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magazine

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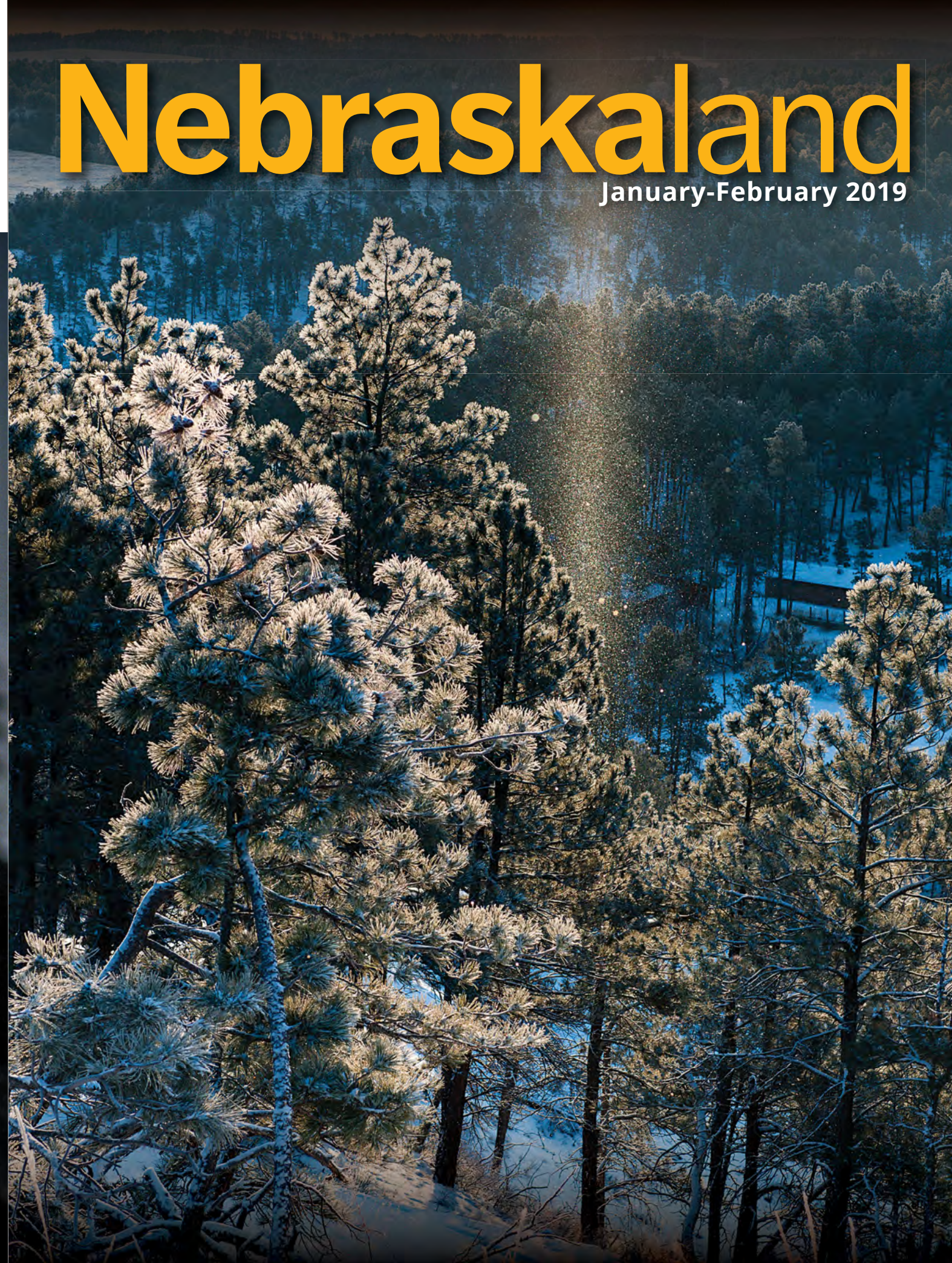
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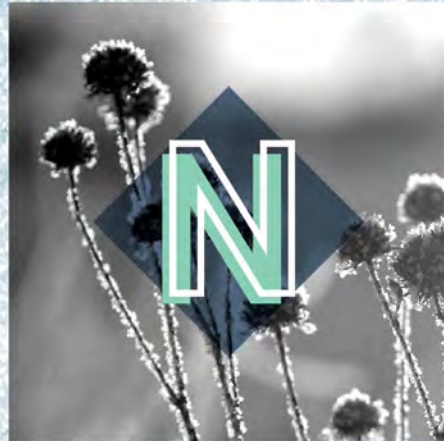
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# Nebraskaland

January-February 2019





# Feast

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PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

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To see additional content including photos, videos and additional articles, visit [Magazine.OutdoorNebraska.gov/digital](http://Magazine.OutdoorNebraska.gov/digital).

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2019 Chapter Banquets

Table with 3 columns: Date, City, Chapter. Rows include: 1/12/2019 Bow Valley Lewis & Clark PF, 1/26/2019 Holdredge Great Plains PF, 1/26/2019 Wilber Saline County PF, 1/26/2019 Culbertson Southwest Prairie QF, 2/2/2019 Blue Hill Webster County, 2/9/2019 Kearney Prairie Hills PF, 2/16/2019 Hastings Little Blue River PF, 2/16/2019 Howells Maple Creek PF, 2/16/2019 Broken Bow Custer County PF, 2/22/2019 Lincoln Cornhusker PF, 2/22/2019 Franklin Franklin County Covey QF, 2/23/2019 Greeley Cedar River Ringnecks PF, 2/23/2019 Spencer Ponca Creek Ringnecks PF, 2/23/2019 Sutton Rainwater Basin PF, 2/23/2019 Fairbury Rock Creek PF, 2/23/2019 Seward Seward County PF, 2/24/2019 Albion Boone County PF, 3/1/2019 Sidney High Plains PF, 3/2/2019 Alliance Heritage PF, 3/2/2019 Aurora Lincoln Creek PF, 3/2/2019 Imperial Southwestern Nebraska PF.

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

For more Information visit www.NebraskaPF.com

 **Instagram Photos**

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



By Rebecca Johnson (@thecoloringtree): "Photographing foxes may be my new favorite thing. Especially when you're hiding behind a nearby tree, happily clicking away and one of the fox kits decides to find out why the tree is making such funny noises. So, he trots right up to you and sits down an arm's length away and blinks up with his shiny brown eyes. And for a moment, the world is just perfect."

By Dakota Altman (@dakotaltman): "A beautiful common garter snake gracefully navigates its way through a blowout in the warm light of a Sandhills evening before being picked up by curious herpers. Its movements seem effortless, using musculature and scales to push against the sand substrate and surrounding vegetation."



Becky Wright submitted this image of gray tree frogs.



Karen Kutz Smith submitted this image of a swallowtail butterfly on a purple coneflower.





Lacey Fiorelli from Broken Bow captured this photo at the Custer County Fair during the Bull Riding Classic.



By Jake Rogers (@jakerogersphoto)



By Adam Hintz (@adamhintzlincoln): "The sun scrapes a ridge of shadow across the river valley. Every day is a promenade of change. How will we cast our influence?"

By Paul Filsinger (@Paul\_filsinger): Taken at the Wildlife Safari Park by Ashland.



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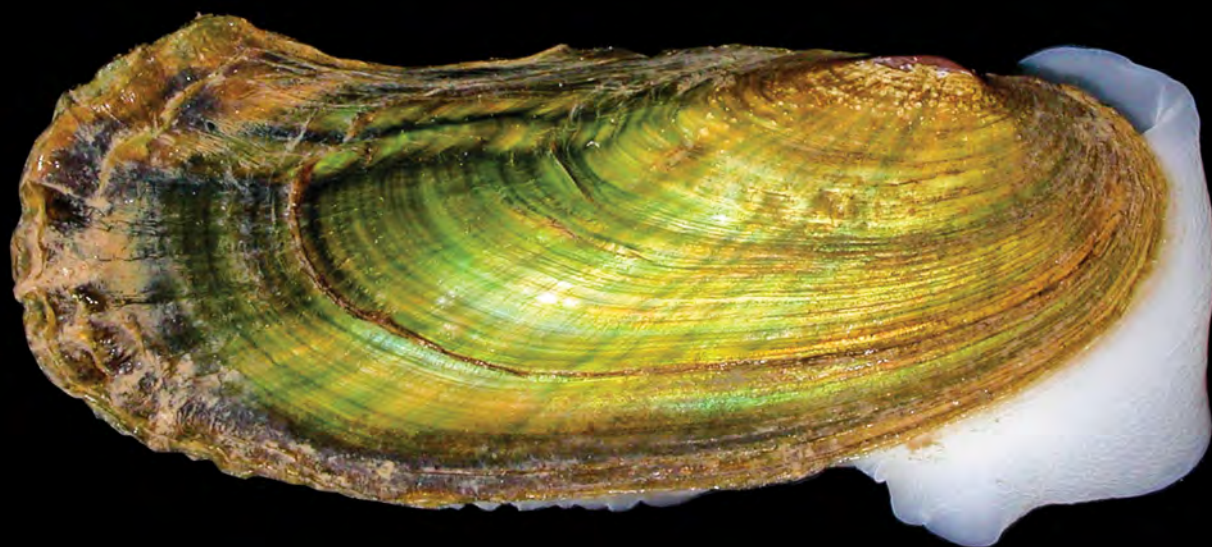
Please include your postal address and telephone number. Letters may be condensed and edited. Photographs are also welcome.

## HORSES AT MAHONEY

Eugene T. Mahoney State Park's long list of attractions includes breathtaking scenery. Here, horses graze in a pasture.

PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS





FEMALE SCALESHELL MUSSEL. PHOTO BY CHRIS BARNHART, MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY

## THREATENED AND ENDANGERED THE SCALESHELL MUSSEL

By Melissa Panella, Wildlife Biologist

If you spend time along Nebraska's lakes and rivers, you are likely to come across the occasional large "clam" shell. These are examples of our state's native freshwater mussels. It can be quite interesting to observe the unique shapes, sizes and colors of the 29 species found in our state, although a few of those are considered relicts, meaning only their shells, and not the living mollusk that would normally reside within, are detected. They have descriptive names like fawnsfoot, pistolgrip, threeridge and pimpleback.

Freshwater mussels are completely aquatic. Seasonally, many venture on a vertical migration to embed themselves in the riverbed or lake substrate. They are cued to do this when the water temperature begins to drop in the fall. During winter, you may be able to see a freshwater mussel filter feeding beneath the clear ice.

Freshwater mussels are often indicators of high water quality, but large-scale stream modifications have resulted in declines of many populations. The scaleshell (*Leptodea leptodon*) is both a federal and state endangered species. In Nebraska, it occurs only in the northeastern part of the state in the Missouri River, but it is rarely found.

The study of mollusks is known as malacology. When I recall first learning about freshwater mussels, I think of Dr.

G. Thomas Watters, a malacologist, telling me that they need divine intervention to reproduce successfully. This is because they have a complex life cycle that requires a host fish to complete the process. Somewhat like a parasite requires a host to survive, a freshwater mussel requires a particular type of fish to reproduce; however, the fish is unharmed in this relationship. Some freshwater mussels even deceptively bait their host fish to then spray them with glochidia (the microscopic larval stage of the mussel). The "infected" fish swims away, ultimately dispersing the juvenile mussels that develop from the glochidia. Otherwise, the mussels would be unable to disperse to new locations. The freshwater drum (*Aplodinotus grunniens*) is the host fish of the scaleshell.

It is extremely challenging to locate scaleshells, and experienced malacologists have been diving to look for them without success. The population of scaleshells in our state is believed to be small. Because of the species' limited mobility, any conservation efforts for the mussels would have to take place directly at the sites where they occur.

Native freshwater mussels provide a service to us by filtering and oxygenating bodies of water. They contribute to cleaner water. Plus, they are really cool to find. Please just watch out for the heelsplitter when you're wading barefoot!

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PHOTO BY JARROD SPILGER

# FEBRUARY RABBITS

By Jarrod Spilger

With upland bird seasons closing Jan. 31, there's not much to hunt in February besides rabbits.

February is actually my favorite month to hunt rabbits. I typically discourage my dog, Phantom, from pursuing rabbits, often ignoring her rabbit points so she remains focused on birds. But once February rolls around, we have some fun.

Look for cottontails near brush piles or thick shelterbelts. With a pointing dog, be prepared to kick some brush to get rabbits moving. A flushing dog will move them for you. Since most shots are at running rabbits, I like to use a little .410 shotgun.

Extra care must be taken when hunting rabbits with dogs. Unlike birds, which fly when flushed, a rabbit remains on the ground at dog level. Always know your dog's location before pulling

the trigger. If in doubt, don't shoot. Cottontails tend to run in a circular pattern, so there will be more opportunities soon enough.

Still-hunting solo through shelterbelts or river bottoms with a scoped .22 rifle can also be productive, especially if there's snow on the ground to make rabbits more visible. Plus, it's good practice for deer season.

Jackrabbits can be found in open pastures year-round. Once flushed, they tend to run in a straight line and keep going. A shotgun is a good choice, and a 12-gauge is not too much gun, since jacks can weigh up to eight pounds.

Nebraska's rabbit season runs through the end of February. For bored hunters, human and canine alike, rabbits provide the perfect cure for cabin fever.

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PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

## THE RED-BREASTEDS ARE HERE

By W. Ross Silcock

Red-breasted nuthatches are favorite feeder birds for many people – they are cute, colorful, active and entertaining. In Nebraska, they are winter visitors mostly, although there are small breeding populations in areas with conifers in northern and western Nebraska, most notably the Pine Ridge. Surprisingly, there are nesting records in the southeast for Seward and Douglas counties and nesting may also have occurred in Lancaster County.

This species is the only North American nuthatch that regularly stages mass movements away from its breeding range, usually due to diminished food supplies. Because of this propensity for long-distance movements, it is the only North American nuthatch to have made it as a vagrant across the Atlantic Ocean. An indication of the magnitude such movements can attain in parts of North America are counts reaching 1,000 per day in Quebec. Occasionally, large numbers show up during Nebraska winters, such events often being referred to as “invasions,” “incursions” or “irruptions.”

It looks as though we are experiencing such an event this winter. There have been many reports of red-breasted nuthatches at feeders and in pine groves earlier during fall.

The first arrivals this fall in eastern Nebraska were on time for most winters: single birds were in Douglas and

Dodge Counties on Sept. 6-7. However, numbers climbed rapidly; eight were at Holmes Lake in Lincoln the next day. Since then, six to eight have been at Holmes Lake, when in most winters one or two are found there. In Douglas County, the best count so far is eight – at feeders on Monroe Street, Omaha in November, and in Sarpy County, five were at the Fontenelle Forest feeders in October.

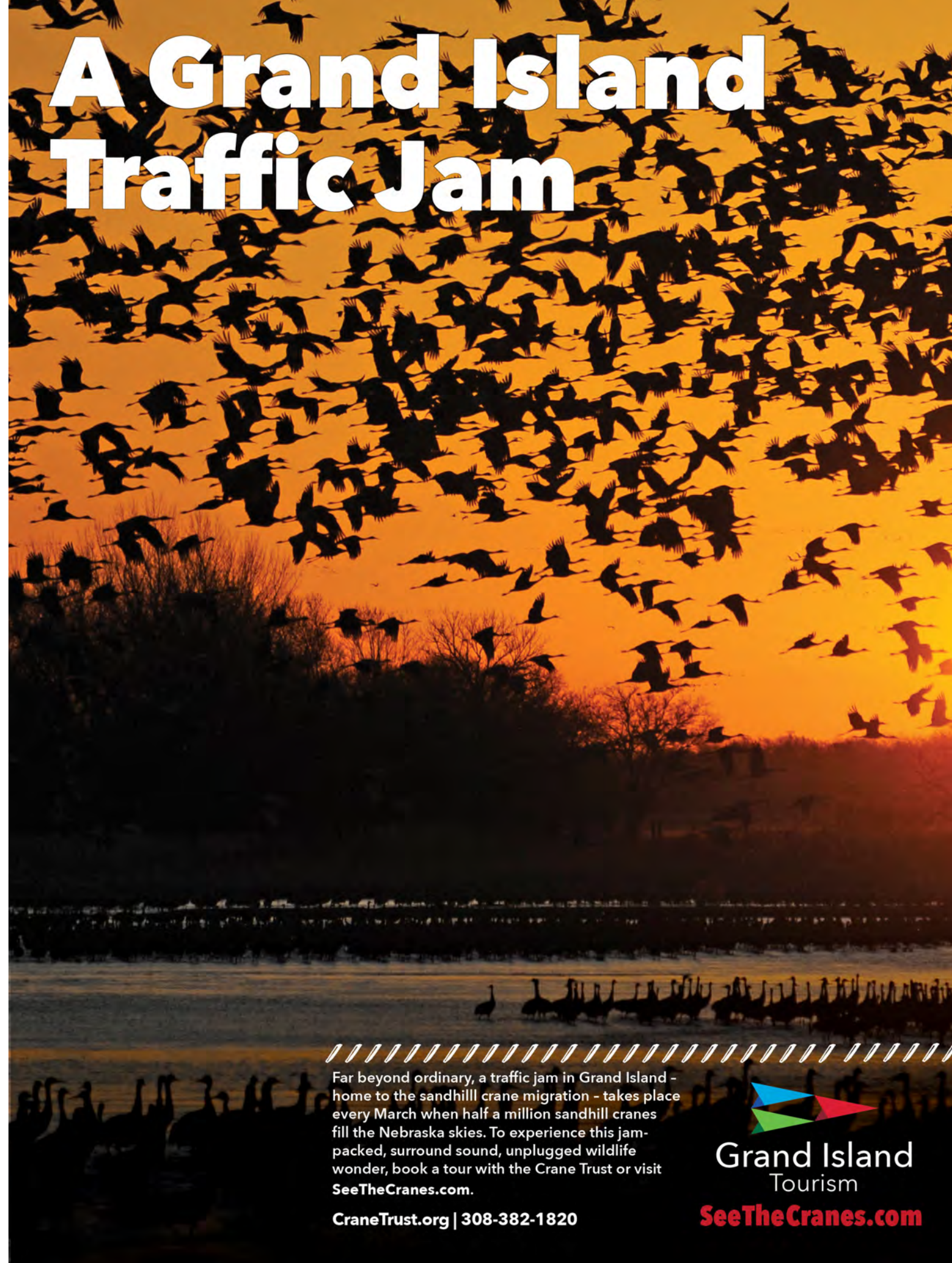
In western Nebraska, numbers have been impressive at feeders in or near pines. As many as 12 were at the Croft family feeders nestled among ponderosa pines at the base of the Wildcat Hills mid-October, and up to nine are attending the feeders at the nearby Wildcat Hills Visitor Center. The best counts usually occur in November and are in the range 13-16.

As the winter plays out it will be interesting to see if these rather amazing numbers continue, or gradually decline through the coldest weeks. Sometimes in spring there is a return movement that may be detected over and above local feeder numbers. Spring high counts usually occur in early May. We'll be watching.

Visit the Birds of Nebraska – Online ([Birdsofnebraska.org](http://Birdsofnebraska.org)) for more information on Nebraska birds.



# A Grand Island Traffic Jam



Far beyond ordinary, a traffic jam in Grand Island – home to the sandhill crane migration – takes place every March when half a million sandhill cranes fill the Nebraska skies. To experience this jam-packed, surround sound, unplugged wildlife wonder, book a tour with the Crane Trust or visit [SeeTheCranes.com](http://SeeTheCranes.com).

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Grand Island  
Tourism

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PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY

## WILD WHAT'S UP

By Monica Macoubrie

As an environmental educator, I am asked countless questions about wildlife, habitats, and plants. Occasionally I know the answer, but now and then I have to do some research. Nebraska Game and Parks now has an email address ([wildwhatsup@nebraska.gov](mailto:wildwhatsup@nebraska.gov)) where people can send their wildlife questions and get a response. Here are some questions we have recently received.

### Do fish freeze in the winter?

Fish are cold-blooded, which means that as the temperatures drop, their metabolism dips as well. During the extreme Nebraska winter, when there is a layer of ice and snow on the rivers, streams, lakes and ponds, fish will be less active and tend to stay toward the bottom. This layer of ice and snow actually provides fairly good insulation to retain the heat already in the water. Warm water will then start to sink toward the bottom where groups of fish usually gather for their winter rest. Some species will even burrow themselves into the sediment for periods of time.

### I see a lot of black squirrels; what species are they?

A lot of people in Nebraska have seen black-colored squirrels, and have wondered if they are a new, or different species. Actually no, they are just a common eastern fox squirrel (*Sciurus niger*). These squirrels are usually a rusty-brown color but can vary from silver-gray to even black. The black squirrels that everyone is seeing lately are just a different genetic variation – similar to how people have different hair and eye colors.

### Armadillos are popping up more frequently, is Nebraska just now getting them?

Yes, and no. Nebraska has records of male nine-banded armadillos as far north as Ord, but we do not have established records of females or babies. Armadillos don't regulate their body temperature well, so they are normally only found in warmer climates (Texas, Oklahoma, etc.) However, for the past few years, Nebraska has experienced rather mild winters and extremely warm springs. This is causing armadillos to survive in Nebraska, where they couldn't previously. If these animals become established, they could then become permanent members of the mammal community in the state.

### Do I need to worry about urban-dwelling red foxes?

In Lincoln, the population of urban red fox sightings has increased. These small members of the canine family only reach around 30 pounds at most, and often feed on rabbits, birds and small mammals – such as squirrels and mice. People often wonder if they should worry about their children being attacked – the answer is no. Foxes do not attack humans, and officials have not found any sick or diseased foxes. There have been a few reports of foxes allegedly killing backyard chickens and two unconfirmed reports of them attacking pets. Pet owners need to be vigilant – don't leave small pets unattended, and don't think a 4-foot-high fence will keep foxes out of your chicken coop – they can easily jump that. The ultimate goal is to gain a better understanding of these elusive animals within our city limits.

# Experience the Sights & Sounds!



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# An Ice Storm Feast

Photos and story by Chris Helzer

I woke up on the morning of January 17 with a clear plan of attack. The biggest ice storm in a decade had ended the previous evening, and the forecast had correctly predicted clear skies and calm winds for the post-storm sunrise. Road crews had worked through the night, allowing me to slowly and carefully make my way across Aurora to a series of restored prairies along Lincoln Creek. It was going to be an epic morning for photography.

Orbs of ice encase the now-empty flowers of stiff goldenrod.



Indiangrass seeds droop under the weight of their icy coating.



Sunrise along Lincoln Creek turned the prairie into a glittering wonderland.

However, I didn't anticipate how visually overwhelming the icy prairie was going to be when I arrived. As the sun peeked above the horizon, the entire prairie began to sparkle and glow, and I felt like a dog chasing handfuls of popcorn tossed in the air. I wandered aimlessly for about 10 minutes as the sun continued to rise, mildly panicking, unable to decide where to point my camera in the face of the wonderful glittery awesomeness. Finally, my brain kicked in and I began to sort and prioritize my options. I pulled my wide-angle lens out to capture the sun shining through the icy prairie vegetation while it was still low enough to do so. Once the sun rose too high for that pursuit, I switched to my macro lens and settled in to capture close-up images of the glazed golden plants around me.



A long frozen drop of water extends from a small reservoir of ice in a grass leaf.

During the next three hours or so, I was surrounded by splendor, but it was a real challenge to find subjects situated such that I could actually make them into pleasing images. Everything was sparkly and bright, which made it difficult to find subjects without a distracting glare behind them. I had the best luck with seed heads or leaves that were isolated by a few feet from neighboring vegetation. Then I could either use shallow depth-of-field to blur out the background or get low enough to frame my subject against the clear blue sky.



A stiff sunflower seed head carries an icy clear coat.



Jewels of ice-covered switchgrass seeds dangle in the morning light.

While everything around me that morning was gorgeous, a few plant species seemed perfectly suited to their crystal coatings. The fuzzy golden seeds of Indiangrass, for example, caught the light wonderfully when wrapped in ice, and ended up in nearly one-third of all the photos I took that morning. The panicked seed heads of switchgrass were also fabulous, creating drooping clusters of glittering globes, each encasing a tiny switchgrass seed. A surprising addition was stiff goldenrod, whose compact flower heads had lost most of their fluffy seeds, but now were handsomely enclosed by clear ice.

When I finally left the prairie, it wasn't because I ran out of beauty to photograph – it was because I was emotionally spent. I felt very much like I had just gorged myself on a fantastic Thanksgiving meal, except that my brain was full of goodness, rather than my stomach. The ice melted away pretty quickly that afternoon, but my memories from that day will stay with me for a very long time.

# Outdoor Nebraska

By Renae Blum

Winter may be in full force, but there's still outdoor fun to be had, whether your thing is hunting, birdwatching, fishing, hiking, or just spending time with loved ones. Read on for some ideas on what to do during these chilly months. To read about fun park events coming up, visit [Calendar.OutdoorNebraska.gov](http://Calendar.OutdoorNebraska.gov).



## Backyard Bird Feeding

Throughout the winter | Statewide  
Food for birds may be scarce right now. Help our feathered friends by setting up a feeder. *Nebraskaland* Regional Editor Julie Geiser says that birds love to snack on sunflower seeds, cracked corn, safflower seeds, Niger or thistle seeds, peanut hearts and shelled, unsalted and dry-roasted peanuts. Also, keep your feeders clean to keep hungry birds from getting sick. “Wash your feeders at least monthly in a light 9:1 water-to-bleach solution, then rinse thoroughly and allow to air dry,” Geiser says.



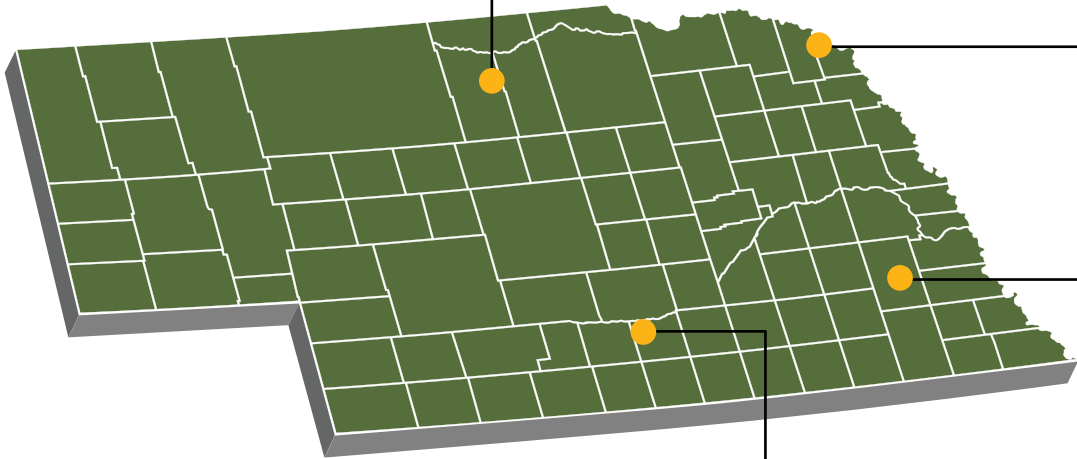
## Trout Fishing

Throughout the winter | Statewide  
Check out Nebraska Game and Park's updated put-and-take rainbow trout stockings at [OutdoorNebraska.org](http://OutdoorNebraska.org) for your latest trout fishing possibilities. “The same baits that work in open water – small spoons, jigs and live bait – also work through the ice,” writes *Nebraskaland* Editor Jeff Kurrus. “Plus, typical presentations used for panfish through the ice will work well for trout, too.” Streams across the state, such as Long Pine Creek (pictured), can be accessed as well.



## Valentine's Day Specials

Various dates | Various state parks  
Valentine's Day becomes a unique, outdoor-centric experience at a state park. Enjoy the snowy woods with a cabin or lodge room, take a quiet hike to see winter's beauty up-close or join the Great Backyard Bird Count. Various parks offer Valentine's Day packages, including a special dinner at Platte River State Park and lodging specials at Eugene T. Mahoney and Ponca state parks.



**Shootout at Salt Creek**  
Jan. 6  
Nebraska Outdoor Education Center

**Light Goose Conservation Order Hunting Begins**  
Feb. 11  
Various Zones



## Get Ready for Spring Turkey

Throughout the winter | Statewide  
Get a jump on spring turkey season and start planning this winter. Outdoor Education Specialist Aaron Hershberger recommends looking ahead and seeing what vacation days you can lock in. Also, take a look through your gear, including camera equipment. Take stock of what's missing, or what needs to be replaced or fixed. You can also use this time to think about your goals – places you want to go and milestones you want to achieve.



## First Day Hikes

Jan. 1 | Various locations  
Walk off your Christmas ham and mashed potatoes on a First Day Hike. Stretch your legs, see a state park dressed in its full winter splendor and welcome in 2019. Fort Kearny State Recreation Area is one of our featured destinations. For more locations, visit [Calendar.outdoornebraska.gov](http://Calendar.outdoornebraska.gov).



# 2018 Photo Contest

The 2018 *Nebraskaland Magazine* Photo Contest drew in another year of stunning images from your fellow Nebraska photographers in the categories of Wildlife, Flora, Scenic, Recreation and Youth.

The *Nebraskaland Magazine* staff found it difficult to pare down the excellent images – especially the Best of Show winner, which went to Liz Garcia and her image, “The Birds and the Bees.”

In addition, the Readers’ Choice Award went to Chris Pischel for his image, “Weathering the Test of Time.”

We thank everyone who participated and made this exciting feature possible in our magazine. We look forward to seeing more of your great photographs in next year’s contest.

Keep shooting.

## BEST OF SHOW

**The Birds and the Bees**  
Photo by Liz Garcia, Utica

WILDLIFE



**SECOND PLACE – Mom and Kits**  
Photo by Karen Harris, Lincoln



**THIRD PLACE – Looking Out at the World**  
Photo by Rechelle Pelzer, La Vista



**FIRST PLACE – Deer at Chalco**  
Photo by Justin Pence, Omaha

# FLORA

FIRST PLACE – Goat's Beard Magic  
Photo by Roger Richters, Utica





**SECOND PLACE – Sunflower Sunset**  
Photo by Jamison Thies, Lewiston

**THIRD PLACE – Milkweed**  
Photo by Alexis Mendyk, Dannebrog





**SCENIC**

**FIRST PLACE – The Heavens Above Montrose**  
Photo by Joseph McCarty, Monterey, California



**SECOND PLACE – The Cloud**  
Photo by Jeremy Bower, Lincoln



**THIRD PLACE – Rural  
Summer Sunset**  
Photo by Jamison Thies,  
Lewiston



FIRST PLACE – Little Moments  
Photo by Joel Jones, Lincoln

**RECREATION**

**SECOND PLACE – An Archery Trek**  
Photo by Amber Dubs, Ashby



**THIRD PLACE – Apollo's Mission**  
Photo by Jamison Thies, Lewiston





FIRST PLACE – Wild Grass at Sundown  
Photo by Corby Cannon, Silver Creek

Weathering the Test of Time  
Photo by Chris Pischel, Lincoln



# A Horse Rescue on the Icy Missouri

By David L. Bristow, History Nebraska

How did a valuable pacer (a horse used in harness racing) nearly drown in the icy Missouri River in January 1882? The story tells us something about 19th century life in a river city.

The story begins Jan. 22, when Omaha businessman Clifton Mayne traveled to Council Bluffs for work. This wasn't as easy as it sounds. A railroad bridge spanned the Missouri River, but it wasn't open to wagon traffic. Mayne took the "dummy train," a train that went back and forth across the bridge.

But how would he get around Council Bluffs? He could walk or take the streetcar, but that wouldn't do for a wealthy man with a taste for fine horses. Mayne had some special cargo loaded on the train: a light buggy that he used only on special occasions, and his prized pacing horse, Oscar Phelps.

This was the 1880s equivalent of bringing a Porsche.

Mayne's business took longer than expected and he missed the dummy train's westbound departure. No matter. He'd just cross the river on the ice, as people had been doing since before the bridge opened in 1872. The next day's *Omaha Daily Bee* tells what happened.

"When part way over, he observed some boys who were skating making violent signs at him and stopped to see what was wanted, when one of them came up and told him he was driving on dangerous ground. On getting out and examining the ice he found his horse's fore feet within six inches of a space where ice had been cut out and the new ice was so thin that the boy who warned him readily broke it through with his skate.

"Mr. Mayne then made a wide detour and had nearly



This circa-1920 harness race in Neligh was after Oscar Phelps' time, but shows the kind of racing he did. *History Nebraska RG2836-1818*



Travelers and workers often braved the icy Missouri River, just like these bridge workers near Rulo in 1886. *History Nebraska RG2457-5-24*

reached the Nebraska shore when suddenly his horse broke through with his fore-feet. He got out and unhitching him pulled the buggy back and then took the horse by the bit and tried to get him on the solid ice. The animal, however, floundered about so that he broke the ice in all directions about him, letting himself and his owner down in the water. Mr. Mayne scrambled out, but the horse worked himself under the ice, all but his head, which rested on a cake of ice which alone prevented him from being drowned."

Oscar Phelps was in serious trouble. His unusual name probably wasn't a good omen. He may have been named for a character in a syndicated 1880 short story in which a young man using the alias "Oscar Phelps" is killed in a duel

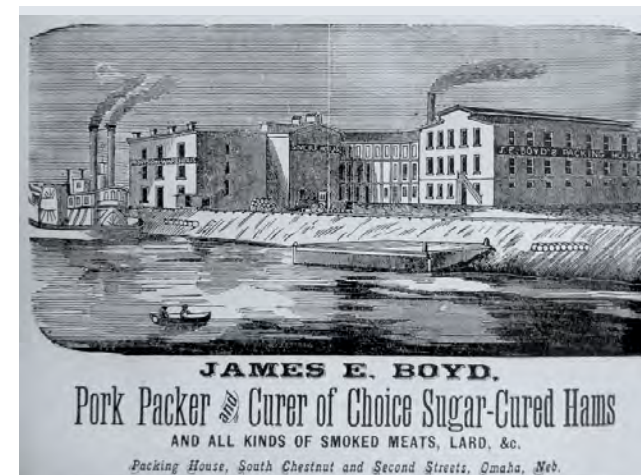
by a disguised woman seeking revenge. Or he may have been named for the soon-to-be-defunct town of Oscar, in Phelps County, Nebraska. Either way, he was in danger of being pulled under the ice by the current.

Mayne ran for help. The nearest business was Boyd's Pork Packing House, Omaha's original meatpacking plant, north of present-day Lauritzen Gardens. Several plant workers came with planks and ropes. For the next two hours they struggled to rescue the horse while a crowd of some 500 onlookers gathered along the riverbank.

It was dangerous and unpleasant work. Oscar was floundering just below the spot where the plant discharged its untreated waste directly into the river. And the plant was no small operation, having slaughtered some 112,000 hogs during the previous year. Omahans were used to living in a smoky, smelly, and muddy city, but the *Bee* noted that the "work was done in the face of sickening filth and stench."

Meanwhile, other drivers and teams of horses crossed the river that day, oblivious to the danger. It was how things had always been done. The *Bee* recommended waiting for another "cold snap."

It was getting dark by the time Oscar was pulled from the cold and filthy water "in a half dead condition." But the horse was tough as well as fast. He recovered and was later sold to Mayne's business partner. The following year the *Bee* reported that Oscar Phelps was "winning some fast races and high honors at Ohio fairs this fall." Running on the soft dirt of a track probably seemed easy after crossing rotten river ice.



Future Nebraska Governor James Boyd opened Omaha's first meatpacking plant in 1872. From Alfred Sorenson, *Early History of Omaha* (1876), p. 242.

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

# The Nebraska Table



## Part 4 Winter

By Ryan Sparks

Winter is a time for reflection, and if you’ve been following along with the Nebraska Table you have a lot to reflect on. You’ve foraged morel mushrooms and stinging nettles. You’ve watched the sunset from a deer stand. You’ve felt the rush of a covey of quail as they burst from a fencerow. The best meals capture these moments. They contain the essence of a place, and each bite is made sweeter from the memory of how it ended up on your plate. It connects you to the land and gives you a better understanding of Nebraska.

Clayton Chapman of Omaha’s *The Grey Plume* restaurant has spent a lifetime working with and exploring the flavors of our region. No other chef offers such a striking and emotional representation of Nebraska. The menu at the *Grey Plume* is always in flux and demonstrates Chapman’s nuanced understanding of seasonality. If you’ve cooked any of Chapman’s recipes from the previous three installments, you know exactly what I’m talking about. I was happy to interview him and learn about his approach to working with local ingredients and producers.

### How did you first become interested in working with local food and ingredients?

I was looking for a way to reconnect, explore and evolve the way I was cooking. There was a growing realization from those first interactions with local farmers and growers that the ideals of “local food” encompassed so many of my own personal beliefs and attitudes. I enjoyed the fact that there was a mutual curiosity between the farmer and the chef. I was drawn to the challenge of sourcing and cooking with the

seasons and creating a menu that highlighted such thoughtful collaborations. Opening *The Grey Plume* rooted in the philosophies of sustainability and stewardship felt like the most natural next step for me. These have become the cornerstone of how and why I cook.

### What are the benefits of working with local foods?

Working with local food presents the opportunity to align ourselves with the state in a different way. It can provide a shift in perspective. A different perspective not only through a deeper understanding of where and how our food is being produced or how we can support our local economy, but it also can cause a shift that translates through the ways we want to engage and participate with each other. We live in a world of such disconnect, and it sometimes feels like we are moving further and further from the source and authenticity of many things. Working with local food evokes meaning and it’s a powerful way we can connect to our land, culture and community. Whatever you buy “local,” it always has a story behind it and these food stories can help us to connect, relate and learn from each other. Isn’t that at the heart of sharing a meal?

### What are local ingredients that home cooks overlook?

Two ingredients come to mind: 1) Stinging nettles can almost be found everywhere in Nebraska and they are really versatile. You can braise them like collard greens, wilt them like a spinach, wash repeatedly in cold water for use in a salad, make tea, and soups. 2) Paw-paw is the midwestern version of a tropical fruit. Native to Nebraska, the paw-paw tree grows in southeastern Nebraska and its fruit has a very short harvesting time, ripening in September or early October. It has a creamy flesh with big seeds and it tastes of pineapple and bubblegum. It’s delicious as an ice cream or custard.

PHOTO BY RYAN SPARKS



### What is a year-round staple in your pantry?

Our house-churned butter is something we are never without. We are fortunate to partner with Nebraska dairies to bring us delicious cream that we culture, churn and squeeze by hand.

### How do you handle Nebraska’s long winter?

Canning, pickling and preserving. We dedicate a lot of time in the summer and fall toward capturing Nebraska fruits and vegetables in the height of their season. If they grow it, we jar it and then reach for it to brighten up our winter menus. So much so, we opened *Provisions* in the fall of 2014; offering our house made preserved items, cured meats and coffee in an everyday retail format.

### What is the biggest misconception about the local food movement?

Eating “local” and the “farm to table” concept may have started out as a food trend but the momentum has

grown and it’s not going away. There is an awareness and a consciousness that is out there now and it’s created a powerful level of accountability for our food producers, grocers and chefs that wasn’t there before. More and more consumers are looking for local food options and are expecting to see it on the shelves and menus. We have a tendency to limit the scope and power of local food. Its reach and representation goes far beyond local farmers markets. It’s changing the way we think about agriculture, conservation, nutrition and policies that define our city, state and country.

### How has your experience sourcing local ingredients and working with Nebraska farmers influenced your understanding of Nebraska’s landscape?

It’s gratifying on many levels to be able to witness and explore the passionate ways Nebraskans are producing food. I’ve been able to spend time with ranchers in the Sandhills and the Niobrara River Valley and have had daily interactions with Omaha’s urban farmers. Nebraska has this special duality of rural and urban farming and I think it’s probably one of our greatest assets. Every producer

and grower is dealing with a unique set of challenges depending upon where they are.

Among those I’ve worked with is a strong willingness to collaborate to evolve our food system in Nebraska. It’s a willingness that’s grounded not only in the ideals of preservation but also innovation.

You will find chef Chapman’s recipe for Honey Creek Farm’s potato soup in the following recipes. Also featured is nettle tea from Abigael Birrel, former executive chef at Lincoln’s Hub Café, as well as Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley’s elk stew and Jane Sparks’ bread pudding.

I hope you have enjoyed the recipes featured in the Nebraska Table, but even more, I hope you have discovered a new passion and developed a better understanding of Nebraska. Nebraska is full of flavors and experiences that can’t be purchased at a store. You have to get outside, explore and find them.

## Honey Creek Farm’s Potato Soup

Many of us know how cold a Nebraska winter can be – some years are colder than others and some years are brutally cold. Growing up in this wonderful state, I remember my mother making potato soup every winter. The soup usually consisted of a beef broth made from the roast beef from the night before, roast beef trimmings and a ton of potatoes with carrots, onions and anything else that was in the fridge. This recipe is a homage to that soup, but in a different variation. Instead of using a broth base, the soup is buttermilk and potato-based. The blood orange adds a nice brightness of acidity, and the oxtail is a nice variation of the roast beef I remember eating as a child.

Honey Creek Farm in Hancock, Iowa, produces amazing potatoes for us year-round. The recipe is suitable for a wide variety of potatoes, so please use what you have in your kitchen. Rhizosphere Farm is in Bennington, and we are fortunate that Matt and Terra are able to produce onions for us into the winter season.

La Vigne Organics is a Certified Bio Dynamic and Certified Organic citrus farm in Fallbrook, California, where Helene Beck produces phenomenal citrus for us. But like with any seasonal produce, things change with the seasons. The blood orange in this recipe can be substituted with any type of orange, but blood oranges are in high season on the West Coast during our Nebraska winters.

Mark and Jill Schmitz own and operate Majinola Farm or Majinola Ranch, a small wagyu cattle ranch in Panama, Iowa. We are thrilled to work with them as our only beef provider at the restaurant.

Servings: 2 large servings or 8 small portions  
Prep Time: 1 hour  
Cook Time: 13 hours

**Potato Soup**  
Ingredients:  
● 3 pounds heirloom potatoes, peeled and cut into

- 1-inch pieces (We use Yukon gold at the restaurant.)
- 2 cups Burbach’s Dairy whole milk
- 2 cups buttermilk
- 1 yellow or white onion, julienned
- 3 sprigs fresh thyme
- 4 ounces spinach
- 4 ounces George Paul red wine vinegar
- Kosher salt, to taste
- Fresh cracked pepper, to taste

Place peeled, cut potatoes and onions into a pot with the milk. Add thyme sprigs and season with salt and pepper. Cook the potatoes on medium heat until they are tender and add the buttermilk. Continue to cook the potatoes until they are at a mashed-potato-like consistency. Remove the thyme sprigs and add spinach to the potato mix, then place in blender. Blend the potatoes until smooth. If you like a thicker, chunkier soup you can leave the soup as is, once partially pureed. If you would like a completely smooth soup, pass the blended soup through a fine mesh sieve to alleviate any chunks of unblended potato. Season to taste with salt and pepper and add the George Paul vinegar.

**Cipollini Onion**  
Ingredients:  
● 4 cipollini onions, peeled and cut in half with the root end still intact

- 1 ounce neutral cooking oil
- 1 ounce whole unsalted butter
- Kosher salt, to taste
- Fresh cracked black pepper, to taste
- 1 sprig fresh thyme sprig
- ½ ounce George Paul red wine vinegar
- ¼ ounce fresh chives or parsley, minced

Heat oil in pan and add cipollini onions. Sear the onions on medium heat until they get a nice crust on one side. Strain oil out of pan and add butter, thyme sprig, salt and pepper. Continue to sauté the onions until butter foams and then add about 1 ounce of cold water. Reduce until the water evaporates and add the vinegar. Season to taste again with salt and pepper. Add chives or parsley.

**La Vigne Organics Blood Orange**  
Ingredients:  
● 2 blood oranges, segmented and zested

Zest the orange. Cut off the top and bottom of the orange so that it stands on one end without rolling. Underneath the skin (that you segmented) there will be a layer of white pith followed by the dark red color of the orange. You want to cut down to the orange. After the top and bottom are removed and the color of the orange is exposed, start cutting down the sides of the orange to expose the whole fruit. Discard the pith. You will be left with your whole fruit, zest and pith removed. Using your paring knife, cut out the individual segments of the fruit. These are the small pieces of fruit between each of the membranes. After segmenting all the fruit, set aside along with the zest for later use.



PHOTO BY RYAN SPARKS

**Majinola Farm’s Wagyu Beef Oxtail**  
Ingredients:  
● 1 oxtail, cut into 2-inch sections

- 2 cups red wine
- 1 cup carrots, peeled and cut into ½ -inch dice
- 2 cups onion, peeled and cut into ½ -inch dice
- 1 cup celery, cut into ½-inch dice
- 1 bay leaf, fresh or dried
- 3 sprigs fresh thyme
- 24 ounces beef stock/beef broth
- 2 ounces neutral cooking oil
- Kosher salt, to taste
- Fresh cracked black pepper, to taste

Pour the wine over the oxtail and marinate overnight. Once oxtail pieces have marinated, pull from the marinating liquid (reserve the marinating liquid) and pat dry with paper towels. Season the oxtail with salt and pepper. Heat a sauté pan/large rondoux on the stove with medium heat and add the neutral cooking oil. Sear the oxtail until golden on all sides and place the oxtail in a baking dish. In the pan that the oxtail was seared in, add all of the carrots, onions, celery and sauté until you develop a nice dark color on the exterior of the vegetable. Once vegetables are sautéed add the red wine, beef broth and bay leaf to the pot and bring to a boil. Pour liquid over the oxtail and bake in a 250-degree oven for about 12 hours or until the oxtail meat comes off the bone easily. Reduce the cooking liquid by ¾. Pull the meat off the bone and fold in the reduced cooking liquid, chives and blood orange zest (from above).

To assemble: In the bottom of the bowl, place a small

pile of the braised oxtail, two cippolini onions and 3 blood orange segments. When ready to serve, pour the hot soup over the top.

– Clayton Chapman



## Nettle Tea

Chef Birrell sings the praises of wild nettles. Her spring contribution featured a forged nettle pesto where she suggested drying additional nettles to make an earthy tea during the winter. If you didn’t manage to pick any nettles or simply forgot to dry some, dried nettles can be found in many health food stores. Besides being a welcomed taste of summer, nettle tea is known for its numerous health benefits.

Servings: 1  
Prep Time: 1 minute  
Cook Time: 3 minutes

Ingredients:  
● 1 teaspoon dried nettle leaves

- Dash of honey (optional)

Place the dried nettles in a tea ball and steep in boiling water for three minutes.

– Abigael Birrell





## Elk, Parsnip and Turnip Stew

Servings: 4-6  
 Prep Time: 15 minutes  
 Cooking Time: 3 hours

- Ingredients:
- 3 pounds elk (or deer) stew meat, do not remove silver skin
  - Salt and pepper to taste
  - 5 tablespoons flour
  - 1 onion, chopped
  - Cooking oil
  - 3 ribs of celery, cut into large sections
  - 1 bay leaf
  - 1 teaspoon dried rosemary or fresh leaves, chopped
  - 1½ cups dry red wine
  - 2 tablespoons tomato paste
  - 5 garlic cloves, smashed
  - 2 quarts unsalted/low sodium elk or beef stock
  - 2 large carrots, chopped into large pieces
  - 2 parsnips, peeled and chopped into large pieces
  - 2 turnips, chopped into large pieces
  - Flat leaf parsley for garnish

Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Pat elk meat dry with paper towels and toss with salt and pepper to taste in a bowl. Then toss with the flour. In a Dutch oven, coat the bottom with oil and heat over medium-high. Shake off

excess flour from elk meat and add meat to the hot oil (in batches) and brown to form a nice crust. Set remaining flour aside for a later step. Remove browned meat and set aside.

Add more oil to the pot. Add chopped onion, pinch of salt, bay leaf, rosemary and celery and sauté until onion turns translucent; lower heat if necessary to avoid burning. Next, add the tomato paste, remaining flour from step 1 and garlic, and sauté for 1 minute.

Add wine and scrape the bottom of the pot with a wooden spoon to release brown bits. Allow wine to simmer and reduce by one quarter. Return browned elk stew meat to the pot and pour in elk or beef stock. Stir and bring to a low boil.

Take off heat. Cover the opening of the pot with foil, and then place the lid on top – the foil helps to slow down moisture loss. Cook in a 350-degree oven for about 1 hour and 30 minutes. Then discard the foil and add the carrots, parsnips and turnips and continue to cook covered for another 30-45 minutes until meat and vegetables become tender. Taste for seasoning and garnish with freshly chopped parsley. Serve with crusty bread. This stew tastes better the day after.

– Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley



PHOTO BY RYAN SPARKS

## Bread Pudding

This simple and hearty bread pudding is wonderful on a cold winter night. It's also a delicious way to use stale bread. This has been a fixture in our family for generations. It's delicious as is, but adding a scoop of vanilla ice cream, a splash of cream, or a dash of brandy doesn't hurt.

Servings: 6  
 Prep Time: 10 minutes  
 Cook Time: Approximately 1 hour

- Ingredients:
- 1-3 tablespoons butter
  - 6 cups cubed bread (approximately 1 inch)
  - ½ cup raisins
  - 2 eggs
  - ½ cup sugar
  - ¼ teaspoon cinnamon

- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 cups whole milk

Preheat the oven to 350 F.  
 Combine the raisins with the bread cubes and spread them evenly in a lightly buttered casserole dish.  
 Combine eggs, sugar, salt, cinnamon, vanilla, and milk and pour the mixture over the bread cubes.  
 Place the casserole dish in the oven, uncovered, along with a baking dish filled with water. This helps keep the pudding moist.  
 Bake for one hour or until the top is nicely browned.

– Jane Sparks, author's grandmother





PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NEBRASKA TOURISM COMMISSION

# VISIT GERING

By Erin Lenze, Nebraska Tourism Commission

Take some time, get off the beaten path and discover the winter wonderland of Gering. Nature lovers, “foodies,” and those who just want to relax will love what this charming city in Nebraska has to offer.

Cozy up in a renovated 100-year-old barn at the Barn Anew Bed & Breakfast. Located on the historic Oregon Trail, wake up and enjoy a gourmet breakfast while admiring the view of Scotts Bluff National Monument in the background. Rest up in a room that defines comfort and hospitality at the Monument Inn & Suites, located only a few minutes from the Monument. Additional lodging options in Gering include Cobblestone Hotel & Suites, Circle S Lodge and Arcadia Hotel.

Explore Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area & Nature Center while you’re in the area. Enjoy hiking three miles of nature trails through the canyons and bluffs of the area and watch for wildlife. In the nature center, learn from interactive displays and programs or admire the captivating view of the park and valley below. Don’t forget to grab a souvenir from the gift shop on your way out.

Spend a little extra time out in the cold at Scotts Bluff National Monument. Drive or hike 1.6 miles up Saddle Rock Trail to reach the top of the bluff that gives way to beautiful views. Too cold outside for a hike? Walk around the visitor’s center to learn from exhibits and an audiovisual program chock-full of information.

Itching to learn more about the pioneers who came before us? Head to the Legacy of the Plains Museum located on the Oregon Trail. Legacy of the Plains features state-of-the-art interactive exhibits. Play games and answer questions on flipboards throughout the museum to find out how you would have survived as an emigrant on the trail, facing the many hazards pioneers met. Bring the kids to experience exhibits geared toward them such as milking a cow or kiddie-teepee theaters with interactive video of Oregon Trail experiences.

Start your day off right with an omelet or all-you-can-eat pancakes and French toast at The Mixing Bowl or wait until lunch time and enjoy the pineapple express burger, a house favorite. Warm your insides with a cup of coffee at The Daily Grind Coffeehouse. Or stop by the Gering Bakery and grab a made-from-scratch sweet. Gering Bakery has been baking sweet treats using all fresh ingredients since 1950. For dinner, dive in to a home cooked meal at Log Cabin Restaurant & Lounge and finish your night off with a beer at The Union Bar.

From hiking to learning about the Oregon Trail to stuffing your face with delicious bakery treats, you won’t be disappointed that you got off the beaten path and took the time to explore Gering.

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# BUCKET LIST HUNTS

By Game and Parks Commission Staff

Nebraska's diverse geography offers a wide range of hunting opportunities. From grasslands to woodlands to river bottoms, our state is home to a wide array of wildlife. Many Game and Parks Commission staff can point to a favorite hunt. *Nebraskaland* Regional Editor Eric Fowler details his ultimate bucket list hunt, elk in the Pine Ridge, below:

“In Nebraska?” That’s what many people will say when I show them the photo of the bull elk I harvested in the Pine Ridge in 2007. Not only does Nebraska offer elk hunting, more than 80 percent of the hunters with bull tags harvest an elk, and most of the bulls can truly be considered trophy-class. Sure the odds of drawing a permit are long, but it’s like the lottery: Someone has to win.

As I recall, I was fairly calm as I lay on that hillside in northeastern Dawes County, waiting for a bull elk I’d just spotted to walk from behind a rise and present a clear shot. Considering I’d waited 12 years to draw that permit, and that I’d missed an opportunity from the same hillside five days earlier, I’m surprised I was. After the shot ... now that was a different story. I was shaking and my heart was pounding. Days of scouting, walking, glassing, calling and watching elk, mostly on the wrong side of the fence, had paid off. My once-in-a-lifetime hunt was over, and I had a beautiful bull



to show for it.”

For more inspiration in planning your next hunting trip in 2019, read other bucket list hunts from Nebraska Game and Parks staff at [OutdoorNebraska.gov/bucketlisthunts/](http://OutdoorNebraska.gov/bucketlisthunts/).



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# KEEP ME WARM

By Jeff Kurrus

Each year, the contributors to *Nebraskaland Magazine* spend hundreds of hours outside in frigid temperatures. There is no way to consistently battle this type of climate without a game plan. For me, I eat multiple servings of protein – including peanut butter and yogurt, before and during my trips to increase my metabolism which, in turn, increases body heat. Here are some thoughts from our staff.

Jenny Wheatley – “I use Hot Hands Foot Warmers instead of their toe warmers, the ones that cover the bottom of your feet. Also don’t wear too many layers of socks, which can restrict blood flow to your feet.”

Eric Fowler – “Don’t get hot. Dress light going to your location, then layer up from there. If you sweat, you’re going to get cold.”

Daryl Bauer – “Keep your core and head warm and the rest of your body will follow. Start with base layers of modern synthetic underwear, and then layer on top of that. Wool is great for outer layers – stays warm even if it’s wet, and finish with an outermost layer that will break the wind. And nothing beats real fur for warmth!”

Justin Haag – “Dress in layers and allow ample time to hike to a given location.”



Dress appropriately and you can handle any photo assignment, even laying in a photo blind on a frigid, snowy February day.

Julie Geiser – “If I’m able to be in a blind situation, I always pack in my Buddy Heater; it’s lightweight, easy to light and warm. If in the elements, a stocking hat and neck gator is a must so I don’t lose body heat from my head and neck.”

Chris Masada – “Mittens are warmer than gloves. For activities requiring dexterity, I wear convertible mittens (fingerless gloves with mitten covers) or layer very thin, grippy glove liners under mittens and remove mittens as needed.”

PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER

# JUNIOR DUCK STAMP COMPETITION OPEN

By Justin Haag

Students in kindergarten through 12th grade will again show off their skills as waterfowl artists during the Federal Junior Duck Stamp Competition.

Each year, hundreds of entries from students throughout Nebraska are judged at a public event in the Panhandle. This year’s entries are due March 15.

Last year’s Nebraska competition was won by Margaret Hoff, a 16-year-old artist from Alliance. Hoff created a

watercolor of king eiders. It marked the third consecutive year the contest was won by an image featuring the king eider – a large sea duck that spends most of the year in coastal marine environments and breeds on the Arctic tundra in June and July.

The Junior Duck Stamp Conservation Program, administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, provides students throughout the United States a learning opportunity that combines both art and science. Artists and wildlife educators visit schools to introduce the competition and assist the students.

Each year’s winning entry is featured on the following year’s Nebraska waterfowl stamp, a required purchase for the state’s waterfowl hunters. It also moves on to compete against other states’ winners and a chance to be chosen for the national junior duck stamp – a collector’s item that is available for \$5.

For details about the competition, contact Lydia Patrick, Nebraska’s contest coordinator, at [lydia\\_patrick@fws.gov](mailto:lydia_patrick@fws.gov). More information and contest guidelines may be found at [fws.gov/juniorduck](http://fws.gov/juniorduck).



MARGARET HOFF’S 2018 FEDERAL JUNIOR DUCK STAMP WINNER

# MENTOR SOMEONE

Courtesy of the Nebraska Safari Club

We all know someone, young or old, who would love an outdoor experience of any type, such as hunting, fishing, camping, cycling, hiking, or any of the myriad of outdoor activities. Sometimes the most difficult step is that first one, and many of us need that little push to get started.

We all have that one person who made a difference in our lives, who asked us to go fishing or hunting or on some other great outdoor adventure. I bet we all remember those first times in our lives: the first time you saw that ring-necked pheasant explode out of a patch of cover or the first time you felt the pull of a fish on the end of your line.

We take many things for granted in our everyday lives. We’ve experienced these things before. However, there are countless others who have never had the chance to see those many wonders of the great outdoors.

This makes a great opportunity for all of us! Ask someone to go with you on that next pheasant hunt, fishing trip, or whatever your next outdoor experience may be.

Here in Nebraska we are fortunate to have countless outdoor opportunities available to us. There are many organizations that can help you in this mentoring process. Many of them already have programs that will assist you in becoming a mentor for someone who is ready for that new adventure.



It is not necessarily just youth that can benefit from mentoring. There are many veterans, disadvantaged and other adults who need a little assistance to get started. The opportunities are endless!

So, take someone with you the next time you wet a line or take your dog out to chase up a few birds. You will be passing along our hunting, fishing and outdoor heritage. But best of all, you will make friends for life.

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Pictured is my father, Madison (Matt) Freeman on the far left, my grandfather Jesse Freeman in the middle and my uncle Douglas Freeman on the far right. All were from Neligh and have since passed away. The man in the uniform (game warden?) behind them is unidentified.

The year was 1945 and my father Matt was a soldier enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps. The war was over but he was still under enlistment and stationed on the East Coast. My grandfather Jesse Freeman applied for a permit to hunt deer in Nebraska. This was the first deer season since 1907 and Grandfather was lucky enough to win one of the 500 permits issued. My father was granted temporary leave from base, and he returned to Nebraska for a chance at a mule deer in the Bessey National Forest near Halsey. The photograph is testament to his success! Father used a Winchester Model 94 lever-action rifle in 30-30 caliber. Later he had the head mounted and now, 73 years later, it hangs on my wall in Dallas.

– Mark Freeman, Dallas, Texas



This is my late husband, Loren Gebers, fishing in 1980. He loved to fish from his youth, since the family had a creek on their farm.

I was thrilled to take his picture with this "big catch."

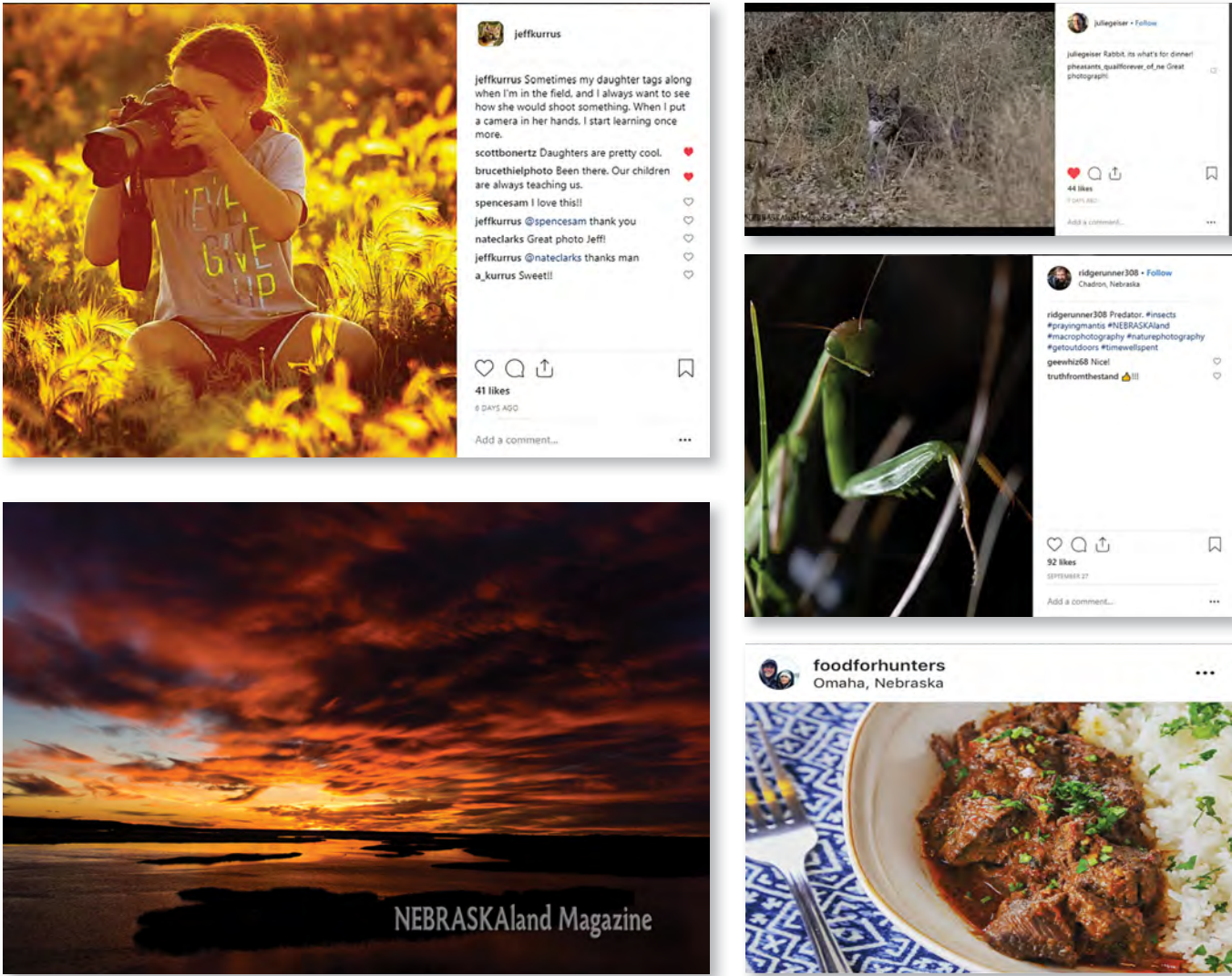
– Inez Gebers, Johnson, Nebraska



Great day of pheasant hunting in northeastern Nebraska around Laurel and Dixon, back when 10-year CRP was great. There were lots of birds, friendships and laughs. Left to right: Ron Hirschman, dog Duke, George Paidousis, Cortny Berg, Steve Sorensen, unknown, Ryan Schear, me, Casimir Tluchausb, Tom Shear, and dog Chelsey. Not pictured is Howard Lammers.

– Charles Hirschman, Laurel, Nebraska

*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](mailto: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.*



# INSTAGRAM

By Jeff Kurrus

After an outdoor excursion, it's common practice to share a photo or two with family, friends and the people that made that excursion possible in the first place – the landowners and public land caretakers who believe in maintaining quality habitat.

In recent months, I've added another recipient to the list – Instagram. This app has more than 800 million active users, including the entire staff at *Nebraskaland Magazine*, and is an awe-inspiring motivator for the outdoor enthusiast.

Easy to use for both the photographer and the viewer, this app has shown me the fine work that so many Nebraska photographers are doing on a day-to-day basis.

Personally, it's allowed me to not only chronicle my time afield, but also provide a landing spot for so many photos that may never find their way to the pages of *Nebraskaland Magazine*.

If you haven't already, check it out.

Also, add a few more *Nebraskaland* photographers to your list: @juliegeiser, @eric.fowler1, @ridgerunner308 (Justin Haag), @foodforhunters (Jenny Wheatley), @prairieecologist (Chris Helzer), @mforsbergphoto, @1.ryan.sparks.1 and @jeffkurrus.

We'll do our best to make sure you keep checking back for more.

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