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Cover: A killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*) runs on the north shoreline of Walgren Lake in Sheridan County. See story on page 20.
JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

This page: Horses, belonging to Nancy and Benton Shirey of Kentucky, are corralled at the equestrian campground at Danish Alps State Recreation Area in Dakota County. See story on page 30.
JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND

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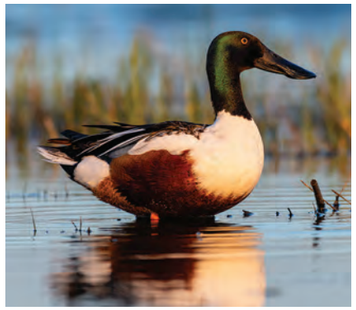
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Photo Librarian Jaclyn Cruikshank Vogt

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Advertising
For advertising information, contact:
Shane G. Gilster, 402-742-0125
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The northern shoveler is a common duck in Nebraska wetlands during migration and nesting season. Its shovel-shaped bill has many lamellae — or fine projections — that filter tiny crustaceans, seeds and aquatic invertebrates like a colander.

WORDS BY MONICA MACOUBRIE, PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

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Pasquale Mingarelli, Bellevue
Reflections at Platte River State Park



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I Want to Join the Flock!



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Jeff Kurrus, Editor
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A quilt is more than fabric. It is warmth, memory and belonging, a reminder of who we are, and that we are held not just by where we come from, but by those who came before us. The stitching is not perfect. Some threads pull tight, others loosen; some edges align, others don't. But that is its beauty, the quiet evidence of care, of hands that chose to keep piecing it together.

From Jenna Rose's unpublished essay, "The Quilts That Carry Us."

JENNA ROSE



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In the Field

Nebraskaland regular contributor Todd Mills hunts a Rainwater Basin marsh during teal season. He uses the Game and Parks' wetland conditions report to begin his scouting process each year. See story on page 14. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND



Understanding the Wetland Conditions Report

By Jeff Kurrus

Understanding the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's Wetland Conditions Report each August can be a complicated process. To begin, in the Rainwater Basin there are 35 properties owned by Game and Parks and 59 Waterfowl Production Areas owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Fifty-four of these areas have wells and pumps, including 29 on Game and Parks properties. Read on to learn why this report should be your starting point for research each hunting season.

What Does 'Good' Mean?

Published beginning in late-August, this weekly report uses the categories Dry, Poor, Fair, Good and Excellent. "Waterfowl biologists assign these categories using their subjective judgement based on how each of these sites relate to duck hunting," according to Game and Parks Wetland Manager Ted LaGrange.

These ratings take into account the amount of water present and vegetation density at a particular wetland.



Kirkpatrick Basin North Wildlife Management Area near York during a wet year. ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

For example, a Poor rating could be given when a wetland has plenty of water, but there is not an open spot for hunters to set out decoys or ducks to land.

"You're obviously looking for Good and Excellent," said LaGrange. "With Good, there is enough water to float a decoy. Fair is a little water, and it might be OK for teal. And Dry is dry."

What to Pump When?

The report obviously raises question, including which areas should be pumped. The determination process and a timeline for doing so starts with a meeting among wetland biologists in mid-August. Hot, dry and windy days cause evaporation, making it difficult to sustain water levels achieved through pumping. "Some areas are so dry," said LaGrange, "that an entire week of pumping wouldn't help."

Another factor is vegetation. "What are the conditions of the plant community?" LaGrange stated. If it's solid cattails, there's no reason to pump because of how hard it would be to hunt. "It's not the best use of money," he said. But if it's smartweed or barnyard grass — both excellent food sources for ducks — then just a few inches of water would create a duck magnet.

Sometimes an area could be involved in a management plan, such as the removal of invasive species, that would preclude pumping. "Biologists will mow at times," said LaGrange. "They'll disk. We may have something with a lot of cattails that is nearly dry. We might let it winterkill and disk it to create better habitat in the long run."

When a wetland covers both public and private land, and pumping that wetland could lead to water spilling onto adjacent land, then there must be an understanding between the biologists and that landowner. "Some neighbors are tolerant of additional water and others don't mind water if their crops are out," said LaGrange. "Keep in mind we don't pump to capacity because there is still a chance of rain, and we don't want to flood an adjacent landowner."



A teal hunt bag shot from the Rainwater Basin. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

What Should Hunters Understand?

Biologists visit these sites once a week starting in mid-August, passing along their assessments to LaGrange and his staff, who compile the wetland conditions report. "I trust the biologists," said LaGrange. "If they say there's water, there's water, but pumping remains a complicated process. We want to have huntable water with some open vegetation. If you have 6 inches of water, food and openings, you're going to have teal. That's good water."



A New Name for Twin Lakes WMA

By Julie Geiser

During his 46-year career with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, most spent as a wildlife biologist, Nick Lyman became an invaluable part of the waterfowl management community, not in just Nebraska, but also throughout the Central Flyway and even in Canada. In recognition of his contributions, Twin Lakes Wildlife Management Area south of his hometown of Bassett in Rock County has been renamed the Nick Lyman WMA. Family and friends who knew him consider the lakes' renaming an honor.

Lyman started his career with Game and Parks in the parks division in 1960. He worked out of the Bassett service center before transferring to the North Platte district office in 1968, where he spent the rest of his career as a wildlife biologist. Lyman, who retired in 2006, died Nov. 26, 2024.



Nationally respected among his peers, Nick Lyman's lifelong dedication to waterfowl conservation and his love for this resource leaves a lasting legacy of his efforts.

In his early years with Game and Parks, Lyman was instrumental in efforts to reintroduce Canada geese to the Sandhills. His knowledge of the Sandhills wetlands and friendship with landowners was crucial in selecting release sites for geese, as well as the locations to trap and band the birds after populations were established.

According to longtime friend Joe Hyland, Lyman's skill as a waterfowl surveyor was relied on by other agencies throughout the Central Flyway, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Canadian Wildlife Service. He conducted aerial breeding duck surveys in Nebraska, which contributed to the creation of hunting regulations, and was a reliable source for sandhill crane numbers. Lyman loved the hundreds of hours he spent on aerial surveys across the United States and Canada, and counted millions of birds during his lifetime.

He was also heavily involved with waterfowl banding and migration studies in the central United States and Canada. Lyman participated in summer duck banding in the Sandhills, pre-season banding of ducks as part of cooperative central flyway annual population monitoring, fall banding of mid-continent white-fronted geese in Canada and Nebraska, and assisting Canadian biologists with arctic snow goose banding projects.

Mark Vrtiska, wildlife management specialist with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Lyman's former co-worker, stated: "Nick was one of the best field biologists I knew. He was great at catching Canada geese. I'll never forget those times capturing geese with him in the Sandhills, spending time with him in a duck blind or walking for pheasants."

Vrtiska estimated Lyman banded close to 40,000 ducks and geese during his career.

Lyman shared his knowledge of waterfowl with others during the annual U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Migratory Bird Parts Collection Survey, also known as the Wingbee. Wings and tail fans from ducks and geese harvested and submitted by hunters in each of the four flyways in the United States are examined to determine the species, sex and age structure of the population. Lyman was relied on to confirm the identification of difficult submissions. His involvement at the Wingbee continued after his retirement.

During his time with Game and Parks, Lyman received numerous awards, including the Ducks Unlimited Wetland Conservation Achievement Award for Outstanding Contributions to Wetland Conservation in 2005, the Ducks Unlimited Conservation Service Award in 1993 and the Director's Award of Honor from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2005.

Nationally respected among his peers, Lyman's lifelong dedication to waterfowl conservation should be remembered by all who love this resource. We, and the waterfowl he spent years studying, are the beneficiaries of Lyman's lasting legacy.



Grouse and Date Poppers

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

Making poppers is a simple way to turn heavily shot-up game birds into tasty morsels. This sweet, salty and tangy recipe differs from the usual poppers most hunters are accustomed to: I trade jalapeno and cream cheese for dates and goat cheese. And to provide some crunch, I added a cashew nut. It's a riff on a dish I tasted many years ago at a tapas restaurant in Las Vegas called Firefly.

A cooking note: To avoid overcooking the grouse, choose a thinner cut of bacon; the thicker the bacon, the longer it will take to render and cook. I also allow the bacon to sit at room temperature to warm up, while keeping the grouse chilled for as long as I can before assembling the poppers.

Servings: 10 poppers
Prep Time: 1 hour and 30 minutes
Cooking Time: 15-20 minutes
Ingredients

- 2 sharp-tailed grouse breasts
- 2 tablespoons of balsamic vinegar
- 1 tablespoon of olive oil
- ½ teaspoon of dried crushed rosemary, or fresh equivalent
- 5 slices of bacon (not thick cut)
- 2 ounces of goat cheese
- 10 pitted dates
- 10 whole cashews or almonds

Special equipment: toothpicks

1. Cut breasts into 10 pieces total, including the tenderloins, and slightly flatten into oblong pieces with a mallet (or something flat and heavy). In a small bowl, whisk balsamic vinegar, olive oil and rosemary to emulsify. Add grouse pieces and marinate for 1 to 2 hours. Keep chilled until ready to use.

2. Thirty minutes before assembling poppers, cut each strip of bacon in half. Allow to rest on the counter to come to room temperature. This will help the bacon become more pliable and render faster.

3. Preheat oven to 450 degrees Fahrenheit or prepare grill for medium-high heat cooking.

4. Split open each date and fill with goat cheese and one cashew or almond. To assemble the poppers, take half a piece of bacon and completely wrap it around one piece of filled date and a piece of marinated grouse. Secure with a toothpick.

5. Place poppers on a rimmed cookie sheet lined with foil. Bake on the middle rack of a 450-degree oven for about 15 minutes, or until bacon is cooked through, turning occasionally. Oven temperatures vary so keep an eye on the poppers to avoid burning, adjusting heat as needed. Or, grill poppers accordingly. Serve immediately.







Willets, such as these at Kiowa Wildlife Management Area, frequently move through central and western Nebraska during the migrations, with some stopping to breed.



Summer Travelers

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JUSTIN HAAG

SHOREBIRDS SATISFY THE ITCH FOR PHOTOGRAPHING THE FALL MIGRATION





A lesser yellowlegs wades for food at Box Butte Wildlife Management Area. Its bill is straighter and proportionally shorter than that of the greater yellowlegs.



The diminutive semipalmated plover walks on a sandbar at Kiowa Wildlife Management Area.



A Wilson's phalarope swims at Fort Robinson State Park. Phalaropes swim in circles to create a whirlpool that drives invertebrates to the water's surface.

When thinking of a certain group of birds, a sporting event from a couple years back comes to mind.

On a hot day in August my daughter and her teammates are opening their high school volleyball season in Scottsbluff. As soon as the match is over, I shift gears from the team's sports shutterbug to wildlife photographer, setting up camp at nearby Lake Minatare and trudging through mud in the dark to place a blind along the water's edge.

Some don't think of August as prime time for bird photography, but it can be. Even though the bulk of fall bird migration comes a little later, there's one group that's on the move in late summer.

Shorebirds are long-distance migrants and early movers through Nebraska for fall migration. They are attracted to the shallows and are ideal for photographing from the water's edge from a ground-level blind. Setting up along a shoreline to see what birds come near is my favorite thing to do in both fall and spring.

As the group of species in the order Charadriiformes, shorebirds include sandpipers, plovers, avocets, oystercatchers and phalaropes.

A number of these globetrotters summer in the Arctic tundra and travel to southern South America for winter. With an aerodynamic anatomy, they don't take much time to get from one place to the other.

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology reports that about 20 species of shorebirds have been recorded making nonstop flights of more than 3,100 miles. That's just a tad farther than a flight from Lincoln to, say, Greenland's capitol city, Nuuk. Yes, nonstop.

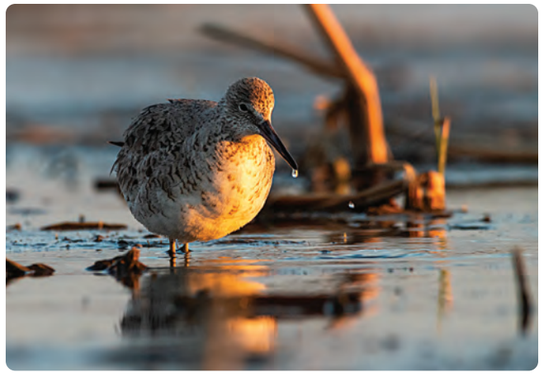
The endurance champion is the bar-tailed godwit *(Limosa lapponica)* which flies nonstop in excess of 6,000 miles from western Alaska to either New Zealand or Australia. To have enough energy to make the trip, it nearly doubles its body weight with fat reserves before leaving.

A spotted sandpiper walks near the shore at Lake Minatare. While the origin of the bird's name is obvious in spring, it loses its spots outside of breeding.



A least sandpiper moves through exposed vegetation at Walgren Lake. It's the smallest species of shorebird in the world weighing 1 ounce and measuring 5-6 inches long.





A willet fuels up before making a night flight northward in spring.



A pectoral sandpiper lands at Lake Minatare, a stop on a journey that may be as long as 18,000 miles.

Observers likely won't see that bird flying over Nebraska as it's not on the long-established route, but other long distance migrants do fly over here and many stop. The pectoral sandpiper, which breeds in upper North America and Siberia and summers in lower South America, potentially makes a trip of more than 18,000 miles.

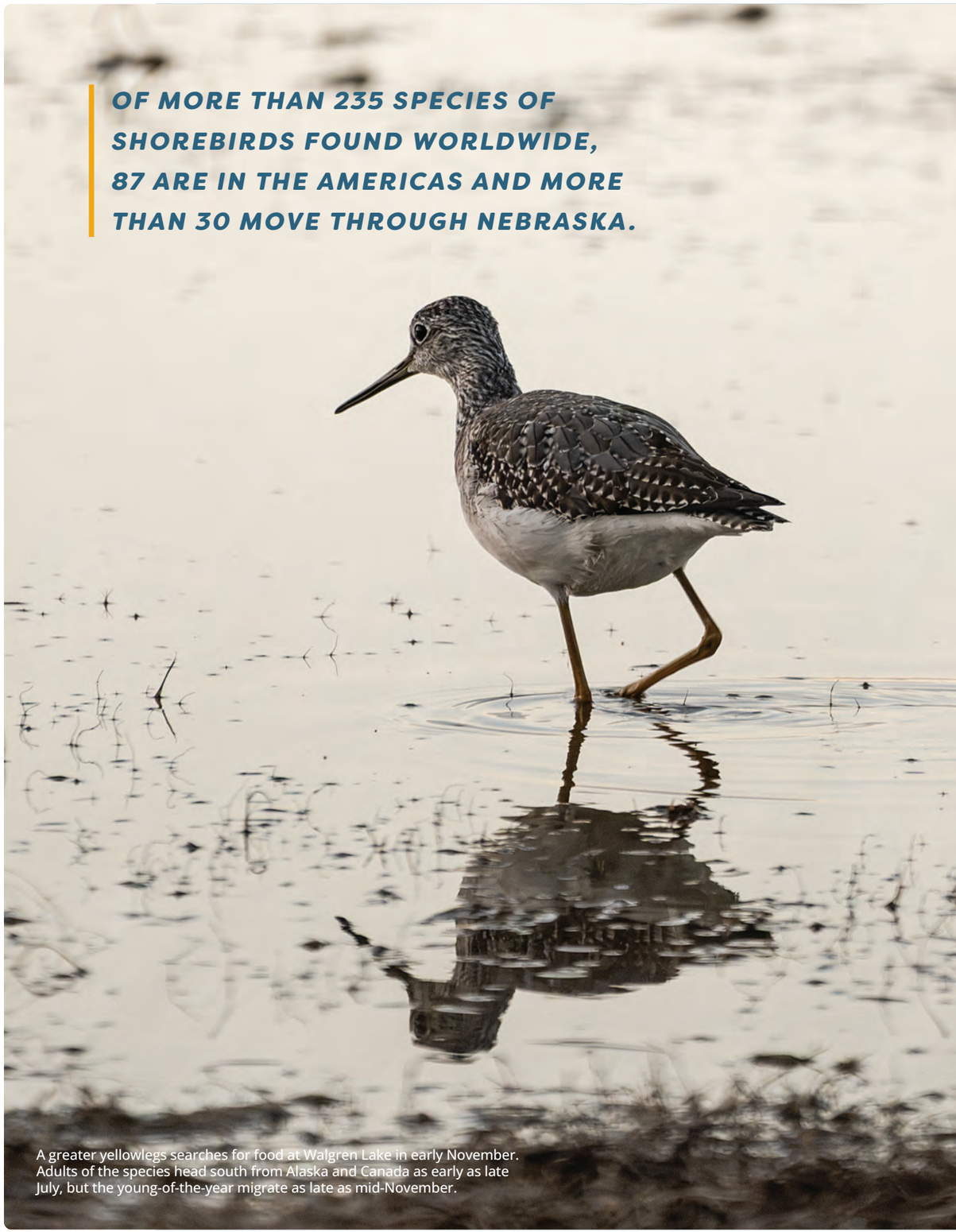
Those that stop along the way from one hemisphere to the other diligently forage to gather the fuel needed for the next leg of the journey. While there is some variation in technique, most species have long bills and long legs, suited for wading the shallows probing the mud or sand for invertebrates. Long toes keep them from sinking into the substrate.

This characteristic was on full display one spring evening in the blind at Kiowa Wildlife Management Area when I was visited by a large flock of willets *(Tringa semipalmata)*. As I put them to bed with a sunset photo that evening, I planned to rejoin them the next morning. I didn't know at the time that willets are night travelers and they were long gone by the time I returned at first light. Migratory birds such as willets capitalize on the cooler, calmer air of night and evade daytime predators. They use stars and the Earth's magnetic field for navigation.

The average shorebird might not get as much attention from people as other species, with a mottled plumage of brown that provides excellent camouflage but doesn't impress upon first glance. The similar plumage among many species can make identification a challenge. Admittedly, I often don't know what species I'm looking at until examining photos later. Solving the mystery is part of the fun for me.

Of more than 235 species of shorebirds found worldwide, 87 are in the Americas and more than 30 move through Nebraska. The Nebraska Birding Guide website directs people to the wet meadows of the Platte Valley, shallow lakes in the Sandhills, and wetlands and flooded fields of the Rainwater Basin to see shorebirds. All prime locations, for sure, but I've encountered plenty at farm ponds and the shores of large irrigation reservoirs in western Nebraska when the water is low in late summer.

OF MORE THAN 235 SPECIES OF SHOREBIRDS FOUND WORLDWIDE, 87 ARE IN THE AMERICAS AND MORE THAN 30 MOVE THROUGH NEBRASKA.



A greater yellowlegs searches for food at Walgren Lake in early November. Adults of the species head south from Alaska and Canada as early as late July, but the young-of-the-year migrate as late as mid-November.



A long-billed curlew flies over the Oglala Grasslands.







American avocets, with their attractive breeding plumage, gather at a Dawes County farm pond.

Early in my career with Nebraskaland, I concealed myself under grass sheets at a nearby farm pond in late June and was visited by a flock of incredibly elegant American avocets *(Recurvirostra americana)*. Dressed in their striking breeding plumage, they entertained me at close range as they used their upturned bills to stir the mud to reveal food. That shoot resulted in my first cover image for a Nebraskaland calendar.

Some shorebirds are frequently encountered with little water in sight. Parts of Nebraska serve as breeding grounds for North America's largest shorebird, the long-billed curlew *(Numenius americanus)*, which, with its unmistakable snout, is always a pleasure to see on grasslands in spring. The upland sandpiper *(Bartramia longicauda)* begs to be photographed as it's standing on fence posts along county roads. And, it seems a person never has to go far to see a killdeer *(Charadrius vociferus)* and hear its familiar, shrill call. This vocal plover hangs out not only near water, but also in dry farm fields, golf courses, gravel roads and parking lots.

Although this special order of birds can be easy to find, they face numerous conservation challenges. Coastal development, climate change, human disturbance, nest disruptions and the rise of recreational activities in breeding areas are listed among the primary threats. A recent study shows that populations of some shorebird species have declined by more than half in the past three decades.

That's bad news for a person who gets the itch to photograph some birds in late summer. Turning the tide on this shorebird population trend won't be easy, but, similar to trudging through the mud in the dark to set up a blind in late August, will certainly be worthwhile.

OPPOSITE LEFT: Morning light shines on a killdeer at Walgren Lake. The species is encountered not only on shorelines, but also parking lots and other urban settings.

OPPOSITE RIGHT: An upland sandpiper stands on a T-post overlooking the grasslands of northwestern Nebraska.

Outdoor Nebraska

WHAT TO DO IN AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER

By Jeff Kurrus

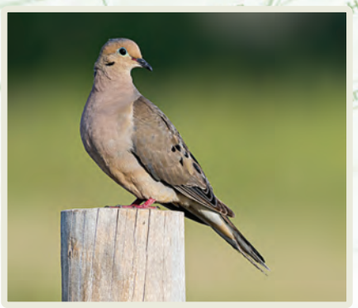
August and September aren't transition months. It's just continuing the party in a different outdoor space using food sources, pretty colors and the Cornhusker football team as your guides.



Dead Ahead

Participate in Nebraska's Roadkill Reporting project, aiding researchers in identifying wildlife-crossing locations on our highways and byways. Roughly 2,500 wildlife-vehicle collisions are reported annually in Nebraska, and those are only the incidents that result in vehicle damage. Track peak wildlife crossing areas during your travels by uploading photo observations to the free iNaturalist app. The information will be shared with the Nebraska Department of Transportation and landowners to help install warning signage, design dedicated wildlife crossings and add fencing to make road travel safer for people and wildlife. For more information, visit OutdoorNebraska.gov and search for "Dead Ahead."

WORDS BY BRIANNA NUGENT, PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



Second Week Dove

"The first cold snap and they're gone," many hunters will tell you about mourning doves. This is far from the truth. Visit the OutdoorNebraska.gov "Other Small Game" webpage to find our Mourning Dove Hunting Fact Sheet. Here hunters will find public areas where food plots have been planted. Revisit these areas once most hunters have moved on after opening day. Last season, while scouting for October waterfowl, I came across a food plot that had more than a hundred doves on it. There was not a hunter in sight.

PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



Football at the Parks

With today's streaming world, it's pretty easy to have everything. You can watch the Husker game at the RV and, when the game is over, grab a fishing rod and catch a few for supper. Nebraska's football team opens their season Sept. 5, right around the time the summer push is ending at Nebraska's state parks. Reserve a spot at OutdoorNebraska.gov and project the big game on the big screen — then be prepared to introduce yourself to a few new friends who just happen to be walking by.

PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



Hoppers

Match the hatch at many of our public fisheries by walking the banks and nearby fields before wetting a line in search of hoppers. There doesn't seem to be a fish alive that won't chase a grasshopper — whether real or artificial — including rainbow trout in western streams to largemouth bass statewide.

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND



First Fall Color

Find your first fall color at the end of September at Nebraska's northern parks — including Ponca, Smith Falls and Niobrara state parks and Long Pine and Lewis and Clark state recreation areas. "Green ash, walnut, Kentucky coffee, aspen and smooth sumac will begin to turn in normal years," said Jeff Fields, parks division administrator for Game and Parks. "Paper birch and aspen" at Smith Falls. Fields also said vines such as poison ivy and Virginia creeper will begin to turn red as well.

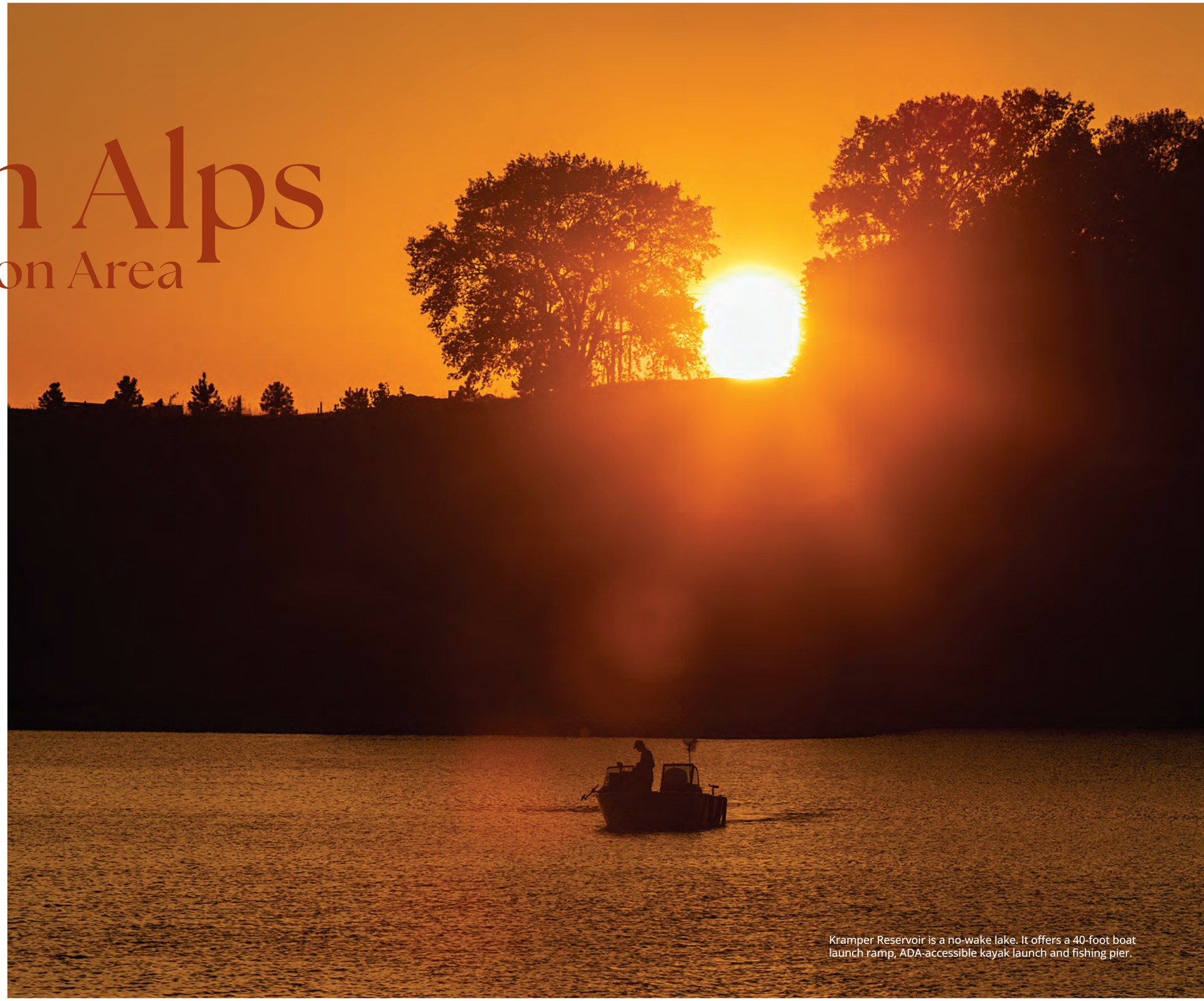
Other hardwoods, such as bur oak, cottonwood and linden, will change in mid-October.

PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

Danish Alps
State Recreation Area

Story and photos by Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

Tent campers unwinding in the shadow of maturing shade trees. RVers marveling at panoramic views of Kramper Lake from camp. Horse riders relaxing after a morning on the trail — their horses happily grazing in corrals nearby. The silhouette of boaters and anglers trolling along the length of the 219-acre lake, shimmering in the golden late-day light …



Kramper Reservoir is a no-wake lake. It offers a 40-foot boat launch ramp, ADA-accessible kayak launch and fishing pier.



Since opening in summer 2015, locals and travelers have come to treasure this Dakota County park. Inspired by the Danish pioneers who settled in the area, Danish Alps State Recreation Area has welcomed countless morning dog walkers, afternoon anglers and weekend warriors during its relatively new existence.

Parkgoers who have been engaging with the area since the beginning continue to visit because of the park's growing beauty and amenities.

Fishing

Designed for both the shoreline and boat angler in mind, Kramper Lake offers a 40-foot boat launch ramp, new ADA-accessible kayak launch and fishing pier, and ample bank fishing opportunities. A fish cleaning station was built in 2018.

Regional Park Superintendent Tyler Wulf believes it's the aquatic habitat and quality fishing that makes Danish Alps special.

"Although it's a relatively newer established area, Danish Alps continues to develop into a destination area for anglers. Fishing throughout the year continues to be very successful and popular. It has great structure, depth and diversity of fish," Wulf said, noting the lake reaches 45 feet deep in some areas and is fishable year-round. The lake also sees many ice anglers during the winter.

Sisters Christina and Ibeth Calderon are enthusiastic anglers. On a late-summer afternoon, they caught bluegill from the bank. The sisters love Danish Alps because it's well maintained, making the drive from their home near Sioux City well worth it.

The lake also offers opportunities for keeper-size largemouth bass, black crappie, channel catfish and walleye.

ABOVE: Aquatic habitat features, such as three water quality basins, a wetlands complex, rock breakwaters, underwater shoals, tree and brush piles and diverse water depths, encourage fish to reproduce and grow rapidly.

RIGHT: Christina Calderon of Sioux City, Iowa, holds a bluegill she caught.

OPPOSITE RIGHT: Sisters Ibeth (left) and Christina Calderon fish from the bank.







The equestrian campground offers hitching posts, water and four horse corral options.





ABOVE: Seventeen primitive campsites are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

LEFT: A Colorado man walks his dogs on the scenic hike-bike trail that loops around the lake.



Mark and Robin Heckerson of Beaver Lake camp with their RV at one of 43 electric plus campsites.

Camping

Nancy and Benton Shirey stopped by to camp with their horses while on their way home to Kentucky. They traveled to Bryce Canyon in Utah to ride, and Danish Alps happened to be en route. First timers to the park, they rode the 7-mile equestrian trail that loops around most of the lake that morning and appreciated the SRA's scenery and quiet, peaceful atmosphere.

The equestrian campground offers 29 equestrian electric plus campsites, hitching posts, water and four horse corral options, one of which can hold six horses, each in their own 6' by 8' pen.

On the northwestern side of the lake, husband and wife Mark and Robin Heckerson of Beaver Lake were celebrating Mark's retirement. They brought their RV to the most scenic site they could find. Though, they couldn't go wrong with any of the 43 electric plus sites available, each offering amazing views.

In September 2025, Andrew and Betsy Olson of Sioux City set up camp for family and friends they were expecting later in the evening. The group planned on attending Ponca State Park's Missouri River Outdoor Expo that weekend. Just 30 minutes south of Ponca, Danish Alps' primitive campground offered the group a less crowded place to stay during one of the busiest weekends in the area.

Plus, it's cheaper than staying in a hotel, they said, and tent campers will usually have no problems finding a spot. Seventeen primitive campsites are available on a first-come, first-served basis, and of those, five are located on the south side of the lake and accessible only by backpacking in on foot, canoe or kayak — perfect for campers looking for a remote experience.

Four modern restrooms with showers are located near campgrounds, as well as four pit toilets strategically placed around the lake.

Other Activities

Walk off your morning or evening meal on a 5K hike-bike trail. One-third of the original chip limestone trail was concreted in May, providing 10-foot-wide ADA-accessibility in some areas. Under a cooperative agreement between the Papio Missouri River National Resource District and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, more of the trail will be concreted in future years.

Three-day use areas offer ample shade, seating and beautiful views of the water for picnicking, birthday parties and family gatherings.

Hunting is allowed on the 250 acres south of 203rd Street. The grassland areas hold pheasants, turkey and quail. Other hunting opportunities include deer and waterfowl. Regulations apply, so refer to the Nebraska hunting guides for details.

"With its rolling hills, prairie landscapes, stunning lake views and with the help of Nebraska's surrounding natural beauty, this peaceful rural area is a popular destination for tourists, hunters and anglers alike," said Park Superintendent Hudson Schweers.

At Danish Alps, visitors experience the charm of the prairie.

ORB-WEAVER SPIDER WEBS

By Monica Macoubrie, Wildlife Education Specialist

Woven overnight, an orb-weaver's web is both a work of art and highly effective hunting tool.
AMY KUCERA

Every season in Nebraska has its markers. For me, one of the more fascinating signs of fall isn't the leaves or the cooler air — it's the sudden appearance of perfectly spun spider webs glistening with morning dew.

This time of year, walk through a field, your own backyard, or even around the edge of a porch light, and you'll likely spot these intricate designs. Chances are, they are the work of an orb-weaver spider, one of the largest families of spiders with more than 4,700 species worldwide and named for their iconic wheel-shaped webs.

An orb-weaver spider forms a web on a foggy morning at Buffalo Creek Wildlife Management Area in the Wildcat Hills of Scotts Bluff County.
JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

WHAT IS A SPIDER?

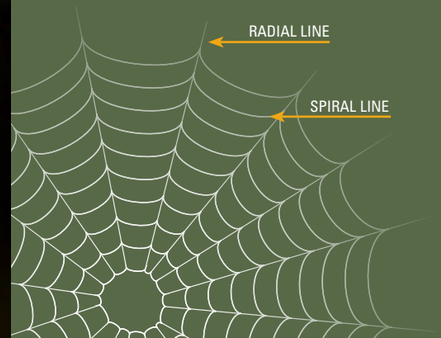
Spiders belong to a group of animals called arachnids, which also includes scorpions, ticks and mites. Unlike insects — which have six legs and three body segments — spiders have eight legs and two main body sections: the cephalothorax (where the legs attach) and the abdomen.

All spiders are predators, using venom and silk to catch their prey, though only a handful of species worldwide pose any danger to humans. In Nebraska, we have dozens of spider species, ranging from tiny crab spiders that ambush pollinators on flowers, to wolf spiders that actively chase their prey on the ground.

Orb-weavers are part of the "web-building" group of spiders. Not every spider spins a web, but every single one can make silk.



A yellow garden spider *(Argiope aurantia)* at Wagon Train State Recreation Area has captured a grasshopper in its web and begun wrapping it in silk. Photo taken at Wagon Train State Recreation Area.
MONICA MACOUBRIE



MASTERS OF WEB DESIGN

Orb-weaver webs are true works of engineering. Strong yet flexible, these webs can stretch several feet across and are perfectly positioned to catch anything that flies or crawls by. What's impressive is how carefully these spiders build and maintain their webs. Many orb-weavers take their webs down each evening, consuming the silk to recycle its proteins, then spin a fresh web by morning. This daily routine keeps the web sticky and functional — ready to catch the next meal — and it also helps repair damage caused by wind, rain or wandering insects.

Zig-zag patterns are woven into some webs. This is called a stabilimentum, and scientists are still debating its exact purpose. Some think it helps strengthen the web; others believe it makes the web more visible to birds, so they don't accidentally fly through and destroy it. There's also evidence that the stabilimentum reflects ultraviolet light, which could attract insects by mimicking the colors of flowers. In some species, the pattern may even serve as a sort of warning, signaling, "Hey, I'm here!" to other animals.

Every strand in an orb-weaver's web is calculated. The radial lines act like scaffolding, the spirals are sticky trap lines, and even the spacing of the silk can influence which types of prey are most likely caught.

PATIENT AND PRECISE HUNTERS

Unlike wolf spiders or jumping spiders that actively chase down prey, orb-weavers are true sit-and-wait predators perched patiently in the center of their intricate webs. Their legs are incredibly sensitive, able to detect the tiniest vibration from a struggling insect, whether it's a fly, moth or grasshopper.

When prey wanders into the web, the orb-weaver springs into action. It rushes out, wraps the insect tightly in silk and delivers a venomous bite to subdue it. Nebraska's orb-weavers play a big role in keeping insect populations in check, catching pests like mosquitoes, leafhoppers and aphids before they become a nuisance.

Some of the most common species include the yellow garden spider *(Argiope aurantia)* and the marbled orb-weaver *(Araneus marmoreus)*, which is smaller but just as skilled at trapping insects.



A marbled orb-weaver spider rests on a plant. This species is sometimes called the "pumpkin spider" because the female's rounded, orange abdomen resembles a small pumpkin.
ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



A yellow garden spider *(Argiope aurantia)* sitting on its web at Niobrara State Park. KEN BOUC, NEBRASKALAND

APPRECIATING THE WEB BUILDERS

You can find orb-weavers in a wide range of habitats in Nebraska — from backyard gardens and schoolyards to prairies, wetlands and forest edges. Some of the larger species, like the yellow garden spider, are impossible to miss, while smaller spotted orb-weavers may go unnoticed. Regardless of size, each web is a testament to the spider's skill and persistence.

They're living reminders of the tiny engineers sharing our world, quietly keeping insect populations in balance and adding a touch of wonder to the landscape. N



Custer County's original courthouse in Callaway, shown in the 1960s after a historical marker was placed. NSHS RG3335-5-16

The County Courthouse

By David L. Bristow, Nebraska State Historical Society

Frontier courts often met in rented rooms, and when a county's first dedicated courthouse was built, it was usually small and cheap — like Custer County's log cabin courthouse. But by the late 19th century, a grand courthouse became a point of pride, with Nebraskans eager to show their progress. Several Nebraska counties still have their landmark courthouses from that era.

Just as some courthouses are known for their architecture, others past and present are associated with unusual stories. Here are just a few:

Have you ever been to Orville City? It was the original seat of Hamilton County, soon challenged by upstart Aurora. In a series of legal battles in the 1870s, Aurora twice defeated Orville City in county seat elections, but the commissioners refused to move and prevailed in court.

In 1874, about 150 Aurora men descended on Orville City and stole the county records, later grudgingly returning them under court order. After a few more disputed elections — rife with accusations of fraud and ballot box stuffing — Aurora finally defeated both Orville City and the town of Hamilton in early 1876.

While its rivals faded into ghost towns, Aurora spent two years building a fine courthouse — only to see it burn down within two decades. Today's landmark Hamilton County Courthouse is an 1895 replacement, a monument to the city's persistence.

Nebraska has many stories of county seat rivalries, but none provided a better photo op than Box Butte County. After Hemingford lost a county vote in 1904, Alliance men came to remove the courthouse itself! Balancing the two-and-half-story wooden building on a Burlington Railroad flatcar, they hauled it 20 miles to Alliance.

In downtown Omaha, the monumental Douglas County Courthouse is not the first grand courthouse to stand on that location. Its predecessor was smaller but more ornate — and it stood on higher ground. A circa-1900 postcard shows the old courthouse perched strangely atop an earthen pyramid. Built in 1885, the courthouse in its later years was accessible only by long stairways after a massive



Hamilton County Courthouse, Aurora. Built in 1895 and still a local landmark, it attracted the attention of Wheeler County photographer John Nelson, who made and sold this stereocard, designed for a special viewer that offered the illusion of 3D. NSHS RG3542-254-1



Moving the Custer County Courthouse from Hemingford to Alliance, 1904. NSHS RG3152-3-1



Rioters enter the third, and current, Douglas County Courthouse during the lynching of Will Brown, Sept. 28, 1919. NSHS RG2281-0-72



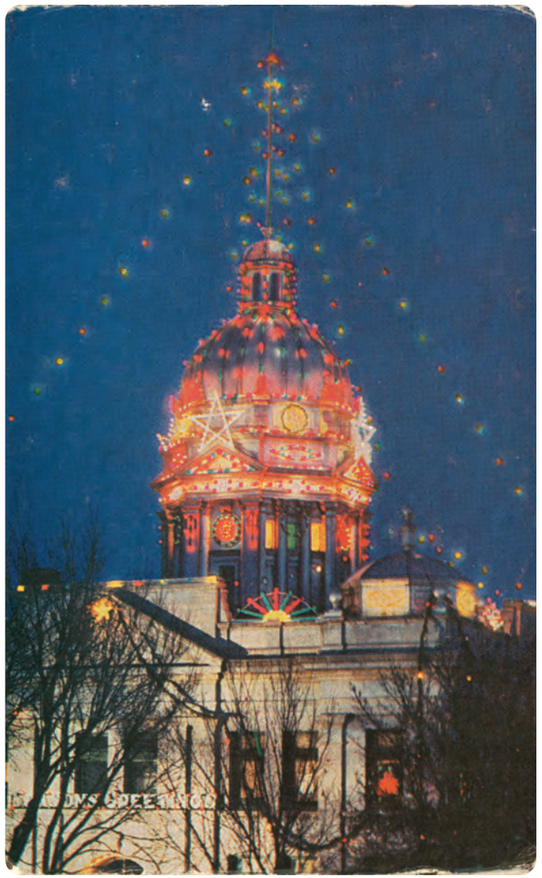
The old Douglas County Courthouse as shown in a 1907 postcard. NSHS RG3348-6-416



Saline County Courthouse in 1935, two years after Farm Holiday protestors held the sheriff captive. NSHS RG0813-0-400



Frontier County Courthouse in Stockville. An addition provides modern restrooms. NSHS RG3369-5-1



Kearney County Courthouse in Minden, decked out for the holidays, undated postcard. NSHSRG2100-3-9

earth-removal project lowered the steep hills of downtown Omaha. The remaining land was cut away when the current courthouse was built in 1912. Both courthouses share a grim distinction: Each saw mob lynchings of Black men accused of rape — in 1891 and 1919.

The Saline County Courthouse in Wilber saw its own version of civil unrest on March 13, 1933 — fortunately without fatalities. During the Great Depression, protestors associated with the "Farm Holiday" movement disrupted farm foreclosure auctions by intimidating anyone from making more than a token bid. They called it a "penny auction." After the property was sold for a few dollars, the buyers would return everything to the owner.

When such a penny auction was to be held near Wilber, a crowd of farmers, including women and children, entered the courthouse and held the sheriff in his office to prevent him from stopping the planned disruption of the sale. Barricading themselves in the office, the protestors fought with deputies until they were dispersed by tear gas. The Lincoln Star told of "men and women alike jumping out of windows or doors." The leaders were later arrested and fined.

Across Nebraska, women served on juries for many years before Frontier County empaneled its first female jurors in 1966. Why so late? The problem was indoor plumbing, which the tiny courthouse lacked. Many years earlier, a local judge had issued a rule prohibiting female jurors until modern restroom facilities could be provided. (As if the county's mostly farm-and-ranch women were too delicate to use an outhouse!) The improvement was finally made in 1962, but several more years passed before a local case came to trial.

And finally, in Minden, every year the Kearney County Courthouse is strung with 12,000 Christmas lights and hosts an outdoor pageant performed by more than a hundred local volunteers. The light display began in 1915 and the pageant in 1946 — living traditions now older than many of the state's current courthouses.

Learn more at the NSHS's website at history.nebraska.gov

Sutherland Reservoir and Lake Maloney SRAs

A TWO-FOR-ONE WEEKEND EXCURSION

Story and Photos By Julie Geiser

It's a two-for-one weekend, and in southwestern Nebraska, that's an easy task. Less than 40 minutes from each other, Sutherland Reservoir and Lake Maloney state recreation areas offer anything an outdoor family could desire — regardless of the time of year or the activity.

These two reservoirs were built as part of a public power and irrigation project for water storage, hydroelectric power and irrigation for central Nebraska known as the Sutherland Project — and they provide recreation of all kinds.



Fishing at Sutherland Reservoir is a popular sport. Jerry Vieyra of North Platte gets the net ready to catch the fish Robby Rowland of Lemoyne is reeling into the boat.



Janee Wagner, left, and Lexus Erickson of North Platte give the thumbs up as their excitement builds for a tubing experience at Lake Maloney State Recreation Area.



American white pelicans can almost always be seen at Sutherland Reservoir. These birds swim together at the inlet of the lake in an attempt to school fish for a tasty meal.









ABOVE: Getting pulled behind a boat or personal watercraft brings a weekend of fun at Sutherland Reservoir State Recreation Area.

OPPOSITE TOP LEFT: Barge hunting is a great way to successfully hunt waterfowl at Sutherland Reservoir. Shane Freihage and Jeremy Gilbert pull their barge into the decoys to anchor down as Wes Gilbert opens the barge door.

OPPOSITE MIDDLE LEFT: Fun and camping in the sun is enjoyed by many at Hershey Beach at Sutherland, and there's plenty of shade trees and water when you feel the need to cool off.

LEFT: The bubble at Sutherland is where the action is for fishing — fish love the fast-moving water there. Water coming from the cooling pond travels through a massive underground tube structure, creating intense pressure as it reaches the surface of the main part of the reservoir causing it to bubble.

SUTHERLAND RESERVOIR

Sutherland Reservoir, completed in 1936, was created to connect the North Platte River with Lake Ogallala's canal systems. It remains an important part of the hydroelectric, irrigation and water-management system operated by the Nebraska Public Power District. It also supplies water to cool the adjacent Gerald Gentleman Station, which is the largest electricity-generating plant in Nebraska.

After water leaves the station, it travels down a canal to a stair-step device resembling a waterfall that helps reduce the temperature of the water as it descends to the Sutherland Reservoir cooling pond, before entering the main part of the reservoir through what many locals call "the bubble."

Wildlife

In the fall, hunters utilize the reservoir in boat blinds and by bank in pursuit of waterfowl. Then, as winter descends and the lake freezes, the bubble area remains open and holds ducks, geese and eagles for photographers.

During the spring and fall migrations, shorebirds and songbirds — including vireos, flycatchers, yellowlegs and sandpipers, to name a few — visit the reservoir and congregate along the shoreline of the 3,000-acre lake.

Fishing

During the summer, anglers take advantage of the bubble, as fish are attracted to the flowing water there. As with many reservoirs that have canal water flowing through them, the flowing channels create drop-offs where anglers troll or anchor to catch fish.

Sutherland is stocked with walleye, channel catfish, smallmouth bass, yellow perch, freshwater drum and wiper, making it a prime spot for mixed-bag anglers.

Amenities

Sutherland has three campgrounds run by Game and Parks: the Inlet, Hershey Beach and Westshore campgrounds.

The Inlet:
- 22 electric sites
- freshwater hydrants
- fire rings
- picnic tables
- a fish cleaning station
- vault latrine

Hershey Beach:
- numerous primitive campsites with shade and scenic views
- a popular swim beach
- vault latrines
- boat ramp

Westshore:
- boat ramp
- vault latrine
- basic camping among the trees and beautiful shoreline

Every area here has ample places to take a walk, rest in the shade, or sit and enjoy the sun. Nearby attractions include a nine-hole golf course along the north shore.







OPPOSITE: Kids try their luck fishing off the dock near sundown, hoping the bite will be on before night arrives.

ABOVE: Steam rolls off the cooling pond in winter as the sun sets behind the Gerald Gentleman Station.

LEFT: Waterfowl are abundant at both reservoirs, especially during the spring migration. These brightly colored male northern shoveler ducks are trying to impress the two hen ducks as they make their way across the water.

LAKE MALONEY

Built in 1935, Lake Maloney was formed by the construction of a large dam across the Platte River Valley. Once excavated, this off-channel reservoir was developed to store and regulate water flows before they are used for hydroelectric generation at the North Platte Hydro facility run by NPPD.

These flows travel down the canal system from Sutherland Reservoir into Lake Maloney's inlet on the west side of the lake called Kansas Point.

Trails

At Maloney State Recreation Area, it is the scenic hike/bike trail that garners the attention. Running adjacent to the lake, the 2.9-mile-long path is where visitors take in the sights and view a myriad of wildlife, including deer, turkeys and songbirds.

On the Water

At 1,000-acres, visitors paddleboard, kayak, sail, swim, tube and ski while anglers fish for channel and flathead catfish, crappie, bluegill and smallmouth and largemouth bass. Ice anglers travel across frozen waters to take advantage of walleye, perch and white bass during the winter, and hunters can get their fill of waterfowl on portions of the lake.

Amenities

Lake Maloney has two camping areas, Kansas Point and the Outlet (main camping area). These areas offer different views of the lake and a nearby public golf course.

Kansas Point:

- 54 electrical campsites
- vault latrines
- fire rings
- picnic tables
- fish cleaning station
- freshwater hydrants
- new fishing pier and fishing walkway completed in 2025

As the water continues its way through the lake, it flows to the Outlet area before traveling down the canal system. The Outlet has its own set of conveniences and is a great place to walk your dog, view wildlife, fish or enjoy the view from a lawn chair.

Outlet Area:

- over 60 basic camping sites
- shower facilities
- day-use areas under shade trees
- fire rings
- picnic tables
- a playground
- freshwater hydrants
- swim beach
- two boat ramps
- fish cleaning station
- dump station

Jaycee Park is a day-use area located on the south side of the lake that includes a swim beach, picnic area, vault pit latrine and a disc golf course which is a popular, more secluded place for recreation.

While a family can pull a two-for-one and visit both parks on a weekend, it becomes quickly apparent upon arrival that spending an entire weekend at one location is better than splitting your time between two spots. And it gives you reason to visit the other area the next time you find yourself in southwestern Nebraska.













LEFT TOP: Fishing from the bank at Lake Maloney is sure to land some fish, especially during the annual Carp-O-Rama event.

LEFT BOTTOM: Gabe Geiser, left, along with his dad, Dillon, and little brother, Beckett, walk the jetty at Lake Maloney SRA with rods and reels in hand.

OPPOSITE TOP: The main camping area, called the Outlet Area, at Lake Maloney SRA provides ample camping spots under the shade trees or in the sun. With over 60 basic camping sites, there's a place for everyone.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Catamarans and sailboats make good use of the breeze to travel across the water at Lake Maloney.

BELOW: The opposite side of the dam at Lake Maloney provides a steep place to sled when snow covers the ground.

BOTTOM: Lake Maloney is a popular place for ice anglers in winter. At times, the area resembles a small village of ice huts on the frozen lake.





Abnormal antler growth on the left likely resulted from genetics or a limb injury, while the deformed antler on the right was caused by damage to the pedicle or skull plate.

ANTLER ANALYTICS:

The Science and Symmetry of Deer Antlers

By Brian Peterson

PHOTOS BY RYAN HOLT, NEBRASKALAND

Antlers are fast-growing, costly-to-produce appendages that are shed and regrown annually. Like most structures in nature, antler development in most deer species is genetically coded to grow perfectly symmetrical on both the right and left sides. A deer's antlers reflect an individual's health and condition, with size and shape influenced by genetics, age and nutrition.

Interestingly, one notable exception to perfect antler symmetry in the deer family is found in caribou, also known as reindeer. Unlike all other common deer species, their antlers display noticeable asymmetry with the left antler typically larger than the right, with features such as the shovel, or brow tine, showing the largest variation in size.

While antler shape is primarily due to genetic factors, antler size is more directly related to nutrition and age. Asymmetry occurs in all deer species at varying degrees, often due to stressors experienced prior to and during antler development. These stressors may be environmental or biological, including climate, pollutants, pathogens, nutrition, disease, predation, competition, parasites and insects. These stressors can negatively impact health which redirects energy away from normal growth.

PHOTOS BY RYAN HOLT, NEBRASKALAND



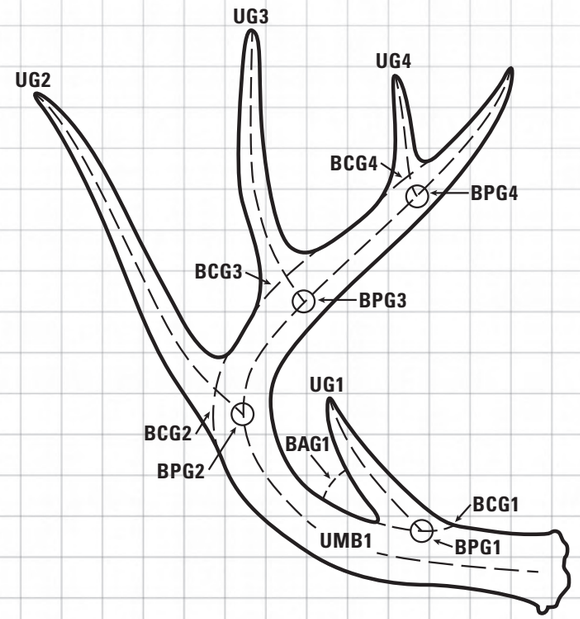
Skull with normal antler pedicles post antler shedding.





Skull with abnormal antler growth which prevented antler shedding on one side likely due to pedicle, skull injury or brain abscess.





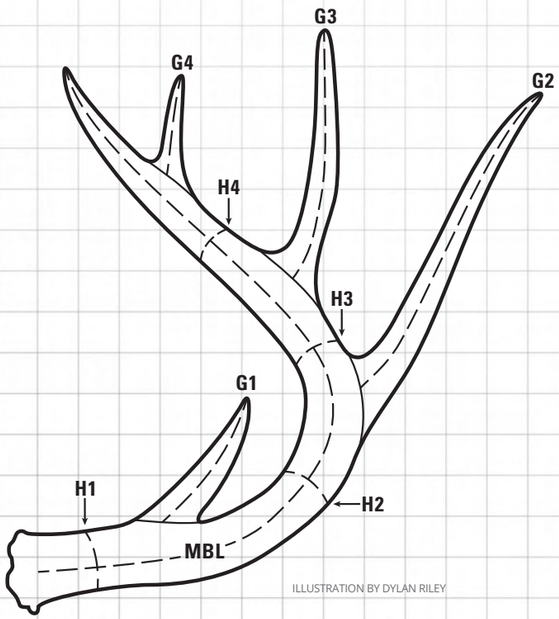


ILLUSTRATION BY DYLAN RILEY



Like a fingerprint, each buck's pedicle seal has a unique appearance. While pedicle seal depth varied mathematically, it remained visually symmetrical between antlers. The examples shown illustrate concave (top) and convex (bottom) pedicle seal bases, unique to each individual.

Main Beam Length - MBL

Antler Points - G

Tine Length - UG

Main Beam Circumference - H

Antler Tine Circumference - BCG

Tine Branching Angle - BAG

Branching Point of Each Tine - BPG

Mechanical and physical injuries further contribute to asymmetry. For example, injuries during velvet, insect damage or damage to the pedicle or skull plate can disrupt growth, dramatically impacting antler size and shape. Leg injuries can cause major to minor antler asymmetries, known as contralateral asymmetry, which disrupts the transfer of nutrients toward the growing antler side opposite the injured leg, often resulting in abnormal antler shape and size.

To better understand antler symmetry in Nebraska's white-tailed deer herd, we conducted a long-term study within the Central Platte River Valley. Our research focused on naturally shed antlers which provided us with a unique opportunity to evaluate the final state of antler pairs following growth, rubbing and fighting damage. We studied more than 200 antler pairs and evaluated both standard Boone and Crockett Club as well as a suite of novel antler measurements to determine the most symmetric measurements between each antler, while additionally determining symmetric differences between ages. Our measurements included main beam length, tine lengths, antler points, main beam and antler tine circumferences, tine branching angles, pedicle depth and shape, antler mass, total score and the branching point of each tine.

We found that the most symmetric measurements between antler sides included main beam length, pedicle seal area and the initial main beam and tine circumferences. The least symmetric and most inconsistent measurements included total points and antler tine lengths. Measurements like tine branching angles and pedicle seal depth showed low mathematical symmetry but had strong visual symmetry, unique to each buck like a fingerprint.

Interestingly, we found the antlers of older deer were more symmetrical than younger deer for more than 90% of the measurements investigated. These findings suggest that older, stronger or the most fit bucks are more suited to cope with and buffer out environmental stressors during antler development than younger individuals resulting in more symmetric antlers.

Investigating antler symmetry is a valuable tool to understand the developmental impacts of environmental stressors such as habitat quality, individual health and competition within deer populations. By researching these patterns, we can get a snapshot of the ecological and physiological forces behind antler development, highlighting the intricate balance between environmental conditions, health, age and genetics in shaping one of nature's most fascinating and fastest-growing structures. N

Brian Peterson is a biologist and online academic program advisor for the Masters of Science Biology Program at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. He and UNK undergraduate student Bryce Sutton's published research focused on white-tailed deer antler development and growth. For more information, contact petersonbc@unk.edu.



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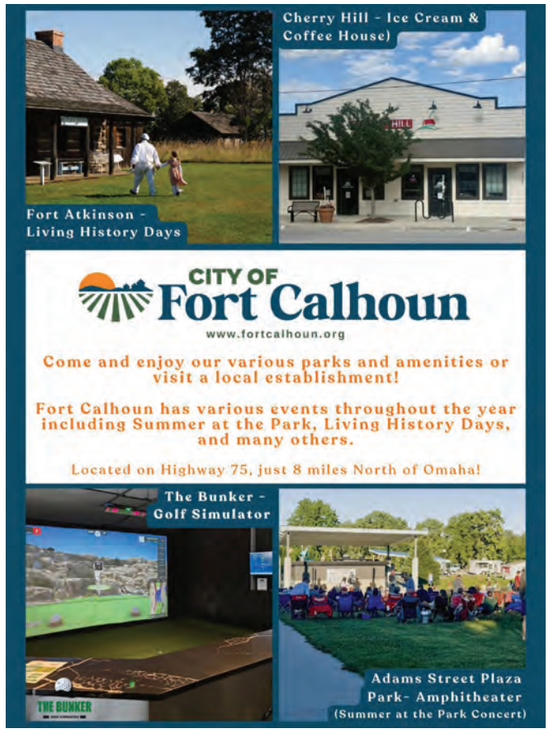
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One for the Bird Nerds: A merlin (*Falco columbarius*) eats on a fencepost in York County. *See story on page 60.*

JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND



The ‘Birdnerd’ Jason St. Sauver

By Julie Thomas

Self-nicknamed the “Birdnerd,” Jason St. Sauver has inspired countless young learners with his knowledge on environmental and outdoor science. He is the senior education manager at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center in Denton, and his educational programs invite people of all ages to develop personal connections with nature.

Jason remembers being an outdoor kid who loved tunneling in the snow and hunting and fishing in South Dakota. He credits his grandmother for introducing him to birding. She kept a bird feeder outside her kitchen window and gave him his first “Golden Field Guide.” Although he could recognize common birds already, one day he asked his grandmother to help him identify a bird he couldn’t name. At her urging to “use your book!”, Jason identified the dark-eyed junco by himself — the “spark bird” that hooked him on birding.

Jason’s father, an avid sportsman, also helped shape his son’s understanding of outdoor ethics. His father often brought Jason to sportsman club meetings, and at one memorable session, the speaker, from the South Dakota Game and Parks Association, shared a series of photos to help hunters identify the many ducks that move through the pothole region of South Dakota and Minnesota. As Jason remembers, he was “totally the know-it-all-kid” who identified every bird.

By age 12, Jason had become an avid birder — someone who was increasingly interested in identifying and listing bird species.



Jason always liked lists. Even as a young boy, he listed things that interested him in close detail, such as Matchbox car race records and radio’s Top 40 songs. And he didn’t just list songs — he also sang them and recalls “performing” with the help of his mother’s electric skillet cord that he used as a microphone. By high school, Jason’s interests focused on music and theater, which led to a brief stint in New York City.

Jason double majored in zoology and music theater. Afterward, he worked for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Massachusetts banding and surveying water and forest birds. One day, a local bird expert — who specialized in identifying birds by their song — asked Jason if he knew he was singing back to the birds. In short time, Jason came to realize his new work in conservation helped link his interests in science and music. His music training became a unique asset in birding.

Today, Jason leads birding hikes and trains Spring Creek staff, volunteers and guests to identify birds by song. He is a proud Nebraska birder who has listed bird sightings in every county in the state, a very “nerdy” thing to do.

Julie Thomas is a University of Nebraska-Lincoln professor emerita and a Nebraska Master Naturalist. To celebrate our history of conservation storytelling, Nebraskaland will feature experts who have made a difference for Nebraska’s wildlife and wild places. Without their work, Nebraskaland writers would have fewer stories to tell.







Beebalms' Minty Monoterpenes

By Gerry Steinauer, Botanist

Few Nebraska native plants can match beebalms for fragrance. Crush the leaves or flowers of these mints and you release a burst of aroma from compounds called monoterpenes. Those same compounds give beebalms their distinct flavor when brewed as tea or used as a culinary herb or garnish.

Nebraska's Native Beebalms

The annual Plains beebalm (*Monarda pectinata*) grows in open, sandy habitats across the western two-thirds of Nebraska, especially in the Sandhills. Our other native beebalm, the perennial *Monarda fistulosa*, is called simply beebalm or wild bergamot and occurs statewide in grasslands, woodland edges and roadsides.

A Nebraska botanist described the fragrance of these beebalms as "strong, pleasant but somewhat medicinal," adding that wild bergamot sometimes smelled of roses and lemons. Their scent comes from monoterpene-rich oils stored in tiny, hair-like glands on the leaves and flowers. Rub the leaves or flowers and the glands rupture, releasing volatile oils and pleasant scents. Besides mints, other plant families also produce monoterpenes. In citrus fruits, for example, squeezing the rind releases oils rich in limonene creating a bright, citrusy odor.

Three monoterpenes — geraniol, carvacrol and thymol — are most common in Nebraska beebalms. Their abundance varies by region, possibly as an adaptation to local climate, herbivores or pollinators. This variation produces differences in smell and taste. Plants rich in geraniol, for example, smell sweet and lemony, while those high in carvacrol or thymol have a sharper, oregano-like scent. With practice, these differences can be detected by smell alone. The Pawnee, for instance, named two strains of wild bergamot based on aroma: one, "tsusahtu," meaning "ill-smelling"; and another, "parakaha," meaning "fragrant."

Monoterpenes serve several roles in plants. Their strong aroma and taste can deter insect and mammal herbivores.



Plains beebalm flowers emit a sweet, minty fragrance that is most pronounced on warm, sunny days.



Wild bergamot flowers bloom in July and August. Crushed flowers remain fragrant even when dry in winter.

Eucalyptol, linalool and thymol are antimicrobial and antifungal, helping protect plants after injury or attack. Released into the air, monoterpenes can also act as signals, attracting beneficial pollinators and predatory insects that feed on plant pests. In Nebraska, bumble bees, smaller native bees and butterflies are the main pollinators of beebalm flowers.



Plains beebalm forms a colorful colony in mixed-grass prairie at Fort Robinson State Park.

Grown in open, sunny sites, Plains beebalm and wild bergamot make attractive ornamentals. Easily established from seed or young plants, the hardy plants, adapted to the rigors of the prairie, need little care. Their long-lasting blooms will keep a garden abuzz with bees and butterflies for weeks.

Drawn to Beebalms

Their fragrant monoterpenes have long drawn people to beebalms. On the social side, Plains tribes gathered the flowers of both Nebraska species and mixed them with water to make a perfume sprinkled on the hair. For medicine, tribes prepared teas and poultices to treat ailments including insect bites and stings, headaches, colds and coughs, and stomach troubles. The Winnebago boiled the leaves and applied them to pimples, while the Blackfeet bound flower heads over burst boils until they healed. Human curiosity about monoterpenes' medicinal value continues as researchers experiment with them to inhibit tumor growth and ease respiratory congestion.

As food and drink, tribes used beebalm leaves and flowers to make minty teas and to season beans, meats and stews. Today, food enthusiasts often favor the milder, more pleasantly flavored wild bergamot over other beebalms. Carrying on Native traditions, they use it in refreshing teas and, in contemporary cuisine, to infuse flavor into liqueurs, ice cream, syrup and flower jelly. Fresh leaves can garnish soups and salads or be used in marinades and vinaigrettes. Some refer to bergamot as the "pizza plant" because it pairs so well with tomato sauce. Dried leaves make a good substitute for oregano or thyme in foods ranging from bread dough to sausage. Perhaps this justifies adding beebalms to your herb garden.

In "Edible Wild Plants of the Prairie," ethnobotanist Kelly Kindscher notes that wild bergamot varies greatly in taste depending on the variety and the time of year it is harvested. The early leaves are the best substitute for mint tea, the later leaves before the plants flower make the best oregano-tasting seasoning, and the old leaves, which can be tough and are the hottest, can be used in hot sauce.

However you enjoy beebalms — whether for the flight of their pollinators, the aroma of crushed leaves or the minty kick of their tea — remember to thank the monoterpenes.



Minty, wild bergamot tea made from young, green leaves.

Threatened and Endangered – Blacknose Shiner

By Ruby Micek

Nebraska lists 32 species of plants and animals as threatened or endangered. The blacknose shiner (*Notropis heterolepis*) is listed as endangered and can be found in the northwest amid sandy-bottomed, cool-water rivers and streams.

From a bird's eye view, you'd barely see the winding strip of water as it cuts through the Sandhills. Grasses and sedges hang over its edge obscuring it from view with only its silver-reflecting pools giving its presence away overhead. Even more inconspicuous is a small minnow in the cool water along the stream's edge. Just two inches long, the blacknose shiner's yellowish back and white underbelly disguises it within the sandy-bottomed stream. Setting it apart from other shiners is a stripe of black crescents running from nose-tip to tail along its side. Its edges shimmer with gold-flecked scales.

Listed as endangered in 2000, the blacknose shiner is considered a glacial relict in our state. This tiny fish likely thrived during the last ice age. But, as the glaciers melted, this fish quickly found itself on the fringes of its range trapped in the few cool, clear-water streams left in the glacier's retreat.

Already squeezed into a small range, these shiners were pushed to the brink by decreased water quality, quantity and overall warming water due to longer, hotter summers. To help combat their decline, today's conservation efforts focus on promoting stream-friendly farming and grazing practices like establishing water sources for livestock away from sensitive prairie streams and leaving buffer strips along stream edges when planting crops. With the spread of conservation efforts improving water quality and quantity across our state, we are hopeful these little fish have a "cool" future ahead of them.

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



The blacknose shiner was listed as endangered in Nebraska in 2000.



Portraits from the Past

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Mixed-Bag Hunt, 1990 ▲

Hunting in Butler and Platte counties with The Explorers Outdoor Club on Nov. 30, 1990, for a mixed-bag hunt. Game bagged included 19 pheasants, nine cottontail rabbits, 32 quail, six squirrels and seven jackrabbits. Front row: Marvin Roubal, Jeremy Roubal, James Groene, Jim Gilliam and Larry Plasek. Back row: Richard Masek, John Andel, Eugene Andel, Larry Polivka, Larry Polivka Jr., Roger Koke and James Plasek.

– John Andel, Bruno



◀ **Best Shot in the Family, 1943**

My mother, Joy (Loft) Elstermeier, was the "best shot" in the family. This picture was taken in 1943 while she was hunting with her brother, Dan Loft, and her husband, Hamie Elstermeier, north of Ord. She used a vintage Iver Johnson matted rib 12-gauge shotgun. I learned to hunt with that same gun in the 1960s, and I still use it when I hunt today.

– Robin Elstermeier, St. Paul

Pheasant Limit, 1961 ▶

Terrance J. Feeken, 19 years old, shot this limit of pheasants in a cornfield north of his parents' farm east of Dorchester in November 1961.

– Gary Koci, Lincoln



Send contributions to: Portraits from the Past, Nebraskaland Magazine, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370. Or e-mail to Jenny.Wheatley@Nebraska.gov. Photos should show people enjoying Nebraska outdoor activities, such as camping, boating, hunting or fishing, and must have been taken before 2006. 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. Please send ORIGINALS if possible for best reproduction.

The Pink Flamingos

By Julie Geiser



Pink Flamingos from left to right: Lona Clarey, Tam Schlueter, Carla Carda and Connie Thomas, all of Hastings.

If you spot a flock of pink flamingos at a state park, don't worry. They are simply there to put a smile on your face.

In 2018, Tam Schlueter of Hastings wanted to spread a little more joy to park areas that she, her husband Sam, their dog Rolly and other fun-loving friends went each summer, nicknaming these trips "Glampalooza."

And that's where the shenanigans began. Tam and her friends began dressing up in large, pink, inflated flamingo costumes. They wore sparkled flamingo glasses with pink, feathered boas around the necks. They filled bags with toys and trinkets, then danced their way through park areas — including Fort Kearny State Recreation Area — to their own music.

"I am grateful more than I can describe," Tam said, whose group continues this tradition today. "Glampalooza is all about spreading joy in an all-too-chaotic world. It's about friendship and snort-laughs and silly foolishness, and knowing that, regardless of what you might be facing, you have a flock of pals to share the journey."

The Last Stop Revisited

Tree Skull

By Eric Fowler



I was taught long ago to never assume anything. I forgot that rule when I wrote "Tree Skull" for the May issue of Nebraskaland, in which I didn't just get one fact wrong, but two.

The story accompanied a photo of a skull hanging in a pawpaw tree at Indian Cave State Park. I spotted it in 2018 while checking camera traps I had set there in hopes of capturing a photo of a mountain lion. Sam Wilson, the Game and Parks furbearer biologist, was hoping for more than photos. He wanted to trap the lion and place a radio collar on it. To up his odds, and mine, he dragged dozens of road-killed deer to that area of the park for bait. When I spotted the skull, I instantly assumed it was the skull from one of those deer, began looking for the best composition for a photo, and never closely inspected the skull in person or in my photos. And everyone I showed the photo to assumed I knew what I was talking about.

When 16-year-old Eli Cox of Burwell was reading the issue and came to the photo, he said "Cool coyote skull," and then read the article to find my mistake. His mother, Hanna, said they doubted him, but should have known better. Eli spends his winters trapping and skins and tans the hides of the animals he catches. He even has a colony of dermestid beetles to clean skulls that fill a shelf in their home. Included in that collection is a coyote skull that proved he was right.

It gets worse for me. I assumed and wrote that the tree had sprouted beneath the skull and lifted it off the forest floor. Long-time subscriber Larry Williams of Lincoln wrote and let me know that tree branches do not grow higher as a tree ages: They remain at the height they sprouted from the trunk.

Friend and former co-worker Mike Groenewold confirmed Williams' point and gave me the same biology lesson he shared with school children during his 40 years as a Game and Parks horticulturist. "A tree doesn't grow out of the forest floor like Jack and the Beanstalk," Groenewold said. "Say I'm a tree and you drove a nail in my belly button. In 10 years, how high would that nail be?" The answer is exactly the same height. "Apparently someone just hung it in the pawpaw at that height is how I would explain it," Groenewold said.

Groenewold did say I was correct on one point. Trees add a layer of tissue every year ... like putting another glove on your hand ... and the circumference of the tree likely outgrew that of the coyote's (note the correction) eye socket, breaking the bone and sending the skull back to the forest floor.

Like every publication, we strive for accuracy at Nebraskaland. Sometimes, mistakes happen, and we run corrections. This isn't my first. I'll try to make it my last.

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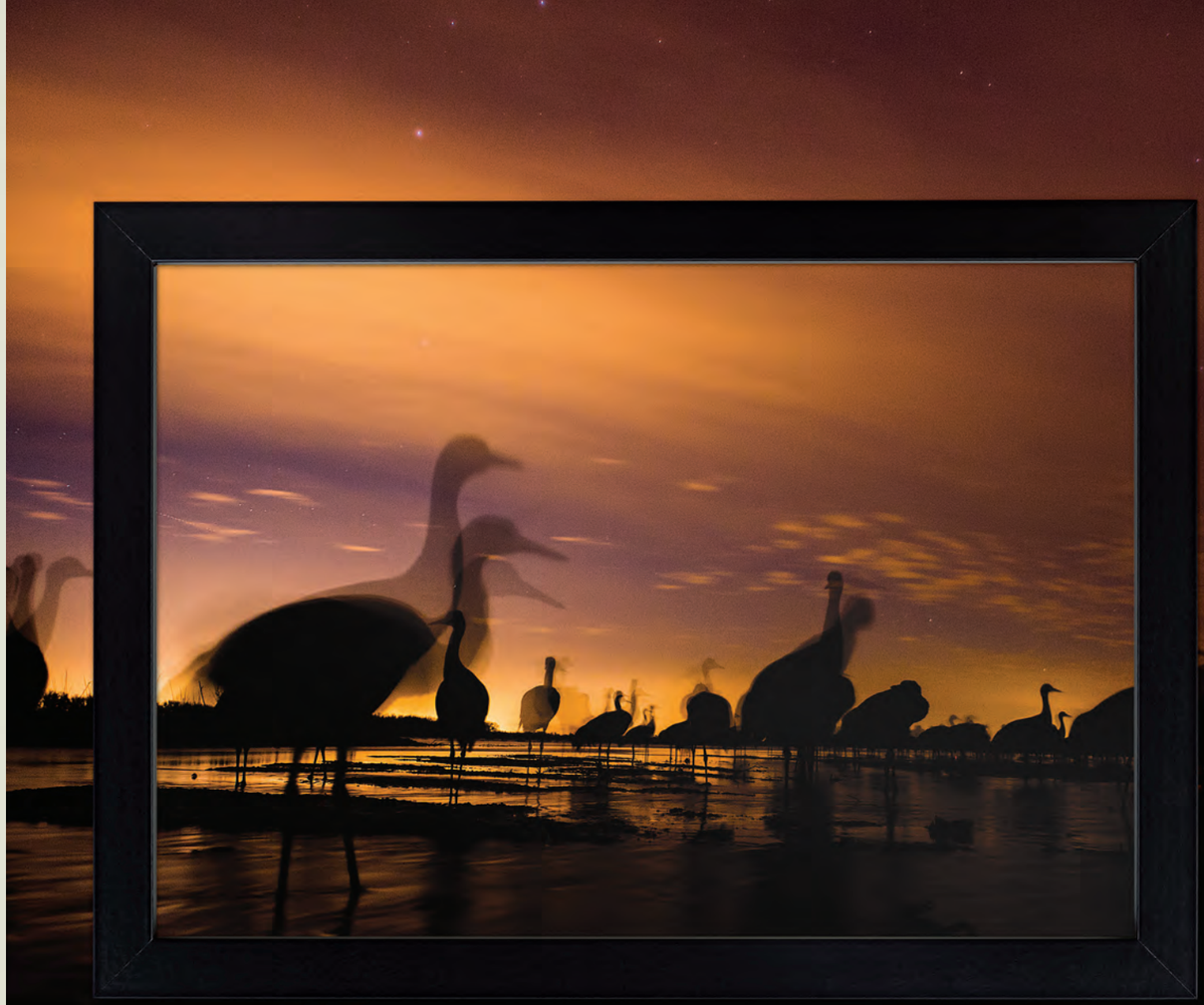
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