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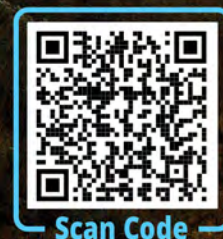
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NOVEMBER 2023



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Cover: A bobcat walks near
East Ash Creek in the Pine
Ridge Ranger District of the
Nebraska National Forest in
Dawes County.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

This page: Cattails (*Typha*) at
Chadron City Reservoirs in
Dawes County distribute their
seeds.

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Congratulations to Curt Blum, of Lincoln, who won the Nebraskaland award at the state fair for this image of a crimson salt flat tiger beetle. The photograph was captured at Frank Shoemaker Marsh in Lancaster County.



*Connie Allen, Grand Island
Storm Cloud Over Ponderosa Lake*

Send your comments and photos to:
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Please include your postal address and telephone number. Letters may be condensed and edited. Photographs are also welcome.

POUR SOME JOE

Brandon Black of Tilden pours a cup of coffee while waiting for ducks to fly during a hunt at Red Wing Wildlife Management Area near Neligh.

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



A ONE-DAY SCOUT

By Jeff Kurrus

Some firearm deer hunters are weekend warriors. Some have been checking trail cameras for months. And some don't plan on stepping into the woods until opening day. But there are many reasons not to do the latter. At the least, cross off the following tasks on your opening morning checklist.

How's the Weather?

It's fascinating how quickly Nebraska's weather can change. A snowy morning can turn into a T-shirt afternoon, so prepare for both. Wear minimal, moisture-wicking layers into the stand and finish dressing once there. A quick check of the weather also will reveal which way the wind is expected to blow. Plan accordingly with stand location.

No Time for Wasps

There's nothing more distressing than seeing a wasp fly out from under your deer stand seat while you're sitting in it. Counter this by checking your deer stand before opening day. This is also the time to check for board damage, and attach your tree strap to the tree so your body harness can be easily connected on opening morning.

Shooting Lanes

From your stand or blind location, analyze game trails and see if there are enough shooting lanes. You don't want to alter the landscape too much before the big day, but make sure a safe, accurate shot can be made when the time comes.

Buy a Permit

This seems obvious, but I have rushed to more than one library on a Friday night to print a permit for the following morning.

Shoot

Don't ignore one of your most important weapons — your weapon. For a list of public sight-in locations statewide, visit OutdoorNebraska.gov, and search "sight-in days." Where I hunt, deer numbers decrease immediately when the first rifle goes off. If possible, practice shooting elsewhere to avoid this same pitfall, and make your first shot count.

Rubs and Scrapes and Trails

Do a quick walk through the woods. Walk parallel to game trails and look for rubs and scrapes. If there are creeks moving through the property, where are deer crossing them? If you know where large thickets are located, stay away from these bedding areas but look for game trails leading to and from them. Then, hang your climbing stand or place your blind within shooting range of these paths.



If only given one day to scout, do a quick walk across the area to determine game trail locations that travel between bedding areas and food and water sources. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

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Tucked neatly away amongst the rolling hills of the Missouri River Breaks and the steep canyon draws of the Niobrara River lies this fantastic, one-of-a-kind property that truly has something for everyone. Excellent access from opposite sides of the property and a perfect internal trail system allow easy navigation. Comfortable, high-end tower blinds are positioned in some of the best areas throughout the property, just waiting for that first frosty November morning to arrive. Food plot locations have been strategically carved out across the land to offer the deer and other wildlife yet another reason never to want to leave. Thick draws littered with mature oak trees provide yet another ideal food source for various wildlife. The property has recently undergone a massive cedar tree-clearing project that will benefit the land for years. Warm-season natives and other plant species once choked out from the dense cedar stands already show signs of returning. Natural springs trickle down the steep draws and eventually find their way into the stocked fish pond, ready to provide you with hours of angling fun. The man-made bridge across the creek is another hidden gem you can check out while exploring this property. If you're looking for your piece of paradise with so much to offer, then look no further! Please contact Jason Schendt today for your private showing of this unique property!



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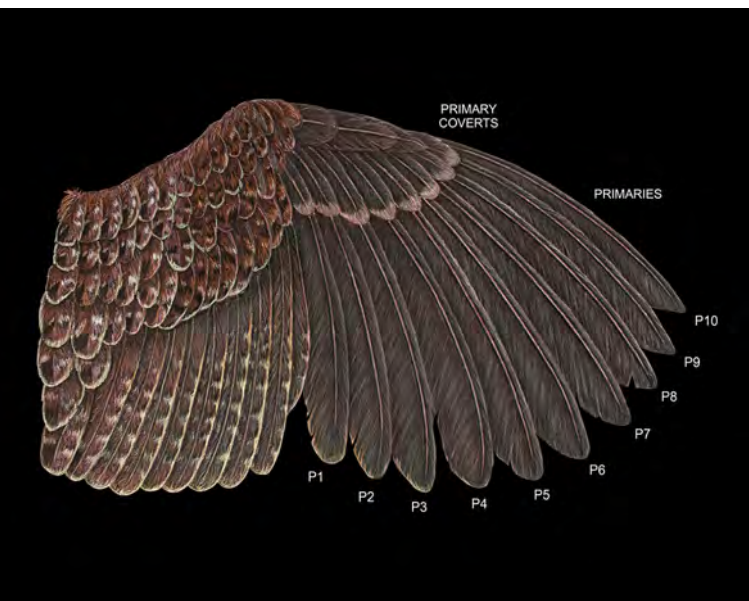


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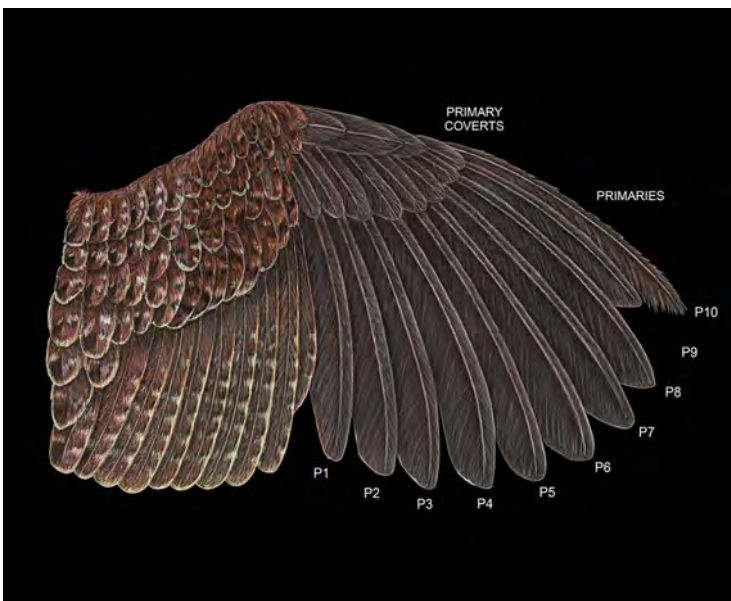
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Juvenile quail primaries and primary coverts feathers.
ILLUSTRATION BY KELLIE HAYDEN



Adult quail primaries and primary coverts feathers.
ILLUSTRATION BY KELLIE HAYDEN

HOW TO AGE QUAIL IN-HAND

By Kellie Hayden

The features that make our favorite game birds so charismatic also provide details into the ages of these birds. When we read the clues that feathers hold, we can make smart decisions on maintaining high-quality habitat.

Feathers take time and energy to grow — two things young birds don't have much of when they need to quickly learn how to forage, fly and evade predators. This means the first set of feathers that many birds are equipped with are not high quality, and it doesn't take long for these feathers to become heavily worn. These ratty feathers can give us insight into the age of individual quail.

The outer flight feathers, called the primaries, are counted inward. The outermost primary is called P10, and the innermost primary is P1. Northern bobwhites molt their primaries starting with P1, working outwards to P10. Once P1-P8 are fully molted and replaced with adult feathers, bobwhites are considered over 150 days old. When looking at the primaries, you may see that your bird has retained one or more of their juvenile primaries. If this is the case, the innermost primaries will look sleek and strong (adult feathers), while one or two of the outermost primaries look heavily worn, dull and may even be broken (juvenile feathers yet to be molted).

Another important clue to reading your bird's age lies in the primary coverts. These are the small feathers that cover the shafts of primaries. In bobwhites, juvenile primary coverts have light-colored tips. They may also resemble low-quality juvenile primaries in looking heavily worn. As bobwhites molt into their adult plumage, these light-tipped coverts are replaced by uniformly colored coverts. If your quail has primary coverts with uniformly light-colored tips, that's a giveaway your bird is a juvenile. No buffy or white tips on the coverts indicates an adult. Examining both the primaries and primary coverts will give you the best insight into your bird's age.

Why does aging birds matter? Data about the age of harvested birds can help inform land management practices. When managers have insight into the age of birds on the land they steward, they can better understand the health of breeding bird populations. This information can affect and even improve vital practices that maintain high-quality habitat, such as prescribed burns, grazing methods and seed mix selection.

And, it's just fun to know!

Kellie Hayden is a writer, artist and bird-banding apprentice who is passionate about grassland habitat and conservation.



CEO AND FOUNDER ANTHONY IMPERATO PRESENTS \$100,000 EACH TO ARKANSAS CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL AND THE FRED & PAMELA BUFFETT CENTER AT NEBRASKA MEDICINE.

Henry Repeating Arms, one of the country's leading firearms manufacturers, is proud to announce donations totaling \$200,000 to Arkansas Children's Hospital and the Fred & Pamela Buffett Cancer Center at Nebraska Medicine. The funds will go directly toward supporting the hospitals' efforts in treating and caring for pediatric cancer patients, ensuring that children and their families have access to the world-class care these healthcare providers are known for.

"If I could snap my fingers and solve one thing in this world, without a doubt it would be childhood cancer. It's impossible to imagine what these kids and their parents must go through," said Imperato. "Seeing the smile of positivity and confidence on the

face of a kid fighting the battle of their life is all the inspiration and motivation I need to try and support these children and their families in any way I can. Guns for Great Causes has always been about the kids, the future of America, and I am proud to make these donations in their name."

The survival rate for childhood cancer has improved greatly over the years thanks to advancements in medical technology and science, with more than 80% of pediatric patients now surviving five years or more after their initial diagnosis. As the primary mission of Henry's Guns for Great Causes program, we appreciate everyone's support as we work together to improve the outcome for all children with cancer.





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VENISON AND CHEESE-STUFFED POBLANO PEPPERS

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

Chile relleno is a Puebla Mexican dish: charred peppers stuffed with gooey cheese, dipped in fluffy egg meringue and then deep fried. The fresh poblano peppers and melty Oaxaca cheese are more traditional, but interchangeable. You may use Anaheim peppers instead, and if Oaxaca is difficult to find, try a combination of mozzarella and cheddar cheese for the filling.

Prep Time: 5 minutes

Cooking Time: 1 hour

Servings: 6

Ingredients:

- ½ pound of ground venison
- 6 medium-large poblano peppers
- ½ teaspoon of dried oregano (Mexican oregano preferred)
- ½ teaspoon of chili powder
- 10 ounces of Oaxaca cheese, shredded
- Kosher salt, to taste
- 4 eggs, whites and yolks separated
- ¼ cup of all-purpose flour
- Crumbled queso fresco cheese, to taste
- Vegetable oil for frying
- 1 jar of roasted salsa roja (or homemade)

Special equipment: toothpicks, stand/hand mixer

1. On a rimmed cookie sheet, broil the poblano peppers until blistered and fairly charred all over, turning occasionally. If you have a gas stove, use tongs to turn the peppers directly over a medium flame. Transfer peppers to a bowl and cover to allow them to steam in their own heat for about 10 minutes.



JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND

2. Over medium-high heat, brown ground venison, chili powder and oregano in 2 teaspoons of oil. Season with salt and allow to cool.

3. Gently scrape off the skin on the poblano peppers, being careful not to break the flesh. Then cut an opening down the length of each pepper to make a pocket, being careful not to cut through the other side. Remove the ribs and seeds. Stuff the peppers with a layer of Oaxaca cheese, cooked ground venison and then more cheese. Secure the openings with toothpicks. Be careful not to overstuff the peppers because they will be difficult to handle in step five.

4. To make the meringue, separate egg whites from their yolks. Beat whites on medium-high speed with a stand/hand mixer until it resembles the thickness of whipped cream. Break

the yolks and gently fold them into the meringue. Do not overmix, because the meringue will deflate. Heat salsa roja in a saucepan and keep warm.

5. In a deep-frying pan, preheat 1 to 1½ inches of vegetable oil to 350° F. When the oil nearly reaches temperature, lightly coat each stuffed pepper with flour and then carefully dip them into the meringue to coat. Fry the chile relleno seam-side down first, and then flip to brown the other side. Do not crowd the pan, so fry in batches; only dip peppers in meringue just before they go into the oil. Drain peppers on paper towels/frying rack and keep warm while you finish frying the remaining chile rellenos.

6. Ladle hot salsa onto serving dishes and lay one stuffed pepper on top. Remove the toothpicks before serving. Crumble queso fresco on top.

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A River Used to Run Through It

Red Wing Wildlife Management Area

Story and photos by Eric Fowler

Dams, diversions and development have changed many rivers in Nebraska. The Elkhorn River is not one of them. It still winds its way through the northeastern Nebraska countryside, its channel slowly shifting course from year to year. During floods, those shifts can be drastic.

That is what happened sometime early in the 20th century at what would, in 1977, become Red Wing Wildlife Management Area between Clearwater and Neligh. Where the Elkhorn had taken a right turn and headed south, it took a hard left and headed north, soon turning east and eventually rejoining the main course more than a mile downstream.

During the most recent flood in 2019, the Elkhorn changed its mind and jumped back into the channel it had abandoned a century ago. What it left behind has become a haven for wildlife, especially beaver, and a mosaic of plant species sprouting from the sand where the river once ran.

A Wild, Meandering River

The Elkhorn River is, like many in Nebraska, a meandering, alluvial river. While it has been straightened in places and had its banks armored in others, and irrigation pumps reduce its flows during the summer, it has only one small dam on its main stem, and it hasn't been diverted for irrigation and

hydropower.

As such, it still does what wild, meandering rivers do. It winds its way like a snake through a broad floodplain, constantly chewing away at the outside of each bend, the cut bank, and depositing that sand and soil on the inside of the next bend, creating point bars. Through time, those bends become wider and the distance across the neck shorter. Eventually, during periods of high flow, the water will take a shortcut across the neck, cutting the bend off from the river and leaving oxbow lakes or marshes behind.

Fly over the river in a plane or on Google Earth, and you will see the Elkhorn River valley is littered with oxbows. Some were created many decades ago, while others are more recent. Floods in 2010 and 2019 created six cutoffs in Antelope County alone, including the one at Red Wing and another upriver at Hackberry Creek WMA, adding to the 60 or so that already existed in the county. The result is a maze of lakes, marshes, wetlands and cottonwood forests.

My first look at the changed river at Red Wing came while I was taking aerial photos of the river in September 2020. Recognizing what I was seeing was not your typical cutoff, I made several passes. The abandoned channel, 2.4 miles in length, was mostly bare sand, except for a small ribbon of flowing water. The river's new route was only 1.5 miles long, most of it south of the 316-acre wildlife

area. It looked new, with massive point bars on each bend that, like the old channel, were also bare sand.

Back at the office, I opened Google Earth and quickly saw the river's new course was actually its old course, a path that for years had been a backwater and marsh.

When did the river turn north, I asked? Historic aerial photos did not answer the question. The first available were captured in 1938, and by then the river had been following its pre-2019 course for some time.

Topographical maps weren't available for Antelope County prior to that time either.

Merlin Bolling, a life-long resident of the Clearwater area, has seen plenty of floods in his 73 years. They come about every 10 years, he said. There were big ones in the 1940s, 1960s and 1990s. The biggest was in 2010, although there could have been others before records were kept. Bolling suspected a 1918 flood he was told about by other long-time residents caused the shift. It was after that flood, the former county

road superintendent said, that a bridge was moved to the river a few miles upstream from Red Wing. The long, narrow oxbow it left behind, the one now carrying the river's flow, became known as Horseshoe Slough.

On a visit to the Antelope County Museum to peruse old bound volumes of the Neligh Leader, I found a story on the front page of the June 7, 1918, edition of a storm that brought heavy rain, turned the streets to rivers and washed out the railroad tracks west of town in a location where only

temporary repairs had been made following a previous storm. The story, short by today's standards following a flood, focused more on damage done by wind and lightning, as though flooding was passé. Most of the news in each edition of the paper that year was coverage of World War I.

The museum had another interesting relic that may be the best clue to the river's shift: An 1884 plat map, the oldest they have, showed the main channel of the river flowing south, where it does today, but also



A wood duck perches on a fallen tree as a North American beaver lurks below it in a backwater at Red Wing Wildlife Management Area.



TOP LEFT: Brandon Black of Tilden retrieves a wood duck he harvested while hunting a beaver pond in the old channel of the Elkhorn River at Red Wing WMA.

BOTTOM: Prior to the 2019 flood, the Elkhorn River occupied the channel at the top of this photo captured in September 2020. The flood sent the river back into a channel it hadn't occupied for a century.

TOP RIGHT: A grass spider stands on a beaver pond filled with ramshorn and bladder snails, moss and rushes.



a smaller channel flowing north, covering part of the course it took prior to 2019. That leaves me to assume the 1918 flood caused the river to shift its flows entirely to the north channel, and also created another cutoff that remains as an oxbow marsh today.

Boots in the Sand

I set foot in the old river channel for the first time in May 2021, not knowing what I would find. Snags and sand filled most of the upper end of the old channel, which was disconnected from the river's flows. The water that was trickling down the former course was, as the case with many Nebraska rivers, coming from groundwater below. It began flowing a few hundred yards downstream and continued throughout most of its length, with small streams connecting deeper pools next to the former cut bank or scoured around snags by the flood.

In the lower end of the wildlife area, a backwater had existed for more than 100 years in the river's former course. Water taking this path during the 2019 flood completely reshaped this oxbow,

carving away 100 yards of land from its north end and leaving massive cottonwoods sunk in a 10-acre pond dotted with sandbars surrounded by deep scour holes, a haven for wood ducks. Eventually, the river took an easterly, overland route, leaving the pond, another cutoff, behind. A row of ash trees that once stood on the east bank of the old oxbow now stands on the west bank of an island in the middle.

The 2-plus miles of mostly dry riverbed between was dotted with snags toppled or deposited by the floodwaters, including a few bur oaks. Beavers had only begun to get busy, having built a handful of dams that I could find no sign of in the aerial photos I had captured the previous fall. Their runs were now plainly visible wherever there was water. Rushes, grasses, cottonwoods and willows had begun to sprout from the moist, sandy bottom of the channel, and shorebirds were probing the sand for insects.

By the time I returned a month and a half later, life had exploded. Beavers had raised the level of their dams and built more, a theme that would repeat itself



TOP LEFT: A stair-step of vegetation occupying different levels of soil moisture in the old channel includes, from left, cottonwoods and willows, great blue lobelia, partridge pea and spike rushes.

BOTTOM LEFT: Creek chubs and sand shiners fill a pool in the old channel.

BOTTOM RIGHT: A bobcat pauses to look over its shoulder at a camera trap while crossing a beaver dam.

with each subsequent visit. In those waters, I saw more minnows than I had seen anywhere. In the deeper holes, I found sunfish, largemouth bass and schools of recently hatched bullheads. Thousands of snails crawled through the shallows. Where they were found in masses, you could hear their shells rattling against each other as they moved. Frogs thrived in the water and toads on the sand.

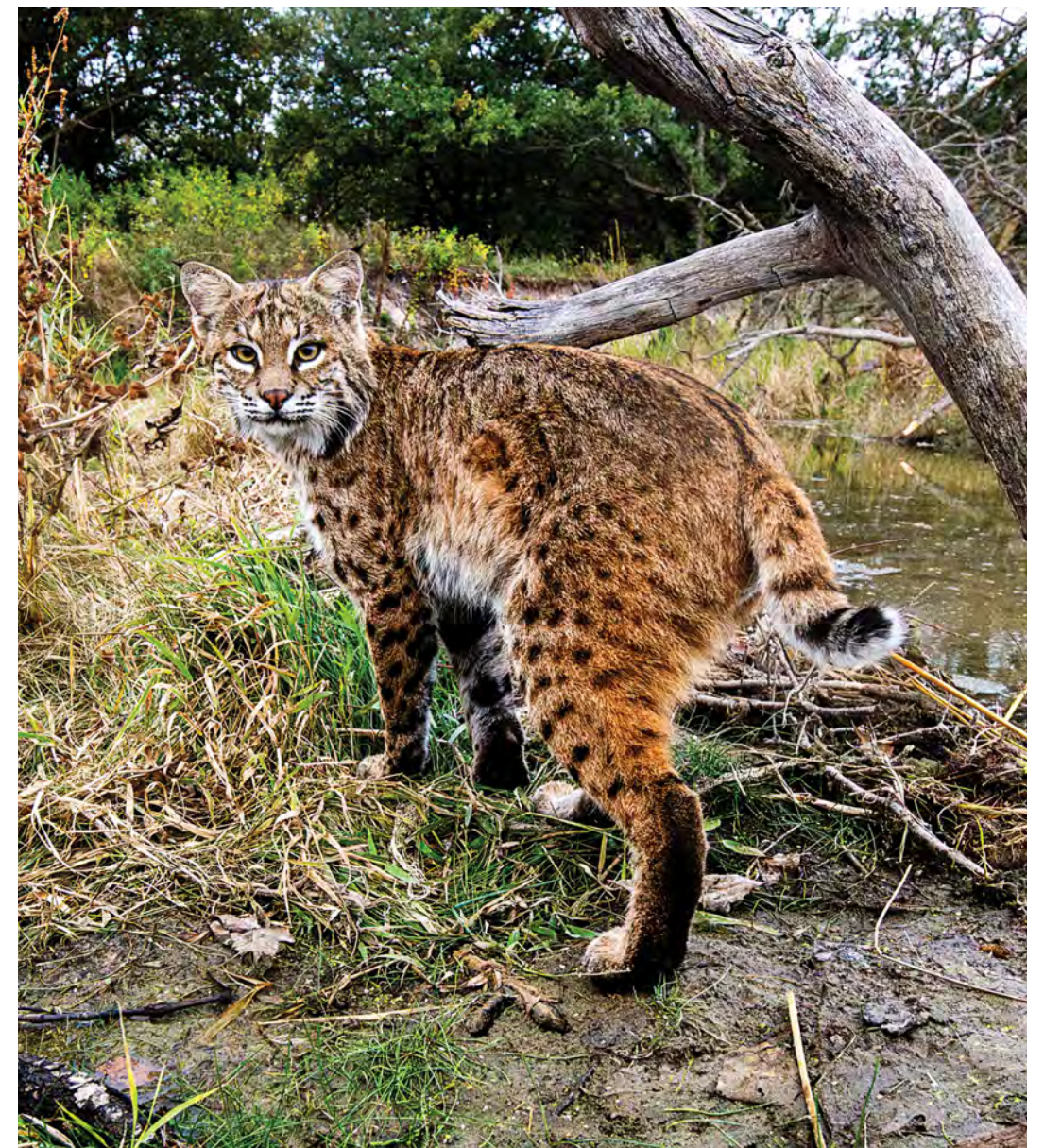
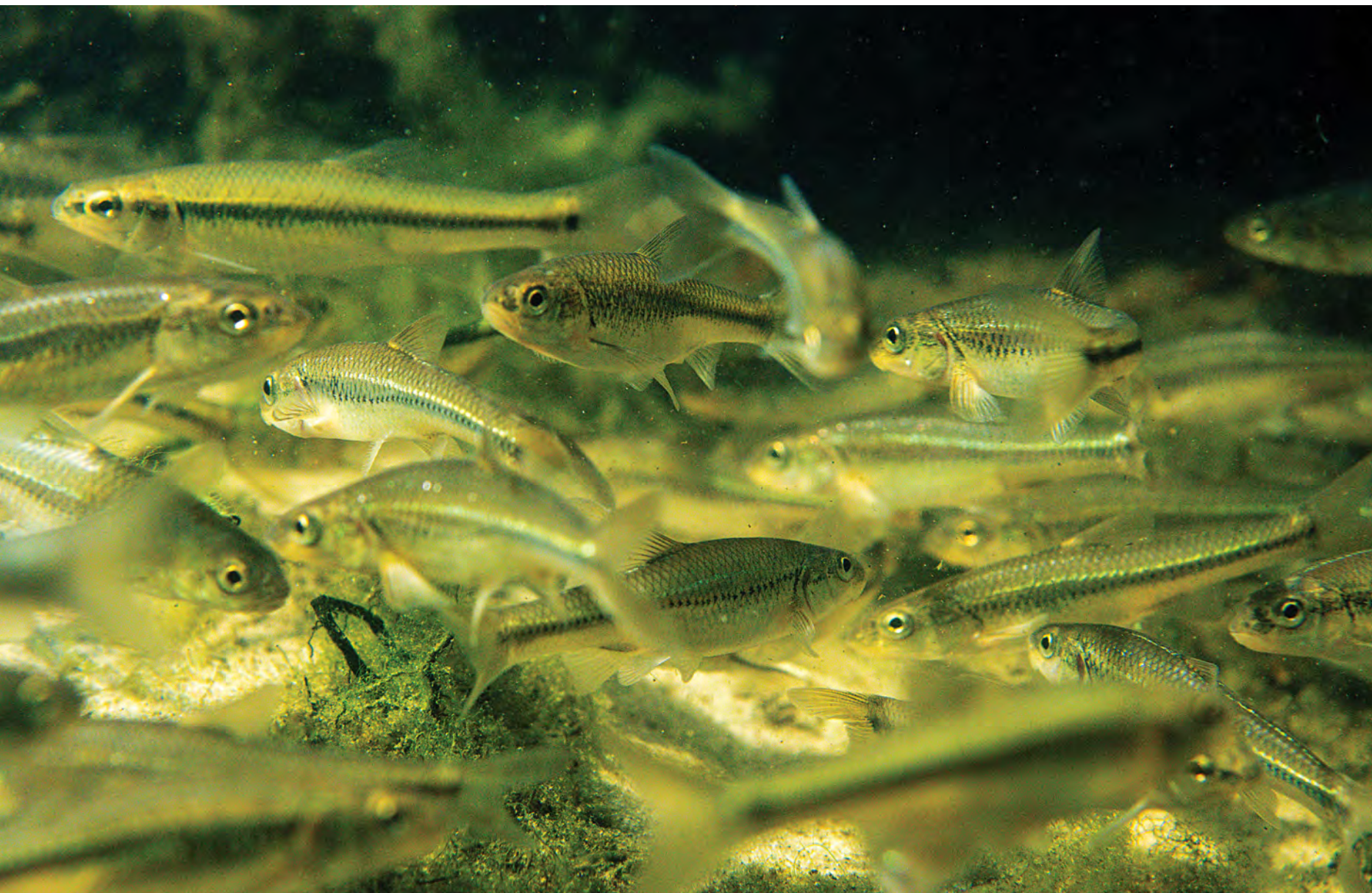
Thad Huenemann, rivers and streams biologist with the Game and Parks Commission, said aquatic life often explodes following a flood. What was left in the deeper pools when

the water receded thrived with the nutrients carried by floodwaters.

Vegetation continued to spread and flourish. Gerry Steinauer, a Game and Parks botanist, joined me on my next visit to Red Wing two weeks later. What was happening, he said, was classic river channel succession that occurs naturally in meandering rivers like the Elkhorn. The river had deposited the seeds of most of the plants sprouting from the sand. Many were flashy annuals, including lovegrasses, nutsedges and wildflowers, like beggarticks, that are adapted to growing in these ephemeral

habitats. Some species preferred higher, drier spots in the sand, and others, moist soils closer to pools or the groundwater fed stream. Wetland plants, such as swamp smartweed and cattails found a home in the pools. Knee-high thickets of young plains cottonwoods and peachleaf willows were extensive. Given time, they would mature, thin themselves and become forests.

By my next visit in the fall, vegetation had covered most of the bare sand. Beaver ponds, now numbering more than 20, stretched from one dam to the next. Resident





LEFT: Water pools behind one of many beaver dams built across the old channel to hold back flows fed by groundwater.

TOP RIGHT: Allegheny Monkey-flower blooms in the moist soils of the old channel.

teal and wood ducks were joined by migrating mallards.

I visited Red Wing four times in 2022. By mid-summer, the old channel that had been almost entirely bare sand in early 2021 was now completely green and vegetated. Snails were still abundant, but there were far fewer minnows in the pools. When I returned late August, in the midst of extreme drought, there was little water to be

found. Ponds behind the beaver dams, and the runs between them, were left high and dry. With nary a track to be found, the beavers had no doubt moved back to the river. Raccoons and other birds and mammals had likely feasted on the aquatic life as the pools dried up. Snail shells littered the bottom of dry pools.

Soon after the irrigation wells were shut off for the season, groundwater

levels recovered, and the water began flowing again. By November, the dams were full and water flowed between them, enough to provide a place for ducks to stop in their fall migration, and for duck hunters to deploy a decoy spread.

My only visit in 2023 came during a hot, dry spell in late July. Beaver dams still held water in the upper end of the old channel, but it was low

and not flowing between dams, and I saw no fresh sign. The middle reach was dry. The lower end, however, was brimming. The influence of groundwater was obviously stronger in some reaches than others. The beavers had figured this out. The dams they built in the wet reaches, once low lines of tangled sticks, were now several feet high and covered with mud, from which trees and other vegetation grew.

side. That pond was deeper than I was prepared to explore in my boots. I saw no minnows in the upper ponds, but I did see a few small bluegill, bass and pickerel, as well as snails. How they got into these pools that were dry a year earlier is testament to nature.

Perennial wildflowers, rushes and sedges were filling the marshes. On rich, moist soils, cottonwoods and willows were now head-high.

Wildflowers and grasses were becoming more established on the higher and drier, sandy soils.

The ebbs and flows of water, and the life in it, will likely continue at Red Wing. Will the river stay in its new channel? The next flood could easily send water rushing through a low spot in the upper end of the old channel. Will it be enough that the still-wild Elkhorn will change its mind again? Or will it remain on its new course, which is actually its old course from a century ago, something that continues to amaze me.

Only time will tell. [N](#)

Outdoor Nebraska

By Renae Blum

Autumn offers much to the outdoors enthusiast; get out there and enjoy it! This month, make some time for pheasant hunting, trout fishing, hiking and disc golf. 



Play disc golf at Chadron State Park

Throughout the month | Chadron

Chadron State Park's disc golf course is one of the best in the state, said park superintendent Gregg Galbraith. Well-designed and full of scenic beauty, this 18-hole course provides the perfect setting for fall fun. The bottom nine holes are great for families, while the top nine present more of a challenge. Loaner discs are available, or you can purchase some in the gift shop.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



Visit the Wildcat Hills Nature Center

Throughout the month | Gering

Visit this fascinating site to discover the secrets of the Wildcat Hills through interactive displays and interpretive programming. Visitors can also soak in the area's ancient past through interpretive paleontology and archeology displays. Bird viewing is a must here; the center boasts a large viewing area with several feeders and a view overlooking the North Platte River valley.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



Look for bird nests while hiking

Throughout the month
Statewide

While you're enjoying a hike on a crisp fall day, keep your eyes peeled for birds' nests. You could even bring along a nest field guide and try to identify what species built the nests you see. Get up close and look at how the nest was constructed, what materials were used and where the nest was placed — all interesting insights into the world of our feathered friends.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

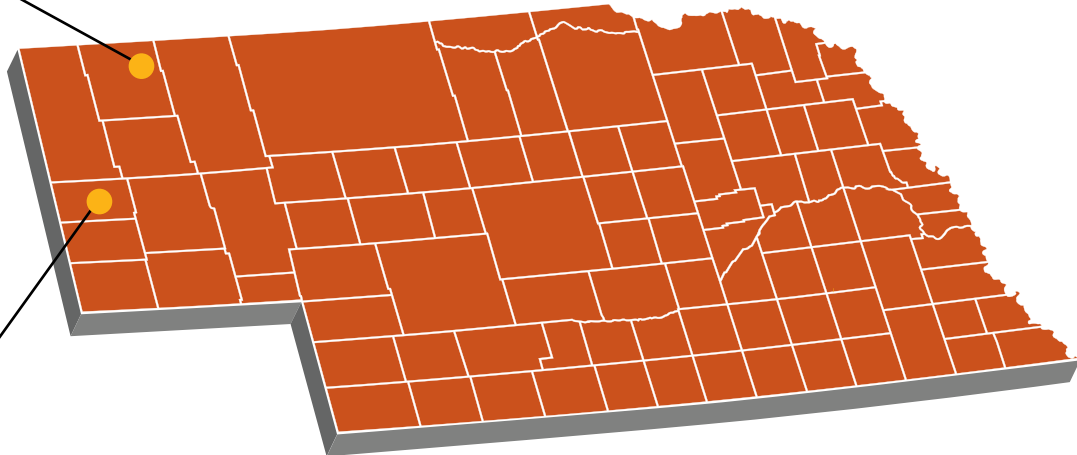


Work on completing the Trout Slam

Throughout the month | Various locations

Fall is one of the best times to work on completing the Nebraska Trout Slam — which you can do by catching, photographing and submitting a photo of Nebraska's four trout species. Rainbow trout were stocked in urban and park waters in October, as were some cutthroat trout, and trout can be found in cold-water streams in the northern and western regions of the state. Learn more at OutdoorNebraska.gov.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



Bring home a pheasant for Thanksgiving

Throughout the month | Statewide

Get out and enjoy Nebraska's upland bird hunting tradition this fall — and see if you can bring home a pheasant for the Thanksgiving table. They're tasty and easy to cook — and if you don't harvest enough for the main dish, try pheasant poppers for appetizers. A rooster's long tail feathers will also add a vibrant touch to your Thanksgiving centerpiece.

JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND



Shot Down in World War II

By David L. Bristow, History Nebraska

U.S. Navy Ensign John Doyle's chances of surviving World War II seemed bleak on Nov. 25, 1944, as he struggled to hold his burning dive bomber on target over the South China Sea," writes Samuel Van Pelt. "While attacking a Japanese heavy cruiser, anti-aircraft fire damaged his plane, but Doyle still managed to release his bomb and score a hit on the ship."

Back home in Lincoln, Nebraska, Doyle's parents, Lewis ("Lum") and Mary, received a telegram saying their 20-year-old son, also known as Dugie, was missing in action. Later, they received a letter from Captain Dixie Kiefer, commander of Dugie's aircraft carrier, the USS Ticonderoga. By coincidence, the captain was an old friend of Lum's. He wrote:

"It was the most heroic case I have seen on this trip and was over and above the call of duty. His plane caught fire at 9,000 feet from anti-aircraft. Instead of getting over friendly natives and using the parachute, knowing that the cruiser was the biggest type and a very important target, he went on down and scored a direct hit, crippling it so others could sink it. He has been recommended and will receive the Navy Cross. He then landed in the water and was seen by the rest to get clear and in a rubber boat."



A Curtiss "Helldiver" circles above an aircraft carrier in the South Pacific, January 1945. U.S. NAVY PHOTO, 80-G-320999



Ensign John R. Doyle, USN. Courtesy of the Doyle Family



Luzon, the Philippines. Robert Ross Smith, *United States Army in World War II, The War in the Pacific: Triumph in the Philippines*. OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF MILITARY HISTORY, DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY, 1993

By then, a month had passed, and Dugie was still missing. He had gone down off the Philippine island of Luzon, but it was occupied by the Japanese.

In 1993, Dugie Doyle — still very much alive — told his story to fellow Lincoln attorney Sam Van Pelt. Doyle explained



Doyle and the other rescued fliers aboard the aircraft tender at the U.S. fleet anchorage near Leyte, January 1945 (left to right): Maurice Nayland; Doyle, N. J. Roccaforte; P. R. Schleitchy; W. W. King. Nayland, Roccaforte, and King were killed in an airplane crash soon after the photograph was taken. COURTESY OF THE DOYLE FAMILY



The U.S. Navy aircraft carrier USS Ticonderoga (CV-14) lists to port in the aftermath of a kamikaze attack in which four suicide planes hit the ship on Jan. 21, 1945. This was Doyle's carrier, but he was not aboard at the time of that attack.

U.S. NAVY - U.S. NAVY NATIONAL MUSEUM OF NAVAL AVIATION PHOTO NO. 2000.219.001 [1]

that after he and his crewman took to their raft, they floated for more than a day waiting for a rescue sub. Then, “all of a sudden, I never saw this Japanese plane coming. He was right on top of us.” Doyle and his crewman flipped the raft over while the Japanese plane flew so close that Doyle could see the observer’s goggles.

After that, they figured they had better take their chances on shore. A Filipino man guided them to a small village of bamboo huts, where local people fed them. But “the word got out that Americans were up in the hills ... We got the hell out of there just in time.”

A local guerilla leader led them to the hideout of Lt. Colonel Giles Merrill, who had escaped the Bataan death march in 1942 and had been living in the jungle since. Rail-thin from malaria and dysentery, Merrill “was a character and would strap on his pith helmet and his .45” while working with local Filipinos to protect any Allies who came his way. He kept up with the latest news in a hut that was “a regular war room” with a card table, road maps and a bicycle-powered shortwave radio receiver.

Merrill knew that three downed American flyers were

hiding out in an isolated bay 7 miles distant. Doyle and his crewman went to join them. Doyle urged Merrill to come along. At the bay, Doyle argued, they would stand a better chance of rescue. But Merrill remained at his remote command post to await the promised return of General Douglas MacArthur to the Philippines.

At the bay, Doyle and the others signaled passing U.S. planes. “When they came over, we would catch them with the mirror and get their attention. Then we would write stuff in great big letters in the sand, like ‘food,’ ‘fever’ and the code word for a rescue plane in the navy, ‘Dumbo.’” One day, an army A-20 zoomed the beach but didn’t make it up over the hills.

“He stalled out and crashed. Oh God, the plane’s ammunition was going off for about three hours.” The next day, Jan. 10, 1945, two of the men on the beach climbed the hill to bury the plane’s crew. It was then that a Navy PBV “Catalina” flying boat landed in the bay.

“They must’ve set the world’s dash record coming down that hill. The natives then rowed us in a wooden bark or hollowed log canoe out to the PBV, and we all got aboard.”

Doyle and the others were soon back with the U.S. fleet off the eastern shore of Leyte, where three of the five men were pronounced fit to “rejoin their outfits or go home.”

But Doyle was sick with malaria. He argued with the doctor, but was not allowed to board the transport plane with the others.



Doyle receiving the Navy Cross from Rear Adm. Arthur C. Davis during Oct. 26, 1945, ceremonies at the University of Nebraska. Capt. M. D. Matthews, commander of the university’s naval ROTC program, left, was also decorated for wartime service.

COURTESY OF THE DOYLE FAMILY



The transport crashed soon after takeoff, killing all on board.

“I would have been on that plane if I hadn’t had malaria or had won that argument with the doctor ... It was from an Anopheles mosquito, and it saved my life.”

Back home in Lincoln, Doyle went on to a distinguished career as an attorney and as president of the Lincoln Council on Alcoholism and chairman of the National Council on Alcoholism. When he died in 2013, he was known more for “his life serving others” (in the words of a Lincoln Journal Star headline) than for his Navy Cross.

Abiding by Doyle’s wishes, Van Pelt withheld the 1993 interview from publication during Doyle’s lifetime. Nebraska History Magazine printed the full interview in 2014. You can find it by searching “Dugie Doyle” at history.nebraska.gov

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



John R. Doyle COURTESY OF CHICK THORNE AND THE COUNTRY CLUB OF LINCOLN

Upland Hunting the Sandhills

A Scientific Approach

A wildlife biologist at the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge shares his perspectives on one of his favorite pastimes: hunting prairie grouse.

Story and photos by Justin Haag

Melvin Nenneman knows birds. As wildlife biologist for the 71,516-acre Valentine National Wildlife Refuge the past 21 years, he's become familiar with flying creatures that range in size from the huge pelicans cruising the shallow lakes to minute grasshopper sparrows fluttering about the rolling, grass-covered dunes. He and his coworkers strive to preserve and maintain the ecosystem for birds and all of the other plants and animals. From Blanding's turtles to western prairie fringed orchids, he's become intimate with the many species that make the Sandhills such a special place.

Nenneman's time at the refuge also has provided opportunity to pursue a favorite pastime: hunting. Among his favorite quarries are Nebraska's native prairie grouse.

While following Nenneman, his dog Patch and a coworker around the hills in search of upland game during an evening, the biologist shared his insights. My questions and his answers follow.

Upon first look, the Sandhills can be intimidating for a bird hunter — an expanse of rolling hills as far as the eye can see. Which areas of the hills should hunters focus?

Generally, finding hills that have good grass cover and food resources will improve your odds of finding birds. Areas that have been grazed or otherwise disturbed such that the grass is more uniformly short are not great places to look. If there is a good food source in these grazed areas, it may have birds,

With the sun low on the horizon, Mel Nenneman and Patch, an English cocker spaniel, pursue grouse at the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge.

but they will be hard to get close to. Areas that are ungrazed, grazed early in the season so that the grass has recovered, or lightly grazed areas tend to be good places to look for prairie grouse. Talking to land managers — be it the ranchers, federal or state land managers — can be a good start in figuring out where to hunt. Vegetation height also seems to be important to grouse. They tend to avoid uniformly short, ankle-high, and uniformly tall, waist-high vegetation, with a preference for heights in the mid-shin to knee-high range. Taller vegetation may be used if there is a lot of shorter cover mixed throughout.

How much work is required to bag a grouse in the Sandhills? How's the terrain for hiking?

Generally, a hunter should be prepared to do some walking to bag prairie grouse in the Sandhills. If grouse numbers are good and you are in the right habitat, a limit of three birds in two to three hours of walking is reasonable. If grouse

numbers are down, bagging one grouse in that amount of time would be a success.

How you cover the ground can make a difference as well; taking more time to thoroughly walk an area of good cover can be more effective than covering a lot of miles in a straight line. The first steep hill to hike up always seems to be the most challenging to me. Once I've gotten up onto a dune ridge I plan to hunt, the terrain tends to be more rolling than steep climbs all the time. That said, it helps to do some walking ahead of the grouse hunting season if you want to enjoy your hunt.

How does grouse behavior change throughout the day?

Grouse do have habits throughout the day, which can be impacted by the weather conditions. Typically, they will leave the site that they roosted for the night early in the day to spend some time foraging. Around mid-morning, they will typically settle into a day roost to rest and digest the food





Nenneman loads his shotgun with steel ammunition, which complies with the refuge's requirement of non-toxic shot.

that they gathered in their crop (the temporary storage in their esophagus) that morning. In the mid- to late afternoon, they will leave their roost to forage again before finding a place to roost for the night during the last bit of daylight.

On warm days, they will seek day-roost sites that have shade or cooler microclimates, which are typically the north-facing slopes of dune ridges or patches of shrubs or other tall vegetation. On colder days, they will seek enough cover to conserve energy during the day. In rainy conditions, I have found them in areas with less cover — bare patches of sand in the hills and cattle loafing areas. If you flush grouse while you are hunting, make a note of where the grouse flushed from and hunt similar locations for the time of day and season.

How does grouse hunting change throughout the season (Sept. 1-Jan. 31)?

Early in the season, young of the year grouse are often still with the hen, and consuming more animal foods — grasshoppers and other invertebrates — and it is more likely to find these birds lower in the landscape, along the edges of meadows or in meadows with open canopies that allow the birds to move freely. Areas with a lot of flowering plant

diversity are good as they tend to have greater abundance of these invertebrates.

As the season goes on, all prairie grouse tend to switch to a more vegetarian diet, so finding areas with ample rose hips and poison ivy berries can be productive. They also like green vegetation — sprouting flowering plants and new grass growth is attractive forage. Later in the season, especially if there is a lot of snow, grouse will consume cedar cones (often called berries, but actually a cone) or other food sources available above the snow, such as seeds of trees and tree buds.

Early in the season, you may find grouse in the shade of a plum or chokecherry thicket, or tall but open forbs in a meadow, while late in the season you might find them on a south-facing slope where the snow has melted off. During the warm early months of the season, feeding bouts tend to be shorter as food resources tend to be more plentiful and energy requirements are lower, while in colder weather, grouse will spend more time actively feeding to meet energy demands.

Both prairie-chickens and sharptails can be found in your vicinity. Within the region, where do they reside? Does the habitat vary between species?

Both species need large expanses of grassland habitat with little development to persist in the landscape. Across the Sandhills, prairie-chickens are more common to the east and south, while sharptails are more common to the north and west in the region, with a lot of overlap of the two species across the middle region.

Generally, prairie-chickens tend to be found in and adjacent to the sub-irrigated meadows more often, while sharptails tend to be out in the Sandhill dune prairie. Prairie-chickens seem to avoid trees and shrubs more so than sharptails, and sharptails prefer some of the highest, roughest hills in the area.

Prairie-chickens seem to exhibit a short-distance migratory behavior in the late fall and winter, with many chickens apparently leaving the refuge to find center pivot agricultural crops. This is based on the observation that during the spring breeding season, there are roughly equal numbers of male sharp-tailed grouse and prairie-chickens on the refuge, while in the fall harvest, most of the birds taken on the refuge are sharptails. Researchers elsewhere in the Sandhills have documented prairie-chickens moving from the Sandhills to center-pivot agricultural areas and feedlots during the winter.

What's the status of grouse populations on the refuge/region? I assume the harsh winter was not good for them. What weather and climate conditions do grouse need to thrive?

Prairie grouse, and sharptails in particular, are pretty

well adapted to survive tough winters, and they seem to have weathered the winter of 2022-23 pretty well based on lek counts this spring. Weather seems to play a key role in determining how successful prairie grouse are during the nesting season.

Researchers have made a connection between temperature and precipitation during the nesting and brood rearing seasons on prairie grouse reproduction. Having adequate soil moisture from precipitation to grow vegetation for nesting and brood rearing is important, while having too much rain in June when the chicks are hatching has a negative impact. Similarly, warmer average temperatures in June positively influence grouse production, but days over 95 degrees Fahrenheit had a negative impact on production.

Overall warmer temperatures likely allow increased productivity in the invertebrates that chicks rely on for rapid growth and development and increases the amount of time chicks can spend foraging (versus brooding under the hen). Temperatures above 95 F can be lethal to young chicks as they are less able to regulate their body temperature and cannot travel far to find thermal cover.

Additional research looking at nest sites selected by hens has found the nest locations to have better thermal protection against cooler and warmer temperatures and to help avoid exposing eggs and the hens to the extreme warm temperatures during the day. Hot temperatures during the summer are possibly more of a problem for grouse than cold winter temperatures. Weather conditions that allow for the production of good food resources and adequate

cover are important, so the “goldilocks” zone of enough rain but not too much rain, and warmth but not too much warmth is probably ideal. This summer may have been an example of good reproductive conditions for grouse; we had about average rainfall which was spaced out well across the growing season, there were no extreme hot or cold temperatures during the critical hatching and early brood rearing stages, and we avoided storms with hail. An Audubon Society analysis of potential climate change impacts on birds suggests warming temperatures and lower precipitation may combine to make Nebraska and the Sandhills less hospitable to sharp-tailed grouse, while the trend for prairie-chickens was stable. Nebraska is the southern extent of the range of sharp-tailed grouse.

Prairie grouse are not the only upland bird species in the Sandhills. Tell me about the pheasant population. Ever see any quail or partridge?

The ring-necked pheasant is an introduced game bird from Eurasia and was released in Nebraska starting in the early 1900s. The Sandhills are not prime habitat for these birds, but there is a decent population on the refuge and in pockets on surrounding ranches.

Pheasant numbers can fluctuate markedly from year to year, influenced greatly by weather. Cold and snowy winters tend to negatively affect pheasant populations as they are not well adapted to these conditions. At Valentine NWR, there is a population of pheasants that seems to sustain itself. There is enough cover in the form of cattails and tree rows to get



With leaves fallen, a flock of sharptails gather in a thicket in early November. Nenneman said the birds are drawn to thickets early in the season for their shade.

them through most winters, and plenty of grassland habitat to sustain the population.

Pheasants tend to do well where there is a matrix of row crop fields interspersed with grasslands, but there are enough native food items for them to make a living at the refuge in the absence of agricultural crops. The pheasant density here is nothing like you would find in South Dakota, but there are usually enough here to make it fun to chase them. Bobwhite quail are usually pretty scarce here, although there is often a covey or two around. While they are legal to hunt on the refuge, I wouldn't plan on coming here for a quail hunt. Bobwhite numbers here are typically low.

Gray partridge have been documented on the refuge in the past, but I have not encountered one here, so I would have to say encountering a partridge on the refuge would indeed be a chance encounter.

Besides the refuge, what other nearby public lands are good for upland bird hunting?

McKelvie National Forest has been good for prairie grouse recently, and the staff there has been making a map of its grazing program available each fall to help hunters decide where to go on the forest. Similar to the refuge, most of their prairie grouse harvest is sharp-tailed grouse with a good sprinkling of greater prairie-chickens in the mix. There are several Nebraska Game and Parks Commission wildlife management areas nearby that provide opportunities for both prairie grouse and pheasants — and the occasional quail. Ballard's Marsh has a good mix of habitat that makes for a nice place to try for grouse or roosters. Merritt Reservoir and Schlagel Creek WMAs can also hold some birds.

Tell me about the wing bee. What have you learned from it?

Valentine and Crescent Lake national wildlife refuges, and Nebraska National Forest, Bessey Division and McKelvie National Forest all have locations for prairie grouse hunters

to drop off one wing from each grouse they harvest. These volunteer wing return boxes have envelopes that hunters can place wings in, and they are asked to fill out some information about their hunt; providing names or address is optional, but it would be great if the date, number of hunters and number of birds harvested were filled in. Nebraska Game and Parks also collects a sample of wings from the east and west prairie grouse zones. After the grouse season closes, a group of biologists gets together for the Prairie Grouse Wing Bee —

here, we go through all of the wings that hunters submitted and determine the species of grouse (sharp-tailed grouse or greater prairie-chicken, and sometimes we can pick out hybrids), and then determine from the wing molt if the bird is an adult or juvenile (or hatch year bird = bird hatched in that year).

We use this information to calculate a juvenile to adult ratio from the harvest, and if hunters provide the date of the hunt, we can backdate from the known age of a juvenile grouse to figure out an approximate hatch date.

Calculating the hatch date can shed some light on habitat conditions and how successful hens were at hatching their first nesting attempt versus a second or third try. If

there is adequate nesting cover — residual vegetation from the previous year — hens can begin nesting earlier (and the peak of hatching would be earlier) than if they need to delay nesting to use the current year's growth for concealment, which pushes the peak of hatching later. If there are two peaks in hatch dates, it shows that a number of first nesting attempts failed and the hens renested and hatched a second attempt. These data provide a measure of the harvest on these public lands, and the ratio of juveniles to adults in the harvest provides an index of grouse production. When the number of juveniles in the harvest is high relative to the number of adults, it represents a year of good production while ratios with more adults show poor reproduction. A ratio with 2.5 or more juveniles per adult in the harvest is



A sharptail forages among the grass. Grouse tend to avoid uniformly short or uniformly tall vegetation.



Nenneman gives Patch a drink. Especially while covering large expanses, a hunter must tend to the dog's needs.

indicative of good reproduction and a population that should grow.

Let's talk gear. What do you prefer for a shotgun?

I am probably not going to give a very exciting answer to this, as I'm not that interested in owning every gauge of shotgun ever made or caliber of rifle produced. I tend to find a gun that works for me and stick with it, so I hunt upland birds with a 12 gauge over-and-under shotgun I purchased off the used gun rack at a Cabela's about 15 years ago. With non-toxic shot, I use cylinder and improved cylinder choke tubes in my gun.

That said, the most effective shotgun and choke tube combination for any hunter will be a gun they can carry for hours while walking, comes up to the shoulder well, and that they can hit flying targets with. You could have the finest, most expensive shotgun on the market but if it is too heavy and doesn't fit you well, you are going to hit less birds.

Any other gear advice?

Grouse hunting can be a minimalist pursuit. Probably most important among gear is a good pair of hiking or hunting boots as you'll only go as far as your feet will take you. Pair good boots with clothes that keep you comfortable. I like moisture-wicking shirts that can be layered as needed and a decent pair of hunting pants that resists stickers and burs.

Also, a hunting vest with enough pockets to carry adequate water for you and your canine companion, a shotgun and shells are pretty much all you need. And snacks!

The refuge requires the use of non-toxic shot. Any preference among the various types, such as bismuth, tungsten and steel?

I have not tried all the different non-toxic shot available. I started bird hunting as a relatively poor college student/biological technician/graduate student, so I used the most inexpensive non-toxic shot available, which was steel. I've had success using steel shot, so I have not felt the need to use any other shot types. I usually use 2¾-inch shells with 1½ ounce of No. 4 shot traveling at 1400 fps, which seems to be a great all-around load for grouse, pheasants and ducks over decoys.

What other special regulations should people be aware of?

As far as the refuge goes, the main things to know are that we do not allow camping, fires, or the use of ATVs or UTVs; hunters are allowed access from 2 hours before sunrise to 2 hours after sunset; and vehicle travel is allowed only on refuge trails designated as open to motor vehicles. <https://shorturl.at/cwBMW>

The refuge brochure with all regulations is available at <https://shorturl.at/cwBMW>

Booming Bobcats

Something of a mystery, Nebraska's bobcat population remains healthy.

By Justin Haag

As I moved among patches of shoulder-high weeds at an abandoned farmstead in search of pheasants, I glanced over to see my younger brother, fresh out of hunter-safety training, become excited as he entered a clearing.

"Whoa, what was that? It looked like a lion," he shouted as an unfamiliar creature scurried into cover.

Despite any skepticism by those of us in the hunting party that day, we now know his exciting encounter, which happened in the mid-1990s, was surely a bobcat. While sightings of the species were rare in years preceding that hunt, the chance meeting coincided with an incredible population boom for the species, and such encounters have become more common by Nebraskans in years since.

One Cool Cat

The bobcat (*Lynx rufus*) is regarded as one of Nebraska's most handsome wildlife species, especially among cat-lovers. Notable features include its spotted fur, facial ruffs, ear tufts and, of course, the bobbed tail for which it gets its name.

Bobcats average about 20 pounds, with the larger toms sometimes exceeding 30 pounds. They're about one-third the size of Nebraska's other resident wildcat species, the cougar, and stand under 2 feet tall.

The bobcat's reddish-brown, gray

and black-spotted coat provides camouflage that helps it ambush cottontail rabbits, its favorite prey. Studies have shown that more than 90 percent of the bobcat's diet consists of cottontails, but the opportunistic carnivore also will occasionally feed on ground-nesting birds, rodents and even deer. Reportedly, it is quick enough that it can sometimes grab a low-flying bird from the air. Yes, cat-like reflexes.

Individual bobcats have a range of up to 30 square miles, but must avoid becoming prey to coyotes, cougars, foxes, owls and humans. Although they may growl, meow, hiss or scream for mating and other reasons, they are quiet as they hunt for food, find mates and move between den sites.

The bobcat is highly adaptable and has a broad distribution throughout the lower 48 states and bordering regions of Mexico and Canada. It is one of four lynx species in the world, and one of just two in North America. The other American species is the less adaptable Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) that resides in cold, snowy climates.

The Boom

Population estimates for such elusive, primarily nocturnal, species are difficult to figure, but evidence shows there are certainly more bobcats in the state than there used to be. Sam Wilson, Game and Parks furbearer and

carnivore program manager, said the species' harvest records, which date back to 1941, indicate a remarkable surge within the past few decades.

Similar to most wildlife species, the bobcat population suffered during the westward settlement of Euro-Americans in the late 1800s and early 1900s. It is a survivor, however.

"The historical strongholds for bobcats were that wild part of the Niobrara River Valley, the Pine Ridge and maybe a few around the Wildcat Hills; those steeper and wilder areas of the state had a few that could stay hidden or eke out a living," Wilson said.

Bobcat pelts are internationally coveted and are the most valuable of Nebraska's fur-bearing species. When the market is high, one pelt can fetch several hundred dollars. At a certain point in history, more hunters and trappers began enjoying bobcat success.

"In the late 1990s, something changed. Biologists aren't really sure what happened," Wilson said. "Populations boomed across much of the Midwest, including Nebraska. Nebraska's harvest went from 50 to 200 for about 50 years all the way to 1,500. Not only did harvest go up, particularly in the southeast in the early years, but bobcats spread into most parts of Nebraska."

Now, hunters and trappers are reporting bobcat success in all but just



A bobcat walks along a cliff in the Pine Ridge, which for many years was one of the few places the species could be found in Nebraska. Now, it's widely distributed throughout the state. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

a few Nebraska counties. The counties without bobcat reports are mostly covered with corn and soybeans and void of wooded creek bottoms and tall grasses.

During the population surge, the bobcat harvest particularly skyrocketed in the southeastern part of the state where few cats had been reported in years prior. The successful harvest has continued there and moved into the south-central and southwestern regions.

In the agency's most recent reporting period, Harlan, Red Willow (the location of my brother's sighting years ago) and Furnas counties on the state's southern border had the highest harvest density, ranging from 5.7 to 7 per 100 square miles.

The bobcats' appearance varies by region and time of year and the individual. The fur is generally considered to be more attractive, soft and consequently valuable the farther north and west they reside.

"A lot of the cats in the southeastern part of the state are orange and gray, and you don't even see spots until you look close, although a few do have the classic dark spots," Wilson said.

The season for hunting and trapping bobcats runs from Dec. 1 through the end of February, when their pelts are prime. A fur harvesting permit and habitat stamp are required to kill them. Anyone who harvests a bobcat must contact Game and Parks to have it registered and tagged for the Convention on International Trade in

Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

"This is done in part to ensure legally harvested bobcat pelts are not confused with similar pelts of protected endangered species, like Iberian lynx," Wilson said. "This also allows the Commission to accurately determine how many bobcats are harvested each year to ensure the species is properly managed."

Sound management will ensure sightings of the species occur for generations to come. And excitement will always be justified when encountering the elusive, handsome bobcat, whether it be the Pine Ridge, the bluffs of the Missouri River, or an abandoned farmstead in Red Willow County. ■

COLD-WEATHER CAMPING

By Jamie Bachmann, Wildlife Educator

In Nebraska, high summer reigns as the busiest season for family camping, but I'm the kind of mom who prefers to avoid the distractions of busy campgrounds. Unfortunately, opportunities for isolation can be limited in the summer. So, when my children were young, I heard tales — near legends — of families embracing cold-weather camping. Then in March 2003, a single car camping trip to see the sandhill crane migration launched nearly two decades of cold-weather camping.

On that first trip, my oldest was 3 years old and my youngest was 5 months and still nursing. Yes, there was a diaper change in the middle of the night when it was below 20 degrees outside. Yes, it was more traumatic for me than the baby — but it was worth it. Although these trips were not always easy and comfortable, they've become some of my kids' favorite and most memorable outdoor experiences. My boys have grown to become resilient because of those experiences.

The Advantages of Off-Season Camping

Camping is closely tied with the communal fire. While summer campfires are for cooking and keeping the bugs away only, in the cold, the warmth of a fire becomes enjoyable. I am an advocate for letting kids play with a campfire. Poking at a fire or tossing in pine cones are great ways for children to develop their risk assessment of fire and learn to respect it.

Cold-weather camping also means you are working with sunset near 5 p.m. in December versus 9 p.m. in June. Earlier bedtimes are a symptom of camping in the off season. My kiddos were always ready to climb into their sleeping bags a couple of hours earlier than their regular bedtimes.

Cold weather clears out insects and most people, too. Fewer people means less noise and more wildlife viewing opportunities.

Gear

When we started cold-weather camping, we simply took our summer gear and extra layers, and then slowly over the

years, started upgrading. As any gearhead knows, quality camping gear is expensive, but please, remember that cold weather camping is accessible without having to spend a lot of cash on fancy new gear. Borrow from friends, buy used or just pack more layers until you know you are dedicated to continuing this pastime.

SLEEPING BAGS – If you don't have the extra cash for a cold-weather bag, line your existing sleeping bag with another blanket or bag liner to increase the temperature rating. A tip: The transition from shedding outer layers and hopping into a cold sleeping bag can be a tough go for kids. A hot water bottle will warm up a bag, but I worried about it leaking. So, I switched to hot rocks! Set the kids out to collect rocks and warm them up by the fire.

CAMP MAT – Without this barrier, the cold ground will pull heat from your body, making for a miserable night. Sleeping mats don't have to be rated for cold weather — use your summer camp mat and an extra blanket to lie on top.

TENTS – If you have a two- or three-season tent that keeps

out the rain, that will work just fine. The most important thing is to keep dry — getting wet is the worst when it's cold, which can also quickly turn into an emergency.

LAYERS – Mornings and nights will be cold, but dress your children in layers that they can peel off if you experience a sunny, warm day. Here is how I dress my kids: I start with a base layer, something a little tighter fitting that a couple more layers can fit over. Over the layers, they wear insulated bib overalls, which can be easily removed during warmer spells. Next, a shell jacket will help keep them dry and block out the prairie wind. Cold feet and hands are the quickest way to put out the fire on a good winter adventure. I keep a stock of hand warmers to tuck inside pockets and boots. Also, ear bands will provide protection, even when it's too warm to wear a stocking cap.

The P's

There is just no way around it, the inevitable baring of skin for the P's: pee and poo. Boys may have it a little easier than

girls, but we all end up having to squat at some point in time. Diaper wipes will always have a place at my camp.

On a related note: When my youngest was 3, we camped in an ice storm, and a few days after our family adventure, he broke out in poison ivy in the only three places that get exposed in such weather: his hands, face and groin.

Urushiol is the compound in poison ivy that is responsible for my son's nasty reaction, and it exists in every part of the plant, even during dormancy and also when it's dead. Know how to identify poison ivy in any season and pass on that knowledge to your children.

If cold-weather camping sounds as though it could scratch an itch for your family, start by planning a couple of trips mid- to late fall. Head over to OutdoorNebraska.gov and search “camping,” and take a look at what Nebraska camping has to offer in the off-season. 

POISON IVY, GETTYIMAGES



if you prepare well, winter camping offers solitude, no insects, and quality time with family outdoors. GETTYIMAGES

YOUR NEBRASKA STATE PARKS — INDOOR STYLE

By Renae Blum

When it's too cold to be outdoors, you don't have to stay cooped up at home. Try any of these opportunities for indoor fun, where you can learn more about nature and Nebraska history, get active or be entertained.



Educational Opportunities

Interested in learning more about a particular place? Then you'll love the Wildcat Hills Nature Center, which explores the features of this pine-clad butte range, and the Missouri National Recreational River Resource and Education Center, located at Ponca State Park, where you can learn more about the Missouri River. Also check out Schramm Education Center near Gretna, which explores Nebraska's aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems.

Want to learn how fish are raised and stocked across the state? Visit one of Nebraska Game and Parks' five fish hatcheries, many of which offer tours and educational opportunities.



Recreational Activities

Bring the family to Eugene T. Mahoney State Park's Activity Center, which hosts a large indoor playground with fun tubes,

slides, net bridges and ball pit. Or go next door to the Venture Climb complex, which features a 42-foot climbing wall and bouldering structure.

If you enjoy archery and target shooting, or would like to learn, visit the Turpin Outdoor Education Center in Lincoln. This family-friendly facility offers indoor archery and firearm ranges, educational classes, workshops, special events and instruction for all ages and skill levels.



Museums

Interested in Nebraska history? Many of Nebraska's state historical parks offer museums or visitor centers where you can indulge your curiosity in Nebraska's past.

Arbor Lodge State Historical Park, located in Nebraska City, is the home of Arbor Day. During the park's winter hours, tour this elegant mansion and learn more about the Morton family.

Many other park museums and visitor centers are open only by appointment in the winter months, so you can enjoy having the place to yourself. This includes Ash Hollow, Buffalo Bill Ranch, Fort Atkinson, Fort Hartsuff, Fort Kearny and Rock Creek Station state historical parks.

Entertainment

Be dazzled by magic tricks and sleight of hand at Eugene T. Mahoney State Park, which is hosting performances by magician Ryan Chandler throughout the winter at Kountze Memorial Theater. Find the schedule at melodrama.net and reserve your tickets by calling 402-944-2523, ext. 7122.

For more information on the activities listed here, visit OutdoorNebraska.gov. A park entry permit is required at Nebraska state parks.



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IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU

By Jeff Kurrus

We've all messed up at one point here: When introducing a newcomer to hunting — whether it's a kid or adult — we try to make them love exactly what we love. Some do, but many don't. To effectively pass on hunting skills, what we need are smarter ways to welcome people to the sport.

So, the next time you introduce someone to hunting, do so with this in mind — what type of hunting will match what you know about their personality?

Here are a few ideas to get you thinking.

Stand Deer Hunting

Hunting from a deer stand is perfect for patient people and those who like to watch the day, and all the nature around them, unfold. Anyone who carries around an occasional paperback book, or likes reading on their electronic device,

can do so in the deer stand. Bird lovers are good candidates, as well. If firearm hunting during November or January, make sure your hunter is properly clothed to stay warm. Folks who don't like the cold will balk the second time you ask them to tag along if you didn't prepare them well the first time.

Spot-and-Stalk Deer Hunting

If your friend wants to add a workout component to their hunting, this is the sport for them. Adventurers and people who love to hike or bike will enjoy finding themselves in the middle of nowhere. Spotting and stalking is for gearheads as well: people who love using trail cameras, spotting scopes, binoculars and GPS maps.

Waterfowl Hunting

This type of hunting is for your organizers, your room cleaners and your arrangers — the kids, or adults, in your life who simply can't sit still. For there is always time to readjust your decoys. Waterfowl hunting is also good for music lovers; when a blind is filled with hunters who know how to blow a duck or goose call correctly, it sounds like an outdoor symphony.

Turkey Hunting

Chasing toms has always reminded me of playing war as a kid, sneaking, plotting and moving across the terrain like I'm a pretend sniper. It's also for the tricksters in your group and the practical jokers — those who have a knack for luring in folks for a story or situation, which is a lot like luring a big tom into a set of hen decoys.

Upland Hunting

Nothing is better for dog lovers than upland hunting. From pheasants to quail and the prairie-chickens and other grouse in between, watching a pointer or flusher track down game is more exciting than pulling the trigger. Upland hunting is great for walkers as well — those who might enjoy spending their downtime circling the track at the local high school.

Right now, I have no idea what type of hunting my 4-year-old son will like. What I do know is that he absolutely loves to be outside in the dark wearing a headlamp. This has led us to hunting frogs one to two nights a week since bullfrog season opened. Eventually, these frog hunts will be replaced by nighttime fishing trips and, maybe, if we get lucky, a raccoon hunt or two.

When we introduce newcomers to hunting, we must do so with one aspect firmly planted in mind — them.



Upland hunting is for hikers and exercise enthusiasts.
JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND



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ANIMAL VISION

By Monica Macoubrie, Wildlife Education Specialist

Eyes on the side hide, eyes on the front hunt.

The size, ability and position of the eyes of animals can vary widely depending on the species, environment and whether the animal is predator or prey. Some animals can move their eyes independently; some can see in ultraviolet light; and others can't really see much at all. Throughout this article, we will take a closer look into four types of animal eyes and their uses and functions.

Dragonflies

Dragonflies are often considered the apex predators of the insect world, despite their small size. They have the ability to catch food right out of the air during flight, thanks to their humongous, globular compound eyes. Compared to African lions, which have a capture success rate of 25 percent when pursuing prey, dragonflies are successful about 95 percent of the time.

A dragonfly's compound eyes cover most of its head, and they can see nearly 360 degrees around them. Two separate eyes come together at the top, and within each eye are smaller lenses. Depending on the species, a dragonfly's eyes can be composed of up to 30,000 facets or little lenses.

Owls

Not many avian predators can outrank owls in vision. They are considered perfect nocturnal hunters, possessing



JUSTIN HAAG

many of the adaptations needed to excel in stalking prey at night. One characteristic in particular is their eyes.

An owl's eyes are located facing forward on its head, very similar to humans. This eye arrangement is effective in tracking the movements of potential prey. Owls actually have the most forward-facing eyes out of any group of birds.

Owls have what is known as 3-D or binocular vision, a trait they share with many other predatory animals. This helps with acute depth perception and allows them to gauge distance when planning an attack.

Behind the retina is a layer called the tapetum lucidum, which catches any light that may have passed through the retina and bounces it back to the sensitive rods. All these adaptations add up, and some owl eyes can be as much as 100 times more sensitive to light than human eyes.

Snakes

In Nebraska, there are 29 species of snakes. Some of these are nocturnal, meaning they are awake at night, while others are diurnal, meaning they are awake during the day. Snakes, overall, have a diverse set of rods and cones in their eyes — the specialized cells in the retina that an animal uses to detect light. One adaptation is that snakes have multiple types of visual pigments inside the cones, which allows them to see in color because the pigments are sensitive to different wavelengths of light. So, snakes that hunt during the daytime have lenses in their eyes that block



JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY

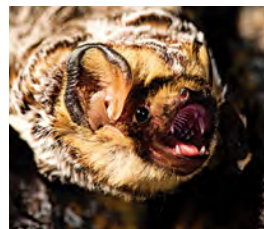
ultraviolet light, which allow them to see clearly in bright conditions — similar to people wearing sunglasses. Conversely, nocturnal snakes that hunt at night have lenses that allow more UV light in, which help them see in the dark.

An old myth that is still in circulation claims that a snake's pupil shape can help people determine whether it's venomous or non-venomous. The myth is that all venomous snakes have elliptical-shaped pupils. Unfortunately, this is inaccurate, as venomous snakes can have elliptical, round or even keyhole-shaped pupils. Therefore, the presence or absence of venom has nothing to do with pupil shape.

Bats

Contrary to the phrase "blind as a bat," these flying mammals have extremely sensitive vision, which helps with their nocturnal lifestyle. In Nebraska, the 13 species of bats are known as insectivores, and to find their food, they have to do it in the dark and often while flying, which requires extraordinary eyesight.

In Nebraska, bats also utilize an adaptation known as echolocation, when bats produce sounds which bounce off objects to help them navigate to their food. However, research shows that many bats prefer to use eyesight as opposed to sound when they hunt. These species have particularly sharp vision, and some can see ultraviolet lights. A few species of bats can even see in color, thanks to two light-sensitive proteins at the backs of their eyes.



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Deer hunting, 1953

This photo was taken in my grandfather Leon Klanecky’s “old red barn” back in 1953 after he shot this mule buck northeast of Ord in the Oak Canyons. I spent my childhood hunting in these canyons with my dad and grandpa, and they have taught me everything I know about deer hunting. My grandpa has since passed away, but the memories in those hills will last forever. My dad, Tom Klanecky (of Ord), and I still look forward to deer hunting together every year.

– Evan Klanecky, Utica



Turkey hunt, 1980

Deer and turkey hunting were always enjoyed at the Frank and Mary Prokop family farm in Spencer.

Pictured from left is my brother Steve Pavlis, Uncle Emanuel Prokop and my husband Keith Bonner with their wild turkeys.

– Bev Bonner, Papillion



Fishing a farm pond, 1978

My grandfather, Elmer W. Gydesen, was photographed by my sister, Linda, while they were fishing a farm pond in 1978. His farm was about 9 miles north of Scotia. Some of my favorite memories were while deer and coyote hunting with him in my teen years.

– Dennis Kasson, Greenville, Illinois



Fishing at Lake Ericson, 1933

This photo was taken at Lake Ericson in the summer of 1933. Pictured from left: Lawrence; Jim (my dad); Francis; Grandpa John; Dave (nephew); and Al – all Van Ackerens. I still have the wooden tacklebox with the wooden lures, the South Bend fishing reel, leather reel case with the maintenance instructions, and his many fishing/hunting licenses.

– Larry Van Ackeren, Yutan



Deer hunting, 1979

This photo was taken on my family farm near Haigler in Dundly County in 1979.

Gene Thomsen and I worked for the Department of Roads in Lincoln as right-of-way surveyors.

– Mike Olson, Arnold

Send contributions to: Portraits from the Past, Nebraskaland Magazine, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370. Or e-mail to Tim.Reigert@Nebraska.gov. Photos should show people enjoying Nebraska outdoor activities, such as camping, boating, hunting or fishing, and must have been taken before 2000. We will give priority to unusual photos or activities. When possible, please include a story about the photograph and identify the people, places and approximate date it was taken. Text may be edited and photos adjusted for reproduction. All photos will be returned.



BIT BY A BLUEGILL, NEARLY RUN OVER BY A BEAVER

By Eric Fowler

Red Wing Wildlife Management area is a dangerous place for wildlife photographers.

During the past three years, as you read earlier in this issue, I made numerous trips to the area between Clearwater and Neligh to document changes that occurred in the channel the Elkhorn River abandoned during flooding in March 2019.

In late June 2021, armed with my mask, snorkel and an underwater camera, I set out to photograph the abundant aquatic life in the natural pools and beaver ponds and the streams between them, all fed by groundwater.

In a backwater at the lower end of the old channel, I found a male bluegill tending its nest in the midst of beaver-chewed sticks in 3 feet of water. He swam back and forth, thoroughly annoyed by my presence, occasionally head butting the dome port on my camera. After 10 minutes, he'd had enough and swam up and bit my left index finger while I was gripping the camera. I've been bit by many fish, but only while removing a hook from their mouths, so this was a first of sorts. I'm glad it wasn't a pike.

The following May, I spent an evening sitting in the willows next to a beaver pond, hoping a flock of blue-winged teal I spooked from the water earlier would return. When they didn't, I walked to the middle of the stream below the pond to photograph the sunset. I turned to look downstream and saw a beaver swimming my way.

This was the second time this had happened in less than an hour. The first time, while walking the channel a few hundred yards to the west, I was also caught standing in the open. Wearing camo hip waders and a ghillie suit jacket, I froze. The beaver kept swimming my way, letting me grab a few frames as it did. When it swam behind a dam, I pre-focused on the spot I hoped it would walk across. Instead, it sprinted. I captured four blurry or poorly-composed frames,

fired off at 14 frames per second, before it splashed into the pool above the dam. Seconds later, it emerged long enough to slap his tail on the surface, his way of giving me the bird, before continuing upstream.

The second beaver, like the first, kept coming near, but at a more leisurely pace — closer and closer until my 600mm lens wouldn't focus. As a rule, my focus limit switch is set to on, as my subjects are typically more than 33 feet away. That no longer being the case, I slowly reached up and turned the switch off, and I kept firing away until it breached the lens's 14.4-foot minimum focus distance. And it kept coming.

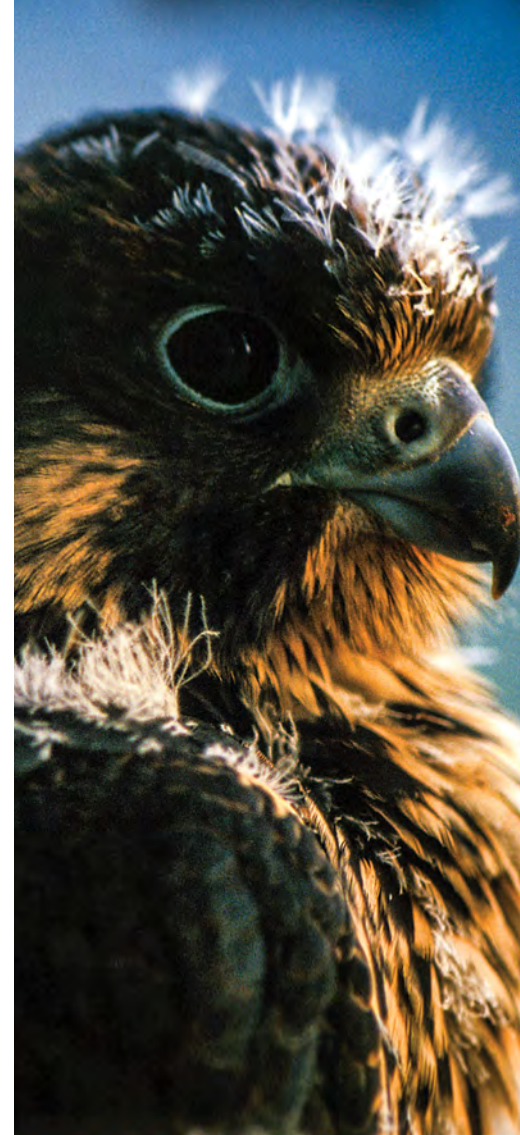
Have you seen the commercial where a beaver bites into some heavy-duty work pants and breaks its teeth? But I wasn't wearing heavy-duty work pants. So, having no clue how a beaver would react if startled — would it attack? — I reached, in slow motion, for the second camera hanging from my shoulder, fitted with a wide zoom.

Minutes earlier, I was photographing landscapes from a tripod. I was smart enough to spin the aperture dial to wide open, but it took way more frames than it should have for me to realize that wasn't enough to get the shutter speed fast enough for hand-held action photos. I slowly and blindly fumbled to boost the ISO, continuing to click away as the beaver walked up its run, me looking down as it passed three feet from mine.

Whether this beaver was dumb, blind or just indifferent, it didn't care that I was there. I shadowed it for 400 yards as it swam and walked up the channel, even moving ahead of it once, and capturing a few more frame-filling portraits, giving me 359 photos in all — most of them garbage — in the course of 16 minutes.

Which was a much better outcome than if it had treated me the way that bluegill did.

Saving Wildlife and Wild Places



The Nebraska Wildlife Conservation Fund improves land and water for native fish and wildlife, supports important research projects, and connects people with nature. Learn more about the fund, the projects it supports and how you can help at:

NebraskaWildlifeFund.org

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

