



Now a state historical park, Fort Kearny was originally built to protect Overland Trail travelers. Today it gives great insight into the settlement of the American West. Photo by Doug Carroll.

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August-
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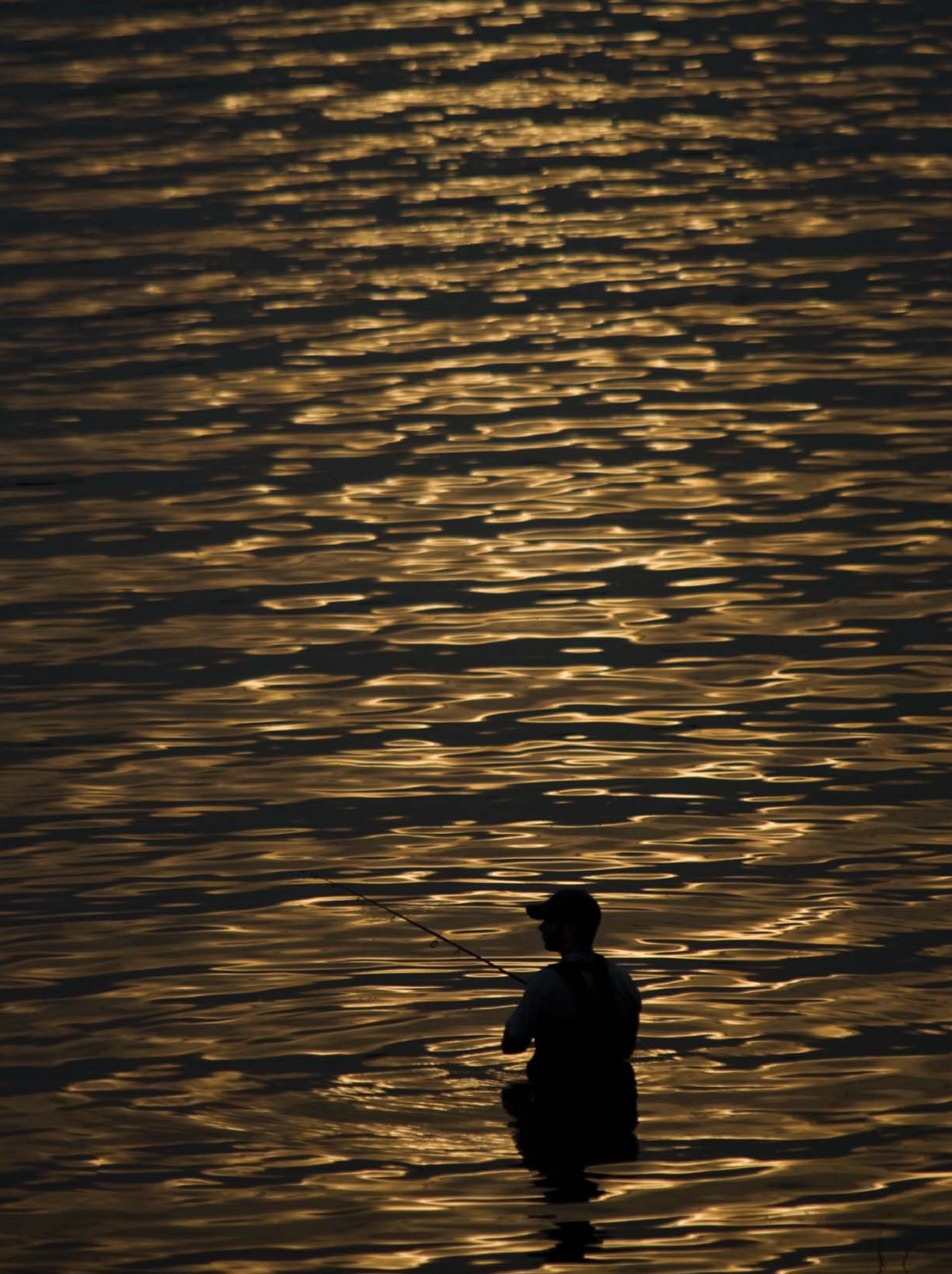
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Michael Forsberg's Horned Lark • Roger Welsch's Speaking of Crows



NEBRASKAland

Volume 90, Number 7, August-September 2012

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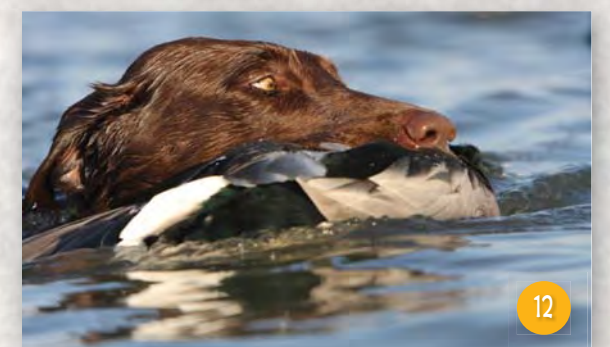
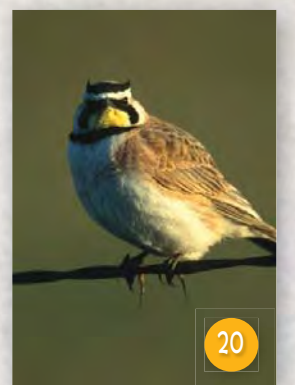
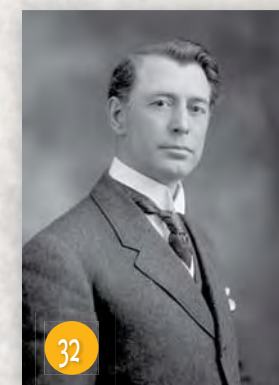
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Cover: Storm clouds and a rainbow serve as a backdrop for the state capitol building following a late-summer storm. Photo by Doug Carroll.
Opposite: The golden reflection of the setting sun on the rippled waters of Branched Oak Lake silhouette an angler plying its waters. Photo by Doug Carroll.

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Cougar Photo Op

I captured this image of a mountain lion on July 8 of this year about 20 miles south and west of Scottsbluff in Banner County. A friend of mine went out behind his house early that morning with his dog and came face to face with the lion in a much smaller tree. The cat came out of the tree and ran away, then as my friend was looking for tracks to see which way it had gone he looked up in this tree and saw the lion much higher up. He then called me and Scott Brandt, the local conservation officer, and we both got some photos before leaving the cat alone. It left around six that evening.

The day was a thrill for me because it was the first wild mountain lion I had ever seen, much less had a chance to photograph.

Richard Teller
Teller Nature Photography
Scottsbluff, Nebraska

A Wish Come True

Maybe this story should be titled “A Wish Come True” – my son (Jeremy Waggoner Jr) and I were fishing on the Nemaha River this past June and catching gar right and left. While waiting for the next bite, my son looks at me and says “Dad, I wish I could catch the biggest gar ever!” I I replied “I’ve been wishing I could catch the biggest bass ever my whole life, but good luck son.”

Lo and behold, about 30 minutes later he hooks a big fish that gave him

a run for his money, so I netted the fish for him and it turned out to be a huge gar. Because it was around midnight, we waited until the next day to take it to a local grocery store, where it weighed 8.1 pounds on their certified scale.

So the next day we got the gar out of the freezer and took it to Aksarben Aquarium near Gretna, where it was officially certified at 7.32 pounds and 32 inches in length. It may not have been the biggest gar ever, but it was a new state record for shortnose gar. Good job, Jeremy Jr.! Maybe next time we go bass fishing he will look at me and say “Dad, I wish you could catch the biggest bass ever! Lol!

Jeremy Waggoner
Hiawatha, Kansas



What About Bob?

When Conservation Officer Dina Barta posted a photo on Facebook of a quail calling from a picnic table at a Lincoln-area campground, one of her friends asked if the campsite has been reserved for a Bob White. Tongue

planted firmly in cheek, Barta replied that there had been a mix-up – the site had been reserved by a Bob O’Link instead!



Lambsquarters

I thoroughly enjoyed the article by Kimberly Stuhr about lambsquarters in the June 2012 issue of *NEBRASKAland*.

I grew up just northwest of Big Springs and lambsquarters were common, growing wild on our farm. I have eaten them, mostly as salad greens and a couple of times prepared like spinach. One item of interest to me was not mentioned by Ms. Stuhr, if she is aware of it – how the plant got the rather odd name. You see, if you let a patch of lambsquarter grow to maturity, which is over three feet tall, and then walk through the patch on a hot, calm summer day, you will notice a pretty strong odor, just like a sheep pen or “lambs quarters” – thus the name!

Monty Splitter
Kearney, Nebraska

NEBRASKAland Visitor Letters

We want to thank all 36 readers that sent e-mails and letters for last issue’s visitor, an **Assassin Bug** that was on **page 31** (see page 11 for the winner, rules and this issue’s hint). Here are a few of the wonderful responses we received:

The visitor is on page 31 on the Commission ad. Not sure what it is. Enjoyed the article on silencers.
Ron Decker
Spokane Valley, Washington

You have an assassin type bug attacking your logo on page 31! Say, thanks for including the spear (and atlatl) in your hunting weapons this year! This will be a tough weapon to be successful with in deer hunting,

but it will be fun trying. Now I will have to try my hand at making the atlatl and “darts.” Thanks again for adding variety to the hunt. (We now join South Carolina and Missouri.)

Ron Macomber
South Sioux City, Nebraska

Assassin bugs are a predaceous family of true bugs in the order Hemiptera. True bugs, which include stink bugs, squash bugs and assassin bugs, can be identified by their overlapping wings. Assassin bugs hide in a variety of habitats, waiting for prey to come by. While they are weak fliers, they can run relatively quickly when hunting or fleeing. Assassin bugs are considered beneficial insects, because they feed on plant pests such as aphids and caterpillars, but they will also feed on beneficial insects, including ladybugs and lacewings. The assassin bug pictured here is likely the leafhopper assassin bug (Zelus renardii). Adults measure up to ½-inch in length and coloration can vary from reddish-brown to yellowish-green. Females lay barrel-shaped eggs in clusters on foliage and immature assassin bugs lack wings upon hatching. These nymphs will go through five molts before reaching maturity, when wings are fully formed.



Special thanks to Julie Van Meter, State Entomologist, Nebraska Department of Agriculture. Visitor image by Chris Helzer.
www.bugguide.net is a good site for identification

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

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AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 2012 • NEBRASKALAND 5

The Wonderful World of Crayfish

Dominique Worthing

If you were to turn over a few rocks on the edge of the closest pond, lake or stream, you might find a critter that resembles a miniature lobster. You are probably looking at a crayfish. Crayfish, better known as crawdads, are freshwater relatives of lobsters. It is estimated that there are 500-600 different species of these crustaceans in the world, with some species discovered as recently as 2011. Approximately 350 of those species can be found in North America, four of which are native to Nebraska: the calico (or papershell), the virile (or northern) the gapped ringed, and the devil crayfish. While the calico and virile are quite common, the gapped ringed and devil are harder to find.

Anglers use craydads as bait, and if you head to a Cajun restaurant you'll probably see them listed as a menu item, but what role do they play in the ecosystems they live in? How do they benefit our waterways? Crawdads are omnivores – they will eat both living and dead plant and animal material, and their eating habits help lower the amount of waste product in waterways, creating cleaner water in the lakes and streams they call home. Due to their sensitivity to pollution, their presence is a good indication of a healthy habitat. They are also a food source for many different animals, including but not limited to: trout, bass, sunfish, catfish, ducks, geese, water snakes, bullfrogs and raccoons.

In recent years an exotic (non-native) crayfish has been introduced to Nebraska waters and is outcompeting the native species: The rusty crayfish, identifiable by the brown (or rust) colored patch on the sides of its abdomen, is native to the Ohio River drainage but has made its way into parts of Nebraska and many other midwestern states. These crayfish have much larger claws in comparison to the native species, making it easier for them to outcompete native crayfish and take their place in the ecosystem.

Just as we protect and manage deer, cranes, and other large animals, we must protect and manage the smaller creatures as well. Crayfish are an important part of our Nebraska waterways and rusty crayfish pose a serious threat to their continued existence. If you suspect that a bait shop is selling rusty crayfish, see anyone throwing bait into a lake or stream, or find rusty crayfish in Nebraska waters, it's important to report your findings to the proper authorities. Help us help native crayfish keep our waters clean for a healthy ecosystem for everyone.



PHOTO BY DOMINIQUE WORTHING

Parks App Available for iPhones

iPhone users are now able to access information for all of Nebraska's state parks by downloading a free Pocket Ranger mobile app from iTunes.

This new, customized mobile app provides interactive GPS and GIS Map technology for tracking trails, marking waypoints and locating landmarks. Other features include an events calendar that is updated in real time, social networking capabilities and a tool that allows mobile users to publish

and share photos. Visitors can search for specific parks in a region or retrieve information from a comprehensive list of all park activities or events.

Future plans include a fall release of an expanded application for hunters and anglers, an Android version release and a mobile website format for Blackberry users.

For more information and to download the mobile app, visit the Game and Parks web page at: http://outdoornebraska.ne.gov/mobile_apps/pocket-ranger.asp.

Upcoming Events

Here is a list of upcoming outdoor events across Nebraska. For more information about these and other events, visit the calendar page at www.OutdoorNebraska.org.

August 1

Squirrel Season Opens

Pick up a copy of 2012 Nebraska Hunting Guide for more information.

August 4-5

Living History Weekend

Fort Atkinson State Historical Park, 402-468-5611, ngpc.fort.atkinson@nebraska.gov.

August 4, 11

Free Fishing Clinic

11 am-4 pm, E.T. Mahoney State Park. Contact Carl "Catfishman" Brown, 402-681-6265, oldcatfishman@cox.net.

August 8

Family Fishing Event

6-8 pm, Iron Horse Park Lake, North Platte. Contact Lindsey Chizinski, 402-332-3901, lindsey.chizinski@nebraska.gov.

August 20

Archery Pronghorn Opens

For more information about this and other big game hunting seasons, pick up a 2012 Big Game Hunting brochure.

August 31

Moonlight Hike at Wildcat Hills

8:30 pm, Wildcat Hills Nature Center, 308-436-3777, ngpc.wildcat.hills@nebraska.gov.

September 1

Dove, grouse and cottontail

September 1 marks the traditional start of the fall hunting seasons with the opening day for dove, grouse and cottontails.

September 15-16

Missouri River Outdoor Expo

8th Annual Missouri River Outdoor Expo at Ponca State Park. Fun for the whole family – learn about wildlife-related and outdoor recreation activities, including wildlife viewing, fishing, hunting, shooting sports, camping. 402-755-2284, ngpc.ponca@nebraska.gov.

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A Look Back - September 1959

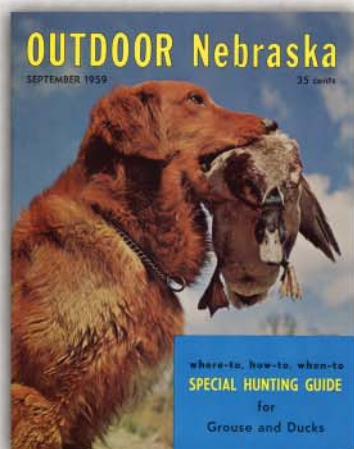
Dominique Worthing

In September of 1959, for 35 cents you could own Outdoor Nebraska's "Special Hunting Guide" issue, which focused on grouse and duck hunting. Coming from a large hunting family, "The Eight-Step Method: The Easy Way to Clean Your Ducks" by Emma DeFord stood out among the other articles immediately.

In her article DeFord, a long-time bird cleaner, lays out an eight-step plan that she guarantees will allow you to clean five birds in less than a half hour. Having seen the mess normally inflicted on the kitchen by my brothers' bird-cleaning skills, I was amazed at how clean Ms. DeFord's cleaning process was.

I found step five to be the most interesting of the steps – in it DeFord describes how to singe the skin of the bird with rubbing alcohol to remove any remaining down missed in the previous steps. She achieves this by placing two tablespoons of 70-percent rubbing alcohol in a small dish or coffee lid and setting the liquid on fire. A must read for anyone who cleans waterfowl, Ms. DeFord's article is sure to entertain as well as inform.

To read "The Eight-step Method" go to NebraskalandMagazine.com and click on "A Look Back."



Send Us Your Trail Cam Photos



This photo was taken in Yuma County, Colorado near the headwaters of the Republican River. Sent in by Alan Krueger.

Please submit your trail camera photos by e-mail to: nebtrailcam@gmail.com. Also include any information that will help explain your photo.

Backpacker.com

Dan Farnsworth

The phrase "Flyover country" ignores the great beauty of Nebraska from the Missouri River Valley to the rolling Sandhills. Backpacker Magazine's online publication, Backpacker.com, has taken note with a page exploring the Nebraska outdoors. The site reviews nine trips to inspire the short weekend getaway or an outdoor excursion. Each destination is a starting point for more adventures in the area, and the site allows users to submit destination reviews to inspire others. The review of the Norwesca Trail at Chadron State Park provides a great description of the valleys and buttes surrounding Nebraska's Pine Ridge, and each review rates the difficulty of trails at each site. There is also a substantial amount of general outdoor information from starting a fire to treating poison ivy. Visit Backpacker.com and tell them about your Nebraska trip.

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...even if you registered in 2010**

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Only residents under 16 years
of age are exempt.

Dove Hunting Locales

Jeff Kurrus

Where one should dove hunt is an oft-asked question in Nebraska. If you're fortunate enough to have private land somewhere, good for you. If not, take a look at the following public hunting lands throughout Nebraska and pay attention to the Commission's latest dove forecast at OutdoorNebraska.org.

NORTH CENTRAL

- Borman Bridge
- Calamus Reservoir
- L.A. Koziel, Pressey
- Myrtle Hall
- Pine Glen
- Sherman Reservoir
- Thomas Creek

NORTHEAST

- Black Island
- Don Dworak
- Elk Point
- George Syas
- Oak Valley
- Wood Duck

SOUTHWEST

- Box Elder Canyon
- Cedar Valley
- Clear Creek
- Enders Reservoir
- Medicine Creek Reservoir
- Ogallala Strip
- Swanson Reservoir
- Wapiti

SOUTH CENTRAL

- Alexandria
- Flathead
- Little Blue
- Little Blue East
- Rose Creek
- Rose Creek West

SOUTHEAST

- Branched Oak
- Larkspur
- Little Salt Creek West
- Olive Creek
- Osage
- Pawnee
- Rakes Creek
- Stagecoach
- Twin Lakes
- Wildwood
- Yankee Hill

PANHANDLE

No fields planted for doves, but the following provide good hunting around ponds or water sites.

- Arnold Trupp
- Bordeaux Creek
- Buffalo Creek
- Cedar Canyon
- Facus Spring
- Kiowa
- Nine Mile Creek
- Peterson

Get HIP

Dove hunters (and almost anyone else that hunts migratory game birds such as doves, woodcock, snipe and waterfowl, etc) need to remember to get their HIP (Harvest Information Program) number before taking to the field this year.

The HIP program helps biologists more accurately monitor the number of migratory birds harvested across the country. See the ad at left to find out how to register for the program.

DuckDawg Retrievers

A good dog makes all the difference



UpClosePhoto

www.DuckDawg.com

Turpin Time

Dick Turpin

Imagine if you had to run through tar to get somewhere. It would be difficult and you'd probably abandon the idea. Well, here's a similar idea for picnic tables to deter ants.

This tip involves camping mostly, but it could also be used in your backyard. If you're out there camping, it takes about two days for the ants to find your food. They come up that picnic table leg and they get into your stuff. Same thing on your deck. We have that problem once in awhile but there is a good way to solve that: Vaseline. You just take some Vaseline and rub a little of that around the leg of your picnic table ... just a little bit. Who'd ever think it would prevent ants from getting up on your picnic table? ■



Hunters Helping The Hungry

Help reduce hunger in Nebraska
Consider a donation today



Hunters and nonhunters alike can donate to this program, which provides funds for processing of donated deer to feed some of Nebraska's less fortunate.

Learn more about this program by visiting our website...

www.OutdoorNebraska.org

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Swim While You Can



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

The E.T. Mahoney State Park Family Aquatic Center, which includes three water slides, wave pool, lap pool and concession stand, is open noon-5 p.m. and 6 to 8 p.m. daily, weather permitting, thru mid-August. Hours of operation will be reduced from mid-August thru Labor Day weekend. Call 402-944-2523 ext. 7122 for more information. Admission is \$8 for adults and \$7 for children ages 3-12.

NEBRASKAland Visitor Winner and Hint



Last issue's winner of the Visitor drawing was Jason Obermiller, of Ravenna Nebraska, who found the **assassin bug** on page 31. Readers are encouraged to contact NEBRASKAland within 10 days after this issue's publication with the correct page number and name of this issue's "Visitor" – a bug found in Nebraska that just happened to find its way onto one of the pages.

We will then gather the correct entries and draw one to win a NEBRASKAland Magazine mug. To enter each month, write:
NEBRASKAland Visitor
2200 North 33rd Street,
Lincoln, NE 68503.

Or e-mail:

Tim.Reigert@Nebraska.gov with "Visitor" in the subject line of the message.

HINT: This issue's visitor is not on page 5, 6, 7, 9, or 50.

Waterfowling 101

Start Your Duck Dynasty Today

Photos and text by Doug Steinke

When I was six, Dad took me on my first duck hunt, which took place on the Republican River just upstream of Superior. My father carried me out to an island covered with willows and tall grass. The details of that day are still with me: Sitting on the upstream side of the island, facing southeast, he put out his sack full of Ariduk duck decoys. We were still settling in, me comfortable in the thick grass, when a hen mallard came screaming in, cupped against the steel-gray sky. We turned our heads together to watch, and then he reached for his gun. Before he could maneuver into position and get a shot off, the mallard flew off upstream. He looked at me and said, "I should have shot it. I thought she'd come back around." He may have been upset about the poor hunting since that was the only duck we saw that morning, but in my little boy mind that day was special, my first on the river. I'm a waterfowler first and everything else in the hunting world is a distant second.

To the uninitiated, this is hard to explain. Most of you who go on a first duck hunt have a great time, enjoy the warm blind, hot breakfast and banter among blindmates. Shooting a duck may even complete the day. At the end of the day, many can take it or leave it. But for a few of you, waterfowling can become an obsession. It begins with watching that first duck cupping, dipping, following the duck call and settling into the decoys. You'll know. And once you know, you will want to know more about how to improve as a waterfowler.

For most of you, your first experience will be as an invited guest out to a blind, probably from a wise old waterfowl veteran. These veterans can always use an extra hand putting out decoys –

they've burned out most of their non-diehard friends long ago and are always looking for fresh replacements. My father was invited to our own hunting spot more than 30 years ago by an elder of the camo, and so it goes.

One of the really cool things about duck hunting is the opportunity to acquire a lot of toys. Not that you have to buy all of these items brand new: A waterfowl purist is the king cheapskate of all sportsmen. He knows how to find free junk and make it work for him. Here is an outline of what you'll need to get started.

Swag

First, consider yourself lucky in this day and age of Gore-Tex jackets, neoprene waders and propane heaters. I recall cotton coats; cracked, leaking rubber waders; and coffee cans filled with charcoal briquettes putting off smoky heat. Some of those days were miserable and probably the reason for my brother's dislike of anything hunting. To this day, I just have to say "duck blind" and he starts shivering uncontrollably.



Using a prairie hay blind in front of shallow, flowing water – the quintessential Platte River duck hunting setup.

Late morning mallards returning to the Platte River after feeding.

Camouflage Clothing

There are a myriad of camouflage styles on the market these days. It is hard to go wrong with Realtree's Max-4 or Avery's KW-1, but even just plain khaki-colored camo will do. The older ... um wiser ... I get, the more I want just plain khaki, because it blends into every environment. Plus it's usually substantially cheaper. Go with Gore-tex, never skimp on rainwear. Trust me, I've been there sitting in an open blind, soaked to the bone in driving, freezing rain in, cheap "knock off" material. That's when you say to yourself, "I should have paid the extra 50 bucks because I'd pay almost any amount right now to be dry and warm." The most important thing to remember when hunting – no matter the style of camo you wear – is to keep still and not to show your face to the incoming birds. It's basic and simple. Use the surrounding mud or grime and smear it on your face, which is just as good as any commercial face paint out there – the goal is to simply dull your face signature.



Left: Kegan Steinke finds some time to rest next to his father Cory during a mid-morning lull in the action.

Above: Redheads feeding on the end of a flooded cornfield.



Shotguns and Ammo

There are as many schools of thought about waterfowl shotguns as there are species of ducks. For reliability and toughness, it is hard to beat a 12-gauge pump shooting three-inch shells. If you are hunting out of a layout blind on the ground, then dirt and grime are going to be your partners. In this situation you can't go wrong with a pump shotgun like the Remington 870s, 877s or the Benelli Novas. In all of my years I've never seen a pump fail in the field. Semiautomatic shotguns require more upkeep, but work well in a relatively clean, enclosed pit blind.

When it comes to ammunition for ducks, I like anything from size 2 to size 4 shot. More important than pellet size is understanding the best choke pattern for the situation at hand. When hunting a warmwater slough or narrow river channel, most decoying shots are going to be in the 10- to 30-yard range. In this situation I like a

very open choke, such as a skeet choke.

If, however, you are shooting over a wider river or rainwater basin where the shots will generally be 20 to 50 yards, a tighter choke such as modified or improved modified is more appropriate. If you find yourself pass-shooting birds, then go with a very closed choke, a full or third party full choke. Get out to a local shooting range and actually shoot at large sheets of paper from varying distances to visually see how each load and choke combination performs. Once you become more advanced in your shooting, then fine tune your loads to match your gun's choking system.

Shotguns that shoot 3½-shells have their place as well, but don't get caught up in the more is better school of thought – if you have a duck cupped at 30 yards and get a solid hit on it, the bird is coming down whether struck with a 28, 20, 12 or 10 gauge.



Left: Josh Carda puts the finishing touches on his cornfield decoy spread by adding a spinning wing decoy.

Below: Tony Wiese's dog Nikki making a nice retrieve.

Bottom: The bagging of birds aren't the only types of memories that hunters take home with them. Some are simply beautiful sunrises.



is the spinning-wing motorized decoy – no other decoy over the past 50 years has made decoying ducks easier. In most situations and locations, a couple dozen decoys and a spinning wing decoy will be more than enough for a day of hunting.

Locations

Accumulating gear is one thing, but now we get to the point of “Where do I go?” Ducks will be found in the obvious locations – a river, rainwater basin, lake or a pond. No doubt ducks like water. But as each year passes it is becoming more and more difficult to find a place to hunt even for veteran waterfowlers. The three most important words in waterfowling are the same as in real estate ... location, location and location.

Some lucky hunters fall into a great hunting spot. Access to warm water sloughs, prime river ground or a flooded corner of a cornfield is a gift. There is no doubt this is the quickest way to fast forward through the learning curve of waterfowling. On the other hand, the opportunity to explore, innovate and struggle your way to success in a sub-prime location is like making something out of nothing.

Growing up in central Nebraska, I learned to make the best out of marginal hunting areas. In high school I discovered a hidden gem in almost every cornfield – irrigation re-use pits. During early duck season, a tennis court-sized re-use pit provides ample opportunity to jump ducks. It is essential, of course, to secure permission from the landowner.

For the beginning waterfowl hunter, there is no better place to start than the Rainwater Basin area in south-central Nebraska. It can offer up some of the most amazing waterfowling to be found between Canada and Mexico, and most of it is public hunting ground. Pick up a CRP Map atlas at a local sporting goods store or visit the Nebraska Game and Parks web site (OutdoorNebraska.org) to see a listing of the wildlife management and waterfowl production areas near you. Saturday and Sunday mornings are by far the busiest times at such locations and they can get quite crowded, but if you're able to get off work during the week, you may have the place to yourself.

When hunting these public areas there are unwritten rules you must know: Keep your ego

Decoys

There has never been a better time in the history of waterfowling than now for decoys. Technological advances in plastics, paints and the molding process have allowed decoy companies to make near stuffer replicas of ducks and geese at reasonable prices. There are also the secondary markets of eBay, Craig's List and garage sales where great deals can be found if you look hard enough. Here, however, I must advise restraint – you can soon rack up a healthy investment in decoys if you're not careful. Many companies have entry level “hot buy” duck decoys that start out at \$30 a dozen. These are usually lightweight and small enough you can easily get three dozen in a decoy bag and carry them up to a mile without much effort. These days the most important decoy you must possess





locked in your vehicle, be courteous to those already out, and try to get out an hour before shooting time or wait until after sunrise – otherwise the best 30 minutes of shooting for everyone else is ruined while you are walking in and spooking birds. Leave at least 200 yards between you and your neighbors' spread, and don't set up downwind from another spread. Whether or not a flock is decoying to you or your neighbor is usually a judgment call. Finally, use common sense and safe distance when shooting.

Field or ground hunting ducks is fast becoming a preferred method of hunting in the basins. Migratory ducks will sometimes fly five to 10 miles away from their wetland roosting or loafing areas to feed in a field. Not only are these fields a great place to hunt, but getting permission to hunt a crop field is often easier than landing a spot on the river. Success in this venture requires spending an early morning or late afternoon scouting for feeding spots. This is time consuming initially but simple, and the beautiful thing

about field hunting is that once permission is granted by the landowner, the hunter may drive directly to the location and unload equipment and decoys without the inconvenience of hoisting gear overland for hundreds of yards. If you are in a field where ducks were actively feeding the morning or night before, then two dozen field and one or two motorized decoys should be all that is needed to decoy flocks numbering in the hundreds.

Duck Calls

Troy Bailey, past Nebraska state calling champion, does not recommend high end calls for beginners: "For the beginning duck hunter getting into calling, I would start off with a double reed call such as a Haydels DR-85 or a Primos Wench duck call. They are inexpensive and don't take a great deal of technique to use." There are all kinds of CDs and DVDs about duck calling, and sample videos on YouTube that you can use to help hone your skills. Or why not go to the source? Sit at your local city park and spend some time listening

to the sounds ducks make. Listen for the four to five note call of content ducks. The hail call is just a louder version of this call. There are more advanced calling tips, but this should help get you on your way.

Share the Experience

Lexington-native and long-time waterfowler Rod Reynolds has introduced scores of youngsters to waterfowling. He feels strongly about giving opportunities to kids and helping them to find a passion for the outdoors:

"Kids are the future of our sport and some of the most profound lessons can be learned in the outdoors. When starting, instruct them about safe and ethical hunting. Beyond that, kids must be warm and comfortable, and plan on a short hunting trip so they do not get bored – it is better to go for an hour and be successful so they want to do it again. Build some excitement into the planning of the hunt ... I think getting ready for the hunt is almost as exciting for a kid as the hunt itself." ■

Above: Spot, stalk and jumping of ducks can be quite a thrill. Here David Hoferer and Justin Gill jump some late-season mallards.

Right: Anytime you can make duck hunting a family affair it's a good thing.



Doug Steinke is a freelance writer and photographer who grew up in central Nebraska. He is a major contributing photographer for Ducks Unlimited Magazine, and lives in Grand Island with his wife, Becky, and three boys: Gage, Blake and Garrett.



Open Country Songbird

Text and photos by Michael Forsberg

My earliest recollection of a horned lark is from a bitterly cold February day in the Blue Creek Valley of the western Sandhills. From a hillside I watched a flock of these dainty yet tough birds gather on a snow bank and feed intensely on prairie grass seed heads sticking up out of the snow. They would hop up onto the grass stems and ride them down to the ground where they could then strip the seed heads bare.

Months later, while camped out on a shortgrass prairie in early June, I fell asleep listening to what sounded like the constant tinkling of distant sleigh bells. It wasn't until the next morning I realized the sound wasn't part of a dream – it



Horned lark nests are built so that the female's back is level with the ground, offering protection from the hooves of grazers.

was a horned lark calling under the pale light of a full moon.

An enchanting songbird of open country, the horned lark (*Eremophila alpestris*) can be found in prairie, desert and tundra grasslands from the Arctic Circle south to the northern reaches of South America. It holds claim to being the only lark species native to the western hemisphere (meadowlarks, by the way, are not true larks – they are most closely related to blackbirds and orioles).

Seven inches long, the horned lark's wings are long and slender and its tail short and square – a good design for living and flying in places where the wind always blows. Its sharp yet stout bill is designed to crack open small seeds, but is also used for digging. So are the elongated hind claws, which grow out like long, curved fingernails and may help the bird dig more efficiently in the soil.

There are at least 20 recognized subspecies of horned larks in North America, yet all are similarly marked with a black mask and breastband, a yellow chin, white underparts and small tufts of black feathers that stick up on both sides of its head like horns, thus its name. The coloration on their backs, tails and wings, however, can vary from light tan to rusty brown, usually matching the color of the soil where they live.

Horned larks evolved on the plains near bison herds and prairie dog towns, where the grass was short and frequently disturbed. Today they can be found just as readily in plowed or fallow fields and short cropped or overgrazed pastures.

In Nebraska they are regular breeders in the western half of the state and can be seen nearly statewide certain times of year. In winter, horned lark populations that breed farther north in the Dakotas and Canada migrate through and



A songbird of open grasslands, horned larks have a black mask and breastband, a yellow chin, white underparts and small tufts of black feathers that stick up on both sides of their head, thus the name.

sometimes winter in Nebraska. Those that breed here and in other Central Plains states usually migrate south, depending on the harshness of winter and food availability.

During the breeding season the male arrives at potential nesting areas first and establishes a two- to four-acre territory. When the female arrives, the male performs an elaborate courtship flight, sometimes gaining several hundred feet in elevation before facing into the wind, setting its wings in a V-shape, spreading its tail and gliding downward while passionately serenading the female with its buoyant song.

Once a mate is selected, the female will usually choose a nest site next to a clump of grass, rock or cow pie, dig out a depression and line it with fine grasses and stems. This nest cup is about the diameter of a small toddler's fist and just deep enough so that when the female sits on the eggs her back is flush with the ground. In this way, the hooves of grazers such as bison or cattle moving across the prairie are less likely to crush her or her eggs.

Females typically lay three eggs. The chicks, born naked and blind and fed an all-protein diet of insects delivered by

both parents, grow quickly and fledge in about two weeks. In Nebraska, horned larks can raise two, sometimes three, broods a year.

By fall they begin to form loose flocks while shifting to a more seed-based diet gleaned from maturing prairie grasses and wildflowers. In the winter semi-nomadic flocks of horned larks, sometimes joined by longspurs and buntings, become primarily seed eaters, often foraging in agricultural fields seeking out grains left over from harvest.

From my blind in a prairie dog town this past May, I watched from just a few feet away as a horned lark meticulously pecked, chipped and scraped away a butter dish-shaped depression in a patch of bare soil, then settled into the dusty bowl and bathed. It ruffled its feathers and slid side to side, eventually covering itself from head to tail with the tawny colored soil. When I turned away for a moment then looked back I couldn't see the lark until it shook itself off, revealing again its yellow chin, black mask, chest bib and feathered horns. Seemingly satisfied with its bath, it paused and gazed out over the prairie, let out a single "cheep" and flew away. ■



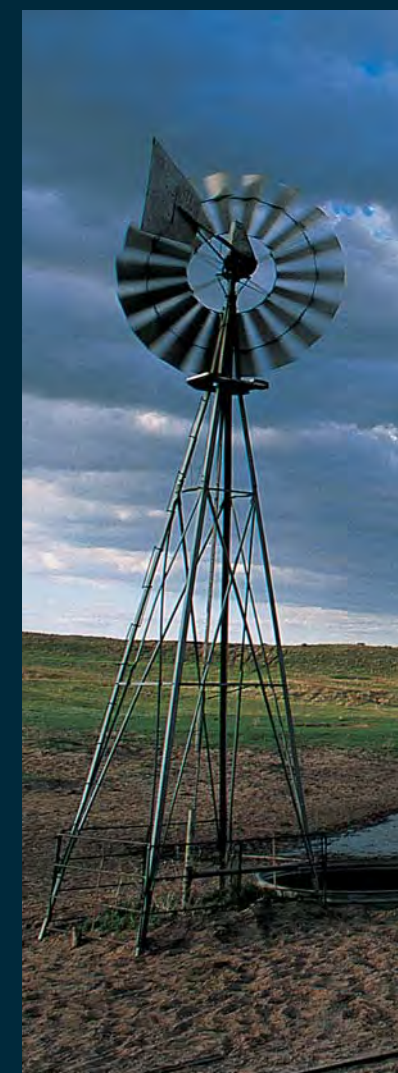
PHOTO BY JON FARRAR

The Nebraska Environmental Trust was established to conserve, enhance and restore the natural environments of Nebraska. A prosperous future requires a sound natural environment. We must act dynamically, progressively and systematically to ensure bountiful and thriving natural resources. The Trust is to complement existing activities, stimulate private investment and emphasize long term gain. The Trust is to lead in the development of a vision of Nebraska's future environment. The Trust is to collaborate with public and private efforts to achieve that vision.



Nebraska Environmental Trust

Preserving Natural Nebraska for Future Generations



Thanks to caring, farsighted people, in 1992 Nebraska created a unique and effective mechanism for providing money to fund the conservation, enhancement and restoration of the state’s natural environment. Twenty years later, more than \$187 million has been distributed to groups and organizations trying to make a difference in the world around them. In many cases, these projects never would have happened if it weren’t for the Nebraska Environmental Trust.

How it Started

The Trust was created on the belief that a prosperous future is dependent upon a healthy natural environment, and that Nebraskans could solve many environmental problems if project seed money was available.

With that belief and the idea that it could be funded by a state lottery, the Nebraska Environmental Trust was



Nebraska Environmental Trust money is being used to preserve, protect and enhance wildlife habitat across the entire state.

created under legislation advanced by then-governor Ben Nelson and passed by the Legislature in 1992 – before the Nebraska State Lottery had even been established. When voters created the lottery, 25 percent of the proceeds were earmarked for the Environmental Trust and the rest allocated to the Education Innovation Fund, the Compulsive Gamblers Assistance Fund and the Solid Waste Landfill Closure Assistance Fund. Since that time, the portion of the lottery proceeds devoted to closing landfills or bringing them up to federal standards has been reassigned to the Trust, which now receives 44.5 percent of the lottery profits after the first \$500,000 is paid to the Compulsive Gamblers Fund. In addition, the Nebraska State Fair receives 10 percent of the lottery proceeds.

Today

2012 marks a significant milestone in the history of the Trust – many organizations have received funding from the Trust over the past two decades to put worthwhile projects on the ground.

Ranging from habitat, surface and groundwater, waste management and recycling to air quality and soil management, all 93 counties in Nebraska have benefitted from the existence of the Trust. A crucial component to these projects is that each was encouraged to have local, state or federal matching funds, resulting in substantial outside funds being brought into Nebraska, some with a ratio greater than 1:4.

Because these annual grants are funded through the proceeds of the Nebraska Lottery, the people who enjoy the fun and excitement of participating in the lottery are helping keep the state’s land, air and water clean for future generations. In recent years, the Trust has received and granted approximately \$16 million on an annual basis.

The Trust attributes much of its success to the citizens of Nebraska for their on-going support in protecting the

environment and for their commitment in preserving Nebraska’s natural resources.

What it Has Accomplished

A vital part of Nebraska’s conservation activities, the Trust makes many projects a reality that otherwise might only be a dream. By providing the seed money needed to qualify for other grants, the Trust helps bring about projects that the public can enjoy both today and into the future – everything from wet meadow restoration to community recycling

PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER



Recently built Lake Wannahoo near Wahoo was funded in part with money from the Nebraska Environmental Trust.

projects, from small soil improvement projects on degraded inner-city lands in Omaha to the acquisition of more than 2,000 acres of pristine Cedar Canyon in the Wildcat Hills for public use.

Individuals, private organizations and public entities can all apply for Trust money – matching funds for a project are not required, but are encouraged through points awarded on the ratings scale. The Trust can fund a project for up to three years based on one application, after which the project must pass through the competitive awards process again.

In particular, the Trust seeks

opportunities that bring public and private partners together to work on high-quality, cost-effective projects. It also values projects that leverage private investment in conservation and emphasize long-lasting results. The following is a short list of projects that the Trust has helped fund.

Aquatic Habitat Rehabilitation Initiative

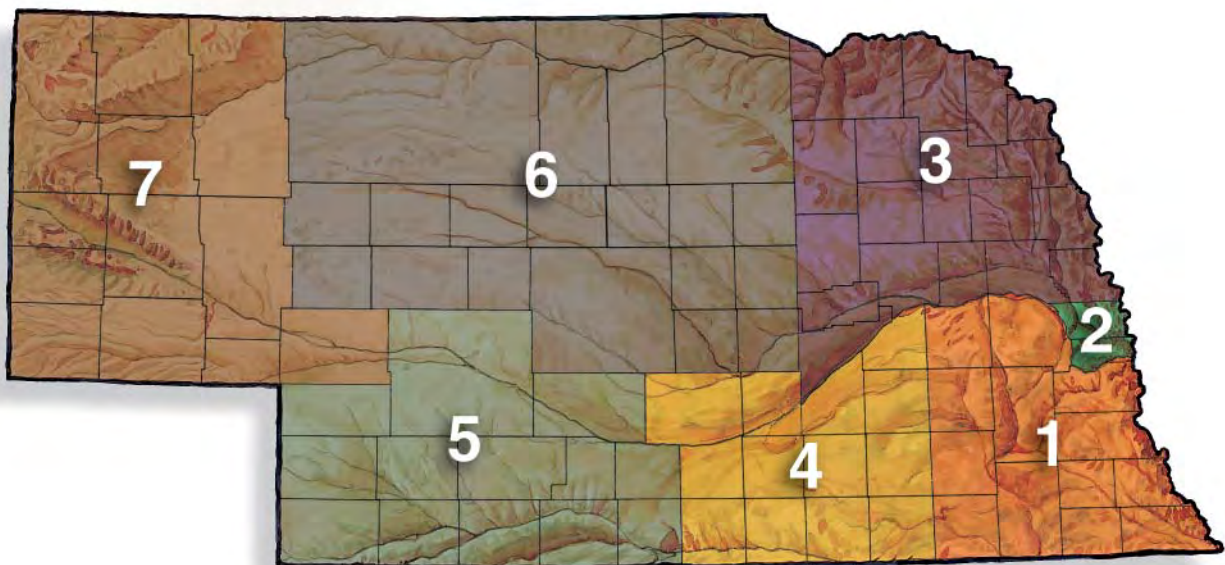
The goal of the Nebraska Aquatic Habitat Rehabilitation Initiative is to conserve, restore and enhance the water quality of aquatic systems across the state. Nebraska was the first state to

establish an Aquatic Habitat Stamp Program that dedicates a portion of each fishing license for aquatic rehabilitation projects.

Don Gabelhouse, administrator of the fisheries division of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, said the initial funding provided by the sale of stamps was adequate for 17 projects, “but when we went to the people, we ended up with 53 lakes on the list. So we had to find other funds.”

The Trust has now funded six grants to the Aquatic Habitat Program totaling \$4,700,000 to rehabilitate 35 different waters. According to Mark Porath, the

Geographic Distribution of Awards (1994-2012)



	1994-2011	2012	Totals
1	\$28,448,900	\$2,550,283	\$30,999,183
2	\$15,619,444	\$2,815,445	\$18,434,889
3	\$19,658,042	\$985,383	\$20,670,425
4	\$18,586,417	\$2,018,266	\$20,604,683
5	\$14,857,772	\$3,520,361	\$18,378,133
6	\$12,761,212	\$1,831,338	\$14,592,550
7	\$26,073,028	\$2,359,069	\$28,432,097
Statewide	\$36,022,866	\$3,212,251	\$39,235,117

Total Amount Awarded
1994-2012 = \$152,084,959

Awards with Statewide Benefits for 1994-2012
(not included in map figures) = \$39,235,117*

* Some funds are returned and re-awarded to new projects.

programs manager, Trust funding has “provided the state matching funds critical to securing federal dollars for these projects. Without Trust grants, it is safe to assume that at least a fourth of these would not have been completed.”

A major objective of the initiative is to facilitate completion of the Aquatic Habitat Plans first approved by the Nebraska Legislature in 1997 and then again by the Commission in 2008. Through 2011, a total of 58 projects have been completed at a cost of \$45,278,268, with the Trust playing a major supporting role.

Funding is used to design, engineer and construct water quality projects. NGPC matches Trust funds with Aquatic Habitat Stamp, Sport Fish Restoration, EPA Section 319, Bureau of Reclamation Title 28, Game Cash, Parks Cash, other public funds and private monies to accomplish these projects. Techniques proven to be

successful include sediment/nutrient dikes, dredging, excavation, bank stabilization, offshore breakwaters, aeration, water level management, islands, basin development, riparian buffer zones, alum treatments, fringe wetland development and fish renovations. The Initiative addresses the Trust’s priorities for improving water quality and conserving water by rehabilitating lakes, reservoirs, rivers and streams in order to provide diverse, stable and productive habitats that support a greater diversity of flora and fauna. Associated human benefits include high-quality recreation and aesthetics.

Wild Nebraska Program

The WILD-Nebraska program, in existence since 2000, provides wildlife conservation on private lands throughout the state. The cornerstone of this program is the partnerships developed to implement a variety of

management practices on grasslands, wetlands, and woodlands. This program has already affected 926 acres of grassland, 404 acres of wetlands, and 135 acres of woodlands.

Activities on the grasslands range from invasive tree removal and prescribed burning, to the establishment of native grasses and forbs. Wetlands have been restored by managing the areas water through irrigation reuse pits near (or in) the wetlands. There has also been sediment and invasive tree removal that has benefited the type of vegetation growing in the wetlands.

Woodland projects have consisted of adding native shrubs to areas and removing invasive tree species from forested areas. In addition to these habitat projects, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission staff have provided technical assistance to more than 2,700 landowners, affecting more than

82,500 acres of land across the state.

Funding for this project comes from the Nebraska Environmental Trust and the Commission’s Habitat Cash Fund, which is derived from the sale of Nebraska Habitat Stamps to hunters and trappers in Nebraska.

Smith Falls State Park

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and project partners are working to restore a unique ecosystem surrounding Smith Falls, the state’s highest waterfall. Smith Falls State Park (SP), located in north-central Nebraska, has a diverse mix of plant communities and is a key component of the 76-mile stretch of the middle Niobrara River designated as a National Scenic River.

The following are project objectives at Smith Falls:

- Enhance the native forests at Smith Falls SP by controlling invasive cedars and young pine through thinning.
- Conserve rare plant species in the park.
- Provide a demonstration site for

sound forest management that can be viewed by park visitors and adjacent landowners.

- Maintain recreational opportunities for park visitors.
- Prevent catastrophic park wildfires.

Project managers have received 174 percent of matching funds and in-kind value toward grant funding (including funding from the Environmental Trust), which illustrates the interest the Nebraska Forest Service, National Park Service, Nebraska Western Resource Council, Northern Prairies Land Trust and The Nature Conservancy have in restoring the park’s ecosystem.

Panhandle Program Preserves Grassland

With the potential expiration of contracts protecting more than 260,000 acres of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) land in the Panhandle by 2013, Panhandle Natural Resources Districts and the Natural Resources Conservation Service have teamed together to preserve regional grassland cover.



Nebraska Environmental Trust funds are being used for a project that seeks to restore the unique ecosystem surrounding Smith Falls, the state’s highest waterfall. Located in north-central Nebraska, the area is a key component of a national scenic river.

Project Eligibility Criteria

Environmental Acceptability:

The project must be environmentally acceptable.

Environmental Benefits: The project must have clear and direct environmental benefits.

Trust Priorities: The project must make a real contribution to achieving the Trust Board’s priority categories — habitat, surface and ground water, waste management, air quality and soil management.

Public Benefit: The project must provide benefits to the general public.

Feasibility: Funds will only be given to proposals which are deemed technically and financially feasible.

Regulatory Assistance: Trust funds will not be used to provide direct assistance to regulatory programs or to implement actions mandated by regulations except remediation.

Private Benefits: Trust money will not be used to provide assistance to projects whose benefits are primarily private in nature or to relieve private liability for environmental damage.

Financial Hardship: Trust funds will only be used in cases where the beneficiaries of the project could not afford the costs of the benefits without experiencing financial hardship.

Eminent Domain: The fund shall not pay for land or easements acquired without the full and express consent of the landowner.

So How Does It Work?

The Trust is governed by a 14-member board appointed by the governor that is composed of nine private citizens – three from each of the state's three congressional districts – and the heads of five state agencies. The citizen members, two of whom must have finance experience, serve six-year terms. The agencies represented on the board include the departments of Agriculture; Environmental Quality; Division of Public Health Department of Health and Human Services; Nebraska Department of Natural Resources; and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

Through the year 2015, the Trust has committed its funding to these priority areas – habitat, surface and ground water, waste management, air quality and soil management. To qualify for funding, proposed projects must fall within these priority areas and meet 12 additional standards, including environmental acceptability and benefits, benefit to the public, and technical and financial feasibility.

Any individual, organization or public entity can apply for grants, and there is no maximum limit for grant amounts. The Trust does not provide direct assistance to any regulatory program with the exception of soil or groundwater remediation, and it does not provide funds for the implementation of actions mandated by regulation. Proposals designed primarily for private benefit are not accepted, nor does the Trust assist in the acquisition of property through eminent domain. Awards are granted once each year. Applications are due in September and the review process lasts until February.

Grant applications are subject to two screenings. First, a technical and feasibility review is conducted by the Trust's Technical Advisory Committee, a group of nearly 140 volunteer experts in a variety of scientific and technical fields. Then the Grants Committee reviews the applications.

After determining which applications are eligible, the subcommittee rates them, assigning numerical point values in each of four categories – advancing Trust priorities, environmental benefits, social and economic benefits, and project design. Because the Trust recognizes seven district boundaries across the state, additional points may be added for projects that will help ensure an equitable statewide distribution of funds. In addition, extra points can be added for projects that meet all established criteria to encourage large-scale collaborative projects with significant environmental impacts.

After the subcommittee recommends funding based on the ratings, public comment is accepted and a public hearing is held. Grants are awarded in April, and awards can be full or partial project funding. To date the Trust has completed 19 grant cycles and will announce the results of the 20th round of award recommendations in February 2013.



PHOTO BY JON FARRAR

The Trust has provided funds to purchase conservation easements in the biologically unique, central Niobrara River Valley.

Preserving CRP Benefits in western Nebraska, a three-year program funded by the NRDs and a grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust (NET) seeks to ensure that highly erodible land remains in cover yet continues to produce income for landowners. Originally focusing on lands at high risk for erosion, CRP removed them from agricultural production and established native or alternative vegetative cover in an effort to stop soil erosion. Since then, the CRP program has expanded to protect land and water resources, wetlands, and wildlife habitat.

With the large amount of acres that could potentially be returned to production due to expiring contracts, officials have been concerned over the possible loss of CRP's benefits to air, water, soil and wildlife resources.

With that in mind the panhandle NRDs, with the South Platte NRD as lead agency, joined the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and NRCS for an Environmental Trust grant to help landowners with CRP contracts maintain grasslands. Funding to build perimeter fences around CRP ground is one of the program's main benefits. While NRCS programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) provide for assistance with other components to implement a livestock grazing system, perimeter fences are not. Cost share is also available for producers who want to enhance the habitat on their existing CRP. Enhancements can include wildlife water development and the interseeding of grasses, legumes, pollinators and even shrub thickets.

The program has benefited more than

4,560 acres, with nearly 25 miles of fence installed. Total costs thus far for the Preserving CRP Benefits in Western Nebraska program are \$192,570, of which the Environmental Trust has contributed \$39,983.00.

For All of Nebraska

The Nebraska Environmental Trust is truly an asset for all Nebraska, now and far into the future. Many excellent projects would never move from the drawing board to the landscape without the financing a grant can provide. Government can do much to preserve the precious resources nature has given us. Now, so can individuals, businesses and public-spirited organizations working together with the strength and support of the Nebraska Environmental Trust.

Funding Categories

The Trust sets the funding category areas for five-year periods, in a process involving members of the Nebraska public and conservation organizations. Any project or portion of a project funded by the Trust must achieve one or more of the following priority areas. These priority areas are equally important. Until July 2015, the Trust will consider funding proposals in the following priority areas: habitat; surface and ground water; waste management and recycling; air quality; soil management.



PHOTO BY JON FARRAR

Facts in Brief

The Nebraska Environmental Trust...

- Is funded by the Nebraska Lottery. The Lottery has transferred more than \$187 million to the Trust in the last 19 years.
- Covers the cost of operations through interest earnings. The Trust has

operated with overhead expenditures equaling less than 3% of income since it was created.

- Has completed 19 grant cycles and will announce the results of the 20th round of award recommendations in February 2013.



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For more information, go to www.environmentaltrust.org or contact the Nebraska Environmental Trust, 700 S 16th Street, PO Box 94913, Lincoln, NE 68509-4913. Phone: (402) 471-5409. Fax: (402) 471-8233.

Additional copies of this publication can be requested by calling the Trust office or e-mailing info@environmentaltrust.org.

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Visionaries of Conservation

Celebrating the 75th Anniversary of the Pittman-Robertson Act

By Doug Carroll

In 1937, Nevada senator Key Pittman together with another visionary of the same time, Absalom Willis Robertson, a Virginian congressman, created the formula for federal sharing of ammunition tax with states to establish wildlife areas.

Seventy-five years ago, history was made when the Congress of the United States passed a bill known as the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act. Known better by its two chief sponsors, Senator Key Pittman of Nevada, and Representative A. Willis Robertson of Virginia, to hunters and outdoorsmen across the country, the Pittman-Robertson Act may well be the most important piece of legislation ever passed in the United States. Without it, many of the wildlife species that we take for granted today may well have gone the way of the passenger pigeon. Before we take a look at all the good things this legislation has enabled, perhaps a look back at the state of the nation in the early 1900s is in order.

Barreling Toward Disaster

When the first pilgrims stepped foot on what eventually became the United States, the land was full of virtually unimaginable bounty in regards to wildlife. By the time the first Transcontinental railway system broke open the West in 1869, vast herds of 100 million bison and 40 million pronghorn antelope that had virtually blanketed the mid-continent had essentially vanished completely and an estimated 60 million beavers had been reduced to 100,000. Passenger pigeons that had once filled the sky for hours during their migrations had disappeared completely, and market hunting continued with no end in sight. Meanwhile swamps were being drained at an alarming rate and other prime habitat was being converted to agriculture. America was headed towards a natural resources disaster and few people seemed to care.

Sportsmen to the Rescue

Despite the seemingly endless amounts of natural resources that this still relatively new country had to offer, little by little Americans woke up to the need for conservation before it was too late. By the late 1800s and early 1900s, a handful of forward thinkers had emerged with the political will and commitment to save what they recognized as America's greatest treasure. They were, by and large, America's sportsmen.

In the first half of the 20th century, almost all of the responsibility for the nation's natural resources fell directly on the shoulders of hunters and anglers – their state hunting and fishing license revenue provided the only stable funding source to protect, restore, and manage fish and wildlife resources. With the creation of state fish and game agencies in the early 20th century, fish and wildlife had been given a legislative voice and a bank account, but it was not enough. Underfunded, understaffed and prone to political interference (hunting and fishing license revenue was more often than not used to support projects other than wildlife restoration), these agencies were usually fighting a



KEY D. PITTMAN 1872-1940



ABSALOM W. ROBERTSON 1887-1971

THINKSTOCK



Federal excise taxes on firearms, ammunition, archery equipment and arrow components are collected and appropriated back to Nebraska and other states for a variety of wildlife and hunting projects.

losing battle.

Outdoorsmen (and women) didn't give up the fight, however, and better days were soon coming.

Finding the Funding

When Teddy Roosevelt was ushered into the White House in 1901, federal legislation got a presidential jumpstart and large patches of land became refuges for beleaguered wildlife. By 1913, the federal government had claimed custody of the migratory birds of the nation, establishing waterfowl hunting seasons in every state, and soon established protective international treaties. Essential funding mechanisms to fund long-term wildlife restoration programs, however, was still lacking.

In 1936, a 10 percent federal excise tax on sporting guns and ammunition existed that Congress wanted to abolish, but sportsmen groups and other conservationists had a better idea – why not divert the tax proceeds to the states for wildlife restoration projects to be matched on a 3:1 basis with state hunting and fishing license revenue? The ammunition companies supported the proposal, and Carl Shoemaker, former chief of the Oregon Department of Fish and Game, drafted the legislation. Shoemaker enlisted the support of Senator Key Pittman of Nevada to introduce the bill in the Senate. On the House side, Shoemaker approached Congressman A. Willis Robertson, who had moved to Congress from the Virginia Game Department four years earlier. When Shoemaker sat down with Robertson and handed him the bill, Robertson penciled in 29 words: "... and which shall include a prohibition against the diversion

of license fees paid by hunters for any other purpose than the administration of said State fish and game department." With those words, Robertson secured protection of hunting license dollars – if a state wanted federal money to help them restore their wildlife, they had to guarantee their fish and game department's right to use every dime of hunting and fishing license revenue to support it.

The Pittman-Robertson (P-R) Federal Aid to Wildlife Restoration Act sailed through Congress. President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the bill into law on September 2, 1937, turning a deaf ear to protests from his budget office that earmarking funds from excise taxes were not in the country's best interest. Since 1937, more than \$6.4 billion has been invested in wildlife restoration through the P-R program. It has turned into one of the most successful federal-state-conservationist-sportsmen partnerships in history. ■

Read next month's issue to find out how this legislation had directly affected Nebraska's fish and wildlife.



Mapping Nebraska's

Record Book Bucks

By Joel W. Helmer and
Levi Shinn

“Big bucks are where you find ‘em.” Rather profound huh? I think I first heard this from a speaker at the Wisconsin Deer Classic but can’t say for sure. It probably sticks in my mind because as a Boone and Crockett Club (B&C) and Pope and Young Club (P&Y) official scorer, I get to hear “The Story” from a lot of Nebraska deer hunters. They often include surprisingly specific details on where their buck was taken, with my reaction sometimes being, “Are you serious – this monster came from there?!” It’s amazing the places big bucks can hide out and it’s this well-known unknown that makes hunting so exciting. The point of this article is to give you a little more information about “where” big bucks have been taken in this state by mapping the harvest location of whitetail and mule deer that have been entered into the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission’s Big Game Trophy Records database.

Nebraska's Records Program

Nebraska’s records program recognizes five species; white-tailed deer, mule deer, pronghorn, elk and bighorn sheep, divided into 32 categories by type of rack (typical and non-typical) and method of take (archery, crossbow, muzzleloader and rifle). The program uses the same scoring system developed by B&C in 1950 and adopted a year later by P&Y for archery-killed deer. The main difference between those records books and Nebraska’s is that the minimum scores necessary to make the Nebraska record book are generally lower. The legalization of crossbows for all archery hunting in Nebraska also creates a discrepancy, as P&Y does not accept crossbow entries, while



Luke Polenz's Sarpy County non-typical whitetail scored 165% on the P&Y scale.

Nebraska’s program added another category for this weapon (B&C accepts any legally taken buck, regardless of weapon, and even accepts picked-up trophies).

Nebraska’s records program has been awarding certificates for big game trophies since 1962 and is a wonderful, historical archive of big-game hunting in the state. White-tailed deer may have been totally extirpated from the state by the early 1900s and mule

deer were extremely rare. Following decades of closed seasons, modern-day deer hunting began in 1945. This first season produced the oldest records book entry when R.A. Wirz from Halsey shot a 177-inch mule deer in Thomas County. The next oldest mule deer entry was one shot in 1948, while the oldest trophy whitetail entries were a pair of bucks shot in 1949 – one from Cherry and one from Sheridan county.

Following the first modern-day,

statewide firearm season in 1961, the deer harvest and number of trophy entries has risen steadily, increasing from less than 300 in the 1970s to more than 1,000 this past decade.

Despite many great bucks and a herd with an increasingly older age-class structure, Nebraska is still often overshadowed by states like Iowa, Illinois and Kansas as trophy whitetail destinations. Events over the last several seasons, however, are starting to change this: In 2009, Texan Wes O’Brien shot a massive 284-inch nontypical in southeastern Richardson County. Although never officially entered into the Nebraska records book, it would eclipse the current state record of 279% taken by Del Austin with a bow in 1962.

Even more extraordinary was the 202% inch whitetail shot by Kevin Petrzilka in Saunders County in 2010 – not only was that a new state record, it was the first typical buck in the Nebraska records book to break the magical 200-inch mark. Stories of bucks like these go viral on the Internet, focusing national attention on Nebraska deer hunting and its records program.

Mapping the Records Book

Being a geography professor at Concordia University in Seward, I like to see data shown spatially on maps since it often reveals interesting geographic patterns. Concordia geography major Levi Shinn and I contacted Randy Stutheit, the Commission’s Big Game Records Program Coordinator, and he agreed to e-mail us a digital copy of the records book. We imported it into ArcGIS, a computer mapping program, to produce the series of maps seen on the following pages. As with many larger databases we encountered a few errors, limiting us to mapping 5,016 of the 5,124 entries, a success rate of 98 percent.

White-tailed Deer

The records book category with the most entries, not surprisingly, is whitetails taken by rifle, with the map showing the distribution of 1,811 entries and every county having at least one. The minimum score to make the records book is 150 typical and 160 non-typical. Lincoln County leads the state with 69 entries, followed closely by Cherry and Custer counties with 67 each. The remaining top 10 includes Pawnee (54), Gage (51), Cass (49), Keya Paha (49), Richardson (49), Holt (47), Jefferson (45), Otoe (44), Knox (42), Saunders (42) and Lancaster (40). The physical size difference between eastern and western counties is obviously a factor. For example, if you divide land area by entries then Cherry County has only one entry for every

90 square miles, while Pawnee has one for every eight square miles. The far southeastern part of the state really stands out on the whitetail maps – its rolling hills, riverbottoms and forest interspersed with crop fields creates a habitat mix that supports larger deer densities and some great bucks.

The archery map shows 1,282 entries that score a minimum of 125 typical and 150 non-typical. The southeastern cluster of counties again is well represented while only two counties, McPherson and Kimball, don’t have an entry. The more urbanized Sarpy and Lancaster counties top the list with 85 and 70 entries, respectively. This is consistent with the national maps I’ve produced of the B&C and P&Y records books. Many large metropolitan areas in the upper Midwest are some of the best places to shoot a trophy buck



Want a Nebraska mule deer trophy? Look west.

– the urban/rural fringe of housing developments, riverbottoms, parks, golf courses and open areas where hunting is either not allowed or limited to archery protects bucks until they reach the four to seven years of age necessary to grow trophy racks. Lincoln (64), Cass (62), Gage (61), Jefferson (49), Saunders (43), Douglas (34), Otoe (30) and Buffalo (28) round out the top 10 archery counties.

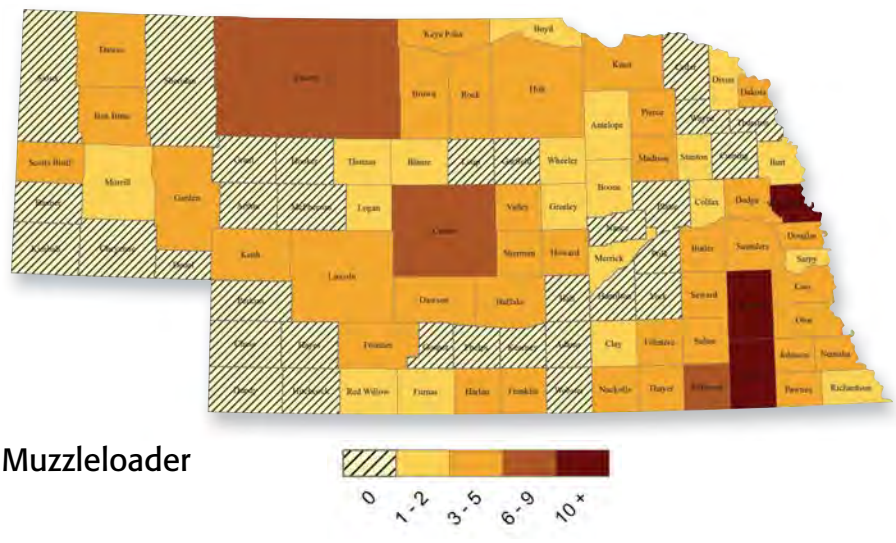
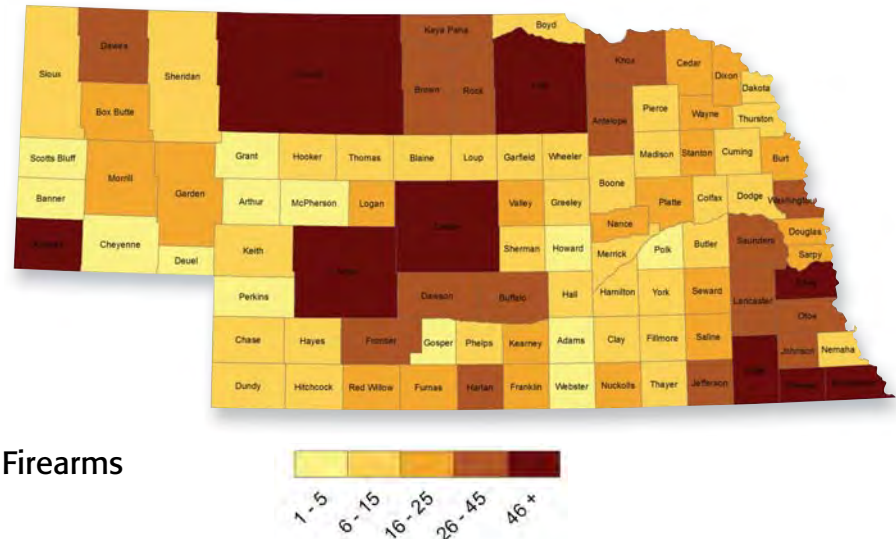
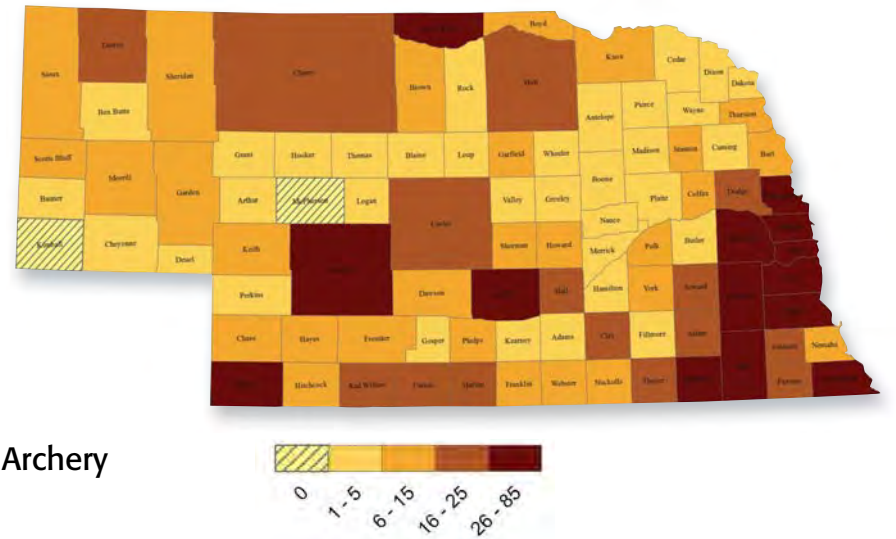
The number of whitetail muzzleloader entries is considerably lower than archery and rifle, with only 170 typical and 45 nontypical bucks in the book. Although the minimum score is lower than for rifle, at 140 typical and 155 nontypical, the number of hunters using traditional weapons is far less. For example, of the 140,000 deer permits issued in 2011, only 10,389 were muzzleloader, with these hunters shooting 1,589 of the 37,024 adult bucks harvested. These statistics are why many big-buck hunters absolutely love the late muzzleloader season, since there is less hunting pressure and bucks key in on food sources as temperatures drop. Far eastern Washington County leads the state with 25 muzzleloader entries, followed by Lancaster (15) and Gage (10), with the remaining counties having eight or less. If being first excites you, there are 32 counties in Nebraska that don't yet have an entry in this category.

Mule Deer

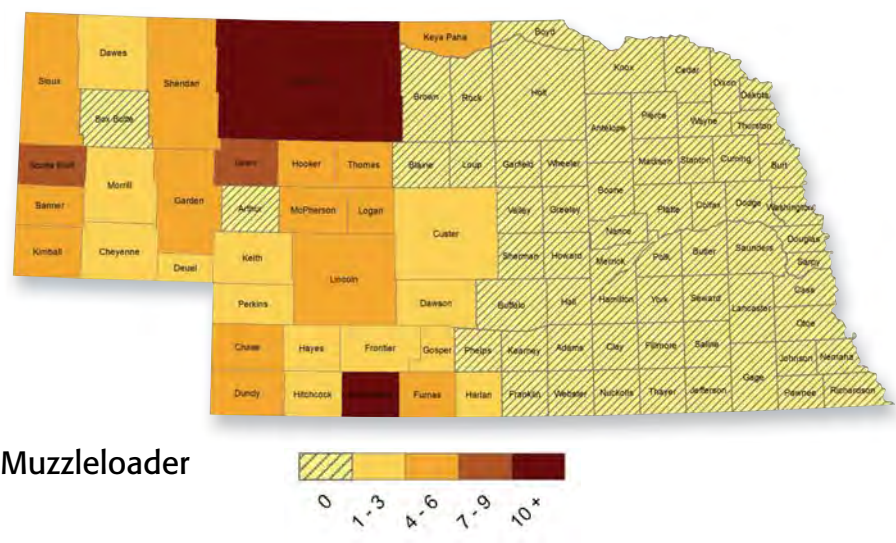
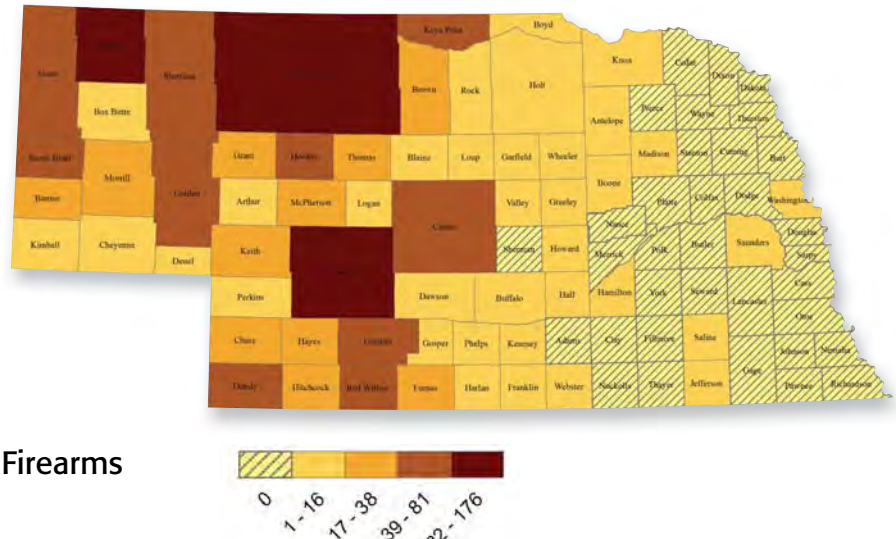
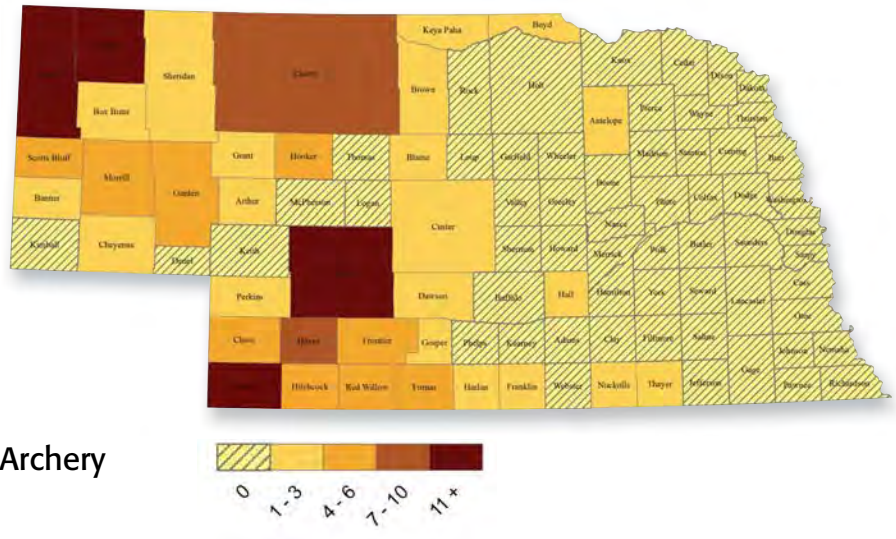
Some geographers claim the West begins at the 100th meridian of longitude – a line roughly bisecting Nebraska. If you're driving I-80 from Lincoln to North Platte you cross it near Cozad where, appropriately enough, you can visit the 100th Meridian Museum. Others argue the line dividing the Midwest from West is more fluid, a gradual landscape change. One minute you see a whitetail jumping a fence into a corn field and the next you see a mule deer cresting a sandhill sprinkled with yucca. Although the expansion of whitetails westward along Nebraska's river corridors has blurred this divide, the maps still show a geographic separation between the two species.

We successfully mapped 1,459 mule deer taken with rifle (minimum score

Whitetail Deer Trophies by County



Mule Deer Trophies by County



150-typical, 170-nontypical). Cherry County ranks first with 176 entries, followed by Lincoln (109), Dawes (84), Sioux (73), Custer (67), Sheridan (65), Red Willow (58), Frontier (56), Hooker (55) and Dundy (50). Although a few mule deer are still occasionally harvested in the eastern third of the state they are rare, with single record book entries coming 20 years ago or more from Saunders, Washington, Saline and Jefferson counties.

With mule deer favoring more open terrain, it is especially challenging to get within bow range of a quality buck. Combine that with declining populations in some areas and shooting a trophy-caliber mule deer with a bow is a rare feat. We mapped only 143 archery entries, which require a minimum of 140 typical and 155 non-typical points. Dundy County in southwestern Nebraska tops the list with 16 entries, followed by Sioux (14), Lincoln (13), Dawes (12), Cherry and Hayes (9).

The rarest category mapped is mule deer with a muzzleloader, with only 106 entries (minimum 145-typical, 160-nontypical). These records are distributed in the western half of the state with Cherry County first with 13, followed by Red Willow (9), Scotts Bluff (8) and Grant (6). With only 31 counties currently having an entry in this category, there is ample opportunity for hunters wanting to be the first to enter a trophy.

If you are fortunate enough to take a nice buck and want to enter it into a record book, you must first have it officially scored. You can take it to a district Game and Parks Commission office in Alliance, Bassett, Norfolk, North Platte, Lincoln or Kearney to have it scored, as well as any other certified B&C Club, P&Y Club, or Longhunter Society measurer. These organizations list their scorer's contact information on their respective web sites and there is no cost to having your buck measured.

Good luck this coming hunting season and remember, they are where you find'em! ■

To purchase a deer permit, go to www.OutdoorNebraska.org and click on Buy a Permit. Permits for most units are still available, and statewide buck permits are unlimited.

Pawpaws

Nebraska's Wild Bananas



Text and photos by Jon Farrar

Near the end of the Dark Ages, back when I was in about the third or fourth grade, we used to sing a little song titled “Way Down Yonder in the Pawpaw Patch.” I think it involved all the boys and girls in the class holding hands and sort of skipping around the room between the rows of desks, looking for whomever was designated to be lost in the pawpaw patch. Could have even been that we were forced to alternate – boy, girl, boy, girl – in the hope we would come to tolerate the opposite gender. And I sort of believe I remember whenever we sang the chorus about “picking up pawpaws” we all pretended to bend down, pick one up and put it in our pocket. It probably qualified as

Where, Oh Where, Oh Where is Susie?

Where, oh where, oh where is Susie?
Where, oh where, oh where is Susie?
Way down yonder in the paw-paw patch.
Chorus:
Picking up paw-paws; put ‘em in a basket.
Picking up paw-paws; put ‘em in a basket.
Picking up paw-paws; put ‘em in a basket.
Way down yonder in the paw-paw patch.
Come along, boys, and let’s go find her.
Come along, boys, and let’s go find her.
Come along, boys, and let’s go find her.
Way down yonder in the paw-paw patch.

Repeat Chorus:

She’s a queen of old Hawaii.
She’s a queen of old Hawaii.
She’s a queen of old Hawaii.
Way down yonder in the paw-paw patch.
Repeat Chorus:
She can teach you how to hula.
She can teach you how to hula.
She can teach you how to hula.
Way down yonder in the paw-paw patch.

both music instruction and physical education for the day. I cannot remember if the lost person was illusive and skipping around, too, or was just standing in the pretend pawpaw patch somewhere in the room. My memory is hazy on that point.

If you sniff around on the Internet you will find many versions of the song’s words. One version is in the sidebar on this page. I especially like it because Susie is “a queen of old Hawaii” and “She can teach you how to hula” but I doubt it was the version we used in grade school. And, as I recall, we chanted “put ‘em in your pocket,” not “put ‘em in a basket.” If you know pawpaw fruits, putting them a basket seems the better choice; although one website noted that “pocket” really meant a pocket formed by holding up the front of an apron, which seems reasonable, but only if the boys picking up pawpaws were wearing aprons as well as the girls.

Jessie Morris was our red-haired, barrel-chested teacher in those grades. She could have been a major league pitcher, as she was deadly accurate hitting the back of the head of any boy whispering to whoever was in the desk behind him, no matter the distance, with a blackboard eraser, which has nothing at all to do with pawpaws. The point in mentioning her was that if she ever explained to us what a pawpaw was, I was not paying attention. I doubt any of us had the slightest idea what they were. It was 20 years before I saw my first pawpaw fruit. It didn’t look like something that should be growing on a tree in Nebraska, and that is not far from the truth.

How They Look

Pawpaws (*Asimina triloba*) are small trees, usually not taller than 20 feet in Nebraska but growing to 40 feet with a trunk diameter of one foot in southern states. The Nebraska champion pawpaw is 23½ feet tall. When not competing for space with neighboring trees they often grow in a somewhat pyramid shape. The species is native to 26 states and provinces, ranging from northern Florida to southern Ontario. Southeastern Nebraska is at the northwestern edge of the pawpaw’s range, so it is found principally in Missouri River woodlands as far north as Douglas County. University of Nebraska-Lincoln botanist Raymond J. Pool, in his 1951 revised edition of *Handbook of Nebraska Trees*, reported pawpaws pioneering up rivers feeding the Missouri River and that it had been found in Pawnee and Saunders counties.

University of Nebraska botanist J.E. Weaver wrote in *Native Vegetation of Nebraska* that pawpaws belonged to the red oak-linden plant community on “...the best protected slopes and ravines ... on lower slopes and north exposures

Pawpaws are understory trees, seldom more than 20 feet tall, prospering under the canopy of taller trees, often red oak and basswood.

of the higher ones.” It prefers rich, moist, loamy soils. Because it sends out suckers, pawpaws are usually found in patches or colonies. It is an understory tree, an inhabitant of deep and shady woods, capable of prospering under the dense canopy of taller trees; but does best and forms the most extensive colonies in woodland openings.

Pawpaw leaves are large and attractive, what botanists call obovate or obovate-lanceolate in shape, meaning teardrop-shaped tapering to their narrowest where the leaf joins the twig. The leaves are seven to 12 inches long and three to six inches wide, droop in an appealing dog-ear sort of way, and turn a wonderful butter-yellow in autumn. An interesting side note to the pawpaw’s foliage is that the larvae of the zebra swallowtail butterfly feeds almost exclusively on its young leaves. It is reported that chemicals in the leaves make the insect, at all stages of life, unpalatable to birds and other predators, enhancing the swallowtail’s chances of survival. In states east of Nebraska, the larvae of the pawpaw sphinx moth feeds on the foliage of several trees but prefers those of pawpaw.

Flowers appear before the tree leafs out, usually in early-April, and so are conspicuous. They are unlike the flowers of any other Nebraska plant, more suggestive of flowers

found on tropical trees, where most fellow members of the “custard apple” family (Annonaceae), are found. When they first begin to open they are bell-shaped and, like a bell, the open end faces down. As the flowers mature, the six petals spread widely, eventually arching back. Each flower is from an inch or an inch-and-one-half in diameter, a deep maroon color, wrinkled and leathery looking. The flowers are often described as having a faint fetid or yeasty smell or, even worse, the smell of rotting meat. More generous writers describe their smell as having a “remembrance of fermenting purple grapes.” A number of insects are drawn to the smell – blowflies, carrion beetles, fruit flies and other beetles – and accomplish cross-pollination. Typically, a tree produces far more flowers than fruits.

Wild Bananas

The pawpaw fruit is even more exotic and bizarre than the flower. Technically it is a berry with seeds embedded in the fleshy ovary, and it is also the largest edible fruit of any plant native to the United States. The name pawpaw is said to be derived from the Spanish *papaya*, a South American tropical plant with superficially similar fruits. There is no shortage of common names – wild banana, poor man’s



Pawpaw leaves are large, up to 12 inches long and six inches wide, and turn an appealing butter-yellow in October. The larvae of the zebra swallowtail butterfly feeds exclusively on pawpaw leaves, absorbing chemicals that make them unpalatable.



Immature pawpaw fruit, as many as three to a cluster, are light green. They are the largest edible fruit of any plant native to the United States, some weighing a pound.

banana, Ozark banana and banango. The name of many states where the pawpaw is found is often put in front of “banana” and used as a common name – West Virginia banana, Kansas banana, Kentucky banana, Michigan banana, Missouri banana and Hoosier banana.

One to three fruits may be produced from each flower. So strange are the pawpaw’s fruits they have strained the vocabulary of botanists to describe them, ranging from – “a bit like a mango” to “short, stubby bananas.” In my mind, they are something like a potato, if you could find a smooth-skinned, kidney-shaped potato. Immature fruits are light-green or

yellow-green. When mature they are bluish in color. The fruit can range in size from two to six inches long and up to two inches in diameter or more. The size is probably determined by a variety of factors, such as maturity of the tree, number of fruits per cluster and moisture available during the growing season. Large fruits can weigh a pound. In Nebraska, mature fruits are generally falling to the ground in late-September, but small fruits may fall earlier, perhaps “pushed overboard” by larger fruits of the same cluster.

The ripe fruit is perfumy and its taste difficult to describe – “sweet, custardish flavor somewhat similar to a very ripe banana, mango, or

cantaloupe” to “a tangy wild-wood flavor peculiarly its own...sweet, yet rather cloying to the taste and a wee bit pucker” to “too luscious for the relish of most people” to a conservative “sweet and edible.” The texture somewhat resembles that of a ripe avocado. Eaten in their natural state just off the tree, their flavor is overwhelming after about the second spoonful.

Within each fruit are from two to ten or more large seeds, up to an inch in length, flattened, polished brown and arranged in rows. The seeds are extremely hard and in the past were sometimes used as good luck “pocket pieces” like a chestnut or lucky stone.

Production of new trees from seeds occurs at a fairly low rate – the plants spread more efficiently by suckering.

Pawpaw Recipes

Donald Culross Peattie, in his second edition of *A Natural History of Trees of Eastern and Central North America*, wrote that the earliest documented mention of pawpaws is in the 1541 report of the Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto expedition, who found Native Americans cultivating it east of the Mississippi River. He noted that wood-wise Indians of the east “...knew there are good and bad [pawpaw] trees, as to flavor, and have

long insisted that selection would soon result in marked improvement of the fruit....” and that “...in general, the orange-fleshed variety is considered much more tasty.” Today’s plant

breeders seem to agree and have developed cultivars for the size and taste of their fruit.

Pawpaws once were a popular wild fruit, often used for banana-based

recipes. In eastern and southeastern states, the ripe flesh of pawpaw fruits has been used to make banana bread, jams and jellies, pies, custards, puddings, cookies, as an ice cream



The bell-shaped pawpaw flowers appear before the leaves do and are leathery in appearance. The fruit contains two to 10 or more hard, dark brown seeds. The pulp is perfumy, sweet and in taste often compared to custard or ripe bananas. Because of their powerful scent and taste, they are used sparingly in cooking.



Because they sucker, pawpaws are usually found in patches, and are conspicuous in early-October when the leaves turn yellow.

flavoring, in drinks (usually mixed with other fruits to subdue the powerful scent and taste of the pawpaws), and in wine making. Chilled pawpaw fruit was said to be a favorite dessert of George Washington. A recipe for pawpaw bread, from Kay Young’s book on edible wild plants, *Wild Seasons*, is in the sidebar on the right. Her book also provides good information on selecting trees producing the best tasting fruit, when the fruits are best gathered, how to gather and store them, and pulp extraction.

Wild creatures also feed on pawpaw fruits. Opossums are said to be particularly fond of them, and raccoons, fox, squirrels, deer and a host of insects are drawn the fruit’s pungent scent. The seeds are said to contain a powerful alkaloid that has a “stupefying effect” on the brains of animals, but that may be no more than woodland mythology.

Fibers of the inner bark of pawpaw were woven into a coarse cloth by American Indians and early pioneers; and braided to make fish stringers, ropes and fishing nets. Its wood is of no commercial value, but researchers are finding promise in chemicals found in the leaves, bark and twigs, which possess potent antitumor and pesticidal properties.

Growing Your Own

Because of their attractive foliage, particularly in the fall, exotic flowers, bizarre fruit and the appeal of having a colony of like trees in a relatively small space, pawpaws are receiving more attention as ornamental trees; although some homeowners may object to having such large fruits fall to the ground. Because they sucker, pawpaws are best planted where the area around them can be mowed. In the proper locations, they are probably hardy into central Nebraska.

The easiest way to start pawpaws is to order seedlings from a nursery. It is also the best way to ensure you are planting pawpaws selected for their flavor and large fruit size. Do-it-yourselfers need to know that pawpaw seeds require a 90 to 120 day exposure to cold temperatures, what propagators call stratification, to germinate. This can be done by placing seeds in moist sphagnum moss or soil in a plastic bag and storing in a freezer; or by planting them outside in the fall where you want them to grow. Germination is slow, perhaps because of the seed’s hard coat, and probably contributes to low germination success. New plants may not emerge until late summer, by which time the new plant will have sent down a 10-inch-long taproot. Nicking the seed with a file may allow moisture to penetrate faster and speed germination. The advantage of growing trees from the seeds of Nebraska natives is that they are probably better adapted to our climate.

One of the best places to find pawpaws in the wild is at Indian Cave State Park along the Missouri River in Richardson and Nemaha counties. They grow throughout the park but are most often found midway between the top and bottom of a slope, especially north-facing slopes, and along drainages. A patch easily found is on the south side of the one-way loop road, not far beyond where the road turns easterly and before reaching the pull-out with restrooms and picnic tables. Pawpaw fruit is usually ripe in September. The best fall color is during the first three weeks of October, before the first killing frost. ■

Pawpaw Bread

350-degree oven

2 cups all-purpose flour

1 teaspoon soda

½ teaspoon salt

½ cup margarine or butter

1 cup granulated sugar

2 eggs

1 cup mashed pawpaw pulp

½ cup nutmeats (hickories if you have them)

Grease a 9x5x3 loaf pan with margarine or butter and set it aside.

Sift the flour, soda and salt together onto a piece of waxed paper. With an electric mixer, cream the margarine or butter until fluffy. Gradually add the sugar and continue beating until thick and light. Add the eggs, one at a time, and beat well. Add about half of the dry ingredients and stir only until the batter is blended (don’t beat), then add half of the pawpaw pulp, again stirring only enough to mix. Add the remaining dry ingredients and the remaining pawpaw pulp in the same way. Fold in the nutmeats. Bake for about an hour or until the surface springs back when lightly touched at the center.

Remove from the oven and allow to cool for about 10 minutes, then loosen the sides with a table knife and turn the loaf out onto a plate. Cover with a cloth and allow to cool completely (hot bread crumbles when cut). Pawpaw bread freezes well – simply store it in a tight container.

– From Wild Seasons by Kay Young, University of Nebraska Press, 1993.



PHOTO BY BRUCE INGRAM/BRUCEINGRAMOUTDOORS.COM



Wild Rice Chase

Wild rice is hit-and-miss in Nebraska.

By Jon Farrar

It is getting close to the wild rice harvesting season, so we should all be tarring fissures in our birch-bark canoes and looking around for our knocking sticks. Or maybe not. And for you neophyte wild rice gatherers, lacking both a birch-bark canoe and knocking stick to flog the seeds out of the seedheads while they're bent over your canoe, a bit of natural history about wild rice (*Zizania aquatica*).

Wild rice is an aquatic grass native only to North America. The heart of its range is the Great Lakes region. Northeastern and north-central Nebraska is the southwesternmost extent of its distribution. It once was common in the Missouri River floodplain in northeastern Nebraska and harvested by the Santee Sioux, but alteration of the river over the last century makes it unlikely it is still found there. Lakes, marshes and streambanks in the northern Sandhills are the plant's last stand in Nebraska, but even there carp that stir lake and marsh bottoms have probably contributed to a decline.

Wild rice plants may range in height from two to seven feet and grow in as little as four inches of water, but prefer one to three feet of water over a mucky or silty substrate. The spreading, feathery seedheads bear grasslike flowers on open, spreading panicles during August and into September. Male and female flowers are borne on the same stalk, the male flowers below the female flowers, probably to increase the chances of cross-pollination with other plants.

The rice seed forms and dries during September; as many as 200 on one plant. But apparently only a small percentage of the seeds mature – open up the seedhead of wild rice while the seed is still in the milk stage and nine times out of ten you will find one or more rice worm larvae busily munching the soft seeds. Back in the early-1990s when I was doing the fieldwork for an article on wild rice (August-September 1995 issue), and wild rice was more abundant in Cherry County than I had ever seen it, after a day of trying to gather enough ripe seeds for a photograph and searching at seven different sites, I had no more than a handful of the slender black seeds enclosed in a thin brown hull bearing a long, stiff, straight awn covered with minute barbs.

But it is not just rice worms that feast on wild rice – one morning I watched half a dozen wood ducks harvesting wild rice, fluttering up from the shallow water, grasping a stem in their bill and raking the seeds from the seedheads. Nearly all species of ducks and geese feed on wild rice when it is available, but particularly the puddle ducks that tip up and pluck it from mucky-bottomed shallows. Several times over many years of hunting in the northern Sandhills I have found the crops of mallards crammed full of nothing but wild rice, and it seems highly unlikely those mallards did an all-night flight from Minnesota. Flocks of blackbirds gathering to



The slender black seeds of wild rice are enclosed in a thin, brown hull bearing a long, stiff, straight awn covered with minute hairs.

migrate at the time wild rice is ripe sweep through the beds feeding. With everything wanting to eat it, it is a wonder any seed survives to grow future wild rice plant, but some must as the plant is an annual.

Wild rice seed can lay dormant in wetland muck for years waiting for optimum conditions to germinate. After 40 years of hunting ducks and photographing in Cherry County, I have seen years when wild rice seemed to be totally absent, more years when gatherings could be found here and there, and occasionally years when wild rice seemed to be everywhere. In 1991 and 1992 it seemed to be everywhere, including places I had never seen it before. While shooting aerial photos in central Cherry County I saw one shallow wetland, at least four acres in size, completely covered with wild rice. I've hunted one particular pond since 1972, and in only two of those years was there a lime-green band of wild rice in deeper water beyond the fringe of cattail and bulrush. It was so abundant I used it to cover my pole blind both years. It was not growing there in 1993 or subsequent years. Unless you subscribe to the idea that seeds are moved from wetland to wetland on the muddy feet of waterfowl on a regular basis, there is no other conclusion to draw except wild rice seed had been in the bottom muck of that pond for at least 20 years before germinating. I have seen ducks and geese with muddy feet returning to water after feeding in grain fields, but offhand I cannot recall ever seeing a duck or a goose in the Sandhills with muddy feet.

So, back to birch-bark canoes, knocking sticks and the thought of gathering your own wild rice in Nebraska: It is probably something like fishing for walleye times a hundred – it's cheaper to buy your walleye and your wild rice in a store, even with "wild rice" selling for \$10 to \$20 a pound or more that was almost certainly grown commercially in California. I did find a bargain price on an Internet site – only \$2.29 a pound – but only in 2,000-pound quantities. When shipping costs were added the invoice would be \$5,079. ■

Platte River Access Program

Access Program opens 4,000 acres to public hunting in Central Platte.

By Eric Fowler

Hunting along the Platte River is excellent. And because of that, demand for hunting land, private or public, is high, making the opportunity provided by the Platte River Recreation Access program very unique.

The program, an offshoot of the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program's (PRRIP) efforts to acquire and restore land for endangered species, will open about 4,000 acres between Lexington and Gibbon to hunting this fall, its second, with access limited by reservation to about 35 people daily.

"River habitat ... there's nothing like hunting there," said Brian Peterson of Kearney (pictured at right), who hunted deer and turkeys through the program in its first official year and also hunted some of the PRRIP lands before the program went public. "There's always potential for big deer and big numbers of deer."

The land opened for the firearm deer season last November, with access on 3,000 acres granted to 32 people via a lottery that drew more than 100 applications. An online reservation system at PlatteAccess.com was up and running and the land opened to archery, muzzleloader and late rifle deer hunting last December and turkey hunting this spring. This fall, some sites will allow waterfowl and small game hunting, including pheasants, quail, rabbits and squirrels, and access will open with the first hunting seasons. Hunting isn't the only activity allowed on the land, however – it is also open to fishing, mushroom hunting, hiking and birdwatching, also by reservation only. The access program is administrated by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission through a partnership with PRRIP.

The lands are a portion of the 9,500 acres owned or controlled by PRRIP, which grew from a cooperative agreement signed in 1997 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the governors of Nebraska, Wyoming and Colorado to find solutions to declines in river flows caused by more than 100 years of surface and groundwater irrigation development. The loss of those natural flows has allowed trees to encroach on what was once an open, braided river channel. Land acquired by PRRIP is being restored to benefit least terns, piping plovers and whooping cranes, all federally threatened or

endangered species, and other species of fish and wildlife that utilize the river. More land will be purchased and opened to the recreation access program.

Access to the properties, which are each open to two to seven hunters depending on the amount of land available, is restricted to foot traffic-only from designated parking spots.

That can mean a long hike in and out, possibly with a deer to drag, which is a deterrent to some hunters. "A lot of people absolutely loved it," said Ryan Chramosta, a wildlife biologist who manages the program from the Commission's Kearney office.

"Some of the areas are big enough that you can walk in a ways and basically hunt by yourself. If you're willing to work, you should have good success."

Count Peterson among that group. He hunted one site for three days in January and harvested a doe. He also served as a mentor for

a friend's son during the November firearm

season last year, and has taken his sons turkey and deer hunting on the properties. Peterson has only been hunting for five years, and started on some of the 1,700 acres of wildlife management areas open to public hunting in this reach of the Central Platte. Those areas get plenty of use, which tends to make game wary. While Peterson can't hunt the PRRIP ground whenever he wants as he could a WMA, he's happy to trade those days for quality. "The quality of the hunt and the quality of the experience," he said. ■



Platte River Recreation Access Program

Approximately 4,000 acres open to hunting, fishing, mushroom hunting, bird watching and hiking.

Applications for the November Firearm Deer Season access lottery can be made online at PlatteAccess.com September 1-30 or by visiting the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission office in Kearney during that time.

Areas are closed from March 23 - May 10 and October 1 - November 15 to minimize disturbance to migrating whooping cranes. Some areas also closed May 11 - August 15 to protect nesting least terns and piping plovers.

Go to www.PlatteAccess.com for more information or to make a reservation.

ART/PRINTS

ART WANTED: GOOSE PRINTS by Bridgeport, Nebraska artist Charlotte Edwards, entitled "Platte River Honkers" and "On the Rise." These prints were at one time possibly handled by Ducks Unlimited in Nebraska as auction items. Call 308-284-3203.

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▲ This photo was taken in Omaha in 1972 and shows three generations (left to right): my father, Harold Freese; myself, Steve Freese; and my grandfather, Willard Thorpe. It was after a successful pheasant hunt near Ithaca. We hunted a favorite spot near old railroad tracks and pasture marsh grass, and also the Mead Ordinance plant. I remember it was opening day and now retired (and friend) game warden Dick Wilson stopped and checked us. Not pictured was my Brittany spaniel, Frankie. My dad, grandfather and dog have since passed, but my passion (obsession) for hunting and fishing continues and was greatly influenced by them. I now hunt and fish with my daughters, grandson and Lab, Scout. The additional photo is my grandfather's hunting and fishing license from 1924. Note the cost – one dollar.

– Steve Freese (retired Douglas County Deputy), Omaha, Nebraska



▲ This photo of me was taken in 1975 east of Grand Island in the Buffalo deer hunting unit. I was hunting that day with my uncle, Harley Bergen, and my dad, Eugene Bergen. I shot the deer with a 7mm Remington mag. One shot was all it took. The base of the left antler was previously shot by another hunter.

– Jim Bergen, Henderson, Nebraska



▲ This is a photo of my mother, Lila Johnson, and my brother, Curt. Mom enjoyed hunting and still takes an interest in her sons' hunting adventures today. This photo was taken in 1963 somewhere in the Holdrege/Wilcox area. The rifle she is holding was a Winchester Model 88 in .308 caliber. That was mom's gun. All three of her sons still enjoy hunting coyotes today.

– Wade Johnson Holdrege, 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. Photos should show people enjoying Nebraska outdoor activities, such as camping, boating, hunting or fishing, and must have been taken before 1980. We will give priority to unusual photos or activities. When possible, please include a story about the photograph and identify the people, places and approximate date it was taken. Photos will be returned.

Just Be Caws – Speaking of Crows

Decipher their language and you'll learn crows are smarter than many people you know.

By Roger Welsch

I was a language major in college. In my senior year at UN-L I had classes in German, French, Latin, Old Norse, Icelandic, Hebrew and linguistics. Languages have always interested me, which is why these days I am working at learning crow. No, not the Native American language of the Crow Nation in Montana but, well, you know ... Caw! Caw! Caw! In Nebraska.

My fascination with crows started with the PBS documentary “A Murder of Crows” (a “murder” being a flock of crows). I have always been interested in crows, now that I think about it. For one thing, the first sounds that wake me up in the morning, right after the cardinals and thrashers (sometimes I think those birds don't sleep at all!) are the squawks from the domestic disturbances of my crow family neighbors down toward the river. I carry scraps from the house down to the river road for scavengers and realized very early in this exercise that all I had to do was start out from the house with an old bread sack and almost instantly there was a loud caw-alarm (get it? “caw-alarm?”) that I quickly learned to translate as “Here comes the fat guy in overalls again! And it looks like he has more of that stale bread and fatty steak scraps he palms off on us!” That surmise was verified when I noticed that all I had to do was empty my plastic bag, turn around, and take a couple dozen steps back toward the house before my corvid friends were busy sorting through whatever I had thrown out to see if maybe there wasn't something worth salvaging.

As time went on I figured out that our noisy neighbors didn't just caw, but made a lot of different vocalizations that correlated with different circumstances. That is, they were talking among themselves. I learned to imitate their Caaaaaaw ... caaaaaaw ... caaaaaaw (three long, spaced caws) that seemed to say in crow something like: “Looks like he's on his way with goodies!” And then I figured out that Caaw caaw caaw (and sometimes a fourth caaw) – three or four quicker, shorter calls – meant something like, “Yep, it's food. And I think he's headed back to the house so I'm going to go down and take a look.”

While others simply savor the melodious song of *Corvus brachyrhynchos* (the fancy name crows go by when they're not working on a week-old, road-kill skunk along the highway), I am working on a dictionary of crow talk. Have you ever seen a road-kill crow? Of course not. Listen closely. They watch both ways up the highway and when they see a vehicle approaching, they warn the others “Caaar caaar caaar!” The only thing I've found that crows won't scavenge (no kidding!) was some leftover lutefisk I threw out. One crow tried it and yelled at the others, “Cod Cod Cod!” and they passed on that particular free meal.

Having learned a lot about this genius of the avian kingdom, I suspect that when crows swoop down and grab something from the bits I drop on the cabin road, they

think they are getting away with something ... you know, “Caecawcawcaw!” meaning, “Look at me! I just outwitted the fat guy in overalls again!” This morning they responded to my efforts at the feeding call with “Haw haw haw haw haw!” (Translation: “Hey, guys! Did you hear that? He just said ‘At sunrise my tail feathers sometimes fluff up like a raccoon!’ The guy is hilarious!”) Crows think they're so smart.

Wait a minute ... they have an adult human hauling food through the weeds and weather to feed them – now that I think about it, they are pulling a fast one! As a biologist once told me, “It's true, Rog ... crows are smarter than any other bird, as smart as dolphins, and ten times smarter than half the drivers on Interstate 80 on any particular weekend.”

The Pawnee have great reverence for the eagle because it soars high and sees everything, but they also honor the crow, which flies in a straight line because it knows, among so many other things, precisely where it is going. For that reason, it's believed that if you carry a crow feather you won't get lost. Once, after I had left some steak scraps on the river road, I returned the next day to find a single black feather left on the same spot. Knowing how clever my friend the crow is, I can only presume it was left on purpose as a gift ... a fair enough trade, in my opinion. (Note, however: Crow smarts must not transfer to humans with a feather, because I still get lost.)

There are downsides to my consorting with crows – Linda says she thinks I'm running in bad company and she will draw the line when crows start coming up to the house, knocking on the window, and saying “C-c-c-caawn Rogie come out and play?” ■

Author's Note: A Murder of Crows is available as a DVD from Amazon.com (I bought one for each of my kids because it is so amazing) or online at www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/episodes/a-murder-of-crows/full-episodes/5977/.

If you want some real fun, look up “crow” on YouTube. You will be amazed and amused because you may find that crows are a lot smarter than some people you know. Information about crow language can be found online at www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/American_Crow/sounds.

*Because crows are so interesting, a lot of books have been written about them, and because crow people are good people, the books are consistently good reading! My favorite right now is Michael Westerfield's **The Language of Crows**, which has the advantage of coming with a CD of crow calls. Look for it at www.crows.net.*

Roger Welsch is an author, humorist, folklorist and resident of the nation of Crows – in Dannebrog, Nebraska.





There's a well known photography quote – “F/8 and be there” – that is usually attributed to New York City photographer Arthur “Weegee” Fellig, who did a lot of photojournalism and street photography back in the 1930s and 40s. His quote can be interpreted a couple of ways, but I take it to mean that the best way to get a great photograph is to be there when a good scene presents itself.

Although actually shot at f/11, the photo above is a case in point – I was photographing this dark-phase female eastern swallowtail butterfly last summer when a male suddenly swooped into the frame and began mating with the female. I didn't need to change my camera focus or move my tripod to get a good shot of nature in action!

One of the most familiar butterflies in Nebraska, the eastern tiger swallowtail (*Papilio glaucus*) has a wingspan that measures three to 5½ inches and can produce two to three broods a year. The male is yellow with four black “tiger stripes” on each forewing, while the females may be either yellow or black, making them dimorphic.

Doug Carroll
July 6, 2012



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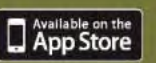
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