

Nebraskaland magazine

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Nebraskaland

January-February 2020

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Nebraskaland

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January-February 2020

Cover: Eric Wellman's image
"Perseverance" won Best of Show in
the 2019 Nebraskaland Photo Contest.
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PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

Nebraskaland (VOL. 98 / NO. 1 ISSN 0028-1964) is published monthly, except for the combined Jan./Feb. and Aug./Sept. issues, by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, 2200 N. 13rd St., Lincoln, NE. Periodicals postage paid at Lincoln, Nebraska, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Nebraskaland, P.O. Box 30570, Lincoln, NE 68505-0570.

Nebraskaland
magazine

Published by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission since 1926. The Commission is dedicated to the conservation and protection of all the state's natural resources and the people who use them.



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Rates: \$18 for one year; \$33 for two years; \$44 for three years. Nebraska recipients must add appropriate sales tax. To subscribe call 1-800-NEBLAND (632-5263), or go online to: NebraskalandMagazine.com.

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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.

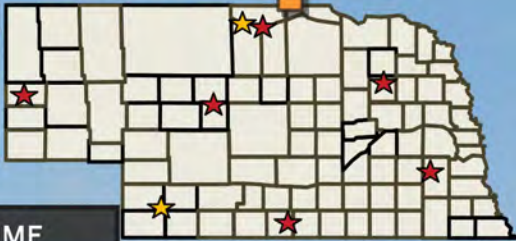


Table with 4 columns: DATE, TOWN, LOCATION, TIME. Rows include workshops in Ainsworth, Red Cloud, Lincoln, Thedford, Scottsbluff, and Norfolk.

Introduction to Prescribed Fire



Learn the basics of planning and implementing a prescribed burn on your land

Table with 4 columns: DATE, ADVANCED WORKSHOPS, LOCATION, TIME. Rows include workshops for Burn Plan Writing, Southwest Nebraska Learn and Burn, and Growing Season Burn Workshops.

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

Join a Prescribed Burn Association

Prescribed burn associations are a collection of landowners, land managers, and volunteers who pool time, equipment, and knowledge to help each other get prescribed fire on the ground within their communities.





Kathy Strong, Fremont
Back Porch Fox Squirrel

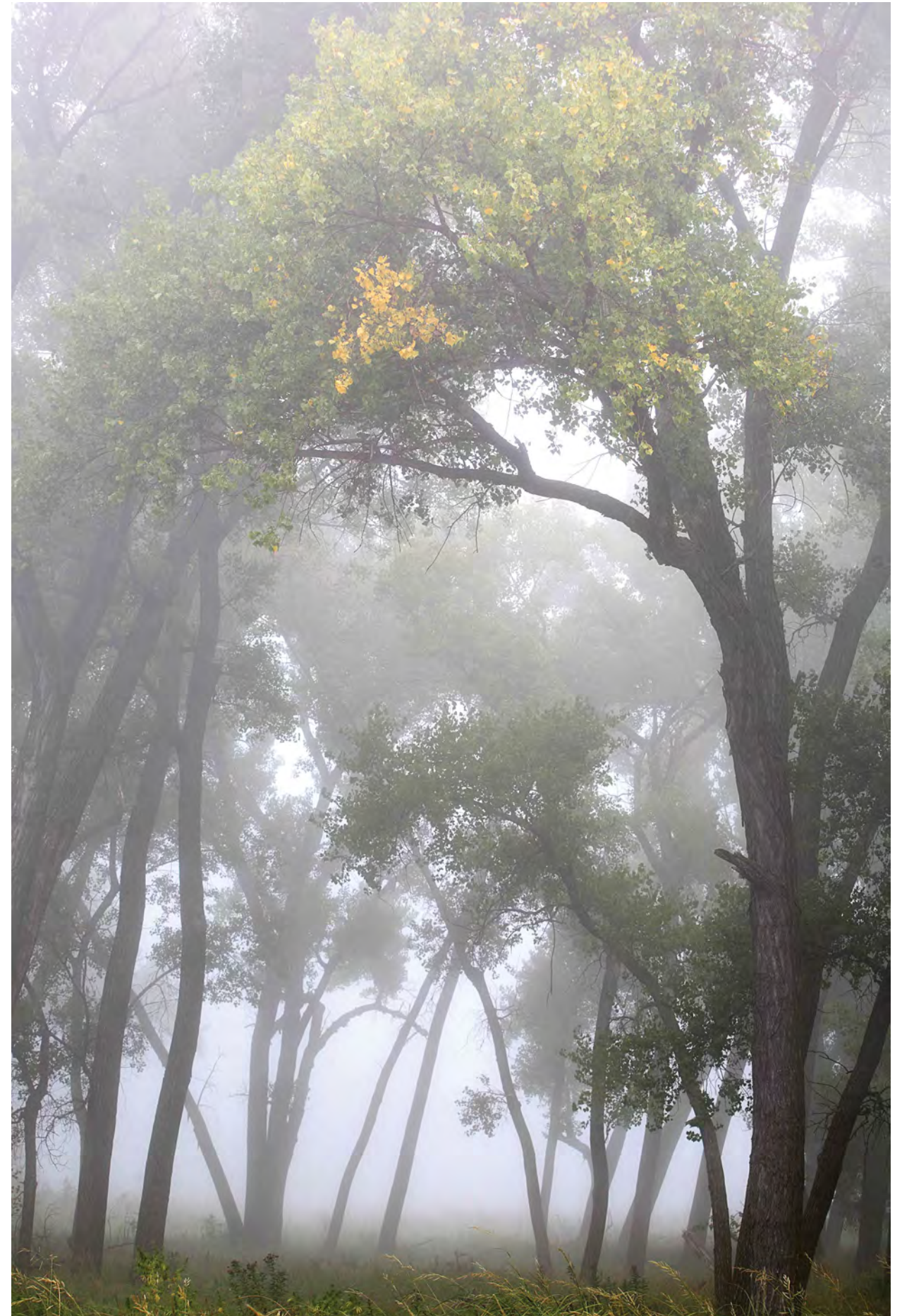


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upcoming issue.

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



OLD BOOTS

It has been a common practice to place worn-out cowboy boots as covers on fence posts like this one in Dawes County.

PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

RECOVERING AMERICA'S WILDLIFE ACT: AN UPDATE

By Melissa J. Panella

The grinning child with her first harvested turkey, the angler with the biggest catch of his life, the longtime birder with a new state record in her sight – people of all walks of life value abundant wildlife for varied reasons. Plants and animals and the habitats they depend upon offer us bountiful enjoyment and recreational opportunities, in addition to playing vital roles in ecosystems. New research shows that time spent outdoors even improves our overall health and well-being.

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission works diligently to conserve the state's natural legacy, but this charge can be daunting. The number of people and financial resources to take on the workload often pales in comparison to the demands brought on by habitat loss, disease, invasive species and other threats to wildlife. Nebraska is not alone. States across the country share in the mission to conserve all native wildlife, but often with not enough resources to do so.

Wildlife professionals and others who care about this issue have long been exploring ways to fund the recovery of declining populations of native plants and animals and keep common species common. Traditional wildlife funding sources such as hunting and fishing licenses are an important contributor to conservation, but not all species of greatest conservation need are eligible to use those funds.

The most recent and promising effort to date for a funding solution comes in the form of Recovering America's Wildlife Act, introduced to the U.S. House of Representatives on July 12, 2019, under leadership by Congressman Jeff Fortenberry (R) of Nebraska and Congresswoman Debbie Dingell (D) of Michigan. This bipartisan legislation has created a path that will lead to increased resources for state wildlife agencies and their partnering organizations to help prevent the need to add species to endangered or threatened lists, and to increase populations of the most at-risk wildlife. A new title to the legislation is dedicated to supporting conservation strategies on tribal lands and territories as well.

In Nebraska, Recovering America's Wildlife Act would enhance our grasslands, combat invasive species, restore wetlands, maintain water quality and improve our woodlands.

We could begin catching up on much needed inventory, monitoring and research of wildlife populations. More environmental education programs will be offered. There would be additional outdoor recreation opportunities available.

Current estimates indicate that Nebraska would receive approximately \$16.5 million in federal funds if the Act is passed. The funds to make this possible would come from existing sources, including fees from energy and mineral development on federal lands and waters. This money can be strategically applied to conservation, while being shared with private landowners and others willing to conserve land

and water to benefit wildlife. Nebraska has a track record of success with the Natural Legacy Project, where willing landowners have received cost-shares to enhance over 50,000 acres every year to benefit wildlife by finding common ground since 2005. The Act would result in grants for universities, nonprofit organizations and community

groups to put the responsibility of conservation directly in the hands of the highly capable people who live, study, work and undertake recreation in Nebraska's biologically unique landscapes. This support will help the Nebraska Natural Legacy Project meet its full potential.

Many outdoor enthusiasts, hunters, anglers, scientists and businesses are supporting the Recovering America's Wildlife Act as a way to get in front of the conservation challenges at hand. More than 1,000 scientists and hundreds of businesses around the country have signed a letter of support. Over 160 members of Congress have been called to action by their constituents and have signed as co-sponsors on this bipartisan legislation. The House Natural Resources Committee recently voted 26-6 in favor of advancing the legislation. The list of supporters is growing. Nebraskans have the chance to be part of the solution to conserve the full array of fish and wildlife today and for future generations.

To learn more, visit ournatureusa.com.

Melissa J. Panella is a wildlife biologist for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

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RICHARDSON CO, NE - 332.69 AC.
This property is truly a rare find in Nebraska! Formerly this property was part of the historic Miles Ranch as well as a high fenced hunting operation. Since the times of the Miles Ranch, a small cabin was built as well as an outbuilding with concrete floor and walk-in cooler. The timber consists of a balance of large blocks of dense timber with intermittent timber cleared grass openings. The rolling topography will make you feel like you're miles away from anything. Inside the fence and near the cabin you'll find a spring-fed pond nestled down in a small valley. This county is notorious for big deer and this property provides every opportunity you'll need to grow them big! Call today for your private showing.

DIXON CO, NE - 80 AC.
Tracts like this never last long! This ideal sized tract will hunt much larger than it is! Heavy stands of hardwood timber loaded with acorns and beat down trails make up most of this property. Several open meadows will provide great future food plot locations. Newly created atv trails make access into the heavy timber easier to help get to the stand or retrieve the buck of your dreams. If you are looking for a place to build your weekend get-a-way for the summer, spring, or fall this tract is the one to do it all. Great numbers of turkeys on the property and quick and easy access to the public boat ramp to launch your fishing boat or jet ski onto the Missouri River.



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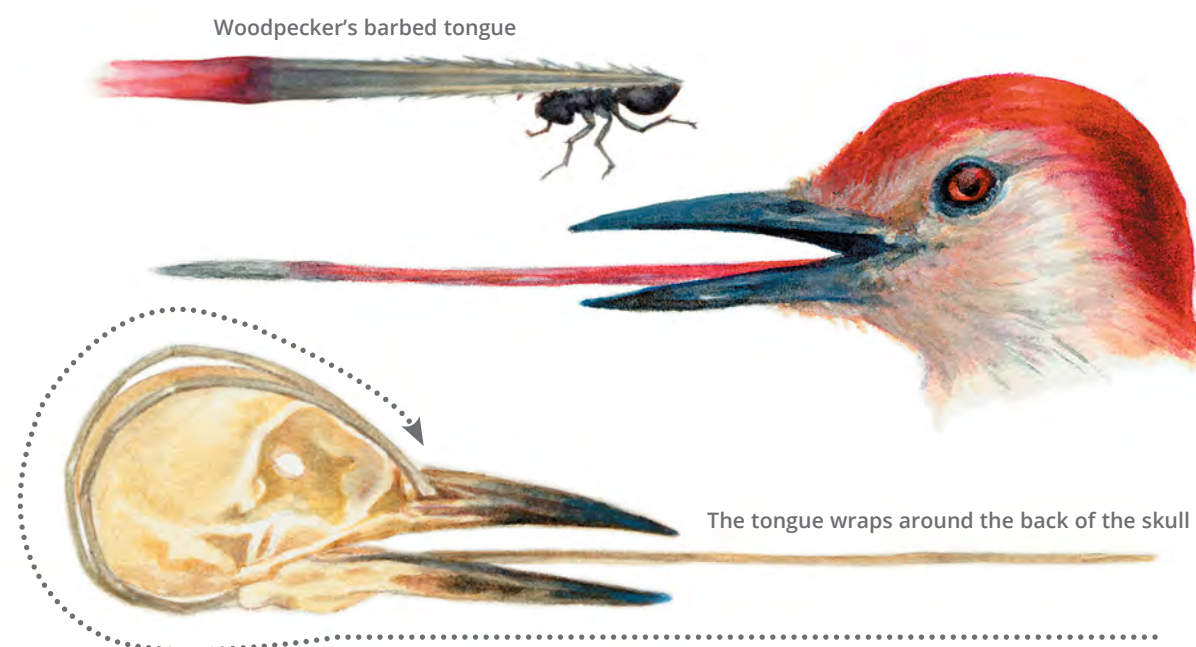
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TONGUE TIED

By Monica Macoubrie

Nebraska's natural world is filled with all sorts of flamboyantly bizarre creatures. Hiding inside their mouths are some of nature's most outrageous tongues, which give these animals unique abilities. Here are a few.

Woodpecker tongues are long and narrow with backward-projecting barbs near the tip. They use this tongue like a spear, impaling insects and then capturing prey with a large amount of sticky saliva. However, where does a woodpecker store this tongue, which can be several times longer than its bill? In short, its tongue wraps around its skull. The bones and muscles that attach the tongue to the throat run over the brain, around the side of the head, under the lower jaw and into the mouth where the bones meet to form the tongue.

Bobcat tongues, like all feline tongues, are covered with papillae, or tiny hooks, that give their tongue a rough texture. These microscopic hooks face toward the throat of the animal and work like a comb to help clean the cat's fur. In the wild, these papillae also help the animal tear meat off the bones of its prey. Their tongues also work like temperature regulators; during the winter, they help to fluff the fur to keep warm. In the summer, they use their saliva to wet their fur down to stay cool.

Over the past few decades scientists have determined that the closest approximation of what **snakes** do with their tongue is smell. Snakes collect chemicals from the air

and ground whenever they flick their tongue in and out. The tongue itself does not have receptors to taste or smell. Instead, the receptors are in the Jacobson's organ in the roof of the mouth. Once the chemicals are inside the mouth, they will trigger electric signals, which are then relayed to the brain. Because a snake's tongue is forked, they can collect information from two different places at once. Their forked tongue gives them a 3-D smelling "view" and helps them gain a sense of direction.

A **frog's** diet can vary, so their tongue has to be widely adaptable at grabbing sticky, hairy and even slippery surfaces with ease. The speed at which they stick their tongue out is also incredible, around five times faster than a human can blink. Studies also show that they can use their tongue to pull prey 1.4 times their own body weight. The impact on the insect is studied in some frogs to be around 12 times the acceleration of gravity. Just so you have something to compare this to, when astronauts take off in a rocket launch, they experience around three times the acceleration of gravity.

Tongues are sometimes considered gross and slimy; however, they are essential organs that can make all the difference when it comes to an animal's chance of survival.

Monica Macoubrie is an outdoor educator with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.



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PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

HOARFROST

By Martha D. Shulski

Feathers on a fence post. No, not that of a bird, but rather wisps of white interlocking crystals that form as water transitions directly from vapor to solid form. This is hoarfrost.

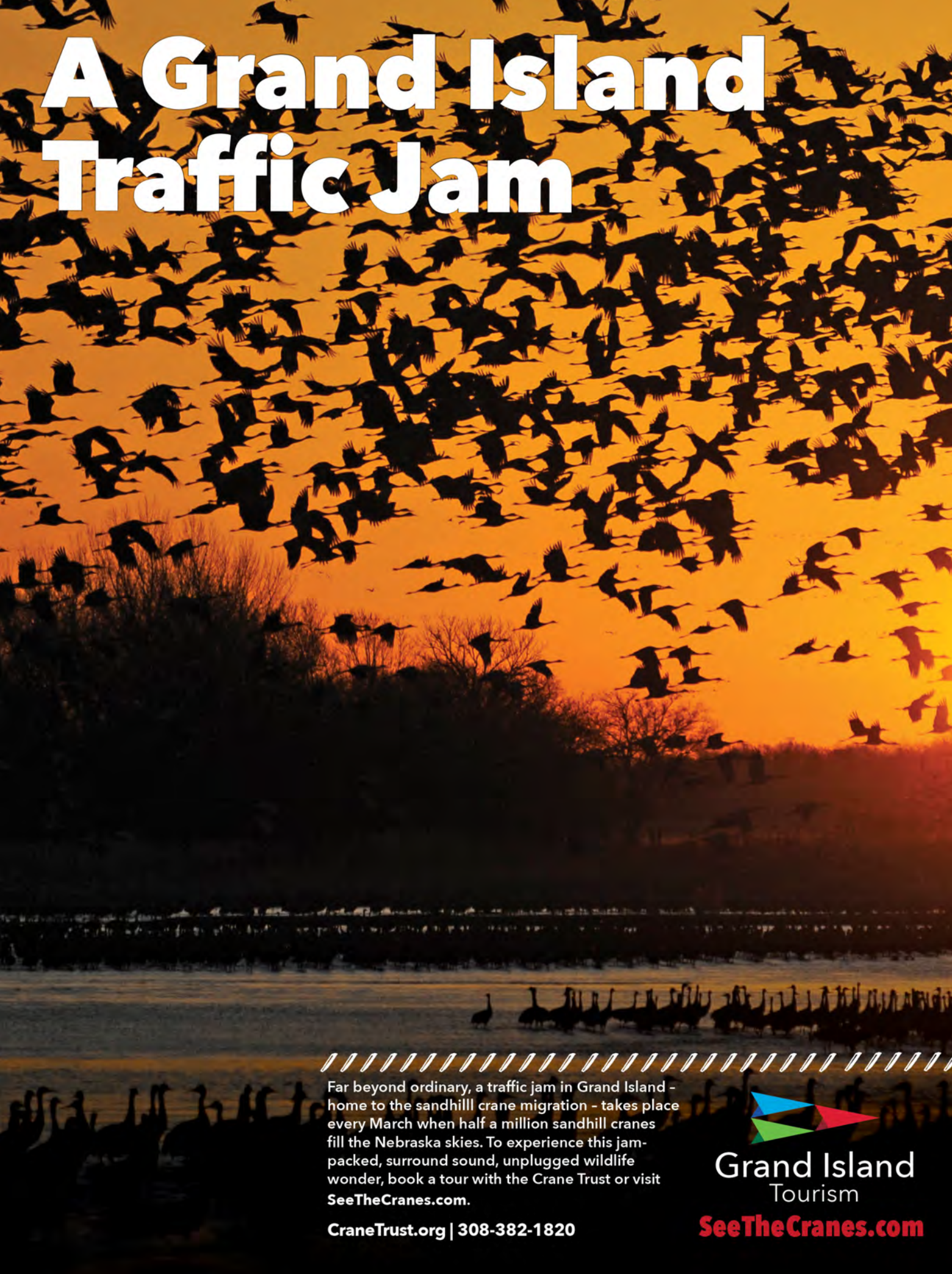
This specific type of frost is voluminous, feathery and light, extending out from leaves and tree branches, wires or poles. Most of us are familiar with frost, the thin coating of ice on the landscape that occurs when water vapor deposits on surfaces at temperatures that are below freezing, termed deposition. But hoarfrost has much more structure than frost and may in fact look like a dusting of snow from a distance.

The occurrence is most common under clear and calm

nights as the earth cools and loses its daytime heat energy to the atmosphere. If there is just a light wind, the crystalline structure will act as a wind vane and tell you the direction the air is moving. Hoarfrost can also form as liquid dew that cools and subsequently freezes, in which it is then called silver or white frost.

As with everything else when it comes to our weather, conditions change as quickly as a bird taking flight. Catch these “feathers” before the faint winter sun turns them back into liquid phantoms.

Martha D. Shulski, at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, is the director of the Nebraska State Climate office.



A Grand Island Traffic Jam



Far beyond ordinary, a traffic jam in Grand Island - home to the sandhill crane migration - takes place every March when half a million sandhill cranes fill the Nebraska skies. To experience this jam-packed, surround sound, unplugged wildlife wonder, book a tour with the Crane Trust or visit SeeTheCranes.com.

CraneTrust.org | 308-382-1820



Grand Island
Tourism

SeeTheCranes.com

DUCK WITH THYME AND CREAM

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

When cooking wild game, simple is often the best treatment. This wild duck with herb and cream sauce recipe has few ingredients, but it allows the main ingredient to shine: Savory and tart Ponzu, fruity dry sherry and fresh herbs complement the gaminess of mallard well.

You can cook the duck whole, spatchcocked or simply halved. Or take the time to debone the breasts, pictured, while leaving the legs and thighs intact. This helps the pieces lie flatter in the pan, allowing for more even browning and cooking. Prepping duck this way also makes it easier to eat at the table. Check foodforhunters.com for step-by-step photos.

- Servings:** 2
Prep Time: 1 hour
Cooking Time: 20 minutes
Ingredients:
- 1 whole mallard duck, plucked
 - 1 tablespoon of olive oil
 - 1 small shallot, thinly sliced
 - 2 tablespoons of dry sherry
 - 2 sprigs of fresh thyme
 - 2 sprigs of fresh marjoram, optional
 - 2 tablespoons of Ponzu sauce
 - 1 cup of heavy whipping cream
 - Freshly cracked pepper, to taste
 - Kosher salt, to taste

1. Remove the duck's backbone with kitchen shears. Then follow the contours of the duck's back and breast bones and separate the meat from the bone. Keep leg and thigh bones intact by snipping the socket between the thigh bone and body. Cut the duck in two between the breasts. Allow the meat to sit for an hour at room temperature.
2. Pat duck dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Add half the olive oil to a pan and turn heat to medium. Add duck skin-side down to the still-cold pan and cook until the skin renders and turns golden.
3. Flip the duck and brown on the

other side until internal temperature reaches about 135 degrees. Remove duck from heat, wrap in foil and rest for at least 5-10 minutes for a finishing temperature of 140-145 degrees for medium doneness.

4. Meanwhile, add the rest of the olive oil to the pan and sauté the shallot, marjoram and thyme for 30 seconds; do not let the shallot burn. Add the dry sherry and cook until most of it evaporates – a few seconds – while scraping the bottom of the pan with a wooden spoon to release browned bits. Then add the Ponzu and heavy cream. Simmer until thickened and season to taste.



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY

» Experience the Great Migration! »

From late February through early April, over 600,000 Sandhill Cranes and other migratory birds flock to Kearney, Nebraska to fuel up before resuming their northward migration. Audubon's viewing blinds are placed along the Platte River so you can spend sunrise and sunset with the cranes.



Photo Credit: Don Brockmeier

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Iain Nicolson
Audubon Center
at Rowe Sanctuary

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Rowe Sanctuary is 15 minutes from Kearney!



Photo Credit: Mike Fernandez



Viewing blind at Rowe Sanctuary

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- » Fort Kearny State Historical Park & Visitor Center
- » Fort Kearny State Rec Area Hike/Bike Bridge
- » CPNRD Roadside Viewing Site
- » CPNRD Plautz Viewing Site

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Photo Credit: Martin Knippel

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Kearney, where the Heartland gathers.



2019 Photo Contest

With more than 2,000 entries, the 2019 *Nebraskaland Magazine* Photo Contest drew a record number of stunning images from your fellow Nebraska photographers in the categories of Wildlife, Flora, Scenic, and Recreation.

The *Nebraskaland Magazine* staff found it difficult to pare down the excellent images – especially the Best of Show winner, which went to Eric Wellman and his image, “Perseverance.”

We thank everyone who participated and made this exciting feature possible in our magazine. We look forward to seeing more of your great photographs in next year’s contest.

Keep shooting.

Jeff Kurrus, Editor
Nebraskaland Magazine

BEST OF SHOW

Perseverance

Photo by Eric Wellman, Lincoln
@ericwellmanphoto

FIRST PLACE – All Choked Up
Photo by Mike Bazant, Omaha
@mbazant2321



SECOND PLACE – Howdy, Neighbor
Photo by Rebecca Johnson, Central City
@thecoloringtree





THIRD PLACE – Class Photo
Photo by Marquene Koontz, Ogallala
@marquenemarie



FIRST PLACE – Carns in Bloom
 Photo by Emily Swan, Springview
 @emilyswanphotography

SECOND PLACE – Blaze
 Photo by Eric Wellman, Lincoln, @ericwellmanphoto

FLORA



THIRD PLACE – Purple Sunset
 Photo by Derrill Grabenstein,
 Lincoln
 @de_grabenstein



SCENIC

FIRST PLACE – A Two-colored Sunset

Photo by Lindsey Keller, Lincoln

@llarson4



SCENIC

SECOND PLACE – Milky Way Tree
Photo by Tyler Moore, Omaha, @drtylermoore



THIRD PLACE – Autumn Horses
Photo by Julie Hudson, Omaha
@j.hudsonphotos

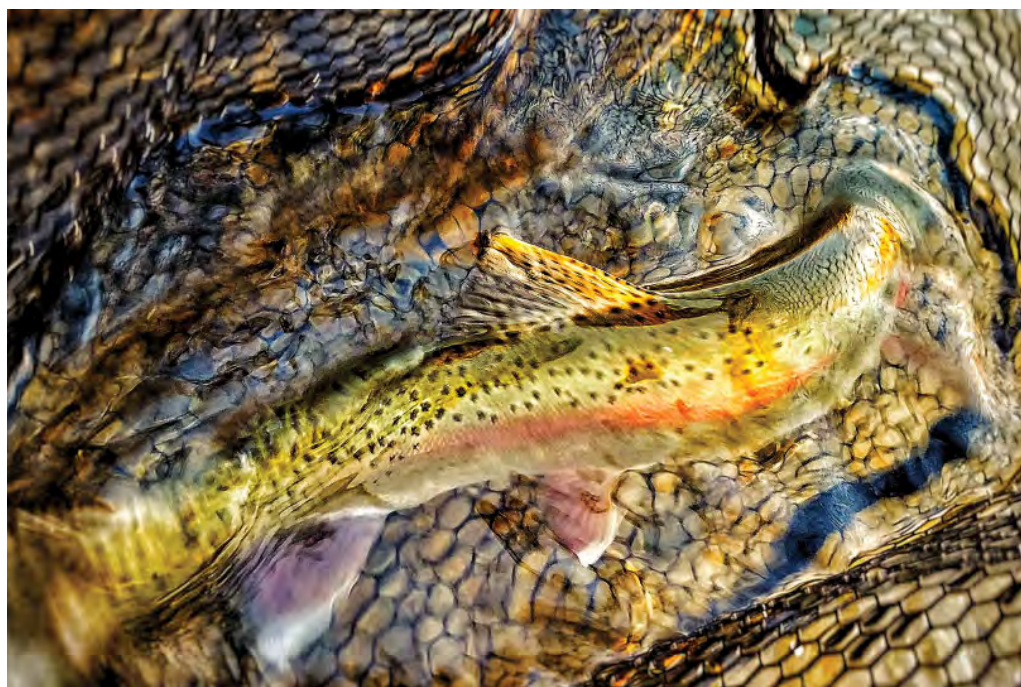


FIRST PLACE – Branched Oak Angler
 Photo by Derrill Grabenstein, Lincoln
 @de_grabenstein

RECREATION



THIRD PLACE – Reflections of a Dream
 Photo by Ryan Jones, Seward, @bentlight



SECOND PLACE – The Trout Dance
 Photo by Jacob Patterson, Mitchell
 @living_on_the_fly

Outdoor Nebraska

By Renae Blum

Crisp, clear days sparkling with snow – that’s a perfect opportunity to go outdoors and make memories with activities like these. Learn more about the events listed below at Calendar.OutdoorNebraska.gov. 



CHADRON CREEK RANCH WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA
PHOTO BY JUSTIN HANG

Try night photography

Throughout the month | Statewide

On a clear, moonless night, get out your camera and tripod and take some pictures of the stars. Use a large aperture and adjust your settings manually based on the amount of light available.



FINDING A CACHE AT BUFFALO BILL STATE RECREATION AREA
PHOTO BY JULE GEISER

Go geocaching

Throughout the month | Statewide

Geocaching, a kind of treasure hunt using GPS to find hidden containers, can be fun even when there’s snow on the ground. Dress for the weather, drink lots of fluids and tell someone where you’re going and when you’ll be back. Waterproof gloves and boots and something to dig through snow with are also handy.

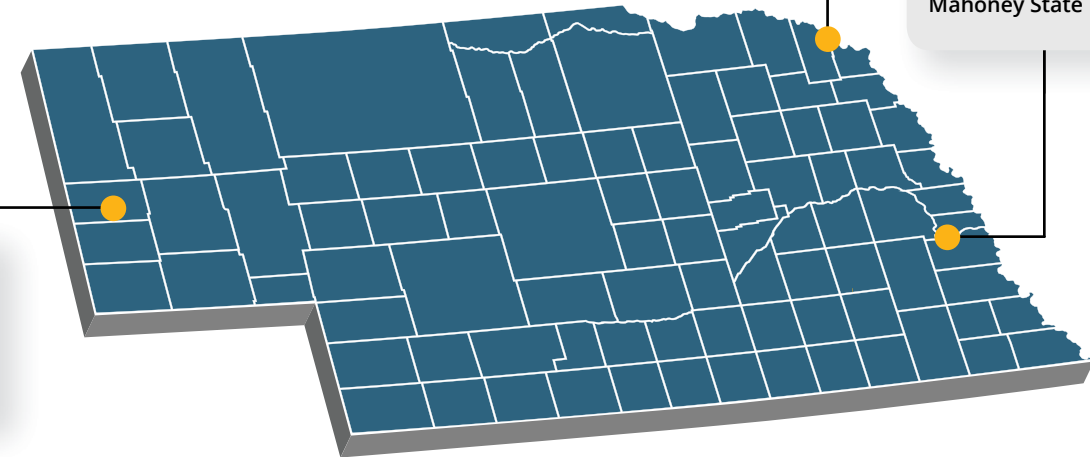


PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY

Attend Marsh Madness

February 23-March 16 | Ponca State Park

This popular birding event features Avian Adventure tours and viewing blind sessions that offer the chance to see and learn about waterfowl, eagles, and other early spring migrants. For more information, contact the park at 402-755-2284 or visit the park’s Facebook page.



Cold Days, Warm Hearts

Jan. 11, Eugene T. Mahoney State Park



WINTER CAMPFIRE AT FORT KEARNY STATE RECREATION AREA
PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Camp at a Nebraska state park

Throughout the month | Statewide

Winter camping is a totally different experience. This year, try it at a state park. Fort Kearny and Branched Oak state recreation areas, Indian Cave State Park, and parks with ice fishing access are popular. Keep in mind that in most cases, water, restrooms and sometimes electricity is not available, so check ahead. Also call ahead to see if snowy roads and campsites are accessible.



SETTING UP CANADA GOOSE DECOYS BEFORE A HUNT
PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Go goose hunting

Seasons vary | Statewide

Goose hunting can make for a great day of hunting with family and friends. Strategies for success include scouting for areas where geese frequently feed; using a variety of decoys, including silhouettes, full-body, shells and socks; and selecting a couple of people to call while the rest of the group calls sparingly or not at all.

The Soul of the Prairie

What does a scarcity of bison mean for Nebraska's grasslands?

STORY AND PHOTOS BY CHRIS HELZER

The plains bison has earned its standing as an iconic large animal of the American prairie. That status was reinforced a few years ago when the bison was named the national mammal of the United States. Bison capture the imagination of people like few other grassland animals, but there are not many places where you can still find them within big prairie landscapes.

Before European Settlement

Everyone has heard stories about the masses of bison roaming across the Plains prior to European settlement. Estimating the historic size of the North American bison

population is difficult and much disputed. Many estimates put the herd size at between 30 and 60 million animals prior to the year 1600. Bison then expanded their range for a few centuries, as Native American peoples were decimated by disease and subjugation by Europeans. By the 1890s, however, widespread European settlement and excessive harvesting had nearly obliterated bison as a species, leaving only about 1,000 animals.

During that same period, a few people began efforts to save what was left of the bison population. Some wanted to crossbreed bison with cattle (leading to very small amounts of cattle genetics in many of today's bison) while others were strictly focused on conservation. According to the National



A small group of bison grazes in the northern Sandhills at The Nature Conservancy's Niobrara Valley Preserve.



A bison bull in autumn with its full winter coat.



Bison at sunrise at The Nature Conservancy’s Niobrara Valley Preserve. Unlike cattle, whose loud bawling can be heard from far away, bison vocalizations consist of soft grunts and “huffs.”

Bison Association, there are now about 360,000 bison in North America, about half of which are on private ranches and farms.

While most of today’s bison are in captive populations, there’s still something emotionally stirring about seeing them in person – especially when they’re surrounded by grassland that stretches from horizon to horizon. Perhaps more than any other prairie animal, bison evoke feelings of wildness and nostalgia within us. Grasslands without bison can be beautiful and inspiring, but grasslands *with* bison are on another level.

Bison and Cattle

Herds of large grazing animals have always played a crucial role in the ecology of grasslands. Historic bison

herds modified habitat structure for animals and growing conditions for plants in ways that sustained a broad diversity of both across the Plains. Today, both cattle and bison can fill those roles, though there are some important differences between the species.

Bison need to consume large amounts of vegetation to sustain their massive bodies, eating as much as 20 pounds or more of grass per day. The majority of their diet consists of grasses, but bison also eat a variety of wildflowers to satisfy their constantly shifting nutritional needs. Cattle have similar diets when given the opportunity to forage wherever they wish (as opposed to being squeezed into a series of small paddocks). However, cattle tend to make broad-leaved plants a slightly higher percentage of their diet than bison do.



The fresh growth of grasses after a prairie fire are a strong attractant to bison.

and domestic cattle is related to their use of wooded areas and water. Cattle tend to seek out the shade of trees during hot sunny days, but bison tend to avoid wooded areas except when they need something to rub against. Bison also don’t often stand around in ponds or streams, polluting those areas with manure and disturbing sediment as cattle are prone to do. While cattle managers have to mitigate for the impacts of cattle hanging around shade and water, bison-grazed sites don’t typically have those problems, especially when bison have plenty of room to roam around.

Fire

Historically, indigenous peoples recognized the attraction of bison to fresh grass growth and burned large patches of prairie, knowing they could come to that area later and find bison to hunt. Bison would often concentrate within those large stretches of recently-burned prairie for most or all of a growing season, creating huge patches of short, sparse vegetation. Other wildlife species were drawn to those same patches too, including many birds, mammals and insects that prefer short habitat structure to the taller, more rank vegetation outside burned and grazed areas. Examples of those wildlife species included upland sandpipers, horned larks, jackrabbits, kangaroo rats, many species of grasshoppers, tiger beetles, dung beetles and other invertebrates. Predators of all those creatures, of course, followed their prey into those areas.

Eventually, new fires (or the eventual inability of plants to keep putting out sufficient new growth after repeated grazing) would draw bison away to new foraging areas. This allowed the grassland community to begin recovering from its long period of repeated grazing. It often took a year or more for the most heavily impacted perennial grasses and wildflowers to regain their dominance within the plant community. During that time, annuals and other opportunistic plant species



Dust bathing by bison creates wallows that provide habitat for many other animal and plant species.

flourished, including annual sunflower, ragweed, hoary vervain, evening primrose, gumweed and many others. The combination of short, weakened grasses and a flush of tall “weedy” wildflowers created a habitat bonanza for many wildlife species.

An abundance of insects quickly flowed into those areas. Some, like bees and other pollinators, were drawn to the wealth of flowers produced by the opportunistic plants. Other insects took advantage of a habitat structure that included tall wildflowers with an understory of short grass plants, still weakened by a long period of repeated grazing. That combination made it easy for insects to regulate their temperature by moving quickly from sun to shade while feeding on the abundance of plants and/or other insects.

Upland birds such as grouse and quail, looking for a place to rear their mobile broods, were drawn to the same locations. The chicks of those species could easily move through the short-statured grasses and feed on the abundant insects while sheltering under or near the protective cover of the “weedy” plants all around them. They could also easily find sunny patches in the mornings to dry out and warm up and then enjoy the shade of tall wildflowers during hot afternoons.

As vegetation gradually recovered from the impacts of

intense bison grazing, it became tall and dense once again. That provided habitat for yet another suite of wildlife species that preferred that heavier cover. Those species included nesting grouse and quail, along with other bird species such as sedge wrens and Henslow’s sparrows. Some small mammal species, especially voles, also thrived in tall thatchy vegetation, and that, in turn, attracted predators like bull snakes and many others. Of course, the density of the plants and abundance of dried vegetation from previous years also created prime conditions for fire, through either random lightning strikes or purposeful ignitions by people. Those fires restarted the entire cycle of bison grazing and subsequent recovery.

Today, grazing patterns of both bison and cattle can create a similar succession of habitat types across the prairie. However, most contemporary cattle management consists of relatively short bouts of grazing, which leads to quick recovery of grasses and low heterogeneity of vegetation heights and density across the landscape. Even many bison herds are managed in ways that fail to create the kinds of season-long intensive grazing that leads to flushes of opportunistic plants and the habitat they provide. As a result, many grasslands are missing some key habitat components, contributing to the plight of many wildlife species across the Great Plains.

Wallowing

Bison also create important smaller-scale disturbances. The most recognized of these is the result of wallowing, or dust bathing. Whether to help shed a winter coat of fur or gain some relief from flies and other biting insects, bison enjoy rolling in the dust. Big bulls will also urinate and then roll around in it to advertise their physical prowess to other bulls. Over time, the favorite areas for these behaviors turn into shallow depressions in the ground called wallows.

Bison wallows are utilized by other animals, too. Insects are drawn to the open sunny habitats within wallows, and that draws invertebrate predators including tiger beetles and robber flies, as well as small vertebrates like toads, lizards and rodents. Wallows also provide great habitat for plant species that thrive in mostly bare soil where competition is light. When wallows are temporarily abandoned as herds move elsewhere, opportunistic plants quickly colonize them, followed more slowly by longer-lived plants. However, when fire or chance brings the herds back, bison revisit previous wallowing areas, re-opening and enlarging them each time.

When wallows are created in low-lying areas, or in soils that



Lesser earless lizards are among numerous wildlife species that appreciate habitat with a lot of exposed bare soil.

are easily compacted, they can become temporary ponds after rain events. Tadpoles of toads and frogs are often abundant in those pools, along with aquatic insects and other small animals. The ponds also provide drinking water to many



Fourpoint evening primrose is a biennial plant, and one of many plants that benefits from intensive bison grazing.



Bison spread out across the Nebraska Sandhills at the McMurtrey ranch.

terrestrial animals, as well as places to cool off and rehydrate. If they are big or long-lasting enough, water-holding bison wallows can support aquatic vegetation and even provide stop-over and feeding habitat for migratory water birds.

Cattle don’t have the same extensive wallowing behavior as bison, though they can sometimes provide smaller scale areas of bare soil. In addition, both cattle and bison create trails through the prairie along paths between water sources or

favorite feeding or loafing areas. Those trails are often used by many other wildlife species seeking easier movement through dense vegetation. Reptiles and insects also utilize those trails as places to come out in the sun and warm up on cool mornings.

Soul of the Prairie

The days of 30 million bison rambling across the prairies

of North America are long gone. Fortunately, cattle grazing can still fill many of the roles of those historic bison, though current livestock practices tend not to provide the full spectrum of habitat needs for prairie plants and animals. There are countless species of prairie wildlife, each of which adds to the complexity and function of the grassland.

Any visit to a prairie is enhanced by a flock of grouse

exploding from cover, the loud buzzing of katydids and cicadas, or a coyote slipping quietly out of sight. Somehow, however, there’s nothing quite like coming over a rise and spotting a group of massive furry beasts grazing and grunting their way across the landscape. Bison make important contributions to the ecology of large grasslands, but they might contribute even more significantly to the soul of the prairie. 🦌

Nebraska's Five Capitols

By David L. Bristow, History Nebraska

Our state capitol is one of the nation's most recognizable, but did you know it's the third capitol built on that spot, and the fifth to serve as Nebraska's seat of government?

Nebraska's first territorial capitol was built in Omaha by the Council Bluffs and Nebraska Ferry Company. It was Omaha's first brick building and stood on Ninth Street between Farnam and Douglas.



"The building is a neat and substantial one, but altogether too small for the purpose intended," said the *Nebraska Palladium* (Bellevue) after the first legislative session opened in January 1855. The front door opened into a hallway, with the House of Representatives chamber on the left and the governor's apartment on the right. A winding staircase led upstairs to the Council chamber (equivalent to a Senate) and committee rooms. A real estate agent would call it "cozy."

In 1858 the legislature moved to a larger, partly finished building on the present site of Omaha Central High School. The new building began falling apart immediately. A year later it had to be repaired to keep a wall from collapsing.

And with no "privy" on the grounds, members of legislature relieved themselves in the dirt-floored basement. In this photo the capitol would have been drafty and chilly, but at least it didn't stink as much in cold weather.

The second capitol stood on the present site of Omaha Central High School. History Nebraska RG2341-2-p17-1



Omaha newspapers ridiculed the state government's move to the tiny village of Lincoln. "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 paper. Lincoln "is destined for isolation and ultimate oblivion," said another.

Governor David Butler feared that unless a new building was ready to receive the state legislature in January 1869, Omaha would find a way to remain the capital city.

The new capitol was ready in time, but it was a rush job and its inferior stone soon began to crumble.

The third capitol was completed in Lincoln in 1868. History Nebraska RG1234-3-1

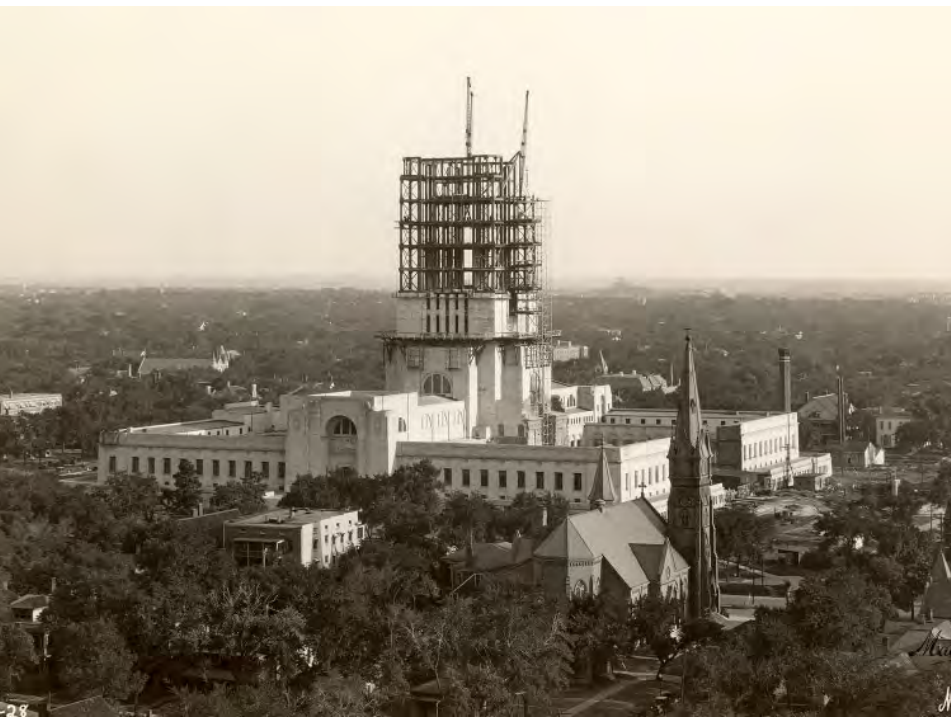


Built in the 1880s, the fourth capitol remained in use while the present capitol was built around it. History Nebraska RG1234-13-8

The fourth capitol was built on the site of the third. It was bigger but not much better. Completed in 1888, it soon settled and cracked. It was in poor shape by the early 20th century.

By the 1920s Nebraska was planning its fifth

capitol in less than 70 years. Here you can see the present capitol rising around its predecessor. This was done to keep the old building open until part of the new one was complete.



You might think the legislature would play it safe and try for a plain but competently-constructed building. Instead they commissioned an unusual, modern design. They spent 10 years having it built, paying for it as they went. Our present capitol was completed in 1932 – an enduring landmark at last. 📌

Visit *History Nebraska's* website at history.nebraska.gov.



The fourth capitol was demolished before the present tower (photos above and top) was built. History Nebraska RG1234-40-6



Raising the Sower,
April 24, 1930. The eight-ton
sculpture doubles as a
lightning rod.
History Nebraska
RG1234-42-3

The Unseen

Camera traps capture wildlife at Indian Cave State Park

PHOTOS AND STORY BY ERIC FOWLER



2/17/2018, 5:32:11 PM
A mountain lion steps
off a fallen tree at
Indian Cave State
Park in Richardson
County.

When I placed a camera trap along a game trail in the wooded bluffs at Indian Cave State Park in 2017, I was hoping to capture a photograph of a mountain lion that had been spotted in the area. I figured it was a long shot, at best. And I never imagined the camera would capture nearly every mammal larger than a mouse that lives in those woods. To succeed on both fronts shows the effectiveness of camera traps to survey wildlife, and that while you might not see most of them when you're hiking these woods, the forest is indeed alive with wildlife.

The first evidence of a mountain lion in the area came in 2015 from a hunter who sent a copy of a game camera photo captured near the park to Sam Wilson, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's furbearer/carnivore program manager. Wilson met with the man, confirmed the report, and set up his own cameras on his land and at several locations throughout the park. His cameras have since captured the lion several times, as have the cameras of other hunters in the area. One neighbor was lucky enough to get a live look at the cat and photograph it with her cell phone. Wilson was also able to collect DNA that identified the cat as a female.

Justin Haag, *Nebraskaland Magazine's* regional editor in Chadron, had been using a camera trap to successfully photograph mountain lions in the Pine Ridge since 2015. You saw many of his photos in "Lessons from Cat Country" in the November issue of the magazine. Wilson thought the chances of photographing the lion at Indian Cave were good enough that we ordered another camera trap from Jeff Dale of TRLcam, who builds them for photographers around the world. Like Haag's, it is a Nikon DSLR in a waterproof housing, wired with three external Speedlights that allow quality photos to be captured day and night, a major step up from the game cameras used by hunters.

With Wilson's help, I picked a spot along a game trail and set up the camera on February 7, 2017. On a warm afternoon 11 days later, I took my wife, Theresa, and son, Mace, to the park to go for a hike and change the output on the flashes to get a better exposure on the camera. Just 8½ hours later, at 11:41 p.m., it captured the first photos of the night: six frames of a Virginia opossum walking up the trail. Five minutes later, it captured a series of 45 photos, one per second, of the lion walking up the trail, pausing to sniff the trail and log where we'd placed scent, and to look at the camera.

Not only did I find that series of photos when I checked the trap, I found two more sets, one captured of the cat walking down the trail on February 26 and another walking up on March 1. Wilson and I were elated.

I moved the camera farther uphill on the trail and captured the lion two more times in the next 10 days. Each time the cat passed, it paid less attention to the click of the

camera and the flash of the strobes. I moved the trap again, but captured no photos of the lion before pulling the camera at the end of May.

I put the camera back out in December 2018, capturing no photos from the first location. The second location produced the photo that leads this story, part of an interesting series you can see online of the cat noticing the camera from the next ridge and turning back for a closer look. The third and final spot I placed the camera that winter was on the main trail near that fallen tree. It was nearly successful at capturing a photo I was lacking: the cat walking directly toward the camera. I did capture her presence, but she left the trail 10 feet before she was within the pre-focused range of the camera and the range of the strobes, leaving her blurred, underexposed and partly obscured by vegetation.

With more help from Wilson, I picked a new spot for the camera last winter, placing it along a rock wall and setting up for an exposure that would only work at night. The lion posed for the camera once, providing four frames in the minute she was in the spot.

That was the sixth time she provided us with quality photos, something neither Wilson nor I could have imagined happening. Equally surprising was the variety of wildlife the camera trap captured. According to *Mammals of Nebraska, a Bulletin of the University of Nebraska State Museum*, if you don't count bats, mice, shrews, voles and other small creatures camera traps aren't designed to capture, there are 22 species of mammals that can be found in southeastern Nebraska. Of those, Keith Geluso, a University of Nebraska at Kearney professor and one of six co-authors of *Mammals*, said there is a realistic chance that 14 could be found in the woodlands at Indian Cave. My camera trap captured 13 of them, missing only the southern flying squirrel. If you add white-footed mice, wild turkeys, an owl and four song birds, hikers, mushroom hunters and roaming domestic dogs, the trap captured 22 species in all, and some interesting behaviors.

Whenever I recounted the species the trap captured to my wife, she asked a fair question: Why do we rarely see anything other than squirrels when we are hiking at the park?

The answer, according to Wilson, lies in wildlife behavior. "Most mammals are active at dawn or dusk or during the night and we hike during the day, so we're out there when they are least active," he said. "And they are shy, elusive and very aware, so although you may hike by a fox or bobcat, if it sees you first it's not going to step out and put on a show. It's going to hide."

So if you want to see wildlife, the best thing to do is to go early or stay late, sit quietly and patiently, and wait for them to come to you. Like a deer hunter does. Or a camera trap. 



2/18/2017
3:18:47 PM
The author, his son, Mace, wife, Theresa, and their dogs pose in front of the camera trap after resetting the strobes and taking a hike.



2/18/2017
11:46:51 PM
At the same location a little more than 8 hours later, a mountain lion walks the trail past the trap, pausing to sniff the air.



3/4/2018
10:46:37 PM
An eastern cottontail rabbit passes in front of the camera trap.



3/4/2018
10:48:03 PM
Less than a minute and a half later, a bobcat stalks the rabbit. This was one of several interactions between two species of wildlife recorded by the camera trap.



12/19/2017
3:31:35 PM
A white-tailed buck peers over a fallen tree at the camera trap.

1/9/2018
6:43:16 PM
A coyote walks across the same fallen tree the mountain lion is pictured on in the opening spread of this article. Six mammals walked across the log in the 52 days the camera was focused on it, including the raccoon and bobcat below.



1/9/2018
7:08:53 PM
Bobcat

1/20/2018
1:57:05 AM
Common Raccoon





1/21/2019
10:51:36 PM

A mountain lion walks in front of a sandstone wall above the Missouri River at Indian Cave. The long, nighttime exposure was further illuminated by a full moon, and also allowed a ghost of the cat to be recorded when it paused in front of the camera trap.



1/19/2018
5:28:47 PM

An eastern fox squirrel triggered the camera trap while a white-tailed buck was walking along the next ridge.

To see more images from this story, visit Magazine.OutdoorNebraska.gov.



12/17/2017, 12:01:56 PM
Coyote with mange



3/4/2017, 2:21:17 AM
White Footed Deermouse



2/23/2017, 3:30:35 AM
Red Fox



3/8/2017, 4:27:14 PM
Northern Flicker



2/10/2017, 5:22:16 AM
Striped Skunk



4/9/2017, 6:42:02 PM
Woodchuck



4/20/2017, 9:22:27 PM
American Badger



3/03/2017, 11:49:03 PM
Virginia Opossum



1/26/2018, 4:49:11 PM
Eastern Gray Squirrel



2/27/2017, 6:26:18 PM
Great Horned Owl



3/12/2017, 7:04:31 PM
White-tailed Deer



4/3/2017, 6:58:51 AM
Wild Turkey

A Warm Day

Survival on the Missouri

By Todd Mills, as told to Jeff Kurrus

It was Nov. 30, 1998. Three of my childhood friends were coming back to duck hunt – a tradition we had done since the mid-1980s. I’ve known one since kindergarten, the rest of them fifth and sixth grade, more than 50 years. We grew up hunting together with BB guns, so we spent a lot of time in the field getting to know one another. This probably had a lot to do with the fact we’re still alive.

We were hunting on the Missouri River, and it was a very mild day – 48 degrees. When we finished our hunt, we decided to scout. We were coming back from a little pothole near the main channel of the river toward the Santee boat ramp. We had four guys, two dogs and a pile of decoys in a 14-foot john boat with a wooden blind on top of it; we’d hunted out of it for several years. We weren’t thinking about our weight, or what could happen if your boat is overloaded, or if you’re not in the right place inside the boat.

I said, “Let’s go down one more channel, check one spot and then we’ll turn around and come back.” Then, at the last minute, we decided we weren’t going to do it. I was in the back of the boat, running the tiller, and the rest of the guys were in front. I stopped, then began to turn around in a little bay.

As I did, one of the guys in the front of the boat said, “Get the bucket.” That’s the last thing I remember before our boat turned upside down. So, in a matter of 30 seconds, we went from tooling down the river to being underwater.

Looking back, several things were wrong.

There was too much weight to

begin with, but even if there wasn’t, we didn’t distribute it properly. I had a flat-bottomed boat, which I will never have again because water can come over the front way too easily. Plus, it was a mild day, so we were a little more relaxed than we normally would be.

We popped up like bobbers, and the look on everyone’s faces was complete shock. It happened so fast that it wasn’t really so much “we’re in a bad spot,” as it was disbelief. If the boat had flipped mere feet in a different direction, we would have been dumped in the main channel and no one would have survived. Fortunately, because we had just drifted off that channel, we could stand. We didn’t have to swim, but my dog was leashed to the front of the boat – which had suctioned to the water surface – and was trapped underneath. My buddy was able to reach underneath and unleash my dog so she could get out. My other buddy threw his dog on top of the boat, and we all just stared at each other. I’ll never forget the hopelessness watching our decoys, life jackets and other gear drift away with the current.

We got the boat to a long point of cattails where it would set, then realized we were in trouble. No one was on the water, and we weren’t prepared. Only one of us was wearing polyester, while the rest were in big, heavy, cotton shirts and jeans. We had another channel to cross before we could even get close to the channel that took us to the boat ramp.

At that point, and I truly believe that because of us knowing each other so long, none of us panicked. We started throwing information at one another and trying to find the right fix. We had no way of getting across the channel, and it was an hour before sunset.

It was getting cold, and we were trying to get the boat tipped upright. When we finally got it turned back over, we got as much water out as we possibly could. At that point, I couldn’t get the motor started, so we agreed that once we got enough water out to float the boat, we had to get



Left: Scott Lewis, Todd Mills, and Gray Carlson hunt in 2016 near Grand Island. Above: Scott Lewis and Dean Schade hunt in 2017 on the Missouri River.

it across to another island, and across a channel, so we could start walking the boat up. Because we still had our shotguns – they had suctioned underneath the boat as well – we also tried to fire a couple of distress shots, which was to no avail. I didn’t have any sort of flare in the boat. We were completely unprepared. So we decided to cross the channel with two oars and our weight as evenly distributed as we could, with no life jackets and water two inches from the top of the boat.

When we got to the other side, I did whatever I could to get the motor to run. In the meantime, the one guy wearing polyester took a rope at the front of the boat and started walking us around the island. We had probably a half-mile of channel to get to another bigger channel to get to the boat ramp. Obviously, everyone was colder. If it had been a normal, Nov. 30 kind of day, we would’ve all died from hypothermia.

But we finally got the boat all the way to the point. We were still a long way from the boat ramp, but there was a kid who rode up on a bike. We fired two or three more distress shots but he didn’t even acknowledge it. So we huddled as closely as we could in the middle of the cattails to provide some sort of heat to one another. I kept working on the motor and, finally, got it started. Broken prop, but it started.

We decided that another person and I would get across the channel to the boat ramp, drain the boat, then come back for the others. When we got to the ramp, some guys came down and we asked them to get help, and they said they would. But they never came back. This was before cell phones, so we couldn’t call anyone for help. We were also terribly dehydrated.

But somehow, that was the first time I really felt like we were going to be OK. A little while later, after leaving one buddy at the ramp, just in case, I tooled back across. It took two more trips but I got the other two back to the boat ramp.

In the years since, I’ve thought a lot about this day. How any number of slight differences would have changed the outcome for the worse. I can only shake my head at our ignorance, and how the good Lord was definitely looking down on us. **N**



Todd Mills waterfowl hunts near Grand Island.

Survival Tips

If you hunt, fish, or participate in any other outdoor activities, it's not a matter of "if" you get in a dangerous spot, it's "when." Apply these tips to your outdoor ventures.

- **Wear your life jacket**
If the boat would have flipped over 10 yards before it did, we would have been in the main channel and dead because we weren’t wearing our life jackets. I rarely see a duck hunter leaving the boat ramp with a life jacket on – a big mistake.
- **Tell someone where you are**
There were always people hunting on that stretch of river, but that day there weren’t. Let someone know where you are at all times and have the local conservation officer’s number with you.
- **Don’t overload your boat**
Follow your boat’s guidelines and evenly distribute weight. We didn’t and it nearly cost us.
- **Bring extra clothes**
Always have extra clothes in your boat, even if it’s a warm day. And remember to stay away from cotton. We prefer polyester.
- **Never leash your dogs to the boat**
This gives them no chance to survive if something goes wrong.
- **Don’t remove boat flotation**
Many people will take it out to create extra storage. Don’t do it. It probably saved our lives.

Advancing Groundhogs

Look Out Nebraska

By Keith Geluso

Groundhogs, whistle pigs or woodchucks are all synonymous with a large squirrel commonly active during the day and seen frequently on the edges of woodlots, rivers, streams, fields and even in backyards across eastern parts of the United States. Punxsutawney Phil of Pennsylvania is likely the most famous woodchuck of all, and along with other individuals from the Eastern United States, supposedly predicts the length of winter based on seeing its shadow (or not) on Groundhog Day, the 2nd of February each year. This past winter, however, we all know that the groundhogs back East did not predict the length of winter here in Nebraska, as snow cover and cold temperatures extended well into March.

Until recently, many folks in Nebraska likely were unfamiliar with this species in the Cornhusker State. That is, sightings of woodchucks in much of the state are rather recent occurrences, unless you live in eastern Nebraska. As a kid in the 1970s and 1980s, I remember seeing a few individuals on the outskirts of Omaha, with one even taking up residence under a shed in our backyard in town.

Woodchucks literally have been on the move in Nebraska, advancing westward across the state to almost now Colorado, where the related cousin, the yellow-bellied marmot, resides at high elevations in the Rocky Mountains.

Researchers have continued to plot this westward advancing front. In the 1960s, woodchucks lived in only the eastern quarter of the state, not much farther west than York. However, by the late 1990s and early 2000s, woodchucks reached central parts of the state.

In 2018, my students and colleagues at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, including assistance from many private residents and Nebraska Game and Parks Commission conservation officers and wildlife biologists, once again updated the whereabouts of woodchucks across Nebraska. We were surprised to learn that woodchucks are now as far west as Ogallala in Keith County and are quite common throughout all of central Nebraska. We calculated that woodchucks colonized the central and western parts of the

Platte River at about 6 miles (10 km) a year since about 2000. We did not see as extensive movements along the Republican or Niobrara rivers, but we might learn even more about the distribution of this large squirrel by *Nebraskaland* readers. We also learned that woodchucks are at times a nuisance species in places where they now occur in the state, as they tend to like gardens, outbuildings and crop fields. Although reported as troublesome, woodchucks dig extensive burrows that, in turn, create habitats for river otters, raccoons, mice, snakes, birds and more.

Other woodland mammals, too, have been moving westward across the state, including eastern fox squirrels, white-footed mice, opossums and a number of bat species.

Why the shifting distributions? The former treeless prairies of the Great Plains were once a barrier to such tree-loving species found in eastern parts of the state. Large-scale changes to our prairie rivers (flood control and installation of bridges) and changes to grassland ecosystems (loss of wildfires), as well as tree plantings associated with cities, towns, farms, ranches and shelterbelts all have greatly increased trees statewide. Since the early 1980s, forested areas have increased across the state. So watch out Nebraska. Don't be surprised if woodchucks become a regular occurrence in your area of the state, if not already. 📍

Dr. Keith Geluso is a professor of biology at the University

of Nebraska at Kearney. If you have observed woodchucks in the unshaded areas below, please contact Dr. Geluso (gelusok1@unk.edu).



Woodchucks have colonized central and western parts of the Platte River at a rate of about 6 miles a year since 2000.

PHOTO BY CHRIS HELZER



WILLOW CREEK STATE RECREATION AREA NEAR NORFOLK
PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY

VISIT NORFOLK

By Erin Lenz, Nebraska Tourism Commission

Discover Norfolk, the heart of northeastern Nebraska. Shopping and nightlife downtown, exciting outdoor adventures and a whole lot of charm and hospitality can be found here.

Explore downtown Norfolk and find a wide variety of shopping, dining, nightlife and local experiences. Shop at Magnolia’s Home Décor and Design for the perfect decoration to add to your home, or if you love to quilt, shop at I Bee Quiltin for fabrics and patterns.

For art lovers, take an intimate guided tour of the Norfolk Sculpture Walk, a revolving sculpture attraction that features beautiful art pieces and showcases the downtown area. For more, head to Ravenwood Art Gallery to view professional prints and paintings from a variety of local artists.

Getting hungry? At Black Cow Fat Pig everything is made in house; all meat is cut and smoked on the premises, and the menu is seasonally inspired to support local ingredients with menu items such as braised pork belly and steak bruschetta. Or warm up with a latte at Downtown Coffee Company, where you can stay for lunch and enjoy soup, salads and/or sandwiches made with freshly baked bread, and then finish your meal with a dessert or pastry.

A trip to the Norfolk isn’t complete without a visit to the Elkhorn Valley Museum. Home to the Johnny Carson exhibit, the museum also features a restored first home of Norfolk, a Square Turn Tractor, one room school house and more. Visit the Norfolk Arts Center to view exhibits, attend events and be a part of various educational classes.

Stay overnight at Norfolk Lodge & Suites. With several fireside gathering areas, an indoor atrium-style pool and 18-hole miniature golf, this is the perfect place to stay after a day of exploring. The hotel is connected to the SandBar & Grill and Divots Brewery, Norfolk’s only brew pub serving handcrafted beers.

Enjoy the great outdoors on the longest rail-to-trail project in the United States, the Cowboy Trail. With the trail head located in Norfolk at Ta-Ha-Zouka Park, the Cowboy Trail is a great spot for biking, hiking and horseback riding. Or stay where you are: Ta-Ha-Zouka Park features a public campground, softball fields, fishing, a disc golf course, off-leash dog recreation area, sand volleyball courts and more.

For outdoor time on the water, head to North Fork Outfitting to rent kayaks, tubes, canoes, stand-up paddleboards or paddle boats for experiences on the Elkhorn River or Skyview Lake. North Fork Outfitting also offers bike rentals for the Cowboy Trail and a free shuttle to get you to your starting point.

If hunting is more your interest, Top Flight Hunts offers 1,110 acres of private and CRP hunting grounds along the Elkhorn River. They specialize in pheasant, quail, turkey and deer expeditions and can accommodate hunting groups of up to 20 people for hunts that range from a half-day to five days.

Whether you’re planning to spend a day downtown shopping and eating or a day in the great outdoors, Norfolk has what you’re looking for.

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JOHNNY, I BARELY KNEW YE ...

By Roger Welsch

SCENE: Lawyer's office in Lincoln

CHARACTERS: Two opposing lawyers and the perp

SITUATION: Deposition being taken under oath. The air is heavy with tension. The person under oath has just attacked the character of the opposing lawyer's client.

CLIENT'S LAWYER: "Don't you even *start* to talk about the morality of *my* client. We *know* what you do down there at the river cabin of yours!"

[He slams shut his notebook. His face is red with indignation. He rises and stomps out of the office, leaving the door open behind him. Roger (let's call him Roger because his name is Roger) looks at Lawyer Ed (let's call him Ed because his name was Ed) in bewilderment.]

LAWYER ED: "Uh, Rog, what the heck *do* you do down there at the river cabin?"

ROG: "Nothing! We can't afford expensive vices and when the day is over, we're far too exhausted to indulge in the inexpensive ones. I can't imagine what he's talking about."

LAWYER ED: "I know Cy (let's call him Cy ... well, you know) and I'll just talk with him and find out what the issue is."

All of the above is true, including the names, but since I am the only one still alive I think I can go ahead and skip the part about "any resemblance"

Ed did talk with Cy and reported to me later what I had done to offend the general morality. Rumors had it, Cy said, that if a fairly tall person stood on the third bridge railing support on the southwestern corner of the Loup River bridge at Dannebrog, tipped his head slightly northward, and had a decent pair of at least 10x50 binoculars, late on hot August afternoons that person might see some people of my acquaintance – avert your eyes if you are of tender sensibilities – DIPPING SKINNY IN THE RIVER!

Well, jeez ... At the time my friends and I were rebuilding an 1872 log house, a filthy, hot, exhausting job. The only water source at the site was a pitcher pump that belched up a half cup of water with every handle push. At the end of the day we were covered with ancient dirt and sweat, hot and weary. And there was that wonderful, clean, cool, sandy, soothing river. There was no one else closer than a quarter mile and, we presumed, intent on driving across the bridge, over the hill, and around the curve. We barely saw the cars so they barely saw us. The operative word being, at least in Cy's mind, I guess, was "barely."

Now, to be honest, it was not only during that month of construction that this offense was committed. In fact, I have bathed in that river in every month of the year except January. I suppose I could have worn a swim suit, then exiting the river carrying 10 or 12 pounds of sand in the loose parts, but when

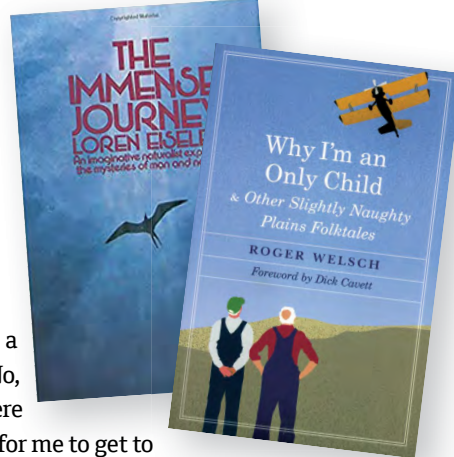
was the last time YOU took a bath with your clothes on? No, until it got to the point where age made it almost impossible for me to get to the river's cleansing waters, I was out there lying in the sun and water almost every day for decades. It was therapy. It was reviving. It was an unmitigated joy. Even poetical! Noted Nebraska anthropologist, poet and essayist Loren Eiseley wrote in *The Immense Journey*, "*The Flow of the River*": "I lay back in the floating position that left my face to the sky, and shoved off. The sky wheeled over me. For an instant, as I bobbed into the main channel, I had the sensation of sliding down the vast tilted face of the continent."

Skinny dipping is moreover an inspiration for many American folktales, this one from my own book *Why I'm An Only Child And Other Slightly Naughty Plains Folktales* (University of Nebraska Press), to wit:

[One] hot summer day a local gent decided to cool down by skinny-dipping He left his clothing in a pile behind a cedar bush near the bridge but kept his straw hat on to avoid getting his face and nose sunburned. He made his way up stream and then lay back in the cool, clean water, letting the current drift him back downstream toward the bridge – a practice we still enjoy in the same river, referring to it as "butt bouncing." But as he approached the bridge he heard voices so he pulled himself toward the shore and peeked through the shrubs to find – oh no! – the preacher's wife was hosting the church's annual ladies' auxiliary near the bank at the bridge. That is, between him and his cached clothing. He lowered himself back down into the water and quietly mulled over his options: He could cover his private parts with his hat to preserve his dignity, make a mad dash through the gathering, grab his clothes, and head for cover up the bank; or he could cover his face with his hat to preserve his identity and make the same run. He decided on the latter. So, holding the hat over his face, he dashed among the startled and screaming women, grabbed his clothes, and hotfooted it through the trees toward town.

Once they had recovered from their astonishment and regained their voices, one woman decided to defend her family's honor and said, "I can tell you one thing – that was not my husband." Whereupon a second insisted, "Well, it wasn't anybody from my family." But conversation came to a stop when the preacher's wife said, "I'm pretty sure it was no one from this congregation."

Roger Welsch is a folklorist, humorist and author who lives in Dannebrog.





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— GAME PARKS —

SHOTGUNS FOR WATERFOWL HUNTERS

By Julie Geiser

Tried and true semiautomatic shotguns have been in use since the early-1900s, and many folks still use them today. Inertia-driven guns like the Browning Auto-5 were the first on the scene. In the mid-1900s, gas operated shotguns, including the Remington Model 1100, appeared.

Inertia-driven shotguns work in most every situation including extreme cold, snow and rain. When these shotguns are fired, the recoil compresses an inertia spring that powers a bolt assembly to quickly cycle the action, unloading the spent shell and loading a new one into the chamber. With fewer parts than a gas-operated gun, they are lightweight and balanced. While they deliver more felt recoil than gas-operated guns, a hunter will hardly notice the difference in the field.

When the trigger is pulled and the powder in the shotshell ignites in a gas-operated gun, some of the expended gas traveling up the barrel is redirected through one or more ports into a piston in the forearm. The piston drives a bolt back to cycle the action. The drawback with these guns, however, is the carbon residue left behind means they must be cleaned regularly. Hunters who fail to do so may find that



PHOTO BY JULIE GEISER

in very cold and/or wet conditions, their shotguns will not cycle properly. Whether you keep this gun dry and warm in a blind or field hunt can make a difference in performance.

Regardless of the type of semiautomatic shotgun you choose, most will reliably cycle light to heavy loads. Autoloaders on the market today are offered with polymer stocks that are strong and lightweight, and most have an enlarged safety, bolt handles and release buttons that make them easy to operate when wearing gloves in cold weather.

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THE VALUE OF PHOTO MENTORS

By Gerry Steinauer

My first *Nebraskaland* articles, published in the 1990s, were tag team efforts. I wrote the text while staff photographers Mike Forsberg or Jon Farrar provided the photos. This worked well, but after a few years, I decided it was time to expand my journalistic repertoire and take my own photos. So I bought an old Nikon camera and few lenses from Forsberg, stocked up on film and started snapping pictures.

My problem, I knew little about photography. So first, I



One of my earliest images of a yucca flower taken in the Sandhills of Cherry County.



A recent yucca image with more interesting light and composition.

read a few nature photography books, but it was my next move that was sheer genius. I began taking my photos to Forsberg and Farrar for critique. Lucky for me, they were not only excellent photographers, but also willing and patient teachers.

During a typical session, one of them would examine a few of my photos and kindly say something such as: “This would be a nice photo, if only ... the light was better,” or “the background wasn’t so cluttered, the focus was sharper, or if you had just done this with the composition.” Fortunately, I was a good listener and my ego recovered quickly. Like most beginners, I fancied many of my photos as pretty good, but the more I learned, the more my shortcomings became apparent. Unfortunately, a few of my early photos still hang on the walls of friends and family.

Eventually, I weaned myself of the enlightening critiques of Forsberg and Farrar that jump-started my venture into photography. Over the years, I have continued to improve my skills, mostly by studying the works of other photographers, watching a few videos (Nebraska native Joel Sartore's *Fundamentals of Photography* is really good, and can be purchased at joelsartore.com), and taking heed of the advice of *Nebraskaland's* photo editors.

In some aspects, my photographic talents are still fairly amateurish. For example, I know little about the technological capabilities of my camera and I am shaky, at best, with Photoshop. Technology was never my cup of tea.

But overall, I have learned enough to take decent photos. Photos that help tell my *Nebraskaland* stories.

Gerry Steinauer is a botanist with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and a regular contributor to Nebraskaland.

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This picture of Brown County residents was taken near Eddyville, NE, in 1963. Pictured left to right: E.G. Grooms, Miner Hagen, Merlin “Turk” Beebout and Mel Lacy. Turk, my dad, was a member of the greatest generation and served in the Pacific Theater during WWII. He passed away in the fall of 2019 at the age of 95. His legacy will include his love for all things Nebraska – hunting, fishing and, of course, the Cornhuskers.
– Bruce Beebout, Kearney

These fish were caught on March 25, 1972, at Sioux Lookout Check on NPPD canal using creek chubs 6 to 8 inches long with #2.0 hooks. They were 8 to 10 pounds and caught in one hour. My cousin Bob runs a bait shop in North Platte. Granddad had one in the 30s-40s with his son, who ran *Freeze’s Bait and Tackle* in North Platte – 70 years in the bait business.
– Larry Freeze, North Platte



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



PHOTO BY CHRIS HELZER

FROGS ON ICE

By Chris Helzer

It was a balmy 30 degrees outside and I was in desperate need of some fresh air, so I headed to Springer Basin Wildlife Management Area west of Aurora. When I stepped carefully onto the thin layer of ice, I was hoping to find and photograph some interesting patterns on the frozen surface of the wetland. I certainly didn't expect to come away with photos of leopard frogs.

Leopard frogs typically spend the winter lying at the bottom of a stream or pond where the thin skin along the sides of their body allows for enough oxygen exchange to keep them alive. However, while they enter a kind of dormancy, they can still move around when they want to. On this particular day, as the thin ice cracked around my feet, I saw some leopard frogs swimming around beneath the frozen surface. Once, when my foot punched through the thinner ice near the wetland edge, a few frogs even popped up onto the top surface of the ice and hopped/slipped around comically for a few minutes.

I was a little surprised to see the frogs swimming around,

though I'd seen that a few times before. Having them come out on top of the frozen wetland through the hole I created was a little more startling, but understandable, given the opportunity presented to them. However, about a half hour later and a half mile away, I was shocked to find a few different leopard frogs hopping easily around on top of the ice as if they were just out for a morning constitutional.

Recovering quickly from my shock, I laid out prone on the ice and tried to get some photos of them. While they weren't as lively as frogs in the summer, they were more than hoppy enough to make it tricky to get them into focus before they moved away. I did eventually get some nice photos, and then took the time to wonder what in the world those frogs were doing on the ice. Even now, I'm still not sure why they were there, but I'm grateful for the chance to spend a little time with them.

Chris Helzer is The Nature Conservancy's director of science in Nebraska.

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