



A summer thunderstorm moves across the upper end of Calamus Reservoir near Burwell.  
Photo by Eric Fowler.

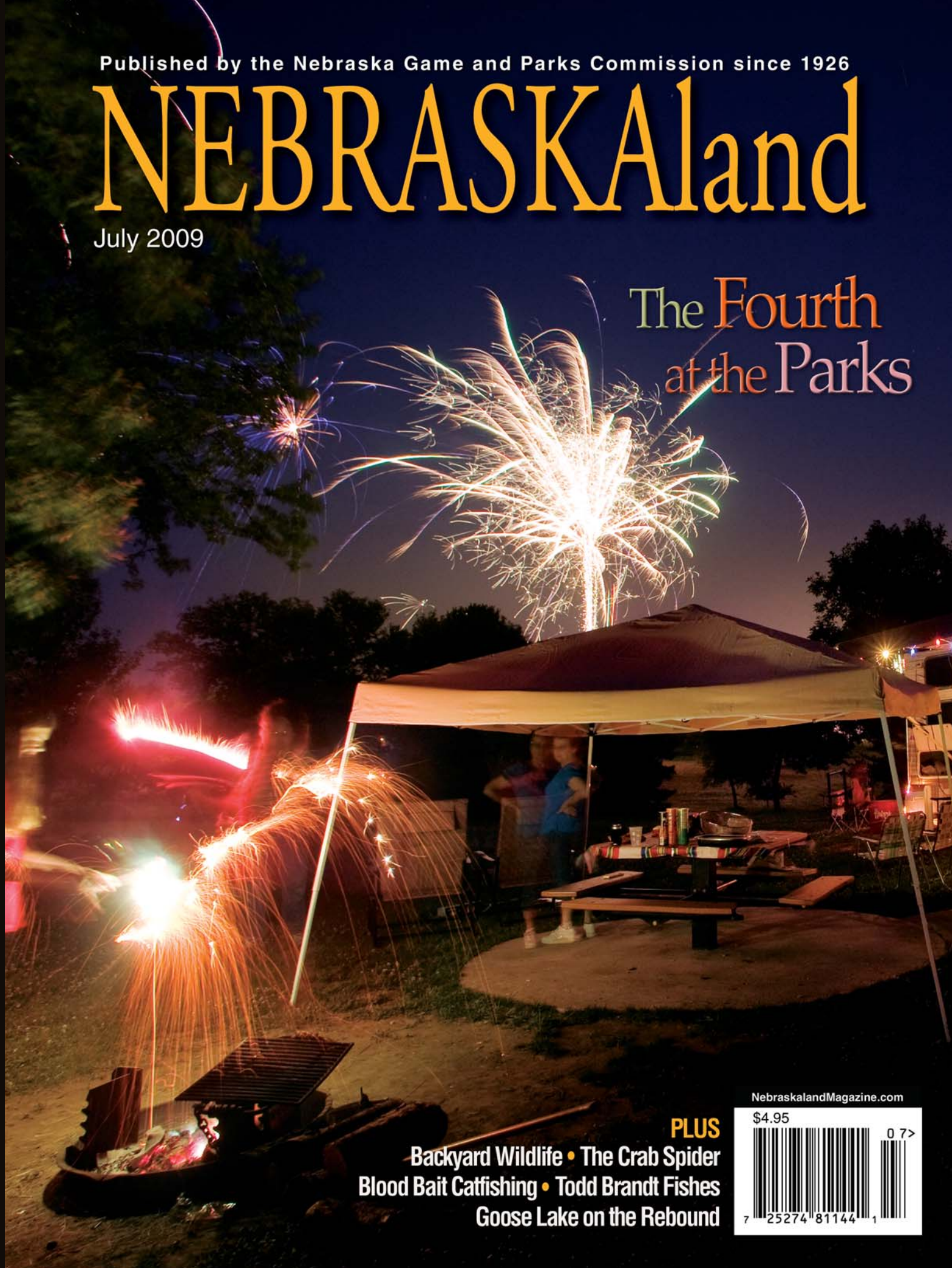
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# NEBRASKAland

July 2009

The Fourth  
at the Parks



**PLUS**  
Backyard Wildlife • The Crab Spider  
Blood Bait Catfishing • Todd Brandt Fishes  
Goose Lake on the Rebound

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# NEBRASKAland

Volume 87, Number 6, July 2009

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State parks and recreation areas are great places to visit any time of year, but they're especially enjoyable in early July when our nation comes together to celebrate its freedom.

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When not on the radio, talk show host Todd Brandt likes to fish – quietly. TEXT AND PHOTOS BY JEFF KURRUS

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**Cover:** For some, the Fourth of July means fireworks. For others, it means a trip to the lake. Thousands of people across the state, like this group camping at Pawnee State Recreation Area last year, combine the two. See story beginning on page 12. Photo by Doug Carroll.  
**Opposite:** A windmill is motionless on a calm summer day at The Nature Conservancy's Dahms Tract south of Wood River near the Platte River. Photo by Chris Helzer.

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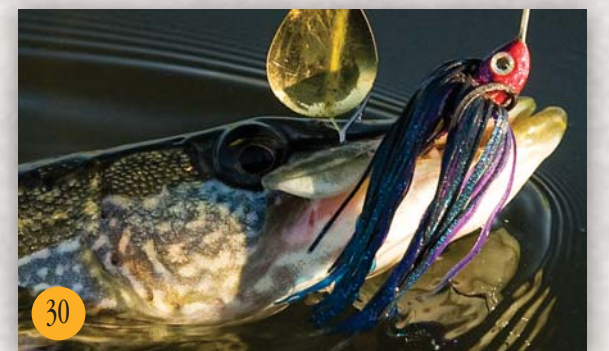
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# NEBRASKAland Magazine



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## Old Spaces and Old Friends

Dear Bob (Grier),  
I have really enjoyed reading your  
articles on the Panhandle area of  
Nebraska, especially the May 2009  
article on old deserted houses. I was  
born and raised in Alliance, and I am  
now living in Vienna, Virginia, with my  
husband, who lived in Lincoln and is  
an NU graduate. I was wondering if  
you are the nephew of Emily Hein of  
Alliance. She died several years ago,  
but she and my mother were very good  
friends and I thought so much of  
Emily.

Hope you continue to write the  
interesting articles about Nebraska with  
your excellent photographs.

Sincerely,  
Peggy Williams Doole  
Vienna, Virginia



## Young Bass Angler

My 10-year-old son, Ryan Tejral  
of rural Pleasant Dale, caught this  
largemouth bass in our home pond  
on May 10, 2009, just as it began to  
sprinkle. He caught it with rod and  
reel using a “sparkly, shiny lure” as  
he described it. He was so excited!  
Becky Tejral  
Pleasant Dale, Nebraska

## Arizona Wildlife Kudos

To my colleagues at *NEBRASKAland*:  
I don't often have time to read all the  
magazines that come through our  
doors here at  
*Arizona Wildlife Views*,  
but I just picked  
up your  
December 2008  
issue and was  
entranced by  
“The Next Hole.”  
Kudos for a  
design that pulled  
me in and a  
writing style that  
kept me intrigued  
throughout the  
story. Without preaching, the article  
conveys a sense of the magnitude of the  
gift when one generation passes on  
tradition to the next. Nice work!

Julie Hammonds, associate editor  
*Arizona Wildlife Views Magazine*



## First Turkey Nest

Dear Editor of *NEBRASKAland*:  
This is a first for me. I was  
mushroom hunting on May 14th with a  
friend, and I came upon a hen turkey  
laying on her eggs. She flew away  
when we got near (about three feet  
before she even moved ... I didn't even  
see her) and I found this turkey nest.  
This is the first time I have ever seen a  
nest in 25 years of hunting turkeys. The  
area was protected by a tree limb and it  
had dry leaves as the bed. There were  
11 eggs in the nest.

Scott Houston  
Beaver Lake, Nebraska

## Shoemaker and Insects

This is a late thank you to all the  
staff at *NEBRASKAland Magazine*. The  
April article on Shoemaker Marsh was  
most interesting, and the photos of the



insects a few months ago were  
spectacular.

Keep up the good work.  
*NEBRASKAland* is the best.  
Clayton Brant  
Lincoln, Nebraska



## Thanks for a Lifetime of Outdoors

This is the thank-you letter that eight-  
year-old Seth Fink of Elkhorn sent in  
after having his name drawn for a half-  
price hunt and fish lifetime hunting  
permit this past spring. On behalf of  
the Commission, as well as the  
*Nebraska Game and Parks Foundation*,  
which funds the other half of these  
permits that are drawn for at various  
locations every year, let me say “You  
are so very welcome, Seth.” - Editor

Send your comments to:  
**Doug Carroll, Editor**  
**NEBRASKAland Magazine**  
**P.O. Box 30370**  
**Lincoln, NE 68503**  
or e-mail [doug.carroll@nebraska.gov](mailto:doug.carroll@nebraska.gov)  
Please include your postal address and  
telephone number.  
Letters may be condensed and edited  
for clarity. Photographs are  
welcome and will be returned.

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|                       |          |                |               |           |                |
|-----------------------|----------|----------------|---------------|-----------|----------------|
| <b>Administration</b> |          |                |               |           |                |
| Ted Blume (Adm.)      | Lincoln  | 471-5531       | Randy Pomplun | Fullerton | 536-2987       |
| Craig Stover (Asst.)  | Lincoln  | 471-5532       | Darin Gress   | Hebron    | (402) 768-2287 |
| Wes Loos (Asst.)      | Lincoln  | 471-5591       | Dale Johnson  | Kearney   | 237-1079       |
| Rod Loos (Asst.)      | Ogallala | (308) 284-8056 | Mark Reeves   | Loup City | 745-0662       |
| Murray Johnson        | Lincoln  | 471-5003       | Robert Finke  | Milford   | (402) 761-3537 |

|                      |           |                |                   |            |             |
|----------------------|-----------|----------------|-------------------|------------|-------------|
| <b>Panhandle</b>     |           |                | <b>Northeast</b>  |            |             |
| Officer              | City      | Phone (308)    | Officer           | City       | Phone (402) |
| Jim Zimmerman (Sup.) | Gering    | 436-7561       | Tom Zimmer (Sup.) | Norfolk    | 371-6625    |
| Walt Meyer           | Chadron   | 432-4398       | Dale Davis        | Bassett    | 273-1700    |
| Scott Brandt         | Gering    | 436-3418       | Ross Oestmann     | Bloomfield | 373-4412    |
| Heath Packett        | Gordon    | 282-2553       | Steve Oberg       | Columbus   | 564-5937    |
| Dennis Thompson      | Lemoine   | 355-2024       | Daniel Roberts    | Fremont    | 721-7852    |
| Dan Zuehlke          | Ogallala  | 284-4815       | Jon Reeves        | Kennard    | 427-7378    |
| Doug Pollard         | Oshkosh   | 772-9950       | Marion Shafer     | Norfolk    | 371-2031    |
| Frank Miller         | Valentine | (402) 376-1183 | Pat George        | O'Neill    | 336-1588    |
| Dan Kling            | Whitney   | 432-8367       | Eric Wiebe        | Ponca      | 755-2566    |
|                      |           |                | Tim Williams      | Neligh     | 887-1335    |
|                      |           |                | Cory Krause       | West Point | 372-6979    |

|                       |           |             |                  |            |             |
|-----------------------|-----------|-------------|------------------|------------|-------------|
| <b>Southwest</b>      |           |             | <b>Southeast</b> |            |             |
| Officer               | City      | Phone (308) | Officer          | City       | Phone (402) |
| Roger Thompson (Sup.) | N. Platte | 532-9175    | Duane Arp (Sup.) | Gretna     | 332-2965    |
| Ray Dierking          | Brkn. Bow | 872-3078    | Sean McKeenan    | Ashland    | 944-4174    |
| George Sund           | Cambridge | 697-4629    | William Krause   | Auburn     | 274-3789    |
| Michael Thome         | Cozad     | 784-4362    | Mike Luben       | Colon      | 443-4278    |
| Matt Andrews          | Elwood    | 785-3025    | Douglas Kramer   | Lincoln    | 466-9001    |
| Dirk Greene           | Imperial  | 882-5328    | Dina Barta       | Lincoln    | 483-2358    |
| Virgil Gosch          | McCook    | 345-2185    | Stacey Lewton    | Lincoln    | 476-0436    |
| Dudley Sorensen       | N. Platte | 532-0747    | Levi Krause      | Louisville | 234-2212    |
| Rich Routh            | Rep. City | 799-2085    | Russell Mort     | Nebr. City | 873-5684    |
|                       |           |             | Dan Evasco       | Papillion  | 592-6733    |
|                       |           |             | Jeff Clauson     | Waterloo   | 359-5301    |

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Red Headed Woodpecker, Pheasant, and Gold Finch photos courtesy of Don Brockmeier



## Get the Lead Out

### Rocky Hoffmann

Sweetie, a well-trained, four-year-old yellow Labrador, wasn't acting right. She began to ignore basic field commands, became disoriented, got confused in field corners as well as the corner of the living room and couldn't find her way out. Within days, she had completely stopped eating and sleeping. She constantly paced in circles while panting. Her muscle mass had deteriorated significantly. She was dying.

North Platte veterinarian Dr. Ronald Green remembered seeing some of these symptoms – not in dogs, but in cattle. It turned out that the cattle were suffering from lead poisoning, which they had been exposed to by chewing or licking old batteries discarded in pastures. An x-ray revealed that Sweetie's stomach contained a single lead shot pellet. When the pellet was surgically removed it appeared that it had eroded significantly. Chelation and steroid treatments followed. More than a month after the surgery, the dog was still recovering and had to relearn some of her training. Some personality departures still exist but are improving.

Most likely, Sweetie either ate the discards of a cleaned pheasant that contained lead shot or she chewed up a shotgun shell – one of her favorite

sports after the hunt was finding and retrieving spent shells. Dr. Green cautions hunters not to overlook accidental lead poisoning. He said that it is important not to discard the remains of cleaned birds where dogs or raptors may find them. It's also not wise to leave shotgun shells lying around for a playful pup to discover. In this case, one pellet was almost fatal to a normal, healthy retriever.

## Fishin' Fever

### Jeff Kurrus

Recently doing research for an upcoming *NEBRASKA* and American bullfrog article, I ran across the following poem taken from the 1901-1902 *First Biennial Report of the Nebraska Game and Fish Commission*. It was amusing to find poetry included with an official state government document.

*Like to drop my work an' go  
Tew a fishing' hole I know;  
Reckon I wud miss my guess  
Ef I cud'nt ketch a mess.  
Pears tew me they ort tew bite:  
Sun and sky an' air seems right;  
Ef I jes' cud have my pick,  
I'd be down erlong th' crick.*

*Like to drop my wurk an' go  
Tew a fishin' hole I know;  
Like to go an' fish away  
Jes th' hull endurin' day;  
Like tew fish away an' hear  
Worter singin' in my ear;  
An' I'd go, I calculate,  
Wuzzent jes for diggin' bait.*

## Turpin Time

### Dick Turpin

Camping, kids and s'mores. Everybody knows that story ... but this time of year you open that marshmallow bag up and it's just a big glob of goob. Here's a way to solve that. If those marshmallows are sticking together, get yourself some powdered sugar and a container big enough to hold what you need. Take those stuck together ...



# NEBRASKA Pheasants Forever & Quail Forever LANDOWNER HABITAT TOURS

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WILDLIFE BIOLOGISTS FROM ACROSS THE STATE WILL BE HOSTING A SERIES OF HABITAT TOURS THIS YEAR. TOURS ARE DESIGNED TO DEMONSTRATE HABITAT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES, AVAILABLE CONSERVATION PROGRAMS AND HOW TO CREATE THESE RESULTS ON YOUR OWN PROJECTS.

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**IMPROVING HABITAT FOR PHEASANTS**

**JULY 21, 2009 10:00 TO 2:00**  
**HICKORY RIDGE WMA-EAST PARKING LOT**  
**IMPROVING HABITAT FOR PHEASANTS**

**JULY 23, 2009 10:00 TO 2:00**  
**BRANCHED OAK WMA-DOG TRIAL AREA**  
**IMPROVING HABITAT FOR PHEASANTS**

**JULY 24, 2009 11:00 TO 3:00**  
**ST. PAUL-THE GATHERING PLACE**  
**QUAIL MANAGEMENT**

**AUGUST 21, 2009 9:00 TO 3:00**  
**BROKEN BOW-HUCKLEBERRY'S HIDEOUT**  
**RANGELAND MANAGEMENT**

**SEPTEMBER 16, 2009 4:00 TO 6:00**  
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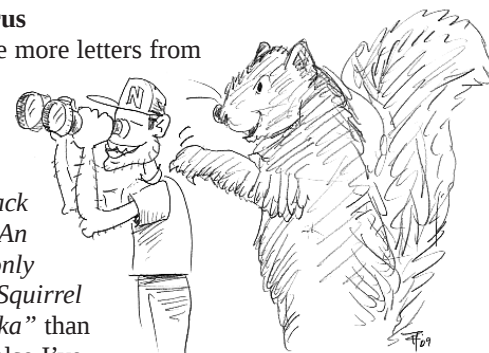
separate those babies ... dump them all in there ... give them a shake ... and those babies are ready to go ... coats them ... dusts them ... so they don't stick together. When you get to camp you'll be glad you did.

## Black Squirrel Sightings

Jeff Kurrus

I receive more letters from readers regarding the October 2007 "Black Squirrels-An Uncommonly Common Squirrel of Nebraska" than anything else I've written for *NEBRASKAland*. This has led to colleagues buying me black squirrel prints, stuffed animals and the like. It has also led to people telling me their own black squirrel sightings, something that I am becoming more intrigued about because of the frequency of black squirrels I am seeing, most recently at Louisville SRA in eastern Nebraska.

So, because I have been unofficially deemed the "black squirrel guy," let me know where your latest sightings have occurred by e-mailing me at [Jeff.Kurrus@nebraska.gov](mailto:Jeff.Kurrus@nebraska.gov) so I can begin to create the Nebraska black squirrel map my colleagues have stated that I was born to make.



## Outdoor Message Plates

Steve Scheinost of Lincoln and his family began camping in a tent more than 30 years ago and are looking forward to many more. They have improved their accommodations since, stepping up to a pop-up camper, a travel trailer and now a fifth-wheel, which he

pulls with a pickup adorned with this plate.

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

## Lewis and Clark SRA Shoreline Stabilization Funding

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission will receive a \$500,000 grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust for the Lewis and Clark State Recreation Area (SRA) Shoreline Stabilization.

The Trust board announced funding for the project on April 2. This is the first year of the award, with a potential for second- and third-year funding totaling \$910,000. The project is one of 82 receiving \$15,065,944 in grant awards from the Trust this year. The Commission also received \$250,000 from the Sport Fish Restoration Fund

for this project.

There has been significant wave-related shoreline erosion and filling of the channel with shale and sediment at the popular Miller Creek and South Shore access points at Lewis and Clark Lake. The project includes three rock jetties at these areas to decrease the rate of erosion, provide fish habitat and ensure proper bank stabilization.

The Nebraska Legislature created the Nebraska Environmental Trust in 1992. Using revenue from the Nebraska Lottery, the Trust has provided more than \$142 million in grants to 1,134 projects across the state. The Nebraska Environmental Trust works to preserve, protect and restore our natural resources for future generations.

## Test Negative for Tuberculosis

The 42 wild white-tailed deer sampled near a Knox County facility where bovine tuberculosis was detected were free of the disease, recent test results showed.

Biologists with the Nebraska Game

## Dutch Oven Chicken

### Joey's Stupendous Chicken

- 4 chicken breasts, skinned & boned
- ½ cup milk or white wine
- 8 slices Swiss cheese
- ½ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
- 2 beaten eggs
- 1 16 oz jar marinara sauce
- 8 slices mozzarella cheese
- Parsley & twists of orange (optional)
- Bread crumbs

- Butter
- Olive oil

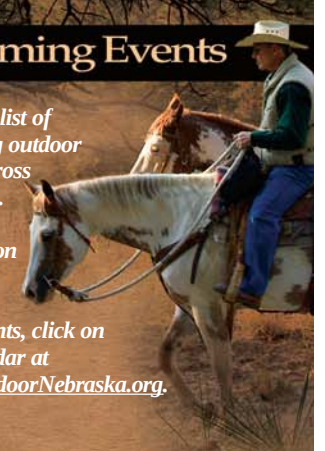
Dip chicken in eggs and roll in fresh bread crumbs. Brown in half butter, half olive oil. Add milk or wine to marinara sauce. Pour into bottom of Dutch oven, and layer browned chicken breasts on top. Layer cheeses over top of chicken breasts. Top with Parmesan cheese. Bake 30-40 minutes. Uncover and cook to reduce liquid slightly. Garnish with parsley sprigs and twisted orange slices.



– from the 2004 Dutch Oven Cooking pamphlet published by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

## Upcoming Events

Here is a list of upcoming outdoor events across Nebraska. For more information about these and other events, click on the calendar at [www.OutdoorNebraska.org](http://www.OutdoorNebraska.org).



- July 2-4
  - Fort Robinson SP Annual Art Show
- July 3
  - Niobrara SP Kids Program
- July 4
  - Niobrara SP Buffalo Cookout
- July 4
  - Fort Robinson 4th of July BBQ
- July 4-5
  - Pioneer Longrifle Rendezvous, Indian Cave SP
- July 4-5
  - Fort Kearny Stampede Day
- July 4-5
  - Fort Atkinson SHP - Living History
- July 7
  - Family Fishing Night, Zorinsky Lake, Omaha
- July 10
  - Nebraska Star Party Star Gazing, Eugene T. Mahoney SP
- July 10-12
  - Chadron SP Fur Trade Days
- July 11
  - Niobrara SP Buffalo Cookout
- July 14
  - Family Fishng Night, Holmes Lake, Lincoln
- July 18
  - Niobrara SP Buffalo Cookout
- July 22
  - Family Fishing Night, Standing Bear Lake, Omaha
- July 23-25
  - 88th Nebraska's Big Rodeo, Calamus SRA/Burwell
- July 24-29
  - Merritt Reservoir Star Party
- July 25
  - Niobrara SP Buffalo Cookout
- July 25
  - Lake McConaughy's 20th Annual Kites and Castles
- July 29
  - Family Fishing Night, Wildwood Lake
- July 31
  - Niobrara SP RV Campground Kids Program

## Officer's Notebook

### A Good Day Fishing Gone Bad

A couple of years ago, Conservation Officers Jeff Jones, Darin Gress, and I were assigned to an undercover fish detail at Maloney and Sutherland reservoirs, where some of the state's best fishing opportunities can be found, because we had received complaints about people catching and keeping more white bass in one day than their daily bag, or even possession, limit allowed.

Officer Gress and I were posing as fishermen at Sutherland Reservoir and watching for the overbagging problems to develop. The fishing was good and everyone seemed to be catching some fish. It didn't take long to spot two groups of people who were obviously out-catching most people and keeping well over their limit of 15 white bass. We watched as some of the individuals caught and kept more than twice their limit in just 45 minutes! They tried to disguise this activity by having a group member take fish up to the camp while others continued to fish.

While we were watching these groups, Officer Jones was coming in our direction after being at Maloney Reservoir. Just as he arrived, a van from the first group was leaving camp with a load of fish, so he stopped the vehicle outside the campground and discovered that they had more fish than their bag limit. It was quite obvious that the van's occupant called to warn the others because they abruptly stopped fishing, packed up and headed back to camp. We decided it was time to make the contact despite the fact that there was another group not associated with them that was also catching more than their limit.

Officer Gress and I stopped one of the first group's vehicles. The car, with one occupant, was trying to leave the area with well over 200 white bass. We spent quite some time collecting fishing licenses, counting fish, interviewing subjects and taking pictures. Deputies from the Lincoln County Sheriff's Office and a federal game warden came to assist.

I was concerned that we were only going to catch one of the groups with illegal fish because of the circus we were creating with the first party. So as we worked, Officer Gress and I kept glancing over to where the other party's vehicle was parked and where they were fishing. We were astounded that it was taking them so long to decide to leave. When one of them went to the vehicle, Officer Gress and I contacted them and, much to our amazement, they still had their fish and far more than their limit – the fishing was so good they hadn't even noticed the commotion or patrol cars parked in the campground near them. The first party of nine anglers had 416 white bass in their possession and had caught them all in approximately three to four hours of fishing. The other group of four had caught 77 white bass in about the same time. In total, the two groups of fishermen paid a total of \$7,568 in fines, court costs and liquidated damages, and had their fish and coolers seized for evidence. Luckily we were able to donate the fish to a local homeless shelter after the case disposition.

– Mike Thome, Conservation Officer, Cozad



and Parks Commission and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services (USDA-WS) collected the free-ranging deer in early May within a mile of a facility containing captive elk, several of which tested positive for tuberculosis earlier this spring. Samples from the deer were tested at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (VDL). Biologists with USDA-WS, USDA-Veterinary Services and the Commission assisted the VDL with sample preparation.

The collection and testing of wild deer was necessary to help determine if the disease organism was present outside the captive facility. Deer were collected on private land with landowner permission.

This was not the first time Nebraska deer have been tested for tuberculosis. The Commission collected and tested 271 samples in 1996, with no positives resulting from the tests.

Tuberculosis is a slow, progressive bacterial disease and is difficult to diagnose in the early stages. As the disease progresses, animals may exhibit emaciation, lethargy, weakness, anorexia,

### A Look Back - July 1978

#### Jeff Kurrus

31 years ago this month, *NEBRASKAland Magazine* featured a photo essay by Jon Farrar on Goose Lake, the same place where Eric Fowler's article this month, "Goose Lake Rebound," is focused. Natural history articles

entitled "Owl Encounters" and "Black-Footed Ferret" were also included. And last, but not least, was "Gardening with Whiskers," which spoke about Mother Nature gardens found in the outdoors.



low-grade fever and pneumonia with a chronic, moist cough. It usually is transmitted through contact with respiratory secretions from an infected animal.



PHOTO BY DOUG CARROLL

### Peregrine Chicks Banded

Two male and two female peregrine falcon chicks from the nest box near the top of the Nebraska State Capitol building were banded and given a checkup in early June by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and Raptor Recovery Nebraska.

"The banding went very well and the chicks appear to be in very good shape," said Joel Jorgensen, the Commission's nongame bird program manager. "They have everything they need to be successful."

The banding was performed by Jorgensen and the Commission's Melissa Santiago, as well as Betsy Finch and Janet Stander of Raptor Recovery Nebraska.

Peregrine female A/\*Y laid four eggs about the second week of April and, with the help of her mate, 19/K, hatched the eggs between May 12 and May 14. The same pair has been present at the Capitol since 2005.

The 20-day-old chicks hatched in the nest box located on the 18th floor. Biologists placed unique bands on both legs, took blood samples and checked for diseases and parasites before returning the youngsters to the nest box.

This is the fourth year that the peregrine pair successfully hatched eggs. In 2005, the pair successfully raised a chick that, through a "Name the Chick" contest, was named Pioneer. In 2006, three chicks fledged and were given the names Willa, Bess and Sterling after famous Nebraskans Willa Cather, Bess Streeter Aldrich and J.

Sterling Morton. In 2007, four chicks fledged and were named Boreas, Notus, Eurus and Zephyrus after the four wind gods from Greek mythology that are ascribed to the cardinal directions North, South, East, and West. Last year's nesting attempt failed.

Peregrine falcons were first observed at the State Capitol when a lone male was seen in August 1990.

Peregrine falcons almost disappeared from the lower 48 states following World War II because of eggshell thinning caused by the pesticide DDT. The falcon was listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act in 1970. Recovery efforts, including the release of falcons at tall buildings in urban areas, were successful. By the late 1990s, peregrine falcon numbers recovered and the species was removed from the list of endangered species in 1999.

### Bow Practicing

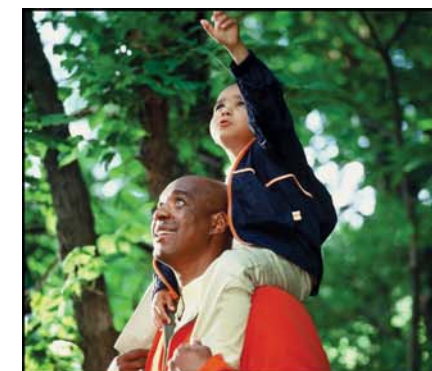
#### Doug Carroll

While it might be hard to think about this fall's archery season when all you want to do is sit near an air conditioner and escape the summer heat, the practice you do now makes a big difference to the success you have during archery season.

To shoot accurately on a consistent basis, make sure your equipment and your muscles are in good working order – something that can't be done with just a few weeks of shooting before the season starts.

Summer is a good time to get used to new equipment, such as arrow rests, sights and arrow releases, if you use them. It's also a good time to lengthen your effective range by working on longer shots and by shooting targets at unknown distances to improve your distance judging – missing a shot on the range is much better than doing it in the field.

By shooting early in the morning or late in the evening during the summer, you can accomplish several goals – you'll be a much better and more confident shooter come this fall, you'll escape the worst heat of the typical summer day and you'll also be used to shooting in the lowlight conditions that often exist when your best hunting opportunities occur. ■



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# The Fourth at the Parks

State parks and recreation areas are great places to visit and have fun any time of year, but they're especially enjoyable in early July when our nation comes together to celebrate its freedom.



Campers at Pawnee State Recreation Area enjoy last year's Fourth of July by setting off their own fireworks and watching the displays of others.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Flags line the road next to campsites at Area 2 of Branched Oak State Recreation Area near Malcolm last year.

What better way to celebrate our freedom than to spend Independence Day fishing, boating, swimming or camping? Visit almost any state park or recreation area across the state on July 4th and you will see plenty of examples of American pride on display. And although not every park allows fireworks, celebrants at several can enjoy pyrotechnics from the comfort of their campsite while visitors to those parks where fireworks are not allowed can often make a quick trip to a local town to enjoy the traditional nighttime barrage of celebratory firework displays before returning to their campsite for a bedtime s'more. Either way, spending the day outdoors is a great way to celebrate this holiday.

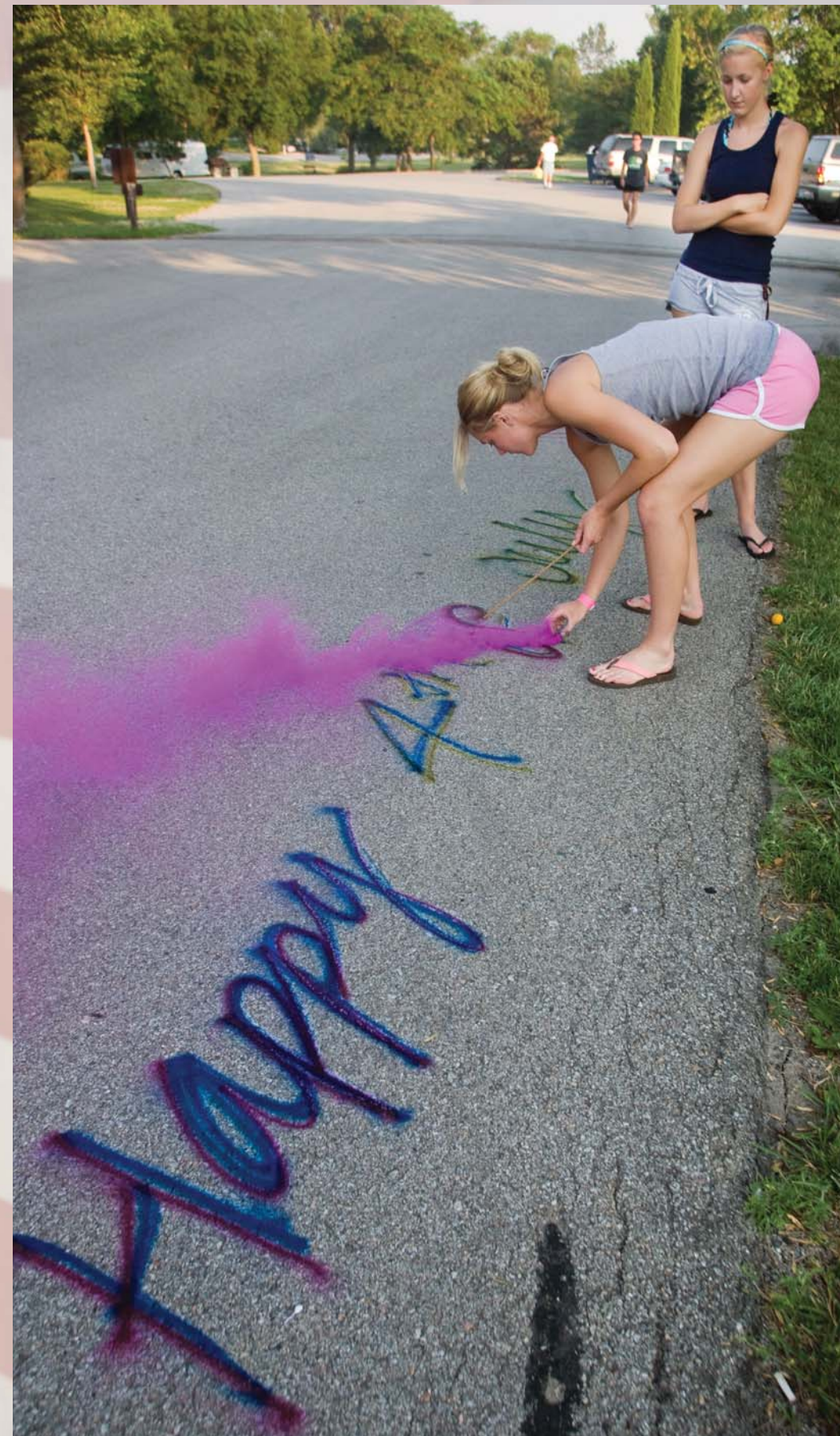


PHOTO BY DOUG CARROLL

Megan and Maddie Poe of Hickman use colored smoke bombs to write a Fourth of July greeting on the blacktop in the campground area of Pawnee State Recreation Area last year.



Bill and June Hansen of Omaha ride their tandem recumbent bike through Two Rivers State Recreation Area last Fourth of July.

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

For Tanya Strayer, the Fourth is all about red, white and blue.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

If awards were given for the best campsite decorations, the prize might go to Matt and Tanya Strayer of Lincoln, who invite friends and family to share in the celebration each year at their Branched Oak Lake campsite.



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Lizzie McGrath from Kansas City plays on the jungle gym at E.T. Mahoney SP.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Sailboats are a constant at Branched Oak Lake, including last year on the Fourth, when Steve Bauer of Seward (left to right), Jeff Ryan of Bellevue and Roger Bast of Lincoln set sail in their catamarans with a perfect wind.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Chad, Austin and Jordyn Becwar, along with Ken and Dylon Stithem, all of Lincoln, watched the Area 11 fireworks display and their fishing lines from the jetty near Branched Oak Marina last year.



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Carson Pecera plants a flag at Victory Lake's beach at Fremont Lakes SRA.



PHOTO BY PASQUALE MINGARELLI

George Rushing of Bellevue and his grandson, Isaiah Cooks of Omaha, have fun in a paddleboat at Platte River State Park.



PHOTO BY PASQUALE MINGARELLI

Tent campers at Louisville State Recreation Area enjoy last year's Fourth under the shade of the park's cottonwood trees.



Visitors can take in the fireworks display on Liebers Point, one of two designated fireworks areas at Branched Oak Lake, from land or water.

# Ambush!

A patient hunter, the crab spider sits motionless – until...

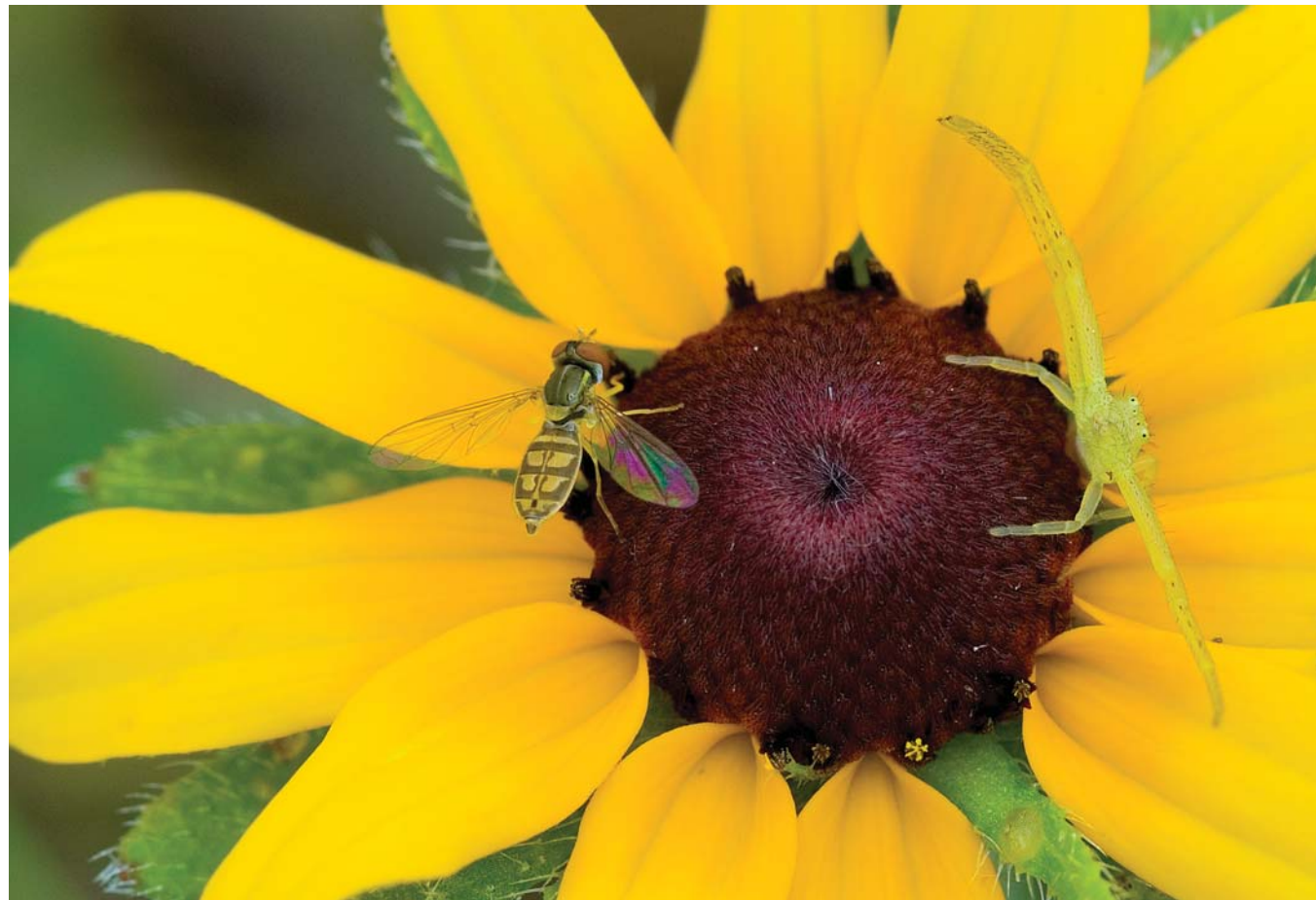
Text and photos by Chris Helzer

Crab spiders don't spin elaborate webs like those made by big, yellow and black garden spiders. They're not big, fast, hairy hunters like wolf spiders either. In fact, crab spiders mostly just sit around on flowers, but they have a charm of their own and they're worth getting to know.

Named for their similarity in appearance to crabs, crab spiders have short, wide, flat bodies, and their first two or three pairs of legs are much longer than the rest and are often held away from their bodies, much like a crab's claws. These spiders are a diverse group, with more than 2,000 species

worldwide. In North America there are about 200 species of crab spiders, at least 50 of which are found in Nebraska.

I frequently see crab spiders in prairies, but only if I remember to look closely enough. They're small enough (most are less than a centimeter in length) and sit so still that they're easy to miss – which, of course, is the idea. Because of their camouflage and patience, crab spiders are excellent at ambushing prey. Most sit quietly on leaves or flowers, waiting for an unsuspecting insect to wander within reach.



A small insect searches for nectar on a black-eyed Susan, likely unaware of the camouflaged crab spider with posed legs waiting for its chance to strike on the other side of the flower head.

Of those that hunt on flowers, many have the ability to change color, mainly between yellow and white. They are not quick-change artists like octopi or chameleons – it can take several days for a crab spider to complete its transformation – but the ability to match the flower color they're hunting on adds to their effectiveness as predators.

Unlike jumping spiders, wolf spiders and other free-living (non web-spinning) spiders, which have large eyes and keen eyesight, all eight of a crab spider's eyes are small and probably function more like motion detectors than true eyes. Their hunting method, however, is such that their poor eyesight is not a disadvantage. Most crab spiders in Nebraska hunt by taking up a position on a flower and waiting for small prey to come within range of their long front legs. When a small insect comes to gather pollen, nectar or just to rest, it's not likely to notice the silently waiting spider. If the unsuspecting insect ventures too close, the spider's front legs snap together like a trap and the spider gives its prey a quick, paralyzing bite. The venom used by the spider is extremely effective on insects, but fortunately crab spiders are not a threat to humans.

As I was walking through one of The Nature Conservancy's prairies along the Central Platte River last summer, I stopped to examine a black-eyed Susan flower. Kneeling down to get a better look, I noticed a small crab spider sitting at the edge of the dark flower center. I decided to grab my camera and wait to see if anything happened. It turned out to be a good decision.

After shooting a couple photos of the spider, a small fly arrived in search of some nectar. It seemed to be staying on the opposite side of the flower from the spider, which was sitting perfectly still, its front legs poised to snap shut if the fly came close enough. A minute or so later, the fly flew away as a larger one arrived. The new arrival wasn't as cautious or lucky as its smaller counterpart – I didn't actually see the spider move, but the next thing I knew the fly was connected to it. I assume the spider bit the fly immediately, because the fly never moved once it was in the spider's grasp.

The spider sat perfectly still for a half minute or so, and then retreated underneath the lip of the flower with its prey, probably looking for a safe place to sit and suck out the now liquefied insides of its prey. I was impressed with how easily the spider carried the fly, which looked about twice as heavy as its captor. Not long after the spider disappeared, the first



Faster than the blink of an eye, the crab spider grabbed this unlucky visitor to the flower head and quickly gave it a paralyzing bite.



Its much larger prey neutralized, the crab spider enjoys its lunch beneath a flower petal while an insect above can once again search for nectar in safety.

fly I'd seen, or one just like it, came back. I was reminded of movies where the customers in a bar sort of melt away when they see an impending fight, and then sidle back when it's over.

I had read about crab spiders and had even seen them holding prey before, but I had never had the chance to be present at the moment of capture. It was an impressive display of hunting prowess. I was glad to have seen the event, but I also found myself grateful that crab spiders are less than an inch in size. ■

Chris Helzer lives in Aurora and is the Eastern Nebraska Program Director for The Nature Conservancy. He has been a contributor to NEBRASKALAND since 1994.



# Fishing with Marcus

Text and Photos by Ken Bouc

Omaha's Marcus Washington competes in bass tournaments and really enjoys participating in the amateur division of the B.A.S.S. (Bass Anglers Sportsmen Society) Tournament Trail Weekend Series on waters in Iowa, Oklahoma, Kansas and, of course, Nebraska.

But as much as Marcus enjoys meeting the pros, fishing new waters and the knowledge he learns in the process, he finds fishing's greatest values lie far from the tournament trail – "Fishing is for families. Fishing is for kids," he says with conviction.

Marcus came by his belief from personal experience. He was born in Independence, Kansas, lived in Oklahoma until he was two or three, then moved to Wichita with his mother and two sisters when their parents separated. But his father, who remained in Oklahoma, maintained contact with his children, and fishing played a large part in their relationship.

"Every summer, he would come and get me and my sisters or send for us. I would just dream about it and couldn't wait until I got down there because I knew we were going to fish. We went

fishing almost every day," Marcus said. In fact, he still fishes with his father. Marcus's mother moved her family from Wichita to Omaha when he was in the fourth grade, and about seven years ago, Marcus's father also moved to the Omaha area.

"When I was three years old, my dad hooked a worm under a bobber and

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**"When you go camping and fishing, you see nature, and most inner city kids don't get that experience."**

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told me to watch that bobber. He tells the story that the bobber went under and I had a five-pound catfish on the line. Ever since then, I've been hooked," Marcus said.

Fishing with their dad when they

were youngsters was important to Marcus and the rest of the family, so now he's applying the same formula while raising his own family. "My dad taught me to fish and I loved it, so I wanted to show my kids how to fish. Once they catch that first fish, that gets them hooked. My kids are being taught to fish, both the girls and the boys. My youngest, Keshawn, just caught his first fish, a catfish, last year. He was five then," Marcus said proudly. "Sometimes, the catfishing is good and that's what we all do, then sometimes we're bass fishing."

Marcus also cited some of the angling accomplishments of others in the family. DeAngelo, the oldest boy, caught his biggest largemouth bass, about 2½ pounds, on an artificial lure in an Otoe County farm pond in 2007. DeAngelo's mother, however, topped that.

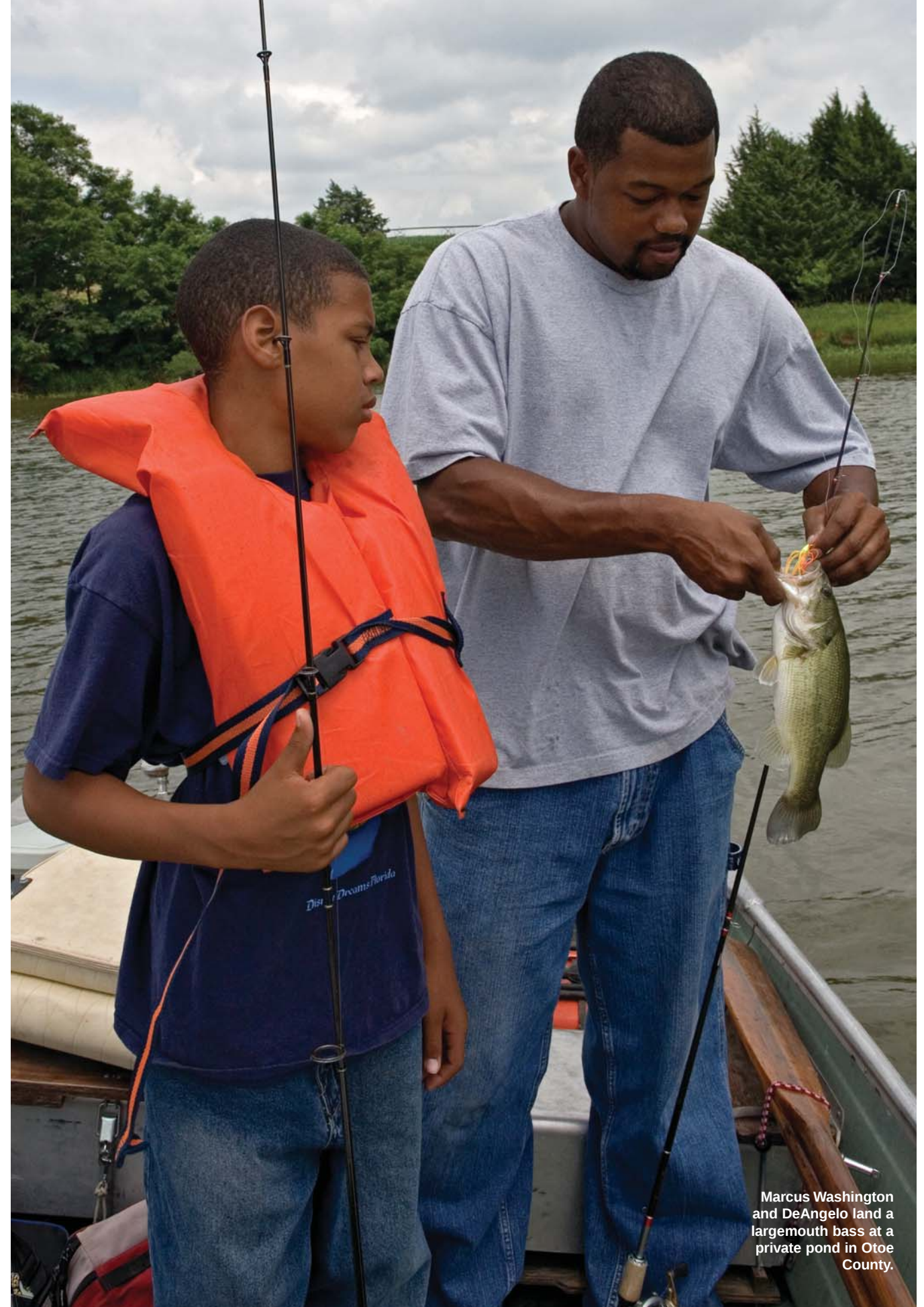
"I took my wife, Kylie, fishing when she caught her first fish," Marcus said. "After that, she caught a five-pound bass. I've been fishing since I was three years old, and the biggest bass I ever caught weighed five pounds, so she matched me in just one year of fishing!"

Like many families today, the Washington household is a blend of two broods. When Marcus married Kylie, she brought her children, DeAngelo and Kyliessa Peak into the fold with Marcus' daughter, Tiara. Sons Marcus Jr. and Keshawn came along later. They now fish as one family, with Marcus, a concrete specialist who makes foundations for new homes during the week, serving as the family fishing guide.

When the weather's nice and fish are active, weekends often find Marcus fishing. Sometimes this involves a distant bass tournament, but his favorite outings are with the family at nearby lakes, such as those at Two Rivers and Louisville state recreation areas, and occasional farm ponds. Some are simply day trips taken on a Saturday or Sunday when there's no overtime or youth activities scheduled, but the main



The Washington family talks about the day around a campfire at E. T. Mahoney State Park.



Marcus Washington and DeAngelo land a largemouth bass at a private pond in Otoe County.



Marcus and DeAngelo try their luck at Summitt Lake near Tekamah in Burt County.

events are at least two full summer weekends spent at an area lake.

Washington and his family likes to set up camp on Friday evening and stay until Sunday evening. “We fish, we camp, we grill. We make s’mores around the campfire at night, play board games and play card games,” Marcus said. “I think fishing brings us closer together. We get to spend quality time with our family, quiet time without all the ruckus and all the noise of the city. It’s quiet and you get to talk to your kids.

“When you go camping and fishing, you see nature, and most inner city kids don’t get that experience. They just play video games and Playstation. I think it’s of value when they get out and see Mother Nature, see the different kinds of birds and different kinds of wildlife that they never see in the city.”

DeAngelo mentioned playing with garter snakes on their camping trips, and Marcus reminded him of the frogs, toads and tadpoles he had captured and the Canada geese and broods of



The Washington family enjoys spending quality time fishing together at Two Rivers State Recreation Area (pictured above) and many other public lakes around Omaha.

goslings that swam around the lakes as they fished.

When asked if any of his friends at school or in his activities talked about fishing, camping or any of the other experiences with wildlife or the outdoors that he’s been exposed to, DeAngelo couldn’t remember anything like that ever being mentioned.

“I’m from North Omaha ... I know there is a loss of interest in the outdoors within the black community because there’s no one teaching it to the kids,” said Marcus. “I think their grandfathers fished a lot back in their day, but this new generation is losing interest in fishing and the outdoors because now fathers are not teaching their kids. They let them play video games all week long,” Marcus said. “When we go camping and fishing, I don’t often see minorities – in fact, in the whole urban community, there is definitely a lack of interest in nature and the outdoors.

“We need to reach out, get people more involved in the outdoors – fishing camping and the beauty of nature. I believe if we were to reach out, we could do that. God’s blessed us with the beauty of nature, and I believe that everyone, at least once in their lifetime, should experience that through camping and fishing.”

Marcus once took his seven nephews camping, and ever since then they’ve been asking when he might take them again. “I tried to reach out to them and maybe get them hooked. I need to do that more often, like my stepfather did with me. He’s a camper and the one who taught me ... Camping and fishing go together. It was a good experience for my nephews, like in trying to put their first worm on the hook,” Marcus said with a grin. “They didn’t catch anything but they had fun. They still talk about it.”

While Marcus understands that fishing and an appreciation of the outdoors are best learned from family, he wondered why more public programs are not offered to fill the need. As it turns out, there is quite a number of them available from city, state and private sources, but not all of them are widely known (see sidebar).

Marcus’s kids, however, will not need classes or programs for their outdoor education. They have Marcus. ■

## Urban Youth Fishing Opportunities



By Andrea Faas  
Outdoor Education Specialist, Ak-Sar-Ben Aquarium

*Various organizations offer a variety of fishing opportunities across the state. Contact your local Commission office to find out what’s available in your area. Here are a few to get you started.*

### • Nebraska’s Youth Fishing Program

Volunteer Fishing Instructors are available statewide to take young people and their families fishing. Fishing tackle and educational handouts are available to certified volunteers. To find out about local fishing opportunities or to become a volunteer, contact Andrea Faas at (402) 332-3901 or [andrea.faas@nebraska.gov](mailto:andrea.faas@nebraska.gov). You can also go online to [www.outdoornebraska.org](http://www.outdoornebraska.org) and look under aquatic education or at the events calendar to find out about upcoming events.

### • Fishing Tackle Loaner Program

Fishing rods and tackle are available for park visitors to borrow at 18 of Nebraska’s state parks and recreation areas. Check out the following web site for park locations or ask at your local state park office. <http://www.ngpc.state.ne.us/fishing/tackloan.asp>

### • Take Me Fishing

This web site has information about local fishing, regional outfitters and other resources. [www.TakeMeFishing.org](http://www.TakeMeFishing.org)

### • Lincoln Parks and Recreation Department

A weeklong fishing camp is usually offered the week after the public school year ends. Many of the department’s summer day camps also offer fishing as a part of their camp experience. Contact Lincoln Parks and Recreation at (402) 441-7847 for details.

### • Omaha Parks and Recreation Programs

Call (402) 455-5900 for information on fishing in Omaha city parks and the parks department’s youth fishing programs.

### • Missouri River Expo, Ponca State Park

Kids can learn casting, fishing knots and fish identification. September 18 is set aside for schools, and September 19 and 20 are open to the public. Call (402) 755-2284 for information on the Ponca event, or call (402) 471-6009 regarding other Commission expos.

### • SANDS Programs

Sportspeople Assisting Nebraska’s Disabled Sportspeople (SANDS) offers a youth fishing program for kids with disabilities. Contact Dave Burgess at (402) 559-3743 for more information.

### • Nebraska Walleye Association

The NWA is dedicated to promoting primarily walleye fishing, and offers family fishing opportunities around Nebraska. Clinic dates and sign-up information are available at [www.nebraskawalleye.com/](http://www.nebraskawalleye.com/).

# What's in Your Backyard?

Text and photos by Julie Watts

*“Build it and they will come” was the big line in a popular movie years ago. Turns out the line is very true – we built it, and they came.*



The house, with the waterfall leading down to the pond.

If you want an ideal opportunity to attract wildlife, just add water. My husband, Mike, and I both enjoy being outdoors and recently purchased a few acres in the Pine Ridge area of northwestern Nebraska. In addition to a 1920s house, which needed total restoration, our property also included more than 80 years of accumulated trash. We found three water tanks and decided to use one to build a small pond. We imagined it as a project for a year or two down the road, but

two hours later, because patience is not one of my virtues, the hole was dug, the tank was set and the water was running. Within hours, birds began to filter in, drinking and bathing.

We quickly decided we needed another pond and went for the tank of all tanks – four foot wide by sixteen foot long, approximately 1000 gallons of pond luxury. We placed it in the natural atrium near the house, an enclosure surrounded by hardwoods and lilacs where the arched branch of an ash tree creates an entrance. We planned ahead for a waterfall, which would provide aeration and be powered by a solar pump. Native water plants were added, as well as painted turtles, fathead minnows, frogs and other local aquatic creatures. Our last addition was solar lights at the edge of the pond to draw in insects for our pond critters.

At least 25 different species of birds have visited our pond



A western tanager.



A pygmy nuthatch.



These three leopard frogs are frequent visitors to the pond.



A screech owl naps in a tree trunk.

of scat greeted us near the pond and our fish population began to diminish. It made for lively conversation and good-natured disagreement as we contemplated what animal had visited. So we e-mailed scat photos to wildlife friends. Opinions varied, but I was holding out for a mountain lion. Mike was convinced it was from a large raccoon. If so, that would be one big coon. That winter, we also found a deer kill site nearby, furthering the debate.

The subject of a game camera soon came up. We found one with a rechargeable battery, fed by a small solar panel. Placing it in the corner, we could get a diagonal shot of the entire pond area, catching all the entrances and exits as well as having enough sunlight for power. In theory, it was perfect.

– goldfinches, chickadees, orioles, Townsend's solitaires, tanagers, crossbills, and pinyon jays. While mountain and western bluebirds are more open prairie birds, both joined us at the new watering hole. Then, near nightfall, bats began to bombard the pond. So we added several bird-houses and a bat house to encourage them all to return.

As our wetland and its surrounding flora grew, we began to see rabbits, deer and coyotes. Several weekends that first summer, a large pile

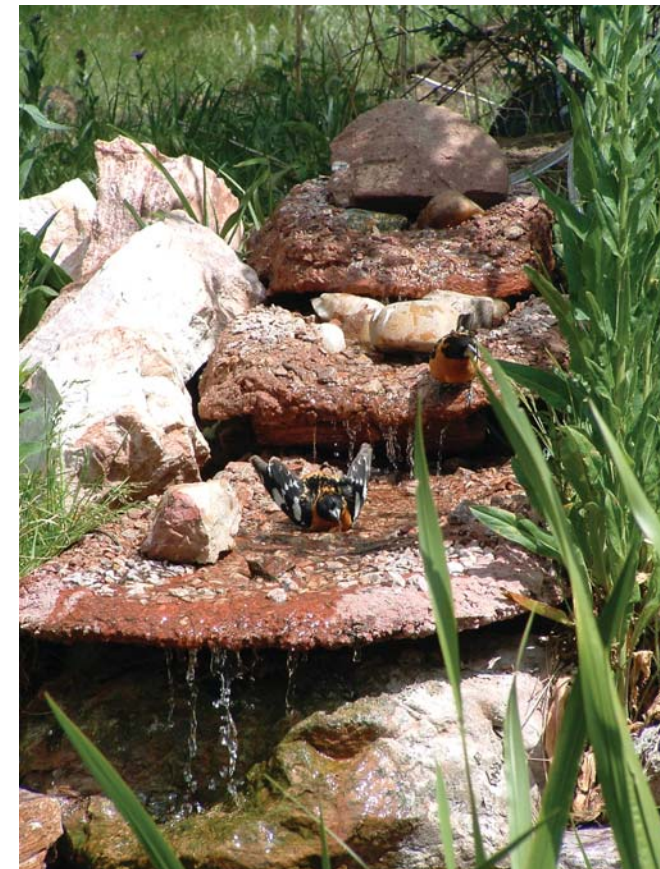


Images of deer, turkey and elk were a few of the many animals that the game camera captured near the pond. No mountain lion yet.

Reality was arriving to find a dead battery and more than 500 photos, mostly birds, rabbits and a lot of empty shots where birds and rabbits had evidently been seconds before. Moving the camera to another location, we tried again. The camera didn't take high-quality photos, but they were adequate for our purpose. Rabbit, turkey, a screech owl, deer, elk, porcupine and coyote were filmed frequenting the area, but no raccoon or mountain lion. We probably even captured the turkey on film that displaced the hose for the waterfall, causing the water to be pumped on the ground and draining the pond down to almost nothing. The pump no longer ran and we sent it back for repair. It was returned with a note: "Don't run pump dry." Tell that to the turkey.

We brought the camera in for the winter, put a pond heater in for a vent hole in the ice, and let nature take its course. We continued to see wildlife during the winter months, but our sights are set for next spring, when we can sit by the pond and watch the show. Plus, I'll put our game camera back out, curious to see if I get a picture of a big cat. ■

Julie Watts is a freelance writer living in Chadron.



Two grosbeaks bathing in the waterfall.

# Goose Lake Rebound

A renovation and regulation change have transformed this eastern Sandhills lake into a prime fishery.

Text and photos by Eric Fowler

When the Bureau of Fish and Game of Nebraska purchased Goose Lake in 1925, it didn't do so with the expectations that it was getting a good fishing lake. Located in Holt County on the eastern edge of the Sandhills, the lake, with its ever-fluctuating water level, was subject to winterkill and summer dry downs, making it a long shot for fishing. The Bureau, predecessor to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, also didn't buy it to provide a place to water ski, as that sport had just been born. The only thing they knew for sure was the area would be a great place to camp and hunt ducks.

Yet the lake's primary use has shifted through each of those purposes. A well installed in 1975 made maintaining water levels and water-skiing possible, and it also made managing the fishery possible – a renovation and restocking of the fishery in 1990 showed the lake could be as productive as any in the Sandhills. But high-speed boating muddied the waters of the shallow lake, and it also increased the conflict



Spinnerbaits are a good bet to catch northern pike, and their weedless design makes them a good choice for Goose Lake.

between boaters and anglers that had begun even before the well was installed. Water-skiing also conflicted with the management philosophy that governed other wildlife management areas. So in 2008, after years of discussion, Goose Lake finally became what this agency's forefathers had envisioned – a great place to hunt waterfowl and a great fishing lake. Sorry, no speedboats allowed.

By most accounts, the modern conservation movement began in the 1800s with the writings of Thoreau and Muir and the photos of William Henry Jackson. Those works heightened our nation's awareness of its natural resources and the need to preserve them for future generations. They also led to the creation of our country's first national park – Yellowstone – in 1872 and the National Forest Service in

1905 by then-President Theodore Roosevelt.

It wasn't until 1921, however, that the movement to preserve wild places for enjoyment by the masses gained enough of a foothold in Nebraska that the State Park Board and the state's first park, Chadron State Park, were created. Two more parks, Arbor Lodge and Victoria Springs, were added in 1923. In 1925 and 1926, the Bureau of Fish and Game, then part of the Department of Agriculture, joined the movement. With \$50,000 from hunting and fishing permit revenue, it purchased four properties – Goose Lake, Walgren Lake in Sheridan County, Rat and Beaver lakes in Cherry County, and Fremont Sandpits in Dodge County – and designated them as special use areas. Goose Lake, with 249 acres of water and 100 acres of land around it, came at the bargain

price of \$7,000.

"The people of the middle west are just now awakening to the fact that unless something is done – and done quickly – the wild life and natural beauty of the prairie will have vanished before the ever grasping hand of commerce," Frank O'Connell wrote in the June 1926 issue of *Outdoor*



Located 23 miles south and four miles east of O'Neill, Goose Lake Wildlife Management Area offers fishing, hunting, primitive camping and a wheelchair-accessible boat ramp and dock.



A boat pulls a water skier around Goose Lake in 1977, two years after the installation of a well to maintain water levels made this popular pastime possible each summer.

PHOTO BY JON FARRAR



This photo of people fishing and wading in Goose Lake from about 1915 was one of more than 2,000 images taken by Emanuel Wolfe of Neligh and donated to the Nebraska State Historical Society.

*Nebraska* magazine, the predecessor to *NEBRASKALand*. “With our population rapidly increasing and more mouths to feed, our workshop must necessarily be widened. And when our workshop is widened, just so much is our playground narrowed.

“The Bureau of Fish and Game of Nebraska has taken up this problem and is making an earnest endeavor to secure hunting and fishing and camping grounds for the future. With hunting and fishing facilities rapidly falling into the hands of private parties who lease such places to persons of means, the Bureau realizes that prompt action must be taken if the average Nebraskan of modest means shall have a place for recreation – a place far from crowded cities where he may go to enjoy some of the natural beauty of this state.”

Goose Lake was already a popular retreat for area residents, who would travel by horse and wagon to splash in its waters. O’Connell wrote that Goose Lake had been a famous hunting and fishing ground that was “full of pickerel and the wild fowl came down to it by the thousands.” When it was acquired, however, the maximum depth of the lake was just three feet, and stocking it with more game fish would have to wait.

The Bureau hoped that wouldn’t take long, thanks to two flowing wells sunk in the lake bed. But their combined capacity of 8,820 gallons per day was only enough to add a half inch to its level during the course of a year – not enough to keep the lake from going dry, as it sometimes did. In

some years, the lake would actually dry out enough that area residents played baseball on the dry bed.

The wet years, however, kept people wanting more. When the lake was up, the Commission stocked game fish periodically through 1944 in hopes of developing a decent fishery, and ski boats would carve circles around it. But when the next dry spell hit, lake levels would drop, causing winter or summer kill of the fish and leaving boats parked in the shed for the summer.

It isn’t known exactly when talks about doing something to “fix” the lake began, but correspondence in the Commission’s files from 1957 floated several ideas, including dredging and deepening the lake or adding more free-flowing wells or a pump to keep levels sufficient for fish and wildlife. In the 1960s, keeping the lake high enough for boating was the main topic of discussion.

It wasn’t until 1975, however, that something finally happened and the Upper Elkhorn Natural Resources District (NRD), acting on the behalf of boaters, entered into a cooperative agreement with the Commission in which the NRD would drill a well and install a pump to maintain lake levels.

Fisheries and wildlife biologists with the Commission were opposed to the idea. While folks had been skiing at Goose Lake for years, they didn’t like the idea of entering into an agreement that would, for all intents and purposes, designate a wildlife management area a ski lake. They saw

the can of worms such an arrangement could open up. Almost immediately, it did.

During negotiations, the Commission granted the NRD permission to drill a test well, but before the final agreement was even signed, the well was installed, water was being pumped into the lake, and NRD officials were talking about building a dike to close off the shallow, south arm of the lake to make pumping efforts more efficient. When the agreement was completed, the Commission retained overall management of the property while the NRD could do little more than use their well to maintain lake levels. The NRD would foot the bill for the pumping, and could “grant no special or specific privileges to any person or group for exclusive use of any part of or all of this land and water area.” The agreement was for 10 years.

Fish surveys in 1975 found the lake was loaded with 8-inch bullheads and also contained a few common carp. Northern pike were stocked in 1976 and 1977 and bluegills in 1978, and before long, anglers were having fair success. But few people fished the lake, due in part to incessant pounding their boats took from the wakes left by ski boats. The conflicts between boaters and anglers didn’t stop there. NRD officials demanded that biologists remove brush piles they had placed in the lake for fish habitat because they were

a danger to water skiers. Fishermen “had a lot of other places to go in the area, water skiers had none,” one NRD board member wrote in a letter to the Commission.

A hard winter in 1978-79 killed many of the pike and nearly all of the panfish, yet left plenty of 5- to 9-inch bullheads. After spending \$5,900 to pump during the summer of 1981, the NRD asked the Commission to fund pumping during the winter to prevent another winterkill of fish. Commission fisheries and wildlife managers balked at the idea. “If pumping is necessary and beneficial to the fishery, I would be in agreement, but if the main benefit is to keep a high water level for water skiers next summer, I’m opposed to pumping,” Commission district wildlife manager Larry Radant wrote in an agency memo, adding that “it seems to me that the NRD has gotten into a costly program and now wants the Commission to pay for it.”

By the late 1980s, sportsmen in the area had begun to wonder if the lake could be a better fishery, and even circulated a petition asking the Commission to aggressively manage the area for fish and wildlife and limit boating to electric motors only. Leon Spangler of Ewing signed his name to the petition, hoping he could have a lake closer to home to fish instead of making long drives to other Sandhills lakes or even South Dakota to fish.



About 14 inches of rain fell in the Goose Lake area in October of 2007, leaving the lake and low spots in hay meadows around it brimming with water. In this view, looking south, the boat ramp and primitive camping area is at lower right.



While a ring of cattails has always surrounded the lake, submergent aquatic vegetation such as American pondweed couldn't grow in waters stirred by common carp and powerboats.

"I understand guys wanting to ski it," Spangler said. "I did it when I was growing up. I remember seeing people [crash and] come up with mud on their head. It was a mud hole."

By 1990, carp had taken over the lake and further muddied the water that was already being stirred every summer weekend and then some by ski boats and jet skis. Water clarity was limited to three inches on most days and 10 inches on a good day. Aquatic vegetation, apart from the cattails that ringed the lake, was nearly nonexistent, and biologists found only a few bluegills, pike, black crappie, largemouth bass and yellow perch in fish surveys. The pike were as thin as broomsticks.

"Basically the pike were starving to death because the carp and bullheads were too big to eat and they couldn't see to eat either," said Jeff Schuckman, district fisheries supervisor in the Commission's Norfolk office.

But Schuckman, who started working for the Commission in 1976, also saw the potential of the lake, based in part on "the old quart jar test." When faced with poor water quality in a lake, fisheries managers simply take a jar full of lake water, put it on a shelf and see how long it takes the sediment to settle out and the water to clear. "That will tell you whether something in the water is keeping it stirred up or whether you've got something like clay in suspension that just won't allow that water to clear up," he said. The sample

from Goose Lake cleared up in a matter of days.

"Water clarity is everything in a shallow lake like that because you have to establish aquatic vegetation to anchor the sediments and keep the thing clear, and then you also provide your fish habitat, invertebrates and on down the line."

In the fall of 1990, drought had sapped lake levels and water had receded from the few cattails that fringed the lake, providing a perfect opportunity for Commission biologists to ensure all existing fish could be removed with rotenone, a chemical that kills fish. Schuckman said the day after biologists applied the chemical, dead carp lined the banks and the water was noticeably clearer. Within days, you could see the bottom in the deepest part of the lake. The following spring, native aquatic vegetation, including northern water milfoil, coontail, sago and American and narrow leaf pondweed, reappeared and flourished.

The pike, bluegill, perch and bass stocked in the lake after the renovation flourished too, and by 1992, fishing was excellent. Anglers were ecstatic. So were duck hunters, who flocked to the lake in the fall to hunt ducks drawn by the new smorgasbord of plants. Boaters, on the other hand, were not thrilled with the vegetation, which was so dense that it clogged props and made skiing either difficult or impossible. NRD board members, who had just signed an extension to the management agreement in 1990 with the understanding that all boating would be allowed or the pump would be shut down, went so far as to demand that the Commission chemically kill the aquatic vegetation, a proposal rejected by the agency.

Seemingly never ending rains in 1993 inundated the countryside. In wet cycles such as this, Goose Lake and the Elkhorn River are connected by Clearwater Creek. Carp followed that path, as well as flooded road ditches and meadows, back into the lake. "We tried to put chicken wire fencing and screens up at that time, but we just kept fighting the rising water and the carp won that battle," Schuckman said.

Schuckman knew this would eventually lead to another downfall of the fishery, but it also allowed Commission biologists and engineers to determine the flow patterns of the water – and carp – in and out of the lake and begin to develop a solution to that problem.

Carp eventually began to degrade water quality, inhibiting the growth of vegetation and making power boating possible once more. By 2003, fishing was still good, but the condition and number of panfish in the lake was declining and "we could see the writing on the wall," Schuckman said.

That summer, \$202,000 from the angler-funded Aquatic Habitat Program was used to build four rock barriers across drainages connecting to the lake to Clearwater Creek. The barriers, which adjacent landowners graciously allowed to be

## By 2003, fishing was still good, but the condition and number of panfish in the lake was declining.



Leon Spangler of Ewing fights a northern pike to the boat last summer.

built on their land, allow water to pass through but not carp – not even fry or eggs. In addition, the project also shored up a dike that rings the lake's south arm, separating it from pastures that flood in wet years and blocking another avenue carp could follow into the lake. And under a separate \$42,000 project to improve access, the lake was deepened around the boat ramp and the parking lot and boat ramp rebuilt.

With work complete, biologists jumped on the opportunity provided by drought, which had again sapped lake levels, and in the fall of 2003 killed the fish in the lake after removing 450 northern pike and many largemouth bass, which were trucked to other lakes or to the Calamus Fish Hatchery to restock in Goose Lake.

"It wasn't an easy decision, but it was pretty obvious when we were doing some of the salvage work in the summer of '03 that we did make the right decision with all of the carp we were finding in there and all the small carp coming on," Schuckman said. "They were the most abundant fish we saw."

The renovation didn't come without more conflict with boaters. Wanting to keep lake levels low and water out of the cattails to ensure a complete kill of carp, the Commission asked that there be no pumping. More than once, however, the pump was turned on, likely by folks who wanted to ski that summer.

As was the case after the 1990 renovation, aquatic vegetation and fish responded quickly to the improved water

quality. By 2006, pike had reached lengths of 26 inches, and bluegill and perch up to 10 inches were being caught.

But one problem remained – the agreement between the NRD and the Commission regarding the well, which had been renewed in 1990 and expired in 2000. A new one could not be reached. The NRD wanted the Commission to continue to allow power boating. The Commission, on the other hand, did not. It wanted the management of Goose Lake to match the purpose of other WMAs, which is to balance hunter and angler desires with resource capabilities, provide outdoor recreation opportunities while



Last summer, young-of-the-year carp were fighting unsuccessfully to swim through a barrier built to keep them out of the lake.



Al Schilousky of Ewing lands a yellow perch last summer.

protecting, enhancing and sustaining diverse wildlife fish and plant resources, and limit activity to compatible use within the those objectives. Studies had shown that the prop wash from a 10-horse outboard motor operated at full throttle could stir bottom sediments in six feet of water. A 50-horse motor could do it in 15 feet of water. In a wet year, Goose Lake might be nine feet deep, but in a normal year, it is only six feet deep. Commission staff felt that because of this, and because hunters and anglers had funded the purchase of the lake and the Aquatic Habitat work that had been done, their interests should take priority.

Goose Lake had also become a top destination for area anglers and, being the eastern-most Sandhills lake, its pike and perch also attracted anglers from throughout central and eastern Nebraska. Anglers had become more willing and able to travel, and on any given weekend, you were as likely to find vehicles from Omaha in the parking lot as you were those from O'Neill. And in contrast to what the NRD board member had stated when asking the Commission to remove brush piles two decades earlier, there were now better and deeper waters for skiers in the region, including Calamus Reservoir and Willow Creek Lake, reservoirs that were constructed in the 1980s. Many boaters were already choosing these destinations over Goose Lake.

In accordance with the 1990 agreement, the Commission held a public meeting in O'Neill in October 2006 to allow area residents to weigh in on a proposed regulation change that would limit boats on Goose Lake to 5 mph. Attendance was low, and the NRD asked that another be held in December. Only nine residents attended the second meeting, the majority of which supported the change. As such, the NRD agreed to sell the well and pump to the Commission for \$10,000, ensuring the lake's future as a fish and wildlife area, not a ski lake.

Not all news is good for those who are enjoying the excellent pike and panfishing at the lake, however. When they designed the fish barriers, engineers had assumed the

landscape around Goose Lake couldn't get much wetter than it did in 1993. But following 14 inches of rain in the area in October of 2007 alone and an extremely wet spring in 2008, it did just that. The area was so wet that water flowed over the top of the south fish barrier. When it did, a handful of carp were able to reenter the lake.

Pike and bass may be able to keep carp in check, but Schuckman knows the lake may need to be renovated again. "You can try to control carp and keep them at bay, but eventually they may win and you just have to start over," he said. "But I

have no problem doing that as a fisheries manager. My philosophy going in was if we can get 10 good years out of the deal, the renovation will be well worth it.

"It only takes about two years to develop a heck of a fishery in that lake. It's so productive and those fish grow so fast that we're not losing a lot of time and the benefits are well worth sacrificing a year or so following a renovation."

A fifth fish barrier was constructed in the lake's northeast corner this spring. Knowing that carp can be kept out of the lake except in extremely wet years, and that the affects of power boating will no longer hinder the fishery, will make that decision even easier.

"I'm sure there are a few people that still wish they could go there and Jet Ski and water ski, but by and large the people that are using the lake, and I would classify it as very high angler use, are very pleased to have it the way it is – a nice quiet place to go fishing. It's a good fishing opportunity and they're taking advantage of it."

The only thing anglers need to worry about now is whether or not they will be able to get their boats through all of the vegetation. ■



While submergent aquatic vegetation such as coontail makes it difficult to fish crankbaits in Goose Lake – or any lake – its presence is vital to a healthy, productive fishery.

## Managing Goose Lake for Pike

Sandhills lakes are extremely productive when it comes to fishing. Though often shallow, their excellent water quality typically leads to an abundance of aquatic vegetation, which in turn produces an abundance of the invertebrates needed to support good numbers of panfish such as bluegills and yellow perch. Where there are panfish, big predators such as northern pike and largemouth bass can also thrive.

Goose Lake fits that mold perfectly. Following renovations in 1990 and 2003 to remove common carp, bluegills, perch, bass and pike that were stocked in the lake grew fast and fat. In 2008, anglers caught a few pike that measured 36 inches or longer, bass up to 18 inches, 14-inch perch and 10-inch, one-pound plus bluegills.

"This is panfish heaven," Elgin angler Al Schilousky said while fishing the lake last summer.

Anglers from throughout the eastern half of Nebraska are coming in droves to fish the lake year-round, both in open water and through the ice. The heavy fishing pressure and presence of northern pike will make managing panfish populations a challenge, but it's one Jeff Schuckman, district fisheries supervisor in the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's Norfolk office, is happy to tackle.

"We realize pike can be hard on panfish populations," he said. "They're a heck of a predator. But pike are a big draw for a lot of people. They're a fun fish to catch and a good-eating fish. I think Goose is well suited for them."

Schuckman said annual sampling will monitor the density and growth of pike. The 5,100 fish that were stocked in 2004 are reproducing naturally, so none have been stocked since. So far, the density is fairly high and on target with management goals. Should pike numbers get too high, some fish will be netted and moved to other lakes where more pike are needed, but Schuckman said he doubts that will be necessary. "Anglers are the best tool we have to manage pike and they're harvesting a lot of them out there," he said.

Research at the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge has shown that big northerns are fairly effective at controlling carp, and all pike 28-inch and longer that are caught there must be released. On Goose Lake, a protected slot limit was imposed, requiring anglers to release all pike between 28 and 34 inches, leaving room for some trophy fish to be kept.

Carp weren't expected to be a problem in the lake, but extremely high water levels in the spring of 2008 allowed the rough fish to swim over the top of barriers built to keep them out. Even though intense angling pressure has prevented many pike from reaching the slot limit, something biologists are tracking closely, Schuckman hopes simply having any pike in the lake will keep carp numbers in check for a few more years than would be the case without them. "This is our first attempt at a slot limit on northern pike," Schuckman said. "We're going to have to see how it works."

The number of yellow perch, the preferred food of pike and a favorite of fry pan-toting anglers as well, isn't

where Schuckman would like it despite good natural recruitment. Supplemental stocking has occurred in the past two years to maintain a quality perch fishery.

Bluegills are doing quite well, with many fish in the 8- to 10-inch range. Largemouth bass are in good shape as well, both in numbers and size. Thanks to excellent water quality, abundant aquatic vegetation and plenty of food, all four species are seeing excellent growth in both length and girth. That said, the vegetation can make fishing difficult, especially during the summer when motors are easily clogged by the growth.

When the boating speed limit on the lake was reduced to 5 mph in 2007, the Commission purchased the well and pump the Upper Elkhorn Natural Resources District had been using to maintain lake levels for water skiing. "That is our hedge against winterkill and to keep the water levels up during drought cycles," Schuckman said.

Pumping hasn't been needed since 2003. When it is necessary, Schuckman said most will be done in the fall, when it is more efficient due to reduced evaporation. The Commission might also pump during the winter to keep the northwest corner of the lake open and prevent fish kills that can occur when thick ice and snow cover can cause vegetation to die, which depletes oxygen levels. About \$5,000 annually is budgeted for pumping.

"It's going to be a gut feeling on our part when we think we need to get those water levels up, but we'd like to see six foot or more water out there for sure," Schuckman said.

Camping is allowed in an area near the boat ramp, but other than a few picnic tables, fire rings and an outhouse, there are no amenities. Some improvements are planned for the summer of 2009, but the site will remain primitive.

Overall, Schuckman is very pleased with what has happened at the lake and the regional fishery it has become. "Anytime we do a project and make the fishing good, and I see anglers out there enjoying themselves and catching fish and having a good time, I'm happy," he said. "That's my job. And as a fisherman, I'm happy."



Steve Frederick of Scottsbluff hoists a northern pike caught from Goose Lake this spring.



Jeff Schuckman

# No Time to Talk

When not on the radio, talk show host Todd Brandt likes to fish – quietly.

Text and photos by Jeff Kurrus

He did not discuss politics or media controversies, or about the actors, musicians and other celebrities he had met. Unless pressed, he most certainly did not talk about himself. In fact, Todd Brandt, one-half of Omaha's highly rated and syndicated morning radio talk show "The Todd and Tyler Radio Empire," rarely spoke at all during a recent fishing trip to Louisville State Recreation Area (SRA). He just fished.

Brandt originally began his radio experience in high school, followed by stops in Fargo, Phoenix, Spokane, Portland, Cleveland, Louisville and then Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. "[Mike]

Tyler and I were only on the air for five months in Harrisburg," he said. "Then we came here as a joint deal in August of 1993. Because we both like to avoid conflict and have no big philosophical differences, it works well."

One of their differences, which occasionally emerges on their radio program, is Brandt's interest in the outdoors, which began when he was a kid. "Grandpa got me started fishing," he said. "My first fish was a bullhead in North Dakota. We caught pike and perch as well. When I moved here, I ran into a couple of guys who liked to fish, so I spent a lot of time with them." Yet his outdoor time is not limited to the water.

"My wife Christy and I like to tent camp," he said, "I'm not a luxury camper. We just like to go away from home, places that tend to be a little less crowded. I don't mind a National Forest Service campsite. Trees separating everybody so you can't see your neighbor. As long as there are no bears or lightning, I'm good most private places."

He had no bear worries that day at Louisville SRA. A little rain on a summer weekend, yes, but the worst thing that might happen that day was not catching a fish. That didn't happen. Using a 1/8-ounce yellow jighead with a two-inch chartreuse plastic shad, Brandt caught several crappie over those few hours, including a couple of nice slabs along the west bank of Lake No. 2.



For someone familiar with his radio show, it was a bit surprising that Brandt was so silent while fishing. But after a bit of thought, it made perfect sense: For a person who talks five hours a day, five days a week, 250 days a year to an estimated audience of 100,000 in Wichita, Kansas; Springfield, Missouri; Burlington, Vermont; Plattsburgh, New York and Omaha, it wasn't any wonder why he had little to say when in the fishing boat.

On the radio, there's no telling what opinion he might voice, but the subject of nature makes frequent appearances,

as seen in interviews with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's Greg Wagner. "Todd's love for the outdoors periodically bleeds through during his time on the radio," said Wagner. "Those guys are great to work with. Todd is straight-shooting and promotes Nebraska by getting a totally different audience interested in the outdoors."

Brandt's views on several controversial topics are well known and offend some people, but he knows his work is simply designed to get folks from home to work every morning. It was quite evident after a little time on the water that the boisterous Todd from the radio show is much different than the reserved Todd observed during a day of fishing.

He did discuss football, his family and how he wanted to learn more about morel mushrooms. He relayed past bear encounters while camping at state parks in Colorado and Montana, then expressed an interest in fishing the long line of Interstate 80 sandpits, telling of the notes he and his wife had recorded about the lakes while driving to and from



Brandt uses spinning tackle to handle the light-weight jigs needed for crappie fishing.

Denver. He also spoke of the Sandhills, and how each summer he loves to fish a group of backwater farm ponds along the Middle Loup River near Mullen.

But for the most part, turns of the handle were all that could be heard. Maybe a bit of background noise from the ever-growing number of bank

anglers showing up. Bank anglers that never came to talk to him, never requested an autograph and never asked a question about the radio show – a far cry of what day-to-day life can be for a long-haired, city-dwelling, rock-station listening angler who loves to spend time on the water. Quietly. ■



Todd Brandt with a nice crappie at Louisville SRA.



Brandt has Louisville SRA Lake No. 2 all to himself on a summer morning.

# A Bloody Mess of Cats

Text and photos by Eric Fowler

*If you don't like the sight of blood, don't go catfishing with Jay Dee Osburn. But if you like eating catfish, you might want to give blood bait, a favorite of Osburn and many other anglers, a try.*

**B**lood bait is a favorite among catfish anglers. And we're not talking about one of the many commercial catfish baits that include blood in their list of ingredients – we're talking about 100-percent pure blood, straight from a meat processor, that's allowed to coagulate into a Jell-O-like mass that can be carved into chunks and threaded onto hooks. It's probably not the best bait for someone with a queasy stomach.

The latter doesn't apply to Jay Dee

Osburn, a lifelong resident of Valentine who makes the time to pursue with trap, hook, bullet or arrow nearly every furred, feathered or finned creature that calls his neighborhood home. Osburn learned the virtues of blood bait in 1996 while working at Merritt Trading Post on Merritt Reservoir. A customer at the lake for a catfish tournament told Osburn how to fish with blood bait and even gave him a few of the leaders he would need. That angler may have regretted sharing his secrets when Osburn and his partner won the same tournament a few years later with a catch that still ranks as the largest in the tournament's history.

"We caught 17 fish that night," Osburn said. "We weighed our biggest 10 and it was 163 pounds. Our biggest fish that night was 22 pounds, so our average was pretty darn good."

Osburn has tried a few variations to the technique originally shared with him, but keeps coming back to where he started simply because it works. It all begins with a bucket and a trip to the local meat locker for some blood. Any type of blood.

**Left:** To make blood bait, blood is collected fresh from a locker, allowed to coagulate, then cut into chunks and frozen.

**Right:** Troy Hansen of Blair and Jay Dee Osburn of Valentine fish the shallows of Big Alkali Lake, dragging hooks baited with blood. Once in the water, it's easy to see the trail that blood bait leaves and why it's a good bait to use for scent-feeding catfish.

"Some guys swear you need to use buffalo blood and some guys swear you need to use pig's blood," Osburn said. Still others use chicken or deer blood. Osburn doesn't think the catfish care. "I think if the fish are there and you put it in front of them, you're going to catch them," he said.

Like many anglers, Osburn mixes a small bottle of dime-store anise oil with the blood while it's still fresh. "I don't know, but that black licorice smell seems to take some of the stink off the straight blood and maybe that's why I like it," Osburn said.

Other blood bait anglers have used about every kind of extract known to man, including spearmint, cinnamon and wintergreen. "I've tried coconut and caught fish on it," Osburn said. "I've tried cherry and didn't catch fish, but that doesn't necessarily mean it doesn't work."

He's also used straight blood, fishing it in a side-by-side test against his anise-scented bait. Anise won that battle seven fish to four. Osburn cautions, however, that that "doesn't mean it works better, it just means that's what we caught."

After adding the anise oil, Osburn allows the bucket of blood to set up for five or six hours. He then carefully dumps what is now a chunk of blood into the sink and uses a fillet knife to cut it into 4-inch cubes, which he freezes in a plastic coffee can and thaws when it's time to fish.





**Above: Osburn watches his rods and fish finder, waiting for a bite as dusk settles on Cub Creek Lake near Springview last April. Left: Osburn lands a channel catfish estimated at 10 pounds that took his blood bait in 27 feet of water at Cub Creek Lake.**

Some anglers are more precise, pouring their blood into cake pans and allowing it to set up there. Others freeze the chunks separately on a cookie sheet and keep them frozen until it's time to thread them onto the line and dip them into the lake. "I've never tried that but it might not be such a bad thing," Osburn said. "The blood would probably last longer." On the other hand, he's pretty sure his significant other would not appreciate the sight of frozen blood cubes in the freezer.

Still others start with big chunks that they freeze, thaw and refreeze several times. Each time the chunks thaw, water drains off the blood. Eventually, Osburn said, "they get little pieces almost like leather that you can cast. They fish single circle hooks and they don't get snagged as much as you do with treble hooks. I've tried it a couple of times but I don't really care for it. It's just a lot of work freezing and thawing that stuff out.

"There are a ton of different variations. Go to a couple of catfishing tournaments and just start talking to guys. Pretty soon you'll end up with about 50 different ways to do it. Just like anything else, you've got to find what works for you."

Not all blood is created equal, Osburn said. He's had batches that set up better than most and others that just wouldn't set up at all. He makes sure he gets two or three buckets of blood before a

tournament to ensure he has something that will stay on a hook.

Osburn's tackle consists of heavy baitcasting and spinning rods spooled with 30-pound Berkley Fireline, 40-pound braided nylon leaders, 2/0 treble hooks, and heavy barrel and snap swivels to connect the line and leader. He uses a small piece of light wire to thread the blood onto his leader and hook.

While the blood bait sets up into a somewhat solid form that can be handled, it is usually not firm enough to cast. Once on the hook and in the water, it will sink, so unless you're fishing in deep water or on a windy day, no weight is needed, Osburn said. Using weight just leads to more snags, which, apart from fish, are the only thing that will prevent the blood from staying on your hook for hours.

"I usually change bait every one to two hours just to give it fresh flavor," Osburn said. "But if you're in fish, it won't last that long before you catch them."

Some anglers, especially those who fish waters with lots of bottom vegetation, put a clear float between a weight and the blood-baited hook to keep it off the bottom and reduce the chance of snagging. "Up here in the Sandhills it's pretty easy to drag your stuff along the bottom because it's sand and not a lot of weeds. You'll snag a few times, but not a lot," Osburn said. "I've heard of guys who put their

blood in panty hose so they don't have to be so gentle with it. I've never tried it because I don't wear panty hose."

When he's on the water, Osburn makes one or two drifts to lay down a blood line across the entire width of a lake's arm, especially where there's current flowing into the lake. If the wind isn't blowing, or isn't blowing in the right direction, he'll use his electric trolling motor for the job. In doing so, he creates a trail for fish to follow to his hook.

"Those catfish will hit that trail and start working to find the source of it," he said. "That's why a lot of times if you run a drift trail and just drift up against the bank and let your bait sit there for a while, you'll catch fish after a few minutes.

"If you catch a fish [during a drift], just throw out an anchor and sit there because the fish are going to be coming. When they smell that and taste it, they just go nuts. If there are fish there, they usually hammer it. I've fished it in the [Niobrara] river a few times. You pull up in your canoe behind a little rock or a log or something where there's a deep spot behind it and you drop that blood in there. If there's a fish in that hole, within two or three minutes he's on the hook. If they're there, you hammer them. After five minutes, if you don't catch a fish, go to the next hole because there's not a fish there."

Blood bait isn't a magic bullet, or bait, in this case. "Nothing's a sure thing," Osburn said. To catch fish, you still have to find fish, and they have to be hungry, or at least in the mood to eat. But if you fill both of those requirements? "It's not even fair," Osburn said.

Which likely explains why, according to Osburn's estimates, nine out of 10 anglers use blood in tournaments. "In my opinion, it's the best bait out there," he said. As long as you don't mind the mess. ■



## What Will Catfish Eat?

Channel catfish will eat just about anything, dead or alive, from fish, crayfish, worms, nightcrawlers and insects, to plant material and artificial lures. As one might expect from a species which feeds primarily on the bottom and whose habitat is often murky water, they have an uncanny sense of taste, allowing them to locate food.

Their whisker-like barbels are their primary tool in this task, but a catfish's entire body is also covered with taste buds. To illustrate this fact, *The Fishes of Missouri*, a book that serves as a reference for the description and habits of fish from that state, says that when you touch a piece of meat to a catfish's side, it will turn and gulp it down. To further the point, it says that even allowing the juices from a piece of meat to touch the fish's side will elicit the same reaction.

That gives credence to using congealed blood for bait rather than steak. While a piece of meat would leave a trail of blood behind it, eventually the amount trailing behind the bait would diminish.

Catfish are most active at night when they move into the shallows to feed. During the day, they are usually found near snags or other cover in deeper water. They're not always bottom feeders, however, and have been known to suspend beneath schools of baitfish, eating live fish or scraps dropped by other predators.

While they feed primarily by scent or taste, catfish also feed by sight. But to judge their sight-feeding ability, one needs only to compare their small, beady eyes with the big glassy ones of a walleye, another fish that often feeds at night. Both are adapted to different habitats and habits, which explains why a catfish might take a Rapala, but a walleye probably won't gulp down a gob of blood.

## Getting Permission to Hunt

*Asking permission to hunt is hard for many hunters, but these tips might help.*

By Jeff Rawlinson

Hunting in Nebraska remains high on the list of priorities for many. The lengthy seasons and abundant wildlife make hunting in our state a joy for many. However, once you realize that nearly 97 percent of the land in Nebraska is privately owned, it's easy to see why landowners are such valuable partners in our wildlife management efforts and are important partners for many hunters.

Gaining permission to access private property is still one of the jewels of Nebraska hunting – many hunters have established lifelong friendships with farmers and ranchers through hunting, and that should be the goal of each request. Hunters who find the most private land access are not shy and genuinely appreciate the newfound relationships they have made. The following are some tips to consider that may enhance your success in finding places to hunt and in developing lifelong friendships with Nebraska landowners.

Summer months can be good times to approach landowners. Nebraska landowners make their living off the land, so planting season (April – June), harvest season (September – November) and hunting seasons are poor times to approach farmers, as they are generally very busy. Also, by the time hunting season approaches, many landowners have already granted access to other hunters and are less inclined to add more to the mix.

A face-to-face meeting and a handshake go a long way. Take time to actually knock on doors and introduce yourself to landowners. It shows respect and is much more personable than a phone call.

Find landowner names using a plat map. Such maps can generally be found at the local county treasurer's or

county clerk's office. These can be invaluable for learning who owns a certain piece of property.

When knocking on doors, dress appropriately – first impressions are everything.



Face-to-face meetings at the proper time of year go a long way toward receiving permission to hunt.

Appreciate any access provided and respect all rules. Ask questions to make sure you understand landowner rules, requests, etc.

Oftentimes, how you act after you've been granted access plays a key role as to whether you're allowed back a second time, and can also affect whether other hunters are given the chance to hunt. Remember: One bad apple can ruin the entire barrel. Here are some tips that will go a long way toward developing a long-lasting relationship with a landowner.

Leave all gates, fences, etc as you found them and promptly report any unusual findings to the landowner.

Pick up any litter found on the

property, especially your own.

Make sure you know, understand and respect property boundaries.

Be a value to landowners and offer to help with chores, farming, etc. This relationship should not be a one-way street.

Offer game to the landowner. Better yet, offer processed or cooked game (jerky is a favorite) to landowners to show your appreciation.

Network yourself within your community – often people you already know have fantastic hunting opportunities available.

Once permission is granted, make sure you let the landowner know when you are coming out – don't assume permission is granted indefinitely. Call beforehand and ask if anything on the property has changed since your last visit. One of the main reasons some landowners are reluctant to give permission is not knowing when hunters are on their property. This can also avoid dangerous situations such as multiple hunters in the same location.

Make sure you make a special trip back to thank landowners for their hospitality.

If you approach a landowner correctly to ask permission to hunt, chances are you'll ultimately have some success. At that point you may have found much more than a new place to hunt ... you might have made some new family friends. Remember these folks during holidays, family events, etc, and appreciate the gift they've given you. ■

Jeff Rawlinson is the Outdoor Education manager and an Assistant Division Administrator for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.



## The Maiden Voyage at Walnut Creek

*A "simple" bass boat test-drive quickly became a test of humility.*

By Jeff Kurrus

I needed a place close to home to try out my new toy – a slightly used 17-foot bass boat with a 150-horsepower motor trailing behind. Living in Gretna, my options for using the big motor were limited, but 105-acre Walnut Creek Lake was within 20 minutes and would be perfect for cranking up the boat and seeing how she idled.

Dad was in town, and our original plan was to do the test-drive on a Saturday. However, that being one of the first warm weekends of the year, we decided to allow the weekend crowd to disperse and go out Sunday morning instead. What we didn't plan on was how many other people would have the same idea. Big boaters, small boaters, canoeists, kayakers and bank anglers could be seen in every direction. Personally, I'm usually not fond of this many people being around when I'm on the water, but if any small reservoir can accommodate these numbers, it's Walnut Creek.

Two small, rock-lined islands, three jetties, shallow water vegetation, sunken brush piles, and a long line of exposed trees allow anglers to locate their own niche on the lake. If fishing isn't your thing, the entire public area covers 440 acres, and includes a walking path, picnic tables, and wheelchair-accessible fishing pier. Our objective, however, was simply idling and trolling.

Unfortunately, we couldn't get the main engine to turn over because the battery was dead, so I immediately had to go to Plan No. 2 – the trolling motor. As I sought to learn the motor's foot control operations, spinning us in circles a few times and trying to ignore the ever-increasing number of curious visitors, we made our way to our first bank.

While the Nebraska wind would have been manageable for a trolling motor that actually worked, it thwarted ours quickly. A slow push on the foot control became an even slower lumber across the bank. Then a quick gust of wind buried us into the opposite east bank –

a very, very long way from the boat ramp.

When I pulled the trolling motor from the water to check our speed, it resembled a barely turning ceiling fan. But

because of the long line of trees in the lake's middle, we would at least have the opportunity to slowly make our way from tree to tree with a paddle. We only had, however, a five-foot paddle, so the person in front would have to lean down from their knees and scull the boat back to the dock if we wanted a chance to get home.

Now was not the time to ask fellow boaters for help, or to even think about the bank anglers, who, beneath their caps, had to be trying not to smile at the paddling big-boat fisherman. While I was mentally swearing at all of them at the time, I understood their position: This was a show that needed watching. While on all fours on my boat's front deck with the paddle, I repeatedly gazed at my surroundings, trying to see if I was making any headway, while in the back Dad made casts toward the trees. The nearby flock of coots was moving faster than us, as was the kayaker making his second trip around the lake. Then at least one pheasant cackled from the nearby grass.

My right arm began to tire, but from my position I couldn't rightly paddle with both hands. If I could get seated on the front of the boat and straddle the trolling motor, I could guide us, canoe-style, back to the ramp.

As I climbed into position, I failed to remember how proficiently my friend Rob and I had recently waxed the boat. As soon as I sat down on the boat's edge, my body began taking me to the left. Dad later described the scene: "You slid into the water just like one of



those seals on the Discovery channel."

When my head went under, I realized two things. One, the large throng of people at the lake had to see that and not know whether to laugh or throw me a flotation device. Two, even though it was nearly May, the water was still very, very cold. Dad leaned over to help but couldn't. He tried, much like he had tried to steer me and our johnboat away from an electric fence years ago, but his laughter thwarted all efforts this time as well.

After finally being hauled back into the boat like a tuna, I continued paddling with my original technique, trying to make it from one set of trees to the next. Finally we made it to another angler, and I was forced to ask for help. I was too tired to introduce myself, so I have no idea the name of the Samaritan. "Not too good of a day," he said. "I just broke one of my rods myself." We offered our condolences, thanking him every few feet for his generosity.

We then explained our original objectives to him. "Yeah, one day," he started, "I pulled up to the boat dock and went to get my truck to load my boat. When I came back down, the boat was floating halfway down the lake. There was a man fishing from the bank. 'I think you lost your boat,' the guy said. You talk about feeling like an absolute idiot." Dad and I nodded as I rang out my shirt. Yeah, we knew the feeling. ■

# Bison Bellows Research at Fort Niobrara NWR

*Study finds that quiet bison sire more calves than louder rivals.*

By Liese Greensfelder

During bison mating season, the quietest bulls score the most mates and sire the most offspring while studs with the loudest bellows see the least action, according to a surprising new study by researchers at University of California, Davis, and Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego. The researchers also found that the volume of a bull's bellow was not related to its weight or age.

"We were expecting to find that the bigger, stronger guys – the high-quality males – would have the loudest bellows, because they can handle the costs of

it," said Megan Wyman, a graduate student in geography at UC Davis and the lead author of the study. "But instead, we found the opposite. My collaborator in San Diego wanted me to call the paper 'Speak softly and carry a big stick.'"

The study is the first to examine

how the amplitude, or loudness, of a mammal's vocalizations correlate with reproductive success. It was published in the November issue of the journal *Animal Behaviour*.

Most studies of vocalized sexual signals among animals have focused on the pitch characteristics, timing and duration of calls. Amplitude has received much less attention, Wyman said, largely because loudness is especially difficult to measure in the field. By the time a grunt or a roar reaches a sound-level meter, its amplitude may have been affected by the animal's distance from the meter, the direction the animal was facing when it called, wind conditions and a number of other factors.

Bison bellows are loud, low-frequency vocalizations performed by bulls during the rut. They are most commonly used when one male challenges another, typically when the two are within 45 to 90 feet of one another. Yet sometimes a bellow will attract bulls from farther away, and this may be one reason that a herd's dominant bulls keep their voices down, Wyman speculated.

"It could be that bulls provide information about their high quality

through other signals – for example, the frequency or the duration of their bellows. So they don't have to be louder, they just have to be heard," she said. "If you bellow too loudly, it could bring in too many other bison to check you out."

The bigger question raised by the study, Wyman said, is why lower-quality males don't turn down the volume of their bellows to emulate their more successful rivals.

"That's a lot harder to explain," she said. "It could be that if you use a quieter volume, other bulls have to approach even closer to check you out, and any time you bring someone that close, there's a higher risk of attack. And that's the type of cost that these low-ranking bulls may not be able to bear."

To learn how bison communicate with one another, Wyman and Michael S. Mooring of Point Loma Nazarene University and a number of student interns spent two summers monitoring 325 wild bison at Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge in the Nebraska Sandhills. The animals were well habituated to the four-wheel drive vehicles the team used to shadow them, and each was easily identifiable by a unique brand it had been given as a calf.

Observing the herd for 14 hours each day during the two-month rut of July and August, the team was able to record each copulation and to detail the tangled web of connections between males and females as bulls lost and gained cows during their intense competitions. To assess where each bull ranked in the herd's hierarchy of dominance, Wyman tallied outcomes of challenges between rivals, including threats that ended with an animal backing down in the face of combat, as well as full-blown, head-to-head fights. When calves were born the following spring, DNA samples were taken to determine parentage.

For measurements of amplitude, Wyman used a hand-held sound-level meter from the safety of her vehicle. With each reading, she also recorded specific behaviors of the bull, his female and any challenging rivals, as well as noting the factors that could affect the level of the reading, such as the bull's head orientation, its distance from the meter and wind conditions.

After selecting for accuracy and quality, she narrowed some 2,000 readings taken from 67 bulls down to 408 readings from 44 bulls.

Her analysis showed that, on average, the least successful bulls – those with the lowest number of copulations and offspring – bellowed at least 50 percent louder than their more successful rivals, corresponding to decibel readings averaging from 109 per bull down to 103. This drop in volume correlated with a rise in the number of times a bull copulated from none to five, and the number of calves it sired from none to nine.

These data are just a portion of the information the researchers collected in the field with the overarching goal of understanding how bison communicate

vocally. Yet the results clearly indicate that loudness as a factor of animal communication should receive more

attention, Wyman said.

"We've shown a way of using simple, affordable instruments in the field that can give a good measure of amplitude," she explained. "I'm hoping that researchers will now start looking at amplitude as something that matters." ■

*Liese Greensfelder is the senior public information officer at the University of California, Davis. Her husband, Bob Erickson, grew up in Lincoln and is a longtime subscriber to NEBRASKALAND Magazine.*



UC Davis geography graduate student Megan Wyman measures the amplitude of a bison's bellow in Nebraska's Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge.



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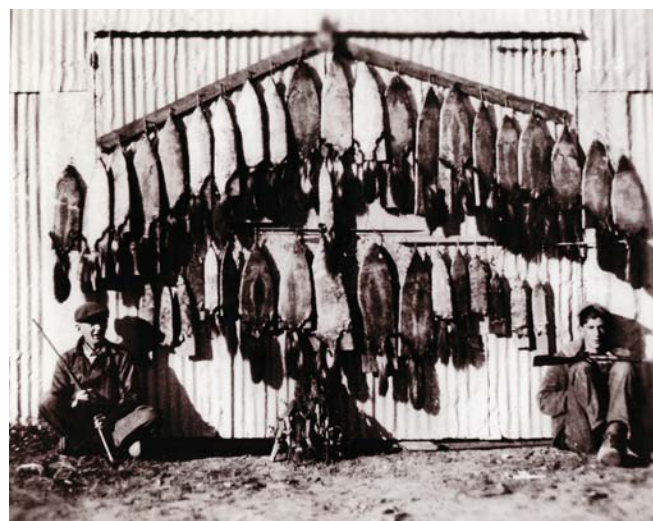
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◀ Pictured left to right are Kennerd Palmer, Ralph Kohler and myself, Gordon Cram, posing with more than 500 crows that were shot off their roost at night back when crows were considered a disease carrier and this was legal.

Pictured below is myself and Linda Lea with coyotes in front of the plane they were shot from. We did a lot of coyote hunting back in those days (1947). We spotted for a bunch of hunters with dogs (greyhounds) and we caught 70-some coyotes a couple of years.

— Gordon Cram, Tekamah, Nebraska



▲ This photo is of my father, Art Ballmer, and uncle, Herb Ballmer, in the late-1920s. As brothers they grew up north of Cozad on a farm that was located close to Buffalo Creek, where they did their trapping. Shown are the pelts of beavers, raccoons and muskrats trapped during a season of hunting. You can see their traps in the middle, under the pelts.

— Dale Ballmer, LaVista, Nebraska



▲ This is a photo of my grandpa, Dean Russell (bottom right), and my great uncle, Roger Russell (top left), with some of their friends from Texas. The photo was taken in the winter of 1967 on my grandpa's land near Wallace, Nebraska. Judging by the amount of pheasants they shot, I'm sure their friends from Texas deemed the trip a success.

Roger now lives near Chattanooga, Tennessee, and my grandpa passed away a few years ago. He always loved to pheasant hunt, and I'm grateful he passed that tradition on down through the family. Thanks for a great magazine.

— Derek Russell, Imperial, Nebraska

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Lakeside campsite at the Miller Creek Area of Lewis and Clark State Recreation Area.



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