



Water cascades over Smith Falls at the state park of the same name along the Niobrara River near Valentine.

Photo by Eric Fowler

Anyone who has spent even a small amount of time in Nebraska understands its beauty. From the badlands through the Sandhills to the Missouri River bluffs, our state exemplifies diversity at every turn.

Here in this collector's edition the photographers at *NEBRASKAland Magazine* and this year's photo contest winners share their own views of the Cornhusker State's unique combination of landscapes and wildlife. Their descriptions are sure to make any viewer ready to set off on a rewarding Nebraska outdoor adventure during any season of the year.

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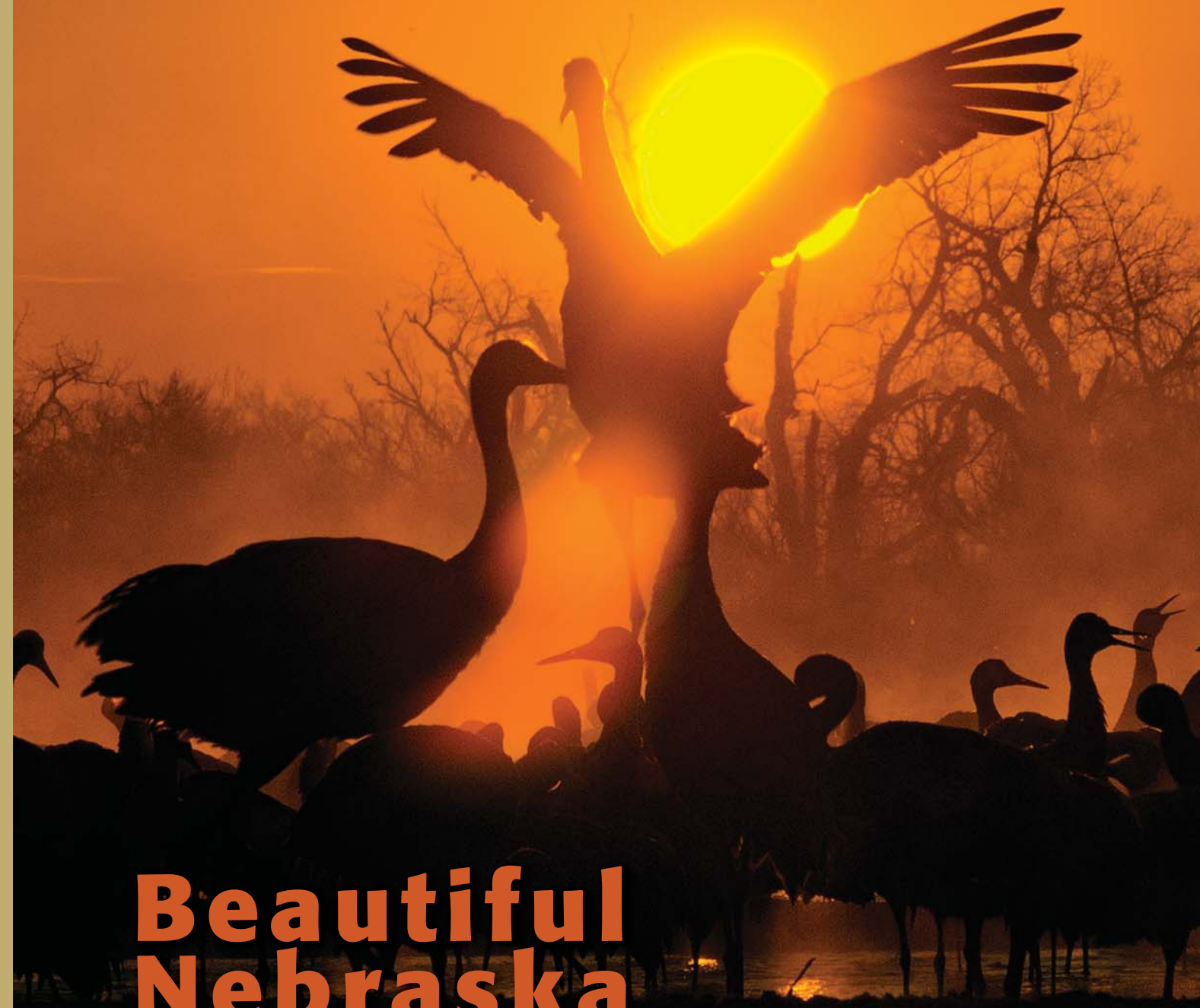
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NEBRASKAland



Beautiful Nebraska A Collector's Edition

Plus the 2014 NEBRASKAland Magazine Photo Contest Winners



Beautiful Nebraska

A Collector's Edition

NEBRASKAland Magazine

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**Cover: Sandhill cranes dance on the Platte River at Martin's Reach Wildlife Management Area near Alda.
Photo by Eric Fowler**

**Left: Low clouds obscure the ridgetops above a road that runs through the Pine Ridge Ranger District of the Nebraska National Forest south of Chadron on a rainy summer day.
Photo by Eric Fowler**

**Above: A mallard flies along the icy Platte River between Bridgeport and Broadwater.
Photo by Justin Haag**

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**A white-tailed deer fawn walks through a grassland along
Beaver Creek at the Olson Nature Preserve near Albion.
Photo by Eric Fowler**



Introduction

Not one of Nebraska's 77,000 square miles of land and water features an ocean or mountain view. For many, this is the excuse for staying on Interstate 80 and getting in and out of our state as quickly as possible. But those of us who live here, and a few regular visitors, know better. We've been to the Sandhills in spring, floated the Niobrara River in the summer, watched the leaves change along the Missouri River in autumn, and witnessed snow blanket the Pine Ridge in winter. We know that regardless of how many times we've taken an alternate route and seen the world from a different gravel road, we are seldom surprised when we find another spectacular view.

You're never quite sure what you're going to see in the Great Plains. Which is why *NEBRASKAland* wanted this edition to reveal some of those places, and the species inhabiting those places: to not only confirm this state's beauty but also encourage you to slow down and take a detour down a dirt road during your travels.

For we see these *NEBRASKAland* photos, including the winners of our photo contest starting on page 82, as a starting point for a list of places you can spend your free time in our great outdoors. But there's no way we could cover it all. So we urge you to soak in each landscape and every species in this book and then place your copy on the coffee table and return only after seeing that Nebraska scene with your own eyes.

Then you'll understand why it's okay that you can't hear the ocean as the sun sets, as long as you have a field of sunflowers or bluestem blowing in a prairie wind nearby.



Sunflowers lunge toward the light at Wehrspann Wetland in southwest Omaha.
Photo by Jeff Kurrus



Beautiful Nebraska

An angler who rose before the sun dips his line in Wagon Train Lake near Hickman on a peaceful July morning.

Photo by Eric Fowler



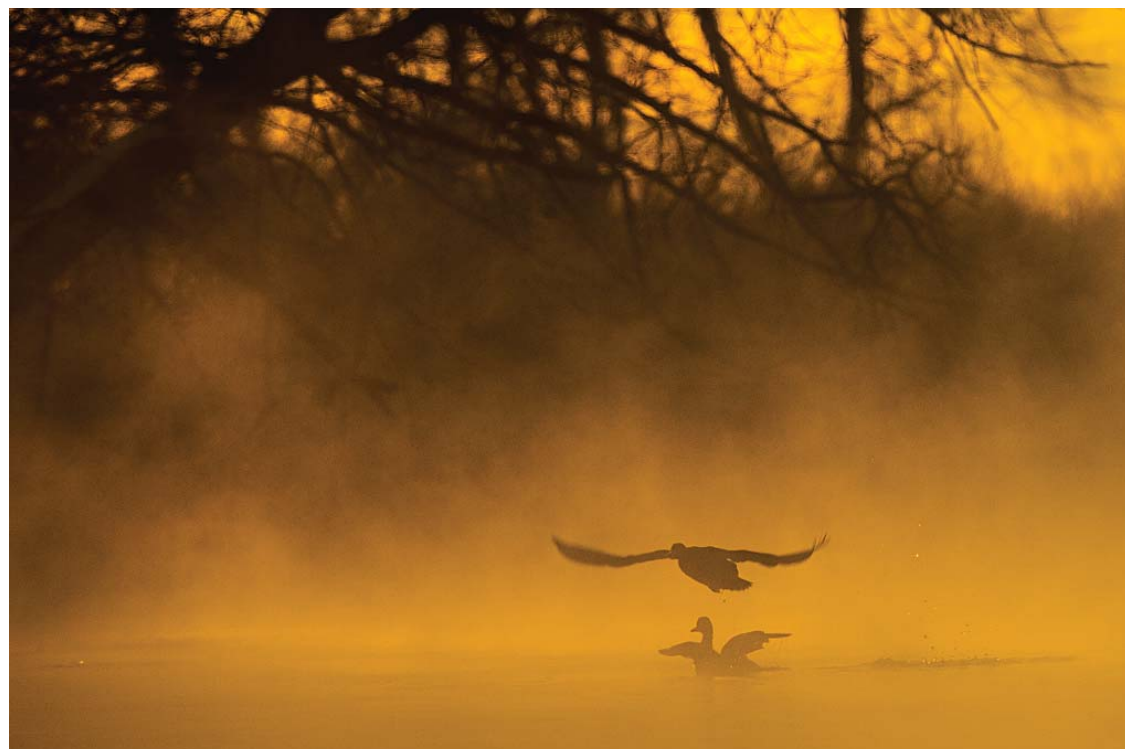
The violet nectar lines contrast with the pinkish white petals of cobraea penstemon growing at Rock Glen Wildlife Management Area near Fairbury. Located adjacent to Rock Creek Station State Historical Park, the area is comprised of 700 acres of native tallgrass prairie and oak draws.

Photo by Eric Fowler

A snag is silhouetted against the predawn sky near Valentine.

Photo by Eric Fowler





A pair of mallards alight on a warm-water slough one cold winter morning along the Platte River near Gretna.

Photo by Eric Fowler

Coyotes, such as this one seen near Wood River, have a larger range than any other North American animal. Constant adapters, coyotes are generalist predators with no specific feeding patterns that can hybridize with dogs, gray wolves and red wolves.

Photo by Eric Fowler



Black-eyed susan, including these at the Nature Conservancy's Dahms Tract near Wood River, is a relatively short-lived plant that thrives best in areas where dominant prairie grasses have been weakened. As a result, it is found scattered across many prairies but can quickly increase in abundance in years following mowing, grazing or drought.

Photo by Chris Helzer





The North American porcupine, such as this one near Brady, has a coat of large, stiff hairs called quills that detach easily from the skin when touched. The tip of each quill is adorned with several hundred barbs that can penetrate a predator's skin easily, but once embedded the barbs resist removal. New quills will grow to replace any that are lost.

Photo by Julie Geiser

Dragonflies, such as this one near Pawnee City, are incredibly agile aerial predators able to dart quickly after their prey. Researchers are beginning to learn more about the long seasonal migrations made by certain dragonfly species. Some can even fly across oceans.

Photo by Chris Helzer





As the air warms, ice expands and breaks into pieces on the shoreline at Lake Maloney State Recreation Area near North Platte.
Photo by Julie Geiser



Tree swallows nest in tree cavities and will readily take up residence in nest boxes. While caring for young and eggs, adults are known to dive-bomb intruders – including humans – to drive them away.

Photo by Jenny Nguyen

From late September to Halloween night, Vala's Pumpkin Patch near Gretna hosts its annual festival, featuring train rides, live shows, haunted houses, corn mazes and, of course, pumpkin picking.

Photo by Jeff Kurrus





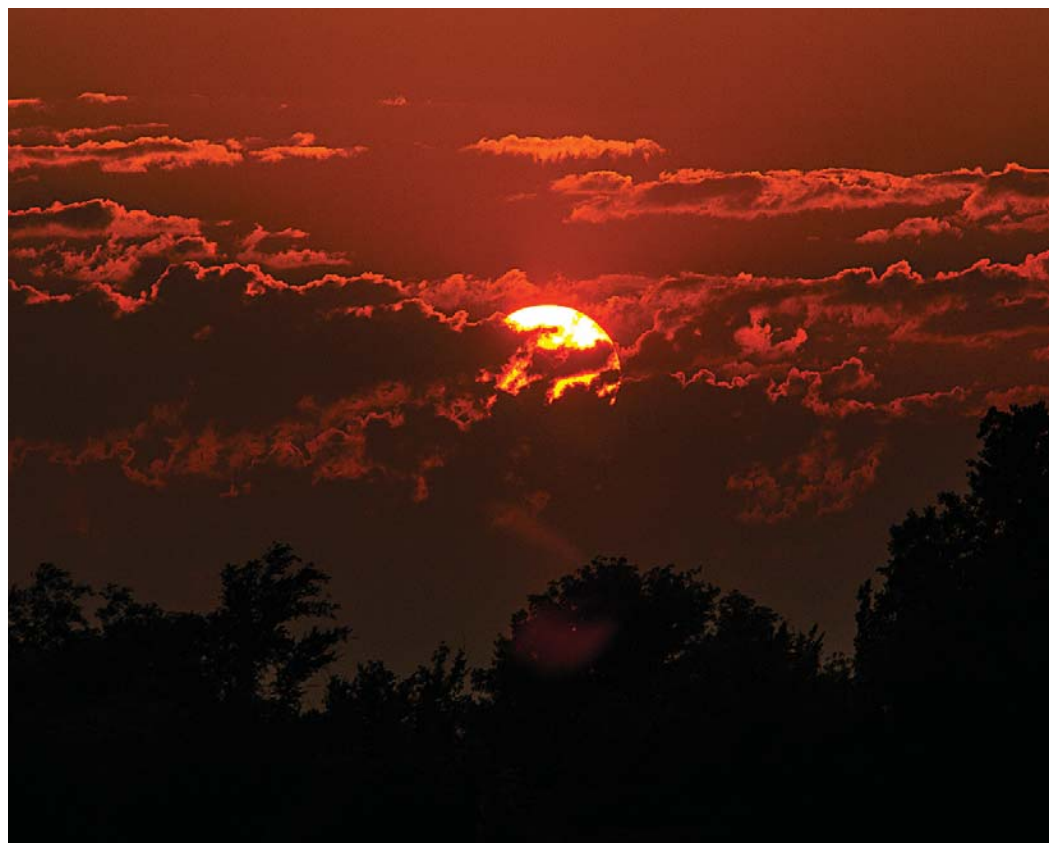
The courtship flights of pintail drakes, like this one on the Platte River near Lexington, are a common sight in spring, as the birds compete to gain the favor of hens for the upcoming nesting season.

Photo by Doug Steinke



Toadstool Geologic Park, near Harrison, derives its name from the sandstone rocks balanced on narrow pedestals throughout the area.

Photo by Jeff Kurrus

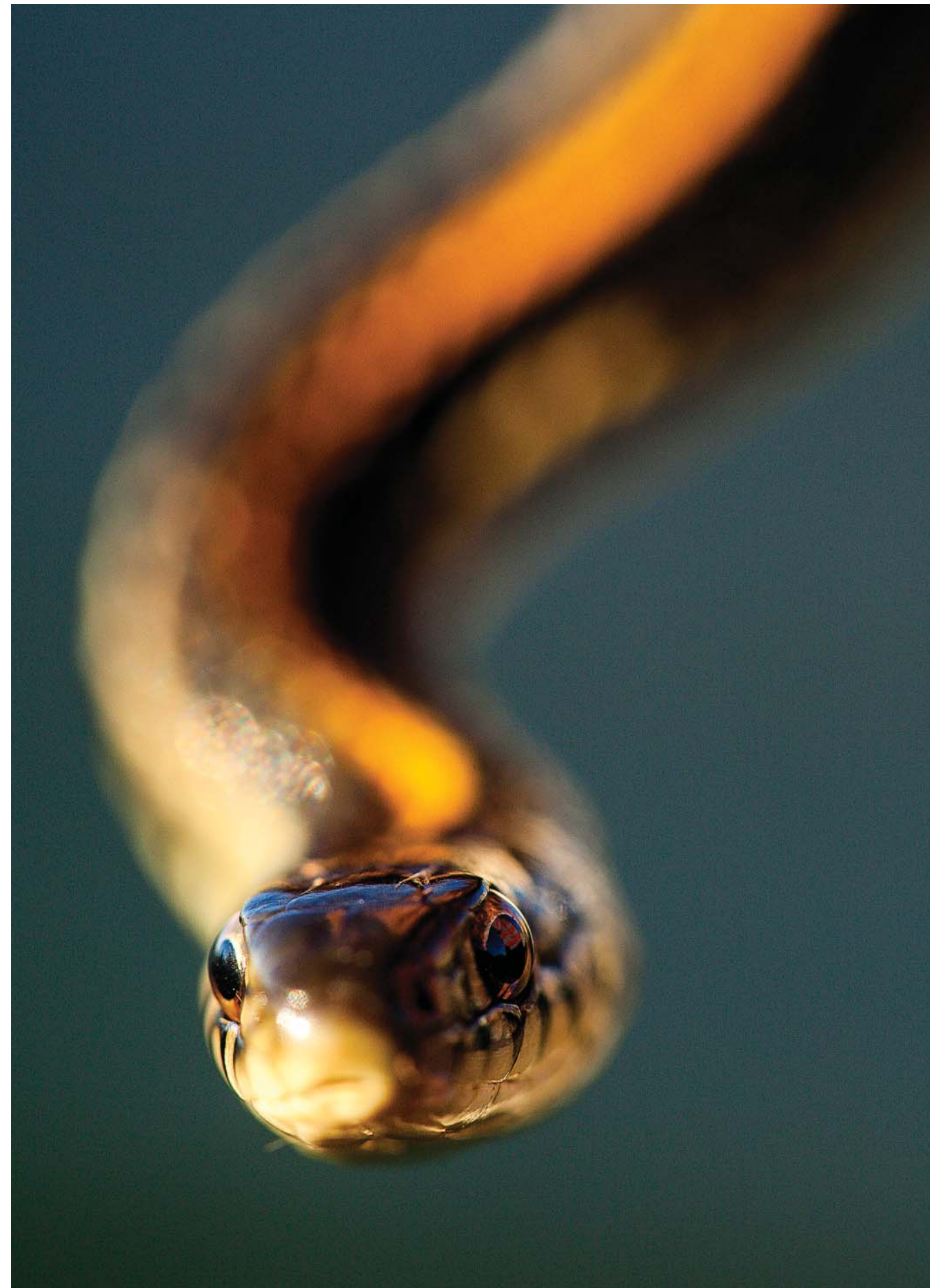


The sun sets over the trees at Fremont Lakes State Recreation Area, a location of nearly 300 acres of water in 20 sandpit lakes featuring both tent and RV camping.

Photo by Jeff Kurrus

This plains garter snake, photographed in Sarpy County, eats worms, amphibians, fish and ground-nesting birds. Females, such as this one, are bigger than males to improve reproductive capacity and give birth to live young.

Photo by Jeff Kurrus





The gobble of a tom turkey, including this one near South Bend, can be heard from more than a mile away. When he is excited or distressed, a tom's head and snood, the flap of skin dangling over the bird's beak, will change colors, including red, white and blue.

Photo by Jeff Kurrus



Golden asters, plains sunflowers, yuccas and green grass decorate the late summer landscape in the Nebraska National Forest south of Whitney.
Photo by Justin Haag

A pair of bighorn sheep rams compete for dominance north of Harrison. The hierarchy of rams is determined by size, strength and mass, as they square off in brawls during the pre-rut. Rams generally increase rank each year and peak in weight at age 7-8.
Photo by Justin Haag





The Calamus River spreads out and slows down as it winds through the upper end of Calamus Reservoir northwest of Burwell.

Photo by Eric Fowler



A young swift fox explores the world outside its den north of Scottsbluff. Swift fox, which grow to be just under two feet long, are native to the shortgrass prairies in western Nebraska.

Photo by Justin Haag

An aspen tree is illuminated by the sun as it rises over the edge of the Niobrara River Valley at Smith Falls State Park near Valentine. Nebraska Game and Parks Commission land managers are working on a project to improve the health of aspen groves and woodlands along the river.

Photo by Eric Fowler





Blake Bowman of Benedict casts into the glassy water at Alexandria State Recreation Area near Alexandria.
Photo by Eric Fowler

Raindrops cover sumac bushes in the Bessey Ranger District of the Nebraska National Forest near Halsey. A harbinger of fall, sumac begins to turn bright red in September.
Photo by Eric Fowler



Cattle trails radiate out from
a windmill and stock tank into a
Sandhills pasture north of Hershey.
Photo by Eric Fowler



A raccoon scurries along the bank of a Platte River slough near Ashland. Nocturnal by nature, raccoons are opportunistic feeders who have adapted to both urban and rural settings throughout the country.
Photo by Eric Fowler

Stars fill the sky at Summit Lake State Recreation Area near Tekamah.
Photo by Bobbi Anderson





Steam fog rises among sandhill cranes roosting on the Platte River at Martin's Reach Wildlife Management Area near Alda. For overnight protection, cranes have guards who watch the nearby banks for predators.
Photo by Eric Fowler



Morning sun shines through the vane of the windmill at Eugene T. Mahoney State Park near Ashland, one of the many scenic views to witness at Nebraska's most visited state park.

Photo by Jeff Kurrus

Bruce Switzer and Ronny Morgan ride through a foggy Sandhills pasture near Burwell on their way to a fall roundup.

Photo by Eric Fowler





A jumping spider captures a fly at Lincoln Creek Prairie in Aurora. When hunting, the jumping spider first attaches a safety line of silk at the launch point, then creeps close to the prey and makes one leap to capture.

Photo by Chris Helzer



A lesser earless lizard crawls across the ground at the Bessey Ranger District in the Nebraska National Forest. The lizard gets its common name because they have no external ear opening and the long, spindly toes on its back feet are well-adapted to running on loose sand. The lizard pictured is a female, as evidenced by her swollen abdomen and orange coloration. Pregnant females take on this orange color as a signal to lesser earless males.

Photo by Eric Fowler

A Pine Ridge hilltop near Crawford provides a perfect vantage point to watch the moon rise over Whitney Lake on a December evening.

Photo by Eric Fowler



Elk move through a pasture southwest of Lewellen on a December evening. While they spend most of their time in the North Platte Riverbottom and adjacent canyons, in the dead of winter elk in this area will walk two miles or more to feed in wheat fields on the table lands south of the river.

Photo by Eric Fowler





On a cool October morning fog rises from Big Alkali Lake south of Valentine. Hardstem bulrush covers an exposed sandbar in the foreground.
Photo by Gerry Steinauer

An eastern fox squirrel greets its albino nest mate as it emerges from the cavity of a tree near Aurora.
Photo by Gerry Steinauer



The American bullfrog, such as this one at Lewis & Clark State Recreation Area near Crofton, is the largest frog native to North America. Because a bullfrog will eat anything it can fit in its mouth, introductions throughout the country have been highly detrimental to some animal populations.

Photo by Jeff Kurrus



The kitchen of the reconstructed 1874 Cavalry Barracks at Fort Robinson State Park is furnished as it would have appeared at the time when bread was made in the post bakery and distributed to the company cooks.

Photo by Amy Kucera



A rooster pheasant runs through an equally colorful, dew-soaked mix of grasses after drying itself along a roadside near Calamus Reservoir State Recreation Area northwest of Burwell on an October morning.

Photo by Eric Fowler



**This tornado formed on June 14, 2014, near Wilcox, building up just east of a farmstead then traveling north and missing another farm before dissipating.
Photo by Chris Sheen**



Morning fog rises over Branched Oak State Recreation Area near Raymond on a cool August morning.
Photo by Jeff Kurrus

Narrowleaf beardtongue grows among prairie grasses on the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge. One of several penstemons native to Nebraska, this species is most commonly found in the Sandhills and further east in northern Nebraska.
Photo by Eric Fowler





The sun's rays streak through morning fog along the Niobrara River at Chat Canyon Wildlife Management Area on a September morning. Located south of Nenzel, the 420-acre area acquired by the Game and Parks Commission this year includes two miles of the Niobrara, pine forest, wetlands and Sandhills prairie.

Photo by Eric Fowler



Taillights glow at dusk following a rainstorm on the scenic road through Smiley Canyon at Fort Robinson State Park southwest of Crawford.

Photo by Amy Kucera

A bumblebee clings to thick-spike gayfeather at Branched Oak Wildlife Management Area near Raymond.

Photo by Jeff Kurrus





Ribbons of water wind through a bottomland forest ablaze with fall color along the North Platte River west of Lewellen.
Photo by Eric Fowler



The open, brightly colored mouths of these European starling nestlings leave no doubt food is desired and where it should be delivered. The inside of some bird species' mouths will change color depending on their need.

Photo by Jeff Kurrus

Fall colors, including the reds in oak leaves like these at Schramm Park State Recreation Area near Gretna, are expressed through two groups of pigments: the yellows and oranges in carotene and the reds and purples of anthocyanins. As daylight dwindles the chlorophyll fades, allowing the yellow carotenoids to show through. Anthocyanin reds intensify when the leaf prepares to fall and abscission layers form on the stalk. When the sap flow gets restricted, the sugars manufactured in the leaves begin to accumulate rather than move to the roots and the blazing scarlets appear.

Photo by Jeff Kurrus



Andrew Schlueter's dog "Bear" eagerly leaps off the bank of the North Platte River to begin tracking down a mallard duck near Scottsbluff.
Photo by Doug Steinke

On an August morning, a bison herd grazes native Sandhills prairie grasses above the Niobrara River Valley on the Nature Conservancy's Niobrara Valley Preserve near Valentine.

Photo by Gerry Steinauer





Black-tailed prairie dogs, such as this one at the Niobrara Valley Preserve east of Valentine, have a complicated communication system that, among other uses, helps warn of approaching predators. They even use different sounds for different kinds of predators.

Photo by Chris Helzer



An ant climbs on leadplant at Griffith Prairie southwest of Kearney. Besides being major predators, ants also eat seeds, pollen and nectar, and help aerate soil and recycle nutrients. Their abundance is staggering: the weight of a reasonably stocked pasture of cattle would be the same as the ants in the same pasture.

Photo by Chris Helzer

The sun rises over the snow-covered Red Cloud Buttes at Fort Robinson State Park. The buttes, which have been photographed by countless visitors, rise about 450 feet above the main park and are enjoyed by many hikers and horseback riders.

Photo by Justin Haag



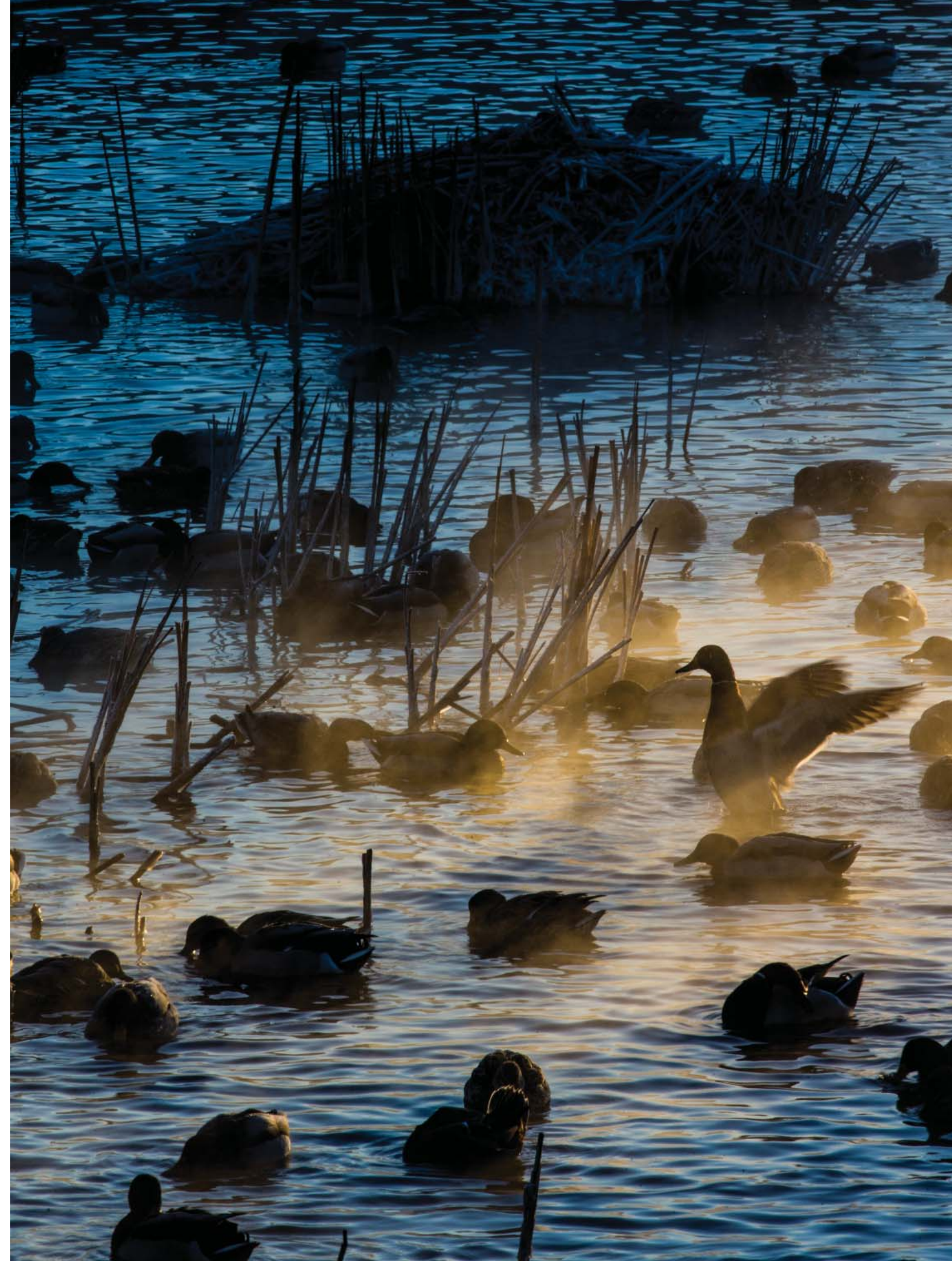


The bright yellow flowers of hairy puccoon are easy to spot in a Valentine National Wildlife Refuge grassland that is flush with green following spring rains. Found statewide, the native perennial is most commonly found in the Sandhills.

Photo by Eric Fowler

Mallards and Canada geese enjoy the warmth of a warm-water slough on a morning when the temperature struggles to reach zero degrees south of Grand Island.

Photo by Doug Steinke



A male bluegill guarding its nest in a Lincoln quarry pond flares its dorsal fins in an attempt to scare away a snorkeling photographer.
Photo by Eric Fowler



Photo Contest



BEST OF SHOW

Kahne Packer and his German shorthaired pointer anxiously wait to set foot afield at a youth mentor pheasant hunt at Cub Creek Hunting in Beatrice.

Photo by Kaleb White

MAMMALS

FIRST PLACE – White-tailed fawns walk by a stand of snow-on-the-mountain, a native annual, near Guide Rock.
Photo by Alan Shadduck



MAMMALS



SECOND PLACE – Khloe, a Labrador retriever, sits in an abandoned Volkswagen on the family farm near Ceresco.
Photo by Erik Johnson



THIRD PLACE – Red fox pups emerge from their den near Grand Island.
Photo by Jerry Jacobs



FIRST PLACE – A spiderwort bloom glows purple along a hiking trail at Schramm Park State Recreation Area near Gretna.

Photo by Andrew Loftis



SECOND PLACE – Purple coneflowers appear pink in a field near Lincoln.

Photo by Angela Carroll



THIRD PLACE – A beetle crawls across common milkweed at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center near Denton.

Photo by Gordon Warrick



LANDSCAPES

FIRST PLACE – Fireworks explode across the Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge after a home run derby at TD Ameritrade Park in downtown Omaha.

Photo by Peter Carbonell



SECOND PLACE – The sun sets over a bean field near Bennet.

Photo by Erik Johnson

THIRD PLACE – A rainbow accompanies storm clouds during an April shower south of Valentine.

Photo by Chris Davis



REPTILES, AMPHIBIANS AND INVERTEBRATES



FIRST PLACE – A tiger swallowtail butterfly pollinates backyard flowers in a garden in Lincoln.
Photo by Julie Halloran



SECOND PLACE – An American rubyspot clings to a piece of grass along the Niobrara River near Sparks.
Photo by Gordon Warrick



THIRD PLACE – A bumblebee pollinates flowers in Grand Island’s Stolley Park.
Photo by Nia Karmann

OUTDOOR RECREATION

FIRST PLACE – Brightly colored carnival rides spin during the Cobblestone Festival in Falls City.

Photo by BJ Pedersen

SECOND PLACE – (bottom left) Nate Key and Luke Farrar snow goose hunt in morning fog near Firth.

Photo by Erik Johnson

THIRD PLACE – An angler fishes from the pier amidst a misty winter fog at the Sutherland Reservoir State Recreation Area near North Platte.

Photo by Bill Kesler



BIRDS

FIRST PLACE – American white pelicans stand in the water at Pawnee Lake State Recreation Area near Lincoln.

Photo by Lindsay Anderson



BIRDS

SECOND PLACE – A mallard hen and her ducklings swim across Holmes Lake in Lincoln.
Photo by Dale Benham



THIRD PLACE – Silhouetted red-winged blackbirds take flight over the setting sun north of Lincoln.
Photo by Erik Johnson



Unfortunately, we were unable to present winners from the two youth categories (ages 13-17 and 12 and under). This portion of the contest is now re-open until September 1, and entries can be submitted at NebraskalandMagazine.com/photocontest.

Vote for your favorite photograph among these finalists for this year's Reader's Choice award at NebraskalandMagazine.com.

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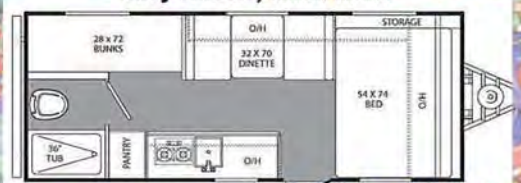
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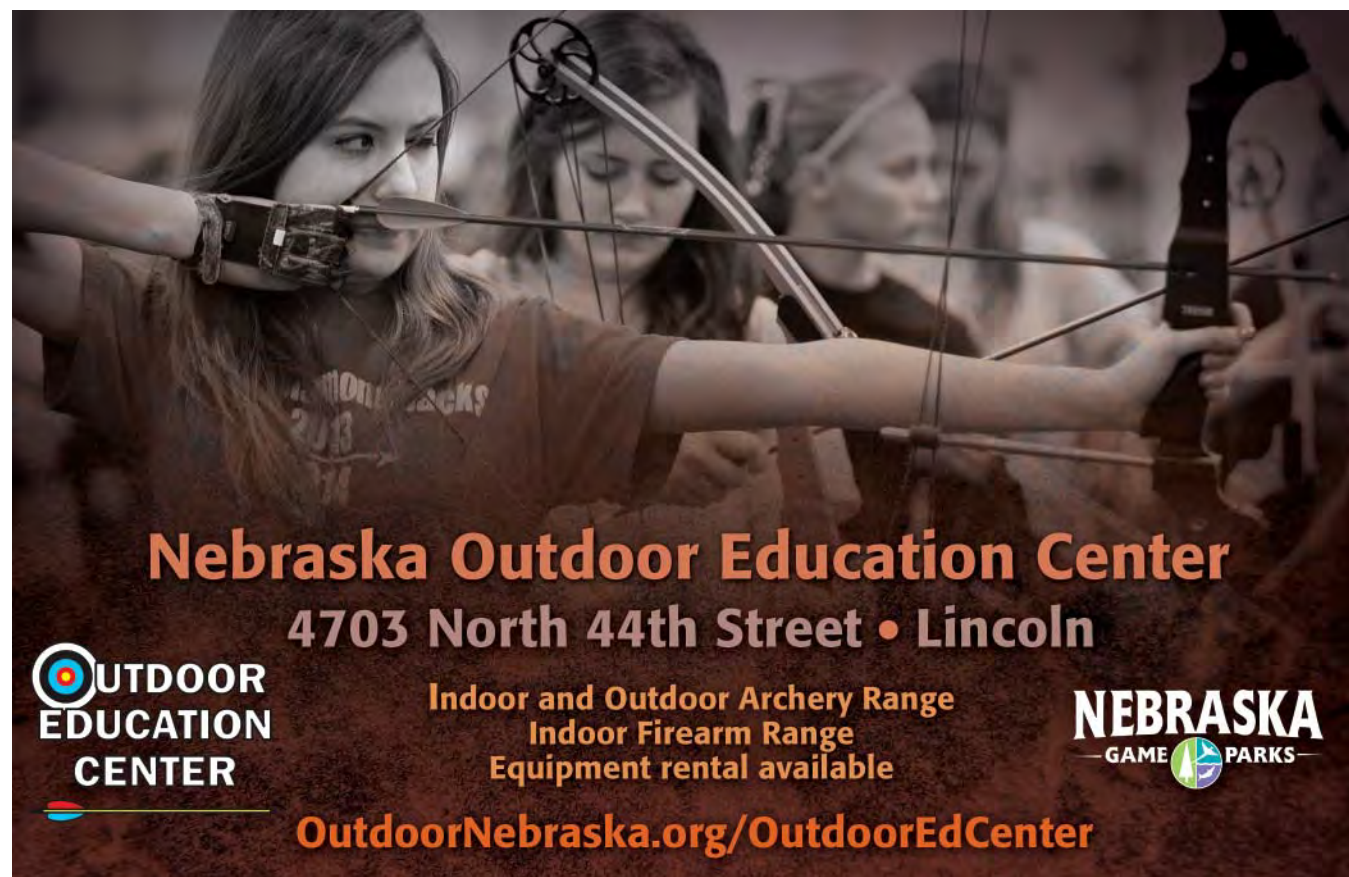
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**The coat of an American bison is adorned with frost on a November morning
at Fort Robinson State Park. The bison's thick coat and muscular neck allows
it to continue grazing when temperatures drop and snow deepens.**

Photo by Justin Haag

