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NEBRASKAland

May 2017

Nebraska's
Threatened and
Endangered
Species

See page 42



May is for morel mushrooms as seen from this image taken near the Platte River in Sarpy County. Photo by Jeff Kurrus.

Published by the
NEBRASKA
— GAME  PARKS —
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INSIDE

Wipers on the Fly • The Shotgun State
Operation Walleye • Topwater Favorites
The Friends of Fort Atkinson • Morels For Days



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NEBRASKAland Magazine

Volume 95 • No. 4 • May 2017

FEATURES...

26 Keeping the Past Alive - The Friends of Fort Atkinson
By RENAE BLUM

34 Time Well Spent - What to do in May
By RENAE BLUM

36 Wipers on the Fly
PHOTOS AND STORY BY DOUG STEINKE

42 Extinction is Final
STORY BY KRISTAL STONER, PHOTOS BY JOEL SARTORE

48 Learning at Cedar Point
STORY AND PHOTOS BY MARK HARRIS

54 A Family Fishing Restart
By LINDSEY CHIZINSKI

56 Morels for Days
STORY AND PHOTOS BY JENNY NGUYEN

64 Connecting to Nature
By MONICA MACOUBRIE

66 The Shotgun State - The Cornhusker Trapshoot
By JOEL W. HELMER



INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Mixed Bag – The Woodchuck, Travel to South Sioux City, Edible Dandelions, Favorite Topwaters and more 8
Page 49 – Welsch Gets Prickly 70
In the Field – Saddling Up at a State Park 74
Wilderness Workshop – Operation Walleye 78
Outdoor Update – Aquatic Habitat Updates 80
Portraits from the Past – Reader's Photos 82
In the Kitchen – Wild Turkey Enchiladas 84
The Last Stop – Finding No-No 86



THROUGHOUT 2017, *NEBRASKALAND MAGAZINE* WILL PUBLISH ARTICLES ASSOCIATED WITH THE STATE'S 150-YEAR CELEBRATION. LOOK FOR THIS LOGO TO READ ABOUT NEBRASKA'S RICH HISTORY AND VIEW OUR INTERACTIVE DIGITAL EDITION FOR MORE INFORMATION.

NEBRASKALand (VOL. 95 / NO. 4 ISSN 0028-1964) is published monthly, except for the combined Jan./Feb. and Aug./Sept. issues, by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, 2200 N. 33rd St., Lincoln, NE. Periodicals postage paid at Lincoln, Nebraska, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to NEBRASKALand, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370.



Cover: This image of Sara, a federally endangered whooping crane, is part of the National Geographic Photo Ark project. Photo by Joel Sartore.

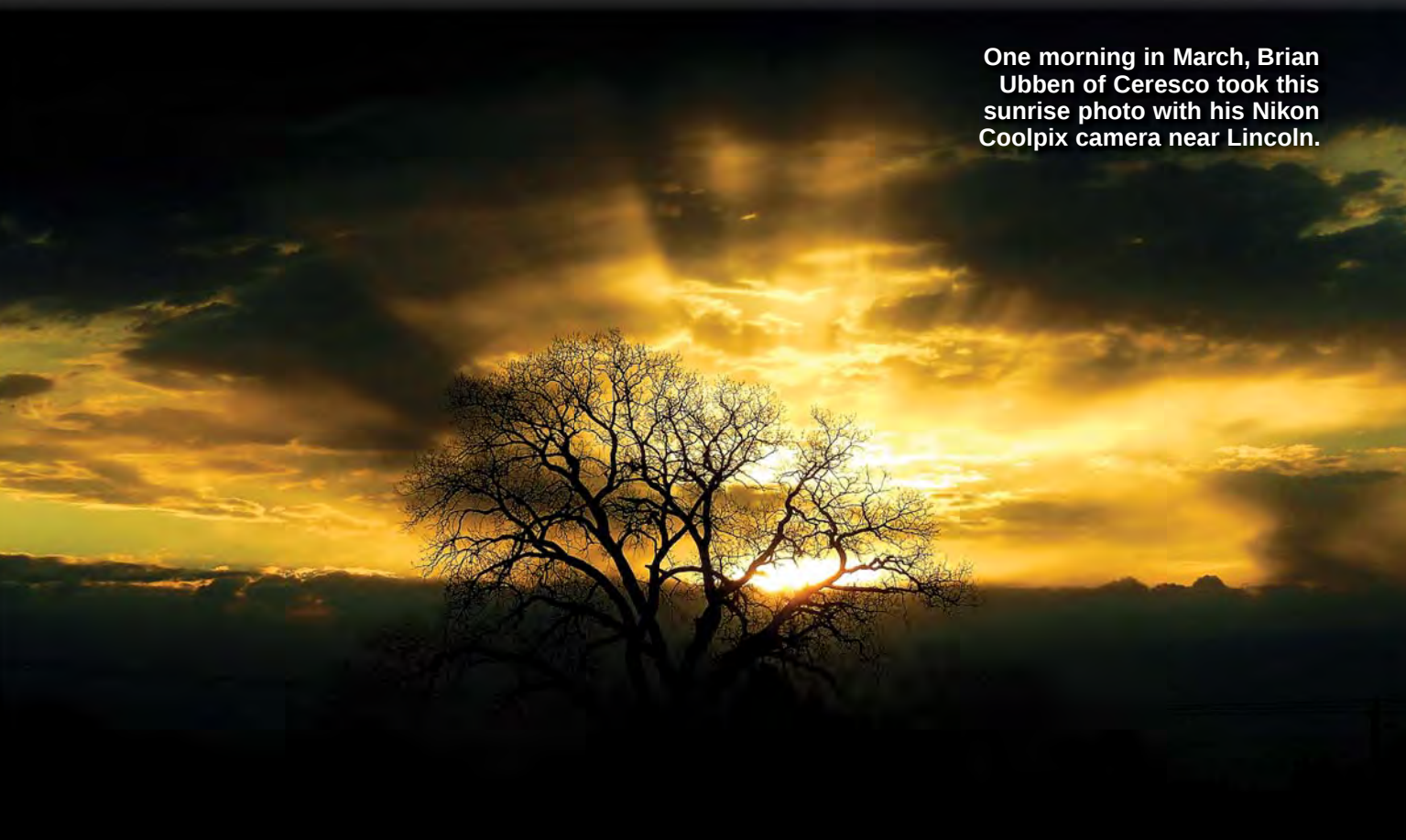


"I spotted this horned lark north of Minden while watching the cranes," said Bobbi Heitman of Minden. "He then started turning his head like he was really wondering what I was up to. He even jumped up and down on the post like he was trying to get my attention. He was fun to watch."



Brenda Creigh of Grand Island shared this photo of a red-winged blackbird she saw by the Alda Bridge Crane Viewing Site near the Platte River.

One morning in March, Brian Ubben of Ceresco took this sunrise photo with his Nikon Coolpix camera near Lincoln.



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Scott Miller of Lincoln found this mule deer skull and antlers on family land near Trenton in Hitchcock County.



Sabine Kantenseter of North Platte took this photo of an adult bald eagle at Johnson Lake in February.



Tiara Brown of Omaha sent in this photo of a cyclist at Zorinsky Lake. She said the abnormally warm weather in February melted any remaining ice on the lake and prompted hundreds of people to flock to the trails for sunshine and exercise.



Outdoor Plates

Alan Hersch of Lincoln loves to catch big bluegills, and takes a moment to admire their “unmatched” colors before releasing them. His wife surprised him with his plate, and a signed copy of the bluegill print that is the Nebraska Habitat Stamp, when he returned from a fishing trip.

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



Kaitlin Smith of Martell sent this windmill photo taken near Cambridge.

Send your comments to:

Jeff Kurrus, Editor
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P.O. Box 30370
Lincoln, NE 68503

or e-mail Jeff.Kurrus@Nebraska.gov

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

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A Mammal Brief

Woodchuck

By Lindsay Rogers

Marmota monax

Ranging over much of the eastern United States, the woodchuck can be found in grasslands and forest edges in eastern Nebraska. Most individuals will have two burrows – one for summer near food sources and one for winter near protective cover. Each burrow will have numerous chambers and several entrances.

Woodchucks are true hibernators, meaning they remain inactive for the entire winter despite temperature rises. Males emerge from hibernation before females to establish a mating territory, establish dominance among other males and search for a mate. Mating occurs soon after females emerge from hibernation. Young leave their mothers by the time they are two months old.

They are diurnal and often seen foraging on vegetation in gardens, prairies and pastures. They feed almost entirely on plants including alfalfa, clover and dandelion. They will also feed on bark, leaves, insects and occasionally bird eggs. Although a rather stubby species, they are often observed sitting or standing on their hind legs, making them appear taller. ■



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

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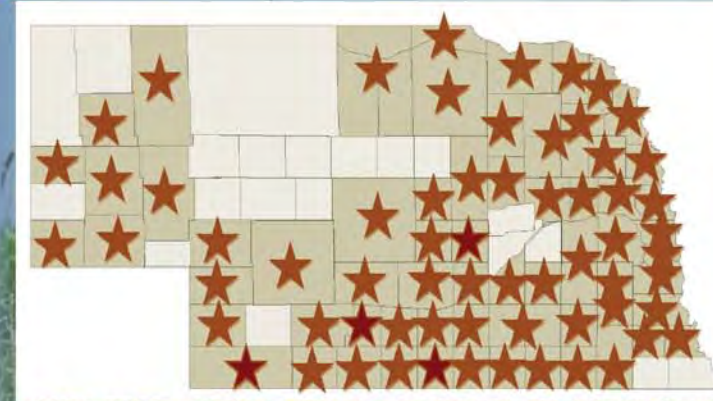


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South Sioux City to Niobrara State Park Road Trip

By Hannah Hundley, Nebraska Tourism Commission

What was once a popular route for outlaws, thieves and lawmen is now the perfect route for those seeking adventure and cultural awakenings. This month's Nebraska road trip takes you from South Sioux City, on the Outlaw Scenic Byway, to the wonder-filled water bluffs of Niobrara State Park.

Sioux City is a three-state metropolitan area tucked in the northeastern corner of Nebraska. Here, visitors can find a thriving music and arts culture. To the west, travelers will encounter charming towns full of hidden gems.

Enjoy a delightful farmers market, craft fair and tearoom at St. James Marketplace, two miles east of Wynot. Next, gaze at the grandeur of some of the most breathtaking historical churches in the state, including Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Church in Bow Valley and the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in St. Helena. The downstairs speakeasy tavern of the Historic Argo Hotel in Crofton is



At Niobrara State Park in Knox County, 19 cabins overlook the Missouri River, giving an impressive view of the valley below.

PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

another must-see – rumor is that the hotel is haunted. Then, try your luck at the Ohiya Casino on the Santee Reservation. This 12,000-square-foot casino, operated by the Santee Tribe, offers authentic American Indian

jewelry, blankets and other crafts.

Once you reach Niobrara State Park, take a horseback trail ride led by wranglers or go fishing in the nearby rivers. There are also 14 miles of hiking trails. Other areas of interest are the Ponca Cemetery, Mormon Monument and Standing Bear monument.

Tip: Try and find the highest hill in the park for the most spectacular view of the river and surrounding landscape – it's the perfect place to watch the sunset. ■

While in South Sioux City

- Visit the 45,000 square foot Art Center, which includes a hands-on children's gallery.
- Go back in time at a number of historical attractions, including the August 21, 1804 Lewis and Clark campsite, Old St. John's and the 4th Street District.
- Spend a day at the Siouxland Freedom Park to honor those – past, present, and future – who so bravely sacrifice for our nation's freedoms.
- Take a look at visitsouthsiouxcity.com for a complete list of local attractions, including a month-by-month calendar of events.



The Immaculate Conception Church in Saint Helena in Cedar County is a beautiful centerpiece to this northeastern Nebraska town.

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

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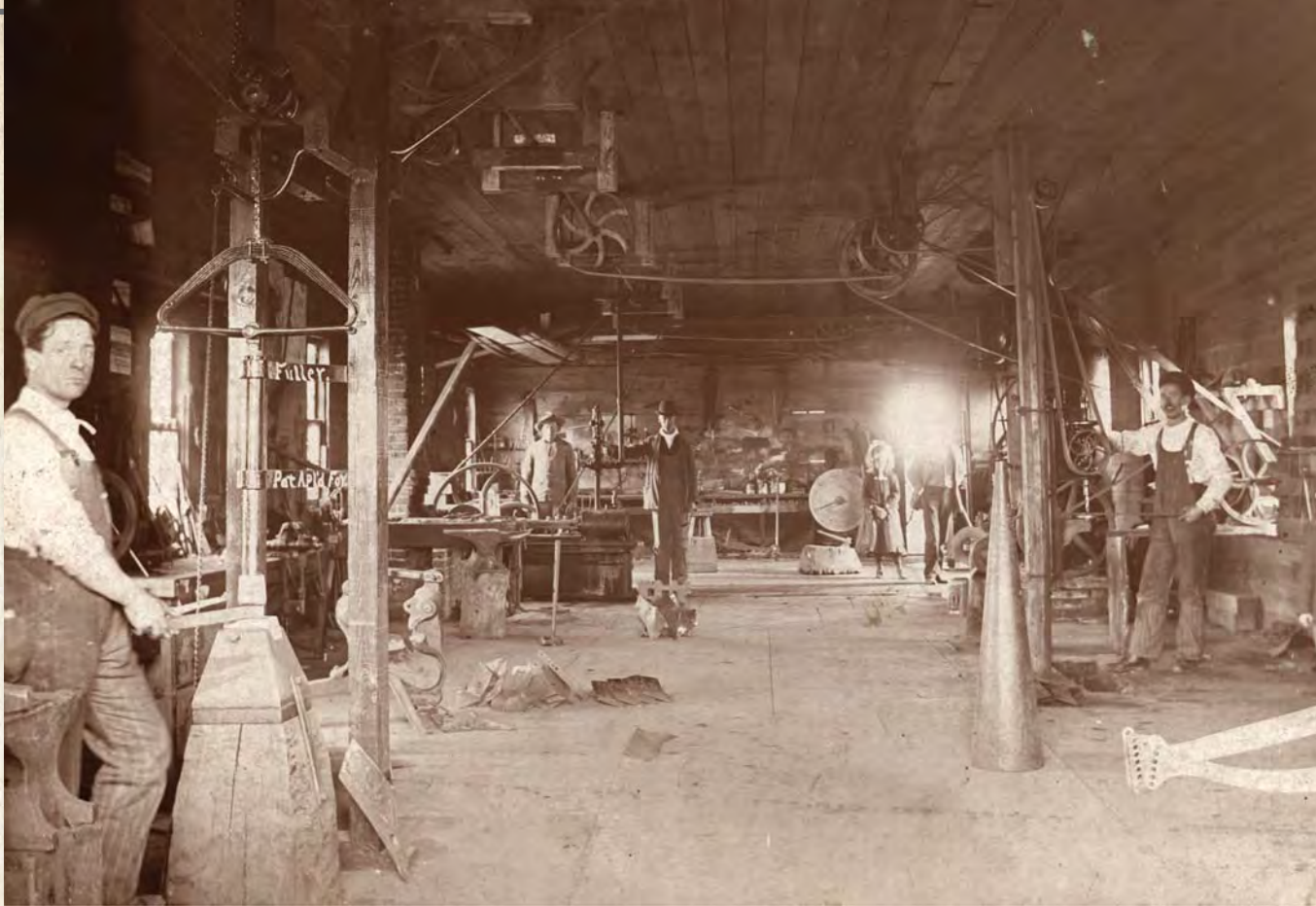
By the Nebraska State Historical Society

Charles Fuller built his first automobile in 1898 in Angus, Nuckolls County, Nebraska. Angus in 1900 had a population of 500 and supported 12 businesses. Today the town is gone. But from 1907 to 1909 it was the home of the Angus Automobile Company, employing 40 craftsmen who produced over 600 cars in its short life. Only one is known to have been restored.

Charles Fuller left Angus in 1902 to work for the St. Louis Motor Company and afterwards worked for the Buckeye Manufacturing Company of Anderson, Indiana, where he was instrumental



An early automobile designed and built by Charles M. Fuller at Angus, Nebraska, in 1902. Fuller's building is in the background.



Interior of the Fuller machine shop at Angus, ca. 1905.



A restored Model "A" Fuller automobile at the Nebraska Centennial Celebration, 1967.

in building the Lambert car. Fuller returned home with a Lambert and convinced investors that he could build a better car. He organized the Angus Automobile Company with a capitalization of \$50,000, each share selling for \$10. On February 16, 1907, production of the Fuller car began.

There were four models of the Fuller car. The best seller was a five-seater touring car that sold for \$2,500, a comparatively high price for that day. The Fuller car used only genuine leather upholstery, had 16 to 18 coats of paint, and the best engine then available. Its brass needed to be cleaned frequently, and owners noted that when cleaned, the car shined "bright as gold in the sun."

Unfortunately the success of the Fuller car was short-lived. In 1908 a demonstration was held at the Nuckolls County Fair in which a Fuller car completed two laps of the fairgrounds racetrack in 60 seconds, averaging 60 miles per hour. The performance was so exceptional that a group of Omaha businessmen offered to buy the Angus Automobile Company. Charles Fuller wanted to accept the offer, but the other stockholders did not. The resulting dispute resulted in Fuller's decision to sever all ties with the company. Without him, the business did not long survive. ■

Visit the Nebraska State Historical Society's website at nebraskahistory.org.





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12 NEBRASKAland • MAY 2017

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What Do You Do With a Baby Bird?

By Julie Geiser

Spring is a time when baby birds hatch from their eggs. It's also a time for spring storms that can displace babies from their nests, sending them plummeting to the ground. Many people find baby birds and wonder what they can do to help; there are a few things that can be done.

First, determine if the baby is a nestling or fledgling. A nestling will have few feathers, if any, and may still have its eyes closed. If you find a nestling, wrap it loosely with a paper towel or Kleenex to keep it warm. Try to locate a nest near where the bird was found. If the nest is visible and is safe to reach, put the baby bird back. It's a myth that a mother bird will not come back to her young if touched by a human.

If the nest is too high or you do not see a nest, make one by using a small plastic sour cream or butter tub or something similar. Wash and dry the

tub, then place paper towels or Kleenex in the bottom. Secure the tub in a tree where the bird was found by cutting two holes about an inch apart in the tub, then run string or wire through the holes and wrap it around the tree. Make sure your nest is placed high enough to keep potential predators away, then place the baby in the nest. The parent bird(s) will hopefully find their baby and take care of it.

If you find a feathered baby bird, you can use the same procedure as above. Keep in mind that fledglings will fly out of their nest, usually unsuccessfully on their first flights, and will end up on the ground. Parent birds take care of their young when this happens. Watch the fledgling for a while and see if a parent shows up to take care of it.

It is illegal to take in baby birds and try to feed and take care of them. As much as humans want to be kind and help baby animals, sometimes they are

better off left alone. People sometimes take a healthy bird out of the wild, depriving them of the care of their nearby parent. Nature can be seemingly cruel at times, but it is how the animal kingdom makes sure that the fittest survive and the species live on. ■



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Wild Edibles - Dandelions

By Julie Geiser

Dandelions are available spring through fall. This “weed” is often pulled or sprayed as most people don’t know its nutritional value. Dandelions are packed with vitamins, and they are also delicious.

Dandelions are not native to North America, but were brought here by immigrants that valued them as a food source. The edible parts include the leaves, stems, buds, yellow flowers and roots. All these parts can also be frozen or dehydrated for later use in many recipes.

To harvest dandelions, gather them from areas that have not been treated with chemicals, and also be cautious of roadsides where dirt and exhaust fumes can cover plants. Identifying dandelions is simple: Look for leaves that are tooth-shaped and hairless, leaves and stems that grow from the rootstalk in the soil, and a single stem with only one flower. When broken, the stem contains a milky, white sap. Dandelions have a thick root that may have small, hair-like roots growing off it.

Dandelion leaves have a pleasant flavor similar to collard greens. They taste best from plants that have not budded and are great in salads. Older plant leaves may taste bitter but can be boiled in water for three minutes or until tender, which removes some of the bitterness. Aside from salads, dandelion leaves can be used in soups, egg dishes, casseroles, and they may be sautéed with a little oil and garlic.

Flowers are slightly sweet and will take the flavor of other ingredients they are cooked with. The green sepal that holds the yellow petals together is bitter, so some people remove the sepal before cooking by pinching it off. The petals are also good in jellies, teas, made into vinegar, oil and wines

as well as in casseroles, cookies, biscuits, fried fritters and more.

Buds that are still tightly closed and roundly shaped, not oval, taste like mushrooms. The bitter sepal can be removed before using. The buds are delicious whether pickled, boiled or sautéed. They can also be battered and fried or put into soups.

Dandelion stems are nature’s noodles. Cut the stems at the base of the plant and cut off any flowers. Boil the stems in water with a couple pinches of salt. Serve boiled stems with Parmesan cheese and butter or on their own. The stems can be used in casseroles or with other vegetables, and can replace spaghetti noodles.

Dandelion roots also provide great nutrition and flavor. To collect the root, moisten the soil around the plant and pull the plant with a garden shovel or dandelion puller. Fresh roots can be used in stir fry dishes and in casseroles. They can also be made into coffee.

To roast dandelion roots to make coffee, scrub the roots like you would a potato but do not peel. Place in a single layer on a baking sheet and then bake in a 350-degree oven for 1 hour and 15 minutes. When done, the roots should be dry and crunchy. Once cool, crush the roots in a blender and store in a covered container. Use ground roots in cakes, meat rubs, as coffee, tea and to make root beer. ■

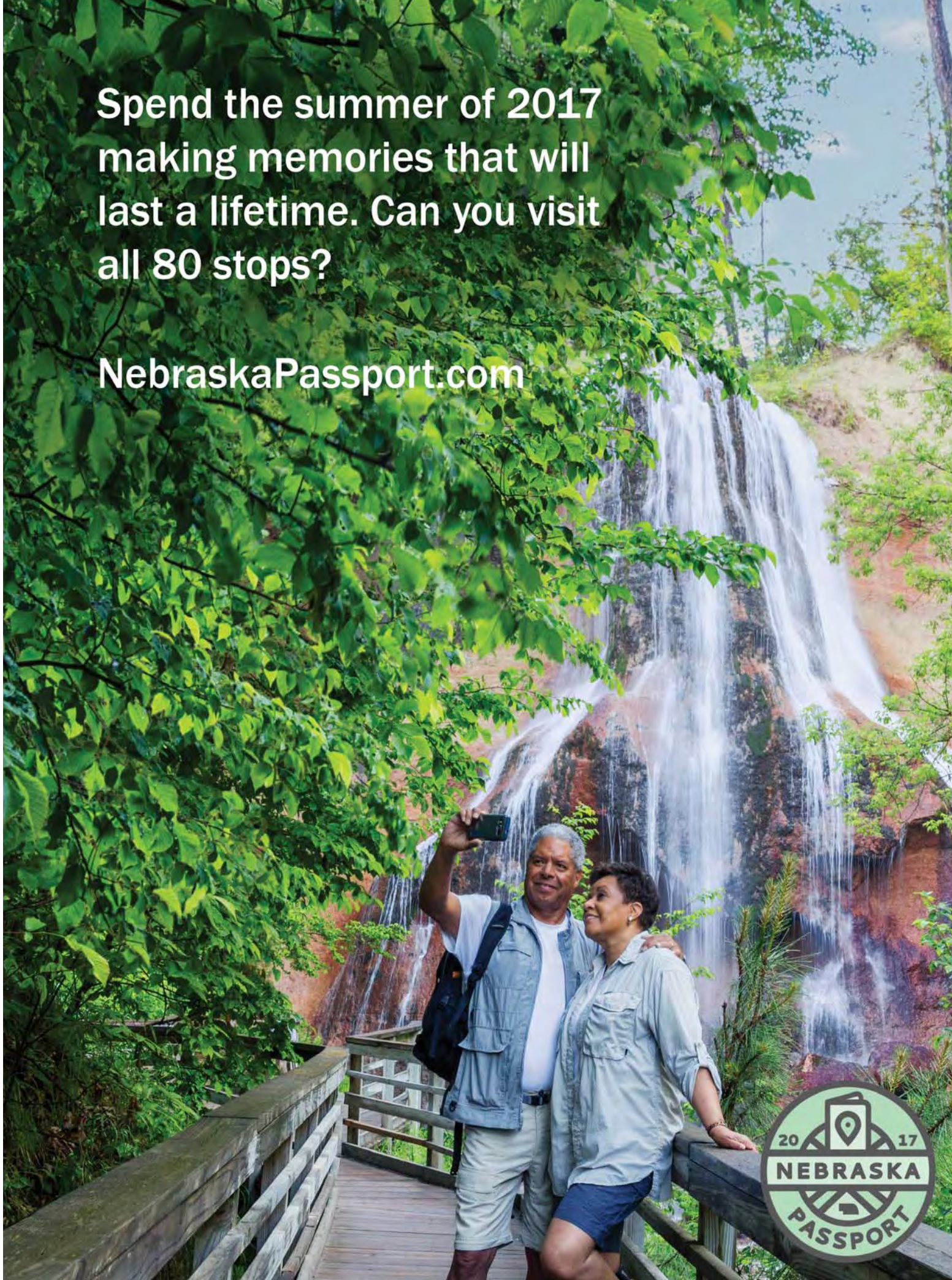
For more information on dandelions, refer to *The Ultimate Dandelion Cookbook* by Kristina Seleshanko and *Wild Seasons* by Kay Young.



PHOTO BY JULIE GEISER

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Mixed Bag

Don't Just Read the Paper

By Jeff Kurrus

Some say the newspaper is dead. I certainly hope not. Ever since reading the transcripts to one of Dick Turpin's "Turpin Time" videos about newspaper uses, I have been on a quiet, yet constant, quest to see how helpful our dailies actually are to the life of an outdoor enthusiast.

It started with using newspapers to help eliminate smells from fish and game coolers. After washing out a cooler with soap and water, then drying the inside of a cooler with a towel, I found through the years that the fishy smell would remain long after I closed the cooler. However, by inserting one more critical step, tossing a dry newspaper inside of the cooler and closing it again, the gamey smell soon dissipated. Turpin was exactly right.

Since hearing about this tactic and seeing it in action, I began using newspapers with all of my coolers, then I went and told my friends. They returned with their own list of newspaper functions, including, but not limited to, using

newspaper as a boot dryer, an insulator for cots, a firestarting aid, an excellent headlight and windshield cleaner, and even something to wrap frozen meats in while transferring them in a cooler. You can also place layers of newspaper on top of your cooler contents to add insulation and make your ice last longer. Or go a step further and fill all of the airspace between the contents and lid.

And I'm always looking for more uses, so if you use them for a particular reason that's not listed here, drop me a note at Jeff.Kurrus@Nebraska.gov. ■

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS



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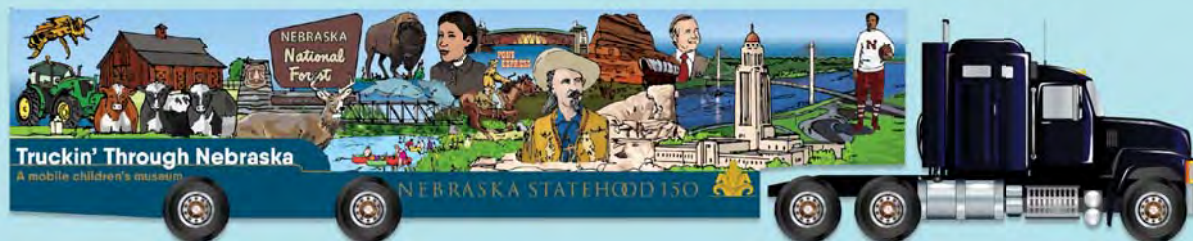
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Slowing Time with S'mores

By Lindsay Rogers, Wildlife Education Specialist

My life – like that of most people – is busy. Between two young children, two mischievous dogs and a ridiculously busy work schedule, the fun stuff occasionally gets pushed aside. We always make time for the big stuff – going to the pumpkin patch, the zoo and a week-long summer vacation. But the day-to-day fun is often waylaid by laundry, loading the dishwasher and the arduous bedtime routine.

Realizing that time often goes faster than I like, I set out last summer to ensure our family had a relaxing, smile-filled summer that would go down as the best yet. I decided we

cookies (my son's favorite), Reese's peanut butter cups, dark chocolate, white chocolate, Hershey's cookies-n-cream bars.

Weekly (sometimes more) we would leave the dinner dishes in the sink and gather around the backyard fire pit with the patio table covered in our s'mores options. Very quickly my daughter Lucy found her favorite: birthday cake Oreos twisted open to allow for a warm marshmallow, the Oreo filling serving as her "chocolate." My son Sam and I took longer and were more interested in experimentation. In the end we determined Sam likes nearly every variation of the s'more.

It was not until our family vacation to Lewis and Clark Lake that I found my favorites (there are two). Around the campfire one night, I had the brilliant plan to sandwich the traditional marshmallow and chocolate

between two monster cookies. I was in love. The next night it was marshmallows and Reese's peanut butter cups between traditional graham crackers. This was not a s'more, it was amore!

In the end, this simple project actually slowed time. I put playing in the backyard before sweeping the floor and riding bikes before getting to bed on time. The summer lingered with lazy trips to the pool, afternoon strolls through the zoo, swinging in the backyard and of course, plenty of s'mores. ■



Lucy with a "birthday cake Oreo" s'more at Lewis and Clark SRA.



Ever-silly Sam roasts his marshmallow at Lewis and Clark State Recreation Area.

needed a project, something that could be done at least weekly, that would keep our enthusiasm and that would involve the whole family. S'mores. Making s'mores is fun, but this project needed more "umph." Our task would be to devise the greatest new s'mores recipe. No longer would graham crackers, marshmallows and chocolate bars suffice.

My next step was heading to the store. If it could be included in a s'more, it was purchased. Fudge-stripe cookies, birthday cake Oreos (my daughter's favorite), mint chocolate



One of the greatest – chocolate and marshmallow between two monster cookies.

PHOTOS BY LINDSAY ROGERS

Presented by

Plant it Forward

**By Julie Van Meter
State Entomologist, Nebraska
Department of Agriculture**

Plant pests are taking a toll on Nebraska's trees. Dutch elm disease continues to kill elms statewide. Pine wilt has all but eliminated Scotch pines from eastern Nebraska. In 2016, emerald ash borer (EAB) was found in Omaha, threatening the state's 44 million ash (*Fraxinus* spp.) trees.

There are steps we can take to protect the health of our trees, including proper pruning, mulching and watering, and also chemical treatments. Buying firewood where you burn it helps prevent the introduction of new pests to non-infested areas. But what do we do about the trees we've already lost?

The Nebraska Forest Service estimates that since the 1970s, Nebraska has lost 50 percent of its community canopy cover. For every tree planted, four are being removed. This is more than just an aesthetic concern; it is also an economic and

environmental concern.

Trees planted around a house can significantly reduce heating and cooling costs and increase a home's value. Trees improve water quality, reducing soil erosion and runoff. Crop fields protected by windbreaks typically see increased yields, reduced irrigation needs and reduced wind erosion of soil. Livestock raised with windbreak protection generally have better weight gain, require less supplemental feed and have increased production and survival rates.

Wildlife benefits from trees, too, even in a prairie state. Trees provide food and shelter; think acorns for deer and turkeys, and nesting sites for birds. Trees also support large numbers of insects, which play an important role in the ecosystem and are a food source for many larger animals.

What should we do to reverse this loss of trees? Plant more trees. Realize the loss of one tree is an opportunity to plant another, or two or three. But what tree should be planted?

Consider the reason for planting a tree. Are you looking to shade your

house, create

a windbreak or add fall color? Size matters – make sure the size and shape of the tree at maturity will fit the site. Think about the location of overhead power lines, buildings and other objects in the landscape.

Don't forget factors like soil type, plant hardiness and light and moisture needs. Diversify the landscape by planting a species not already present on your property.

The Nebraska Forest Service has developed a campaign to encourage the replacement of trees called *Plant it Forward* to rebuild community forests and rural landscapes for the next generation. This will be increasingly important as trees are lost to EAB. The campaign includes tree lists which provide information on tree species adapted to Nebraska, and can help you make an informed decision when choosing trees at a local nursery.

More information on the *Plant it Forward* campaign can be found online at nfs.unl.edu/ash-replacements. Remember that the best time to plant a tree is now! ■

YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT IS IN YOUR FIREWOOD

LURKING

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

PREVENTION IS KEY:

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

BUY LOCAL, BURN LOCAL.

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

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PONTMOVE FIREWOOD.org

Caught on Camera

By Scott Schrage, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

It darts through the darkness of a chilly night in the Nebraska Panhandle, drawn across the shortgrass prairie by the wafting stench of a skunk. No larger than a house cat, it accelerates to 25 miles per hour, then coasts within eyeshot of a stake capped by a glob of petroleum jelly.

As the nocturnal sleuth approaches the skunk-scented lure, a camera mounted on a nearby fence registers the movement and heat. In a flash, the camera snaps a three-photo burst of the elusive creature before it moves on to search for dinner.

Two weeks later, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln undergraduate who planted the camera trap will sit down to a computer that reveals what she was hoping to find: images of the swift fox, once a common Great Plains predator now residing on Nebraska's list of endangered species. The experience, part of a new one-credit course at the university, exposes undergrads to biological fieldwork while furthering a statewide conservation effort to map the distribution of the swift fox. Faculty are also examining how the experience can help students learn about the ecological factors affecting canids, the family of mammals comprising foxes and coyotes.

Since 2012, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission has worked with the university to determine which areas the swift fox still inhabits. That knowledge can inform decision-making – whether to follow through on the building of roads, for instance – that affects the prospect of swift fox survival in the Cornhusker State. And clarifying where the species no longer resides can offer clues about its decline while helping state agencies save significant time, effort and money.

More than 50 students from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Chadron State College surveyed sites – many private, some public; many rural, some suburban – during the fall 2016 semester, after swift foxes raised their young to independence and began venturing beyond their dens. Though the swift fox remains the prized subject, many different animals of interest wander by the cameras: other fox species, coyotes, deer, owls, bobcats, badgers and more. Those species' classifications, and where they were found, then enter a database that is used to update a map of swift fox distribution.

"To have a student get to pick a spot on the planet where they put out this camera and not know what's going to walk by – but know that whatever walks by is adding to science – I think that's a unique opportunity," said project leader T.J. Fontaine. "It's pretty exciting just to see how they're all responding to it." ■



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NEBRASKA CANID PROJECT

Students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Chadron State College surveyed sites during the fall 2016 semester in the Nebraska Panhandle to place camera traps in an effort to determine areas the swift fox still inhabits.

LAND FOR SALE

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SALINE CO, NE - 153.93 AC.

Maintained county road access to the two available sides of the property, 3 ponds and a creek bed, Extensive amounts of timber edge, Productive tillable acres, open for 2017 season, Excellent mix of timber, Endless recreational possibilities, 5.5 miles west of Wilber, 2.5 miles north on Road 1600 - **\$650,000**

BURT CO, NE - 295 AC.

Great access with white rock driveway to the property and an additional access from the west, Extensive amount of timber edge, Potential for future timber harvest, 80 acres of tillable, 2 established food plots in ideal locations, Stocked spring fed fishing pond, More than abundant deer sign throughout, Great numbers of turkeys, Incredible deer sanctuary set up in center of property, Very isolated from any main roads, 1 Hour from Omaha, 5 minutes from Decatur - **\$1,239,000**



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Upcoming Events

by Jerry Kane

May 1
Family Fishing Event
Terry's Pit, Terrytown

May 6
Mom's Day Archery Fun Shoot
Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

May 6
Take Pride in America Day
Verdon Lake State Recreation Area (SRA), Verdon

May 6-7
Living History
Fort Atkinson State Historical Park (SHP), Fort Calhoun

May 13
Fort Kearny Outdoor Expo
Fort Kearny State Recreation Area (SRA), Kearney

May 14
Mother's Day Buffet
Fort Robinson State Park (SP), Crawford

May 14
Family Fishing Event,
Riverside Discovery Center Zoo Pond, Scottsbluff

May 15-June 2
Eligible landowners may apply for one elk permit

May 17
Let's Talk Trees
Lake Ogallala SRA, Ogallala

May 19
National Endangered Species Day and Pizza Party
Lake McConaughy SRA, Ogallala

May 19-20
Spring Muster
Fort Hartuff SHP, Burwell

May 20
Free Fishing and Park Entry Day
No fishing or park entry permits required this day

May 20
Republican Valley Archery 3-D Shoot
Red Willow Reservoir SRA, McCook

May 20
Barbecue and Kids' Fishing Derby
Fort Robinson SP, Crawford

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

May 20
Wildcat Hills Wildlands
Wildcat Hills SRA, Gering

May 23
Family Fishing Event
Holmes Lake, Lincoln

May 25
Family Fishing Event
Halleck Lake, Papillion

May 25
Evening Acrylics
Lake McConaughy SRA, Ogallala

May 26
Take Aim at Summer
Platte River SP, Louisville

May 26
I Spy
Lake McConaughy SRA, Ogallala

May 27
Migratory Bird Day
Indian Cave SP, Shubert

May 27
Birds and Bikes
Ash Hollow SHP, Lewellen

May 28
Fashion a Feeder
Lake McConaughy SRA, Ogallala

May 30
National Water a Flower Day
Lake McConaughy SRA, Ogallala

May 31
Spring turkey seasons close

150 Year Activities

By Cara Pesek

Nebraska turns 150 years old in 2017, and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission will celebrate this milestone all year long with special events, challenges and other activities showcasing the history and culture of our unique state. These include:

- **Convergence on Sacred Ground**
Ash Hollow State Historical Park on July 21-23.

This gathering is an effort of the Friends of Ash Hollow, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and Lakota Sioux. The history of Native Americans, settlers, cowboys, farmsteaders, fur traders, pioneers and military will be recognized during the event.

- **150 Years of Storytelling**
Ponca State Park on Aug. 1, 7-8
This is a celebration of Nebraska's history and culture through literature and the art of storytelling.

- **Nebraska 150 Challenge**
The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission has joined the Nebraska Sports Council in the Nebraska 150 challenge – an effort to encourage Nebraskans to run, walk, bike, hike, swim, paddle or otherwise complete 150 miles or more of physical activity throughout 2017.
To assist this effort, staff at Nebraska's state parks and recreation areas will offer 150 miles of guided hikes throughout the year. A schedule of guided hikes is at OutdoorNebraska.org/nebraska150/, with more to be added throughout the spring, summer and fall.

- **150 Bird Challenge**
The challenge consists of listing all of the bird species that you see or hear in Nebraska in 2017, with a goal of reaching 150 species.

- **Fish 150 Challenge**
The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission challenges you to celebrate Nebraska's 150th year of statehood by catching 150 fish in Nebraska waters in 2017. ■

My Favorite Topwater Lures

By Julie Geiser

There is nothing like the thrill of watching a topwater lure work its way back through the water when suddenly from the depths or shallows, the strike happens.

Three proven and popular lures that can be used for multi-species of fish including bass, crappie, white bass, northern pike and muskies are the Zara Spook, buzzbaits and poppers.

These lures have been enticing fish to the water's surface for years; they can be seen and heard, and they all release vibrations of some sort.

All three can be used in deep or shallow water to catch fish off guard or make them mad enough to bite. They all come in different sizes, shapes and colors to fit whatever fish species, big or small, you are after.

The key to all of these is varying the speed and direction of the lure presentation to find what the fish like. Don't get in the rut of using these lures only in the mornings and evenings – pull them out all day long and see if the bite is on. ■



Zara Spook – Use a twitch and pause, twitch and pause retrieve that makes the lure walk back and forth across the water's surface.



Poppers – Known for slow retrieves to catch fish that are unwilling to chase faster moving baits.



Buzzbaits – Begin reeling as soon as it hits the water. This lure is great for flushing fish out of shallow water as well as suspended fish.

NEBRASKAland Visitor



Last issue's winner of the Visitor drawing was Brad Dietz of Pierre, South Dakota, who found the **springtail** on page 57.

Readers are encouraged to contact **NEBRASKAland** within 10 days after this issue's publication with the correct page number and name of this issue's "Visitor" – a critter found in Nebraska. We will then gather the correct entries and draw one to win a **NEBRASKAland** mug.
To enter each month, write:
NEBRASKAland Visitor
2200 North 33rd Street
Lincoln, NE 68503

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

HINT: This issue's visitor is not on page 2, 15, 21, 25, 35, 44, 46, 47, 48, 50, 53 or 86.

Springtails (Order Collembola) are exceptionally small, wingless creatures, between $\frac{3}{64}$ and $\frac{1}{8}$ inch in length. They live in moist soil, feeding on decaying organic matter. While insectlike, they are no longer considered to be true insects. Springtails get their common name from an unusual tail-like structure on the underside of their abdomen, called a furcula, which moves the springtail in a unique way. The furcula is attached at the rear of the abdomen, and folds forward under the abdomen. It is held in place by a structure called a tenaculum. When the tenaculum is released, the furcula pushes down against the ground, causing the springtail to appear to jump, sometimes up to several inches. Occasionally springtails can be found in moist areas inside homes. But they cause no structural damage and do not bite, and are more a nuisance than a problem.

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





Keeping the Past Alive

The Friends of Fort Atkinson

By Renae Blum

We emerged from the van in the dark, approaching an entrance within 15-foot wooden walls stretching out beyond us to the right and the left. A sentry stopped our docent, who was dressed as a 19th century Plains frontiersman.

"Who goes there?" the sentry asked. "State your purpose at the gate."

Permission granted, we moved through the entrance and found ourselves along a boardwalk, dwarfed by an enormous grassy quadrangle bordered by barracks. Following our docent and the light of his lantern, we slipped into one room after another, and for the next hour, we watched.

Lit by candlelight and burning fireplaces, the scenes played themselves out: two women hand-making lace and spinning wool, a duke and a colonel discussing the next day's buffalo hunt, ladies fussing over the cream in their soup, a Native American man beset by typhoid coughing by a fireplace.

It resembled live theater, but in actuality there were no scripted lines, just ordinary people portraying a history of this place, this fort, that they have come to know like the back of their hands.

At Fort Atkinson State Historical Park in Fort Calhoun, a group of passionate volunteers known as the Friends of Fort



Penny Ankenbauer, Denise Wenke and Donna Joyce portray soldiers' wives during the annual candlelight tour at Fort Atkinson State Historical Park. Volunteers bring Nebraska history to life each year at the park in Fort Calhoun.

PHOTO BY BOBBI ANDERSON

PHOTO BY CURT BLUM



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN

A common sight during Fort Atkinson living history events is the marching soldiers. Fort Atkinson's soldiers comprised about one-sixth of the standing U.S. Army at the time. They were also farmers, tending more than 500 acres of land.

Atkinson has brought history to life for the park's visitors the past 22 years. Many historical sites with a robust living history program have a paid staff to research and interpret the site. Fort Atkinson's living history interpreters are unpaid. In addition to living history interpreters, the Friends' 60-some members include donors, docents and others who interact with the public on the park's behalf.

Fort Atkinson State Historical Park offers six living history events each year, in addition to the annual candlelight tour, which is by reservation only and sells out quickly.

"It takes a tremendous amount of dedication from the people involved to put on six events each year, and then the candlelight tour on top of that," said living history interpreter Dean Slader, who's participated in living history activities for more than 30 years. "Most parks I'm aware of put on just one event a year."

On a typical weekend, visitors wander freely throughout the fort, watching living history interpreters portray the roles of spinners, weavers, blacksmiths, enlisted men, laundresses and others. All of the interpreters wear meticulously researched, handmade attire, including period-correct shoes and eyewear. The goal is to transport guests back in time, to educate them about a period in Nebraska's history that is rarely taught in school. Many activities are hands-on: You can sample homemade butter and bread from the outdoor bake oven, grind apples at a cider press, churn butter, sing hymns during a church service and feel the ground shake from cannon fire.

Periodically, the interpreters also reenact what would have been common scenes at the time. At an October event, the militia marched, with the sergeant scolding unruly young privates to stay in line. The paymaster handed soldiers their wages, chiding a few of them about how they'd likely fritter away their earnings at the gambling table. Backed by hours of research into the fort's logs and records, the scenes are endless in their variety. One year, the group portrayed an amputation.

Living history interpreter Wade Davis remembers it well: Raising a racket to attract as many eyeballs as possible, the soldiers shouted for others to make way as they carried the "victim" of an accidental musket firing into the surgeon's



PHOTO BY NIKKI McDONALD

For volunteers Kristy Ericson and her daughter, Taylor, living history at Fort Atkinson is a family affair.

Fort Atkinson, 1820-1827

"During the seven years of its existence, Fort Atkinson was the focal point of a million square miles of American territory."
— Historian Virgil Ney

The first U.S. military post west of the Missouri River, Fort Atkinson can claim a number of Nebraska firsts: first school, hospital, library and military post. Established in 1820, Fort Atkinson's role was to protect the growing American fur trade in the West, counteracting the encroaching presence of British fur traders from the north, and keeping the peace between traders and the Indian tribes of the region. It was also an early experiment in pioneering the frontier, coming less than 15 years after the end of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Isolated on the "Great American Desert," the fort's inhabitants quickly learned that if they were to survive, they had to make or grow everything they needed to live. Their success made Fort Atkinson a popular spot for trappers to gather supplies, as well as a jumping-off point for explorations of the West and trading expeditions to Mexican settlements. From its spot on the Missouri River bluffs, Fort Atkinson saw the fur trade become the dominant force for American expansion and witnessed the opening of the American West.

Compared to other similar forts of its day, Fort Atkinson was large: At its height, it housed 1,200 soldiers — about one-sixth of the standing U.S. Army. Roughly that many civilians lived just beyond the wall of the garrison. It operated like a small city: the soldiers' children attended school on the fort's grounds, goods were sold at the sutler store, and the necessities of daily life were carried out at the sawmill, grist mill, bakery, the blacksmith and armorer's shop, and at numerous storehouses and barns. Fort Atkinson's troops were also farmers: They grew corn, wheat, oats and millet on more than 500 acres of land.

Walking through the fort's reconstructed buildings, you'll notice long rectangular gun ports built into the barracks. Historically, they were never used. Fort Atkinson itself never experienced a battle or skirmish, though it did send aid to a party of fur trappers upriver who'd been attacked by Indians in 1823.

A shako plate found on the site of Fort Atkinson. They were worn on the riflemen's leather caps. Courtesy of the Washington County Museum.

One of the most vital buildings at Fort Atkinson was the Council House, where Indian agent Benjamin O'Fallon and sub-agent John Dougherty met with representatives from local Indian tribes. The area surrounding Fort Atkinson was occupied by tribes with diverse languages and cultures, including the Oto, Missouri, Pawnee and Omaha. This proximity was one of the reasons the site was chosen in the first place. The fort's relationship with these tribes was friendly. Col. Henry Leavenworth made it clear to O'Fallon and the commanding officers that while the fort should be prepared to protect itself if necessary, they would also respect the Indians' rights and privileges.

In addition to its legacy as a peace-keeping institution, Fort



ILLUSTRATION BY H. CHARLES MCGARRON, COURTESY OF THE U.S. ARMY CENTER OF MILITARY HISTORY

Above: Fort Atkinson was established by the Yellowstone Expedition in 1820. Here, Major Stephen H. Long, leader of the scientific party of the expedition, holds council with the Native Americans of the area in 1819. Below: Uniform buttons found on the site. Courtesy of the Washington County Museum.



Atkinson was also a training ground for future prominent military leaders. "Within the regiments at Fort Atkinson were to be found the seeds of the future combat leadership of the last Seminole War, the Mexican War and even the Civil War," wrote historian Virgil Ney.

Fort Atkinson's story came to a close in 1827. The Army had realigned its forces to the south, the fur trade was secure, and more people were settling southwest of the fort along the Santa Fe Trail. Forts were needed elsewhere. The troops and civilians abandoned Fort Atkinson, and all traces of the garrison vanished. The only signs that the fort was once there were the musket balls, uniform buttons and antique coins that regularly appeared after spring plowing. Archaeology on the grounds began in the 1950s, and various buildings were reconstructed over a period of 25 years. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission established Fort Atkinson as a state historical park in 1963, and, with the help of interested citizens and potential partners, has developed a tactical plan to propel the park into the future.



Park updates under consideration include new displays and programming, additional events, lodging and camping opportunities, and an updated visitors center. ■



Living history interpreter Julie Ashton plays the hammered dulcimer for onlookers. About 15,000 people visit Fort Atkinson's living history events each year, learning more about a period in Nebraska's history that isn't often taught in schools.

quarters. The man – who in real life wore an artificial leg from the knee down – was screaming and soaked in artificial blood. Using an antique meat carving saw he'd found at a thrift shop, the surgeon, Davis, began sawing away at the "leg." Visitors listened as the saw ground against a half-inch of PVC pipe attached to the bottom of the table, and as the wound was cauterized, smelled what seemed to be burning flesh – out of sight, someone was searing a piece of steak to produce the smell. After the demonstration, Davis spoke to the crowd of onlookers about how amputations were performed at the time. A doctor in the audience later complimented him on how realistic the presentation was.

But don't come expecting a gory scene like this – the reenacted amputation was a one-time event, much to the disappointment of visitors. "We had people calling the visitor's center for the next three years asking when we'd be doing it again," Davis said.

Once a year in November, the Friends put on the candlelight tour, an attraction that the group developed in response to a common request from visitors: they wanted to see the fort at night. The living history interpreters see Fort



WADE DAVIS

Atkinson at night all the time; many of them sleep overnight at the fort during living history weekends. It's like going camping, they say.

"It's nice and quiet, and there's no electricity," said Kevin Arnold of Omaha. "The kids will read books and play games, all by candlelight."

Meanwhile, the adults gather to talk, share stories about the historical research they've done lately, and play instruments together. Many of the interpreters said this is the best part of being involved in the Friends – enjoying the rich conversation and good company long into the evening, after all the guests have gone.

Six generations of people have participated in the Friends since it started in 1995. That's how volunteers talk about their community – in terms of family. Children accompany their grandparents to watch them during a living history weekend, and they're soon bitten by the living history bug, drawn to the drama of portraying a soldier or a laundress. Husbands, wives, boyfriends and girlfriends visit Fort Atkinson to find out what it is that has so engrossed their significant others. Other children grow up with parents who have volunteered for years. Kris and Kristy Ericson's two daughters, Lylah and Taylor, have been going to Fort Atkinson's living history events "since birth," Kristy said.

"A month after they were born, I was back on-site. We had cribs for them; I'd nurse them in the corner of the room. It's just a part of life for us."

The majority of living history interpreters at Fort Atkinson are retirement age or older. Recruiting young people to join their ranks can be difficult, the Friends' leaders say. After all, when you pit cell phones and computers against weekends spent reenacting Nebraska history, the technology tends to win. A life packed with activities is another barrier for both kids and adults, leaving little room for the investment of time and energy that living history requires.

For dozens of people, though, Fort Atkinson is worth it. A number of them drive from out-of-state to participate in living history weekends. Many have devoted themselves to learning obscure and sometimes extinct trades solely for living history purposes, including tinsmithing and coopering (making buckets and barrels, a vital trade in Fort Atkinson's day), leading to a level of expertise that continually impresses visitors and other interpreters.

"The amount of knowledge walking and running around here is staggering," Slader said. "I'm pretty knowledgeable on ironwork and steelwork of that period, because it's part of my blacksmith's craft. But our chief of artillery knows the artillery drill of the period as well as anybody nationally. Others can tell you exactly what the army did and how it worked, and how a court martial went, and if you want to know anything about it, they can tell you. It goes clear across the board – carpenters, spinners, weavers, tinsmiths, laundresses, cooks.

"They're also articulate. They have the ability to engage people, to feed off of their questions and follow the direction that the visitor's question takes you. There's no stock spiel; it changes, it morphs. You do it for so long that it becomes natural."

Some interpreters spend hours reading original documents, and regularly traveling to Washington, D.C., to research Fort Atkinson in the National Archives. Others gain the bulk of their knowledge verbally, from talking with fellow interpreters and listening to them interact with the public. For everyone, the sharing of knowledge, and of learning new things, never truly finishes. It's a rewarding journey, volunteers say.

If there's one thing that the Friends care about, it's getting the history right. Volunteers never share information they aren't absolutely certain about, and will tell visitors if they don't know the answer to a question. Before a new living history interpreter can gain official membership, he or she must pass a written test and sit for multiple interviews. They are also observed during living history weekends and mentored on how to present their personas to the public. The Friends want to see newcomers succeed, and have produced a 100-page handbook to acclimate them to the fort's history,

to making period clothing, to the art of interpreting history to the public, and more. The visitor's center keeps books about Fort Atkinson's history available for checkout. "They're going to read a lot," Slader said.

All of this work is paying off. Visitors who've been to the most illustrious living history sites in the country – including Colonial Williamsburg, Plymouth Plantation and historic Jamestown – tell the interpreters that Fort Atkinson measures up, and even surpasses those sites in some ways.

Take, for example, Fort Atkinson's Sutler Store. Many historical sites have a gift shop of some kind, but that isn't what they do, said Heather Blazicevich, who runs the store alongside her sister, Morgan Cummings.

"We try to sell things that are close to something that would have been found in that era," she said, such as Jamestown glass, cookbooks published during the period, and handmade ragdolls. They also sell items crafted by the site's blacksmiths and tinsmith. The store is modeled after Fort Atkinson's historic sutler store, which offered hundreds



Living history interpreter Doug Appel works in the blacksmith shop. The Friends' volunteer blacksmiths fashion items for the fort such as wall hooks, hinges and chain.



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN

Archaeology on the fort's grounds started in the 1950s. It took about 25 years to reconstruct various buildings, including the soldiers' barracks, the Council House, the Trader's Cabin, Powder Magazine and the Sutler Store.



Volunteer Tom Wood portrays fort commander Col. Henry Leavenworth.

of items for sale to soldiers and civilians.

Running a successful living history program requires an extraordinary amount of organization and oversight. Someone is needed to manage new volunteers, make schedules, plan events, coordinate volunteers, and develop and maintain standards of quality for the program. Many sites have found it impossible to do all of this without an official organization of some sort. In the early 1990s, Fort Atkinson superintendent John Slader decided it was time for the park to form one of its own. He pitched the idea to the people who were doing living history activities at the fort at the time – those who were intrigued by the idea but undecided on whether to go forward. In April 1995, they called together an open meeting to discuss what to do.

“The auditorium at the visitor’s center was packed full,” Davis recalled. “People were afraid, people were excited. Some thought that if we had an official organization, perhaps the living history wouldn’t be fun anymore.”

After several hours of discussion, the group unanimously voted to form the organization. They named it the Friends of Fort Atkinson, and adopted a set of bylaws introduced

by Davis, who had served as a labor union president. They also voted in a Council of Administration, named after the original council that oversaw various affairs at Fort Atkinson, such as the setting of prices for the regimental sutler.

Over all the years he’s been involved at Fort Atkinson, throughout all the various characters he’s researched and portrayed, Davis is most proud of his involvement in getting the Friends started, a nonprofit organization that is still going strong after more than 20 years. “It’s still serving its same purpose, to promote and preserve the living history at Fort Atkinson,” he said. ■

Living history events will be at Fort Atkinson State Historical Park on the following weekends: May 6-7, June 3-4, July 1-2, Aug. 5-6, Sept. 2-3 and Sept. 30-Oct. 1. No admission is charged, but a valid state park vehicle permit is required. The candlelight tour is Nov. 4. The park is located on the east side of Fort Calhoun off of U.S. Highway 75, and about eight miles north of the I-680 and U.S. 75 interchange. To learn more, visit fortatkinsononline.org.

Living History at Nebraska Parks

Besides Fort Atkinson State Historical Park, six other Nebraska parks educate visitors through living history interpretation.

Ash Hollow State Historical Park - Lewellen

Each year on Father’s Day weekend, Ash Hollow State Historical Park celebrates its heritage through the Ash Hollow Pageant. Costumed volunteers tell the story of Oregon-California Trail pioneers through live music and outdoor performances, with a chuck wagon supper for guests cooked over an open campfire.

Bowring Ranch State Historical Park - Merriman

During Sod House Sunday, the last Sunday in June, visitors can learn more about the lives of early settlers to the Sandhills. Living history demonstrations include pioneer cooking, vegetable and herb gardening, rug making and other ranch crafts.

Buffalo Bill State Historical Park - North Platte

In August, the park has its end of summer celebration, which includes demonstrations of candle making, blacksmithing, butter making and other crafts. The annual candlelight mansion tour, during the first two weekends in October, is by reservation only, and gives a unique perspective of Buffalo Bill’s home, “The Mansion on the Prairie.”

Fort Hartsuff State Historical Park - Burwell

Each April, the Fremont Pathfinders visit the park for a weekend to portray

what life was like at this 1870s Plains fort. Volunteers portray individuals such as laundresses, the post surgeon and the blacksmith, and the cannons are fired all weekend long. They visit the park again in August for a more laidback weekend of living history.

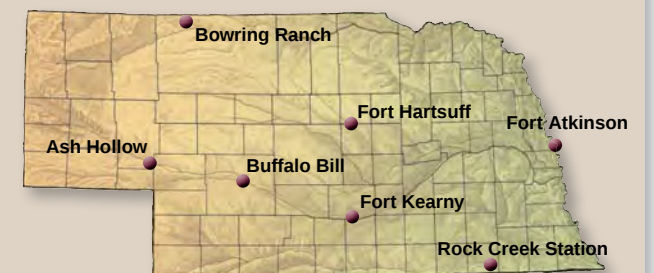
Fort Kearny State Historical Park - Kearney

Volunteers portray a typical day in the life of this 19th century stage station during Memorial Day weekend, the Fourth of July weekend, and Labor Day weekend. The cannon is fired during each event. A Pony Express re-ride is also held in June.

Rock Creek Station State Historical Park - Fairbury

Living history events at Rock Creek Station State Historical Park look a little different: Rather than portraying specific trades and crafts, volunteers reenact the daily ranch chores at this 1860s stage and Pony Express station. Their activities look different depending on the time of year and the time of day. Events are every third Saturday from May to October. The Rock Creek Trail Days weekend in June includes reenactments and skits, and a buffalo stew cookout on Saturday.

To learn more about these and other state historical parks, visit OutdoorNebraska.org/statehistoricalparks.



Time Well Spent

What to do in May

By Renae Blum

Looking for an excuse to hit the road or simply a few ideas for a sunny weekend spent outdoors? The following ideas should keep you plenty busy. To read more and learn about other upcoming events across the state, visit OutdoorNebraska.org. ■



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Sip Nebraska

May 5-6

Eugene T. Mahoney State Park

Enjoy wine and hard cider tastings at this annual wine festival held at Eugene T. Mahoney State Park. The festival also includes live music; food, artisan and craft vendors; and wine education sessions. To get tickets, visit sipnebraska.com. A limited number of Mahoney's cabins, lodge rooms and campsites are reserved for festival guests. Call 402-882-2448 to book your stay.

Fort Kearny Outdoor Expo

May 13

Fort Kearny State Recreation Area

Try fishing, archery, kayaking, outdoor cooking and other hands-on outdoor activities at the popular and family-friendly Fort Kearny Outdoor Expo on May 13. All activities are free; just a valid Nebraska Park Entry Permit is required. Learn more at fortkearnyexpo.com.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER



PHOTO BY DOUG CARROLL

Free Fishing and Park Entry Day

May 20

Statewide

Relax with a Saturday of fishing or state park activities without the need to purchase a fishing or park entry permit for the day. See the online calendar for all scheduled park events this day.

Sesquicentennial Celebrations

Throughout the month

Statewide

Celebrations continue this month in honor of Nebraska's 150th birthday last March. The following are a sampling of events; for a full list and complete descriptions, visit ne150.org.

On May 7, the Omaha Symphonic Chorus will present a concert featuring songs that celebrate the singers' ancestral heritages. Starting May 3, the Bone Creek Museum of Agrarian Art in David City will show "150 Artists, 150 Artworks, 150 Years of Nebraska in Miniature," a large-scale juried art exhibit. Are you a creative person? Starting May 30, you can submit artwork in the "150 Nails" Contest sponsored by the Buffalo County Historical Society. Pieces must include – you guessed it – 150 nails.



Plant for Pollinators

Ongoing

Statewide

Pollinators, including bees, butterflies, birds, ants, and many other species, play a critical role in our food production, economy and natural landscapes. Help provide them with the nourishment they need to survive by planting sources of pollinator food and habitat. You can find a list of recommended plants that are native to the Midwest at OutdoorNebraska.org/gardening.



PHOTO BY CHRIS MASADA

A man wearing a red baseball cap, sunglasses, and a blue and white plaid shirt with tan waders is standing in shallow water. He is holding a large striped bass (wiper) by its tail. The fish is silver with dark horizontal stripes. In the background, another person is visible in the water. The sky is blue and the water is calm.

Terry Kruse admires the first of several wipers he caught on the fly during a warm spring day.

WIPERS ON THE FLY

Photos and story by Doug Steinke

While you can catch wipers on the fly almost any time of the day, some days are much better than others. From my experience, below is a description of the optimum conditions that will put the odds in your favor for catching a wiper on a fly.

Season: April-June

Time: Late morning to sunset

Weather: Sunny day with a high temperature of 60 degrees or better with a 0-10 mph wind.

Rod: 5-8 weight

Line type: Floating

Leader: 6-9 feet of 20-pound flourocarbon

Flies: Minnow imitation like a 4-inch Lefty's Deceiver or a 2-4-inch Clouser Fly

Colors: All white, white/chartreuse and/or blue/chartreuse

Location: Lake McConaughy, on the north side of the lake from Martin Bay to Admirals Cove.

Technique: Most active wipers will be in the top three feet of the water column. Wade into the water up to the knees or deeper and fan cast at a 180-degree angle. Yes, there will be times where you'll get a strike directly parallel to the bank you're standing off of.

After you complete the cast, make 6-12-inch strips and watch your line for any indications of "strikes" and strip set* to hook the fish. Apply as much pressure to the fish as you can, and if you do this long enough you'll eventually face a fish you won't be able to stop.

Wipers will take you all the way down to just a few wraps of your backing left on your reel. If this happens, try to grab the backing before the fish breaks it from your fly reel. Re-tie and start all over.

** Strip setting is when you sense a "strike" or fish taking your fly. You need to grab the line and while pointing the rod tip at the fish, violently pull the line back toward you without lifting the rod. This is easier said than done. It takes practice.*



ABOVE: In early spring, a bronze 6-inch Sardinia saltwater streamer can excel. Wipers target juvenile smallmouth until the alewife and shad arrive in the shallows.

RIGHT: Wipers in general are a fairly hardy fish, but it is still just good stewardship to keep them wet.



“You’ll eventually face a fish you won’t be able to stop.”
— Doug Steinke



ABOVE: Jim Langford, at left, and Kruse are my fly fishing mentors. I treasured the opportunity to reciprocate the knowledge transfer by exposing them to wipers on the fly.

OPPOSITE: There are not many things more satisfying than catching a fish on your own hand-tied flies. Alewife streamers include (clockwise) the deceiver, articulated and snagless type.

Extinction is Final

Story by Kristal Stoner, Wildlife Diversity Program Manager
Photos by Joel Sartore, Creator of the National Geographic Photo Ark

The thought of losing something forever triggers an instinct to protect and preserve. Some charismatic species naturally draw our attention. The threatened river otter's playful reputation has captured many hearts over the years. Today, thanks to reintroduction efforts several decades ago, the river otter is using most of Nebraska's major rivers and is under consideration for "delisting" or removing it from protection under the Nebraska Nongame and Endangered Species Conservation Act.

Sometimes, a threatened or endangered species acts like a canary in a coal mine and can warn us about changes in the environment. The classic example is the bald eagle, which warned us of chemicals in the environment. But sometimes the story is more complex. The pallid sturgeon decline has taught us about the dynamic nature of big rivers and floodplains, while the northern redbelly dace has taught us about the importance of connected watersheds. Even the

minuscule American burying beetle is declining because of habitat fragmentation. These are the stories that we know, but there are undoubtedly other species declining that go unnoticed.

Restoring an animal from the brink of extinction may appear to have a narrow focus, but the solution often means restoring ecosystems, with benefits beyond a single species. Restoring grasslands for the American burying beetle means that expansive grasslands are supporting many other declining grassland species, as well as supporting cattle ranching. Helping whooping cranes in Nebraska translates into restoring wetland complexes, which also provides valuable habitat for migrating flocks of shorebirds and waterfowl. These wetlands also clean our drinking water.

The stories, and lessons, of each of these species are worth listening to. After all, endangered means there is still time. ■



River Otter
Lontra canadensis
Threatened

Whooping Crane
Grus americana
Endangered





Pallid Sturgeon
Scaphirhynchus albus
Endangered

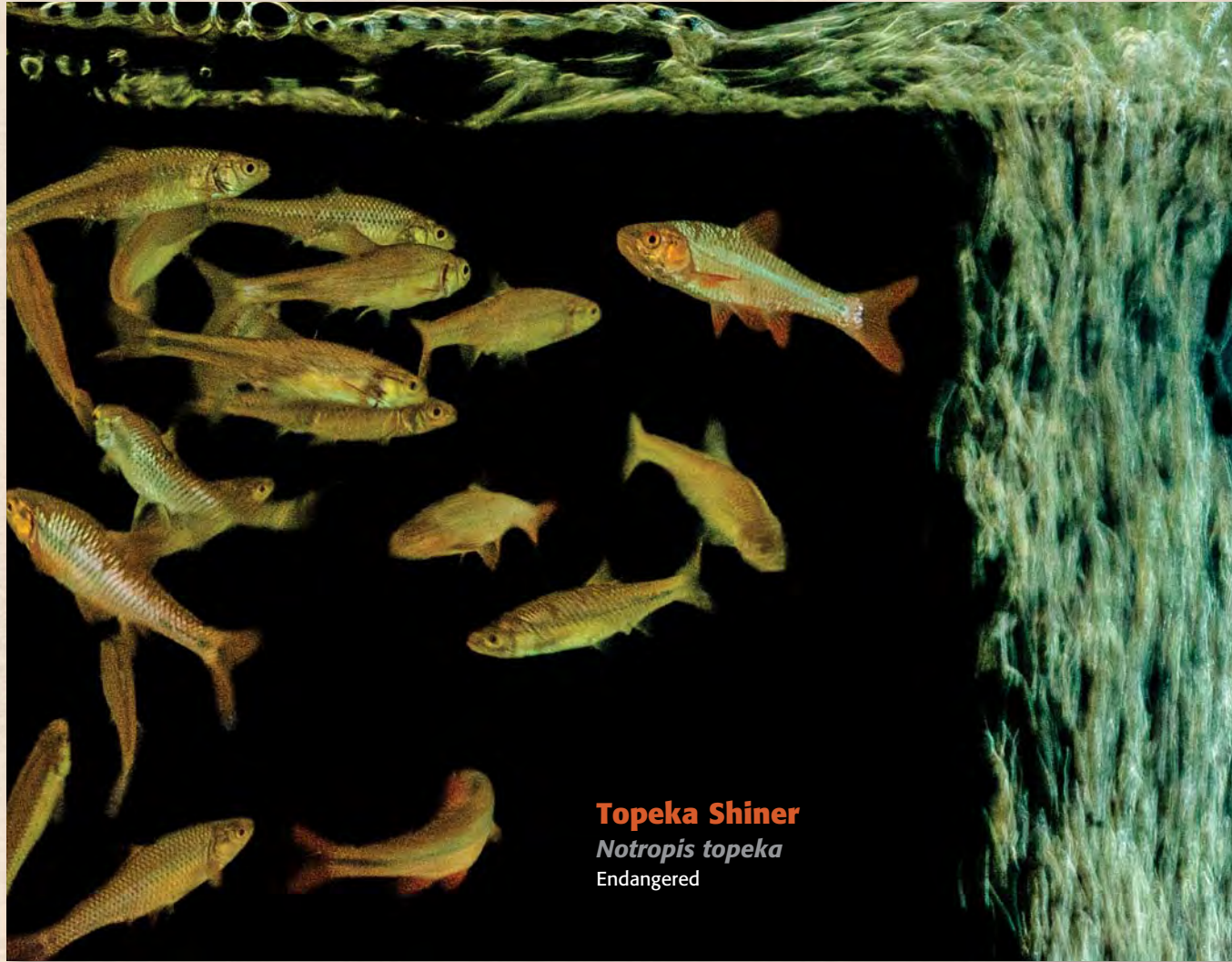


Salt Creek Tiger Beetle
Cicindela nevadica lincolniana
Endangered

Nebraska's Threatened & Endangered Species

Common Name	Scientific Name	State Status	Federal Status
BIRDS (6 Species)			
Eskimo Curlew*	<i>Numenius borealis</i>	Endangered	Endangered
Whooping Crane	<i>Grus americana</i>	Endangered	Endangered
Interior Least Tern	<i>Sternula antillarum athalassos</i>	Endangered	Endangered
Piping Plover	<i>Charadrius melodus</i>	Threatened	Threatened
Mountain Plover	<i>Charadrius montanus</i>	Threatened	not listed
Rufa Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus rufa</i>	Threatened	Threatened
MAMMALS (6 Species)			
Black-footed Ferret*	<i>Mustela nigripes</i>	Endangered	Endangered
Gray Wolf*	<i>Canis lupus</i>	Endangered	Endangered
Swift Fox	<i>Vulpes velox</i>	Endangered	not listed
River Otter	<i>Lontra canadensis</i>	Threatened	not listed
Southern Flying Squirrel	<i>Glaucomys volans</i>	Threatened	not listed
Northern Long-eared Bat	<i>Myotis septentrionalis</i>	Threatened	Threatened
FISH (7 Species)			
Pallid Sturgeon	<i>Scaphirhynchus albus</i>	Endangered	Endangered
Topeka Shiner	<i>Notropis topeka</i>	Endangered	Endangered
Sturgeon Chub	<i>Macrhybopsis gelida</i>	Endangered	not listed
Blacknose Shiner	<i>Notropis heterolepis</i>	Endangered	not listed
Lake Sturgeon	<i>Acipenser fulvescens</i>	Threatened	not listed
Northern Redbelly Dace	<i>Chrosomus eos</i>	Threatened	not listed
Finescale Dace	<i>Chrosomus neogaeus</i>	Threatened	not listed
INSECTS (2 Species)			
American Burying Beetle	<i>Nicrophorus americanus</i>	Endangered	Endangered
Salt Creek Tiger Beetle	<i>Cicindela nevadica lincolniana</i>	Endangered	Endangered
REPTILES (1 Species)			
Western Massasauga	<i>Sistrurus tergeminus</i>	Threatened	not listed
MUSSELS (1 Species)			
Scaleshell Mussel	<i>Leptodea leptodon</i>	Endangered	Endangered
PLANTS (7 Species)			
Hayden's (Blowout) Penstemon	<i>Penstemon haydenii</i>	Endangered	Endangered
Colorado Butterfly Plant	<i>Gaura neomexicana</i> ssp. <i>coloradensis</i>	Endangered	Threatened
Saltwort	<i>Salicornia rubra</i>	Endangered	not listed
Western Prairie Fringed Orchid	<i>Platanthera praeclara</i>	Threatened	Threatened
Ute Ladies' Tresses	<i>Spiranthes diluvialis</i>	Threatened	Threatened
American Ginseng	<i>Panax quinquefolius</i>	Threatened	not listed
Small White Lady's Slipper	<i>Cypripedium candidum</i>	Threatened	not listed

* Species of historical occurrence in Nebraska but no known populations exist in the state.



Topeka Shiner
Notropis topeka
Endangered



Black-footed Ferret
Mustela nigripes
Endangered



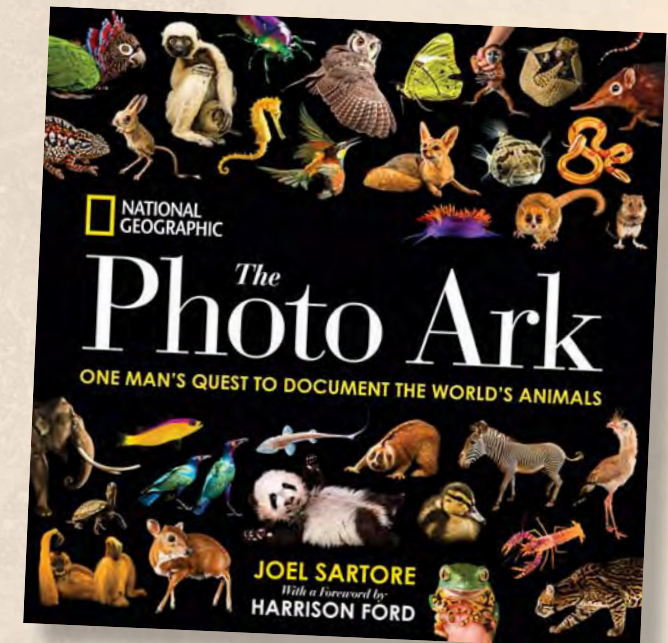
Piping Plover
Charadrius melodus
Threatened



American Burying Beetle
Nicrophorus americanus
Endangered



Hayden's (Blowout) Penstemon
Penstemon haydenii
Endangered



Joel Sartore's new photography book, *The Photo Ark: One Man's Quest to Document the World's Animals*, offers a powerful message through humor, compassion and art to its viewers: to know these animals is to save them. To order, visit joelsartore.com.

Through the Wildlife Conservation Fund, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission has helped protect Nebraska's threatened and endangered species. With donated dollars and grants, the Fund makes the following efforts possible: habitat improvements, species reintroduction projects, educational programs for kids, bird wildcams and more. To donate, visit nebraskawildlifefund.org.

Learning at Cedar Point

A Unique Biological Station

Story and photos by Mark Harris

On a remote country road in western Nebraska, a young lady bolts from an abruptly-stopped SUV and sprints toward a flock of wild turkeys. Unaccustomed to the threat of women in gym shorts, the baffled turkeys run halfheartedly at first, but as the distance closes they fly. Tall weeds impede their noisy launch and the last one airborne is nearly nabbed. “That’s the closest I’ve ever come,” the blond girl says later. “They were young.”

University of Nebraska-Lincoln senior Kate Durst never pictured her college experience this way. College is lectures and labs, assignments and homework. Eyes glued to phone screens, hordes of students winding antlike between campus buildings

among unwary squirrels along manicured pathways. But at the Cedar Point Biological Station in Keith County, phones don’t work, pathways are dirt, and turkey carcasses are course material. Squirrels are watchful here – for they may become course material, too.

Like many others who have enrolled at Cedar Point this season, Durst is here to broaden her knowledge of Nebraska’s natural world and to improve her scientific skillset. She chose Cedar Point’s Field Parasitology course, where she has become the class specialist in turkey parasites. She hopes to eventually land a career in tropical disease control and prevention. “I’m getting hands-on experience here that other UNL students don’t get,” she



Grasshoppers make up the bulk of a greater prairie-chicken’s diet in late summer. The bird that ate these will be examined for parasites in Cedar Point Biological Station’s lab.



Travis Doht and Shelby Lyon shift dirt from a pocket gopher’s mound to locate its entrance and lay a trap.

said. “Cedar Point integrates a truly academic setting with the area’s unique nature, and that pushes me to explore.”

Set within cedar trees among picturesque rolling hills southeast of Lake McConaughy’s spillway, Cedar Point lies at the juncture of Nebraska’s tall grass and short grass prairies along the southern region of the Sandhills and the northern edge of the Platte River Valley. This geographical nexus provides uniquely diverse flora and fauna for the University of Nebraska field courses offered here,

such as fundamentals of biology, ecology and evolution, ornithology, field epidemiology, predator ecology, literature and the environment, art and nature, and photography.

Originally built in 1960 as a Girl Scout camp, the University leased Cedar Point in 1975 for field-based courses and research, and the University Foundation purchased the property in 1980. The Nature Conservancy and the Nebraska Environmental Trust purchased surrounding land over the years,

growing the original 38 acres to more than 500. With student-based research as the central focus, Cedar Point now hosts a broad range of research groups every year.

While mornings and evenings are for fieldwork, hot afternoons are better suited for the laboratory. Today in the Field Animal Behavior lab, two young men linger over a water tub holding two male crawdads. Submerged with them is a ceramic structure offering safe haven, but male crawdads don’t get along; this space will not be shared.



The University of Nebraska’s Cedar Point Biological Station is a field research facility and experiential classroom located near Lake McConaughy and the city of Ogallala in Keith County.



From left, Guin Drabik, Carter Shank and Masiel Maza take a moment to explore nature on one of many daily field trips near Cedar Point Biological Station. Friendships made here can last a lifetime.



This student finds a peaceful moment in the Cedar Point cafeteria before setting out on another busy day of field research.

Cedar Point, and it's not just nature that draws her. "It's about being around like-minded people," Drabik said. "Like-minded" in this case denotes focused, mature, hardworking students who love sharing adventures. Students in her parasitology course are young natural-science brainiacs, wide-eyed and enthusiastic about what lives in animal guts. They chatter about the amazing *Anoplocephaloides variabilis* and the elusive *Vexillata armandae*. In the late summer, coursework is not the only challenge here. Masses of midges, mosquito-like bugs without the bite, plague the station. Higher up where the bluffs turn to plains, great swarms of blackflies pester, bouncing

Fighting ensues. After the skirmish the winner settles inside, cozy and hidden, while the loser fidgets exposed and vulnerable outside.

Paint-dotted for identification, two crawdads that battled the first day are swapped into the tub. One steers clear of the other, yielding shelter to the crawdad that gave it a thrashing yesterday. This is enthusiastically noted. Crawdads remember battles. How long will they hold that information – a day, a week, forever? Though this experiment's results won't alter the path of humanity, it will inform these young men about the scientific process, and someday they may discover something greater.

Any student is welcome at Cedar Point, though most are pursuing larger scientific career goals in life science fields such as biology, human health professions, fisheries and wildlife, veterinary practice or animal sciences. "Students pick up a level of enthusiasm for science and biology that they didn't have before they came," said Cedar Point's Associate Director Jon Garbisch. "This provides a focus on what they want to do with their life. Those who endeavor to take summer courses here gain tangible skills and a unique depth of specific knowledge. We get the students who like being in a hands-on learning environment where they can put their fingers in the mud."

Guin Drabik fits this mold. A city girl who loves camping and riding horseback, Drabik's major is veterinary science and she wants to become a professor. This is her third session at



North of Paxton, Annie Skradski checks traps set to capture jumping mice the night before. Local ranchers cooperate with UNL's researchers by allowing land access.



Situated next to Lake Ogallala, Cedar Point Biological Station will soon bustle with activity this hazy August morning.

off faces and slipping up noses. Lake Ogallala is the culprit; this is where they breed. “It’s a weird balance of working and just not letting it get to you,” Drabik said. “It’s a mindset. My second year was easier.”

Phone service is spotty. “You have to walk to the top of a hill to get service,” said Drabik. “My taller friends seem to have an advantage. I found that standing on a log helps, or sometimes I’ll take a bucket to stand on.” Student cabins purposefully lack Wi-Fi, and that lack of social media creates a fascinating throwback: groups of students hanging out together talking. “It keeps students from dispersing,” added Garbisch. “They are happy without internet access. It’s about personal connection. They’re getting dirty and having adventures, then sitting around in the evening and talking about it. It’s real. Quite a few students have met their future spouse here.”

Cedar Point students earn four credit hours in three intense weeks. Initial panic often grips first-time students as they realize how quickly the material

must be learned. “These students are all high achievers,” said Scott Gardner, professor and curator of parasitology at the University of Nebraska State Museum. “But they’re still not used to working so hard. They need to collect data for 12 days straight, synthesize it all and then present it in a paper.”

“It was kind of scary at first,” said Drabik. “The long hours seemed insane. The hardest thing is keeping a strong work ethic going, but as days go by you just accept the demands and throw yourself into it. If you don’t do the work the data won’t be there.” As it is in all science, data is everything here, though sleep is a close second. “Exhaustion is hard,” Drabik said, “Sleep is beautiful.”

Many spend months more working on their project in Gardner’s Lincoln parasitology lab, and some projects are published in scientific journals. “This is an opportunity for students to discover something completely new,” Gardner said. “It’s an experience they can receive in no other way.”

Because parasites are highly

prevalent in the wild, their place in the larger puzzle of the ecosystem is still being worked out. Gardner can tell what has been eating what by tracing parasites’ paths in the food chain. “You can determine a lot about animal distribution over a geographic space,” Gardner said. “Parasites often respond more quickly to environmental changes than their hosts. They provide an early warning signal for ecological disturbances.”

Finding parasites means catching the animal, dissecting it and then carefully examining what’s inside. “Most students have never dissected an animal and are often reluctant at first,” Gardner said. “But after seeing so many parasites right before their eyes, it becomes a fascination.” All parasites and their hosts examined here end up in the University of Nebraska State Museum’s collections for future DNA analysis. Rodents, rabbits, fish, amphibians, bats and non-migratory birds from the Cedar Point area represent snapshots in time providing readily available reference points

for future studies in grassland biodiversity.

Surrounding farmers and ranchers allowing land access occasionally stop by to see what the students are up to, but Cedar Point remains enigmatic to most of the regional population. “It’s like the Area 51 of Ogallala,” said Durst. “The locals know we’re here, but most don’t know why.” But the local teachers know. Cedar Point and UNL’s Environmental Studies Program partner with Keith County’s middle schools to provide several days of exploration per season learning about nature, catching bugs, fishing, collecting plants, and building friendships.

As an added incentive for faculty to present courses here, professors’ families are allowed to tag along. Playing children give the station a summer-camp feel. These kids are learning to love the outdoors just as their professor parents do. Many will attend courses here someday and all will gain new friends.

“Friendship” is a catchword here. Amid all the frenetically implanted knowledge and experience, students soon understand that their greatest



takeaway will be human connections. “As I get older this will be a place I hold close to my heart,” said Durst, newly appointed turkey-gut specialist.

College campuses can be impersonal, and as technology gradually enables students to attend in the mode of passive anonymity, things remain old-school at Cedar Point ... and proudly so. ■

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



Masiel Maza adjusts the microscope's light while Altangerel Dursahinhan searches animal organs for parasites which are ever-present in all of Nebraska's wildlife.

A Family Fishing Restart

by Lindsey Chizinski, Aquatic Education Coordinator

Paulette Lovino was raised with the Atlantic Ocean in sight. Just two doors down from her home on Long Island was a dock where her father, a native New Yorker, launched his boat to head into the Sound in search of fluke and flounder. Some of her fondest memories of childhood involve crabbing and clamming on local beaches. She remembers her father waking her in the dead of night after he finished fishing and carting her with her siblings down to the beach where a blazing fire awaited. The kids would comb the beach for horseshoe crabs while the adults conversed around the fire.

As she recalls these memories of family and friends, water is the common thread that weaves her stories together. This thread continues as Paulette, now a transplant to Nebraska, recounts summer vacations in Minnesota with her own children and their family friends. The memories are different, with much more time in the kitchen preparing meals while the kids and their dads passed days on the lake catching walleye. But the theme remains the same – family, friends, fishing, good food and simply enjoying each other’s company.

On a gray and drizzly evening last September, I met Paulette and her grandchildren, Paisley, 5, and Riley, 8, at Holmes Lake in Lincoln for the final Family Fishing Night of the season. Despite the rain, Paulette was eager for her grandkids to experience the joy and excitement of fishing that she remembers from her youth. I have to admit, however, that I wasn’t sure they would last five minutes in the unfortunate weather of that day before opting for a warmer, dryer alternative. They proved me wrong.

We equipped the kids with rods and reels from the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission’s fishing trailer and they headed for a spot on the sandy bank. My husband, Chris, a volunteer fishing instructor, grabbed a few juicy nightcrawlers from the cooler and showed Paulette and the kids how to pinch off a thumbnail-sized piece of worm and thread it on a hook. He then gave them a quick casting lesson.

- Put your thumb on the button and hold it down
- Raise your pole so the tip points to the sky (but make sure your hook doesn’t tangle up your line)
- Look toward the water and decide where you want your bobber to go
- Point your rod in that direction as you lift your thumb off the button and let the bobber fly...



Simple, right? Paisley will tell you it wasn’t quite that easy. Her first attempt got her line stuck in the bush behind her. But she soon got the hang of it and cast, or in her words “rolled,” her line right into the water. Riley has fished before, and he was casting like a seasoned angler in no time. Even my son, Elvis, 3, was hitting the water with about half of his casts.

They didn’t have to wait long for satisfaction. Within minutes, Paisley’s orange and yellow bobber ducked hard under the water. With some help, she wildly reeled her line in to discover a bluegill on her hook – her first fish ever. She was so proud, and her grin stretched ear-to-ear as

she displayed her fish for a photo. Rainy day? No matter! Her bright pink raincoat and that smile chased all the gloom away. I started to get a little nervous for Riley; no one wants to be out-fished by a kid sister. But never fear;

he reeled in a largemouth bass about 10 minutes later. This wasn’t Riley’s first fish; he’s caught bluegill at Holmes before, but it was the biggest, and I think he was just as satisfied with it as Paisley with her first fish.

Paulette recalls that both children were fascinated with that bass. Chris opened its mouth and showed them how water moves past the gills for a constant supply of oxygen. All three kids bravely felt the scales and examined the eyes and fins and – “What’s that?” ... “That’s where it poops” – before gently placing it back in the water and waving goodbye as it swam away. Of course, Elvis attempted to follow the bass into the lake.

When I met with Riley and Paisley recently to talk about their Family Fishing experience, they mentioned the rain but didn’t recall it as a negative. Paisley gleefully told me in one breath that her hair got all wet and she got to have ice cream on the way home. Paulette also mentioned that Paisley now stops to chat with every fisherman she sees when she rides her bike on the Holmes Lake trail. And both kids told me they are looking forward to spring and another chance to go fishing.

I asked Paulette what motivated her to bring the grandkids out on that rainy day. She recalled her childhood and her strong connection with water, how spending time outdoors in general, and near water in particular, enriches her life. We talked about how fishing is a lifetime activity, something you can do alone or with friends, in youth and in senescence. And how somewhere in the story of her life, that thread, the common theme of fishing and enjoying the outdoors as family, was broken. She is trying to weave that back into the story, to introduce her grandchildren to the natural world that she loves and help them experience it as she has.

It’s difficult, she says, because so



Above: Paisley Tolliver of Lincoln releases a crappie back into Holmes Lake in Lancaster County. Opposite: Riley Tolliver poses with a bluegill caught at Holmes Lake.

many things compete for the kids’ interest, things such as video games. Riley loves to spend time outdoors, but he also loves Minecraft.

Paulette wants to immerse the kids in nature play whenever she spends time with them in hopes that these experiences will lead them in their own free time to choose, for example, a fishing pole as frequently as a screen. She appreciates events like Family Fishing Nights because she doesn’t need to recall all the small details of skills she hasn’t practiced in years. She admits she was a little nervous to touch the worm that gray September evening and welcomed the assistance from a volunteer instructor to help her regain the confidence of her youth. And even though she is more comfortable now with pinching a worm in half, she still plans to join us again at Family Fishing Nights for the opportunity to gather with friends near water and, hopefully, catch some more fish. ■

For more information on the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission’s Family Fishing program, including Family Fishing Night dates, visit OutdoorNebraska.org/familyfishing.



This morel mushroom was found at DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge near Missouri Valley, Iowa.

MORELS FOR DAYS

Story and photos by
Jenny Nguyen

If someone asked me what about outdoor Nebraska makes me happy most – that immediately puts a smile on my face – the answer would be morel mushroom hunting. There’s just something about finally emerging into the woods after a long, dreary winter that makes me feel like a kid again – ready to explore, witness the animals and trees wake, and deeply breathe in the smell of moist earth and fresh spring rain.

Typically emerging in mid- to late-April and through May, the arrival of morels not only signals the promise of warmer, milder days ahead, but also a whole new year of great fishing, hunting, camping, kayaking, horseback riding ... Like that first sip of champagne on New Year’s Eve and the first egg of Easter wrapped in one, morel mushroom hunting is a great way to welcome in and celebrate spring. However, don’t go into the woods unprepared.

When to Look

Morels are fickle, only growing when conditions are just right, which makes them a poor candidate for mass production. While you won’t find this fungus fresh in any major grocery stores, millions of Americans flock to the woods every year to search for this wild prize. With a distinct honeycomb-like appearance as well as possessing a richly nutty, meaty taste, morels are highly coveted by home cooks, professional chefs and artists everywhere.

In Nebraska, some morel seasons are long, while others are disappointingly short. Because conditions vary from year to year, it’s hard to pinpoint exactly when mushrooms will grow. However, experts generally agree that favorable daytime temperatures fall between 60 and 70 degrees while nighttime temperatures should hover around 40 degrees. Also take soil temperature into careful consideration: the earth must be between 45 to 50 degrees for morels to “pop.”

“Are the bur oak leaf buds the size of a fox squirrel’s ear? Are any woodland violets sprouting? Have wild asparagus spears begun to break the earth yet? Have you done that first mowing of your lawn?” asked Greg Wagner in his March 27, 2017, blog post on early season morels. Wagner has found morels as early as March 20 in southeastern Nebraska along the Platte River, but basically alluded that morels will grow when and where they darn well please.

Morels prefer moist, well-drained soils and are encouraged



A mesh bag will allow mushroom spores to redistribute throughout an area as you hike.

by spring rains followed by warm, sunny days. When the air and soil temperatures are right, and there is precipitation, plan to look for mushrooms the following day. But while too little rain is not good for morels, too much rain can negatively affect harvest as well. Last year, I had to pass on many morels that were so saturated with water that they “melted.” I’ve also observed that the extra moisture seems to speed up molding.

It’s hard to say when you should begin and stop looking for morels, but keep your eyes and ears open.

Refer to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission’s Morel Mushroom Report for clues from other mushrooms hunters around the state: Outdoornebraska.org/morel.

Where to Look

My first morel mushroom hunting experience was with Mark Davis, a former *Omaha World-Herald* journalist who was also an avid mushroom hunter. Davis had a keen eye for



The growth of woodland violet coincides with the emergence of morel mushrooms in northeastern Nebraska near the Missouri River.



Warm spring rains, like this one near Niobrara State Park early last May, encourage morel mushrooms to “pop.”

mushrooms, as well as a system that he and his friends developed for hunting in groups. Every time a hunter finds a mushroom, he or she will make a unique whooping sound. This allows companions to keep track of one other in the woods, as well as raise the stakes for friendly competition.

While I haven’t successfully adopted Davis’s system of producing strange bird noises in the woods, I did find and pick my first morel mushrooms that day – a thrilling experience, and I learned a lot. Davis told me that the

most successful mushroom hunters don’t go into the woods and search randomly: They learn to read the trees.

River bottoms with open forests of dying trees, most notably ash, aspen, elm, and cottonwood trees, are prime morel habitat. As mentioned previously, morels love moist, well-drained, loose, loamy soil. Early in the season, look for morels on south-facing slopes where the soil is warmed by the sun. As the season progresses, continue searching for mushroom on north-facing slopes.

When you walk into the woods, follow the dying or dead trees, Davis said. Morels love to hang out at the base of these trees, especially those that have been stripped of their bark. But as soon as you find a mushroom, don’t pick it right away. Carefully scan the areas around that morel. Often when you find one morel, you will find others that are part of the same “patch.” Morels also like areas where snake grass (*Equisetum*) exists, and they’re said to likely grow in areas that have been recently disturbed through

burning or flooding. Early-season morels will be small and harder to find, while late-season morels will be larger and easier to spot. Wherever morels may be found, though, never trespass onto private property.

Still, no matter how much you’ve read or heard about morels, you’ll likely come to the conclusion that they are one of the greatest mysteries of our woods. They have popped up in strange places such as in landscaping wood chips, fireplaces and even cracks in sheetrock wall, according to

Eugenia Bone, author of *Mycophilia: Revelations from the Weird World of Mushrooms*.

I have a friend who wonders why her property doesn’t produce morels when it seemingly meets all the “right” conditions. And in some areas, I’ll find morels one year and then won’t see them the next. No one really knows why. Science has yet to crack the great morel conundrum, but that only adds to their allure.

What to Wear

Spring in Nebraska is an exciting time of year – you can experience warm, sunny days or wet, drizzly conditions. On cloudy days, the April or May air can still hold a slight chill. A waterproof, breathable windbreaker is my favorite top to wear while mushroom hunting. It’s thin enough that I won’t get too hot, but will also help protect me from any unexpected rain, sharp limbs and thorns while walking through the woods. I prefer jackets with zipper armpit vents to keep me cool, dry and comfortable. Also consider wearing a brightly colored jacket. Your companions will have a better time keeping track of you, and any turkey hunters in the area will have an easier time seeing you.

Sturdy, waterproof wellingtons are my footwear of choice. I’ve found myself having to walk through mud and water puddles too often during morel season, and the boots’ tall height also provides protection to your legs from low thorns, bushes and poison ivy. Lightweight, comfortable Muck Boots, or similar brands, are great for mushroom hunting, but do yourself a favor and get some support or comfort insoles – many of these rubber boots were not made for long periods of walking. The extra arch support will pay off after a whole day of hiking.

If you prefer to wear hiking boots, a good pair of gaiters will also offer the same protection from brush. The coverage also helps prevent ticks from crawling up your pant leg, which is a common annoyance during mushroom season.

However, to find mushrooms others haven’t seen, you’ll have to walk off the beaten path. Exploring is fun until you get caught in a nasty greenbrier vine, which will invariably happen sooner than later. Densely covered in thorns, these vines can grow longer than 30 feet and will hurt like the dickens when lodged into your flesh.

The thought of savagely macheteing

lightweight brush pants or long chaps will have to satisfy. A pair of work gloves is also not a bad accessory to have in the woods.

What to Bring

You don’t need much to begin mushroom hunting. Some essentials are a mesh bag, pocketknife and walking stick, if you desire. I also carry bug spray, inexpensive sunglasses – free pair of Ray-Bans for anyone who can find them at Whitetail Wildlife Management Area – suntan lotion, water and snacks, and if I’m going to make a long day of it, I pack a light lunch to enjoy in the quiet woods or by a river or stream. To keep track of your progress, a map, GPS unit, compass and/or outdoor journal are other items to consider.

Using a mesh bag is important. It will enable air to circulate through the bag, allowing mushrooms to “breathe” and stay fresh. Especially if it’s hot out, using a plastic bag will create condensation, speeding up decomposition. Many experts also agree that using a mesh bag will allow collected mushrooms to drop their spores onto the forest floor as you walk around, helping to ensure the propagation of future morels. You can buy specially-made morel mushroom mesh bags, but reusing an onion bag will work just fine.

A pocketknife is a good tool to have anytime you’re out in the woods, but it’s my preferred way to harvest mushrooms, especially when I have presentation for photos and cooking in mind. However you harvest your morels, though, remember not to pull up the whole mushroom, roots and all. Pinch or slice off the mushroom near the base of the stem. This will keep the root system underneath the earth intact, helping the patch to produce again next year.



Jasmine Cutter of Delaware holds up a morel mushroom she found in Knox County.

my way through the woods has crossed my mind – you know, like in the movies. But greenbriers are beneficial for wildlife, so avoidance and a pair of



From left, Jackie Freeman and Bekah Jessen, both of Bloomfield, and Tim Nissen from Hartington, stop to search for morels during a kayaking trip along the Missouri River last spring.

While most Nebraska public properties are not large enough for people to get lost, this certainly does happen in other states. Still, be careful not to lose track of time when out in the woods – getting turned around in the dark will ruin your day. Other essentials include a headlamp/flashlight, small first-aid kit, extra food, extra sweater and matches.

Storing and Prepping

If I plan to cook the mushrooms the same day, I run water over them to get rid of as much sand/dirt and insects as possible. I may also cut bigger morels in half to make sure no ants or roly-polies are hiding inside. After rinsing the morels in water, I let them drip dry in a colander for about an hour or so before cooking. Allowing the mushrooms to dry will help give me a golden brown sear when I add them to a rip-roaring hot pan, which will bring

out the mushroom’s nuttiness. Wet mushrooms will just steam and boil in the pan, which doesn’t help to develop their flavor.

If you don’t plan on eating the morels right away, they may be stored in the refrigerator for several days. I often don’t wash morels at all before storage, unless they are noticeably dirty or covered with insects. Usually, I just brush them off with a paper towel. I also avoid soaking morels for long periods of time. This makes them soggy, which can speed up decomposition during storage. Much like storing green vegetables wet, excessive moisture invites rot. The drier mushrooms are, the longer they will keep.

To store them in your refrigerator, place morels in a bowl and cover with a couple sheets of damp paper towels. I rewet the paper towel every morning after I get up, and depending on the humidity in your refrigerator, you may have to rewet the towel twice a day. I may also rearrange the morels in the bowl every couple days to keep them

well ventilated and discard rotted ones. I’ve kept morels fresh this way for up to a week.

To preserve mushrooms for long-term storage, Mark Davis has three methods: frozen breaded, frozen sautéed and dehydrated.

Frozen breaded: Clean morels thoroughly then bread them in milk, egg wash and then cracker crumbs. Place them on wax paper on a cookie sheet and set in the freezer. Once frozen, store them in freezer bags and fry as needed. Consume breaded morels before 6 months, as mushrooms will lose their flavor beyond that period.

To freeze sautéed morels, lightly sauté them in butter and freeze them in their own juice in sandwich-size Tupperware. When ready to eat, defrost in the microwave and throw them back into a hot pan to finish sautéing. Consume before the next season begins for best flavor.

Lastly, according to Davis, drying is the best method for long-term storage



Freeman found these morels on Goat Island during a kayaking trip down the Missouri River.

of morels: “Use non-metal screens or a long, shallow box, commonly used at butcher shops, with newspapers in the bottom. Only use this method on dry, windy days, changing the paper twice a day until crispy dry. Keep a brick or heavy rock in the box to prevent having to hunt the ‘shrooms again when the wind blows the box over. You can also use a dehydrator. The key is to fully dry the mushroom to avoid mold. I then place them in a zip-close bag and store in the freezer. They will last for years dried.”

Cooking Morels

Battered and fried is *the* way to prepare morels in the Midwest, but several people have told me that fried morels don’t often sit well with

their stomachs. If we eliminate the possibility of food allergies, the most likely reason is that the morels were not cooked long enough.

Morels should never be consumed raw – this can send you to the hospital. Still, they need to be fully cooked to keep you from frequenting the toilet. According to Hank Shaw, who has an awesome fried morel mushroom recipe on his website *Hunter Angler Gardener Cook*, morels need a substantial batter that will hold up to a longer cooking time, allowing the mushroom to fully steam inside. A light dusting in flour will not do.

“You need to fry your morels for longer than you’d think ... Six minutes per morel seems to work fine. To get there, you actually don’t want to fry your morels at ragingly hot

temperatures; 325°F to 350°F is the sweet spot,” Shaw wrote.

To find Shaw’s recipe, visit honest-food.net/fried-morels-recipe.

I may be in the minority, but sautéed morels satisfy me most. Once I get my pan, oil and/or butter hot, the mushrooms go into the pan, where they will lose much of their moisture and then form a brown crust, which intensifies their flavor; I stir occasionally and never overcrowd the pan. After, fresh herbs such as minced shallot, scallion, onion, garlic, chives and/or parsley are added, followed by a splash of whiskey, cognac, brandy or white wine to add another layer of flavor – whatever I have on hand. Once the alcohol evaporates, I take the morels off the heat, season to taste and swirl in a pat or two of butter for good

measure.

The mushrooms are especially delicious this way served over a steak or burger. I made a wild turkey burger with sautéed morels, avocado and caramelized onions last season, and it was oh, so good. You can find the wild turkey and morel mushroom burger recipe here: gameandfishmag.com/recipes/wild-turkey-and-morel-mushroom-burger.

Morels for Days

Morel mushroom hunting is like a rite of passage for anyone interested in cooking wild food. It certainly was for me. Every spring, I get so excited that I see them in my sleep. While morels have been found in all 50 states, they are most abundant in the Midwest and eastward. We are so lucky that this special fungus has a presence in Nebraska. ■



Wild turkey burger with sautéed morel mushrooms, caramelized onion, avocado and baby kale with a side of french fries.



Jessen and her niece, Ella Jessen, pose for a photo with their best-looking morels of the day.

— CONNECTING TO NATURE —

Legacy in Environmental Education

By Monica Macoubrie and Jamie Bachmann

As modern society takes a hold on us, we become less connected to the natural diversity of our great state. It seems that Nebraska students are more connected to the wildlife of faraway places they see on television or their tablets than what is right outside their backdoors. How many times have your kids seen a polar bear, Siberian tiger or African elephant out of the kitchen window? Instead, you are more likely to see a goldfinch, kangaroo rat or even a garter snake. Students should learn about this wildlife, too. A prescription for this lost sense of place for our state's

students is to arm their educators with the tools they need to immerse their classrooms in outdoor Nebraska. Using this as a focus, the Legacy in Environmental Education Discovery (LEED) educator workshop was launched.

This free, two-day intensive educator workshop happens annually at a different or biologically unique landscape (BUL) across Nebraska. A biologically unique landscape is an area that has a large array of biological diversity in Nebraska. These landscapes are selected based on known occurrences of natural communities and at-risk species.

Previously, the workshops have been in the southeast prairies, lower Niobrara River, middle Niobrara, Oglala National Grasslands and the Loess Canyons BUL. Our goal is to engage educators in the outdoor classroom where they and their students live, familiarizing them with their unique habitat, wildlife, geography, history and conservation concerns.

For 2017, the workshop will be held at Indian Cave State Park in Schubert. This area is located in the extreme southeastern portion of the state, where the majority of the habitat is eastern deciduous forest containing oaks, hickories and basswood. This location supports a high diversity of native flora and fauna that is found nowhere else in the state.

Local natural resource professionals from a variety of conservation agencies including the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Pheasants Forever, Northern Prairies Land Trust and local area colleges are all invited to present at this workshop. They come to share their expertise and knowledge on a variety of topics including fire ecology,

plant identification, bird mist netting, small mammal trapping, geologic history, reptile and amphibian identification, land management, citizen science and aquatic macroinvertebrates.

Not only will educators gain knowledge in these subject areas, but they will also immerse themselves in hands-on training and experiences that guide many of the current research projects going on at Indian Cave State Park. For instance, this year educators will attempt radio telemetry on timber rattlesnakes. This species is considered a "species in need of conservation," yet has a secure population at this particular site. Participants will use equipment to track individual snakes that have been tagged for population studies at this BUL for the past three years. Participants will also mist net for bats and identify species caught, identify at-risk plants, learn about invasive species specific to this area and collect macroinvertebrates in the lower Platte River.



Teachers learn a variety of skills at LEED workshops, including the study of macroinvertebrates from canal water.

Workshop participants receive Nebraska-specific educational resources and are trained to use environmental education curriculum guides that reinforce interdisciplinary education. Interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary education creates connections between core subject areas such as math, science and literature instead of compartmentalizing them. For example, one lesson in wildlife population fluctuations and limiting factors will cover science, math, conservation education and expressive arts.

The goal of the LEED workshop is to immerse formal classroom educators into unique landscapes across Nebraska. Studies show that teachers who are familiar with an area, or have extensive knowledge about a subject, are more likely to teach it to their students. Our goal is to get students passionate about Nebraska. Working together as classroom educators, environmental educators, natural resource professionals and landowners, we hope to inspire the growth of deep roots in the place Nebraska students call home. ■

Over the last six years the Legacy Education in Environmental Discovery workshop has trained more than 120 educators across the state. If you or someone you know may be interested in attending the LEED workshop on June 26-27, 2017, at Indian Cave State Park, please email Monica.Macoubrie@Nebraska.gov. All teachers who participate in this free workshop will have lodging, meals and transportation between sites paid for. Registration is limited to 20 formal classroom teachers.



T.J. Walker, left, discusses plant life with teachers at a LEED workshop at Chester Island Wildlife Management Area south of Brady.

The Shotgun State

The Cornhusker Trapshoot celebrates its 48th year.

By Joel W. Helmer, Trapshooting Coach

Taking a walk down the quarter-mile long row of trap houses during the Cornhusker Junior/Senior High School Trapshoot is something every Nebraskan should do at least once. It is a unique sensory experience. First is the noise – thousands of rounds of shotgun shells exploding and mixing together with the talking, clapping, and cheering of friends, family, teammates, and coaches. Then the smell of spent gunpowder mingling in the air with grilling burgers, funnel cakes, and barbecue. Finally, and most importantly, the wonderful feeling you get seeing thousands of young people safely and responsibly handling firearms while competing in trap shooting.

This spring marks the 48th year for the Cornhusker Trapshoot, one of the nation's longest running and largest tournaments of its kind. From May 4-6 more than 2,500 high school and junior high competitors from Nebraska and across the nation will descend on the Nebraska Trap Shooting Association's home grounds near Doniphan, swelling the town's population from 840 into the thousands. It is an event like no other.

What brings these young shotgunners to Doniphan is American trap. In this event squads of five shooters position themselves on stations, called posts, 16 yards from an automated thrower located inside a trap house. At the shooters' command the thrower launches a 4¼-inch clay pigeon randomly somewhere within a 34-degree angle. According to the

official rules book, the clay must fly about 50 yards, meaning it is moving at a brisk 42 mph. After shooting at five clays the squad rotates to the next post until a round of 25 is complete. High school competitors shoot three rounds of "sixteens" on Friday and then are moved farther back based upon their score. This "handicap" event on Saturday consists of 75 targets, for a final total of 150. Junior competitors shoot 100 targets from the 16-yard line on day one of the tournament.

The Cornhusker Trapshoot began rather inconspicuously in 1970 as a friendly duel between Northeast Community College and Chadron State College. Organized by Dave Wells and Jim Carlisle, the event grew quickly, with a high school division added in 1972. Three years later the

event expanded to two days with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission now sponsoring the event and awarding the coveted Cornhusker Cup to the top overall high school shooter. In 1976, the event moved to its current location in Doniphan and by 1978 included not only a third day of competition but also a junior division for 6th-8th graders.

Over the next several decades, attendance at the state tournament grew steadily but slowly. Then things began to change. New high school and 4-H teams began popping up around the state and rosters of existing teams grew. For example, as recently as 2010 there were only

SPECTATORS watch as trapshooters ready to shoot at the Cornhusker Junior/Senior High School Trapshoot in Doniphan.

1,150 competitors at the Cornhusker Trapshoot, half as many as now. In the more heavily populated eastern third of Nebraska, where many teams belong to the Eastern Nebraska Trapshooting Conference, the growth has been phenomenal. In the last 15 years, the conference has tripled in membership from 500 to more than 1,600, necessitating dividing the conference into three divisions and expanding the weekend tournaments to two days.

What is happening in Nebraska is also taking place nationally, especially across the Midwest. I attended the Minnesota State High School Clay Target League championship several

years ago and was astonished to see more than 5,000 competitors. This summer they are expecting over 8,000. Minnesota's league is managed by the USA High School Clay Target League, which now has affiliates in 20 states. The Scholastic Clay Target Program, a youth development program established by the National Shooting Sports Foundation, is another major player, with its national tournament in Ohio attracting thousands of shooters. Others compete through their 4-H clubs, with the 4-H Shooting Sports National Championships now held at Heartland Public Shooting Park in Grand Island each June.

So why this sudden interest in trap shooting? Ted Vasko, Creighton Prep's head coach, points to the "all inclusive" nature of the sport. "Most coaches do not cut athletes from the team. Everyone gets to participate." This contrasts with the hyper-competitiveness and early specialization of more traditional sports, making it difficult for many to get playing time or even a spot on the team.

All-inclusive also means young women competing alongside young men. Marian High School's long-time head coach Bruce Esser points to the increasing participation by girls as a major factor in the growth of the sport. "From my perspective as a girls' school



PHOTO BY BOB GRIER



PHOTO BY DOUG CARROLL



Trapshooting is an all inclusive sport – young women are competing alongside young men – which points to a major factor in the increasing participation in this shooting sport.

coach the biggest increase has been in participation by girls. For example, in 2000 our conference had only 25 girls, but last year there were 220.” Coach Vasko agrees: “The shooting sports do not limit you by size and strength. Anyone can compete.”

Parents and young people also enjoy the family atmosphere surrounding the sport. Keith Brunkow, coach of one of the state’s largest teams at Norris High School, explains: “The atmosphere surrounding a shoot is a family atmosphere; teams put up tents,

bring trailers and have cook-outs. I have parents of graduates tell me how much they miss Saturdays at the range. A few years ago a group of parents missed their Saturday shoots so much they continued meeting over breakfast after the season was over.”

The shotgun sports are also growing because busting clays is just plain fun. Nothing beats watching a clay turn to dust. And for beginners it’s a sport where they can improve quickly and literally see their success explode in front of their eyes. In

today’s technology-saturated culture young people are conditioned to seeing immediate results, whether it’s playing video games or using social media. Shooting clays provides instant gratification while getting young people outside and away from their screens. Regardless of the why, parents, coaches, and administrators appreciate the life skills and lessons the shooting sports teach children. Handling a shotgun at a young age demands both responsibility and accountability. Coach Vasko believes that parents feel this generation is more protected than they were and therefore not given enough responsibility. “Being given responsibility of a firearm is often the first adult thing they get to do,” he said, “and despite what we are sometimes led to believe, I think young people want responsibility. I think they embrace it.” Rob Cooksey, head of schools at Concordia Lutheran Schools of Omaha, started a team last year and the response has been overwhelmingly positive. “Trap shooting broadens our ability to add value to a student’s education and for many students it is a primary motivation to do well in school. One of our junior high shooters was struggling with ineligibility prior to shooting. He is now doing much better after finding a home on the trap team.”

Another often-overlooked benefit is to the state’s local gun clubs. Many clubs in Nebraska and around the country were struggling to stay afloat as membership aged and interest waned. With the influx of new shooters, clubs are now struggling to accommodate increasing demand. Some are now planning to build additional trap ranges and skeet fields. Terry Kriz, owner of Oak Creek Sporting Club near Brainard, has seen the change firsthand. “The increase in



CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY shooters practice on a range in Seward County.



PHOTO BY DOUG CARROLL

COMPETITORS prepare to shoot at the Cornhusker Trapshoot as a scorer looks on.

high school and college shooting teams has helped gun clubs across Nebraska immensely. The daily traffic at my facility has grown by 5-10 percent in the last few years due solely to high school and college shooters.” Skeet Hiers, manager of Lincoln Trap and Skeet Club, agrees: “It has helped our facility a lot. And we encourage young people by letting them shoot at a discounted rate.”

Universities in Nebraska and other states are taking notice. Although collegiate shooting teams have existed in Nebraska for many years, they were mainly student-led club teams with limited funding from the schools. Smaller, private universities are stepping in with scholarships and financial support. Midland University in Fremont and Hastings College began shooting teams in 2013, with both experiencing rapid growth. The following year I formed a team at Concordia University in Seward, while Doane University began its program this fall. Nebraska

has fast become a hotbed for collegiate shooting. At last year’s national tournament in San Antonio, Texas, there were 697 students representing 76 universities. This is double the number of just four years ago.

For young shooters interested in competing in college, the main difference is the higher level of competition and number of disciplines shot. Although American trap is common, collegiate tournaments include multiple disciplines such as American skeet, double trap, wobble trap, sporting clays, five-stand and some international events as well. The good news for college coaches is that more high school shooters are expanding their shooting repertoire as the opportunities for college scholarships increase. I encourage all of our young shooters in Nebraska to keep working hard in school and on their shooting. The opportunity for you to keep competing and enjoying the shooting sports is only going to grow. ■

Coaching

My experience in starting and coaching a team at Concordia University has been amazing. The initial team of five grew quickly to a roster of 20 this past fall, necessitating hiring an assistant coach. Our roster, which includes seven women, consists mainly of Nebraska students but also includes shooters from MN, SD, TX, CO, WI, and KS. At Concordia, we treat our shooting team like the other athletic teams by offering scholarships and covering the costs of ammunition, fees and travel. It has been rewarding working with these young adults who have put the time and effort into becoming excellent and well-rounded shooters.

“...that d***ed cactus”

Suggested scientific name “Paininthebutkus nebraskensis”

By Roger Welsch

One of the reasons I love this piece of ground we live on is that it provides a spectrum of Plains ecologies, rising from the Middle Loup River, which gives us acres of wetlands and riparian woodlands. Then there is a belt of river terraces with tall grasses such as big bluestem and thickets of plum and chokecherry brush. A hundred yards farther it rises into wind-formed Sandhills with short grass, junipers, and ... that d***ed cactus. Sorry about the language but in our family that has become a set phrase: “... that “d***ed cactus.”

In the lower climes there are some large “beaver-tail” prickly pear (*Opuntia*) and I find it in my heart to forgive it what little pain it inflicts. The waxy yellow flowers are gorgeous on those rare occasions when the plant blooms, the “pear” fruits make lovely jelly and even the “paddles” are edible for salads and soups. So it is pleasant enough as a neighbor. I don’t bother it and it doesn’t bother me.

That can’t be said for “that d***ed cactus,” justifiably labeled “leaping cactus” because even when I am careful walking around the uplands, the stuff sees me coming, crouches in wait, and then leaps at any exposed flesh or loose clothing. I don’t think there has been a time in my 40-year tenure here that I have walked the uplands without bringing back a few specimens of the accursed stuff.

Once in the house it jumps free and hides under the furniture or rug, waiting for bare feet to stray its way and once again it earns its name ... in fact, all three names – *opuntia fragilis* (fragile only in the sense that parts of it detach easily and latch onto the unwary), “leaping cactus” and “that d***ed cactus.”

On those occasions when I find it hooked into my shoes, pant legs, or most distressingly on the seat of my overalls, and with pliers (a stick won’t do it) pull the blasted offender off my



person, I have learned never to toss it aside because that’s exactly what it wants.

Within seconds of hitting the ground, it sends forth roots and cheerfully adapts to its new home, directly in the path where Linda will next walk out to her studio to feed the cat. And there will be not a doubt in her mind how “that d***ed cactus” made its way into Fortress Welsch: “Rog! Check your shoes when you come back from a hike!”

I know what you’re thinking: just get rid of the stuff. Easily said. It flourishes when doused with herbicides. When dug up it simply sends up new needle balls from the roots. And if you saw how many tens of thousands of the wretched pain inflictors populate this place, you’d know how impossible that would be.

I’ve used propane torches to burn large areas, and with some success: rabbits found the de-spined cactus flesh delicious and feasted for a while ... until new segments sprang up from the roots with needles sharper than were there before. A friend suggested that I water a patch and see if that would do the job. Nope, of course

this cactus, unlike all others, loves water.

I’ve even thought about taking out advertisements in coastal newspapers warning readers that anyone coming to Nebraska to harvest my cactus for its wonderful hallucinatory properties will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. Which would be none because “that d***ed cactus” doesn’t even offer that commercial potential.

So over the years we have had to adopt the attitude expressed by author Joyce Meyer: “You may have been given a cactus, but you don’t have to sit on it.” Or an alternative phrasing that I think should be the Nebraska state motto: “It could be worse.” Although in the case of “this d***ed cactus” it’s hard to imagine how it could be worse. ■

Roger Welsch is an author, humorist, folklorist and a former essayist for CBS News Sunday Morning. He has authored more than 40 books and has contributed to the magazine since 1977.



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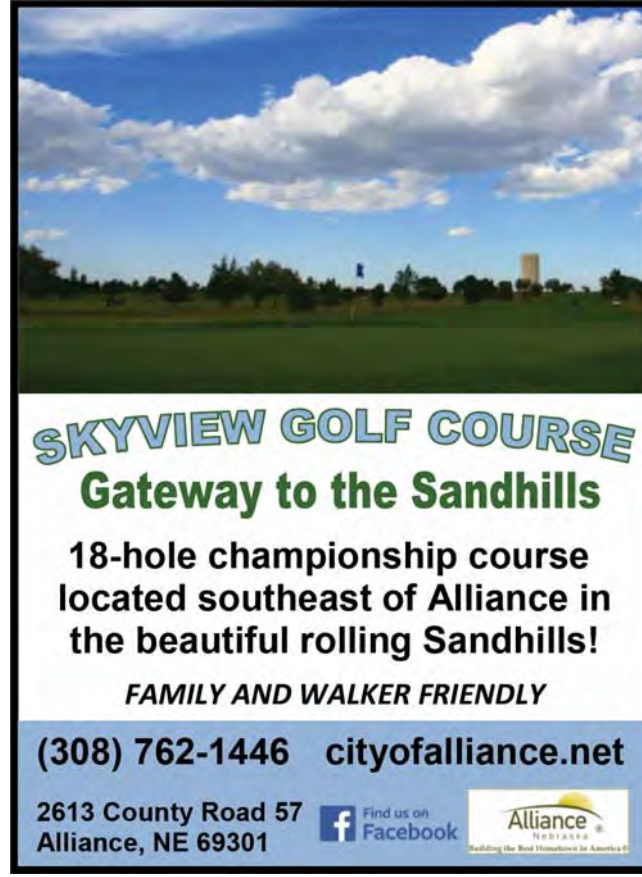


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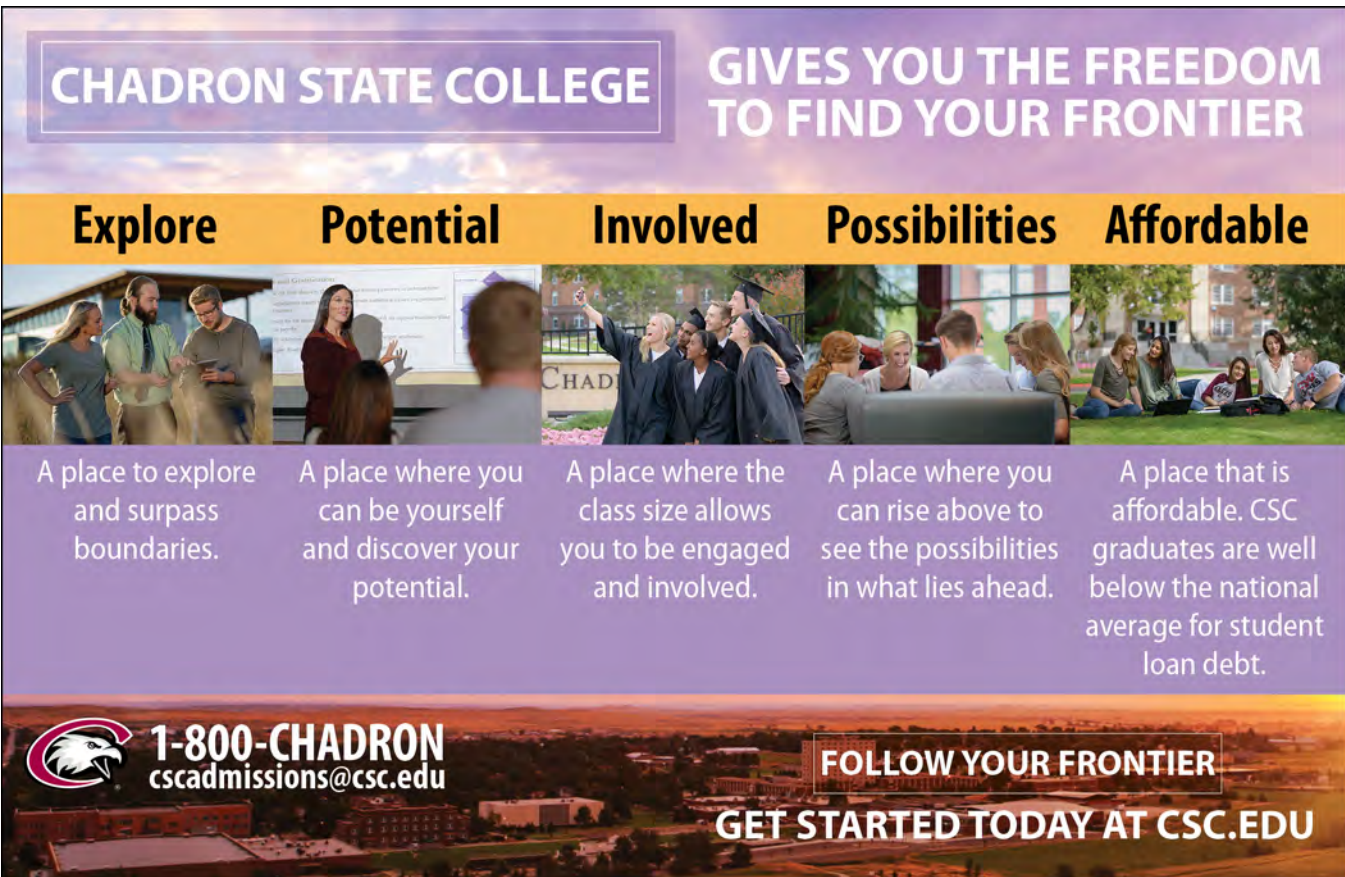
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Saddling Up at a Nebraska State Park

A Quick Guide

By Renae Blum

Horsewoman Suzanne Ridder has ridden most of the equestrian trails at every state park, state recreation area and state historical park in Nebraska that has them, excepting two (“They’re on my list this year,” Ridder said). While she believes there is no bad place to go horseback riding, Ridder appreciates state parks and recreation areas for “the amount of acres you have to ride, the scenic places you get to see and the amenities,” she said.

Those living in or visiting Nebraska have a wealth of choices for riding at state parks, Ridder said. Her favorites close to home in southeastern Nebraska are **Rock Creek**



Blain Sullivan (gray), Heather (blue) and Larry Ehrlich ride out of horse camp at Rock Creek Station State Historical Park.

Station State Historical Park and the adjoining **Rock Creek Station State Recreation Area**, located 6 miles east of Fairbury in Jefferson County. The parks feature 6 miles of equestrian trails and a group equestrian campground with 20 individual corrals. The state historical park contains visible Overland Trail wagon wheel ruts and is famous as the place where gunfighter Wild Bill Hickok got his bloody start. “I love history, so that’s a big draw for me,” Ridder said. “I also enjoy the camaraderie of the group campground.”

Also in southeastern Nebraska is **Indian Cave State Park**, located 12 miles north of Falls City. Ridder recommended visiting the park during the fall, when the hardwood forest puts on an impressive display of color. A primitive group campground is available for riders at Indian Cave, along with



Riders enjoy autumn colors at Lewis and Clark State Recreation Area in Knox County.

miles of hilly equestrian trails.

Pawnee State Recreation Area and **Branched Oak State Recreation Area** are great choices near Lincoln with camping amenities, Ridder said. Pawnee’s amenities include a primitive camp with picnic tables, drinking water and fire rings, while Branched Oak’s horse camp offers 15 electrical rock pad campsites, an accessible mounting ramp, hitching posts and corrals. In addition, **Two Rivers State Recreation Area** near Yutan features “a neat riverside trail and a beautiful scenic area,” Ridder said. “The equestrian campground is all primitive, and like Rock Creek Station, it’s a group camp. You can also put up portable pens for your horses.”

Northwest Nebraska contains what Ridder considers



A horse grazes at Two Rivers State Recreation Area’s equestrian campground.



With the Red Cloud Buttes serving as the backdrop, a wrangler leads a trail ride at Fort Robinson State Park.

“the absolute premier horseback riding in the state”: **Fort Robinson State Park**, located three miles west of Crawford. The park offers 20 miles of equestrian trails, large barns and a number of lodging choices for riders, including lodge rooms and cabins. The American Paint Horse Association’s annual trail ride at Fort Robinson has drawn riders from across the country and as far away as Germany. “I ask them, why this ride, why Fort Robinson? And they say it’s the only place where you can get all this in one location – the trees of



Niobrara State Park in Knox County offers guided trail rides that overlook the Niobrara and Missouri rivers.

the Pine Ridge, the prairies, and the buttes, where you can see for miles. It’s a unique location,” Ridder said.

In northeastern Nebraska, Ridder highlighted **Lewis and Clark State Recreation Area** near Crofton, which offers 6.5 miles of trails and an equestrian campground with corrals, water, restrooms and picnic areas. “It’s a nice horse camp and the trails take you up into the hills with a beautiful view of the lake,” Ridder said. **Niobrara State Park** is a great day



Visitors enjoy a trail ride at Chadron State Park in Dawes County.

ride as well, she said, with 120 acres of free range riding and an equestrian campground with primitive camping.

Both **Willow Creek State Recreation Area** and **Danish Alps State Recreation Area** are also great multi-use areas, Ridder said, with opportunities to fish, boat and hunt along with equestrian campgrounds and other amenities. The 321-mile **Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail** beginning in Norfolk is another option for horseback riders, she said.

Those without horses of their own can rent one for a guided trail ride at **Buffalo Bill State Historical Park**, **Chadron State Park**, **Eugene T. Mahoney State Park**, **Fort Robinson State Park**, **Indian Cave State Park**, **Niobrara State Park**, **Platte River State Park** and **Ponca State Park**. For more information on these and other locations, visit OutdoorNebraska.org. ■

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Operation Walleye

There is no time like the nighttime.

By Jake Jadowski

For as long as I can remember I've been a fisherman, or at least I've called myself one. Thanks to my old man, there was always time to squeeze in a week in Minnesota between the end of baseball season and the beginning of the school year. I grew up catching bluegill, which was the gateway to largemouth bass and the spark to fantasize about big pike. Largemouths and northerns, that was life. At least it was until a couple of years ago.

On the way home from our yearly trek to Minnesota, a couple of buddies and I stopped in South Dakota. At the time I was still looking down on lazy walleye fisherman, but after I hooked up with a bottom bouncer walleye for the first time, it was game over. Our new addiction quickly turned into weekend walleye excursions and 18-hour days on the water.

Bottom bouncing, jigging, and trolling – we chased limits and trophies and we chased them hard. I was all in; actually, we were probably too in. It didn't take long before fishing sunup to sundown wasn't satisfying the addiction. One of my buddies said he read something about catching walleyes under a full moon. Challenge accepted. Either we got lucky or someone was right. But we haven't looked back. Our craving of choice these days is trolling crankbaits for walleyes under the cover of darkness.

There is something mysterious and unknown about the nighttime. Maybe it's the darkness or the moonlight or the silence. I don't know. Maybe it's because you feel like you're in the middle of the ocean. There's just something

rugged and satisfying about chasing walleyes when everyone else is sleeping.

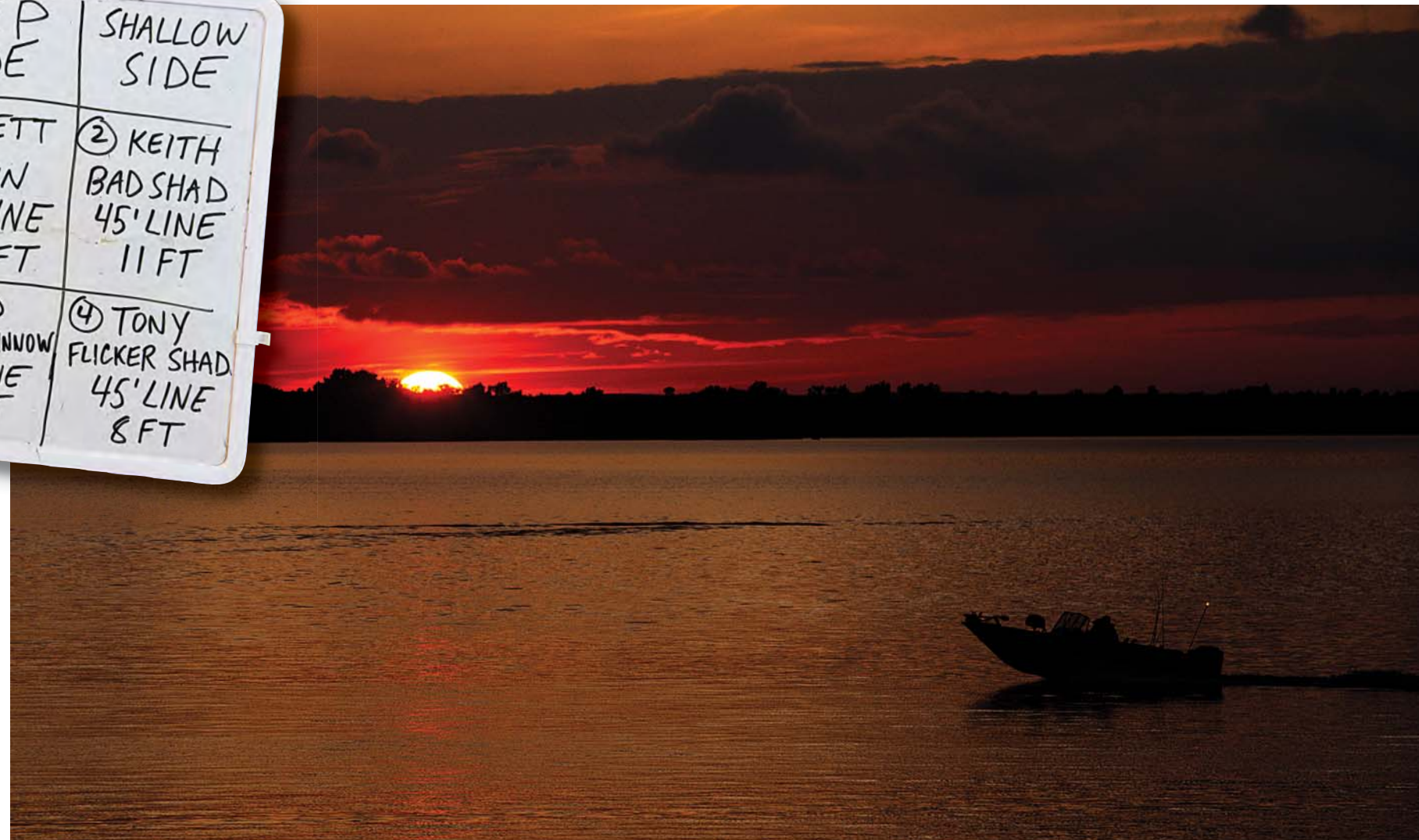
In the dark, though, relying on and trusting your electronics is crucial. We use a Lowrance Elite-7 TI with the Navionics chip. Combining GPS navigation, down-scan, side-scan, and chirp – the mysteries of the deep come alive. The Elite-7 TI unit is also equipped with internal Wi-Fi. Using iPads and iPhones, we are able to connect to the Lowrance unit and mirror its screen on our tablets and smartphones. And with the help of a handy DeWalt USB charger that hooks up to my drill batteries, we are able to keep all four guys with eyes underwater all night without losing power. The driver, the guy on the front deck, and the two out of the back never have to abandon their post.

But as cool as we thought our electronic system was, which also included newly installed LED under-dash light strips and a Bose bluetooth player, we struggled with efficiency. We didn't know how much line we had out, we all had different crankbaits tied on, and we were running them at different depths. It was hard to pattern walleyes with that much inconsistency in our game plan. It was time for a new one.

Since we were staying up for days at a time, we tried to make the miserable Monday morning that always follows a little more worth it. We attempted to turn night trolling into "Operation Walleye." We expanded the budget to include planar boards. Turns out those are hard to see at night. In an attempt to illuminate them, we used glow sticks. Apparently, we can stay awake longer than they can. They were replaced with waterproof LED lights to keep the planar boards lit up all year long.

Next, we upgraded to trolling rods and line counters. If we wanted to know the depths our cranks were running, we needed to know how much line we were letting out. And by

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③ JAD FLICKER MINNOW 100' LINE 18 FT	④ TONY FLICKER SHAD 45' LINE 8 FT



Anglers set off at sunset for a night of walleye fishing at Sherman Reservoir in Sherman County.

PHOTOS BY JEFF KURRUS

this point, our crankbait collection was pretty impressive. In order to determine depth with a wide variety of cranks, we again turned to technology. More specifically, the Precision Trolling App. Simply enter trolling speed, line type, lure and a payment of \$2 per lure – a small price to pay. And without any equations, bad math or guessing the Precision Trolling App tells you how much line to let out to make a certain crankbait run at a desired depth.

"Operation Walleye" was a full go. Except it got confusing. Four guys with multiple lines in the water gets chaotic very quickly when someone hooks up. "Operation Walleye" turned into a frenzy immediately. Between keeping the boat on track, frantically reeling in, fighting snags and grabbing the net, we kept forgetting who was using what rod in what position and how much line was out. In addition to some simple boat organization, we solved this problem without technology. No cell phones, iPads, or fancy Lowrance units. We bought a whiteboard.

On our not so high tech white board, we labeled each position in the boat and wrote down the rods that were being used at each post. We also included the type of crankbait and how many feet of line was being let out. With our new system in place, we were able to get back to fishing at full

strength as quickly as possible. And once somebody catches fire, we use his information to mirror his set up at each post. Multiple cranks running at the same depth over the right structure under the cover of darkness might be the most fun you can have in a fishing boat.

I know we're kind of crazy. This probably isn't for everybody and I don't know how long we can keep it up. But if you're feeling shorthanded by daylight hours, try your luck under a night sky. The walleye don't disappear when the sun goes down. We've been pulling cranks at night for a couple of years from the Nebraska Sandhills and potholes of South Dakota to the northern waters of Minnesota, and I haven't had this much fun fishing since I was dreaming about catching my first pike off the dock in Minnesota. There's something satisfying about watching the sun rise, set, and rise again without ever leaving the boat. Here's to long nights, big walleyes, great company, and full livewells. Fish hard, sleep later. ■

Jake Jadowski is a high school history teacher and freelance writer in Gretna who loves to hunt and fish.



Aquatic Updates

Angler opportunities improving at lakes across the state.

By Eric Fowler

Now deep, clear and teeming with fish, it looks like the third time is a charm for Arnold Lake.

The Village of Arnold teamed up with the Nebraska Game Forestation and Parks Commission in the early 1930s to buy 40 acres south of town for a park, the centerpiece of which is a small, spring-fed lake.

Through the years, the lake, which was only 4 to 6 feet deep, suffered from dense aquatic vegetation and periodic fish dieoffs. The village received a Nebraska Environmental Trust grant and help from the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission to hydraulically dredge 30,000 cubic yards of silt from the lake in 1997, deepening it to 10 feet.

The benefits were short-lived for reasons discovered when the latest attempt to rehabilitate the lake through the Commission's Aquatic Habitat Program began in 2011. When the lake was drained and crews began to remove sediment, saturated soil oozed out of the banks and filled spots that were just excavated. Engineering used fabric mat to stabilize the banks, allowing it to be deepened to 12 feet.

The project also built five fishing points, one of them accessible by wheelchair, to get anglers closer to deep water; replaced the outlet structure;

and installed a new boat ramp. Below the surface, shoals, rubble piles and spawning beds were also installed to provide fish habitat.

Adult largemouth bass – stocked when the work was completed and the pond began refilling in 2013 – are reaching the 21-inch minimum length limit, and fingerling bass that were stocked are reaching 15 inches and providing plenty of angling action. Bluegills will reach the 8-inch range this year, giving anglers the chance to take home a meal, as will the 10-inch channel catfish stocked in 2014 and 2016. Black crappies were stocked in 2016.

The angling opportunities are proving to be popular for kids of all ages in the town of 600, a goal of similar community lake projects like this that have been completed under the Aquatic Habitat Program. "We try to develop amenities and also fisheries that are well suited for families and children," said Mark Porath, head of the program in the Commission's Fisheries Division.

The Commission transferred the state recreation area to the Village of Arnold in 2010. The community has added several improvements, including a shower house to serve campers using 20 campsites with electrical hookups and numerous primitive sites for tents. ■



Ready to Fish

The project at Arnold Lake is one of many that have been completed, are underway or are planned through the Commission's Aquatic Habitat Program (AHP), which began in 1996, and the Angler Access Program (AAP), which began in 2010. Using funds paid by anglers through the Aquatic Habitat Stamp, as well as matching funds from other programs, including the federal Sport Fish Restoration Program (SFR) and 71 other partners, the programs have spent \$68 million to improve aquatic habitat at 96 Nebraska waters and improve angler access at 52 others.

Work has been done at the following lakes for a few years, but fish are now reaching keeper proportions.

Watts Lake, Valentine National Wildlife Refuge

AHP and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 230-acre Sandhills lake renovated in 2015 to remove carp. Perch and bluegills should reach keeper size by fall or winter. Bass are numerous and growing.

Rat and Beaver WMA, Valentine

AHP. 450-acre Sandhills lakes renovated in 2014 to remove carp. Crappie and bluegills should reach keeper size by fall or winter. Bass are numerous and growing. Yellow perch should reach 12-inch minimum length limit by 2018.

Lake Yankton, Cedar County

332-acre lake below Gavins Point Dam renovated in 2014 to remove rough fish that entered in flood of 2011. High density of bass in 12- to 15-inch range and bluegills in 8-inch range. Channel catfish, crappies and walleyes need more time to grow. Joint effort among the Commission, South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. No gas motors allowed.

Sandy Channel SRA, Elm Creek

AAP and SFR. New boat ramps on Lakes 2 and 4; six fishing pads on Lakes 2, 4 and 8, one wheelchair accessible; cleared trees and brush and graded shoreline to improve access on Lakes 2, 4 and 8 and to restore swim beach on Lake 8.

Jenny Newman Lake, Platte River State Park, Cass County

AHP and AAP. New fishing pier, improved shoreline access and ADA trail. Also created a stream with waterfalls to aerate well water that feeds lake. ■

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My brothers and I owe our love of the outdoors to our father, Anton "Tony" Partusch (left picture), who always took us hunting and fishing with him. He is shown here after one of our fishing trips in 1967. The other image (right picture), was taken after my brother (Larry-pictured right) and I (left) returned from an overnight fishing trip to East Twin Lake, near Pleasant Dale, in 1972. We also enjoyed many trips together camping and fishing on sandbars on the Platte River near Louisville, Nebraska. Larry has since moved to Anchorage, Alaska, but we still get together as often as possible for fishing trips. We will always treasure the memories of all of our fishing trips in Nebraska. Thank you!

— Tom Partusch, Omaha



▲ This 1956 photo taken in my grandfather's barn, north of Brule, shows my uncles and my grandfather after a successful duck hunt. Left to right: Jim McMillan, Doug McMillan, Tom McMillan, Sam McMillan (my mother's brothers), and Harold Fenwick (my father's father). My grandfather's duck blind was located near Lewellen.

— Jan Nielsen, Arthur

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Wild Turkey Enchiladas

A Mexican family recipe adapted to wild game.

By Jenny Nguyen

It is now spring and most turkey hunters are out in the woods with one goal in mind: to shoot the biggest, “baddest” toms they can call into their decoys. While these old turkeys may look awesome on your walls, their meat may not be the best. Still, many of us want to do right by the animals we shoot by salvaging as much meat as possible.

But the question remains: What to do with these tough, old legs? You can do lots, really. Any tough meat is edible as long as you cook it long enough. And it could be delicious.

This is an adaptation of my fiancé’s mother’s recipe for chicken enchiladas. You can use turkey breast here – it will cook faster, but don’t underestimate those legs and thighs. Wild turkey enchiladas are an easy way to utilize some of the more underrated parts of a wild turkey.

Servings: 6-8

Prep Time: 3 to 4 hours

Cooking Time: 45 minutes

Ingredients:

- 4 wild turkey legs and thighs, cooked and shredded
- 2 cloves of garlic, minced
- Half a brown onion, chopped
- ½ teaspoon of cumin
- ½ teaspoon of dried oregano
- ½ teaspoon of chili powder
- Cayenne pepper, to taste
- 16 ounces of mild enchilada sauce
- 12 Mission corn tortillas
- 12 to 16 ounces of Mexican-style shredded cheese
- 2.5-ounce can of sliced black olives, drained
- Manteca/pork lard for cooking
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- Cilantro, chopped
- Hot sauce, optional

1. Place skinless turkey legs in a slow cooker and submerge with water and/or chicken stock. Set slow cooker on high and cook 3 to 4 hours or until meat becomes tender. Remove turkey legs



Once you get the hang of making enchiladas, they become an easy, quick meal.

PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN

from cooking liquid and allow them to cool. Once cooled, remove meat from bones (so many pin bones!) and shred with forks.

2. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. In a skillet, heat 2 tablespoons of manteca/pork lard over medium-high heat. Add chopped onion to the fat and cook until softened and translucent, about 3-5 minutes. Add minced garlic and cook for 30 seconds. Add shredded turkey meat, cumin, chili powder, cayenne pepper and oregano. Cook meat until slightly browned and crusty, stirring occasionally. Add salt and pepper to taste.

3. Spray a baking dish with cooking spray. To assemble the enchiladas, form an assembly line – it’s easier to have an extra set of hands to help. Pour some enchilada sauce into a plate. Keep shredded cheese and olives close by. Take out another empty plate.

4. First, heat 1 teaspoon of lard over medium heat in a small skillet. Place one corn tortilla in the lard and warm through on both sides so it becomes

pliable. Then coat the warmed tortilla on both sides with enchilada sauce and place onto the empty plate. Fill with shredded turkey, shredded cheese and olives. Roll up tortilla and place in the baking dish. Repeat, using more lard as necessary to heat tortillas. Once enchiladas are snugly laid in the baking dish in one layer, pour more enchilada sauce over the top.

5. Sprinkle shredded cheese and more olives over the enchiladas. Bake in a 350-degree oven until cheese is melted and slightly toasted, about 20 to 30 minutes. Sprinkle chopped cilantro over enchiladas before serving. Offer extra enchilada sauce and/or hot sauce on the side. ■

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



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Finding No-No

One day last spring, not wanting to fill our limits too quickly at Two Rivers SRA's Lake No. 5, my fiancé, Rick, threw out a worm on his second rod to see if he could entice a catfish. We didn't expect to catch anything – didn't know what other fish were in the lake, but the worm sat at the bottom while Rick continued to fish for trout.

Some time went by and we almost forgot about it. Toward the end of our morning, though, the silent rod began to twitch and bend. Rick nearly tripped when he dropped his first rod to run to the second, and as I watched him reel in the fish, which did put up a good fight, I saw flashes through the water that I did not expect.

Now, I may be no fish expert, but I was pretty sure, as I racked my brain, that there is no such thing as neon orange-colored fish in Nebraska. Rick reached down into the water and pulled up the thing. And there it was, a fat goldfish, nonchalantly dangling at the end of his line, as beautiful and shiny as they look to children at the fair. The fish offered a fun photo opportunity. But while this strange catch thoroughly amused us and other fishermen close by, there's a more serious message here. Who the devil thought it was a good idea to release their pet fish into a public pond?

There are two responsible choices when disposing an unwanted, exotic pet fish: Either put Nemo up for adoption or, as a friend said when she saw this picture, "This is how invasive species explosions happen. Club the little [mongrel]."

In case you're wondering ... No, we didn't eat it. Nor did we throw it back.

Jenny Nguyen
March 27, 2017



This spring, answer them. Because few places offer the three permits, large bird population, thousands of acres of public land and high hunter success rates that make Nebraska one of the top turkey hunting states in the country.

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