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On Point

by Mike Hayden



2006 Legislative Update

The 2006 Kansas legislative session is drawing to a close, with the regular session ending in late April. I want to highlight three important bills initiated or supported by the department that have been signed by the Governor. These bills are Senate Bill 417, Senate Bill 578, and House Bill 2899.

Senate Bill 417, introduced by KDWP, is a bill that we have been working on for three years, and its passage marks a milestone in Kansas recreational boating. Several portions of the boating law hadn't been updated since the late 1950s and early 1960s. The bill will update many outdated definitions, require documented vessels to be registered with KDWP, and require vessels to display a registration expiration decal. Additionally, all watercraft will be required to carry an efficient whistle or sound-producing device, and water skiing hours will change to prohibit skiing from one-half hour after sunset to one-half hour before sunrise. A skier down flag will be required to be displayed while a skier is in the water getting ready to ski and while the skier is being retrieved. Other provisions of the law deal with altering a boat's hull identification number, abandoned vessels, and procedures for law enforcement personnel handling these situations. There are 98,000 registered boats in Kansas and about 186,000 acres of public waters, plus 3 publicly accessible rivers, making recreational boating a significant part of the state's outdoor recreation. KDWP works to provide the safest possible environment for boating, and this bill will aid that effort. The provisions of this bill become law January 1, 2007.

Senate Bill 578, severely limits ownership of lions, tigers, leopards, jaguars, cheetahs, and mountain lions, and related hybrids; as well as, bears and non-native venomous snakes. The Kansas Wildlife and Parks Commission had spent two years developing regulations governing ownership of big cats. Then a tragic event spurred public interest last fall when a tiger killed a teenage girl in southeast Kansas while she was having her senior pictures taken. Senator

Dwayne Umbarger, in consultation with KDWP and the Animal Health Department, introduced legislation that will significantly restrict ownership of these animals and prohibit direct contact with the public. This new law places most of the regulatory responsibility on cities and counties, while KDWP will develop regulations concerning housing requirements for the animals and the standards for handlers. The bill will require owners of these animals to meet USDA standards for managing the animals, and they will have to register with their local animal control authority. In addition, owners will have to carry at least \$250,000 in liability insurance or be bonded. This bill takes effect July 1, 2006.

I appreciate the diligent work KDWP Law Enforcement Division staff put into both of these bills.

The third bill I want to highlight is House Bill 2899, which prohibits sport hunting of feral hogs. Feral hogs are descended from domestic hogs that have escaped or been set free. Within a couple of generations, these pigs return to a wild state and pose great threats to domestic livestock and the environment. Feral hogs compete with native species for food, destroy habitat through rooting and wallowing, and may spread diseases such as brucellosis and pseudorabies to domestic livestock. Feral swine are present on public and private lands across the state.

The Kansas Animal Health Department (KAHD) has statutory authority for controlling feral swine, but KDWP supported this bill, which precludes the importing, transporting, possessing, and sport hunting of feral swine. The new bill allows landowners, or a designee of the landowner, to kill pigs found on their property. A designee must have a permit from the KAHD. This bill takes effect July 1, 2006.

These bills take important steps to protect the public and help ensure enjoyable outdoor experiences. While these bills may not directly affect all Kansans, they will have a positive impact on the quality of life in the state.

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Front Cover: Collared lizards and other nongame wildlife benefit from state wildlife grants. Mike Blair filmed this lizard with a 200mm micro lens, f/11 @ 1/500th sec. **Back:** Mike Blair filmed a white-tailed doe browsing the young leaves of an American elm. Elm has many benefits. 600mm, f/8 @ 1/500th sec.



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A Future for Kansas Wildlife

by **Ken Brunson**
wildlife diversity coordinator, Pratt

photos by **Mike Blair**
associate editor/photographer, Pratt

Wildlife species with critical habitat and management needs will benefit from the State Wildlife Grants program and Kansas' Comprehensive Wildlife Management Plan.

It was 1936 when concerned hunters, conservationists and politicians successfully lobbied for the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, or Pittman/Robertson Act, to be passed by Congress and signed by President Roosevelt. The Act stipulated

that the excise taxes on sporting arms and ammunition be applied back to the states for wildlife restoration programs. The states were required to provide a 25 percent match. Since that milestone in wildlife management, more than \$4 billion has been

raised for wildlife programs. That's in addition to the billions of hunter dollars provided through license, stamp and permit sales. The truth is nearly all of today's major wildlife programs were and are funded by hunters.

So what's the problem? We'll there's a couple. For one, our population has become increasingly urban in the last 20 years and as that shift has taken place, the percent of our population who hunt has steadily declined. While there are fewer hunters today, they spend more, and they're still providing the bulk of wildlife management funding. But what will happen in 20 years? If the number of hunters continues to decline, additional funding sources will be necessary just to maintain programs. And what about programs for species that aren't hunted, or threatened and endangered species? How will state agencies pay for those management programs? It's time for others to chip in.

Fortunately, a new program called State Wildlife Grants, or SWG, is currently in place. Conservationists crafted SWG to provide funds to complement the longstanding programs for sport fish and game. Called "nongame" at one time, the "other" species have benefited from habitat programs funded through Pittman/Robertson Act. But there is a critical need to fund specific programs for these species.

"A Future for Kansas Wildlife" is the introductory title of the State Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan, recently completed so that the department is eligible for SWG. But before we examine this plan, let's backtrack. In the 1980s, the department began addressing growing urban constituencies by locating

offices in urban areas. We started urban fisheries programs. We located more technical staff to address the majority of Kansans who lived in metropolitan areas. We started nongame programs and a Wildlife Education Service to educate a public increasingly out of touch with wildlife. During the 1990s, the department began involvement in a national effort to secure long-term funding for nongame. The funding initiative is called Teaming With Wildlife (TWW), and it isn't in place, but it is still alive. Major wildlife viewing programs were initiated in nearly every state wildlife and federal land management agency as a continual evolution of marketing to a generally wildlife-friendly public. TWW attracted support from more than 3,000 organizations nationally — the largest ever on any issue. The initial effort was called "CARA" (Conservation and Reinvestment Act) which ultimately morphed into State Wildlife Grants (SWG). Congress promised six years of

funding for SWG. So far, Congress has followed through. But the six years is up this year and the TWW effort continues, determined to get the long-term funding commitment for long-term wildlife conservation needs.

SWG grants must be matched with state funds just as the sport fish and wildlife programs require. The intent of SWG is to address the broad array of species not formerly addressed by either the fish and game programs or the endangered species act. The program's focus is on preventing species from needing to be listed. The concept of preventative conservation medicine is valid, saving money from expensive recovery efforts. Kansas has 59 species on its threatened and endangered species list. It has another 70 on the Species in Need of Conservation List. Efforts are underway to recover species on these lists so they can be ultimately de-listed. If we are successful, we can keep them off the federal lists. And just as the



Amy Zavala photo

To better manage wildlife, good data is necessary. Many of the first SWG-funded projects involved getting up-to-date habitat and assessment information on priority species.



Species of Greatest Conservation Need were identified and many are considered indicator species, meaning their status signals the condition of our environment.

sport fish and wildlife habitat programs benefited nongame wildlife, the SWG habitat programs will also benefit game species. Current funding for SWG in Kansas is almost \$1 million per year, but original plans and expectations are for a major annual contribution of \$6-\$7 million per year for Kansas. At this level, the program would create the substantial third leg of fish and wildlife funding support, equaling the amounts contributed through the sport fish and wildlife restoration programs for sport fish and game animals.

As part of the SWG agreement with Congress, states were required to develop plans. So plan we did. KDWP staff met, discussed, consulted, argued, wrote, and edited. At the major summit held in February of 2005, more than 70 wildlife experts refined issues and strategies for wildlife in Kansas. In all, more than 200 technical experts and 125 department Fisheries

and Wildlife Division staff participated in the planning effort. Public comment was invited and incorporated throughout the process. The final product, "A Future for Kansas Wildlife," was unveiled in last December.

Even before its final acceptance by the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service last fall, this action plan was being used. A key part of the plan is identifying Species of Greatest Conservation Need (go to the KDWP website for specifics on these 315 species). Several filters were used to select these species. They received higher rankings if they were not already receiving attention from the federal Endangered

Species Act or existing sport fish and wildlife restoration program. Through the ranking process, species that made the list were perhaps already on state sensitive species lists, but the list may also include those that appeared to be headed for trouble or those where additional status information is needed. Remember, the SWG purpose is to keep species from being listed federally. So, state listed species or those headed in that direction receive priority.

The plan also ranks habitats so that an ecosystem approach would make sense for potential projects. In a logical approach, prioritized habitats and highest ranked species receive first attention. Many of the projects deal with "indicator" species, meaning they are indicators of



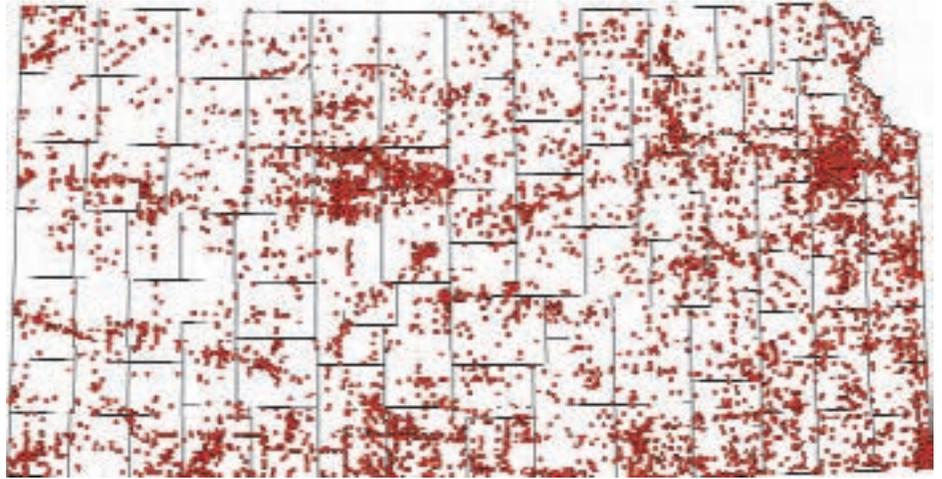
One purpose of SWG and the comprehensive wildlife conservation plan is to keep species from being listed on the federal Threatened and Endangered Species list.

quality habitat. Their disappearance may portend a more serious problem, and even an unhealthy situation for humans. In essence, by protecting these species, we also protect our quality of environment and, therefore, our quality of life.

Presented here are three highlighted SWG projects. The first is the *Kansas Herpetological Atlas*. Beginning in the fall of 2003, SWG funds allowed staff at the Sternberg Museum of Fort Hays State University to begin a comprehensive assessment of the status of Kansas amphibians, reptiles and turtles. Nearly 15,000 new records were obtained, mostly through field surveys — trapping, collecting, and observing at over 4,000 sites. These records will greatly assist in determining trend information on many species. As a result of this comprehensive status update, reconsiderations for listings of several species are expected. The tremendous success of the *Kansas Herpetological Atlas* will be a springboard for an upcoming *Kansas Mammal Atlas*.

The first order of business for wildlife management is up-to-date information, and SWG is supplying the muscle to get it done. In this manner, SWG is allowing us to identify and prevent problems before they threaten wildlife and affect humans.

A second highlighted project is the Shortgrass Prairie Bird Survey. Grassland bird species are among the most threatened. This project involved the western third of the state. Many species such as Baird's sparrow, western meadowlark, and grasshopper sparrow have shown marked declines in recent



The map shows locations where researchers documented 15,000 new records for reptile and amphibians at 4,000 sites, creating the *Kansas Herpetological Atlas*.

years. Conducted by the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, this effort established some outstanding monitoring information, providing sound data from which to judge the status of many species. This will translate into on-the-ground programs and projects to assist land managers and landowners through incentives designed to improve the status for these species.

A third featured project has been a study in the Red Hills to assess various grazing practices on ground-nesting birds. Paddock-style rotational grazing is catching on. There's also a candidate federal species, the lesser prairie chicken, in the area. We needed to know whether this intensive style of patch grazing impacts this species along with other ground nesters. The study generally found no significant differences between impacts of paddock style grazing to other management schemes, at least in the Red Hills. This gives some relief to the fear that intensifying the concentration of livestock might have negative affects on pro-

ductivity of ground nesting birds such as the lesser prairie chicken. SWG projects are making measurable strides in our knowledge base, helping us to keep common species common while delicately addressing sensitive species needs. Taking pro-active approaches based on sound science is good management.

Future generations will come to know the privileges of enjoying wildlife and wild places, and they'll know them because of the efforts of some very determined conservationists earlier in the century. These were people who saw the value wildlife add to the quality of life for Kansans, and employed reasonable approaches to keeping wildlife off of endangered species lists. We all expect it. Everyone wants it. Thankfully, we'll have it if we maintain the course and see the long-term funding through Teaming With Wildlife and State Wildlife Grants fulfilled. ♡



Some of the grassland bird species have shown declines in recent years. One SWG study looked at the effects grazing and burning had on these species.

Projects of State Wildlife Grants from the beginning in 2001

(Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program, or WCRP, projects were the predecessors SWG efforts for the first year.)

Assessment of Streams on Public Lands

Streams occurring on public lands throughout Kansas were surveyed with a focus on determining the extent of exotic species. Surveys were done through private contract and by KDWP's Environmental Services Section staff.

Volunteer Stream Monitoring

Contracted through Stream Link of the Kaw Valley Heritage Alliance, this project involved around 9,000 students and 760 adults in assessing water quality in streams.

Support

"Kansas Waters" Exhibit

WCRP funds helped the Lee Richardson Zoo at Garden City complete a great water education exhibit.

Assist with

Monarch Watch Program

This WCRP project supplied some additional support for the Monarch Watch Program, a valuable educational effort of the University of Kansas.

Sensitive Species Data Management

Cooperating with the Kansas Biological Survey, this effort incorporated new records of sensitive species into a data management program to make it easier to assess distributions and status of species.

Develop Recovery Plans

SWG supported recovery plans for additional state sensitive species, including the prairie mole cricket, peppered chub, and Henslow's sparrow.

Apply Recovery Strategies

SWG supported work toward recovery strategies for the Arkansas River darter, snowy plover, slender walker snail and the spotted skunk.

Section-based Inventory of Shortgrass Prairie Birds

Contracted through the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, this several year project assessed the occurrence of grassland species which are showing some of the most marked declines in populations of any birds. This baseline information will be used for cooperative and incentive programs for improving the situation for these species.

Nature Center Operations and Conservation Education Services

SWG allowed for continuation and expansion of some services offered from nature centers and through the Wildlife Education Service of KDWP.

Summer Naturalist Program

Initially the WCRP program allowed for continuation of the popular Summer Naturalist Program at our state parks.

Kanopolis State Park Wildlife Viewing Development

A wildlife viewing area and trail were part of this initial WCRP project.

Support for Southeast Kansas Nature Center

This project provided some assistance for this special nature center in the southeast corner of the state.

Evaluate Ground Nesters in Red Hills Under Varying Grazing Practices

One of our highlighted projects, this effort provides valuable guidance for assessing paddock-style grazing impacts to birds such as the lesser prairie chicken.

Evaluate Freshwater Mussel Populations in Southeastern Kansas Streams

This recently completed project supplied thorough assessments for some of the states most sensitive species. This baseline information and update of status will assist in recovery projects for many sensitive species in this part of the state and which constitute a large percentage of the state's threatened and endangered species.

Develop a Non-indigenous Invasive Species Management Plan

The biggest threat to many Species of Greatest Conservation Need may be exotic species. SWG supported the development of strategies to deal with this pressing threat.



Scientists search an area for reptiles and amphibians while compiling the data for the *Kansas Herpetological Atlas*. Suzanne Collins photo

Inventory for Natural Areas in Northeast Kansas

Using the Kansas Biological Survey, this effort identified remnant natural areas of northeast Kansas and assessed their biological communities.

Distribution and Status of Kansas Herpetofauna in Need of Information

As another featured project in this article, the Kansas Herp Atlas supplied a monumental amount of information on the distribution and occurrence of Kansas herps.

Develop State Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan

SWG helped pay for the preparation of "A Future for Kansas Wildlife," Kansas' Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan.

Statewide Survey of Sensitive Fishes and Mussels

SWG supplied funds to continue the statewide stream survey, supplying critical monitoring information for Kansas stream fish and mussel species.

Anderson County Prairie Conservation Project

This was a project that allowed The Nature Conservancy to acquire some critical property adjacent to existing tallgrass prairie owned by the organization and through willing sellers.

Aquatic GAP

This project, conducted through Kansas State University, is permitting the application of fish species observation records through critical analysis to determine existing and predicted distributions. The effort will help reveal gaps in distributions and guidance in recovery projects for sensitive species.

Detection of T-2 Producing Fusarium Species in Kansas Soybeans

Biologists are concerned about T-2 fusarium, a fungi which is toxic to birds. This effort will identify the distribution of this threat so that future actions may be developed to address it.

Instream Flow Assessment

This is a project to assess existing instream flows and determine their utility in maintaining healthy aquatic habitats.

'Gill Quest:

The Search for Giant Bluegills

text and photos
by Mike Blair



It takes years and some special circumstances to grow truly big bluegills in Kansas. However, dedicated 'gill lovers are always on the lookout for that special pond.

The pond surprised us. Though its owner had mentioned some “old-fashioned sun perch,” the dingy water raised few hopes for big bluegills. But it was the right time of year, and besides, the closest big sunnies we knew of were 80 miles away. We launched our float tubes and began casting.

Jennie, my daughter and fishing partner, dropped a black-and-gray wooley worm into the shade of an overhanging limb and felt an instant surge.

“Whoa!” she yelled, as the five-weight fly rod doubled over. “This fights like a bluegill, but it pulls like a big bass.” After a frantic battle that tore up the shallow water and clearly indicated something of size, she lipped a beautiful hybrid bluegill measuring 12 inches on her tube’s casting apron. Weighing a pound and a half, that’s a monster sunfish in anyone’s book.

She wasted little time admiring it but eagerly returned to fishing. Two casts later, an 11-

incher pounded the fly and anchored her hopes: we’d found bluegill paradise. Before the afternoon was over, more than 50 of the giant hybrids had fallen to our flies.

This phenomenal trip was due partly to good timing, but more importantly, to the lucky discovery of a trophy fishery. There isn’t an angler alive who doesn’t love to catch giant ‘gills, but few actively pursue these sunfish because of their typically small size. Most waters produce bluegills in the 7-8 inch range,

hardly worth getting excited about. But rarely, certain factors combine to produce oversized 'gills that are trophies in every sense of the word. Persistence is the key to finding them.

Bluegills are excellent angling targets, since they're abundant throughout most of the continental United States. They're probably the most "learned-on" fish there is, for even the youngest angler can catch them with worm and bobber. They are common in reservoirs and ponds and also in streams and river lacking swift current. They grow fastest in the warm waters of southern states, but may reach trophy proportions throughout their northern range. A bluegill is usually considered trophy-sized when it measures 10 inches long or weighs one pound.

Few anglers ever see bluegills this large. Bluegills are prolific, which makes them abundant and easy to catch but also affects their trophy potential. They may spawn several times each season, producing 12,000 to 60,000 eggs in each nest. Many fry are lost through predation, but even so, high bluegill populations quickly develop to compete for food. When too many adult bluegills are present, competition means that few 'gills grow beyond 8 inches in size.

Trophy bluegill waters usually have a magic combination of factors that help to control runaway sunfish populations. Trophy haunts are not always easy to spot, but four water conditions are usually evident. These are impoundments of at least several acres in size; moderate weed growth harboring excellent food supplies; under-

water clarity of at least 18 inches; and many small bass or other predator fish.

As it turned out, our newly discovered pond had all these ingredients except clarity. We later learned the water was temporarily murky only because of recent heavy rains. Clarity is important in producing big bluegills because it makes their young more susceptible to predation. If you're after big bulls, skip waters that are consistently dingy. Dirty water makes it easier for young bluegills to hide. Ponds drained by farm ground or used to water livestock seldom produce big sunfish. The same is true in impoundments where rough fish populations dirty the water.

Size of the impoundment doesn't necessarily affect fish size, but it does affect the number of trophy bluegills available. An acre of water can carry

only a given number of sunfish, depending on how large they are. For instance, an acre that supports 750 bluegill fingerlings can provide for only about 275 sunnies in the 3-5 inch class. The number drops to 250 for 6-8 inch fish, and to 200 for bluegills 9-10 inches long. In those rare ponds where 11- and 12-inch bluegills exist, capacity drops well below 100 per acre. Therefore, if an angler in a small pond fishes for these giants during a vulnerable time such as the spawning period, it's conceivable that most of the big fish can be taken in just a couple of outings. Once gone, they're often not replaced by a trophy class unless factors favorable for trophy production remain constant. Obviously, larger impoundments can carry larger numbers of trophy 'gills, reducing the risk of over fishing.

Trophy bluegill haunts are usually somewhat weedy with



Any bluegill over 10 inches long is considered a quality sunfish to serious 'gill seekers. Big bluegills are tenacious fighters and use their saucer shape to its full advantage, making them challenging quarry on a fly rod or light spinning tackle.

large areas of open water. Moderate weed growth helps oxygenate water, and harbors a tremendous complex of aquatic insects and invertebrates that serve as food for young sunfish. Weeds also provide shade for trophy 'gills, concentrating them during summer months in water more shallow and accessible than the deeper hangouts they otherwise prefer. But limited vegetation is the key. Too many weeds can shield young 'gills from effective predation, leading to overpopulation and stunting.

A final ingredient – perhaps most important – is a healthy predator base. Throughout much of the U.S., bluegills are stocked as a food source for largemouth bass. As bass and bluegills mature from initial stockings, natural reproduction takes over. In the right water conditions (generally, those already mentioned here,) vigorous young bass popu-



Large numbers of small bass in pond will keep bluegill numbers low, and allow the surviving 'gills to grow big.



As much fun as they are to catch, bluegills are equally tasty to eat. A mess of large sunfish like this will yield several pounds of sweet white meat.

lations hold the bluegills in check. But once bluegills get ahead, the trophy potential for sunfish is lost.

This phenomenon is commonly experienced after initial stockings. Excellent big bluegill fishing may be enjoyed 4-5 years after a pond or lake is first stocked. But a few years later, the giant sunnies disappear, never to return. This is because of the artificial balance created at the time of stocking, before natural reproduction of bass and bluegills really kicks in. At first, fish numbers remain within acceptable carrying capacities and are able to enjoy full growth potential. But as the original fish mature and reproduce, an imbalance may occur. If water conditions aren't just right, sunfish overpopulate, the food supply is taxed, and small 'gills may actually become nest predators of the bass themselves. Bass fall farther behind, with the net effect that the bluegill

size potentially drops to its typically modest range.

This is why maintaining consistent trophy bluegill fisheries is difficult. Only certain water situations can foster ongoing generations of trophy 'gills. Fisheries biologists recognize this and may sometimes recommend management of these special areas for big sunfish to the exclusion of other interests.

This often involves a tight manipulation of the bass crop – with a harvest strategy that might seem backward to the largemouth angler. Many modern bass fishers are likely to release all fish caught, especially the large ones. If bass are taken, it's usually the smaller fish that can quickly be replaced. But this strategy actually works against trophy bluegill production. For big 'gills, it's better to remove all bass larger than 15 inches, leaving smaller, more active bass as a predator base.

This is true for several reasons.

Large bass tend to select food items larger than bluegill fry, eating bigger meals less often. Small bass actively pursue young bluegills, and due to their own growth stage, tend to eat constantly. Obviously, this makes them more efficient as sunfish predators.

A second reason involves the carrying capacity of an acre of water. While a good pond might support only 15 bass in the 12-15 inch size class, the same acre will support 60 bass in the 8-12 inch range. Thus, more young fish will eat more bluegills than fewer large fish. Culling the bass population to favor small bass translates into more efficient sunfish control, allowing bluegills to reach their trophy potential. To maintain lunker bluegill waters, all large bass should be removed.

While the hardest part of catching giant bluegills is finding them, their spooky nature makes them challenging targets even



Bluegills spawn in early to mid-June and spawning beds are visible in clear ponds. When the bluegills are on the beds is a great time to catch them on fly tackle.

then. Unlike their smaller cousins, they can be line-shy and finicky. They tend to hang deeper than expected and may be caught at least 20 feet deep where such water exists. In ponds, look for 10-foot water if possible.

Best bets for catching monster bluegills are 2-inch minnows or minnow imitations on a size 6 hook, using 4-pound-test line. Nightcrawlers and crickets also make excellent live bait choices. Fly-fishing is often considered a topwater bluegill pursuit, but is far more effective using paired nymphs or small bugs fished deeply and slowly. Since bluegills have a highly developed sense of smell, artificial lures and flies can sometimes be improved by the addition of panfish scent, wax-worms, or small pork strips.

Giant bluegills are worthy trophies for even the most serious angler. Due to their scarcity and feeding habits, they're not likely to be caught by accident. But once found, they offer an exciting challenge that keeps a fisher on the lookout for suitable haunts. Fight a 12-inch bluegill a time or two, and it might even change your bass fishing tactics. ♡



The turquoise matriculation on this fish's gill cover identify it as a sunfish hybrid. Hybrids are popular in small ponds because they grow fast.

TERNs AND PLOVERS ON THE KANSAS RIVER



text and photos by
Michael A. Watkins
wildlife biologist,
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

After the floods of the early 1990s, the Kansas River sandbars were ideal nesting habitat for least terns and piping plovers. A five-year study uncovered some interesting information about these unique birds.

Dr. Roger Boyd flipped the toggle switch on the remote control and the trap sprang shut. He bolted from his hiding place behind the large piece of driftwood and raced toward the interior least tern he had just captured. He gingerly cradled the bird and slowly untangled it from the netting. Holding the bird in one hand, he reset the trap with the other, being careful not to disturb the eggs in the nest cup. He quickly made his way through the predator fence and back across

the sandbar to the cover of the pile of driftwood.

Within minutes, the captured bird's mate had settled over the eggs and assumed the incubation responsibilities. "Judging from the extent of the black tip on the beak, this appears to be the female," Boyd said. He took a variety of measurements to determine the gender and health of the bird. The adults have identical plumage, but the male is slightly larger than the female. The measurements confirmed his suspicions that this was the female tern.

Boyd attached a standard U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) aluminum band to one leg and a plastic light blue visual identification band to the other.

"The color designates where and when the bird was banded," Boyd said. "For example, the light blue indicates this bird was banded on the Kansas River in 2004." He released the female and triggered the trap to catch the male.

The least tern is the smallest tern found in North America,

measuring only 9 inches long and with a 20-inch wingspan. It is a sleek white bird with a gray back, a black crown and yellow beak tipped with black. It frequently hovers while hunting and feeds on small baitfish from 1 to 3 inches in length.

The piping plover on the other hand is a small, stocky, sandy-colored bird with a black breast band, measuring 6 1/2 inches in length and resembling a killdeer or sandpiper. It runs in spurts in the wet sand in search of beach-dwelling invertebrates, including insects, small crustaceans, and marine worms.

In 1985, both birds were listed as federally protected. The least tern was listed as endangered and the piping plover was designated as threatened throughout most of its range, including Kansas, but it was listed as endangered around the Great Lakes and Canada.

The birds are protected by several federal and state laws, including the Endangered Species Act (which also protects threatened species), and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Their nest sites are also protected. Anyone who disturbs or harms a nesting pair of either species may be assessed a maximum penalty of a \$100,000 fine and/or a one-year jail sentence.

“The floods of 1993 and 1995 created quality-nesting habitat on the Kansas River,” said Jim Knapp, hydraulic engineer for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). “The peak flows scoured sandbars and created numerous un-vegetated islands.”

Both species prefer to nest in sandy/gravelly areas with sparse vegetation. They dig

scrapes (small nest cups) in the substrate in which to lay their eggs.

The first report of least terns nesting on the Kansas River occurred in 1995. The following year, least terns and piping plovers were discovered nesting at a site near the town of Wabaunsee. This was the first record of the piping plover ever nesting in Kansas.

Piping plovers typically arrive on the Kansas River in early May. They lay their first clutch of eggs between late May and the end of June, depending on the weather and availability of habitat. The least tern nesting chronology usually lags two to four weeks behind that of piping plovers.

Least terns lay two to three eggs and piping plovers lay three to four. Incubation takes 21 and 28 days respectively. Young least terns are semi-precocial and leave the nest within a day or two of hatching. Piping plovers are precocial and mobile within one to two hours of hatching. Both the

eggs and chicks are well camouflaged with cryptic colors to conceal them from predators.

Least terns fledge when they are about three weeks old and piping plovers fledge in about four weeks. The birds generally migrate south by the middle of September. They winter in Mexico and South America.

Terns and plovers will hatch and raise only one brood of young, but will readily re-nest if their eggs are destroyed or their chicks perish. Some adults will even establish a third nest if the first two are destroyed early in the breeding season. Each successive nest however, will usually contain a smaller clutch of eggs because of the additional energy needed to produce the embryos.

From 1996 through 1999 the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP), the USFWS and the USACE worked together to monitor the birds and the water elevations at which they established nests. “One goal of the monitoring activity was to



This large Kansas River sandbar is known as the Belvue sandbar. It has been the most productive nesting area for terns and plovers.

avoid adversely affecting a listed species with releases from our lake projects," said David Hoover, environmental resources specialist with the USACE.

A biological opinion issued by the USFWS in November, 2000 recommended the USACE conduct a five-year study of terns and plovers on the Kansas River. The objective of the study was to determine if the Kansas River could adequately support a viable population of nesting least terns and piping plovers. The USACE contracted with Dr. Roger Boyd, Chairman of the Biology Department at Baker University, to study the least tern/piping plover nesting colonies.

Each year, USFWS and USACE employees surveyed the river from Manhattan to Bonner Springs looking for new nesting colonies. They used airboats to traverse the shallow, braided river more efficiently. After a colony was located, Boyd and a student assistant used an ATV and canoe to visit the nest sites every three days. They monitored the success of individual nests and conducted trapping and banding activities.

Once a pair of adults established a new nest, if necessary, the scientists floated the eggs in a cup of water to determine the relative phase of incubation.

"Floating the eggs in water is the best way to determine the stage of development of the embryos,"

Boyd said. "Based on the rotation of the egg and the elevation at which it is suspended in the water, you can tell approximately when it was laid and when it will hatch."

Boyd forwarded the information on egg development, along with the nest elevation, to USACE to be entered into a national threatened and endangered species database. The database tracks the progress of each nest on the Kansas and Missouri rivers. The Corps used the nest elevations to help make river operational decisions.

In 2001 and 2002 predators destroyed a number of nests while the adults were still incubating eggs. The primary culprits were coyotes and raccoons that stumbled across the nests during nighttime foraging activities. In 2003, predator exclosures

were placed around each nest.

The predator fences were made using 4-foot-high, welded-wire fence. Tern exclosures were constructed 100 feet in circumference, as the birds like to approach by air and land next to their nest. Plovers land several feet away and approach their nest on foot. They readily walk through the mesh in the fence so the protected areas were only 50 feet in circumference.

"The exclosures were extremely effective in protecting the nests during incubation," Boyd said. "Unfortunately some of the chicks were lost to predators once they ventured out from the protection of the fenced areas."

Adult terns were trapped and banded while sitting on the nest about one week before the eggs hatched. Boyd and his assistant captured the young chicks and banded them with aluminum leg bands before they could fly. The band numbers could be used to identify the birds if they were recaptured in subsequent years. The scientists did not band the piping plovers as the USFWS was concerned about leg injuries



Jim Knapp, hydraulic engineer for the the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, uses an airboat to search the Kansas River for new least tern and piping plover nesting colonies.



The least tern's eggs are colored and mottled to blend in with the sandy, gravelly nest, called a nest cup or scrape.

observed on plovers banded in other locations.

While conducting the trapping and banding operation between 2001 and 2005, Boyd caught four birds that had been banded in other states. Three were banded least terns; one from Mississippi, one from Indiana, and one from Nebraska. The other bird was a piping plover, originally hand-reared and released at Lewis and Clark Lake in South Dakota by the USACE.

Between 1998 and 2005 nine different colony sites were used along the Kansas River. The sites were located between Manhattan and Lecompton with the most productive area near the town of Belvue. Only one to three colonies were active in any given year and the birds moved from site to site

depending on the availability of quality habitat.

The number of pairs of piping plovers attempting to nest on the Kansas River has ranged from two to four during the study period. Least terns have been much more sporadic with a low of six pair recorded in 1998 to a high of 21 in 2005. So far the reproductive success has varied greatly from year to year primarily due to the effects of predation and flooding caused by runoff that the USACE could not control with reservoir operations.

Both least terns and piping plovers are fairly long-lived species and typically experience wide variation in reproductive suc-

cess from year to year. Researchers speculate that to sustain a viable population of terns and plovers, the birds may only need to pull off a successful brood of young every few years.

In 1994 least terns were discovered nesting on fly ash spoil piles at the Jeffery Energy Center, about 6 miles north of the Kansas River. Over the years, Boyd has documented a number of banded birds moving between the energy center and nesting sites on the river.



Above right, Boyd sets a remote-control trap next to a nest cup with eggs to catch adult terns. The fence behind him was erected to protect the nest from predators. Above left, researchers floated the eggs in a glass of water to determine when they were laid and when they would hatch. Above, Boyd measures the beak of an adult tern to determine its gender. And left, Mathew Sexson, Boyd's student assistant, releases a tern after it has been banded.

“It appears that the birds prefer habitat on the Kansas River.” Boyd said, “But when it is unavailable due to high water, many of the birds will opt for habitat at the Jeffery Energy Center as Plan B.”

Perhaps the biggest obstacle facing nesting terns and plovers on the Kansas River is the inevitable loss of quality nesting habitat.

“It is fairly clear that the sandbars and islands are going through succession,” Boyd said. “The larger islands are becoming wooded and the smaller islands are being eroded away. Quality nesting habitat is disappearing at an alarming rate.”

“What is needed to maintain the habitat are some scouring flows similar to those that occurred in 1993 and 1995,” Knapp said. “However, flows of that magnitude are unlikely to

An adult piping plover fakes injury to draw the approaching Boyd away from the nest. Below, two plover chicks lay on either side of an egg containing their soon-to-hatch sibling.



occur in the near future.”

USACE lakes located on tributaries to the Kansas River are normally operated, as authorized by congress, to provide a balance between flood control, navigation, water quality, water supply, recreation and fish and wildlife management. Therefore,

while the current study continues, the USACE will work with the USFWS, the Kansas Water Office and KDWP to integrate all operational requirements for the Kansas River lakes in an attempt to maintain a safe river elevation for the nesting least terns and piping plovers. ♡



HE'D RATHER BE GOOD THAN LUCKY

text and photos by Marc Murrell
manager, Great Plains Nature Center

Living the angler's dream — fishing for a living — isn't as easy as it might sound. Anglers vie for sponsors, tournament spots, and top-ten finishes. Learn from a pro's perspective.



The life of a professional walleye angler seems like the perfect occupation. Who wouldn't want to get paid for catching fish, something that most people do only on their time off. But while a job fishing sounds like a dream to someone who loves to fish, making a living fishing is more difficult than it might seem. If Peyton Manning fumbles the snap or throws an interception, he still draws a paycheck. If a professional angler fumbles a walleye at the boat and loses it, his paycheck goes right back in the lake with it.

There are plenty of anglers, though, who trade in regular, dependable paychecks to take that chance. One pro on the In-Fisherman Professional Walleye Trail (PWT) was a dentist, another a doctor. Brainerd, Minn., resident Perry Good was a computer programmer when he decided to turn pro.

"I was working for a company and had a boss who allowed me to take time off to fish the tournaments when I started fishing them in 1990," Good said. "I finished fourth in the first tournament I fished, and was hooked."

Good continued to work as a computer programmer while also fishing the PWT until a new boss wasn't as understanding.

"I talked it over with my wife and we agreed I should commit to making the jump to full-time pro," Good said. "I couldn't have done it over the years without the support of my wife and family."

Good's new career would prove to be productive as he has finished in or near the Top 10 in the Angler of the Year race in most years. The Angler of the Year competition awards points according to an angler's finish in each tournament throughout the season. The angler who accumulates the most points is crowned with the title, and with it recognition, fame and the ability to attract sponsors. Good finished sixth in 2005. Anglers

"I was working for a company and had a boss who allowed me to take time off to fish the tournaments when I started fishing them in 1990,"

also compete to qualify for the Super Bowl of



When they're not fishing, pro anglers spend much of their time promoting their sponsor products and the tournament trail. The life wouldn't be possible without sponsors.

walleye fishing, the season-ending PWT Championship, where only the top 52 anglers from the various divisions are accepted.

"I won the PWT Championship in 1994, and that was probably my most memorable win," Good said. "I've only missed qualifying for one championship, and that was in 2004."

Proving that fishing can be humbling, Good entered the 1995 PWT season with high hopes.

"I finished 122nd at the first tournament (Put-In-Bay, Ohio) that year," he laughed. "But then I redeemed myself and won the second tournament at Lake Mille Lacs (Minn.)."

"I think the best thing about competitive fishing is it's kind of like gambling," Good admits. "I get a rush out of winning a competition, not just catching fish."

Over his 16-year career Good has won four events on the PWT, putting him in an elite group of walleye anglers. Only Burlington, Colo. pro Ron Seelhoff has more with five wins. Iowa resident Tommy Skarlis is the only other pro to match Good's total.

"It's tough to win because there are so many good fishermen," Good admits.

Good truly loves to fish for walleye and his favorite angling techniques involve live bait.

"I like using lighter equipment, jigging and pitching up to the shoreline or in deeper water,"

Good said. "I do okay on the trolling bite, but it's my downfall."

Typically, anglers can be divided by the techniques they specialize in, according to Good. Pros hailing from Minnesota, South Dakota and North Dakota tend to be better at live bait fishing while pros from Wisconsin, Michigan and Ohio tend to be better trollers.

"It's a matter of what you're used to and what you like to do," Good said. "Confidence in what you're doing plays a big part in how you do, but do be successful you have to learn all the different ways to fish for walleye."

Sponsorships are the life-support of a professional walleye angler, providing equipment, entry fees and help with expenses. Pro anglers advertise for their sponsors by using and being successful with their equipment and by wearing logos and brand names. Good has several major sponsors that support him on the PWT, including Gander Mountain, Lund, Mercury, Rapala, Lowrance and Lindy.

Over the years Good has made a lot of friends through competitive fishing. And some of those connections have led to projects outside of tournaments that have enriched his life. He has provided guided trips to raise money for the Cancer Foundation in addition to working with other organizations.

"I've had the opportunity to work with young kids at the YMCA and other places and take them

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"Confidence in what you're doing plays a big part in how you do, but do be successful you have to learn all the different ways to fish for walleye."

fishing," Good said. "I work with a place called, "Camp Confidence" for mentally and physically-challenged children, and I probably get more out of those experiences than I do at any tournament."

Even with the rewards, thrills, and satisfaction of fishing competitively, most competitors would agree on the downside of being a tournament angler.

"Being away from home," Good listed as the only bad part of his profession. "I'm glad to be fishing a tournament, but I hate missing my kids ball games, activities and being away from my wife.

"I'm very lucky because I have a wife who supports me 100 percent," he said. "If I'm having a bad day, my wife will call and tell me to keep my chin up and that means a lot."

Good is considered one of the veterans of the PWT, but he doesn't have any immediate plans for retirement because he loves what he does.

"I'm 50 years old now and I get worn down and I've got a bad back that I've got to get fixed," Good said. "But I still keep a good mental approach even though I don't have quite the energy that some of these young bucks do."

A quest for Angler of the Year may keep the veteran in hot pursuit of more tournament good fortunes.

"That's one thing I haven't won," Good said. "I've been second, third and come close a lot of times, but I've never won it and that's probably the one thing that keeps me coming back. You



Last September, 52 anglers came to Milford Reservoir near Junction City for the year-ending Super Bowl of walleye tournaments, the PWT Championship.

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"I've had the opportunity to work with young kids at the YMCA and other places and take them fishing,"

.....



.....

have to have a perfect season to do it because there's too many good fishermen."

Down-to-earth and a pleasant boat partner, Good is truly a good person and good fishermen. He knows he's achieved something the weekend angler can only dream of and recognizes his good fortunes in a positive, non-egotistical way.

"You have to remind yourself fishing is just a game we're playing even though it's our job and you've got to keep everything in perspective," he concluded. "I've been working a boat show and asked someone looking at a boat if I can help them and they say, 'No, just dreaming,' and I realize just how fortunate I am."

PWT VISITS KANSAS FOR 2005 CHAMPIONSHIP

Fifty-two of the nation's best walleye fishermen converged on Milford Lake's 15,600 acres last September for their shot at winning the Super Bowl of walleye tournaments in the In-Fisherman Professional Walleye Trail (PWT) Championship. Milford State Park and the Junction City area hosted the anglers and tournament organizers for the time Kansas hosted this championship event.

Anglers could practice for nearly a week before the tournament, which took place September 16-18. Fishing was tough and catching was even tougher as many anglers struggled to catch legal 18-inch fish.

"It's tougher than third-grade Algebra," joked one competitor of the bite during the week of practice.

But persistence prevailed and some anglers managed to put fish in their livewells during the three-day tournament. At the final weigh-in Sunday evening, Amery, Wisc. pro David Andersen hoisted the 2005 PWT Championship trophy for his total weight of 24.51 pounds of walleye. Andersen had fished the PWT for 10 years, most of



The first prize and \$117,000 in money and prizes went to David Andersen from Amery, Wisc. Anderson weighed 10 fish over the three days with a total weight of 24.51 pounds.

them on a part-time basis, and this was only the second time he'd qualified to fish the PWT Championship. For the victory, Andersen collected \$117,000 in money and prizes.

According to Andersen, his secret spot wasn't and there were 35 boats in the area at times. He was trolling with lead-core line in 28-32 feet of water using a purple Rapala Shad Rap. His strikes came when his crankbait was banging off rocks and other bottom structure.

Second place went to 22-year-old rookie professional Chase Parsons from Appleton, Wisc., with his three-day total weight of 18.77 pounds.

"This is an incredible feeling," said Gary Parsons, Chase's dad and the only 2-time Angler of the Year winner.

Last year, the younger Parsons fished as an amateur, and Gary admitted it was a financial strain and he was concerned he'd learn bad habits. Apparently, he didn't pick up too many.

"I couldn't be more proud to watch my own son come on as strong as he has in his first year of professional fishing," Gary said. "It wasn't long ago and he was just a little kid tagging along, but when he wanted to try it I supported his decision."

Chase is on his way to following in his father's success and will likely make his own mark on the PWT.

"I don't even have words to describe it," Chase said of his second place finish. "I'm just so happy and so pleased to take second because these guys out here are some phenomenal fishermen. It's just an awesome feeling because I've known a lot of these guys since I was 10 years old and to have them congratulate me is something special." 🦈



Second place at the Milford championship went to rookie angler Chase Parsons, whose father, Gary, is a well-known legend on the tourney trail.



FROM POWDER KEGS AND BOXCARS

text and photos by J. Mark Shoup
associate editor, Pratt

One of the country's largest suppliers for powder for recreational shooting, Hodgdon's headquarters are located in Overland Park. Hodgdon supplies more than 60 percent of the market for reloaders.

It was 1947, just after World War II, and young Brewster Hodgdon had a vision. An active hunter and clay target shooter before the war, "Bruce" had taken note that the armed services were selling off surplus powder no longer needed for the war. The Overland Park native with a reloading background saw a market waiting to be served, and he seized the opportunity.

Hodgdon won a bid for 50,000 pounds of surplus gunpowder, but he quickly encountered a few snags.

"He soon found out that nobody wanted to store gunpowder on their property," said Bob Hodgdon, Hodgdon's son, who now runs the company with his brother J. B. "He finally found a farmer who would let him store it on his property but not in his barn. Dad had to buy

two old boxcars to store the powder."

The storage problem solved, Hodgdon now tackled marketing. He ran an advertisement in *American Rifleman* offering powder for reloaders at bargain prices. Soon, the orders began to trickle in, and with the help of his first two employees — sons Bob, 9, and J.B., 11 — the Hodgdon Powder Company was in business.

Initially, the company sold 150-pound kegs of powder that Hodgdon had bought from the U.S. Army, but this attracted a limited market. Before long, they were breaking the kegs into smaller packages to fill the needs of the casual reloader and shooter. Within a few years, however, another obstacle presented itself: the company was out of powder. But this was not a

major obstacle. U.S. and world markets for surplus powder continued to supply Hodgdon until 1960, when the company began buying from Olin. At the same time, the company started developing their own specifications to improve the quality and range of their product line.

Hodgdon wanted to make high-quality products that contained five specific characteristics not always found in bulk surplus powder: consistency; the highest safe velocity; the highest safe density; handloader-friendliness; and powders that would work best with a variety of different bullets, shot weights, casings, and primers. Hodgdon's first specialty powders were ball powders (small round grains), but by 1970, they were buying and selling extruded powders (tubular grains).

In 1976, the company hooked up with the inventor of Pyrodex, Dan Pawlak, and struck a deal. Hodgdon would be the exclusive distributor of this safer, “smokeless” form of black powder. In 1977, seizing another opportunity, Bob and J.B. — who had now taken over operation of the company — bought Pawlak’s Washington Powder Company, which had to go out of business due to an accident. Then they moved the Pyrodex manufacturing portion of their operations to Herington and began shipping product in 1980. Today, all Hodgdon muzzle-loading powders are tested, modified, and packaged at the Herington plant.

Although all manufacturing and distributing operations have now moved to Herington, Hodgdon’s executive offices are maintained on the same site in Overland Park where Hodgdon



Bob Hodgdon stands in the testing lab of Hodgdon’s Overland Park facility. Bob and brother J. B. run the business today, taking over for the founder, their father.

started up in 1947. Hodgdon brand extruded powder is ordered in bulk, to Hodgdon’s specifications, from Australian Defense Industries. In addition, the company now owns Dupont’s IMR brand — which comes from a plant just outside Montreal, Canada — and the Winchester brand ball powder franchise. This powder is purchased from General Dynamics.

Using the latest high-tech equipment in the Overland Park state-of-the-art laboratory, each batch is tested for con-

sistent density, velocity, and breach pressure before being declared suitable for packaging and marketing.

Perhaps one of Hodgdon’s most significant contributions to the reloading industry was the development of its Triple Seven black powder propellant. Using nine different chemicals, the company tested more than 800 laboratory batches of this revolutionary powder. Batch number 777 turned out to be the best, thus its name.

“The result of all our work on Triple Seven is a black powder that comes in both granules and pellets, has no sulfur smell, cleans up with water alone, and offers flatter, more accurate shooting,” Bob explains. “I think these features are the reason that Triple Seven now accounts for 70 percent of muzzleloading powder sales nationally.”

Over the years, Hodgdon Powder, by providing inexpen-

Powders are tested with high-tech equipment to ensure powders are consistent, safe, high velocity, and clean burning.



sive reloading products, has had a tremendous impact on recreational shooting in the U.S. And to support reloaders and keep them up to date on the latest innovations and techniques, Hodgdon also publishes *Reloading* magazine.

Today, their annual gross sales top \$20 million. The company sells more than 1.5 million pounds of powder annually and holds more than 60 percent of the reloading powder market. Each year, sales to major ammunition companies such as Federal and Remington, as well as smaller companies, increase.

Hodgdon produces 13 different Triple Seven products, 17 IMR products, and 31 products with just the Hodgdon label. These powders fit the needs of all shooters, from competition pistol and rifle to recreational shotgun shooters. Hodgdon powders fulfill the requirements of every caliber and gauge and offer the serious hobbyist the ability to tinker with loads.

These figures reflect a significant impact on the Kansas economy that reaches beyond their face value. By providing powders that fill both common and specialty niches, Hodgdon has helped other businesses that cater to shooting sports. These include hunting equipment dealers, sellers of shooting products such as clay targets, as well as other businesses patronized by shooters, hunters, and the company's employees, including motels, restaurants, and more. With fewer than 2,700 residents, the city of Herington has benefited greatly from the 58 jobs Hodgdon Powder has brought to town. The company also employs 22 people in Overland Park.

In almost 60 years of business, Hodgdon Powder has helped develop a fledgling reloading market into a major shooting sports activity. Before his death in 1997, founder Bruce Hodgdon donated all the ground for the Mill Creek Rifle Range in

DeSoto. He had been awarded the National Rifle Association (NRA) Public Service Award, the Shooting Industries Lifetime Achievement Award, the National Alliance of Stocking Gun Dealers Lifetime Achievement Award, and the Shooters News Lifetime Achievement Award.

Promoting the shooting sports has been an integral and natural part of Hodgdon Powder's mission over the years. Bob and J.B. continue this tradition through innovation and providing high-quality products at reasonable prices. Bob served six years on the NRA Board of Directors, and the company continues its support of the shooting sports through consistent contributions to the NRA Foundation, helping fund the NRA's handloading courses, and contributing to the National Shooting Sports Heritage Foundation and the National 4-H Shooting Sports Foundation.

The Hodgdon Family Charitable Fund receives grant requests and after considering each, supports those organizations it feels fulfill the trust's mission statement of Christian outreach. Some donations go to hunting-related activities, such as Farmers and Hunters Feeding the Hungry and dream hunts for handicapped kids, but many non-shooting sport programs are supported, as well.

While all Kansans can enjoy the often unnoticed economic benefits of another home-grown outdoor industry, Kansas hunters and sport shooters can be proud to know that Hodgdon powder calls Kansas home. ♡



Hodgdon produces a variety of products for just about any recreational shooting discipline. With gross annual sales of \$20 million, the company employs 70 Kansans in its Overland Park and Herington facilities.



Moon Watching For Better Fishing

text and photos by Bill Scheffler
Colwitch

By keeping track of moon phases and noticing other elements of weather, pressure, and air quality, the author picks the best time to catch fish.

Since childhood, I have had an interest in the effects the moon has on all forms of life. I was raised on a farm and my parents did most of the planting and harvesting of crops, as well as working livestock, by the moon signs. We also hunted and fished, and I remember my dad's predictions on how well the fish would bite based on the moon and the elements being accurate. One of his sayings was, "Wind in the east, fish bite the least; wind in the south, it blows the bait in their mouth; wind in the north the good fisherman doesn't go forth; and wind in the west, they bite the best."

When one of my older brothers began fishing by the solunar charts with some success, it lit a fire in me to learn more. I began keeping track of

charts published in national outdoor magazines. On one occasion, I thought I had figured out when the fish would be active, so I invited a friend to go fishing. We never caught a fish. When I double checked the charts, I discovered the fine print that said the information would be effective if the elements were right. I was confused, but I was determined to discover what the elements were.

Soon after that episode I saw a magazine advertisement for a book titled *Moon Up Moon Down* by John Alden Knight. I ordered it immediately, and it was one of those books I could not put down. Knight is the grandfather of charting the effects of moon phases on wildlife movement and he began studying its affects in the mid-1920s. However, in

his book he acknowledged that there are days when even though the signs are right, the action never happens. Knight stated that understanding why the solunar effect was variable would come from studying ions.

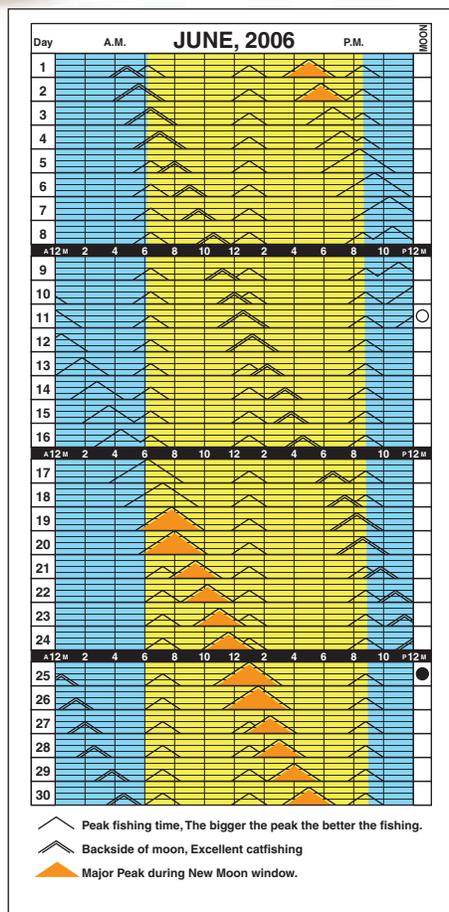
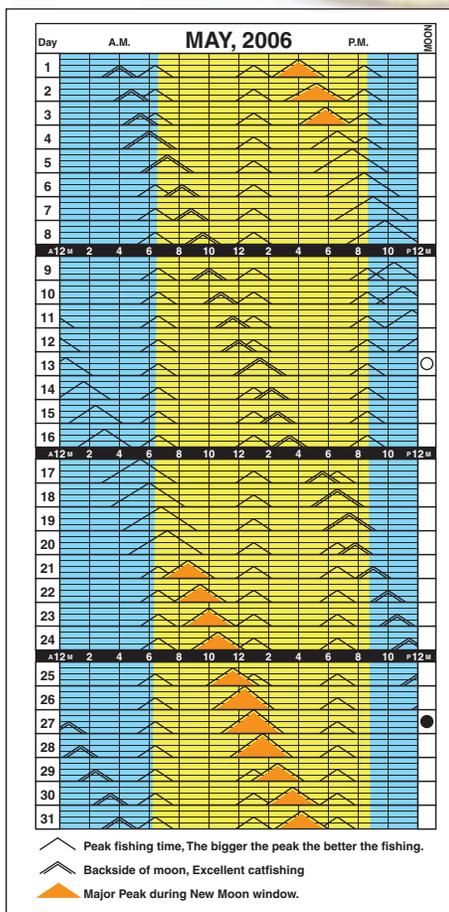
Ironically, just a week after I had read Knight's book, a friend of my wife brought me a book called *The Ion Effect* by Fred Soyka, which includes discussions on the affects of negative ions on the human body. This was another book I read over and over. It was about this time I began using a book written by the late George Wylie of Clay Center called *The Fishing Calculator*. Wylie's publication basically charted moon peaks, but it also had charts showing the effects of elements such as wind direction and barometric pressure. After Wylie died, I

contacted his daughter and obtained information that allows me to make the charts, which I continue to make today.

I have continued to learn as much as I can about ions and what is happening in the air. Ions are electrical particles that develop in the air. They come from molecules when there is wind or water movement. They develop into either negative ions, which activate or positive ions which deactivate. Negative ions develop mainly with a rising barometer such as the arrival of a high-pressure system, but also from the development of big cumulus (power) clouds. The largest cumulus clouds are formed by strong upward movements of warm, moist air, and these can become thunderheads. Positive ions develop mainly with a falling barometer and the arrival of the low-pressure systems.

The effectiveness of the ions will be determined by the clarity of the air. When the air has pollen, mold spores, dust, smoke, high humidity, and pollution, the ions become corroded with those elements and, therefore, the fishing will slow down. A rain that "washes" the air can bring activity back quickly. Ions affect all forms of life,

In summary, the success of fishing the solunar peaks is dependent upon what is happening with ions. The impact of ions is determined by the barometric pressure and the clarity of the air. So what does all this mean to me? It has had an



The charts at left were taken from *Bill Scheffler's Fishing and Wildlife Guide 2006*. They are designed to help anglers find the best time to catch fish.

impact on my family and friends who like to fish. They are spoiled. I have always believed that fast action will keep people interested in fishing, and I plan outings around positive signs. When friends and family go fishing with me, they expect to catch fish. I have also taught a non-credit course at Wichita State University on this topic for the last five years.

To understand solunar fishing, you need to grasp a few basic principles. To start with, everything is based around elec-

tricity. The molecules coming from electricity develop into ions. When the air is clear, ions activate all forms of life. When the air is "dirty" with pollution, pollens, mold spores, smoke, dust, and humidity, ions cannot activate and animals, such as fish, become inactive. Over the years, I've observed correlations between the activity of goldfish in an aquarium, birds at the bird feeder and fish in farm ponds.

When Knight began researching the effects of the moon, he looked at world record

fish and discovered that more than 90 percent were caught during the new moon, when the effects of the moon phase appear to be greatest. Almost all of the fish I catch are caught in the new moon window days. This is four days before the new moon in the morning and then for a week after the new moon in the afternoon and early evening. In my *Fishing and Wildlife Guide*, I chart new moon and full moon window days so you can easily follow them.

On the dates that we have a perigee moon, which is when the moon is about 27,000 miles closer to the earth than at other times, I normally have more fishing action. I attribute this to more gravitational pull from the moon. With favorable elements, these are must days to be out.

I believe using these formulas can be so effective, anglers must be careful not to overharvest ponds. Keeping fish to eat is fine, but be careful not to keep too many. My biggest enjoyment now is to be able to take my wife, grandchildren and close friends out when the signals are "on," so they have success. My theory makes it easy to schedule ahead four or five days for special outings. I simply study the air for clarity, then see if we will be under a high or low pressure and schedule when the major peak hits in late afternoon or early morning. For me it takes the guesswork out of fishing. I hope it helps you. ♡



The author, right, and his brother, Harris, with a dandy stringer of channel catfish caught during a new moon window from a central-Kansas farm pond.

*For more information,
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Grandmother Elm

Lorraine J. Kaufman
Moundridge

photos by Mike Blair

The American elm has a strong history on the prairies of Kansas.

We stood in the cool afternoon shade, surrounded by a deep green canopy. The wide spreading branches of the American elm, *Ulmus americana*, reached high above and then arched downward as if in a loving embrace. Standing quietly, I felt strangely protected and comforted. “Just like the loving arms of a buxom grandma,” I thought, “always ready, willing, and eager to gather all who need sanctuary into her generous outstretched arms.”

To many other admiring friends, the American elm may also be described as beautifully tall and stately, dignified, and simply grand with its heavy, far-reaching branches. It is not hard to

understand why the early settlers called it “The Lady of the Forest” when they first encountered it in the eastern half of the U.S.

The American elm is the most prevalent native tree in Kansas and is found throughout the state except in the extreme northwestern and southwestern counties. It thrives in full sun, along streams and rivers or on rocky hillsides, adapting to many kinds of soil except those excessively moist. Dark ashy-brown bark is characteristic, and trees may reach 80 to 115 feet tall with diameters of 6 feet or more. In summer, elms wear an arching crown of abundant, oval, coarsely toothed leaves, capable of producing dense shade.

The silhouette of the American elm displays an artistic flair in both “vase” and “umbrella” shapes most noticeable in winter. The umbrella-type under which I stood on that memorable afternoon is easily recognized by the strong, nearly horizontal, far-reaching limbs that branch from the sturdy trunk at 10 to 20 feet. The vase variety presents a tree that separates into large limbs, most of which extend straight up.

Elms grow rapidly, and a sapling planted in favorable conditions can be expected to reach 25-30 feet in eight to 10 years. The bark of younger, smaller trees is noticeably black, making identification easy. The elm can tolerate severely cold temperatures, and



The American elm is the most prevalent native tree in Kansas. However, Dutch elm disease, which is evident in this old tree, has devastated the trees in many towns.

the large, strong limbs resist breaking in ice storms. With wide-spreading roots, it is also able to withstand the blustery spring and summer winds of Kansas. With such admirable characteristics, it is no wonder why American elms were chosen to grace towns and homesteads as pioneers moved westward across the state.

Quite a number of these giant trees still flourish along streets in my hometown of Moundridge, planted when the town was still young in the late 1800s. Two stalwart specimens more than 100 years old flourish at the Cole House Museum Complex on land homesteaded in 1875. They have a circumference of 10 feet, 3 inches, and 8 feet, 5 inches, respectively. Other elms found in Moundridge neighborhoods measure 10 to 12 feet in circumference. They seem to have settled comfortably into the landscape and give a feeling of permanence, security, and peace to their surroundings.

As would any grandma, the American elm provides a virtual pantry generously shared with

friends. Flowers grow from winter buds before leaves appear in early spring and produce pale brown, flat fruits. The seed occupies the center of a thin, circular wing. By mid-June, the seeds are ripe and become a banquet for goldfinches, purple finches, and bobwhites. Not to be left out of the feasting, squirrels, mice, opossums, and other small mammals gather for their own picnic on the ground. If not consumed, seeds germinate soon after they fall on moist soil, much to the consternation of my neighbor who finds them sprouting with wild abandon in his garden.

American elm trees may start producing seed after 15 years, but they usually aren't prolific until 40 years or older. Seed production may continue for decades. With such a record, the elm may be called a generous provider for future generations, as they have been known to live for more than 200 years.

The largest American elm in Kansas is currently in McCune, in Crawford County of southeastern

American Elm Facts

Three kinds of elms are used as landscape trees in Kansas. They are American elm, *Ulmus americana*, Siberian elm, *U. pumila*, and Chinese elm, *U. parvifolia*. Only the American elm is native to Kansas.

American elm, once the backbone of Kansas' urban plantings as described in this article, continues to face the threat of Dutch elm disease. Modern community forestry programs learned from the ravages of this disease in the 1960s and 1970s to limit any tree species, no matter how attractive its benefits, to less than 10 percent of a community tree population. Further, such species should be randomly dispersed throughout the city. Under these conditions, it is difficult for a disease to establish itself and cause serious problems. By the 1980s, most Kansas communities had seen disease losses of American elms to approximately these natural limits. Dutch elm disease continues to occur, but is now infrequent. Thus, planting occasional American elms within city limits usually causes no harm, but continued susceptibility to Dutch elm disease should be considered. Check local regulations in your community before planting American elms.

"Chinese elm" is a confusing term. What many people know as "Chinese" elms are actually Siberian elms. These trees have been

Kansas. Growing near the last house on W. 6th Street, it has a circumference of 20 feet, 4 inches, a height of 65 feet, and a crown spread of 103 feet. The Louis Vieux elm growing near the Vermillion River northeast of Wamego was designated the national champion American elm in 1979. Determined by the American Forestry Association as the largest tree of its kind, it began declining in 1988. Suffering the effects of wind, lightning, vandalism and dynamite, only one large healthy branch remained in November of 2003. Though it has lost its national ranking and is but a shadow of its former size, it remains a large tree.

From a utilization standpoint, the heartwood of the American elm is light brown to brown, usually with a reddish tinge. The sapwood is light colored. Elm wood has a straight or interlocked grain with a coarse texture that makes it difficult to split. This characteristic makes it ideal for hockey sticks. It is also desirable for implement and tool handles as it is moderately heavy, hard, and strong. Elm wood is used for furniture, flooring, wall panels, barrels, boxes, chopping bowls, and for fiber in roofing felt.

In Kansas, most elm wood is made into pallets and dunnage. It is somewhat difficult to work, but it glues, screws, and nails satisfactorily. It does not polish easily but finishes well otherwise. The heavy hard wood is also good for firewood.

The American elm, beloved for its beauty and magnificent shade, has been planted extensively along streets and boulevards in many cities. Historic events have also taken place through the years

in the shade of an elm tree, Custer's Elm in Council Grove being noteworthy in Kansas. With the advent of the deadly Dutch elm disease introduced into our country in the early 1930s, many of these noble trees died, leaving their grieving communities feeling "naked" and bereft. Numerous streets, parks, and creeks still bear the name "Elm" however, proving high regard for this species.

Dutch elm disease, first identified by Dutch women scientists, is caused by microscopic fungal spores carried on the legs of feeding elm bark beetles. These spores, deposited as the beetles feed and reproduce beneath the bark, eventually clog the "pipelines" that carry food and water between roots and crown. There is no known cure at this time, but it is thought that some elms are naturally resistant. Research is being conducted at the Elm Research Institute in New Hampshire to propagate these resistant strains. Currently, a strain known as the American Liberty Elm shows promise. After

historically popular in the Kansas landscape, particularly in Western areas where they grow quickly into shade trees. They are often found in city parks and on golf courses. A disadvantage of Siberian elm is spindly growth that causes limbs to break easily in ice storms. Siberian elms are commonly infested with elm leaf beetles, leading to a ragged, unsightly appearance in summer and household nuisance problems when the beetles try to move indoors in autumn. Siberian elms are not affected by Dutch elm disease. They are smaller and shorter-lived than American elms, and given their current abundance, are seldom recommended in modern urban tree planting programs.

The best elm choice for new plantings may be the "true" Chinese elm, often marketed under the name, "lacebark elm." This elm is different in several ways.



American elms were the tree of choice for the settlers to plant around homesteads and in towns as they moved west. These stately old trees now provide many benefits.

testing and planting 250,000 American Liberty Elms in public locations around the country for over 18 years, fewer than 100 cases of Dutch elm disease have been confirmed in the experimental strain.

While American elm seedlings are not readily available from nurseries, it is possible to grow a tree from seed. I collected and planted American elm seeds this spring and found them to sprout quickly. Freshly collected American elm seeds sprout within 6-12 days if planted in well-drained loamy soil and full sun conditions. They can be started in a pot or a garden and moved to a desirable location during fall or early spring. A friend has successfully transplanted several saplings that sprouted in his lawn. After three years, they are already 18 to 24 inches high. Whether propagating seeds or saplings, it's wise to make sure of the elm species. American elm and "Chinese" elm saplings are similar in appearance, but the Chinese elm is less desirable as a shade tree. Therefore, always choose seeds or saplings from under a known American elm. Also, when planting your elm in a permanent site, choose an area that will sufficiently accommodate a tall, mature tree, well away from overhead wires.

Besides beauty and economic worth, the American elm also impacts the environment. These towering trees could be called nature's air conditioners since they cool the air by transpiring water from leaves. The cooling effect of one urban American elm is estimated to be equivalent to five air conditioning units. Insurance



This elm, near the Vermillion River northeast of Wamego, once claimed title as the national champion.

claims may assess the value of a mature American elm tree as high as \$2,500 in a home landscape. In addition, the abundant, deciduous elm leaves crumble and decompose readily, improving the soil with a high content of potassium and calcium and many other desirable nutrients.

Last but not least of the gifts from "Grandma" elm are our own treasured memories – carefree childhood days, when high in a rope swing suspended from a sturdy elm branch, we surveyed the "whole world" of our own backyard or walked the tree-lined street with its canopy of green that led to Grandpa's house and the lemonade stand we set up in the shade. Who has not marveled at the oriole's swinging nest in the topmost branches, or stood quietly, listening to the sighing of the breeze through fluttering leaves, or searched for a feathered soloist out of sight on his swaying stage?

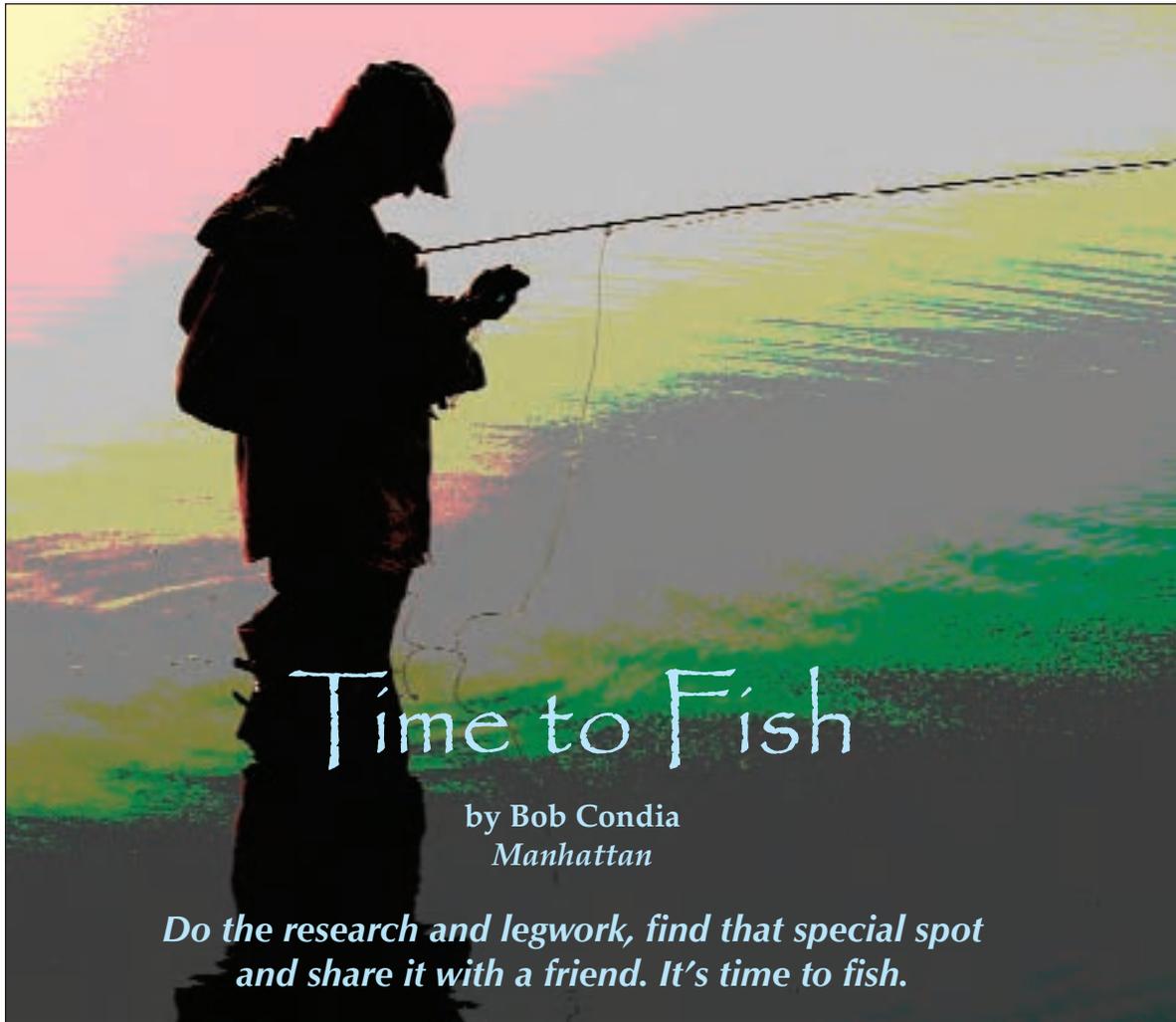
Yes, we are blessed and inspired by Grandmother elm. She offers beauty, shade, sanctuary, and the soothing solace of a wind song. ♡

Though its leaves are characteristic of elms, its bark is scaly and thin. It seeds in the fall, rather than spring months typical for American and Siberian elms. The tree doesn't attain the size and spreading shape of the American elm, but it is basically free of insect and disease problems, including Dutch elm disease and elm leaf beetles. It provides good shade and is a relatively fast-growing tree suitable for lawn and park use throughout the state.

Jim Strine, district forester for the Kansas Forest Service at Hays, says there has been increasing interest in planting American elms in Kansas, but advises caution. "I would not plant a seedling or try to grow elms from seeds. Dutch elm disease is still around, and I would be concerned that they would become infected when they get 6 to 8 inches in diameter. If someone wants to plant an American elm, I would suggest that they purchase a cultivar that is tolerant of Dutch elm disease. There has been a lot of research on developing American elms that are tolerant of Dutch elm disease. The U.S National Arboretum has released two cultivars that are highly tolerant. They are Valley Forge and New Harmony."

For questions dealing with these and other shade trees, contact your county extension office or the Kansas Forest Service at www.kansasforests.org.

— Blair



Time to Fish

by Bob Condia
Manhattan

Do the research and legwork, find that special spot and share it with a friend. It's time to fish.

Presently, I sit in the basement and contemplate the budding of my redbud. Every evening after work, I scrutinize the tree with anticipation. When the buds are red it is time to fish.

Fishing begins much earlier in the Flint Hills than people believe. Please keep this to yourself if you still want a few weeks of solitude. I recall from several years ago a mid-March adventure to a local fishing lake where I caught a bunch of bluegills, some bass and nice-sized green sunfish. I enjoyed the afternoon jointly with an immature bald eagle. Although it was clumsy with its fish diving style, the

bird provided high-style company. That early trip, alone with an eagle, stands out in my mind.

I love this time of year at the lakes – the cool evenings with good rises before the mosquitoes, bass boats, and poison ivy reach their eventual numbers. The Lilies are another good indicator of spawning activity, although I cannot remember if they bloom before or after the bass enjoy their beds. I should look this up.

Everything has to do with water temperature. It is useful to recognize two things at this time of the season: one, smaller waters like farm ponds warm up first, and second, the shallows

warm fastest. And at that, the north side of the lake will get the most sun. A thermometer to observe water temperatures as you fish can add experience to your hobby. I make my annual plan to fish the small waters first. Water temperature can assist you in being in the right place at the right time.

Contemplating such, I have a flood of good memories. Last spring's wipers take the front of the queue. These fish can pull like mules. I also recollect a spot where bluegills ate Baetis nymphs, and only Baetis nymphs. Like snotty trout, the bluegills demanded a quality presentation and scattered when

lined overhead. It was a commendable game.

We can all look forward to a mayfly hatch that comes off late-March or early April (depending on the current degree-days) when the water temperature is about 56 degrees. These are big drakes, I believe, and everything that swims relishes eating them. A leech tied by a friend imitates the nymph particularly well. Indeed, last year I caught every species in the lake with it except a walleye.

So it's time to go fishing. If the time is now, and the method is obvious, then the question is, "Where?" Well, one's spots are a sensitive subject. Of all the issues facing the fisher, *Where?* is the most critical and privileged. Simply put, because fishing locations are found at some expense of time, travel and empirical venture, they must be treated as precious. A good spot is a gift shared among friends. In this day and age a good spot can be overrun at the speed of business, e-mail and the SUV. We should agree to treat locations as a currency of principle between friends. Finding a new spot and figuring it out with success is a delicacy. Sharing the adventure may even be better. Joy is hard to keep wrapped up. If you should find yourself in this sort of good fortune, a little etiquette is in order.

The rule for me is this: Someone's spots belong to them. If they shared it with you, it is for you to enjoy and keep to yourself. For example, last summer on our club's safari to Rocky Mountain National Park, a club member enjoyed, as he does, getting everyone onto fish. Three of us enjoyed a superb

day catching native greenbacks at his sponsorship. It is not that others do not know of the place, or that it is not published in the journals, fly shops, and guide books, but it was his experience and recommendation that delivered the day. It is his spot.

Interestingly on our hike out, a somewhat surprised local asked us about the fishing and which bugs were working. He was up for the afternoon with his young son. He told us that he had never seen so many people up on the creek before.



To him, the three of us were a crowd. We spoke, as it were, about the etiquette of fishing holes and his opinion was that, *I never tell anyone about my spots – but I might take them there.* I insist this is the essential interpretation of the rule.

There are ways of finding places of your own. One can study literary guides, maps, and acquaintances. Bar napkin maps are legendary, if relatively unreliable. I found a bit of advice on the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks web page. It has some interesting information.

First, I downloaded the Kansas Fishing Forecast. It is a

biologist's report on many of the waters in Kansas by species. Unfortunately, carp and gar have been omitted. Nonetheless, I discovered several new bodies of water and a local confirmation. For instance, you can read that Milford rates good or better for almost all species we chase with fly rods. If you haven't visited Milford it is worth a stop, especially as the small waters get warm. Spawning gar milling in the Milford rocks creates a scene. State fishing lakes Bourbon, Chase and Wilson are rated good for spotted bass. Lebo City Lake has excellent conditions for small wipers. La Cygne Reservoir should be excellent for bass and good for wipers. Atchison SFL and Bronson CL look excellent for bluegills. Bronson has the larger. You get the idea about finding new places to try.

The Kansas FISH program is another good source of information. A free FISH atlas provides information about walk-in fishing opportunities county-by-county, complete with fish species present in each enrolled water. These privately-owned waters, whether pond or stream, provide public access from March through October. Visiting them adds adventure and discovery to one's fishing.

By way of reporting, I recently tried out a hole on a local creek that last fall had a nice spotted bass (13 inches to be sure) in residence. He was not home. The water was low, 50 degrees and fairly clean for a windy afternoon in the sun. It was, nonetheless, great to leave the papers on my desk and breathe a trace of spring – because it's time to fish. ♡

Edited by Mark Shoup

CORRALLING CATS

Editor:

I would like to thank Pat Silovsky for the article, "All Cats: Indoors" [*Kansas Wildlife and Parks* magazine, March/April 2006, Page 43]. I thought I was the only one who thought about domestic pets that way. Each pet food container should, by law, have an inscription on the bag or can saying "please be responsible and keep your pet indoors."

Pets do non-stop damage to both game and nongame wildlife. Thanks again to Pat for a fine and much-needed article.

*Don Hawley
Lawrence*

THANKS FOR THE INFO

Editor:

Thank you KDWP for listing the attributes that go toward the outdoors people of Kansas. It is very admirable that you allow the public to know that the fees for licenses and permits goes back directly to the license holder. Take

for instance the trout permit. This fee allows the Kansas angler to fly fish within the angler's own state.

Thank you for your hard work and dedication to the local outdoors lover. I get *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine, and I know it's for a good cause.

*Kevin Canada
Bentley*

TEXAS TWO-STEP

Editor:

I whole-heartedly agree with Mr. Heater [*Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine, March/April, Page 34], and it is my hope that more Kansas residents follow his lead in voicing their views on this subject [places to hunt deer].

I would also add that this troubling trend is not restricted to deer hunting. In my experience, Kansas resident turkey hunters are also being detrimentally affected by the infiltration of outfitters leasing land. Although I applaud the hard work KDWP biologists do in managing our populations of both game and nongame species, I think others need to start paying attention to the hunting heritage and what we will be leaving our grandchildren. The proliferation of out-

fitters guiding hunts for nonresident hunters is quickly becoming a thorn in the side of Kansas resident hunters. If we do not take care, the sport of hunting will once again become the "sport of kings," and that will be a sad day indeed.

We are constantly bombarded with the message to "Pass it On," and that is what I am trying to do with my two sons; I just wonder what I will have to pass on in the coming decades. I understand that landowners have the right to do whatever they want with their property, and I can't say I have all the answers, but as Mr. Heater states, we don't want to "become like Texas, where you don't hunt unless you pay an outfitter."

I have also heard that Secretary Hayden has monetary interest in two outfitter businesses operating in Kansas. Is this true? If it is, he should either step down as secretary or sever his relationships with these businesses. In my mind, this is a major conflict of interest and does not serve the hunters and fishermen of Kansas, whom he serves. Thank you for your attention.

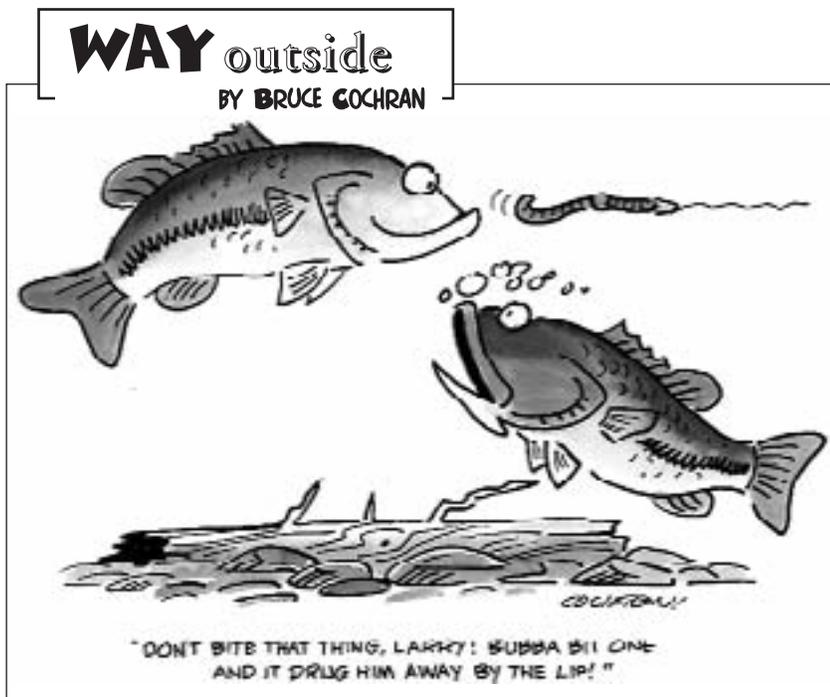
*Ryan Gulker
Manhattan*

Dear Mr. Gulker:

You raise some common concerns that KDWP's Deer Task Force Committee is attempting to address. In February, the committee reported to the Kansas Legislature and will make recommendations that may or may not be implemented. Nothing will happen until 2007, however. In the meantime, the group encourages public input. If you have suggestions, please post them on the task force web log (blog), www.kdwp.blogspot.com.

Secretary Hayden does own a 10 percent interest in West Creek Outfitters, but no others. He made this clear to Governor Sebelius on his disclosure statement before his appointment as secretary. He is not an outfitter or guide himself, and since he has taken office, he has recused himself from any action regarding outfitters.

-Shoup



TO THE POINT

Editor:

I find it disturbing that nowhere in [Secretary Hayden's] article ["On Point," **Kansas Wildlife & Parks** magazine, Nov./Dec. 2005, inside cover] did he mention any of the benefits to the pheasant population of an early start to the pheasant season. As a matter of fact, every article I have read about the change to the 2006 pheasant opener – from *Wildlife and Parks* to the *Kansas City Star* – has listed money as the primary reason for the change.

I fear that KDWP is not keeping the best interests of wildlife in mind, and after all, it is the wildlife that the employees of KDWP serve first and foremost, not the hunter. It is discouraging to see decisions about what is best financially decide the future of hunting.

The days of being able to knock on a farmer's door to ask permission to hunt his field are dwindling thanks to big money hunting leases that many of us can't afford. It is not unforeseeable that in the near future only the wealthy will be able to afford \$1,000 leases and hundreds of dollars for licenses to hunt.

It's no wonder more hunters are giving up our sport; it's evolving into an industry instead of a hobby. In the future, please make decisions about game management based on what is best for the game, not what is going to make the state the most money.

*Patrick E. Jankowski, D.D.S.
Eudora*

Dear Dr. Jankowski:

Thanks for your letter. You express many of the concerns Secretary Hayden alluded to when he mentioned that the regulation moving the opening of pheasant season from the second Saturday in November to the first was passed "amidst controversy." However, the biological impact of a change in season dates was the first consideration before the proposal was made. After speaking with our upland game bird biologist, I can say with confidence that moving the season opener will have no detrimental effect on our pheasant population.

In addition, you state that the only reasons for the change you have ever

read involve generating more money, but Secretary Hayden mentions some in this article, including greater opportunity for the hunter and greater opportunity to pass on the hunting tradition.

Yes, hunting is important to the Kansas economy. If this change helps in that regard without hurting the pheasant population, that in itself is not a bad thing.

–Shoup

TURKEY IN THE BAG

Editor:

I work with Celia Blair at the Chautauqua County Courthouse in Sedan. I showed her the pictures of a turkey I got in the spring of 2005, and she suggested that I send you one.

This turkey was a Rio. It weighed 18 pounds, had an 8 1/2-inch beard, and its spurs were 1 inch and 1 1/4 inches.

I've been hunting since I was old enough to tag along. I started with rabbits and squirrels. Dad used to take me, but now I'm 39 and go with my husband and our two sons. Or I go by myself if they are busy.

Here's the photo. If you want to use it, that's great.

*Paulia Hubert
Sedan*

Dear Ms. Hubert:

Nice bird. Thanks for the photo and most of all, thanks for Passing It On.

–Shoup



INCENSE, DEER, & FIRE

Editor's note: The following story came to Kanopolis State Park manager Rick Martin from an old college buddy. Rick's friend is poking a bit of friendly fun at his younger brother, but the brother, Mark, has graciously agreed to the story's appearance here. In his defense, Mark adds that it was just a small fire that he put out with the bag that carried his chair.

–Shoup

Rick:

I recently purchased a small farm. When my brother, Mark, found out about it, he had to go deer hunting. Had to. So I said, "Knock yourself out. I've seen lots of deer sign on the farm, and you should have good luck."

I told him where it was, and he went. Once there, he surveyed the area and decided to set up one of these pop-up blinds (tent with holes in it). He walked about 150 yards away from the blind and set up what I guess is an incense burner to attract deer. So he moseyed back to the blind, sat down, and looked out of the blind at the nicest grass fire you have ever seen.

He hauled himself out of the blind with his special chair that fits into his brand new tent with holes in it and ran the 150 yards in about 3 minutes and started beating out the fire with his chair. Well, Smokey must have been smiling down on him because he got the fire under control and completely out.

Soon after he returned from his hunting trip, he called and told me about the fire and was most apologetic about it. I told him it was no big deal, but I couldn't stop laughing after the call. He didn't see any deer that day, but he did tell me not to tell anyone. (You betcha!)

*Carl Schroeder
Lenexa*

DEER POACHERS PAY BIG FINES

Eight hunters from North Carolina will pay more than \$36,000 in fines and fees after pleading guilty to illegally shooting trophy deer in Kansas and taking them across state lines. The poachers were caught shooting bucks out of season in the Stafford County area in November of 2004 and often illegally tagged the deer with Whitetail Antlerless Only Deer game tags.

Tips from the public are credited for the arrests, but the case was resolved through a 15-month investigation by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, and the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission.

The hunters entered guilty pleas and were sentenced on Jan. 25 in Wichita by U.S. Magistrate Judge Donald W. Bostwick. The eight men each pleaded guilty to one count of transporting illegally-taken wildlife across state lines.

Along with monetary penalties, the defendants will serve three years probation. During this time, they will not be permitted to hunt anywhere in the United States. In addition, they had to forfeit all the game and five firearms used in the crimes.

—Shoup

GYM SHORTS BUST

Monday, June 6, 2005, was my day off, and I had worked around the house all day, chipping away on the long list of things to do that come with building a new home. I was fresh out of the shower, wearing gym shorts and a T-shirt, barefoot as I walked out the door to start the grill for dinner. Music? Yeah, that was music, loud music, coming from the road in front of the house. What now?

I walked into the front yard, and through the leaves of the trees and the weeds along the road I could see a blue van just west of the house in the road, with the sliding side and the front driver's doors open, music blaring. My first thought was that it had to be some kids answering the call of nature, but I continued to walk toward the road to see if it was something else.

As I got closer to the van, I could see a guy with a snake hook and a reptile bag standing in the middle road and trying to catch a copperhead snake. I walked out into the road and told him to let it go, but he didn't hear me. I repeated the order a second time, louder. This time he

looked up at me, but continued his efforts to capture the snake. The third time, I said it loud enough to make sure he knew I meant it.

Now he was in a fix. He didn't know who or what to pay more attention to, the venomous snake or me, but he finally let the copperhead crawl off the road into the ditch. As I walked up on the van, I could see it had Indiana tags. I identified myself as natural resource officer Bob Funke, and the look on his face was priceless. He said, "You live here?"

I said, "Right there," pointing at the house.

His ID revealed that he was from Hobart, Indiana. I asked if he had any other snakes in the van, to which he replied "no," but he did admit to having some turtles. I asked if I could look in the van, and he agreed. In the back of the vehicle, I found a reptile field guide, leather gloves, a long-handled net, more snake bags, and plastic containers with three ornate box turtles and a common snapping turtle.

After questioning him about when and where he'd picked up the turtles, he said they were all taken in Wilson County. I informed him he needed a non-resident hunt-

ing license to collect reptiles, and he replied that he didn't have one. I told him to shut the doors on the van and wait for me.

Taking the keys to the van, I went back to my house and put on my uniform and boots. (The gravel road was more than my bare feet could take.) When I came back, I told him I was writing him a ticket for taking reptiles without a hunting license. I also let him know that since he was from out-of-state, he was going to have to post a cash bond. The man replied that the bond wouldn't be a problem, so I photographed the turtles (which I later released) and had the man follow me to the city of Buffalo Post Office, where I wrote him the tickets.

He put the required \$160 in an envelope, addressed it to the clerk of the district court, and dropped it in the mail box. He said next time he would have a license, and we parted after I explained to him that he could not collect reptiles in Kansas for commercial purposes. He assured me that he was doing it for his personal use.

The next week, I checked with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, and they said that they had arrested this man before. The

charges? Commercialization of wildlife, specifically reptiles.

Commercialization of reptiles for the pet-store trade is big business. The report I received from Indiana revealed that this particular collector illegally sold box turtles for as much as \$15, tree frogs for \$5, and snakes for up to \$80. Some Texas turtles were sold for as much as \$150.

In the state of Kansas, snakes and turtle are easily picked up on and along the roadways of the state, and these illegal reptile harvesters are hard to detect and apprehend. I'll keep my eyes out for this particular fellow. I have a feeling he'll be back in the area although now that he knows where the Wilson County natural resource officer lives, he probably won't be stopping in front of this house again.

—Bob Funke,
natural resource officer,
Fredonia



STATE PARK FUNDING

From 1958 through 1963, the Kansas state parks system was funded entirely from the State General Fund (SGF). Park entrance fees were implemented in 1964 and camping fees in 1982. Since 1995, however, SGF support for parks has been reduced from 60 percent of the annual parks operating budget to 17 percent. As SGF support has fallen, user fees have increased to bear more of the funding needs of parks. In the past five years, park entrance fees have increased twice and camping fees four times.

Fiscal Year 2005 Parks Division operating budgets were funded primarily by park user fees (65 percent), SGF appropriations (17 percent), and federal grants (9 percent). The balance of the KDWP Parks Division's 2005 expenditures were funded from a variety of lesser funding sources. State and federal statutes prohibit the use of revenues generated by sale of hunting and fishing licenses and permits to fund state park operations.

A minimum annual operating budget of \$10 million is required to adequately maintain state parks. The Fiscal Year 2005 budget to operate state parks was \$7.2 million. The Parks Division comprises 107 full-time employees. Kansas ranks next to last among all states in spending on its parks, but fifth among all states in overnight camping stays, and the long-term



deferral of maintenance and capital improvement presents a growing challenge to provide adequate facilities and services.

How do we ensure that adequate resources are available to operate state parks that continue to serve the state and its citizens? Surveys indicate strong public sentiment in favor of a state-supported parks system. However, alternatives for an acceptable mechanism to generate funds are still being explored. One proposal recently discussed is to add a \$5 outdoor recreation fee to the annual registration fee paid for personal and recreational vehicles. Patterned after a system implemented in Montana, that proposal would allow anyone with a valid Kansas license plate on their vehicle to enter any state park, any time of the year, without having to purchase the currently-required daily or annual vehicle permit. The proposal would have distributed 80 percent of the estimated \$11 million raised annually to state parks, with the 20 percent balance disbursed to communities across Kansas for development of local parks, trails, and outdoor recreation facilities.

In recent years, other funding strategies have been discussed by legislators, community leaders, outdoor recreation professionals, and other Kansas citizens. Pending legislation as of

early April, if passed, would add an additional \$6 million to Kansas state parks.

Your participation in the search for a solution is important. We'd like to hear your comments and ideas, so add your two cents at www.kdwp.blogspot.com.

—Mathews

WILDLIFE CREDIT CARD

On this page in the Nov./Dec. issue of *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine, we announced the debut of our KDWP "affinity" credit card. Anyone who wants to contribute to fish and wildlife conservation or parks in Kansas should get this card. The personal credit card allows the holder to support the KDWP programs of their choice and receive additional benefits.

Here's how it works.

When a new applicant is approved, KDWP receives a signup fee from UMB Bank. This fee is donated to the program the applicant designates to support. Applicants may choose to support parks, hunting, fishing, boating, or watchable wildlife at the time they apply. The program will generate long-term support from every card issued because a percentage of what each card holder spends is returned to that selected department program monthly.

In addition, the applicant receives a two-year free subscription to *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine. (If you're reading this right now, that

should be an attractive incentive.) In addition, card holders earn redemption points on purchases of KDWP's Outdoor Store merchandise, park and game permits, stamps, and licenses.

Applications for the KDWP Visa® Platinum credit card are available at KDWP offices. Applications may also be made online. Just click "KDWP Info" on our home page, and then click "KDWP Visa Card" on the left-hand column of the page.

—Shoup



TRACK THAT BILL

The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks website is the place to go for the latest news on KDWP-related bills in the Kansas Legislature. Department staff regularly update information on bills under consideration in the legislature to provide current reports on legislation affecting outdoor recreation in Kansas.

Just click "KDWP Info" on the agency's home page, then click "Legislative Update" for background information on any current bill, as well as a summary of actions taken on the bill while in the legislature. In addition, a link is available to the Kansas Legislature website to view the full text of any bill.

—Mathews

KDWP Deer Task Force

The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks presented a report on deer-related statute review to the Kansas Legislature Feb. 1 and 2. During the legislature's 2005 session, the House Wildlife, Parks and Tourism Committee requested that the department review statutes and bring recommendations to simplify them. Last fall, the Deer Task Force Committee, a 10-member group of department employees, was assembled to begin that process.

The Task Force began meeting in November, charged with reviewing not only deer-related statutes, but also regulations, permitting processes, and management. The group soon discovered that it couldn't change one aspect of the package without affecting two or three other areas. And it realized that with potential changes affecting so many hunters, landowners, and non-hunters, public input was necessary.

The Deer Task Force's report requested that any final department recommendations for changes to deer-related statutes be delayed until the 2007 legislative session so that public input could be incorporated. Below are some of the key points included in the report:

- permit allocation and distribution should be a function of the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, and opportunity to obtain permits should be fair and equitable. Comments from hunters, landowners, and outfitters indicate an overwhelming dislike for the current transferable permit system;
- the deer resource, especially mule deer in the west, must be conserved. Deer populations should be maintained within levels sustainable by the habitat and within tolerance levels of people for the damages and conflicts that deer may cause. Animal health issues must be addressed as they pertain to wild deer and captive cervid operations. Deer herd characteristics must be maintained within aesthetic and quality standards desired by people;
- Kansas' deer hunting tradition must grow. The complexity and restriction of current permitting procedures and regulations have kept the Kansas deer hunting tradition from being what it could be;
- stakeholder input is necessary;
- the permitting process and hunting regulations can be simplified; and
- deer hunting opportunities can be improved.

Preliminary recommendations of the task force include increasing nonresident whitetail either sex permits to meet demand in eastern units and eliminating the transferable permit; developing a whitetail either sex permit that would be valid in any season with legal equipment; re-establishing the statewide, either species archery permit; reducing the number of management units from 19 to two for whitetail either sex permit holders; adjusting the special muzzleloader season to open in late September; and more.

A complete report on the draft recommendations are available on the department's website, www.kdwp.state.ks.us.

The task force has been soliciting public input through email, the website, telephone, and the department web log, www.kdwp.blogspot.com. The recommendations have been discussed at all commission meetings since January. Task force members will schedule public meetings around the state to hear public opinion later this summer.

—Miller

SSN REPEAL PROPOSAL

Last February, U.S. Senator Rick Santorum (R-PA), chairman of the Senate Republican Conference, introduced Senate Bill (S.) 2249, the Sportsmen's Privacy Protection Act, which would repeal the federal mandate

that requires states to collect Social Security numbers for recreational licenses.

"I have heard from a lot of hunters and sportsmen's groups about their legitimate concerns in giving their Social Security number when apply-

ing for a hunting license," said Senator Santorum. "In my view, there are significant privacy concerns to disclosing Social Security numbers when outdoor enthusiasts purchase their hunting, fishing, or recreational licenses.

"This important legislation restores the privacy rights of recreational hunters and fisher-

men, while maintaining an effective system of child support enforcement [the stated intent of the law]," Santorum continued. "I urge my colleagues to consider cosponsoring this legislation that restores the privacy rights of recreational hunters and fishermen."

—National Shooting Sports Foundation News Release

INSTRUCTOR OF THE YEAR

The Advisory Committee to the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP) Hunter Education Program has named Ray Fischer, Claflin, as the 2005 Hunter Education Instructor of the Year. An instructor for more than 10 years, Fischer has taught and organized classes in Barton, Ellsworth, and Saline counties.

Fischer actively recruits and works with new instructors for communities in central Kansas and has developed trail walks and live-fire exercises. In fact, he developed the first hunter education trail walk in his area and took equipment for setting up trail walks anywhere in the state they were needed. In addition, he has conducted classes on lesson plan preparation, teaching techniques, and developing and setting up equipment for trail walks.

A National Rifle Association certified shotgun instructor, Fischer conducts shooting clinics for the Barton County Boy Scouts Shotgun Merit Badge and annually helps sponsor and coach a Youth



Scholastic Clay Target Shooting Team comprised of youth ages 10 through 16. For 10 years, he has taken area youth on turkey, quail, and pheasant hunts. His past Hunter Education Program honors include master instructor and Order of the Buffalo.

In addition to Fischer's award, exceptional instructors in three of KDWP's five regions were named Regional Instructors of the Year. These include the following:

- Region 2 – Robert J. Kramer, Meriden;
- Region 3 – Anthony Luebbers, Garden City; and
- Region 4 – Donovan Arrowsmith, Arkansas City.

Fischer received a Beretta AL391 12-gauge shotgun with his award, and the regional honorees each received Henry Golden Boy .22 caliber rifles.

–Shoup

HUNTER ED MAKEOVER

The KDWP Hunter Education Section is offering a number of alternatives to Hunter Education certification. One alternative involves just one day of class work and only about two hours in the classroom. Here's out it works.

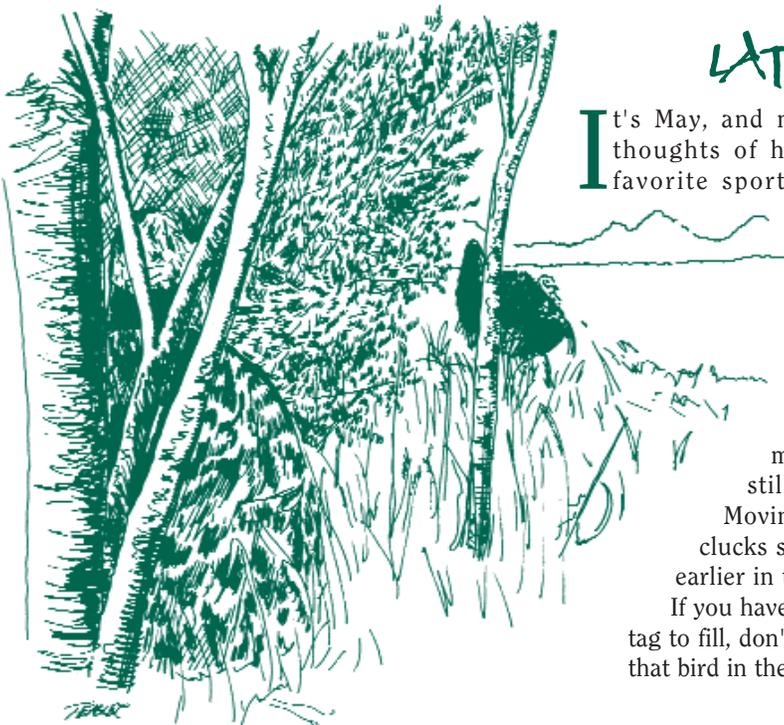
Several days before the class, students log on to <http://homestudy.ihea.com> and take an online test. The next step is to show up at a designated shooting range with a room for a short class and take a 15-minute, 25-question quiz.

Following this short quiz, the students will be given review on material from the website. The rest of the day, the students rotate through several hands-on outside learning stations, such as a Laser Shot computer-simulated hunting game, safe gun handling, field obstacles, and live shotgun fire on the range.

After the stations have been completed, students return to the clubhouse to take the same final test that all hunter education course students take.

Phone 620-672-5911 for more info.

–Shoup



LATE-SEASON GOBBLERS

It's May, and many outdoorsmen and women have turned their thoughts of hunting to pursuit of spawning crappie or other favorite sportfish. However, the die-hard hunter knows that there's still a month of turkey hunting left.

By May, most hens have been bred and are on the nest. This leaves that lonely gobbler with fewer paramours about, making him as vulnerable to a perceived tryst as he might have been when the breeding season began.

Granted, late-season gobblers can be as jumpy as late-season bucks. However, in isolated areas, toms may have been bothered little. Those that have may still respond to the hunter who is quiet and patient.

Moving little and calling with caution are the keys. Low clucks sparingly used may be as effective as aggressive calling earlier in the season.

If you haven't bagged a turkey yet this spring, or if you still have a tag to fill, don't give up. The crappie will still be there once you've got that bird in the bag.

–Shoup



MEALS FROM HEAVEN

by Mark Shoup



It has been said that the best watermelon is stolen watermelon. Now I cannot attest to this fact, nor can I recall where I may have heard it. If it is true, however, I have a theory about why this may be. The theory is twofold: 1) such melons must surely be eaten outdoors with close companions, and 2) the entire nature of the eating must be improvised, from the hasty picking of the melons to safe haven in which they might be devoured in relative peace and safety.

I come to these conclusions not necessarily through any direct experience with stealing or eating stolen watermelons but through the much more sublime culinary experience of meals fashioned over a campfire. Some of my most vivid outdoor memories involve campfire meals, whether cooked over a fire or beside one on an old Coleman camp stove.

When I was a boy, my heart leapt whenever Dad asked if I wanted to go camping. These trips were usually along the Pawnee Creek or the Arkansas River near Larned. One of the earliest I recall was with the high school football coach, Crump Redding, and three of his boys, Clark, Bobby, and David. With the help of our fathers, we set lines along the Arkansas. Then we ran up and down the river, skipping rocks, whittling wood, and finally, battling sleep, we stretched outside our tents naming the stars.

The next morning, we were up bright and early and checked the lines, proudly hauling a large stringer of pan-size channel cats back to camp.

"Well, boys," said Crump, stirring the

campfire embers as Dad threw a few logs on, "looks like you brought us breakfast!"

Dad and Crump gutted the fish and cut their heads off while we stoked the fire. Crump had a huge cast-iron skillet – about 30 inches in diameter – a standard fixture on such outings, perfect for cooking an entire meal. He poured in oil and chopped potatoes, and still there was room for a dozen catfish. As the golden brew sizzled, we huddled around the fire, gabbing about willow limbs bouncing under the struggle of unseen fish, our mouths watering until finally came the magic words, "Get your plates, boys."

Crump shoveled fish and potatoes onto our plates, and as we ate, we surely felt some sense of residing, however temporarily, in Heaven. The last I can remember of that morning is David, about 6 years old at the time, falling asleep in an old deck chair, the remains of a channel cat skeleton dangling just below his chin.

I have many other such memories: the aroma of bacon sizzling over a fire in Wyoming as I crawl out of my pup tent. Dad, his friend Jim Ware, and I are on a deer and antelope hunt, and I am in 6th grade. It's fall, the air is crisp, and Dad and Jim are already up and dressed. The fire and the bacon draw me spellbound to their sides. Not a word is spoken; none need be...

Dad and I have camped, once again on the Arkansas – just the two of us – and Dad is frying ham and eggs on his Coleman white-gas stove. We slap the ham between two pieces of bread with no condiments, and it is absolutely the

best ham sandwich I have ever, or ever will, eat.

Suddenly, I am a grown man. The mantle of camp cook has been passed to Clark as we take our boys camping along the same rivers. Although that huge skillet remains part of the legacy, Clark has refined campfire culinary techniques handed down from generations. In the evening, we set lines as usual, using willow limbs overhanging the river or cutting the best and showing them in the bank over promising cuts and holes in the river. Then we return to camp and prepare.

We dig a hole about 4 feet across and 2 feet deep. Our boys gather sticks, and limbs, and logs, and as the sun sets, the fire blazes. We feed the fire late enough to keep coals going all night, and when the morning dawns, Clark gets out the shovel. As I place logs on the struggling embers, he digs a rectangular channel on one side of the pit, about 18 inches wide, 3 feet long, and the same depth as the fire pit.

Clark is organization personified as he chops onions and potatoes, peels bacon, and breads filleted fish. Spices fly. Then he scoops coals from the fire into the channel, about a 8-inch layer, and throws a grid across the new pit. For my small part in this ballet, I place the coffee pot on two smoldering logs, and smoke encircles the blackening vessel. Bacon and potatoes begin popping and cracking in the skillet. A timeless aroma gathers everyone into a circle of good humor, but a second, deeper cast-iron cauldron steams, brimming with oil that begs for breaded fish. As Clark drops in fillets, the oil snarls and the fillets swirl, filling the air with yet another rich aroma that complements the orchestra of campfire cooking music.

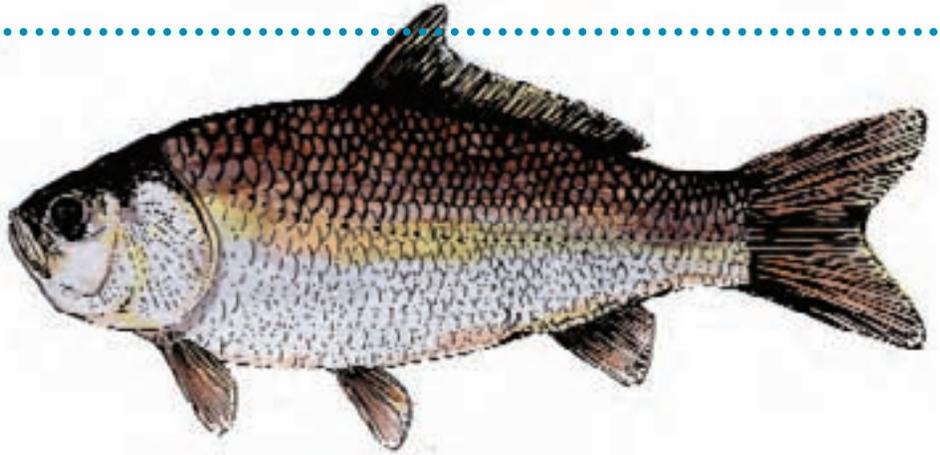
And once again, a generation learns to eat with the flair of the outdoorsman. Perhaps not unlike that watermelon, these are stolen moments, snatched from the pace of daily life like fairies appearing in an evening wood. God willing, there will be more such feasts that reveal not just the relationship between people and food, but a strikingly spiritual communion among meals, friends, and family, made all the more sublime by a campfire.

Commercial Fishing

For those who dislike rough fish (carp, buffalo, gar, etc.) in reservoirs, some relief is here. Commercial fisherman J.D. Bell from Missouri has been working under contract with KDWP and has removed nearly 4 million pounds of nonsport fish since he began back in the early 1990s. Reservoirs he's worked include Melvern, Clinton, La Cygne, Perry, Pomona, John Redmond, Kanopolis, and Lovewell.

The primary target species is buffalo, but carp, river carpsuckers, gar, drum, and shad are also removed. He is required to pay the state one cent per pound of the buffalo he catches. That may not sound like much, but a million pounds of fish can add up quickly.

Most of the buffalo caught are hauled either live or frozen to fish markets in Kansas City, Illinois, and



New York. Believe it or not, a lot of people are willing to pay for these fish. Thus, Bell's efforts provide a benefit to him, the buffalo fish lovers, and Kansas anglers.

Bell started working at Glen Elder Reservoir last July and has found so many nonsport fish there that he plans

to work this lake for the next two years, in addition to Kanopolis, Lovewell, and Clinton reservoirs. He uses both gill nets and 1/4-mile seines. The gill nets have 4-inch mesh that most sport fish in the lake can swim right through while the big 12-15 pound buffalo are caught. When seining, he uses 3-inch mesh and catches a minimal number of sportfish, which are almost always released in good shape. In fact, the more time he has to spend dealing with sportfish, the longer it takes him to work, so he makes an effort to avoid working in locations with high numbers of sportfish.

Since July 2004, Bell has removed nearly 800,000 pounds of nonsport fish – about 64 pounds per acre – from Glen Elder. Buffalo account for 90 percent of that total; carp and gar, 4 percent; river carpsuckers, 2 percent; and drum and shad each less than 1 percent. Bell thinks that, given time, he can remove as much as 175 pounds per acre, which equates to more than 2.2 million pounds.

This work can have a positive impact on the sportfish populations, hopefully resulting in long-term improvement of sportfish recruitment and much lower concentrations of these nonsport fish.

–Scott Waters,
fisheries biologist, Beloit

Canadians Watch Walleye

One of Kansas' most popular angling opportunities occurs in late May and early June as anglers search for walleye along mud flats and points in major reservoirs. But anglers aren't the only ones interested in walleye. Last March, fisheries biologists conducted their annual harvest of walleye eggs, a process that makes Kansas walleye fishing possible. Two developments made this year's walleye egg harvest particularly interesting.

The first was that egg-taking and propagation were performed on site at Cheney Reservoir. Biologists took eggs from the lake's females, fertilized them, and placed the eggs in heated hatching jars under the Law Enforcement Division's covered dock. After hatching, the young walleye fry were returned directly to the lake. On-site propagation was used because Cheney is infested with white perch, and biologists didn't want to risk spreading this undesirable species to other lakes.

The second interesting development in this year's walleye egg harvest was the presence of biologists from Quebec, Canada. Two Canadian fisheries biologists learned about Kansas propagation techniques from a video clip on the KDWP website. Intrigued, they decided to purchase a walleye barge much like the one used by KDWP. To learn more about the process, they helped with Kansas egg-taking at Milford Reservoir in March.

KDWP's biologists harvest almost 100 million walleye eggs and 15 million saug-eye eggs this year. Because fewer than 5 percent of eggs normally hatch in the wild, artificial spawning and hatching is used annually to increase egg survival rates as much as 40-50 percent.

Some fry are stocked in hatchery ponds to be raised to fingerling size and stocked later in the summer. Others are stocked directly into lakes as fry. All this activity may not be high-profile, but it means more fish in the frying pan for Kansas anglers.

–Shoup

Kansas Hummers

Hummingbirds, the Sunflower State's smallest birds, live only in the Americas. Of the 319 species, 15 are found in the United States, and only the ruby-throated hummingbird is common in Kansas. It nests along streams and woodland parks and is more abundant in the eastern half of the state. Rufous and broad-tailed hummingbirds can be seen during migrations.

Ruby-throated hummers are a mere 3 1/2 inches long and weigh only 4.5 grams. This compares to a 5 1/2-inch, 27-gram house sparrow. The sphinx moth (adult form of the tomato hornworm), seen feeding at flowers during summer evenings, is sometimes mistaken for this darting atom of bird-life.

Hummers can be seen in Kansas from mid-April to October. They winter along the Gulf Coast, Mexico, Panama, and Yucatan. Some even cross the 500 mile-wide Gulf of Mexico in about 20 hours, nonstop. Because of the ability to rotate their rapidly-beating wings, hummingbirds are the only bird that can hover in place and even fly backwards.

These small birds must consume large amounts of energy to compensate for their high metabolic rate. Feeding about every 10 minutes, they eat one-half of their body weight in insects and nectar each day. In order to prevent starving to death at night, hummingbirds go into a torpor, temporary hibernation, and their heart rate lowers from 500 to 40 beats-per-minute.

—Ken Brunson,
wildlife diversity coordinator, Pratt

Faces In The Water

Monkeyface, pimpleback, and fat mucket are colorful names for three of 41 species of native Kansas mussels. Freshwater mussels are frequently overlooked as native wildlife in Kansas. However, the roles they play in our aquatic systems are important and as interesting as any other species.

Some species can be found throughout the entire state, while others are limited to specific drainages. As with most plants and wildlife, the diversity of mussels is greater in eastern Kansas than in the west. The Neosho River, which starts near Council Grove, is the only river in the state where all 41 species can be found.

Mussels are an important component of the aquatic community. They con-

stantly filter water, making them excellent indicators of aquatic health. A large mussel, such as the heelsplitter, can filter as much as a gallon of water in a day, removing sediments and small organisms from the water. If pollution is a problem in the stream, mussel populations can plummet.

Reproduction among freshwater mus-

sels is fascinating and unusual. After a short incubation, the young mussels (glochidia) are released into the water. There, they must attach to the gills of certain species of fish. Some mussels can use a number of host fish species while others can only use one. If one or more host fish species disappear from the stream, the mussels will be unable to reproduce and eventually will die out.

Mussel shells have been used for a variety of things over the years. The plains Indians ate mussels and used the shells for digging and scraping. More

recently, buttons were made from thick-shelled species. In fact, Missouri and Kansas led the nation at one time in buttons produced from mussel shells. One of the biggest button factories in the United States was in Iowa. Many modern buttons try to

mimic the color and texture of the once-popular shell buttons.

Today, there is a moratorium on all commercial mussel harvest in Kansas.

Freshwater mussels come in all shapes and sizes. In Kansas, the largest is the white heelsplitter, which

can grow to 8 inches in diameter. One of the smallest is the fawnsfoot, which gets

not much bigger than a half-dollar. The most common are the pond mussel and the mapleleaf.

Mussels are long-lived, some living more than 120 years. Fifty-year-old mussels are fairly common. Counting the growth rings on the shell will give the approximate age of the individual although some rings are difficult to distinguish. The most difficult rings to count are the ones on the outer part of the shell.

Some of the least common Kansas mussels include two species – the black sandshell and the hickory nut. These were once common to the state but are

now completely extirpated. Shells of the hickory nut and black sandshell can be found along the Kansas River on Fort Riley.

While tempting, it would not be a good idea to cook up a mess of Kansas clams.

Because they are so long-lived, they can accumulate a high degree of pollution and sediments and generally do not have a good flavor. One that can be eaten is the Asiatic clam, which is not native but is fairly common in the state's waters. However, it may be difficult to find many bigger than a silver dollar.

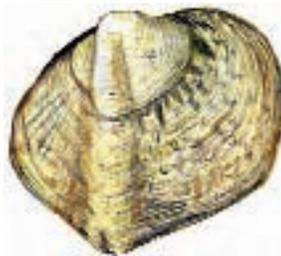
For more information about freshwater mussels in Kansas and on Fort Riley, phone 785-239-6211.

—Alan Hynek, fish and wildlife biologist, Fort Riley

HEELSPLITTER



MONKEYFACE



PIMPLEBACK



OUTDOOR ADVENTURE CAMP

Kansas youngsters between the ages of 10 and 12 who enjoy the outdoors should make plans to attend the Outdoor Adventure Camp (OAC), held annually at the Camp WaShunGa area of Rock Springs 4-H Center, near Junction City. This year's event runs Sunday, June 11, through Friday, June 16, and is sponsored by the Kansas Wildlife Federation.

Days will be spent hiking the grounds at Rock Springs with instructors, getting a hands-on understanding of how various Kansas animals and plants live.

Each afternoon, every youngster will be involved in two activities, including canoeing, horseback riding, pellet gun shooting, archery, fishing (twice), and arts and crafts (twice). Each session lasts about an hour, followed by an afternoon swim in the pool.

Nighttime activities include prowling for owls, star-gazing, and watching bats catch bugs. Campfire snacks will round out the evenings with storytelling. Wednesday evening will include a fishing contest.

Other activities include scavenger hunts; rifle, shotgun, and muzzleloader shooting; a volleyball tournament; and a day-trip to the Milford Nature Center and Fish Hatchery. Kids will be assigned cabins for their stay, and Friday, each cabin will perform a skit associating their cabin mascot with some environmental topic.

Participants need to bring

a swimsuit, sleeping gear, clothes for a week, sunscreen, insect repellent, a cap, and a water bottle. Food, instruction, and lodging are all included in the price of the camp, which is \$225. Space is limited, and the registration deadline is June 6.

For more information or an application, phone 785-526-7466 evenings, 785-658-2465 during the day, or email bergkwf@wtciweb.com.

— *Tommie Berger,*
fisheries biologist,
Sylvan Grove

BOATING EDUCATION

Any person born on or after Jan. 1, 1989, must complete an approved boater safety education course in order to operate a motorboat or sailboat on public waters in Kansas. This requirement does not apply to a person accompanied by and under the direct supervision of a person older than 17 who either possesses a certificate of completion of an approved boater safety education course or is legally exempt from the requirement.

Boating safety courses approved by the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) and recognized by the United States Coast Guard meet the educational requirements. Nonresident boaters must also comply. All states provide a NASBLA-approved course that is also accepted in Kansas.

To maintain U.S. Coast Guard recognition, the course must be a minimum of eight hours long. The

course covers navigation, trailer use, equipment requirements, personal watercraft, safety tips, drug and alcohol impairment, self-rescue, and marine theft.

You can take a boating safety course offered by KDWP, U.S. Power Squadrons, or U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary. Classes are posted on the KDWP website, www.kdwp.state.ks.us, as they are scheduled and may have a pre-registration fee. A free home-study course is available by phoning 620-672-5911, ext. 170, or by using the email form on the "Boating" section of the KDWP website.

For a \$15 fee, an internet course is available at Boat-Ed's website, boat-ed.com/ks. Passing one of these boating safety classes may also make you eligible for a discount on boat or personal watercraft insurance from your insurance provider.

— *Erika Nighswonger,*
boating education
coordinator, Pratt

PARK EVENTS

Each year, Kansas state parks conduct special events, some in conjunction with Free Park Entrance Days, some to celebrate a special historical event or geological attribute of an individual park, and others just for entertainment. Each park sets its own dates for these events, including Free Park Entrance Days.

Events are diverse and may include anything from a marathon race to boating courses and equestrian events. Many are educational, and all are designed to enhance the fun of visiting

Kansas state parks. For more information on state park events, click the "Events Calendar" on the "State Parks" page of the KDWP website.

— *Shoup*

SURVEY SEEKS PARTICIPANTS

On March 27, the Census Bureau began interviewing people for the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation. Interviews will be conducted primarily by telephone. People unreachable by phone will be interviewed in person.

The survey provides fish and wildlife agencies with data critical in determining the social and economic benefits of their programs and the numbers of participants.

Participation is voluntary and all responses are confidential. Data collected will be used for statistical purposes only. The first wave of interviewing will run March 27 through May 31. The second wave of interviews will be conducted in September and October, and a third wave will be held in January and February of 2007.

Preliminary survey findings will be available that spring. Final reports will be issued in the fall of 2007.

For further information, contact the Division of Federal Assistance's survey staff -- Sylvia Cabrera, Richard Aiken, or Jerry Leonard -- at 703-358-2156. Updates will be posted on the Fish and Wildlife Service's home page, <http://federalaid.fws.gov>.

— *Shoup*

FOR THE BIRDS



silhouette of roadrunner

usually found on the ground



silhouette of cardinal

typically found perched on a branch or wire

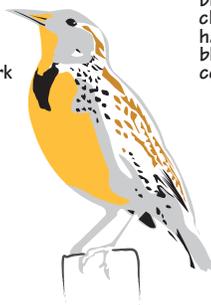


silhouette of woodpecker

woodpeckers are often sighted on tree trunks after being located by their noisy pecking



birds like this chickadee can have a simple black & white coloration



the meadowlark has a distinct yellow breast with a black V mark on it

Have you ever seen a bird in your backyard and wondered what kind it was, or have you heard a beautiful song and wondered what bird made that sound? You are not alone. Birdwatching is one of the most popular outdoor activities in the United States, with nearly one out of every five Americans participating. That means there are about 46 million people in the U.S. who watch birds.

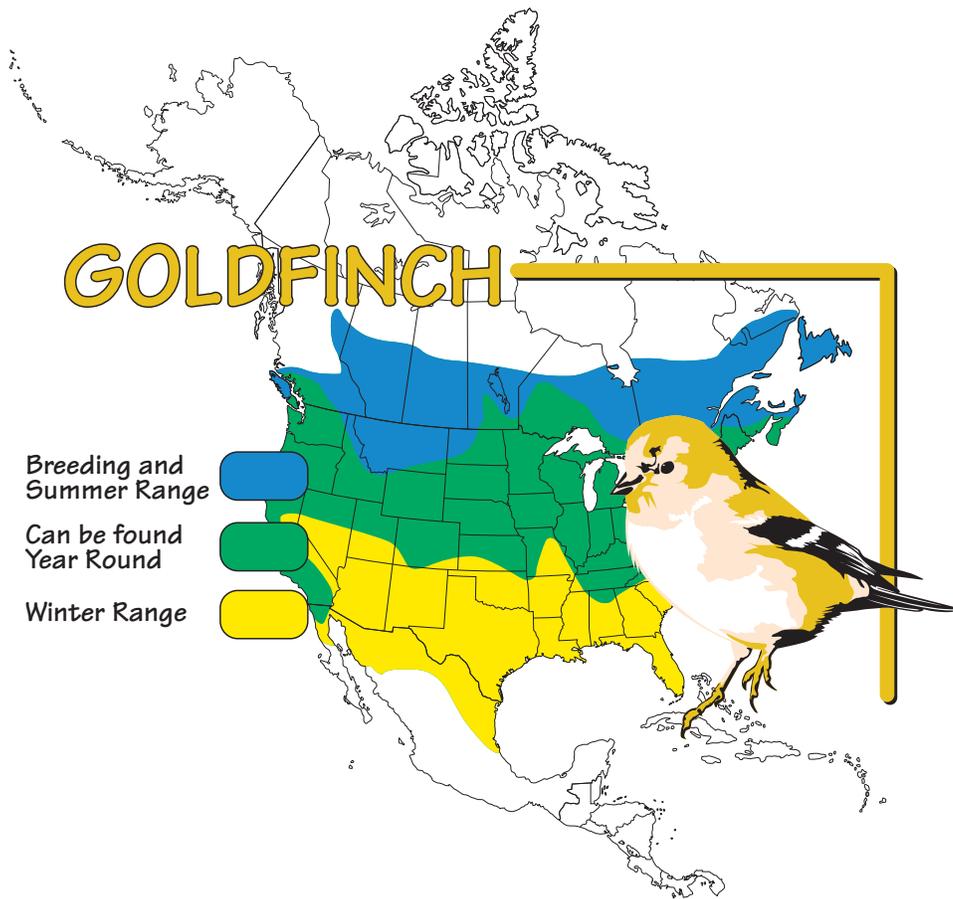
It is easy to get started watching birds; just go outside or watch a bird feeder from a window. You will need some kind of book to identify the birds. The National Audubon Society has published one of the more recent guides called *The Sibley Guide to Birds*, by David Allen Sibley. But if the internet is your thing, check out eNature.com. There are lots of great field guides and lots of internet sites there. Visit the public library and see what bird books you can check out.

The only other tool you might need is a pair of binoculars. These are helpful but they are not a must, especially if you are observing birds at a nearby feeder.

What do you look for? Here are some key points to help you identify a bird.

Size: Is it larger or smaller than a robin, a sparrow, a pigeon, a crow, or a Canada goose? Use five or six common birds of different sizes as your gauge.

Shape: Is the neck long or short? Are the legs long or short? What size is the bill or beak? What is the shape of the bill? Notice how the bird sits. Is it upright when it perches, or is it almost horizontal to the ground?



you? Who cooks for you all? It doesn't sound like this, but the rhythm works. Other attempts to describe bird calls with letters involve making up words that imitate the bird's sound, such as *caw-caw* for the common crow.

Location: Was the bird in a tree? Was the bird on the ground? Was the bird in the water? Where in the U.S. were you when you saw the bird?

Time: What time of day or night was it? What time of the year?

If you can answer the questions above regarding your mystery bird, you can identify it. The majority of the birds you see are not rare or unusual. Be observant and get

into the habit of asking the right questions.

By the end of April, millions of birds are migrating through North America to northern nesting grounds, trying to attract mates and establishing territories. While wetlands like Cheyenne Bottoms in Kansas are migration hotspots because they provide resting and refueling places for hungry birds, backyards can also provide refueling and watering stations for migrating birds. Put a bird feeder and water in your back yard. If you would like to learn from experienced birdwatchers, attend a birdwalk in your community or at a nature center.

It's easy to see that birds are fun to watch, but would you believe that birds also provide jobs and help the economy? A report from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service found that 46 million birdwatchers across America spent \$32 billion on birdwatching gear such as binoculars, travel, food, canoes, cabins, and off-road vehicles. This spending supported more than 863,000 jobs.

This spring, become a bird watcher. Create a lifelong hobby and know that you are also contributing the economy of the nation and the well-being of birds.

Color: Is the bird all one color? What color is the head? What color is the breast or belly? What color are the wings? What color is the back?

Field Marks: This is related to the question of color. In many guides, there are arrows pointing to unique colors or markings found on the bird that make it easier to identify. These are called "field marks." For example, does the bird have white outer tail feathers or a white patch at the base of the tail? Are there white bars or stripes on the wing? Field marks are the details that make it easier to identify the bird quickly. Practice looking for small details.

Sounds: Was the bird singing, chipping, or making any kind of sound? Learning the calls of birds is a skill knowledgeable birders gain with experience, but it can also help the beginner. CDs and the internet can be helpful in locating recordings of bird sounds. Most field guides describe the sound and rhythm of bird calls. For example, the rhythm of the barred owl call is described like this: *Who cooks for*



Backlash

by Mike Miller

Life's Little Gifts

Last spring, I was helping Lennie carry a dresser and drawers into his house. The unit wasn't as heavy as it was awkward to hold on to and of course, we neglected to secure the drawers. As you would expect, they kept sliding out whenever the dresser tipped. We'd set it down, push the drawers in hard, as if that would make them stay, and start up the sidewalk again. As we set it down for the third time, each blaming the other for the drawers coming out, I noticed Lennie's neighbor, Roger Wirthlow.

"Don't look," I said in a low whisper, "but Ole Worthless is laughing at us from his porch."

Of course Lennie immediately whipped his head around to glare at Wirthlow.

"Don't strain yourself, Worthless," Lennie quipped."

"This is too good, Lennie Boy," Wirthlow hollered back. "I was watching a Three Stooges episode, but when I saw you two nincompoops, I knew this would be twice as funny. I count watching this calamity as one of life's little gifts," he chuckled. "If you'd used just a little duct tape, you could be done and back laying on the couch watching TV — doing what you two do best."

Lennie just chuckled quietly, offering no rebuttal, which was highly unusual. Then he turned to me and said in a low voice, "Ole Worthless thinks he's so smart, but he wasn't so chipper last month when I took him down to Uncle Stub's crappie pond. Remind me to tell you later."

We managed to wrestle the dresser into the house and up the stairs to the bedroom without Wirthlow's help. When we sat down on the couch to rest, I reminded Lennie of the crappie story.

"You never told me about taking Worthless crappie fishing," I said, without hiding my disappointment of being left out.

"Oh yeah," Lennie remembered. "You were out of town that weekend, or something, and I was desperate for someone to go fishing with," he added, reading my tone. "Ole Worthless was out back planting potatoes, so I mentioned crappie fishing on that pond by Uncle Stub's house. He couldn't put his shovel down fast enough.

"The crappie weren't biting worth a darn, but Ole Worthless made it a memorable trip. I laughed so hard, I'm pretty sure I pulled a muscle.

"Worthless was goosy about fishing out of my little Bass Scamp, and he'd grab the bottom of his chair every time the boat tipped a little. The crappie weren't biting, but I was having a blast catching two-pound bass on my little ultralight. Worthless isn't a bass fisherman, so he complained and acted bored. He finally announced that he had to 'tinkle.' I didn't want to leave those bass, and he was really getting on my nerves, so I told him to just go over the side — not thinking he'd actually try. But he had to go pretty bad because he started looking around for possible spectators. He noticed we were only 50 yards from Uncle Stub's house. I told him no one was home and even if they were, they wouldn't care, but Worthless was afraid Stub's girlfriend was watching. When he realized there was no way I was taking him to shore, he had me spin the Scamp away from the house. He stretched one leg out, leaned over on the other knee, and discreetly pulled the front of his pants down, holding on to the base of his chair with the other hand. It was pretty funny watching his contortions, but all of a sudden, I had a strike. When I set the hook, the scamp rocked back, and Worthless lunged for the base of his chair with both hands, allowing his waistband to snap back up — in mid-stream, so to speak." Lennie gasped, then took a deep breath and wiped his eyes, he was laughing so hard.

"Worthless turned to glare at me, and I kind of felt bad, but when I saw that he was wet from his eyebrows to his waist, I couldn't hold it in. I just about passed out from laughing. Man he was mad! He didn't talk to me the rest of the day — not a single word on the ride home. I count that day as my all-time best crappie fishing trip, and I didn't catch a single crappie. Now every time Worthless pops off and says something smart, I just picture that look on his face, eyebrows dripping — cracks me up every time. You know, he's right about one thing, we have to appreciate life's little gifts," Lennie sighed, and we both wiped tears from our cheeks. ♡

