

# KANSAS

*Wildlife & Parks*

MAY/JUNE 2016

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MAY/JUNE 2016 – VOL. 73, NO. 3

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Black Dog Back In The House

**Front Cover:** Turkey vultures are common in Kansas during the summer months, soaring on thermals, looking for something dead. Judd Patterson photo. **Inside Front Cover:** May and June are prime months for fishing in Kansas. Grab your rod and go! Nadia Marji photo.

Contact the Editor: mike.miller@ksoutdoors.com







## Putting Fish And Hunt Revenues To Good Use

When the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) embarked on a nearly year-long process of considering fee increases last year, it was important to me that our constituents be informed. Through ongoing discussions at public Commission meetings and public responses to news stories, we heard from hunters and anglers. I expected some resistance, but I was pleasantly surprised at the level of support our proposals received. Part of that support, I think, was due to the fact that we hadn't raised license fees since 2002, and we hadn't raised the price of deer and turkey permits since 1986. People seemed to understand that to continue our current level of programs, we needed to increase revenues. However, nearly all of the supportive comments I heard came with one condition: "I can support fee increases as long as the money is spent on the right things."

We assured people along the way that it would be. All revenue from license and permit sales goes into our Wildlife Fee Fund (WFF). By law, our WFF must be spent on wildlife and fisheries programs, which allows the state to qualify for federal Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration funding, derived from excise taxes on hunting, shooting, fishing and boating equipment. If we spent our WFF on things other than wildlife and fisheries programs, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would put the agency in diversion, making us ineligible to receive the nearly \$20 million we receive annually.

Another comment we heard often was that we need more game wardens. We agree, but our first problem is keeping the game warden positions we have filled. Because our state employee salaries have remained stagnant for the last 13 years, we've fallen below market value. KDWPT staff is diligently working on a pay matrix that will make the department more competitive in the workplace. Improving our law enforcement presence in the field is a priority.

We told hunters and anglers through the discussion process that we wanted to maintain current programs we know are popular and enhance hunting and angling opportunities. Those pivotal programs include Spring Walk-In Hunting Access, Fall Walk-In Hunting Access, Fish Impoundment and Stream Habitat (FISH), and Community Lake Assistance Program (CFAP), all of which have increased access for hunters and anglers with no additional charges. The amount of land open to hunters was tripled with the walk-in programs, and more than 200 community lakes no longer charge fees for anglers through CFAP.

But maintenance of current programs isn't our only goal. We strive to improve and enhance hunting and fishing opportu-

nities, as well as conservation of our wildlife and habitat resources. While I believe hunters and anglers in Kansas today have opportunities former generations didn't even dream of, the agency is not resting on its laurels.

In the Fisheries Division, biologists and culturists strive to produce more and larger fish. Several years ago, fisheries staff began an ambitious project that spawns largemouth bass up to two months early. Largemouth bass are produced early in a controlled setting and gain a huge head start on fish spawned normally. The hope is that the early-spawn fish will grow enough during their first summer that they'll have a better chance of surviving their first winter. Early DNA testing shows promising results, but it may be another year before we know the program's full impact on reservoir largemouth bass populations. The division also recently produced a plan to improve walleye fishing through improved culture programs and innovative length and creel limits. Fisheries science is constantly changing and research is uncovering new and more successful culture and stocking techniques.

On the wildlife side, biologists recently unveiled the new private land habitat program, Habitat First. The program is designed to help willing landowners improve wildlife habitat on their land. District wildlife biologists work with landowners, providing technical assistance and designing individual plans based on the landowners' wishes. Biologists will also help landowners enroll in state and federal cost-share programs to keep costs minimal.

Public Lands managers continue to gather hunter information through iSportsman to improve management of our wildlife areas. Innovative management programs have created fantastic dove hunting on some areas, sought-after special hunt opportunities on others, and overall created optimum wildlife habitat.

And we must keep in mind that everything staff do to improve habitat on public and private land benefits all wildlife. In fact, habitat programs, paid for by hunters and anglers, benefit many more nongame species than game species. These programs, whether you hunt, fish or just enjoy seeing wildlife, improve our quality of life in Kansas. And while improving the quality of life is part of our agency mission, all of us here at KDWPT gauge the success of our work by the level of high-quality, safe opportunities Kansas hunters and anglers enjoy. 

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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 to The Editor

### LOOK WHAT I FOUND

Editor:

I got some decent shots of a pair of great horned owlets last night just outside Wellington city limits at a friend's place. You are welcome to share them in the magazine.

Rhonda Newberry, Wellington



### MARSHMALLOWS AND POWERBAIT

KDWPT:

Stocked rainbow trout at Moon Lake, Ft. Riley. Thanks for all y'all do. They're gonna be delicious on the grill!

Michelle LeFave, Junction City



### SEASON SUCCESS

Editor:

Thought you guys might appreciate this! Youth hunt from Larned area.

Kolby Keith, Larned



### BIGGUN' ON THE LINE

KDWPT:

This fish was caught by Shelley England on a light action rod while fishing for crappie with jigs on April 4. We released it after weighing it.

Jesse Kirk, Bonner Springs



### Have a picture or story to share?

Write the Editors at:

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# BIRD BRAIN

WITH MIKE RADER

## The Butcherbird

Have you ever seen a small lizard or mouse hanging from a barbed wire fence or the thorn of a honey locust tree? The culprit was most likely a shrike. We have two species of shrikes in Kansas, the Northern and the loggerhead. Northern shrikes are here only in late fall through early spring, so the most abundant shrike we see here is the loggerhead, meaning “blockhead.” They migrate from the northern part of their range (as far north as central Canada), so we occasionally have an influx of loggerheads, but Kansas also has a breeding population.

Loggerhead shrikes are mostly birds of the prairies and open habitat, particularly areas with scattered shrubs and small trees to use as perches. They’re most abundant in central and western Kansas and are frequently seen in pastures where cattle are grazing. They’re smaller and more slender than an American robin, but act more like a hawk or falcon in how they obtain their food. Shrikes lack the large talons of other predatory birds, but have a strong, slightly hooked bill perfect for killing and eating small prey. The habit of impaling prey on fence bars holds the carcass for easier consumption, and it may provide a “larder” or “pantry” for food storage to eat later. They can kill and carry off prey nearly as large as themselves, using the bill for smaller kills and their feet for larger prey.

Shrikes eat a wide variety of prey, including large insects (mostly in summer), frogs, lizards, small snakes, small birds and small mammals like mice and shrews. The manner by which they get food is the reason they are often called “butcherbirds.” I vividly recall a winter bird watching outing a few years ago when I saw something strange impaled on a barbed wire fence. On closer inspection, I realized it was the head of an Eastern bluebird! After a little patience and searching the immediate area, I spotted a shrike in one of the nearby trees. It had left only the head on the fence. Amazing – unless you’re the bluebird!

Loggerhead shrikes have black and white wings and a gray body, making bold patterns, especially when in flight.

They have a thick black face mask, adding to their “sinister” appearance. They are sometimes confused with northern mockingbirds, but with practice, can be readily told apart. Northern shrikes are slightly larger than loggerheads, have a more pronounced hook on the end of the bill, narrower black mask and are typically two colors (black and gray). With a large body size and heavier bill, northerns tend to take larger prey than loggerheads. Both species hunt from perches, sometimes hovering over prey like an American kestrel.

Shrikes nest in small trees, shrubs, brush or even in tumbleweeds, usually less than 6 feet above the ground. Both sexes gather nesting material, but the female usually builds the 6-inch-diameter structure herself. She will lay five or six eggs that she incubates for approximately 16 days. The young are naked and helpless and require constant attention by the pair. Once they fledge from the nest, the parents take care of them for another month or so, teaching them how to hunt and fend for themselves. It’s common to see family groups in late summer perched on fences, the young looking like mini, short-tailed versions of the adults. Observers have reported the young performing exaggerated versions of adult hunting behavior, practicing on small sticks and by chasing their parents around.

Shrikes tend to call often when in courtship and when the young are out of the nest, but they’re not beautiful singers by any means. It is an interesting call, though, with some varied notes reminiscent of a brown thrasher or a yellow-breasted chat.

Loggerhead shrike populations have been in a steep decline in North America. While the reason for the decline is not fully understood, land-use changes and increased pesticide use may be factors, as well as urban sprawl, vehicle collisions, and loss of hedgerows. North American Breeding Bird Survey data shows an estimated cumulated loss of more than 75 percent of the population from 1966 to 2010. The current estimated population of about 5.8 million seems substantial until you realize it’s just 25 percent of what it was less than 40 years ago.

Because of its relatively large clutch size, the species could potentially repopulate quickly with improved habitat and curtailed pesticide use. But today, I consider it a real treat to find a few shrikes in winter or a pair nesting in the spring. They’re such cool birds and certainly a species I hope we can enjoy well into the future.



DAVID SEIBEL PHOTO



# IT'S THE LAW

WITH COL. KEVIN JONES

The Law Enforcement Division recently recognized several officers and other individuals for work and services performed. The awards, which are given out annually, are presented in a variety of categories, including Meritorious Work, Lifesaving, Natural Resource Education, Boating Safety Enforcement, Investigations, Cooperative Projects and Officer of the Year. This year's recipients are as follows:

The Merit Award was presented to Capt. Dan Melson for his work in developing and maintaining the Game Wardens' Facebook page and an application allowing the Law Enforcement Division to more efficiently record violations.

Game warden Jonathan Rather was awarded the Natural Resource Education Advancement Award for his work in implementing hunter education programs in the area schools.

The Boating Officer of the Year Award was presented to game warden Jeff Clouser for his extensive work in the area of boating safety enforcement, including dealing with stranded boaters, investigating boating accidents and enforcing boating under the influence laws.

Game warden Hal Kaina received the Lifesaving Award for his efforts in two incidents where individuals were facing life-threatening circumstances. In one incident, Officer Kaina rescued a hunter who had broken through the ice and was unable to get out. In another incident, Officer Kaina aided in the rescue of four individuals, some being children, after their boat had sunk in the middle of the reservoir. All the victims were rescued and brought safely to shore.

Game warden Cody Morris was awarded the Lifesaving Award for his participation in rescuing a family that was adrift in a boat that would not start.

Lt. Rick Campbell and game wardens Jesse Gehrt and Travis Schulte received Lifesaving Awards for rescues they performed on the Kansas River. In one situation, Lt. Campbell and officer Gehrt rescued a man whose canoe had overturned in the river. Later in the summer,

a family was caught off guard by a severe thunderstorm as they floated the Kansas River, leaving them stranded on a sandbar. Officers Gehrt and Schulte, along with a local emergency medical technician, responded and got the family, including a 4-month-old baby, to safety.

The Richard Harrold Memorial Award for Investigations was presented to game warden Josh DeHoux for his investigation efforts uncovering big game violations in his assigned area.

The Director's Award was presented to a large group of game wardens, department staff and a private citizen for their work in hosting the conference of the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA). Those recognized include: Major Dan Heskett, Capt. BJ Thurman, Lt. Eric Deneault, Lt. Dave Adams, Lt. Jeff Sutton, Lt. Mike Peterson, Lt. Scott Hanzlicek, Lt. Bob Funke, game wardens Michael McGinnis, Cody Morris, Jesse Gehrt, Tracy Cikanek, Dennis Zehr, Jim Bussone, Matt Hanvey, Jon Entwhistle, Vince Wonderlich, Scott Leamon, Jeremy

Stenstrom, Ross Uhrmacher, Glenn Cannizzaro, Mike Hopper, Greg Salisbury, Landen Cleveland, Ryan Smidt, Lance Hockett, Chris Stout, Daniel Howard, Aaron Scheve, Clint Lee, Jacob Greene, Lynn Koch and Jonathan Rather; Erika Brooks and Shelby Stevens of the Education Section; Jason Deal and David Jenkins of the Public Lands Division; Tony Reitz of the Parks Division; and volunteer, Jenna Scheve.

Game warden Jesse Gehrt received the Officer of the Year Award, a joint recognition by the Law Enforcement Division and the Shikar Safari Club International. Gehrt has performed his duties above and beyond what is normally expected and is extensively involved in all aspects of being a game warden. Apart from his daily duties, and many other contributions around the state, Gehrt is also a member of division's Honor Guard and maintains valuable ties to his local community.

Although these are this year's recipients, it must be noted that all officers and staff of the Law Enforcement Division are dedicated to the mission of providing quality, professional services to the people of Kansas. All the officers, staff and others who have worked to meet this mission receive my thanks.

**WAY outside**  
BY BRUCE COCHRAN

"DO YOU SMELL WHAT I SMELL? STINK BAIT!  
IN A BOAT...A THOUSAND YARDS SOUTHWEST...HEADED THIS WAY!"



# AT WOODS EDGE

WITH ANDRA BRYAN STEFANO

## The Makings of Milestone Moments

They happen all the time; milestone moments. Sometimes we make an effort to capture them, like the annual photo we take of our two sons on the first day of school under the same tree in our front yard. And sometimes the moments are captured only by our mind's eye, like the sight of one son in the kitchen looking for a cup in the cabinet that a few months ago he needed a step-stool to reach.

These milestone moments are at once joyful and bittersweet. Each means an accomplishment, as well as the passage of time. But it's never more evident to me that our sons are growing up than when we're in the outdoors. I'm guessing those who boat, kayak, waterski, snow ski, ride bikes, or play sports with their children have experienced similar moments.

This year, under a picture-perfect Kansas blue sky on the kind of mild 40-degree January day with just a slight southwest wind perfect for duck hunting, evidence of these milestones surfaced every step of the way:

This year, Older Son and Younger Son worked together to pull one decoy sled across the water to our blind, while Hubby pulled the other sled. Last year, Older Son wasn't as strong and needed my help to pull one, while Younger Son lagged behind — his legs so much shorter and his footing in the wetland not so sure.

This year, both of them set out the decoys and achieved a suitable spread by themselves. Last year, they relied on Hubby to do it.

And this year, Older Son knew exactly when to blow his duck call and which call to use without being told. If I travel even further back in either my mind's eye or our photo album, it seems only a few days ago he was sitting in the duck blind with a toy pop gun, barely able to see over the edge.

We were hunting from a blind we built on a wetland we built at the edge of a prairie we planted on land that has been in our family for three generations. Previously farmed in row crops, Hubby — a biologist — took the lead a few years ago in converting

it to a conservation area perfect for wildlife and hunting.

He has enlisted the help of our sons in tasks like spreading seed and erecting a water control structure. It's evident the land, too, has reached milestones: A few weeks ago, we startled up a covey of quail from the prairie — something neither Hubby nor I have seen in the wild in 20 years. We're keeping a list of wildlife spotted in and around the wetland, and it's growing week by week. Our conservation efforts are working.

There were a few milestone moments for me, too. For the first time, I wore my own chest waders — Santa was good to me and decided I shouldn't have to wear Hubby's old pair any longer. But I could scarcely believe it when I learned Older Son and I now wear the same size: Adult, Size 8.

And, when Hubby was busy watching the sky for mallards and I took a moment to watch him, I noticed more flecks of gray in his whiskers than last year. We are entering our 18th year as hunting buddies and just completed our 16th as a married couple.

Perhaps the best milestone for both of us was when the sun slipped to just the point on the horizon when we knew we could no longer shoot. Our sons stood up and divided duties: zipping shotguns into cases, retrieving decoys, and starting the long walk back to our truck pulling the two sleds. Silhouetted, I could see they were gaining on their dad in size. Older Son was nearly Hubby's height and Younger Son — a head taller than last season — was to Hubby's shoulders. Both of them kept up with their dad the entire way.

Just before dark, Hubby and Older Son fell back just a few steps, and Younger Son took up the ropes to pull both sleds. He did so all by himself the remaining 20 yards to shore.

As I tucked into bed, I was thankful to be falling asleep with warmth, memories, and the kind of milestones that can only be experienced outdoors. I also was thankful I had my camera along to capture it. I smiled. It was a very good day.



# HUNTING HERITAGE

WITH KENT BARRETT

## Is There Enough For Everyone?

In 2012, the National Shooting Sports Foundation reported the latest figures on the number of hunters in the U.S. and the trend is pointing upward. The information gathered was from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Department of the Interior for the five-year period from 2006 through 2011. The figures indicated a 9-percent increase in the number of hunters, from 12.5 million to 13.7 million. Although the causes aren't entirely known, these figures have generated interest in the areas of recruitment, retention and reactivation of hunters in the United States, an important component of every wildlife agency. The major concept is that we need more hunters to keep hunting alive. At the risk of being considered a heretic, I'll ask: Do we really need more hunters? And why? Are we truly prepared for more hunters? What will be the results of adding more hunters to the mix? Ultimately, what do we owe new hunters regarding hunting opportunities?

To add additional hunters to the ranks serves hunters in a couple of ways. Adding hunters will slowly increase the voting base to add additional protection

of the outdoors and our resources. Hunters have been the leading force in wildlife restoration since 1937 with the passing of the Restoration in Wildlife Act that we call Pittman-Robertson legislation. More hunters qualifies the state for access to more funds. That is a win for wildlife! With the just concluded armed occupancy of a federal wildlife refuge in Oregon, attention has been focused on all federal lands. Renewed calls have been made to sell off federal properties to energy companies to provide more funds to states, as well as divest the government of lands that need managed, or in other words, cost money. Do we want to sell off Bureau of Land Management land to companies to strip it of its mineral deposits and leave it forever ruined and neglected? What of national forests? Clear cut the trees and abandon the slopes to the elements? What of the crown jewels, our national parks and monuments? Extract the geothermal energy from Yellowstone and leave what remains abandoned forever?

Mollie Beattie, former USFWS director once said, "What a country chooses to save is what a country chooses to say about itself." So the question begs, what do we choose to save?

Apart from retaining land, we must retain new hunters. Recruitment without retaining hunters isn't a winning strategy. But it will be virtually impossible to retain new hunters if we can't provide them with quality hunting experiences.

In Kansas, the Walk-In Hunting Access (WIHA) program has become one of the most successful access programs in the

country. By 2004, over 1 million acres were enrolled, providing countless opportunities for sportsmen to pursue their favorite game with guaranteed access to hunt land. Although the majority of the acreage provides good-to-excellent upland game bird hunting, some areas even provide opportunities for deer, waterfowl, turkey and squirrel hunting, as well. But one of the essential features of the WIHA and public lands programs is that the hunter is responsible for their own successes. Hunting public access land is not ever going to be easy, a "gimme." As Randy Newberg, an advocate for hunting public land has said, "I am all about making sure opportunity exists, but not [just] handing [success] to [new hunters]. I respect people who want to take the journey rather than be led to the destination. I think the worst thing you can do for a perspective hunter is to [just] hand them something. Show them the easy way and you've cheated them out of the entire experience of what hunting really is."

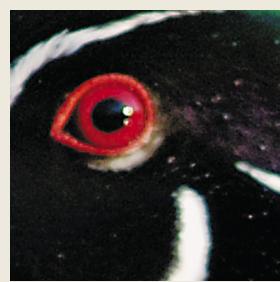
This may cause us to look hard at our definition of hunting success. We must ask ourselves if we are able to meet these new hunter's expectations in order to provide quality experiences. In reality, not everyone can harvest every time they go afield. Maybe we, as self-identified hunters, need to ask ourselves what our definition of success really is. Are we ready to accommodate others who may have a very different definition of success? Is there enough success to go around? Only you can answer that question.

## WHAT I AM



Using only the thumbnail image and clues below, see if you can figure out this month's "What Am I?" species!

Answer found at bottom of page 9.



1. I am a very colorful animal
2. I hang out in trees and in water
3. I can fly

March/April answer:  
Gray Tree Frog



# Fish Squeezet—retired, but not yet tired

WITH TOMMIE BERGER

## The Bluegill Boogie

May and June are months when most families are thinking about school getting out, baseball, and summer camps. Some families might even be planning a family vacation. At the Berger household, we're thinking about filling that last turkey permit, Outdoor Adventure Camp from June 5-10, and bluegill fishing.

Bluegill are the most common sunfish in Kansas and one of the easiest fish to catch, making them perfect for youngsters. They are present in nearly every lake and pond in Kansas and you might even find a few in some of our streams. They're also very good on the dinner table.

Bluegill are native to the eastern streams of Kansas, but they have been stocked into almost every lake and pond in the state. They're an easy fish to raise in our hatchery ponds and are stocked into new waters just about anywhere. They do well in shallow water habitats, preferably with some vegetative cover. Bluegill are also sight feeders, needing relatively clear water. They eat most anything they can get in their small mouth but they prefer aquatic invertebrates, bugs that fall into the water, and God's greatest fish bait – WORMS.

Bluegill have a few close relatives in Kansas, including the green sunfish, the

redear sunfish (also called the shell-cracker because of its love of snails), the beautiful orangespotted sunfish, the longear, and the warmouth. A lot of folks have trouble telling all these sunfish apart, so they lump them all together and call them perch – a no-no in Tommie Berger's fishing classes! For clarification, reference the *2016 Kansas Fishing Regulations Summary* for full color photos of some of these fish.

All sunfish reproduce in a similar manner. When water temperatures get around 68 to 70 degrees, the males begin building their nests. They clear out a small, saucer-shaped bowl in shallow water, in close proximity with a neighbor. This creates a large spawning bed quite visible to the attentive angler. The male invites a gravid female, a female full of eggs, into his nest where the eggs are scattered and fertilized by the male. The male then guards the nest until the eggs hatch, which often is only two to three days. Bluegill may spawn multiple times over the summer but initial, early summer spawns seem to be the most significant. After that, it's time to grab a fishing pole!

Rig up some line with a No. 8 or smaller hook, a small piece of split shot or weight, and a small bobber – no bigger than a nickel. (A long shanked No. 8 hook works best as bluegill are notorious for swallowing the hook).

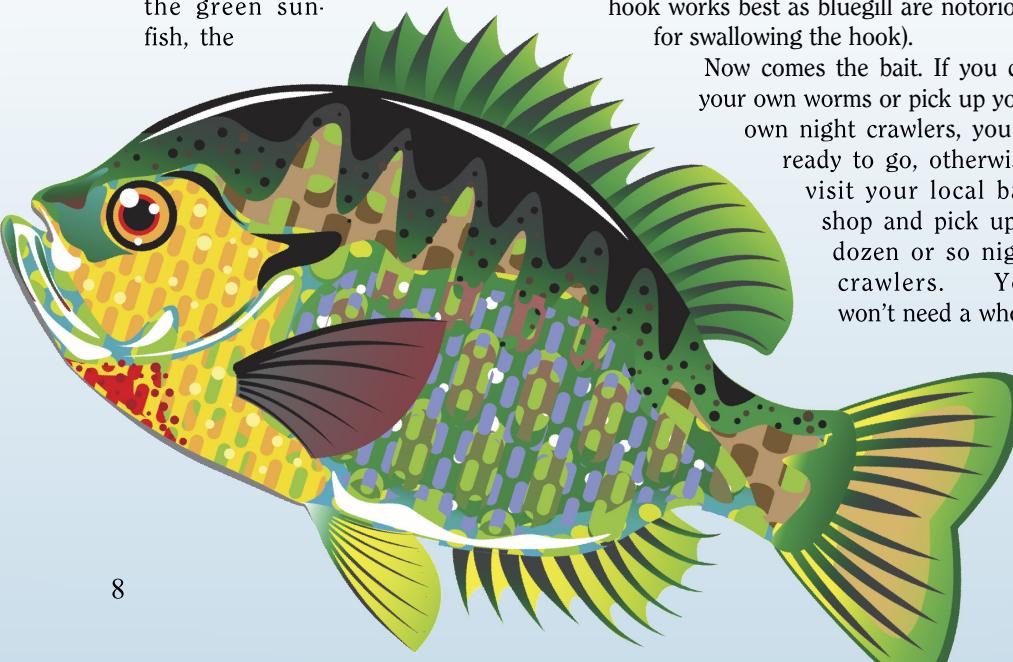
Now comes the bait. If you dig your own worms or pick up your own night crawlers, you're ready to go, otherwise, visit your local bait shop and pick up a dozen or so night crawlers. You won't need a whole

worm. One big juicy night crawler can be pinched or cut into five to 10 baits. Take a piece of worm and put it on the hook like a sock on a foot – run the hook down the center of the worm all the way through. With this method, the hook turns into what looks just like a piece of worm, and will stay on well. Set the bobber no more than a foot or so above the hook and fish close to the shoreline.

Now it's time for FISH ON! Bluegill are pound for pound one of the strongest fighting fish in the water and will excite most any young angler. Mom, Dad, Grandma or Grandpa, you'd better have a fish basket or bucket handy because there will likely be a bunch of fish caught.

For the best bluegill spots, consider checking out the *2016 Fishing Forecast* online at [ksoutdoors.com](http://ksoutdoors.com) where you will find a list of ponds, lakes, and reservoirs and their ratings for bluegill. As you look at reservoirs, you will find the top five include Marion, Lacygne, Sebelius (Norton), John Redmond, and Hillsdale. State Fishing Lakes with good bluegill populations are Lyon, Miami, Scott, and Pottawatomie (No. 1) state fishing lakes, and Pottawatomie County/Cross Creek Lake.

Fishing on Memorial Day weekend is a tradition at the Berger house. One day that weekend we try to head to the best bluegill spot in our area and find a spawning bed to fish. Theresa is a kid at heart and loves the constant action of bluegill spawning bed fishing. A 5-gallon bucket of big bluegill yields about a gallon of tasty bluegill fillets. My son, Fritz, learned to rib fillets with bluegill when he was small and we all take part in the cleaning process. With that being said, it's time to plan that bluegill fishing trip and let's TAKE THOSE KIDS FISHING!



# EVERYTHING OUTDOORS

WITH MARC MURRELL



Hunter has accompanied his dad, Jeremiah, on many hunts as an observer, but he became a participant last spring when he harvested his first turkey.

## Doin' It Like Daddy

Many who enjoy hunting, fishing, trapping, camping and the outdoor lifestyle as adults often have someone to thank for their introduction to these activities. Sometimes, it's a family friend or relative, but many times it's a father passing on his love of the outdoors to his children. Such is the case for Jeremiah Hobbs and his two boys, Hunter, 7, and Walker, 4.

The Hobbs' live in La Crosse and enjoy hunting, fishing and camping as a family.

"I grew up on a family farm south of Beloit and I always hunted and fished," Jeremiah said. "Now I'm just trying to continue that tradition with my boys, and my wife goes with us occasionally, too."

"Whether it's a short outing to look for sheds, a weekend deer, turkey or pheasant hunt or simply going camping for the weekend and doing some fishing, we cherish being in the outdoors every day," he said.

Until last year, Hunter was just an observer on duck, goose and deer hunts.

"I started taking him when he was 3 or 4 years old and he'd just sit in the blind with me," Jeremiah said. "But last year he started hunting and got his first turkey in the spring season."

"He was grinning ear-to-ear and couldn't stop talking about it," he added. "He was already excited to give it another try this year."

The turkey hunting experiences have led to additional wish-list items with hopes of building on that success. Hunter wants to try to hunt deer this fall with a rifle, so father and son will begin working on those skills this summer.

"And he really wants a bow, so I'm hoping to get him one so we can start practicing together and hopefully hunt deer in a few years when he's able to shoot accurately enough," Jeremiah said. "For now, we'll practice and go to 3-D archery shoots around the state once he learns to shoot his bow."

Hunter has learned to manage a fishing rod and reel, too. On family camping trips to Wilson and Horsethief reservoirs, he loves to fish and spends plenty of time along the shore with his family catching striped bass and other species. They'll catch catfish and bullheads in waters close to home, and their family camping trips outside the state focus on the outdoors, as well.

Walker has also shown excitement for the outdoors.

"He enjoys going with me and his brother as a spectator and does everything he can to get involved," Jeremiah said. "He has been on deer, turkey, dove, waterfowl and rabbit hunts with us and enjoys it all. I think he, too, is going to be a real outdoorsman someday soon."

Jeremiah realizes he has to choose the right days when the boys accompany him on outdoorss. Cold, windy and wet days are generally not considered. He tries to keep the outings fun and enjoyable and leaves it up to the boys if they want to go or not. But if he asks, he generally knows the answer.

"They get upset if I go without them," he laughed.

# Life Unpaved

WITH Nadia Marji



Why Are You So Surprised?



It dumbfounds me when I encounter a fellow angler (in this instance, they've always been men) who can't mask their sense of bewilderment when they see a photo of me with a decent fish. The look is typically paired with "YOU caught that fish?" or, "Did someone help you reel it in?" or my all-time favorite to date, "Did you just hold on to it for the picture?" Seems ignorant, right? That's because it is. I usually laugh it off, aware that I don't fit the bill of what I suppose these men think a typical angler should look like (and when you find out what that look is, please let me know), but each time this scenario unfolds, I grow more and more anxious to ask: Why are you SO surprised?

Is it such a rarity these days for a woman to tie a fisherman's knot, hold a rod, set a hook and reel in a fish? Have today's women really become so far removed from the outdoors that it's simply unfathomable a female should enjoy fishing more than carting kids to practices

and creating master grocery lists? I highly doubt it. I'm happy to do all of the above, but let's get real here. The answer is probably deeper and less cliché than that.

Does a woman holding a big fish she caught pose a perceived threat to some men's idea of masculinity, fearing potentially being out-performed?

Are cultural stereotypes so deeply engrained within some that they can't expand their minds to accept new ideas?

The truth is probably a blender bottle of this and more. But I think at the crux of these comments is this: We get uncomfortable when we don't know how to label someone. It's human nature to compartmentalize and categorize others to maintain some feeling of order.

In some people's simple thought processes, carpenters are good with wood, race car drivers are good at driving fast, and pretty women are good at looking pretty. But if you're "pretty" AND can enjoy the same activities as these men with the same level of success or better, well by golly, their mind is just blown.

Since when do people have to be chucked into just one category? Are the invisible labels on our foreheads so small that we only have room for a single description? I refuse to believe we're so limited on text space.

Make no mistake, I can create a lasting smokey eye like it's nobody's business, and I'm in a good mood for days following a mani-pedi, but I think it's silly these men find it such an oddity that a woman could wear two very different sets of shoes and flourish in both soles.

Now, I could easily crank out a few thousand words on the silly people I've encountered since my brief time with the magazine, but I'd much rather fill a notebook with the names of the wonderful

people I've met as a result of it, instead. I won't spend any more space hashing out the idiocies of these few select men, but what I will say is "thank you." Thank you to the men who have let me stay in my undefined, multiple-versions-of category, and to the men of the Outdoor Writers of Kansas (OWK).

For the past few years, I've enjoyed being an OWK member, and not just a "we'll let you tag along" kind of member, or "you're one of the guys now!" kind of member. I've been a member, and a female, and it's all good; no looks of bewilderment, no special or preferential treatment, just the great outdoors and good fun.

If you're a woman, kid, senior, experienced angler, unskilled hunter, obsessed with catching lizards, kind of a hermit, always photographing, or interested in building your collection of shed antlers, it doesn't matter - if you have a love of the outdoors and can write - consider joining OWK. Some of the most amazing hunting and fishing experiences I've had, and some of the nicest people I've met, have been a direct result of OWK. We meet twice a year, membership fees are cheap, and you won't have to allocate any more of your free time than you're comfortable with. For more info, visit [www.outdoorwritersofkansas.com](http://www.outdoorwritersofkansas.com).

If you're one of the anglers behind the flippant comments in the first paragraph, keep reading. Instead of asking me if I really caught that fish (for your sanity, the answer is, "every one of them - minus the few my grandpa helped me with at age 4"), why don't you ask yourself why you're so surprised? Once you have that conceptualized and care to share it with me, consider joining OWK, too. We'd love to welcome you to our group - no questions asked ;)

# Park View

WITH  
KATHY PRITCHETT

Ever want to visit a place just because the name is cool and you want to say, "I've been there?" I'd like to say I've been to Honaunau-Napoopoo, but it's not worth the cost and a 16-hour plane flight just to say that, though I'm sure I could find something to do in Hawaii for a few days. But you don't have to go that far or even take a plane to find interesting places to visit in Kansas.

Some locations' names give information. Rocky Ford sounds like a much better place to cross a river than Quicksand Bog. Others give history, like Threshing Machine Canyon. I sure wouldn't want to be near Hangman's Tree if I was the fellow who inspired naming Horsethief Canyon. What do you think you might see at Buzzard Bay? Or at Eagle View Cabin?

What the heck is a "cross timber?" Is it an angry tree? Actually, it's a group of very old trees, some of which have been around since the American Revolution, in a very beautiful region of Kansas with a park named after the region. It serves as the merger of eastern forests and plains. Here you will find diversity in plant and animal life, as well as a great place to kick

back and relax. And there is a trail called the Ancient Trees trail.

Would taking the Spiderleg Bridge Trail make you think you'd be stalked by creepy-crawlies? The truth is, on this short but interesting trail, you would get a lesson in little known history, dating to the early days of Kansas as a territory.

What famous general and President associated with Kansas lent his name to a state park with campground names like West Point, Abilene, Churchill and Blackjack? This park is in the rolling Flint Hills and contains an awesome equestrian campground and trails, as well as the only yurts in our system.

What kind of flora do you think you'd see in Sand Hills State Park, with trail names like Bluestem, Tallgrass, Cottonwood, Prairie, Woodland and Rolling Hills? And don't forget Dune Trail. And with flora like this, you can bet there will be plenty of fauna enjoying this diverse, unique habitat. Conveniently for humans, there is a campground and shower building. And corrals for equines.

Sailboat Cove and Hobie Beach campgrounds are aptly named for common activities practiced nearby, as is

## What's In A Name, Anyway?

Windsurfer Beach, in a different park. And I'm not sure my skills are up to a bike trail named Cactus Ridge, but I'll bet it's interesting, considering it is located in forested hills. What kind of animal do you think you might see near a campground named Gobbler's Knob? It leads to Turkey Trail.

How about the Great Spirit Springs, Waconda Springs Replica? What kind of history do you think you might learn there? Or El Cuartelejo and the Steele Home? Different park, but more interesting history. What kind of fish do you think anglers seek from campgrounds called Walleye Point? And what would you expect to see at a park named Mushroom Rock?

All of these are places to explore within Kansas state parks. Go to our website, [ksoutdoors.com](http://ksoutdoors.com), and see what you can find. All it will cost is some fuel, a bit of your time and the entrance fee to the park. You can visit every one of our 26 parks as often as you want for the price of an Annual Vehicle Permit (\$25.50, or \$13.75 for Kansas seniors) or a State Park Passport (\$15.50, purchased with your vehicle registration). What place with a cool name will you visit next?

## Assistant Secretary Keith Sexson Recognized By Pheasants Forever

During his 47-year career in wildlife management, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism assistant secretary Keith Sexson has been a partner and friend of Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever (PF/QF). Sexson and the organization's members share a vision of what wildlife habitat management in Kansas can be. PF/QF recently recognized Sexson for his work as a champion for lesser prairie chicken conservation efforts and his work establishing Interstate Working Groups for greater prairie chicken and sharp-tailed grouse. Sexson understands how important cooperation among wildlife agencies, conservation groups and the private sector is in conserving prairie grouse and he has been a conduit for the groups. He answered the call for action in order to keep these species healthy and available to public hunting, and he continues to support the efforts of PF/QF with innovative ideas and strong partner relationships.



Sexson, pictured far left, was recently one of four individuals recognized for contributions to the management of upland birds. Photo courtesy of PF/QF.

# Go With The Flow

with Mark VanScoyoc

As the weather continues to warm and we start migrating outside for various activities, and the furry, feathered and scaled residents are also stirring and making their presence known.

It's time to grab the kids, your significant other, or a friend and take the dog for a walk, go for a bike ride, patiently watch a bobber at your favorite lake, paddle a kayak, or sit under a tree and listen to a chickadee scold you for taking its spot. If you're short on time, that's okay – just step out to your front or back porch, or walk to a nearby park in the morning or at dusk. Whatever you do, make sure it includes the outdoors. I know, realistically, some of you will likely be texting, tweeting, and posting while you're outdoors. That is fine because your fancy smartphone or tablet probably has a decent high definition camera.

Why not snap a few pictures of something interesting you see while outside and share them?

Now, I'll be honest with you about my intentions for getting you outdoors and taking photos. In addition to coordinating the statewide stream survey and assessment program, I also oversee the administration of scientific collection permits. These permits are for the purpose of research, environmental assessment and education. At the end of the year, permit holders are required to submit an annual report detailing what they found, where they found it, and other descriptions about the area they are studying. The data they report is not published in scientific journals, but it is very useful in helping us achieve our goal of conservation and educating and informing you about the rich diversity of species in Kansas.

I'd like to take the idea further by asking for your help. While you're enjoying the Kansas outdoors, take a few moments to snap a photo of that bird visiting your feeder, that bug crawling along the trail you're hiking, or whatever critter you might be crossing paths with. If have a trail camera you only use four or

## Use Your Smartphone Smarter

five months out of the year during deer season, post it in front of your feeder or somewhere in your yard where you think animals travel. Next to the camera, put a small container of peanut butter or poke some holes in a tin of sardines for bait. You never know what may stop by.

Can't figure out what type of species you're looking at? Not a problem, photograph them anyway. There are several good online resources to identify animals you're unsure about. Here are a couple of suggestions:

[www.ksoutdoors.com](http://www.ksoutdoors.com) – webpage for The Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism

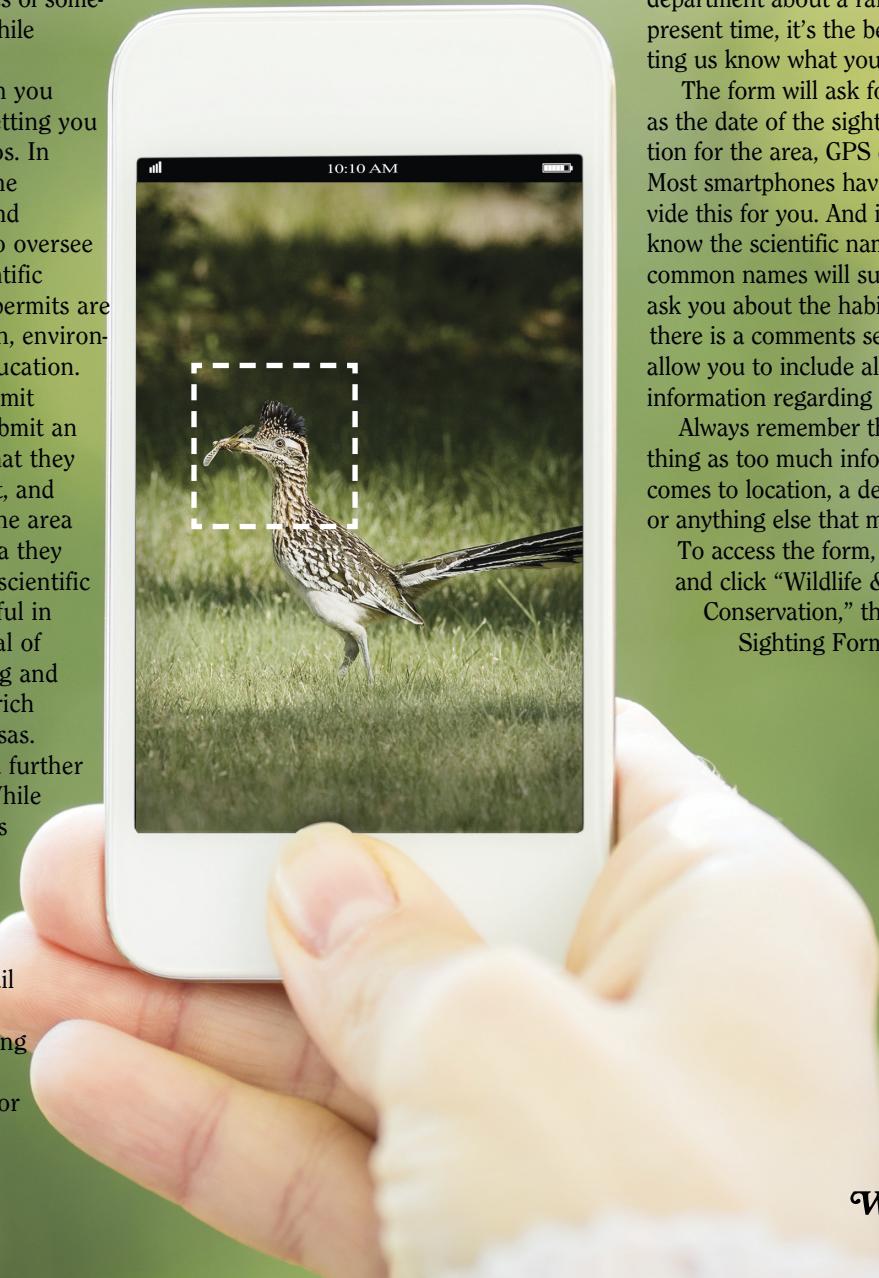
[www.gpnc.org/floraof.htm](http://www.gpnc.org/floraof.htm) - Great Plains Nature Center

If after a little bit of research you think you've snapped a photo of something rare, we encourage you to fill out our rare species sighting form. The purpose for the form is to inform the department about a rare sighting, and at present time, it's the best method for letting us know what you're seeing out there.

The form will ask for information such as the date of the sighting, legal description for the area, GPS coordinates, etc. Most smartphones have apps that will provide this for you. And it isn't necessary to know the scientific name of the animal, common names will suffice, but the form will ask you about the habitat observed, and there is a comments section that will allow you to include all relevant information regarding the sighting.

Always remember that there is no such thing as too much information when it comes to location, a description of the area, or anything else that might seem important.

To access the form, visit [ksoutdoors.com](http://ksoutdoors.com) and click "Wildlife & Nature," "Wildlife Conservation," then "Rare Species Sighting Form."





## DOUBLE, NO TROUBLE

In our house, we focus on spring turkey hunting in April and May, and along the way, we find teachable moments and opportunities to experiment.

During this past

youth season, my son, Hunter, was fortunate to take two toms on his first morning hunt. This was a great opportunity to teach him how to dress and butcher a turkey. I would clean one while he watched and cleaned the other. He was apprehensive at first, unsure of his cuts and whether he was following me correctly, but by the time he finished the first half, he was getting the hang of things. I kept emphasizing, that as long as the meat comes off the bone and into the pan, we can use it.

There are various methods of butchering a wild turkey, but I prefer to skin and debone the bird, focusing on thighs and breast meat. Drumsticks are hard to work with, but there is enough meat to use as a complement to a batch of chicken and noodles/dumplings.

I decided to try a new recipe since we had two birds, and I found one I could modify to utilize traditional Teasley go-to ingredients. The cooking method was a little different than I'm used to because I usually don't use cooking bags, but I decided to give them a try on this recipe.

### ITALIAN DRESSED CREOLE TURKEY BREAST

1 breast fillet (feeds 4)  
5 ounces Italian dressing  
2 Tbsp Tony Chachere's Creole Seasoning  
1 tsp lemon pepper  
1/4 C butter (melted)  
1/4 C olive oil



Place cleaned and trimmed breast meat and Italian dressing in a gallon Ziplock bag. Marinate in refrigerator 12-24 hours, turning at least once. Remove meat from bag and rub Creole and lemon pepper seasonings liberally onto both sides of meat. Place meat in cooking bag and add melted butter and olive oil and close. Place bag on a baking sheet where meat can lie flat to cook. Poke two holes in the bag to let it breathe (I used a digital thermometer meat probes to make my holes). Bake at 350° for 55 minutes or until meat temperature reaches 165°. Remove from oven, let rest and cool in unopened bag for at least 20 minutes before slicing to serve.

The fluid from the bag smelled so good I decided to make a roux gravy. While the turkey was resting, I whipped up a batch of Minute Rice and a favorite vegetable to complete the dish.

The next time you find yourself cleaning a wild turkey, consider trying this recipe for a delicious and different meal.



### When "Close" Isn't Good Enough

Even if you don't fish for trout, you've probably heard about "matching the hatch." At times, trout can feed so specifically on a particular insect, that unless your offering closely resembles what they're eating, your fly won't get a glance. I've also written about matching the hatch for bass, crappie and white bass; which means using a lure that somewhat resembles the color and size

of the prey fish they're feeding on. "Somewhat resembles" usually works, too.

However, though I subscribe to the "match the hatch" theory, there are times when I can get too complacent or, maybe, lazy. I love to cast a spinnerbait because it's versatile, almost snagless and it usually works. And a spinnerbait with silver blades and a white or chartreuse skirt resembles shad or minnows, giving off flash and vibration that can get reflex strikes from bass. With that in mind, I stubbornly kept casting a spinnerbait at the sandpit the other night, even though I had only one timid strike.

Finally, after hearing and watching large shad skip and flip along the pit's surface, I gave up and switched. I dug

around in my tackle box and found a 5-inch white and chartreuse swim bait. I think I had a strike on my second cast. The swimbait's paddle tail wobbled tantalizingly as I retrieved the bait slowly just under the surface. I caught four nice bass in the short time before dark and all hit the bait aggressively.

All I had done was matched the hatch. It was early spring, and the shad were fairly large, so the big swimbait matched better than small jigs or my spinner bait. I only wish I had made the switch sooner.

The episode was just a reminder that anglers who are aware of their surroundings and conditions, figure out what the fish are feeding on will always catch more fish.



# The Way I See It

WITH TODD WORKMAN

## Hunting With Herb

It was an ominous sound, like the roar of an EF 5 tornado, coming from the gravel road. It was November when I was eight years old and we were at Uncle Jerry's farm for a quail hunt. I wasn't old enough to carry a shotgun, so it was my job to retrieve Grandpa's quail. The adults were milling around, kicking pebbles, talking about where to hunt, when the approaching noise stopped their idle chatter.

"That ain't Franks car, is it?" inquired Grandpa. "Did somebody mention that we were gonna quail hunt today?" he said, disapprovingly.

"I might have mentioned it, but I didn't really invite him," admitted Dad.

An old red Ford Fairlane careened into the driveway, spouting smoke and shedding bits of rusted metal. Everybody moved upwind of the poisonous cloud as the old car continued belching smoke even after the ignition was turned off. Uncle Frank emerged through the haze.

"Bout ran over ya, Snap!" Frank shouted. Snap was his nickname for Dad.

Frank shouted everything due to hearing loss he suffered in WWII.

Frank popped the Fairlane's trunk and to my amazement, out shot a boy about my age and a greasy looking half German Shorthair, half Tasmanian devil-looking dog, both coughing like three-packs-a-day smokers.

"This here boy is Marvin," barked Frank. "He's my next door neighbor's kid and he wants to learn about hunting."

"Marvin, meet my nephew Todd," Frank said.

"Marvin, that's cool you get to ride in the trunk with the dog," I said.

"Dad, why can't I ride in our trunk?"

"Because I love your mother and I'd like to live another day," Dad replied.

"Frank, I see your dog is as foul tempered as ever," Grandpa noted.

"Well he hasn't eaten for a couple

of days," said Uncle Frank. "Ran out of carcasses."

Frank was a taxidermist, so Herb lived off the carcasses from his mounts.

"Why don't you feed him some real dog food?" Grandpa asked.

"Never bought a sack of food in my life!" Frank admitted proudly. "And who knows, maybe he'll get a quail or two today. Right Herb?"

Herb to let out a low, slobbery growl.

"Can Herb and Marvin ride in the back of your car?" Frank asked my dad. "I'm running a little low on gas."

As we started to load in the vehicles, I heard a sound like air hissing from a punctured tire.

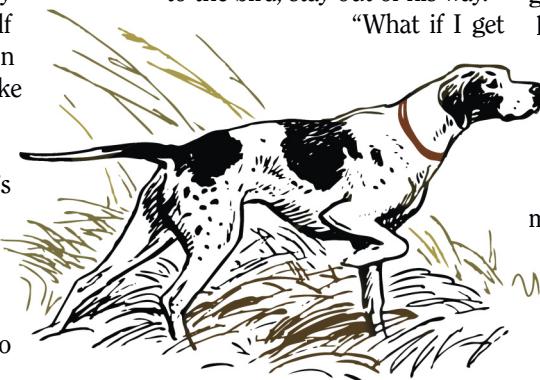
"Dad, we might have a tire going . . ." my sentence was cut short by a nasty stench.

"That's coming from ole Herb," laughed Frank. "He gets gassy when he's excited."

To my surprise, we made it to the first field still breathing.

Grandpa pulled me aside and whispered, "Listen Todd, that dog eats any bird it finds, so you gotta get my birds first. If you don't think you can beat Herb to the bird, stay out of his way."

"What if I get



the bird and Herb tries to take it from me?" I asked.

"Ever seen a crocodile attack a wildebeest on television?" Grandpa asked.

I had and it gave me nightmares.

"I might need danger pay on this

hunt," I cleverly added.

"How old are you, you little shyster?" Grandpa chuckled. "I'll buy you a chocolate shake if you get to my birds before that dog."

"Deal!" I snapped back.

Dad shot the first bird, making a beautiful crossing shot on a single. I couldn't see Herb, but I heard Marvin shouting for him to fetch it just before Dad yelled "No!" When I heard the sound of gulping and gagging, I knew it was too late.

"Herb ate my first bird," Dad said despondently.

"Got to be faster than that, Snap," cackled Frank.

The commotion caused a large covey to flush around us. Grandpa knocked two birds down, and I headed for them as fast as I could. I found the first bird, then heard Herb charging through the brush like an enraged grizzly bear toward the second. Like gunfighters in the Old West, we met in the middle of the hedgerow. I dove for the quail, but Herb outdrew me.

Fuming, I leapt at Herb, grabbing his bloated abdomen. I clamped down tight, giving him the Heimlich. Herb upchucked and gave me a backward glance of hate mixed with a little respect. I brought the birds to Grandpa.

"I don't want that second bird," Grandpa said hesitantly, as he peered closer. "It looks like a half decomposed mole. Why, that is a mole!" he said laughing as he dropped the rodent on the ground. Apparently, my Heimlich had dislodged one of Herb's earlier meals rather than the quail I was after.

By the time the sun set on our hunt, Herb had eaten his share of quail. Fortunately, later in the hunt, he found a deer spine to gnaw on, allowing me to retrieve the last few birds in peace.

As we arrived back at the farm, Frank loaded Herb and Marvin into the Fairlane's trunk and the car sputtered away.

Dad turned to me, "That was a heck of a hunt. I'll buy you two chocolate shakes for that."

"If it's all the same, Dad," I said, sheepishly. "Could I just ride home in the trunk with our dog?"

# Wings 'n Wildflowers

BY IRALEE BARNARD

In the heart of the Flint Hills lies Chase County State Lake where visitors can enjoy spectacular prairie views, hike, bike, launch a boat and fish, or just relax in a scenic spot. The lake and surrounding prairie, full of wildflowers, also draws visitors for other reasons - some on the wing, others with field guides in hand.

Every year in June, Chase County State Lake becomes part of a nationwide study involving butterflies. In Chase County, the event is called the Marvin Schwilling Annual Butterfly Count and is a part of the North American Butterfly Association's efforts to collect information about these beautiful insects.

The 2016 Chase County Butterfly Count will take place June 18. There's no experience necessary to participate, and it's free and open to the public.

This family-friendly activity not only teaches participants about butterflies, but native wildflowers, too. Here are some things you could learn:

- Adult butterflies drink nectar from flowers through their tongues, which function much like straws.

- Often, caterpillar species will eat only a small group of related plant species. For example, pearl crescent caterpillars will eat species of asters. Although they eat plants, very few butterfly caterpillars are agricultural pests.

- Native milkweeds are important butterfly nectar plants, with several varieties growing in the hills surrounding Chase County State Lake.

- Blooming in June, butterfly milkweed is an impressive sight, especially when covered with butterflies. The profusion of wildflowers at Chase County State Lake draws numerous species of

butterflies. Beebalm, purple prairie-clover, and New Jersey tea are other native plants found blooming in June and attractive to butterflies.

Apart from surveying, participants can enjoy a variety of activities relating to wildflowers and butterflies from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the butterfly count headquarters, as well as a wildflower walk with the Kansas Native Plant Society.

For those who choose to participate in the survey, experienced guides will lead small groups to various locations within a 15-mile radius of Strong City, providing opportunities to visit some out-of-the-way and private prairies that outdoor enthusiasts may not have access to otherwise.

To learn more about this count, and to view a schedule of events, contact Paula Matile with The Nature Conservancy at [pmatile@tnc.org](mailto:pmatile@tnc.org).





## Those BIG White Birds

by Dan Witt

One of the true blessings of living close to Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area and Quivira National Wildlife Refuge is the ability to quickly respond to a report of an unusual bird sighting. I was about to start mowing my grass in Hoisington when my cell phone (I love that "quack" ringtone) put a halt to the action. One of my friends who doesn't spend much time in the marsh called to ask me "What are those big white birds circling over Highway 4 east of Hoisington?"

I had several ideas since we recently had whooping cranes, great egrets, cattle egrets, and snowy egrets flying around the area, but I asked him for a better description, nonetheless. He responded that I always ask him questions that he can't answer, go figure.

"Big and white" and "a long bill" was all he could provide, so I told him I would get my camera and bird book and come pick him up. It doesn't take much for me to abandon the lawn-mowing chore.

After picking up my friend, we drove east on Highway 4 to Redwing and turned south to the Bottoms. I saw his birds circling high in the sky - big, beautiful birds with black wing tips and a long bill - about 300 in number, not making a sound. It was magnificent. I informed him that what we were looking at were American pelicans.

Driving a little farther into the marsh, we found several large groups sitting in the water. One group in particular was very active, forming a line about 50 yards off shore, smacking the water with their bills and wings and chasing shad and carp into shallow water where they ambushed and ate them. American pelicans are very buoyant, and thus, are surface feeders, unlike their counterpart, the brown pelicans, who dive for their food. The feeding frenzy made for some good pictures.

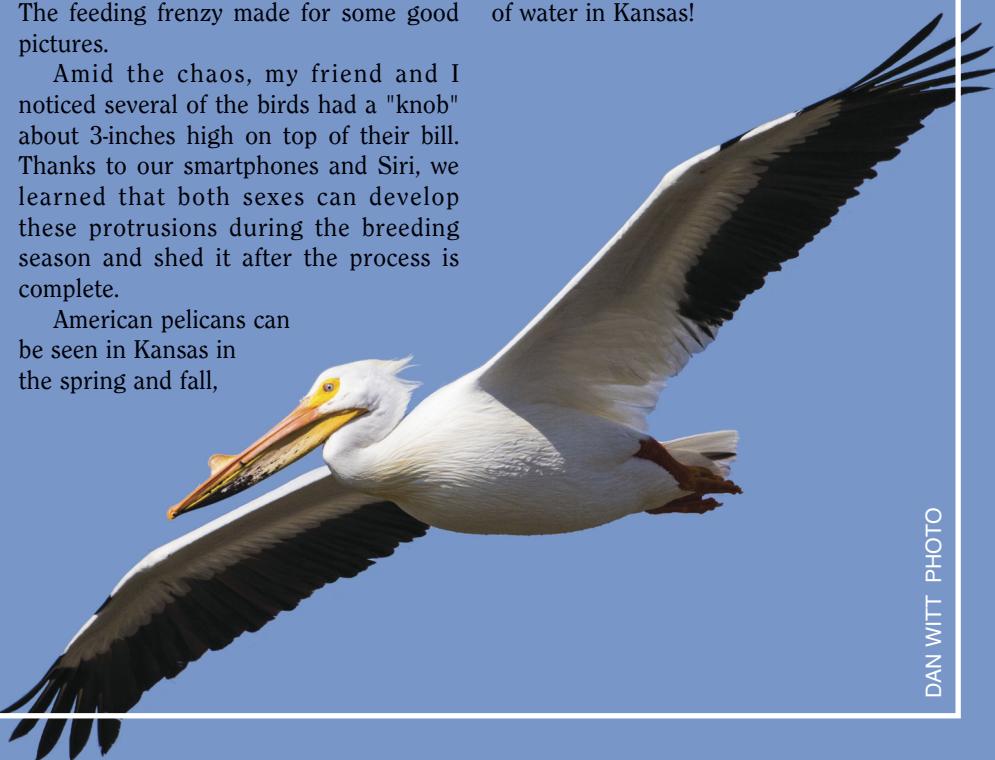
Amid the chaos, my friend and I noticed several of the birds had a "knob" about 3-inches high on top of their bill. Thanks to our smartphones and Siri, we learned that both sexes can develop these protrusions during the breeding season and shed it after the process is complete.

American pelicans can be seen in Kansas in the spring and fall,

especially at the Bottoms, while traveling from Mexico to Canada. Lucky for us, the timing was just right.

We spent a very happy two hours in the Bottoms watching the action. When these birds form long lines, gliding about a foot or two above the water's smooth surface in the slanted light of dawn or dusk, it's nothing short of elegant.

What a great reminder of our bounty and treasures that result from a little bit of water in Kansas!



DAN WITT PHOTO

## Thompson Named Wetland Manager of the Year

Kirk Thompson, Public Lands manager at Benedictine Bottoms Wildlife Area, was recently named Kansas Ducks Unlimited's Wetland Manager of the Year, and for those who know Thompson, it comes as little surprise.

A Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism employee of 34 years, Thompson knows what it means to be

dedicated to something. His work with the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers (USACE) on the Missouri River Mitigation properties, and his efforts to repair seepage issues at the 56 manageable wetland areas he oversees at the Benedictine Bottoms Wildlife area, are proof of that.



Kirk Thompson, left, receives his award from Region 2 Public Lands Supervisor, Dustin Mengarelli.



# Show us what makes YOU wild about Kansas!

Photo submissions for the 4th annual "Wild About Kansas" photo contest are being accepted now through Nov. 4, and new this year, categories have been expanded to include "Other Species" and "Hunting and Fishing."

Divided into five categories, participants can submit photos related to:

- Wildlife** (game and nongame animals, primarily mammals, migratory birds, furbearers, etc.)
- Outdoor Recreation** (people participating in recreational activities outdoors, not hunting or fishing)
- Landscapes** (scenery; wildlife may be present, but should not be the sole focus of the image.)
- Other Species** (insects, reptiles, and amphibians)
- Hunting and Fishing** (hunters and anglers; set-up shots following a hunting or fishing trip. Photos with dead game will be accepted, however, "action" shots, or photos taken during the activity will be given preference.)

## RULES

Photographers can submit up to three photos total. Photos must be taken within the state of Kansas and must be the entrant's original work. The contest is open to both residents and non-residents of Kansas, and there is no age limit.

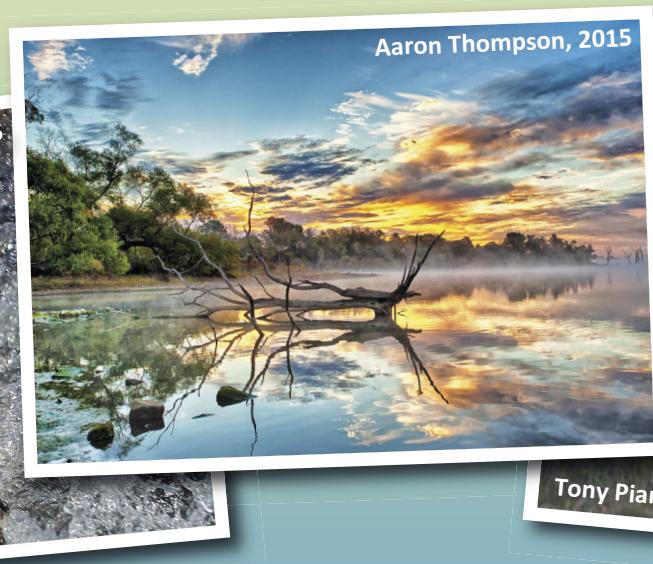
## JUDGING

Each photo will be judged on creativity, composition, subject matter, lighting, and the overall sharpness. Photographs from participants under the age of 18 will be placed in a youth division; all others will compete in the adult division. Winning entries will be featured in the 2017 January/February photo issue of *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine.

## DEADLINE

Entries must be received no later than **5 p.m. on Nov. 4, 2016**. Photo format should be JPEG or TIFF and file size should be not less than 1mb and not more than 5mb.

For more information, visit [ksoutdoors.com](http://ksoutdoors.com) and click "Services," "Publications," "Magazine," then "Wild About Kansas."



# Only A Mother Could



essay and photos by Larry Holman,  
*Charule*

# Love





My first photo of the eggs was taken on April 27, and I had almost given up on the eggs hatching. However, on June 7, one chick broke free and the other one was just starting to chip away. Needless to say, I was hooked! I was quite shocked to see the chicks were pure

**M**y experience with turkey vultures was limited to watching them ride thermals with the greatest of ease. So when I found two turkey vulture eggs in my barn last spring, I thought it would be a fun experience to watch them.



white except for their bills. At that point, I really started to get into taking their pictures.

Before long, I wanted photos of mama feeding them, so I rigged a trail camera and pointed it at the nest. I soon found out that a 4GB SD card would hold about 8,000 photos! Every little movement triggered a new photo. Another surprise was that mama never stayed at the nest. She fed them and then promptly left. Not once did I capture any other



critter around the nest site, though.

Baby vultures won't win any beauty pageants, and they are not very good housekeepers, either! But I'm sure in mama's eye they were picture perfect. When they were about half-grown, I put a second trail cam in the barn from a different angle. Then I went through about 8,000 photos every week! About

• • •





then, the chicks started to develop personalities. When I took photos, the smaller of the two birds became very defensive, while the larger one would retreat to the corner. However, other than hissing at me, they were never aggressive. I think they became accustomed to me.

The last photos were taken in mid-August when I thought they were about ready to leave the nest. The adult would hang around close as if to help coax them out, and sure enough, the next day they were gone. They stayed in the vicinity for a while and I managed to get a few photos of them in flight. You could always tell the chicks because they still had some white down feathers around their neck.

It was an interesting experience, but not one I wish to repeat. It took a long time for the odor to finally go away! But they are one of God's creatures and they serve a purpose in nature. I refer to them as the "Clean-up Crew." — Larry Holman



# PRAIRIE CHICKEN SWAP

## Helping our neighbor

by Andra Bryan Stefanoni  
contributing writer, Pittsburg



Matt Hill remembers well the time two male greater prairie chickens spent the night in his garage.

"I didn't sleep at all that night," he said. "It was worse than a new baby."

He barricaded the cat door and rose every hour or so to check on them. Just hours before, they had been residents of the Smoky Hills region of Kansas, where life is good and greater prairie chickens are plentiful.

Then, they crossed the Missouri State Line, and they became an endangered species.

## DISAPPEARING

There are three subspecies of greater prairie chickens and each have met different fates. The heath hen, common in colonial times along the east coast, became extinct in 1932. The now-endangered Attwater's prairie hen is rare and can be found only in parts of southeast Texas. As for the greater prairie chicken, in Missouri it once numbered in the hundreds of thousands, but has disappeared from all but a few of the tiny parcels that remain of the state's once vast prairies. Fortunately, there are healthy populations of greater prairie chickens in Kansas, Nebraska and South Dakota.

Hill, a wildlife biologist for the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) based out of El Dorado Springs, Missouri, was part of a team that conducted a translocation project from 2008 to 2012. Their goal: To increase populations of the grassland birds in the Show Me State.

"They had just about disappeared here," Hill said.

Their primary habitat — native grassland — was once plentiful in Missouri, but has

sions kill as much as 30 percent of the prairie chicken population each year.

Prairie chickens are sensitive to trees and won't use acreage with timber. And predators like coyotes, opossums, raptors, and snakes are a checkmark against them.

Near Lockwood, Missouri, in Dade County, biologists observed two leks two years ago. Now, only a single male remains in that area.

At the Golden Prairie near Golden City, Missouri, conservationist Lowell Pugh said he thinks he heard a bird or two in 2009, but none since. In 1970, there had been 45 there. In the early 2000s, he counted about 30. Each year that followed, there were fewer.

"They're all gone," Pugh said.

In neighboring Kansas, though, they're still plentiful

been converted to housing developments, fescue pastures, row crops and other uses. Poor weather during nesting season in the past decade hasn't helped, and neither have fences; colli-





Today, the Wah'Kon-Tah Prairie, a former feedlot that has been restored to native prairie, spreads across 3,000 acres in St. Clair and Cedar counties, is home to no more than 10 prairie chickens.

enough to be hunted, as they are in Nebraska and South Dakota.

Today, the Wah'Kon-Tah Prairie, a former feedlot that has been restored to native prairie, spreads across 3,000 acres in St. Clair and Cedar counties, is home to no more than 10 prairie chickens. That number may seem small, but it's 10 percent of the state's total population.

The 10 are the remaining offspring of the 435 prairie chickens that Hill and his fellow biologists translocated from the rolling Kansas grasslands near Salina. For five years, they used walk-in traps and drop nets to capture wild birds in Kansas. Veterinarians checked the birds before they crossed the state lines, as per state requirement. Of the original group, Hill and his colleagues, who have done several helicopter surveys, know the birds traveled some distance to investigate suitable prairie and leks.

"We found a male the second year just over the Kansas state

line from Lamar, Missouri," Hill recalled. "Three weeks later, he was here again, at the Wah'Kon-Tah."

## LAST GASP

Hill has high hopes for the population at The Wah'Kon-Tah.

"It's really the last gasp of life," he said.

Because prairie chickens enjoy short grasses for feeding and taller grasses for roosting at night, the Wah'Kon-Tah seems ideal. Jointly owned by The

Nature Conservancy of Missouri and MDC, it's also close to native prairie chickens at Taberville Prairie. Hill and other biologists have observed prairie chickens using three leks here, and know that some courting males and females were hatched and reared here — an encouraging sign. They use radio transmitters in collars and leg bands to track their movement and populations.

Mid-March through mid-April, the males return like clockwork come rain, wind, or, in some occasions, snow.



The booming dance is so dependable at the Wah'Kon-Tah that the MDC offers viewing opportunities each spring to those who wish to see it.



"They can't risk losing their spot," Hill said.

Hens, meanwhile, will visit multiple leks, scoping out the choices in a partner. By the first week of May, the hens will begin laying one egg every day or two until they have a clutch of 8 to 10. They will incubate them for 23 days, rarely moving off of them until they hatch in June.

The booming dance is so dependable at Wah'Kon-Tah that the MDC offers viewing opportunities each spring to those who wish to see it. One viewing group this spring was an assemblage of people all interested in the translocation program, the chickens' plight, and their survival: master naturalist Gene Long, of Joplin, Missouri, took his teenage son; a fourth generation local landowner, Jered Burch, of nearby Walker, Missouri, took his son and a 4-H club.

Joseph Roy, a field biologist at Peck Ranch in southcentral Missouri, and his colleagues drove eight hours round-trip to see the ritual.

Long-term stability of the program hinges on continuing intensive grassland management and adding viable nesting and brood-rearing cover on nearby private lands — something that still is in sharp contrast when compared to what's available in Kansas.

"It was worth it," he said.

It's important, Hill noted, for birdwatchers, naturalists, private landowners, and others interested in conservation to have such an opportunity.

"These birds need strong conservation support," Hill said. "It's great to see this kind of interest."

## SUCCESS STORIES

The MDC reported that in 2010, one of the males translocated from Kansas flew to the Taberville Prairie, and within days became the dominant male on the established lek of native birds.

In 2011, a hen flew to Walker, about 10 miles west of the Wah'Kon-Tah, and successfully hatched a brood on private land. She remained there until 2012, when she returned to the Wah'Kon-Tah and hatched another successful brood.

The success of nests overall from 2010-2012 was higher than expected among native greater prairie chickens, the MDC reported. In summary, the translocation project worked in

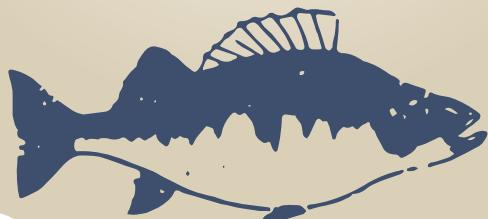
reestablishing a functional greater prairie chicken population at the Wah'Kon-Tah, said Max Alleger, grassland bird coordinator for the MDC.

And biologists now have a solid DNA bank built from feathers, which should allow them to track lineage. Studying that, plus movement and behaviors, will shed more light on what prairie chickens need to have in order to thrive.

"But the long-term stability of the program hinges on continuing intensive grassland management and adding viable nesting and brood-rearing cover on nearby private lands — something that still is in sharp contrast when compared to what's available in Kansas. It also means engaging consumers, farmers, ranchers, and conservationists," Alleger said.

"Our ability to grapple with issues like these will determine whether our grandchildren, and theirs, will see prairie chickens in Missouri." 

# Finding a Way FOR Fish, Rivers, AND People ON THE GREAT PLAINS



BY

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**The Great Plains** is home to an exceptional group of fish species known as "pelagic-spawners." Pelagic spawners release semi-buoyant eggs into the water column where they float, become fertilized, and drift downstream over several days. As they travel in the current, the eggs develop and eventually hatch. The tiny fish emerge, marking the next stage in what can only be called a perilous journey. This reproductive strategy is rather unique as far as freshwater fish are concerned. Most pelagic-spawning species live in the world's oceans. This notable group of fishes have evolved this remarkable strategy in order to cope with the harsh environment they experience within the rivers of the Great Plains. Historically, prior to the construction of dams and water extraction for agricultural irrigation, the rivers of the Great Plains were marked by periods of intermittency, or periods of little to no rain that result in rivers drying up to scattered and isolated pools, followed by sporadic high-flow events. Adult pelagic spawners wait out these periods of low flow within isolated pools of water in the stream bed. At times, the numbers of fish within these pools can reach into the hundreds; in an area sometimes no bigger than a kiddie pool. Once rain falls, the sudden increase in water flow cues the fish to begin their course upstream to spawn. These tiny, extraordinary fish use the swift current to carry their fertilized eggs the distance necessary for them to hatch and survive into free-swimming youngsters.

Fish that spawn this way have been faced with great challenges throughout recent history. The 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s marked the height of dam building across the United States. Kansas is ranked second on a nationwide list of states containing the most

lowhead dams, outnumbered only by Texas. Most of these dams are less than 6 feet high and are the result of old milling operations. When these mills ceased to operate, the dams were simply abandoned in the river. While some larger dams, like those used for water storage, provide many benefits to society such as drinking water, flood control, and recreation, the negative effects these structures can have on native fish are hard to ignore.

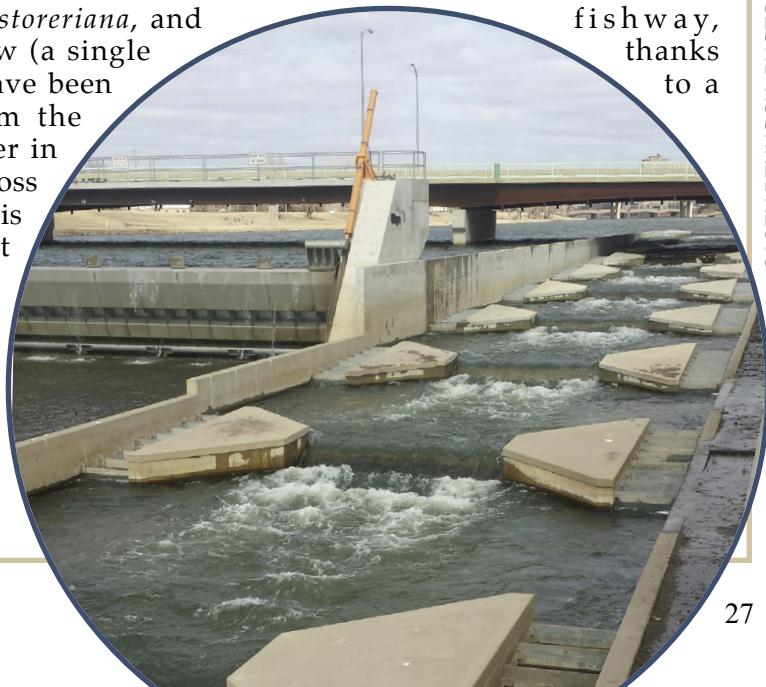
Dams are a key source of habitat loss and destruction for many obligate stream fish, or fish that require the habitats created by flowing water. They block upstream movement of adult and juvenile fish, and change the timing, volume, and temperature of downstream flows. Kansas, not unlike other states across the Great Plains, has seen a troubling decrease in the number and distribution of pelagic spawning fish. One such species, the federally threatened Arkansas River shiner, *Notropis girardi*, has not been seen in Kansas since the 1980s. Other species like the aptly named state threatened plains minnow, *Hybognathus placitus*, and the state endangered peppered chub, *Macrhybopsis tetraneura*, have experienced massive restrictions throughout their entire known range. In recent years, only the state endangered silver chub, *Macrhybopsis storriiana*, and plains minnow (a single individual) have been collected from the Arkansas River in Kansas. This loss of fish species is only a snapshot of what is taking place across the Great Plains, and throughout the world, in terms of biodiversity loss.

Luckily, biologists have taken note of this threatening trend and have developed a solution that will reduce the negative effects of dams. One such solution that is gaining in popularity is the installation of fishways. Fishways are structures built on, alongside, or around dams to allow fish to move upstream. To date, most fishways have been built upon high gradient, or steep, rocky streams inhabited by larger, longer-traveling species like salmon and trout. In 2012, construction of a unique fishway alongside the Lincoln Street Dam on the Arkansas River in Wichita was completed. Unlike other fishways, this structure was built for the passage of small-bodied (generally 1 to 4 inches) minnows – specifically the Arkansas River shiner, peppered chub, plains minnow, and silver chub. Adding to its uniqueness, it is the first of its kind built in the Great Plains on a low gradient, gently sloping, sand-bed river.

In 2015, researchers at Kansas State University began an assessment of the fishway, thanks to a



RICHARD SCHULTHEIS PHOTO



CASEY PENNOCK PHOTO

state wildlife grant. The goal of the project has been to determine what species are using the fishway, and how well they are able to travel upstream. Although the study will continue into 2016, in just the first year 27 species were documented using the fishway, and one species that had earlier disappeared from upstream of the dam had recolonized that area.

While the Lincoln Street Dam fishway provides native fish with access to an additional 7 miles of river, another barrier still exists upstream with the 21st Street Dam in Wichita. Removing that barrier would restore connectivity to more than an additional 100 miles of waterways for these fish. With continued monitoring and data analysis, biologists hope this fishway will lead the way in prioritizing future fishway projects, reverse the downward trend of the number and quantity of wildlife species present, and lessen the effects dams have on aquatic systems throughout the Great Plains area and beyond.

## Protecting Fish Using the Fishway

To protect the fish using the fishway, Kansas regulation prohibits fishing and bait collecting in the fishway. While the fish passage was intended for the aforementioned threatened and endangered species, other native fish benefit from the passage, as well. In the spring, longnose gar, *Lepisosteus osseus*, can be seen sur-

An adult silver chub (endangered in Kansas) collected from the Arkansas River in Wichita, just downstream of the dam and fishway. Ryan Waters photo.



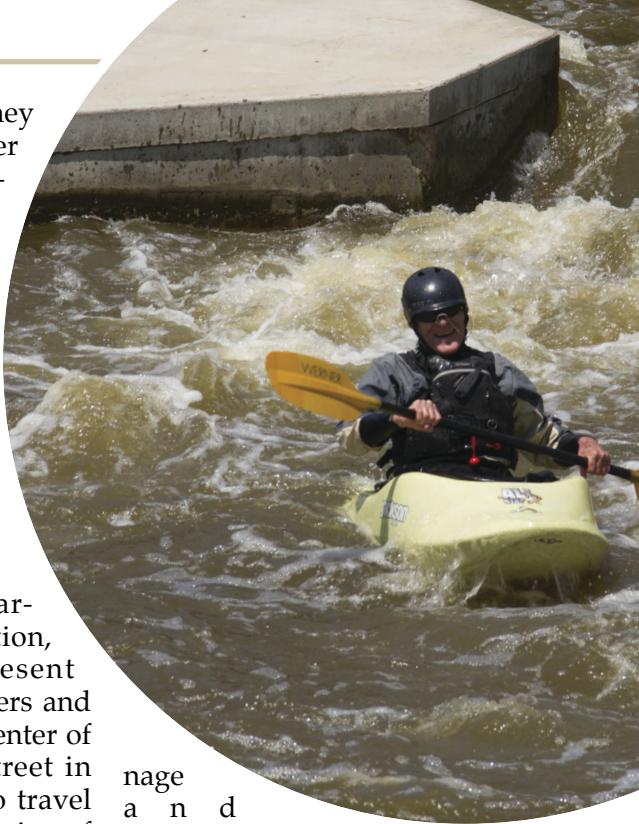
facing in the fishway as they travel upstream, and larger species such as river carp-sucker, *Carpoides carpio*, flathead catfish, *Pylodictis olivaris*, freshwater drum *Aplodinotus grunniens*, and several species of sunfish have also been documented in the fishway.

## Safe Passage for Boaters

Apart from creating barriers to native fish migration, lowhead dams also present potential dangers to paddlers and boaters. A passage in the center of the fishway at Lincoln Street in Wichita allows kayakers to travel downstream through a series of weirs, structures designed to alter the water flow. For novice or less-adventurous paddlers, an exit above and an entrance below the dam allow paddlers from upstream to portage around the fishway safely.

## Success through Partnerships

The fishway is certainly a success story for supporting both recreation and conservation through partnerships. The City of Wichita collaborated with the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to model and design the fish passage. Additionally, KDWPT dedicated \$150,000 to the project and worked with the city to gain another \$500,000 from a federal grant administered through the U.S. Coast Guard. The City of Wichita used this opportunity to connect additional walking paths to the downtown area, and add interpretive sign-



nage  
a n d  
landscaping.

The improvements to the area have attracted families and encouraged outdoor exercise along the paths, where people stop to watch the birds and other wildlife drawn to the area. Beyond funding and initial improvements, these partners continue to work together on research of the fishway, other conservation projects, and recreational activities on the river.

## Getting Involved

There are several ways Kansans can help our local fish and rivers. Consider exploring options with one of the following organizations:

KDWPT builds programs, supports research, and works with communities and landowners for public access to the river with revenue from the sale of fishing licenses and boating registrations.

The Arkansas River Coalition ([www.arkrivercoalition.org](http://www.arkrivercoalition.org)) works to protect, restore and improve the entire Arkansas River watershed. With monthly float trips on the Arkansas River, the coalition engages support for the



[TOP LEFT] Kayakers enjoy the challenge of maneuvering through the boat passage. [ABOVE] The Lincoln Street Fishway was completed in 2012. It is located on the east side of the river at Lincoln Street Dam in Wichita, Kansas. Jessica Mounts photos.

river through its membership, supporting public access to the river, and improving wildlife habitat.

Kansas Alliance for Wetlands and Streams ([www.kaws.org](http://www.kaws.org)) collaborates with local people, conservation and community organizations, agencies, and local governments to promote conservation of streams, wetlands, riparian areas, prairies, watersheds, and wildlife – the natural heritage and resources – of Kansas.

Friends of the Kaw

([www.kansasriver.org](http://www.kansasriver.org)) serves the Kansas River, known locally as the Kaw. This friends group advocates for water quality and wildlife habitat provided by the Kansas River. Water education, recreational events, and support for public access to the river are just a few of the ways members can get involved.

World Fish Migration Day is May 21, 2016. For more information on this global-local event creating awareness on the importance of open rivers and migratory fish, visit [www.worldfishmigrationday.com](http://www.worldfishmigrationday.com)



KDWPT stream biologists, Jeff Conley and Ryan Waters, install an antenna used to monitor fish movement in the fishway with the help of Peter Mackinnon, a post graduate researcher at Utah State University and technical expert in fish tagging. Jessica Mounts photo.

birds~flowers~surveys~roots~caterpillars~seeds~micro



# LESSONS OF THE LAND

BY VICKY HILGERS, MULVANE MIDDLE SCHOOL, MULVANE  
KRISTA DAHLINGER, KANSAS NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY, MULVANE

## PART I: KRISTA'S "AHA" MOMENT

Nearly 20 years ago, I discovered that wildflowers – the native plants found in prairies, roadsides and parks – were not the same as the cultivated, “improved” species of plants for sale at hardware stores and garden centers. Though I enjoyed the bright colors and flower shapes of these packaged plants, I was drawn to the challenge of gardening with native plants. After some online research, I was delighted to discover there was a thriving community of others who were interested in native plants, as well – members of the Kansas Native Plant Society (KNPS). I joined as a member in 2002 and started attending the organization’s wildflower walks, forays, strolls, and the Annual Wildflower Weekend event held throughout the state. I was hooked by the generosity and camaraderie among fellow members. As someone who enjoys time in the great outdoors, walking and talking in undisturbed natural settings with people who have a great deal of knowledge about native plants – and the insects, birds and animals that rely on these places as a home – has provided me with many days of time well spent.

While on a road trip through Newton years ago, I happened to pass by the Kauffman Museum and was stunned by the sight of the reconstructed prairie garden created by Dwight Platt in the 1980s. The grasses and forbs appeared as a riot of prairie vegetation; a fantasy painting of flower color and leaf shape and line of grass stem, all come to life on the museum grounds. That first view of a garden composed of native plants made a lasting impression on me.

Fast forward to 2014 when a KNPS connection suggested I make contact with a sixth grade science teacher in my hometown of Mulvane. I had Vicky Hilger’s email address written on a scrap of paper for months before emailing her to ask if she and her class were interested in native plants, thinking that on behalf of KNPS, I might pass along some identifi-

cation guides. After finally initiating contact, I wished I hadn’t waited so long. In Hilger, I quickly discovered a fellow friend of nature and was thrilled by her enthusiasm for bringing science and nature to her students. (And as luck would have it, she, too, had seen Dwight Platt’s prairie garden and was equally awed by the experience).

A visit to Hilger’s classroom is like entering a mini nature center. Upon seeing it for myself, I knew had to get Vicky in contact with some of the other great like-minded nature folks I had come into contact with over the years – like Brad Guhr of the Dyck Arboretum, Chip Taylor of Monarch Watch, Nat Barton with Prairie Pride Plants and the many Pheasants Forever members that host programs designed to engage young people with nature. I passed all their contact information on to Hilger and she told me about her idea to create a native plant garden in the courtyard at her school. And that’s just what she did.

## PART II: VICKY'S GAME PLAN

My whole idea with the native area was to connect students with the natural world around them, while building skills that could be used in the class curriculum. Kids have a natural curiosity and enthusiasm, so my job is to facilitate that. Plus, the more kids can invest themselves in something, the greater their connection.

Before I accepted my job as a 6th grade science teacher in Mulvane, I went to check out the school – mostly to see the student/teacher dynamics – but also to see the classroom. As I walked in, I saw that windows took up most of one wall. They looked out onto a large lawn, rimmed by a few trees. There was nothing else out there and that called to me. I envisioned the native gardens at Kauffman Museum and then flashed back to the overgrown lawn. All those windows, all those kids, and all the possibilities.

# *birds~flowers~surveys~roots~caterpillars~seeds~micro*



My decision had been made – I would take the job. But what of the bare lawn? I was inexperienced with planning large gardens, and ignorant of most native prairie plants, but there's one thing I did know: when you're passionate about learning and doing something positive, people who are capable and willing to help usually show up.

I started with Dr. Thomas Eddy's summer classes on native prairie plants through Emporia State University. The class also led to a contact with the Kansas Native Plant Society, Krista Dahlinger, who happened to live in Mulvane. She volunteered to jump on board with me and led the way in planning, seed collection and plant donation. She also provided vital information and a wealth of necessary contacts. Dahlinger introduced me to the Wichita Chapter of Pheasants Forever who agreed to fund our first year, as well as a volunteer work-day to put in the garden foundation.

Through Dahlinger, my education continued with Earthpartnership for Schools at Dyck Arboretum in Hesston. There, Guhr instructed teachers in planning

Students take butterfly larvae and let them pupate in the classroom before releasing them as adults.

a garden and using it with their classes, providing detailed lesson plans and activities.

Next, came Monarch Watch, out of Lawrence. They donated common milkweed for a second garden for pollinators at the school. And of course, support in many ways came from Mulvane's school administrators, teachers and staff, as well as community members.

We had the National Junior Honor Society students help build the garden foundation with Pheasants Forever, and we researched native flowers and grasses in class, making grids to show when each species blooms, what color they'll be and how tall they typically grow. With this information, students made educated decisions as to where each species should be planted, and the garden was on its way.

We bought plants through Dyck Arboretum, and Guhr delivered them, and led our "Planting Day." Students dug holes and put in each plant, while others hung bird feeders and put in a water feature to encourage wildlife.

The first spring, classes recorded data on which new plants survived the winter, figuring out the percentages of success for each species, and reported back to Guhr.

Monitoring plants for pollinators laying eggs and hatching larvae also began. Once monarch and swallowtail larvae were discovered, we began collecting some, letting them pupate in the classroom, and then releasing the adults back into our gardens when they emerged.

Woodhouse toads also made an appearance, laying long lines of eggs in the pond, which we collected and raised to tadpoles in our aquarium. And these are just a few of the things the outdoor sanctuary provides.

Each year, students collect seeds in the fall and put them in moist, cold storage during winter. They plant them and then meticulously record the germination rate in spring. The plants that succeed make their way to the school garden, filling in empty spaces and expanding new areas.

Long-term projects exist with feeders that are filled in the fall to determine ruby throated hummingbird numbers and migration dates. The data is then logged online with Audubon at Home so we can contribute to the National Audubon Society's database.

An annual winter bird survey also allows us to practice identifying native bird species, as well as collect field data over an extended period of time.

scopes~toads~dirt~plants~sun~butterflies~eggs~blooms



Mulvane Middle School students, with the help of a passionate teacher and many supportive organizations, have transformed a dull grassy area at their school into a garden paradise pictured above.

When there are lulls, flowers – and usually a tiny insect or two – are brought in and small parts are examined under a dissecting microscope.

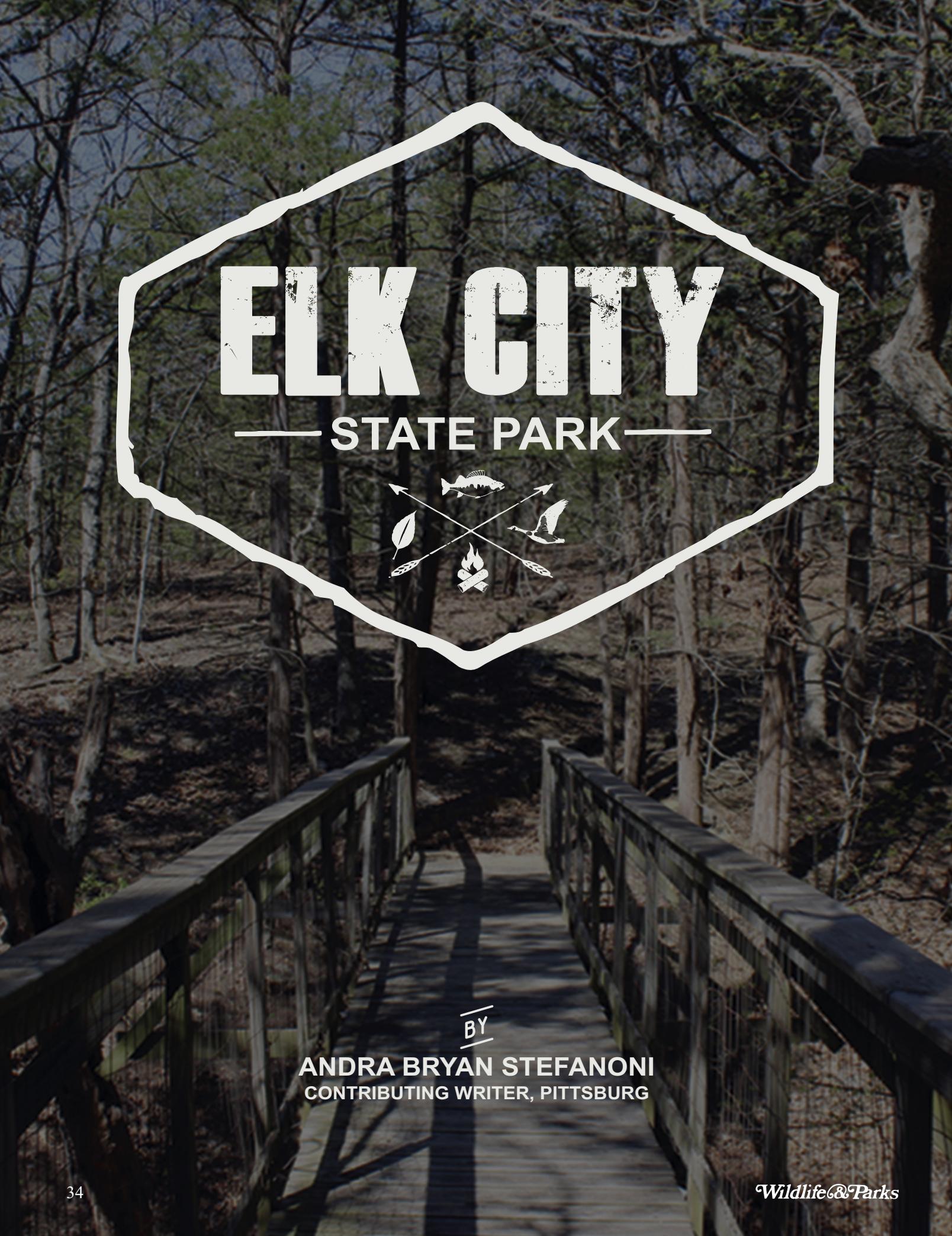
These few select projects of ours are proof that there is always something to learn from the nature. Different ideas for using our garden are always coming up, and we incorporate new ones each year. Our small native gardens will never rival those at Kauffmann, but that's okay because they are more than enough to enrich our growth.

Learning to collect and record data – to measure and count and convert those numbers into ratios and percentages – is an important part of science. To be able to turn data into graphs and charts, which actually show meaningful patterns is necessary for logical thought. Developing journaling and writing skills, as well as predicting and drawing conclusions, is key to becoming successful students and critical thinkers. I am so happy with the gardens for helping our students to do those things. But I love the gar-

dens for another reason, too.

Almost every day I get to listen to what species of birds were in someone's backyard, and how tall the native grass is in the ditch by their house. Students ask permission to bring in their phone between classes to show me pictures of the caterpillar on their grandmother's purple cone flowers and the mourning dove that has been sitting on their fence in the mornings. Pressed flowers from fields come to me in young hands; insects come in jars with carefully poked holes; dead butterflies are peeled from the front of parents' cars and brought in for identification. The kids are connected with their natural world around them, and that connection fuels their interest to learn more, experience more, and be more.

Be sure to visit [ksoutdoors.com](http://ksoutdoors.com) and [ksnps.org](http://ksnps.org) to look for places, events and information you can use to get outdoors and into a nature experience. 



# ELK CITY

— STATE PARK —



BY

**ANDRA BRYAN STEFANOJI**  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER, PITTSBURG

*"OF ALL THAT I LOVE TO DO OUTDOORS, I'M HAPPIEST WHEN HIKING. THERE'S A BALANCE I ENJOY OF BEING ON A PATH, BUT NOT KNOWING WHAT TO EXPECT."*

I'm fond of the Ozarks, where limestone bluffs and forested creek crossings provide eye candy and mountainous vistas provide photo opportunities. But my goal this year is to see more of Kansas. So when a day presented itself to head to a trail, I set my sights on Elk City State Park near Independence in Montgomery County. My inspiration: The Hiking Guide to Kansas by Catherine Hauber and John Young, which uses the words "Elk City State Park" in the same sentence as words like "sheer rock walls," "rock canopies," "bluffs overlooking the lake," "giant boulders," and a "rock hollow carved by a small waterfall."

I'm a Kansas native. I've lived here 46 years. So I couldn't believe something so, well, unKansas-like, existed in my corner of the state and I hadn't seen it.

My companion for the trip was my 11-year-old son, Jack, who is a natural explorer. We decided to make it a simple one-day adventure. Then, if there was enough at Elk City State Park to capture our interest, we would return with the rest of our family this summer.

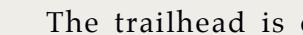
Trail as two we knew we could complete.

Since the state park is 5 miles outside of town and we wanted to maximize our time, we packed a cooler with a picnic lunch, plenty of snacks and of course, jugs of water. We loaded our mountain bikes, just in case, added a small backpack for each of us with basic first aid and safety supplies, and we were on our way.

It was an April day perfect for being outdoors, as the woods were coming alive with blooms, leaf buds, and birdsong. But when we arrived at Elk City State Park, we could easily imagine it in other seasons, as well. Autumn here will be lovely, with the forested bluffs above the lake putting on a show of color for nature photographers. Winter hikes will be interesting, as well, as we'd see more of the rock formations for which the area is known. And in summer, the area will no doubt be a magnet for those who enjoy boating, jet skiing, fishing, camping, and biking.

Trail as two we knew we could complete.

## Green Thumb Nature Trail



The trailhead is on Timber Road, and there is both a convenient parking area and restroom nearby.

Interpretive signs along the one-mile loop trail are perfect for families and hikers with an interest in natural history. For example: At the first stop, we learned that the eastern red cedars common to these woods are actually junipers — not cedars — and that squirrels and birds use their stringy bark as nesting material, while their evergreen foliage is a favorite of white-tailed deer and provides year-round cover for many wildlife species. Songbirds enjoy their berry-like fruits.

Further along the trail, more signs told us about animal tracks, pileated woodpeckers, and snakes.

Like other trails at the park, this one is moderately strenuous,



## Heading Out



As spontaneous as I sometimes like to be, when a child is along, I do like to have at least a rough plan. Before going, Jack and I visited the newly revamped Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism website ([www.ksoutdoors.com](http://www.ksoutdoors.com)) for a map of the park and trails, and to determine which we might like to tackle in one day. We chose Green Thumb Nature Trail and Table Mound Hiking



meaning that it's beyond a simple stroll but not so challenging that one would need to be a seasoned hiker to attempt it. It had plenty of features to entertain a child who likes to climb, including downed trees and craggy rock outcroppings that were manageable without specialized equipment, and to appeal to my bent for photography.

The trail, shaded by towering oaks, also afforded us a couple of charming wooden footbridges to cross, understory woodland vegetation like springtime blooming phlox and redbud trees, and, at the top, a spectacular view of the lake.

Well-blazed with white arrows and paint, we only nearly lost our way once when we arrived at the largest of the rock outcroppings at the highest point on the trail. It was the perfect opportunity for me to discuss with Jack what to do if you lose sight of a trail: Don't panic, don't stray too far, and shift your view just a bit — we climbed up a bit higher on a rock and immediately spotted where the trail picked up. Worst case scenario: on a loop trail such as this one, if you really can't figure out how to continue forward, simply turn around and go back.

We finished off our morning with a picnic lunch at the park shelter back at the trailhead, where tables offer a lakeside view.

## Table Mound Hiking Trail

One of two trailheads for the 2.75-mile Table Mound Trail is a stone's throw from that of the Green Thumb Nature Trail on Timber Road, so we could leave our car where it was. Another trailhead is located at the Scenic Overlook near the dam, where it runs along the edge of a 20-foot bluff and passes boulder fields and cave-like formations.

Start on either end and you'll have plenty of scenic views, from small creek crossings to forested areas, to views of the lake.

Well-blazed with blue arrows and paint, it's considered a moderately strenuous hike. It's designated as a National Recreation Trail as part of the U.S. Department of the Interior National Trail System.

About a half a mile in from the Timber Road trailhead, we left the trail briefly to make our way

down to the lakeshore, as we couldn't resist the pull of the water any longer. Littered with driftwood and shells from mussels and snails, the pebbled "beach" is terrific for exploring.

Back on the trail, we again marveled at the feeling that we weren't in Kansas anymore; near the end of the trail, the cave-like formations were dead-ringers for what I've seen in southwest Missouri and northwest Arkansas.

On the other side of the lake, the Elk River Hiking Trail — a 15-mile trail from the west end of the dam to the US-160 bridge over the Elk River south of Elk City — has been called the best trail in Kansas, and was awarded recognition as one of the 8 Wonders of Geography by the Kansas Sampler Foundation. But at that length and with children, I'd like to plan it as a two-day outing and camp along it.

## What Others Say

We had time before heading home to see what the rest of the park offered, so we got on our bikes and explored.

In a folding chair at one of the fishing piers, southwest Missouri resident Dean Linder was happy to share with me his take on the park. It was his first visit, too, and he proudly showed off what he'd caught so far. He said he found Elk City to be clean, quiet, and with plenty of coves a person could settle in at to spend the day with a rod and reel.

The lake offers anglers crappie, bluegill, channel catfish, flathead catfish, green sunfish, largemouth bass, saugeye, and white bass. It's known for producing big white crappie, and the Kansas state record flathead catfish, also the world record on pole and line, weighing 123 pounds, was caught from the lake in 1998.

At the Sunset Point campground, Mike Zinser and his family invited me to sit under their shade canopy next to their RV and chat. Mike was a park ranger here for several years and recalled his uncle being part of the National Guard that helped build the lake.

His daughter and son-in-law, Ivorie and Cody Maloney, told me they love the friendliness of people who camp at the park; they often get together on Friday evenings for a cook-out.

There are 11 sites with water, electric, and sewer hookup, 85 sites with water and electric only, and 54 primitive sites with no utilities; restrooms with showers, a laundry facility, and trailer sewage dump stations also are available.

At the Comfort Cove campground, Dayna O'Kane and her children paused to visit. Dayna, who was on her bike, lives in Independence and says the park is a favorite outing for her and her friends because their children can play while they ride on the campground road surrounding the playground.

"It's a place we feel really safe in," she told me.

They also enjoy the park's Kids

Fishing Pond near Prairie Meadow campground, where they sometimes tent camp and almost always catch something.

Down at the lakeshore, Gabby Pelton was wading in the shallows while her father, John, and grandparents, Janet and Michael Pelton, watched. They come down from Leavenworth a few times a year, they said, to camp in an RV and enjoy the lake views.

"I like to take pictures," Janet told me. "It's scenic here."

And, like me, John said he enjoys the trails.

"It's interesting that you're in Kansas and can see terrain like this," he said. "The rocks, the forests — it's just a really neat environment."

Looks like we'll be making that return trip. And next time, we'll include the whole family.

wildlife area nearby.

The compact park allows easy, quick access to features including boat ramps, a swim beach, camping, playgrounds and hiking trails. The lake area offers picturesque views ranging from open prairie to wooded hills and limestone bluffs.

Elk City State Park was made possible by the signing of a lease agreement in 1967 between the Kansas Parks and Resources and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

## More To Do Nearby

Nearby Independence, population 9,500, offers the charming Riverside Historic Park and Ralph Mitchell Zoo bordered by stone walls built by WPA workers and featuring vintage playground equipment, child-sized train, and live animal exhibits. The zoo is free and open year-round. A nearby aquatic center provides summer fun. About 12 miles southwest of Independence, the Little House on the Prairie home and museum offers an attraction for Laura Ingalls Wilder enthusiasts and is open April through October. 

## More About Elk City State Park

Dense oak and hickory woodlands meet rolling meadows of big bluestem and Indian grass at this 857-acre park located on the east shore of 4,500-acre Elk City Reservoir, with a 12,000-acre





# Wingin' It

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

"Wing bees" have become a tradition in each of the waterfowl management flyways to help biologists better understand the impact of hunter harvest on duck and goose species. For the past 25 years, the Central Flyway's Wing Bee has been conducted at Flint Hills National Wildlife Refuge in Hartford.

Each year, the Kansas Wildlife, Parks and Tourism Commission approves duck and goose seasons based on recommendations provided by department biologists. However, the recommendations are made working within frameworks provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

To establish the frameworks, the USFWS uses a variety of data, including surveys of breeding populations, habitat conditions on the nesting areas, and hunter harvest. Hunters provide some harvest data when they purchase Harvest Information Program stamps, and many also receive surveys from the USFWS in the mail.

"Back in the 1950s, the USFWS started trying to measure harvest and asked hunters to identify their harvested birds," said Jim Dubovsky, Central Flyway representative for the USFWS. "But many of them didn't have a good handle on what they were shooting."

"They knew mallards, but many of the others were simply 'brown' ducks," he said.

In an effort to more accurately determine the range of species hunters were harvesting, states initiated wing bees in the early 1960s. These events assembled qualified participants who "read" duck wings and goose feathers submitted by hunters, identifying age and species. In 1962, the USFWS expanded on this effort and moved everything to centralized locations within each of the four flyways. A manual, "Species, Age and Sex Identification of Ducks Using Wing

Plumage," by Samuel M. Carney, was developed as the "go-to reference guide" for waterfowl wing identification, aging and sexing. For the last 25 years, the Central Flyway Wing Bee has been conducted at the Flint Hills National Wildlife Refuge (FHNWR) in Hartford.

Submissions for the wing bee are a bi-product of the survey system. Each year, the USFWS sends out a random sample of surveys to waterfowl hunters.

"The Harvest Information Program is a two-tiered survey system," said Stephen Chandler, with the USFWS Branch of Harvest Surveys in Laurel, Maryland. "We'll take random samples from that survey and send hunters a card asking if they'd participate in the next part of the survey. From there, we'll send out a diary that hunters can use to keep track of harvested birds by date and species."

Return rates for the surveys are approximately 40 percent according to Chandler, which is about what's expected in a survey of that sort.

The next season, hunters who receive the diaries are provided envelopes and asked to place the wing of each duck, or the outer wing feathers and tail feathers from each goose, into envelopes and mail them in throughout the season. Sorting, cataloging and keeping track of each year's submissions is a monumental task that falls on Lyle Hancock, a bio tech at FHNWR, who's been doing it since the Central Flyway Wing Bee came to Kansas. The Hartford Post Office has handled 511,070 envelopes containing

waterfowl "parts" over the past 25 years, and was recognized with a plaque during the Central Flyway Wing Bee last February.

"I pick up the envelopes every day from the post office, probably starting in August," Hancock said (some northern states have resident goose seasons that early). "I then sort them by state and county, and separate them into ducks and geese."

Hancock then enters the data into a computer, verifies each submission, and adds a species identifier to it. The envelopes are placed in large storage boxes and put in a freezer. Envelope counts have been as high as 27,000 and as low as 18,000. Hancock said 20,000 is average.

"I handle each of those envelopes seven times from start to finish," Hancock added. "Even after we're done with the envelopes, we recycle them."

The Central Flyway Wing Bee was held in Ft. Collins, Colo., and Santa Fe, New Mexico, but for the last quarter-century, it's been held at the FHNWR.

"We've just had a great rapport with the staff here at the Flint Hills National Wildlife Refuge and it's a great central location," Dubovsky said. "This year we presented refuge staff with an award for the 25th anniversary of hosting the Central Flyway Wing Bee."

The award, a beautiful hand-carved wooden plaque featuring a blue-winged teal, was created by Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation



Kelvin Schoonover, wildlife biologist from Oklahoma and wing bee participant, shows the hand-carved plaque he created to present to the Flint Hills National Wildlife Refuge in appreciation for hosting the event over the last 25 years.

wildlife biologist and Central Flyway Wing Bee participant, Kelvin Schoonover.

"We consider it an honor to host the Wing Bee here," said Tim Menard, FHNWR biologist. "We believe in the importance of this data for managing birds in the Central Flyway and understand how the data is used to set season dates and regulations."

Just a half-mile from the facility where Wing Bee participants gathered, thousands of ducks and geese on the refuge provided visual evidence of the importance of the data being collected.

"We have about 2,300 acres of moist soil management on the refuge and we keep water on much of it throughout the seasons for waterfowl to use during their migration," Menard said.

"It's nice to make the tie of this direct work with the work of the Wing Bee to help all waterfowl in the Central Flyway, so we're happy to do it," he added.

About 40-50 people with waterfowl interests from the Central Flyway's 10 states assemble for four or five days each February to evaluate roughly 15,000 duck wings and 5,000 goose wing feathers and tails.

"The Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism typically has at least 5-6 employees who participate in the Wing Bee," said Tom Bidrowski, KDWPT waterfowl program manager. "Typically, we have game wardens, wildlife area managers and district biologists who volunteer, and we ask them to commit to two to three years."

Officials are confident in the value of the information gathered. Accuracy rates for the process run about 95-98 percent. Knowing harvest rates of the different waterfowl species is crucial to sound wildlife management.

"The data collected is plugged into population models and used to determine allowable harvest and to better understand population dynamics," Dubovsky said.

In February, as has been done for the past 25 years at the Kansas refuge, tables were set up in a large out-building, each seating two to six people evaluating wings. Examiners open up an envelope and identify its contents. A Quality Control Checker sits at the end



The Hartford Post Office has handled more than 511,000 envelopes containing duck and goose "parts" in the last 25 years.



Officials from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism, and other state natural resource agencies in the Central Flyway gather every February for the Central Flyway Wing Bee in Hartford, Kansas.

of the table and double-checks all of the recorded data for accuracy.

"Most of our checkers have at least 10 years of wing bee experience before becoming a checker," Dubovsky said. "And they have to pass a proficiency test to become a checker."

After the wings and feathers have been processed, they are given to the Zuni Tribe of the Pueblo of Zuni in New Mexico.

"They'll be here with a truck with a topper on it after we're done and take all of the bags of wings and feathers," Hancock explained. "They can't sell the feathers, but they can use them in head dresses and other things in traditional ceremonies."

Thanks to Hancock and others with decades of experience, the Central Flyway Wing Bee runs smoothly. Participants take pride knowing their work will benefit waterfowl and waterfowl hunters throughout the Central Flyway for generations to come. 



Records are meticulously kept, and each envelope is scanned to enter information electronically.

## *The Cal Ripken of Wing Bees*

Those who hunt and manage waterfowl share a kindred spirit, and many individuals who participate in the wing bees have years of experience and are a dedicated bunch. One of those individuals is Norm Saake.

Saake, 73, has been assisting with wing bees for 50 years. He started with the Pacific Flyway when he was the staff specialist for migratory game birds for the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW).

"I had a desire to be a waterfowl biologist since I was 13 years old," Saake said. "I got out of school and got that job and it's been a wonderful opportunity ever since."

After 35 years with NDOW, Saake retired, but kept helping with wing bees.

"I usually try to make two of the four flyway wing bees every year," Saake said.

Saake said he hunts waterfowl in two or three states and Canada each season. His personal and professional passion for ducks and geese drives him to continue helping with wing bees and helping with flight surveys, as well.

"I hope to do this until the day they put me in the ground," Saake concluded. "I think waterfowl are one of God's greatest creations. They fly, they swim, they migrate, and working with them for all these years has been a tremendous opportunity."

# 2016 SPORTSMEN'S CALENDAR

## SQUIRREL

June 1, 2016-Feb. 28, 2017

## HANDFISHING

June 15-Aug. 31, 2016

## BULLFROG

July 1-Oct. 31, 2016

## FLOATLINE FISHING

July 15-Sept. 15 2016

## DOVE

Sept. 1-Nov. 29, 2016 (*mourning, white-winged, Eurasian collared, and ringed turtle doves*)

## EXOTIC DOVE

Nov. 30, 2016-Feb. 28, 2017 (*Eurasian collared and ringed turtle doves only*)

## RAIL

Sept. 1-Nov. 9, 2016 (*Sora and Virginia*)

## SNIPE

Sept. 1-Dec. 16, 2016

## DEER

Youth/Disabled Hunters: Sept. 3-11, 2016

Archery: Sept. 12-Dec. 31, 2016

Pre-rut Whitetail Antlerless: Oct. 8-9, 2016

Muzzleloader: Sept. 12-25, 2016

Regular Firearm: Nov. 30-Dec. 11, 2016

Firearm Extended Whitetail Antlerless Season:

Jan. 1-2, 2017 (Units 6, 8, 9, 10, 16, and 17)

Jan. 1-8, 2017 (Units 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 11, 12, 13, and 14)

Jan. 1-15, 2017 (Units 10a, 15 and 19)

Archery Extended Whitetail Antlerless Season:

Jan. 16-31, 2017 (Unit 19 only)

## FALL TURKEY

Oct. 1-Nov. 29, 1, 2016 AND Dec. 12, 2016-Jan. 31, 2017

## SEPTEMBER TEAL

High Plains Unit

Sept. 17-25, 2016

Low Plains Zone

Sept. 10-25, 2016

## WOODCOCK

Oct. 15-Nov. 28, 2016

## DUCKS

High Plains Unit

Youth: Oct. 1-2, 2016

Oct. 8, 2016-Jan. 1, 2017 AND Jan. 20-29, 2017

Low Plains Early Zone

Youth: Oct. 1-2, 2016

Oct. 8-Dec. 4, 2016 AND Dec. 17, 2016- Jan. 1, 2017

Low Plains Late Zone

Youth: Oct. 22-23, 2016

Oct. 29, 2016-Jan. 1, 2017 AND Jan. 21-29, 2017

## Low Plains Southeast Zone

Youth: Nov. 5-6, 2016

Nov. 12, 2016-Jan. 1, 2017 AND Jan. 7-29, 2017

## DARK GEESE (Canada, brant)

Oct. 29, 2016-Jan. 1, 2017 AND Jan. 4-Feb. 12, 2017

## WHITE-FRONTED GEESE

Oct. 29, 2016-Jan. 1, 2017 AND Jan. 21-Feb. 12, 2017

## LIGHT GEESE

Oct. 29, 2016-Jan. 1, 2017 AND Jan. 4-Feb. 12, 2017

## LIGHT GEESE CONSERVATION ORDER

Feb 13,-April 30, 2017

## TROUT

Nov. 1-April 15, 2017

## SANDHILL CRANE

Nov. 9, 2016-Jan. 5, 2017

## PHEASANTS

Youth: Nov. 5-6, 2016

Nov. 12, 2016-Jan. 31, 2017

## QUAIL

Youth: Nov. 5-6, 2016

Nov. 12, 2015-Jan. 31, 2017

## GREATER PRAIRIE CHICKEN

Early Season: Sept. 15-Oct. 15, 2016

Regular Season (Greater Prairie Chicken Unit):

Nov. 19, 2016-Jan. 31, 2017

Southwest Unit: No open season for prairie chickens

## RABBITS

Open year-round (*cottontail and jackrabbit*)

## CROW

Nov. 10, 2016-March 10, 2017

## TRAPPING/HUNTING

Nov. 16, 2016-Feb. 15, 2017 (*badger, bobcat, mink, muskrat, opossum, raccoon, swift fox, red fox, gray fox, striped skunk, weasel*)

## BEAVER & OTTER TRAPPING

Nov. 16, 2016-March 31, 2017

## RUNNING

March 1-Nov. 8, 2016



# A Hunter's Smile for Elijah

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



Some of my life's most memorable moments were shared with my children in a boat or blind. And I've also enjoyed taking other kids on deer and turkey hunts through the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism's (KDWPT) Pass It On program. It's important to KDWPT staff to pass on our hunting heritage, and many plan, coordinate and conduct fantastic youth hunting events, providing once-in-a-lifetime experiences for youngsters.

For me, some of these hunts have been as meaningful as those with my own children. One in particular happened this spring on a youth turkey hunt near Hutchinson.

Elijah Hamby was a last-minute addition to the youth turkey hunt conducted by KDWPT biologists Kyle McDonald and Steve Adams. Adams met 12-year-old Eli and his family at a cancer center. Adams' little girl, Blaisi, is battling cancer and Eli was recently diagnosed with leukemia.



"When I told Eli about the turkey hunt," Adams told me, "his eyes lit up."

Eli hasn't had much reason to light up in the last year. His grandpa, Ron, told me that Eli is quarantined to his room much of the time. Chemotherapy and other painful treatments have weakened Eli's immune system. A simple cold can send him to the hospital. A sanitizing station sits outside his room for any visitors, and most of those are limited to immediate family. He takes his middle school classes online.

Battling cancer has left Eli weak and his voice soft. The recoil of a 20-gauge shotgun was brutally painful, and he was hesitant to shoot at turkey targets during practice. I loaded the gun with light loads and assured Eli that when he was staring down the barrel at a real turkey, he wouldn't feel a thing. (Thankfully, he admitted I was right after the hunt.)

After practicing that afternoon, we went to a pre-set blind for an evening hunt. However, as we neared the

blind location we could hear the sound of banging 5-gallon buckets. McDonald and Adams had placed the buckets in the pop-up blind for us to sit on, and when the blind came into view, we could see that cattle had trampled our blind and were knocking the buckets around.

I shooed the cattle and quickly reassembled the blind. Once we were inside, I started calling occasionally and Eli and I chatted. Somehow we got on the topic of pets and he admitted he had a cat.

"Why?" I asked. "Does it fetch ducks?"

"No," he laughed.

"That's one strike against you," I joked.

As I checked one of the Final Four scores on my phone, Eli mentioned he was a KU fan.

"Why?" I asked, my K-State heritage showing.

Again, he laughed.

"That's two strikes against you," I teased. "One more and you're going back to the truck."

But before Eli could get his third strike, we were interrupted by gobbling turkeys. On this beautiful evening, turkeys were on the move and the toms were gobbling. We were watching a hen peck its way around near the blind when a half-dozen red turkey heads appeared bobbing over the hill toward the hen.

"Here comes a bunch of jakes," I whispered. "We're going to get you ready and you're gonna shoot one of these."

I'm always amazed at the adrenaline rush young hunters get, especially those who have never killed a turkey or deer. Eli was no different and his breathing became rapid and labored. I told him to relax and we'd let them separate to get a good shot at just one bird.

They did, and he did, but unfortunately, Eli's shot missed. As they wandered off, I called and they all gobbled back in unison, unfazed by the shotgun blast. That seemed to amuse Eli as much as the close encounter.

Another close call later had similar results but with plenty of daylight left, I knew our chances were still good.

More birds answered my calls and soon we had some big toms headed our way. Then all of a sudden, it was like the turkey flood gates opened and we were surrounded by a dozen hens and another bigger band of jovial jakes.

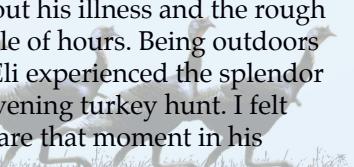
"We're going to get one of these," I told Eli. "I'm going to help you aim this time."

While kneeling behind him, I instructed Eli to line up on one bird but not shoot. I wanted to make sure he was indeed lined up and that he'd kill only one bird. I whispered for him to lift his head and I'd have him adjust one way or the other and put his head back on the stock. Each time I knew he was lined up, the turkey moved. Finally, after several tries, I told him to pull the trigger. At just 12 yards, the jake hit the dirt and the remaining birds scattered and gobbled as they retreated.

"I got him!" Eli exclaimed.

We sat in the blind a while longer and watched and listened to more turkeys nearby. Eli jabbered more in those 15 minutes after he shot his bird than he had in the hour prior. It was like he'd got a second wind and his ailments and illness were no longer in the forefront of his mind. In that moment, he was like any other excited child who'd just taken his first turkey.

As I videoed Eli's labored walk to his bird with my phone, I was reminded that he isn't like any other child. My heart ached because no child should have to endure the hideousness of cancer and I thought of the will and determination Eli will need during the two years of treatments he faces.

But Eli walked with purpose to his prize, and he smiled broadly as he picked up his first turkey. I silently hoped that Eli had forgot about his illness and the rough road ahead if only for a couple of hours. Being outdoors is therapeutic, and I'm glad Eli experienced the splendor and beauty of a wonderful evening turkey hunt. I felt fortunate and humbled to share that moment in his young life. 

For more information about Eli, see his Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/fight4eli](http://www.facebook.com/fight4eli).



# Species Profile

## American Dog Tick

Kansas' most common tick species, the American dog tick, is one of the smallest, greatest common foes to animals and humans, alike. Known to carry diseases such as Rocky Mountain spotted fever and tularemia, the American dog tick is a formidable adversary in a compact body.

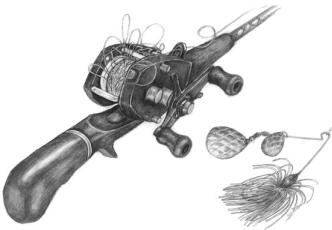
Males and females share a reddish-brown color, while females are marked with ivory near their dorsal shield, and males showcase two irregular-shaped, ivory-colored bands running the length of their body. Females are the most likely to bite humans, and after

engorging with blood, can swell to great sizes.

Like most other tick species, the American dog tick can locate hosts by sensing heat, moisture, odor, and even vibrations. Contrary to popular belief, ticks can't jump or fly, rather they latch on to their host by waiting in an "arms wide open" pose on grasses and shrubs, typically in well-used areas. As soon as the host comes by, they make their departure.

To decrease the risk of being a host to a tick, use a permethrin-based repellent on your clothes and be sure to tuck your shirt into your pants and pantlegs into your boots.





# Backlash

WITH MIKE MILLER

For the last year and a half, I've been asked often when I was getting a Lab puppy. Although I believe that one good dog should lead to another, I wasn't in a hurry to replace Creede.

There was trepidation in my desire to have another black dog. While I talked to people in the "dog business" about potential litters, and I searched the internet for reputable breeders, picking a puppy that way felt like a shot in the dark. I was hesitant to simply choose a kennel and puppy based on the sire's or dam's photo, pedigrees, hunt test titles, or buyers' testimonials.

I like big, square-headed dogs, and I was mainly shopping by appearance. I also knew I didn't want a high-strung, field-trial-type dog that would be a handful to manage and train. I, like many hunter/dog-people I know, desire a big laid-back dog that is a great member of the family, but also hunts with appropriate enthusiasm. Kind of a tall order, and another reason I hadn't acted quickly on getting a replacement.

When managing editor Nadia Marji announced that her female black Lab was carrying a litter, I kept quiet. Kota is a nice dog, but she's small by my standards. Nadia and her fiancé Jon Reimer have a small kennel and this was their first litter. They also own the sire, and his size and conformation are more to my liking, but I still held my tongue during the pregnancy. I couldn't shake my apprehension.

However, the more I considered it, the more I became convinced I should look into this litter. I had seen both dogs hunt and work, and that's uncommon when choosing a puppy. In fact, it would be unheard of if I bought

a dog from an out-of-state breeder.

When Nadia called to tell me Kota had 10 beautiful pups, something in my brain clicked, and I blurted out "Pick me out the biggest one." Now that's a scientific way to choose a pup, eh? She said she would, but I immediately felt guilty, assuming that I could just speak for a pup after keeping quiet all this time. Nadia didn't seem to mind, and low and behold, one of the pups was noticeably larger than the others. I asked for a male. Color was not negotiable, since my wife, Lisa, wears mostly black clothing. White hair from the liver and white Brittany is bad enough for her to deal with.

Another unique perk with this litter is that I was able to visit every week. Even so, I couldn't tell much about personalities. I could tell that the one I spoke for, "Purple Collar," was bigger than the others. He was mellow and seemed to appreciate my attention during visits.

Lisa and I picked up "Kiowa Creek Bullet" (Ki) at seven weeks, and while life has changed around our house, it's been fun. Ki is a happy dog that loves people, which I attribute to the tremendous socialization Nadia and Jon did with these pups. With the whelping box in their living room, they interacted with the pups constantly. I've found that nothing puts a smile on my face, improves my mood, or gives me more satisfaction than spending time with this pup. Ki has worked himself firmly into our family, although Trip the Brittany may not agree all the time, and the grumpy old cat hasn't come out the basement.

It's always a big decision to bring a puppy home, but when the time is right, I highly recommend it. I believe puppies, and dogs for that matter, are good for the soul. The pup gets up early, requires almost constant vigilance when he's in the house, and he has seemingly endless energy; until it ends, then he crashes for an hour or two before waking refreshed and going again. But we're making progress on all levels. It's good to have a black dog back in the house.



Meet  
Kiowa Creek Bullet  
"Ki"

A photograph of a woman with curly hair holding a young boy in a field of tall grass. The boy is looking through binoculars. A young girl is standing nearby, holding a net. The scene is set in a natural, outdoor environment.

# Quality family time.

Experience wild

Kansas

Help protect it

[nature.org/Kansas](http://nature.org/Kansas)

The Nature  
Conservancy



TNC Kansas

Jerry and Marcy Monkman

