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NEBRASKAland

January-February 2016



An Eastern bluebird eats berries from a burning bush in Hall County.
Photo by Rick Rasmussen.

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— GAME  PARKS —

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Snake on the Plains • Lover's Leap Histories
Pressey Wildlife Management Area • Time Well Spent

Experience Winterfest in Nebraska's State Parks



NEBRASKAland Magazine

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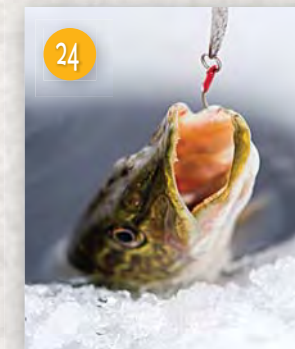
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WHEN YOU SEE THIS SYMBOL IN THE PAGES OF NEBRASKALAND MAGAZINE, VISIT NEBRASKALANDMAGAZINE.COM AND VIEW OUR INTERACTIVE DIGITAL EDITION FOR MORE INFORMATION.

Cover: The toboggan run is a wintertime favorite for kids at Eugene T. Mahoney State Park in Saunders County. See story on page 48. Photo by Jeff Kurrus.

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Brad Goetsch's "A Message From Heaven" photograph won the Reader's Choice Award for NEBRASKAland's 2015 Photo Contest.



Count Lilly In

This is a picture of my 10-year-old niece, Lilly Counts, whom I took up in the Sandhills in Cherry County north of Halsey on private land of some friends that we have been going on for many years. At a time when many lands in Nebraska are increasingly being attached to “for payment/lease hunts,” there are still many Nebraska farmers and ranchers that like to let folks hunt, with permission, who they know have a love for the land and Nebraska and hunting.

Lilly is an adventurous young lady from Plano, Texas, and has talked about wanting to come along on one of our hunts for the last couple of years. She waited patiently with her .410 shotgun in 25 degrees and snow, and with one shot had her first turkey.

A memory that she will always have and another young hunter for future years of Nebraska hunting!

Tim Counts
Temple, Texas



Smiling Dog
The photo on the back cover of the December 2015 issue is the greatest! We decided to save that picture so that if anyone ever needs cheering up, all they need to do is look at that picture! She not only looks like she is having a great time, but also really wants to have her picture taken. We had a yellow Lab some years ago who we could easily imagine in that hat with that grin, but Abby is the best. Thanks to her human companions for sharing with everyone.

John Crawford
Valentine, Nebraska

Deer hunter Evan Horak took this photo with his iPhone through his rifle scope while in the Keya Paha Unit near Mills during the November firearm season. The little buck kept hanging out near the blind where Evan and his father were sitting in.



Outdoor Plates
Bob Flakus of Omaha had already been a grandpa for a few years when he got his message plates three years ago. He’s been getting plenty of comments on them since, often while he’s enjoying time in the field with his son and two teenage grandsons hunting dove, turkeys and deer.

If you have a unique outdoor message plate you would like to share, or know someone who does, e-mail a photo (high-resolution, JPEG format only, please) of it to Eric.Fowler@Nebraska.gov, along with your name, hometown and a brief description of the interests expressed on your license plate.



Brenda Creigh, her husband, and granddaughter enjoyed this sunset at Eagle Scout Lake in Grand Island.

Send your comments to:
Jeff Kurrus, Editor
NEBRASKAland Magazine
P.O. Box 30370
Lincoln, NE 68503
or e-mail Jeff.Kurrus@Nebraska.gov
Please include your postal address and telephone number. Letters may be condensed and edited. Photographs are also welcome.

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Mixed Bag

A Mammal Brief

Black-tailed Prairie Dog

By Lindsay Rogers

Cynomys ludovicianus

In *NEBRASKAland's* December 2015 story, "Prairie Dog Town Tenants," author Kristal Stoner detailed some of the animals that live in these towns, except the black-tailed prairie dog itself. As its name suggests, the black-tailed prairie dog can be distinguished from North America's three other prairie dog species by the black-tip on its tail.

All four species are found in the western United States with the black-tailed prairie dog having the largest range, including Nebraska. The black-tailed prairie dog can be found throughout most of western and central Nebraska in open grasslands. The highly social species communicates through a series of barks and yips; this species has 12 distinct calls. They also communicate through touch such as nuzzling, grooming and playing. They form large colonies with well over 100 individuals living within one small burrow. Often considered a nuisance species, black-tailed prairie dogs are ecologically important as they are a prey species for many prairie predators including hawks, coyotes, snakes and eagles. Their construction of burrows is also important in aerating the soil and providing homes to other burrowing animals. ■



Lindsay Rogers is an outdoor education specialist with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

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Prescribed Fire Training Workshops

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



Basic Workshops

DATE	LOCATION	TITLE AND DESCRIPTION	ADDRESS	TIME
January 20th 2016	Scottsbluff	Prescribed Fire Basics — Learn why, when and how to plan and complete a safe and effective prescribed fire.	North Platte NRD 100547 Airport Rd • Scottsbluff	9:00 AM - 4:00 PM MST
January 21st 2016	Gothenburg	Prescribed Fire Basics — Learn why, when and how to plan and complete a safe and effective prescribed fire.	Monsanto Water Utilization LC 76268 NE-47 • Gothenburg	9:00 AM - 4:00 PM CST
January 27th 2016	Grand Island	Prescribed Fire Basics — Learn why, when and how to plan and complete a safe and effective prescribed fire.	Hall County UNL Extension 3180 US-34 • Grand Island	9:00 AM - 4:00 PM CST
January 28th 2016	Lincoln	Prescribed Fire Basics — Learn why, when and how to plan and complete a safe and effective prescribed fire.	Lancaster County UNL Extension 444 Cherry Creek Road • Lincoln	9:00 AM - 4:00 PM CST
February 9th 2016	Norfolk	Prescribed Fire Basics — Learn why, when and how to plan and complete a safe and effective prescribed fire.	Life Long Learning Center—Northeast Community College 801 E. Benjamin Ave • Norfolk	9:00 AM - 4:00 PM CST
March 1st 2016	Gibbon	Prescribed Fire Basics — Learn why, when and how to plan and complete a safe and effective prescribed fire.	Rowe Sanctuary 44450 Elm Island Road • Gibbon	9:00 AM - 4:00 PM CST

Advanced Topics

January 26th 2016	Curtis	Mop-up, Ignitions, and Making Decisions Under Pressure — Learn best practices for mop-up, proper techniques for ignitions and decision making skills as a leader on your fire crew.	Curtis Cattle Company 223 Center Ave • Curtis	6:30 PM - 9:00 PM CST
February 23rd 2016	Hartington	Burn Plan Writing — Learn how to write a sound and effective burn plan for your Conservation Reserve Program acres.	Hartington City Auditorium 101 North Broadway • Hartington	5:00 PM - 8:00 PM CST
February 24th 2016	Imperial	How to use Prescribed Burning for CRP Mid-Contract Management — Learn how to utilize the prescribed burning option for your Conservation Reserve Program mid contract management requirements.	Mid-Plains Community College 1324 Broadway St • Imperial	5:30 PM - 8:30 PM MST
February 25th 2016	Lincoln	Burn Plan Writing — Learn how to write a sound and effective burn plan for your Conservation Reserve Program acres.	Lancaster County UNL Extension 444 Cherry Creek Road • Lincoln	6:00 PM - 8:00 PM CST
March 3rd 2016	Hastings	Fire Weather — Understand and predict fire behavior based on weather. Use tools to determine a good burn day. Presented by National Weather Service Meteorologists.	Headstart 123 N. Marian Road • Hastings	1:00 PM - 4:00 PM CST
May 24th 2016	Oconto	Fire Pump and Engine Design — Learn engine design and performance from pumps to tank capacity to hoses and nozzles. We encourage anyone who has already built their own engine to come and share there experience.	Pressey Wildlife Management Area Shooting Range	11:00 AM - 2:00 PM CDT
May 25th 2016	Chadron	Responding to Wildfire — Wildfires can start from many places such as outdoor barbeques, railway tracks, discarded cigarettes, etc. Attend this workshop and learn how to keep an escaped fire small.	Country Kitchen 1250 West 10th Street • Chadron	5:30 PM - 7:30 PM MDT

Registration fee of \$10 includes meal and training materials. Visit www.NebraskaPF.com or call 308-850-8395 for more information and to register.



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Travelogue

By Jenny Nguyen

O'Neill

Residents paint the town green in O'Neill every March. Known as the "Irish Capital of Nebraska," this northeastern Nebraska city's claim to fame is its all-out St. Patrick's Day celebrations, scheduled March 16-18 this year. In 2009, Smithsonian Magazine named O'Neill, Nebraska, the third best "unusual" place to celebrate this Irish holiday in the nation, and the city made CNN's list of "quirky" St. Patrick's Day destinations in 2011. On this weekend, the town of 4,000 doubles its population with visitors every year.

Visitors flock to O'Neill to see the world's largest shamrock on blacktop, prominently displayed at the intersection of 4th and Douglas streets. Visitors can view the shamrock year-round, but prepare for the weekend's celebrations that Wednesday by watching the giant clover refreshed with a new coat of emerald paint.

Saturday festivities include a morning fun run, Irish Dancers on the shamrock at noon, followed by a parade at 1 p.m., where spectators will see the famous green horse gracing O'Neill's streets. Past fun and games at the local high school included donkey basketball and husker hoops. In the evening, enjoy live music in various establishments.

Stay the entire weekend and explore O'Neill's many charms. For nourishment and libations, dine at the **Blarney Stone** for Guinness on tap, **La Herradura** for authentic Mexican food or **Chesterfield West** for classic bar food. Looking for lodging? The **Historic Golden Hotel** is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and has been "the jewel of the plains in O'Neill since 1913." RV campers will find ample amenities and comfort at **Carney Park**.

For public fishing and hunting opportunities nearby, check out **Goose Lake Wildlife Management Area** (27 miles south). **Atkinson Lake State Recreation Area** (20 miles west) offers fishing, picnicking, wildlife viewing, electrical hookups and primitive camping.

For more information, visit Cityofoneillnebraska.com or Oneillchamber.org.

Reuben and sweet potato fries at the Blarney Stone.



St. Patrick's Day Parade

PHOTOS COURTESY OF LAURI HAVRANEK



Donkey basketball at O'Neill High School

O'Neill



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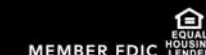
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Hunters exhibit their trophies following a hunt in Franklin County in Jan. 1914.

A Brief History Fire and Accident a Friend to Coyotes

By Patricia C. Gaster,
Nebraska State Historical Society

Organized hunts for “wolves” (what we now call coyotes) were a frequent part of the winter sporting scene in the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s. Hundreds of hunters frequently joined in, but despite all the manpower, the wily coyote was not always bagged. Sometimes he seems to have been amply revenged on his hunters.

In a hunt covering 117 square miles held in March 1900 in Rock and Brown counties, a ring of hunters on foot, horseback, and in vehicles was formed to trap their prey within an ever-tightening circle. However, the hunters were foiled and many coyotes escaped due to a prairie fire. The *Omaha Bee* reported on March 22: “A lighted match dropped accidentally by one of the riders ignited the grass and in a moment the prairie was in flames. The lines being broken to fight the fire, at least twenty-five wolves escaped, but after all five were killed within the ring.”

More than 500 men participated in a hunt in Jan. 1913 near Elmwood, with 11 coyotes killed. The editor of the *Elmwood Leader-Echo*, who took part, noted on Jan. 31 the shooting mishaps that occurred: “During the hunt two or three men were shot as a result of carelessness,

but no one was hurt seriously. A shot from a heavily loaded shot gun entered the mouth of one of the hunters through the cheek, and it is said the fellow spat it out, seemingly unconcerned over the incident.”

A large hunt in Franklin County in Jan. 1914 by 200-300 men and boys resulted in the shooting of six coyotes and a wild dog. No mishaps with fire or firearms were reported, but the *Franklin County News* said on Jan. 17 that “some of the boys who were not used to trudging from eight to twelve miles, were about all in the next day.” ■

Visit the Nebraska State Historical Society’s website at Nebraskahistory.org.



After a hunt south of Elmwood in 1913.

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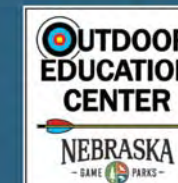
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Mark Harris
Foreword by Candy Hunsaker

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-Joel Sartore, National Geographic photographer

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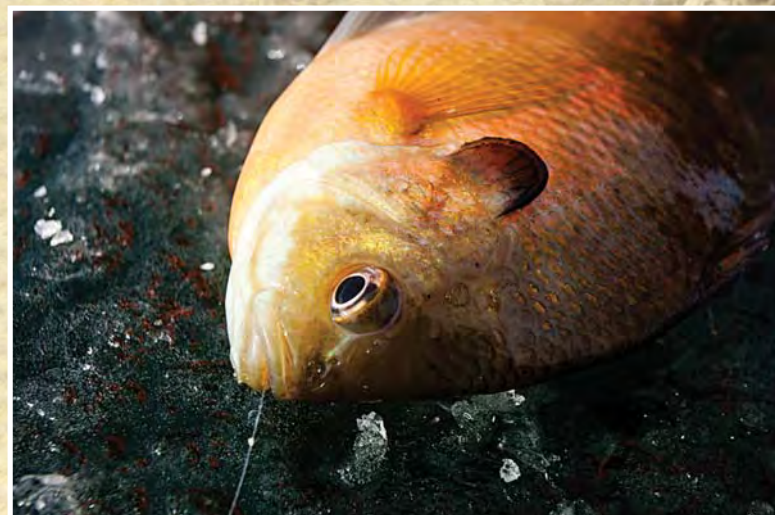
Bluegill Through the Ice

By Nebraska Outdoor U

Bluegill are the classic schooling fish, so when you find some bluegill under the ice, get a variety of lures in front of them and you'll pull out a good amount of fish. The larger bluegill will hang out toward the bottom of the schools, and they tend to nibble instead of attacking your bait. So be patient and set the hook at the right time.

But do so safely. Only fish on water that has at least four inches of clear, solid ice before walking on it with cramp-ons to prevent slipping. ■

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PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN

Rooster Roundup

By Julie Geiser

Good pheasant and quail hunting in Nebraska shouldn't be a thing of the past. Knowing that quality habitat will mean increased numbers in pheasants, quail and other wildlife, Nebraska Game and Parks Commissioner Lynn Berggren is a strong proponent of grassland habitat improvements.

This hunting season, Berggren and other commissioners have planned trips to experience firsthand the quality of hunting on Nebraska's public lands.

Over November and December, they bagged several pheasants and quail and saw great numbers of birds on wildlife management areas (WMA) that have undergone habitat improvements.

Hunts have taken place at Sherman Reservoir WMA near Loup City, the Ducks Unlimited Verona Wetlands Complex near Aurora, Davis Creek WMA near North Loup, on conservation reserve program property and Grove Lake WMA by Royal, and also Elk Point Bend WMA near Ponca.

"We see a good number of birds," Berggren said. "The opportunity in Nebraska to hunt pheasants is not dead. It's out there." ■

Bagging the Big One

By Julie Geiser as told by Zac Brashears

At 90 years old, Ivan Mortensen finally drew and filled the coveted landowner bull elk tag in the Box Elder Elk Management Unit. Mortensen had applied for an elk tag several times before finally drawing a tag this year.

Only four bull tags are available to landowners owning 320 acres or leasing 640 in the Box Elder Unit, criteria that Ivan met for the month-long season running Sept. 26 through Oct. 25.

Mortensen scouted and hunted multiple times throughout the season catching glimpses of a few elk; he had a couple close opportunities and several adventures with family members and close friends with elk hunting experience who tried to help him fill his tag. Ivan ventured out on his own in search of a nice bull on several occasions with no luck, which, as any elk hunter will tell you, happens quite frequently.

Finally on Oct. 24 hopes of bagging a bull came to light. Accompanied by his grandson Quenton Mortensen; son, Allan Mortensen; and friends Marvin Hanes, Robert and Zac Brashears, the group set out into a crisp 28-degree morning with little wind. Everyone had a great feeling about this particular morning. Just as it was getting light enough to see Robert spotted a bull elk working a ridge toward the bottom of a canyon.

Quickly formulating a game plan the hunters dropped into the bottom of the canyon to get in front of the bull to try and call him in. A cow decoy was placed in an opening of the canyon bottom and Zac Brashears started cow calling to lure the bull in for a shot.

Several minutes passed with no response from the big bull, so Zac tried bugling to see if they could get a response. Sure enough, the bull had moved in close, bugling back at the hunters. Looking in the direction of the bugle, Zac caught movement of the bull's legs through the cedar trees. He whispered to Ivan to cock the hammer of his Browning Lever Action .30-06 so he would be ready for a shot when the bull walked out into the opening in front of them. After

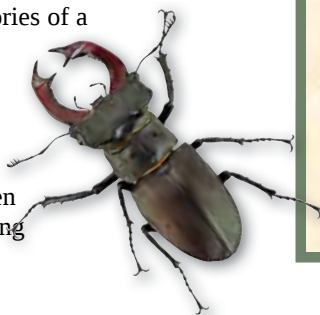


PHOTO BY ALLAN MORTENSEN

what seemed like an eternity, the bull started moving from behind the cedars toward the cow decoy. The bull stepped into view only 20 yards from Mortensen. Just as planned the big bull was in the clearing, giving Ivan the perfect shot with his open sights. Using a rifle with no scope worked perfectly in this situation; Mortensen squeezed the trigger and the bull ran back up the canyon through the cedars before finally dropping about 50 yards from the shot sight.

After finding the downed elk, the celebrating began with congratulations, hugs, phone calls, photos and memories of a hunt that will last for several lifetimes for all that helped Ivan in this journey.

Allan Mortensen said, "Dad has walked on cloud nine since this hunt. He would tell his story at the coffee shop to everyone that walked through the door, time and time again." Allen continued, "He even made elk stew for all the residents of the Senior Living Choice in Curtis. He was so ecstatic." ■



Nebraska Bird Library

Black-capped Chickadee

Song or calls: Rapid, nasal "chickadee-dee-dee." Song is slow "fee-beee; beee" at lower pitch.

Description: Sexes similar. Black throat and cap; white cheeks; gray above; creamy below, with buffy flanks. Wing coverts and secondaries are broadly edged in white.

Behavior: Black-capped chickadees are primary cavity nesters, which means they excavate their own hole, usually in soft, rotting tree stumps.

Habitat: Deciduous and coniferous forests, as well as orchards, woodlots, and urban areas. Nesting often occurs in edge situations or open areas of forest.

Where in Nebraska: Common permanent resident across the state. The population increases during winter months with the arrival of migrants from farther north.

Fun Facts: Each autumn, black-capped chickadees allow old neuron cells to die and new ones to grow in order to adapt to social and environmental changes. ■

To learn about more birds visit:

NebraskaBirdLibrary.org.



PHOTO BY ROCKY HOFFMANN

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In the little white house
Lincoln, NE 68504
(402) 464-4055

Omaha
Harrison Village Mall
168th & Harrison
Omaha, NE 68136
(402) 504-4450

wildbirdhabitatstore.com

Wingtips by Wild Bird Habitat

Black-capped Chickadees are cavity nesting birds and common across Nebraska year round.

This fragile bird weighs a mere 3/4 of an ounce. Equivalent to three pennies.

Nesting territories range from 5 to 30 acres depending on woodland density.

Chickadees can remember thousands of locations where they cache food.

Many bird species identify and react to the warning calls of Chickadees.

Woodpeckers and nuthatches will form loose winter feeding flocks with groups of Chickadees.

Common at backyard bird feeders where they will retrieve a seed then fly to a perch to feed.

Prefers sunflower and safflower seeds as well as shelled peanuts and suet.



junior journal

interesting notes for readers of all ages

by Lindsay Rogers and Donna Schimonitz

Wildlife Myths

by Jamie Bachmann, Nebraska Project WILD

Do you know what a myth is? A myth is misunderstood information that has been told over and over again until it is believed to be true by many people. An example of a wildlife myth: Toads give you warts. Let's investigate some common wildlife myths.

MYTH NO. 1: Bats are blind. FALSE

Some bat eyes may have poorly developed eyes, but most bats can see as well as humans. Bats are nocturnal creatures and have evolved a sophisticated adaptation that allows them to "see" in the dark. Bats use echolocation to send out sound waves, from their nose or mouth. The sound waves will bounce off an object they want to avoid while flying, like a tree, or an insect they are hunting. When the sound wave, or echo, bounces back to them they are able to tell the size, shape and even texture of the object.

MYTH NO. 2: Toads give you warts. FALSE

Toads have bumps, not warts, on their skin that help them to camouflage into their environment. Warts are a human virus and in no way can be contracted from frogs

or toads. Some toads have wart-like bumps behind their eyes called parotid glands. These glands secrete a chemical substance that tastes bad to predators.

MYTH NO. 3: Touching baby animals will cause their mothers to abandon them. FALSE

Adult animals have an innate drive to fiercely protect their young. When a baby animal is found alone, humans most likely will have scared the adults away or the adults are off looking for food. Most adult animals will return to their young regardless of human scent. Birds, for example, have a very limited



Photo by Julie Geiser

sense of smell so our human scent would go mainly undetected. Some animals, like squirrels and mice, will relocate their young when there is a disturbance to their nests. Regardless, the best thing we can do is leave any wild animal babies alone. Usually their adults are watching and will return to care for their young.



raccoon kits

MYTH NO. 4: Porcupines can shoot their quills. FALSE

When porcupines are in fear of being attacked, muscles under their quills contract and the quills will stick up and out. But as cool as it would be, porcupines do not have the ability to shoot out their quills. The North American porcupine has about 30,000 quills that are actually large, stiff hairs. Porcupines use these quills to protect themselves from predators. If a porcupine is preyed upon, the predator will get stuck by the quills, which are easily pulled out of the porcupine but not so easily pulled from a predator. 🦔

NATURE CALENDAR

- Deep snow acts as insulation for plants: As long as there is snow on the ground
- Look for evidence of animals feeding on twigs and saplings: December through February
- Look for woodpeckers at feeders: All winter long
- Barred owls are courting: December through February

Kits and red-bellied woodpecker photos by Thinkstock

- 1 Bees fly up to 4 miles to find pollen and nectar.
- 2 Pronghorn can run over 50 miles per hour.
- 3 Woodpeckers can peck up to 20 times per second.
- 4 When bees sting you, they always die.
- 5 Bats eat their body weight in insects every night.

TRUE or FALSE

Answers to TRUE or FALSE: 1 True, 2 True, 3 True, 4 False, 5 True.

Bug Banter

What Lives in Your Firewood?

By Julie Van Meter
State Entomologist, Nebraska
Department of Agriculture

Invasive pests threaten the plants and animals in the state of Nebraska and can do great damage to our environment. One way we can all work together to help protect the trees in our state from invasive pests is to think about the firewood we use.

Many damaging insects and diseases can be transported from infested to non-infested areas through the movement of firewood. These new infestations can cause tremendous damage to forests and street trees, and are very expensive to manage and control.

Tree pests known to be transported in firewood include emerald ash borer, Gypsy moth, Asian longhorn beetle and thousand cankers disease of walnut. These pests cannot move very far on their own, but when people move

firewood, they can inadvertently move pests hundreds of miles.

Think of firewood as a shipping container. When a tree is cut down and made into firewood, any pests in or on that tree can be moved with the firewood. Once the firewood gets to a new destination, insects can emerge from the firewood to infest new trees. Spores or other disease-causing organisms may be released from the firewood and find a new home on nearby trees.

Some pests, including fungal spores or insect eggs, are nearly impossible to see with the naked eye. It is never safe to assume the wood is free of pests.

There are a few simple steps that you can take to protect Nebraska's trees from invasive pests.

- Buy locally harvested firewood. Ask the firewood seller where they harvest the firewood to confirm it is local.
- When you travel, leave your firewood at home. Instead, check with the local campground or park office for

Presented by



information on where to purchase local firewood.

- Don't bring firewood back home with you when you finish camping; leave it for the next camper.
- Finally, be aware of firewood regulations. State and federal regulations exist that impact the movement of firewood. Before you travel, visit Dontmovefirewood.org for state specific firewood information.

Taking these simple steps will go a long way toward protecting Nebraska's trees, whether they are in your favorite campground, in natural areas or right in your own backyard. ■



Emerald Ash Borer

DAVID CAPAERT MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY BUGWOOD.ORG

YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT IS IN YOUR

LURKING FIREWOOD

Invasive pests like walnut twig beetle that carry Thousand Cankers disease can move in firewood.

BUY LOCAL, BURN LOCAL.

www.nda.nebraska.gov

Upcoming Events

by Jerry Kane

Contact the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission at 402-471-0641 or visit OutdoorNebraska.org for more information. Visit HuntSafeNebraska.org for a list of hunter education classes and BoatSafeNebraska.org for a list of boating safety classes.

January 1
First Day Hike/Hiking Marathon, Ponca State Park (SP), Ponca

January 1
First Day Hike, Platte River SP, Louisville

January 1
New Year's Day Game and Parks offices closed

January 2
Yule Log Quest, Platte River SP, Louisville

January 2
Rifle Fun Shoot, Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

January 2
Winterfest, Ponca SP, Ponca

January 3
Shootout at Salt Creek, Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

January 3
Introduction to Competitive Archery, Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

January 5
Duck and coot hunting seasons close in Zone 3, Low Plains and High Plains Units

January 5
Best Shot Rifle Marksmanship for ages 10-16, Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

January 5, 14
Ladies Day at the Range, Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

January 6-27
Duck and coot hunting seasons in Zones 2 and 3, High Plains Unit

January 7
Explore Hunting, Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

January 7
Explore Archery for Beginners, Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

January 7
.22 Pistol League for Ages 12 and Up, Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

January 9
Discover Ice Fishing, Eugene T. Mahoney SP, Ashland

January 9, 16, 23, 30
Hiking Marathon, Ponca SP, Ponca

January 11
First day of spring turkey hunting permit sales

January 15
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission meeting, Lincoln

January 15
Youth, Landowner, Season Choice and River Antlerless, and Gifford Point WMA deer hunting seasons close

January 15
Dark goose hunting season closes in North Central Unit

January 15-17
Women's Wellness Weekend, Ponca SP, Ponca

January 19
Special Public Health Hazard Order crow hunting closes

January 20
Crow hunting season opens statewide

January 23
Archery Fun Shoot, Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

January 23
Cold Days, Warm Hearts and Family Fun, Eugene T. Mahoney SP, Ashland

January 23-February 9
Statewide light goose hunting season

January 30
Ice Bowl Disc Golf Tournament, Eugene T. Mahoney SP, Ashland

January 30-February 9
White-fronted goose hunting season

January 31
Hunting seasons close for November late doe/fawn antelope, fall turkey, pheasant, quail, partridge, grouse and squirrel

February 2, 16
Ladies Day at the Range, Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

February 6
Birds and Binoculars, Eugene T. Mahoney SP, Ashland

February 6-7
Super Bowl Sunday Mini-Lodge Package, Ponca SP, Ponca

February 7
Shootout at Salt Creek, Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

February 6, 13, 20
Hiking Marathon, Ponca SP, Ponca

February 9
Dark goose hunting season closes in East, Platte River, Panhandle and Niobrara units

February 10
Light Goose Conservation Order hunting begins

February 12-15
Valentine's Special, Eugene T. Mahoney SP, Ashland

February 13
Pheasants Forever State Habitat Meeting Kearney

February 13-14
Valentine's Dinner, Platte River SP, Louisville

February 13-14
Birds and Breakfast, hike and identification workshop, Ponca SP, Ponca

February 24
Introduction to Gun Safety and Technique for Young Shooters, Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

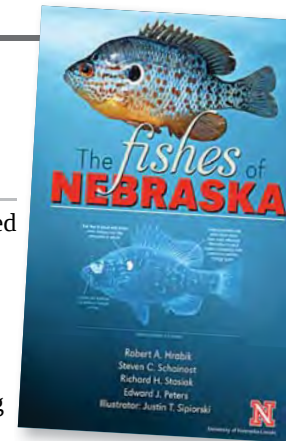
February 29
Cottontail and jackrabbit hunting seasons close

February 29
Bobcat, raccoon, Virginia opossum, long-tailed weasel, mink, red fox, gray fox and badger hunting and trapping seasons close

The Fishes of Nebraska

Nearly every state in the United States has a published book covering the natural history and distribution of fishes. Nebraska has been one of those states that have never had such a book. This was corrected this fall with the publication of *The Fishes of Nebraska*. Useful to naturalists, scientists, students and the layperson, *Fishes* will aide anyone wanting to identify a fish using a key through the meticulous illustrations of each of Nebraska's native and non-native fishes (more than 100 species). The guide also includes an insert of color plates of the fishes, distributional maps, species accounts and a description of the stream networks in the state and how geography, geology and human impacts have influenced fish species composition.

The book sells for \$39.99 and is available for purchase from the Nebraska Maps and More Store on the first floor of Hardin Hall at 33rd and Holdrege streets in Lincoln or by calling 402-472-3471. The book is also available at Amazon.com and Go.unl.edu/fishesofnebraska. ■



Watching Great Horned Owls

By Paula Hoppe

Shortened daylight, a scarcity of resources and cold Nebraska temperatures have sent many birds flocking south, and it may seem the world has tucked itself in for winter. But step outside on a still evening and the quintessential "hoot" of the common great horned owl is easily heard.

- Found statewide, great horned owls are one of our largest owls; they get their name from two feathered tufts on top of their heads.

- These owls are nocturnal, but are readily seen and heard at dusk perched in open areas with large trees, from city

parks to country shelterbelts statewide.

- Listen for their calls to one another, the male with his typically deeper voice answered by the higher-pitched hooting of the larger female, as they establish or strengthen pair bonds and set up territories in January.

- Nesting begins in February. Great horned owls do not build their own nests but use tree cavities, the nests of other large birds and even abandoned buildings, normally laying 2-3 eggs.

- If you regularly hear duetting Great horned owls near your home, take advantage of the leafless trees and you just may spot a nest near you. ■



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

NEBRASKAland Visitor



Last issue's winner of the Visitor drawing was John Lewis of Mason City, Nebraska, who found the *Ailanthus webworm* on page 56.

Readers are encouraged to contact NEBRASKAland within 10 days after this issue's publication with the correct page number and name of this issue's "Visitor" – a critter found in Nebraska. We will then gather the correct entries and draw one to win a NEBRASKAland mug. To enter each month, write:

NEBRASKAland Visitor
2200 North 33rd Street,
Lincoln, NE 68503.

Or e-mail:

Tim.Reigert@Nebraska.gov
with "Visitor" in the subject line of the message.

HINT: This issue's visitor is not on pages 11, 17, or 19.

*This colorful orange, black and cream moth is the **Ailanthus webworm** (Atteva aurea), native to Central and South America. It is often mistaken for a beetle, due to the way it wraps its wings along its body when at rest. The moth likely doesn't overwinter in Nebraska, but rather adults migrate up from the south in the summer. Watch for these moths in the late summer and fall around flowers such as goldenrod. Female moths lay eggs on Ailanthus trees, (Ailanthus altissima), also known as Tree-of-Heaven. The caterpillars live and feed in groups inside loose webs they make around Ailanthus foliage, similar to webs made by eastern tent caterpillars. The damage caused by this insect is not significant, particularly since the Ailanthus tree, introduced to the U.S. from Asia, is considered to be a nuisance tree.*

Special thanks to Julie Van Meter, State Entomologist, Nebraska Department of Agriculture. Photo by Eric Fowler.

Adams Family Values

Keeping a hunting heritage alive

Story and photos by Jeff Kurrus

“It’s my tag,” Wymore landowner Rex Adams will tell you when he’s talking to hunters about deer. “I’ll choose what I choose to shoot, and you’ll choose what you choose.” It’s a pretty good concept to live by, and one that Rex has advocated for as long as he can remember. It eliminates the comparisons of one deer to the next, for they’re all trophies and to be congratulated when big antlers aren’t the most important thing to consider. What is important to Rex, however, is family – something that has been valued more than anything else in the Adams home for years.

For nearly 20 years, Rex owned Adams Bottles & Bows in Wymore, a convenience store/bow shooting range/seasonal deer check-in station that welcomed thousands of visitors, including hunters in every season. It was there that his son Frosty, just 4 years old when Rex opened the store, became mesmerized by deer and deer hunters. “I also took Frosty hunting from the time



The Adams family “tree house” has become not only a great deer hunting spot but also a place to spend time with family of all ages.



In November 2011, Rex Adams (right) organized a firearm hunt on his land in Gage County for young Cayden McConnell, who was suffering from cancer. After a day and a half of hunting, Cayden’s dream of killing his first buck came true.



Rex and his family's passion is deer hunting, and they learn as much as they can about the behavior of whitetails throughout the year, including their use of deer decoys (above) and trail camera photos (below). The trail cameras on his property often garner the most attention throughout the year, as his wife Jodi usually babysits these and reports back to the Adams hunters.

he was a little kid,” Rex said, “he wasn’t more than 3 or 5 years old. His sister Camille would sit with him as well.” It was with this attention that Frosty, now 30 years old, continued to learn about deer hunting, a passion that he inherited and passed on to his own family.



“My three older kids, ages 7, 4, and 2,” said Frosty, “and they all have their own bows. We go out once a week and play. We shoot stumps, balls, anything to make it fun.” Frosty’s desire, like his father’s when Frosty was a boy, is to keep his kids involved. This has led to his daughter turkey hunting last spring and duck hunting this fall. “I don’t know if it’s second nature, but I always remember going with my dad doing

something,” Frosty said. “I just think it’s easy to take them.”

Easy until, as Frosty began to reminisce, he is forced to referee a WWE-style wrestling match between a laughing grandpa and grandson in a turkey blind. But that’s what has always been the biggest bond for this family through the years, all the more strengthened by Rex’s decision in 1990 to protect his family’s outdoor heritage. That was the first year Rex bought land of his own.

“I never had land growing up,” said Rex, “and I was saying then that my generation was going to be the last one that didn’t pay to hunt, and I think it’s coming true now. If you didn’t own a place to hunt, then you weren’t going to have a place. So through the years I didn’t buy a new truck, and I didn’t buy a new house, I bought land. And I’ve bought here and there for many years.”

Here and there has totaled to about 200 acres – cedar thickets, forests and fields – that doesn’t earn a single dollar of income, as Rex has never been interested in making money from this property. “The land is pure habitat,” he said, “this year we planted beans, wheat, alfalfa, milo and other food plots. But we have a tractor, a Gator UTV, and that’s about all we need.”

By having their own land, the family’s deer passion can be nurtured all year instead of just during the hunting seasons. Land management is a lot of work, Rex admitted, but he and Frosty bring along the kids as much as they can, even when there’s tractor work to be done, and it definitely becomes a family affair when it comes to trail cameras.

It starts with setting up and then periodically checking the cameras. Currently there are nine on the property. “It starts

with me and dad going to check cams,” said Frosty, “and then we all go. We’ve seen deer at 20 yards and a lot of turkey feathers. On these trips, the kids start walking and the next thing you know, you’re a hundred yards from the truck explaining something about an acorn.”

But even if you’re not on a Gator, it doesn’t mean you’re not fully vested in deer. Spend any amount of time with the Adams family around the dinner table, where all strategy, conjecture and field notes come together, and you’re bound to hear Rex’s wife Jodi ask “Anything nice?” as she prepares food for the family.

“Maybe,” Rex will say, scrolling through a series of trail cam photos. “How about this one?” he asked one night last winter shortly after firing up the laptop and putting his card in the reader.

“Nice,” she said, taking a look at a photo of a buck any hunter would proudly show off to his friends, then making her way back toward the kitchen counter. But her nonchalance should be no indication of her interest, Rex shared, as she will interrupt her own dinner prep if any sight comes along that Rex finds interesting.

“Jodi enjoys running trail cams more than any of us,” Rex shared. “They are kind of her babies. She used to shoot deer, but she’d rather watch them now.” It’s a sentiment that Rex is starting to have himself, especially when he spends as much time now taking young hunters afield as he does trying to shoot deer himself.

The Adams family has also been active in their local chapter of Whitetails Unlimited, and Rex funded the inception of Big Indian Archers Club. Community is what Rex is concerned with, both the rural community of Wymore and Blue Springs as well as the hunting community overall. “The outdoors is something we all have to protect, and I want to protect and preserve as much as I can, which is why I do what I do,” he said. “Anyone that says an outdoorsman is there to rape and pillage doesn’t know a true outdoorsman.”

A true outdoorsman knows better, a notion that can be witnessed each year on opening weekend of the firearm season in the Adams house. “I bring my kids down and my brother-in-law also comes,” said Frosty. “Even dad, a lifelong bowhunter, is starting to rifle hunt a little because everyone is together. It’s the family for the entire weekend, and mom’s always got food ready.”

Community, family and deer hunting. They are the cornerstones to the Adams family. And watching Frosty’s involvement with his own kids, they will be for generations to come. ■



Frosty Adams climbs a ladder stand with his bow. He is trying to pass along his archery passion to his kids.



Buck or doe, every white-tailed deer brings excitement to the Adams family, as they follow their passion for deer hunting every day of the year.

Western White-out

Photos and story by Justin Haag

When Old Man Winter visits the Nebraska Panhandle, there's a good chance he'll bring a little snow with him. Love it or hate it, it brings a special beauty to the landscape and has a way of brightening the darkest of days ... if you let it.

With a little snow on the ground, the area burned by the 1989 wildfires at Fort Robinson State Park take on a special beauty in the evening light.



The natural camouflage of sharp-tailed grouse, above, and wild turkey, below, is usually quite effective in the shortgrass prairies and agricultural fields of western Nebraska. It doesn't provide the same level of safety on fields of white, however.



White isn't the only color in winter, of course. When sunset comes at Crow Butte, Mother Nature often selects other paints from the palette.



The white rumps of pronghorn serve as a warning signal to others in the herd when danger looms. In this case, the white fur matches nicely with the ground beneath their speedy legs.



The hooves of bighorn sheep lambs not only work for climbing, but also for finding nutrition through the snow cover.



Wildlife managers welcome a layer of snow to help aerial surveys of deer and other species, as the white backdrop makes spotting the animals much easier.



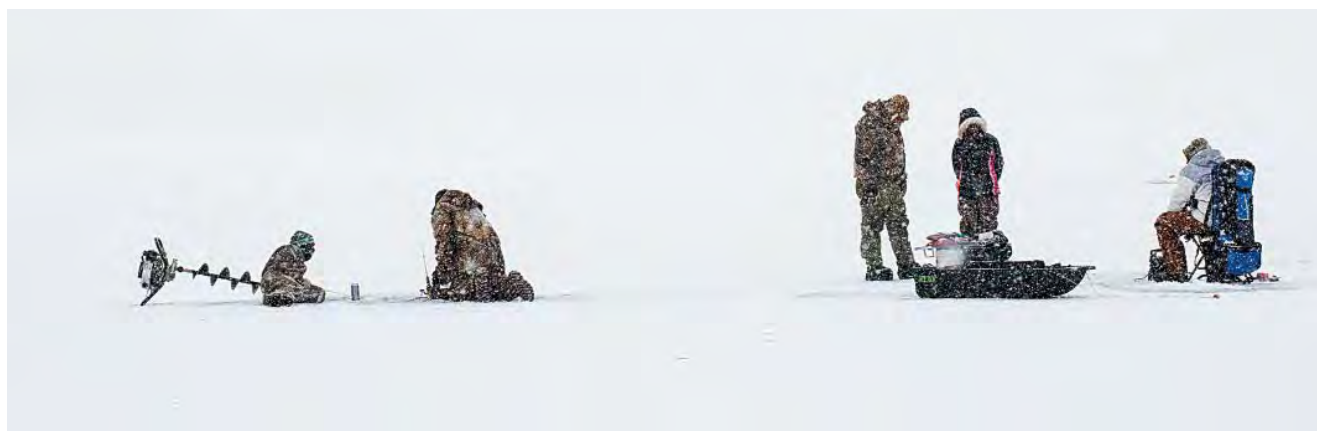
Golden eagles don't seem to mind a little snow on the ground. It helps them find their prey.

While snow may be a bane of livestock producers, it adds contrast and visual interest to the normally plain-looking black Angus.



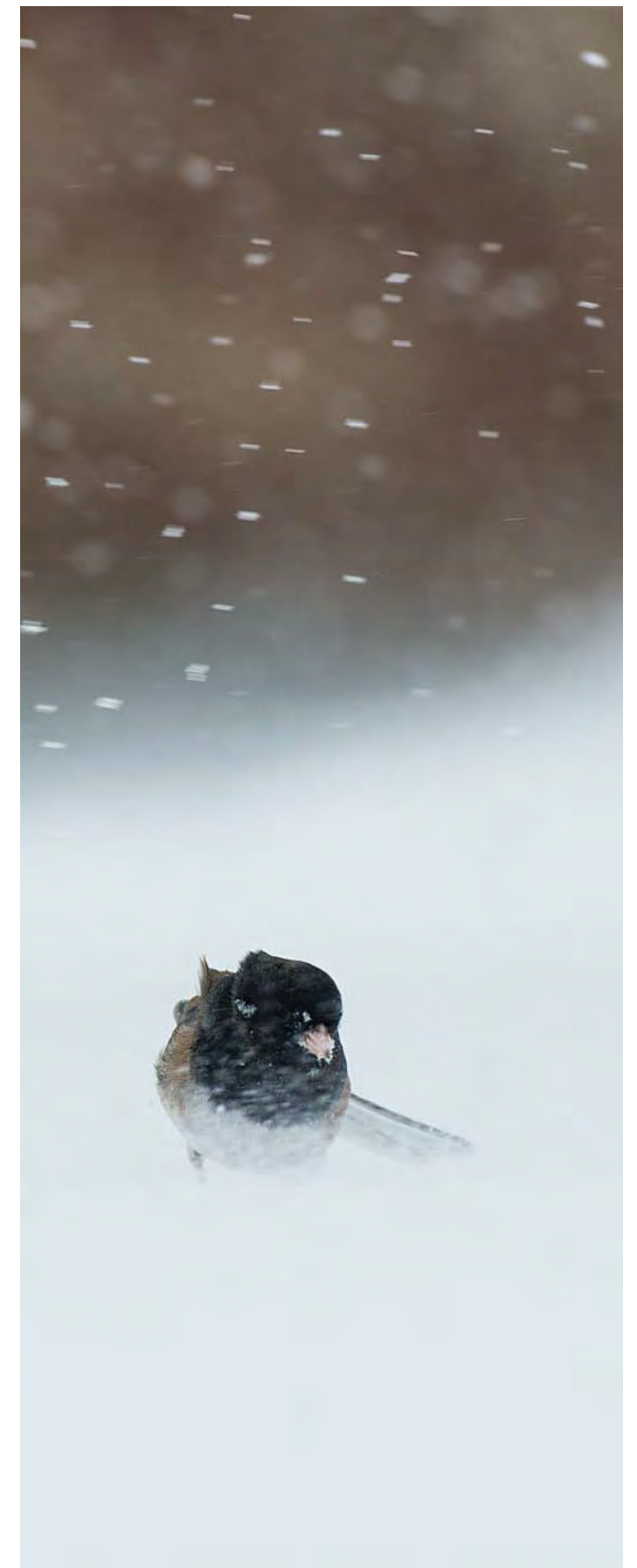


In a scene far removed from the picnics of summer, the Soapweed Shelter at Chadron State Park takes on special beauty as the sun breaks after a day-long snowstorm.



Ice anglers at Box Butte Reservoir State Recreation Area don't let a little snow stop their pursuit of northern pike and panfish. For it's the winter weather that they crave.

The winds and white stuff of winter can interrupt the routine of birds both big and small, including this dark-eyed junco on Christmas day.



Prairie Rattlers

Story and photos by Mark Harris

My son spotted his first rattlesnake at age 5. Proud he could finally keep up on a hike, he was streaming with enthusiastic chatter when he halted. The tenor of his voice changed, warning, “Snake!” Suspending motion came instinctively to him as it has in snake encounters since hominids walked the savannas. Ahead on the grassy trail a large rattlesnake stretched full length. As rattlesnake sightings go, this one was perfect – no danger, no fright – a learning opportunity. I took Colton onto my hip and approached the snake. At that moment I could not have imagined the rattlesnake encounters yet to come with my boy. He’s a snake magnet, and no rattler encounter would be so peaceful again. In a decade of close calls, Colton acquired a deep and broad catalog of swear words way too young.

I spoke to my wide-eyed son as we closed to a safe distance. He needed to see what made this a rattlesnake. “Do you see the rattle on the end of its tail? Do you see that its head is shaped like a triangle? See those blotchy marks along its body?” Colton nodded silently, stiffly. “This one is greener than most. Did you know that their colors are a little different depending on where they live? If he lived up in the rocks he might be grayer.” The rattler moved toward higher grass, not panicking like other snakes might. “See how he just wants to be away from us? They aren’t looking to hurt us, but they sure can. That’s why we always keep our eyes on the ground out here, right? Just like you were doing! Great job spotting him, buddy, you saved us!”

Colton tried restraining a grin; he knew this would be a heroic story to tell.

Rattlesnakes give nearly everyone the heebie-jeebies, but most folks have only an abstract idea of what rattler encounters are like. Remember that intense feeling after narrowly avoiding a car accident? It’s much the same emotion. The body floods with chemicals and the brain flashes code red. I always curse – loudly. It’s uncontrollable. Swearing helps counter the intense adrenaline surge. And then for some people, once all is well, in sets fascination. This fascination borders on obsession for a few, like Lincoln’s Dan Fogell, professor of biology at Southeast Community College. Fogell loves rattlesnakes. He keeps them in his lab and at home for education and outreach – a lot of them. He talks to them like naughty beloved dogs. They hate his guts.



DAN FOGELL

Fogell speaks of rattlesnakes like a botanist would of orchids – their varied colors and patterns, their personalities. He is captivated by their behaviors, by a rattlesnake mother’s protective nature, by the sound of their rattles, and that they do the same things other animals do but without arms and legs. He is interested in their venom, which is a collection of enzymes that help digest large prey rapidly. “Because of this venom, rattlers don’t need to lie around immobile with this giant lump in their gut,” said Fogell. But

The prairie rattlesnake’s daunting defensive stance is a rare display among wild creatures and has fostered fear and misinterpretation for centuries.



Nebraska's Venomous Four

Nebraska has four venomous snakes, including three species of rattlesnakes.



Massasauga Rattlesnake

Rare and only found in small pockets of southeastern Nebraska, the massasauga primarily lives in wet tallgrass prairies or near wetlands.



Timber Rattlesnake

Timber rattlesnakes are very rare and can only be found in southeastern Nebraska. They are woodland residents that rely on camouflage to remain safe and to find prey.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL FORSBERG

Copperhead Snake

Copperheads are the rarest venomous snake in Nebraska, living only along the Big Blue River in southern Gage County.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Prairie Rattlesnake

Prairie rattlesnakes are the most common venomous snake in Nebraska, ranging primarily west of a north/south line around Kearney. They hibernate in prairie dog towns or in rocky outcrops.



PHOTO BY JON FARRAR

it's this venom combined with their startling, menacing, hunkering-down behavior which makes them notorious – firmly fixing them into the running as Nebraskans' least liked animal.

Fogell maintains a live collection of Nebraska's four native venomous snake species, but fear not Nebraskans, three of these are rare. The **massasauga rattlesnake** and the **timber rattlesnake** can be found in small pockets in far southeastern Nebraska and some **copperheads** live in Gage County south of Beatrice, but in western regions the **prairie rattlesnake** reigns. Habitats in eastern Nebraska don't suit them. There is a north/south line which prairie rattlesnakes generally don't cross near Kearney. They like shortgrass regions; thank the tallgrass, easterners.

Rattlesnake encounters were common around McCook where I grew up. Today, Fogell confirms that southwestern Nebraska is still a hotspot for rattlesnakes as are areas in the Panhandle. We killed rattlesnakes back in those days. Like slaying a dragon, it came with bragging rights. Unfortunately this mentality still exists. "People fear them," said Fogell. "People don't understand them and disrespect them. Some believe that they are doing the world a huge favor by killing rattlesnakes, thus removing more potential for bites." But rattlesnakes serve an important role just like all predators do. "Rattlesnakes are voracious vermin eaters that keep mice, rats, rabbits and other small mammals from reproducing to unmanageable numbers," Fogell said. "And they want no part of humans. Just leave them alone and nobody gets hurt – including the snake."

A rattlesnake's alarming behavior throws people. This noisy, intimidating animal implies malevolence, starkly contrasting behaviors we are used to seeing in all other wild animals. It's a mean looking creature bold enough to stand its ground as if daring you to approach and it will bite you if you do. Many people misinterpret this scary mannerism as aggression, but it is pure defense.

Be comforted that they give warning. As much as this sudden, forceful buzzing scares the bejeezus out of



When a rattlesnake strikes (like this one in Dan Fogell's laboratory), its hollow fangs unfold from the roof of its mouth to target enemy or prey. Not all rattler bites deliver venom, but this one did to the camera's lens.

people, there is a newer phenomenon developing that is even more terrifying: rattlesnakes that remain silent.

No unexpected rattling noise compares to the primitive fear in spotting a coiled, quiet, strike-ready rattler where your foot will next fall. Though not typical rattlesnake behavior, I have experienced more of this stealth in recent years and so have scientists. Nearly unheard of decades ago, it is becoming a phenomenon. "It's the foundation of Darwinian evolution," said Fogell. "This variation in the choice to rattle when approached by a threat is allowing some of these well-camouflaged snakes to remain unseen by predators that might kill them."

Researchers have even noted atrophied tail muscles in some rattlesnakes, where tail ends are so weak that loud rattling is not possible. Many say that quiet rattlers have ascended as a result of human encroachment. Theoretically, as mankind invades habitat, noisy rattles

bring death from fearful humans. Remain unnoticed, remain alive, and the silent, limp-tailed snakes pass on genetics while their louder neighbors might be killed.

Heard or not, there is no standard rattlesnake encounter; assorted natural factors come into play. Warm weather makes a more active snake, quicker to agitate. On chilly days, they are lethargic. The less notice a snake has of human approach the more sudden and robust their reaction will likely be. Snakes are deaf, but they feel us coming; vibrations from the ground announce our advance. The heavier the footfall, the more notice they have to move away. Keep your kids behind you in rattlesnake country.

Rattlesnakes rank fairly low on the venom lethality scale worldwide. According to Fogell, "Severity of a prairie rattlesnake bite depends on where the bite is, the amount of venom injected, the size and health of the person being bitten and what the victim does after the bite." Only one remedy

“Rattlesnakes are voracious vermin eaters that keep mice, rats, rabbits, and other small mammals from reproducing to unmanageable numbers.”

— *Dan Fogell*

works: medical attention and perhaps a few vials of antivenin. Old, unhelpful concepts that can actually cause more harm are tying off the limb with a tourniquet, using ice or cutting the skin to suck out the venom. Says Fogell, “A person can and likely will survive a

bite with medical care. But it will hurt . . . a lot.”

The main principle of avoiding a bite is simple: watch where you are going. Easy as it sounds, that doesn’t come naturally to those not used to rattlesnake environments. A rattler-



My son, Colton, eyes a snake we have shooed off the road. Tightly-coiled in protective mode, the snake becomes as small as possible and covers the back of its head.



Rattlesnakes silently writhe at the edge of their wintering den on a warm October afternoon. They have come from several miles in all directions, and here they will spend Nebraska's cold months beneath the earth's frost line.

savvy person moves differently through rattlesnake territory and they do so with diligence. Where the feet will land, the eyes must always scan.

Common rattlesnake hangouts can be avoided, but this shouldn’t be misinterpreted; they can be anywhere. They like warm, southerly-facing rocky hillsides, and in spring and fall they congregate around prairie dog towns where many pass Nebraska winters deep below the frost line. They hibernate in communities and any deep hole or rock fissure will do. There

is a small, peculiar window of time either side of winter where snake-pit entryways become writhing masses on warm days as they prepare to transition away from or into the dens.

One den I often visit sits high on a hilltop. Its limestone mouth is surrounded by grass and brush. In the summer it lies abandoned but in October, as temperatures drop, prairie rattlesnakes migrate there from several miles in all directions.

One fall day, I warily approached through high grass and a subdued

chorus arose: “Tititititit.” The volume increased as I neared, but then they quieted while I observed. They saw me there, but as they wound among a large pile of their own I didn’t warrant much alarm. They didn’t flee or coil, and only a few rattled halfheartedly off and on when I moved. They came and went from the pit’s entrance, which left an unanswered question: how many more were below? It could have been 10 times the 40 up above.

Few natural settings elicit more respect than does a heap of rattlesnakes

eyeballing you, but there was majesty as well. I envisioned snake congregations like this occurring simultaneously over a wide expanse of western states, and then I imagined this scene unfolding backward through time long before humans set foot there. And in that moment it was clearer yet that they, the prairie rattlesnake, belong on earth no less than do we. ■

Mark Harris is an author and the associate director of the University of Nebraska State Museum.



Love on the Rocks

By Justin Haag and Jenny Nguyen

At least five rocks in Nebraska have names derived from a common theme: Lovers meeting their demise.

When one looks up at the steep-faced sentinels, it's not hard to surmise how they got their names. Perhaps it's our fear of falling that makes the observer's mind imagine a body jumping from the ridge above hundreds of feet to the hard ground below. The alliterated toponym Lover's Leap has been used throughout the ages, capturing the imaginations of those who marvel at the natural wonders.

An Internet list names 25 Lover's Leaps from coast to coast and many more throughout the world. The Cornhusker State is overlooked on the list but it is home to at least five topographical features named in such fashion – three in the west, two in the east.

In 1949, University of Nebraska professor Louise Pound gave recognition to Nebraska's rocks in the scholarly journal *Western Folklore*. In the article "Nebraska Legends of Lovers' Leaps," she writes about four such geological formations, one each in Banner, Dawes, Knox and Nance counties.

In the essay she tells of the romantic tragedies associated with each precipice, all of which involve Native Americans.

"With monotonous sameness the beautiful maiden, daughter of a stern chief, leaps to death from some steep cliff," Pound wrote. "More rarely, her suitor leaps also. These legends of suicide purport to be of Indian derivation and Indian tradition; as a rule they are vigorously championed as such. But skepticism is in order, I am

convinced, when tales associated with definite local sites are told of Indian courtships with tragic outcome."

Why all the stories involve Native Americans may merely be for effect, she wrote. She surmised that legends are told about history, and the Native Americans of course preceded the Euroamerican storytellers – the explorers, hunters, trappers and soldiers who were relaying the tales.

So, in celebration of Valentine's Day, here are the legends of the Lover's Leaps in Nebraska. Regardless of their historical authenticity, we can't help but be intrigued by the tales.

Banner County

Nebraska's westernmost Lover's Leap is in the Panhandle, near Harrisburg. Legend has it the young daughter of a Sioux Indian chief was in love with a young brave of her own tribe, but was ordered by her father to marry an Oglala brave who offered his finest ponies for her hand in matrimony. On the eve of the marriage, the young maiden and her sweetheart escaped with two of the horses. After the two were seen and captured, the angry chief had his daughter whipped

and her lover killed.

The next day, the young maiden appeared to be taking things well, however – dressed in her wedding attire and humming throughout the village. She sang her way up to the top of the escarpment, her tune turning increasingly sad along the way. As all watched and listened to the weird, yet sweet, singing, she stood at the eastern edge of the cliff and raised her arms to the sun. "A dozen braves rushed after her, but before they could reach her, she threw aside her blanket and stood for a moment as a statue of bronze in the morning sun. Then with a cry to her dead lover, she leaped over the cliff and was crushed to death on the rocks below."



ILLUSTRATION BY TIM REICHERT

Lover's Leap butte on private property south of Harrisburg in Banner County. Photo by Justin Haag.



Above: Lover's Leap Butte, Dawes County. Photo by Justin Haag.

Dawes County

Perhaps the most familiar Lover's Leap in the state features a cliff wall overlooking Crawford at Fort Robinson State Park. While most agree that it's one of the region's most familiar landmarks, not all agree on which tale about the butte is "the right one."

One story, an account from a 1936 article in the *Northwest Nebraska News*, has young Sioux chief Eagle Feather instantly falling in love with Crimson Cloud of the then rival

Cheyennes while on a reconnaissance mission in preparations for attack. He was so taken by her that he decided to not raid the tribe, but rather to come alone and capture the maiden. He arrived with two horses, literally swept her off her feet while she was alone at a nearby creek and carried her off with her consent. The two tribes soon realized the pair's forbidden relationship and began pursuit. "The lovers, caught between the two opposing forces, were driven to the highest point in the hills. Seeing no

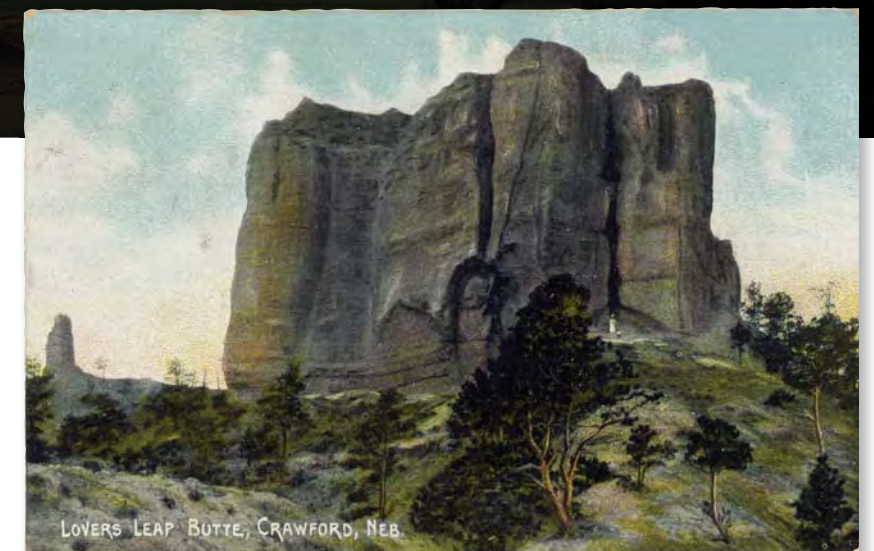
chance of escape, with their arms about each other they leaped from the high cliff and were crushed to death." The bright side, according to the tale: "The Sioux and Cheyenne did not continue their fight but became united against their common enemies and were henceforth as one people."

Pound wrote of another account she learned from a nearby resident. The woman, who claimed to have verified her story with a member of the Sioux while on a bus ride, said the battle was instead between the Crows and Sioux.

After the Crows killed a noble Sioux warrior who was engaged to the chief's daughter, the brokenhearted maiden jumped off the butte to "rejoin her lover in spirit land."

Knox County

The Maiden's Leap in Knox County is located east of Niobrara, easily viewed on the south side of Highway 12. The legend that surrounds the area is credited to Santee Indian origin. After an uprising in 1862, the Sioux



A lithograph postcard of the same butte from 1908. Notice the person in white standing at the base. Also, the chalk rock formation at the far left is referred to as "The Giant's Thumb."



Above: Lover's Leap in Fullerton at the Broken Arrow Wilderness park in Nance County. Opposite: Maiden's Leap by Niobrara in Knox County. Photos by Jenny Nguyen.

were transferred from Minnesota and Dakota Territory to live on the bank of the Missouri River beyond the town of Niobrara. There, they created the Santee settlement.

In Santee lived an Indian girl betrothed to her hard-nosed father, though she loved another brave. Unable to marry the handsome warrior of her choice, she rode one of her father's horses over the cliff and ended her life.

The outlaw Jesse James also had connection to this cliff, wrote Pound in *Nebraska Folklore*. When pursued by Indians, legend has him leaping on horseback from the cliff and swimming across the Missouri River to safety.

Nance County

Every year newlyweds, picnickers and family reunions gather under the shade of the Lover's Leap in Fullerton, but it is the owners Douglas and Darla Russell who keep Broken Arrow Wilderness's rich history alive.

In 1857, Illinois settlers John Edgington, his wife, and daughter

Nellie, and two brothers, Frank and John Wickland, camped along the Cedar River, which then ran almost directly beneath the leap. Frank and Nellie were engaged and would have married sooner if Mr. Edgington had not insisted that Frank gain "a start in life" first – homesteading offered a fitting challenge.

After dark, Pawnee Indians attacked the camp and captured the small party; the livestock and wagons were burned. The Indians indicated that the settlers would die, however Nellie would be spared to become the chief's "squaw" wife. At this, Frank protested and Nellie begged for death with the rest of the prisoners. Angry, the chief challenged Frank to prove his love by riding "down the bank." If he succeeded, he could have Nellie.

The leap, or bank, had a 283-foot drop and the constant cutting from the Cedar River ensured that it remained steep and sharp. Frank agreed without hesitation, bewildering the Indian chief. Despite the outcries from his companions, Frank climbed onto an



Indian pony and was led to the top of the hill. He rode over the fringe and leaped to his death, in full view of the party. The Indians silently released their prisoners, and Frank was buried on-site. Other settlers have immortalized this tale, which was rumored confirmed by survivors who returned to the area years later.

Another ill-fated story is referenced in a poem by Mrs. A.P. Jarvis, found in *Collection of Nebraska Pioneer Reminiscences*, which told of a Pawnee Indian maiden, the chieftain's only child, who fell in love with a "pale-face lad." You can guess what happened next. ■

We hope your Valentine's Day is full of love and laughter – and no cliff-jumping.

Hounds, Hares and 4-H

Shooting Stars Club members finish project following a beagle on a mentored rabbit hunt.

Story and photos
by Eric Fowler

Calin Ortiz had hunted rabbits before. But never with beagles. So last winter, on a hunt organized by his Lincoln Shooting Stars 4-H Club, the look on his face the first time Bella struck a rabbit's trail and let out a series of bellowing yips and yelps and howls, was about as predictable as sunrise.

"What the ...?" the 7th grader's face said.

"It was very, very loud," Ortiz said. "And strange."

That first bawl didn't come as soon as Shane Krause, who led the hunt at Wagon Train Lake State Recreation Area near Hickman, would have expected. After rendezvousing in the parking lot, Krause, his daughter, Emma, 4-H coach Rachel Carlson, Ortiz and Kolton Davis, another first-timer behind beagles, headed through a grassland recently cleared of eastern red cedars and other invasive trees. Bella sniffed her way around one of the many piles of trees left behind, seemingly perfect rabbit cover, but said nothing.

In the adjacent wooded draw, she zigged and zagged and burrowed her way through the thickest cover, letting out a few yips, but not enough to signal a trail. The hunters and mentors shadowed the dog, some in the woods and some on the edge, waiting patiently for a bunny to bolt, but Bella found none.

So the hunt moved back out to the tree piles. She said nothing at the second tree pile, but lit up on the third. Tail wagging, she crawled atop the tangled mess of limbs and trunks and then into them as far as she could, trying to pinpoint the source of the rabbit scent wafting out of the tangle.

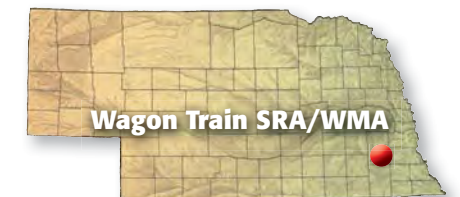
The joy of hunting bunnies with beagles is the chase. When spooked from whatever cover they are hiding in, a rabbit will run from the dogs, but not wanting to leave its home range, almost always circles back to from whence it came. In the midst of the chase, hunters



Emma Krause smiles as she watches the beagle named Bella root around a wood pile for a bunny.

are treated to the intermittent bursts of bellowing from the dog, announcing it has picked up a scent trail it may have briefly lost.

There was no chase at this tree pile. When Bella got too close for comfort



Wagon Train is a 315-acre watershed impoundment with 746 acres of land. This area offers electrical camp pads, primitive camping, boating, fishing, picnicking and a swimming beach.

Shane Krause takes a rabbit from Calin Ortiz, who dispatched the bunny when it was flushed from a wood pile at Wagon Train SRA and WMA near Hickman. Krause organized the hunt for members of the Shooting Stars 4-H Club in Lincoln to give kids in the Hunting and Wildlife Project a chance to experience rabbit hunting with a beagle.



Kolton Davis walks next to grass covered deadfall along the upper end of Wagon Train Lake hoping to flush a cottontail.



Bella, a beagle borrowed by Krause for the hunt, roots through the undergrowth at Wagon Train in search of rabbits.

and the bunny bolted, Ortiz was ready and dispensed it with a single shot from his 20-gauge, bolt action shotgun. “Yes!” he exclaimed.

Krause has been hunting rabbits since he was a boy. He picked it up from his father, **Stan Krause**, who had started hunting them as a youngster. For most of that time, the elder Krause hunted sans dogs. That changed when he moved to Lincoln in the 1970s, met other rabbit hunters who ran beagles and picked up one of his own.

Stan had several beagles through the years, the last of which died a few years ago. Shane has one at home, but managed to pick the dog that every litter has one of: the dog that won’t hunt.

Bella’s owners had much better luck. He met them through his son’s Cub Scout pack. They were bewildered

by the dog’s behavior whenever they ran across a rabbit on their walks. When they were telling Krause about it, he knew exactly what it was they were describing, and has been borrowing the dog ever since. “It’s kind of like having grandkids from what I hear,” Krause said. “You get them for the fun part, and then you send them home.”

The Shooting Stars 4-H Club has been serving youths age 8 to 18 in Lancaster County off and on for 30 or so years. It got a boost when the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission’s Outdoor Education Center opened in 2014. It meets at the indoor shooting range weekly, offering BB gun, air rifle and pistol, .22-cal. rifle and pistol, shotgun, muzzleloading and archery.

The rabbit hunt was a final exam of sorts for another club offering: Hunting and Wildlife. Part of the National 4-H Shooting Sports program curriculum, hunting and wildlife teaches kids about wildlife, their behavior and habitat needs before they set out on a hunt. “It’s basically trying to incorporate

outdoor and science education and hunting,” Carlson said. “We have a lot of kids in our 4-H group that are city kids and we’re trying to introduce and expand their horizons to more opportunities that are not in town.”

Krause, who volunteers both as a Hunter Education instructor and as a coach for the 4-H Shooting Stars, said the club wants to cover every aspect of the shooting sports, and hunting is one of them. Only a few clubs offer the Hunting and Wildlife Project.

This hunt was the second Krause organized. The first was a dove hunt in Sept. 2014, something they did again in 2015. He had another rabbit hunt and a squirrel hunt planned for this winter, and hoped to organize a pheasant hunt.

“They’re really good about practicing for their competitions and learning how to use their BB guns and air guns and .22s,” Krause said. “But there’s something else when you go outside to shoot trap and skeet and sporting clays. It’s like the kids come alive. They can move around, they can talk, they give each other a bunch of guff. Then when we go hunting, it’s once again something different and they seem to really latch onto it. Nobody is concerned whether they got something or they didn’t. They all seem to work together and they have fun and that’s the goal. To go out and learn in the outdoors and have fun while you’re doing it.”

On this hunt, Calin’s rabbit was the only one bagged. There were other chances, but they were fleeting at best. Bella ran a bunny right back to Emma Krause. “It was right in front of me,” she said. “As soon as I got my gun up and got the safety off and was ready to shoot, it ducked in the grass. And as I was waiting for it, it never came out.”

Davis didn’t mind. “It’s hunting,” he said. “I enjoy all of it.”

The next day, the same group with a few substitutes brought home three rabbits for the pot. Stan brought several pots to a Shooting Stars meeting and prepared a variety of rabbit dishes for the young hunters.

“It’s not any fun if you’re just shooting,” Krause said. “You’ve got to eat them, right?” ■

4-H Shooting Sports



When many people think of 4-H, they think about farm kids showing their calf at the county fair. But for many youths, 4-H means guns and bows thanks to the organization’s shooting sports program.

4-H Shooting Sports is one of 150 projects offered by 4-H through clubs, camps, after-school groups, school enrichment and other programs and events to youth age 5-18 in every county in Nebraska, helping them develop leadership, citizenship and life skills with a learn-by-doing approach. Other projects include everything from robotics to clothing care to theatre, far from “the days of cows and cookies,” said Steve Pritchard, University of Nebraska extension educator in Boone and Nance counties and head of 4-H shooting sports in Nebraska.

The program offers instruction and competitive shoots in archery, muzzleloading, shotgun, BB, air and .22-cal. rifle, and air and .22-cal. pistol, as well as a hunting and wildlife project that teaches youths about wildlife and their habitat. All are taught by certified volunteer instructors from a standardized curriculum used by 4-H programs across the country.

“The rifle, the bow, the pistol are just tools to work with kids, developing youth, that’s number one,” Pritchard said.

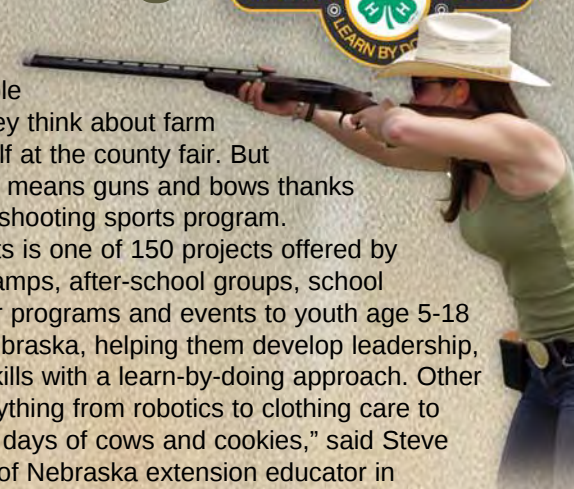
In Nebraska, 4,724 youths participated in a 4-H shooting sports program in Nebraska in 2015. Counting some enrolled in multiple disciplines more than once and adding others exposed to shooting at camps, fairs and other events, more than 22,000 youths participated in a shooting sports program in 2014, the fourth highest total in the nation. Pritchard said that is a testament to the more than 700 instructors who volunteered 40,000 hours to teaching the youths.

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission is a partner with 4-H in several Outdoor Skills and Shooting Skills summer camps that teach shooting. 4-H volunteers also often help teach shooting at the Outdoor Discovery Program events the Commission holds around the state each spring. And many clubs send teams to the annual Cornhusker Trap Shoot in Doniphan each spring, where a 4-H division was established long ago to give youths in rural counties that may not be able to field a high school team the chance to compete.

Pritchard said the shooting sports projects are life-long pursuits 4-Hers can enjoy with their families, making them a perfect fit for the organization. “They can enjoy that outdoor experience as good Lord’s willing and they have an interest in it,” he said.

As the youth development program of the Cooperative Extension System of land-grant universities, including the University of Nebraska, dating back to the Morrill acts of 1962 and 1890, 4-H is the nation’s largest youth development organization, with six million young members in all 3,007 counties in the United States.

For more on the 4-H Shooting Sports Program, go to 4h.unl.edu/ShootingSports.



Time Well Spent

What to do these winter months

By Cara Pesek

January and February should not be waiting room months for the outdoor enthusiast looking forward to spring. It's the time to put on one more layer of clothing and venture into the great, snowy world. Following are five great things happening these months. More information on these and many other events is available on the outdoor calendar on our website, OutdoorNebraska.gov. ■



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Learn to Ice Fish

Jan. 9

Eugene T. Mahoney State Park

Jan. 16

Yanney Heritage Park, Kearney

Game and Parks staff and volunteers will teach youth and adults the basics during two free events on Jan. 9 at CenturyLink Lake at Mahoney State Park and on Jan. 16 at Yanney Heritage Park in Kearney. The Mahoney clinic will run from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., and the Kearney clinic will take place from noon to 4 p.m., with an optional classroom clinic beforehand. Equipment, bait and hot cocoa will be available at both events on a first-come, first-served basis.

Hunting Bunnies

Until Feb. 28

Statewide

With or without beagles, a late-season rabbit hunt can be the icing on a memorable hunting season. Due to limited pressure statewide, public accessible areas in both east and west offer chances at hunting bunnies. The season remains open until Feb. 28, and on most days you'll have the fields completely to yourself.



PHOTO BY JON FARRAR



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

First Day Hikes **Jan. 1** Parks Across the State

Celebrate the first day of the new year by taking in the quiet beauty of Nebraska's winter landscape. Parks across the state including Ash Hollow State Historical Park, Chadron State Park, Fremont Lakes State Recreation Area, Platte River State Park, Ponca State Park and Eugene T. Mahoney State Park will offer guided first day hikes to celebrate the new year.

Ponca Snowman Contest

Before Mar. 20

Ponca State Park

Build a snowman at Ponca State Park before March 20 and you could win a stay in one of the park's beautiful mini-lodges. Bring your sleds, binoculars and cross country skis and take advantage of the park's sledding hills, birding opportunities and groomed cross-country skiing trails while you're at it.



PHOTO BY KELLY WOODMAN

Mahoney Ice Skating

All Month Long

Eugene T. Mahoney State Park

Bring the family to Eugene T. Mahoney State Park for old-fashioned winter fun in the park's ice skating pavilion.

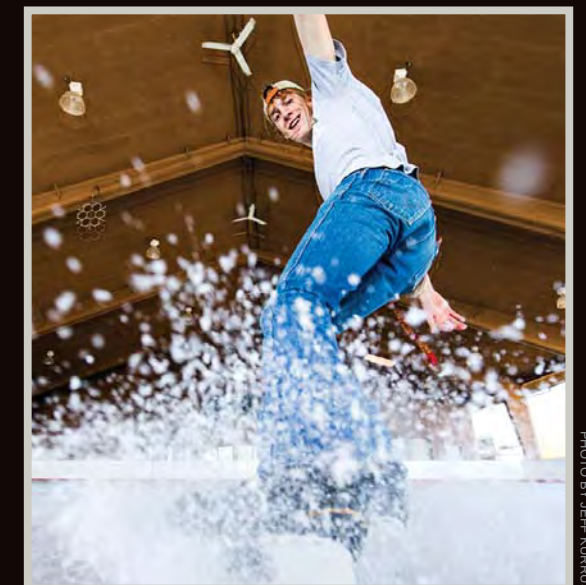


PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

A Precedent of Public Spirit

The Continuing Legacy of H.E. Pressey

By Carson Vaughan

Back then, of course, none of us gave a second thought to its namesake. To a bunch of 16-year-old boys, Pressey wasn't a man with a history or a mission or a gift to bestow – Pressey was an escape. Pressey was 17 miles from school, from parents, from our summer jobs. Pressey was 17 miles south of responsibility. Pressey was a bonfire and too many hot dogs; a forgotten beach ball floating downstream; a stolen can of Old Milwaukee split five ways. And at the moment, Pressey was four pretty girls on the far side of the South Loup River, tan skin and coy smiles, laughter whispering across the water.

We'd found this spot – *our* spot – the summer before. We followed the river well past the bridge, crawled up the bank, cut through a clearing in the trees, and there it was: a full campsite completely hidden from view, inaccessible by vehicle, the only road in or out blocked by a hundred yards of downed trees and undergrowth. A rusty old fire pit lay in the center, the iron grill rack still attached. Sunlight filtered through a canopy of cottonwoods and northern catalpa. As if forgotten from time: our secret, teenage Eden – and that was



Pressey is located 5 miles north of Oconto on Nebraska Highway 21 in Custer County. The area consists of 1,700 acres of land, including hills and steep canyons mostly covered by grasslands of the South Loup Valley. Diverse habitat types include riparian woodland, wetlands, native prairie and agricultural areas. Land management activities such as grazing rotations and prescribed fire are used to control the spread of invasive plants and to maintain wildlife habitat. Hiking trails and a campground are also available.

before we had company.

So captured we all were by our fondest memories we often forget the backdrop. As I grow older I find myself daydreaming more often, chewing on scenes from a grainy past. So many of them, I've come to realize, spawn from the Pressey Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in Custer County. Different stories, all of them connected by a single park, beautiful and unassuming, split sideways by what early Custer County resident and sometimes-poet George B. Mair repeatedly called "the laughing South Loup River." Boy Scout campouts. Elementary school field trips. Family reunions. Pressey blooms behind them all like a lesser-known Bierstadt painting, slanted sunrises and muddy banks. Few of us ever pictured a time when the picnic grounds weren't maintained, or when a clean gravel road didn't usher us into the valley. We never questioned the land's public use. Nor did we ask perhaps the most obvious question: Who is Pressey?

A Celebration

You're not likely to find Pressey WMA on a top-ten list anytime soon, but when it first opened on May 6, 1930 – the country still on edge just months after the Wall Street Crash of '29 – nearly 4,000 people attended the dedication ceremony for Nebraska's newest state park. They started trickling in around 11:30 that morning, toting toddlers and picnic baskets, checker-boarding their blankets and auto-cushions along the river. The church ladies set up lunch stands, and the men cobbled together a speaker's platform beneath the trees. Cardinals chirped. Hammers cracked. Later, a concert band from nearby Broken Bow filled the air with brass and woodwinds, and a group of enterprising locals staged a cowboy parade, complete with horseback acrobatics and re-enactments of the cattle days of yore – all of it a primer for the main event. In the midst of a Great Depression, good news swelled quickly.

Directing the whole affair was local luminary Emerson R. Purcell, editor of the *Custer County Chief* and a member of what was then called the State Game, Forestation & Parks Commission (NGFPC). Just months before, he'd been approached by a man – a farmer with a mustache like steel-



Nebraska Gov. A.J. Weaver (right) reads a statement of thanks to benefactor H.E. Pressey (left) at the opening ceremony of the Pressey State WMA. Between them sits Emerson R. Purcell, editor of the *Custer County Chief*, who helped facilitate the donation.



wool – who held in his hand a deed conveying to the State of Nebraska 80 acres of land straddling the South Loup River: 17 acres to the east of Highway 21, the remainder to the west. Prime real estate. According to an article published in the April 1930 issue of *Outdoor Nebraska*, a precursor to *NEBRASKAland*, "This is one of the most highly developed and beautiful tracts of land on this scenic river, and Nature has designed it for a delightful recreation ground."

Now early afternoon, Purcell, standing atop the wooden platform, sharply dressed in a three-piece suit, called the gathering to order. Following a short string of guest speakers, Purcell introduced the man with the deed, the benefactor whose name would forever be attached to the park they were gathered in now: Henry E. Pressey. Some called him "H.E.," others "Harry." Either way, he looked uncomfortable on stage, standing next to Purcell and Gov. A.J. Weaver, neck craned and shoulders slouched, cap in one hand and his cane in the other. He leaned heavily on his right leg, for his left was solid hackberry below the knee. He whittled the appendage himself.

"In a few well-chosen words," wrote the *Custer County Chief*, "he [Pressey] stated that it was a great pleasure for him to give this property to the state, expressing the hope that it would be of lasting benefit to the public as a recreation ground."

After a brief exchange, Weaver placed in Pressey's grip a gold watch engraved for the occasion, "as a token of the love and esteem of his Nebraska friends." Turning to face the audience, the governor, a much larger man than Pressey – more at ease before a crowd of thousands – delivered a half-hour speech, praising the mission of the one-year-old parks commission. When it began, just four state-owned recreation areas were available for public use. Today, he said, there are more than 40. But only one of them was donated outright to the people of Nebraska, and they were standing in it now. More than the land's intrinsic value, Pressey's gift, the governor proclaimed, has "established a precedent of public spirit with a high regard to the welfare of rotating generations."

Pine Barrens to Plains

Today, it's the name itself that rings a bell – not the man behind it. Aside from those stalwart curators at the local historical museum, few Custer County residents seem to remember that before Pressey, there was a Henry Eugene.



H.E. Pressey purchased the homestead of Civil War veteran Ferdinand Zimmerer, pictured here with grazing horses and cattle, in 1903. Zimmerer originally constructed a soddy along the South Loup River, and later upgraded to a framed wooden house.

There was a Harry. There was a prosperous farmer with a botanist’s eye and a flair for the experimental. There was a husband, and for a time, there was a father. And before all that, there was a child born the son of a carriage maker in the Pine Barrens of southern New Jersey, in a town called Hammonton, “the liveliest looking town on this part of the road,” wrote the eminent poet Walt Whitman in 1879.

Harry’s father, Henry True, arrived in Hammonton, New Jersey – midway between Philadelphia and Atlantic City – in 1858. A wheelwright by trade, Henry built the house Harry would grow up in, known locally as “the octagon house,” or sometimes “the round house.” Named for its eight-sided shape, it was likely the only one in Hammonton, though strangely, it wasn’t the first Henry had lived in. Just four

years earlier, he’d built a similar eight-sided home in the Greek Revival style on the shore of Messalonskee Lake in Oakland, Maine. In 1977, “The Pressey House” in Oakland was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

That creative gene seems to have cast a net over the entire family. Harry’s uncle, George W. Pressey, also a wheelwright in his early career, later became an inventor of national renown, patenting – among other products – a carriage spring known as “Pressey and Farnum’s Lever Spring,” the widely used Pioneer Stump Puller, the Pressey Folding Umbrella, and a bestselling chicken brooder. In 1888, he patented his most popular invention, the American Star Bicycle, later sold and manufactured by the H.B. Smith Company and currently on display at the Smithsonian

Museum.

“These inventions do not come as a happy inspiration to men, but are the outcome of deep and long-sustained effort,” according to the *Biographical, Genealogical and Descriptive History of the First Congressional District of New Jersey*, published in 1900. “It has been such qualities that have won Mr. [George W.] Pressey prominence among the mechanical inventors of the land and gained him a handsome competence.”

In 1859, Henry’s wife Julia gave birth to young Henry Eugene, whom friends later called Harry, probably to differentiate between he and his father. Harry spent the first two decades of his life in Hammonton. Few documents exist to color his formative years, though census records

show he was just one of seven sons, and that a 23-year-old laborer lived with the family for an uncertain period of time. Further, both Henry and Julia were leaders in the local Universalist church, hosting social functions to bolster their faith, which dismissed the Calvinist doctrine of predestination once dominant in American culture. No doubt Harry was exposed to Universalist beliefs at an early age. Regardless, by the time Harry turned 21, he considered himself a farmer, a trade he would soon follow 1,500 miles west to Custer County in central Nebraska.

In Aug. 1881, Harry purchased the homestead of a man named EJ Packard in the Wood River township. He plowed the land and repaired the crumbling dugout, and by the following September, he’d moved permanently onto the property. On Jan. 7, 1882, he filed a homestead pre-emption claim (entry no. 2909) with the land office in North Platte, and spent the next five years working to “prove up” on the land. He broke 52 acres, planting corn and oats. He built a new stable, hen house, hog corral and a corncrib. He upgraded from the dugout to a new sod house with a glass door, “habitable all the year,” he testified, and in an act of forward thinking, he planted 700 two-year-old “forest trees” at a cost of roughly \$200, nearly a third of his total expenditures in improving the property.

History seems to have poorly documented H.E. Pressey’s midlife. We do know, however, that in 1893, he married a woman 10 years his junior named Hannah Katherine Burbank. Born in Bitlis, Armenia (now eastern Turkey), Kate was the daughter of a Presbyterian missionary and doctor named L.T. Burbank. When they returned to America sometime around 1881, the church sent L.T. to spread the word in Custer County, specifically to those settlers along the South Loup River. “As he went from one settlement to another, preaching and encouraging the pioneers spiritually, he also administered to their physical needs as well,” according to W.L. Gaston’s *History of Custer County, Nebraska*. When Harry first met her, Kate was the first teacher in the history of the nearby village of Cumro.

A decade later, in 1903, Harry bought the land Pressey State WMA sits on today, formerly the ranch of Civil War veteran Ferdinand Zimmerer. Once the postmaster in Tuckerville, Zimmerer prospered during his time on the ranch, acquiring land beyond his original claim and building a framed house next to the old soddy. All of it now belonged to Harry. He and Kate moved into the house, and like he had on his original homestead, Harry quickly set to work planting a large flower garden and experimenting with non-native trees along the South Loup River, among them more than 5,000 pines of differing species, according to the Custer County Chief. Though he may not have shown it, Harry must have been excited when Kate first revealed she was related to botanist Luther Burbank, famous for developing more than 800 varieties of plants and flowers, the Shasta daisy and the blight-resistant russet Burbank potato among them. In curating the nature on his new property, Harry frequently consulted with the famous botanist.

“He has planted almost innumerable varieties of trees and shrubs, and has properly cared for them until they became a stately forest,” wrote *Outdoor Nebraska*. “The flower garden which he and his wife...maintained each season attracted



H.E. Pressey, who donated his land to the state of Nebraska, stands next to a sign bearing his name at Pressey WMA.

very great attention, and his garden and orchard have always been outstanding.”

The Pressey ranch must have become fairly well known in the years prior to Harry’s first meeting with Purcell. In addition to raising their adopted daughter, Julia, Kate taught weekly Sunday school classes in their home, and Harry regularly hired out for help on the farm. Traffic on the Pressey ranch increased even further when Harry – in a stroke of creativity that falls squarely in line with the eccentricities of his father and uncle – cobbled together a makeshift gondola system for crossing the South Loup. He strung a cable line from the east bank to the west and built a cable car just big enough to convey himself across without touching the water. Though ostensibly he built it for more practical purposes, word spread fast among children in the area, who often stopped by for a ride across the river.

“No matter what the conditions, the prospects, the circumstances, the home of H.E. Pressey seemed to many of us, in the old days, as an oasis in a desert of disappointment,” wrote friend and neighbor Harvard Lomax. “And life seemed brighter, the road less arduous, the burden lighter from the effects of its optimistic atmosphere.”

Alone on the Ranch

In the summer of 1924, that optimism began to fade. Kate, always so cheerful, grew tired. She couldn’t finish a meal, could barely stomach a few bites. She felt nauseous. She lost too much weight. Come fall, her symptoms unshakable, she traveled west to Denver, where St. Joseph’s Hospital diagnosed her with stomach cancer. She endured three months of serum treatments before returning to her husband on the South Loup, but the symptoms quickly resurfaced. A few weeks later, just before Thanksgiving, she and Harry returned to Denver. On Dec. 12, 1924, Kate passed away, Harry at her side. Afraid of raising their adopted

daughter alone, Harry – in what must have been one of the darker moments of his life – returned Julia, now 15, to the orphanage she came from.

Back in Custer County, the old Zimmerer house must have felt especially quiet to Harry during those next few months, now a childless widower. Nevertheless, he continued to work the farm, sowing seeds in the spring and harvesting in the fall. He nursed the garden and his trees in the orchard, orchestrating his multiple hired hands.

By the spring of 1930, he’d made up his mind to donate a portion of his land to the state of Nebraska. Perhaps, living alone now, he missed the activity that once surrounded his property. Perhaps he felt the same civic duty that his family seemed to have felt back in New Jersey, where they held positions in municipal government. Perhaps, passing 70, he just felt old, growing fearful of being forgotten before he was gone.

Either way, in May 1930, before the governor and a crowd of thousands, he deeded his first 80 acres. Thirteen years later, in 1943, he deeded the rest of his property, another 1,444 acres, to the NGFPC. The property included 60 acres of irrigated farmland, in addition to profitable hay and pastureland. In total, his donation was valued at roughly \$50,000. Accounting for inflation, that’s more than \$687,000 today. Harry retained the right to live on the land until his death, in addition to a stipend of \$1,000 per year paid for by the land’s revenue.

“Pressey park...is especially outstanding because of the fact that the land has all been donated by one person,” wrote the *Omaha World-Herald* in 1944. “For many years his big desire in life has been to leave to Nebraska his own picturesque land so that with each passing year thousands and thousands of people may enjoy its scenic value as a picnic ground and recreational center.”

His health failing, he spent the winter of 1944 with relatives in California. He returned home in March, but like Kate before him, his time away from the ranch didn’t seem to help. He grew worse. He called a doctor in Eddyville, who made a visit early in the second week of April, recommending he go to the hospital. On Tuesday, April 13, 1944, as he waited for the ambulance to arrive, Harry passed away. He was 85 years old.

A Low Profile

In the 71 years that have passed since Harry’s death, the Pressey WMA has quietly – for the most part – established itself as a mainstay along the river. In 1959, it crept back into the headlines when Mel Steen, then director of the state game commission, publicly opposed legislation mandating the extermination of prairie dogs on all state-owned lands. Steen noted that Pressey Park was the only park left in Nebraska with a native prairie dog population. “We are not opposed to prairie dog control,” Steen told the Lincoln Evening Star. “We are opposed to their total extermination on the only outdoor zoo in Nebraska where they are likely to survive indefinitely.”

When a group of Harry’s heirs filed suit against the State of Nebraska and state game commission in 1961, the park made headlines again. The heirs – 16 in total – claimed



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

Today, Pressey Wildlife Management Area is still an oasis attracting all manners of species of wildlife.

Pressey’s final (and largest) donation of land in 1943 was a “pretended” document, and that the original deed had been tampered with two months after Harry’s death. The suit was later dismissed by the Custer County District Court, and a motion for a new trial overruled.

For the most part, however, the park has kept a low profile. Locals know it. Others, less so. “Thousands upon thousands of people” may be a stretch – determining traffic at a free park is tricky – but the New Jersey native’s impact on central Nebraska is undeniable. In 1971, a small plaque was installed at the entrance to the park in Harry’s memory. And in 1978, the mayor of Oconto declared May 6 as the annual “Harry E. Pressey Day,” “Whereas, we owe a deep debt of gratitude to the man who made Pressey State Wildlife Management Area available to all of us.”

A Return to Pressey WMA

On a recent trip back home to Broken Bow, I detoured south to Pressey Park. In an hour the sun would dip below the hills, but right then the light was perfect, the sky empty and dark blue, the trees swaying in a dusty, yellow haze. A host of 15 or 20 campers milled about near the picnic shelter, their tents and camper trailers set up beside the road. They smiled and waved as I kept past them. I drove until I hit a sign that said “No Vehicles Beyond This Point.” I

parked the car, unleashed my dog and waded into the South Loup River. The water was warmer than I had expected. I pushed out into mid-stream, dug my toes into the cool sand. The campfires and the hidden campsites and those coy summer smiles – they’re all here, rushing past me beneath a mid-summer sun.

Out there, on the highway and in the cities and towns connected by it, so much has changed since Harry’s time. But right here, in the middle of the spring-fed South Loup River, water lapping at the cattails and the cottonwoods guarding the banks, so much is the same. Just like Harry envisioned, here I am, a man with his dog more than seven decades later, enjoying his gift, reliving the memories I’ve created here. Still today, the words of Harvard Lomax ring true:

“And life seemed brighter, the road less arduous, the burden lighter from the effects of its optimistic atmosphere.” And all of it for free. ■

Carson Vaughan is a freelance writer originally from Broken Bow. He is currently writing his way across the lower 48 states in a renovated 1968 travel trailer. His work has appeared in The New York Times, Chicago Tribune, National Geographic, Travel + Leisure and more. To read more of Carson’s work visit CarsonVaughan.com, and follow his travels at LocalColorXC.com.

From There to Here

A dog's life across Nebraska.

By Patrick Mainelli

In the colder reaches of January my dog and I play this game. After the sun's gone down, the dinner's dishes scrubbed and stacked, the baby returned quiet and dreaming to her crib, we take a walk. The dog, Suzzy, pulls me by leash across the quarter mile of snow-blown pavement that leads to the empty plain of the old Fontenelle Golf Course in North Omaha.

When we get there I undo her leash and she turns to me, looking up in the oily mix of moon and street light, waiting.

"Okay," I tell her.

Then she's gone, springing above the snow, plunging half submerged a moment later. The game is simply that I follow where she goes, through the empty fairway, over the gnarled and weeded fence, onto the frozen lake, into the island of trees. As a piece of urban land – surrounded by gas stations, liquor stores, pharmacies – the failed golf course is necessarily defined by its absence. It has become, by virtue of its purposelessness, a wild thing.

Suzzy the dog was once Elsie the dog. Until we came along she lived on several hundred acres of Sandhill ranchland in Hooker County. She was the last of her litter to be adopted off the ranch, excused from a life of earnest work and the constant company of other dogs. Though she has largely grown accustomed to her new place in the world, there remains, it seems, something laying idle inside her. With no cattle to move, no passing deer to pursue, she can now be found, most hours of most days, in the living room, her nose pressed flat against the window, steaming and unsteaming, steaming and unsteaming her view to the outside.

After jumping the wire fence and onto the frozen lake, Suzzy runs from one teacup pool of melted water to the next, eagerly lapping up the chill. I should stop this, I've tried actually,

but there she is. Though I call it a lake, the water we walk across might more precisely be known by its other name. Though its quiet and bone stillness seem real enough, the City refers to these kinds of variously-scattered, deliberately-engineered urban ponds as stormwater detention basins – any resemblance to the natural phenomenon known as lakes is merely coincidental.

As she stops to drink, I stop too. In the sky, the stars – arranged here in the same pattern visible anywhere else in this quarter of the world. Though they compete with the surfeit energies of so many other droning lights, I can still make out the major players: Sirius, Bellatrix, Regulus, Polaris. Beside the bleeding hum of the horizon's prolific glow their vibrancy feels, at best, an afterthought. Like the wasted space of an unwanted golf course, their purpose is unclear.

When she's done with the water Suzzy scales the bank of the small island in the middle of the ice. Here she knows her favorite trees to inspect, her favorite shores to take watch from. On the ground are already layers and layers of prints pressed into the snow. If I look closely I will see what I already know – every paw is hers; every boot, mine.

On the five hour drive from the Sandhills to the city she mostly

trembled in a ball on the floor. When we stopped in North Platte for lunch she tongued soft-serve in a drive-thru, peed on the white lines of a Wal-Mart parking lot and seemed to feel a little better.

In the following days, we gave her shots to stay healthy and a collar to stay found, and though those first weeks were hard, she quickly made use of that most profound animal ability – she adapted.

There are times, though, when I wonder which life she has preferred. Was it worth it to trade nights in the barn, piled among your many brothers and sisters, for a cotton pad on the living room floor? Could those organic, grain-free, dehydrated pellets we put in her bowl ever compare to the scavenged viscera of a pronghorn bleeding out beneath the tree? Did she ever think of it? Could she?

Regardless, when we leave the ice and the island and the immutable stars behind she is as anxious to go home as she is to go anywhere. Watching her sprint full-bodied into the cold and total white of the evening, I think there could be nothing else, anywhere else, more alive in the world. And if I whistle and she returns, retracing the postholes her legs have driven into the snow, she will look up at me, ice in her beard, with eyes so bright and hungry I cannot help but follow. ■

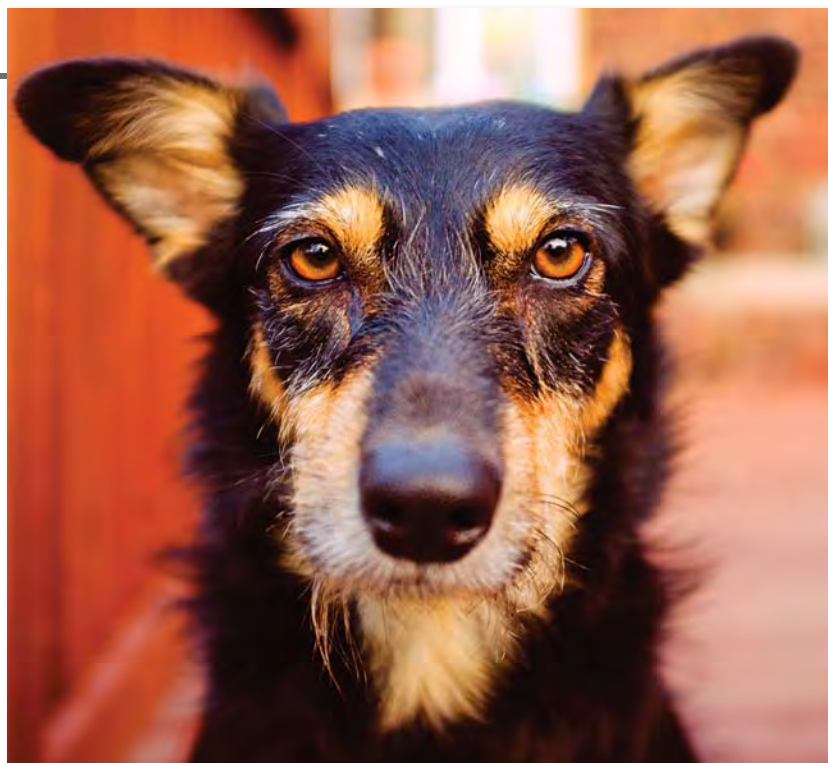


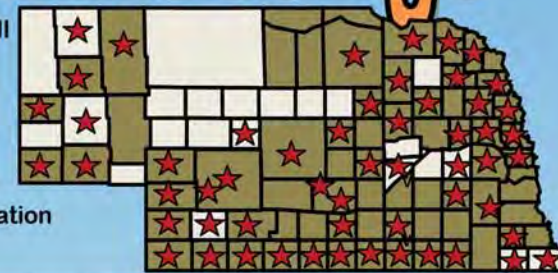
PHOTO BY PATRICK MAINELLI

CRP Informational Meetings

General CRP Signup
Dec. 1st - Feb. 26th

A series of informational meetings will be held across the state concerning the Conservation Reserve Program.

Soil rental rates have increased significantly in some areas. Learn of these new rates and all your conservation program options.



Antelope County UNL Extension Service 501 Main St. Suite 98 Neligh January 14 7:00-9:00pm CST	Boone County Cornerstone Bank 240 S 3rd. St. Albion January 5 7:00-9:00pm CST	Box Butte County Alliance Public Library 1750 Sweetwater Ave Alliance January 7 11:00-2:00 MST	Buffalo County Community Building 301 Alba Ave Ravenna January 19 12:00-2:00pm CST	Buffalo County Community Building 110 N Main St. Amherst January 21 12:00-2:00pm CST	Burt County 1st National Bank Northeast 448 South 13th St Tekamah January 5 12:00-1:30pm CST	Burt County City Auditorium (Rosen Rm.) 401 N. Oakland Ave Oakland January 7 6:00-8:00pm CST	Butler County Hruska Memorial Public Library 399 5th Street David City January 7 1:00-2:30pm CST
Cedar County Auditorium 101 N. Broadway Hartington January 7 12:00-02:00pm CST	Chase County MPCC Ext Campus 1324 Broadway Street Imperial December 3 11:00-1:00 MST	Cheyenne County South Platte NRD 551 Parkland Drive Sidney January 13 11:00-2:00 MST	Clay County Extension Office 322 Grant Ave Clay Center January 13 7:00-9:00pm CST	Coffax County Schuyler Golf Club 295 Higgins Drive Schuyler January 13 1:00-2:30pm CST	Cuming County Pizza Ranch 245 S Main Street West Point January 14 1:00-2:30pm CST	Custer County Mid-Plains Community College 2520 South E Street Broken Bow January 20 12:00-2:00pm CST	Dawes County Country Kitchen 1250 10th St W Chadron January 8 11:00-2:00 MST
Dixon County Ponca State Park 88090 Spur 26E Ponca January 7 6:00-8:00pm CST	Dodge County Veterans of Foreign Wars 108 N Main Street Hooper January 12 1:00-2:30pm CST	Douglas/Sarpy County Papio-Missouri River NRD 901 S. 154 Street Omaha January 13 12:00-1:30pm CST	Dundy County Farm Bureau Office 1303 A Street Benkelman December 2 11:00-1:00 MST	Franklin County Franklin Country Club Hwy 136 Franklin January 7 11:30-1:30 CST	Frontier County Ag Valley Coop 202 W. 2nd St Curtis January 11 9:30-11:00am CST	Furnas County Community Center 722 Patterson St Cambridge January 11 1:00-3:00pm CST	Harlan County Johnson Center 509 Main St Alma January 6 12:00-2:00pm CST
Hayes County American Legion Hall 73297 Ave 369 Hayes Center January 13 6:00-7:30pm CST	Hitchcock County USDA Service Center 36465 US HWY 34 Trenton January 14 3:00- 4:30pm CST	Holt County UNL Extension Service 128 N. 6th St. Suite 100 O'Neill January 6 3:00-5:00pm CST	Howard County The Gathering Place 612 Howard Ave. St. Paul January 7 5:30-7:30pm CST	Jefferson County Union Bank 1313 K St Fairbury January 6 7:00-9:00pm CST	Johnson County Nemaha NRD 62161 US-136 Tecumseh January 21 1:30-3:00pm CST	Kearney County USDA Service Center 1005 S Brown Ave Minden January 12 12:00-1:30pm CST	Keith County ESU 16 Building 3145 W 1st St. Ogallala January 5 530-8:00pm MST
Kimball County Eagles Club 218 S Chestnut St. Kimball November 17 7:00-11:00am MST	Knox County Community Center 101 S. Broadway Bloomfield January 13 10:00-12:00am CST	Lancaster County UNL Extension 444 Cherrycreek Rd Lincoln January 28 5:30 - 7:00pm CST	Lincoln County Wallace VFD 118 N Commercial Ave Wallace January 4 530-8:00pm CST	Lincoln County UNL Extension - WCREC Auditorium 348 E State Farm Rd North Platte January 12 530-8:00pm CST	Logan County Community Center 236 Main St. Stapleton January 7 530-8:00pm CST	Madison County Lifelong Learning Center-Northeast Community College 801 E. Benjamin Ave Norfolk January 5 12:00-3:00pm CST	Merrick County Merrick Foundation 1530 17th Ave Central City January 20 3:00-5:00pm CST
Morrill County USDA Service Center 902 Main St. Bridgeport January 12 11:00-2:00 MST	Nuckolls County Community Center 333 S Main Street Nelson January 6 12:00-2:00pm CST	Pawnee County Pawnee City Library 735 8th St. Pawnee City January 20 1:30-3:00pm CST	Perkins County USDA Service Center 927 Central Ave Grant December 8 9:00-11:00am MST	Red Willow County 4H Building 1412 West 5th Street McCook January 12 6:00-7:30pm CST	Richardson County Location TBD Falls City January 12 1:30-3:00pm CST	Saunders County Lower Platte North NRD 511 Commercial Park Road Wahoo January 12 7:00-8:30pm CST	Scottsbluff County North Platte NRD 100547 Airport Road Scottsbluff January 6 1:30-3:30pm MST
Seward County Cattle National Bank & Trust 104 S 5th Street Seward January 7 7:00-8:30pm CST	Sheridan County Legion Club 206 Sprague Street Rushville January 5 11:00-2:00 MST	Thayer County Statsney Community Center 1350 Dove Rd Hebron January 11 7:00-9:00pm CST	Valley County Lower Loup NRD 2620 Airport Drive Ord January 21 5:30-7:00pm CST	Washington County USDA Service Center 1060 Wilbur Street Blair January 11 12:00-1:30pm CST	Wayne County The Max. 109 Main St. Wayne January 13 6:00-8:00pm CST	Webster County Community Senior Center 555 W Gage St. Blue Hill January 13 11:00-1:00 CST	Wheeler County Fairgrounds Bartlett January 12 3:00-5:00pm CST

Plan to attend if you have an interest in learning more about how conservation programs can work to increase income on your farm or ranch. Additional cost-share incentives may exist in some areas.

Free meal may be included. Please contact your local USDA office to RSVP and speak with a local Farm Bill Wildlife Biologist. Visit www.NebraskaPF.com or www.CRPsignup.com for more information.





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GRAND ISLAND
NEBRASKA

Time to Draw

Drawing is a luxury I enjoy – when I have time.

By Tim Reigert

Since I was a child, I've loved comics and cartoons. All shapes and sizes: Newspapers – daily, Sunday morning; Comic books; *MAD Magazine*; *Peanuts*; and later, *Eerie*, *Creepy* and even underground comics like *ZAP* and the *Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers*– you name it.

I once cut out a bunch of *Marmaduke* single gag panels from the daily newspaper and glued them into a homemade book for my grandfather. He liked them and *Dennis the Menace*.

He said to me "Tim, wouldn't it be the best job in the world to draw a newspaper comic strip?" He'd see me drawing whenever we visited while growing up. Grandpa was always thinking, and he came up with some pretty good ideas over the years.

So while in school, and college, and at jobs I would continue to draw cartoons.

A few years ago my daughter Jamie wanted a subscription to *The New Yorker*. She and I would always look at the cartoons and laugh together. You see, she also grew up on cartoons: *Calvin and Hobbes*, *The*

Far Side, and more recently *MAD Magazine*.

In the back of *The New Yorker*, each week they have a "Cartoon Caption Contest" in which they run a cartoon without a caption. The readers are invited to write captions in which three finalists are chosen – then the fellow readers vote on the one they like best – which is then published in the next issue.

Here at *NEBRASKAland*, I was toying with the idea of starting a cartoon contest as well. You see, the *NEBRASKAland* Visitor contest has been going on now for some time in which we hide a bug and ask the readers to identify it. We draw from the submissions and the winner receives a *NEBRASKAland* mug.

I thought it might be nice to vary the mug contest with

cartoons each issue – write the caption for the readers sort-of-thing.

The editor and I discussed that we probably would need a year's worth before committing to this sort of thing so I started thinking and sketching ideas at home on my own time.

Ahhhh Time.

Time was when I was able to devote more of my work time to illustration for the magazine. Every now and then we would need a new map which I would render by hand (as most of my illustrations). And, occasionally, we would get a story that would benefit from artwork rather than photography – or that could not be shown with photography – something diagrammatic or a narrative that was meditative, for example.

But I fear those days are waning. More to do with less people – that sort of thing.

Other projects come down the pike and all are important.

On the bright side, I still enjoy what I do – being creative for a living is the best I can imagine – whether it's designing a story in the magazine,

a book, or illustrating with artwork. As the American entrepreneur, author and motivational speaker – Jim Rohn said...

"The worst days of those who enjoy what they do are better than the best days of those who don't."

Well, I still have hope that we may run out of bugs someday and we will run a cartoon caption contest. So I will try to find time – somewhere. ■

Tim grew up in Lincoln the son of a taxidermist and a musician. He has been *NEBRASKAland's* Art Director for the past 20 years.



A quick sketch idea for a cartoon. Some possible captions I was thinking of: "So that's what happened to Larry's leg!" or... "Maybe his uncle still hunts?" or... "Look at the size of that leg – he must have been a big man!"



◀ This photo was taken in 1964 after a deer hunt on my grandparents' farm and pastureland east of Steel City, Nebraska. My father, Dwayne Bostelman (not pictured), got us boys interested in deer hunting at a young age and now my father, my son and I still enjoy harvesting mature bucks on the property.

Pictured on left: Grandpa Ed Pingel (deceased), myself and my younger brother Bruce.

Pictured below: My father, Dwayne Bostelman, and grandpa Ed. – Gregg Bostelman, Grand Island, Nebraska



◀ This photo was taken after a morning hunt in October of 1960, south of Smith Lake State Wildlife Management Area. Pictured is Clem Mannion, my maternal grandfather, who stands behind his party's limit of ducks. My grandfather made the annual trek to the Sandhills every year for over 50 years. For him, it was a pilgrimage – to leave behind the city life of Omaha, where he worked for the REA Express, for the beauty and serenity of the High Plains.

Gramp's enthusiasm for this region spread quickly. My father (John), who turns 80 this February, my two brothers and I still make the annual trip. Recently, I enrolled in the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Grasslands Management Certificate program as my experiences continue to foster interest for all living creatures that call the Sandhills home. And, it all started with a cribbage-playing, devoted family man named Clem.

– Michael J. Murphy, Alexandria, Virginia

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. Photos will be returned.

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NEBRASKA
– GAME PARKS –

Venison Cabbage Rolls

My version of cabbage rolls, an homage to Nebraska's Eastern European heritage.

By Jenny Nguyen

Cabbage rolls are common in several cuisines, including the Balkans, Central, Northern and Eastern Europe, and also in West Asia. Having never had them prepared by no one other than myself, I can't claim that these are authentic by any stretch. However, I did choose to simmer the rolls in a tomato sauce, which does point to an Eastern European persuasion.

The cabbage rolls I made here are stuffed with freshly ground venison, bacon and long grain Jasmine rice. And because I spent so much money on a jar of saffron at "Whole Paycheck" for another recipe I made awhile back, I try to use it whenever I can. Saffron is delicious in sauces that are tomato-based.

Servings: 4-5

Prep Time: 45 minutes

Cooking Time: 1 hour and 30 minutes

Ingredients:

- 1 pound of freshly ground venison
- 3-4 ounces of ground bacon
- 1 head of cabbage
- 1 teaspoon of kosher salt, plus extra
- 1 teaspoon of garlic powder
- 1 egg
- ½ cup of uncooked long grain white rice
- 1 large onion, sliced
- 1 tablespoon of olive oil
- 1 tablespoon of tomato paste
- 2¼ cup of crushed tomatoes
- 1 14-ounce can of low-sodium beef broth
- 3 sprigs of fresh thyme
- 1 pinch of saffron
- Freshly cracked pepper
- 1 tablespoon of fresh Italian parsley, chopped

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Mix together ground venison, ground bacon, chopped parsley, 1 teaspoon of kosher salt, garlic powder, freshly cracked pepper, uncooked rice and egg. Cover and chill.

2. Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Core out the cabbage and discard discolored or dried out outer leaves. Place the cabbage in the boiling water, turning it occasionally. Allow cabbage head to cook for 2 minutes. Peel off leaves as they become more soft and pliable, and then run under cold water and drain. You should end up with 12-15 leaves.

3. With a small knife, shave away part of the protruding lower rib on each leaf to make leaves evenly flat. Next, place about 2 tablespoons of ground meat mixture towards the bottom of the cabbage leaf. Fold in the two sides, the bottom and then roll it all up. Repeat until you run out of ground meat.

4. In a large Dutch oven, heat 1 tablespoon of oil over medium heat. Add the sliced onion and sauté with a pinch of salt until translucent, about 5-7 minutes. Add tomato paste and stir for another minute – do not burn. Add

crushed tomatoes, beef broth, thyme sprigs and a pinch of saffron. Bring sauce to a simmer.

5. Finally, gently lay rolls in the sauce in one layer, seam side down. Lightly sprinkle with more salt and pepper. Ladle some sauce over rolls, cover and bake in a 350 degree oven for 1 hour and 20 minutes. Check halfway through to make sure sauce doesn't reduce too much. If so, add more stock. Check to see if meat is thoroughly cooked. Sprinkle freshly chopped parsley on top of rolls and serve warm with sauce. ■

This recipe and photograph originally appeared on Jenny's Food for Hunters blog at Foodforhunters.com.




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Nature's Beauty Through Photography

Nature abounds in beauty, both subtle and sublime. I credit photography with helping me see and appreciate the former. Over 15 years ago, I bought a used Nikon camera from then *NEBRASKAland* staff photographer Mike Forsberg, and under his patient tutelage, began my journey with photography.

Through the lens, I viewed familiar landscapes in ways I had not before. The hues of tallgrass prairie and the shape and lines of Sandhills dunes became more profound. Wildflowers were scrutinized from all angles seeking their perfect form.

Intrigued by the intricate feather patterns and colors, harvested game birds were no longer just table fare, but an artistic opportunity. For several springs, I photographed wild turkeys in the dappled shade of our backyard maple, finding that just the right angle and intensity of sunlight flashed brilliant reds and silvers among their seemingly all black breast feathers. On fall and winter days, prairie chickens (photo above), sharp-tailed grouse and rooster pheasants were laid on our front porch where the rays of the low afternoon sun warmed the feathers' colors and shadows brought forth rich textures to capture.

Viewed with new eyes, nature continues to surprise me.

*Gerry Steinauer, Botanist
December 11, 2015*



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