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NEBRASKAland

November 2017



An oak tree is silhouetted against the evening sky at Weiss farm near Papillion. Photo by Chris Helzer.

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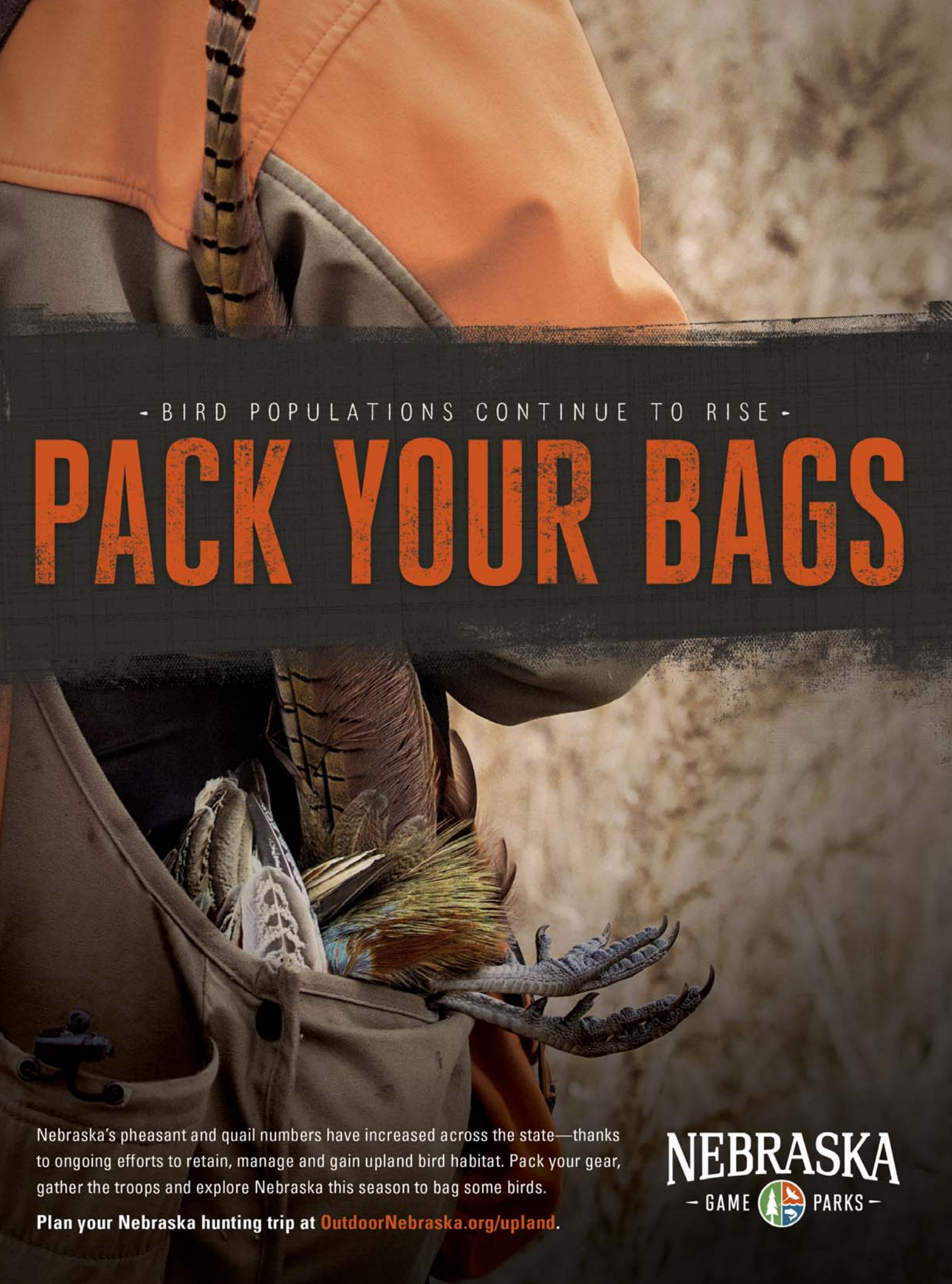
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Candlelight Tour at Fort Atkinson
Sneezeweed • Cooking the Entire Pheasant
Clear Creek Wildlife Management Area • The Ponca Oak
Venison Cottage Pie • Travel to Imperial • Hunt Quail Now



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NEBRASKA
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NEBRASKAland Magazine

Volume 95 • No. 9 • November 2017

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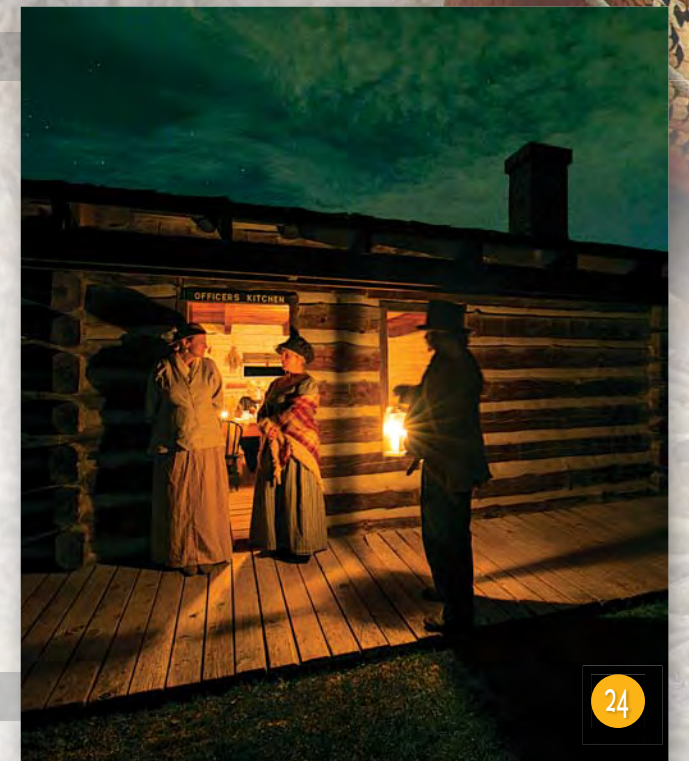
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Cover: Ashley Bales of Lincoln hunts at Yankee Hill Wildlife Management Area in Lancaster County. Photo by Jeff Kurrus.

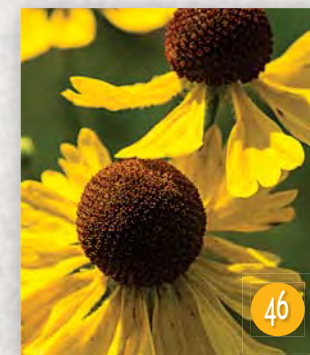


THROUGHOUT 2017, *NEBRASKALAND MAGAZINE* WILL PUBLISH ARTICLES ASSOCIATED WITH THE STATE'S 150-YEAR CELEBRATION. LOOK FOR THIS LOGO TO READ ABOUT NEBRASKA'S RICH HISTORY AND VIEW OUR INTERACTIVE DIGITAL EDITION FOR MORE INFORMATION.

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Hand Calling Doves

Dear Mr. Spilger,

I read your article about dove calls in the August/September 2017 issue of *NEBRASKAland Magazine* and it made me think about how, as a kid, I would cup my hands around my mouth and imitate the doves on our farm. At least in my mind, the doves would reply to my imitations over and over. Maybe I was just doing it between their normal spacing of calls, but it made me happy.

Many years later, I went dove hunting with some friends and we got to the hunting area too early in the afternoon, so the doves were not moving around. I found a scraggly old tree with a large root exposed, so I sat down on the root, in the shade, with my shotgun across my knees and

waited. It was hot and I was sweating and bored, so, after a while, I decided to do my dove imitation and to my surprise a dove got up from a nearby tree and flew directly toward me. So I shot it. Shortly after that one of the other hunters came walking by to get water for his dog. He said, "I heard you shoot. Did you see a dove?" So I said, "You won't believe this" and told him what I had done.

He wanted to hear my imitation, so I did it again and another dove got up from the same tree and flew right to where I was, and I dropped it, too.

I have tried my imitation call countless times since with no luck, but somewhere out there is a young man who thinks I can call doves in with my "mouth call."

Good memories.

Monty Splitter

Kearney, Nebraska



Ed Winans took this image in Paxton. Minutes later, both animals were gone.

This photograph was taken by Bruce Thiel near Lakeside, Nebraska.

Cloud Formations

My dad, Larry Rivers Sr., is a longtime reader of *NEBRASKAland Magazine*. He served as a meteorologist in the Army back in the 1960s, and is always eager to point out various cloud formations to me. He snapped the attached photo below of mammatus clouds just outside his southeast Lincoln home this evening, right after the worst of the storm had passed over, and thought it might make a good submission for the "From Our Readers" section of your magazine.

Brady Ann Rivers
Lincoln, Nebraska



Bruce Thiel from Lincoln submitted this photo of a Sandhills hay meadow on a foggy morning.





Chelsey Fuhrman shot this image of a hot air balloon at the Balloon and Wine Festival near Omaha.

August-September Issue

I would like to thank you for Volume 95 No. 7 (August-September 2017) of the *NEBRASKAland Magazine*. It is the best I have read since I have been receiving this magazine.

I was born in Nebraska and enlisted in the Navy during WWII. I married in Pennsylvania and have lived there since. *NEBRASKAland* is my reminder always of my life in Nebraska.

Thank you again for such a wonderful magazine.

Harry Channer
Schwenksville, Pennsylvania

The Visitor and Reader's Photos

Look forward every month to finding the monthly visitor. It is the very first thing that I do when my new issue arrives. And then I read the articles. Also, enjoy the pictures that readers send in.

Thanks for a great magazine!
Stephanie McClure
Plattsmouth, Nebraska



Photographer Suzie Wahlgren sent this Milky Way image taken at Jeffrey Lake south of Brady.



Doug Oppliger of Denver, Colorado, photographed this woodchuck along the Platte River near Columbus.

Newspapers

Loved your idea to use newspapers to remove smells from a cooler ("Don't Just Read the Paper" May 2017 issue, page 18).

We use them to add a weed barrier under straw for garden mulching. It eventually composts along with the straw.

Thanks,
Karen Anderson
Via email

Enter Our Photo Contest

Don't forget to enter our NEBRASKAland Photo Contest - see ad on page 8.

Send your comments to:
Jeff Kurrus, Editor
NEBRASKAland Magazine
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

Mule Deer

By Lindsay Rogers

Characterized by large ears and a relatively small tail, the mule deer can also be distinguished from the white-tailed deer by the growth pattern of its antlers. A mule deer's antlers form dichotomous branches (tines split in two) where the white-tailed deer's antlers form one main beam with tines branching off the main beam. Historically, mule deer were found statewide, while white-tailed deer were found in the eastern part of the state. Today, white-tailed deer have expanded their range to cover the entire state because of their ability to adapt to habitat changes, while mule deer, which are less adaptable, are now restricted primarily to the western two-thirds of the state.

As a ruminant species, the mule deer has limited ability to digest highly fibrous plant material. Because of this, its metabolic rate varies with the seasons – high metabolism in the summer months when easily digestible plants are available and lower metabolism in the winter months when only highly fibrous plant material is available. They can also feed on acorns, berries and other fleshy fruit to a lesser extent. ■

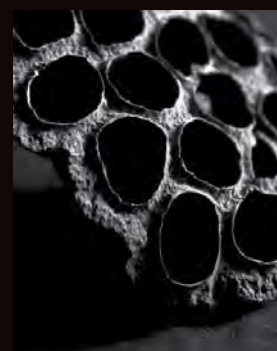
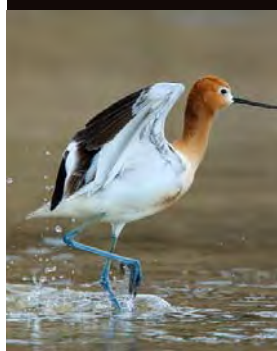
Lindsay Rogers is an outdoor education specialist with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

NEBRASKAland

PHOTO CONTEST

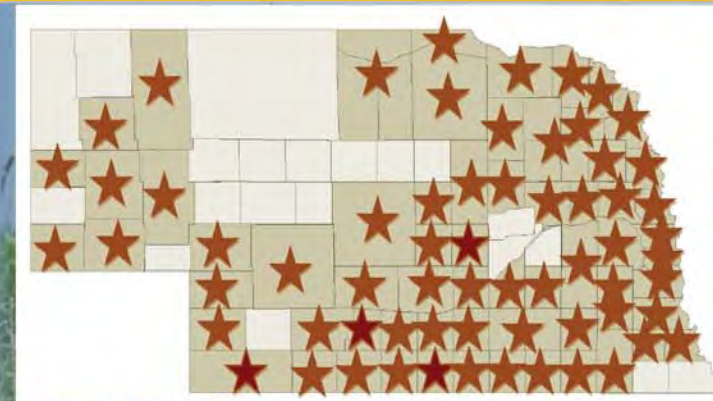


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Visit Imperial and Chase County

By Brenna McFadden, Nebraska Tourism Commission



Once referred to as the Great American Desert, Chase County is a broad expanse of land home to beautiful golf courses, state parks and prairie lakes just waiting to be explored. Chase County offers 17,000 acres of public land where hunters in search of pheasant, quail, dove, turkey and deer have access. If your interest is in spending some tranquil time on the water, stop by Enders Reservoir State Recreation Area just southeast of Imperial. Enders Reservoir is a 1,700-acre lake used for boating, fishing and camping and is teeming with wildlife in the fall and winter months.

While you are in the area be sure to visit the Champion Mill State Historical Park and Recreation Area. This old mill pond provides the perfect place for families to spend time playing with their little ones and teaching them how to fish or camp. You can also stop by the restored 1892 flour mill – the only remaining operating water-powered mill in Nebraska today. Its hours are from 1-5 p.m. daily. For an indoor history experience head to the Chase County Historical Museum in Champion. It houses more than 1,800 artifacts from the 1700s and on. Exhibits include antique clothing, housewares and World War I memorabilia such as uniforms and farm machinery.



Champion Mill Historical Park provides the perfect place for families to visit.

Once you fall in love with the scenery and hometown atmosphere, you will probably want to stay a night or two. Check into the Balcony House Bed and Breakfast in Imperial and enjoy a cozy night tucked into a historic and unique building that offers old-fashioned hospitality. If you are interested in golf then stop by the Imperial Country Club. It stretches across level terrain where most of the holes are straightaways and the fairways are all elegantly lined with trees.

If golf is not for you, Imperial has plenty of other places to visit! 509

Broadway is an upscale clothing boutique and coffee shop that lets you order a gourmet latte to keep you going while browsing their selection of clothes.

Before you retire to your comfortable bed and breakfast, explore the downtown area of Imperial, rich with a number of shopping and dining attractions. After grabbing a bite to eat you can relax while viewing a movie at the historic Imperial Theatre on Fridays and Saturdays at 7:30 p.m. or Sundays at 7 p.m.

Whether you want to venture outdoors to take in the true beauty of the Nebraska plains, or spend time in a welcoming and historic town, Imperial and Chase County have all that and more to offer. ■

While in the Area

Other places to visit while in Chase County include:

- Imperial Lanes
- Good Times Bar
- Enders Lake Golf Course
- Old Rock Corral



Two kayakers fish at Enders Reservoir State Recreation Area in Chase County.

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A Brief History

Red Willow County's First Thanksgiving

By the Nebraska State Historical Society

Thanksgiving in 1896 was celebrated on Nov. 26, and editor F. M. Kimmell of the *McCook Tribune* took advantage of the holiday to reflect on Red Willow County's recent past. "I wonder if any one has thought of this month being the twenty-fifth anniversary of the first settling of the county," he wrote in the *Tribune* on Nov. 27, 1896.

"The first Thanksgiving dinner was eaten in camp near the mouth of Red Willow creek, and in some respects was the most unique Thanksgiving dinner ever eaten. The eleven men who represented 'The Republican Valley Land and Townsite company,' had reached their destination [starting from Nebraska City] the latter part of November, 1871, and



An unidentified family in front of their dugout, presumably near McCook, Red Willow County, about 1890. NSHS RG3464-45

after locating the Red Willow townsite and their respective claims, announced their readiness to return."

Townsite companies were common in Nebraska during the territorial period and the early years of statehood. Towns were often founded by groups of speculators who located sites, claimed land, and tried to convince prospective settlers to buy town lots. Such would-be cities were known as "paper towns." Some grew into actual towns, and some didn't. The now-unincorporated town of Red Willow (between present-day McCook and Indianola) became the county's first town in 1872.

Kimmell continues his story:

"Two of the company kept in camp by allotted duties, had no opportunity of attending to individual interests, and looked upon the proceedings as being extremely selfish and unjust, and so pronounced it in vigorous language. The usual way of eating was in regular camp style, each as he pleased, but in deference to the day, this dinner must be somewhat ceremonious. The tin plates were arranged as on a table and all sat around, except the two, who were not yet in a thankful frame of mind, and while a blessing was asked, one of them, in an aside, muttered quite sulphurous words.

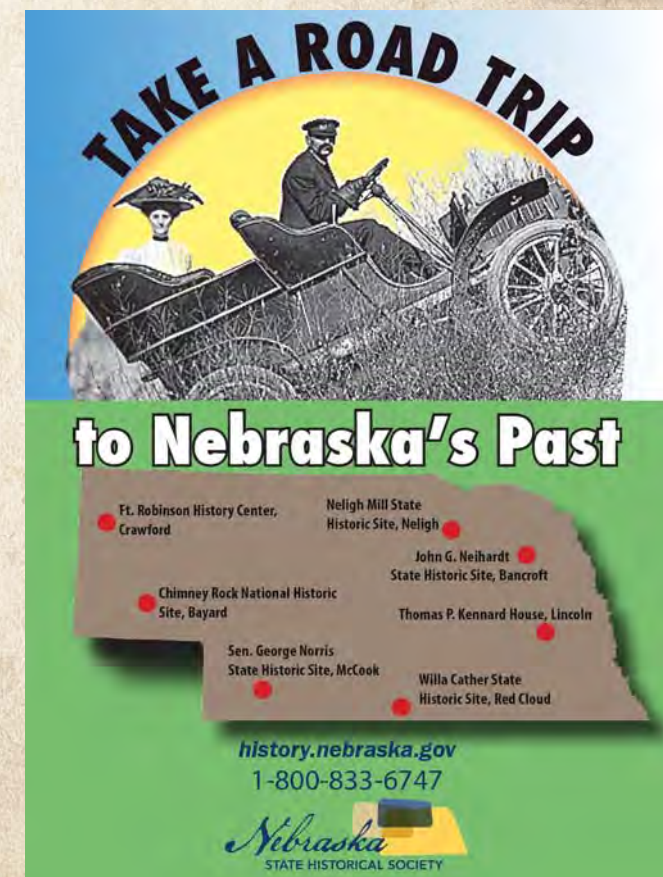
"After while, matters were so adjusted that the two shared in advantages taken by the others, and the lurid atmosphere cleared. Buffalo meat, wild turkey and prairie chicken were eaten with the regulation camp fare, among which was the inevitable flapjacks and syrup. It was too cold for the syrup to run, so it was cut off in chunks and lengths as it pressed through the bung hole of the keg. On occasion, one would become impatient for his sweet morsel, and reach over another to secure the piece for which the first was waiting, when exhibition of temper and ready use of strong words followed."

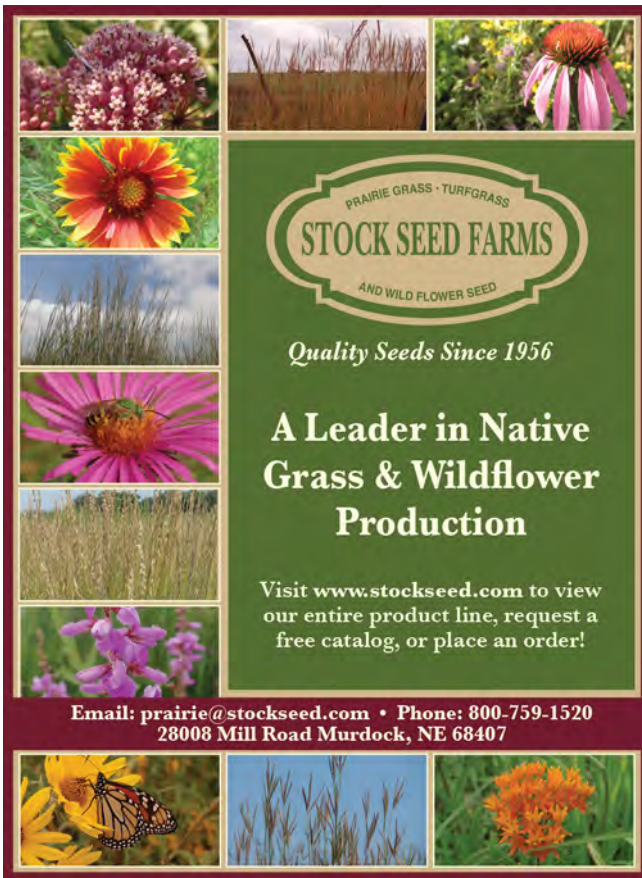
May your Thanksgiving pass with warmer lodging and fewer "sulphurous words"! ■

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



The townsite company men could only dream of a Thanksgiving such as this one celebrated in Wausa, Nebraska. NSHS RG2797-35





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Quail Hunt Now

By Jeff Kurrus

While pheasants remain the No. 1 priority for many upland hunters every fall, there is a large contingent of hunters realizing they need to take advantage of the state's best bobwhite quail hunting in years. During the 2016-17 hunting season, harvest was nearly 45 percent higher than the 10-year average. And bobwhites have continued to thrive according to recent surveys – population indices from spring whistle counts and the July rural mail carrier surveys were 23 percent and 81 percent above the recent 5-year averages, respectively. Although these surveys don't directly measure production, much of the quail range experienced favorable conditions throughout the summer and into fall.

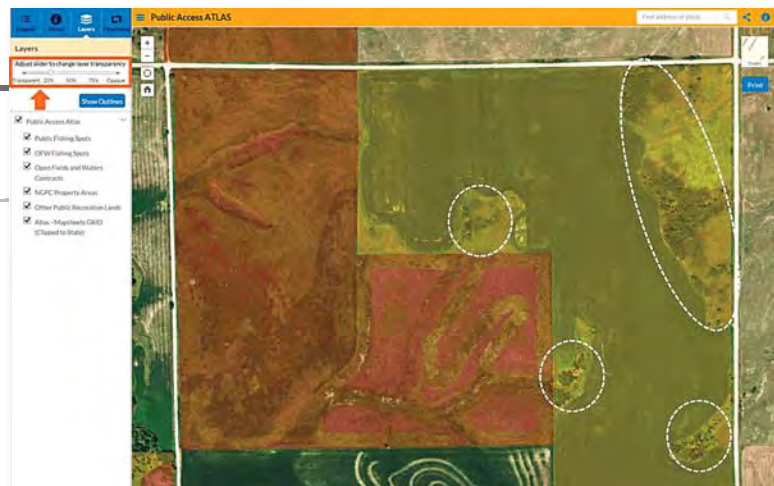
Recent reports from the field have also been very positive. "With harvest nearly in full-swing, farmers are seeing great numbers of bobwhites," said Commission Upland Habitat and Access Program Manager John Laux. "This year, there have been many reports of broods of different sizes (and ages) – many of the younger broods are likely from re-nesting attempts but some females may have produced multiple clutches." Either way, hunters will find some excellent quail numbers in Nebraska again this fall.



English pointer dog Jake retrieves a bobwhite quail on private land in Cass County near Louisville.

Where to Hunt

The primary quail range includes southeastern Nebraska and west across the southern border with Kansas. That said, bobwhites were harvested in 86 of Nebraska's 93 counties last year – indicating that populations have recently expanded into many areas outside their primary range. While the majority of quail hunting will occur on private lands, ample public hunting opportunities are available on wildlife management areas as well as private lands enrolled in the state's Open Fields and Waters (OFW) Program. Of the 253,000 acres of land enrolled in OFW, 75 percent occurs within the quail range.



COURTESY OF JOHN LAUX

The online version of the Public Access Atlas is an invaluable tool used by hunters to locate quail habitat on public lands. By adjusting the layer transparency at the top left, hunters can locate woody cover adjacent to cropland, grasslands and other types of cover – great places to start looking for bobwhites. Visit OutdoorNebraska.org/publicaccessatlas and click on "View Interactive Map."

Type of Habitat

Different from ring-necked pheasants, the native bobwhite quail is an edge species and can often be found where two or more habitat types come together. As groups of pheasant hunters comb through large swaths of grass and cropfields, quail hunters target the woody draws and other areas where grasslands converge with other cover types. Bobwhites are commonly found in tree lines, ditches and pockets that feature native shrub thickets including American plum and chokecherry and downed trees that provide ideal loafing and escape cover for bobwhites. Locate these areas adjacent to high-energy food sources, such as corn or milo, and you'll find yourself in ideal locations for bobwhite quail.

To research quail habitat, many hunters use the online version of the Public Access Atlas for pre-season scouting. This interactive, GIS-based tool is free and can be very useful in narrowing down where quail habitat occurs on public lands (see graphic above). To view the online version, visit OutdoorNebraska.org/publicaccessatlas and click on "View Interactive Map."

How to Hunt

Quail hunting is not a game of sunrise chase. When working with a pointing or flushing dog, hunters will often allow quail ample time in the morning to come out of their roost, where they overnight, and move about their habitat spreading scent as they travel. Successful hunters will then allow their dog to work an area with suitable habitat, paying specific attention when their dog begins to get "birdy."

Once a dog goes on point – for quail on average will hold, or remain still, considerably longer than pheasants – hunters are safely arranged and either the dog or a hunter is directed into the heavy cover. Then, all heck breaks loose as birds fly in all directions in a blur. Hunters will then send their dogs in the direction of "singles" once again as they watch their canine partners in excitement.

For more information on Nebraska's upland bird hunting opportunities, visit OutdoorNebraska.org/upland. ■

The Animal Game

By Jeff Kurrus

Dinnertime at my house alongside two elementary school kids is consumed by what has become known as The Animal Game. It's quite simple to play. Start with any letter of the alphabet and then each person has to name an animal that starts with that letter. If the animal is repeated or a participant can't come up with

an animal, then they are eliminated from that round. The winner of each round decides the next letter that will be used.

For an even more challenging game, create the rules that competitors can only state Nebraska animals. Before long, if your kids are like mine, they'll be bringing home library books, secretly hiding them in their rooms, and using them for reference before they come to the dining room table. ■



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Rainbows Through the Ice

By Jeff Kurrus

Throughout September and October, more than 80,000 put-and-take rainbow trout were stocked in public fishing areas across the state. The fish are approximately 10 inches in length and can be caught using a variety of tactics in open water, including spinners, salmon eggs on a hook and a bobber and artificial flies.

However, catching these trout through the ice may be even more fun than open water. With just a jig and a waxworm, anglers can find these fish near cover along with other species. But once hooked, they give the panfish angler a considerably different fight, as this hard-charging fish nearly refuses to be brought to the surface of the ice.

It's an added bonus for those anglers who are bluegill and crappie fishing on the hard water throughout the winter months.

For a complete list of trout stocking locations, visit OutdoorNebraska.org/fishstockingreports/. ■



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

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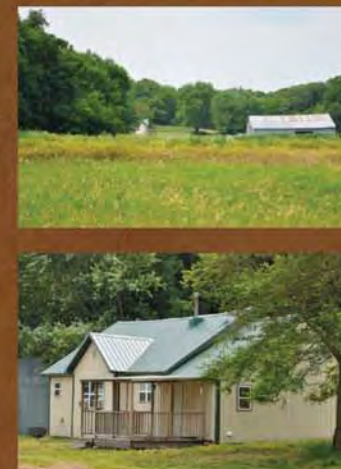
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THAYER CO, NE - 320.09 AC.

Here is a great farm with diverse acres in one contiguous tract that are in an ideal location. A majority of the acres have recently come out of the CRP program and been put into production. Established shelter belts full of mature timber protect these tillable acres while providing excellent cover for all types of wildlife. Bisecting the tillable acres is a large draw containing multiple ponds with the largest being located just a short distance from an optimal acreage or cabin site. These ponds are ideal for both the livestock and wildlife that call this property home. There are multiple prime locations for food plots for the outdoor enthusiast.



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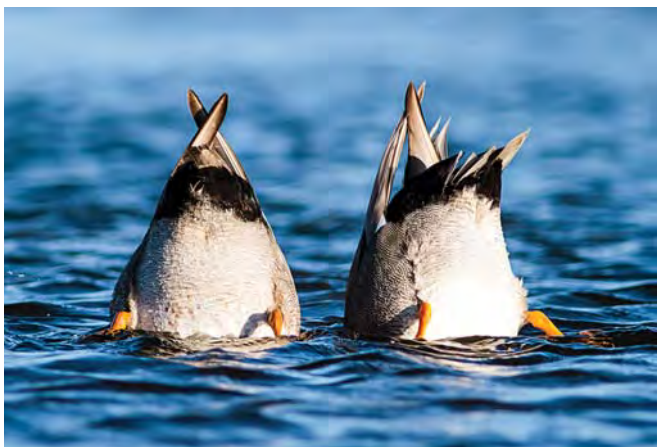
Shooting Blinds

By Evan Barrientos

When I worked for The Nature Conservancy near Wood River, Nebraska, I lived close to a restored wetland. In late winter I would gaze longingly out my window at the clouds of migrating waterfowl whirling above the calm water. I wanted to photograph this spectacle, but approaching the skittish birds through the open prairie seemed an impossible task. Then I met Michael Forsberg, famed Nebraska wildlife photographer.

I learned how Forsberg builds blinds out of garden fence and grass and sleeps in them, sometimes for days, in order to capture the most intimate moments of nature and share them with the rest of us. I wanted to learn this art, too, so I headed to the hardware store to buy materials for my first blind and proceeded to make a very big mistake.

The store was out of garden fence so I bought chicken wire instead, thinking it couldn't be too different. It could. I spent most of the next afternoon pounding stakes; cutting wire, camo cloth, and grass; and zip tying it all together



Gadwall drakes feed in classic dabbling duck form.

in the rough shape of a burrito with a hole at one end and a window at the other. The blind was placed right on the water's edge and would have a spectacular view of ducks waking up in the golden light of sunrise. Or so I thought.

After leaving the blind out for two weeks to let the birds acclimate to it, I set out one March night with my camera gear and sleeping bag, crawled into the blind, and fell asleep to the quiet murmurs of roosting mallards. I was so eager for sunrise that I had no less than five dreams of waking up in the blind. In one dream I woke up underwater. In another I woke up to find the wetland dry. When I finally did wake up, I discovered a snafu that I hadn't even dreamt of: my blind had collapsed on me. The chicken wire couldn't support the added weight of the morning dew, and in order for me to see out the blind's window I had to prop the darn thing up with my head. In addition to being extremely uncomfortable, I worried that the floppy blind would scare away the birds. Fortunately, it did not. Maybe the birds thought it was too pathetic to be man-made, or maybe it looked like a



A killdeer ruffles its feathers while preening at sunrise.

decomposing tree trunk, but they didn't seem to notice me at all. I knew I was okay when a red-winged blackbird strolled across the top of my head.

What I sacrificed in comfort I made up for in views. It's not often you get to see wild animals behave truly naturally, completely unaware of your presence. Seeing a killdeer bathe in the golden light of sunrise, hearing blue-winged teal drakes whisper soft calls to a female, watching beads of water drip from a gadwall's impermeable feathers – these were new and beautiful experiences for me. At one point, a great blue heron, normally too skittish to approach within 50 feet, spent 10 minutes hunting just a few feet away from me. I left the blind with some nice photographs and a very sore neck.

Pathetic as it was, I'm grateful to that blind for giving me glimpses into the lives of birds that I never would have had otherwise. It taught me a new way to appreciate wildlife, one that requires you to become a part of the landscape. Hunters and photographers know the value of extreme patience, but in today's fast-paced society, rarely do we sit in a spot for hours and watch nature's secrets reveal themselves. A blind, I learned, teaches you that patience and provides a window to a new view of nature. I hope to build many more blinds in the future, but never, ever again out of chicken wire. ■



A greater yellowlegs scans the water for invertebrates.

PHOTOS BY EVAN BARRIENTOS

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Upcoming Events

by Jerry Kane

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.

November 1

Late Doe/Fawn Antelope season opens

November 1

Raccoon, Opossum, Long-tailed Weasel, Mink, Red Fox, Gray Fox and Badger hunting and trapping seasons open

November 1

Muskrat and Beaver Trapping season opens

November 3

Wildlife and Watercolors Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area, Gering

November 4

Candlelight Tour Fort Atkinson State Historical Park, Fort Calhoun

November 6

Woodcock Hunting season closes

November 6

Tickets go on sale for Historical Christmas Dinner Fort Robinson State Park, Crawford

November 9

Rail Hunting season closes

November 11-12

River Valley Artisans and Craft Market Eugene T. Mahoney State Park, Ashland

November 11-19

Deer Hunting firearm deer and restricted statewide buck seasons

November 15

Crow Hunting First segment of crow hunting season closes

November 18-19, 24-26

Christmas at the Mansion Arbor Lodge State Historical Park, Nebraska City

November 19

Citizen Science in the Classroom Educator Workshop Hastings Museum, Hastings

November 19

Fort Robinson Longhorn and Buffalo Sale Crawford

November 28

Bighorn Sheep Hunting season opens

November 28

Learn to Hunt Muzzleloader Deer Nebraska Game and Parks Outdoor Education Center, Lincoln

Fall fishing with spoons, slabs and lures for northern pike at Merritt Reservoir in Cherry County.

JP Wachter of Lincoln firearm hunts at Oak Glen Wildlife Management Area in Seward County.

A Tool-Holding Antler

By Ryan Sparks

One day while attending graduate school in Montana, I wandered into the Slide Inn on the banks of the Madison River. The fly shop's owner, Kelly Galloup, had a reputation as a trout-crazed wild child, and his fly-tying abilities and patterns are known all over the world. The shop displayed an eclectic collection of fishing memorabilia – antique bamboo rods, replicas of enormous brown trout, and photos of legendary anglers from days gone by. There was a ton of interesting objects to look at, but my eye jumped to Galloup's fly-tying desk. Perched atop it was a large elk antler, sporting every

manner of fly-tying tools imaginable. I snapped a quick photo and was determined to make my own.

That spring I found a whitetail shed that happened to sit flush on a table. Using 1/8th- and 3/16th-inch bits, I drilled several evenly spaced holes in the main beam of the antler. While my antler doesn't hold as many tools as Galloup's, it keeps every tool I use on a consistent basis organized, so I'm not fumbling around looking for my scissors or hackle pliers.

I have seen other antler tool holders dyed with wood stain, but I prefer the natural color of the antler as I found it. If you can't find one that sits perfectly level, feel free to grind down the points or the base to make it stable. The result is a beautiful and efficient addition to your tying desk. ■



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

NEBRASKAland Visitor



Last issue's winner of the Visitor drawing was Gail Griess of Sutton, Nebraska, who found the **brown recluse spider** on page 54.

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 14, 17, 23, or 52.

The **brown recluse spider** (*Loxosceles reclusa*) is a medium-sized brown spider native to southeastern Nebraska. The state is at the northern edge of this spider's range, which extends south to Texas and east to Kentucky. Identifying characteristics include a distinct dark brown, "fiddle"-shaped patch right behind the eyes, and six eyes arranged in three pairs, instead of the more common eight eyes.

The brown recluse is a nocturnal predator, spending the day tucked into dark crevices and venturing out at night in search of insects. They are not aggressive, preferring to escape when threatened. While brown recluse spider bites are uncommon, they are serious. The spider injects cytotoxic venom, which kills surrounding tissue. Seek treatment for any suspect bite, and attempt to collect the spider so it can be properly identified to assist with treatment.



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



A Fort by Candlelight

Photos and story by Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

By the gate, a stranger approached.

“State your purpose,” the sentry prompted.

A raised lantern revealed a messenger who had a letter, and he must see the fort’s commander – it’s urgent.

Leery, the sentry allowed access, but warned the soldier to take care. Rarely does Fort Atkinson receive visitors this time of night. There may be trouble in the air.

The messenger slipped past, but the guards can’t see that there are others with him: visitors from a different century, wearing clothes from a future time. Invisible and perceived as mere shadows they go undetected, and without question, they traveled quietly in a single line.

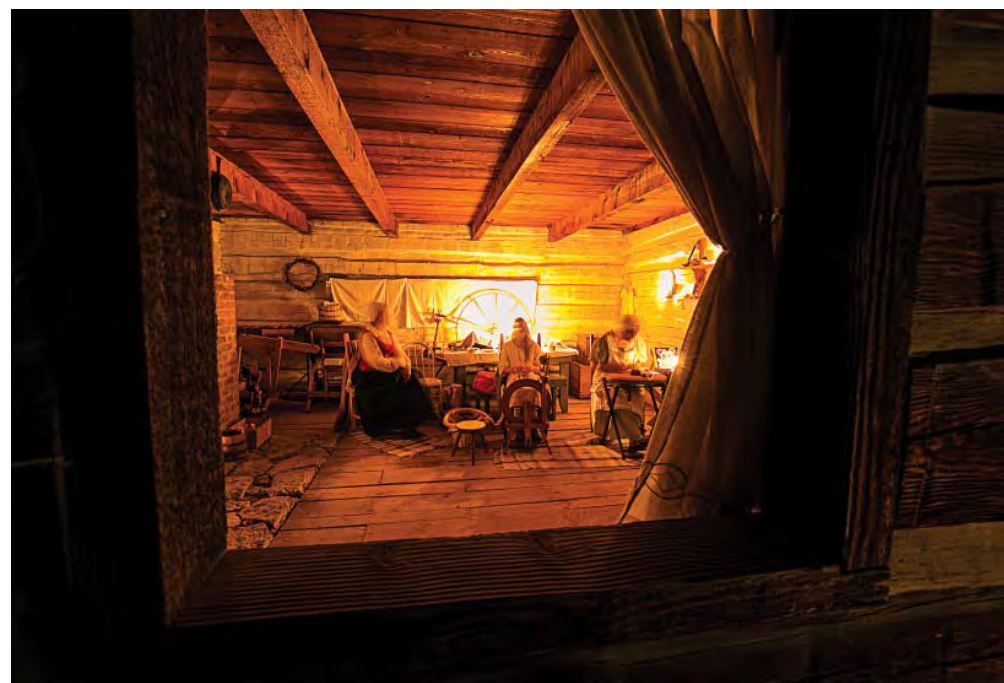
So by candlelight these visitors followed the messenger, as he guided them through this history: Fort Atkinson State Historical Park from 1819-1827, it guarded our country’s manifest destiny.

Infantry privates Josiah Miller and Steve Jones, and Sgt. Stephen Baker, left to right, stand watch at the gate at Fort Atkinson State Historical Park, which existed between 1819 and 1827. The fort’s primary purpose was to protect the fur trade, keep peace with the American Indians and guard the “gateway to the west.”



Through the gate a dark lawn opened, under a twinkling, inky sky. And under a full moon a retired flagpole stood until reveille; it cared not who passed it by.

Our ghostly visitors from the future could not speak with the living, but were permitted to ask questions through their guide. Mostly domestic murmurs filled the barracks, but there was also intrigue on the rise. From room to room, as they watched and listened, a plot unfolded before their eyes. Wives and widows gossiped over weaving, as their soldiers puffed on pipes by brick firesides.



Above: A slow shutter speed shows a ghostly light trail left by a lantern and visitors as they visit the barracks during the Candlelight Tour. The tour is always scheduled on the first Saturday of November.

Opposite: Julie Baker reads by candlelight.

Left: Donna Jones, Jacqueline Ericson and Marilyn Jones, left to right, spinning and weaving in one of the barracks. At its height, Fort Atkinson housed nearly a quarter of the standing U.S. Army – approximately 1,200 soldiers. Civilians who lived just beyond the wall of the garrison equaled nearly as many, which included the soldiers' wives and widows who did the washing, cooking, gardening, weaving and spinning.

Most of the day-to-day work at Fort Atkinson was agricultural. Because the fort was hundreds of miles away from civilization and outside supplies were limited and uncertain, the fort had to be self-sufficient. In addition to soldiers and their families, an Indian agent, blacksmiths, carpenters, coopers, tinsmiths, musicians, surgeons and teachers also lived at the fort.



For 16 years the fort has welcomed candlelight tour visitors, and this November will be the 17th. Based on actual fort events, the popular tour sells out every season.

One year the talk buzzed of the presidential election: Adams' 1824 victory was an embroiling one, indeed. Some years centered on a mystery – a petty theft or crime or misadventure – who would take such little heed? There were also nights before a funeral, to embalm soldiers who sadly died in surgery. Next come inside the dusty wood shop, where those eerie coffins may still be seen.

In 1820 one man awaited execution, locked up on that restless eve. While a few doors down the women toiled, the officers and their dinner guests will be most pleased.

But outside the westerly wind howled, it sent plumes of chimney smoke straight into the punishment room. Being hanged or smoked like salted fish to death, the poor prisoner didn't know which would come more soon.

Above: Secured at the center of the fort is the powder magazine, a limestone building used to store gunpowder.

Opposite: After dinner, soldiers settle down for a game of chess: Josiah Miller, John Miller and Kevin Arnold sit on the left side of the table; Mike Bowman and Jim Habegger sit on the right.



Then there was that year trapper Hugh Glass came running, with grizzly wounds across his hide. And never was there a shortage of scurvy, and Indian peace treaties, you'd find.

The next story will be told on Nov. 4, and rumor speaks of a keel boat carrying fort supplies. It may be the last shipment before old man winter comes, and for many months, he will long reside. ■

For more information on Fort Atkinson's Candlelight Tour, visit fortatkinsononline.org. Tickets are limited and reservation is required. A valid vehicle entry permit is required and available at the visitor center. Complimentary refreshments will be served at the conclusion of each tour. All proceeds will help support the living history program at Fort Atkinson State Historical Park.



Above: Blacksmiths Doug Appel and Lauren Joyce take advantage of the cool night. These men, including farriers and armorers, were responsible for nearly everything made of steel and iron. The fort employed nearly 25 smiths at its height and produced items such as nails, horseshoes, wagon wheel bandings, door latches, hinges and farming equipment. They also repaired weaponry. Today, Fort Atkinson reenactors have learned this craft to carry on the tradition. Reproduction pieces may be purchased at the Sutler Store.

Opposite: The Sutler Store offered hundreds of items for sale to the soldiers and civilians who lived on the fort. It functions today as a gift shop where visitors may find items made by Fort Atkinson artisans, including lanterns, animal hides, period cookbooks, old-fashion candies and jerky, home decor, pottery and candles.

Left: Tourgoers may pick up a copy of *The Military Journal* in the visitor center to read day's news on the fort and commemorate their time on the Candlelight Tour.

Time Well Spent

What to Do in November

By Renae Blum

As temperatures cool and winter approaches, make the most of the fall season by getting outdoors and enjoying nature. The below activities are a great place to start. To learn more about fun events at state parks and recreation areas in November, visit Calendar.OutdoorNebraska.gov. ■



PHOTO BY JULIE GEISER

Bird Hunting Throughout the month Statewide

The hunt is on! During November, you have an array of choices when it comes to hunting birds in Nebraska, including pheasant, quail, turkey, waterfowl and grouse. Visit our website at OutdoorNebraska.org to pick up a permit, find places to hunt and access various hunting guides.

Outdoor Cooking Throughout the month Statewide

Cooking outdoors isn't just for summer grilling. Outdoor Education Specialist Julia Plugge recommends outdoor cooking in the fall for a number of reasons: you'll welcome the heat, rather than tolerating the sweat it brings in warmer temperatures; there's no need for bug spray; and many fall favorites, such as soup, are perfect for outdoor cooking. "This Thanksgiving, free up your oven and make a pumpkin dessert in the Dutch oven," Plugge writes.



PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

Christmas at the Mansion Nov. 18, 19, 24, 25, 26

Arbor Lodge State Historical Park

Step back in time to enjoy a historical Christmas at Arbor Lodge State Historical Park. Visit the park's 52-room mansion, home of Arbor Day founder J. Sterling Morton, to see it dressed up in its Christmas best, including vintage décor and holiday-themed collections.

Sesquicentennial Events Throughout the month Statewide

In late November, take a lamplight tour of the post commander's home at the Fort Sidney Complex, decorated as it would have been 150 years ago. The day after Thanksgiving, attend Omaha's Christmas at Union Station event to see a tree lighting ceremony featuring the region's largest indoor Christmas tree. To learn more about these and other events, visit ne150.org/calendar.



Holiday Shopping for the Outdoor Guru Throughout the month Statewide

Know someone who loves the outdoors? Make your holiday shopping simple and take a look at the Nebraska Game and Parks Gift Guide at OutdoorNebraska.org/giftguide. In it, you can find options to fit a variety of interests: lifetime permits and stamps, hunting and fishing permits, Game and Parks "Bucks" (which work like a gift certificate), a wild game cookbook and more.

PHEASANTS

Prepping the whole bird

Story and photos by **Gerry Steinauer, Botanist**

When properly cleaned, butchered and prepared, all parts of a pheasant – including the wings, legs and even the heart, liver and gizzard – can be made into delectable meals.

When I was young, the downside of pheasant hunting with Dad was that after the hunt my brothers and I would always end up in the basement cleaning birds while he was upstairs catching up on football scores. We cleaned the entire bird, and when Mom fried them it was the whole pheasant: breast, legs, wings, back, ribs, heart, liver and gizzard. At the supper table, with six kids in the family, we spared not a piece.

These days, after a successful pheasant hunt, some hunters simply tear away a bird's breast feathers and fillet out the breast meat and toss the remaining carcass. Their woeful justifications for wasting the remaining meat go something like this: "pheasant legs are full of tendons and tough as rawhide, you can't eat them," "there's no meat on a pheasant wing, why clean them?" and "eat the heart, liver and gizzard? That's gross!"

The practice of only filleting out the white-meat breasts stems from hunters not knowing how or not taking the time to properly clean, butcher and prepare an entire pheasant. If they invested a little more time, learned a few tips and expanded their cooking repertoire, they and their families could enjoy delightful meals made from the whole bird.

Aging, Cleaning and Butchering Pheasants

There is no doubt that pheasant meat, especially that of an old rooster, can be tough. To enhance a pheasant's tenderness and flavor, I often age harvested birds prior to cleaning them. I know many hunters and non-hunters alike are repulsed at the thought of hanging an uncleaned bird in their garage for a few days – they fear bacteria is tenderizing the meat. It is not. All good beef is aged and many hunters hang their deer for several days before butchering; why not pheasants? In England, aging pheasants has been a tradition for centuries.

Aging of meat occurs when natural enzymes in the muscle cells, given time, break down collagen, a hard, fibrous

protein. Preferred temperatures for aging meat range from a few degrees above freezing to about 50 degrees F. Bacterial growth is limited below 60 degrees.

I age my pheasants, feathers on and un-gutted, four to eight days – if it makes you feel less queasy, gut the birds before hanging. In November, I often hang them in the garage. Later in the season, if it is cold enough outside to freeze the birds, I set them on a cold basement windowsill or in the refrigerator. Aging makes even the tough legs and thighs of an old, long-spurred rooster tender and more flavorful. For more details see "Aging Game Birds Results in a Delectable Treat" at Nebraskalandmagazine.com.

As for cleaning pheasants, I have seen hunters slash, tear and pull on birds for minutes without making much progress. Knowing when, where and how to slash, tear and pull helps, especially when saving the entire bird.

I start with a little trick unknown to many hunters – pulling the tendons from the drumsticks. Having to eat around the sinewy tendons is why many hunters do not eat pheasant drumsticks.

One fall morning about 20 years ago, Dick Turpin, long-time conservation officer, was being videoed by the crew from the Outdoor Nebraska television show in the Commission's Lincoln office parking lot for a segment on how to pull tendons. Passing by on my way to work, I stopped to watch. Turpin had snapped the pheasant's lower leg bone and was trying to extract the tendons using pliers and was struggling mightily. To save him from further filmed embarrassment, I stepped in, put the pheasant's foot under my shoe and quickly pulled the tendons. He smirked and called me a "young whippersnapper."

To pull the leg tendons (see photos on page 36), first pop the joint between the bones where the feathered drumstick meets the scaled lower leg by grasping the lower leg and pushing it sideways against the joint. Next, lay the pheasant's foot on a concrete or gravel surface with the lower leg angled upwards at about 45 degrees. While grasping the drumstick step on the lower leg near the spur with the ball of your foot. The bone should snap. Now, with the ball of your foot firmly placed on the pheasant's foot,





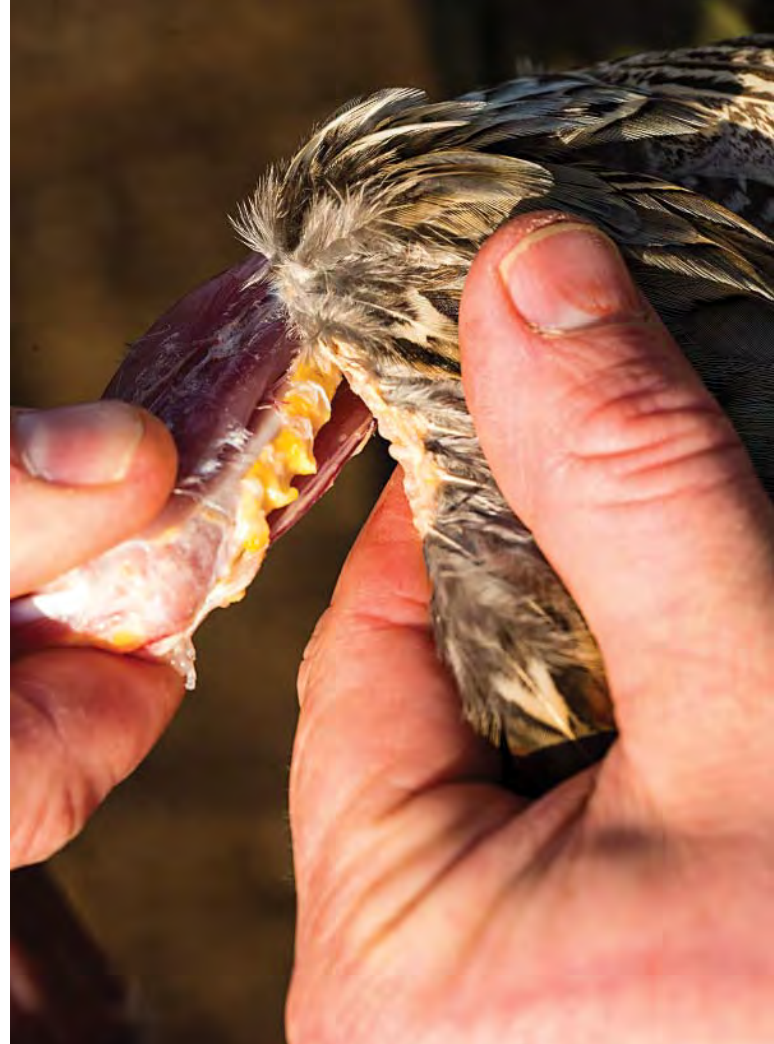
To pull pheasant leg tendons, first snap the lower leg bone by placing the ball of your foot near the pheasant's spur and applying pressure.



Next with your foot placed firmly on the pheasant's foot, grasp the drumstick and pull upwards.



This method removes all but a few of the leg tendons.



Making an incision between the bone and the base of the long flight feathers on a pheasant's mid-wing aids in their removal.

grasp the drumstick and steadily pull upwards. The tendons should slide out of the drumstick, remaining attached to the pheasant's foot. A rigid boot sole and somewhat roughened concrete to provide friction helps prevent the pheasant's foot from sliding out from under your foot. Lastly, cut through the skin at the previously broken joint to remove the remaining stub of the lower leg. If transporting or storing birds, leave one stub with the spur attached to identify the bird as male.

To skin the bird, first make a cut through the skin where the base of the neck meets the crop. Grasping the bird by the head and starting at the cut, pull the feathers from the pheasant's breast, back and legs. Then pull out the crop and cut the tail off at its fleshy base. To clean the wings, first snap the upper wing joint and then cut through it, removing the upper segment. Next, pull the feathers from the lower wing and the foreside of the mid-wing. Lastly, on the backside of the mid-wing, make a short incision between the bone and the base of the long flight feathers. This will aid in pulling off the strip of flight feathers (see above photo).

With the bird de-feathered, now comes the dirty work: gutting the bird. First, make a shallow horizontal cut through the gut lining where it is exposed at the base of the breast bone. Cutting too deep here can puncture the intestines. Then pull back the breast bone to expose the guts. If saving

the heart and liver, now remove them. Pull the gallbladder, the clear, greenish-red sac attached to the liver, as it contains foul-tasting bile. To extract and clean the gizzard, cut the esophagus and small intestine where they attach to it. Then from the gizzard's side, make a cut halfway through the organ (see top right photo). Pull open the gizzard and shake out the gravel and ground food from its interior. Next, using your fingers, pull off the gizzard's leathery inner lining (see bottom right photo). Once the organs are pulled, finish gutting the bird, making sure to scrape out the kidneys tucked under the backbone and the lungs lodged against the ribs. Lastly, with a hose or in the sink, thoroughly wash the bird inside and out – including the organs – removing all blood and feathers.

A cleaned pheasant can be left whole for baking or slow cooking or cut into pieces. I butcher pheasants into six pieces: breast fillets, wings, and legs (drumstick and thigh intact). I start by holding the bird's backbone with one hand, and while grasping the thigh with my other hand, pull upwards dislodging the thigh bone from the hip socket. To remove the leg, I cut closely along the back and through the broken hip joint making sure to get all the meat in the bone pockets along the back. Next, I cut off the wings at the lower joint and then fillet off the breasts by running the blade tightly down along the breast bone and then along the ribs. I stockpile the pheasant carcass (breast bone, ribs, back and neck) in the freezer until I have enough to make soup stock.

Cooking Pheasant Legs and Wings

In the kitchen, pheasant hunters, traditionalists by nature, often resort to standard recipes, such as slow-cooked pheasant with cream of mushroom soup or pheasant breasts floured and fried to a golden brown. These recipes are not bad, but if you stretched your culinary boundaries, perhaps did a little online research for imaginative recipes, you can treat your family and friends to delicious meals made from all parts of the bird.

A pheasant's white-meated, mild-flavored breasts are a chef's delight. Basically, they can be used in any recipe that calls for chicken breasts. Two of my favorites are pheasant parmesan and tarragon pheasant in cream sauce. A word of caution, though: pheasant meat contains less fat than chicken, and when overcooked, even the breasts can become dry and a bit tough.

The bony and tougher legs (all dark meat) and wings of a pheasant provide more of a culinary challenge, as they must be tenderized during cooking. Therefore, I often use them in separate dishes from the breasts.

One way to utilize the legs and wings is to bake an entire pheasant. To add moisture to the meat prior to baking, my wife, Grace, uses a large injecting syringe to inject the skinned bird with a mixture of melted butter and beer. First, to infuse flavors, she simmers a stick of butter, along with



Once the gizzard is extracted from the pheasant, make a cut halfway through it to clean out its contents.



Next, remove the gizzard's leathery inner lining.

rosemary and crushed garlic, at a very low heat for about a half hour, then strains out the pieces of garlic and rosemary. She then adds a can or bottle of beer to the butter and brings the mixture to a brief low boil before injecting all parts of the bird.

The bird's exterior is rubbed with olive oil, rosemary and crushed garlic, and then placed in a covered roaster or pan and baked at 375 degrees for 40 to 45 minutes and basted twice. She then removes the cover and bakes the bird another 15 minutes at 325 degrees to brown its exterior before serving. The beer adds a unique flavor to the meat – perhaps it is the hops – and any kind, from the cheapest light beer to the finest home brew, works for this recipe.

Another recipe that came down through my wife's family calls for skillet browning pheasant legs and wings, as well as the breasts if you wish, followed by slow baking. First, make several cuts into the thighs and drumsticks. This allows hot liquid to enter the meat during baking, increasing tenderness. Also, if using breast fillets, pound them with a meat tenderizer. Then lightly flour and season the pieces



Pheasant hearts, gizzards and livers (not shown) are similar in taste and texture to those of chicken.

with salt, pepper and garlic powder and lightly brown them in oil in a skillet. Once browned, place the pieces, along with a sliced onion and one 12-ounce can of chicken stock and an equal amount of water, in a roasting pan or casserole dish. Cover the dish and bake at 400 degrees for 15 minutes, then reduce the temperature to 350 degrees and bake for an additional 1.5 to 2 hours. If all the liquid evaporates during cooking, add a bit more water, but not too much, as little liquid should remain in the pan when the dish is done. Out of the oven, the meat is fall-off-the-bone tender with a deep-fried taste.

Lard is my preferred oil, both for this recipe and anytime I brown or fry pheasant. You cannot beat it for flavor. Remember your grandmother’s fried chicken? Frying in lard is probably what made it taste so good. I render my own lard, but it can still be found in most grocery stores. Olive oil is my second oil of choice.



Pheasants can be baked or slow cooked whole or butchered into pieces for other dishes.

Another quick and easy recipe for pheasant legs and wings, or again the entire bird, is slow-cooked pheasant with sauerkraut. In the morning, flour and season the pheasant pieces with salt, pepper and dried sweet basil and brown them in a skillet. If in a hurry, forego the flouring and browning. Next, place a layer of the browned or raw pieces in a Crock-Pot, followed by a layer of sauerkraut, apple slices and a sprinkling of caraway seed. Continue the layering, leaving room at the top of the Crock-Pot for a few potatoes. I set the Crock-Pot at a high temperature for a few hours, then reduce the heat and cook until supper time. Fans of the old Bohemia Café in Omaha will enjoy this recipe. If you prefer the dish Bavarian style, sprinkle a little brown sugar between the layers.

Also tasty are browned pheasant legs and wings slow cooked in a cup or two of red cooking wine. Or slow cook them in chicken stock, and once tender, use a fork



Pheasant legs and wings slow cooked with sauerkraut and potatoes make a complete meal.

to shred the meat from the bones. The shredded meat can be used in ways ranging from pheasant salad sandwiches to sautéed in taco spices and added to Mexican dishes.

When butchering pheasants, I sometimes leave the wings and legs attached to the carcass and use them as soup meat. To make soup stock, I gently boil the carcasses in a pot of water for a few hours along with a chopped onion or two, carrots, celery, fresh garlic and parsley and a teaspoon or so each of salt, pepper, sweet basil, rosemary, thyme and sage. When the meat is tender, I pull the carcasses from the pot to cool and then strip the meat from the bones. Next, I strain the broth through a colander to remove small bones and the vegetables and then add the meat back to the broth.



Sweet and sour pheasant soup will keep you warm on a cold winter night.

My favorite soup made with the broth is my own concoction I call sweet and sour pheasant soup. To the broth I add diced sweet potatoes (garden grown ones are the sweetest and make the best soup), parsnips and onions, and then boil it at medium heat for about 30 minutes until the vegetables are tender. Next, I add ½ to 1 cup of apple cider vinegar and a few tablespoons each of real maple syrup and blackstrap or full flavor molasses. Bring the soup back to a boil before serving. I usually ad-lib on the amount of vinegar, syrup and molasses I include, depending on the amount of broth. Start with smaller amounts of these ingredients and slowly add more until the soup is flavorful and has a good balance of sweet and sour. This is a hearty, healthy soup that will keep you warm on a cold winter night.

Hearts, Livers and Gizzards

“Pheasant hearts, livers and gizzards are close in taste and texture to those of a chicken, though they are a bit smaller in size,” said Jenny Nguyen, *NEBRASKAland* associate editor and author of *Hunting for Food*. “If you like one, you will like the other.”

Most people prefer their fowl hearts, livers and gizzards simply floured and fried. In some families, tradition calls for flavoring the holiday turkey stuffing with finely chopped fried hearts and gizzards. Nguyen’s approach to cooking pheasant organ meats is less conventional. “I sprinkle them with salt and pepper, pierce them with a sprig of rosemary and then grill them quickly at a high temperature.” She emphasized quick searing and not cooking them past medium – “pink on the inside.” “If you overcook wild game, it generally does not taste as good,” said Nguyen. “This is even more important with hearts, livers and gizzards, as overcooking brings out their organ flavor and toughens them. This is especially critical with gizzards as they are chewy already.”

She often serves the organs with a citrusy or vinegary sauce or dressing to cut through their richness. Another Nguyen tip, “I bring all meats, including the organ meats, to room temperature before cooking. Otherwise, when cooked to medium or medium rare, the meat will still be cold on the inside, when done on the outside.”

For adventuresome hunters, Nguyen recommends pheasant liver pâté. Though fancy in name, it is rather simple to make. First she sautés the livers to medium rare in butter along with dashes of freshly chopped garlic, rosemary, thyme and cognac. She then blends the cooked livers in a food processor and runs the resulting paste through a colander to remove pieces of rosemary and to provide a smooth texture. She favors the pâté spread on French bread. “I love it, but it is an acquired taste,” said Nguyen.



Grilled pheasant hearts and gizzards, left side of plate, and fried livers, right side of plate, make tempting appetizers.

Nguyen freezes the pheasant hearts, livers and gizzards from several hunts until she has a meal’s worth. She recommends not storing them for long in a refrigerator as the organs are rich in blood, which easily oxidizes when exposed to air, turning the meat brown and stale tasting.

So hunters, next time you harvest a few rooster pheasants, keep all the parts and try a new recipe or two. The results might surprise you. ■

Gerry Steinauer is botanist for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and has been writing and photographing for NEBRASKAland Magazine for more than 20 years.



The Old Wolf Oak Tree

Ponca State Park tree is one of the oldest in Nebraska

By Mike Groenewold, Park Horticulturist

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission properties include some very beautiful and interesting habitats and ecological systems, and each region of the state contains a variety of wetlands, grasslands and woodlands. Consequently, unique plant specimens may be found at our parks and wildlife management areas.

Ponca State Park, one the agency's flagship parks, is located on bluffs overlooking the Missouri River just 2 miles north of the town of Ponca. Growing in the interior of park woodlands is a bur oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*) estimated at 373 years old. This "Old Wolf Tree" was so named and designated as a "Nebraska Heritage Tree" by the Nebraska Community Forestry Council and the Nebraska Forest Service in 2006.

Foresters often name/identify old, large and solitary trees of any species that occupy considerable space in their neck of the woods as "wolf trees," so

named because they are wolfing up space. These old specimens somehow gained a foothold – through superior genetics, a slightly better niche of site conditions or escape by fire or animal browsing – to overtop and outcompete adjacent trees. And with this advantage in growth, a wolf tree can even shade out any seedlings that emerge beneath. Once a tree gains elder status, it will reign supreme over its section of woodlands until it grows old and dies.

The Ponca Wolf Oak was core sampled in 1964, we believe by staff of the now Nebraska Forest Service, and estimated at 320 years. To age a tree, foresters use an increment borer to drill and extract a soda straw-sized core of wood from the tree stem. If the drill can reach the pith center of the tree from the perimeter of the trunk, a sample containing each annual growth ring may be extracted. After adding about five years to the count of rings, to account for seedling emergence and development, a reasonably accurate estimate of the age may be derived. Our current age estimate is determined by adding 53 years to the original estimate in 1964. Colleagues of mine agree that this tree is undoubtedly one of the oldest in Nebraska. As a timeline perspective, this tree may have emerged as a seedling on the year that William Penn, who founded the Pennsylvania Colony, was born.

Currently the Ponca Wolf Oak is 9.8 feet in circumference. Interestingly, the Nebraska Champion Tree Registry, maintained by the Nebraska Forest Service, lists the State Champion (largest) bur oak at 18.7 feet in circumference, which grows somewhere in Peru County. But to my knowledge the State Champion bur oak

"Old bur oaks are like the tribal elders of the forest. Throughout their life they have thrived and they have suffered, but they endure – eventually outliving all their neighbors (including us). They are a patient tree – never in a hurry. They are slow to put leaves on and slow to let them go. Other trees foolishly expend their energy, grow impatiently, and search for their day in the sun. Meanwhile the old elders of the forest witness their foolish and frivolous expenditure of resources. We should all take some good advice from these old oaks."

– Jeff Fields,
Regional Park
Superintendent,
Northeast Region



JEFF FIELDS

has never been core dated. The Ponca Wolf Oak exhibits very smooth bark when compared to typical bur oaks, indicating very slow growth at least in recent years. Slow growth translates to very narrow annual growth rings. So likely the Ponca tree could be much older than the State Champion bur oak, which is twice the circumference.

The park woodlands looked much different during pre-settlement in 1644. Historically, fire was the major ecological force in the Missouri River bluff ecosystem forming a mosaic of plant communities. Dense forests of basswood, red oak, black oak and hickories grew in somewhat fire-protected bottoms and on low north- and east-facing slopes. Higher on these slopes were woodlands dominated by



Ponca State Park sits on the wooded bluffs of the picturesque, unchannelized Missouri River about 4 miles from the town of Ponca. If you haven't visited Ponca, fall is the perfect time. Go to OutdoorNebraska.org/parks for more info about this unique park.

the more drought- and fire-tolerant bur oak. And in southeastern Nebraska chinkapin oak (*Quercus muehlenbergii*) also grow on these drier sites. These dry west- and south-facing slopes and ridge tops supported tallgrass prairie and an oak savannah (prairie with scattered oaks); fire discouraged the encroachment of trees in prairie sites and limited the densities of woodlands in savannah environments. Consequently, the Ponca Wolf Oak probably originally sprouted and developed with only a few other trees on its home acre.

Settlement gradually developed following the Lewis and Clark Expedition in 1804; and, fearful of fire, settlers began extinguishing any fires started by lightning or other sources of ignition. The gradual absence of fire has allowed the establishment of many other mid-canopy and understory species, creating a dense forest canopy often limiting the development of oak regeneration.

Despite increased competition over three centuries, the Ponca Wolf Oak has prevailed and appears healthy. During a recent visit the foliage looked normal, with little apparent damage of fungal blight and insect damage, and only a small percentage of the crown exhibits dieback of branches. I also noticed bulbous callus growth covering most of the limbs that had been removed or died and fallen from the



Sign reads: This oak tree began its life in 1644 and was 143 years old when the U.S. Constitution was signed on Sept. 17, 1787. The tree was 223 years old when Nebraska became a state in 1867.

crown; a good sign of tree vigor. It's anyone's guess how long the tree will survive, but for the short term its future looks promising.

Tree huggers like me can be odd nuts, and we often become emotionally attached to special trees, sometimes assigning a living soul to ancient woodland specimens; and as far out as it seems, we just can't help but wonder

what they have witnessed during their lifetime. How cool it would be if they could share a video story of the change in their landscape, a witness of people and creatures who passed by. ■

Mike Groenewold has been a park horticulturist at the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission since 1977.



The Ponca Wolf Oak has fairly smooth bark in comparison to typical bur oaks.



A section of the core extracted in 1964 (enlarged approximately 300 percent) shows faint growth rings and fire scars.

Fire scar

CLEAR CREEK

A SPECIAL HUNTING AREA FOR WATERFOWLERS

Story and photos by Julie Geiser

Over the years, I've hunted geese and ducks many places, but some of my fondest memories have been made with family and friends at Clear Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA) west of Lake McConaughy. My son shot his first duck from a pit there, our family dogs have retrieved many a bird there,

and the laughs and breakfasts in the blinds are icing on the cake. Best of all this area is open to the public.

Clear Creek WMA is run by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Work is done each year to improve habitat for pheasants, deer and waterfowl, which gives hunters the chance to hunt various species at the WMA. Clear Creek is broken



Julie Geiser and her Labrador retriever, Berkley, after a great day of goose hunting last year at Clear Creek WMA.

PHOTO BY TOM GEISER



The sun peeks over the trees and casts shadows from a decoy spread on a frozen marsh at Clear Creek.

down into four different areas that may be used by the public: a traditional wildlife management area, two refuges and a special hunting area – each having specific regulations.

WMA

The eastern portion of Clear Creek is a traditional wildlife management area open to hunting, trapping and fishing within the appropriate seasons. This area encompasses more than 3,200 acres of riparian woodlands, wetlands, river channel, lake bed and upland grasslands, and offers excellent deer,

turkey, pheasant and dove hunting. Those willing to put in the effort to hike to the river can be rewarded with excellent waterfowl hunting. This area borders the Lake McConaughy State Recreation Area and is available for public access year-round.

SEASONAL REFUGES

Two refuges are included at Clear Creek. The seasonal refuge covers 2,500 acres on the west end of the property, including land on both the north and south sides of the North Platte River. It is open to most hunting,

fishing, trapping and other outdoor activities from Feb. 15 until the Monday before Thanksgiving, when it becomes a waterfowl refuge. The exception is waterfowl hunting, which is only allowed on the wetlands along the east boundary of the refuge.

A portion of Clear Creek is included in the Garden County Refuge, established in 1925 to provide a sanctuary for migrating waterfowl, and is closed to all bird hunting. Extending 110 yards from the North Platte River banks and its side channels throughout Garden County, the area is open to deer hunting during all legal seasons



Clear Creek Wildlife Management Area is located about 4 miles southeast of Lewellen in Garden County. This area encompasses more than 6,000 acres of riparian woodlands, wetlands, river channel, lake bed and upland grasslands. It offers deer, turkey, pheasant, dove, rabbit and squirrel hunting, as well as fishing and mushroom hunting during specific seasons.

until the refuge closes on the Monday before Thanksgiving, at which time it is closed to all access until Feb. 15.

Once the refuges close, they provide sanctuary to thousands of migrating Canada, white-fronted and snow geese, numerous duck species and trumpeter swans throughout the winter months.

SPECIAL HUNTING AREA

The Special Hunting Area (SHA) of Clear Creek consists of about 300 acres, which includes 10 four-person pit blinds, and is open to hunting for waterfowl and other game species until the Monday before Thanksgiving. At that point, the area is open only to those who are assigned a blind through

a drawing held each morning at the Clear Creek check station.

The drawings, conducted by Commission staff at Clear Creek, determine the order of blind selection for each hunting party. Five of the blinds are located in the meadow along the refuge boundary, four on wetlands and one on the North Platte River.

Duck hunters prefer the blinds on the water, numbers six through 10, until it freezes. Hunters in all of the blinds stand a good chance of decoying geese coming and going to and from the refuge and Lake McConaughy. When winter weather pushes new geese down from the north is when hunters have the best success. Weekly updates are available online showing the bird

harvests from each of the blinds.

Up to five blinds are available by reservation. Hunters may apply for dates during August and September, and a drawing is held the first Wednesday in October. Applications are available on the Commission's website, the agency's North Platte office and at the Clear Creek WMA check station. If any advance reservation dates remain open after the drawing, hunters may call the district office in North Platte to reserve one. No more than two advance reservations are allowed per individual per year.

Hunters with reservations have a separate drawing for blind selection; the remaining blinds are allocated by a second drawing. All drawings are

conducted 45 minutes before legal shooting hours for that day, and hunters must check in at the station to be eligible for the drawing.

On weekends, the slots that can be reserved are typically filled, and there may be more hunting parties than there are blinds remaining. On weekdays, however, there is typically room for all who want to hunt. Blinds not filled in the drawing and those vacated during the day are assigned for use on a first-come, first-served basis. There is an 18-shot shell limit per hunter using the blinds, and only non-toxic shot is allowed at all areas of Clear Creek.

Part of the fun of hunting at Clear Creek is meeting the folks who come to join the hunt during the drawing.

Many people have hunted Clear Creek longer than I have – 25 years – and make it a tradition to meet up with hunting partners there, whether they are locals or out-of-staters.

Seasoned hunters at Clear Creek will bring two-wheel carts to haul gear to the blinds or sleds when there is snow on the ground. Some of the blinds have a walk-through door, making it easy for hunters and dogs to get in and out. One blind is wheelchair accessible.

Each blind is equipped with two dozen goose decoys for hunters to use. Waders or hip boots should be on hand when hunting blinds six through 10, as there are wetland areas around them. Hunters are also encouraged to use hunting dogs to retrieve downed birds

from wetland areas, the North Platte River and the refuge.

Downed birds may be retrieved from the seasonal refuge by hunters or a dog sent for a retrieve, but no firearms are allowed on the refuge, and no decoys may be placed past the refuge boundary signs. ■

For more information about Clear Creek WMA and opportunities there, visit OutdoorNebraska.org/waterfowlchecklist/.

Planning Ahead for the Hunt

Hunters may hunt only with the group they registered with for the drawing. Resident hunters age 16 and older and all nonresidents must have a valid Nebraska hunting permit, habitat stamp, Nebraska waterfowl stamp, federal migratory waterfowl stamp (duck stamp) and HIP registration. Permits and stamps are not sold on the area, so purchase these required permits and stamps in advance.

A Migratory Bird Harvest Information Program number (HIP) is required by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Nebraska Game and Parks Commission regulations. HIP registration is free and is available 24 hours a day by calling toll-free 888-403-2473 or online at OutdoorNebraska.org.

Aside from the hunting season, Clear Creek WMA is popular with hikers, mushroom hunters and birdwatchers. Birders enjoy some excellent viewing opportunities of waterfowl, swans, cranes, songbirds, raptors and shore birds found throughout the year in the wetland meadows of the WMA.

There are 10 blinds, each equipped with two dozen decoys, for waterfowl hunters utilizing the special hunting area.



PHOTO BY JULIE GEISER

Purple-headed Sneezeweed

A lone population on the lower Platte

Story and photos by Gerry Steinauer, Botanist

In July of 2016, Mike Bullerman, Prairie Plains Resource Institute ecologist, called me: “The sneezeweeds at Fertig Prairie look different and they are blooming way too early,” he said. “Are there two sneezeweed species in the state?”

“No, we just have common sneezeweed,” I responded. “How are the Fertig plants different?” He described plants shorter than common sneezeweed (*Helenium autumnale*) with purple-centered flower-heads, not yellow. Most peculiarly, the plants were blooming in mid-July, well before the late-August bloom period of common sneezeweed, a widespread species in Nebraska growing in wet meadows and shallow marshes. I suggested that he photograph the plant next time at Fertig, a 45-acre, Wachiska Audubon Society-owned Platte River wet meadow in Colfax County. So he did.

The photo and a quick check of *Steiermark's Flora of Missouri* identified the plant as purple-headed sneezeweed (*H. flexuosum*), a species never before recorded for our state and whose nearest known population is near Kansas City, Missouri, more than 250 miles from Fertig Prairie. This species is widespread over the eastern United States growing in similar habitats as common sneezeweed, but unlike its close relative, it does not range out onto the dry Plains.

This past July, Bullerman and I visited Fertig. Expecting only a few plants, I was surprised by the thousands of purple-headed sneezeweeds that

bloomed among the bluestem and cordgrass. Sneezeweeds contain bitter and potentially toxic lactones and are avoided by livestock, allowing them to occasionally proliferate in overgrazed pastures. This, however, was no overgrazed pasture, but a quality hay meadow with lanceleaf blazing star, Indian-plantain and other disturbance-sensitive plants. Wachiska Audubon only recently purchased the meadow from the Fertig family under whose care this rich flora survived.

To document its occurrence, we collected and pressed several purple-headed sneezeweed specimens for deposit at the University of Nebraska's Bessey Herbarium. The Fertig sneezeweeds ranged from a foot to over 2 feet tall and had fibrous roots that reached only shallowly into the loamy sand soil. The lance-shaped, up to 4-inch-long leaves tapered at their base to narrow wings that extended down the stem. The wedged-shaped, yellow ray flowers, which ringed the flower-heads' outer edge, had three-lobed tips. This latter feature and the “winged stems” distinguish sneezeweeds from “look-alike” members of the aster family, such as sunflowers and coneflowers.

Origins of the Fertig Sneezeweeds

For nearly 18 years, while seed collecting for prairie restorations, Bullerman has hiked the wet meadow complex that survives in the Platte

Nebraska's only known population of purple-headed sneezeweed was recently discovered at the Fertig Prairie in Colfax County.





Common sneezeweed flowers greet the early morning sun in a wet meadow near Worms, Nebraska, in Merrick County. The flower heads of sneezeweeds, as well as other members of the aster family, are composed of numerous small flowers that collectively mimic typical flowers and act to attract pollinators. Showy, single-petaled “ray flowers” line the flower heads’ outer edge, while hundreds of yellow, petal-less “disk flowers” occupy their center.



The “winged stem” of common sneezeweed. The wings are often more prominent on lower stems.

bottoms of Colfax and western Dodge counties, including the Fertig prairie, and never before encountered purple-headed sneezeweed. This makes me believe that, indeed, the Fertig plants represent our state’s only population, which in turn, begs the question, how did they get there?

Similarly, other plant species that range over the eastern United States have unexplainable, isolated populations along eastern Nebraska streams. Our state’s only colony of the delicate, white-flowered snow trillium, for example, grows in oak woods on limestone bluffs above Weeping Water Creek in Cass County, 200 miles from its nearest known population in northwestern Missouri.

Perhaps purple-headed sneezeweed has existed in eastern Nebraska for millennia and the Fertig plants are relicts of an ancient, once widespread population in the region. For several thousand years after the close of the last Ice Age, which ended roughly 12,000 years ago, the Great Plains’ climate was wetter than at present. Plausibly, during this mesic period, purple-headed sneezeweed migrated up the Missouri River valley from the



Purple-headed sneezeweed is abundant in portions of the Fertig Prairie, a 45-acre, Platte River valley wet meadow.

southeast into eastern Nebraska. When the climate began to dry starting about 8,000 years ago, the sneezeweed’s range would have contracted eastward, leaving only scattered populations in our moist, eastern stream valleys. Since Euroamerican settlement in the mid-1800s, nearly all the region’s bottomland meadows have been plowed or severely degraded by overgrazing and invasive plants, leaving the Fertig sneezeweeds as sole survivors.

Another possibility: purple-headed sneezeweed established more recently in the Fertig Prairie via long-distance seed dispersal. Historically, large ungulates

were abundant in the region. Could a young bull elk, for example, forced from its home range – say in northern Missouri – by rival males, have carried sneezeweed seed, stowed deep in its fur or undigested in its gut, to the Platte valley? Conceivably, one spring morning long ago, a Sandhill crane rose from its meadow roost far to the southeast with sneezeweed seed mud-caked to its scaly toes, its destination the lower Platte.

Humans are also known transporters of seed. For example, a recent study of visitors to Antarctica, whose shoes, clothes and gear were vacuum-searched, found that nearly all of

them unknowingly carried seeds of non-native plants to the continent. Likewise, westward trudging settlers on the Mormon Trail, which passed near the Fertig Prairie, may have carried sneezeweed seed in mud plastered beneath their wagons or trapped in the laces of their well-worn boots.

The name “sneezeweed” originates from Native Americans’ use of the plant’s dried flower heads as a snuff to induce sneezing to cure headaches, colds and blocked sinuses. Some tribes used the snuff in a similar manner to aid in the expulsion of the afterbirth. One can imagine the Pawnees, who

occupied the lower Platte valley in historic times, trading with the neighboring Otoe Tribe, whose range dipped into northwestern Missouri, for purple-headed sneezeweed snuff. Composed of dried flowers, the snuff conceivably contained viable seeds, and its ultimate post-sneeze destination would be the ground and germination.

A genetic study might solve the mystery of the Fertig sneezeweeds: Are they relicts of an ancient, widespread population in eastern Nebraska or did they establish more recently via seed? I lean toward the former theory, but you can ponder your own ideas. ■

A Dry Idea

The Sticky Business of Wader Repair

By Justin Haag

Patching waders can be a futile effort. If you want to just make it through the season it can often be accomplished with some success, however.

As a fisheries biologist with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Joe Rydell of Alliance is in waders as much as anyone I know. Rydell and his coworkers spend many of their days in the water completing fish surveys and other projects that help improve angler success. Their waders take a beating and they are often given the opportunity to test their patching skills.

The neoprene waders of today have been a great advancement in comfort, camouflage and warmth, but Rydell said they aren't nearly as easy to repair as the rubber waders of yesteryear.

"You could take tire patches and repair those old rubber waders all day long," he said.

When it comes to fixing a leak in newer waders, Rydell said the best bet is to refer to the instructions on patching kits that come with most new waders. It's not uncommon for wader users to misplace that kit, though, so here are his recommendations.

The first step, Rydell said, is to give the waders a good inspection. If the boots are cracked or other parts of the waders are suffering from dry rot, it's time to invest in a new pair.

Some leaks are trickier than others, and small pinhole leaks away from seams are the best candidates for patching.

"Once you start noticing dampness from a leak in the seams, which usually begins in the crotch, or at the top of the boots, you'd better start putting money away for a new



When the boots of waders become cracked, such as this, there is not much that can be done to save them.

pair of waders," he said.

If you have decided to proceed, choose your adhesive. A brand name product like AquaSeal is probably best to use as the patching adhesive, but Rydell said he's had success with clear silicone – the type sold in the home improvement aisle for use in caulking guns.

Next, to pinpoint the leak, take your dry waders and fill them with water. Once water starts seeping through, which shouldn't take long, use chalk to mark the leaks.

After the waders dry out, it's time to patch. Cut a piece of patching material, such as neoprene or another impermeable flexible fabric, and cut to size. A product such as acetone, along with some light sanding, will help ensure a good bond. Once the area has been prepped, apply the adhesive around the hole, cover with patching material, and cover with another layer of adhesive.

Allow your work to dry for a day or so and get back to enjoying the great outdoors. With the help of your patching job, and perhaps a little luck, you'll come home dry when the outing is over. ■



Joe Rydell of Alliance fishes in waders at Blue Lake near the Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge.

PHOTOS BY JUSTIN HAAG

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Flying Ants

A Wood River prairie introduction.

By Evan Barrientos

On a warm November afternoon I was walking through a prairie near Wood River when I realized I was not alone. Slowly, it dawned on me that I was standing below thousands, maybe millions, of flying insects. As I gazed around I saw dozens of swarms the size of cars, incessantly whirling and shifting. Slightly hypnotized, I walked underneath one of the swarms and saw many of the insects landing on the grasses below. Up close, I could see they had slender waists, suggesting they might be ants or wasps.

wings in order to convert her wing muscle into food to feed her offspring via glandular secretions. Then, by herself, she crawls away to start her own colony.

Interestingly, Trager explained that the ant in my photo is actually an unnamed species. There are currently three different ant species all being called *Myrmica americana* because two of them haven't been officially named yet. The unnamed species I encountered is actually quite common, which just shows how much we still have to learn about the amazing insects in our own backyards. ■

Evan Barrientos is the monitoring and outreach assistant for the The Nature Conservancy in southwestern Oregon. He has a passion for communicating ecological restoration and conservation through photography, videography and blogging.



PHOTOS BY EVAN BARRIENTOS

Caught in a strand of silk, this flying ant awaits a jumping spider's grasp.

Several of the insects were caught in strands of spider silk I had never seen before but suddenly were everywhere. While I was looking at one snared insect, I noticed something black and fuzzy scuttling toward it. After a moment of hiding, a jumping spider darted over to the insect and carried it away. This made me wonder: were the silk strands there by coincidence, or did the spiders realize there was a bonanza of food overhead and hastily cast lines like fishermen at a salmon run?

This experience left me with many questions. First and foremost: what the heck had I seen? To find out, I sent photos to James Trager, an ant expert who works for the Missouri Botanical Garden. He instantly identified the insects to be a species of ant called *Myrmica americana*. According to Trager, male *Myrmica* ants swarm together in order to attract females to mate. Having been drawn below the swarm myself, I can see why this works! During the swarm, males descend to the curious females watching below and mate with them, if they can avoid the predators. Males are so zealous that dozens will compete over a single female, forming what some call a "mating ball." The females are no less dedicated. After mating, she pulls out her own



Ants swarm above a tallgrass prairie in Nebraska.

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Hunting for Mentors

Prepare now for changing a person's life forever.

By Jeff Kurrus

There may never be a better time to take a kid hunting than November. To watch a youngster's eyes bug out after seeing their first covey rise or flock of mallards making one last turn toward the decoys before fully committing is priceless.

But simple hunts can be just as rewarding. Some of my most pleasurable hunting experiences as a kid were squirrel hunts, and now I'm starting these hunts with my own family.

November is also the time for the deer rut, where bucks often lose control of all logical thoughts and begin chasing does.

But it doesn't take a snorting buck in rut to do it. It doesn't hurt, mind you, but every trip in nature becomes an

outdoor classroom for a young hunter when they are allowed to walk the edge of a field or through a game trail in the woods.

What if you don't know all the answers to the questions that they'll ask? Simply shrug and say, "I don't know." This moment then becomes an opportunity for further investigation by both the mentor and mentee. These hunts are always learning experiences for everyone involved. And in a month like November, there is a lot that can be learned together.

In addition, if you enjoy these mentoring sessions, visit OutdoorNebraska.org/mentoredhunts to learn about additional outreach opportunities or OutdoorNebraska.org/

huntereducation to learn about becoming part of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's Mentored Youth Archery Program for the fall of 2018.

In this program, qualified Bowhunter Education instructors, who are also veteran hunters, are paired with bowhunter education graduates ages 12 to 17 for a full archery season.

Mentors teach participants how to scout, safely hang tree stands, and walk new archers through each step of a hunt.

Regardless of what you decide, make sure you do something. Take a friend, neighbor or youngster into the field and continue our outdoor heritage. ■



Abigale Bennetts, left, JP Wachter and Zachary Bennetts, all of Lincoln, archery hunt at Oak Glen Wildlife Management Area in Seward County.

PHOTOS BY JEFF KURRUS

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Winter “Kid-approved” Wildlife Crafts

A to-do list when the weather outside becomes frigid.

By Allie Claypool, Outdoor Education Assistant

You have probably noticed the weather outside is becoming a bit more frosty. The critters of Nebraska feel this change more than we do. You may have observed an abundance of birds flying in the sky or that the neighborhood squirrels look extra plump this time of year.

With the cold comes snow and with snow comes snow days, which leave you and your family trapped inside. Well, you're in luck, because the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission has a few fun ideas you can try with your family when staying home is the best option.

Homemade Bird Feeders

This is an easy craft you can make using what you already have around your house. This activity doesn't have to be something you overthink. Let your creativity come out.

What you could use:

- Ribbon, old shoe laces, or pipe cleaners.
- Bird seed. Do not use whole grains of rice.
- Gelatin or peanut butter.
- Pine cones, cookie cutters,

hollowed out orange peels, plastic pop bottles, or anything you can find around your house to help keep the seed contained.

Once you have completed your bird feeders, find a good place outside to hang them. It is best if you can hang it near a window so you can encourage your kids to watch for bird visitors.



Make a Bird Journal

Add to the fun by creating a bird journal with your kids. Encourage them to draw the birds they see on a journal page. All you'll need for this is construction paper, printer paper, and markers or crayons. I recommend



buying or borrowing the book *Birds of Nebraska Field Guide* by Stan Tekiela to help your kids learn more about what birds they might see.



Create a Hibernation Fort

Make a fun activity by creating a pillow and blanket fort with your kids while teaching them about animals who hibernate to survive the cold winter. Hibernation is defined as a state of inactivity when an animal's body temperature lowers, their breathing becomes slower, and their heart rate and metabolism also slow down. Some Nebraska animals that hibernate include striped skunks, prairie dogs and bats. ■



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▲ This picture approximately from 1959 shows me, now 85 years old, catching fish at the Kohrs farm pond near Johnson, Nebraska.

Six of the women had attended rural Zion Lutheran Church, married, had families and got together once a month and called ourselves the Round Robin bunch. When our families were grown, we no longer got together socially, but continued to keep in touch by writing the Round Robin letter, mailing the fat envelope to all six couples and starting a new chain letter again.

The now remaining persons telephone each other occasionally. The Good Life in Nebraska.

— Inez Gebers, Johnson, Nebraska



▲ From Webster County during the late 1930s – a Sunday afternoon hunt! My uncle Carl Pearson had been to the county church (note the tie) that morning.

My father worked at night on the railroad so he and his friends could make an afternoon hunt.

Pictured left to right are unknown, Roy Shore, Roy Bramble and Carl Pearson.

— Russell A. Bramble, Hastings, Nebraska

At my grandparents' farm northwest of Madison in the late 1940s or early 1950s. I am the only girl in the picture, and I can remember that day some 67 years ago. All my uncles who lived in Omaha would come for the weekend to fish in the Elkhorn River. They always hoped to catch enough fish for the supper table that night. You'll notice they all had bottles of beer brought from Omaha and orange or grape soda for my brother and me. Pictured left to right are: Back row – my dad Joe Hekrdle; uncle Joe Pavlis, Jr.; grandpa Joe Pavlis; my uncle's cousin Frank Kulicek and uncle Marty Novy. Front row – brother Tom Hekrdle; uncle Johnny Yak; and myself. All gone now except Tom and me.

— Mary Ann Vacha, Madison, Nebraska



Send contributions to: Portraits from the Past, NEBRASKAland Magazine, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370. Or e-mail to Tim.Reigert@Nebraska.gov. Photos should show people enjoying Nebraska outdoor activities, such as camping, boating, hunting or fishing, and must have been taken before 1980. 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.

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Venison Cottage Pie

An English/Irish favorite made with wild game.

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

Who doesn't love a good meat pie? This one is as easy as it gets. There's no rolling out dough to speak of – no pastry to make. There's meat, potatoes, and gravy, and it doesn't have to look perfect. The more "rustic," the better.

Servings: 4-6

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Cooking Time: 1 hour 20 minutes

Ingredients:

- 3 large russet potatoes, peeled
- ½ cup milk
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 ounces extra sharp white cheddar, plus more
- 1 tablespoon oil
- 1½ pounds ground venison
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh thyme
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 3 dashes Worcestershire sauce
- ½ cup dry red wine
- 1 bay leaf
- 2 cups beef broth
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon freshly cracked pepper
- ½ teaspoon celery seed
- Frozen peas and carrots, to taste
- Fresh parsley for garnish

1. Cut peeled potatoes into large chunks and place into a pot. Cover with water, add a couple pinches of salt and cook until tender. Drain potatoes, return to the pot and mash with milk and butter. Shred/grate cheese and mix into the potatoes. Season to taste and set aside.

2. Heat oil in a wide-bottomed pot over medium heat. Add chopped

onion and a pinch of salt and cook until browned, but do not burn – lower heat if necessary. Add thyme, garlic and tomato paste. Stir for 1 minute.

3. Turn heat up to medium-high and add ground venison. Brown meat and then add flour. Thoroughly combine the flour into the meat-onion mixture and cook for 2 minutes, stirring frequently. Next, add wine and stir frequently until wine evaporates; lower heat if necessary.

4. Add beef broth and bay leaf. Simmer for 20-30 minutes, or until liquid turns into a thick gravy, stirring occasionally. Add Worcestershire sauce, celery seed, salt and pepper. Take off heat and stir in frozen peas and carrots. Discard

bay leaf.

5. Pour meat into an 8x8-inch baking dish. Spread mashed potatoes over the top and sprinkle with more shredded cheddar. Place pie onto the top rack of your oven and broil until mashed potato topping becomes golden. (Place a cookie sheet underneath the baking dish to catch any liquid that might bubble over.) Scoop out meat pie onto serving plates and garnish with fresh parsley. ■

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



RECIPE PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN, DEER PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

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The Three-legged Doe

Last year I was hunting from my blind when the doe pictured above walked in front of me about 35 yards away. At first I didn't see that she was missing a front right leg through the phragmites. After snapping a few photos and checking my settings I saw that she only had three legs. I impatiently waited to see if she would turn the other direction so I could see her other side. My curiosity was running rampant as I attempted to form a hypothesis on what might have happened to her. She wasn't in any distress, and I didn't see any signs of blood, so it must have been an old wound or perhaps hereditary. She stood quietly facing the same direction as if she was waiting for something when a pair of fawns caught up to her. They paused to look and sniff the air and on their way they went. But I couldn't help but wonder what happened to her leg.

It's amazing to me how resilient deer can be, but it shouldn't be that much of a surprise. Deer are survivalists by instinct and will. No matter how deep the scars, deer seem to prevail and the saying of "whatever doesn't kill you will make you stronger" seems to hold true for them.

*Julie Geiser
September 21, 2017*



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