

KANSAS

Wildlife & Parks

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Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism
Website: ksoutdoors.com
magazine e-mail — mike.miller@ksoutdoors.com





FOR THE GOOD OF ALL

“For the good of all” is an interesting phrase. Google it, and you’ll find some intriguing references ranging from the Bill of Rights to the Bible. I like to think we do things here at the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism for the good of all, but that’s like coming to a consensus with a large group of people or pleasing everyone. It’s likely impossible. However, for the good of all is something I believe our wildlife and fisheries biologists and park and public land managers strive for. Each time they make a recommendation to the Kansas Wildlife, Parks and Tourism commission, they are attempting to establish a regulation that’s “for the good of all.”

So, how do we decide what’s good for all? Fisheries biologists look at the health of the fisheries and the success of anglers on the lakes they manage as a gauge of how well they’re doing their job. Park managers look at opportunities provided, attendance records, gate receipts and comments from visitors to measure their success. Wildlife area managers and biologists look at wildlife populations, habitat health, hunter satisfaction and annual harvests to determine the value of management practices and regulations.

The majority of KDWPT staff are passionate about wildlife and outdoor recreation, so they understand the implications of their decisions. However, they have to step away from their personal biases to see the big picture. When making recommendations, staff consider biology and impact to the resource, the effects on recreational opportunities and sociological issues. Ultimately, perhaps idealistically, staff want to provide opportunities that benefit everyone. Realistically, no matter how many benefit from a regulation or program, it will likely ruffle someone’s feathers.

To ensure acceptance of these programs, KDWPT staff use surveys extensively to find out what constituencies desire and how they enjoy the outdoors. They also mine data compiled on harvests, participation, and trends. In some cases, such as when staff recommend waterfowl seasons, years of recorded data on harvests, hunter participation and migration chronology are figured into recommendations. It’s not easy, especially considering the wide range of preferences that exist among hunters. And even the best-laid plans will come up short if we experience an extended, unusual weather pattern.

It would seem likely that recommendations concerning hunting and fishing regulations would be based solely on biology, but human dimension considerations are important, too. Number one is the desires of hunters and anglers. However, there are always other stakeholders and influences involved. For example, the desires of landowners can weigh heavily. Kansas is 97 percent privately owned, and most game and hunting occurs on private land. Landowner surveys, as well as crop damage complaints, come into the mix when setting deer hunting regulations. Even those who don’t hunt or own land must be considered. The number of deer vehicle accidents each year also influences deer hunting regulations.

Legislative action is a factor, as well. Every year, constituents lobby for legislation affecting wildlife and outdoor recreation. Often this is a reaction to a one-time incident or specific situation, and broader implications may not be considered. It is better to make these decisions through our regulatory process, which requires discussion and public input at three public meetings. While it takes as long as six months to set or amend a regulation, it’s a transparent process and regulations can easily be adjusted year to year, whereas legislation is much more difficult to adjust. In recognition of that, commission action is sometimes spurred by proposed or passed legislation.

There are times when staff make recommendations to accommodate a small constituency. We have special seasons for muzzleloader, youth, archery and disabled hunters. Each time one of these proposals is considered, staff look at the impact on the resource and whether it can be accommodated without impacting established seasons and traditions. And even though these special seasons may not impact a majority of hunters, they are available to all, and they represent increased opportunity.

The phrase, “You can’t please everyone” is absolutely true. Even a regulation or program that is obviously “for the good of all,” won’t make everyone happy. But KDWPT staff keep trying and frankly, when I look at the outstanding outdoor recreation opportunities we enjoy in Kansas, I couldn’t be more proud. ♡

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MAGAZINE STAFF
Editor Mike Miller
Associate Editor Nadia Marji
Graphic Designer Dustin Teasley
Staff Writer Marc Murrell
Circulation Teri Simpson

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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 . . .



WHITE SQUIRRELS

Editor:

Did you know that Kansas has white squirrels? I had three white squirrels at one time! But they come and go. The last time I had a white squirrel was about six months ago. I think they moved to a new place in Enterprise because I have seen them around different parts of town.

I thought you would like to know about and see white squirrels.

Robert Johnson
Enterprise

Mr. Johnson,
Thanks for sharing. Interestingly, this issue features an article by Bob Gress on the black squirrels common in Marysville.

Editor

NEED MORE TRAPPERS

Editor:

I read your article on prairie chicken and noticed you didn't say anything about the coons eating the eggs. A local girl has been trapping Haun Creek and the Neosho River for several years. She has caught as high as 50 coyotes a year, about four or five bobcats and this year 50-plus coons in less than three miles of streams. If you've ever run coons with dogs, you know when you get a prairie coon, you get a heck of a race. They're hard to catch. We have more prairie chickens this year than two years ago, - near Parkerville. The farmers and ranchers have not done anything different - that you can see. You have to do something to get people to do more trapping. It starts with the youth. We need to keep the fur prices up so they can at least break even.

Jessie McKenzie
White City

Mr. McKenzie,

I'll agree that trapping is a tool that can be used to control local populations of furbearers, such as raccoons. And certain furbearers such as coyotes, raccoons, and skunks are effective nest predators of ground-nesting birds. Our biologists have voiced similar concerns when predominantly grassland habitats are taken over by trees. Succession is ongoing, and without fire or some other control, trees will encroach on native prairie. As the trees become prevalent, the make-up of wildlife begins to change.

This isn't a problem in areas of the Flint Hills, where there is perhaps too much of a good thing. Too much fire leaves very little residue for nesting and brood-rearing and, as stated in the article, most nests were destroyed by coyotes, skunks and snakes. The number of nest predators may not be as much of a factor as is the quality of the habitat the prairie chickens are nesting in.

What has been suggested as a solution that could benefit prairie chickens and be profitable to ranchers is a patch-burn, grazing rotation program, where a third of the grass within a given tract is burned each year. The tallgrass prairie evolved with fire and grazing, and both are necessary to keep it healthy. A balance in land-use practices and predators could go along way in restoring prairie chicken numbers.

Editor

LIKES ISSUE

Editor:

I finally got around to giving it (March/April issue) a look . . . one of your best, especially considering lay-out and design.

Michael Pearce
Newton

BIRD BRAIN

with Mike Rader

MAY IS BEST MONTH

May can be one of the best months to bird watch in Kansas. We still have many migrants coming through on their way to northern breeding grounds. Many species (especially shorebirds and warblers) will have flown thousands of miles before reaching Kansas and are destined to fly thousands more. The journeys are long and perilous, and Kansas birders are lucky to see a multitude of species in a short window of time. More than 200 species can be seen in our state in this month of transition.

June can be a fun month to watch birds because it's when local avian residents begin nesting efforts. The air in forest, prairie, and wetland habitats is filled with song. Male birds wear their best plumage, making identification for most species the easiest of anytime throughout the year. For beginners, spring and early summer is perhaps the best time to practice identification skills and prepare for the more difficult challenges of fall, when many birds have molted out of the bright plumage and young-of-the-year birds are in drab and often confusing colors.

While we have our share of brightly colored species that call Kansas home in the summer, I always have a soft spot for one of our more cryptically-colored residents, the upland sandpiper. Uplands are members of the shorebird family, but have no dependence on water, in fact it's somewhat unusual to even find them in wetlands. These birds prefer grasslands, and the Flinthills and Smoky Hills regions are their traditional breeding strongholds. The population is about 350,000, with the bulk being from the mid- to upper Great Plains of the U.S, the prairie provinces of Canada and stretching up into central Alaska. Populations farther east and in the Pacific Northwest have fallen dramatically. The decline stems from various things, including land use for agriculture, development, use of annual burning in grasslands that keeps grass short and unsuitable for adequate nesting and perils of migration, including unregulated hunting in some Caribbean countries where basically anything that flies is shot. It is not a species that can be legally hunted in the U.S.

Upland Sandpipers are large shorebirds, standing almost a foot tall, weighing 6-8 ounces and sporting a wingspan of approximately 18.5 inches.

Uplands winter in the Pampas of South America, as far south as Argentina, for almost eight months, which is actually the austral summer in the southern hemisphere. They migrate north in March and usually arrive here in large numbers in mid- to late April. Their southbound migration begins in late July, with most birds, including young, usually gone by the end of August or early September. When in North America, they utilize good grasslands, airports and even some croplands as preferred habitat. They migrate mainly at night and have an unusual two-note call given in flight. Once you learn that call, you can really pick out nights when the bulk of migration happens.

Upland Sandpipers are large shorebirds, standing almost a foot tall, weighing 6-8 ounces and sporting a wingspan of approximately 18.5 inches. Their flight is strong and almost

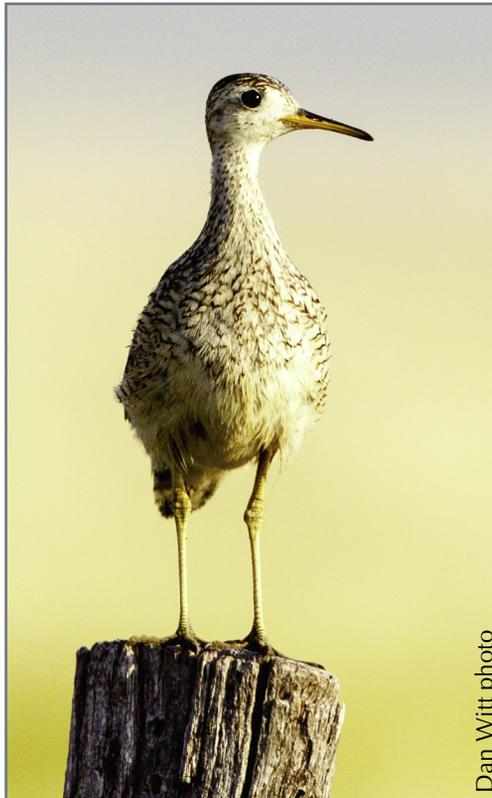
falcon-like - a sort of stiff-winged action. They will eat some grass seeds, but are primarily feeding on insects and other invertebrates. They set up breeding territories in the grasslands and the displays are fun to watch and listen to. They have a mix of sputtering calls and a "wolf whistle" when on territory.

They will sit on fence posts, power poles, and even power lines, doing an interesting series of calling and display flights. They are slender, with a head that is reminiscent of a dove, large dark eye and long yellowish legs.

Nests are scrapes on the ground that can be lined with a few twigs and grasses or may be unlined. Clutch size is usually from two to seven eggs, and young are precocial,

meaning they can run around on their own after hatching and are not totally dependent on adults for feeding and care. They sometimes nest in loose colonies, where there seems to be a tendency of synchronous hatching, when all clutches in a colony go through the hatching process in the same day or two.

Take the time this spring to drive through a grassland area on a calm morning or evening and listen. You'll probably hear the song of meadowlarks, dickcissels, lark and grasshopper sparrows, and few other summer prairie residents. If you happen to hear the wolf whistle, made familiar by the stereotypical construction workers whistling at a pretty girl walking by, then you are probably in the territory of an upland sandpiper. It's one of the wonderful sounds of summer in the outdoors of Kansas.



Dan Witt photo

LESSER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN LISTED

In March, Dan Ash, director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), announced the decision to add the lesser prairie-chicken to the federal Threatened Species List, citing habitat fragmentation, population declines, drought, and threats from development.

"This wasn't the decision we hoped to hear," KDWPT Secretary Robin Jennison said. "A lot of work went into a plan to show that state wildlife agencies could manage and conserve lesser prairie chickens without designating the species as threatened."

For the past 18 months, KDWPT participated in the Lesser Prairie-Chicken Interstate Working Group, established by the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA). Wildlife biologists from agencies in Kansas, Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico and Colorado, as well as other partners, worked tirelessly to develop a Range-wide Lesser Prairie Chicken Plan (RWP) to conserve the species. Keith Sexson, KDWPT assistant secretary, was actively involved in the process and is pleased with the way state agencies worked together.



"The feeling among state wildlife agencies was that such a plan would benefit lesser prairie chickens through voluntary support from industry and private landowners, and perhaps dissuade the USFWS from listing the species," said Sexson.

"I'm proud of the effort and passion shown by our staff to help create this plan, and it demonstrates the ability for state fish and wildlife agencies to work together with industry and private landowners to deliver an approach that will result in positive conservation for the lesser prairie-chicken," Sexson added.

The final RWP is the result of an unprecedented effort and collaboration among state agencies, landowners and industry. The RWP is a comprehensive lesser prairie-chicken conservation/management plan that provides a vehicle to

bring industry, government and private landowners together to conserve the lesser prairie-chicken and its habitat. To date, more than \$20 million has been committed by oil, gas, wind and electric transmission industries that will impact nearly 4 million acres, enhancing and developing critical lesser prairie-chicken habitat.

"I believe the development and initial success of the range-wide plan shows that our staff have the expertise necessary to manage lesser prairie chickens and their habitats. I think we missed an opportunity to break out of the status quo in managing species in need of conservation," Jennison said. "Had the final decision been 'not warranted,' the range-wide plan would have represented a groundbreaking new approach for the way these decisions are made. We have a plan that would have conserved prairie chickens and benefitted all stakeholders without the burdensome red tape and often times heavy-handed approach of the federal government."

Information about the RWP is available on the WAFWA website, www.wafwa.org.

– KDWPT News

KDWPT'S PAM MARTIN HONORED BY PEERS

The Kansas Association for Conservation and Environmental Education (KACEE) announced that Pam Martin, an environmental educator with the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) at the Kansas Wetland Education Center, was awarded with the Rising Star Award. The award recognizes individuals who are new to the conservation and environmental education field in Kansas, but are already making an impact. Nominated by peers, awardees exhibit outstanding innovation, leadership and achievement, as well as collaboration and cooperation within the environmental education field.

The nomination for Martin states:

In her five years of environmental education, Pam Martin has established an incredible program at the Kansas Wetlands Education Center that rivals any environmental education program in the region. Martin has worked at KWEC since the Center opened in 2009. For the first year and a half, Martin was the only educator on staff and was

... Pam Martin has established an incredible program at the Kansas Wetlands Education Center that rivals any environmental education program in the region.

responsible for establishing the core foundations of the KWEC's educational programs. Her passion and commitment to education is evidenced in the sheer volume of programs she does. In 2013 Martin conducted 264 environmental education programs. Martin provides education programming to area elementary students, as well as family programs, programs through the Great Bend Recreation Commission, Scouts programs, and festivals. One of her most impressive accomplishments is the relationship she has established with the USD 428-Great Bend school district. As a result of her efforts in working with the district administrators and the various science committees, Martin has been able to schedule programs with every K-6 classroom in the district. Martin's work is helping to inspire and educate our next generation about the important role of wetlands in our state and KACEE is extremely proud to honor her with this award.

– KDWPT News

LAW ENFORCEMENT IMPLEMENTS NEW GAME WARDEN CANDIDATE TRAINING AND EVALUATION PROGRAM

An integral part of a new law enforcement officer's training is the time spent "shadowing" an experienced officer directly following academy graduation. During this one-on-one time, new hires are able to learn the ins-and-outs of their position, while gaining hands-on experience in a supervised manner. In the past, newly-hired game wardens have been paired with an officer located near or around their soon-to-be region or area of work. Although this form of additional training has been effective, inconsistencies have existed in the type and quality of training offered to officers due to the training being subject to the host officer's experience level and time and/or resource availability.

In an effort to create a more uniformity in the way new officers are trained post graduation, the Law Enforcement

Division of the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWP) has implemented a new training and evaluation program that involves a specific set of phases and steps that each new officer is to complete in a predetermined amount of time. Each new officer is evaluated during and post completion of each phase and step to ensure the standards set forth by the department are met. Once an officer has completed phases 1-3, they are put on a five-month probationary period, during which evaluation continues.

Recent hires, Austin Jackson, Mitch Falls, and Owen Johnson, are the first officers to participate in the new training and evaluation program. Stay tuned for more information on these officers, including their personal experience with the program, in the July/August issue.

IT'S THE LAW
with Kevin Jones

AQUATIC NUISANCE SPECIES



We have been contending with invasive, nuisance species of animals and plants for a long time. In some cases these animals and plants were thought to be of some benefit and therefore desirable; at least up to the time they actually became established as a wild population. The pigeon, European starling and common carp come to mind. In more recent times, a new array of nuisance animals have come upon the scene and are causing a variety of problems. Animals such as zebra mussels, white perch, silver carp, bighead carp and black carp are some of the more notorious.

These animals can be very prolific. Typically, a population will start to increase at a slow pace, but at a certain point their numbers will explode and dominate their environment. When this happens, the native wildlife suffer, often losing out to the nuisance animals. Additionally, the nuisance animals may cause problems beyond simply competing with native wildlife, but actually cause economic or public health and safety issues. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration stated the following in one of their publications on the economic impacts of invasive species:

"AIS (aquatic invasive species) are seen as a threat not only to biodiversity and ecosystem functioning, but also to economic development. They reduce production of fisheries, decrease water availability, block transport routes, choke

The cost to manage both aquatic and terrestrial species is estimated at \$137 billion per year to the U.S. economy alone.

irrigation canals, foul industrial pipelines, degrade water quality, accelerate filling of lakes and reservoirs, and decrease property values. The cost to manage both aquatic and terrestrial species is estimated at \$137 billion per year to the U.S. economy alone. This number is likely an underestimate as it does not consider ecosystem health or the aesthetic value of nature, which can influence tourism and recreational revenue. Estimating the economic impacts associated with AIS is further confounded as monetary values cannot be given to extinction of species or loss biodiversity and ecosystem services."

Aquatic nuisance species inhabit quite a few water bodies in the state. The most notable are the zebra mussel, the white perch and three species of Asian carp (the silver, bighead and black carp). How they got here is an interesting story in itself, but regardless of how they got here, it is important that they are prevented from spreading further. Kansas has enacted several laws to help control the spread of aquatic nuisance animals. First, it is unlawful for a person to import or possess any live specimens of these animals. Second, there are regulations prohibiting the transport of live fish from designated waters and limitations on the use of live bait fish. Third, there is the requirement that boats have to be drained of any water in the bilge and live wells before being transported on public roads. The key here is to clean, drain and dry your boat and equipment. These measures and others are focused on limiting the spread of these invasive, nuisance animals.

While the creation and enforcement of laws is one step in addressing this issue, a larger, more effective control method is through the efforts of the folks using our waters and lands. The old saying that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure certainly applies here. It is important that you do your part in controlling the spread of the animals, and plants, that can cause irreversible damage to our native wildlife. For further information, log on to our department's website at www.ksoutdoors.com, pick up copies of our publications or contact one of our offices.

Boat SAFE

with Erika Brooks

Be Buoyant

What makes an object float? It's simple: if an object is less dense than water, it will float. As an object is submerged in water, it displaces water according to how much it weighs. Water will push against the object with a force equal to the weight of water that is displaced.

How much water is displaced is determined by the density of the object. Density is the measure of how much mass is in an object related to its volume. A basketball and a beach ball may have the same volume, but the basketball weighs more so it is denser than the beach ball. A steel boat can weigh a great deal but it has a large volume and will displace enough water to match its own mass, so it floats.

Buoyancy is the upward force we need from the water to stay afloat, and it's measured by weight. Buoyant forces are why we feel so much lighter when we're in a swimming pool or bathtub. Our bodies are mostly water, so a person's density is fairly close to that of water. Because of this, an average person only needs about seven to 12 pounds of additional buoyancy to float. A life jacket provides that extra lift.

The material inside a life jacket traps air when the jacket is submerged. The trapped air weighs much less than the weight of the water it displaces, so the water pushes up harder than the jacket pushes down, allowing the life jacket to remain buoyant and float. This buoyancy is strong enough to hold up additional weight without sinking.

Life jackets are measured according to how much additional weight they can support. Jackets for adults provide at a minimum, 15.5 pounds. Some range up to 22 pounds of additional buoyancy. Since the average adult only needs seven to 12 pounds of additional buoyancy to float, a life jacket does not have to support the entire weight of the human body. Instead it supports those seven to 12 pounds.



Types of Life Jackets:

The outer shell of a life jacket is usually made of nylon or vinyl with the material that keeps the life jacket afloat sewn inside. There are three classifications of life jackets, depending upon the substance inside: inherently buoyant, inflatable, and hybrid.

An inherently buoyant life is one that provides buoyancy through the use of closed-cell foam. These jackets are called inherently buoyant because a person does not need to do anything to activate the flotation. Historically cork, balsa wood, and kapok were used, but today the most commonly used materials are plastic foams, such as polyvinyl chloride and polyethylene. Generally they are rugged and low maintenance. There are sizes available for both adults and children.

An inflatable life jacket has cartridges of carbon dioxide gas sewn into them. When activated, the cartridge releases gas that fills the chambers of the inner bladder of the jacket. Some models will activate automatically when the jacket is submerged

and manual models require the wearer to pull a tab to activate the inflation. Both styles also have a tube that a person can blow into to provide more buoyancy or to release air if the jacket is too tight. Inflatable jackets are not approved for use on personal watercraft (jet skis) or while skiing for being towed behind a boat. They are only approved for persons 16 years of age or older.

Hybrid life jackets are a mix of inherently buoyant and manual inflation jackets. These jackets can be best for non-swimmers and people who are not comfortable around water. The inherently buoyant portion of the jacket will give instant flotation, yet allow the jacket to be less bulky than a full life jacket. Once in the water the inflatable portion of the jacket added to the foam flotation will keep the wearer afloat until rescue.

No matter which type of jacket you choose, the most important step to take is to physically wear it!



Life Jacket or PFD?

Life jacket or personal flotation device? All life jackets are PFDs, but not all PFDs are life jackets. A throwable cushion or ring buoy is considered a PFD but not a life jacket because it is not meant to be worn.

HUNTING HERITAGE *with Kent Barrett*

Ammo Shortages

I have been on the road this winter participating in training events around the state. I've made it a point to stop in gun shops and outdoor stores I pass to look over the products for sale and talk to the employees. Questions I always hear include, "Where the heck is the ammo?" and "Why is there a shortage?" The frustration is obvious as people genuinely want to know reasons for the shortage, especially .22 long rifle.

The rumor mill has been working overtime, and one theory is the government is trying prevent Americans from protecting themselves. This isn't accurate. Not that large government ammunition orders for future purchase have not affected the supply situation, it has. But the truth is, we have done this to ourselves.

There are about 27 U.S. ammunition manufacturers in business and busy making product today. Recently, I have seen a change on store shelves as the supply is catching up to the demand we've seen over the last year. You can go into any store and find more stock than you could just four months ago, which looks promising.

The big worry is over the one cartridge that has lagged behind all the rest in availability: the .22 long rifle. Why is the .22 LR still in such short supply? At first, panic buying stripped the shelves in a matter of days. Those of us who like to shoot have always followed the motto: "You can never have too much ammunition." But you can have too little, and when supplies get short, we worry that we may not have enough to continue shooting on a consistent basis. That concern led to stockpiling and then to speculation. A brick of cheap blasting ammo that cost \$25.00, was being offered at gun shows and on the internet for \$75 to \$250. And even though there seemed to be plenty available, many worried

they would run short, so they were willing to pay those prices. That kind of wild speculation will not end until people are resigned to say no to the inflated prices and wait. I am told by sales people that the same individuals arrive early to stand in line every week on delivery days and then use multiple people buy up the entire available stock of product in a matter of minutes. Then they turn around and resell to the public. This is capitalism in its purest form and will end when demand subsides. So we each must decide how much we are willing to pay in order to go out to play.

Most people wonder why the manufacturers have not been able to keep up with demand. It is true that most of the manufacturers have opened up their production to a third line and are running round-the-clock. But the availability of components also dictates how much product is produced. Powder, primers, cases and bullets all must be available or the process will grind to a halt until the supply catches up.

Why don't the companies just expand production? The industry is working at about 87 percent of capacity. If there is a problem with availability of components, then there is no advantage in increased production capability. The companies are slow to increase production capability only to find the demand returns to previous levels, causing layoffs and idle equipment that still must be paid for. This is a serious problem for the producers to consider. Slow steady progress is met with increased production capability. Panic buying with the attendant shortages are harder to gauge and therefore are not as easy to remedy.

The truth is the only solution to this problem is patience. Just relax and take some nice deep breaths. Don't buy in to the panic and speculation. Wait a while and the supply will catch back up to the demand. Then you will be able to go to the range and enjoy this wonderful past-time we call target shooting. Spring is here and summer is on the way. Stay safe and enjoy your time at your favorite range.

**In the U.S. today,
there are about 27
ammunition
manufacturers in
business and busy
making product.**

2013 SAFEST YEAR FOR HUNTERS ON RECORD

2013 was a record year for hunter safety in Kansas. Just six hunting incidents were reported, marking the lowest number of incidents since record-keeping began in 1962. No fatalities occurred in 2013. Two-thirds of the reported incidents resulted from careless handling of firearms.

Hunter Education Program coordinator, Kent Barret, credits the dedication

and hard work of volunteer instructors for the low number of incidents, which is even more impressive when you look at incident numbers from the past. In 1942, there were 45 people killed in firearm accidents in Kansas, including eight 8 hunters. The number of injuries wasn't reported. Since 1973, 500,000 students have completed Kansas hunter education.



Fish Squeezer *Retired but not yet fired*

with Tommie Berger

Take A Kid Fishing

It's the time to remind everyone about Outdoor Adventure Camp. This camp, held at Rock Springs 4-H Center south of Junction City every June, is for youngsters age 10 to 12 who are interested in the outdoors. This year's dates are June 1-6, and this will be year 26 for OAC. My wife Theresa and I co-coordinate this camp for the Kansas Wildlife Federation, and we have averaged around 40 campers each year - we limit it to 50. Contact us at bergkwf@wtciweb.com for more information.

In addition to getting ready for OAC, I have been running a fishing clinic for the Head Start Kids in Salina. Those little munchkins are near and dear to my heart. I am also the Sportfishing leader for our local 4-H club, and we've already had several outings to local ponds. We fought the weather for awhile, but the fish have cooperated well.

One more event I need to mention; Theresa, my son Fritz, and I will be heading to Grand Island, Neb. in late June for the 4-H National Shooting Sports Competition. This year Fritz will

be the team captain for the Hunting Skills Team, and I will be going along as coach. Kansas has been fortunate in the past few years to finish in the top ten nationally, finishing as high as third.

Spring and early summer is the best time to take kids fishing. I recently

Make the fishing outing fun, and take along some snacks and something to drink.

found a magazine article I wrote years ago about the dos and don'ts of taking kids fishing. Here are some of those rules.

Match the size the rod and reel to the child. A spincast outfit is best for small hands and is east to cast. Outfits modeled after cartoon characters will work for very young anglers, but a good Zebco or Shakespeare spincast combination will hold up better and last longer. Spool it with 6- or 8-pound line and keep the spool filled so it casts smoothly. I recommend a No. 6 or No. 8

hook and an eighth-ounce split shot for weight. Use small bobbers for panfish because a beach-ball-sized bobber will scare away more fish than it catches. I don't use a swivel with this bait rig.

For bait, worms win, hands down. They are readily available and will catch almost every type of fish that swims. Bluegill are perfect for introducing young anglers because most kids just want to catch fish no matter the size. Good bluegill waters include farm ponds, state and community lakes, or even a nearby river or stream.

Make the fishing outing fun, and take along some snacks and something to drink. Don't forget a camera, sunscreen, and insect repellent. Let the kids do most of the casting and catching

Try to keep the outings short to prevent boredom but always be prepared to point out turtles on logs, geese or ducks on the pond, or raccoon tracks along the shoreline. Frogs and crawdads were put on earth for the kids to catch and enjoy.

Take a kid fishing and you'll have a fishing partner for life.

FREE Fishing Weekend June 7 and 8, 2014

Visit us online at: ksoutdoors.com/news/Fishing
for more information that will enhance your fishing experience.

Take the opportunity to introduce someone to the joys of fishing.



Anticipation; that's spring turkey hunting. Thunderous gobbles get any hunter's blood pumping, and the sight of a big tom coming to a call in full strut is mesmerizing. The only thing better than one big tom coming to the call is two toms coming to the call!

Kansas hunters can fill a second turkey game tag in Units 1, 2, 3 5 and 6 during the spring season. I've had the good fortune to take two birds on the same day on several occasions. And once, I even took two big toms with one shot (on purpose). I've never planned it that way, but it's double the fun when it happens!

It's even more rewarding to witness some else feel that excitement, and I was fortunate enough to see it twice this turkey season.

My 15-year-old son, Cody, and I shared a blind in a Butler County river bottom the first Saturday of the youth turkey season. The birds were vocal on the roost, but much farther west of our set-up than I had hoped. I called softly but feared our chances weren't good.

The morning was beautiful, and we spent a couple quality hours in the blind together. We saw several turkeys and had an unsuccessful run-in with a couple of jakes that sneaked in silent from behind.

We were about to give up, finishing off the last couple donuts and hot chocolate, when I tried one last series of yelps. An immediate gobble response had us both looking wide-eyed at each other. It was a long way off, but another call got the same response. Minutes later, three toms emerged single file from the timber several hundred yards away, two of them in full strut.

A long 45 minutes later, they were within 10 feet of the blind, all three strutting and shaking the blind with gobbles. The problem was they weren't in front of our open window. To make matters more difficult, they flew across a narrow stream behind us.

I jumped into action and told Cody to get up and I grabbed his seat to get it out of the way. I had him get his gun out the back window of the blind. He got on the last bird and pulled the trigger. That bird hit the ground flopping and another turned back around. A second shot followed after Cody confirmed it was okay to shoot and that bird, too, flopped in the weeds.

Cody was excited and I was, too. His first bird weighed 20 pounds and had a 9-inch beard. His second bird weighed 22 pounds with a 10-inch beard. His season was over in a matter of seconds, but it was one of the most memorable few seconds ever!

And the day wasn't over. I was helping with the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism's 14th Annual Youth Turkey Hunt at Hutchinson that afternoon. I was guiding 13-year-old Jaden Eslinger from Anthony. Jaden is an avid outdoors kid, but he'd never killed a turkey.



About 45 minutes into our evening hunt, Jaden got excited and whispered that turkeys were coming. Eight or nine hens came trotting in followed by two longbeards. Jaden was shooting the same 12 gauge Cody used that morning, and it was pointed out the front. The problem was the strutting toms were on the left.

Fearing they were going to leave, I had Jaden reposition his gun to that window. Once he was lined up I told him to shoot the strutting tom. The



sound of the shot sent all but that turkey scattering in every direction. Jaden's first bird lay still in front of us only 18 yards away. His ear-to-ear smile said it all.

Knowing more turkeys were still in the vicinity, I opted to stay in the blind. We still had 90 minutes shooting light and distant gobbles were encouraging. About 50 minutes later some hens and jakes passed by. When the three jakes found Jaden's dead tom, they proceeded to jump on and flog it. Jaden nearly laughed out loud and asked why they were whipping his bird!

Before I could get much of a response out, two toms, one in full strut, came waddling down the sandhill and bowled the three jakes right off the dead bird. One tom stood on the dead bird in full strut and pecked at his deceased rival. Jaden's eyes were about to pop out of his head.

"Shoot that one, too!" I told Jaden as he eased his gun over to the same window.

Again, the sound of the shot sent turkeys scattering and Jaden had his second tom. Even more entertaining was the one surviving tom would not leave. Nor, could he decide which dead bird he needed to whip and went back and forth. Jaden was enjoying the show when I finally started talking to the confused turkey and it gobbled back at every sound. We were both laughing by now.

Although both boys' spring turkey seasons were over in a matter of seconds in one case and minutes in another, they were incredibly memorable experiences. When he left, Jaden said "I'll remember this for the rest of my life!"

I will, too.



Accidental HUNTRESS

with Nadia Marji

ACCIDENTALHUNTRESS.BLOGSPOT.COM/

THE PROMISE OF A PUP

Exhausted from a cold, early morning turkey hunt, I did what all smart hunters do after peeling off damp, tick-laden clothing... I took a hot shower and hit the hay. Little did I know that nap would be one of many naps to come that would be cut short.

I was just getting relaxed and dozing off when the bedroom door opened and my boyfriend, Jon, had a birthday card for me. My birthday was two weeks away, so I must've had quite the look of bewilderment on my face.

"Open it!" he said excitedly.

Half awake, I began reading his words to find the last line, which read "let's take a roadtrip." As he eagerly stood there staring at me, it immediately occurred to me that he didn't mean in the future, but right then and there.

Puzzled, but excited, I slid on some sandals, grabbed my purse and out the door we went. What seemed like an hour later, we rolled up to a strange new street, in an unfamiliar town, when Jon stopped the truck. He told me we had reached our destination. As I looked around at my surroundings, I noticed a young family playing with a small, black puppy. They had been waiting for us. I began welling-up with emotion as I realized that pup was for me.

Watching her playfully hopping around the grass, with a chukar wing hanging out of its mouth, I immediately knew this was going to be my new hunting buddy. She was a 7-week old black lab that had all of the promise of the world in her eyes, and she was mine. Without hesitation, I picked her up, and as if by some pre-ordained event, proclaimed "her name is Dakota. I'll call her Kota for short."

Since that moment, my days have been filled with some sleepless nights, multiple "accidents" on the carpet, endless "no" commands blurted out, and multiple battle wounds from her, as I like to call them, "puppy-piranha teeth." But my days have also been filled with over-

whelming love, endless playfulness, pure excitement for the future, and most of all, pride, as I watch her learn what it means to be a retriever. Kota and I have so many things to learn, but that's the wonderful thing about this journey - we're a team and we'll figure things out together.

"Watching her playfully hopping around the grass with a chukar wing in her mouth, I immediately knew this was going to be my new hunting buddy."



Kota is now 10 weeks old and is already learning basic commands. As luck would have it, this pup retrieved her first bird on my actual birthday, April 24.

Looking back at that fateful trip, I realize that Jon didn't just give me a birthday present, or just a puppy - he gave me an adventure, and that's the best kind of gift a huntress could ask for.

During state park open house weekend, March 29, 2014, many families took advantage of some delightful weather to try out activities Kansas state parks provide all spring, summer and fall. Everyone knows our state parks providing camping and access for fishing and boating, but did you know what else you might find at a Kansas state park?

We have archery ranges at El Dorado, Clinton, Hillsdale, Tuttle Creek, Lovewell, Prairie Dog, and Eisenhower state parks. During its open house, Tuttle Creek's range hosted tomahawk throwing, archery and slingshot shooting events. Archery instruction also took place at Elk City State Park.

At Elk City State Park, a local trainer conducted a retrieving dog workshop attended by four-pawed and two-footed students.

More than 40 shutterbugs participated in the guided nature photography hike at El Dorado. All of our state parks offer stunning settings for photography, as well as frequent opportunities to view and photograph wildlife. Family photos taken at the parks generally include big smiles.

At Crawford State Park, 80 people enjoyed a "Spring Into Summer" event at the Crawford Marina. The park also dedicated new fishing access points and hosted hikes to highlight the recent donation of the Skinner property.

Milford State Park hosted an "Adventure Race," which is a triathlon with running, mountain biking and canoeing. Tuttle Creek held the Zombie 5K, and a hunter education field day.

June is Great Outdoors Month, and there will be lots of special events. Learn more on the special events calendar at www.ksoutdoors.com.

The "Team Levi Strong: Outrun Cancer" benefit run/walk occurred at Lovewell State Park.

The benefit trail ride at Perry State Park boasted 160 registered riders. Others signed up for guided

rides. Local owners held a small car show in the park's parking lot. Area bike clubs held a cookout at the bike trail.

Meade State Park held a trout derby to highlight the fact that Meade Lake was stocked with trout this year, a first. Scott State Park offered kids of all ages a chance to drive their radio-controlled vehicles in an area developed just for that purpose. Hillsdale State Park has an area for radio-controlled airplanes.

Folks who looked at or took a ride in a boat at the boat show at Webster State Park during the open house received tickets for a free lunch provided by the boat shop. Pomona State Park staged an early Easter Egg Hunt and hosted Miss Teen Kansas and various recreation vendors at their Southwind Shelter. At Scott State Park, visitors viewed displays of John Deere gators and utility tractors.

There's a lot going on in Kansas state parks. Next time someone asks "What shall we do this weekend?" a great answer would be "Visit a state park." June is Great Outdoors Month, and there will be lots of special events. Learn more on the special events calendar at www.ksoutdoors.com.

It costs only \$5 per vehicle per day to enter (or \$25 for the calendar year or you can purchase a State Park Passport annual pass for \$15.50 when you register your vehicle.) Where else can you have this much fun for that price?

KANSAS ARCHERS QUALIFY FOR NATIONALS



Kansas Archery in the Schools hosted its fifth annual state archery tournament, Saturday, April 5, at Clearwater High School, southwest of Wichita. Three hundred and twenty students vied for a chance to compete at nationals. Of those 320 archers, three teams and 60 individual competitors qualified for the National Archery in the Schools tournament in Louisville, Kentucky, May 9-10.

Students from 11 communities competed this year, including Anthony, Clay Center, Clearwater, Erie, Tribune, Holton, Hugoton, Kingman, Neodesha, Olathe, and Rose Hill.

Competing in three divisions, elementary school (4-6), middle school (7-8), or high school (9-12), participants shot five arrows in

each of the three rounds from a distance of 10 meters and a distance of 15 meters. A score of 300 points is considered perfect, which would be scores of 10 on each of the 30 total arrows they can be scored on.

Clearwater school teams placed first in all divisions. The top 10 boy and girl competitors from each grade division from any of the participating schools also qualified for nationals.

For more information, visit www.ksoutdoors.com and click "Services / Education / Archery in the Schools," or email Mike Rader at mike.rader@ksoutdoors.com.

- KDWPT News

Individual winners in each grade division are as follows:

GIRLS

Avery Schill, 264, Clearwater Elementary; Tatyana Miner, 278, Clearwater Middle School *Top overall score, top female score; Amber Asbury, 266, Clearwater High School

BOYS

Richard Wolf, 260, Clearwater Elementary; Daniel Schule, 274, Clearwater Middle School; Kyle Reed, 277, Clearwater High School *Top male score

Go With The Flow

with Mark VanScoyoc

Biodiversity — What does it mean, and why is it important?

Simply put, the word means the variety of plants and animals in a particular area or region. For all of the ribbing and joking Kansans receive about how “dull” or “boring” our state is, once you get off the highway, get out of the car, and take a closer look, visitors and even life-long Kansans start to see a totally different picture.

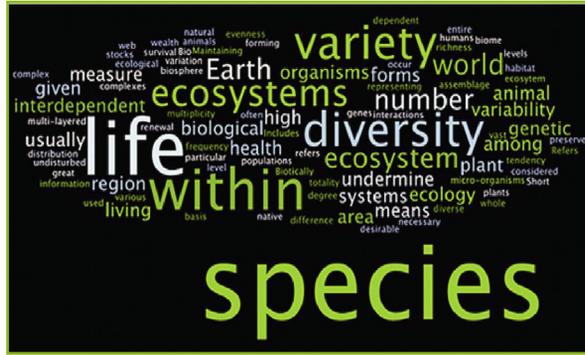
As you drive across the state, you will see many examples of this diversity. Species that inhabit Hays are different from those in Lawrence. Seine a stream in northwest Kansas versus one in southeast Kansas and you quickly begin to see this diversity. Just to give you an idea of this diversity, here is a brief summary of the approximate number of species for various groups of plants and animals recorded in the state.

- **Insects – somewhere between 15,000 - 20,000 species**
- **Freshwater mussels – 48 species**
- **Fish – 144 species**
- **Amphibians – 31 species**
- **Reptiles/turtles – 68 species**
- **Birds – 472 species**
- **Wildflowers & grasses – 756**

And these numbers don't take into account species of invertebrates and fungi. Some estimate there are over 20,000 species of non-game wildlife in Kansas.

But why is Biodiversity important?

In past articles I've attempted to show the importance of various species of wildlife, ranging from their aesthetic importance, how they play an important role in telling us about the quality of our land and water, and how their loss would be detrimental to us and lessen our quality of life. Take it a step further, and it makes good business sense to preserve biodiversity. Do a search on the internet for “biodiversity importance” and you'll see what I mean. One such search estimates that at least 40 percent of the world's economy is derived from biological resources. Do a quick search for Gross World

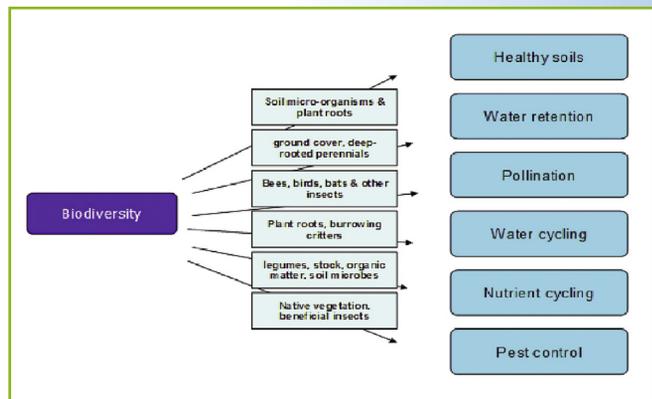


Product, some calculation, and this 40 percent number translates into approximately \$24 trillion, and that was estimated 6 years ago. The search also went on to say that 80 percent of the needs of the poor are also derived from these biological resources.

Back at home in Kansas, the importance of biodiversity is apparent when it comes to making a living on the farm. The functions of biodiversity are sometimes referred to as ecosystem services. Such services provide any number of benefits to our state, not the least of which are to providing food, protection of water resources, contributing to climate stability, recovery from unpredictable events, medicinal resources, ornamental plants, and more.

Bear in mind that these services are essentially free and would be extremely difficult and expensive to replace (if replacement were possible).

From a practical point of view, it's good business to preserve biodiversity. Many dislike the idea of putting an economic value on biodiversity. The main reason for doing so is to help people understand just how great of an impact loss of biodiversity can have on our daily lives. It's important to understand how valuable the environment is to humans, as well as the costs and benefits of doing or not doing something. This value is partially defined by the clean air, fresh water, and healthy food necessary for our survival. Furthermore, future generations will look back and see how their predecessors took steps to preserve the value of biodiversity.





Chicken Fried Turkey

Spring turkey hunting is a favorite of my family. We all love to be in the woods, and I put so much time into prepping for the hunt, I can get lazy once a bird is down.

Plucking is an option, but I always opt out for skinning because of the time involved. I fillet the breast meat off, remove legs and debone thighs. The backs, drumsticks, wings and necks get boiled out and made into turkey and noodles/dumplings. We usually wait until the end of season to make this, so we can combine parts from several birds if our luck is good.

The thighs and breast meat usually get turned into chicken fries immedi-

The kids love those home cooked meals and take pride in providing for the family when it's one of their birds we're eating.

ately. Tenderizing each piece is a must before breading. Use a puncturing type meat tenderizer instead of a mallet to insure the meat maintains the desired shape and thickness doesn't ball up during the cooking process.

Once tenderized and cut into manageable pieces, I salt and pepper the raw meat. I then use crushed saltine crackers to bread the pieces. I will pan fry with a little vegetable oil and a tablespoon of bacon grease. I always keep some leftover bacon grease in the fridge to add additional flavor to fried foods.

A whole turkey will produce a lot of chicken fries, one from each thigh and three to four from each side of the breast. We usually eat ours with mashed potatoes and chicken fry gravy and corn or green beans. The leftovers get consumed the next day as sandwiches. A reheated steak nestled inside a Hawaiian roll with a slice of cheese and Miracle Whip is a pretty tasty sandwich.

The kids love those home cooked meals and take pride in providing for the family when it's one of their birds we're eating. We get three really good meals from each turkey harvested, but the memories last forever.

You can make healthier dishes with skinless, boneless turkey, but I figure I earn those extra calories with long treks in the woods. That's my story, and I'm sticking to it.



In nearly 50 years of fishing, I've had hooks pierce my skin past the barbs just three times. The first time, getting the hook out was easy. A friend snagged my ear with a quarter-ounce bass jig and the barb passed completely through. My buddy was determined to cut the barb off and remove the lure before anyone saw my rubber-skirted earring and started asking questions. Armed with only a pair of fingernail clippers, he was able to clip the hook point off, just behind the barb. The hook easily slipped out. Since it poked through thin cartilage, it was painless. It was dark by then and neither of us noticed how much the tiny hole in my ear had bled. From the look on his face, the guy at the bait shop did.

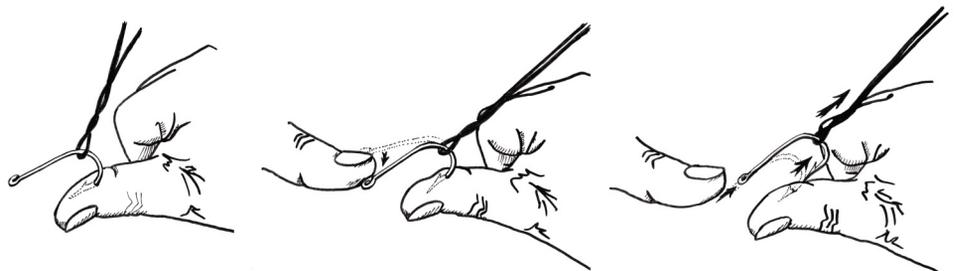
Years later, while I was landing a brown trout in swift current, the fish squirted from my hand, dragging the dropper fly with it. The small nymph hook buried in my palm. Though tiny, it's amazing how tightly the hook's barb held in my skin. I wasn't going to simply back it out without damage and pain. The hook was away from any joint or artery, so I decided to try the

fishing line hook-out method I'd seen demonstrated on television. I took about three feet of the heaviest tippet material I had, doubled it, and put it around the bend in the hook. I then wrapped the two ends around my right hand, used my thumb to push down on the hook eye, gave it some slack and popped the line straight away. It snapped out without pain, leaving only a tiny hole. Surprised and relieved, I went back to fishing.

I've done it a couple of times since, once on my other hand, then on my buddy's face when wind blew elk-hair caddis fly into his cheek on his back cast. Each time it's been painless and easy. Depending on where the hook is located, you may need help to push down on the hook eye.

The other method is to push the point on through, snip the barb off and back the hook out. This works, but pushing the point of a hook through skin can be a lot harder and more painful than it sounds.

The line hook-out technique shouldn't be used if the hook is buried near a joint or artery or near the eye. Under those situations, go to the emergency room.



Todd Workman

The Way I See It

RULES OF SURVIVAL



Everything is safe these days. Seatbelts, bike helmets, safety caps, safety nets – the list goes on. As long as we strap ourselves in and cover ourselves with hard plastic, we'll be safe. We just keep getting safer and softer. But do we really want to live that far away from the edge?

I remember the days of Easy Bake Ovens, wood burning kits, chemistry sets, and Creepy Crawlers. When we weren't cooking an awful tasting cake, we were pouring chemicals in the ditch water and lighting it on fire. We used our wood burning kits as branding irons – marking anything within the reach of an electrical cord. Those toys of my youth were taken away well before they broke or wore out. I'll admit I was probably too amused with the reactions of adult humans when they found large exotic looking spiders in clothes hampers or snakes by the car doors. I was probably too fascinated by the different colors of smoke that came from mixing chemicals, and fairly disheartened on being punished for marking my initials on Mom's good lamps (I heard it was effective theft deterrent). My parents weren't "out of the box" thinkers when it came to my good intentions.

However, with BB guns came a whole different level of rules, which were invoked with extreme prejudice. One small safety infraction, and the BB gun was taken away never to be seen again. My dad set some basic ground rules for BB guns: Don't point them people, don't point them at houses, don't load them until you are ready to shoot, and if you break rules 1-3 he would make it the worst day of your life.

I never broke those rules mainly because my BB gun wasn't powerful enough to break the surface of the water. In fact, I could track a BB from my barrel to target by sight. Out of the three boys, mine was the least powerful BB gun, which I think, looking back, could have been the forerunner of today's Nerf guns.

My younger brother's gun was powerful enough to penetrate the exoskeleton of a grasshopper, which made it an effective weapon for harvesting fish bait. Grasshopper hunting became a favorite activity of my brother and me. However, it came to an unceremonious end when, during a solo hunt, my brother took an ill advised shot at a grasshopper perched on a beveled window on the front door of our house. I believe the range was less than an inch. My brother didn't think his gun would penetrate the grasshopper and the glass, but that assumption was proved incorrect when the BB rolled across the kitchen floor and rested against the house slipper of my stunned father.

My brother made matters worse by violating every rule of "being caught." He stayed frozen, stunned I suppose, still pointing the BB gun at the window until my dad looked at him. Then, he screamed "Nooooo!" threw his gun in the air,

and took flight. He could run fast but showed little imagination or a survival instinct as he ran three laps around the house. The BB gun and parts of his hide disappeared that day.

My older brother had an air rifle. Just the name "rifle" spoke to its lethal power. This gun had a pump mechanism to fill a cylinder full of air and regulate the power. The result was a gun capable of killing frogs, birds, or books. Unfortunately, in my brother's attempt to penetrate deeper and deeper into the pages of an encyclopedia, he pumped it too many times and ruptured the cylinder. The only way to prevent air leaking out the end of the barrel was to place a finger over it until a target was selected. On a bird hunt under the willow tree in the vacant lot next to our house this defect caused an issue. A starling lit close, offering an inviting target. My brother put in a few extra pumps while watching the bird. We both heard the gun go off and heard the BB skitter through the branches of the tree. We looked at each other and wondered where the shot came from.

"Somebody else is shooting at birds", whispered my brother.

"You sure that wasn't your gun?" I inquired.

"No way. I had my finger over my over the barrel," he said, his voice trailing off.

We both looked at his pointer finger at the same time. There was a small neat hole right through the middle of it. My brother's head went into a small circle, his eyes rolled up, and he collapsed into the dirt. He then got up and we ran to the house.

"What are we going to do? I'm going to get tetanus or gangrene. Don't tell Dad! How are we going to fix it?" he rattled off in panic.

"In old westerns they cauterize wounds with a red-hot iron. I'll get my wood burning iron, or I could get the Creepy Crawler kit and we can fill the hole with goop. I know where Mom hid that stuff," I offered.

"Don't come anywhere near me with your hot iron or your goop you little fool. Get some bandages and it will grow back together."

Well I might be a little fool, but I didn't have a hole in my finger that you could see through. We walked to the house and snuck into the bathroom with the first aid kit. It's funny how blood and bandages tip parents off that something is amiss, and it didn't take long for me to crack under Dad's interrogation. My brother lost his air rifle and a little hide, as well. The gun ended up in the same box with the rest of the confiscated toys of our youth.

I still wish I had that Creepy Crawler set.

Attention Young Photographers

Whether it's a snapshot of a peaceful moment fishing on the lake, the fiery colors of a Kansas sunset, or the image of a white-tailed fawn at rest, Kansas Wildlife & Parks magazine staff want to see Kansas outdoors through the lens of your camera. Photo submissions for the 2nd annual "Wild About Kansas" junior photo contest are being accepted now through Oct. 24, 2014. Participants can submit photos in three categories: wildlife, outdoor recreation or landscapes. There is no fee to enter, and the contest is open to both residents and nonresidents, age 18 or younger.

"Kansas is a state filled with a plethora of diverse and awe-inspiring natural resources, and this contest is just one more way we can enjoy and share those resources with others," said Kansas Wildlife & Parks magazine associate editor, Nadia Marji.

Budding photographers can submit up to three photos and multiple entries may be submitted in the same category.

Photos must be taken within the state

of Kansas and must be the entrant's original work. Each photo will be judged on creativity, composition, subject matter, lighting, and the overall sharpness. First, 2nd, and 3rd place prizes will be awarded in each category, as well as one honorable mention per category. Winners will be featured in the Kansas Wildlife & Parks January/February 2015 photo issue.

Entries must be received no later than 5 p.m. on Oct. 24, 2014. An entry form must be submitted for each participant. Photo format should be JPEG and a file size should be not less than 1mb and not more than 5mb.

For more information and entry forms, visit ksoutdoors.com/services, or contact Nadia Marji at nadia.marji@ksoutdoors.com.



The Playa Lakes Joint Venture (PLJV) recognized Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism's Joe Kramer, director of Fisheries and Wildlife Division, as one of two recipients of the 2014 North American Migratory Bird Joint Venture Conservation Champion Award. Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory was the other 2014 recipient.

Each year, this award is given to partners and partnerships that have demon-

KRAMER HONORED BY PLJV

strated a long-term commitment and dedication to the important work of the Joint Ventures, and Kramer is no exception.

"For his 34 years of contributions to the people and places so vital to the wildlife and wetlands we want to sustain, we are honored to present the Conservation Champion Award for an Individual to Joe Kramer," said PLJV Coordinator Mike Carter. "Joe has been with us from the beginning, as a founding member of the management board, and is still just as involved today."

Raised in Great Bend, Kramer developed a pas-

sion for waterfowl at Cheyenne Bottoms. After completing his degree in wildlife biology at Kansas State University, he began his professional career as a wildlife area technician in Kansas. In just 11 years, Kramer rose to Chief of Wildlife and Fisheries Division, where he remains an important leader 27 years later.

For more information on Kramer's contributions, visit www.pljv.org/news/playa-post/march-2014.

— KDWPT News

RECORD TROUT



Spring Hill angler Josh McCullough knew he had hooked something special when he saw the big trout on his line. On Feb. 23, while fishing at Kill Creek Park Lake in Johnson County, McCullough had no idea the rainbow trout he was fighting would land him in the record books.

When McCullough's catch surfaced, he knew this was no ordinary fish. As he landed the trout, McCullough he wondered if the fish might be a new record. McCullough snapped a few photos with a phone, and then did what any angler should do when potentially holding a new state record fish - he took it to a certified scale to get weighed.

The 28.5-inch long fish tipped the scale at 15.72 pounds, a mere .29 of a pound heavier than the former state record rainbow trout, which weighed 15.42 pounds and was caught by Nicole Wilson. Wilson made the books in 2012 with her catch from Lake Shawnee in Topeka.

To view a complete list of current Kansas state record fish, visit ksoutdoors.com and click "Fishing/StateRecordFish."

— KDWPT News

SEN. CAROLYN MCGINN

This is the sixth article in a series featuring Kansas legislators and their views on wildlife resources and outdoor recreation.

by Mike Miller
editor, Pratt



Sen. Carolyn McGinn, R-Sedgwick, has represented the 31st District in the Kansas Senate since being elected in 2004. She currently lives outside of the town of Sedgwick where she and her husband operate a grain production farm. Sen. McGinn holds a Master of Science degree in Environmental Science from Friends University and a Bachelor of Business Administration degree in Marketing from Wichita State University.

Sen. McGinn currently serves as Chair of the Joint Committee on Corrections and Juvenile Justice Oversight, and sits on Senate Natural Resources, Judiciary and Agriculture committees.

Her path to politics followed involvement in local grassroots issues and a seat on the Sedgwick County Commission. When asked about the jump from county commission to Senate, she related that her constituency base actually got smaller when she was elected to the Senate.

"I went from 90,000 constituents to 65,000. The Sedgwick County Commission covers part of Wichita, so I was used to having a large constituency base and a diverse district. When I moved to the Senate, a lot of my commission area was in my senate district and I picked up Harvey County. The town I'm from, Sedgwick, is on the Harvey County line, Sedgwick is a Harvey County School, and we farm in southern Harvey and northern Sedgwick counties." Sen. McGinn said about the natural transition.

When asked about time spent pursuing outdoor recreation, Sen. McGinn said, "I fish on occasion and if someone invites me to go hunting, I'll go. Most of my time outdoors is spent working on the farm," she added, although she is looking forward to her first-ever Canadian fly-in fishing trip this June.

"We appreciate wildlife and my husband and I work to maintain quality habitat where we can. We have some of our land in CRP, and we recently acquired land that has a stream and some woods," she added. "We've been researching what we need to do to enhance that area for wildlife."

When asked about natural resource-related issues she's been involved with as a legislator, Sen. McGinn brought up the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Plan (CREP), which is an offshoot of the Conservation Reserve Program. CREP targets high priority conservation issues identified by local and state governments.

"It was controversial, but looking at the big picture, I saw it as one piece of the puzzle to conserve water in western Kansas," she said. "I pushed very hard for that. It was a voluntary thing for farmers; they weren't forced to do it, but at the same time it was a way for them to ease out of their water rights and it would certainly be a helpful piece to try to conserve that aquifer."

When asked about future issues that may affect our natural resources and outdoor recreation, Sen. McGinn listed her top three:

"Water, water and water," she said, expounding on her interest to conserve water. "It's a big issue. Two years ago when we dealt with the flex program and began making what I considered sweeping changes in water law, it was fine to deal with because of the drought. But as soon as we got rain, it was like people forgot all about it."

Sen. McGinn is interested in looking ahead and establishing conservation plans before resources become critically low. She has a unique perspective on water issues because of where she lives, the make up of her district and the farming operation she and her husband operate.

"We live and have our business north of Wichita and we're all getting our water out of the same aquifer, the Equis Beds, so we've had to learn to work together. We are a unique and diverse GMD (groundwater management district) because we are agriculture, municipality and industrial. We've had to sit at the roundtable and figure out how to make this work. We've come a long way but we still have work to do."

Another aspect of owning farmland in a populated county is desire for access by hunters. The McGinns allow hunting on their land, but she said they want to ensure it isn't over hunted, and it can be confusing keeping track of who's hunting where. They are looking into a system that will allow them to limit hunting pressure and know who is on their land. "We're studying some type of system where we could maybe charge for hunting but still make it affordable while not locking it up for just one person," she said.

Her concern for the conservation of our natural resources, while bringing various stakeholders together, is evident. And while she views water conservation as one of our most critical issues, she also spoke about Kansans losing their connection with the land.

"We need to continue to work on programs such as Walk-In Hunting so people have access to land," she said. "It seems that as we urbanize, there is less opportunity for people to find places to hunt."



Squirrel Of A Different Color



text and photos by Bob Gress
Wichita

The small town of Marysville takes pride in and actively promotes a local population of black fox squirrels.

Marysville is located in Marshall County, just south of the Nebraska border, and it was a popular stop for those traveling the Oregon Trail. Today, there's a "new" feeling about Marysville that mixes comfortably with a proud history. New construction and renovations are evident throughout the city. Marysville was also on the route of the Pony Express, and the old Pony Express Station, still standing in downtown Marysville, is worth a visit. The Military Road, St. Joe Road, Otoe-Missouri Trail and Overland Stage all contribute to Marysville's rich history. However, Marysville has an unusual claim to fame due to some unique animals. Perhaps no other Kansas town shows more pride in a local species of wildlife than Marysville!

Marysville is the proud home of the black squirrel. Today, signs welcome visitors to "Marysville Kansas – Black Squirrel City." In 1972, the black squirrel was

formally designated as the "Marysville City Mascot" and was given special "rights and privileges inherent to such designation, including the freedom to trespass on all City property, immunity from traffic regulations, and the right of first choice to all black walnuts growing within the City." It was also given the right-of-way on all streets, alleys, and railroad crossings and given its own special day of community celebration. "Black Squirrel Night" is held annually, before Halloween, and features safe trick-or-treating, entertainment, hayrack rides, contests, food stands and information booths. The evening concludes with a costume contest including a visit by a giant costumed black squirrel!

So, what are these unique black squirrels? Marysville's black squirrels are melanistic eastern fox squirrels. Melanism is an unusual genetic trait producing dark melanin pigments, resulting in black or

The gray squirrel, picture at left, is common to the timbered areas of far eastern Kansas. The fox squirrel, picture at right, is common throughout Kansas, and they usually look like this one. Marysville's squirrels are fox squirrels in a black, or melanistic color phase.



File photos



Although black gray squirrels and occasional black fox squirrels are found elsewhere, few squirrels get the attention like those in Marysville. Nearly every internet reference to black squirrels of either species makes reference to Marysville.

partially black animals. Melanistic animals can occur anywhere and these squirrels may have originated in Marysville. However, local legend offers an explanation of black squirrels escaping from a traveling carnival in the 1920s.

In Kansas we're familiar with normal looking fox squirrels with their fox-like bushy tails and reddish-orange fur. They're common in woodlands, parks and cities. Eastern fox squirrels are found throughout the eastern U.S. and may be the most variably colored tree squirrel in the world. In Florida, Alabama and other southeastern states, they look different than our squirrels. They have a mixture of black, silver, gray and red hairs. They often have grayish bodies, orangish bellies, reddish tails, and black facial masks around their eyes and noses. Others from the eastern states have black fur with tan, gold or reddish undersides. Some are nearly all black with white or gray noses, and white ears and feet. In much of their eastern U.S., at least some black coloration is typical. In fact, their scientific name is *Sciurus niger*. "Niger" means black and refers to the black patterns found on eastern squirrels. But totally black (melanistic) fox squirrels usually appear in isolated cases. Populations of melanistic eastern fox squirrels are found in Council Bluffs, Iowa; Omaha, Neb. and Marysville. All-black, melanistic, eastern fox squirrels, like Marysville's, are truly rare.

An internet search for black squirrels produces many hits. Nearly all of these are melanistic forms of eastern gray squirrels, not eastern fox squirrels, like Marysville's. In Kansas, we find eastern gray squirrels only in the woodlands in the eastern quarter of Kansas. They're significantly smaller than our fox squirrels and are more reluctant to descend to the ground. Melanistic eastern

gray squirrels are found in parts of Canada as well as Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Washington D.C., Wisconsin and Massachusetts. Populations of melanistic gray squirrels appear to occur fairly regularly.

Although black gray squirrels and occasional black fox squirrels are found elsewhere, few squirrels get the attention like those in Marysville. Nearly every internet reference to black squirrels of either species makes reference to Marysville. One internet site lists the "Top 10 Black Squirrel Locations", and Marysville sits at number two behind the black gray squirrels of Washington D.C.'s National Zoo. The black squirrels of Marysville are truly famous!

Want to see Marysville's black squirrels? They're not hard to find. Approximately one-fifth of

Marysville's squirrels are black. Grab your camera and kids, pack a picnic lunch and head to Marysville's City Park or Lion's Park. The City Park is located along U.S. Highway 77 in the south part of town and Lion's Park is located in the northeast part of town. You'll be seeing a truly unique, wildlife treasure. ♡

Bob Gress retired as director of the Great Plains Nature Center in 2012. A skilled naturalist and renowned wildlife photographer, he's a frequent contributor to Kansas Wildlife & Parks magazine. He first saw Marysville's black squirrels while picnicking in the City Park over 50 years ago.





SCRATCH AND SNIFF



An odor only a
catfish could
love!

If it really was a scratch and sniff photo, you probably would have thrown this magazine away by now. "Punch" baits catch channel catfish, and the best baits usually have the most offensive odor. As an old-timer once said of his homemade bait, "I don't know if catfish like the smell of it or if they're picking it up to get it out of their pond because it smells so bad." Either way, he knew catfish punch baits would catch fish.

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

Channel catfishermen are an interesting bunch. Many have a personal bait favorite when it comes to catching one of America's most popular sport fish. There are plenty of store-bought bait options, but some anglers make their own concoctions and revel in its creation. But one common denominator in most catfish baits is that they are typically aromatic in a big way.

Sure, there are catfish anglers who swear by fresh bait such as shad or other species of fish cut into chunks or fished whole. And there are distinct differences in best bait choices depending on whether channel catfish or blue catfish are being pursued. For the average Joe angler, though, it comes down to fishing for channel catfish, a species that ranks at the top in angler preference in Kansas. Likely one of the more popular baits for channel cats is simply "stink" bait of some variety.

Commercially-prepared stink baits come in all shapes, textures and key ingredients. However, there is usually one of two base ingredients – blood or cheese, or sometimes both. Stink baits are available in retail fishing outlets from local bait shops to big box stores and there are plenty on the



Gizzard shad are the main forage for sport fish in Kansas reservoirs, so catfish anglers often use dead shad as a base for their homemade punch baits. Whatever else is added in is kept top secret but often includes cheese and some sort of fiber to help the bait stay on a hook.



Once the author's recipe has aged to a sufficient rancid, putrid odor, he adds cattail fiber, which helps keep the bait on a treble hook that's "punched" into it. The art of aging catfish bait is convincing nearby neighbors that the smell is coming from a dead animal in their woodpile.

Internet. They're relatively inexpensive, and it's simple enough to keep stocked up, provided you have a place to store it agreeable with the rest of your family.

In addition to being an interesting bunch, catfish anglers are also frugal to some extent. And while making your own bait can save money, creative anglers enjoy coming up with a unique formula and take great pride knowing they're catching fish using bait they've developed. Some try it once and forget it while others keep at it, often altering or "improving" their batches of smelly brew year after year.

I've been a fan of punch-type baits over the years for catching channel cats. It's worked well on channel cats in small streams, farm ponds and even big reservoirs, from shore or boat. A punch bait is simple and requires nothing more than a No. 4 or No. 6 treble hook that is "punched" (or more accurately pushed to the middle of the bucket) with a stick. Pulled out at an angle the bait is held on the treble hook with some type of fiber, man-made or natural, within the bait.

Several years ago I decided to try my hand at making my own catfish bait. I started with a

couple dozen, 6- to 9-inch gizzard shad I had frozen. You can catch shad with a throw net in many reservoirs during the summer or pick dead ones up along the shoreline after ice-out in the spring. You can go with quantity (the smaller ones, 3-4 inches, are usually easier to come up with) or quality – the big ones. The end product doesn't really turn out much differently, although the smaller ones will turn to mush quicker.

I cut the shad up into chunks and placed them in a bucket with a lid. It's tough to keep flies out of the mixture but some cat-

Does it work? The author's daughter, below, holds proof of his recipe's effectiveness. His personal concoction includes rotten shad chunks and old cheese. He claims that handling the bait without gloves is a sure cure for biting your fingernails.

fish bait makers use a piece of cheese cloth over the top of the bucket and then place the lid on it. I'm not real sure flies could hurt it much and the resulting maggots may add "flavor."

Be forewarned, this recipe isn't for those with a weak stomach. In addition, you better get along well with your neighbors and figure any prevailing winds into the equation. Or, find friend who lives in the country where you can "cook" your brew. As the summer gets warmer the mixture can smell so bad I'm convinced turkey vultures would turn up their noses at it.

After letting it set for a few days in the Kansas summer sun, I added some old cheese. You can get this from certain markets or distributors at a reduced rate after it goes unsold past its due date. Dairies that make their own can provide similar options. Take the cheese out of the freezer and before it turns from a solid state to a "soft" state, it will become crumbly enough to add to the mixture without having to shred or cut it up.

The mixture is checked every couple days and the liquid (which typically stays on the bottom of the bucket) is poured or drained off. It gets stirred again and left to "cook" a few weeks longer. After that period of time, it's probably done and gone as far south





Fishing with punch bait over a chum hole can provide lots of action and great family fun. The author, his sister, niece, son and nephew show off part of a morning's catch.

smell-wise as it will go. I can usually tell when it's getting good when I see my neighbors wandering around in their yard, wrinkled noses in the air with a disgusting, gag-like look on their face.

The last ingredient I add are cattails I've stored from the previous fall. It doesn't take too many and just a few of the dried heads go a long way. They're shredded into the mixture and stirred until the entire bucket's contents get the consistency of thick peanut butter. The key is to use a much larger container and stir standing upwind so the escaping cattail fluff doesn't choke you. I often wear rubber gloves to handle this from start to finish, as it can be a mess. If you don't wear gloves, I guarantee it will break you of biting your fingernails.

I store the mixture in several containers with tight-fitting lids. The "Family" size ice cream buckets (usually just over a gallon) with a handle work well. They fit inside a 5-gallon bucket I use to

haul my catfish concoctions in my boat or down a creek bank and are sturdy enough to stand up over the course of a season.

One of the first batches I ever made was put to the test when I took a friend, Dennis Zehr, and his then 14-year-old son, Brian, out on a catfishing trip to Marion Reservoir. I anchored my boat near a river channel break and dumped a gallon or so of chum (rotted soybeans, wheat or corn) just prior to baiting their hooks. The results were immediate as Brian had a "swing-and-a-miss" within seconds. His second hook-set found its mark and a fat 5-pounder was flopping at the surface in no time.

That fish pretty much set the stage for the next hour. In the blink of an eye, the father-son duo had 18 fish in my livewell and I was baiting hooks and taking off fish for my guests about as fast as humanly possible. Things finally slowed and I got a chance to fish and added my limit to our total as



well. Most fish ranged in size from 2 ½-7 pounds.

I'll have more batches brewing in my backyard this summer, too. So far I've been able to convince my neighbor to the north that a critter of some sort must have got into his wood pile and died. I try to assure him the smell of a dead critter usually dissipates in a couple weeks. It seems odd it happens most every summer around the same time, but he's never made the connection.

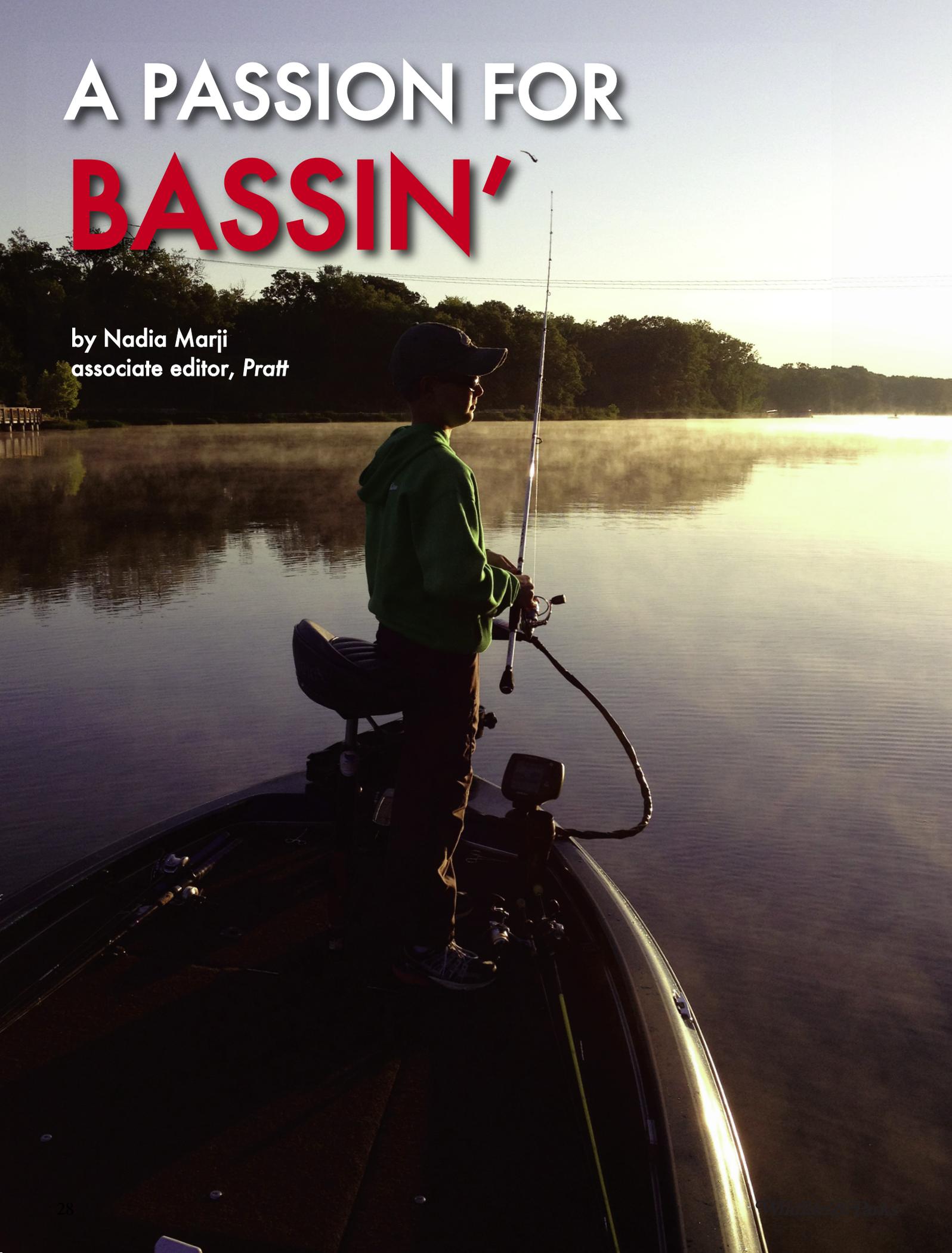
All is good, though, as he is elated when I give him a freshly-cleaned bag of catfish fillets. The smell of the brewing bait in 90-degree weather is long gone by the time he smells those fillets sizzling in hot grease or turning golden brown on his barbecue grill. It's amazing how something that tastes so good can be caught on something that smells bad enough to gag a maggot. But it works! 🍷

Catfishing requires teamwork as Brandon and Cody Murrell show above and below. A good punch bait will maintain its consistency in a wide range of temperatures and stay on the hook long enough to entice a fat channel catfish.



A PASSION FOR **BASSIN'**

by Nadia Marji
associate editor, *Pratt*



ANGLER PROFILE



Name: Zach Vielhauer
Age: 15
Location: Shawnee
Title: 2013 Kansas Junior Bass Fishing Champion
Target: largemouth bass
Equipment choice: Livingston Lure Dive Master Junior

There are those who enjoy fishing every once in a while, those who are a little obsessed, and then there is Zach Vielhauer. Since the age of two, Vielhauer has just about spent more hours on the water than on land.

A Kansas Junior Bass Fishing Champion by the age of 14, this boy means business when there's a pole in his hand.

HOW IT BEGAN

It all started with a dock, some jigs and minnows, and time to spare at Lake of the Ozarks. Fishing for crappie with his father and grandfather, Vielhauer learned the ins and outs of angling.

"We used to get up early and

go down to the dock and fish until breakfast and then after breakfast we went out again," Vielhauer recalled. "Mid-afternoon when it was really hot, we went swimming, but as soon as it cooled off, we were back to



Vielhauer, at age 9, holds a largemouth bass he caught while out fishing with his grandfather.

fishing again. I loved it."

Thoroughly enjoying his time at the dock, Vielhauer soaked in and put to practice all the knowledge his father and grandfather had to share with him. He was quite the enthusiast, but it wasn't until he graduated to fishing for bass from a boat that the angling-bug got the best of him.

"Being able to be in the boat was a big step up from the dock, and that was what really got me hooked on fishing," said Vielhauer. "A fish jumping out of the water just gets your heart racing, knowing that fish could get off at any second. I don't think I'll ever get over the thrill of fighting a fish all the way to the boat."

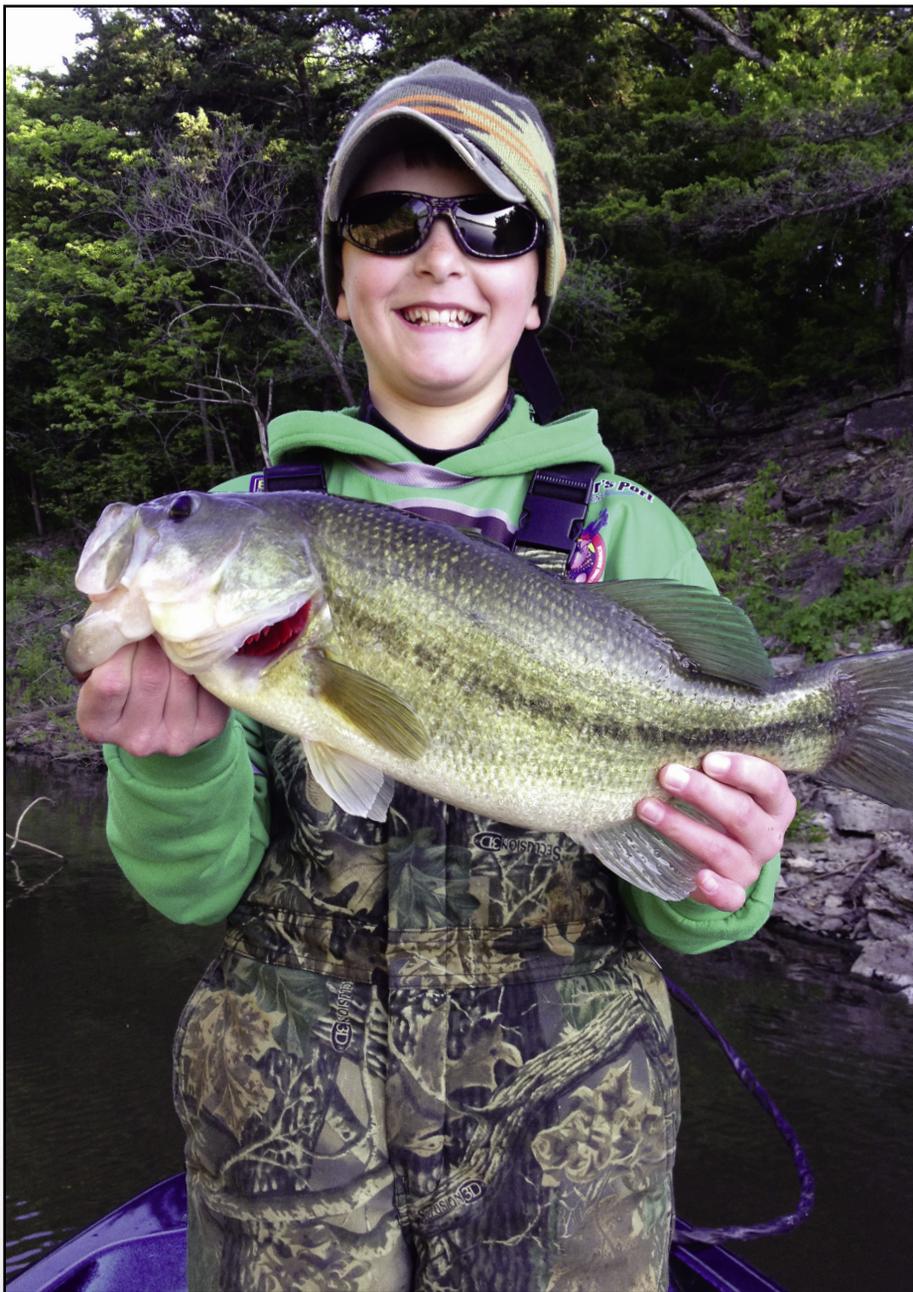
It was this very drive and passion that landed Vielhauer the title of Kansas Junior Bass Fishing Champion last year at The Bass Federation's (TBF) state championship at Wilson Lake last May.

"I don't think I'll ever get over the thrill of fighting a fish all the way to the boat."

Taking first place in the 11-14 age group, Vielhauer won the tournament with five fish weighing 13 pounds. As if the title wasn't prize enough, his win that day earned him a spot to compete in the 2013 TBF Junior World Bass Fishing Championship in Shreveport, La. in August. Although he didn't take home first this time, Vielhauer has no regrets about his time there.



Vielhauer holds his plaque for winning first place in the TBF Youth State Championship last May. He caught both largemouth and smallmouth bass that day.



While fishing Cedar Valley Reservoir in Garnett, Vielhauer caught this largemouth bass using a topwater bait.

HIS BIG BREAK

“My experience in Shreveport was a once-in-a-lifetime experience,” Vielhauer said. “I remember the night before the tournament, I was so nervous I spent the whole night organizing my tackle and coming up with a plan of what I was going to do the next day. This was one

of the biggest things to ever happen to me.”

With acute clarity, Vielhauer recalls the events of that day as if it had happened just yesterday.

“That morning we pulled up to our first spot and didn’t catch anything. We moved to our second and third spot — still no fish. Finally at our fourth spot my partner caught a keeper fish. I was starting to get discouraged

that I still hadn’t caught anything, but I stuck in there.”

Vielhauer has always said that if fishing teaches us anything, it teaches us to never give up. Staying focused, Vielhauer was more determined than ever to land a fish.

“We were fishing down the bank when I saw this clump of trees and knew it was good habitat for fish. There was one in particular that stuck out from the others and I said to myself ‘that tree is going to have a fish on it.’ I pitched my 10-inch worm up to the tree and let it sink. Seconds later, I watched as my line jumped and I set the hook.”

Vielhauer’s dry streak had finally ceased and before he knew it, it was go-time.



Using his “lucky” lure, a Livingston Lure Dive Master Junior Crankbait, Vielhauer was able to land this largemouth bass from La Cygne Lake.

“I remember that bass erupting out of the water like an active volcano.”

“I remember that bass erupting out of the water like an active volcano, jumping and throwing its head around. My boat captain grabbed the net and just as he leaned down to scoop up the fish, it came off,” said Vielhauer. “It was less than a foot away from the net when it sunk in that I had just lost the fish that could have moved me on to the second day to compete for the World Champion title. I was crushed and for the next 10 minutes I just sat there in disbelief.”

Devastated the fish freed itself of his hook, Vielhauer took solace in knowing he wasn't alone. Several other competitors went to weigh-in that day without a fish.

“I had just lost the fish that could have moved me on to the second day to compete for the World Champion title. I was crushed and for the next 10 minutes I just sat there in disbelief.”

It wasn't the picture-perfect day that Vielhauer had envisioned the night before, but not all was lost.

“I got to go on stage, which was a really cool experience, and the next day my whole family went to the expo for the Forest Wood Cup. I got to meet a lot of really neat people there who were representing different companies and I learned a lot. I'll never forget it.”

GETTING INVOLVED

The TBF Junior World Bass Fishing Championship was just one of many competitions under Vielhauer's belt. In just five short years, Vielhauer has already competed in some 40

tournaments, some of which have been hosted by various clubs that Vielhauer is involved with. Holding positions such as tournament director, vice president, and even president, Vielhauer has enjoyed being a member of the Kick Back Junior Bass Club, Kick Back High School Bass Club, TBF, and the Bass Anglers Sportsman Society.



Vielhauer (left) stands toe-to-toe with fellow angler, Ryan Rebori, (right) after fishing the TBF Kansas High School State Championship. Vielhauer found success while using finesse baits.



Pictured above, Vielhauer enjoys an evening fishing with his father, Jim. The two dunked their lures in the spillway lake of Melvern Reservoir during a family camping trip.

“Being in clubs like these has helped me develop a sense of leadership and responsibility. It also has helped me get introduced to the tournament world of bass fishing,” Vielhauer said. “Getting involved with these tournaments teaches us how to do a different kind of research, nothing like what we do at school.” Vielhauer went on to explain that prior to a tournament, he will do several hours of research studying the lake’s contour and it’s fishing reports.

Local bodies of water aren’t the only places that Vielhauer researches. In fact, this angler has his sights set on a much larger body of water than your

average lake these days: the Amazon. After seeing several television shows of anglers catching peacock bass, Vielhauer has made it his mission to one day have a duel with this fish.

“The thrill of the fight is what appeals to me, especially when I’ve seen on videos how these fish hit lures. I’ve even seen some videos where guys throw big poppers out just to see the fish erupt on the bait,” Vielhauer said. “The fight they put up is amazing. They use so much energy when they hit the lure that by the end of the fight, they are worn out. I would love to have an experience like that someday.”



Buzz baits were the lure of choice this day when Vielhauer and his father enjoyed a day fishing on Lake of the Ozarks. The two have been fishing there together since Vielhauer was two.

“Catching fish here doesn’t take a boat, electronics, lots of rods and reels, and driving all over to make something happen. All it takes is water and the drive to catch fish.”

WHAT IT TAKES

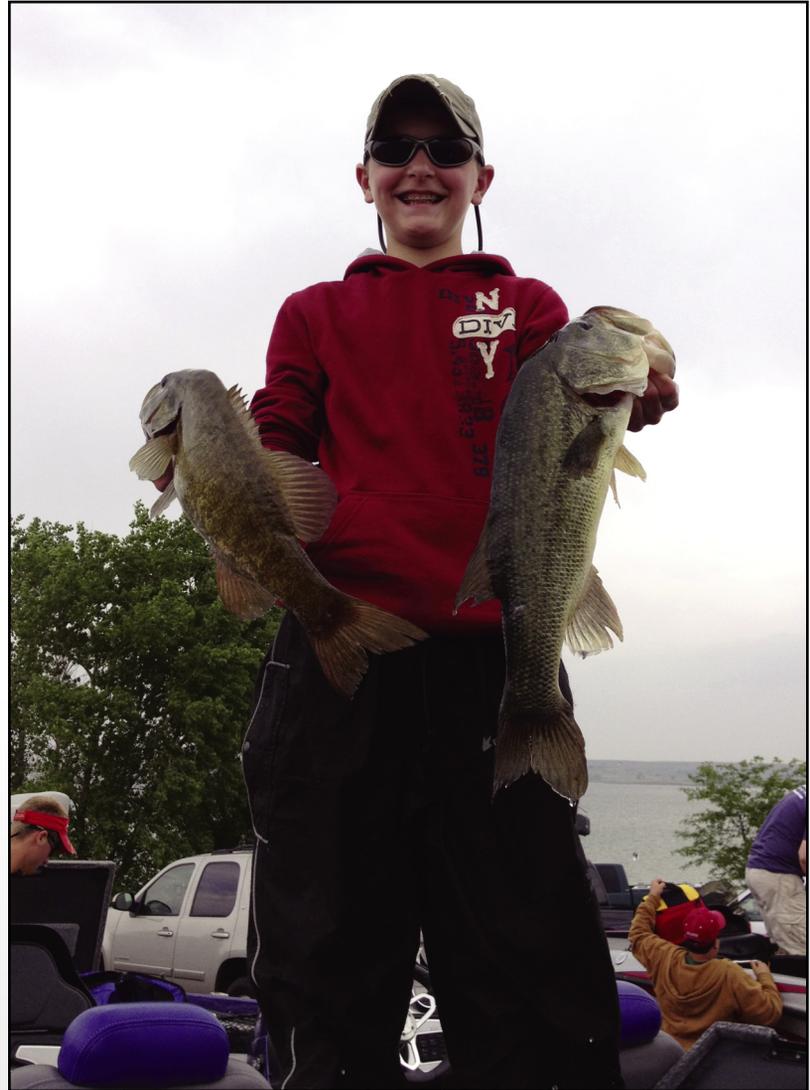
With all the support Vielhauer receives from family and friends, it’s pretty likely this young angler will be gearing up for that fight sooner than later.

“I have received a lot of support from my family and friends, especially my parents,” said Vielhauer. “They’ve played the biggest roles by far because they’re the ones driving me to my tournaments. Having someone at your back like that is exactly what a competitive fisherman needs.”

When he’s not fishing at world championships or dreaming of Amazonian peacock bass, Vielhauer can probably be found on a Kansas lake.

“I like to fish Wilson Lake, Melvern Lake, and La Cygne, but there are a lot of great fisheries all over the state of Kansas,” said Vielhauer. “Catching fish here doesn’t take a boat, electronics, lots of rods and reels, and driving all over to make something happen. All it takes is water and the drive to catch fish.” 🎣

Vielhauer believes the trick to catching fish lies in two things: water and the drive to do so.



Q&A WITH A BASS CHAMP

Q: *When someone opens your tackle box, what might be something they would be surprised to see?*

A: Super glue. I use it to make one of my finesse lures.

Q: *What can someone always expect to find plenty of in your tackle box?*

A: Livingston Crankbaits and Z-man baits.

Q: *Do you have a “lucky lure?”*

A: The Livingston Lures Dive Master Junior in Tiger Spot.

Q: *What are some basic lures you think every angler should have?*

A: A Texas-rigged worm, spinnerbaits, shaky heads, and small crankbaits. These are lures that are easy to work, don’t take a ton of experience, and catch a lot of fish.

LIFE ON THE LEK

A PHOTO ESSAY OF LESSER PRAIRIE CHICKENS

by Nadia Marji, associate editor, *Pratt*



Each spring, just before dawn, male prairie chickens can be seen strutting around on communal mating grounds known as “leks,” where they fight, sing, and dance to win the affections of females. Only the most extravagant displays will do, and only the best males will get to mate. Welcome to life on the lek.





Top left: A male lesser prairie chicken postures, trying to catch the attention of a nearby female.

Bottom left: In short bursts of energy, males take their jousting to the air.

Right: When the excitement has ceased, the deflated lesser prairie chicken's air sac is almost invisible to the naked eye.





Life of A Master Angler

by Mike Miller
 editor, Pratt

“Some people think you’re goofy if you tell them you have to think like a fish. But that’s what you have to do if you want to catch them.” **Michael Reno, avid angler from Holton**

Calling Michael Reno an avid angler is like calling Dick Vital a college basketball fan. Reno sent in a Master Angler application this spring and included a letter about his past awards and fishing history. The Master Angler program recognizes anglers with a certificate if they catch a fish that is equal to or longer than the minimum length set for the species. It’s a popular program, but most anglers only catch a handful of species large enough to

qualify, since the minimum length is set to what is considered trophy size. Reno’s letter indicated he had awards for many of our primary sport fish species. When I checked our records, I learned he had awards for just about every sport fish species, not including panfish and rough fish. I was impressed and wanted to know more.

Reno answered the phone in a matter-of-fact tone of voice, but when I asked him about fishing, the tone

changed noticeably. I wouldn’t say there was excitement in his voice, but there was a passion that was hard to miss.

Reno grew up in Atchison and says his grandpa taught him to fish.

“My grandpa had a love for fishing that is just hard to explain,” Reno said. “There was an old pay lake called Figgies, west of Effingham. We used to pull in there and all he fished for and caught was carp. He was taking me with him as far back as I can remember.

“Grandpa got me into fishing and you know, I get just as excited about going fishing today as I did when I was five years old,” Reno related. “It’s just a love I have for it. I never went to bars when I was growing up because I was too busy fishing. Heck, my wife, who’ve I’ve been married to for 35 years, our first date was to a farm pond,” he said chuckling.

Reno learned to fish for catfish on the Missouri River and on farm ponds and Atchison watersheds. Back then, it was uncommon to catch bass in those waters and Reno admits he didn’t like bass fishermen.

“They’d fly across the water, you know, and I just didn’t have no interest. Then in 1989 or 1990 a guy I worked with gave me a ride in a bass boat and I’ve been hooked on bass fishing ever since that first ride,” he added.

Reno fished his first bass tournament in 1990 as a nonboater in the old Redman Trail at Smithville. He was paired to fish with a boater angler who turned out to be an old friend from Atchison.

“There was 300 and some people in that tournament and a computer was used to pair boaters and nonboaters. An old friend from Atchison, Lyle Banks, was leading the division, and I’ll be darned if the computer didn’t pair Lyle and me together,” Reno said, with amazement in his voice. “Now what are the odds of that.”

Banks only needed a few pounds to win the division and move on to the regionals, which he did. The next year Banks invited Reno to fish as his guaranteed nonboater, which meant Banks could always fish out of his own boat.

“I figured there would be no better way to learn than to fish with somebody who has been on the lakes and could show me the ropes,” Reno remembered. “So I went to tournaments as his nonboater partner, but I would still draw different boater pros at each tournament.”

In just the second tournament he ever fished at Grand Lake, Reno placed 13th out of 363 anglers. He won \$700



and was hooked on fishing bass tournaments. The next year, he went on his own and he bought a bass boat. He spent the next few years learning the lakes, learning how to run a boat in all conditions and learning how to compete.

“I fished about every bass lake in the Midwest. I’ve fished in Texas, Missouri, Nebraska, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Ohio, and Kansas. I fished the FLW, Everstart, BFL, Central Pro-Am, and all the B.A.S.S. tournaments. And I made the state team four times,” Reno added.

Michael Reno has Master Angler Award certificates for most of the larger sport fish species, including the flathead pictured above.

However, Reno had to give up the rigors of tournament fishing because of an injury he received in a work-related accident while he was working as an electrical lineman. After the accident, Reno didn’t fish at all for almost a year.

“I don’t know if I was burned out or just heartbroken because I had to give up tournament fishing,” Reno explained. “Then I got right back into fishing. I didn’t really set out to get all these Master Angler Awards, but I fished through the seasons and go with the flow on the fish. Like right

now (April), the crappie are moving back around the boat docks setting up for pre-spawn.”

Reno spoke reverently of Perry Lake and the fishing opportunities it provides year-in, year-out.

“I’d say that Perry is the best crappie and catfish fishery in the whole state,” Reno said. “I remember standing on the dam in 1969 with my grandpa when they shut the gate before the lake filled.”

Now, every spring as the ice goes off, Reno collects dead gizzard shad, saving the guts, heads and bodies, which he freezes and uses throughout the year for catfish bait. He related his experience fishing for big catfish on the flats.

“Those big ole catfish migrate to the shallow flats to feed on the dead shad,” he said. “It was by accident that I figured this out. I was at Paradise Point and I couldn’t figure out why I wasn’t getting bites. I could see bubbles come up, so I went up to the jeep and grabbed my binoculars. From above, I could see these dark shapes swimming then stop, then swim off. It was the big catfish, and I figured out what they were doing. They were finding dead shad on the bottom, flipping them up then biting them. It looked like they were just squeezing the guts out then spitting out the rest and moving on. That got me thinking, and I went to using shad guts for bait.”

When the water is up, Reno likes to wade out on the shallow flat, knee deep, and sit quietly on a tall bucket. He hooks one of the big dead shad through the eyes, and casts it around the flooded willows, no weight. Then he waits quietly.

“It usually doesn’t take long before one of those big cats will pick up that shad. And when a big cat figures out he’s hooked and takes off, he’ll strip the bark off those willows and lay them over as he moves out. I managed to catch several over 20 pounds and that’s how I got my Master Angler for the channel cat.”

In recent years, big blue cats are showing up, and Reno added a Master Angler certificate for blue cats to his collection.

"I've hooked bigger ones, but they just straightened out my hooks and got off."

When the water warms a little more, Reno turns his attention to crappie.

"I take my grandson with me to fish for crappie on Perry at Rock Creek Marina. They've remodeled that facility and it's really nice. Dennis Hewitt is great about accommodating anglers. I think that part of Perry holds more crappie than any other part of the lake," Reno added.

Fishing from docks is just one of the adaptations Reno has made since his accident. On disability, he can't afford a boat. So he learned to catch fish from the shore and from the marina boat docks. And while he takes pride in the Master Angler Award certificates he's received, taking his grandkids fishing is more important these days.

"I love taking them kids fishing more than anything," he said, his tone softening. "There's something about a kid catching a fish and reeling it in, there's always a smile on their face. And when we fish, we're all on common ground. No one's better than anyone else."

In fact, taking kids fishing is actually how Reno got involved in the Master Angler Award program. When his son was young, he caught a channel catfish that weighed nearly 25 pounds. Reno saw the Master Angler Award application in the fishing regulations pamphlet and thought it would be neat to get a certificate for his son and give it to him for Christmas.

"I had it framed and had a picture next to it, and boy he really liked that," Reno remembered. "Then I realized that I had caught quite a few fish that would qualify. It's a good program, and it's not that easy to go out and catch different species of fish that qualify because they have to be pretty good size. I guess that kind of replaced my tournament fishing."

Reno set out to get a Master Angler Award for about all the major game species, which is just about done.

"And you know all of those, except for the smallmouth bass and that walleye have come out of Perry Lake," he said. "That's how good that fishery is."

Reno's angling success can be attributed to his love of fishing and the fact that he spends as much time as he can doing it. However, one of his

Reno, below, back row second from right below, came out of tournament fishing retirement in 2012 and qualified for the FLW State Team, ranked No. 5.

habits that could help other anglers catch more fish is keeping a fishing journal, making notes about every trip.

"Here's what I keep," he says. "I keep records of air temperature; wind direction and speed; whether it's sunny or cloudy; water surface temperature; barometer; and whether it's rising, steady or falling. I also include per-

sonal notes about techniques and water depths that produced," he said.

Each time he readies for a trip, he consults notes to read about past trips under similar conditions.

"If the wind isn't blowing, the fish don't bite," he added. "My barometer preferences are between 29.80 and 30.10. I don't care if it's rainy, cloudy or what. Your best fishing will be within those barometric parameters."

Reno finished up our conversation talking about how many anglers miss out on some of the best fishing in the Midwest by traveling out of state to fish. As a man who's fished in dozens of lakes in other states, he rates Kansas lakes higher than most. Of course Perry is his No. 1, but he also loves to fish Banner Creek, Melvern, Milford and Hillsdale.

While I find that positive outlook about our Kansas fisheries refreshing, I wondered if that attitude doesn't play a big role in Reno's success as an angler. Some people are convinced that the grass is greener or the fishing is better at another location. Believing the fish are there and being optimistic about catching them increases the odds of angler success. It also helps create excitement about going fishing. Rather than feel sorry for himself when his disability prevented him from fishing tournaments, Reno found a new outlet for his competitive nature through the Master Angler Award Program. With a renewed commitment to fishing and grandkids to mentor, Reno has the ingredients to for a happy life - the life of a Master Angler. ♡



The Master Angler Award program offers certificates to anglers who catch fish meeting or exceeding minimum length limits for each species. applications can be found in the 2014 Kansas Fishing Regulations Summary or downloaded at www.ksoutdoors.com. Applications must be submitted with a color photograph of the fish to allow positive identification.

The Little .410 That Could

by Scot Hill
Shawnee Mission

Eva Hill took advantage of a change in turkey hunting regulations to take her first turkey with a .410 shotgun.



BOOM!

Just because it's a .410 shotgun, that doesn't mean it's quiet.

THEN SILENCE

The bird flopped twice and then lay motionless. I've watched a lot of birds flop after a load of No. 5s from a 3 1/2-inch 12 ga. shell. It's all about shot placement. And this little shooter's was excellent.

A .410 FIRST

It was her first turkey. And it may have been the first turkey legally killed in Kansas with a .410 shotgun in a long time. And I'll take odds it was the first by an 11-year old girl!

GET IN A BLIND

The hunt began in the cold blackness of early morning. Spring 2013 was definitely chillier than normal. But my 11-year old daughter, Eva, and I were just fine. We dressed for December even though the calendar read May.

Actually, we were quite comfortable sitting in our chairs in a ground blind at the intersection of a wheat field and a small pasture bordering the tree line where the landowner had seen birds nearly every day. Our ground blind was tucked into the cedar shelter belt overlooking both the wheat field and the pasture.

A ground blind is an essential element when hunting turkeys with kids. It lets everyone move around without disturbing game, and you can lean over and talk a lot easier. This is especially important with mentored hunts because the mentor needs to explain things and keep the kid's attention by pointing out all of the wonderments in God's grand creation—deer, opossums, the hoot of the barred owl, the sunrise, whatever happens to be out there.

A ground blind is also a lot easier for a kid to get a gun in position to shoot. Veteran turkey hunters know how uncanny a turkey's eyesight can be, and how painstakingly slow it can be to get the gun shouldered if turkeys are afoot. A ground blind helps level the playing field—and kids need all the help they can get.

MY BALLERINA'S FAVORITE SHOTGUN

Eva was hunting with a single-shot .410. This was the second one I bought for her. I made the mistake of buying one with a plastic stock and forend. Don't do it. They pack a harder shoulder punch than my 12 gauge. So this one was made of wood.

A .410 shotgun has historically been considered too small for turkeys. But the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism adopted new regulations in 2013 allowing for any gauge shotgun. I'm glad they did, and so is Eva.

Eva is slight of frame and crazy recoil shy. All other guns were deemed too painful to meet her requirements. But not the .410. She could shoulder it because of its light weight. And the recoil was acceptable—or at least tolerable.

CLOSE ENOUGH TO COUNT SNOOD HAIRS

About 7 a.m., the flock came off the roost. The cold weather still had them flocked up. It wasn't until the next week that the flock starting breaking up. We lost sight of them as they took a detour away from our position. Turns out, they double backed outside of our sight line. At 7:30 a.m., the flock walked

right up to us. Probably 20-25 birds.

Her heart was racing. I could see it in her eyes and in the way she moved. The hens were first. Six or seven birds walked in front of our blind at about ten yards.

Then the jakes. Three jakes cleared the shooting lane. None aware of their predicament.

The big boys came through last—four strutters all decked out. It was a veritable turkey smorgasbord.

Eva took the first big boy to clear the shooting lane made through the blind opening. And she took it at seven yards!

CLOSE COMBAT ONLY

I wouldn't shoot a .410 at a bird very far away—even with 3-inch No. 6s. And Eva would've been disappointed if they had walked by at 20 yards because I wouldn't have allowed her to shoot. After all, it's better not to shoot than to wound a bird by overreaching on distance. But at short range (OK, very short range), the .410 is deadly. It's a welcome addition to the spring turkey woods. ♡

2014 Sportsmen's Calendar

SPRING TURKEY:

- Youth/Archery/Persons with disabilities: April 1 - 8, 2014
- Firearm: April 9 - May 31

FALL TURKEY:

- Oct. 1-Dec. 3 AND Dec. 15-Jan. 31, 2015

DEER:

- Youth/Persons with Disabilities: Sept. 6-14
- Archery: Sept. 15-Dec. 31
- Muzzleloader: Sept. 15-Sept. 28,
- Pre-Rut Whitetail Antlerless Oct. 11-12
- Regular Firearm: Dec. 3-Dec. 14
- Firearm Extended Whitetail Antlerless Season: Jan.1-Jan. 4, 2015 (Units 6, 9, 10, 17)
- Firearm Extended Whitetail Antlerless Season: Jan.1-Jan. 11, 2015 (Units 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16)
- Special Extended Firearms Whitetail Antlerless Season: Jan. 12-Jan. 18, 2015 (Units 10A, 15, 19)
- Archery Extended Whitetail Antlerless Season (DMU 19 only): Jan. 19-Jan. 31, 2015

ELK (residents only)

Outside Fort Riley:

- Muzzleloader: Sept. 1-30
- Archery: Sept. 15-Dec. 31
- Firearm: Dec. 3-14 and Jan.1-March 15, 2015

On Fort Riley:

- Muzzleloader and archery: Sept. 1-30
- Firearm Season for Holders of Any-Elk Permits: Oct. 1-Dec. 31

Antlerless Only:

- Firearm First Segment: Oct. 1-31
- Firearm Second Segment: Nov. 1-30
- Firearm Third Segment: Dec. 1-31

ANTELOPE

- Firearm: Oct. 3-6
- Archery: Sept. 20-28 & Oct. 11-31
- Muzzleloader: Sept. 29-Oct. 6

GEESE AND WATERFOWL SEASONS TO BE SET

DOVE

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

- Season: Sept.1-Oct. 31 and Nov. 1-9, 2014
- Daily bag limit: 15 • Possession limit: 45 (Daily bag and possession limits apply to mourning and white-winged doves, single species or in combination. No limit on Eurasian collared or ringed turtle doves)

EXOTIC DOVE

(Eurasian collared and ringed turtle doves only)

- Season: Nov. 20-Feb. 28, 2015
- Daily bag limit: No limit • Possession limit: No limit

RAIL (Sora and Virginia)

- Season: Sept. 1-Nov. 9
- Daily bag limit: 25 • Possession limit: 75

SNIPE

- Season: Sept. 1-Dec. 16, 2014
- Daily bag limit: 8 • Possession limit: 24

WOODCOCK

- Season: Oct. 11-Nov. 24, 2014
- Daily bag limit: 3
- Possession limit: 9

SANDHILL CRANE

- Season: Nov. 5, 2013 - Jan. 1, 2015
- Daily bag limit: 3 • Possession limit: 9

PRAIRIE CHICKEN

- Early Season (East and Northwest units): Sept. 15 - Oct. 15
- Regular Season (East and Northwest units): Nov. 15, 2014 - Jan. 31, 2015
- Daily Bag Limit: 2 • Possession Limit: four times daily bag

PHEASANTS

- Season: Nov. 8, 2014-Jan. 31, 2015
- Youth Season: Nov. 1-2, 2014
- Daily bag limit: 4 cocks in regular season, 2 cocks in youth season

QUAIL

- Season: Nov. 8, 2014-Jan. 31, 2015
- Youth Season: Nov. 1-2, 2014
- Daily Bag Limit Quail: 8 in regular season, 4 in youth season

SQUIRREL

- Season: June 1, 2014-Feb. 28, 2015
- Daily bag limit: 5 • Possession limit: 20

RABBITS (cottontail & jackrabbit)

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

CROW

- Season: Nov. 10, 2014-March 10, 2015
- Daily bag/Possession Limit: no limit

TRAPPING/HUNTING

- Season: Nov. 12, 2014-Feb. 15, 2015
- Badger, bobcat, mink, muskrat, opossum, raccoon, swift fox, red fox, gray fox, striped skunk, weasel.

BEAVER AND OTTER TRAPPING

- Season Dates: Nov. 12, 2014-March 31, 2015
- Otter season Bag Limit: 2

BULLFROG

- July 1 - Oct. 31, 2014
- Daily creel limit: 8
- Possession limit: 24

FLOATLINE FISHING

- July 15 - Sept. 15, 2014
- Area open: Hillsdale, Council Grove, Tuttle Creek, Kanopolis, John Redmond, Toronto, Wilson, Elk City, Fall River, Glen Elder, Lovewell and Pomona reservoirs.

HANDFISHING (flathead catfish only)

- June 15-August 31, 2014
- Area open: Arkansas River, Kansas River and federal reservoirs 150 yards from beyond the dam upstream to the end of the federal property.
- Daily creel limit: 5
- Permit required

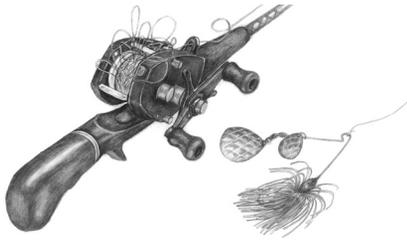
PADDLEFISH SNAGGING

- March 15-May 15, 2014
- Daily creel limit: 2
- Season limit: 6
- Permit required

Female belted kingfisher by Danny Brown

Belted kingfishers are common in Kansas, nesting in stream-bank burrows. While migratory, they may stay around as long as there is open water. Feeding primarily on fish and aquatic insects, kingfishers dive head-first into the water from aerial dives to capture prey. Always near water, they are easily located by their staccato call. The female is distinguished by the orange band across the breast.





Backlash

by Mike Miller

WHO DOESN'T LIKE TO FISH?

I can tell you why I like to fish. As a matter of fact, I can talk in great detail about my passion for fishing, but my explanation probably won't make you like fishing. Playing a fishing video game is fun, but I doubt it will convince you to try fishing. Fishing, like hunting and other outdoor pursuits, affects everyone differently, and its hold on me is inexplicable. From the first time I was exposed to fishing at a very young age, I was hooked, so to speak. It's been nearly an obsession since.

One of the things I've learned while working with the Pass It On program, is there is no substitute for outdoor experience in the recruitment effort. There is no website, no computer game, no video or television show, no book or magazine article that will convince a youngster that he or she will love hunting or fishing. There are many who have an interest in hunting and fishing and believe they'll enjoy it, but until they actually try it, they don't know. That's because the act of hunting and fishing causes physiological responses in our bodies. It's involuntary, and it varies by individual. No matter how eloquently I describe my love and enjoyment for fishing or hunting, it won't completely register with someone who has never tried.

"I don't know how you can sit there all day, especially if the fish aren't biting," is a common response from someone who hasn't fished before. I'll explain that fishing is a process. When you're not catching fish, you work on figuring out where they are and how you can catch them. I think maybe people envision fishing as just sitting, mindlessly waiting for a fish to bite. Another attraction for me is the desire to be near or on the water and outdoors. If you don't enjoy that, you probably won't make a very good fisherman, even when the fish are biting like crazy.

The only way I can help someone understand why I like to fish, especially a youngster, is to put a fishing pole in their hand and show them. They'll begin to understand when a fish takes the bait, when they feel the pull or they see the splash. They'll feel the excitement and adrenaline surge in their body. Fishing affects all of our senses and for some, it's the best thing they will ever do.

Some will say that kids won't like fishing if the action isn't fast and furious. However, while I always wanted to

catch fish and I may have become discouraged when I didn't, I never gave up. It can be boring if you don't do it right, and a youngster's first fishing outing shouldn't consist of an adult casting a bait into the water, handing the youngster the pole, then staring at the water waiting for a bite.

A youngster's first fishing outing should include explaining how the reel works, how to cast it, and how it's rigged. Show them how to tie an improved clinch knot, then let them tie the hook on. Talk about how far up the

line to place the weight or bobber and about the bait, where it came from, why fish like it and how to place it on the hook. Take time to explain the difference between catfish and bluegills and how different techniques may be necessary to catch them. If you see a leopard frog, challenge the youngster to catch it. If they're successful, talk about what frogs eat and how they catch their food before letting it go. Point out a snapping turtle, a redwing blackbird or the great blue heron. And if a fish interrupts these lessons, so much the better. When a fish is caught, identify it, talk about what it eats, where the lateral

line is, how it finds food and how big it gets. Every thing you see, hear, smell and experience can be a short learning opportunity. A kid doesn't have to catch a fish every minute to keep interested.

If the fish aren't biting, do something else for a while; take a hike, sneak up on some ducks, or study dragon flies. Don't decide that success or failure depends on how many fish are caught. Your attitude about what success is or isn't will influence the youngster's attitude. Success should be measured by how much fun you have. If it's hot or windy or cold or at all uncomfortable, keep the outing short.

Make it fun. Let kids learn about and explore their outdoor surroundings, and you have a good chance of starting them on a life-long journey of fishing. However, just as not every youngster will like baseball or soccer, not every youngster will love fishing. Most will enjoy it, but only some will pursue it the rest of their lives. All will remember the experience and come to appreciate the time you spent teaching them about fishing. Whether they become anglers or not, it's time well spent.



