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Nebraskaland

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OCTOBER 2025

Jordy Bahl

**circles back
home**

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Cover: Jordy Bahl of Papillion pheasant hunts with her black Lab, Remi, on private land in Otoe County.
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JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

This page: A two-track road in Chase County winds past a lone tree and into the sunrise.

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

Nebraskaland
magazine

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Pheasants Forever and
Quail Forever of Nebraska
2025-26 Event Dates



Youth Mentor Hunt Dates

Table with 3 columns: County, Chapter, Date. Lists youth mentor hunt dates for various counties including Butler, Boone, Burt, Cass, York, Lancaster, Dakota/Thurston, Dixon, Douglas, and Madison/Stanton/Pierce.

Banquet Dates

Table with 3 columns: County, Chapter, Date. Lists banquet dates for various counties including Saunders, Colfax, Scotts Bluff, Red Willow, Platte, Furnas/Gosper, Jefferson, Saline, Seward, Gage, Chase, Washington, and Keith.



For additional events and to find an event near you, scan the QR code or visit: www.NebraskaPF.com

Our mission is to conserve pheasants, quail, and other wildlife through habitat improvements, public access, education, and conservation advocacy.

Table with 3 columns: County, Chapter, Date. Lists event dates for various counties including Duele/Garden, Burt, Cass, Lincoln, York, Lancaster, Dakota/Thurston, Dixon, Douglas, Thayer, Cheyenne, Kearney, Hamilton, and Wayne.

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Boni Edwards, North Platte
Burrowing Owl Pellet



Curt Blum, Lincoln
Otoe Milky Way



Peyton Weller, Lincoln
Water Droplet Leaf



Brian Beamer, Superior, Colorado
Cranes on the Roost



Steve Krout, Papillion
Green Heron Dinner



Connie Allen, Grand Island
Goose and Goslings

Chuck Hackenmiller, Lincoln
Windmill at
Mahoney State Park



Corrections:

Aug-Sept 2025 issue

- Page 28 – The image of the observation deck should be credited to Duane Reading/ Sandhills Prairie Refuge Association.

- Page 32 – The first Missouri River Outdoor Expo was hosted in September 2005. The wrong date was listed.

Send your comments and photos to:
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or email Jeff.Kurrus@Nebraska.gov

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



STONE AND GRASS

A lichen-covered stone lies amid prairie grasses at Rock Glen Wildlife Management Area in Jefferson County.

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



Eastern bluebird. CHRIS MASADA



Eastern phoebe. MARY CLAUSEN

BLUEBIRD BOUNCE BACK

By Joel Jorgensen, Nongame Bird Program Manager, NGPC

Wildlife is routinely forced to endure setbacks and occasionally even catastrophic events that can dramatically reduce overall population. Fortunately, many species are resilient and have the capacity to recover from sudden declines. An unexpected and notable drop in numbers of two of our favorite feathered creatures, and the subsequent rebound in the last few years, serves as a recent case study of a comeback.

Eastern bluebirds are a familiar songbird whose dashing plumage and cheery song have the potential to brighten up anyone's day. In 2021, in this very magazine, I wrote a short article lamenting the absence of eastern bluebirds at many of their usual haunts in Nebraska. Bluebird numbers suffered a dramatic sudden decline, perhaps as much as an 80% drop, following an intense mid-February cold spell that put much of the southern and central Great Plains in a deep-freeze. If you were in the state during that time, you probably still feel the chill deep in your bones from temperatures that sunk as low as over 30 degrees below zero.

The cold also reached well to our south and deep into states like Texas and Louisiana. Even though bluebirds are a semi-hardy species that regularly overwinter in Nebraska, the cold was associated with snow and ice, which likely covered critical food resources bluebirds and other species rely on to get them through the winter.

Numbers of **eastern phoebes** also suffered a similar fate. Phoebes are flycatchers that often nest under bridges or building eaves. This brown and white bird is perhaps more recognized by its "feee-bee" song over its appearance.

After a few years of these birds' absence being more notable than their presence, 2025 was the first year in a while when it seemed like both species' numbers were more or less back to normal. Wanting confirmation, I queried Steve Eno with Bluebirds Across Nebraska whether he and other "bluebirders" were witnessing the same sort of recovery.

Bluebirds Across Nebraska is an organization whose mission is to increase bluebird and other cavity nesting birds' numbers. Many members maintain bluebird trails, which are a series of bluebird nest boxes along a route or path. The consensus from BAN members was like mine: bluebird numbers have rebounded. A review of data on the online birding portal eBird also showed a bounce back for both species.

Following the February 2021 cold snap that caused the unanticipated and dramatic drop in the number of these two species, it was unclear whether or how quickly these species would recover. It now appears the slump was a blip rather than a trend or long-term consequence. This is good news for anyone who enjoys the sight of eastern bluebirds at their nest box or the song of the eastern phoebe in early spring.

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Beyond recreational water use, the property includes income-producing tillable acres that provide annual income through farming. This productive ground not only offsets ownership costs but also increases the parcel's investment appeal.

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This European-mounted turkey foot is a combination of bones from two turkey feet.
JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

FRANKENSTEIN TURKEY FOOT

By Jeff Kurrus

The idea came from the lazy — albeit patient — way of European mounting deer. Separate the buck’s head from the body, dig a hole and place the head in the hole.

Once it is recovered with dirt and a container is placed over the antlers to keep mice and other little toothy mammals from eating, let the bugs do the rest.

Remove a year later, hose off and you’re done.

Which begs the obvious question: Could the same steps be taken to European mount a turkey foot? The answer? Sort of.

After a successful spring turkey hunt two seasons ago, we removed the turkey’s feet with a pair of shears where the feathers began. Then, imagining a turkey foot is broken into multiple joints, in many ways like a human’s feet and hands, we dug a hole and buried both feet in a lidless plastic container and let the bugs go to work.

Nine months later, that was exactly the case, so well that nothing was left but the bones from both

feet, with at least 30 individual bones to puzzle together.

I gave an ornithologist friend a call to ask him if he had a model detailing what turkey foot bone attached to another bone, essentially the “knee bone connected to the thigh bone, the thigh bone connected ...” type of question.

He instructed I find something else to do with my time.

I then found a diagram online and started to piece my Frankenstein foot together like I was building a puzzle with multiple answers. Once I had what I felt was one modestly put-together turkey foot, I began the superglueing process.

One final touch of furniture polish on the claws and my European turkey-mounted foot was complete.

Just don’t touch it. Ever. If I were you, I wouldn’t even breathe on it.

But man it looks cool.



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WHY SO MANY FALL COLORS?

By Jennifer Ruyle, Outdoor Education Specialist, NGPC

It's that time of year when trees start to dress for winter. Maybe not in the same sense that we do — they can't check the weather forecast and put on layers before a chilly morning. But they prepare in other ways.

Inside their cells, tree leaves contain a pigment called chlorophyll that absorbs sunlight and reflects green light waves during photosynthesis. This causes leaves to look green. The UV rays in sunlight break down chlorophyll all the time, so new chlorophyll must constantly be made.

As days shorten toward autumn, deciduous trees start to store nitrogen and phosphorus in their woody parts rather than continuing to supply leaves with nutrients, protecting themselves and saving energy.

So, with fewer nutrients and less sunlight, leaves slow down their chlorophyll production, and the green color fades. This enables other pigments in the leaf to show through and reflect different colors.

The red maple leaf, below, is a great example of this

phenomenon. You can practically see the tree withdrawing nutrients from the leaf. Areas closest to the leaf stem and veins have the most chlorophyll production happening so they still appear green. Nutrients from the perimeter of the leaf have already been pulled back into the branch to be used for leaf production next year.

But why are there so many fall colors? In addition to chlorophyll, other pigments are present in leaves. Different types of trees have genetic differences that cause certain pigments to dominate their leaves in the fall and turn colors characteristic to their species.

Bowhunters that favor hunting in river bottoms in early fall will notice the golden yellow of cottonwoods. Hikers and birdwatchers in oak hickory woodlands will enjoy red, brown and golden bronze colors.

Of course, it doesn't happen all at once. Every tree is an individual in a unique place in the forest. And just like people, they get ready for winter in their own time.



For deciduous trees like this red maple, chlorophyll production diminishes in the fall, revealing a number of other colors.
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Pheasant and egg noodles with gravy. JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND

PHEASANT AND NOODLES

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

- Servings:** 4
Prep Time: 1 hour
Cooking Time: 2 hours
Ingredients:
- 4 to 6 pheasant breasts
 - Sea salt, to taste
 - 4 pats salted butter
 - 1 tsp. fresh sage, minced
 - ¼ tsp. dried thyme
 - ¼ tsp. dried rosemary
 - ¼ tsp. white pepper
 - ¼ tsp. paprika
 - 2 cups low-sodium chicken/game stock
 - Half an onion
 - 1 carrot, quartered
 - 1 rib of celery, quartered
 - 1 tbsp. chopped parsley
 - Reames Frozen Homestyle Egg Noodles (12 or 16 ounces)
- Cream of Chicken**
- 4 tbsp. salted butter
 - ½ cup all-purpose flour
 - 2 cups low-sodium chicken/game stock, warmed
 - 3 tsp. Better Than Bouillon

- Roasted Chicken Base**
- ¼ heaping tsp. celery seed
 - ¼ heaping tsp. onion salt
 - ¼ heaping tsp. garlic powder
 - 1 cup whole milk, warmed
1. Cream of chicken: In a medium-large saucepan over medium heat, melt 4 tablespoons of butter and allow to foam for a few seconds. Then add ½ cup of flour and whisk for 2 minutes; it will look dry and pebbly. Next, slowly add warmed chicken or game stock, whisking constantly, to form a smooth roux. Then stir in remaining ingredients, adding the warmed milk slowly while whisking. Bring to a simmer and cook until you get a thick, smooth sauce, stirring frequently, about 5 minutes. Adjust heat accordingly to prevent scorching the bottom. Take off heat.
2. Preheat the oven to 300 degrees Fahrenheit. Move the oven rack to the lower third. In a medium-size enameled Dutch oven, add pheasant

- in one layer and sprinkle with salt. Pour the cream of chicken over the pheasant, along with 4 pats of butter, sage, thyme, rosemary, white pepper and paprika. Then stir in 2 cups of stock, carrot, celery and onion. Bring to a simmer. Close the lid and transfer the pot to a preheated oven. Cook for 1-2 hours, or until the pheasant becomes tender.
3. Twenty minutes before you think the pheasant will be tender, add frozen noodles directly into the pheasant and gravy mixture and stir. If the mixture seems dry, add a bit more stock or water to loosen.
4. Cover and return the Dutch oven into the oven and continue cooking until the pheasant and noodles are tender. When done, cut the pheasant into bite-size pieces, and then return it to the pot. Discard onion, carrot and celery. Stir in chopped parsley and season to taste with salt and pepper. Serve pheasant and noodles by itself or over hot mashed potatoes.

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The Circle

The Jordy Bahl story is never about her

Story and photos by Jeff Kurrus

In softball, pitchers throw from “the circle.” It’s where the game is won or lost. And on the softball field, Nebraska native Jordy Bahl, the 2025 National Fastpitch Coaches Association Player of the Year, commands the circle like no other. But it’s not her most important circle.

Jordy, originally from Papillion, is a three-time All-American and a two-time national champion with the University of Oklahoma. After winning the second of those titles during her sophomore year with the Sooners in 2023, she decided to come home, and transferred to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. In the months that followed, she convinced a host of childhood teammates to play alongside her with the Huskers. In 2024, when expectations for the softball program were perhaps as high as they have ever been, she tore the ACL in her left knee in the Huskers’ first game. Her season was over before it began.

But because of the words that are so often used to describe her — tenacious, fierce, competitive, driven — fans knew her comeback would be epic. And it was. Not only did her stellar pitching return after the injury, Nebraska head coach Rhonda Revelle and her staff allowed Jordy to hit as well, a rare double-dip in college softball where pitchers usually just pitch. She solidified Revelle’s decision by becoming one of the nation’s best hitters, leading the Cornhuskers within one game of their first College World Series appearance since 2013.

It is in the softball circle where Jordy appears the most comfortable. That is until you see her don a hunting vest and, with a shotgun in hand, walk next to family in hopes of seeing a rooster pheasant flush.

Off the softball field, Jordy’s family is her circle. They are her comfort, peace and the ground beneath her feet.

Jordy Bahl and her Labrador retriever, Remi, pause during an Otoe County pheasant hunt, after Remi’s first retrieve.





When Jordy is with her family, like during this upland hunt, she is in full relaxation mode.



Jordy, seen here pitching against the University of Nebraska at Omaha at Connie Claussen Field in Omaha in 2025, is very familiar with throwing in front of a packed house.

The Circle

The scene was a familiar one in Nebraska each fall. On this day in Otoe County, the line of upland hunters clad in orange with guns in hand consisted of Jordy; her dad, Dave; two of her brothers, Hayden and Broden; and her soon-to-be husband, Trey Frahm.

In front of the group, Dave's Labrador retriever, Jessie, weaved left and right across the line, a dog well-versed in his job of flushing birds. Meanwhile, Jordy's black Lab, Remi, had to be

ushered back to her job more than once.

"J, if you're not going to work this dog," Dave called out, "we're going to have to get her with grandpa."

Jordy didn't respond. How could she? As one of Nebraska's most popular athletes, downtime for other pursuits — even dog training — is nearly nonexistent.

Two summers ago, when Jordy announced her return to Nebraska, the decision was reported by every major sporting news outlet in the country. Since then, she's become a folk hero of

sorts. While she has continued to field countless interviews from the likes of ESPN, Sports Illustrated and other titans of sports media, she would also show up at a local Sunday night Fellowship of Christian Athletes event in places like Gretna to talk about her relationship with God.

One might think the 23-year-old carries a little weight on her shoulders.

But in that pheasant field that day, while walking through a patch of standing milo, the only weights she carried were the semi-automatic shotgun in her hands, and the thought

that she should have found a bit more time to work Remi before the hunting season began.

A Weight Lifted

"This is why," Jordy said when asked about her decision to return to Nebraska. "This" was sitting in the cabin of family friend, Barry Brandt, and watching a Husker football game alongside her family after the pheasant hunt. She soaked in the conversations filtering through the room while everyone downed burgers and drinks from Runza. "This is where

I realize that all of that other stuff — the softball — it doesn't matter."

Jordy's softball success came early, garnering attention from universities nationwide during her high school years. But she felt different off the field. "I internalized a ton in high school," she said. "I was very alone."

She got involved with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, where she developed her relationship with God, and her anxiety improved. "I began to seek a greater purpose than softball," she said. "That's where my identity and purpose were. But with

this platform [softball], I could give back to Him."

During these years, Jordy bounced between church, the softball field and nature — with her family always nearby.

But her relationship with nature had begun long before. Dave had taken Jordy and her brothers hunting and fishing since they were little.

"I was there when Broden shot his first deer, a doe, and his first buck," Jordy said. She has also harvested multiple deer through the years, but squeezing the trigger is not her



Dave’s Lab Jessie retrieves a rooster during a Bahl family pheasant hunt.

favorite part of deer hunting. “I love being able to sit down outside in the middle of nowhere, with no one but my family knowing where I am.”

When she moved to Norman for college, that part of her life was no longer there. Feeling that separation during spring break her freshman year — in between two-a-day softball workouts — she got a tattoo: an outline of her home state on her right arm.

While grasping for any sort of connection she could muster, pressure and success at Oklahoma were at an all-time high. “And with the success,” Jordy said, “there came more expectation.”

During her sophomore year, while the rest of the athletic world was singing her praises, she was once again lost. She was hanging on every word her coaches said and, believe it or not, fearful of messing up and never seeing the field again.

“That fall, I got very far away from God,” she said. “I had shame. Doubt. Negative thoughts. Loneliness. My prayer life had gone to a minimum. I didn’t have light, but I wasn’t looking for light either.”

Going home was at the forefront of her mind.

Home

Days after the Sooners won the 2023 national championship, Jordy announced she was transferring to Nebraska.

Home has so many layers for her. There, she can listen to her dad tease her about Remi, and remind herself to watch a sunrise or sunset, just like she has been doing for so many years.

It’s where she can visit the same pitching coach — Darren Dubsky — she has had since she was 8 years old. To this day, whenever she needs a few words of encouragement, she knows he will be there.

Playing for the Huskers, she is again teammates with friends from her childhood — Bella Bacon, Ava Kuszak and others.

Nebraska is where she gets to be part of the day-to-day life of her family. Because the story of Jordy Bahl has never been all about her.

Let’s Go!

“Let’s go!” Jordy screamed. Her body rocked back and forth, and she was biting her nails as if she lived and died on every play.

Yet she was nowhere near a softball field. And there weren’t thousands of fans living on every one of her swings.

Instead, she was living on every dribble her brother, Bryson, then a high school basketball player, took.

Bryson was in a dogfight on the hardwood and Jordy, like all of the fans packed in the arena, was holding her breath with each three-pointer that left her brother’s hands.

Back in the pheasant field, Jordy had a similar feeling not 30 minutes after her dad questioned Remi’s training regimen during that Otoe County pheasant hunt. A rooster had flushed in front of the group as Jordy and Trey took a shot. The pheasant went down, but his head was upright as he fell into the tall grass. The bird would be on the move. Remi bolted, bounding toward the mark and disappearing as Jordy held out hope.

Her brothers and dad stopped mid-stride, ready to heckle her if Remi returned empty-handed.

Trey called out, “She’s coming back!”

A moment later, Jordy shouted: “She’s got the bird!” A smile covered her entire face before cutting her eyes toward her dad, who couldn’t help but grin.

Better Than a Tattoo

Now that Jordy has this dog training thing figured out, she might want a cat. On nights when her schedule is clear, she wants to do nothing but lie around. “I’m a big homebody,” she said.

While the rest of the world wants her to play softball for the next 15 years, Jordy, recently married but still just a college kid, doesn’t yet know what her future holds. She might teach. She might coach. “But I don’t want to leave Nebraska to do it,” she said.

Actually being home is better than a tattoo. It is where she can stand in the circle in front of a packed house of screaming fans, knowing the ones that matter most, the ones in her circle, will be there long after the game is over. **N**

The Jordy Rules

Through success and failure, Jordy has found these are fundamental rules for life.

- Know where you’re weak.
- Always be confident and share.
- Never stop learning and growing.
- Know where to find your identity.
- Don’t follow feelings, follow the truth.
- When it’s dark, search extra hard for the light.
- You train to be ready for the 5%.
- Your faith lets you know you’ll still be loved.



Jordy, her dad Dave, brothers Hayden and Broden, and Jordy’s husband Trey Frahm after an Otoe County family pheasant hunt.

Outdoor Nebraska

By Tim Reigert

Make time this month to experience the beauty of fall, from changing leaves to hunting seasons, great fishing opportunities and state park events. [N](#)



Youth pheasant hunting season

Oct. 18-19 | Statewide

This year's youth pheasant, quail and partridge season will be Oct. 18-19 and is open to hunters ages 15 and younger. Youth hunters do not need a permit to hunt during this time, but non-residents will need a hunting permit and habitat stamp. Adult mentors accompanying youth hunters (only one adult per youth) are allowed to hunt, but only at designated Special Youth Hunt locations. Game and Parks will release pheasants at specific wildlife management areas and the N-CORPE east tract this season. For more information, contact Game and Parks at 402-471-0641.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



Take kids trick-or-treating at a state park

Dates vary by park | Across the state

Take your kids trick-or-treating this Halloween season at a state park or state recreation area. Campers are encouraged to decorate and hand out treats. Activities are free and vary by park, but a park entry permit is required. Visit [Calendar](#). [OutdoorNebraska.gov](#) for details.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

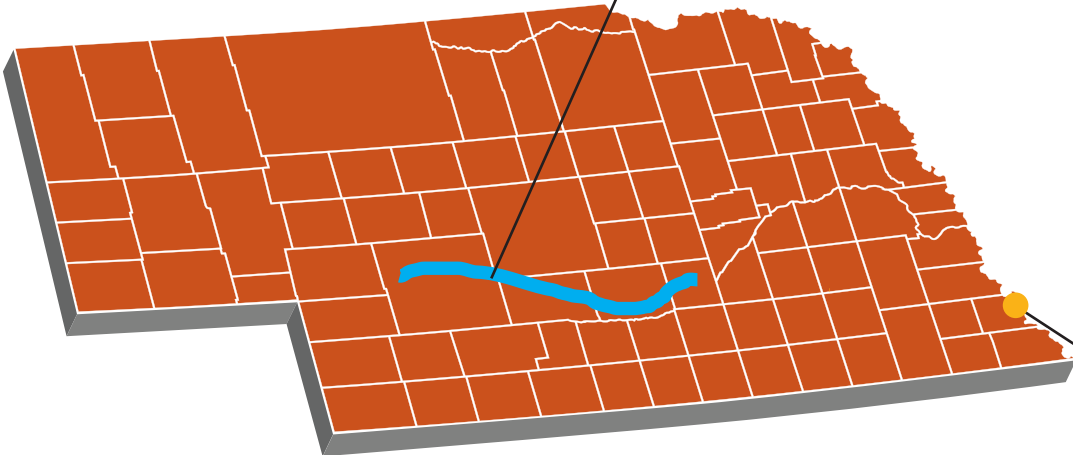


Fish for largemouth bass at interstate lakes

September to November
Central Nebraska

Fall is one of the best times to catch big bass, and one place they can be found is in Nebraska's interstate lakes — dozens of small water bodies scattered along Interstate 80 from Grand Island to Sutherland. According to fisheries biologist Daryl Bauer, they may contain largemouth bass as large as 5 or 6 pounds this year. You can fish more than one of these lakes in a day. Find a guide to the I-80 lakes on the Fishing Guides and Reports page at [OutdoorNebraska.gov](#).

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



What to Do in October



See the Harvest Supermoon this month

Oct. 6 | Statewide

The Harvest Moon — also known as the Hunter's Moon — will reach peak illumination at 10:48 p.m. Central Time on Monday, Oct. 6. Plus, it's a supermoon — the very first of 2025 — so it's bigger and brighter than usual. You can use binoculars, a telescope or your naked eye. Use a lunar filter on telescopes to reduce glare. [JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND](#)

Fall events in Nebraska City

Multiple dates in October
Nebraska City

October in Nebraska City offers a variety of fall-themed events, including the Scarecrow Festival at Kimmel Orchard, the Nebraska City Art Walk and All Hallows' Eve weekends at Arbor Day Farm. Additionally, Arbor Day Farm will host Oktoberfest at Steinhart Lodge on Oct. 17. Check each venue for details. [JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND](#)



THE PAWNEE SEED SAVERS

Nebraska gardeners replenish ancestral foods

Story and photos by Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

Once numbering 60,000 strong, the Pawnee people lived in the Loup, North Platte and Republican river basins in present-day Nebraska and northern Kansas. They were semi-nomadic people, hunters and gatherers for parts of the year and cultivators during the growing season.

In spring, the Pawnee lived in permanent cities and focused their energies on tending crops such as

corn, beans and squash — known as the “three sisters.” In June, hunters traveled west to the High Plains, where they spent the summer in mobile tipis, to follow the bison herds that roamed the prairies by the millions. In late summer, they returned to their respective villages to harvest crops, and in late October or November, the hunters left again for the winter hunt. The Pawnee returned to their dome-



Miller, Alfred Jacobs. "Pawnee Running Buffalo." 1858-1860. Watercolor. 8 1/4 x 11 11/16 in. Commissioned by William T. Walters.



Deb Echo-Hawk of Pawnee, Oklahoma, founded the Pawnee Seed Preservation Society to replenish ancestral foods lost during tribal displacement. BRYAN DOWNEY



Regional Park Superintendent Laura Rose (left); gardener Ronnie O'Brien and her granddaughter, Louie Green, of Shelton; and Fort Kearny State Historical Park Superintendent Gene Hunt stand near Arikara sunflowers.



Catlin, George. "Encampment of Pawnee Indians at Sunset." 1861-1869. Oil on paperboard. 18½ x 24¾ in. Paul Mellon Collection.

shaped earthen lodges in late winter to begin another cycle of their variegated lives on the Plains — according to the Oklahoma Historical Society.

They called themselves Chatiks si Chatiks, meaning "men of men." Explorer Francisco Vásquez de Coronado was the first European to meet the Pawnee in 1541 and noted the nation's powerful social and governmental structure. In the early 1700s, the Pawnee began a lucrative and mutually respectful trading partnership with the French, with whom they later allied to fight Spanish expansion into the Great Plains.

However, following the Treaty of Paris in 1763, which ended the French and Indian War between France and Great Britain over control

of North America, the French began withdrawing from the Louisiana Territory. France's departure resulted in the Pawnee becoming increasingly vulnerable to attacks by their Sioux and Osage enemies, who had allied with the British.

Subsequently, the encroachment of hostile tribes became a major factor impacting the Pawnee way of life, as well as the effects of colonialism and the westward movement of Euro-American settlers that overtook the Plains into the 19th century.

Disrupted Foodways

By 1850, smallpox and cholera had reduced the Pawnee population to about 6,000. When missionaries Gottlieb Frederick Oehler and David Zeisberger Smith visited the Pawnee in eastern Nebraska in 1851, they found a starving people whose traditional foodways were being dismantled. Oehler and Zeisberger's account of the visit was reprinted in the winter 2006 issue of "Nebraska History."

Despite allying with the U.S. Government, who had promised resources and assistance in exchange for lands that enabled westward expansion, the missionaries described the Pawnee's plight as thus:

"The road of the emigrants lies through the country belonging to the Indians; their hunting grounds are traversed by the long lines of white-covered wagons, and the buffaloes, the principal subsistence of the Indians, are thereby chased away to more distant and more secluded pastures ... and they have thereby been reduced to poverty and want. For all these privations they have been promised presents, as a compensation, from our Government, but thus far they have received nothing."

The final blow came in 1874-1875. Increasing pressures and conflicts with Nebraska settlers resulted in the Pawnee's decision to move to Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma,



Miller, Alfred Jacobs. "Pawnee Indians Watching the Caravan." 1858-1860. Watercolor. 10 7/16 x 9 7/16 in. Commissioned by William T. Walters.

where the Pawnee Nation now resides. This displacement was more than geographical. Not only did they lose many traditions and ceremonies, some that were tied to the cycles of the seasons in their homeland, the Pawnee diet also was completely changed to rations and unfamiliar foods.

Chef Anthony Warrior, the Indianpreneurship director at the Nebraska Indian Community College in Santee, explained the predicament: If you take ancestral varieties of pumpkin, corn or beans that thrived in the Great Lakes or the Great Plains regions, and try to grow them in Oklahoma, they would fail because the soil and climate are completely different.

"And that's how you conquer people," Warrior said. "When you take people's food systems away, you destroy them When you can sever that tie, you then invite [the body] to disease and depression — and control."

Warrior pointed to the argument for

eating according to one's genetics, a field of study called nutrigenomics, which explores the complex relationship between our genes and the foods we eat, and how it impacts our health outcomes and risk of diseases.

Even Oehler and Zeisberger recognized this breaking nearly 175 years ago, that want and hunger had "shak[en] that tenacity and attachment so strongly developed in the Indian character, for long cherished customs, and making them more pliable in adopting the arts of civilization."

The Seed Warriors

For Native Americans living on reservations, displacement and assimilation came at the high costs of poor health and the loss of access and knowledge of their traditional foodways. After generations of eating nutrient-deficient, processed foods such as fry bread, a food created during hardship using meager



Bi-colored painted-like-a-horse beans are white and brown and/or black. Hunt admires the beans' striking appearance and sweet flavor.



In 2024, Hunt grew blue speckled corn in his Pawnee garden.

government rations, diabetes and heart disease have become two of the leading causes of death among Native Americans.

Recognizing the declining physical and mental health of their people, there has been a call from recent generations to restore traditional diets. One of those people is Deb Echo-Hawk (Pawnee), who started the Pawnee Seed Preservation Project in 1998. Over time, ancestral seeds diminished because they did not grow well in Oklahoma, so what was still viable was precious — remnants of vegetables and fruit that were the very last of their kind. The Pawnee cultural committee and chiefs asked families to come forward with ancestral seeds, to be given to Echo-Hawk, the Keeper of the Seeds, for replenishment.

Then in 2003, Echo-Hawk received

a call from Nebraska. Ronnie O'Brien of Shelton was working at The Archway in Kearney at the time, and she was reaching out to the Pawnee about creating a historical program on Native gardening.

Echo-Hawk had a better idea. Would O'Brien help the Pawnee bring their ancestral crops back home?

The Seed Keepers

That first year in 2004, O'Brien received 25 seeds of Pawnee eagle corn, Skidi red popcorn and yellow flint, and as the daughter of a corn farmer, she planted the seeds in the way Nebraskans typically do in late April.

"I was all excited — and they all rotted in the ground. It was too early and too cold," O'Brien said.

The next year, Echo-Hawk sent 25 more seeds to Nebraska, but told O'Brien that it was the last that she could spare. The Pawnee had to keep the few remaining seeds in Oklahoma for posterity if the experiment in Nebraska failed. Thankfully, the second crop survived. O'Brien said that it took about seven years for the corns' genetics to strengthen and take off.

"Over time, as we built trust with [the Pawnee], they would make more seeds available ... another family might come forward with something else out of their sacred bundle that hadn't been [planted] for a long time," O'Brien explained.

This special partnership with the Pawnee has lasted over two decades, and during that time, the project has recruited 20-plus volunteer growers across Nebraska. It's become a network of gardeners exchanging their experiences and ideas on how to grow healthier, more robust crops each year. Together, they grow over 20 varieties of Pawnee corn, in addition to ancestral varieties of beans, squash, sunflower seeds and watermelon.



Omaha pumpkins can grow as large as 10 pounds, but most are closer to 6 pounds. It is a "pie pumpkin," a variety that is ideal for cooking.

In the fall, the crops are harvested and transported to Pawnee, Oklahoma, for use in ceremonial meals. Echo-Hawk hopes that by providing Native people access to foods that their DNA recognizes, the Pawnee could lead healthier lives and feel more connected with their history.

One gardener rolling up his sleeves is Gene Hunt, who has been superintendent at Fort Kearny State Historical Park for 52 years. This is Hunt's 22nd season growing food for the Pawnee.

Pawnee Gardens

In August 2024, Hunt led the way across the green expanse of lawn at the state historical park. O'Brien, South-Central Regional Park Superintendent Laura Rose and I stopped at a rectangular patch of tendrilled, sprawling vines. Large, ground-covering leaves crowded our view, while yellow-orange, starfish-like flowers floated over the green foliage. The park superintendent sank to his knees and pushed away vines to reveal an elongated yellow-green-



Kahheetah Barnoskie (Pawnee) is a University of Nebraska-Lincoln graduate agronomy student. She helps the Pawnee Seed Preservation Society collect data on the ancestral corn grown by Nebraska gardeners.

striped pumpkin lying in the soil. It was an unripe Omaha pumpkin, one of the squashes that Hunt carefully tends for the Pawnee.

In another garden patch, a stand of Arikara sunflowers stretched toward the sky. The Pawnees refer to the sunflower as their “fourth sister.” Not only did they eat the seeds, the Pawnees also planted sunflowers around their gardens as natural fencing to help keep out rabbits and even bison. At full height, the Arikara sunflower can grow 10 feet tall.

In a different area of the garden, Hunt stripped a bean pod to reveal striking bi-colored seeds of white and brown and/or black. Aptly called painted-like-a-horse beans, they’re delicious and sweet-tasting, according to Hunt.

And although he didn’t grow any Mandan squash in 2024, Hunt spied a stray squash growing among his blue speckled corn, where Kahheetah Barnoskie (Pawnee), a University of Nebraska-Lincoln graduate agronomy student, was busy measuring plants and taking notes. Of all the sisters, corn is the most sacred to the Pawnee. It has a spiritual value that’s important to their daily lives, and they believe the crop holds healing powers. Corn is

a large piece of the Pawnee story, and having been lost for generations, being able to bring back these ancestral varieties has been encouraging.

Thus, Barnoskie spends her summers in Nebraska traveling from garden to garden to collect data for the Pawnee Seed Preservation Society. This information helps the society identify which corn varieties are doing well and where, and to determine what to plant the following year. Barnoskie’s work is establishing a baseline that would help future gardeners replicate this success.

“When you grow something for one year or two years, you really don’t know [what it’s supposed to look like],” O’Brien explained, especially if it’s a crop that hasn’t been grown or seen in decades. But as the genetics get stronger through selective planting, the crop starts to change.

“So now we have it back in its homeland, and this corn is getting stronger and thriving, and it’s showing us what this variety is supposed to be like. And it’s here in Kearney where [there’s] clay in the soil, which is essential, too. [There are] all kinds of ideal situations going on here for this beautiful crop And this one’s going

to teach us more this year than we know about this variety,” O’Brien said.

Share the Harvest

Although widely known for his lightheartedness and jovial laugh, Hunt tends his Pawnee garden with seriousness and pride. Of all the crops he’s grown, caring for the corn makes him most anxious.

“There’s so much pressure on the corn, because you feel like you’re given something that has been on the verge of extinction for 150 years ... the corn is very sacred,” Hunt said.

But the effort is well worth the toil. Gardeners get to experience the fruits of their labors in October, when the harvest has been successful.

In October 2023, Hunt and O’Brien helped facilitate a dinner to honor the Pawnee Scouts; an estimated 1,000 Pawnees served as military allies to the United States Army between 1864 and 1877. The dinner coincided with the annual Share the Harvest event, and more than 100 Pawnee members attended at Fort Kearny State Recreation Area, as well as the Nebraska Army National Guard and former Sen. John Lowe.

Volunteers prepared bison raised at Fort Robinson and cooked the ancestral beans gardeners grew. They also made 20 loaves of pumpkin bread.

In working with the Nebraska gardeners, the Pawnee are able to forge alliances that maintain homeland ties. They consider many of the gardeners like “family,” and Echo-Hawk believes their Pawnee ancestors would be pleased with their work, particularly in replenishing the corn.

“We now safeguard around 24 ancestral corn varieties,” Echo-Hawk said. “As we work toward expanding our gardens, we look forward to tasting each variety and strengthening our spiritual connection to the past — honoring our ancestors by nourishing our people once again.” 🍁



Fort Kearny SHP Superintendent Gene Hunt is one of 20-plus Nebraska gardeners helping the Pawnee Nation replenish their ancestral crops.

How Lincoln Became the Nebraska State Capital

By David L. Bristow, Nebraska State Historical Society

Nebraskans knew Lincoln would be the new state capital before they knew where Lincoln would be.

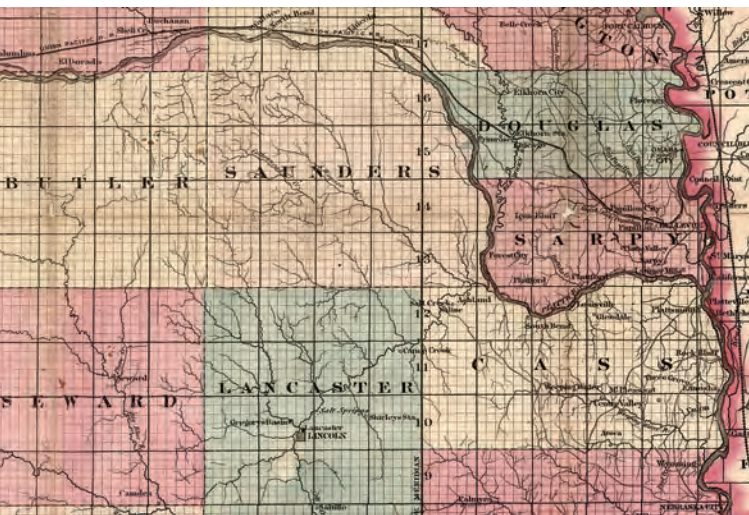
Omaha had been the territorial capital since 1855. It had maintained its status through shady parliamentary maneuvers, bribery and, at times, even by physical intimidation. By 1867, most Nebraskans wanted to start fresh someplace else.

The Platte River was Nebraska's big dividing line. The unbridged river was tricky to cross, and most Nebraskans lived south of it. They wanted the capital on their side of the river.

The legislature debated a bill to move the capital to a to-be-determined location within a four-county area: Seward, Lancaster or the southern half of Butler or Saunders counties.

Omaha did not have the votes to stop the bill. The best they could do was to attach some poison-pill amendments in the hope of siphoning off votes. One amendment required that the capital city would also get the state university, agricultural college, prison and insane asylum. Omahans hoped this would discourage towns not in the running for the capital to vote against the bill.

Another amendment required the capital city to be named "Lincoln" in honor of the late president — an idea sure to be



Detail of Colton's New Sectional Map of the State of Nebraska, 1868, showing "Omaha City" and the four-county area (Seward, Lancaster and southern Butler and Saunders) in which the capital city was to be located. NSHS M782 1868 C72 C3



Southwest corner of Ninth and O streets, Lincoln, 1868. NSHS RG2158-PH10-55



Market Square, Lincoln. Photo of an 1868 painting. NSHS RG2158-PH0-217



The new state capitol, shown here under construction in 1868, was a rush job to ensure that the legislature had a place to meet. Replaced in 1879-88, it stood on the site of the present capitol. NSHS RG1234-PH4-4

and Pawnee City. They also thought — mistakenly, it turned out — that Lancaster’s salt deposits would prove commercially valuable.

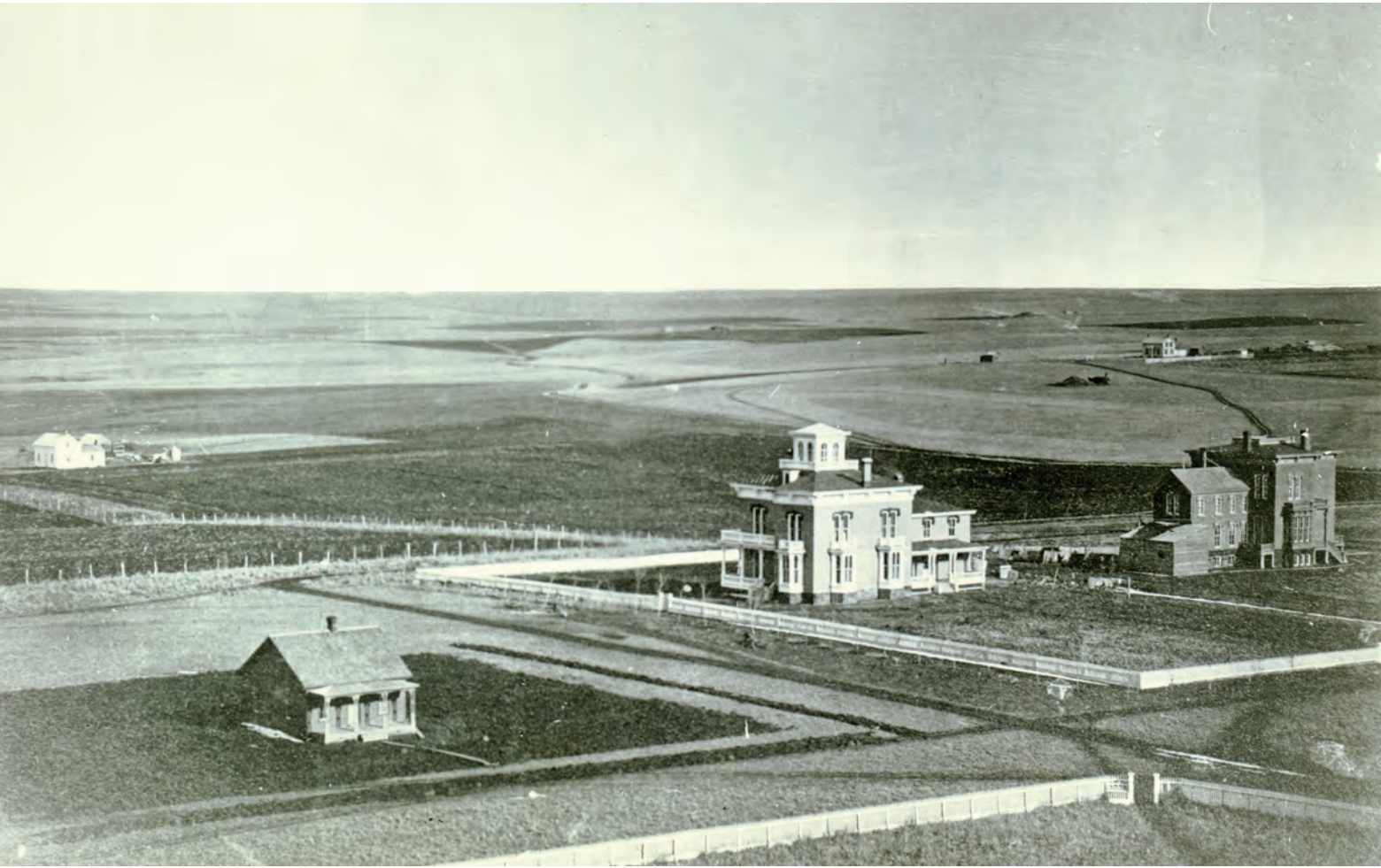
Omahans were furious. “Nobody will ever go to Lincoln who does not go to the legislature, the lunatic asylum, the penitentiary or some of the state institutions,” said one Omaha paper. Lincoln is “destined for ultimate oblivion,” said another.

Feelings in Omaha ran so high that the state auditor conspired to have two wagonloads of furniture and books removed secretly in the middle of the night. The wagons were well out of town before daylight.

Thus, Lincoln got its name at least partly out of spite, and got the original contents of the capitol through a clandestine operation that looked like a nighttime burglary. [N](#)

Visit the Nebraska State Historical Society’s website at history.nebraska.gov.

unpopular in the heavily Democratic South Platte region. But the bill passed anyway. That summer, a three-man commission toured the four-county region in search of Lincoln. They selected Lancaster, population 30. The village was far from any railroad or navigable river. Omaha, meanwhile, had a major river for steamboats, a soon-to-be-complete transcontinental railroad and was on its way to 16,000 residents by 1870. The commissioners reasoned that Lancaster was centrally located in relation to the state’s main cities at the time: Omaha, Fremont, Columbus, Plattsmouth, Nebraska City



The new capital struggled at first. The selection commissioners built fine houses to demonstrate their confidence in the new “city.” One of these, the Thomas P. Kennard House (shown in 1872, left center), still stands as the Nebraska Statehood Memorial. NSHS RG2158-PH0-000011-A



Lincoln had grown considerably by 1872. This view to the northwest from the tower of the state capitol shows the lone building of the new University of Nebraska. NSHS RG2158-PH0-23



Harper Wright proudly displays a hen wood duck her father, Greg, harvested on the Calamus River during a fall 2024 hunt.
PHOTO BY ANGIE WRIGHT

Hunting the Calamus

A Father and Daughter's Adventure

Story and photos by Gerry Steinauer, Botanist

As the first light of day spilled over the high dunes to the east, 9-year-old Harper Wright nestled beside her father, Greg, in the rushes along the Calamus River. The ducks weren't flying, but that didn't matter. What mattered was that they were together, with the river flowing past and the valley beginning to stir.

I've known and worked with Greg Wright, a U.S. Forest Service wildlife biologist based at the Nebraska

National Forest near Halsey, for more than a decade. As avid outdoorsmen, our conversations often turn to hunting. During one such talk, he shared how he's trying to pass on his passion for hunting and the outdoors to his daughter. In today's busy world, this is no easy task.

His approach is to make each hunt with Harper about more than just harvesting game. It's also about exploring, appreciating nature and spending time together. I wanted

to see his strategy in action, so we planned a waterfowl hunt for October 2024 on the Calamus River.

The Family Cabin

Late on a Saturday afternoon, we arrived at the Wright family's cabin, tucked beneath a riverside grove of tall cottonwoods and elms a stone's throw from the Calamus River in Brown County. Greg had recently hauled the



The Wrights' cabin, nestled beneath a tall grove of trees, sits along the Calamus River upstream of the Calamus Reservoir.

cabin, a simple prefab, onto a small piece of family land. With one room and no running water or electricity, it reflected his practical, efficient personality yet offered a snug retreat in the vastness of the Sandhills.

We unpacked and, before sunset, walked along the river bluff, scanning the marshes below for ducks and geese. The Calamus winds through a narrow valley flanked by high, sandy bluffs. Its floodplain is a patchwork of prairie, wet meadow and curving oxbow marshes formed in old, cut-off channels. Ragged stands of cattails, rushes and willows border the oxbows.

Back at the cabin as night fell, Greg

lit an oil lamp, and by its dim light we sipped dandelion tea and played a few rounds of cribbage, the cabin’s traditional game, until our eyes grew heavy. We crawled into sleeping bags, eager for the morning hunt.

The Hunt

Greg and I rose well before sunrise. His first task was to light the propane heater and boil water on a camp stove for coffee and hot chocolate. Harper soon joined us at the table, and we breakfasted on cinnamon rolls, a favorite of Harper’s, that his wife Angie, also a wildlife biologist, had

made especially for the trip. Greg and I talked shop — the status of grouse populations in the Sandhills, which is typical for biologists. Most kids would be bored out of their minds, but Harper quietly listened. It seemed her parents’ passion for nature was already sinking in.

After breakfast, Greg and Harper pulled on their chest waders and camouflage and loaded their .410-gauge shotguns and decoys into the truck. Since we hadn’t seen ducks or geese on the oxbows the previous night, Greg chose a nearby bend in the river where he hoped birds might be enticed to land. Here, the river was

about 10 yards wide and 2 feet deep, with a slow current and a gentle sand bank. In the dawn light, Greg and Harper set out a small spread of decoys while I drove the truck back to the cabin. Upon my return, we nestled into a patch of tall, streamside grasses and rushes to await the morning flight.

Greg’s waterfowl hunts are simple affairs, with no heated blinds or spreads of dozens of decoys. For Harper’s sake, he keeps it low-key. She can help set out a few decoys, and what better experience than sitting on the riverbank with her father watching the sun rise and the valley come to life?



Greg calls to a small flock of high-flying ducks, but they ignore his pleas.



The scenic Calamus River valley on the Wrights’ family land. Oxbow marshes — former river channels — fill the lower right corner; the river appears near the top center of the photo.

Unfortunately, few birds were flying. One small flock of ducks flew high overhead but showed no interest in Greg’s pleading calls or the decoys. He filled the void with his knowledge of local wildlife.

“Harper, did you hear that screech owl?” he said. “There it is again.”

He also drew our attention to the chatter of marsh wrens in the oxbow behind us, the faint cackling of prairie chickens in the high dunes and the splashing of unseen deer crossing the river. These moments were for Harper. He was keeping her engaged and developing her naturalist’s skills.

Our talk was interrupted by a pair of wood ducks zipping downriver, but they, too, ignored us.

“Wood ducks are tough to decoy,” Greg conceded. “They go where they’re going.”

The action stayed slow, and he was puzzled. “Two weeks ago, there were hundreds of ducks here,” he said. On that trip, Greg and Angie downed a mixed bag of mallard, teal, wood duck, gadwall and shoveler, which Harper and her little sister were happy to

retrieve. “The Sandhills are dynamic,” he explained. “You get local birds that hatch here and others passing through during migration. Usually, there’s something to hunt.”

The warm weather may have been responsible for the lack of bird movement. Greg prefers hunting when cold fronts are descending and pushing waterfowl south. He takes Harper hunting, however, only in early fall when the weather, and her experience, are more pleasant. When she’s older, tougher and hopefully hooked on hunting, he’ll introduce her to those late-season, finger-numbing hunts.

After an hour tucked along the bank, Greg sensed that Harper was growing restless and uncomfortable in her waders and decided it was time to move.

Exploring

We walked the riverbank downstream for a quarter mile to a new beaver dam and lodge Greg wanted to show Harper. We inspected



The rising sun illuminates Greg and Harper’s decoy spread on a bend in the Calamus River. Here, the river reaches a maximum depth of 2 to 3 feet.

the rodents’ handiwork until our attention turned to a piece of old farm machinery partially buried in sand. Harper climbed onto it as Greg and I pondered its one-time use. We concluded it was a piece of horse-drawn haying equipment used long ago by local ranchers, when this part of the ever-changing floodplain was meadow, not marsh.

Soon after, our thoughts returned to hunting. As we approached the beaver dam, Greg caught a glimpse of ducks rising and settling again on

an oxbow farther downstream. Seeing an opportunity for jump-shooting, he and Harper snuck to the oxbow’s edge, hidden by shoreline rushes. When they arrived, about 40 birds sprang from the still water. A single shot rang out, and a bird fell back into the marsh. Greg retrieved the green-winged teal.

In the excitement, Harper didn’t get a shot off. Jump-shooting fleeing ducks requires quick reflexes and is tough for a child, especially one bundled in a thick coat and waders. For now, Greg prefers teaching her

wing-shooting over decoys, where she can prepare for shots at birds with cupped wings floating in to land.

As we examined the teal, Greg noticed Harper was tiring. She had walked a fair distance in waders since leaving the decoys, and we still had some hiking to do. We called it a day and headed back to pick up the decoys. I was impressed by Harper’s stamina, which Greg credits to the hours she spends in athletics and jumping on her backyard trampoline.

Philosophy

Back at the cabin sipping coffee, Greg said he wasn’t bothered that Harper hadn’t taken a shot or bagged a duck. “She still had fun, and I got to spend some quality time with my daughter,” he said.

He believes that parents often think their kids need to harvest animals to stay interested, but he disagrees. While success is obviously important, he believes that occasional failure to harvest game can build more interest

Tungsten .410 Reloads

Greg and Harper carried .410-gauge shotguns on our Calamus River hunt, and they use these guns for most of their upland bird hunts. Some readers might question a .410’s ability to bring down a tough rooster pheasant or a big Canada goose, but not Greg. He makes up for the .410’s small bore by using hard-hitting tungsten reloads.

Tungsten pellets are 60% denser than lead and more than twice as dense as steel, allowing the smaller tungsten pellets to deliver the same impact as larger lead or steel shot.

For example, a No. 9 tungsten pellet, which Greg uses in his duck hunting reloads, weighs the same as a No. 5 lead pellet or a No. 3 steel pellet. He can also pack more of the smaller tungsten pellets into his .410 reloads than are found in standard 12-gauge lead or steel shells.

Tungsten shot holds its shape and speed better than other shot types, resulting in tighter patterns and better penetration. Because of the high number of tungsten pellets in his reloads and his desire to expand their pattern, Greg uses an improved cylinder choke for the most effective hunting results. For him, the main benefit of tungsten shot is that it allows Harper to hunt with a .410 when a larger gauge might still be too much for her. “The gun is light, has little kick and isn’t loud,” he said. “It’s the perfect gun to begin her journey into hunting.”

Greg admitted that tungsten shot has some downsides. The pellets’ hardness can be tough on shotgun barrels, so he uses special protective wads in his reloads. Manufactured tungsten shells are expensive, and few companies make .410 tungsten loads. Luckily for Greg, his reloads cost only about a dollar each.



Greg’s .410-gauge No. 9 tungsten reloads (right) pack a similar punch to 12-gauge, 3-inch No. 3 steel shells (left).

and drive. When hunting with Harper, his focus is never on how many ducks, geese or pheasants they shoot. “My main goal is to teach her to value wildlife and nature. If she has an adventure, she’ll keep hunting.”

When I asked Harper about her

favorite part of the hunt, she said, “I liked playing cribbage and just coming to the cabin.” Then after a pause: “And walking around in the water in my waders and helping Dad pick up the decoys.” She had enjoyed her weekend adventure. 🦆

Nebraska Prairie Plants Prepare for Winter

By Monica Macoubrie, Wildlife Education Specialist

When fall rolls into Nebraska, it's not just people grabbing cozy sweaters and pumpkin spice lattes — our native prairie plants are busy getting ready for winter, too. These tough plants have a toolkit of tricks to handle the changing seasons, ensuring they survive the chilly months and come back strong in the spring.

The Mighty Roots

If prairie plants had a superpower, it would undoubtedly be their incredible root systems. Picture big bluestem or purple coneflower. While we admire the foliage and blooms above ground, the real action is happening beneath the surface. The plants' roots dig deep into the soil, sometimes reaching down 10 feet or more — they're like



Known for its showy yellow flowers earlier in the year, the common evening primrose takes on a different beauty in fall. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



At the Platte River floodplain tallgrass prairie at the Lillian Annette Rowe Bird Sanctuary in Buffalo County, plants include big bluestem, Indian grass, prairie cordgrass, switchgrass, goldenrod, white aster and Maximilian sunflower.

JON FARRAR, NEBRASKALAND

nature's underground skyscrapers.

These roots don't just anchor the plant. During the summer, they work tirelessly to gather nutrients and water, soaking up everything they can while the days are long and the sun shines bright.

Then when fall arrives, it's time for a serious shift. The plant transitions from growth mode to survival mode. All that energy that was once dedicated to maintaining those beautiful stems and leaves are now redirected to the roots. Prairie plants begin hoarding nutrients

to prepare for their long winter's "nap," storing sugars and starches deep underground where the cold can't touch them.

While the above-ground parts may appear to be shutting down — turning brown, wilting and seemingly "dying" — the plant is thriving below the surface.

Seed Scattering

When fall hits, prairie plants go into reproduction mode, and they

have some clever ways to spread the next generation across the landscape. But instead of just tossing their seeds randomly, these plants have mastered creative tactics to make sure their seeds have the best shot at finding the perfect place to grow.

Have you ever noticed those fluffy, feather-light seeds on plants such as goldenrod? It's not just for looks — those fluffy, little "parachutes" are key to their strategy. The seeds are designed to catch the wind, so they can float and soar across the prairie,

landing far from the parent plant to a new location.

But wind isn't the only trick. Some prairie plants are downright sneaky about getting their seeds out there. Take stickseed, for example. Its seeds are tiny hitchhikers, equipped with sticky barbs that latch onto the fur and clothing of passing animals and humans. These seeds use unsuspecting critters as their personal cab service, getting a free ride to a new home where they'll eventually drop off and, hopefully, settle



In October, these red current leaves have started their dormancy along a Pine Ridge stream. BOB GRIER, NEBRASKALAND

in to grow.

Then there's wild bergamot and other plants that are a little more patient. Instead of sending their seeds out to sprout right away, they go into dormancy. These smart plants know that Nebraska winters can be harsh, so they make sure their seeds don't germinate too early and risk freezing. The seeds tuck away underneath the soil or in leaf litter and wait for the perfect combination of warmth and moisture the following spring to wake them up.

Some plants even have seeds that require a little extra help from fire, frost or digestion to kickstart their growth. For example, certain prairie plants need their seeds to pass through the digestive system of an animal, such as a turtle or a squirrel, before they can germinate, a process that breaks down the tough seed coat and gives them a head start when they land in, well, fertilizer. It's like a two-for-one deal — dispersal and a nutrient boost.

Leaf Drop and Dormancy

Dropping leaves is another component of prairie plants' strategy to survive the colder, darker months. By shedding their leaves, they stop wasting precious energy and water on parts of the plant they don't need during winter. Also, with fewer leaves, there's less surface area for water to evaporate from, so they can hold onto as much moisture as possible when the dry, cold air hits.

Flexible and Frost Ready

Prairie plants are truly Nebraska tough — they've got what it takes to handle whatever wild weather comes their way. As winter rolls in, these plants don't just stand there helpless in the face of snowstorms and freezing winds. Grasses like little bluestem and switchgrass are the prairie's flexible, wind-proof warriors. Their stems aren't stiff and brittle like you might

expect. Instead, they can bend and sway with ease, no matter how hard the wind blows or how heavily the snow piles on.

But that's not all — some prairie plants are equipped with antifreeze. Plants like blue grama produce special chemicals in their cells that act like a natural antifreeze, protecting them from temperatures that would normally turn most plants to ice. These chemicals help keep the water inside the plant cells from freezing solid, which is crucial because when water freezes, it expands and can cause cells to burst.

Plants Helping Wildlife

Prairie plants aren't just focused on their own survival during the fall — they're also providing crucial support to local wildlife. As the days grow shorter and colder, birds and small mammals rely on the seeds from plants like milkweed and asters to stock up for winter. These seeds are a vital food

source, helping animals build up their energy reserves for the long, chilly months ahead.

But it's not just birds and small mammals that benefit. Migrating pollinators, such as monarch butterflies, flock to the late-season nectar produced by these plants. As they prepare for their epic journeys to warmer climates, these pollinators find much-needed fuel in the blooms of goldenrod and wild bergamot. It's a win-win situation: The plants get pollinated, and the butterflies get a tasty energy boost to help them along their way.

Even after prairie plants have gone dormant and their vibrant blooms fade, they continue to play a vital role in the ecosystem. The dried stalks and foliage of these plants create cozy shelters for small animals like rabbits and various overwintering insects. These natural hideaways provide protection from predators and harsh weather, making them essential havens for wildlife as they hunker down for the winter.

Nebraska's native prairie plants are the ultimate survivors. With their deep roots, smart seed strategies, flexible structures and winter-proof tricks, they've mastered the art of fall preparation. While they may look like they're winding down for the season, these plants are busy behind the scenes, making sure they'll come back strong when spring rolls around.

So next time you're wandering through the prairie in the fall, remember that these plants aren't just pretty — they're masters of survival, working hard to ensure Nebraska's prairie ecosystem stays healthy and vibrant, no matter the season. 🌱



Birds and mammals stock up on seeds such as milkweed and aster (shown above) that provide crucial support to wildlife in fall and winter months. GERRY STEINAUER



Switchgrass in snow illustrates how it lodges but remains standing and provides wildlife habitat in Conservation Reserve Program land in Dixon County. JON FARRAR, NEBRASKALAND

ENDANGERED SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

The Small White Lady's Slipper

By Ruby Rolland, Environmental Specialist, NGPC

The small white lady's slipper (*Cypripedium candidum*), a species of flowering plant, is listed as threatened in Nebraska and can be found in a variety of wet meadows and prairies in the northeastern and central parts of the state.

When thinking about where you might find threatened or endangered species, what usually comes to mind are expanses of untouched prairie, secluded canyon streams or middle-of-nowhere wetlands. Some species, however, have had to make do with less. The small white lady's slipper, where it has been pushed out of its preferred "untouched prairies," has settled for soggy road ditches.

Standing around 8 inches tall, the small white lady's slipper is a hearty species of orchid. With several long green leaves and one stalk tipped with a white slipper-shaped flower, this orchid was traditionally found hidden among other prairie species like equisetum and anemone within wet meadows and prairies — fields of native vegetation where the water

table is close to the surface.

However, as agricultural production became more prevalent, these lush, wet fields were preferable for tilling and planting crops and stocking cattle. Consequently, this turning over and trampling of the prairie led to the rapid decline of this orchid.

While patches of pristine habitat still support some populations, many small white lady's slippers are now found growing alongside asparagus, pop bottles and other prairie species seeking sanctuary. The road ditches where these orchids have settled are sometimes the only good places left for them to grow, offering a small but reliable refuge in a changing landscape.

These road ditches, while safe from cows and plows, do require regular maintenance for the safety of the travelling public. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and the Nebraska Department of Transportation work closely together to balance the duties of roadway management with the needs of this



The small white lady's slipper is listed as threatened in Nebraska. DREW GRANVILLE

Nebraska's List

Threatened Species

- Eastern black rail
- Piping plover
- Rufa red knot
- Thick-billed longspur
- Mountain plover
- Southern flying squirrel
- Lake sturgeon
- Northern redbelly dace
- Finescale dace
- American burying beetle
- Timber rattlesnake
- Western massasauga
- Western prairie fringed orchid
- Ute ladies'-tresses
- American ginseng
- Small white lady's slipper

Endangered Species

- Eskimo curlew
- Whooping crane
- Interior least tern
- Black-footed ferret
- Swift fox
- Gray wolf
- Northern long-eared bat
- Pallid sturgeon
- Topeka shiner
- Sturgeon chub
- Blacknose shiner
- Salt Creek tiger beetle
- Scaleshell mussel
- Blowout penstemon
- Colorado butterfly plant
- Saltwort

rare flower. Sometimes that means adjusting mowing schedules so the plants have time to flower and set seed; other times, it means marking patches to avoid during herbicide applications. This careful coordination is supported by site visits with Game and Parks biologists, spring surveys with conservationists and project reviews with the Department of Transportation's Environmental Division.

Thanks to the efforts of dozens of dedicated people, this unconventional habitat continues to support one of Nebraska's rarest flowers.

For more information on Nebraska's threatened and endangered species, visit OutdoorNebraska.gov.

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BULLFROG BRUMATION

By Justin Haag

As October comes and goes, it's time to say goodbye to many of the pond's familiar residents of spring, summer and fall. One such character is the American bullfrog (*Lithobates catesbeianus*).

Unlike many of the pond's bird species, the bullfrog isn't going far, however. Neither is it "croaking," in the sense of life or death. Rather, it is staying local to enter a sluggish period of dormancy called brumation.

As cooler weather arrives, bullfrogs retreat to the bottom of the pond and stay there, perhaps oblivious to the cold

and snow above. Bullfrogs can absorb oxygen through their skin. As their heart and metabolic rates slow in the brumation process, they don't require as much oxygen as they do during summer when expending energy to actively eat whatever bugs and animals they can fit into their mouths.

Not only is brumation vital to survival, but so is the frog's heavy diet of late summer. Bullfrogs add glucose to their organs at this time, creating something of an antifreeze.

Although many assume bullfrogs burrow into the mud and litter at the

bottom of the pond, they stay atop or not deep into it. Sometimes they'll even move during winter months, albeit slowly, to seek water with more oxygen in it.

This process happens upwards to 10 times, considered the maximum lifespan for most bullfrogs in the wild. When the water temperature reaches about 60 degrees, we can welcome the bullfrog once again as it returns to the surface. Once there, it will resume its feeding frenzy and greet us — or, actually, a hoped-for mate — with its familiar croak.



In a scene that represents seasonal transition, the bullfrog, a star vocalist from sweltering summer nights, awaits prey among the fallen leaves that usher in the chilly days of autumn. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

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Pictured: Parker Wise, Buzz's great grandson

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PARKS IN FULL COLOR CAMPAIGN

Donate to provide EnChroma color-blindness glasses at state parks

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

Although most people who are color blind can see color, they have trouble accurately distinguishing between different shades. Color vision deficiency can drastically diminish the vibrancy and range of colors that exist in the outdoors. A study conducted by EnChroma, creators of glasses for color blindness, found that three-fourths of 505 respondents felt “left out” or disappointed in trips to parks, gardens and art museums because they couldn’t fully experience the colors. Furthermore, roughly three out of four participants found it challenging to understand maps, brochures, signs and exhibits that convey information through colors.

Nebraska Game and Parks Fisheries Biologist Keith Hurley described his color blindness as “moderate.” He has trouble distinguishing between the colors red, green, brown, blue and purple — colors often found in nature.

In college, ornithology was a particularly difficult subject for Hurley, because bird identification hinges on a person’s ability to detect colors quickly as a bird flies past.

“Someone might say, ‘Look at the red on that green bird.’ And I’m like what red?” Hurley said. “Or they’ll say, ‘Look at that bright green.’ I’m looking at it and it doesn’t look bright green to me.”

As an archery hunter, Hurley has difficulty differentiating deer among the browns of fall vegetation. However, when he is successful in connecting with an animal, blood trailing becomes the bigger challenge. Red and green colors are the most difficult colors for Hurley to separate, so trying to find specks of red blood on the greens and browns of oak leaves and grass can be frustrating.

“I need to have some form of an aid to get me through the blood tracking part because I can be crawling on my hands and knees and not see blood that my son can see standing 5 feet away,” Hurley said.

Hurley has to be mindful of his archery equipment. His setup allows for fast-expiring animals and the largest blood trail possible because he doesn’t have the ability to follow long, difficult trails. Whenever possible, he has friends or family members help him track deer. He has also leaned on the help of dogs that can follow scent.



Trees at Indian Cave State Park are shown on a split screen with the left side in full color and the right side displaying their appearance to people with red-green color blindness. ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

Hurley advises colorblind hunters to plan ahead. Depending on the type of color blindness, there are flashlights that can help differentiate blood trails. Another trick is to use hydrogen peroxide to make blood foam, making it more visible.

Lately, Hurley has been reaching for his EnChroma glasses, a new technology that is helping people with red-green color blindness — the most common type of color blindness — see the world. These glasses stimulate the brain’s color processing center to enhance color vision for most people with this condition. Hurley uses the glasses whenever he is outside, whether hunting, fishing or simply enjoying nature.

“The first time I put these glasses on and the first time I’ve watched others use them — they literally bring tears to your eyes. It’s an emotional experience that you didn’t even know was possible because you never knew it existed,” Hurley said. “One of the things about nature is just the splendor — the visual splendor that nature has. And until I had these glasses, I never truly understood what that meant.”

However, EnChroma glasses are expensive. Recognizing that people with color blindness may struggle to fully enjoy activities like hiking, fishing, birdwatching and hunting, the Parks in Full Color Campaign is looking for donations to make these glasses available to visitors. The goal is to provide EnChroma color-blindness glasses kits at locations such as Wildcat Hills Nature Center, Schramm Education Center and Ponca State Park, with plans to expand.

To make a charitable donation, visit OutdoorNebraska.gov and search “Parks in Full Color Campaign.” Your support can make a lasting impact on someone’s outdoor experience.



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Pheasant hunting near Fremont (1969) and Fullerton (1982) ▲

Little did I know that hunting pheasants back in 1968, while attending Midland Lutheran College in Fremont, would lead to a lifetime of hunting. My good friend Stephen Uehling got my nephew, John Miles, and me (top photo, pictured left to right) into hunting pheasants when the number of birds was high. This was photographed in 1969, the Sunday of opening morning and taken in Stephen’s dorm room before we attended church. We had a quick hunt and still bagged five birds.

As the years passed, we hunted every opening day until they both passed away. I lost two great hunting buddies. Because of this introduction to hunting, I became actively involved in the Hunter Education Program back in 1974. I started teaching classes back in 1994. I hung up teaching classes in August 2024. All of this led to the Miles Family Annual Pheasant Hunt that lasted for 28 years.

Bottom picture was taken north and west of Fullerton in 1982, showing hunters (pictured left to right) John Miles Sr. (deceased), myself Steve Miles, John Miles (deceased), Mark Miles and Mitch Miles. The tradition lives on with my son, Mitch, and me.

– Steven Miles, Grand Island



▲ Pheasant hunting at North Bend, 1970s

My brother, Pat, and his dogs
Bridget and Buzz.

– Tom Elliott, Ralston



Fishing at Lake McConaughy, 1978 ▲

Last camp of our honeymoon trip which started at Lewis and Clark Lake to the Black Hills then Big Mac. We rented a boat from the marina and fished in Martin’s Bay. Still fishing with my biggest catch — wife Cathy.

– Steve Partusch, Burr



Pheasant hunting at Naponee, 1990 ▲

Pictured from left, back row: Stacey “Snuffy” Smith, South Carolina; Jim Brogdon, South Carolina; Charles McElveen, South Carolina; Mitch Snyder, California; Bill Applebee (me), California; Charlie Bethea, South Carolina; Jim VanDyke, Kansas City. Front row: My brother Jim Applebee, California; Larry Post, Naponee; Ron Fuller, New Orleans; Jerry Post, Nebraska; Unknown; Vachel Applebee (father-deceased), Republican City; dog belonged to Jerry Post.

Every year since 1990 this group and more have been hosted by Larry And Terri Post. The group has evolved throughout the years to include sons, daughters and friends.

Always good hunting, great food and friends.

– Bill Applebee, Huntington Beach, California



◀ Hunting near Chimney Rock, 1935

On Oct. 20, 1935, this photo was taken of (left to right) Quinton Martin, Harry Martin, Mr. Temple and Fred.

First day of pheasant season on Jim Durnal farm near Chimney Rock near Bayard. Four birds each.

– Ellis Martin, Kearney

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



A moonlit night around a campfire at the Niobrara Valley Preserve. CHRIS HELZER

AFTER THE MILKY WAY

By Chris Helzer

Everyone else had left the campfire, leaving just Nic and me. The skies above the Niobrara Valley Preserve had been spectacular that evening, with a terrific sunset followed by a Milky Way so bright we could see it even while sitting near the fire. The sun had set nearly three hours earlier, though, and people had headed to bed, tired from a day of exploring the Sandhills and river.

As Nic and I watched the fire slowly die down, a glow appeared behind the ridge to the north of us. The light illuminated a smattering of diffuse clouds moving

across the sky. Slowly, the distant glow grew brighter and brighter until, finally, the moon appeared just above the horizon. It wasn't a full moon — maybe ⅔ of one — but its light was startlingly bright in the otherwise dark sky.

We watched, mesmerized, as the moon climbed higher. Gradually, its light dimmed our view of the stars and Milky Way but suffused the beautiful landscape around us with eerily beautiful light. After a while, we doused the fire and headed off to sleep, grateful for an opportunity that too few people in the world ever get.

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