

KANSAS

Wildlife & Parks

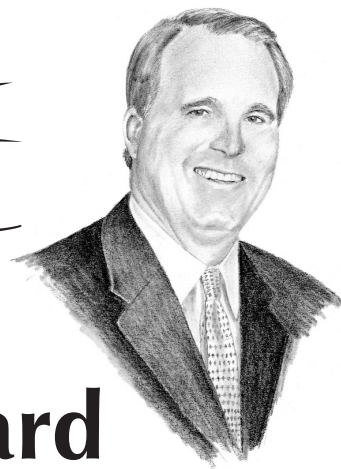
MAY/JUNE 2011

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KANSAS *View*

by Robin Jennison



Work Hard, Play Hard

Anyone who grew up in rural Kansas knows how busy springtime is on a farm. The fields need to be prepared in order to produce the best results in summer and fall. As a young man, I spent many hours sitting on a tractor, working the ground on our family farm. Timing is the most critical part of planting. Weather doesn't allow you to start too early, but if you plant too late in the season, crops won't grow properly.

Just like on the farm, our work here at KDWP hinges on timing and hard work, and spring is a busy time. For example, late March is when fisheries biologists are netting walleye and sauger, taking eggs and delivering them to hatchery staff. For a couple of weeks, hatchery biologists work around the clock monitoring eggs and caring for fry. Then they hit the road, stocking millions of fry in lakes across the state. But hatchery work is just getting started. The department has four hatcheries, where this spring and summer biologists will produce more than 80 million sport fish to enhance Kansas fishing opportunities. Popular game fish produced at Kansas hatcheries include walleye, largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, channel catfish, striped bass, and popular hybrids such as wipers and saugeye.

Wildlife area managers and wildlife biologists are also busy this spring, enhancing wildlife habitat on both public and private lands. Area managers are busy burning prairie, strip-disking, preparing food plots, and planting shrubs. District biologists work with landowners to help them enhance wildlife habitat, as well as take advantage of Farm Bill programs that help pay for certain practices. There is often a narrow window when much of this work must be completed, but the long hours will benefit all wildlife, as well as those who enjoy it.

Wildlife Section staff are also gearing up for the Walk-In Hunting Access sign-up deadline in July. More than 2,000 landowners will enroll more than 1 million acres for next fall's hunting season, and staff will be busy this summer contacting landholders, writing contracts, mapping tracts, and putting up signs.

Spring is a critical time for state park staff. While staff have been working all winter preparing for the

spring camping rush, there are plenty of jobs that can't be completed until spring. Water lines, restrooms, fish-cleaning stations and shower houses are repaired and readied for a busy camping season. Utility hook-ups are serviced, and electrical power lines are prepared to handle the increased demand of peak camping seasons. Camp and gate hosts are trained to provide excellent customer service, and facilities and grounds are prepared to look their best. Our 25 state parks host 7 million visits annually, and they couldn't accommodate that kind of traffic without constant maintenance and herculean preparation efforts.

Spring is also a busy time for department natural resource officers, with turkey season in full swing, angler activity increasing and boaters hitting the lakes. And park rangers are gearing up for the first really big rush of the year, Memorial Day weekend.

But field staff aren't the only employees busy in spring. Providing anglers, hunters and campers with information, licenses, permits, brochures, atlases, and regulation pamphlets are crucial efforts. They require staff who write, edit and produce the information, IT staff who make it available online, licensing staff who steer license sales and application processes and everyone who communicates with constituents through telephone, email and in person.

Our employees go above and beyond normal expectations because most have strong connections to our outdoor heritage. We believe in what we do, we want everyone to enjoy and appreciate the wonderful opportunities Kansas provides, and we truly care about our natural resources.

Whether you want to harness the wind in your sails, feel a tug on your line or hear the crickets as you fall asleep in a state park cabin, outdoor Kansas provides extraordinary experiences. Wherever you live, there is a state park, wildlife area, state fishing lake or reservoir nearby. You don't have to drive hundreds of miles to have a great outdoor adventure. Make it a point this summer to discover the Kansas outdoors. With what you save on gas, you'll have enough left over to buy that new rod and reel outfit you've had your eye on. ♡

KANSAS

Wildlife & Parks

May/June 2011

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Editor Mike Miller

Associate Editor J. Mark Shoup

Illustrator Dustin Teasley

Staff Writer Marc Murrell

Circulation Teri Simpson

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Front Cover: Bob Gress snapped this shot of a male kingfisher as it paused on a limb before delivering a fish meal to its mate and young in a nearby burrow. **Back Cover:** Mike Blair shot this photo of a magnificent Rio Grande tom as it displayed and drummed for a group of hens on the south-central Kansas prairie.



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

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Kansas Department of Wildlife Parks Website
kdwp.state.ks.us
magazine e-mail — mike.miller@ksoutdoors.com



Letters . . .

A NEW FISHERMAN

Editor,

My mother asked me to contact you about a picture she was hoping to get published in your magazine.

The attached picture is of my son, Aiden, at Frontier Park in Hays. We decided on this location because of its beautiful scenery and also because we had brought props for the photo session, which happened to include his favorite fishing pole. Who knew the weather would be so favorable that day?! When we arrived at the park and picked the spots where the photos would be taken, we had no idea that this two-year-old would sit down and fish as if he had done it for years! This was the first time he had "fished" and he was so proud that he was doing it "all by himself." I hope everyone enjoys this picture as much as we have. Please consider it for an upcoming publication. I hope that it puts as many smiles on other people's faces as it has on ours.



His name is Aiden Dinkel, and he's two years old.

Thank you for your consideration,

*Darian and Tori Dinkel
Victoria*

HUNTING with Kent Barret HERITAGE

Learning About Hunting

I try to read every day because, first of all, I enjoy it, but also if for no other reason than to slow the onset of senility. Recently, I came across an article about children and hunting. The author, Ann Hirsch, was commenting on hunting as an activity and hunting's beneficial effects on children. She made a wonderful observation: "By participating in the food chain, children learn respect for life and that there is more to life than themselves."

We "adults" so often bemoan the problems we see in the "what's in it for me," self-absorbed young people growing up around us. I thought, "How does hunting help youth see that there is more to life than just themselves?" What did I get from my grandfather and father as they taught me to be a hunter? I came up with a few things I learned.

For one thing, I learned to be patient. I remember my grandfather teaching me to sit quietly and be still if I wanted to see any game. Grandpa had contracted polio as a youth, so there was no room for squirming in Grandpa's blind.

I learned responsibility from safely han-

dling a firearm as a kid in the presence of adults in the hunting party. Statistically, hunting is a very safe activity, but it can be dangerous if the rules for safe gun handling are forgotten or ignored. So, children can learn to accept responsibility for their actions through hunting.

Children can learn courage from hunting. It can be difficult to engage in something new. A line from a favorite movie illustrates this. A grizzled old hunter asks a young man if he wants to go hunting with him. The kid replies, "But I've never hunted before." The old man smiles at him and says, "Heck, neither had I until the first time." It takes courage to tackle new challenges such as approaching a landowner you don't know to ask permission to hunt their property.

I learned fortitude – what it takes to complete a task well. This might be one of the most difficult of all the learning opportunities afforded kids as they become hunters. Whatever you choose to do, it is important to learn to do it well.

And lastly, I learned humility. Every hunt can end successfully although that doesn't mean that we come home with game in the bag. Accepting that we are not perfect and that we can always learn from our mistakes is very helpful to kids as they grow.

Ann Hirsch also said, "In the age of computers, DS and Wii, we are losing our children to a virtual world." Maybe hunting can help us bring them back to a real world that is really worth living in.

WAY outside BY BRUCE COCHRAN



"HOLD HIM OUT CLOSER TO THE CAMERA SO HE'LL LOOK BIGGER."

The Cooper's hawk is one of my favorite raptors. It is a quick and agile aerial predator with needle-sharp talons and a fierce disposition. Cooper's hawks are common in Kansas, especially in spring and fall migration and during winter months. Cooper's hawks are one of a group of species known as accipiters, which also includes the smaller sharp-shinned hawk and the larger northern goshawk. They are medium-sized birds, usually about as large as a crow. Males tend to be slightly smaller than females, and there is some potential for confusing a large female sharp-shinned hawk with a male Cooper's. Cooper's hawks tend to have rounder tails and a large head-to-body ratio. They have rounded wings and a long tail. They also have a distinctive flight rhythm, which is usually a "flap-flap-glide," repeated over a distance.

Sharp-shinned hawks are also common at times during migration in Kansas but rarely stay in the state to nest. They tend to have a more squared tail and a small head-to-body ratio compared to the Cooper's. Northern goshawks are uncommon in the state and are noticeably larger than Cooper's hawks, with wingspans approaching that of a red-tailed hawk. They show a definite white stripe over the eye, and adults are darker gray and have a different pattern of streaking on the breast. Goshawks are birds of the mountains and are an unusual treat to see in Kansas.

Cooper's hawks range across the entire lower 48 states and southern Canada. They will nest in small numbers in Kansas, preferring quiet woodlots and shelterbelts but can sometimes be found in more populous areas, such as Oak Park in Wichita and other municipal parks. I have found nests in several places in Kansas, including shelterbelts in Smith and Phillips counties, Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, and at Wilson Reservoir. Clutch sizes vary from two to six eggs, hatching in about 30 days. Chicks are in the nest for another 30 days before fledging. Males build the nest and provide nearly all the food to the young and female over the next two to three months before the young fledge.

Cooper's hawks and sharp-shinned hawks like to patrol backyard bird feeding stations, hoping to pluck off unsuspecting songbirds as a meal. We get lots of calls during the winter from people complaining and wanting to know what to do about this "hawk" hanging around their yard. Really, there are only a couple of options – either remove the feeders for a few days until the hawk moves on or let nature take its course. These birds need to eat, too. Cooper's hawks tend to go after prey, such as starlings, rock pigeons, mourning doves, American robins, northern flickers, smaller songbirds, some game birds and even young chickens. They will also eat some mammals, including small rabbits, squirrels, mice and bats. The smaller, lighter sharp-shinned hawks usually go for birds that are sparrow-sized or smaller.

While researching Cooper's hawks, I found some inter-

The Cooper's Hawk



esting facts about them. They tend to catch their prey with their feet and kill by repeatedly squeezing them, sometimes even holding prey underwater until they die. Most large hawks and falcons kill by biting their prey. In recent years, Cooper's hawk populations have shown increasing trends throughout their range, and they have become fairly common in suburban and urban areas. With the high population of prey species such as starlings and pigeons available in cities, Cooper's hawks are becoming more common in those settings than what was considered their traditional natural habitat of forests and mountains.

Males are submissive to females and will wait until the female calls out with reassuring notes before approaching. Males are sometimes in danger of becoming prey to the larger females, so they need to be pretty careful! The hawk's life can also be treacherous because of the hunting method typically used. A study of 300 Cooper's hawk skeletons found that almost one-fourth of them had old, healed bone fractures of the chest from running into branches while pursuing prey.

Be on the lookout for these fantastic little predators this spring, and maybe you will be lucky enough to find a nest to watch through the summer. They are not very tolerant of people and will try to lure you away from a nest site by aggressively calling, typically a "kak-kak-kak" call. They will move from tree to tree, scolding until the perceived threat to them has passed. If you are quiet and stand or sit still, they will calm down and resume their normal behavior. They will put terror into smaller birds, but they sure are fun to watch.



WEIRD LOOKING SQUIRREL

Editor:

You don't see one of these everyday! Little fellow was out scurrying around with the rest of our local red squirrels in the great outdoors of our back yard in Wichita.

*Dave Reid
Wichita*

LIKED PHOTO ISSUE

What a treat the Jan./Feb. issue is. I like how you organized it into the sections, Fly On, Fur On, Fish On, Gobble On, Quack On, Hunt On and Pass It On. Excellent close-up photos in all of these sections. The layout and text are very enjoyable. Thanks for all the work on this stunning issue.

*Anne Loomis
Pratt*

IT'S THE LAW

with Kevin Jones

Legislature Deals With Concealed Carry and Suppressors For Kansas Hunters



Kansas statutes form the foundation of law that controls what equipment may be legal to use while hunting, fishing or furharvesting. During the 2011 legislative session, two provisions concerning firearms that may be legally possessed or used while hunting in Kansas were passed and signed into law by the Governor.

Statute 32-1002 makes it illegal to take wildlife unless the equipment or method used is allowed by law. Usually the regulations, passed by the Commission, dictate what is legal to use, but sometimes the statutes create allowances, as well. Senate Bill 152 created two provisions in 32-1002. The first provision allows for a person, properly permitted under the Personal and Family Protection Act, K.S.A. 75-7c01 et seq, to carry a concealed firearm while hunting, fishing or furharvesting. This provision now allows a properly permitted person to carry a concealed firearm, for personal protection purposes, while hunting during a hunting season or under a permit limited to certain types of weapons. An example is the archery-only deer season. Formerly, no hunter was allowed to carry a firearm while hunting during an archery season or with an archery-only permit. Similarly, a person holding a muzzleloader-only permit, or hunting during an early muzzleloader season, could only carry weapons that were allowed for that type of hunting. This would mean only muzzleloading firearms, meeting the minimum requirements, or archery equipment would be allowed. The new law applies only to persons with a concealed carry permit issued through the Kansas Attorney General's office. You should contact the Attorney General's office if you have questions about concealed carry permits.

The second provision allows a person to use a firearm equipped with a sound suppression device, provided the person meets the legal possession requirements. Sound suppression devices, often called silencers, are used to muffle or decrease the report of a firearm. In most situations the firearm is not really silenced, but the report is not as loud as it would be otherwise. In order to meet the legal possession requirements, the person must hold a valid federal possession stamp available from the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF). The federal application and \$200 fee must be submitted, approved and the possession stamp issued by ATF prior to the purchase of the device. More information about the federal requirements for possession of sound suppression devices may be found by contacting the ATF.

Both of the new provisions go into effect once they are published in the statute book. This means the new laws will allow properly permitted hunters to carry concealed firearms during a weapons-restricted season, or use sound suppressed firearms this fall.



PRIVATE LANDS
with Jake George

2010 KANSAS WILDLIFE HABITAT CONSERVATION AWARD

The Kansas Wildlife Habitat Conservation Award is a statewide award modeled after the county-level soil conservation awards that focus on the recognition of farmers and ranchers who have completed projects designed to improve environmental quality or conserve natural resources such as soil, water, and energy. The purpose of this award is to stimulate interest in wildlife management by means of recognizing an individual who has exhibited outstanding progress in the development and stewardship of wildlife resources on their property.

Nominations for this award are accepted from biologists from across the state, reviewed by committee, and a winner selected based on overall habitat quality, quantity, maintenance, and enhancement on the property. Additionally, if the criteria are met, the state wildlife habitat conservation award winner is nominated for the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' National Private Lands Fish & Wildlife Stewardship Award.

This year's winner, and the third ever recipient of the statewide award, is the Alexander Ranch in Barber County. The 7,000-acre ranch, which lies just south of Sun City, is operated by Ted and Brian Alexander. The Alexanders have family connections to the land dating back to the early 1900s when Ted's great-grandfather, H.W. Skinner, owned the ranch. In 1984, Ted gained control of the property and was joined by his son Brian in 2006, forming the Alexander Ranch LP.

In 1984, eastern red cedar encroachment had reached 70-75 percent canopy cover on the ranch, reducing its value as a cattle operation. Upon taking control of the property, Ted's main objectives were to battle the tree and brush encroachment, improve the productivity of the native range, and improve heterogeneity. A systematic approach of prescribed burning and mechanical tree removal was used in conjunction with a planned grazing system to facilitate the distribution of grazing, reduce the nonproductive cedar trees, and enhance habitat for nesting, roosting, and brood-rearing for wildlife.

As the competition from cedar trees was eliminated,

growth from desirable perennial forbs was stimulated. With more ground cover, the amount of water infiltration increased; the once-dry springs became active; and the creeks carried more water. Today, the cedar tree canopy cover is about 10 percent and mainly confined to steep slopes and draws on the property, the prescribed burning regime has been reduced from once every 3-5 years to once every 10 years, and advanced grazing management techniques are used to control young brush establishment during winter months.

Through the years, Ted has teamed with the Natural Resource Conservation Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, among others, implementing practices that enhanced water developments, incorporated native forbs on once cropped areas, and expanded the grazing system on the ranch. These improvements allow better grazing distribution and better interspersions of habitats required for nesting, roosting, and brood-rearing cover for grassland birds such as the lesser prairie chicken and bobwhite quail.



Ted Alexander, center, receives the Kansas Wildlife Habitat Conservation Award from KDWP Acting Secretary Robin Jennison, left, and Kansas Wildlife and Parks Commission Chairman, Kelly Johnston.

FISH SQUEEZER

with Tommie Berger

Beware of Invaders



sponsored carp fishing contests and derbies to help reduce carp populations in some lakes. Several years ago, carp derbies were held on Wilson Reservoir to generate more interest in carp fishing and attempt to reduce carp numbers. The initial intent was to see if we could catch enough carp to have an impact although that would be difficult on a large reservoir. We had a rod and reel division and an archery division, and it took several hundred pounds of carp to win the weekend tournament. Those who chummed a location with whole-kernel corn found that they could consistently catch significant numbers of carp in significant. Unfortunately, few folks are interested in the carp after these tournaments, and the carp usually end up as garden fertilizer or a robust banquet for the local racoon population.

The spread of this fish from one end of the nation to the other demonstrates how a non-native fish can become established over time, and that is why we are so concerned about the Asian carp – an aquatic nuisance species (ANS) you may have read about. We know they won't be any more accepted by anglers than common carp. They compete with native fish for plankton, and it has been documented that high populations of Asian carp lead to poor body condition in other game fish species. If they spread into our reservoirs, the first sportfish to suffer will likely be walleye and crappie. The tendency for silver carp to leap out of the water as a motor boat passes over can be dangerous, hitting anglers and causing broken jaws, concussions, and bruises. Therefore, it's imperative that every Kansas angler learn about our aquatic nuisance species and do everything to prevent spreading them.

Is "carp" a dirty four-letter word? Some think so, especially when Asian carp enter the discussion. There is a difference between the common carp and Asian carp, so let's take a look at both.

Common carp aren't popular with Kansas anglers, but there are a few who have found that carp are darned fun to catch. They are hard-fighting, easy-to-catch fish that get little respect. Because of sheer abundance, common carp can provide both angling and bowfishing fun and excitement.

The common carp, which thrives in lakes and streams all over the country, is a giant member of the minnow family. This outcast of the sport fish world was imported from Germany in 1872 and has since spread throughout the United States. Ole' buglemouth has earned a fairly poor reputation. Carp can destroy waterfowl habitat by uprooting aquatic vegetation, and they tend to muddy up the water in some shallow lakes. They are prolific and can crowd out game fish, and there certainly aren't many sitting in taxidermy shops to be mounted.

But there is interest in carp fishing throughout Kansas. When I was growing up, carp fishing was a major part of our river fishing outings. On rainy days, we and the neighbors used to load up and head for Stranger Creek, the Delaware River or the Big Blue River and fish for carp. After catching a gunny sack full, we'd head home and clean them. Several days later, we'd have a neighborhood fish fry. Deep-fried scored carp, fried potatoes, and ice cream for dessert were the most important things on the menu.

Carp tournaments have been held at various locations throughout Kansas over the years. Some sportsmen's clubs and other organizations have

Recently, Jason Goeckler and Mike Miller had a great article about ANS in the March/April 2011 issue of this magazine. I encourage you to go back and read it again. Make copies of it and pass them around to all your fishing buddies who might not have seen the article. Education will be key to controlling the spread of these unwanted and scary critters.



CHANGES COMING TO THE DEPARTMENT

In March 2011, Governor Brownback's executive reorganization order (ERO) was approved by the Legislature and will become effective July 1, 2011. The ERO does the following:

move the Division of Travel and Tourism (DTT) from the Department of Commerce to Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks;

establish the new position of Assistant Secretary for Parks and Tourism;

abolish the position of Assistant Secretary for Operations;

create the position of Assistant Secretary for Wildlife, Fisheries and Boating; and rename the agency to Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism.

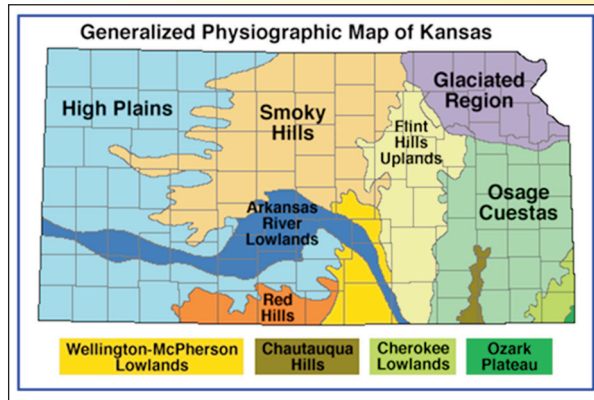


Linda Craghead has joined KDWP and on July 1, 2011, Linda will become the new Assistant Secretary for Parks and Tourism located in the Secretary's Office in Topeka. Craghead has a strong background in tourism, marketing and business development. She was formerly the executive director of the Flint Hills Tourism Coalition where she was responsible for the development, direction, oversight and coordination of a tourism program for the Kansas Flint Hills region. Craghead has served as the Wabaunsee County Economic Development Director, and most recently, she was the site coordinator for the annual Symphony in the Flint Hills.

Also on July 1, 2011, Keith Sexson will become the Assistant Secretary for Wildlife, Fisheries and Boating.

—Kathleen Dultmeier

On The Web with Mark Shoup



Kansas Ain't Flat

Well, okay, parts of it are. But Kansas has some of the most diverse landscapes in the U.S. To find out just how diverse, visit the Kansas Geological Survey's "Physiographic Map of Kansas" online at www.kgs.ku.edu/Physio/physio.html. Here you'll find just what you'd think, a map of Kansas with the physiographic regions delineated in color. This is helpful when driving the state and trying to identify various Kansas landscapes, but there's more.

Dig deeper by dragging your cursor over the map and clicking on any of the regions. You'll see brief descriptions of each area and how they developed over time, with accompanying photographs. This site is by no means comprehensive, but it's an excellent starting point for anyone interested in learning more about the Sunflower State's diverse landscapes. The site also links to more on Kansas geology.

Angling Online

May and June are active times for anglers, and resources to make fishing trips successful are expanding more all the time. The internet has become one of

Kansas Ain't Flat Angling Online

these important resources, and www.kansasangler.com is a good stopping point for all anglers in the Midwest. There are links to KDWP's fishing reports, as well as those from neighboring states, angler reports, and a place to put your own personal report online.

The "Anglers' Academy" links you to information on everything from how to catch fish to how to

handle them after you've made that catch. Links to fishing clubs, fish photographs, a kid's page, state records, license information, and the latest news from tournaments can be found on this site. Many links are to KDWP web pages, and you'll find specific information on guides, as well.

A general all-round angler's aid, kansasangler.com is useful and easy to access for all anglers, no matter what your favorite species.



Right Equipment

It's the first of May and the deer from last season, seven including the one my 7-year old son and one my wife took are all but processed into a sausage or jerky of some sort. Under the pressure of a rapidly approaching spring, I had to hustle to get the majority of my deer meat processed. Weekends were soon to be filled with mowing, gardening and overall maintenance of the two-acre yard.

Having a lot of deer meat to process posed a problem with timing. I can only do so much at one time. I spent most of the weekends in April grinding, slicing, mixing, stuffing, boiling, smoking, packing and vacuum sealing.

After 25 years of using hand-me-down slicers and meat grinders or borrowing them, I finally bought my own. Now I wonder why I waited. I bought an antique sausage stuffer at an auction about 10 years

ago and fixed it up like new. Enterprise, the company that made my stuffer, is still around and parts are easy to find. But after my small discount slicer went down, and my arm tiring of turning 50 pounds of meat through a No. 22 hand-crank grinder. I found myself scrounging friends for the use of slicers and electric grinders. I ended up paying for their use in product, which soon became counter productive.

This year, I purchased a one-horse grinder with stuffing attachments and a foot pedal, as well as a semi-industrial slicer. Oh man, is it great. The grinder runs through meat effortlessly and takes the work out of cranking out smaller casings. The Enterprise is faster at stuffing larger casings. The slicer is capable of running 30 pounds of semi-frozen deer roast for jerky without bogging down once.

One problem I will have is now that people know that I have this equipment, I have more friends than I thought I did. A word of advice on loaning out this type of equipment. Supervise their use. Pairing



the wrong blades with the wrong plate on a grinder can damage or dull a blade, and never let anyone but a professional sharpen your grinder blades. If you loan your grinder out often, you may want to invest in an extra set of plates and blades just for that; same with slicers. Purchasing an extra blade might be advisable, and don't let your friends sharpen them even though some higher end slicers have built-in sharpeners.

No longer am I worried about losing parts, burning-up or breaking someone else's equipment, and I have products that I know can handle the types of jobs I need them for. Although they were a little pricey, they are proving their worth.



FISHIN' with Mike Miller

Bobber Basics

Just about all of us started fishing with a bobber. It was an easy way for a young angler to keep hooks out of snags and bait in front of fish. And watching a bobber bounce as a fish takes the bait is exciting. However, we anglers inevitably advance to more "technical" fishing methods and begin our life-time quest to fill as many tackle boxes with lures as we can. We forget about bobber basics.

Another reason bobbers fall out of favor is our addiction to the "strike." We love the feel of the bite, and the bobber takes that away. Besides, it's hard to look like an accomplished angler when you have a big red and white orb floating at the end of your line. However, there are times when a bobber, or float, as we "advanced" anglers call it, is the best tool for the job. ("Advanced" versions are never red and white.) Relearning how to use a bobber and recognizing when to use it will help you catch more fish. And seeing the bobber bounce and go under is still exciting, whatever your age.

Spring crappie fishing can be the perfect application for a float. Spawning crappie congregate in shallow, brushy water

near the shore. Jigs are the lures of choice, but presentation can be difficult in shallow water, and snags can be frequent. And shallow-water fish are easily spooked by an approaching boat or wading angler. A float allows the angler to cast the rig to the spot while keeping a safe distance. Casting a jig without a float works, but the jig quickly sinks into brush and rocks. On some days, a jig suspended under a float, twitching tantalizingly with wave action, will catch more fish than conventional casting, and it definitely saves jigs.

When using a float in water less than 4 feet deep, a fixed-depth float will work fine, but if the fish are deeper, you can't set a fixed float and still cast it. With a slip float, you attach a float stop on the line at the depth you want your jig or bait to hold. The float will slip to the jig or bait as it is retrieved and cast, but after the cast, the weight of the jig will pull the line through the float, stopping at the set depth. This way, you can fish a bait in 10 or 15 feet of water, again keeping it right in front of the fish and "bobbing" tantalizingly with the wave action. This method can work great if walleye are holding on a rock pile or other structure and drifting over them in a boat will likely spook them. Simply set the float stop so that it will hold the jig and crawler combo above the rocks or stick-ups, cast to the upwind side and let the wind and wave action move the rig across the spot.

Keep an eye on the bobber . . . um, I mean float, and when it goes under, ease the line tight and set the hook. Fish on!

PROFILE:

with Mark Shoup

Steve Price



Steve Price is a happy man. Born and bred in rural Cissna Park, Ill., his connection to the land was a way of life. His father ran the local grain elevator, so he grew up knowing all the area farmers. Access to the land was built into his youth.

I feel a bit silly asking whether people like Price hunted and fished growing up, but I ask anyway.

"Oh man, did we," he replies with satisfaction. "My dad and two older brothers did a good job of introducing me to the outdoors. We hunted pheasants, doves, and squirrels, but mainly pheasants. When I was about 12, my grandmother got me a bow to hunt rabbits, but I got my first shotgun when I was about 14."

There was plenty of recreational water, too.

"We'd walk down to Pigeon Creek and shoot carp with bows and fish for bullheads," Price explains. "As we got older, we'd take trips to the Iroquois and Vermillion rivers to fish. There were several larger lakes around, too." But this was Price's outdoor kindergarten.

"The big deal was Dad taking us to Balsam Lake Wisconsin every summer on a two-week fishing trip," Price says. "We fished for largemouth bass and walleye, and we'd always catch some pike. I did this clear through high school. Those trips north were the biggest factor in my career decision."

The inspiration was more than the trips, however. "My dad, no doubt, was my biggest inspiration," he says fondly. "I was sweeping floors at the grain elevator office when I was 10, and I worked for Dad throughout high school, and on and off during my first couple years of college."

Price attended Parkland College in nearby Champaign for two years, then transferred to Southern Illinois University, where he earned a B.S. degree in zoology with an emphasis in fisheries in 1977. Like most people seeking a conservation job, Price worked temporary and part-time jobs for wildlife agencies, once as a summer fisheries aide for the Indiana Department of Natural Resources.

After graduation, he took a temporary job on a creel survey crew at Crab Orchard Reservoir near Carbondale. After that, he took an Indiana DNR position coordinating a creel survey on the Indiana waters of Lake Michigan. Here, he worked with a crew that not only surveyed the lake but its streams and tributaries, as well. In his off time, he actually fished.

"What I liked best was fishing for steelhead in the streams with spinning gear," he says.

All this time, he was sending out applications for permanent jobs, and in 1979, he was offered the KDWP district fisheries biologist job at Stockton. It was a long way and a dramatic change in landscape, but Price and his wife spent 23 years in Stockton, where they raised two sons. Here, he managed the fisheries in Kirwin, Norton, and Webster reservoirs, as well as smaller state fishing lakes and local community lakes.

Although other job opportunities came up, Price stayed put until 2002, when he was offered the job as Region 1 Fisheries and Wildlife Division supervisor in Hays.

"This gave me the chance to work closely with wildlife biologists and learn more about wildlife management," he explains. "But in 2007, the Fisheries and Wildlife Division went through a reorganization with a split along section lines, and I became the regional fisheries supervisor for Regions 1 and 3, where I am now."

Price can name no one professional who has inspired him because "there's been so many. I've been inspired by nearly every supervisor I've had and by most of my coworkers. In these later years, I am truly inspired by my staff and all of the dedicated frontline folks who get after it day in and day out."

He cites the Solomon River Trout Project, above Webster Reservoir, as one of his most gratifying projects.

"I think this may have been the first attempt in the state to stock trout in an unconfined stretch of stream," Price explains. "It was a special project not only because we weren't sure the fish would stay put (they did), but also because we cooperated with Fort Hays State University staff and a lot of students, some who now work for KDWP. We conducted a two-year pilot study, an environmental assessment, and other support work."

But the most exciting thing in Price's career required Mother Nature. For years, the reservoirs in northwest Kansas had suffered from drought. Some covered only a few hundred surface acres. Vegetation overtook these dry lake beds, and some people thought the lakes would never return. Then several years of heavy rains in the early 1990s filled the reservoirs. Not only was the water back, but newly-submerged vegetation created fantastic fish habitat. Fish populations exploded, luring anglers from across the nation.

"It was Mother Nature's doing," Price jokes, "but we took as much credit as we could."

Price believes the future of Kansas outdoors is dependent on "those frontline people who are recruiting and training kids in outdoor recreational activities, finding and managing land where the public can enjoy the great outdoors. It's all about access, opportunity, and participation."

The anglers of Kansas are lucky to have a man like Price, and we hope he'll stick around awhile because a happy man does good work. For Price, this is a great profession, and he sums his career by quoting a retired biologist who once told him, "We've got the jobs everybody wants, boys." Oh man, he does.

HUNTING SPOTS

with Marc Murrell

Remembering The Hunt

If you're like most hunters, you cherish the memories of past hunts with special people. Often we only have memories or perhaps a couple photos to help relive favorite outdoor moments. Some take it a step further with taxidermy mounts of their deer, ducks, pheasants or turkeys as reminders of special hunts. But skin mounts can be expensive, so some hunters opt for an abbreviated version they assemble at home. Armed a few supplies and a little ingenuity, in an afternoon you can create a keepsake that will always remind you of a special hunt.

Turkey "mounts" are common do-it-yourself projects. The Kansas spring turkey season wraps up the last day of May, and the next rainy day is the perfect time to tackle this project. It's best to assemble your supplies ahead of time. In addition, this project requires some pre-planning on your part as soon as you harvest a spring gobbler.

Field care of your turkey is critical to the final product that will hang on your wall. The fan, or tail feathers, is the most



important part of this project, but the spurs and beard can also be included in the final piece. Be careful when placing the turkey in your vehicle to avoid bending, spreading or breaking the tail feathers.

Before cleaning your bird, remove the tail fan carefully and avoid getting it wet. Remove as much meat as possible from the base of the tail fan and rub what's left with Borax or salt. The turkey fan should be spread on a piece of cardboard or plywood. Use push pins or nails near the hub of the fan to keep the fan spread in a half-circle until it dries, usually in two to three weeks. Keep flies and other insects away.

Cut the beard at the skin, making sure to leave plenty of meat and skin attached to the base of the beard so the hairs don't slip. Apply Borax or salt to the meat portion of the beard and let it dry, as well.

The spurs can be added, too. Simply saw the turkey leg completely through on each side of the spur. They can be soaked in hydrogen peroxide to soften up the leg scales, which can then be removed. The bones with the spurs can be painted or stained. They can be attached to your turkey mounting board or threaded onto a piece of leather cord and draped around it.

Other things to incorporate into the display include the shotgun shell used to harvest the bird and maybe a framed field photo or two.

Turkey mounting kits can be purchased from most outdoor retail stores. They vary in price from \$20-\$50, depending on what you want the finished product to look like. Some of the more expensive ones have a rubber turkey head in the middle. All of them typically have a place for the fan and beard, and some have a small metal plate that can be engraved with the details of the hunt.

The finished product hanging on your wall provides a reminder of your time outdoors at a glance. These projects are particularly memorable for children or others with "first-time" trophies. They're relatively inexpensive, and anyone can do it.



Get Messy

By the time this magazine finds its way to your hands, the outdoor recreation season will be in full swing. Please keep safety in mind as you venture into the great outdoors. Don't let a few minutes of carelessness ruin the rest of your life.

A more complete list of regulations may be found at www.kdwp.state.ks.us. The rules are meant to allow you to have fun without the unnecessary stress of injuries. Relax, breathe deeply, and enjoy Kansas nature at its unpredictable best. Slow down and tolerate less structure in your life. Allow a little messy among the order.

Perhaps we need some "messy" in our modern world. Research has shown that playing in dirt contributes to a child developing a healthy immune system. Walking on natural surfaces as opposed to concrete or asphalt is good for our bodies. Maybe this is why we need to come to parks to interact with nature, to see and experience the "messy" natural environment. We need to watch fireflies blink throughout real dark, unlit by artificial means. We need to sit in ragged grass under untended trees and feel the earth beneath us. To calm our souls and regain touch with the world that nourishes us, we need to get away from straight con-

crete lines and square corners and into the ragged, unkempt, messy environment that is real. Visit a Kansas state park this summer and get messy.



RULES TO REMEMBER:

1. Wear your personal flotation device (PFD) while boating. Most drowning victims were not wearing a PFD. Children 12 years old and younger are required to wear them at all times when boating. Anyone operating a personal watercraft must wear one.
2. No riding in the backs of pickups or in towed boats while driving through the park. Injuries occur every year because someone fell from a vehicle that was "only going five miles an hour."
3. Your pets are welcome in the park, as long as they are confined to a leash less than 10 feet long or in your vehicle, trailer or travel kennel.
4. Quiet hours are from 11:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.
5. Leave baby wild animals where you find them. If you try to "save" them, you will most likely be condemning them to death. They can also transmit diseases to those who handle them.
6. Obey traffic laws in parks. Roadways in Kansas state parks are considered state roads, and traffic laws are enforceable by park rangers and managers who have full statewide law enforcement authority. This means they can arrest and take people to jail.
7. Be alert around the campsite and on the trails. Snakes, biting insects, and other creatures may appear anywhere.

ROCKY FORD FISHING AREA

Some of the larger streams and rivers in Kansas once powered saw and flour mills to serve the state's growing population. The remains of one such mill can be seen at Rocky Ford Fishing Area, along the Big Blue River northwest of Manhattan. The river was once called the "Merrimack" of Kansas, referring to the Merrimack River in New Hampshire and Massachusetts, which powered a number of 19th century textile mills. The Little and Big Blue rivers were considered to be among the finest mill streams in the U.S.

Under normal conditions, Rocky Ford's flat rock bottom made it a safe river crossing for Native Americans and early pioneers. The Rocky Ford Mill and dam were built on the east side of the river in 1866 at a cost of \$100,000, and the mill was used to saw wood and mill flour. The dam was 342 feet long with a 10-foot fall and was made of stout oak timbers and rock. The dam was called "superb," and the mill reportedly had enough reserve power to run a string of mills all the way to Manhattan (about 3 miles at the time). The four-story,

40- by 60-foot mill was built on solid rock, and its cement walls were 4 feet thick up to the second floor. In the early 1900s, the dam was reconstructed in concrete, and the mill was converted to a power plant by the Rocky Ford Milling and Power Company. The new dam was hollow, a feature used by employees to walk to and from company-owned housing on the west side of the river to their work stations at the power plant on the east side.

Rocky Ford Fishing Area was donated to the Kansas Forestry, Fish & Game Commission (now the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks) by Kansas Power and Light in 1967. In 1988, a retaining walkway was constructed below the dam, improving angler access and fishery habitat. The dam and mill's foundation still stand, dominating Rocky Ford Fishing Area.

Rocky Ford Fishing Area is located northeast of Manhattan, east of the Big Blue River. From Manhattan, drive north on U.S. Highway 24 (Tuttle Creek Blvd.) to Barnes Road. Proceed east on Barnes Road to Rocky Ford Road, located north of the Barnes Road bridge over the Big Blue River.

—Ron Kaufman

TURTLE TROUBLE

THAT'S WILD
with Ken Brunson

2011 is the Year of the Turtle, according to the group Partners in Amphibian and Reptiles Conservation (PARC) and other major turtle conservation organizations worldwide. Why? Well, it's not only because they are cool and popular animals, but they are in trouble. Turtles are disappearing faster than any other group of vertebrates according to PARC. Worldwide, nearly half of all turtle species (328) are identified as threatened with extinction. Much of this is because of the tremendous Asian commercial market for food, pets and traditional (but not demonstrated to be effective) medicines.

Among vertebrates, turtles are matched only by primates in their status of vulnerability. There are a number of great organizations trying to promote turtle conservation: Turtle Conservation Fund, IUCN/SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group, Turtle Survival Alliance, Chelonian Research Foundation, and PARC. As stated in a recent article by the Turtle Conservation Coalition, this group of animals represents a remarkable evolutionary success story, yet turtles are at more risk than birds, mammals, amphibians, and sharks. Google any of the above organizations for more information about the worldwide plight of turtles and what is being attempted to save them.

There are some federally threatened and endangered turtles, including six species of marine turtles as well as eight other land or semi-aquatic species in the U.S. But the U.S. has not sustained major wholesale declines – yet. Fortunately, the southeastern U.S. harbors one of the world's most diverse assemblages of turtles. But now is the time to take action – while there still is time. As Asia and other countries are eradicating their species, there will be more and more demand for animals through illegal take and trade. While there are some legal commercialized rearing programs in Asia and in the U.S., there are problems associated with these ventures dealing with genetic pollution, disease transmission and the harboring of illegally taken animals.

In Kansas, we have only one turtle on the state's threatened list, the common



Mike Blair photo

map turtle. It is uncommon, occurring only in limited numbers in mid-sized streams of southeast Kansas. The alligator snapping turtle is on the state's watch list, the Species In Need of Conservation. It is not considered to have a reproducing population in Kansas although recent stocking efforts in Oklahoma give promise that this amazing creature may expand into its original range in southeast Kansas. While the map turtle and alligator snapping turtle are protected, it is legal to take and keep up to five turtles of any other species. A hunting license is required unless exempt.

While the ornate box turtle and the eastern box turtle occur in Kansas in good numbers, there is concern for potential over-exploitation. Besides being a favorite "hand pet" for kids, the ornate box turtle is also distinguished as being the official state reptile for Kansas. In fact, this year marks the 25th anniversary of that bill passing the Kansas Legislature. This effort has quite a story, one more adequately told by Larry Miller who orchestrated the effort 25 years ago:

"Believe it or not, the idea of having a state reptile for Kansas was first brought up by some of my sixth grade students in Caldwell in the early 1970s and then again after the honeybee was named the official state insect in 1976. Working with the 18 students in the 1985-86 Caldwell

6th grade class, along with the countless other supporters of the ornate box turtle from not only Kansas but dozens of other states was one of the most enjoyable and rewarding experiences of my teaching career. After some discussion, the students decided on the ornate box turtle. The parents and the school administration liked that choice, but they cautioned me to make sure I let the students know that they would not be successful. It was just going to be a learning experience where they learned a little about how a bill is passed, and they were going to learn that most bills never pass. By the time Governor John Carlin came to Caldwell and signed the bill in front of what he called the largest bill signing audience of his term as Governor, people from all around the world had heard of Caldwell, Kansas!"

And that's how this interesting little turtle became the point of attention for thousands of people and perhaps hundreds of legislators who had never given it much thought. This anniversary, while ornate box turtle numbers are healthy, should remind us to not neglect our diligence to watch and conserve it carefully, as well as all our other chelonian friends. We cannot let the eradication of turtle species witnessed elsewhere happen here. To learn more, check out PARC's website, www.yearoftheturtle.org.

1st Annual Luke Nihart Memorial Youth and Disabled Turkey Hunt

Tuttle Creek State Park hosted the First Annual Luke Nihart Memorial Youth and Disability Spring Turkey Hunt on April 1-3, 2011. This year, Tuttle Creek and Milford state parks combined their youth and disabled spring turkey hunts and initiated the Luke Nihart Memorial Youth and Disability Spring Turkey Hunt, to commemorate the life of park ranger Luke Nihart, who was lost last June to a tragic accident. Luke started Tuttle Creek State Park's first youth and disabled turkey hunt in 2003. He was an avid outdoorsman and archer, and he was dedicated to introducing others to the Kansas outdoors, especially youth and physically challenged hunters.

Five young hunters and one disabled hunter participated in the first Annual Luke Nihart Memorial Youth and Disability Spring Turkey Hunt. Six volunteers guided the hunters, and many other volunteers helped make the event a success.

On Friday, a safety program was presented by NRO Justin Wren, then hunters and guides sighted in their shotguns and bows. Hunting gear and supplies were provided to the hunters, including shotguns, shells, targets, and eye and ear protection. After all of the hunters and guides felt confident with their firearms, all hunters received a gift basket, consisting of a diaphragm call, a box call, a slate call, a camouflage hat, and their required turkey permits. The local chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf) was gracious enough to donate all of this to every participating hunter.

Saturday morning started early for hunters, parents, and guides, beginning with doughnuts, juice, and turkey hunting DVDs being played. After everyone got their fill, hunters and guides headed out to their blinds for the morning hunt. Tension



and excitement was high because this was the first time many of the hunters had hunted wild turkeys.

On the first morning, four hunters quickly filled their tags with some impressive tom turkeys. Several of the hunters spoke of the difficulty they had keeping still while turkeys were in front of them because they were so nervous. That afternoon, Cody Oswald, harvested his first jake turkey with his bow. This hunt was particularly rewarding to everyone, because it was Luke who had introduced Cody to hunting. Luke's father, Doug Nihart, guided Cody, and it provided a memory no one involved will forget.

Thanks goes out to the volunteer guides, Larry Larson, Brent Harper, Dale Grunewald, Kaleb Campbell, Doug Nihart, and KDWP employees Scott Skucius, Tony Reitz, Matt Colvin and Rob Gordon. A special heartfelt thanks is also extended to all the participating landowners for allowing hunters access to their property. Last but not least, the Three River Chapter of the NWTf is to be commended for all their contributions.

Justin R. Wren, NRO I, Milford State Park

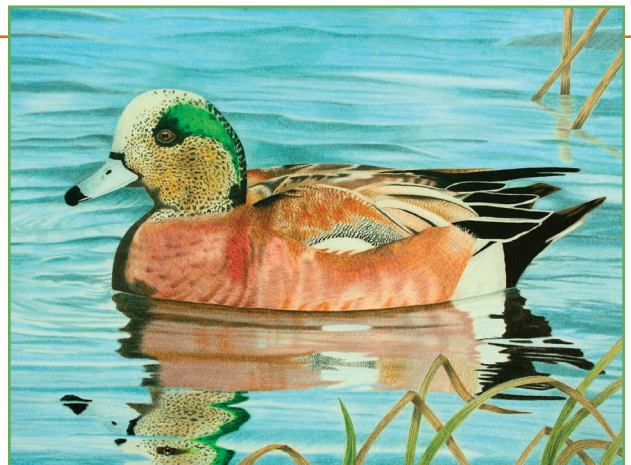
JUNIOR DUCK STAMP CONTEST

For the third straight year, Christina Stockton, a 17-year old student at Stockton Academy in Wichita, claimed the state's top prize in the annual Junior Duck Stamp program on Friday, March 18.

Stockton has been participating in the Junior Duck Stamp program for six years, and this is her third Best of Show. Her 2011 colored pencil entry, "This Side of Heaven," features an American wigeon in intricate detail. Stockton used reference photos from professional photographers online at Birds in Focus, along with live birds observed on wetlands near her home.

Stockton's entry will compete against Best of Show winners from 49 other states in the national competition on April 15 at John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge at Tinicum (outside of Philadelphia, Pa.), the host of this year's Junior Duck Stamp Contest. The first place national winner receives a \$5,000 scholarship and a free trip to Washington, D.C., and has their entry made into a Junior Duck Stamp that is sold nationwide. Proceeds from the sale of the \$5 stamp fund conservation education and art scholarships.

Stockton's wigeon bested 776 entries, including those of two of her sisters, who were also in the running for Best of Show. Entries were submitted in four age categories: Group 1 – K-3rd grade (287 entries); Group II – 4th-6th grade (293 entries); Group III – 7th-9th grade (101 entries); and Group IV – 10th-12th grade (95 entries).



—KDWP News

TEN DEER CONFIRMED CWD POSITIVE

On March 2, the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP) announced that 10 deer from northwestern Kansas had tested positive for chronic wasting disease, the same number as last year although two of those deer were found in counties farther east than any previous confirmations. These were animals taken by hunters in the 2010 hunting seasons.

Six confirmed cases of CWD deer were taken by hunters in Decatur County and one each from Graham, Norton, Sherman, and Smith counties. The Norton, Sherman, and Smith cases were firsts for those counties. The cases included nine white-tailed and one mule deer. This season's testing results brings the total number of confirmed CWD cases in Kansas to 40 since testing began in 1996. In total, 2,503 animals were tested for CWD for the 2010 deer seasons. Although most testing is finished for the year, KDWP will continue testing some vehicle-killed and sick or suspect-looking deer, as well as deer taken with depredation permits, through July 31. If U.S. Department of Agriculture funding is available, a new surveillance period will begin Aug. 1.

Annual testing is part of an ongoing effort by KDWP to monitor the prevalence and spread of CWD. The fatal disease was first detected in a wild deer taken in Cheyenne County in 2005. Three infected deer were taken in Decatur County in 2007 and 10 tested positive in 2008, all in northwest Kansas.

CWD is a member of the group of diseases called transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs). Other diseases in this group include scrapie in sheep and goats, bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE or Mad Cow Disease) in cattle, and Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease in people. CWD is a progressive, fatal disease that results in small holes developing in the brain, giving it a sponge-like appearance under the microscope. An animal may carry the disease without outward indication (only two of the 40 positive animals showed symptoms) but in the later stages, signs may include behavioral changes such as decreased interactions with other animals, listlessness, lowering of the head, weight loss, repetitive walking in set patterns, and a lack of response to humans. Anyone who discovers a sick or suspect deer should contact the nearest KDWP office.

"It must be noted that many symptoms of CWD are indicative of other diseases," says KDWP wildlife disease coordinator Shane Hesting. "Thus, a sick deer may or may not be infected with CWD. CWD is a serious deer disease but is still a rare disease in Kansas. There is no vaccine or other biological method that prevents the spread of CWD. However, there is no evidence that CWD poses a risk to humans or livestock in the natural environment."

Still, precautions should be taken. Hunters are advised not to eat meat from animals known to be infected, and common sense precautions are advised when field dressing and processing meat from animals taken in areas where CWD is found. More information on CWD can be found on KDWP's website, www.kdwp.state.ks.us or at the Chronic Wasting Disease Alliance website, www.cwd-info.org.

—KDWP News



FANCY CREEK GETS 50-METER LANE

The Friends of Fancy Creek Range will dedicate a new 50-meter shooting lane on Saturday, April 16, at 9:30 a.m. at the range in Tuttle Creek State Park, near Manhattan. The range dedication is free, but regular range fees will apply for those who want to test their skills on the new lane.

The Fancy Creek Range 50-meter lane was constructed with grants from the federal Wildlife Restoration Act, the National Wild Turkey Federation, the Justin Corbet Shooting Foundation, and the National Rifle Association (NRA) Foundation.

During the year, the range hosts a variety of events and services, such as NRA Kids Day and Women on Target, from the

Women of the NRA. The range also offers range safety and officer training, 50- and 100-meter rifle lanes, 7-, 10-, and 22-meter pistol lanes, and rimfire silhouette shooting.

The Fancy Creek Range is located approximately one-half mile east of the junction of U.S. Highway 77 and Kansas Highway 16. Because the range is located within Tuttle Creek State Park, a park permit is required to enter. The range is normally open the first and third weekends and the fourth Thursday of every month.

For more range information, contact Kerry Moore, Friends of Fancy Creek Range, at 785-485-5527.

—KDWP News



Mike Blair photo

The best times of your life just got less expensive



photo courtesy of Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation

She'll be 16 before you know it and off to college in the blink of an eye. Don't miss a single chance to be on the water with your daughter by purchasing a multi-year youth fishing license.

The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks offers resident multi-year hunting and fishing licenses for youth 16-21. For a one-time investment of \$42.50, you can give your teenager a hunting or fishing license that will last until they turn 21. A combination multi-year hunting/fishing license is \$72.50. Regular one-year licenses are \$20.50, so if you buy your daughter the multi-year fishing license for her sixteenth birthday, you'll save more than a hundred bucks!

And you'll be investing in more than time with your teenager. Your license dollars help fund Kansas' wildlife and fisheries management and conservation programs.

You can purchase a multi-year youth license wherever licenses are sold, through the website www.kdwp.state.ks.us or by calling 620-672-5911.

Resident multi-year licenses are perfect for:

- ✓ Birthdays
- ✓ Graduations
- ✓ Holidays
- ✓ Special celebrations



2011 Sportsmen's

TURKEY

2011 FALL TURKEY:

- Season: Oct. 1 - Nov. 29, 2011 and Dec. 12-31, 2011; and Jan. 9-31, 2012.

BIG GAME

DEER:

- Youth/Persons with Disabilities: Sept. 10-18
- Archery: Sept. 19 - Dec. 31, 2011
- Muzzleloader: Sept. 19 - Oct. 2, 2011
- Early Firearm (Subunit 19 only) Oct. 8-16, 2011
- Regular Firearm: Nov. 30 - Dec. 11, 2011
- Firearm Extended Whitetail Antlerless Season: Jan.1-8, 2012
- Archery Extended Whitetail Antlerless Season (DMU 19 only): Jan. 9-31, 2012
- Special Extended Firearms Whitetail Antlerless Season: Jan. 9-15, 2012 (Open for unit 7, 8 and 15 only.)

ELK (residents only)

Outside Fort Riley:

- Muzzleloader: Sept. 1-Oct. 2, 2011
- Archery: Sept. 19 - Dec. 31, 2011
- Firearm: Nov. 30 - Dec. 11, 2011 and Jan.1 - March 15, 2012

On Fort Riley:

- Muzzleloader and archery: Sept. 1 - Oct. 2, 2011
- Firearm Season for Holders of Any-Elk Permits: Oct. 1 - Dec. 31, 2011 Antlerless Only
- Firearm First Segment: Oct. 1-31, 2011
- Firearm Second Segment: Nov.1-30, 2011
- Firearm Third Segment: Dec.1-31, 2011

Antelope

- Firearm: Oct. 7-10, 2011
- Archery: Sept. 24 - Oct. 2 & Oct. 15-31, 2011
- Muzzleloader: Oct. 3-10, 2011

MIGRATORY GAME BIRDS

DOVE (Mourning, white-winged, Eurasian collared, and ringed turtle doves)

- Season: Sept.1 - Oct. 31 and Nov. 5-13, 2011
- Daily bag limit: 15
- Possession limit: 30

EARLY TEAL

- High Plains Season: (To Be Set) TBS
- Low Plains Season: TBS
- Daily bag limit: 4
- Possession limit: 8

EXOTIC DOVE

(Eurasian collared and ringed turtle doves only)

- Season: Nov. 20, 2011 - Feb. 28, 2012
- Daily bag limit: No limit
- Possession limit: No limit

RAIL (Sora and Virginia)

- Season: Sept. 1 - Nov 9, 2011
- Daily bag limit: 25
- Possession limit: 25

SNIPE

- Season: Sept. 1 - Dec. 16, 2011
- Daily bag limit: 8
- Possession limit: 16

WOODCOCK

- Season: Oct. 15 - Nov. 28, 2011
- Daily bag limit: 3
- Possession limit: 6

SANDHILL CRANE

- Season: Nov. 9 - Jan. 5, 2012
- Daily bag limit: 3
- Possession limit: 6

Calendar

MIGRATORY GAME BIRDS

DUCK

- Season: (To Be Set) TBS
- Daily bag limit: TBS
- Possession limit: TBS

CANADA GEESE

- Season: TBS
- Daily bag limit: 3 including Brant
- Possession limit: 6

WHITE-FRONTED GEESE

- Season: TBS
- Daily bag limit: 2
- Possession limit: 4

LIGHT GEESE

- Season: TBS
- Daily bag limit: 20
- Possession limit: None

FURBEARER HUNTING & TRAPPING

- Trapping Season: Nov. 16, 2011 - Feb. 15, 2012
Badger, bobcat, mink, muskrat, opossum, raccoon, swift fox, red fox, gray fox, striped skunk, weasel:
- Running Season: March 1, 2011 - Nov. 1, 2011
Bobcat, opossum, raccoon, red fox, gray fox:

BEAVER TRAPPING

- Season Dates (statewide):
Nov. 16, 2011 - March 31, 2012

UPLAND GAME BIRDS

PHEASANTS

- Season: Nov. 12, 2011 - Jan. 31, 2012
- Youth Season: Nov. 5-6, 2011
- Daily bag limit: 4 cocks in regular season, 2 cocks in youth season

QUAIL

- Season: Nov. 12, 2011 - Jan. 31, 2012
- Youth Season: Nov. 5 - 6, 2011
- Daily Bag Limit Quail: 8 in regular season, 4 in youth season

PRAIRIE CHICKEN

- Early Season (East Unit): Sept. 15 - Oct. 15, 2011
- Regular Season (East and Northwest Units):
Nov. 19, 2011 - Jan. 31, 2012
- Regular Season (Southwest Unit):
Nov. 19 - Dec. 31, 2011
- Daily Bag Limit: 2 (East and Northwest Units)
1 (Southwest Unit)
- Possession Limit: twice daily bag

SMALL GAME ANIMALS

SQUIRREL

- Season: June 1, 2011 - Feb. 28, 2012
- Daily bag limit: 5
- Possession limit: 20

RABBITS (Cottontail & Jack rabbit)

- Season: All year
- Daily bag limit: 10
- Possession limit: 30

CROW

- Season: Nov. 10, 2011 - March 10, 2012
- Daily bag / Possession Limit: No Limit

FISHING SEASONS

TROUT SEASON

- Oct. 15, 2011 - April 15, 2012
- Daily creel limit: 5
- Area open: Designated trout waters listed at www.kdwp.state.ks.us

PADDLEFISH SNAGGING SEASON

- March 15 - May 15, 2011
- Daily creel limit: 2
- Season limit: 6 (Permit required)



Kingfisher Spirit

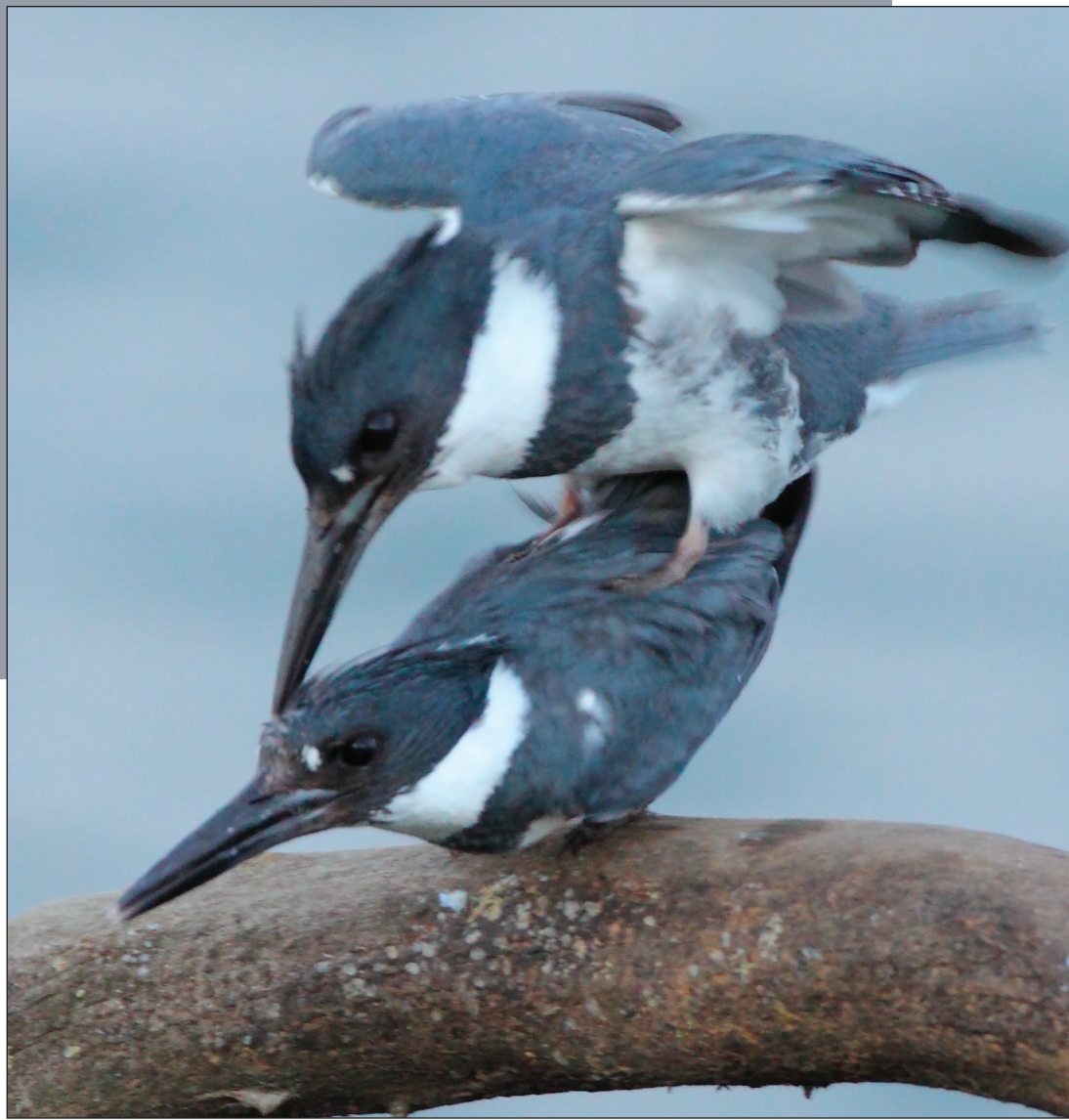
text and photos by Bob Gress
manager, Great Plains Nature Center, Wichita

Anyone who has spent any time along Kansas streams has heard it — the staccato chatter of the kingfisher. Watching a kingfisher dive into the water after prey is fascinating and entertaining. Follow the author's photo journal as he delves into the lives of a pair of kingfishers raising young on a Kansas reservoir.

"Do Belted Kingfishers play?" I was asked via e-mail a couple of years ago. The sender went on to describe her experience. "I was kayaking at the mouth of Lost Creek in July, and there were four of them," she said of her Wisconsin trip. "They were beckoning me in, taking turns flying over me, crisscrossing and chittering at me. They seemed full of that kingfisher spirit."

As I pondered the question, I thought about my own experiences with these unique birds. I'd seen plenty of kingfishers and even discovered several of their nests, but I realized there was more to learn. The following spring, I decided to try to find another nest. This time, I'd do some research, study and document my findings. Here's what I discovered:

Nest burrows are generally excavated in sandy soils overlooking water. The pair flies to a suitable bank, and the male begins to slash and probe the substrate with his bill while the female perches nearby, calling continuously. Both sexes participate in excavating the burrow.



May 17: In two days, I'd kayaked 13 miles on the Arkansas and Little Arkansas rivers. I'd found six kingfishers, but despite careful searching, I was unable to locate a nest. At a nearby lake, mostly developed with homes, I was scanning the vertical banks of the distant shoreline when I spotted a kingfisher perched on an emergent snag in the water. Farther along the bank, I spotted a plume of fresh excavation, and at the top of the plume, a hole. I found it!



Unlike most birds, female belted kingfishers are more colorful than males. Males have a blue-gray band across the chest and females have an additional rufous band.

May 18: It was still dark at 5:30 a.m. when I set up my portable blind along the shoreline. I sat on a bucket with my feet in about 4 inches of water and waited quietly. The male flew in carrying a fish. He perched for a moment and then flew off to join the female on another perch. He offered the fish to the female.

The “rattle call” is the most common vocalization. Copulation occurs when the male flies to the perch next to the female, pauses, then treads on the female’s back while fluttering his wings to maintain balance. Vent contact occurs after the female cocks her tail to the side. Copulation lasts only a few seconds.

May 22: This morning, my feet would be dry. I picked a small cottonwood tree on the bank above the snag in the water and set my blind under the low branches. It was still 40 minutes before sunrise when I heard the rattling call announce the female’s arrival. Within a minute, I heard the male as he approached over the water. They sat side by side, and I marveled at the way they communicated with their crests. They had a language beyond vocalizations. It was still dark, and at 6:05 a.m., it happened quickly: the male mounted her, and instinctively I pressed the shutter. Inspection of the photos revealed the process.



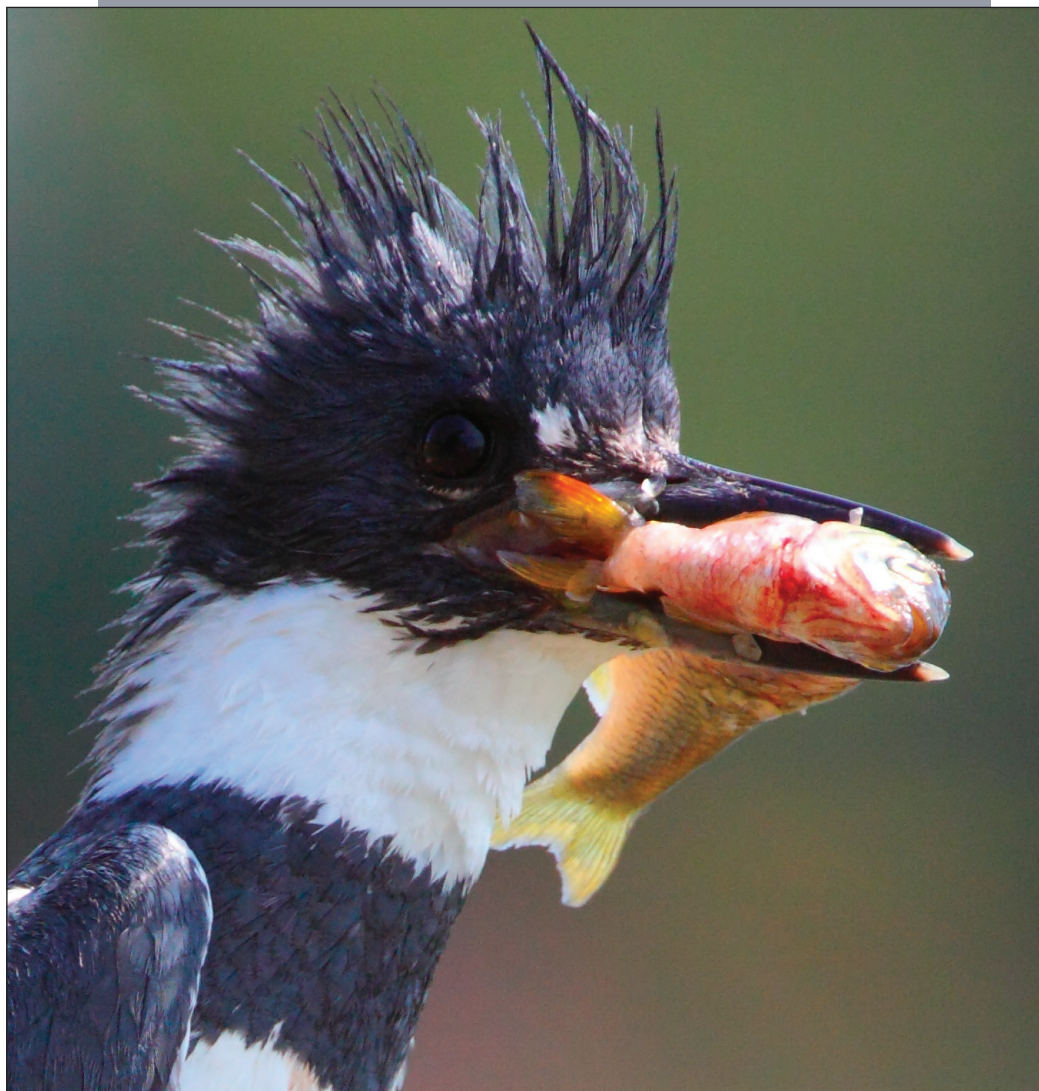
Clutches consist of five to seven pure white, glossy eggs. The incubation period is 22-24 days and begins after the last egg is laid. Both sexes incubate (but most of the incubation I saw was by the female). For about four days after the eggs hatch, the female doesn't leave the burrow. She's fed by the male. During this period, the chicks are fed a regurgitated oily bolus of partially-digested fish. After five days, the nestlings consume whole fish.

June 16: It has become routine. I'm in the blind and ready for action by 6 a.m.; sunrise is around 6:30 a.m.; and by 8 a.m., I'm at work. It's a good way to start my day. This morning, the male brought fish to the nest. He came in three times with fish in his bill. He landed on the perch, looked around, and then flew behind the bank and into the nest burrow. The eggs must have hatched! It would be another five days before I would see the female.

Kingfishers primarily eat small fish and crayfish but have been observed eating mollusks, insects, amphibians, reptiles, young birds, small mammals and berries. Most fish are caught close to the surface. Birds dive, close their eyes moments before striking the water, and grab their prey with their bills.

June 25: It was a good morning. A great blue heron landed on the perch and sat preening for 10 minutes. I finally stuck my hand out of the blind and scared it away so the kingfishers could use the perch. The male came in with a fish at 6:45 a.m. The female arrived with a fish at 6:54 a.m., and the male again with fish at 7:11 a.m. and 7:31 a.m. They perched for only a few moments before flying to the burrow. Just before I left, a hen turkey with small poults passed on both sides of my blind. They were too close to photograph.

The nest burrow extends 4-10 feet into the bank and ends in an unlined chamber about 12 inches in diameter. When nestlings defecate, they shuffle backwards and eject the liquid feces against the earthen wall of the chamber. The nestling then turns around and hammers the substrate above the target area. The nest chamber gets enlarged, the excreta buried, and the loosened soil shuffled out of the burrow. At 16 days old, the chicks venture from the chamber into the burrow.



June 29: Only once this morning, at 6:19 a.m., did the female use the snag in front of my blind. Around 7 a.m., I saw both birds flying toward the river. I left the blind and walked along the edge of the water to the burrow. With a flashlight I looked in and spotted a youngster about three feet down the tunnel. It quickly backed out of sight. The tunnel was only large enough for one bird, so I had no idea how many may have been behind it. I photographed the entrance where two furrows had been made by the shuffling feet of the parent birds.



After delivering fish and shuffling down the dusty tunnel with wet feathers, the adults frequently bath. While flying 10-15 feet above the water the bird will splash-dive with wings held partially open. The bird may do this several times before flying to a perch to shake, preen and dry the feathers.

July 10: The male brought fish at 6:27 a.m., 7:11 a.m., 7:37 a.m., and 8:02 a.m. I could see shiny minnow scales on his beak and face. After feeding the last fish, the male splash-dived twice, flew to the perch and preened for several minutes.



Fledglings depart the burrow 27-29 days after hatching. They resemble the adults, but their bills and tails are noticeably shorter.

July 15: I knew the chicks would soon leave the nest, so I had been checking the area both in the mornings and evenings. Last evening, at dusk, I spotted a youngster on a perch several hundred yards north of the burrow. This morning, I was in the blind early. At 7:20 a.m., a fledgling female landed on the perch and intently watched the minnows in the shallows below her. I could see no down feathers, but her beak and tail were shorter, her crest less developed, and she had tiny white spots on her back and tail. The adult male arrived, fed her, and both left at 7:52 a.m. She flew like a master and had no difficulties matching his flight. I was amazed at how developed she appeared only hours after leaving the nest.

They remain with their parents for approximately three weeks and are fed irregularly. Crayfish and insects are among the first prey taken. They won't capture live fish for at least a week. Once catching prey is mastered, the young wander and the adults disperse.

July 18: I couldn't find the kingfisher family at the lake, so I took my kayak to the river to continue my search. I found the birds along a half-mile stretch of the river. I counted seven birds, meaning at least five chicks fledged. It was hard to keep track of them as they flew back and forth above me and up and down the river. Their rattling calls revealed their excitement. They appeared curious. They appeared playful. As I watched, I couldn't help but smile and appreciate their kingfisher spirit!

Window



Ron Kaufman photo

To The Kaw

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

Kansas' newest state park, Kaw River State Park, provides a unique escape just minutes from busy I-70 traffic and the bustling city of Topeka. The day-use area provides a network of trails and a boat ramp on the Kansas River.

I have to admit, I'm not a city person. I've lived in cities and appreciate the museums, restaurants, music, and other entertainment they offer. But I can do without the noise, crowds, and traffic. So it was with a some skepticism that I traveled to Topeka in March in search of peace and quiet at a supposedly natural setting within the city limits of the Sunflower State capital. I was in for a pleasant surprise.

Our newest state park, Kaw River State Park comprises 76 acres adjacent to the Governor's Mansion, Cedar Crest, so if you've never been to that part of the state, or the town, you're probably thinking the same things I was — just another city park with the state's name on it, right? Wrong.

As I pulled off I-70 onto Wanamaker Road and up the hill north, I was still unconvinced. An imposing old building with a clock stood atop the hill near the KDWP Region 2 Office, and there were trees behind that, so I couldn't see much beyond. With I-70 only about a half mile below me to the south, I still wondered how I might find a real outdoor experience here. A 1,000-foot radio tower a couple

hundred yards to the west was not reassuring, either.

I met park manager Jeff Bender inside the Region 2 Office building, and he took me to view an aerial of the area on his computer. Bender is a deep-voiced, burly guy with a broad and easy smile, the type you expect to work in the outdoor field. In fact, his experience includes stints with the National Park Service at Glacier National Park in Montana, Great Sand Dunes National Park in Colorado, Lake Meade National Park in Nevada, and in our own Pomona State Park — a pretty solid resume for someone “stuck” in the city. When he brought up the satellite map of the area on his computer, I saw a sea of green bounded on the north by a wide river and overlaid with computer-generated lines that described otherwise invisible boundaries between the park and its neighbors, a virtual forest spanning the park, 240 acres of nearby MacLennan Park and Cedar Crest to the east, approximately 150 acres of grass and trees owned by Saint Francis Hospital (Sisters of Charity), and 40 acres on the west owned by Washburn University (about two-thirds open to the public).

Bender explained that a cooperative agreement among these landowners provides Topeka residents and other visitors a unique opportunity to hike approximately 6.5 miles of trails through these areas (with the exclusion of some undeveloped private ground) seamlessly.

“Partnerships are a big thing here,” he says. “They’re formal and informal land-access agreements that allow everyone access to a really neat, free wooded area.” It looked good on the computer, but I was anxious to see the property, and Bender was accommodating. But first, a little history.

Kaw River State Park lies on the grounds of what was once the innovative Menninger Clinic, founded in 1919 by the Menninger family and comprising a medical clinic, a sanitarium, and a school of psychiatry. In 2003, the clinic formed an association with Baylor college of Medicine in Texas and moved its facilities to Houston. (All that remains of this vast complex is the administration building with its beautiful clock tower, now owned by the Sisters of Charity.)



New stone columns open the gate to Kaw River State Park from 6th Avenue in Topeka. The park is free and open to the public from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m., seven days a week. This road leads to a parking lot and boat ramp on the Kansas River.

In May of that year, then-Governor Kathleen Sebelius met with Howard Fricke and Mike Hayden, former secretaries of the Department of Administration and KDWP, respectively, to discuss a proposed donation by the Menninger Board of Directors to create a state park. The proposed area would be 76 acres of the northern portion of Menninger property. Sebelius asked that action to acquire the property proceed, and in 2004, the Kansas Legislature passed a bill approving the acquisition of what was then called simply “state park 24.” Sebelius signed the bill. Before the property could be transferred, the Menninger Board of Directors sold their entire property, including what would become the park, to a

private development corporation, 21st Century Ad Astra, L.L.C. They honored the previous agreement, however, and transferred the park portion to KDWP in December 2005.

In 2007, the Legislature passed and Sebelius signed a bill naming the new area Kaw River State Park, after the state’s largest river, the Kansas (known colloquially as the “Kaw”), which graces the park’s northern border. The legislation also appropriated funds to develop a road to the Kansas River, a railroad crossing, and a parking lot and boat ramp on the river, stipulating that entry into and use of the park would be free and open to the public from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m., seven days a week. Now not only hikers and bicyclers would have an area

to recreate, but anglers, canoeists, and kayakers would have ready access to the Kansas River.

The area already contained many trails that had been used by locals for years and were known as the Menninger trails. These trails, however, were badly in need of repair and, in many cases, rerouting because of erosion on the steep, heavily-wooded bluffs that comprise most of the park. Although the Kansas Trails Council had maintained the trails, along with the adjacent MacLennan Park trails, trails in the park would be greatly enhanced once Bender and his crew began work in January of 2008.

On September 4, 2010, the park officially opened with a dedication by Kansas Governor Mark Parkinson and his wife, Stacy. Venues for the celebration included the park entrance framed by two stone columns at the gate near 6th Avenue, the boat ramp, the Topeka Water Weir Portage, and the Great Overland Station. Activities included a Kaw River Run/Walk (planned to be an annual event), an antique car parade, a boat ramp dedication with VIP speeches, a barbecue lunch, and a float trip with more than 50 participating boats. With parking lots at the entrance to the park and at the boat ramp on the river completed, Kaw River State Park was on its way to providing a genuine nature experience in the heart of the city. But much was yet to be done.

Bender and his crew had accomplished considerable trail development before last winter halted work, and by the time I arrived, they were hard at work again. After showing me what the park looked like on the computer screen, he was anxious to take me on a stroll down the newest trail project — a double-wide main trail

from the Region 2 office to a small pond not far from the river, a drop of 200 feet in ¼ mile. With this kind of grade, Bender has his work cut out for him making trails stable and ADA accessible, friendly to bikers and hikers alike, and accessible to equipment and emergency vehicles.

Once you step into the trail, however, you have entered a different world, a hardwood world that reminded me of *The Last Of the Mohicans*. Oak, hickory, walnuts, hackberry, cottonwood, sycamore, ash, and maple envelope the walker no more than a couple of minutes into the woods. If transported here by magic, one would never know it was in a big city. Although I-70 is nearby, there is no traffic noise whatsoever. Songbirds sing and flit from tree to tree, and deer, turkey, furbearers, and eagles enjoy the sanctuary as if it were

made for them, which it was. Trees yield to the Kansas River flowing gently along the north border of the property, perfect winter eagle fishing waters on the apron of their roosts.

Man has only tread lightly here. Other than the trails, the only human sign is one that most people wouldn't recognize — bush honeysuckle. This invasive species is the first to green up and the last to brown in the fall, and to most visitors, it may seem a beautiful part of nature. Until a solution to control it can be found, however, the woodlands that used to offer a view of the river through the trees to the river is now blocked by this invasive greenery.

To the average hiker, however, the park is pure natural therapy, and Bender is re-routing and reinforcing trails to prevent erosion and keep the "sanitarium" active.

One of the most interesting reinforcing structures used in the park is the Gabion wall. Gabion walls are built with large, heavy wire cages filled with rock. After carving trails, these cages have been shoved up against the downhill side of the trails, providing undergirding and erosion control. To allow water to drain under trails in strategic spots, French drains — made of plastic drainage tubes and covered with small and large rock — were dug and trails were built over the drains.

Natural drainage areas cut throughout the wooded bluffs, and old trails often avoided these, creating a very steep downhill grade. To make life easier for the walker, Bender decided to take these "ditches" head-on. He and his crew are building bridges where these drainages so rudely interrupt one's stroll, making the grade less



Crews working in the fall of 2010 completed the boat ramp on the Kansas River, at the end of the road from 6th Avenue. An adjoining parking lot provides easy access for shallow-draft boats, kayaks, and canoes.

severe and the walking easier for those who prefer it that way. Bridges are partly made of recycled materials, including old electric poles cut into lumber donated by Westar Energy, steel I-beams, and lower wooden decks. And trees had to be cleared before any of this work began.

"We spent three days just figuring out the best route to provide an easy average downhill grade," says Bender, speaking of the main trail from the office. "That's not so easy deep in these woods, but it's important because we want everyone to enjoy this slice of wildness right on the edge of Topeka."

Once the route is selected and cleared, trail surfaces — 3,700 feet of double-wide completed in 2010 — are graded then packed with a base layer of heavy concrete "gravel." (All the concrete rock

used on the trails is recycled from the clinic; I think the Menningers would be pleased.) This year, those stretches will be top-dressed with fine gravel, making a smooth surface for travelers. Throughout the woods, "social trails" crisscross the main trail, many of them little more than small ditches sharply cut by runoff. These are trails made over the years by visitors, haphazard routes through the woods followed by many because someone created a tradition by walking this way first. Like deer on game trails, hikers have followed these routes for decades, but they are rough and difficult pathways now, and many are due for replacement or repair in the future.

In mid-March, the foliage had yet to bud, so long views through the woods were still open. I could see portions of the river from near

the top of the bluff, and at one point, Cedar Crest revealed herself through a break in the trees, the only point in the park where the mansion can be seen, and only when the trees have no leaves.

At another point, shards of old glass and tableware peek through the earth, the remnants of what appears to be an old trash pit. And that is exactly what it was — for the Security Benefit Home and Hospital, the early name for the Menninger Clinic. To Bob Hoard, state archeologist for the Kansas Historical Society, however, this was much more. He had noticed this spot while hiking the area with his wife, and when work began on the trail, he received a letter from KDWP asking if there might be anything of historical value here. Construction could wait if he wanted to explore the spot first. Of course he did.

A dump older than 50 years is categorized by the Society as an antiquity, so under state law, Hoard had to explore the site. The Society's current budget did not include funding for an in-depth study there, but Hoard and his assistants went to the site and collected numerous pieces, including pharmaceutical bottles, tableware, whiteware pottery with green decoration and the Security Benefit Association logo, serving dishes, plates, bowls, cups and saucers, canning jars, perfume and nail polish bottles, and other items. They also cleaned up anything they thought might be hazardous to trail users.

"We haven't had a chance to inventory, analyze, and write up everything we've found," Hoard explains, "but we will catalogue and store it for future study. Hopefully, we'll have the budget for that down the line." It would, indeed, be interesting to know the history of these objects that nature is now reclaiming.



Gabion walls buttress trails across steep grades, preventing erosion and providing access for all — even emergency vehicles. Manager Jeff Bender examines his crew's handiwork.

At key points in the park, information kiosks keep walkers oriented and aware of rules, such as leaving no trash and keeping dogs on leashes. One of those kiosks greeted us where this double-wide trail meets the blacktop road running from 6th Avenue to the boat ramp and adjoining parking lot. Bender's pickup was parked there, so we got off our feet

and drove to the boat ramp. The ramp is complete now, a wide, gently sloping concrete entryway to the Kansas River, and an easy place to back a trailer and launch a shallow-draft boat suitable for the river at this point. But preparation is particularly important here.

"This river is precarious," Bender cautions. "Anyone who puts a boat on it better know what they're doing. They need to research the underwater hazards downstream. The water level fluctuates, too, and at times, underwater hazards can be dangerously



close to the surface but out of sight. And when it's low, sandbars are shallow but the main channel is always fairly deep. People also have to get out of the river 2 miles downstream from the park and portage around the Topeka Water Weir on the left (north) bank, near city water plant. This can be dangerous, too, especially when the water is high. Friends of the Kaw and the Corps of Engineers would be good resources for anyone putting in who isn't familiar with the river."

Most good things in life require cooperation, and this is particularly true at Kaw River State Park. The following entities, both public and private, have helped make the park what it is today and will be tomorrow:

Saint Francis Hospital
(Sisters of Charity)

Washburn University and
KTWU public television

Cedar Crest staff

MacLennan Park Board

City of Topeka

Topeka Riverfront
Development Authority

Kansas History Center

Kansas Trails Council

Adjacent private landowners

Union Pacific Railroad

Security Benefit Association

Sunflower Striders

Let's Help of Topeka

Keep America Beautiful

Friends Of the Kaw



Above: Crews build bridges partially with recycled materials, from I-beams to lumber. Below: The Kansas River spans the park's northern border. River users are cautioned to do their research before entering waters that can be dangerous.

Kaw River State Park is open, and usage is brisk. Nature lovers who have only recently discovered the area have found an unexpected escape from the city, and folks who have been using the area for years are enjoying the improvements. But much is yet to be done. Future plans include installation of security cameras, tree and shrub plantings, clearing non-native brush along the river, developing a picnic area near the boat ramp, building a new shop, continued trail development including a riverfront trail connecting the park to downtown Topeka, more trail bridges, a park-

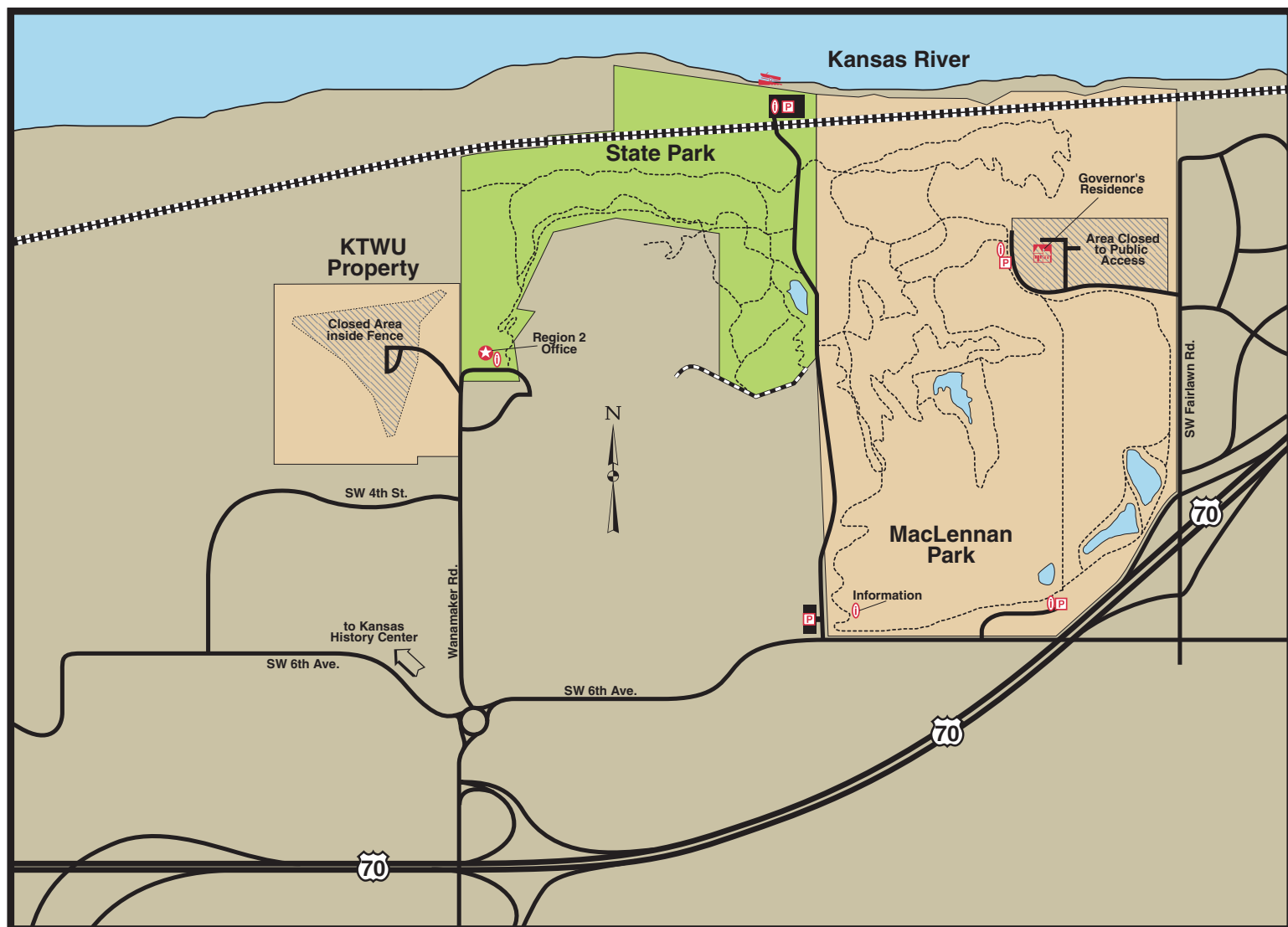
wide botanical survey, and honey-suckle control.

It's a lot of work, but the place is so special that "work" hardly express future developments, the way Bender puts it: "I've had more fun in the past two years working here than I've had in my entire career." Quite and endorsement from a guy who has worked at three premier national parks.

With all Kaw River State Park is and all it will be, residents of our state capital have much to enjoy and much to look forward to. They are blessed with this free natural area in the city, a place where they

can step off the asphalt jungle and reconnect with the land. All this has a special effect on anyone who has ever stepped into this complex. In the midst of a political city, politicians can be especially touched by the area. As former Governor Mark Parkinson, an avid walker, said of leaving the mansion at Cedar Crest, "I'll miss the grounds more than I'll miss the house."

Come visit, and you'll know what he's talking about. ♡



The Science Of Turkey Management



text and photos by
Marc Chipault,
graduate student,
University of
Wisconsin - Madison



To learn more about mortality rates in wild tom turkeys, KDWP enlisted the help of a University of Wisconsin-Madison graduate student and the National Wild Turkey Federation.

Wild turkey populations have made a strong comeback in Kansas, thanks to hunters, managers and good scientific information. To contribute to the scientific ingredient of turkey management, I was sitting in a blind in the early morning hours, conducting a study as part of a cooperative effort between the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP), the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf), and the University of Wisconsin — Madison — Department of Forest and Wildlife Ecology. I'm a graduate student in the lab of Dr. Scott Lutz at UW-Madison. Working together with Jim Pitman, KDWP's small game coordinator, and Brandon Houck, NWTf's director of conservation operations for the western region, we designed a study that would help provide managers with important information for maintaining this renewable resource.

Today it's fairly common to hear the echoing gobble of male wild turkeys during spring in Kansas. Turkeys now occupy almost all suitable habitat in Kansas, and they can be found in nearly every county. Prior to the 1960s, when restoration efforts were initiated, there were few turkeys remaining in the state. By the early part of the 20th century, turkeys were eradicated from Kansas and across most of their range in North America due to a combination of overhunting and loss of habitat.

The temperature is somewhere in the teens, but thankfully the winds are calm. There's no moon tonight. I use my headlamp to find my way to the drop-net and add some more cracked corn to the bait pile from the 50-pound bag I'm carrying. The deer have eaten quite a bit of the bait again. I check the perimeter of the drop-net to make sure it's at the right height – high enough that a tom won't mind walking under it, low enough to drop to the ground quickly. I check the batteries and test the trigger before I hook it up to the single piece of twine that keeps this big 30-by-30-foot net suspended like a circus tent. Satisfied, I walk back to my blind at the brushy edge of the field. I take a look around before entering. I can just begin to make out the treeline across the field, down by the creek. It's too dark to make out the birds, but I can hear them starting to wake up now. I step into the blind and sit down to wait.

The first turkeys to return to Kansas followed the Cimarron River up from Oklahoma in the 1950s. During the 1960s, the Kansas Forestry, Fish and Game Commission began releasing wild birds trapped in Oklahoma and Texas into areas with suitable habitat. As re-established populations took off, biologists began trapping and moving birds within the state to help speed recovery.

In the spring of 1974, populations had recovered enough that the state held the first regulated turkey hunt, with limited permits distributed through a lottery. Both fall and spring seasons have been available to hunters since 1979, and today spring hunters can purchase a permit and second turkey game tag in most of the state. Today, revenues from the sale of turkey permits exceed \$1 million annually, and these funds help to improve habitat for turkeys and other wildlife within the state.

After decades of expansion, turkeys in Kansas have filled most of the available habitat, and populations appear to be approaching a plateau. This will bring a new challenge for wildlife managers because populations at or near carrying capacity typically have fluctuations in productivity from year to year that growing populations do not. Game managers rely on



good information to help them set regulations that ensure healthy populations in the long-term, while providing hunting opportunities for the public. For turkeys, some of this important information comes from surveys that are sent out to a subset of permit-holders each year. Answering these questionnaires is an important way that hunters contribute to smart management.

Back in the blind, I can start to see the lumps of turkey bodies sprinkled through the tops of the trees. They're getting more vocal now. Any minute, the first ones will start flying down to the ground. I hope they decide to fly down on this side of the creek today. That would be a good sign that they intend to visit the bait under my drop-net. Although there's plenty of tracks and scat to show that they've found the bait, they haven't been gung-ho about it. It's been a mild winter and they're just not that driven by hunger.

About 45 minutes later, it looks like the whole flock is on the ground. They take a while to gather and socialize, making quite a commotion. Eventually, the flock settles down and begins to feed. I'm relieved to see them moving generally in my direction.



The author spent hours in the blind (top photo) watching the net and bait site. The net wasn't dropped until a good number of mature toms were in the drop zone.

Another way that game managers get information is through scientific studies like this one.

The study took place on and around three public wildlife areas in northcentral Kansas — Cedar Bluff, Webster, and Lovewell wildlife areas. These sites were chosen in part because they are in different hunting units, so they provide a comparison of harvest under different regulations. Cedar Bluff WA is in Unit 4, which is the only unit with a limited number of spring permits, available by draw only. The restricted draw in Unit 4 was put in place after a dramatic

decline in turkey numbers in this region during the late 1990s. Webster WA is in Unit 1, where permits are sold over-the counter, and hunters can take one bearded bird during the spring. Lovewell WA is in Unit 3, where a game tag, good for a second bearded bird, can be used in addition to the initial permit.

We tracked the survival of adult males, or toms, during the spring season. These birds are the main target of spring hunters. Jakes, which are yearling males, are legal to harvest as long as they have an identifiable beard, but they are generally less desirable to hunters. In Kansas, jakes make up only about 15 percent of the total spring harvest. Most studies have shown that spring is the critical time for tom survival. This is not only because they get picked off by hunters, but also because the activity and stress of the mating season leaves them more vulnerable to predators.



Once the net was dropped, researchers quickly removed the birds to prevent injury. Only mature toms were used in the study to learn about spring mortality rates and causes.



Toms were fitted with small radio transmitters and leg bands. The band included a phone number and reward offer to hunters who called with information about the location of harvest.

It looks like this isn't my lucky day after all. Eventually the flock comes to the bait, but it's all hens and jakes. I'm only looking for toms. They are nowhere to be seen. They must have gone down on the other side of the creek.

After the hens and jakes eat their fill and wander off, I decide to try something a little unorthodox. I slip out the back of my blind and make my way to my truck. I drive around to the south side of the creek, and sure enough, there they are. It's a mixed group, but I can pick out the toms easily with my binoculars. I hop out of the truck and start walking toward the flock. They see me and start to move back toward the trees. I start running toward them, flailing my arms and yelling. This must look rather silly, and I'm glad nobody is around to see this. The birds melt back into the trees where I hope they will decide to jump across the ravine and finish their morning rendezvous in my field on the other side. I run back to the truck and jump in.



To monitor survival, we used radio transmitters that the birds wore like a backpack. They also had a leg band that offered a reward for reporting harvest of a marked bird and included a phone number to call. Each bird's transmitter emitted a signal on a unique frequency, and we could track their day-to-day movements using a receiver and antenna. When a transmitter sat still for more than eight hours, the signal automatically switched to a faster pace, indicating that the bird had died. When this happened, we would follow the signal to the bird and use signs at the kill site to determine what happened to it.

While data analysis is still ongoing from this study, we have already learned some interesting things. As you might expect, mortality was quite a bit lower at Cedar Bluff under the restricted hunting compared to the other sites. Overall, about 20 percent of toms died from the combination of hunter harvest and predation during the spring season at Cedar Bluff, compared to 60-70 percent at Webster and Lovewell. Most of this difference was attributable to greater harvest at the latter sites, which have less restrictive hunting regulations. Because we could not predict at the time of capture where turkeys would end up during the spring, we were only able to compare public and private land harvests at Webster, and we found that there was statistically no difference.

Because one tom can breed many hens, turkey populations can sustain a relatively high rate of male harvest with little effect on the overall population. Consequently, spring hunting regulations primarily focus on ensuring that the take of toms in one year does not negatively impact the availability of toms the next. Because other factors affecting the availability of toms, like predation and reproduction rates, can fluctuate, it is difficult to pinpoint an optimal rate of harvest. However, experts on wild turkey populations say that a conservative spring harvest of 30 percent or less of the tom population is sustainable. In this study, two of the three sites exceeded that level – 41 percent of toms at Lovewell were harvested and 48 percent at Webster. While this should raise a flag for managers, it does not necessarily mean that the harvest rates are unsustainable; in fact, other indicators suggest that tom populations in these areas are stable. For instance, based on hunter survey data for the northwest and northcentral turkey management regions, hunter success rates have been constant or slightly increasing for the past several years, while the percentage of jakes in the harvest has remained low. If



In the photograph above left, the author holds one of his subjects before release. Above, a tom doesn't waste any time getting away from its handler.

toms were being overharvested, we would expect to see a decrease in hunter success and/or an increasing percentage of jakes in the harvest. However, these regional survey data come from a much larger area than our survival study, and there is probably a good amount of variability in local harvest rates across management regions. So while the region as a whole seems to be doing fine, there may still be cause for concern at a local level. Managers will continue to keep a close eye on indicators to see if a change in regulations will be necessary in the future.

Other results showed that predators took 7 percent to 21 percent of toms during the spring season, with coyotes and bobcats being the primary predators. Also, turkeys that moved long distances in search of a mate during this time were more likely to be killed than those that stayed closer to home. Presumably this is because covering a lot of ground increases the chances of a bird encountering either a hunter or a predator during its travels. ♡



Each transmitter emitted a unique frequency so researchers could track the day-to-day movements of toms (below left). If a transmitter didn't move for a period of eight hours, the signal automatically switched to a faster rhythm, signalling that a bird had died.



Back on the north side of the creek, I park the truck, run back to my blind and slip inside. As I slowly crack open the front window on the blind I'm greeted by a wonderful sight. Eight toms are booking it across the field, headed straight toward the bait. If I had gotten back 30 seconds later, I would have been too late to get in the blind.

Two of the birds head straight under the net to the bait. The other six stay just outside the net and chase each other around for a bit. One by one they decide to go under and feed. When six of them are under, the remaining two decide to walk away. It looks like this is the best opportunity I will get. I turn on my remote, pull out the antenna and squeeze the trigger. At the net, the trigger mechanism rapidly heats up, burning through the twine and causing the net to collapse.

But it's not a perfect drop. A twist in the net causes it to hang up on a post, allowing one of the birds to escape. Down to five – darn. I call in my backup crew. They help me extract the birds from the net, and one by one, we record measurements, fit each with a leg band and transmitter, and release them. We watch the toms as they fly off to the treeline, no doubt to preen their ruffled feathers.

After an exciting and fruitful morning, I head back to the office for some much needed lunch and to plan for the next flock trap.

LITTLE STRESS



text and photos by Rick Olsen, Leavenworth

If you've ever dreamed of catching giant catfish on rod and reel, the Missouri River provides the opportunity. The author shows how to make such an adventure both productive and peaceful.

The sky was clear, moon bright, and the stars glistened on the peaceful river water. Not a soul in sight, just the blue herons, beavers, coyotes and the usual nightlife on the Missouri River. It was about 10 p.m., and I was getting ready to bed down for the night. Suddenly, one of my poles slammed to the water, the line stripping off my reel. I knew I had a 50-pound plus catfish on my line. When the fight was over, I landed a 62-pound flathead, one of

many large cats caught in the Missouri River.

I love to fish for big cats, but I do not have the patience to sit and wait. Therefore, I've devised a system that allows me to enjoy the great Kansas outdoors and not have to sit tied to my fishing poles.

Ever wonder how many waking hours an angler has to sit to catch a big cat? Probably too many hours for most fishermen. But for those who salivate every time they see a picture of someone with a big cat, I

have some good news. Maybe you can't sit still long enough to catch a record catfish, but you don't have to. Take it from a guy who does not like to sit still for very long, but loves to fish long hours to catch big cats.

"I love to fish, but I don't have the patience to sit and wait," a friend recently said.

"Why are you sitting hostage in a boat and staring at your fishing poles?" I replied. I will tell you the best way to catch large cats, and

enjoy every moment doing it. One disclaimer — there are catmen and women all over the United States who have different tactics and are even more successful than I. I'm simply going to outline what has worked for me.

When I prepare to fish, I also prepare to camp. There are many items a camper needs to camp and fish for large catfish. This is not supposed to be a miserable trip. Take your favorite food, snacks, drink, fire starting materials, camping utensils, and a very comfortable sleeping bag with a fluffy pillow. And of course, insect repellent. Believe it or not, between the insect repellent and the campfire, most of the mosquitoes stay away. Camping with a campfire on the mighty Missouri River at night is one of the most beautiful and serene experiences you will ever have.

In addition to prepping for your trip, you need to prep the family. It is quite helpful to have a loving, supportive, understanding wife to let me go out all night once a week. (I think she figures there are worse activities for men than fishing.) I tell my wife, "Since no one is crazy enough to be on the river at night, I could not get into trouble even if I wanted to."

It has been said, "If it can go wrong in the day, it will go wronger at night." Fishing at night takes practice, and each time you go out, you learn something more you need to for a non-stressful event. Be prepared to have lots of lessons learned. A word of caution: Be prepared to be chased off of the water when a storm pops up. Check the weather, and be careful on any body of water at night.

Fishing on the Missouri River at night can be serene but also dangerous, and this is no place to take the kids. When there is no moon or stars to help light the sky, it is even darker. A radiant fire and a good head lamp will allow you to see. I also ensure that the entire camp

site is in very close proximity to my boat. My whole camp site is no larger than 20 feet in circumference. The less you travel on the ground, the less you are going to trip over something in the dark.

Back up batteries (or fuel) for every device that produces light. How do you find anything in the dark? Put everything back in its rightful place. If everything has a specific place, you'll know where it is even in the dark. After a few fishing trips, you won't even need much of a light to find common items.

I use South Bend -foot—inch medium/heavy action fishing rods, an Okuma Corrida BR 90 Reel, 80 pound test Power Pro braided line, size 2 barrel swivel and a 3- to 5-ounce egg sinker. My hook of choice is the Eagle Circle C, size 5/0. My line attached to the swivel is approximately 12-18 inches long, but with two hooks, creating a trotline effect. There is a drawback to two hooks — you double your chances of snags. I only use double hooks when I know the body of water I am fishing is flat, with very few

snags. Otherwise, one hook will do the job.

What has really keeps my sanity is bells on my poles. I use Rod & Bobs Beacon Bell Light Stick combo. I tape it on the end of my pole with a waterproof adhesive and electrical tape, so I don't have to sit and stare at poles all night long. If I get a bite, I know immediately, no matter what I am doing, which is usually something else, like eating, reading, tending the fire or just admiring creation and all of its beauty. I sometimes use my bait clickers (an accessory on the reel to make it free spool). If you use them, you must be near enough to hear the line pulled down the river. It only takes a few seconds to have 40-50 yards of line spooled off your reel, especially as a big cat heads to the channel.

I use a bass boat, with 90 horsepower motor. However, this loud motor should only be used to get within 100 or 200 yards of your camping/fishing spot. On the Missouri, I overshoot my fishing spot by 200 yards up river, and then silently float down, guided by my trolling motor. I attribute part



A 68-pound blue catfish taken by the author in July 2009. Most of his catches in recent years have been blues, not flatheads.

of my success in catching large catfish to this technique of entering their domain undetected. A quiet trolling motor is essential. Research has shown that when boaters come into a fishing area, some catfish move away from the area. Some say catfish will return, but research shows otherwise. In scientific studies, catfish were rated very high on the order of intelligence. How do you think those cats got to be 50-80 pounds?

I use a Minn Kota, 80-pound thrust trolling motor that gets me on a rock dike or shoreline with very little noise. Once you are there, practice what we in the military call "noise discipline." No loud noises or vibrations. Quietly get your poles out and set up camp. (Just remember there is a two-pole limit in Kansas, three with a three-pole permit.) Since you will be here for the next 12 hours, make sure you bring those comforts mentioned earlier. Remember, there is no substitute for time on the water. Fishing for big cats takes time to be successful. And if you love coffee, there is no better way to wake up than with a hot cup of coffee at sunrise.

I fish off either rock dykes or shallow areas just outside of deep holes, but I prefer shallow flats. I have a few areas where the river is only 4-8 feet deep and very flat. You can check the bottom with a depth finder. Big blues and flat-heads will run these flats at night looking for a meal. You have to get used to fishing shallow at night. You can fish deep, but it's like fishing a spot where the fish have left for the evening. Flat, shallow areas are magnets for large catfish.

It is important to cover all of the areas. If you are on a rock dyke, put one pole at the down-water side of the dyke, one pole at up-water side, and one pole off the front tip of the dike, but far down river in the seam between the current and still water. I no longer ignore the front (up-current side)

of a rock dyke. I pulled in a 62-pound blue cat a few years ago off the up-current side. The water was only about 4 feet deep. When you cast out your lines, the seams where the current meets still water are also excellent places to fish.

Although many of my catfishing brothers swear by cut bait, I have never been successful using it. I only use live, large bait fish such as green sunfish, drum, bluegill, goldfish, and even smaller catfish. I also believe that the most important pole in my boat is not my catfishing poles but my small bait pole. Using night crawlers, I keep out a small bait pole in high hopes of catching bait fish that are local to the water I am fishing. Nothing beats a 1-pound drum or a small channel catfish. The biggest cat I

ever caught, which was 75 pounds, bit on a 6-inch channel cat in only 3-4 feet of water.

The good thing about using large bait is that it will discourage the smaller catfish from biting. Who wants to waste time catching 2- to 5-pound catfish when 30-pounders and larger are what you really want? From about 7 p.m. until I bed down for the night, I change bait every hour, on the hour. If the bait is still alive and very active, I keep it on the hook, but I also put on a fresh one. Yes, now I have two fish on one hook. I keep both hooks supplied with fresh bait. That way, if one bait fish is taken, falls off or dies, I have a back-up.

Start baiting the hook with your smallest bait fish, and save your biggest bait for later. Another



Flat, shallow areas are magnets for monster catfish cruising for food at night. This 65-pound blue was taken in July 2009, the author's most productive month ever.

important aspect of baiting is where you hook the bait. I know conventional wisdom states you hook the bait fish behind the dorsal fin. I believe that is too much shock and pain for the fish and causes it to die quicker. I hook all of my fish just under the mouth and bring the hook out of the mouth. Do not hook the fish through both lips because the fish cannot breathe and will die on the hook. Many of my 4- to 6-inch bait fish stay fully alive from 11 p.m. until 6 a.m.

Once I get to my fishing spot, I pull the fish from the live well and place them in the river in a very large nylon bait keeper. You want to put them in a container in the river that offers plenty of room. If they are crowded and oxygen deprived, they will die. Nothing is worse than fishing all night with dead bait.

Since I am a night angler, I start about 6 p.m. and fish until about 11p.m., when I pull out my largest and most lively bait fish. I bait both hooks on each pole, throw out the lines, and go to sleep. Hopefully, I get a wakeup call from ringing bells and stripping line. What a great way to wake up.

What if there are no bells? My motto is, "Worst night of fishing is still the best night of camping." Catching big cats takes persistence, patience, and time on the water. Many of my biggest fish have come in the predawn hours. Do not ignore this time. Some studies show that catfish are most active in the predawn hours.

It's not easy. I fish one night a week, and I have gone weeks with no activity on my poles. But there have also been times like the summer of 2009. In five weeks, I hauled in a good number of 60-, 50-, and 40-pounders. But as with most things in life, if you are persistent, study the body of water you are fishing, study the science and art of catching large cats, and apply wisdom and judgment, you

will eventually be successful.

To be honest, I could greatly improve my odds if I got up at about 3 a.m. and re-baited my lines. To have fresh bait in those predawn hours will certainly bring in more fish. Better yet, stay awake all night and change bait every hour. But I need my beauty sleep.

Take some life advice from a fisherman who has had his share of failures: the second half of June and the first part of July in 2009 turned out to be the best fishing I have ever encountered, at least for blue catfish. But this fortune did not come with luck. It was honed over several times of trial and error.

As mentioned earlier, I fish all night once a week and have sat for weeks on end without a bite. At first I blamed it on the fish, the bait, or the river in general. But there is a lesson in life here. When things don't turn out the way you think they should, the first place you look is in the mirror. What am I doing wrong? Where can I improve? Who has the right answers for me? That pretty well goes for anything in life. Instead of shooting blame at things outside of ourselves, try looking inward and asking yourself, "What can I do to improve this situation and who is best able to help me? After I realized the problem was me, I got to work. I read everything I could find on catching big cats. In fact, I started a collection of books, magazines, and internet articles. In addition, I sought out reputable fisherman.

Now I have to ask, "Where have all the flathead gone?" The river seems to be teeming with blue catfish, yet landing a decent-sized flathead has been difficult. For three years, I have landed some big



Start them early: the author's daughter, Abby, holds a small flathead that one day may be a monster just waiting for her hook and line.

cats, but all have been blues. My last large flathead was more than three years ago. When I speak to fisherman who fished this river years ago, they say it used to be the opposite. I don't have an answer, perhaps our local fisheries biologist does. No matter — as long as the fish are big, fight like champs, bend my pole in half and strip my line, I'm not picky.

Parting Advice:

Find someone who can help you learn about catching big catfish. My mentor is George Hildebrandt of Leavenworth. Getting to know an experienced river angler will pay off big some starry night when the pole is slammed, the line starts peeling, and you have a catch of a lifetime! ♡

Dr. Rick Olsen is a retired Army officer and teaches military leadership at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth. He put the finishing touches on this article while deploying to Afghanistan. He can be contacted at richard.olsen1@us.army.mil.

Bellyboat Bass



text and photos by Mike Blair
videographer, Pratt

Not only are bellyboats effective in getting anglers close to big bass, they are a blast to fish out of. The angler is so close to the action, it's like hand-to-hand combat, and fly tackle adds an extra challenge.

I caught my first bass on a fly rod 45 years ago. Little Sugar Creek was up and running when I carried my brand new fiberglass rod purchased with earnings from home chores to the low-water dam near my home at Mound City. Flipping a size 10 floating rubber frog into the current, I watched it drift to a large rock before it disappeared in a swirl. Excited and amazed, I fought and landed the bass just like I'd read about in *Field and Stream* magazine. I'll never forget that pound-and-a-half fish.

Since then, I've owned eight fly rods and caught thousands of bass in the Midwest. Learning to tie my own flies added to the enjoyment. I've always fished small waters and never owned a boat. Long ago, I found that float-tubing pro-

vided an inexpensive and convenient way to sneak into big bass haunts. This quiet form of angling, combining intimate contact with the bass's world and the finesse of fly-fishing, became my choice way to chase lunkers in Kansas waters. And a recent trip reminded me again why one should never get too busy to enjoy such opportunity.

We met in northcentral Kansas last year. Mike Groenewold and I, college roommates from forestry school at University of Missouri-Columbia back in the 1970s, have taken to fly-fishing together when time permits. Groenewold is a native Kansan who now works for Nebraska Game and Parks. We usually alternate states for these getaways, fishing new waters each time.

This outing involved a large

private watershed lake, and the scouting report promised clear water and lots of big bass. That's a hard combination to beat, especially as water is warming in late May. Using appropriate fly patterns for each season, largemouth fly-fishing can be productive year-round, even during the heat of summer. But spring fishing helps avoid problems with algae and floating cottonwood seeds that can cause problems later on. And the tail of spawning season for panfish and bass doesn't hurt, either.

Water temperature was surprisingly cool the third week of May. Having earlier reached nearly 70 degrees in this impoundment, cool, rainy weather had forced the surface temperature back to 60 degrees. That is Clouser minnow weather, and we quickly found

that chartreuse patterns in size 4 were just the ticket. Clouser minnows are tied with dumbbell eyes usually painted red or yellow with black pupils. This helps the 3-inch flies to sink quickly and provides a tantalizing “roller coaster” action in the water column when stripped in 6-inch pulls. These flies mimic bait fish.

Better yet, the Clouser pattern is also excellent for crappies, making it doubly effective. I experimented with a variety of size 10 point flies like McGinty nymphs or bead head wooley worms, tying on a 3-foot trailer with a terminal Clouser. It’s legal to use two hooks in this way. With this setup, I could also enjoy catching big bluegills that preferred smaller meals.

It didn’t take long to start the action. Groenewold launched while I concentrated on shooting video and still photos from shore. Since we’d met late in the day, there was only a short time to get limbered up and check out our gear. Even so, he caught a 3-pound bass before I got into my waders. We agreed to bag all crappies and bluegills the first evening for a fish fry the next day. We’d release all bass during the trip, and after our traditional shore lunch, we’d concentrate solely on catching bass. Cleaning panfish takes too much time although it’s worth it at least once a trip to enjoy a fresh-caught dinner.

We found a bed of crappies and worked them over in the two hours before dusk. We cleaned and iced them down, got into bed by 11 p.m., and looked forward to good weather and great fishing the next two days.

Next morning started off right. Heavy fog lifted and promised light winds for the day, something rare in Kansas and always helpful when fly-fishing. We found the bass from 4 to 6 feet deep, and



The author and his college buddy, Mike Groenewold, meet every spring for a fishing adventure. They fish from bellyboats on small waters for bass, crappie and bluegill, and both enjoy the challenge of catching fish on a fly rod.

they were scrappers. Even in the relatively cool water, they fought hard and often made spectacular jumps. I had to work at remembering to use the cameras as much as the fly rod.

Conventional wisdom usually suggests 7- or 8-weight fly rods for big, hard-fighting fish like bass. These stout rods have the backbone for stripers, wipers, big channel cats, and hawg largemouths. But Groenewold and I both chose 5-weight rods for the extra action they offer. It’s like using ultralight spinning gear, except these rods

were 8 and 9 feet long. I use a 5-weight as my standard Kansas fly rod and have caught most large game fish species in the state. So far, I’ve had no problems with a 5-weight rod on fish weighing up to 15 pounds. Since much of my fishing is done in ponds, the 5-weight is a good tradeoff for a mixture of large and small fish.

That was tested again when I threw the Clouser to a weedbed and hooked what I thought at first was a small fish. But the bass was just fooling. Right away, it turned and surged in a pulse-pounding



For many anglers, fishing is a relaxing, renewing adventure. However, fishing a remote farm pond from a tube enhances the serenity of the experience.

run that would delight any angler. At water level in a float tube, there's a connection with a fighting fish that is unmatched by bank or boat fishing. As I concentrated on the two-handed fight, I strained to see the bass in the clear water. When I did, I could tell it was a big fish. A few minutes later, I lipped the bass that proved to be my biggest of the trip. It was 22 inches long and weighed more than 6 pounds.

On the heels of that thrill, I concentrated on shooting video of my partner. I normally shoot a high-definition camera, but the risk of dunking gear from a float tube makes using less-expensive equipment a safer bet. I shot with two small cameras – one standard definition handycam and another specialty waterproof point-and-shoot model. We tried a number of experimental shots that combined both under- and above-water shots on the same landing sequence. One of these successful attempts can be seen on an archived video segment of the trip posted on the Kansas Wildlife and Parks webpage.

Groenewold steadily caught good bass on our first full day. He had to work for them, but by early


afternoon, he'd landed about 10 nice largemouths along with numerous panfish. We took a break and cooked fish on a Coleman stove, enjoying nice weather and great eating. By the time we'd cleaned things up, a couple of hours had passed. Then it was back to work catching more bass. Fish were large and chunky, ranging from 14 inches to more than 20 inches. We held our usual good-natured competition, and just before sundown, he caught a fish that was a dead ringer for my big one earlier in the day – another 6-pounder. Day one ended with the tired satisfaction that only good fishing can bring.

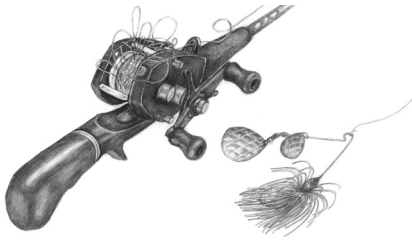
Next morning, now somewhat familiar with the large impoundment, we increased our catch rate. Bass averaged about 3 pounds, but again, we caught a number in the 20-inch range. Several were in the 5-pound class. And when the water grew calm as a high pressure system passed, we enjoyed the fun of topwater fly patterns. Groenewold used an unweighted Muddler Minnow, and I tied on a large chartreuse floating Pike Perch. Watching as big bass blasted these flies on the surface added to the experience.

We filmed a number of spectacular jumps on video, including a long tailwalk and several high somersaults by fighting bass. It was fascinating to see the power and acrobatics of these large fish when viewed later in slow motion. Attached to a fly rod, you could definitely feel it at normal speed.

The end of day two was bathed in golden sunlight, making us wish the trip wasn't over. We'd caught more than 50 nice bass between us, gathered unforgettable memories, and felt again the wonder of enjoying the Kansas outdoors. Rain was forecast for overnight, and as always, it was time to head back home after a welcome break.

Fly-fishing had provided its particular spice, and the float-tubing created a serene way to connect with nature. We parted ways, lucky for a great trip where everything went just right and trophy bass cooperated.

With any luck, we'll do it again next year in another place where the fish are waiting. Meantime, you might want to try it for yourself in water near you. Catch a big Kansas bass on a fly rod, and chances are, you'll never get over it. You'll find yourself on some foggy morning, sitting in a float tube, stripping flies through quiet water, and hoping. 



Backlash

by Mike Miller

Get Out Of Your Way

At a recent hunter education field day, students and instructors were waiting in the classroom as a thunderstorm passed through. We'd been shooting shotguns, and though the swirling winds made targets challenging, everyone was breaking them and having fun. However, one young man who hadn't shot yet assured me he wouldn't break a target. He said he had tried before and wasn't any good at it. I tried to convince him he would break a target and used the fact that all the shooters before him had found success, but he was still sure of his fate.

When the weather broke, he was first up. We talked about what I wanted him to do, and I threw a couple of floating incomers for him to look at. As he predicted, he missed the first two targets. We made an adjustment, and he broke the next one, and the next one, and the one after that. He was smiling now, and his confidence was growing. After smashing six incomers in a row, I had him look at a slow, quartering in, left to right target. We talked about where to focus and how to move the gun, and — bang — he smoked the first one and several after that. He beamed with confidence.

Once he got out of his own way, he broke targets. Wingshooting isn't complicated: mount the gun correctly, keep both eyes open, focus on the target. For new shooters, target presentations should be simple. I like a long floating incomer that peaks about 15 yards from the shooting stand. It's an easy shot and builds confidence. For those who catch on quickly, I have a second trap set up to throw a high, incoming slightly left to right crosser. This target is slow and shows lots of belly. It doesn't require lead but does require the student to move the gun with the target. Because it's showing belly, breaks are spectacular explosions — building more confidence.

Depending on a shooter's personality, some will start thinking about it and complicate things after just a few shots. There's an old saying in shooting: "The more you think, the more you miss." It's all too true, and I know it all too well. And even beginning shooters may become aware of early success and the fact that other students are watching. They become deliberate and they start thinking — and they start missing.

Shooting a shotgun is lots of fun, and wingshooting is a valuable hunting skill. Kansas offers unsurpassed bird hunting opportunities, from dove to waterfowl to upland birds, so wingshooting is a perfect first step to hunting. If you have a youngster who shows some interest in bird hunting and wingshooting, remember the following tips:

- Keep it simple. Don't overload new shooters with lots of rules and things to think about.
- Use a gun that fits, such as a youth model for small shooters, but don't get too carried away with gun fit at first. Just be sure the gun isn't way too long, way too short or too heavy.
- A light semi-automatic 20-gauge is perfect for young shooters because upper body strength will be an issue, and recoil is reduced with a gas operated semi-auto.
- Have them shoot with both eyes open with the gun mounted under their dominant eye. I don't talk much about eye dominance unless I can see a problem. (It's one more thing a student doesn't need to think about.)
- Encourage right-handed, left-eye dominant shooters to try shooting left handed (and vice-versa), especially youngsters. They will be better wingshooters if they can keep both eyes open and mount the gun under their dominant eye.
- Shoot a few targets, rest, then shoot some more. If you shoot too long in one stretch, the gun will get heavy and recoil may become an issue.

Spring and summer is the time to practice wingshooting. Many local gun clubs offer youth and new shooter programs, and many county extension offices offer 4-H Shooting Sports programs. Call your local KDWP office. Staff may know of an upcoming youth event such as an OK Kids Day at a state park or an outdoors skills day in conjunction with a local conservation group's youth program. Type the words "shooting ranges" into the search box on KDWP's website, and you'll find a directory to shooting ranges across the state. Local members are always happy to see potential new members and will be glad to show new shooters the ropes. Wingshooting is great fun, and it's a perfect first step to bird hunting. 