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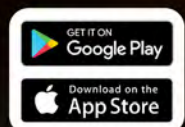
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magazine

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A northern painted turtle out on a hot summer day. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

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



### A LONE MUSSEL

Flanked by cottonwood seedlings, a mussel shell lies on a Missouri River sandbar at Ponca State Park in Dixon County.

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



Scott Stengle from Hickman hunts mourning doves in Lancaster County. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

## DOVE DAY 2

By Jeff Kurrus

For many, the dove opener is the official start of fall hunting season.

Day 2, however, draws crowds significantly smaller. And it shouldn't have to. Here are a few thoughts on how to extend your season.

### 1) Try Again

If you're hunting a high-traffic location, at least a few people will be there on Day 2. Hunters will burn the field out, meaning birds will wise up and not return, but those remaining birds that do will be looking for food and water. Concentrate on these two resources to find the largest concentration of doves.

### 2) Rest and Repeat

If you're fortunate enough to have a location to yourself, give the birds a few days to re-acclimate to not being shot at repeatedly. Then go and hunt it again. The only caveat to this tactic is the weather. If a cold snap happens to come through the area, birds will move away. However, don't stop hunting completely as new birds will continue to filter in

from the north.

### 3) Traditional Flight Paths

Regardless of what food is on the ground, check areas where you've shot doves in the past. If they have flown there before, odds are they will fly there again.

### 4) Food

Even after autumn really sets in, doves will still be around. Some of my best Nebraska dove hunts have occurred in October, well after everyone else has moved on to other hunts. I'll ride roads and look for concentrations of birds working a field. Then the only thing left to do is gain permission.

Kicking off the hunting season with a great dove hunt is an annual celebration for many. But if you haven't quite filled that itch to shoot at these acrobatic flyers, consider hunting a few more days using these tips.

I'm pretty sure you won't be the only person there ... but you just might be.

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Try this DIY project to place your trail camera at the perfect angle. RYAN SPARKS

# DIY TRAIL CAMERA MOUNT

By Ryan Sparks

It is the time of year when hunters start thinking about deer and preparing for the upcoming season. A part of that process is placing trail cameras to take an inventory of the deer on the property you hunt. The right trail camera in the right spot can be the key to tagging the buck of a lifetime. But getting a trail camera placed just right is easier said than done. Trees rarely grow perfectly straight, and they are seldom the ideal diameter for a trail camera strap. Screw-in trail camera mounts are great for getting your camera in exactly the right spot and positioned at the perfect angle, but they are expensive, often sold for around \$25.

Using materials commonly found at most hardware stores, you can make your own screw-in trail camera

mounts for less than \$5. Even better, the mount takes less than a minute to assemble. Here's how to put it together.

**Materials:**

- ¼" x 3¾" eye screw
- ¼" x 20 x 3" eye bolt
- ¼" wing nut
- ⅝" x 1" hex bolt
- ⅝" locking nut
- ⅝" x 1¼" fender washers (x3)

**Directions:**

- Add a washer to the hex bolt.
- Next, thread the eye screw onto the bolt next to the first washer.
- Add a second washer.
- Add the eye bolt.
- Add the third and final washer.
- Lastly, screw the hex nut onto the bolt.

- Add the wing nut to the eye bolt, screwing it on upside down so you can use it to secure the trail camera later.
- Tighten the nut to your desired tension with a ⅝" wrench or pliers. I like it tight enough so it won't move under the weight of a trail camera, but with enough give that it allows adjustment when mounting the camera.

Optional: I like to spray my trail camera mounts with flat camouflage paint to remove the shine of the metal.  
NOTE: In Nebraska, it is illegal to place trail cameras on private property without permission from the landowner.

*Ryan Sparks is a freelance outdoor writer and photographer. See more of his work at [sparksryan.com](http://sparksryan.com).*

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There's nothing like a campfire to spark a connection with your favorite people and landscapes. And whether you want to blaze new trails or just contemplate your place under the stars, the best option for both is in Nebraska's outdoors.



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Fried walleye and coleslaw sandwich. JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND

# WALLEYE PO’ BOYS

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

Servings: 4

Prep time: 15 minutes

Cooking time: 20 minutes

Ingredients:

- 4 walleye fillets, skinless and boneless
- ½ cup of fish/seafood breading
- Vegetable oil
- 4 cups of coleslaw mix
- ½ cup of mayonnaise
- ¼ teaspoon of celery seed
- 2 teaspoons of coarse ground mustard
- 2 tablespoons of apple cider vinegar
- 1 teaspoon of sugar
- Louisiana hot sauce, to taste
- Kosher salt, to taste
- Freshly cracked pepper, to taste
- 4 hoagie buns
- Sliced tomato
- 1 to 2 ripe avocados, sliced

1. Combine coleslaw, mayonnaise, celery seed, mustard, vinegar and sugar. Season to taste with hot sauce, salt and pepper. Cover and refrigerate while you prepare the fish.
2. In a frying pan, heat about ¼ inch of oil to 350° Fahrenheit. Meanwhile, check walleye for bones. Rinse fish under cold water, shake off excess moisture and roll into the breading.
3. Fry the walleye until golden and crispy on both sides, carefully flipping halfway through. Drain on paper towels. If needed, fry fish in batches and keep warm in a 200° oven until you’re ready to assemble the sandwiches.
4. Before serving, give the coleslaw a good mix. Assemble po’ boys with fish, coleslaw, sliced tomato and avocado. Season tomato and avocado to taste with salt and pepper.

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# The Things That Stick to Us

*A celebration of the ways seeds transport themselves around the world and onto our pants and pets.*

*Story and photos by Chris Helzer  
Illustrations by Tim Reigert*

**W**e've all been there. You're in the middle of a perfectly pleasant walk through a woodland, wetland or prairie and you glance down to find your pant legs covered with sticky seeds.

"Well, dadgum," you exclaim, "would you look at that incredible seed dispersal adaptation!"

"Golly," you continue, "those little hooked spines sure are effective at catching onto my pants. Ha! They're on my socks, as well! I bet they work pretty great on dogs, too. Bowzer, come! Yep, look at that, they work spectacularly well on dogs!"

"Hey, Frank," you call to your friend, "come over here and check out how sticky these little seeds are. It's going to take me hours to get them all off my clothes. Aren't they amazing?"



**Stickseeds (*Hackelia* sp) and foxtail (*Setaria* sp) on pants.**



**Illinois tickclover at sunrise at Lincoln Creek Prairie near Aurora in Hamilton County.**

It's hard not to admire the way some plants have figured out how to move their seeds around the world. Sure, it adds a few hours of work to your outdoor adventure, but when you put things in perspective, it's a small price to pay for an intimate look at a natural wonder, right? Besides, what were you going to do with all that time, anyway?

There's a good reason those seeds are so proficient at adhering to your socks. It's part of a broader strategy for reproduction and territory expansion. When you brush up against a plant and come away with a scad of little marvels clinging to you, that plant is handing you responsibility for transporting its children to a new and safe location. I hope you take that responsibility seriously.

Plants create and release seeds as a way to help their

kids move to exotic new locations. Unfortunately, most of those seeds never make it to full planthood. They get eaten or otherwise perish before they land in a spot where there is bare soil, sufficient light and moisture, and manageable competition from nearby plants. That's OK. Only one seed has to be successful to perpetuate the genetic lineage of its parent.

Arguably, seeds have the best chance of becoming a plant near their parent. After all, if the parent is thriving, the site conditions must be pretty good, right? If the goal was simply to create successful progeny, plants might all just drop their seeds straight down, or maybe a few feet away. That approach, however, only works until a disease, burrowing badger, or other threat appears at that localized site and

wipes everyone out. So much for that genetic lineage.

Creating seeds that travel gives plants a chance to set up satellite locations and hedge their bets a little. Hopefully, a little distance between parents and kids means one or the other will avoid that fungal infection or badger activity. Over many generations, a family line might spread across many acres, or even square miles, and really cement its legacy.

Seed dispersal, then, is a crucial strategy for most plants, and the ways plants move those seeds across the landscape can vary widely. Generally, though, most plants create seeds that can be carried by wind, be ingested and deposited by animals, or become attached to the hide of a passing creature.

The first of those approaches consists of making lightweight seeds with little feathery appendages that help



Needle-and-thread grass seed (*Hesperostipa comata*) at the Nature Conservancy's Platte River Prairies in Hall County.

them float away on a breeze to seek their fortune elsewhere. Plants can often create hundreds or thousands of those tiny wind-dispersed seeds per year, and while most still fall to the ground or get stuck in vegetation close to their parents, a few may travel many miles.

Wind dispersal sounds like a terrific strategy until you realize that to reduce weight, seeds can't carry much food within their seed coat. That means they don't have long to hit the soil and germinate before they die. They also have a thin seed coat, which means they are vulnerable to damage from temperature extremes, digestion by animals and other threats. As a result, the risk for an individual seed is extraordinarily high.

On the other end of that spectrum, there are plants that give their seeds heavy-duty protective coverings and try to attract animals to eat them. In most cases, those seed coats can protect the integrity of the seed as it passes through an animal's digestive tract, and it can emerge and be deposited far away from where it was consumed. You might say those seeds are both heavy-duty and heavy-in-doody. You probably shouldn't, though.

Making large seeds with robust seed coats, however, takes a lot of resources from a plant. That investment increases even more when a plant wraps its seed in a sweet, fleshy fruit to entice a robin or raccoon to make a meal out of it. As a result of that high cost, plants generally don't make very many of those seeds. The few seeds they do create have a relatively high chance of surviving their journey, but there's still a huge risk that none will be deposited where they can germinate and grow to adulthood.

Seeds that can hitchhike on animals (or human hikers) kind of split the difference between those other two strategies. They tend to be larger and more robust than wind-dispersed seeds, but the investment in their construction is much less than is needed to create a plum or raspberry. In most cases,

the plant simply adds some spines, hooks or other similar appendages to the seed coat or seed pod. The variety found within those attachment features is incredible.

Hitchhiker seeds can latch onto a passing animal's coat (or pants, as applicable) when that animal brushes up against them. They then get carried until they're dislodged, either intentionally or unintentionally. Sometimes, there's a very short period between attachment and detachment ("Ouch! What is that? Get it off me!").

More often, the seed's courier doesn't realize it has passengers until it has moved a fair distance away. In fact, many seeds are brushed off before an animal even knows they were there — dislodged as the animal scrapes against other vegetation or rolls around in the dirt for a nice, pleasing dust bath.

There are lots of plants that equip their seeds with hooks, spines or other features that help them hitchhike on animals, including humans. Here are six plants that Nebraska outdoors enthusiasts are likely to encounter. Each has its own unique characteristics, worthy of your appreciation.

### Needlegrasses

Needlegrasses (*Hesperostipa* sp) are perennial grasses that bloom in late May and early June across Nebraska. Two, in particular, have seeds that resemble long spears with sharp points. Needle-and-thread grows mostly in sandy soil and can be found throughout the northwestern two-thirds of the state. Porcupine grass (illustration, right), which has even larger "spears," is in the northeastern two-thirds of the state, meaning that in much of central Nebraska, you might find both.



Cocklebur (*Xanthium strumarium*) at the Nature Conservancy's Platte River Prairies.

The seeds of these needlegrasses are encased in the sharp "spear head," which also features stiff hairs that help keep it from slipping back out of whatever it sticks into. That spear head is attached to a long awn, similar to a very thick hair, which acts as the spear's shaft. As the seeds mature, they become loose in their moorings. If a furry animal or hiker brushes against them, those sharp points embed themselves in fur, clothing or even skin, held firmly in place by the aforementioned stiff hairs.

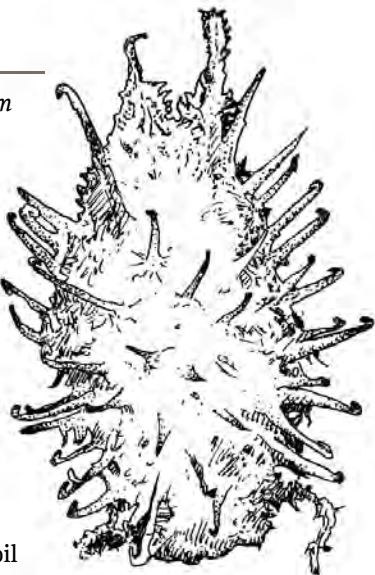
It's easy to imagine this tactic being very effective when bison roamed most of Nebraska, covered in thick, curly hair. Of course, it's also very effective on moisture-wicking wool socks and lightweight, breathable pants made with blends of nylon, polyester and spandex. Once needlegrass seeds become embedded, further jostling often pushes them further into whatever material they're attached to until they eventually encounter the skin beneath. That's usually when they're detected, yanked out and discarded in a new location.

After needlegrass seeds are deposited in a new site, the long awn (the spear's shaft) gets to display its additional ability. The awn can repeatedly coil up and straighten as humidity conditions fluctuate over a period of days. As a result, the seed can effectively drill itself through thatchy vegetation and right into the soil where it can germinate and grow.

### Cockleburs

Cocklebur (*Xanthium strumarium*) is a native annual broadleaf plant found across Nebraska that commonly grows in crop fields or along wet habitats, often in bare ground within dried up wetland basins or stream banks. Young cocklebur seedlings, which resemble those of annual sunflowers, can release toxins into the soil that can suppress the germination and growth of nearby plants. The plants themselves, including the burs, are toxic as well, so try to avoid the temptation to eat them.

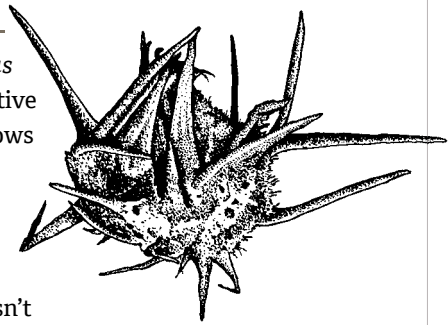
Two seeds are contained within each of the oval-shaped burs produced by cocklebur plants in the late summer or fall. Those burs contain hooked spines that effectively latch onto fur or fabric. Typically, those burs are relatively easy to detach from pants and socks but can be much more intractable in longer fur or hair.



Sandburs

Sandbur (*Cenchrus longispinus*) is a native annual grass that grows statewide in dry habitats and, like cocklebur, produces seeds inside sharp-pointed burs. It doesn't compete well with most perennial plants, so it is often found in areas of sparse vegetation, or along the edges of trails and roads. Conveniently, of course, that's where people and animals are likely to brush up against them. Sandburs are native in North America, but we have managed to export them to Europe, Australia and New Zealand, where they are appreciated about as much as they are here.

The burs of sandbur contain one to three seeds. Each bur features robust spines that point in every direction and easily penetrate clothing or skin. During the late summer and early fall, the burs are strategically located at ankle height, where pant legs, socks and boot laces can interact with them.



Sandburs (*Cenchrus longispinus*) at the Nature Conservancy's Platte River Prairies in Hall County.

Beggarticks

Beggarticks, aka beggar-ticks, beggar's ticks or (obviously) Spanish needles, are all names given to a group of annual broadleaf plants in the genus *Bidens*. Most are found in wet habitats, where some produce showy sunflower-like blossoms and others don't. They are annual plants that often occur where water level fluctuations or something else prevents perennial plants from being strongly established.

The seeds of beggarticks plants are encased within an elongated, hardened fruit with barbed awns at one end. Those awns make the fruits look like multi-tined spearfishing spear heads. They are certainly effective at spearing clothing, but they can also tangle themselves up in fur or hair.



Beggarticks (*Bidens*) at the Nature Conservancy's Platte River Prairies.

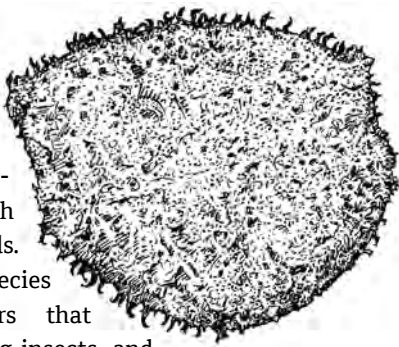


Showy tickclover (*Desmodium canadensis*) at Deep Well Wildlife Management Area in Hamilton County.

Tickclovers

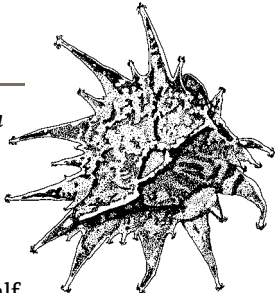
Tickclover, aka tick-trefoil (*Desmodium* sp.) plants are perennial legumes with three-part leaves found in both prairies and woodlands. Many of the grassland species have beautiful flowers that attract lots of pollinating insects, and the leaves and stems of younger plants are highly sought out by grazing cattle. Except for showy tickclover (*Desmodium canadensis*), which is statewide, most species are restricted to the eastern one-third of Nebraska.

The fruits of tickclover plants are called "loments" and are covered with tiny hooked hairs. They weren't, as far as I can tell, but they could have been the inspiration for Velcro® because they work the same way. They adhere so well to most shirt and pants fabric, and especially to socks, that they can usually survive a trip through the laundry, much to the frustration of people hoping for an easy way to get rid of them. Each loment is like an envelope that contains a single very hard-coated seed.



Virginia Stickseeds

Virginia Stickseed (*Hackelia virginiana*) is a short-lived, biennial forb with small flowers. It is the most common of the three *Hackelia* species in Nebraska and is found mostly in the eastern half of the state, but also in places in the northwest. Stickseed grows in wooded areas, including right along the edges where a dog or human child might easily encounter them without having to work very hard.



Stickseeds (*Hackelia* sp) and foxtail (*Setaria* sp) on pants.

The fruits of stickseed are called "nutlets," which sound fun, and are found in clusters of four along the long flowering stems of the plant. The nutlets are covered with little barbed prickles that are extraordinarily good at sticking to clothing and fur.

Prickle, by the way, is a technical botanical term that also refers to the spiny parts of rose stems. Fortunately, the prickles on stickseed nutlets are small enough that they aren't painful to the touch of anyone trying to scrape them off of pants or gently pry them from the fur of a dog.

.....

Because most of us aren't botanists, the commonly-used names of many of these sticky-seeded plants are used interchangeably. As a result, when you post a selfie showing off a particularly nice spread of stickseed nutlets on your pant leg, some of your friends might use names like beggar's-lice, beggar-ticks or sticktight in their comments. That's OK. The important thing is to celebrate the effectiveness of the seed dispersal strategies of these plants, regardless of what you call them.

Even as you revel in the amazing adaptations of these sticky seeds, however, you will probably want to remove them from your clothing or pets. There is no single best way to do this. In some cases, a comb can help remove cockleburs or sandburs from clothing without getting your fingers poked by the sharp spines. If you have to use your fingers, many people recommend wetting your fingers first to make the process less painful. I'm not sure why that works.

In other cases, you'll probably have to come up with your own innovative tactics for seed removal. Otherwise, the standard method is to simply pry them off one at a time while humming a little tune to yourself to make the time pass pleasantly. Try to avoid more drastic measures such as shaving your dog, burning your clothes or using foul language.

Most importantly, take time to marvel at the various and inventive ways these plants have found to transport their potential offspring to new locales. Don't whine about those spines. Don't be a cur about those burs. Celebrate your moments with those loments and admire the stick-to-it-ness of the seeds that have chosen you to help them travel the world. 🌱

# Outdoor Nebraska

By Renae Blum

Late summer and fall is a wonderful time to be outdoors. Of course, it's the start of fall hunting season, but there are also various park events to enjoy, as well as camping and photography opportunities. 📷



## Photograph blooming goldenrod

Prime bloom is August and September | Statewide

This showy plant grows quickly and can be found in prairies, along roadsides and in overgrazed pastures. Some may see it as a weed, but for many insects, such as certain bees, wasps and beetles, this is one of their only food sources during the fall months. Many bees will use the pollen from goldenrod to make honey. Snap a photo of these pollinators at work!

JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND



## Fall hunting season

Various dates | Statewide

Fall hunting season has officially begun, and you don't want to miss it! Plan some time in the field to take advantage of the various seasons open this month, including archery deer, dove and teal. Bring a young person with you and introduce them to the sport; there's nothing quite like celebrating someone's very first harvest.

JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

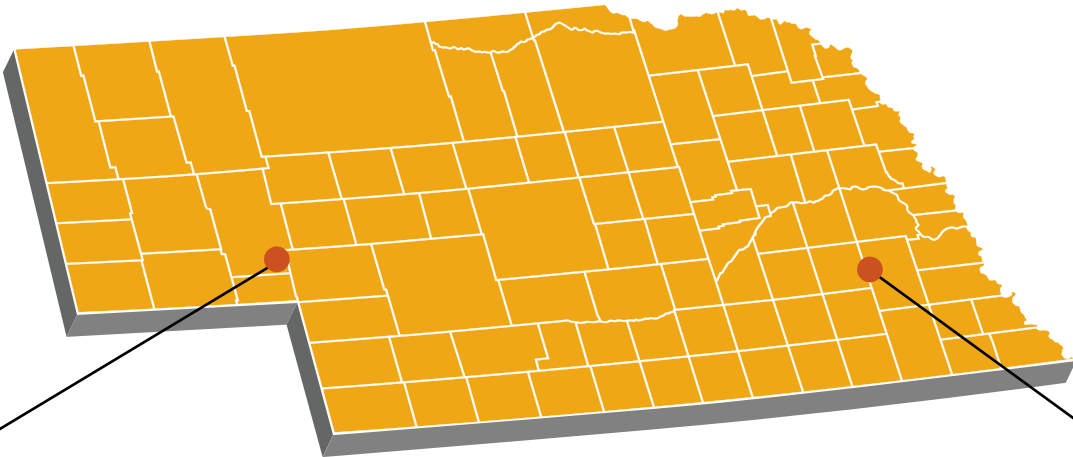


## Community Fishing events

Various dates | Papillion, Lincoln, Kearney, North Platte, Scottsbluff

Would you like to learn how to fish — or perhaps get back into the sport after years away? That's what Community Fishing events are for. At these events, you can take advantage of free instruction from staff as well as free loaner equipment such as rods, reels and bait. Find the event schedule at [Calendar.OutdoorNebraska.gov](https://Calendar.OutdoorNebraska.gov).

JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND



## 3rd Annual Ash Hollow Rendezvous

Sept. 8-10

Travel back in time and immerse yourself in pre-1840s history at this fun event at Ash Hollow State Historical Park. Watch demonstrations, such as black powder shooting and tomahawk throwing; buy goods on the trader's row; and enjoy food, live music and living history. Guests can also sign up to compete in a mountain man run. Learn more at [Calendar.OutdoorNebraska.gov](https://Calendar.OutdoorNebraska.gov).

JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND

## Camping at Pawnee

Throughout the month | Pawnee State Recreation Area

Conveniently located near Lincoln, Pawnee State Recreation Area features shady campgrounds with modern services, a sandy beach, good picnic locations, trails and a lake where visitors can enjoy powerboating and skiing. The campground also offers water, showers and modern restrooms. Make reservations at [OutdoorNebraska.gov](https://OutdoorNebraska.gov).

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



# The Ponca Powwow

Story and photos by Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

The 29th Annual Northern Ponca Tribe Powwow is Aug. 11-13, 2023, with grand entries — ceremonial entrances to the grounds by tribal dancers — at 7 p.m. Friday, 1 p.m. and 7 p.m. Saturday, and 1 p.m. Sunday. The powwow grounds are located 1 mile west of Niobrara on Highway 12: If coming from the east, turn left at the Ponca sign, located across Niobrara State Park, and follow the pavement.

All dancers and spectators are welcome. **Ponca Culture Director Richard Wright Jr.** shares insights on this sacred Native American tradition.

**Q: What is the purpose of the powwow?**

A: The powwow is about our people coming together with friends and family and practicing our culture, traditions and way of life.

I think it's especially significant with the Northern Ponca because we're so spread out. It gives us an opportunity to come together and be one. We've been having this powwow since 1994, but there were powwows that took place prior to our termination [by the United States Congress] in 1962.

Powwow, itself, is relatively modern. You're talking about the late 1800s to early 1900s. The word "powwow" actually comes from an Algonquian word "pau wau," meaning "medicine man," and it got interpreted later on by the early settlers as a gathering of some kind. So, we actually took that word back and made it our own.

Our traditional range in Nebraska goes all the way from Sioux City to the Black Hills and then down south to Lincoln — Lincoln was where we'd go to collect our salt. The Southern Ponca Tribe [whose ancestors were Nebraska Ponca people who were forcibly relocated to Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma in the mid-1800s] has had a major impact on

the powwow circuit itself, creating the straight dancers, the fancy dancers and grass dancers. The Ponca songs that were created have also had an impact — you'll literally hear them all across the country at different powwows.

**Q: If the powwow is a new tradition, what was the impetus for its creation?**

A: This tradition started — a lot of it — due to the boarding schools and the breaking up of families. Powwow was a time for us to come together.

**Q: What are the main elements of a powwow?**

A: Usually, we'll start off the morning with a contest of some kind. This year, we're doing archery, horseshoe and cornhole tournaments. There's always contest, because we love to compete. We also do a walk/run for diabetes through our health department. There are powwows I've seen that have carnival rides, fireworks

shows — I've seen a little bit of everything at different powwows.

And then we'll usually go right into Grand Entry and do a flag song [equivalent to the national anthem], veteran's song and prayer song. Next, we'll go into intertribals [when all competitors and visitors are welcome to dance], and within that, each drum group will take turns doing different intertribal songs.

Our powwow is unique because we invite both southern and northern drum types — with the northern drum being a little higher pitched, and there's a little bit of a different rhythm to its beat. Another significant thing about northern drums is that they set up on the outside of the arena around the circle, and the southern drums will set up in the center of



Above: Dreamcatchers sold by a vendor at the Northern Ponca Tribe Powwow near Niobrara.  
Opposite: A couple of elder Ponca men perform the men's northern traditional dance.





Southern drums, pictured, set up in the center of the powwow circle, as opposed to northern drums, which set up on the outside of the arena.

the circle.

Then we have a break around 5 p.m. to stop and eat. Last year, we had a Ponca poet who read stories.

We'll have a second grand entry around 7 o' clock. During the evening, we also do specials and giveaways, especially to recognize our previous head staff. We'll also sing honoring songs to relatives who passed away.

**Q: What is the purpose of the Grand Entry?**

A: The Grand Entry is what starts everything up. We line up in a certain fashion, depending on what kind of dancer you are and whether you are female or male. In front is the

head man, and he'll be carrying the Ponca eagle staff. Then we'll have three veterans carrying flags: the Ponca flag, U.S. flag and POW flag. Following behind are the Ponca princesses, straight dancers, men's traditional and grass dancers, and then women's traditional, fancy shawl and jingle dress dancers.

**Q: How is the head man chosen?**

A: The head man is selected each year by our powwow committee. He has to be a Ponca member, and the committee looks to see who has given their heart out when they're dancing.

It's an honor to be a head man.

**Q: What do you eat at meal times?**

A: All of our meals include fry bread of some kind, and usually also wojapi, a berry mix that you dip the fry bread in. A lot of our foods are soup-based, including corn soup. And of course, we always have buffalo meat.

**Q: What are the different types of dances?**

A: There's the men's northern traditional. We still do that up here because many of our members are mixed, especially with the Lakota and Dakota. There's the men's fancy dance, which we don't really have any members who dance that up here, but our southern relatives [in Oklahoma] host the

Fancy Dance World Championships — you have to be really energetic and move a lot. They drop and do the splits in the end, and it's really entertaining.

And then we have the men's straight dancers, who are generally adorned with otter skin caps and an otter that goes down their backs. And we also have the grass dancers who are moving really fast, keeping up with that movement and imitating the grass blowing in the breeze.

Generally, women's traditional and women's fancy dancers are moving pretty quick, too. And there's the women's jingle dress dance, as well.

**Q: How are dancers judged?**

A: We do team dances, and it's judged by individuals who are selected — generally they're elders or people who really know the powwow scene, who have traveled to different powwows and have seen a lot of these dances at other places. They look for cadence and rhythm — do dancers stop right at the end of



Women's jingle dress dancers wear gowns that feature metal cones.



Women’s fancy shawl dancers wear moccasins and leggings, along with elaborately decorated shawls that feature long, colorful fringes.

the beat? How do the dancers’ form look when they’re dancing together? The judges look for a lot of different things.

We also do a switch dance. That’s when the men dancers dress like women dancers, and the women dancers dress like men. It ends up being kind of comical. We also do the men’s fancy shawl dance, when the women dancers will go out to the side of the arena and select a guy to do the fancy shawl dance.

We do a potato dance, where teams of two balance a potato between their foreheads. And the MC will tell them: “You have to jump up and down now” or “turn around and do a spin” or “get on your knees.” It ends up being really fun.

**Q: What is the significance of the circular set up of a powwow?**

A: You’d see the circular set up at every powwow across the country. The only difference is that I’ve seen some tribes dance counterclockwise, whereas most will go clockwise. From my research, the Ponca used to do things counterclockwise, and so originally, we would’ve danced “backwards.” But we slowly changed that over time somewhere in the early 1900s, and we started dancing clockwise. I couldn’t tell you why

they switched, to be honest, but the circular stage represents our belief that everything goes full circle. Everything is never-ending — keeps going.

There are also certain protocols with the arena. When you enter, you have to go all the way around and come back out in the same place. If your kids are playing in the circle, you have to put some money on the head drum — there’s a respect factor that’s involved. Your kids are not supposed to be playing inside the arena. That arena is sacred.

**Q: Elders, especially, are given respect and reverence during powwow. What is the role of elders within the community?**

A: Our elders are revered to the highest degree and treated with the utmost respect with everything we do. It’s ingrained in our way of life and a part of our culture. They’re the wisdom and knowledge keepers. They’re the ones we go to if we have questions about anything, because they generally will have an answer one way or another.

**Q: How many people attend the Ponca Powwow?**

A: Last year, 1,600 people — give or take — attended the powwow over the weekend. It was probably the largest turnout we ever had. I think COVID had a huge impact on that. I think people who were isolated were really wanting to get out and be together and have that human interaction, which is so vital and crucial to Native culture.

**Q: Advice for new visitors?**

A: I just encourage people to come. I think they’re going to have a great time participating in and witnessing our culture, eating great food and listening to good music. If you’ve never been to a powwow, you need to at least go to one before you kick the bucket. Our powwow is one of the greatest to attend because we’re really friendly to outsiders and guests. We have EMS and security on site. We have plenty of vendors every year. If you’ve never had an Indian taco, you have to come and try one. 🌮

*For the latest on the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska, follow updates on social media at [facebook.com/PoncaTribeOfNebraska/](https://facebook.com/PoncaTribeOfNebraska/).*



Top, Right: The head man, carefully selected each year by the powwow committee, leads the Grand Entry and carries the Ponca eagle staff. Above: The Ponca powwow dance circle on a Saturday evening.

# Early Road Signs

By David L. Bristow,  
*History Nebraska*

We take for granted that roads will be marked to show directions and hazards. That wasn't always the case. Early highways were more of a do-it-yourself affair for private groups and local communities.

Private organizations began promoting “automobile trails” in the 1910s and '20s. A group would navigate a cross-country route along local farm roads and then promote this dirt-road path as a “highway.” Local communities eager to attract motorists then marked the route with improvised signage. Painting colorful stripes on telephone poles was a popular way to do it.

The raspy “awooga” of a Klaxon auto horn is rarely heard today, but a century ago, it was part of a national advertising campaign that changed automobile travel. At the time,

car horns were not standard equipment, and highways were full of unmarked hazards.

Starting in 1913, the manufacture of Klaxon horns began giving 18” x 24” wooden signs to automobile clubs — such as the one below from Burt County, Nebraska. Club members placed the signs at dangerous spots.

The Klaxon campaign was not only clever advertising, but it also helped raise expectations that roadside directions and hazards would be prominently marked. In time, it made more sense to devise a publicly funded, standardized system of road signage. Highway advertising was then left to billboards and Burma-Shave signs.

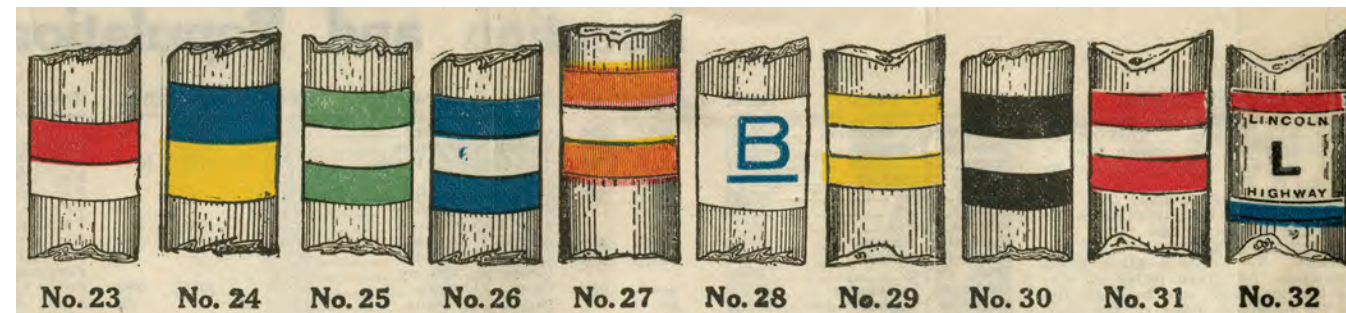
Here are a few examples of how Nebraska’s road signage developed over the first half-century of automobile travel. 

Visit History Nebraska’s website at [history.nebraska.gov](http://history.nebraska.gov).



Some 3,000 concrete markers were erected along the Lincoln Highway in 1928. This one is now at the Nebraska History Museum in Lincoln, but others survive here and there along the route.

HISTORY NEBRASKA, 11920-1



Navigating automobile trails required a good map to interpret telephone pole markers. Here's a sample of the 38 highways shown on the 1918 *Map of Nebraska with Names of Townships*: 23. Black Hills Loop of the Lincoln Highway; 24. North Platte Valley Highway; 25. Alliance, Chadron, Hot Springs; 26. Alliance, Angora, Bridgeport, Sidney; 27. Alliance, Broadwater, Oshkosh, Sidney; 28. Bee Line (Missouri Valley, IA, to Fremont, NE); 29. Alliance, Scottsbluff; 30. Alliance, Hay Springs; 31. Alliance, Crawford, Hot Springs; 32. Lincoln Highway.



Lincoln Highway marker at Gothenburg, 1919.

HISTORY NEBRASKA, RG3341-3-20-21



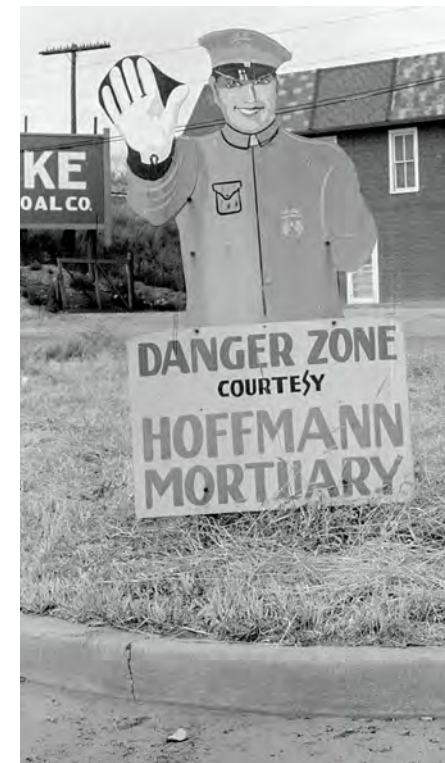
AWOOGA! HISTORY NEBRASKA, 11744-52



Installation of Nebraska's first numbered highway markers, June 5, 1926. Old U.S. Highway 38 is now U.S. 6; old Nebraska 11 is now U.S. 34. As roads improved and traffic became faster, these small signs were replaced with larger ones that could be read at a greater distance. NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION



Lighted billboards became common along highways by the 1930s. At modern speeds, a driver wouldn't have time to read all the words on this Scottsbluff billboard. HISTORY NEBRASKA, RG1431-64-11

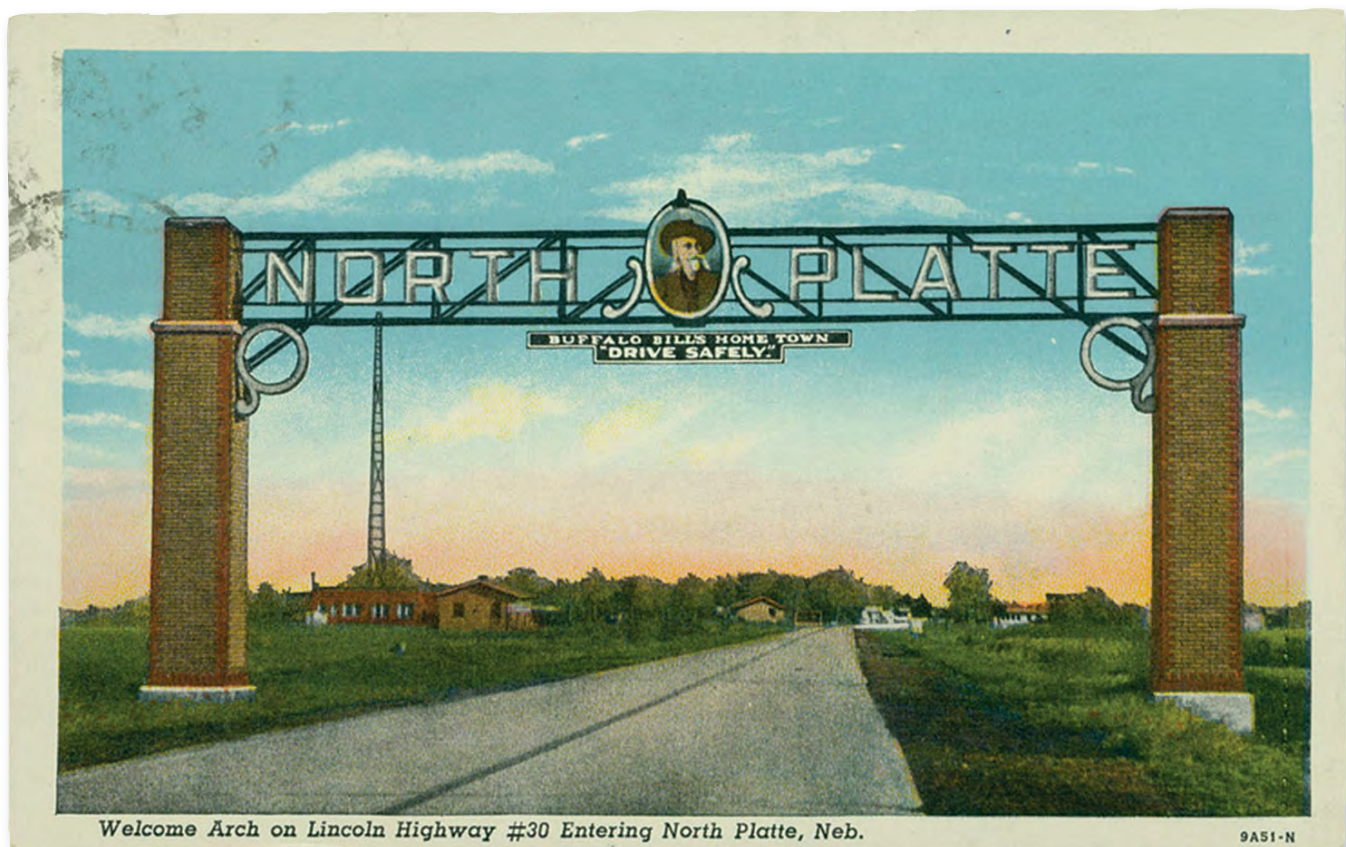


The tradition of privately funded hazard signs lived on for years. This Omaha sign gave drivers something to think about in 1938.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



Do you see the railroad crossing sign? Some drivers didn't. This photo was taken near Blue Hill after a 1949 accident. HISTORY NEBRASKA, RG2183-1949-927



Several Nebraska communities built welcome arches over the main highway into town. HISTORY NEBRASKA, RG2154-6-78



The intersection of Highway 2 and 56th Street was well southeast of Lincoln in 1949. Stop signs were yellow until 1954. A concrete marker, like the ones on the left, still stands at 56th Street and Saltillo Road. HISTORY NEBRASKA, RG2183-1949-927-24

# The Scissors Grinder

## An Annual Cicada

*Story and photos by Gerry Steinauer, Botanist*

Sunlit exoskeletons of  
scissors grinder nymphs  
hang from a tree branch  
in Aurora.



Recently-emerged scissors grinder adults have light green and gold bodies.



Mature scissors grinder adults have a mostly dark green body with a white stripe on the side.

During the dog days of late summer, the reverberating call of the scissors grinder cicada (*Neotibicen pruinosus*) begins late in the afternoon and continues into dusk. Emanating from high in the trees, individual calls initiate softly and build to a loud, shrill, “WHEE-oo WHEE-oo” crescendo lasting about 20 seconds. Sometimes, it’s a lone call; other times, it’s a cacophony, an apparent horde singing in a shrieking chorus. Some find the call a beautiful sound of nature, a fond tradition of summer; others find it as annoying as the neighbor’s broken-down, muffler-less lawn mower.

Blame the male scissors grinder for making all the noise. The insect is so named because in days gone by the call reminded people of the sound of scissors being sharpened on a grinding wheel. The call is his means of wooing a female with which to mate.

The scissors grinder is the 2-inch-long, thick, green-bodied, bulging-eyed insect that you sometimes see on sidewalks or in the grass below trees. When disturbed, they often buzz their wings, spinning their bodies, before taking off in erratic, apparently drunken, flight. More commonly encountered are the telltale exoskeletons left on tree trunks and branches by scissors grinder nymphs as they molt into adults.

### Nebraska Cicadas

Roughly 3,000 species of cicada are known worldwide, a staggering number that makes Nebraska’s cicada fauna,

22 species of annual cicada and 2 species of 17-year cicada (see sidebar on page 41), seem impoverished. Besides the scissors grinder, our other annual species include the southern grass cicada, bush cicada, lyric cicada and plains dog-day cicada. Some are woodland species, while others are grassland species. They range from common and fairly widely-distributed to rare with a limited range in our state.

The scissors grinder is our most common annual cicada, inhabiting rural and urban deciduous woodlands throughout much of eastern Nebraska and extending westward along wooded river valleys. The Walker’s cicada is another common annual cicada sharing roughly the same range and habitat with the scissors grinder. Although nearly identical in appearance, the species are easily distinguished by their calls. The Walker’s call is louder: a pulsing, droning “jeeb-jeeb-jeeb-jeeb” rasp. An internet search will provide recordings of the calls of these species and others.

### The Life Cycle

Like all annual cicada, a scissors grinder’s life begins when a nymph emerges from an egg, which in this case, was laid in a tree. The tiny hatchling drops from the tree and burrows into the ground in search of a tree root from which it will suck sap. The nymph lives underground for three to five years, molting several times before digging its way out of the soil, leaving a half-inch exit hole near a tree. Unlike 17-year

cicada, annual cicada emergence is not synchronized; some individuals emerge each summer.

The nymph’s journey continues as it climbs a tree, eventually halting and tightly clinging to the trunk or branch to undergo its final transformation into an adult. First, the cicada pushes its head and thorax through the back of the exoskeleton of the nymph. Then the legs emerge and grab the head of the exoskeleton and pull out the rest of the body. The adult, still clinging to the exoskeleton, now slowly and gently unfolds its wings. Once unfurled, the wings and body begin to harden and change color, at one point turning a beautiful hue of gold, and voilà, the adult scissors grinder is ready to rock-n-roll.

Living only four to five weeks, the adults waste no time in their rush to reproduce. The males climb high into a tree and begin calling by expanding and contracting an organ on their abdomen. The females, which emerge a few days after the males, respond by clicking their wings at a slow, steady pace, making a sound resembling snapping fingers that attracts males. After mating, females seek a small branch and, using their mouthparts — small, sharp, straw-like structures tucked beneath their head — make several slits in the bark, in which they lay 20 to 40 eggs. They repeat this process several times, laying a total of 200 to 400 eggs with the goal of starting a new generation of treetop singers.

Hopefully, their chorus tugs at your heart strings rather than rattling your brain. [N](#)

## 17-year Cicadas



A Cassin’s 17-year cicada perches on an oak leaf in Douglas County during their 1998 emergence.

The Cassin’s cicada and the pharaoh cicada, the latter also known as the Linnaeus’s cicada, are our state’s only species of 17-year cicada. Inhabiting deciduous woodlands in southeastern Nebraska, they are easily distinguished from annual cicadas by their black bodies, orange legs and wing veins and beautiful reddish-orange eyes. The pharaoh is distinguished from Cassin’s by the broad orange stripe on its abdomen.

The life cycle of a 17-year cicada is similar to that of an annual cicada, except that the nymphs feed and molt in the soil for 17 years and all individuals emerge during the same year. The synchronized emergence, which starts in early June in Nebraska, may be a strategy to overwhelm predators, mainly birds. Strangely, both the pharaoh and Cassin’s cicada are on the same 17-year cycle, emerging the same year. They last appeared in Nebraska in 2015.

The pharaoh’s call is a high-pitched “weeeee-whoa” or “pharaoh,” while the Cassin’s call is a series of ticks followed by a drawn-out buzz, which rises and falls in pitch. Both calls last only a few seconds. In prime habitat, the in-unison calling of tens of thousands of 17-year cicadas is a raucous event of biblical proportions. Prepare yourselves: They will come again in 2032.

# Row Big Red

*Story and photos by Eric Fowler*



Members of the University of Nebraska – Lincoln Crew team, coxswain Eleanor Dunning of Omaha; Kiara Pavlik of Wichita, Kansas; Bethany Sessions of Little Rock, Arkansas; Katie Morland of Colorado Springs and Grace Fegter of Omaha, row a four-person sweep boat across Pawnee Lake during a practice last fall.

When Kevin Fierro came to the University of Nebraska – Lincoln in the fall of 2020, he knew little about rowing, much less that the school had a club crew team.

“I’d only seen those types of boats maybe twice in my life on TV,” said Fierro, a graduate of Grand Island High School, who like many Americans, only see the sport every four years when the Olympics roll around.

This fall, Fierro will start his third year on the club team, which spends evenings rowing on Pawnee State Recreation Area from ice-out in March through early November, traveling to regattas around the Midwest in the spring and fall, and countless hours on rowing machines in the club’s boat house on campus and competing in inland races during winter. These are not, after all, your typical rowboats.

He is one of many who have hit the water to Row Big Red.

## Let’s Row

In 1970, when Allen Maybee of Scottsbluff first started recruiting

members for UNL’s rowing team, he didn’t even have an oar, much less a boat. He promised the prospects he would by the time the ice went off the lakes the following spring. He sent letters to 54 rowing organizations asking if they had equipment to spare and spent the winter driving around the eastern U.S., picking up gear that was donated or offered for sale. Then, in the spring of 1971, 40 crewmen who had never rowed a shell put on an exhibition at Capital Beach in Lincoln. A women’s team was formed in 1973.

For the first 50 years, the team practiced at Branched Oak State Recreation Area. Equipment was stored in Mead and transported to the lake each practice until Maybee appropriated an unused maintenance building on campus for its boat house and, somehow, managed to not get evicted when officials found out. They continue to use that building today.

Nebraska’s team was competitive, at one point rolling off six straight Big Eight championships in the 1970s. They regularly competed in the Head of the Charles, one of the world’s largest and most prestigious regattas, in the

Boston area. There, they competed against the likes of Harvard and Yale, who held the first intercollegiate competition of any kind when their crew teams faced off in 1852.

A few team members kept rowing beyond college, competing on a national and international scale. Lisa Rohde, a farm girl from Hubbard, won a silver medal in rowing in the 1984 Olympics. George Pagano and Caitlin Miller rowed across the Atlantic Ocean in 2015.

## Still Rowing

In 2021, the club moved its practices to Pawnee State Recreation Area, where, in partnership with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, they leased half of the renovated marina building, where they trained on rowing machines and stored equipment. Outside, there is a boat pen where the vessels are stored and new docks.

Membership in the club last school year was about 20 students, well below what was in decades past, but double what it was the year before.



UNL Crew coach Eric Jensen gives instruction to his rowers from a boat driven by assistant coach Libby Bicak.

Eric Jensen, who in 2021 became the club’s first paid coach in years thanks to an active alumni group, Friends of Nebraska Rowing, hopes to return to that level in both membership and competitiveness. Jensen, who got into rowing after college and coached a few college teams before moving to Nebraska, hopes to boost their numbers to between 40 and 70 in the

near future.

A majority of the current members are former high school athletes looking for a competitive outlet in college. Of the 16 that rowed competitively last year, just three had some experience in the sport. Katie Orr was one, having rowed in high school in Rochester, Minnesota. She didn’t know Nebraska had a crew team when she came to

Lincoln but was happy it did when she found she was “just missing something.”

“There’s just no other sport like it,” Orr said. “Every time you push that oar in the water, there’s some kind of sound you’re looking for.”

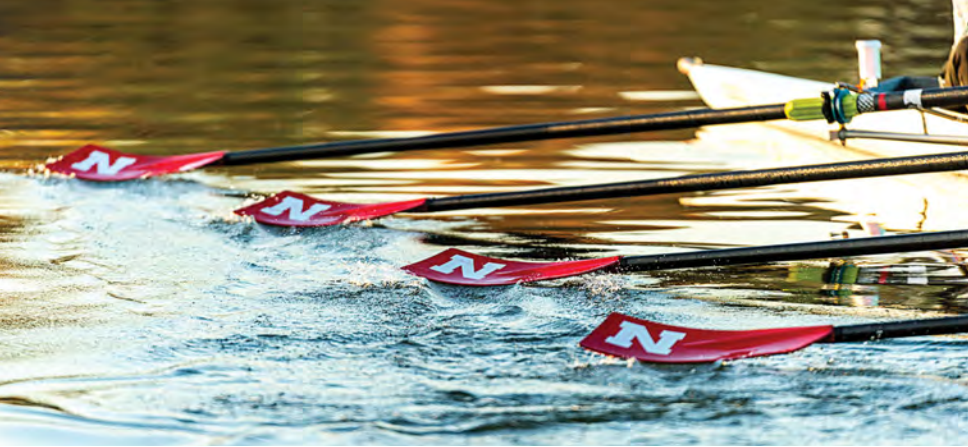
The sport is a full-body workout, said Jensen, using nearly every muscle from the legs to the fingers. The 2,000-meter sprint races are compared to running 2 miles or playing back-to-back basketball games. The longer, 5,000-meter head races include sprints at the beginning and end. Blisters come quick in the early practices, eventually turning to callouses.

Then there is the off-season, when they train all winter long on rowing machines. “It’s boring as heck,” Jensen said. “Too bad it’s the longest season.”

But it’s also the time to work on the physical and technical parts of the sport. The stroke rate of each person on the boat has to be perfectly timed to perform well. If not, you might not even stay upright, as Fierro knows all too well. The first time he rowed, he capsized in his first strokes on a double. “Instead of puffing air, you’re

The crew team powers an eight-person sweep boat across Pawnee Lake.





Oar blades on a UNL skulling boat skim across the water during the recovery portion of the stroke.

sucking on water,” he said.

Assistant coach Libby Bicak learned to appreciate the mental aspect of the sport while rowing in college and still

does on the Omaha Rowing Club. “For an hour and a half, you can’t think about anything else that’s going on,” she said.

“When you push the dock away, you push the world away with it,” Jensen added.

## Rowing for Nebraska

The biggest challenge for the University of Nebraska crew team is the weather. Each school in the region has its own battles on that front. Here, they deal with rain, snow and, of course, wind. “We row in everything, just not the hard water,” Fierro said.

The new facilities at Pawnee will help. The dock in the marina is protected from the wind and waves,

making it easy to get sculls on and off the water. As long as there aren’t whitecaps on the lake, they can typically find smooth water on one tree-lined shore or the other. If they can’t get on the water, they continue their indoor training.

Last spring, for the first time in several years, Nebraska sent a team to the ACRA National Championship Regatta in Tennessee. Orr was part of that coxed four team that finished 18th out of 27 teams. Her college career now over, Orr, like past club members, will look for the opportunity to row wherever life takes her next.

Fierro isn’t sure yet after being plagued by injuries that date to high school, but also include pulling the lats muscles in his back. How do you do that? “Pull to hard,” Fierro said, with a mix of pride and shame.

“Kevin broke a handle off an oar one time,” Orr said with a laugh, offering further explanation on her teammate.

Wherever they go, they will remember their time rowing for Nebraska Crew. They will remember the good and bad weather. And the sunsets that come earlier every fall practice, which by season’s end finish up in the dark, in landlocked Nebraska. **N**

## Rowing 101

**Competitive rowing utilizes one-, two-, four- and eight-person shells measuring between 27 and 58 feet in length and as narrow as 10 inches wide. Typically made of carbon fiber today, compared to wood in the past, shells weigh from 23 to 230 pounds. New boats range in price from \$15,000 to more than \$60,000.**

**In sweep rowing, each person has a single oar. Eight-person sweep boats always include a coxswain who coaches the rowers on the water and steers the boat via its rudder. Two- and four-person sweep boats may or may not include a coxswain.**

**In sculling, rowers hold an oar in each hand. These boats come in one-, two- and four-person versions.**

**The eight is the fastest, with top teams reaching nearly 14 mph, and enough power to pull a water skier.**

**Oars are attached to the boat via riggers. A rower’s feet are stationary, locked into a stretcher with special shoes. Rowers sit on a seat that slides back and forth with each stroke.**

**The UNL Crew team competes in the American Collegiate Rowing Association. The fall season includes time-trials held on rivers. While typically 5 km long, the distance can be shorter depending on the river. In the spring, the races are 2 km sprints held on lakes, with several boats going head-to-head from a dead start to the finish line. The latter is the format used in the Olympics.**

**Every school in the Big Ten Conference has a rowing team. At some schools, women’s rowing is a NCAA varsity sport. Creighton University has a women’s rowing team.**



Team members carry an eight-person shell back to the boat pen in the marina at Pawnee following a practice.

CAMERA READY *By Jeff Kurrus*



When photographing the sunrise, as I did on this morning at Olive Creek State Recreation Area, you can determine where the sun will rise using one of two methods. One, arrive an hour early, note where the first hints of light are coming from, and position yourself accordingly. Or, use a photography app like PhotoPills, which allows the user to pinpoint the sun’s exact location throughout the day at any location.

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# THE LATE-SEASON PUSH FOR LARGEMOUTHS

By Jeff Kurrus

Angler Ryan Glatter coaches high school softball in Omaha. In Nebraska, softball season happens to be played during the fall, which doesn't necessarily align with one of his favorite times of the year to fish. So, when he has a morning here, or a few afternoon hours there, he has to maximize time. The following are several ways Glatter fits in fishing during the dogs days of August afternoons to the cool mornings of late September.



## Rainouts

There is a fine line as relates to precipitation in Nebraska. If it rains too much, waterbodies with runoff become turbid, making fishing for sight-fishing species like largemouth bass difficult. "But," said Glatter, "fishing gets hard when it doesn't rain. Rain adds oxygen to the water and can also cool it." These added benefits increase fish activity during these dog days, so pay attention to the weather forecast.

## Top of the Strike Zone

"When there is open water," said Glatter, "we always have a topwater lure tied on." As soon as the first cool evening hits Nebraska in the late summer, some anglers think their shallow-water fishing is over. They'll move deep and slower, thinking this presentation is a necessity as the water cools. "Fall anglers put the buzzbait away too soon," said Glatter, "just like early spring anglers often wait too long to start

fishing on top. We catch a lot of fish early on a mouse each year." Think about it like this: Right before ice out in the winter, anglers often relay stories of catching fish in extremely shallow water — less than 2 feet in many circumstances. If fish are feeding just below the surface when the water temperature is just above freezing, then why wouldn't they hit on top long before the first fall frost of the year?

## Bush League

When the water lowers in the summer, Glatter searches for brushpiles, where he repeatedly finds bass in the summer. Then, if Nebraska gets late summer or early autumn rains, he returns and fishes these brushpiles once they're covered up. "This time of year, we'll move to the secondary pieces of cover, including brushpiles and even weed beds, and there are always big fish nearby."

## Starting Lineup

Lure choice for Glatter is a combination of repetition and common sense. "I'm going to fish a chatterbait when I'm on the water because I've had a lot of success with it, but I'm also paying attention to the baitfish I see." While cliché, matching the hatch is correct, as Glatter detailed. Yet he's not opposed to fishing brighter colors as well.

"As the year goes on, I'll also add more vibration to my lure choices."

He's also paying attention to the frog bite. By late July, ping pong ball-sized bullfrog tadpoles are morphing into bullfrogs, adding a different looking menu item for largemouths well into the fall.

## Stealing

Glatter is very adamant about his fishing techniques throughout the year. "I'm a shallow water guy," he said. "Less than 6 feet in open water. But because I'm a coach, I'm used to listening and stealing everything I can from those around me. If it's working for someone else, I'll try it."

From reading Twitter posts to watching online videos, Glatter is looking for any edge he can find, which is exactly what someone with a very hectic schedule would do when allowed just a little time on the water.

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**Pheasant hunting, 1983**

These pheasants were taken opening day in 1983. Five limits of pheasant hunting with my high school (Hastings High, class of 1948) best friend, Joe Mc Keone then from Cozad. Front row left to right: Kert McKeone, Tod McKeone and their father, Joe McKeone. Back row: Dave Martin and Joe's son, Mark McKeone. I'm now 92, but the memories of that hunt make me want to try it again!

– David W Martin, Lakeland, Florida



**Paddlefish, Gavins Point Dam, 1975**

My wife, Jan, of now 61 years along with our three sons (Greg, Steve and Roger) were spoonbill fishing below Gavins Point Dam. Four gates were open so there was a lot of action that day. We caught several spoonbills, but this was the largest. I still go spoonbilling whenever I can get a permit.

Love your magazine for a long time now.

– Donald Ortmeier, Fremont

**Platte River State Park, 1990**

This picture was taken in 1990 on the steps of the commons area of the six Wild Strawberry cabins at Platte River State Park. My wife, three children and I stayed at PRSP the first two years it was open. After that, the next 38 years, my six siblings and their children have gone together every July or August. The annual reunion generates biblical amounts of trash, some scientific cabin stuffing, lots of giggles, grins, games and memories for a lifetime. All of the park personnel have been great through the years with their help and patience. The family names here are the Brannens, Flemings, Hereks and Joneses.

– Tom Brannen, Bellevue



**Nebraska record whitetail, 1961**

This is a picture of my brother, Jeff Nelson, on the left and Todd Wackel on the right. My dad, Larry Nelson, took this picture in 1961 of the Nebraska record whitetail that Todd's dad, Robert Wackel, shot in Washington County. At the time, it broke the state record by 18 inches. It scored 192% and still stands as the fifth largest in the state.

– Bryan Nelson, Fremont

*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.*



# DRAGONFLY ENCOUNTER

By Chris Helzer

I first spotted her while I was lying propped up on my elbows in about a foot of sludgy water along the edge of the Niobrara River. She was hovering right at the surface of the little backwater wetland and repeatedly tapping her tail on the water. Right above her, another dragonfly — this one with a bright white abdomen — was also hovering in the air. He aggressively charged at any other dragonfly that dared come near, but never went more than a couple feet away from his mate. After all, he needed to make sure she successfully laid the eggs he had just fertilized.

My son sat nearby and watched bemusedly as I stealthily army crawled through the mud and water, keeping my camera just above water. I wanted to go slowly enough that I didn't spook the dragonflies, but quickly enough that she didn't finish laying eggs before I got into decent camera

range. The cricket frogs I'd been photographing scampered out of the way as I slid past them. I wondered distractedly how many leeches might have already attached themselves to my lower body.

I eventually got close enough that my 105mm macro lens could capture the action. I laid there clicking away as the male chased numerous competitors and the female doggedly deposited egg after egg in the water. Eventually, she finished her job, and the two dragonflies drifted away in opposite directions, their brief relationship over. The eggs were on their own to develop into new common whitetail dragonflies, assuming they didn't get eaten by something first. I hope at least one of them makes it.

Speaking of one, that's how many leeches there were, in case you were wondering.

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