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On Point

by Mike Hayden



Resource In Peril

Ask a dozen Kansans which of our natural resources is most valuable, and you'll likely get a dozen different answers. One might have a passion for deer hunting, so our nationally acclaimed whitetail herd would be the answer. Still another may rightfully tout the value of our remaining tallgrass prairie as the top resource. Who would argue with the duck hunter who ranks Cheyenne Bottoms, a wetland of international importance, as our top natural spot? And there would be a valid argument for the rich Kansas soil that helps feed the nation. However, there is one resource without which none of the above would exist: Water.

Water has always been an issue on the Great Plains. If we forget or become complacent, a drought comes along to remind us how important water is to our economy and our quality of life. And perhaps no other industry is more affected by water than agriculture, but it wasn't until the drought of the 1950s that ground water in western Kansas began being exploited on a large scale. Irrigation seemed like a reasonable answer to the problem of periodic drought. The groundwater seemed endless.

Much of the water used for irrigation in western Kansas is drawn from the Ogallala Aquifer, an aquifer that underlies 174,000 square miles in parts of eight states — Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas and Wyoming. In 1949, only 2 million acres were irrigated from the Ogallala, most of them in Texas. However, by 1978, there were 170,000 irrigation wells tapping into the Ogallala, 23,000 of these in Kansas. Irrigation wells in eight states that year pumped 23 million acre-feet of water from the Ogallala to irrigate 13 million acres of crops — 2 million of which were in Kansas.

Another way to guard against the effects of drought is to store surface water. During about that same time frame, 1950-1978, more than 20 large federal dams were constructed across Kansas streams. The result was tens of thousands of surface acres of water, stored for irrigation, flood control, municipal water supplies and recreation. Water recreation was new to Kansans, and

boating, fishing, and camping grew into traditional pastimes. State parks were constructed along the shores of our reservoirs, and Kansans soon appreciated how much water-based recreation could improve the quality of their lives. Soon, a new and significant economic base grew around water recreation.

But the Ogallala supply isn't endless, and today, water issues are more contentious than ever. Those issues are exacerbated by the current drought, but our water issues can't be blamed solely on the drought. It's a simple truth of conservation and renewable resources: you can't withdraw faster than the resource can recharge.

The current drought is rated as "moderately severe" in Kansas, and there has been relief in some parts of western Kansas. In fact, Cheyenne Bottoms, the 19,000-acre wetland in Barton County, went from bone dry to full in just two weeks in August. But the picture isn't as bright farther west. Many stream flows are the lowest on record — lower than the drought of the Dirty Thirties, which lasted from 1929-1941. Most western reservoirs are critically low. Sebelius, Cedar Bluff, Webster, and Kirwin reservoirs are 16 to 28 feet below conservation pool. And reservoirs that traditionally maintained stable levels are affected — Glen Elder is 9 feet low, Wilson is 6 feet low, and Kanopolis is so low that none of the boat ramp facilities are useable.

Our water issues won't be solved by normal rainfall. Water problems are much deeper. In some arid areas of southwest Kansas, water withdrawals from the Ogallala have been as much as 100 times greater than recharge rates. By 1980, the water levels in parts of the aquifer had declined as much as 100 feet. We have used this resource at a rate far faster than it can recharge itself, and it has impacted many facets of our lives. But rather than choose sides and begin battling for what's left, we must join forces and figure out how to ensure our future. Rural economies must diversify and water use must be done responsibly with the good of all considered. If we continue our current path, rivers, reservoirs, and communities will dry up, literally and figuratively.

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Front Cover: Kansas is known world-wide for its white-tailed deer hunting. Photographer Mike Blair filmed this November scene with a 600mm lens, f5.6 @ 1/500th Sec. **Back:** More comfortable on the ground, pheasants may roost in trees after snowfall. Mike Blair photographed this bird with a 600mm lens, f/5.6 @ 1/500th Sec.



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Turning Back The Clock

Byron Walker Wildlife Area



Troy Smith photo

By Troy Smith

Byron Walker Wildlife Area manager, Kingman

photos by Mike Blair

photographer/associate editor, Pratt

Wildlife area managers across the state constantly work to turn back the clock — maintaining wildlife habitat by fighting the natural process of succession.

Succession. If you want a case study, the 4,500-acre Byron Walker Wildlife Area, 7 miles west of Kingman along Highway 54, is it. What is succession and why are wildlife area managers working so hard to slow it down? Read on.

As we all get older, we catch ourselves wishing to turn back the clock. When our hair turns gray, our reaction time slows, and our vision and hearing aren't as sharp, we wish for the days of our youth. The same analogy can be used for wildlife habitat.

Without notice, wildlife habitats gradually age before our eyes. Surely you can remember that brushy waterway choked with switch grass and plum thickets where you harvested pheasants, quail, and deer as a teenager. What does it look like now? It probably has several mature elm

trees in the bottom of the draw, the plums may be gone, and the switch grass has given way to smooth brome or even downy brome (cheat). Birds and deer just don't seem to use it like they did in the past.

Even the newer habitats like CRP have changed since their inception in 1985. Can you remember the many weed-choked fledgling CRP grass fields originally supporting vigorous populations of upland birds and deer? In recent years, those same fields may yield game only grudgingly. It seems like we have to walk more miles to bag the same amount of game as we did but a few years ago.

When we evaluate what our boots are traversing, we can easily see there have been changes. This is due to a biological principle known as succession. Succession is the natural



When fire is suppressed, woody vegetation takes over on the native prairie, hurting native grassland species.

tendency of plant communities to change. Bare dirt is quickly covered by broadleaf weeds. Weeds are eventually replaced by perennial grasses. Finally, over time, brush and trees invade the grasslands, converting them to woodlands.

Succession has existed since the first plant emerged. It can be a benefit or a problem, depending on management goals. A variety of tools and practices can influence succession. Kansas Wildlife and Parks (KDWP) wildlife managers work vigorously to maintain the habitats on our wildlife areas. We make frequent use of fire, grazing, mowing, chemicals, and cutting. However, despite these normal annual efforts, the habitats on our wildlife areas naturally age. There is probably not one township in the state that isn't suffering reduced wildlife from aging habitats. It happens on farms, ranches, wildlife areas, and even road ditches.

In fact, the problem is not even limited to Kansas. The following quote from the Oklahoma Conservation Commission (2003) points out such a problem in that state: "Redcedars are encroaching

into pasture and rangeland, reducing forage production and livestock carrying capacity. The red cedar invasion into native plant communities changes habitat structure and composition that results in the displacement of quail, deer, turkeys, and songbirds. Eight million acres in Oklahoma are infested with at least 50 Eastern redcedar or other junipers per acre. This is a 400 percent increase in acres infested in the past 52 years. This

cedar infestation increases at a rate of 762 acres per day. As a result, redcedars are costing Oklahoma \$218 million a year in loss of cattle forage, wildlife habitat, recreation, and water yield. This annual economic loss will increase to \$447 million by 2013 if steps are not taken to control the growing population."

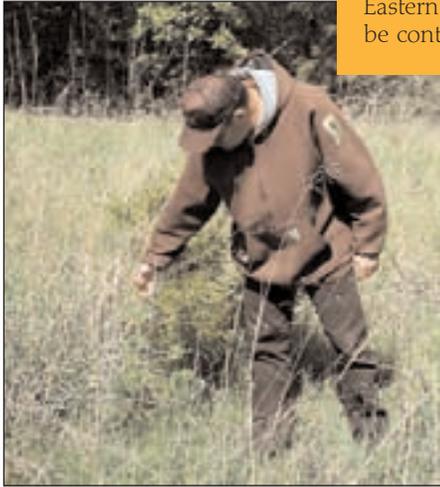
If you have driven both states recently, you can see that Kansas is not far behind. And this information considers only cedar and juniper invasion, not the equally destructive invasion of deciduous trees.

So just what is the problem? The problem is that nearly every game species in Kansas is adapted to early stages of habitat succession. True, many animals make use of more mature habitats like timber or high-succession grasslands. However, the same species usually flourish in either the lower-succession habitats or a



Tree removal is one way to fight succession. Private contractors work aggressively on several areas of the Byron Walker Wildlife Area to remove unwanted trees.

Eastern redcedar is an aggressive invader that can be controlled by fire or cutting.



mixture of habitats that include a large percentage of “younger” habitats. Even species like prairie chickens, which are often related to higher-succession habitats, make use of lower-succession habitats for a significant part of their annual cycles of reproduction, brooding, and growth.

Many Kansas wildlife species went through a boom period in the 1800s and 1900s, as much of the prairie was broken into small fields planted to a wide variety of crops using primitive agricultural practices. This interspersed many crop and perennial cover types in close proximity, along with the significant forb/weed component, greatly increased the usable space for these species.

As time has passed and agricultural practices have trended toward, large, weedless farming, formerly productive habitat has been degraded. Although part of the change is due to the reduction of interspersed as field size increased and cropping methods changed, much of the problem has to do with having the wrong plants in the wrong place. If you ask any grade school class what kind of state Kansas is, you will get a group of predictable answers that include: “The Wheat State,” “The Sunflower State,”

and “The Prairie State.” All of these are true, but only one denotes a habitat type that precedes the arrival of European descendant settlers. We truly are the Prairie State and should be proud of it. Prairie has persisted here for thousands of years and has been threatened only at our hand. More than 97 percent of the world’s grasslands have been destroyed, and Kansas is home for many of the remaining acres.

Much of the problem associated with the degradation of our grassland habitats is easy to see. We have, over time, brought in exotic species of brush and trees to provide habitat for our wildlife species, provide shade and wind protection for our homes and

have crept from the rows where we planted them to invade our grasslands. In some instances, we have voluntarily introduced them there. As a result, the wildlife species we thought we were helping are losing usable space on once productive acres. Recent research has found that many of our wildlife species, especially the more prairie obligate species like the prairie chicken, bobwhite, dickcissel, meadow lark, and grasshopper sparrows, are negatively affected by the encroachment of these woody species.

KDWP and the Byron Walker Wildlife Area (BWWA) are not immune to this degradation. In fact, when Byron Walker took over as manager of what was called the Kingman County Wildlife Area in 1947, planting trees for wildlife habitat was a significant part of his job. The biological knowledge of the time was that more woody habitat was needed to sustain almost all wildlife populations in Kansas. Many hours and dollars were spent to “correct” this

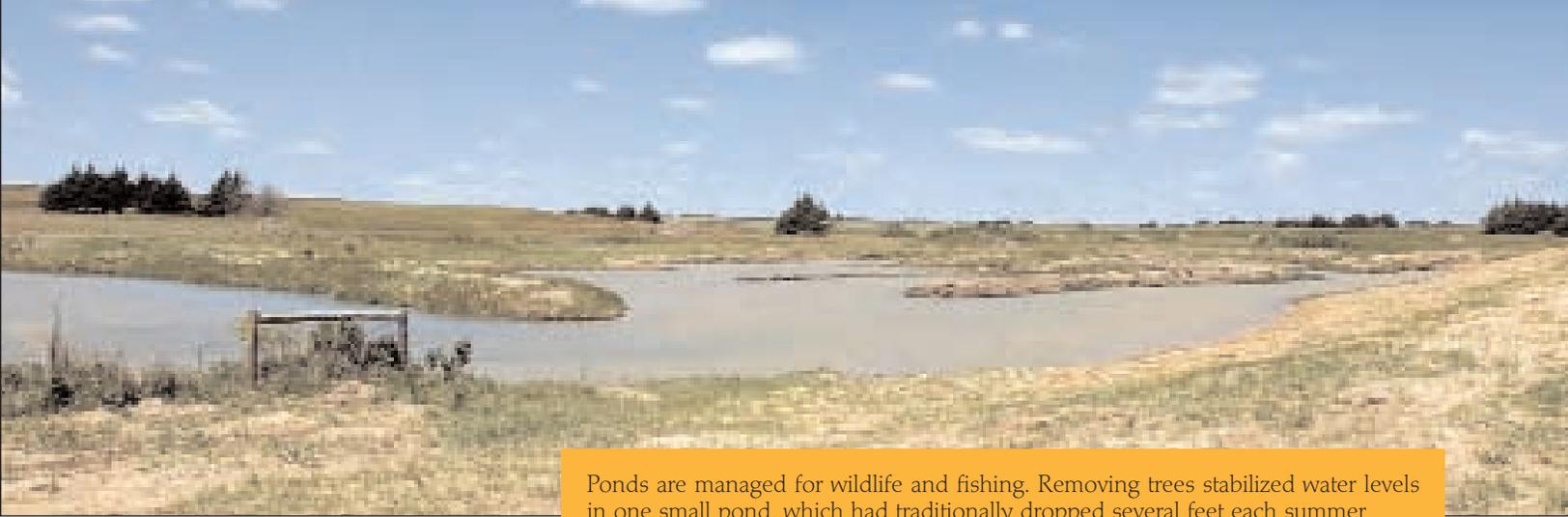


Bobwhite numbers decline as succession advances and trees replace prairie.

livestock, and beautify our surroundings. However, we have not done a good job of keeping those non-native species in the places we intended them to be. In the absence of fire and persistent management, many species like Eastern redcedar, Siberian elm, Osage-orange, honey locust, and black locust



Increased woody vegetation brings nest predators such as raccoons.



Ponds are managed for wildlife and fishing. Removing trees stabilized water levels in one small pond, which had traditionally dropped several feet each summer

deficiency by planting both trees and shrubs on the property. The plantings of plum, sumac, and other shrubs were needed and have provided valuable habitat for decades.

Unfortunately, we have learned that trees growing in prairie habitats can reduce the productivity of some wildlife species and cause their decline. As a result of past assumptions, we have set ourselves up for the succession problems of today. Conditions on BWWA are excellent for producing woody vegetation. Much of the area is sub-irrigated by springs, providing favorable conditions for tree growth. As a result, the combination of the trees planted to “make” wildlife habitat and the seed source they created has resulted in accelerated succession on BWWA.

Bobwhite and prairie chickens are examples of species negatively affected by woody invasion on the prairie. First, the trees themselves make environmental changes beneath their canopies to favor plants not adapted to the full sunlight conditions found on the prairie. Beneficial native grasses, forbs, and brush that once inhabited the site now are forced out, due to their shade intolerance and/or competition with deep-rooted trees. This gen-

erally results in less cover and food being produced at ground level, reducing necessary habitat for bobwhites while favoring their avian predators.

Secondly, bobwhites and their eggs are table fare for many ground predators, such as the raccoon. Raccoons excel when hunting edges, especially near wooded drainages. Their travel distance to eat in such a set up is quite reasonable, allowing them to feed with ease. However, they generally have a difficult time foraging efficiently in an open prairie setting. There is little cover to hide them, they are not efficiently mobile to cover large expanses of open grassland in a night, and they must reach their den trees by morning.

With Eastern redcedar in the prairie picture, though, raccoons no longer need to return to the timber for cover. Raccoons will day-bed in the cedars, right in the upland bird nesting cover, and venture forth at nightfall to steal eggs and reduce the year’s game bird production.

From a prairie chicken perspective, an ancient adaptation is at work. It seems that eons of living in an open landscape inhabited by avian predators has evolved the prairie chicken to avoid vertical structure from which a hawk

might hunt effectively. Whether that structure is a tree, telephone pole, or windmill, prairie chickens refuse to nest within 600-800 yards of a potential hunting perch. As a result, each tree or tower tall enough to cause avoidance costs the prairie chicken 450-640 acres of potential nesting habitat. When you consider the density of prairie trees now in formerly flat habitats, it is no wonder prairie chickens have declined markedly in recent decades.

So what can be done? On BWWA, two levels of plant succession exist. This is due to the eastern third of the area being purchased in the 1930s, and the western two-thirds in the 1960s. Therefore, the two stages of succession must be managed differently.

The older purchase suffers the most advanced succession, as it was developed earlier and includes more sub-irrigated soils. The 1960s land has younger to middle-aged trees invading the prairie acreages. A significant number of cedar rows were also planted in its grasslands. It is bisected by wooded draws and riparian timber that is not completely canopied. A multi-stage management plan has been developed for this portion of the wildlife area and most of our efforts will be directed toward

this younger habitat.

The goal is to reduce or eliminate the negative effects caused by invading trees while retaining the habitat diversity of mixed grass and timber. To do this, deciduous trees and feral cedars will be removed from the prairie remnants, leaving the wooded draws and timber intact. Over time, any exotic, invasive tree species will be removed from all of

grassland acres in this part of Byron Walker have been completely replaced by trees. Some small openings still remain, hidden within mature timber. Much of the timbered acres are completely canopied, leaving little wildlife cover or food at ground level. The cost to reclaim significant portions of this type of habitat as prairie would be too high to be feasible and, since

imity to the mature cover. These openings will essentially create usable space for bobwhites and other species on acres where they have disappeared. Timber management techniques such as thinning, removal of exotics, and understory burning will be used to improve the productivity of the wooded acres. These openings will also provide improved browse and bugging habitat for deer and turkeys.

Work began on these management plans in 2000. Initial efforts were somewhat limited but provided a good start. Much of this work was done by hand by KDWP staff and the members of the Jayhawk Retriever Club (Wichita) using chain saws from 2000 to 2002. The results from this early cutting uncovered some unexpected benefits near one pond. Pond water levels significantly improved when surrounding trees were cut. For years, the pond had dropped three to four feet each summer. After trees were removed, the pond has remained full for more than three years, significantly improving its fishery and attraction to waterfowl.

In order to remove trees more efficiently, an open-end contract was bid out for tree removal services in 2003. Contractors were hired to perform tree removal on BWWA using commercial tree saws. This equipment can cut trees up to 30 inches in diameter at ground level. The stumps are chemically treated from the machine to prevent resprouting. Cutting began in earnest in the summer of 2003 on more than 100 acres of grasslands south of Highway 54. Removal continued in 2004, with another 1,500 acres being treated in the grasslands



Timber removal on the wildlife area generated interest among area landowners, so the area hosted informational meetings with landowners, NRCS agents, and private contractors who demonstrated their tree cutting equipment.

the habitat types. Planted cedar rows will be initially reduced by removing all short and/or broken rows. Eventually, most of remaining rows will be removed to reclaim the prairie ecosystem and reduce predator habitat. This will result in easier management of reclaimed blocks of prairie, capable of supporting quail, pheasants, doves, rabbits, deer, and turkeys in respectable numbers.

The 1930s purchase presents more challenging management dilemmas. Many of the former

woodlands have their own value to many of our wildlife species, these acres would be better managed as permanent woodlands.

Even so, these woodlands can be made more productive for wildlife by developing lower-succession habitat blocks within them. The plan on these tracts is to cut openings into the mature timber, focusing on the remnant prairie openings that still persist. This will provide early stage habitat for nesting, brood rearing, and feeding areas in close prox-



Some mature timber will be maintained at BWWA, but its value to wildlife will be enhanced by clearing and maintaining grassland openings wherever feasible.

and four significant clearings being developed in the timber. In 2005, a grant was received from the National Wild Turkey Federation for \$3,000 to continue work in the timbered areas, and an additional four clearings totaling 40-50 acres were developed. In addition, another 500 acres of grassland were treated. The Jayhawk Retriever Club remained involved in the tree cutting project, donating \$1,000-\$4,500 per year since 2000.

To date, trees in most of the larger grassland tracts in the 1965 purchase have been cut for the first time. Some smaller tracts and tracts adjoining riparian woodlands remain to be cut in the near future. Many of the acres already cut will be gone over again to reduce the number and density of cedar rows, and to pick up trees blocked by fallen slash during the first cutting.

In the older portion of BWWA, many areas are still available for additional tree removal. Due to the advanced succession in this area, these acres were initially passed over to concentrate on parcels that provided the most wildlife benefits per acre treated. Now that many of

those areas have been treated once, overgrown areas are higher priority. As time and funding become available, these will be thinned or opened to provide the necessary habitat interspersions.

This work will greatly improve the diversity within the prairie and woodland habitats on BWWA, making those acres more productive. It is hoped that information gathered annually through the hunting permit system started in 2003 on the area will help document improved game numbers and harvest on BWWA as a result of tree removal.

The work being done on BWWA has generated interest in tree removal on private lands in Kingman County. This is partly due to recent modifications in CRP, now requiring landowners to clear invading trees on the contracted acres. In August 2005, a local landowner, seeing the work

being done on BWWA, contacted the Kingman County Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) district conservationist to request that a field day be held for rangeland tree management in the county. He then contacted the BWWA area manager to assist.

On September 14, 2005, a field day was held on BWWA sponsored by the Kansas Department of Wildlife

and Parks, Kingman County NRCS, Sunflower RC&D, Kingman County Conservation District, and the Kingman County Extension. Area tree cutting contractors were invited to display and demonstrate their equipment. Nine contractors participated with up to 3 pieces of equipment each. Each contractor



Troy Smith photo

Byron Walker Wildlife Area attracts bird hunters from across the country.

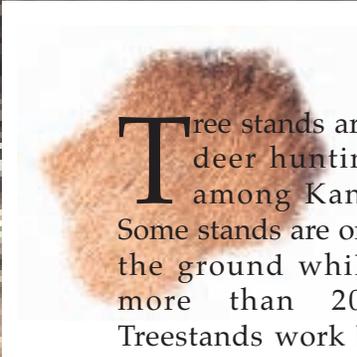
was allowed time to demonstrate their equipment in the field cutting trees and brush on BWWA. More than 80 local landowners, land managers, and government officials attended. This event spawned similar events in several surrounding counties, providing landowners with valuable information concerning the costs of unchecked woody invasion and available contractors.

Fighting woody succession is hard work, but its benefits brighten the future for Kansas wildlife. We may not be able to turn back the clocks for ourselves as we grow older, but through work and management, we can do so for once productive hunting areas. 🍷

EYE-LEVEL WHITETAILED

*Text and photos by Marc Murrell
Great Plains Nature Center manager,
Wichita*

*Most Kansas whitetail hunters
rely on treestands to get close but
groundblinds can be effective,
and they provide a great opportu-
nity to involve youngsters.*



Tree stands are a traditional deer hunting technique among Kansas hunters. Some stands are only 6-8 feet off the ground while others are more than 20-feet high. Treestands work because scent isn't as detectable and deer typically don't sense danger from above. And there's no arguing that an elevated vantage point provides plenty of viewing opportunity. But there's another technique growing in popularity

and that's going eye-to-eye with whitetails at ground level.

"I love hunting from a ground blind," said Eric Johnson who owns at least a half-dozen and has used them regularly over the last couple years. "They're so easy to set-up and you really don't have to worry about your scent."

The new portable pop-up blinds are convincing more hunters to try ground blinds. Their versatility is unmatched.

"In the past you've always been out of luck if you didn't have a decent stand tree in the right place, but with these blinds you can pop them up anywhere and be hunting in just a few minutes," Johnson added.

There are dozens of different models of portable pop-up blinds on the market today. But Johnson knows for a blind to be functional and effective it has to be easy to use, durable and the blind material has to be tight to

prevent noise and movement.

"There are some cheap models that flap in the wind, and you might as well be waving a big flag at the deer because they'll spook from all that commotion," Johnson advised. "The hub-style blinds that stretch the fabric work well, and you can hunt out of them in high winds, as long as the corners are staked down."

Johnson believes you get what you pay for but admits you don't have to spend a week's pay on his personal favorite.

"I use the Brickhouse TSC (Total Scent Containment) by Ameristep," Johnson said of his recommendation. "It's about one-third the price of some of the high-dollar models and the Brickhouse works



Modern portable pop-up blinds are ideal for most situations, and with a little work, they can literally disappear into the landscape.

just as well. I can buy several of those for what the high-end models sell for, and the deer sure don't notice how much you spent on your blind."

A stickler for eliminating human odor during his deer

hunts, Johnson doesn't worry too much about it or even wind direction when he's hunting out of his blind.

"As long as I don't open a bunch of the windows, I've never really had a problem with deer getting my scent, even when they're straight downwind," Johnson said. "I usually just open one or two windows so there's really no air-flow through the blind and nearly all my scent is contained within the blind."

The only downside to a blind is visibility. Voyeurs may feel claustrophobic because of the visual confines.

"You're not elevated, so you can't see everything around you," Johnson said. "But you can't shoot clear across a field with a bow anyway, so it's really not a problem."

But there are plenty of advantages. Treestands typically don't offer the



Most pop-up blinds have dark-colored inside walls, making them perfect for introducing youngsters to turkey and deer hunting. Sound and scent can also be somewhat contained.

option for use by several participants. A blind is ideal for taking kids along, either as hunters or observers. Such was the case last year when I hunted out of portable pop-up blind for the first time.

My twin 6-year-old boys, Brandon and Cody, had wanted to accompany me on bowhunting trips numerous times but the idea of trying to strap them both to a tree wasn't feasible. And coupled with their attention span, which is measured in minutes, I couldn't imagine keeping them still to avoid detection.

At Johnson's recommendation, I purchased a couple of Brickhouse blinds and put one of them up near a well-used deer trail in an overgrown pasture. Both boys helped with installation and were fired up about spending time in the "fort."



Most commercial blinds will be camouflaged, but some cedar limbs will break up the blind's outline. For deer hunting, place the blind several days before you plan to hunt.

I picked the boys up from school one afternoon and we headed out with plenty of drinks, snacks and a couple beach shovels and buckets. I hoped they could entertain themselves digging in the dirt

inside the blind but hadn't planned on the amount of noise two tiny, plastic shovels could make in energetic hands. Fortunately, the south wind was blowing at about 25 mph, acting as the perfect muffler. Every so often, one of the boys would stop excavating and peek out the front window.

"There's one, Daddy!" Cody said loud enough for deer in the next county to hear. Then he eased back down trying to hide from a deer that was a mere 8 yards away. "It's a buck."

That got my attention and I peeked around the corner of the window opening to see what we later coined the, "spork." It had a spike antler on one side and a fork on the other.

"Are you going to shoot it?" Brandon asked.

"No. It's too little," I said, knowing it was just a year-and-a-half-old buck. "We'll wait for a bigger one."

The boys watched the buck feed and wander off. It wasn't long, and they were back to digging and building a waterless



The author's twins enjoyed this hunt last fall when he took a yearling from a pop-up blind. Without a ground blind, such a hunt would have been nearly impossible.

lake. Another deer just out of range a short time later had the front window packed with two little faces trying to catch a glimpse. Both boys were content to play, eat and drink in the noise and sight-protected confines of the blind. It wasn't long and more deer were stepping into view.

"There's three coming in," I whispered to the boys. "We're going to shoot one of these."

The boys got a quick look as I grabbed my bow and prepared to fill an antlerless permit. I drew my bow as both boys watched, and I waited for the nearest deer to turn broadside. I knew the shot was good and watched as the deer fell a short distance away.

"Did you get it?" both boys asked.

"I don't know, we'll have to go see," I played dumb.

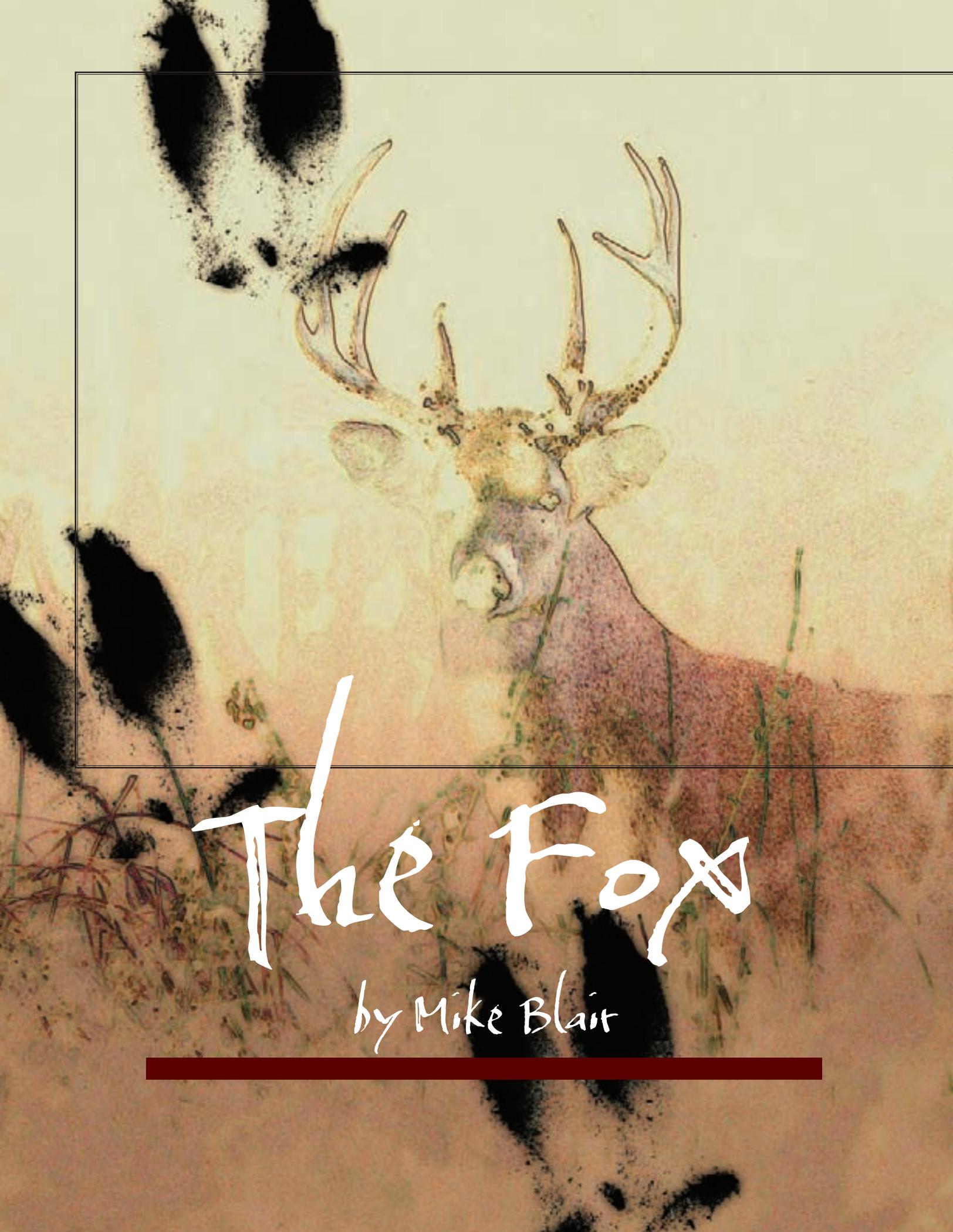
Out of the blind, I asked them to help look for evidence of a hit. I showed them where the deer was standing and instructed them to look for the arrow which was just a few feet away. From there it was a matter of following the blood trail which is apparently much easier for 6-year-olds than it was for me. I reasoned it was because they were closer to the ground but in reality older eyes were likely to blame. They covered the 60 yards in a matter of seconds when Cody looked up.

"There it is!" he hollered.

Both boys were excited as was I. There was no way I could have shared this experience with them without the use of the ground blind, and I'm looking forward to more hunts just like it. The only difference might be "forgetting" those noisy little shovels and packing Nerf toys instead. ♡

GROUND BLIND TIPS

- Position the blind in a location that is normally shaded. Ideally, there is some cover behind or in front of the blind to break up the outline.
- Add your own cover to break up the outline of the blind. Most come with straps or ties to secure foliage and natural material as added camouflage. Cedar tree branches work well and placed on the corners, top and front, provide more concealment.
- Stake the corners of the blind to avoid problems during high wind.
- Many models offer shoot-through mesh windows for archery hunting. If using this option, don't use expandable broadheads and it's not a bad idea to practice doing it on a target to make sure everything works out okay.
- Open as few windows as necessary. This helps with scent containment and keeps the inside of the blind dark. An effective tactic is to open the one where you anticipate a shot opportunity completely, and then open windows on either side of it just a crack in order to see a deer's approach and get ready for the shot.
- Take something to sit on like a small, folding stool. A 5-gallon bucket works in a pinch.
- You can hold your bow on you lap or lay it on the ground but a better option is to purchase a bow holder. For about \$7 this handy holder pushes into the ground and holds the bottom limb of the bow, keeping it within easy reach.
- Practice drawing your bow within the blind and visualize possible shot opportunities. Keep in mind your sight picture is above the actual arrow flight and be sure not to shoot through the blind.
- Rake up natural debris and dirt along the bottom edges of the blind. This not only breaks up that solid line, it provides a seal to prevent light penetration and scent escape.
- Wear dark colored clothing while hunting. Head-to-toe camouflage isn't necessary, but a black sweatshirt blends well within the dark interior.
- Wear a face mask and gloves. The white of your face and hands moving could alert deer to your presence within the blind.
- If at all possible, erect the blind several days or even weeks before planning a hunt to allow deer to become accustomed to it. Blinds shouldn't be left out for extended periods as the weather and sunlight can cause them to deteriorate.



The Fox

by Mike Blait

You could look at Master Barton all day and never once guess that his name was Brent. The given name means "steep hill." His nickname made more sense. A nuclear conflagration of carrot-orange hair, worn in a '70s-style Afro, screamed "Fireball." For the college residents of 1st floor Hudson Hall, the name immediately stuck. Like a self-fulfilling prophecy explained in sophomore Psychology class, the nickname gradually transformed a quiet introvert into an outgoing personality. Brent became Fireball, and Fireball, a local celebrity.

The best names are never chosen; they're extracted. It's why Native Americans gained their life-names through a vision or event – something unique that set them apart. Temporarily named at birth, warriors like Crazy Horse received the name that fit their later lives. You can be sure that Jack London's famous wolf, White Fang, was named in respect to its actions while being tamed. Even the Lord himself, according to Revelation, will one day give each follower a new name based on faithfulness. The best names are earned.



And that's how a whitetail buck living in an obscure Kansas swamp came to be known as the Fox. The name was really more of a title, but an honest one, after a misty November saw it through two close calls at a bow stand. The deer's uncanny ability to read danger at crucial moments saved it twice as arrows were drawn. Years passed until the teeth of its lower jaw were worn to the gum line, and destiny drew the old deer into final union with one who sought him . . .

Dawn came late that fall morning, impeded by low, gray clouds. The hunter quietly waded the stream in darkness, hurrying the last few feet as cold water welled through leaky rubber boots. It was a dozen more steps to the Osage-orange nestled oddly among ashes and hackberries crowding the riparian corridor. These were timber trees, tall and straight with narrow crowns. But the Osage-orange was different. Foresters would call it a wolf tree, one that spreads its limbs to

command an unequal share of the streamside soil. The wide canopy offered perfect concealment, ideal for the hang-on tree stand erected months earlier. Wolf tree – it was a fitting place from which to take a deer.

At its base, the man removed a backpack and tied it to a haul line in the dim light. The climb was tricky. Between limbs and tree steps that afforded access,

the necessary route required a complete circling of the trunk to reach a platform 14 feet high. The heavy pack contained gear from camera to rattling antlers and was awkward to maneuver among the spiny limbs. Like the hunting bow, it was hoisted only after reaching the stand.

This was a magic date. It was the hunter's birthday, November 12, but more importantly, a day that historically resulted in sightings of big deer as the whitetail rut progressed. The man sometimes wondered if the timing of his own birth somehow fueled a passion for the autumn woods. On this dreary morning, anticipation ran high.

The hunter settled, watching owl-like as the forest floor brightened. The site was ideal, situated on an island bordered by a clear, flowing creek and a beaver pool snaking through timber. Two deer trails crossed nearby in open understory that allowed good bowshots every direction. Not far away, a fringe of brush bordered a wooded corridor laced with rubs and scrapes. The stand could be reached quickly and silently to avoid detection, but offered proximity to a buck highway. Cover conditions provided hunter advantage. It was the perfect location from which to rattle a buck.

In dawn's gray light, it was time to try. The hunter hung his bow and cracked the heavy horns together, grinding them at their bases so that the antler burs growled. The first sequence was

scarcely ended when a decent six-point suddenly appeared from an unexpected direction. At once the deer smelled the hunter's entrance trail and bolted to safety before offering a shot. Fortunately, it ran toward the area least likely to hold deer later in the morning. The waiting began.

Half an hour passed, and the hunter rattled again. Soon the legs of a big deer could be seen through the brushy screen, and the man caught his breath at the



sight of antlers. This buck had an impressive 8-point rack, wide and tall, but it was the brow tines that commanded attention. More than a foot long, they tipped the buck over the 160s mark. The deer walked straight in, clearing the undergrowth at 13 yards and stopping face-on at seven. The hunter froze, bow up, hoping to avoid detection.

Alarm washed over the buck. It was visible, erasing the deer's expectant swagger as the source of the sounds showed empty woods. On full alert, the buck turned and sneaked, passing just three yards from the hunter's tree. The man turned softly to draw for a quartering shot, and his cuff brushed the stand. Instantly the deer stopped to listen. For half a minute it stood, the hunter not daring to breathe in the still air. Then the antlered head snapped skyward to stare at the camouflaged man poised above. The gaze was momentary, and the deer abruptly turned down the trail.

Angling away now, the buck continued to watch the form overhead. The hunter waited to draw as the animal stepped behind a double tree 10 yards away. The 70-pound bow came back without perceptible sound, but the buck instantly bolted. Too late! The arrow was away and deflected by a sapling. The deer ran 75 yards, stopped in sight, and snorted before leaving. There was no evidence of a hit.

Shaken at the exciting moment, the hunter climbed down to find his arrow. It was clean except for a few short hairs on one blade. Looking further, he noticed a large pinch of very short, salt-and-pepper bristles. An experienced archer, he was puzzled by the unusual hair. No other clues were found on the trail. The deer had made a clean escape.

Why had it bolted? It was as if radar had saved its life. The man headed home, hoping for

another chance at the buck with the long brow tines.

A week passed, and the woods were moist from recent rains. A thousand yards upriver, the stalking hunter found a place where deer trails crossed among ancient catalpas. He climbed into a low fork and liked the feel of the place. Settling in, he hung his bow on a limb and tried to adjust to the slightly awkward setting. The woods were open here, and it appeared that any deer approaching would offer ample time to prepare for a shot.

Not so. The man was turned the wrong direction when a nearby movement caught his eye. Without reflex, he slowly turned to find a large buck intent on his motionless form in the low fork. The bow, with its nocked arrow, was several feet away. At once the hunter saw a long scab healing on the deer's face, a gray, *salt-and-pepper* face. In the same moment, the huge brow tines of the 8-point jumped into focus, and he recognized his deer. Unbelievably, he had a second chance. Could there be a second shot?

To the hunter's surprise, the buck relaxed and passed at 10 yards. With nothing to lose, the man seized his bow as a six-inch tree eclipsed the deer's eyes. Predictably, the buck froze, staring for another minute before walking on. Slowly and smoothly, the hunter raised the bow and began to draw as the trophy deer ignored the danger. With confidence growing at full draw, the man waited for the final instant needed to carry the

buck into a clear shooting lane.

It never happened.

Without warning, the buck wheeled and raced away to spoil the chance. Directly upwind of the man in a moderate breeze, there was little chance of an errant breeze. There were no unnatural sounds to alert the deer. After two open staredowns, it seemed doubtful that the buck would spook at something seen

And so the buck became the Fox. Local hunters, ever ready to embrace a new and mystical swamp ghost, called his name and hoped to see him. The stories lived and grew for several years, but no one got close to the deer with a name.

through a screen of twigs. The hunter shook his head as he shook all over. Like before, the buck had beaten the odds and escaped as if by magic. The deer ran hard until out of sight.

And so the buck became the Fox. Local hunters, ever ready to embrace a new and mystical swamp ghost, called his name and hoped to see him. The stories lived and grew for several years, but no one got close to the deer with a name. The Fox took its place in local lore, and even

now, is sometimes mentioned.

I look at a deer on my wall and wonder. The big 8-pointer is the best I've got, with heavy bases and wondrous brow tines. One is nine inches and slightly forked, the other, 13-plus. The buck came early on a frosty dawn and worked three scrapes as I frantically rattled from across the woods. It ignored the clicking antlers, pausing just once to glance in my direction. As it started another way, I desperately seized a grapevine and jerked it hard to scrape the bark and limbs above my stand.

The buck wheeled like a cutting horse and walked stiff-legged toward me. It never broke stride as it walked into range, and the arrow struck high in the shoulder, angling downward.

The distant sight of those big antlers rising from woodland soil thrilled me then, and thrills me now. The buck's teeth were nearly gone, and though his rack still had the clean lines of a prime deer, it was clear the latter chapters were progressing. I checked for a long scar on the deer's face and found none. *But a shallow razor cut from years before might have healed cleanly. . .*

I carried out the buck with the help of friends, stopping to rest beneath a wolfish Osage-orange that once held its breath as a man and a deer poised for a moment in November ritual. I looked at the deer, remembering, pondering.

Either way, the Fox would always live there. ♡



Eat'n Wild

by **Dustin Teasley**
graphic designer, Pratt

photos by **Mike Blair**

Cooking foods from gathered wild edibles and harvested game teaches everyone who does it a little about the past and helps carry traditions to future generations.

Like an old song, certain foods can cue memories, and almost everyone can tell a happy childhood story as they reflect on good eats from the past. Some have fond memories of cooking their first pheasant shot with dad. Others may remember canning pickles with grandma. I can remember gathering buckets full of black walnuts for shelling later during winter months.

Time for hunting, fishing and gathering our own food is getting harder to find. Time to prepare game from these outings is hard to come by, as well. It's much easier to run to the local grocery store or stop by the fast-food place. And there's no doubt that preparing some wild game takes considerable time. But I believe the harvest, the preparation and the tradition make the

meal all the more delicious and memorable.

So what is the solution to finding both time and recipes to prepare these wild foods? Plain and simple, friends and family. Ask friends, neighbors, aunts, uncles, grandparents, parents — all can be good resources for recipes and help. Scheduling time to cook up a batch of these goodies with friends or family obligates you to be there, and makes the experience much more enjoyable.

One of my favorite game recipes came from a co-worker. It duplicated a favorite commercial product I wouldn't have thought to attempt: Hot Mamas. These bright red pickled sausages always make for interesting conversation, but even better is their taste, which is great with



saltine crackers. I remember as a youngster eating Hot Mammias with my dad and chasing their spicy heat with an ice cold Pepsi as we fished for catfish on hot summer evenings. Be warned: Hot Mammias aren't for the faint of heart. Many who have eaten the commercially-made ones will attest that one Hot Mamma is often enough for a day.

I came by the recipe when coworker, Jim Hlaus, passed my office and stopped to admire a couple of shed antlers lying near my door. He asked if I liked deer meat. The next day he brought in a jar of venison Hot Mammias and offered one. Cautiously, I accepted and was in for a treat. They were delicious. I was impressed that his homemade version tasted just like the commercial Hot Mammias I remembered, but without all the fat. I wanted to learn and he agreed to teach me. Soon we were cooking up a batch in my garage.

This began my own book of recipes. Other outstanding recipes have been gathered

since. Some, I pass on with permission. Others are guarded secrets among a small circle of family or friends. Each recipe is labeled with the contributor's name, and I'm careful not to breach a trust when a special recipe is shared.

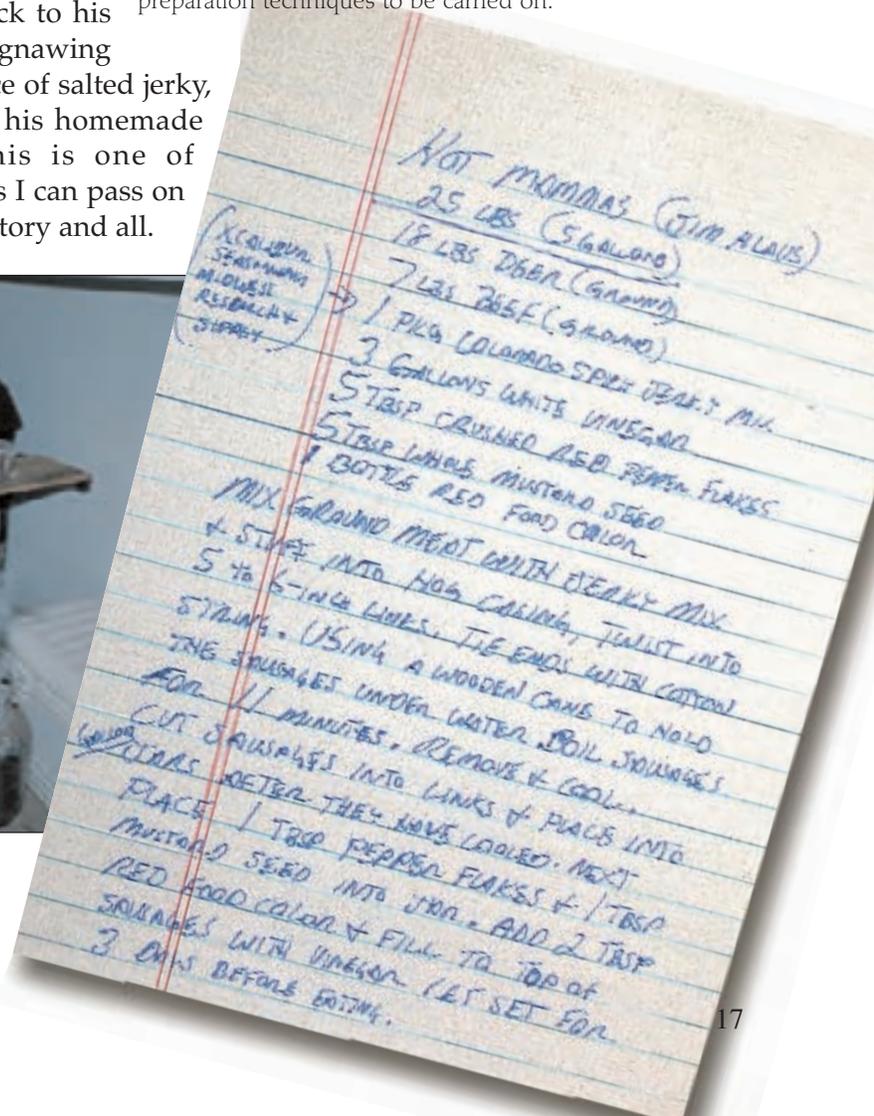
Another of my favorites is a jerky recipe handed down from one of my dad's friends. He gave it to me when I first started hunting deer. He has since passed away, but when I pull that recipe and see his name at the top, it takes me back to his house – me gnawing on a big piece of salted jerky, fresh out of his homemade smoker. This is one of many recipes I can pass on to my kids, story and all.



The best recipes for wild game are handed down from generations and friends, allowing age-old traditions and preparation techniques to be carried on.



While anyone can write a recipe down and give it to a friend, some recipes require hands-on instruction and that can often be the most fun.





Networking for recipes often leads to unusual but tasteful ways to prepare foods. This sausage was stuffed using old pillowcases as casings and then hung in a refrigerator for up to 8 weeks to dry and cure.

Recipe networking has provided me with great cooking techniques for duck, goose, deer, fish, pheasant, doves, and even frog legs. Networking has also helped dispel misconceptions about certain types of game, notably waterfowl. Typically, there is more to a recipe than the words on a piece of paper or card, so mentoring is always wel-

come. By talking to good cooks, you learn about certain ways to cook meat, handy tools, or how to modify cooking time and heat.

Most commonly, the taste of wild duck is compared to liver – yuck. I was skeptical until someone showed me how to properly cook this wild game. I



don't mean what spices to use, or how much cereal malt beverage to soak it in. I'm talking about cooking time. Waterfowl meat is dark, so one must rethink what "done" means. I used to cook wild duck on the grill until the juices ran clear, just like mom taught me for chicken.

Wrong! When this happens with waterfowl, the meat is dry, and it can taste like liver. I don't condone eating raw meat, but neither do I condone overfeeding the dog. And this is exactly where overcooked duck meat will end up.

The USDA recommends that cooked duck have an internal temperature of 165 degrees. I typically wrap wild duck with raw bacon and pull the grilled duck when the bacon is done. A digital thermometer with a cabled



Adding a little wild game while grilling burgers and hotdogs is a good way to introduce reluctant friends to the great tastes of the outdoors.

Pheasant Nuggets

Cut pheasant into 1" cubes. Soak in egg and milk mixture for about 20 minutes. Combine equal parts of flour and cracker crumbs seasoned with salt & pepper, for coating. Deep fry until golden brown.

I fried the whole pheasant (like chicken) until I started doing this. So me this is much better.
mom



Boiling cased sausages is a technique the author learned from Jim Hlaus, shown here holding the cane. This method of cooking is used in making Hot Mammias and also to set casings on sausages that will be frozen and later cooked on a grill or in a broiler.

probe is a great tool for grilling, baking, or smoking game meats to the correct doneness.

But keep in mind, cooking does not stop when game is removed from the heat. The internal temperature can rise as much as 5 degrees after being pulled from an oven, grill, or cooktop. Therefore, always pull meat from its heat source 5° before it reaches the recommended internal temperature, and then let the meat rest. Wrap it immediately in a double layer of aluminum foil to ensure the desired internal temperature is met. Juices will run red and meat will have a pink color to it. This is true for waterfowl, and also other game meats such as deer and wild turkey.

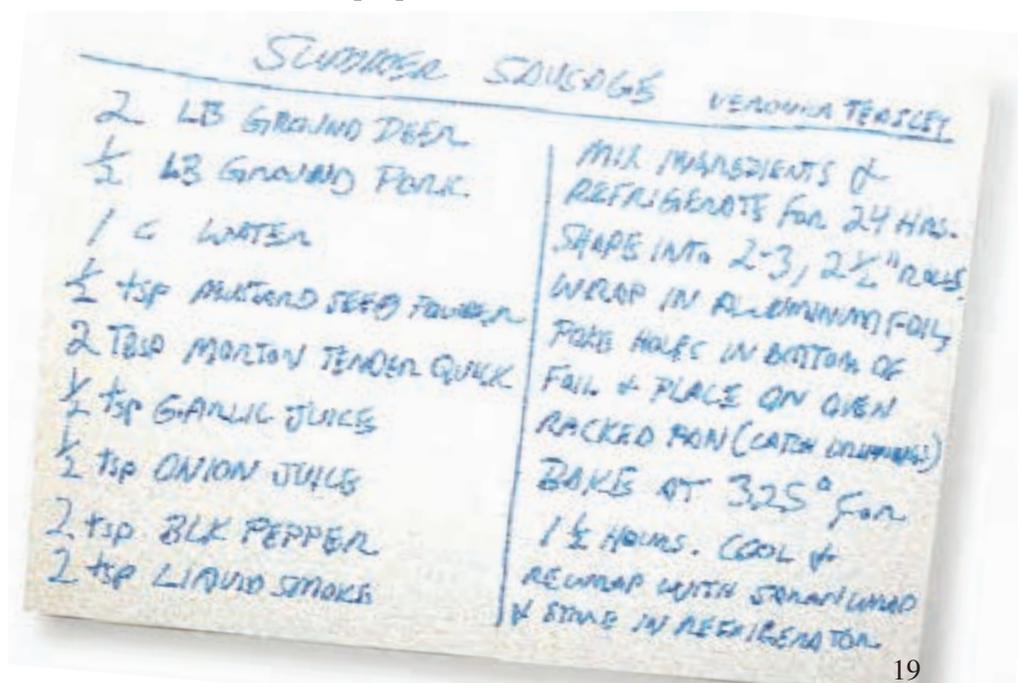
Many great methods exist for preparing wild game. Some take time and experience, but the results are worth it. Smoking, casing, drying, and curing are best learned from someone with proper

tools and expertise. Trial and error works, but a lot of wasted time can be avoided by watching over someone's shoulder.

County extension offices and the Internet are good sources for learning fundamentals about processing wild game and harvested wild crops. They also provide great recipes. Nutritional information exists for many types of wild game on the web at: www.nutritiondata.com. Just enter the wild game category to learn the breakdown of carbs, fats, and protein. There are even recommendations on fitting these foods into your diet.

The right tools and spice resources are essential to making do-it-yourself sausages and jerky. Teaming up with family and friends helps divide the costs for special equipment or large quantities of ingredients. This also makes the work more fun. Casing for sausages costs a lot less when bought by the case than by the batch. Auctions and garage sales are often good resources for inexpensive grinders and stuffers.

To find unique spices, spice mixes, casings, and new non-



DEER JERKY (MIKE STRODA)
 2 LBS DEER MEAT SLICED 1/4" THICK
 3/4 C WATER
 1 BOTTLE SOY SAUCE (LA CHOY BRAND)
 1 TBS WORCESTERSHIRE SAUCE
 1 TBS LIQUID SMOKE
 1 TBS LEMON JUICE
 1 TSP GARLIC JUICE
 1/2 TBS. BLACK PEPPER

MIX INGREDIENTS & SOAK MEAT OVERNIGHT. PLACE ON RACKS OF OVEN OR DEHYDRATOR & FEEDER. LIBERALLY HEAT OVEN TO 200° WILL TAKE ABOUT 4 HOURS. A DEHYDRATOR ABOUT 15 HOURS. LET MEAT REST IN REFRIGERATOR AFTER DEHYDRATING.



Feeding the hungry. Snack sticks, jerky and summer sausage make great on-the-go snacks for kids. Eventually they become students for making these tasty foods.

industrial butchering equipment, try Mid-western Research and Supply located in Wichita. You can find them on the Internet at: www.midwesternresearch.com to place an order or request a catalog. Some local grocers seasonally carry mixes specifically designed for wild game. Butcher shops are good local resources for both sausage casings and pork fat commonly added to venison sausage for flavor and texture.

Properly cooked game is the perfect end to a memorable hunt. It can change the way you think. Instead of looking for someone in your hunting party to take home your limit of wild game, you'll find yourself volunteering to take the "burden" off of their hands.

Through the years, my personal wild game recipe book has grown. Many of these recipes have been a means of making

new friends while providing a greater appreciation for the game I hunt. They link me to the traditions of others, which I pass to my own friends and family. In my kitchen cabinet, nestled between the Betty Crocker cookbook and a long-forgotten generic Christmas present, waits my treasured book not only with recipes, but memories of the past, present, and future. ♡



TEAL ROLLS
 DUCK BREAST FILLETS
 BACON (BUT 5 HUNDRED SLICED)
 PICKLED JALAPENOS
 TOOTHPICKS
 PLACE JALAPENO IN MIDDLE OF FILLET, FOLD MEAT AROUND IT & WRAP WITH BACON (2 SLICE) & SECURE WITH TOOTHPICK. PLACE ON HOT GRILL & TURN OFTEN. REMOVE FROM HEAT WHEN BACON IS DONE.

2005 KDWP ANNUAL REPORT

The value of fish, wildlife and state park resources to Kansans is illustrated by the tangible support outdoor recreationists provide. As the tables on the following page illustrate, more than 80 percent of the department's operating revenues are supplied by the people who hunt, fish, boat, and use state parks.

The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks is a cabinet-level agency with a secretary appointed by the governor. A seven-member, bipartisan commission – also appointed by the governor – advises the secretary and sets regulations governing outdoor recreation. The commission conducts business in regular sessions that are open to the public.

KDWP employs 407.5 full-time employees in five divisions: Fisheries and Wildlife, Law Enforcement, Parks, Executive Services and Administrative Services. Following is a summary of those divisions:

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Seventy-eight employees staff this division, which is responsible for enforcing wildlife, boating and natural resource laws and regulations. Natural resource officers perform a variety of tasks in addition to law enforcement, from inspection and licensing of game breeders and controlled shooting areas to teaching hunter education classes.

FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE

With a complement of 126 full-time employees, this division provides the technical expertise and on-the-ground projects to manage fish, wildlife, and public lands. The Research and Survey Section evaluates fish and wildlife populations, conducts research, monitors environmental conditions, surveys recreationists, and recommends adjustments in regulations.

The Fish Culture Section operates four hatcheries, producing and stocking millions of sportfish in public waters each year. The Public Lands Section manages department lands for optimum wildlife habitat, as well as recreational opportunities for hunters, anglers, birders, and hikers.

PARKS

With a full-time staff complement of 108, this division operates and maintains 23 state parks and the Prairie Spirit Rail-Trail, hosting millions of visits annu-

ally. Parks staff enforce state park regulations, build and maintain facilities, present educational programs, host major events, and improve access to the lands and waters around state parks.

ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

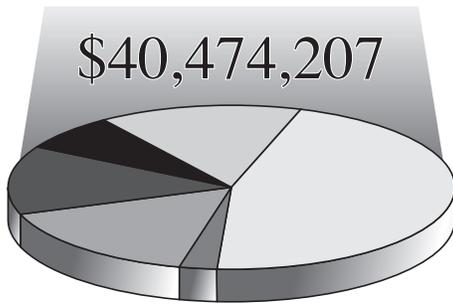
With 21.5 positions, this division oversees business management, accounting, data processing, planning, and budget efforts. In addition, staff develop and manage the licenses and permits purchased by hunters, anglers, trappers, boaters, and park visitors.

EXECUTIVE SERVICES

This division comprises 74 full-time employees who perform a broad variety of services. The division includes Information and Education (20 full-time employees), Engineering (10), Information Technology (9), Environmental Services (9), regional office administrative assistants (9), Federal Aid/Planning (4), Human Resources (3), and Legal Services (2) staff. Engineering administers construction and maintenance of facilities on all department-owned lands. Environmental Services reviews publicly-funded development projects across the state, advising developers of state and federal regulations and minimizing impacts on fish and wildlife habitats. The Information and Education Section informs the public through *Kansas Wildlife and Parks* magazine, the department website, numerous printed brochures, and media releases. The section also administers the hunter, furharvester, bowhunter, and boater education programs of the department, provides environmental education services to schools, and manages nature centers at four locations in the state.

The department celebrated its centennial in 2005. As we begin our second century, we applaud the dedication of our department staff in meeting their mission to conserve and enhance the state's natural resources and the recreation it provides. We also express our sincere appreciation to the people of Kansas for providing the means that make our work possible...and for their dedication to ensuring future generations the same rich variety of outdoor recreation that makes Kansas a great place to live, work, and play.

Revenue



Hunt/Fish License Sales	\$18,390,042	46%
Hunt/Fish Federal Aid	\$8,522,530	21%
Park Permits	\$4,831,172	12%
Boat Registrations	\$800,495	2%
Other Federal Aid	\$4,551,266	11%
State General Fund	\$3,375,702	8%

Totals \$40,471,207 100%

FISHING, HUNTING, FURHARVESTING

License/permit	Number sold	Revenue
Resident Fish (\$18)	158,509	\$2,853,162
Combination Fish/Hunt (\$36)	18,239	\$656,604
Nonresident Fish (\$40)	8,570	\$342,800
Five-Day Trip Fish (\$20)	2,005	\$40,100
24-Hour Fish (\$5)	38,211	\$191,055
Trout Stamp (\$10)	8,078	\$80,780
Lifetime Fish (\$440)	348	\$153,120
Lifetime Comb. Fish/Hunt (\$880)	502	\$441,760
Lifetime Hunt (\$440)	1,482	\$652,080
Resident Hunt (\$18)	79,718	\$1,434,924
Nonresident Hunt (\$70)	54,377	\$3,806,390
Nonresident Junior Hunt (\$35)	2,103	\$73,605
Controlled Shooting Area (\$15)	9,505	\$142,575
48-Hour Waterfowl (\$25)	674	\$16,850
Resident Deer Permits/Tags (variable)	134,447	\$2,632,345
Nonresident Deer Permits/Tags (variable)	16,664	\$3,472,490
Resident Turkey Permits/Tags (variable)	57,487	892,500
Nonresident Turkey Permits/Tags (variable)	15,422	409,660
Adult Furharvester (\$18)	5,314	\$95,652
Junior Furharvester (\$10)	159	\$1,590
TOTAL	611,814	\$18,390,042

THREE- YEAR BOAT REGISTRATIONS

Registration Type	Number Sold	Revenue
Boats under 16 feet (\$20)	17,016	\$340,320
Boats over 16 feet (\$25)	18,407	\$460,175
TOTAL	35,423	\$800,495

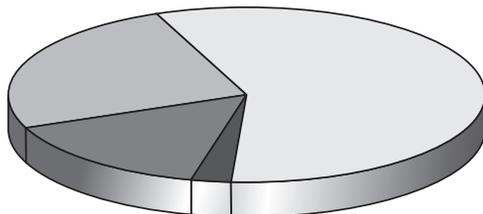
STATE PARKS

Permit Type	Number Sold	Revenue
Annual Vehicle (variable)	35,074	\$1,252,803
Annual Camp (\$150)	3,240	\$486,000
Second Vehicle (variable)	12,750	\$241,551
Duplicate Vehicle (\$10)	362	\$3,620
Daily Vehicle (variable)	206,736	\$1,103,305
Daily Camp (variable)	85,540	\$590,848
14-Day Camp (variable)	944	\$85,560
Utility (1-\$5.50)	13,186	\$72,523
Utility (2-\$7.50)	106,726	\$800,445
Utility (3-\$8.50)	17,182	\$146,047
Group Camping (variable)	24,006	\$48,012
Group Camping (variable)	205	\$458
TOTAL	505,951	\$4,831,172

FEDERAL AID

Coast Guard (boating safety)	\$ 4 9 1 , 2 3 6
Dingell-Johnson (fish)	\$4,527,105
Pittman-Robertson (wildlife)	\$3,995,425
Other	\$4,060,030
TOTAL	\$13,073,796

Expenditures



Fish & Wildlife	58%
Parks	30%
Administration	9%
Boating	3%

Totals 100%

Venison To Fill The Hungry



by Mark Shoup
associate editor, Pratt
photos by Mike Blair



In 1997, Maryland hunter Rick Wilson's life took an unexpected change when he offered to help a woman who appeared to be stranded on the side of the road with her trunk open.

"As I walked off the shoulder of the road, I saw a little six-point buck laying there," Wilson explains. "She asked me if I would help her load it in her trunk, and I said, 'you know, if we do that, you could get arrested without first getting a tag from a wildlife officer or state trooper.' She says, 'I don't have time for that; me and my kids are hungry.'

"So I took a chance and helped her load it up and asked her if she wanted me to field dress it for

her, but she said, 'No, when I used to do that, they bled all over my trunk. Now that my husband's gone, the kids are gettin' good at it.'

"With that, she thanked me, closed the trunk, and disappeared."

Wilson returned to his job as an art teacher but couldn't stop thinking about the incident. "I realized that it's time we started trying to help some of these folks by providing some of the extra venison that we hunters take. Then it slowly came over me what the Lord talks about in Matthew 25 when he says, 'In as much as you've done this to the least of these, my brother, you've done it to me.'"

Wilson began calling on individuals, organizations, and corporations to pay for the processing, and Farmers and Hunters Feeding the Hungry was born. The organization has grown nationally, with affiliates in 36 states and 83 sub-chapters.

By 2001, the word had spread to Kansas, and the Sunflower State's chapter of Farmers and Hunters Feeding the Hungry was added to the growing list. Under the direction of state chairman Tony DeRossett, Tonganoxie, the Kansas chapter has steadily grown. During the 2005 deer season, the group processed 543 deer, one bison, and one elk that were donated by Kansas hunters to feed people in need.



Hunters can donate their deer to help feed those in need. Go to www.fhfh.org to find a participating butcher near you or to learn how you can help with processing fees

"This was up considerably from the previous year, when we processed 432 deer," says DeRossett. "Even with that, we were \$100 short on funds and had to shut down, but our budget is balanced, and I'm optimistic because we raised \$40,000 last year."

Of that, \$25,000 came from hunters who, when purchasing their licenses, chose the voluntary option to donate \$2 to FHFH. The rest came from individuals, organizations, and companies.

The biggest donor so far this year is Hodgden Powder Company of Overland Park, which has pledged \$5,000. Kansas Farm Bureau and American Family Mutual Insurance Company have donated \$2,500 each, and Wal-Mart has pledged \$1,000, so if hunters continue their support, more money should be coming in to support the hungry. (Note: Vendors are supposed to ask hunters if they would like to donate when they purchase licenses, but this is sometimes overlooked. Hunters should ask about this option when they purchase a hunting license.)

"With the events we have conducted and are working on, combined with private and corporate donations, we hope to be in a position to process even more deer in 2006," says DeRossett.

If Kansas hunters continue donating venison to the organization, the money raised will pay for processing, packaging, and freezing of donated deer.

Donations from churches, clubs, businesses, and individuals all help in the effort. Some hunters also donate to processing costs. Some meat processors across Kansas agree to accept donated deer. About \$70 is required to process each deer. The food is distributed to needy families through existing food banks and community service organizations although the program also needs volunteers to transport the processed venison from the meat processors to local food distribution services.

During the national organization's first six years FHFH processed 1,600 tons (nearly 12,800,000 servings) of venison and other big game for soup kitchens and food pantries across America, providing a nutritious source of protein desperately needed by feeding programs.

Anyone interested in

helping fund the program may email DeRossett at tonyderossett@fhfh.org or phone 913-724-1189. Donations may be sent directly to Farmers and Hunters Feeding the Hungry, 17811 Donahoo Rd., Tonganoxie, KS 66086. Information on the program is also available at the organization's internet website, www.fhfh.org.

FHFH is co-sponsored by many Resource Conservation and Development Councils and the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks. Other organizations are expected to participate this year, as well. (Kansas has three sub-chapters — Kansas City, Mound City, and Topeka.)

To locate the nearest place to donate deer, go online to fhfh.org. Use the "FHFH Processor Quick Lookup" to select "Kansas." Then select the nearest county (not all counties have processors), and you will be given a location and phone number. The contacts listed below may also provide more information. ♡

Local chapters contacts of FHFH include the following:

KANSAS CITY
Kelli Mendenhall,
phone 913-722-4142 or
email kmendenhall@reeceandnichols.com

MOUND CITY
David Ayers,
phone 913-795-2209 or
email dayers@usd346.k12.ks.us

TOPEKA
Brian Hermann,
phone 785-256-6740 or
email greywolffarchery@msn.com.



Sharp Company Home In Kansas

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

This is the final story in a series about outdoor-related industries in Kansas and their impact on our economy. All entrepreneurs recited a familiar theme – Kansans provide a great work force, and Kansas is a great place to live if you like the outdoors.

Kansas has a well-deserved reputation when it comes to natural resources. Turkey, upland birds and waterfowl all provide excellent hunting opportunities. But Kansas' reputation for trophy whitetails may receive more national attention than all the others combined. And it's these deer that may be responsible for one company calling Kansas home for more than two decades.

"I really wasn't satisfied with the broadheads available at the time," said Mike Sohm, owner of Magnus Broadheads in Great Bend. Sohm was hunting deer with traditional archery equipment more than 20 years ago, and he couldn't find a broadhead he liked. "So I set out to build a better one. I started Magnus in 1984 in a spare bedroom of my parents' home."

Sohm was born and raised in Kansas and grew up in Otis. He was employed as a machinist mechanic with Fuller Brush Company, and it's this avocation that really got him thinking about building a better broadhead.

"I came up with my own ideas and basically started doing my own thing. I really had no intention of going into business at the time," said Sohm who has bowhunted for about 30 years.

"I was just doing it for me and started handing out a few broadheads, and through word of mouth, it kind of kept going."

But Sohm credits a phone call from one of the nation's most notable, enthusiastic, and pro-hunting advocates, rock and roller Ted Nugent, with the rise of his company.

"He wanted us to make a broadhead for him," Sohm said of Nugent's involvement. "And that's when I made the decision to turn it into a full-time business in about 1994."

Nugent has been a huge help in promoting Magnus according to Sohm.

"I've known him for 20 years, and he's a very intelligent man," Sohm said. "He's got to be the world's greatest field tester because he just loves to bowhunt, and it doesn't matter if it's the smallest deer in the world, he's going to be just as happy."

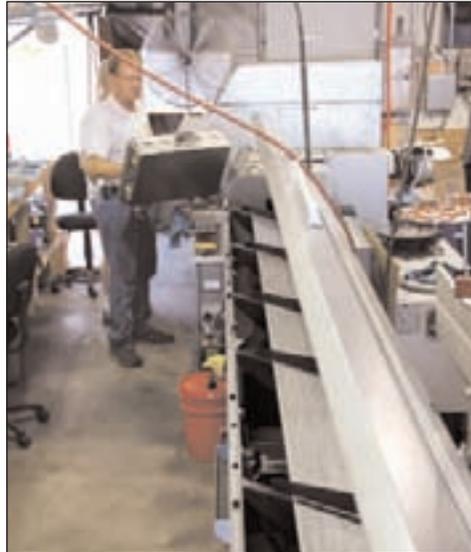
Sohm initially wanted to call his company, Magnum Broadheads.

"But there was already a company out of New York that had a Magnus broadhead made by Hiawatha Archery," Sohm said. "So we did a little research and I actually found, 'Magnus' in the dictionary and it's a Swedish name which means, 'Strength and Strong,' and it's a coincidence that the 'M' on Magnus and the 'S' were the first initial of my first name and last."

In 1995 Sohm moved his operation from Otis to Great Bend and employed three people. In 1997, Sohm started making the Snuffer Broadhead for Delta Industries.

"And then about two years after that, we purchased that broadhead line from Delta Industries, and that took us to another step in sales with that line," Sohm said.

In 2002 Magnus engineered another broadhead called the Stinger, which coupled with the Stinger BuzzCut, continues to be a staple of their business. Sohm hired Mark Nichols as a sales representative and started full-scale promotion of Magnus products.



The Magnus plant in Great Bend employs nine full-time employees.

"The timing was perfect because before that we just didn't have the time to market and sell the product the way it should be," Sohm said. "Since then, our sales have gone up dramatically."

Quality control is important in Sohm's business and they cut no corners in manufacturing or production. They make the most important part of a broadhead, the ferrule, in-house with incredible precision through a machining process. The broadheads must pass a rigorous inspection to make it to packaging.

"We spin-check every single one on a dial indicator, and if it's outside of .003 as a total run-out on the point it does not get shipped," Sohm said.

During that same time Magnus became a national distributor of the Accu-Sharp Knife Sharpener and associated products.

"That has helped our business tremendously," Sohm said. "It basically expanded what we were doing instead of just totally relying on broadheads."

Sohm said Magnus also makes the Wensel Woodsman and STOS Broadhead for companies in Indiana and Colorado, respectively. All total they make more than 40 different styles of broadheads.

One of the misconceptions, according to Sohm, is that cut-on-contact heads, like all in the Magnus line, don't fly well out of today's fast bows.

"People would say it would fly great out of a recurve that's going 180-200 feet per second (fps) or a compound that's 220-240 fps, but if you get from 240-310 fps, they said it wouldn't fly, and that's where we've changed the way of thinking," he admits. "Every single Stinger and Stinger BuzzCut broadhead will fly like a field point right out of the package, and we're very confident in that."

"When I first started, I'd say the traditional archer was probably 70-80 percent of our business, but I would honestly say it's the other way now with about 60 percent compound and



Quality control is top priority at Magnus. Every broadhead must pass a precision spin test before it is shipped.



photo courtesy Magnus

Magnus broadhead company founder Mike Sohm credits Ted Nugent with helping his company take off. Nugent is a tireless promoter of bowhunting and Magnus heads.

40 percent traditional,” Sohm said. “We still make all of our traditional heads, and we’re making them better today than we ever have. But I think the guys shooting the fast bows have found that the Stinger and Stinger BuzzCut lines really work.”

The newest member of the Magnus line in 2006 is the Snuffer SS.

“It’s in the same line of the old Snuffer broadhead but in a smaller, cut-on-contact, stainless steel 3-blade, which is all one piece that is laser welded,” Sohm said. “It not only has great flight characteristics, it’s extremely strong and works very well.”

Magnus now has nine full-time employees and two part-time employees. They sell worldwide to Australia, Austria, Germany, New Zealand, Switzerland, Spain, South Africa, Iceland, Britain and Russia along with many others. Sohm credits the Internet and his sales rep for increasing sales abroad and nationally.

“Overseas sales have really picked up,” Sohm said. “And in

the last five years, our sales have been increasing at a 25-30 percent rate yearly.

“We’ve always had a lifetime guarantee on our products,” Sohm said. “We are extremely customer-service oriented, and if a bowhunter shoots a broadhead and it hits a rock and is bent or broken, we replace it with no hesitation. The Internet has helped us because we can respond to our customers faster, and if someone e-mails us with a concern or question we can call them right back.”

Magnus has a full-time technical advisor, Woody Sanford, who is available to help any bowhunter with questions about their products. He also field tests many of Magnus’ products.

“We want to make the most efficient broadhead for penetration and cut-

“In all honesty, I believe our increase in sales is based on how we treat our customer,” Sohm added. “Our goal is to make a bowhunter happy when he spends his hard-earned money on our product.”

Sohm estimates he sells more than 300,000 broadheads annually now compared with about 700 the first year he worked out of his parents’ home. He realized his business ventures wouldn’t always necessarily go according to plan and there would be hills and valleys along the way. But his goal from day one hasn’t changed and that’s to provide a quality product and back it up.

ting,” Sohm said. “There’s no question that Magnus would not be where it is today without the help of my family, the city of Great Bend and the people who work here. The only way you can be successful as a company in my opinion is to have good people around you, and that’s the key to our success. And having traveled all over the country I wouldn’t want to have my company anywhere else other than Kansas.”



Mike Sohm holds up a large replica on one of his top selling broadheads at a recent trade show.

November!



It's On

by Mike Blair









Edited by Mark Shoup

RIGHT ON

Editor:

The article about training your dog that features Tony Zimmerman's kennels in the Sept./Oct. issue of *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine ("Dog's Best Friend," Page 12) is right on point, especially in Mark Shoup's evaluation of Zimmerman's talent as a dog trainer. I have spent quite a lot of time around professional dog trainers over the last 15 years, and Tony is a cut above even the best of them.

John Settle
Larned

GROUNDHOG DAY

Editor:

Attached are the photos of what I think is a groundhog at Lakewood Park in Salina. I think it is a groundhog. It has burrows under the flower stand and bench area right in back of the information center.

I've never seen one of these before in Kansas. Is it really a groundhog?

Bruce Barrett
Salina



Dear Mr. Barrett

The pictures indeed are of a "groundhog" (better known as a woodchuck). Woodchucks occurred in at least north-eastern Kansas at the time of settlement of that region of the state. The species became more abundant in the early 20th century and eventually moved westward across the Flint Hills.

It first appeared in southern Kansas

and began moving westward at about mid-century. By 1992, the woodchuck had been documented as far west as Rooks County along the Solomon River. At that time, I hypothesized that woodchucks already occurred in several counties west of the Flint Hills (Clay, Cloud, Mitchell, Osborne, Ottawa, Republic, and Saline), and the species had advanced westward as far as Trego County.

From the above, you can see that woodchucks probably have occurred in Saline County for a good number of years but went unreported because they were not especially abundant. They now have become abundant throughout northern Kansas as far west as the boundary between the Smoky Hills and the High Plains. I have no data on the extent of their western dispersal in southern Kansas.

Jerry Choate, *Sternberg Museum of Natural History, Hays*

Note: For more information on woodchucks, see "How Much Wood" in this issue's "Nature" section, Page 41.

APPRECIATE THE FOSSILS

Editor:

Writers often don't hear enough good about their work, so here's a word of praise for Ken Brunson's piece "85 Million Years Ago!" in the most recent issue of *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine (Sept./Oct. 2006, Page 17). This is another example of the kind of article not directed at traditional sportsmen but which I really appreciate and know many other people do, as well.

I pick up fossils and sometimes write about them. I did a story this summer on Dakota sandstone and some of the fossils found in it, including *s. condrayi*. Frankly, the effort it can take to find certain kinds of fossils can be as challenging as any kind of hunting.

Anyway, a great piece. Thanks for your work.

Elby Adamson
Clay Center

NONRESIDENT OVER 65

Editor:

I am a Missouri resident age 65. Do I need a license to fish in Kansas, and if so, which license and how much does it cost?

Jerry Nickeson
Webb City, Missouri

Dear Mr. Nickeson:

Yes, you need a license to fish in Kansas. All nonresidents 16 and older must have a valid nonresident license — \$42.15 for annual license, \$22.15 for five-day, or \$7.15 for 24-hour — to fish in Kansas, unless fishing on a private pond not leased for public fishing.

—Shoup

FISHIN' KID

The little boy in this picture is Randall Copeland, my 6-year-old grandson. He caught his big green sunfish in a Chautauqua County farm pond Labor Day weekend. He was using a Roadrunner.

Randall loves *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine, and I give him each copy after I read it.

Reid Copeland
Sedan





TRICKED BUCK

Editor:

This is a picture of my 12-year-old son, Gunnar Hays of Almena, with the mule deer he shot during the youth hunt. The buck had an outside spread of 26 inches and 17 points. Gunnar killed the buck with one shot from about 50 yards with his .243.

We teased him that no one had told this big old buck about youth season, so he didn't know he was supposed to run away. This wasn't Gunnar's first deer, but he may never shoot a bigger one.

*Gale Hays
Almena*

CONFUSED ABOUT HOGS

Editor:

I'm confused. Is it now illegal to hunt wild hogs in Kansas? Why? Do we want our state populated with wild hogs? Please explain. Thank you.

*Jason Funk
Tonganoxie*

Dear Mr. Funk:

We would rather have no feral hogs, and the new Kansas statute makes sport hunting of hogs illegal. This is a health issue as well as a conservation issue. It is feared that feral hogs, which have been released for sport hunting, may spread disease to domestic animals, and wild hogs are very destructive of native wildlife habitat. Landowners may still control them on their own land.

This is a new statute passed by the

Kansas Legislature. Read "No Hogs" in the "Notes" section of this issue, Page 42, for quotes from the law.

For more information, contact the Kansas Department of Animal Health, (785) 296-2326.

—Shoup

LICENSE CLARIFICATION

Editor:

I have read the information on your website and just wanted some clarification. I am now living in California and have a Virginia drivers license. I have family living in Kansas, and I visit them often. I did join the Navy from Kansas.

Can I still buy a hunting/fishing license as a resident of Kansas? My home town is Miltonvale, where I lived all my life until I joined the Navy. I also took hunter education in Kansas.

*Bill Shepard
Miltonvale*

Dear Mr. Shepard:

Kansas law states that anyone who is a Kansas resident when they enter the armed services remains a Kansas resident for purposes of hunting and fishing as long as they remain in the armed services. However, this does not apply if

WE NEED YOUR LETTERS

Help us fill our "Letter" section. Find answers to questions, let us know what you know, or just express your opinion.

Email letters to MarkJMS@wp.state.ks.us or write

Mark Shoup, c/o KDWP,
512 SE 25th Ave.
Pratt, KS 67124

—Shoup

that person has established residency in another state. One example of establishing residency elsewhere would include paying income tax in another state.

The most important issue regarding your eligibility for Kansas resident licenses and permits is your military home of record. If you entered the service from Kansas, you likely established Kansas as your military home of record. However, if for any reason you changed your home of record with the military during your time of service — to avoid Kansas state income taxes, obtain resident permits in another state, etc. — you are no longer eligible for Kansas resident hunting and fishing licenses and permits.

—Shoup

WAY outside BY BRUCE COCHRAN



"AM I THE ONLY ONE HERE WHO FINDS THE TERM 'YARMINT' TO BE DEROGATORY AND INSENSITIVE?"

PROUD POACHER

A photograph in the Dec. 9, 2004, Marysville newspaper showed a hunter with the head and cape of a very large non-typical whitetail buck taken using a landowner/tenant deer permit. A couple of days after the article went to print, an agent with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and a KDWP natural resource officer began investigating the legality of the buck's harvest.

They learned that the hunter had previously lived a number of years in Kansas. While residing in Kansas, he purchased a lifetime hunting license, which entitled him to obtain deer permits as a Kansas resident. However, no documents could be located that supported his claim as a landowner or tenant. This, combined with local rumors that the buck may have been taken prior to the season opener, led the officers to investigate further.

The officers were able to verify that the buck was harvested with a rifle during the archery season in November. The hunter was informed that he would be charged with misrepresenting himself to purchase a tag or permit; hunting and taking a deer without a valid tag or permit; and taking a deer with a rifle during closed season. Each charge carried a potential \$1,000 fine. And because the buck had a 27-plus inch inside spread, it met the legal "trophy" criteria, which could carry an additional \$5,000 fine.

Initially, the hunter was offered an opportunity to resolve these issues in state court for about \$6,000 in fines and restitution. The hunter's attorney recommended that he plead not guilty and have his day in court, so the state informed the defendant that it would drop state charges and turn the case over to the federal government. Federal charges would include a felony Lacey Act violation (transporting illegal deer antlers across state lines) and felony commercialization of wildlife charges (offering those antlers for sale for approximately \$10,000) – carrying fines of up to \$250,000 and five years in jail.

Soon, the hunter and his attorney were back at the bargaining table trying to reach a plea agreement. One final opportunity was granted the hunter to resolve his issues. Providing the hunter pled guilty to the charges brought by the state of Kansas, no felony prosecution in federal court would be sought.

The hunter pled guilty to all state counts. He was assessed \$8,000 in fines, ordered to pay \$5,000 restitution to KDWP, and forfeited his rifle with the option of re-purchasing it for \$400.

The circumstances surrounding the poaching of this animal were truly unfortunate, for a buck of his caliber should be remembered and enjoyed in a positive manner by true sportsmen and women for a lifetime.

–Darren Brown, natural resources officer,
Home City

NWTF REWARDS

On April 16, 2005, witnesses told Allen County Sheriff's Deputy Tim Beckham they had observed a hunting violation north of Gas City.

They told Beckham that two young men had come out of the woods on the side of a field opposite from where they were hunting. One of the men rapid-fired a rifle into a flock of turkeys that were between the two groups. The witnesses said they could hear bullets "whizzing through the air" in their direction. They also said that one of the men killed a turkey, and both ran back to the woods.

Beckham investigated and gave me the suspects' information and a witness' cell phone number. I met with all three hunters, who told me that they'd tried to watch as much of what was going on but were also trying to take cover behind some trees to avoid being shot.

After the shooter had killed the bird, he turned his attention to the flock of turkeys, but when Beckham arrived, the suspects heard the siren and started to run. The witnesses believed the suspects dropped the bird at the tree line as they were running away.

The witnesses then led me to a location about 100 yards from where the hunters had been set up. I found a large spot of blood in the field and a spent .22-caliber cartridge casing. I also found a dead tom turkey just inside the tree line with its beard cut off.

I learned that one individual was 15 years old and the other 24. I went to the younger man's house first and met with his mother. She informed me the suspect and his father had just left to get their turkey permits. I waited.

The two returned shortly, and I explained to them the incidents that had just occurred. The boy confirmed that it was his .22 involved in the incident and that the other man had been the shooter. I informed the father and son

that I needed to speak with the other man involved before determining what charges would be forthcoming.

When I visited the second suspect's house, he admitted that he had killed the turkey. I asked if he had a turkey permit. He replied that he did not. I informed him that he was going to be charged with taking a wild turkey without a permit and taking a wild turkey with an illegal firearm.

The 24-year-old man paid \$410 in fines for his involvement in the incident. The juvenile was given a warning for the charge of aiding and abetting hunting wild turkey without a permit.

Any individual who reports the unlawful taking of a wild turkey is eligible to receive a reward of up to \$500 from the National Wild Turkey Federation if the information leads to the arrest and conviction of the individual involved. The caller in this case was nominated to receive the reward.

–Jason Deal, natural resource officer,
Yates Center

HUNTING RESEARCH

What more can be learned about hunting? Humans have been students of their most primal instinct for thousands of years, so what possibly could be left to discover? Plenty, as it turns out.

The National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF), a trade association now representing more than 3,200 companies of the firearm industry, conducts and compiles research on new trends in hunting and shooting sports participation, sales, demographics, business environments, and more.

Here's a roundup of some 2006 findings:

Retail value of a hunter – During his or her lifetime, an average American hunter spends \$17,726 on hunting equipment. When licenses, lodging, food, fuel, magazines, meat processing, and other expenses are included, the average lifetime total spent on hunting jumps to \$96,018. These figures were calculated as part of 2006 NSSF-commissioned research. The study looked at hunters' total expenditures from age 16 to 75. During that period, an average hunter in the U.S. annually spends \$70 on rifles, \$53 on shotguns, \$9 on muzzleloaders, \$21 on handguns, \$49 on ammunition, \$12 on decoys, and \$49 on dogs and supplies.

Hunting's good old days – A majority of U.S. taxidermists report growing numbers of customers and increasing workload. But quantity isn't the only thing on the rise. The average specimen of America's most popular trophy, the whitetail buck, is getting larger over time, most taxidermists say. NSSF conducted a 2006 national survey to research taxidermy business trends, operations, and challenges. More and better trophies spell good news for hunting today, but most taxidermists foresee trouble from the animal rights movement, wildlife habitat loss, and rising costs of business.

Hunter numbers up – A 2006 study suggests there are more hunters in the U.S. than previously thought. Nearly 12 percent of Americans 16 and older – 26.4 million people – said they hunted with gun or bow last year. The study is by the Outdoor Industry Foundation, which usually focuses on contemporary pursuits such as paddle sports and rock climbing. It is the organization's first look at hunting. NSSF is optimistic yet wary until further studies are completed because veteran researchers maintain more conservative figures. NSSF-commissioned research shows 23 million Americans consider themselves hunters, even if latent or inactive. The National Sporting Goods Association reports 20.6 million active hunters. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service surveys show 14.7 million people, or about 5 percent of Americans, purchased a hunting license last year. [Many hunters, however, are not required to have a license.]

Ivy League endorses hunting – Show Cornell University researchers a young hunter, and they'll show you a future environmentalist. A 2006 study shows that children who hunt, fish, or play in the wild before age 11 are more likely to grow up with deeper understanding and respect for nature. Domestic outdoor activities like gardening also positively influence adult environmental attitudes and behaviors, but their effects aren't as strong. When kids become truly engaged with the natural world at a young age, the experience is likely to stay with them in a powerful way, shaping their environmental path, Cornell researchers say. Interestingly, participating in Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts and other formalized outdoor education programs has no effect on adult attitudes toward the environment.

For more information on NSSF and its research programs, visit www.nssf.org or call 203-426-1320.

–*Bullet Points*



BIRD FLU

During hunting seasons, bird hunters may be concerned about avian influenza, commonly known as "bird flu." Birds have long been susceptible to bird flu, but the latest strain – highly-pathogenic H5N1 – has killed more than 200 million domestic birds and sickened 241 people worldwide. Since 2003, 141 people have died from H5N1.

The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP) is collecting samples from 750 migratory birds, including shorebirds, ducks, geese, and sandhill cranes. Hunters should be aware that KDWP employees may ask to sample any waterfowl or sandhill cranes in their bags.

So far, highly-pathogenic H5N1 has not been detected in North America. During extensive surveillance of wild birds in Europe, H5N1 was detected only in dead birds.

There have been only seven cases, all in the Eurasian country of Azerbaijan, of humans acquiring H5N1 directly from wild birds. These people contracted H5N1 after plucking feathers from swans that died in an H5N1 die-off.

Until highly-pathogenic H5N1 is detected in North America, experts believe the risk to hunters is extremely low. Nevertheless, the U.S. Geological Survey's (USGS) National Wildlife Health Center recommends that hunters should follow these common-sense precautions when handling wild game birds:

- do not handle or eat sick game;
- wear rubber or disposable latex gloves while handling and cleaning game;
- wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after handling game and thoroughly clean knives, equipment, and surfaces that come in contact with game;
- do not eat, drink, or smoke while handling animals; and
- thoroughly cook all game (well done or 160 degrees F).

Discovery of sick or dead wildlife is no reason to panic. Not all sick or dead animals carry H5N1. Wild birds and animals routinely die of accidents, predation, and diseases that have been around for decades. However, anyone finding a large number of dead or sick birds (five or

more) should phone the nearest KDWP office.

If highly-pathogenic H5N1 is detected in North America, precautions for hunters and the general public could change. Check KDWP's website – www.kdwp.state.ks.us/hunting/migratory_birds/bird_flu – or the U.S. Geological Service website – www.nwhc.usgs.gov/disease_information/avian_influenza/index.jsp – for updated information on avian influenza.

–Helen Hands, wildlife biologist, Cheyenne Bottoms

HAYDEN, KDWP WIN LAWSUIT

On Sept. 12, U.S. Senior District Judge Wesley E. Brown, Wichita, issued a summary judgment order in favor of defendant Mike Hayden, in his official capacity as secretary of the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks. Summary judgment is a

legal term which means that a court -- in this case the judge applying facts presented by both plaintiff and defendant -- has made a legal determination without a full trial.

The order stemmed from a lawsuit filed by George Taulman, a New Mexico resident who owns two ranches in western Kansas. As a non-resident landowner, Taulman is not allowed to obtain a special transferable Hunt-Own-Land deer permit. In addition, because his land is in turkey management Unit 4 and he is a nonresident, he is ineligible for the limited number of turkey permits reserved for the resident-only drawing in that unit.

Taulman argued that as a nonresident landowner, he should have equal access to wildlife on his land as resident landowners do on their land. This would allow him - - and all other nonresident landowners -- to apply for turkey permits in Unit 4, as well as obtain a special

transferable Hunt-Own-Land deer permit, which allows the taking of mule deer or white-tailed deer in any season with equipment legal for that season and may be transferred to a lineal or collateral relative.

Taulman argued that Kansas laws and regulations regarding nonresident landowners and hunting violated the "Privileges and Immunities Clause" of the U.S. Constitution, which states that "Citizens of each State shall be entitled to all Privileges and Immunities of Citizens in the several States."

After analyzing all the facts and legal citations presented by both parties, however, the court found that previous rulings on this clause have determined that "not every state law which discriminates against nonresidents runs afoul of the Privileges and Immunities Clause." Specifically, such discrimination would have to threaten the "basic . . . maintenance

or well-being of the Union." One example cited was a case in which a state law threatened a nonresident's commercial livelihood. Kansas law in this case in no way threatens the livelihood of Taulman, the court ruled.

"This case is important for Kansas hunters because it reaffirms the longstanding notion that it is the prerogative of the Kansas Legislature and the Department of Wildlife and Parks [KDWP] to enact laws and regulations that benefit or give preference to resident hunters over non-resident hunters," said KDWP chief legal counsel Chris Tymeson.

A full reading of the Memorandum and Order of summary judgment may be viewed online at www.ksd.uscourts.gov/opinions/051118-36.pdf.

–Shoup

PARKS FROM SPACE

The KDWP website, www.kdwp.state.ks.us, offers many informational features about each of its state parks, including detailed news, brochures, camping area information, events, photographs, fish and wildlife, and direct email. Each of these features may be accessed by clicking "State Parks" at the top of the KDWP home page, then "Locations," and then the park of choice. Icons at the top of individual park pages offer access to all this information and more.

Perhaps one of the most fascinating portals is the "Map" icon. By clicking this, the reader is taken to a conventional map of the state park and surrounding area. Icons on the map show the location of primitive and modern campsites, the park office, playgrounds, shelters, cabins, and other features of the park.

Best of all, the map may be viewed in three formats: conventional map, satellite, and hybrid. The conventional map is like one would see in a brochure of the area, with highways, service icons, the lake, and county roads. The satellite image is a photographic view of the area from high altitude. The hybrid image is the same as the satellite image except that major highways are superimposed on the photograph.

All formats retain the service icons, and viewers may zoom in or out to gain a desired view of the area. In addition, viewers may "grab" the image by holding down on their computer mouse and move the image in the view box, offering a glimpse of the area for several miles around the park.

For all this and much more on Kansas state parks, visit the KDWP website.

–Shoup



Bottoms Up

In early August, KDWP reported that wetlands in central and northwest Kansas were in dire straits due to lack of rainfall. One of the agency's premier wetlands – Cheyenne Bottoms, near Great Bend – was nearly dry.

All that changed in mid-August when up to 8 inches of rain fell in the rainwater basin west of the Bottoms, filling the wetland and making the prospects for the opening of early teal season bright. As the Bottoms filled, it provided excellent teal habitat. This also is good news for late-migrating duck hunters.

"We've got good water, and we're going to have a good duck season," said Karl Grover, Cheyenne Bottoms area manager, in early October. "Every hunting pool has water. Number 4B is the shallowest with 8 to 9 inches. Shorebird migration should be good, too."

Duck season dates are as follow:

High Plains Zone

Oct. 7-Jan. 2, 2007, and Jan. 20-Jan. 28, 2007;

Early Zone

Oct. 14-Dec. 10, and Dec. 16-31;

Late Zone

Oct. 28-Dec. 31 and Jan. 20-Jan. 28, 2007.

For more details, visit the KDWP website or pick up a copy of the *2006 Kansas Hunting and Furharvesting Regulations Summary* wherever licenses are sold.

—Shoup

Upland Outlook

For the second year in a row, the Kansas upland bird hunting outlook appears promising. The state will have good numbers of birds, more than 1.6 million acres open to public hunting, and some of the longest upland game seasons and most liberal bag limits in the country.

Due to a relatively mild winter across most of the state, pheasant numbers going into the nesting season were the highest recorded in the last 10 years. However, drought and a late fall blizzard in western Kansas resulted in an averaged statewide decline in production of more than 20 percent from last year. Because of poor production in some regions, the statewide average number of pheasants will be down. Fortunately, pheasant production was not poor across the entire state, and in certain areas, the number of birds will be similar or even greater than last year.

Like pheasants, quail numbers going into the nesting season were the highest observed in the last several years due to the relatively mild winter across most of

the state. Unlike pheasants, quail did not suffer poor production. Quail production was actually up 10-20 percent averaged statewide and even greater in some regions. Quail experienced poor production only in the severely drought-stricken western one-third of the state. All indications point to the upcoming quail season being one of the best in the last several years.

Kansas is home to both greater and lesser prairie-chickens. Lesser prairie-chickens are found in the western and southwestern part of the state. In recent years, the lesser prairie-chicken population has increased across the majority of its range, offering good hunting opportunities. Greater prairie-chicken numbers appear to be declining in the Flint Hills and were down substantially again this spring. However, because of dry conditions this year, pasture burning wasn't as widespread in the Flint Hills, so production may have been better than last year. Greater prairie-chicken numbers in the northcentral part of the state were up this spring.

A more detailed 2006 Kansas Upland Bird Forecast, including a regional map, is available online at www.kdwp.state.ks.us and at most offices of the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks.

—abbreviated from small game coordinator
Jim Pittman's 2006 Upland Outlook

Cedar Bluff Whitetails

The decline of Cedar Bluff Reservoir for the last five years has added approximately 2,900 acres of prime deer habitat in the lake bottom, increasing the white-tailed deer population and crop damage on adjoining private land, as well as habitat degradation. Harvesting these antlerless deer is key to controlling this whitetail expansion.

Only 17 female deer were harvested at Cedar Bluff during the 2005 firearms deer season. Hunters who have already obtained a 2006 permit that allows them to take an antlered deer may also purchase a Whitetail Antlerless permit (\$32.15 for residents, \$77.15 for nonresidents). By using that permit on Cedar Bluff Wildlife Area, hunters can improve habitat quality on the wildlife area, as well as curb crop damage on adjacent private lands. Whitetail Antlerless permits are available online at www.kdwp.state.ks.us, at KDWP regional and state park offices, as well as local vendors.

The Whitetail Antlerless Only permit is valid during any season with legal equipment. For more information about deer hunting at Cedar Bluff Wildlife Area, phone 785-726-3212.

—Kent Hensley,
public lands manager,
Cedar Bluff Wildlife Area



2006 deer seasons at Cedar Bluff include the following dates:

Muzzleloader Season – Sept. 9 – 22
and Nov. 29 – Dec. 10;

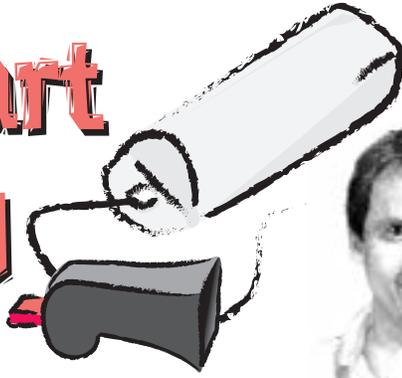
Youth and Disability Season – Sept. 23-24;

Archery Season – Oct. 1 - Dec. 31; and

Firearms Season – Nov. 29 - Dec 10.

Jumpstart Morning

by Mark Shoup



Some readers of this magazine will know that I bought a new pup in the summer of 2005 and took her to local trainer Tony Zimmerman in late October. After two months with Zimmerman, I picked up a well-trained young dog that would come, stay, heel, retrieve, and was learning hand signals. "Ruby" was affectionate, obedient, and responsive to command.

Then comes a day in late July 2006 when Ruby is ready for graduate school. But first, I learn that getting a day started can be more difficult than getting a pup off on the right foot. It's a work day for my oldest son, Logan, and me. My wife, Rose, has to take our youngest son, Will, to swimming lessons at 7:30 a.m. Routine family morning, right? Wrong.

It is axiomatic that alarm clock makers are sadistic by nature. Their idea of gently waking someone is akin to ramming one's nose into a closed door in the dark of night. I have never heard a pleasant-sounding alarm clock, and this particular morning, the alarm comes screaming through my dreams like a mad P-51 pilot, buzzing the placid trout stream in which I stand.

I lunge toward the nightstand only to send both alarm and lamp flying. The siren screams until I drop to the floor with a violent thud, fish the evil device from under the bed, and rip its cord from the socket. Then I sit on my knees panting and stare at my stunned wife who glares back as if I have morphed in the night like some humanoid creature from *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.

"Sorry," I growl, pulling myself up and staggering to the bathroom.

After a shave and shower, I elbow through my two sons, who are wrestling for sink space and second place in the shower before the hot water runs out. Safely away, I dress and eat a relatively peaceful breakfast. By now, the boys are scurrying from one room to another, rifling through laundry baskets for their favorite shorts before a quick bowl of cereal. Ruby is bounding after everyone, unable to decide who will do something else interesting.

About this time, Rose walks into the kitchen with her nose in the air and a bloody tissue cupped over it.

"Weeel! Durry oop! I'b god a buddy node, an' dor wate spor paktise!" she exclaims, her sensitive nose the victim to a string of dry, hot days. Strangely, Will has no trouble interpreting this command, and he wolfs down the last of his cereal, grabs a towel, and follows his mother as she marches toward the garage with her face to the sky.

"Logan, you've got to get going, too, Bud," I mumble between bites of cereal and blueberries that stick between my teeth. "You don't want to be late for work."

"I know!" he replies with all the indignation a soon-to-be high school senior can muster. Leaving his half-eaten cereal, he's out the door.

I'm brushing my teeth when Logan rushes back into the house in a panic. "Dad, I locked my keys in my car!" he screams. "Do we have a spare?"

I choke on my toothpaste, struggling to breath. *Don't yell, Mark*, I tell

myself. *There's a key somewhere. He's just a kid. He's just a kid. He's just...*

After dumping a jar the size of a gallon bucket on the kitchen table, we begin throwing keys everywhere, and Ruby is eagerly retrieving them. I come to the horrible realization that there is no spare in the pile. That, or it's disguised itself as an 1857 skeleton key. Then I remember a key in the safe, fumble through the combination, retrieve the key, and Logan is off.

Whew! Finally some peace and quiet, I think. *But I've got to get truckin'.*

I'm ready to leave, but neither Ruby or our old dog, Teller, will come. I look everywhere but cannot find them, so I get in my truck, drive around the house, and then pick up tracks in the road heading to our neighbor's place one-half mile away. Sure enough, Teller's there chasing cats, and I drag her into the truck.

Back in the yard, Ruby materializes at my side as I search for places Teller could have gotten out. All the gates appear tightly closed except one. Ruby discovers it. She runs right up to it, looks at me, and sits down. This is a broken gate that had been tied with ropes that have now been loosed, open just enough for Teller to get out. Ruby just looks at it, then at me, as if telling me what had happened.

If I ever get this dog to the trainer, she is going to be a good one, I tell myself.

I secure the gate with bailing wire and scan the yard. Warily, I take Ruby to the truck, glancing at the sky and watching my step. It's been one of those mornings, you know.

But no meteorites hit us on the way to Zimmerman's, and I drop her off without incident. A month or so later, I return to find a young dog making blind retrieves and responding to hand signals. I am astounded — and reminded that bad starts do not a day make.

Still, I now keep my alarm clock muffled in a Mad Bomber rabbit fur hat. I'm considering application for a patent on the concept.

FISH CULTURE WORKSHOP

The Mid-Continent Fish Culture Workshop is held each year, drawing state, federal, and private fish culturists from across the nation. The 2006 meeting hosted attendees from Idaho to Virginia with 18 states represented. Those attending exchange information and listen to both practical and experimental presentations on fish culture.

Kansas will host the 2007 annual meeting in Overland Park on Feb. 5-7, 2007, at the Holiday Inn Hotel & Suites, Overland Park West, 8787 Reeder Road. To reserve a room, go online at www.ichotelsgroup.com/h/d/hi/1/en/hotel/mkcpkjsessionid=OIDWPCFZ0WK3CCTGWAJCIHQKM0YBUIY4?_requestid=117233. In the left-hand column under "Check Availability," enter the check-in and check-out dates, the number of people and rooms desired, and put KDW in the "Group Code" box. This will automatically offer the conference special rate of \$69 per night for a double or get a single king size bed for the same price.

Fish culturists raise fish in hatcheries, creating much greater survival rates for young fish than those hatched in the wild. Fish raised in hatcheries are stocked in state and federal waters, providing a valued recreational resource for anglers nationwide.

"This meeting evolved out of a small meeting among biologists from Kansas and Nebraska years ago," says Doug Nygren, KDWP Fisheries Section chief. "It's an opportunity for fisheries biologists to bounce ideas off their peers and see what they think." Nygren expects about 150 fish culture biologists to attend this meeting.

For hotel reservations by phone, call 888-890-0242.

—Doug Nygren, Fisheries Section chief, Pratt

TROUT TIME

The Kansas trout season began Oct. 15 and runs through April 15. During this cool period of the year, the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks stocks rainbow trout in designated waters throughout the state. Anyone fishing for trout in these waters must purchase a \$12.15 trout permit, whether they are required to have a fishing license or not.

Trout permits are valid for the calendar year, so permits purchased on or after Jan. 1, 2006, are valid through Dec. 31 of this year. All residents 16-64 years old, and all non-residents 16 and older must also have a valid fishing license.

Trout fishing at Mined Land Wildlife Area #30 (Cherokee County) and Tuttle Creek State Park Willow Lake, where trout survive through the summer, requires a trout permit year-round. At other trout sites, the permit is only required during the trout season.

The daily creel limit is five trout, unless otherwise posted. The possession limit is three times the daily creel.

Trout permits are available online, at KDWP offices, some county clerk offices, and license vendors. For information on stocking dates and locations or to purchase a permit, visit the KDWP website, www.kdwp.state.ks.us. For specific regulations on trout and other fish, pick up a copy of the *2006 Kansas Fishing Regulations Summary*, available at most license vendors and on the KDWP website.

—Shoup

KIDS HALL OF FAME

Summer is long gone, but parents, grandparents, and friends have a new way to reminisce and share fish tales and photos of their favorite little anglers' accomplishments from the warmer months. The nonprofit Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation (RBFF) has launched the Kids Fishing Hall of Fame on the takemefishing.org website.

In the Hall of Fame section, parents can share their kids' fishing experiences with friends and family across the country and around the world. The new section features photos and stories about kids who have gone fishing and caught on to an activity they can enjoy for years to come. Recognizing kids' accomplishments on the water, no matter how big or small, the section encourages families to experience the fun of boating and fishing.

Parents are invited to nominate their kids for the Hall of Fame by submitting a story and photo about time they've shared on the water. The Kids Fishing Hall of Fame accepts submissions in four categories:

- "The First Fish" captures the excitement and joy of the day every angler remembers — that first fishing trip;
- "The Big Catch" recognizes kids who have had especially fruitful days on the water;
- "The Best Fishing and Boating Buddy" is the place where stories are shared



about great times on the water; and

- "The Strange and Hilarious" highlights those unique stories that are told at family gatherings year after year.

The Hall of Fame also includes a certificate-maker that lets parents and kids create a memento of their special day. A certificate of achievement can be customized with information about the trip and/or the catch and printed out for hanging on a wall or posting on the refrigerator.

The Hall of Fame is easy to navigate, and the submission process takes only a few minutes. All submissions are reviewed by RBFF before being posted on the site. To explore the Kids Fishing Hall of Fame and learn more about fishing and boating, visit takemefishing.org and click on "Family Fun."

—Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation

HOW MUCH WOOD...

...could a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood? Everyone is familiar with this old tongue-twister, but most people don't conjure images of this largest member of the squirrel family when they recite it. In fact, ask most Kansans what a woodchuck looks like, and you'll probably get varying answers. Ask what a groundhog looks like, however, and most people will probably mention the weather-forecasting critter from Bill Murray's perennially-popular movie, *Groundhog Day* (which they've seen over and over again).

"Groundhog" is actually another name for the animal that biologists refer to as a woodchuck (*Marmota marmota*). Some people call them "whistle pigs" because of their habit of sounding a loud, shrill whistle when alarmed. The woodchuck is found throughout North America, including the eastern one-half of the U.S. into northern Idaho. Most Kansans don't think of them as a native animal, but they have been spotted in much of eastern half of the state. (See "Groundhog Day" in the "Letters" section.)

True to its name, the woodchuck inhabits woodlots and forested areas, but it also prefers a variety of habitat mixed with pasture and farmland. Unmistakable in Kansas because of its size, the woodchuck may weigh as much as 11 pounds and grow more than 2 feet long.

Anyone who has seen a marmot in the mountains has a good idea of what a



woodchuck looks like, but Punxsutawney Phil from Murray's movie is the real deal. Thick fur, large claws for digging, and heavy incisor teeth for — you guessed it — "chucking," actually chewing, are its most identifying characteristics. The impressive teeth grow constantly and must therefore be worn down by continued chewing.

At least part of the woodchuck (groundhog) myth of poking its head out of its burrow on Feb. 2 to check for impending spring is true: woodchucks hibernate through winter. In the spring, they breed, giving birth to two to seven young after 30 days of gestation. Young are weaned by six weeks and may be sexually mature in only one year.

In the wild, the woodchuck may live as long as six years although captive animals have been known to live 10.

The best time to see this fascinating rodent is near midday and late in the day in the spring and autumn and early morning in the summer. When not feeding, they may be seen grooming themselves outside their den.

Woodchuck dens are feats of engineering mastery, with several entrances. The den may be burrowed as deep as 5 feet with tunnels running up to 50 feet. Freshly dug earth around an entrance is a good indication that the den is occupied.

Contrary to the chucking-wood tongue-twister, the woodchuck dines primarily on soft plants although they may eat bark, buds, and twigs when green vegetation is scarce. Farm crops, especially alfalfa, are among the woodchuck's daily diet.

From Rooks County east in northern Kansas, the lucky wildlife watcher has a chance to catch a glimpse of a woodchuck, but the farther east you go, the better the odds. If you are looking carefully next spring, you may even see one in your favorite park.

—Shoup

Water Spears

Icicles form when the air is about 32 degrees Fahrenheit. The areas not in direct sunlight are cool and below freezing while the sun melts ice and snow on more exposed surfaces. The melting water dripping down along edges refreezes in the cool air, forming a column of ice — the icicle. If icicles are attached to a something other than a large volume of ice, they usually don't grow very large before breaking by their own weight.

This winter, go on an icicle hunt a few days after a big snow. Gather friends and family and offer a prize for the largest icicle.

—Shoup

AMERICANS SUPPORT HUNTING

A recent nationwide survey of Americans 18 years old and older shows that a strong majority of Americans support hunting and fishing. The nationwide survey, conducted by Responsive Management of Harrisonburg, Va., found that support for hunting and fishing has remained strong over the past decade with approximately three out of four Americans approving of legal hunting and more than nine out of 10 approving of recreational fishing.

"We have been seeing public support for hunting increase in several states over the past decade where we had data, but this is the first nationwide study where we could verify that public support has increased nationwide," says Mark Damian Duda, executive director of Responsive Management.

In 1995, 73 percent of Americans approved of hunting while in 2006, 78 percent approved of hunting. Support for fishing nationwide remains very high, with 93.3 percent of Americans approving. The results of this survey reflect the opinions of a random telephone survey of 813 adult Americans conducted from Aug. 31 through Sept. 9. The sampling error is 3.44 percentage points.

For more information and the complete survey, visit Responsive Management's website, www.responsivemanagement.com.

—Shoup

KONZA HONOR

An educational website for Kansas State University's Konza Prairie Biological Station has been recognized for its outstanding educational content. The Konza Environmental Education Program website has earned an Award of Excellence from StudySphere, an education portal on the internet that provides free access to a wide variety of research-quality, child-safe websites that are organized for education online at both home and school. StudySphere can be used as an online educational resource for students, teachers, and parents.

The Konza Prairie Biological Station is a 8,616-acre native prairie preserve owned by The Nature Conservancy and K-State and operated as a field research station by K-State's Division of Biology. The station's mission includes ecological research, education, and prairie conservation.

The Konza Environmental Education Program, supported by the Friends of the Konza Prairie and several funding agencies, is one way the station meets its education mission. The program promotes public awareness of the tallgrass prairie ecosystem through tours, science activities, and other offerings, including the website, www.k-state.edu/konza/keep.

While more than 5,000 people, mainly schoolchildren, visit the Konza each year, the Konza Environmental Education Program website is a way for everyone to learn about this native prairie trea-

sure. The site takes visitors on scientific adventures where they can study the bison, prairie chickens, reptiles, butterflies, grasshoppers, and many more animals and plants that live on the prairie. Viewers also can learn about prairie fires, research projects, and other activities at the Konza. The website even provides resources for teachers and activities for children.

To access the website at the StudySphere site, go to www.studysphere.com/Site/Sphere_10253.html. For more information, phone 785-532-6415.

—Shoup

NO HOGS

A new Kansas statute makes sport hunting of hogs illegal. The law states that "no person shall engage in, sponsor, instigate, assist, or profit from the release, killing, wounding or attempted killing or wounding of feral swine for the purpose of sport, pleasure, amusement, or production of

a trophy."

In addition, the law states that "owners or legal occupants of land, the employees of such owners or legal occupants or persons designated by such owners or legal occupants may kill any feral swine when found on their premises or when destroying property. Such designees shall have a permit issued by the livestock commissioner in their possession at the time of the killing of the feral swine."

For more information, contact Kansas Department of Animal Health (785) 296-2326.

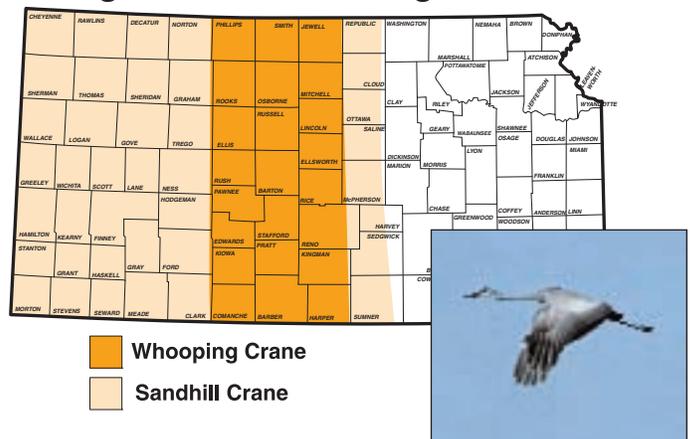
—Shoup

CRANE TEST

All sandhill crane hunters should be aware that they must now take an online crane identification test before obtaining a sandhill crane permit. The test may be found online at <https://secure.ksfishandwildlife.org/crane/>. (Be sure to include the "s" in "https.")

—Shoup

Migration Route Through Kansas



Endangered Ecosystem



Did you know that Kansas sits in the middle of one of the most endangered ecosystems in all the world? It is a grassland ecosystem called the Great Plains. As the name "grassland" suggests, the most common type of plant found in this region is grass. In its natural state, trees and other water-loving plants had a tough time living here because water was not plentiful and fire came through frequently.

The Great Plains was once the greatest grassland on earth and covered over one-fourth of the United States. It stretched for 3,000 miles from the north to the south and west from the

Rocky Mountains to Ohio. Grasslands began forming about 20 million years ago, and three distinct kinds of prairie developed: tallgrass prairie, mixed-grass prairie, and shortgrass prairie.

How tall the grass grows depends on how much rain falls in the area. The tallgrass prairie is found in the eastern third of the Great Plains, including eastern Kansas. It gets the most rainfall (30-40 inches per year), so the grasses are taller and thicker. Indian grass, switchgrass, and big bluestem are grasses you would find here. Big bluestem can grow to be 12 feet tall and grow

as fast as 1/2 inch per day.

Today, 99 percent of the original tallgrass prairie has been destroyed. What was once tallgrass prairie is now the area where most of our corn is grown, and we call this area the "corn belt."

Mixed grass prairie is west of the tallgrass prairie, and as the name suggests, there is a mixture of both tall and short grasses present. Rainfall is less (about 23-30 inches per year). Grasses that grow here include species such as little bluestem and prairie dropseed. Today, we call this area the "wheat belt" because so much of the wheat grown in the U.S. is grown here.

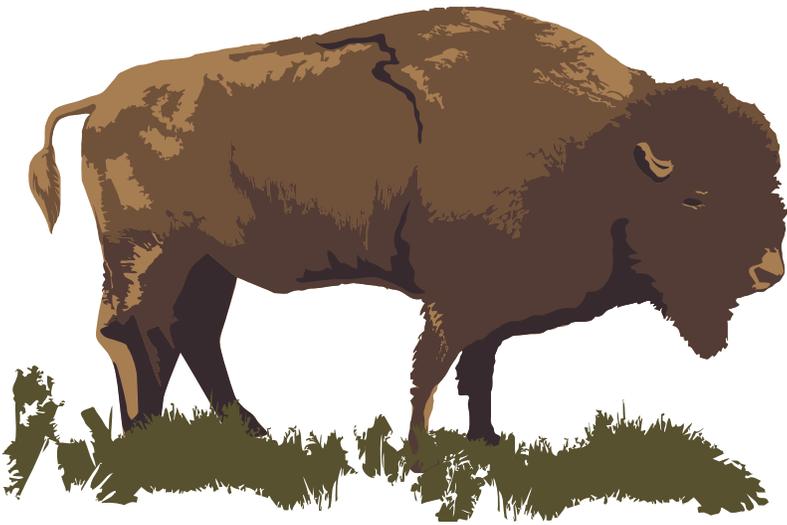
Shortgrass prairie is the far western part of the Great Plains and sits in the shadow of the Rocky Mountains, from the Front Range into western Kansas. Rainfall is much less and only averages about 15 inches per year, so the grasses only grow 6-12 inches tall. Blue gamma and buffalo grass can be found here. Most of this area is now used for cattle grazing.

Before the prairie was farmed or settled, many huge herds of



Big Bluestem

Little Bluestem



plant-eating animals lived on this vast expanse of grassland. As many as 60 million bison grazed alongside 50 million pronghorn, millions of deer and elk, and an estimated 5 billion prairie dogs. It is hard to imagine such huge numbers. Put together, 60 million bison would weigh more than every person in the U.S. and Canada today.

Bison were killed in huge numbers so that by 1900, only a wild band of about 20 remained. Zoos and private herds still had about 500 bison — the ancestors of most of today's living bison. So, too, have the prairie dogs been killed in great numbers. Less than 2 percent of the prairie dog's original habitat remains. Since the arrival of settlers on the Great Plains, Americans have viewed prairie dogs as pests.

Prairie dogs, however, deserve close study. Prairie dog colonies are very special areas that attract a wide variety of animals. Prairie dogs provide other animals with food, shelter, and even vegetation that would not exist if the prairie dog was not there. By eating the grasses and manipulating the soil, prairie dog towns create islands of a special nature

surrounded by a sea of grass. Studies have shown that more than 140 different kinds of animals are found in and around a prairie dog town.

Many of these animals have declined in numbers like the prairie dog. Swift fox, burrowing owls, golden eagles, prairie falcons, and mountain plovers are some of the animals linked to prairie dog towns. The most endangered mammal in North America — the black-footed ferret — is also linked to prairie dog towns.

Black-footed ferrets live in prairie dog burrows and eat almost nothing but prairie dogs. This means they are very dependent on prairie dogs to survive. In the 1970s, scientists believed

black-footed ferrets were extinct. However, on Sept. 26, 1981, a dog brought a dead black-footed ferret to its owner's doorstep near Meeteetse, Wyo. Since that day 25 years ago, black-footed ferrets have come a long way. They have been bred in large facilities, and many have been put back in the wild in Wyoming, Colorado, Arizona, Montana, and South Dakota. They are still the most endangered North American mammal, but since 1998, there are more black-footed ferrets in the wild than in captivity.

Scientists who work for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are learning all they can about Logan County in Kansas to see if this area could be the newest home for as many as 50 captive-born ferrets. They haven't decided yet, but if they release black-footed ferrets in Kansas, it would be the first release of captive-born ferrets on private land. It would be an experimental program over a five-year period.

Conservation organizations like The Nature Conservancy and the Audubon Society are involved with this effort. To help, learn all you can about black-footed ferrets, prairie dogs, and the prairie ecosystem and tell others why prairies are worth preserving.





Backlash

by Mike Miller

DYI Dog Training

After reading a recent article about a local hunting dog trainer, Lennie and I were discussing our own dog training expertise. I had surrendered that I should probably take my next puppy to a professional trainer. I had “trained” my last three dogs, and none seemed to learn much.

“I don’t know,” Lennie pondered as he rubbed the stubble on his chin. “Those professional boys are okay if you’re into field trial competitions, but I think you’re better off training your own dog for hunting. And you’ll save lots of money. Professionals charge an arm and a leg. Besides, everyone who uses a professional trainer becomes completely obnoxious showing off all the stuff their dog can do.”

“I’ll admit the showing off part gets old, but Bubba’s Lab once made a long retrieve on a mallard I scratched down at the Bottoms. Without the dog, I would have killed myself wading through the mud and cattails to look for that bird, and I probably wouldn’t have found it. Bubba’s trainer taught the dog hand signals so all Bubba had to do was stand in the boat, blow the whistle and motion the way he wanted to the dog to go.”

Lennie was leaning forward and nodding his head like I was agreeing with him.

“Yeah,” he said, raising his eyebrows, “and Bubba never let you forget it. Did he?”

Lennie was right, Bubba talked about that retrieve for the rest of the winter. He told the story over and over, and it got better each time. But hearing the story 20 times was better than wading through 100 yards of knee-deep mud.

“Shoot, Carpman’s Lab retrieves ducks all day long and it doesn’t know hand signals from Alpo,” Lennie continued on a roll. “Carpman just throws a shotgun shell in the direction he wants ole Rocky to go. When the dog sees the splash, it heads that way. Carp does have to bring along some extra shells, though,” Lennie said, speaking of Jake Troutman’s dog Rocky.

I’ve hunted with Jake’s dog before, and I had always wondered if its name wasn’t a reflection of what it had in its head – rocks. Rocky pays no attention when Jake yells at him, but he can hear Jake get a donut out of the sack from a hundred yards away. But Jake loves that dog like a son, so I’d never say anything bad within earshot of Jake.

“And then there’s Tuck’s dog, Norma Jean,” Lennie continued. “Man, that little mutt will hunt pheasants like

there’s no tomorrow. Tuck never trained it a bit – dog runs on pure desire. Tuck said he didn’t want some professional trainer breaking his dog’s spirit.”

I’d also hunted behind Tuck’s dog, named after his ex-wife just to irritate her. But he should have named it Eveready because when Tuck lets it out of the box, it keeps going, and going, and going. We figure if Tuck didn’t get such a kick of yelling “Norma Jean” followed by some expletive, “Cloud of Dust on the Horizon” might also have been a fitting name. But Tuck was truly blind to that dog’s faults. It’s almost embarrassing how Tuck makes over it, treating it better, I’m sure, than he did its namesake.

“And the final example is Nick’s Brittany, Polka-dot. Not one ounce of formal training, but I remember one day when Polka-dot retrieved six quail we knocked down on a covey rise. If it wasn’t for ole Polka-dot, we’d have only found two or three of them,” Lennie concluded his final argument on the case.

I was there that day, and the truth has obviously become a little cloudy in Lennie’s mind. Four of us did knock down six quail on a staggered covey rise, which is amazing by itself. And Polka-dot, Ron Nickleson’s Brittany, did find a couple of them. But the dog had a very short attention span and usually dropped the bird it was retrieving about half-way back. Nick would yell “POLKA-DOT” at the top of his lungs and we’d all hustle to the last place we’d seen the dog with the bird. While Nick continued yelling “POLKA-DOT. DEAD BIRD,” Polka-dot would find another bird, pick it up, start toward Nick, get distracted and drop it, as well. While the four of us looked for the birds Polka-dot dropped, we actually found the other birds we knocked down on the rise. By the end of the day, none of us could say Polka-dot’s name in a normal tone. Even today the dog is known as “POLKA-DOT!”

I gave up trying to convince Lennie that using a professional dog trainer would be money well spent. I guess it all depends on how selective your memory is. One thing is for sure, dogs have a way of lodging themselves into our hearts so that we are blind to their faults. It’s probably because they accept ours without question, and it’s hard to find that kind of loyalty. I’m fond of a quote that says “May I be half the man my dog thinks I am.” But I think that it can be turned around with hunters and their dogs: “May my dog be half the hunter I think he is.”



