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Cover: A white-tailed buck deer buck walks through a Cass County woodland. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

This page: Pheasant hunt at Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge. BOB GRIER, NEBRASKALAND

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



HUNTING AND HARVEST

A field of corn stalks are silhouetted against an early November sunset in Sarpy County.

JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND



The elusive and seldom seen, eastern black rail. WILLIAMBURT.COM

THREATENED AND ENDANGERED: THE BLACK RAIL

By Joel G. Jorgensen

Most people have heard of the fabled Sasquatch, but far fewer are familiar with the mythical creature known as the black rail. The former serves as a useful comparison for the latter, not with respect to its size or validity of its existence, but in its trademark elusiveness.

The sparrow-sized black rail inhabits dense marsh vegetation, usually stays out of sight and vocalizes infrequently. Many sightings of black rail are brief glimpses of a small, dark bird lasting not more than a second. The brevity of observations and its similarity to other species, such as the far more common Sora, often leaves an observer trying to make sense of what they encountered. Few observations are supported by hard evidence such as photographs or audio recordings. Thus, this little marsh dweller almost becomes a creature of dreams and folklore, like that big hairy hominin, rather than one that can be experienced in the here and now.

The eastern black rail (*Laterallus jamaicensis*) inhabits the eastern and central United States and was federally listed as threatened in late 2020. As a result, and because of how Nebraska's endangered species law is structured, the species automatically became state listed at the same time. However, the black rail is not known to regularly occur in the state and, in fact, there are only two widely accepted records in the past 40 years. Its primary range is to the south and east along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. There are a handful of other reports from Nebraska since the late 1800s, some credible and others not so much.

So is the black rail more common in Nebraska than is known? Has the species been looked for? Since 2013, biologists with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and its partners have conducted more than 1,300 call playback surveys where trained observers play the black rail's call in the hopes this will elicit a response from a real bird. Out of all those surveys, only one black rail was detected. Thus, it appears the black rail truly is a very rare bird in the state and only occurs as a rare migrant or vagrant.

The black rail is a species that has declined throughout its range because of many factors, but like many other marsh birds, wetland loss and alteration is a major driver. More than 90 percent of all breeding season records are from coastal areas, so its future and fate likely will be determined by the effectiveness of conservation efforts in those areas. With small localized breeding populations as close to Nebraska as central Kansas and southeastern Colorado, there is always the possibility a black rail could be seen or heard at a Nebraska wetland.

However, it happens so infrequently its presence here remains something almost of legend and superstition. Just like Sasquatch, having a camera or an audio recorder handy and acquiring indisputable proof will go a long way in convincing the skeptics if you encounter one.

Joel G. Jorgensen is the nongame bird program manager for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

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While strutting is most commonly associated with breeding in the spring, toms will gobble and raise their feathers at other times of the year. These Pine Ridge toms were showing off in November 2020. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

A THANKSGIVING TURKEY

By Todd Mills

It's not often in hunting that you get to pursue the same bird during two different times of the year, but in Nebraska, the wild turkey will give you this opportunity.

The sound of a lonesome tom during the spring is what drives me to pursue them so passionately. If you've ever experienced it, and particularly at close range, you know what I mean. Hunting them in the fall, however, requires a different approach.

Change Your Strategy

Hunting turkeys during the fall requires completely different tactics as they prepare for the winter season. Turkeys hatch their eggs in the early summer. So, unlike hunting turkeys in the spring, birds are young and not nearly as intelligent. Hens and late-spring hatched birds travel together in large flocks. It's not unusual to find hens together with their young, and toms are always close by.

The strategy I've used with success in the fall is to break up a flock, scattering birds in different directions. Set up a blind close to where you broke them up under a tree and start calling. More times than not, those birds will travel back, curious to the sounds and wanting to be with their group.

Stay patient and concealed, and you will likely get an opportunity. Decoys can be effective as well, but I would suggest using only hens this time of year. The sight of a large tom on his own in the fall may send them packing.

Find Travel Routes

Fall turkeys are a bit more predictable than spring birds. Since no mating and nesting is involved, they tend to follow the same patterns. They also feed longer, as they prepare for the winter months ahead. Find a travel route between roosting areas and feed plots and you're likely to fill a tag; hunters may purchase two turkey permits in the fall, and each permit allows two birds.

Set up on fence lines, game trails and meadow areas where they could be traveling through. Make sure you're concealed in the shadows or in a blind as they'll pick up on any movement. Remain patient as birds won't always move at the same time. Weather conditions and the time of year all play a factor in their daily routine.

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Nebraska offers some of the best turkey hunting in the country, with three different subspecies of turkeys, including the popular Merriam's. It also offers long seasons, affordable permits and 1.2 million acres of public and public-access land in Nebraska. You also can harvest both sexes in the fall, unlike in the spring when only male tags are available.

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Wild turkey salad seasoned with cranberries and tarragon. JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND

WILD TURKEY SALAD

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

Over crackers, in a sandwich or scooped over a bed of fresh greens, this is my go-to turkey salad recipe for leftover Thanksgiving dinner or made from scratch with a wild bird. Tarragon — a classic French herb — has an anise, or licorice-like, aroma and used sparingly, can transform any poultry dish. Tart cranberries, lemon zest and juice add balance and brightness to this creamy salad.

Skip the brine if you wish, but wild turkey dries out easily. This simple brine will add flavor and ensure that your wild turkey breast will stay moist in the oven.

Servings: 4

Prep Time: 4 hours and 20 minutes

Cooking Time: 45 minutes

Ingredients:

- 1 wild turkey breast
- 4 cups of water
- ¼ cup kosher salt
- ¼ cup brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- Freshly cracked pepper
- Mrs. Dash Seasoning Blend
- 1 rib of celery, finely diced

- ½ cup mayonnaise or to taste
- ¼ teaspoon dried tarragon
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- ½ cup dried cranberries
- Zest of one lemon
- 1 tablespoon of lemon juice

1. To make the brine, combine water, kosher salt and brown sugar, and stir until dissolved. Submerge turkey breast into the brine; use a plate to weigh it down. Refrigerate for 2 to 4 hours; the longer you allow the meat to sit in the brine, the saltier it will taste.

2. Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Remove turkey breast from the brine and rinse with cold water. Pat dry with paper towels. Rub with olive oil and season with cracked black pepper; I also used a bit of Mrs. Dash.

Place breast on a rimmed cookie sheet and bake for about 40 minutes or until internal temperature reaches 160 degrees. Once cooked through, allow breast to cool.

3. Dice or shred turkey breast. Place meat into a medium bowl and mix with mayonnaise, tarragon, Dijon mustard, cranberries, lemon zest, lemon juice and cracked black pepper to taste. Adjust the amount of mayonnaise to your liking. Chill before serving.



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Honoring a Conservation Legend

After 47 years of service, including nine years serving as director of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Jim Douglas is retiring. He has celebrated a lifetime of conservation accomplishments.

“Ask yourself what kind of world you want to live in and leave for your kids,” said Director Jim Douglas, a statement that says so much about what he has accomplished during his 47 years in conservation.

For the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, he has served in a variety of roles, including the district supervisor and chief of the Resources Services Division, chief of the Wildlife Division and deputy director of Administration. His last nine years were served as the agency’s director, where his contributions locally and nationally were immense.

Originally from Illinois, Jim’s relationship with the natural world came early. He often tells a story from his childhood that mirrors his future work in conservation. “I spent a lot of time in the woods and the creeks. But there was a rule; until I was a certain age, I could only go to the first creek. There were three parallel creeks that were about a quarter mile apart, so I could go down into the first creek when I was 6 years old. But I had to be 8 or 9 before I could go to the second creek — older, wiser. I couldn’t go to the third creek until I was about 12. And after I made it to the third creek and saw all of its wonders, one of my older brothers said, “Well, that’s nothing. If you keep going, there’s a river.”

Jim’s passion for natural resources fueled his long, distinguished career in conservation. “I have always appreciated how Jim was able to look down the road amongst the traffic weaving in and out to try to proactively address the next wildlife resource challenge,” said Ritch Nelson, state wildlife biologist and forester for the Nebraska-Natural Resources Conservation Service. “His work in regard to

forming the Nebraska Bird Partnership in the early 2000’s is a good example among many such efforts by Jim.”

Partnerships and servitude have long been an excellent way to describe Jim’s efforts in conservation. He has served on the Federal Aid Joint Task Force, the Monarch Joint Venture Steering Committee and the National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative. He chaired AFWA’s Agricultural Conservation Committee and the Wildlife Resource Policy Committee, and has served on the Executive Committee, Bird Conservation Committee and the Fish & Wildlife Health Committee, among others.

“Jim Douglas is the consummate professional, and his contributions to the work of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, on national policy, are countless,” said Ron Regan, executive director of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. “His years of experience as a leader and his consistent, thoughtful and wise counsel have made him one of our ‘go to’ directors for managing the complex conservation issues of our day. He brings the same passion to interactions with peers and colleagues, at a personal scale, all across the country.”

For Douglas, it is those peers and colleagues — landowners, conservationists, and fish and wildlife staff here and across the country — who make the difference. “I have been blessed to work with great commissioners and talented, dedicated staff,” Douglas added.

“I recognize our greatest strengths are not our personal achievements; they are our successful collaborations,” Douglas said. “It takes working together to care for our fish, wildlife, parklands and natural resources, and I know my contributions will be continued and built upon by others who also want to see healthy lands, wildlife and waters available for generations to come.

“That, I believe, is the greatest gift we can give to future generations.” 📍

Jim Douglas, director of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission from 2012 until his retirement this month, has had a lifelong love of conservation and the outdoors. Director Douglas speaks at the Fort Robinson State Park 1891 Officers Quarters Dedication in June 2021. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



In 2013, the Commission returned to the Nebraska State Fair in grand fashion with a 12-foot waterfall, aquarium, shooting activities and games providing interactive learning opportunities for thousands of Nebraskans. ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

Created by Douglas, the Commission's communications division connects people with outdoor Nebraska through marketing and public relations, social media, special events and programs, outreach and skills-based education.

These efforts have helped grow the agency's customer base and participation in many outdoor activities, such as hunting, fishing, boating, camping and wildlife viewing.



One of the many successful ways Douglas has worked to recruit youth has been through supporting mentored hunting programs and skills-based education programs. ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



Creation of family-friendly shooting ranges and the addition of ranges at parks across the state have helped grow shooting sports participation. JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND

“Jim Douglas was key to the development of the Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation plan. He understands that the Commission needs to create opportunities for our user groups. He also knows how important it is to keep our sportsmen and sportswomen actively engaged if our outdoor heritage and traditions are going to remain healthy and survive. This is why you can always count on Jim Douglas to work tirelessly to make R3 a success.”

– Mark Pinkerton, former Nebraska Game and Parks Commissioner



Douglas recognized the importance of increasing kids' curiosity in the outdoors and engaging them at an early age. He expanded educational programming in parks and created a new division to engage teachers and families with outdoor Nebraska.

Educator Amanda Filipi teaches elementary students about yucca pods at the newly created Wildcat Hills Nature Center. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

The new Schramm Education Center is at the heart of the Venture Parks Complex and teaches guests about Nebraska's wildlife and ecosystems.

JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

During Douglas' tenure, he created Venture Parks at four popular state parks and recreation areas along the Platte River — Eugene T. Mahoney State Park, Platte River State Park, Schramm Park State Recreation Area and Louisville State Recreation Area. The goal of Venture Parks is to engage new users and create future generations of park patrons. The expanded features were possible thanks to innovative public and private partnerships.

The creation of the Commission's Fish and Wildlife Education division highlights Douglas' desire to create a conservation-minded society and getting all ages curious about the natural world. From outdoor discovery programs across the state to the ever-expanding Trout in the Classroom program, the Commission is well positioned to build the next generation of outdoor stewards.

"Jim has been a strong ambassador for conservation over the years, including his critical thinking on challenging issues and his ability to bring teams together at the state and national level to solve those problems. On a personal note, Jim has been a sage counsel and a bright light for other conservation leaders through his guidance, encouragement and support. He truly is a mentor of mentors. I'm thankful for all the ways he has positively pushed conservation forward during his tenure."

– Sara Parker Pauley, AFWA past president and Missouri Department of Conservation director





During Douglas' tenure Nebraska worked with partners to develop plans to improve pheasant habitat. Pheasants have been released annually on wildlife management areas across the state to provide special hunting opportunities for Nebraska's youth.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

The National Wild Pheasant Conservation Plan is a collaboration among 24 state wildlife agencies and Pheasants Forever. Finalized in 2013, it provided a blueprint for restoring and maintaining pheasant populations across the country and addressed states' collective conservation goals in today's agricultural landscapes.

The Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies asked Nebraska Game and Parks' Director Jim Douglas to facilitate hiring the plan's coordinator — a critical role in moving the plan forward — and to provide the groundwork in creating interstate partnerships across the pheasant range.

In Nebraska, Jim has been a champion for the Berggren Plan, which has been aimed at growing the state's pheasant population and increasing land open to hunting.

The plan, named for the late Nebraska Game and Parks Commissioner Lynn Berggren, continues to grow since its 2016 inception with the goal of making Nebraska one of the best upland bird hunting locations in the country.

“There were a lot people who were involved in putting all the pieces together, but I think Jim was the plan's champion. He was in a unique position of being in Nebraska — a state where pheasants are still important — and he has great relationships with other directors across the country and Pheasants Forever. All these things came together through Jim.”

– Dr. Scott Taylor
National Wild Pheasant Conservation Plan
Coordinator, Pheasants Forever & MAFWA



The Commission has expanded fish and wildlife research to help guide management practices and the development of several management plans, including the Coolwater Stream Management Plan, the River Otter Management Plan, the Berggren Plan for Pheasants, the Mountain Lion Management Plan, the Bighorn Sheep Management Plan and the Elk Management Plan, which is currently underway.

Chadron State College students join Commission staff and volunteers to release a bighorn sheep ewe back to the wild after equipping it with a new radio collar near Chadron State Park. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



Conservation Officer Ethan Teter teaches a kayak class at Outdoor Discovery Day at Platte River State Park in Cass County. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND



Pictured is a monarch butterfly in the hands of a child in Sarpy County. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

Director Douglas increased law enforcement personnel, resources and support to help protect our natural resources and the people of the state who enjoy our outdoor amenities.



Nebraska Conservation Officers were recognized by the Commission in 2021 for working with partners to solve one of the largest poaching cases in Nebraska’s history. From left to right: Commissioner Pat Berggren, Director Jim Douglas, Officer Mike Thome, Officer Stacy Lewton, Officer Travis Shepler, Administrator Craig Stover and Commission Chairman Dan Kreitman. CHRISTY FIRESTONE, NGPC

“Most people in Nebraska probably don’t realize what a leader Jim Douglas is in the conservation field, not only in Nebraska but also across the country. There’s a list of programs today — including the Monarch Joint Venture — that are just accepted, but 20 years ago, that wasn’t the case. It’s easy for a government agency to say, ‘This is how we’ve always done things,’ and the only reason the ice was ever broken was because someone like Jim said, ‘Wait a minute. Why wouldn’t we want to do something?’ Jim’s innovative and collaborative approach is the hallmark of his career.”

– Pete Berthelsen, partnership director of the Bee and Butterfly Habitat Fund



Above: Director Douglas participates in the Governor's Pine Ridge Turkey Hunt sponsored by the Northwest Nebraska Development Corporation. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND Opposite: Jim bags a tom on the trip. RONALD J. REGAN

Jim has been a huge supporter of the visitor industry. "Tourism is the second largest industry in our area," said Deb Cottier, executive director of the Northwest Nebraska Development Corporation. "Jim has been a supporter of the Governor's Pine Ridge Wild Turkey Hunt and has been there to sit down and discuss solutions. He knows what it takes to run a 'business' as large and geographically dispersed as the Game and Parks Commission. As the face of the Commission, his word is good, his interest is genuine and his knowledge of all things from critters to people has served us well in Nebraska. I think Jim's legacy will be the quiet nature of his voice, the breadth of his understanding of wildlife, habitat and people services, and the desire to share Nebraska's natural resources with as many people as we can. Thank you to Jim for being such a good custodian of those natural resources during his time with the Commission."

Thank you, Director Jim Douglas, for your 47 years of service to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, our natural resources and the people of the great state of Nebraska.



"I consider myself blessed to have a career with the National Wild Turkey Federation that overlapped with Jim Douglas' career with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. I have always appreciated Jim's straightforward leadership style, desire to hear and consider all viewpoints and his commitment to making the best decision for the wildlife and sportsmen and sportswomen of Nebraska. Jim's strategic and steady leadership will be sorely missed but his legacy and body of work for the wildlife and wild places of Nebraska and across the West will persist well into the future."

– Jared McJunkin, director of conservation operations for the National Wild Turkey Federation

Outdoor Nebraska

By Renae Blum

Whether you're waiting for snow or just basking in the crisp air, there's something for you to enjoy outdoors this month as a hunter, wildlife watcher or nature enthusiast. [N](#)



JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

Enjoy firearm deer season

Nov. 13-21 | Statewide

It's the season you've been waiting for. Experience the rush of nine days stalking deer, making memories and bringing home delicious venison. To find a place to hunt, consult the Public Access Atlas, and learn about regulations, bag limits and more with the 2021 Big Game Guide, all at [OutdoorNebraska.org](#).

View common loons at Lake McConaughy

Throughout the month
Western Nebraska

Common loons are large diving water birds with long bodies and short tails. Their long dagger-like beaks are used for foraging in the water, and these birds often will breed on quiet, remote freshwater lakes. Be on the lookout for this beautiful-sounding bird this month.



CHRIS MASADA, NEBRASKALAND

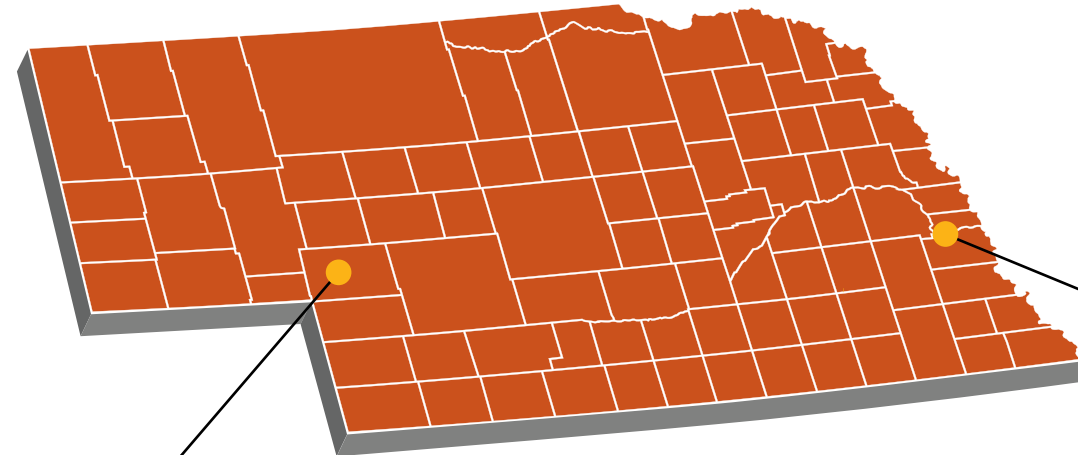


JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

Book discounted state park lodging

Throughout the month
Select state park areas

During the off-season, you can enjoy a 30 percent discount on lodging and camping at select Nebraska state parks. It's a great chance to gather the family for Thanksgiving or experience your favorite park during a different, less-crowded season. For more information, call parks directly or visit [NebraskaStateParks.ReserveAmerica.com](#).



Visit the Schramm Education Center

Year-round
10 a.m. – 5 p.m. daily | Gretna

Looking for indoor family fun? Check out the Schramm Education Center. This state-of-the-art facility teaches visitors about Nebraska's natural ecosystems through unique, interactive exhibits. Explore live animal tanks, aquariums featuring Nebraska fish, a virtual reality mountain biking experience and much more. See details at [OutdoorNebraska.org](#).

What To Do in November



JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

Go geocaching

Year-round | Statewide

Go on a high-tech treasure hunt this fall! Geocaching is a great way to spend time with family over Thanksgiving. Since weather can vary, be prepared and let someone know where you're going. You may be sharing space with hunters, so keep any noise minimal and make yourself visibly noticeable.



JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

100 Years of Husker Football on the Radio

By David L. Bristow, History Nebraska

Long before Lyell Bremser first shouted, “Man, woman, and child, did that put ‘em in the aisles!,” Pittsburgh radio station KDKA made Husker history Nov. 5, 1921, when it broadcast the Pitt-Nebraska football game. It was the first live broadcast of an NU football game, and one of the

Sixty-Three Yards!



Team captain and future College Football Hall of Fame inductee Clarence Swanson scored the only touchdown of the 1921 Nebraska-Pittsburgh game with a 63-yard run. *Omaha World-Herald*, Nov. 6, 1921.



Nebraska's home field, circa 1920, before Memorial Stadium. The NU-Pitt game, the first Husker game broadcast on radio, was played at Forbes Field, the baseball park that was home to the Pittsburgh Pirates. History Nebraska RG2758-105-8

first football broadcasts ever.

Few Nebraskans had radios in 1921. The state's first commercial stations did not go on the air until the following year. And even if you had headphones and one of those newfangled battery-powered crystal sets, Nebraska was too far away to pick up the signal.

KDKA first went on the air in 1920; it still boasts of being the “Pioneer Broadcasting Station of the World.” KDKA did the first live football broadcast during the Pitt-West Virginia game on Oct. 8, 1921, less than a month before the Nebraska game.

Though Nebraskans could not hear the broadcast, they were pleased with the outcome. The Cornhuskers defeated Pop Warner's squad 10-0.

Nebraska began its own radio broadcasts the following season. The first live broadcast from Nebraska Field (predecessor of Memorial Stadium) was NU's season opener, a 66-0 thumping of South Dakota on Oct. 7, 1922.

The university had its own radio station in the electrical engineering building. A telephone wire connected the station to a remote microphone beside the field. In 1924 the *Daily Nebraskan* boasted that the station had a broadcast radius of 300 to 400 miles.

Commercial radio stations soon got involved. In 1925 the university partnered with the “Nebraska Buick station” KFAB to broadcast games from a new soundproof booth in the (unheated) press box. For away games, KFAB “leases a telegraph wire” to relay the signal to its own studio.

By 1927, fans had grown accustomed to having an announcer explain the game as it unfolded. That season, Memorial Stadium added its first public address system and stadium announcer. Radio, however, was becoming controversial among athletic departments. In 1928 the Big Six Conference (the future Big 8, and predecessor of today's Big XII) discussed banning game broadcasts. Some athletic directors believed radio hurt attendance. Others thought it

helped by raising interest.

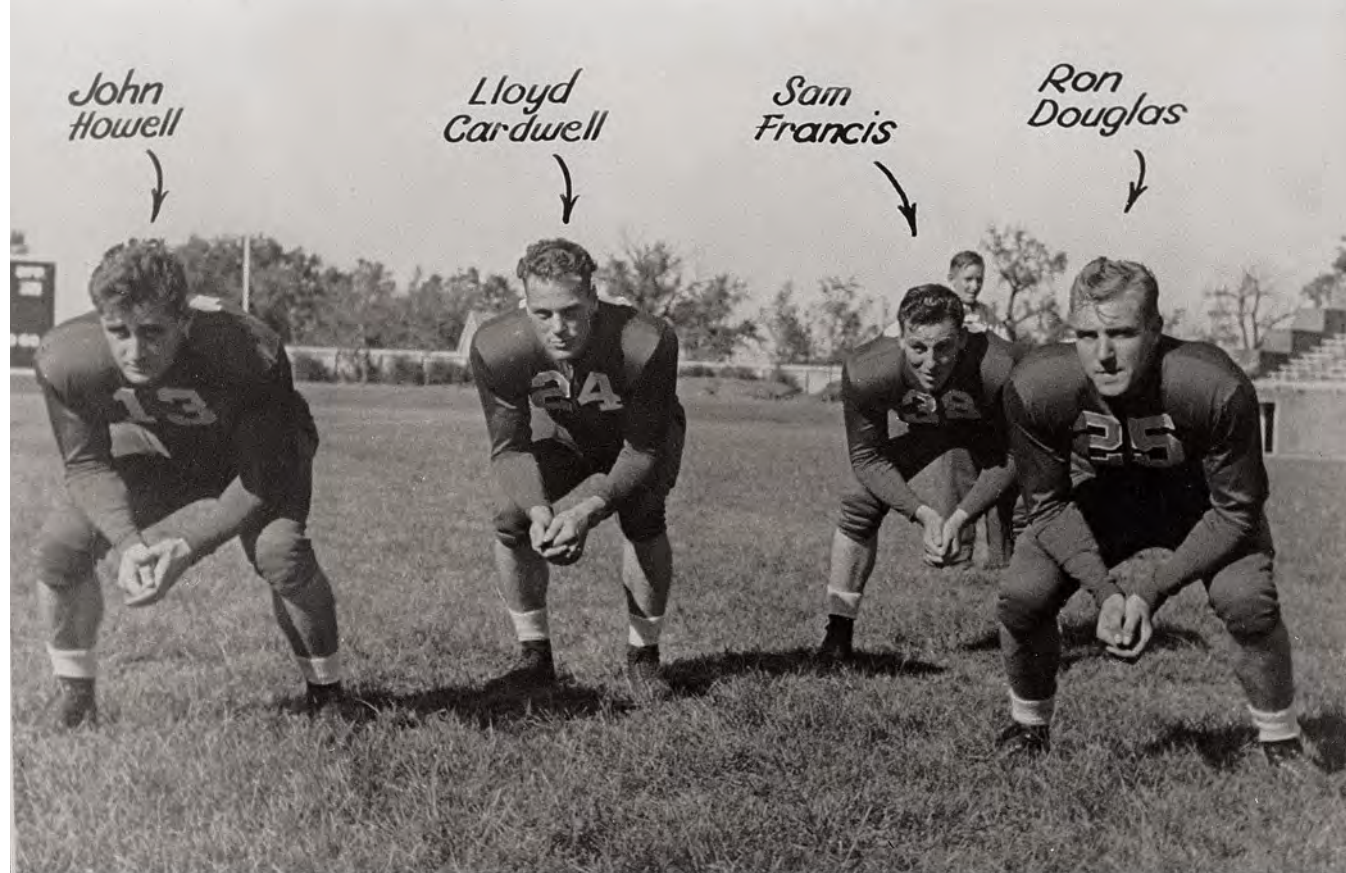
When a few athletic conferences banned broadcasts in 1932, Nebraska's “business manager of athletics” expressed support. As the *Daily Nebraskan* put it, “many people who would otherwise pay their \$2.75 to see the game now do not do so because they can save their money and enjoy the game almost as much at home.”

The Big Six banned broadcasts of conference games starting with the 1933 season. A letter to the *Daily Nebraskan* complained that “untold thousands of true Nebraska grid fans are to be severed from their ‘blood of life.’” In 1935 a McCook state senator introduced a legislative bill requiring the university to accept the highest bid for game broadcasts. Warning of “considerable resentment” in his part of the state, he argued that taxpayers supported the university and were therefore entitled to hear the games.

The university responded that the football program received no tax dollars and that football paid for much of NU's

Two halves of a panorama of a still-unfinished Memorial Stadium during a game in its first season (1923).
History Nebraska
RG2758-102-105 and
RG2758-102-106





DANA BIBLE'S "DREAM BACKFIELD."

This 1936 backfield—three seniors and one junior—represented the culmination of Dana Bible's eight years at Nebraska. It embodied all his desires in speed, power, finesse and offensive-defensive ability. Headed by All-American Sam Francis and the amazing Lloyd Cardwell—the only man whom old-timers declare is worthy to rank with Bender and Chamberlain—the Huskers of '36 cleaned up all conference opposition without being scored upon. They lost only to the nation's No. 1 and No. 2 teams—Pitt and Minnesota—and could have won these, with adequate reserves.

Great things were expected of Coach Dana Bible's team in 1936. The Cornhuskers entered the season as reigning Big Six champions. History Nebraska RG2758-0-559



Cornhuskers with Head Coach Biff Jones, circa 1937. History Nebraska RG2758-100-57



The 1936 Nebraska Cornhuskers. Head Coach Dana X. Bible (front, center) left Nebraska after the season and spent the rest of his head coaching career with the Texas Longhorns. History Nebraska RG2758-103-39

athletic program. Furthermore, gate receipts had increased since the ban. Despite Nebraska's winning teams, the 31,000-seat Memorial Stadium rarely sold out in those days.

"It seems best not to tamper with the set up," a *Daily Nebraskan* editorial concluded. The McCook senator's bill failed to pass, but football fans nationwide were growing louder in their demands to hear games on the radio.

By 1936 about half of college football teams were still banning or limiting broadcasts. Nebraska broadcast one game per season, selecting a likely sellout. (That year it was Pitt.) Head coach Dana X. Bible wanted to limit broadcasts until all of Nebraska's facilities were paid off. After that, he said, it would be worthwhile to look into a commercial deal. By then, Big Six schools were again free to sign radio contracts. Iowa State, Kansas, Kansas State and Missouri allowed broadcasts of all home games. Oklahoma and Nebraska did not.

That season, two conferences signed radio sponsorship contracts with oil companies. The Pacific Coast Conference received \$100,000 for the rights to broadcast its conference games, to be divided equally among its 10 schools. The Southwest Conference split \$14,000 per season among seven teams.

These contracts sound like low-rent predecessors of today's network deals, but they got the attention of athletic departments. The 1937 season saw a 300 percent increase

in the number of college football games on the radio, and Nebraska's games were among them. From then on radio was a regular part of a Husker fan's life — and within 5 years, so was Lyell Bremser. He began calling Husker football games for KFAB in 1942, a position he had for 42 seasons. [N](#)

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



Lyell Bremser, right, interviews Nebraska assistant football coach Gomer Jones in 1946. History Nebraska RG2183-1946-831-10

Public Grouse

An Adventure Story

Story and photos by Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley



A brace of sharp-tailed grouse hanging from an Open Fields and Waters Program sign on public access land near Minatare.

The hunting world can be small, and it seems even smaller on the internet. I credit social media for several friendships over the years — connections with like-minded hunters whom I would've never met otherwise. Through sharing photos, advice and recipes on Instagram and Facebook, we celebrate and

commiserate in each other's successes and failures every season. And sometimes, these online connections lead to hunting opportunities — real "FaceTime" and new adventures — down the road. A few years ago, my husband, Rick, and I had one such opportunity.

In early fall 2018, Ross Juelfs

filled his limit on grouse in western Nebraska. He posted a picture on Instagram, and I made a casual comment about grouse being on my bucket list. Ross and I had never met, but we've been Facebook "friends" since I started writing for *Nebraskaland* almost nine years ago. He is a hunting guide at The North Platte Outpost

by Cheyenne Ridge Outfitters near Minatare, and when he's not guiding clients during the waterfowl season, you can find Ross at a nearby stream with a fly rod in hand or chasing birds in the Sandhills with his dog Beaufort.

Ross saw my comment on his photo, and without hesitation, he invited Rick and me to hunt with him the following



Ross Juelfs of Gering, left, and Rick Wheatley of Omaha hunting for greater prairie chickens on private rangeland in Keith County, with Lake McConaughy sparkling in the distance.



LEFT: Megan Beach of Oregon and Ross Juelfs discussing where to walk next.

OPPOSITE: The author bags a sharp-tailed grouse.

season . To trade, I said I'd cook for him — we had a deal.

Public Grouse

A year later, Rick and I met with Ross and his friend Megan Beach, now of Oregon, out in western Nebraska on a Friday late afternoon. We went to dinner in Scottsbluff, at a great restaurant called the Flyover Brewing Company, to get acquainted and to go over the plan for the weekend. It's always a little awkward hunting with strangers for the first time, but when you know you're going to be handling firearms around each other, you make an effort to break the ice quickly.

The plan was to get up early the next day. We would hunt in the morning, take a break for lunch and then hunt again until one of us couldn't walk any longer in the afternoon. I was mentally prepared to cover ground that weekend. While most of the terrain in Nebraska isn't as dramatic as some other states', don't underestimate the Sandhills' gentle slopes. I did get on the treadmill a few times leading up to the hunt, and I was so glad I did.

On Saturday morning, we were on the road as the sun came up. Ross drove us south from Gering, and we passed

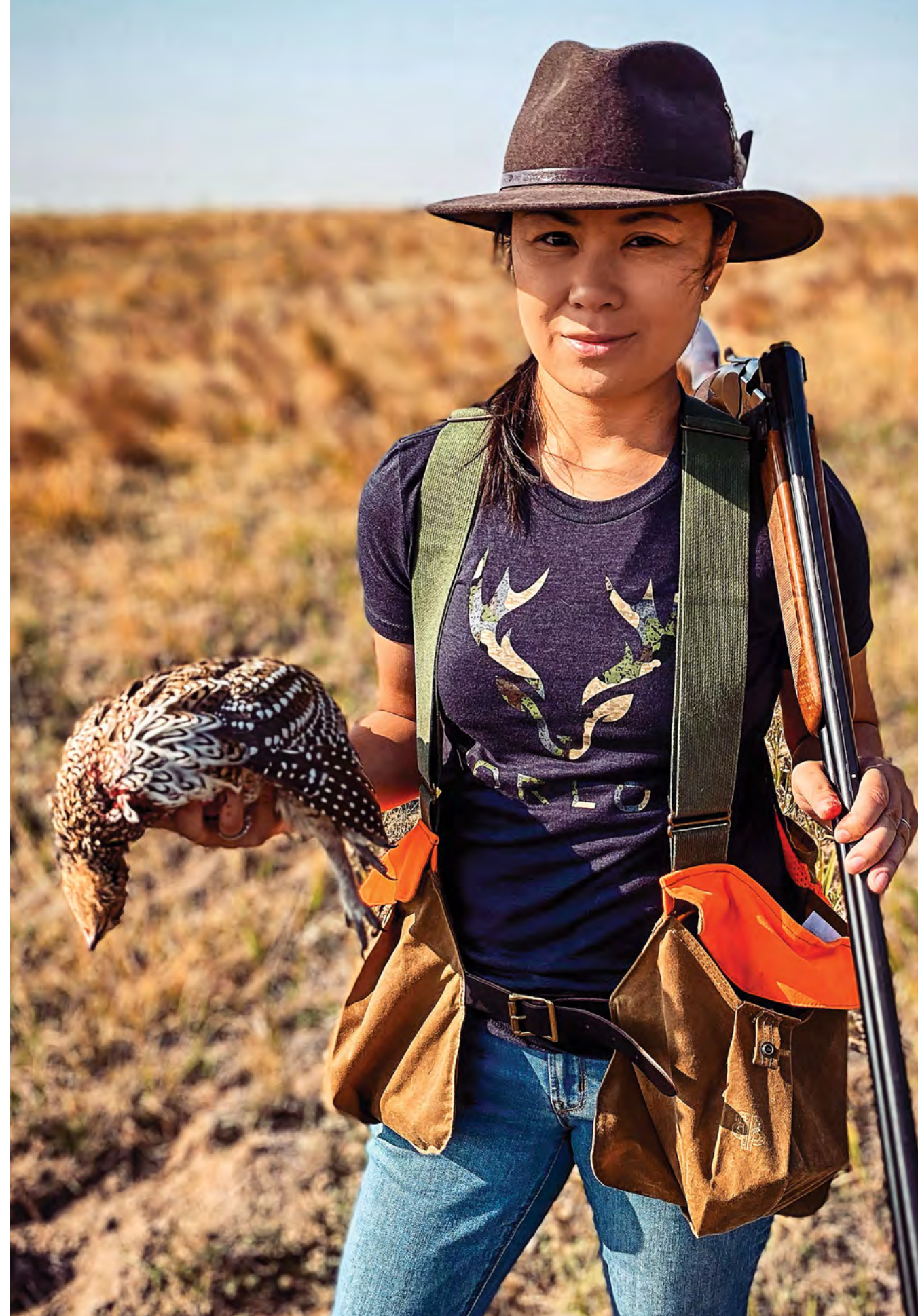
Gear for Grouse Hunting

The prairie grouse season starts Sept. 1, and temperatures could be scorching during the first half of the month and chilly as the season progresses. Wear layers that you can easily take off. Also, choose a lightweight, well-ventilated hunting vest to wear.

Expect to cover ground. In some Open Fields and Water sites, there also could be elevation. Light, comfortable hiking shoes will do. Sandburs are a nuisance out this way, especially for hunting dogs, but it's not enough for hunters to wear chaps. Grouse like open grasslands and short brushland habitat, which are relatively easy to walk.

With all the walking, hunt with a lighter, easy-to-carry gun. Grouse are not hardy birds and are easy to knock down — that is, if you don't miss. Earlier in the season, Rick and I do well with our 20-gauge over-unders with modified chokes in both barrels and 6 shot.

Shooting instructor Greg Preston of Omaha said, "Over pointing dogs, improve cylinder to light modified is best, and if they are getting up a little wild, use modified in the bottom barrel and improved modified on top. For a single barrel gun, modified is the best all-around choke."



Getting There and Staying

From the metro area, the drive out to Scottsbluff can be a long one, so set aside a three-day weekend to hunt. If you're leisurely travelers, like me, tack on a couple more days to see other sights on the way there and back. I recommend setting aside half a day for scouting if you're not familiar with the area.

The fastest route to Scottsbluff from Omaha or Lincoln is on the I-80. Everyone knows that long stretch to North Platte can be boring, so bring a fishing rod to visit one of the **I-80 lakes**, if you have the time. Then stop for a late lunch in Paxton. Although Julie Geiser has written about **Ole's Big Game Steakhouse** in a previous travel story, it didn't prepare me for the greeting I received when I walked in — a massive polar bear stood near the doorway, followed by countless animal mounts from every continent that filled every inch of wall space. It's a lot to take in, and you'll relish every bit of it.

If you're coming from Lincoln, it would make more sense to stick to the I-80. But those coming from Omaha have another option: Hop on the 275 toward Fremont, then head straight west on the 91. The Sandhills start opening up once you get near Ericson. Check out the **Northside Bar** in Burwell, a cowboy watering hole complete with bull fries on its menu — the drinks are cheap, the service is friendly and all the old rodeo photographs are fun to look at, too. This route will take you onto Highway 2, which isn't called the **Sandhills Journey Scenic Byway** for no reason.

Stay in Scottsbluff or Gering for the hunt. I've found that hotel prices are slightly cheaper in Gering; the **Cobblestone Hotel & Suites** and the **Monument Inn & Suites** are both pet friendly if you plan to bring a hunting dog; however, make sure to call ahead.



Ross Juelfs's English springer spaniel, Beaufort, is 14 years old. Although Juelfs has tried to retire Beaufort on several occasions, the old dog still loves to hunt.

through the beautiful Wildcat Hills. Not too long after, we stopped at the first Conservation Reserve Program field, which was situated directly across from a field of wheat stubble that year. Having never seen grouse habitat before, I was delighted when I realized that I wasn't going to have to fight through any head-tall stands of kochia or hip-breaking cattails, land characteristics so typical of pheasant hunting. Instead, the ground looked relatively sparse with mostly short vegetation.

Ross, Megan, Rick and I spread out to begin walking abreast. I licked my lips in anticipation and shifted my gun to a more comfortable position in my hands. My heart was pounding — I always get nervous stepping into the field for the first time every season. It's a combination of emotions: the fright from the first explosion of feathers — it's startling after being off for so long; and the nervousness of making the first kill of the season — that one always weighs heavily on me.

A few paces in, and we didn't have to wait long for a flush. I didn't see from where the bird came, but it made this distinctive sound: a combination of clucking and gobbling, almost like a rapid laugh. Ross shouted at Megan and me to look up, and before we could get our guns up, the grouse had flown beyond what both our skills could hit. It sailed across the road where we couldn't hunt. "So, that's what a sharptail looks and sounds like when it's in the air," I made a mental note.

Rick, who was working the field edge, also missed a bird; he hadn't picked up his shotgun in over a year, and after flubbing his first-ever opportunity at a grouse, he looked over at us crestfallen, heavily wagging his head. It was Ross who would bag the first bird that weekend. His English springer spaniel, Beaufort — who was 14 years old at the time — happily made the retrieve. We worked toward the far fence line and saw several more birds flush out of gun's reach.

When we reached the end of that field, Ross stopped to give Beaufort water. After a breather, we swung around to head back out toward the pickup, and nearing the end, a bird flushed ahead of me.

I heard it before I saw it, flapping its wings above the mullein. Quickly, I shouldered my over-under, squeezed the trigger — and missed. But there was no time to lament. Rapidly

remembering what I had learned from a handful of shooting lessons, I pulled the gun tighter against my cheek, gave myself time to zero-in on my target and made a second attempt. To my amazement, I hit the bird square in the back, dropping it immediately. My companions whooped in excitement. I jumped for joy. This was my first sharp-tailed grouse.

"That was a long shot!" Ross said,



Rick Wheatley smiling with a sharp-tailed grouse.

Scouting

Before you hit the road, make sure to bring your Nebraska Public Access Atlas. And although not necessary, I've found the onX app helpful in marking and saving my favorite hunting and foraging spots, as well as being able to see property lines. You could also download maps ahead of time to use in areas with poor data coverage.

When you get to Scottsbluff/Gering, drive those county roads. Map sheets 3 and 4 show the general area where we hunted. A good number of those Conservation Reserve Program areas shaded in red hold grouse. John Laux, Nebraska Game and Park's upland habitat and access program manager, said:

"Out in that part of the state, grouse commonly use CRP fields, which are typically undisturbed and provide better cover than adjacent rangeland, especially during dry years like this one. That all being said, they do hang out in some short or sparse cover at times. You are generally looking for large blocks of grasslands — mostly void of trees — with shin to knee-high grasses that provide sufficient cover for concealment. This structure is typically the key to finding grouse."

Furthermore, look for areas with good plant diversity of grass intermixed with broadleaf plants and patches of bare ground, Laux said.

"These broadleaf plants attract insects, which are an important food source for grouse early in the season. Many broadleaf plants also produce seeds and fruit. Native shrubs are another thing to look for — they provide shade during hotter parts of the day and food resources as well. And during dry periods, grouse often key-in on the fruits and succulent leaves of some forbs."

Topography is also important. "Throughout much of the sharptail's range in Nebraska, they prefer choppy topography and are usually found at the higher elevations, which is generally where you will find good plant diversity and cover that is more patchy and intermixed with bare ground," Laux said.



As for Rick and me, we were absolutely stoked about our day. The weather was beautiful, the company was second to none, and we were happy to see birds on public ground. That night, I prepared a dinner of French sorrel soup, summer heirloom tomato salad, goose confit with Cumberland sauce, sautéed seasonal mushrooms and wild elderberry panna cotta for dessert. We stayed up late talking — a couple of us had trouble waking the following morning.

Missed Opportunities and Other Ones

The next day, we hunted on private rangeland for prairie chickens. I couldn't tell you how big the property was, but it sprawled for miles in all directions; I could see Lake McConaughy sparkling in the distance. The scenery was spectacular — it was cattle country as you would imagine it in Hollywood cinema. However, we saw few birds, and the ones we did view did not hold well.

I still kick myself when I think about that Sunday hunt. Toward the end



A sharp-tailed grouse feather resting between blades of grass.



The hunting party hitting the road with the rising sun.

smiling wide and giving me a high five. "I'm so excited for you!"

We found the bird, and Rick took a picture. He was just as happy for me as I was for myself. Both he and I were surprised by how many birds we saw, just in that one CRP lot. We continued on to the next field, where Rick redeemed himself and shot his first sharpie, too. Ross got his second bird in the bag.

We had lunch at a charming roadside diner called the Double L Country Store and Café, located on Highway 71 near Harrisburg. The Double L had great food: fresh farm-to-table cooking, ice cream, old-fashioned sodas and baked goods. Its gift shop was full of interesting knick-knacks. We went over the morning's events.

Temperatures got warm that afternoon, and although keen,

Beaufort sat out the rest of the day. He was 14, after all, and his role that weekend can be best described as "honorary." That was another thing that surprised me: You don't need a dog to be successful hunting sharp-tailed grouse in this area. Ross brought Beaufort along mostly for the company, and because his senior dog still loves to go out.

"I've tried retiring him many times," Ross said.

The remainder of the day proved to be as productive, although more birds flushed wild. Ross and Rick ended up shooting their limits, and I got one more sharpie in the bag. Unfortunately for Megan, she was never in the right place at the right time. Still, I don't think she minded. An accomplished hunter, Megan was just happy to be out and meet new hunters.

of the morning, after walking miles, up and down the hilly, otherworldly landscape, a prairie chicken caught me by surprise. It was sitting on the opposite side of a hill, and as soon as I crested over the hump, the bird exploded into flight, its wings quickly catching the wind. I panicked. Had I given myself more time to shoulder my gun for a proper mount, maybe — just maybe — I might have picked up my first greater prairie chicken on that trip, too. Alas, I had spent my shells, and all I could do next was watch it disappear over the next ridge. That was the one opportunity I had at a chicken that day, and I blew it. A single, lonely bird left the field that morning, shot by Ross, who gifted it to me.

As vexed as I was over missing a bird, a greasy burger and ice-cold red beer at the Admiral's Cove on Lake McConaughy melted away all irritation. It was also where we

parted ways with our new friends. We promised Ross we'd be back again, and that following year, Rick and I traveled west to hunt grouse twice. We hunted on our own in early September 2020 on our way home from vacation in Yellowstone and then the second time with Ross — and we've never come home empty-handed.

Tradition

Grouse are quickly becoming my favorite game to hunt. With the season beginning Sept. 1, it's the perfect kick-off to a new hunting season to go along with doves. But more than that, I often ponder about how the opportunity came about. Circling back, I think about the hunting community as a whole: Much like other sports, there are rules of engagement when hunters meet in the field. But unlike other sports, there is no room for dirty play: Can you trust a stranger to meet them

on unfamiliar ground? What's more, can you trust them to keep you safe in the midst of an exciting flush? There really is no other sport that can bring strangers together in such an extraordinary way as hunting.

In hunting, there's an uncommon trust that binds us together. Whether you hunt with a stranger on the other side of your home state, or on the other side of the world, gun safety, sportsmanship and respect for the game you chase are the foundations of every successful hunt. And the stories you make together and tell beyond the field keep the tradition alive. I've hunted with and photographed many strangers over the years, and always on the drive home, I never fail to feel pride in being a part of this world. 

For more information, see *Game and Parks' 2021 Prairie Grouse Hunting Trip Planner*: <https://bit.ly/3njdfy3>

One Trail

Many species use a well-worn path between two waters

Story and photos by Eric Fowler

If you've ever "blazed a trail" through the woods, or gone "bushwhacking" as some might say, you know it can often be an unpleasant experience pushing your way through branches, brush and tall grass.

Life is much easier on a trail. And wildlife agree. That's why a hike through any woodland or prairie will reveal a series of what we often call game trails. These trails, to put it simply, are the easiest paths between points A and B.

That was certainly the case with a trail on a friend's property along the Platte River south of Wood River, on which I placed two camera traps for the better part of two years in hopes of capturing a photo of a river otter.

Not only did the camera capture photos of otters, including a mother and her five pups, it also captured images of other species using the trail, including raccoons, mink, mice, muskrats, opossums, deer, a bobcat, beavers, a hen wood duck and her brood, a few random birds that just dropped in for a drink and three species of turtles: painted, snapping and spiny softshell. And raccoons. So many photos of raccoons.

Trails such as this one are found everywhere there is wildlife. Some have been used for generations. Some were so well defined that man, be it the Native Americans, Euroamerican explorers or fur

traders, followed them and took the same routes. Some even became roads.

This trail covers a scant 75 feet of land between the two water bodies it connects. One water body is what is left of the south channel of the Platte River. Now disconnected from the river where it splits from the main channel near Kearney,



A family of North American river otters walks up a trail leading from the south channel of the Platte River south of Wood River. Left: A curious raccoon gets an up-close look at a camera trap.

its flows are fed mainly by groundwater. The other, on the north end of the trail, is a stream that flows from the Platte during high flows and is fed by groundwater when the river is low. Both streams flow through sandpit lakes above the trail and rejoin the main channel of the Platte about one-third of a mile downstream.

On the north end, the trail climbs a steep bank, crosses a two-track trail road, and ducks into a 40-foot stretch of grass and brush before dropping down the bank into the south channel of the Platte. One of my cameras captured photos on the trail through the brush during the day. The other was set

on the bank of the south channel, capturing photos both day and night.

Few of the photos are perfect. The camera on the water's edge never made it more than a few days before its lens was covered with dirty water spots left by otters or raccoons shaking to dry off as they left the water and headed up the trail. Or by the same critters leaving wet nose prints.

Most of the photos — there must be thousands — captured raccoons using the south channel of the Platte as a trail, wading along the edge in search of food. But this game trail was often their approach to or from that path.

The deer were likely using this trail to move between woodlands north and south of the streams. But most of the species, including the otters, turtles, ducks, mink and other species, used it to move between the two streams they called home.

It's not the only trail between these habitats. There are two other well-worn paths between the two waters. All three have something in common. They are at the narrowest points in the territory they share. These critters are smart: No need to waste energy bushwhacking their way through the forest when they can take a road. 📷



A bobcat leaves the trail and follows the high and dry ground rather than following it down to the Platte's south channel.

A river otter carries what's left of a catfish down the trail to the river.



An American beaver.



A hen wood duck and her brood.



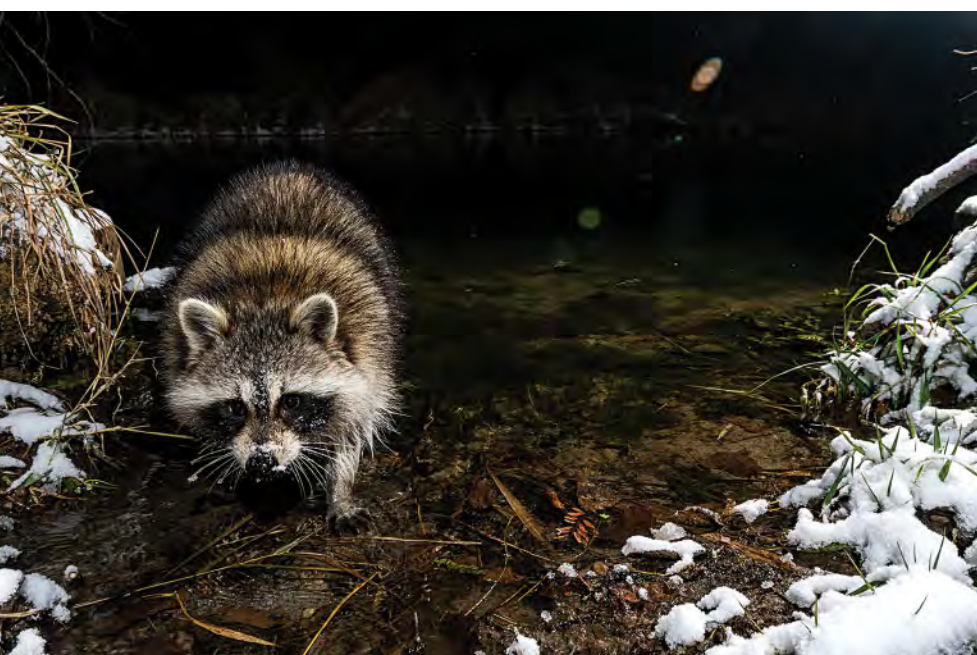
A young Virginia opossum.



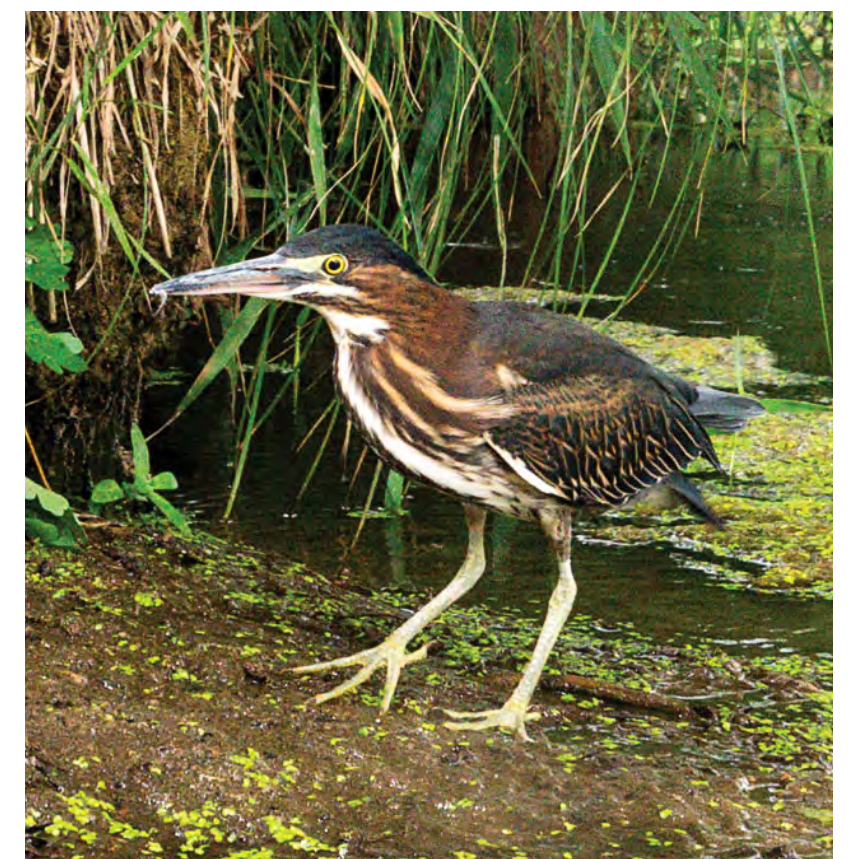
A painted turtle.



A white-tailed deer.



A raccoon.



A green heron.



A family of river otters shake as they leave the river, spraying the lens of the camera trap with water.



A great blue heron “photobombs” an image of a raccoon.



A common snapping turtle.



A common muskrat and its kit.



An American mink.



The trail leads south through grass and brush to the south channel of the Platte River.

Fort Robinson

Exceptional Horses and Fine Fish

By Justin Haag

Soldiers tend to yearling horses at Fort Robinson in 1932.

Historians often tell of Fort Robinson's period of producing the trusty steeds of the cavalry as a remount depot for the U.S. Army in 1919-1945. The fort's role in rearing aquatic species that bolstered the region's fishing heritage during that era gets less attention.

During the 20th century, Crawford and Fort Robinson became an integral location for producing the fish that found their way to dinner tables of the Midwest and High Plains. Most of the ponds that visitors enjoy today were created to serve aquaculture as Crawford was part of the U.S. government's federal fisheries program for more than half a century. They stand as a reminder that the Crawford city park was home to a first-class fish hatchery from the late 1920s until a devastating flood in 1991.

Hatching a Hatchery

As the U.S. government was looking to remedy depleted fisheries resources across the nation in the late 19th century, it developed the National Fish Hatchery System. The Crawford operation was established as a substation of the Spearfish hatchery in South Dakota's Black Hills, which had been operating since 1896. The U.S. Department of Defense issued a permit to the Department of Commerce in December 1927 for the construction

of fish nursery ponds on Fort Robinson property. The request to do so had come in the form of a two-page letter from none other than Herbert Hoover, who was U.S. secretary of commerce at the time and would become the nation's 31st president two years later.

Henry O'Malley, U.S. commissioner of fisheries, wrote in his 1928 annual report that construction had begun on "a new combination trout and pond station" at Crawford as a subsidiary to the Spearfish hatchery.

Much of the early construction was on the main hatchery grounds at the city park, including buildings, ponds



Henry O'Malley led the United States Bureau of Fisheries from 1922 to 1933, the period in which the Crawford hatchery was created.

and a water line from springs at Fort Robinson. By 1933, Crawford had grown to become a stand-alone operation.

From 1933 to 1935, the hatchery capitalized on the ready labor of the Civilian Conservation Corps, which had established a "drought relief company" camp at Fort Robinson as part of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal to provide employment opportunities during the Great Depression.

Just as it had done throughout the nation, the corps, known as the CCC, left a lasting impression in the Panhandle through its many projects. Among them were construction of cabins at Chadron State Park and the lighthouse-styled observation tower at Lake Minatare. The largest of the projects at Fort Robinson was for irrigation — what we now know as Carter P. Johnson Reservoir.

A CCC newsletter from May 1935 tells that the 470-foot "Noel Dam" on Soldier Creek was nearing completion. Surely, the workers would have enjoyed having equipment that would be used for the lake's upcoming renovation, as constructing the dam and excavating the reservoir with Fresno scrapers proved challenging that winter.

"At first the work was all pick and shovel until the flow pipe was laid," the newsletter's author stated. "Then four mule teams with Fresnos were



Although the Crawford hatchery has long been abandoned, remnants of the operation still stand in the city park.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



A watercolor portrait of Lt. Carter P. Johnson by American artist Frederic Remington, circa 1888. The largest of Fort Robinson's ponds, Carter P. Johnson Reservoir, is named for the colorful cavalryman.

added followed by four caterpillar tractors with Fresnos to speed up the movement of dirt. Every night a crew of six men kept fires burning to keep out frost and thaw the ground. Work progressed with day crews as large as 40 men to speed the work and in an effort to be ready to impound the spring rains.” The construction was a success, and with ample rain that year, the reservoir filled quickly.

According to the newsletter, the corps initially named the resulting 20-acre reservoir Lake Bertha to honor the wife of Louis Bash, a quartermaster general who had recently visited Fort Robinson. At some point, naming honors instead went to Carter P. Johnson, the cavalryman who served five tours of duty at Fort Robinson while advancing through the ranks and building a storied military career. Having retired as a major in 1909,

and taking up residence on a nearby ranch along the White River, Johnson returned to the fort for a short stint as commanding officer in 1916 — the same year he died of heart problems. His colorful reputation is reinforced in a painted portrait by renowned 19th century artist Frederic Remington.

Putting in Ponds

The conservation corps was busy in ’35. An annual report from hatchery foreman Fred Engelhardt said the work included “concrete outlets for two nursery ponds on Cherry Creek, lower ice pond dam of earth and spillway, concrete outlet, earth dam and spillway for lower Grable Springs bass pond. One half mile drainage ditch from Grable ponds to Grable Reservoir.”

They also “began repair work on lower ice pond dam and spillway, damaged by erosion caused by a cloud



A 1986 photograph shows the well-kept grounds of the Crawford hatchery. NGPC LIBRARY



The Grabel Ponds, recently renovated with fishing access and habitat improvements, were an important part of the hatchery’s operation. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

burst early in June.”

Historical documents also tell of the CCC constructing numerous dams along Soldier Creek. Although not specified, the Wood Reserve Ponds, near the fort’s old timber and sawmill operation, and Crazy Horse Pond, named for the highly revered Sioux war leader who was killed while being detained at Fort Robinson in 1877, were likely among them.

In 1936, Engelhardt wrote that station personnel graded bottoms and banks of two “Grable Spring trout nursery ponds.” With corps labor, they also rebuilt the “lower ice pond dam and completed the spillway with concrete floor and side walls at discharge end of the spillway, riprapped upper ice pond spillway and rebuilt Grable Spring pond number three dam.”

Sometime since Engelhardt’s reports, the spelling of Grable changed to Grabel in documents. Also, the “ice ponds” became known as Ice House

Ponds and Grable Reservoir became Lake Crawford.

The Old Ponds

Records indicate the Ice House Ponds and Lake Crawford are the earliest of the fort’s impoundments.

Lake Crawford, which was originally called Grable Lake, is named for an enterprising family from the late 1800s that became known nationwide for its efforts to develop the West. Regrettably, those efforts seemed to end in scandal.

The Crawford Tribune of the 1890s featured many headlines conveying excitement about Francis C. Grable and his nephew Charles J. Grable and their work in developing irrigation infrastructure in the White River Valley and gold mining and smelting operations in nearby Edgemont, S.D. Grable Lake was part of those efforts.

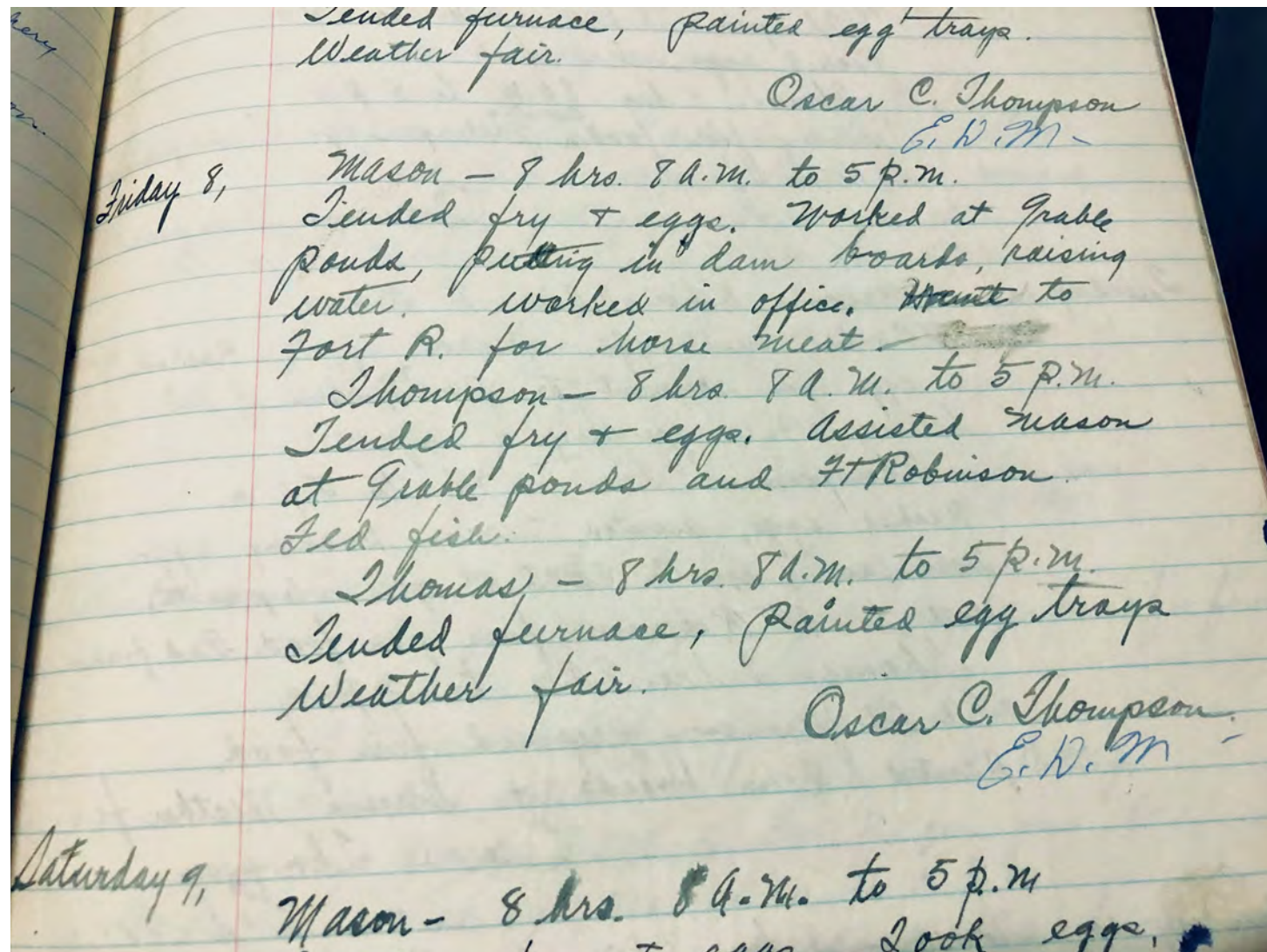
Francis C. Grable, an Ohio native, had connections to the railroad and had early dibs on townsites between

Alliance and Deadwood, South Dakota. He also had connections to wealthy aristocrats on the East Coast and brought them to the West by train for tours, convincing them to buy stock in the operations.

The two promoters were founders of the State Bank of Crawford, Francis first serving as vice president and later president, and Charles as cashier. Newspaper accounts of the “Grable boom” tell of the men as charismatic characters who were working hard to bring prosperity to the region.

“[Francis] Grable brought into existence more mining, smelting, manufacturing and like projects it has been estimated, than any other one man in the world,” wrote an Omaha World-Herald reporter. “He floated all these schemes on money obtained from eastern capitalists.”

The whole operation crashed February 1898 when the cashier at the Chemical National Bank of New York



A log book from the 1940s tells of typical hatchery work, including a trip to Fort Robinson for horse meat.

APRIL GREGORY, D.C. BOOTH NATIONAL FISH HATCHERY AND ARCHIVES



Constructed in 1904, the ice house at Fort Robinson served a vital role prior to artificial refrigeration. HISTORY NEBRASKA

admitted to the bank's president and board that he had loaned Francis Grable \$243,000 — about \$8 million in today's figures — without authorization. Headlines in metropolitan and small newspapers throughout the nation promptly told of the Grable "schemes" on their front pages. Although the Grables said the projects would realize returns soon, the investors backed out.

The Grables immediately departed the region, the bank closed, the projects were abandoned, and the Grable reservoir dam would not be completely finished until 1930 when the new fish hatchery included it in its appropriations as a pond for rearing bass.

The reservoir must have been far enough along to hold some water upon the Grables' departure, though.

"Some very fine ice has been put up in Crawford this week, cut from the Grable lake south of town," stated a January 1901 one-sentence news report in the Tribune.

Prior to modern refrigeration, ice was harvested during winter and stored for later use. At Fort Robinson, reports indicate it was cut from the Ice House Ponds and housed in a wooden building between Soldier Creek and the fort's veterinary hospital, near what is now U.S. Highway 20. Reportedly, the building was later sold and moved to Agate Springs Ranch south of Harrison.

While the Ice House Ponds remain an attraction, the Grable Lake, or Lake Crawford, has long sat empty because of damage to the dam and outlet structure. The other ponds named for the family, which were constructed for the hatchery and likely named such as a matter of convenience, have been transformed to one of Fort Robinson's most popular fishing spots.

In the decade following his departure, Francis Grable focused ambitions to the area north of Fort Collins, Colorado, developing irrigation ditches and roads. Those efforts were halted when he was arrested in 1912 after being tied to a bank embezzlement scheme. After a judge dismissed Grable's case, he moved to Clermont, Florida, and entered the citrus industry. It was later reported the city of Clermont was so thankful for his contributions to the region that it gifted him with a trip to Europe.

Despite the legal problems, he was regarded as an irrigation pioneer in northern Colorado and retained popularity. He returned to Fort Collins from 1931-1936 and wrote a newspaper column titled "Reviewing the Years." A column about his efforts at Crawford and Edgemont was not found during this research.

He died in Florida in 1944.

Diverse Production

Boosted by the ponds' capacity, the Crawford hatchery had one of the most diverse missions in the nation. Early reports tell of its successes and failures in producing brook, rainbow, "black-spotted" (cutthroat) and "Loch Leven" (brown) trout, catfish, bream, sunfish, "black" (largemouth) bass, yellow perch and crappies. Of the 91 stations and substations listed in the system's 1933 annual report, only five other hatcheries were producing a more diverse set of species than Crawford.

Fort Robinson may have been one of the nation's best places to be during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Not only were the CCC's activities building excitement, but the fort also hosted the Army Equestrian Olympic Team as it prepared for the 1936 games in Berlin. (Equestrian for what was termed the "Nazi Olympics" later ended with

suspensions of foul play, as the host Germans claimed an unprecedented and not since repeated sweep of all six gold medals.)

The fort's role in producing horses and fish was symbiotic in at least one regard. Surplus from the fort's thousands of horses and mules provided a supply of meat that was converted to fish food. While other hatcheries across the nation were advertising to purchase horses to feed the fish, Crawford enjoyed a free supply of as many as a dozen horses per month. Documents indicate it was something of a trade for keeping the fort's streams and lakes stocked for the military personnel who liked to fish. In 1942, the hatchery reported receiving 30,000 pounds of horsemeat.

Making fish food from animal products — sheep liver and beef hearts also were commonly used — was messy and labor intensive. In the



Interior of hatch house at the Crawford National Fish Hatchery in 1983. NGPC LIBRARY

1960s, dry pellets revolutionized the way hatcheries feed fish.

Upstream Battle

Although hatchery staff was grateful to the fort for allowing ponds on the property, the distance from the main grounds could be problematic. Each of the ponds was upwards of 10 miles away. One year, after a period of heavy snowfall, hatchery staff reported filling backpacks with fish food and plodding on snowshoes to certain ponds to keep fish alive.

Clarence Storbeck of Chadron, a longtime assistant supervisor in Crawford, said hatchery employees stocked the abandoned cellar of the Wood Reserve’s officers’ cabin with overnight necessities in case weather left them stranded.

In late summer of dry years, water at some of the ponds would get too low and fish would require salvaging. One especially challenging period was during World War II when the fort’s 1,000-man prisoner of war camp was

constructed near the Cherry Creek ponds. Not only did the “blitzkrieg” of construction result in eroded sediment piling up in the Cherry Creek ponds, but also the water was diverted away from the Grabel Ponds to meet the demands of the new facilities.

The period brought another set of challenges. With hundreds and thousands of stock dams being constructed on farms and ranches at the encouragement of the Soil Conservation Service, the Crawford hatchery had a hard time keeping up with requests for fish.

The hatchery’s original service region included all of Nebraska, all of Wyoming, areas of South Dakota west of the Missouri River, and parts of Colorado. Of course, Crawford was not the only hatchery in Nebraska. The state’s Game, Forestation and Parks Commission produced millions of fish at hatcheries near Gretna, Parks, Valentine and North Platte. Records show the Crawford facility had a positive working relationship with

Nebraska’s state fisheries.

It was often noted with gratitude that state employees provided pick-up and delivery of fish from Crawford.

A Popular Place

The hatchery was popular with visitors ranging from schoolchildren to distinguished dignitaries, reporting more than 12,000 visitors per year by the early 1950s.

A publicity flyer produced between 1957 and 1974 boasts that the Crawford Hatchery, then one of more than 90 such facilities across the nation, was producing in excess of 2 million fish per year for stockings in Nebraska, South Dakota and Wyoming. By that time, the facility had narrowed its scope to largemouth bass, bluegills, rainbow trout and brown trout.

“Several 1- to 3-acre earthen ponds on the Fort Robinson Reservation are used by the Crawford Hatchery to produce largemouth bass and bluegill sunfish for distribution to approved ponds and lakes,” the author wrote.



A Game and Parks employee feeds fish with a few of the facility’s many visitors in August of 1985. DON CUNNINGHAM, NEBRASKALAND



The hatchery stands in ruins on May 10, 1991, after a devastating flood. NGPC LIBRARY

“The ponds are scattered over a wide area so it is generally not convenient for visitors to observe these operations.”

Torrents of Change

The Spearfish station would later be named for D.C. Booth, who was its superintendent during the era of the Crawford site’s inception. Today, the D.C. Booth Historical National Fish Hatchery & Archives stands as an impressive interpretive facility that annually attracts more than 160,000 visitors and houses many of the records from the Crawford hatchery that were used for this report.

Because of budget cuts, the Crawford Hatchery was abandoned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1984 and the Game and Parks Commission took over its operation. With support of the Legislature and Gov. Bob Kerrey, Nebraska established the Trout Stamp to fund the operation.

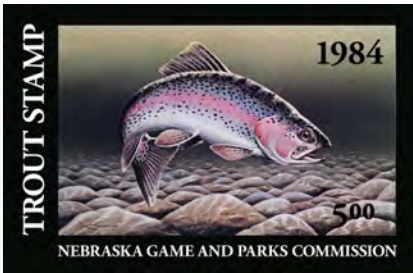
Game and Parks switched it from a brown and brook trout facility to brown and rainbow, and, for the first time, the

fish from Crawford were distributed exclusively to Nebraska waters.

Unfortunately, the Crawford hatchery’s era under Game and Parks was short-lived. On May 10-11, 1991, the hatchery and many other structures in the valley were destroyed when 12 inches of rain in a six-hour period caused a 15- to 18-foot wall of water to strike parts of Crawford. The ponds at the hatchery filled with mud and thousands of brood stock, fry and fingerlings washed downstream — most of which surely died.

While remnants of the hatchery still stand at the Crawford city park, the facility never reopened and Game and Parks has relied on its five other hatcheries — Calamus, North Platte, Rock Creek, Valentine and Grove — for the bulk of its fish production.

The hatchery’s ponds, however, remained an asset at Fort Robinson. With the facility destroyed, all the ponds opened to the public for fishing at the northwest Nebraska tourist attraction, having transformed to a



In 1984, Nebraska enacted a \$5 trout stamp to fund the Crawford Hatchery.

state park in the 1960s.

The Trout Stamp also went away, but the Aquatic Habitat Stamp was implemented in 1997 to fund fisheries projects throughout the state. One such project includes the impressive pond renovations being realized at Fort Robinson today.

Things are a little different from the ponds’ beginnings, but, in a way, they are still doing what they were originally designed to do. With the recent investments, they are sure to continue putting fish on the table and contribute to the state’s fishing heritage for generations to come. 

A LIFETIME OF MENTORS

By Gerry Steinauer

I feel privileged to be a botanist who travels our diverse state surveying plants, evaluating landscapes and helping conserve our native prairies and woodlands. I also feel privileged to have outdoor hobbies, including gardening, hunting, fishing and photography. Nature is a huge part of my life.

Looking back, my interest in nature is due, in large part, to having capable mentors, which Merriam-Webster defines as “a trusted counselor or guide.” From an early age, mentors influenced me, taught me needed skills and, most critically, helped me find my path in life.



My dad was my primary mentor for hunting and fishing, and his efforts started when I was a mere preschooler. He often took his flock of six children, me being the youngest, fishing in a muddy Elkhorn River oxbow on his brother's farm west of our hometown of Millard. There, he diligently laced my hook with squiggling worms and unhooked my catch of spiny little bullheads and flopping carp.

On trips to this same farm during grade school, Dad had the good sense to let me run wild and explore while he visited and played cards.

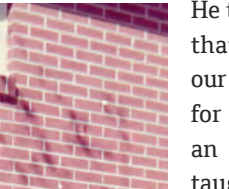
Wandering alone through the brushy riverbottom and oak-wooded bluff allowed me to bond with Mother Nature. After much begging, he also allowed me to tag along on bobwhite hunts in Pawnee County where, to my delight, our Brittany spaniels flushed a covey from nearly every wooded draw and hedgerow. My job was to watch and learn until I was responsible and big enough to shoulder my grandfather's old single-shot 12 gauge.

One of my early female mentors was my dear grandmother. I fondly recall spending summer mornings with her in her tree-shaded, old-town Millard backyard picking and savoring ripe, purple raspberries. Those pleasant times with her likely turned me into the avid forager and preserver of wild fruits that I am today.

Also among my childhood memories is an early spring escapade on an aunt's farm on the outskirts of town. While cutting across a neighbor's small, grassy field, I came upon a patch of low-growing, white flowers, which years later I realized were prairie dog-toothed violets. When I returned



to the house, I asked her why there were flowers in the field. She explained that it was a prairie, a term I had never before heard. My aunt, who passed away more than 25 years ago at the age of 101, then told me that when she was a child, a prairie, lush with wildflowers, covered much of their farm, and that when a renter, without permission, plowed it, her mother cried. I was intrigued by her stories of days gone by.



As an aspiring biologist at Wayne State College, my zoology professor became a mentor. He taught especially tough courses that students dreaded. Perhaps our fears stemmed from his knack for challenging us: Failure was an option. Fear aside, his classes taught me to see detail in nature, and to pass, I had to put my nose to the grindstone, spending hours studying in the library and lab. To this day, I still use the knowledge and skills he ingrained. As a mentor, he had a passion for teaching and a dedication to his students. He cared.



Beginning my career at the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, I found new mentors, or perhaps, they found me. One was a late *Nebraskaland Magazine* writer and editor who took me

under his wing. I was never sure why. At the time, my writing skills were limited, to say the least. In college, I squeaked by with a C- in freshman composition. Maybe he saw potential as he patiently painted drafts of my early articles with red ink. I had great respect for this individual as a person and writer, and worked hard on my writing, in part, to gain his respect. When he retired, he told me I was ready to go it alone. I greatly appreciate his years of guidance, without which I might still be kicking out C- compositions.

Today, well along in life and career, I continue to benefit from mentors, including editors who still work to rid me of bad grammatical habits.

Luckily for me, my lifetime has been filled with mentors who were willing to invest their time in a kid from Millard. Without them, I wonder where I would be.

Gerry Steinauer is a botanist for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission for 33 years. He also is a regular contributor to Nebraskaland Magazine.

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SETTING UP A DECOY SPREAD

How to lure in Canada geese

By Julie Geiser

I've sat with many Canada goose hunters over the years and have seen my share of decoy spreads. To find the perfect set up to draw in geese, some hunters might adjust their spreads as often as several times throughout a hunt. And almost all hunters will change their set up as the season progresses. Here are some tips:

- Before you hunt, take some time to watch Canada geese as they land in the field. Take note of wind direction — geese land facing into the wind — and other weather patterns such as sun, rain or snow. Remember how those birds look in the field as they feed or rest, which you can imitate with your decoy set up. The number of decoys needed to attract geese will vary depending on hunting pressure, the time of year and how many decoys you have.
- Early in the season, use as many or more decoys than the number of geese that you hope to attract. I like starting with a few dozen and adding more as the season progresses. During this time, you can set decoys close to your blind, even right next to it.

- Later in the season, birds may become decoy shy as they've been hunted in many states along their migration. Sometimes less is more for decoy-shy birds. You may have to set the decoys about 30 yards upwind from your blind; flocks will swing wide as they determine if it's safe to land, ultimately flying over the blind as they circle the decoys.

- Don't set decoys too far apart. This may make the spread look larger to you, but from the sky, it won't resemble real birds. Geese will naturally maintain some distance between each other on the ground, but they also will bunch up into smaller groups consisting of family groups, individuals, pairs and non-breeders. Arrange the decoys into family groups of four to eight decoys. Fill in between the family groups with singles and pairs. Using decoys of different sizes also looks more real, but keep those of the same size together.

- Don't make the mistake of facing decoys in only one direction. Geese typically face into the wind, but there will be those feeding or

moving. Use different decoy positions in the groupings, including preening, sleeping, feeding and sentry. I set up one sentry to every eight or so decoys. Placing more than one sentry in a grouping could be taken as a warning to a flying flock.

- Geese will usually try to land in an opening in the decoys, so always keep an opening well defined and on the downwind side of your blind about 20 to 30 yards out. Some flocks may circle several times before they are in range to shoot, so be patient.

- A secret to setting up decoys is to make your spread the shape of a triangle or arrowhead. The triangle should always point into the wind. The decoys will fill the shape of the triangle, but be sure to leave a landing area near your blind.

Once your decoy spread is set up, stand back and determine if it looks natural. The flow of the flock and its smaller groupings should face in one main direction with some variance. Hunting patterns change during the season, but knowing some tactics will help you bag more geese.



To lure in Canada geese, be strategic in setting up your decoy spread. JULIE GEISER, NEBRASKALAND

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NOT-SO-RANDOM TIPS FOR DEER SEASON

Start planning for opening day now.

By Jeff Kurrus

The opening day of deer firearm season remains an event throughout Nebraska, as much a tradition for thousands of families as Husker football.

Make it more special with these tips.

Before the Hunt

- Buy a permit. Don't get in trouble by forgetting to abide by the law.
- Ready your old meat cooler by washing out with soap and water, drying and placing dry newspaper inside of it.
- Exercise beforehand. Walk through the neighborhood, do push-ups and sit-ups, or anything else that will help prepare your body for all the

twists and turns that an opening day deer hunt can provide.

- Sharpen your knife. Dull knives lead to accidents. The sharper, the better, for field dressing and quartering.
- Charge your phone or bring a book. The longer you can sit, the better your chances are of getting a shot.
- Shoot before you hunt. Know where your gun shoots before you have a buck in your sights. It's the ethical step to take and will also help prevent a post-hunt nightmare if you miss.
- Carry extra clothes. If you fall in a creek, sweat too much, get rained on or experience any other water-related setback, have back-up layers.
- Convince someone to go with you.

I enjoy hunting alone, having that feeling of being the last person on the planet, but it's not the safest way to hunt. Bring a friend along to share the day with you.

- Scout. You can walk into the woods on opening morning for the first time if you want to. But increase your odds by looking for travel routes, scrapes, rubs and scat.

During the Hunt

- Bring a backpack. Water, grunt call, blood-trail markers, knife, protein bars, flashlight, safety harness and anything else you need for the day.
- Dress light into the stand. The worst thing you can do is wear all of your clothes in. Any sweat that's created will be your detriment once your body cools back down.
- Stay in the stand. Many hunters get down from the stand a couple of hours into the morning. Shoot your nice buck when they move him in your direction.
- Take a great shot. More times than not, the animal will present a good shot to you. Take a deep breath, calm your nerves, and squeeze the trigger.

After the Hunt

- Process your deer before taking it to the processor. When taken care of correctly, deer meat is not "gamey." Much of the blood, sinew, fat and other undesirables can be removed before handing the meat over to the experts.
- Take pictures. Pixels are free, and some of my most enjoyable technological times are when my phone sends me a "A Year Ago Today" montage. Make sure yours focuses on your opening-day hunting trip.
- Thank your landowner before ... and after ... the hunt. Enough said.



Abigale and Chet Bennetts firearm deer hunt. Bringing a friend, or a child, along on the hunt is a great way to spend time afield. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

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Pheasant and Quail Hunting, 1958.

Three of my long-time hunting buddies during our senior year at Beatrice High School. Many a weekend Norman Holdiman, Darrell Feit and Albert Van Borkum hunted pheasant and quail near Burchard.

I married Norman’s sister. Darrell went on to work for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and retired as the director of the Aksarben Aquarium. Van Borkum opened Van’s Lakeview Fishing Camp at Lake McConaughy.

 – Robert Kuhn, Kearney



Deer Hunt, 1979.

My wife of now 51 years, Kathy, and me with a mule deer from Custer County in 1979. My hunting buddy, Duane McCan, and I traveled from Lexington and archery hunted this buck the day before the rifle season. He used his antlers to move his does away from us. Kathy joined us the next day when I shot him. We had the deer mounted and moved it with us to Alaska and later Washington state. Kathy and I retired in Utah. Duane, now of Kearney, and I still hunt this area annually.

– Gary Lemke, St. George, Utah

Hunting Day, 1994.

We invited my brother-in-law from Dallas, Texas, Richard Adams, to go goose hunting at the Calamus Lake in Burwell, Nebraska. We hunted from a boat blind with Lloyd Ness as chief cook and Rick Gilbertson as boat captain.

Richard took a shot directly overhead and dropped a near 20-pound goose almost in the boat blind. It actually clipped the bill of my cap as it fell.

Later, Richard had to return to Dallas early and on the way to the Omaha airport, he told his wife Cheri, “There are things you do in life you never forget, and this is one of them!”

Welcome to waterfowling in Nebraska!

 – Alan Embury, Lincoln



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



Pheasant Hunting near Arapahoe, 1982.

The results of a pheasant hunt in 1982 in the Arapahoe area with (left to right) John Helms and Brittany — Twister; Ron Hines and Irish setter — Riley; Burton Foutz and English setter — Patti; and Gary Helms with Beagle — Ginger. It was hard to keep the dogs from wanting the pheasants on the ground in front and in the hands of the hunters. The beagle was known as “the bird beagle,” and she tracked pheasants like it was her mission. The pointing dogs and owners learned to trust her instincts when tracking and flushing. She did not let many wounded birds escape either.

– Gary Helms, Kearney



Fishing for Sunfish 1950s.

My little brother Jim, right, and me — sporting matching hats and shirts, no less — caught these underwhelming “sunnies” in the mid-50s from the creek near the old Moseley place west of Weissert at the T intersection. What little remains of Weissert lies a few miles east of Broken Bow. We also caught “the fishing bug” in those days and remain intrepid Nebraska anglers at ages 71 and 68.

– Steve Moseley (York) and Jim Moseley (Scottsbluff)



A CLASS RING OR AN .870

By Jeff Kurrus

Dad pleaded with me, knowing the inevitable outcome. I was 17-years-old and looking at a catalog of senior class rings.

“Forget the ring. I’ll buy you an .870 pump instead,” he said, convinced of the short shelf life of the ring and the girlfriend’s finger it would be placed on.

But I was hard-headed, despite spending much of my free time during those years in floodplain water chasing mallards. So, I chose a ring with all the predictable etchings — baseball uniform number, a white-tailed buck and a largemouth bass.

Several weeks later, that ring came in the mail. And I wore it proudly ... right up until the point it was on some girl’s finger.

While Dad and I never spoke about it, I imagine

we agree that it was about the worst \$200 I had ever asked him and Mom to spend on anything — soccer camp included.

Even worse, less than a year later, in 1994, I took my own money and bought that .870 myself. Since that purchase, I’ve shot ducks, geese and upland birds from southern Mississippi to northern Nebraska. Its had rust sanded off its metal and camo tape applied to its stock.

It’s been caked in mud, stepped on by any number of people and animals, and underwater more times than I can count — like in this Rainwater Basin image from last hunting season.

As far as the ring? I have no idea of its whereabouts. I’m sure it’s gathering dust somewhere.

Something my .870 has never done.

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