



Mike Livingston of Lincoln and "Jag," a yellow Labrador, watch intently as a flock of mallards returns to a warmwater slough from a nearby cornfield in Knox County. Photo by Doug Steinke.

Published by the
NEBRASKA
— GAME  PARKS —

NebraskalandMagazine.com
OutdoorNebraska.org
See You Out There.

Published by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission since 1926

NEBRASKAland

October 2010



NebraskalandMagazine.com
\$4.95
7 25274 81144 1 10>

INSIDE
Elk Making a Comeback in Nebraska
Mountain Biking the Pine Ridge • 1960s Loup Duck Hunting
Outside in Autumn • Smallmouths - the Overlooked Bass



NEBRASKAland

Volume 88, Number 8, October 2010

FEATURES

14 Is It History Yet?

The 1960s was a pivotal decade in waterfowl hunting as old ways and equipment were abandoned and new technology introduced. Camouflaged clothing replaced duck-brown hunting coats and plastic replaced paper-hull shotshells and papier mâché decoys. TEXT AND PHOTOS BY JON FARRAR

20 Ride West!

Nebraska's Pine Ridge has some of the best mountain biking in the nation. BY HOPE SCHEIMO

24 Autumn - Choose Wisely

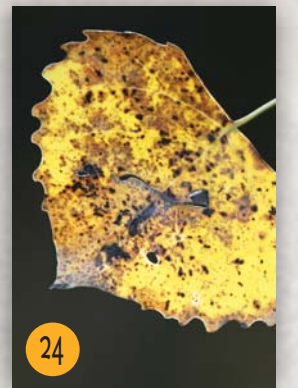
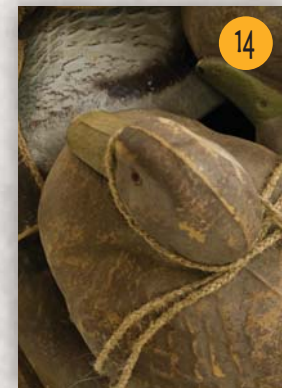
The question is not if you should be outside during what could be Nebraska's most enjoyable outdoor month, but what you should do once you're there. BY JEFF KURRUS

30 Return to the Plains - Elk Comeback Not Yet Finished

Not long after elk returned to Nebraska in the Pine Ridge in the late 1960s, the species survived a move to eliminate them. In the years since, elk have flourished there and reclaimed more of their former range, begging the question: How many elk can Nebraska hold? TEXT AND PHOTOS BY ERIC FOWLER

38 Smallmouths - The Overlooked Bass

While Nebraska's smallmouth fishery is often overlooked by anglers throughout the state, there are many public waters capable of producing quality fish all year long. Here's where these waters are and how to catch smallies once you arrive. TEXT AND PHOTOS BY JEFF KURRUS



DEPARTMENTS

Comment	4
Mixed Bag	6
Outdoor Business	44
Parks & Places	45
In the Kitchen	46
Classifieds	48
Portraits from the Past	50

Cover: A bull elk moves through the cottonwood forest along the North Platte River near Lewellen. See story on page 30. Photo by Eric Fowler.
Opposite: Backlit by the sun on a fall afternoon, sand bluestem seed heads glow in a Sandhills draw. Photo by Eric Fowler.

NEBRASKAland (VOL. 88 / NO. 8, ISSN 0028-1964) is published monthly, except for the combined Jan./Feb. and Aug./Sept. issues, by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, 2200 N. 33rd St., Lincoln, NE. Periodicals postage paid at Lincoln, Nebraska, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to NEBRASKAland, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370.



Chomp, Chomp, Chomp

The grasshopper invasion, after the wet spring, was a sight to see in the Sandhills this summer. You could hear the hum of the hoppers' wings and, as portrayed in the movie "A Bug's Life," you could almost hear them chewing the leaves. You definitely saw the destruction left behind by their uninterrupted assault.

My daughter Brittney, who is looking into how to make photography her career, captured this photo outside our house

Loralyn O'Kief
Wood Lake, Nebraska



Sandpit Jellyfish

I thought I would share this unusual find with you. Please feel free to share this with your readers.

Jellyfish in Nebraska? Yes – just another of God's little surprises for us.

This is the second time in three years our little sandpit lake in the Gibbon area has had jellyfish show up.

Everywhere you look you can see these little fluffy-looking balls with a clear white "X" in the center floating around.

Three years ago I found them around the Fourth of July and they were gone by September. The last two years didn't produce any. This year they showed up in late-August and seem to be far more abundant than before. They are dime to penny size on average. I enjoy collecting samples and supplying local schools with something new to study. They remind me of a "living lava lamp," just floating up and down all day long in a jar.

Keep looking in your lakes – you never know what might show up.

Dave Borman
Gibbon, Nebraska

Baby Badger

I found the article entitled "The North American Badger" in the 2010 August/September issue of *NEBRASKAland* to be very interesting.

I had a pet badger when I was a young lad. We used to dig coyote dens and once we dug one and it turned out to be a badger den. Since I was the smallest one of the crew, I had to crawl down into the den and found a tiny badger – it's eyes were not even open yet. I raised him until he was nearly full-grown and one night he got out of his cage, got in the chicken coop and killed 23 chickens. That was the end of my pet badger, "Gruffy."

Dale Zikmund
Kearney, Nebraska

NEBRASKAland Visitor Letters

We want to thank all 143 readers that sent e-mails and letters for last issue's visitor, a **pillbug** on page 38 (see page 13 for the winner, rules and this issue's hint). Here are just a few of the many wonderful responses we received:

I am totally charmed by the addition of your clever visitor. Having survived a career as a graphic designer and continuing with my obsession as an avid bird watcher, I have considerable pride thinking my eyes are pretty darn sharp. An added plus: I really like insects. Well, *NEBRASKAland*, your magazine has never had the workout it now receives. I have to save each issue so I can check the whereabouts of what I totally missed. This is so much fun even though I am truly humbled. Kudos to your design team,

Bonnie Bedford-White
Coarsegold, California

As a poor boy growing up, the only pets I had were the "rollie-pollie" bugs (some called them armadillo bugs) that traveled the crack roadways of our sidewalk.

Although I've NEVER seen them in the cornfields, (ref page 38, Aug/Sept issue of *NEBRASKAland* w/corn cob) I have found them housed within the morel's collected from the central Platte River Valley!

Ken Fankhauser,
Kearney Nebraska

My dad (originally from Ainsworth) is an avid reader of *NEBRASKAland* and just told me last month about the visitor to look for. He had never found it. So this month I was curious and got very excited when I found it. It's on the top left corner of page 38. I've always just called it a roly polly bug but Google has many other names for it (pill bug, sow bug, *Isopoda Armadillidiidae*, woodlouse, etc). So take whichever works best. I look forward to looking for something next month!

Kelsey Rohwer
Knoxville, Tennessee

I found the pillbug on page 38. The name of this issue is *NEBRASKAland* August-September 2010 and on the front is says

"Nebraska City's Applejack Festival." We just got this issue off the newstand. Thank you.

Margaret Karnatz
Davenport, Nebraska

The pillbug isn't really a bug at all. As a crustacean in the order Isopoda, it is actually more closely related to crayfish than insects. Pillbugs feed on decaying vegetation, and can often be found in moist areas under rocks and logs. They roll up into tight balls for protection, which is likely how they got their other common name, roly-poly.



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

Statement of ownership and monthly circulation of NEBRASKAland Magazine		
Owner and publisher: Nebraska Game and Parks Commission		
Editor: Doug Carroll		
Headquarters of Publisher and Publication: 2200 N. 33rd St., Lincoln, NE 68503		
Stockholders, Bondholders, Mortgage and Security Holders: None		
	Average number of copies of each issue during preceding 12 months	Single issue nearest to filing date
A. Total Copies Printed (net press run)	28,028	27,345
B. Paid Circulation		
1. Single-copy sales	2,937	2,959
2. Mail subscriptions	23,241	22,853
C. Total Paid Circulation	26,762	25,125
D. Free Distribution by Mail	360	360
E. Free Distribution Outside the Mail	397	397
F. Total Free Distribution	757	757
G. Total Distribution	26955	26841
H. Copies Not Distributed	1,073	504
I. Total	28,028	27,345
J. Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation	97%	97%

Send your comments to:
Doug Carroll, Editor
NEBRASKAland Magazine
P.O. Box 30370
Lincoln, NE 68503
or e-mail doug.carroll@ngpc.ne.gov. Please include your postal address and telephone number. Letters may be condensed and edited for clarity. Photographs are welcome and will be returned.

Story and photo submissions can be sent to the same address. Include a self-addressed stamped envelope for mailed submissions. The publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited material.

Under federal and/or state law, discrimination is prohibited on the basis of race, color, religion, age, gender, marital status, national origin, disability or political affiliation. If you think you have been discriminated against in any program, activity or facility by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission or want more information, contact the Commission in Lincoln, NE, at (402) 471-0641 or the Equal Opportunity Commission, Lincoln, NE, (402) 471-2024, TTY/TDD (402) 471-4693.

NEBRASKAland Magazine

Published by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission since 1926

COMMISSION

Director Rex Amack
Assistant Directors Roger Kuhn, Kirk Nelson, Sam Sidner

Commissioners
Chairman - Jerrod Burke, Curtis
Vice Chairman - Mick Jensen, Blair
2nd Vice Chairman - Ron Stave, Waterloo
Dr. Mark Pinkerton, Wilber
Dr. Kent Forney, Lincoln
Lynn Berggren, Broken Bow
Rex Fisher, Omaha
Mark Spurgin, Paxton
Norris Marshall, Kearney

CONSERVATION OFFICERS

PANHANDLE Officer	City	Phone (308)
Jim Zimmerman (S)	Gering	763-2940
Scott Brandt	Gering	631-0663
Heath Packett	Gordon	360-0682
Dennis Thompson	Ogallala	289-0755
Dan Zuehlke	Ogallala	289-3399
Doug Pollard	Oshkosh	778-7101
Frank Miller	Valentine	(402)389-0444
Dan Kling	Harrison	430-0572

SOUTHWEST Officer

City	Phone (308)
Roger Thompson (S)	N. Platte 535-8025
Ray Dierking	Brkn. Bow 870-0322
George Sund	Cambridge 655-0028
Michael Thome	Cozad 529-8146
Matt Andrews	Elwood 746-2418
Dirk Greene	Imperial 882-0015
Virgil Gosch	McCook 340-2440
Dudley Sorensen	N. Platte 530-0016
Rich Routh	Rep. City 920-0367

SOUTH-CENTRAL Officer

City	Phone (308)
Jerry Pecha (Sup.)	Kearney 865-5327
Jeff Jones	Clay Center(402)762-5022
Terry Brentzel	Doniphan (402)469-5795
Randy Pomplun	Fullerton 550-0489
Darin Gress	Hebron (402)768-8665
Dale Johnson	Kearney 440-3847
Robert Finke	Milford (402)947-1363

NORTHEAST Officer

City	Phone (402)
Tom Zimmer (Sup.)	Norfolk 370-3374
Dale Davis	Bassett 760-0712
Steve Oberg	Columbus 910-3366
Daniel Roberts	Fremont 719-1108
Jon Reeves	Kennard 889-8508
Marion Shafer	Norfolk 992-7590
Pat George	O'Neill 340-0787
Tim Williams	Neligh 929-0051
Cory Krause	West Point 380-6410

SOUTHEAST Officer

City	Phone (402)
Duane Arp (Sup.)	Gretna 332-2965
Sean McKeethan	Ashland 521-0159
William Krause	Auburn 274-8063
Mike Luben	Colon 443-6392
Douglas Kramer	Lincoln 890-6465
Dina Barta	Lincoln 890-6463
Stacey Lewton	Lincoln 890-7140
Levi Krause	Louisville 949-0593
Russell Mort	Nebr. City 209-1506
Dan Evasco	Papillion 616-5961
Jeff Clauson	Waterloo 658-7057

ADMINISTRATION Officer

City	Phone (402)
Ted Blume (Adm.)	Lincoln 471-5531
Craig Stover (Asst.)	Lincoln 471-5532
Wes Loos (Asst.)	Lincoln 471-5591
Rod Loos (Asst.)	Ogallala (308)284-8056

Nebraska Wildlife Crimestoppers 1-800-742-7627

NEBRASKA GAME & PARKS

www.OutdoorNebraska.org

4 NEBRASKALAND • OCTOBER 2010

OCTOBER 2010 • NEBRASKALAND 5



PHOTO BY LUKE KATHOL

Wood Ducks

Elizabeth Mack

Fall is the time Nebraskans begin to see the annual migration of wood ducks as they fly south from northern breeding areas, with numbers usually peaking in mid- to late-October. Their ideal nesting spots include streams, wetlands, shallow farm ponds and lakes with mature woodlands nearby. Wood ducks most often move as singles or pairs and can be found in large numbers along the Platte River and wetlands along the Missouri River. Breeding populations can be found across Nebraska, though numbers are higher in the eastern part of the state, where tree cavities for nesting are more readily available. Some wood ducks have been found to nest in hollow tree cavities as high as 40 feet off the ground.

The male wood duck can be identified by its brilliant coloring, often considered the most stunning of all waterfowl. Its Latin name, *Aix sponsa*, translates to “water bird in bridal dress.” The iridescent green and purplish head is bordered by a thin white line from its striking red eyes to the end of the crest, with another narrow white stripe from the red and black bill to the tip of the crest. The wood duck’s burgundy chest offers a sharp contrast to its golden sides and white throat.

In the last half of the nineteenth

century and beginning of the twentieth century, wood duck populations decreased so significantly that they were in danger of extinction. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 and hunting restrictions on wood ducks imposed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in the 1940s and 50s prevented further losses. Eradication of bottomland hardwood forests – their favored habitat – kept their numbers down, but the introduction of nesting boxes in the last two decades seems to have helped the population.

In 2004, Bluebirds Across Nebraska (BAN) received a grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust Fund to finance a wood duck restoration project, which included introducing nesting boxes across the state. Steve Eno, former executive director of BAN, says the population numbers show a marked improvement since the inception of the program: “We have seen notable increases in the wood duck population across Nebraska since the introduction of over 250 nesting boxes across the state, most notably in Otoe County.”

Significant improvements in wetlands conditions across the Plains states in 2009 continue to improve nesting conditions for wood ducks, according to the USFWS. Current populations remain stable or are increasing – an encouraging sign for this popular game bird.

Upcoming Events

Here is a list of upcoming outdoor events across Nebraska. For more information about these and other events, click on the calendar at www.OutdoorNebraska.org.

September 18-19

- Arbor Lodge/AppleJack Festival – Arbor Lodge State Historical Park and the town of Nebraska City are host to this annual event. Call (402) 873-7222

September 18-19

- 6th Annual Missouri River Outdoor Expo – Ponca State Park. Call (402) 755-2284

September 18-19

- 7th Annual Big Mac Fall Classic/Walleye Tournament – Lake McConaughy SRA. Call (308) 284-8800

October 1-3

- Missouri River History Conference-Agricultural Frontier & the Missouri River Valley – Ponca State Park. Call (402) 755-2284

October 1-3

- 2nd Annual Heritage Farm Weekend – Ponca State Park. Call (402) 755-2284

October 2-3

- Living History Days – Fort Atkinson SHP. Call (402) 468-5611

October 9, 15-16, 22-23

- Haunted Hollow – Indian Cave State Park. Call (402) 883-2575

October 10

- Living History Events – Arbor Lodge State Historical Park. Call (402) 873-7222

October 16, 23

- Hallowfest – Ponca State Park. Call (402) 755-2284

October 17

- Living History Events – Arbor Lodge State Historical Park. Call (402) 873-7222

October 22-24

- Holiday Craft Show and Old West Cookout – Eugene T. Mahoney State Park. Call (402) 944-2523

November 1

- Ticket Sale for Annual Historical Christmas Dinner – Fort Robinson State Park. Call (308) 665-2900

NEBRASKA

Pheasants Forever & Quail Forever

EVENTS

Nebraska Fall Banquet Dates

Date	Chapter	Location
8-26-10	Kearney County PF	Minden
9-9-10	Dakota/Thurston PF	South Sioux City
9-16-10	Burt County PF	Tekamah
9-18-10	Platte River PF	Lexington
10-9-10	Cody Ringnecks PF	North Platte
10-9-10	Upper Big Nemaha PF	Tecumseh
10-14-10	Loup/Platte PF	Grand Island
10-22-10	Cass County PF Youth Banquet	Plattsmouth
10-23-10	Oregon Trail PF	Gering
10-26-10	Custer County PF	Broken Bow
10-29-10	Four Seasons PF	Deshler
10-30-10	South Central NE PF	Alma
11-11-10	Central Nebraska QF	Boelus
11-12-10	Sandhills PF	Ainsworth
11-27-10	Niobrara Valley PF	Atkinson

Nebraska Youth Mentor Hunts

Date	Chapter	Location
09-03-10	Cody Ringnecks PF	North Platte
09-25-10	Heartland PF	Tekamah
09-26-10	Sandhills PF	Ainsworth
10-02-10	Boone County PF	Albion
10-02-10	Dixon County PF	Allen
10-02-10	Douglas County - West PF	Tekamah
10-02-10	Elkhorn Valley PF	Pierce
10-02-10	Little Blue River PF	Hastings
10-02-10	Loup River PF	Ord
10-02-10	Perkins County PF	Grant
10-09-10	Dakota/Thurston PF	Walt Hill
10-09-10	Golden Prairie PF	Neligh
10-09-10	Lewis & Clark PF	Hartington
10-09-10	Loup/Platte Ringnecks PF	Grand Island
10-09-10	Otoe County PF	Palmyra
10-09-10	Seward County PF	Brainard
10-09-10	Washington County PF	Blair
10-09-10	Webster County PF	Blue Hill
10-16-10	Bazile Creek Ringnecks PF	Bloomfield
10-16-10	Corn Country PF	York
10-16-10	Cornhusker PF	Syracuse
10-16-10	Dodge County PF	Arlington
10-16-10	Franklin County Covey QF	Franklin
10-16-10	Lincoln Creek PF	Aurora
10-16-10	Medicine Creek PF	Marywood
10-16-10	Republican Valley PF	Arapahoe
10-17-10	Niobrara Valley PF	Atkinson
10-23-10	Antelope Valley PF	Oshkosh
10-23-10	Burt County PF	Tekamah
10-23-10	Cass County PF	Plattsmouth
10-23-10	Custer County PF	Broken Bow
10-23-10	Four Seasons PF	Hebron
10-23-10	Great Plains PF	Holdrege
10-23-10	Heritage PF	Alliance
10-23-10	Kearney County PF	Minden
10-23-10	Logan Creek PF	Wayne
10-23-10	Lower Elkhorn Valley PF	West Point
10-23-10	Lower Platte PF	Ashland
10-23-10	Maple Creek PF	Clarkson
10-23-10	Mile High PF	Kimball
10-23-10	Prairie Creek Ringnecks PF	Central City
10-23-10	Prairie Hills PF	Kearney
10-23-10	Rainwater Basin PF	Geneva
10-23-10	Saline County PF	Crete/Wilbur
10-23-10	Sherman County PF	Loup City
10-23-10	South Central Nebraska PF	Alma
10-23-10	Southeast Nebraska PF	Beatrice
10-23-10	Southwestern Nebraska PF	Imperial
10-24-10	Cedar River Ringnecks PF	Greeley
12-11-10	Nemaha Valley PF	Humboldt
03-19-11	Niobrara Sportsman PF	Gordon

For further contact information or dates visit www.NebraskaPF.com



from renowned attractions



to specialty shopping



to word-class recreation

Take your pick.

Look for seasonal
festivals, promotions, &
lodging packages at
www.NebraskaCity.com!



Antlerless Deer Program

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission is using a new online tool designed to increase hunter access to land where landowners seek more antlerless deer harvest.

The Antlerless Deer Hunter Program allows hunters to register online and landowners to scan the database for hunters in their area and then contact them by telephone or e-mail.

This program is available at OutdoorNebraska.org. Click on Hunting, Programs and then Antlerless Deer Hunter Program to access it, or go directly to <http://outdoornebraska.ne.gov/hunting/programs.asp>.

"We hear from many hunters who have difficulty finding land to hunt," said Kit Hams, the Commission's big game program manager. "We also hear from landowners who say hunters only want to shoot bucks or they do not feel comfortable telling hunters to shoot does. This program has the potential to address both problems with a mutually beneficial solution."

Hunters provide the following when they register: name, address, telephone number, e-mail address, counties and months in which they are willing to hunt, preferred weapons, and the number of deer they want to harvest.

Landowners search the database by county and can see the hunters' first name, contact information and hunting preferences.

"With 136 days of deer seasons and 250,000 permits and bonus tags that allow antlerless deer harvest, we have more than enough days and permits to control deer herds," Hams said. "This is one more tool to help."

Walleyes for Whitetails

Eric Fowler

A 30-foot rise in water levels from last year at Lake McConaughy inundated about 8,000 acres of cottonwood and willow forest that had grown on the lakebed, sending whitetails scrambling for higher ground.

As a result, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission biologists have been responding to increased crop-damage complaints around the Clear Creek

Wildlife Management Area. "We'd like hunters to harvest as many does as possible to reduce those numbers," said Commission biologist Lance Hastings.

Changes to regulations in 2009 opened most of the 6,100-acre WMA to deer hunting until the Monday prior to Thanksgiving, including the October Antlerless and November Firearm seasons. For complete regulations, go to OutdoorNebraska.org and search for "Clear Creek."

Phragmites Duck Blind Camo

Eric Fowler

Phragmites is causing major ecological problems on the Platte and other rivers and wetlands in Nebraska. Now it has shown up at Goose Lake, a Sandhills lake in Holt County, likely with the unintentional help of duck hunters.

Commission biologists suspect the phragmites found at Goose Lake grew from seeds that were brought to the lake on duck boats camouflaged with the plant. Luckily, it was the native variety of phragmites, not the extremely invasive exotic that escaped into the wild from ornamental gardens and is now choking out native vegetation, overtaking sandbars needed by some wildlife, changing the flow patterns of rivers and contributing to flooding.

Still, biologists want hunters to be aware of the problems they might cause by using this plant to camouflage their blinds, and ask that hunters only use native plants like cattails for blind materials.



Phragmites on the Platte River.

Why You Should Wear Orange

Eric Fowler

There is no regulation making it mandatory to wear hunter orange while hunting upland game in Nebraska. But that doesn't mean it's not a good idea.

Look at the photo below, and it's evident which hunter stands out more in the field. And whether you're crossing paths with another party while hunting public land, or a flushing rooster is crossing between hunters in your party, you want everyone to stand out.

Wearing orange also lets newcomers know that safety should be first priority when in the field.



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

See You Out There ... But Where?



Do you know where this Nebraska photograph was taken?
See answer at the bottom of page 13.

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Experience the Power of RED™ Open House

Sponsored by the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources



November 6, 2010 • 9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. • UNL East Campus

Students and their parents are encouraged to attend to:

Explore Career Opportunities • Experience East Campus • Interact with Deans, Faculty, Staff and Students
Learn More About Our 28 Programs and Two Pre-Professional Programs as well as
Our Program for Students who are Undecided

For more information contact:

University of Nebraska-Lincoln College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources
103 Agricultural Hall • Lincoln, NE 68583-0702 • 1-800-742-8800 ext. 2541
casnr.unl.edu • casnr@unl.edu



The University of Nebraska-Lincoln is an equal opportunity educator and employer with a comprehensive plan for diversity.



Tribal Encounter Kits Bring Story Time to Nebraska's Classrooms

Kristen Friesen

Judi gaiashkibos, an enrolled member of the Ponca tribe, attended school in Norfolk. When the bell rang, she'd race home to her family's tiny house that cradled 10 brothers and sisters and three generations, of which hers was the first to grow up off the reservation. On a good day, she'd help her mother (one of the first women to sit on the Ponca Tribal Council) bake bread while her Santee Sioux grandma told stories about her days at the Santee Normal Training School.

Though Judi's all grown up now, with an office at the State Capitol, story time is never far from her heart. As executive director of the Nebraska Commission on Indian Affairs, she's thrilled that the Commission is now able to introduce five tribal encounter kits, each geared toward Nebraska classrooms and available on loan and at no cost.

The kits are bursting at the seams with authentic items packed by the Plains Indians they represent: Omaha,

Pawnee, Santee Sioux, and Winnebago. A fifth kit focuses on the Powwow, from historic to modern day. And thanks to the extensive time and energy put forth by each tribe, said Judi, each kit "brings to life our rich tribal cultures in a hands-on way that makes teaching easy and learning fun."

Through dress up, music, literature, artwork, DVDs, recipes, language lessons and a variety of touchable objects ranging from furry buffalo hides to porcupine quills, students using the kits will experience some of Nebraska's best stories. Chances are, they won't even realize they're learning history, culture and strong values. And that's the beauty of story time – just ask Judi.

For more information about the kits, visit Nebraska's Commission on Indian Affairs on the 6th floor of the State Capitol: P.O. Box 94981, Lincoln, NE, 68509-4981, or call (402) 471-3475.

Pumpkin Puree and Pumpkin Curry Soup

Kelsea Nore

When you pick out the perfect pumpkin to carve for your jack o' lantern this October, be sure grab another for the kitchen. When choosing one to cook, however, remember that smaller pumpkins are usually sweeter. Making your own pumpkin puree is easy and inexpensive, and results in the main ingredient for pumpkin bread, pumpkin soup and the classic pumpkin pie.

Using a serrated knife cut the pumpkin into halves and remove the stem and pulpy insides, including the seeds. An ice cream scoop works wonderfully for this. Place the seeds in a strainer (we'll get back to those in

a moment). Next, you are going to steam the pumpkin halves; some people may prefer to use a pressure cooker or the stovetop, but a microwave works just as well. Combine the pumpkin with about a cup of water (depending on the size of your pumpkin) and cook it on high for 15-20 minutes. The outer skin will fall away from the rest of the pumpkin when it is finished. You don't want the remaining pumpkin to be too watery, so don't be afraid to squeeze out any excess moisture using cheese-cloth. Lastly, using a blender or a hand mixer, mix the pumpkin to a smooth consistency. Ta-dah – you've made pumpkin puree! This ingredient freezes well, so be sure to save some for next month, when I have a recipe for pumpkin cheesecake to share with you.

Those seeds that have been sitting in the strainer? Clean them thoroughly and spread them out on a baking sheet or newspaper to dry. My mom hastened this process with a hair dryer. When the seeds are dry, toss them with four tablespoons of melted butter or canola oil and then season using your imagination. Some may

prefer plain sea salt, but my personal favorite is equal parts garlic salt and cayenne pepper. Spread the seeds on a baking sheet and bake them at 275 F for 10-20 minutes or until golden brown. Let them cool and enjoy this addictive new snack.

Pumpkin Curry Soup

- 4 medium apples
- 1 Tblsp. butter
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 cloves of garlic, chopped
- 1-2 Tblsp curry paste, to taste
- 2 cups pumpkin puree
- 4 cups chicken broth
- ½ water
- 1 tsp sugar
- 1 cup plain greek yogurt

In a large saucepan melt butter over medium heat, then add the onions. Cook until soft and add the apples, garlic, curry paste, pumpkin puree, broth and water. Reduce heat and simmer for 20-30 minutes or until soft. Pour entire mixture into blender and mix until smooth. Serve with a generous spoonful of yogurt (or sour cream). Serves 4-6.

Wildlife Conference

The public is invited to attend the 19th Annual Watchable Wildlife Conference October 5-7 at the Kearney Holiday Inn.

Community leaders, wildlife and tourism agency professionals and private business owners are all looking for new ways to take advantage of the growth in wildlife/nature tourism. The conference brings together North America's leading experts in developing and growing those tourist programs.

Attendees may take part in comprehensive sessions concentrating on wildlife tourism development and management programs, wildlife viewing site development and natural resource conservation management. For more information or to register for the conference, visit <http://www.watchablewildlife.org/conference/register.htm>.

Don't Be Fake

Jeff Kurrus

Even if you've never killed a banded duck or goose, that doesn't stop your ability from acquiring a waterfowl band. They're easy enough to purchase – the online site Ebay always has some available. However, if undetected, these bands can create errors in the harvest record system database, which is the source of bird band recovery data for those setting hunting regulations and making management decisions. "I am confident undetected counterfeit reports have entered our database," said Maryland-based Bird Banding Laboratory biologist Jo Anna Lutmerding. "Some of these bands are incredibly well made, so we really don't know how many that might be."

In addition to the potential research implications, said North Dakota waterfowl biologist Michael Johnson, these bands also create time issues because researchers must track down banding information that may or may not be authentic. "These bands can also

be associated with decreased reporting rates," said Johnson. "People that are fooled by fake bands or hear of people being fooled may be less likely to report their encounters with real bands. This increases our costs in acquiring all migratory bird band data." Plastic neck bands, continued Johnson, are an even more serious problem because color and code combination can be duplicated even more easily than leg bands. "Even if the codes aren't identical, simply having these color/code combinations leads to hours of work for researchers in state and federal wildlife agencies in the United States and Canada trying to sort real from bogus information."

Currently, Lutmerding and her colleagues process data from more than 80,000 bands yearly, and hope each reporter gives accurate information regarding how the band was attained, whether through hunting, purchased, etc. Because Lutmerding and her colleagues have only really begun trying to track detected counterfeit bands in the last two years, it will take some time before they have a grip on the issue.

Until then and even after, said Commission waterfowl biologist Mark Vrtiska, "For the better management of waterfowl and other migratory bands, people should do two things: 1) report bands, and 2) refrain from dealing in bands on internet sites." These steps can aid researchers in presenting data the way it was originally intended – correctly.

Super Tag Winner Announced

Leo Benes of Firth won the first Nebraska Super Tag Lottery. His name was randomly drawn from a barrel by Gov. Dave Heineman at the July meeting of the Nebraska Game and Parks Board of Commissioners.

The permit, offered for the first time this year, is valid for hunting in 2010 and 2011 and has a bag limit of one elk, one deer, one antelope, and two turkeys.

Benes, 50, is a battalion chief for the Lincoln Fire and Rescue Department, and has never hunted elk, antelope or turkey. "I'm very much looking forward to the opportunity to travel out west and give it [elk hunting] a try."

There were 1,714 applicants who each paid \$25 to enter the lottery, which is only available to Nebraska residents. Hunters who had drawn a once-in-a-lifetime bull elk tag also were eligible.

The permit allows Benes to hunt with any legal weapon in any open hunting unit during the general hunting season for each species.

Raptors on Display

On Saturday, October 23 from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., the Aksarben Aquarium Outdoor Education Center will be displaying live raptors.

Information on identification, food habits, biology and behavior of these fascinating birds will be provided. For more information, call the aquarium at 402-332-3901.

NEBRASKAland Visitor Winner and Hint

Last issue's winner of the NEBRASKAland Visitor drawing was Peter Berthelsen of Elba, Nebraska who found the **pillbug** on page 38.

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 bug found in Nebraska that just happened to find its way onto one of the pages of our publication.

We will then gather the correct entries and draw one to win a NEBRASKAland Visitor 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 5, 10, 13, or 26.

Strategic Air and Space Museum near E.T. Mahoney State Park

Is It History Yet?

Loup River Duck Hunting 1960s

Text and photos by Jon Farrar

The 1960s was a pivotal decade in waterfowl hunting as old ways and equipment were abandoned and new technology introduced. Camouflaged clothing replaced duck-brown hunting coats and plastic replaced paper-hull shotshells and papier mâché decoys.

When I look at “Portraits from the Past” in the back of *NEBRASKALAND* and see photographs from the 1960s, I always think – that’s not so long ago. And photographs from the 1970s, well, I started writing for the magazine in 1970. Over the years I have interviewed men who began hunting in the 1910s and hunted through the 1920s and 1930s, men who went hunting in Model Ts and shot over live decoys. That’s old-time hunting. When I look closely at the photos from the 1960s, though, particularly the clothing, it’s obvious things have changed – camouflage was rare and brown canvas hunting coats and Jones hats were everywhere. Judging from 1960s photographs, one would guess coonhounds were more abundant than bird dogs. While that was likely not the case, it’s evident hunting dogs are far more abundant today than they were back then. All these changes seem especially pronounced with waterfowl hunting.

Yesterday I dropped off some used clothing and shoes at the local Salvation Army store. As I was stuffing bags in the receiving bin I caught a whiff of tobacco smoke. It wasn’t the scent of pipe tobacco or a cigar, which I always find pleasant (except for stale cigar stink), but cigarette smoke from one of the good smelling cigarettes most men smoked when I was young, probably a Camel short, Lucky Strike, Pall Mall or Chesterfield. When I passed the alley there was an older man leaning against the wall, smoking a cigarette without a filter. I read once that scents evoke our most powerful memories, like the yeasty smell of the kitchen when your mother baked bread.

The connection between tobacco smoke and the duck hunting of my youth was my cousin, Gary Ziegler. He was about 10 years older than me, and Garys, Larrys and Jerrys had spread across America like the plumed seeds of dandelions by the 1960s. Gary and I were friends first, relatives second; and as things used to be in small towns, we were related about five different directions if you did all the genealogy – sort of like the covey of quail that never

got broken up. We started hunting together after he got out of the Navy, when I was still in high school. In those days he smoked Camels. The whiff of good-smelling tobacco coming from that alley took me back to our days duck hunting on the Loup River between Monroe and Genoa. There were three intoxicating scents on those chilly November mornings – Gary’s Camel shorts, dried willow leaves, and the aroma of coffee the first time the vacuum bottle was cracked opened.

Gary and I spent less time hunting ducks than pheasants in the 1960s and early-1970s because pheasants didn’t just migrate through and there was plenty of them. Most of our ducks we back-shot off farm ponds, sloughs, sand pits and drainage ditches, but every year we built a willow blind on the river, and some years two – one a high-water blind up against a



Before the 1960s, as in this 1946 photograph of Monroe duck hunters Wayne Hagenbuck (left), his son Warren (center) and his brother Lloyd, hunting clothing was often what you wore to work under a brown canvas hunting coat and hip boots.

cutbank and another on a sandbar, where ducks felt safer and decoyed more readily. Stream flows in that section of the Loup were at the whim of the Loup River Public Power District. Their canal diverted water upstream southwest of Genoa and ran it through two power plants before releasing it to the Platte River southeast of Columbus, so our area was but a shadow of the river it was farther upstream, as, I suppose, was the quality of duck hunting. When the river starting running ice the power district would close the diversion gates upriver and the water would come down the river in a whoosh, hence the high-water blind.

More often than not we were diligent about hauling our decoys to high ground after hunting for the morning. My uncle operated the power plant on the canal north of Monroe and he would usually, but not always, give us a heads-up that they were about to turn water and ice down the river at the headgates. When we hunted Saturday mornings and were going to hunt again the next morning, we often left our decoys in the sandbar blind rather than haul them to the shore. Twice when the river started running ice we lost not only our sandbar blind but also all our decoys. One of those times we found some of them crammed into a logjam a quarter-mile downstream. We

went to town for axes and a bucksaw, returned to the river, and chopped out what we could, less than a dozen as I recall, some now stored in my attic, probably in a box labeled “coffee cans and Mason jars, Gary’s decoys with a yellow “Z” painted on the bottoms, mine with a “J Farrar” in hunter-safety orange.”

In those days we shot over Carry-Lite papier-mâché mallard decoys, only two or three dozen as the concept of monster spreads was a decade in the future, at least where we hunted. Our decoys were anchored with sparkplugs, railroad spikes, wheel weights or discarded bearings that could be had by the bucketful at any auto repair shop. Usually several sparkplugs or wheel weights were required to hold one decoy in the current. We liked the bearings best because they were heavy, round, tidy and dug into the river’s shifting sand. If you knew the mechanic of an auto repair shop well enough (and we knew them all) they would even let you wash out the grease in the parts pan filled with gasoline, using a brush with stiff black bristles and a long, round wooden handle. We tied the anchors to the decoys with the same braided-cotton “canal cord” we used for catfish setlines in the power canal in the summer, a name no doubt used only locally. It would have been a good idea to tar the cords



Even in 1970, standard jump-shooting attire might be a camouflaged Jones hat, down jacket and western boots. The author with mallards from Potter’s Pit near Monroe.

like serious waterfowlers on the East Coast, but we didn’t know about that. If there was braided nylon cord in those days we didn’t know about it either, or Barney Pearson didn’t stock it in his hardware store.

Most of our Carry-Lites were of late production with bills resting on the breast, making it less likely the heads would break off, although I had a few of my brother’s high-heads from the 1950s. The tips of some bills had been chewed on by mice that must have climbed down the rope suspending the decoy-filled gunny sacks that hung from the rafters of the barn in the off-season. The sacks reeked of mice until being dragged through the river a few times. Thin-shelled plastic decoys hit the market in the 1960s and paper decoys became something from the past, but Gary and I were still shooting over them in the early-1970s.

In the 1950s, before I started duck hunting, Loup River duck shooters not only put out papier-mâché decoys, but also a dozen or two homemade silhouettes that everyone called “shadows.” Most were crudely cut from sheet tin in

the shape of a duck, a metal stake riveted to the body, and painted black. Most hunters sprinkled a bit of sand or dirt on the paint before it dried to make the finish dull; this being before cans of spray paint were much in use. Some shadows, though, were fashioned from wood, often salvaged from wooden crates of whatever fruit was in season and being shipped to grocery stores. Monroe had two grocery stores in those days even though the town claimed only about 350 souls. A few ambitious hunters bought pints of paint in three or four colors and did the best renderings they could of mallards, typically drakes.

The most inventive duck lure I recall was made by my brother in the late-1950s. He applied yellow paint to empty beer cans (back when they were still substantial steel containers opened with a “church key”), then rather crudely crisscrossed the yellow with black lines to simulate ears of corn and spread them on a sandbar near his decoys. Apparently ducks didn’t find them irresistible, as I never recall him bringing home more than we could eat.

Total investment in our duck hunting operation consisted of a shotgun – prorated to cover hours it was used for pheasant and quail hunting, or shooting blue rocks and pigeons; shotshells (yes paper hulls, but just like decoys, plastic shotshells started replacing them in the early-1960s); a couple dozen decoys; and cheap, uninsulated

hip boots made in Taiwan and sold at a discount store in Columbus that I think was called Pamida, but might have been an Alco or Gibson’s. Not only were the prices there cheap, so was the quality of the merchandise – a pair of waders seldom saw a second hunting season. I’d swear some got their first tear between the store and the car. Red Ball rubber waders were the best, and Converse not far behind. Both were available, but apparently too pricey for our pocketbooks. If washed and stored properly they lasted

for years and could be patched on patches. I owned a pair of Red Ball hip boots in the 1970s – hand-me-downs from a fisheries biologist – and I wore them, heavily patched, for 10 years before the rubber died of old age.

If you stayed away from the cutbanks, hip boots were usually adequate to get around in the Loup. There were chest waders, called breast waders in those days, but we never used them. I’ve always wondered about that change in language – it happened so suddenly, probably because of morphing sexual connotations in the language, that by the 1970s it was no longer manly for men to have breasts, hence wear breast waders. Warriors and soldiers wore breastplates for centuries and breastworks were hastily constructed fortifications, usually of earth, thrown up at breast height to hide behind for protection and repel attacks. And foresters measure the diameter of trees by their “diameter at breast height.” By today’s standards it would seem only females would be allowed to measure trees. But I digress.

I blush at the thought of how much more duck hunting equipment I own today, from which I get about the same amount of fun as I did with far less on the Loup in the 1960s.

In the 1950s, I’ve been told by old Loup River duck hunters, blinds were no more than whips of sandbar willows cut and pushed into the sand to make a rectangle large enough to house however many hunters would be using it. The secret to using sandbar willows was to cut them in September when their leaves were still green and firmly attached. Cut then, the leaves would turn brown but cling to the branches. More were cut than needed and stashed on shore for filling in thinning parts of the blind later in the season.

My cousin and I did about the same in the 1960s, but were a bit more elaborate. Building our blind or blinds usually took most of a day and was as much fun as hunting from them later. First we gathered driftwood of appropriate length and girth. Eight “corner posts” were required as the blind wasn’t just rectangular in shape but had a baffle entrance to break the wind. From post to post we wired smaller, horizontal driftwood branches about four feet above the sand. It was, of course, a crooked and crude framework, but it served our purpose.

Next we cut our willows with corn knives, or Army surplus machetes bought at the Army-Navy surplus store in Columbus. We started pushing the taller willow branches, some six feet long and sharpened on the big end, into the sand around the driftwood frame, pushing them in at an angle so they arched back and pressed against the frame. Then came medium-sized willows to fill the gaps between the large willows, and finally small willows at the base. The small willows probably weren’t necessary but helped break the wind and keep sand from blowing into shotguns, homemade cinnamon rolls and coffee cups.



We built our high-water, three-sided blinds much the same way butted up against cutbanks. I seem to remember once putting an old bridge plank salvaged off a sandbar across two upside-down five gallon grease buckets (steel buckets, as there was no such thing as a plastic drywall bucket in those days) for a seat, but otherwise we spent our mornings standing, eager with anticipation we would actually see a flock of ducks.

Paper-hull shotshells were first replaced by Remington in 1960; but it was several years before other manufacturers followed suit.

I don’t recall coming home laden with ducks after we hunted our Loup River blinds; but then legal bag limits were stingy in the 1960s. In 1965, the year I graduated from high school, the statewide season was October 20 through November 28. The daily limit of four ducks could not include more than two wood ducks or canvasbacks, or more than one mallard or pintail. The following year the season was slightly longer, October 15 through December 12, but the bag limit was only three ducks. Daily bag limits had been even smaller – two per day in both 1961 and 1962.

Gary and I killed more mallards with a good sneak on flocks tucked under the north banks of sandpits. The pits, because of their deeper waters, often remained open when the river was running slush ice. Early in the season we would shoot a little of this and a little of that on the river, but only puddle ducks as I recall. I don’t remember shooting a diving duck. Older hunters told me they occasionally shot bluebills, blackjacks and butterballs – three names covering all known diving ducks in the world except drake canvasbacks and drake redheads, the only two diving ducks I bet they could identify. Blackjacks (ring-necked ducks) were no doubt often identified as bluebills (lesser scaup), and vice versa. They said the diver duck shooting was better before the power canal stole away most of the river’s flow in 1936. Back in those days there were only three kinds of puddle ducks – mallards, teal and gray ducks. Mallards had green heads, teal were little ducks, and “gray ducks” were



In the 1950s, Loup River hunters were shooting over homemade silhouettes; some fashioned from scrap wood and crudely painted but most were made from tin and painted black.



The Broadbill caller, left, was introduced in 1917 and sold through 1946. It was still used in the 1950s. In the 1960s we used the P.S. Olt D-2 Model.

nondescript birds larger than teal and without green heads and probably often included some diving ducks as well.

Long-legged wading birds were classified as one species – shitepokes – and shot by many hunters because “they eat fish.”

Our best days on the river came with the big push of mallards when winter storms sent them scurrying south out of the Canadian provinces and the Dakotas. In the 1960s, more often than not, that came around the second week of November; earlier and more predictable than in recent decades. The push of mallards often came at the same time as the firearm deer season. Many blustery opening mornings of the deer season I sat high in a cottonwood treestand with a high-powered rifle in my hands, watching flock after flock of mallards run the river, their orange legs nearly brushing the treetops. Depending on the nature of the storm that moved them south, we would have good mallard shooting for one to three days, sometimes longer, and then they were gone.

It was rare in those days for any hunter to shoot a Canada goose, and when they did it was invariably a small or medium-sized bird. Restoration programs that would bring back the “giant Canadas” did not start until the late-1960s in the Dakotas, and 1970 in Nebraska. Gary and I never killed a goose on the Loup River, but did on several occasions when jump-shooting farm ponds.

There was one morning that we came close to piling big birds on a Loup River sandbar, though. It was just a few minutes into legal shooting time when we saw an undulating flock of white birds winging upstream toward us, no more than 30 yards above the river. It was a foggy morning as I recall. Convinced they were snow geese, although neither my cousin nor I had ever seen a snow goose on the Loup River or heard of anyone seeing them, we tucked back deep into the blind until they were overhead, raised to shoot, clicked off safeties, moved index fingers to triggers and only in the last fraction of a second saw the huge yellow bills and pouches of pelicans.

Both my cousin and I were smart, if not good, duck callers. Usually we kept our calls in our pockets until it was obvious the flock of ducks that just swept past our spread wasn’t going to turn and come back, so there was no harm in giving them a toot. During lulls in the action

– which were both frequent and prolonged – Gary would often do an outstanding rendition of a whinnying horse on his D-2 Olt. And I recall a day when I had partied into the wee hours of the morning and overslept until Gary cut loose on his call outside my bedroom window. The Olts were made of what we called “hard rubber,” but I’m guessing they were an early-day plastic, the same sort of stuff from which gearshift knobs were fashioned. Our lanyards, when we had them, were of the same cord we used to tie anchors to decoys or, if we got fancy, a used leather strand from broken bootlaces, although it was a rare event either of us wore a call around our necks.

While the scent of curing willow leaves vividly carries me back to the 1960s and duck season, so does the springy feel of pushing shotshells into the magazine of a Model 12 Winchester, followed by the clankity-bang of oiled, all-metal parts as a shell is pumped into the chamber at shooting time. To a Model-12-shooter’s ear it was a symphony, a promise that this morning there would be orange legs dangling under cupped wings over the decoys and spent shotshells would litter the sand floor of the blind. There were a few semi-automatic and side-by-side shotguns on the Loup in the 1960s, but four-to-one they were outnumbered by Model 12s, “The Perfect Repeater,” the first choice of waterfowlers in those times; works of art in a modest blued-steel and walnut way, a workingman’s gun. Invariably they were full-choke guns, although that was changing by the 1960s. My Model 12, bought in about 1960, was bored modified, but Gary was just enough older to be of the full-choke generation. The older Model 12s, from back when they had nickel-steel barrels, were almost always bored full.

By the late-1960s, interest in duck hunting on the lower Loup River seemed to be on the

Because of poor production on the nesting grounds, daily bag limits were stingy in the 1960s.



Barney Pearson’s hardware store in Monroe was our duck hunting headquarters – selling permits, shotshells and other accouterments of the hunt.

decline, perhaps spurred by low duck numbers and hence three-bird-per-day limits; but it didn’t recover with the more liberal “point system” adopted in 1970. The interest in big game hunting, particularly for deer, was on the rise. There was ample room on the river for blinds, but a tradition seemed to have passed on the lower Loup River. I heard stories of the generation of duck hunters before me, after World War II and through the 1950s, when favored sandbars were jealously guarded. In those times, if you regularly hunted a certain sandbar or stretch of river it was assumed to be your spot until you no longer used it; and that territorial right was usually enforced by the landowner whose land you needed to pass through to



Well into the 1970s, Gary Ziegler and I were shooting over Carry-Lite papier mâché decoys. His hunting garb would not have been out of place on an aircraft carrier.

reach the river. The rub, though, was that the landowner on one side of the river was seldom the same as the landowner on the other side, and so conflicts did arise. There were stories of hunters building their blind too close to another, and a few days later, perhaps struck by lightning in one of those rare November thunderstorms, the infringing blind burned, along with any decoys in it. I’ve been told papier-mâché decoys and dried willow leaves made a hot fire.

For the last dozen years or so I’ve been telling myself that I’m going to build a willow blind on the Loup back home and hunt from it in November just one last time. Dig out as many papier-mâché mallard decoys as I can find stashed away in my attic, oil up the same old Model 12 I’ve shot since I was 13, find a D-2 Olt call in one of the old cigar boxes on a shelf in the closet, sharpen my World War II machete, and pretend I’m 18 years old again. Chances are I’ll never do it and just savor memories that now are “portraits from the past.” ■

Ride West!

Nebraska's Pine Ridge has some of the best mountain biking in the nation.

By Hope Scheimo
Photos by Jeff Kurrus

Looking for a new place to ride this fall? Then go west. Imagine enjoying the rhythmic rotation of knobby tires meeting the trail, pine-fresh air; crisp, fallen branches and leaves snapping beneath your wheels as autumn's bouquet of color rustles in the trees above you. Western Nebraska's Pine Ridge provides some of the best riding in Nebraska, says Dirtworld.com, a popular mountain biking web site, and once you've ridden there yourself, it's hard not to agree.

The web site for the Pine Ridge Ranger District of the Nebraska National Forest near Chadron describes the district's 6,600 acres of the ponderosa pine-covered land as "many miles of popular mountain biking ... in an undiscovered part of Nebraska."

The exact amount of mountain biking opportunities available in the Pine

Ridge area is of course difficult to determine, but suffice to say there's more miles to ride than you can get to in a weekend. Herb Peterson, owner of Chadron's bike shop, Mountain Mania Bicycles, can't even tell you, even though he's helped develop a number of the trails himself.

What is known, however, is that you're sure to have a challenging and fun time learning all of these trails, which are being expanded or created on a regular basis. For instance, the National Forest Service is expanding the Pine Ridge Trail from the Spotted Tail trail head to the West Ash Creek trail head approximately 35 trail miles away.

These names and places were unfamiliar to me when I moved to the area in late-2008, but they've easily become friends, for in the Pine Ridge



Elizabeth Ledbetter (left) and husband George spend many afternoons riding bike trails near Chadron.

familiarity breeds anything but contempt. The names alone conjure images of scenery both rugged and serene, as well as hopes of crossing paths with the area's abundant wildlife, which often add to the enjoyment of a day's ride.

"Deer have let me get nose to nose with them," said George Ledbetter, publisher of *The Chadron Record* newspaper and a frequent user of the area's bike trails. Familiar with cars, the deer seem curious about mountain bikes and have approached Ledbetter in the past to investigate this much quieter mode of transportation.

Although the chance to see a variety of wildlife increases the enjoyment of biking the Pine Ridge, it can also create some trepidation: Ledbetter's most interesting, although somewhat frightening, experience with wildlife while riding his bike was watching a mountain lion attack a deer. Although it was mesmerizing to see nature acted out, "I didn't stop to ask him how breakfast was," said Ledbetter.

The wildlife encounters most riders will have probably won't be nearly as exciting, but they will be special to the individual, nonetheless. For instance, on one of his bike rides Dr. Jerry McClain

of Chadron rounded a corner on the trail to find a coyote with his latest meal: "There he was, chewing on a carcass at the bottom of the hill. He didn't smell me because the wind was blowing the other direction, and I was literally within five feet of him."

McClain has also been blessed with sightings of bighorn sheep during his rides – he counted 14 on one visit to Chadron State Park alone.

While the remoteness of these trails improves your chances of seeing wildlife while enjoying a peaceful ride, it also decreases your chances of finding help should something go wrong, so

take a few precautions prior to heading down the trail:

First, get a good map of the area to help you find the miles upon miles of biking trails and old logging roads in the Pine Ridge. Perhaps the best single map you can get is available from the National Forest Service office in Chadron at (308) 432-0300, which will help you locate points of interest as well as assist in getting you back home.

Second, bring a riding partner along whenever possible to enjoy the ride with and to help out if any problems should occur.

Third, even though a mountain bike's



For bike riders, autumn features some of the year's best scenery and weather.



Dr. Jerry McClain rides through a patch of water on one of the Cliffs trails southeast of Chadron. The Cliffs are one of many trails in the region that offer both challenging and scenic rides for bikers.

tires are “knobby” and wider for better control and gripping power, they can go flat in the rough terrain found in western Nebraska.

“You need flat-resistant tires just in the towns around here,” joked McClain, and Ledbetter agreed. Between puncture vines, goats head burrs and weeds and seeds with sharp thorns you want to get “slimed.” Perhaps the best-selling tire sealant in the world, Slime© can be purchased at most bike shops, larger retail stores and online, and is easy to use: “Just remove your tire’s stem, pour the stuff in, close it up and then pump up the tire,” said Ledbetter.

If you get a small puncture (this does not work for rips and large holes), the slime fills in the hole before much air

can escape. Occasionally, however, your tire will get a larger hole in it that Slime© can’t fix, so make sure you bring along at least one extra tube, tire repair kit and air pump. Wrenches for chain problems might also come in handy, and, of course, water and a helmet is a must:

“I was on King Canyon going downhill way too fast to make the curve and decided I had to brace myself for impact,” said McClain. As his bike flipped, he tucked up and allowed his back to take the brunt of the fall, suffering a huge road abrasion. Getting up and checking himself over, he discovered a small tree branch imbedded in his helmet. “It was at least an inch into the helmet,” he said. “You

want to wear a helmet whenever you are out bike riding.”

Once you’re properly outfitted and ready to find a place to ride, there’s probably little reason to look much beyond the Chadron area – in 2000, *Sports Afield* dubbed the town of Chadron “one of the four best mountain biking towns in the United States,” and nearby Chadron State Park is a favorite for bikers in this area and has been recognized as one of the top mountain biking areas in the nation.

So bring your bike or rent one from Fort Robinson State Park (308) 665-2900 (Note: Fort Robinson only rents bikes from Memorial Day through Labor Day) or Mountain Mania Bicycles in Chadron (308) 432-3653

and hit the trail. Below is a short list of some that you might want to check out:

- **Pine Ridge Trail**, Nebraska National Forest, with trail heads at: West Ash, East Ash, Coffee Mill, Roberts (Loop), Chadron State Park and Spotted Tail.
- **Toadstool Trail** and **Bison Trail**, Toadstool Geologic Park.
- **Trooper Trail** and **Boots & Saddles Trail**, Soldier Creek Wilderness Area.
- **White River Trail**, Crawford to Fort Robinson State Park.
- **The Cliffs Trails**, a loose network of trails 15 miles southeast of Chadron.
- **Norwesca Trail**, **Steamboat Loop Trail**, **Blue Tail Trail**, **Yellow Trail**, **Black Hills Overlook Trail** and **Outrider Trail**, Chadron State Park. ■



The Ledbetters discuss bike routes near the Pine Ridge Trail.

Autumn

Choose Wisely

By Jeff Kurrus

The question is not if you should be outside during what could be Nebraska's most enjoyable outdoor month, it's what you should do once you're there. From fall color viewing along the Missouri River, to hunting or fishing with friends and family or taking a few more glimpses of the small world living all around you, autumn has limitless possibilities. The only drawback is time isn't limitless, so choose wisely, take photos during your travels, and revel in this time of year when the world is not yet cold, only very, very cool.



PHOTO BY LUKE KATHOL

Above: A cottonwood leaf hangs from the side of a tree along the Platte River in Buffalo County as back lighting from the sun brings out its fall color.
Right: A whitetail buck peers through a thicket of leafless ash trees in Gosper County.



PHOTO BY LUKE KATHOL



PHOTO BY BILL HAGER



PHOTO BY CHRIS HELZER



PHOTO BY BILL HAGER

Above left: A campsite on Merritt Reservoir is transformed by brilliant maple and sumac leaves glowing in the warm afternoon light.

Left: A caterpillar rests on a prairie clover stem on an early October day in Aurora.

Above right: The lush green of a Sandhills landscape changes to shades of brown, orange and yellow against a contrasting sky.

Right: The seeds of summer provide forage for migrating birds as they prepare for their trek south.



PHOTO BY BILL HAGER



PHOTO BY BILL HAGER



PHOTO BY CHRIS HELZER

Above: A pronghorn buck lopes off to rejoin his herd along the Dismal River near Halsey.

Left: Fall brings lots of colors to Nebraska, few of which are looked forward to by kids of all ages as much as the bright orange and yellows of Halloween jack-o-lanterns cut from pumpkins

Right: Fall colors abound on an overcast October afternoon as golden leaves from an overhanging cottonwood tree partially cover a sandy river road near Smith Falls State Park.



PHOTO BY BILL HAGER

Return to the Plains

Elk Comeback Not Yet Finished

Text and photos by Eric Fowler

Mention elk to most people, and they are apt to think of high mountains cloaked with aspen and pine forests. Which makes sense, since throughout recent history, that's where most elk have been found.

That, however, was simply because as Euroamericans settled the continent in the 19th century, the Rocky Mountains and the Cascades in the Pacific Northwest were the only places elk were able to find refuge from hungry settlers' guns. Before settlers arrived, elk were the most widely distributed of the deer species,

found across two-thirds of the United States and as much at home, if not more so, on the Great Plains as in the mountains.

Today, elk are making their way back home. Nebraska, the heart of the historic elk range, now boasts more than 2,000 head, a number that is growing steadily as herds expand within their current range and continue to reclaim former territory. The growth

comes a mere 25 years after efforts to eliminate the first wild elk herd in the state's modern history failed, much to the delight of biologists, hunters and nature lovers.

What follows is a brief history of the elk's return to the state and what the future might hold for this majestic big game animal.

Elk Before White Man

Rocky Mountain elk (*Cervus canadensis nelsoni*) once occupied all corners of Nebraska. Unlike deer, which browse on trees and shrubs, elk are primarily grazers. "Prior to settlement, Nebraska was better elk habitat than deer habitat, solely because we were 95 percent grass," said Kit Hams, big game program manager with

the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

Plains Indians, including the Pawnee and Sioux, regularly hunted elk, especially when buffalo moved to distant ranges. They made clothing from elk hides and the Sioux decorated those clothes with elk ivories, the two top canine teeth that scientists believe are remnants of three-inch-long tusks of the modern elk's ancestors.

The journals of the Lewis and Clark expedition mentioned elk often as the explorers traveled up the Missouri River in the summer of 1804. They spotted their first on an island in the Missouri near the mouth of the

Nemaha River on their second day in what is now Nebraska.

"the Elke Sine is [v]erry plenty. Deer is not as plenty as it was below," Charles Floyd wrote in his July 18 entry.

In the years that followed, explorers, soldiers and settlers noted the presence of elk, sometimes great herds of them, in Nebraska along the Missouri, Platte, Loup, Cedar, Dismal, Niobrara and Republican Rivers. Like the buffalo, however, their days were numbered, and as civilization spread westward, sustenance hunting and wanton shooting took its toll. By the 1880s, elk had been extirpated from the entire state.

Once 10 million strong across North America, elk were gone from 90 percent of their historic range by 1900, when fewer than 100,000 elk remained, mostly in the Mountain West.

Reclaiming Their Territory

In *Distribution and Taxonomy of Mammals of Nebraska*, published in 1964, J.K. Jones Jr. wrote that elk historically were likely more abundant in eastern Nebraska, where there was less competition from bison and more rivers to provide refuge, than in western Nebraska. Yet it was out west where wild elk first reappeared in the state

and are most abundant today.

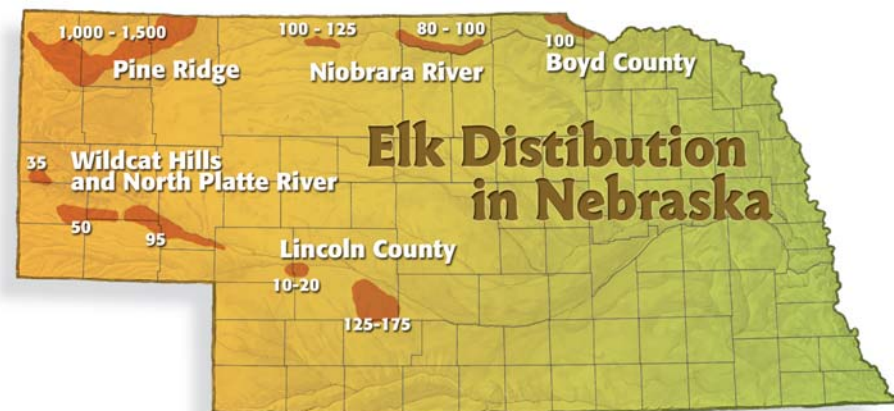
The first recorded elk sighting came from Box Butte County in 1958, although there are no details of how many. In 1964, a cow and calf elk were seen in Garden County. In either case, the elk likely wandered in from Colorado or Wyoming, where wild elk had survived the settlement rush, or from South Dakota, where elk reintroduction began in the Black Hills in 1914.

Although Wyoming probably had the greatest number of elk following the Westward Expansion, most lived in the mountainous western portion of the state, including Yellowstone National Park. Wyoming's efforts to expand their



A bull elk stands between his harem and a satellite bull as the rut began last fall near the top of the Bordeaux Creek watershed in the Pine Ridge near Chadron, where wild elk first reappeared 40 years ago.





Ever since the first resident herds returned to Nebraska’s Pine Ridge escarpment in the late 1960s, Rocky Mountain elk have reclaimed territory along the Niobrara, North Platte and Missouri rivers, as well as the Wildcat Hills escarpment in the Panhandle and Lincoln County’s loess hills. Because of the reclusive nature of elk and their tendency to spend daylight hours in thick cover, biologists can only estimate the number of elk found in Nebraska today, but place that number at around 2,000.

range included the release of 43 elk in the Rawhide Buttes, located 12 miles south of Lusk, in 1967 and 1968.

Just five miles to the north of Lusk lies the western tip of the Pine Ridge, a rugged, crescent-shaped escarpment covered in ponderosa pine forest and mixed grass prairie that encompasses about 1,100 square miles of northwestern Nebraska between Wyoming and the South Dakota line north of Rushville. When the elk released near Lusk wandered, as relocated animals often do, it wasn’t a surprise they ended up in the Pine Ridge. An ear-tagged spike bull released in February 1967 was found dead by a Nebraska conservation officer six months later north of Hay Springs, 95 miles from the Rawhide Buttes. In September 1969, Nebraska conservation officers found the remains of a mature bull in Sioux County that had been released south of Lusk in January 1968.

It was during that same two-year span that Stanley Stumf recalls seeing a cow elk on his farm and ranch along Bordeaux Creek southeast of Chadron. A few days later, he heard a bull bugle. He never saw the bull, but saw plenty of the cow.

“She stayed with my cattle all winter long and ate hay with them,” recalled Stumf, now 89. “Then in the spring, I saw her when I was out riding and there she is with a calf.

“I never even questioned it. I figured, ‘Here’s the beginning of an elk herd.’ That’s what I thought and I was right. Pretty soon there was elk all over –

they multiplied.”

While there were likely elk elsewhere in the Pine Ridge at the time, biologists believe the elk that made their home on Bordeaux Creek grew into the state’s first resident herd in more than 80 years. The area remains a stronghold for elk.

“The habitat in that Bordeaux area was so suited for elk. You had an interspersed of small grains, you had calving areas, you had good escape cover and you had good winter protection. You had all of the things, including water, that good elk habitat will have,” said Gary Schlichtemeier, who worked in the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission’s Alliance office from 1965 through his retirement in 2006.

Stumf was happy to have the elk, but not all of his neighbors were. By the early 1980s, with the Bordeaux Creek herd having grown to at least 38 head and possibly as many as 65, complaints of damage to crops, hay stacks and fences, and the cost of pasturing the elk, abounded, as did concerns about diseases such as brucellosis.

In 1985, 42 people from 24 families signed a petition asking that the Commission trap and remove the elk. However, follow-up interviews by Karl Menzel, the Commission’s long-time big game biologist who passed away in 2009, found that about half of the families in the core of the elk range who signed the petition did so only to be good neighbors. They actually welcomed the elk.

Stumf didn’t sign the petition. “They never bothered anything that I knew

of,” he said. “Sure they grazed in the millet field a little bit, but that’s no big deal. Hell, I don’t mind having them around. I like having animals around.”

The Commission contacted biologists in six states to see if trapping and removal the elk was feasible. All said such a plan would be extremely expensive and ineffective. Eliminating elk by using sharpshooters or a hunting season were discussed as alternatives, but most Commission biologists, including Schlichtemeier, weren’t in favor of any of those plans: “We knew the habitat was there for elk to increase, and it was just a matter of trying to figure out how elk could survive with the agricultural activities that were going on,” he said. “I felt we could always do something else if we found we just couldn’t have elk in Nebraska, but I felt as wildlife managers we should give it a try and see if we could make it work. I guess I felt there were definitely a lot more people that wanted elk than those that didn’t want elk.”

Feeling pressure from landowners and state legislators, however, Commission administrators agreed to a plan that would reduce the herd to less than 20 head through hunting (even though some landowners said they would not allow it) and not allow the herd to rebuild to problem levels. So Nebraska held its first modern elk season in 1986, issuing 75 permits – a number most biologists believed was greater than the number of elk. Only 15 elk were harvested, with low success due in part to some landowners closing their land and the ability of elk to become scarce when pressured. In 1987, 42 more permits were issued for a second elk season, and hunters again took home 15 elk.

Based on observations by biologists, conservation officers and landowners, an estimated 12 to 15 elk remained in the Bordeaux Creek herd, bringing it below the population goal, and hunting ended for the time. Contingency plans to feed elk during the winter, and possibly even trap or shoot elk if problems continued, were never needed.

From that small nucleus, the elk herd quietly grew. In 1994, 51 elk were counted in one herd in the Bordeaux Creek area, and there were likely more.

That put the count near levels that had prompted the outcry from landowners a



A spike bull follows a calf down a trail in the cedar canyons above the North Platte River near Lewellen. Elk in this herd spend most of the year in the riverbottom forest and nearby crop fields, retreating to the canyons only during the winter months.

decade earlier, but complaints were fewer and usually involved elk feeding in stack yards. The Commission responded by providing fencing materials to keep the elk out, a practice it continues to this day and one biologists, both past and present, agree was key to changing the perception of some landowners who were initially against having elk in the Pine Ridge.

While the elk herd was growing along Bordeaux Creek, elk were quietly reclaiming territory elsewhere in the Pine Ridge. By 1994, a herd near Crawford had grown to nearly 50 animals, possibly from the 14 head, including a cow that had been fitted with a radio collar in South Dakota that had been spotted in the same area in 1987. Smaller herds had also become established south of Whitney and north of Hay Springs.

With the growth of these herds, hunting resumed in 1995. This time, however, the goal was not to eliminate the population, but to slow its growth through limited recreational hunting, with the emphasis on recreation. An elk season has been held in the Pine Ridge

ever since, and the herds have continued to grow. Todd Nordeen, who took over for Schlichtemeier as district wildlife manager for the area, estimates the Pine Ridge elk population at between 1,000 and 1,500 head, with numerous herds concentrated in core areas during certain times of the year and elk scattered throughout the escarpment during others. “There’s still opportunity for growth,” said Nordeen of the area’s elk population.

Beyond the Ridge

While the elk herd was growing in the Pine Ridge, they were also becoming established in other parts of Nebraska. When those herds grew to manageable levels, new areas were opened to hunting, providing a timeline of elk expansion in the state.

In the early 1990s, captive elk escaped from a pen on the Yankton Sioux Indian Reservation near Pickstown, South Dakota. Some of those elk crossed the Missouri River and made themselves at home in the rugged cedar and oak forested canyons rising from

the river into Nebraska’s Boyd County. In 1996, the area became the second open to elk hunting in the state.

A band of elk spotted in southwestern Nebraska in 1981 may have been the seed for a herd in the loess canyons south of the Platte River between Maxwell and Curtis. Elk were firmly established in the area by the late 1990s, and the area opened to hunting in 2002.

Elk that were spotted along the North Platte River near Lewellen in the early 1980s apparently didn’t stay, but a decade later, others wandering through the area did. There are now two small herds living in the riparian forest between Bridgeport and Lewellen, with elk scattered throughout the riverbottom between Wyoming and Lake McConaughy.

During the same time period, elk became established in the Wildcat Hills, a pine forested escarpment south of the river stretching from Bridgeport to Wyoming. Three herds and other scattered elk now occupy the Wildcats which, along with the North Platte River, opened to elk hunting in 2005.

Natural History Facts

Origin: Elk are even-toed ungulates (hooved mammals) of the deer family (*cervidae*), along with white-tailed and mule deer, moose and caribou. North America “elk” (the name elk properly belongs to the European moose) are closely related to red deer of Europe and Asia, and are believed to have crossed the Bering Land Bridge between Siberia and Alaska 120,000 years ago. Elk are also referred to as wapiti, a Shawnee name for “white rump.”

Subspecies/range: Six subspecies of elk, numbering perhaps 10 million, once roamed throughout most of the United States and parts of Canada and Mexico. Today four remaining subspecies number an estimated one million elk. The Rocky Mountain elk was found from the mountain west to unknown points to the east, possibly overlapping with the now-extinct Eastern subspecies. It is still found throughout the west and has been transplanted in several eastern states as well. Of the other subspecies, Roosevelt elk are found on the Pacific Coast, tule elk in central California, and Manitoban elk in the northern Great Plains.

Size: As adults, cows measure 4½ feet at the shoulder and 6½ feet from nose to rump. Bulls are 5 feet at the shoulder and 8 feet long. Calves weigh about 35 pounds at birth. Cow elk can weigh more than 500 pounds, and bulls average 700 pounds.

Diet: Elk are primarily grazers that feed on grass, but they sometimes browse trees and shrubs and will even nibble aspen bark in the high-country. In Nebraska and other agricultural states, elk will also eat corn, wheat, alfalfa and other crops.

Antlers: Starting in their second year, bull elk grow and shed antlers annually. The antlers grow from pedicles on their skull in the spring. Beneath a layer of velvet, layer upon layer of cartilage that mineralizes into bone is added at a rate of one inch per day,

growing faster than any other kind of bone. When the growth stops in August, the velvet is shed. In their second year, bulls grow spikes that are 10 to 20 inches long. Later sets produce tines that branch from the main beams. By its seventh summer, a bull typically has six points per side on antlers that can measure 4 feet in length and weigh 40 pounds each. During the breeding season, which in Nebraska begins in mid-September and stretches into or through October, bull elk use their antlers to fight for breeding rights and protect their harem. The biggest bulls with the biggest antlers typically win these battles, which are often bloody and sometimes deadly.

The Language: Bulls let out eerie, high-pitched bugles to advertise their presence to rival bulls and potential mates during the fall rut. Cows bark to warn others of danger and mew to keep track of each other.

Breeding Age: Unlike white-tailed deer, which sometimes breed in their first fall and often have twins, cow elk usually don't breed until they are 2½ years old and in most cases have only one calf. In late-May or early June, following approximately 8½ months of gestation, cows separate from the herd to have their spotted, scentless calves in isolated areas. Calves join the herd about two weeks after birth.

Lifespan: Elk can live 20 years in captivity, but typically live 10 to 15 years in the wild.

Conservation Partners: The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation has helped protect and enhance 5.8 million acres of elk habitat since it formed in 1984, including several Nebraska projects, where it has also been a partner in elk research. Information in this sidebar came from their web site at RMEF.org, which contains many more facts and details about elk conservation issues, hunting tips and news.

Captive elk that escaped on the Rosebud Indian Reservation in south-central South Dakota appear to be the seed for a herd that now spends most of the year in the canyons along the Niobrara River near Nenzel. Elk sightings in the area began in the early 1990s and a decade later became common. Unique among Nebraska's elk, most of the cows and some of the bulls in that herd migrate between the two states, wintering in South Dakota and spending the rest of the year in Nebraska. With other herds established along the Niobrara near Valentine and Basset, the region opened to hunting in 2007. Growth of the herd near Valentine, as well as disease concerns, led to changes at the Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge, which has begun eliminating its captive elk and lowering fences to allow wild elk to come and go as they please.

The Niobrara River and Boyd County elk herds aside, biologists can only speculate on the source of the other herds. The Pine Ridge is a likely source, but elk could have wandered in from Wyoming, Colorado or even South Dakota. Biologists have also found it difficult, if not impossible, to get an accurate count of the number of elk in Nebraska, but based on their observations and those provided by hunters, landowners and others, they believe each of the herds is slowly growing.

Next Stop ... ?

Biologists estimate there were between 1,600 and 2,200 head of elk heading into last spring's calving season, which likely added about 300 more animals to the herd, and elk harvest should be around 150 head this fall. Based on Hams' estimates, the state's herd is growing by 15 to 20 percent per year. At that rate, the elk that survived the first two hunting seasons in the Pine Ridge could have fueled the growth of the state's entire population, but interstate movement of animals likely figured into the equation as well, and not just in the Boyd and Niobrara units. Nordeen is fairly certain there continues to be movement of young bulls, and possibly other elk, from the Black Hills of South Dakota and Wyoming into the Pine Ridge.

Elk, especially young bulls that tire

of bouts with older males, are prone to wander and can cover 50 miles in a day. Reports of bull elk have come from all corners of Nebraska, most staying in one area for a short time before moving on. Sometimes cow elk wander off with those bulls, too, and when that happens, a new herd can be established wherever they find things to their liking and stop, as was the case when the Wyoming elk settled in the Pine Ridge more than 40 years ago.

So where will elk wander off to next? “Clearly they're going to continue to fill in the Pine Ridge, the North Platte River, the Wildcat Hills and those escarpments, and the Niobrara River all the way down to the town of Niobrara,” said Hams. “Those are all of the easy ones.”

Nordeen said it appears as though new herds are currently forming along the Niobrara south of Rushville and Gordon, and in the Wildcat Hills on the south edge of the Pumpkin Creek Valley west of Harrisburg.

Hams said the territory elk are likely to reclaim next is the Sandhills, which may already have the beginnings of its first herd. Michael Croxen of the Nebraska National Forest – Bessey Ranger District near Halsey said four years ago a visitor reported seeing a herd of 10 cows and calves with two bulls. While a herd of that size hasn't been reported since, sightings of elk on the forest aren't uncommon, including a cow and calf that were seen this summer. Elk are also being reported on nearby private land along the Dismal River. For that matter, any of the other rivers running through the Sandhills, including the Snake, Cedar and Loups, all of which include stretches that are forested with cedars, cottonwoods or other deciduous trees, could support elk today just as they did more than 100 years ago. So could rougher areas of the Sandhills, including those east of Alliance where Schlichtemeier regularly received reports of elk.

“If elk stay in the general habitats that they're in right now, I think the population will double from where it is now in about five years,” Hams said. “If they expand into the Sandhills, that's a huge amount of habitat – three times as much habitat as there is everywhere else in the state. There's very little row-crop agriculture and a lot of grass. You could put 1,000 elk in the Sandhills



A young bull elk peers through the cattails on the North Platte River.

and not even know they're there.”

The rugged, cedar-forested canyons of the Central Loess Hills Region in and around Custer County also have habitat suitable for a new elk herd, as do most rivers, including the Missouri. Richard Nelson, district wildlife biologist in the Commission's North Platte office, said there are already a few elk living along the Platte and Republican rivers in southwestern Nebraska.

It's Your Call

While some landowners in the Pine Ridge, Boyd County and elsewhere initially were opposed to having any elk around, perceptions seem to be changing.

“They've become fairly popular with the landowners,” said Nordeen, noting that landowners not only appreciate the opportunity they get to hunt elk themselves, but many make additional income by charging others who hunt their land.

Wherever elk move to next, it will be the landowners who decide if they stay and how big the herds will be, as Hams said the Commission recognizes the damage these large mammals can do to crops.

John Orr has had elk on his farm and ranch on the North Platte River near Lewellen since the early 1990s. He said bachelor groups of bulls spend much of the summer in his corn fields, which provide everything an elk needs – food, water and cover – and may be

cooler and less bug infested than the riverbottom. The bulls trample the corn, bed down and stay.

“When they start living in the corn fields, those things do a lot of damage,” said Orr. “It seems like they have to make themselves a new place to lay down every night.”

That damage isn't evident until harvest rolls around in the fall, but the damage elk cause to fences is more readily seen. “A four-wire fence is nothing to them,” Orr said. “If they want



Like deer, rutting bull elk rub their antlers on trees. With elk, however, the trees are often much larger, including this 12-inch ponderosa pine.



A bachelor group of bull elk graze in the Sandhills north of the Niobrara River near Nenzel. While some elk spend the entire year in the area, most of the cows and calves in this herd migrate north into South Dakota for the winter and return in the spring.



Fresh from a roll in a wallow, a bull elk heads back into the timber after feeding on an alfalfa field in the Pine Ridge near Chadron.

to, they'll just run right through it and never look back."

A self-described nature lover, Orr admits he has mixed feelings about the elk, and isn't sure he would want the herd to grow much beyond its current level. "They're so pretty to look at and so majestic, and I love hearing them in the fall when they start bugling," he said. "So I'm glad they are here – I just wish they weren't quite so destructive."

Likewise, Mark Johnson is mostly happy to have had elk on his place near Nenzel since the early 1990s. But the migratory nature of that herd lessens the damage they can cause, and led Johnson and other landowners to ask that only bull permits be issued when the area opened to hunting in 2007. It was the bulls that were doing most of the damage, often tearing up hay bales

and trees with their antlers. Johnson tries to alleviate the damage by placing round bales near a shelterbelt and pivot on the south edge of his property, giving the elk something to eat far from his stack yard.

Hunting has reduced the number of bulls in the Nenzel herd, and the pressure seems to have broken what had been one large herd into several smaller ones, Johnson said. Last winter, however, the cows were slow to move north to South Dakota. "I had them here probably for a month and a half which was getting to be a little long," said Johnson. "If the cows did stay here all winter long, we would want more cow permits because I can't have 62 head of elk all winter. I just can't. But in the short time they're here you get to see them, you get to enjoy them and people want



Lined out and headed back to the timber above the Niobrara River after spending the night feeding on center pivot fields, a herd of elk wanders past Kewanee Public School on Nebraska Highway 12 between Valentine and Sparks.

to come see them. And as long as the snow doesn't get a foot-and-a-half deep, they're not too bad."

With the sentiments of Orr, Johnson and other landowners in mind, the Commission's elk management plan has been fluid and ever evolving. Ten years ago, the plan suggested that elk would not be tolerated in heavily farmed portions of the state. That section will likely be removed in a revised plan, work on which is underway. Hams said the new approach will be on a case-by-case basis wherever elk decide to settle down.

"There are a lot of places in the Sandhills where elk are going to be welcomed," he said. "And we've had elk show up throughout eastern Nebraska and rarely have we had a complaint. If we get 20 elk that set up on the Lower Platte, it will probably be a problem, but we'll see."

Two recent examples illustrate the differing opinions landowners have of elk. For the past two years, Pat Molini, the Commission's district wildlife manager in Lincoln, has received a call from a woman living in the hills south of the Platte River near Columbus. She wouldn't leave her name or address, but wanted Molini to know she had elk on her property. The last time she called, she reported seeing elk calves. Molini said she is apparently happy to have the elk and doesn't want anyone to bother them.

A herd of 10 to 20 elk that has made its home along a creek south of Interstate 80 near Sutherland, however,

has not been welcomed by landowners, so the Commission has increased the number of cow permits available in the area and has directed hunters there in an effort to reduce that herd, an approach it will use elsewhere that elk become a problem.

Even within their current range, biologists aren't certain how many more elk will be tolerated. In the Pine Ridge, for example, the population is already about double what a 2002 University of Nebraska – Lincoln study estimated the area's landowners would want, although that number was less than what the study said the habitat could support. But Hams said landowner tolerance of elk is greater now than anyone could have imagined. "It kind of started out like a relationship between the little boy and girl that are eight or nine years old and can't stand each other and then end up getting married," Hams said. "People start seeing things differently, and that's the phase we've been in here the last 20 years, an emerging of appreciation for each other ... elk, landowners, hunters and Game and Parks."

"It's a changing story, that's for sure," said Hams.

And a good story for those who appreciate elk. The next chapters should be interesting reading. ■

For more information and photos of elk in Nebraska, go to www.NebraskalandMagazine.com.

Smallmouths

The Overlooked Bass

Text and photos by Jeff Kurrus

At the time of press, there were 477 Master Angler (MA) largemouth bass reported to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission for 2009. For a largemouth bass to be considered for a MA award, the fish must measure 20 inches or above and weigh at least 5 pounds. Despite the fact that the minimum measurements for smallmouth bass are less restrictive due to the fish's smaller size (to qualify for a MA award, a smallmouth should measure 18 inches or weigh three pounds), only 31 smallmouth received MA awards last year. Because of these numbers, it might appear that Nebraska's smallmouth population isn't worth fishing for, yet I disagree. While not as many as some states, Nebraska has multiple smallmouth lakes to fish, and is gaining more each year.

The more I research, the more I've seen that instead of spending the time and money to fish in Minnesota or Wisconsin for smallies, I could stay right here and have just as good of time.

The following sections reveal how you could do just that – remain close to home chasing one of Nebraska's most underutilized, yet also most fierce, game fish.

Finding Smallmouth Waters

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's re-designed web site has an interesting feature for anglers looking for new spots to fish for their beloved species, including smallmouth.

On the home page, at OutdoorNebraska.org, click on the **Maps** link on the left side of the screen. The screen you now see will look like the state of Nebraska with the words [Boating](#), [Fishing](#), [Hunting](#), [Parks](#), and [Trails](#) listed at the top of the map. Click on [Fishing](#).

In the upper right hand corner of the screen, there is a blue fish icon next to the word **Search**. If you click on **this icon**, you can find the locations of specific water bodies or what water bodies have certain fish species. Other information includes water body size, contours, and any special regulations for each public area. Because the map is frequently updated, check back often.

Gearing Up for Smallies

1. Fly rod/reel – Use floating poppers or sinking flies for clear-water smallies.

2. Spinning reel/rod – Spinning tackle allows the smallmouth angler to more easily fish lighter, smaller lures with less visible line. "There are two things I'd concentrate on when fishing for smallmouth versus largemouth," said Commission fisheries biologist Daryl Bauer. "One, put yourself in smallmouth waters. And two, downsize your tackle just a little bit." Lures from 1/8 ounce to 1/4 ounce are typical, and line test from 6 to 10 is the norm.

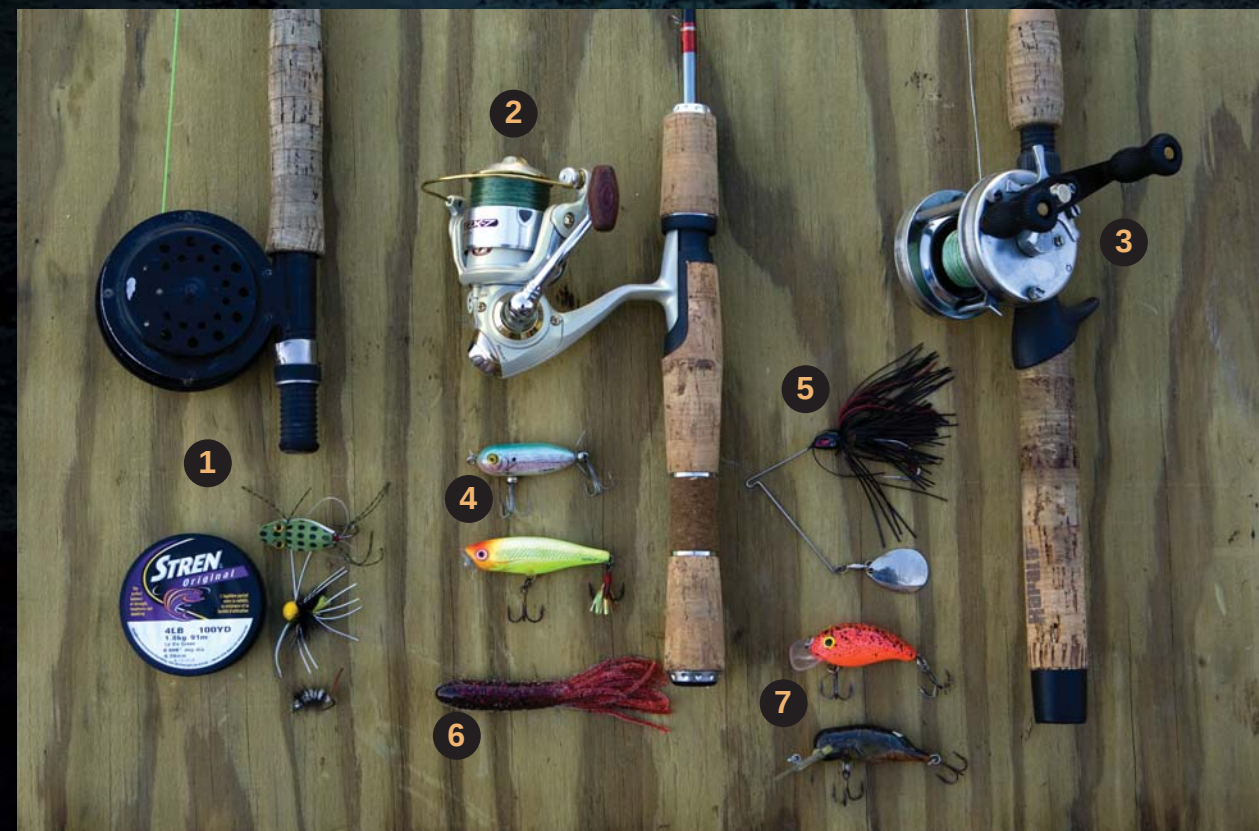
3. Baitcasting reel/rod – You don't totally have to forgo your heavy tackle to catch smallmouths. In Nebraska I've fished 1/2-ounce spinnerbaits and line test above 20 pounds for smallies and had good success.

4. Topwater lures – Try prop lures as well as poppers. I watched angler Trevor Nation one day at Johnson Lake repeatedly have strikes on lures similar to these. They are definitely an option in my own tackle box.

5. Black spinnerbait – My most reliable lure for all Nebraska big game fish species is the black spinnerbait. The color is supposed to represent crawfish, a staple in the smallmouth diet. Change blades and lure sizes to find the right match for the smallies you're targeting.

6. Tube jig – Whenever longtime smallie angler Wendell Newcomb struggled on the Missouri River during a recent trip, he went back to this lure and its slow presentation. And it worked.

7. Crankbaits – Remember the name of this fish when choosing crankbait sizes. My favorites are Shad-raps from Rapala, the Bandit 100 series, and Bagley crankbaits.



Largemouth Bass/Smallmouth Bass Comparison

Both smallmouth and largemouth bass are members of the sunfish family, which contains 33 species. The term “bass” is derived from the Old English word *baers*, meaning bristly. The spines of both fish help protect each species because predators will often take soft-rayed prey instead. Yet they may be known more for their differences than their similarities.

First, the mouth of the largemouth is large and underslung, aiding their predatory instinct of attacking prey from below. In contrast, the smallmouth is better suited to feed on their preferred diet – crayfish – in small rock crevices due to its narrow and more pointed mouth.

In addition, while the jaw of the largemouth extends past the eye, the jaw of the smallmouth ends before the eye. Also, while both species will change colors due to the clarity and composition of their environment, largemouth are typically dark to light green while smallmouth are bronze to brown.

Regarding their environment, the largemouth

habitat is much more varied than that of the smallmouth. Largemouth bass can tolerate a variety of environments, including brackish water, ponds, lakes, reservoirs, large and small rivers, and marshes. The smallmouth is more selective – they thrive in clear lakes and cool rivers with rock-gravel bottoms and moderate flows, flows they can manage better than the largemouth because of their streamlined shape.

There are also other differences between these two fish: Largemouth bass usually have horizontal stripes along their sides, while the smallmouth has vertical bars, and largemouth grow larger than smallmouth. The world and Nebraska state records for largemouth bass are 22 pounds, 4 ounces and 10 pounds, 11 ounces, respectively. In contrast, the world record and Nebraska state record smallmouth are 11 pounds, 15 ounces, and 7 pounds, 4 ounces.

While their differences are varied, both of these fish are known by sportsmen for their fighting ability. However, it is rare to find an experienced angler who would rather catch a 4-pound largemouth as opposed to a 4-pound smallmouth, which is probably the greatest difference between these two freshwater fighters.



The crayfish is a favorite meal of the smallmouth bass. The fish are also partial to other insects and smaller fish as they mature.



“Inch for inch and pound for pound, the smallmouth bass (*Micropterus dolomieu*) is the gamest fish that swims,” claimed outdoor writer J.A. Henshall in the late-1880s – a statement that is still very accurate today.



The largemouth bass (*Micropterus salmoides*) is the most popular game fish in Nebraska and the U.S., and is found from coast to coast in a variety of waters.

FISH ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOSEPH R. TOWELLARI

“River fish tend to be harder fighters,” said Commission fisheries biologist Daryl Bauer. “They’re exercised more because they’re in river current. But if you take a smallmouth in a pond environment, they’re still going to fight better than most fish.”



The River Rat

River rat – that's what Wendell Newcomb is. He's been fishing the Missouri River for 35 years and will probably continue fishing it until he dies. As we rode west from Verdel Landing one morning last summer, Newcomb repeatedly cut back and forth across this unchannelized part of the Missouri. "Traditional lake fishermen don't like navigating the river," he yelled over his engine. "You'll get stuck on sandbars quick. Some guys will run 60 miles per hour and not know where they're at. Slow that boat down on this river."

Smallmouth angler Wendell Newcomb fishes the lower end of a sandbar on the Missouri River west of Verdel Landing. A long time Missouri River angler, Newcomb fishes various habitat on this unchannelized portion of the river depending on the time of year.

It was my first time smallmouth fishing on the Missouri, and more MA smallies came from this part of the river in 2009 than any other location in Nebraska. "The river has been consistent through the years on production," said Newcomb. "Either it's gotten better or I've gotten better."

After seeing how many different options and techniques he used while fishing that day, I imagine it's a little bit of both. Here are a few locations Newcomb regularly fishes on Nebraska's best smallmouth fishery:

1) Rip-rap banks and jetties – Because the smallmouth bass spends so much of its life near rip-rap and sand, these locations are perfect spots to catch smallies. The flow of the river can create holes near rip-rap, so both deep and shallow water fishing are available. There is a large amount of rip-rap just west of the Verdel boat ramp. "Those fish will be there

all day," Newcomb repeatedly told me that day. "We'll get back there later," he said as we sped in the opposite direction. Yet when fishing turned slow later in the day, this set of rocks was the first place we went. And the fish were there.

2) Eddies – Smallmouth near these eddies feed on a variety of aquatic prey coming through the eddies, including baitfish, so position the nose of the boat into the current below the eddy and fish upstream to downstream, allowing the lure to flow through the eddy following the natural flow of the river.

3) Downside of sandbars – The downstream side of sandbars often create small shelves and drop-offs in still water where topwater lures, including weightless soft plastics, become good options.

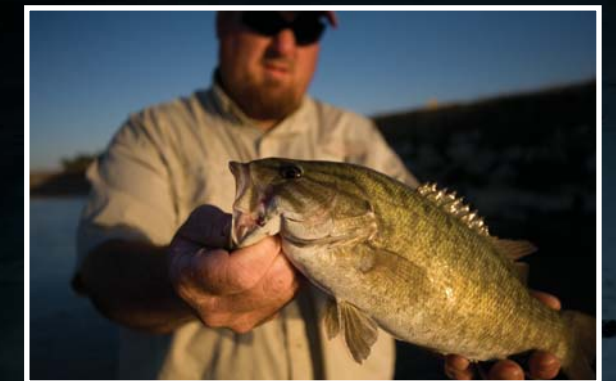
4) Upside grass on sandbars – Fish these with spinnerbaits and weedless soft plastics. The cover is denser and will hold smallies late into the summer. "There is a lot more grass on this river than a lot of people realize," said Newcomb. "And it holds smallies."

5) Backwater – In late-April and into May, said Newcomb, fish move into the backwaters as soon as these shallow spots become warmer than the main river. "Once you're there, fish every log you see because spawning fish will be on each one. It's a matter of going from stump to stump to stump, and that lasts until June."

6) Points – Once fish move out of the backwaters, look at river points. "Come up behind the points when you fish them," Newcomb said. By doing this, the lure has a more natural presentation to the fish. These areas should also be fished during the first cool nights of August, Newcomb said, for smallies will congregate on any kind of point where these fish can locate fry. "Smallmouth are like packs of wolves," said Newcomb. "Here today, gone tomorrow. They move a lot through the year, especially during the summer, making spring and fall the best times to catch them."



The State of Smallies in Nebraska



"While we do have a self-sustaining population of smallmouth in multiple places," said Bauer, "I definitely wish we had more smallies." Unfortunately, most waters in Nebraska don't have suitable smallmouth habitat, so it's probably better to release the smallmouth you catch instead of putting them in the fryer. Plus, because the state has a 15-inch minimum on members of the black bass family, which the smallmouth belongs to, any smallmouth a person keeps would therefore be one of the larger smallies in the state and one of the few that helps sustain Nebraska's naturally reproducing population.

Smallmouth bass mature sexually between three and four years of age, at which time they are able to spawn, usually in early-May to early-June depending on the latitude. Females lay eggs numbering in the thousands and males defend the nests, continuing to aggressively chase off interlopers days after the eggs hatch. Spawning can be compromised by a variety of factors, including water temperature, predation and rainstorm runoff, with water washing away eggs or covering them with silt. If they survive this initial storm of danger, fingerling smallmouth feed on plankton, then move on to small crustaceans, insects and fishes. But many young smallmouth in Nebraska do not survive this early part of their life cycle, which is why the state's stocking program is so important to their continued existence. War Axe SRA, near Shelton, is one of the lakes recently stocked by the Commission. "People are catching 10- to 12-inch smallies in there right now," said Bauer, "with a few larger ones as well." For larger water with naturally reproducing populations, Merritt, McConaughy, and Lewis and Clark are some of the state's best. However, the unchannelized portion of the Missouri River above Lewis and Clark remains the best place to find this fierce fighter.

New Land on the Missouri

Purchases will benefit wildlife and public use.

By Eric Fowler

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers recently purchased two large tracts of land on the 59-mile reach of the Missouri National Recreational River in northeastern Nebraska to benefit least terns and piping plovers that will also substantially increase the amount of land on the river open to public for hunting, fishing, camping and other uses.

A 2,372-acre tract north of Wynot to be known as Audubon Bend will open to the public this fall, according to Mike George, manager of the Corps' Missouri River Recovery Program Manager before moving to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The land was purchased with the assistance of The Conservation Fund, a national non-profit group which, among other things, uses its revolving fund to help federal, state and local partners quickly acquire land.

Audubon Bend includes 4.5 miles of river frontage and bottomland between the bluff line and river, and is adjacent to a large sandbar complex where terns and plovers nest. The purchase will protect the land from recreational development that could degrade the sandbars, said George, and the Corps will look at ways to enhance those sandbars, including allowing the natural bank sloughing and erosion that provide the sediment necessary to maintain them.

The Corps is working on a restoration plan that will eventually include converting more than 1,800 acres of cropland to native grasses and cottonwood forest. It also hopes to restore a chute that formed the historic St. Helena Island. When restoration is complete, the Corps may transfer the land to a government agency to manage. "We've bought a lot of land since the

mitigation program has been in business," said George. "These are the kinds of tracts that leave the legacy of why we're in that business."

Audubon Bend is adjacent to Bow Creek Recreation Area, which was purchased by the National Park Service and opened in 2008. Other public lands open to hunting on the Nebraska side of the riverbottom in this reach include 800 acres at Ponca State Park and the nearby 660-acre Elk Point Bend Wildlife Management Area.

While the Audubon Bend property will be the most used by Nebraskans, a second tract was also purchased by the Corps – the 546-acre North Alabama Bend property southwest of Vermillion. The Corps plans to remove cedar trees that have invaded the grasslands and woodlands there in recent years, as well as control smooth brome grass. ■



Hunting on Tribal Land

Many species and opportunities for hunters this fall on tribal reservations.

By Ken Bouc

Nearly 100,000 acres of tribal land on three northeast Nebraska reservations are open this fall to hunters with permits issued by the Omahas at Macy, the Winnebagos at Winnebago (both in Thurston County) and the Santee Sioux at Santee in Knox County. Their regulations include the following:

The Winnebago

Reservation in northeastern Nebraska will have about 30,000 acres open to hunting this fall, according to tribal conservation officer Pete Snowball Sr. These fields and woodlands hold pheasants, quail and a scattering of Hungarian partridge for upland game enthusiasts, plus cottontails and squirrel for small game hunters.

High flows this spring and summer filled oxbows along the Missouri River with abundant water, providing excellent opportunity for waterfowlers. Plenty of furbearers, including beaver, muskrats, raccoons and mink, are available for those who wish to do some trapping.

Tribal fall turkey permits also are available, but only to hunters who also have a valid Winnebago deer permit, which are already sold out for this year.

Permits are \$75 for the upland game permit and \$20 each for small game and waterfowl hunting and furbearer trapping. A \$100 combination permit allows upland, small game and waterfowl hunting and furbearer trapping. A \$20 tribal habitat stamp is required for all hunting or trapping.

Permits and maps must be picked up in person at the Wildlife and Parks Office behind the Ho Chunk Hope Building on the south outskirts of Winnebago. Only a cashier's check or money order, in the amount of the permit and made out to the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska, will be accepted as payment, and permits will not be issued to anyone under 12 years of age.

For more information, call (402) 878-2362 or (402) 320-9471 between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.

The Omaha Reservation offers an unlimited number of either-sex fall turkey permits, waterfowl permits, upland game permits valid for pheasants, quail, cottontails and squirrels, and 38,000 acres on which hunters can use those permits, according to Wildlife

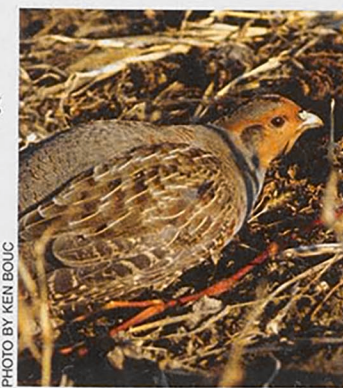


PHOTO BY KEN BOUC

and Parks Program Director Mike Tyndall. Deer permits for this fall, however, are not available – the Omahas sell those in early January each year, often exhausting the supply in an hour or less.

The Omaha's fall turkey season is open October 28 through November 30. Permits are \$25 each, are valid for one bird of either sex, and there is no limit on the number a hunter may buy. Upland game permits are \$175, and allow the taking of pheasants and quail from October 23 through January 23, plus cottontail rabbits and squirrels, open now through February 28. The tribal waterfowl permit is \$100.

Permits and a map showing land open to hunting are available over the counter at the Tribal Parks and Wildlife Office at Big Elk Park, near the Missouri River northeast of Macy. Permit applications and a map also are available online at www.rezhunter.com. For more information, or to reserve park cabins or campsites, call the Wildlife and Parks office at (402) 837-4389. Permits and accommodations must be paid for with credit card or money order.

Deer, turkey and upland/small game seasons on the Santee Reservation in Knox County will open and close on the same dates as Nebraska's statewide seasons and, with one exception, also will have the same bag and possession limits – the Nebraska fall turkey permit allows two birds of either sex, while the Santee permit is valid for one.

The approximately 30,000 acres of the Santee Reservation open to hunting offer "lots of turkeys," according to Don LaPointe, director of Santee Parks and Wildlife. An unlimited number of turkey permits, each allowing one bird, are available at \$50 apiece.

At \$40 each, an unlimited number of doe permits will also be available. Those wishing to take a buck using a bow, firearm or muzzleloader can upgrade to one of 200 available either-sex permits for \$125.

A Santee upland and small game permit seems a bargain at \$20, valid for pheasants (which are making a comeback from winter losses several years ago) as well as quail, partridge, rabbits and squirrels.

Permits and a map showing land open to hunting are available via e-mail at santeeparkswildlife@yahoo.com. Also include any questions you might have. Permits and maps also may be obtained over the counter at the tribal Parks and Wildlife office in the town of Santee. Permits may be paid for with cash, money order or personal check. ■



PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER



www.nebraskabirdlibrary.org

The Nebraska Bird Library is an interactive website dedicated to helping Nebraskans identify and learn about Nebraska's birds.

Searchable by color, size, region, habitat, or by common or scientific name, the Nebraska Bird Library is filled with high quality images, bird descriptions, songs, habitats, and Nebraska-specific bird locations.

Beginner or expert, the Nebraska Bird Library is ready to help you get out and go birding!



Duck Soup

Something different when you have grown weary of the same old recipes.

By Jon Farrar

As soup, duck is attributed with extraordinary powers. 'When married couples quarrel,' said an ancient Chinese sage, 'they should immediately make duck soup and eat it together. The soup is so beneficial that even the most argumentative man and wife will be reunited.' It helps that the Mandarin duck, which mates for life, is a symbol of felicity and constancy.

— William Mark, *The Chinese Gourmet*, 1994

A less flattering comment about eating duck came from a line in the Marx Brothers' classic movie, *Duck Soup*, released in 1933. The movie had nothing at all to do with duck soup. The title was one of Groucho's lines: "Take two turkeys, one goose, four cabbages, but no duck, and mix them together. After one taste, you'll duck soup the rest of your life."

Duck soup should not be ducked! It is hearty and delicious. Most recipes are for domestic duck and Eastern European or Chinese in origin. All can be adapted using wild ducks. For hunters, duck soup can be a welcome change from the usual ways ducks are prepared — roasted, stir fried or on the grill. The Internet is awash in domestic duck soup recipes, but be aware most Chinese recipes begin with a roasted duck to bring out the full flavor of the bones; and most Polish recipes for *Czarnia*, a traditional Easter-time meal, call for the use of several cups of duck blood, something impossible for duck hunters to gather. Also, when cruising the Internet, be diligent to avoid "duck soup" recipes for sick ferrets. While they may breathe new life into ailing ferrets, the ground cat food recipes would require strong drink to choke down.

Since most recipes are built around domestic ducks that are substantially larger than wild ducks, the volume of other ingredients should be halved if using one mallard, or two mallard-sized

ducks should be used. Most soup recipes call for a carcass with skin-on, particularly if the duck is to be roasted first. As most health-conscious eaters today will discard the skin after the duck is cooked and skim fat from the top of the stock, it is acceptable to start with a whole, skinned duck. The carcass is simmered to extract the favor locked in bones and connective tissue, creating a tasty stock for the soup. If a whole duck, picked or skinned, is not at hand, boned-out duck meat can be substituted in the soup using commercial chicken broth in place of the homemade soup stock, but the flavor is a distant second.

Chunky Duck Soup with Wild Rice

Serves four to six

SOUP

- 1 mallard-sized duck, picked
- 5 cups water or canned chicken broth
- 1 large bay leaf
- 1 crushed garlic clove
- ½ teaspoon crushed rosemary leaves
- 2 large carrots
- 2 celery stalks
- 2 large red potatoes
- 1 large white onion
- ½ cup minced parsley

Place duck on its back in stockpot with liquid. Should be enough to flow into the body cavity but no more. Add herbs. Bring to a low boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer for about two hours or until meat easily flakes off bones. Remove meat and set aside. Return bones to the stock. Simmer at least 30 minutes more.

Strain stock, cool, and skim fat from surface. Coarsely chop and add the vegetables. Cube breast meat and add along with legs to the pot. Simmer until all vegetables are done. It is a shame to overcook fresh vegetables. Add parsley last. Amount of seasonings may be

changed to suit individual tastes. Add salt if necessary.

RICE DISH

- 1 cup washed wild rice
- 2 cups washed white rice
- 7 cups homemade stock or canned chicken broth
- ½ teaspoon each of oregano leaves crushed fennel seeds and thyme
- 1 teaspoon granulated or freshly minced garlic
- ½ pound baby portabella mushrooms
- 15 moist prunes
- 1 red pepper
- 10 small green onions

Prepare rice dish while soup is simmering. Bring rice and liquid to boil while gently stirring. Reduce to a simmer, add herbs and cover. When only a little liquid remains, add quartered mushrooms, quartered prunes, diced red pepper and diced green onions. Cover and simmer for a short time, no more than 10 minutes or until all liquid is absorbed. Red peppers are mild and lose their sweetness if overcooked.

As the soup and rice are cooked separately, they may be served as separate dishes, or together with the soup ladled over the rice mixture.

Top with a dollop of sour cream and chives and a sprinkle of freshly ground black pepper. Tabasco lovers might want to add a drop or three to their individual bowls. A hearty red wine is a fine companion to the meal.

If desired, the duck may be cooked and stock prepared, refrigerated overnight, and the meal completed quickly the following day.

Hearty Barley Duck Soup

Serves four to six

- Two mallards (or equivalent of smaller ducks) skinned
- 2 quarts cold water (or 1 quart chicken stock, fresh or canned, combined



In countries where domestic ducks are commonly raised, duck soup is a much anticipated meal. Wild ducks can be used in most recipes for domestic duck, keeping in mind that they weigh less and as a rule do not have as much fat.

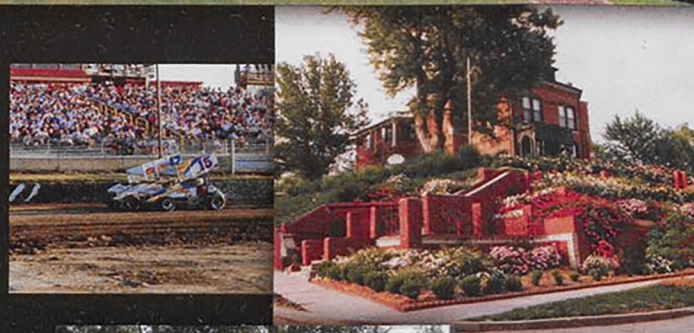
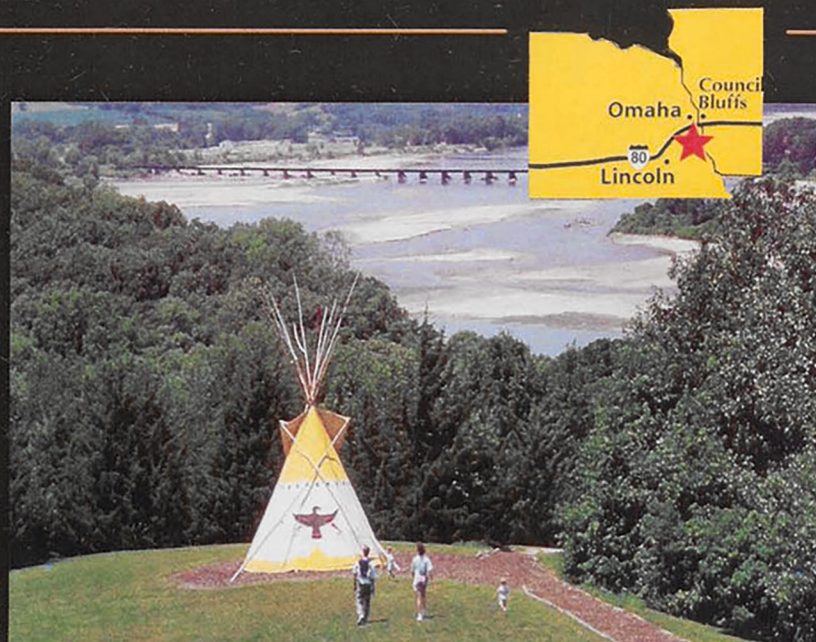
- with 1 quart water)
- 2 carrots, scraped and coarsely chopped
- 2 celery stalks, including leaves, coarsely chopped
- 1 small parsnip, scraped and coarsely chopped
- 1 onion, peeled and pierced with 2 whole cloves
- Freshly ground black pepper
- ½ pound portabella mushrooms, coarsely chopped
- ½ cup pearl barley
- 2 large bay leaves
- ½ teaspoon each of coarsely ground pepper, rosemary, and granulated garlic.
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh parsley

Fillet breast meat from carcass and cube. Cut thighs and legs from carcass but leave joined. Marinate meat overnight or up to three days, refrigerated. (My favorite marinade is enough bottles of stout beer to cover the meat in a glass or ceramic bowl, 6 tablespoons soy sauce, 2 tablespoons each of crushed ginger and chopped garlic, and two large bay leaves. Periodically stir the meat so all surfaces are exposed to the marinade.)

Prepare stock as in the first recipe by simmering carcass in 1 quart of water or commercial chicken broth for at least one hour. Strain to remove bones. In stock pot combine the broth, 1 to 2 cups of the marinade, breast and

leg meat, herbal seasonings. Simmer for 30 to 40 minutes. Salt to taste. Add barley, but do not use "quick barley" as it will not make the wonderful barley "milk." Simmer until barley nearly done. Add additional water if too thick. About 10 to 20 minutes before serving, add carrots, celery, parsnip, mushrooms and onion. Cook until vegetables as desired. Serve with sprigs of parsley for a garnish. Thick slices of hearty sourdough or rye, an aged cheese that can hold its own next to this hungry hunters' soup, and a dark beer are perfect companions. As with most homemade soups, the flavors blend and improve in any left over and eaten the next day. ■

Cass County IN THE MIDDLE OF IT ALL



- Strategic Air and Space Museum
- Eugene T. Mahoney State Park
- Wildlife Safari Park
- Hiking and Biking Trails
- Seven Golf Courses

For FREE Visitors Information, call 1-800-965-8479
www.visitcasscounty.com

ATTRACTIONS/EVENTS

WILDERNESS SURVIVAL CLASS - Start a fire with the bow-drill method, build a survival shelter, be introduced to primitive traps, cordage, flint knapping, edible and medicinal plants, water location and purification, and much more! Go to www.greatplainstracker.com.

BOOKS/PUBLICATIONS/VIDEOS

EXPLORE NEBRASKA art, history, culture and the great outdoors with a subscription to Nebraska Life Magazine. One year (six issues) for \$21 or two years (12 issues) just \$38. Phone (800) 777-6159, write us at 206 W Norfolk Ave, Norfolk NE 68702-0819 or visit www.NebraskaLife.com. Makes a great gift.

SATISFY YOUR CURIOSITY about Nebraska's rich past with *Nebraska History*. Learn about Nebraska's fascinating people, places and events that shaped our state. To subscribe or to give a gift of *Nebraska History*, call 1-800-833-6747 or (402) 471-3272. To learn more, visit www.nebraskahistory.org.

DOGS

PLUM CREEK KENNEL. German shorthairs, stud service, puppies and started dogs. Training for all pointing breeds. Specialize in training the handler as well as the dog. Wayne Clark, Percival, Iowa (near Omaha) (712) 529-4238, clarks1@iowatelecom.net.

DUCKDAWG RETRIEVERS - Raising exceptional hunting yellow and black Labradors. Puppies raised in our home, 30-month, written health guarantee. Stud service: GRHRCH UN DuckDawg's Eba Roll the Dice and GRHRCH UH McMac Magic Eyes A'Smilin MH. The first Grand Hunting Retriever Champions in Nebraska. www.duckdawg.com Ron Green, DVM and Libby Milroy, North Platte, NE (308) 534-3659

PREMIER GUNDOGS TRAINING KENNEL: State licensed kennel specializing in Hunting Dog and Hunt Test training for all waterfowl and upland flushing retrievers, spaniels and pointing Labradors. Dale and Kris Taylor (402) 787-2048 www.premiargundogs.com.

FLATLANDER KENNELS INC. Bayard, NE Full-time retriever training facility for the serious hunter or AKC and HRC hunt tester. Trainer of Nebraska's first and only GRHRCH's! Super Retriever Series competitor and a member of Avery's Team Waterdog. Training available for all levels of hunt tests and Gundogs. Chris Jobman: (308) 249-0707, www.flatlanderkennels.com.

FISH/FISHING

FISH FOR SALE. Catfish, largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, perch, crappie, bluegill, walleye, rainbow trout, grass carp, minnows. Pleasant Valley Fish Farm, 27851 U.S. Highway 83, McCook, NE 69001. (308) 345-6599.

NEBRASKA LAKE MANAGEMENT. Biological lake surveys, fish stocking, rough fish control, lake aeration, algae control, aquatic weed control. Rob Hofpar, Aquatic Biologist, licensed, insured and qualified. (402) 784-6005 Valparaiso - (888) 850-2460 www.nelakes.net.

GET YOUR FISHING PERMIT online today! Don't wait until tomorrow to enjoy Nebraska's great outdoors by going fishing with the family. To purchase a permit from the comfort of your own home, go online to www.OutdoorNebraska.org and click on Purchase a Permit under Licenses and Fees.

FOOD/GIFTS/HOME

HOME BREWING/BEER AND WINEMAKING. Fermenter's Supply, 8410 K Plaza, Suite #10, Omaha, NE 68127. Phone orders only, (888) 655-2739. Advice line (402) 593-9171. www.fermentersupply.com.

GUIDES/OUTFITTERS

CANOE - KAYAK - TUBE RENTALS on the beautiful Niobrara River with Dryland Aquatics at Sparks, Nebraska. Your Niobrara River Specialist. (800) 337-3119. www.drylandaquatics.com. info@drylandaquatics.com.

OUTDOOR EQUIPMENT

IS PERFORMANCE IMPORTANT? For the finest canoes and accessories look to Great Plains Canoe Co., 205 Main, Springfield, NE 68059. Phone (402) 253-2000.

TAXIDERMY

B&B SKULL CLEANING and European mounts: professional service at affordable prices. Contact Rubin Fields in Omaha at (402) 598-1873 or go to www.bbskullcleaning.com.

VACATIONS/RESORTS

THE OLDE MAIN STREET INN. A historic bed and breakfast listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Beautiful dining room with fireplace. Headquarters for General Nelson Miles, Wounded Knee Incident, 1890-91. 115 Main Street, Chadron NE 69337 (308) 432-3380. www.chadron.com/oldemain.

DIAMOND B TROUT RESORT, Orchard, Nebraska. Lodge, cabins, spring-fed lakes, playground equipment, paddleboats. Great for families, groups, hunters. Book your cabin now! Call for brochure (800) 974-3002. www.diamondbtroutresort.com.

BIG BLUE RANCH & LODGE - Enjoy fishing, hunting, hiking, birdwatching and ranch adventures on 2000+ acre cattle ranch in southeastern Nebraska. Beautiful log cabin, with fireplaces, kitchens & big covered porches, overlooks 20-acre lake. www.bigblueranch.com (402) 730-3643.

MILL IRON V LODGING has modern cabins for your vacation pleasure. We are located near Verdigris, NE in turkey country. Each cabin offers privacy; view and a birdwatcher's paradise. Stay with us for a COUNTRY

MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTERS

Don't forget your to get your
HIP number by calling
1-877-634-8687

GUN DOG TRAINING All Sporting Breeds



All dogs worked on foot - no
horses. Obedience included.
Midwest's finest facilities.

Started and trained dogs for sale.

"Training for hunters by hunters."

Wilderness Kennels
Henry Sader-Lincoln, NE
(402) 423-4212

www.wildernesskennels.com

RUFF RIVER'S BLACK MAGIC MARKER MH QAA
Sharpie is a good-looking, powerful 80# male who is intelligent, trainable and loves to retrieve. When he is not working he is equally capable of turning-it-off and laying around the house. Sharpie has been very consistent in both AKC HT and FT. In addition he is a powerful upland dog with a fantastic nose.

- AKC Master Hunter
- Qualified All-Age
- SRS Semi-Finalist
- Yellow Factored
- OFA Excellent Hips
- EYES CERF Normal
- EIC and CNM Clear
- \$500.00 Stud Fee

FC-AFC Hilltop's Hayseed

Sire: FC-FTCH-AFTCH "Magic" MH
Cedar River Sage

SHARPIE

FC-AFC-FTCH-AFTCH Ritz

Dam: Ruff Rivers "Minni" MH QAA
Ruff Rivers "Trudy" MH

JASON BRION

402-730-4235

www.jlbretrievers.com

EXPERIENCE. (402) 668-7488. www.milliron-v-lodging.com. jpeinrem@gpcom.net.

PLANNING A VACATION? Why not spend it at a Nebraska State Park? With more than 80 state park and recreation areas across Nebraska to choose from, you can enjoy a campground or cabin and enjoy activities such as fishing, swimming, camping and hiking. Call (402) 471-1414 for reservations or go online at www.OutdoorNebraska.org and follow the Parks link.

WANTED

LUGERS, MILITARY SIDEARMS, swords/edged

weapons wanted. Contact: Dave (402) 677-2323, david-jayuden@msn.com

Classified Rates: 85¢ per word, minimum \$15.
Closing: First business day six weeks before issue date. Classified ads are accepted on a first-come, first-served, space-available basis. Classified Ads, NEBRASKALAND Magazine, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370. Telephone (402) 471-5473. Fax: (402) 471-1984. E-mail: ngpc.classifieds@nebraska.gov. Ads are posted online at NebraskalandMagazine.com at no additional charge.

NEBRASKALAND Now Offers Display Advertising...

Enhance your advertisement
with photos, graphics
and color!

Reach
thousands of
NEBRASKALAND
readers with your
message through
our display
advertising program.

A limited number
of spots are available,
so call us today at
(515) 440-2810 or e-mail

dave@larsonent.com



Prairies MADE BY HAND

PRODUCT OF U.S.A.

PRAIRIE PLAINS
RESOURCE INSTITUTE
AURORA • NEBRASKA

EST. 1980



IT'S WORTH THE EFFORT.

Making anything by hand takes time, patience and a commitment to quality. For 30 years Prairie Plains Resource Institute has been restoring Nebraska prairies with over 150 species of Nebraska seed - collected, processed and planted by hand. That same care and attention goes into everything we do - planting prairies, offering outdoor education for all ages and maintaining our 7 Nebraska prairie preserves. Learn more by visiting our website and become a member today!

1307 L Street | Aurora, NE 68818 | 402-694-5535 www.prairieplains.org



◀ Pictured on the left is my dad, Matt Wachal, in the early 1940s with furs that he trapped in the Richland area. He trapped skunks, muskrats and weasels with his dog, Brownie.

Below is a picture of myself taken approximately forty years later after trapping the same area around Richland and catching coyotes, muskrats, coons, beavers and mink with my dog, Lady.

— Dan Wachal
Schuyler, Nebraska



▲ This is a picture of Cedric Meisel from Omaha, second cousin to my father, August "Augie" Thomsen. Augie and his brother Bud used to go "coon" hunting and sell the pelts for extra income during the Depression.

Bud had the dogs. They were good hunting dogs but one night one of them would not return to the car when called – it must have had a coon up a tree! So Dad left his coat beside the road. The next day he returned and found the dog waiting beside the coat. The scent of the coat made him stay until Dad returned.

The photo was taken in Scribner, Nebraska, in the 1930s.

— Marilyn A. Volz
McCook, Nebraska



▲ This photograph was taken in Murray, Nebraska in approximately 1950. On several Sunday afternoons during the winter, many of the local hunters would get together for a coyote hunt. They would surround a country section and walk toward the center herding the coyotes into the ever decreasing circle. Today I'm sure this would give a hunter safety instructor cause for concern, but other than the coyotes, no one was ever injured. I can identify all those leaning on the top rail of the stock truck. All but two are deceased. My father, Bob McKulsky, is 5th from the left. He passed away in 2008 at the age of 91.

— Bob McKulsky Jr., Omaha, 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. Photos will be returned.



In a day, you went from "Dad" to hero, mentor and friend.

Nebraska has made it easier than ever to pass on the gift of hunting to our young people. With your leadership and knowledge, bonds will be strengthened and a first-time hunter will become a lifetime hunter. To help, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission is proud to announce new regulations that allow youth hunting at a younger age with fewer roadblocks to success – including lower tag fees. And your local shooting range is the perfect place to begin your preparation. This year, make a lasting connection. *Take a young person hunting.*

\$5 Youth deer and turkey permits.

For more information, go to
www.outdoornebraska.org/youth

