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NOVEMBER 2025



A Club for Carvers

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PLUS
Longhorns at Fort Rob • Burning of the Grand Central Hotel
Wildlife-Friendly Holidays • What to Do in November
Bobwhite Quail Habitat • The Backpack Buck

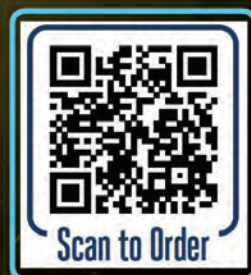
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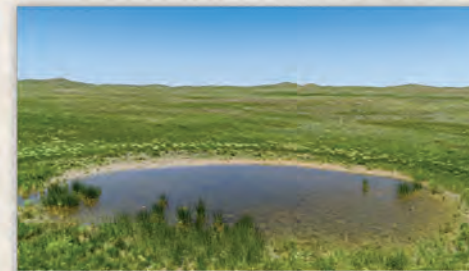
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Cover: Cliff Hollestelle's great horned owl wood carving is one of the many examples of spectacular work being created by members of the Central Flyway Decoy Collectors and Carvers Club. See story on page 28.

JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

This page: An American coot seemingly walks on water as it takes flight from a wetland at Conestoga Lake Wildlife Management Area near Denton.

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

Nebraskaland magazine

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It's a great time to begin your winter bird feeding.

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

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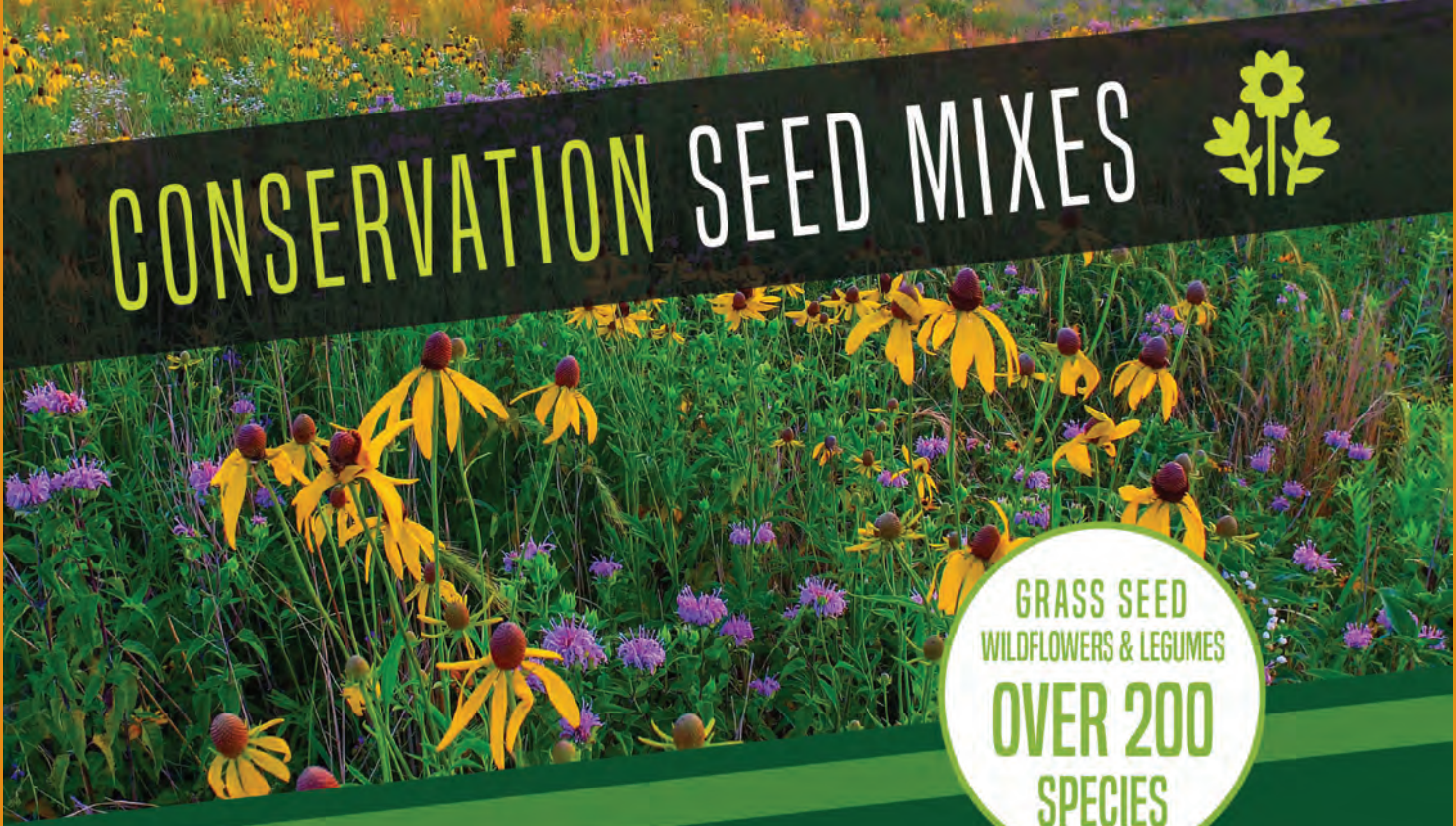
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Please include your postal address
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may be condensed and edited.
Photographs are also welcome.

WALKING THE LINE

A coyote pauses as it walks along a fenceline in a pasture in Perkins County.

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND





Do something new this deer season, like sitting atop a ridgeline, bow at your grasp, scanning the horizon on your Nebraska adventure. ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

SOMETHING NEW THIS DEER SEASON

By Jeff Kurrus

Deer season is more about making memories than success. Very rarely does a deer harvested outweigh everything else that surrounded the hunt. Form a new memory this firearm deer season with one, or more, of these options:

A New Cut – Whether you process your deer at home or take it to a meat locker, try something new. After years of grinding the majority of my venison into burger, I ordered some jalapeno-and-cheese summer sausage from my processor, and it has become a family favorite.

Stop at the Check Station – Even if you don't have a deer to check in, it can be fun to pull into a check station parking lot, talk to other hunters and see what they have harvested. You never know what you will find. I just happened to pull into the check station at the Schramm Education Center in 2009 when Wesley O'Brien, a hunter from Texas, was checking in a 38-point whitetail buck that would be the new non-typical state record.

Hunt All Day – With today's creature comforts, this is easy to do. While I've never done it, sitting atop a ridge overlooking a valley with the wind in my face on opening day while watching a full slate of college football games sounds like a relaxing way to spend the day. This puts you in the field when other hunters are coming and going, which

often forces deer to move.

Bucket List – Plan an out-of-town trip to a place you've never hunted. Use the Nebraska Public Access Guide and the onX Hunt app and talk to regional biologists about finding a place for your first spot-and-stalk deer hunt. If you're a rifle hunter, it might be too late to get a permit in some of these units. If you're a bowhunter, you might just be able to start packing now.

The Local Tavern – The first opening day hunt I ever went on, at the age of 12, began at a local tavern outside of Ashland, Mississippi. Following our group in the door, the sight of hunter orange vests filling the room nearly blinded me. Decades later, this memory is still firmly cemented in my mind.

Group Chat – A few years ago, I sent a text to a long list of friends and colleagues, asking if they wanted to be part of a group chat about what they were seeing from their stand on opening morning. Shortly after sunset on the eve of the opener, people began to wish each other luck. The next morning, hunters shared photographs, stories and congratulations — truly happy for someone else's success even if they hadn't yet squeezed the trigger. Start your own group, or another type of memory, this year.

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A PLUM THICKET CAN SAVE A COVEY

By Ryan Sparks, Editor of Quail Forever Journal

Unlike ducks or geese that travel thousands of miles each year, bobwhite quail live their entire lives close to where they hatch. These small, iconic game birds of America’s grasslands and farmlands rely on the immediate habitat around them.

Research shows that a bobwhite’s home range can be as small as 20 acres, sometimes stretching to 100 acres depending on food, cover and seasonal needs. Within that space, quail form coveys in fall and winter, nest in spring and raise broods through the summer. Their survival depends on the habitat within a relatively small area.

Within a bobwhite quail’s already small home range, coveys spend most of their time in what biologists call “covey headquarters.” These are areas of cover that provide protection from predators, shelter from weather, and serve as a central hub for daily activity.

A covey headquarters is sometimes no more than a single plum thicket growing in a ditch or the limbs of a fallen tree. Other times it’s a patch of brush or a hedgerow just big enough to hide a dozen quail.

The quality and availability of these headquarters determine whether quail can persist on the landscape. Without them, birds are far more vulnerable and less likely to survive harsh winters or predation.

For landowners and conservationists, recognizing and preserving these small but vital features is key. Leaving that lone thicket or brushy fenceline can provide the anchor a covey needs to thrive.

Unlike migratory birds, quail can’t fly away to better conditions. They are tied to the land in a way that makes them both vulnerable and emblematic of the places they live.

A single covey headquarters can literally be the difference between a place with quail and one without.



This roadside ditch included plum thickets (bottom) before being cleared (top), eliminating all signs of quail habitat.
JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND



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Danish-style meatballs with gravy and boiled potatoes. JENNY NGUYEN WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND

DANISH VENISON MEATBALLS

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

Unlike Swedish meatballs, Danish meatballs — or frikadeller — are football-shaped. Serve them hot with gravy, boiled potatoes and pickled cabbage or cucumbers. Enjoy them cold sliced and served on top of rye bread with pickles.

This recipe was inspired by my dear friends Nathan and Amy Kramer of Benson who have introduced me to the customs and comforts of Danish food — and aquavit. My life has been richer since.

Servings: 6-8

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Cooking Time: 30 minutes

Ingredients:

- 1 lb. ground venison
- 1 lb. fatty ground pork
- 2 tbsp. olive oil, divided
- 1 medium onion, minced
- 2 small shallots, minced
- 2 cloves of garlic, minced
- ½ cup panko breadcrumbs
- ½ cup whole milk
- 2 tsp. kosher salt
- ½ tsp. freshly cracked pepper
- ¼ tsp. ground nutmeg

- 2 eggs
 - 3 tbsp. flour
- Gravy**
- 2 tbsp. butter
 - 3 tbsp. flour
 - 1½ cups venison or beef stock, heated
 - Salt and pepper, to taste
 - Splash of heavy cream

1. Over medium heat, add 2 teaspoons of olive oil in a pan. Sweat minced onion and shallot, with a pinch of salt, for 5-7 minutes, or until softened and translucent. Add garlic and stir for 30 seconds. Do not brown. Transfer to a large mixing bowl and cool completely. Meanwhile, soak panko breadcrumbs with milk in a small bowl.

2. Into the mixing bowl with the cooled onion, add ground venison, pork, soaked breadcrumbs, 2 teaspoons of kosher salt, ½ teaspoon cracked pepper, ¼ teaspoon nutmeg, eggs and 3 tablespoons of flour. Knead with your hands until you get a well-combined paste. Cover and refrigerate for 1 hour.

3. Shape meat mixture into

quenelles using two large spoons or use your hands to make football-shaped dumplings. Place them onto a cookie sheet lined with wax paper while you work.

4. Preheat oven to 350° Fahrenheit. In a pan, heat 1 tablespoon of oil over medium-high heat. Working in batches, sear frikadeller until well browned on all sides. Add more oil as needed. Place browned meat into a baking dish, cover with foil and place in the oven to cook through for another 10 minutes or so. You're looking for an internal temperature of at least 155 degrees Fahrenheit.

5. While the meat is in the oven, make the gravy: Heat the venison or beef stock. In the same pan you cooked the frikadeller, melt 2 tablespoons of butter over medium-low heat. Next, add 3 tablespoons of flour and whisk for 2 minutes. Then gradually whisk in hot stock, allowing the stock to reabsorb and thicken with each addition. Whisk until there are no more lumps. Add a splash of heavy cream and season to taste. Add more stock as needed.



The Longhorns at Fort Robinson

A special herd of cattle links Nebraska's largest state park to the Wild West

Story and photos by Justin Haag



Texas longhorns add to the scenic beauty of Fort Robinson State Park as they graze near the Red Cloud Buttes.

The sight of Texas longhorns on the High Plains isn't all that uncommon, but this herd is special. Not only do the cattle — with their signature horns that can span 8 feet or more — look at home grazing among the scenic Pine Ridge at Fort Robinson State Park, they also have special ties to the American cowboys' long cattle drives of the late 1800s.

Rob Lemmon, Fort Robinson's superintendent, said the cattle grazing at Nebraska's largest state park represent one of just two

registered longhorn herds in the world with careful documentation on the Cattleman's Texas Longhorn Registry.

"We DNA test all of our bulls to make sure we're keeping the bloodlines correct," Lemmon said. "They are purebred Texas longhorns just like the cattlemen drove back in the day."

Longhorns serve as an iconic symbol of the Wild West, even if they are not native to the continent and their heyday in the United States was short-lived. The hardy species that was introduced to the Americas from Spain more than 500 years ago and roamed

mostly feral in Mexico for ensuing generations, proved ideal for cowboys' long, arduous drives north to railheads and pastures in the late 1800s and helped feed the masses on the East Coast. Ogallala served as an important railhead, receiving about 100,000 cattle annually between 1876 and 1885.

When the railroad came to Texas, less mobile but faster growing breeds featuring more meat gained favor with cattlemen.

Even if the breeding wasn't watched as closely as it is today, records exist of longhorns grazing at Fort Robinson



ABOVE: Fort Robinson State Park employees and volunteers move longhorn cattle down Soldier Creek Road in 2018.

BELOW LEFT: As winter gives way to spring, a new arrival to the herd receives a meal from its mother.



even before it was a state park. Perhaps exemplifying how loose things were in the past, a Hereford-bison cross named Levi made the news in 1980 as it grazed with Fort Robinson's longhorns.

How the pure-bred herd came to Fort Robinson can be traced back to efforts to preserve the species as it was facing extinction in the early 20th century.

In the 1920s, the federal government identified 30 purebred longhorns and set them aside at Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge in Oklahoma. In 1936, a portion of that herd was taken to Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge near Valentine where the attractive bovines were managed for purity. They grazed there for the remainder of the century.

In 2000, the refuge determined the non-native longhorns were not in line with its mission, unlike the native bison that roam there today, and were evicted. After some uncertainty about the herd's future, Fort Robinson arranged to take in the Fort Niobrara

cattle to add to the park's attractions and serve as a fitting tribute to its Western heritage. To make way for the purebreds, the park's existing 100 cattle were sold and moved off the property.

How the 160 of the original longhorns arrived to Fort Robinson from Fort Niobrara was fitting for a park that prides itself on its rich history of horsemanship as a cavalry post.

Lemmon was 12 and remembers accompanying Fort Robinson's superintendent at the time, who was his father Jim, and others on a 180-mile cattle drive from Valentine to Fort Robinson during a spell of bitterly cold weather.

"The people of Valentine were pretty nice. They rounded up a bunch of trailers and stuff to haul them here for us," Rob Lemmon said. "My dad decided that wasn't the way Texas longhorns should be moved. So, in November, we drove them. I think it took us nine days to get from Valentine



LEFT: Park employees and volunteers round up cattle from the rugged Pine Ridge terrain in late fall.

BELOW: Drovers move cattle from Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge through Valentine during the 171-mile journey to Fort Robinson in November 2000.

BOB GRIER, NEBRASKALAND

to here.”

The drovers on horseback, which at first numbered about 60 but dropped to about a dozen with the cold temps, provided a spectacle to observers as they moved the cattle through Valentine and other towns along U.S. Highway 20. About 60 other cattle, bulls and calves, were moved to the park by trailer.

Today, the 22,000-acre park runs about 125 cows with the herd totaling about 200. They’re complemented by the resident bison and wild pronghorn, muleys,

whitetails and other fauna at the park.

“From the end of May through July, we have them in seven different pastures so we can put one bull with them,” Lemmon said. “Once the breeding season is over, we put them down by the golf course near Crawford. But, at all times, we have the show steers near the water towers, which have grown big horns and look good in pictures.”

A true taste of the Wild West, and just one more picturesque feature for a park that is full of them. [N](#)



Outdoor Nebraska

By Tim Reigert

Soak in the last of autumn by spending time outdoors — whether that’s hunting, fishing, taking in a little Nebraska history or visiting a park for a Halloween under the stars. [N](#)



1875 Grand Thanksgiving Ball

Nov. 15, 5:30 to 8 p.m. | Fort Hartsuff State Historical Park

Celebrate the 150th anniversary of Fort Hartsuff with a re-creation of the 1875 Grand Thanksgiving Ball. The Enlisted Men’s Barracks will be decorated for a period-correct catered supper, music and dancing. Daytime activities will occur ahead of the event, including dance rehearsal, a shooting demonstration and more. Tickets are \$35 per person (must be 18 years or older). A valid Nebraska state park vehicle permit is required for entry. Contact the park at 308-346-4715 for more details. [ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND](#)



Camp & Treat at Red Willow

Oct. 31-Nov. 2 | Red Willow State Recreation Area Campgrounds

Enjoy the spooky season at Red Willow State Recreation Area. Enjoy off-season discounted camping rates throughout the weekend. Halloween activities will take place from 4 to 7 p.m. Saturday including a pumpkin-painting contest and a camper- or campsite-decorating contest. A valid Nebraska state park vehicle permit is required for entry. [ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND](#)

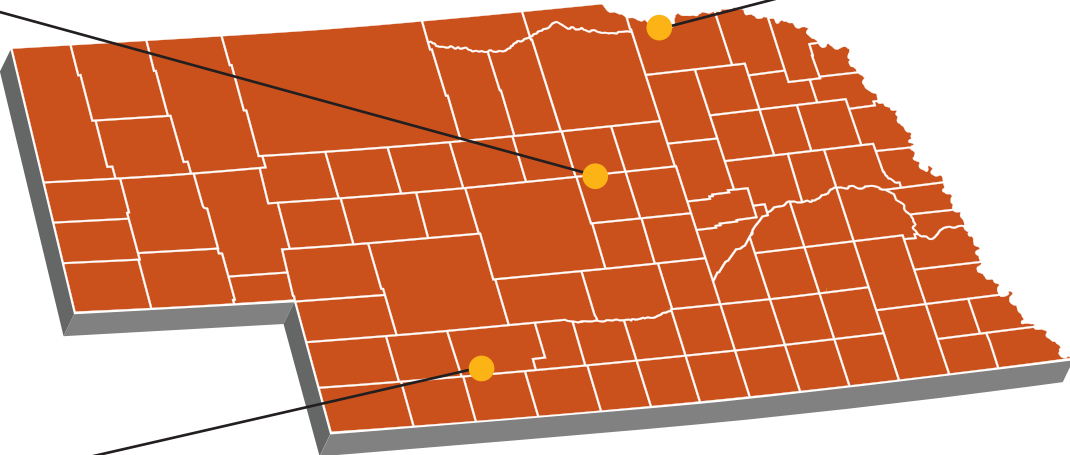


Fall Fishing

Through November | Statewide

“Fall provides some of the best open-water fishing of the year,” said Daryl Bauer, Nebraska Game and Parks fisheries outreach program manager, who enjoys fall fishing because of the lack of competition with other anglers. Fish behavior in the fall is largely dictated by the need to feed, and most species will be in their best body condition. “Big baits for big fish” is true for fall.

[JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND](#)



Stargazing at Niobrara State Park

Year-round | Niobrara State Park

It’s hard to beat the scenic views at Niobrara State Park in northeastern Nebraska. Nestled atop rolling hills, the park offers stunning overlooks of the Missouri River, beautiful sunrises and sunsets and stunning views of the Milky Way during the fall and winter months. Stay in one of the park’s scenic-overlook cabins. Add a Star Package to your cabin stay and get an easy-to-use telescope and receive seasonal stargazing recommendations. A park entry permit is required. [JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND](#)

Archery deer hunting

Season is Sept. 1 to Dec. 31 | Statewide

The week before the firearm deer season, which is Nov. 15-23, is a Nebraska archery hunter’s most intriguing days of the year. Hunters looking to catch a buck moving in rut will spend time afield as most crops are usually out and bucks are on the move during their breeding season. Plan to hunt at different times of the day, or all day, as the weather and action are perfect reasons to be in the stand.

[JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND](#)



A Club for Carvers

Veterans and Novices Welcome

Story and photos by Jeff Kurrus

The Central Flyway Decoy Collectors and Carvers Club is an eclectic group. There are world-class decoy carvers and first-time folks with the worry of “I’m not sure if I can do this.” There are those who carve for medical and mental health benefits; there are others who just want their carving to resemble the species they have chosen. Folks who are terrified to paint and others who carve so they can paint.

The one thing they all have in common is the step during this process that possesses them during the most tedious parts of this fascinating passion: the carving.

Thursdays with Norm

“Thursdays with Norm” is an often-repeated phrase among this group of carvers.

This describes the days away from the monthly club meetings to get together in La Vista at Norm Wise’s house for carving, critiquing and camaraderie.

“I just enjoy doing it,” said Norm, who began carving in 1980. “A lot of people who come to my place are just good friends. We enjoy each other’s work.”

Much like with other artistic disciplines like photography, carvers develop their own style — so much so that Norm can pick out a carver’s work without seeing their name attached.

“Bill Browne [a club member] ... the thing he does best is make a bird come to life. To not be stiff.”

During conversations with the group, the term “stiff” resurfaces often. “A stiff bird has no negative space with shaping,” Norm said. “It looks more like an inanimate object.



Norman Wise, one of the club’s long-time members and a weekly host to aspiring carvers at his home, has more than 50 bird mounts at his house for carvers to reference, like this hen mallard he carved.

This great horned owl, carved by Cliff Hollestelle, is just one example of his meticulously detailed work.



It’s the shadows, layers and depth that keep it less stiff.”

Besides learning from and helping other carvers, Norm admits his greatest reason for carving. “The only reason I carve is because I like to paint.”

Many carvings ago, he took five years of instruction from a local artist. On the first night of class, he brought a tackle box of paints and brushes.

“What’s that?” the teacher asked. Once he explained, she followed. “Well, you can take that home because you won’t need it for two years.”

“For the next two years,” Norm said, “we worked on composition and mediums. It was often boring, but it was rewarding to make my carvings more animated and more comfortable when I got the paint out.”

In Norm’s mind, decoy carving has a few simple steps.



This miniature redhead duck was Bill Arneson’s first carving for the club. It relaxes him, he said, but it also has an added health benefit. “My doctor told me to keep my fingers moving, because I have rheumatoid arthritis.”

In the beginning you survive. Then you model great work around you. Finally, the process starts to become your own.

What Color to Put Where

After Bill Arneson from Lincoln took a carving class at Southeast Community College a couple of years ago, he was off and running. He spent his early carving days making decorative plates but has since moved on to the task of carving decoys.

The club’s first instruction was to start small, giving Bill the assignment of a miniature decoy, which has many advantages.

“You start to learn the anatomy of the bird and what color to put where,” said Bill. “There’s a difference between the back of the bird and its wing pockets. Painting is intense. It

has been the difficult part for me.”

Like many of the club’s carvers, they lean on each other for instruction. “I have an appointment with Norm soon so he can help me get the details of the feathers. He knows the anatomy of the bird so well.”

Bill’s next step is a full-size decoy. “Starting with the miniature is great because I learned that the tail feathers have to go this way, and the head has to be shaped like this. And the bill has to be cut just right. I can look at the miniature to go by, and that’s a big plus.”

Carving by Necessity

Originally, Tom Christie from Ashland began carving decoys out of necessity. “While I was duck hunting, I couldn’t get goldeneyes to come to my river rig when I was using other decoys.”

Once he started carving his own, “the goldeneyes came right in.”

In 1986, Tom began submitting his carvings to competitions. There are 12 categories, he said. These include mantel, what he deemed “fancy” birds, miniatures, functional and even a “no holds barred” category where carvers can go all out on any number of methods. In some of the categories, like the hunting ones, the decoys have to be placed in a water tank to ensure they float upright.

Regardless of the category Tom competes in, he is constantly challenged by his lifelong pastime. “The difficult part for me is sculpting a bird in the preening position where it looks comfortable.”

The painting can also be a challenge, even though he enjoys this process the most. “Adding a third dimension with the painting is a challenge for me.”

But the draw for the entire process is simple. “I love seeing something to fruition.

It comes to life.”

Either on the competition table or in the duck blind.

Simply Love the Work

Chances are you have seen Cliff Hollestelle’s work. This carver from Lincoln has been featured in this magazine before, and his bronze sculptures have been on display across the country.

Yet he, too, is a member of the Central Flyway Decoy Collectors and Carvers Club, having started carving in the 1960s while getting an art degree in college.

His work is meticulously detailed, but he also knows where his limitations are. “I don’t make a lot of folksy birds,” he said, describing birds that resemble simple portrayals versus real-life interpretations. “But I really like them. People have an



Tom Christie began carving decoys out of necessity. “While I was duck hunting, I couldn’t get goldeneyes to come to my river rig.” Once he started carving his own, “the goldeneyes came right in.”



While many of his carvings end up on the mantel, Christie mostly competes in categories where his birds, such as this spectacled eider hen, are judged on the water.

eye for that stuff that I don’t have.”

He has also made birds for utilitarian purposes, using his finished carvings while hunting near Cedar Bluffs, and his house is filled with any manner of carvings, from intricately detailed duck decoys and owl recreations to life-sized songbirds yet to be painted.

“I simply love the work,” he said.

Look Like a Duck

Jade Chapman from Papillion was looking to expand her skills in art, including 3D art. She was always interested in wood carving but was unsure how to get involved. She then saw an ad for a wildfowl carver course in a Game and Parks e-mail newsletter and signed up.

“I didn’t know if there were going to be any other girls there,” she said. “Then, when I showed up, there were four.”

For her first carving, Jade’s primary goal was that her duck “looked like a duck.” It went well, and since that day in February, Jade continues to attend club meetings, learning the art form and receiving instruction from other members, who have encouraged her to enter competitions.

“They build my confidence,” she said. “They’ll definitely push you and find a way to get [your work] to look the best.”

“The fun part is the challenge.”



New carver Jade Chapman doesn’t have world championship aspirations. “I just want my duck to look like a duck.”



One of Cliff Hollestelle’s early carvings, this drake bluebill duck, is an example of the type of carving — not meticulously detailed — he’s uncomfortable attempting. “People have an eye for these types of carvings that I simply don’t have.”

Learn the Bird

“You have to study the birds,” said William Browne from Lincoln. “You can’t just make stuff up.”

When Bill started competing, he jumped right into the professional track because he had been carving for six years for money. In many ways, this transition became a shock to him.

“I got thrown in with the best carvers,” he said. “And judges are crazy picky at the big shows.” Photographs, other carvers and even ornithologists are used to judge. But there remains an additional element that many viewers don’t realize.

“You can be really intricate, but that doesn’t mean it’s good. The bird has to have a flow to it. You have to know where the feathers come from on the wing so you know how the feathers lay. This is the hardest thing to do for carvers.”

Another hard part is being critiqued at big shows. “The first three years of the show, you think someone has won because it’s their last name and they’ve won before. But then you realize and start seeing that a certain person’s birds have more presence and feel than the one next to them.”

In one such moment, he had a realization. “I’m not putting in the time,” he thought. “I’m not learning the bird.”



William Browne’s birds, including this female gadwall, are intricately sculpted, but he says that alone doesn’t make a great carving. “The bird has to have a flow to it,” he said. “You have to study the birds. You can’t just make this stuff up.”



Lon Bernth, carver of this bald eagle, has always loved art. A school principal for more than 30 years, he would always have a project close by in case he had extra time to work.



Kirk Pfeffer, creator of this avocet, has very practical advice for would-be carvers. “If you start out carving a larger bird and it looks like garbage, then make a smaller bird out of it.”

Before School, After School

Lon Bernth from Papillion was a school principal for more than 30 years, and the role of a principal is enormous. Early morning meetings and after-school athletic events. It’s a 24/7 job. Which is why Lon always had a carving nearby, just in case he got a few minutes to work on it.

“I always loved art,” he said. “I was always painting and coloring as a kid.” Then, when he started carving, he fell in love with the step-by-step process. “Watching it come from a block of wood to look like a bird or animal. Then you woodburn it, and it added more. Then you painted it, and it added even more. I was hooked.”

Now, he’s nearly 50 years into carving. “A lot of people, when they retire, don’t have something to do,” he said. “You just want something you like and that you can spend time to do.” Carving is it for Lon.

Make a Smaller Bird

Kirk Pfeffer from Council Bluffs remembers the day 27 years ago that he was walking through an airport and saw a man detailing a carving as he waited on his plane. “This guy was an old member of the club, and he turned me on to Norm, and I eventually started taking lessons from Norm and have been doing that for a long time now.”

To carve, Kirk said, you have to find a mentor. “You get so much help from everyone here,” he said. “Finding a mentor, an instructor, that was huge.”

This support remains so important because the act of wood carving is not a simple one, he said. “Anyone can do this, but it takes perseverance, and the learning curve is steep.”

An engineer by trade, painting is toughest for Kirk. “I’m never good enough in my own mind doing it,” he said. “It’s a struggle.”

But he does have one tip that can help any carver, new or experienced. “If you start out carving a larger bird and it looks like garbage, then make a smaller bird out of it.”

A Light Clicked On

“I was carving in a vacuum,” said long-time carver Al Thomas from Omaha. “Then I went to a show and saw what the other guys were doing. It turned the light on.”

That light has stayed on for five decades as Al has continued to work, competing nationally and contributing any number of projects to Pheasants Forever and Ducks Unlimited banquets. “When I started in 1979,” he said, “I was an art teacher. I started to do woodworking, and I had grown up hunting. I put these three things together.”

Now, long since retired, Al — for the most part — continues to have fun with it, except for one aspect. “Sawdust is not fun,” he admitted. “Instead, I use a lot of knives.”

I’m Not Going Back

“When I first went to the club,” said Dick Zechmann of Lincoln. “I told my wife I wasn’t going back. They were



When Al Thomas, the artist of this Canada goose, went to his first competition, a light clicked on. “I had been carving in a vacuum,” he said. “This allowed me to see what else was out there.”



“I’m not going back,” Dick Zechmann — artist of this redhead — told his wife after his first club meeting. “They were so good.” But without their encouragement through the years, Dick would not have become the carver he is.



Each new member of the club, including creator of this decoy Claire Meerian, is tasked with carving a miniature. She carves to have an escape from her stressful job.



“The painting is my satisfaction,” said Ed Svoboda, carver of this ruddy duck. “The goal is to get your work competing with folks around the world.”

A Brief Club History

In the late 1960s, a group of folk art enthusiasts, wildfowl hunters, artists — both amateur and professional — biologists and game managers came together to form a group interested in collecting duck and goose decoys as well as carving working decoys. The champion of the group was Lincoln accountant Robert Wohlers, who hosted the first meeting of the club in January 1970.

Through the years, club members have competed on a regional and national level and continued to critique each other’s work with the goal of keeping this long-standing artistic tradition alive.

Now, 55 years later, the club welcomes those with national competition aspirations, as well as others who just want to see what decoy carving is all about.

For more information on the club, including meeting times, email Norm Wise at wcvau1945@gmail.com.

so good.”

His wife encouraged him to return, which he did, producing his first carving soon after. “I was so proud of it,” he said. “I was super happy.”

Since that first bird, the carvings have become much more elaborate, yet he continues to find value in that first bird. “I show students and younger people where I started,” he said. “Then I show them the real thing. This encourages them.”

Like other members, he has consumed videos and books, was critiqued by club members and spent many sessions with Norm. And the challenges have continued.

“The colors,” he said with a shake of his head. “I just couldn’t get the colors right when I started. I didn’t know what mixed with what. I needed a color wheel to show me.”

He would do this over and over again, slowly improving through the years. “The guys in the club kept telling me to keep trying. Keep going.”

I Needed to De-stress

Claire Meerian of Gretna started carving decoys because her dad, Randy, asked her to come along. From his perspective, it was one more way to spend some time with his daughter who had finished college and had now entered the workforce. But for her, an accountant, it was a welcome relief from tax season.

“I was working 60 hours a week and needed some creativity to deal with that,” she said. “I needed to de-stress.”

So she started going to meetings and working on her miniature duck decoy. “I’m technical to a tee,” she said. “And the members of the club let me know that my duck was boxy. It looked good, they said, but they showed me I had to have some creativity when I was carving.”

This is exactly what she has needed. Plus, all of her friends want decoys for Christmas and can’t wait to see what she comes up with.

It Becomes Real

“It comes to life,” said Ed Svoboda, looking at his carvings before him. “The painting is the most enjoyable. It becomes real when it’s painted.”

Ed has carved since 1980, spending Thursday mornings through the years with Norm and many of the other members working on projects to display during competitions.

“I’m in an intermediate category,” he said. “There are novice, intermediate, advanced and master’s levels. If you start to win the novice and intermediate, you move up. I’ve gotten as high as second place in those.”

Regardless of his finishes, it’s therapy for Ed. He’s currently working on a wigeon and has no plans to quit anytime soon despite its challenges.

“Finding the pattern and getting it cut from the block of wood is the tough part for me,” he said. “The painting — the painting is my satisfaction.”

I’d Go Crazy

Don Gabelhouse of Lincoln carved his first decoy in 1970. More than 55 years later, he continues to carve for one main reason. “If I didn’t have carving, I’d go crazy.”

Don, meticulous by nature, began entering carving contests soon after he started, eventually winning an amateur category just a few years later, only to receive some much needed, albeit critical, comments by his former University of Nebraska-Lincoln instructor, Paul Johnsgard.

“Johnsgard pointed out my errors on the bird and said another one should have won instead of mine.”

While he laughs at the memory, it also set Don on a path of gathering as much information as he could to become as detailed as possible. He has continued to receive critiques of his work, even if he never leaves the house.

“I’m red-green colorblind,” Don said. “But my wife was an art teacher, and my daughter is an art teacher. ‘You’re not

supposed to have green here,’ is something they would say to me, commenting about a particular bird I’m carving. Plus, there are so many other resources.”

He uses books, magazines and Tom Christie’s YouTube videos for tasks like determining feather size, shape and position and paint color mixing. “You have to totally understand the anatomy of the bird you’re doing,” he said, a constant reminder for a veteran or novice carver. [N](#)



Don Gabelhouse, a former fisheries administrator with Game and Parks and a 55-year carver, continues to improve in his carvings, including this drake green-winged teal. His most important carving tool is a pair of lighted magnifying glasses.

Burning of the Grand Central Hotel

By David L. Bristow,
Nebraska State Historical Society

It was after midnight, and Billy McNamara and three other volunteer firemen were manning a hose inside the second-floor dining room of Omaha's Grand Central Hotel. Billy was "a popular young man and soon to be married." A hotel employee, he knew the building well.

When other firemen warned Billy and the others to get out of there, Billy replied (as reported in the Omaha Bee) "that he had been employed in the hotel so long that he did not feel like going back on it just then." Nearby, John Lee — another young man, married less than a year — "proposed to stay with the fire till (sic) the last moment."

They saw no immediate danger. They had time.

Eight years earlier, in 1870, Omaha leaders decided their growing city of 16,000 residents needed a first-class hotel. Selecting the southwest corner of 14th and Farnam streets (where the Paxton Hotel stands today), more than 120 prominent men bought shares in a joint company and eagerly anticipated the money that well-to-do travelers would spend



Sept. 5, 1878. Aftermath of the Grand Central Hotel fire. NSHS
RG2341-PH0-270



Inside Omaha's Grand Central Hotel. NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

in the city.

The project was troubled from the beginning. Funds ran out and construction halted after less than four months. Ed Creighton — the richest man in town — made a big personal loan, but two years later, the company again ran short before the hotel was finished. When Creighton tried to foreclose, the other stockholders fought him in court to prevent him from gaining sole ownership. The feud was still unresolved when the hotel finally opened in 1873.

Five stories tall and billing itself as the “largest and best hotel between Chicago and San Francisco,” the Grand Central offered the latest in style and comfort. Its ground-floor exterior featured lots of iron and glass; the upper stories were brick with white stone window caps. Every room had hot and cold water, steam heat and gas lighting. The local press described each floor in detail — the chandeliers and marble-topped stands, the richly carpeted hallways, the lavish bar and billiard rooms and the Western Union telegraph office with its 34-wire switchboard.

But the hotel struggled financially and was sold at auction in 1878. Renovations were underway when, on the evening of Sept. 4, a workman accidentally kicked over a candle on the fifth floor. Omaha's all-volunteer fire department arrived to find dense smoke rolling from the mansard roof and upper windows. The city had supported a hook-and-ladder company since 1860, starting with a single cart pulled by the men themselves. Other equipment had been added over the



The Union Pacific Railroad had its own volunteer fire company, the Durant Engine and Hose Co., shown here in May 1875.

NSHS RG2341-PH0-98

years, including a steam engine and a network of cisterns from which water could be pumped — because the city had no waterworks.

The fire began about 6:45 p.m. Within an hour, the firemen ran out of water and spent the next 15 to 20 minutes running hose to more distant cisterns. Even then, they could not

pump water higher than the third floor.

Onlookers filled surrounding blocks. It seemed the whole city turned out to watch. The hotel and adjacent buildings swarmed with men hauling anything movable to safety. The Omaha Herald moved their presses. An undertaker moved his coffins.

“Great excitement and confusion prevailed among the firemen during the fire,” the Bee reported, “and there seemed to be a general lack of order, management, and good judgment.” Telegraphed by Omaha's mayor, the Council Bluffs fire department arrived between 10 and 11 p.m. By then, the fire was down to the fourth and third stories.



“Omaha’s First Fire Engine” was brought out for a parade during the 1939 Golden Spike Days celebration. The event celebrated the world premiere of Cecil B. DeMille’s film “Union Pacific.” NSHS RG3882-PH35-47

Part of the fifth-floor wall collapsed onto Farnam Street at 10:30 p.m. Two hours later, the ground floor was burning. But Billy McNamara and his companions were still manning a hose on the second. They had no warning when a wall collapsed on them, crashing through the floor into the billiard hall below.

For the next few hours, “walls here and there tumbled in sections” until the fire burned itself out at 5 a.m. The four firemen’s charred bodies were recovered from the ruins by the light of day. That evening, a fifth fireman died of injuries suffered in another part of the hotel.

The disaster changed Omaha. The city was both grateful and embarrassed that the arrival of the Council Bluffs fire department had saved the rest of downtown. Omaha dismissed its fire chief and replaced its volunteers with a professional fire department. (The volunteer firefighters that serve many communities today are far better trained and equipped than Omaha’s old hook-and-ladder companies.)

The Omaha Bee, meanwhile, lambasted residents who opposed the expense of a city waterworks. Omaha soon built a system of pressurized fire hydrants and reservoirs. Although the city suffered other major fires afterward, it would never again face one so unprepared. [N](#)

Visit the [Nebraska State Historical Society’s website at history.nebraska.gov](http://www.history.nebraska.gov).



The Grand Central Hotel on the southwest corner of 14th and Farnam. NSHS RG2341-2-P32

Make the Holidays Wildlife-Friendly

By Monica Macoubrie, Outdoor Education Specialist

The holiday season is a time of joy, warmth and celebration. As we deck the halls and light up our homes, let's consider how our festive practices might impact the environment and local wildlife. By making mindful choices, we can create a holiday season that's not only merry and bright but also beneficial to the creatures that share our environment.

Light Pollution

For many people around the world, the holidays are a magical time of year, often highlighted by festive outdoor lighting displays. With many holidays falling around the winter solstice, these lights bring warmth and joy to the



A Christmas decoration made from pheasant feathers decorates a tree at the Cody mansion at Buffalo Bill State Historical Park. ROCKY HOFFMANN, NEBRASKALAND

dark, cold days of mid-winter. But do holiday light displays contribute to light pollution? And should we be concerned?

Light pollution is generally described as any negative impact caused by the use of artificial light at night. This helps distinguish the beneficial uses of nighttime lighting from the known or suspected harmful effects it can have. Importantly, not all outdoor lighting qualifies as light pollution.

According to a 2014 National Aeronautics and Space Administration study, “nighttime light shines 20-50 percent brighter during Christmas and New Year’s compared to the rest of the year.” This pattern is also observed in other parts of the world. For instance, during the Islamic month of Ramadan, some Middle Eastern cities experience nighttime lighting that is more than 50 percent brighter than at other times of the year.

While we have limited data on the adverse impacts of this increased lighting on the nighttime environment, we do know light emissions contribute to skyglow — the brightening of the night sky that makes it harder to see stars.

Still, the potential impact of light pollution from holiday lights is relatively small compared to the constant illumination of streetlights or buildings that remain on throughout the night year-round. In most cases, holiday lighting does not pose a significant environmental threat, especially when installed away from ecologically sensitive areas, such as forests, prairies, river corridors or wetlands. So, it’s still possible to enjoy the warmth and charm of holiday lights without causing undue harm to the environment.

However, there are several ways to make holiday lighting more wildlife-friendly. First, consider using fewer lights overall. As David Hardisty, a University of British Columbia business professor, explains, “The first string of lights you put up adds a lot of holiday cheer. Having one string up versus none makes a big difference, but adding six strings instead of five barely changes anything [in adding holiday appeal].”

Second, be mindful of the color of your lights. Avoid using lights with a cool or blue tone, as blue light is particularly disruptive to raptors, such as owls and hawks, and contributes significantly to skyglow. If you prefer white lights, opt for warmer hues that resemble the soft glow of



Christmas lights outline the lodge at Fort Robinson State Park.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

a candle flame. These are less harsh on the eyes and cause fewer disturbances to nocturnal creatures.

Finally, use timers to control when your outdoor holiday lights are on, and be sure to turn them off at bedtime. Lights left on all night serve no real purpose and waste electricity. Instead, limit illumination to the hours when people are most likely to be outside to enjoy them, ensuring they don’t disrupt the nighttime environment. By following these simple steps, we can continue to enjoy the festive ambiance of holiday lights while minimizing their impact on the natural world.

Mindful Soundscapes

The holiday season is often filled with the sounds of celebrations, music and fireworks. While these noises bring joy to many, they can have a significant impact on local wildlife. Loud sounds, such as those from music, can cause stress in animals, leading to disorientation and changes in their behavior. For example, loud noises can cause deer, foxes and birds to flee their habitats or alter their movements to

seek resources during the winter. To ensure that wildlife is not disturbed during our celebrations, it is important to adopt practices that minimize noise pollution.

One way to create a quieter celebration is by opting for low-volume music. Keeping the volume at a moderate level reduces the impact of sound traveling long distances, especially in open areas or residential neighborhoods. This helps ensure that nearby wildlife is not overwhelmed. If using outdoor speakers, position them away from areas with high wildlife activity. Setting a time limit for music also helps avoid excessive disruption.

Finally, it’s important to respect quiet hours, particularly during early mornings and late nights when many animals are most active. Nocturnal species, including owls, rely on the quiet of the night for essential activities like hunting, foraging and communication. Excessive noise during these hours can disrupt their natural routines, leading to stress and disorientation. By keeping noise levels down during these times, we help ensure that wildlife can carry out their activities undisturbed. A simple way to do this is by ending



Choose natural and biodegradable decorations to make your holiday decor more sustainable. JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND

celebrations earlier in the evening or minimizing noise during these crucial hours.

Natural and Biodegradable Decorations

The holiday season is a time to celebrate, but it's also an opportunity to reflect on how we can reduce our environmental impact. One of the most effective ways to make your holiday decor more sustainable is by choosing natural and biodegradable decorations. These options not only add a rustic, organic charm to your home, but they also offer an eco-friendly alternative to plastic and synthetic materials. By opting for decorations that can break down naturally in the environment, you can enjoy the beauty of the season while minimizing waste and supporting sustainability.

One of the simplest and most popular choices for natural decorations is pinecones. These can be collected from the ground in forests or your backyard — just make sure to gather fallen materials rather than removing them from living trees, which can harm local ecosystems. Pinecones make an excellent addition to wreaths, garlands and table

centerpieces. They add texture, warmth and a seasonal fragrance to your home.

Similarly, branches from trees like fir, spruce or holly can be woven into wreaths or used to create natural garlands. These elements not only bring the beauty of nature indoors, but they can be composted after the season ends, leaving behind no waste. Using materials that are sourced from nature reminds us of the beauty and bounty of the earth and encourages us to be more mindful of our environmental footprint.

Dried fruits and berries also make beautiful, biodegradable holiday decorations. These items can be strung together to create colorful, natural garlands or used in bowls and centerpieces. Dried orange slices, cranberries and apples are particularly popular choices, as their vibrant colors and sweet scents evoke the holiday spirit. These decorations can be hung on trees, mantelpieces or draped across dining tables. Once the season is over, you can compost the dried fruits, ensuring that nothing goes to waste. Additionally, the dried fruits can serve as a food source for birds and other animals during the winter months.



Another important step toward more sustainable holiday decorations is investing in reusable decor. While it may be tempting to purchase new ornaments every year, these items often come from plastic or other non-biodegradable materials that contribute to waste. Instead, consider investing in durable, high-quality ornaments made from natural or long-lasting materials such as wood, metal or glass. These decorations can be used year after year, reducing the need for constant replacements and limiting the environmental toll of disposable holiday items. Reusable decor can also have a timeless, classic appeal that adds a sense of tradition and sentimental value to your celebrations.

■ ■ ■

By incorporating wildlife-friendly practices into your holiday traditions, you can create a season of celebration that's harmonious with nature. Small changes, like adjusting light schedules, using natural materials and reducing noise, can make a big difference for local ecosystems. This year, let's celebrate the holidays with kindness toward our environment and the creatures that call it home. [N](#)

LEFT: A bird feeder made out of a pine cone, suet and seeds.

JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND

BELOW: A mule deer approaches deer holiday decorations in Chadron. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



ONE CALENDAR FOR EVERY YEAR

By Jeff Kurrus

I should have done this years ago. Grab an old calendar and, alongside a collection of photos and journal entries, fill in your outdoor activities through the years. A few areas to consider:

Include days you had success

Patterns will develop telling where you should hunt/fish at the same time next year.

Also include days you haven't had success

Sometimes we force trips — over and over again — because we're convinced a result will occur. Use this calendar to try something new.

Include who you were with

Time goes by incredibly fast. The bird hunt you think you went on last year might have occurred four years ago. Reach out to people you've had fun with in the past to get together again. This is especially important to stay in touch with landowners and remind yourself of the gifts you need to drop off to them for allowing you access.

Save vacation days

I didn't realize until this calendar how many days I spend in the field each January. Between ice fishing and goose hunting, I'm out all of the time. Good to know so you don't



schedule any doctor's appointments during prime time.

Talk to friends

One of my fishing buddies works nights and weekends, leaving his weekdays open for fishing. Most of the time I am not with him, but I have included everything he's told me throughout the year. Just because you weren't with your buddy doesn't mean that information can't be good for your future trips to the water or woods. Also include what tactics are being used, as they might be different from yours.



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IMPACT NEBRASKA ARTISTS

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

Impact was created in 1985 to provide Nebraska artists opportunities to collaborate and share their work through exhibitions. Members commit to five exhibition themes per year. In 2025, exhibits included Impact Willa Cather, Spirit of Robert Henri, Waters of Life, Color of Music-Rhythm of Art, and Pollinators.

Nebraska Game and Parks graphic designer Donna Schimonitz has been an Impact member for 20 years. She describes her work as mostly nature-based and enjoys painting wildlife and scenic landscapes. Unsurprisingly, the Waters of Life and Pollinators exhibits have been most meaningful to her.

“I try to do something a little different,” Schimonitz said. “[For] the Waters of Life [exhibit], I did the tiger salamander because I figured no one else would be doing that.”

For the Pollinators exhibit, artists aimed to highlight the importance of pollinators and the roles they play in our ecosystems and everyday lives. Schimonitz chose to paint a calligrapher fly on purple aster flowers. This hoverfly is known for its distinctive black markings and is an important pollinator of native flowers. Also, its larvae are beneficial predators, helping to control plant pests such as aphids.

The group occasionally shows outside of Nebraska — they’ve had exhibits in Wyoming, Florida, Kansas and Washington, D.C. Impact is a professional community that provides its members opportunities to improve their craft. Member artists practice a variety of styles and media.

“It’s a group of high-quality art producers that made me push myself to be a better artist. I love the camaraderie and solid group of friendly but very professional artists,” Schimonitz said.

Membership is selective, with applicants being



Acrylic painting of a calligrapher fly on purple aster flowers.
BY DONNA SCHIMONITZ

“juried-in” by a third party, such as an outside artist or museum director, who judges their portfolio. Membership is a four-year commitment, with the expectation of participation in all programs, exhibitions and twice-a-year meetings.

The next Impact art exhibit will feature works inspired by American writer Willa Cather, known for her novels about the Great Plains. See the exhibit Nov. 1-Dec. 1 at the Valentine Public Library in Valentine and Dec. 4-28 at the West Arts Center in Scottsbluff.

For more information, visit impactart-ne.org.

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USING DAYLIGHT TO UNDERSTAND BIRD MOVEMENTS

By Stephen J. Brenner, Audubon Great Plains, and Joel Jorgensen, Nongame Bird Program Manager

Modern technology has unlocked a kaleidoscope of tools that can be used to reveal animal movements, including those of small migratory birds. Transmitters that use the same GPS that we tap into to navigate our vehicles to restaurants, airports and auto-part stores can also be harnessed to follow the real-time movements of many animals. However, most migratory songbirds that breed in our state present a challenge for GPS technology. As many migratory species need to travel over 1,000 miles twice a year and weigh as little as a couple dozen paper clips, most are incapable of carrying the heavy load of a GPS unit while in flight. But there is a less weighty alternative that utilizes an old school technology to answer new questions about the annual movements of migratory birds.

Light-level geolocators are small data loggers whose only function is to record the length of daylight every 24-hour period. As all the information is stored on board and there is no need to transmit or spend energy finding a satellite, almost no battery is required and the simplicity of the technology greatly reduces the weight. Yet with this simple data of sunrise and sunset times paired with knowing the date and original location of deployment, these tiny devices can be used to track the movements of small songbirds traveling long distances anywhere across the globe.

The positional data from geolocators compared to GPS units is certainly less precise: think about a 100-kilometer scale for a geocator and a 10-meter scale for GPS. But with the newest light-level geolocators coming in at under 0.5 grams (that's roughly 1/6th the weight of a penny), there is no better way to safely track the incredible journeys of these amazing animal athletes on their endurance flights across the continent.

One such small but impressive long-distance traveler is the ovenbird. Ovenbirds are migratory wood-warblers that spend much of their time foraging on the ground feeding on invertebrates and blasting their loud, escalating "teacher-Teacher-TEACHER!" song. The ovenbird got its swanky name

because their nest has a domed appearance that some might say resembles an oven. This species has a large breeding range across North America but a limited breeding range in Nebraska, restricted primarily to the Pine Ridge, Niobrara River Valley and sparingly along the Missouri River Valley. Its wintering range is also large, spanning from northern South America up through parts of northern Mexico and much of the Caribbean.

Birds from the core range of this species have been tracked before using geolocators, tracking migrations from the expansive boreal forests of Canada down to Central America, and from the islands of the Caribbean to the idyllic woods of New England. However, no one has studied the populations at the very edge of their range in western Nebraska, and as you might expect, no one is sure where these individuals migrate, spend the winter, or what their survival rate is compared to more well-studied counterparts in eastern North America.

Researchers at Nebraska Game and Parks and Audubon Great Plains set out to understand where warblers living on the edge in the Cornhusker state might spend the winter months, and what — if any — breeding success these birds have relative to previously-studied populations. As it so happens, ovenbirds breeding at the range-limits in Nebraska overwinter at the known nonbreeding range-limits in northwestern Mexico and Baja California, and it seems very likely from the data that Nebraska ovenbirds may have extended the map of where this species spends the "off-season" in western Mexico.

As if new tropical wintering grounds some 1,300 miles away weren't interesting enough, three years of data have revealed that ovenbirds breeding in the pine forests of the western Plains have very high survival rates relative to birds breeding in both sub-optimal and high-quality habitats out east. This research completes the larger picture about the breeding and migratory ecology of this incredible bird across its range, and is a testament to the amazing journeys and geographic connections that even the smallest birds in our state can make.



Ovenbirds have a limited breeding range in Nebraska. JON FARRAR, NEBRASKALAND

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FISHY FISH *A look at the science of why they taste better from cold water*

By Justin Haag

Those who catch fish in winter often profess there is no better-tasting fillet of a given species than one harvested through a hole in the ice.

But why is it that a fish caught in January is often favored table fare over one harvested in August?

Late in summer, the water is often loaded with vegetation, algae and small organisms which can find their way into the fillets in a “you-are-what-you-eat” sort of way. Some develop a “muddy” taste in these conditions. Another reason often

the floor of the boat on a 100-degree afternoon will not hold up as well as one that is chunked onto the ice for the duration of a hardwater trip.

It’s not as easy to give proper care to meat on a sweltering day of summer as it is in the cold of winter, but it can be done with just one step. Putting fish in a cooler loaded with ice helps ward off the enzymes and bacteria that cause spoilage and negatively affect fish taste. It’s something people should do anyway, since it’s illegal to move water from Nebraska’s



Putting a fish on clean ice not only helps improve the taste but also combats the spread of invasive aquatic species.
JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

cited is that colder temperatures tighten the muscles of fish, resulting in firmer flesh.

While there’s not much you can do for those factors, perhaps the most important aspect influencing fish taste is something within the angler’s control.

As with all pursuits that involve harvesting natural resources, much of it comes down to how things are cared for from field to table. Obviously, the taste of a fish left to sit on

lakes, ponds, rivers and streams, whether it’s in a livewell, bucket or something else. Not only does putting fish on clean ice help improve the taste, it also helps combat the spread of invasive aquatic species.

Thankfully, though, we’re entering the time that we can enjoy the conveniences of the big “cooler,” or perhaps “freezer,” that is Nebraska’s outdoors. Enjoy the harvest and respect the resource.



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Pheasant hunting near Aurora, 1931

This is a photo of my grandfather and friends hunting near Aurora in 1931. Pictured from left are: Mr. Kelp (first name unknown), Doc Walker, Vincent Schultz, Fagan Fadden and Milton J. Peterson (my grandfather).
 – Danny McEntarffer, Lincoln





A white-tailed buck walks toward the spot where Andy Moore of Maxwell had dropped his backpack and called minutes earlier while bowhunting in the loess canyons of Lincoln County. ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

THE BACKPACK BUCK

By Eric Fowler

Patience is a virtue Andy Moore does not have. That is one of the reasons he prefers spot-and-stalk bowhunting for deer in the loess canyons south of his home in Brady over sitting in a tree stand waiting for a deer to walk by. That lack of patience, however, cost Moore a shot at a white-tailed buck last fall.

As many bowhunters do, Moore was hunting as much as he could in the days leading up to the November firearm season. On this day, he was in the canyons before sunrise, sitting below a ridgetop that provided an extensive view of land that had been cleared of cedars and enrolled in the Open Fields and Waters program, scanning the countryside for deer through his tripod-mounted binoculars. After glassing for an hour and seeing nothing, it was time for him to get moving.

After stopping here and there to glass for the next two hours, he settled in behind his binoculars once again. Thirty minutes later, at 11:30 a.m., he spotted a buck walking along a sidehill below a ridge three-quarters of a mile away. When the deer dropped into the bottom, so did Andy.

Still hunting seemed fruitless, as the tall, tinder-dry vegetation cracked beneath his feet at every step. But 20 minutes after starting this quest, Moore caught a glimpse of the buck in the shadows of a finger of the steep-walled canyon, raking his antlers against a tree and making enough noise that he didn't hear the hunter's approach.

As I slid into the shadows on the opposite side of the bottom, hoping to photograph a successful end to a hunt, Moore posted up behind a cedar near the tip of the finger. After shedding his pack, he nocked an arrow, pulled out a rattling bag and grunt call, and made some noise with both.

Soon after, I saw the buck step out of the shadows between a gap in the tall weeds. The deer stood and listened for a bit, probably wondering which of his buddies might be sparring around the corner. As he did, Moore's patience wore out. After merely four minutes, he walked 50 yards north, thinking the deer might have taken the high road to the next finger.

From his new position, Moore rattled and called again. Immediately, the deer made a beeline for the spot where Moore had initially stood, stopping in a position that would have provided a 10-yard, quartering shot and an incredible photograph. Sensing something was just not right, the buck retreated a few steps before continuing toward the calls. When the buck rounded the corner, he recoiled at the sight of Moore's pack before bolting up the canyon, passing within 30 yards of the hunter before disappearing into the canyon.

"I guess maybe I should give it more than a couple of minutes next time," Moore said. "I didn't think this actually worked.

"Just add it to the list of should've beens."

Add it to this photographer's list, too.

When boating, remember to:

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DRY



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