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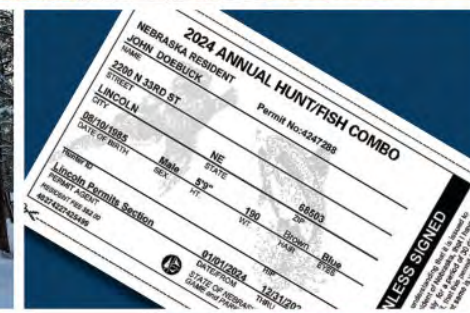


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Clash of the Bighorns  
Knowing the Risks of Winter  
No Spitting • An Ice Fishing Timer  
Dear Potential Goose Hunters • The Last Stop

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Cover: A bighorn sheep ram  
carries its impressive headgear  
at Williams Gap Wildlife  
Management Area in the  
Wildcat Hills of Banner County.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

This page: In the beginning  
stages of its eastward journey  
across the state, water of  
the North Platte River flows  
over rocks as the sun sets  
behind Scotts Bluff National  
Monument.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

Nebraskaland
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Crabapples and rose hips, above, are an excellent source of winter food for wildlife. GETTY IMAGES

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Jacob Oakes, Denver, Colorado  
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Swallowtail butterfly

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

Roy Liesegang, of Bellevue, loves to spend time photographing in his backyard. Here are a few of our favorites.



Raccoon



Plains garter snake

A WALK IN THE FOG

A pair of whitetail does stand in a hoarfrost- and snow-covered landscape along the Calamus River on a foggy morning in Loup County.

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

## THE OTHER RUT

By Jeff Rawlinson

Deer hunters have long been fascinated by the rut — when bucks temporarily seem to lose common sense and become more active chasing does. Rarely, however, is another rut discussed as much as it should be: the squirrel rut.

The mating season for Nebraska squirrels takes place this month when males begin chasing females. During the day, males become more active and provide hunters increased access to this species. A few tips:

- Sleep in to hunt squirrels, for they often want to remain in their nests as much as you want to remain in bed. A sunny afternoon on a cold, December day is also prime time to hunt. With the leaves having fallen, these quick, agile climbers will be easier to locate.

- With fewer leaves, however, a hunter is also more

vulnerable to detection. Hide becomes extremely important, so simply match your camouflage to the habitat.

- Knock on doors. With the firearm deer season in the rearview, squirrel hunters stand a chance approaching landowners for permission.

- Try a squirrel call this time of year. Any sort of chatter can lure squirrels in your direction.

- If you're shooting a .22 caliber, make sure you have a safe background as those bullets can travel more than a mile, and always wear blaze orange to and from the woods.

- Turn this winter's squirrel hunting trip into a muzzleloader deer scouting trip, or vice versa — just as long as you understand there is an entirely different type of rut going on that deserves attention this time of year.



A cold, sunny afternoon is prime time to hunt squirrels during the December rut. JULIE GEISER, NEBRASKALAND

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Efficient ice fishing teams consist of one person cutting holes, pictured, and one finding fish. PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

# AN ICE FISHING TIMER

By Jeff Kurrus

Staring into an 8-inch hole in the ice, your eyes following the thinnest fishing line you’ve ever seen, might be the most addictive activity on the planet. So addictive, in fact, that a stopwatch is nearly as important to your fishing success as your rod and reel.

Using this uncommon ice fishing device, an angler can assure that they will in fact move when the fishing slows. Set it for 15 minutes when fishing new water. If there are no strikes, or you don’t see marks on your sonar, change locations.

Here are a few other tips to increase your efficiency on the ice.

**Two-Person Teams**

- **One cuts a set of holes** – 20 to 30 is a fine starting number — and the other person lowers the sonar transducer into the water. If fish are marked, kick away the snow cone

of ice from the top of the active holes so these spots can be quickly spotted again.

- **Share Ideas** – You should know how the person beside you is fishing — from depth to lure to action. It’s also not a bad idea to ask strangers fishing nearby. The ice fishing community, at large, is friendly. I’ve never run into a group of anglers unwilling to share information on the hard water.
- **A New Person** – Quite often, it’s to your advantage to take a new person ice fishing. They’ll try things you won’t. Last season, toward the end of ice, a relatively new ice angler suggested we look at a spot in the middle of a lake.

While I explained we were nowhere near any sort of underwater structure, he persisted. Two limits of panfish and a monstrous channel catfish later, I could only tip my cap. With a stopwatch in hand, every part of the lake is worth exploring if the fish are slow.



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# GARLIC SHEET-PAN PHEASANT WITH BLISTERED TOMATOES

By Ryan Sparks

My grandma’s cooking style embraced simplicity, seasonality and bringing family together over a home-cooked meal. Her garden thrived during Nebraska’s summer, providing her with an abundance of fresh produce, such as tomatoes, cucumbers and a variety of herbs. She also made a point to make the most of everything in her kitchen, including the pheasants and quail my grandpa hunted. This isn’t her recipe — having originally come from Yasmin Fahr, food author of Keeping it Simple — but I think she would have liked it for how the bright flavors pair with the charred tomatoes and red onions, for the simplicity of how it comes together, and for how it squeezes all the goodness out of late summer while clearing freezer space for this fall’s pheasants.

- Servings:** 4 to 6  
**Prep Time:** 10 minutes  
**Cooking Time:** 15 minutes  
**Ingredients:**
- 1 cup, full-fat Greek yogurt
  - 2 lemons (1 halved and 1 thinly sliced)
  - 1 teaspoon dried oregano
  - Salt
  - 2 garlic cloves, minced
  - 2 pounds boneless, skinless pheasant breasts (about 8 breasts), cut into 2-inch chunks
  - 1 pint grape or cherry tomatoes
  - 1 small red onion, thinly sliced
  - 4 tablespoons olive oil, divided
  - ¼ cup packed mint leaves, roughly torn
  - 1 (6-ounce) block feta cheese, crumbled
  - ½ cucumber, sliced
  - Pita bread or couscous



Garlic sheet-pan pheasant with blistered tomatoes. RYAN SPARKS

In a large bowl, combine the yogurt, the juice of half a lemon and oregano; season to taste with salt. Transfer half to a small container and set in the fridge. Stir the garlic into the remaining mixture in the large bowl. Season the pheasant all over with salt, then add to the bowl; toss to coat and place in the fridge to marinate overnight.

Turn on the broiler and place a rack 6 inches from the heat source. Combine the tomatoes, red onion and 2 tablespoons of olive oil on a half-sheet tray, season with salt. Add the last two tablespoons of olive oil to the bottom of a second half-tray. Add the marinated pheasant, making one uniform layer.

Place the pheasant tray on the top rack and broil until the pheasant is charred on top, 5 to 7 minutes, depending on the strength of your broiler. Meanwhile, place the tray with the tomato mixture on the rack below the pheasant, keeping the oven door

closed while it cooks.

When the pheasant is slightly charred, remove the tray from the oven and use tongs to turn the pheasant pieces over. Scatter the lemon slices over the top and place back in the oven. Broil until the pheasant is barely cooked through and slightly charred. Remove it from the oven to rest.

Move the tomato tray to the top rack under the broiler and cook until it begins to char, around 5 minutes. Using tongs, stir the tomato and onion mixture so it cooks and blisters evenly. If using pita bread, place it on the bottom oven rack to warm. If using couscous, prepare it according to the instructions on the packaging.

Sprinkle the pheasant with some of the mint. Cut the remaining lemon half into wedges. Serve the pheasant and roasted tomato mixture with the feta, lemon wedges, sliced cucumber, remaining mint leaves, reserved yogurt, and your choice of pita bread or couscous.

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Look for the Peregrine Falcon image on your Nebraska tax return.





# CLASH OF THE BIGHORNS

The bighorn sheep pre-rut provides an incredible show on Nebraska's wildlife scene.

*Photos and story by Justin Haag*



Bighorn sheep rams gather to determine dominance during the pre-rut. Since the 1980s, reintroduction efforts have returned the species' presence to the steep terrain of the Panhandle's Wildcat Hills and Pine Ridge.

Nebraska's Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*) and their amazing climbing capabilities are enjoyable to watch throughout the year, but there's arguably no greater show than when they put their heavy headwear to use during fall.

It's the headwear, after all, that gives the species its name. With a spread that can reach almost 3 feet wide, the horns on a mature ram can weigh more than 30 pounds. That exceeds the weight of all the other bones in its body combined.

During the pre-rut, a period of fall in which rams work to establish

dominance among fellow males, the horns become especially useful. While subordinate rams occasionally sneak past the dominant ones for breeding, researchers estimate that in each herd the top one to three rams father 60 percent or more of the lambs.

Because mating behaviors by bighorn sheep and other ruminant species are triggered by length of daylight, the timing is predictable. With that in mind, I ventured to the Wildcat Hills in early November last year to see if I could catch the show. After finding a group of five similar-sized rams working to determine their pecking order below the region's

rugged landforms, it didn't take long to determine it was well worth the journey.

Similar to gunfighters of the Old West, rams frequently squared off in twos and stared each other down. Sometimes, they reared up on hind legs in what is called a "threat jump." And, occasionally, they'd perform the best show of all — a head-on collision creating the cracking sound said to be audible from miles away.

Scientists have estimated the collisions generate a force 60 times greater than that required to crack a human skull. If one ram is fortunate, the other will concede until the

following year and more collisions won't be required that day. The victor will mate with the ewes of choice, and come spring, they'll deliver offspring with his winning genetics.

Such collisions require a special build. Horns are constructed of bone extending from the skull, covered by a thick sheath of keratin, the sheep's version of the material that forms human fingernails. Not only are the horns solid enough to withstand the collision with minimal damage, the rams' skulls are specially constructed to take a blow. The skulls are segmented with suture-like seams, giving them flexibility to lessen the risk of cracking.

In addition, large frontal sinus cavities protect the brain by distancing it from the point of impact.

While the clashing of the horns may be the most dramatic part of the rams' pre-rut behavior, each blow is usually preceded by long periods of jostling that is also captivating. Most of this group's time that day was spent in a huddled mass, nudging one another with their horns. This activity often results in wear on the horns' tips, known as brooming. During these sessions, rams use their stout legs to kick their adversaries, often in the testicles. No, being a bighorn ram surely isn't always fun.

A few hundred yards away from this group of rams was a large group of grazing ewes, lambs and smaller rams. With the new forage that had emerged from areas recently burned by wildfires, they seemed uninterested in the drama between the big males. Yet, the outcomes of the day's competition would determine which males the females would be spending time with in the weeks to come.

Furthermore, it would determine the genetic make-up of the herd for years to come. For these reasons, and of course human tendency to marvel at a "good" wreck, it's a show worth watching. [N](#)



**TOP:** A pair of rams size each other up.

**BOTTOM:** Ewes, lambs and young rams graze on an area burned by wildfire while large rams compete in the distance.

**TOP RIGHT:** A ram puts his previously determined dominance to court a ewe, one of many collared and tagged for research.

**BOTTOM RIGHT:** During pre-rut, rams rub horns and kick one another while gathered in a huddled mass.



# Outdoor Nebraska

By Renae Blum

Take a break from the holiday craziness and savor time outdoors. This could involve deer hunting, a scenic hike in the snow or simply watching birds at your feeder. [N](#)



## Light Up the Fort

Dec. 2-31 | Fort Robinson State Park

Experience a local tradition 30 years in the making: See Fort Robinson’s historic buildings and grounds decorated with Christmas lights. Put up by park staff and local businesses and groups, the lights are turned on each evening through midnight and make for a fun drive with family and friends.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



## Fourth annual Holiday Tree Decorating Contest

Nov. 23 - Jan. 2 | Lewis and Clark State Recreation Area

Decorate the best tree and win a two-night cabin stay at Lewis and Clark. Choose a tree at the park entrance to decorate (one entry per household or group); environmentally-friendly decorations, such as popcorn garland, solar-powered lights and bird seed pine cones, are preferred. To enter, send a photo of your decorated tree to [ngpc.lewis.clark@nebraska.gov](mailto:ngpc.lewis.clark@nebraska.gov). For questions, contact the park at 402-388-4169. Remove any non-wildlife-friendly decorations by Jan. 14.

JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND



## Late-season deer hunting

Season dates vary | Statewide

Things get more challenging in the late period for deer hunting, but don’t put your gear away yet; just readjust your strategy. Tracks are much easier to see in the snow, so use that to your advantage. Hunt late afternoons when deer are more likely to feed this time of year. Also, find places where deer will move out of high winds. For more tips, search “Tips for late-season deer hunting” at [NebraskalandMagazine.com](http://NebraskalandMagazine.com).

JULIE GEISER, NEBRASKALAND



## Winter hiking

Throughout the month | Statewide

Hiking in the winter can be just as fun as it is in the warmer months. Getting out in nature is a great form of exercise, improves your mental health and boosts your mood. It’s also an opportune time to view wildlife. To stay safe on the trails, plan your trip in advance, tell someone where you’re going, dress for the weather, stay hydrated and well-nourished, and hike with a buddy.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

## Put out suet for birds

Fall through spring | Statewide

Suet is a high-fat food that provides the extra calories birds need in colder weather. A variety of species love this protein-packed offering, including northern flickers and downy, hairy and red-bellied woodpeckers. Hang suet in a visible area near shrubs and trees. You can buy suet cakes — or make your own — and place them in a metal suet cage.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



# Dear Potential Goose Hunters

*Story and photos by Jeff Kurrus*

It's easy to become entranced with these gigantic birds, their honks seemingly daring you to take the plunge into the deep water that is Canada goose hunting. But before you do, I'm going to encourage you not to. Find something, anything else, to do with your time. You'll thank me for it.

## Just What I Needed

First, you don't have enough decoys. Well, maybe you do. But you probably don't. In the beginning of my Nebraska



Knowing the wind direction in a blind is sometimes the difference between cutting a hunt short or waiting for a push of birds later in the day.

goose hunting adventures, I picked up some decoy shells at a garage sale. I've never seen a more seemingly happy individual giving away good stuff.

My next goose hunting purchase was in the form of full-body stand-ups. This was a crowning achievement for the family and, outside of our automobiles, one of our most expensive purchases. Immediately, I was convinced that these \$60-apiece decoys would be the difference in our group whispering "Maybe next time" to "Take 'em!"

Our last large purchase was silhouettes — five dozen to be exact. Because a bigger spread is better, right? But the more decoys that are out, the more a goose from the air can find

something wrong.

After this multitude of purchases, there's still no telling how many flocks of birds — or even a single or pair — have cupped in our direction and peeled off at the last second. "Something's not quite right," one of us will say.

On one morning like this, while hunting with a friend and my son, Eli, in eastern Nebraska, we had a combination of stand-ups and shells anywhere from 20 to 40 yards away and not a single bird would finish.

"If something isn't working, make an adjustment," long-time goose hunter and Nebraskaland writer Todd Mills had told us. So we flip-flopped our spread, moving anything less

than 40 yards farther away and completely out of shooting range.

As we were returning to our blind, the next group of geese were cupping their wings between us and the closest decoy. We were now getting 20-yard, feet-on-the-deck shots and were done with a two-person limit in 30 minutes.

The next time we tried the same trick, we went home without firing a single shot.

"It has to be perfect," my dad, Larry, has told me multiple times as he often watches from afar. "When you guys actually shoot any birds, it's like killing a deer. It's that momentous."



On some days, a few full-body decoys like this one are all you need to shoot geese. On other days, I'm convinced you need a semi-truck filled with full bodies to bring a bird in range.



Even when they seem relaxed, there are always a few sentry Canadas, with raised heads, guarding the flock.

## Let the Good Times Roll

There is a section of readers right now, after finishing that last statement, that are scoffing. At this precise moment, they are right in the middle of birds. But they are in the minority and should appreciate every second of good fortune. I wish we had when this was happening to us.

About four years ago, our group was hunting private ground near the Missouri River, and we were frequently killing birds. We had just enough standing water on the crop fields, and birds, more often than not, would work the area throughout the day.

We were shooting birds nearly every time we hunted. It became so commonplace that even our picture-taking slowly diminished. Why photograph these birds after a long day when there'd be more to take pictures of tomorrow? We thought these days would last forever.

They did not. The 2019 flood devastated the land where we hunted, making it unfarmable for a year and altering the entire region — from the pre- and post-hunt gas station stop to the land itself.

For a few years, we looked elsewhere. Trips east toward the river turned into trips west toward the Rainwater Basin. And while this has led our group to an entirely different part of the state with its own set of good fortune, we still desired being near the Missouri where, even for an occasional instance, we had felt like goose hunters.

Luckily, last year we were able to return to this spot, and once again we're shooting some birds nearly every time we go. But we no longer take these days for granted. Last December during the holidays, our crew watched thousands of geese all afternoon, not one wanting to decoy.

"It's tough when you're not on the X," said Mills, who was hunting with us that day.

"You think it's our hide?" I asked, a question you will also repeat more than any other in your newfound pursuit.

"It always is," Dad mumbled from his pulpit, both an eye-rolling indictment and a proclamation.

## You Might Think

You might think a natural hide is the absolute best. Usually, but not always. Last year, our group hid inside a huge, grassy ditch in the middle of a cut crop field and every single bird avoided our spread. A year before, while hunting the same place, we couldn't keep birds out of our decoys.

Another popular option is a laydown blind. I have one of the most comfortable ones on the market and hate it immensely. They are called coffin blinds for a reason. You can't turn, can't sit up, can't fit your supplies in with you, and they stick out like any number of inappropriate clichés in church.

But at first, you're convinced this is the answer — the best thing you've ever sat in until the birds circle, circle, then land behind you. You go home with a sorer neck than after the

opening day of squirrel season.

What's your other option then, Einstein? The birds are landing smack dab in the middle of the most wide open bean field that has ever existed.

"A-frame," Mills told me years ago.

If you take his advice, sticking one of these blinds in the middle of a cut bean field, you'll be convinced it would be better camouflaged if set in the middle of a Walmart parking lot. You'll laugh at him and others like him, condemning their minor league-ness as you climb into your coffin.

Until you hear guns going off from those blinds and find out that geese will, in fact, land right on top of an A-frame, as long as one thing is for sure — the blind is sitting on the X.

## Magic

The "X," as it's known, is the exact, magical spot where you're convinced birds will land when hunting.

Years before my shed and my hunting partners' garages and sheds were filled with equipment, an old friend from Tennessee, Jeff Wages, would go with a group of hunting buddies to Canada, pulling a trailer of decoys 1,500 miles for the opportunity to hunt ducks. The group would break in half, with one group hunting during the morning while the other group scouted.

Once the hunt was over, the groups would share information and switch. Hunters became scouters; scouters became hunters. The scouting was the most important part. They had to find where birds were specifically working. They were looking for the X. Once they found birds, their job was to gain permission as quickly as possible and solidify their hide.

But there remains an issue with the X, whether hunting in Canada, Nebraska or all parts in between. Do not think you can hunt the field within sight of the X, waving your newly purchased goose flag trying to convince yourself that the third goose on the left side, the big one, almost came your way? He wasn't going to. It's as much mirage as it is false hope.

Being on the field next to the X also won't work. Why visit you when there was still corn, and no hunters, in the next field over the day before? You might get an occasional curiosity flock, that's for sure — the group of birds that veer your way because they've seen movement outside of the blind: a wayward retriever, or maybe two teenage boys throwing dirt clod footballs. The birds will momentarily cup their wings — something you and your buddies will talk about on your drive home — but they'll turn and land in the next field over.



Regardless of hunting success, a blind breakfast is always worth the trouble to chase Canada geese.



An impatient Lab retrieves and finally has a little fun during a Sarpy County goose hunt.

Because you have to be on ... the ... spot, and you have to be hidden. And, probably just as important as these factors is having the time to make your dreams come to fruition.

So be prepared for an all-day hunt. Yesterday's 2 p.m. arrival means you have to cover the four hours preceding and the four hours after. If you're going to put this much windshield time into this type of hunting, you can't miss it.

Last season, a group of birds — 40 or 50 — had been working one of our fields. But for any number of reasons, we couldn't get our schedules aligned to go. When we were finally able, it was going to be perfect. An afternoon storm was pushing through so we would start hunting midday.

However, when I awoke that morning, two inches of snow had already fallen and I had multiple phone calls from Mills.

When I finally called him back, his voice was somber. "Too late," he said. "There are 200 birds in the field."

I gigantic pit filled my stomach. "Tomorrow," I replied. "They'll be back."

I was wrong. They never came back.

## Touch and Go

On the X? Check. Hide? Check. Weather? Check. All of these are a great start, for sure, along with not too little or not too much calling. But now it gets complicated.

The first group of four birds are making a beeline to your spread, locked in from hundreds of yards away. You do a quick check on your blind mates, just to make sure all of their blond-haired children are wearing camo stocking caps or facemasks

and the orange potato chip bags are properly hidden.

Now their distance is 100 yards ... 80 ... 60. Then they turn ... making a small circle around your blind ... and the closest bird is at 40 yards.

"One more pass," your hunting partner says. And he's right. Why shoot one at 40 when you can shoot four at 20 yards?

But on the circle, something happens. Did your buddy's son poke his head out of the blind too soon? Did the flock hear that one bad note — the sound you'll describe later as a squeak when your hunting partner is out of earshot — from his goose call. You don't know what, never will know, but the birds turn and start lengthening their distance away from the blind ... 60 ... 80 ... then finally pitching down 100 yards away from your spread.

You look up, and a group of 10 are coming your way. You flag desperately, the muscles in your forearms burning as this second group pitches right into the group of four.

"This isn't good," your partner says. "Should we go bust that other group up?"

This will require one in your group to walk toward the other birds and scare them, all the while hoping a larger group doesn't see this strange movement in the field and bug out completely, ruining the entire afternoon hunt.

Then you have a brilliant idea. "Let's send Eli."

My 10-year-old son puts down his bag of sunflower seeds. "I'm in."

He runs out of the blind in the direction of the group, everyone in the blind commenting how his gray and black snowsuit sort of looks like a Canada goose. Within 50 yards of the birds, they bust up and away from our spread.

But there's another problem. We hear something. Over Eli's shoulder, hundreds and hundreds of yards away, we see more than 200 birds already cupping their wings toward our spread.

Eli sees this, too, and without any instructions, begins his sprint back toward the blind.

"Faster," we yell at the kid, who is dodging and high-stepping between decoys as he tumbles outside of the blind and crawls in.

The birds in the air are undeterred. Their wings remain cupped. 100 ... 50 ... 30.

"Take 'em!" your partner yells, but when you stand up, you realize that the 30-yard estimate is off. They're farther than that. But they know you're there. This is your only chance.

The air fills with booms, one after the other as the flock drifts farther and



Sometimes flags and a great hide aren't enough to entice birds in your direction.

farther away.

The Lab, appropriately named something akin to Hope, has been so patient in her kennel beside the blind but will have to be patient a little while longer. There's not a single bird on the ground.

Everyone sits back down, closing their eyes as they shake their heads.

That was the moment that everything was right. Hide. The X. Everything.

And we missed it.

## Since You're Gone

Dad was right. Every single downed bird is a treasure, because it doesn't matter if you shot 90, nine or none last year, it can all change — for better or worse — in a minute.

The nights when you mess up a flock are bad. You replay the moment repeatedly, not unlike a wayward shot from the deer stand or a missed receiver on the game-winning drive of the football game. It's painful, because you know how much work it took to put yourself in that exact spot.

So, you completely understand why that guy was so happy to get rid of his decoys. It's too dang hard to get this right.

But ... if you ever do get it right, even one time, you have some major life decisions to make. For there is nothing, and I mean nothing, that satisfies the hunter's soul as much as being on the X with birds on the deck — with some of your favorite people right next to you. During these moments, you're convinced that guy getting rid of those decoys is the dumbest person in the world. 



When it all goes right, like it did at this moment for hunter Trevor Johnson of Doniphan, there's nothing better.

## Goose Hunting Checklist

### Hunting Partners

Find someone you like spending long hours with in frigid weather. Someone retired helps, as they will be able to scout. A wealthy friend definitely could help, but might not want to spend as much windshield time as you. However, they might be able to get you on the X better. A wealthy, childhood friend whose wedding you were in might be perfect.

### Vacation Time

Being able to leave immediately is a must. You have to be on call to do this effectively. The snowstorm that was supposed to come at noon, when you told your boss you'd need to leave by 11 a.m. so you have enough hunting time, sped through Colorado and will be here by 9 a.m. Birds will want to get their feeding bags on. You will need a gift for your boss come the Holidays.

### Storage

Decoys of various types, including ducks just in case that becomes a option, are not small. An extra garage stall is good — a dedicated goose shed is better. You'll also need to find a place for your new dog, backup shotgun, shells and bulky hunting clothes. Wader hooks are nice, so they can easily dry, and you'll probably want to save some room for your 4-wheel drive truck. A place to clean birds? Optional. Let's not be totally outrageous.

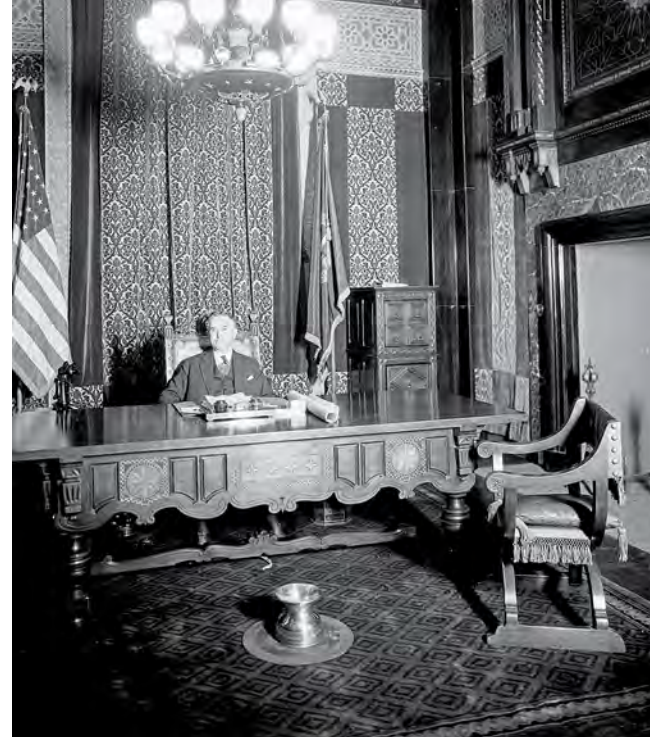
# No Spitting

By Patricia C. Gaster, History Nebraska

During the late 19th century, spittoons became a common feature of saloons, hotels, stores, banks, railway carriages and other places where adult men gathered. Many localities passed laws against public spitting other than into a spittoon, but such laws were seldom enforced. Some people of this era objected to restrictions on where they could spit as an infringement on their individual liberty.

Nonetheless, anti-spitting sentiment was growing. The Norfolk Weekly News-Journal on Sept. 7, 1906, reported a recent move by the federal government to end spitting on the floors of federal buildings, ostensibly to prevent the spread of disease. The News-Journal said:

“In the Norfolk federal building, in several prominent places, there has been recently hung the following sign: ‘Please Do Not Spit on the Floor. To Do So May Spread



A spittoon for visitors adorns Governor Adam McMullen's private office at the old Nebraska State Capitol, Dec. 27, 1927. HISTORY NEBRASKA RG2183-1927-122

Disease.’ There is no demand to stop the practice, but a kind request, the government believing that an appeal to the



Norfolk's post office and federal building was built in 1904, two years before the anti-spitting campaign.

RG5730-0-67



This circa-1880s brass turtle spittoon was covered by a lid that was opened by stepping on the turtle's head. It was used in the parlor of Helen Woods Haecker of Lincoln.

HISTORY NEBRASKA 2817-2



By 1940, a spittoon was a joke gift at the Lincoln Telephone and Telegraph Company. A.B. Gorman's desk is covered with “birthday sentiments,” including a spittoon with a note attached: “Herein is a lovable chap in a loathsome sort of way, and So Are You! (from) Norm!” HISTORY NEBRASKA RG6097-2-320

conscience of the general public through kindness will be more effective and will do more toward checking the practice than an ‘official command.’ As a result of the government's extreme politeness in affixing the word ‘please’ to the notice there is already a noticeable decrease in the number who have unintentionally used the post office lobby for a place to expectorate.

“During the past year the movement to stop the increase of the ‘white plague’ [tuberculosis] has assumed gigantic proportions, but not more so than the increase of the disease. Realizing the deep inroads the plague is making into the ranks of the American people, especially those of the poorer classes, the government has started out to do its share in preventing its further spread, and the first step in this direction, known of in Norfolk is the new sign warning the people of the danger caused by their expectorating on the floors.

“Although there is a city ordinance, which provides a fine of from \$1 to \$10 for any person caught spitting in public places, halls, etc., it has not been enforced to any great degree, and the practice has become as common as before the passage of the ordinance, which in a measure for the time being, checked it. It has been pointed out that during the past year there has not been one arrest for violating this ordinance.

“Several of the local physicians, who have interested themselves in the disease and made a study of its causes and effects, are contemplating petitioning Mayor [John] Friday to order the chief of police to enforce the ordinance, and by so doing eliminate to a great extent the exposure of Norfolk people to the tubercular germs, which breed in great numbers in the sputum expectorated upon the walks by thoughtless persons.” [N](#)

Visit History Nebraska's website at [history.nebraska.gov](http://history.nebraska.gov).



Spittoons are visible on the floor in this circa-1910 photo by John Nelson of Ericson. RG3542-95-20

# Knowing the Risks of Winter

By Julie Geiser

*Participating in outdoor activities during winter can be tons of fun, but stay safe in the cold.*

## Frostbite

Frostbite happens when the skin and outer tissues of your body become frozen. This condition tends to happen on extremities such as the fingers, toes, ears and nose. They may become pale, gray and blistered, and the skin will have a burning sensation or become numb.

If frostbite occurs, head indoors and place the frostbitten parts of your body in warm, not hot, water. Warm washcloths may be applied to frostbitten nose, ears or lips. Do not rub the frozen areas.

After a few minutes, dry off and cover up with clothing or blankets, and drink warm liquids. If the numbness persists for more than a few minutes, seek medical attention.



JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

## Hypothermia

Hypothermia develops when body temperatures fall below normal due to exposure to cold. It often happens to people outdoors who are not wearing proper clothing in extremely

cold weather. Knowing the signs of hypothermia can save a life.

As hypothermia sets in, a person may shiver, become lethargic and clumsy, slur speech and experience decline in body temperature.

If you suspect someone is hypothermic, call 911. Until help arrives, take the person indoors, remove wet clothing and wrap them in blankets or warm clothes.

## Safe Clothing

Layering clothes in the winter will help you avoid hypothermia and frostbite. Wear loose, lightweight, warm clothing in several layers, especially clothing designed to wick away moisture from the skin. Avoid cotton and denim, which traps moisture against your skin. Outer garments should be tightly woven, water and wind repellent, and hooded. Wear a stocking hat, as most body heat is lost through the head.

Keep ears covered to protect them from frostbite, and if activity allows, wear mittens instead of gloves. Mittens, snug at the wrist, are warmer than gloves because fingers maintain more warmth when touching rather than separated.

Avoid dressing active children in clothing with drawstrings to prevent strangulation, and have them wear a neck warmer or face mask while playing instead of a scarf.



GETTY IMAGES

## Weak Ice

Frostbite and hypothermia can result from falling through ice, a real concern for ice anglers and some hunters. It's impossible to judge the strength of ice by its appearance, thickness, the daily temperature or snow cover alone.

At a minimum, 3 to 4 inches of blue lake ice thickness is required to support a single angler and about 6 inches of ice will support a group of anglers. Slush ice is only half as strong as clear lake ice, so anglers should double the minimum thickness requirements when encountering such conditions.

The best way to ensure ice is safe is to whack it with a spud

bar before stepping onto it.

A few things to look for when traversing ice:

- Ice heaves can form when water under the ice fluctuates and pushes the ice into itself, creating heaves on top of the ice or sometimes underneath it. These are weak areas and should be avoided.

- Honeycombed or black ice should be considered unsafe. Also, stay away from areas where objects are sticking up through the ice, such as muskrat lodges, cattails, trees and logs, which store heat from the sun and can weaken the surrounding ice.

- Avoid lakes or areas of lakes that are known to have underground springs, or warm water spots, until ice is thicker. Stay well away from open-water areas or ice adjacent to running streams.

- Recreate on or near ice with a friend or family member. Take 50 feet of rope with you in case of emergencies. In the event you break through the ice, carry ice safety spikes on your person to help you climb out, and keep extra clothing in the vehicle in case you do fall through. Wearing wet clothing in cold weather will quickly result in hypothermia.



GETTY IMAGES

## Car Troubles

Before hitting the road, make sure your vehicle is up-to-date on routine maintenance. Keep the gas tank full, and check weather conditions before traveling.

As soon as there's trouble, immediately change the voicemail on your cell phone telling people what has happened and where you are, so if your phone goes dead or you're out of cell service, people can still hear your voice message.

If you become trapped in your car during a winter storm, stay in your car and wait for help to find you. Run your engine for short periods of time to stay warm. Keep your down-wind window cracked open and make sure your exhaust pipe is clear of snow.

Hang a brightly-colored piece of cloth or clothing outside your car. Turn on the dome light at night when you are running the engine to help potential rescuers see you. Use a

flashlight when the car is turned off.

Exercise from time to time by vigorously moving your arms, legs, fingers and toes to keep blood circulating and to keep warm.



ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

## Pet Safety

Hunting dogs can get caught up in the excitement and push hard before we notice signs of danger. Take breaks to make sure your dog is getting enough water and rest between hunting. In the cold, put boots on the dog's feet to avoid frostbite on their pads.

Waterfowl dogs should wear a neoprene coat to keep their bodies warm and provide some buoyancy in the water. Do not send a dog into dangerous water, such as thin or slushy ice on lakes or rivers. Even the strongest swimmer can be taken under the water or ice to their demise.

Upland hunting dogs can wear light coats or stomach protectors, but neoprene on these hard-working dogs may make them overheat or get too sweaty, which may cause them to get too wet and cold.

Don't take a working dog directly from the field to an outdoor kennel as soon as you return to the vehicle or home, as the dog will keep generating heat, which will put moist air inside the kennel that will quickly turn cold. Let your dog cool down and dry off first. 📌

*Recreating in the winter comes with an extra set of risks, so it's better to be overprepared. Be able to start a fire, build a shelter and have a way to signal for help. If traveling and recreating in a remote location, leave an itinerary with a family member or friend, and stick to your location and time frame so others will know where to look for you in an emergency.*

## NEW HUNTERS ENJOY 'HISTORICAL' SANDHILLS HUNT

By Justin Haag

The description would surely get attention from near and far if posted by a real estate agent: "Outstanding mule deer property with 7,000 acres of pristine ranch land in the Sandhills of northwestern Cherry County. Has not been hunted in decades."

Four budding hunters were given the special opportunity to hunt such a property in December 2022 during the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's first mentored muzzleloader hunt at Bowring Ranch State Historical Park near Merriman.

Jeff Rawlinson, the Game and Parks assistant division administrator who supervises the state's hunter outreach programs, and Aaron Hershberger, a hunting education specialist for the agency, organized the effort and were joined by three volunteers in mentoring the hunters.

The group arrived at the ranch's visitors center, which served as base camp, on a Friday evening for orientation, dinner and card games. After biscuits and gravy the next morning, the hunters set out in the dark to pop-up ground blinds that had been erected at various locations of the park.

Not only did the participants get the opportunity to pursue mule deer, an emblematic species of the American West, they also experienced the magnificence of the region's landscape, flora and fauna. The park has long provided visitors insight to the workings of a Sandhills cattle operation with grazing on the surrounding acreage owned by the Nebraska Game and Parks Foundation.

Alexandra Sutton of Lincoln, a young mother who got her itch to hunt in the Becoming an Outdoors-Woman program, harvested a young buck with guidance from Russ Tooker of David City, a longtime hunter education instructor. She said she's looking forward to passing on what she learned to her young son.

Later that day, teen Cameron Copple, a recent hunter education graduate, harvested a mature doe with mentor Todd Schmidt of Gordon and his mother, Chanda, nearby.

It wasn't Cameron's first deer, but it was a special one. When Cameron was 13, his father, Ben, mentored him in

harvesting a whitetail doe. His father died a year later from injuries sustained in an accident.

"I wanted to continue to foster Cameron's passion for hunting but knew I couldn't do this on my own," Chanda said.

While driving back to the ranch from a morning of no deer activity near the blind, Schmidt noticed a distant herd providing a good ol' Sandhills spot-and-stalk opportunity. The two set out on foot.

"I had never shot with a muzzleloader or hunted mule deer before this," Cameron said. "Once I had the deer in my sights, I took a shot, and it dropped. I was so happy."

The mentors assisted the hunters in field dressing the deer.

"Mule deer chili was delicious," Chanda said. "We also had some of it processed into deer sticks and summer sausage. It is so good."

The other two hunters were teen Brody Rouse of Axtell and BOW participant Dawn Daniel-Conton of Bellevue. Clifford Cady of Merriman, who works on the

Bowring Ranch and knows the property well, also served as a mentor.

As another group of aspiring hunters is making plans to gather at Bowring Ranch this month, the experience certainly has the support of one mom.

"I am so grateful for this mentorship opportunity that Nebraska Game and Parks provided," Chanda said. "Cameron is now connected to a hunting family that has offered him future opportunities to hunt. It is beyond incredible."

### Bowring Ranch

Bowring Ranch State Historical Park opened in July 1987 after being gifted to the Nebraska Game and Parks Foundation. It provides the public a view of a quintessential working Sandhills ranch. The visitors center's modern displays and the ranch's historical buildings tell of early ranch life, the development of the region and the lives of Arthur and Eve Bowring, each who were prominent in state and national politics in the early to mid-20th century.



Participant Cameron Copple, left, and mother Chanda Copple of Lincoln with mule deer doe harvested at the mentored hunt that took place at Bowring Ranch State Historical Park near Merriman. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

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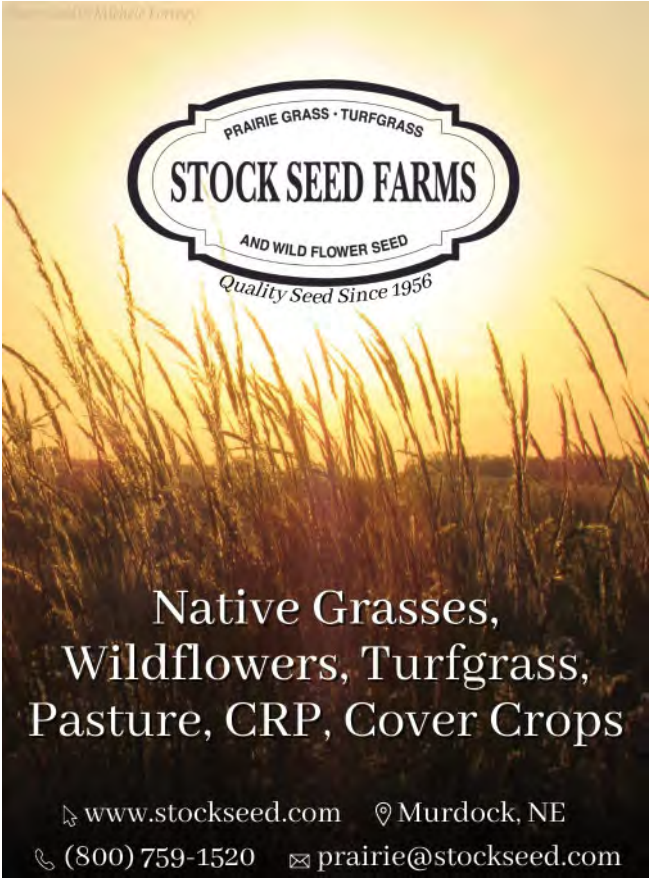
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# I'M A SHOE GUY

By Jeff Kurrus

I'm a shoe and sock guy — have been since I went hiking in western Nebraska many years ago and spent a tremendous amount of off-trail time nursing my aching feet. Since then, I've gotten wise. I leave my cotton socks at the house, on-call when I'm in for the day. Otherwise, I wear moisture-wicking only.

As for footwear, that's a different story. My closet is filled with shoes and boots, each serving a particular purpose in my day-to-day life as a writer, photographer, hunter and angler. Here are my favorites and why.



## Low-rise Muck Boots

Perfect for keeping your feet dry on dew-covered mornings whether you're fishing or bow hunting. The added benefit is being able to slip into the office after a morning afield and not have to bring a second pair of shoes.



## Sperry Sneakers

My go-to comfort shoes when I'm photographing events. Available in wide sizes, I've never worn a more comfortable pair of sneakers.



## Danner Hiking Boots

From dove to quail season, these light-weight hikers allow me to walk any field in Nebraska and cross any ankle-high creek as well. Because any number of holey obstacles present themselves along ditches and treelines throughout the state, these boots have the ankle support I need to hunt long into the day — injury free.



## Rocky Winter Boots

If my winter boots aren't covered in mud, and then ice, I'm not goose hunting or ice fishing enough. My new go-to hiking boots are the waterproof Rocky Lynx lace-ups.

Shoes are a big deal to me. While folks who know me best have seen me in more than one pair of \$2 thrift shop sneakers, my outdoor foot apparel is more advanced. The one thing I refuse to do is cancel an outdoor adventure because of my feet. Luckily, with the right shoes, I don't have to.

## My Favorite Socks

I repeatedly wear two brands of socks in the field, and you can't go wrong with either — Gordini's form-fitting performance socks (pictured) and CEP's athletic compression line.



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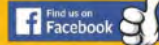
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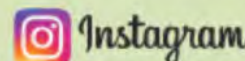
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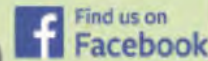
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#### Fishing Gavins Point Dam, 1966

Our father Walter and sons Warren (me) and my brother Wayne Sund after a fishing trip. Wayne caught a spoonbill, and its head remained in our parents' freezer for years. This photo was taken at our grandparents' farm near Bloomfield.

– Warren Sund, Verdel



#### Pheasant hunt, 1963

William Christensen remembers a memorable hunt 3.5 miles southeast of Hartington in October 1963. That year, their west 80 was planted to milo and across the road to the west there was 320 acres of brome grass soil bank, and to the south another 200 acres. The brome was being hunted by other parties of hunters that morning and Bill remembers the sky was filled with pheasants. As he watched, William compared the site to flocks of waterfowl migrating.

The picture shows the bag of the opening morning hunt. The weekend ended with a total of 50 pheasants — definitely a weekend hunt to remember, recalls William.

L to R: Elmer Christensen, Ron Middleton, JoAnne Christensen (Janssen) and Blitz, William Christensen, Leo Doc Middleton and Arnold Christensen.

William and JoAnne still own the ground that was hunted that morning back in 1963. The irrigated corners are in CRP, which supplies good habitat for nesting pheasants. Hunts are held every fall on this ground with their children and grandchildren, many being just as memorable as the one back in 1963.

– Harley Christensen, Hartington



#### Opening day, 1954

While looking through my mother's photos, I found the attached slide which was labeled "Opening Day 1954." It reminds me of a Norman Rockwell painting. From left is my uncle Phil Lang, my grandfather PJ Lang, and the others, we don't know who they were. We researched the weather for that day in 1954, and it was warm, which explains the lack of warm clothes.

– Ed Wieger, Omaha

#### Fishing, early 1950s

This photo was taken when Swanson Lake was new. From left: Art Wood, Wayne Allen (my father) and Ernest Dutton.

They made many trips to the lake in its early days. Eric (my brother) and I got to go along as little boys.

– Ron Allen, McCook



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



Two coyotes peek through grass at a field outside of Aurora. GERRY STEINAUER, NEBRASKALAND

# CURIOUS COYOTES

By Gerry Steinauer, Botanist

I first saw the big, beautiful coyote in early January last winter during an evening jog with my dog, Ree, around a grass field on the outskirts of Aurora. He stood rock-solid about 40 yards away at the edge of a creekside woodland and stared at us. We stopped and stared back. He held his ground for a minute or two until we started walking toward him, at which point he scampered into the woods.

A few days later, as I made another lap around the field, he appeared on a low, grassy knob at the edge of the woods. Again, he watched us with no apparent fear. Perhaps, living near town, he had grown accustomed to humans.

We encountered the coyote sitting or lying on the knob several more times during the next few weeks. He often showed up after we had run past a time or two, and I believe he either smelled or heard us from the comfort of his den and came out to observe. Ree, who is friendly with other dogs, instinctively knew something was different about this “dog” and never tried to approach it, but she also did not fear it.

In early February, I decided I wanted to photograph the coyote. For several evenings, I brought my camera and tripod to the field and set them behind a cedar tree and proceeded to run laps. The coyote never appeared: He was either camera shy or my luck was bad, and I gave up on the photo idea.

Then, on a windy, cold, snowy evening in late February, I was thrown for a loop: two coyotes were on the knob, the male and a smaller female. Coyotes form pairs in January and February for breeding and pup-rearing, and the male obviously had a mate. Thinking back, there were probably two coyotes all along, as some evenings I thought the coyote on the knob looked smaller.

I ran home, grabbed my camera and drove back to the field. The coyotes had left the knob and moved down the woodland edge about 80 yards away. With the wind shaking my tripod and snow sticking to my glasses, I snapped a few quick photos of the coyotes before they slipped into the trees. After that encounter, the coyotes made no other appearances on the knob: Perhaps they had moved to a more secluded den for pupping.

My coyote photos fall well below the standards of professional wildlife photographers, most of whom would have set up a blind and waited, hoping they would return. I pondered the idea, but sitting in a blind is not my style, and being sneaky would have been a violation of my unspoken, unaggressive pact with the coyotes. Although they are not wall hangers, someday down the road my photos will bring back fond memories of the curious coyotes. In this case, that is good enough for me.



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