

KANSAS

Wildlife & Parks

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KANSAS *View*

by Robin Jennison



Pheasants After Opening Day

See if this sounds familiar: It's opening day, and you and 20 of your best friends are lined up at the edge of a big CRP field in western Kansas. The dawn sky is purple and red, and the weeds and grass are painted with a frosty brush. There is no wind, and you can hear the pheasants crowing. The birds may be a little concerned about the humans lining up, but for all they know the orange-garbed hunters and their pesky four-legged friends are just out for a stroll. The birds crow and cackle, planning a breakfast trip to a nearby feed field. Meanwhile, four blockers line up along the half-mile road to cut off running birds. It is a half-hour before sunrise — legal shooting time.

The drive starts, and within 100 yards, shots ring out. Voices shout out "Hen!" or "Rooster!" or "That #@\$& dog is out of control already. I should have left him in the box." The roosters run helter-skelter, sit tight or flush as shots ring out. Fifty or 100 birds escape, but a few don't. The hunters can't wait for the next field where they hope the scene will be repeated. The roosters at the next big CRP field react the same way. It's a great day with limits of birds and plenty of stories of blown shots, great shots, and historic dog work. You can hardly wait until the next morning.

The next morning doesn't go as planned, though. The same weather, the same tactics, and the same fields don't produce the same results. The group bags just a couple of birds, and you wonder where they all went.

The birds are still there. However, those that survived, received their opening-day education and diplomas, and they won't soon forget. What was a fantastic day for the hunters was Black Saturday for the ringnecks. Instead of flying, birds now run out of the county at the sound of the first truck door slamming.

How many times have we heard of limits on opening day but only four or five birds taken the next? After that first weekend, hunters need to think outside the box. We have to think of other ways to hunt these big western Kansas fields for roosters that have earned their spurs.

Western Kansas is big, wide-open country. Large weedy grain patches open into stubble fields that roll into large pastures of buffalo grass and yucca plants. The pheasants left these large fields after opening day are wary.

A couple of years ago, I was hunting out by Healy with my friend and my brother. We kept driving by a mile circle,

wheat stubble/weed patch that was full of pheasants. We thought it was too much ground to cover for three guys and their dogs. So, we kept passing it by, opting instead for windrows and small draws, but we were striking out. We were seeing bunches of birds, but they were flying out of the small areas as we were pulling up in the truck. We finally decided to hit the big field.

This typical southwestern Kansas feed field was wheat stubble, choked with weeds, that had been saturated with moisture after harvest. The fire brush had grown tall and thick. It was an ideal place for a pheasant to hang out. There was plenty of feed, cover, and dusting areas. It was pheasant paradise.

My brother started on the south side of the field with his dog. The landowner dropped me off a quarter-mile away on the other side of the weed patch with my dog. With no particular strategy, we kept our eyes on each other and began walking. Almost immediately pheasants started pouring out of the waist high weeds out of range. They could definitely hear us. I walked in about a hundred yards and stopped. I called my dog to my side and knelt down to pet her. My brother did the same thing. Within five minutes we could hear the pitter patter of little sneaky feet walking and running through the weeds nearby. My dog was trembling. She could smell them. The shoe was on the other foot! With no noise to reference our position, the pheasants' strategy of moving away from people and noise wasn't working. They didn't know where to run.

When the noises got so close I thought an ole rooster was going to peek at me through the weeds, I let my dog loose and walked swiftly toward the nearest noises. Pheasants blew out of the weeds well within range. Sounds of shots in the distance told me that my brother was ambushing some roosters, too. Two stop-and-gos later, and we were both heading out of the field with our limits. We all three agreed that the technique was a great way to bag late-season roosters in a large field.

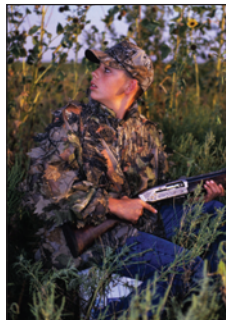
Don't be afraid to hunt the big fields in the western part of the state after opening weekend. A smaller group of hunters can still effectively hunt large plots of ground by thinking like a wary rooster. A stealthy approach can be the best way to hunt late-season roosters. Good luck, be careful and shoot straight. ♡



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Front Cover: Bob Gress snapped this shot of a spotted sandpiper during fall migration. Many shorebird species cover thousands of miles between summer and winter grounds. **Back Cover:** Dove hunting can be a great way to get young hunters into wingshooting. Mike Blair shot his photo of a hunter waiting in sunflowers.



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

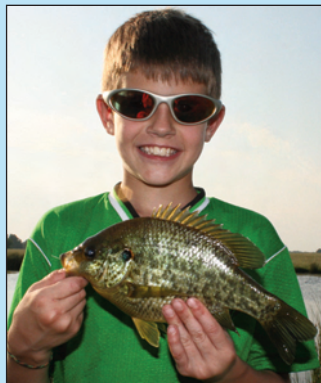
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Letters . . .



BIG REDEAR

Editor:

While fishing in my father-in-law Wayne Cook's farm pond west of Baxter Springs Kansas, my son, Noah, caught a very nice redear or bluegill. We took several pictures and released the fish. Many viewers of these pictures suggested that it might have even been a state record had we submitted it to KDWPT. Is there a method to submit a couple of these pictures for potential print in your next issue?

*Dwayne Friend
Joplin, Missouri*

Dear Mr. Friend:

That is one nice redear, but it probably wouldn't have been a state record. The record redear weighed 1.69 pounds and was 11.5 inches long.

Anyone who believes they have caught a state record fish should weigh it as soon as possible on certified scales. The weighing must be witnessed. The fish must be species-confirmed by a KDWPT fisheries biologist. (A tissue sample may be required.) A color photograph of the fish must accompany the application. The fish must be weighed before it is frozen.

All applications for state records require a 30-day waiting period before certification. For a list of Kansas state record fish, visit the KDWPT website, www.kdwpt.state.ks.us, or pick up a copy of the Kansas Fishing Regulations Summary wherever licenses are sold.

Thanks for sending this to us.

-Mark Shoup

HUNTING HERITAGE

with Kent Barrett

Experience

The word for today is: experience. In a recent *Shooting Sports Retailer* article, Rick Sapp wrote about today's youth in a way that I could relate. He suggested that "The problem is this generation doesn't naturally go outside if they can help it. They don't grow up with that urge to hang out with dad or the uncles or run around in the woods." (Like us old guys did!) They are accustomed to sitting in rows to take accredited classes to learn outdoor skills. They must take written tests before they can climb trees and shoot at squirrels with BB guns; and to build a "fort" in the woods on the vacant lot next door might invite a visit from the police. What's more, they hunt and shoot with a joy stick in their hands wearing 3-D glasses and registering their scores on Internet sites. They text and tweet and post on Facebook, and it is not unusual to see them texting while driving or taking cell phone calls during movies. This "electronically adaptable generation" is not used to going outside for fun or handling the real thing rather than a simulation of the real thing.

The late Edward Reed, an associate

professor of psychology at Franklin and Marshall College wrote in his book *The Necessity of Experience* of how in our society today, technology "does little or nothing to help us explore the world for ourselves." Because of a loss of what Reed called "primary experience" - namely that which people can smell, feel, hear, see or taste, we are beginning to lose the ability to experience our world directly.

This view can be somewhat depressing for those of us who grew up outdoors and have resisted the call to come back inside ever since. But I am excited now by this as I realize that we have the antidote to the challenges presented by Generation Next: experience. Every time I attend a Hunter Education field day, youth shooting event, Women On Target or Becoming An Outdoor-Woman event, I can see the faces of those who are experiencing for the first time what we routinely do. That ear-to-ear grin on the face when the first target is broken at the shotgun range, the first time the plate rings at the handgun range or the ram target gets knocked down on the rifle range allows me to know that these experiences are still enjoyed by even the most "electronically adaptable" among us.

So, I invite you to take your shot at technology. Ask someone to come outside sometime. Invite them to go shooting, hiking, looking for frogs or picking up night crawlers. Get dirty and have a ball "experiencing" Kansas. They will love it! And you might just have some fun while you are at it.

WAY outside BY BRUCE COCHRAN



"MAY I SUGGEST THE CHATEAU DE PATRIMONIO, SIR? IT'S FRUITY AND COMPELLING, HAS A MELLOW YET COMPLEX BOUQUET, AND YOU CAN USE THE CORK TO TIE A BASS BUG."

COCHRAN!



Ah fall! I hope by the time you're reading this, we are in that wonderful season. As I write this though, we are mired in the third straight week of 100-plus-degree days. It's been a tough summer in Kansas,

for birds, other animals and people, as well. We think we have it rough, but some folks are forced to decide whether to cool their homes or eat – which keeps things in perspective. High energy bills may force many birders to choose between staying at home or traveling to pursue their hobby. Maybe with the dog days of summer behind us, I will have a better attitude about going out and finding some birds!

Hot summer weather is hard on most wildlife, with birds being no different. I heard many reports of dead young birds around the marsh at Cheyenne Bottoms, many “baked” in the heat. Local barn owls lost nestlings due to the extreme temperatures inside nesting structures. Marshes drying down complicated brood rearing for many species of water birds, with suitable habitat being reduced and food sources changing dramatically from the time birds began nesting to

BIRD BRAIN

with Mike Rader

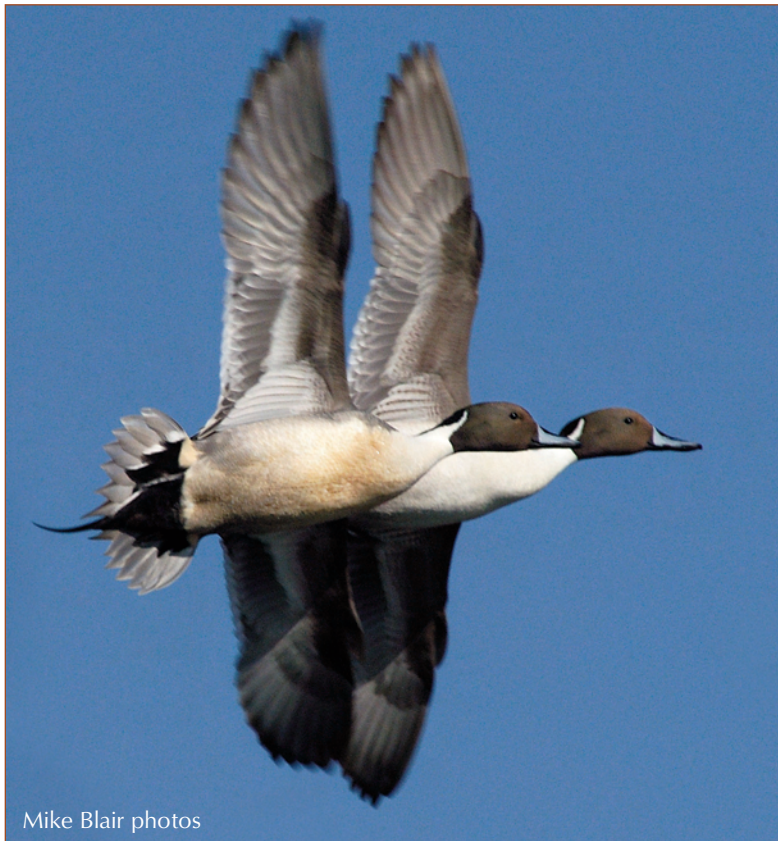
Fall Birding Now!

when the young were fledged. Local production of most birds may be down substantially.

There was some good news this summer from the northern U. S. and central Canada, where many waterfowl species arrived in record numbers. Good nesting and brood-rearing conditions could mean record numbers of ducks migrating this fall, providing great opportunities to hunt or view waterfowl. If water levels are low in central Kansas marshes, major reservoirs will be critical to migrating waterfowl this fall. Agricultural crops in the western and southern parts of Kansas have suffered this past summer, too, so finding food for this expected record number of waterfowl may be difficult. Lakes in the northern and eastern part of the state have had high water most of the summer due to flooding in the Missouri and Mississippi drainages, so water levels should be more than adequate for birds passing through. It's certainly been an interesting year so far!

With all that being said, birds are resilient, and birders are, too. Fall is a great time to get out and see what made it back to Kansas. Field trips and excursions to favorite birding locations can provide great opportunities. I hope to get out to southwest Kansas at least once this fall, and a few other places are definitely on the agenda. The fall meeting of the Kansas Ornithological Society will be held at the Kansas Wetlands Education Center Sept. 30 to Oct. 2. The meeting consists of a social at the center on Friday evening, with folks getting to see old friends, meet new ones and swap birding stories. The paper session, with presentations of ornithological work being conducted in Kansas or by Kansans, will be held during the day on Saturday. The annual banquet and awards ceremony will be held on Saturday evening, complete with a great guest speaker, providing entertainment and education. Field trips to local birding hotspots will be conducted on Sunday morning, with a compilation and boxed lunch at the Wetlands Education Center capping off the weekend. More information on this event can be found at www.ksbirds.org

September and October are great months to go out and see the tail-end of shorebird migration, the beginning of waterfowl migration and the peak of many passerine species' migrations. I hope to be testing my skills of flycatcher and sparrow identification, so maybe I'll see many of you out in the field!



Mike Blair photos

Letters . . .

KANSAS MEMORIES

Editor:

Several years ago, a good friend sent me a subscription to *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine. He continues to give me your magazine, and I continue to enjoy it. Neither fisherman (woman) nor hunter, still the contents evoke memories of my growing up in Wichita until I moved to Kansas City, Mo. when I was 15 years old.

Ken Brunson's essay, "Roadside Beauty" brought back scenes of those years, which are an important part of the memory bank. Indeed for many years, I, with mother and father, "cruised roadside ditches," most unappreciative of the natural beauty of the prairie land. Many years later, as we drove across the plains, the foothills, the long stretches on I-70 to Colorado, it was then I began to actually see, and to feel, the magic of that land. As we came out of Topeka and headed due west, the tenseness of the drive dissolved, the road stretched before us and one's soul (mine) began to unwind. As we continued that journey through the years, the way only became sweeter.

The early trips, leaving Wichita before dawn, before the hot, blistering winds nearly blew us off the road (this was in the mid-1930s, with no air conditioning, of course), was more agony than pleasure. And most certainly, I did not see any beauty in "glorious profusion" of sunflowers or any other flower, bird or stray pheasant.

My father traveled western Kansas from about 1932 to 1945. He called on every dentist from Wichita to Great Bend, to Hutchinson and Abilene. My mother and I "took to the basement" when the dust blew, and it covered very inch of the windows, doors sidewalks and clung to creatures brave enough to be outside. My father hunted pheasant and quail, and my mother fixed those birds, baked in cream or roasted.

So, Mr. Miller, you can see, my Kansas years mean a lot to me, and I

IT'S THE LAW

with Kevin Jones

Road Hunting?

Each year, we receive questions on whether it is legal in Kansas to hunt or shoot from the road. As with a lot of questions, the answer is not a clear yes or no. A correct answer depends upon the circumstances.

The statute entitled Criminal Hunting (K.S.A. 21-3728) states, in relevant part, that a person must have permission from the landowner or tenant before hunting, shooting, furharvesting, pursuing any bird or animal, or fishing upon any land or nonnavigable body of water of another; or, upon or from any public road, public road right-of-way or railroad right-of-way that adjoins the land. Therefore, a person would have to have permission from the landowner or tenant of the land that adjoins the road before they could legally shoot from the road. This does not mean permission must be acquired from the landowner or tenant on both sides of the road, but only from the one on the side of the road where they are standing.

A second statute, K.S.A. 21-4217, addresses the criminal discharge of a firearm. It is similar to the Criminal Hunting statute. This law states that a Class C misdemeanor crime is committed if a person discharges a firearm "upon any land or nonnavigable body of water of another, without having obtained permission of the owner or person in possession of such land; or, upon or from any public road, public road right-of-way or railroad right-of-way that adjoins land of another without having first obtained permission of the owner or person in possession of such land." Here again permission is required when shooting from a road.

Now, there are a couple of other considerations that must be kept in mind. First, if the land is posted that written permission is required for hunting, then that requirement extends to the road area where the shooting may occur. Second, consideration must be given as to who controls the road or highway. County or township roads are generally a public right-of-way across private land. This means that the landowner actually owns the land where the road is located. Normally, if there are two landowners across the road from each other, the property line runs down the center of the road. Hence, the requirement to have the permission of the landowner, or tenant, on the side of the road where the shooting is occurring. Of course, there are situations where a bend in the road may shift the relationship between the roadway and the actual property line. However, roads maintained as state or federal highways by the Kansas Department of Transportation are not public right-of-ways in the same sense that county or township roads are considered. In these situations the Department of Transportation exclusively controls the road right-of-way, and therefore also controls all activity within that right-of-way. The Department of Transportation does not allow hunting or shooting from highways under their control.

And finally, the above laws apply to hunting in general, but persons holding handicapped hunting and fishing permits have a different rule to follow (K.S.A. 32-931). This law allows a person who possesses one of these permits to shoot from a land or water vehicle, but that person may not shoot from any highway, as defined by K.S.A. 8-1424. The definition referred to defines a highway, not as a type of road, but as the total area that is maintained for a road. That area would be from the field edge or right-of-way fence, across the road to the other field edge or fence.

Once again it is up to the hunter or shooter to know the law and have the necessary permissions before engaging in the activity. Be sure to read and understand the rules and regulations, and if they are not clear, get assistance from our Department offices or personnel.



Boat Safe

with Erika Brooks

Any good waterfowl hunter will tell you that having the right equipment can mean the difference between having a successful hunt or a lousy day in the blind. A good dog, some realistic looking decoys, and a call that will have them peeling off from the flock and dropping into your spread are top priorities for most seasoned hunters. Depending on where you hunt, a reliable boat might also be a necessary piece of equipment as transportation to your favorite hunting spot and as a floating blind. I've seen hunters in small kayaks and fully camouflaged barges, but it seems I rarely see life jackets in the marsh. While hunting at Cheyenne Bottoms with my family, I've regularly witnessed overloaded boats with

no navigation lights screaming away from the boat ramp into the darkness. I've seen grown men sitting on top of a 6-foot pile of decoys in the bow of a boat while their buddy tries to maneuver through the marsh and beat everyone to their favorite hunting spot. Never mind the fact that the boat operator can't see around the decoys and the man perched atop them to see if there is a concrete blind in their path of. Unfortunately, things happen when we least expect them, and nothing ruins a hunting trip faster than an accident on the way to the blind.

When asked, most waterfowl hunters who hunt from a boat don't consider themselves boaters. However, if a boat is involved in any way, boating regulations and equipment requirements apply, including navigation lights and life jacket requirements. The most disappointing observation I've made while hunting was seeing a group of five, including two children, without a single life jacket anywhere on the boat. By regulation, children 13 and younger must wear a life jacket at all times when on a boat, including when that boat is anchored. There must be a properly-fitting life jacket in a readily acces-

sible location on board for each adult in the boat, and that means not buried under a pile of decoys or stowed in a closed compartment. In boats 16 feet long or longer, USCG approved Type IV throwable flotation devices are also required.

While the regulation doesn't require adults to wear life jackets, with the inflatable life jackets that are on the market, there is no excuse not to wear one when out on the boat. The camouflage belt packs are perfect for the waterfowl hunter since they are not in the way when you shoulder your gun. A float coat is also a great solution for meeting the life jacket requirement. Not only are



float coats US Coast Guard approved flotation devices, they are insulated for warmth and waterproof. It's even a good idea to wear some kind of flotation device if you are standing outside the boat while hunting because if you've ever walked through the water in waders, you know how easy it is to trip or step in a hole. The same rules apply if you are hunting on a major reservoir from a boat and are even

more important because the weather can turn, and the wind can make the water extremely rough and dangerous.

The best part of a great waterfowl hunt is being able to return home and share the stories of the trip with your buddies. Wear It, Kansas!



Anyone born on or after January 1, 1989, and under the age of 21 must complete an approved boating education course in order to operate a boat without being under direct supervision. Visit www.kdwpt.state.ks.us/boating for information on completing a course.

Letters . . .

am grateful to have lived there. Your essays at the conclusion of the magazine give the readers much pleasure, and often with insight that bears much thought. KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK. This letter has really rambled on, still I'm glad for the opportunity to tell you and your editorial staff how much the magazine is appreciated.

My friend, Jack Longstreth, hunted for years around Larned. Loved every minute with friends and the dogs.

*Dian Prettyman DeWall
Dayton, OH*

Dear Mrs. DeWall,

When words as gracious as yours are written, we are inclined to allow as much rambling on as is desired. Thanks for taking the time to put your memories and thoughts down on paper and share them with us. They mean more than you know.

-Mike Miller

FIRST SEASON DEER HUNTER

Editor:

I have a picture of my dad (Alvin L. Lampe, Hanover, Washington County) with the deer he took with a bow in the fall of 1965. My mother (Virginia) told me he got the first deer taken by bow in Kansas when they opened the season. She told me he was published in a Kansas Wildlife magazine but could not remember which one. Do you have any idea how I could follow up on this. I would be glad to share this photo and would like to find out more about early deer archery in Kansas. Dad passed away in 2001.

Dad was a vocational agriculture teacher for 30 years in Washington. He fished and hunted all his life. We children would sometimes get to go with him. We ate a lot of game and fish in our early years. He was an avid hunter,



In recent articles, I have written about some of what we fisheries biologists do in the fall. The list also includes trying to complete fish sampling on all of our lakes – checking out how game fish have fared over the past year and gathering data for next year's fishing forecast. I answered a question about why fish have eggs in the fall: species that spawn in the spring have to develop those eggs in late summer and fall so that they are mature by the time spring arrives. I have delved into fall fishing and discussed why fall might be the very best time of the year to put fillets in the freezer: fish are filling up on groceries in anticipation of winter and will often hit a slab spoon or crank bait that imitates their favorite food, whether it be gizzard shad, crayfish or bluegill.

Our fall schedules also include a few other activities. For the past couple of Septembers, the agency has taken our mobile fish aquarium to the Kansas State Fair in Hutchinson. This giant fish tank is popular with fair goers. This is one of the aquatic education tools that we use to inform Kansans about our fish species, and we answer lots of questions about fish in farm ponds, lakes, and reservoirs. Fisheries biologists from across the state spend a day or two manning the aquarium and share wisdom and knowledge with the folks who stop by. If you haven't seen the mobile aquarium, come by and visit this September.

By early September, schools are back in session, and program requests begin to come in. Eco-meets, those high school ecology competitions, are being conducted. Generally there are some aquatic elements to the eco-meets, and biologists are often asked to give programs to biology classes.

Some biologists are even the coaches for the eco-meet teams.

Every year for the past 15, I have been

FISH SQUEEZER

with Tommie Berger

Fall Fisheries Work

involved in a career day at Rolling Hills Refuge near Salina where high school youngsters learn about a number of career opportunities from presenters. School field trips to the lake to observe and assist the fisheries guys with their netting operations are popular fall events, too.

Other September activities might include stilling basin salvages. About every five years, the outlet structures below reservoir dams have to be inspected. To do that, the stilling basin, which is the large pool directly below the outlet tubes, has to be dewatered and the fish removed. Some biologists might also be finishing up their shoreline seining to evaluate shad and other young-of-the-year fish populations. Others might be finishing up a habitat project, conducting a final fishing clinic, or simply maintaining equipment and getting it stored for the winter.

Trout season starts on October 15, so we have to check trout waters in our district to ensure they are ready for trout – that water temperatures are low enough and that there is adequate oxygen for trout to survive. If conditions are right, we have to take time out from our netting schedule to stock trout. Signs need to be checked and fishing reports updated. There are even some other fish stockings that occur in this time period. Generally, blue catfish are ready for stocking in our reservoirs, and there might even be some channel catfish that still need to find a home in a state fishing lake or F.I.S.H. pond. October is also the last month of our summer creel survey season. Those biologists conducting creel surveys on their lakes will be getting final data in and saying goodbye to the creel clerks who have been collecting data since last March. If a trout creel or winter creel is on the agenda, now is the time to be finding creel clerks and organizing schedules.

There never seems to be a dull moment in the life of a fish squeezer. Just about the time that I think I am caught up and can breathe a bit, the magazine editor will be e-mailing that the deadline for the next magazine article is coming soon!

Letters . . .

using a bow a good portion of his life. He got a deer most seasons. He waited patiently for Kansas to get a turkey season, but his sight started going, and he was never able to turkey hunt. His grandson (my son, Justin Bayes) learned to hunt with him. Justin inherited his grandfather's hunting abilities and has continued the family tradition.

In Dad's later years, dementia kept him out of touch with reality; however, Justin would bring him all the game that he bagged for his grandfather to see, along with a story about the hunt. Justin said that for those few minutes, Grandpa was lucid again. Dad relived his hunting days through his grandson.

A cutline appears with Dad and his deer in an article entitled "Alvin Lampe Gets Bow & Arrow Deer" in the *Hanover News* that fall and reads: "Alvin Lampe, Hanover vocational agriculture teacher, poses with the whitetail doe he killed Saturday morning with a bow and arrow along the Little Blue River. Dressed weight was 90 pounds. Distance of shot, 20 yards."

Lynn Salsbury
Manhattan

Dear Ms. Salsbury,

Although a search of all our back issues of the magazine from that time revealed no mention of your father, and we have no records to document who might have shot the first deer in the modern Kansas deer hunting season, this is a great story and accomplishment. Because he shot it with a bow in the first season, it's certainly possible that it was the first deer taken in the state's modern deer hunting era.

It's great to hear these kinds of stories, and it's even better that your father passed the hunting tradition on to his grandson. Thank you for sharing this with us.

—Mark Shoup

On The Web with Mark Shoup



OUTDOOR PRESSROOM

You may not be an outdoor writer, but if you're reading this magazine, I'll bet that you will enjoy "the Web's best resource for the outdoor writer and communicator." Outdoorpressroom.com will capture the attention of anyone interested in the outdoors. It's packed with synopses of outdoor stories, from the issue-oriented to the downright quirky. Here's a taste of headlines from July 22:

- First-time female angler lands 335-pound, \$15K halibut;
- NC city to hire professional dog hunters?;
- Happy birthday, Hemingway;
- Wipe out: Tons of toilet paper dumped into scenic Idaho river;
- Wisconsin teen lands state record, uh, minnow;
- Rancher fined for killing grizzly that killed his sheep; and
- Native cutthroat to be stocked in native Tahoe waters.

All headlines are followed by short synopses of the stories and links to the

Outdoor Pressroom Wildflower Time

detailed stories, from various media outlets. And if that isn't enough information for you, there are links to blogs from Outdoor News, Shooting Illustrated, The Outdoor Pressroom, Sportsman's Guide, and Outdoor Life Newshound; various newspaper blogs; general outdoor blogs; gun blogs; independent blogs; outdoor industry blogs; and much, much more. There's even a Navy SEALs blog. Of particular interest to me were links to humor writer Pat McManus and Second Amendment researcher John Lott.

When you want outdoors indoors, then a visit to outdoorpressroom.com is a must.

WILDFLOWER TIME

September can be great time to view wildflowers, and our friends at naturalkansas.org have all the information you need to plan a trip. From mayapples in a woodland glade in Douglas County to Indian blanket along the roadsides of Meade County, Kansas offers a rich array of destinations for wildflower viewing throughout the growing season. The Natural Kansas website lists more than 100 of these destinations, as well as a calendar of events to help guide both seasoned and novice botanists.

Visit them soon at naturalkansas.org/wildflow.htm.





Carp: Can It

I am often told that some of the things I eat are, well – strange. To be honest, even I have reservations about some of the foods I cook. One is the common carp. Often shunned by fisherman as a food fish because of intramuscular bones, I've had a hard time making carp tasty. However, I have come across and modified a recipe for canned carp that is noteworthy.

Six 20- to 26-inch fish will make a canner full (7 pint jars). I prefer to fillet carp, but I use a modified approach because the ribs can be tough to cut through. I start by removing scales from around the gill plate on both sides, then I cut downward to the backbone. Then I roll the fish on its belly so I can cut along the back on both sides of the dorsal fins. Next, I go back and work my way down both sides and around or through the ribs. (Rib bones can be canned.) Once down to the belly, I fillet and skin. I cut the fillet down the middle lengthwise to make smaller pieces and trim away some of the dark red meat from the center of the fillet. I then rinse and soak the fillets in cold salt

(sea salt) water overnight in the refrigerator. Let's face it, at this point you have done enough work for one day.

To finish the recipe, you need a pressure canner and a case of pint-sized canning jars with lids and rings. Ingredients include only two things other than fish: white vinegar and sea salt.

Prepare the canner by putting 3 inches of water in the bottom. Make sure its rack is in place to keep jars off the bottom. Begin heating water on high heat. Place seven jar seals in a saucepan of boiling water to soften.

I measure a jar from its neck to the bottom and mark my cutting board to aid in trimming pieces to size. After cutting the fillets into uniform lengths, pack them into the jars as tightly as you can, filling in voids with trimmed pieces. Never pack above the threads on the jar. Add one teaspoon of sea salt to the top of each jar and then a tablespoon of white vinegar. I slide a butter knife down the sides of the jars to help remove any trapped air and add fish if necessary. With a moist washcloth, wipe the top of the jar, retrieve a hot seal from the saucepan and secure it with a jar ring to the jar, hand-tighten only. It needs to be tight enough the rubber seal adheres to the



jar when cooled but not so tight that air cannot escape during the canning process.

Place jars in canner strategically so they do not touch each other or the sides of canner. Put on canner top and lock. When white steam vapor vents out of the hole in the top, place the weight at 10 pounds on top of the canner. When the weight starts to dance and clatter on the vent, begin a timer for 80 minutes. If during this time, the clattering stops, it could indicate too much heat. Try reducing the heat until the clattering begins again.

After 80 minutes, turn off stove and leave canner alone for 30 minutes. With a hot pad, carefully remove the weight and allow pressured steam out. After about 10 minutes, carefully remove lid, avoiding escaping steam. Remove jars and let cool. Jars will have a cloudy film, which can be removed after cooling with a washcloth. It's ready to eat. Your carp is ready to eat and can be used like canned tuna or salmon.



FISHIN' with Mike Miller

Match the Hatch

I've said it before, but it's important, so I'll say it again: Gizzard shad are at the top of the menu for nearly all of our reservoir sport fish. And they are particularly important in the fall when they are numerous, just the right size for fish food, and predatory fish are stocking up on groceries before cold weather hits.

Gizzard shad spawn in late-April and May, and the young-of-the-year (YOY) shad get big enough to attract attention from fish such as crappie, white bass and walleye in late June and early July. They are often about 2.5 to 3.5 inches long by late summer. In September and October, they are perfect, bite-size morsels for most game fish. In late summer and early fall, open-water predators such as white bass, striped bass, and wipers will feast on



YOY shad schools, pinning them on the water's surface. Anglers can capitalize on this activity by watching for commotion on the surface or watching for birds. Gulls and terns will also get in on the action, swooping down to pick up confused and wounded shad that don't get eaten by fish. When an angler gets within casting distance of one of these melees, just about any lure, as long as it's white, chartreuse or silver, will catch fish.

A white spinnerbait with silver blades can represent a school of shad to largemouth and smallmouth bass. And every brand of crankbait has a shad model, some built for shallow water and some that go deep. Of course, any jig with a white body will catch fish feeding on shad. My favorite is a Sassy Shad body in a white color.

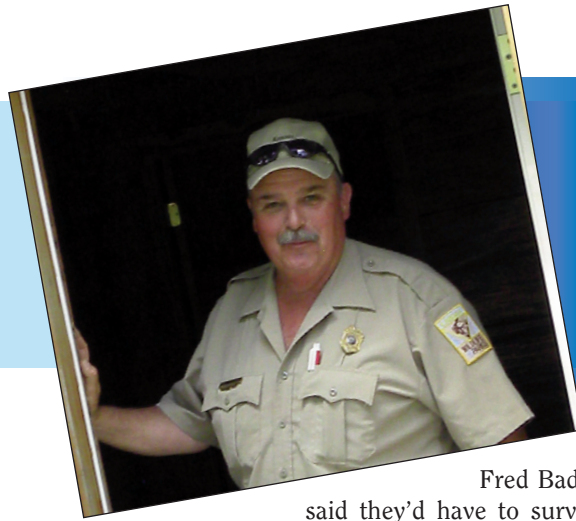
I also like a white tube, soft jerk bait and white swim bait.

Find shad and you'll find the rest. When it's calm, look for surface feeding fish. If you don't see surfacing fish, cast along rap-rap shorelines, standing timber, banks where river channels swing near the shore, and humps or rockpiles. If the weather cools, hunt for shad in the backs of coves and creeks and rivers. Forget Nemo, find shad.

PROFILE:

with Mark Shoup

Rick Cleveland



In 1958, the Bureau of Reclamation finished Lovewell Reservoir, near the Nebraska border in Jewell County, and appointed Randall Cleveland the first superintendent of the lake. On June 29, 1959, he moved his wife and three-year-old son, Rick, to a house on the lake. It was Rick's birthday. Rick Cleveland would spend the rest of his life there – to date, at least – and eventually become the manager of Lovewell State Park, which graces the lake's northeast banks.

"I grew up fishing and swimming and playing on this lake," Cleveland told me over a pulled-pork sandwich on the Lovewell Marina veranda in late May. "Family friends would come by here to vacation, and it was my job to entertain them." It would seem he was groomed for his career at an early age.

Cleveland graduated from Mankato High School in 1973 and went to work at Tony's Pizza in Salina. But he had worked as a seasonal at the park since April 15, 1971, so he had other aspirations.

"Dad and I raised cattle while I was growing up, so I had the money for college," Cleveland explained. "I wanted to be a game warden, but at the time, I thought spending my money on college would be a waste, and I'd worked summers at the park since I was 16, so I thought my chance to work there would eventually come around."

Frugality was essential to Cleveland because he married in November of 1973 and was preparing to support a family. And the Tony's job would only last six months although he received six promotions in that time. On Feb. 17, 1974, park manager Sylvan Harris asked Cleveland to come back to the park as a full-time maintenance man. Nine months out of high school, and his career was on its way.

In 1978, Cleveland graduated from the Kansas Law Enforcement Training Center and was hired as the Lovewell park ranger, and in 1987, he advanced to park manager. In 1989, he was promoted to field supervisor for what was then the agency's Parks and Public Lands Division, overseeing operations at Lovewell State Park and Wildlife Area (WA), Jamestown WA, Jewell State Fishing Lake, and Brzon WA. In 1995, the agency reorganized, separating parks and public lands into separate divisions, and Cleveland was given the choice of remaining at Lovewell as the park manager or moving to Hays as the Region 1 Parks Division supervisor. He stayed.

"I got to stay home," he mused. "We lived in Courtland, where we have raised our kids, and we didn't want to move."

While Cleveland prides himself on maintaining a crew that can do everything from electrical and plumbing work to planting trees, he believes his great career accomplishment was dredging of Marina Cove to allow more access for boats.

"The marina docks were unusable when the water was down," Cleveland explained, "so I talked to our chief engineer at the time,

Fred Badders, and he said they'd have to survey the place to see how many cubic feet of mud would have to be removed. But I knew I could do it myself. In the winter, I set a depth-finder on ice every 10 feet and figured it from that. Dredge America did the work, and now you can get to the boat docks when the water is 8 feet low."

When asked who most influenced him in his career, he mentions former wildlife officer Gary Heskett.

"I grew up with Gary around," Cleveland said. "I always looked up to him, and when I came to work here, he helped me with law enforcement issues a lot. But I've worked with a lot of great people over the years."

Cleveland bears affection for both people and KDWPT. "This agency means a lot to me," he said. "My son, Landon, is wildlife officer, so it's in the family. I just hope people recognize how important outdoor recreation is. We need leaders who will work for these goals. Most importantly, what makes a good field person is someone who participates in what he provides. If you don't camp, how can you run a good campground. To manage a wildlife area, you have hunt. Employees have to be constituents."

Cleveland retired June 12, but it wasn't easy. "It's going to be hard to quit," he told me, adding that he'd like to be hired part-time. "This place is home, my 'family farm.' I love this place, and I'm reminded of it every day, even when I look at the scar on my knee from a fall I took playing on the rocks by the lake when I was 12."

As we ate lunch, we were interrupted by a constituent who wanted to know why the water hoses on the fish cleaning stations weren't longer. At first, I thought the interruption might be considered rude, but Cleveland seemed to appreciate it. As it turns out, the man wanted longer hoses so he could clean the stations better. He was trying to help. This is the kind of respect Cleveland garnered over the years, a mutual respect between customer and provider. It's an attitude that even spilled over into Cleveland's hiring practices.

"Even with seasonals, I want people who can do all of it," he told me. "Even office staff sometimes drive a truck or run a mower. We're here to serve."

Cleveland's service will be missed, but his example leaves a legacy at Lovewell that will likely continue. And those regular Lovewell State Park users don't need to worry about missing him. He'll most likely be around, even if it's as one of those he served for years.

HUNTING SPOTS

with Marc Murrell

THERE REALLY IS SUCH THING AS A SNIPE

It's a well-known childhood prank. A group of kids organize a snipe hunt and lay a tactical plan to catch this elusive critter under the cover of the darkness. Everyone is onto the trick, other than one poor, unsuspecting soul who's usually the new kid on the block or the most gullible.

So off the posse would go and place their victim in a strategic location with last minute instructions on how it all works. They leave the sitting duck in the middle of the woods holding a burlap sack, promising to return as they drive the snipe toward him. And then as fast as they can they run back home. They laugh the entire time about the poor kid standing in the middle of the night holding a bag waiting on a critter that doesn't exist.

But the joke might be on them. Snipe are indeed real and frequent Kansas' wetlands during their spring and fall migrations. And hunters who venture to any of these areas know snipe can provide some of the best wingshooting opportunities found in the Midwest. They're often overlooked and rarely hunted despite a liberal bag limit or eight and lengthy season (September to mid-December).

A good snipe hunt can be the perfect

end to a morning duck hunt as I witnessed first-hand one October day at Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area several years ago. I donned a pair of hip boots and shed a sweat-shirt and doused myself in bug spray. I loaded up a shell belt with a couple boxes of steel No. 7s and pulled my camo cap down tight against a 30 mph southerly breeze.

Snipe are commonly found around the edges of wetlands where they probe the mud with their long bills for small invertebrates. The best approach is to walk in water barely covering your boots as you silently ease along the edge of the marsh.

It took only a few minutes before I flushed the first snipe. Snipe are solitary, generally, but can also be found in small groups. Identification is critical as other shorebirds look similar to the untrained eye. However, a snipe's flight and call are distinct, and once you've seen several, identification isn't a problem.

Hitting them in a 30 mph wind, however, can be a problem. They fly like an Etch-A-Sketch gone haywire or a butterfly on steroids. So you can imagine my delight when my shot folded the first bird cleanly. My joy would be short-lived, and



reality would soon rear its ugly head.

I flushed more snipe as I walked and occasionally one would fly into my shot string. Others would find a hole in my pattern and fly away unscathed. The good news was that there were plenty of snipe, and I had plenty of shells. Faith was restored when I managed to shoot my eighth and final snipe on my first snipe hunt without getting into the second box of shells.

I looked at my watch, and I hadn't been gone from the truck 30 minutes. I was about a half-mile from it, but the leisurely walk back was enjoyable as I watched ducks and more snipe. And I couldn't help but smile knowing that all those kids that didn't believe in snipe were missing something truly memorable.



Marc Murrell photos

The Wilson's snipe is one of the most abundant and widespread shorebirds in North America. It's roughly 10 inches tall with an 18-inch wingspan and weighs from 3-5 ounces. The name "snipe" is derived from "snite," a variant of "snout," and refers to the bird's long bill, which has sensory pits near the tip that it uses to detect prey as it probes into the mud. Snipe eyes are set far back on the head and provide full vision to both sides and a binocular overlap to the rear, allowing it to detect predators while its beak is buried. It eats insect larvae, crustaceans, earthworms and mollusks.

It nests in a variety of marshes, bogs and willow or alder swamps in May or June in the northern United States and Canada. Incubation of several eggs by the female and takes 18-20 days. Both the male and female care for chicks, and the young can fly 19-20 days after hatching.

Snipe migrate south, flying mostly at night from mid-July to December, some birds wintering as far south as South America although some stay along the coastal and inland areas of the United States.

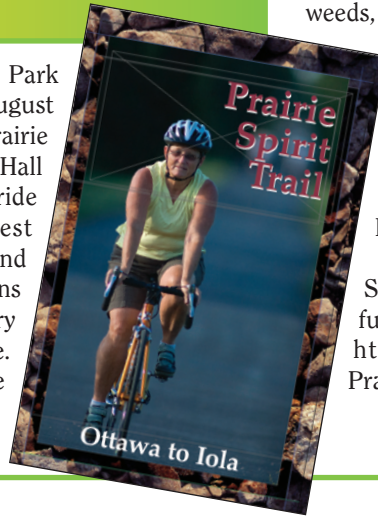
PARK VIEW

with Kathy Pritchett

Trail of the Month

KDWPT's own Prairie Spirit Rail Trail State Park has been designated "Trail of the Month" for August by the Rails to Trails Conservancy. Further, Prairie Spirit has been added to the RTC's Rail-Trail Hall of Fame. Not only is the trail an easy bike ride through some of the most diverse and rarest prairie ecosystems in the world, it broke ground as one of the first successful rail-trail conversions in Kansas. Travelers can also sample the history and vitality of the small towns along the route. New businesses catering to travelers have opened along the trail.

When the trail began, residents in the



towns bordering the trail feared an influx of hoodlums and transients. Instead, what they found was an influx of tourists spending time and money in their towns and, in state management, a good neighbor that controlled noxious weeds, trimmed trees and repaired fences. Manager Trent

McCown and Ranger Jim Manning patrol the trail regularly, in addition to their time spent maintaining the trail. When the third phase of the trail opened in 2008, it gave bicyclists and hikers the opportunity to travel in safety from Ottawa in northeast Kansas to Iola in southeast Kansas.

To read what RTC has to say about Prairie Spirit, go online to <http://www.railstotrails.org>. For further information from the KDWPT website, see <http://ksoutdoors.com/State-Parks/Locations/Prairie-Spirit-Trail>.

Kansas History

by Ron Kaufman

CEDAR BLUFF STATE PARK

Cedar Bluff State Park in central Kansas is the gateway to a canyon noted for its historic significance. Threshing Machine Canyon, accessible by a road west of the park, was the site of a station on Butterfield's Overland Despatch (BOD) or the Smoky Hill Trail, called Bluffton Station.

In 1867, a wagon train transporting a threshing machine to Brigham Young in Salt Lake City camped for the night beneath a bluff overlooking the canyon floor. A group of Native Americans attacked the encampment, killed the travelers, and set the threshing machine on fire. Remains of the old burned threshing machine could be seen for years.

Travelers along the trail carved their names in the limestone bluffs. Threshing Machine Canyon was visited as early as 1849 (quite possibly earlier) and up to the present. In the historic canyon, you will find carvings dating back to the mid-1800s, and some are still visible today. Many of the inscriptions were carved by the "Pike's Peakers" in 1859 and U.S. cavalrymen (3rd Wisconsin and 13th Missouri) traveling along the BOD in 1865.

The canyon is located in the Cedar Bluff Wildlife Area, west of the Bluffton portion of the state park. Visit the Cedar Bluff State Park office for location information. The park is located 13 miles south of I-70, exit 135, on K-147 highway.



AMERICAN BISON

It's impossible to appreciate Kansas history without paying tribute to the majestic American bison, the Kansas state mammal. The American bison, also called the buffalo, inspires awe in almost all who encounter the species. The plains bison subspecies was once prevalent throughout Kansas. With males (called bulls) weighing up to a ton each, bison were an important source of food, shelter, clothing, fuel, tools and other survival essentials for Native Americans of the plains. Only a handful of wild bison herds remain, the most notable of which is in Yellowstone National Park. Most American bison are kept in managed herds on private or public land. In Kansas, the last wild bison was killed in 1879 as it grazed with domestic cattle at Point of Rocks, north of Elkhart in the far southwest corner of Kansas. Point of Rocks, a landmark on the Cimarron Cutoff of the old Santa Fe Trail, is now a part of the Cimarron National Grasslands.

KDWPT offers several opportunities to view public bison herds in historic settings, including Maxwell Wildlife Refuge, Sandsage Bison Range and Wildlife Area, and Big Basin Prairie Preserve.

1861 KANSAS 2011

WHAT'S WILD ANYMORE?

THAT'S WILD
with Ken Brunson

I've witnessed some tremendous wildlife management success stories though my career. I've seen turkey, deer, and goose populations recover – to even nuisance levels in some parts of Kansas. I remember seeing my first deer along the South Fork Solomon River at Stockton – there due to management efforts by some of my mentors in this agency. I was part of the first modern day firearm and bow seasons for deer and turkey. I've seen the Soil Bank Program and in recent decades, the Conservation Reserve Program, provide outstanding hunting opportunities; and the advent of lake and reservoir fishing opportunities blossom through the past 30-plus years. I've seen streams benefit from better regulation of pollution and better technologies for controlling runoff. Farm programs have addressed pressing needs in private land and water conservation efforts. Bald eagles and peregrine falcons have been removed from the Endangered Species List. Black-footed ferrets, once suspected extinct, have once again become a component of the state's fauna. And waterfowl populations have rebounded well.

Hunters and anglers have funded most of these great wildlife success stories. They, with other multitudes, also supported incredible wildlife and environmental protection programs inspired four decades ago. The dawn of "modern" environmental laws happened at a time of great social upheaval of the late 1960s and

early 1970s. The clean water and air acts, the National Environmental Policy Act, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act, and the Endangered Species Act were all spawned from the national concerns about imminent threats to our land, water, and wildlife.

Unfortunately, there is a reality check for today's challenges in wildlife management. We are staged to lose whole groups of animals, not just one species at a time. We are peering into the maw of some daunting death jaws, including the threats from exotic sources such as white-nose syndrome in bats, zebra mussels in streams and lakes, sericia lespedeza on our prairies, and Asian carp species in our rivers are poised to demolish our native ecosystems. The menacing encroachment of eastern red cedar and other woody plants into our grasslands threatens most prairie birds. And amphibian populations face threats from pesticides, chitrid fungus and climate change.

To make matters worse, the public may be largely ignorant – a public that on one hand doesn't understand natural ecosystems and on the other has misplaced sensitivities – a public more inclined to believe in superstition than science. When a large segment of the public believes that feral household cats and wild horses deserve the same reverence as native species, we have failed in the conservation

education arena. When many of our politicians believe its time to gut wildlife and environmental legislation even on the heels of major pollution disasters, the conservation alert meter is pegging out.

To work in wildlife management is to be an incessant optimist – well mostly. Being an optimist, I can see the great accomplishments. Being a realist, I see daunting threats right here. The list of threatened ecosystems and species expand at the rate at which exotic species, pollution, weakening of legislation, and public ignorance dictates. This is not an optimistic reality. Countering these threats will require some major economic and political will if we expect to leave any meaning to the words "natural resources" to the next generation. It's going to mean buckling down on land and water conservation efforts. It can be done. Imagine the possibilities if the country could muster the same kind of war on exotic species and environmental threats as we are currently involved in politically. We have just one environment. We can leave it in better shape for our kids if we can overcome ignorance, political pandering, and greed. It won't take all that much time to tell whether this generation cares as it once did 40 years ago. On that count, I'm frankly not very optimistic.

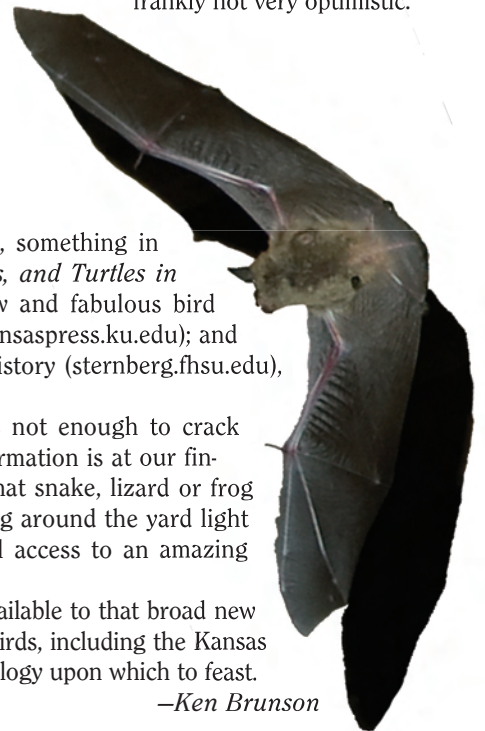
BATTY OVER BOOKS

Kansas has an incredible treasure of natural history books and guides for the state, something in which we can take great pride. Recent and excellent works include *Amphibians, Reptiles, and Turtles in Kansas*, published by Eagle Mountain Publishing (eaglemountainpublishing.com); a new and fabulous bird book, *Birds of Kansas*, published and available through the University Press of Kansas (kansaspress.ku.edu); and *Bats of Kansas*, an outstanding work available from the Sternberg Museum of Natural History (sternberg.fhsu.edu), the Kansas Wetlands Education Center (wetlandscenter.fhsu.edu), and other outlets.

But in this modern electronic media age, having outstanding printed publications is not enough to crack nature deficit disorder. Fortunately, easy electronic access to most of this outstanding information is at our fingertips. You can search Google using "Kansas herp atlas" for instant information about that snake, lizard or frog in your hands. Google "Kansas mammals atlas" to learn about the bats you might see flying around the yard light at night. Or buy the books for yourselves and your kids and use the web for additional access to an amazing amount of information based on good science.

Hopefully, the incredible information in the new *Birds of Kansas* book will one day be available to that broad new contingent of iPhone users, as well. For now, there is still a plethora of web information on birds, including the Kansas Ornithological Society's website, ksbirds.org, where inquiring minds can find plenty of bird biology upon which to feast.

—Ken Brunson



SIDE-SCAN SONAR

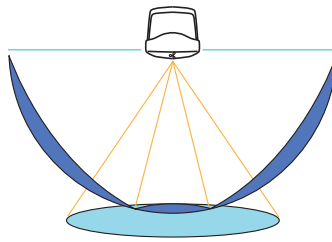
KDWPT Law Enforcement uses a variety of techniques and equipment to protect our resources and keep outdoor users safe. Training and experimenting with new technology keeps officers up-to-date.

Eric Deneault, a natural resource officer based in Circleville in Jackson County, is a boating and water safety officer and has used Hummingbird Side-Scan Sonar units to assist in law enforcement duties. A side-scan unit uses a sonar device that sends fan-shaped pulses up to 240 feet to the left and right of the boat, perpendicular to the path of the transducer through the water. These units provide detailed imagery of what's below the boat, as well as what is on either side of the boat's path.

A regular transducer sends a pulse straight down below the boat in a cone-shaped area. This new technology provides much more detail of the lake bottom below and on either side of the boat. The detailed images can be very useful in water rescue and recovery efforts.

While practicing a water recovery training exercise with city and county emergency management teams, Deneault was using the side-scan sonar to locate a sunken dummy. Deneault had recently worked with the side-scan sonar's local dealership for training and was using his newly-learned techniques.

Deneault was taking the boat back to the ramp after the water rescue training had ended. The sonar equipment was left



on when something caught his eye on the sonar's screen – an outline of a truck.

"It was obviously a truck. You could see the bed of the truck and everything," he said. There was indeed a truck at the bottom of Hillsdale Reservoir.

While primarily used to recover drowning victims, the side-arm sonar can also be used to locate large objects at the bottom of the lake.

Deneault stumbled upon this use, but the results helped bring closure to two families.

Since the find at Hillsdale, Deneault has scanned several lakes and twice has located vehicles that held human remains. The first discovery was at Clinton Lake. The body was identified as a 38-year old woman who had been missing since 2004.

"After the vehicle had been pulled from the water and the body identified, the victim's dad kept telling me, 'We always had a feeling she was in the lake,'" Deneault said.

The second vehicle was recovered in June from Lake Shawnee. According to Deneault, "the car was submerged in very shallow water – only about 9 feet of water." The body was identified as an elderly Milwaukee man who disappeared in 1984.

In addition to rescue and recovery, the sonar can also be used to find and mark underwater obstacles such as sunken bridges or rocky areas.

Additional sonar units will be purchased and will allow the agency to respond faster during emergencies. "More units mean we won't waste precious time during rescue operations," Deneault said. — *Kathleen Dultmeier*

DUCKS AT ALL-TIME HIGH

Duck hunters found plenty to cheer about in the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) annual breeding population and habitat survey, released in early July. Conducted each May by USFWS and the Canadian Wildlife Service, this year's survey reveals the second-highest pond count and a record 45.6 million ducks, the most since the survey was started in 1955. Blue-winged teal, shovelers, and redheads soared to record levels, and mallard, pintail, canvasback, and gadwall numbers rose substantially from 2010.

The only species of concern are the American wigeon, which fell 14 percent from last year to 2.1 million and is now 20 percent below average, and green-winged teal, off 17 percent to 2.9 million but still 47 percent higher than average.

Across the U.S. side of the region, the last three years have been the wettest since pond counts began. The 3.2 million ponds inventoried in the U.S. this spring were the most on record. The 4.9 million ponds in prairie Canada were 43 percent more than the long-term average, which dates back to 1955, and brings

the total pond count across the traditional survey area to 8.1 million, second only to the 8.3 million recorded in 1974.

Not surprisingly, all that water attracted a record number of ducks. The 12.5 million breeding ducks that settled in the eastern half of the Dakotas was the most ever and was 172 percent above average.

The following chart reveals the changes in number of ponds from last year, as well as the changes in numbers of the 10 most common duck species in the Central Flyway, as well as the change from long-term averages.

Species	2011 (millions)	2010 (millions)	% Change from 2010	% Change long-term ave.
Mallard	9.183*	8.430	+9	+22
Gadwall	3.257	2.977	+9	+80
American wigeon	2.084	2.425	-14	-20
Green-winged teal	2.900	3.476	-17	+47
Blue-winged teal	8.948*	6.329	+41	+91
Northern shoveler	4.641	4.057	+14	+98
Northern pintail	4.429*	3.509	+26	+10
Redhead	1.356	1.064	+27	+106
Canvasback	0.692	0.585	+18	+21
Scaup	4.319	4.244	+2	-15
May Ponds (U.S. & Can.)	8.132*	6.665	+22	+62
Total Ducks	45.554*	40.895	+11	+35

*Indicates significant change from 2010

common duck species in the Central Flyway, as well as the change from long-term averages.

An uninterrupted wet cycle that began in the U.S. in 1994, millions of acres of dense nesting cover provided by the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), and an outbreak of mange that has kept fox numbers in check are factors contributing to unprecedented duck numbers in recent years.

While the USFWS Fall Flight Forecast has yet to be completed, the number of nesting ducks bodes well for strong numbers once birds migrate south in the fall. Kansas

hunters only need to hope for rain to ensure that birds stop as they migrate south this fall.

—*KDWPT News*

NEW COMMISSIONERS

Governor Sam Brownback has appointed three new commissioners to the Kansas Wildlife, Parks and Tourism Commission. The terms of commissioners Kelly Johnston, Doug Sebelius, and Sheri Wilson expired June 30, 2011, and all have been replaced.

Replacing Johnston, Randy Doll, Leon, is currently the president and managing partner of Doll Real Estate Services, L.L.C. He is a lifelong Kansan and an avid outdoorsman. Doll has over 25 years of experience in business and governmental arenas, giving the commission a well-rounded background that has focused on excellence in performance and quality of product and service.

Replacing Sebelius, Tom Dill, Salina, is currently a financial advisor at Edward Jones. He received his degree in accounting and agricultural economics from Kansas State University. Dill has more than 30 years of bowhunting experience and has incorporated a wildlife and quality deer management program on his farm.

Replacing Wilson is Kansas City native Donald Budd Jr. Budd

is an entrepreneur and owner of Budd Enterprises, an agricultural and real estate firm. Budd has been a small business owner in Kansas for more than 30 years. An avid waterfowl and deer hunter, Budd is also a life member of the Kansas Trap Shooters Association and the National Amateur Trap Shooters Association.

Gerald Lauber, Topeka, is the new chairman of the commission, and Frank Meyer, Herrington, is vice-chairman.

KDWPT is administered by Secretary Robin Jennison and is advised by the seven-member Wildlife, Parks and Tourism Commission. All positions are appointed by the Governor with the commissioners serving staggered four-year terms. Serving as a regulatory body for the agency, the Commission is a non-partisan board – made up of no more than four members of any one political party – that advises the Secretary on planning and policy issues regarding administration of the department.

—KDWPT News

COMMERCIAL OPERATIONS FILL NICHE

Surveys indicate a primary reason that hunters miss a season or two is lack of time. Weekends are filled with job responsibilities, family events and other commitments. Before long, hunting season has sadly passed without a single round fired. But there is a less time-consuming option: a hunting lodge or professionally managed hunting operation.

Kansas has more than 70 licensed commercial hunting operations that provide a wide variety of hunting services to busy hunters. These businesses and other controlled shooting areas (CSA) are private fee-to-hunt areas licensed by KDWPT. Because CSAs release pen-reared birds, the CSA season begins earlier, Sept. 1, and ends later, March 31.

A hunting lodge or professionally managed hunting operation provides services ranging from do-it-yourself day-hunts to fully-guided hunts with guides, dogs, meals and room accommodations.

"Some customers want many services, so our facility provides food, lodging and field dogs. Other customers only want a hunt and will bring their own dog and stay somewhere else. The industry is driven by customer service," said Ken Corbet, owner of Ravenwood Lodge, Topeka, and president of Kansas Sport Hunting Association (KSHA).

According to Corbet, professional hunting operations range from basic,



such as providing access to hunting land, to a five-star hotel experience.

"Professionally managed operations are like any other businesses. We have three things to sell: quality service and product. We work hard to provide a productive hunt with excellent customer service. We have high standards in the industry," Corbet said.

Steve Bittel, KSHA executive director, said his associates provide many advantages for hunters. According to Bittel, a managed operation is a great way to introduce kids or new shooters to hunting.

"It hooks them because it's a great hunt," Bittel said.

A CSA also removes the burden of

getting permission to hunt private land, which some hunters are reluctant to do.

Bittel adds that managed operations provide a convenient way for older hunters who lack the stamina or mobility to enjoy a day with younger hunters. "We are selling memories and experiences," Bittel said. He added that some hunters want to relive the past and pass along hunting traditions. "The feeling you have after hunting and you are gathering around a good meal, that's the whole experience."

For more information about professionally managed hunting operations visit www.huntkansas.org.

—Kathleen Dultmeier

The best times of your life just got less expensive

photo Mike Blair

He'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 in the field with your son by purchasing a multi-year youth hunting license.

The Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism 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 - Jan. 8, 2012
- Archery Extended Whitetail Antlerless Season (DMU 19 only): Jan. 9 - Jan. 31, 2012
- Special Extended Firearms Whitetail Antlerless Season: Jan. 9 - Jan.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 - Oct. 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

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

EARLY TEAL

- High Plains Season: Sept. 17-25, 2011
- Low Plains Season: Sept. 10-25, 2011
- Daily bag limit: 4
- Possession limit: 8

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: High Plains
Oct. 8-Jan. 2, 2012 and Jan. 21-29, 2012
- Season: Low Plains Early Zone
Oct. 8-Dec. 4, 2011 and Dec. 17-Jan. 1, 2012
- Season: Low Plains Late Zone
Oct. 29-Jan. 1, 2012 and Jan. 21-29, 2012
- Season: Low Plains Southeast Zone
Nov. 5-Jan. 8, 2012 and Jan. 21-29, 2012
- Daily bag limit: 6 (see regulations)

CANADA GEESE

- Season: Oct. 29-Nov. 6 and Nov. 9-Feb. 12, 2012
- Daily bag limit: 3

WHITE-FRONTED GEESE

- Season: Oct. 29-Jan. 1, 2012 and Feb. 4-12, 2012
- Daily bag limit: 2

LIGHT GEESE

- Season: Oct. 29-Nov. 6 and Nov. 9-Feb. 12, 2012
- Daily bag limit: 20
Conservation order: Feb. 13-April 30, 2012

YOUTH WATERFOWL

- Season: High Plains and Low Plains Early
Oct. 1-2, 2011
- Season: Low Plains Late and Southeast
Oct. 22-23, 2011

UPLAND GAME BIRDS

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
- Daily Bag Limit: 2 (East and Northwest Units)
1 (Southwest Unit)

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: 8 in regular season,
4 in youth season

FURBEARERS

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 - Nov. 1, 2011

BEAVER/OTTER TRAPPING

- Season: Nov. 16, 2011 - March 31, 2012
(Statewide otter harvest quota of 100, two per trapper)

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

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

BULLFROG

- July 1-Oct. 31, 2011
- Daily creel limit: 8

SHOREBIRD FREQUENT FLYER MILES

In Greenwood County this upland sandpiper stands on the top of a fencepost to get a better view of its Flint Hills summer home.



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

More than 30 species of shorebirds, numbering in the hundreds of thousands, can be found in Kansas each year. A few of these stay to breed, but most are migrants. Although shorebirds are found in every county, the wetlands of Barton and Stafford counties provide many of these travelers the luxury rest stop they need. These ultra-flyers use tremendous amounts of energy, and these two wetlands and their associated mudflats produce such high-quality food resources that both Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area and Quivira National Wildlife Refuge are designated as Wetlands of International Importance. But it's not just the wetlands that attract shorebirds to Kansas. Some species nest and forage in our grasslands and one species, the American woodcock, nests in the woodlands of eastern Kansas. Shorebirds vary greatly in their behavior, feeding habits, migration patterns and reproduction strategy. This diversity makes shorebirds fascinating subjects to study.

Upland Sandpiper

– Home on the range –

This is a common summer resident on the tallgrass prairies of eastern Kansas and less common in western Kansas. A spring tour through the rolling Flint Hills will usually find upland sandpipers checking out the views from the tops of fence posts. Their song, given in flight or from their fence-post perch, is a series of gurgling notes that rise, then fall in a long, descending "wolf whistle." It's a favorite sound to those who love the prairies. From their nests, hidden under drooping clumps of dense grass, chicks emerge in June. Each autumn these sandpipers migrate from their homes on our rangelands to similar grasslands on the pampas of southern South America.

After migrating through Kansas from southern South America, this American golden-plover was photographed on its nesting territory on the tundra of northern Manitoba, Canada.



American Golden-Plover

– *Long-distance migrant* –

From southern South America to northern Canada, the American golden-plover makes a 12,000-mile round-trip migration each year. This shorebird is more at home on grasslands than shorelines. During our winter, this plover feeds on summer insects on the pampas of Argentina and Uruguay. In late March, flocks depart for eastern Peru, then take off for a nonstop 2,000-mile flight to grasslands in Texas. Then they're off to the Great Plains where the freshly burnt prairies of the Kansas Flint Hills provide easy pickings of lightly roasted grasshoppers. Another 2,000 miles to the tundra breeding grounds is their final destination. Golden-plovers are monogamous. They migrate together and arrive on the nesting grounds already paired. After the young begin to fly, the parents abandon them. By mid-August, most of the adults are heading south by a different route. They gather in Labrador and Nova Scotia before flying south over the Atlantic. Most arrive on the wintering grounds by the end of September. All of the young birds and a few adults follow the safer, more leisurely, spring migration route and arrive several months later.

Pectoral Sandpiper

– *Siberia or bust* –

Here's another long-distance migrant. From southern South America, these birds are often encountered feeding in Kansas before continuing to their breeding grounds on Arctic coastal tundra. A few of these birds even cross the Bering Sea and nest in northern Siberia. A bird that was banded in Kansas in 1970 was captured by a cat on the northeastern coast of Siberia in 1972. When alerted, these birds often assume a strange upright posture with neck extended. Male pectoral sandpipers have air sacs that lie beneath the skin of the neck and breast. Males inflate these during courtship displays on the breeding grounds while producing a low, hollow booming sound.



An alert pectoral sandpiper stands tall at Quivira National Wildlife Refuge.



Black-necked stilts strut after copulation at Quivira National Wildlife Refuge.

Black-necked Stilt

– Check out the legs! –

These elegant, long-legged birds are easily found every summer nesting at Quivira National Wildlife Refuge and Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area. They feed in shallow waters that are deeper than those used by shorebirds with shorter legs. They move slowly and pick food from the surface of the water. Aquatic insects as well as small fish and occasionally tiny frogs are favored prey. When disturbed near their nests or young, they don't fly away or try to hide. They fly overhead, calling loudly, warning every other bird in the marsh that an intruder is present. Nearby stilts join the fracas and soon a small flock of screaming birds is circling overhead, making the intruder uncomfortable enough to retreat.

Long-billed Dowitcher

– *Sewing machine bird* –

During both spring and fall migration, large flocks of these birds descend on high-quality wetlands for refueling. Both long-billed dowitchers and short-billed dowitchers feed with unique head movements. Their heads probe, bobbing up and down in rapid “sewing machine” fashion. In tight flocks, they wade in the shallows “stitching” for insect larvae. At Cheyenne Bottoms they find a rich food reservoir in tiny midge larvae, referred to as bloodworms because of their color. Because of the mud at Cheyenne Bottoms can have a bloodworm density of approaching 50 per inch, the birds find plenty to eat and quickly replenish their dwindling fat reserves. Long-billed dowitchers spend their winters along the southern and western coastal areas of the U.S. and Mexico and breed on the coastal tundra of western Canada, Alaska and Siberia.



This long-billed dowitcher stretches after feeding in the shallows of Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area.

Ruddy Turnstone

– *Searching for buried treasure* –

This strikingly colored shorebird has a unique feeding behavior. Its name hints at its habit of looking under things. When foraging, turnstones walk quickly and with the tip of their bill, flip stones, shells, vegetation and pieces of wood, then snap up prey hiding beneath. Ruddy turnstones are one of the most widespread of all shorebird species and can be found on coasts of every continent except Antarctica. Birds passing through Kansas may be seen along the coastlines of Texas and Mexico during our winters. They breed on the tundra of high Arctic islands of northern Canada. Southbound migration finds most ruddy turnstones passing through Kansas in mid-September.

Before continuing its migration north through the Great Plains this ruddy turnstone searches for food around a dead jellyfish on a Texas beach.



Mountain Plover

– *Prairie Ghosts* –

From their winter homes in the arid grasslands of northern Mexico and southern Texas, mountain plovers frequently migrate in nonstop flights to their breeding grounds. These are not typical shorebirds searching for wetlands, playas and mudflats. In fact, these shorebirds are seldom found near water. Nor, as their name implies, do they go to the mountains. They're at home on dry, flat, arid shortgrass prairies of the western Great Plains and Colorado Plateau. A few nest in the southwestern corner of Kansas. In these arid lands, they feed on a variety of insects. They're so difficult to find in this landscape that they've been given the nickname of "Prairie Ghost." Rather than flying away when disturbed, they often face away from searchers and squat motionless. These drab birds literally disappear.



On the Cimarron National Grassland in southwestern Kansas, this mountain plover fluffs its feathers to invite a hiding fledgling to its parent's warmth.

Wilson's Phalarope

– *Strange feeding style and gender role reversal* –

Wilson's phalaropes winter in southern South America. Most nest in the prairie potholes of the northern Great Plains, but a few nest in our central Kansas wetlands. Flocks of thousands gather each spring to feed at Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira. Birders and non-birders love watching the feeding frenzy of a flock of phalaropes. The lobe-toed phalaropes swim dizzily in rapid, tight circles. Each bird creates a small vortex in the water that brings insects and larvae to the surface where they can be easily picked up. Some swim clockwise and some counter-clockwise. Unlike most birds, female phalaropes are more brightly colored than males. Females court the males and lay the eggs. Then the plainly colored males take over incubating the eggs and raising the chicks.






Mined Land Wildlife Area **PARADISE RECLAIMED**

Mike Blair photo

by J. Mark Shoup
associate editor, Pratt

The Cherokee Lowlands region of far southeast Kansas was once so badly scarred by surface coal mining that much of the region resembled a moonscape. Today, through the efforts of dedicated KDWPT staff and partners, the damaged landscape has been transformed into a paradise unimaginable 40 years ago.



The Cherokee Lowlands region of southeastern Kansas was once a flat, open plain cutting a tilted triangle across the eastern corners of Labette and Crawford counties and encompassing most of Cherokee County, which is just above the bottom tip of the triangle, and boasts a small point of the Ozarks. Laid down some 300 million years ago during the Carboniferous (coal-bearing) Age, great swamps covered the area at the edge of the sea, creating dense bogs of giant ferns and other vegetation that died and were pressed

into coal by the weight of time and younger sediments.

Hidden just beneath the surface for millions of years, coal now defines this part of the state and the portion we call the Mined Land Wildlife Area. As Europeans settled the area, this energy-rich mineral became the catalyst that transformed the Lowlands from plain to moonscape, then later to a “jungle” rich with vegetation, water, and wildlife. It only took man about 150 years to make the transformation that still continues today.

Most people familiar with the

area know of the giant steam and electric shovels that ripped the land in this region beginning in the mid-19th century. The largest of these, Big Brutus, remains as a 160-foot tall museum, reminding viewers of the overwhelming scope of activity. By the time shovels fell silent in the mid-1970s, the area looked as if Greek gods had plowed the earth, leaving furrows deeper than 60 feet and steep ridges nearly as high. Early 19th century trappers would not have recognized it.



Later in the mining period, conservationists recognized many of the environmental damages to the land. Laws were passed that required the coal companies to repair erosion issues and revegetate the disturbed earth.

In fact, as far back as 1926, the coal companies began to give away “useless” land, and some of it went to the Kansas Forestry, Fish and Game Commission. The largest parcel, 8,208 acres, was donated to the Kansas Fish and Game Commission in 1981. Today, the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) owns

A visitor stands atop Big Brutus, a 12-million pound electric coal shovel that still looms over Mined Land Area No. 44, providing a stark reminder of the forces that both ravished the landscape and created its lakes.

and operates 47 separate tracts (called “units”) throughout Labette, Cherokee, and Crawford counties, a total of 14,500 acres. Included in this are the area’s unintentional gems — hundreds of strip-mined lakes, often called “strip pits,” left when the region’s abundant 40-inch-per-year rainfall combined with groundwater to fill the mining ditches. Approximately 1,500 of these lakes, comprising 1,500 surface acres of water, grace the Mined Land Wildlife Area.

Today, driving east on U.S. Highway 400 across the rolling Osage Questas past Parsons, if you bounce off the highway down a dirt road near the small town of McCune, the disorientation is palpable. Suddenly, you find yourself in a maze of flat roads surrounded by dense woodland on all sides. The thick vegetation is a composition of hardwoods, vines, and brambles.

Say you stopped on one of the area’s 15-plus miles of interior roads or one of the section-line roads crisscrossing Mined Land. Say you decide to play Dr. Livingston and explore the jungle. If the greenbrier, blackberry, and other thorny plants don’t stop you within 50 feet, if the trumpet vine doesn’t entangle you, and you hack your way a few hundred yards back into the place, you might need a GPS unit to find your way out. It really is that dense and green.

“I’ve talked to a lot of people who have gone into an area and spent hours of extra time getting out,” says KDWPT Mined Land Wildlife Area manager Rob Riggan. “Fortunately, we’ve never had to go in and rescue anyone, but there are places that if you make the wrong turn, you’ll just keep running into water. But that’s what’s really neat about this area. It’s so green, and you have this dense wall of vegetation growing right up to the water’s edge.”

In other places, however, the roadsides open up to beautiful grasses, plains, and long “finger lakes” with some of the clearest water you’ll find anywhere. These



Whitetail deer and turkey are primary quarry on the wildlife area. Small game and furbearers, including otter, are also abundant.

lakes are incredible resources, and one could imagine staying here for several nights camping and fishing, or in the fall, spring, and winter, hunting deer and turkey. For years, the Mined Land Wildlife Area has slowly undergone transformation from wasteland to paradise through the process of succession and soil building.

But time alone has not been enough to transform all of the property into a productive wildlife area. During the mining process, clay, shale, and iron pyrite that was once buried as deep as 60 feet, was brought to the surface and exposed to oxygen. Oxidization and breakdown of the iron pyrite results in production of sulfuric acid. If not curtailed, acid mine drainage (AMD) accelerates the further breakdown of iron pyrite, causing the problem to exponentially increase. Although the mining companies were required to neutralize acidic soils with lime and revegetate mined areas from the early 1970s forward, several acid sites, called "hot spots," show up from time to time. When they occur, hotspots must be repaired by neutralizing the acid with lime.

KDWPT is not alone in these reclamation efforts. The National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) took on several moonscape-looking AMD sites on the wildlife area as projects. The NWTF provided funding to bulldoze and rip the soil, then work 85 tons of lime per acre into the earth and plant native grasses and 300 pin oaks, which are acid-tolerant. Today, those areas are fully revegetated to an oak savanna.

"They've put turkey habitat in a place where there was none," says Riggin. "This project will provide habitat for turkeys and other wildlife and improve the area for hunting and fishing. But the key for all wildlife is in native grass; we just need more of it."



The National Wild Turkey Federation, one of the area's many partners, reclaimed this once-barren area with native grasses and pin oaks.

Various types of vegetation were experimentally planted in the disturbed soils from the 1930s through the 1970s in an attempt to find a plant that could easily sustain itself in the poor soils for the purpose of stabilizing erosion. Many such plantings were very successful, and both constituents and wildlife benefit today from the efforts of those who planted many acres to bur oak and shagbark hickory. One can still see several ponderosa pines scattered about the area in a slightly less successful attempt. Still, KDWPT staff spend a considerable amount of time and money each year fighting the spread of kudzu, sericea lespedeza, and tall fescue — early

revegetation species that are less than ideal for wildlife.

The most dramatic changes on the wildlife area involve "safety reclamations," where strip-mine lakes push right next to roads, creating safety hazards for vehicles and causing damage to roadways. (In the 1990s, two people drowned when their vehicle slipped off the edge of one of these slopes.) In such cases, there are three solutions — move the water, move the road, or improve the slope on the shoreline. To improve the

slope, the edges of the pits have to be rip-rapped and filled in and the bank smoothed down gently to the pits. If soil acidity tests show highly acid content, the area must also be limed. In some areas, rock "toes" — resembling long rock and earthen piers — are built in the water alongside roads to reduce dangerous high-walls and stabilize shoreline.

This work often involves moving massive amounts of dirt from opposite banks, redirecting creeks that have been channelized, and creating new pits or mitigation marshes to offset changes to the landscape. In all cases, native vegetation must be replanted. None of this work is random.



Mark Shoup photos

Seventy boat ramps have been added to Mined Land's lakes, providing easy boating access, at non-wake speeds, for anglers, hunters, and campers.

“We don’t just dig anywhere,” Riggin explains. “We try to plan, so our constituents will have better access while wildlife and the environment benefit, as well. Because we have an overabundance of woodland and lack native grass openings that are vital to wildlife, we design safety reclamations to provide more openings. We’re always trying to improve habitat and access for hunters and anglers, and we take on big jobs as we can. We are very grateful to the Surface Mining Section of KDHE for the funding and engineering staff to design and implement such large-scale projects.”

The benefits of reclamation areas are multiple. Safety is improved; water, habitat, and open areas are created for wildlife; and hunters and anglers have greater access to the area’s natural resources. Marshes are created for waterfowl. Canals are sometimes dug, connecting lakes to improve boating access and adding miles of shoreline. And reshaping these pits often creates shallow-water spawning areas for fish.



Mark Shoup photo

Rock “toes” are built alongside some roads to reduce dangerous highwalls and stabilize shorelines, improving road safety and angler access.

The story of Mined Land is one of American dedication to repairing man-made damage to the earth. Many issues must be addressed here: creeks can cut into lakes and drain them; Eurasian watermilfoil has been found in some lakes; a few thoughtless visitors dump trash in the pits as generations before them have; older reclamation areas sometimes slough off near roads because they weren’t properly built; the pollutant perchlorate from a nearby explosives plant has leached into an adjacent strip-mine lake; phragmites, an exotic plant much like cattails, has invaded some waters and threatens to choke out native aquatic vegetation; and ADM sites kill vegetation along the banks of some pits.

And two abandoned coal cleaning facilities — called “tipple sites” — pock the landscape as if they were dropped from the surface of the moon.

These barren gray slurry basins and waste coal piles are where coal was hauled for washing before it was shipped out, and they are huge sources of acid drainage and sediment loading into the nearby Deer Creek. To address this issue, large berms have been built to hold back drainage, and filter valves have been installed for times of heavy rainfall to stop massive movement of sediments. These areas also contain a great deal of leftover coal, and plans are in the works to retain a private company to mine them, leaving these spots open to reclamation, as well.

In addition to lake reclamation, summer burning is an essential part of Mined Land’s management plan. The rugged topographical features leave many areas inaccessible for spraying and mowing. The result of no manipulation and much rainfall is dense tree and brush invasion. Burning throughout the growing season is a cost-effective tool and restores native grasses and opens up large open spaces and edge habitat for wildlife. Future plans include adding three new boat ramps to complement the 70 that have already been installed, renova-



Mark Shoup photo

Area manager Rob Riggin shows how burning can reduce invasive plants, which promotes native grasses.

tion of sizable acreages from fescue to native grasses, removal of brush and other woody invasion that encroach on grassy meadows, opening units 28 and 29 to public access, making further repairs to nearly breached slurry basins, and constructing a handicapped-accessible walkway to the Trout Lake fishing dock.

Managing such an area would overwhelm most people, but Riggins, one of several architects of these reclamations since taking over the area in 1997, is undeterred.

"I just think everything about this area is interesting," he says. "When I started with the agency in 1991, a lot of people thought this was the least desirable location in the state, but I saw potential. Now I think this wildlife area has so much more diversity than any place in the state."

For those who love to fish, more than 200 of the 1,500 lakes on the area are actively managed for fishing although most lakes have fish in them, and many have likely been unexplored. Largemouth bass, walleye, crappie, bluegill, channel catfish, redear sunfish, spotted bass, wipers, and war-



Mark Shoup photo

Two deluxe rental cabins overlook Trout Lake, which provides unique trout fishing year-round.

mouth are abundant, but the star of this show is largemouth bass. Bass measuring 18 to 19 inches are common in many lakes. The 28-acre Trout Lake (in Unit #30) harbors rainbow and brown trout year-round due to its deep, unstratified water. Riggins is not sure why the lake

doesn't stratify, but it is possible that water movement, perhaps through a submerged mine shaft, keeps the water cool and oxygenated for trout. He believes it's possible that other lakes on the area have similar water qualities that could sustain trout.

Although the lakes are mostly inaccessible to large boats, small boats, canoes, and float tubes are used frequently. Anyone who just loves to put a canoe or small boat on the water and cruise around will find themselves in heaven. Because they are quiet, canoes offer the intrepid wildlife watcher or photographer the opportunity to see many species



Rob Riggins photos

Water-control structures such as this (left) are installed by KDHE to replace undersized tubes. These structures can be used to raise lake water levels and inundate fish structure (right).





Mike Blair photo

Huge trenches from surface coal mining have now been reclaimed, both water and shoreline. Some 1,500 of these strip-mined lakes offer Mined Land Wildlife Area users exceptional fishing, and seclusion rarely found on other public areas.

up close in their natural habitat. This can be a special addition to a primitive camping trip in this wild landscape. (Note: motorized boats may be used at no-wake speeds only; water skiing and personal watercraft are not allowed. Swimming is not allowed either.) Primitive camping is allowed throughout the area, and two public-use cabins are available for rent on Trout Lake.

For hunters, pick a spot; deer and turkey hunting is excellent, and a few marshes hold waterfowl every year. Native grass establishments, timber stand improvement, food plots, and shrub planting, combined with annual burning, continue to improve habitat for these species, as well as rabbits and squirrels.

Furharvesters can expect to find ample numbers of raccoon, muskrat, bobcat, beaver, mink, fox, and coyote. And this year, trappers get a bonus — river otters. Otters are fairly numerous on the area,

and for the first time in modern history, trappers will be allowed to take two otters during the beaver tapping season until a statewide quota of 100 is harvested. (Be sure to check the *2011 Kansas Hunting and Furharvesting Regulation Summary*, for details.)

A special opportunity has also been created for dove hunters, youth in particular. Several dove fields are planted with sunflowers that attract thousands of doves each year. The fields are partially surrounded by trees, and area staff come in before harvest and clear spots to assist hunters with access and locating downed birds. They also girdle some trees in these spots, creating the dead-tree perches that doves prefer. One 12-acre field of sunflowers will be open to a limited number of mentored youth hunters on Sept. 1. Both mentors and youth will be able to hunt the field on Saturday, Sept. 3.

No matter what kind of outdoor

recreation you prefer, seclusion is icing on the cake at Mined Land. As Riggins asks rhetorically, “Where else can you find a small lake and have it to yourself for the weekend?” This is incredible considering that approximately 300,000 users of every stripe come here each year. Incredible dispersion, incredibly efficient use of the land.

Reclaiming Mined Land Wildlife is an ongoing effort and will be for many years to come, but so much has been done that you have to consider this one the greatest success stories in Kansas’ — and perhaps the nation’s — wildlife restoration history.

And there’s much more to tell. KDWPT recently acquired 3,000 acres of the nearby Kansas Army Ammunition Plant, which is shutting down. It will be a new wildlife area in the Cherokee Lowlands called the Grand Osage. So stay tuned; that’s another story. ♡

WHY YOUTH SEASONS?



by Mike Miller
editor, Pratt

Since 1996, Kansas has established special youth-only hunting seasons. Youth seasons generally open before regular seasons and provide excellent opportunities.

Chase was smugly confident as he sat in the wooden box blind on his first deer hunt. The 13-year-old from Wichita was part of the Harper County Youth Deer Hunt, an annual event that takes place during the youth deer season. The Harper County event has been conducted since 2000, which was Kansas' first youth deer season, and usually introduces 15 to 20 youngsters to deer hunting each September. The hunt is a big deal to the folks in Harper County and the city of Anthony. Local hunters and KDWPT staff serve as guides; local businesses provide food and drinks for the young hunters; landowners

open their land; and many also serve as guides. The Anthony Gun Club opens its grounds to the event, and the City of Anthony allows hunters to camp at the city lake. This youth deer hunt is a community effort. However, as I visited with Chase that evening, this deer hunt didn't seem like such a big deal to him.

Chase was glad to be on the hunt, don't get me wrong. He appreciated that Richard, his neighbor, was willing to bring him to Anthony so he could participate. Richard, who had grown up in Texas and hunted deer for years, lived next door to Chase and his mother in Wichita and knew Chase had an interest in

hunting. The Harper County hunt seemed like a perfect way to let Chase experience deer hunting.

Before the first evening's hunt, hunters, guides and KDWPT staff gathered at the Anthony Gun Club to register, learn about deer hunting and sight in rifles. I was helping with rifle sight-in, and Chase shot his very well. I was matched as a guide with he and Richard, and later that afternoon, we left for our pre-assigned hunting blind.

As we drove to the field, I talked with Chase about what he expected. He was excited, but he didn't think it would be too difficult. He was confident with his .243, and he was pretty good at a computer hunting game

he'd been playing.

When we arrived at our blind, though, I was not optimistic. It had been dry that fall, and what should have been green wheat in front of us was red dirt. A tree-lined creek skirted the south edge of the field in front of us, but I didn't see any reason a deer would come into shooting range. A hot wind blew across the bare dirt as we settled in and began talking about hunting, school and sports.

Suddenly, Chase's confident attitude shattered like a cheap window-pane. Against all odds, a doe walked out of the trees at the far end of the field. Chase, who had been calmly telling me about his computer hunting skills, quickly became a puddle of nervous energy as I pointed to the doe. Just as he placed his rifle on the rest, the deer disappeared back into the trees.

We laughed about the short window of opportunity and about how excited we all got. I was telling Chase that sometimes that's just how hunting is. Then I realized Chase was visibly shaking and his breathing was labored. I grinned and said "This isn't like playing a video

game, is it?"

Chase shook his head "NO" in big exaggerated movements, smiling widely. "That was exciting," he said. "Do you think we'll get another chance?"

"Who knows?" I said. "We just might."

We did get another chance, and Chase was able to take his first deer, overcoming another bout of buck fever to make the shot. He learned that real deer hunting was much different than video games – much better. I knew that our youth seasons could work exactly as we intended – we could get youngsters hunting who might not normally get a chance. And some of those youngsters, like Chase, would discover that hunting was something they really enjoy.

Kansas' first youth hunting season was in 1996 when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service allowed one day outside of states' regular waterfowl seasons for youth hunting. This goal was to provide high-quality hunting opportunities for young hunters and reverse the decline in the number of hunters nationwide. The one-day season was open to youth 15 and younger and required an adult 21 or older to supervise the young hunter. As with most new programs, participation during the first few years was light.

In 2000, the USFWS allowed a two-day season and reduced the minimum age of the adult to 18, which is consistent with other Kansas youth seasons. Since then, the Kansas Wildlife, Parks and Tourism commission has approved two-day youth seasons in each waterfowl hunting zone, usually the weekend before the opening day of the first segment. This gives young hunters first shot at hunting waterfowl, and because hunting pressure



Dustin Teasley photo

Mild weather during early youth seasons is ideal for young hunters.

has remained light, it also ensures uncrowded public hunting areas.

In 1999, the department began working on a hunter recruitment and retention program. By then, staff were tracking a downward trend in Kansas hunting license sales, and there was concern about the financial, social and political support for our hunting heritage and our wildlife management programs. Youth seasons were part of that original recruitment plan. In 2000, the KWPT commission approved two new youth seasons; one for deer and one for upland birds. The two-day deer season opened in September, before the regular archery season. The upland bird season opened the weekend before the regular pheasant and quail opening day. Both seasons were open to youth 16 and younger. Disabled hunters are included in the special deer season because comments to the commission indicated cold weather could be an issue for disabled deer hunters.

While most hunters support youth programs, the first youth pheasant and quail season was not without controversy. In a risky move, members of the hunter recruitment and retention committee recommended that one supervising adult hunter be allowed to hunt with each



Lilly and Kris Kobach pose proudly with Lilly's first deer. While youth seasons offer outstanding early hunting opportunity, youth can also hunt during regular seasons.

young hunter. The committee agreed that this would increase participation. However, some hunters blamed lack of opening day success on the youth season, concluding that the early pressure made the birds spooky and difficult to hunt on opening day. The KDWPT commission listened to a large number of sometimes emotional complaints and requested changes for the 2001 youth season, prohibiting adult mentors from hunting. It has remained that way since.

In 2001, KDWPT established a youth/disabled spring turkey season, which opened on the Friday before the regular season opener and ran for three days. In 2008, the youth spring turkey season was extended to run concurrently with the archery spring turkey season, opening on April 1 and running through the Tuesday before the opening day of the regular season, which opens on the second Wednesday in April. As with the youth deer season, the turkey season is open to youth 16 and younger, as well as hunters with disabilities. All youth hunters must be supervised by an adult 18 or older during the youth season.

You might question the need for youth seasons when youth can hunt during the regular seasons. Most of

us Baby Boomer Generation hunters learned by hunting alongside our fathers or other mentors, right? My dad never left me at home to hunt with his buddies, but I'll bet some from our generation were left out on occasion. I know of many pheasant season opening day traditions that include large parties of family and friends. A group of 20 or 25 hunters walking thick CRP grass with blockers might not be the best place for a young hunter to learn, and because of that, many may get left out. A youth season outside of the regular season provides a great opportunity for a mentor to work with a young hunter. Scheduled prior to the seasons, the youth opportunities also ensure hunters of uncrowded conditions, even on public areas. Early season game is often more visible and less scattered because of lack of hunting pressure. An early youth season can also be a good time to scout new areas and work the bird dog.

Youth seasons also accommodate special youth hunts, which rely on experienced hunters and KDWPT staff to serve as mentors. Many avid hunters plan to hunt with their own families during the regular seasons, so a youth season makes it easier for them to commit to assisting with a youth hunt. KDWPT area managers and natural resource officers are usually working their areas during the regular season weekends. And landowners who lease their land for hunting can allow youth hunts prior to the regular seasons without interfering with their lease hunters.

The youth seasons



Mike Miller photo

The youth spring turkey season might be the best opportunity for a young hunters to learn in a safe, controlled environment.

work. After that first youth pheasant and quail season, there have been very few complaints. Hunting pressure is relatively light, so impacts to regular season opening day success has been nonexistent. With plenty of land open for hunting and odds of success high, the youth seasons provide excellent high-quality opportunities for youth hunters and their mentors.

In addition to the youth seasons, there is a variety of special youth hunting opportunities, ranging from limited entry youth hunts like the Harper County event described earlier to specially managed dove fields open to youth/novice hunters and their mentors. Check out the Special Hunts page on the KDWPT website or call your local KDWPT office for information on special hunts. Keep an eye on the local newspaper, as well. KDWPT staff often advertise locally to attract interest in special hunts. ♡

2011 YOUTH SEASONS

Deer

September 10-18

Waterfowl

High Plains: October 1-2

Low Plains Early: October 1-2

Low Plains Late: October 22-23

Low Plains Southeast: October 22-23

Pheasant and Quail:

November 5-6

Spring turkey 2012:

April 1-10

Wild Women!

text and photos by
Kathleen Dultmeier
marketing specialist, Topeka



A unique outdoor camp for women in western Kansas teaches outdoor skills and promotes the hunting and outdoor opportunities available in Hodgeman County.

What started as an idea hatched while mowing a yard and forced into creation by a blank page, has become an outdoor success story.

"When it takes three hours to mow your yard, you have a lot of time to think," joked Rhonda Stithem. She is with the Hodgeman County K-State Research and Extension office, and one day while mowing her yard, she hatched the idea about Camp Wild Women.

Due to the fact that women make up half the population but are a small percentage of those who hunt, Stithem and Lea Ann Seiler, director of Hodgeman County Economic Development, felt that offering hunting skills instruction for women made sense. The idea bounced around the offices for a bit, but when faced with a blank page in the Hunt Hodgeman Information Guide, Seiler and Stithem were forced to put a deadline to the idea.

"We needed to fill an entire page in the directory, so we decided to promote Camp Wild Women," Seiler said. "We didn't yet have a target date so Rhonda put 'Coming Soon' on the flyer. That ad meant we had to put the camp

together. It was just the motivation we needed."

Camp Wild Women is a hands-on shooting sports education camp designed specifically for women. Stithem was laser-focused on making this a learning venue.

"From the start, this would be a relaxed atmosphere where women were comfortable to ask questions and develop their skills," Stithem said.

Many of the participants had never handled a gun, much less fired one before the first camp was held on April 30, 2011, at HorseThief Reservoir near Jetmore. Seiler reinforced Stithem's vision that Camp Wild Women would have the reputation of treating women as serious hunters — not just "girls with guns."

And serious it was. Thirty-five women from across the state participated in the first Camp Wild Women course. According to Seiler, the participants learned archery, muzzleloading, handgun shooting, and shotgunning, and went through a Hunter Education Program simulated hunting trail walk. Many women successfully completed the hunter education course

and received their certificates.

Based on feedback, Camp Wild Women will continually adjust its curriculum to meet needs.

"Future plans include a two-day course. Day one will be hunter education and general information. Day two will be slightly advanced, allowing more time for the women to enjoy actual shooting," said Seiler.

Future camps might include a course aimed at women ages 12 to 17.

"We have had many requests for a class designed for younger female shooters," said Seiler. "Our goal is to offer young women additional encouragement and instruction to build confidence in shooting sports."

The FAME mentoring program successfully launched a Camp Wilderness program in Hodgeman County this summer. The camp taught kids various ways to enjoy nature such as animal tracks ID, survival and shooting



One of the shooting stations taught safe handling and shooting of handguns.

skills. It was a great way to introduce the kids to the outdoors.

Seiler added that KDWPT has been a tremendous resource for Camp Wild Women. "Daniel Haneke, local natural resource officer, helped with hunter education, as well as with the other camp rotations. Volunteers and KDWPT staff made this event possible with equipment, training and their own personal passion for the hunting heritage."

Camp Wild Women was created from the Hunt Hodgeman campaign. This county-wide marketing program was designed to recruit

hunters to Hodgeman County.

"Pheasant season for Hodgeman County is like what Christmas is to the mall," said Stithem. "With four hunting outfitters and a great pheasant population, Hodgeman County is a fantastic place to hunt. The community recognizes the value that hunters bring to our area."

This duo also recognizes that women were being overlooked. Camp Wild Women is joining a nation-wide movement to offer women the same outdoor opportunities that their fathers, brothers and husbands have always enjoyed.

Hunt Hodgeman has fostered development in other areas as well. Hodgeman County is planning a Pheasants Forever chapter with an evening banquet scheduled on opening day this fall. The Hunt Hodgeman campaign has also drawn statewide and national recognition in the travel industry through magazine features and TIAK marketing awards.

Hodgeman County sponsored a booth in the Kansas Pavilion during the 2010 Pheasant Fest in Omaha, Neb. and again during the spring Kansas Sampler Festival. But most of the buzz has been created by word-of-mouth. "Sports enthusiasts refer to us as official card-carrying Wild Women. It was wonderful when we discovered we are not in this alone," Seiler said.

While at Pheasant Fest, Stithem and Seiler met the crew from the television program, *Women of the Wild Outdoors*. "Their slogan 'Move over boys, there's a feminine invasion of the great outdoors!' emphasizes that we are on the right track with Camp Wild Women," Seiler added. ♡

For more information about Camp Wild Women, contact Hodgeman County Economic Development, P.O. Box 121, Jetmore, KS 67854, phone 620-357-8831, email: campwildwoman@hotmail.com. You may also visit online at www.campwildwomen.com.

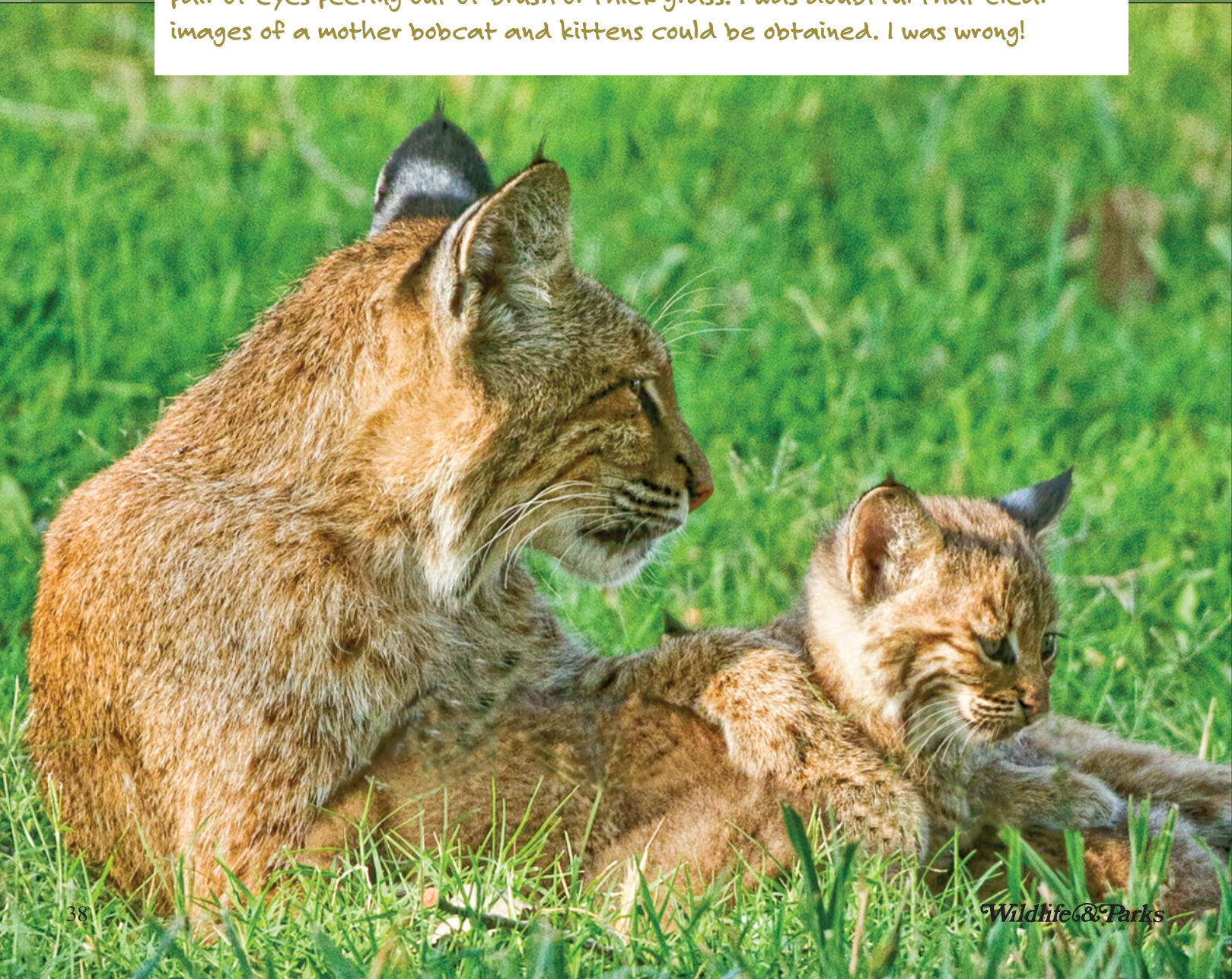


The wingshooting station teaches basic shotgun skills and is designed to ensure all break flying targets.

by Dan Witt,
Great Bend

BOBCAT ENCOUNTER

In mid-June, one of my friends called and asked if I was interested in getting some pictures of a bobcat with three kittens. My previous attempts at getting images of bobcats consisted of shadows and body parts disappearing into the brush due to the elusive rapid retreat of the beautiful animals, or a pair of eyes peering out of brush or thick grass. I was doubtful that clear images of a mother bobcat and kittens could be obtained. I was wrong!





This bobcat lives south of Pawnee Rock. She housed her kittens in a stack of irrigation pipe within 100 yards of my friend's home, which includes a cheerful German shorthair and several house cats. She allowed me to drive into my friend's yard and park the vehicle and take pictures without ever seeming to be concerned. I was able to "visit" her on five different occasions.

I watched the mama bring a pack rat to the kittens, and saw her stalk and kill a rabbit for them by the corrals less than 100 yards from the den. She was calm and let the kittens play freely in front of their home. She marched them over the hill and into the woods on hunting or training expeditions that lasted up to a couple of hours, and then she would bring them back and put them to bed while she dozed by a tree about 30 yards from the irrigation pipes where they slept.





When one kitten was reluctant to join his/her siblings on one trip, she calmly went over and picked it up by the back of its neck and took it with her to the woods. She let them nurse, lying comfortably on the ground in front of the den. The kittens played exactly like my wife's kittens do at home. The training processes became longer, and in early July the family disappeared as she expanded their territory. It was a very special gift to be able to get images of this part of their lives. My friend and I will watch to see if the den is used again next year.





DUCK CAMP: GOOD, BAD, AND UGLY

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

Annual hunting and fishing outings can evolve into traditions built around people, places and land. Having duck camp to look forward to brings added anticipation as fall nears.

Many hunters and anglers have a favorite annual outing that eventually becomes a tradition. Deer hunters in the East enjoy a deer camp tradition. Southerners enjoy fishing outings at the beach for a weekend, often shared with close family and friends. We Midwesterners have options, as well. One of my favorites is a fall duck camp at

Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area near Great Bend.

If you've never been to Cheyenne Bottoms, you owe it to yourself to visit. North America's largest inland marsh is considered a Wetland of International Importance, and the sights and sounds of 20,000 acres of prime wetland habitat make it pure heaven for a duck hunter. In autumn, huge flocks of sandhill

cranes, white-fronted geese, dozens of species of shorebirds and more species of ducks than you can count on both hands provide more entertainment than any night on the Discovery Channel.

Several buddies and I have made duck camp an annual tradition. We pull campers and several duck boats, depending on how many people are planning to attend, and set up camp

for several days. But our duck camps are strictly at the mercy of Mother Nature. The 2007 duck camp plans were scrapped when Cheyenne Bottoms flooded due to torrential rains. That year, the Bottoms became Kansas' largest lake, covering more than 30,000 acres and making hunting all but impossible. But it's true, absence makes the heart grow fonder, and the anticipation built over the following year.

The 2008 season was fast approaching, and Cheyenne Bottoms had good water conditions and favorable duck numbers. Hopes were high as we made plans to hunt four days in late October. But as we planned, my "good buddies" had to remind me of our 2006 duck camp. That was a duck camp I'd rather forget.

That year, a buddy and I arrived early, set up camp, and headed for an evening hunt and some scouting. As the boat plowed through the shallow water, ducks rose by the hundreds, and my adrenaline was high after we hid the boat and began pitching decoys. I was in a hurry and trying to throw decoys at least 25 yards to spread things out. For long throws, I would grab the decoy string in the middle so that the lead weight and decoy hung together below, then chuck it as far as I could with a sidearm heave.

As I launched one of the last decoys, the string wrapped around my finger and didn't leave my hand. The 6-ounce lead weight swung around as fast as it could on a 3-foot string and caught me squarely in the mouth. Hearing the thud of lead on flesh and teeth, my buddy looked at me and his eyes got big. Blood was gushing down my chin and onto my waders and shirt.

"What in the world did you do," he hollered, knowing it wasn't good.

I mumbled something about "screwing up pretty bad" as the side of my face began to swell. Fortunately, I had a first aid kit, and I cut some gauze into strips that I packed it into my left cheek to stop the bleeding. I tried to take inventory of my teeth but that was difficult due to all the blood. I decided my teeth were all there, but my upper left canine wiggled loosely. I assumed it was just loose in the socket.

With the bleeding stopped and the ducks flying, I decided to stay and hunt, against my better judgment. We ended up shooting a near-limit of ducks, but my mood had

taken a dramatic turn for the worse. The pain was excruciating but the thought of abandoning duck camp because of a stupid mistake hurt nearly as much.

Back at camp, I discovered that my canine tooth was broken nearly in two at the gum line. By then, another buddy had arrived, so I now had two friends to wince and grimace every time they looked at me. A call to my dentist's emergency number told me he was in Vegas at a dental convention and wouldn't return for two days. It was difficult to sleep that night, but I told my buddies they could hunt in



The "good" and the "ugly." Some duck camps provide memorable weather and hunting success, while others are remembered for less pleasant and less attractive incidents. The inset photo is a lesson on how not to throw decoys 25 yards.



There's gold at the end of the rainbow if you're a duck hunter. This gold is Cheyenne Bottoms on a clear fall day with nothing to do but hunt ducks and enjoy the marsh.

the morning (we were in my camper and boat), and then I would pack up and head home.

I spent the next day in a recliner sipping soup through a straw. Every time my tongue bumped the broken tooth, the nerve would pull tight and send a shooting pain through my head like someone hitting me with a skillet. The next morning's dental visit couldn't come soon enough.

The dentist numbed my mouth and broke the tooth off before performing a root canal. I got a temporary tooth and was feeling no pain until I saw the \$1,500 bill, which added expensive insult to injury.

By that afternoon, I was feeling much better, so a buddy and I made plans to return the next morning. It was a beautiful morning as we pitched decoys, with much care this time, into the darkness. I flinched like a toad in a hail storm each time my buddy launched a decoy as the feeling of 6 ounces of lead at 60 mph was still quite vivid.

We had a great hunt and wrapped it up with a big fire in the campground and a wonderful lunch of Cajun gumbo. I kicked back in my chair and enjoyed the day and experience of our abbreviated duck camp.

Duck camp has become a tradition because most of the memories are good. We'll kill our share of ducks, but the icing on the cake comes when all the ingredients fall into place. That happened in 2008, the year following the big flood, two years after my decoy accident.

In 2008 we hit the absolute perfect weather pattern for four days. Mornings were in the 40s, crisp and clear, and daytime temperatures rose to the mid-60s. With light winds, these were ideal conditions for ducks, fires, eating outdoors and a big ole afternoon nap in a lawn chair.

We saw thousands of ducks each morning. Limits were bagged quickly, and much of the enjoyment was just sitting in the duck boat, soaking up the morning sun and watching the marsh wake up. I love to shoot ducks, but watching them never gets old. Each morning that year, we lingered in the marsh after our hunts were over, scratching the dog's ears and sipping hot coffee, reveling in the thought that we had absolutely nothing to do the rest of the day.

A big breakfast back at camp was the rule, and after cleaning our ducks, we'd sit around a fire. Each day that year brought bright, blue

skies filled with thousands of migrating and extremely vocal white-fronted geese and sandhill cranes. You couldn't create or sell a CD that sounded as tranquil or serene. The melody went on for days and never got old. Throw in the visual aesthetics of a giant, beautifully-orange harvest moon each evening, and we had the total package.

An afternoon nap and relaxation are key ingredients to a successful duck camp. The campground at the Bottoms has huge cottonwood trees that offer the perfect noise machine when just the slightest breeze rustles their leaves. Coupled with the calls of the wild, it makes ideal sleeping conditions, and sleep comes easy most days.

Evenings are spent in the same relaxation mode. We often take drives through the marsh to watch wildlife -- deer, turkeys, pheasants, ducks, geese and countless shorebirds and wading birds make it a wildlife watcher's mecca. And did I mention food? After the evening drive, a hearty supper is in order. Usually on the second evening, we feast on grilled duck kabobs. Those bacon and jalapeno-wrapped morsels never taste better than while watching a sunset and listening to the sounds of the Bottoms.

Our duck camps are good medicine for the mind, body and soul. We've had some great camps over the years and look forward to great ones in the future. And while we hope for good weather and lots of ducks, the tradition is more about sharing time with good friends and enjoying the outdoors. Waterfowling is inherently social, and I think that's what I enjoy about it most. It's a chance to get away from normal every-day stress and live in the moment, even if for only a few days. That's duck camp in a nutshell, and simply writing about it has me looking forward to 2011's version. ♡



Backlash

by Mike Miller

Little Duck Luck

You need four things to hunt teal during the September early teal season: water, patience, luck, and mosquito repellent. I'll admit, I take decoys, duck calls, wear camo clothing and bring the Big Black Dog, but I do that only so it feels more like "real" duck hunting. You see, teal aren't like other ducks, especially during the early season when there aren't many real ducks around to set good examples.

Of the three requirements, water is probably the most critical. You don't need a lot of water, just enough to flood some weeds. And while water may be tough to come by this September, it only takes a timely rain or two to put us in business.

Patience and luck are necessary because even when you have water and lots of teal, there's no guarantee a single teal will fly within shotgun range. Other than a general southerly direction during the fall migration, I don't think teal have any idea where they're going until right before they get there. Bluewings never fly in a single direction for more than seven seconds and don't appear to make conscious decisions to land; they simply get lower and lower until they hit the water. So fretting over the decoy pattern and blowing a duck call is only practice for big duck season. (For hunting conversation during the teal season, there are only two kinds of ducks: big ducks [non-teal] and teal.)

Luck is also necessary because you need to be ready when teal suddenly appear over your decoys. You can scan the horizons watching for teal, but it's usually wasted effort. Even when you see what you think are teal in the distance, you won't know if they'll fly in range until right before they are. A conversation between two early-season teal hunters often goes like this:

"Look south over those cattails; big ducks or little ducks?"

"You mean way down there over that farthest pool? I don't think those are ducks. Look more like blackbirds."

"Wait, they might be teal, but they're flying west. NO, they're getting close, and they are teal. Get ready!"

"Nah, they're going east, but they are definitely teal. Dang it."

"Whoa! There they go. Crap. I took my eyes off 'em for just a second, and they were here."

A limit of teal is mostly luck, and like most types of hunting and fishing, the amount of luck you enjoy is directly related to your perseverance. The longer you sit near water, the better chance you'll have of teal flying by. It's rare that you go out and only kill one teal, unless you have a bad shooting day. Teal hunting is usually nothing or a limit

because one minute you can be sitting on a bucket in the middle of a marsh without a single teal within 2 miles, and the next minute 13 bluewings splash down in your decoys, looking more flustered than you.

The late Vance Matthews, a good friend and mentor, told me a story that explained his frustration with teal. He recalled a teal hunt at Cheyenne Bottoms when his boys were young. The boys were too young to hunt, but they accompanied Vance often. Wanting to give the youngsters a taste of duck hunting when the weather was mild, Vance loaded them in the truck for a September hunt. At the marsh, he loaded the decoys on his back, strapped life jackets on the two boys, sat them in the little boat and towed them several hundred yards through shallow water and cattails. He set out a dozen decoys, told the boys to sit still, loaded his gun and sat down. After a short wait, a flock of bluewings buzzed by low and fast. Vance quickly picked a bird, swung and shot once – four birds folded, and he had his limit. Even at their young age, the boys still looked at him like, "That's it?"

But if the perfect teal hunt is so rare, why is the early teal season so popular? I think we all tend to remember the good hunts and forget the not-so-good hunts, but it does intrigue me how a fantastic hunt seven years ago is now the standard by which all teal hunts are judged. In reality, that fantastic hunt was the perfect storm. The marsh was full, and I was lucky enough to be there on the same day the teal were. On such a day, teal will fly by you; perhaps hundreds of teal will fly by you – no matter where you set up. Just a few years later, after a series of "normal" teal seasons, I began reminiscing about the "good old days" when teal were thick as mosquitoes.

The early teal season is popular because it's the first waterfowl season of the fall, and most duck hunters are desperate for a waterfowl fix. And teal area fun. They travel in gangs and fly fast and erratically. While they may not decoy or turn and set their wings to a call, they challenge even experienced wingshooters. When you do find that perfect storm and shoot your limit before 7:30 a.m., you can sit back and watch the show. The marsh in early fall can be alive with other migratory water birds, and while they may not admit it, most duck hunters are closet birdwatchers. September is a great time to be the marsh, but even if you don't find that perfect teal hunt when the teal are thick as mosquitoes, remember the fourth item on the list because you can bet the mosquitoes will be as thick as mosquitoes. ♡

