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Nebraskaland
2021 Photo Contest

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NebraskaWildlifeFund.org

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



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Cover: Britton Bailey's "Sandhill Crane Preening on Platte River Bank" image won Best of Show in the 2021 Nebraskaland Photo Contest. See page 20.

BRITTON BAILEY

This page: An abandoned house lays witness to March snow in Sioux County in the Nebraska Panhandle. BOB GRIER, NEBRASKALAND

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Nebraskaland
magazine

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Boreal chorus frogs are the first frogs to start calling this month. Listen for their call, which can be deafening. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

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PHEASANTS FOREVER AND QUAIL FOREVER



2022 Chapter Banquets

Table with 3 columns: County, Chapter, Date. Rows include Adams, Boone, Buffalo, Burt, Cedar, Chase, Cheyenne, Clay/Fillmore, Colfax, Cuming, Dakota/Thurston, Dodge, Duele/Garden, Franklin, Frontier, Frontier/Gosper, Furnas/Gosper, Gage.

Table with 3 columns: County, Chapter, Date. Rows include Garfield/Loup/Valley, Greeley/Wheeler, Hall, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lancaster, Merrick, Phelps, Red Willow, Saline, Saunders, Scotts Bluff, Seward, Stanton/Madison/Pierce, Washington, Wayne, Webster.



For more information, visit our website at NebraskaPF.com/calendar-2

 Instagram Photos

Follow us @nebraskaland
and tag us in your photos
to be featured in an
upcoming issue.

Opposite: Rich Hodson, Plainview
Missouri River Smooth

Sonja Brandt, Utica
Full Moon Rising



Clark Landers, Omaha
Decoys over the Platte





Send your comments and photos to:

Jeff Kurrus, Editor
Nebraskaland Magazine
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or email Jeff.Kurrus@Nebraska.gov

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

Opposite: Chuck Hackenmiller, Lincoln
A Holmes Lake Sunrise

Katie Bresnahan, Osceola
Snowy Day



Erik Johnson, Lincoln
Williams Gap



GREATER PRAIRIE CHICKEN

In spring, males gather on “booming grounds” and display to attract females. In display, males lower heads, raise tails, inflate air sacs, and stamp their feet while making a hollow moaning sound.

RICK RASMUSSEN



Sandhill cranes fly in a cloudless sky the morning after a rainstorm in Hall County. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

IT'S NOT YOU, IT'S MIE

By Martha Shulski

After a weather front has passed, often an overcast and rainy sky magically transforms into a crisp indigo-blue with the air so clean you can almost taste the freshness. This shade of blue seems to resemble cobalt tropical ocean waters and can occur without so much as a single cloud to dot the hemisphere.

What you are witnessing, quite purely in this case, is Rayleigh scattering, named after an 18th century British physicist who discovered the physics of why the sky is blue. Visible light in the wavelengths emitted from the sun appear as white light, but is actually composed of all colors of the rainbow (see “Seeing Double” in the Aug/Sept 2021 issue). Blue is on the shorter wavelength end of the visible spectrum, while red is longer.

In the clearest of air and after a front passes, the

indigo and blue can appear quite vividly. Because the size of gas molecules and tiny particles in the atmosphere is similar to that of blue light (0.00002 inch), this wavelength is very effective at scattering these hues. For the human eye, scattering means we see it, sometimes brilliantly. Contrast this with a warm and humid summer day.

While typically not visible to the naked eye, microscopic particles such as water vapor, dust and pollen can be quite prevalent in the atmosphere. These larger particles result in Mie scattering, named for a German physicist, which spreads all wavelengths of solar energy. The result is often a paler shade of blue, which can fill either the whole sky or most often just near the horizon.

But not to worry, the pale shade is not you, it's Mie.

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PENDING

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The proper amount of turkey hunting preparation leads to spring opportunities like this. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

SPRING GOBBLER PREP

By Todd Mills

You can never start preparing early enough for turkey hunting. Planned preparation prevents poor performance, and although I find this applicable in all facets of life, it's crucial for hunting success.

Too many times I've not done my homework and paid for it later. The following are some ideas to help you avoid mistakes I've made in the past:

Confirm with Your Farmers

Nothing can ruin a hunt faster than somebody else showing up to hunt the land you had permission to hunt. Although this may lead to new hunting partners, it usually ends up in a confrontation of some sort. One big mistake many hunters make is not checking in with landowners before every season. They just show up assuming they still have permission. It's also handy to have them give you a handwritten permission "slip" each year so you've got proof. Whichever direction you go, don't make the mistake of not checking in. And while you're at it, take the landowner a gift certificate to their favorite local restaurant as a thank you.

Gear Check

Don't wait until the last minute to check your to-do list and check your gear. I'm ashamed to admit I didn't check my tent before going out a few years ago. I didn't remember that a brace had broken the year before. That, of course, made for an interesting hunt as I held up one end of the tent with a long branch. Make sure you do an inventory on decoys, clothing, tents, chairs and even the choke you use.

Expand Your Territory

Don't count on last year's "honey hole" for gobblers. Turkeys travel and so should you. Take time in early- to mid-March to drive around the areas you like to hunt. Birds are usually still really grouped up at this time, and if it's a nicer day, they'll be moving. Knocking on a door early last year led me to taking a really nice tom on property I had never hunted before. Expanding your territory will pay dividends.

Todd Mills is a former Avian-X and Mossy Oak pro staffer who divides his outdoor time between hunting waterfowl and turkeys.

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Goose legs slow-cooked until tender and served on top of cheesy nachos. JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND

GOOSE LEG NACHOS

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

Serving size: 2

Time to make: 3 hours and 30 minutes

Ingredients:

Meat:

- 2 large Canada goose legs and thighs, skin on
- Half an onion, cut into four pieces
- 3 cloves of garlic, smashed
- 1 bay leaf
- Kosher salt, to taste
- 1 chipotle pepper in adobo sauce, plus extra
- 2 cans of Mexican lager
- 1 tablespoon of olive oil
- ½ teaspoon each of cumin, coriander and onion powder
- ¼ teaspoon of garlic powder
- Freshly cracked pepper, to taste

Nacho Toppings:

- 12 ounces of shredded Mexican blend of cheeses
- ¼ cup of chopped cilantro
- 16 ounces of refried beans, warmed

- Half an onion, chopped
- ½ cup of diced tomato
- 1 to 2 avocados, diced
- 1-2 fresh jalapeños, thinly sliced or sliced pickled jalapeños
- Crumbled cotija cheese, to taste
- 9 ounces of tortilla chips*
- Other toppings: hot sauce, salsa and/or sour cream

**Choose a thick, sturdier brand of tortilla chips.*

1. Sprinkle salt all over Canada goose legs and thighs and place into a heavy-bottomed pot. Add onion pieces, garlic, bay leaf, 1 chipotle pepper in adobo sauce and submerge with beer. Bring to a boil and then back down to a simmer. Cover and cook on low for 2 ½ to 3 hours, or until tender. Add more beer or water as needed. Or cook on low in a Crockpot overnight or while you're at work.

2. When goose is tender, pull the meat and skin off the bones and shred/cut into smaller pieces. Discard

cooking liquid. Over medium-high heat, heat olive oil in a pan and sauté goose meat with cumin, coriander, onion powder and garlic powder until slightly toasted. Add salt and pepper to taste. Add a chopped chipotle pepper for extra spiciness.

3. Preheat oven to 350-degrees Fahrenheit. Line a sheet pan with foil or spray a 12-inch cast-iron pan. Evenly spread a layer of tortilla chips on the bottom, only slightly overlapping the chips, and drop small dollops of warmed refried beans all over, a generous sprinkle of shredded Mexican cheese, chopped onion and some of the goose meat. Spread another layer of tortilla chips on top and continue building layers until you run out of beans, meat, onion and cheese. Bake nachos until cheese is melted, about 5-10 minutes.

4. Sprinkle some of the cilantro, avocado, diced tomato, sliced jalapeño and crumbled cotija cheese on top and serve hot with extra toppings on the side.

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NEBRASKA
— GAME  PARKS —



2021 Photo Contest

With more than 3,000 entries submitted through Instagram, the 2021 *Nebraskaland Magazine* Photo Contest drew a record number of stunning images from Nebraska photographers in the categories of Wildlife, Flora, Scenic and Recreation.

This year's Best of Show winner, "Sandhill Crane Preening on Platte River Bank," by Britton Bailey of Aurora, was shot at Rowe Sanctuary in central Nebraska. "To witness the ancient annual spring migration up close from the bank of the Platte River cannot be expressed in words," she said. "So, I hope my photographs do the talking for me."

We thank everyone who participated and look forward to seeing more of your great photographs in next year's contest.

Keep shooting.

Jeff Kurrus, Editor
Nebraskaland Magazine

BEST OF SHOW

Sandhill Crane Preening on Platte River Bank
Photo by Britton Bailey, Aurora
@bfbinstailey

WILDLIFE

FIRST PLACE – Mother's Love

Photo by Connie Rathbun, Omaha

©rathbun2682





SECOND PLACE – Sunflower Bee
Photo by Tyler Moore, Omaha
@drtylermoore



THIRD PLACE – Catch Me if You Can
Photo by Lynette Hahne, Lincoln
@dennishloose

FLORA

FIRST PLACE – Milkweed Seed
Photo by Tyler Moore, Omaha
@drtylermoore





THIRD PLACE – Rise of the Evening Star
Photo by Derrill Grabenstein, Lincoln
@de_grabenstein



SECOND PLACE – Maidenhair Fern
Photo by Britton Bailey, Aurora
@bfbinstailey

SCENIC

FIRST PLACE – Winter's Surreal Moment

Photo by Roger Richters, Utica

@rogerrichters



SCENIC



SECOND PLACE – Summer Warmth
Photo by Jayson Basilio, Oakland
@jayson_basilio



THIRD PLACE – A Bright Future
Photo by Melanie Moree, Papillion
@melaniemoree

RECREATION

FIRST PLACE – The Second Harvest
Photo by Alexis Mendyk, Dannebrog
@lexi_leighphotography





SECOND PLACE – Beach Girl
Photo by Juston Brazda, Valley
@justonbrazda



THIRD PLACE – Paddleboard Fisherman
Photo by Tiara Brown, Omaha
@huskertiaara

Outdoor Nebraska

By Renae Blum

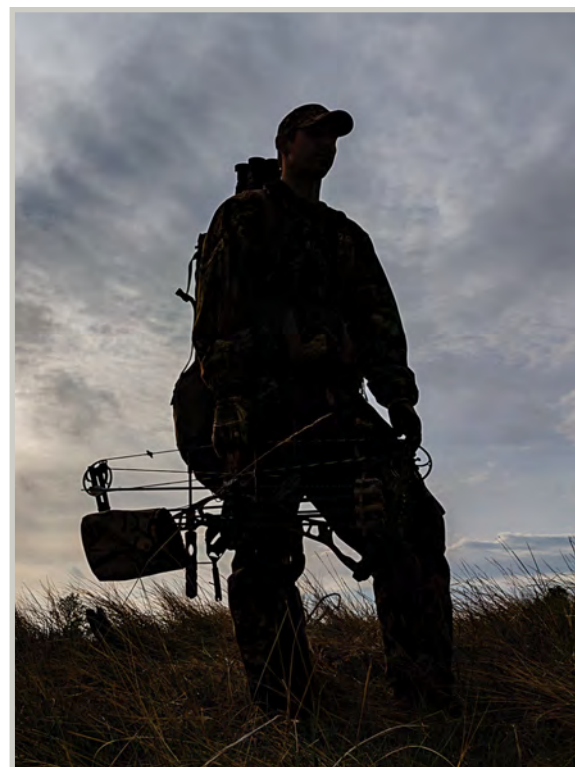
There’s no telling what the weather will be like this month, but there are plenty of reasons to get outdoors in any case: spring migration, turkey hunting, camping and much more. How will you enjoy the outdoors in March? 📅



Science of Salamanders virtual event

March 3, 3-4 p.m. Central time | Via Zoom

Salamanders are extremely secretive, and most of us have never seen one. Join us for this virtual event as we unpack the secrets of salamanders, including which species call Nebraska home. Registration is required; sign up at [Calendar.OutdoorNebraska.gov](https://calendar.outdoornebraska.gov). JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



Archery turkey season

Starting March 25 | Statewide

Get out your bow and round up your hunting buddies — turkey season is about to start. With a long season, affordable permits, great public access and \$8 permits for youth, Nebraska is your destination for turkey hunting. Learn more and buy permits at OutdoorNebraska.org/wildturkey.

JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

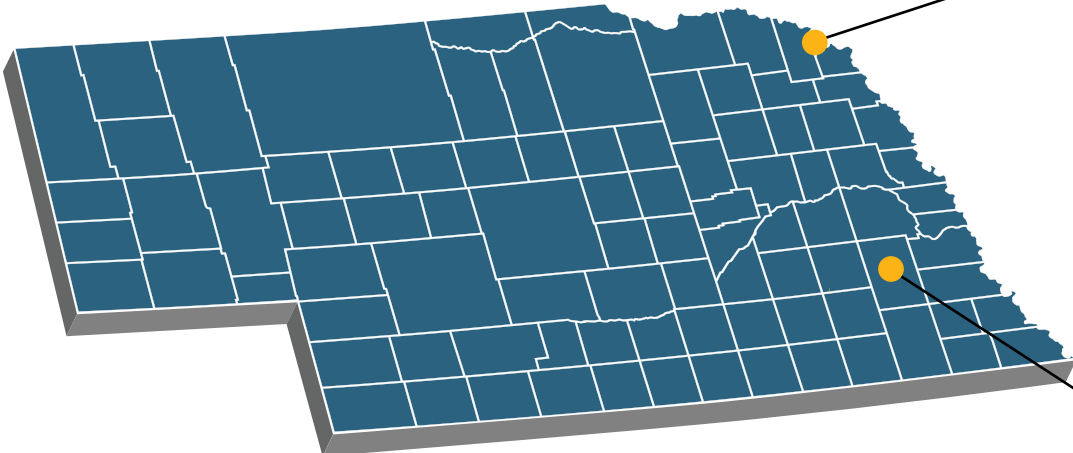


Early spring camping

Throughout the month
Statewide

Early spring, before summer crowds arrive, is the time to enjoy peaceful and quiet campgrounds. Mild temperatures and low humidity provide perfect conditions for long hikes, wildlife viewing and exploring. Be prepared for cool and wet weather: pack layers, extra blankets, footwear for mud and rain gear.

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



Marsh Madness

Throughout the month; guided viewings on Saturdays,
March 5-26 | Ponca State Park

Witness the peak of migration at Ponca State Park, considered an “Important Bird Area” by the National Audubon Society. Visitors can enjoy guided sunrise and sunset waterfowl blind viewings and a 30 percent discount on lodging, with the chance to see whirlwinds of snow geese, wood ducks, mallards and other waterfowl. Learn more by calling the park at 402-755-2284 or by visiting Ponca State Park’s Facebook page. JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND

Fly-tying Basics class

March 9, 12 | Outdoor Education
Center, Lincoln

Ready to catch some trout and panfish this spring using your own handmade flies? Attend this workshop and learn the basics of fly-tying, with all materials and tools included to create at least four to six flies during class. Learn more at Calendar.OutdoorNebraska.gov.

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



New Life for the Old Stevens

By Justin Haag

Heavily marred with dirt, dings, scratches and rust, it did not look like much. Despite its condition, I knew the item handed to me — a Stevens Springfield 87A .22 semi-automatic rifle — was a special gift.

I best remember the gun from my childhood in southwestern Nebraska in the 1980s; it hung on the rack in Grandpa Alfred's beat-up green Ford as it was parked at his and Grandma's service station on Danbury's main street. Resting in the rear window, the

rifle was always at the ready during his evening trips to the farm, his boyhood home 4 miles north of town.

I was fortunate to be passenger on many of the daily trips to the place where he and my dad were raised, and have memories of Grandpa teaching me how to use the rifle at a nearby prairie dog town.

Rifles such as this were not required to have serial numbers until 1968, but the barrel has one patent number; resources indicate it was manufactured in the model's first three years of



Hunters pose with the 60 jackrabbits and one cottontail they harvested near Hay Springs in 1931. Considered a pest during the Dust Bowl years, many counties offered bounties to encourage hunting them. L.L. BUTZINE



Even though the Springfield Stevens 87A, purchased by the author's grandfather about eight decades ago, shows signs of abuse, it's been refinished and given new life. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

production, which began in 1938.

Grandpa often told of how the gun paid for itself in jackrabbits in short time. Considered an overpopulated pest during the Dust Bowl of the 1930s and into the 1940s, many counties offered a bounty on the long-legged, hungry grazers. A newspaper article from 1940, when Grandpa was 19, tells of the McCook rendering plant paying 5 cents per jackrabbit. An advertisement from that year shows the gun could be bought for \$11.61. So, cost of ammunition aside, I figure that's about 232 jackrabbits.

As one of more than a million of this model Stevens sold, the firearm — one of the first mass-produced semi-automatic .22s — is far from being a rarity.

I could not even guess how many rounds it has fired. It helped put food on the table for my grandparents when they were newlyweds. Long before I took aim with it, and years after those jackrabbit harvests, my dad and uncle remember it entertaining the family as a plinker around the farm — especially on the many nights the TV's one station was on the fritz. They say one

of Grandpa's favorite activities was lighting and extinguishing matchsticks with a careful aim. If the farm's varmint population needed to be curbed, it was the go-to tool. During wheat harvest, it rode on the combine. Despite heavy use and minimal cleaning, Dad says he cannot remember it ever jamming or misfiring.

As Grandpa aged, the rifle was put into storage with his other guns. Sometime after he died in 2001, they were passed on to family. I decided to clean the Stevens well enough to stop the rust and keep it as a conversation

piece. Beyond that, I had little optimism about its future.

After inspecting it, though, I was pleased to find the bore free of rust and corrosion, as were all of the mechanics of the trigger and bolt assembly. A few blasts of an aerosol gun cleaner had those parts moving well and looking fresh again. All of that Red Willow County dirt came off easy enough, and the rust on the exterior of the barrel and magazine relented by rubbing it with fine steel wool and oil. After cleaning and oiling, I put the gun in the cabinet. It stayed there for more than a decade.

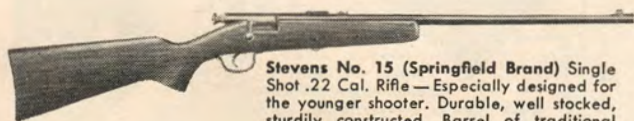


Stevens No. 87 (Springfield Brand) .22 cal. automatic rifle. 15 shots as fast as you can pull the trigger. One of a great line of Stevens-built ".22's."

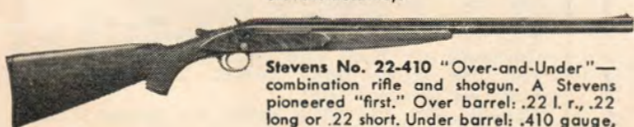
"GREASED LIGHTNING"

His first name is "speed" but he's s-l-o-w compared to the "greased lightning" packed into the trim, sleek lines of a Stevens .22 cal. Automatic. Here's a fine handling, fast shooting "auto-loader" with all the traditional accuracy, value and dependability of Stevens rifles and shotguns. You'll want to own and shoot this great Stevens rifle. It opens up a new and exciting field of small bore rifle sport, including the thrills of "speed shooting" at small running game. Your dealer has—or will have soon—your new Stevens .22 Automatic, as well as a selection of other popular Stevens models, including repeating and single shot bolt action rifles; repeating, double and single barrel shotguns and .22-.410 over-and-under combination guns. See them today.

J. STEVENS ARMS COMPANY, Chicopee Falls, Mass.
Division of Savage Arms Corporation



Stevens No. 15 (Springfield Brand) Single Shot .22 Cal. Rifle—Especially designed for the younger shooter. Durable, well stocked, sturdily constructed. Barrel of traditional Stevens accuracy.



Stevens No. 22-410 "Over-and-Under"—combination rifle and shotgun. A Stevens pioneered "first." Over barrel: .22 l. r., .22 long or .22 short. Under barrel: .410 gauge, 2½ or 3 inch shells.



MARCH, 1946

235

This winter, while giving guns a routine cleaning, I decided the rifle deserved better.

I am certainly no gunsmith, but after reading message boards and watching how-to videos online, I gained enough confidence to tackle a more thorough restoration. As a weekend do-it-yourselfer, I already had the necessary tools, and the refinishing products were easy enough to find at local retailers and online.

A special cleaning solution helped remove the little bit of bluing that remained on the barrel, and a fine wire brush on a rotary tool helped clean the tight spots. After getting that maltreated steel to shine, I was amazed at how a liquid cold-bluing solution returned it to an attractive black in a matter of seconds.

A hot iron over a damp rag lifted many of the dents from the stock, and deeper gouges and scratches were filled with a putty of wood glue and sawdust, the latter of which was harvested by drilling a hole under the butt plate. After sanding the surface smooth, multiple coats of gun stock finish made the wood shine. Below the glossy finish is evidence of all those dents and dings, but they somehow add a richness and beauty to its one-of-a-kind appearance that only decades of abuse can provide.

The rifle is not only a conversation piece, but also a firearm I am proud to carry. What's more, I have found it to fire as reliably as it did when aimed at those hordes of jackrabbits of the '40s.

Advertisements from when the rifle was new boast not only of its craftsmanship and affordability, but also its speed and three-in-one design. It will fire as not only a semi-automatic, but also a single-shot and bolt action. I became familiar with each part of its action throughout the refinishing process.

With the stamping of "Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts, USA" on top of the barrel, the Stevens Springfield 87A was born in a different era of the



Above: The author carries the rifle on a small-game hunt in the Pine Ridge. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKA
Opposite: A 1946 advertisement for the rifle targets jackrabbit hunters.

American economy. Even though it was one of the least expensive rifles available, it has a quality of construction present only on high-end firearms of today — a collection of sturdy, machined, U.S. steel parts assembled on a bed of birch, presumably harvested in New England.

I did have to replace the stock's butt plate, the only piece of plastic on the entire rifle. Extremely brittle, it shattered when I fumbled it to the hard basement floor. Thankfully, I located a replica from an online retailer.

Perhaps I would have been better off hiring a professional gunsmith, who surely would have done a better job returning the rifle to near mint condition, without dropping any pieces. That is not my style, though. Nor my grandpa's. There is much reward in doing the project myself, and I am glad there are still a few remnants of the rifle's many battle scars.

While I consider the rifle a treasure, I will not be hocking it to embark on a lavish lifestyle. Rusty relics in this one's previous state often sell for a low

bid at farm auctions. Even in pristine condition, they do not fetch much more than \$150.

To me, though, it is invaluable. It is an heirloom that bridges generations and honors the past. Every time I shoulder it, my hands grip the same places my grandfather's did. Also relatable, my eyesight has degraded to where I complain about the rear sight being a little blurry — just as I remember him lamenting at that prairie dog town in the '80s.

Sadly, Grandpa and the old Ford are gone, the gas station's closed, and the old house and other farm buildings are in disrepair. The state's jackrabbit population is scarce. The rifle, however, endures.

Surely many modern .22 rifles are much more highly regarded than this one, but, lacking American artisanship from the 1930s and '40s, I wonder if they will stand up to decades of such use and abuse. If the objectives are durability and reliability, I will place bets on Grandpa's timeworn, but reborn, American-made Stevens Springfield. [N](#)

A Rare Bird

Remembering Jon Farrar

By Eric Fowler

Dogged writer and photographer. Accuracy hound. Swearer. Whiskey drinker. That was Jon Farrar. This colorful character of a man, who spent 42 years on the staff of *Nebraskaland Magazine*, passed away

on March 30, 2021, at the age of 73. His closest friends will remember the stories he told, the late-night decoy carving sessions and how he disappeared into the Sandhills each October, primarily to hunt ducks. His body of work, however, including more than 580 articles, several books and tens of thousands of photographs honoring, and trying to conserve, the flora, fauna and history of our great state, will live on.

“He is *Nebraskaland*,” said longtime colleague and friend Michael Forsberg. “Not to take anything away from the others on the staff that were in that same generation, but he defined it. He set the bar.”

Nebraskaland employed writers and photographers when Farrar was hired, and he excelled at both. His other passion was research. He leaned on colleagues for insight and read everything he could find on a subject, from scholarly papers to first-hand accounts, before ever setting foot in the field. Once there, he recorded his own observations in field journals, a practice he began as a youth growing up a short walk from the Loup River in Monroe. Those small, brown, tattered notebooks came to be arranged neatly in a file cabinet in his office, to aid his own or a fellow staffer’s work long into the future. “As an outdoor writer I can think

of few that were as good of a naturalist as him,” said Gerry Steinauer, a longtime colleague.

Farrar produced articles with a greater depth than had been seen previously in *Nebraskaland*, a depth that makes many of them reference material still today.

Often, his work focused on articles about little known species that could be considered obscure.

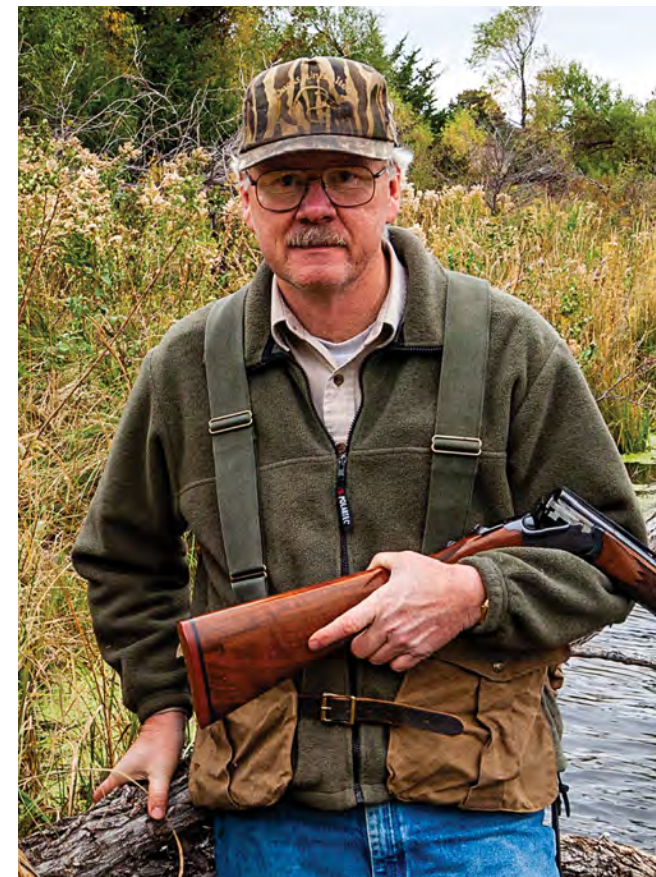
The Obscure

Farrar wrote many natural history pieces during his career, stories detailing the life cycle, habits and habitats of plants and mammals of the state. While he wrote several on common species, including pheasants, Canada geese and bald eagles, many of his subjects were species the magazine’s readers likely had never heard of, much less seen. There were stories on shrikes, skinks, wood rats, blue-eyed grass, and perhaps Farrar’s favorite, grebes.

In 1984, he wrote “Crested Hell Divers,” a story about eared grebes, one of three subspecies of the birds found in the state. It is perhaps the best collection of photographs he captured for a story.

“Jon didn’t just think those birds were cool, he was in love with those birds,” Forsberg said. “And every story that he ever wrote about them, that love was just sort of oozing from the page and from the pictures.”

That collection of eared grebe images provides a glimpse of the time Farrar spent in the field. He didn’t just take one



Jon Farrar

In 2000, Jon Farrar photographed this stilt sitting on a nest brooding its young while one chick pokes its head out from under the wing. The nest was located in southern Sheridan County.



Farrar once told me this image he captured of a female eared grebe laying an egg in a Sandhills marsh was his “all-time high.” In “Crested Hell Divers,” he wrote: “The ear grebe’s nest is even flimsier than the western grebe’s. I guess the eared grebe is a lower middle-class bird living as if he’s wealthy.”

trip, capture a few frames and call it good. He went back time and time again, brushing aside heat, cold and bugs, to get the images he needed to tell the story of the lives of these creatures.

He also cared about his subjects. When photographing nesting birds, he slowly moved blinds closer, often through the course of days, hoping they would accept his presence. In time, he knew which birds would and which ones would not. One bird he wrote about in “A Tale of Two Stilts” in June 2001, the black-necked stilt, never really did.

As Farrar chronicled, it was hot and there was no wind, and the stilts, one appearing to have “sheer terror in her eyes,” were taking turns tending the three chicks that had hatched that morning and one yet-to-hatch egg, between cooling off in the water. “The birds were suffering,” Farrar wrote. “I was torn between doing what was right, and what I had to do. I had nearly as many days invested in the nest as the stilts. And, if I left my grass-covered blind only 12 feet from the stilt nest, I might disrupt the hatching more than if I stayed. Telling myself that helped briefly. But I knew this was the most important day of the year for the two stilts panting and pacing near the nest. By noon, my conscience was unbearable. I pulled the blind and quickly left the meadow.”

Farrar focused on these lesser-known species partly because he hated the ordinary. But he also wrote about them

in hopes of fostering greater appreciation among people for all things wild, and the landscapes and habitats in which they lived. To him, they mattered, just as much as the game species with which most people were familiar.

“He was way more interested in the true natives and the little guys, the underdogs ... the kangaroo rats and blowout grass species,” said Jim Van Winkle, a long-time friend of Farrar’s from Wood Lake. “I think he felt that those species were entitled to recognition. And they were just such an intrinsic part of the ecosystems up here that they needed to get the same amount of attention that a ring-necked pheasant would.”

The Sandhills

Farrar’s true love was the Sandhills. He loved everything about the region, and in 1977, he produced an entire issue of the magazine dedicated to it. “Have you got a few minutes?” he wrote in this issue. “Have another cup of coffee and let me tell you what I know of these hills and their people. No, I’m not a sandhiller; didn’t even move here as a boy. But I wish I had. I’m just passing through, like you, but I’ve passed through here before and I know something of these people.”

He wrote about the history, from the Native Americans



As he sometimes did with hard-to-photograph species, Farrar built enclosures (left) to capture images. For example, Farrar captured this Bailey’s eastern woodrat (*Neotoma floridana baileyi*) and photographed it at the Niobrara Valley Preserve in 2006.



Legend has it that Farrar, in 1999, captured this image of a least weasel in an enclosure he built in his basement, even leaving a window open to let the snow blow in.



“One of two species of garter snakes common statewide in Nebraska, the red-sided garter snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis*) is most abundant near streams, ponds and marshes,” wrote Farrar in 2002. “Its principal foods are frogs, toads, salamanders, fish, tadpoles and earthworms. Its name comes from its striped pattern, which was similar to the fancy garters men once wore to support their stockings.”



Storm clouds and a Sandhills blowout are warmed by the light of the setting sun west of Wood Lake in Cherry County. “Light is everything,” Farrar once said when talking about what makes a great photograph.

who lived there and passed through on hunts, to the French explorers, early cattlemen, homesteaders and ranchers. He wrote about the ecosystem and its origin, from the lakes and marshes and fens in the valleys to the grass covered dunes to the blowouts. He wrote about the fish and wildlife, and the opportunities they provided. And he wrote about the men and women who now live and work there.

He wrote stories about the black pioneers who homesteaded near Brownlee, about several ranches and the people who built them, and on the short-lived potash industry near Lakeside and Antioch.

“I think it was a combination of the people and the landscape,” said Joe Hyland, a former colleague and long-time friend. “He was fascinated by the people who lived that life in the Sandhills, both early and to this day.”

He would disappear for days in the Sandhills, far from the nearest highway and motel, living out of the back of his truck. In the fall, he hung his waders at several hunting base camps in the search for ducks, geese, grouse and pheasants. But his love for the obscure extended to the field, where his

passion for hunting included snipe and diving ducks.

“He loved a lot of places in Nebraska,” Van Winkle said. “But he always told me this was his second home up here in the hills.”

History

True to his position, Farrar wrote about the history of hunting, fishing and boating in the state. He poured over columns by Sandy Griswold that ran in the *Omaha Bee* and *World-Herald* in the late 1800s and early 1900s to gain more insight on hunting, fishing and even wildlife populations.

He wrote about many old hunting clubs, including Ducklore Lodge on the North Platte River and The Merganzer Club near Cody, both run by brewers from Omaha. On his own time, he wrote a book on the Red Deer Club south of Valentine.

“He just spent an inordinate amount of time piecing together little details about all of these clubs that haven’t existed for years,” said Van Winkle. “He was a hound hunting

“To be in a marsh. The rich, stagnant fragrance of marsh. The gray sky. Drizzle on the neck. Squads of snow geese and courtship flights of pintails. The scene cries out for description, yet defies it. A glimpse back to our origins, a closeness to life other than our own, as if we belonged somewhere, finally belong somewhere”

— Jon Farrar, from “Sky Carp”

for information on those old clubs.”

Farrar collected, built, and, of course, used decoys, so it’s no surprise that he wrote several pieces on the history of decoys, including Herter’s, Mason, paper, miniature, Nebraska-made and even live decoys.

For all of these pieces, Farrar talked to people who were part of the history. Lots of them. He tracked down old men who were market hunters, duck club members and ranchers. He would sit in their kitchens, or in some cases, their rooms

at the local nursing home, turn on his cassette recorder, and listen to the stories of their lives and those who came before them. Sometimes he would go back for more.

Some believe that Farrar wrote some of these historical pieces because he felt that if he didn’t do it, no one would. “He knew it was getting away,” Van Winkle said. “Like we all know, we lament the things we didn’t do and the people we didn’t talk to and the records that we don’t have. He did something about it.”



Colorful autumn leaves, fungi, moss and lichen adorn a fallen paper birch tree in this image Farrar captured in 2005 at the Nature Conservancy’s Niobrara Valley Preserve.



In 1994, Farrar captured this image of a male and female blue-winged teal standing together on a little mound in the middle of Marsh Lake, located on the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge in Cherry County.

Conservation Issues

Farrar took on many environmental issues, and others, in a tell-it-like-it-is style. His “A case for shelterbelts” in April 1971 bemoaned the fact that tree claims, planted by settlers to cut the wind on the prairie, were being bulldozed at an alarming rate. He pointed out the benefits, both economically, socially and for wildlife, debunked myths, and simply said: “If you have a shelterbelt — keep it. If you don’t — plant one.” The story could be run nearly verbatim and still apply today.



In 1981 or so, on a marsh north of Ashby, Farrar took a self-portrait next to a photography blind he built from conduit and wire that sat atop of his jon boat. “The two long poles are conduit, locked in place with thumb screws. They are the stabilizing rods to hold the boat in place, except when the wind hits 45 mph. Should have drowned five or six times in one afternoon on Marsh Lakes, back before the carp got in there.”

He wrote against channelization of the Missouri River between Yankton and Sioux City, a dam on the Niobrara River, the incursion of center-pivot irrigation systems into the Sandhills, and unethical hunters. He authored many lift-outs for the magazine that detailed some of the state’s most sensitive and imperiled lands, including wetlands in the Rainwater Basin and the rare saline wetlands near Lincoln, and the Platte River. He ruffled the feathers of many, including farmers, power companies, developers and sometimes readers with these works.

“I think what I liked most about Jon’s writing is he had really a unique way of describing or writing about environmental problems, and sort of putting the skewer in the sides of people who were not ethical and really didn’t care about wildlife,” long-time colleague Carl Wolfe said.

Joe Hyland appreciated “Sky Carp,” a piece Farrar did in 2001 on snow geese after seasons were liberalized in an attempt to reduce the population of the bird, which was so high it was destroying its own nesting grounds in the Arctic.

In it, Farrar detailed nearly every attempt he made to capture magazine-worthy photographs of the bird throughout his career, the behaviors he witnessed, what he learned from them, and how he appreciated them. “He kind of took the people who look down their nose to snow geese to task,” Hyland said. “Jon never treated them irreverently. He didn’t like people calling them sky carp. They deserved better than that.”

Knock Their Socks Off

Farrar was a great storyteller with a great sense of humor. Who else would, during his younger days, keep

a small rattlesnake in a coffee can in his office for when visitors entered? Or walk in front of a colleague’s middle-of-Nebraska-nowhere trail camera and make obscene gestures toward the lens?

His ability to tell a story extended to his work. He was a master with the keyboard and the camera. “His work is the standard by which everything else can be measured,” said Forsberg.

A few years before his passing, he bestowed this advice on me. “Grind out the stuff you need to do to buy groceries, but once or twice a year knock their socks off. When you look back, should you live so long, those will be the ones you’re glad you did. The ones that last — that some snot-nosed kid will quote in his Ph.D. dissertation 50 years from now. Yeah, I know, you’re dead and won’t know, but it would be good now if you saw you were doing something significant in the long-haul.”

That was Jon Farrar. [N](#)

Visit Nebraskalandmagazine.com to read Farrar’s articles mentioned in this story.

A Love of Wildflowers

Jon Farrar approached his *Field Guide to Wildflowers of Nebraska and the Great Plains*, originally published in 1990 with a second edition in 2011, with the same conviction and care for the species as the rest of his projects.

“There is no way I could pick just one wildflower as a favorite,” he wrote. “Each is special in its own way, especially when you consider how it evolved to prosper in its own niche in the world.”



“The number of snow geese staging on Rainwater Basin wetlands during spring migration has increased dramatically since the 1970s,” wrote Farrar in 2004. “Nearly five million snow geese are estimated to pause in these wetlands each spring in recent years. Large numbers of snow geese migrate through Nebraska on their way to breeding grounds in Canada during late winter and early spring.”

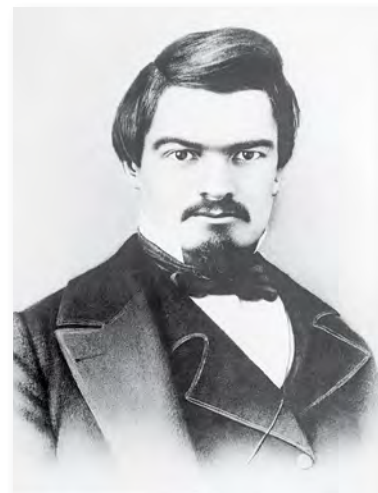
When Omaha Was the Capital City

By David L. Bristow, *History Nebraska*

Were it not for Francis Burt's digestive problems, Bellevue might be Nebraska's big city and Omaha its suburb.

Francis Burt was Nebraska Territory's first governor, appointed by President Franklin Pierce. (U.S. territories elected legislatures but not governors.) Burt arrived in Bellevue on Oct. 7, 1854. Why Bellevue? Towns were springing up all along the west bank of the Missouri River, but Bellevue was more established, having served as a trading post and Indian mission for decades. Burt apparently intended to convene the legislature there.

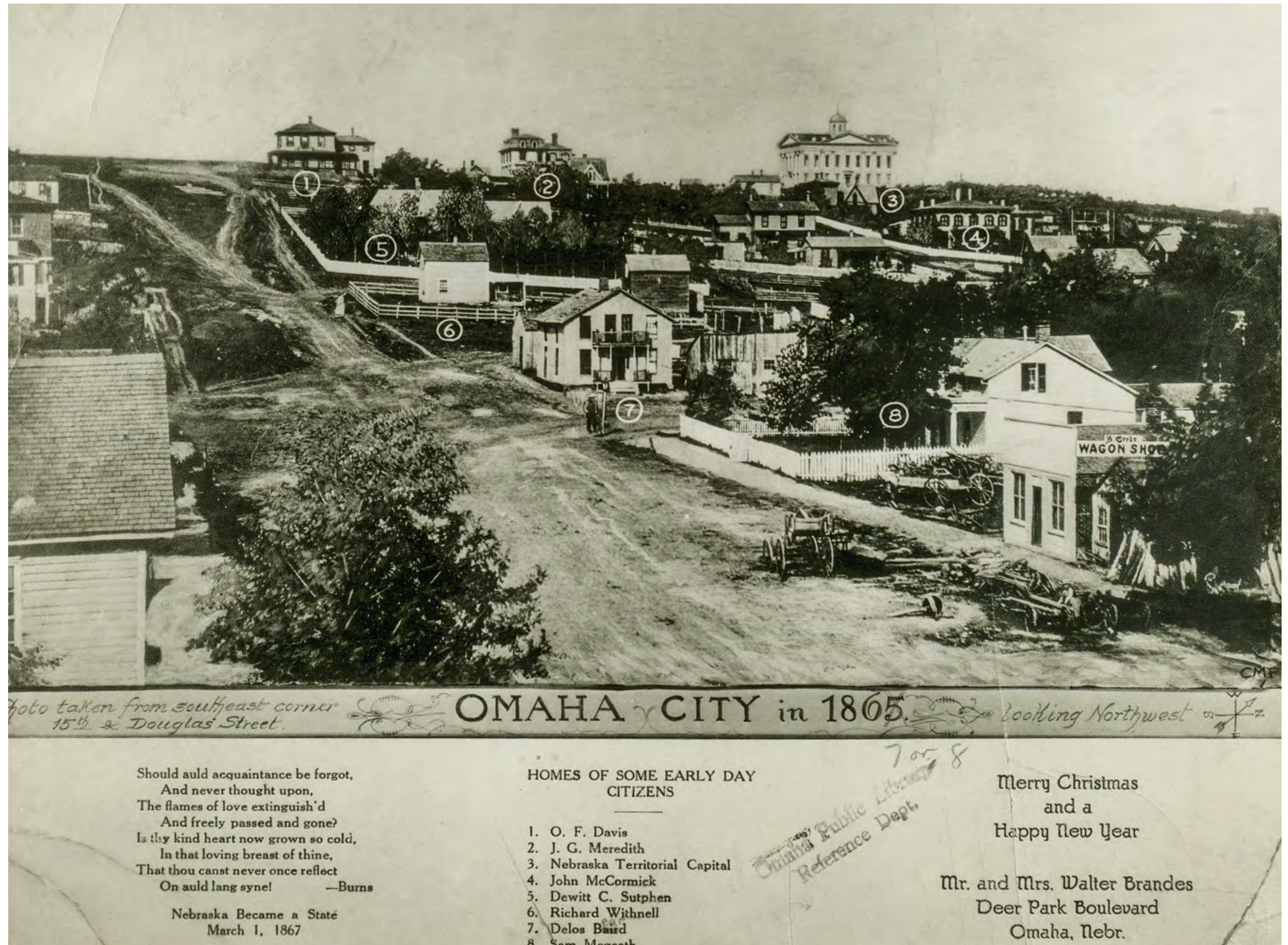
But the governor had fallen seriously ill during the four-week journey from his native South Carolina. He died on Oct. 18. During the next crucial months, territorial secretary Thomas Cuming served as acting governor. Cuming was allied with the founders of "Omaha City" and made it the capital.



Thomas B. Cuming, territorial secretary and, twice, acting governor of Nebraska Territory. History Nebraska RG2411-0-1184



FRANCIS BURT



An early-twentieth century postcard preserved this 1865 view of Omaha, numbering the homes of early residents. The view is northwest from 15th and Douglas streets; the territorial capitol stands atop the hill. RG2341-0-11-a

Cuming ordered a census so he could apportion legislative districts for Nebraska's first election. The census showed twice as many people living south of the Platte River as north

of it. That was not what Cuming and his Omaha backers wanted to hear. The unbridged Platte was a major travel barrier and was quickly becoming a political divide. South

Platters didn't want the capital to be in Omaha.

The acting governor ignored the census results and assigned most of the legislative seats to the area north of

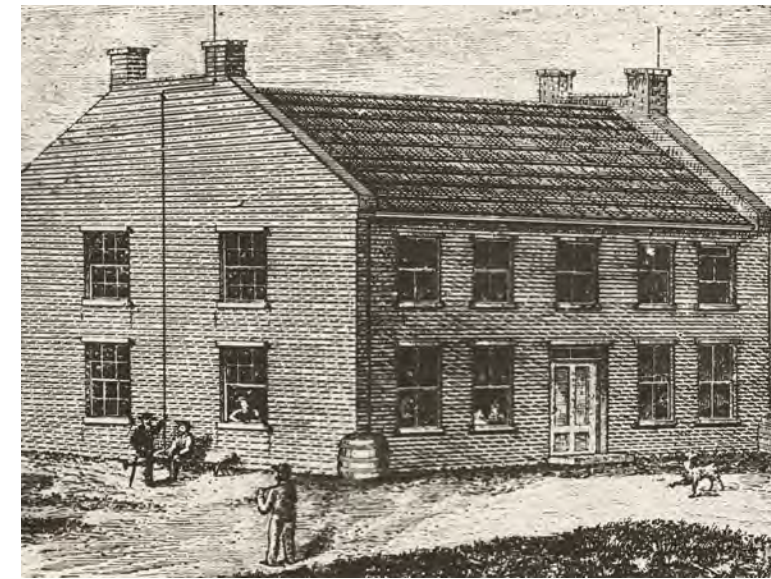


How an illustrator imagined the legislative fistfight of Jan. 6, 1858. From Alfred Sorenson, *The Story of Omaha* (1923).

the Platte. This helped him protect Omaha's status as the territorial seat of government after Cuming convened the first legislature there.

Cuming's enemies lambasted him at mass meetings. In Nebraska City, a 22-year-old aspiring politician named J. Sterling Morton wrote to President Pierce denouncing Cuming as an "unprincipled knave."

Omaha used a combination of bribery and parliamentary maneuvers to maintain its status, but by early 1858 the anti-Omaha men had a clear majority in the legislature. They planned to introduce a bill to allow the selection of a new capital. That day, Omaha legislators and their allies launched a filibuster that quickly erupted into a fistfight on the House floor. The Omahans prevailed with help from about 50 local



Nebraska Territory's first capitol was also Omaha's first brick building. It stood on Ninth Street between Farnam and Douglas. The legislature moved to a larger building in 1858. History Nebraska RG1234-2-10



men waiting in the back of the room.

The next day the anti-Omaha group carried a motion to adjourn the House and reconvene in Florence. The Omahans protested that the motion was illegal, and for several days Nebraska had two rival legislatures, each denouncing the other as illegitimate.

Nebraska was between governors at the time. The former appointee had resigned; the new one had not yet arrived. Tom Cuming was once again acting governor. He refused to recognize the Florence legislature. Upon arrival, the new governor agreed with Cuming. Omaha had escaped again.

Omaha's reign as capital city finally ended after Nebraska became a state in 1867. An anti-Omaha coalition passed legislation to select a new capital city. The winner was required to change its name to Lincoln in honor of the late president. A committee chose the village of Lancaster, which at the time had only two stores, a shoe shop, six or seven houses, and about 30 residents.

"It is founded on fiat," an Omaha newspaper said of the new capital city, "no river, no railroad, no steam wagon, nothing. It is destined for isolation and ultimate oblivion."

But Lincoln eventually grew into its new role, while Omaha boomed as a railroad center. Today, Omaha Central High School stands atop the former Capitol Hill.

As for Bellevue, the former trading post and almost-capital city remained a tiny town until the Martin Bomber Plant opened there in World War II. [N](#)

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

Lincoln in 1872, looking northwest from the tower of the state capitol. The University of Nebraska's lone building is in the background. History Nebraska RG2158-23

A More Family Friendly Lake McConaughy

By Justin Haag

In registering visitors for campsites, Nebraska's largest reservoir sailed uncharted waters in 2021. The predominant verdict is that it was a highly successful voyage.

Last April, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission implemented changes needed to create a safer, family-friendly environment at the 22-mile-long Lake McConaughy and the smaller reservoir below its dam, Lake Ogallala.

One change was requiring reservations during the peak season for camping at the two state recreation areas. The new system, largely implemented to combat problems of overcrowding, marked a monumental shift from prior years when beachgoers could show up and place a tent or camper into any vacant spot along Lake McConaughy's expansive, often crowded, sandy shoreline.

The new strategy meant visitors could choose from Game and Parks' 1,500 designated sites — 500 of which are in nine campgrounds, and another 1,000 spots at 17 beach areas.

The popularity of Lake McConaughy, owned by the Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District and managed for recreation by Game and Parks, has long posed a challenge. Many of the lake's hundreds of thousands of visitors each year come from Colorado's Front Range, where many see it as the nearest place to enjoy recreational opportunities most often found at coastal settings.

Such a large area attracts a diverse set of users. The excellent fishery attracts anglers. The big, open water attracts a variety of boaters and personal watercraft users. Campgrounds attract groups of friends and families. Wildlife attracts

hunters and other conservationists. Sailboaters, picnickers, wind surfers and scuba divers are also in the mix. The park often was overcrowded and congested, overburdening park infrastructure, and groups of unruly partiers sometimes demanded the most attention.

This year's changes came about after collaborative discussion by the Game and Parks Commission and a local advisory committee that included business leaders, concession operators, lake residents, park guests, area first-responders, local tourism and economic development officials and the Keith County Chamber of Commerce. The committee is open to anyone who wants to attend.

Officials say the positive outcomes have exceeded even their expectations, resulting in better control, an increased ability to collect

fees, improved collection of visitor information, capital improvements, and opportunities for visitation growth.

Better Control

Perhaps the primary proponents of the changes are the law enforcement and emergency personnel tasked with responding to crime and emergencies at the big lake.

The equipment for the fire and rescue service for the two villages at the north shore of the big lake, Keystone and Lemoyne, reflects how the complexity of calls has evolved during the past four decades. In that period, it has grown from just two fire engines to six, plus two rescue boats, three ATVs and UTVs, and rope rescue and dive rescue equipment.

The 21-member department reported far fewer emergency calls

from park visitors last year. Just three of the calls, an all-time low, involved drugs and alcohol. That figure is usually in the double digits.

Ralph Moul, the department's chief, has long been a proponent of reducing crowd sizes and banning alcohol — done in 2020 — to alleviate the many stresses on limited infrastructure and personnel. He said 2021 was a huge improvement.

"It's like night and day compared to previous years. Our call volume was cut in half," he said. "We have a different crowd here now. We have the family people back. I'm very pleased with what has been accomplished, but it needs to continue."

Craig Stover, Game and Parks law enforcement division administrator, certainly was glad to see the number of incidents involving assaults, domestic violence and vandalism down in 2021.

"The fact that there were fewer people, and they were able to spread out, resulted in fewer squabbles among campers," he said. "One comment we heard a lot from the public was 'We're glad to see so many of you officers out here.' Well, you know what: When you reduce the size of the crowds, people can see you."

Because crowd control issues were not demanding as much attention, Stover said the officers were able to deal with more enforcement of fish, game and boating laws.

Fee Collection and Economic Impact

The park reports that its gross revenue is up more than 17 percent from last year — a remarkable figure considering outdoor attractions everywhere experienced unusually high visitation in 2020 from people



People of all ages enjoy the Kites and Castles event at Lake McConaughy. JULIE GEISER, NEBRASKALAND



A crowded shoreline in the Arthur Bay area on the July 4th weekend at Lake McConaughy State Recreation Area in 2020. ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

Bicyclists ride past a pair of campers on the shoreline in the No Name Bay area at Lake McConaughy State Recreation Area in Keith County.

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



looking for safe entertainment at the height of pandemic restrictions.

Significant financial indicators are Keith County’s lodging tax and sales tax receipts. From May through September this year, each of the funds experienced a five-year high.

Deb Schilz, until recently mayor of nearby Ogallala, has been supportive of the changes and is looking forward to working with Game and Parks to build on the success and make the parks even more attractive to families.

“I was pleasantly surprised of how few issues there were with the process,” she said. “Most of our lake businesses commented they were on track from 2019 (didn’t count 2020 due to COVID) with their sales higher than 2019. Many business owners received comments on how our visitors enjoyed their experience with knowing where they would be camping and being able to have room for their campers, tents and other belongings.”

Improved Tracking

Because visitors are required to reserve campsites through Game and Parks, the agency now has the best demographic data that it has ever had to understand who visits the two parks. While most of the campers are from the Denver area, the park received overnight visitation from all 50 states and beyond. Having such data is beneficial to Game and Parks, businesses, and others who market nearby attractions.

Even though many campers feared they would not be able to make last-minute plans to stay at the parks, officials say that was not necessarily the case. The parks’ electrical sites were booked weeks in advance, but aside from the season’s three busy holiday weekends, campsites without hook-ups, including beach sites, still were available every Friday.

Those sites usually did fill by the end of the day Friday. The park also

experienced an increased number of campers during weekdays. Park staff say spreading its visitation over more days is preferable.

Expanded Camping

Given the successes, to accommodate more campers, Game and Parks has contracted with eight concessionaires to manage additional campsites around the lake. The goal is to continue growing those offerings at a sustainable pace, supporting economic development and meeting consumer demand.

Future of Investment

Part of the successes have included major investments by Game and Parks over the past five years. About \$14 million in improvements have been made in campground, boating access and road improvements—all in line with goals set out in the Lake McConaughy master plan launched in 2016.

If Game and Parks sees continued growth and demand at the recreation areas, it will bring continued need for investments in infrastructure, facilities and services to provide the best opportunities. Changing to the reservation-only system means Game and Parks now can better predict its staffing needs and costs, such as trash collection — one of the major service expenses for the parks. Changes to park entry permits by the Nebraska Legislature also mean Game and Parks will see added revenue through higher nonresident park entry permit fees, effective in 2022, helping to offset any new expenses, including to build or maintain infrastructure.

Other successes have created a win for two threatened and endangered species and for the Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District, which is tasked with protecting terns and plovers to maintain its operating license. Creating designated beach

campsites in 2021 reduced the tern and plover nest site disturbances that have long threatened the species’ survival.

The Right Course

Comments from the public overwhelmingly have been positive, but concerns have been fielded from a small number of businesses that reported decreased revenue in 2021. However, many locals and visitors say the changes were overdue.

Frequent lake visitor Kelly Rohrbouck of North Platte suspects there are many more supporters of the changes than opponents, even if they are not as vocal. Her family of four now spends its summers in a trailer at Lake McConaughy, a purchase they made after five years of camping at Lake Ogallala and crossing the dam to McConaughy for fishing and other day use.

“First and foremost, I feel safer,” she said. “Crowds are still common,

but seem to be manageable and less confrontational. Also, the ease of being able to find a spot on the water where I didn’t feel like a jerk setting up my day-use stuff virtually on top of someone — or five different groups huddled around a sliver of land — was amazing.”

Even though the initial reviews are extremely positive, longtime law enforcement and emergency responders have not declared victory because of one year’s results. Having seen problems at the lake ebb and flow like coastal waters over the years, they temper their optimism with cautiousness.

Similar to those who take the helm of sailboats at the big water of Lake McConaughy, officials consider changes in management strategy an exciting — albeit challenging — adventure. Complications may arise, but officials believe they, and their partners, are on the right course. 🏡

THE COMPANIONSHIP OF DOGS

By Roger Welsch

Twenty years ago I wrote the book *A Life with Dogs* because my life truly has been one rarely without the companionship of dogs. As a child quarantined with the mumps, I was given my first dog to keep me company, and from that point on dogs have been a norm in my life. But never something, well, ordinary. For me, dogs have always been something special.

And yet, inevitably, also a source of the worst pain. Nothing is worse than losing a dog. Whoever invents the 100-year dog will deserve a Nobel Peace Prize because one of the few disadvantages of having a dog is that their tenure on this earth is so much shorter than our own. It was almost 10 years ago that our beloved black Labs Abigail and Dunstan died within a few weeks of each other. And a piece of me died, too. Linda and I then went into a long period of quiet mourning. At my advanced age, I wasn't sure I could deal emotionally with the pain of burying yet another dear canine friend, nor, if my own use-by expiration date ran out, I did not want to burden Linda with yet another obligation in my absence.

But then the Dark Ages of 2019-2020 crashed in on us. We lost dear friends and relatives, young and old; terrible floods inundated our little community of Dannebrog; we suffered unexpected health issues of our own; there was the horrific coronavirus pandemic with its death and disruption; and the entire nation became a maelstrom of political turmoil. Occasionally, friends came by with their dogs and I had a much-needed comfort of rubbing a velvety dog ear, patting a warm head, sharing again the exuberance of a wagging tail; and asking again the eternal question, "Whooo's a good daaaawg?!" But those moments were too rare and too far between. The hollowness of our dogless life grew ever greater.

And then, as so often is the case, came an unexpected miracle: Linda, almost by accident, saw a brief Facebook post

from Start Over Rover, a pet rescue agency in Hastings, and there was a three-second glimpse of a dog Linda instantly insisted was *our* dog. There was no question in her mind: that dog had to come live with us. Not just *a* dog, but *that* dog! We contacted Start Over Rover, filled out the papers to prove we were worthy of dog society, were approved for adoption, and then ... were told we'd missed our chance. The dog was already spoken for. Even though we had never met this dog, the

haunting, dark emptiness was there again. We were wretched. To be that close to again sharing the joy of a dog in the house — *that* dog — and yet, disappointment.

A couple days later, we got a call. The people who had spoken for the dog were suddenly and unexpectedly unable to take him. If we still wanted him, we could pick him up. The next day! Thus came into our lives His Majesty, Sir Triumph the Wonder Dog! An eight-year-old terrier-schnauzer-something-something mix, fraught with health issues, terrified of fly swatters and aluminum foil, and yet miraculously an echo and compilation of all of the virtues of every dog we'd ever known! He was instantly perfect for our household. Even our snooty eight-year-old cat Boo found

him, well — "interesting." It was complete love. He was instantly ours. Or more precisely, we were instantly his. As it turned out, we didn't want a dog, we needed a dog. And that, I would argue, is the true status of mankind's relationship with dogs: It's not so much that we want dogs. We need dogs. Now, excuse me. Someone needs his tummy rubbed.

Roger Welsch is an author, humorist, folklorist and a former essayist for CBS News Sunday Morning. He is the author of more than 40 books and has been contributing to Nebraskaland Magazine since 1977.



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SPOTTED LANTERNFLY UPDATE

By Julie Van Meter, State Entomologist,
Nebraska Department of Agriculture

Spotted
Lanternfly (SLF)
made the news
last fall when an
adult specimen was
submitted as part of
a 4-H entomology
collection to the



Kansas State Fair. The specimen was collected in Colby, Kansas, during the summer. Inspectors with the Kansas Department of Agriculture went to the collection site to visually check for an SLF infestation. No life stages of SLF were found at the site or in the surrounding area, and it remains unknown if the collected insect represents a lone hitchhiker or indicates an early population. Surveying for SLF in the area will continue in 2022.

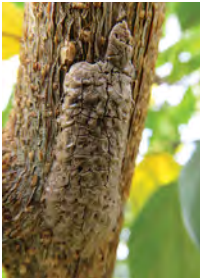
The Nebraska Department of Agriculture, in cooperation with the USDA, has been conducting visual surveys and inspecting nursery stock for SLF in the state for several years.

No SLF has been found in Nebraska to date.

SLF was first found in Pennsylvania in 2014 and has since spread throughout several eastern states. In 2021, small populations were also confirmed in Ohio and Indiana. As with any exotic invasive pest, early detection is key to effective control.

Winter is a good time to scout for SLF egg masses on trees, outdoor furniture and vehicles. Inspect tree trunks, the under sides of branches and horizontal surfaces near the ground. It is especially important to check vehicles that have traveled into or through infested areas last summer and fall. Look in the wheel wells, behind spare tires and in all the nooks and crannies where an insect can hide an egg mass.

Egg masses are a gray-brown and about 1.5 inches in length. The female lays approximately 40-60 eggs, then covers them with a putty-like substance. As this covering ages, it gets lighter and cracks.



If you think you've found an SLF egg mass, take pictures or collect a specimen, and report your suspicions to your NDA Entomology Inspector, or contact Julie Van Meter, NDA entomology program manager/state entomologist at 402-471-6847 or Julie.vanmeter@nebraska.gov.

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SEASIDE HELIOTROPE — A DREAM PLANT

By Gerry Steinauer, Botanist, NGPC

Many naturalists keep “life lists” of species they have observed. A birding and mothing friend, for example, diligently records every bird and moth species he has seen in Nebraska by county. I, however, am not a list keeper, but in the far recesses of my mind, I generally know what plant species I have encountered over my years of botanizing and those I dream of encountering. The latter includes the rare seaside heliotrope (*Heliotropium curassavicum*).

Seaside heliotrope is a much-branched plant with distinguishing succulent leaves and small, white flowers elegantly arranged on a coiled stalk that uncoils with maturity. Native to the Americas, the plant occurs from Canada to Argentina, and although common and even weedy in some regions, it is rare and non-weedy in the northern Great Plains growing in saline and alkaline wetlands. Strangely, the plant is a perennial in warm climates and an annual in cool climates, such as ours. Over recent decades in Nebraska, botanists have observed seaside heliotrope once in a Lancaster County salt marsh and a few times in western alkaline marshes.

Over my career, when in appropriate habitat, I have kept a keen eye for seaside heliotrope, but alas, my searching was in vain; that is, until late one afternoon this past September. While walking across the dike of a small, restored wetland on our southeastern South Dakota farm, I gazed down on a drying mudflat and saw a single white-flowered plant

whose identity baffled me from afar. Approaching the plant, I noticed the coiled heads of white flowers and nearly jumped with joy. It was seaside heliotrope, finally.

With the sun low on the western horizon, I ran back to the farmhouse, grabbed my camera, returned and snapped a few quick photos of the plant. I also pinched-off a branch with flowers to press and dry for a herbarium specimen. These would serve as evidence if my botanist wife or others doubted my claim.

Because rare plants usually occur in fairly pristine, native habitats, I questioned why seaside heliotrope was growing in our recently restored wetland, which was previously a crop field. After a bit of research, I came up with a theory.

Seaside heliotrope grows in alkaline wetlands in two South Dakota counties about 100 miles north of our farm. I speculate that a southward-bound duck or other waterbird carried a seed from these sites, either undigested in their gut or imbedded in mud caked to their feet, to our wetland, whose soils are somewhat alkaline. When the wetland dries, a thin, white alkaline crust sometimes forms on the soil surface. I am curious to see if seaside heliotrope will sprout in the wetland in coming years — I never got back to see if the lone plant produced seed.

Although I was a bit disappointed not to have found seaside heliotrope in Nebraska, I am still checking it off my dream list.



The seaside heliotrope. GERRY STEINAUER, NGPC

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A RECORD YEAR

By Jeff Kurrus

“A Record Year” is how you should plan on describing 2022. As a rod and reel angler, you have multiple opportunities across the state to catch a state record fish, and the following species—and types of waterbodies—offer your best chances.

Species

Blue Catfish – Current record: 100 pounds, 8 oz. The Missouri River is the place to fish for this monstrous fish, and fisheries biologist Daryl Bauer believes this record could have already been broken. “A 100-pound fish is absolutely doable on the Missouri,” he said. “I believe we’ve had guys catch several of them already. They’re just turning them loose.” Anglers use cut bait on the backsides of wing dikes—in deep water near rocky habitat and fallen trees—to find these behemoths.

Muskellunge – Current record: 41 pounds, 8 oz. What makes this potential record fish so intriguing is an angler’s ability to catch them from the bank from early spring through June. “Merritt is the place to be,” said Bauer, who spends time every spring fishing the dam for these toothy trophies. Find the largest lures in your tackle box and start casting.

Tiger Trout – Current record: 6 pounds, 13 oz. “We haven’t

reached our growth potential with this fish yet,” said Bauer. The last two tiger trout state records have come from Sutherland Reservoir after traveling down the Keystone Canal from Lake Ogallala. These fish usually don’t survive the summer, as they are a put-and-take species, but when they do, they have a shot to grow big.

Forgotten Waters

When looking for trophy panfish this year, also make note of two other waterbody types—turbid waters and lakes that have experienced fish kills. When a lake is known for being muddy, for any number of reasons, fishing pressure often decreases. “You have to find a lake that everyone has forgotten about to have sunfish that grow huge,” said Bauer.

Finally, look for lakes that have experienced a fish kill during the last couple of years. The information usually circulates by word of mouth, but if you can find these lakes you may be surprised at the results. “These fish kills don’t eliminate every fish,” said Bauer. “What survives has a lot less competition for food.” With less competition, these leftover fish grow even faster.

Start your record year with a little research, and then hit the water.



Nebraska’s next state record muskie is predicted to come from Merritt Reservoir, where this fish was caught and released.
DARYL BAUER, NGPC



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Mixed Bag, Wisner, early 1960s.
 My father, Carl Brasee, in the backyard of his in-laws in Wisner in the early 1960s. This mixed bag was likely taken in northeastern Cuming County on my grandfather's farm. The black Lab is the first of several — always named Lucky. Dad learned his hunting, fishing and outdoor pursuits as an adult and is an avid outdoorsman. He is an accomplished shot with both rifle and shotgun. Waterfowl hunting is his passion. He also always out-fishes us with a fly rod. He turned 90 last May.
 — Mark L. Brasee, Omaha



Coyotes, Northeast of Pierce, early 1950s.
 This is a picture of my dad, John Wesemann, and me, Willie Wesemann, taken in the early 1950s. We used smoke to get these young coyotes out of a large pipe. At this time the county or state paid a bounty for them. It was a large litter.
 I still live on the home place, have for 76 years, northeast of Pierce, Nebraska. I still hunt and fish. I have enjoyed *Nebraskaland* for many years. I also enjoy taking young people hunting and fishing.
 — Willard Wesemann, Pierce



Pheasant Hunting in Boone County, 1983.
 Opening day of pheasant season in 1983 at the farm where I grew up in Boone County. Back row left to right: Me, Gary Lee; my younger brother, Merlin Lee; Sye Munson; Kent Lee. Front row left to right: my older brother, Duane Lee; Ron Laux; Terry Munson. Ron was a teacher and football coach at Albion High School, and Terry was a teacher. We had 21 pheasants by 10:30 a.m. I enjoy reading your magazine.
 — Gary Lee, Imperial



Waterfowl hunting near Tekamah, 1963.
 This picture is of my dad, Harry Newill, of Oakland, and my grandpa, Jess Newill, of Lyons. The year was 1963. They were hunting ducks, geese and pheasants at Lake Quinnebaugh, which was 12 miles from Tekamah. Dad has his faithful Chesapeake Bay retriever, Pepper, who was an amazing hunting dog!
 — Paula Stromquist, Oakland



Fishing near Gothenburg, 1964.
 The following picture is from Gothenburg, 1964. This was our last fishing trip before we started college that year. The catch are walleye from Jeffrey Lake of Brady. Pictured left: Captain Douglas Neel, Merchant Marine, Honolulu, Hawaii. Right: Dr. Samuel H. Perry II of North Platte.
 — Samuel Perry, North Platte

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.



FREEDOM OF THE ROAD

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

I took this photo in April 2013, on a county road somewhere in northeastern Nebraska. The caption says “Weeder Ranch strange mailbox” — not much to go on nine years later. I can’t recall where I was that day or where I was headed. Probably nowhere in particular. The land was thawing. I was thawing. I just survived the longest winter of my life, and it was time to get out and become familiar with my new home.

When editor Jeff Kurrus offered me a position with *Nebraskaland*, he told me to stick it out for a couple years. If Nebraska didn’t fit, I could just pick up and go back home. No big deal. I was 23 years old, toting a shiny English degree from UCLA — and not much else. Lots of people, including myself, had doubts.

In my little rented apartment in Norfolk, I was lost at sea, but on the road, I felt the least alone. Every road I traveled, every person I spoke to, every strange, new thing I saw that made me pick up my camera — my feverish need to see the state was a way to give myself anchor, to give myself a sense of place. I wanted to *know* Nebraska, because only then could I make it home. That first year, I put 57,573 miles on my work vehicle, lots of it on gravel roads like this one.

Today, I am 32. I’ve changed. The job has changed. Becoming a new mom last year has rocked my world again. But I’ve put down roots. This photo is a reminder of a specific time in my life — a moment so fraught with uncertainty, yet so much freedom and possibility.

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