



Sunset over the Niobrara River at the Nature Conservancy's Niobrara Valley Preserve.
Photo by Chris Helzer.

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June 2018

In this issue
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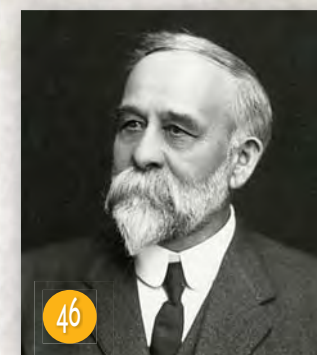
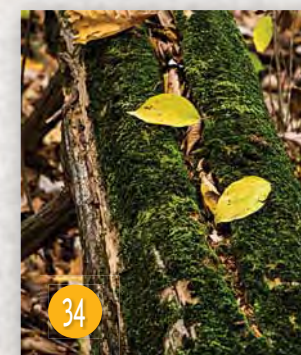
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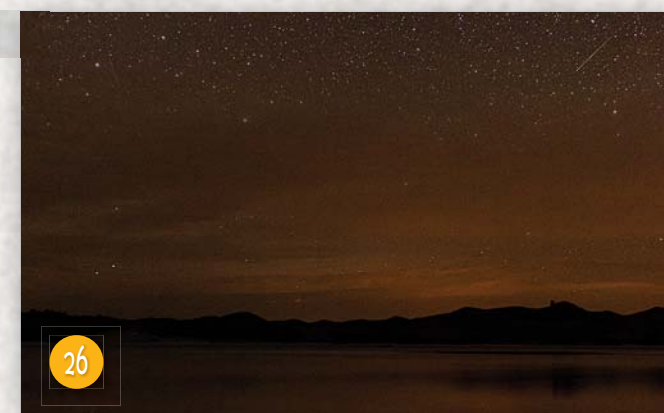


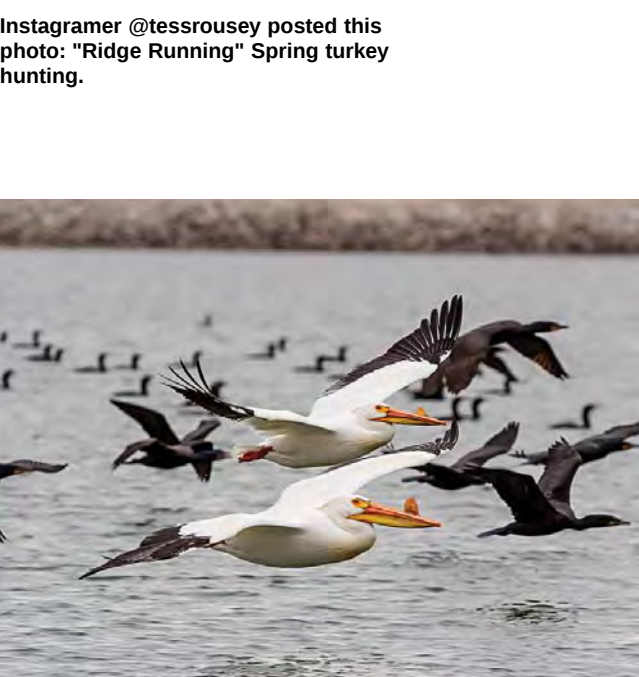
ON THE WEB...

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videos and additional articles, visit
magazine.outdoornebraska.gov/digital.

Cover: The Aquatic Habitat Program has been improving fishing,
including that for largemouth bass, for 20 years. Story on page
28. Photo by Jeff Kurrus.

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Phillip Ciesluk of Omaha shared this photo on Facebook of pelicans at Standing Bear Lake. "I was hesitant to go out that day since it was really cloudy. But I'm glad I did ... pelicans are so much fun to watch," he said.



Visitor
The visitor in the May 2018 issue of *NEBRASKAland* is on page 36. It is a velvet ant.
In reading about this insect, I found this is actually a wingless female wasp. It was also mentioned that the male has wings. The article also stated that the velvet ant is known as the “cow killer ant.” The name was given to the velvet ant because of the reputation of the female’s sting. It is said that the sting is so painful that it could kill a cow! Wow!
Carol Shafer
York, Nebraska

Good morning,
I found the ant on page 36, I believe it is a red ant. Really enjoyed the “Native foods of NE.”
Thanks for another great issue
Janelle Downing
Norfolk, Nebraska

Liz DuBry of Utica wrote: "I have enjoyed watching a great horned owl pair since I located them in late summer 2016. On April 29, 2018, I felt extremely blessed to have the opportunity to watch this little owlet fledge the nest. ... A truly fascinating experience!"

Instagramer @tessrousey posted this photo: "Ridge Running" Spring turkey hunting.



Tiffany Niewohner took this photo through her kitchen window in Petersburg last February.



Kyle Madsen, a former park superintendent at Danish Alps State Recreation Area near Hubbard, captured this sunrise on Kramper Lake.



Jayson Basilio took this sunset photo at a city park in Oakland.

Send your comments to:
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or e-mail Jeff.Kurrus@Nebraska.gov
Please include your postal address and telephone number. Letters may be condensed and edited. Photographs are also welcome.

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A Mammal Brief

Least Weasel

By Lindsay Rogers

North America's smallest carnivore, the least weasel is less than one-third the size of the American mink.

Their fur is brown to pale tan in the summer, but creamy white in winter. Its tail is significantly shorter than its cousin, the long-tailed weasel, and lacks the long-tail's characteristic black tip.

The least weasel is found in wetlands, grasslands, and non-forested areas, but prefers to live near water. They are found across Canada and northern United States; in Nebraska they are found statewide.

Although small, least weasels are great predators and must eat their own body weight in food daily. To accomplish this, they hunt both day and night. The feed mainly on rodents, but will also eat bird eggs, amphibians, fish and invertebrates. Like most weasels, least weasels will go after prey larger than themselves. ■

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



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Pheasants Forever & Quail Forever Habitat Tours 2018



Title	Description	Starting Location	Date and Time
Boost Game Bird Habitat by Grazing, Tree Removal and Prescribed Fire	Come see first-hand the processes and effects of habitat projects around Davis Creek and Sherman Reservoirs. We will look at grazed, burned, and tree removal areas, as well as some CRP fields.	Davis Creek NRD Campground 2620 Airport Dr. Ord, NE 68862	May 31st, 2018 9:00 AM - 2:00 PM CST
Prescribed Fire Tour	See what landowners are doing to combat eastern red cedar, enhance forage quality and increase profitability on grazing lands in partnership with a prescribed burn association. Catered evening meal to follow.	Community Center 201 Garlick Ave. Curtis, NE 69025	June 14th, 2018 2:00 PM—6:00 PM CST
Using Conservation Programs to Benefit Ag Production and Wildlife	Come learn about the program options which will benefit your farm and ranch through soil health, range health, while also providing wildlife habitat on those unproductive acres. We will also tour fields that are already benefitting from these practices.	2490 Road 45 Linwood, NE 68036	June 14th, 2018 9:30 AM - 2:00 PM CST
Beef, Birds and Working Lands - What Can You Do?	This tour will highlight a new initiative in the sandhills to help landowners receive technical and financial assistance for many landscapes. The tour will also showcase the importance of grazing systems as it relates to better grazing management for livestock and providing quality habitat for prairie grouse.	Bibs & Boots Cafe 1 Randolph St. Bartlett, NE 68622	June 21st, 2018 11:00 AM - 4:00 PM CST
Wildflower Wednesday	Join us for an evening of learning about wildflowers and their importance to many pollinators. Plant ID and site visits to areas in Southwest Nebraska. Bring your camera...if plants are blooming, excellent time to get close-up photos of blooms.	Imperial NRCS Conference Room 706 East 5th St. Imperial, NE 69033	June 27th, 2018 5:00 PM - 8:00 PM MST
Prairie Restoration Tour	Join us for an evening tour of a recently seeded prairie restoration project. Topics will include grassland management strategies, wildlife habitat, pollinator habitat and plant identification.	Northwest Corner of Highway 83 and W J Street McCook, NE 69001	June 28th, 2018 5:00 PM - 8:00 PM CST
Monarch Education Day!	Join us for a day of Monarch Butterfly and milkweed education. We will be taking a field trip to local milkweed patches to look for Monarch eggs, caterpillars and observing all species that frequent the patch. Free packets of Showy Milkweed seed will be given to attendees with instructions on creating your very own Monarch attracting Milkweed Habitat.	Wildcat Hills SRA Nature Center 210615 Nebraska Hwy 71 Gering, NE 69341	July 2nd, 2018 9:00 AM - 2:00 PM MST
Available Conservation Programs for Your Operation!	Unproductive Acres? Troublesome areas to farm? Come to this meeting to see what potential conservation programs are out there for you! We will address: wildlife enhancement, pollinator establishment, erosion, water quality etc. We will potentially tour some currently enrolled project sites based upon time and interest.	Nebraska Game & Parks Commission Lake McConaughy Visitors Center 1475 NE-61 Scenic Ogallala, NE 69153	July 12th, 2018 4:00 PM- 7:30 PM MST
Brush Removal and Mulching Demonstration	Do you have brush piles that you need to get rid of and burning is not an option? Come join us to learn of an alternative way of eliminating brush and brush piles. This tour will have a live demonstrations of brush removal techniques, chipping and mulch dispersal.	Nebraska Game & Parks Commission Maintenance Shop (West side of Lake) 13401 W Branched Lake Rd. Raymond, NE 68428	July 26th, 2018 9:30 AM - 12:00 PM CST
Cover Crop Seminar and Field Day	Join us for a day of discovering cover crops in Southwest Nebraska. The event will highlight grazing opportunities presented by the University of Nebraska, a producer panel featuring local producers and a field tour showcasing cover crops. Come learn the benefits for your operation and wildlife.	Ella Missing Community Center 411 6th St. Arapahoe, NE 68922	August 21st, 2018 9:00 AM - 3:00 PM CST
Answering questions on CRP: Deciduous tree encroachment, thistle issues and invasive cool season grasses	Come see the process and effects of different management methods of thistle, deciduous tree encroachments and invasive cool season grasses.	Hartington NRCS Conference Room 102 Elm St Hartington, NE 68739	September 6th, 2018 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM CST
Monarch Tagging at Lake Wanahoo	Join us for a Monarch Butterfly tagging at Lake Wanahoo SRA where you will have a chance to catch, tag & release butterflies. This is family friendly event. Weather dependent.	Ron Larsen Day Use Area 1651 County Road 16 Wahoo, NE 68066	September 9th, 2018 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM CST

Workshops are FREE! Visit www.NebraskaPF.com or call 308-850-8395 to RSVP for meal count.



Visit Valentine

By Erin Lenz, Nebraska Tourism Commission

A small town with big adventure, Valentine is waiting to be explored. Located in the beautiful Sandhills of Cherry County, Valentine has plenty of experiences and views for outdoor enthusiasts. Whether it's a scenic trip down the Niobrara River, bike ride on the Cowboy Trail or a hike through a state park, you will already be planning your return trip.

Do

See the history of the Sandhills and ranch life up close at **Arthur Bowring Ranch State Historical Park**, a working cattle ranch and living history museum. Walk through the visitor center and view artifacts from early ranching days or take a glimpse at corrals, barns, bunkhouses and sod house. The Cherry County Historical Society Museum is another destination where you can learn more about the history of Cherry County.

Interested in viewing wildlife? Five miles east of Valentine is home to a herd of bison, elk and a prairie dog town at the Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge. Or catch a fish at one of the top fisheries in the state, Merritt Reservoir, known for its walleye fishing, sandy beaches, boating and swimming opportunities. Good bass, northern pike, perch and bluegill fishing is also popular in the nine lakes open year-round at the Valentine

National Wildlife Refuge.

Last but not least, don't forget to mark down Aug. 5-10, 2018, on your calendar to attend the Nebraska Star Party, one of the nation's premier stargazing events.

Eat

After you've finished golfing one of the two world-class golf courses at The Prairie Club, stop into The Prairie Club Lodge to experience the cuisine of "cow country." Peppermill Restaurant & Lounge is another great option if you're in the mood to try some of the local favorites made with Nebraska-produced beef.

Once you've had your fill of beef, quench your thirst with an Indian Pale Ale from Bolo Beer Co. or try one of the other beers on their menu like the Wild West Wheat Ale or Wild Plum Gose.

Not too far from Valentine, enjoy a taste of Sandhills wine at Niobrara Valley Vineyards. Sip on their award-winning Marquette and semi-dry white wine, Boss Cow.

Stay

Not only is The Prairie Club great for dining and golfing, but it also offers a few different lodging styles from a rustic Bunkhouse room (wooden deck to view sunsets included), a cabin right on the edge of Snake River Canyon or



Visitors at Nebraska's famous Smith Falls.

a room in the main lodge. Heartland Elk Guest Ranch and Merritt Trading Post Resort offer cabin experiences close to nature, or camping is available at a variety of different locations along the Niobrara River, including **Smith Falls State Park**. If you're more interested in a restful hotel stay with complimentary breakfast, The Niobrara Lodge is perfect for you.

Explore

Outdoor adventures are waiting all throughout Valentine. Tube, canoe or kayak down the scenic bends of the Niobrara River where you will experience dramatic bluffs and wildlife diversity. While you're floating down the river, don't forget to stop at the state's highest waterfall, Smith Falls. Dry off and take a hike to the state's largest waterfall by volume, Snake Falls or walk through the mile-long, self-guided hiking trail: Jim McAllister Nature Trail at Smith Falls State Park.

If you're looking for a great trail to bike, hike or ride horseback, look no further than the Cowboy Trail. The Cowboy Trail is the largest rails-to-trails conversion project in the United States with 192 miles finished from Valentine east to Norfolk. One of the most scenic parts of the trail is the former railroad bridge east of Valentine that offers breathtaking views from 150 feet above the Niobrara River. ■



Sod House Sunday at Bowring Ranch State Historical Park near Merriman.

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A Brief History

Luella's Lightning Shoe

By David Bristow, History Nebraska
(Nebraska State Historical Society)

Carol Pearson was browsing an estate sale in California when she found an old shoe containing a yellowed newspaper clipping and a handwritten slip of paper. In the article, an elderly Mrs. Luella Brown of Chico, California, recalled the day in 1902 when she was struck by lightning near Lakeland, Brown County, Nebraska. The slip of paper read, "I was born in 1894. This happened 1904."

Brown said the family had gathered for her grandfather's birthday. She was inside sitting on a cousin's lap when suddenly

"the house was in shambles" and she

"was on the floor covered with plaster." The lightning

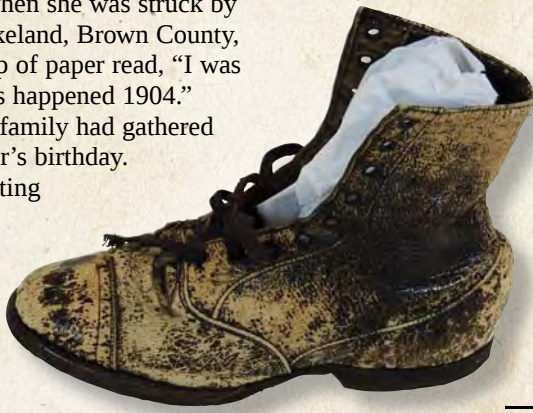
apparently followed a clothesline to the house, passing through Brown and her cousin and exiting through her left foot. Her foot was blistered and the shoe damaged. Brown said she was once offered \$100 for the shoe but refused to sell it.

We tried to learn more when Pearson donated the shoe to History Nebraska in 2013. We searched Nebraska newspaper databases for 1902 and 1904. Because Brown's paternal grandfather, Frederick Albert Cox, had a June 8 birthday, we focused especially on that month in the hope that he was the correct grandfather.

We didn't find the story, but we found lots of others.

Consider June 1902. A severe storm on the 5th burned down a barn in Leigh, tore a hole in a farmhouse near Gretna, "severely shocking the family, although not seriously" (whatever that means!), and knocked the North Bend telephone exchange manager out of his chair and tore plaster from the wall. On the 13th a young man was struck fatally near Peru while crossing a wire fence; the report concludes cheerfully that "Nemaha County has the best prospects for crops ever known before." Two days later a Lexington farmer was killed by lightning while on horseback; the report didn't mention the horse's condition but said the crops were promising "a mighty fine yield."

June 1904 was even worse. On the 10th the *Red Cloud Chief* claimed that "Probably more than a score of persons have been killed or dangerously injured by lightning the last two weeks in Nebraska alone." A day earlier the *Valentine Democrat* reported one dead from lightning in Fullerton and



Luella's shoe, donated in 2003 by Pearson.
NSHS 13290-1

four killed by lightning or drowning during flooding in Greeley and Nance counties. Other Nebraska papers reported horses killed, fires started, and a rancher named Sam Lane struck dead while riding fence near Hay Springs; he was still mounted on his dead horse when neighbors found his body.

Now at least we understand how Luella's story might have been overlooked at the time.

Our homes and buildings are better protected these days, but Nebraska weather is still Nebraska weather. While enjoying the great outdoors, keep an eye on the sky. ■

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

PHOTO BY KEN BOUC

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Duck Creek Now Open

By Eric Fowler

Duck Creek Recreation Area and its new 62-acre reservoir near Peru opened to the public in April.

The recreation area, built and managed by the Nemaha Natural Resources District, encompasses 200 acres and will offer fishing, no-wake boating, RV and tent camping, a nature trail, picnic areas, swim beach and playgrounds.

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission was one of several partners in the project, providing design and funding assistance to enhance aquatic habitat for fish and access for anglers with a \$500,000 grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Sport Fish and Wildlife Restoration program, which is funded through excise taxes boaters and anglers pay on equipment. The work included excavating parts of the lake and building underwater shoals to provide depth diversity, anchoring tree piles for fish habitat to compliment



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Duck Creek Recreation Area, located 5 miles northwest of Peru, was built for flood control and recreation.

the abundant standing timber that was flooded, building breakwaters and sediment traps to maintain water quality, and a boat ramp and fishing pads for anglers.

The Commission stocked the lake with bluegill, black crappie, largemouth bass and channel catfish starting in 2016. Bass and bluegills also found their way into the lake from upstream ponds. Duck Creek currently has a high

density of small bass and bluegills, with a few keeper-sized fish.

A grand opening and dedication is planned for June 2 at 11 a.m. The event includes lunch, kayaking, boat and facility tours and a fishing clinic. A Nemaha NRD access permit (\$15 annual, \$5 daily), which provides entry to four other areas, is required and can be purchased on site. For more information, go to NemahaNRD.org. ■

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In-field Zipper Repairs

Some tricks to know if your tent zipper fails

By Julie Geiser

Tent zippers are key components to tents. They keep wind, rain and bugs out, but when they fail, be prepared with some knowledge and tools to do on-site repairs to your tent.

Zippers consist of nylon, plastic or metal teeth or coils and a slider or grab tab pull that brings the teeth or coil tracks together. Many tents come with closed-end zippers, which means the zipper is stitched together at both ends. Closed-end zippers can be harder to repair in the field unless you have some good tools in a repair kit. Open-end zippers are much like those on a jacket where the two sides of the zipper come apart; these zippers are somewhat easier to repair.

Zipper maintenance can help extend its life span and keep problems to a

minimum. Keeping the zipper free of dirt and sand will help keep it in good working order. Running a damp washcloth along the zipper track will clean most sand and dirt while in the field. A small can of keyboard air cleaner in a repair kit is great for flushing debris out of a zipper track.

If a zipper is only misaligned, you might fix the problem by working the slider back and forth a couple of times to make it run more smoothly.

If the slider is broken, there are things you can do to try to fix it. If the slider is stuck, try using some lubricant to make it run more smoothly on the zipper track. There are dry lubricants made just for zippers or try using a graphite pencil by running the graphite along the zipper's teeth to lubricate the track.

Other lubricants can be used but be careful that they do not attract sand and dirt. Lip balm or WD-40 can be used when you do not have any other options; run a light layer of either along the teeth of the zipper and see if that helps the slider pull the two teeth sides together.

If this doesn't work, try putting some pressure on the slider's back side by squeezing the top and bottom together on each side of the slider pull tab with pliers; squeeze one side of the slider at a time and then run the slider up and down on the teeth until it hopefully closes the zipper.

If the slider is not working at all, a quick solution to the problem is a zipper repair kit like FixnZip.

The sliders in the FixnZip make repairing a zipper fast and simple with no other tools or sewing needed like other conventional



Try to loosen stuck zippers by putting pressure on the pull tab with pliers.



The FixnZip makes repairing a zipper simple with no tools or sewing required.



The FixnZip works on zippers made with coils or plastic or metal teeth.

zipper repair kits. The FixnZip sliders work by finding the right size of slider, then loosening a screw on the top of the slider, attaching it to the zipper teeth on both sides of the slide and tightening the slider down on the zipper. FixnZip replaces old zipper sliders or repairs broken zippers that separate or come undone. They work on zippers made of coils or plastic or metal teeth, and can be used on opened and closed zippers. They also fit many zipper sizes.

The zipper sliders that I purchased online came with three different zipper slider sizes, which ensures that one will fit your tent, sleeping bag, jackets or other equipment. These sliders are a lifesaver when zippers break on a camping trip and will save tent owners a lot of money by fixing a zipper instead of replacing a tent. ■

PHOTOS BY JULIE GEISER

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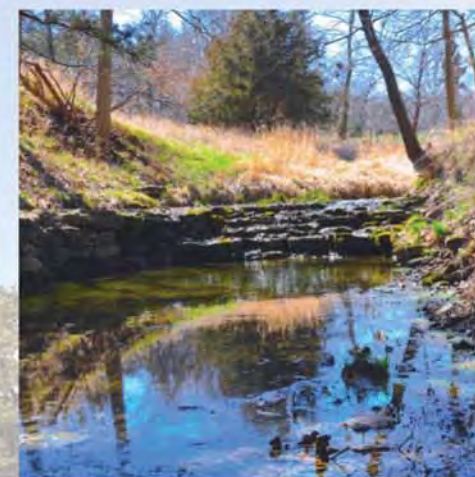
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CASS CO, NE - 149 AC.

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Junior Explorer Program

By Justin Haag

Children have long enjoyed exploring nature at Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area, whether by hiking the trails of the 1,000-plus-acre park or by viewing the interactive displays of its Nature Center. Now there is a new program to make their exploration at the Panhandle park official.

This spring, the Nature Center began awarding badges and certificates to children who complete its new Junior Explorer program.

Amanda Filipi, the outdoor education specialist who is based at the Nature Center, worked with members of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's communications division to create, design and print a 16-page full-color book with activities for children ages 4 and up. In addition to traditional activities, such as a word search and maze, the program has activities that require children to find and study natural features, such as animal tracks and plants.

A Watchable Wildlife Grant, made possible by donations to the state's Wildlife Conservation Fund, funded the project.

"Here at the Wildcat Hills we're always looking for ways to help kids gain an appreciation for nature and the region's history," she said. "We're sure the kids will enjoy completing the activities and getting a little recognition for it. We're excited to get it started."



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

The new book and badge created for the Junior Explorer Program at the Wildcat Hills Nature Center helps children explore the park.

Filipi said the activities are intended to relate specifically to the Wildcat Hills, highlighting the region's history, wildlife, paleontology, flora and geology. For instance, there is content devoted to topics such as bighorn sheep, the ancient fossils that have been unearthed nearby, the park's Great Depression-era stone shelters and the rare-to-Nebraska mountain mahogany tree.

"And, we have a section on the bees. Here at the Wildcat Hills we always have to have something for the bees since we have an active bee hive at the building," she said.

Filipi said this is the first Junior Explorer Program at a Game and Parks Commission attraction, but hopes to see it added to other parks in coming years.

The Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area is located 10 miles south of Gering along Nebraska Highway 71. The books are available at the Nature Center's front desk. ■



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Bug Banter

By Julie Van Meter
State Entomologist,
Nebraska
Department
of Agriculture

The Japanese beetle (*Popillia japonica*) was introduced to the United States around 1916 on nursery stock. Since its introduction, this exotic invasive insect has established in almost every state in the eastern half of the country.

Nebraska is on the leading edge of this infestation as the beetle moves westward. Currently 38 Nebraska counties are considered infested, including Douglas and Sarpy counties where infestations are widespread.

Adult beetles are approximately ½-inch in length. The head and thorax are green and the elytra (hard back wings) are brownish to bronze in color. June beetles, by comparison, are larger in size and a more uniform orange to dark brown color.

Other scarab species, including the false Japanese beetle and the rose chafer, both of which are found in

Nebraska, are often confused with the Japanese beetle. A key identification characteristic of the Japanese beetle is the white tufts of hairs on the sides and end of the adult abdomen. Japanese beetles have a one-year life cycle. Adult females begin to lay eggs in the ground in early to mid-summer. White grubs, similar to the grubs of other scarab beetles, hatch from these eggs. The grubs (larvae) remain in the soil, feeding on grass roots, which can cause significant damage to turfgrass. Grubs overwinter by burrowing deep into the soil. As spring approaches and soil temperatures increase, the grubs resume feeding, then pupate before emerging as adults. In Nebraska, adult emergence typically begins in early to mid-June.

Adults crawl out of the ground and begin to feed on flowers and foliage. Preferred hosts include linden, rose and grapes, but these insects are known to feed on more than 300 species of

Presented by



Japanese Beetle.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DAVID CAPPAERT, BUGWOOD.ORG.



plants, ranging from trees and shrubs to annuals and vegetables.

Homeowners and land managers have a number of chemical options for managing Japanese beetles. Selecting plants that are less attractive to adult beetles and hand removing adults (when populations are low) are non-chemical options. Contact your local extension office for Japanese beetle management recommendations. ■



Japanese Beetle.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DAVID CAPPAERT, BUGWOOD.ORG.

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Tree-killing pests, like the emerald ash borer, hitchhike on firewood and spread insects and diseases that destroy our trees. Keep your backyard, campgrounds and favorite places safe from these pests.

PREVENTION IS KEY:

- Buy locally-harvested firewood.
- Ask a park ranger or campground host about where to get local firewood when you travel.
- If you brought firewood in from another area, BURN IT! Don't leave it, don't take it with you.

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To report potential emerald ash borer, contact the Nebraska Department of Agriculture at 402-471-2351.

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Upcoming Events by Jerry Kane

June 1
Landowner Elk Permits
Final day eligible landowners may apply for one elk permit

June 1-30
Archery Paddlefish
Season start and end

June 2
Family Fishing Event
Yanney Heritage Park, Kearney

June 2
National Trails Day
Indian Cave State Park (SP), Shubert

June 2-3
Living History
Fort Atkinson State Historical Park (SHP), Fort Calhoun

June 4, 25
Family Nature Club
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Classroom, Norfolk

June 6
Family Fishing Event
Benson Park, Omaha

June 6, 13, 20, 27
Becoming an Outdoors-Woman
Handgun Series
Platte River SP, Louisville

June 7
Family Fishing Event
Mormon Island State Recreation Area (SRA), Grand Island; Oak Lake, Lincoln

June 8
Wildflower Walk
Wildcat Hills Nature Center, Gering

June 9
National Marina Day
Lewis and Clark SRA, Crofton

June 9
Birding Day
Fort Atkinson SHP, Fort Calhoun

June 9
Family Fishing Event
Medicine Creek Reservoir SRA, Cambridge

June 9-10
Becoming an Outdoors-Family Camp
Louisville SRA and Platte River SP, Louisville

June 10
Family Fishing Event
Terry's Pit, Terrytown

June 11-22
Deer Permit Applications
Residents and nonresidents may apply for one deer permit in any draw unit

June 11-22
Antelope Permit Application
Residents and eligible landowners may apply for one buck or either-sex antelope permit in available units

June 11-22
Elk Permit Application
Residents may apply for one elk permit

June 12
Family Fishing Event
Walnut Creek Reservoir, Papillion

June 13
Family Fishing Event
Bowling Lake, Lincoln; Red Willow Reservoir SRA, McCook

June 14
Becoming an Outdoors-Woman
Beginning Canoeing
Wehrspann Lake, Omaha

June 15-16
Ash Hollow Pageant
Ash Hollow SHP, Lewellen

June 16
Buffalo Cookout and
National Park Service
Program
Niobrara SP, Niobrara

June 17
Father's Day Buffet
Platte River SP, Louisville

June 17
Father's Day Fishing
Tournament
Niobrara SP, Niobrara

June 17
Father's Day Fish Fry
Ponca SP, Ponca

June 18-19
Legacy in Environmental
Education Discovery
Workshop
Wood River

June 19
Family Fishing Event
Holmes Lake, Lincoln

June 19-21
Learn to Hunt Camp
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor
Education Center, Lincoln

June 19-22
Patriot Camp of Eastern Nebraska
Fort Atkinson SHP, Fort Calhoun

June 20
Family Fishing Event
Windmill SRA, Gibbon

June 20-21
Project WILD and Aquatic WILD
Educator Workshop
University of Nebraska, Lincoln

June 21
Growing Up WILD Educator
Workshop
North Elementary School, Falls City

June 21
Family Fishing Event
Cottonmill Lake, Kearney; Towl Park, Omaha; Skyview Lake, Norfolk

June 22
Commission Meeting
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
meeting, Ogallala

June 22
Family Fishing Event
Birdwood Wildlife Management Area,
North Platte

June 23
Carp-O-Rama
Branched Oak SRA, Raymond

June 23
Sod House Saturday Night
Bowring Ranch SHP, Merriman

June 23
National Park Service River
Adventure Day
Niobrara SP, Niobrara

June 23
Tour de Nebraska Bicycle Tour
Niobrara SP, Niobrara

June 24
Show and Shine Car Show
Indian Cave SP, Shubert

June 26-28
Outdoor Explorer's Camp
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor
Education Center, Lincoln

June 27
Family Fishing Event
Prairie Queen Recreation Area,
LaVista; Red Willow Reservoir SRA,
McCook

June 28
Family Fishing Event
Carter Lake, Omaha

June 29
Dutch Oven Cooking Class
Louisville SRA, Louisville

June 30
White Perch Tournament
Branched Oak SRA, Raymond

June 30-July 1
Living History
Fort Atkinson SHP, Fort Calhoun

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

**Living History
at Fort
Atkinson near
Fort Calhoun.**

**Every June at the Ash Hollow Pageant,
volunteers reenact scenes from the diaries of
those traveling the Oregon trail.**



Family fishing in Kearney County.



Go Ape!

By Cara Pesek

On Arbor Day, a group of students from Lincoln Southwest High School spent the morning in the treetop canopy at Eugene T. Mahoney State Park. They crossed suspension bridges, balanced on cables, and completed other feats of daring and strength before ziplining back to the ground. It was an experience many said they found both exhilarating and unforgettable.

The students were among the first participants to try the new Go Ape Treetop Adventure, which is now open at Mahoney State Park. This new feature, the first of its kind in Nebraska, features six challenge courses high up in the trees. The grand finale of each course is a zipline that whisks participants back to the ground.

The Go Ape Treetop Adventure is part of Nebraska's new Venture Parks Complex, which will bring exciting new activities and features to four parks: Mahoney State Park, Platte River State Park, Schramm Park State Recreation Area and Louisville State Recreation Area.

"Providing learning opportunities in an outdoor environment is a key pillar of the Venture Parks project," said Nebraska State Parks Administrator Jim Swenson. "Guests gain a sensory experience by venturing into the parks' treetops and have a fun and memorable experience at the same time."

To learn more about the course, see photos and video or to book online, visit goape.com. ■



Preston Green of Lincoln crosses a Go Ape structure at Eugene T. Mahoney State Park.

NEBRASKAland Visitor



Last issue's winner of the Visitor drawing was Sherrill Maxon of Bellevue, Nebraska, who found the **velvet ant** on page 36.

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

To enter each month, write:
NEBRASKAland Visitor
2200 North 33rd Street
Lincoln, NE 68503

Or e-mail: Tim.Reigert@Nebraska.gov with "Visitor" in the subject line of the message.

HINT: This issue's visitor is not on page 16, 17, 19, 26, 40-45, or 63.

*The velvet ant (*Dasymutilla occidentalis*), native to Nebraska, is not an ant at all; it is actually a wasp. Both males and females are nearly one inch in length, and have dense, orange to reddish hairs covering their black bodies. Males have transparent wings and look like a typical wasp. But it is the wingless female, scurrying along the ground in late summer, that attracts all the attention. This bold coloring is a warning that she is not to be messed with. While not aggressive, the female can deliver a very painful sting when threatened, earning her the nickname "cow killer." Velvet ants are solitary creatures and do not build a nest or live in a colony. Instead the female lays eggs in ground-dwelling bee and wasp nests. Her larvae parasitize the host larvae, ultimately killing them.*



male



female

Special thanks to Julie Van Meter, State Entomologist, Nebraska Department of Agriculture.

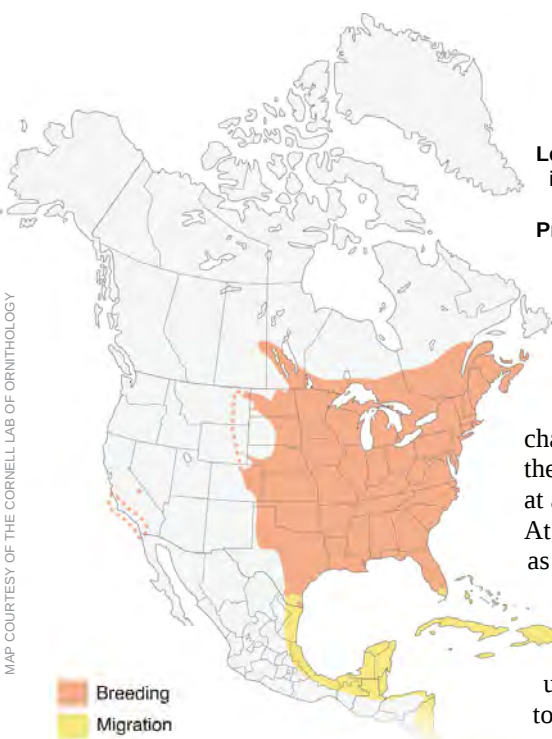


Chimney Swifts

The Wildlife Among Us

Story and photos
by Michael Forsberg





Left: Distribution of the chimney swift in North America.

Previous pages: Swifts circle the chimney at Irving Middle School before descending to roost on an early autumn evening in Lincoln, Nebraska.

up to a massive vortex of swirling, chattering silhouettes descending into the school's towering chimney. "Look at all the bats!" I heard someone say. At first, I thought they were, too. But as we watched I realized these were birds, and they were disappearing *into* the chimney, not coming out of it for the night. And they were using a nearby church's chimney, too. I went home and did some quick research. They were a huge migrating flock of chimney swifts.

Chimney swifts are those dark boomerang shapes that chitter in the sky from dawn to dusk over our towns and cities in Nebraska, across the Midwest and all the way to the East Coast.

With a wingspan of 14 inches but

One fall evening while walking the dogs around the neighborhood and Irving Middle School in Lincoln, Nebraska, a small group of parents waiting for their kids at soccer practice were pointing



The Irving chimney casts a shadow on the playground during a youth flag football game. This chimney and others in Lincoln serve as important roost sites for chimney swifts, neo-tropical migrants that move between the Midwest and the Upper Amazon Basin.



Chimney swifts dive toward their roost head first, but as they enter a chimney, they will turn right-side-up and drop in feet first.

weighing just less than an ounce, chimney swifts are part of a larger group of bird species including swallows, goatsuckers and other swift species called "aerial insectivores." They specialize in eating flying insects (especially mosquitos), and like bats, an individual can eat 2,000-3,000 insects per day.

In other words, if bats are the night shift, swifts are the day shift, working hard for us as 100 percent organic, nature-certified, non-GMO pest control agents, sweeping the skies 24 hours a day, and they work for free.

Chimney swifts are neo-tropical

migrants, meaning they do not require one home but many homes to thrive, moving thousands of miles annually between breeding grounds in eastern and central North America to wintering grounds in the tropics. In fact, scientists have yet to identify exactly where their core winter grounds are, except to say that they are remote and likely somewhere in the Upper Amazon Basin.

Chimney swifts do not perch like other birds standing on two feet. Instead, they have specially designed claws that allow them to cling to vertical surfaces like bats, but right-side

up rather than upside down. Before Euro-American settlement, chimney swift communal roosts and solitary nests were once in hollowed-out trees of old growth riparian woodlands and eastern hardwood forests. But as America grew west and harvested those trees for fuel, building materials or cleared them for agriculture, the swifts adapted quickly to using brick chimneys built for our homes or schools, and smoke stacks for industry.

But today, most of those old brick chimneys in homes are being covered or sealed, dilapidated buildings and their smokestacks are being torn down,

old steam-generating heating and cooling systems in public buildings like schools and office buildings are being retro-fitted or modernized, and now the swifts' human-made habitats that they were able to adapt to in the last century are dwindling, and the birds are struggling in some areas to survive. That's the bad news.

The good news is, people and communities that learn about these swifts seem to care, and conservation efforts for swifts are on the radar. Cities like Austin, Texas, have incorporated swift-friendly roosting and nesting structures into their

Irving's students and teacher sponsors helped developed an after-school Chimney Swift Club to educate their classmates, local neighborhoods and the city about these remarkable little birds.

city's architecture and urban design. An elementary school and local conservationists in Portland, Oregon, raised awareness and succeeded in protecting a large de-commissioned chimney attached to their school because it served as an important migratory roost site for thousands of Vaux swifts, western counterparts to the chimney swifts, and provided a perfect environmental education opportunity for the school that now hosts hundreds of spectators gathering to watch the birds descend to their nighttime roost on fall evenings.

And even in my own home neighborhood at Irving Middle School where I first saw those swifts several

years ago, a small group of enthusiastic teachers, a University of Nebraska ornithologist (and Irving alumnus), and a group of students formed an after-school Chimney Swift Club, now in its fourth year, to learn and help educate their classmates, local neighborhood and city about the beauty and value of these remarkable little birds and celebrate the wildlife among us.

It is hard to believe at a glance that a small cigar-shaped brown bird twittering above our urban forest here in the Plains can connect us to far-flung places half a world away, and either despite us or because of us, is making a life in an increasingly modern world. ■

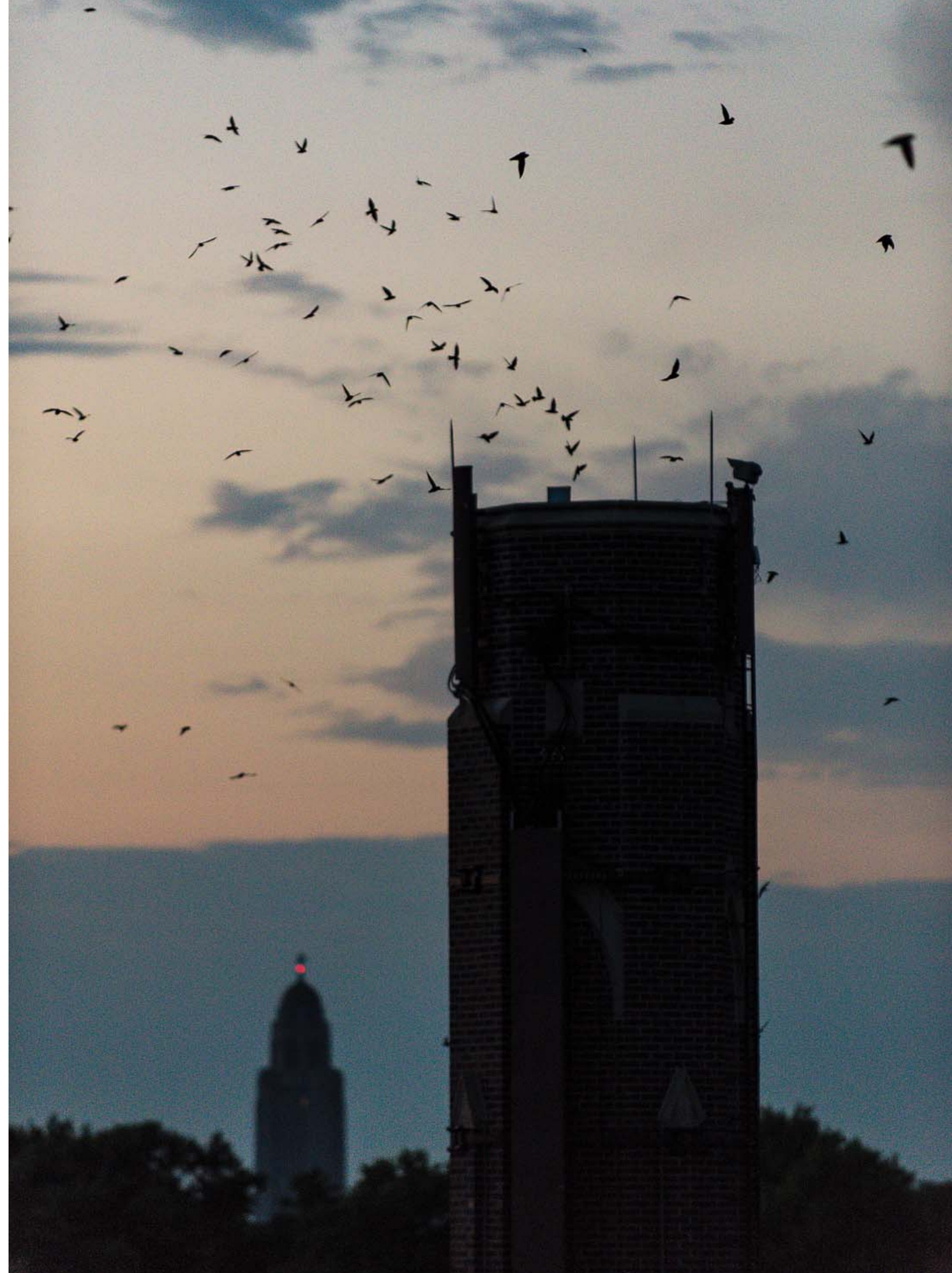


Swifts do not perch upright like most birds. With specially designed claws, they perch by clinging to rough surfaces, usually bricks and mortar of interior walls.



Above: The communal roosts of chimney swifts can number in the hundreds or thousands during migration. Like bats, they will roost in tight clusters for protection and warmth.

Opposite: A swift may eat thousands of flying insects before returning to the roost each night. If bats are the night shift then swifts are the day shift, aerial insectivores and nature's pest control agents, sweeping up our big Nebraska skies.



Time Well Spent

What to Do in June

By Renae Blum

Once Memorial Day rolls around, it's "park season" in Nebraska, which means plenty of fun family events scheduled throughout the summer. Here's a preview of several you can look forward to. You can find more details about these and other events online at Calendar.OutdoorNebraska.gov. ■

Stargazing June 22

Eugene T. Mahoney State Park

Nothing quite catches the breath like the sight of a star-filled sky – much less one viewed through a good telescope. On June 22 the Omaha Astronomical Society and Prairie Astronomy Club will set up powerful telescopes at Mahoney for visitors to use. Meet at the Bur Oak Picnic Shelter across from the golf driving range from dusk to 11 p.m.



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

Wildflower Walk June 8

Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area

Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area is a great place to view wildflowers – volunteers have spotted more than 40 blooming species in a single day. To celebrate Nebraska Wildflower Week, join us for a mile-long hike in the park to see the flowers in bloom and learn key characteristics for identification.



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY

Living History – Old-Fashioned Fourth of July with a Focus on 1812 June 30-July 1

Fort Atkinson State Historical Park

Fort Atkinson's Fourth of July events are a prime time to see living history at the park. This year's event has a special focus on 1812, specifically the War of 1812 and its connection to the fort, with special displays onsite from the Archives of Ontario and the Naval Museum in Washington D.C. The weekend's activities also include a visit from Dolly Madison and other historical presentations.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

2nd Annual National Marina Day June 9

Lewis and Clark State Recreation Area

It's boating season, and there are few places better to celebrate than at Nebraska's second largest reservoir, Lewis and Clark Lake, during their National Marina Day event June 9. The day includes kayaking, archery, fishing clinic, boat tours, sandcastle building contest, fish fry, hayrack ride and more. The event also offers an educational angle, with talks on boating safety, wetland habitats and aquatic invasive species; a fish cleaning demonstration; and a search and rescue dive demonstration.



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Visit a Nebraska Beach Throughout the month Statewide

Nebraska and beaches – two words you don't tend to associate with one another. However, a number of inviting beaches and lakes can be found throughout the state. Some of our favorites are at Lake McConaughy, Calamus, Louisville, Windmill, and Summit state recreation areas.

Aquatic Habitat Program

Celebrates 20 Years

To maintain, restore or enhance the capacity of a waterbody to produce and sustain fish.



In the mid-1990s, Nebraska's reservoirs constructed during the middle part of the 20th century were showing their age: Basins had filled with silt, shorelines had eroded, water quality had degraded, and less-than-desirable fish communities made for poor angling.

Anglers wanted change. More than 650 anglers attended 19 meetings across the state beginning in 1993 to discuss problems and possible solutions related to aging reservoirs and aquatic habitat. Seventy anglers were invited to meet with biologists and others at a three-day meeting in 1994, in which they identified priorities and developed a course of action for addressing the state's aquatic habitat issues.

From this meeting, what would become the Nebraska Aquatic Habitat Program and the Aquatic Habitat Stamp were born.

In 1996, the Nebraska Legislature passed a new law requiring most anglers to buy a stamp in order to fish in the state. Money generated by sales of the newly-established Aquatic Habitat Stamp went into a fund, which was only used to make improvements to aging Nebraska waters.

More than 20 years later, sales of the stamp have generated more than \$22 million for improvements to 127 waterbodies across the state. Many additional funding partners, including the Nebraska Environmental Trust Fund, the Federal Sport Fish Restoration Fund, Natural Resources Districts and cities across the state, have contributed an additional \$73 million for Aquatic Habitat Program projects, which have improved water quality, removed sediment, stabilized shorelines, added submerged aquatic habitat structures, provided for the construction of fishing docks and piers and much more.

Because it was the first of its kind, the American Fisheries Society recognized it with a Sport Fish Restoration Outstanding Project award in 1998. The true beneficiaries of this program have been anglers, who have better access and opportunity in Nebraska than ever before.

Now, and into the future, anglers will continue to reap the benefits of so many successful projects across Nebraska.

— Don Gabelhouse, Fisheries Division Administrator
1993-2016



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Above: Bluegills hover over their spawning beds at Louisville State Recreation Area (SRA) where a \$500,000 angler access project to install fishing piers was completed in 2012. Opposite: Biologists get an early start on a day long renovation of the fishery of Lake Ogallala.

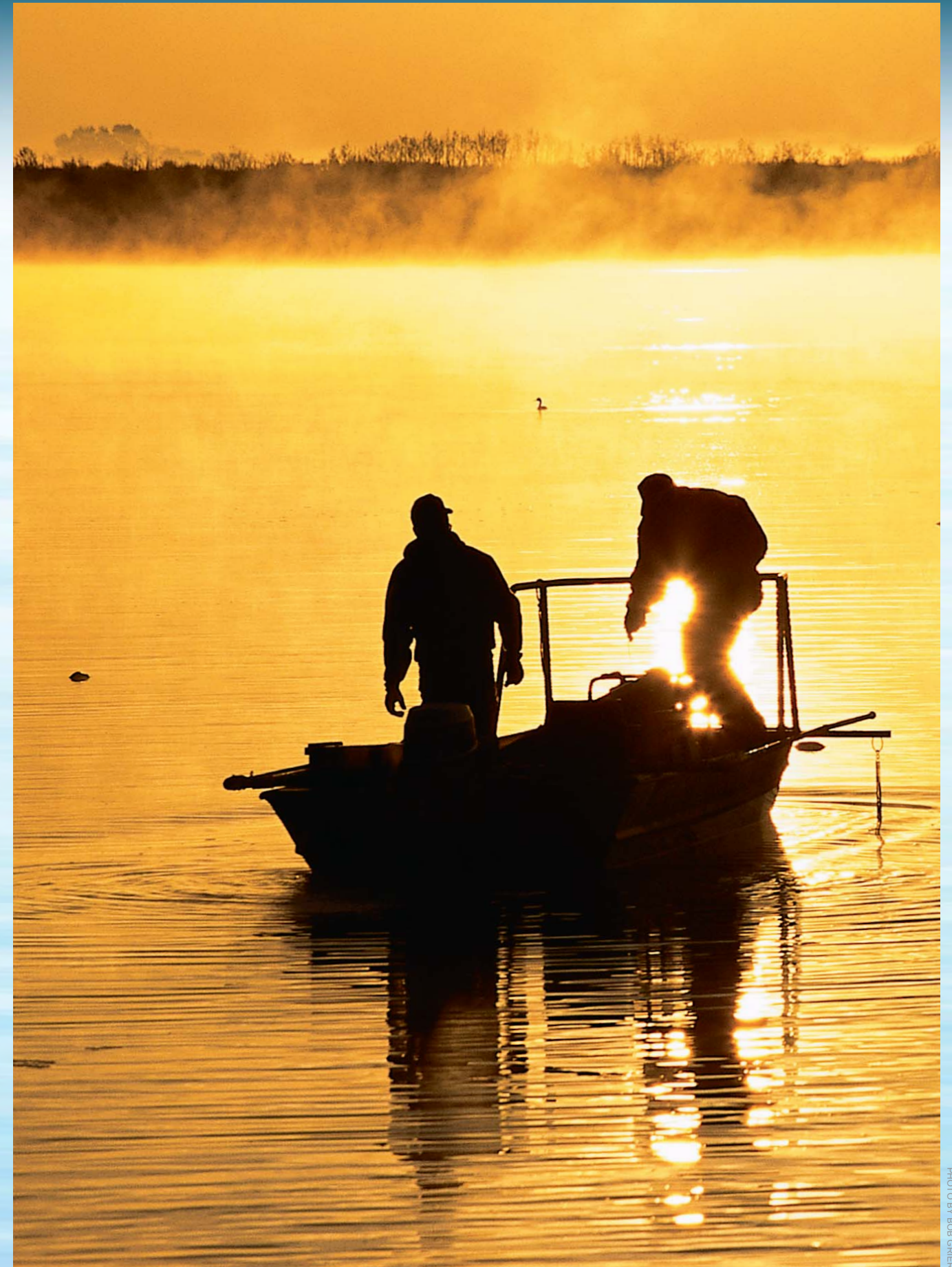


PHOTO BY BOB GRIER



Left: Rick Wheatley fishes for trout in Long Pine Creek at Long Pine SRA in Brown County during the winter. Coolwater streams are also on the Aquatic Habitat Program's plan to improve fish habitat and angler access.

Bottom: An already great fishery, Sherman Reservoir was enhanced by a large scale Aquatic Habitat project to stabilize major points and protect coves, the focus of many anglers to this Sherman County jewel.

PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY

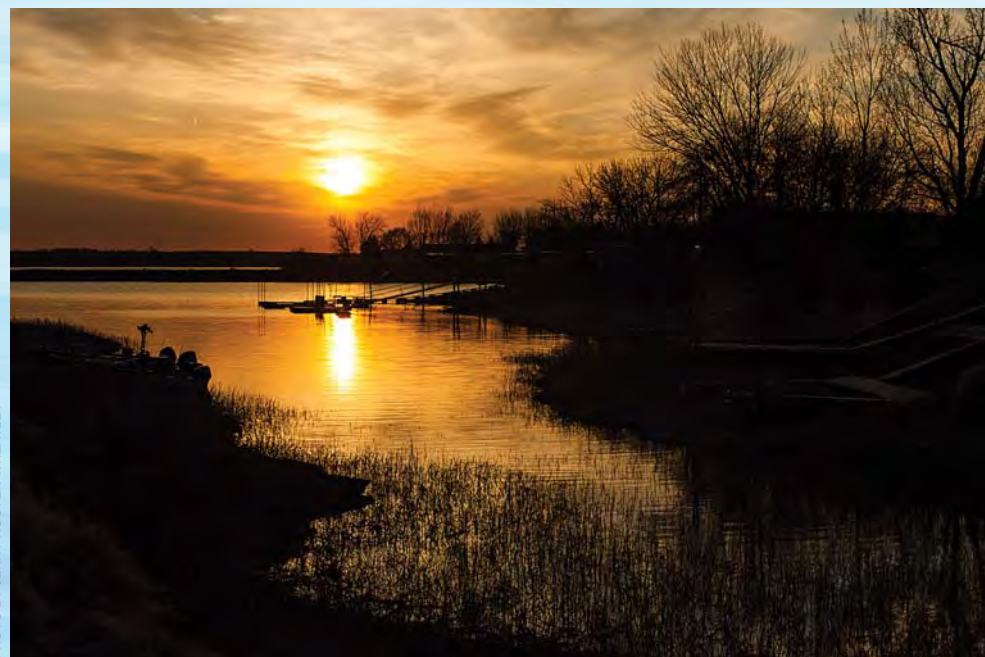


PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY

Right: Over the last 6 years a major project has improved access and restored aquatic habitat on the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge in Cherry County, setting the stage for its return as a world class fishery once common carp are removed.

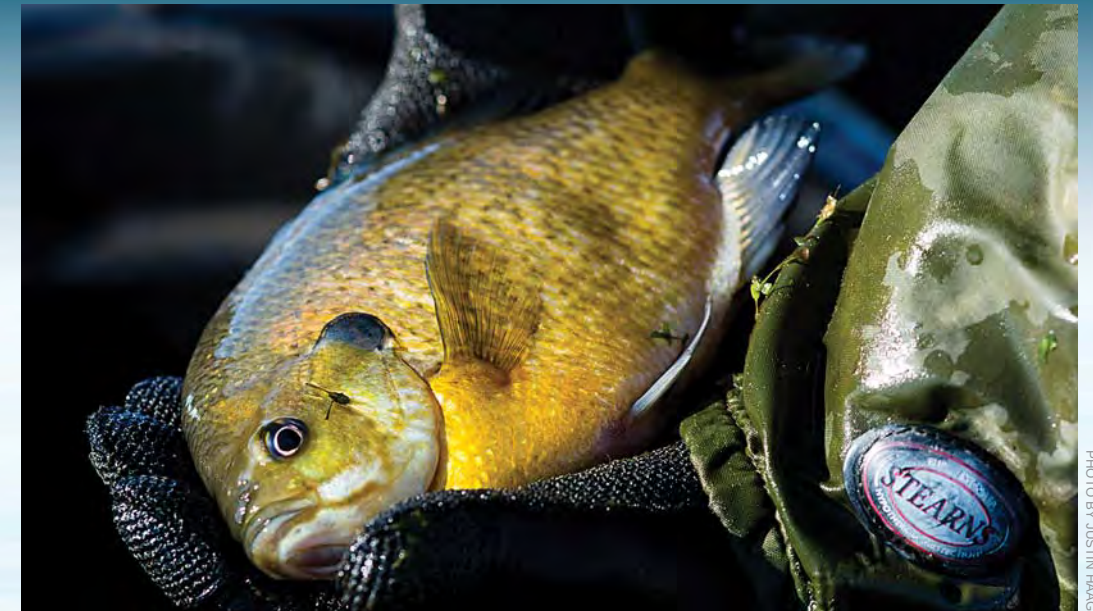
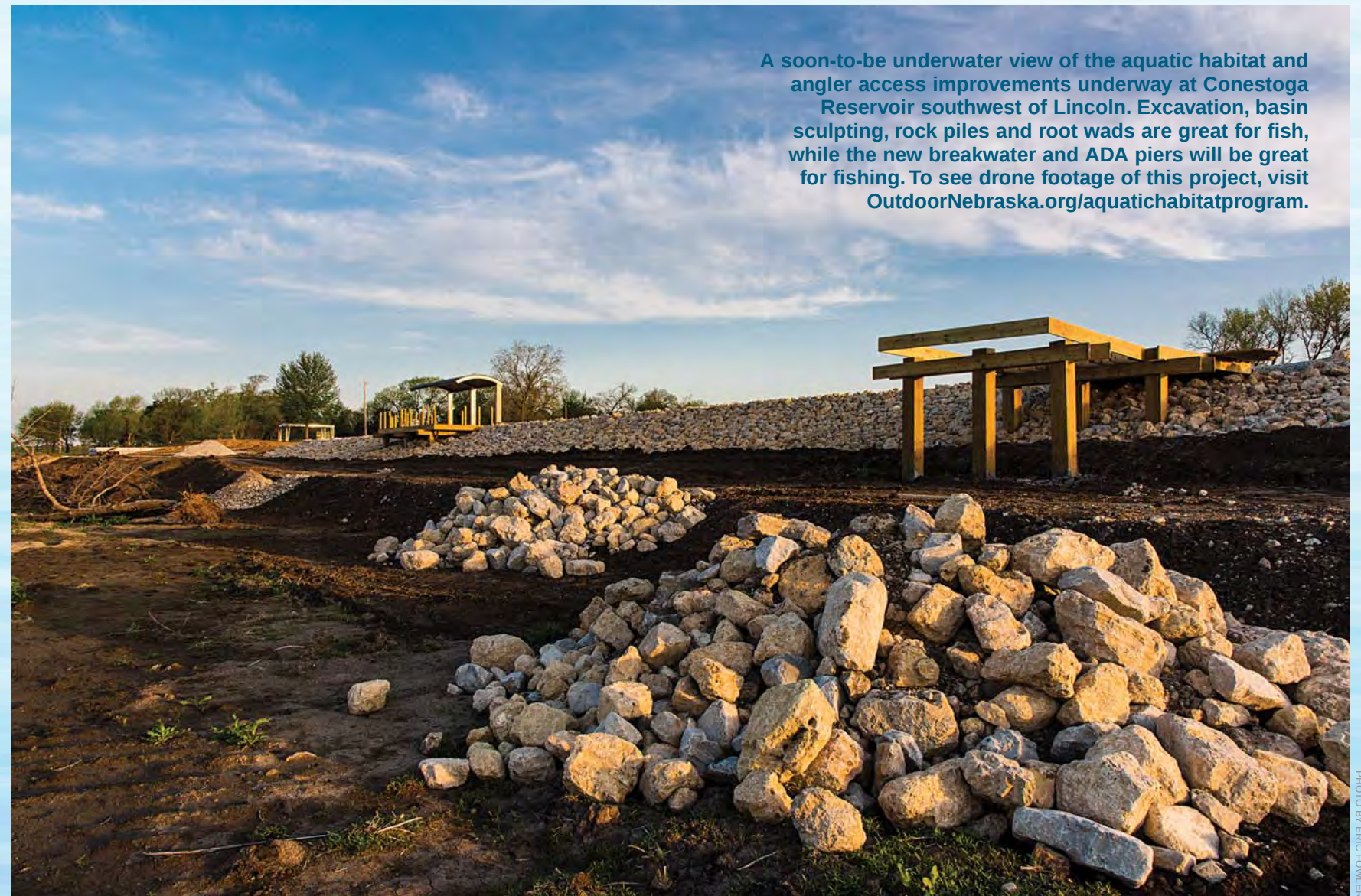


PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG



A soon-to-be underwater view of the aquatic habitat and angler access improvements underway at Conestoga Reservoir southwest of Lincoln. Excavation, basin sculpting, rock piles and root wads are great for fish, while the new breakwater and ADA piers will be great for fishing. To see drone footage of this project, visit OutdoorNebraska.org/aquatichabitatprogram.

PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER



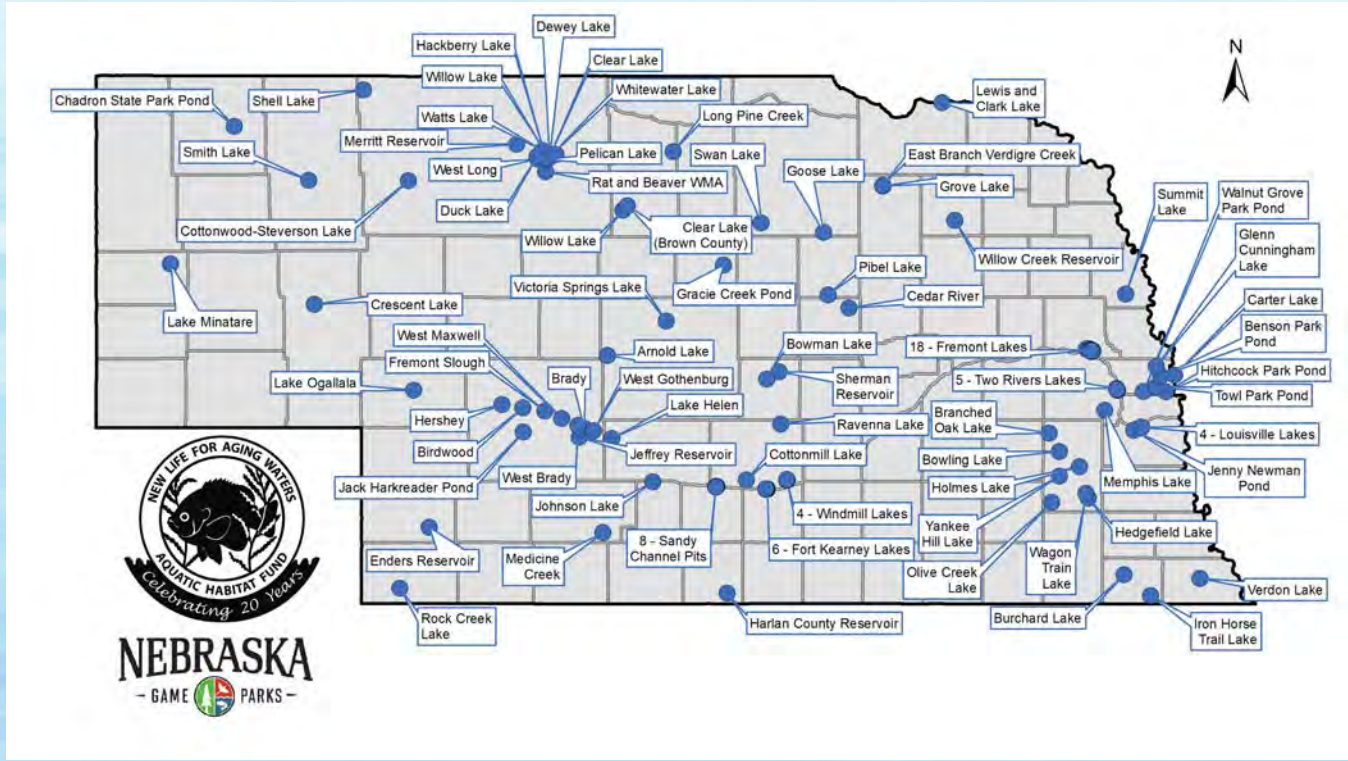
PHOTO BY JULIE GEISER

Fisheries biologists Jared Lorensen and Caleb Huber conduct an electrofishing survey on West Brady Wildlife Management Area, one of seven interstate lakes recently improved for angler access.



At Shell Lake Wildlife Management Area, northeast of Gordon, in Cherry County, an early Aquatic Habitat project was conducted to increase depth in this shallow natural Sandhills lake to improve fish growth and survival.

PHOTO BY BOB GRIER



Opposite: The locations of Nebraska waterbodies that have benefitted from Aquatic Habitat and Angler Access projects are statewide. Find more information at OutdoorNebraska.org/fisheriesprograms, or feel free to contact Aquatic Habitat Program Manager Mark Porath at mark.porath@nebraska.gov.

Right: The restoration of Summit Lake was prior to the addition of angler access into the Aquatic Habitat program. It still produces great fishing and is now getting access enhancements like a new ADA fishing pier added to this breakwater in 2017.



PHOTO BY JEFF KURBUS

Completing the Vision

The New Niobrara Confluence Wildlife Management Area

Story and photos
by Eric Fowler

From the hilltop lodge at Niobrara State Park, one can see for miles up, down and across the picturesque Missouri River. Now, thanks to a generous donor and other partners, much of the land and wetlands you can see in front of the park will forever be in the public trust, part of Niobrara Confluence Wildlife Management Area.

Stretching from the mouth of the Niobrara River 3 miles up this relatively unspoiled segment of the Missouri National Recreational River, the 1,225-acre tract contains a diverse mix of habitats that teem with fish and wildlife.

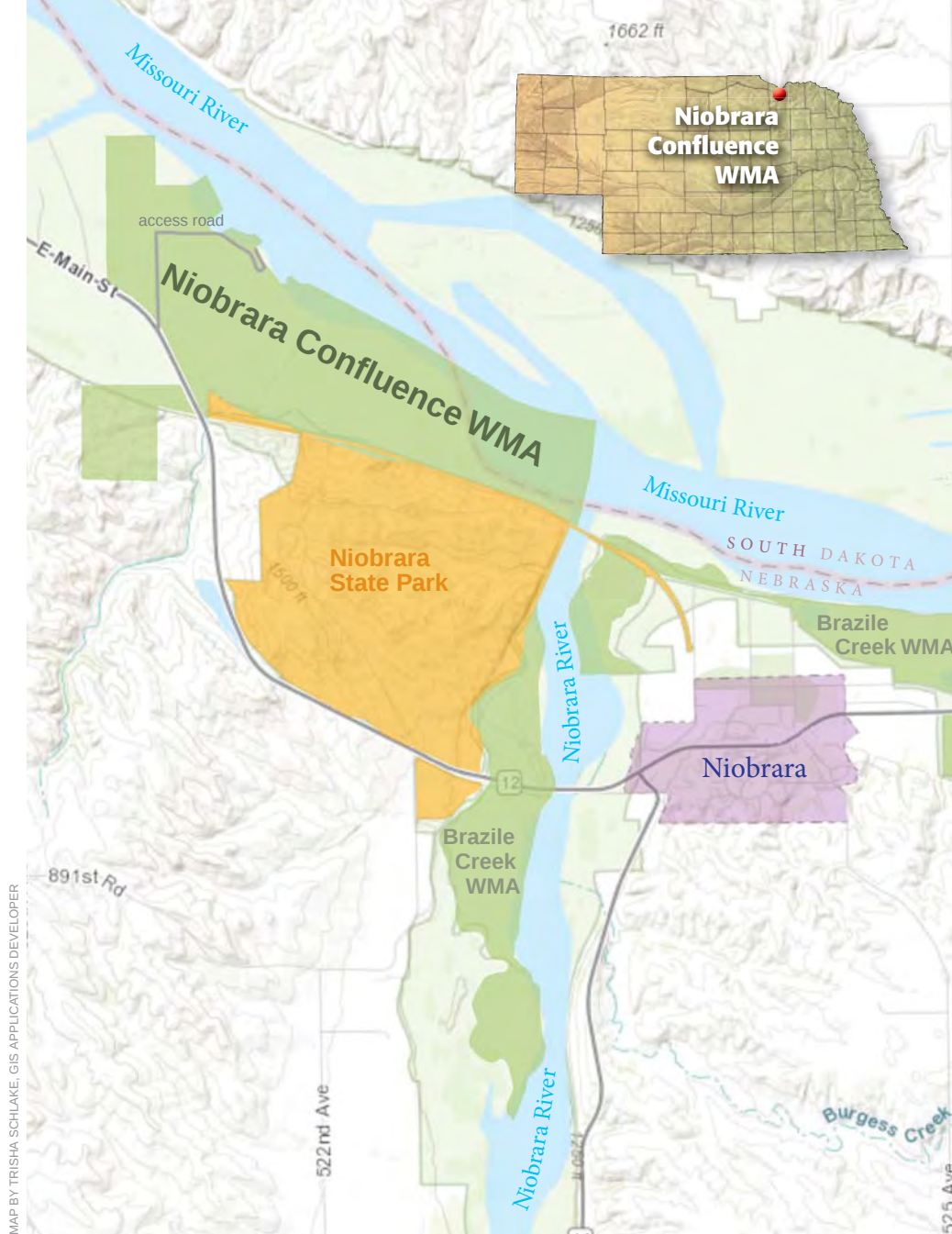


Theresa Fowler of Lincoln and Mary Snowden of Niobrara kayak through the backwaters of Niobrara Confluence Wildlife Management Area on the Missouri River.



ABOVE: The extent of Niobrara Confluence WMA and its wetlands and backwaters can be seen from the group lodge at Niobrara State Park. **BELOW:** A least tern sits on its eggs. The birds, a threatened species, nest on sandbars in the Missouri River.

Much of the bottomland is comprised of backwaters, wetlands and cattail marshes that fill the traces of the historic river channel and provide valuable habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds and other migratory birds. It includes bottomland prairie that was once farmed but abandoned due to rising groundwater levels and is now wet during periods of high river flows and always pocked with shallow wetlands, providing nesting habitat for grassland birds, including pheasants. In recent years, a pair of bald eagles has nested in a cottonwood growing along an old road in the midst of the backwaters. Sandbars on the river provide habitat for least terns and piping plovers, and the Niobrara River delta provides an abundance of shallow water for many water birds. A 120-acre parcel of land stretching from the bottomlands into the bluffs includes a mix of tall- and mixed-grass prairie and hardwood forest and is home to white-tailed and mule deer, wild turkeys and numerous woodland bird and mammal species. In all, the property is home to 25 resident bird species and visited by another 115 migratory species.



Niobrara Confluence WMA is a welcome addition to the public lands managed by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission near the village of Niobrara.

The waters of the area are home to many of the 64 native and introduced fish species that swim in the Missouri, including the endangered pallid sturgeon, the prehistoric paddlefish and numerous game fish including catfish, northern pike, small- and largemouth bass and sauger. False map turtles and other amphibians also call the area home.

The area, combined with the adjacent 1,647-acre Niobrara State Park and the 4,061-acre Brazile Creek WMA, which stretches from the Niobrara River 12 miles downriver to near Santee, will provide many recreational opportunities, including hunting, fishing, kayaking and bird watching, as well as an additional access point to the Missouri River. The state park's railroad trail runs between the properties and provides an elevated view of much of the property. An access road leads to a small concrete boat ramp in a backwater that connects to the Missouri.

Opening the land to the public was a long-time vision of landowner Tom Hastings, who began working with the Commission on the project more than 10 years ago. It is also a big part of why Ducks Unlimited (DU) stepped in to

work with the Commission and help facilitate the complicated process to make that vision a reality. Hastings donated a 227-acre portion of the property to DU, which last year transferred that property to the Commission. DU purchased the remaining 998 acres and held it until the Commission could secure the necessary funding to buy it back. That was accomplished through a \$473,000 grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust, a portion of which was used as matching funds to obtain another grant through the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, which distributes excise taxes paid on firearms and ammunition to the states.

“This is a great addition to the public lands which are enjoyed by a vast array of Nebraskans and our visitors,” said Commission Director Jim Douglas. “We can’t thank Mr. Hastings, Ducks Unlimited and the Nebraska Environmental Trust



A portion of Niobrara Confluence WMA located in the bluffs adjacent to the riverbottom includes prairie and hardwood forest.



A county road crossing the western portion of Niobrara Confluence WMA, which stretches for nearly 3 miles to the mouth of the Niobrara River, provides access from Highway 12 to a primitive boat ramp on a Missouri River backwater.

enough for helping make it happen.”

John Denton, manager of conservation projects for DU in Nebraska, said the size of the property increased the organization’s interest in the project. “It’s probably going to get as much or more use than 99 percent of the properties we work on,” he said. “Public use is a big deal for us. Being a conservation organization, we’re relying on there being other people who are enthusiastic about the same things we are and donating to our cause. If they don’t have a place to go view and enjoy these resources, then it depletes our donor base and volunteer

base and membership base, everything that makes us what we are and allows us to be so successful.”

There was a “big-time fringe benefit” of the project, too, Denton said. DU used the proceeds of the sale of the property to the Commission to obtain yet another grant, this one for \$973,000 from the North American Waterfowl Conservation Act (NAWCA). That money and \$1.8 million in matching funds from partners will be used to restore and enhance wetlands and improve access on Niobrara Confluence WMA, as well as another 1,000 acres of wetlands on other state and federal areas along the Missouri River including Bazile Creek, Ponca State Park, Elk Point Bend WMA and DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge, and on the Elkhorn River at Wood Duck WMA near Stanton and a Ducks Unlimited property near West Point.

There is considerable work to be done at Niobrara

Confluence. Proposed habitat improvements through the NAWCA grant include excavating shallow wetlands on the floodplain, removing a roadbed and filling a ditch that have altered the hydrology of the existing backwaters and wetlands, and controlling invasive species such as cattails and reed canary grass to improve the value of existing wetlands. A Nebraska Natural Legacy Program project is working to remove eastern red cedar and other invasive trees from the grassland and woodlands in the bluff portion of the property. And the remains of several cabins destroyed in the 2011 Missouri River Flood need to be removed. Future access points may be developed in conjunction with proposed improvements to Nebraska Highway 12.

While those improvements are pending, the area is receiving plenty of use, both from man and beast. And it’s only likely to see more. ■

Ten Tips for Insect Photography

Photos and story by Chris Helzer

Insects like this katydid nymph can be very satisfying to photograph – as long as they don't fly, jump, or crawl away first.

Have you ever wanted to take better photos of insects? Of course you have; insect photography tops every self-respecting outdoor enthusiast's list of aspirations. It's hard to hold your head high among your peers when they're showing off spectacular photos of leafhoppers and damselflies and all you have is a blurry shot of something that might have been a bee.

Worry no more, my friend. Here are 10 tips that will make you a better insect photographer. Many of these tips will also apply to other kinds of close-up (aka macro) photography, so if you can successfully photograph insects, you'll find that photographing flowers, tree bark, or your favorite Lego Minifigure will feel like child's play.

By the way, I may refer to spiders and other non-insects in this article, and yes, I know they're not insects. It's just a lot simpler to write "insects" than it is to write "arthropods" or "invertebrates." Don't be pedantic.

Tip #1. Be Prepared for Failure

Here's the hard reality: most insects aren't going to let you take their picture. Just when you've crept nearly close enough to get a smashing photo of a cute soldier beetle on a flower, the little bugger will almost always jump or fly away.

Alternatively, you'll knock the beetle off its perch yourself, with your big clumsy feet or elbows. You're going to get really frustrated. You'll find yourself on your hands and knees yelling bad words at a ladybug *who won't stand still for just a second*.

If you can't handle that degree of exasperation, you might as well stop reading right now and go find something easier to do – like putting together jigsaw puzzles with no pictures.

Tip #2. Approach Low and Slow

Stalking insects is much like stalking any other prey. Approach your quarry slowly and avoid making sudden moves that might draw attention to yourself. Try not to bump or step on plant stems that could hit the stem your subject is on. Be aware of your shadow and make sure it doesn't pass over the insect as you're creeping toward it. Most importantly, keep your head down. Like many other creatures, insects will most easily spot you when you obstruct their view of the sky. Stay low enough that your head is below the insect's view of the horizon and you'll have a decent chance of getting close enough for a photograph.

Tip #3. Camera Equipment

Before you go out, let's talk about the kind of camera equipment you'll need. There are a few important things to consider when you're shopping for insect photography gear.

You don't need to buy a camera that costs more than your car. All you need is something that lets you manually control exposure (shutter speed and aperture), allows interchangeable lenses, can attach to a tripod, and lets you remotely trigger the shutter, when necessary. Because you'll be working with very little depth-of-field, you'll need to manipulate the camera's aperture (more on that later) and often shoot with relatively slow shutter speeds. A basic

digital single lens reflex (DSLR) camera is probably your best option.

A macro lens is really important. There are cheaper options, including some magnifying lenses that screw onto your lens like a filter, but if you're

going to be serious about insect photography, start with equipment that won't limit you. A good lens may cost you several hundred dollars, but you'll be glad to have it. Look for a macro lens capable of a 1:1 magnification ratio, which means the projected image of a bee onto your camera's sensor will be the same size as the bee is in real life.

Some photographers like to use flash equipment for close-up photos of insects. I own a flash system, but rarely use it. However, if you plan to photograph insects in woodland or other shady places, or if you will be taking lots of photos of fast-moving insects like bees, flash can be really helpful. Look for flash systems that direct light at the subject from more than one direction simultaneously, using either

a ring flash or multiple flash units. Also, try to use flash as supplementary light, rather than at an intensity that illuminates the subject so brightly the background turns black.

Tip #4. Use a Tripod

Tripods can be unwieldy, especially when you're trying to photograph something close to the ground in dense vegetation. However, the added stability of a tripod has enough advantages to outweigh the hassles most of the time. When trying to maximize depth-of-field, you'll often need slow shutter speeds, and that can make it hard to hold a camera steady enough to avoid blurry images. A tripod can solve that, especially when you control the shutter remotely, either with a cord or a radio-controlled trigger.

In addition, however, a tripod can minimize the number of factors you are trying to deal with when taking insect photos. With a shallow depth-of-field, a camera movement of just a millimeter toward or away from the insect can cause it to go out of focus. A tripod helps reduce movement of your camera so all you have to worry about is the wind and the movements of the insect, which is plenty. Sometimes, when an insect is moving quite a bit, or the wind is blowing its perch around, I'll fold my tripod legs together and use it as a monopod. That way I can move with the insect, but still control camera shake and give myself a reasonable chance of getting that little stink bug in focus.

Tip #5. Make Your Camera Squint

Maximizing depth-of-field in macro photos means using small apertures (higher F-stop numbers). The effect is like squinting at the alarm clock without your glasses or contacts, or to just see something more clearly. When photographing insects, a larger f-stop number means more of the insect will be in focus (large f-stop number equals a small hole for light to pass through). The trade-off, of course, is the need for slower shutter speeds. Even with a tripod, there will be many times when an insect is moving enough that a shutter speed of 1/30 second or faster will be needed to freeze the action. Faster shutter speeds limit how much your camera can squint, especially in low light situations, so balancing aperture with shutter speed is always in the mind of an insect photographer.

Tip #6. Perpendicularity is Good

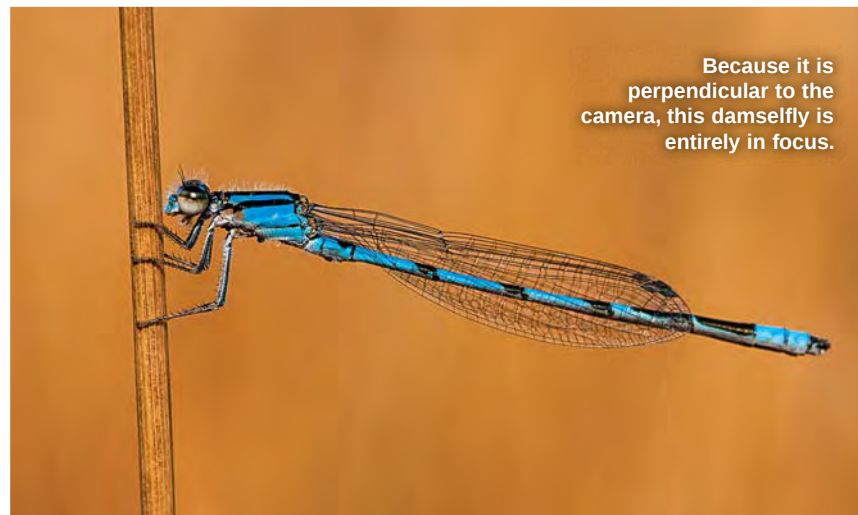
One way to limit frustration with depth-of-field is to position yourself so the insect is as perpendicular as possible to the camera. The flatter you can make the subject, the more of it will be in focus. Depending upon the situation, it's not always possible to control the angle from which you photograph, but sometimes just moving yourself a few inches one way or the other can make a big difference. If you can, think about the angle you want before you approach the insect. That will limit how much fiddling around you'll need to do when you're within shooting range, and will increase the chance of getting a photo before that butterfly flees the scene.

Tip #7. Aim for the Eye

When we look at other people our eye is automatically drawn to their eye(s). The same is true with insects, even if their eyes might look different (or be more numerous) than our own. If you can see the eye of the insect you're photographing, make sure it is in focus when you take the picture. Even if the majority of the insect is out of focus, get the eye sharp and the photo will likely work. Only on rare occasions is there a more appropriate focal point than the eye. In addition, although depth-of-field issues can make it tricky, don't be afraid to try for intimate face-to-face images of insects. If you don't scare the insect away (and you probably will) you might get a truly great photo.



Because depth-of-field is limited, make sure the eyes of tiny subjects are in focus. Wolf spider and offspring.



Because it is perpendicular to the camera, this damselfly is entirely in focus.



A fast shutter speed was needed to capture these mound building ants.

Tip #8. Pay Attention to the Background

When trying to keep track of focal point and depth of field while cursing softly under your breath at the wind and the spider that keeps shifting position, it can be easy to forget about what’s behind your subject. Unfortunately, the background of an image can easily ruin a photograph, even if you get everything else right. A nice clean background, free of distracting blurry stems or leaves, can create simple, elegant images that highlight the insect itself. On the other hand, sometimes it’s nice to include a background that shows the insect in its actual environment, creating a less studio-like photograph. In either case, the key is to make sure you’re making conscious choices about how you want the background to look. If your camera has a “depth-of-field preview” button, use it to check out the background before you shoot.

There are several ways to control the background in a close-up photo. The first is depth-of-field. A shallow depth-of-field will blur out everything behind the subject, creating a nice, simple image. However, because there are good reasons to maximize depth-of-field to ensure a sufficient amount of the insect will be in focus, this can create a tension. Again, there is no rule to follow here; just be thoughtful about the choices available to you, and if there’s time, experiment with both shallow and deeper depth-of-field options.

Background can also be controlled by your relative position to the subject. You can get down lower than the insect and frame it against a clean sky, for example, with or without a horizon line included. Sometimes, by moving slightly to one side or another, you can eliminate a pesky shadow or stray leaf that is creating a distraction behind the subject. In some situations, you can hold up your hand or hat to create a shadow behind the insect and prevent overly bright reflections from light-colored stems or leaves. Be very careful with this last strategy, of course, since both movement and shadows can easily spook your insect before you get the photo you want.

Finally, you can control background by physically moving objects around to get them out of the way of the shot. I do this all the time, but there are ethical boundaries to consider. It’s one thing to bend a grass leaf out of the way and tuck it behind another plant. It’s another thing to tear plants out by the roots because they’re in your shot. Remember that as a nature photographer, you’re there to capture the scene, not destroy it. Plus, by the time you mess around with moving distracting plants out of the way, your insect will have flown off long ago.

Tip #9. Take a Lot of Shots. Seriously.

One of the greatest advantages of digital photography is that, unlike with film photography, clicking the shutter button costs you nothing but time to sort through the resulting images. In the case of insect photography, this is a huge blessing. Between wind, moving insects, depth-of-field issues, messy backgrounds, and all the other complications you’re dealing with, getting everything right in the same shot is really difficult. It’s not unusual for me to take 100 photos of the same insect (assuming it sits still long enough to do that). Within those 100 photos, I’m trying different angles and composition options, creeping gradually closer to the insect, and experimenting with depth-of-field and shutter speed. Above all, I’m hoping that at least one of the images will come back with the insect’s eye in sharp focus, especially when that insect isn’t sitting perfectly still. Take way more photos than you think you’ll need; you’ll thank me.



Early morning dew both slowed and highlighted this salt marsh caterpillar.



Golden early morning light makes this photo of a ghost bee on silky prairie clover a winner.

Tip #10. Go Out When the Light is Good

In insect photography, as with any photography, light is the most important element. Getting good insect photos in the middle of a bright sunny day is almost impossible without using diffusers, flash, or other tricks to reduce the harshness of the bright light and contrasting dark shadows – and those tricks just add to the complexity of an already difficult task. Your camera’s sensor can’t handle the same range of light your eye can, so you’ll either get washed out highlights or black shadows, and either way, the resulting image will likely be disappointing. More importantly, photographs taken when the quality of light is high will result in more colorful and attractive images. The sun looks nearly white in mid-day, but is colorful during the early morning and late evening. That colorful light reflects from whatever it hits, making your insect and its background more attractive. In addition, reduced light intensity on bright, overcast days or during the early or late portions of the day eliminates distracting shadows and lets every nook and crevice of the insect shine through in your image. Journalism photographers have to shoot when the action is happening and do what they can with the light they get, but the rest of us have more control over when we go out. When you can, search for insects when the light is good; you’ll get better quality photos. Of course, this assumes any insects sit still long enough to be photographed.

BONUS TIP. Dewy Mornings!

Despite all the complications nature throws at insect photographers, there is one blessing bestowed upon insect photographers that makes up for everything: dewy mornings. Especially in the late summer, nature creates magical opportunities when a low morning sun angle provides soft golden light and the world is covered by glistening jewels of water droplets. Not only do dew drops create interesting and attractive subject matter, the cool temperatures and moisture also prevent insects from moving (much) until they warm up and dry out. It’s hard to imagine a better overall scenario for insect photographers, so if you wake up and see dew drops on still leaves outside, clear your schedule and go find some insects!

Last Thoughts

Some hunters and anglers say their satisfaction comes not from shooting a deer or catching fish, but from the pursuit, and the stories they can tell later. Regardless, it’s true that chasing deer, pheasants or fish makes you look at the world differently, and brings a different kind of enjoyment than just walking aimlessly down a trail. The same is true of insect photography. Despite the fact that most insects will escape before you capture their image (did I mention that?) you’ll find that just the bare attempt to find and photograph insects and other little creatures will open your eyes to a world you’d otherwise ignore.

As you develop a mental search image for insects, you’ll start seeing them everywhere – and not in a creepy way. Once you begin watching those insects closely, you’ll see behaviors and interactions that will stimulate your curiosity and sense of wonder. You’ll find a diversity of life you never imagined, and find yourself digging through books and internet sites trying to figure out what kind of moth has that cool wavy stripe across its wings. If you’re lucky and persistent, you might even get some nice, sharp photographs of insects. ■



The Forest in the Sand

The Nebraska National Forest at Halsey



The Forest's abundant windmills are vital to equestrians like Roger White from Kearney, Nebraska. Roger and his wife, Misty, camp and ride within the Forest's 142 square miles several times a year.



Trees cover about a quarter of the Nebraska National Forest. Being man-made, the Forest's natural grandeur contrasts its oddly straight edges within continually rolling Sandhills.

Freight trains following the Middle Loup River send sound waves deep into the Nebraska National Forest. Punctuated by the wail of their horns, the engines' hum filters southward through cedars, pines, junipers and firs until muffled to a whisper.

This is a peculiar forest. Rooted in abruptly transitioning sandy hills without the familiar contours of creeks, valleys or ridgelines, walking through it is disorienting – a roller coaster of trees. Equally curious are the unnaturally straight edges dividing woods from grasslands.

Viewed from above the Forest has a patchwork quality. Some sections are impenetrably thick – too daunting even for deer – though most are traversable. Not many people venture through on foot, so if you choose to be among the adventurous few you will find raw and scenic solitude. Take a map.

Situated southwest of Halsey, Nebraska, this implausible collage

of hand-planted trees and open hills comprise Nebraska's forest in the sand, created by ambitious men with practical objectives.

At a time when homesteaders and railroads needed wood, University of Nebraska Professor of Botany Dr. Charles E. Bessey foresaw a man-made forest on a landscape void of trees. Widely known for his grand vision, without resources it would remain visionary until 1891 when Bessey heard from the man who would help bring the forest to life – Bernhard E. Fernow, chief of the USDA Division of Forestry.

One year and 9,000 trees later, the experiment proven successful, Bessey and other advocates continued the



DR. CHARLES E. BESSEY

quest; it was a forest they wanted, not just a prototype. In 1902, President Theodore Roosevelt heard their voices and designated a forest reserve. That same year, the Charles E. Bessey Tree Nursery began growing saplings, and in 1904 the planting began.

Horse-drawn wagonloads and hand planting soon gave way to machines planting 20,000 sprigs per day. Today, trees cover 25,000 of 91,000 acres comprising the Nebraska National Forest, and the Bessey Nursery is a regional powerhouse in tree sales.

Nursery Manager Richard Gilbert and staff produce 1.5 million bare-root trees per year. Skinny as a pencil and about a foot tall, they grow outdoors in long, orderly rows. Eastern red cedar, Rocky Mountain juniper, American plum, chokecherry, and 40-some other varieties sell to several state and federal agencies for land conservation and habitat.

Greenhouses grow another 900,000

species such as spruce, pine and fir which replenish forests devastated by fire or bark beetles. "Very small trees are preferred," said Gilbert. "They're easier to plant in rocky ground."

Living on the grounds near headquarters, botany-obsessed Gilbert often treks into the woods where he once came upon a freshly killed young deer as its killer, a bobcat, came up behind him. "It was not very happy with me, but it was an amazing experience," he said.



Situated southwest of Halsey, Nebraska, the Nebraska National Forest is a year-round destination for diverse groups of outdoors people.



Camped nearby, kids gaze over the Middle Loup River before sunset. Forest campgrounds come alive in the evenings.



Luke and Kayla Fries of Grand Island share a loving campsite moment with daughter Rayan during their second family reunion in the Forest.

The Nebraska National Forest experience is a mystery to most Nebraskans. Many will say they have driven past, some might have climbed Scott Lookout Tower for a bird’s-eye view, but few truly know what is beyond the entrance. Two categories of recreationists know it well, however, and divergent as they are, they have one thing in common: horsepower.

It is counterintuitive that horses and all-terrain vehicles could coexist in one place. Their riders seek opposites: sand-churning speed versus peaceful exploration. But the Forest is large; western regions are for equestrians while all-terrain people stick to the east. Loud engines are inaudible miles away in the peaceful Natick campground where horses munch hay in individual pens.

Windmills brimming with water are crucial to Forest riders; nearby rivers are not accessible and the quick-draining sand does not hold surface water. Roger and Misty White of

Kearney camp in Natick several times a year. Riding windmill to windmill on their horses Hellno and Trouble, they sometimes team up with new campground friends. “We love the fellowship with the other horse people,” said Roger, “but it’s also about peaceful rides, quiet camping and starry skies. Horses don’t need horseshoes in the sand but they have to work harder. It’s good for them.”

Camping is allowed anywhere, and some groups form their own communities just off road, circling campers and trailers like wagon trains. One circled group of Iowans cooks over coals as their horses run loose in the section where they camp. “We have been coming to this spot for 20 years,” said Jeff Pierce of Colfax, Iowa. “Windmills are landmarks for us, helping us keep on course,” Pierce said. “We have been a little misplaced, but we always find our way back. Other Iowans we talk to can’t imagine a riding area so huge.”



One large section of the Nebraska National Forest comprises a labyrinth of 4-wheeler trails. Here atop the Forest’s “Hill Climb,” ATV and UTV riders spin donuts in the sand.

Their camp is in the middle of the Forest near all-terrain vehicle trails, so sometimes the groups converge. “The four-wheelers respect our horses and yield the trail to us,” said Pierce. “It has been a good relationship.”

All-terrain vehicles, “quads,” are a mix of smaller, one-seater ATVs and larger UTVs (utility terrain vehicles) with side-by-side seats and payload bed. With fat, deeply grooved tires, springy racing shocks and powerful engines, UTVs are more dune buggy than utility cart and most trails here are not for beginners.

Loren Eaton, recreation specialist, is no UTV rookie. Racing away from the setting sun along the aptly named Poison Ivy Trail, he guns the engine through narrow straightaways and fishtails around steep NASCAR-style turns created by decades of spewing sand. Tightly buckled and full-face helmeted, Eaton slows when approaching blind spots and hilltops, hoping that others do the same.

Wrecks are common in the Forest – on quads and from horseback. Eaton, also a local volunteer rescue captain, is a first responder. Normally his rescue UTV suffices, but at times he summons medivac helicopters to pluck serious cases from remote areas.

The trail finally emerges onto the

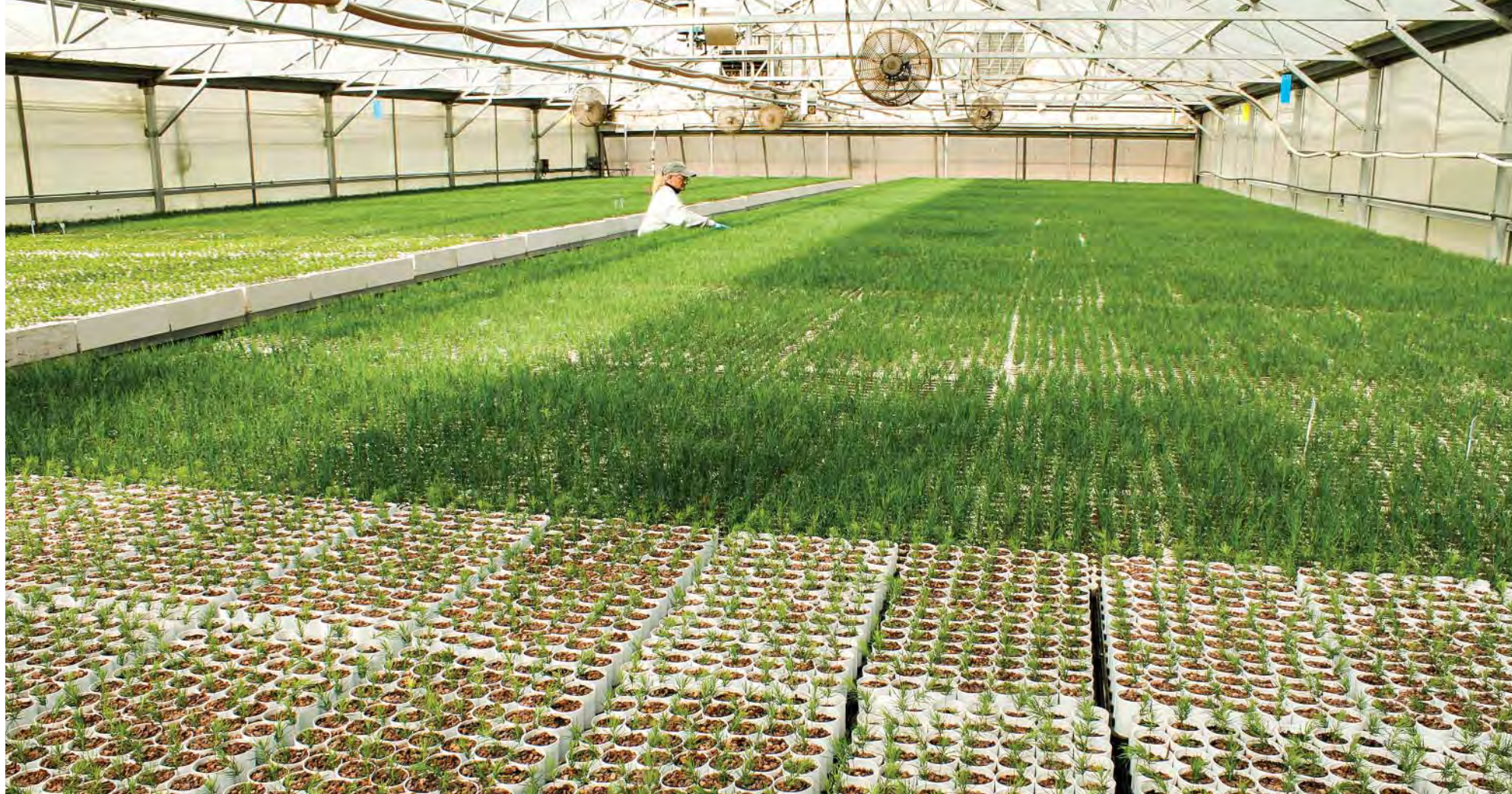
region’s quad-riding Mecca, the climbing hill. Abuzz with donut-spinning riders, hell bent for speed, it is steep – climb fast or spin out. Target sand moguls at the bottom and launch four wheels off the sand! It’s a circus.

Foraging deer barely notice us as we noisily return to camp. They are much warier of men on foot, especially late in the year when 200 to 300 will fall prey to hunters.

We arrive at the most popular campground near the Forest’s northeast entrance, full of campers this warm June evening. Colorful quads dot the grounds, helmets resting on spring-loaded seats ready for tomorrow’s outing. It smells of burgers as families gather around picnic tables.

After a day of fishing in the pond or swimming in the river, vacationers are happy. Everyone offers me food. Parents in lawn chairs watch the kids play. Up the hill, a family reunion bustles with Frisbee throwing in a camping complex made for such groups. Up a distant road, the state’s 4-H complex attracts larger family reunions and kids’ groups.

Two-wheel drive vehicles cannot access Whitetail campground in the Forest’s southernmost region. Remotely set near the Dismal River, it brings a mixture of quad riders, horse



The Charles E. Bessey Tree Nursery produces 900,000 pine saplings indoors per year and another 1.5 million various tree species outdoors.



Fire is essential to healthy prairies. In springtime, if conditions allow, yellow-clad “burn crews” converge on the Forest’s grasslands to conduct highly orchestrated blazes.

people and campers, including one pair of impromptu nudists startled to see my SUV round their private nook. “Sorry!” shouts the man as they scramble for clothing.

Loren Eaton is not surprised to hear of nudists. He has seen all kinds of antics and incidents. “Most commonly, people don’t take a map and they get lost,” he said. “Some are lost overnight, and in emergencies cell companies will ping phones to give us the general vicinity.” And people get stuck in the sand. “It’s the first time some of them have ever left the pavement.” But standard visitors are rural folks with big tires and high clearance who know about dicey roads.

Forest staffers are largely rural, too. “We have a lot of former ranch hands,” said Julie Bain, district ranger. “It’s a competent bunch who can fix things.” Bain lives here and loves it. “We are much less visited than mountain forests,” she said. “You have a real opportunity for seclusion on hikes or

on horseback.” Recently, Julie heard rifle shots and redirected her horse to investigate. Coming around a bend she found a man sighting in his rifle. Stunned to see her, the man declared, “I’ve been coming out here for 47 years, and I’ve never seen another person!”

“I often get puzzled looks when I tell people where I work,” Bain said. “There’s a forest in Nebraska!?” “But the locals know it well. It’s a playground for them.”

Julie looks after the land’s well-being and to remain healthy, grasslands need fire. “Prairies evolved with fire,” said Bain. “To maintain a healthy ecosystem our goal is to burn 10,000 acres each year.” Controlled burns are much about getting rid of invasive plants like cedar trees that can overtake grasslands. “From an ecological standpoint, this land is amazingly intact,” Bain said. “It didn’t get plowed up during the Dust Bowl, grazing has been well managed, and invasive

species don’t do well here.”

Pocket gophers rule by sheer quantity within mounds that carpet the Forest’s hills, but large animal tracks are perpetually visible. It’s sand, so their every step leaves a print – something we hard-dirt people find mesmerizing.

Walk far enough in these hills and you may flush a covey of quail or sharp-tailed grouse, the flying jugs of the prairie. Accompanied by songbirds you will likely spook deer, maybe turkeys, perhaps a distant antelope. Evenings bring crickets, yipping

coyotes, hooting owls, and emerging badgers. As people bed down for the night among the trees rooted deeply in sand, engines cooled, horses resting, the Forest comes alive.

This is Nebraska’s paradoxical masterpiece. As the Dismal and Middle Loup waters flow silently past, the legacy of Dr. Bessey and his determined associates lives on. ■

Mark Harris is the Associate Director of the University of Nebraska State Museum.



Alia Bejot of Ainsworth drops her line off the deck overlooking the Forest’s pond.

Roles for Kids

If you can get a child outside, which you can, you can find something they're passionate about.

By Jeff Kurrus

Every time I talk about the image below, which is a lot, I always go back to the response of the little girl on the left side of the frame. This is Brylee Heard, sister of Jake who is on the right of the image and was the focus of the April, 2018 article "Countdown for the Crew."

It was Jake's first-ever bullfrog hunt and one of many for my daughter, Madeline, who is in the center.

Brylee is not a fan of blood or any of the other results of a good hunt. She also has no desire to touch a fish, much less a slimy, smelly bullfrog. It was a surprise she opted to go on this hunt in the first place.

However, she was ecstatic about shining lights in their eyes while her

brother and friend grabbed them from the pond edges that night.

And she was really good at it, spotting frogs that no one else in the boat could see. With that in mind, here are a few other roles that kids can play on hunting and fishing trips that might just further their interest in the outdoors, creating their own unique relationship with those activities that life-longers have enjoyed forever.

Waterfowl hunting – setting decoys, waving goose flags, calling.

Small pond fishing – running the trolling motor; cooling everyone down with waterguns during hot-water trips.

Turkey hunting – calling, especially push-button and box calls. Also making decisions on when to move and when to sit still.

Big lake fishing – glassing for gulls when white bass and wiper fishing; using GPS and topographical maps to help with location changes.

Deer hunting – setting up trail cameras and pinpointing the best spot for a ladder stand location; helping build food plots, especially throwing seed.

Ice fishing – pulling along a sled, first for carrying equipment, and later for riding across the ice.

Regardless of your outdoor pursuit, understand that a kid may see that activity differently than you do. This alternate point of view isn't necessarily a negative.

Just because they don't want to pick up a frog doesn't mean they're not a frog hunter. ■



Brylee Heard, Madeline Kurrus and Jake Heard celebrate after a successful Sarpy County frog hunt.

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

from NEBRASKAland's Trail Tales magazine for kids

junior journal

interesting notes for readers of all ages

by Monica Macoubrie and Donna Schimonitz

Build a Fort – Make it Your Own!

By Julia Plugge, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

Do you dream of building your own ultimate fort? Maybe you want a special place to play or hide? Forts provide shelter from the weather, a secret hiding spot, outdoor nook to read a book, or a clubhouse for friends to hang out.

Outdoor forts are a lot of fun and easy to make. Summer is the perfect time to break out your fort-building skills. Using only a few supplies, you will soon have your own outdoor hideout!

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Find the best place – Locate an area with large trees and low-hanging branches, fallen logs, bushes, a swing set structure, or clothesline poles to serve as your scaffolding. If this is not available – an open area in the yard of your choice will work. Large branches leaning in on each other can make a base for your fort.

2. Gather materials – The best forts are built using natural materials found outside – fallen branches, sticks, twigs, fallen leaves, mowed grass,

etc. Your fort also can be made with pallets, rocks, recycled lumber or even snow.

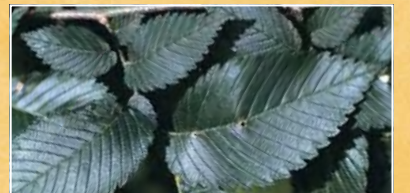
3. Start building – Arrange your taller branches vertically on a tree, securing the top of the branch directly up against a "Y" shape within the tree with the base of the branch angled out. Use a clothesline pole or swing set as your main frame if no tree is available. Tie branches together with string or rope for added support. Close in your fort with lightweight sticks around the outside frame. Don't forget to leave a space open for your door.

4. Fill fort and decorate – Unleash your imagination; make the inside of the fort your own space. Use leaves, grass, vines, clippings, or bark as your floor. You could sit on a pile of leaves, tarp or stump for a seat.

5. Do not stop building – Your fort should be an ongoing project. Continue to fill in the sides with twigs as they fall onto the ground. Make the fort as big as your imagination. 🌿

Tree ID

Identify the leaves in each photo as cottonwood, maple, bur oak, ginkgo, black walnut or American elm.



Answers, top to bottom: GINKGO, MAPLE, BUR OAK, COTTONWOOD, BLACK WALNUT, AMERICAN ELM.

Compass plant photo by Jon Farar

NATURE CALENDAR

- Watch the Perseids meteor shower: July 17-August 24, 2018
- Compass plants can be found all across the prairie: all summer
- Grasshopper eggs hatch: middle to late June
- Look for robins and other songbirds molting: late August through September



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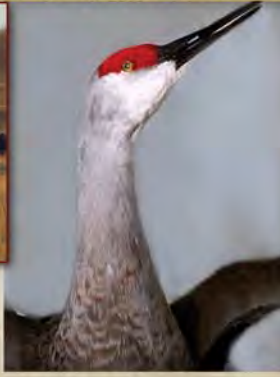
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The Outdoorsman's Advocate

Every year, legislation is introduced at the state and federal level that affects how we use and enjoy our public lands and waters. Safari Club International as well as the Nebraska Chapter are constantly striving to improve our opportunities in the great outdoors.

Not only are we monitoring legislation on the national level, but we are also watching closely and informing our members of any actions at the state level that may affect us all.

Most of us are not aware of the projects our own Game and Parks Commission undertake on a day-to-day basis. The actions we take on the local level are important to support how effective our managers can be as custodians of our game and lands.

Nebraska Chapter SCI informs our members through e-mail alerts and social media posts on issues that we feel are important. We also provide tips on effective ways to communicate with legislatures and commissioners.



Each spring, SCI Members visit with their elected representatives during the annual Lobby Day to advocate for hunters' rights.

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For more information on all of our activities or to sign up for e-mail alerts you can go to nebraskasafariclubint.com or you can e-mail nebraska.safariclubint@gmail.com or call (402) 214-8270.

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Scallion and Ginger Baked Walleye

A French technique called “en papillote,” this walleye dish is cooked “in parchment” paper.

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

Fish gently cooks in these parchment packets, creating their own steam and staying moist. Allow each guest to open up their own packet at the table. The aromas that fill the room will be a fun surprise. If you don't have parchment paper on hand, then heavy-duty foil would work just as well.

The vegetables listed below are only suggestions. Use whatever greens and herbs you like best. The scallion, ginger and soy sauce makes this dish salty enough to enjoy with white rice.

Servings: 4

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Cooking Time: 15-20 minutes

Ingredients:

- 4 walleye fillets
- Kosher salt and freshly cracked pepper
- 1½ cups of grape or cherry tomatoes, halved
- 8 ounces of fresh green beans
- 1 shallot, thinly sliced
- 2 tablespoons of olive oil
- Cooked jasmine white rice
- Special Equipment: parchment paper

Scallion-Ginger Soy Sauce

- 2 tablespoons of peanut oil
- ¼ teaspoon of Asian dark sesame seed oil
- 3 green onions, white and light green parts finely julienned
- 2-inch by ½-inch piece of fresh ginger, peeled and finely julienned
- ¼ cup of soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon of rice vinegar
- 2 teaspoons of sugar
- 1 Thai chili, minced (optional)

1. Preheat oven to 400° Fahrenheit. Cut 4 sheets of parchment paper into 12- by 12-inch squares. Fold each



sheet in half and divide tomatoes, green beans and sliced shallot between each sheet, laying ingredients only on one side of the fold. Sprinkle salt, pepper and drizzle a little olive oil over vegetables.

2. Rinse walleye fillets under cold water and pat dry with paper towels. Check for bones. Lay one fillet over vegetables and sprinkle salt, pepper and drizzle olive oil over fish.

3. Fold the parchment over fish and vegetables. Then starting at one end of the fold, make little folds on top of each other to form a sealed packet around ingredients. If necessary, cut a half circle around the ingredients to get rid of excess parchment to seal more neatly.

4. Lay packets on a cookie sheet(s); do not overlap. Bake walleye for 15-20 minutes in a 400° F oven until fish is cooked through. Do not open packets

mid-way to check doneness – you will lose the steaming effect.

5. While the fish is in the oven, make the scallion-ginger soy sauce. Gently heat peanut oil, sesame oil, julienned green onion and ginger in a small saucepan until warmed, but do not brown. Take off heat and mix in the rest of the ingredients.

6. Serve fish immediately. Eat right out of the packet or slide everything onto a plate. Give the scallion-ginger sauce a good whisk before drizzling over fish. Serve immediately with hot jasmine white rice. ■

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



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A Life Well Worn

It wasn't until I finally shot the turkey that I noticed what had happened to my boot. It was twice as large as normal, a clown shoe of sorts, and the first line of my internal dialogue was "I don't feel injured."

Yet something still wasn't right. Both of my feet were wet, as they often get when turkeys pitch down from their roost on the wrong side of the creek and I'm forced to quickly head them off. But these boots had been wet and muddy before. They were my three-season, do-everything walking boots that have accompanied me everywhere from Dawes to Richardson counties and all places in between.

Now I had a massively swollen foot – so swollen, I thought, that I must have broken something when I slipped from a dirt wall I was trying to climb earlier in the morning. Yet it didn't hurt at all. Perhaps I was in shock. I sat on a log and looked at the sole of my boot. Through the caked-on mud I could see my sock. My sock? Why was I seeing my sock?

Then I smiled, finally understanding that this is what a boot looks like when you've worn it so much that you have completely torn out its rubber sole.

Some might believe a boot isn't worth its weight if it doesn't last a certain number of years, but I'm not one of those. I remembered a conversation I once had with former *NEBRASKAland* writer Jon Farrar. Every gun, he said, needs at least a few scratches on it.

I think boots do, too. And, if they get enough scratches, they will fall apart on their lucky owner.

Quite often, I am approached by a friend or colleague trying to convince me that I need the newest in new technology or gear. I usually counter with the question, "Do you think it will hold up?" I need rods and reels that can outlast a trip or two down a dusty Sandhills road, a bow that won't rust when I want to archery hunt during a rainstorm, and a pair of boots that will, at some point, spontaneously combust – yet only after leading me on one of my most memorable turkey hunting ventures of the season. ■

Jeff Kurrus
May 9, 2018



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