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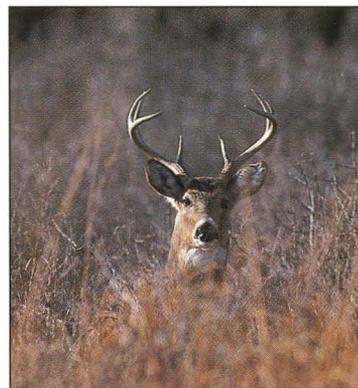
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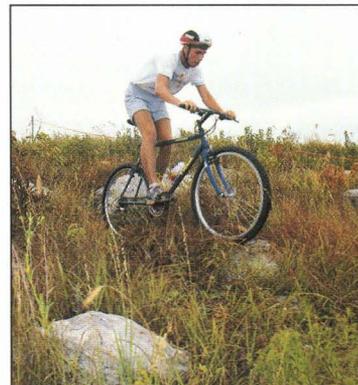
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Front cover: A white pelican crosses Quivira National Wildlife Refuge during fall migration. Mike Blair took the shot with a 600mm lens, @ F/5.6, 1/500. **Back cover:** At home on the prairie, a whitetail buck travels during the rut. Mike Blair filmed the scene with a 400mm lens, @ f/11 at 1/125th sec.

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Editorial Creed: To promote the conservation and wise use of our natural resources, to instill an understanding of our responsibilities to the land.

Equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from programs described herein is available to all individuals without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, sexual preference, religion, age or handicap. Complaints of discrimination should be sent to Office of the Secretary, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, 900 Jackson St., Suite 502, Topeka, KS 66612.

The Test Of Time



Has the 1987 combination of the Fish and Game Commission and the Park and Resources Authority yielded the predicted benefits? Perhaps no other department issue has generated so much public discussion.

The executive reorganization order that created the Department of Wildlife and Parks was founded on sound principles: improved administrative efficiency, increased management effectiveness, a higher departmental profile, elimination of overlapping (sometimes counteracting) programs, better use of funding, broader funding opportunities, a more universal view of natural resource use, and better constituent services.

To those who question that these goals have been realized, I answer an emphatic "Yes!" These and additional benefits have resulted, but evaluating the total effectiveness of the merger demands an objective look at the downside, as well as the department's mission.

Wildlife and Parks is now a cabinet-level agency, which enhances cooperation with other state and local departments. This important benefit should not be underestimated. It affords invaluable partnership opportunities.

The department's fish, wildlife, park and boating programs are diverse, yet share considerable commonality. All demand management that considers both natural resources and users. Department employees with diverse expertise and duties share common offices, yielding a professional synergy that brings faster, better-thought solutions to the management challenges. Overlapping responsibilities have been eliminated, and conflicting department positions on critical issues (such as water level management on reservoirs) have been replaced with coordinated efforts, benefitting resources and constituents.

Under the present department organization, a single set of internal support units provides engineering, accounting, purchasing, planning, legal review, public relations, and data processing services. The former separate agencies each maintained their own internal support units.

Placing fisheries, wildlife, park and law enforcement staff in a common office provides the most pronounced advantages in the arena of customer service. Licenses and permits are available in a single location, and people no longer get bounced from agency to agency in search of wildlife and outdoor recreation information.

A single, unified Wildlife and Parks Commission is another benefit of the merger. It provides a reliable information conduit for constituents who are often stakeholders in

both of the former agencies' programs. This allows better coordination of regulation and program development.

I cannot agree with those people who say the department has become "too political." The department manages public resources and programs, and management decisions must be made in a public forum. The political process is that public forum, and a cabinet-level department has a great deal more openness to the input of its constituents. The track record of Wildlife and Parks' legislative efforts is noteworthy.

Even changes ushered in with new state administrations aren't inherently undesirable. The balancing effect it can have and the resulting fresh perspectives it lends to department programs and priorities are beneficial. Both of the department's predecessor agencies faced potential leadership changes as a result of political influences.

Some constituents have complained that their ability to affect department-level decision-making has been diminished. This may be partly true. The decision-making process must now accommodate a more diverse public, so a single interest may have less influence. Some constituents have complained that park issues receive too much attention; others say wildlife interests dominate. Perhaps the mix is about right.

A reorganization is expensive and painful. Splitting Wildlife and Parks into two organizations would exact a heavy toll on the programs, resources, and personnel of the department. We are blessed with exceptional employees, many of whom have persisted through excruciating change. We must not unnecessarily divert their energy and dedication with another major reorganization.

I don't mean to suggest that all of the state's wildlife and parks problems are solved. Certainly the federal audit has shown that some of our internal structures and systems could be improved. A chronic funding shortage underscores the need for effort in that area also. Structural and procedural changes have been made to address audit concerns, and new funding initiatives are underway. We will continue to improve internal management and planning systems, and public involvement in developing clear and concise departmental goals will be a major thrust.

I remain convinced that the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks is well-suited for meeting today's challenges and tomorrow's opportunities. The diverse and involved constituencies that rose from the 1987 merger are great assets. It is only through their involvement that the department will achieve its potential as the state's chief steward of wildlife and outdoor recreation resources.

Ted Ensley





A Wonderful Bird Is The Pelican . . .

by Mark Shoup
associate editor

photos by Mike Blair

*. . . His bill will hold more than
his belican.
He can take in his beak
Food enough for a week,
But I'm damned if I see how the helican.*

— *Dixon Lanier Merrit*

So goes the well-known limerick written in 1910, and that's not the half of it. In fact, the pelican's beak (actually a huge pouch of skin, called a gular pouch, stretched from the lower half of its long bill) will hold several times what its stomach can. According to the *Audubon Encyclopedia of North American Birds*, the white pelican may scoop up as much as three gallons of water with its catch of fish. It then squeezes the water from the flexible pouch before swallowing the fish.

This famous "beak" serves another important function for the pelican — cooling the body. The featherless skin that forms the gular pouch is filled with tiny blood vessels that dissipate heat, so it is not uncommon to see



The white pelican eats mostly fish, and often hunts in groups. Several pelicans will swim together, herding small fish into the shallows. Then, as if on cue, the birds suddenly plunge their enormous bills into the water, scooping up gallons of water and their prey.

pelicans panting on hot days, causing the pouch to flutter.

On land, with short, fat legs and huge head and bill, pelicans look like living cartoons. But in the air and on the water, they epitomize grace. Circling a lake before landing, a formation of snowy American white pelicans — with 8- to 9 1/2-foot wingspans, the tips of which are jet black — would inspire even people with no interest in wildlife. Although they are among the largest living birds (4 to 6 feet long and weighing as much as 17 pounds), they glide through the air and settle on the water with hardly a splash.

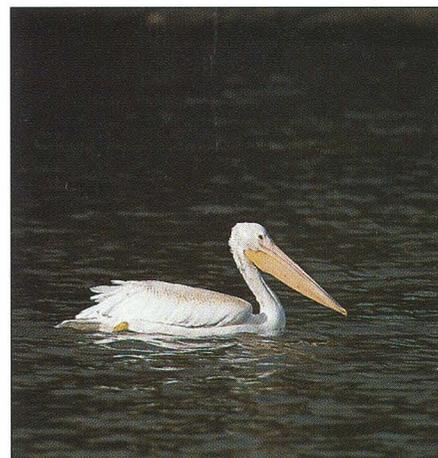
On the water, a system of air sacs under the skin and in the bones lets them float like a fisherman's bobber. Once afloat, the gregarious birds are ready for the "hunt."

To satisfy a daily requirement of

4 pounds of fish, white pelicans often fish in groups (behavior noted by Charles Darwin in *Descent of Man*). Several birds will fan out in a semi-circle and swim quietly toward shore. As they close in, they'll flap and splash, driving the fish into the shallows where they can be easily caught. Other fishing methods are also employed. At times, individuals will drop from the air with a splash and scoop up their prey, but their extreme buoyancy makes it impossible to dive under water.

Using these methods, white pelicans catch mostly carp, chubs, shiners, shad and other rough fish. In addition to fish, white pelicans will also eat amphibians such as salamanders, as well as crayfish. (Food-habit studies indicate that pelicans do not compete with commercial or sport fishermen.)

While pelicans may land with ease and grace, leaving the water is another matter. To build up enough steam for take-off, they must run across the water, flapping their great wings until they're finally air-



The gular pouch, for which the pelican is so well known, lies under the bill.

borne and gliding gracefully, heads held back against their bodies. (At a distance, this is a quick way to distinguish pelicans from snow geese, which have similar coloration but fly with necks extended.)

Pelicans are members of the order called Pelecaniformes, which includes six families: aningas, cormorants, frigatebirds, gannets, pelicans and tropicbirds. They're an ancient order, dating back at least 100 million years, and are distinguished by the fact that they are the only birds with all four toes joined by a web of skin. Only the Pelecanidae family — the pelicans — have the enormous beak pouch. Two species are found in North America — the American white pelican and the brown pelican.

The white is a common Kansas migrant, having been spotted in most Kansas counties, especially in the eastern two-thirds of the state. Its huge bill is orange, but its skin pouch can vary from orange to blue-gray. Its feet are more reddish orange. Breeding adults sport a horny plate on top of the bill. Male and female look alike.

The white pelican migrates through Kansas from March to June and from September through November, wintering as far south as Panama.

During courtship, they will bow head and beak between their short legs, inflate their pouches, and waddle and strut about in a ritual dance. Although they have been known to breed along the Texas coast, most nesting occurs from late April to early June in southern Canada and the northcentral U.S. (The largest nesting colony on the continent is at Chase Lake National Wildlife Refuge in North Dakota.)

Using no nest materials whatsoever, the white pelican lays its eggs in dirt often molded to a slight depression or mound. Usually, two eggs are laid, which take 36 days to hatch and are attended by both parents. Incubation begins when the first egg is laid, so there is an age difference between the chicks. The second chick often starves to death due to harassment from the larger,

older chick.

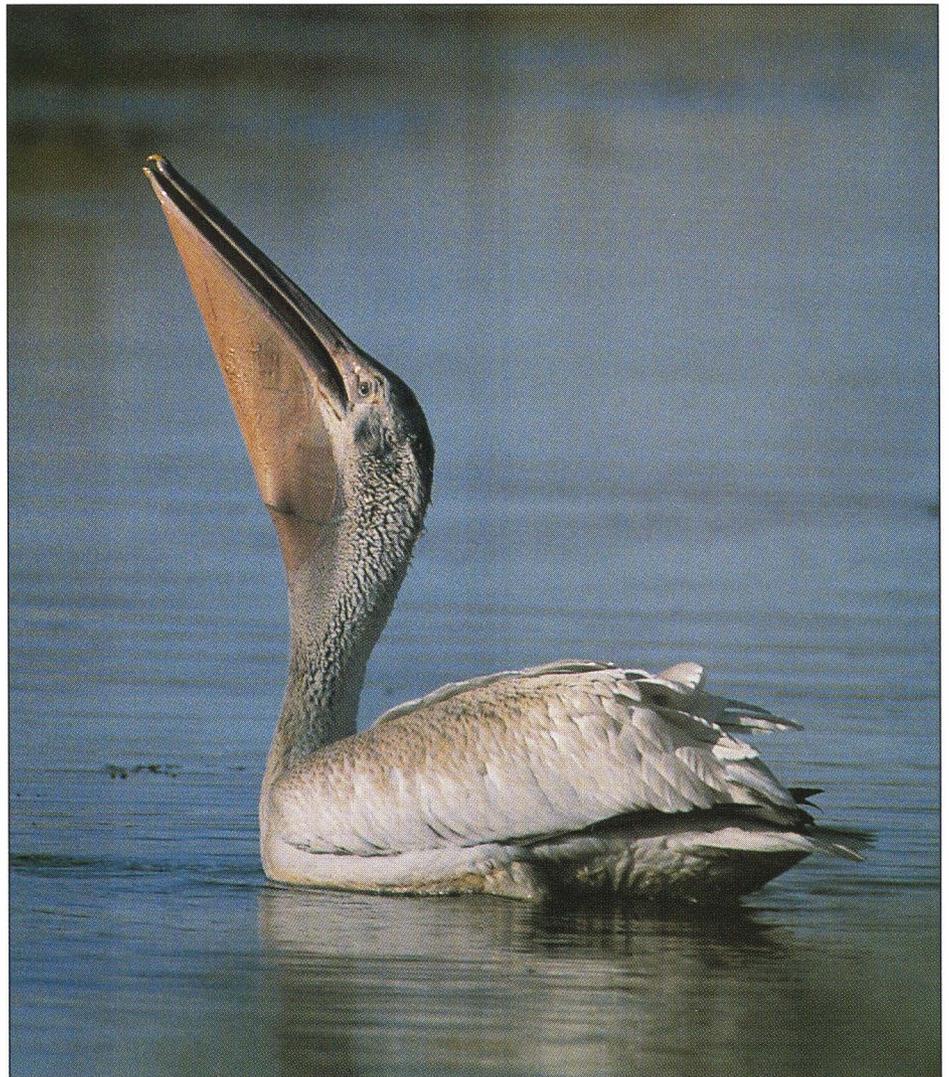
During incubation, an expecting parent may occasionally rear its head and inflate its gular pouch, both as a greeting to its mate and as a warning to intruders.

In three to four weeks, the young hatch. As with many birds, pelicans feed their young by regurgitation. Twenty-one to 28 days after hatching, the young leave the nest and gather in groups called pods. During this time, growth is extremely fast for a large bird. In fact, at two months — when they are ready for first flight — young pelicans actually weigh more than they will as adults.

The oldest wild, banded white pelican ever found was 16 years old,

although one lived 34 years in the National Zoo in Washington, D.C.

White pelicans have been blamed for problems they didn't create. Perhaps because of the enormous size of their pouch, or their habit of fishing in large groups, they have been accused of overfishing. One population of white pelicans nests on the Molly Islands on Yellowstone Lake in Yellowstone National Park. In the early 1900s, they were blamed for declines in Yellowstone Lake cutthroat trout populations, through predation and hosting a tapeworm thought to hurt the fish. In 1924, the National Park Service even began removing pelican eggs from the island in an attempt to control the population



After fish and water have been scooped up, the water is squeezed out and the fish are swallowed whole. Most of the pelican's diet consists of small rough fish.



Deceptively large, the white pelican can weigh 17 pounds and has a wingspan of 8-9 1/2 feet. The huge wings allow the heavy bird to glide along effortlessly, just above the water's surface.

and restore the cutthroat. By 1934, however, the error of this management program was realized, and the birds were completely protected.

Since 1972, the white pelican has been protected throughout the continent by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

The brown pelican (which is endangered throughout most of its range), inhabits the coastal United States and has only been sighted a few times in Kansas. Unlike its white cousin, the brown pelican is a solitary hunter that plunges from as high as 70 feet to the seas and dives completely under water in pursuit of prey. Because its prey are taken almost exclusively from the salty water of coastal areas, the brown pelican has a highly-developed "salt gland" in front of its eye. This gland aids the kidneys by extracting excess salt from the bird's body and passing it through the nostrils.

According to *Birds In Kansas*, by

Max C. Thompson and Charles Ely, the only confirmed Kansas sighting of a brown pelican since 1916 was in 1985, when Meade State Park manager Mark Goldsberry and Meade State Fish Hatchery manager Joe

drainages), Texas and Atlantic Coast populations, and the brown pelican was officially listed as an endangered species in 1973.

Since DDT has been banned, however, the brown pelican has



Riding thermals, white pelicans spiral in ever higher circles, gaining energy-saving altitude. The black wingtips are key identifying characteristics.

Lily spotted and photographed one at the hatchery.

With "only" a 6- to 8-foot wingspan, the brown pelican is the smallest member of the pelican family. Body feathers are generally grayish/brown with a pale yellow crown. Its bill is gray, and its feet are black.

One of the many species victimized by the egg-shell-thinning effects of exposure to the pesticide DDT, brown pelican numbers dropped dramatically in the 1950s. By 1962, a Louisiana population of 50,000 birds had completely disappeared. The birds had apparently absorbed DDT from the flesh of the ocean fish they had eaten, and the eggs they laid were too fragile to incubate. Other brown pelican population drops occurred in California (where the white pelican was also hurt by DDT and lake

been making something of a comeback. At Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge in Florida, the birds successfully raise young year-round. Imports from Florida have also helped re-establish brown pelicans in Louisiana.

Like the white pelican, browns will nest on the ground, but they will also build nests in trees and shrubs using reeds, grasses and other materials. Usually, three eggs are laid, which hatch in about a month. Young stay in the nest for another month and make their first flights a little more than two months after hatching.

The oldest wild, banded brown pelican was an ancient 31 years old.

Although browns don't generally migrate, their nesting range includes the Atlantic Coast from North Carolina to South America

and the Pacific Coast from northern California south to Chile. Occasionally, individuals will wander north after breeding, which could explain the incidental sighting in Meade County.

In Kansas, two of the best places to see white pelicans are Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area, near Great Bend, and Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, in Stafford County. These two sites provide the large bodies of water with plenty of shallow feeding areas that the birds seem to prefer. Pelicans sometimes remain on Cheyenne Bottoms throughout the summer. During the fall migration, pelicans can usually be seen at the upper ends of most reservoirs in the state, where they often stay into mid-winter if sufficient open water remains.

Due to our interior position in the

Central Flyway, fall is birdwatching time in Kansas. Ducks, geese, cranes and, yes, pelicans, migrate through the state by the tens of thousands. Because this is the halfway point on their trip to southern wintering grounds, they usually stop, giving bird lovers the opportunity to watch these fascinating, gregarious creatures. This year, make sure the pelican is on your observation checklist. After watching them glide, land, swim and fish, if you're lucky, you may get to see a few hundred of these graceful birds spiral above, higher and higher, floating upward on a thermal until they're out of sight.

There's something wonderful about this comic looking bird, and there's more to wonder about the pelican than how much his bill can hold. ♡



Pelicans migrate through Kansas each fall to wintering grounds along the Gulf Coast. The best places to view the birds include reservoirs and especially Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area near Great Bend and Quivira National Wildlife Refuge in Stafford County.



A Piece of History Saved: The Prairie Center

by Steven B. Case
director, The Prairie Center, Olathe

photos by Mike Blair

Once the tallgrass prairie covered 250 million acres from Ohio to central Kansas. Today, only a fragment of that original prairie exists in its natural state. The Prairie Center in Olathe is one small area set aside to remind us of our natural heritage.

The natural history of the Prairie Center unfolded during the last

10,000 years. Like all natural ecosystems, the prairie is a reflection of the forces that created it. As the last of the four glaciers to cover North America withdrew to the north, the northeast corner of Kansas was covered by spruce forest, a result of the cool climate near the edge of the glacier. By 9,500 years ago, the spruce forest ecosystem had with-

drawn to the mountains, and northeast Kansas had changed to a grassland, in response to the changing climate. The tallgrass prairie has been the climax community of northeast Kansas every since.

The grasses and wildflowers of the tallgrass prairie form a complex and diverse community. The tallgrass community utilized the rather

poor glacial soils to develop grasses reaching 8-12 feet in height. As impressive as this community is above ground, nearly 60 percent of the community is below ground. This part of the community is the most biologically active, forming a thick mat of roots, some reaching depths of 18 feet.

The tallgrass prairie ecosystem is maintained by two important catalysts; the relatively stable average rainfall of 35 inches per year and naturally occurring fires. The fires were started by lightning, often associated with the thunderstorms common on the open prairie. Research at the Konza Prairie indicates that the prairie burned at approximately five-year intervals due to these natural fires. This combination of rainfall and fire maintained the tallgrass prairie until human intervention changed it forever.

The property now comprising the Prairie Center was purchased by the United States Government in 1803 as part of the Louisiana Purchase and was made a part of the Kansas-Nebraska Territory in 1854. This area, open frontier in the early 1820s, was a pathway for European Settlement. The Santa Fe trail cut through the heart of the area, and just eight miles south it crossed the Oregon Trail, making Johnson County a major thoroughfare of its day. From 1838 to 1845, even the U.S. Army had an established military trail, east of Olathe along present-day U.S. Highway 69. The Shawnee Indians were settled in the area by treaty. The first European settler, Reverend Thomas Johnson, befriended the Shawnee, and in 1839 was given a piece of land to build a mission on. In 1856-57, the Shawnee gave up tribal title to the land and a physician appointed to the Shawnee Indians, Dr. John Barton, claimed two



The Prairie Center provides visitors with a chance to step back in time and learn about the native prairie and local history through educational programs and hands-on experience.

quarter sections that became Olathe, Kansas. In 1865, J.B. Mahaffie, owner of the largest farmstead in the area, converted the basement of his farmhouse into a dining room to serve hot meals to the weary travelers. Maps of Johnson County at this time show the Prairie Center land was part of a farm owned by the Lawrence family.

George W. Algire and his wife Frieda moved to Olathe by team and wagon in 1913 and settled at a homesite that is now the Prairie Center. Algire, a stone mason by trade, built their home, a brooder house, a chicken house, garage, stone walls, and lamp posts from the native stone on the land. At this time, the Shawnee still had a camp to the northwest, and covered wagons camped in the pastures as they followed the trails. The Stone House at the Center stands as a

hand-built and hand-carved monument to the past and to the vanishing stone masonry trade. To record life as it was then, Algire kept a hand-written history of Olathe, the people and the President of the United States and his policies, in a fruit jar. He hid the jar behind a large stone slab near the roof of the house and carved a large A in the stone to mark the hiding spot.

The Prairie Center truly began in 1963 when R.C. Wagner and his son Larry bought the hill country farm from George Algire. On this farm they decided they would grow no crops but instead they would preserve the land, and in so doing, save a portion of the tallgrass prairie. Where original prairie survived, they protected it and encouraged it to flourish. Elsewhere they painstakingly replanted native

grasses like switchgrass, Indiangrass, little bluestem and big bluestem. They dug a 30-foot deep lake, stocked the ponds and established trails.

The Prairie Center became a project of the Grassland Heritage Foundation in 1983. This nonprofit organization is made up of many active volunteers who aid in the preservation of this native area. The foundation continued the Wagner's

Nature Conservancy and Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, the Grassland Heritage Foundation transferred ownership of the Center to the State of Kansas. The Center is a striking model of how cooperative efforts between several groups can lead to preservation of our native grasslands. Management of the Prairie Center is an ongoing process that relies on the cooperation of the Grassland Heritage Foundation and

the Center's education goal in the forward to *A Sand County Almanac*: "We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect." The Prairie Center provides a place for people to experience this sense of community. With a little education, the tallgrass prairie can be appreciated as one of the most biologically diverse, interesting, and environmentally important areas on the planet.

The educational programs at the Prairie Center include The Spring Prairie Festival. The festival is an event that helps educate the public on the important role of fire to the prairie ecosystem. Each year there is a discussion of the ecology of fire, followed by a demonstration burn. People have conflicting views of fire, as they do about all of the outdoors. Many people see fire as the great destroyer with animals fleeing in its path (thanks a lot, Bambi). Quite the opposite is true. Fire is the savior of the tallgrass prairie, and the community is well adapted to its occurrence. The Native Americans called fire the "Stampede of the Red Buffalo." If you would like to observe this increasingly rare natural phenomenon, join us at the Prairie Center the third weekend in April. Come for the day, and in the evening watch the "stampede" on the prairie. The Festival has attracted up 1,000 visitors to the Center.

Summer Nature Discovery Workshops are sponsored by the Outdoor Education Laboratory. These workshops draw area students to the Center for week-long field trips. The workshops not only emphasize the unique features of the Prairie Center but also introduce young people to natural history and ecology. Many area students do not have an opportunity to experience the outdoors and the summer program addresses this need. This summer, nine weeks of workshops were offered at the Center and more than 200 area students participated.

Teacher training is an important



The native prairie is much more than just grass. Wildflowers bloom each spring and summer to the delight of outdoor photographers, and the variety of other plants and animals that prosper in the grassland are a treasure to behold.

work. Restoration of native fields and ecosystems continued and educational programs were begun. The foundation worked hard to make sure that the Center would be secure and that it became an invaluable community resource.

The recent history of the Prairie Center began in 1990, when, working the Kansas office of the

Department of Wildlife and Parks.

The diversity of habitat and the Center's accessibility to the public make the Prairie Center an ideal location for environmental education programs. It is the educational programming at the Center that will give people a deeper understanding and appreciation of our natural history. Aldo Leopold's words reflect

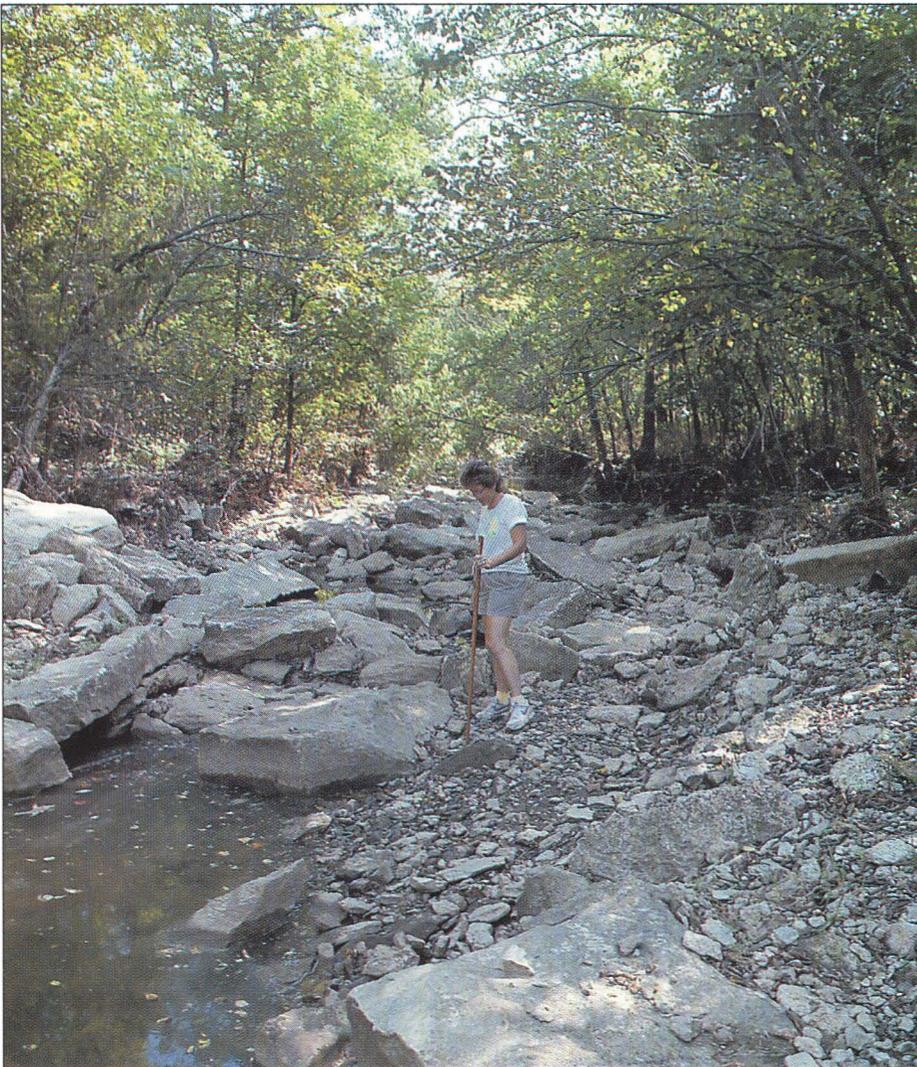
part of the education programs at the Center. Regularly scheduled workshops are offered to introduce teachers to activities they could use while visiting the Center and to increase their comfort using the outdoors as a teaching tool. In addition, Project WILD has come to the Prairie Center. The Center has offered its first WILD training workshops, and plans are being made to continue this program. Project Learning Tree workshops have also been offered at the Center. It is felt that these outstanding programs help teachers to include environmental education in their curriculum while the Prairie Center offers them the resources to meet their goals.

The Global Lab Project is a very exciting project that the Prairie Center became active in during the last two years. The Global Lab connects students and scientists around the world in joint environmental monitoring projects. Students and scientists are linked by an international telecommunication network. The initial project was a "Snapshot Activity," which involved the area high school students in collecting environmental data at the Prairie Center and sharing this data on the network. Additional projects included counting leaf stomata for use as an indicator of environmental change, using computerized remote sensing stations to compare different microhabitats, a VU data col-

lection project, lichens as bioindicators, and ground-level ozone measurements. Students are able to propose projects over the network and then share data as it is collected. A Kansas version of the Global Lab has been set up. The Kansas Environmental Monitoring Network (KEMNET) Project allows the Prairie Center to connect with high schools across the state. Kansas students are able to compare data collection in their local area with data and field work at the Center. Monitoring the species composition of the prairie fields will allow students to observe the sometimes subtle effects of global changes.

A popular event has been the Walk With Wildlife sponsored by Kansas Wildlife and Parks. The public is invited to the Center to observe native Kansas wildlife brought in and displayed by area wildlife rehabilitation groups. This event has drawn in a large number of school children and is also open to the general public.

The Center is a community resource and is available to a variety of school and community groups. As a community resource, the most important role of the Center is to provide a place for people to come and learn. Formal programs and tours on the prairie are available. In addition, two self-guided nature trails with program books are available. It is the people who come out and walk the trails and experience a small bit of natural Kansas who leave with the most. They begin to understand how the land has shaped the people of Kansas. As a part of the state's public areas, the Prairie Center preserves a part of our native tallgrass prairie. To naturalists and students of the outdoors, it is a priceless laboratory and study area. To fishermen, campers, and groups of Scouts, it is a primitive retreat that seems miles, and centuries, removed from the city. For those of use who would simply wander along its narrow paths, it is a place to dream and think, while listening to the rustling tallgrass, and to imagine that once vast ocean of grass. 



While our Kansas land has changed through the last 100 years, it's refreshing to know that a small piece of prairie history is available for us and future generations to enjoy.



Gene Brehm Photo

Chickens Before The Frost

by Bob Mathews
chief, Public Information Section

photos by Mike Blair

Five years after it was first proposed, the early prairie chicken season (Sept. 15-Oct. 15) has developed a loyal following. The nontraditional season and hunting methods provide a unique opportunity to hunt this prairie grouse.

Kansas has more prairie chickens than any other place on earth. But that doesn't mean it's a cakewalk to hunt them. Prairie chickens can be as demanding of hunters as any game bird. That may explain why there is not much middle ground among hunters on the subject of chicken hunting. Either you love hunting them or you gave it up years ago, opines one seasoned chicken hunter.

However, the early prairie chicken season initiated in Kansas five years ago has added an appealing new dimension to the state's hunting opportunities.

In 1989, Kansas opened its first "early" prairie chicken season in modern times. The quarry was the same, but the game was entirely different than the traditional fall season that has long attracted bird hunters to the Kansas prairies.

The traditional prairie chicken season — the one that opens the first Saturday in November and runs through the end of January — is characterized more by physical tolerance rather than physical exertion. For the most part, it's a matter of setting up in a stationary position to pass shoot chickens flying from their grassland roosts to the cropfields where they feed in early morning and late evening. Aside from the fact that the deceptively fast-flying prairie chickens present a shooting challenge, hunters often have to deal with unfriendly weather. Sitting on an icy patch of frozen earth an hour before sunrise can test any hunter's resolve. Hot coffee and insulated coveralls help, but the real warming has to wait until that first flight of prairie chickens pops into view. With good advance scouting and a little luck,

they'll fly within gun range on their way to feed.

Hunting the early season is a challenge of a different sort. A September chicken hunt is legwork. More than once, I've joined friends for an early chicken hunt, walked five miles, and not fired a shot. That's all part of the game. But, somehow, it's all still worth it. What makes it worthwhile is watching the dogs do their work in front of us and the prospect of that sudden rush of wings. If it happens just once during the day, it makes the miles worthwhile.

Until the first freeze kills off the grasshoppers, crickets and beetles prairie chickens rely on so heavily for food during the milder seasons of the year, prairie chickens are likely to be scattered across broad

expanses of their grassland habitats in September and early October. During the late summer, the birds are most active during the cooler parts of the day, when the young are in search of food.

Since insect populations tend to be higher in diverse habitats, such as interspersions of cultivated fields among their grassland habitats, the birds make heavy use of cropland-grassland borders during the summer. The sparser vegetation of these "disturbed areas" allows the young birds to move about more easily, while the denser grassland cover nearby provides shade and shelter from predators.

In fall and winter, the diet consists of seeds of both native and domestic plants. Waste grain from fields of milo, soybeans and corn



During the early season, the normally wary prairie chickens are in smaller flocks and much more likely to hold for a hunter and dog. In the traditional season, hunters usually wait near grain fields and pass shoot the birds as they fly in from pasture. Walking birds up then is difficult.



Early chicken hunting requires plenty of leg work and preferably a good pointing dog. It can be a great time to get a bird dog in shape well before the regular bird seasons.

are used heavily during the winter. As a result, their winter movements — and hunting techniques — are more predictable. The birds are also most commonly seen in large concentrations flying into and out of grain stubble fields.

As the early prairie chicken season opens, the birds are still somewhat scattered but are beginning to flock. Concentrations of 25 to 50 birds, especially among the more plentiful greater prairie chickens, become more common although the flocking may occur later in some years.

As you might expect, predicting prairie chicken behavior during the early season is an uncertain venture. That's one reason why dogs figure heavily in early prairie chicken hunting, unlike the later season.

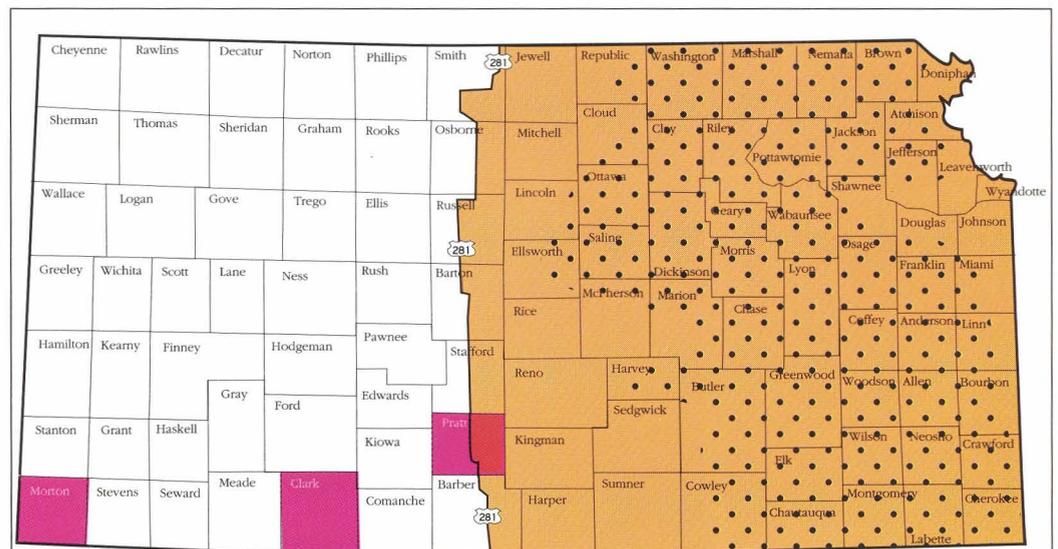
For most participants in

the early season, the September 15 opening date is the first real opportunity of the year to put their pointers, setters and spaniels

through their paces. A bird dog stretching out ahead of the guns, quartering the fields into the wind, intent on the first real hunting of the year, suddenly stopping and locking into a point, nostrils flaring with the rich scent of birds, the suspense building toward an explosion of wings...these are the elements that draw the small but dedicated core of early chicken hunters to the field. "I'm a dog man," says Dr. Robert Wallace, a native Kansan and retired economics professor who has made a habit of coming back to Kansas every year to hunt prairie chickens. "I love to watch my pointers handle these birds." Dr. Wallace, who now lives in Pullman, Washington, was among the earliest proponents of an early prairie chicken season in Kansas.

Part of the appeal is also the season. September is a time to cast off the remnants of summer and jump, with both feet, into a hunter's favorite season of the year.

"There's nothing better than walking through the prairie and watching my dogs go on point and bust out about 30 birds," says Jerry Shivers, a Council Grove hunting guide. "It's my favorite time of year. My pointers love it." What advice does Shivers have for early



Greater Prairie Chicken Range
 Lesser Prairie Chicken
 Open Areas

The area open for the early prairie chicken season includes that portion of the state east of U.S. Highway 281 (greater) as well as Pratt, Clark and Morton counties (lessers).

chicken hunters?

"Cover a lot of country. Put on a good pair of broken-in boots, take some good dogs, and cover a lot of country."

Shivers also advises concentrating your search around ponds, especially during dry years. Although prairie chickens generally ingest water from dew on plants and in the succulent vegetation and insects comprising their late summer-early fall diets, they will use surface water when moisture is below normal. The birds will often walk in to a pond, too, rather than fly, Shivers says.

KDWP biologist Dr. Kevin Church proposed the early season to Kansas Wildlife & Parks commissioners in 1988. "Hunting opportunities for prairie chicken in Kansas

provide much greater potential than is now being realized," Church told commissioners in his proposal. "The objective of establishing the early season is to provide a quality hunting experience for hunters who want to pursue chickens on foot."

Prairie chicken hunting is a somewhat specialized pursuit. About 20,000 hunters participate in the traditional prairie chicken season each year; about 8,000 hunters pursue chickens during the early season. (By comparison, Kansas pheasant hunters number about 120,000.) Nevertheless, the probability of harvesting a bird is slightly higher on any given day during the early season versus the regular season.

Kansas' early prairie chicken hunting season runs from Sept. 15

through Oct. 15. The season is open east of U. S. 281, and in Pratt, Clark, and Morton counties. Greater prairie chickens inhabit portions of the Flint Hills, Osage Cuestas, and Smoky Hills regions in the eastern half of the state. Hunttable populations of lesser prairie chickens are found in the three southwest Kansas counties — Pratt, Clark, and Morton — open for the early season.

There isn't a better way to celebrate the arrival of fall than immersing yourself in the sights, smells, and sounds of late September in Kansas. For upland bird hunters, the early prairie chicken season is the prime ticket for first-class passage into the best part of the year. 





Wide-Open Whitetails

by Gene Brehm
staff videographer, Pratt
photos by Mike Blair

The wide-open prairie may not hold the highest population of white-tailed deer in Kansas, but less hunting pressure and ample food supplies add up to big bucks. It's tough hunting, but well worth it.

It's simple. When you think of white-tailed deer, you think of timber. Yet, in many of the Plains states, whitetails have expanded to open grasslands — regions where once only mule deer and pronghorn antelope were found. In Kansas, whitetails have learned to use the skimpiest amounts of cover to hide by day — and they can surely hide. A clump of tall grass, yucca or a sandhill plum thicket, even the slightest erosion cut and a few weeds, are all that a whitetail needs to feel — and be — safe from man.

When a person chooses to bowhunt grassland whitetails, he or she is accepting to hunt a low density population — as low as one deer per square mile. To make matters worse, deer in open country seldom follow a consistent pattern. On the positive side, competition from other bowhunters is low. This means deer are not being randomly spooked, and a higher percentage of the bucks will live to a mature age.

Another reason bucks grow big in Kansas is the wealth of food available in the form of agricultural crops. Since Kansas is primarily an agricultural state, cropped acres are spread throughout the grasslands. Traditionally, only the most sandy or rocky soils remain in native grass. However, in 1986 the Conservation Reserve Program encouraged cooperators to replant millions of acres of marginal croplands to native, warm-season grasses. The more than 3 million acres of CRP grasslands in Kansas are used heavily by deer throughout most of the year. Regions with these large tracts of grass mixed with croplands and occasional pockets of timber are excellent whitetail habitat.

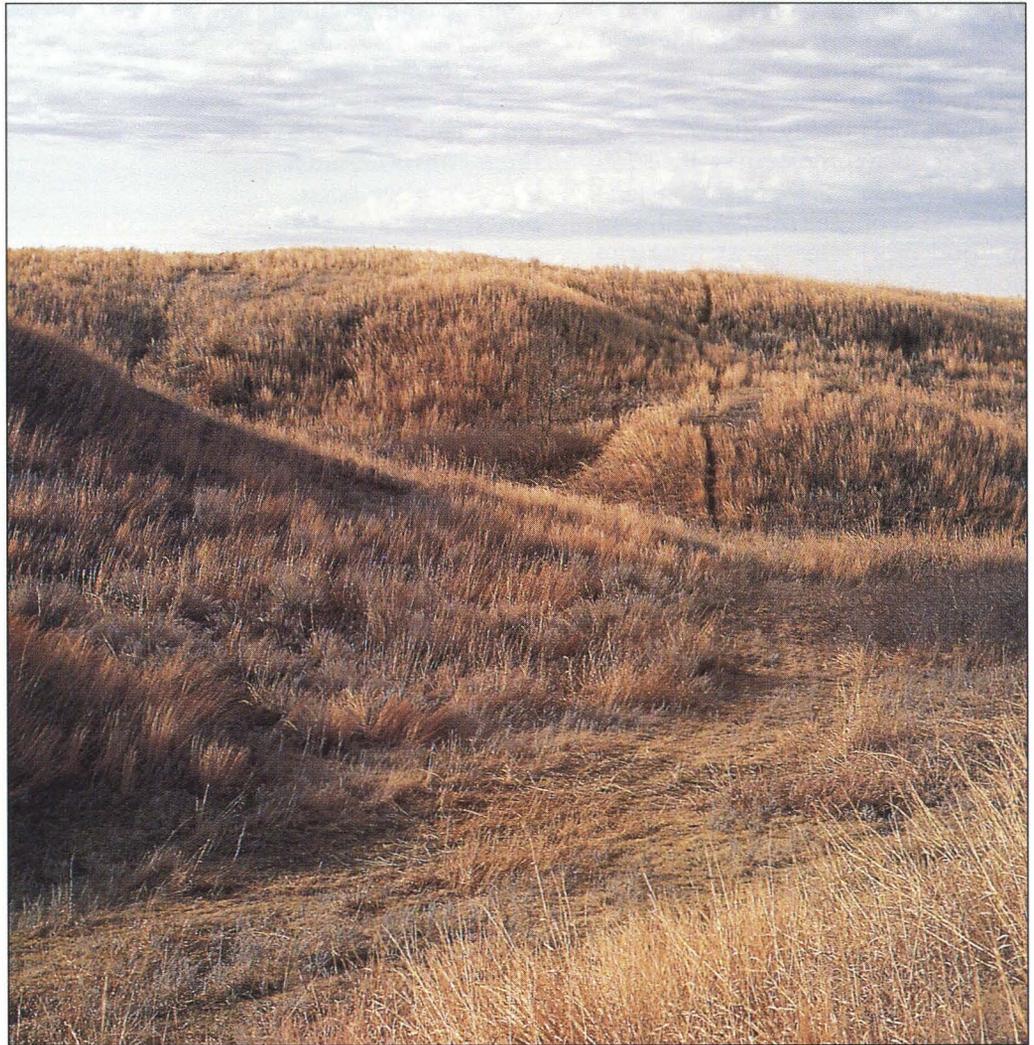
While the whitetail has adapted to the grassland, numbers of deer will probably always be lower than in more traditional deer habitat.

Bowhunters must keep this in mind. Hunters should also consider that distances traveled by deer in their daily routines may be greater. Kansas' open country whitetails may travel a mile or more between bedding and feeding locations during the fall and winter. Does and fawns may leave their beds and visit traditional feeding areas during daylight hours, yet mature bucks usually stay in their bedding sites until near darkness. Even farmers and ranchers who live and work in the home ranges of mature bucks seldom see these animals.

I witnessed one interesting episode while bowhunting in 1988. It was the evening of Nov. 7, and the sun was just setting. From a tree stand in a windbreak, I watched as

five whitetails traveled from a pasture to an alfalfa field. The group contained two does, two fawns and a 1 1/2-year-old, eight-point buck. They jumped the pasture fence 60 yards north of the windbreak, and the does and fawns proceeded to the alfalfa. The buck hesitated, watching the other deer, then headed toward the windbreak at a fast walk. Once within the shelter of the trees, the buck relaxed and ambled toward my stand, eventually bedding down directly below me. The buck watched the does and fawns until 40 minutes after sunset, before finally joining the feeding deer.

During mid-November of the 1991 season, I observed similar behavior by a grand old whitetail



This open prairie scene may look more like mule deer country than whitetail habitat, but as the visible trail attests, plenty of both whitetails and mule deer live in these grassy hills.

buck I had first seen in 1988. From my treestand, I spotted the monarch about an hour before sunset as it chased a smaller buck from a thicket. I immediately made a mental map of the buck's location and began a stalk. The thicket was in the middle of the sandhill pasture, and the terrain provided enough relief to allow a rapid approach. Luck and the wind were on my side, and I stalked to within 20 yards of the buck long before sunset. I watched silently while the buck rubbed its antlers on a sandhill plum bush, within easy bow range, yet the brush made a shot impossible.

The wait lasted more than 30 minutes. Finally as the sun set, several does emerged from the thicket and walked through an opening right in front of me. They were heading for a corn field in the next section, a full mile away.

"It's the rut," I thought, "surely the buck will quickly follow."

I nervously prepared for the shot. I had never lost sight of the buck as it moved about the thicket, and now it stood motionless, watching the does walk through a saddle and out of sight. I could do nothing but wait. It was nearly dark before he finally moved to follow the does, too late for a proper shot.

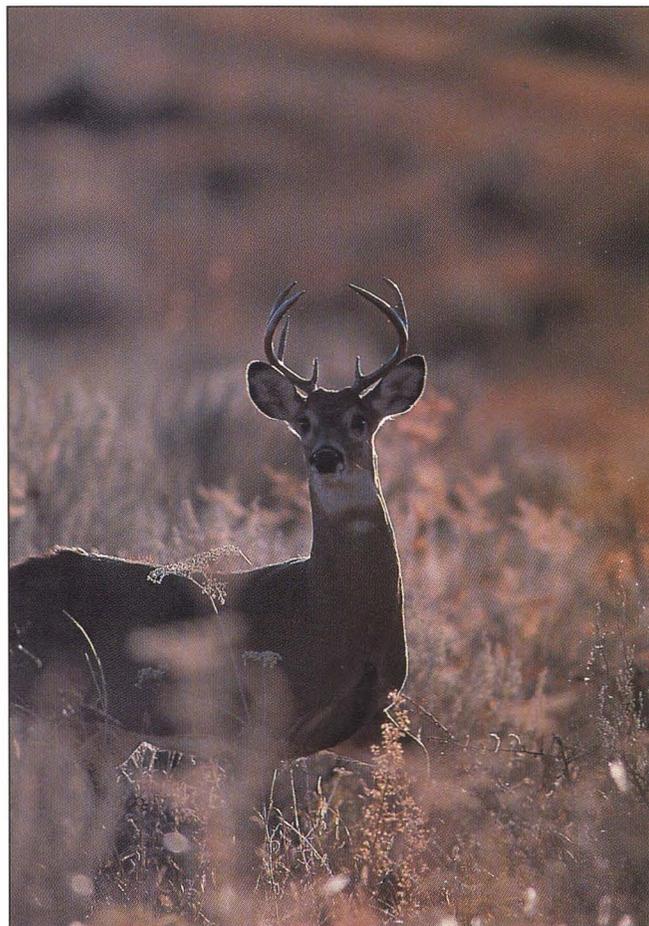
In my job as a wildlife videographer for the department, I've had the opportunity to observe white-tails year-round. I have found them to be the most fascinating and complex wild animals in Kansas. I have not found does to be less wary than bucks, just less secretive, at least part of the year. During the months of July and August, groups of bucks can be seen feeding in the open during the twilight hours and are often no more secretive than does of the same age. However, as days shorten and testosterone levels in the bucks' bloodstreams increase, their behavior changes. Buck white-tailed deer seem to undergo a behavioral metamorphosis when the velvet is shed from their antlers. Deer that were often seen in summer seemingly move to new ranges. This is possible but prob-

ably rare. It's more likely the bucks have just become more secretive toward man and more hostile toward rival bucks. To the archer, this means only one thing: if you want see the bucks that live where you hunt, look for them in July and early August. Mature bucks may be hard to see by September.

Fortunately, mature bucks will leave an increasing amount of sign as the fall approaches. Even in regions dominated by grassland, white-tailed bucks are drawn to timber. As the rut approaches, bucks rub trees with their antlers and later make scent posts pawed in the ground called scrapes. In general, research has shown that most scrapes are made by mature bucks, and if you see a rub on a large-diameter tree, you are looking at sign made by a mature



To find the home range of mature bucks, the author scouts isolated pockets of timber near pasture bedding areas.



This little buck is a long way from heavy timber, but it's obviously right at home on the prairie.

buck.

Hunters reading such sign may correctly interpret that they are scouting the home range of a mature buck, just like I did in 1990. Tremendous rubs told me a true bruiser was visiting a tree belt in a predominantly grassland region. From Oct. 25 through Nov. 5, I sat in the stand but saw no mature buck, yet the sign increased. I placed a trail timer on what I considered to be the buck's trail, and it was never tripped before 9:30 p.m., and the rubs and scrapes nearby were hit twice more. This information led me to two possible conclusions. The first, that the buck lived nearby but was not moving until two hours after sunset. Or second, that the buck was traveling a good distance from its bedding area to reach the trees where I found so much sign.

I decided to concentrate on the second option since I could never

harvest a deer that was so completely nocturnal. The very next evening, binoculars in hand, I sat on top of the highest hill in the nearby pasture. With the tree belt and crop fields to my back, I scanned the grassland for movement. In front of me lay a vast panorama of grass, sandhill plum thickets and a few scattered cottonwoods. One cottonwood had a few black locust trees and one osage orange tree clustered around it. As the sun set, I watched deer, mainly family groups, converge on the spot from three directions. Some fed for a while before heading for the croplands. Other deer passed through with little hesitation. Still others seemed to wait to meet other deer. I seemed to have discovered a staging area for the deer that bedded in the grassland beyond. Since that evening I have hunted that spot extensively. Never has sign in that spot matched the huge amounts of sign in the tree belt I first hunted, but the hunting has certainly been more productive.

No human can explain deer behavior. It's best to just consider two drives — food and sex. Let's talk about food. In a grassland habitat, deer foods are quite abundant during the spring and summer. Grasses, however, are not an important part of that diet. Weeds, or forbs, within the grassland, the leaves of trees and shrubs and agricultural crops comprise the largest part of a deer's diet. During the first part of the Kansas bowhunting season, food is available within the grassland. Mature bucks will often browse near their beds, then move to croplands after dark. Early season bowhunters may be forced to adopt a glass and stalk approach. Glassing from the highest hill or tree, spotting deer, then stalking that animal may be the most exciting form of hunting. It's also one of the most difficult. A hunter must carefully plan a stalk and mentally map the topography before leaving the vantage point. Leave absolutely nothing to chance. If the stalk appears impossible to complete, back off without spooking the animal. Remember,



The grassland provides everything a deer needs including plenty of summertime food such as weeds or forbs. Sandhill plum thickets are all any buck needs to disappear.

you are pursuing an animal intimately familiar with this part of its home range. If that animal becomes aware of a hunter's presence repeatedly, it will become even more secretive, and the movement patterns you may have discovered will change. For that very reason, I don't favor random stillhunting through my hunting areas. If a deer hasn't been spotted first, the odds are all in its favor. Most random stillhunters will repeatedly frighten deer and never realize their folly. This may cause a buck to become truly nocturnal.

After several killing frosts make foods within the grassland less nutritious and palatable, agricultural crops become increasingly important food sources. As feeding patterns shift, so will deer travel patterns. It is crucial that a hunter be aware of, look for and even plan for these changes. This pattern shift often begins in the last week of October.

The final piece to the puzzle is the sex drive. The behavioral and travel pattern changes caused by the cooler weather correspond with the approach of the breeding



The author saw does in areas heavy with buck sign, but he found the older bucks rarely left the grassland before dark. Even during the rut, most activity is at night.

season, or rut. And while scent communication is always critical to a white-tailed deer, it is perhaps most important now. Mature bucks communicate their presence to other bucks and does with scrapes. A scrape is made as the buck paws the ground clean of vegetation and leaf litter, invariably beneath an overhanging limb. While standing over the depression, the buck will urinate over its tarsal glands, located on the hock of the rear legs. The tarsal gland emits a personal identifying scent. The overhanging branch is also covered with scent from the buck's saliva, glands on the forehead and preorbital glands near the eyes. A mature buck will make many of these scent stations throughout its home range. Even though does avoid contact with dominant bucks during this pre-rut period, they will consistently leave their own scent in or near these scrapes.

Food and the basic drive to perpetuate the species influence deer movements now. After the killing frosts, does will establish consistent travel patterns to and from neighboring croplands, leaving daytime bedding areas before sunset. In route to the primary nighttime feeding areas, does seem to make an effort to travel to timbered areas to eat leaves that have recently fallen. Sometimes a single osage orange or mulberry tree can attract many deer to a single location. To announce their presence, bucks will travel these same routes and create a series of scrapes.

Since most of this scraping activity takes place at night, the bowhunter needs to know more than where a buck's scrape is. Key locations such as scrape lines along well-travelled routes must be located, but, most importantly, the hunter must be there on those rare occasions when a mature buck visits

during daylight hours. To make matters more complicated, the pheasant and quail seasons open about the time the rutting activity gets into full swing. The vast majority of the deer in the region I hunt will be frequently ousted from their day beds or will lay concealed as hunters pass a few feet from them. If a buck isn't completely nocturnal, it will be after the second weekend of November.

So when is the best time to hunt? Current research indicates that deer enter the "chase phase" prior to when most breeding occurs. In Kansas, this generally starts by the end of the first week of November. White-tailed bucks literally lose control during this chase phase and travel extensively, often beyond their home range. Confrontations between bucks of similar status will occur now. All things considered, the chase phase may offer the best opportunity to harvest a grassland whitetail. In my opinion, serious bowhunters should schedule their vacation at this time — and pack a lunch each day. At no other time of the year, including the peak of the rut, are bucks less nocturnal.

Hunt from a high tree stand if possible. This reduces the number of times that deer will catch your scent. Invariably, does move into the staging areas (like the one mentioned earlier) long before bucks show up. On evening hunts, deer approach my stands from the north and pass through to the southwest. It is critical that these does not scent me, even as they leave the area. I can only hunt these areas in the evening when the wind is from the west-northwest. Basically



The chase phase of the rut, usually the first two weeks of November, is the best time to see big bucks during the daylight hours. This bruiser fell to the author's arrow just minutes before sunset.

the same is true on morning hunts. Never hunt when the wind is not exactly right. To find a good hunting spot only to ruin it by consistently spooking deer with your own scent is ridiculous. If the wind is wrong, go to an alternate site or spend your time glassing from a high hill or a different tree. You will always learn by doing this, and you may see an opportunity to stalk a real bruiser.

During the chase phase, bucks often respond to rattling antlers. When a buck is spotted moving toward you, do nothing. If the buck is moving away from you, a horn rattling sequence might get its attention. However, in very open country, don't rattle (or grunt) when a buck gets close.

On Nov. 6, 1991, I used rattling antlers to call in a good buck — but I used them one time too often. The deer came in head-on and stopped for a look at 100 yards. I could not resist temptation, and I lightly ticked the antlers together. The buck came cautiously but was obviously uneasy since it could see forever, and there were no bucks fighting anywhere in sight. Coming on, the buck stopped to look every few steps. Every time it came to a screen of brush that would have given me a chance to draw, the buck would stand and stare for 30 or 40 seconds. I decided not to draw the bow until the deer moved past my stand. However, it was dead calm, and I suspect the buck heard me draw the bow. It bolted, then circled and eventually got my scent.

That buck was unusually active, and I saw it many times that year. I would see the buck coming for 1/2 mile, and it would approach to within several hundred yards of my stand location, circle downwind, get my scent and trot or walk away. It made me a believer that deer do learn and have a memory. In most whitetail habitats, the hunter can't see far enough to observe this behavior, but it definitely happens. Hunting on the open prairie, I get reminded of my mistakes quite often. This problem can be partially solved by hunting the same



Isolated trees can be staging areas for deer between grassland cropland. Learn movement patterns and only hunt a stand when the wind is in your favor.

population of deer from several different locations. If deer repeatedly scent a hunter in a stand, their movement patterns may shift, so, it's wise to have several stand options. Sometimes just moving 100 yards can make the difference.

Where treestands are not an option, ground blinds or pits are a good alternative. They should be built or dug where topography forces deer to travel through a narrow corridor — a bottleneck — such as a draw or saddle. Again, get familiar with the travel routes and be positive that deer won't smell you. Take extreme measures to leave very little human scent around the ground blind or on the deer trail you'll be watching. There is no question that the more human activity deer detect, the more nocturnal they will become. I wear tall rubber boots to and from stand sites and always take them off at my vehicle. I keep the boots in a plastic bag or box in the back of my truck to keep ambient human scent to a minimum. Whenever I hunt in an area with cattle, I make detours on my way to the stand, stepping in as

many fresh patties as possible.

If you're going to dig or build such a blind, visualize shot opportunities and place screens of brush to cover you when you draw. Hunters have sat for days in such blinds for just one opportunity and when it came, their bow brushed a limb and made noise or the deer saw the movement and the chance was lost. When I make the commitment to hunt an open country buck, I want to remove as many of the potential errors as possible. Even then, the really big bucks will win 99 percent of the time.

Maybe the best advice to anyone hunting Kansas' open-country bucks might be to take in the "big picture." There are many species of animals that thrive in our grasslands. Upland birds, coyotes, bobcats and even badgers can be seen. Bowhunters have a great excuse to become avid wildlife watchers. What other group of people can sit on a hilltop or high in a tree and gaze about for hours on end — and get away with it. I consider the deer I've been lucky enough to take an added bonus. ♡

OWLS OUTDOOR WILDLIFE LEARNING SITES

text and photos by Ken Brunson
*Chickadee Checkoff Coordinator,
Pratt*

With a lot of work and cooperation, the OWLS program is developing outdoor labs at schools all across Kansas. It's a combined effort that will pay huge dividends in the future of our outdoor resources.





Nearly everyone gets involved when an OWLS site is developed; students from all grades take part in much of the development as well as community leaders, government agencies, private organizations and local businesses.

Do you want to see some magic? Go to your nearest OWLS. I'm not talking about the feathered kind, but rather the Outdoor Wildlife Learning Sites (OWLS) Program sponsored by the department's Chickadee Checkoff Program. There really is magic to experience as you see kids, teachers, parents, civic leaders, companies and government agencies all joining forces for wildlife education. Put grade school children in an outdoor environment designed to teach them about wildlife and — presto! — you have a learning experience.

At any given OWLS you will see the County Extension agent

arranging ground preparation for a songbird bundle planting. And you might catch the local District Conservationist of the Soil Conservation Service providing technical advice for planting a native grass plot. There will be teachers, administrators, groundskeepers and civic leaders donating time and resources to planting shrubs or constructing a frog pool. But most of all, you will feel the excitement of the kids. It's contagious. The excitement of the hands-on work and learning involved — both for the kids and the grownups — getting their hands dirty, putting in a tree, planting wildflowers or

grabbing a tadpole from the miniature wetland they created.

Each member of each class will have the opportunity to plant something or care for something at their OWLS. They all get chances to learn about butterflies, house finches, prairie lizards and tadpoles. It's a miraculous learning machine that fills the air with magic.

OWLS was initiated in 1991 to do several things: In its never-ending effort to provide wildlife educational services, the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks wanted to help schools develop outdoor learning laboratories. Some Kansas schools have had these for



The outdoor labs often include many native wildlife plantings, bird feeders, frog ponds and a host of other projects designed to not only allow students to learn about their environment, but get involved in the construction of habitats as well.

years, and they provide a fantastic opportunity for students to learn about nature right on or near their school grounds. Other scholastic disciplines can be incorporated into

the learning experiences at these sites as well, including English, math and art. OWLS also offers the department an opportunity to publicize the Chickadee Checkoff Program designed to benefit wildlife other than sport fish and game species.

The planning stages for OWLS actually began in 1989, when a survey indicated considerable interest from Kansas schools in outdoor laboratories. We discovered several schools that had maintained extensive natural areas for years. It was evident that the potential existed for many more. A catalyst was needed, and the Chickadee Checkoff Program stepped in. The approach was slow

though, allowing a two year planning and testing period, which included two pilot sites in 1991 at McLouth and Goessel. Early in 1992, six more pilot sites were added in Olathe, Valley Falls, Onaga, Baxter Springs, Mound City and Wakeeney. Six more OWLS sites were added before the end of 1992.

In 1993, The KANSAS WILDSCAPE Foundation, a nonprofit fund-raising, conservation organization, adopted the OWLS program and successfully gained funding partners. Largely because of Wildscape's effort, the program really took off last year, and we funded an additional 23 sites. By May of 1994, we'd funded another 20 sites, bringing the grand total number of OWLS to 57.

The typical OWLS project consists of butterfly/hummingbird gardens, native prairie plots, small wetlands or frog ponds and small tree and shrub plantings. Other features that may be incorporated



The excitement and positive learning atmosphere created by an OWLS is nothing short of magic.



The future of our natural environment lies with our younger generations, and the development of OWLS is a positive step in teaching youngsters about conservation and getting them involved.

tures that may be incorporated include bird houses and feeders, bat houses, nature trails and interpretive signs, small amphitheaters and managed existing pond and stream areas near the school grounds.

While each OWLS is a result of cooperation among government and private groups, most involve local sponsors as well. Total costs have ranged from the basic OWLS grant of \$2,000 up to \$10,000 to \$15,000. Some brand new schools have joined the program in order to take advantage of construction opportunities while ground landscaping is in progress.

The first step to getting involved is to get a copy of the OWLS Guidelines. Once you have these guidelines at your school, you must set up a local OWLS committee and begin the planning process with the help of one of our department district wildlife biologists. Once you have the proposal together, you submit it to the department's Operations Office in Pratt for approval. To get a set of Outdoor Wildlife Learning Site Guidelines or other information write: OWLS, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, 512 SE 25th Ave., Pratt, KS 67124-8174. 

The KANSAS WILDSCAPE Foundation has attracted major grants for the OWLS program from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Forest Service/Kansas State and Extension Forestry, the Forrest C. Lattner Foundation, Southwestern Bell Foundation, and the Boeing Company, Inc. Other supporting grants have been provided by the Price R. and Flora A. Reid Foundation, Vulcan Chemical Company, Payless ShoeSource, Inc., Sprint, Inc., Air Products Chemicals, Inc.



Fat-tire Fun

by Dana Eastes
graphic designer, Pratt

photos by Mike Blair

Off-road biking has taken other parts of the country by storm, and now it's catching on in Kansas. Several of our state parks offer off-road trails for the mountain bike fan, and there's plenty of paved roads for the touring biker.

A bicycle is the perfect recreational tool; get on a bicycle and it's instant enjoyment. The off-road bike or "mountain bike" can go just about anywhere. If you're to-pooped-to-peddle, you can walk; or if a section of the trail is passable only on foot, the off-road bike is light enough to carry.

Most people think of off-road biking as something you do in the mountains or the mountain racing and rock-hopping they see on ESPN. Although the mountains of California gave birth to this recreational escape, it has multiplied in

number of participants and spread into all parts of the country, including the prairies of Kansas. The homogenized term of "off-road biking" may be more suitable to the varied terrains of Kansas. Off-roading defines the end result of getting on a fat-wheeled bike and enjoying the outdoors; whether riding trails at a state park, a long cruise through the backroads of the Gyp Hills; just about any lonely stretch of two-lane will do. As varied as the Kansas landscapes are, so too are the personalities that are attracted to off-roading Kansas.

When off-road biking was first taking hold out west, the biking world painted a double yellow line between touring and off-road bicyclists, mostly due to the nature of the sport and personalities it attracted. It was the Sissys vs. Dirt. Here in Kansas, the lines may have always been white hash marks. Maybe due to scant public lands or it could be that for many outsiders, Kansas doesn't evoke images of vertical bone-breaking terrain.

At any rate of speed, bicyclists are finding benefits in crossing over the line. Although each is per-



The Bike Badger – Feisty, independent, dirt-kick’n, dirt-eaten, head bang’n, knee-scrap’n, two-wheel’n rebel.

sonal preference, off-road biking tends to be a social and touring a loner recreational activity. There is safety in numbers and some showing off when riding trails. You want your buddies around to call 911 if you do something really stupid. Most off-roaders agree that it’s a rush to push the limits of body, bike and terrain, and a good spill (barring injury) is funnier with your friends around to watch. These daring stunts, questionable jumps and inevitable spills all take a toll on your body. This body abuse is another reason why bikers switch between off-road and touring workouts. Besides saving skin, the health benefits are different. Touring is a good cardiovascular workout and off-roading a muscle-toner. This is not to say off-roading is all hell-bent recklessness. Kansas offers a multitude of quiet, scenic dirt roads and backroad highways. Most bicyclists just love to bike, no matter where they’re going or what they’re riding on — a touring bike, a city bike, a mountain bike or a 1950 Schwinn. This is evident from my own personal experience as well as talking with bikers and bike shops around the state.

“We love to bike,” as Mike

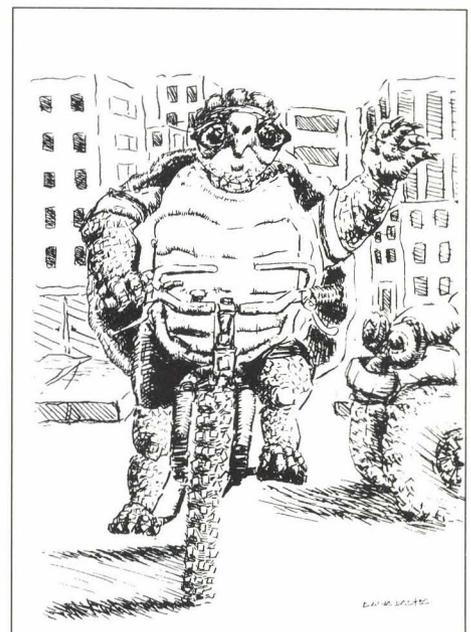


The Scenic Sunfish – swims casually through the backroads, spawning memories of the beautiful countryside, but races for the nearest pool when arriving back in town.

Combest, sales manager from Rick’s Bike shop in Lawrence, put it in the first five seconds of our conversation.

Some people see their off-road bike as a utility machine. Hunter’s camouflage and outfit their bikes for pronghorn and mule deer hunting. Bike companies specifically build, camouflage paint, and outfit bikes to a hunters specifications. That nostalgic, Norman Rockwell scene of two boys heading down the road to their favorite fishing hole hasn’t changed, except for painting in the bike helmets and two off-road bikes.

You never know, the next time you get your fishing license checked, the CO or ranger may be riding an off-road bike. This is already a reality for some park services across the country. The go-anywhere versatility, low maintenance and personal contact bikes allow, not to mention the health benefits to employees, are seen as pluses to many departments. Law enforcement departments in college towns and larger cities across Kansas have been using off-road bikes in the past few years



The Ornate Bike Turtle – dresses in the latest biking fashion, moves slow enough to be seen, never leaving the city limits and always in danger of being run over.

to patrol crowds, run down crooks and do undercover work.

Actual off-road biking trails at state parks and reservoirs are few, but growing in number. At Clinton Lake there is the 15-mile, North Shore Trail. Off-roading enthusiasts say that Clinton has technically some the best trails in the country. Currently, Clinton trails are maintained by volunteers.

There has been talk and some investigation into fee permits or a bike stamp to use the trails at Clinton. Monies generated from this source would go to improving and maintaining the trails. The “pay to play” adage should include “pay to play, maintain and improve.” The trailhead begins on Corps of Engineers land and at times becomes congested with high use. To thin this high traffic area, park manager Jerry Schecher is planning to build a trailhead within the park boundaries.

Clinton holds one or two bike races every spring and fall. The races are usually held on a six-mile section of the trail and are growing in popularity, the last having 300 participants:

At Tuttle Creek Reservoir, bikers use the Randolph 4-wheel drive park or Bowls area and the spillway. Kanopolis has twenty miles of trail open to off-road bikes. Other Kansas off-roading trails include Boeig Hills, Toronto Lake, Elk City Lake, Sandhills State Park and Santa Fe Lake. Santa Fe Lake will hold the state off-road biking championships this year. Call a local bike shop in your area. Staff can usually give you the low-down on the rougher trails, if you're into the incline; races, if have the urge to compete; or information on leisurely group rides.

There is a serious side to trail-biking besides staying healthy. It's the high-wire ride of being a recreational user vs. a habitat abuser. Trail-biking can be detrimental to habitat. The large knobby tires contribute to erosion. The mountainous states, in some areas, close trails completely or prohibit bikes from trail use to protect fragile habitat and safeguard against erosion. Bikers, hikers and horsemen have gone from being friendly users to

angry activists. None want to relinquish their recreational enjoyment. Hikers and horsemen usually point fingers at off-road bikers for disrupting the quiet with reckless endangerment and destruction of habitat. Although they all contribute to erosion, it's usually a few irresponsible bikers that cause the finger pointing at the whole off-roading contingent.

Although Kansas habitat seems a bit more forgiving than mountain habitat, it's still important to give the land time to recover. It's just wise to take responsibility for your recreational enjoyment before someone makes that decision for you.

Consider riding highways rather than trails after a rain. Biking on wet trails can cause more damage than when the trail is dry. Limit your own use of trails when they become overrun with bikers. Obviously, high-use trails erode faster than restricted or seldom used trails.

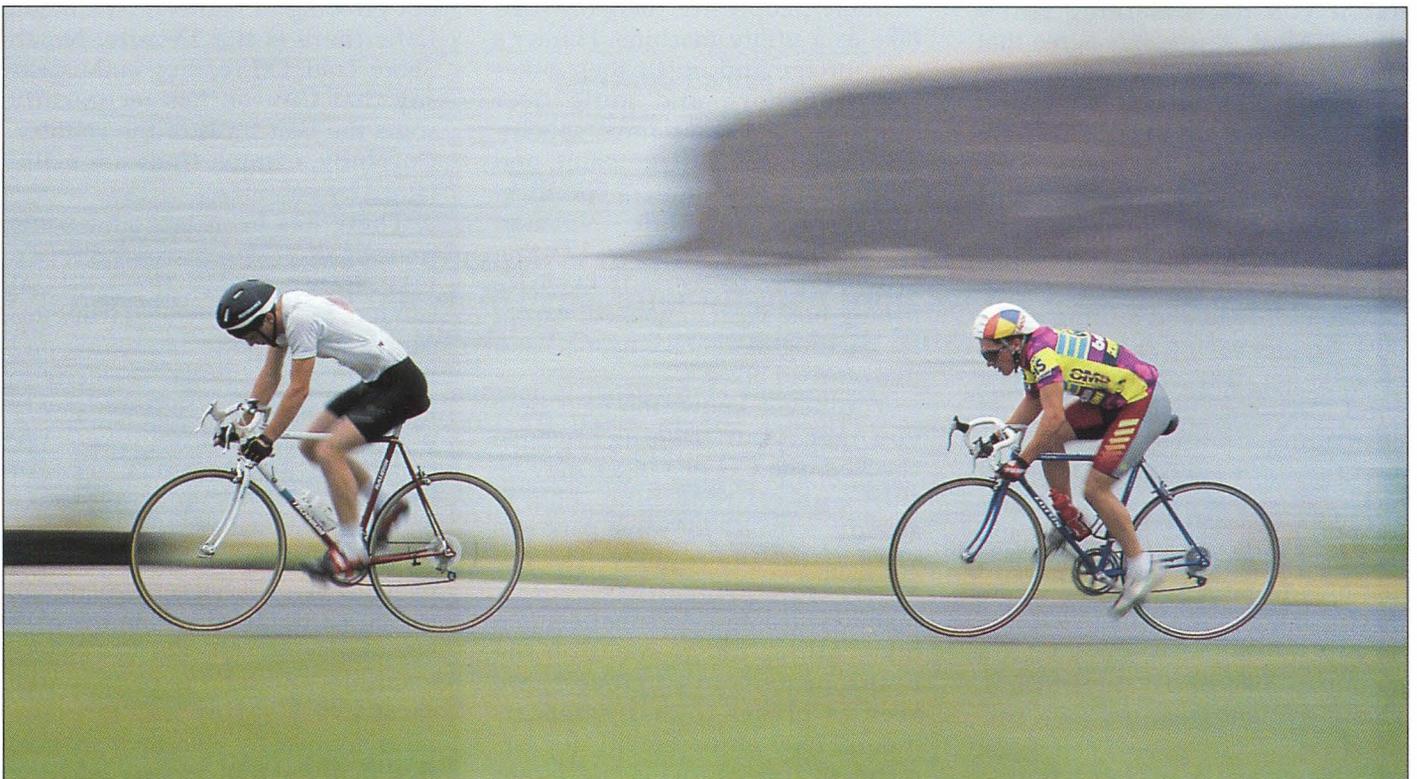
Many trails start as wildlife paths and are adopted by humans. Most

animals, including humans, take the easiest route to their destination, never considering what's under foot. Today, new recreational trails are built to be erosion-resistant, avoiding sandy soils, steep inclines and cutting across draws.

Remember the golden rule of the trail. Those who can maneuver the easiest should give way to those who can't. Walkers should give way to bikers and horses; and bikers should give way to horses. And when sharing the trail with horses, you'll need to practice your bicycle agility by dodging horse charcoal.

If you're just starting down the off-road trail, this is what it may cost you on a mid-range budget: bike, \$300 to \$400; helmet, \$25 to \$50; bottle and holder, \$7-\$10. Optionals include gloves, \$20; biking shorts and shirt \$50-\$100.

Essentially, a helmet and the quality of the bike should be your main purchase concerns. The difference in a \$300 bike and a \$400 bike could be as simple as the way the chain rings are mounted. As you go up the price range, you'll find dif-



While off-road cycling is the newest rage, tour biking is still very popular. Many Kansans find the paved roads in and around many of our state parks to be perfect touring routes. Light traffic and beautiful scenery make this riding a treat.

ferences in frames, components (brakes and gearing) and front suspension systems. Front suspension systems will cost from \$100 to \$300 more.

Now, if the sky's the limit, you can have your bike specially made and fitted to suit you. Companies such as Fat City Cycles in Boston are known world wide for their meticulous handmade bikes. You can find a listing of custom-made bike manufacturers in the July 1994 issue of *Mountain Biking* magazine.

There are numerous bike companies competing for your dollar, but just two major frame-making companies. Giant and Mirita supply the frames to most bike companies. Giant, a Japanese company, is the largest manufacturer, making frames for Briggstone, Univega and most Trek bikes. Mirita makes bikes for Schwinn and Scott. Many of the frames are welded in Taiwan. Specialized, GT, Berracuda and Cannondale make their own frames. Color and logo may visually identify one bike from another, but the

biggest differences are in the materials and technology used to make the bikes. For instance, Cannondale frames are characterized by their large, tube-like construction. Impact is dispersed over a larger area; thus fatter frames are stronger frames. Frames made not to wear out.

Except for small, specialized companies like Sun Tour, Shimano owns the market on components. Unless you're in the competition circle, most bikes you'll see on the streets and trails have Shimano components. The XTR components are Shimano's top-of-the-line.

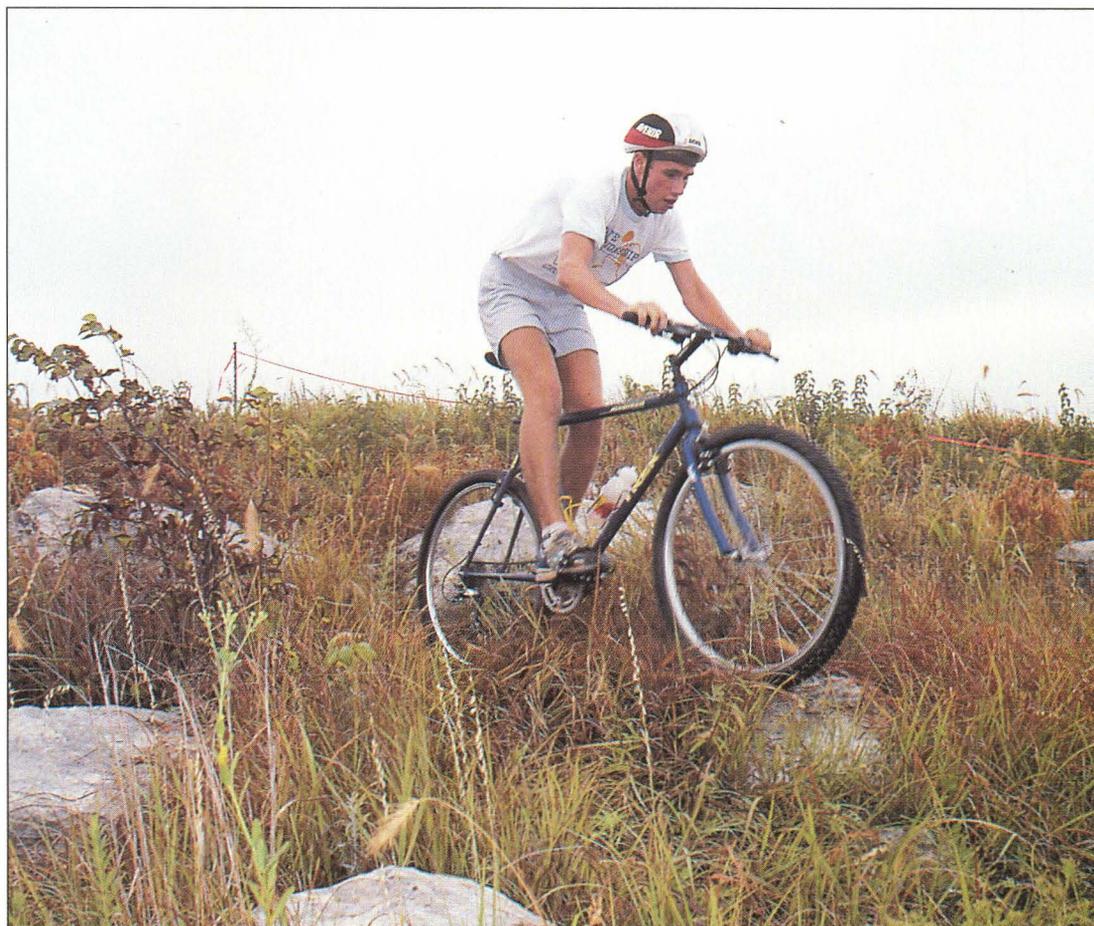
The artistry in an off-road bike can be seen in its technology of components and frame. Off-road extremists are always pushing their bikes to the verge of breaking. In essence, that technology has to stay one rock and one gear ahead of the breaking point. This is quite different from the delicate beauty of a touring bike, where artistry is in the making of the bike and revealed in the speed and fluid continuity of rider and bike as one.

"Keeping a bike in shape is a constant state of repair," Combest said when discussing bike maintenance. He also went on to say that when you own a bike it's a good idea to become your own mechanic, excluding major overhauls. Basic bike maintenance consists of cleaning and making adjustments to gears, brakes and chains frequently, to keep your bike running smooth.

As this recreational opportunity grows in popularity, so will the number of trails grow in our state parks and public lands. This is good news for those of you who have already discovered fat-tire fun. It will also be an interesting endurance test to see if Kansans can maintain healthy trails as well as healthy relations between all trail users.

For those of you gearing for your first off-road ride, you need only remember a few things: respect others and the beauty of Kansas outdoors, have fun and don't forget your helmet. 

Off-road biking is healthy and exhilarating, but it can be damaging to natural habitats. Be sure to stay on designated trails on public lands, and avoid easily muddied trails after a rain. As more and more people get involved in off-road biking, environmental considerations become more important.



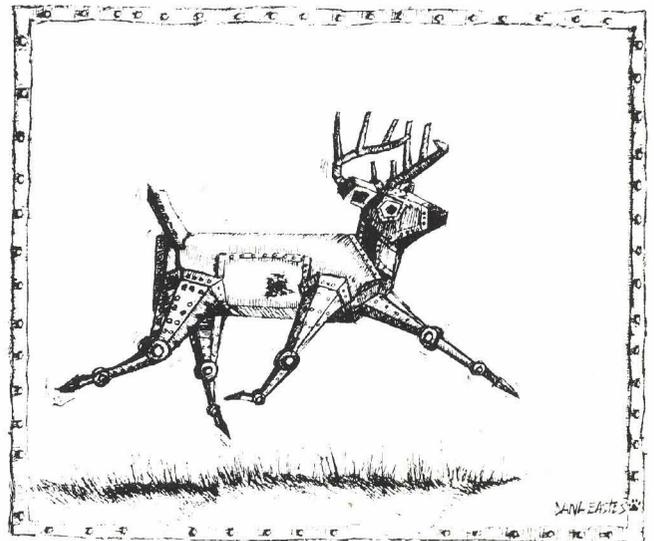
Movin' On Down The Road



For the past 30 issues of *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine, you've enjoyed the work of a talented graphic designer/illustrator. Unfortunately (from my own selfish point of view), Dana Eastes will no longer illustrate our pages. While we regret Dana's leaving, we respect her decision to spend more time with her two young boys — Joel, 5 and Jacob, 3. She'll continue to work on freelance graphic and computer graphic jobs from her home.

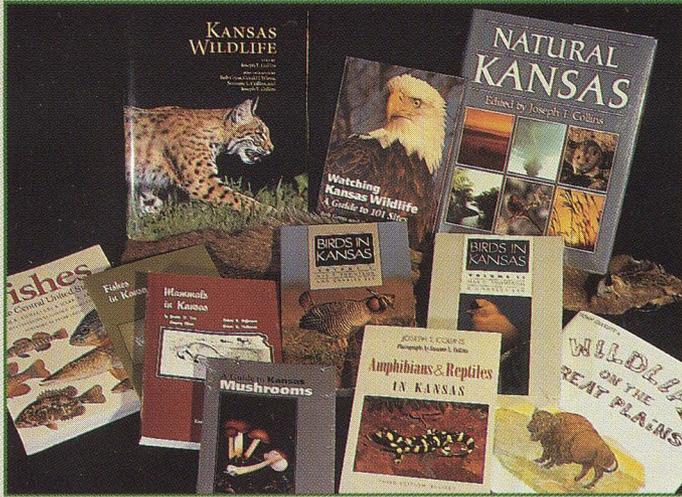
It's been a good five years, and the magazine, especially the Wild Currents section, has seen many changes and improvements as a result of Dana's influence. She brought a unique perspective, a creative flair and a wonderful sense of humor to her work. As editor, I'll sorely miss Dana's work, but her influence went much further. If you've ever filled out a deer or turkey permit, purchased a department T-shirt or belt buckle, looked at a map of a wildlife area or even just read a sign at one of our state parks, you've benefitted from some of Dana's effort.

We've received many compliments and requests for prints of Dana's artwork over the years, so I thought I'd provide you a special treat. No matter how foggy or far out my cartoon request was, Dana always created an image that was humorous and entertaining. Here are a few of my favorites!



Kansas Outdoor Store

Products that show your pride in the Kansas outdoors.



The Kansas Outdoor Store line of products are available at many of the department's offices, including several state parks. The items include a selection of wildlife and natural history books, cups, mugs, a frisbee, and the line of annual belt buckles, T-shirts and hats. The items pictured here are currently in stock. For a list of offices where the products are available, prices and additional ordering information, turn the page.



Edited by Mark Shoup

FLATLAND FLYTYER

Editor:

Thanks for the great article by Mike Blair on fly fishing in Kansas (*Kansas Wildlife and Parks*, May/June 1994, Page 2). One of the great things about fly fishing is that you can get into such interesting sidelines, such as the study of freshwater insects and fly tying to represent those insects.

There has been an active fly-tying group in Wichita for a number of years. The Flatland Flytyers meet the first Thursday of every month on the second floor of the Backwoods building in Wichita. Rev. Don Schroeder has done a great job of faithfully issuing a one-page newsletter each month that lists the pattern to be tied at the next meeting and the materials required.

We'd like to invite anyone in the Wichita area to join us any time. Lessons are offered for beginners as the demand warrants. There's nothing like catching a green sunfish or black bass on a fly you tied yourself.

Roy J. Beckemeyer
Wichita

RATTLER ROUNDTABLE

Editor:

As a 23-year resident of Wallace County, a former biology instructor, and the local botanical expert, I have followed the events and opinions pertinent to the Rattlesnake Roundup with interest and, at times, much amusement. Since I am a non-hunter of rattlesnakes (except for scientific purposes) but not opposed to hunting them for sport, food or reasons of safety, I prefer to think that my thoughts on the subject are unbiased.

The views expressed by the various herpetological and ecological authorities (except Dr. Fitch of KU) appear to ignore the basic realities of the situation. The relevant realities are these: the ecology of the area has been and is

being altered by industrialized agriculture, and most inhabitants are rather hostile to the rattlesnake (and other snakes). The reaction of most area ranchers (and others) has been to kill all rattlesnakes on sight.

The advent of the Rattlesnake Roundup has modified this behavior.

Regardless of the attitude of humans towards their serpentine relatives and other wild creatures, the major determinant of wildlife populations is habitat destruction. For example, several thousand acres of grasslands have been placed in crop production in Wallace County in the past 25 years. In addition, the prairie dog has been nearly exterminated in the same time period. (The prairie rattler shares the dogs' burrows.) This loss of habitat likely accounts for the loss of more snakes than the Rattlesnake Roundup. The first year, only 70-some snakes were taken; the second year, about 150 were turned in from Wallace and nearby counties. This year, more than 300 were taken in the entire hunting area, which includes Kansas west of US 283 (excluding Morton County).

Until some local people decided a roundup would add to the financial health of the area and provide a bit of fun in the process, the practice of slaughter on sight and loss of habitat was, apparently, ignored by both legal and scientific authorities.

The scientific and Wildlife and Parks authorities would better aid the *Crotalus viridis viridis* by a program of education and resource management rather than the establishment of bureaucratic regulations that seem more designed to harass than maintain a healthy population of rattlesnakes. The Rattlesnake Roundup does provide the opportunity for education and scientific research.

Henry F. Barstow
Sharon Springs

Dear Mr. Barstow:

Your points are well-taken and illus-

trate the fact that few issues are clearly black and white. While it may seem ironic that exploitation of a species might actually help it, history tells us that when people have a concrete, vested interest in a species, they will find a way to protect it.

I'm not sure what "bureaucratic regulations" you may be referring to, but the regulations Wildlife and Parks adopted following legislation on this issue allow some measure of control over the roundups, as well as provide the opportunity for collection of scientific data. —Shoup

ARF YOU VERY MUCH'

Editor:

Hi. My name is Tammy. I'm a female Brittany, and I am nine years old. I love to hunt. My owner takes me almost every day during the bird season.

He gets a few birds now and again. We enjoy each other's company very much. He tells me that whether we get any birds or not he likes seeing me work.

We go fishing during the summer, but, gee, have you every tried to point a bass or channel cat?

I was wondering if bird season could be extended two more weeks. If not, I understand. I just thought you'd like a dog's view. Thank you for your time.

Tammy
Whiting

EVERYTHING'S UNFAIR

Editor:

My favorite place to hunt turkeys was near the Nebraska line in northeast Kansas, but now the Iowa Indians won't let me hunt there without their non-resident license even though your map shows that I can hunt to the Nebraska line.

I maintain some deer in my pasture and feed them well all year, but if I want to harvest one, I must buy your permit. My relatives in Missouri can harvest one or two on their own land free every year. You claim the deer, but if they

wreck my car, you aren't responsible.

I read that you are considering canceling the free fishing and hunting permits for the poor old seniors.

I visit our library quite often, and often have an hour with nothing better to do than to read *Kansas Wildlife and Parks* magazine, which is there on the shelf. That translates to a free steak dinner every year. Thanks.

John W. Carwell
White Cloud

Dear Mr. Carwell:

Department biologists and commissioners set turkey hunting units using data on population and available habitat. The department can't guarantee hunting access on any private land, whether it's a landowner's creek-bottom or an Indian reservation. The reservation land is owned by the tribe, and they can control access to that land, just as you do yours.

If you want to hunt deer in your pasture, we have a Hunt-Own-Land permit for \$10.50 – one-third the general resident's price. Because of our deer management program, Kansas is considered by many to have some of the finest deer hunting in the Midwest. That management, which includes monitoring hunters' success, landowners' input, crop damage complaints, and deer-vehicle accident frequency, does cost money. The money from permits goes to pay for that, as well as provide conservation officers who will respond if you have trespass or road hunting problems. The monitoring of the population in regions also allows permit quotas to be changed according to deer numbers within a unit. If landowners begin experiencing heavy crop damage, permit numbers are raised, and deer numbers are reduced. It would be cheaper and simpler to sell everyone a permit, but then we would not enjoy the fantastic hunting opportunities we now have, and landowners would see many more hunters afield.

The state's deer belong to the people, not the department. It's the department's job to manage and protect that resource. Deer-vehicle colli-

sions are much like any natural danger, such as lightning, floods or tornados. Our department couldn't possibly afford to pay for damage done to vehicles by deer. The only option would be to eliminate the deer, which few Kansans would accept.

I know I won't change your mind about "seniors" paying their way, but I will say that regardless of who is using our park facilities or other natural resources, it takes money to provide those opportunities. No other life luxury suddenly becomes free when you turn 65. Since our hunting, fishing, and most of our park budgets come from user fees (not general tax dollars), the department feels that everyone who chooses to enjoy these resources should pay their fair share for management and upkeep.

Keep reading our magazine; we often try to explain our reasoning behind decisions in the articles. –
Miller

WHAT'S WITH PERRY

Editor:

Just wanted to let you know that I have been a subscriber to *Kansas Wildlife and Parks* for many, many years. You have a very good magazine, and I read it from cover to cover.

I have a question. I have fished Perry Reservoir for quite a few years. It used to be really good fishing. We could go for a weekend and get our limit on channel cat each day and fill our coolers with carp fillets. The last couple of years, it seems like the fish just aren't there. We are bank fishermen and have tried all around the lake and are not having any luck at all.

Is the fish population dropping off at Perry, or is it something else?

Also, with all the flooding that occurred at Perry last year and all the insecticides and herbicides and chemicals in the water, will the fish be good to eat, or will the catfish and carp be contaminated?

Ron Merchant
Hiawatha

Dear Mr. Merchant:

Standardized fall test netting is indicating a slight decline in channel catfish numbers in Perry. In the fall of 1993, channel catfish samplings were similar to 1985. Young of the year fish are also sampled using standardized sampling methods in the early fall. In 1993, young of the year numbers were similar to 1992, but lower than the 7-year average. Channel catfish numbers appear to be in a 4- to 5-year cycle of high and low numbers. This would indicate that 1995-96 will be good years for channel catfishing.

As for common carp, adult numbers are not computed annually, but young of the year are. Young of the year carp numbers have increased slightly over the past two years, indicating that more harvestable fish will be available soon.

As indicated in the on-going creel census at Perry, angler preference and catch rates for channel catfish have increased. Water level also influences catch rates and spawning success. As in the case of last summer's flooding, angler access was greatly reduced. The high lake levels made even locating the fish difficult, let alone enticing them to bite. However, the lake fishery did receive positive effects from the higher water levels, increased spawning habitat, protective habitat for young fish, and addition of nutrients.

Fish numbers will continue to be monitored, and if supplemental stocking, reduction in creels, addition of habitat, or water-level manipulation are in order, they will take place. However, these measures will be taken to benefit the state's sport fish like channel cat, crappie or largemouth bass, not nonsport fish like carp and buffalo.

Concerning contamination of fish, several areas along Kansas rivers and streams have fish consumption advisories. These are printed on Page 6 of the *Kansas Fishing Regulations Summary*. No Kansas reservoirs have been included in this advisory. If fish sampled do reveal dangerous levels of a toxicant, the public will be notified. –*Kirk Tjelmeland, fisheries specialist, Ozawkie*

RESCUE AWARD

In the Sept./Oct. 1993 issue of *Kansas Wildlife and Parks*, we reported the heroic efforts of conservation officers Randy Benteman and Tom Swayne in rescuing 11 stranded flood victims near Staffordville, in Chase County.

Last May, the pair received national recognition in the form of the Higgins and Langley Memorial Award for Outstanding Achievement in the Field of Rescue.

In May of 1993, the two COs had recently finished training in the use of personal watercraft for rescue. Chase County Sheriff's officers had asked the National Guard to use a helicopter to rescue the family, but trees and other obstructions made the attempt too dangerous. When the sheriff contacted Benteman and Swayne, they felt they were prepared for the task — and they were right. All 11 people were rescued without mishap.

The award, which is presented by the National Association for Search and Rescue, honors civilian Earl Higgins, who lost his life in 1990 attempting to save a child in the flood-swollen Los Angeles River, and firefighter Jeffery Langley, who died in a helicopter incident in March of 1993. —*Shoup*

ANGLER RESCUE

A Missouri River fishing trip almost turned fatal for a Kansas City man on May 14. Cleotus Brown was visiting friends in Atchison when he decided

to try fishing on the Big Mo although recent rains had made the banks along the river very slippery and treacherous to climb.

Meanwhile, Conservation Officer Joe Lienemann, also from Atchison, was patrolling the area and stopped to check the fishing licenses of Brown and a companion. The licenses were in order, and Lienemann gave them directions to Atchison State Fishing Lake. He had returned to his truck when he heard a splash and a frantic cry from Brown's companion, "Game warden, help! He fell in the water!"

Lienemann grabbed a "throw bag" life preserver from his tool box, ran down the shoreline to where Brown had fallen in, threw the line to him and pulled him safely to shore. Although Brown lost his rod and reel and was shaken by the incident, he was otherwise unscathed. —*Shoup*

CO GUIDE

Many people do not realize that a degree in natural resources is required to become a conservation officer.

Minimum qualifications for conservation officer are graduation from an accredited four-year college or university with major course work in fisheries science, wildlife science, park management or recreation, or another natural resources subject. (A conservation officer brochure is available from the department's Pratt Operations Office.) Qualified applicants must take a Civil Service examination, be

among the top scores, and be selected in an interview process.

Conservation officers must be certified by the Kansas Law Enforcement Training Commission and take and pass a drug screening test approved by the state of Kansas. —*Mathews*

JAIL TIME FOR POACHERS

Last fall, a Goddard man saw something suspicious and called the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks' Outdoor Alert toll-free hotline, 1-800-228-4263 and reported seeing a vehicle pull out of a field where he knew it didn't belong. He had taken the license tag number and a description of the vehicle and followed the tracks into a field where he found a field-dressed deer with the head and back legs removed.

With assistance from Sedgwick County Sheriff's Officer Terry Spreier, conservation officers Alan Hulbert, David Nelson and Dan Hesket began an investigation. Hulbert hid in the field near the carcass while officers Spreier, Nelson and Hesket drove to the address to which the vehicle was registered, just in time to see a Blazer leave.

Back in the field, Hulbert watched as the vehicle returned to the scene and three men piled out. After looking in all directions, one man motioned for the other two, who came running and threw the deer wrapped in a blanket into the back of the vehicle. The men then jumped back in

the truck and sped away.

Moments later, all four officers stopped the vehicle and found the deer.

The three men, Goddard residents, were all issued citations, and the deer was confiscated. One man admitted to shooting the deer in Kingman County earlier in the day with a .22 rifle. He was charged with seven counts, including possessing deer illegally, failure to tag a deer, hunting in closed season, no hunting license, no hunter education card, hunting with the aid of a motor vehicle, and failure to wear blaze orange while hunting deer. He was charged \$47 in court costs, ordered to pay \$62 for processing of the deer (which was donated to the Wichita Union Rescue Mission), spent 14 days in jail, and must perform 40 hours of community service.

The second man was also charged with illegal possession of a deer and was fined \$250 plus \$40 court costs.

The third man was charged with illegal possession of deer, fined \$275 plus \$40 court costs, spent 30 days in jail, and has 18 months probation. —*Murrell*

NEW REGULATION BROCHURE

The 1994-1995 Hunting and Furharvesting summary will be available September 1. All hunters and trappers should have one of these brochures to carry with them. In addition to the seasons, daily limits, possession limits and other pertinent regulations, there is other valuable information. —*Miller*

CRP INVESTMENT

Every year since 1986, more than 47.7 million tons of Kansas soil have been saved from the ravages of erosion under a farm program that idles land across the state. Now, the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is in jeopardy, a potential victim of federal budget cutbacks, unless Congress re-authorizes it in the 1995 Farm Bill.

"From a budget standpoint, we have to give CRP some CPR," said Rep. Pat Roberts of Dodge City, the ranking Republican on the House Agriculture Committee. "We're still on the budget chopping block."

The vast First District represented by Roberts ranks No. 1, too – at \$1.4 billion, its farmers have CRP contracts worth more than any other congressional district in the nation. Overall, Kansas is third in the country in the value of contracts, most of which last 10 years or more, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture statistics. If the program isn't renewed – and there's no word on whether the Clinton administration will support it – the nation's farm economy could undergo fundamental changes.

"It's the first big question for this farm bill," said Kenneth Cook, president of the nonprofit Environmental Working Group. "It's really the first generation of a program that tried to link agriculture with environmental policy."

During the farm crisis of the 1980s, Congress devised CRP as a way of helping farm-

ers hold on to their land by agreeing to pay annual rent to idle acreage susceptible to erosion. The farmers also got a one-time payment to help them plant the land in grass or trees. For farmers, the idle land means higher prices for wheat, corn, oats and other crops because there is less chance of surplus. They've been getting paid for it – an average of \$50 per acre every year in Kansas.

"This program was put into effect in the middle of a farm crisis, and it saved a lot



of farmers," Roberts said.

For environmentalists, the program means saving of valuable topsoil and crucial habitat for wildlife. In Kansas, more than 2.8 million acres are enrolled in CRP. Five counties – Hamilton, Reno, Stanton, Morton and Greeley – account for 15 percent of the total value, and idled wheat farms make up about half of the acreage. Most is planted in native grasses.

Nationally, the 36.4 million acres enrolled in CRP represent an area slightly larger than Iowa. Total value of the contracts over time is nearly \$20 billion. Before CRP, Kansas land eroded at a rate of 18 tons per acre every

year. Since its enactment, that rate has plummeted to just 1.8 tons per acre, according to an analysis by the Environmental Working Group.

Beginning in 1996, the contracts will expire, and by 2004, there will be only a handful left. Unless the program is renewed, some farmers will put the land back into production.

"You're looking at some environmental degradation, an increase in soil erosion, a decrease in wildlife," Roberts

said. "That's a road we don't want to take."

So far, the USDA's budget projections include no money for continuation of CRP beyond current contracts. An agency spokesman said Secretary Mike Espy hadn't yet come to a decision on its future.

"It doesn't make sense to go into a long-term agreement if we're going to go back to fence-row-to-fence-row farming," Roberts said. "With depressed prices, we have to have a solid CRP." –Curt Anderson, *Associated Press*

TREE PLANTING

More than 47,000 trees and shrubs have been planted

on a 1,600-acre area north of Atchison. The area – known as the Rushville Bend Mitigation Site – was purchased in 1992 by the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers as part of a \$67 million mitigation project along the Missouri River in Kansas, Iowa, Nebraska, and Missouri. The purpose of the project is to restore a small portion of the one-half million acres of fish and wildlife habitat destroyed during Corps development along the river from 1912 to 1980. Development at the Rushville Bend site will be completed in 4 to 5 years. At that time, the Corps will probably enter into a cooperative agreement with the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks concerning operation and maintenance of the site. –*The Troy Chief*

WETLAND RESERVE AID

Under the federal emergency Wetland Reserve Program (WRP), many farmers whose land was devastated by last year's floods may soon find relief, according to the Mississippi Interstate Cooperative Agreement (MICRA), a coalition of state and federal agencies concerned with issues affecting the Mississippi River Drainage Basin.

In early March, 25,400 acres were signed into the program, including 1,200 in Kansas. Soil Conservation Service representative Don Butts announced that beginning April 1, an extended emergency WRP "open season" began and will run through the end of 1994. The

open season will allow farmers to determine the farmability of their land this spring, before signing up.

WRP easements transfer most rights, but farmers retain certain rights, such as timber production, grazing and hunting. The easements provide no public-use rights.

While the price the government might pay for easements is not yet known, Butts said that he expects post-flood easement values to range from 60 percent to 70 percent of pre-flood values. Agricultural producers in the Midwest who suffered losses due to floods and other adverse weather can call USDA's Flood Response Center at 1-800-880-4183 for more information. —Shoup

INTERIOR FOLLOWUP

Midwest farmers may also benefit from a program of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Farmer's Home Administration (FmHA) which involves establishing conservation easements on unproductive agriculture lands as a way to help them recover from damages resulting from the floods of 1993. When these farmed areas were flooded, many returned to their wetland state and became unproductive agriculturally but ideal habitat for many species of wildlife, especially waterfowl.

The Conservation Easement Debt Cancellation Program allows farmers with FmHA loans secured by real estate to cancel a portion of their debt in exchange for establishing a conservation easement on their property, known as a "debt-for-nature" easement. —*United States Interior Department news release*

B O O K BEAT B O O K BEAT B O O K BEAT

EVOLVING ETHICS

Hunter ethics has been a subject of discussion for at least four decades now, since the first hunter education programs began. Now, a new hunter advocacy group — Orion: The Hunters Institute — has taken the lead in this arena and, in my opinion, provides hunters with a welcome alternative to some pro-hunting lobbies that have lately aligned themselves with anti-conservation issues involving public, private and corporate land use.

Orion's first and most visible effort is *Beyond Fair Chase: The Ethic and Tradition of Hunting*, written by Jim Posewitz and published in cooperation with the United Conservation Alliance.

While it's an ideal tool for hunter education programs, this pocket-sized book should really be carried by every hunter. It's easy reading, even for young hunters, and filled with anecdotes that illustrate the hunter's role in conservation, as well as ethics. Whether writing about safety, landowner relations, care for the land, or the game we hunt, Posewitz places emphasis on knowledge and respect. The book's forward begins with a young hunter who passes up a good shot at an elk because he is uncertain, action which Posewitz rightfully praises.

From this point, the author briefly traces the pre-history and history of hunting in North America

and the conservation ethic that developed in this century.

The bulk of the book, however, is dedicated to the behavior of hunters. Posewitz notes that times have changed since Aldo Leopold, the gifted and eloquent father of modern wildlife management, made his oft-quoted statement that the hunter "has no gallery to applaud or disapprove of his conduct."

"Today," notes Posewitz, "there are many thoughtful people saying that perhaps it is time that hunting end." He believes that the unethical behavior of some hunters is behind much of this sentiment.

But what are hunter ethics? This is the question that Posewitz tries to frame in a modern context. His definition of an ethical hunter is boiled down to a simple definition: "A person who knows and respects the animals hunted, follows the law, and behaves in a way that will satisfy what society expects of him or her as a hunter."

He then elaborates upon this definition, much of which is the same as has been taught since the 1940s, such as safety, preparation, physical fitness, respecting private property, careful shot selection, and care of and respect for game.

Then he tackles the complex topic of "trophy" hunting. To Posewitz, an ethically-taken trophy should be a natural, free-ranging product of the land. The rest resides in the grey area of

the hunter's attitude:

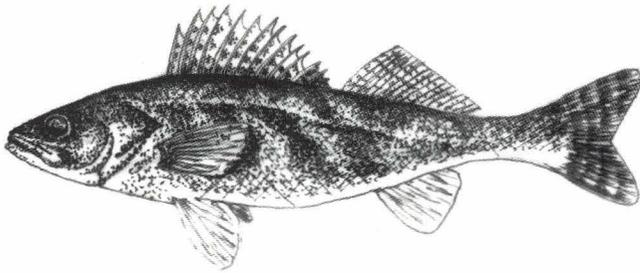
"If you hunt these animals because they represent the survivors of many hunts . . . then you have selected a high standard. If, on the other hand, you pursue a trophy to establish that you, as an individual, are superior to other hunters, then you have done it to enhance your personal status, and that crosses the ethical line. No animal should be killed for that reason."

He carries the argument a step further, saying that "trying to take a trophy to get your name in a record book is taking a fine animal for the wrong reason" and "contests between hunters that require killing animals should be prohibited."

While Posewitz does not object to keeping record books on game animals, he believes that "displaying the name of the hunter may no longer be necessary."

No doubt, *Beyond Fair Chase* will be a source of much debate. Posewitz was one of the featured speakers at the third annual Governor's Symposium On North America's Hunting Heritage at Little Rock in August. At this writing, the conference had yet to take place, but I'll be interested to follow the debate in the months to follow. In my opinion, the future of hunting hinges on the ability of hunters to rethink their values in these and other sometimes difficult ways.

Available from Falcon Press, Helena, Montana, for \$5.95. —Shoup



SAUGEYE RECORD TUMBLES

Several years ago, the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks introduced a new fish in Kansas lakes. Called a saugeye, it was hoped that this new hybrid would combine the flavor and size of the walleye with the sauger's ability to hold tight to reservoirs during floods. This, combined with the fast-growing qualities of most hybrids, would be the perfect fish for many anglers, especially walleye enthusiasts.

It now appears that these efforts have finally born fruit. Going into the spring of 1994, the state record saugeye was 4.19 pounds, caught by Gerald Dannel in March 1993 at Elk City Reservoir. In May of this year, that fish was outweighed four times, three of which were state records.

On May 9, Robert Smith, Norton, was fishing a white Power Grub in Sebelius Reservoir when he landed a 4.24-pound saugeye, a new state record that would last only eight days. On May 17, Roger Hawks, another Norton angler, also hit paydirt (or water) with a Power Grub at Sebelius, landing a 4.97-pound saugeye. Hawks' mark would last five days.

Then on May 22 J.B.

Covington, Almena, used a Lindy rig with minnow to haul in a 4.98-pound saugeye, establishing the current state record.

Ironically, Sky Stevenson of Council Grove caught a 4.4-pound saugeye at Council Grove Reservoir on May 29, proving that Sebelius is not the only lake in Kansas with big saugeye. Unfortunately, he was about a month late for the state record.

The saugeye saga is a true fisheries management success story. First introduced in 1988, it appears that the fish are just beginning to put on good size. Currently, saugeye can be found in Elk City, Council Grove, and Sebelius reservoirs, as well as Brown, Chase and Washington state fishing lakes, Great Bend Vets Park Lake, Anthony and Parsons city lakes, and Marion County Lake.

Some states report that saugeye grow to 10 pounds, so "walleye" fans may have a lot to look forward to in the next few years. —*Shoup*

LINK TO RIVERS

In Kansas, stream users need landowner permission to fish or wade in most rivers. Access to most rivers also requires permission from the landowner whose property lies next to the portion of river being used.

There are exceptions to that rule:

*Stream reaches located within the boundaries of state-owned or managed public wildlife areas are open for public use, unless posted otherwise. To obtain a "Fishing Guide to Kansas," which provides information on public fishing waters in Kansas, contact the nearest

KDWP office.

* Three rivers in the state — the Arkansas, Missouri, and Kansas rivers — are public property between their normal high water marks. Even on those three rivers, however, landowner permission is necessary if private land must be crossed to reach the rivers. —*Mathews*

STOCKIN' THE BALL PARK

Each year, Department of Wildlife and Parks fish hatcheries at Farlington, Meade, Milford, and Pratt produce fish for Kansas public waters. All fish stocked go in Kansas waters where public fishing is allowed, such as city lakes, state fishing lakes and federal reservoirs.

In the spring of 1994, fingerling (2- to 4-inch fish) stockings included walleye, sauger, and saugeye (a cross between a female walleye and a male sauger). Approximately 647,000 walleye, sauger and saugeye fingerlings were stocked this spring. In addition, 131,000 striped bass fingerlings were stocked, and 2.4 million walleye fry, 450,000 saugeye fry, and 5.2 million wiper (striped bass/white bass hybrid) were stocked.

Fish were stocked in the following lakes: sauger — Perry Reservoir; saugeye — Council Grove and Sebelius reservoirs, Anthony City Lake, Chase and Washington state fishing lakes, Marion County Lake, Great Bend Veterans' Park Lake, and John Redmond Rearing Pond; striped bass — La Cygne, Lovewell, Milford, Pomona, Sebelius, Webster, and Wilson reservoirs, Crawford State Fishing Lake, and Pleasanton East Lake; walleye — Clinton, La Cygne, Hillsdale, Kanopolis, Kirwin, and Milford reservoirs, and numerous state fishing lakes and community lakes; wiper — La Cygne, Lovewell, Milford, Pomona, Sebelius, and Webster reservoirs.

An additional 1.5 million fry were stocked in Wildlife and Parks ponds for fingerling production, and requests for an additional 398,000 intermediates and fingerlings — including channel catfish, largemouth bass, paddlefish, and wipers — should be filled by the end of the summer.

If these numbers seem impressive, a look at the total state stockings since 1980 are downright mind-boggling: blue catfish, 76,400; bluegill, 4.5 million; channel catfish, 13 million; largemouth bass, 2.8 million; redear sunfish, 1.2 million; sauger, 4.3 million; saugeye, 4.1 million; smallmouth bass, 560,000; striped bass, 3.2 million; walleye, 508.3 million; and wiper, 43.9 million. This makes a grand total of 586 million fish.

This many people would fill Royals Stadium for every home game for the next 170 years (based on a seating capacity of 42,000 and 81 home games per year). If Royals Stadium were a fishbowl, 586 million goldfish would pack the facility from wall to wall. — *Shoup*

WHAT YOU PAY FOR



by **Jim Holderman,**
chairman, **Kansas Wildlife
and Parks Commission**

Our public lands are of great importance to the people of Kansas, our visitors, and to the state's economy. Yet they all face major funding problems that must be addressed if public expectations for resource and recreational opportunities are to be realized. It is no secret that our parks have been historically underfunded, and many are in need of major repairs. The 1993 floods added to those problems. Many of the state fishing lakes have aged to the point that extensive structural repairs are required. Wildlife areas continue to provide wildlife and public benefits but often fail to reach their potential due to funding shortages. Adequate funding for routine maintenance of these areas, particularly parks, is sorely lacking.

Kansas is one of the lowest-ranking states in the amount of public recreational land available for use by its citizens. We can ill-afford to improperly manage what resources we do have, or worse, be forced to abandon some that currently exist. Unfortunately, that is exactly what will happen unless new funding sources are secured.

Increased reliance on the state general fund (tax dollars) is often suggested, but this has not proven to be a reliable source of funds. Recreation and resource management do not compete well with the many other demands for limited tax dollars.

Creation of a totally new source of funds, such as the one-eighth of one percent sales tax enjoyed by the Missouri Department of Conservation, would be great. However, the chances of something similar occurring in Kansas needs a major display of public support.

A logical approach to improved funding exists with a true "user pay" approach, and that is what was promoted by Wildlife and Parks in House Bill (H.B.) 2797 (passed by the House last spring but defeated in the Senate). Current exemptions allow many folks to use parks, wildlife areas and state fishing lakes for free. This means the financial burden to operate these areas for all users falls on the shoulders of remaining license and permit buyers. Unfortunately, the ranks of license and permit buyers are decreasing while the numbers of non-paying users are increasing. As fees are raised in an attempt to compensate, more license and permit buyers drop out.

Under H.B. 2797, all users 16 years old and older would have been required to purchase a "state-park-use license" to use state parks, wildlife areas or state fishing lakes. Persons with a hunting or fishing license could use wildlife areas and state fishing lakes without a public land license. H.B. 2797 did not remove the hunting and fishing license exemption for people 65 or older as some writers have claimed.

In most people's minds, H.B. 2797 was fair in that folks enjoying the areas would assume a major responsibility for supporting the areas they use. The suggested fees of \$10 for an annual-use license and \$3 or \$4 for a daily- or short-term-use license was not unreasonable. And those license costs would have been a fraction of the overall recreational costs for people who use the areas.

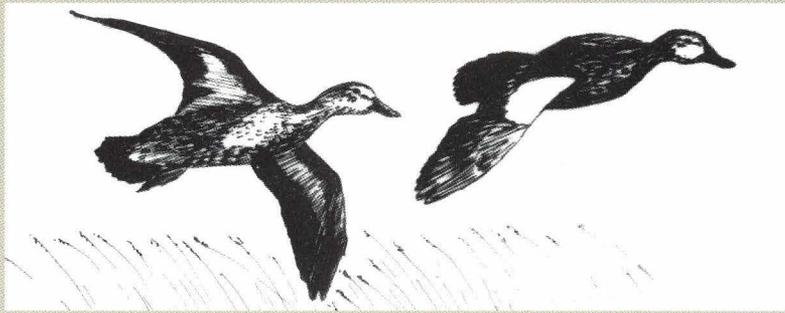
Several editorial writers have pointed out that their financial support over the years has helped establish and maintain our parks and public lands. Upon reaching a certain age, they maintained, use of the areas should be at no cost. I am not aware of that ever being the stated purpose for an age exemption, and I have been involved in many discussions involving exemptions. If that reasoning were true, then it should follow that a person who has helped build and maintain highways should be able to use the roads for free after reaching a certain age. Such is not the case, nor should it be.

Perhaps the most disturbing "letters to the editor" on this subject are those that criticize the representatives and senators who voted for H.B. 2797.

These elected officials took a very difficult stand during an election year in an attempt to keep parks and public areas open for their constituents. None relished their vote, but they recognized the serious funding problem and truly believed the proposals to be fair and their actions necessary. That leadership should be respected, not faulted.

The real question remains: Do people want a high-quality park and public land program in Kansas? I believe the answer is "Yes." However, it will not happen at today's funding level and with the attitude that "someone else should pay." Sixty-three representatives and six senators went on record to provide for the needs of their constituents by addressing the immediate and real funding shortages.

If there are other or even better methods to finance parks and public lands, work with those elected officials to identify those methods. Simply criticizing a vote is counter-productive. Legislators who voted for H.B. 2797 took a stand because they recognized the problems and wanted to improve conditions for their constituents. Make use of that recognition and interest and work with them to explore other, perhaps even better alternatives. The future of your state parks and public lands really does depend upon it.



EARLY TEAL

Waterfowl enthusiasts will be pleased to know that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has approved an early teal season again this year, which will run Sept. 10-18 in Kansas.

Early reports from the duck breeding grounds of the northcentral U.S. and south-central Canada have been encouraging, so teal hunters may be in for a good season. Green-winged teal have remained fairly stable throughout the years of decline in other duck species, and blue-winged teal are experiencing an upsurge in numbers.

The early teal season provides an excellent opportunity to introduce youngsters to the fine art of waterfowling. Temperatures are usually mild, and the extra hours of daylight allow hunters added time to learn and teach the subtleties of waterfowl identification, decoying and calling. Federal and state waterfowl stamps are required. —*Shoup*

'93 DEER REPORT

During the 1993 Kansas deer hunting season, 79,167 permits were issued, and approximately 40,000 deer were harvested. Regular firearms hunters harvested approximately 24,920 deer, for a 60-percent success ratio. Archery hunters harvested approximately 6,000 deer, 33-percent success. Hunt-Own-Land permit holders took an estimated 6,875 deer, for a success ratio just under 60 percent.

The remaining take was filled with Unit 12 Deer Game Tags and deer taken on military reservations. —*Shoup*

FORT RILEY ELK

Elk were first re-introduced to Fort Riley in 1986 when 12 animals were released onto the installation thanks to the combined efforts of the fort, the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks and local conservation organizations. Last January, 18 Rocky Mountain elk were released onto Fort Riley, where they joined a herd of approximately 60 other elk.

Primarily due to unregulated hunting, early pioneers to Kansas exterminated the species from the state in the 1800s. Today, Fort Riley has one of only two free-ranging herds in Kansas, the other being at the Cimarron National Grasslands in Morton County.

Because most of the original animals were stocked from a single herd, Fort Riley managers concluded that it was time to add some animals from a different genetic background. That effort was designed to prevent the eventual development of inbreeding problems such as reduced fertility, reduced resistance to diseases, and increased occurrences of birth defects.

The elk — five adult bulls, three bull calves and 13 cows — were brought to the fort by the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation through arrangements with the Wind Cave National Park in South Dakota. Prior to releasing the animals, radio-transmitter collars were placed on them to keep tabs on their movements at Fort Riley and monitor how well they integrate with those already there. The new additions, composed of all ages, are expected to mix quickly.

Fort Riley natural resources personnel, biologists from Kansas State University and members of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation were present at the release. —*The Kansas Sportsman*

AMMUNITION ASSURANCE

Ammunition should be treated with respect and common sense in handling, transportation, and storage. At home, ammunition should be stored in the factory package. The labeling and identification of the original package help ensure that the ammunition will be used in the intended gun. Avoid storing ammunition at high temperatures, e.g., in the trunk of a car or in an attic. Also avoid immersing ammunition in water or exposing it to chemicals, such as paint thinner, ammonia or penetrating oils.

Ideally, home storage should be in a locked cabinet out of sight and out of the reach of children. For added security against theft or unauthorized use, store guns and ammunition separately.

For more information on shooting sports, arms, and equipment, contact one of the following organizations: Federal Shooting Resource Center, 900 Ehlen Drive, Anoka, MN 55303; National Shooting Sports Foundation, 555 Danbury Rd., Wilton, CT 06897; National Rifle Association, 11250 Waples Mill Rd., Fairfax, VA 22030; Amateur Trapshooting Association, 601 W. National Rd., Vandalia, OH 45377; National Skeet Shooting Association, 5931 Rofth Rd., San Antonio, TX 78253; or National Sporting Clays Association, 5931 Rofth Rd., San Antonio, TX 78253. —*Federal Cartridge Company*

YOUTH AND HANDGUNS

Effective July 1, it became illegal for anyone under 18 to possess handguns in Kansas except for sporting uses. Gov. Joan Finney signed into law a bill making it a crime for minors to have handguns, and several other provisions getting tougher on juvenile criminals. —*Olathe Daily News*

FALCONS LOSE CHICK

Throughout the spring, a pair of peregrine falcons nested on a downtown Topeka office building. The falcons and their nest were secured from disturbance while observers monitored the birds' progress from inside nearby buildings.

The pair successfully hatched three young, but the excitement was somewhat diminished when one of the chicks was lost. The young falcon glided into an adjacent vacant lot where a Wildlife and Parks biologist retrieved and returned it, but it later died.

Even in natural nesting habitat, it is common for one or more young falcons to die before they are able to fly and fend for themselves. They may fall or even be forced from the nest by older siblings. The remaining chicks fledged within weeks.

The adult falcons first appeared in the downtown Topeka area in 1993 but failed to reproduce. The current offspring are the first peregrine falcons to nest in Kansas during modern times. The species was nearly eliminated in the 1950s, primarily due to contamination from the pesticide DDT. Since the banning of this chemical, peregrines have rebounded in traditional habitats and urban locations across the country, largely through releases of captive-raised birds. —*Marty Burke, Topeka*

CALL THE SHOT

Many of the best wildlife photographs are taken by luring animals close with game calls. This same trick can be used to enhance wildlife watching, outdoor programs, and nature walks.

Mouth-blown calls are inexpensive, easy to carry, and add interest to any program by way of demonstration. Their only drawback is that most require a good deal of practice for successful field use.

Perhaps of greater value for programs are cassette players and recorded animal calls. These are extremely easy to use and highly effective in attracting birds. Certain tapes, such as the screech owl, often call a dozen species of songbirds within five minutes. Songbirds respond with alarm to the call, expecting to mob an enemy.

Barred owls tapes are also highly successful in attracting barred owls at any time of day. Simply move off-trail and sit quietly at the base of a tree, then allow the tape to play at full volume in a central location. Most songbirds will voice alarm calls as they approach the recorder, yielding additional behavioral information to talk about.

Bird calls are easiest to use with groups, given the difficulty of moving people quietly into position for more wary subjects. However, cassette tapes

overcome this problem and may quickly call coyotes, bobcats, raccoons, turkeys, and other animals.

Though any battery-powered cassette player can work, those with directional speakers have greater range. One excellent caller is the Johnny Stewart MS-512. The Johnny Stewart company also has a complete line of inexpensive animal tapes. For more information, call them at (817) 772-3261 in Waco, Tex. —*Blair*

LIFE OF A LAKE

As a new lake fills, it floods vegetation and creates perfect hiding, spawning, and resting sites for fish. A population boom occurs. But as the lake ages, fish numbers decline as vegetation decays, reducing cover. This is a natural cycle of the lake.

Draining, adding brushpiles, fish stocking, and allowing lakes to refill results in a brand new lake.

Over time, siltation can rob large reservoirs of shallow water, affecting water clarity and fish productivity.

Reservoirs can be drained several feet below normal level in the fall and held until spring. After new vegetation has covered the exposed shoreline, the lake is allowed to return to normal level. Drawdowns immediately affect fish populations by concentrating prey species in a smaller area, making them more available to predators. —*Murrell*

"Deer In Kansas" -- This 43-minute video includes some of the most spectacular deer video ever shot. You'll see deer natural behavior through the seasons, including the exciting rut. Watch a buck rub a tree or challenge a rival. See deer in their daily struggle to survive and perpetuate this remarkable species. You'll watch it again and again. Hear management strategies from the professionals who've made the Kansas deer herd what it is today. Anyone who hunts or watches deer will love this natural history video. Act now and take advantage of this special offer: Order the video for \$20, and we'll send you a year's subscription of *Kansas Wildlife and Parks* magazine for only \$5. That's \$3 off the normal subscription price. Send your order today!

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send credit card or check order to: Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, Public Information, 512 SE 25th Ave., Pratt, KS 67124-8174 or call (316) 672-5911. (allow 2-4 weeks for delivery)

MAXWELL WAGON TOURS

A new way to experience the Kansas prairie made its debut on Memorial Day weekend at the Maxwell Wildlife Refuge, seven miles north of Canton in McPherson County.

The refuge was the setting for tours and programs throughout the summer. Wagon-like trams carried visitors through the 2,000-acre prairie, home to free-roaming herds of bison and elk. Nature walks and other programs will also be featured on the refuge and around the adjacent McPherson State Fishing Lake.

These new opportunities are made possible by a cooperative arrangement between the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks and the newly-formed Friends of Maxwell, a non-profit citizens' organization that has raised funds and supported Maxwell since last year.

For information on tour prices, schedules, special tour packages, and the refuge, contact the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, Region 4 Office, P.O. Box 317, Valley Center KS 67147, or call (316) 755-2711. —*Chris Havel, wildlife and park program specialist, Pratt*

DREAM CAMP

Since the early 1970s, a church camp once known as Camp Alubro has been abandoned and unused. But the dusty brick building on the north shore of Cedar Bluff won't be abandoned much longer. The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks donated the camp to

Dream Inc., a Hays-based non-profit organization that provides summer activities for children. —*Hays Daily News*

PERRY DREAMER

Trail blazer Dorothy Moore charts her life by the dreams she has realized. In addition to being a writer and weekly square dancer, the 66-year-old Merriam resident has hiked across much of the U. S. and even spent three months last year backpacking across Alaska. Hiking at Perry Lake, though, has been a special pastime. In 1974, after "discovering" Perry Lake, Moore founded the Kansas Trails Council, which since has built the 30 miles of hiking trails at Perry. —*Lawrence Journal-World*

SUBJECT SOUGHT

KDWP photographer Mike Blair is looking for any of the following photo subjects for future *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine stories: hairy woodpecker nest, pileated woodpecker nest, and screech owl nest.

If anyone knows of such locations, they are requested to contact Mike at the Pratt Operations Office, (316) 672-5911. Please keep in mind that this is a request for subjects, not photographs. —*Mathews*

CITY MAINTAINS SFL

In a 5-year cooperative agreement with the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, the City of Greensburg will assume maintenance and repair responsibilities for Kiowa State Fishing Lake. In exchange, Wildlife and Parks will allow the city to use

water from the lake's supply well.

This is one of a handful of agreements the state agency has made with cities, volunteer groups and other organizations in an effort to reduce operating costs.

Wildlife and Parks owns and operates the lake and holds the water right to the well that fills the lake. In this relatively arid part of Kansas, the agreement should be beneficial to both parties. The City of Greensburg will be responsible for maintenance and repair of the well, its pump, and all facilities at the lake, including a boat ramp, picnic tables, a road, a water fountain, parking lots, and a toilet. The city will also be responsible for maintaining minimum lake water levels. Wildlife and Parks will continue to manage the lake's fishery.

Currently, the department has a similar agreement with the City of Medicine Lodge to maintain Barber State Fishing Lake, and other such agreements are possible elsewhere in Kansas in years to come. —*Shoup*

WATCHING WILD KANSAS

Watching wildlife in a natural setting appeals to almost everyone. No fancy equipment or special skills are required to witness the wonders of nature. A doe and her fawn feeding in a wheat field, a bald eagle soaring overhead, or a prairie chicken doing the dance of love are just a few of these wonders that Kansans enjoy.

Kansans are fortunate that many species of wildlife can

be seen throughout the year. White-tailed deer, raccoons and various hawks can be found statewide, while elk, buffalo and even roadrunners appear in certain locales. Many species are nocturnal, but trips scheduled early in the morning or late in the evening can provide a glimpse of these secretive creatures. Spring and fall are ideal times to look for wildlife because they are often very active at these times.

Wildlife watching techniques vary from stalking and building blinds to simply driving the backroads, but the casual observer really needs nothing more than keen eyes to relish the sights. However, a good pair of binoculars or a spotting scope mounted on a tripod allows more detailed observation. Field guides are helpful for identification of unknown animals you might encounter.

Watching Kansas Wildlife, a viewing guide produced by the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, lists several "can't miss" spots to view wildlife. This 104-page guide identifies 101 prime viewing sites and lists locations, species present and facilities on the area. Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area and Quivira National Wildlife Refuge are two of the best places to find shorebirds and waterfowl.

Copies of *Watching Kansas Wildlife* are available for \$10 from any Wildlife and Parks regional or state park office, or by contacting the Pratt Operations Office, 512 SE 25th Ave., Pratt, KS 67124, (316) 672-5911. —*Murrell*

Let's Go Hunting!

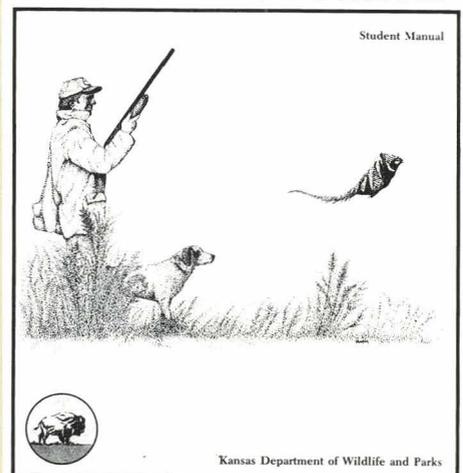
Hunting with your mom and dad can be lots of fun, and it's a great way to learn more about nature and the outdoors. Dove and teal seasons open in September and are perfect for young, beginning hunters. You won't get too cold or too hot, and there's usually plenty to see and learn about.



Before you go hunting, you must complete a Hunter Education Course. The course is sponsored by the Department of Wildlife and Parks and is taught by volunteer instructors from all across Kansas. Instructors are usually experienced hunters who want to pass on their hunting and firearm safety knowledge to young people. The course lasts 10 hours, usually over several evenings and a Saturday morning, and you'll have to pass a test at the end. But don't worry, it's fun and interesting and you'll learn neat stuff about Kansas wildlife, conservation, hunting regulations, hunter ethics, and firearm and bowhunting safety. Have Mom or Dad call the nearest Wildlife and Parks office for a course schedule. Area instructors will usually conduct courses in August, September and October.

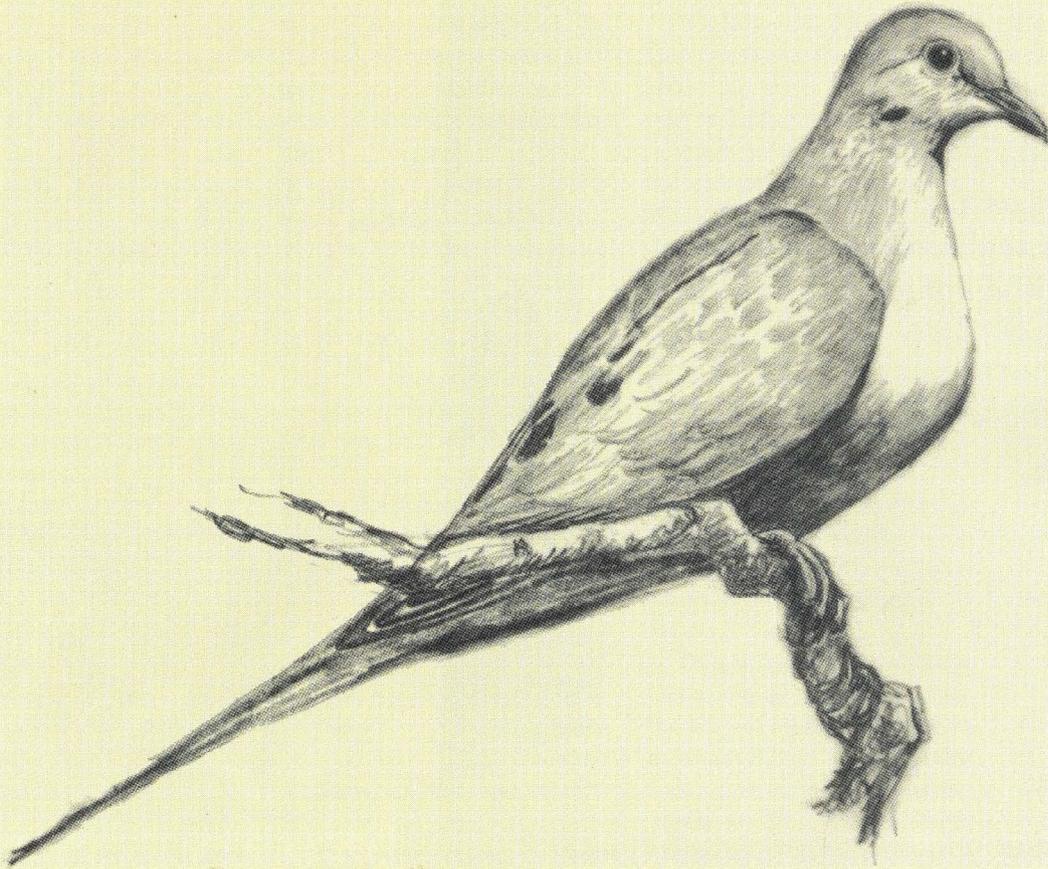
Kansas

Hunter Education



Once you pass the course, you're ready to start learning about hunting.

Mourning dove season opens on September 1. Doves are the most numerous game bird in North America, and Kansas usually has very high dove populations through the summer. Doves are migratory, meaning they fly south in the fall to avoid the cold temperatures. And it doesn't take very cold weather to make a dove migrate. If the weather is hot and dry in early September, there will be lots of doves, but if it's cool and wet, many will head south.



Dove hunting can be action-packed, especially when hunting near a pond in the evening. You may see hundreds of birds fly by, but it's certainly not easy. You'll want to be sure to shoot a lot of practice shells before the season because doves fly fast and are hard to hit. Even good shooters will hit only one out of three.

Remember: ask your mom and dad about taking a hunter education course -- they might even take it with you. Then, with mom or dad's help, practice shooting before the season opens. Find a public hunting area near your home, or ask a landowner for permission to hunt. Your whole family can have a blast being outdoors together, hunting and learning about the Kansas outdoors.



How To Stalk A Skunk

I'm not much of a skunk hunter; not that I couldn't be if I took a notion. It's just that skunk hunting has never gotten in my blood. Nevertheless, I've proven on several occasions that, if I was so inclined, I could be a darned good skunk hunter, maybe even legendary.

So, even though I don't avidly pursue skunks (at least not on purpose), I feel obliged to offer my expertise to those who might want to try. You see, I've been face to face with a number of skunks and through those harrowing encounters, I've discovered my innate ability to get very close to our most malodorous varmint. Some folks brag about stalking deer, and some like to sneak up on ducks and geese, but you never hear them boast about skunk stalking. Few have a true, instinctive skunk stalking skill. I guess I'm just blessed.

The first step is learning about your quarry: *Mephitis mephitis*, the striped skunk. Most people know very little about the creature because they run the opposite direction whenever they sense the first hint of a skunk's presence. You'll never learn about skunks that way. And you certainly won't get hair-raisingly close to one, either.

I've spent hours learning about skunks from my deer stand. My buddies think I stayed in the tree because I was afraid of getting sprayed, but I honestly saw the opportunity to learn. I noticed right away that a skunk appears to pay little attention to anything but what's right in front of its nose. Some would interpret this lack of wariness to mean the skunk is stupid — an easy mark. I disagree. The skunk isn't so much stupid as it is apathetic. It really doesn't care if you're nearby; the striped one always has an ace up its sleeve (or under its tail if you prefer).

But when you get inside the skunk's comfort zone, things can get exciting. From my experience, that zone is about 3 feet. A seemingly preoccupied animal can suddenly become quite alert to your presence. And, to the skunk hunter's adrenaline delight, the skunk rarely turns and runs.

Most of my really close skunk encounters have been while walking into the spring turkey woods at daybreak, or leaving my deer stand after sunset. Some might assume these upclose encounters were a result of me not seeing the skunk in the darkness in time to avoid it. But I actually look forward to these meetings — to test myself under pressure.

Although I've never hunted grizzly bears in Alaska or leopards in Africa, I think my skunk episodes have been as exciting. Keeping your cool in the face of danger is the essence of skunk stalking. And regardless of what you've heard, my pants were wet after my last skunk encounter because of an unusually heavy dew that morning.

Because of the skunk's unique camouflage, it can just appear at close range in the dark. What looked like a dark clump of grass through sleepy eyes suddenly turns toward you and does a little handstand. Boy, will that will wake you



Dana Eastes illustration

up! Think fast. Keep cool. Your first move must be swift, yet planned. To stumble now would be disastrous (and would probably inhibit your social life for about a month). Quickly check the wind's direction. Wind direction is important in all big game hunting, but big game hunters prefer to be downwind of their quarry. I've learned that just the opposite is true with skunks. Don't ask why — just get upwind fast.

The next move is what I call the standoff. You simply stand there and stare at the skunk. A buddy once accused me of being scared stiff, but the truth was I was trying to disguise my next move. I was also trying to figure out which end of the skunk I was looking at (another important factor).

After several tense seconds, I usually make a casual, but hasty, loop around the still unmoved skunk, always maintaining my upwind advantage. For some reason, this fast walk through waist-high grass and sandhill plum bushes while keeping an eye on the skunk always makes my hunting partner laugh hysterically. The stumbling and near falls are all part of the plan — to keep the skunk off guard — as is the terrified look on my face.

If you're looking for an exciting, death defying challenge, try sky diving. If you want about the same amount of excitement with less risk (getting sprayed won't kill you but you'll wish it had), try skunk stalking. It requires skill, stealth and cool actions under pressure. And if you find yourself at close quarters with a skunk, don't be embarrassed if you forget some of what I've told you. I truly believe that much of my skunk stalking ability is natural. I guess it just comes easy to me.



