

Nebraskaland
magazine

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Nebraskaland Volume 97 • No. 2
March 2019

Cover: Sandhill cranes perform
courtship dances while roosting on the
Platte River. Photo by Eric Fowler

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PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

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Table with 3 columns: Date, City, Chapter. Lists banquet dates and locations for various chapters from 1/12/2019 to 3/2/2019.

Table with 3 columns: Date, City, Chapter. Lists banquet dates and locations for various chapters from 3/7/2019 to 4/27/2019.



28th Annual State Habitat Meeting on February 9th, 2019

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Tiara Brown (@huskertiara)
Red fox

Barry Major (@bmajorphotos)
White pelicans



Paul Filsinger (@paul_filsinger)
Sandhill cranes at Elm Island
Crane Viewing Site



Karen Smith (@kasmitty52)
Female cardinal at Chalco Hills





Glenda Byerly
South of Bloomfield



Karen Smith (@kasmitty52)
Eastern screech owl near Grand Island



Dayna Kush
Canada geese and mallard ducks

Ben Overstreet
Sunflowers and foxtail



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



PHEASANT TRACKS

Pheasant tracks in alkaline-crusted prairie at The Nature Conservancy's Platte River Prairies.

PHOTO BY CHRIS HELZER



PHOTO BY REJEAN BEDARD

THREATENED AND ENDANGERED: THE WHOOPING CRANE

By Melissa Panella, Wildlife Biologist

The whooping crane (*Grus americana*) is one of the most endangered species in the world. Yet amazingly, you have a chance to see one in Nebraska during their migration every year. In the 1940s, the global population of whooping cranes declined to only around 20 birds. The birds had been an easy target, either for their meat or for collection of their long beautiful feathers to adorn hats and other apparel. Whooping cranes were also losing nesting habitat. Without protections and dedicated efforts to conserve this magnificent bird, the species would have gone extinct.

In Nebraska, you are most likely to observe whooping cranes in spring and fall as the population migrates between breeding grounds at Wood Buffalo National Park in northeastern Alberta and winter range in and around Aransas National Wildlife Refuge along the Gulf Coast of Texas. Whooping cranes in Nebraska most often travel in small family groups of approximately 3-4 individuals, but the highest count on record in our state are the 30 birds that flew over Valentine National Wildlife Refuge in Cherry County in October 2007. On rare occasions, a whooper is found mid-summer in Nebraska. This is typically an immature bird that hasn't quite figured out where to go next.

Whooping cranes may live around 30 years in the wild, and mated pairs will stay together for life. Courtship dancing

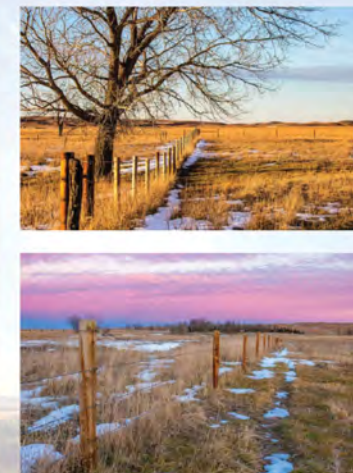
is high-energy jumping, running, wing-flapping, tail-feather shaking, and even stick tossing. Both adult birds build a nest and will incubate two eggs for a little over a month until hatching occurs. The chicks are able to walk and swim within just a few hours of hatching, but they are unable to fly long distances until around three months of age. The youngsters do not venture too far from their parents, who will guide them through migration.

Perhaps the most famous bird species in Nebraska is the sandhill crane (*Antigone canadensis*) that migrates through the central part of the state, with peak numbers reaching more than 500,000 cranes in mid-March to early April. During this time, crane watchers may find a single whooping crane among the flock of sandhill cranes. This individual hasn't found his way to other rare whooping cranes or is simply perfectly content living among the sandhill cranes. The locals affectionately refer to the lone whooper as Bob. If you have the good fortune of seeing a whooping crane, enjoy the moment and please remember not to disturb it as it needs to save its energy for the marathon of migration.

The current population of whooping cranes recently surpassed 500 birds. For more information on whooping cranes in Nebraska, be sure to check out Birds of Nebraska – Online: birds.outdoornebraska.gov.

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PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY

SLOW COOKER DUCK CONFIT

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

Confit is a French cooking technique that calls for slow cooking meat in fat – preferably the animal's own fat. The low, slow heat breaks down collagen and the flavor of the fat infuses into the meat. Domestic ducks have so much fat on them that they can be rendered down for later use. And in many cases, the same can be true for several species of hunted waterfowl.

For how-to instruction on rendering your own duck/goose fat, check out Hank Shaw's blog post at honest-food.net/how-to-render-duck-fat. The resulting fat is buttery and nutty. Use it to sear meat, fry eggs and potatoes, and to sauté greens ... anything you would normally do with cooking oil.

If that's too much work or if you don't shoot enough waterfowl throughout the year to render, buy jarred duck fat at specialty food stores or online. The brand I use is Rougie.

Servings: 2-4

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Cooking Time: 10-15 hours

Ingredients:

- 8 small or 4 large duck/goose legs and thighs (skin on for choice birds, skin off for less desirable species – pictured is snow goose)
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 6 sprigs of fresh thyme
- 8 ounces of rendered duck fat
- Special equipment: Vacuum sealer and bag or heavy-duty zip-top bag

1. Pat duck/goose legs and thighs dry with paper towels and season well with salt. Place in a vacuum sealable bag or zip-top bag and add duck fat and thyme. Remove as much air out of the bag as possible and seal. (If using a vacuum sealer, be careful not to let the vacuum suck out the fat.)

2. Place the bag in a slow cooker

and submerge with water. Cover, turn slow cooker on low and cook for 10-15 hours, or until meat becomes tender.

Cooking times will vary depending on size and age of birds. If necessary, use a heavy bowl/plate to keep the bag submerged. Flip the bag halfway through or every few hours for more even cooking. (Vacuum sealed bags will inflate as the pressure inside the bag changes – this is normal. An advantage in using a zip-top bag is the ability to check doneness.)

3. Remove legs from the bag. Drop a tablespoon or two of remaining duck fat into a pan and heat over medium-high. Sear legs on both sides for a nice brown crust. Season to taste. Serve with your favorite sides, preferably something with a bit of tartness to complement the richness of the confit, such as a vinegary salad, slaw, sauerkraut or kimchi.

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PHOTO BY JOEL G. JORGENSEN

THE OVERLOOKED TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE

By Joel G. Jorgensen

The Townsend's solitaire is an elegant thrush that often occupies the background while its relatives, such as the ubiquitous American robin and beloved bluebirds, steal the limelight. Unlike those other species, and as its name implies, this sleek gray songbird with a white eye-ring and a proportionately long tail typically is not found in flocks or groups. It is a western bird that breeds in mountainous regions from northern Mexico to eastern Alaska and as close as the Black Hills of South Dakota. Townsend's solitaires visit Nebraska during winter and migrate through the state in spring and fall. There are, however, a couple of historical breeding records from the Pine Ridge in northwestern Nebraska in 1900. The species is most common in western Nebraska, but rare eastward.

Townsend's solitaires are often found around junipers, such as the eastern red cedar, whose berries are an important winter food source. In fact, Townsend's solitaires are territorial; lone individuals will defend their patch of junipers

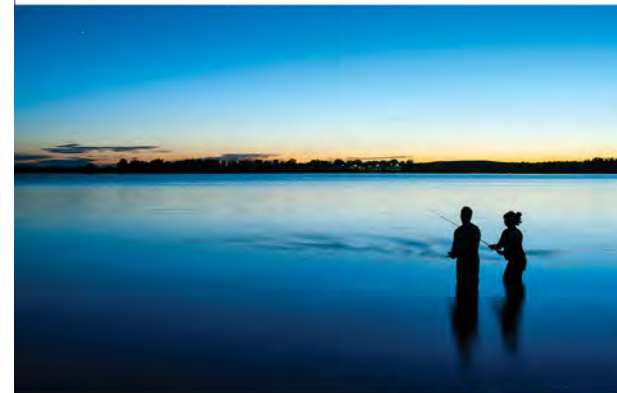
and the trove of berries from others of its kind. Highest densities predictably occur in winter in areas of extensive junipers in the west such as the North Platte River Valley, the Wildcat Hills and Loess Canyons in Lincoln County. Eastern red cedars have invaded prairies in certain areas of the state, such as the Loess Canyons, and have become a serious problem for agricultural producers and for grassland birds. However, red cedar expansion has no doubt been a windfall for the solitaire.

Townsend's solitaires are most often seen sitting on a high branch of a juniper tree, but sometimes an observer needs to "pish" or squeak to coax the bird out into full view. Always curious, once a bird is prompted into the open, it will generally offer excellent views.

Visit the Birds of Nebraska – Online at birdsofnebraska.org for more information.



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NEBRASKA
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PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHRIS HELMS

AN UPLAND SLAM CHALLENGE

By Jeff Kurrus

“Thirteen-year-olds like a challenge,” said Holdrege resident Chris Helms. “My son Aiden and his friends will get on YouTube and are always looking for a challenge.” So when Chris mentioned Nebraska’s Upland Slam to Aiden, it didn’t take much convincing to get started.

Nebraska’s Upland Slam, introduced by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission in 2018 alongside Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever, challenged hunters to harvest four birds – a sharp-tailed grouse, greater prairie chicken, ring-necked pheasant and northern bobwhite quail – in Nebraska to receive an official certificate, pin and to be registered to win one of several prizes, including a Browning Silver 12-gauge semiautomatic shotgun.

But like many of the 140 other hunters who completed the Upland Slam, Chris and Aiden were much more interested in the challenge itself than the potential prizes.

“It definitely motivated Aiden to get in the field with me,” said Chris, who was also hunting beside their 8-year-old Brittany spaniel named Molly. “With Molly’s age and Aiden wanting to do this, it was special for me.”

An upland hunter, Helms usually goes two to three times a week. “It’s my thing,” he said. “It also helps me stay in shape.

“I knew there’d be challenges with the chickens and sharpies because of the amount of walking with a 13-year-old,” he continued. “We had multiple 26,000-step days. During these walks, we might be five miles in before we saw birds. It was tough.”

Nearly all of their walks were on land open to public access, where they harvested every bird between them except one. The only private land bird was Aiden’s quail, which came less than 50 yards from where Chris shot his first pheasant as child on land that has been in their family since the 1870s.

It was a challenge where father and son faced constant adjustments. A 4-H trapshooter, Aiden was not yet used to pheasants flushing at his feet, something dad had to talk him through during their hunts. There was also the challenge of a young hunter carrying a gun for so many miles.

“I learned a ton on these trips,” said Chris, who enjoyed seeing the look of excitement on Aiden’s face after each new harvest. “It’s been motivating for me to seek other upland adventures.”

All in the company of a bird dog in her prime, and a son just coming into his own.



We congratulate the hunters who have completed the Upland Slam:

- | | | | |
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| Scott Aden, Gothenburg, NE | Cole Gathye, Gretna, NE | Brisen Kuhn, Kearney, NE | Michael Rambour, Columbus, NE |
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The Value of Controlled Hunts



A chukar flushes in front of Bill Heard and his son Jake of Gretna and a guide during an upland hunt at Pheasant Bonanza near Tekamah.

Story and Photos by Jeff Kurrus

Controlled shooting areas are a mystery to many hunters. Defined as a private location leased or owned by an individual or group to hunt upland birds like ring-necked pheasants, quail, chukars, Hungarian partridge, and even mallards, during an extended season – they are often viewed as hunting spots for the inexperienced.

When I started at *Nebraskaland* in 2006, I didn't see what a controlled shooting area offered to an experienced, able-bodied hunter like myself. After visiting some – and talking to hunters who had visited others – I discovered these areas offer much more than I thought.

So All Can Hunt

My first introduction to a controlled shooting area was during the fall of 2006 when I photographed a Sportsmen Assisting Nebraska's Disabled Sportsmen (SANDS) hunt at Pheasant Bonanza near Tekamah. Participants who couldn't walk far – or at all – were able to watch excellent pointing dogs work, see flushing birds, and even shoot pheasants on the rise.

That day, I realized that other hunters' needs were different than my own, an important idea to the owners of these establishments. "We continue to provide hunts for people who need assistance like this," said Pheasant Bonanza owner Trent Leichleiter. "We don't want to turn anyone down. For example, maybe we have a person whose dad introduced them to hunting and can't get around like he used to. We want to make sure we have opportunities for those hunters as well."

Education

Some controlled shooting areas, like Oak Creek Sporting Club near Brainard, also provide the skills



INTERIOR OF LODGE AT PHEASANT BONANZA NEAR TEKAMAH

Visiting a CSA

Choosing a Controlled Shooting Area (CSA) to visit is like picking a dog breed or style of shotgun – you have to find the one that fits your needs. This can be accomplished by speaking to someone at the preserve. Ask about the terrain, the length of the hunts, and exactly what to expect. Tell them if anyone in your group has physical limitations, and they will let you know if they can accommodate you.

For those who have visited Oak Creek Sporting Club and Pheasant Bonanza, it's clear once you arrive that they are completely different operations – Oak Creek offers a blue-collar experience while Pheasant Bonanza caters to an upscale audience, both in accommodations and feel. Both are fine, unique examples in the world of controlled shooting areas. However, they are not the only controlled shooting areas in the state. From Dawes to Richardson counties, Nebraska has 45 commercial (available to the public) controlled shooting areas to visit. A list of these can be found at ultimatepheasanthunting.com/usa/Nebraska.

needed before the hunt. When Oak Creek hosts youth days throughout the year – with 4-H groups, trapshooting teams, and the like – participants study hunter safety, watch dog trainers work, learn how to appropriately shoot shotguns and rifles, and actually have an opportunity to hunt pheasants. For many young hunters, it is their first time afield.

"We want to cater to families," owner Terry Kriz said. "We love seeing people get their first bird. From mothers and daughters to fathers and sons, we want our guests to see action – to provide an environment that is more than a walk in the park.

"We also want to make sure we keep hunting's legacy moving forward."

Volunteer Chad Phillips demonstrates with his pointing dog, a small munsterlander, during a youth day at Oak Creek Sporting Club near Brainard.





DOG TRAINING FOR A YOUTH DAY AT OAK CREEK SPORTING CLUB

Dog Work

By Ryan Sparks

Whether it's a new hunter or a new puppy, there's only one thing that's going to get them excited about hunting — birds. That's why controlled shooting areas are an excellent resource for introducing new hunters and their dogs to the sport. It takes birds to make a bird hunter, and hunting preserves guarantee the birds that will get them excited about hunting. Hunting all morning on a frigid day without finding any birds isn't motivating for anyone.

These preserves are also a way to keep you and your dogs in shape before and after the hunting season. Heading to a hunting preserve for a few outings before Nebraska's regular season opens will shake off the rust and ensure you are both in top form when opening day arrives. Then, after your regular hunting season closes, you can venture to a CSA to extend your good time a bit longer.

A youth day at Oak Creek Sporting Club features a myriad of activities, from hunter safety (top left), trapshooting (top right), proper shooting techniques (bottom left), and shotgun patterning (bottom right).

How Do They Fly?

This is a question every hunter has about a controlled shooting area: How do the birds fly?

"We don't raise our own birds at Oak Creek," said Kriz. "When they arrive they're released shortly after. They learn to adapt."

"We cater to 'your birds are out there; go hunt them' method," said

Pheasant Bonanza's Leichter. "We want to offer as wild a hunt as possible, and are constantly releasing more birds than people are paying for — some the day of the hunt and some days before a person's hunt."

For example, on a 3-bird hunt, Leichter and his staff will release six to eight birds. "We want people to see 12 to 15 birds on a 3-bird hunt. And

the more wild the hunter's experience is, the better."

A Controlled Hunt First

Years ago, on a whim, a few buddies and I took a trip from Tennessee to Kansas to hunt pheasants. Having no idea where to go, we hopped around for two days and never fired a shot.

In hindsight, I wish we would have started at a controlled shooting area. From there, we could have talked to the owners of the area and gotten some advice on which nearby public areas to hunt.

Maybe we would have learned something on that area that helped us on public land. Perhaps we would

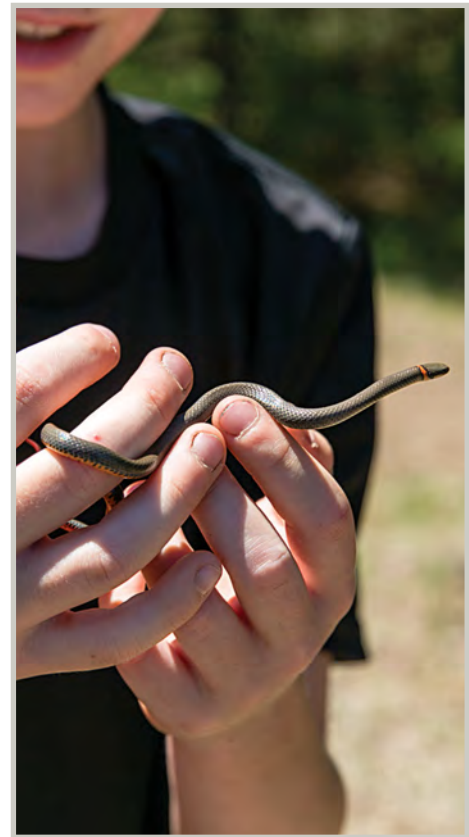
have shot a few birds. And maybe, just maybe, that same group of guys would still be hunting together.

In Nebraska, controlled shooting area upland hunting seasons open September 1 and close April 15. For more information, visit Outdoornebraska.org/csa.

Outdoor Nebraska

By Renae Blum

The outdoor world is slowly waking up. Don't miss the start of spring – try these ideas for outdoor fun this month to stay active and enjoy time outside with family and friends.



Spot a ring-necked snake

Late March | Eastern Nebraska

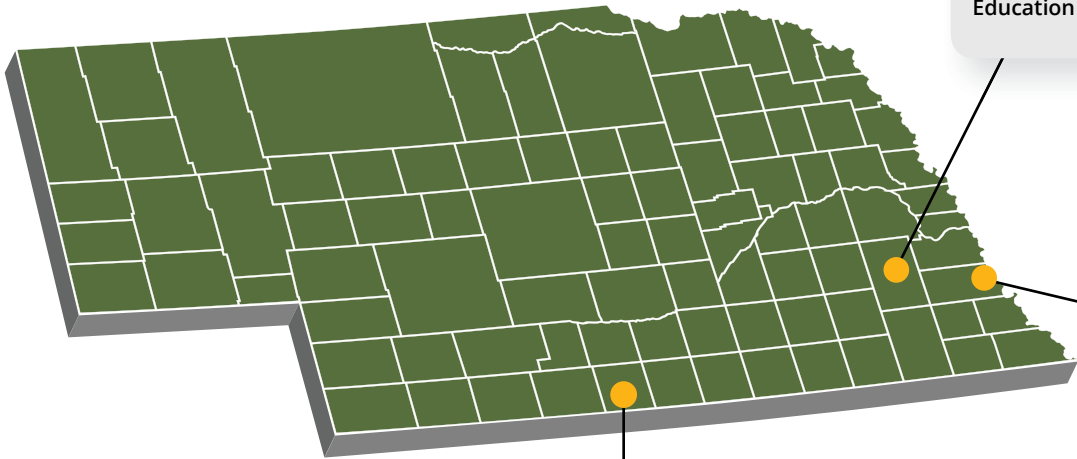
Ring-necked snakes are one of the first snakes to emerge from hibernation in Nebraska, says Nebraska Game and Parks wildlife educator Monica Macoubrie. “During this time, if you flip a few rocks, logs or pieces of metal, you might find hundreds of these snakes huddled in the same spot,” she writes. “Ring-necked snakes are some of the smallest snakes in Nebraska, reaching about the length of a ruler. They are olive green to gray on top and bright yellow, red, and orange on their stomachs.”



Trout stockings

Various dates | Various locations

Starting about mid-March, fisheries staff will begin stocking 65,000 rainbow trout into more than 30 lakes and ponds in Nebraska. Another 35,000 trout will be released in April. Look for a news release to be posted at Outdoornebraska.org/fishstockingreports announcing stocking locations.



Shootout at Salt Creek

March 3
Nebraska Outdoor Education Center,



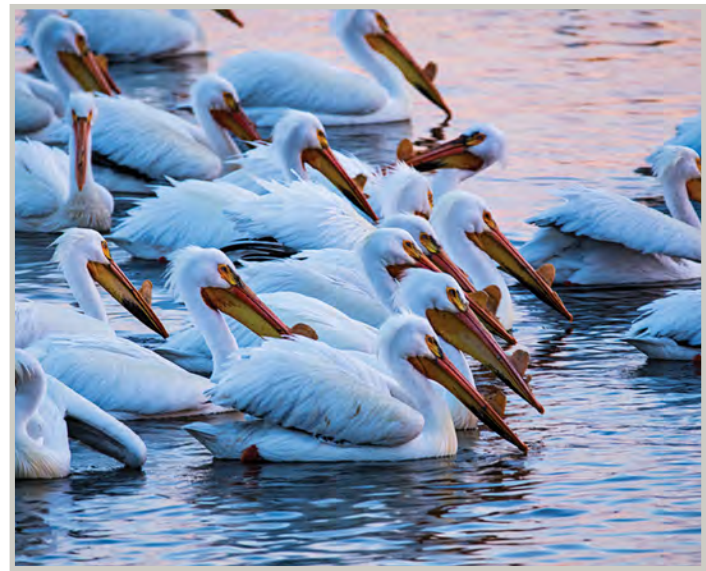
Attend a spring park event

Throughout the spring | Statewide

Celebrate the spring season at one of the state parks in the coming months. Your adventures could include mushroom hunting at Indian Cave State Park, birding tours at Ponca State Park and more! Visit Outdoornebraska.org/parkevents to find an event near you.

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Meeting

March 14-15
Lied Lodge in Nebraska City



Harlan white pelican watch

March 1 – April 15 | Harlan County Reservoir

Annually, hundreds and sometimes thousands of American white pelicans land in Harlan County Reservoir to feed on their way to breeding grounds in the north. For locals, the arrival of the large birds is a sign that spring is almost here. The annual White Pelican Watch starts March 1 and runs through April 15, although dates and numbers of birds can be variable. Pelicans can generally be observed during daylight hours from locations all around the Reservoir. Learn more at harlantourism.org.



Learn to hunt – spring turkey workshops

Various dates | Various locations

Whether you're new to hunting or a seasoned hunter looking for additional tips, the Nebraska Game and Parks spring turkey hunting workshops will give you a leg up before you head out. Workshops cover hunting basics, turkey biology, equipment, scouting, hunting strategies and more. Find the class schedule online at Outdoornebraska.org/workshops.

Crane Moves

Sandhill Cranes Arriving Earlier, Shifting East on Platte

STORY AND PHOTOS
BY ERIC FOWLER

Thousands of sandhill cranes will have arrived on the Platte River in central Nebraska by the time you read this. In the weeks to come, there may be 600,000 or more on the river on a given night, with some yet to arrive from their wintering grounds to the south and others having already continued their northward migration. This gathering of more than 80 percent of the mid-continent population of cranes is one of the great wildlife spectacles anywhere, drawing bird watchers from around the world to Kearney, Grand Island and towns in between.

Changes in flows and habitat on the Platte and the availability of food around it during the past century prompted the birds to congregate in a limited number of reaches within the 76 miles of river they now frequent. And according to a new study led by Andrew Caven, director of conservation research at the Crane Trust, the phenomenon is still evolving. Cranes continue to move, leaving behind roosts in the western reaches of the central Platte River Valley for better habitat in the east. The cranes are also arriving earlier and staying longer. With more birds packed into a smaller area, biologists are left to wonder what the future holds.

Cranes and the Platte

Scientists believe sandhill cranes have been stopping on the Platte River during their spring migration for 2 to 10 million years. While records are sparse, the tall, lanky birds are thought to have been dispersed throughout its length in the state before Euroamerican settlers arrived on the Plains. The wide, braided river and its many sandbars provided ideal roosting habitat, and the adjacent meadows held plenty of

Sandhill cranes dance on their roost on the Platte River in Hall County, part of a courtship ritual that takes place during a stopover on their annual spring migration.





food in the form of invertebrates.

The cranes’ use of the river was likely disrupted by unregulated spring hunting until the practice was banned by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act in 1918. It changed again when settlement brought farming to the Platte River Valley, and corn that didn’t make it into the combine gave cranes a high-energy food source that let them fatten up for the remainder of their journey. Irrigation brought more corn, but it also changed the river. Farmers began digging ditches to carry water to their crops in the late 1800s. Large dams in the basin followed, the first being Pathfinder Dam on the North Platte in Wyoming in 1908 and the last and largest the Tri-County Project, which began operating in 1938 and included Kingsley Dam, completed in 1941, and Lake McConaughy near Ogallala.

With each new dam and diversion for irrigation or hydroelectric power, the river dropped, allowing vegetation to sprout on the exposed, moist ground. With high spring flows trapped in upstream reservoirs, there was nothing to scour the river clean. Eventually, what once was riverbed became woodland composed primarily of cottonwoods at first, and later by Russian olive and eastern redcedar, and the remaining flows were restricted to narrower, deeper, and more winding channels.

Described by one journalist in the 1880s as “a mile wide and an inch deep,” the Platte was actually wider in places. Yet by the 1950s, it spanned only 50 yards between North Platte, where most of the water was diverted by the Tri-County project, and Overton, where some of that water is returned.

Aerial photos show the stark difference in habitat in two reaches of the central Platte River. Near Odessa (top), nearly all of the forested area pictured was river channel a century ago. At The Crane Trust’s headquarters south of Alda (bottom), the river looks like much like it did a century ago, with both channels retaining their width, little woodland encroachment and much of the surrounding landscape in meadow. While the width of the river channel is similar in these reaches today, the change in character has caused sandhill cranes to abandon the area near Odessa.

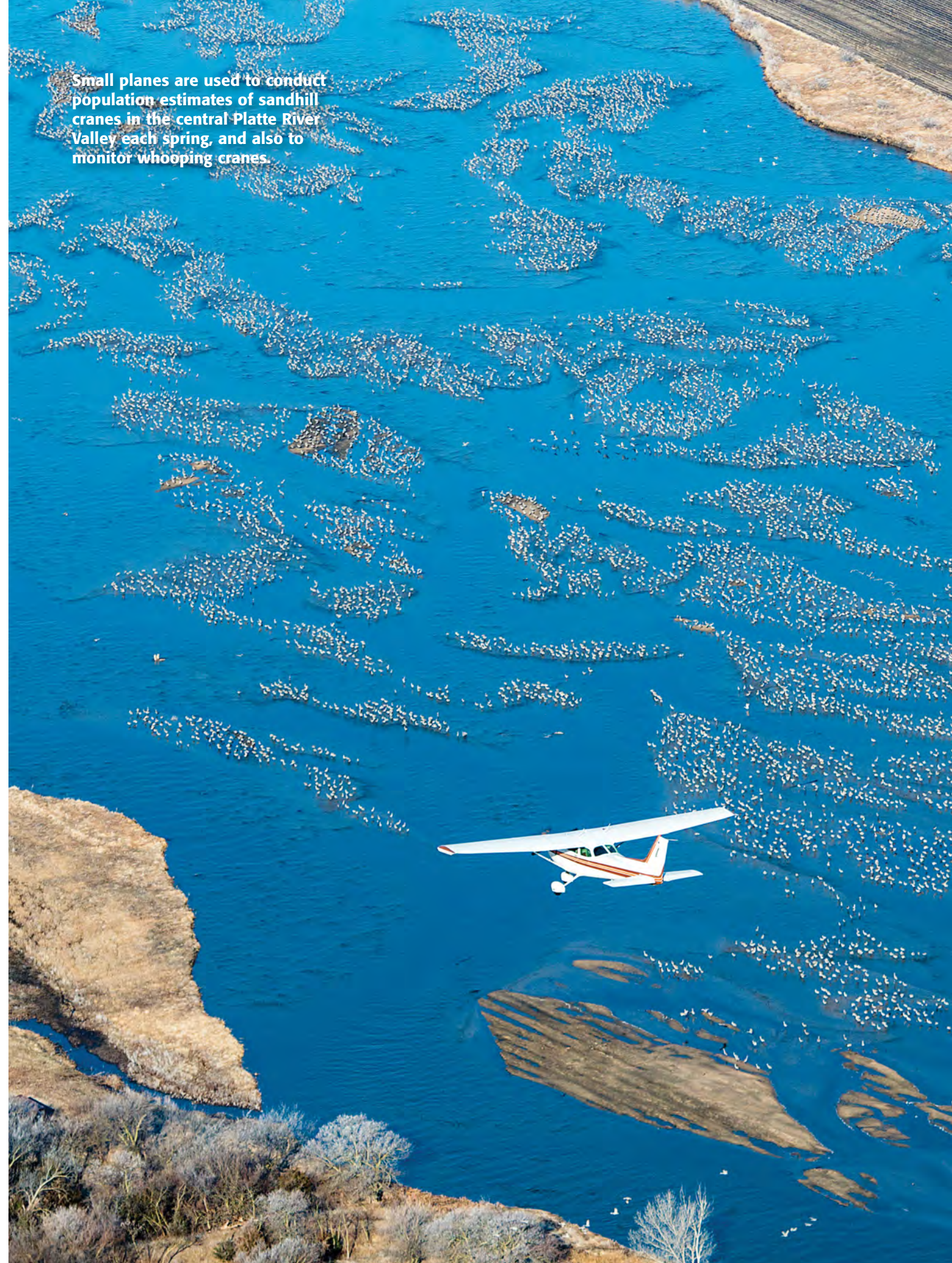
The succession was not good for cranes, which soon abandoned the river above Overton. As accretion and woodland growth continued to move eastward, so did the cranes. A 1957 study found that 60 percent of the cranes stopping on the Platte in the spring were found between Overton and Kearney. By the late 1970s, most were between Kearney and Grand Island.

The Shift Continues

Population estimates of cranes, while an inexact science, have been conducted since the 1950s by various entities, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which does an intensive air and ground survey of the valley in late March each year. Since 1998, with the exception of two years, the Crane Trust has from mid-February to mid-April conducted weekly survey flights on the river between Overton and Chapman. The methods used and routes flown have been mostly the same since 2002: From a fixed wing aircraft, observers estimate the number of birds on the river and the adjacent fields and take photographs of selected roosts. Back on the ground, they analyze the photographs and adjust their estimates as needed. Their highest recorded count of 598,000 came on March 22, 2018, a figure that does not account for cranes that left the river for fields farther from the river than observers could count. The service’s count, which reaches farther from the river and continues west through the North Platte River Valley, estimated there were a record 1 million cranes on the rivers during the same week last March.

The Crane Trust’s survey data has

Small planes are used to conduct population estimates of sandhill cranes in the central Platte River Valley each spring, and also to monitor whooping cranes.





Sandhill cranes leave their overnight roost on the Platte River in Hall County, headed to nearby fields and meadows to feed.



Sandhill cranes take flight from a cornfield in Hall County. The birds fatten up on crop residue left in the fields, providing energy for the remainder of their migration.

allowed the shift of cranes from west to east to be quantified in the study, co-authored by Emma Brinley Buckley and others from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Service, Rainwater Basin Joint Venture and Platte River Recovery and Implementation Program. The survey area is divided into 11 segments defined by highway bridges. Of those, only the four easternmost segments, from Wood River to Chapman, show increasing numbers of cranes.

Interestingly, the eastern segment, from Highway 34 to Chapman, hosted so few cranes that it wasn’t included in any surveys until the late 1990s. Yet the average count of combined surveys from 2015 to 2017 found 25 percent of all cranes in the central Platte in the two reaches between Grand Island and Chapman.

The reach between Alda and Grand Island, where the Crane Trust owns considerable property that has been

restored to near-historic form, is the most used segment, boasting a peak density of 6,400 cranes per mile and 32 percent of the count from 2015 to 2017.

At the same time, crane use has generally declined in the four segments west of the Highway 10 bridge (Minden), which hosted just 4 percent of the cranes combined. The three segments between Minden and Wood River host 20 percent of the cranes, but numbers in all are also declining, with the exception of the reach from Minden to Gibbon that includes the National Audubon Society’s Rowe Sanctuary and a considerable amount of restored land and boasts a stable population.

Why Move?

With the eastward shift of cranes quantified, the Crane Trust’s study hoped to determine why they were moving. Using aerial imagery from 1938, 1998, 2015, and 2016, Caven and his team looked at changes in channel width, and with images from 1998 and 2016, he looked at land cover.

“Everyone expected the model to show why wide channels are good and prairie is good,” Caven said. “Well, the model showed that prairie was very good, and it also showed wide channels

were good. But what’s more important than just wide channels is the amount the channel has shrunk since 1938, and that was a more important variable in our model, likely because it’s indicative of the change in the character of the river there more than just its width.

“That change started in the west and moved east. The perception was that the change has stopped, but that’s not the case. We keep seeing more islands popping up in the middle that are becoming stabilized and those are crappy for cranes.”

The adjacent prairie component of the equation is likely tied to the importance of those habitats, as other studies have found, for the protein provided by macroinvertebrates, for pair bonding activities, and also the cranes’ desire to stage next to the river in the evening, continuing forage until dark before returning to roost.

Early Arrivals?

Research suggests that the greater sandhill crane, which nests primarily in Alaska, Canada and Minnesota, is the first to arrive on the central Platte, and fills eastern segments of the river first. The lesser sandhill crane, which nests in Siberia, western-Alaska and northern

Canada, arrives later and fills in western portions of the region.

The Crane Trust’s survey data, because it spans the entire timeframe in which the cranes are on the Platte, paints a clearer picture of this staggered arrival, with counts in eastern segments peaking about two weeks ahead of the west. It also shows how the overall peak, which can be influenced by weather, varies from year to year.

The data also showed that cranes have been arriving, on average, a little more than a day earlier each year since 2002. A century ago, the first reports of cranes arriving on the Platte came in late March. Now they come in early February, and a few cranes have even wintered here in recent years.

The study looked at weather in wintering areas on the Texas coast and elsewhere and found it was a fairly reliable predictor in their arrival date. “What’s interesting is a 1 degree average increase in average temperature in Texas in January and February basically meant 20,000 more birds came to Nebraska in week 5 (mid-March) of the surveys,” Caven said.

The advancing migration date is not exclusive to sandhill cranes. Other studies have found that whooping cranes in North America and common cranes in France are also migrating earlier, trends Caven said could be a result of climate change or a combination of many factors, including the availability of waste grain or drought.

“That doesn’t mean that they’re leaving early though,” Caven said. “They’re coming 20 days earlier but they’re staying a little bit longer. So the peak hasn’t changed as much as the arrival date.”

What Now?

Researchers watching the transformation of the Platte as irrigation expanded recognized the importance of a wide-open river to cranes and other wildlife. Since the early 1980s, the Crane Trust, as well as numerous other organizations, including the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, The Nature Conservancy, Audubon Society and, more recently, the Platte River Recovery and Implementation Program, have been working to restore and maintain the river’s historic character in the central Platte Valley. The groups

have cleared riparian woodlands, restored grasslands and wet meadows and, when the river is low, disked the channel to inhibit growth of vegetation that can form islands.

Cranes are now concentrated primarily in areas where that work has been conducted. The density, however, has raised concerns about the increased risk of disease transmission between sandhill cranes and other birds, especially whooping cranes. A continued shift of birds from west to east and birds staying longer than the three to four weeks they once did, coupled with an increasing sandhill crane population that is two to three times greater than it was in the early 1970s, could further increase density, making the work to restore habitat along the river even more important.

But Caven said conservation partners will need to look at where and how the work is being done, as cranes are even abandoning some reaches of the river where habitat has been restored. While some may be tempted to give up on those areas, maintaining stopover habitat there is critical because of the use of those reaches by whooping cranes.

“We’re probably not restoring areas that are big enough to redistribute the cranes,” Caven said.

They will also need to look east to insure the habitat the cranes are adopting is maintained. In the two

eastern reaches, the character of the river remains good and there is a considerable amount of meadow and prairie. But less than one percent of the land within a half mile of the channel is protected, either through ownership by a conservation organization or through a conservation easement, a pittance compared to the 34 to 67 percent in some other reaches. “Our major concern is sandpits and housing developments,” Caven said, noting that conservation easements that would prevent such development while allowing farming and ranching to continue would be invaluable in protecting the habitat.

The work along the river isn’t important only to cranes. An open, braided river benefits other species like whooping cranes and least terns. The large blocks of prairie benefit prairie chickens, bobolinks, Henslow’s sparrows and other upland species.

“There’s a lot [in this study] of sandhill cranes, but they’re really good umbrella species,” Caven said. “They’re a really good indicator of habitat quality because their presence in high numbers is reflective of the historic structure of and function of that ecosystem.”

Sandhill cranes feed in open ground in a snow covered meadow near the Platte River in Kearney County. Meadows are important feeding and loafing habitat for cranes.



East Ash Road

Story and Photos by Erik Johnson

The first time I laid eyes on this corkscrew turn nestled in the Pine Ridge of the Panhandle, I couldn't help but question if I had stepped outside the borders of Nebraska. Such a far cry from the familiar geography of the Plains, the Pine Ridge is an area that has continually captivated me and keeps me coming back to discover more. As the seasons pass, the rugged buttes take on drastically different appearances and personalities. During the last year and a half I've embarked on a project to capture these changes, as seen from one specific vantage: a scenic overlook off East Ash Road between the towns of Crawford and Chadron.

I first photographed the road in late May of 2017. The bright green shrubs and undergrowth provided a striking contrast to the blackened tree trunks – remnants of a fire that scorched the hills in 2012. As I waited for the soft evening light to cover the landscape, I found myself beneath a fast moving, isolated rain shower that swept over the hills. The precipitation cast a veil over the land and glistened against

the rays of the setting sun. It was then that I realized my desire to experience these beautiful surroundings at all times of the year.

My next visit to East Ash was during a late season snow shower during the final days of March. I found myself standing at the same vantage as wet snowflakes dropped to the ground, accentuating the twisting road. Once again the thick atmosphere created a haze that concealed the surrounding buttes. After I returned home I converted the image to black and white, emphasizing the contrasting tones between the snow-lined road and barren vegetation.

It wasn't until late July that I had another chance to visit the Pine Ridge. I made the drive during the last week of the month, hoping to capture the region under a dramatic midsummer storm. As night fell on East Ash, I could see distant lightning flashes on the horizon. As I waited, the flashes became brighter and brighter as the storm followed a direct path toward me. Ultimately, I was forced to retreat as



the lightning became too close and rain began to fall. Once back in my truck, I was in awe of the landscape as I scrolled through the frames to find an image with three bolts emanating from an ominous cloud formation.

The fourth and final image was taken during a quick road trip in mid-October. I was amazed by the colors I found lining the hillsides. The bright green vegetation I was familiar with from past visits was now a colorful gradient of yellows, golds and reds. I awoke early on a Sunday morning to find another beautiful veil of mist covering the golden hills. I snapped a frame, and with that, captured my final season on East Ash Road.

Nebraskaland Magazine would like to see your seasonal images from one vantage point. Send to Jeff.Kurrus@Nebraska.gov.



Opposite: May 2017

Top: July 2017

Middle: October 2017

Bottom: March 2018.





Every year bucks cast off their antlers and those that are willing to put in the time and miles are rewarded with sheds like this one found in Cass County.

Much More Than Antlers

Shed Hunting in Nebraska

STORY AND PHOTOS BY RYAN SPARKS

Late winter can be a trying time for people who love the outdoors. With closed hunting seasons and thin ice, spring still seems a long way off. However, shed hunting is a refreshing mind cleanse that will motivate you to get outside during the doldrums of winter. Shed hunting is simply searching for the cast-off antlers of species like elk, mule deer, and white-tailed deer. Every year these animals shed and regrow their antlers, leaving clues about their size, location and travel routes.

Ask a seasoned shed hunter why they enjoy it so much and they will probably tell you it's about more than collecting antlers. Deer trails stick out like I-80 in winter, concentrated turkey feathers and droppings are a sure sign of a turkey roost, and all the miles you put on looking for antlers up your chances of stumbling across some morels (and works off your winter belly). Searching for sheds makes you intimately familiar with the land. Of course, there are also the antlers. Most deer hunters swoon after them whether they're attached to a deer's head or not. They have an almost magical quality. They also tell you what caliber of bucks are in the area and make memorable decorations in your home.

Getting Started

Most people know that bucks shed and grow a new set of antlers every year, but many don't know the biology behind this phenomenon. Biologists agree that antler growth and dropping is regulated by hormones and daylight hours. Antler is one of the fastest growing tissues on earth and can grow more than an inch a day. After rutting activity has stopped and light levels decrease, a buck's testosterone drops significantly. This decrease spurs the creation of a bone cell called osteoclast. Osteoclast removes the connective tissue between a buck's head and antlers by absorbing the calcium in the bone. Once the connective tissue weakens, the antler falls off. Osteoclast creates small striations that feel coarse to the touch causing the base of a shed antler to feel like sandpaper. Other factors such as injuries and stress from hunger or extreme cold can cause testosterone and, consequently, antlers to drop. While bucks can lose their antlers as early as December and as late as April, most deer in Nebraska go antlerless between January and March.

There aren't any hard rules to when antlers are shed, yet there are a few tricks to know when it's time to lace up your hiking boots. I like to park along a field where I have seen deer feeding. Using binoculars, I can see if there are any

antlerless bucks in the field. If you find a field filled with deer, but they all look like does, it probably means there are some bucks mixed in who have lost their head gear.

It's a good rule to hike as many miles as you can, but all that walking won't do any good if you're not in an area with sheds on the ground. In winter, deer are either bedding, eating or traveling between the two. Start by searching in the thickest cover you can find. I've found that harshly cold winters concentrate deer around food sources and winter cover, which also concentrates shed antlers.

My best shed hunting spot is a cluster of cedar trees you almost have to crawl through. I've found several pairs of sheds lying right next to where a buck has bedded. You ideally want to find a location with clusters of beds. These are round patches where deer have laid down and matted the vegetation. Seeing lots of deer droppings on the ground also indicates that deer are concentrated in an area. If you find an antler, look in a grid pattern around where you found it. If you're lucky you'll find its match.

Fields where deer are feeding are also prime locations. I like to find a high point and use binoculars to scan large swaths of a field. Once you think you have thoroughly covered both bedding and feeding areas, walk the adjoining trails. While hiking, note rubs, scrapes, fence and creek crossings, and scout for locations to hang a tree stand or



Finding bucks you were hoping to hunt next year that didn't make it through the winter is a harsh reality of shed hunting.



This antler was found near a bedding area along the outside of a thick stand of cedars. After a grid search of the area we found its matching side.



Mice, squirrels, opossums, foxes and even beavers will chew antlers for the calcium and phosphorous they contain.



For a shed hunter, small antlers like this are just as much of a trophy as their larger counterparts.

place a blind for the next hunting season. Nothing gives you a better understanding of a property than walking every inch of it. You can't work an area too thoroughly. For example, I walked past my favorite "shed" I've ever found dozens of times over the course of two years before I ever saw it. Then one day, I decided to walk the creek bottom instead of the usual trail above and discovered two bucks against the creek bank who had died because their antlers had locked together during a fight.

If the area where you hunt doesn't have many fields nearby, try searching around forest browsing areas that contain acorns or other food sources. South facing hillsides are also one of the best places to find shed antlers. If you have a pet you've probably seen them get up and move to lay in the sunlight. Deer do the same thing.

It's one thing to know where you should be looking and another to actually find sheds. There aren't any tricks to spotting antlers, but much like morel hunting, once you see your first shed of the season your brain seems to imprint the image and finding the next few seems easier. Don't expect to see an entire antler laying in the open. Look for a tine poking through the grass or a patch of white against the drab landscape. The largest shed I've ever found, a four-foot-long six-point elk antler, only had a tiny piece visible above the grass. I've also stepped on sheds before I ever saw them. You walk past more than you find, but knowing that gives you the desire to work the same area again.

Most new shed hunters will look about 10 feet in front of themselves as they walk, but I've found it best to scan from 20 to 100 feet. It helps to work slowly, stopping now and then to look around. Find a different perspective by standing on a tree stump or squatting close to the ground. Many antlers are only visible from one angle. After several hours of shed hunting you get in a Zen-like state where your entire focus is on the landscape. It's a fantastic way to enjoy nature.

Equipment

Gearing up for shed hunting couldn't be simpler. It's an activity where fancy gear doesn't apply and hard work is well rewarded. All you really need is a good pair of hiking boots. The more miles you put on the more sheds you will come across. Of course, there are a few other pieces of equipment that make shed hunting more productive. Sunglasses are helpful on bright days so you don't have to squint as you look for antlers. Binoculars are useful for surveying fields and for when you aren't quite sure that what you're looking at in the distance is an antler. If you find more than a couple sheds a backpack is handy for hauling them out of the woods as well as carrying a snack and water. Finally, if you really want to take your shed hunting seriously, I've known people who carry a GPS to track and record where and when they find a shed.

Getting permission to shed hunt on private land is a good way to establish a relationship with a landowner by showing them you are respectful of their property. Relationships like these eventually lead to hunting permission. On many



Jillian Sparks walks up on an early season shed during a cold January shed hunting session. She is perhaps the world's luckiest shed hunter, since she consistently finds matching sets while her husband scratches his head in amazement.

properties you will likely be the first person to shed hunt and that first year is usually incredible because there are several years of antlers on the ground.

If you have a dog they will certainly enjoy shed hunting as much as you do. Many people even use them as a tool for finding antlers. They train their dog to smell, locate and retrieve shed antlers. In college I read several articles about shed hunting dogs and got interested in trying it. A friend and I began training his dog in our backyard. Over the summer and fall the dog got really good at finding them, even when we buried them in leaves and brush. We were excited to see how many more sheds we would find now that we had a "shed dog."

On our first outing we quickly realized we had trained him to smell for the scent of our hands rather than antlers. We spotted a large shed lying along a field edge, but when the dog got near it he ran right past it. Even when we showed it to him he had no interest. He did enjoy his hike, though. While we failed as trainers, many people won't go shed hunting without a dog. If you are interested in trying it for yourself there is plenty of information available online as well as books and DVDs on the subject.

Reaping the Benefits

After several seasons of shed hunting, you will probably have a large collection of antlers. I like to remember where

and when I find my sheds, but this becomes difficult after a pile of antlers builds up. Now I attach small tags with zip ties to the base of each antler. A friend in Idaho who has picked up thousands of sheds places small pieces of painter's tape on the pedicle (the place where the antler attaches to the head) and writes on them with a marker. Cataloging them like this creates a living history of your shed hunting.

Many people enjoy using them as home decorations. They are attractive and have hundreds of uses from chandeliers to lamps to cabinet fixtures and dog chews. I prefer to place them around the house as they are, and I've found them to be a good conversation starter. People are always curious about the more interesting sheds I've found like the locked bucks, an antler I found hanging in a tree, two matching sets of antlers from the same buck, and large elk sheds.

It's a good thing shed hunting isn't just about antlers because you do a lot more walking than finding. My best day ever I found eleven antlers. Usually I'm happy if I find one. The difficulty makes it that much more rewarding. When you find an antler take the time to admire it and celebrate the discovery with whoever is around, even if it's your dog. Shed hunting is just another way to spend time outdoors in the company of people you care for. All you have to do is enjoy the walk, keep your head up, and your eyes open.

Bikes, Farmers, and “Good Roads” in Nebraska

By History Nebraska

It was an unlikely alliance: farmers and bicycle enthusiasts. Both were dissatisfied with the muddy, unimproved roads of the late 1800s. But it would take a lot of tax dollars to build a modern road system, and not everyone wanted to spend the money. And then came a new, noisy, four-wheeled invention ...



Unidentified Nebraska women's bicycle outing, circa 1895.
History Nebraska RG3906-7-8

Nebraska's early roads were unmarked trails across the countryside. Railroads received large government subsidies, but the dirt roads linking farms and towns were seen only as a local concern.

Most people assume a marked effort to improve roads at the local level came about because of automobiles. That's partly true, but the nationwide "Good Roads" movement started years earlier. It began with bicyclists.

The invention of the modern "safety bicycle" led to a nationwide bicycling craze in the 1880s and 1890s. The new bikes were safer and easier to ride than their high-wheeled predecessors. Nebraskans formed bicycle clubs and explored the countryside. Some men and women completed "century rides" of 100 miles in a day. (Imagine doing that on dirt roads on a heavy, single-speed bike. And women did this in long skirts!)

At the time, Nebraska's larger cities were beginning to pave their main streets. In rural areas, roads were bare dirt – not even graveled. Bicyclists soon found allies among farmers and small town merchants who wanted better farm-to-

market roads.

Many Nebraska towns had commercial clubs to promote local business. Some of these clubs formed Good Roads committees to raise funds for road equipment. They sponsored road building "bees" in which rural and town volunteers labored on sections of roads. Even dirt roads could be improved by grading or by being dragged with heavy split logs to smooth the surface.

The Good Roads Movement gained momentum with the coming of the automobile. City drivers on country roads infuriated farmers by scattering their chickens, frightening their horses, raising plumes of dust, and damaging roads that were often maintained by the farmers themselves.

But as autos became more affordable (starting with the Ford Model T in 1908), farmers began modifying cars into early pickup trucks. "If anyone on earth needs the motor car, it is the farmer," said the *Nebraska Farm Journal* in 1911.

Even before paved roads were common, road maintenance was too big a project for local volunteers or county employees. Motorists began calling for state and even federal funding of



Polk County was known for its good roads, which were overseen by a county highway commissioner and this road crew. History Nebraska RG2407-5-3



The Ford Model T put millions of people on the road. In Hooper, Nebraska, a local Ford agency organized a parade for local Model T owners. After the 103-car parade, the motorists rallied at the school grounds and posed for a photograph. History Nebraska RG3347-3-33

roads. It took decades of promotion to convince enough voters and lawmakers that this was a good idea. Nobody wanted their taxes to go up. Most roads long remained unimproved as a result.

The bicycle craze faded, but automobiles grew more popular year by year. In 1916, the number of cars registered in Nebraska topped 100,000. By then, local groups were working with multi-state organizations to promote "automobile trails" – the beginnings of the modern highway system. Roads such as the Lincoln Highway (more-or-less the future U.S. Highway 30), the Detroit-Lincoln-Denver or D-L-D Highway (U.S. 6), the Meridian Road (U.S. 81), and dozens of others were cobbled together from existing local routes, marked by



painting telephone poles, and promoted through maps and guidebooks. Here's how the *Automobile Blue Book* described a section of the Meridian Road between Norfolk and Pierce in 1912:

"Turn left from business center and at the fork ... bear left, following the angling road straight out of city through edge of Hadar ... bearing right with road ... Jog left and take first right. Turn left 1 mile, then right ½ mile. Turn left 1 mile into Pierce."

Later, concrete markers were added to guide adventurous motorists. Sharp-eyed travelers can still spot some of these markers along backroads around the state.

The federal system of numbered highways was adopted in 1925, transforming the old automobile trails into U.S. highways. That year, Nebraska adopted a gasoline tax to raise money for roads. Auto travel gradually became less of an adventure, but faster and more reliable.

Adapted from "The Good Roads Movement in Nebraska" by L. Robert Puschendorf, from the Winter 2015 issue of Nebraska History. Visit History Nebraska's website at history.nebraska.gov.





BASS FISHING AT MASKENTHINE LAKE/JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY

VISIT STANTON

By Josie Meister, Nebraska Tourism Commission

Head up to the northeastern part of the state to discover what Stanton has to offer! This community is full of hidden gems that give you the perfect reason to explore.

Spring is coming and what better way to prepare than enjoying the warm weather that's on its way? Gear up for this year's golf season by planning a trip to the Elkhorn Aces Golf Course. This course is ranked fifth in the top nine-hole courses in Nebraska. Or embrace the spring weather and explore the arboretum and native plant display at Maskenthine Lake. Established in 1976, this arboretum is a collection of native and exotic tree species planted in a natural arrangement. While you're at Maskenthine Lake, enjoy all the other recreational activities this area has to offer including hiking, fishing, hunting and boating.

Looking for delicious food and drinks in the area? Visit one of Nebraska's popular breweries, Uptown Brewery, and try one of their 10 rotating beers on tap. Hungry? Stay for lunch or dinner and try their "best ever" prime rib. Still hungry? Stop by Wolf's Den for the best burger in Stanton and help them celebrate 38 years in business. Finally, finish off the day with some homemade pie from the Stanton VFW.

Get ready for hunting season with Cedar Valley Hunt Club. Go on a hunt led by experienced guides on hundreds of acres of privately-owned land. With CRP grasslands, food plots, crop lands, two streams and a large pond, the entire property is managed for hunting productivity. Home to an abundance

of pheasant, quail, and whitetail deer, the gently rolling hills provide the perfect backdrop for your hunt.

Learn, connect and relax at Red Roads Herbs Retreat & Learning Center where you can learn hands-on gardening skills and purchase fresh and dried herbs at the gift shop. Or explore the Stanton Public Library, recently placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Take a trip to Stanton in the summertime and experience what this community is all about. Spend Fourth of July participating in a full day of activities, commencing with a top-notch fireworks display put on by volunteer firefighters.

A historical community with delicious food and endless recreational activities, Stanton is where you will want to be this spring.



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The City of Stanton is a rural setting community located 12 miles south-east of Norfolk along Nebraska Highway 24. Stanton has a community base of 1,627 residents.

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Maskenthine Lake Recreation Area

This recreation area is a multipurpose project owned and operated by the Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District. Located 10 miles east of Norfolk, NE in the rolling hills of north-central Stanton County, the lake attracts people from across the state.

The area is approximately 740 acres in size, including the 100 acre lake, which provides many recreational activities, including: hunting, boating (5 mph/no wake), picnicking, hiking, camping, a mountain bike trail, disc golf, swimming, and a sledding hill and warming shed in the winter.

Camping is \$20 per night. Tent camping is \$8 per tent per day. No park permit or fee is required for entrance.

RECORD MULE DEER

By Jerry Kane

Michael Dickerson had come up empty in past hunts, but he finally got his Nebraska trophy this past September. Dickerson of Davison, Michigan, now holds the Nebraska record typical mule deer taken by archery. He stalked and shot the deer, which scored 197 4/8, Sept. 10, 2018, on private land in the badlands of northern Sioux County. “It truly was a privilege to have an opportunity at such a great animal,” said Dickerson, 40. Dickerson’s deer is the second largest typical mule deer entered into the Nebraska records regardless of method of take. The top Nebraska mule deer of 200 3/8 was taken with a muzzleloader by Miles Lemley of Lyman, Nebraska, in Scotts Bluff County in 2007. The previous archery record was 187 2/8. The Pope and Young Club said Dickerson’s trophy, with its current score, would rank in the top 25 nationally in the typical mule deer archery records maintained by the club. Scoring a trophy is a combination of measurements of antler tine length and mass. The morning of the hunt, Dickerson watched the deer for several hours. Eventually, he noticed it bedding with three other bucks and the stalk began. The bucks began feeding their way up a valley and into a bowl, which put a small hill between them and the hunter. Dickerson crept up behind the



PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHAEL DICKERSON

hill and took his broadside shot from 57 yards as the deer fed. Dickerson’s shot hit directly behind the front shoulders before the buck ran to higher ground, stopped and turned back toward Dickerson. “He looked back at me almost as if he didn’t know what had happened,” he said. “Shortly after he fell over and it was over.” For more information on the Nebraska Big Game Records Program, and to browse the record database, visit Outdoornebraska.org/biggame trophyrecords.

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SUPER TAG

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

Zachary Welch of Ainsworth is the latest hunter to complete the Nebraska Game and Park’s resident-only super tag, which allows for one elk, one antelope, one deer and two turkeys. The permit is awarded to one hunter annually by lottery and is valid for two years.

Welch, a 21-year-old student at the University of Nebraska-Kearney, successfully hunted all five animals within four months by archery. He harvested a bull elk south of Wellfleet, a white-tailed buck and two turkeys on his home range in Keya Paha County, and a male antelope in Brown County.

Welch has been bowhunting since the 6th grade, guided by his grandfather and father. He has hunted deer, turkeys and antelope extensively, but coming in, Welch felt the chances of filling the super tag would be difficult with a bow.

“I worked so hard to prepare for the elk hunt, which has been at the top of my bucket list,” Welch said. “I had the elk within 10 yards and was at full drawn twice, but I couldn’t get a shot. I finally ranged him in at 51 yards.”

“Completing the super tag – I can’t put into words what it means to me. I put in so many hours, literally thousands of practice shots throughout the summer and fall. To have it all come together and pay off, to shoot an animal I’ve dreamed of hunting in my own state, and to experience it with my dad and friends, it means the world to me.”

Welch is grateful to all the landowners, wildlife biologists, and friends who made his success possible.

For more information on the super tag, visit Outdoornebraska.org/supertag.



PHOTO COURTESY OF HARLIN WELCH

SEND YOUR SENIOR OUTDOOR PHOTOS

By Eric Fowler



Ryan Baker, a photographer from Imperial, contacted us to share an observation that somewhat surprised him, and pleasantly surprised us: Baker said most high school seniors he photographs want “hunting” photos. Especially the girls.

With the decline in hunting participation throughout the U.S., it’s good to know that youths across Nebraska not only have an interest in the shooting sports, but also want to flaunt them.

Do you know such a senior, or were you one decades ago, posing with your shotgun and trap-shooting vest, or your favorite deer rifle? Send us your hunting, shooting or even fishing-themed senior photo by March 22 to jeff.kurru@nebraska.gov, along with their name, class and school, and we will publish our own yearbook in the May 2019 issue of *Nebraskaland*.

HANNAH SULLIVAN, WALLACE, CLASS OF 2018. PHOTO BY RYAN BAKER



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READING THE FORECAST

By Jeff Kurrus

One of the most anticipated days of the year is when the Nebraska Fishing Forecast is released. Not only can you learn fish numbers and sizes at lakes surveyed across the state, but you can also read further into the graphs to make this year’s fishing trips even more successful.

Because I desire to predominantly catch largemouth bass on rod-and-reel, let’s focus on this species. First, in the 2019 forecast Louisville State Recreation Area (SRA) Lake No. 2 surveyed the largest number of bass per electrofishing hour. The lake also shows a fair number of fish at different lengths, meaning that this is probably a place I could take my kids to fish because there will, on average, be more action than a lake like Wagon Train, which is near the bottom of the density list.

However, I also have to take into consideration that this lake gets a considerable amount of water recreation pressure, namely from its swim beach, paddlers and newly installed floating playground. If I’m alone, I’ll make sure to hit this one on a weekday afternoon or early weekend morning. If I’m with my family, it’s a perfect fish and play location.

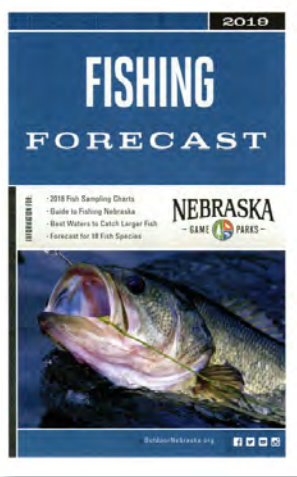
If I’m taking a diehard angler and we’re trying to chase big fish, I look for those lakes with the highest densities, continuing to weigh angler pressure, location, and even water

clarity into my decisions. While Wanahoo has the largest density of >15-inch largemouths, I might also look at a place like Alexandria West, with its partner lake Alexandria East, for a couple of reasons. One, Alexandria is a bit farther away from the metro so fishing pressure will be lower. Two, I haven’t fished Alexandria in years and it will be like fishing new water again.

I will also cross-compare lake sizes with fish densities. If I only have a morning to figure out a body of water, I will choose a lake with a smaller fish density versus a larger lake because it might take me longer to find fish on larger water.

Because of these fishing forecasts and the note-taking that follows, I have had epic days on lakes across Nebraska that I had never even thought of fishing before – Arnold, Ravenna, Fremont No. 7/8, Burchard, Mayberry, Walnut Creek, Lawrence Youngman, Grove Lake and others. You can too.

View the 2019 fishing forecast at Outdoornebraska.org/fishingforecast.



COMBAT INVASIVES

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

Invasive species threaten the state of Nebraska. From emerald ash borer attacking ash trees to zebra mussels damaging our fisheries, threats can be found on all fronts.

Invasive species are any non-native plant, animal, disease or other organism that can cause harm to the environment, the economy or human health.

Research finds invasive species cause more than \$120 billion in damage to the U.S. economy annually. This includes invasive weeds in crop fields (\$21 billion) and pastures (\$6 billion), invasive crop diseases (\$18 billion) and crop insects (\$13 billion), and invasive forest pests (\$4 billion). This increases production costs and is passed on to consumers.

Invasive species cause tremendous damage to our natural environment. Invasive plants can suck up water needed by native plants and crops, change streamflow patterns and water clarity, and increase water runoff and soil erosion.

They also degrade wildlife habitat, reduce species diversity and out-compete native species. Over 40 percent of the species on the Endangered Species Act list are at risk due in part to invasive species.

Human health is also directly impacted by invasive



species. Stings from fire ants and Africanized honey bees may require medical attention and can be deadly. Feral swine carry diseases harmful to humans, and contact with giant hogweed can result in severe skin blistering and burns.

According to the Nebraska Invasive Species Program, however, simple steps can make a huge difference in fighting back. Inspect and remove plants, seeds and dirt from clothing and shoes, vehicles and equipment, and even your dog before leaving an area. Clean, drain and dry boats after leaving any water body to prevent accidental movement of aquatic invasive species. Dispose of bait properly – don’t toss it in the lake or dump it on the ground. Finally, buy firewood locally, and don’t bring it back home. Each of these steps can help safeguard Nebraska from invasive species.

Report sightings of possible invasive species to the Nebraska Invasive Species Program at neinvasives.com/report-a-sighting.

GIANT HOGWEED PHOTO BY THOMAS B. DENHOLM

BIRDSEED COOKIES

By Julie Geiser



Here is an easy treat you can make for backyard birds.

Servings: 4-5 medium-sized cookies
Prep Time: about 10-15 minutes
Cooking Time: 10-15 hours

Ingredients:

- 2 cups flour
- 1/2 tsp baking powder
- 1/2 cup of sugar
- 2/3 cup vegetable shortening (Crisco)
- 2 eggs
- 3/4 cup birdseed of choice
- 3 egg whites
- Cookie cutters
- Yarn to hang cookies

1. Sift all the dry ingredients together and cut in the shortening with a blunt knife. Add the eggs. Add the birdseed and knead until smooth. Allow the dough to chill overnight.
2. Roll out the dough to 1/4 inch thickness and cut into shapes with cookie cutters. Insert a paper clip into the top of the shape to act as a hanger. Brush the cookie with beaten egg whites and press birdseed into the top of the cookie.
3. Bake on an ungreased cookie sheet at 325 degrees Fahrenheit for 10-15 minutes or until the cookies are hard.
4. String yarn through the paper clip and hang outside.

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To report potential emerald ash borer, contact the Nebraska Department of Agriculture at 402-471-2351.

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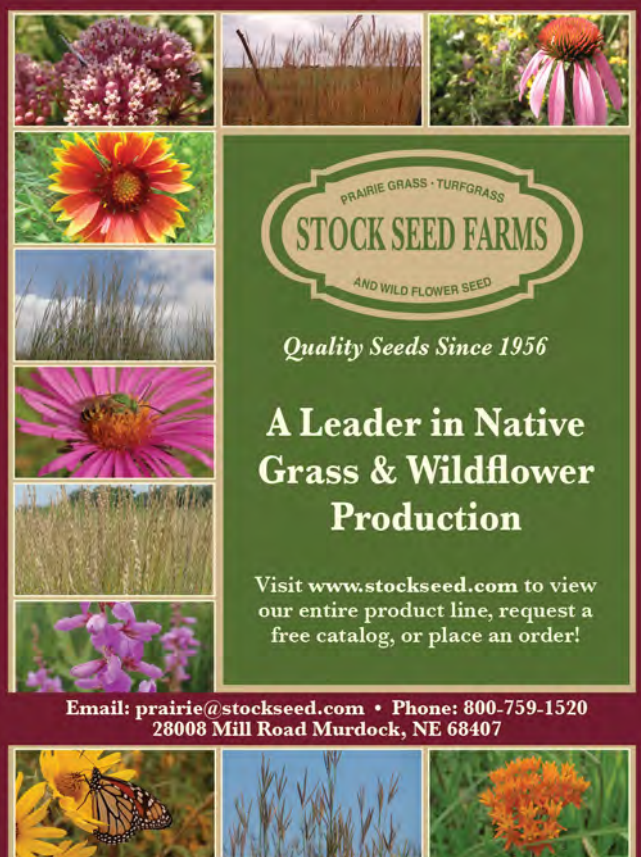
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STEALING THE SHOW

Paid Advertisement from the Nebraska Safari Club

Safari Club International held its annual convention in Reno, Nevada Jan. 9-12, 2019. This is the largest hunting convention in the world. International exhibitors, furriers, jewelers and more took part in four days of celebrating the sport we hold so dear: hunting.

Nebraska was well represented on many levels. Hunt Nebraska, Pheasant Bonanza, Gunderson's Jewelers and Zeller Trunks/Chuck's Wood Barn were exhibitors.

Greg Middleton served as exhibitor services manager, a title he has held for well over 20 years. Cal Campbell served as regional representative for Nebraska, Iowa and the Dakotas. Mary Middleton served not only as the national secretary for Safari Club Foundation Sables, but also as the Nebraska chapter president, thus representing Nebraska on the Safari Club International Board of Directors.

Congratulations to 2003 Mrs. Nebraska Olivia Nalos Opre, who was presented the C.J. McElroy Award. Olivia is not a stranger to the hunting awards stage. In 2014, Olivia received the Diana Award, the most prestigious female hunting award. It is a difficult award to achieve and an honor once accomplished. This year, Olivia's efforts to advocate for hunting and her achievements in the field crossed paths with the C.J. McElroy Award.

This award is named after the founder of Safari Club



OLIVIA NALOS OPRE (LEFT)

International. The award honors members of the worldwide hunting industry who have made tremendous contributions to the sport of hunting, achieved worldwide hunting excellence, demonstrated dedication to wildlife conservation and have a history of service to the global hunting community and to SCI goals.

Opre's cohorts with this award include Jeff Rann, Jim Shockey, Craig Boddington, and Dick Cabela to name a few. Opre is the first female to achieve this pinnacle award.

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Far left is my paternal grandfather, George Nolda, next his youngest son, Wilbur. Next Mr. and Mrs. Fink. (Don't know their first names and there's nobody left to ask.) Photo taken in Ravenna, circa 1943. George's two oldest sons, Herb and Virg, were off fighting in the War. (Herb was my dad.) Both sons returned OK from the war and Grandpa and his three sons greatly enjoyed pheasant hunting in the late 40s. Then when the Korean War broke out, Wilbur was drafted and sent to Korea. He excitedly wrote that he saw ring-necked pheasants over there. It was October and he lamented that he wasn't home to go pheasant hunting with his dad and brothers, but stated, "I'll be home next year and we'll give 'em hell." He was killed in action a month later.

– Valerie Vierk, Ravenna

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. Text may be edited and photos adjusted for reproduction. All photos will be returned.



FRUITION

By Jeff Kurrus

Photographing construction is a slow process. Assignments are given to *Nebraskaland* photographers, including myself, all of the time. On top of our typical field work, we might shoot family fishing nights, outdoor expos, shooting or angling tournaments, and the like.

In the last couple of years, however, I’ve had a different kind of assignment. I was tasked to photograph Venture Park construction at Louisville and Schramm Park state recreation areas and Eugene T. Mahoney and Platte River state parks. From glamping cabins and a floating playground to rock-climbing walls and ziplines, I’ve had a front seat view to each of these projects.

For a person used to shooting wildlife and people participating in outdoor adventures, photographing a new wall wasn’t thrilling ... until it was.

When the steel beams were added to Mahoney’s Activity Center, where the climbing wall would be located, I shrugged. Yet when I came back months later, my first response was

“Wow.”

When I photographed the site at Platte River State Park where the splash pad (pictured) would eventually go, I shrugged once again. Upon completion, I couldn’t wait for my kids to see it.

Each of these projects – from beginning to end – drew a similar response from me.

So as the newly renovated Schramm Education Center is set to debut later this spring, I am once again excited about seeing people using it for the first time – while also remembering the images I took of the sheetrock, mud, and other materials so typical of a construction site.

I hear the second phase of the Venture Park project will begin soon. I’ll have to take a deep breath before it starts, for it will take some time before my excitement is fulfilled.

Then I’ll smile knowing that when these projects do come to fruition, I’ll be just as giddy as the people visiting them.



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