

KANSAS

Wildlife & Parks

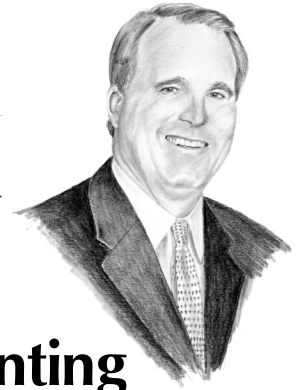
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KANSAS *View*

by Robin Jennison



Flexibility Key To Successful Hunting

Drought. You can't watch a weather forecast, local or national, without hearing about drought and its effects on the Midwest. You couldn't drink half a cup of coffee in a small-town Kansas cafe without hearing multiple discussions about the drought. It's true, many parts of Kansas have suffered through nearly two years of not only drought, but also record hot summers. In some areas, it's had a devastating impact on crops, native habitat and certain wildlife.

Aside from the many physical effects drought has on us, it also affects our psyche. Long periods of hot, dry weather can be depressing, especially for hunters, who worry about the drought's affect on game populations. There's no denying that hunting opportunities will be impacted. However, one of the best things about hunting in Kansas is the variety of opportunities. Dove hunting could be exceptional this fall. All a hunter will have to do is find a pasture pond with water, and he'll have the chance to see every dove roosting within a 5-mile radius.

Smack in the middle of the Central Flyway with several major inland marshes, Kansas attracts millions of ducks and geese each fall. Waterfowl stop in Kansas on their southern migration, roosting on marshes, rivers and reservoirs and feeding on nearby stubble fields. If the winter is mild, large numbers of waterfowl may stay for several months, providing outstanding hunting. I saw a Youtube video posted by some hunters who traveled to Kansas last year. When the fields they hunted yielded few pheasants, these guys switched to goose hunting and had a great time. I know the drought has impacted our marshes, but as we're fond of saying in western Kansas, "Were only a rain away from great duck hunting." One downpour in the right place can dramatically improve conditions at marshes such as Cheyenne Bottoms, Jamestown and McPherson Valley. There's still hope. If we don't get rain, reservoirs, lakes and farm ponds will still hold waterfowl.

Kansas has one of longest fall turkey seasons of any


Midwestern state, and our bag limits are generous – in several units, a hunter can take one bird on a fall turkey permit, then purchase as many as three more fall turkey game tags. The season opens Oct. 1 and runs through the end of January, closing only during firearm deer seasons.

Kansas also boasts underutilized small game hunting for rabbits and squirrels. Small game hunting traditions have always been overshadowed by upland bird, waterfowl and deer hunting. Hunters from the eastern Midwest are amazed that no one hunts cottontails in Kansas. This year, bring a couple of beagles, and you'll have a ball.

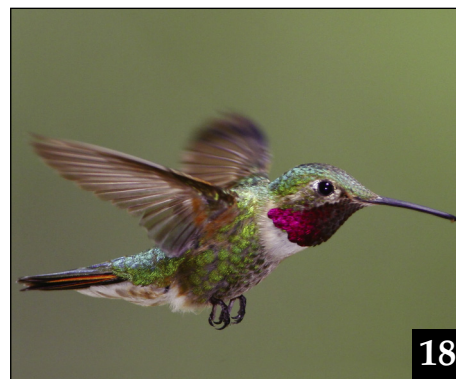
So I guess the word for 2012, other than drought, is flexible. Be flexible in your hunting plans. With more than 1 million acres of Walk-In Hunting Access, you can find areas to hunt in regions of the state less impacted by drought and weather. Be

flexible in the game you pursue. Take advantage of the opportunities you find.

Enjoying your hunt in Kansas this fall really boils down to this: Why do you hunt here? Over the years, I've learned that hunters are motivated by three major factors. Of course every hunter wants to have optimism that they will be successful. They want to harvest game. A good bird forecast can motivate hunters to get into the field. However, I'm not sure that is the most important factor. I know many hunters, especially those who travel long distances, come here to reconnect with the people — family, friends and landowners. And lastly, hunters come to reconnect with the land. Hunters develop a strong connection with the land they hunt.

The hunters I visit with each year ask the prerequisite questions about bird numbers, weather and habitat conditions. But I know the majority are coming whatever the forecast. The hunting heritage is about relationships with the wildlife, the people, the land, the dogs and the tradition. The longer I hunt, the more important maintaining those relationships becomes. 

"Hunters develop a strong connection with the land they hunt."



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Front Cover: The rubythroat is the only hummingbird known to nest in Kansas. This male rubythroat was photographed by Bob Gress.
Back Cover: This photo shows a small number of the 119 deer heads confiscated in one of the largest deer poaching cases ever prosecuted in the U.S. Marc Murrell photo



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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 . . .

NEAT WHITE SQUIRREL

Editor:

My name is Chris Kelley and I have a picture of a neat white squirrel that I took with my phone in 2010 in Wichita. I was wondering if you might have any interest in publishing it in your magazine? Its body was all white except for patches on its face, tail, and underside. It was a very interesting experience as the squirrel seemed as interested in me as I was in it. It came right up to me..

*Chris Kelley
Wichita*



MORE THAN A FOX

Editor:

I respect hunters. I see them as conservationists who have a deep respect for wildlife, who observe the laws of game conversation while being a part of the harvesting process. I have harvested my share of quail and pheasant, and I try to give financial support to responsible conservation organizations. I will never understand individuals who shoot wild animals outside of the season or without just cause.

We live in a nice, secluded development outside of the city limits of Louisburg. We moved here from Johnson County because we like land, foliage, seclusion and wildlife. We have sightings of turkey, deer, quail, geese, bobcat, coyote and an occasional fox.

This year, we had a red fox living somewhere on our property. We, along with many of our neighbors, would see her as she was looking for a mouse or

some other small rodent to be a meal for her and her four kits. She would trot past one neighbor's chicken coop and then past other neighbor's pets never causing a problem. She was a welcome resident. We enjoyed her as she studied us from a distance.

Even the dog seemed to enjoy watching her.

Last Sunday evening, we were walking our dog in the neighborhood when the peace of the evening was broken by a loud gunshot. The gunshot concerned us because it came from between two houses in the neighborhood. As we walked to that area, a neighbor told us that the gunshot came from her husband's gun. He had just shot and killed the red fox. Supposedly, the fox was a threat to their goat.

I understand that a pack of coyotes may be a threat to a goat, but it is hard for me to believe that a fox poses a threat to a goat. Many of us in the neighborhood are saddened and upset by the loss of the red fox. She was a nice, bright and wild punctuation to our rural setting. She represented why some of us moved to the country. Last night the coyotes found the den and killed the four kits.

I do not understand people who shoot animals just because they are wild or people who might say, "it was just a fox." This incident brings to mind the words from the first verse of an Anglican hymn written in 1848 by Cecil F. Alexander of Dublin, Ireland:

All things bright and beautiful
all creatures great and small
all things wise and wonderful
the lord god made them all.

But, this was just a fox!

*James E. Cox
Louisburg*

KEEN ON KITES

Editor:

I appreciated the article by Mike Rader on kites. We have been seeing them many times at our home in Bel Aire this summer for the first time.

*Carolyn Smith
Bel Aire*

HOOK MORE WALLEYE

Editor:

I enjoyed Marc Murrell's "Hook More Walleye" article in the May/June 2012 issue of *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine. Just saw a "slow death" excerpt from *Field & Stream's* March 2012 issue that helped me visualize better the overall setup. I have really enjoyed all of your articles!

*Dave Weigel
Kansas City, MO*

OFFICE STRUTTERS

Editor:

These pictures were taken today from inside my home office, through the window. I think it's a rare sight to see two displaying at the same time and wanted to share them with the *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine. I have been seeing these two and a larger dominant one displaying in my back yard for several days. I also have pictures of the dominant also. The pictures are a little grainy because of shooting through three panes of glass.

*Ray Ikenberry
email*



BIRD BRAIN

with Mike Rader

Do They Need Help?

Fall has arrived, and we have endured a long, drought-ridden spring and summer. Hopefully, by the time you read this, we will have had ample rain to water thirsty lawns and crops, fill ponds and streams and maybe get out of this devastating weather pattern. In case we haven't, I'd like to make a few suggestions as to how we can help our some of our feathered friends.

Many think that putting seed in feeders to attract birds to our yards is the most important way to get them through tough times. However, unless weather conditions are extremely harsh, such as long periods of sub-zero temperatures, ice or deep snow, birds will do just fine without our help. Feeders merely attract birds closer for us to observe and enjoy. There are exceptions of course, such as hummingbirds that stay late into the season when there are no flowers or maybe sick or injured birds staying close to feeders.

In dry times like we have had this year, a reliable source of water may attract more birds than food. The sound of flowing water attracts many species, so a running sprinkler, bubbling rock, or bird bath with running water work great. Even in cold weather, there are bird bath heaters and other products that keep water open and available for birds to use. Something as simple as a shallow pan filled with fresh water every day can prove valuable in drawing birds in and helping them as well. Bird baths work great and can provide opportunities to see species that will not come to a feeder. I have a friend in Johnson County who recently had a brood of eastern screech owls coming to his bird bath. They used it to drink and bathe, and it afforded him the opportunity to take some great photos of a usually-secreitive species. I have known other people who have had owls,

SOME THINGS TO REMEMBER ABOUT PROVIDING WATER

Keep it fresh and clean. Stagnant water is not healthy for birds and can host things like mosquito larvae. Water that has become fouled with feces and algae can spread disease. In warm weather especially, daily cleaning is recommended

Keep it shallow. Shallow pans and bird baths are best for providing water. Deeper structures such as fish ponds and stock tanks can become death traps for birds (and other animals). I have seen many birds (including birds as large as barn owls) floating in stock tanks, making for a sad ending. Some type of structure fashioned out of hail screen or wire attached to the side of a tank or fish pond can allow a struggling bird to escape deep water.



hawks, and non-typical yard birds use these structures. Song birds are always looking for an excuse to get wet and can be easily seen while bathing as well.

Keep it open or flowing. In cold weather, use a heater or dump out ice regularly so there is useable water.

Proper habitat to provide cover for birds is another great way to get them to use your yard. A mix of large trees, fruiting shrubs and smaller bushes is ideal. Protection from harsh weather conditions and predators is the main importance of backyard habitat. However, this habitat can also provide locations for predators to hunt from, so placement of water features and feeders is important as well. Try to not have feeders close to bushes and small shrubs, as predators frequently use these as places to hide and stalk from.

I have a couple of feeders that are hanging from large trees, but use shepherd's hooks to put others out in the middle of the yard. Feral and domestic cats are by far the most common and destructive predators of birds, taking many times more than our native mammal and avian species. Please consider keeping cats indoors. They are predators by nature, and even well-fed cats catch and kill birds.

Birds are resilient, adaptive creatures and while many do perish in hard times, these things I mentioned can be a way to keep some close and available for us to watch and enjoy.

DUCKS AT RECORD HIGH

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) 2012 "Trends in Duck Breeding Populations" report estimated the duck breeding population in North America's duck factory was at a record high last summer. This year's report estimate of 48.6 million is significantly higher than the 45.6 million birds estimated last year and 43 percent above the long-term average.

This annual report summarizes information about the status of duck populations and wetland habitats collected by wildlife biologists from the USFWS and the Canadian Wildlife Service for the "Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey." The survey

samples more than two million square miles of waterfowl habitat across the United States and Canada.

Highlights from the survey include 10.6 million mallards, a 15 percent increase over 2011 and a 39 percent increase over the long-term average of 7.6 million. Green-winged and blue-winged teal were estimated at 3.5 million and 9.2 million, respectively, 20 percent and 3 percent above 2011 numbers. Both species continue to remain well above long-term averages by 74 percent and 94 percent.

—KDWP News

IT'S THE LAW

with Kevin Jones

RESTITUTION

Kansas is well known for its trophy-class deer and commands national attention. Hunters invest considerable time and money to legally pursue deer. This is beneficial not only to the deer management program but also to the citizens of the state. A problem does arise though, when poachers steal this resource from the people of the state.

Poaching is an ancient problem, going back centuries. Through the course of history, the reason for poaching may have been to supply food, but in more recent times, the reason is for personal gain. Whether the personal gain is monetary or personal gratification or notoriety, we see increasing pressure being applied to what are considered trophy-class animals. Bucks with big antlers are at the center of the issue, and during my more than 34 years in wildlife law enforcement, I have been continually amazed at the methods and risks poachers will take to kill trophy animals.

So how do we address this issue of poaching? One way might be to increase the penalties on convicted poachers. To that end, Senate Bill 314 changed the penalties for poaching trophy-class big game animals. The new law, which is now in effect, sets a minimum fine of \$5,000 for poaching a trophy-class big game animal.



A trophy big game animal is defined as an antlered white-tailed deer having an inside spread measurement of at least 16 inches; an antlered mule deer having an inside spread of at least 20 inches; an antlered elk having at least six points on one antler; or an antelope having at least one horn longer than 14 inches.

In addition to the fine, the law now states that convicted poachers must pay restitution to the state for the value of certain animals taken in violation of license and permit laws, with illegal methods and means for hunting; unlawfully possessing, shipping or transporting the animal; unlawfully commercializing the animal; or, trespassing on land posted to allow hunting only by written permission. Restitution is based on the gross Boone and Crockett score of the animal's antlers or horns. A gross score of at least 125 inches for deer, 250 inches for elk or 75 inches for antelope are required for restitution to apply.

Once the gross score is determined, it is in a formula that then sets the dollar amount of restitution. For deer, the gross score is reduced by 100, and then this number is squared and then multiplied by two dollars. So if a deer scored 150, the calculation would be 150 minus 100 which equals 50. The square of 50 is 2,500 which is multiplied by \$2 resulting in a restitution value of \$5,000.

Kansas has a tremendous wildlife resource that is enjoyed by residents and visitors to the state. Hopefully these increased penalties will help to positively address the poaching problems we are facing in the state.

Duck Baiting Bust

Just prior to the late duck season last year, KDWPT officers received an anonymous tip composed of a map and a short description. The tip suggested a group of hunters might be hunting over bait on the Neosho River during the late season.

Officers contacted Special Agent Kenny Kessler with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and decided to execute a multiple-officer operation in the area the next morning. Two officers were placed on the opposite river bank prior to shooting hours while the rest waited to make contact.

Three adults and a juvenile arrived and began hunting. As the sun rose and the ducks began to fall, the hidden officers could see corn scattered on the bank. They kept tally of how many ducks they could see being killed by each hunter.

When the subjects began to gather ducks and line them up on the bank, the officers closed in. Corn was found in the bed of one of the trucks as the officers

approached the scene. Kessler and KDWPT officers walked over the bank to face the hunters, corn scattered along the shoreline, and a carnage of unlawfully-taken ducks scattered around the scene. Needless to say, their eyes widened and their jaws dropped.

After interviews, the reality of the situation set in for the subjects. One said the ducks had been scattered along the river and he became greedy, so he began baiting the area to attract them to one location. The three adults admitted knowing it was illegal to hunt migratory birds over bait. Two of the adults confessed to killing over the limit of ducks. The end count of dead ducks was 26 mallard drakes, 5 mallard hens, and one drake wigeon, for a grand total of 33 unlawfully killed ducks. An officer had to use a kayak to retrieve several ducks that were stuck in the ice where the subjects' dog would not go.

After federal prosecution, the three adults were cited and charged with \$5,700



in fines. The hard work and dedication of Kessler and KDWPT officers Lt. Keith Rather, Lt. Bob Funke, Josh DeHoux, Brad Hageman, and Ben Womelsdorf removed three subjects that could have easily returned every morning and night to unlawfully kill excessive numbers of waterfowl over the baited shoreline.

—Benjamin R. Womelsdorf, natural resource officer, Iola

QUEST FOR FIRE



The beleaguered column of bicycles limped into our campsite, a dirt tipped point on the pond, as the sun slowly sank like a bleeding mass in the western sky. The attack of the wolf dogs had wounded our pride and dampened our exuberance. Much of our provisions had been lost to the chocolate lusting canines. The confidence that I had in our command had been lost in the wild, undisciplined melee that had ensued after the initial charge of the rabid mongrels. Morale was low.

The sight of the pond changed the mood quickly. It was a glimmer of glass, reflecting the fire-like clouds. Little dimples dotted the water, marking feeding bluegills. The thoughts of lunker bass trumped losing Lil Debbie snack cakes, HoHo's and Orange Crush.

"Maybe we should start a fire right away?" suggested Bobby, the youngest of the group, and maybe a little skittish of the dark. I was about to proclaim that it was great idea when a large V cut a furrow in the water and a deep swirl indicated a large fish feeding.

"The \$%#@ with the fire, catch that big &^%\$ bass!" I shouted. I was prone to use expletives when excited, or out of earshot of adults. I had learned most of my "good" words from my uncles and understood very little of their true meaning, but they were fun to use around my buddies.

For the next half-hour, Lazy Ikes, Rooster Tails, and Mepps spinners raked the water, whipping up a veritable froth. With every empty cast more expletives rained over the water, cussing being a very addictive vice, until at the end of our fruitless effort, a hailstorm of cuss words pelted the area, knocking our verbal morales back to the Stone Age. We finally succumbed and slumped to the ground, sweat dripping from off our brows and overworked tongues, as darkness fell on our group.

Presently, the thought of a fire came back up, and we realized how hard it might be to find kindling and wood in pitch darkness. A frenzied search for a flashlight turned up nothing. Nobody had packed one! Someone suggested we make a torch. We managed to find a suitable dry weed stem to light and made another startling discovery – no matches. No flashlight and no matches. I was dismayed by our lack of planning in regards to essentials and went over my list of people that I could blame this gaff on.

With no suitable scapegoat at hand, we sent Bobby back in the dark to his house to retrieve these essential items. We settled down to wait for Bobby's return and dew settled on us. Dew is something I didn't reckon on. A heavy dew can make you every bit as wet as a rainstorm. By the time Bobby's bike light was seen bouncing up the dirt road, we had huddled into five cold wet balls of misery.

Bobby staggered up in the darkness without using a flashlight, which should have been cause for concern if we had been more observant.

"Where is the flashlight?" his older brother demanded.

"Couldn't find one, so mom gave me some candles", he replied. Candles were okay. Those long Christmas type candles would burn a long time and give out a little light. With there being no wind, candles weren't a bad alternative. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a dilapidated box of birthday candles. Their ability to shed light was slightly dimmer than a spark of hope. The BTUs on those little babies wouldn't warm an ant's antennae.

"That is just great Bobby," someone quipped. "I didn't catch whose birthday it was." The group was piling onto the rookie pretty good.

"Now, now fellas. We just need enough light to find some wood for the fire," I said in his defense. "Bobby, where are the matches?" Bobby reached into his other pocket and pulled out faded book with three slim paper matches dangling inside.

We all stuck it to him pretty good while we arranged the candles around a pathetic pile of wet grass and tiny twigs. One match was used to light the candles, and we tried to ignite the dew-soaked grass to no avail. As the candles melted into tiny puddles of despair, the six anxious campers stared at the last glimmer of hope, and the scene descended into total darkness. "Good job Bobby!"

I knew from one of the few days of I listened during American History class that the Plains tribes had used buffalo chips for fuel. The suggestion was met with jeers and skepticism. However, seeing no alternative to the deepening darkness, we decided to do a blind cow chip hunt. After crawling around in the dark, feeling for cow chips, we managed to find a few dry enough to attempt ignition. The "wet" ones had quelled what was left of our appetites. We had forgotten soap or wet wipes.

Amazingly the last match managed to light the edge of a dry cow chip and soon several were ablaze with a low chalky fire. The aroma emanating from the small cool blaze made us acutely aware of wind direction.

Soon we all had slightly browned hot dogs folded in buns. Now I like smoking with mesquite, but I just could not acquire a taste for the cow-manure-smoked Oscar Meyer wiener. We discarded the hot dogs unceremoniously into the pasture – ceding them to the local wildlife population. A later trip revealed that coyotes had decided to bury them rather than eating them, thus elevating my opinion of that animal's intelligence.

The dew covered crew crowded around the south side of the stink pot and settled in to wait out the night. Sometime during the night we fell into a troubled sleep and woke up miserable, wet, and adopted by the local cowherd. Their idea of initiation was to slobber huge amounts of saliva on our fishing gear. Evidently, we were situated on their favorite place to defecate. They mixed this with the spit cocktail, rendering any attempt to fish very unlikely and undesirable.

We flushed the cows away from our camp site and packed up quickly. It was still pre-dawn and a perfect time to fish. Looking back, I can vaguely remember that it would have been a great day to be at this pond at this time, but it wasn't even suggested. We packed up what remained of our slimy tackle and what was left of our provisions and headed for home as the cows started coming back to the camp site to chuckle at our spectacle.

"Do you think we ought to put out the fire, Todd?"

I looked at our smoking pile of cow chips. A black angus meandered over to it with a sound like a big rain.

"No need," I replied and headed east.

Have you ever wondered why there are so many boats running around in the state that have a registration number issued by Oklahoma, Missouri, Texas, or some other state? Well, let me shed some light on this issue.

By federal law, a boat must be registered in its “state of Principle use,” meaning the state where a vessel is used or will be used most during a calendar year. Very seldom can this be enforced.

For several years, the agency has addressed members of the legislature on the issue of personal property tax assessed to recreational boats in the state. Currently, the state assesses a value at 30 percent of the value of the boat, multiplied by the mill levy. Our neighboring states, which do not have a property tax valuation, set the stage for Kansas boat owners to register in those states.

The number of boats registered to Kansas has drastically declined in the last five years, and this has a devastating effect on boating programs. Boats are registered with Kansas Wildlife, Parks and Tourism at a cost of \$30 for three years. That money, with matching federal dollars, is used to build and maintain boat ramps and docks, administer boating education programs, enforce boating laws, and provide navigation aids.

While it is unknown how the dollars generated from the prop-

Boat SAFE

with Dan Heskett

Boat Tax Ballot



erty tax of boats are spent within the counties, the funding generated from boat registrations and federal matching dollars can only be spent toward recreational boating safety items.

High property taxes also impact marine dealers. Research shows that nearly 70 percent of the boats registered in Kansas are at least 13 years old. Newer, more expensive boats are being registered in other states.

As a result of House Concurrent Resolution (HCR) 5017, Kansans will vote this November on whether the property tax valuation on recreational vessels should be changed.

Reducing this tax could boost sales of boats from local boat dealers and allow more Kansas residents to afford boating recreation.

Whether you own a boat or not, take a look at (HCR) 5017.

HUNTING HERITAGE *with Kent Barret*

Why Hunt?

One of my hunter education instructors sent me an interesting article titled “Why Hunting Your Own Dinner Is An Ethical Way To Eat,” by Lily Raff McCaulou. When I read the title, it reminded of an interview that occurred years ago between Tom Snyder and rocker/celebrity hunter Ted Nugent. Nugent was explaining why every person should have to dispatch their own food when eating at a restaurant and how they would form a different opinion of nature as a result. I think I was expecting the same thing from this article, but I was pleasantly surprised. The author made some astute observations about hunters and conservation.

The author explained that she grew up back east and never knew anyone who hunted. Her perception of hunters was that we were “barbaric gun nuts.” But after moving from Manhattan to Oregon and getting to know some local hunters, she realized that even though she considered herself an environmentalist, these locals were “more knowledgeable and thoughtful

about animals and nature” than she was. She eventually made the decision to purchase a gun and take part in hunting.

She lists five reasons why hunting makes an ethical dinner. First, hunting has a light environmental footprint. No land is tilled and no additional carbon is released into the atmosphere. Second, wild animals aren’t subjected to inhumane farming practices. “Wild animals, unlike many domesticated ones, aren’t bred, fed and medicated to achieve rapid weight gain.” Wild game is a low-fat, healthy protein choice. Third, none of the meat is wasted.

“After I shoot an animal, I gut and butcher it myself. This way I know the

“Now that I hunt, I have a real-life, vested interest in seeing places and wild populations preserved in the long-term.”

meat was handled safely. Meat is life. So I seek out recipes that make the most of it. I cook it with care. I share with friends and family. I make sure every bite gets enjoyed.”

Fourth, hunting pays for conservation. She explains what it costs for her to hunt elk in Oregon, then says, “Hikers and bird-watchers haven’t paid anywhere near that much.”

The federal excise taxes hunters pay when they purchase firearms, archery equipment and ammunition funds conservation.

Fifth, hunting promotes conservation. “To hunt is to participate in the ecosystem rather than just watch from the sidelines. I considered myself an environmentalist before I started hunting. But back then, all my reasons for conservation were theoretical. Now that I hunt, I have a real-life, vested interest in seeing places and wild populations preserved in the long term.”

She then made the most important statement of the entire article. “Someday, I want to take my son hunting in all my favorite spots.”

Hunting is more than just a good way to eat. Hunting is family. Hunting is the outdoors. Hunting is an ethical way of life.

On The Web Conservation Organizations

with Mark Shoup

Fall means hunting seasons for many Kansans, and this is a good time to remember those private conservation organizations that dedicate their money and time to helping the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) develop the habitat that makes wildlife so abundant in the Sunflower State. There is a long list of these organizations, complete with websites and other contact information, in the *2012 Kansas Hunting and Furharvesting Regulations Summary*, available free wherever licenses are sold or on the agency website, ksoutdoors.com. Consider joining one today and help in the effort to conserve the resources you dearly love.

While space limits an overview of every such organization in the state, three have been long-standing advocates for hunting, and more importantly, put the money they raise into habitat projects across the state.



Online at ducksunlimited.org/Kansas, you'll find the latest information about one of the oldest and most active conservation organizations in the state, Ducks Unlimited (DU). Started nationally in 1937, this organization has been a critical player in acquiring and restoring wetlands throughout Kansas. Working in conjunction with KDWPT, DU has helped with wetland acquisition or restoration projects from Jamestown and Cheyenne Bottoms wildlife areas, Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, and McPherson Wetlands in central Kansas to Marais des Cygnes and Neosho wildlife areas in the east. Find a local chapter in your area, attend a banquet, and gain the satisfaction of knowing you've done your part "for the ducks."

Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever (PF) focuses its efforts on upland game bird habitat. In addition to assisting local chapters with fund-raising events – where 100 percent of funds raised go for local habitat development – PF Farm Bill biologists assist landowners in designing, developing, and funding habitat improvements on private lands. They possess the knowledge of federal, state, and local programs to assist landowners in finding the right program to meet their personal habitat and land-use goals. PF Farm Bill biologists are located in local USDA service centers in priority habitat areas



throughout Kansas pheasant range. More information on PF can be found online at pheasantsforever.org. For Kansas chapters, click Kansas on the U.S. map. Some individual chapters have their own website, as well.

Founded in 1973, the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf) has local chapters in every state and Canada. Through trap and transplant and habitat restoration projects in partnership with KDWPT, the NWTf has helped bring Kansas wild turkeys back from extirpation in the mid-twentieth century to abundance throughout most of the state. During the 2011-12 fiscal year, the Kansas State Chapter of the NWTf committed \$80,500 in Kansas to conservation, education and other projects. Efforts ranged from forest management at Fall River Wildlife Area and restoration of 400 acres of native grass savannah on Woodson Wildlife Area to contributions for KDWPT's Walk-In Hunter Access program in northcentral Kansas. Visit them online at nwtf.org.





A Fungus Amongus

Each spring, avid mushroom hunters seek out the valued morel, and they are

highly secretive about their secret spots. Morels are tasty and can be found virtually statewide along creeks, around decaying vegetation, deadfalls, or unkept orchards. They are recognizable and not easily confused with dangerous mushrooms. Although I never have much luck finding morels, I've eaten them and do find them a treat fried in butter.

Growing up on a farm near Abilene, I would often trek to the nearby woods to explore. One early fall day, after a week of rainstorms, while plinking around with a friend, I discovered a mess of fresh oyster mushrooms. My brother had showed me this species a year or so before, and I knew exactly what it was.

My friend and I found some bags, returned to the woods and picked the meaty mushrooms. The oyster mushrooms we found were on decaying cottonwoods, but I've also found them on elm, willows and live cottonwoods. This mushroom is thick and resembles a taco in shape and can weigh from just a few ounces to 2 or 3 pounds. The underside is gilled, and it is attached lengthwise to the host tree. Oyster mushrooms fruit all year but are most common in spring and fall. When fresh, they resemble suede in texture but

quickly turn leathery or rubbery as they age. Once mature, these shelves harden and resemble rock.



If you find oysters that are fresh, wash them gently and slice into strips. Then dip in a wash consisting of 1 cup buttermilk or milk and one egg. The strip can then be floured and deep fried or skillet fried in a mixture of butter and oil. Flour seasoned with salt and pepper is sufficient for battering mushrooms. The light taste can easily be overwhelmed with flavors, so keep it simple and don't double-dip in wash and flour. The resulting product is a tasty and earthy treat that is meaty and full of flavor. Some say it resembles oyster, but I compare it to a lightly-flavored, light-textured steak strip. Unused mushrooms can be rinsed whole and place in a storage bag and kept for a week in the refrigerator.

I recommend becoming familiar with edible and nonedible mushrooms before picking and eating them. There some very good books available to help identify the 150 species of mushrooms found in Kansas, including *A Guide To Kansas Mushrooms*, published by University Press of Kansas. Morel and oyster mushrooms are good for beginners because of the ease of identification. Keep an eye out this fall for oysters, and watch next spring for the morels to pop up.



FISHIN' with Mike Miller

All-round Utensils

I know it's still hot, but I'll make it official: we're into the fall fishing mode. What's that mean? It means that big schools of whites and wipers will be cruising the open waters of reservoirs eating and harassing schools of gizzard shad. There are avid anglers who've been taking advantage of this feeding activity already: those who live close to the lake and can go for a couple hours early or a couple of hours before sunset. However, for those of us who have to drive an hour or more, the cooler fall temperatures make spending the whole day much more attractive and the drive worthwhile.

You already know that whatever lure you cast – it should look like a 3- or 4-inch gizzard shad. That's

what they're eating. And there are lots of great lures out there that imitate gizzard shad, including jigs, spoons, crankbaits, inline spinners, spinnerbaits, soft jerkbaits, swimbaits and top-water plugs. I carry a few of each because I like fishing lures, but if you said I could only take one lure, I might have a breakdown. If you said I could take two lures for a fall fishing trip, I wouldn't like it, but I could survive. What would they be? I'd take a quarter-ounce jig with an orange head, and a three-inch white plastic curly-tail grub. I can fish that slow, fast, shallow and deep, and I can cast it a long way if white bass bust a school of shad on the surface. My second choice, and everyone should have several, is a jigging spoon/slab spoon; quarter-ounce again, white, silver or chartreuse. I can't fish it shallow very well, but I can cast it, and I can fish it vertically.



With these two lures, you can catch any sport fish chasing shad in the fall, but white bass and wipers love them. I usually fish them on relatively light tackle – 7-foot medium-light spinning outfit with 6-pound braid or super-line. With this outfit and these lures, you'll enjoy all the fishing fun you can stand this fall.

PROFILE:

with Mike Miller

J. Mark Shoup



Metaphorically, Mark Shoup's career path has been a long, winding journey, but he ended up not far from where he started, literally. Shoup is the associate editor for *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine, and he also coordinates the department's weekly news release program and printed brochure production.

Shoup grew up in Larned, only 60 miles from KDWP's Pratt office where he works, and he has fond memories of a childhood in that small rural community. His early years prepared him well for his eventual career.

"I can remember when I was 12 carrying my shotgun, wearing my hunting vest, and walking down the street through town to hunt doves just outside the city limits," he recalls. "The neighbors didn't give me a second glance."

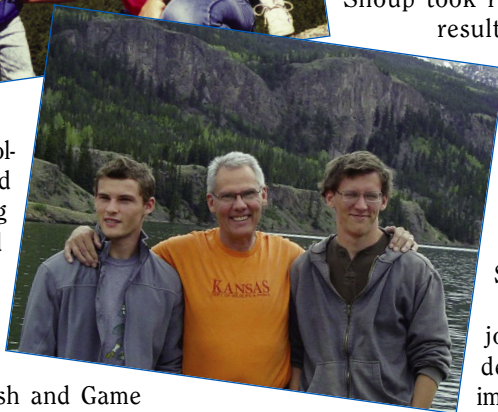
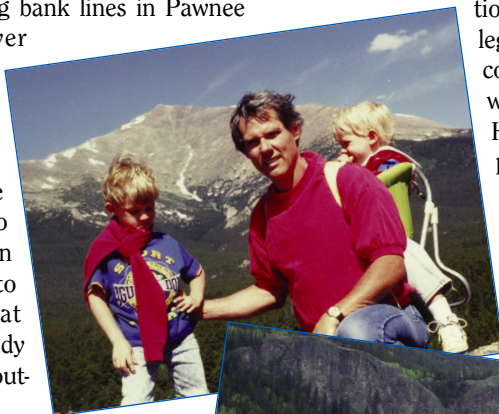
As a youngster, Shoup honed a natural wingshooting ability hunting ducks, doves and upland birds with his father. He also speaks reverently of fishing and setting bank lines in Pawnee Creek and the Arkansas River where the streams meet on the southwest corner of Larned.

After high school, Shoup attended college for a couple years before he was drafted into the army and spent a tour in Vietnam. When he returned to the states, hunting ducks that winter with a high school buddy reminded him how much the outdoors meant in his life.

Shoup spent several years working as a carpenter before going back to college. He received a master's degree in English and a master's of fine arts degree in creative writing from Wichita State University. But he didn't find a career that put his education to work for several years. In 1982, while working as a wholesale hardware representative, a seed was planted. On a trip to Pratt to visit a customer, he dropped by what was then the Kansas Fish and Game Commission headquarters just southeast of town. He didn't receive much encouragement from the Information staff when he inquired about potential opportunities, but the seed still grew.

Several years later, he contacted Paul Koenig, who was the editor of the magazine then, and Koenig gave Shoup a feature writing assignment. Shoup wrote several magazine features and discovered something that combined his love for the outdoors with his education and writing skills. He set a goal of one day working for the department. However, he learned that he would need nine more

"I think the most rewarding part of this job was working on these articles with department field staff,"



hours of college courses to meet the minimum education requirements.

Maybe it was luck, good timing or fate, but not long after Shoup completed the coursework he needed, Koenig decided to move back to his hometown of St. Louis. I was hired as the editor, opening the associate editor's position. In 1989, I offered Shoup the job, and he accepted without hesitation.

Shoup has held that position ever since, longer than any associate editor before him. Over the last 23 years, he has written and

assembled more than 1,100 weekly news packages. In the old days, the release package was typed, printed in-house, folded, stapled and mailed out to more than 900 media contacts. Today, the weekly package is instantly emailed out to more than 3,000 media and individual contacts. He has contributed his writing and editing skills to

135 bimonthly issues of *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine. And he's helped update, assemble, print and distribute 23 years worth of hunting and fishing regulation pamphlets, atlases and thousands of other publications and information materials.

But Shoup's contributions to magazine readers, hunters, anglers and wildlife conservation won't be measured in numbers or even longevity. His legacy will live in the words he wrote and the messages he conveyed. He was especially articulate and passionate when writing about his family, wife Rose and sons, Logan and Will. His pride in his family and the joy of raising two boys while passing on his love of the outdoors often filled his columns. He was also gifted in his ability to paint a picture with his words, describing a breathtaking view from a hiking trail high above Elk City Reservoir or the eerie feeling of walking into the bowels of the Kanopolis Reservoir Dam. Shoup took readers with him on his travels, which resulted in feature articles on the Arikaree

Breaks on northwest Kansas ("Arikaree Breaks Dancer"), Big Basin Preserve in southwest Kansas ("Ancient Mystery Of Big Basin"), and the Tall Grass Prairie Preserve ("Field Of Dreams"), as well as historical features on Osa Johnson ("Star Of The Cast"), L.L. Dyche ("A Man For All Seasons"), just to name a few.

"I think the most rewarding part of this job was working on these articles with department field staff," he said. "I was impressed to learn how dedicated they are to their jobs, and I've always appreciated what they do. And I felt that way every time I worked with them. They are remarkable people."

Shoup isn't retired yet, but he can see the light. This will be his last magazine as associate editor. I'll hold a page for him in the next issue if he chooses to write a farewell column. Metaphorically, Shoup's career may have come full circle in that he's uncertain what lies ahead. Literally, his words will live on in the archives of *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine.

HUNTING SPOTS

with Marc Murrell

BAND ON THE RUN

Nothing pleases a waterfowl hunter more than when his retriever brings back a duck or goose wearing a leg band. Bands, prizes of sorts, hold sentimental meaning to avid waterfowlers and are quite rare. However, leg bands and the information they can provide are truly important to waterfowl biologists who make decisions on the management of ducks and geese.

Banding has been practiced since the 1800s as a way of learning about the movements and habits of birds. Birds are captured, information such as age, sex, species and location are recorded, and once the metal band is placed, the bird is released. Information gathered when bands are recovered reveals plenty of clues to the life history of many species.

"It's one of the basic tools, particularly for those who study waterfowl," said Tom Bidrowski, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) waterfowl program coordinator. "It gave us the concept of the four different flyways across the continent, and it gives us data like survival, harvest and movement, so it's an important tool."

Two bird banding studies are underway in Kansas now.

"We typically band about 2,000 to 3,000 doves each year," Bidrowski said of a study that has been ongoing for several years.

A new study started this past summer when Bidrowski and other KDWPT personnel began banding resident Canada geese, particularly goslings, in an effort to collect more data on this species.

"This is the first year of a five-year study," he said. "The reason for this study is we're at the maximum of 107 days of goose hunting according to the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, so in order to raise our bag limits or institute something like an August season, we need more data to look at our resident geese."

"It's going to be a pretty important move in our goose management over the next decade," he added.



There's been a big push in the last two years in the Central Flyway to raise the daily bag limit from three Canada geese per day to possibly five or more, according to Bidrowski.

"But we have to know, percentage-wise, how many of these resident birds we're shooting and where we're shooting them," he said.

Wichita led the way, numbers-wise, as more than 600 Canada geese were banded there in a single day.

Bidrowski enlists the assistance of other KDWPT personnel from various divisions to help with banding efforts. It's not an easy task, so the more hands the better in many cases, particularly when dealing with possibly hundreds of birds at one site.

Catching the birds isn't difficult but requires plenty of teamwork. Framed panels with netting are laid flat on the ground in an octagon shape. The birds are corralled, with kayaks if they're in the water, or herded like sheep on land. (They're flightless for several weeks during their molt.) They're pushed toward the middle, and each person grabs a panel to form a pen. Several panels are dropped

out until a tidy, four-sided enclosure is left with one side lower than the rest to allow access to the birds.

Both adults and goslings are fitted with numbered metal leg bands issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Birds are sexed by inverting their cloacal opening and looking at, in plain terms, what pops up (male) or what doesn't (female). This information is recorded and now corresponds to a specific bird and used for reference upon band recovery. Geese are immediately released, and other than a new little "bling" and a few ruffled feathers, they're no worse for wear.

Banding efforts have taken place across the state, with many locations corresponding with reservoirs or major cities. Wichita led the way, numbers-wise, as more than 600 Canada geese were banded there in a single day.

If you're a waterfowl hunter, there's an outside chance that one of these banded birds will pay you a visit this fall. If you are one of the fortunate few who harvest a bird with a leg band, be sure to report it by calling the Banded-Bird Hotline at 1-800-327-BAND (2263), or go online at www.reportband.gov. Bands do not have to be returned, and you will receive a certificate of appreciation with information about where the bird was banded, its age (if known) and who banded it.

Fall Offers State Park Opportunities

Labor Day traditionally signals the end of summer and beginning of fall, even though the fall equinox is still three weeks away. After this sweltering summer, though, it could bring an upsurge in outdoor activity.

Now that temperatures are more bearable, families can camp, hike and boat without daily triple-digit heat. With most kids back in school, those who want to avoid crowds can spend quiet mid-week days at the parks, while families can enjoy their weekends.

Special events abound, ranging from cook offs and benefit rides to family reunions and mountain man rendezvous. Check out the events calendar on our website for events that interest you. We offer entertainment, exercise and exploration close to home.

We are wrapping up the first season of our new outdoor

recreation management system, popularly known as our ORMS system. After the initial learning curve on the part of staff and constituents, most agree that it is a wonderful tool for staff and a convenience to those customers who choose to use it. Visitors who want to be assured of a campsite or cabin can use the system, and those who like to take their chances on there being a site available can still do so.



Mike Blair photo

Camp Hansen Owls by Emily Lowe

It was the 28th day in April of 2012, and there was a Cub Scout camp going on at Camp Hansen. They were using the bouldering wall of our climbing tower. One of the instructors climbed the wall to show the Cub Scouts exactly how to do it when all of a sudden an owl flew out from behind the wall and nearly knocked him off!

We decided to go check it out. We found a family of barn owls were living behind the 8-foot bouldering wall in a gap about 1 ½ feet wide. The first time we went to see the owls, all we could see was the mother owl and broken eggshells. The second time we went to see them, both the parents were there together, and we could see five little baby owls under them. We continued to visit, and each time they were bigger than the time before. Sometimes there were critters such as rats, mice, and other rodents the parents had brought to feed to their young.

By the beginning of June the chicks were able to walk up and down in the area behind the wall. By the end of June, they were able to fly, and on June 27, we went to see the owls and there were only four baby owls in their space. We just figured they were flying off to start a new life, but to our surprise, when we went back to check on them on the June 29, there were seven owls in there again. Evidently they had discovered they were able to fly out of the narrow space but returned to what they knew as their home.

It's uncertain how long they will actually keep returning, but we will continue to check on them and see [as of last July, at this writing]. We've been told owls are territorial, that they will return from year to year to the same nesting spots. Considering the excitement they created at summer camp this year, it would be fantastic if they did. We'd like to continue to share a little knowledge about them and their habitats with young scouts in years to come.



Emily Lowe is the daughter of Rex and Patty Lowe who run and operate Hansen Boy Scout Camp, located on the south side of Kirwin Reservoir. She is in Thunder Ridge Middle School and very active in every aspect of school from athletics to scholastics. She is 13 years old and will be in the 8th grade this year. She has had a love for all kinds of animals since she was a little girl, so finding the owls was pretty exciting to her and the rest of the family. She's active in Girl Scouts, Teens for Christ, as well as KAYS and Scholars Bowl. Even though she keeps busy with all that, she always finds time to spend with her two black Labs and three cats.

Go With The Flow

with Mark VanScoyoc

“Why are those little silver fish that look like bait so important anyway?”

As part of our annual monitoring of the Arkansas River in southwest Kansas, I got the chance to leave my desk for a few days and get back out in the water. With net in hand, I surveyed, sorted and counted species of fish you'll find in our Kansas streams. It's apparent that the drought has taken a toll on our state's streams and rivers, especially in regions that have already been experiencing water issues for many years. I keep reminding myself that drought, however harsh, is a part of the natural cycle of things. As I've mentioned in previous articles, nature finds a way to survive and eventually recover from these harsh conditions.

My job as a stream biologist primarily focuses on how aquatic life is doing in Kansas streams and rivers, with particular emphasis on non-game species of fish and freshwater mussels. I'm often asked how our streams and rivers are faring, and I try to be as informative as possible and tell people it depends on where we're at and what we find or do not find as a result of our stream surveys.

Coal miners once took canaries down into the mineshafts to warn them of dangerous gas leaks. The birds would stop singing or even die, alerting the miners of unsafe conditions. Biologists have their own “canaries” they use to assess potential threats to our state's natural resources. Wildlife species considered threatened, endangered, or in need of conservation (SINC) are important tools for determining the health and vitality of the land and water.

Threatened and endangered species often get a bad name in the media because they may be considered obstacles to progress, such as new construction projects. Furthermore, the perception is also out there that if you find a threatened or endangered species on your land or in the stream running through your land, the government will be stepping in to tell you how you can or cannot use your land. It is true that laws such as the federal Threatened and Endangered Species Act, as well as the Kansas Nongame Act of 1974, are meant to protect the habitats where these species exist. There are extreme views on both sides of the issue on how these laws should be enforced. A concern for some people is that a little silver fish that resembles bait gets more consideration than human beings. Such concerns tend to be exaggerated and emotional in the wake of media reports. Often, these stories fail to mention why these animals are in trouble.

Biologists are not just concerned with managing wildlife species. The concern is for the habitat, whether land or water, that these animals require in order to survive. There is only so much of this resource, so it's necessary to make decisions that will benefit both wildlife and humans for the long term. Part of the mission statement for our agency is to conserve, protect, and enhance the resource for all species of animals in Kansas. Another part of that statement is to educate the public. Only about 3 percent to 5 percent of the land in Kansas is considered public and under the jurisdiction and care of the state. Educating and aiding landowners in implementing Best Management Practices (BMPs) continues to be another important part of our mission statement and even more important given current economic conditions in our nation.

So you might ask, “All this is fine and good, but what use are these endangered animals to me?” To that I would answer that factors causing the “little silver fish” to become threatened or endangered will eventually affect other species, our quality of life and our incredible natural heritage. They are our “canaries in the coal mine.”

As a biologist who deals with threatened and endangered species on a regular basis, I'll admit I don't fully understand the ramifications of having more species become extinct. It can be an overwhelming, confusing and controversial task to study and determine the causes of why a species

becomes threatened or endangered. I do know that biologists, scientists, and researchers prefer taking species off of these endangered lists rather than putting them on it.

We live in politically charged times where fierce debates occur on a variety of issues; natural resource management is not the least of these. When I first began working for the department, a former colleague/mentor now retired gave me a quote that I still have hanging on a bulletin board in my office. I still refer to it when necessary.

“We are still too ignorant of ultimate consequences to understand in full the urgent need to protect even the most inconspicuous forms of life so that we do not diminish the rich variety of biological resources that continue to exist. Nevertheless, the urgency is there, and we need to impress upon the public consciousness that extinction is an act of awesome finality.”

—James Buckley, Undersecretary of State under the Reagan Administration



Teachable Moments

This summer has been hot and dry. It makes me thirsty just writing about it. I've been planting a big garden for nearly 40 years, and the 2012 garden is by far the worst I've ever had. I told the wife the other day that we are going to go north to Montana or Minnesota next summer. Summer is NOT my favorite season of a Kansas year, especially the last two.

But life goes on, and so do the programs. Last summer, I gave a fisheries program at Rock Springs for a BOW bachelorette party. The temperature was 105 degrees, but the eight ladies still caught seven species of fish from the stream running through camp. In late July, our local 4-H club hosted an archery tournament at the Lincoln County Fair, and again the temperature at 3 p.m. was 105, but we still had 37 shooters. My agenda includes a Hunter Education class, a Post Rock 4-H District Archery Competition, BOW at Rock Springs in late September, and taking some of my local 4-Hers to the state 4-H Archery and Hunting Skills competition in October.

The other day, a 4-H mom asked me why I did so many programs and why I was so good at doing them. I was humbled by the compliment, and I told her about my years of experience as a fisheries biologist and that I really enjoyed the programs. The exchange made me think about what it takes to put on a good program.

It is really important to know your topic, and a lot of that comes with experience. In college, we had to read professional papers; we were taught to do research and present our findings; and were encouraged to keep up with modern technology. But if you try to give a program designed for your colleagues to a bunch of third graders, you are going to fail miserably. It is extremely important to present your information to the level of the audience, and that usually means KISS – keep it simple stupid.



I have found it very important to engage the audience in a program. Never just get up there and preach. It is a big advantage to pull people (kids especially) in to participate. Live critters, no matter how big or small, are a big hit, as are things you can bring that provide hands-on participation. Always end your program with a summary and allow time for questions. Remember, there is never a stupid question.

Always look for teachable moments. I've had youngsters do some really unsafe things during fishing clinics, archery and hunter education, and even baseball practice. I try, without making a big issue, to make the unsafe act a teachable moment. Those teachable moments work both ways. If a participant is doing something really well or has discovered something really neat, make sure that everyone is aware. It's great reinforcement to praise someone in a teachable moment situation. Make even the negative, scary situations into positive ones.

I was fortunate to have had a career where I spent a lot of time in the great outdoors. The outdoor classroom is by far the best for learning. I think a lot of teachers realize that but have difficulty figuring out how to present their material outside. My wife is a teacher, and she tries hard to get her classes outside at least a few times each year. She has to deal with scheduling buses, school events, and weather, but she will tell you how valuable things like the Eco-Meets, Envirothons, and Habitat Judging Contests are for the kids who are genuinely interested. Things like Outdoor Wildlife Learning Sites are wonderful learning environments. Almost every school has at least a small area of grass and trees where outdoor teaching can happen.

Remember: know your audience; engage them in your program; try to have live critters or hands-on materials; and take advantage of all those teachable moments. But, beware, if you are successful, you may one day retire but the programs and teachable moments will continue forever.

PRAIRIE CHICKEN PERMIT REQUIRED

A \$2.50 permit will be required to hunt lesser and greater prairie chickens this fall. Permits may be purchased wherever licenses are sold and online. The \$2.50 fee is the minimum charge, with all proceeds going to vendors and automation costs.

The permit will give KDWPT biologists the ability to identify and survey prairie chicken hunters. A random sampling of those individuals will be sent a post-season survey that will be used to develop more accurate estimates of harvest and species distribution.

The lesser prairie chicken has been

considered a candidate under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) since 1998, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) will release a proposed rule on the status of the bird under the ESA in September. KDWPT is opposed to a federal listing of the lesser prairie chicken because it will likely hamper voluntary landowner enrollment in conservation programs that have greatly benefited lesser prairie chickens and other grassland wildlife across the state. Information from the new prairie chicken survey will help KDWPT to further justify hunting of

lesser prairie chickens to the USFWS and the general public in the face of possible listing. Research has already shown that the current level of hunter harvest has negligible effects on population growth, which is much more sensitive to changes in the production of young.

Also new for 2012, the Northwest Prairie Chicken Unit has been expanded to include all of Kansas west of U.S. Highway 281 and north of Highway 96. That unit will also now be open during the early season, Sept. 15-Oct. 15.

—KDWPT News

KANSAN RISES TO THE TOP

by Jonathan Manteuffel

Brent Chapman of Lake Quivira, is having a phenomenal year as a professional bass fisherman. He started the 2012 season of the Bassmaster Elite Series ranked 58th in the world of bass fishing, according to the BassFan.com World Rankings. Now, with one event left to go in the season, he has climbed an incredible 56 places to claim the Number Two spot in the rankings. It is the highest he has been ranked since BassFan.com began publishing their World Rankings.

As the series of eight tournaments unfolded, beginning in March, Chapman started strong with a 4th place finish at the St. John's River in Florida. A 5th at Lake Okeechobee moved him up to 2nd in the Bassmaster Angler of the Year (AOY) race (which considers only the 99 anglers fishing the Bassmaster Elite Series). After another 5th place finish, this time at Table Rock Lake, he found himself at the top of the AOY list. Unfortunately, Douglas Lake in Tennessee proved to be a very challenging venue for him and he finished well down the list at 68th place, out of the money cut (top 50). The bomb dropped him to 3rd in the AOY standings, 40 points behind the new leader.

Apparently determined to erase the sour taste of a poor finish after three consecutive Top Fives, he rebounded to dominate the next contest on Louisiana's Toledo Bend, taking the lead on the second day and never relinquishing it. It was his first Elite Series win (the series began in 2006), and fourth win of his 17-year career. And he did it fishing deep, rather than in his comfort zone fishing shallow water cover. The win put him back atop the AOY points race.

Chapman has kept his No. 1 position since then, and continued his string of high finishes, logging a 22nd at the Upper Mississippi River, then a 27th at Lake Michigan's Green Bay. He will take a

13-point lead into the final event on New York's Oneida Lake August 23-26, 2012. That means if he can finish 13th or better – which he's done in four of seven tournaments so far – he will be the 2012 Bassmaster AOY.

So far he has won well over \$100,000 in prize money, plus sponsor contingency cash. The Angler of the Year is a highly-regarded honor among the pros, and if he can hold on to win that, it will add more cash to his bank account.

Every pro fishing the Bassmaster Elite Series wants to do well enough to qualify to fish the Bassmaster Classic tournament, one of the most prestigious events in the sport. Chapman is already double-qualified, through his tour-level win on Toledo Bend, and by virtue of winning a next-tier-down Bassmaster Central Open tournament in a fish-off after the final weigh-in at Lake Lewisville, Texas. He looks to be a lock to triple-qualify through the AOY points. (The top 28 qualify for the Classic, though more will be added after double-qualifiers are factored in). He has said that being Classic-qualified even before the Elite Series season started has allowed him to fish loose and take more chances and follow his intuition more, without the pressure associated with "fishing for points" to make the Classic. Apparently Chapman's fishing intuition is right in tune with the bass this year.



LAKE SCOTT BEST BEACH

In early summer, USA TODAY asked local experts to select their favorite beach in each state and the District of Columbia. Scott State Park, north of Scott City, was tagged as having the "best" beach in Kansas.

"Lake Scott opens like a surprise package amidst the vast plains and farmland of western Kansas," the publication stated in a May 29 article entitled "Just for Summer: 51 Great American Beaches."

This is not the first national accolade for the area. In the 1980s, Scott was listed by National Geographic's Traveler magazine as one of 50 "must-see" state parks in the country.

—KDWPT News

WAY outside BY BRUCE COCHRAN



"HE'S TRYING TO GET IN TOUCH WITH HIS INNER BEAVER."

THE OFFICIAL GUIDE FOR

KANSAS

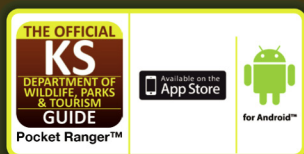
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Little Birds On The Prairie

text by Mike Rader

wildlife education coordinator, Pratt

photographs by Bob Gress

director, Great Plains Nature Center, Wichita

Hummingbirds are marvels of the bird world. Their tiny size, high metabolism and lightning-fast movements intrigue any observer. And while Kansas is not known for hummingbirds, 11 species have been documented here, which is a pretty high compared to surrounding states. We are fortunate because of our location in the center of the continent and being in the migration route of several species that nest to the north and west. We have also been lucky enough to have a few vagrant hummingbirds from the south and west grace our borders when observant birders were in the right place and time to identify them.

Kansas has one resident hummingbird species, the rubythroat. It is fairly common in the eastern part of the state (and the U.S.) from April through September. Rubythroats commonly nest in the eastern half of Kansas, and some birds have been observed spending the summer as far west as Pratt and Salina. Numbers are higher in late-April and early-May during spring migration and again in August and September with fall migration and young-of-the-year birds coming back through. Most winter in Mexico and Central America, so Kansas serves as a destination and also a part of their migration route to nesting areas farther north. Adult males of this species are easy to identify, with a dark, iridescent red throat, dark face, a V-shaped black tail and a green iridescent back. Female and young rubythroats have a light green back and white throat and breast and can appear similar to female and immature individuals of other species that may pass through, making identification difficult.

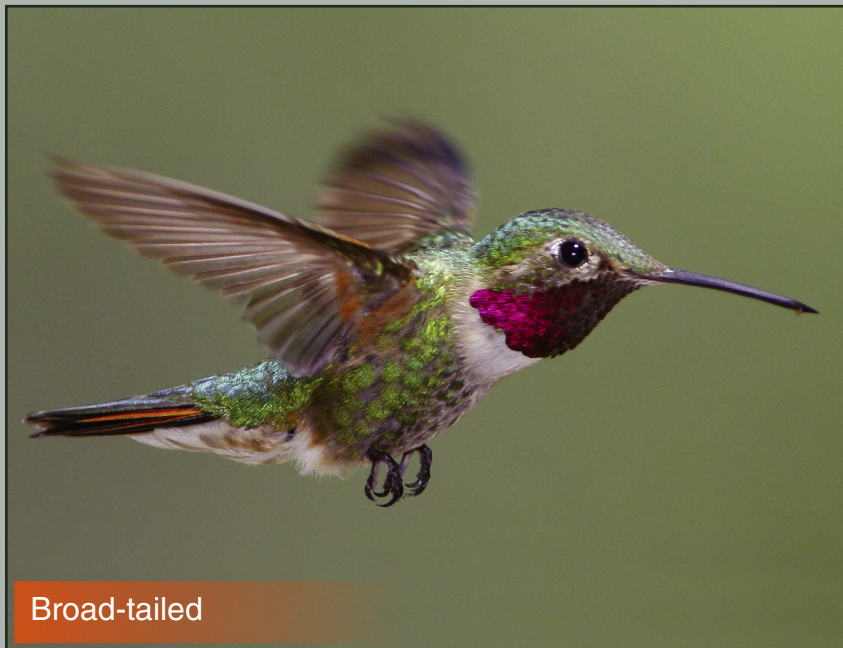
Ten other species of hummingbirds have been documented in Kansas. Realistically, only about four of them offer a decent chance of being observed at the feeders and flowers in the state, especially in the west and southern regions. It would take a tremendous amount of column space to describe features of all the species that have occurred in Kansas, so instead, I will just touch on a few characteristics to look for. Entire field guides are dedicated to hummingbird identification.



Rufous

Rufous hummingbirds are rare transients during migration but are recorded in many parts of Kansas except the southeast corner. Adult males are pretty easy to identify, with orange-red backs and tail, buffy sides and a reddish throat. Females and young birds have orange-red features, as well, with more green on the back and head. Some rufous winter in the southeastern U.S., so we are in their migration route to some extent and are the most common non-ruby-throated hummingbird to be seen in the state.

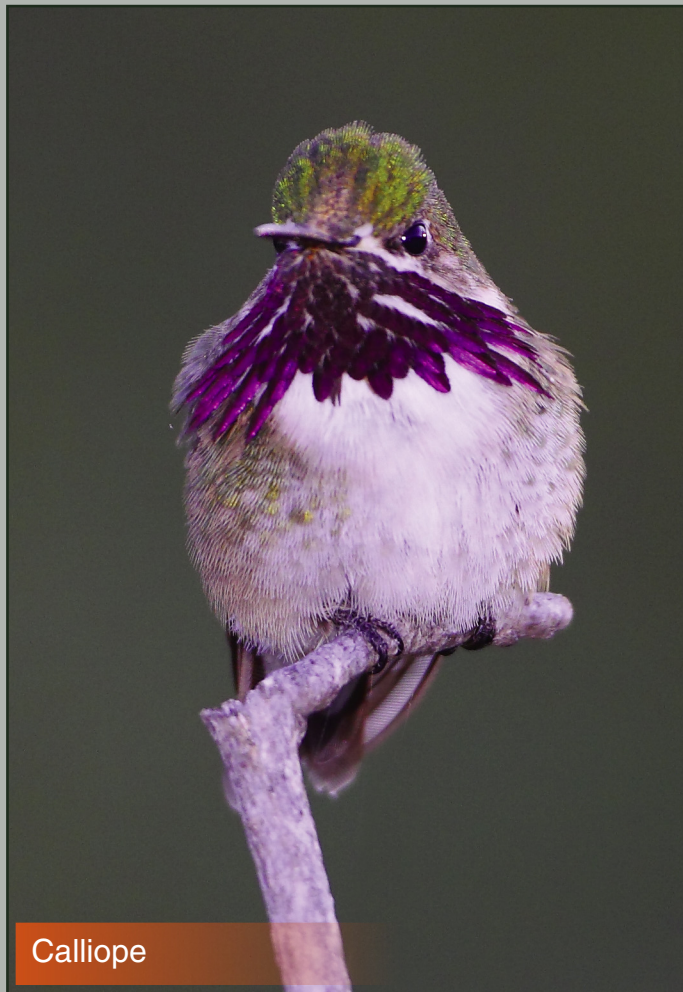
Broad-tailed hummingbirds are common nesters in Colorado and to the north and west, so some may wander east into the state as transients and will show up in yards, especially in southwest Kansas. They have a small amount of the orange color in the tail, with adult males looking sort of like rubythroats, but the red throat is of a different hue. The tail is much wider and is not forked. Females are more difficult to identify but have buffy sides and a large, white-tipped tail as well.



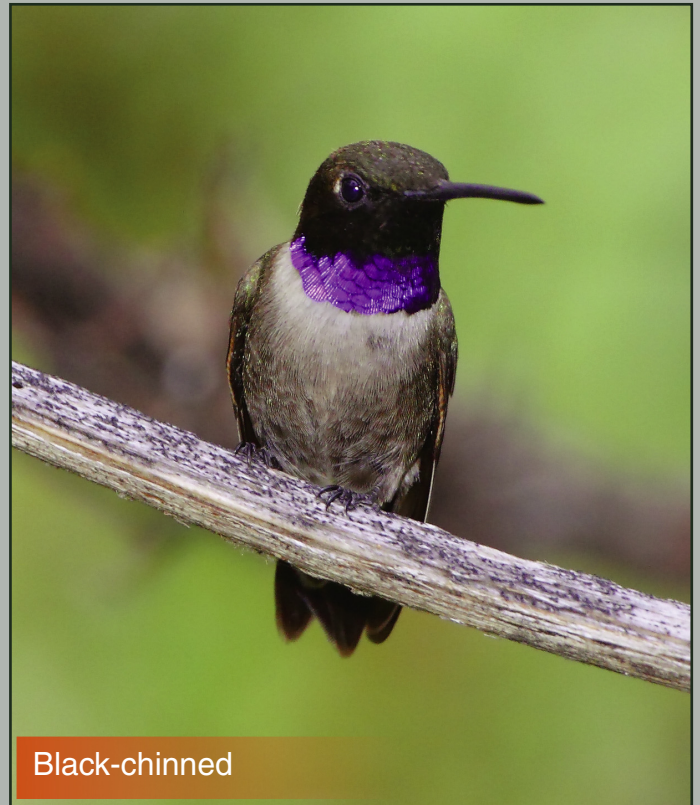
Broad-tailed

Calliope hummingbirds are the smallest species in North America. They are truly tiny, with adult males having a metallic green back and crown and a white throat with purple gorget feathers extending past the throat. Females have a green back, white throat with some dark streaks, buffy sides and small, white-tipped tail feathers. They have short, straight bills and their wings extend beyond the tail. They have been showing up in increasing numbers in southwest and central Kansas but are still considered rare transients

Black-chinned hummingbirds look very similar to ruby-throateds, with the females being almost identical to each other. Adult male black-chinneds have a metallic green back, crown and breast, a black throat with a purple band and a white collar. They are typically a Southwest species but sometimes wander into the state and may breed in some years in southwest Kansas. They are still considered rare.



Calliope



Black-chinned

The remaining six species of hummingbird that have been found in Kansas are extremely rare and cause a lot of excitement when reported here, including:

Broad-billed – It is a Mexican and southwestern U.S. species with blue and green plumage and a red bill with dark tip. There are only two records from Kansas, and they are considered very rare here.

Magnificent – It is a Southwest species as well, with less than five records for the state. It's a large hummingbird, probably twice the size of our typical species and dark green and turquoise in color. Any "large" hummer needs closer inspection, so please report sightings to me at the Pratt Office!

Anna's – This species is fairly cold-tolerant and nests in the Pacific Northwest. If you have a hummingbird at your feeder in later months (October, November, early December), it could be this species. The males have a purple gorget and some purple on the head. Female and immature birds are difficult to identify, as they can look very similar to other, more common species. There are a dozen or so records for the state.



Magnificent

Costa's – This is a West Coast species with fewer than five records for the state. It's a beautiful little bird, with adult males having long, purplish gorget feathers and a slightly de-curved bill. Female and immature Costa's are very plain and can be easily overlooked. There are less than five records for Kansas

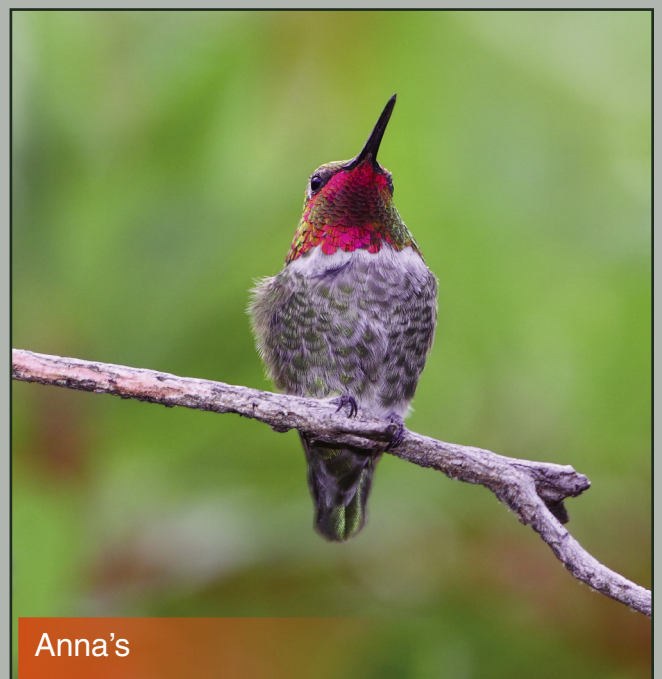
Allen's – This species is also a West Coast native, and being in the same genus as rufous, it shares many of the same plumage characteristics. This makes for an identification challenge as the differences can come down to something as specific as measurement of tail feathers. Adult males have a green back, but a small percentage of rufous males do as well, so it is a tough identification to make. There are only a couple of records for Kansas

Green Violetear – This species is from Central and South America but is a vagrant that often wanders north into the central U.S. The only record for Kansas was near Keats, west of Manhattan, in the summer of 2011. It caused quite a stir in the Kansas birding community and a few of us were lucky enough to see it. It's a medium-sized hummer with lots of green on it. It has been observed in several adjacent states and was an expected vagrant here.

Hummingbirds are a treat to watch and to host. There are many kinds of plants that can be used to draw them to your yard, including salvia, cardinal climber, trumpet vine, cannas, butterfly bush, petunias and others. The birds are attracted by the showy plants, even though some of the flowers are too large or deep for them to actually feed on. That's where a high-quality feeder or two come into play. They can be enticed to stay during migration for a few days if there is fresh sugar water available. Migration starts in late July for male ruby-throats, later for female and immatures and continues through the fall into at least October. August through October can be very good for the other species that migrate through the state, so providing a good food source is a way to see lots of hummers. Spring usually offers a substantially lower chance of seeing species other than ruby-throats.

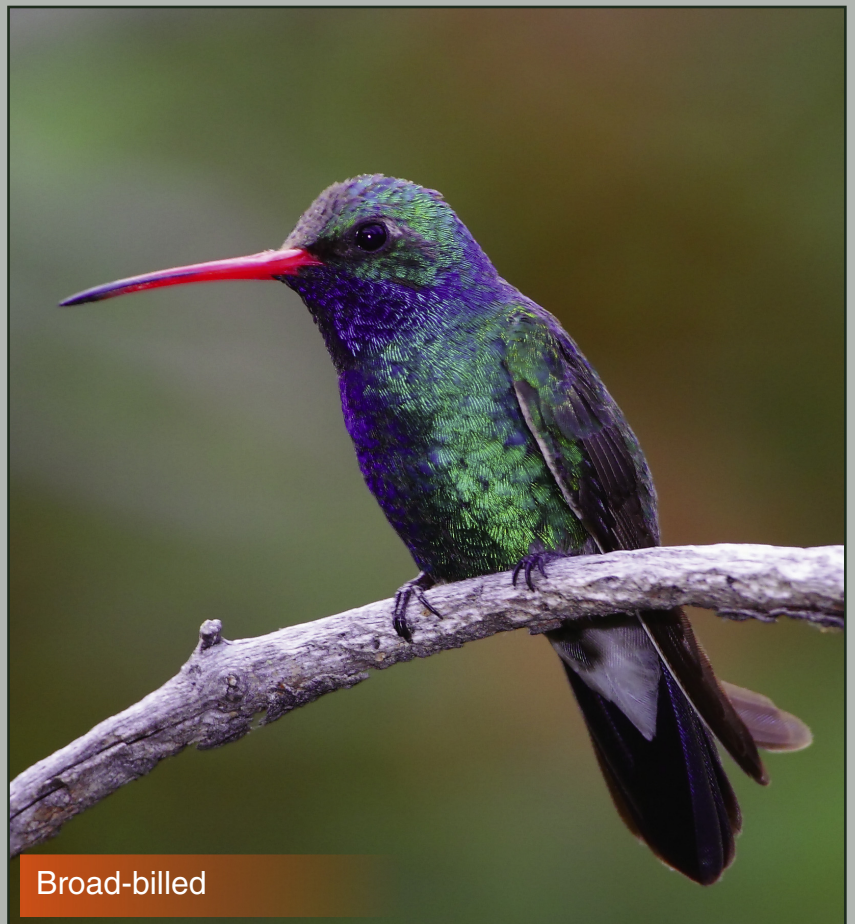
Early in the fall migration season when it is still hot outside, feeders need to be cleaned frequently and the sugar water changed. Birds can be sickened or killed by fermented food and mold, so if you don't plan on regular maintenance of the feeders, don't put them up. You could do more harm than good. I usually start the season with four-part water to one-part sugar in our feeders, then change to a three-part water to one-part sugar later in the fall when the birds need more energy. I also don't fill the feeders all the way to save on sugar. It's more economical to fill them less than half and clean and refill every couple of days.

Eastern Kansas towns can be really good for



Anna's

ruby-throated hummingbirds - usually less so for the other species. Some folks who feed there can have dozens of ruby-throateds using their feeders, consuming gallons of the sweet, syrupy mixture. Many communities in the central and western parts of the state seem to be real "migrant traps" for some of the western species of hummingbirds, with lots of Kansas birders traveling to look for them. There are several yards in Garden City and Larned that have become regular stops for high numbers and good species diversity of hummingbirds. Some neighborhoods and alleys in Hays, Liberal, Ulysses, Elkhart and other western towns have residents that feed hummingbirds and can have good numbers, as well. I've made many fall trips to south-west Kansas to get in on hummingbird migration at my in-laws home in Satanta, where Jack and Norma Conover see up to five different species during fall migration. My family and I have observed five different species at our house and friends' yards around Wilson. My mom has had hummingbirds use her feeders in Kensington, and a friend in Osborne has observed multiple species there in recent years, so northcentral Kansas can have some hummingbird excitement, as well.



Broad-billed



Green Violetear

Watching these fantastic little birds can be a tremendous amount of fun and a great identification challenge. My best advice to people wanting to try identifying the birds that come to their feeders is get at least a couple of bird field guides. The National Geographic Society, Peterson Field Guides, Kaufman Field Guides, National Audubon Society, the Sibley Field Guides and many others provide high-quality printed references with excellent identification tips for all the expected species. There are several good internet sites devoted entirely to hummingbirds that can be of great help in identification, timing of migration and neat facts about them, too. With the dry conditions in the mountain west parts of the U.S. this year, we could have a great migration through western Kansas. I hope to get out and see some this fall. Lots of places have hummingbird feeders on clearance shelves this time of year, so it's not too late to put up a feeder and watch to see what happens. ♡

Shots In The Night

by Mike Miller
editor, Pratt

Kansas game wardens answer a deer poaching report from a Red Hills rancher and step into a cesspool of deer poachers with no regard for wildlife laws. A collaborative effort among state and federal agencies exposed one of the largest deer poaching cases ever prosecuted in the U.S.



OPERATION CIMARRON

The gravel road was dark that evening, especially in this part of the county where ranch house yard lights are few and far between and streetlights from the nearest town are miles away. The rancher had been traveling this road all of his life, and even in the pitch black, he knew exactly where he was. When he saw headlights bouncing in the inky distance to the west, he knew they were in his pasture and they weren't supposed to be there. He turned west toward the lights, and the vehicle, which had been moving slowly, turned and sped toward the road. The rancher accelerated and closed the gap, close enough to read part of the license tag number. But the mystery truck's driver drove at desperate speeds, and the rancher soon gave up the chase.

He had a hunch about what those in the truck were up to. It was November, and the deer rut was on. He drove back to the pasture lane where the truck had pulled out, rumbled over

the cattle guard, and shined his headlights across the prairie. As he slowly turned the truck in a circle, his eyes following the high beams' illumination, he hoped maybe he was wrong or they had missed. But then he saw it, a lifeless brown lump barely visible in the brown grasses. As the truck rolled up slowly, he could make out the body of a white-tailed buck – a truly large buck. His suspicions were confirmed. The vehicle he had chased carried deer poachers, trespassers – criminals. To prevent the poachers from returning later and stealing the buck, he hauled it home and locked it in a shed. He called Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism's (KDWPT) district Law Enforcement supervisor Tracy Galvin, who lived nearby in Coldwater. Galvin promised to visit the next morning. Later that night, someone attempted to break into the shed that held the dead buck. When they couldn't get in, they loaded up the rancher's ATV and took it.

The Red Hills region of Barber, Kiowa and Comanche counties is truly a Kansas treasure. The prairie features rugged canyons, mesas, clear creeks lined with timber, and hills covered with native grass, sandhill plum thickets and yucca.

Galvin came by the next day, examined the deer and tried to run the partial Texas tag number. He didn't have enough of the number for identification, and he couldn't locate any hunters staying or hunting in the immediate area that fit the rancher's description. Things were back to normal the rest of the winter.

When the archery season opened the next fall, the rancher hadn't forgotten the incident and was on alert. On one typical November Red Hills evening, when the wind died and the air cooled noticeably, the rancher knew bucks would be on the move. It was well after sunset, and he was just finishing up chores when heard the unmistakable boom of a high-powered rifle. He stopped what he was doing, held his breath and listened. Another shot echoed through the hills. The man was the third generation of his family to live on this ranch, and he was fiercely protective of the land and its resources. After driving nearby backroads and failing to locate the shooter, he called Galvin. He reported the shots as well as a new camp of hunters he'd noticed not far from the town of Wilmore. The next day, Galvin and game warden B.J. Thurman investigated.

They found the camp of out-of-state hunters and drove in and introduced themselves. While it was archery deer season and the hunters all had nonresident archery deer permits, high-powered rifles were visible in camp and in vehicles. When questioned about the rifles, they claimed they used them to hunt wild pigs. (Hunting the area's budding population of feral hogs was legal at the time – no closed season and no shooting hour restrictions.) They even had a dead hog in camp to prove it. Finding no evidence of violations, Galvin and Thurman turned their investigation in another direction. The two game wardens didn't know it at the time, but they were at the edge of a precipice leading to the underworld of poaching and what would become one of the largest deer poaching cases ever prosecuted in the U.S.

The Red Hills region of Barber, Kiowa and



Comanche counties is truly a Kansas treasure. The prairie features rugged canyons, mesas, clear creeks lined with timber, and hills covered with native grass, sandhill plum thickets and yucca. A few crop fields are planted in the bottomland. Cattle graze on the ranches, which are large and mostly undivided by roads. The region is rich with natural resources and sparsely populated with people. Diaries of mid-1800s pioneers exploring this area describe an amazing wealth of wildlife, including deer, turkeys in untold numbers, buffalo, and quail. However, the big game species were extirpated by unregulated subsistence hunting by 1900. It wasn't until the 1970s that deer and turkeys returned in huntable numbers. As the deer population grew, the region became known for trophy-class bucks. By 2000, the Red Hills had become a desired deer-hunting destination for hunters from across the U.S. Giant deer can become an obsession for some, who may be willing to travel great distances, pay large access and guiding fees, and even ignore regulations. This allure would play a major part in the case at hand.

Galvin and Thurman continued to investigate, running down other leads without success, but they never forgot the first encounter. The next fall, the same rancher reported finding dead deer with just the heads cut off – the worst symptom of trophy-sick poachers. The camp near Wilmore was vacant. This is big country, and if a person wants to stay out of sight, he can. A couple of years went by without contact with those original hunters.

Galvin kept the group on his radar, though, and three years after the first call about these poachers, Galvin found them again. They had purchased 8 acres south of Coldwater, and they had set up a camp there they dubbed Lone Star Camp.

It wasn't until the 1970s that deer and turkeys returned in huntable numbers. As the deer population grew, the region became known for trophy-class bucks. By 2000, the Red Hills had become a desired deer-hunting destination for hunters from across the U.S.

"The Oklahoma gun deer season was open, and we were down working the Oklahoma line. As our group of wardens was heading back to town one afternoon, I thought we should swing by their new camp. As we drove by, we could see several deer hanging with hunters working on them, so we pulled in," Galvin remembered. "I went back to where the deer were hanging and immediately saw that one didn't have a tag. It was kind of funny, but when a hunter saw what I was looking at, he asked if he could borrow a pen. I told him it was a little late for that."

Galvin wrote a ticket for an untagged deer – the law requires big game and turkeys to have the carcass tag attached before being moved from the site of the kill. It's not an uncommon violation, but it is important to prevent permit fraud. A woman in camp claimed to have killed the deer, but one of the men, unrelated, followed Galvin to town to pay the bond. While en route, Galvin called the other game wardens and told them they might as well look around the camp further while he took care of the bond. They had left but turned around and went back after Galvin's call. As they arrived, they witnessed an individual dragging an empty cooler in the field behind camp. Warden Brian Hanzlick was with the group, and he had Alley, his K-9 partner, with him. Alley is trained to find game meat, and the black Lab quickly found deer meat that had been dumped in the grass. No one in the group had a tag for the tossed meat. More tickets were issued, and this group, several who'd been contacted several years ago, appeared more like hardened poachers than well-meaning hunters who'd made a mistake.

With this rash of violations, Galvin's suspicions grew, and he thought one of the main figures, James Bobby Butler from Martinsville, Tex., may have been guiding hunters without a Kansas guide's license. During questioning, he was told that they were just a group of friends who pooled their money and had Butler lease property in Kansas for them to hunt on. However, when Galvin asked more personal questions, it was evident the hunters in camp didn't know one another very well.



Convinced that Butler was guiding without a license, Galvin talked with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) special agent John Brooks, who works out the Derby office. Later that winter, Brooks worked with special agents in Texas to find out if the group was promoting guided deer hunts in Kansas. They came up empty, and it appeared that clients were carefully screened and usually connected to someone within the group. Galvin knew then he would need someone from the inside to provide information.

The next year, that break in the case came. The requirement for a guide license was abolished by the legislature the previous year, but Galvin was convinced that some of the people associated with Lone Star Camp were committing other violations. He became acquainted with a Texas bowhunter hunting on his own in the Coldwater area who had a friend staying at Lone Star Camp. Galvin learned the man had had a falling out with Butler, so he encouraged the bowhunter to have his friend come forward.

Later that winter, the hunter agreed to an interview, and Galvin and Brooks travelled to Texas. After the interview, they had a pretty good idea of what was happening, and they were convinced major violations were routinely committed, including permit fraud, over limit, use of spotlights and night scopes, and Lacey Act violations. The Lacey Act is a federal law that makes it illegal to knowingly transport or sell through interstate commerce any wildlife taken or pos-

The next fall, the same rancher reported finding dead deer with just the heads cut off – the worst symptom of trophy-sick poachers.

sessed in violation of state law or regulation. When a second informant came forward, wardens learned of additional violations and rampant deer poaching beyond their suspicions.

The goal of the subsequent investigation was to identify the main players and as many of the illegal clients as possible. Kansas game wardens and USFWS special agents began compiling evidence: enough to have air-tight cases. Intense surveillance followed, requiring the work of many wardens. It was evident that writing tickets for misdemeanor violations wouldn't slow these poachers down. And even though wardens kept the investigation clandestine, not wanting to tip off the group, there were several occasions where officers had no choice but to write tickets.

"I got a call from the Comanche County sheriff's deputy late one night," Galvin recalled. "He'd seen some lights and guys in a field across from the airport. When the deputy pulled off the highway, a truck took off, leaving guys hiding in the field. While we were looking for them, the truck came back by, so the deputy went after it and stopped it."

Galvin and the deputy eventually found the poachers hiding in the field where they had poached a deer and learned then they were connected to Butler and Lone Star. Concerned with how this could impact the investigation, Galvin made an early-morning phone call to special agent Brooks for his input. The two lawmen agreed that he had no choice but to write tickets. This wouldn't be the first or the last time individuals associated with the camp were cited, and it became clear that misdemeanor fines wouldn't stop them from poaching. One of the guns confiscated that night had a \$3,500 night scope attached. The poachers were well equipped to commit wildlife crimes.

The investigation continued with what Thurman describes as old-school game warden work – lying in ditches, hiding behind yuccas, keeping a log of vehi-



photo courtesy BJ Thurman

cles that came and went and taking tag numbers. While productive, this kind of investigation is labor intensive. To ensure the safety of officers on stakeout, others provided transportation and backup. But it worked.

"It took everybody," Thurman said. "I've never seen a group of game wardens come together and work something like this."

As intelligence was gathered, warden Phil Kirkland worked in front of his computer. First, using a tag number, he would attempt to identify the owner of a vehicle, then he would find the person's address. Often, because the Texas vehicle tag numbers are in a variety of configurations and were spotted through optics in less than ideal conditions, Kirkland would have up to three names that could be the owner of a vehicle. To add to the confusion, he discovered that many from the South use their middle name rather than their first name. He would then query KDWPT's deer and turkey permit database and find out which of the names had Kansas permits.

Tediously and meticulously, he assembled a spreadsheet of permit holders who had visited Lone Star Camp. He began to see a pattern: nearly all were from a two or three-county area in east Texas. This gave him another line to follow through KOALS, searching for individuals from this area who had Kansas permits. He also uncovered a pattern indicating permit fraud. He found individuals tied to Lone Star Camp, which is located in Deer Management Unit 16, with buck permits valid in Deer Management Unit 10 or other eastern-Kansas units. Sometimes they also purchased doe tags valid in Unit 16. It was much easier to obtain a nonresident buck permit in Unit 10 than in Unit 16,

but if the individuals carried a Unit 16 doe tag, they could appear legitimate if checked in the field. He also discovered some were buying fall turkey permits to appear legal while hunting in the area. Kirkland's final spreadsheet had 159 names on it. Not all on the list had broken wildlife laws, but all were connected by some thread.

"It was like a spider web," Kirkland said. "While tracking down leads on one line of connections, I'd find others. As we got further along in the investigation, it became important to us to find out how everybody met everybody and how they all mixed, so you knew who was a friend and who was a paying client – who wasn't inside the circle."

Another factor in the success of the investigation was assistance from Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) game wardens. TPWD wardens inspected Texas taxidermy shops, and when they found heads from Kansas, they would send the names to Kirkland for research.

Kirkland compiled information folders on each of the suspects, including photos, residences, dates they hunted, and permits they held. This information would prove invaluable when officers traveled to Texas to begin questioning.

Another means of gathering evidence against the poachers was watching video of the hunts. Many of the deer killed in Kansas were photographed on video, and those scenes often made it to broadcast TV or were recorded on commercially-produced DVDs. Officers searched video, matching hunters with those on file and locations that could be identified in Kansas.

When the Kansas wardens thought they had enough evidence, they approached supervisors and proposed a task force that would travel to Texas and question suspects. With approval, Thurman worked

with USFWS special agent Brooks and TPWD wardens to coordinate the roadtrip.

"We had 10 Kansas wardens, 12 Fish and Wildlife Service special agents and approximately 20 Texas game wardens," Thurman recalled. "We met and had a briefing, but we'd sent out the suspect information folders ahead of time, so everyone knew who they were after. We knew we had at least 20 deer that had been taken illegally."

"The Texas wardens, even though they didn't have a dog in this hunt, were a huge help," Thurman said. "They knew some of the suspects, they knew the area, and they had already located many of the residences, which would have been extremely difficult in this part of Texas without their help."

The task force headquarters was located in Centerville, Tex., an area where many of the suspects were from. Teams made up of one USFWS special agent, one KDWP officer and one or two TPWD officers were assigned suspects to interview. Included in the information folders was a list of specific questions for each suspect investigators wanted answers to.

"That's one of the best things to come out of this investigation," Thurman said. "This new way of compiling information on suspects. The information folders were a huge help to the teams in Texas and proved to be crucial to making our cases."

The first evening's interviews went smoothly, and the advantage of having a large number of teams all interviewing simultaneously was evident during the first interviews.



They had purchased 8 acres south of Coldwater, and they had set up a camp there they dubbed Lone Star Camp.



photo courtesy BJ Thurman

After two days of interviews, the wardens came back to Kansas with a trailer full of mounted deer heads and antlers from illegally taken deer and a mountain of information to be compiled into reports.

Kansas officers in Texas from left to right, Matt Stucker, Dan Melson, Jeff Sutton, Brian Hanzlick, special agent John Brooks, Tracy Galvin, BJ Thurman and Jeff Goeckler

"While I was interviewing Marlin Butler," Kirkland recalls, "his cell phone was ringing constantly."

The circle of insiders were attempting to warn others about the investigation. In fact, when one team arrived at a suspect's property, they found him trying to burn and bury mounted deer heads. Even so, more than 40 deer heads were confiscated that first night. When suspects were confronted with the overwhelming evidence, many signed confessions and turned over heads from deer taken illegally.

After two days of interviews, the wardens came back to Kansas with a trailer full of mounted deer heads and antlers from illegally taken deer and a mountain of information to be compiled into reports. The reports ended up filling more than 5,000 pages, and the information contained led to another round of interviews, resulting in more charges and more deer heads.

"At the same time we were doing the interviews in Texas, a search warrant was being served on the Lone Star Camp in Kansas," Kirkland said. "In the cabin, there was a wall covered with 8-by-10 pictures of individuals with dead deer — the 'wall of shame' we called it. They seized all the pictures off the wall, and I scanned them to add to our information folders. We were able to identify and locate antlers from every deer in those photos."

When the dust cleared, Operation Cimarron, as it was named, identified and confiscated 119 deer known to be taken illegally. The average Boone and Crockett score of deer confiscated was 159, truly trophy-class

antlers. Deer antlers are scored in inches, and all the scores of illegal antlers added together measure more than one-quarter of a mile. While many hunting violations were committed, it was decided to focus on felony charges from Lacey Act violations and prosecute the cases in federal court.

In June of 2010, a federal grand jury in Wichita returned a 23-count indictment charging James Bobby Butler Jr. with conspiracy to violate the Lacey Act, 18 substantive violations of the Lacey Act and three

counts of obstruction of justice. His brother Marlin Jackson Butler was charged with conspiracy to violate the Lacey Act and 12 substantive violations of the Lacey Act.

The indictment alleged that from 2005 to 2008, James and Marlin Butler conspired to knowingly transport and sell in

interstate commerce deer that had been hunted in violation of Kansas state law. In particular, the brothers are alleged to have operated a guiding service and hunting camp in Comanche County where they sold guiding services to out-of-state hunters for the purpose of illegally hunting and killing white-tailed deer and mule deer.

According to the indictment, hunters guided by the Butler brothers killed deer in excess of annual bag limits, hunted deer without permits or using permits for the wrong deer management unit, killed deer using illegal equipment, and hunted using prohibited methods such as spotlighting. In addition to selling their guiding services, the brothers are further alleged to have arranged for transport of the deer, or parts of

"Not counting prosecution, we've logged more than 5,000 man-hours, many of which were above and beyond normal work expectations. And that shows dedication."

special agent John Brooks



the deer, particularly the antlers, from Kansas to Texas.

This case was prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Kansas and the Justice Department's Environmental Crimes Section. On March 16, 2011, the Butlers pleaded guilty in federal court in Wichita to felony conspiracy and wildlife trafficking charges. James Bobby Butler Jr. pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to violate the Lacey Act, one substantive Lacey Act count, and one count of obstruction of justice. Marlin Jackson Butler pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to violate the Lacey Act and one Lacey Act count.

The guided hunts were sold for between \$2,500 and \$5,500 and in several instances resulted in the killing of trophy-sized buck deer. In the plea agreements, the Butlers admitted knowingly selling guided hunts for the illegal taking of the 25 buck deer identified in the indictment, for which hunters paid them \$77,500 in guiding fees plus tips. James Butler also admitted in his plea agreement that he instructed another person to conceal or destroy evidence during the investigation.

Last July, Barry Grissom, U.S. attorney for the District of Kansas, and Ignacia S. Moreno, assistant attorney general for the Justice Department's Environment and Natural Resources Division announced that James Bobby Butler, Jr. was sentenced to 41 months in federal prison. He was ordered to pay \$50,000 in fines and restitution and must also serve three years of supervised probation, during which he can have nothing to do with hunting, fishing or trapping. Marlin Butler was sentenced to 27 months in federal prison and fined \$20,000. He also must serve three

Deer antlers are scored in inches, and all the scores of illegal antlers added together measure more than one-quarter of a mile.

years of probation while having nothing to do with hunting, fishing or trapping. The Butlers' sentences are under appeal.

As of July 30, 25 of the 30 defendants in this case had been sentenced. Charges ranged from hunting deer without a permit, failure to tag a deer, over limit, taking deer with illegal methods, taking deer with illegal equipment, and felony conspiracy and wildlife

trafficking. From the federal courthouse in Wichita, U.S. Attorney for the District of Kansas Barry Grissom commended the cooperation among state and federal agencies, including the USFWS, KDWPT,

TPWD, the Environmental Crimes Section of the Justice Department's Environment and Natural Resources Division, and Assistant U.S. Attorney Matt Treaster for their work on the case.

"The way these state and federal agencies worked together on this case went beyond normal inter-agency cooperation," special agent Brooks said. "And this case just wouldn't have happened without that cooperation."

Brooks is certain this is one of the largest deer poaching cases ever investigated by the USFWS.

"There were 50 officers involved in this investigation, including those from Kansas, the Service and Texas," he added. "Not counting prosecution, we've logged more than 5,000 man-hours, many of which were above and beyond normal work expectations. And that shows dedication."

The case is significant for many reasons, not the least of which is the sheer volume of crimes committed and charges filed. However, the seriousness of the



At a press conference in Wichita last June, U.S. Attorney for the District of Kansas Barry Grissom (center) announced the sentences handed down to the Butler brothers. Also pictured from left to right, Kansas wardens, Phil Kirkland, Matt Stucker, Jeff Sutton, Brian Hanzlick, USFWS special agent John Brooks, Grissom, assistant U.S. attorney Matt Treaster, Texas warden Brad Chappell, Kansas warden BJ Thurman, and Colin Black, Environmental Crimes Unit, U.S. Department of Justice. Marc Murrell photo

charges and the resulting sentences, especially those for the Butlers, may be the most noteworthy. The action taken by the U.S. Attorney's office, the Department of Justice, as well as the judge's ruling validate the work and dedication of law enforcement officers involved. And perhaps sentences that include time in a federal prison will serve as a powerful deterrent to those who may be blinded by the desire to kill a trophy-class buck. The blatant disregard for wildlife laws exhibited by the defendants in this case and the subsequent loss of a precious wildlife resource casts a pall on the hunting tradition, though none of these individuals deserve to be called hunters.

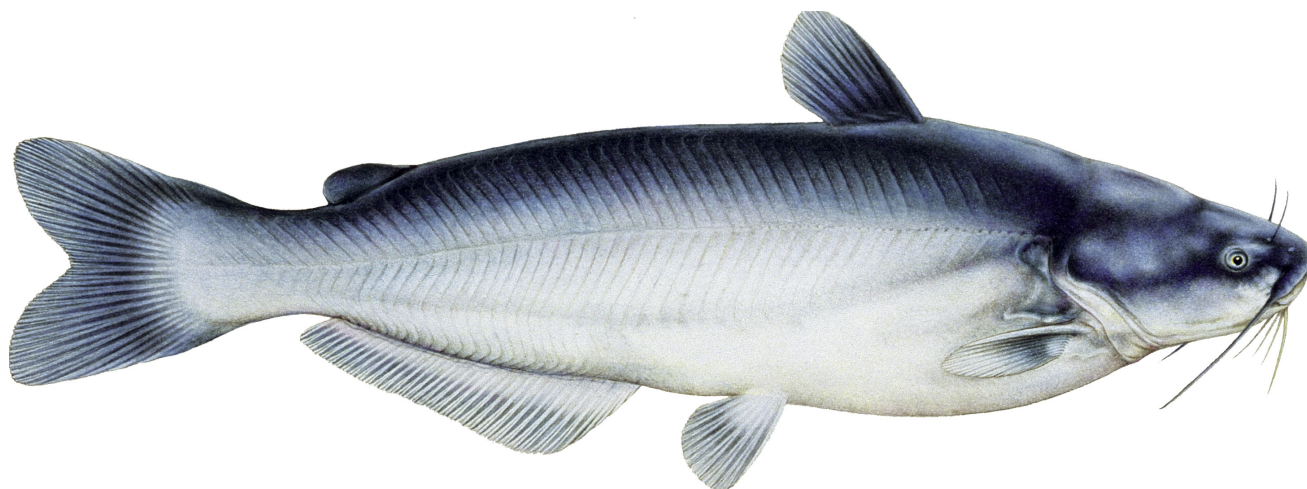
Another critical piece of this investigation that may go unnoticed is the contribution of landowners and hunters who came forward. Kansas has 68 game wardens working the field, many who patrol an area encompassing several counties. They obviously can't

There were 50 officers involved in this investigation, including those from Kansas, the Service and Texas.

be everywhere, so they depend on cooperation and input from concerned landowners and law-abiding hunters. If you witness or know of poaching activity, doing what's right is as easy as calling the toll-free Operation Game Thief hotline, 1-877-426-3843. You can remain anonymous. Local wardens can also be con-

tacted through the sheriff's dispatch or individual phone numbers listed in the 2012 *Kansas Hunting and Furharvesting Regulations Summary*.

Kansas' wildlife is a precious and valuable resource, and the hunting heritage is an important part of our quality of life and economy. To protect that resource and heritage, we need to take wildlife-related crimes seriously. Operation Cimarron shows what happens when state and federal agencies, prosecutors, judges and the public do just that. ♡



Joseph Tomelleri illustration

NEW CAT ON THE BLOCK

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

Blue catfish stocked into Kansas reservoirs just 20 years ago are reaching goliath sizes, and as more reservoirs are stocked, the blue is threatening to unseat the channel catfish as Kansas anglers' favorite.

If you asked Kansas anglers to name a species of catfish, most would respond with "channel cat." Channel catfish are native, abundant statewide and always rank near the top of the list in angler preference. But there's a new cat on the block, and more anglers are singing the "blues" every day.

Blue catfish are native to the big river systems of northeast Kansas. Historical records list blue cats weighing more than 100 pounds. The current state record, caught in 2000, weighed 94 pounds and was caught on rod-and-reel in the Kansas River. (A blue catfish weighing 102.8 pounds was caught from the Missouri River on August 11 and was waiting confirmation as this issue went to press.) Until the 1990s, the only way to catch a blue catfish was to fish in the Kansas or Missouri river. However, in an effort to create additional angling opportunities, fisheries biologists with the Kansas

Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWP) have stocked these fish in several Kansas impoundments.

Milford Reservoir was the first and is now the "king" of blue cat fisheries in the state.

"They've done real well here," said KDWP fisheries biologist John Reinke. "I think it's because of a combination of things at Milford, including the size, the depth and the amount of forage here."

Milford Reservoir's first blue cat stockings were in 1990 with a small dose of 1,500 fingerlings (3- to 4-inch fish). Reinke admits that wasn't much, and over the next four years more blue cats were added.

"In ninety-one, there were 18,000 fingerlings. In ninety-two, there were 18,000 intermediates (5- to 8-inch fish). In ninety-three, we added 11,000 fingerlings. In ninety-four, we stocked 28,000 intermediates and in ninety-five we added 32,000 finger-

lings and 20,000 intermediates," Reinke said.

It wouldn't take long for the success of blue cats and their ability to hold their own to become evident.

"We documented the first natural reproduction in ninety-eight and ninety-nine," Reinke said. "I've been real pleased with their progress."

"What really helped the fishery here is how fast the anglers got involved and saw what a great resource it was. Those guys that fish them hard really take good care of them," Reinke added. "They let the big ones go and keep a few small ones, and I think that's helped the population clip along more than anything."

Milford Reservoir has gained attention beyond Kansas' borders for its blue cat fishing. A tournament held there in August had 30 boats registered with anglers coming from Nebraska, Oklahoma and Missouri, in addition to Kansas anglers. Event



Ryan Gnagy uses a cast net to catch gizzard shad, his preferred bait. He often finds them around rip-rap shorelines and in shallow coves. Gnagy believes fresh is best and catches new bait each trip. He likes hand-sized or larger shad, cut in chunks or used whole and fished 5/0-8/0 circle hooks.

organizers and Catfish Chasers Tournament co-owners Rich Witt and David Studebaker expected a good turnout.

"This lake is always a big draw," Studebaker said during registration. "Milford is our diamond in the rough as there's always some big fish caught here. Last year, it took about 160 pounds with five fish to win in our tournaments here, and I imagine there won't be just one team bringing in big fish this year, either."

Studebaker's prognostication was spot on. Boats launched at 7 p.m. on Saturday night, and weigh-in was at 8 a.m. Sunday morning. Witt and Studebaker fish their own tournaments, but if an angler catches a really large fish and doesn't have a sufficient livewell, they will quit fishing and weigh the fish in early to ensure it survives. The first one in the middle of the night weighed nearly 49 pounds.

"The welfare of these fish is important to us, so we'll quit fishing and run clear up the lake to weigh one early, just so we can get it back in

the water alive and well," Studebaker said. "All of our fish are released after they're weighed to let them get even bigger."

Several teams brought really nice fish to the scales, weighing from 20 to 40 pounds. The 49-pounder was king of the cats until the team of Kevin Parks and Terry Fischer unloaded their livewells. Their big fish weighed 52.60 pounds, and their second biggest wasn't far behind. They won first place with five fish weighing 124.90 pounds and received a check for \$1,260. They tied another team for big fish but won the tie-breaker as their next biggest fish was over 40 pounds. Big fish pot for the tournament was \$410.

"Those big fish really don't surprise me," Reinke said. "Milford has some big blue cats."

And Milford Reservoir may have some company if other blue catfish stockings take off in other Kansas reservoirs. They have been stocked in Tuttle Creek, El Dorado, Clinton, Perry, Melvern, Wilson, Cheney, John Redmond, Kanopolis, Lovewell and

Glen Elder reservoirs in the last few years. Serious catfish anglers are excited about the prospects for these waters, and Perry Reservoir, in particular, has attracted attention recently. "They have grown really well since they were stocked," said Ryan Gnagy, an avid catfish tournament angler of Perry's blue cats. "It could really be something in a few years."

Kirk Tjelmeland, KDWPT fisheries biologist at Perry, was thinking ahead when he requested a stocking of blue catfish in 2005. The first load of blue cats, roughly 22,000 ranging in size from 5-8 inches from KDWPT's Farlington Fish Hatchery, were stocked in the fall of 2006.

"They do eat zebra mussels," he said. "We didn't find those until 2007, but we had the opportunity to stock some blue cats; not that they're the silver bullet for zebra mussels, but they do like to eat them."

Maybe even more importantly, Tjelmeland thought blue cats might be a nice addition to the fishery at Perry.

"If you look around and see what Milford has and realize that blue cats are a native fish to the Kansas and Delaware rivers, I thought it would be a nice fit to our reservoir. We had the opportunity, and we took it," Tjelmeland said.

Additional stockings took place in subsequent years, and Tjelmeland says that more than 93,000 blue cats have been stocked to date. Growth rates are impressive, and with a

strong forage base, Tjelmeland is excited about the prospects. He's not seen any huge fish in his sampling efforts yet, but anglers have told him of their success.

"I've had some guys tell me they've caught some over 35 inches. I haven't seen one of those yet, but I'm not surprised," Tjelmeland said.

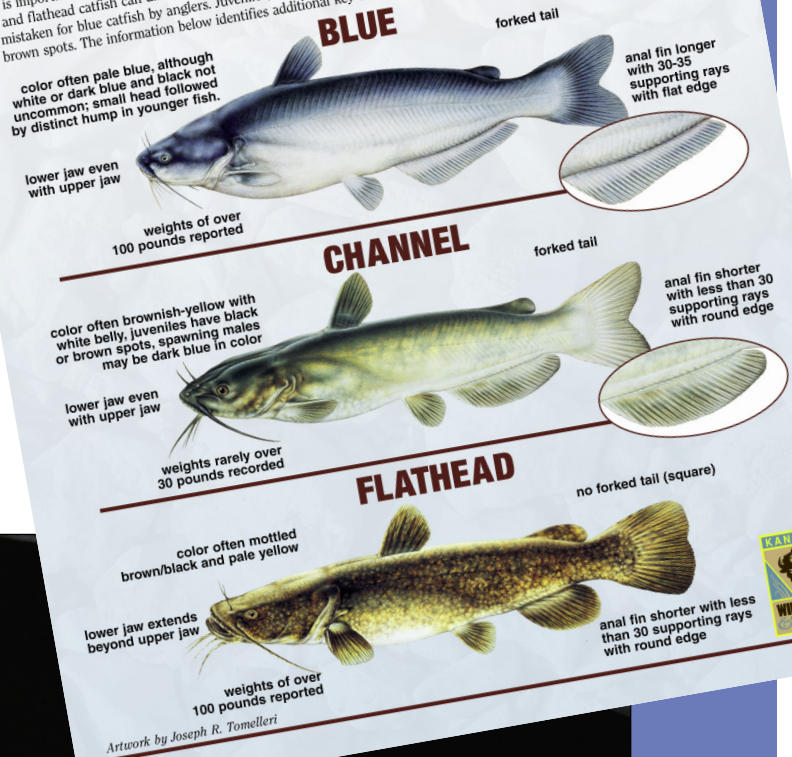
It wouldn't surprise Gnagy, either. He's started guiding for catfish this year (check out his Facebook page at Prime Time Catfishing, or call 785-213-2590) and has been busy most weekends fishing Milford Reservoir. Gnagy looks forward to a time when he can stay close to home fishing for his favorite cats. His personal best blue cat from Perry weighed just over 24 pounds. It pales in comparison to blues he's caught in other lakes. Twice, he's brought five fish to the scales that weighed more than 200 pounds in other states' tournaments. He hopes to do the same at Perry Reservoir somewhere down the road.

No matter where he's at, Gnagy's refined techniques work. He targets big fish although "small" fish weighing less than 10 pounds are routinely caught, as well. His

Identification of Blue, Channel, and Flathead Catfish

In the past, blue catfish have been stocked in Kansas reservoirs to provide trophy opportunities to anglers. Recently, the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks stocked blue catfish in El Dorado Reservoir in an attempt to control zebra mussel populations. Channel catfish are commonly stocked in small impoundments such as community and urban lakes. Flathead catfish, while not stocked by the department, are found statewide, especially in streams and rivers. All three of the catfish species listed below are native to at least part of the state.

It is important that anglers be able to identify what type of catfish they catch because length and creel limits on blue, channel and flathead catfish can differ in a given body of water. During spawning, male channel catfish adopt a blue color and can be mistaken for blue catfish by anglers. Juvenile (fish 12 inches or under) channel catfish are the only catfish that have black or brown spots. The information below identifies additional key characteristics needed to identify these three fish.



Perry Reservoir's blue catfish population is doing well since first stocked in 2006 according to avid anglers like Ryan Gnagy, who caught this blue weighing nearly 25 pounds. Biologists hope that blue catfish stocked will establish a naturally-producing population. KDWPT has produced a poster, above, to help anglers identify the three main species of sport catfish.



Kevin Parks (left) and Terry Fischer pose with two blue catfish they caught fishing the Catfish Chasers Tournament at Milford Reservoir in August. The duo won the tournament with five blue catfish weighing 124.90 pounds. There were 30 boats from Kansas, Nebraska, Missouri and Oklahoma entered in the event. First place paid \$1,230. Their big fish, 52.60 pounds, tied for big fish honors, and they won a tie-breaker as their second biggest fish was over 40 pounds. The big fish pot was \$410.

day starts with a cast net in his hands as he searches for hand-sized or larger shad. He believes fresh bait is much better than frozen. He'll cut the shad into chunks and hook a piece onto a 5/0-8/0 circle hook with a 1 1/2-inch float a few inches up the leader. It's rigged either on a three-way swivel or inline with a sinker slider and 2-ounce slinky weight he makes himself out of 1/4-ounce bullet weights and a steel leader.

Gnagy uses 7 1/2-foot, medium-action rods with baitcasting reels spooled with 65-pound braided line. His 24-foot aluminum boat powered by a 200 horsepower outboard is tricked out with comfortable seats and LED lights under the canopy for night fishing. He's got a rack of rod holders that allow him to drift with the wind out the back of the boat. He sets two rods on the side with the baits roughly 100 yards behind the boat and two rods down the middle about 65-70 yards out. If there isn't any wind, he makes his

own using his trolling motor, and likes to keep his speed below 1.1 mph, ideally at .7 or .8 mph. In big winds, he'll use a 77-inch drift sock tied to each of the back corners of his boat to slow his speed.

Gnagy will target large, expansive flats, often in the upper ends of reservoirs. He'll try depths ranging from 12-25 feet and even as shallow as 4-5 feet, depending on conditions and time of year. He enjoys fishing at night.

"There's no doubt you can catch fish during the day, but there's a lot less boat traffic at night," Gnagy said. "And in the middle of the summer, the temperatures are much


more comfortable, too."

Gnagy would love to see some of these other reservoirs like Perry produce fantastic fishing opportunities for blue catfish.

"We're going to stock blue cats in Perry for probably two more years and then see where we are," Tjelmeland concluded. "If we can document some spawning activity and natural reproduction (most fish don't spawn until 5-7 years of age) we might look at lowering that length limit to allow some selective harvest."

Even at Milford Reservoir where there's no minimum length limit (there is a 5-fish daily creel limit) for

blue cats, Gnagy likes to release any fish over about 7 pounds. He's caught blue cats from Milford weighing more than 50 pounds and knows there are bigger ones swimming its depths.

"Milford is a great lake for blue cats," Gnagy concluded. "And if Perry keeps going, I'm looking forward to fishing it more, too." 

According to KDWPT fisheries biologist John Reinke, there's a 3-year study currently being conducted on Milford Reservoir's blue catfish population by the K-State Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit. A total of 48 fish have been implanted with transmitters so far. There are 18 orange buoys placed throughout the lake with one in the river above the reservoir and one in the river below the stilling basin.

"Those orange buoys have acoustical receivers in them sitting on the bottom," Reinke said. "The fish swim by and are recorded by each receiver. The graduate students pull the buoys about once a week and download the information off the receiver and then sink them again.

"When they're all done, we should have a lot of good information on the movement, diet and habitat preferences of Milford's blue catfish population," he concluded



What Can ORMS Do For You?

text and photos by Ron Kaufman
director, Information Services Division, Topeka

The Outdoor Recreation Management System, ORMS, was launched last April. Through ORMS, ReserveAmerica® allows outdoor enthusiasts to easily find and reserve campsites and cabins.

It was just after midnight on Tuesday, April 17, 2012 and all around Kansas, state park and information technology staff were studying their computer screens and biting their already-short fingernails. Some were in their offices; others watched from home.

From their workstations, technical staff for ReserveAmerica.com also scrutinized their monitors. ReserveAmerica.com is the nationwide camping reservation website where – assuming a successful launch – Kansas state park visitors would be able to reserve a state

park campsite or cabin. KDWPT had not taken online or phone reservations since April 1 to allow programmers to move reservations made before April 1 into the new reservation system.

The launch code was ready and at the appointed time,



With ORMs, campers will be able to go online and reserve a campsite at any state park. When they arrive at the park, a sign like the one above will guide them to their site. The photo at right shows how a reserved site will be marked and available until they arrive.



reporting and auditing.

"We are very pleased to launch this new reservation system to meet the needs of our guests," said Linda Lanterman, acting state park division director. "By revamping our reservations processes we are providing a valuable service to our constituents while encouraging greater participation in outdoor activities."

To make campsite and cabin reservations, visit the KDWPT website, ksoutdoors.com, and click on "Reservations." From the Reservations page, you can select a park or cabin location and then be directed to the new reservation site at ReserveAmerica.com, or you can call a KDWPT state park office or the Pratt Operations Office at 620-672-5911 during normal business hours. For the location of the nearest Kansas state park office, go to ksoutdoors.com and click "State Parks/Locations." For those without computers or who prefer using a phone, park staff can use the new system to help callers with reservations.

The number of campsites available for reservation will vary by

ReserveAmerica.com technicians "flipped the switch." And then it happened. That is to say, it worked. The new reservation system took off like a rocket. Around the country, park patrons (many must have waited with weary, blood-shot eyes to pounce on their keyboards at the first sign the website was "live") began to visit ReserveAmerica.com to snap up their favorite cabin or camping spot. In a matter of minutes and in the wee hours of the morning, hundreds of customers made reservations easily, quickly, and from the comfort of their homes. Some even may have been wearing their pajamas and pink bunny slippers at the time. You

know who you are...

KDWPT had offered online cabin reservations on its own website for several years, but the new system also allowed KDWPT to take its paper- and phone-based camping reservations online for the first time, creating tremendous efficiencies for both park staff and visitors. Using ReserveAmerica.com, guests can quickly search multiple camping and cabin sites. In many cases, park users will save money through reduced service fees and will be assured a site if they have made a reservation. In addition, the system enables park staff to more effectively manage the parks and facilities and benefit from centralized

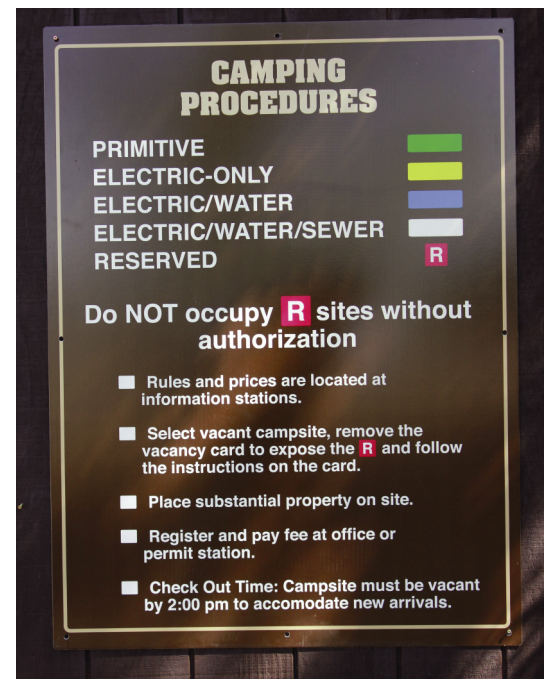
park – in most parks about half of the sites can be reserved. The rest will be available through the traditional first-come, first-served method. Shelter and group campground reservations will continue to be made only through the park office where the facilities are located. When camping is allowed at a state fishing lake or wildlife area, sites are available only on a first-come, first-served basis and cannot be reserved.

As a result of the new reservation process, park visitors will see new signage when they arrive at a campground and campsite. Large color maps near a campground entrance will show the locations of the campsites, so they can be more easily located in the campground area. Once visitors arrive at a campsite, numbered, color-coded posts will be used to identify each site and the amenities available.

- If a red “R” is shown, the campsite is reserved. If the site is available, a card on the campsite post will indicate if the site is available for one or two nights.

- If a reservation has not been made, in order to occupy the site, the camper must place their camping equipment on the site, then take the “Vacant” card to the park office or permit station and pay for the site.

- Campers who arrive after business hours must take the card to the office or permit sales station by 10 a.m. the following morning to register.



This sign provides users with a list of procedures. ORMs will allow the department to better serve park visitors.



Self-pay vehicle and camping permits are available for one night only. Additional days may be purchased at the park office or permit sales station. Whether it's an overnighiter or an extended stay, you'll be amazed at the year-round options Kansas state parks, state fishing lakes and wildlife areas have to offer. From primitive tent campsites to utility sites for RVs, there are abundant opportunities for relaxing outdoor experiences. And, cabins with many of the comforts of home – including heating and air-conditioning – are available for rent at many state parks, some state fishing lakes and at Mined Land Wildlife Area. 🦋



text and photos by Ron Kaufman
director, Information Services Division, Topeka

The hot, dry conditions we've endured the last two summers impact just about everything we do outdoors, but the drought is part of a natural cycle. While there are some positives, such as cattail control at Cheyenne Bottoms, the only good thing about drought for most of us is that it will one day end — better sooner than later.



Kim Schneweis, equipment operator at Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area north of Great Bend, climbs down a rocky dike and steps onto a dusty moonscape. She walks about, scanning the ground for signs of past human activity, and occasionally leans over to collect an old shotgun shell hull or the broken remains of a glass bottle. Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area, a significant portion of the largest interior marsh in the U.S., is virtually dry. The once bustling wetland at the heart of the Central Flyway has been reduced to algae-thickened puddles crowding against a few of the steel gates that can be raised to move water between pools.

The wind, rolling unfettered across the flat terrain, is the only relief from the hot sun and is the loudest sound one hears. In times of normal rainfall, the calls of summering waterfowl and shorebirds would grace the traveler's ears. There are no ducks or geese this day. They haven't been around for a long time. A handful of shorebirds bustle back and forth where a little mud remains, poking about for tiny insects. An occasional heron visits the waning puddles to forage for hardy minnows. The scattered, sun-bleached skeletons of dead fish – mostly rough fish like carp – litter the parched marsh soil, but there are no gulls or vultures to squabble over

the bones. One can gaze across the three pools in the central Pool 1 complex and see miles of wretchedly cracked sediment. It's a stark, eerily barren landscape.

On the bright side, Schneweis and other wildlife area staff can now drive their equipment onto the thirsty sediment, where they easily rip out the cattails and other unwanted plants, create deeper channels, restore islands, and clean around hunting blinds. The staff is optimistic, expecting sufficient rains to eventually return to flood the wetlands once again. "These conditions are hard to see, but we're using the opportunity to get to parts of the Bottoms we couldn't easily reach before. We're preparing for the next cycle of rains," Schneweis says.

The cycle of drought and rain is an often-repeated rollercoaster ride in the Midwest, so the wildlife area staff has every reason to look forward to the future. Still, fall isn't very far away, and several good, heavy rains will be needed to put the "wet" back into the wetlands in time for the migration.

The situation at Cheyenne Bottoms characterizes the drought that has plagued the entire state and more than half of the U.S. for more than a year. Prolonged periods of insufficient rainfall, above-normal temperatures, and drying winds are desiccating the state's croplands, pastures, woodlands, ponds, lakes, streams and rivers.

The U.S. Drought Monitor for July 31, 2012 showed the entire state in various stages of severe, extreme, or exceptional drought. All 105 Kansas counties were under a state Drought Emergency as of early August and were eligible for USDA Farm Service Agency disaster assistance. The National Weather Service NWS predicts the drought will persist at least until the end of October 2012. There have been sporadic rains scattered across the state, but they have been inadequate to break the drought. NOAA reported that July 2012 was the hottest July and the hottest month on record for the nation. The 12-month period ending on July 31



The drought has taken a toll at Kanopolis Reservoir near Ellsworth. As the flows from the Smoky Hill River have waned, the lake level has dropped, making some facilities unusable.

was the warmest 12-month period the nation has experienced since recordkeeping began in 1895.

The drought has created shortages of water – and subsequently – less food and cover that impacts wildlife in a variety of ways. When combined with persistent hot temperatures the state has experienced this summer, the detrimental effects could linger long after the drought ends.

Water Sources Recede

Lakes, rivers and streams supply drinking water for terrestrial wildlife and essential habitat for fish and other aquatic animals. When the rains don't fall, drinking water sources become fewer, farther apart and of poorer quality. Smaller water sources like wetlands, creeks and ponds are the first to succumb.

Animals may have to travel longer distances in their search for water only to become concentrated into smaller areas, increasing the

risks of disease, predation and competition with others of their species. The risks for deer can be seen in eastern Kansas where deaths due to epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) have been reported. EHD is a viral disease spread by midges, tiny flying insects that breed in stagnant water. According to Lloyd Fox, KDWPT Big Game Program Coordinator, "The combination of increased midge populations and concentration of deer where the midges occur make transmission of the disease more efficient during drought years."

Lower reservoir levels impact anglers and boaters, as well. At some of the state parks, such as Kanopolis, Cheney, and Cedar Bluff, managers have had to close some of the boat ramps due to shallow water, limiting angler and recreational boater access. Low water also exposes obstructions and brings underwater hazards closer to the surface where they are more likely to be struck by unwary boaters.

At Kanopolis State Park south of Ellsworth, Park Manager Rick Martin reports they have already closed two boat ramps. The Horsethief Canyon ramp is hundreds of yards from any water while the Buzzard Bay ramp leads to water too shallow for boating. The Smoky Hill River supplying the reservoir is barely flowing. From an overlook above Horsethief Canyon, one can peer across the lake to see what's left of the river – a narrow ribbon of dark mud meandering through a dry riverbed. Martin echoes the sentiments of the Cheyenne Bottoms staff, "It's hard to watch this happening, but it gives us a chance to work on ramps or clean out debris that we can't reach when the lake levels are higher," he notes.

Fish May Die

As waters recede, fish and other aquatic animals also find themselves crowded into shallower, smaller waters. Warm water doesn't hold oxygen as well as colder water so shallower waters not only mean more crowding, but warmer water and less oxygen to support the animals that live there. If aquatic animals cannot migrate to new waters or go dormant, the lack of sufficient water and oxygen can have only one result: death. Larger and more active fish have greater oxygen needs – warmer water also increases fish metabolism which demands more oxygen – and may be the first to be affected. Doug Nygren, KDWPT Fisheries Section chief, reported that several state and local fishing lakes are dry or drying, particularly those in the western part of the state. "A number of streams and creeks also have minimal flow or even pooling, so they have low oxygen levels, the fish are crowding, and some vulnerable populations of threatened or endangered species may be at risk," he said. "At Cheney Reservoir, which is relatively shallow and windswept, higher water temperatures are also killing some of the walleye – a larger fish that prefers colder water," he added.

Plant Life Affected

When the soils dry out, plants lose vital water and the ability to absorb nutrients from the soil. Plants form the basis of the food supply so when they suffer, everything that relies on them feels the burden.

According to John Klempa, southwest district rural forester for the Kansas Forest Service (KFS), drought has a cumulative effect on trees. "If the drought is long enough, trees can feel the effects for up to five years after the drought ends," he said. He also noted that broadleaf trees are more tolerant and can drop their leaves and go dormant, but if the drought lasts long enough, the trees may die. "The drought is even killing eastern red cedars in southwest Kansas, and they're very hard to kill," he added. David Bruton, Northeast District Rural Forester for the KFS agrees with Klempa, but is seeing somewhat different effects in northeast Kansas where the rains have been a little more abundant. "In this part of the state, the trees that are most stressed are those on poor soils such as clay or thin, rocky soils. In the bottom land areas, trees are still in pretty good shape," he said.



This view from the upper end of Kanopolis shows how far down the water is. The U.S. Corps of Engineers usually holds the reservoir several feet above what is considered conservation pool to accommodate boaters, but the drought has made that impossible.

Both foresters stressed the detrimental effect of drought on the trees' defenses. "Trees are more prone to insect and disease problems when they're stressed by drought," Bruton noted.

Food Sources Dry Up

Most notable effect of the drought has been on the food supply for a variety of animals. It has impacted

crops, grasslands, wetlands, wildflowers, and small trees and shrubs. Dave Dahlgren, Research Biologist at the KDWPT Hays Regional Office, reflected on the effects of the western Kansas drought on pheasant populations. "We had a fairly decent spring, but once the drought hit after May, it likely hurt the survival of young pheasants," he said. "Some older broods might have survived if they hatched early enough and grew big enough before the drought hit. We also had an early wheat harvest, and harvesting equipment can destroy nests and kill young birds. Soft plants and insects are the primary food sources for young pheasants, so the brood was affected by poor insect populations to support growth, lack of cover to hide from predators, and reduced food supply."

The drought has Lloyd Fox concerned about the deer population, but the affect, if any, won't be known until after the annual deer surveys in October and November. Among his concerns is the poorer browse quality which can affect lactation in does. "During droughts, fawn mortality may be higher due to poor milk production by



Wildlife are affected by the drought and heat in a variety of ways. Species depending on shallow wetlands such as Cheyenne Bottoms, which dried up, feel the impact most. However, the drought also has an impact on the habitat of terrestrial wildlife, as well. Mike Blair photo

the doe, which leads to high rates of predation on the fawns. If a fawn is hungry, it may become more restless and more visible to coyotes, the primary predator of young deer," he noted.

Brad Simpson, Public Lands Section chief whose staff manages the state's wildlife areas, points to the dove population as one that may be fairly good this year. "While our wetlands, upland crop fields and feed plots are suffering – which will affect many game birds – sunflowers are fair to good, so the dove population may be okay" he remarked.

Increased Animal and People Conflicts

Drought causes wildlife to seek out other food and water sources, and the better sources are often those that people unwittingly provide. Farmers who irrigate their crops may see more deer in the fields partaking of the agricultural bounty. "Farmers' tolerance for deer is reset to a much lower level as a result of drought – and understandably so," remarked Fox.

Even city dwellers and suburbanites are not immune from wild animals helping themselves to the easy pickings of gardens, outdoor water

features like decorative ponds, pet food and water containers left outside, and well-watered lawns and shrubs. Mice and rats may be drawn closer to homes, which in turn attract predators like snakes. Raccoons, opossums, skunks, and red foxes – usually active at night and often found even in inner cities – may become more bold about approaching homes at night in search of food and water. The heat may even force bats – which sometimes roost during the day in the attics and walls of older homes – toward the cooler interiors of houses, alarming the residents.

Drought Cycles and Populations

Although it's hard to be optimistic when immersed in triple-digit temperatures and surrounded by parched soils and dying vegetation, both Dahlgren and Fox emphasize the cyclical nature of droughts and wildlife populations. As Fox reminds us, "Drought is a natural process that has shaped the Great Plains ecosystem. While we may have concerns about particular species and locations at this period of hardship, we also need to maintain that long term and ecological viewpoint that droughts have occurred in the past and have shaped this region."

"Upland game populations, like all wildlife populations, go through cycles – even in periods of adequate rainfall and relatively abundant resources," Dahlgren noted. "We try to manage habitats to keep them constant, but populations still cycle. Upland game birds are remarkably resilient. Whatever population losses may result from this extended drought will likely be reversed in years to come. We just have to be patient."

As for the years to come, Fox concluded by saying, "The long-term impacts on our wildlife depend on the severity of the drought, its duration, and the species involved, so in many respects, it's hard to make a blanket prediction for the future." 🐾



Kanopolis State Park manager Rick Martin stands at the base of a boat ramp at Kanopolis Horsethief Canyon Area.

2012 Sportmen's Calendar

TURKEY

2012 FALL TURKEY:

- Season: Oct. 1 - Nov. 27, 2012 and Dec. 10-31, 2012; and Jan. 14-31, 2013.

BIG GAME

DEER:

- Youth/Persons with Disabilities: Sept. 8-16
- Archery: Sept. 17 - Dec. 31, 2012
- Muzzleloader: Sept. 17 - Sept. 30, 2012
- Early Firearm (Subunit 19) Oct. 13-21, 2012
- Regular Firearm: Nov. 28 - Dec. 9, 2012
- Firearm Extended Whitetail Antlerless Season: Jan.1 - Jan. 13, 2013
- Archery Extended Whitetail Antlerless Season (DMU 19 only): Jan. 14 - Jan. 31, 2013
- Special Extended Firearms Whitetail Antlerless Season: Jan. 14 - Jan. 20, 2013 (Open for unit 7, 8 and 15 only.)

ELK (residents only)

Outside Fort Riley:

- Muzzleloader: Sept. 1 - 30, 2012
- Archery: Sept. 17 - Dec. 31, 2012
- Firearm: Nov. 28 - Dec. 9, 2012 and Jan.1 - March 15, 2013

On Fort Riley:

- Muzzleloader and archery: Sept. 1-30, 2012
- Firearm Season for Holders of Any-Elk Permits: Oct. 1 - Dec. 31, 2012
- Antlerless Only
- Firearm First Segment: Oct. 1-31, 2012
- Firearm Second Segment: Nov. 1-30, 2012
- Firearm Third Segment: Dec. 1-31, 2012

Antelope

- Firearm: Oct. 5-8, 2012
- Archery: Sept. 22-30 & Oct. 15-31, 2012
- Muzzleloader: Oct. 1-8, 2012

MIGRATORY GAME BIRDS

DUCK

- Season: High Plains
Oct. 6 - Dec. 30 & Jan 19-27, 2013
- Season: Low Plains Early Zone
Oct. 6 - Dec. 2 & Dec. 15-30
- Season: Low Plains Late Zone
Oct. 27 - Dec. 30 & Jan. 19-27, 2013
- Season: Low Plains Southeast Zone
Nov. 15, 2012- Jan. 27, 2013
- Daily bag limit: 6 (see regulations)

CANADA GEESE (including brant)

- Season: Oct. 27 - Nov. 4 & Nov. 7 - Feb. 10, 2013
- Daily bag limit: 3

WHITE-FRONTED GEESE

- Oct. 27 - Dec. 30 & Feb. 2-10, 2013

LIGHT GEESE

- Season: Oct. 27 - Nov. 4 & Nov. 7 - Feb. 10, 2013
- Daily bag limit: 20
- Conservation order: Feb. 11 - April 30, 2013

YOUTH WATERFOWL

- High Plains and Low Plains Early: Sept. 29-30
- Low Plains Late: Oct. 20-21
- Low Plains Southeast: Nov. 3-4

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

- Season: Sept.1 - Oct. 31 and Nov. 3-11, 2012
- Daily bag limit: 15
- Possession limit: 30

EARLY TEAL

- High Plains Season: Sept. 15-23, 2012
- Low Plains Season: Sept. 8-23, 2012
- Daily bag limit: 4
- Possession limit: 8

EXOTIC DOVE

(Eurasian collared and ringed turtle doves only)

- Season: Nov. 20, 2012 - Feb. 28, 2013
- Daily bag limit: No limit
- Possession limit: No limit

2012 Sportmen's Calendar

MIGRATORY GAME BIRDS

RAIL (Sora and Virginia)

- Season: Sept. 1 - Nov. 9, 2012
- Daily bag limit: 25
- Possession limit: 25

SNIPE

- Season: Sept. 1 - Dec. 16, 2012
- Daily bag limit: 8
- Possession limit: 16

WOODCOCK

- Season: Oct. 13 - Nov. 26, 2012
- Daily bag limit: 3
- Possession limit: 6

SANDHILL CRANE

- Season: Nov. 7, 2012 - Jan. 3, 2013
- Daily bag limit: 3
- Possession limit: 6

UPLAND GAME BIRDS

PRAIRIE CHICKEN

- Early Season (East and Northwest units):
Sept. 15 - Oct. 15
- Regular Season (East and Northwest units):
Nov. 17, 2012 - Jan. 31, 2013
- Regular Season (Southwest Unit):
Nov. 17 - Dec. 31, 2012
- Daily Bag Limit: 2 (East and Northwest Units) single species or in combination
1 (Southwest Unit)
- Possession Limit: twice daily bag

PHEASANTS

- Season: Nov. 10, 2012 - Jan. 31, 2013
- Youth Season: Nov. 3-4, 2012
- Daily bag limit: 4 cocks in regular season, 2 cocks in youth season

QUAIL

- Season: Nov. 10, 2012 - Jan. 31, 2013
- Youth Season: Nov. 3 - 4, 2012
- Daily Bag Limit Quail: 8 in regular season, 4 in youth season

FURBEARERS

TRAPPING

- Season: Nov. 14, 2012 - Feb. 15, 2013
Badger, bobcat, mink, muskrat, opossum, raccoon, swift fox, red fox, gray fox, striped skunk, weasel.

RUNNING

- Season: March 1 - Nov. 1, 2012

BEAVER TRAPPING

- Season Dates (statewide):
Nov. 14, 2012 - March 31, 2013

SMALL GAME ANIMALS

SQUIRREL

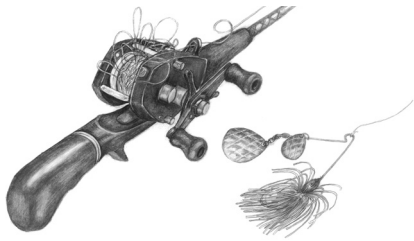
- Season: June 1, 2012 - Feb. 28, 2013
- Daily bag limit: 5
- Possession limit: 20

RABBITS (cottontail & jackrabbit)

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

CROW

- Season: Nov. 10, 2012 - March 10, 2013
- Daily bag / Possession Limit: No Limit



Backlash

by Mike Miller

The Perfect Hunt

It was mid-November 1972, and we didn't have eighth-grade basketball practice that Wednesday afternoon before Thanksgiving. Instead of goofing off with a couple of buddies on the six-block walk from school like usual, I hustled straight home. Granddad and Grandma had arrived the evening before, traveling from their home in Canon City, Colo., to stay with us over the holidays. I was looking forward to spending time with them.

When I burst through the door, cheeks red from the brisk November wind, Grandma smiled and in her soft, slow drawl, asked me where my hat was. I told her it wasn't cold enough for a hat, and she just clicked her tongue at me. Granddad motioned for me to sit with him. I settled next to Granddad on the couch, and he patted my knee and mentioned something about pheasant hunting. I had been looking forward to hunting together over the weekend and assumed that's what he was talking about. My eyes got as big as saucers when he clarified that he thought we had time for a short hunt that evening.

"We visited the farm this morning," he said. "Dale got the milo on our eighty cut, and I think we have time to walk the stubble before it gets dark tonight. He said he's been seeing some birds along the road," Granddad added with a wink.

I exploded off the couch and tore through my bedroom, tossing clothes off a pile in my closet while looking for old jeans and my hunting boots. I changed, grabbed my tan hunting vest and cap, cased my 20-gauge and was back in the living room before Granddad could finish tying his boots. He chuckled, "Slow down, son. We've got time."

The 10-mile drive to the farm seemed to take forever, and as we drove, I thought about how we could hunt the stubble. Dad and I had hunted the 80 earlier that season before the milo was cut, and we'd seen birds. But as we pulled up on the west end of the field, I silently wondered how just two of us would flush any pheasants in the open stubble. I was only in my second hunting season, but I knew enough to be skeptical. Granddad sensed this, so he laid out his plan.

"I think we can split up. I'll let you off at this end, and I'll drive to the other. Then we'll walk toward each other.

That might confuse an old rooster long enough for one of us to get a shot. We'll have to keep each other in sight and be very careful about where we can shoot safely," he added as I quietly slipped out of the car.


As I watch Granddad drive off, I was still unconvinced. The field was flat, and I could easily see him as he walked to a row about half-way in and waved to me. We started our slow walk toward each other. I wasn't expecting to see any pheasants, at least not within shotgun range, but when we were about 80 yards apart, I heard something to my left. As I swung around, a magnificent rooster cackled its way into the sky. The noise and shock of a rooster flush always flustered me (it still does), and my panic was doubled

because I was so complacent. I rushed my gun mount, and the butt plate slipped too high on my shoulder. I slid it back into position, but by then the bird was out of my range. The shot was futile.

"Dang it," I mumbled under my breath, as I grinned sheepishly and shrugged at Granddad. "He was right."

Granddad just nodded and continued walking methodically toward me. Five steps later, another rooster flushed near me, taking the same route as the first. I was more ready this time and only half as flustered. I swung through the bird, shot once, and it crumpled. I was in disbelief — because I got a second chance and because I dropped the bird stone dead.

That was the hunt; 45 minutes, two birds flushed and one in the bag. I was elated. I felt proud of our success, and it didn't hurt my ego when Granddad bragged about the shot I made. Thinking about that afternoon is still gratifying. I can see a snippet of my life that was perfect. No 13-year-old boy loved his grandfather more than I loved that man.

Forty years later and I can still immerse myself in the thrill of that hunt and my feelings for Granddad. Granddad's been gone 32 years, but I am forever grateful for our relationship and can't imagine my life without it. Hunting and fishing together was part of our bond, and I know now I was one of the lucky sons. Never underestimate the power of passing it on. 

*Forty years later and I
can still immerse myself
in the thrill of that hunt
and my feelings for
Granddad.*

