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JUNE 2024

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NebraskalandMagazine.com

Cover: A boat heads back to the marina as the sun sets
over Sherman Reservoir. See page 18.
ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

This page: Distant lights illuminate clouds above
ponderosa pine trees at Chadron State Park on a starry
night.
JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

BLACKHILLS
OVERLOOK
NATURE TRAIL

Nebraskaland
magazine

Published by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission since 1926. The Commission is dedicated to the conservation and protection of all the state's natural resources and the people who use them.



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Coneflowers begin blooming in prairies and near roadsides. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

Conservation Officers

Table with 2 columns: District/Office and Conservation Officers. Rows include ADMINISTRATION (Lincoln), NORTHWEST (Includes counties covered), EAST SUB-DISTRICT, WEST SUB-DISTRICT, SOUTHWEST (Includes counties covered), NORTH SUB-DISTRICT, SOUTHEAST (Includes counties covered), NORTH SUB-DISTRICT, SOUTH SUB-DISTRICT, CENTRAL (Includes counties covered), NORTH SUB-DISTRICT, SOUTH SUB-DISTRICT, and SOUTHWEST (Includes counties covered).

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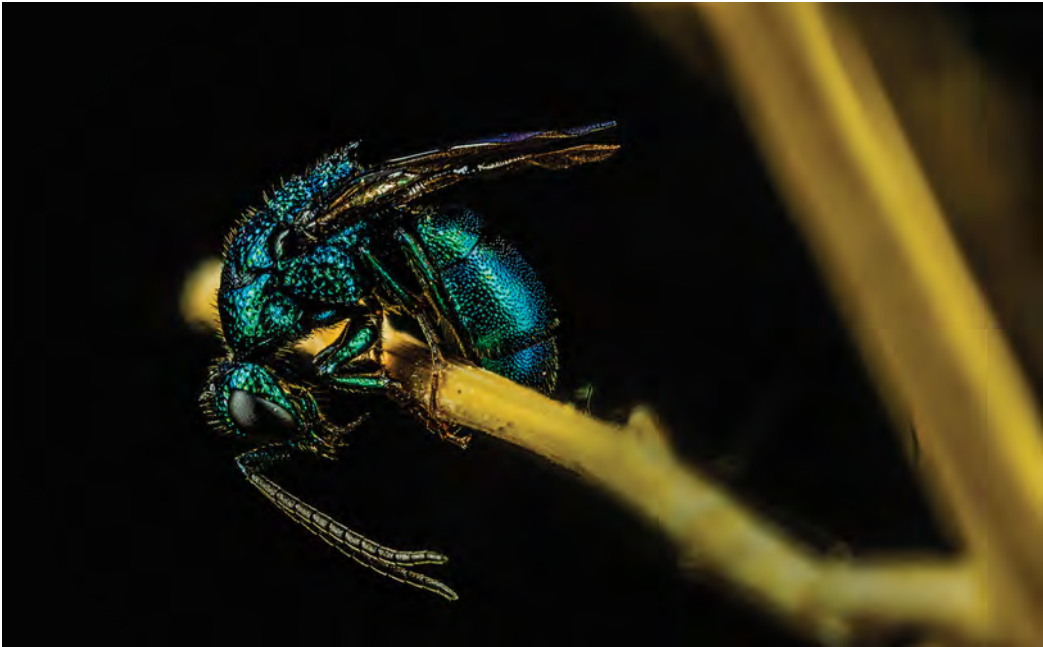
Events calendar for May, June, August, and September. Includes details for Fire and Fermentation, Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center, Knox County Rangeland, Fire, and Wildlife Tour, Soil Health Field Day, York County Fairgrounds 4-H Building, Prescribed Fire Seasonality and Frequency, Monarch Tagging at Lake Wanhoo, and Improving Your Bottom-Line: Benefits of Prairie Strips.



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to be featured in an
upcoming issue.

Tyler Moore, Omaha
Cuckoo Wasp



Ozan Aktas, Lincoln
Sunset Kayaking at Holmes Lake



Steve Krout, Papillion
Red-headed Woodpecker



Jeffrey Z. Carney, Ashland
Summer Lake Wrestling



Roger Richters, Utica
Ice Bubbles

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

STONE CREEK FALLS

Hiking a quarter-mile down the trail will take you to this small waterfall at Platte River State Park.

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

THE CRAPPIE SHED

By Tim McNeil

Dave Armstrong can be excused for his boyish enthusiasm for fishing. After all, he was only 10 when he caught a 22-pound carp out of Rotary Island-Optimist Lake, the pond-size lake on the north end of Auburn.

Onlookers watched him drag the beast by a chain stringer through town, and after the 11-block trek back to his house, he was exhausted.

"I cleaned and ate the fish when I got home," Armstrong remembers.

Armstrong owns the Crappie Shed in Sterling, Nebraska.

He opened his first bait shop in Auburn in November 2020 on a whim, when Armstrong and two of his buddies sat in his unattached garage eating fried fish, swapping fish tales and watching a Nebraska Cornhuskers game.

One of his friends said, "You should open a bait shop."

A week later, Armstrong was selling bait from his garage.

"People were coming and going from my garage every night that fall," Armstrong said.

He moved the Crappie Shed to Sterling two years later. The master closet-size store has nearly 1,000 plastic lures on its walls.

Armstrong paints, powder coats and bakes the jigheads he sells. The process ensures the longevity of the paint. He offers 38 colors, compared to larger retailers, who might provide 10-15 colors.

His plastics come from small suppliers, and he sells his homemade jigheads exclusively to mom-and-pop bait shops, but only after he tries every one of his creations.

"I'll stand and field-test for hours from the Duck Creek Recreation Area dock [in Nemaha County]," Armstrong said. "I don't sell until I test. I'm not interested in selling a lure to make a buck. I want everyone who goes fishing to have a favorable experience."

Armstrong said he can paint 200 to 300 jigheads in a night. Some have one eye. Others have a metallic-like finish that mimics scales falling from a shad. The effect attracts fish to the bait.

He's known for his jelly-skirt jig. His gold-painted Crown Royal jig is also popular with crappie fishermen. And he's putting the finishing touch on his latest creations — a gravedigger jig and a double-bladed road runner.

Armstrong's time spent painting jigheads doesn't mean he's no longer on the water. He has fished in 20 states and travels the country to compete in crappie tournaments. Last November, he was invited to represent Nebraska in the prestigious Dale Hollow Shootout, a \$50,000 crappie tournament in Celine, Tennessee.

"I'm not a great fisherman, but I learned from great fishermen," Armstrong said.

Now he wants to pass his knowledge and passion on to kids. Adopted by an Auburn couple when he was 2 months old, he knows how important the outdoors are to kids.

"I couldn't ask for better parents," he said. "I'm so grateful for what they did for me. They gave me a home. Because of my parents, I have a special calling to give back to kids."

He donates bait, tackle boxes, fishing poles and reels to a pair of youth tournaments — the Nebraska State Youth Kayak

Championship and Old Man River Days. The Crappie Shed and bait shop Anglers Allie in Prague, Nebraska, are co-sponsoring a tournament next May at Czechland Lake.

To support church fundraisers and families with cancer and other life-changing challenges, Armstrong has donated guided fishing trips.

On weekends, he takes open-water and ice-fishing clients to one of five southeastern Nebraska lakes — Czechland, Branched Oak in Lincoln, Iron Horse in DuBois, Burchard Lake in Burchard and Duck Creek in Peru. He likes when clients bring their children.

What motivates him the most is the opportunity to bring joy to someone in need. Recently, a client with spina bifida climbed from his wheelchair and into Armstrong's boat. The determined angler's face lit up when he caught his first fish.

"It's all about the smile," Armstrong said with boyish enthusiasm and a sparkle in his eyes.



Dave Armstrong in his crappie shed. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

—NEBRASKA LAND— IS IN DEMAND



CEDAR COUNTY 140 AC±

This peaceful and secluded hunter's paradise is located in the hills just south of the Missouri River. This turn-key hunting property is set up for comfort and success. The 42x66 steel building is finished off in a more than comfortable fashion. This rustic retreat features a large wood-burning fireplace that the entertainment centers around. Two bedrooms and a 3/4 bath help make it ideal for a weekend getaway. The shop portion is insulated and heated with a concrete floor and a well-set-up meat prep area. It also includes a cedar-lined hunting closet for ultimate scent control for your gear.



GAGE COUNTY 69.56 AC±

Nestled in a picturesque landscape just 2 miles from the heart of Wymore, Nebraska, and within an easy 60-mile drive to Lincoln, this expansive 1.5-story home truly depicts luxury country living. Offering 2,640 square feet of thoughtfully finished living space, this property is designed to accommodate various lifestyle needs, including a fully equipped mother-in-law suite beneath the garage, ensuring privacy and comfort for extended family, guests, and income potential for an Air B&B.

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FROM BOTH SIDES OF THE DOOR

By Ryan Sparks

Growing up on a Nebraska farm, I was blessed with an abundance of land to hunt, but when I moved out of state, I learned the importance of creating relationships with landowners. Having been on both sides of the door — being the one knocking and also seeing what influenced my family to give permission — has provided me with a unique perspective. Here are my top takeaways:

Know Who Owns the Land

Just because someone lives adjacent to where you want to hunt doesn't mean they own it. Resources like OnX or county assessor GIS maps (nebraskamap.gov) will give you a good understanding of land ownership. It's also a good

way to identify small properties that might go unnoticed or to identify landowners with multiple properties. You might gain permission to hunt several places by knocking on a single door.

Ask Permission Well Ahead of the Season

Not only does showing up the week before season make you seem unprepared, you also want the first shot at asking permission. Most landowners give permission to a single person. You want it to be you.

Present Yourself in the Best Light

Look respectable, be polite, clearly state where and when you want to hunt and go from there. If they say no, ask if they know anyone in the area who might let you hunt, and then thank them and move on.

Start Small

Not many people are going to give you permission to hunt giant bucks on their property, but a lot of landowners don't think twice about squirrels, quail or even turkeys. If you are hunting to fill the freezer, let them know you are more than happy to shoot a doe. Some landowners prefer archery hunters. Establish yourself as a respectful hunter with your actions.

Be Clear with Your Intentions

Some landowners want to know exactly when and where you want to hunt. Let them know what vehicle you will be driving, where you plan to park and give them your phone number in case they have questions.

Treat Landowners and Their Land with Respect

Don't drive off-road without permission, and don't drive down roads when it's muddy and leave ruts that will have to be repaired, or worse, get stuck and have to be pulled out. Pick up any trash you find as well as your spent shotgun shells or rifle cartridges. Leave gates the way you found them and don't invite friends that haven't clearly also been given permission.

Let Them Know How Much You Appreciate Hunting on Their Place

Send photos of the success you have and offer them some of the meat. With these things in mind, you will have places to hunt for years to come.



Asking permission to access someone's land well ahead of when you plan to arrive builds trust. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



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JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND

CATFISH AND CHIPS

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

- Servings:** 4
Prep Time: 3 hours
Cooking Time: 30 minutes
Ingredients:
- 4 catfish fillets
 - 4 large starchy potatoes
 - Vegetable/peanut oil for frying
- Beer Batter**
- 1 cup of flour, plus extra
 - 1½ teaspoon of baking powder
 - 1 teaspoon of fine sea salt, plus extra
 - 1 to 1¼ cups of lager beer

1. Cut potatoes, peeled or unpeeled, into desired size strips. Soak in water for about 2-3 hours.

2. Meanwhile, make the beer batter by combining the dry ingredients first, and then whisk in the beer. Batter should resemble thin pancake batter. Refrigerate the batter, covered, for up to 3 hours until you're ready to use it.

3. To fry the chips, drain potatoes and lay them out onto a large cookie sheet lined with paper or cotton towels. Dab the potatoes to get them as dry as possible — water and hot oil do not mix. Then heat oil to 300 degrees Fahrenheit, and fry in batches until potatoes become tender, about 5 minutes. They should still be blond at this point. Drain par-fried potatoes on paper towels or on a cooling rack.

4. Then, crank up the oil temperature to 375 degrees. Fry the chips again until golden and crispy — do not crowd the pan to keep the oil temperature from dropping too much. Transfer chips to a cooling rack, toss with salt to taste and keep warm. If fries get soggy, crisp them again in a 400-degree oven.

4. Rinse catfish with cold water, and then pat dry and season with salt. Next, lightly coat the fish with plain flour and then dip into the beer batter; gently stir batter if separation occurs. Fry fish in 375-degree oil until golden and crispy. Drain before serving immediately with chips and your favorite condiments.





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Shoreline to Spare

Sherman Reservoir SRA

Story and photos by Eric Fowler

A maze of bays and coves extend from the main body of Sherman Reservoir, providing plenty of water for boaters to explore. Thousands of acres of wildlife lands rise from the water.



At 2,845 acres and a little more than 4 miles long, Sherman Reservoir is far from Nebraska's largest. Yet between five large bays that branch off the main lake, and the many coves found in each of those, the lake boasts a maze of 77 miles of shoreline when full. That ranks second among the state's lakes, leaving plenty of water for boaters to explore and shoreline habitat for fish.

Full Pool

Completed in 1962, Sherman Dam was built by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation on Oak Creek northeast of Loup City. The creek, dry except following rain, doesn't supply the water for the lake, however. Instead, water is diverted from the Middle Loup River at Arcadia Dam, 18 miles to the northwest, and flows through a canal to the lake, where it backs up into loess canyons branching off the main arm. During the summer, water stored in the lake, owned by the Farwell Irrigation District, irrigates 49,000 acres of farmland in the Middle Loup Valley.

Sherman Reservoir State Recreation Area offers more than 300 primitive campsites in nine locations around the lake, including a few in out-of-the way corners. Until 2023, the only hookups for RVs were found in the seasonal and nightly spots offered by the Trade Winds Marina on the east side of the lake. Following expansion and improvements, the West Ridge Area campground now provides 61 pads with electrical hookups overlooking Thunder Bay on the south shore of the lake.

During the summer, boats and personal watercraft buzz around the lake, many pulling skiers and tubers, the size and shape of the lake providing shelter from the wind on most days. Lacking the sand beaches offered by several of the state's lakes, sun seekers often retreat to a bay, drop anchor and float the afternoon away on a hot summer day.

Starting in July, irrigation releases draw the lake down an average of 9 feet. Unlike some reservoirs, however,



TOP LEFT: Creyton Cumpston of Litchfield fishes from the footbridge over the inlet at Sherman Reservoir State Recreation Area. Spring fishing at the inlet for white bass, walleyes and more can be excellent.

BOTTOM LEFT: Boaters drop anchor and float the day away in one of Sherman's coves.

BELOW: Cottonwoods and other trees line the shores of Sherman, their roots exposed by erosion that occurs during the short time each spring that the reservoir is at full pool. When the lake is full, these roots are submerged and provide habitat for crappies and other fish.



Sherman refills every year. That process starts in the fall, after irrigation season, bringing the lake to 5 feet from full. Diversions resume in mid-April, and by mid-May, the lake is at full pool.

Fishing and Hunting

Sherman is one of the top walleye and crappie lakes in the state. It is one of three lakes where Game and Parks biologists net walleye during the spawn, collecting eggs to feed the hatchery system and raise walleye to stock in Sherman and other waters around the state. As such, the area along the dam is closed to fishing from April 1-20, but anglers can often find fish there prior to the closure, and elsewhere during it. Walleye fishing peaks in May and June. It can slow considerably in the summer if gizzard shad, the lake’s forage base, have a successful hatch, but picks up



TOP LEFT: The Oak Creek Area on Trail 11 is one of several locations where campers can pitch a tent at Sherman. The layout of the lake provides kayakers plenty of places to escape the wind from nearly any direction.

TOP RIGHT: Kielyn Beezley of Kearney water skis behind a boat piloted by Rick Westland of Pleasanton.

BELOW: A storm cloud fills the sky above the West Ridge Area campground on the south side of the reservoir. The campground was expanded in 2023 and now provides 61 pads with electrical hookups.



again in the fall.

The crappie bite is best when the lake fills in May and floods the cottonwood trees and willows growing on the shoreline, or the trees that have toppled into the lake. Fall fishing can be good for crappies, too.

There are other fish to chase at Sherman. When water starts pouring into the lake in April, anglers find white bass below the inlet in the Fisherman’s Bridge area. During the summer, white bass can be found following schools of shad in the lake. Plenty of channel catfish, and some big ones, provide opportunity throughout the summer. Whatever you’re fishing for, hang on to your rod, and bring a big net. You might hook into a northern pike or a flathead catfish. The flatheads can top 70 pounds, and one caught and released in 2001 measured 6 inches longer than the current 89-pound state record.

The reservoir is surrounded by 4,721 acres of public land, making it a popular spot among hunters. White-tailed deer and turkeys roam the tree- and brush-filled draws, and pheasants, quail and a few prairie-chickens are found in the upland prairie and many food plots on the wildlife management area. Maintenance trails through the area are perfect for a long, scenic hike, especially in the fall, when the cottonwood leaves turn golden yellow.

A dozen trails lead to the water or the wildlife lands around the lake. At the end of each of them — like the coves on the reservoir itself — you will certainly find something to your liking. 📍



Sherman Reservoir is located 7 miles east of Loup City. This 2,845-acre lake provides camping, fishing, boating, hunting and more.



TOP LEFT: Goldenrod blooms in a prairie in the Trail 5 area last August. Grasslands around the lake are managed for wildlife.

TOP RIGHT: A boat heads back to the marina as the sun sets over the lake.

BOTTOM: Ron Garver nets a walleye for his brother, Ben, last fall. Ben, who has fished the lake his entire life and is a fishing guide there, called it “a walleye factory. It just turns them out year after year.”



Outdoor Nebraska

By Renae Blum

There is no limit to what you can do outdoors this time of year. This month, try a new trail program, Your Parks Adventure, or cast a line for catfish, survey for butterflies and photograph flowers. [N](#)



Photograph black-eyed Susans

Blooms late June into August | Generally statewide, except south-central and southwestern Nebraska

If you have ever been outside in Nebraska from late June to August, odds are high that you have seen a black-eyed Susan. These flowers may be one of the most recognizable wildflowers due to their bright yellow petals and brownish-black centers. These flowers are critical for pollinators; many bees, butterflies and beetles rely on them for food and nectar. Shoot photos early and late in the day when the light is warm and golden.

JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

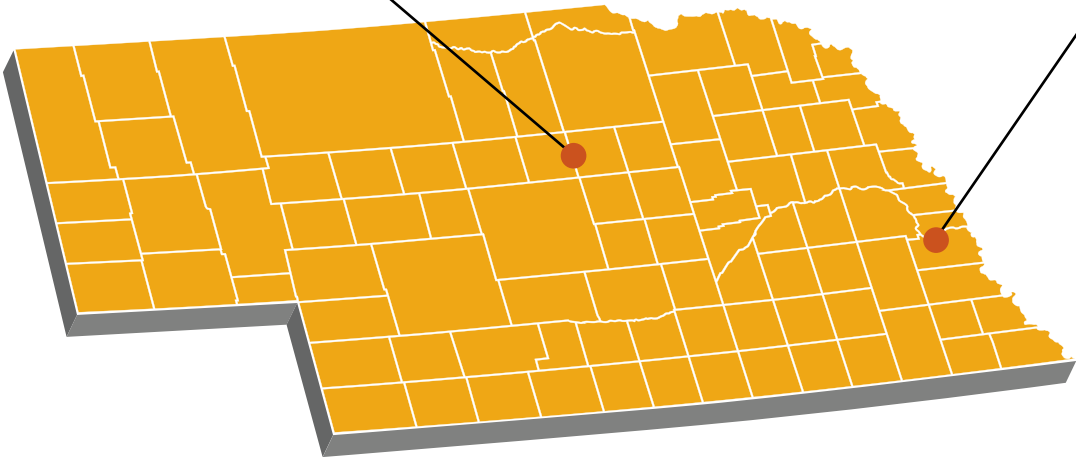


Visit Calamus Reservoir State Recreation Area

All year | 42285 York Point Rd., Burwell, Neb.

Once considered a hidden gem, Calamus sees more visitors every year, with many first timers planning repeat visits. In June, you can enjoy great fishing for walleye and channel catfish, as well as boating on the reservoir and canoeing or kayaking Calamus River. Take the 1.5-mile mowed grass trail up into the hills for amazing overhead views of the reservoir. Electric plus and basic tent camping is also available; due to a repaving project, all camping is first-come, first-served for the time being, so call ahead to check availability.

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



Train to survey for butterflies

June 1, 1-5 p.m. CST | Schramm Education Center

Enjoy exploring nature while helping Nebraska's rare and at-risk butterflies. Sign up for this training session, where you'll learn how to become part of the Monarch and Regal Fritillary Survey. Volunteers like you will help biologists document monarch and regal fritillary butterflies in Nebraska. Learn more and register by searching for the event "Butterfly Training" at [Calendar.OutdoorNebraska.gov](https://calendar.outdoornebraska.gov).

JULIE GEISER, NEBRASKALAND

Fish a Nebraska river for channel catfish

Throughout the month | Statewide

Nebraska's rivers are sometimes overlooked as a fishing opportunity, but you might be surprised at the number of catfish you can catch there. June is an excellent month to fish for channel catfish, as they're migrating up the rivers for spawning in July. Pick a larger river, like the Platte, Niobrara, Missouri or the lower Loup rivers, and look for a deeper spot and cover of some kind. Use your favorite bait and remember to keep it simple: A hook and sinker is about all you need.

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



Participate in Your Parks Adventure: Trail Trek

Through Oct. 31, 2024 | Statewide

Looking for new ways to stay active and explore the outdoors? A new program, Your Parks Adventure, will help you do just that. Choose from over 40 trails across the state, some of which are ADA-accessible, and look for a sign that says "Trail Trek" located along the trail. Then, you'll take a selfie with the sign and submit it online for the chance to win prizes, including a Nebraska state park cabin stay. To learn more, visit YourParksAdventure.com.

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



Wildlife Porcelain Painter

Story and photos by Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

‘My joke is that if you paint a leaf too big or a petal too big, nobody really notices. But if you get the nose too big on a dog or the beak too big on a chicken, people notice,’ said Peg Pelter of Lincoln, explaining the difference between painting traditional subjects such as florals and fruit to animals. Some of her most recent work highlights Nebraska wildlife.

In fall 2022, Pelter began painting a series of plates that would be unveiled at The Landing retirement community center in south Lincoln. The porcelain

painter produced a total of 39 pieces for her exhibit: 16 plates of native wildflowers; six pheasants; nine black-footed ferrets, a Nebraska endangered species; six meadowlarks, our state bird; and a couple of landscapes. She called the collection “Nebraska Treasure.”

Painting History

Past visitors at Arbor Lodge State Historical Park and Arboretum near Nebraska City might’ve caught the artist at work in the Morton Mansion. During living history weekends fall



Pigments that Peg Pelter of Lincoln uses to paint on porcelain. She describes porcelain painting like “painting on glass.”



Five of six plates that Pelter painted of the meadowlark, the Nebraska state bird. Pelter produced a total of 39 pieces for her “Nebraska Treasure” collection, which features Nebraska wildlife.

2022 and spring 2023, they might’ve spotted Pelter working on pieces for her “Nebraska Treasure” exhibit. She paints in the sunroom where the light is best and has been doing so for about 12 years. Pelter’s presence is a tie-in to the mansion’s history — Caroline Joy Morton, wife of J. Sterling Morton, was a porcelain painter, as were many upper-middle class women in the 1890s to 1920s.

China painting came to the United

States in the late 19th century by way of the world expositions in Philadelphia and Chicago, which introduced Americans to cultures worldwide. First Lady Caroline Harrison, wife of 23rd President Benjamin Harrison, could be credited for the mania around china painting in the U.S. Harrison’s talent and interest in the medium captivated women all over the country, and many of her pieces are on display in the White House today, including her design of the presidential china during

her husband’s term, which would’ve been used during state dinners.

The rising popularity of this pastime also coincided with a burgeoning middle class that found itself with more leisure time, a major shift in American society as a result of the post-Civil War Industrial Revolution. China painting was deemed an acceptable hobby for women because it was a way for them to decorate and beautify their homes.

“Nobody ever painted china in a

soddie,” Pelter explained. “You had to have the time and access to a kiln and access to porcelain. Now porcelain is cheaper than dirt, but back in the 1890s to 1920s, china was expensive.”

Then in the 1920s, china painting died out, Pelter said — a casualty of the Great Depression and World War II.

The Second Wave

Trends come and go, and china painting was no exception. Four decades later, the art form made its



ABOVE: Pelter working on a pheasant plate during living history weekend at the Morton Mansion at Arbor Lodge State Historical Park.

RIGHT: Five of six pheasant plates that Pelter painted for her “Nebraska Treasure” collection.

comeback in America. Pelter, a college student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln at the time, fortuitously met a china painter at the Gateway Mall in Lincoln in 1976.

“I watched her for a while and thought, ‘I can do that.’ So, I took her card and ended up taking lessons with her. To be honest with you, it was pretty inexplicable,” Pelter said. “I was a college student, and these lessons were \$75 — I didn’t have that kind of money, but somehow I did it.”

Like many during that time, Pelter

had caught the second heyday of china painting, which happened in the 1960s and 1970s, thanks to the advent of the electric kiln. Previously, kilns were kerosene- or gas-fired, and they were dangerous. Also, the exhaust from these old kilns meant that artists couldn’t store them in the basement or garage, another inconvenience.

When Pelter and her husband, Larry, built their current home in Lincoln in 1985, they built Pelter an art studio. She took a leap and decided to turn this decade-long hobby into a career

and began traveling to countless art and craft shows. Pelter also made a living painting tiles to decorate the kitchens, bathrooms and fireplaces in peoples’ homes. Her dedication to this art form has spanned close to half a century.

Painting on Porcelain

Pelter compares painting on porcelain to “painting on glass,” as there’s no texture to hold the paint in place, as opposed to canvas or paper, so technique and brush control are important skills. Another challenging aspect of china painting is that the objects she paints on are rarely completely flat.

“Most other forms of painting are done on flat rectangles, so it takes a sense of design to get the image on an appropriate piece of china in an appropriate way,” Pelter said. “It’s funny how you get hooked on things. For some reason, I’m really hooked on porcelain. Canvas and paper just seem dull. They don’t appeal to me.”

With china painting, pigments are applied onto a fired, glazed surface — such as a plate or bowl that you’d purchase. To set the image, the piece of porcelain is essentially fired again to about 1,500 degrees Fahrenheit, during which the glaze softens, allowing the pigments to “fall into” the glaze.

“As the glaze cools, those pigments get caught in the glaze. And so, it becomes a permanent surface. The image is no longer lying on top of the glaze — it’s lying in the glaze,” Pelter explained.

Often, Pelter’s paintings may be inspired by a single color. For example, she might feel like painting something “red” one day. The next step would be deciding what that “red” subject would be, after which she searches for a photograph to use as reference. Pelter claims to have one of the largest clip files in existence, though Google has been useful in recent years. Due to the challenging nature of painting





Five of nine plates that Pelter painted of the black-footed ferret, an endangered species in Nebraska and federally.

animals, the six pheasant plates were her favorite to paint in the Nebraska Treasure collection, followed by the meadowlarks for their vibrant, contrasting hues.

“Most of my paintings came from photographs. I’m sure quite a few of them came from *Nebraskaland Magazine*,” Pelter said. While painting her wildflower pieces, she often thought of the work of Michele Farrar, who used her late husband’s

photographs to create etchings of Nebraska plants and flowers — Jon Farrar was a *Nebraskaland* photographer and writer for over 40 years.

The black-footed ferret is one of Pelter’s more obscure subjects. She felt inspired to paint the ferret, a species listed as endangered in Nebraska and federally, after a visit to a nearby state park, where she happened to read some educational material on the weasel.

Once thought to be extinct due to habitat loss, black-footed ferrets were rediscovered in the 1980s in Wyoming. The ferrets’ historic range included the Great Plains, mountain basins and semi-arid grasslands in 12 states, including Nebraska. Biologists guess there are only 300-350 individuals left in the wild in all of North America.

“For some reason, that intrigued me — the idea that these animals are out there somewhere, but nobody knows

where they’re at,” Pelter said.

Since being on display at The Landing in October and November 2023, Pelter’s Nebraska Treasure collection has been “on the road.” It moved to the Unitarian Church in winter 2023 and then was displayed at Bethany Christian Church in Lincoln through March.

Pelterhouse

Though china painting has fallen

out of fashion again, there remains a small, dedicated community still practicing this art. Pelter travels all over the country to share her skills at arts and craft seminars, and she and Larry, who makes pottery, stay at Custer State Park in South Dakota three to four weeks every summer/fall as artists in residency, where they set up a gift shop and do demonstrations.

And who knows. Consider the return of sourdough breadmaking

or high-waisted jeans. A third china painting revival just might be on the horizon. In the meantime, keep up with Peg Pelter’s work on Facebook at Pelterhouse.

Catch Peg Pelter at a living history event at the Morton Mansion, part of Arbor State Lodge Historical Park and Arboretum near Nebraska City. She is scheduled to appear Oct. 18-20, Nov. 30 and Dec. 1, 2024.



Florals are traditional subjects in china painting, which was a popular pastime for upper-middle class American women from the 1890s to the 1920s.

Bird Tools

An Ornithologist's Primer

By Elsa Forsberg

Just as there are many kinds of birds in the world, there are also many tools that biologists use to study them. Tracking changes in survival, body composition, movement and location allows biologists to learn about the life histories, behavioral patterns and ecology of birds. Among the many specialized tools needed to study this diverse group of animals, there are a few standards that most avian biologists can't do without. 📌



1. **Binoculars or spotting scope** — Spotting birds can be difficult, especially when looking for small species or viewing birds from a distance. Binoculars and spotting scopes can magnify details to help with bird identification. These tools can also allow biologists to read codes on bird bands and observe behavior without disturbance.
2. **Waterproof field journal** — Working outside means working with the weather, so a waterproof journal is the best option to make sure important notes aren't lost on a rainy day.
3. **Bird ID book** — While most avian biologists are skilled at identifying birds, there are always a few stumpers. Some species look similar to each other, and sometimes occasional migrants or birds on the edge of their range show up in unexpected places. A good bird ID book can help confirm these sightings.
4. **Camera** — Cameras are useful tools for documentation. In addition to binoculars, the still shots from cameras can help identify species and bird band codes.
5. **Datasheets** — The most precious piece of a biologist's toolkit are datasheets, which can hold the information that will hopefully answer the questions that the biologist sets out to study. Once data is entered into a computer database for analysis, the data sheets become a physical archive.
6. **Egg float kit** — If a biologist is searching for and monitoring bird nests, they will likely want to know the age of the nest. Egg floating is one method for determining how soon a nest will hatch, as the buoyancy of the eggs can indicate how far along the nest is in the incubation process.
7. **GPS unit** — A GPS unit is a useful tool for logging and keeping track of observations, survey points and nest locations, especially when navigating difficult terrain or returning to monitor a nest deep in the field.
8. **Kestrel** — This device records wind speed and air temperature, which are metrics that biologists often record in addition to other observations for the datasheet.



9. **Rangefinder** — Avian biologists conduct several types of surveys, such as point counts, and many require knowing how far away a bird is at the time of observation. A rangefinder offers a quick and accurate estimate.
10. **Sunscreen and hat** — The field season for an avian biologist can include long days in the sun. Applying sunscreen allows biologists to stay out in the field as long as needed. In addition to reducing sun glare, hats also serve as a protective barrier against undesirable droppings from the sky, which are increased hazards for avian biologists.
11. **Mist net** — To study birds, sometimes biologists need to catch them. Once birds fly into the net, biologists extract them for measurements and banding before release.
12. **Calipers, scale and measuring equipment** — Once a bird is in hand, biologists take precise measurements of beaks, legs and other avian body parts with the help of calipers. A specialized ruler is used to measure the length of the wing. Scales are used to get a mass measurement, usually while the bird is temporarily placed in a cloth bag.
13. **Bird bands** — Bands are used to help biologists track birds over time and analyze their survival and movements. Metal leg bands are placed above the ankle joint and are engraved with a unique number for each individual that is read when the bird is in hand. Small color bands are used to help identify individuals from a distance. Neck bands are used in a similar way, often fitted onto larger waterfowl, such as geese and swans.
14. **Neck collar transmitter and backpack transmitter** — GPS transmitters are helpful for tracking locations of birds as they forage, raise young and migrate. The obtained GPS data can inform how and when birds move and what habitats are important. Transmitters are attached in various ways depending on the size and life history of each species.

Elsa Forsberg is a wildlife biologist with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

ALL PHOTOS BY JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

Managing Grasslands for Milkweeds and Monarchs

Story and photos by Gerry Steinauer, Botanist

The monarch butterfly is in trouble. Based on annual surveys conducted at their wintering grounds in central Mexico, the eastern North American monarch population has declined 80 percent over the past 25 years. The rapid decline has spurred the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to consider listing the butterfly as an endangered species.

Complicating the situation, evolution has painted the monarch into a corner. They lay their eggs solely on milkweeds and their caterpillars



Monarchs that breed in the eastern U.S. and southern Canada winter in central Mexico. Monarchs that breed west of the Rockies winter in southern California.



A whorled milkweed colony on the author's family prairie spread via rhizomes in response to spring prescribed fire and fall glyphosate spraying that targeted smooth brome and Kentucky bluegrass.



A monarch caterpillar feeds on a common milkweed leaf. The caterpillars outgrow their skin and molt five times during their larval stage.

eat only milkweeds, making them dependent on the plants for survival. In response to the monarch's decline and research in Iowa that showed declines in milkweed numbers, the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies in 2018 set a goal for conservation groups to increase milkweed numbers by 1.2 billion plants across the monarch's Midwestern breeding range, which includes eastern Nebraska. Our state's portion of the total was an intimidating 125 million.

Many conservationists, including

myself, questioned the number's validity as it was based on limited research and seemed rather contrived. Nevertheless, the proclamation set off a rush to plant greenhouse-grown milkweed seedlings in yards, parks and roadsides to help the monarch. The rush, however, was somewhat tempered when scientists began to caution that the planting of milkweeds alone will not save the monarch.

"Plant milkweeds' was a two-word solution to a complex ecological problem," said Mercy Manzanares, program coordinator for the

Monarch Joint Venture in Omaha, a conservation organization dedicated to conserving the butterfly. She explained that in addition to the loss of milkweeds, other factors contributing to the monarch's decline include loss of their prairie habitat to agriculture, development and tree encroachment; the widespread use of pesticides and herbicides on cropland and lawns; and climate change, which interrupts the butterfly's fall and spring migrations to and from their wintering grounds.

Manzanares, however, still encourages planting milkweeds, as they do benefit monarchs and other pollinators that feed on their nectar and pollen.

“It is an easy way to involve people in conservation,” she said. Milkweed seedlings planted in urban and other areas will attract monarchs and entice them to lay a few eggs. Growing seedlings, however, is labor intensive and the transplants often need watering and, when planted in the

wild, struggle to survive.

In reality, the only practical ways to substantially increase milkweeds and help the monarch is to include milkweed in the seed mixes used when restoring prairies and to manage existing grasslands using methods that increase the plants. Methods landowners can use to accomplish the latter follow.

Intense Spring and Fall Grazing

Fifteen years ago, my wife, Grace, and I began testing methods to increase milkweeds and other wildflowers in a 40-acre tallgrass prairie on her family's farm in southeastern South Dakota. Like many Midwestern prairies, more than a century of season-long livestock grazing and, more recently, annual mid-summer haying, had stressed the prairie's native grasses and wildflowers and allowed non-native grasses, mainly smooth brome and Kentucky bluegrass, to invade. At that time, the prairie supported few milkweeds or other wildflowers and had little value for monarchs. But things were about to change.

First, haying was replaced with intense spring grazing in most years, with occasional additional fall grazing, or spring prescribed fire followed by rest the remainder of the growing season. These practices stressed the spring- and fall-growing brome and bluegrass while allowing the summer-growing native grasses and wildflowers to recover. Small colonies of common and whorled milkweed began to dot the grassland. These plants likely sprouted from the seed bank and then spread by rhizomes, underground stems with buds. We were also delighted to see scattered plants of the uncommon green and woolly milkweeds. Other pollinator-friendly wildflowers, such as purple coneflower and Missouri goldenrod, made their appearance as well.



Sullivant's milkweed pods ripen in late summer. The plant's smooth leaves and pods distinguish it from the hairier common milkweed.



In spring, cattle relish grazing the nutritious early growth of smooth brome and Kentucky bluegrass, and often shun grazing wildflowers.

Our present renters, two young cattlemen, graze the pasture with 30 cow/calf pairs from about April 15 to June 1. This is a heavy stocking rate and the pasture is often golf-course short when the cattle are taken off, but hard grazing is needed to stress the stubborn brome and bluegrass. At first, the renters were hesitant to turn their cattle out in mid-April, fearing there wasn't enough grass to sustain them. I maintained that the young, tender growth of brome and bluegrass is packed with nutrients and would put pounds on their animals. They consented, and when the animals came off the pasture that first year, one of them sheepishly admitted, “Our calves sure look good.” Many native plants, including milkweeds, ramp up their growth in early June and, if left in the pasture, the cattle will forgo the brome and bluegrass and eat the nutritious, early growth of these plants, setting them back as well.

We begin fall grazing about Sept. 15 and usually take the cattle off the pasture sometime in November. Cool fall temperatures trigger brome and bluegrass to resume growth after summer dormancy. At this time of year, the sugars they produce through photosynthesis are stored in their roots and used for the next spring's growth. Hard fall grazing removes the

leaves, stifling photosynthesis, food storage and the plants' future vigor.

Ranchers with multiple pastures dominated by non-native grasses and nowhere else to graze their livestock can select their most wildflower-rich pasture for intense spring and fall grazing while grazing their less-diverse pastures during the summer. Occasionally, they can summer graze the diverse pastures, burn them or rest them the entire growing season. Doing so will benefit wildflowers, milkweeds and monarchs in at least one of the pastures.

Herbicide and Seeding

Although it sounds contradictory, Grace and I also use herbicides to promote milkweeds. In fall, we search the pasture for the dried, dormant stems of common and whorled milkweed and spray glyphosate herbicide (its many brand names include Roundup) on the still-green brome and bluegrass surrounding the stems. Glyphosate is a contact herbicide that kills only actively growing plants — it does not remain active in the soil. The following summer, reduced competition from the non-native grasses allows milkweed plants to sprout new stems, often forming dense colonies.

We spray glyphosate only after

at least two hard freezes, where nighttime temperatures drop to at least 28 degrees Fahrenheit. The cold further stimulates the non-native grasses to move nutrients from their leaves to their roots for winter storage, and the herbicide is carried along for the ride. Once in the roots, the herbicide is more effective, killing the entire plant. We spray only when daytime temperatures reach 50 degrees or higher for two consecutive days, spraying on the first day at a rate of two quarts per acre along with a non-ionic surfactant and ammonium sulfate. We have had our best luck killing brome and bluegrass by spraying in late November, but spraying into December can also be highly effective.

Using a boom sprayer mounted on an all-terrain vehicle, we also treat larger areas of brome and bluegrass, up to about a quarter acre, in the fall, and then hand-sow milkweed and other wildflower seed in late fall or early winter. We only seed in years when the prairie has been grazed or burned and has little thatch, as this ensures good seed-to-soil contact and germination.

Using this method, about 50 butterfly milkweed plants with glorious orange blooms now adorn our prairie, while a few colonies of Sullivant's and swamp milkweed grow in moist soil near an

intermittent stream. Others have had success establishing common, showy and whorled milkweeds from seed.

We collect the milkweed seed from local wild populations, but milkweed, as well as other wildflower seed, can be purchased from local and online seed dealers. Buy seed grown in Nebraska or nearby, as seed from plants grown in distant states may

not be suited for our climate and soils. The demand for milkweed seed has driven up prices, so buy what you can afford. There are more than 4,000 butterfly milkweed seeds in an ounce, so a little goes a long way. Seedling survival can be increased by reducing grass competition for several years after planting using spring, fall or light summer grazing, or prescribed fire.

Disking and Tilling

Russ Hamer has been managing Nebraska Game and Parks wildlife management areas in northeastern Nebraska for 24 years. On these areas, he frequently uses light disking or tilling from spring through fall to create early-successional habitat on grasslands that have been previously

farmed or otherwise heavily disturbed. These habitats, considered “weedy” by some, often teem with common milkweed along with annual plants including foxtails, ragweeds and sunflowers. These plants benefit a variety of wildlife, including gamebirds and songbirds, as well as all stages of the monarch lifecycle from eggs to migrating adults.



A common milkweed colony on the author's family prairie rapidly expanded the summer following fall glyphosate spraying of brome and bluegrass.



Light disking in disturbed native warm-season grasslands, as shown here, and non-native cool-season grasslands stimulates the growth of common milkweed and annual plants. CHRIS HELZER, THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

He disks and tills only to a depth of 1 to 2 inches. Nonetheless, this shallow disturbance exposes buried seeds, allowing their germination, and breaks the rhizomes of brome and bluegrass, weakening the plants.

“Of all our management practices, tilling and disking result in the best response of common milkweed,” said Hamer. “The response is best on clay and loam soils and less so on sandy soils.” After several years, however, if the grasses regain vigor and the milkweeds and annuals decline, the site may once again need to be disked.

On his WMAs, Hamer has also stopped planting traditional wildlife food plots where row crops such as corn and milo are planted and weeded with cultivation or herbicides. Instead, he broadcast plants food plots with sorghum, milo or mustards and does no weeding. Although competition from annual plants diminishes crop yields, they provide ideal brood-rearing cover for pheasant, quail and turkey chicks and support plentiful insects for the chicks to eat. The food plots’ early-successional plants include common milkweed as well as annual sunflowers. Fall-migrating monarchs

flock to the sunflowers for nectar. Hamer also uses other management practices to increase milkweeds, including prescribed fire, grazing and herbicide spraying, often in combination. “It’s OK to be aggressive,” he said. “The more aggressive you are, the more milkweeds you’ll get.”

In summary, Nebraskans can help the monarch by boosting milkweeds anywhere on the landscape. City dwellers can plant milkweed seeds or seedlings about their yard and garden, while farmers, ranchers and acreage owners can follow the steps provided above to increase milkweeds. Monarchs are superb long-distance fliers, and if you have milkweeds, they will come. [N](#)

Monarch Habitat

The Monarch Joint Venture’s Pollinator Habitat Help Desk (337-422-4828) is a free resource available to landowners and others seeking guidance on how to establish milkweeds or otherwise enhance or create monarch habitat.

The Great Depression through John Vachon's Lens

By David L. Bristow, History Nebraska



John Vachon (1914-1975) was not yet a famous photographer when he arrived in Omaha in October 1938. It was his first extensive solo trip shooting photos for the U.S. government's Farm Security Administration. Partly as a way to build support for the New Deal, the agency was creating a nationwide pictorial record of the Great Depression.

Vachon's supervisor gave the 24-year-old a great deal of leeway in the Omaha assignment. Vachon recognized the opportunity he had been given: "For the past year, I had been sedulously aping the masters. And in Omaha, I realized that I had developed my own style with the camera. I knew that I would photograph only what pleased me or astonished my eye, and only in the way I saw it."

From Omaha, Vachon headed west, photographing scenes in Lincoln, North Platte and a handful of other Nebraska communities. The photos he added to the FSA's files provided a visual cross-section of the state at that time, capturing the human drama in ordinary scenes.

Vachon visited Lincoln in 1942 — and this time his camera bag included a limited supply of color film. He explored a changing capital city only months after U.S. entry into World War II.

Together, these photos provide an early example of Vachon's emerging style, which became well known to the public during his long postwar career as a staff photographer for *Look* magazine.

Former *Look* magazine editor Thomas B. Morgan described Vachon as "a taciturn, brooding, hard-drinking man, a product of the Great Depression, who traveled about the American heartland and around the world for nearly 40 years, taking candid pictures of everyday realities in people's lives."

Morgan said Vachon was "a quiet man, shy to the point of disability," but clearly he was able to talk strangers into letting him take their photograph. Vachon provided limited information for each photo, but mostly he let the scenes and the faces speak for themselves.

You can see more of Vachon's Nebraska photos by searching "Vachon Nebraska" at loc.gov.

Visit History Nebraska's website at history.nebraska.gov.

"Unemployed man, Omaha." LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



“Public Works Administration housing project for Negroes, Omaha.” Like many New Deal projects, public housing was racially segregated. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



“Flophouse on lower Douglas Street, Omaha.” Lower Douglas Street, near Jobbers Canyon, was full of cheap lodging and pawn shops. Elsewhere, Vachon noted that many of the city’s unemployed were found in this neighborhood looking for work. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



Downtown Lincoln, 1942. Flags waved proudly, but for months after Pearl Harbor, the news from the Pacific remained grim. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



“War veteran who sells pencils, Omaha.” LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

THE PERCH

By Mariah Lundgren

Spring is my favorite time in the saline wetlands. The mosquitos have yet to emerge, the foxtail slowly dances in the breeze, the temperature is enjoyable, and the birds sing songs of awakening.

It was a crisp spring evening, and I was on a walk at Marsh Wren. The same walk I always take — down the gravel path, past the salt flats and prairie plants, around the saline pond and back up the same path. Sights and sounds are different each time I walk this path, as I usually hear something I have not heard before or see something new and surprising. One time, I spent 30 minutes sitting next to the pond watching three or four muskrats about 3 or 4 feet in front of me diving underwater and coming up to rest again. They didn't mind my presence as long as I sat quietly.

Marsh Wren Community Wetland is an enchanting place located just north of Lincoln, Nebraska. Previously a dog park, this restored saline wetland holds water saltier than the ocean, as well as rare and endangered plants and insects. In the past 150 years, more than 80 percent of an estimated 20,000 acres of saline wetlands have been destroyed by ditching, draining and urban development. Today, local conservation groups are working hard to restore and conserve the wetlands that remain.

During my walk on this particular day, I noticed a dead tree in a way I hadn't before. I don't know what exactly made me stop and look up at this tree, but that is one of the reasons



PHOTO BY MARIAH LUNDGREN

why I love frequenting the same places again and again, to watch how they change over time and to notice even the tiniest things in a different light. I looked up at the leafless

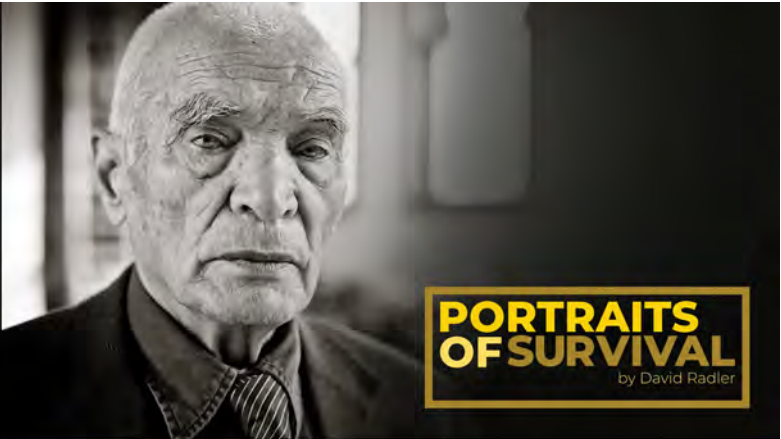
tree, which forked into two branches perfectly positioned as inviting perches. I pondered what creatures may choose to land on those perches and decided to position a game camera to watch what happened over the next year. What I captured on that camera was more amazing than I could have imagined.

Red-tailed hawks feasting on mice and meadowlarks. Great-horned, short-eared and long-eared owls standing guard in the night. American kestrels dining on spiders. Raccoons licking up the remains from the raptor's prey. Songbirds singing, resting and playing. The camera even captured a loggerhead shrike, which is one of my favorite birds.

The wildness from the past still remains in the saline wetlands, and the efforts to keep these places intact

are important now more than ever. Watching the exciting behaviors of the creatures that visited the perch reassured me that every square inch of these unassuming and fragmented spaces matter. The next time you are on a walk in nature and stumble upon a lonely tree perch, I hope you'll gaze up, smile and know that its visitors are frequent, and not so lonely after all.

See "The Perch" video at vimeo.com/768286298.



PORTRAITS OF SURVIVAL
by David Radler



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MEASURING UP

By Justin Haag

Measuring fish is important. For one, a measurement is often needed to abide by regulations, especially for those who harvest fish. For another, it gives a boastful angler baseline information for bragging to friends who weren't there.

Many waters in Nebraska have special size regulations dependent on species and location. They can all be found in the Nebraska Fishing Guide, available free online and in print, in tabular format. The state's recent regulation change to allow only one channel catfish over 30 inches long, for instance, exemplifies the importance of knowing the size of the catch.

The guide also has directions for how to measure a fish. It instructs to lay it on top of the measuring tool, and not use a flexible tape measure to follow the contour of the fish's body. The mouth should be closed and the lobes of the tail fin pinched to a point to find its definitive end for measurement.

A flimsy tape is my least favorite way to measure a fish. Compact, yes, but tape can be a challenge to keep straight while handling a flopping fish. Such an ordeal hinders the goal of quickly returning fish to the water to ensure survival.

A tape measure helps minimize the load while hiking to secluded fishing spots, but my self-constructed bump board is the tool of choice for the boat and ice sled. The bump board, inspired by watching fisheries biologists as they quickly measure dozens of fish during surveys, is sturdy with a stop on one end for the fish's snout.

Of course, a bump board is nothing rare in fishing. Many plastic and metal versions are available from retailers. As anglers know, size matters, though. I discovered that most manufactured bump boards top out at 36 inches or less, short of the 40-inch threshold for a northern pike or muskie master

angler award in Nebraska. Show me a fisherman with a 36-inch bump board, and I'll show you a pessimist.

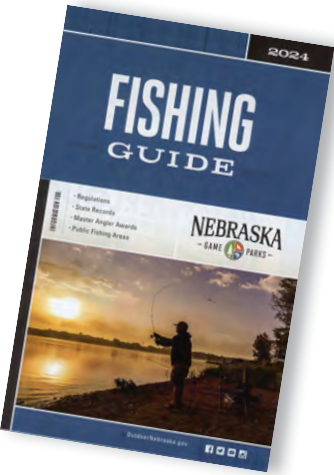
The do-it-yourself bump board is one of those projects that can be built as well, and as attractive, as one wants. The main thing is that it's accurate. Mine is constructed from two 20-inch pieces of three-quarter-inch-thick pine hinged in the center.

With a table saw, I was able to create angled pieces to attach to the sides of the first half, resulting in a trough for retaining bigger species. By making the snout's stopping height exceed the two boards' width when folded, smaller species can be measured without extending the tool.

Once complete, I covered it with red spray paint and a couple of coats of polyurethane for protection from water and slime. Then, I added the hinge.

Manufactured ruler decals, which meet the state's master angler requirements, are easy to install not only on a bump board, but also on the hulls of kayaks, boats and other watercraft. My bump board design required two, and a little help from my daughter's vinyl cutter to complete the final four inches. Again, why are these manufacturers so set on 36 inches? Pessimists, I tell ya.

To maintain accuracy, it's important to not attach the decal until after all hardware has been installed. While it may be tempting to cut a few inches off the left side of the ruler before attaching it — you know, to make photo evidence more impressive when regaling those previously mentioned friends with fish stories — it might not be a popular option during a visit with the game warden.



Among the ways to measure fish are a retractable tape measure and a bump board. The tape measure gets high marks for portability, but the bump board shines for ease of use. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

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PINTAIL – NOT THAT PINTAIL *chosen as duck stamp winner*

By Justin Haag

A species that you surely won't see flying wild in Nebraska graces this year's winning entry for the Nebraska Junior Duck Stamp competition. It is the white-cheeked pintail (*Anas bahamensis*).

Brody Mikesell of Scottsbluff, a seventh-grader, topped the 584 entries submitted by Nebraska students in kindergarten through 12th grades with his acrylic painting of the bird. As Nebraska's winning entry, it will be featured on the waterfowl stamp that hunters purchase from Game and Parks if they plan to pursue ducks and geese in the state.

Depictions of 48 species of North American wild waterfowl — ducks, geese and swans — are eligible for the contest, and the white-cheeked pintail, sometimes called the Bahama pintail, qualifies ... even if not by much. It primarily lives in the Caribbean, South America and the Galapagos Islands. The Caribbean is generally considered to be in North America,

and an occasional wild white-cheeked pintail ventures into Florida — though most U.S. mainland sightings are believed to be domesticated escapees.

The entry represents the only white-cheeked pintail in Nebraska's contest this year and is the first of the species to win the Nebraska competition. It does bear a resemblance to an attractive related species that frequents Nebraska's skies and waters, the northern pintail (*Anas acuta*).

Mikesell's entry was selected by a panel of judges in Scottsbluff in March. As the winner, it competed against selections from other states during the national competition in April.

The annual contest is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. More information may be found on the Junior Duck Stamp page at fws.gov.



Brody Mikesell's winning entry for the Nebraska Junior Duck Stamp competition depicts a white-cheeked pintail, a species that resembles the northern pintail but primarily lives in the Caribbean, South America and the Galapagos Islands.



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LEAVE WILD BABIES ALONE

By Julie Geiser

This time of year, people may find wild baby animals including deer, birds and rabbits. When spotting a baby animal by itself, it is natural to want to rescue it. The best thing to do, however, is to leave it alone. In most cases, the parent is nearby and is keeping its young safe through camouflage.



JULIE GEISER, NEBRASKALAND

Deer

Does will leave their fawns for hours at a time, returning only to nurse them. The doe can be seen by predators, so she leaves the fawn hidden in tall grass, brush or behind large rocks or trees to draw attention away from its location. During their first weeks of life, fawns do not try to flee from predators; they rely on remaining undetected through camouflage and stillness and are learning critical survival skills during this time. People sometimes pick up these fawns, thinking they have been abandoned. The longer the fawn is separated from its mother, the slimmer the chance that it will be reunited with her, and its survival decreases.



JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

Birds

If a bird nest gets blown out of a tree, people can help by putting the nest and eggs or baby birds back up in a tree where it is safe to reach. If young, non-feathered birds are blown out of a nest, simply put them back in the nest if you can safely reach it. Birds will not abandon their young if people touch them.

If you find baby birds on the ground that have very few feathers on them and you cannot reach the nest, make a nest from a small butter or sour cream tub. Punch holes in the tub to thread a thin rope through it, and then tie it as high as you can to a tree. Place some soft tissue and the baby bird(s) in the tub, and the parent birds will come back to take care of their young.

If you find baby birds that have a lot of feathers on the ground, the young birds will be tended to by their parents. At this stage, the fledged or feathered young birds are taught vital life skills like finding food, identifying predators and flying.



JULIE GEISER, NEBRASKALAND

Rabbits

A mother cottontail rabbit will only tend to her nest a couple of times a day for a few minutes and spends the rest of the day away from it. She does this to prevent drawing predators to the nest and to forage for herself. If you find a nest that looks undisturbed and the mother is nowhere in sight, that is her plan. Once the young rabbits are old enough to leave the nest, they will scatter about the area and find places to feed and hide from danger.

Most wildlife is protected by state or federal law, and it is illegal to possess them. There are places that can help in emergencies — the Nebraska Wildlife Rehab, Inc., Raptor Recovery and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission are good resources.

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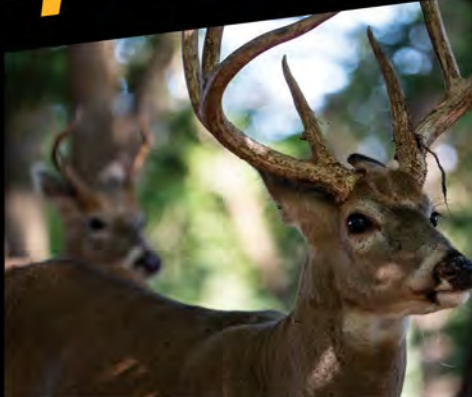
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Stuart, Chambers, Ewing

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July 13

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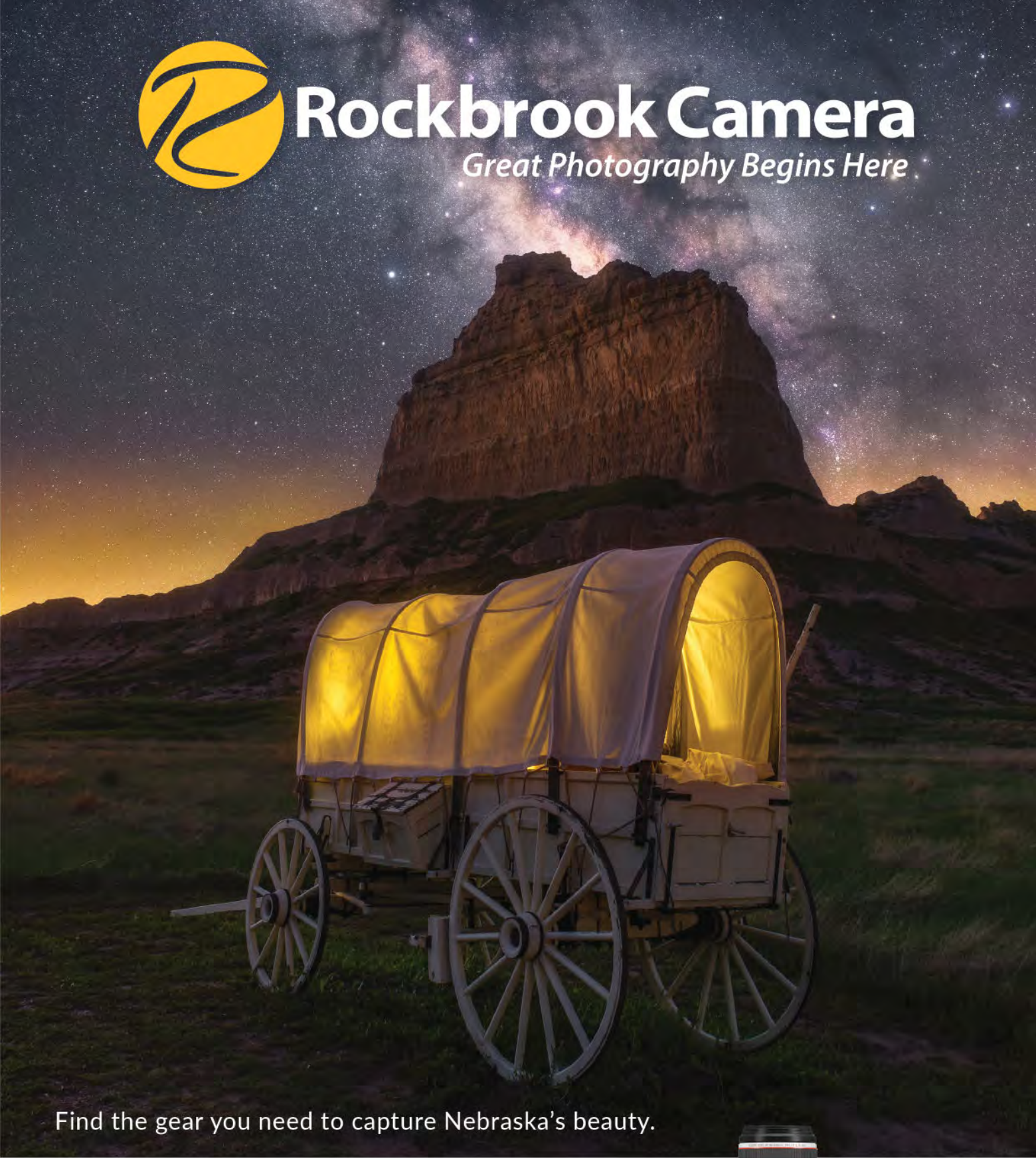


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Ice fishing at Grove Lake, 1957

This picture shows my grandfather, Homer Clemens, ice fishing on Grove Lake in February 1957. Homer and his wife, Verna, lived in Neligh.
 – Lisa Hadenfeldt, Scottsbluff



Pheasant hunting in Cedar County, 1997

Pictured from left: Tom “TJ” Anderson (me), hunting dog named “Dawg,” Dave Pritchard and Casey Anderson. Limit of birds with my son, Casey, and my best friend, Dave, who passed away two years after this picture was taken. We had some great hunts together.

– Tom Anderson, Wynot



Antelope hunt south of Lodgepole, 1980

This is a photo of me, Lynn Gray (left), my good friend Steve Jessen (right) and our scout and guide for the hunt Steve’s dad, Henry “Hank” Jessen, with two antelope we shot south of Lodgepole. I left Omaha on a September Friday afternoon after working on the then-new Methodist Hospital in Omaha and met up with Steve in Lincoln for the 300-mile drive to his parents’ home in Chappell. Steve’s mother, Joyce, taught school in Chappell, and his dad farmed north of Lodgepole. When we arrived, Hank gave us a scouting report of antelope he had seen recently and also information he had gathered talking to other area farmers, probably over coffee. We were fortunate to find our antelope Saturday morning. I had a Winchester Model 94 lever action carbine. We also spent an afternoon fishing at Lake Ogallala below Lake McConaughy. Steve and his parents are now gone, but I have so many good memories of the trip.
 – Lynn Gray, Omaha

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 2000. We will give priority to unusual photos or activities. When possible, please include a story about the photograph and identify the people, places and approximate date it was taken. Text may be edited and photos adjusted for reproduction. All photos will be returned.



The serene water of Carter P. Johnson Lake shines below rugged terrain to the west in June 2023. The lake's 470-foot dam, constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the mid-1930s, was intentionally breached for safety reasons late last year.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

A TRIBUTE TO CARTER P.

By Justin Haag

I always look forward to June, but this one is a little bittersweet because it's the first without an old friend, "Carter P."

Carter P. Johnson Lake, that is.

The once beautiful 20-acre lake at Fort Robinson State Park is now gone after the dam along Soldier Creek was purposely breached last fall. The Nebraska Department of Natural Resources had re-classified the dam as a high hazard in 2020 due to the risk of potential loss of life at the campground downstream should a failure occur. In 2022, it was determined to be structurally unsound. The astronomical price estimate for repair forced its removal.

The lake, straddled by the valley's beautiful backdrops of towering hills and buttes, was loved by locals and park visitors. As the largest public lake in Sioux County, the dam was born during the Great Depression as members of the Civilian Conservation Corps worked night and day with horse-drawn equipment to build it.

The lake has long been regarded as one of the Panhandle's best waters for big largemouth bass.

My first Carter P. experience came in the mid-1990s when a beloved college professor taught me ice-fishing there. We quickly limited out on rainbow trout, and I was hooked.

It was the perfect size for fishing from a kayak, which is how I spent countless hours there with my kids. On one trip, my son won the prize for catching the first fish during the park's annual kids' fishing derby. During another winter outing, one crappie after another rose to bite as soon as my jig fell below the ice.

A destination in its own right, Carter P. was conveniently located for a stop while heading upstream to pursue browns, brookies and cutthroats on the Soldier Creek Wilderness.

I've heard it's the first dam in Nebraska to be destroyed for safety reasons, and I've resigned myself to the fact that it had to be done.

Let's end this tribute on a positive note. Our fisheries team has been working on some fantastic plans to improve the stream for fishing and access. They also hope to save and renovate the smaller pond along the stream, known as Crazy Horse, that has long been silted in. Just a little ways downstream from the old lake, it would provide anglers another special opportunity at what we like to refer to as "Nebraska's Fishing State Park."

I look forward to what comes next, but I'll always look at the pictures of our old friend, Carter P., with a little mist in my eye.



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