



SWIFT FOXES, OGLALA NATIONAL GRASSLAND – BOB GRIER

Wild Nebraska captivates – from the sweep of endless plains to the sparkle in lazy streams. Welcome to a gallery of stunning images by Nebraska photographers showcasing the state's natural realm. Behold its beauty, nuance and wonder. Revel in the breadth and diversity of its creatures. Explore vistas of light, color and seasonal drama. Hear voices from the past, extolling the glories of wild and scenic Nebraska.



NEBRASKAland Magazine

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Cover: Cloaked in early morning light and fog, the Niobrara River evokes nature's ethereal beauty and mystery as it flows through Cherry County in June. – Bob Grier

Left: Yellow cottonwood leaves, among the first to fall in August, slip down a waterfall in Stone Creek, which courses Platte River State Park in Cass County. – Doug Carroll

Above: The color and shape of the Polyphemus moth (*Antheraea polyphemus*) mimics bracket fungi, hanging like miniature shelves from a tree in Antelope County. – Doug Carroll

Introduction

“Capt. Lewis and my Self walked in the Prarie on the top of the Bluff and observed the most butifull prospects imagionable . . .”

– Captain William Clark,
journal entry on July 30, 1804, from Council Bluff,
now the site of Fort Atkinson State Historical Park.

From the beginning, wild and scenic Nebraska captured our imaginations. From the grandeur of endless plains, to the sparkle in meandering streams, to the intricate balance between creatures, the beauty and astounding complexity of natural Nebraska have inspired generations. And now, even after 150 years of development and massive changes to our landscape, wildness lives.

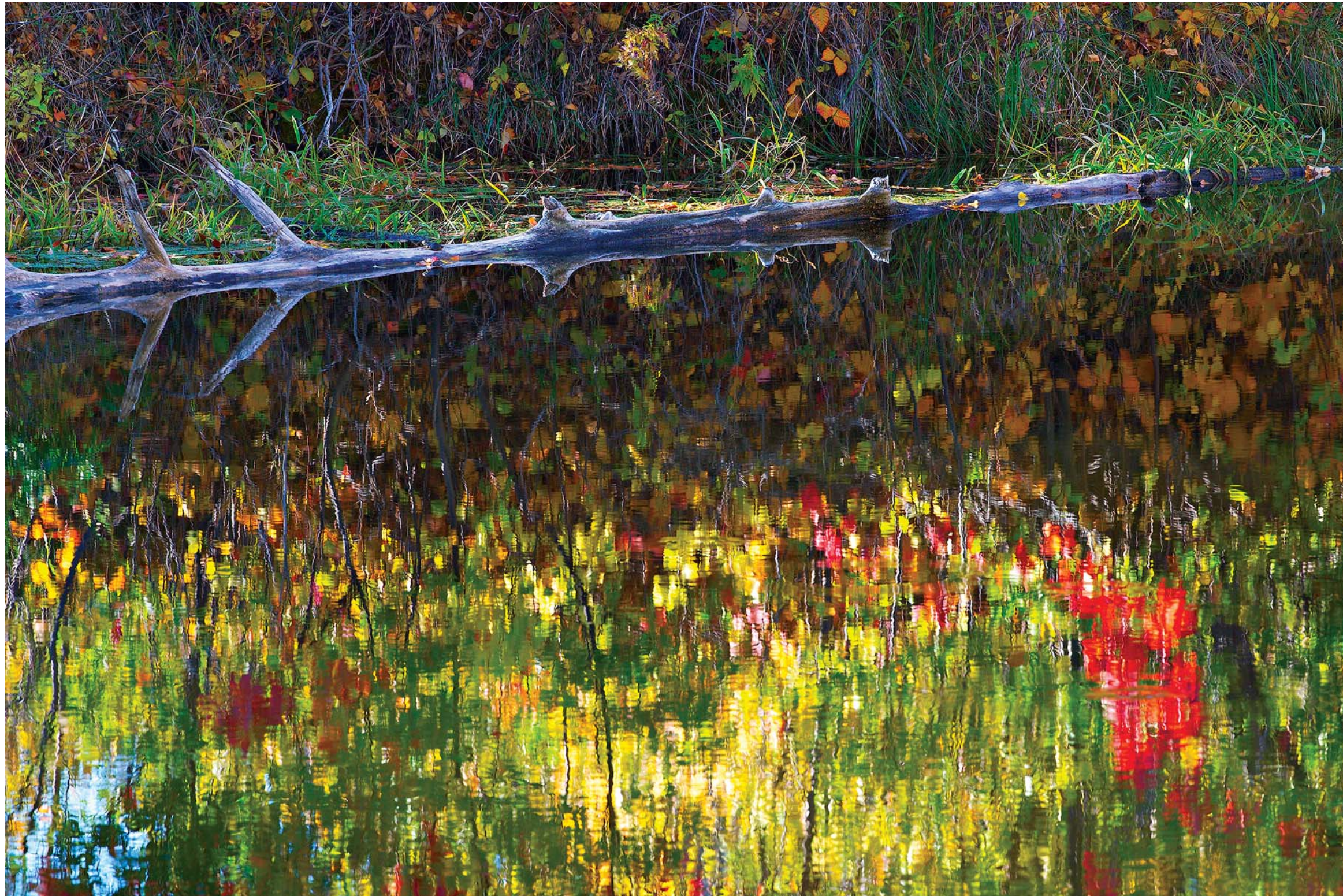
This book is testament to the pristine, serene expanses that nurtured our forebears and still exist amid today’s hurly burly. It is a gallery of images depicting past and present; photographic glimpses of the natural realm that once spanned each of the state’s 77,000 square miles, and of the wild beauty to be discovered within its borders today.

In selecting the scores of images included in this volume, we looked at thousands of frames shot by more than a dozen photographers over several years. We sought dichotomies: the archetypical and atypical; encompassing landscapes and defining details; massive forms and whimsical patterns; bold shades and subtle hues. We demanded both visually compelling frames and photo realism. And, while cognizant of the breadth and diversity of beauty from east to west, north to south, our goal was to explore, rather than to catalog, Nebraska’s wild and scenic essence.

Writer Mari Sandoz once observed that most people traveling through Nebraska see it as a long, flat state between them and a place they want to go. Their impatience, their notion that natural beauty exists only in mountains and on shores, is our gain. We invite you to turn these pages slowly and drink in the nuances and wonders that William Clark saw when he climbed atop that Missouri River bluff more than 200 years ago and said, in effect, “Wow.”

For many, we hope this book is only a beginning, an inspiration to explore and examine the real thing – natural Nebraska – step by step, moment by moment. It’s a grand, inspiring journey.

– Tom White, Editor



AS IN AN IMPRESSIONISTIC PAINTING, FALL COLORS SHIMMER ON A POND RINGED BY ASPENS IN SIOUX COUNTY. – BOB GRIER



“The thunder was loud and metallic, like the rattle of sheet iron, and the lightning broke in great zigzags across the heavens, making everything stand out and come close to us for a moment. Half the sky was checkered with black thunderheads, but all the west was luminous and clear: in the lightning-flashes it looked like deep blue water . . .”

Willa Cather,
My Antonia, 1918.

A LATE SPRING STORM CRACKS THE SKY NEAR HARVARD IN CLAY COUNTY, UNLEASHING NIGHTTIME CLOUD-TO-GROUND BOLTS.
— RICK L. HOUCHIN



WEARING THEIR WINTER COATS AND SPORTING MASSIVE, CURLED HEADGEAR, FOUR BIGHORN RAMS (*OVIS CANADENSIS*) PARADE TOGETHER NEAR SPRING CREEK ON A DECEMBER EVENING IN FORT ROBINSON STATE PARK.
— BOB GRIER



FROM CHADRON STATE PARK, THE VERDURE OF A DAWES COUNTY VALLEY EMERGES AFTER A MAY RAIN. – JUSTIN WAMBOLD



ABOVE: GREEN LEAVES OF SMOOTH SUMAC (*RHUS GLABRA*) CREATE AN ELEGANT PATTERN. SUCH RHYTHMIC DESIGNS ABOUND IN NATURE.
 – DOUG CARROLL

LEFT: IN A NORTHERN LANCASTER COUNTY MARSH, A RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*AGELAIUS PHOENICEUS*) ANNOUNCES THE FIRST DAY OF MAY ATOP A SHEDDING CATTAIL.
 – JUSTIN WAMBOLD

“Time is something we recognize by the rhythms of things. For most of our history as a species, those rhythms have been nature’s; the patterns of sun and moon and tide, the migration of birds, the flowering of plants, the feeding of sparrows.”

– Peter Steinhart, “Time Passes,” *Audubon*.



“Winter has settled down over the Divide again; the season in which Nature recuperates, in which she sinks to sleep between the fruitfulness of autumn and the passion of spring. The birds have gone. The teeming life that goes on down in the long grass is exterminated . . . It is like an iron country, and the spirit is oppressed by its rigor and melancholy. One could easily believe that in that dead landscape the germs of life and fruitfulness were extinct forever.”

— Willa Cather,
O Pioneers!, 1913.

IN EARLY MARCH, ICE-LADEN COTTONWOODS BOW IN MORNING'S BLUE LIGHT ON A FROZEN LANDSCAPE IN SCOTT'S BLUFF COUNTY.
— BOB GRIER



LEFT: ON A CHILLY MARCH MORNING, A BURROWING OWL (*ATHENE CUNICULARIA*) STARES FROM ITS REFUGE IN ADAMS COUNTY.
– RICK L. HOUCHIN

BELOW: BLACK-TAILED PRAIRIE DOGS (*CYNOMYS LUDOVICIANUS*) ARE NOTORIOUSLY LATE RISERS BUT THEY OFTEN FEED UNTIL THE LAST RAYS OF SUNLIGHT IN EVENING AS IS THE CASE WITH THIS ONE IN BROWN COUNTY.
– JON FARRAR



“Several times I passed through villages of prairie-dogs, who sat, each at the mouth of his burrow, holding his paws before him in a supplicating attitude, and yelping away most vehemently, whisking his little tail with every squeaking cry he uttered. Prairie-dogs are not fastidious in their choice of companions; various long, checkered snakes were sunning themselves in the midst of the village, and demure little gray owls, with a large white ring around each eye, were perched side-by-side with the rightful inhabitants.”

- Francis Parkman, *The California and Oregon Trail Being Sketches of Prairie and Rocky Mountain Life*, 1849.



PLAINS SUNFLOWERS (*HELIANTHUS PETIOLARIS*) BLANKET A CHERRY COUNTY HILLSIDE IN MID-AUGUST. – JON FARRAR



IN BLAINE COUNTY, SHIFTING SANDS CREATE FANCIFUL DOLPHIN SHAPES IN THE NORTH LOUP RIVER. – BOB GRIER



LIT BY MOONLIGHT, COURTHOUSE AND JAIL ROCKS IN MORRILL COUNTY STAND WITNESS TO THE HEAVENS. – BOB GRIER

“The Court-house lies about eight miles from the river, and three from the road; in circumference it may be a half a mile, and in height 300 feet; it is, however, gradually degrading, and the rains and snows of not many years will lay it level with the ground. In books it is described as resembling a gigantic ruin, with a huge rotunda in front, windows in the sides, and remains of roofs and stages in its flanks: verily potent is the eye of imagination!

I saw it when set off by weather to advantage. A blazing sun rained fire upon its cream-coloured surface . . . and it stood boldly out against a purple-black nimbus which overspread the southern skies, growling distant thunders, and flashing red threads of ‘chained lightning.’ ”

– Sir Richard Burton, *The City of the Saints*, 1860.



ABOVE: WEARING ITS STRIPES, A SALT CREEK TIGER BEETLE (*CICINDELA NEVADICA LINCOLNIANA*), AMONG THE MOST ENDANGERED OF SPECIES, SKITTERS ACROSS A SALINE MARSH IN LANCASTER COUNTY.
– JOEL SARTORE

RIGHT: IN THE HEAT OF LATE AUGUST, DRIED MUD CRACKS INTO JIGSAW PUZZLE PIECES AT THE LITTLE SALT FORK MARSH NORTH OF LINCOLN. ONLY AN ENDANGERED SALTWORT (*SALICORNIA RUBRA*) AND ANIMAL TRACKS BREAK THE SALINE SOIL CANVAS.
– CHRIS HELZER

“The *News* of September 14, 1861, reports that there are four salt basins of a thousand acres each – except one small one – filled with small springs that during the night ooze out their briny waters . . . They ebb and flow like the tides of the ocean . . . covering the entire surfaces to the extent of thousands of acres and to a depth of several inches. By nine o’clock of an ordinarily dry day, with sunshine, the waters have sunk away, or rather evaporated, leaving a crust of salt.”

– J. Sterling Morton and Albert Wilkins,
History of Nebraska, 1918.





“The roaring . . .
came bearing down
on us like a hundred
freight trains. Only
that twister didn’t
move on. It stationed
itself right overhead,
and made the loudest
noise I’d ever heard,
whining worse than
any jet. There was a
tremendous crack,
and I felt the wall
shudder behind us.
I knew then our house
was being ripped
apart.”

– Dan Hatch describing
the 1980 Grand Island
tornado in *Night of the
Twisters* by Ivy Ruckman,
1984.

NEAR CHESTER IN THAYER
COUNTY ON MAY 24, 2004,
A FUNNEL DIPS FROM A
CHARCOAL CLOUD, SWIRLING
ABOVE LUSH, GREEN FIELDS.
– MIKE HOLLINGSHEAD

“Many . . . are bound by the same seasonal rhythms as our forebears, who were bound by the same rhythms that spur the ducks. Just as we cannot slip the elemental and emotional tides of the seasons, we cannot help but be buoyed by the birds that so typify a season’s passing.”

– Michael Furtman, *Duck Country*, 2001.



ABOVE: ON AN OCTOBER MORNING, A GROUP OF FEEDING NORTHERN SHOVELERS (*ANAS CLYPEATA*) STRAIN THE WATERS OF GOOSE LAKE ON CRESCENT LAKE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE IN GARDEN COUNTY.
– BOB GRIER

LEFT: WITH A CRAYFISH PLUCKED NEAR SHORE HELD FIRMLY IN ITS BILL, A GULL FLIES TO A SAFE SPOT IN KEITH COUNTY BEFORE DEVOURING ITS PREY IN LATE OCTOBER.
– BOB GRIER



A SEPTEMBER BLAZE OF SUMAC (*RHUS GLABRA*) ENCIRCLES YUCCA (*YUCCA GLAUCA*) IN CHERRY COUNTY. – JON FARRAR



IN OCTOBER, A LONE MULE DEER STANDS ON A SANDHILLS RIDGE UNDER A STORM AT SUNSET. – MICHAEL FORSBERG



SNOW FALLS SILENTLY, OBSCURING PINES IN CHERRY COUNTY'S SAMUEL R. MCKELVIE NATIONAL FOREST. – GEORGE BURBA



ABOVE: AN AMERICAN BULLFROG (*RANA CATESBEIANA*) RESTS QUIETLY IN SHALLOW WATER AWAITING AN INSECT AT PAWNEE LAKE STATE RECREATION AREA IN LANCASTER COUNTY.
— DOUG CARROLL

RIGHT: THE RISING SUN BURNS THROUGH FOG CLOAKING A BEAVER POND ALONG THE NIOBRARA RIVER SOUTH OF KILGORE IN CHERRY COUNTY.
— JON FARRAR





NEARING SUNSET, A WILD TURKEY TROTS TO A ROOST IN BESSEY RANGER DISTRICT IN THOMAS COUNTY. – GEORGE BURBA



A BELTED KINGFISHER (*CERYLE ALCYON*) PERCHES ABOVE A LAKE IN SARPY COUNTY. – KEN BOUC



ABOVE: PROSPERING IN SILT-FILLED ROCK FISSURES WHERE FEW OTHER PLANTS ENDURE, PLAINS PRICKLY PEARS (*OPUNTIA POLYACANTHA*) SPREAD THEIR YELLOW FLOWERS IN THE MIDDAY FROM LATE MAY THROUGH JUNE.
— JON FARRAR

LEFT: THOUSANDS OF YEARS OF WATER AND WIND EROSION HAVE EXPOSED UNDERLYING ROCK FORMATIONS IN THE RUGGED BREAKS OF THE UPPER NIOBRARA RIVER WEST OF HARRISON IN SIOUX COUNTY.
— JON FARRAR



AN AUGUST MOON LOOMS ABOVE A DEVELOPING THUNDERSTORM IN WASHINGTON COUNTY. – MIKE HOLLINGSHEAD



THROUGH DRIVEN
SNOW IN A
MARCH STORM,
DEER RACE FOR
FOREST COVER
IN A VALLEY EAST
OF CHADRON
STATE PARK
IN DAWES COUNTY.
— BOB GRIER



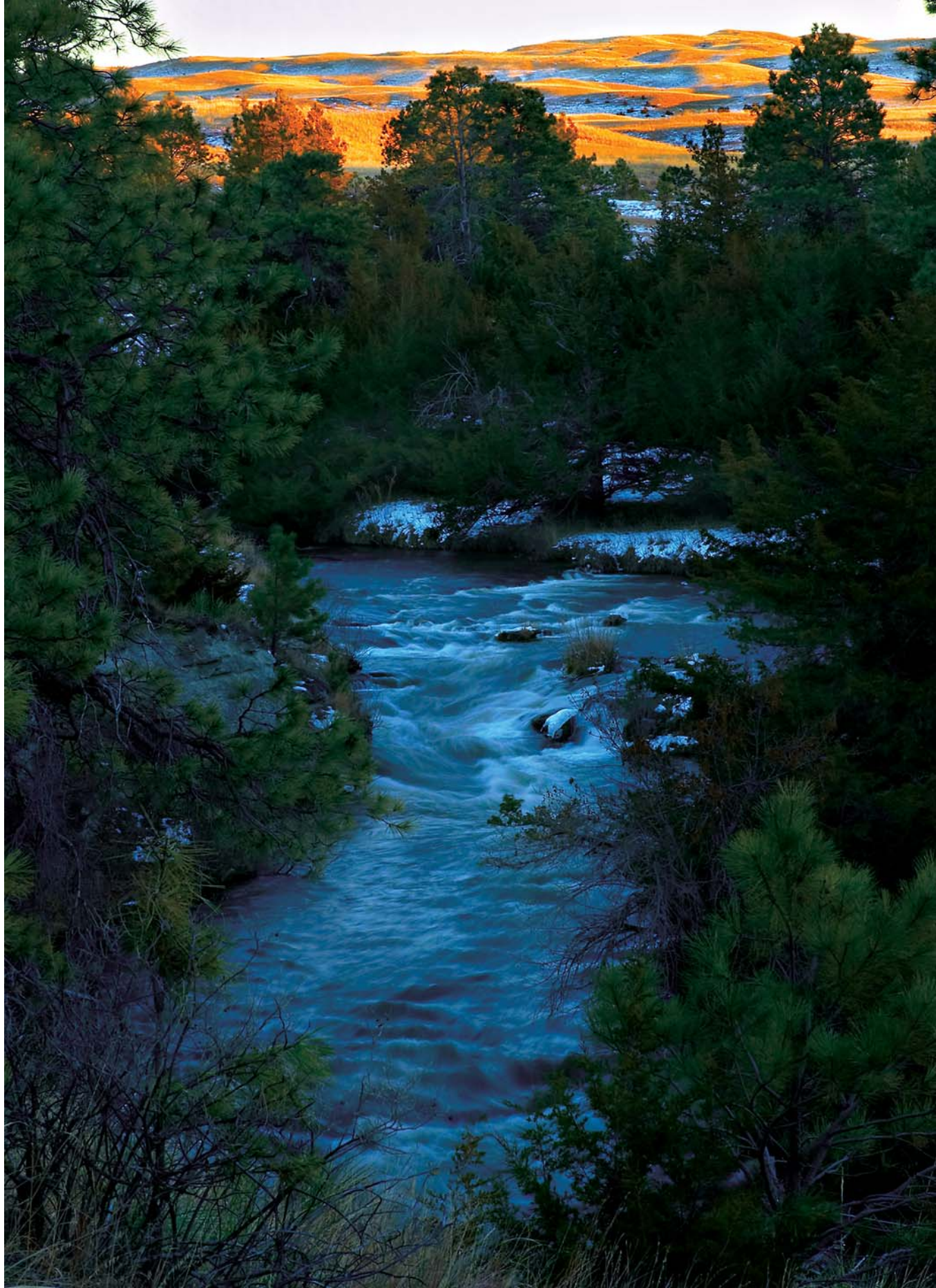
ABOVE: IN CHERRY COUNTY'S SAMUEL R. MCKELVIE NATIONAL FOREST, A NATIVE PICTURE-WINGED FLY (*OURELLIA OCCIDENTALE*) SURVEYS THE FLOWER HEAD OF A PLATTE THISTLE (*CIRSIUM CANESCENS*), WHERE IT LAYS ITS EGGS.
– CHRIS HELZER

RIGHT: ALMOST AN INCH LONG, A LUSTROUS GOLDSMITH BEETLE (*COTALPA LANIGERA*) CLIMBS A BRANCH IN JUNE IN BROWN COUNTY. THE BEETLE FEEDS ON COTTONWOOD AND WILLOW TREES.
– CHRIS HELZER

“It has taken biologists some 230 years to identify and describe three quarters of a million insects; if there are indeed at least thirty million . . . insect taxonomists have ten thousand years of employment ahead of them.”

– Richard Leakey and Roger Lewin,
The Sixth Extinction, 1995.





ABOVE: IN DAWES COUNTY, WILD TURKEYS (*MELEAGRIS GALLOPAVO*) ENGAGE IN A FIGHT FOR DOMINANCE IN MARCH.
– BOB GRIER

LEFT: ON A LATE DECEMBER AFTERNOON, DEEP IN ITS PINEY VALLEY, THE SNAKE RIVER FLOWS A COOL BLUE IN CONTRAST TO THE WARMER TANS OF WINTER GRASSES COVERING SANDHILLS SOUTHWEST OF VALENTINE IN CHERRY COUNTY.
– BOB GRIER



IN LATE JUNE, PRONGHORNS RACE ACROSS WAVES OF NEEDLE-AND-THREAD GRASS IN KIMBALL COUNTY. – MICHAEL FORSBERG

“If the land mechanism as a whole is good, then every part is good, whether we understand it or not. If the Biota in the course of aeons, has built something we like but do not understand, then who but a fool would discard seemingly useless parts? To keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering.”

– Aldo Leopold,
Round River, 1953.



ABOVE: AT MIDDAY IN EARLY APRIL, A SINGLE WHOOPING CRANE (*GRUS AMERICANA*) SOARS TOWARD THE PLATTE RIVER IN HALL COUNTY. WITH ONLY A FEW HUNDRED BIRDS SURVIVING IN THE WILD, A WHOOPER SIGHTING DURING SPRING AND FALL MIGRATIONS CAN CAUSE A STIR AMONG NATURALISTS.
– RICK L. HOUCHIN



LEFT: A LONE BISON (*BISON BISON*), A REMNANT OF THE VAST HERDS THAT ROAMED THE GREAT PLAINS BEFORE SETTLEMENT, STANDS ON THE HORIZON AGAINST A SUMMER, PREDAWN SKY IN CHERRY COUNTY.
– RICK L. HOUCHIN



STANDING MILK-VETCH (*ASTRAGALUS ADSURGENS*) EMERGES FROM A WASH OF PEBBLES IN MORRILL COUNTY. – BOB GRIER



BEFORE DAWN IN MAY, SUGAR LOAF BUTTE TOWERS OVER
THE OGLALA NATIONAL GRASSLAND IN SIOUX COUNTY.
— BOB GRIER



ABOVE: AN AMERICAN GOLDFINCH (*CARDUELIS TRISTIS*)
BRAVES A COLD, GRAY WINTER DAY.
– ROCKY HOFFMANN

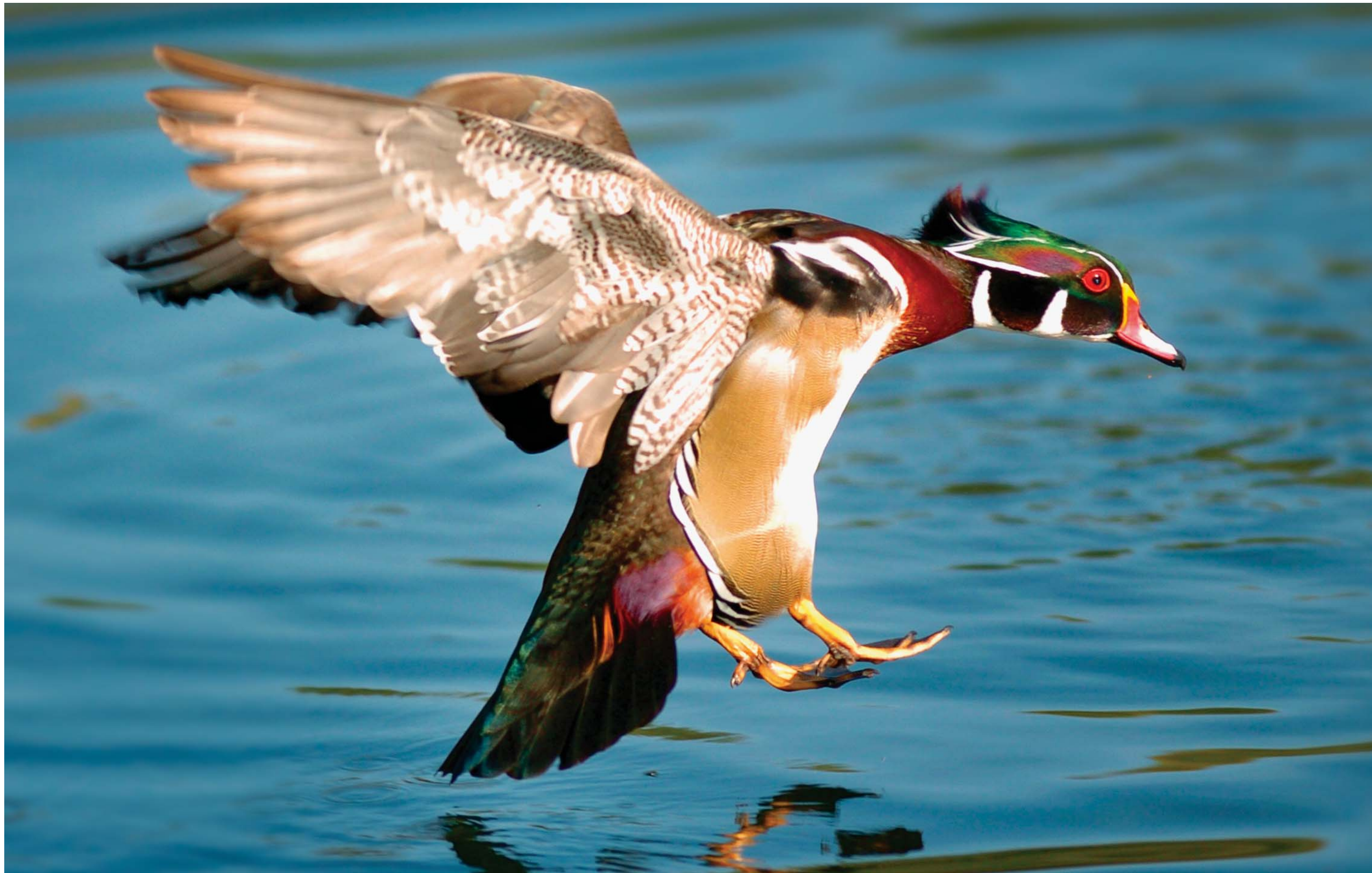
LEFT: A BULL ELK (*CERVUS ELAPHUS*) TRAILS THROUGH
A LINCOLN COUNTY CEDAR CANYON LANDSCAPE
ON A BRIGHT OCTOBER MORNING.
– ERIC FOWLER

“Last winter, they [goldfinches] were all in khaki, wearing their army surplus overcoats. But inside each of them, through the winter months, one of last summer’s dandelion seeds was slowly coming to life, and each breast was beginning to bloom like a bright yellow flower.”

– Ted Kooser,
Local Wonders, 2002.



WRAPPED IN EARLY MORNING LIGHT AND FOG, THE NIOBRARA FLOWS FULL THROUGH CHERRY COUNTY IN JUNE. – BOB GRIER



IN EARLY OCTOBER, A WOOD DUCK (*AIX SPONSA*) BRACES FOR SPLASHDOWN ON AN ADAMS COUNTY POND. – RICK L. HOUCHIN



LICHENS, ROCKS AND WESTERN WALLFLOWERS (*ERYSIMUM ASPERUM*) CREATE A SIOUX COUNTY ABSTRACT. – BOB GRIER



ABOVE: ON A CLOUDY MORNING, A SPIDERWORT
OPENS ITS LAVENDER, SPADE-SHAPED
PETALS ON NINE-MILE PRAIRIE
IN LANCASTER COUNTY.
– JUSTIN WAMBOLD

LEFT: HAVING PROPERLY SPUN AND STITCHED A WEB
AT LOUISVILLE STATE RECREATION AREA IN
CASS COUNTY, A FEMALE BLACK-AND-YELLOW
GARDEN SPIDER (*ARGIOPE AURANTIA*)
WAITS FOR AN INSECT TO BECOME
ENSNARED IN HER TRAP.
– DOUG CARROLL



“There is a mixture of the awful and the comic in the look of these huge animals as they heave their great bulk forwards, with an up and down motion of the unwieldy head and shoulders; their tail cocked up like the queue of Pantaloon in a pantomime, the end whisking about in a fierce yet whimsical style; and their eyes glaring venomously with an expression of fright and fury.”

– Washington Irving,
The Grand Prairie - A Buffalo Hunt, 1835.

AS THEY HAVE FOR CENTURIES, BISON GRAZE PRAIRIE GRASSES. THIS HERD RANGES THE NIOBRARA VALLEY PRESERVE MANAGED BY THE NATURE CONSERVANCY IN BROWN, KEYA PAHA AND CHERRY COUNTIES.
– MICHAEL FORSBERG



A SANDHILLS MARSH IN CHERRY COUNTY IS AT REST IN THE FADING LIGHT OF A SPRING EVENING. – JUSTIN WAMBOLD



ABOVE: A NORTHERN FLANK IN THE PINE RIDGE, THE
FIVE POINTS FORMATION RISES ABOVE
A DEEP GREEN VALLEY IN SIOUX COUNTY.
– BOB GRIER

LEFT: A PEREGRINE FALCON (*FALCO PEREGRINUS*)
SOARS ABOVE ITS NEST IN LANCASTER COUNTY.
– DOUG CARROLL

"It is a stern, formidable land that invites no dalliance with the viewer, no light-hearted love affair with persons who visit or inhabit it. Yet for those who are willing to accept it on its own terms, to battle its storms and fight its droughts, it offers incredible beauty – buttes that turn purple in the fading twilight, pinnacles of rock as delicate as anything designed by a human architect, broad horizons that stretch as far as the limitations imposed by the earth's curvature, deep canyons and broad rivers, all covered by a sky unequalled for grandeur except on the ocean."

- Alexander B. Adams, *Sunlight and Storm*, 1977.



HELD BY ITS MATE, A GREEN DARNER (*ANAX JUNIUS*) DEPOSITS EGGS IN A LANCASTER COUNTY MARSH. – JUSTIN WAMBOLD



SUBTLE PASTELS AT SUNRISE COLOR A TOADSTOOL GEOLOGIC PARK LANDSCAPE IN SIOUX COUNTY. – BOB GRIER



LEFT: SANDHILL
CRANES (*GRUS*
CANADENSIS)
REVEL ON A CRISP
MARCH MORNING IN
KEARNEY COUNTY.
– RICK L. HOUCHIN

BELOW: AT SUNSET
IN EARLY MARCH,
FLOCKS OF
SANDHILL CRANES
FLY IN SILHOUETTE
ABOVE THE PLATTE
RIVER, WHERE
THEY SETTLE ON
SANDBARS AT DUSK
FOR PROTECTION.
– RICK L. HOUCHIN

“There is a bird in the heart of North America that is perhaps even older than the [Platte] river, and far more wary than the waterfowl or prairie-chickens. It is as gray as the clouds of winter, as softly beautiful and graceful as the flower heads of Indian grass and big bluestem, and its penetrating bugle-like notes are as distinctive and memorable as the barking of a coyote or the song of a western meadowlark. The bird is the sandhill crane.”

– Paul Johnsgard, *Crane Music*, 1991.



“I lie there just under the wind, the grasses harping and singing faintly, their tones rising and falling, the prairie world washing over me. There is no point in moving; with a little time, the wind will bring the world to be in a steady and varied traffic . . . I see a dragonfly, alias devil's darning needle, darting downwind to the slough off below. Next comes a squadron of monarch butterflies on their way to some crimson patch of butterfly milkweed. A male bobolink arrives twenty feet above me, hanging on the wind and stating his territorial claims . . .”

— John Madson,
The Lawns of God, 1982.

THE TURKEY FOOT HEADS
OF BIG BLUESTEM (*ANDROPOGON
GERARDII*) WAVE TO PASSING CLOUDS
AT SUNRISE IN NANCE COUNTY.
— JON FARRAR





ALONG THE CENTRAL PLATTE RIVER, COTTONWOODS GLOW THROUGH THE HAZE OF AN OCTOBER MORNING. – ERIC FOWLER

“As it leaves the Rockies and moves downward over the high plains towards the Missouri, the Platte River is a curious stream. In the spring floods, on occasion, it can be a mile-wide roaring torrent of destruction, gulping farms and bridges. Normally, however, it is a rambling, dispersed series of streamlets flowing erratically over great sand and gravel fans that are, in part , the remnants of a mightier Ice Age stream bed. Quicksands and shifting islands haunt its waters. Over it the prairie suns beat mercilessly throughout the summer. The Platte, ‘a mile wide and an inch deep,’ is a refuge for any heat-weary pilgrim along its shores.”

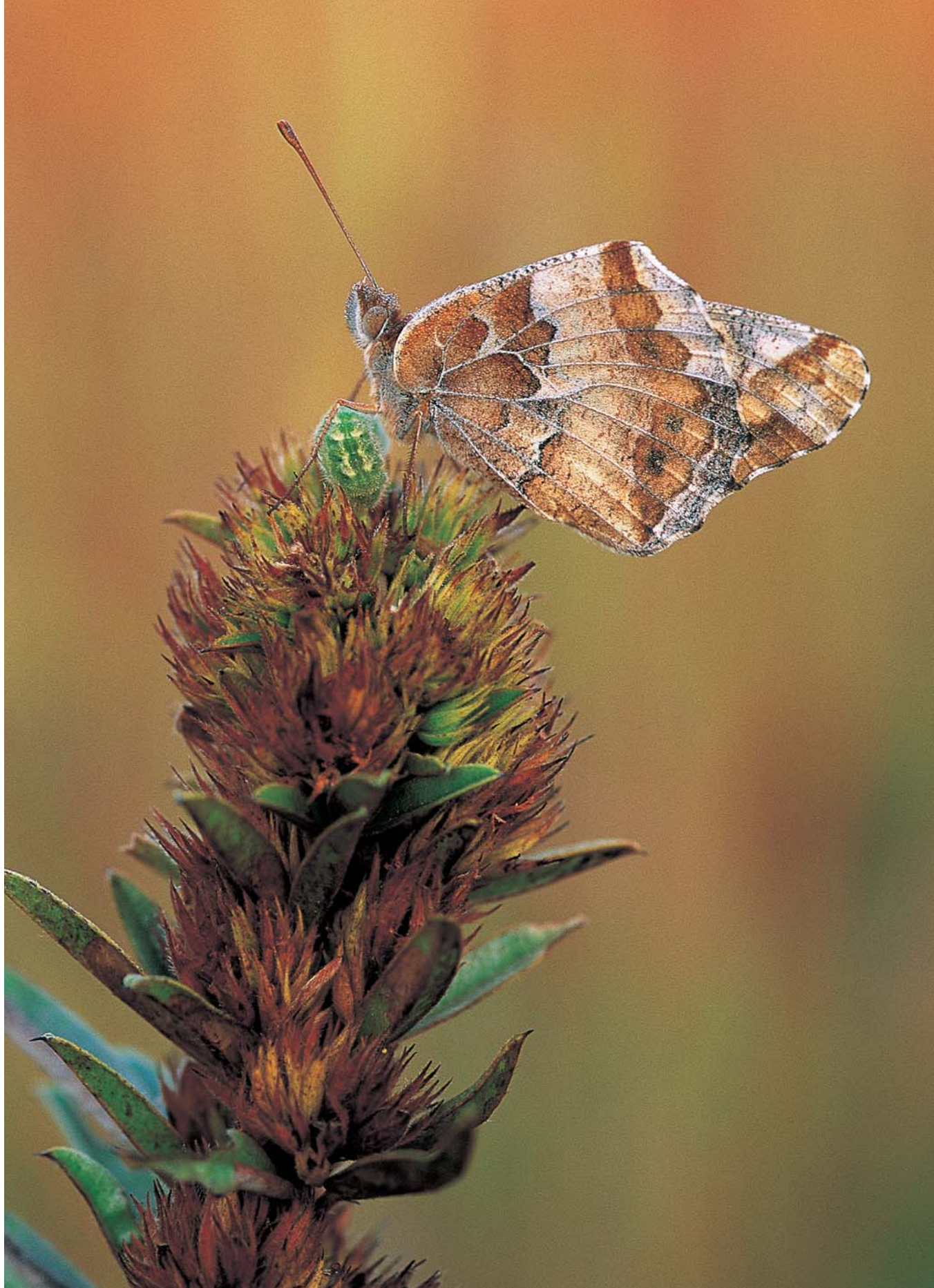
– Loren Eiseley,
The Immense Journey, 1946.

“Boreal aurora glared brighter than a sunset in Syria. The long streamers were intercepted and mysteriously confused by a massive stratum of dark cloud, through whose narrow rifts and jagged chinks the splendours poured in floods of magic fire . . . After a full hour of changeful beauty, the northern lights slowly faded away with a blush which made the sunrise look colder than its wont. It is no wonder that the imaginative Indian, looking with love upon these beauties, connects them with the ghosts of his ancestors.”

– Sir Richard Burton,
The City of the Saints, 1860.

IN THE NORTHERN SKY OF NOVEMBER 9, 2004, SILVERY STARS AND THE LUMINOUS RED AND GREEN OF AN AURORA BOREALIS REFLECT ON THE SURFACE OF AN OGLALA NATIONAL GRASSLAND POND IN DAWES COUNTY.
– BOB GRIER





ABOVE: A COLD NOVEMBER MIDDAY DRIZZLE DAMPENS
AND DARKENS PAWNEE PRAIRIE, A TALLGRASS EXPANSE
COMPOSED OF BIG BLUESTEM, SWITCHGRASS AND
INDIANGRASS AMONG OTHER SPECIES IN PAWNEE COUNTY.
– ERIC FOWLER

LEFT: ON AN EARLY SEPTEMBER MORNING, A VARIEGATED FRITILLARY
(*EUPTOIETA CLAUDIA*) SITS ON ROUND-HEADED BUSHCLOVER
(*LESPEDEZA CAPITATA*) IN A PRAIRIE NEAR AURORA
IN HAMILTON COUNTY.
– CHRIS HELZER



HUNDREDS OF SNOW GEESE (*CHEN CAERULESCENS*) TAKE OFF FROM A HALL COUNTY POND IN FEBRUARY. – JUSTIN WAMBOLD



“ . . . I had an extensive view of the Surrounding Plains, which afforded one of the most pleasing prospects ever beheld, under me a Beautiful River of Clear water of about 80 yards wide Meandering thro: a level and extensive meadow, as far as I could See, the prospect much enlivened by the fine Trees and Shrubs which is bordering the bank of the river and the Creeks & runs falling into it, – The bottom land is covered with Grass of about 4 and 1/2 feet high, and appears as level as a Smooth Surface, the 2nd bottom is also covered with Grass and rich weeds & flowers, interspersed with the Copses of Osage Plum.”

– Captain William Clark, in a journal entry after looking down upon the Big Nemaha River Valley, July 12, 1804.

THE SUN SETS OVER RULO BLUFFS, AN AREA WITH LOESS HILL PRAIRIES AND EASTERN DECIDUOUS FORESTS. THE NATURE CONSERVANCY PRESERVES THE NATURAL BEAUTY OF THIS RUGGED LAND ALONG THE MISSOURI RIVER IN RICHARDSON COUNTY.
– ERIC FOWLER



“Perhaps, among outdoor men, the urge to paint is stimulated by the swift, subtle flows of blue hazes against the Nebraska hills, the yellow-greens, the tans, russets, and mauves of the rolling prairie, the patterns of the contoured fields, and the unsurpassed sunrises and sunsets over it all.

“ ‘It’s paint rags ’stead a pliers in my old ditty box now,’ a gnarled cowman replied when I wondered about the easel beside him in the jeep out on the range. ‘My boy down to the university drug me to look at some pictures. Fair time. I seen right away I could do better.’ ”

— Mari Sandoz,
“Nebraska” in *Holiday*, May 1956.

BLUE CREEK WINDS THROUGH
THE WESTERN SANDHILLS AS
THE NIGHT SLIPS BELOW
BREAKING MAY RAIN CLOUDS
IN GARDEN COUNTY.
— MICHAEL FORSBERG



“ . . . the sky is just
as much a force
directing the lives
of prairie people as
any religious icon,
and the clouds are
just as variable,
and as likely to
send conflicting
messages in
different lights . . . ”

– John Janovy Jr.,
NEBRASKAland,
October 1988.

AS THE SUN SETS, MAMMATUS
CLOUDS DAPPLE A KNOX
COUNTY SKY WITH GRAYS
IN MID-AUGUST.
– MIKE HOLLINGSHEAD



ABOVE: A RED-SIDED GARTER SNAKE (*THAMNOPHIS SIRTALIS PARIETALIS*) TESTS THE AIR WITH ITS DARTING TONGUE IN LANCASTER COUNTY.
– JOEL SARTORE

LEFT: AFTERNOON SUNLIGHT PENETRATES AN OAK CANOPY, ILLUMINATING A TRIBUTARY TO THE NORTH FORK OF THE BIG NEMAH RIVER. FROM THE LUSHNESS OF SPRING, THE STREAM FLOWS OVER A LIMESTONE SHELVE IN TWIN OAKS WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA IN JOHNSON COUNTY.
– ERIC FOWLER

“Soon you can hear it everywhere, the sound of water trickling, shearing from pebble and hill, the lock of winter slipping, the chill drip-drop, drip-drop of what seems to be all the world’s water, running, feeling its way up out of the sockets of tree roots, spilling from roof and sill, from every tilt and crease and lip and corner, till the steep black creek banks soften with winter’s easing.”

– Ted Kooser, *Local Wonders*, 2002.



ABOVE: A RIVER OTTER (*LUTRA CANADENSIS*) FEEDS ON SALAMANDERS
IN A BOX BUTTE COUNTY POND.
– BOB GRIER

LEFT: LINING THE DISMAL RIVER, EASTERN RED CEDARS AND ASH TREES
STAND OUT AGAINST BROWN SANDHILLS
GRASSES IN OCTOBER.
– ERIC FOWLER

“On this continent and in the psyche of its people the plains have always been a staggering presence, a place of myth and cliché, a place for transformation, bafflement, or heartbreak. From the east they are release from the clawing of swamp and tangle and human density. From the west they are a drop and a straightening after the kinks and strains of mountains. Entered from any direction they are new air, a joy to behold, a combination of large-scale intimidation and primordial inner acoustics.”

– Merrill Gilfillan, *Magpie Rising*, 1988.

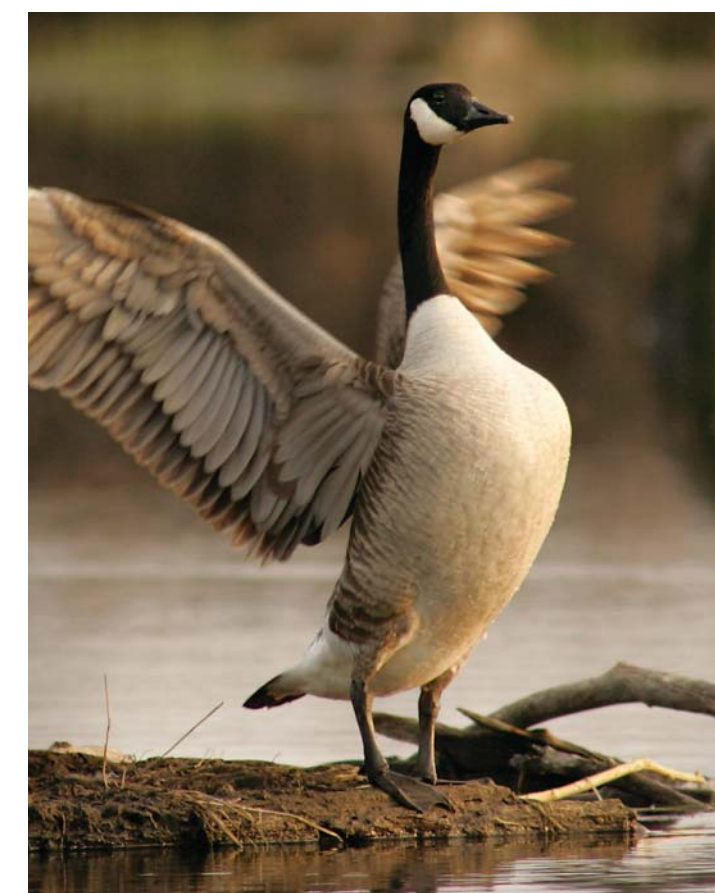


LEFT: WHEN LEWIS AND CLARK ASCENDED THE MISSOURI RIVER IN 1804, IT WAS A BRAWLING STREAM ROAMING AT WILL ACROSS ITS BROAD FLOODPLAIN, LACED WITH SANDBARS AND DEBRIS WASHED DOWNSTREAM BY SPRING FLOODS. TODAY, AT PONCA STATE PARK, IT IS MOST LIKE WHAT IT ONCE WAS ALONG NEBRASKA'S EASTERN BORDER.
— JON FARRAR

BELOW: A CANADA GOOSE (*BRANTA CANADENSIS*) MAJESTICALLY SPREADS ITS WINGS. LEWIS AND CLARK OBSERVED CANADAS NESTING ON THE BACKWATERS OF THE MISSOURI.
— JUSTIN WAMBOLD

“And then the dog-days came, and I saw my river tawny, sinewy, gaunt – a half-starved lion. The long dry bars were like the protruding ribs of the beast when prey is scarce, and the ropy main current was like the lean, terrible muscles of its back. In the spring it had roared; now it only purred.”

— John G. Neihardt on the Missouri River, *The River and I*, 1910.





ABOVE: A DESERT COTTONTAIL RABBIT
(*SYLVILAGUS AUDUBONII*) RESTS IN THE SECURITY OF A
ROCK FISSURE IN SIOUX COUNTY.
– BOB GRIER

LEFT: EARLY MORNING FOG LIFTS TO REVEAL LICHENS,
WILDLFLOWERS AND SHORTGRASS PRAIRIE
GRASSES TUCKED AMONG THE ERODED
SEDIMENTARY ROCKS OF THE
UPPER NIOBRARA BREAKS
IN SIOUX COUNTY.
– MICHAEL FORSBERG



A COYOTE (*CANIS LATRANS*) PICKS ITS WAY THROUGH A SANDSAGE DRAW IN CHASE COUNTY IN NOVEMBER. – ERIC FOWLER



ABOVE: BLUET DAMSELFLIES (*ENGALLGMA SP.*) ATTACH THEMSELVES TO A BULRUSH ON BOX ELDER CREEK IN DOUGLAS COUNTY.
– GEORGE BURBA

LEFT: IN AN AERIAL SQUABBLE, GREAT BLUE HERONS (*ARDEA HERODIAS*) COMPETE FOR A PERCH OR NEST LOCATION AT COTTONWOOD-STEVEYSON WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA IN CHERRY COUNTY. WITH SQUAWKS AND THREATENING JABS OF ITS SHARP BILL WHILE IN FLIGHT, THE DOMINANT BIRD (RIGHT) CHASES THE CHALLENGER AWAY.
– BOB GRIER



“Whatever else prairie is – grass, sky, wind – it is most of all a paradigm of infinity, a clearing full of many things except boundaries, and its power comes from its apparent limitlessness; there is no such thing as a small prairie any more than there is a little ocean, and the consequence of both is this challenge: try to take yourself seriously out here, you bipedal plodder, you complacent cartoon.”

– William Least Heat-Moon, *PrairyErth*, 1991.

ABOVE: JUST AFTER DAWN IN OCTOBER, A RED FOX (*VULPES FULVA*) HUNTS IN A GRASSLAND IN DAWES COUNTY.
– RICK L. HOUCHIN

LEFT: ON A GOLDEN EVENING IN MARCH, AN ARC OF TREE LIMBS AND SYMMETRICAL REFLECTIONS CAST ON A CALM KEARNEY COUNTY POND FORM A CIRCLE OF NATURE.
– RICK L. HOUCHIN



A WHITE-TAILED DEER (*ODOCOILEUS VIRGINIANUS*) FORAGES ON A MAY EVENING IN WASHINGTON COUNTY. – DOUG CARROLL



NOVEMBER MORNING LIGHT GLEAMS ON A SANDSTONE WALL IN THE NORTHERN PINE RIDGE OF SIOUX COUNTY. – BOB GRIER



“It is somewhat to be wondered that, when Audubon’s experiments came up, no person of an ingenious and inquiring turn advanced a theory why Vultures were deprived of the sense of smell: reasoning that if their olfactories were acute they could not bring themselves to eat carrion, and that moreover they would be continually unhappy in the noxious atmosphere emanating from their own bodies; in short, that a merciful Creator had so arranged that they might not smell themselves!”

— Elliott Coues,
Key to North American Birds, 1872.

LEFT: IN EERIE LIGHT, TURKEY VULTURES
(*CATHARTES AURA*) CLAIM A ROOST IN A
BARREN, CROOKED TREE NEAR THE
SNAKE RIVER IN CHERRY COUNTY.
— GEORGE BURBA



FOG SHROUDS A PINE WOODLAND ON THE NORTHERN RIM OF THE NIOBRARA RIVER IN KEYA PAHA COUNTY. – JON FARRAR



ABOVE: IN AUGUST, A COMMON BUCKEYE BUTTERFLY (*JUNONIA COENIA*) LIGHTS ON A DEWY STEM NEAR THE CENTRAL PLATTE RIVER IN HALL COUNTY.
– CHRIS HELZER

LEFT: WITH LEADEN SUMMER SKIES ABOVE, PRAIRIE WILD ROSES (*ROSA ARKANSANA*) BRIGHTEN A WEBSTER COUNTY GRASSLAND.
– MICHAEL FORSBERG

“This earth seemed to her young and fresh and kindly, a place where refugees from old, sad countries were given another chance. The mere absence of rocks gave the soil a kind of amiability and generosity, and the absence of natural boundaries gave the spirit a wider range. Wire fences might mark the end of a man's pasture, but they could not shut in his thoughts as mountains and forests can. It was over flat lands like this, stretching out to drink the sun, that the larks sang – and one's heart sang there, too.”

– Willa Cather, *Song of the Lark*, 1915.



IN SIOUX COUNTY, AN ADULT MALE SWIFT FOX (*VULPES VELOX*) STANDS OVER A PUP NEAR A GRASSLAND DEN. – BOB GRIER



AFTER A JUNE SUNSET, RAIN CLOUDS GLOW RED AND PURPLE AT THE WESTERN EDGE OF SIOUX COUNTY. – BOB GRIER



“But as autumn advances, the woods will open up again. The deep shade, which seemed so unfamiliar when it first returned in late spring, will dissipate. Antiseptic sunlight will again reach the waterlogged earth beneath the great stands of oak and maple. Even as daylight slackens week by week, the turning, yellowing leaves will reflect more light in wavelengths with a warm, inviting cast. As the leaves cover the ground, the floor of the deciduous forest will begin to throw light upward toward the sky. The landscape will seem to decrease in volume because the woods are bare.”

– Verlyn Klinkenborg, *The Rural Life*, 2002.

STURDY, GRACEFUL BRANCHES OF POISON IVY (*TOXICODENDRON RADICANS*) REACH OUT WITH LEAVES DRESSED IN AUTUMN HUES FROM A VINE-ENTANGLED TREE TRUNK AT BOYER CHUTE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE IN WASHINGTON COUNTY.
– DOUG CARROLL

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Photographers

NEBRASKAland Magazine photographers who contributed images to this special issue are: **Ken Bouc**, pages 40-41; **Doug Carroll**, pages 2, 3, 13, 36, 68, 74, 112-113, 126-127 and 129; **Jon Farrar**, pages 16-17, 18-19, 30-31, 36-37, 42-43, 82-83, 102-103, 118-119 and 131; **Eric Fowler**, pages 60, 84-85, 89, 92-93, 98-99, 100 and 106-107; **Bob Grier**, front cover, pages 4-5, 8-9, 14-15, 20-21, 22-23, 28-29, 46-47, 50, 51, 56-57, 58-59, 62-63, 66-67, 75, 78-79, 86-87, 101, 105, 108-109, 114-115, 122-123, 124-125 and back cover; **Rocky Hoffmann**, page 61.

Freelance Photographers

George Burba, a native of Russia, is Senior Scientist with Li-Cor Biosciences. His photos have appeared in American and Russian magazines. His photo web site is www.gburba.com. His images are on pages 34-35, 38-39, 109, and 116-117.

Michael Forsberg is a Lincoln wildlife photographer whose work frequently appears in NEBRASKAland and who last fall published *On Ancient Wings – The Sandhill Cranes of North America*. His site is www.michaelforsberg.com. His photos appear on pages 32-33, 52-53, 70-71, 94-95, 104, and 120.

Chris Helzer is Director of Science and Stewardship for The Nature Conservancy in Nebraska and lives in Aurora. His contributions to this book are on pages 24-25, 48, 49, 88, and 121.

Mike Hollingshead, a lifelong resident of Blair, is a self-described storm chaser. His images appear on his web site, www.extremeinstability.com. His pictures are on pages 26-27, 44-45, and 96-97.

Rick Houchin has been a photojournalist for 29 years, which include the past 20 years at *The Hasting Tribune*. His photos in this issue are on pages 6-7, 16, 54, 54-55, 64-65, 80, 80-81, 110-111, and 111.

Joel Sartore lives in Lincoln and has covered assignments around the world for *National Geographic Magazine* for the past 14 years. His web site is www.joelsartore.com. His images are on pages 24 and 99.

Justin Wambold, a native of North Platte who recently relocated from Lincoln to Chicago, has been a frequent contributor to NEBRASKAland Magazine during the past five years. His photography web site is www.jw-photography.com and his images appear on pages 10-11, 12, 69, 72-73, 76-77, 90-91, 103.



A FRESHLY FALLEN DOGWOOD LEAF RESTS ATOP A MOSS-COVERED LOG IN CASS COUNTY. – DOUG CARROLL

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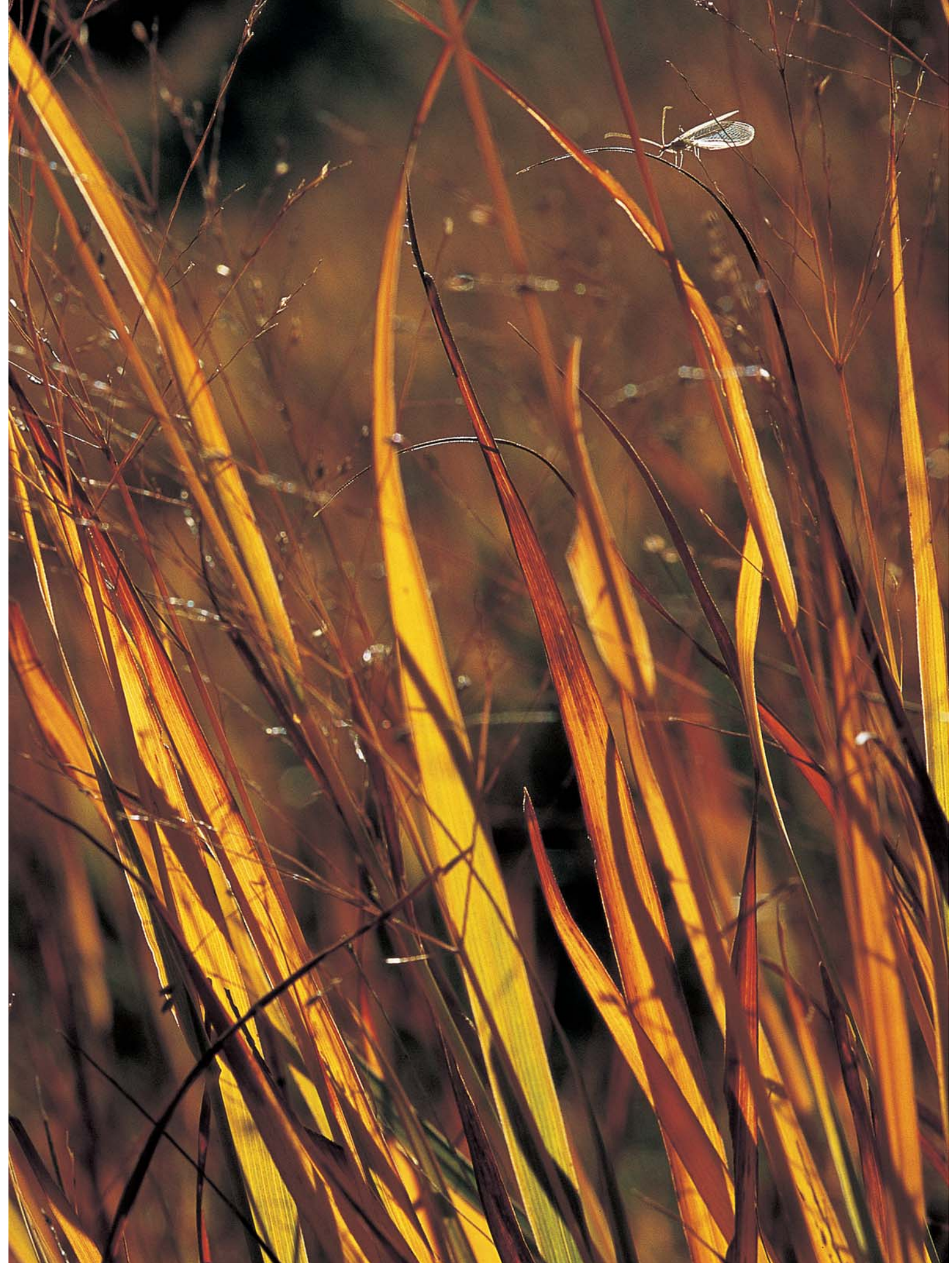
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Right: A September breeze ripples through ripening switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*) at Schlagel Creek Wildlife Management Area in Cherry County. – Jon Farrar



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