

Follow the Water is a 55-minute documentary about a journey taken by two men through the Platte River watershed. The film allows audiences to travel along with conservation photographer Mike Forsberg and filmmaker Pete Stegen as they discover where our water comes from. *Follow the Water* can currently be viewed at pbs.org/show/follow-water.

In the following interview, Mike Forsberg talks about how and why this documentary was created, what the journey was like and his plans for the future.

Q: Long before *Follow the Water* was created, you and Michael Farrell cofounded the Platte Basin Timelapse project, which documents changes in the Platte River watershed. How did you decide to also explore the watershed through a documentary film?

We've had the Platte Basin Timelapse project in place since 2011, and that project is a long-form, multimedia documentary that really doesn't have an end to it. Its goal is to get people to think

about where their water comes from and what it means to live in a watershed today. We have all these time-lapse cameras that we've put in place from mountains to plains in our watershed; each one is a different chapter in the story of that water, and each one has a story to tell.

I got to a point where I wanted to do something that would connect some of these time-lapse cameras from mountains to plains through a personal experience, and I started to talk about that with Pete Stegen. We decided to tell a longer story about traveling through a watershed, starting from



Backpackers Pete Stegen, Lindsay Dalton, Mariah Lundgren, Kery Harrelson and Mike Forsberg rest in an alpine meadow near Kenosha Pass above South Park, Colorado, as they neared the end of the 17-day backpacking portion of the journey.



Sun rises over a beaver dam along the Sweetwater River, the farthest west headwater drainage of the Platte River watershed, flowing out of Wyoming's Wind River Range.

the very farthest away a drop of water comes from, and eventually finding our way back to the drain. I drew up the initial plan on the back of a Subway napkin.

Q: What planning and preparation was necessary for the trip?

We first lined up our own schedules, Pete and I, to know what blocks of time

we had, and then there were a couple key components that we needed to fit. We had to think about where we were going to need help. Who was going to join us along the way, when we needed to be shuttled, when we needed to trade bikes for backpacks, when we needed to trade backpacks back to bikes, bikes to canoe? Who was going to help us and when? What were we going to eat? Where were we going to sleep? What gear were we going to bring?

We wanted to document this, but

we weren't necessarily thinking it was going to be a documentary film. We knew that we couldn't haul a big film crew with, because they weren't going to be able to do what we were doing. When you watch the documentary, most everything that you see there is shot on phones and GoPro. We also ended up having a professional film crew from Platte Basin Timelapse and NET Television meet us in a few different places along the way, but they never went with us anywhere.

Q: What were some of the challenges?

The challenges were mostly physical. I partially tore the meniscus in my knee early on in the trip. But none of this was wrought with all sorts of danger – we were never all that far from help, and we did stuff very deliberately. It was just a matter of putting one foot in front of the other every day, not worrying about 5 hours from now or 5 days from now – just going.



Snowmelt cascades down the wild slopes of Argentine Peak along Colorado's Front Range on its way to the South Platte River.

We always had to make sure we were close to water, though – which was sort of cool, because I didn't think about that until a little bit later. You've got to have water, so you've got to think about that every day. And then when you have that water, you have to conserve it, because you may not have very much to draw from, or you don't want to go walk 200 yards back down to the lake or the creek to pump another 20 minutes to get more water out. You're thinking about water almost all the time.

Q: This was a 55-day trip — over 1,300 miles of hiking, biking and canoeing. What was that journey like for you personally?

Physically it was hard, but mentally I didn't think it was all that rough, because we were with really good people the whole time. It really made me slow down, because when you're operating under your own power, you're only going

as fast as your body will allow you to. And then when you get on the river in a boat, you're only going as fast as that water's going to take you. So you might as well enjoy it. Everything slows down, and you get into the rhythm of this place. You get into the rhythm of the river, you get into the rhythm of the mountains or the plains.

I wish everybody could do that. We could get in my truck right now and drive to the place where we started and be there in probably 11 hours, and we could do it in a glass and steel bubble, and never know where we just went through. So, 11 hours or 55 days.

Q: What were the goals of the trip and the documentary, and do you feel like they were accomplished?

We wanted to get people to think about where their water comes from, and thinking about the watershed as a place that we live in. We live in the state

of Nebraska, yes. But we also live in a watershed, and that watershed doesn't pay attention to any straight lines that we drew on a map. It's nature's borders and boundaries, and we're all neighbors together. There's always somebody upstream of us, there's always somebody downstream of us. All of the people that are attached to this film are a part of that community. We all live in the same place, we all rely on this water in some way, and it connects all of us together in a very personal way.

[The purpose of the trip was] to take people on a journey with us. Not everybody can do what we did. But, if we can take you with, and give you a sense of what it was like, and either show you some things that you haven't seen before, or show you something in a way that you haven't seen it before, then that's a success, I think.

The longer-term goal and hopefully the success of this project is to continue to build community and voice around this watershed, and then other

watersheds. When I give a talk about Platte Basin Timelapse to other places that aren't here, I'll always start with my story from my home country, from my home watershed, but as I do that, I want you to think about your own. Where does your water come from, and what does that mean, and how are you intimately connected to it?

Q: What are your future plans?

I hope this project can continue for a long time. We'd like to make it through a decade – it's good statistically, and it sounds good from a story perspective – but in a lot of ways, I'd like to see it continue, and I'd like to continue to explore my home, as a storyteller. Being able to stay in one place may not sound as sexy to some as traveling the world, but getting to know a place really well is like getting to know a friend your entire life. The more time that you spend, the more layers you



Sunrise greets river camp on a sandbar along the central Platte River between Overton and Elm Creek, Nebraska.



A crew from NET Television: Emily Kruetz, left, and Mariah Lundgren, right, interview Peter Stegen along the shoreline of Lake McConaughy in western Nebraska.



Peter Stegen pulls the canoe through a dense stand of cattails during a long portage around a diversion dam on the North Platte River in western Nebraska.



peel away, the more beauty that you see. I think that's important today. I've spent 25 years as a photographer in conservation, dedicated to my home, the Great Plains of North America. I've seen a lot, I've experienced a lot, I've learned a lot, but I've only scratched the surface.

I love being able to hand what I have

Mike Forsberg and Peter Stegen ending the bike portion of their journey above the Platte River near Henry, Nebraska.

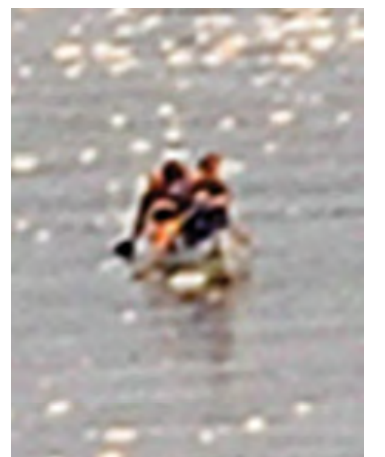


At Schilling Wildlife Management Area near Plattsmouth at the confluence of the Platte and Missouri rivers, a Platte Basin Timelapse (PBT) camera captures Mike Forsberg and Pete Stegen (top, and bottom right) as they near the end of their 55-day, 1,300-mile journey by bike, backpack and canoe across the Platte Basin watershed.

to somebody else, and watch them go explore too, and see the stories that they do. Working with students at the University of Nebraska is really cool, and so is being able to work with and meet people that have a passion and a heart for the natural world, who understand that we all have to be connected to it and be good stewards of it moving forward.

We need people to re-engage, and one of the ways that you do that is to tell stories. We tell stories, and we learn from those stories, and we can be moved

by those stories. Through the written word, and through the power of photography, and art, and other creative devices, that's the way we're going to reach people, and the more personal it is, the more authentic it can be. If I can continue to help move in that direction – if I can still be let out of the barn once in a while to do the work that I'm passionate about, and be able to bring a lot of other people along the way and let them fly and be better than I am — then I'll feel good about it. [N](#)



Outdoor Nebraska

By Renae Blum

As we move into the warmer months, Nebraska – especially the state park system – offers a range of amenities and opportunities for enjoying the outdoors. Here are just a few of them. 



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Go catfishing

Throughout the month
Statewide

June is a great month for catfishing – they're active and moving shallow. Get out your favorite bait and enjoy some fishing before the spawn in July.



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Enjoy a trail on National Trails Day

June 1 | Statewide

Nebraska's state parks have some amazing hiking and biking trails, whether you're interested in an easy stroll or a rugged mountain biking path. Find one to enjoy on National Trails Day at OutdoorNebraska.org/trails.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Camp at a state park

Throughout the month | Various state parks and recreation areas

Get away from the daily grind and enjoy some relaxing time outdoors with a camping trip. Several Nebraska state parks and recreation areas offer a variety of camping amenities and accommodations for tent and/or RV camping. Learn more at OutdoorNebraska.org/camping.

Wildflower Walk

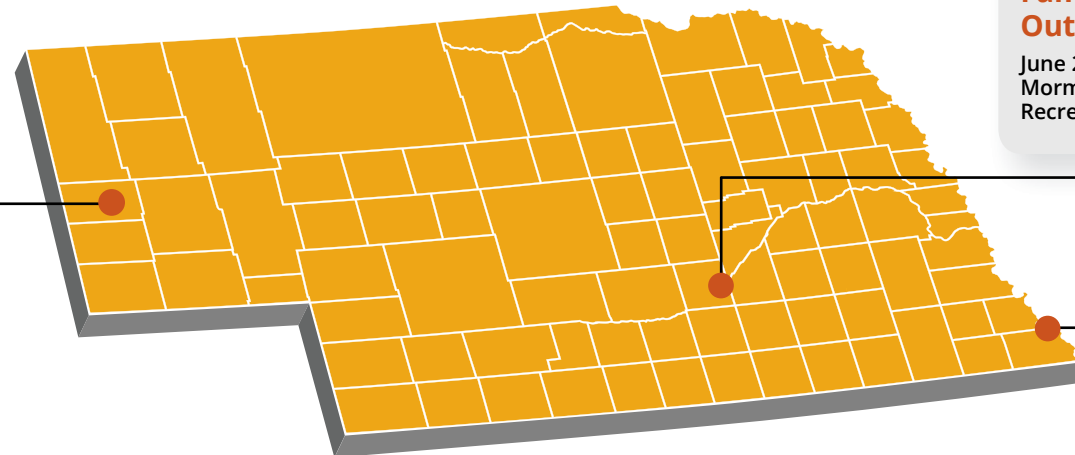
June 7
Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area

Family Outdoor Day

June 22
Mormon Island State Recreation Area

Show and Shine Car Show

June 29
Indian Cave State Park



Visit a shooting range

Throughout the month | Statewide

All kinds of shooting opportunities are available in June at shooting sports facilities across the state. Bring your family and friends and enjoy a time-honored tradition that's not only fun, but helps keep your shooting skills top-notch for fall hunting season.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY

Enjoy a state park pool or aquatic center

Throughout the month | Various state parks

Cool off by splashing around at a state park! Six state parks offer swimming facilities, and two have been newly renovated. Platte River State Park now offers one of the only two-tiered spray parks in the region, and Ponca State Park's new aquatic center features a heated zero-depth entry pool, 172-foot water slide and more. Find details at OutdoorNebraska.org/swim.

New Opportunities in Learning

Schramm Education Center

Story and Photos by Jeff Kurrus

Formally Ak-sar-ben Aquarium, this interactive nature destination sets the bar for outdoor education.

Two friends – a third grader and fourth grader – bounced from one activity to the next at the newly renovated Schramm Education Center. They hopped on the virtual reality mountain bikes, then marveled at a 90-pound common snapping turtle. They picked up magnifying glasses, slid down a tree slide, cast line from a fishing reel and yelled “gross” when they looked at their own arms beneath a microscope. Then they saw the touch tank where paddlefish and shovelnose sturgeon swam inches below the water.

And they had only been at the new center for 15 minutes.

Constantly Changing

“We want you to come in here, so then you want to spend more time out there,” said Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Outdoor Education Program Manager Lindsay Rogers when talking about the newly opened, 14,000 square-foot building. To accomplish this goal, Rogers and a team of colleagues designed the center looking toward the future of nature education.

Fifth grade elementary school teacher Melissa Nelson was no stranger to the center’s predecessor, the Ak-sar-ben Aquarium. “My family and I frequently came to the aquarium,” she said during a visit with her class from Patriot Elementary in Papillion, “but my students absolutely



TOP: Koco Janssen, Averi Bridges and Maddie Kurrus of Gretna play at the Schramm Education Center.

RIGHT: Kylie Raess of Gretna explores with a magnifying glass.

love the new place. It’s a lot more hands-on than it was before. I’m already planning the summer with my own kids.”

The hands-on portion was a pivotal component of the





Logann Dostal of Gretna views the farm pond tank at the Schramm Education Center.

redesign. “People learn by touching things,” said Rogers. “When you get multiple senses involved – hearing, seeing, touching – you get a more robust learning experience.”

The center has a “maker space” where visitors will encounter design challenges. For example, students might be instructed to design a bird habitat that accounts for food, shelter, water and space. Then, the next time they visit, their challenge will be something entirely different.

“This is probably my favorite spot in the entire center,” Rogers said. “You might walk right by it and not notice it ... until you see kids. It’s a place for them to concentrate, to

critically think about what they want to build and how they want to build it.”

Visitors will also have the opportunity to view scientists at work in the quarantine area. From a huge window, guests can watch a biologist give an animal a shot, or see Nebraska’s mussels up close. “We want to offer transparency to science and technology,” said Outdoor Education Specialist Amber Schiltz. “A behind-the-scenes look. A five- or six-year-old can watch a fisheries biologist work and see their future role models.”

Some of the permanent attractions are just as dynamic.

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"The Venture Parks concept was to make one of the best state park systems even better. To motivate and connect today’s families, inviting and enticing future generations to enjoy, experience and explore the outdoors."

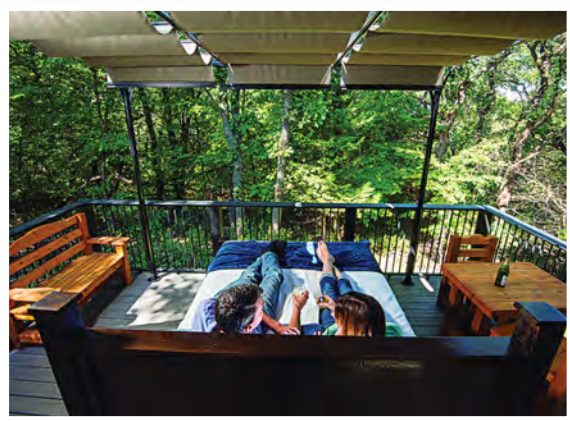
— Jim Abel, Chairman, Nebraska Game and Parks Foundation



Platte River State Park's Crawdad Creek.



Mahoney State Park's GoApe ropes course.



Glamping cabins at Platte River State Park.



Louisville State Recreation Area's floating playground.

Venture Parks

The idea for Venture Parks began in 2014 when Nebraska Game and Parks Director Jim Douglas asked his colleagues, “Who are we, and what do we want to become?” Despite offering numerous activities in Nebraska’s 76 state parks and recreation areas, the team wanted to offer more. Douglas and his staff wanted to provide a series of outdoor experiences that inspired users to go outside. “We want children to look farther,” he said. “And our parks are natural gateways for exploring the outdoors.” Education, adventure, relaxation and being part of the “wildness” that nature can offer were central themes to the Venture Parks concept.

Through an innovative private/public partnership, nearly \$40 million would be re-invested to the state park system for this concept. Five years since Douglas’ first question, Game and Parks – with the aid of the Nebraska Game and Parks Foundation and other private donors – has just completed the first phase of its Venture Parks concept.



The woodland play area offers interchangeable displays for visitors.

More than 60 freshwater fish, turtle, frog and snake species are found at the center, including the world's largest captive common snapping turtle, aptly named "Big Snap Daddy" (see sidebar on page 36). A working beehive is also on site.

"My favorite part was seeing all the smaller fish you usually don't see or catch," said fifth grader Thad Doble from Papillion during his visit. "It was also really cool to step into the bubble and see fish from different points of view."

The "bubble" that Doble referred to is a display in the center's aquarium section where visitors can step into an area and feel like the water completely surrounds them, offering an even more personal perspective to view Nebraska's native fish species. "Even when things are behind glass," said Rogers, "we tried to get a sensory

experience happening to them."

The experience, as on-site aquarium biologist Tony Korth said, takes about one to two hours to get through for a family. But he and the educators aren't expecting the center to be a one-visit type of attraction.

"We wanted about 20 percent of the center's displays permanent and about 80 percent interchangeable," said Rogers, "so there is always a new experience for visitors."

"We want to see what our audience wants," added Schiltz. "There is a lot of blank canvas at the center. We want to offer a menu to our visitors. Depending on grade level, and what students are learning at the time, we want to have our own curriculum they can choose from. Since the first day the center opened, I just can't stop smiling."

Neither can the visitors.

TOP: Interactive touch screens teach visitors about the more than 60 amphibian, reptile and fish species at the aquarium.

MIDDLE: Virtual reality mountain bikes allow people to ride the trails at nearby Platte River State Park.

BOTTOM: The center has multiple work stations where students can use their senses and critically think about Nebraska's flora and fauna.





Big Snap Daddy

One of Schramm's most popular displays is a 90-year-old, 90-pound common snapping turtle named Big Snap Daddy. "He's just as nasty as the day we got him," said aquarium biologist Tony Korth, who has been taking care of Big Snap for 25 years.

He was caught by a fisherman in 1993 from the Missouri River and was housed at Ak-sar-ben Aquarium before the recent Venture Parks renovations. Having spent the past year at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln herpetology lab with Dennis Ferraro and his staff, Big Snap was recently introduced to his new home – a 600-gallon tank substantially larger than his previous home at Ak-sar-ben before the renovation.

"He's the largest common snapping turtle you'll ever see," said Korth. "He's good at educating the public about what these animals look like and how they behave. At this stage, we don't think he'd be very good at taking care of himself in the wild. But we're happy to take care of him here."

Other Amenities

E.F. Schramm – the namesake of this recreation area – was a University of Nebraska geology professor who donated 277 acres to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, which already owned the 54 acres that housed the state's oldest fish hatchery. Schramm wanted the area to be a laboratory where the public could experience nature.

Today, visitors to Schramm can visit the education center, then begin their outdoor adventures right out the door. Hikers, bikers and the like can view wildlife on more than 331 acres of land – including three miles of wooded trails – and visit limestone and shale geologic displays. Canoe and kayak access to the Platte River is also available.

From playgrounds and picnic areas to birdwatching and a nearby archery range, the grounds of Schramm Park State Recreation Area are just as interesting as the new education center. And it's just beginning.

Plans for an interactive stream and treehouse classroom



at Schramm are in the near future, providing even more opportunities for nature-based lessons. "Dr. Schramm wanted this area to be a living laboratory," said Douglas. "We're going to make it just that." 

For more information on the Schramm Education Center and other opportunities at the recreation area, visit OutdoorNebraska.org/schramm.



A birdwatching center allows visitors of all ages to view Nebraska's native bird species.

Sod Houses on Glass Plates

By History Nebraska

Solomon Butcher came to Nebraska in a covered wagon, but quickly found himself poorly suited to the hard life of a pioneer. He failed at homesteading, taught school, briefly attended medical school, served as a rural postmaster, and opened – and closed – the first photography studio in Custer County.

Desperate to avoid going back to farm work, Butcher had a bold idea. He would produce a photographic history of Custer County. Starting in 1886, he hitched up a wagon and began visiting homesteads with his photographic equipment, accepting meals and selling photos, and making images for his history book.

“Some called me a fool, others a crank,” he recalled, “but I was much too interested in my work to pay any attention to such people.”

Butcher’s *Pioneer History of Custer County, Nebraska* (1901)

gave him the only taste of financial success he ever knew. Later projects were less successful. But he continued making photographs, slowly building a collection of nearly 3,500 glass plate negatives, which he later sold to the Nebraska State Historical Society (today’s History Nebraska).

Butcher believed he was a failure when he died in 1927, but today his photos are recognized as a uniquely important record of settlement on the Great Plains. He captured a brief period after the area’s Native inhabitants were forced out and before the new settlers had fully established themselves. Together they are a time capsule of rapid change on the “sod house frontier.”

An exhibit featuring Solomon Butcher’s photography and associated artifacts will be at the Nebraska History Museum in Lincoln from June 15, 2019 to June 1, 2020. [N](#)

Learn more at history.nebraska.gov

The Harvey Andrews family at the grave of their son Willie, near New Helena, Custer County, 1887. History Nebraska RG2068-2360a



Sylvester Rawding house, north of Sargent, 1886. The famous “cow on the roof” photo is a bit of an illusion. Look close and you’ll see that the cow is on a hill behind the house. History Nebraska RG2068-1784



The Chrisman sisters near Gosheen settlement on Lieban Creek, Custer County, 1886. Daughters of a local rancher, each of the sisters claimed her own homesteads, and took turns living with each other to fulfill the Homestead Act’s residency requirements. History Nebraska RG2068-1053



The Shores family near Westerville, Custer County, 1887. Rachel and Jerry Shores (third and fourth from left) were among a number of former slaves who settled in Custer County. History Nebraska RG2068-1231



The First 99

One shutter-button press at a time, the bird photos add up.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
JUSTIN HAAG

What the Nebraska Panhandle may lack in diversity of bird life when compared to eastern Nebraska it more than makes up for in its varied landscape. That variation, from the towering sandstone buttes through the pine forests, sandhill lakes, riparian woodlands, grasslands, croplands and even residential areas, is home to a diversity of birds, and some bird-watching gems found nowhere else in the state.

Joel Jorgensen, nongame bird program manager for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, said many birdwatchers from the east are often attracted to the Panhandle to see western specimens such as the red crossbill or pygmy nuthatch.

“You have a number of western species that creep into the far western part of Nebraska and that makes it attractive to a lot of birders,” Jorgensen said. “Places like Sowbelly Canyon, Monroe Canyon and the Oglala National Grassland harbor a lot of species not found in other parts of the state.”

Birds deserve a lot of credit for making me a wildlife photographer. When I invested in a 500mm lens about

Nebraska did an excellent job in 1929 picking its state bird, the western meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*). Its boisterous song, such as this sunrise rendition at Peterson Wildlife Management Area, has surely lifted many a spirit throughout generations on the Great Plains – including photographers.



LEFT: If one were to choose an official bird of the Pine Ridge, the red crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*) would surely be a candidate. It has a beak designed for extracting seeds from pinecones.

MIDDLE: The red-winged blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) is so common in spring that I find myself shooting photos of it only when the light is best. Regardless, its presence is always welcome, especially on a slow photography day.

BOTTOM LEFT: Eastern kingbirds (*Tyrannus tyrannus*), with their tuxedo plumage and gangster's demeanor, are a frequent subject in summer. Never has photographing them been more enjoyable than staking out this nest fashioned from a decaying fence post in July 2017.



a decade ago, I took to the field to photograph any wildlife species that crossed my path. Admittedly, my knowledge of birds was extremely low and my original goal was to capture the superstars of the Panhandle's wildlife scene: elk, bighorn sheep and swift fox, to name a few. The birds, though, kept me shooting. When other animals eluded me, I could count on a red-winged blackbird or red-tailed hawk to save the day and pose for an image or two. Often, I would not know the species I was photographing until a bird expert would patiently help me with identification.

Those early bird photos, as much as anything, led me to the career I have today. The birds still keep me shooting. And learning.

Just for kicks, on a cold day this winter, I compared my images in the *Nebraskaland* database with a checklist of more than 230 species produced by the U.S. Forest Service: "Birds of the Nebraska Pine Ridge." Memories flowed one-by-one as I checked the boxes.

While many of the photos were shot from a blind, many others were captured while I was just going about business doing other things, whether it be the loggerhead shrike I photographed during the solar eclipse or the rare-to-the-area winter wren that struck a pose while I was hunting turkeys.

When making checks, I counted only the images that I thought were good enough for print and therefore uploaded to the magazine's database. The snowy owl that I observed numerous occasions this winter but remained a little too elusive for a passable photo? Sadly, no X in that box.

The tally of species: 99. Not quite half of the list, but a gratifying start. It has become something of a goal to get as many species on the list as possible, and I will keep chipping away. Certainly, much of the "low-flying" fruit has been harvested and the remaining species will be more of a challenge. Who knows? Before I hang up the camera, maybe I can get them all. If not, I will certainly be thankful for the ones that flew my way.

Now, on to 100. 📷



LEFT: The American avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*) is a common visitor to Panhandle ponds and marshes.

MIDDLE: The coniferous forest loving red-breasted nuthatch (*Sitta canadensis*) is at home in the Pine Ridge.

BOTTOM LEFT: The distinct appearance of the long-billed curlew (*Numenius americanus*) stands out on the Oglala Grassland.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Even though these soured apples may not look appetizing on a snowy day in early December, the cedar waxwings (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) found them cause for party.





LEFT and MIDDLE LEFT: Three of the four wrens on the list have passed in front of the camera, including the rock wren (*Salpinctes obsoletus*) high on the buttes at Fort Robinson State Park and a rare sighting of a winter wren (*Troglodytes hiemalis*) along Little Bordeaux Creek.

BOTTOM LEFT: This lesser goldfinch (*Spinus psaltria*) visited my yard in 2018. The species was first observed in Nebraska in 1984 and has been expanding its range from the West. So far, my observations in Chadron are the farthest east documented in the Pine Ridge.

MIDDLE RIGHT: The colorful feathers of the mountain bluebird (*Sialia currucoides*) are well suited for photography. Western Nebraskans are fortunate to see both this species and the eastern bluebird (*Sialia sialis*).

BOTTOM RIGHT: Although you are more likely to see gray partridge (*Perdix perdix*) in northeastern Nebraska, there are a few in the Panhandle. This is the only one I've noticed in the wild.



LEFT: Even though the burned ponderosa pines stand as a grim reminder of catastrophic wildfires, the red-headed woodpeckers (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*) seem to be reveling among them.

MIDDLE LEFT: The tall cliffs in the Pine Ridge are suited for golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) nests.

BOTTOM LEFT: This loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) posed at Bighorn Wildlife Management Area in the final minutes of the total solar eclipse in August 2017.

BOTTOM RIGHT: This grasshopper sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum*) appears to be a great orator.





Garrett Tramp of Allen helps his mentor Zack Hammack of Omaha reel in a silver carp on the Missouri River.

Bowfishing

BY RICH PORTER
PHOTOS BY JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY

Nebraska’s public waters have enthralled me for more than 30 years. I first picked up a bow in 1988, and very quickly, bowfishing became a lifelong passion. Stalking a fish, unleashing an arrow and hoping for the best – the thrill is similar to hunting. I will always choose fishing with a bow over a rod and reel.

Another reason why I love bowfishing so much – bowfishers still account for a small percentage of anglers in Nebraska, which means the shooting opportunities are endless. With so little pressure on our lakes and rivers for carp and gar, the time to start bowfishing is now.

Where to Bowfish

You won’t find many big reservoirs without an abundance of common carp. Some have buffalo and gar, and few might hold big, old grass carp. I’ve had the pleasure of shooting many lakes in Nebraska, and my favorites are Harlan County, Medicine Creek, McConaughy, Swanson, Merritt and Calamus.

Don’t overlook lakes that connect to the canal system along the Platte River, as well as any lake that gets flooded by the Missouri, Platte or Elkhorn rivers. All these water bodies will likely provide plenty of shooting opportunities.

Rivers also can be amazing places to stalk a variety of fish. Gar, buffalo, grass, silver and the immense bighead carp all reside in our many rivers and streams.

Gavins Point Dam, considered the mecca among Nebraska bowfishers, is easy to shoot from the bank or inside a boat. May and June are the best months to shoot at Gavins Point, when huge schools of bigheads and silver carp can be expected below the dam. Opportunities for buffalo carp, common carp and gar will be plentiful both above and below the dam.

What to Bring

Wading in a pair of old tennis shoes and shorts is the way most people got started on bowfishing. Gear is fairly simple. You’ll need a bow that fits you, several arrows, a reel and components to attach it to the bow, and a heavy-duty arrow rest.

Bowfishing is tough on equipment so purchase rugged, simple gear. I prefer a full capture adjustable arrow rest, such

Bowfishing Tournaments

The Bowfishers of Nebraska hosts several tournaments in varying formats. The 2019 tournament schedule includes:

- May 18 - Carp-O-Rama Border Wars on the Missouri River, weigh-in at Cottonwood Cove Marina in Blair, Nebraska
- June 8 - Upper Missouri River Shoot, weigh-in at Sportsman's Steakhouse and Lounge in Wynot, Nebraska
- June 22 - Johnson Lake and Canal Shoot, details TBD
- July 13 - Lake McConaughy, weigh-in at Admiral's Cove Resort and Marina in Lemoyne, Nebraska

For more information, visit the Bowfishers of Nebraska Facebook page or contact Rich Porter at bwfsh69@gmail.com.



Wyatt Verzani of Allen looks earnestly for telltale signs of fish from a bowfishing platform.



The author's American Eagle bow is equipped with a Carpzilla arrow rest, Muzzy reel, TJE Shoot Thru Rod, and Archenemy arrow.

as the Carpzilla, and arrows that have sturdy points like the Cajun Piranha or Muzzy Carp point. Reels specifically designed for bowfishing are the best. If you use a spin cast reel, like I do, consider spraying the line down with silicone before starting your day. Most stores that carry archery supplies can get you set up.

Another important piece of equipment is polarized sunglasses to help you see through the water. A ball cap helps tremendously to shade those glasses, allowing you to see deeper into the water.

Bowfishing Boat

You don't need a boat to bowfish, but if you're looking to put one together, width is the first aspect to consider. The wider the boat, the better it will keep 2-4 shooters stabilized while shooting from the bow.

Second, consider the design of the shooting platform or deck. I prefer a deck that sits 15-20 inches above the boat for shooting during daylight hours. This height also allows room for light placement if you decide night shooting is something you want to try.

Also, buy the biggest trolling motor and outboard motor you can afford. A large trolling motor allows you to continue to fish when the boat becomes weighed down by fish. It also makes it easier to access areas that are bogged down with mud and vegetation. Not to mention, if you're in fast current, the extra power gives you better control and maneuverability.

Shooting Tips

The best time to bowfish is on sunny, calm days. Slowly sneaking up on feeding fish, or maybe getting lucky and catching the proverbial spawn, is an awesome first experience. Even though I now own a bowfishing boat, I still go back to bank fishing on occasion.

My best tip to beginners is to aim low. Then aim lower. In bowfishing, compensating for water refraction is key. The deeper the fish, the lower you need to aim. If a fish is close to the surface or even on the surface, I aim at the very bottom of the belly and dead center of the target. When a fish is deeper, you will have to make bigger adjustments. It is common to shoot 1-2 feet lower than where you see the fish.

Silence is also golden. Any vibrations from your boat can easily spook fish, so tread lightly and try not to bang or drop your arrows. I also turn my trolling motor down or off and coast into the fish.

The most important thing to remember in bowfishing is have fun. If you miss a shot, it's not a problem – the next target is just around the corner and swimming your way. 🎯



The author Rich Porter with a 9-pound long-nose gar that he shot near Gavins Point Dam on the Missouri River.

The Nebraska Bowfishing Mentored Youth Program

Youth ages 10 and up can try bowfishing with the Nebraska Bowfishing Mentored Youth Program, hosted by Ponca State Park and Desoto National Wildlife Refuge. The course is free and most gear will be provided.

- The Desoto program dates are May 28 and 30, and June 1. Register at register-ed.com/events/view/140464; for more information, contact zhickle@yahoo.com.

- The Ponca program dates are July 9, 11, 18 and 20. Register at register-ed.com/events/view/143120; for more information, contact nntramp@hotmail.com.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NEBRASKA TOURISM COMMISSION

VISIT CHERRY COUNTY

By Jenn Gjerde, Nebraska Tourism Commission

With more square miles than some small states, Cherry County has plenty to offer, especially for the outdoor enthusiast.

Part of Nebraska’s luscious Sandhills, this area’s landscape and ecological diversity create a nature-filled getaway. Set your sights on a variety of wildlife among the rolling meadows of **Valentine National Wildlife Refuge**.

There are also a variety of local outfitters waiting to help you tube, kayak or canoe down the Niobrara River. The spring-fed, slow moving water will gently carry you past outstanding natural beauty, including the tallest waterfall in Nebraska at **Smith Falls State Park**.

Boating, fishing and water sports are part of the fun on **Merritt Reservoir State Recreation Area’s** 3,000 acres of glistening water. A popular Merritt Reservoir event is the annual **Nebraska Star Party**. With minimal light pollution, it’s an ideal place to view stunning starry nights that can’t be seen from in the city. This stargazing extravaganza can be enjoyed with or without a telescope.

At **Bowring Ranch State Historical Park** in nearby Merriman, visitors can learn about ranching, homesteading, geology, wildlife and other topics related to the Sandhills and the Bowring family.

When you’re ready for some cuisine, take a trip to **The Prairie Club Lodge** (also a world-renowned golf course) to experience the cuisine of “cow country.” **Peppermill Restaurant & Lounge** is another great option for local

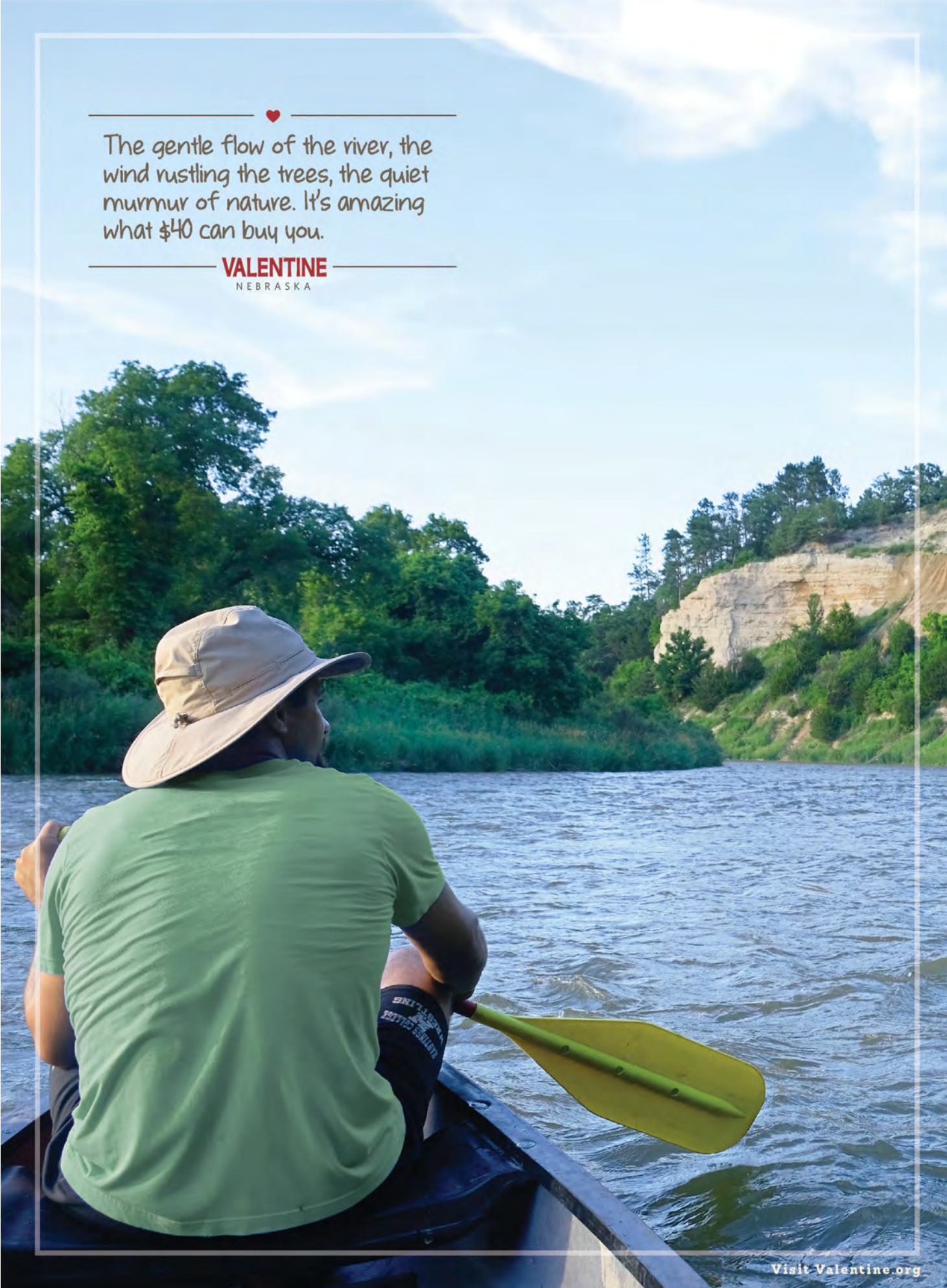
favorites made with Nebraska-produced beef. If you are looking for something more casual, carhops serve burgers, sundaes and the like at **Frosty Drive-In**, so park and revel in the nostalgia.

Once you’ve had your fill of beef, quench your thirst with a Happy Juice IPA from **Bolo Beer Co.**, or try one of the other beers on their menu like the Waggle Scottish Ale. See the vines and taste the wines not too far from Valentine at **Niobrara Valley Vineyards**. While there, sip on their award-winning Marquette and semi-dry white wine, Boss Cow.

In Wild West country get your best cowboy attire at **Young’s Western Wear**. The third generation family-owned and run business provides quality western clothing and gear. If you’re looking for some style for the kids and the ladies stop in to **Broken Spoke Boutique** just up the road.

A place with this much excitement will require an overnight stay. Not only is The Prairie Club great for dining and golfing, but it offers a few different lodging styles from a rustic Bunkhouse room, a cabin right on the edge of Snake River Canyon or a room in the main Lodge. **Heartland Elk Guest Ranch** and **Niobrara River Ranch** are two unique spots as well, as is the taditional, restful hotel option at **The Niobrara Lodge**.

If you are ready to start planning your trip, more vacation resources are at visitnebraska.com.



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wind rustling the trees, the quiet
murmur of nature. It’s amazing
what \$40 can buy you.
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NEBRASKA

LET'S GO BIRDING TOGETHER

By Alie Mayes

On June 9, Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center will host a Let's Go Birding Together program designed to bring people together to explore nature, birds and conservation. Jason St. Sauver, education and outreach director at Spring Creek, points out that "It is important to recognize that these events are for everyone, but it is also an invitation to the LGBTQ community that they are welcome to come and feel comfortable to be themselves at this event."

The program, which started in 2017, has been successful, according to St. Sauver, with 75 percent of participants visiting Spring Creek for the first time. Four of those participants have gone on to become active volunteers with the center. Audubon took the Let's Go Birding Together program national in 2018 with more than 15 programs in seven states, and St. Sauver hopes to bring even more people together to connect to the outdoors.

The June 9 event begins at 10 a.m., starting with a bird walk followed by brunch. Event details for national Let's Go Birding Together events will be available at audubon.org.



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Andrea Bornemeier, Jason St. Sauver and Kevin Poague birdwatch at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center.

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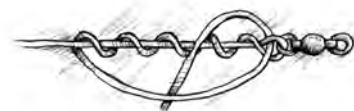
TYING FISHING KNOTS

By Larry Pape, Fisheries Education Specialist

Do you want to keep that big fish on the line? These three knots will help. Practice before you go so you are familiar with them.

THE IMPROVED CLINCH KNOT

This is the most commonly taught fishing knot and can be used on monofilament line to attach a hook, lure, or swivel. The knot is simple to remember and the line retains nearly all of its strength.



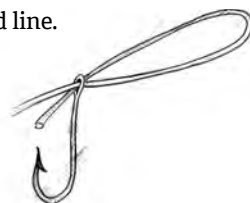
1. Thread the loose end of the line through the eye of the hook, pulling through plenty of line to make your knot.
2. Wrap the line around itself, creating 5 to 7 twists. Too few twists in the line will result in a knot that pulls out. Too many twists in the line will weaken the line. Holding the loose end and secure against the line and turning the hook with the other hand is an easy way to create twists in the line.
3. Holding on to the twisted line, thread the loose end of the line through the loop near the eye of the hook.
4. Notice the new loop that was created by threading the line. Run the loose end of the line through the new loop.



5. Hold the loose end against the hook with one hand and with the other hand, gently pull the line away from the hook to tighten the knot against the eye of the hook. Wetting the line with your mouth before tightening it will help the line cinch down and will reduce friction that could weaken the line.
6. Neaten the knot so that the coils are stacked up tightly behind the eye of the hook.
7. Trim any excess line from the loose end to about one-quarter inch.

THE PALOMAR KNOT

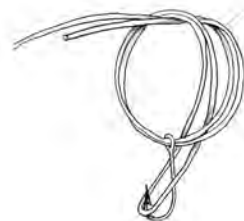
This is another simple and versatile knot that retains nearly all of the line strength after it is tied. The Palomar should be used when fishing with braided line. An improved clinch knot will pull loose on braided line.



1. Thread the loose end of the line through the eye of the hook, pulling through plenty of line.



2. Thread the loose end back through the eye of the hook, creating a large loop that passes through the eye of the hook.



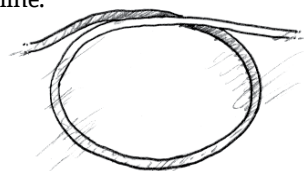
3. Holding the loose end against the line with a thumb and forefinger, use the other hand to tie a simple overhand knot with the loop. Do not tighten the line.



4. Place the hook or lure through the loop.
5. Pull the loop gently to tighten the knot down against the eye of the hook.

THE DROPPER KNOT

The dropper knot forms a loop that will hold a hook or sinker away from the line.



1. Form a loop with the line.



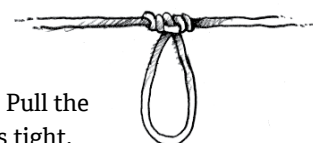
2. Pull one side of the loop down and wrap it around the standing line. Hold the point where the turns are made open, so the number of turns will be equal on each side of the opening.



3. Make eight or ten turns, then reach through the center opening and pull the remaining loop through. Hold the loop so it will not spring back through the opening.



4. Hold the loop open and pull both ends of the line, drawing the turns together on each side of the loop.



5. Pull the ends tight.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TIM REIGERT



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PROTECT OUR OAK

By Julie Van Meter, State Entomologist, Nebraska Department of Agriculture

Oak wilt is a serious fungal disease that threatens Nebraska oak trees (*Quercus* spp.). Oak wilt damages the vascular system of the oak tree, disrupting the flow of water and nutrients, and can ultimately kill an infected oak tree. It has been confirmed in 24 states, including Nebraska.

Trees in the red oak group, which includes red and pin oaks, are highly susceptible to oak wilt. The white oak group, including bur, swamp white and white oak, are less susceptible.

Infection of red oaks most often occurs in spring and early summer, and leads to rapid death. Leaves of infected trees may turn bronze to tan, starting at the leaf tip and moving back toward the base. Rapid leaf drop is another indicator of an oak wilt infection. Peeling bark from infected branches will reveal black to gray vascular discoloration, another symptom of an oak wilt infection.

Symptoms in white oaks often appear later in the season and progress more slowly. Infected white oaks may show leaf drop and branch dieback for several years before dying.

Infected trees will produce a fungal mat under the bark. Pressure caused by the fungal mat causes the bark to split,



INFECTED LEAVES. PHOTO BY C.E. SELISKAR, BUGWOOD.ORG

and the spores to become exposed. Sap beetles are attracted to these wounds and the sweet scent of the spores. The spores are sticky and become attached to the beetles as they feed. The beetles then carry the oak wilt spores on their bodies to uninfected trees, where they cause new infections.

Root grafts, where the roots of two trees fuse together, can also spread oak wilt.

There is no cure for oak wilt. To minimize the risk of spreading the disease, avoid pruning oak trees between April and July, as the pruning wounds may attract beetles. Infected logs and firewood can disperse spores to uninfested areas as well. Don't move firewood. Help protect Nebraska's trees by getting your firewood where you plan to burn it.



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BUY LOCAL, BURN LOCAL.

To report potential emerald ash borer, contact the Nebraska Department of Agriculture at 402-471-2351.

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LEADPLANT – WHAT’S IN A NAME?

By Gerry Steinauer, Botanist

While traveling with the Astor Expedition up the Missouri River from St. Louis into the Dakotas in 1811, the naturalist Thomas Nuttall was likely the first person of European descent to collect leadplant. In 1814, the botanist Fredrick Pursh christened the plant with the scientific name *Amorpha canescens*.

Amorpha is derived from “amorphos” which in Greek means “deformed” in reference to the incomplete, single-petaled flowers characteristic of the genus. Other members of the *Fabaceae*, the pea family, typical have five-petaled, pea-shaped flowers. *Canescens* is Latin for “gray-haired,” describing the dense leaden-colored hairs which coat the plant’s foliage.

A short prairie shrub with spikes of red-violet to blue flowers, leadplant ranges over much of the Great Plains and nearly all of Nebraska. Though its scientific name is descriptive, leadplant’s other common names reflect the history of the Plains.

Native Americans were the first to name leadplant, but the vast majority of these names were lost to history as cultures faded. Luckily, a few of them still persist in tribal languages while others were recorded by ethnobotanists.

The Lakota’s name for leadplant is “zitkatakan” which translates to “the bird’s tree” as small birds perched on this shrub in the tree-less prairie. The Omaha and Ponca call the plant “te-huntonhi” meaning “buffalo bellow plant” (“te” means buffalo, “hunton” means bellow and “hi”

means plant) because the buffalo would soon be coming into rut, the bulls bellowing, when it was in flower. One Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) name for the plant was “taxumaka” meaning “burnt medicine,” as the powdered leaves were moistened and applied as a medicine to scalds. They also call it “Xawisku” translating to “sweet root,” as the root was used as a food.

For the Assiniboine and Sioux, leadplant had spiritual significance and a “medicine” was made of the pounded roots which was rubbed on the hunter’s clothes, giving him the power to attract buffalo and to kill as many of them as he wanted. The Lakota used leadplant’s dried leaves to make a pleasant-tasting hot tea and as a smoking material. For the latter, a little buffalo fat was added to the leaves.

Learning the tea-making tradition from the Indians, European settlers referred to the plant as “wild tea.” They also called it “prairie shoestring” because its tough, stretching roots, abundant just below the soil surface, made a popping sound similar to that of snapping shoestrings when sliced by their plows. The name “Devil’s shoestring” attests to the frustration the roots caused the sod-busting settlers. One might say the rhythmic popping of the roots composed a swan song apropos to the vanishing prairie.

The name leadplant is now universally used. In areas of our state, the shrub is still abundant and in the morning sun, the prairie slopes take on a leaden hue.



Leadplant growing in prairie at Ashfall Fossil Beds State Historical Park in Antelope County.

PHOTO BY GERRY STEINAUER

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Taken in 1948 at Lake McConaughy: from left, my dad, Henry Adkinson; Floyd Nickolson; Winnie Adkinson; Francis Adkinson and my mother, Bula Adkinson. Taking the photo was Vada Nickolson.
 Henry and Francis were brothers who married Bula and Winnie, who were sisters. Floyd and Vada were married. They all lived in Dundy County and had many great fishing trips and stories to tell.
 – Beatrice Hatch, Ogallala



Pictured is me with mink taken from the 1957-58 trapping season while I was in high school at Tekamah High. I ran a trapline at night after school basketball practices. A pair of farmers, Ernest Rojem and Poode Williamson, were kind enough to let me have the run of their farm ponds and marshes at that time.
 I am now 77, but those memories in the outdoors were special as I reflect on them.
 – Fred Lambley, Morse Bluffs

Send contributions to: Portraits from the Past, Nebraskaland Magazine, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370. Or e-mail to Tim.Reigert@Nebraska.gov. Photos should show people enjoying Nebraska outdoor activities, such as camping, boating, hunting or fishing, and must have been taken before 1980. We will give priority to unusual photos or activities. When possible, please include a story about the photograph and identify the people, places and approximate date it was taken. Text may be edited and photos adjusted for reproduction. All photos will be returned.



A limit of pheasants in Stanton and Madison counties, west of our hometown, West Point.
 From left: me and three of my brothers-in-law – Darrell Bunn, Bob Fredrickson and Tom Mace.
 Hunting opportunities have changed, but the experiences of our many years in the fields provided great memories.
 – Glen Ortmeier, West Point



TWO FLY RODS

By Jeff Kurrus

June is a busy month. Between photographing and following my daughter throughout the state playing softball, I have to make time to fish. So in recent years I’ve begun carrying a fly rod with me everywhere I go.

The case easily fits in the front seat of the truck, and whether I have an extra five minutes or five hours, I’m always ready for the water.

Last June on one of these softball trips to Hastings, I decided to pack two fly rods. Maybe, I thought, I could talk someone into fishing with me.

I found my partner when we left the ballfield one day and had a few hours before dark to spare. His name was Calvin Janssen, an 11-year-old who was staring at a cell phone at the hotel while his 9-year-old sister and a gob of her friends

ran the halls. The look on his face said he wished to be anywhere but there.

“You want to fish?” I asked him. “I have all the gear we need.”

“Yes,” he quickly answered.

We spent the rest of the afternoon at Mormon Island State Recreation Area wading along the edges looking for bluegill. The fish were slow and the light wasn’t great, but neither of us seemed to care.

As far as I was concerned, I had someone to share the afternoon with. For him, someone had taken him fishing, and regardless of how the afternoon went, it was a lot better than his other options.

As it always is.

MAYBE CALLING
THEM PLAINS
WAS A POOR
CHOICE OF WORDS.



Many people think of Nebraska as flat, featureless and unappealing, probably due to its location in the heart of the Great Plains. Perhaps we should have called them the Great Dazzling Spectacles or something, because to us, the Plains are anything but plain. They’re majestic, beautiful and awe-inspiring in their own way. Not everyone can appreciate that. But if you can, go to **VisitNebraska.com** for your free Travel Guide. And prepare to be greatly dazzled.

