



A velvet-antlered white-tailed buck is framed by underbrush at Desoto National Wildlife Refuge in Washington County. Photo by Jeff Kurrus.

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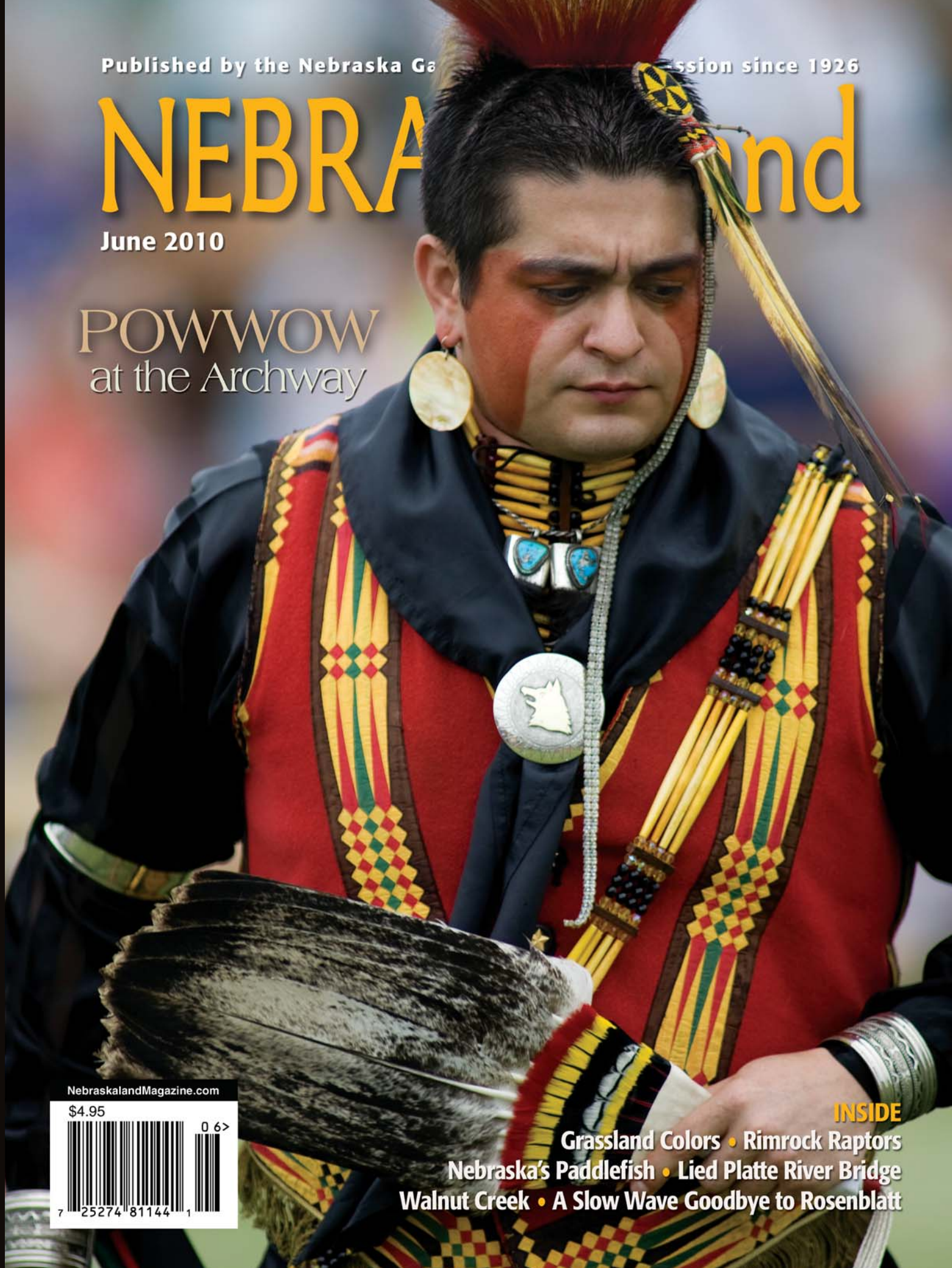
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NEBRASKA nd

June 2010

POWWOW
at the Archway



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INSIDE

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Nebraska's Paddlefish • Lied Platte River Bridge
Walnut Creek • A Slow Wave Goodbye to Rosenblatt



NEBRASKAland

Volume 88, Number 5, June 2010

FEATURES

14 Plains Powwow at the Archway

Despite wet conditions, last year's inaugural Dancers of the Plains Powwow was deemed a great success and this year's celebration may be even better. **By** KEN BOUC

18 Walnut Creek - The Story of a Template

Built more than 10 years ago with fish habitat in mind, Walnut Creek has become one of eastern Nebraska's most popular lakes. For good reason. **Text and Photos by** JEFF KURRUS

22 Grassland Colors

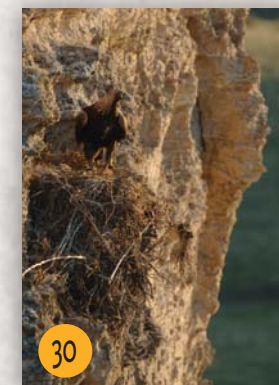
The grasslands and gumbo of the northwestern Panhandle may seem colorless and drab most of the year, but look again after snowmelt and rains briefly bring color back to this parched landscape. **Photos and Text by** BOB GRIER

30 Rimtop Raptors

In Nebraska's Panhandle, where the land seems but a footnote to the sky, raptors reign supreme. **Photos and Text by** MICHAEL FORSBERG

36 Nebraska's Paddlefish

Rarely caught on a baited hook, paddlefish survive in Nebraska today largely because of anglers' support of regulations that restricted the harvest of this prehistoric fish. Those changes may have helped prevent its demise and brought the species to where it is today – a success story in fisheries management. **Text and Photos by** ERIC FOWLER



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Cover: A.J. Leadingfox of Pawnee, Oklahoma, performs at last year's Dancers of the Plains Powwow in Kearney. See story on page 14. Photo courtesy of Department of Economic Development. **Opposite:** Spencer Whitney of Lincoln fishes from a float tube at Wagon Train Lake on a beautiful, warm summer evening. Photo by Doug Carroll.

NEBRASKAland (VOL. 88 / NO. 5, ISSN 0028-1964) is published monthly, except for the combined Jan./Feb. and Aug./Sept. issues, by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, 2200 N. 33rd St., Lincoln, NE. Periodicals postage paid at Lincoln, Nebraska, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to NEBRASKAland, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370.





First Trip of Year

We got out for the first time this year to go fishing and after having his sister Katelin catch the first bluegill of the year, you could see the disappointment in Colton’s face. A minute later, however, he hooked into this monster and boy was that exciting!

We were glad to welcome in the 2010 fishing season with catch-and-release on the first trip to the fishing pond. Thanks, *NEBRASKAland*, for all the fun stories and memories over the years.

Tom and Lisa Keller
Katelin and Colton
Malcolm, Nebraska

Crow Numbers?

Dear Sir,

What happened to all the crows?

In the 1930s they migrated for days after days. At night, big flocks roosted high in the trees where the neighbors and I would shoot them and collect a ten cents bounty for each head. That was welcome money in the tough times. There were also lots of thistles in the fencerows where we could hide and pick the crows off as they went by.

I am 94 and have subscribed to your magazine for a lot of years.

Duane Gray
O’Neill, Nebraska

Since the arrival and expansion of West Nile virus in North America, many scientists are carefully watching how crows and other species are reacting to this disease. According to Joel Jorgensen, nongame bird program manager for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, the number of

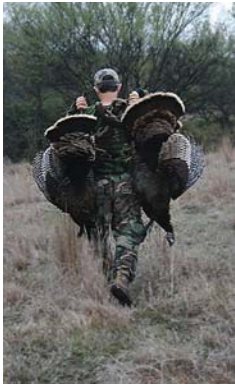
American crows and other corvids, such as black-billed magpies, declined at roughly the same time that West Nile virus appeared in the Midwest. Although one study has shown that crow genetics make them vulnerable to the more virulent form of the disease, he doesn’t believe we have to worry about crows going extinct any time soon.

Although there is no longer a bounty in Nebraska for crows, there is still a crow season – last season’s crow hunting dates were October 1 - November 15 and January 20 - April 6. In addition to these dates, there was also a Public Health Hazard season for crows that ran from November 16 - January 19.

– The Editor

Something Good on Tax Day?

On this year’s Tax Day, April 15, God blessed two Polish hunters with nice tom turkeys. After a couple hard days of hunting in rain, wind, and ticks, friend Dale Grobowski and I were able to down these two toms within three minutes of each other as they came in one at a time to attack our decoys. We didn’t like their attitudes, but we loved their beards and spurs. It was a really fun time hunting as the toms were responding to calls, strutting and drumming their way in. What magnificent birds and such a thrill to behold. Guess it’s time now to hunt mushrooms, go camping, enjoy some great carp shooting with our bows and do some fishing.



Nebraska really is “The Good Life” and *NEBRASKAland* is the best place to read up on where and how to live it!!! Get out there and enjoy the gobbles.

By the way – ladies sometimes it’s really nice to have a man around, as you can tell by the picture of Dale carrying both birds. They aren’t turkeys all the time!

Janice Spicha
Lincoln, Nebraska

NEBRASKAland Visitor Letters

We want to thank all 98 readers that sent e-mails and letters for last issue’s visitor, a **common house fly** on page 3 (see page 13 for the winner, rules and next month’s hint). Here are just a few of the many wonderful responses we received:

I opened the May 2010 *NEBRASKAland* and somehow immediately saw a fly sitting on the handle of a fishing reel in the upper left-hand corner of page three. So I thought that I had better send this e-mail before it buzzes off. This little contest is a nice addition to a super magazine.

By the way, the 2009 deer season was my 50th consecutive year of hunting deer in Nebraska. My first hunt was in 1960 in what was then the Nemaha Area near the Missouri River in southeast Nebraska. Most of my hunting since then has been either in the Pine Ridge area or Blue area. The deer population and deer hunting have both seen quite a few changes since 1960.

Dan Leuenberger
Lincoln, Nebraska

I found the American house fly on page three of the May 2010 issue of *NEBRASKAland*. My husband and I have been traveling this past winter, but now that we’re back home we are enjoying getting caught up on the “visitor” challenges of the magazine. This is a wonderful publication and we have continued our subscription to it even though we now live in the Black Hills of South Dakota. We both retired from the Fremont area 10 years ago, but even though we don’t live in Nebraska anymore, we still continue our “connection” to the state!

Linda and Erik Palle
Spearfish, South Dakota

Our kids get so excited when a new issue of *NEBRASKAland* arrives in the mail. They love trying to find each issue’s visitor.

Our son found the “visitor” in the May 2010 issue. It is a *musca domestica*, or common house fly, and is located on page 3 in the upper left-hand corner.

Thanks for making your magazine fun for everyone in our family. It is a good tie to Nebraska while we live

away from our home state.

Mike and Debra Jilek
Perkasie, Pennsylvania

A pesky fly is sitting on the handle of a fishing reel pictured in the upper left-hand corner of page 3 of the May 2010 issue of *NEBRASKAland*. I’m excited I finally found it! We have subscribed to *NEBRASKAland* for many years and I always enjoy the beautiful photography and well-written articles. They are a wonderful resource for students of the history, geography, culture and wonders of this great state of Nebraska. I am also enjoying the hunt for the “visitor” each month.

Dianne Kleist
Malcolm, Nebraska

I am 14 and I love spending time with my daddy hunting and fishing. We also love looking for the *NEBRASKAland* visitor. We like to make a competion out of it to see who can find ‘em first. Of course, I win again this month. The visitor is the fly on page three in the upper left-hand corner. My dad thought it was the cartoon worm on pg. 29. I also enjoy reading the wonderful articles and looking at the beautiful pictures each month.

Thanks for doing a terrific job!

Brianna Schulzkump
West Point Nebraska

The common house fly (*Musca domestica*) is the most common of all domestic flies, accounting for about 90% of all flies in human habitations. It is found all over the world and considered a pest that can carry serious diseases.

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

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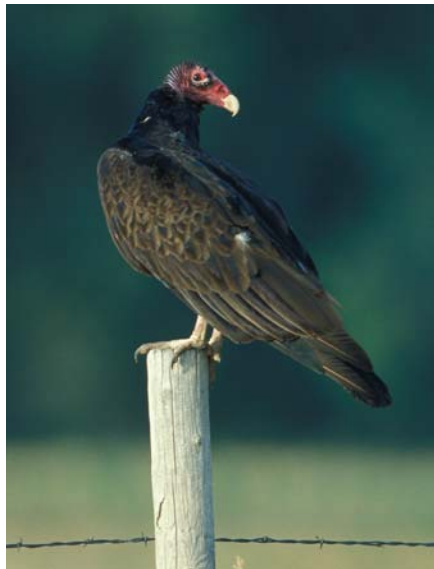


PHOTO BY KEN BOUC

How Vultures Locate Food

Jon Farrar

Turkey vultures (*Cathartes aura*) are common spring and fall migrants, as well as expected breeders in some Nebraska locations. Black vultures (*Coragyps atratus*) have a more southern range and are considered accidental visitors.

Before Euroamericans settled Nebraska, summering turkey vultures were largely restricted to areas with potential nest sites, such as cliff faces with cavities or covered ledges, particularly along river valleys such as the Missouri, Niobrara and the Republican; and near rocky escarpments in the Panhandle. These locations also provide the thermal updrafts vultures seek for soaring. Today, turkey vultures have adopted abandoned buildings with open windows or doors allowing access, particularly house attics or barn mows, for nest sites and are more widespread during the summer months.

Vultures are principally carrion feeders, and ornithologists have long debated how they locate their food. Opposing observations and opinions were bandied between respected ornithologists in the late-1800s and early-1900s. Charles Darwin, on his famous Voyage of the Beagle in the southern hemisphere in the 1830s, concluded vultures located their food by sight alone, and it turns out he was right. Mostly.

Yet in the early-1900s, by covering or

not covering a ripening animal carcass and observing if vultures found it or not, researchers drew varied conclusions – that vultures locate food items by sight alone, principally by scent, or a combination of the two. Today, bird researchers agree that North American vultures have a better developed sense of smell than Old World vultures; and of the vulture species on this continent it is most acute in turkey vultures. Some have attributed this to turkey vultures being more inclined to locate food in wooded areas, where the sense of smell is more useful than the sense of sight. Black vultures and California condors, on the other hand, are larger than turkey vultures and have heavier wing-loading, making it more difficult for them to maneuver in confined spaces and hence are more inclined to search for food in open habitats. Few birds of any species possess an acute sense of smell.

Contrary to popular thought, vultures prefer newly dead animals as food over putrid and rotting flesh. Pressed by hunger, though, they will feed on decaying flesh and have a resistance to the microbes and toxins in it. And they will feed on living animals, such as snakes and grasshoppers, when the opportunity arises, as well as plant material such as fruits or vegetables.

Alcohol Ban to be Reviewed

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission will consider ending the ban on alcohol consumption in state park and wildlife management areas (WMAs) at its May 28 commission meeting at the Civic Center in Gering.

The public hearings to consider ending the ban are scheduled to begin at 8:30 a.m. and the proposed regulation changes include the following restrictions: consumption of alcohol may be prohibited on any state park and wildlife areas, or portions thereof, with the use of appropriate signage; consumption is prohibited between the hours of 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.; consumption is prohibited on all roadways, designated swimming areas and parking areas; and all containers of alcoholic beverages whose single liquid capacity is greater than one gallon, are prohibited.

NEBRASKA Pheasants Forever & Quail Forever LANDOWNER HABITAT TOURS

June 18, 2010	Quail and Pheasant Management	9:00 to 4:00 - Wolbach – Community Center
June 22, 2010	Plant ID and Habitat Management Workshop	10:00 to 3:00 - St. Paul – The Gathering Place
June 24, 2010	Pheasant and Quail Management	1:00 to 5:00 - Humboldt – Fireman's Hall
June 24, 2010	Quail Management	10:00 to 3:00- Curtis – Curtis Cattle Company
June 26, 2010	Do's and Don'ts of Pheasant and Quail Management	9:00 to 2:00 - Alexandria – US Post Office
June 29, 30, 2010	Plant ID and Grazing Management	TBA - Gering – Gering Civic Center
June 30, 2010	Pheasant Management	9:00 to 2:00 - Trenton – USDA Office
July 10, 2010	Plant ID and Habitat Management Workshop	10:00 to 3:00 - Wood River – Derr House
July 14, 2010	Pheasant and Quail Management	9:00 to 4:00 - Tecumseh – Hickory Ridge WMA
July 22, 2010	Prescribed Burning	10:00 to 3:00 - Scottsbluff – North Platte NRD
July 29, 2010	Cedar Tree Removal and Control	10:00 to 3:00 - Burwell – Valley View Campgrounds
Aug. 19, 2010	Rangeland Management	9:00 to 2:00 - Broken Bow – Huckleberry's Hideout
Sep. 14, 2010	Quail Management	10:00 to 3:00 - St. Paul – The Gathering Place

Landowner Tours for Better Habitat

WILDLIFE BIOLOGISTS FROM ACROSS THE STATE WILL BE HOSTING A SERIES OF HABITAT TOURS THIS YEAR. TOURS ARE DESIGNED TO DEMONSTRATE HABITAT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES, AVAILABLE CONSERVATION PROGRAMS AND HOW TO CREATE THESE RESULTS ON YOUR OWN PROJECTS.



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A Look Back - Summer 1944

Jeff Kurrus

If nothing else, "A Look Back" has forced me to look at how *NEBRASKAland's* early writers handled the publication during times of significant historical events. The Summer 1944 edition of *Outdoor Nebraska* was being perused by readers during the time that Allied forces were invading Normandy, France during their World War II D-Day invasion.

I would have to imagine that during those times, even a few minutes of outdoor reading was being done by Nebraskans to take their mind off of world events. This was never more evident than in the photo essay "It's in Nebraska," highlighting a series of outdoor activities throughout the state and introducing these images with this message: "Nebraska has IT, and it is just what the young men of Nebraska are going to crave most when it is over, over there."

Also in this issue were features on Arbor Lodge, Chadron, Niobrara, Ponca and Victoria Springs state parks, as well as a bit of humor from Paul T. Gilbert, head of the Commission at the time, entitled "Elegy to a Cane Pole."

To read "Elegy," log on to NebraskalandMagazine.com and click on "A Look Back."



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Woodhouse Toad

Kelsea Nore

The Woodhouse toad is a familiar sight in Nebraska and can be found throughout the entire state. This amphibian bears a distinctive light yellow or green stripe down its back and has a white stomach, but is more commonly recognized by the wart-like bumps that decorate its dry skin.

Woodhouse toads prefer a moist environment and usually remain in small burrows during the daytime, coming out after sunset to eat. And eat they do – they have been known to consume two thirds of their body weight in a single evening on a diet of insects such as mosquitoes, beetles and crickets.

However, the toads are rarely snacked upon themselves. Behind each eye is a kidney-shaped paratoid gland that secrete a poison that can be harmful to predators, allowing this amphibian to thrive in a Nebraska environment that can be quite inhospitable to small creatures at times.

They're Back!

For the sixth straight year, a pair of peregrine falcons has produced eggs in a nest box outside the 18th floor of the Nebraska State Capitol.

After observing mating and apparent egg-laying via the webcam, Joel Jorgensen, nongame bird program manager with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, checked the nest box on April 19, counting four eggs. Peregrines generally lay three or four eggs, but one to six eggs have been recorded and the pair has had four eggs each of the last two years. He said the eggs were expected to hatch about the second week of May.

Jorgensen also read the leg bands of

the female and confirmed it was the same bird, with a leg band reading "A/*Y," present since 2005. The male, with the leg band "19/K," is believed to be the same male that has been at the Capitol since 2003, but Jorgensen was unable to read its leg band.

FalconCam, a video camera mounted atop the Capitol, is providing streaming video of the nest box and may be viewed at OutdoorNebraska.org. Streaming video also is available on a television in the Capitol rotunda at the peregrine falcon display.

Helzer's Prairie Book

Jeff Kurrus

Landowners who want to increase the abundance and diversity of wildlife and plant species on their prairies now have a new resource available to them. *NEBRASKAland Magazine* regular contributor Chris Helzer's "The Ecology and Management of Prairies in the Central United States" was released this spring by the University of Iowa Press. While intended for prairie owners and land managers, this book is a great resource for anyone interested in learning about grassland wildlife and plant communities.

Prairies are incredibly complex and diverse natural communities. They evolved under harsh conditions: huge herds of bison, expansive fires and extended droughts. In many places they've now been largely replaced by rowcrop agriculture and urban sprawl or degraded by years of continuous overgrazing and haphazard herbicide use. Those prairies that remain are often relegated to steep terrain or places where rocks or moisture make farming difficult.

Because of their scarcity, it's critically important that the remaining prairies retain as much biological diversity as possible by being subjected to periodic intense disturbances such as fire and grazing. In addition, invasive species must also be managed because they can



quickly degrade the plant diversity and habitat quality of a prairie if allowed to gain a foothold, especially in landscapes that are so fragmented. Because of all these factors, thoughtful management is essential to the continued health and survival of prairie communities.

Helzer's book is an attempt to provide background and guidance to prairie managers trying to preserve the biological diversity of native grasslands, and most of the information in this book and its general management philosophies should apply to grasslands anywhere in North America. However, the specific management strategies and recommendations are most relevant to prairies in the eastern half of Nebraska and elsewhere in the mixed-grass and tallgrass prairie regions of the continent.

Whether you are a landowner looking for plant and wildlife diversity on your own land, or a newcomer to the region who wants to learn more about your new home, Helzer's book is an excellent resource to begin your relationship with this hopefully increasing prairie landscape.

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See You Out There ... But Where?



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

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Saturday and from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. on Sunday. Dennis Ferraro, a professor at UN-L, and Dan Fogell, a professor at Southeast Community College, will be leading the survey.

Those people planning on attending part or all of either or both days are asked to contact Laci Prucinsky at (402) 731-3140, ext 230 or lprucinsky@fontenelleforest.org.

Participants should wear long pants and sturdy shoes or hiking boots. They might also want to bring bug spray, sunscreen, work gloves, waders or mud boots, a hat and a field notebook. Snack items (fruit, granola bars, etc.) will be provided, as will water and a refrigerator to store meals in.



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Roadside Markers

Kelsea Nore

There are 466 state historical markers in Nebraska and they can be found near major highways, on county roads and in city parks in every county of the state. While some are small plaques and others stand six feet tall, they all have a story to tell. The first one was erected on Highway 92 in Morrill: "No single sight along the Oregon and Mormon trails attracted more attention than Chimney Rock, 1½ miles south of here" reads this particular marker.

The posts give a brief peek at events throughout the state's history, such as the marker in Garden County that tells of the Easter Blizzard of 1873. Others

commemorate famous natives, such as Sheridan County's Mari Sandoz. Marker 312 in York County describes the establishment and growth of Henderson. To date, the last marker erected is at Pleasant Hill Cemetery in Dorchester.

A list of all marker locations and their texts can be found at www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/markers/texts/.

Donations Received

The Nebraska chapter of Safari Club International recently gave the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission the last installment of their five-year pledge of a \$50,000 donation to help with the Commission's bighorn sheep reintroduction and research efforts in the western part of the state.

In recent years, the Iowa Foundation of North American Wild Sheep has also donated to the Commission's sheep and youth programs, donating \$30,000 for the bighorn program and \$5,000 to help purchase the Commission's family day trailers.

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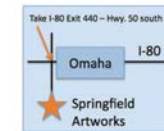


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Going Soft

Jeff Kurrus

Largemouth bass are one of the state's most popular game species. But as spring creeps into summer, many of the state's best fishing waters become choked with vegetation, both submergent and emergent. This is quite frustrating to anglers, who often curse their crankbaits and spinnerbaits as they repeatedly remove gunk from the hooks.

Yet there is no reason to curse these lures. If the fish are in the vegetation, go in there with them with totally weedless options. There are many to choose from, but the following two are as good as any you'll find for weeds:

Texas-rigged floater — I say "floater" because these lures can come in the form of worms, lizards, slug-o's and any other of the variety plastics that anglers use. The main thing anglers must understand is to use these lures



PHOTO BY DOUG CARROLL

without a weight. This allows them to float better along the top of the vegetation, allowing for less hang-ups while providing better sight for the angler. There's nothing like seeing a fish strike these lures through the vegetation.

Scum frogs — These also float on top and are my No. 1 lure for heavy vegetation fishing. Like the floating plastics, these can be fished using multiple techniques, including swimming them, stop-and-go, small twitches and large twitches. Each technique gives the lure different action in the water, and should be tried if another method isn't working.

In June, I'm still fishing a lot of open water, but as the vegetation increases, I don't fight it — I just move right in the middle of it. And these areas always seem to have action. Now, whether or not you can catch and actually land those big bass pulling your lure beneath the greenery is a different story.

Help Needed for Herp Survey

The Fontenelle Nature Association in Bellevue is looking for volunteers to help with a May 22-23 survey of the reptiles and amphibians that live at Fontenelle Forest.

The survey will be conducted rain or shine from 12 p.m. to 10 p.m. on

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PHOTO BY BOB GRIER

Good for Father's Day

Kristen Friesen

The Father's Days of the 1980s went like this: Mom always presented Dad with a new shirt and tie, and Dad always acted surprised. But whenever my sisters and I asked Dad what he wanted most in the world, his answer was always and only, "Good girls. That's all I want."

And with three of us girls running amuck in Lincoln's Wedgewood neighborhood, he probably wasn't lying. But "good girls" are difficult to deliver, if not wrap up, even on Father's Day.

"The next best thing," he'd say, "would be to spend an entire day together."

That usually meant heading to Pawnee Lake, where we'd take turns on Dad's tiny Sunfish sailboat, munch cold Hy-Vee chicken and bask in the warm June sun until we were too tired to cause any trouble.

Here are a few more family-friendly Father's Day weekend events available statewide this year:

- 22nd Annual Mid-States Rodeo in Clarkson: June 17-18; (402) 892-3457.
- 18th Annual Ash Hollow Historical Pageant at Ash Hollow State Historical Park in Lewellen: June 18-19; Historical drama, music, tours, displays and chuckwagon supper, (308) 778-5548.
- Celebrate Lincoln International Festival: June 18-19; Music, vendors, entertainment, activities and ethnic

food, (402) 434-6902.

- Great Nebraska Tractor Ride from Wisner's River Park to Norfolk: June 18-19; (402) 372-5423.

- Demolition Derby at Custer County Fairgrounds in Broken Bow: June 19; (308) 215-0241.
- Chadron State Park's 89th Anniversary Celebration: June 19: Live music, games, demonstrations, wagon rides, antique tractor show, archery shoot, paddle boat races, arts and crafts shows and 89-cent meals, (308) 432-6167.
- Shrine Bowl of Nebraska at Memorial Stadium on June 19; featuring Nebraska's premier senior high school football players, (402) 477-8908.
- 35th Annual Father's Day Rod Run in Ord: June 19-20; Classic cars, Saturday night burn-out show and shine, and parade, (308) 728-9950.
- Father's Day Fossil Hunt and Fish Fry at Ponca State Park: June 19-20; Treasure hunt, paleontologist-guided fossil dig, children's fossil boxes and fish fry, (402) 755-2284.



Officer's Notebook

Back to the Basics

One day a few summers ago I was working with another officer at Zorinsky Lake in Omaha when we asked a couple of anglers if they had fishing permits. They said they didn't, so we asked them to follow us to parking lot where they were parked. The two individuals, in the best way they could, told us that they could not speak English. Because I had been taking a beginning Spanish course, I thought I would try and speak to them in their language to help ease the situation.

When we finished writing out the citations, I tried explaining mine to the individual, and then I tried to explain how to send the citation in to the court. When I was in the Spanish class, they told us not to use Spanglish, which is pretty much putting a "O" on the end of a word. Example: lots-o of food-o. In trying to explain to the individual that he needed to send the citation to the Douglas County court, I informed him that I had a preaddressed envelope for him to use. But what I said was "Put the stamp-o on the envelope-o."

The other officer informed me that I should probably go back and try taking the class again. However, as he was telling me this, he asked his individual, "Where are you from?"

The individual said, "I am from El Paso."

The other officer then said, "Oh, from New Mexico, huh?"

I looked at the officer and said, "Who needs to go take another class?"

— Sean McKeehan, Conservation Officer, Ashland



- Father's Day Trail Ride at Ash Creek Ranch in Crawford: June 20; Bring your own horse; Dutch-oven supper provided, (308) 665-1580.
- Heartland MX Series Racing at Sandhills Motorsport Park in Sargent: June 20; (308) 215-0564.

Bryant Wins Cornhusker Cup

Zach Bryant of Lincoln Southwest won the Cornhusker Cup at the 41st Annual Cornhusker Trapshoot held April 30 – May 2 at the Nebraska Trapshooting Association (NTA) home grounds in Doniphan.

Bryant shot a 196x200 for high overall honors after shooting a 99x100 to win the handicap title on Saturday. Print Zutavern of Broken Bow was second and Cody Stout of Weld County (Colo.) 4-H was third overall.

The Lincoln shooter had scored a 97x100 in the 16-yard competition Friday, when three shooters, including Zutavern, scored 100s.

"I knew it was going to take a 98 or 99 to get back the three rocks I lost yesterday," said Bryant, a senior and five-year veteran of the trapshoot. "I have been shooting handicaps good all year, so I knew it was possible."

A record 1,811 shooters from Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri and Colorado registered for this year's shoot.

"In Nebraska and surrounding states, shooting sports are still growing," said co-shoot director Terry Brentzel. "Whether it is shotgun, archery, muzzleloader, or rifle, families have

found that outdoors is a great place to be with your family."

Keenan Kremke of Karp and Krow 4-H in Ord was crowned the junior high school champion on the shoot's first day. Kremke won with a score of 99x100 on 16-yard targets.

Safety is the top concern at the Cornhusker and all participants are certified in hunter education. "The kids

have been shooting in their conferences for the last six weeks," said Brentzel. "With six weeks of supervision by coaches and parents, they know safety is the No. 1 priority. In 41 years here, there never has been an accident."

Turpin Time

Dick Turpin

In Nebraska, we're fortunate ... we really don't have a lot of trouble with camp theft. Most things taken are items that can be easily carried, like for instance a stove, a cooler, a lantern, a fishing pole, a radio ... those sort of things. Those smaller things that folks can carry off readily. So when you leave camp or go to sleep, put those things out of sight, at least in the tent or in your vehicle. Remember this – if you wouldn't leave it lying around in your front yard, don't leave it lying around in camp. ■



River Recreation

Real Estate Auction

1 PM Thursday June 24
Grey Goose Lodge, Ogallala

Just east of Brule, 4 parcels on south bank, South Platte River. Excellent deer, turkey, waterfowl habitat. Private access; bordered on south by I-80; boundary agreement to flowing channel. Also offered in 2 combinations, and total 155.8 acres as a unit.

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Outdoor Message Plates

David Gerdes of LaVista has been bass fishing since he was about 13 years old and has had his message plate, which reflects both his love for fishing and the brand of boat he fishes from, since 2005. Despite also having a B.A.S.S. sticker on his rear window, he still gets questions about the meaning of the plate.

If you have a unique outdoor message plate you would like to share, or know someone who does, e-mail a photo (high-resolution, .jpg format only, please) of it to Eric.Fowler@Nebraska.gov, along with your name, hometown and a brief description of the interests expressed on your license plate.



NEBRASKAland Visitor Winner and Hint



Last issue's winner of the NEBRASKAland Visitor drawing was Andrew Heskett of Leavenworth, Kansas, who found the **common house fly** on page 3.

Readers are encouraged to contact *NEBRASKAland* within 10 days after this issue's publication with the correct page number and name of this issue's "Visitor" – an insect or bug found in Nebraska that just happened to find its way onto one of the pages of our publication.

We will then gather the correct entries and draw one to win a NEBRASKAland Visitor mug.

To enter each month, e-mail Tim.Reigert@Nebraska.gov with "Visitor" in the subject line of the message or write:

NEBRASKAland Visitor
2200 North 33rd Street,
Lincoln, NE 68503.

HINT: This month's visitor is not on page 5, 13, or 44.

POWWOW at the Archway

By Ken Bouc

Despite wet conditions, last year's inaugural Dancers of the Plains Powwow was deemed a great success and this year's celebration may be even better.

Pawnee voices and drums echoed across the Platte River Valley near Kearney in June 2009, a sound that hadn't been heard in Nebraska since the last of the Pawnee were moved to Indian Territory in Oklahoma 134 years earlier. This June, voices and drums of their Arikara kinsmen, music perhaps not heard in Nebraska for more than 170 years, will blend with those of the Pawnee.

Last year, the first Dancers of the Plains Powwow was billed as "The Pawnee Homecoming" and exceeded all expectations of its sponsor and host, the Great Platte River Road Archway near Kearney: "We thought perhaps 15 or 20 Pawnee would make the trip from Oklahoma, but 155 showed up," said Ronnie O'Brien, the archway's director of cultural education. In a similar vein, spectators were expected to number 1,000 or so, but estimates of actual attendance ranged from 3,000 to 5,000.

Building on last year's success, this year's event has been expanded to two days, June 18th and 19th, and is being billed as "Pawnee & Arikara Rendezvous on the Platte" to celebrate

the reunion of the Pawnee and Arikara in Nebraska (see sidebar on page 17).

While there will be other attractions, the event's main drawing card will be the dancers and drums in the powwow arena from 1 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. each day. Singer and drummer groups (each

group of drummers is collectively called a "drum") will provide rhythm and song for the dancers. Some of the songs may date back to when the Skidi and Arikara were together in Nebraska, and drums from other tribes may also join in.

"We've been taking our drum to celebrations up there (Arikara celebrations in North Dakota) for eight or nine years. The Arikara were once part of my band, the Skidi,"

said Pat Leading Fox, head chief of the Pawnee Nasharo Council in Pawnee, Oklahoma.

Last year's powwow, like most, opened with a grand entry led by U.S. and tribal color guards, dancers, and tribal and local veterans. Rain showers, however, unfortunately silenced the drums and ended the dancing after only 45 minutes. "Last year was excellent — so many people showed up," said Leading Fox. "The only thing I didn't

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



Warren Pratt of Pawnee, Oklahoma, watches as some of his fellow dancers take part in last year's powwow.



Members of the Pawnee Indian Nation take part in last year's inaugural Dancers of the Plains Powwow at the Great Platte River Road Archway in Kearney. This year's event will be held June 18-19.

like about it was getting rained out."

If weather should threaten again this year, however, organizers now have contingency plans in place and the powwow and exhibits will be moved indoors to the Viaero Event Center in the southwest quadrant of the Kearney I-80 interchange Exit 272. Since public parking will not be available at the archway, the event center will also be the designated parking lot, rain or shine, for the powwow. Free shuttles to and from the powwow arena, about three miles distant, will be provided from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. each day.

The powwow invitation extended to

the Arikara for this year's event inspired a plan to build an earth lodge near the powwow arena, a replica of the dwellings that had housed their ancestors and other plains tribes for hundreds of years.

Men from the Three Affiliated Tribes (Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara) in North Dakota with experience building earth lodges visited the Kearney area in March. Cory Spotted Bear, Jasper "Jazz" Young Bear and Marty Young Bear found a good supply of the large, cured tree trunks they needed, either standing dead trees or others already felled, in the woods along the adjacent

Platte River. These heavy timbers would bear the weight of the roof and form the framework of the walls.

In addition, young cottonwoods that had been killed by the New Year's Eve ice storm of 2007-08 would provide the longer, slimmer poles needed to create the lodge's sloping roof and outer walls, and seemingly everywhere were the slender, young willows that would be used to make mats to lay beneath the sod that would be put on the roof and used to fill spaces between the slightly slanting poles that would support the lodge's earthen walls.

Spotted Bear and the Young Bears

were scheduled to be part of a crew of approximately 10 workers from the



The Great Platte River Road Archway is located just east of Kearney off I-80 Exit 272. Designed to emulate a covered bridge, this history museum uses a variety of media to document more than 150 years of transportation and communication across America.



Left: Taylor Keen of Omaha, a member of the Omaha Indian tribe, dances with members of the Pawnee tribe at last year's powwow as a sign of respect for their tribe, which was once a longtime enemy of the Omaha tribe.

Below: wearing a traditional headband, Micah Horn of Pawnee, Oklahoma takes his lead from other dancers.

Above: Reenactors prepare to fire a cannon near the archway museum at last year's event.

Right: Charlotte Miles, also of Pawnee, performs a shawl dance using a fringed cape.



Last year's powwow included a variety of attractions in addition to the dancing, and this year's version is no different. Various living history demonstrations, including grizzled trappers preparing hides, tipis, a traditional Pawnee garden and demonstrations of Civil War-era U.S. Army tactics involving muzzle-loading rifles and a cannon will be available for visitors to view and learn about. In addition, at this year's Civil War camp visitors will learn about the important role that Pawnee scouts played at nearby Fort Kearny both during and after the Civil War, and the service that Arikara scouts put in during Army campaigns on the northern plains.

Last year, Pawnee artists exhibited and sold their work near the powwow arena and additional artists are expected to attend this year, including perhaps some from the Three Affiliated Tribes of North Dakota and others from

Nebraska and neighboring states. As they did last year, outdoor concessions near the archway entrance will provide food, snacks, drinks and souvenirs, while the archway itself offers food at its Chuck Wagon Restaurant, souvenirs and books in its gift shop, restrooms, and tours of the exhibits in the elevated gallery that spans Interstate 80.

To find out more about the powwow and its attractions, see the ad on page 11 or go to www.archway.org. ■

Other Skidi-Arikara Rendezvous

Ancestors of the four Pawnee bands (Skidi, Chaui, Kitkahaki and Pitahawirata) and the Arikara lived in scattered communities across the central plains, from South Dakota into Kansas, as much as 1,000 years ago.

Today, both Arikara and Skidi state that their two communities were once unified, then separated when Arikara villages on the Elkhorn River in Nebraska moved north to be near other Arikara villages in today's South Dakota.

According to Roger Echo-Hawk of Longmont, Colorado, a scholar of ancient American history, Skidi oral traditions say that by the mid-1700s, large groups of Skidi were moving north for extended visits with the Arikara on the Missouri near today's Fort Pierre and Mobridge, South Dakota.

Likewise, groups of Arikara were coming to the Loup River to visit the Skidi in Nebraska. As a result, a very close political relationship developed between them. These visits were probably the earliest reunions of the Skidi and Arikara.

Smallpox and attacks by Sioux, recent newcomers to the northern plains at the time, changed circumstances for the worse for the Arikara by 1790, and a conflict with the U.S. Army in 1823 forced them to abandon their villages for a time. The Arikara eventually returned to their villages and endured drought and more Sioux attacks until the summer of 1832, when they left for another rendezvous with the Skidi.

In the spring of 1833, the Arikara established camp near the forks of the Platte and contacted the Skidi, who hunted buffalo in that region every winter and summer. In October 1834, a missionary noted 2,200 Arikara visitors at the Skidi village on the Loup. In the winter of 1836, Sioux attacked and defeated the Arikara, who fled the Platte and joined the Mandan and Hidatsa tribes far to the north.



Roger Echo-Hawk



Loup Fork Village, Pawnee 1871



Asa Taka (White Horse), 1876

Walnut Creek

The Story of a Template

Text and photos by Jeff Kurrus

Built over 10 years ago with fish habitat in mind, Walnut Creek has become one of eastern Nebraska's most popular lakes. For good reason.

In the December 1999 issue of *NEBRASKALAND*, senior editor Jon Farrar wrote an article on an eastern Nebraska reservoir entitled “Walnut Creek: Fish Habitat From the Ground Up.” In the piece, Farrar chronicled the step-by-step process that the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, in cooperation with the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District, the USDA, the city of Papillion and other resident groups, went through to create a lake close to the metropolitan area with one main purpose – fishing. “Walnut Creek was built with fish habitat in mind, and it

continues to be an excellent fishery because of that,” Commission Fisheries Outreach Program Manager Daryl Bauer said recently.

But not only has it remained an effective fishery, it has also provided a standard that all future lakes must be measured by – a template for how to create and maintain such a consistent fishery close to so many people.

Even before Walnut Creek was created, constructors knew that the land adjacent to the planned lake would be quickly developed with housing. Problem was, such development can create serious problems both during and after

completion due to sediment run-off: more sediment means less fish habitat, poorer water quality and fewer invertebrates for fish to eat. This potential problem was rectified early on with the creation of the 15-member Clean Lakes Community Council, consisting of area farmers, residents and other private citizens. The council’s mission was to develop management goals for the lake’s watershed that would serve the needs and desires of the community and protect the lake from run-off pollution. The council quickly established itself by requiring a high level of erosion control on

construction sites in the area and penalizing violators. The city of Papillion subsequently adopted the ordinance within its jurisdiction of the lake watershed, and these practices provided the first barrier for keeping sediment out of the lake.

An additional aide to the lake’s future was then-lake manager Randy Lee, who, as the area manager and NRD employee, knew the laws and methods of controlling erosion. Lee was passionate about maintaining the lake and watched over the development of the area. Because of similar sediment problems, \$6.8 million was recently

spent at Holmes Lake in Lincoln for renovation, so having someone policing Walnut Creek the last 10 years has been pivotal.

Lee gathered support from local watershed communities, which also helped oversee the area. Similar groups have been formed at Zorinsky and Glenn Cunningham lakes in Omaha, and Holmes Lake. At Holmes, the local watershed community has been promoting the use of nonphosphorus fertilizers near the lake in an attempt to thwart nutrient runoff from lawns, and has also addressed local pet waste, found to be a source of bacteria in the

lake.

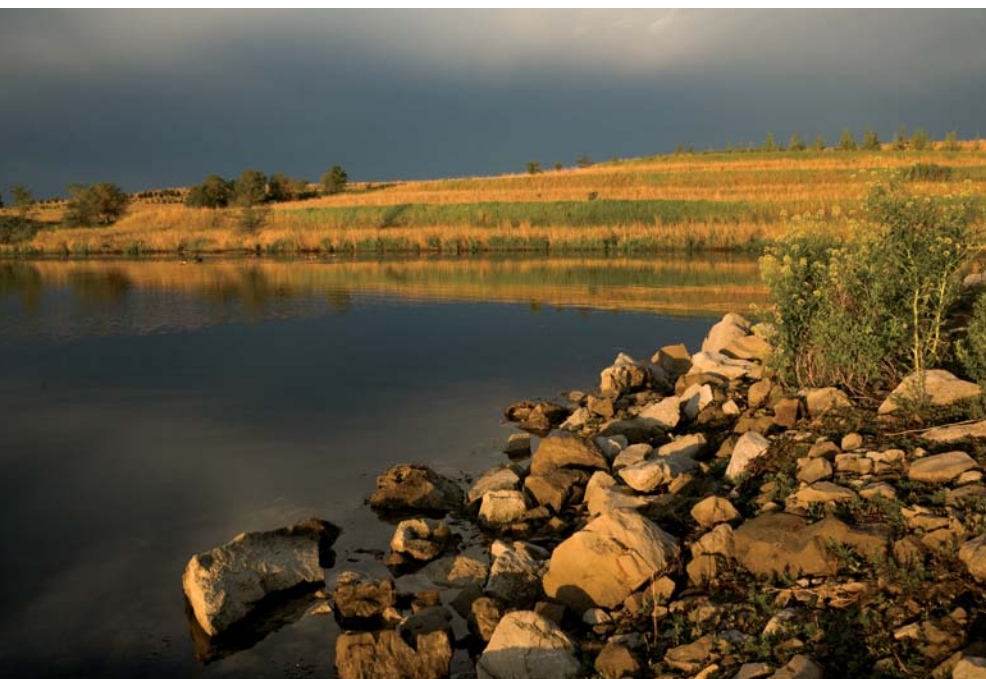
Lee also recruited local boy scouts to place used tires at Walnut Creek to help with erosion on several areas. “They’re pretty effective,” said



Walnut Creek Lake and Recreation Area is open year-round from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. It is located south of Highway 370 and west of 96th Street in Papillion.



At Walnut Creek, one of eastern Nebraska's most popular fishing spots, boats coming and going is a very common sight.



Riprap was used at Walnut Creek to provide stability to its banks, helping prevent erosion and extending the life of the lake. These spots also provide excellent bank fishing.



Joe Anderson helps wife Lindsey lower her kayak into the water at Walnut Creek. Because the lake has a 5 mph speed limit for all boats, this eastern Nebraska reservoir is a great metropolitan lake for a variety of recreational water sports.

Commission fisheries biologist Jeff Jackson, “because they knock the energy out of waves before they strike the bank.”

Another step to increasing Walnut Creek’s life was proper construction of the lake itself: Sediment dams would not be enough to prevent silt and erosion – the lake’s shape also had to be carefully planned out. Any time a water body is built in Nebraska, prevailing winds must be factored in. At Walnut Creek, the lake’s north end was expected to undergo the most shoreline erosion due to fetch, the amount of area available for waves to travel. Natural points on the lake also needed to be addressed because these tend to be the first degraded by wind action. Jetties (long fingers of shoreline covered in rock) were used to combat these problems and were beneficial in several ways: they reduced the fetch, thus minimizing wind erosion for the lake in general; the rock covering them provided habitat for prey fish and reduced the jetties’ own erosion; and the lake bed material used to construct them created deeper water adjacent to the jetties, which anglers could use to

access it. Jetty construction has proven so effective that it was used on future aquatic habitat projects, including Cottonmill Lake near Kearney and Cunningham.

In addition, two islands were created at Walnut Creek near natural high spots on the lake, also aiding in the lake’s sediment issues. “We tried to use the natural contours of the lake to benefit it in the long term,” said Jackson. “In the past, we have not been that involved in the design phase of a lake. But this time we were able to use some Sport Fish Restoration funds and Environmental Protection Agency 319 funds to help design and develop Walnut Creek to better support its water quality and fish habitat.”

Vegetation was also introduced at the reservoir, but very carefully. “You run the risk of the vegetation being invasive to a body of water, and even its watershed,” said Jackson. “We planted water lilies, water willows and cattails within Lee’s tires to protect the shoreline.”

But introducing habitat isn’t always necessary – sometimes leaving things as they are is better. For example, more

than 90 percent of the existing trees were left standing when the lake was built. This saved a lot of money that would have been spent on their removal, and it created excellent fish habitat that will last 20 more years with no expense.

Regardless of the habitat choices and plans made at the lake, Walnut Creek had one thing going for it that cannot be easily altered or replaced: “The watershed for Walnut Creek is very good, with 20 acres of watershed for every one acre of lake,” said Jackson. “In comparison, the Salt Valley lakes are closer to 40-to-1 and other reservoirs in eastern Nebraska are 100-to-1. The higher the ratio, the higher the potential for sedimentation and the poorer the water quality.”

Given proper construction, it is also mandatory to have proper fish management in order to have a good fishery, and Commission biologists manage urban fisheries differently than other water bodies. “Near the metro area, we want high catch rates for both bluegill and bass,” said Jackson. “If we are managing for big fish, we strive for

high bluegill densities and low bass densities. But people won’t catch near as many fish.”

To achieve this goal at Walnut Creek, biologists stocked a year class of adult bass, followed by a fingerling stocking. After the adult bass spawned, there were then three different year classes in the lake simultaneously. Next they stocked bluegill and black crappie – prolific spawners that would need little time to become competitive in the fishery.

When the lake opened to the public, a 21-inch minimum length limit on bass was enacted, which kept anglers from keeping every 12- to 15-inch fish they caught. “We get about 98-percent compliance at this location,” said Jackson. “Twenty years ago, we would have gotten 70 percent. If we still had low compliance, bass would leave this lake very quickly. Given the opportunity, anglers will take between 80 and 90 percent of a lake’s bass population in two weeks. We didn’t want that to happen here.”

Thanks to good planning and the cooperation of local officials, however,



Vegetation help prevent erosion and provides excellent fish habitat.

it’s looking like there will be more of the same here well into the future – good fishing at a lake close to the metro. If nothing else, Walnut Creek has shown that great fisheries can be found in high-use areas, good news in today’s world when having to stay close to home is becoming more commonplace for many outdoor enthusiasts. ■

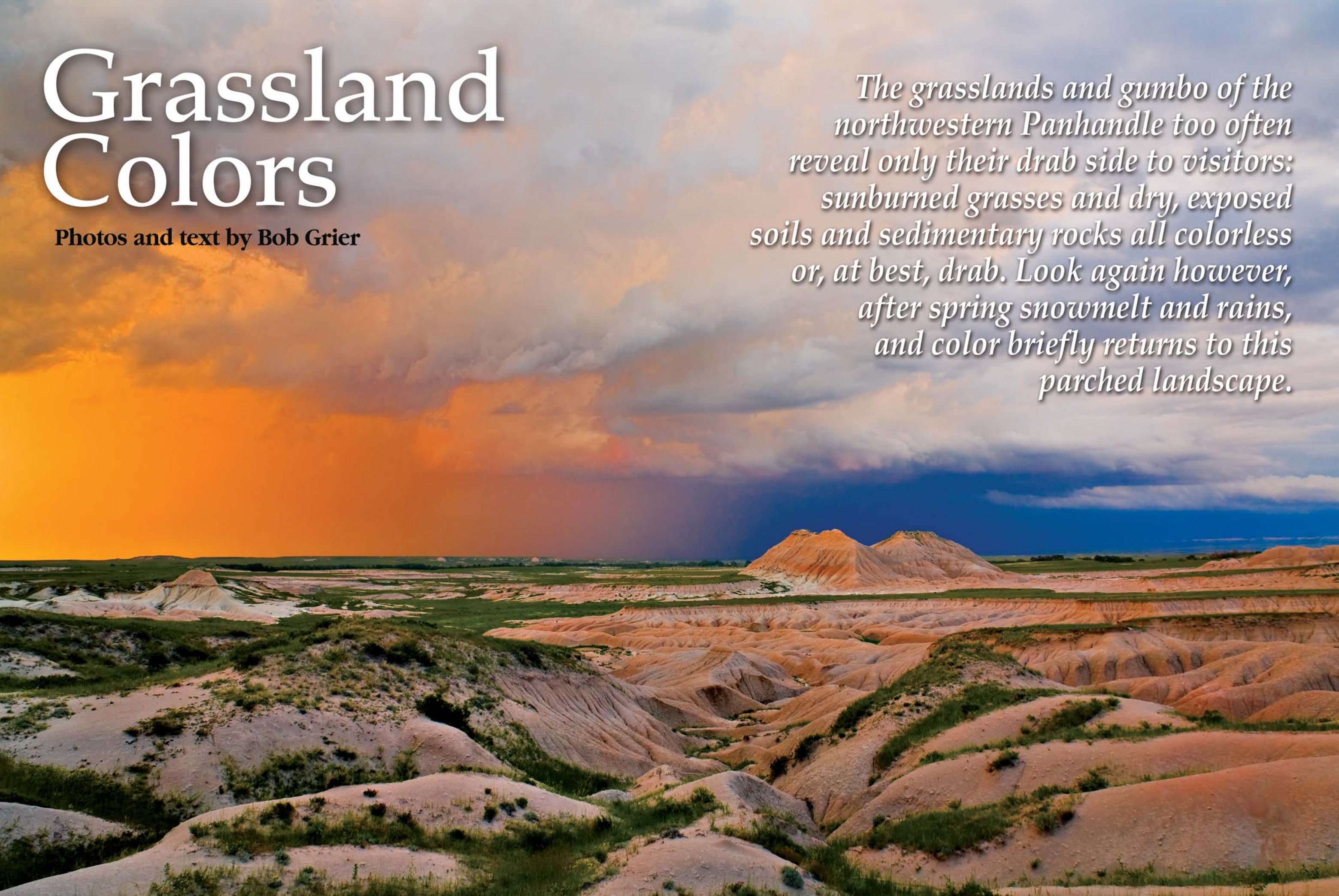


With few other boats on the water, a Saturday morning sunrise is prime time to fish for largemouth bass at Walnut Creek.

Grassland Colors

Photos and text by Bob Grier

The grasslands and gumbo of the northwestern Panhandle too often reveal only their drab side to visitors: sunburned grasses and dry, exposed soils and sedimentary rocks all colorless or, at best, drab. Look again however, after spring snowmelt and rains, and color briefly returns to this parched landscape.





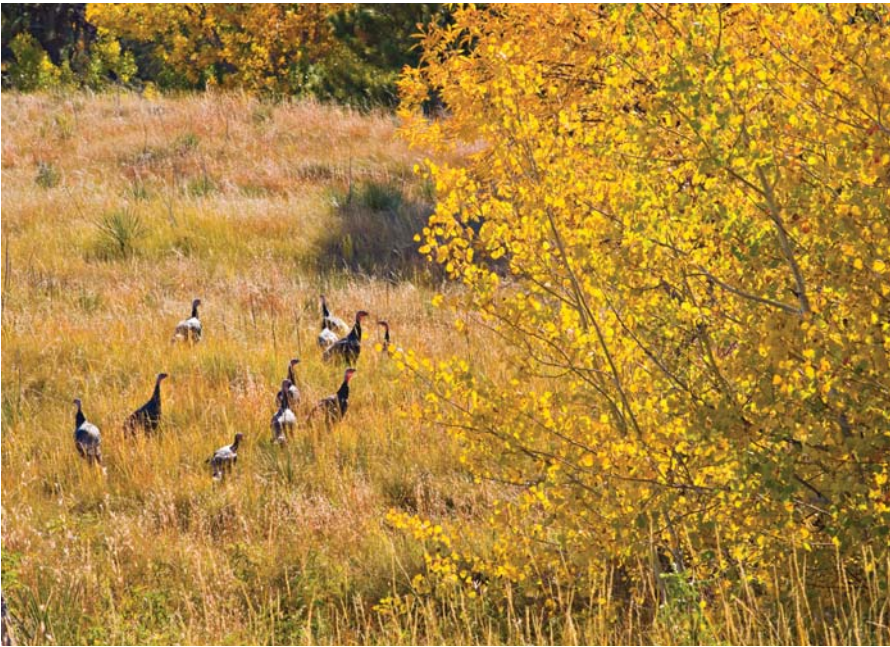
With adequate and timely moisture, the grasslands again show their vibrant colors of green grasses, golden sunflowers and clover blooms. Warm sunrises and sunsets paint the gumbo clay formations red and gold. Add deep blue skies, as well as the dark blues, golds and brilliant flashes of lightning against nearly black storm clouds, and the grasslands become an artist's palette.

Previous page: A midsummer storm moves noisily and colorfully across the badlands north of Harrison. The colorless, sedimentary layers laid down by an ancient ocean, now exposed and eroded, are temporarily awash in color.

Above: A gumbo ghost-town, Orella sits quietly, weathered and nearly colorless beside an abandoned gravel highway and still-busy train tracks. Lilacs planted and tended long ago become festive with this year's abundant moisture.

Opposite: Even with northwest Nebraska's normal annual quota of precipitation – 15 inches – landscapes blanketed by blooming sweet clover are rare, perhaps once every four or five years. Here a cottontail enjoys a colorful evening.

Right: Fall finds a flock of wild turkeys chasing grasshoppers near one of the remaining stands of quaking aspen on a Pine Ridge stream north of Crawford.





The grassland vistas nearly always demand a sweeping panoramic rendition that encompasses both land and sky. The seemingly endless landscape is home to prairie speedsters such as the pronghorn and solitary, stoic characters like badgers and jackrabbits. Scattered widely are human additions to the landscape – ranches, a white church and a few weathered gray and abandoned pioneer homes.



Opposite: A fast-moving thunderhead fills the sky above the picturesque Montrose Church and cemetery in north-central Sioux County.

Above: Sugarloaf is nearly colorless during much of the year, a brilliant white beacon resting on the edge of land and sky, witness to decades of seasons and each day's sunrise and sunset.

Right: His tunnel still secure through nearly three feet of snow, this jackrabbit's patience and insulation is illustrated by the blanket of blowing snow and ice crystals that cover it.





Left: Evening's last sunlight illuminates a mule deer buck feeding in the gold and orange grass along Sowbelly Creek northeast of Harrison.

Above: The sky above a grassland pond filled by above-normal snowmelt and rains is punctuated at dawn by an unusual alignment of Jupiter and a waning moon.

Even skies inky black several hours before sunrise slowly become colorful, the dull orange eastern horizon slowly dividing sky from the dark land shrouded in mystery below. Only a few hours later the day's light reveals large beds of yellow wall flowers in season, prickly pear cactus, lavender milk-vetch, the diminutive wild onion and gumbo lily, and the showy prairie and gumbo primrose.

Everywhere colors – subtle, outrageous, warm, cool, tranquil, liquid, gaseous but always fleeting, colors. ■

RIMROCK RAPTORS

In Nebraska's Panhandle, where the land seems but a footnote to the sky, raptors reign supreme.

Text and photos by Michael Forsberg



From the late 1970s through the early 1990s, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission biologists Ross Lock, Greg Wingfield, and John Dinan conducted periodic inventories of golden eagle, ferruginous hawk and prairie falcon nests in the Nebraska Panhandle. Seasoned field biologists, their tools of the trade were pen and paper, cameras and spotting scopes, low flying airplanes, climbing equipment, and old pickup trucks. They met with dozens of landowners, traveled hundreds of miles of county roads and two-track trails, and either rappelled down or climbed up countless buttes and outcrops to document nests and inspect chicks. The culmination of their work helped gain insights into

these birds' life histories in Nebraska, established a baseline knowledge of breeding populations, and helped guide conservation strategies for these iconic western raptor species of the shortgrass prairie.



Above: Backlit by summer twilight, the soft and delicate texture of a golden eagle feather in shortgrass prairie belies the strength and presence of this fierce predator, long a symbol of nobility and power on the Great Plains. In Plains Indian cultures, a golden eagle feather was said to give courage, strength and wisdom in battle.

Left: Passing time awaiting the delivery of its next meal, a month-old ferruginous hawk chick tests its wings in a series of "flap jumps" as a sibling looks on. Ferruginous hawks are the largest hawks in North America and prey primarily on rodents.

As a staff photographer and writer for *NEBRASKAland* years later, I would sometimes walk over to the Commission library and pull up a chair next to two large, faded green, three-ring binders, which sat appropriately on the shelf next to Arthur Cleveland Bent's classic series *Life Histories of North American Birds*.

Inside these binders were the biologists' raptor data sheets and fieldwork notes, small photographic prints of landscapes, and close-ups of the nests and chicks. There were Xeroxed copies of county maps showing township and range coordinates, and tiny red dots that marked nest locations.

Occasionally on a page I'd find a squashed mosquito that had met its untimely death in the field, or a small grape jelly stain that tipped off what someone had for lunch on a particular day. I'd lose myself inside these pages, pouring over the photographs and imagining in my mind's eye what it would be like to at that moment be at places they had named "Eagle



Above: After a months-long drought, timely June rains bring the shortgrass prairie to life in a flush of green and a sudden bloom of white evening primrose.

Left: Bathed in the glow of a prairie sunset, a female golden eagle looks to the west as she guards two-week-old chicks at her nest anchored to a cliff face in the Niobrara breaks of Sioux County. If lucky, her now tiny, down-covered chicks will grow to become the top avian predators on the Plains, able to dive nearly as fast as a peregrine falcon, agile enough to snatch a dodging jackrabbit and powerful enough to take down a young pronghorn.

Aerie,” “Swede Canyon”, “The Needle” or “Ash Hollow.”

Inspired by their work, I began to make periodic sojourns into this rimrock raptor country with camera in hand, trying to pay homage to the biologists’ work and in some small way do justice to these noble birds of prey where the land seems only a footnote to the sky.

Over the years I hiked miles of hills covered in blue grama, sat in acre-sized fields of white evening primrose and watched these birds for hours on easy summer days as they soared among the towers and wedding cake-shaped buttes and followed the thin thread of the upper Niobrara River that cuts through much of these high plains. I have also been scared out of my skin by the harshness of this place, waiting in blinds while being pelted with hail, rocked by thunderstorms and nearly blown off ridgelines. Yet in this fierce

weather that makes mere humans want to cry for mommy, these birds seem indifferent to its schizophrenic nature. In fact, they seem to almost relish in it.

In Sioux County, in the most remote untrammelled places where raptor numbers are high, their penthouse aeries are traditionally anchored among the sandstone formations that rise vertically out of the surrounding plain: Golden eagles amazingly pinning their huge stick nests to sides of cliffs; prairie falcon scraping out small platforms tucked in deep, shadowed recesses of box canyon walls; ferruginous hawks, the largest hawk in North America, crafting their nests on inaccessible, knife-edge points of rock, or sometimes boldly placing them right on the ground.

Since early spring, when these birds first returned back to this country to claim nesting territories, their diligence and commitment to



A prairie falcon diligently patrols the skies and inspects all intruders near her nest, located in a shadowed recess of sandstone tucked under the lip of a canyon wall.

protecting and rearing their young has been constant and unwavering – incubating eggs, brooding chicks, fiercely protecting territories and shielding their chicks from snow, wind, intense heat and driving rain.

By midsummer, however, the adults' commitment begins to wane. The young chicks have grown strong, fully feathered and are testing their wings. The adults visit less often, usually only to drop off food and leave. From the nest the fully grown chicks watch their parents soar high overhead, sometimes for hours, almost as if coaxing the young birds to come join them among the clouds.

Then – usually on a hot, windy day when strong updrafts swell from the valley floor, wash up the rock walls and and pass over their wings – the chicks' urge to leave their nest and fly becomes too great. They inch towards the rim of the nest like a high diver on the edge of a cliff. They stand on the precipice, waiting, then open their wings and launch themselves into the dome of blue sky, leaving the nest behind and learning to ride the winds where they will make a life on the vast prairie sea.

This is rimrock raptor country. ■



An empty golden eagle nest sits idle after the chicks fledged. Breeding raptors in the high plains can have large nesting territories (a golden eagle's might cover 100 square miles) and may also have several alternate nests they can use in different years. Some of these nest sites have been used for generations, and will hopefully be used for generations to come.

Nebraska's Paddlefish

Prehistoric species persisting in Missouri River

Text and photos by Eric Fowler

The North American paddlefish has many official distinctions: It is both the heaviest and longest fish to swim in Nebraska waters, and ranks among the largest freshwater fishes in the world. It is also among oldest fish species, unchanged for millions of years. It most certainly has the longest nose.

Known by some as “poor-man’s lobster,” this prehistoric fish is rarely caught on a baited hook. Yet it is so endeared by the anglers who pursue it, they wholeheartedly supported regulation changes in the 1980s and 1990s that restricted its harvest in Nebraska.

Those changes may have helped prevent its demise and brought the species to where it is today – a success story in fisheries management.

A Swimming Fossil

With its earliest fossil records dating back to the Cretaceous period some 135 million years ago, the paddlefish is among the most ancient freshwater fishes in the world and is one of two families in the order *Acipenseriformes*, the other being sturgeon. While there are 26 sturgeon species in the world, there at most two species of paddlefish,

and some fear the Chinese paddlefish may now be extinct.

Paddlefish are blue-gray to black on top of their body and have a white bottom. They can live more than 50 years, reach lengths of more than seven feet and weigh in excess of 150 pounds. A fish speared in Iowa’s Lake Okoboji in 1916 reportedly weighed 198 pounds, the largest on record. The biggest fish documented in Nebraska weighed 140 pounds after it was found dead in 1996 in Lake Maloney, likely an escapee from a holding pond. It measured 75 inches and biologists estimated its live weight at 150 pounds.

Toothless except as young and mostly scaleless, the paddlefish has a cartilaginous skeleton protecting a rubbery rotocord that runs from its

Easily recognized by their paddle-shaped snout, paddlefish in Nebraska are found primarily in the Missouri River. Jaw tags on the fish help biologists track their movements up and down the river. Nebraska’s record paddlefish, snagged below Gavins Point Dam in 1998, tipped the scales at 93 pounds. The current hook-and-line world record of 144 pounds came from Kansas.

brain to its tail, with its only bones being in the jaw. The species’ unique, paddle-shaped snout led to its name, as well as other common names such as spoonbill and spoonbill cat, and its scientific name, *Polydon spathula*.

Paddlefish are born without this snout, technically known as a rostrum. It begins growing at one to two weeks of age, and makes up about one half of the fish’s total body length by five weeks and one-third of its length as an adult. Scientists once speculated paddlefish, which live on zooplankton filtered through their huge mouths and close-set gill rakers, used their rostrum to stir up food in bottom sediments. Others believed it was used as a rudder or stabilizer – with no swim bladder to give it neutral buoyancy, a paddlefish must swim constantly or sink.

Biologists now know that the rostrum is full of sensory receptors that help the fish detect food. These sensors are also found on the fish’s head and upper body, which helps explain why fish that lose their rostrum when hit by boats or while passing through hydro-electric dams do fine without them.

The North American paddlefish was first documented in the 16th century by Hernando DeSoto, a Spaniard exploring the Mississippi River. That river and its major tributaries, including the Missouri and Ohio, continue to be the primary home for the species, which prefers quiet or slow-moving water. It also inhabits a few other rivers leading to the Gulf of Mexico, as well as some reservoirs. In free-flowing rivers, paddlefish are most often found in pools below sandbars, as well as

other river habitats with reduced current or where food is more plentiful or concentrated.

In Nebraska, the fish is found primarily in the Missouri River, especially the unchannelized reach below Gavins Point Dam. It is also found in Lewis and Clark Lake and in the lower Platte and Elkhorn rivers, and likely ventures into other major tributaries as well. One was even snagged below a diversion dam in the North Platte River east of North Platte in 1983. The fish are also occasionally found in sandpits along the lower Platte, finding their way into those waters during floods.

Despite its size, longevity and wide range, the paddlefish has suffered major population declines throughout its range. The species was hurt by overfishing in the late 19th and early



PHOTO COURTESY OF ELMER (JEROME) PROMES

Roger Thoene (left), Orville Sudbeck (center), and Elmer (Jerome) Promes show off paddlefish they snagged north of Wynot on the Missouri River around 1970.



20th centuries. The construction of dams and locks and channelization of rivers throughout the Mississippi basin in the past century blocked fish movement, destroyed natural habitat, including historic spawning habitat that was inundated by reservoirs or silted in by soil-laden runoff from farm fields, and held back spring rises that triggered spawning, reducing natural reproduction. Native to 26 states, it has been extirpated from four on the eastern edge of its historic range.

While the two semi-natural reaches of the Missouri River above and below Lewis and Clark Lake resemble its historic form, the construction of Gavins Point Dam and channelizing the river below Sioux City, Iowa, certainly affected the paddlefish in Nebraska, said Gerald Mestl, Missouri River program manager with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

“The river contained a diversity of habitats that were important for paddlefish, such as sandbar pools backwaters and oxbows,” Mestl said. “These are the places where paddlefish feed ... so losing those habitats had a direct impact on how many fish the river could support.”

As with many long-lived fish and mammals, paddlefish are slow to become sexually mature: four to nine years for males and six to 18 years for females, with maturity being attained earlier in the southern portion of their range. Mature male paddlefish can spawn each year, but while annual spawning has been documented in some females in the south, it may take two to seven years for northern females to develop the massive amounts of eggs they carry, which can comprise up to 25 percent of their weight.

Little was known about their spawning habitat until the 1960s, when a biologist working on Missouri’s Osage River noticed paddlefish spawning on gravel bars during a significant spring rise. When river levels dropped, he found their grey to black adhesive eggs broadcast on the bar and, later, larvae in the waters around it.

Strung out as far as the eye can see from the Highway 15 bridge near Maskel, paddlefish gorge themselves on a concentration of zooplankton being washed from the huge, shallow flat upstream at Mulberry Bend.

In Nebraska, paddlefish spawn from mid-May through June. Day length, water temperature and water flow all influence spawning, which historically was triggered by rising water that came when snowmelt from the Rocky Mountains arrived. If those triggers don’t coincide and the fish can’t find clean gravel under flowing water, the females reabsorb their eggs. Eggs hatch in six to 14 days, depending on water temperature, and larvae immediately swim to the surface to ensure they will drift downstream and not be stranded by receding water. Larvae live on their attached yolk sack for up to five days, at which point they are able to consume zooplankton and insects.

Paddlefish adapt and even thrive in many reservoirs, where they grow larger and faster because food is more abundant and they don’t expend energy constantly swimming against the current like their river counterparts. In such situations, fish migrate into rivers above them to spawn, as is the case with fish found in Lewis and Clark Lake, which spawn near the mouth of the Niobrara River.

Paddlefish grow rapidly, reaching 12 inches by their first fall and 20 inches in a year. In aquaculture ponds, fish have reached 28 inches in 100 days. Beyond age five, fish begin adding more weight than length, and can double or triple their mass by age 10. Females grow larger than males and growth rates are greater in their southern range.

The Fish Market

The commercial harvest of paddlefish was allowed in seven states in 2006, with about 500 tons of fish and 28 tons of roe (eggs) taken annually from 2000 to 2006, mostly from Tennessee, Kentucky and Arkansas. That’s well below the 940 tons taken nationally in the late 1800s, when harvest was primarily for flesh but soon shifted to roe for caviar. These unsustainable harvest rates led to significant declines or even depletion of paddlefish stocks. By 1931, harvest had dropped to 108 tons and by 1975, it was just 46 tons.

Commercial paddlefish harvest has not been allowed in Nebraska waters since 1955, but was legal in South Dakota through 1978. Loren Bender of St. Helena remembers when fishermen



Tim Porter, a Nebraska Game and Parks Commission conservation technician, pulls a net heavy with paddlefish from the tailwaters of Fort Randall Dam during a study of fish in the river reach that extends from the dam to Lewis and Clark Lake in Nebraska.

would set trammel nets in the river to catch carp, buffalo and paddlefish. “They would come around and peddle them for 50 cents a fish,” Bender said. “But nobody really knew how to clean them in those days. They didn’t know you had to cut the red meat off. My dad always bought them ... but they fried the dark meat and the white meat and it was pretty tough to eat, pretty strong. Only in the later years did they figure out that if you cut the dark meat off then you’ve got a nice piece of fish.”

Commercial harvest was once nonselective for age or sex, especially when the primary goal was collecting roe. All fish were simply sacrificed to determine if they were female and had eggs ready for taking. Commercial fishermen now use syringes to sample eggs, but periodic spikes in caviar prices, including those caused by a recent decline in sturgeon populations in the Caspian Sea, the source of the world’s most desirable caviar, have increased the demand for eggs. This, in turn, has increased both commercial fishing pressure and poaching on both paddlefish and sturgeon populations in North America.

Anglers are occasionally cited for illegally snagging or netting paddlefish

from the Missouri River in Nebraska. Russ Mort, a Conservation Officer from Nebraska City, has occasionally found paddlefish left on the bank with their bellies slit open and eggs removed, but doesn’t believe the practice is common. However, Mark Webb, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) agent now living in Denver, believes paddlefish are being taken illegally for their eggs in every state they are found. Webb, who now heads the unit that handles covert poaching investigations nationwide for the service, followed several leads when he worked in Nebraska several years ago, but wasn’t able to substantiate any significant caviar trade on the Missouri. It may be worse today – with egg prices tripling to \$125 a pound in recent years, making a 60-pound paddlefish carrying 10 pounds of eggs worth \$1,250 to a poacher, that may have changed: “Because of the money involved, it’s a very clandestine operation,” said Webb. “We’re looking at a whole different type of person involved in the [illegal] caviar trade.”

In 1998, the liquidated damages for an illegally taken paddlefish increased to \$750 in Nebraska, making poaching a risky business. Still, the illegal trade

in eggs is of worldwide concern, and led to some protection for paddlefish and sturgeon species in 1998 from the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), including import and export quotas or bans on some caviar.

Nebraska’s paddlefish snagging season occurs in the fall, when roe, if present, is not suitable for caviar. Fourteen states had paddlefish seasons in 2006, three fewer than in 1983. Most allow snagging during the spring spawning run, when the catch is primarily mature fish. Mestl said because fish of all age classes are present in the river below Gavins Point Dam and because the population is vital to maintaining the fishery, Nebraska isn’t likely to ever have a spring season. “We don’t really want people focusing on the small segment of the population with black eggs,” he said. “Commercializing a sport fish concerns us. It can lead to black market activity and inappropriate behavior by anglers.”

In any case, the demand for roe from wild fish may soon be cut dramatically, as Mestl reported that China recently announced plans to release 300 tons of caviar from pond-raised fish onto the world market. That should lead to a



Filter feeding paddlefish are equipped with huge mouths and large gill rakers.

drop in price, Mestl said, and because aquaculture facilities guarantee production year-round at a lower cost than gathering eggs from wild fish, he believes they are likely the future for the caviar industry. “I think this is a good thing from a fisheries biologist’s perspective, because it will stop harvest just for the eggs,” he said. “We can manage harvest of paddlefish from the sport fishing side. We’ve proven that.”

Snagging Spoonbills

While these filter-feeding fish are seldom caught on baited hooks, paddlefishing is popular where allowed. To catch these fish, anglers cast a large treble hook on weighted line, hoping to snag them on the retrieve.

Paddlefish are the only game fish that can still be legally snagged in Nebraska. Any fish could be snagged year-round throughout Nebraska until 1964, when it became limited to the Missouri River for part of the year. Snagging other game fish in the Missouri was banned in 1978.

When Gavins Point Dam was completed in 1955, paddlefish began concentrating in its tailwaters, where their upstream movement was blocked but they could still take advantage of abundant food flushed from the reservoir. These fish were very vulnerable to snagging, and anglers took home an estimated 100,000 pounds for two winters. Fort Randall Dam was completed in 1956, and in 1958 nearly 13,000 fish were harvested from its tailwaters.

Nebraska and South Dakota soon

recognized the threat to the population, and implemented the first paddlefish regulations in 1957, limiting anglers to two fish per day with four in possession during a year-round season.

Out of concern for increasing fishing pressure and a continued decline in paddlefish numbers, the

daily bag and possession limit was reduced to one in 1970, the same year that Nebraska and South Dakota began working together to study and manage the population. Their research in the 1980s found that most paddlefish spawned above it near the mouth of the Niobrara River, then drifted and swam downriver, through Lewis and Clark Lake and out the dam’s floodgates or hydro-electric plant. After harvest ballooned to 5,500 fish in 1986, more than twice the 1971 harvest estimate, biologists made drastic changes in 1987 to protect the broodstock above the dam and the fish below it: Fishing was closed above Gavins Point Dam and below the mouth of the Big Sioux River, and below Gavins the snagging season, which had been cut to seven months in 1974 and five in 1983, was cut to just November.

When harvested continued to occur at rates biologists believed were unsustainable, the states enacted a new regulation that led to one of the most colorful eras in the fishery: a harvest quota. The 1989 season would open October 15 and close when anglers had harvested 1,000 fish from the tailwaters. With additional harvest downriver, they estimated the take would be 1,600 fish, or five percent of the estimated population.

Knowing that if they didn’t get their fish early they might not get the chance, anglers showed up in droves on opening day. In both 1989 and 1990, the quota was met by the end of the second day, but because South Dakota regulations

required 48-hours notice of the closure, the season remained open for two more days and hundreds more fish were harvested.

While the quota was controlling harvest, biologists could see that there were few sexually mature fish and little natural reproduction. After a test run of snag-and-release fishing in 1991 found that few, if any, released fish died, a protected slot limit was imposed in 1992 that required anglers to release fish between 35 and 45 inches in length, giving mature fish time to spawn several times.

After a few comparably calm seasons, the popularity of paddlefishing, for whatever reason, again began to rise, and by 1995 the area below the dam had more anglers than it could handle. Lines at boat ramps were long, and if they could find a place to park, bank anglers were now waiting for a space to fish. Area managers were concerned for safety. In both 1995 and 1996, quotas were met on opening day. The snagging season had become a race for anglers and a tourist attraction for spectators.

In 1997, with the intent of spreading the pressure throughout the entire month and improving the angling experience, the 30-day season was set to open October 1, and each of the states began issuing 1,200 free permits through a drawing.

Archery fishermen were brought under the permit system as well in 1997, with each state getting 200 tags. They had followed the same bag and possession limits as snaggers since 1957. After having a year-round season for paddlefish in the Missouri River through 1962, their season dates were cut several times and by 1992, lasted nine days in July.

Fewer changes have been made to paddlefish regulations since 1997. Both states now charge for permits, and with demand for snagging permits far outweighing supply, Nebraska implemented a preference point system in 2008, ensuring most anglers could draw every other year. The archery season now begins the second Saturday in July and lasts 30 days.

Harvest has been both above and below the target during the archery and snagging seasons, but the combined harvest by Nebraska anglers since 1997 is about 800 fish, below what biologists



Paul Lind of Norfolk lands a paddlefish on opening morning of the 2008 snagging season in the Gavins Point Dam tailwaters. Once packed with anglers during the time when paddlefish were managed with a quota system, the rocks now offer plenty of room to snag. Even when the season opens on a weekend, only 25 percent of those with permits hit the river on opening day.

consider manageable levels. In response, the number of permits issued by each state has increased twice, most recently to 1,600 for snagging and 275 for archery in 2008. In 2009, Nebraska anglers harvested 1,174 fish and released more than 9,400 during the snagging season, both the highest since harvest tags were first issued, as was the total catch rate of 173 fish per 100 hours of fishing.

Taking Stock

Today, paddlefish populations are stable or improving in most states where it is found, with just three listing it as declining, down from seven in 1983. Efforts to reintroduce the fish in Pennsylvania and New York have begun.

Much more is known about paddlefish than was a few decades ago. This grew from a 1989 petition to grant paddlefish protection under the Federal Endangered Species Act. While the USFWS found such a listing was

unwarranted, the review led to the formation of the 28-state Mississippi Interstate Cooperative Resource Association (MICRA), which has replaced the state-by-state management with a basinwide approach more appropriate for the far-ranging fish.

Through MICRA, paddlefish research grew significantly, including tagging studies of both wild fish and most of the nearly 2.2 million hatchery-reared fish stocked in 14 states between 1988 and 2006 to supplement natural reproduction, restore extirpated populations or support recreational fishing. These tagging studies help biologists monitor habitat use, distribution, movement, harvest and exploitation rates of paddlefish.

With help from Nebraska and South Dakota biologists, the USFWS’s Gavins Point National Fish Hatchery has raised paddlefish since the late 1980s for South Dakota to release in the Missouri River system. Some were stocked in the Missouri River above

Lewis and Clark Lake, but with some natural reproduction occurring and concern for genetic diversity, those efforts were discontinued in 1997.

Early stocking efforts paid little attention to genetic diversity, Mestl said, and fish raised at the Gavins Point hatchery were sent around the country, something that might not be done today. “There is an increasing concern and understanding for local genetic stocks and adaptations that are now taken into consideration,” said Mestl.

South Dakota has stocked more than 400,000 hatchery-reared paddlefish in Lake Francis Case, where no natural reproduction has been documented. Jason Sorensen, a SDGFP fisheries biologist, said recruitment of stocked fish has been good enough that they are considering opening a limited season and continuing to stock fish. “We have a lot of paddlefish in Lake Francis Case right now,” said Sorensen.

Studies have found that some paddlefish stocked in Lake Francis



Jeff Powell and Craig Bockholt of the Gavins Point National Fish Hatchery move paddlefish from a rearing pond to a truck for transfer to Lake Francis Case in 2008. For years, broodstock for paddlefish production at the hatchery have been netted below Fort Randall Dam and near the mouth of the Niobrara River.

Case have been flushed through Fort Randall and Gavins Point dams and moved all the way to the Mississippi and Ohio River basins. Likewise, fish stocked in downstream states end up in Nebraska. “Many paddlefish stocked in Kansas have ended up in the Gavins Point tailwater area,” Mestl said. “It’s just a part of their world. In the Missouri River and its tributaries, it’s all one group of fish.”

Despite the wide-ranging movements of these fish, sport and commercial fishing regulations still vary greatly among states sharing the same open water, although MICRA members are working toward cooperative and standardized regulations similar to those jointly used by South Dakota and Nebraska or Montana and North Dakota.

Fish surveys do not reveal absolutes about a population, but they do reveal trends. The one that Mestl points to when discussing the status of paddlefish in Nebraska’s stretch of the Missouri is the mean body length of fish sampled, which has increased from 29.4 inches in 1995 to 33.2 inches last year in the reach below Gavins Point Dam.

And the MICRA paddlefish surveys, as well as those that are tracking other fish, including the endangered pallid sturgeon, have shed more light on paddlefish reproduction. In 2009, biologists surgically implanted a radio transmitter in a female pallid sturgeon and tracked her intensively in the spring to identify the spawning habitat

she was using. In order to watch her spawn near Decatur, they deployed a DIDSON camera, a high-tech underwater system that uses sonar to capture images. Not only did they find the sturgeon, they also found paddlefish spawning in the same habitat: the base of a revetment, the rock that protects the outside bend of the river. That wasn’t a complete surprise to Mestl. “They’re both big river fish and they have fairly similar spawning requirements,” he said.

Mestl said biologists are now finding paddlefish whenever they sample larval fish in the Missouri River throughout Nebraska and all the way to its confluence with the Mississippi at St. Louis. He believes these larval fish and the increase in mean length are a direct result of stricter regulation of the fishery. “I think by protecting those fish from 35 to 45 inches, we’ve really stabilized paddlefish reproduction in the Missouri River,” he said. “And by maintaining the number of spawning adults, we have adults spread out everywhere and they’re able to take advantage of any sort of a rise out a tributary to spawn successfully.”

While the swift current of the channelized Missouri River is not ideal for paddlefish, holes behind wing dikes provide a continuous chain of still water where the fish can find refuge and food. Paddlefish are regularly seen or sampled in restored backwaters and chutes, including those at Schilling Wildlife Management Area near

Plattsmouth and Ponca State Park, and continued work could foster further growth in the population. “They’re out there,” Mestl said. “We’re starting to work with Iowa to try and figure out how many actually live in the channelized river. Is the fish a resident there or is it from the unchannelized river and moving through? We are trying to capture some fish, tag them and hopefully recapture them to figure out where they came from.” If a significant number of paddlefish are found, it could lead to further opportunities for anglers.

Still, there continue to be concerns, including the number of paddlefish in the reach between Fort Randall and Gavins Point dams. A recent study by Brenda Pracheil, a University of Nebraska graduate student, found that high spring flows from the Niobrara River can influence spawning and make up for the change in both temperature and magnitude of spring flows due to controlled releases from Fort Randall Dam. But Pracheil also found that even when there is good natural reproduction, most young are flushed through Gavins Point Dam, leaving little natural recruitment in this reach. Additionally, fish stocked in Lake Francis Case and flushed through the dam comprise a greater percentage of the population each year. “If they quit stocking paddlefish above Fort Randall, it might



Paddlefish eggs swirl in a jar at the Gavins Point National Fish Hatchery.



Brenda Pracheil scans the rostrum of a paddlefish netted below Fort Randall Dam to determine if it contained an electronic tag identifying it as a hatchery-raised fish. While dams block upstream movements, downstream movement of paddlefish is common. One released in Lake Francis Case was recaptured seven years and 1,200 river miles later in the Kentucky’s Cumberland River after having passed through five dams.

only be a matter of time before the population disappeared,” Pracheil said.

Paddlefish raised for Lake Francis Case last year were instead stocked in the river below Gavins Point Dam, the first time fish had been stocked in that reach. The move was made following the discovery of Asian clams in Lewis and Clark Lake last summer. The lake supplies water to the Gavins Point hatchery, raising concerns that the clams, which had previously been found only below the dam, may have entered the hatchery and could be spread with paddlefish, pallid sturgeon or other fish raised there, said Kurt Schilling, project leader at the hatchery. Schilling said the program will be put on hold until methods are found that can reduce or eliminate the risk of spreading the clams to Lake Francis Case, including chemical treatment of water, which is already done to control zebra and quagga mussels but was found to be ineffective for clams.

Another unknown is the number of paddlefish in Lewis and Clark Lake. Radio telemetry studies and sampling efforts in Lewis and Clark Lake have proven difficult, but there could be more fish in that reservoir than anyone knows.

Biologists are currently exploring the possibility of using the DIDSON camera to run survey transects on the lake to find the answer. “With this camera you can not only tell which fish are paddlefish, but you can actually measure them, so we could actually do a size distribution of paddlefish without setting nets. It would be a very hands-off way to do a repeated survey,” Mestl said.

Concerns that invasive, non-native, filter-feeding fish such as the bighead and silver carp, and even zebra mussels, would compete with paddlefish for food have somewhat subsided in the Missouri River. While Asian carp species have affected native fishes in other North American rivers, Mestl said their numbers might actually be declining somewhat throughout the Missouri River, and that the fish have not fared well above the mouth of the Platte River. “When you look at mean weight, we’re seeing a slight increase in the size of our paddlefish,” Mestl said. “So at this time, we haven’t seen an impact.”

So for now, the paddlefish’s future in Nebraska, at least in the river below Gavins Point Dam, is bright, and Mestl doesn’t see that changing. Much of the

credit, he said, is due to the cooperation from anglers, who participated in public meetings and surveys and supported changes in regulations, even though it would limit their opportunity.

“I guess it was not a message that you might not always hear from anglers or people that harvest fish and game,” Mestl said. “But they were very clear and adamant, right from the beginning, that even if they couldn’t harvest them, they wanted paddlefish in the river. We have had the support from the beginning to enact the right kind of management and regulations.”

The approach, Mestl said, has been conservative. “Were obviously allowing harvest, but we manage that harvest closely and we manage the size of the fish that they harvest, all with the idea that if we leave the adults in the system, the fish will take care of themselves. And that’s exactly what they’re doing.”

“I really think this is a success story, I really do. We’re being very conservative but it’s paying off.” ■

Editor’s Note: Next month’s NEBRASKALAND Magazine will include a how-to feature on shooting and snagging paddlefish.



Tick Season is Here

Don't let it stop you from going outdoors.

By Elizabeth Mack

Spring has sprung – which means ticks will surely follow. May, June and July are peak season months for ticks in Nebraska – a fact that may unnecessarily keep some people from enjoying the great outdoors. Why? Lyme disease.

The issue of Lyme disease in Nebraska is still pretty muddy, causes great confusion and is probably overblown, according to Wayne Kramer, the former medical entomologist and lead investigator of vector-borne diseases for the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services who is currently an Associate Professor of Entomology at Louisiana State University. “Nebraska doesn’t have the classic tick and bacteria combination of true Lyme disease,” said Kramer.

True Lyme disease comes from the bacteria, *Borrelia burgdorferi*, and the tick, *Ixodes scapularis*. The majority of all true human Lyme cases (90 to 95 percent) come from the northeast Atlantic region (the disease’s name comes from Lyme, Connecticut, where it was originally identified) as well as Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Southeastern Nebraska does, however, have the lone star tick (*Amblyomma americanum*) and *Borrelia lonestari*, a

bacteria that can cause a disease with similar, Lyme-like symptoms (bull’s eye rash, fever, aches) that is much less severe. The same antibiotic treatments for both diseases are extremely effective when administered in the early stages.

South of the Platte River, from Omaha to the Republican City area, is the main region in Nebraska associated with the lone star tick (named for the white “star” on its back), partially because deer, an important host for this species of tick, are abundant in this area. Even though deer are also abundant in other parts of the state, Kramer explained, lone star ticks are not.

However, Kramer noted, even though the lone star tick has traditionally only been found in southeastern Nebraska as well as the southern tier of Iowa, Illinois and Indiana, the species has gradually been creeping north over the last 15-20 years: “It’s being found in places where it didn’t use to occur.”

Although Lyme disease is often reported by those with its symptoms, research on it has been limited and diagnosis often difficult. A vaccine used to be available, but never really caught on and was removed from the market. Lyme disease differs from

other vector-borne diseases because the diagnosis is just not very accurate, said Kramer: “A lot of people with Lyme disease are not diagnosed, and a lot of people who probably don’t have Lyme disease are told they do. And even though there are blood tests,

Prevention

- Wear light-colored clothing when outdoors.
- Wear long sleeves and tuck pant-legs into socks.
- Use insect repellent containing DEET; the more natural oil of lemon eucalyptus has also been found to be effective.
- Check all parts of body that bend: behind knees; under-arms; behind ears and any place where elastic is tight on skin.
- Shower immediately after returning from grassy or woody areas.
- If a tick is found, remove gently with tweezers; do not try to burn off.
- If a bull’s eye rash develops, seek medical treatment.

they aren’t always accurate. We have gotten used to expecting a 100 percent accurate diagnostic test for everything, but Lyme disease is one of those diseases where the diagnosis is sometimes impossible to make.”

Kramer believes that when Lyme is reported (often inaccurately) and publicized, the result is often confusion and sometimes even panic. It’s important to note, he said, that if diagnosed in the early stages when the rash first develops, Lyme disease (and its milder, Nebraska version) responds very well to antibiotic therapy, though symptoms could worsen if left untreated. And the chances of contracting Lyme-type diseases in Nebraska remains slim: Compared to the northeastern U.S., where the more serious Lyme disease exists and cases number in the thousands (well over 20,000 cases in eight northeastern Atlantic states in 2008), Nebraska had only eight confirmed cases, though Kramer believes even that number may be inaccurate.

So don’t let the fear of Lyme disease keep you inside this summer. With the proper precautions, ticks shouldn’t take a bite out of your outdoor fun. ■

Lied Platte River Bridge

Perhaps eastern Nebraska’s best Platte River view.

By Elizabeth Mack

Stretching across the Platte River near South Bend in eastern Nebraska rests the expansive Lied Platte River Bridge. The former Rock Island Railroad Bridge once helped move tons of stone, sand and gravel from quarries and pits along the Platte River to build Nebraska towns, and according to Roger Sykes, superintendent of Platte River State Park, the bridge also carried railroad cars with teams of horses and mules destined for the Omaha Stockyards.

Today, the 2,000 foot-long pedestrian bridge connects multi-use hiking and biking trails in Cass and Sarpy counties. With four fishing stations and an observation deck where bikers and pedestrians can view the occasional eagle and other wildlife, the bridge is a popular destination located near several other popular attractions, including the Strategic Air Command Museum; Mahoney, Schramm and Platte River

state parks; and Lee G. Simmons Conservation Park and Wildlife Safari.

Work on the Lied Bridge included numerous phases of development in the \$2.7 million Platte River Connection, including removing the top of the old bridge and replacing it with a 14-foot-wide concrete trail with railings and viewing platforms. Parking lots have been completed on the Cass and Sarpy county sides, as well as a trail that will eventually connect with Lincoln’s MoPac East trail.

Completion of the connector trails will be the final step in linking the 50-mile trails between Omaha and Lincoln, although according to Gerry Bowen, Natural Resources Planner at Papio-Missouri River NRD, the expansion has been slowed as of late by changes in the federal system: “The north end is two-thirds complete but, unfortunately, stimulus projects at the Department of Roads has shifted



Lied Platte River Bridge is located in Cass County off Nebraska Highway 66, near Platte River State Park. From Omaha, take Nebraska Highway 50 to Louisville and turn onto Spur-13/Highway 66. From Lincoln, take I-80 East to Exit 426, then head toward South Bend.

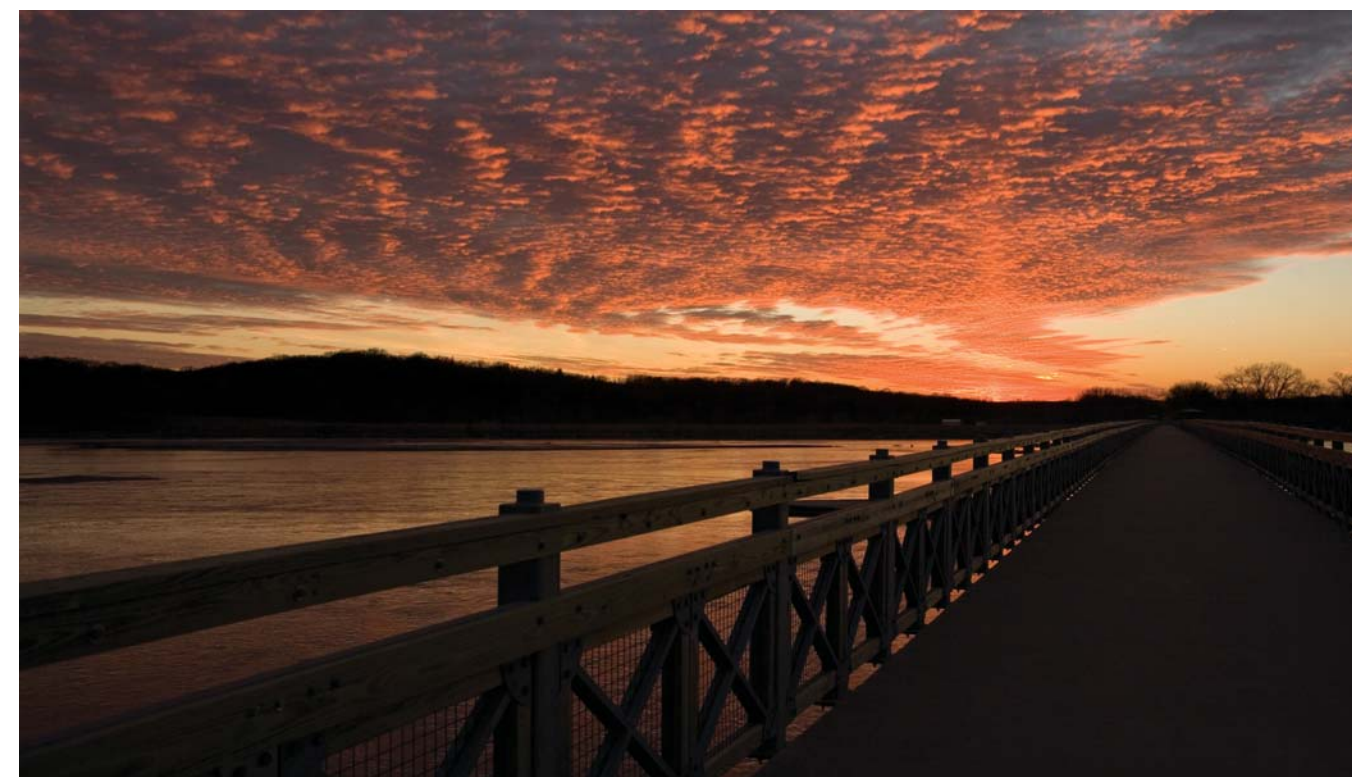
personnel to other projects, so right now the project is delayed until the federal system runs its course.” On the Lincoln end, the Cass County Board and NRD hope to locate the best route this month, though projected completion remains anywhere from 5-10 years away.

Once completed, the dream of cyclists being able to travel between Lincoln and Omaha entirely by recreational trails via the Lied Bridge will become a reality. Whether hiking, biking, fishing or just observing wildlife, the Lied Platte River Bridge is a must-see in eastern Nebraska. ■



Left: Lone star tick; Top: Deer tick; Right: Dog or wood tick.

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The Lied Platte River Bridge allows anglers, pedestrians and bikers access to one of eastern Nebraska’s best sunset views.

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

A Slow Wave Goodbye to Rosenblatt

Sometimes the game itself is the last thing fans are watching.

By Jeff Kurrus

I'm not the person that can recount all the years I went to Rosenblatt Stadium. Actually, the number of times I have been to a College World Series game while living in Omaha is embarrassing – I can't count them on one hand, but I definitely wouldn't need more than two.

What makes that worse is that each trip I have made to Rosenblatt, I remember something from it: the free box seat tickets my friend Berk and I got from a stranger in the parking lot, the last lemon-ice from the vendor's cart that went to my wife instead of the bratty child who was also thirsty, and my introduction to the slow wave.

The latter came during the 2009 tournament elimination game between Texas and Arizona State. With my brother-in-law Chris and sister Amy, we tried to watch the 18 on the field, but were repeatedly distracted by the more than 23,000 in attendance, most definitely by those in the outfield bleachers.

To acquire an outfield seat at a College World Series game it takes a little money and a lot of persistence. For \$10 tickets last year, hundreds of people stood in line for the chance to get into the stadium. The closer to the front of the line, the better those chances were. While definitely a one, maybe even two, water bottle proposition at times, this line was also a place to meet new friends. That couple from "Baa-ton-ruuuge," those college kids wearing the baby blues from Carolina, and those "Hook-em Horns" fans, equipped with finger gestures for all, were just a few folks willing to kill time chatting about Omaha and all things baseball before being allowed into the stadium.

And in most cases, as probably occurred while my family and I were hounding scalpers for cheaper box seats, these outfield patrons were developing plans even before the first pitch by Texas starter Cole Green was thrown, plans that included berating those whose seats were in a different section from their own.

Incoming left field fans didn't even bother to take their seats before yelling at those standing in the right field bleachers, while folks from the right field bleachers yelled back at them, and all outfield bleachers yelled at box seat purchasers, each group self-congratulating afterward with high-fives and more battle cries. Meanwhile, from Green's first pitch on, an epic baseball game ensued on the field, with both teams scoring a run apiece in the third inning.

Then a beach ball emerged from a hole in the right field bleachers, flying into the air as all cheered and many spilled drinks and food in an effort to tap the ball in a different direction. Madness ensued until the ball landed on the field. Then, quite suddenly, cheers heightened as a member of the Rosenblatt field crew ran toward the ball, high-stepping as he did so in mock-track star fashion as his knees nearly hit his head with each stride.

An inning later at least a dozen beach balls emerged from the crowd. And with each one that landed on the field, the track star emerged to again remove it from the field. One group of college kids in right field then tied a string to a ball, pulling it up quickly before the field staff could capture it. The crowd clapped. The PA announcer asked fans to not throw beach balls on the field. More balls emerged. As did more cheering. Meanwhile, a tight game continued into the later innings.

Earlier in the game, between insults and beach ball breaks in the outfield, the left field fans started a wave. This great example of mob mentality, which Americans claim as their own invention despite it originating at a 1980 hockey game in Canada, is an afterthought at most sporting events nowadays. People will do it, yes, but if you're older than 12, it only becomes worthwhile if everyone in attendance is doing it. Even then it's always easy to find a few people who still refuse to hold up their arms from their seated position.

But the mentality of this crowd was

different, as was seen later between the 7th and 8th innings when Arizona State right fielder Matt Newman decided that he was going to give the crowd more reason to cheer. After another beach ball landed on the field, the track star got out of the blocks, only to be countered by Newman. He raced the field crew member to the ball, attempting to throw it back in the crowd before the field crew could get it. As he made his first attempt, the high jumper tried to block his throw, and it tipped off the crowd's fingers and back onto the field. Newman got it, faked right, and then threw it left in the crowd as the field monitor once again attempted a block. Finally, with the ball back in the crowd's hands, Newman returned to his position, as did the field crew member, and the crowd roared louder.

This particular event must have inspired the left field bleachers in a game of "you top this." Those in the outfield seats, with one out in the bottom of the 9th while Arizona State held on to a one-run lead, started the slow wave.

Personally, I've been to a lot of sporting events, and have seen a lot of waves. But I've never seen the mad creation known as the "slow wave." In the left field bleachers, the crowd slowly stood together, raising their arms up, at a snail's pace, and then back down, as the motion slowly traveled in our direction.

The entire crowd began to laugh, many pointing as if the game on the field had long been decided. The right field bleachers, foregoing their earlier hatred of their left field counterparts, joined in as it drew nearer to our section. With one eye I watched the next pitch, with the other, the slow wave. My sister and brother-in-law smiled, we agreed we would participate, and then I heard the crack.

The entire crowd gasped – ASU, Texas and the "who cares" fans alike. I found the ball. It was towering over the center field wall off the bat of Longhorn catcher Cameron Rupp to tie the game.

With the game now even, the next batter popped up on the infield for the

second out. Everyone in the crowd was glued toward the infield as centerfielder Connor Rowe came to the plate – everyone except those watching the slow wave emerging again from left field. As the catcher threw the ball back after the first pitch, arms and bodies again began to raise, then lower. The pitcher pitched. The hitter watched, and the crowd slow waved.

It made it to the right field bleachers, and we again sought participation. We were all kids at the moment, taking in a glorious game under the lights at Rosenblatt after a torrential downpour during the afternoon had all but dashed our hopes of watching baseball that evening.

As it turned the corner from the right field bleachers to our section, with my eyes only staring at the crowd, I heard the crack from Rowe's bat. Everyone stood, the slow wave ended, and the ball landed in the left field bleachers for a walk-off homerun, ending the ball game and ASU's season.

It seemed at that moment that everyone was a Texas fan. That, of course, wasn't correct. But everyone

Omaha's Rosenblatt Stadium



this hilltop site and pushed for its construction. It opened in 1948, and two years later attracted the NCAA College World Series while winning the hearts of those who have attended the College World Series year after year.

Built in 1948, the site of the Men's Division I College World Series since 1950 was originally called Omaha Municipal Stadium.

Johnny Rosenblatt (1907-1979) whose name graces this ballpark, played amateur, semipro and professional baseball before entering a life of public service. He was mayor of Omaha from 1954 to 1961. He located

showed right then that they were a baseball fan, cheering the college kid as he rounded the bases.

As most people left the stadium, aside from those disappointed Sun Devils peppering the crowd, people began to talk about the day they had at the ball park. I assume a few were even planning their trip to Rosenblatt this June, for it will be the last year the College World Series is held at this neighborhood venue.

And that's exactly what Rosenblatt has always been for me, regardless of how few times I've been there – a

neighborhood ballpark whose action off of the field has done nothing but add to the action on the field. I just hope that same atmosphere can be created in the new downtown stadium.

Rosenblatt has always had a pulse to it, complete with its own host of memories – which is why it makes so little sense to me why I visited so few times. So I'll wave good-bye to it this month, doing so slowly while I shake my head wondering why I never did carve out a few more days each year to see more than a game or two at the old ballpark. ■

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Dom Waugh

Bert Fred Larson

◀ This picture was taken near Broadwater around 1937. The man on the right is Fred Larson of Omaha, the man in the center is Bert Cafferty, who went from eastern Nebraska to Broadwater to farm, and my father, Donald Waugh of Valley, is on the left.

Dad made many trips to central and western Nebraska to hunt ducks and grouse.

— Harlan Waugh, Fremont, Nebraska



▲ My father-in-law, Leonard Pelster, is pictured in the early 1940s before he joined the Army. He would trap badgers, coyotes [shown here] and skunks around his father Ed's farm north of Elsie. My husband, Joe, thinks his dad is around 16 or 17 years old in the picture. Leonard is now 85 and lives in North Platte with Christine, his wife of 60 years.

— Carol Pelster, Elsie, Nebraska



◀ My mother, Fern Allen, was born and raised in Valley and married a Sandhills rancher named Roy Loudon. In the early 1940s her brother, Walter Allen of Valley, would bring his friends out to hunt and this photo shows their daily bag limit of pheasants and ducks. Pictured are Fred Whitmore; Clyde Allen; Roy, David and Jack Loudon; and Walter Allen. The picture was taken north of Thedford in Cherry County.

— Joellen Phillips, Mullen, Nebraska



◀ Taken in 1914 on a hunting trip to the Sandhills south of Rushville, the back of this card says "How many do you want for 25 cents?" They camped for three days and each person ended up with several ducks. The tent and open fire used for cooking can be seen in the background. Pictured left to right are Ernest Wendt, Bill Thomas, George Peck, an unknown man, Frank Fisher and my grandfather, John E. Rush.

— Jane Burrows Stiehl, Colorado Springs, Colorado

Send contributions to: Portraits from the Past, NEBRASKALAND Magazine, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370. Or e-mail to tim.reigert@nebraska.gov. Photos should show people enjoying Nebraska outdoor activities, such as camping, boating, hunting or fishing, and must have been taken before 1980. We will give priority to unusual photos or activities. When possible, please include a story about the photograph and identify the people, places and approximate date it was taken. Photos will be returned.

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