

KANSAS

Wildlife & Parks

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Front Cover: According to the 2014 Upland Bird Forecast, pheasant numbers are on the rise. Ring-necked pheasant photo by Bob Gress. **Inside Front Cover:** In this Marc Murrell photo, two hunters enjoy pheasant hunting at Ringneck Ranch. **Inside Back Cover:** Jay Miller captured this photo of an American kestrel, one of the smallest falcons in the U.S.

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FINDING BALANCE

Managing our state's natural resources and the recreational opportunities they can provide is a constant balancing act. From the field staff up through the Secretary's position, we all strive to find balance.

A fisheries biologist's job requires field sampling of the fish populations in a lake he or she is managing. In addition to fish population monitoring, creel censuses may be conducted to learn more about what anglers are catching, what they prefer and how they view the fishery. Once data is assessed, the biologist examines creel limits, length limits, and stocking requests, all designed to return or maintain balance within the fishery while still providing optimum fishing opportunities. Balance is achieved when the fishery is healthy and angling opportunities are maximized according to the potential of the water.


A wildlife area manager works all spring and summer, using a variety of tools to maximize the wildlife habitat on a given area. The tools include grazing, mowing, burning and planting, and managers use them to create the best wildlife habitat possible. Input from hunters, harvest estimates and population surveys help managers consider regulations that might help provide a balance of opportunities. Balance is a moving target, changing constantly with weather conditions, user preference and wildlife populations.

A wildlife biologist works with private landowners to help them enhance wildlife habitat on their lands, finding balance with what is good for wildlife and what is economically feasible for landowners. Often, management practices that improve the health of the landscape will be good for crops and livestock, as well as wildlife. The biologist may also assist landowners in enrolling

in state and federal programs that provide cost-share, balancing the economics of habitat enhancement.

Park managers and staff constantly strive for balance in providing quality recreation opportunities that are attractive and affordable. Operating within strict budget and staff constraints, park managers must balance cost and staff time to provide amenities desired by park constituents.

Department law enforcement staff must find balance in enforcing laws, providing positive front-line contact with hunters, anglers, boaters and park visitors, and covering large territories. A game warden or park ranger may at once provide public safety and wildlife resource protection, as well as education and guidance so constituents can enjoy their time outdoors and stay safe.

At the administrative level, staff strive for balance in how statutes and regulations are established so field staff can do their jobs and hunters, anglers, boaters and park patrons are satisfied. We must also balance the impact our policies and programs have on all Kansas citizens, not just direct constituents. Like it or not, managing our natural resources requires a balance of scientific, political and sociological inputs. We will never arrive at a consensus on any issue because our constituencies are so broad. However, we constantly strive to find that balance of responsible resource management, recreation opportunity, public support and adequate funding. Achieving balance requires diligent interaction, open communication, solid data, and compromise. 

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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 . . .

FIRST FISH

Editor:

Keeleigh Maiden, 6, Andover, was so excited to catch her very first fish at the Council Grove Lake on Labor Day. Keeleigh and her parents, Andrew and Amanda Maiden, were visiting her great-uncle John Turkovic who lives at the lake. Keeleigh is also the granddaughter of Frank and Carolyn Culp. Thank you!

Carolyn Culp
Council Grove



CREEDE

Mr. Miller,

I am a Colorado hunter and dog lover who has happily enjoyed a subscription to *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine for years. Yesterday I read your heartfelt tribute to your longtime friend and companion Creede. In the past few months I have read one or two similar recollections from saddened dog owners, who similarly have recognized the inevitable void that losing such a good friend has made in their lives. I have no doubt you have touched the hearts of many of us who have gone through such losses and weigh the success of our hunting and even our lives by realizing not only our personal successes, but also how well our K-9 companions have performed and how much enjoyment we have both had. For me, fully half if not more of my enjoyment of duck hunting is having my best buddy in the blind with me and experiencing the wonders of the day together. Having said all this, please let me thank you for your sensitivity to such a wonderful part of life and your willingness to share that understanding with the rest of us who have equally valuable relationships with our own pets.

Thank you for your great work

on *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine. As I stated, I have enjoyed your publication for years now, and look forward to many more years of the great stories and good information you provide us. I'll also be looking forward especially to fresh stories about your wonderful new companion, which is also inevitable.

Jon Ewell,
Colorado Springs

LIKE MOLASSES

Nadia,

Just read your article on moving like molasses. GREAT job. My wife and I are instructors, avid wing and target shooters. We just returned from BOW and getting ladies to just relax and move the gun in a slow smooth motion is key. I have a lot of tricks but I really like the molasses analogy. It has prompted me to think of some more concepts. Like a good swimming stroke, splashing is a bad thing. I am convinced we can teach anyone to break a target but it does take many different techniques to reach all the students. But what I love is the reward is so sweet when that target breaks. I am sure our paths will cross at sometime in the future. Kansas is big but it is really a small place. That is one of the main aspects I love about it.

JC Saunders
Lehigh

BIRD BRAIN

with Mike Rader

Winter Watch

November and December are fantastic for birding in Kansas. While migration for most neo-tropical migrants is complete, there are still plenty of birds that show up and are exciting to see. Winter residents are abundant, with species such as American tree sparrows and Harris's sparrows filling the shelterbelts and weedy fields. Water conditions of marshes in Kansas are substantially better than in recent years, so waterfowl numbers will be high, providing wildlife watchers the awesome spectacle of massive flocks going out to feed in area crop fields and returning to marshes and lakes to roost for the night. Some of my best memories of Kansas birding were made at the Big Salt Marsh of Quivira National Wildlife Refuge and Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Management Area at sunrise or sunset in November and December.

Watching flocks of waterfowl return at sunset is exhilarating, but what I find just as amazing are the huge ribbons of blackbirds that fill the skies near these refuges this time of year. It's an awesome spectacle that takes place every morning and evening that I've learned to not take for granted. A lucky and observant watcher might also spy a falcon or hawk catching and consuming a blackbird out of the confusion of the enormous flocks. It's an interesting part of the natural world that happens every day, ensuring survival of the predator species.

This is also a great time to keep feeders full and the reward can be watching many species of songbirds right in your backyard. Birds do not require supplemental feeding to survive, as

there is usually ample natural food. The reason to feed is to attract wildlife close enough so that we can enjoy and appreciate them. Providing food and a source of water can mean hours of observation fun and the opportunity to hone identification skills. There are lots of choices when it comes to birdseed and a good mix can attract a variety of species. In my opinion, the staple for all bird feeding stations is black oil sunflower seed. Most desirable species will eat it, and it is usually reasonably priced. Cheap mixes that are high in milo and millet tend to attract some of the less-desirable species such as house sparrows, European starlings and Eurasian collared doves. You will still get those species when feeding sunflower seeds, but birds such as northern cardinals, chickadees, finches, and others prefer to eat sunflower seeds over milo and millet. Specialty seed such as thistle (niger) will attract goldfinches and pine siskins and isn't usually eaten by other birds. Safflower seed attracts cardinals, while other species don't usually eat it. If you are in an area that you don't want to have the waste of sunflower seed shells, there are mixes that have hulled and cracked sunflower seeds that the birds consume all of and don't leave the extra mess.



tree sparrow

Christmas Bird Counts will fire up in mid-December and continue into early January. Information on where and when counts are scheduled will be available on the Kansas Ornithological Society website: www.ksbirds.org. It's a great place to search for counts occurring all around the state. These counts have similar configurations, with a single center point, and an area extending approximating 7.5 miles in all directions (15 miles across). Participation levels vary greatly, with numbers ranging from a single observer or a handful of folks counting, to dozens of birders dividing up chunks of habitat to spend their time in. I have been a part of both types, and they can be equally fun and entertaining. I hope to get out and count on several. I'll see you out there!

MIKE RADER NAMED AVIAN CONSERVATIONIST OF THE YEAR

Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism wildlife education coordinator, and "Bird Brain" columnist, Mike Rader, was named Avian Conservationist of the Year by the Kansas Ornithological Society (KOS). Rader received the award at the KOS fall meeting, Oct. 3-5, in Salina, and if you ask his nominator, Chuck Otte, there couldn't have been a more deserving person to recognize.

"Conserving our avian resources has become Mike's life-long, all-consuming work," said Otte, Geary County KSU extension agent and past KOS president. "Certainly, Mike's birding is his passion, but making sure that we still have birds

to watch has become his driving force."

The KOS's Avian Conservationist of the Year Award is given each year to an individual who has made significant contributions to bird conservation and/or education; Rader has done this and more.

"Mike spends considerable time working on projects that will benefit birds and all wildlife, and helping other people learn more about the wildlife around them," said Otte. "He has turned us into better conservationists."

Apart from KOS, Rader also serves as a member of the Kansas Association for Conservation and Environmental Education.



Other programs Rader works with include the Kansas EcoMeet, Archery in the Schools, and bird counts throughout the year.

—KDWP NEWS

IT'S THE LAW

with Kevin Jones

WILDLIFE VIOLATOR COMPACT



On November 1, 2005 Kansas became the twentieth state to join the Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact. Nevada, Oregon and Colorado created the original compact in 1991 and by the end of the year, Arizona, Idaho and Washington had become members. Since that time the compact has grown to include just about every state.

The Compact is important for a couple of reasons. While a lot of attention is focused on the license and permit suspension aspect, another extremely important part of the Compact is often overlooked. This part deals with how nonresidents hunting in a Compact member state may address a citation. Depending upon the severity of the violation, the nonresident may simply sign the ticket under a promise to appear clause. When signing the ticket in this way, the person is not taken into custody or required to post an appearance bond; they are released on their own recognizance by giving their promise to contact the court to enter their plea by the date listed on the citation. If the

person does not comply with their promise, a process is started to suspend their license privileges in their home state. They are given notice by their

Prior to joining the Compact, the person from out of state would be taken into custody and required to post an appearance bond.

home state that their privileges are suspended until the citation is taken care of with the court that holds the citation. This process simplifies things considerably by minimizing the amount of time required to deal with the alleged violation. Prior to joining the Compact, the person from out of state would be taken into custody and required to post an appearance bond. This takes a lot of time for all parties concerned. The

Compact's provision allows the person to go on their way in a short time and allows our officers more time in the field checking for compliance.

Of course the second part of the Compact, that recognizes suspensions occurring in Compact member states, is probably the most recognized component of the Compact. This has proven to be a very useful tool in maintaining compliance across the country. Currently there are 44 states that recognize license and permit suspensions that occur within the Compact. Four states are currently in the process of joining the Compact, leaving only two states, Nebraska and New Jersey, having not yet initiated the process of joining. According to the latest numbers, there are over 42,000 people who are in the database; Kansas contributing 179 of those suspensions. South Dakota has entered the most, with 4,695 suspensions. People should no longer take the attitude that what they do in another state does not matter. It does and the outcome may affect them at home.

Overall, hunters, anglers, and trappers support the Compact. On one hand, it provides the opportunity for a less serious violation to be handled in a short time without causing too much disruption. On the other, it provides a means to emphasize the consequence of committing a serious wildlife violation and that the states are working together to protect the nation's wildlife resources.

FOUR NEW GAME WARDENS SWORN IN



The KDWPT Law Enforcement Division welcomed four new game wardens: Kirk Andrews, Travis Schulte, Angie Reisch, and Cody Morris. After their completion of mandatory training, each officer will take over their new duty stations. Kirk Andrews will cover Phillips County, Travis Schulte will cover Pottawatomie and Riley counties, Angie Reisch will cover Finney County,

and Cody Morris will cover Marion County.

Kansas game wardens are responsible for enforcing wildlife laws and regulations, patrolling the waters of Kansas, investigating hunting and boating accidents and conducting boat safety inspections and BUI checks. Wardens also promote outdoor safety by conducting hunting and boating safety programs and teaching hunter education and boating safety courses. As certified law enforcement officers, game wardens also assist other law enforcement agencies with search and rescue operations, fugitive searches, illegal drug investigations and more.

If you or someone you know is interested in becoming a Kansas game warden, visit ksoutdoors.com and click "KDWPT Info," then "Jobs" to view current job opportunities.

WAY outside

BY BRUCE COCHRAN



COCHRAN!
"NOW YOU KNOW WHY WE ALWAYS LAND INTO THE WIND."

KINSLEY KIDS' KLASSIC SAFE FUN

On Sept. 20, the Kinsley Gun Club hosted its annual shoot for youngsters, called the Kinsley Kids' Klassic. The event hosted 148 shooters, ranging from ages 10 to 18, who competed in trap shooting. Approximately 15,000 shells were shot that day in a safe, fun environment.

Events like this show that with proper supervision and safety training, sport shooting is one of the safest outdoor sports your children can compete in.

Congratulations to all of the kids and coaches who competed and a special thank you goes to the Kinsley Gun Club, Dodge City Gun Club, and Frank O'Brien for making this event run smoothly. Also, none of this would have been possible if it wasn't for event sponsors, including Cabelas, Mid-Way USA, National Rifle Association, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, and Pheasant's Forever.

We hope you'll join us next year.

—Jeff Kay, Clark County Shooting Sports Instructor

FALL TURKEY SEASON: AN UNDERUTILIZED OPPORTUNITY

The 2014 Fall Turkey Season opened Oct. 1 and although there are a good number of hunters pursuing a holiday bird, this is still a season that often goes underutilized. The fall turkey season doesn't have the tradition of the spring season, and hunting techniques are different in the fall. And there are many other hunting

seasons open and competing for hunters' time. But don't let this stop you from enjoying the outdoors and a great hunting opportunity.

Permits, game tags, fall turkey hunting regulations and the 2014 Kansas Hunting Atlas are available online at www.ksoutdoors.com or wherever licenses are sold.



For those looking to put a bird on the table this fall, here's a few things you should know:

- The state is divided into six turkey hunting units, and all but one are open to fall turkey hunting. Unit 4 in the southwest is closed during the fall season.
- Hunters who purchase a fall turkey permit, valid in units 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6, may also purchase up to three additional turkey game tags valid in Unit 2.
- All hunters must have a turkey permit and a valid hunting license to hunt turkeys in Kansas. Residents 15 and younger, 75 and older and hunters hunting on land they own are exempt from hunting license requirements.
- Resident permits are \$22.50 for hunters 16 and older and \$7.50 for hunters 15 and younger. Resident turkey game tags are \$12.50. Nonresident turkey permits are \$32.50 and nonresident turkey game tags are \$22.50.

HUNTING HERITAGE with Kent Barrett

Great Expectations

Two duck hunters were out on the marsh. One of the hunters bags a duck and sends his dog out to retrieve it. The dog runs on top of the water all the way out, picks up the duck and returns to the blind still walking on the water. The hunting partner is shocked. "Your dog just walked on water! That's truly amazing." "Not really," said the first hunter. "He just never learned how to swim."

Our lives are filled with expectations. Sometimes these expectations include hunters and hunting. We, as hunters, have come to expect other hunters to abide by a code of ethics. In Kansas Hunter Education we teach our students that ethics are the rules that each of us voluntarily pledge to live by. They are based in what is safe, fair, moral, equal and proper. Another word we use in connection with ethics is integrity. Integrity, too, is a personal choice. But integrity is more than just having values. Integrity means that we live our lives consistent with those values we profess. A person with integrity does not waver in their commitment to principle because of outside influences but stands strong in their personal choices. Aldo Leopold wrote, "A peculiar virtue of wildlife ethics is that the hunter ordinarily has no gallery to applaud or disapprove of his conduct. Whatever his acts,

In Kansas Hunter Education we teach our students that ethics are the rules that each of us voluntarily pledge to live by.

they are dictated by his own conscience, rather than by a mob of onlookers. It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of this fact."

We sometimes use the word honor when we speak about integrity. Thomas Jefferson said, "One cannot acquire honor by doing what is wrong." That quote reminds us that honor is not something that is given to us. Honor is something that is achieved, something that is earned. It is through our choices that it is acquired. These choices always seem to be hard or difficult, and at times they can be downright frightening. But nothing worthwhile ever comes to us easily.

Honor and integrity are acquired when what we think and what we really believe inside matches with what we do. Honor and integrity do not exist until they are maintained without any external obligation.

Our expectation is that all hunters will choose to walk the hunter's path; that what they say will always match with what they do. We are saddened when this does not happen. We may feel somewhat like Westley in the classic movie "The Princess Bride," when he, as the Dread Pirate Roberts, addresses Count Rugen, who has spoken a lie, and says, "Come, we are men of action, lies do not become us." Honesty, integrity, what is safe and fair must be the ideals that chart our course through the hunt. We all would do well to incorporate these ideals into our walk down the hunter's path.



enjoying these special seasons.

KDWPT Jamestown WA assistant public lands manager Matt Farmer is one hunter who makes an effort to introduce youth to the world of duck hunting. Just like the motto of the KDWPT hunter recruitment and retention program "PASS IT ON" says, Farmer believes it really is as simple as "a little of your time, the time of their life." Here's his story:

"The birds showed up for the kids opening weekend of the

LOTS OF DUCKS, FEW HUNTERS

Youth duck season is an opportunity that all interested young hunters should be able to enjoy, but too often KDWPT land managers see far more ducks than hunters during this season. It's often not a lack of desire by young hunters, but rather a lack of time, resources, or a supervising adult to hunt with them that keeps them from

youth duck season and we had two groups out on Saturday morning. Each kid shot a box of shells, five birds, and had a ball.

On Sunday, Jared Leduc and I took two young hunters out, along with one of their dads. Once again, we saw a lot of birds. On this hunt, each boy shot well over a box of shells, and I think we only had three or four shells left in the fourth box. By the end of the hunt, both hunters mentioned they liked it better than deer hunting and even football, and this was coming from the two stars of their sixth grade football team!

One group from Saturday returned the next day and hunted Buffalo Creek North, getting a limit pretty quick. I talked to another youth who went out later in the season and had a great time, shooting five ducks.

It didn't take much, just some ducks, some time, and some shells for these kids to enjoy themselves. I strongly encourage more hunters to consider taking a young hunter out next year. It's a pretty cool experience for all involved."

Fish Squeezer *Retired but not yet tired*

with Tommie Berger

FISHING YEAR-ROUND

2014 has blitzed by at warp speed. This summer I cut way back on my garden and spent more time fishing, and I am enjoying life more. It is amazing what fishing does for the stress level and peace of mind!

I made it to Kirwin this spring to fish for crappie thanks to an invite from a friend. Kirwin crappie were phenomenal – most were 13 to 15 inches and weighed between a pound to 2 pounds. Haven't had crappie fishing like that for some time and they were right up on the bank spawning. I'd almost forgotten how fun doodle socking for crappie is.

I did not spend enough time on the big reservoirs this summer. My home lake – Wilson – just could not seem to catch any water this spring or summer, and it has been sad to watch it recede to record low levels. I love fishing for bass in Wilson when there is flooded vegetation and the beaver lodges are in the water. The one benefit of low water is that vegetation is growing on the exposed shoreline, and that will make fishing fantastic again when the lake finally fills up.

My favorite watershed pond filled up in August, flooding shoreline weeds that grew during the past two years. The bass responded, putting on weight, and they spawned up a storm this past spring. I have been fishing it all summer, and I think there are some bass I can call by name. I have taken my 4-H kids there to fish, and I have taken a couple of ladies who attended the Becoming and Outdoors Woman workshop, too. The bass, bluegill, and crappie did not disappoint us one bit.

My best fishing day was in early September when the first cool front came through. It had been rainy for a couple of days, and I knew the boat I keep there was catching some water, so I decided to go and bail out the water. Of course, I took my fishing rods just in case I got the urge to fish. After getting 15 or 20 gallons of water out of the boat, I decided to see if the bass would bite on a cool, drizzly September afternoon. I started fishing at 4 p.m.,

making one pass around the 28-acre pond with a chartreuse spinner bait and a small purple plastic worm. When I quit at 7:30, I'd caught 55 bass – one just a shade over 6 pounds, three over 5, lots of 3 pounders, and I had a sore thumb!

Recently, I've had several questions

about what fish are doing at the various seasons of the year. Using my experience during a 38-year career as a fisheries biologist and a 60-year career as a fisherman, I've put together a calendar of water temperature and fish activity.

DATE	WATER TEMP.	FISH ACTIVITY
January	32-38 degrees	Icefishing or trout fishing on open water.
Feb.-March	32-42 degrees	Icefishing; if there is open water, find crappie and bass in the upper ends of ponds on sunny days; stripers, wipers and channel cats feeding on shad in warm coves; trout fishing.
March	40-50 degrees	Walleye spawn on dams and rocky points; some crappie, largemouth bass and white bass in the upper ends; channel cats start biting on shad sides; trout fishing.
April	50-60 degrees	Crappie spawn in ponds; white bass moving up rivers; black bass more active and aggressive; channel cat action improving and wipers just beginning to warm up.
May 1-15	60-65	The best fishing of the year! Black bass spawning; a few white bass and crappie still shallow in reservoirs; walleye move on to flats – jig-n-worm time; channel catfish getting better; wipers improving; stripers going deep; bluegill starting to bite.
May 15-June	65-80 degrees	Walleye on the flats; channel catfish spawning; crappie in deep-water brush; white bass on points and open water; wiper action peaking; black bass good early and late.
July-Sept. 15	80 degrees	Channel cats good at night, or on chum piles, floatlines and setlines; crappie deep; black bass good early and late on topwater; night fishing under lights for white bass and stripers.
Sept. 15-Oct. 15	75-60 degrees	All fish more active; feeding for winter; bass action good during the day; white bass, wipers and stripers chasing shad on reservoirs.
Oct. 15-Nov. 15	60-45 degrees	All species slowing down; slab spoons and jigs are preferred baits now; trout season starts Nov. 1; anglers can have lakes to themselves.
Nov. 15-Dec. 30	45-35 degrees	Icefishing may start, depending on cold weather; fish are sluggish, use small baits and work them slow; trout fishing is good.

EVERYTHING OUTDOORS

with Marc Murrell

Dreaming of a White (and Wiper) Christmas

In winter, we often switch gears to ducks, bucks, pheasants and quail. Most outdoorsmen stash their fishing gear and forget about fishing when the mercury dips below 40 degrees. But anglers who think of fishing as a year-round passion and are willing to brave the elements, are often rewarded with incredible catches and fast action. This is particularly true for species such as white bass and wipers (a striped bass/white bass hybrid).

These “white” fish are eating machines. Usually associated with open-water haunts in warmer months, they congregate near rip-rap and breaks on causeways, dams and rocky points and shorelines during the winter. This is probably because their favorite food, gizzard shad, also occupy these areas. Regardless, November and December are great months to catch these hard fighting and ferocious fish.

Winter fishing equipment isn't any different from that used other times of the year. My favorite gear includes a couple of 7-foot medium-light-action spinning rods spooled with 8-pound super line. These are perfect for casting and jigging 1/8- to 1/4-ounce spoons and jigs.

Winter whites and wipers can be caught on a variety of lures. If I could only fish one lure/bait it would be a 1/4-ounce orange jig head with a white 4-inch fluke-type bait. But any of the shad-type, soft plastic imitation baits work well. It's typically easiest to cast and retrieve these baits and bump them off the bottom. While hits aren't quite as aggressive when the water temperature is 45 degrees as when it's 75 degrees, you still better have a good grip on your rod as you're in for a battle once a fish of any size realize it's hooked.

Best bets for white bass according



to the *2014 Kansas Fishing Forecast* include Webster, Cedar Bluff, Clinton, Glen Elder and Cheney reservoirs. Others rated excellent include Wolf Creek and John Redmond Reservoir. Wiper fishing ranked best at Sebelius (Norton), Kirwin, Webster, El Dorado, Milford and Cheney reservoirs. However, any lake with white bass or wipers can provide fantastic fishing at times, so they shouldn't be overlooked, either.

The main difference in catching whites and wipers now versus last summer is obviously the weather encountered, and winter weather should never be taken lightly. If the forecast is for big winds, it's wise to stay off any reservoir for two reasons. The first is safety and self-explanatory. Secondly, big winds make it difficult to hold on areas, cast effectively or feel a jig bite. It's a good idea to wear a life jacket, fish with a partner or at least let someone know where you're

fishing and when you plan to return.

But with a little planning and a little bit of luck, you might find yourself a honey hole. Even better news is you might just have the whole place to yourself. The solitude and serenity of a decent winter day catching whites and wipers is a great way to celebrate the fishing “off” season.





SLINGIN' ARROWS [IT'S PERSONAL]

THERE'S SOMETHING VERY PERSONAL ABOUT SHOOTING A BOW. FROM EACH ARROW BEING CUT SPECIFICALLY TO YOUR DRAW LENGTH, TO YOUR BOWSTRING NESTLING RIGHT UNDERNEATH YOUR CHEEKBONE, SHOOTING A BOW IS JUST AS MUCH ABOUT THE EQUIPMENT AS IT IS ABOUT THE HUNTER DRAWING IT BACK.

A few weeks ago I bought my first “new” bow, and although it’s not considered “top of the line,” I couldn’t be happier to have it in my hunting arsenal. After the draw weight and length had been adjusted from the factory settings, I remember nocking that first arrow, letting it fly, and thinking how perfect it felt. It wasn’t my first time shooting, or even owning a bow – I had a hand-me-down with a draw length two inches too long. However, better fit wasn’t what made this bow so great. This purchase signified the beginning of a new stage for me as a

hunter. It marked the end of shooting at targets just for fun and the beginning of becoming a serious bowhunter.

As I enter into this new hunting stage, I am continually researching and running through scenarios in my head. Each day, as the rut draws closer, serves as a reminder that things will be different this season. I won’t have crosshairs to rely on, and reloading won’t be as simple as jacking in another round. I understand that I will be exposed, and movements that may have been acceptable in a blind during rifle season will no longer do here.

But of everything I am learning about bowhunting, I know enough to realize there’s a lot I can’t know yet. I don’t know how I will react when a deer comes beneath my tree. I don’t know how I’ll grab and draw my bow without being detected, or how I’ll steady myself enough to make a shot. I don’t know yet what my physical limits are and when “cold” will become “too cold” for me. What I know

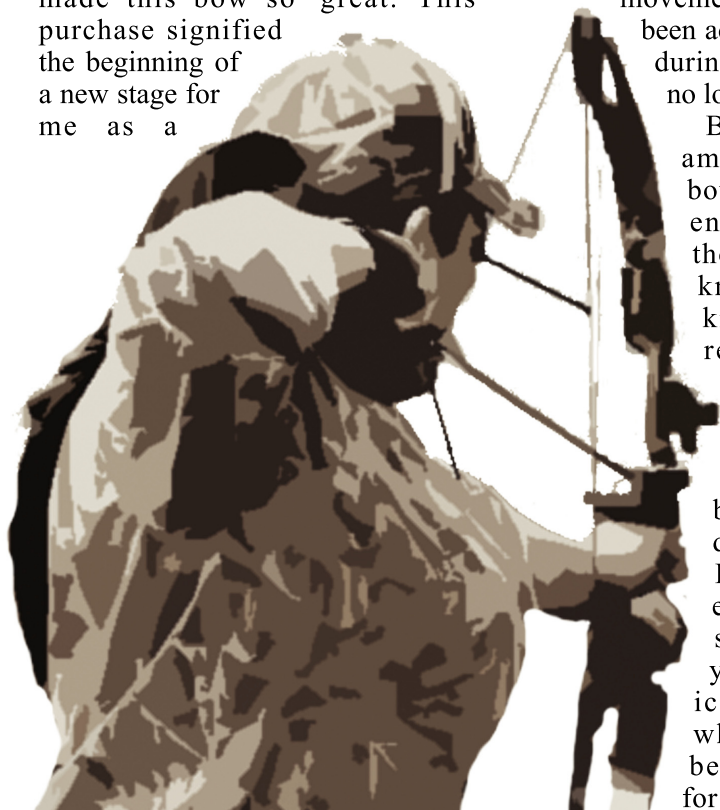
for sure is that I’ll be there, and I’ll be trying, and most importantly, I’ll be appreciating each new experience.

Personally, I don’t want my bowhunting experience to be all about a “BIG BUCK DOWN!” Don’t get me wrong, I love seeing pictures of big deer and the men and women who were lucky enough to harvest them, but you won’t see a Facebook post or Twitter picture of me grinning, holding a bloody arrow. As personal as shooting a bow is, I expect my bowhunting experiences to be personal, as well. I want my journey as a bowhunter to be about connecting with deer in a way I haven’t before. I want to learn what their life is like behind the tree line, and I want to meet these awesome creatures on their turf and on their terms and come home with meat. If I’m successful, I want to know I made the best possible shot placement. And like most bowhunters, I want the challenge, but more than that, I want the connection.

Henry David Thoreau said “. . . what you get by achieving your goals is not as important as what you become by achieving your goals.”

During this bow season, I hope I take a deer and have a story worthy of another column, but more importantly, I hope I become a bowhunter worthy of taking a deer.

‘Till next time, let ‘em fly.



THE "OTHER" STATE PARK SEASON

Just because fall is in full swing, Kansas State Parks don't close down. Fall can be the very best of times in our parks. Many equestrian trail rides are planned to take advantage of cooler temps, and trail use is up, as well, with trail runs, marathons and bicycle races in the works. Fall color has appeared and photo opportunities abound. Wildlife is on the move preparing for winter, giving excellent prospects for viewing. On the other hand, insects and snakes are mostly absent, relieving anxieties about the outdoors for some.

For your hunting trips or holiday get togethers, consider a state park cabin. With all the comforts of home, such as comfy beds, hot showers and cooking facilities, they are more snug than a tent when the north wind howls. Don't delay making your reservations (up to 364 days in advance) because others have discovered the comfort and convenience of state park cabins. To reserve, go to <http://www.reserveamerica.com/> or call the office of the park where the cabin is located. Be aware, most park offices are only open Monday through Friday during the winter season.

Motor vehicle permits and hunting and fishing licenses go on sale December 15 and make great gifts. Campsite reserva-

tions for 2015 can be made starting December 19. In general, campsite reservations are not available October 1 through March 31. Sites are open on a first-come, first-served basis only. Campers may pay at the office or utilize a self-pay station. Be aware that due to the age of some of our facilities, waterline freeze is a hazard, so some campground loops and shower buildings may be closed. Water will always be available near the park office if not at campgrounds.

If you bought your State Park Passport when you renewed your vehicle registration, you won't need another permit to enter a Kansas state park until your vehicle registration expires. If your vehicle renewal is coming up, save yourself time, money and hassle by purchasing your passport at renewal. It's only \$15.50 and can only be purchased with your vehicle registration.

Looking farther ahead, start the new year off right by participating in a "First Day Hike." Many parks will be hosting one; check our events page for locations and start times. What better time than now to make 2015 the year you resolve to be active outdoors, and what better place to be outdoors than a Kansas state park.



TUTTLE CREEK WILDLIFE AREA GETS BIGGER

The Tuttle Creek Wildlife Area has grown by almost 500 acres as the result of a collaborative effort by The National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf), Pheasants Forever (PF), Quail Forever (QF), and the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPt). The conservation organizations and KDWPt partnered to acquire a 484-acre tract of land adjacent to the Tuttle Creek Wildlife Area in Pottawatomie County. The tract, which is open to public hunting, permanently protects habitat vital to many species of

wildlife, including turkey, pheasants, quail and prairie chickens. The acquisition also improves access to 550 acres of the existing Tuttle Creek Wildlife Area.

"It's great to see conservation organizations work together with state wildlife agencies to increase public access opportunities for outdoor recreation," said Robin Jennison, KDWPt secretary. "In Kansas, where less than three percent of the land is in public ownership, projects like these and our continued relationships for conservation are extremely important."

In addition to providing

partial funding for the land acquisition, the conservation organizations worked with KDWPt to help the acquisition pass through the Legislature.

NWTf, PF/QF and Ducks Unlimited (DU) signed a memorandum of understanding earlier this year, creating a historic partnership to ensure wild bird habitat conservation and North America's hunting heritage remains strong for generations to come.

"This particular acquisition is a shining example of what the conservation community can accomplish when we all work together

for a unified cause," said Jared McJunkin, NWTf Great Plains District conservation field supervisor. "While this is the first successful land acquisition for the NWTf in Kansas, we believe additional projects will follow."

The NWTf and PF/QF are national nonprofit wildlife conservation organizations working to conserve wildlife habitat and our outdoor traditions. The NWTf (www.nwtf.org) has 36 chapters across Kansas, and there are 36 PF and 13 QF chapters in Kansas.

— KDWPt News



Lance Hedges Remembered

Wildlife conservation in Kansas lost a true leader and advocate in October when Lance Hedges, 46, of Garnett, passed away. A loving and dedicated husband and father to his wife Stacy and children Cale, Remington and Riley, Lance also touched many lives through his career as a wildlife biologist.

Lance was born in Columbus in 1967, the oldest of two sons born to Dick and Karen Hedges. He graduated from Fort Scott High School and attended the Air Force Academy for two years before transferring to Kansas State University. He graduated with a degree in wildlife management in 1991 and went to work for the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) as a wildlife biologist at Keith Sebelius Reservoir. In 2001, Lance moved to Garnett and worked as a district wildlife biologist in that area before accepting the position of Region 5 Public Lands Supervisor for KDWPT. In 2012, Lance accepted the position of Director of Conservation for the Kansas Nature Conservancy.

Lance was loved, respected, and admired by colleagues wherever he went, and he always brought a smile and positive energy to the table. His passing has left a hole in many lives across the state, and wildlife conservation will never find his replacement.

HABITAT SPECIALIST PARTNERSHIP EXPANDS WITH FOURTH POSITION

Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever, in cooperation with the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT), recently added a habitat specialist position, bringing the total to four in Kansas. The specialists assist with habitat management and restoration on many KDWPT wildlife areas throughout the state.

Habitat specialists are experts in planning, developing and implementing wildlife habitat management projects for each of the assigned public wildlife areas in Kansas. These specialists plant native grasses, perform prescribed burns, and carry out a host of other specific practices to maximize each area's wildlife and natural resource values.

Luke Winge, the most recent addition, is working to improve wildlife resources for the 10,000-acre Cedar Bluff Wildlife Area near Hays, focusing his efforts on creating diverse habitat with a mixture of

crops, grasses and weeds.

Alex Thornburg is working at the 12,200-acre Tuttle Creek Wildlife Area north of Manhattan, managing for multiple wildlife species through mowing, food plots, controlled burns and various other habitat improvements.

Andrew Page is working at the 10,500-acre Perry Wildlife Area north of Topeka, establishing native grass stands, planting of shrubby cover, cutting of shrubby vegetation, and conducting prescribed burns.

Brock Wilson is responsible for managing the 9,352-acre Fall River Wildlife Area in Greenwood County. This wildlife area is a mix of riparian timber, native grassland, and cropland. Wilson's management techniques are focused on increasing the quality of wildlife habitat to provide ample recreational opportunities for hunters to harvest game species such as deer, turkey, waterfowl, doves and quail.

Make Plans To Attend the 2015 Kansas Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever Convention In March

While filling in your 2015 calendars, be sure to add a trip to Wichita on March 13 and 14 to attend the Kansas Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever Convention. This will be the fifth annual convention, which has grown each year. All events for the weekend will be hosted at the Wichita Marriott.

PF and QF are organizations that focus on habitat and youth involvement, and this convention will appeal to all hunters and conservationists. The Convention will bring together wildlife biologists, landowners and operators, officials from USDA agencies, and passionate conservationists to offer discussion on a wide range of topics. Come for any or all activities but make sure to be there Saturday to hear the keynote speaker and attend the breakout sessions. These sessions will allow you to pick and choose which topics interest you most. If you are concerned about our upland bird populations, providing a good future for our youth, our native pollinators, the decreased amount of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres, crop prices, or the amount of native prairies or grazing lands left in Kansas then you will want to reserve your spot soon!

This event is open to the public. The agenda, event information, and registration will be available on the Kansas Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever website (www.kansaspfqf.org) on the 2015-Convention page. The Convention page will be updated regularly so check in often or call Chris Blackledge (620) 767-2121.



Hobo Breakfast and Steak

Early last Winter, I hooked up an old woodstove in my shed that I had purchased from my in-laws a few years ago. My goal was to stay warm while cleaning game or skinning furbearers when the temperatures dropped below freezing. By late winter, we had a couple of deer that needed to be butchered, so my son Hunter and I went out to the cold shed, started a fire and returned to the house.

Thinking about the hot wood stove top, I decided to cook breakfast in a nontraditional way. I grabbed some bread, eggs, butter, salt and pepper and a cookie cutter. Hobo breakfast is what my dad called it. I fetched a cast iron skillet and headed back to the now warmer shed.

We re-stoked the fire and placed the skillet on the hot stovetop. I used the cookie cutter to cut a hole in the middle of a piece of bread. Then I

placed some butter in the bottom of the skillet, laid the bread in the skillet and cracked an egg into the hole. I cooked it for a minute, flipped it and had instant breakfast. Hunter said it felt like what he would imagine living in "olden times."

After a quick breakfast we went to work. Hunter helps butchering, cleaning the front quarters and I remove hams and backstraps. Hunter noticed a large flat almost fatless stretch of meat along the ribs connected to the front shoulder "skirt steak."

"Wonder what that tastes like dad," he asked.

"I don't know, bud." I answered, not even giving it much thought. "We've always ground it in sausage."

Our butchering chores took us past lunchtime and both of us were getting hungry again. On a lark, I decide to try the skirt steaks Hunter asked about earlier. I spooned a lump of bacon lard into the hot skillet and cut a six-inch-square skirt steak. Seasoning with just salt and pepper, I quickly seared one side then flipped to the other to retain

the moisture in the thin piece of meat. I then let it cook while we continue to process deer. I flipped it again after about 10 minutes and let it cook for another 10.

"Smells pretty good." Hunter said, signaling his hunger is getting to him.

I rinsed my hands and cut the steak into strips. The juices bubbled up from the cut as they hit the skillet. The medium steak looked pretty good. Hunter stabbed at a strip with his fork and took a bite.

"Wow, that is good." He remarked.

I don't know if it was smelling it for 30 minutes or the fact I was getting hungry, too, but it did taste pretty darn good. We removed a larger steak from the other side and cooked it, as well. Before it was done, we finished our butchering and were able to relax while we finished our skirt steak lunch.

I have a tradition of removing the tenderloin during field dressing and making fajitas when one of us takes a deer. Guess we have a new tradition of cast iron skirt steaks the next day while butchering.



FISHIN' with Mike Miller

Fish With An Open Mind

I'll admit, I can be as stubborn as anyone when it comes to favorite lures and methods of angling. I've been guilty of staying with a certain lure or type of fishing long after I should have concluded it wasn't going to produce. And I know, good anglers – I mean really good anglers – are versatile and adapt quickly to changing conditions.

The problem is that one of my angling mantras is that fishing is 99 percent persistence. The longer you stay at it, the more likely you'll catch fish. It could be that you'll eventually put your lure or bait in the right place or the conditions will change subtly and for some reason, the fish will suddenly start hitting like crazy. Those who gave up while it was slow aren't around for the change.

However, persistence with a certain lure or method could fall under the definition of insanity: "Doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results."

By all means, keep fishing because you will eventually catch fish. Persistence does pay off. But the odds of catching fish will go up exponentially if you continually change tactics, depths, lures, methods, or spots.

One of my weaknesses is staying with one lure or method because it worked yesterday or last week or even last year. I'll reason that the conditions are the same, at least as far as I know, and if I just find the right fish, I'll catch them.

The reality is that someone is always catching fish, and those are the anglers who fish with an open mind, adapt to the conditions and are willing to change it up when the fishing is slow.



Todd Workman

The Way I See It

A DEADLY CHRISTMAS SURPRISE



I was working in the garage the other day on a shotgun that laid in pieces on a workbench when the next door neighbor kid wandered in.

"Whatcha doin' Mr. Workman?" Joey inquired. "Working on a gun?"

I could tell this was going to be the start of a long afternoon. Joey is a question machine, and not unlike counting sheep, counting questions from Joey could put you in a coma for days.

Distracted by trying to answer the question, I was rewarded by the action snapping back into place – well it would have, if my thumb hadn't been in the way.

"Ow! Ow! Ow! Wow!" I yelped as I danced around the garage.

"That is a neat dance. I bet that baby hurts hooked to your thumb like that and all," Joey said.

"Not at all," I grimaced. "I was just doing a little rain dance. I do that a couple of times a day."

I managed to get the bolt unattached from my finger during his question barrage and was admiring the beautiful blood blister forming when Joey chimed back in.

"Man, that looks bad. I would be crying a lot louder than you did during your pain dance."

"I wasn't crying. My eyes are just sweating a little, and that was a rain dance – although there is a pain in the garage," I said. "This doesn't hurt as much as a praying mantis bite."

I turned to Joey, "Did you ever hear my story about the deadly praying mantis I had when I was ten?"

"Sorry Mr. Workman I got to go. I have chemistry homework."

I cut him off with my garage door opener, figuring he deserved a boring story of my childhood. "Sit down and learn something useful Joey," I said. I remembered it like it was yesterday.

This was back when we still cut our own real Christmas trees, and that year our tree came with an added surprise. After one of my dad's infamous tree trimming jobs, our Christmas packages became speckled with what looked like fine little twigs that turned out to be praying mantis babies – hundreds of them. The tree evidently housed several egg cases, and the heat from the lights had burst them open. I thought they looked cool, but my mom disagreed.

Soon the old Filter Queen vacuum sweeper was sucking up bugs and needles. The tree was then quickly undecorated and deposited in the garden. It was all rather un-festive. Luckily, we had an abundance of the normally rare praying mantis in our garden that spring to make up for it.

They are a cool bug and I wanted one for a pet. As I approached one in the flower garden, it watched my arrival, swiveling its head, which was a little unnerving as I attempt

to put a jar over it. Perhaps this mantis was a survivor of the Great Christmas Purge. As I slowly tried to ease the jar down, the mantis jumped to the top of the jar and bit me. Two bites later I had a couple of good pinch blisters and an aggressive praying mantis in my plastic observatory. I kept it outside and fed it grasshoppers and crickets and watched it grow.

One day, as I was observing Deadly Mantis through the clear Plexiglass, a honey bee lit on a white clover bloom right outside of his plastic prison. On a normal day, Deadly would just stare at me with his baleful green eyes, but the honey bee caused him to do an about face and strike ferociously through the glass. I was fascinated with Deadly's reaction.

After this discovery, I felt compelled to catch a bee and release it in Deadly's cage. I made a small cheesecloth net out of a coat hanger and netted a couple that I turned loose in Deadly's cage. I laughed as his head went round and round watching the bees try to escape.

One unlucky bee flew near Deadly and he flashed out his arm, snagged it, and bit its head off. Then he repeated the carnage with the other. I was mesmerized. I couldn't wait to catch more bees and show my buddies.

The "Deadly and Bee Show" quickly became popular and the neighborhood boys wanted to watch. Since catching bees was hard work and dangerous, I charged a nickel a show. Kids came from blocks away to watch and soon my pockets were bulging with nickels. To satiate Deadly and my lust for nickels, I traveled far and wide to maintain my bee supply.

Then one afternoon Mary Flunt, only the best looking ten-year-old this side of Shunga Creek, came to my door. I wanted to say something debonair, worthy of the entrepreneur that I was, but the only thing I could do was grab a handful of nickels and give them to her (a harbinger of things to come), of which she readily took (another harbinger of things to come).

The normal fee was waived, even though I knew she had plenty of nickels. I tried to act cool as I opened the cage to release two bees into the arena, but I was distracted by her beauty and left the door open too long. Deadly, sensing my love sickness and his chance for freedom and redemption, lunged out and bit me.

I let out a howl and pitched back from the cage. Deadly was flung into the air and flew off over the house taking my fleeting dreams of wealth, fame, and love with him. I was humiliated as Mary laughed at me, called me a big baby, and left me standing there wounded, and nickleless.

I looked at Joey. "What do you think the moral of this story is?"

"Don't mess with a praying mantis?"

It was a better moral than mine.

The best times of your life *just got* *less expensive*



He'll be 16 before you know it and off to college in the blink of an eye. Don't miss a single chance to be in the field with your son by purchasing a multi-year youth hunting license.

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

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

You can purchase a multi-year youth license wherever licenses are sold, through the website www.ksoutdoors.com or by calling (620) 672-5911.

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- ✓ Birthdays
- ✓ Graduations
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HATS



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Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism

OUTDOOR STORE ORDER FORM

To order: visit ksoutdoors.com, call (620) 672-5911, or mail in form with payment.

BOOKS

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<input type="checkbox"/> Birds of Kansas	\$41.45
<input type="checkbox"/> Birds of Cheyenne Bottoms	\$10.50
<input type="checkbox"/> Birds of Kansas Field Guide	\$13.45
<input type="checkbox"/> Birds of the Great Plains	\$22.45
<input type="checkbox"/> Compact Guide to Kansas Birds	\$14.45
<input type="checkbox"/> Edible Wild Plants of the Prairie	\$15.50
<input type="checkbox"/> Field Guide to Common Weeds of Kansas	\$10.50
<input type="checkbox"/> Guide to Kansas Birds and Birding Hot Spots	\$20.50
<input type="checkbox"/> Guide to Kansas Mushrooms	\$20.50
<input type="checkbox"/> Illustrated Guide to Threatened and Endangered Species in Kansas	\$13.50
<input type="checkbox"/> Insects in Kansas	\$25.50
<input type="checkbox"/> Kansas Wetlands	\$25.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Medicinal Wild Plants of the Prairie	\$15.50
<input type="checkbox"/> Wildflowers and Grasses of Kansas	\$20.50
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<input type="checkbox"/> Birds in Your Back Yard	\$5.50	_____
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MISCELLANEOUS

Blue Speckled Metal Campfire Mug		
<input type="checkbox"/> "LOL" (Loving Outdoor Life)	\$8.50	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> "BTW" (Better Than Working)	\$8.50	_____
"Life is Better Outdoors" Koozie		
<input type="checkbox"/> Burnt Orange <input type="checkbox"/> Green <input type="checkbox"/> Pink <input type="checkbox"/> Red	\$2.00	_____
"Live Outdoors" Water Bottle		
<input type="checkbox"/> Blue <input type="checkbox"/> Green <input type="checkbox"/> Red	\$6.00	_____
Floating Key Chain		
<input type="checkbox"/> Blue <input type="checkbox"/> Red	\$1.75	

ADULT CLOTHING

Women's "Live Outdoors" V-Neck T-shirt	
<input type="checkbox"/> S <input type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> L <input type="checkbox"/> XL <input type="checkbox"/> XXL <input type="checkbox"/> XXXL	\$13.50
Men's "Live Outdoors" Crew-neck T-Shirt	
<input type="checkbox"/> S <input type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> L <input type="checkbox"/> XL <input type="checkbox"/> XXL <input type="checkbox"/> XXXL	\$13.50
Men's "Hunt Kansas"/"Fish Kansas" Polo	
<input type="checkbox"/> Pheasant (Navy) <input type="checkbox"/> Quail (Grey)	\$25.00
<i>*Also available in: bass, deer, prairie chicken, and turkey.</i>	
<i>For colors and sizes available, call (620) 672-5911.</i>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Men's Oxford	\$35.00
<i>*Available in: bass, deer, pheasant, prairie chicken, quail, and turkey. For colors and sizes available, call (620) 672-5911.</i>	
"Live Outdoors" Hoodie	
<input type="checkbox"/> Forest Green <input type="checkbox"/> Navy	
<input type="checkbox"/> S <input type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> L <input type="checkbox"/> XL	\$28.00
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ADULT CLOTHING (continued)

Columbia "Fish Kansas" Angler Shirt
☐ Short-sleeve ☐ Long-sleeve
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**For sizes available, call (620) 672-5911.*

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☐ XS ☐ S ☐ M ☐ L ☐ XL	\$10.50	

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Hunt Kansas (Pheasant)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Tan/Navy <input type="checkbox"/> Blaze Orange/Camo	\$13.00
Hunt Kansas (Deer)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Blaze Orange/Camo	\$13.00
Hunt Kansas (Prairie Chicken)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Blaze Orange/Camo	\$13.00
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ARCTIC VISITORS

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY
BOB GRESS, WICHITA

Fall bird migration is not only characterized by the disappearance of summer residents, but also the arrival of new visitors from the north. Waterfowl hunters anticipate ducks from the prairie potholes of the Dakotas. From the coniferous and boreal forests of central Canada come much of North America's breeding songbirds. Other birds come from the Arctic, a region that is mostly ocean, covered by the polar ice cap. But along the coast of northern Canada, Alaska and the many islands of the Arctic is the vast, treeless tundra. This tundra is the breeding area for birds that are fascinating, long-distance travelers. Here, the summers are short and cool and the winters long and brutal, with temperatures plunging to 50 below zero. Only a few hardy birds can stay through the winter. The others head south. Here are a few Arctic birds that visit Kansas while escaping the bitter cold gripping their summer home.

Sandhill Crane

Four thousand miles away on the tundra of Siberia, sandhill crane pairs find an ideal place to nest. Abundant berries, insects and small mammals have provided good food to raise their chick, called a colt. Although they start with two eggs, seldom do they raise more than one. Waiting for a good tail wind, the cranes begin their flight across the Bering Sea in late August or September. For two months they journey, picking up others from Alaska, Canada and the northern U.S. along the way. By October and November the chortling calls of large flocks can be heard as they stream across Kansas. Most sandhill cranes spend their winter in marshes of southern Texas. In March, over a half million cranes, all passing through Kansas, gather along the Platte River in Nebraska to dance and establish pair bonds before moving on north. They're commonly seen at Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira National Wildlife Refuge.

Snowy Owl

No bird represents the Arctic better than the snowy owl. These owls are truly circumpolar and breed throughout northern Alaska, Canada, Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. Although they eat other prey, their life is tied to the variable abundance of lemmings. These nomadic birds move throughout the Arctic and nest where lemmings are most abundant. If conditions are good, they may incubate as many as a dozen eggs. The migration of snowy owls is described as irruptive. When their food supply crashes, hungry birds disperse to the south. In Kansas, snowy owls are rare. In the winter of 2010-11, none were reported in Kansas. In the winter of 2011-12, an all-time record of more than 150 were reported. In the two winters since, three and 14 were reported. Few snowy owls that reach Kansas ever survive to migrate back to the Arctic.

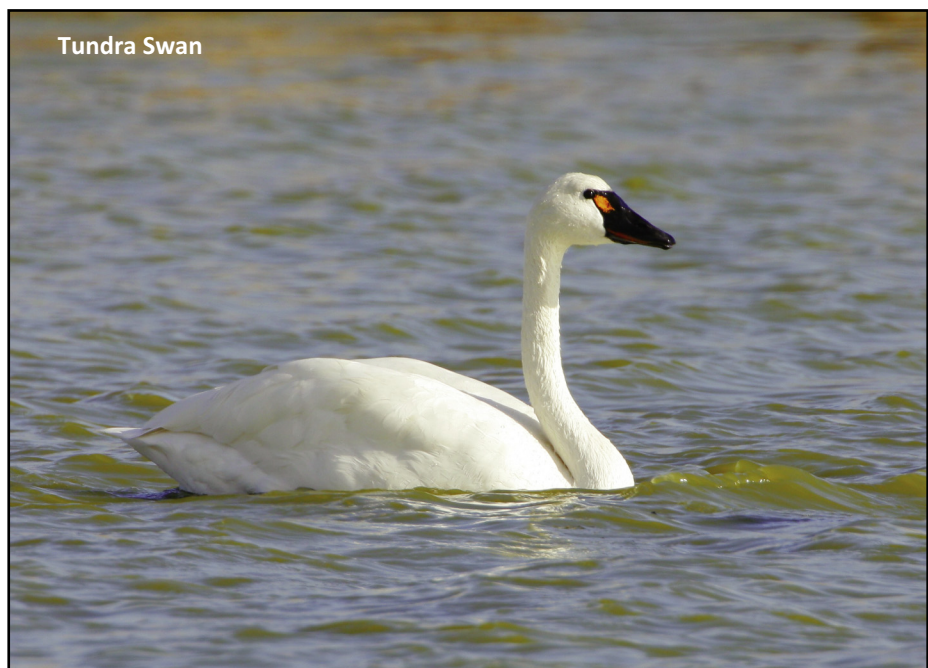


Sandhill Crane

Tundra Swan

North America's tundra swan, formerly called whistling swan, is closely related to Europe and Asia's Bewick's swan. Tundra swans breed on Arctic wetlands across northern Alaska and Canada. They're long-lived and form monogamous pairs. Family groups join together in migrating flocks and stay together through the winter. Large flocks of

hundreds to thousands gather on their main wintering range on the east and west coasts of the U.S. In the Midwest, swans are rare but show up occasionally on large bodies of water or in grain fields. Of the two native swans in North America, the tundra swan is smaller and more numerous than the trumpeter swan. Most adults show a yellow lore spot on the black skin next to the eye.



Tundra Swan



Rough-legged Hawk

Like the snowy owl, the rough-legged hawk also nests circumpolar. Residents of Russia, Finland, Sweden and Greenland are familiar with this small-billed, small-footed raptor that feeds on lemmings and voles. On its Arctic breeding grounds, it's limited by suitable nesting sites. In the absence of trees, rough-legged hawks build their nests on coastal and river cliffs as well as steep outcroppings and rocky bluffs overlooking broad vistas of tundra. By September, their chicks are hunting on their own and migration begins. In Kansas, the first arrivals usually show up in October. They're more common in central and western Kansas where they seek open, treeless prairies and marshes. From a distance, they can be identified by their habit of hovering while hunting.

Pictured above: rough-legged hawk.

Pictured right: black-bellied plover.

Snow Goose

The yelping sounds and sights of arriving flocks of snow geese against blue Kansas skies are truly spectacular. This is one of the most abundant waterfowl species in the world as they have thrived in the last century feeding on Midwestern grain crops during migration. They breed

in dense colonies on remote tundra from northeastern Russia to north-western Greenland. The colonies can be so dense that biologists fear they may be permanently damaging their nesting habitat. Snow geese are dimorphic and occur in both white and blue color phases.

Black-bellied Plover

This high Arctic nester is also known as the grey plover in Europe and Asia. And what a cosmopolitan bird this is! They not only breed in Alaska, Canada and most of the Arctic islands, but also from north-eastern Europe through Russia. And then they move south to spend the winter in the British Isles, Europe, India, China, Japan, Africa, Australia and New Zealand. In the New World, they migrate through the Great Plains and are regularly seen on Kansas marshes. They're also found along both coasts of the U.S., Central America and South America, as well as Hawaii, West Indies and the Galapagos Islands. Each spring flocks of black-bellied plovers are seen in Kansas feeding on recently burnt prairies and bare agricultural fields.





Lapland Longspur

This is another circumpolar nesting bird that breeds in the Arctic of North America, Europe and Asia. It's often the most visible and abundant nesting bird in the Arctic. Each year it leaves the tundra, joins huge flocks and seeks open country in the Midwest to spend its winter. They're common in the western two-thirds of Kansas and erratic in the eastern third. In some years, flocks several miles long, consisting of millions of birds can be found undulating over wheat fields of western Kansas. Clouds of birds descend, feed and wildly flush into a swirling frenzy as falcons dart in to feed on the bountiful flocks. They're called longspurs because of the unusually long claw on the hind toe.

Snow Bunting

Where many nesting birds seek out the vegetation on the Arctic coastal plains, snow buntings seek out the rocky landscapes of island interiors and rugged coastlines. This species nests in rock cavities and competition for quality nest sites is intense. To get choice locations, males arrive in early April while snow is deep

and food scarce. By the time females arrive, four to six weeks later, the snow is melting and insects are hatching. Nebraska is near the southern end of their winter range. In Kansas, they're rare but occur in most winters. Look for them as single birds or in small groups along the rock riprap of reservoir dams and along rural roads and fields. ♡

Pictured Left: Snow Bunting.

Bob Gress is a naturalist, wildlife photographer and co-founder of www.BirdsInFocus.com.

25 Arctic nesting birds that regularly visit Kansas:

Greater white-fronted goose
Cackling goose
Snow goose
Ross's goose
Rough-legged hawk
Sandhill crane
Black-bellied plover
American golden-plover
Semipalmated plover
Ruddy turnstone
Semipalmated sandpiper
Least sandpiper
Sanderling
Pectoral sandpiper
Baird's sandpiper
White-rumped Sandpiper
Dunlin
Buff-breasted sandpiper
Stilt sandpiper
Red-necked phalarope
Short-eared owl
Peregrine falcon
American pipit
Smith's longspur
Lapland longspur

22 Arctic nesting birds that are rare in Kansas:

Brant
Tundra swan
Long-tailed duck
Yellow-billed loon
Pacific loon
Red-throated loon
Whimbrel
Red knot
Red phalarope
Sabine's gull
Black-legged kittiwake
Thayer's gull
Iceland gull
Glaucous gull
Arctic tern
Long-tailed jaeger
Parasitic jaeger
Pomarine jaeger
Snowy owl
Gyr Falcon
Snow bunting
Common redpoll



A FINE FINISH

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY MARC MURRELL
MANAGER, GREAT PLAINS NATURE CENTER, WICHITA

I love the outdoors and like many outdoorsmen, I have several activities that I enjoy and have been doing for decades. However, I'm always striving to learn new things and develop new skills. And this desire is what led to my most recent adventure of learning to finish my own fur.

I'm relatively new to trapping, starting a half-dozen years ago in my early 40s. I was interested because of its historical relevance, as well as the challenge of learning the skills successful trapping requires. Despite a late start, I was an eager student and enjoyed the time spent outdoors with my kids trying to unravel the mysteries of catching furbearers.

Early on, I sold my fur on the carcass or green (skinned) to a local fur buyer once or twice a season. As my trapping skills and interests progressed, I contemplated taking the next step to finishing my own fur.

My initial research told me that finishing fur was HARD work and I wasn't sure I had the time or that my back would hold up. In addition, I knew I'd be on my own and self-taught. But since it's getting more difficult to find local fur buyers, and the fact that you can maximize earnings if you finish and ship your own fur, I jumped in with both feet last December.

Maximizing my fur earnings would come later because I spent about \$750 for the equipment needed to get started. Fortunately, it's all reusable. The list of items is long and includes stretchers, instructional DVDs, fleshing knives, fur hangers, fleshing beam, aluminum push pins, aprons, rubber gloves and other odds and ends. The stretchers were the most expen-



A fleshing knife is a fur finisher's best friend. Several of the more popular ones include the Caribou (top), a custom-made knife by Kansas trapper Lee Steinmeyer (middle) and a Necker 600. Typically, these knives are sharp on one side and dull on the other, allowing the trapper to slice, shave and push fat and meat from the pelt to allow it to dry properly.

sive items and I opted to go with solid basswood stretchers for raccoons since that's what I catch, mostly. Wire hoops would work for beavers and one or two wire stretchers would work for coyotes and bobcats.

The learning curve was STEEP! I tried to read (the archives of www.trapperman.com) as much as I could, and Youtube videos were also helpful. Each species of furbearer is different. Some are finished fur-in like raccoons, possums and muskrats, while others like coyotes and bobcats are finished fur-out. Beavers are finished flat and oval with leather on one side and fur on the other.

A good skinning job is critical and the final step of fleshing removes all of the fat and meat from the pelt so it can dry properly. Stretching the fur is precise as the international auction houses have certain requirements for lengths and widths of all furs.

Fleshing any furbearer's hide is an art form as far as I'm concerned. Handling a fleshing knife is 98 percent touch and feel and experts make it look easy. It's a combination of shaving and slicing using the sharp edge of the knife, and then pushing the rest of the fat and flesh off with the dull side.

Experienced skimmers can flesh a raccoon hide in three minutes and make it look effortless. My first one took me more than 20 minutes, and I put four holes in it, likely rendering the pelt of little value.

But the next 70 raccoon pelts were virtually damage-free, and I got faster as I went. Like anything, it's a matter of practice and learning little tips and tricks that make it easier. I can now flesh and board a



A variety of tools are needed to finish fur. These include various types of knives for skinning and scraping, fur combs, tail strippers, knife sharpeners and more.



Fleshing hides involves scraping the fat and meat from a pelt with a fleshing knife. It takes practice and the learning curve can be steep.



After fleshing, the pelt of a furbearer is placed on a stretcher, usually made from wood or wire. It needs to be done in accordance with international auction house specifications as far as width and length.

raccoon pelt less in than 15 minutes. Although that's still slow by some comparisons, I made progress and hope to improve this season.

You need a committed space to be able to finish fur. I struck a deal with my wife and as long as she gets at least half of the double-car garage for her car so she doesn't have to scrape windows on winter mornings, she's okay with it. One corner of the garage is dedicated to fur finishing and my drying racks are attached to the ceiling.

But occasionally, desperate times call for desperate measures. I was trying to get caught up last Christmas and decided to take about eight of my coons on boards downstairs to an unfinished laundry room to speed the drying process since my garage wasn't heated.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING?" my daughter squealed.

"Hanging a few coons in the laundry room," I said.

"DOES MOM KNOW?" she laughed.

"No, and don't tell her!" I said.

"She's going to kill you!" she laughed.

Fortunately, although drying fur has a distinct smell, it doesn't necessarily stink. I struck another deal and said I'd only use the laundry room in emergencies. So far, I'm still married.

Over the course of 70 raccoons (I finished 21 for my 17-year-old nephew), 15 possums, five beavers and a coyote, I learned what works and what doesn't. Possums require lightweight touch and feel, while beavers require more brawn and bullying. Raccoons require both. They're all different and each species has its own intricacies.

I'm still learning by watching new instructional DVDs and any videos I can find on YouTube to pick up additional tricks and tips. There's always more than one way to do anything and it's a matter of determining what works for me to get a good, consistent, final product. The best teacher is hands-on experience.

Finishing fur is HARD work (did I mention that?). It's an upper body (arms, back and shoulders) workout like you'd get at the gym. My thumbs and wrists hurt often. After a session of finishing fur, I'm ready for a couple Aleve and my recliner. I wish I would have started trapping AND finishing fur back in my 20s. Then I'd really know now just exactly how old I am, but I don't need any more reminders. But there are trappers much older than me still cranking out finished furs that look remarkable and getting top dollar for their efforts.

Although it's hard work, I don't know that I've done anything outdoor-related more gratifying. Looking up at hanging furs provides an extreme sense



It usually takes about a week for furs to dry when the temperatures are 50-60 degrees. A fan moving air is helpful and the pelts can be wiped down every few days to speed the drying process.



Furs must be properly prepped in order to end up as fine finished products. Combing pelts removes burrs and dirt. The finishing process is an art that takes hard work and practice.

of accomplishment like I've never felt. It's rewarding to realize you get the hang of something and are able to get better at it with a lot of hard work and effort. Sure, I'll make more money off my pelts in the end, but the sense of satisfaction is a form of payment in itself. ♡

INTERESTED IN TRYING IT FOR YOURSELF?

Here are a few suggestions from the author:

WWW.TRAPPERMAN.COM

There are many ways to learn how to finish fur. Obviously, having an experienced trapper teach you would be the best, but if you don't have that luxury, go online. Websites like www.trapperman.com have archives with centuries of information, tips and tricks. I learn better watching and found good videos on YouTube.

INSTRUCTIONAL DVD'S

Instructional DVDs on finishing fur also helped me. Many aren't high-quality productions and some are dated, but the information is solid and techniques haven't changed much over the years.

KANSAS FUR HARVESTERS ASSOCIATION

The Kansas Fur Harvesters Association (KFHA) has a fall rendezvous with exhibits, displays and vendors with trapping supplies and a great selection of gear for trapping and finishing fur. One of the highlights of the Friday-Sunday event, usually held in early October, are the seminars and demonstrations on trapping, skinning and finishing fur.

For more information on the KFHA, or for details on the 2015 Fall Rendezvous, check out www.kansasfurharvestersassociation.com.

deer hunting: MEMORIES YOU CAN TASTE

BY NADIA MARJI
ASSOCIATE EDITOR, PRATT



Most people wouldn't suit up and willingly head out into 15-degree weather to sit for hours on end, but Tracy Murphy isn't most people. From playing the role of dad's "bird dog" during pheasant season, to learning how to properly handle a shotgun and rifle, Murphy decided at a young age that hunting was a sport she could relate to. And a sport that would put honest food on the table for the rest of her life.

It's Dec. 6, 2013, right before dusk, and Murphy clenches a 1959 Model 94 Winchester 3030 with open sights in her seemingly-frozen hands in anticipation

of shooting a mature whitetail buck. Edwards County has 10 mph winds and a wind chill of 3.4 degrees, cold enough to make a grown man pack it up and head in, but Murphy stays put.

"Just wait five more minutes. Toughen up, quit being a wimp. Five more minutes,' I kept telling myself," Murphy said. "As I sat there waiting and watching deer in the distance, the sun began to set and temperatures dropped. The further the sun set, the less I could feel my feet, hands and face. It was probably one of the coldest days so far that year."

Thanks to a father who instilled the hunting heritage within his daughters at a young age, Murphy, now 25, learned long ago that weathering the cold is just part of the deal.

"It was finally about dark when I could barely feel any of my body, and just as I was planning to leave, I saw him come out from behind a hill," said Murphy. "A rush of adrenalin hit me and I forgot how cold I was."

It was the buck Murphy had been waiting for.

"I couldn't tell exactly how big he was, I just knew he was big enough for me," Murphy said. "I lined up on him, shot, watched him jump, run 50 yards, then fall. I stumbled back to the truck on numb limbs to warm up before returning to my buck. I couldn't believe I had done it."

Thinking back to the one person who had prepared her for this very moment her whole life, Murphy called on her dad to share in her success and help with the heavy lifting.



Murphy shot this buck with her father's gun, the same one he harvested his bucks with.

"I could see the excitement in my dad's eyes when he saw it and I could tell he was happy for me," Murphy said. "I had put in the time and effort, but he was just as invested in this hunt as I was." Murphy explained that if it hadn't been for the numerous hours and boxes of shells her father had spent teaching her how to shoot, it's safe to say she probably wouldn't be a hunter.

"He gave me those experiences all in hopes that one day I would get to have my own buck on the wall. The

neat thing was that I was on his property, and using his gun that he shot his bucks with, when our hopes had become a reality," said Murphy. "For him to be there with me to find my buck and drag him out was the reward we had worked toward for years. I could tell he was proud and so was I."

**"I COULDN'T TELL
EXACTLY HOW BIG
HE WAS, I JUST
KNEW HE WAS BIG
ENOUGH FOR ME."**

The buck was later scored and came in at a little over 128 inches. Although a respectable buck, it's never been about the glory or bragging rights for Murphy. If the meat in the freezer comes with a pair of antlers, it's a great thing, but as Murphy puts it, "they taste the same no matter how big the rack is."

What matters most to Murphy is the memories these hunts leave behind and her new wall mount will serve as a perfect reminder of just that.

"When I get it back from the taxidermist and see it on my wall, I know the memories will come flooding back like a movie reel," Murphy said. "I'll remember feeling the cold, the waiting, seeing him step out in front of me, the shot, and finding him with my dad."

It's these kinds of memories that are Murphy's driving force for hitting the woods yet again this season.

"My goal this year is to just go and have fun," said Murphy. "There is a part of me that wants to prove to others and myself that I deserve to be out hunting just like 'the guys,' but there's also a part of me that just enjoys being out there and watching nature. If I get a big buck and bragging rights again, that's an extra bonus, but if I can take what I learned last year, apply it to this year and continually make myself better, that's success enough for me." 🍷



2014 Upland Bird Hunting Forecast



Hheavy precipitation fell over much of the state during late summer and early fall of 2013, giving hopes that the long-term drought was subsiding. However, precipitation through the remainder of the fall and winter was sparse, negatively affecting the condition of winter wheat, which is a major pheasant nesting habitat. Precipitation fell on many areas of the state beginning in mid-May and continued through the summer. This precipitation delayed wheat harvest, stimulated the growth of annual weeds, and promoted insect emergence, creating better nesting conditions and excellent brooding conditions throughout much of the state. As a result, nest success and chick survival were higher than have been observed in several years.

Given the increased production for upland birds, Kansas should have improved upland bird hunting this fall. However, due to the limited breeding population in most areas resulting from the extended drought, harvest will remain below average this season.

STATEWIDE SUMMARIES

Pheasant

After three consecutive years of statewide declines, the spring breeding populations stabilized in 2014. The only region showing a significant decrease was the Northern High Plains (northwest). Late summer rains that fell across much of the state in 2013 improved vegetative cover. However, the remainder of the fall and winter produced little precipitation and a majority of the winter wheat was in poor to very poor condition coming into the nesting season, creating less than optimal nesting conditions. Precipitation returned in mid-May and continued through most of the summer. Despite the tardiness of the rainfall, conditions still improved greatly. And precipitation delayed wheat harvest, stimulated the growth of annual weeds, and promoted insect emergence, creating better nesting conditions and excel-



lent brooding conditions throughout much of the state. These factors all had a positive impact on production, and combined for a statewide increase in the summer brood counts by 70 percent when compared to 2013. This increase should offer improved hunting opportunities this fall, although given that the population was at a modern day low, a few good years will be required for full recovery. Kansas will again have a below-average pheasant harvest this fall. Kansas still contains one of the best pheasant populations and the fall harvest will again be among the best in the country. The best areas this year will likely be in the Smoky Hills region.

Quail

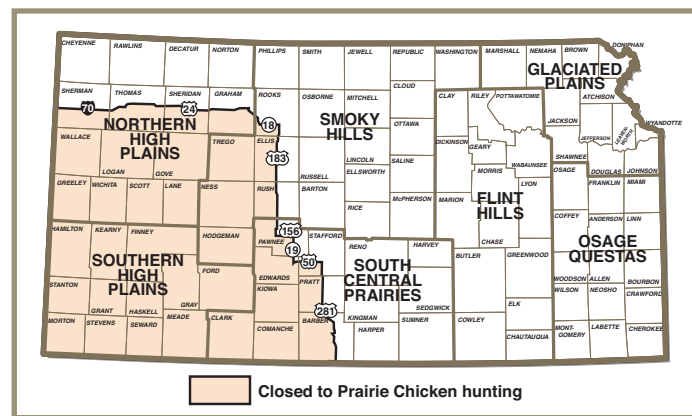
In 2014, the statewide breeding population of bobwhite quail unexpectedly improved by 32 percent. Estimates from the summer brood survey in 2013 showed little production for quail, so the breeding population was expected to remain fairly static. However, the tenacious re-nesting behavior of this species allowed them to take advantage of the improved conditions, resulting from late-summer rains in 2013. Production from these late nests was after the completion of the 2013 brood survey, so they were not detected. With the later nesting chronology of quail compared to pheasant, summer precipitation in 2014 created excellent conditions for production this year. Roadside surveys showed a statewide increase of 50 percent compared to 2013. However, statewide populations are still below historic averages and Kansas will likely have a below average quail harvest this fall. Populations in much of the central and western portions of the state have not fully recovered from the drought. While opportunities will be better throughout most of the state this year, the best opportunities will likely remain in the eastern third of the state, particularly in the Flint Hills region.

Greater Prairie Chicken

Kansas is home to greater and lesser prairie chickens. Lesser prairie chickens are found in west-central and southwestern Kansas in native prairie and nearby stands of native grass established through the CRP. Greater prairie chickens are found primarily in the tallgrass and mixed-grass prairies that occur in the eastern third and northern half of the state.

In March, the lesser prairie chicken was listed under the Endangered Species Act by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and is now protected. New prairie chicken units have been established to close prairie chicken hunting in areas containing only lesser prairie chickens and areas where the two species overlap. Greater prairie chickens may be harvested during the early prairie chicken season and regular season with a two-bird daily bag limit in the greater prairie chicken unit. Since 2012, all prairie chicken hunters have been required to purchase a \$2.50 prairie chicken permit. This permit allows KDWPT to better track hunters and harvest, which will improve management activities.

Prairie chicken populations were generally up where the appropriate habitat exists. Hunting opportunities should be improved throughout the Greater Prairie Chicken Hunting Unit; however, the best opportunities this fall will be in the Smoky Hills Region.



REGIONAL SUMMARIES

NORTHERN HIGH PLAINS (northwest)

Pheasant

This region maintained the highest spring densities of pheasants. As a result of delayed wheat harvest and improved weedy cover in this region, production improved, indicated by a nearly 50 percent increase in the brood survey compared to 2013. Despite this increase, the dramatic decline of pheasant populations over the last several years limited the breeding population, preventing large-scale recovery. Hunting opportunities should be improved throughout most of this region but the highest densities will be found in the northern half of the region.

Quail

Populations in this region had been increasing prior to the drought; however, the deteriorated habitat conditions associated with the drought resulted in significant declines. This area is at the extreme northwestern edge of bobwhite range in Kansas, and densities are relatively low compared to central Kansas. Hunting opportunities in this region will be limited this year but the best areas will be in the eastern and southeastern counties where adequate cover is present.

Greater Prairie Chicken

Prairie chicken populations have expanded in both numbers and range within the region over the past 20 years. Lesser prairie chickens occur in southern and central portions of the region and these areas will be closed to prairie chicken hunting this year (see map for unit boundaries). Within the area that is still open to prairie chicken harvest, the better hunting opportunities will be found in the northeastern portion of the region in native prairie and nearby CRP grasslands.

SMOKY HILLS

Pheasant

The Smoky Hills showed a modest increase in the spring breeding population index compared to 2013. Annual weed growth in wheat fields and delayed wheat harvest within portions of this region created excellent brood cover this summer. This resulted in a 76 percent increase in the summer brood survey compared to 2013. The Smoky Hills had the highest regional pheasant index on the brood survey this year. While densities improved in nearly all areas surveyed in this region, the highest densities were found in the northcentral portion and southern tier of counties in the region.

Quail

The spring breeding population increased in the region again this year, with the population index increasing by nearly 90 percent. Following excellent production conditions this summer, the brood survey also increased by 100 percent compared to 2013. Quail populations in northcentral Kansas are always spotty due to a corresponding distribution of habitat. Areas within the northeastern portion of this region appear to hold the best densities for hunting this fall. There are reports of fair to good quail numbers in several other areas throughout the region, as well, and given the habitat conditions, quail hunting should be improved across most of the region this year.

Greater Prairie Chicken

Greater prairie chickens occur throughout the Smoky Hills where large areas of native rangeland are intermixed with CRP. This region includes some of the highest densities and best hunting opportunities in the state for greater prairie chickens. Improved rangeland conditions resulting from a combination of precipitation and cattle reduction caused by the long-term drought should have positive impacts on densities this fall. The best hunting in the region will likely be found in the central portion of the region, but several other counties also hold relatively high densities of birds. Lesser prairie chickens occur in a few counties in the southwestern portion of the region, and these areas will be closed to prairie chicken hunting this year.



GLACIATED PLAINS (northeast)

Pheasant

Spring crow counts this year indicated breeding populations of pheasants remained similar to last year. Pheasant densities across the region are low, especially compared to areas in western Kansas. Good hunting opportunities will exist only in pockets of habitat, primarily in the northwestern portion of the region.

Quail

Breeding populations stayed relatively the same as last year. While the brood survey indicated a decrease in the regional quail index, several routes that were not used in the annual comparison indicated relatively good densities for quail. Hunting opportunities in the region are expected to be similar to last year and best areas should be in the north and northwest counties in the region.

Greater Prairie Chicken

Very little prairie chicken range occurs in this region, and opportunities are limited. The best areas are in the western edges of the region along the Flint Hills, where large areas of native rangeland still exist.

OSAGE CUESTAS (*southeast*)

Pheasant

This region is outside the primary pheasant range and very limited hunting opportunity is available. Pheasants are occasionally found in northwestern portion of the region in very low densities.

Quail

Though long-term trends have been declining, breeding populations had been steadily increasing over the last five years and remained fairly stable this year. Rainfall last summer was extremely heavy in portions of this region and may have negatively impacted production in those areas. Spring population indices are above the 15-year average but remain far below historic levels across much of the region due to extreme habitat degradation. Production this summer appears to have been good in the region with brood survey indices that are similar to 2013. Several areas throughout this region should offer fair to good hunting with the best opportunities found in western counties along the Flint Hills and in counties in the southcentral portion of the region where appropriate cover exists.

Greater Prairie Chicken

Greater prairie chickens occur in the central and northwest parts of this region in large areas of native rangeland. Populations have been in consistent decline over the long-term. Infrequent fire has resulted in woody encroachment of native grasslands in the area, gradually reducing the amount of suitable habitat. The best hunting opportunities will be in large blocks of native rangeland, primarily located along the edge of the Flint Hills region.

FLINT HILLS

Pheasant

This region is on the eastern edge of pheasant range in Kansas and well outside the primary range. Pheasant densities have always been relatively low throughout the Flint Hills and highest densities are typically found on the western edge of the region. The spring breeding population index did increase by nearly 50 percent this year and the summer brood survey increased by over 100 percent. The best opportunities will be found in the northwest area of the region.

Quail

There was a slight increase in the index to breeding bobwhites this spring, and the Flint Hills region had the highest breeding bobwhite density in the state in 2014. Brood survey results indicated a 127 percent increase in the quail index, producing the highest densities in the state this summer. Quail densities will likely be limited in the core of the Flint Hills where large scale annual burning and chemical control of shrubs have removed key components of quail habitat. However the remainder of the Flint Hills should offer good hunting opportunities this fall.

Greater Prairie Chicken

The Flint Hills is the largest intact tallgrass prairie left in North America, and it has served as a core habitat for greater prairie chickens for many years. Since the early 1980s, inadequate range burning frequencies have gradually degraded habitat, and prairie chicken numbers have been declining as a result. The core of the Flint Hills is typically burned annually and after several years of being unable to burn due to drought, the improved range conditions this year allowed for wide spread burning to return, limiting available nesting habitat in this area. The region as a whole, however, should be slightly better considering the improved cover on the fringes of the region where burning is less common. There are some reports of prairie chicken broods, and hunting opportunities will likely be improved over last year throughout the region. ♡



SOUTHCENTRAL PRAIRIES

Pheasant

The spring pheasant crow survey index indicated a nearly 40 percent increase from 2013. The summer brood survey also showed an increase of 173 percent, the greatest improvement of any of the regions this year. CRP was released for emergency haying/grazing again in 2014, which is the fourth consecutive year for most of these counties. While the whole field is not eligible for emergency use each year, fields utilized in consecutive years may or may not provide adequate cover for hunting depending on moisture available for plant production. The best hunting opportunities will be in the northeast and central counties within this region.

Quail

This region generally has some of the highest quail densities in Kansas; however, prolonged drought and resulting vegetation conditions have caused significant declines in recent years. The breeding population index increased this year by nearly 50 percent and the brood survey indicated that there was nearly a 100 percent increase in quail density in the region. Despite these increases, densities in the region as a whole are still relatively limited with the best densities being found in the center of the region. Hunting opportunities for this species will also likely be good in patches throughout the region where adequate habitat exists for quick recovery.

Greater Prairie Chicken

This region is almost entirely occupied by lesser prairie chickens and areas included in their range will be closed to prairie chicken hunting this year (see map for unit boundaries). Greater prairie chickens are possible in very limited areas in the remainder of this region. Prairie chickens within the open unit in this region would occur in very low densities within the limited remaining large rangeland tracts in the northeast portion of the region.

SOUTHERN HIGH PLAINS

Pheasant

After record lows last year, the breeding population somewhat stabilized this year, indicating only slight decreases from 2013. Precipitation in this region over the last year has greatly improved vegetative cover. The summer brood survey indicated that densities in the region improved by 71 percent. While the regional improvement was encouraging, densities in many areas of the region remain low despite the improved conditions, due to the limited breeding populations. Multiple years of good conditions will be required for recovery to pre-drought population levels. Hunting opportunities should be relatively good in the southeastern counties, but limited throughout the rest of the region.

Quail

The breeding population in this region tends to be highly variable depending on available moisture and resulting vegetative conditions. Quail densities from the spring whistle surveys were greatly improved compared to 2013. Birds in the region were likely able to take advantage of the rains received across the area late summer in 2013, resulting in the observed increase. Timing for precipitation in the area created good conditions for production this year. Brood survey results indicated a large increase in quail but still comparatively low densities across the region. Hunting opportunities should be good in the few areas where appropriate cover exists.

Greater Prairie Chicken

This region is entirely occupied by lesser prairie chickens. Prairie chicken hunting will be closed in this area this fall.



THE *Wandering Wingshooter*



By Tom Schumm, Overland Park

Author J. R. R. Tolkien once wrote “not all who wander are lost.”

Tom Schumm is a man who would likely agree with this statement. A wandering man himself, Schumm has traveled the entire state of Kansas, but he is far from lost. In fact, he’s been on a mission: to hunt each of the 105 counties in Kansas – and that’s exactly what he did. Here’s his story.

I love nature, hunting and history. For 44 years now, I have made my living as a landscape contractor. So, between my work and my passion for hunting, I have spent most of my life outdoors.

One day I received a call about some landscape work and scheduled an evening appointment to discuss it with the landowner, Jim. I arrived a few days later and he was already out in the front yard waiting to greet me. And there was a pointer running around.

I hopped out of the truck, we introduced ourselves, and I queried, “Do you hunt that dog?”

“Oh yeah,” was his reply. “That’s Pearl, and we hunt all over Kansas.”

“Cool, then you’ll like this,” I followed up. “I really hunt all over Kansas.”

“Well, I bet Pearl and I hunt more places than you do.”

“I bet you don’t.”

“We could have a contest,” he fired back.

“That’s fine with me, but you will lose,” I answered confidently.

I was really enjoying our friendly banter because Jim was taking the bait, hook, line and sinker. Then, he ticked off an impressive list of seven or eight places that most years are generally good for pheasant and quail. Long drives would be required, but you just accept that when you live on the eastern edge of the state.

Because of his willingness to travel and the number of places he hunted annually, I understood that he took his

upland bird hunting seriously. When he finished listing his hunting spots, he folded his arms, nodded that it was my turn, then flashed a confident smile, thinking he had bested me in our little duel. My turn!

"There are 105 counties in the state of Kansas. I have hunted all of them!" I announced, knowing I won.

Bam! His eyes widened, his jaw slacked a bit, and I'm pretty sure I heard him mutter something that sounded like "you win." It was an amusing, if not odd, start to our friendship.

This is the kind of reaction I usually receive when I share my tale with other hunters. No one has ever hunted in every county in the state before, so it is unique and people find it interesting. Scanning over a map of Kansas inspired me to combine my hunting trips with history of my state. I have an adventurous spirit and I wanted to visit sites and towns, breathe in the history and experience the "can do" pioneer spirit that lead to the settlement of the Great Plains. And what an adventure it has been. I have loved every bit of it and wouldn't trade the experience.

In 2001, after having already notched 44 counties, a friend suggested I start a journal to keep track of my wanderings. Following his advice, I also marked a map with the date of each hunt and where I actually tromped in that county. A glance at the map will show that after 105 counties, I have pretty much walked across Kansas. The journal tells that while completing the last 61 counties, I have traveled a distance of 21,268 miles. My longest mileage trip was to Thomas, Lane and Finney counties in January 2007. I was gone four days, never left the state and drove 1,303 miles.

So, over the roughly 20 years that I have spent pursuing this

goal, my hunting trips have led me to Pawnee Rock, Castle Rock, Monument Rock, Chalk Pyramids, Fick Fossil Museum, Dalton Gang Hideout, Boot Hill, Sites of the Kidder Massacre, Drum Creek Treaty and Lone Tree Incident. I have stood on the oldest swinging bridge and seen Big Brutus, visited the Cathedral of the Plains, Eisenhower Center, Garden of Eden, World's Largest Hand Dug Well, St. Jacob's Well, Big Basin, Wagon Bed Springs, criss-crossed the Santa Fe Trail and walked the wagon ruts. I can't even count the number of fantastic sunrises and sunsets I've been treated to. Oh, and yes, that Worlds Largest Ball of Twine!

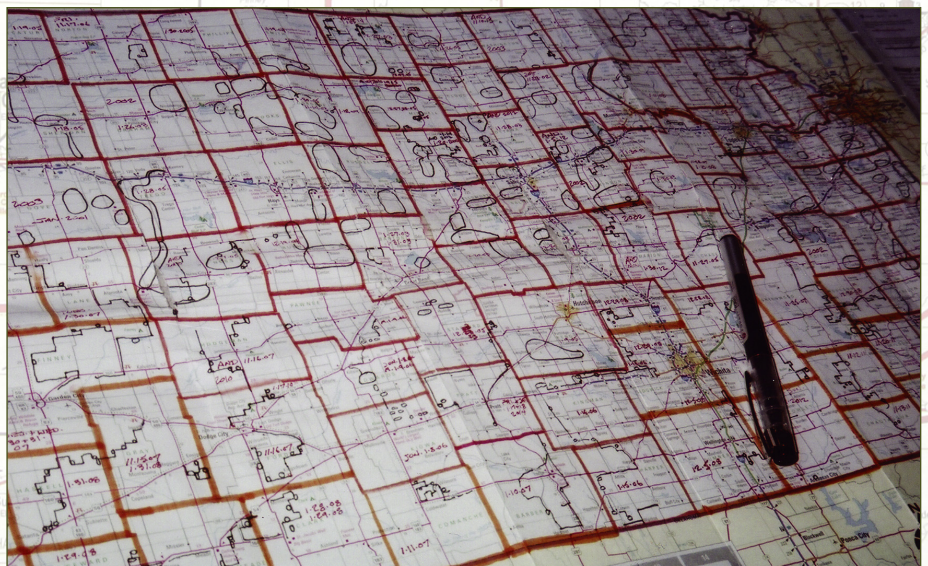
I have also worn out a couple of dogs, a couple of guns, and a couple of trucks and a lot of boot leather. I've driven enough miles to circle the globe and then some; spent more money on gas than I care to think about; stayed in some pretty sketchy motels that at days' end, I was barely thankful for; slept in my truck a couple of times; enjoyed some really good food and not enjoyed some not so good food. I've been temporarily lost a couple of times and a bit concerned a time or two and been stuck in sand, mud and snow. I've helped

folks out a few times, been helped out a few times and have had the honor of meeting some of the finest people on this earth; people who willingly go out of their way to help you because that's "how they roll" in the rural Kansas that I so love to visit.

Basically, I'm a country boy trapped in the city. So, anytime I have a chance to bolt out of town, explore some new places, get face-to-face with nature and chase after some game birds, I'm gone. Point the truck west, set the cruise on 75, tune in the A.M. station, find out what them hogs and grains are bringing today, what that old boy wants for his partially restored 9N (just needs a carburetor), and who served tea at Mrs. Johnson's 90th.

I am also drawn to the stories of these rural towns and how they fought to survive in the early days. Each town tells a tale of pride and hope. One way for a town to prosper was to attract the "Iron Horse." Goods would transfer from the rail cars to the merchants and the local elevator could get the farmers' grain to the market. Another bonus was to have a post office.

In 1886, the newly established town of Greensburg, named after



The author's goal was to hunt in every Kansas county. He planned his trips meticulously using a state map and a Walk-in Hunting Access Program Atlas.



Pictured above is the author's yellow lab Zoey in Stanton County in January 2010. In addition to hunting, the author visited state historical sites during his journeys.

stagecoach driver D.R. "Cannonball" Green, had neither but the city leaders had a plan. "Cannonball" spearheaded what would become the world's largest hand dug well. Completed at a cost of \$45,000, it took two crews, numbering 12 to 15 men each, one and a half years to complete. One crew did the digging and the other quarried rock for the casing from the Medicine River, 12 miles to the south. The finished well was 109 feet deep and 32 feet in diameter. The idea was to entice the railroad and their steam locomotives into town where the well would ensure a steady supply of water. The railroad, however, terminated the tracks short of Greensburg, so the well was never sued for that purpose, but it didn't provide the city water until 1932.

Another story is about a man who founded a competing town just two miles west of Greensburg. This enterprising fellow was granted a post office. Federal regulations prohibited a post office in Greensburg because it was so close. The city leaders knew both towns couldn't survive, so they devised a plan to give two lots to each business from a competing town, one lot for their business and one lot for compensation.

Most of the businesses moved, but the post office held out.

Upping their game a notch, Greensburg city leaders went to the post office one night with whiskey and playing cards. They played cards and got the holdout very drunk. When he passed out, they put the post office on a sled and pulled it to Greensburg with a team of horses. When the postmaster woke the next day and realized what happened, he decided to go along with it. Sometimes a scheme worked out and sometimes it didn't, but these stories show how determined these early Kansans were to succeed.

When I began this project, permission to hunt was almost always granted. As deer hunting gained in popularity, more and more places became off limits. We entered the age of "No Hunting" or "Keep Out - Leased for Hunting" signs, and it became hard to find places to hunt.

Then the Walk-in Hunting Access Program (WIHA) came along. I personally think this is a terrific program and the way the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism has expanded and developed it has been a boon for hunting. WIHA helped me complete my journey because I could refer to the atlas and find public hunting available and sync it with my map to plan a hunt. This is way better than standing in a farmyard trying to gain permission while the guy is frowning at my Johnson County truck tags.

So, I encourage you to Hunt Kansas! See what's out there and stop to read the historical markers along the way. Check out some of the county museums. You will make some interesting discoveries and your hunt will be more fun. You'll also meet some amazing people.

Get out more often and take a different path! 🐾



Seen above is the author with friends. Pictured is Bob, Jim, Jake and Wiggly hunting Rooks County in 2012.

The Kansas Nature Conservancy – Making a difference for 25 years

FOR NATURE AND PEOPLE

BY Shelby Stacy

marketing and communications
coordinator, TNC

On Friday, August 22, 2014, 10 individuals from The Nature Conservancy (TNC) gathered in the Kansas Statehouse waiting their turn for a photo opportunity to commemorate the organization's 25th anniversary in Kansas. During the ceremony, Governor Sam Brownback cited the Conservancy's contributions to the people and wildlife of Kansas. It was a moment to pause and reflect on what The Nature Conservancy has accomplished. Later that day, it was back to work because as TNC state director Rob Manes noted, there is still much to be done.

It began with a simple directive: Open an office. Do good things for conservation. And, despite challenges that lay ahead, opening a state TNC office began a conservation journey that has benefitted the people, wildlife, lands and waters of Kansas.

For those unfamiliar, The Nature Conservancy is a private, non-profit conservation organization working around the world and in all 50 states "to protect the lands and waters on which all life depends." For more than 60 years, TNC has fulfilled its mission worldwide, working collaboratively to protect more than 120 million acres of ecologically important lands and 5,000 miles of rivers. Such a broad mission with such high expectations was surely daunting to the one-man TNC staff 25 years ago when the first state director, Alan Pollom, set out to fulfill the directive: Open an office. Do good things for conservation.

On this anniversary, TNC's legacy in Kansas can be celebrated by reflecting on the organization's accomplishments and examining the organization's goals for the future. To date, the Kansas TNC has protected nearly 100,000 acres of truly beautiful and critical habitats.

The Conservancy evolved under a model of land acquisition and management. Its first project in Kansas dates back to 1965, when the Conservancy acquired, and then transferred to the state, 80 acres of sandsage prairie at the Sand Prairie Natural History Reservation in Harvey County. The model was simple and effective. The Conservancy would acquire land to either keep and manage internally or transfer to an entity that would maintain its conservation values. By the time the Kansas field office opened in 1989, the Conservancy owned or had transferred ownership of more than 12,500 acres in the state.

The purchase of 731 acres in the Cheyenne Bottoms basin in 1990 was the first acquisition brokered by the Kansas office. Over the next two decades, TNC would acquire an additional 7,700 acres at the globally important wetland complex. More recent acquisitions include the 17,000-acre Smoky Valley Ranch in western Kansas and the 11,000-acre Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve near Cottonwood Falls. These large parcels represent high-priority ecosystems and allow for public recreation and increased awareness.

Pictured below is butterfly milkweed on the TNC's Konza Prairie, which is operated by Kansas State University.



In the early 2000s, TNC began to shift its approach to conserving critical habitats, realizing that land purchase alone wouldn't have the desired land-scale impact. Even the mission statement changed from "saving the last great places" to "conserving the lands and water on which all life depends." The Kansas TNC embarked on multiple strategies aimed at enhancing nature and people's lives.

This progressive approach was manifested in part by opening research opportunities on TNC lands for biologists, ecologists, and land managers, with much of the research emphasis on grazing ecology. Konza Prairie and Sunset Prairies host a variety of cutting-edge research projects that are shaping the future of grassland management and providing valuable information about such topics as changing precipitation cycles. At Smoky Valley Ranch, research projects examine lesser prairie chicken habitat needs and identify the greatest threats they face. The resulting data is guiding lesser prairie chicken recovery efforts on Conservancy-owned lands, as well as on private ranches. The Smoky Valley Ranch is also home to a wild-reproducing population of black-footed ferrets, the continent's rarest mammal.

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY IN KANSAS TIMELINE

1965 – Eighty acres of sand dunes, marshes, and a sand prairie are acquired in a partnership with Bethel College. Later, Bethel College assumes sole ownership and management of the Sand Prairie Natural History Reservation in Harvey County.

1972 – 1,818 acres of mixed-grass prairie are acquired in Clark County, establishing the Big Basin Prairie Preserve. The preserve is known for St. Jacob's Well, a sink hole believed to have never run dry. Later, the Kansas Fish and Game Commission assumes ownership.

1973 – A preserve is established in the upland prairie of the Flint Hills. The 2,188-acre Flint Hills Tallgrass Prairie contains healthy examples of big bluestem, little bluestem, switch grass and streams host threatened Topeka shiners.

1974 – 32 acres that neighbor the Ethel and Raymond F. Rice Woodlands in Douglas County are purchased. Both parcels are transferred to the University of Kansas and named Baldwin Woods.

1977 – 7,700 acres are added to the 916 acres of tallgrass prairie, which was secured by Kansas State University Professor Lloyd Hulbert and philanthropist Katherine Ordway in 1971. Under a long-term lease, the Kansas State University Division of Biology manages the preserve for The Nature Conservancy for ecological research, education, and prairie conservation. The site is formally named the Konza Prairie Biological Research Station.

In this same decade, TNC began to leverage the fact that a large part of the Kansas economy relied on healthy prairies for beef production. TNC staff engaged with rancher partners to help protect two of the largest native grassland areas in Kansas – the Flint Hills and the Red Hills.

The Flint Hills Initiative, which began in 2001, was the first landscape-scale project launched by TNC in Kansas. Land purchases would never safeguard more than a tiny percentage of land within the 4 million-acre Flint Hills landscape. Through the initiative, TNC promotes ranching practices that protect the biological integrity of the tallgrass prairie and are in harmony with the cultural and economic foundations of the region. The initiative also includes conservation easements, which provide a shield of protection against incompatible development of at-risk grasslands, while leaving the land in private ownership and management. Even as land is passed down through generations, easements are upheld – protecting the land’s grazing and ecological values in perpetuity. This method of conservation is in line with the goal of many who want to maintain the unfragmented nature of the Flint Hills while preserving its ranching heritage and economic base. Conservation in the Flint Hills has also been strengthened by the Conservancy’s partner organizations such as the Ranchland Trust of Kansas, Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, and the Kansas Land Trust.

Ten years later, the Conservancy copied this model to start a community-based initiative in the Red Hills of southcentral Kansas. Known for its deep-red canyons and clear streams, the Red Hills face energy development pressure and some tillage conversion, along with rampant cedar tree invasion. Parts of the Red Hills have suffered under a culture of fire suppression, which has resulted in invasive cedars overrunning formerly healthy grasslands. The cedars have become so thick in some areas that grassland has lost habitat for lesser prairie chicken and forage for livestock. To control cedars and promote prescribed burning as a management tool, the Conservancy is equipping local landowners with fire equipment and facilitating training for land managers. The Conservancy is also working with landowners on the mechanical removal of large cedars that cannot be suppressed by fire.

These community-based initiatives form the basis of the Conservancy’s future as greater challenges require better solutions. Freshwater restoration and entire systems conservation are among the biggest challenges to securing a



TNC owns almost 11,000 acres of the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve in Chase County. Picture above is an old school house on the preserve.

1989 – The Nature Conservancy opens an office in Kansas. It is the 48th state office to open. Alan Pollom was named state director, a title he held until 2011.

1990 – The first tract of land at the Cheyenne Bottoms Preserve near Great Bend is acquired. The land is next to KDWP’s 20,000-acre Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area. Over the next two decades, other parcels were acquired. The preserve currently covers 7,694 acres. Cheyenne Bottoms is one of only 20 U.S. locations named as a Wetland of International Importance by the RAMSAR Convention on Wetlands. This designation is very important as Cheyenne Bottoms receives global recognition for its significant value as a wetland habitat. In addition to this honor, Cheyenne Bottoms is also recognized as an Important Bird Area by the American Bird Conservancy and is listed as a Hemispheric Reserve by the Western Hemispheric Shorebird Reserve Network.

1998 – 80 acres of tallgrass prairie are purchased in Anderson County for the Sunset Prairie Preserve. Sunset Prairies, which is located about an hour southwest of Kansas City, hosts a portion of the world’s largest known population of Mead’s milkweed, a globally threatened plant. Also found on the preserve is the Henslow’s sparrow, a grassland songbird whose numbers have been on the decline. By 2003, the Conservancy acquires another 1,280 acres at Sunset Prairies. A program administered by the University of Kansas has taken over most of the ongoing management at Sunset Prairie, combining restoration, research, conservation, and education studies at this tallgrass ecosystem.

healthy future for nature and people. Streams are among the most impacted, threatened, and neglected ecological features in Kansas. Land protection efforts, such as conservation easements, can be used in partnership with private landowners to improve and protect water quality and quantity, including upstream of reservoirs. Wetlands are among the best filters of water. The Conservancy has played major roles in restoring and conserving wetlands across Kansas. For example, partnering with DU and KDWPT, the Nature Conservancy in Kansas will soon be utilizing a significant North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant that will contribute to wetland enhancement in the southern Flint Hills. The Conservancy has also made major investments in the McPherson Valley Wetlands, Jamestown Wetlands and the Conservancy's Cheyenne Bottoms Preserve.

This past year, the Conservancy launched a "whole-systems" program



The Red Hills Initiative is a community-based conservation program that was established in 2011 to conserve native prairie in southcentral Kansas.

with Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas. Called the Central Great Plains Grassland Initiative, the effort addresses the drastic grassland habitat declines facing the Great Plains. This focused and innovative approach to grassland conservation identifies common ecological challenges and strategies that impact a 12 million-acre region stretching across the central United States. The Great Plains are a scenic stronghold for rare wildlife including prairie chickens, bats, some fish and mussels. The area is also crucial to the economies of all three states through ranching, crop production, energy development, and tourism. Still, adverse development and some land management practices have degraded hundreds of millions of acres over the years.

However, even with its past accomplishments, innovative strategies and plans for the future, there remains a sense of urgency about the Conservancy's work because development is outpacing conservation. The call has never been louder for conservationists to work harder, faster and smarter to protect the natural world. As society has become more dependent upon technology, conservation strategies are evolving to address new threats.

The needs of a growing, modern society are rapidly increasing demand on natural resources. Ecologically important areas, once considered too remote or too valued, are quickly becoming compromised by energy and transmission development. The unintended consequences of surface disturbance, traffic noise, water use and the introduction of invasive species include sig-

1999 – The Conservancy acquires its single largest acquisition in Kansas with the Smoky Valley Ranch in Logan County. The 16,800-acre mixed grass and shortgrass prairie is home to a wide variety of grassland species including pronghorn, swift fox, golden eagles, burrowing owls, prairie dogs and the federally endangered black-footed ferret.

2000 – The Conservancy partners with KDWPT and Ducks Unlimited to protect more than 2,500 acres of wetland habitat near McPherson. The Conservancy assists with some of its own funding and also locates additional funding sources. The Conservancy partners again with the KDWPT and Ducks Unlimited to protect a 2,770-acre essential migration point in northcentral Kansas called the Jamestown Wildlife Area. Jamestown forms an important migration bridge between areas such as Rainwater Basin in Nebraska, Cheyenne Bottoms, Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, and McPherson Valley Wetlands.

2001 – The Flint Hills Initiative, the first community-based conservation program, is created to address threats in the Flint Hills. By 2014, the Conservancy has protected 100,000 acres through conservation easements.

2005 – Almost 11,000-acres of native tallgrass prairie in Chase County are purchased to establish the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve maintained through a unique private-public partnership with the National Park Service, which runs the day to day operations of the preserve.

2011 – The Red Hills Initiative, a community-based conservation program addressing threats in the Red

nificant detriments to wildlife and habitats.

Organizations like The Nature Conservancy are developing comprehensive approaches that will protect nature while ensuring our nation has the energy it needs. The Nature Conservancy in Kansas is doing this by addressing common ecological challenges, identifying conservation opportunities and implementing strategies that will protect millions of acres. They are working with oil and gas and wind energy companies to develop new siting tools and are facilitating the widespread use of fire as a tool to improve grassland health and grazing production.

This was not always The Nature Conservancy business approach. The Central Great Plains Grassland Initiative is unique, in that it addresses several priorities, all of which will factor heavily into the future of conservation and commerce in the region. Already, the Conservancy is working with oil and gas industry leaders and energy producers on appropriate siting of facilities and allocating mitigation funds. The Conservancy also collaborates with policy makers, industry leaders and landowner groups to reduce the losses of native grassland values by developing a voluntary wind energy certification process. Voluntary certification would incentivize developers to avoid sensitive areas, expedite well-sited energy projects, and support the industry's reputation as an ecologically-friendly source of electricity.

The Nature Conservancy's partnerships and strategies will define the next 25 years of its presence in Kansas. An evolving new conservation model promises clean water, abundant food for people, and green energy. It strives to make industry and developers partners in our shared future.

"As the Conservancy's leaders, we foresee a bright future built on diverse partnerships with the people who derive their lives and livelihoods from the land," concluded Rob Manes, the Nature Conservancy's Kansas state director. 🦋

Hills of southcentral Kansas, is created. In the last three years, the Conservancy has worked with 66 landowners, whose properties cover more than 70,000 acres, by assisting with land management plans and connecting them to more than \$3,000,000 in public funding for conservation. The recommended improvements include restoring the practice of controlled burning, removal of invasive Eastern red cedar trees, and restoration of the region's streams.

2013 – The Central Great Plains Grassland Initiative, a three-state initiative with Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas to address common challenges across a 12 million-acre region in the Great Plains, is created. The program works with oil, gas and energy developers to avoid negative impacts to wildlife through appropriate siting and mitigation. It also ensures that fire continues to play a key role in the health and sustainability of grasslands.



TNC owns and manages more than 7,000 acres in the Cheyenne Bottoms Basin adjacent to the Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area.

2014 Sportsmen's Calendar

SPRING TURKEY:

- Youth / Persons with disabilities: April 1-14, 2015
- Archery: April 6-14, 2015
- Firearm: April 15-May 31, 2015

FALL TURKEY:

- Oct. 1-Dec. 2 AND Dec. 15, 2014-Jan. 31, 2015

DEER:

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

ELK (residents only)

Outside Fort Riley:

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

On Fort Riley:

- Firearm Season for Holders of Any-Elk Permits: Oct. 1-Dec. 31

Antlerless Only:

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

DOVE

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

- Season: Sept. 1-Oct. 31 and Nov. 1-9, 2014

EXOTIC DOVE

(Eurasian collared and ringed turtle doves only)

- Season: Nov. 20-Feb. 28, 2015

RAIL (Sora and Virginia)

- Season: Sept. 1-Nov. 9

SNIPE

- Season: Sept. 1-Dec. 16, 2014

WOODCOCK

- Season: Oct. 11-Nov. 24, 2014

SANDHILL CRANE

- Season: Nov. 5, 2014-Jan. 1, 2015

DUCKS

High Plains Zone

- Oct. 11-Dec. 8, 2014 AND Dec. 20, 2014-Jan. 25, 2015

Low Plains Early Zone

- Oct. 11-Dec. 7, 2014 AND Dec. 20, 2014-Jan. 4, 2015

Low Plains Late Zone

- Nov. 1, 2014-Jan. 4, 2015 AND Jan. 17-25, 2015

Low Plains Southeast Zone

- Nov. 8-9, 2014 AND Nov. 15, 2014-Jan. 25, 2015

GEESE

Canada Geese

- Nov. 1-9, 2014 AND Nov. 12, 2014-Feb. 15, 2015

White-fronted Geese

- Nov. 1-Dec. 14, 2014 AND Jan. 17-Feb. 15, 2015

Light Geese

- Nov. 1-9, 2014 AND Nov. 12, 2014-Feb. 15, 2015

Light Geese Conservation Order

- Feb. 16-April 30, 2015

PRAIRIE CHICKEN

- Regular Season (Greater Prairie Chicken Unit): Nov. 15, 2014-Jan. 31, 2015
- (No open season for taking prairie chickens in Southwest Unit)

PHEASANTS

- Season: Nov. 8, 2014-Jan. 31, 2015
- Youth Season: Nov. 1-2, 2014

QUAIL

- Season: Nov. 8, 2014-Jan. 31, 2015
- Youth Season: Nov. 1-2, 2014

SQUIRREL

- Season: June 1, 2014-Feb. 28, 2015

RABBITS (cottontail & jackrabbit)

- Season: All year

CROW

- Season: Nov. 10, 2014-March 10, 2015

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: Nov. 12, 2014-March 31, 2015

Earn-a-Buck, Literally!

text and photos by
Dustin Teasley, Graphic Designer, Pratt

In the last issue, I wrote about my son, Hunter, evolving into a deer hunter. This article is a continuation of that journey. Now, I don't plan to write an article every time my son goes deer hunting, but certain hunts do inspire me to write. The following story is more about the journey than the harvest. Don't get me wrong, I like to brag about my kids and deer as much as the next guy, but this story is about life lessons involving hard work, discipline, and setting and accomplishing goals.

Hunter's evolution coincided with a change in the deer hunting regulations, allowing the use of crossbows as archery equipment. As mentioned in my earlier article, Hunter took his first deer with a crossbow using borrowed equipment, but that spring, Hunter began talking about buying his own.

Rather than just buy him a crossbow, I figured Hunter should work for it. He agreed to

try and earn enough money mowing lawns through the summer to pay for it, if I would help him find some of those jobs. I figured it would mean more to him that way, and he could learn the value of setting goals and working hard. Word spread quickly and soon Hunter had more jobs than he knew what to do with. I would edge and make the first round with the mower, and he would pick up litter and mow the rest. By the end of summer, he not only had enough to buy a crossbow, but bolts and broadheads, too. His grandparents bought him a case and he was ready for deer. He even received the blessing of Miss Kansas 2013, Theresa Vail, who when hearing



about Hunter's story, signed his crossbow for him, wishing him good luck.

We hunted hard early in the season, but were either set up in the wrong location, or the deer were too far or too small. I figured the many hours would eventually take its toll, but Hunter always seemed eager to go.

Deciding we needed a change from the permanent blind we had been hunting, Hunter and I moved to a nearby area and set up about 20 yards from a well-used trail. Entering the woods about two hours earlier than normal, we put up a portable blind and waited.

After about an hour, we noticed two does in front of the permanent blind we had abandoned – just our luck. As we watched in disgust, a thump in



Mowing is not a particularly fun job, but the goal of a new bow provided the necessary incentive for Hunter throughout the mowing season.

front of our pop-up blind caught my attention. Sure enough, a mature doe with three younger ones had materialized from the thick woodlot 60 yards away. She stood, staring at the blind, trying to catch our scent. Eventually she snorted, stomped, and trotted around while the other three continued to eat, oblivious to her actions. Before we knew it, she walked up as close as five yards from the blind trying to figure things out before cautiously returning to the woods.

As we quietly discussed the event while watching the other three does wander off, a shadow right outside the blind caught my eye. I moved my eyes just in time to see a set of antlers through the camo mesh window. The buck came in front of the shooting window, but at five yards, a wispy tangle of honey locust branches prevented a shot. By the time the buck had walked the 10 yards to clear the locust, Hunter had time to evaluate him. I was pretty sure his labored breathing meant that this buck was what he was looking for.

The deer continued walking straight away from us until it intersected the main trail, then as if on cue, turned broadside and began walking down the trail. He stopped after a couple of steps and looked back, as if noticing for



All the hard work from summer paid off. Using his own equipment added value to our hunts for Hunter even though most days we came home empty handed.

the first time, the blind he had just walked past. Hunter touched off the arrow. The deer whirled around and headed for the woods. We could hear crashing and then silence. We took our time gathering our things before beginning our search, but after about 30 minutes, we couldn't stand it any longer and took off.

Upon entering the woods, we found a blood trail we could have followed on the run. The buck had made it about 40 yards, going down near a small cedar tree. It was a beautiful 135-inch, 10-point buck. We quickly set up a photo to send his mom.

On the way back home we reflected on all that had transpired since the spring; a lot of time, sweat and tears went into this hunt. I asked him if he would do all that work again and got a resounding "yes!" There were quite a few sacrifices during his summer to keep up with his mowing

duties. The few evenings without baseball or football practices were spent mowing. But he stayed the course and was rewarded in the end with not only a nice crossbow, but a beautiful buck and an important life lesson.

Hunter finished the season with a doe at the end of December and he even let his mom (Heather) use his crossbow. As a school teacher, she used Christmas break to get some hunting in during the archery season. She was able to harvest a mature doe and Hunter couldn't have been more proud.

This year Hunter has set another goal: buy a fishing boat. Something we can tool around on the small local lakes and farm ponds, or drop over the riverbank to set a few lines with. I think it's pretty cool he wants to spend time with his dad. I told him if he bought the boat and trailer, I would buy the trolling motor, battery and life jackets. He is well on his way. Although this year, I am making him put back some of his earnings for college and I am sure a car is just a few short years away, too. ♡



2013 Miss Kansas, Theresa Vail, who is an avid archer and bowhunter, signed Hunter's crossbow for good luck after learning of his effort to earn money to purchase it.

AMERICAN KESTREL BY JAY MILLER

The American kestrel is one of the most common falcons in the state.

Similar in size and shape to the mourning dove, American kestrels

are the smallest falcons in the U.S. A daytime migrant, the

American kestrel is easily one of the most colorful raptors in

sight. Males sport slate-blue wings, with a rufous back and

tail, while females display the same reddish brown on

their wings, back and tail. This masterpiece of

contrasting colors is finished off with two

black vertical lines on the head, a yellow

beak, and a pale underside. Snatching

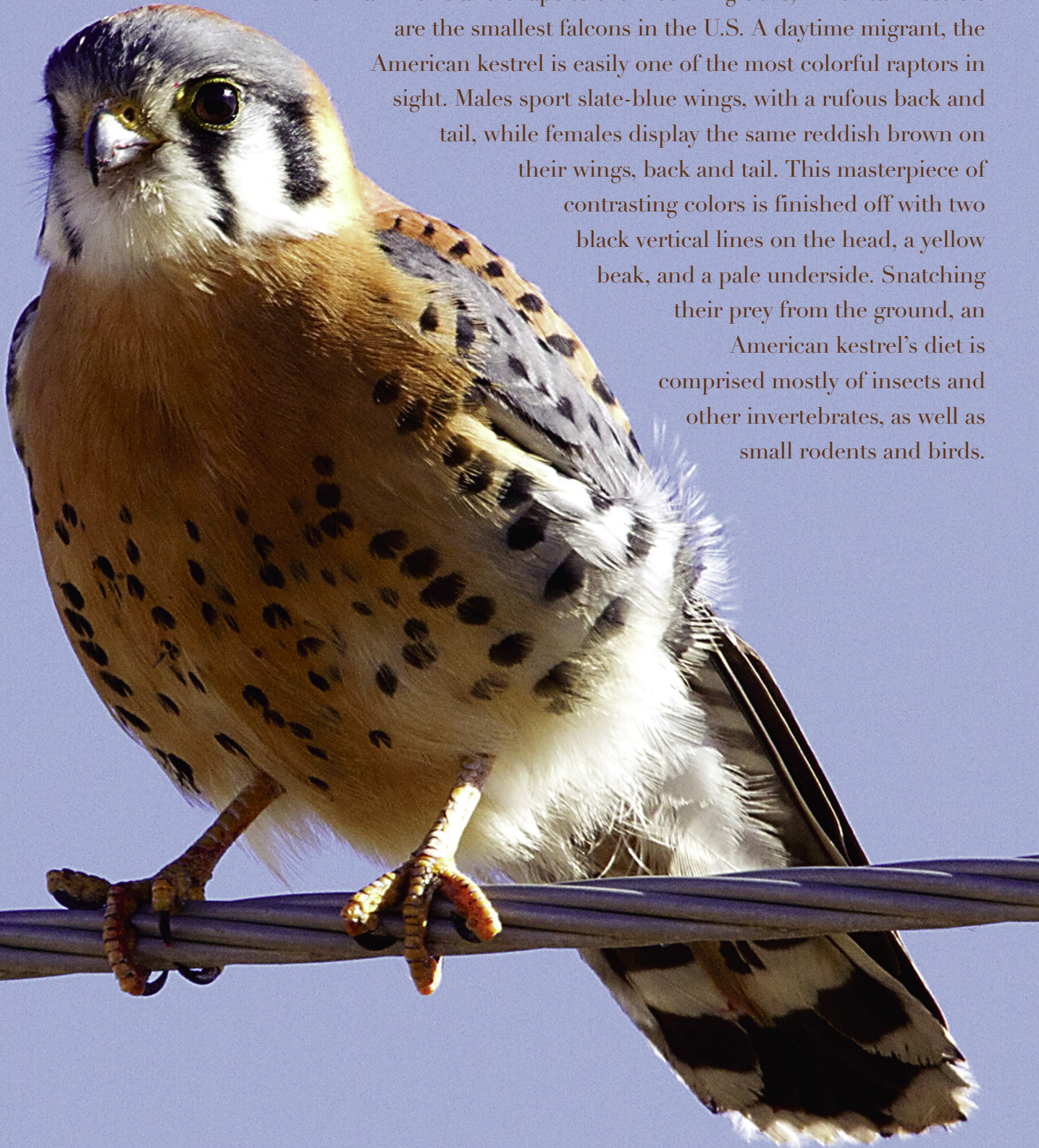
their prey from the ground, an

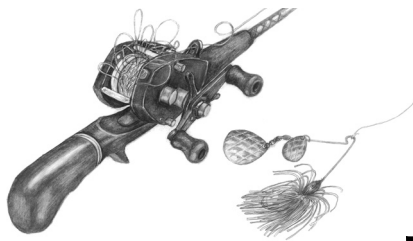
American kestrel's diet is

comprised mostly of insects and

other invertebrates, as well as

small rodents and birds.





Backlash

by Mike Miller

Thanks Jim

In 2001, Pass It On, the department's fledgling hunter recruitment program was just beginning and as coordinator, I wasn't sure where we were headed. I wanted to emphasize youth involvement, and I was certain hands-on experiences were important. We started by training agency staff to be wingshooting instructors.

Jim Kellenberger was in his 35th year as a game warden, holding the title of regional supervisor for the last 20. He was an avid hunter and skilled wingshooter and had taught hunter education through a good portion of his career. He had already passed on his love of hunting to his own children, and he took an interest in the Pass It On program, believing in its importance. Jim took all of the instructor training we could offer. He also had officers who worked for him involved.

We focused on wingshooting because Kansas offers a wide array of excellent bird hunting opportunities, and wingshooting clinics are easy to accommodate. The youngsters who went through our early classes responded positively, but we were only reaching a few hundred each year.

In 2003, Jim retired from the agency after 38 years of service. He was respected and well-liked, and his officers rewarded him with an expense-paid dove hunting trip to Argentina! At his retirement party, Jim and I visited about the Pass It On program, and I suggested that he consider becoming a part-time wingshooting instructor (or maybe he suggested it, I can't remember).

A week later, Jim called and said he definitely wanted to see if we could create a part-time position for him. Neither of us knew how it



would work out. My priority was conducting these events across the state and getting as many youngsters involved as we could.

Within a couple of months, Jim was outfitted with a fully stocked trailer, an old law enforcement pickup and a shooting vest with the Pass It On logo embroidered on the back. It was slow at first, but we did enough events that first year to build some momentum.

Interest continued to grow and Jim eventually built up to 21-25 events a year, mostly on Saturdays from March through October. Over the past 13 years, Jim conducted nearly 300 wingshooting events and instructed more than 10,000 shooters. Most were youngsters, age 10-16, but he instructed at many women-only events, as well. Jim has loaded more than 200,000 20-gauge shotgun shells into the semi-automatic shotguns we use in our programs. He then watched over-the-shoulder on each of those shots, instructing the shooters. I would bet my next paycheck that you could count the number of shooters who failed to break at least one target over the past 13 years on one hand.

Jim criss-crossed the state, never hesitating to drive from his home

base in Jetmore to an event in Chanute or Junction City. When a group requested one of our programs, I contacted Jim to see if his calendar was open. He never once asked where or how far. It was, "I'm open that day. Just tell me when and where and I'll be there." He just about drove the wheels off of that first hand-me-down truck. Many event organizers asked for him by name when they rescheduled. His only rule was that we didn't schedule any shooting events during pheasant season because he always had other plans.

It's been a good ride. Jim is still very much alive and kicking, much to the chagrin of Hodgeman County pheasants, but he's hanging up his shotgun instruction vest. He had another great year until some minor surgery knocked him out of action this October. While he was recuperating, with a singular goal of being able to walk the fields after pheasants this November, he confirmed what I suspected. He was retiring again.

He actually apologized for "bailing out" on me. I told him he didn't owe the program an apology. He was responsible for what it had evolved into. I have a couple of other part-time instructors, and they'll likely be busy next year. I know I can't replace Jim – there's only one. I hope to hire another instructor, but I don't expect to find one with half the passion, dedication and knowledge Jim had. I'm sad because I enjoyed working with him, but the kids are the ones who'll miss out. He is truly one of kind.

On behalf of a generation of Kansas wingshooters and bird hunters, 'Thanks Jim. We owe you more than you will ever know.'

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