

KANSAS

Wildlife & Parks

JULY/AUGUST 2016

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JULY/AUGUST 2016 – VOL. 73, NO. 4

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Front Cover: A mature buffalo is drawn to water in this watercolor illustration by Lorraine Logan, via Shutterstock. **Inside Front Cover:** The KDWPT Stream Survey Crew is hard at work surveying a stretch of the Ninescah River. Nadia Reimer photo.

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We've Come A Long Way

This past year, we've focused on our Wildlife Fee Fund (WFF) and the increase in hunting and fishing fees that was implemented January 1. Part of that discussion included reassuring hunters and anglers that WFF money will be spent only on wildlife and fishery programs. However, as our name implies, the agency also includes state parks and tourism. Tourism was brought in with funding from Economic Development Incentive Funds (Lottery), and Parks were historically funded with State General Funds (SGF). To live up to our commitment to hunters and anglers and to ensure Kansas remains eligible to receive nearly \$20 million in federal Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration funding each year, we can't spend any of our WFF on non-fish and wildlife programs.

When the Kansas Parks and Resources Authority (KPRA) was created in 1955, the Kansas Legislature was committed to developing state parks on federal reservoirs, even though many were far from population centers. The first state park was built on the shores of Kanopolis Reservoir and opened in 1958. Initially, state parks were entirely funded with SGF money, and there were no user fees. In 1964, \$5 annual vehicle fees and \$1 per night camping fees were implemented. The parks weren't fancy or heavily staffed, but they offered camping along with fishing and boating access to reservoirs that were being constructed during that era. Fees were implemented to enhance the park experience, but there was no push for state parks to become self-sufficient.

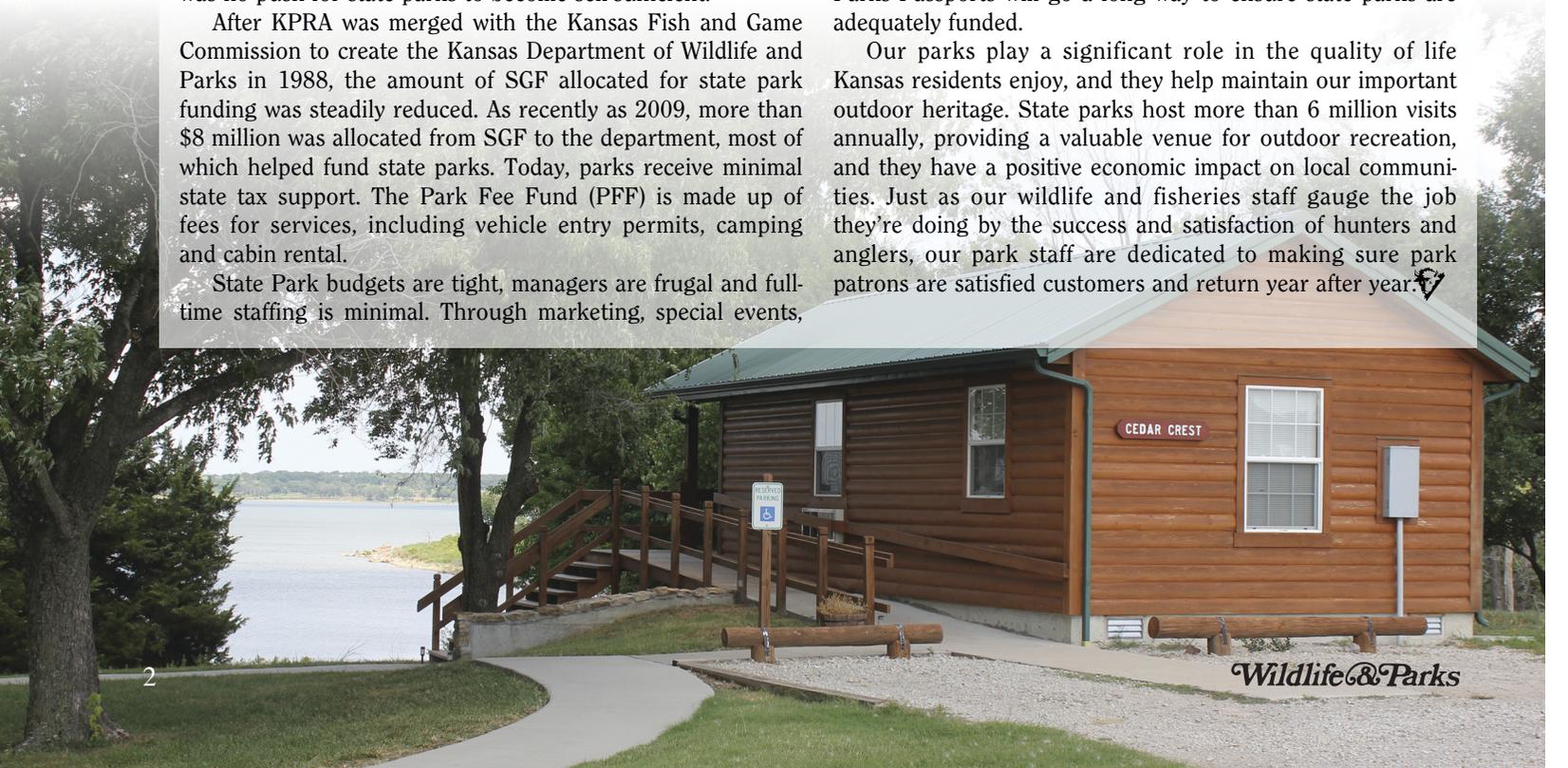
After KPRA was merged with the Kansas Fish and Game Commission to create the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks in 1988, the amount of SGF allocated for state park funding was steadily reduced. As recently as 2009, more than \$8 million was allocated from SGF to the department, most of which helped fund state parks. Today, parks receive minimal state tax support. The Park Fee Fund (PFF) is made up of fees for services, including vehicle entry permits, camping and cabin rental.

State Park budgets are tight, managers are frugal and full-time staffing is minimal. Through marketing, special events,

and diversified recreational opportunities, a healthy Park Fee Fund balance is now maintained. While our state parks offer access to nature, water, boating and fishing, parks staff have been innovative in bringing in new customers. There are more than 500 miles of hiking, biking and horse trails originating in our state parks. Nearly all of our 26 state parks offer summer events such as music festivals, fireworks displays, triathlons, mountain man rendezvous', disc golf, wildlife programs, fishing tournaments, star gazing programs, youth fishing clinics, and more. Remarkably, the PFF balance has increased in recent years even though inclement weather on the big weekends - Memorial Day, Fourth of July and Labor Day - and other environmental conditions such as blue-green algae blooms can drastically impact visitation.

One key effort that has the potential to further enhance and stabilize park funding is the implementation of the State Parks Passport. The passport is an annual vehicle permit that can be purchased at the time you renew your vehicle tags. It is valid for one year from the month of purchase, and at \$15 it represents a 40 percent savings compared to purchasing a regular park vehicle permit. The passport saves money, is convenient and is valid for a full 12 months, rather than a calendar year like the traditional annual vehicle permit. Anyone who visits a state park more than twice will save money by purchasing the passport, and it's valid in all 26 parks. Increasing the percentage of Kansas vehicles with State Parks Passports will go a long way to ensure state parks are adequately funded.

Our parks play a significant role in the quality of life Kansas residents enjoy, and they help maintain our important outdoor heritage. State parks host more than 6 million visits annually, providing a valuable venue for outdoor recreation, and they have a positive economic impact on local communities. Just as our wildlife and fisheries staff gauge the job they're doing by the success and satisfaction of hunters and anglers, our park staff are dedicated to making sure park patrons are satisfied customers and return year after year. ♡



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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

ONE OF THE BEST
Mike,

Longtime subscriber... usually binge-read my new issue on a flight to the west coast, as was the case this Monday AM on my way to Denver. One of the best-ever issues. Great articles with info for every interest. Excellent photos as well (I was privileged to have a couple of my images accompany an article by Iralee Barnard a couple of issues back!). Please pass my thoughts along to all who have a part in putting together this great magazine.

Regards,
David Welfelt, Newton

A GRAND CATCH
Editor:

Our granddaughter Dottie Felton caught this in the pond right behind the house. She used my favorite purple worm to catch this 22-inch beauty. Dot is in college to become a nurse.

Lyle Johnson, Wichita



QUAIL CALL

Dear Nadia and Mike,

For your consideration. I was working outside early one morning and heard a quail calling from about 70 yards away and I called back. That went on for about 30 minutes. He wound up posing on the fence close enough so I could take his picture.

Chris McKee, Tonganoxie



SHOW ME THE WEST
Hello,

I have been a subscriber for a fairly long time and I think you have a wonderful magazine. I would like to see more articles about mule deer, antelope and prairie dogs from the western part of the state. I have shot prairie dogs twice in Kansas and I hate that many landowners are now poisoning them. I enjoy coming out to Kansas every time, whether I am hunting or just passing through. Thanks.

Brett Richeson, Robinson, IL

Have a picture or story to share?

Write the Editors at:

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BIRD BRAIN

WITH MIKE RADER

The Underground Owl



Owls are fascinating. The thought of mostly nocturnal birds stealthily hunting prey in the dark using incredibly acute eyesight and hearing intrigues me. I have been fortunate to observe all owl species recorded in Kansas, as well as several in other parts of the country that don't occur here, such as elf owl, northern hawk-owl, great gray owl, ferruginous pygmy owl and a few others. I still need the northern pygmy owl and spotted owl to fill out my list. However, for this column, I'll shed some light on one species that doesn't fit the owl stereotype - the burrowing owl.

Burrowing owls can be common in appropriate habitat - grasslands, especially near prairie dog towns - from central Kansas to the western border. Burrowing owls are most common in the western third of the state, where breeding populations inhabit big prairie dog towns; areas such as Smoky Valley Ranch south of Oakley, the Cimarron National Grasslands near Elkhart, some towns around Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area and Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, and various other shortgrass prairies.

As their name implies, burrowing owls nest and live underground, using burrows made by prairie dogs, badgers, foxes, tortoises, armadillos and even those of their own construction. I have read that the process of owls digging their own burrow can take up to 10 days. Mostly, they take advantage of something already done, as long as it is no longer occupied. These burrows are at least 2 feet below the ground (much deeper when utilizing old prairie dog burrows) and have some interesting features, including several chambers, one of which is usually a food larder where excess food can be stored. They line the entrance of the burrow with livestock dung, helping to attract insects that the owls eat. They may also line it with small bits of trash such as bottle caps, presumably to signify that the hole is occupied.

Burrowing owls will lay anywhere from two to 12 eggs and have only one brood in breeding season. Incubation takes about a month and the whole nesting process around two months. The babies, like those of other owl species, are down-covered and helpless when they hatch, and it takes a couple of weeks before they appear above ground.

Burrowing owls are easily identified with tan/brown feathers spotted with white; large, yellow eyes; long legs; and a flattened head with no "ear" tufts. They are 7-10 inches tall, have a 22-inch wingspan and weigh a little over 5 ounces, making it all the more impressive they kill prey as large as baby cottontails, young prairie dogs and some birds close to their own size. Most of their diet consists of insects, small mammals and reptiles.

Burrowing owls are different from other birds of prey in that the male and female are similar in size. In most birds of prey species, the female is noticeably larger. They have a relatively long lifespan. In fact, one in California was thought to be 10 years old.

Burrowing owls also differ from most of other owl species in that they are active during the daytime. Females hunt insects mostly during the day when feeding young, while males hunt mostly night, usually targeting small mammals. They also have a high tolerance of carbon dioxide, enabling them to spend long periods of time underground.

The burrowing owls we have in Kansas typically migrate to warmer climates because of the decreased prey availability in winter. However, when I was living in southwestern Kansas several years ago, there was an individual that spent the winter in a small dog town southwest of Satanta in Haskell County, but that is pretty unusual.

This species has a wide range in the western hemisphere, breeding as far north as southcentral Canada and wintering as far south as the tip of the South America. They survive in desert conditions and even on islands in the Caribbean. The biggest factor in the U.S. population is most likely changes in land-use practices and the loss of suitable grasslands. Other factors include predation, destruction of prairie dog towns and insecticide use. The current estimated population is 2 million owls, which is just over half of what was estimated back in the mid-1960s.

I always look forward to their return to Kansas in early spring. I sometimes get lucky and see them in central Kansas, but a summer trip to the Cimarron National Grasslands in Morton usually fills the bill. Plan a trip there in August and you'll be surprised at the abundance of wildlife this arid shortgrass prairie supports. In addition to burrowing owls, you may see rock wrens, mountain plovers, long-billed curlews, Cassin's sparrows, and others. It's also a good area to see different species of snakes, lizards and mammals. There is something serene and peaceful in the wide-open spaces of our state, where only the occasional car or tractor interrupts the quiet. If you have never been out in the far west and southwest parts of our state, I encourage you to go. You won't regret it.



IT'S THE LAW WITH CAPT. LARRY HASTINGS

It's Not All About The Ticket

The Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWP) Law Enforcement Division's role in fulfilling the agency's mission is best summarized in the division's mission statement: "To engage in focused efforts guarding the state's wildlife resources through enforcement of laws, conservation, and education; to provide for the safety of Kansas outdoor recreationalists; and to improve the quality of life for Kansans as a result of efforts in protecting the state's natural heritage." To accomplish this mission, KDWP's game wardens take on a full gambit of duties and roles. On any given day that can mean being an educator, information specialist, wildlife consultant, legal consultant, dispute mediator, search/rescue/recovery worker, compliance officer, back-up officer, investigator, law enforcement officer, or even just "friend," to name a few. Simply put, game wardens are the back bone of the Law Enforcement Division. And the men and women in these positions are truly special, multifaceted people - they have to be to carry out the duties and roles associated with fulfilling our mission.

Now, if you spend time outdoors, you may meet a game warden in any one of the aforementioned roles; however, the likelihood of that meeting depends on the activities you pursue. Some activities, such as fishing and boating, concentrate users on public waters, so you may be more likely to meet a game warden during that time as opposed to land-based activities. Kansas has 24 reservoirs, 42 State Fishing Lakes, and 262 community lakes. Land-based recreationalists are spread throughout Kansas' diverse 82,282 square miles, 52,361,523.2 acres and 105 counties. See what I mean?

Regardless of being on land or water, game wardens are tasked with conducting compliance checks for licenses, permits, certificates, bag limits, creel limits, methods of take, and required safety

equipment. This can only be accomplished through in-person inspection, and during these checks, game wardens also fulfill roles as educators, and information specialists (informing, as well as collecting information). Unfortunately, on occasion, Uniform Notices to Appear and Complaint (tickets) are issued as a result of compliance checks. And while the number of people who receive tickets is very small when compared to the number of people we encounter, nobody is ever happy to receive a ticket, no matter what violation was committed.

With that being said, without consequences, there would be no incentive for people to: purchase the required licenses, permits, certificates, and stamps that fund the activities they are engaged in; purchase the required safety equipment that aids in the saving of lives when things go awry; operate vehicles and vessels at speeds and manners that don't put people in danger; and, generally comply with the

laws and regulations enforced by game wardens, enacted for public safety and resource protection.

Throughout my career as a game warden, I have worked in numerous locations with several different game wardens. While our roles and locations vary, the commonality I observed among our game wardens is their use of common sense and fairness. The vast majority of field contacts resulting in the discovery of a minor violation normally end with a warning being issued, or "lucky break" as most people would call it, paired with some education on how the person can enjoy the activity lawfully in the future.

The truth is, we as game wardens get more enjoyment in checking and observing people lawfully enjoying Kansas' natural resources and outdoor opportunities far more than having to address unlawful actions and activities. It's not all about the ticket.

WAY outside

BY BRUCE COCHRAN



"I DON'T KNOW, MEL. THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT IT THAT JUST DON'T LOOK RIGHT."

AT WOODS EDGE

WITH ANDRA BRYAN STEFANONI



Building Up To Bass

I've written a lot in my career about the importance of adults passing on outdoor skills to youth; of looking to the next generation as the future caretakers of the outdoors; of ensuring that kids know a fishing pole from a tent stake and a kayak from a canoe.

But until a springtime gathering with the Outdoor Writers of Kansas (OWK), I hadn't considered how important it is for outdoor enthusiasts – even seasoned ones – to continue to learn new skills; to branch out a little, add to our menu of choices, and to exercise our brain while exercising our bodies.

I can handle a gun and know how to hunt. I can paddle, mountain bike, hike, garden, and camp. But until my 46th year, my fishing experience was limited to trout. So when I learned I'd be spending some quality outdoor time with people who practically bass and crappie fished for a living, and we'd be in a boat, on a lake, fishing for bass and crappie, I fretted. There's no way you can fake that. I didn't even know where to begin.

I fretted as I loaded up my kayaks, my fishing pole, hiking boots, and a healthy ration of beef jerky and granola bars. And I fretted as I drove the truck north.

But here's the thing: The first step to learning something new is admitting you don't know how to do something. The second step is surrounding yourself with people who are willing to teach you and ask for help.

I shouldn't have fretted. The minute I arrived at the scenic Timber Hills Lake

Ranch near Mapleton, I was welcomed as the newest member of OWK and made to feel at home by owner Joe Bisogno and his staff.

With a private 40-acre lake and several farm ponds with ideal fish habitat at our disposal, it would be hands-on learning at its best, so long as no one laughed.

And no one did.

Joey, Joe's son and our guide, gave me an ABCs and 123s lesson in bass and crappie from his vantage point on the pontoon boat while I navigated the waters via my trusty kayak. As he offered tips, my head began to swim more than the mosquito fish I could see beneath the surface. Spinnerbaits and jigs and grubs, oh my. Cast it this way. Reel it in this way. But he was patient. And kind. And my fishing buddy, Nadia, shouted words of encouragement from her kayak.

Hour by hour, I worked on transitioning from handling my rod and reel like a trout angler would at the bank of an Ozark stream to working it the way I'd need to in order to be successful in a pond with a much different kind of fish. I had to learn to think like a bass instead of a trout, and learn their habits and habitat.

Finally, I got the hang of it. I got a bite! And – I lost it. While trout take just a mere flick of the wrist, bass are bigger, have much wider mouths, and to set that hook, you have to give the line a good solid yank.

Alright. Bass 1, Andra 0.

I paddled some more and cast some

more. It would have been easy, at one point, to simply drift along and listen to the pileated woodpecker in the nearby woods, or watch for a heron to fly over. But in my mind, I kept hearing Hubby say, "You can't catch a fish if your hook isn't in the water."

I renewed my determination, switched location, tackle, and my technique. I tried to learn in a day what the people with whom I was fishing had taken years to learn. But in my mind, I also kept hearing Hubby whisper, "Patience."

So I relaxed.

And then – another bite! This time, that bass was not getting away.

I reeled it in, got it up over the lip of the kayak, and marveled at my success. It wasn't huge, but it was beautiful, and I had caught it. I handled it delicately as I began to quickly unhook it and slide it back into the water, having been accustomed to oxygen-loving, sensitive trout. But Nadia stopped me.

"Bass are tough, so you don't have to be so careful," she assured me. "Grip it by the lower lip like this, and let me get a photo!"

All in all, I reeled in enough bass on that trip to leave with some fun stories to share with my family, who wound up buying me my own set of bass tackle a week later for Mother's Day. I also returned home with a handful of some not-too-shabby photos for the scrapbook. In all of them, I'm smiling. Smiling like a kid who just caught a fish for the first time.

HUNTING HERITAGE

WITH KENT BARRETT

Is Your Chase Fair?

When the spring turkey season ended May 31, I waited for reports of hunting incidents. It may seem ghoulish to wait for incident reports to come in, but making hunting safe is our job, and incident statistics can help us educate hunters about staying safe in the field.

You might assume that most turkey hunting incidents involve inexperienced hunters on crowded public lands. However, national studies show that turkey hunting incidents usually involve hunters with years of hunting experience, and two thirds occur on private land. Most victims are injured at distances of between 11 and 50 yards when shooters fail to properly identify the target. With experienced hunters involved and at distances this close, these incidents can't be considered accidental. Some may say these incidents are just a result of the "heat of the moment" or "turkey fever." Call it what you will, but I feel something else is at play.

The role of a hunter can't be taken lightly. The ultimate goal is to take the life of an animal, and with that, comes the responsibility to hunt safely and have honorable intentions toward the

animal we are hunting. Following "fair chase" principles can guide us in these efforts. When we decide that killing an animal is required for us to have a good hunt, we put unnecessary pressures on ourselves and we risk disrespecting the animal by being willing take shortcuts, or worse – cheat. This violates the concept of fair chase and cheapens the hunt.

If you follow fair chase principles, hunting is not a competition. We aren't competing with other hunters, nor are we competing with the animal; the only competition is within us. We all go afield guided by our own set of values. What we choose to do at the moment we touch the trigger is deeply personal. I try to explain to my students that it is never wrong to decide NOT to pull the trigger.

These values that guide us ultimately affect how we hunt, when we hunt and the equipment we use. Equipment and technology stir passionate debates involving fair chase. Some hunters will say that if it's legal, it's okay, while others say their personal ethics keep them from using certain equipment or techniques.

Sometimes these debates can arise around old equipment used in a new way. A turkey hunting trend sweeping across the nation is "fanning." This involves using a turkey fan attached to the gun barrel or holding up all or part of a decoy to hide the hunter. Fanning can allow the hunter to stalk closer to the bird and is highly effective but also very dangerous. While decoy hunting

has been around for years and is a widely-accepted hunting technique for almost every type of game, I have to consider – at what point are we pushing the boundaries of fair chase? When does technology give the hunter an unfair advantage over the natural abilities of the animal?

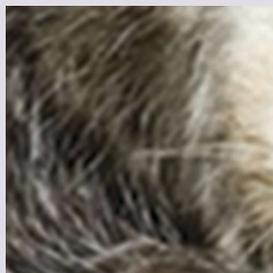
Today's gear and gadgets have made hunters incredibly efficient and can even make the hunt more comfortable and enjoyable. But when those same gadgets become a replacement for practice, effort or time in the field, have we gone too far? A successful hunt can be measured by the game we bring home, the time spent afield, the trophies on film or in our memories, the friends we cultivate (both two-legged and four), and more. What's your idea of success? And what are you willing to do to arrive there?

In my mind, not bringing home game does not constitute a failed hunt. And you won't find me hunting with a decoy covering my head. For me, coming home to family and friends, safe and sound, with the experience of the hunt is what matters most. When we follow fair chase principles, the rules of safe and responsible hunting should be more important than filling a tag or limit. But at the end of the day, it's still your choice to determine what makes a "good hunt."

The Boone and Crockett club says it best, "Ultimately, hunting is very personal and how you feel about yourself is what matters most."

WHAT AM I? ID Challenge

Using only the image and clues below, see if you can figure out this month's mystery species!



Clues:

1. My name is spelled a little funny
2. I have a long, hairless tail
3. I can "play dead" really well

>>> See answer on Page 9.



Fish Squeezer—Retired, But Not Yet Tired

WITH TOMMIE BERGER

A Good Time To Fish

July and August. The days are long and hot, and often the fishing slows down. And unless you know the right tips and tricks, you might only come home with a good sunburn. Here's some ways you can beat the summer heat and catch fish, especially catfish.

Be selective on the time of day you fish and how you fish.

Fish on cloudy and rainy summer days. Fish usually bite well right before a storm hits, but with that in mind, keep an eye out for severe weather. If you get a good rain and there is runoff, head to your best catfish spot. Muddy runoff stimulates catfish to bite because of all the food that washes in. Worms and insects caught in the runoff provide a smorgasbord for catfish that don't have any trouble finding food in turbid water. I have found that worms are the best bait for fishing runoff. And hang on, because big catfish usually take advantage of this muddy water picnic!

Fish on windy days. I know most anglers hate wind, but you can use it to your advantage. If you are using a boat, wind will help you drift, which is a good way to find fish. If you are a floatline angler, you know the wind is your ally. If you are a shoreline angler, fish on the windy side of the lake or pond where fish food is often stirred up by the wave action. I have seen channel catfish feeding in water 1 to 2 feet deep in these situations. When I was working as a biologist, we electrofished ponds in the summer to check fish populations and often shocked up catfish in shallow water on the windy side. Plus, it's always cooler on the windy side as the breeze evaporates water and cools the air coming off the surface.

Fish from a float tube or wade. Both methods will let you get beyond shoreline vegetation and fish the edges. My favorite summer catfishing technique is wading streams and fishing sponge bait. I've found that channel catfish will bite all day long if you put some smelly sponge bait or a worm in front of their nose. Wade fishing for catfish is almost like fly fishing for trout. You have to learn to read the water because catfish hang out below riffles, along undercut or shady banks, and under any brush, logs, or object in the current. Pitch your bait just upstream of where you think catfish are holding and the current will take the odor of your bait right to the fish. You might have to weed through smaller fish to keep some to eat, but this method can pro-

duce lots of fish.

Fish at night. Really big catfish, especially flatheads, are more active at night. You'll need a light and won't have the benefit of daytime fishing when bugs aren't a problem, but you'll make up for that by enjoying the coolest temperatures of the day. Set or limb lines and trotlines are proven methods for catching big summertime catfish at night. Consider using live bait such as large sunfish, large shiners, goldfish, crawdads or frogs. Set your lines at dusk and check them several times through the night. I've always noticed that the bite for smaller channel catfish seems to slow as it gets closer to dark. It makes me wonder if they don't go into hiding to avoid ending up in the stomach of a bigger catfish! Can't blame them.

Don't let the summer heat limit your angling fun. Adjust your timing and techniques and continue to put some fish in the frying pan and freezer. And remember, summer time is a perfect time to take those kids fishing!



Channel Your Inner Cat

Late summer is when many anglers are looking for a recliner and a little AC. July and August can be tough for catching some species of fish and the weather can be brutally hot. However, if you don't mind getting up early, you can have some great catfishing on some of Kansas' smallest bodies of water.

When anglers think of big channel catfish - like the state record, which weighed 36 pounds - they think of big reservoirs or large rivers. But miles of small streams and no-name creeks, many not much wider than a two-lane highway, are home to thousands of pounds of channel catfish. I've caught fish weighing nearly 10 pounds in the smallest of creeks with plenty of 3- to 4-pounders and tons of "eaters" or "pan-sized" cats, as some anglers refer to them.

When I plan a stream catfishing excursion, I always try to arrive just before sunrise. It's an early wake-up call but the temperatures are usually pleasant and a three- or four-hour trip will have you back home by noon for a nap. Bug spray is a must and in recent years I've taken to treating my jeans and t-shirt ahead of time with Permethrin or Permanone to repel ticks.

There's a short learning curve on "reading" a stream and figuring out where catfish hangout, but it's not difficult. They tend to hole up in deeper water and outside bends are usually scoured deeper than the rest of the stream. Areas just below riffles are also deeper and if you find a bend below a riffle with some sort of structure like

fallen trees or stumps, it's a slam dunk there will be catfish holding there.

I wear old tennis shoes with long pants as it's often muddy and poison ivy and stinging nettles can be prevalent. Sometimes, wading the stream bed is the easiest way to navigate, and I always work upstream to avoid muddying up the water and alerting fish of my presence. While catfish aren't sight feeders, it's easier to see deeper holes if the water is clear.

Equipment is simple: a 6- to 6.5-foot medium-heavy-action spinning rod and spinning reel with 12- to 14-pound-test monofilament is perfect. I tie a No. 4 or a No. 6 treble hook to an 18-inch leader below a barrel swivel and thread a quarter-ounce slip sinker on above the swivel.

While night crawlers or cut bait will work, I prefer a punch bait I make myself. There's a good selection of commercial punch, or stink baits, and they all have the common denominator of smelling like something that would gag a vulture. A quick pitch of the bait to the upstream side of where you think a catfish is hiding will quickly tell you whether or not anyone is home. Current will quickly take the bait's scent into the hole, so if I don't get bit within a few minutes, I'll pitch it out again to a slightly different area. Ten minutes or so in one spot without a bite is plenty prior to moving on.

Summertime catfishing is fun, a great way to keep cool, and often productive. Plus fried catfish fillets, fresh home-grown corn on the cob, and garden tomatoes is a meal fit for a king. And who wouldn't want that.

Answer from page 7: Opossum



Life Unpaved

WITH Nadia Reimer (and sometimes "Kota")

Off-season Investments



Three, then four, droplets of white, oil-based enamel paint pool on my mother-in-law's pristine garage floor. I silently say to myself "maybe we shouldn't be doing this," but their expressions tell me it really was an accident. I gingerly balance my paint brush atop my paint container, take a deep breath, and remind myself they're still kids. I tell myself the dog trailer isn't going to be perfect - and that's okay- it just needs to be done. The boys take some paper towels and smear the puddle, wiping it as best as they can. For now, the miniature snow angel of Rust-Oleum paint will have to be on exhibit until we can get some mineral spirits.

Tyler asks me if he can play "his" music now. I chuckle, knowing exactly what he wants to play, and begrudgingly say "sure." I can put up with a little Fetty Wap. After all, he and his brother could be doing anything else, but instead, they're here with me, roughing it, devoting their evenings to do something kind for someone else.

The room becomes lighthearted again and I can't help but smile, shaking my head at the situation we're in: a steaming hot garage, rap music turned up too loud, the smell of McDonald's french

fries permeating the humid air, poor lighting, and a massive undertaking given the limited time we had. I only hoped we could pull it off.

Months earlier, my husband purchased a six-hole dog trailer for our kennel, explaining it was a steal at \$500; and although she was in rough shape aesthetically, structurally she was a Clydesdale ready to ride. I trust his judgement, but I will admit after seeing the photos on his phone of chipped paint, exposing a gray and brown diamond plate

skeleton, I was grateful the trailer wouldn't be stored in front of our house. Thankfully, my mother-in-law had an empty stall in her two-car garage.

Now it's June and Father's Day is quickly approaching. The boys and I convene one evening to decide what our special gift to their dad would be. I try to use this as an opportunity to instill in the boys the importance of thoughtfulness and service, and while traditional store-bought gifts were even sounding good to me given our crazy schedule, it didn't have the "umph" we knew we needed. That's when it hit Dylan and me: the kennel! Because our dog kennel is a small, family-run operation, paired with the fact that Jon and I work full-time jobs, there is always something to be done and not always enough time to do it. Refurbishing the trailer was one such task. Our hunt test season would be ramping up soon, so the boys and I figured our gift to Jon would be to finish dog trailer. Lucky for us, the metal work was already complete, so aside from new tires, all she needed was a fresh, glossy coat!

The timing was perfect: Jon was working the night shift over the four

days leading up to Father's Day. Each night he pulled out of the drive, soon after so did we, to work on our secret mission. The task was harder than anticipated, and tedious, too, but by the end of those four nights, we completed our mission. The boys and I took their Dad on a surprise car ride leading him to his Father's Day gift the next day and his expression at the unveiling said it all.

As we closed the garage door on our grand gesture to fire up the grill at home, I knew this project would serve as the inspiration for my next column, and here's why: this project taught me that when we encourage our kids to invest themselves in our off-season projects, especially if it requires hard work, they will not only have a better understanding of the effort it takes to create meaningful outdoor experiences, but they will feel that they are a needed and important part of the process. And ultimately, they will have a deeper appreciation for the activity because of it.

By allowing and encouraging the boys to invest their time, energy and efforts in this trailer, they'll likely now want to see it get used and stay in good condition. And you can bet, when that trailer has seen the last of its days, they'll remember our time in that hot, muggy garage together, all the trips made with that trailer in-tow, and hopefully, all the dogs that got loaded in and out of its doors over the years, too.

Looking back, we didn't just paint a trailer. We invested in our family business together; we shared in real conversation (without a phone in front of our face), and we, in a way, were giving thanks to Jon for the outdoor experiences he and those dogs have provided us so far, and for all those to come.

So whether you're painting a used dog trailer, putting new batteries in trail cameras, spooling new fishing line, or even just reorganizing last season's pheasant loads - allow your kids to feel the satisfaction of contributing and being a part of the entire process, not just the end result.

Word to the wise, though: when it comes to a big paint smear on the garage floor, don't expect them to remember that.

Park View

WITH
KATHY PRITCHETT

Camp It Out!

My first night in a tent was more than 40 years ago: Gunnison, Colo. in August; putting up a tent we'd never used before in the dark; waking up to frost on the inside of the tent; and FREEZING! The rest of the trip was better, but had I not been optimistic, my first camping trip might have ended after the first night.

If I had gone home, I would have missed sitting on a picnic table 'till the wee hours toasting marshmallows and chatting with a couple from New York we had just met. I would have missed the sun bursting through the tent fabric to wake us up to enjoy a glorious sunrise. I would have missed the scent of pinon pine, sagebrush and a million other experiences that hotel rooms insulate us from.

Fortunately, we had many camping adventures after that. My daughter spent her first birthday camping beside a stream. And there was a goose that mistook my son's ear for a pancake and grabbed hold of it through the window of our antique pop-up camper.

That old \$75 camper housed our

family at campgrounds in Kansas, Colorado and New Mexico for a number of years, but making it usable was an adventure in itself. I took my sewing machine to the picnic table in our yard and repaired tears, replaced zippers, Velcro and screens.

There was the trip to Canada to visit my daughter-in-law's parents. My son, daughter-in-law, and not-quite-two-year-old granddaughter and I shared a tent and our own sleeping bags on an inflatable queen-sized mattress. One morning, when I thought I was the only one awake, I heard something on the other side of the tent. Looking over, I saw my granddaughter amusing herself.

"Whatcha doin', Ally?" I asked.

"Playin' cards," she responded.

She had the cards from her dad's wallet (driver's license, ID's, credit cards) spread across his sleeping bag while he snoozed soundly away.

I would have missed waking up 100 yards from the Atlantic Ocean on Prince Edward Island, digging for clams and roasting them on a campfire while Beth's mom told stories (and ghost stories) about

growing up on that very property.

And there was a trip to the Florissant Fossil Beds where we had to nurse the truck's transmission along to get us out of the valley. Instead of heading to our planned destination (I don't even remember now where it was), we ended up in Pueblo, Colo., where my husband's uncle lived. We parked the camper in their yard and unfurled the tent at a KOA. About 3:00 a.m., the winds howled down off the Front Range, and the tent started slapping our faces. We let it down and hid out in the pickup until the winds died. We repaired the truck, but stayed in the area for vacation and found unexpected jewels: Bishop's Castle, Pueblo City Park, the Pueblo Zoo and the best cup of coffee I've ever tasted. We spent more time with the relatives than we expected and enjoyed every minute.

Moral of the story: Relax your expectations when camping. Don't tie yourself into a schedule. Unplug. You will be surprised and delighted.

Camping at a Kansas state park can offer this and more and is surprisingly easy. You can reserve your site by going to our website, www.ksoutdoors.com or www.reserveamerica.com. Or, if you don't absolutely need utility hookups, you can come to the park and check in to an available site. Your adventure awaits.

Wildlife Division Unveils New Habitat Program

In a state where 97 percent of the land is privately owned, private land habitat programs are integral to enhancing wildlife populations. The department's Wildlife Division has a long history of working with private landowners to enhance habitat on private land, including the Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP), as well as placing district biologists in NRCS offices to deliver wildlife-friendly Farm Bill programs. Now, after a year of development, the division has introduced the newest and latest private land program, Habitat First, which will replace WHIP.

Through Habitat First biologists will provide technical assistance, habitat management planning, equipment loan, and deliver state and federal cost-share programs. And the standardized practices and rates make the program easy to understand and explain.

For more information on Habitat First, visit ksoutdoors.com and click on "Wildlife and Nature," then "Private Landowner Assistance."



PUBLIC WETLANDS: REST STOPS FOR SPECIAL VISITORS

BY MATT FARMER, ASST. PUBLIC LANDS MANAGER, JAMESTOWN

If you visit Kansas public wetlands, you'll find that no two outings are the same. There are always new arrivals to see, along with things you missed during the last visit. Wetlands are diverse and dynamic, changing daily, and if you're lucky, you might get a glimpse at a rare visitor. Wetlands owned and managed by the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) are managed to provide optimum habitat for waterfowl and water birds, and they draw hunters and bird watchers. Time it right, and the fall and spring migrations can provide amazing experiences.

The cost of managing our public wetlands is paid for with revenue from hunting license sales and excise taxes on hunting and shooting equipment. However, KDWPT has some terrific partnerships with conservation organizations and with assistance from the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA), wetlands are being restored and enhanced across the state. In fact, there are more wetland projects underway today than ever before.

Kansas wetlands play a vital role for birds migrating in the Central Flyway. Imagine these areas as "rest stops" along the migration highway – Mother Nature's all-in-one truck stop, providing birds a place to re-fuel and rest during long, grueling migration treks.

A wetland manager's goal is to provide habitat that will allow migratory birds to improve their body condition and

leave with plenty of energy for courting, egg laying and brood rearing. Millions of migratory birds representing more than 300 species regularly stop at Kansas wetlands during their long journeys, and every so often, we get some unique visitors.

Such was the case at the Jamestown Wildlife Area on April 6, 2016 when 23 whooping cranes were observed on one of the wetland's shallow pools. We generally see several endangered whooping cranes on the area every spring and fall, but rarely do we see this many at the same time. Significant numbers of whooping cranes are more likely to be seen at Quivira National Wildlife Refuge or Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area, but Jamestown is a small wetland compared to these two areas. Barry Jones, a visitor's services specialist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at Quivira, said that the largest number of whooping cranes recorded there at one time was 76 on April 2, 2010. Tom Bidrowski, migratory game bird program manager for KDWPT, stated that in 2009, Cheyenne Bottoms had 27 Whooping Cranes on the area.

Hunters and local birding enthusiasts were more than excited to see the whooping cranes at Jamestown. As we continue to improve and enhance our Kansas wetlands, we hope the frequency of special visitors increase. The sportsmen and women of Kansas should be proud that their license dollars provide critical rest stops during migration and play a major role in the survival of this endangered species.





SUMMER SURF 'N TURF

For some reason, my daughter Anastin, has decided she no longer likes to eat fish, and this has caused a problem in our family. We all like catching channel catfish during the spring and summer months and, until recently, we enjoyed the fish fries that followed. On day, with a fish fry in mind, I grabbed a package from the freezer that I thought were fish fillets packed in water. However, it turned out to be the thigh meat from this spring's turkey. I had thawed out two bags of fish and one bag of turkey, but I thought, "We can do this."

Since Anastin now thinks she's too good for anything but hot dogs and chicken nuggets, I was tempted to deep fry her a couple of hot dogs (which are pretty good by the way) but I decided to play to her eating habits. I cubed the turkey and the fish into similar-sized chunks and breaded them in Andy's Red Fish Mix. I usually make my own fish breading, but Andy's Red is as good as it gets for commercial mixes, and it gives us variety when we cook up fish. It's cornmeal-based so it has lots of texture.

Turkey takes a little longer to cook, so I kept it separate from the fish while cooking. I was a worried about how a fish seasoning would fair on turkey, but to my surprise, it was a hit. My daughter ate them up and went back for more.

I accidentally found a great way to prepare wild turkey thigh meat that everyone will eat, and we have a couple more packages of turkey thighs left in the freezer, so we don't have to stoop to deep fried hot dogs quite yet.



FISHIN' WITH MIKE MILLER

Draggin' The Tube

Over the years, I've found that a 3-inch tube bait is dynamite for catching smallmouth bass on Lake of the Woods in northwestern Ontario. In early June, we catch them in water 2 to 8 feet deep along rocky shorelines and points. I prefer to cast the lightest jig head I can fish effectively, which falls slowly and snags up less often than heavier heads. I've also learned that tube baits will catch Kansas sport fish, but the dependable Kansas "breeze" can make fishing with light jigs difficult.

Normally, I fish a tube like any other jig, keeping it near the bottom, and "jigging" it with short pops of the

rod tip. I let it fall, while slowly retrieving line to take out slack. Most strikes occur during the fall, so the rod tip is held high waiting for the familiar "tap," felt when a fish inhales the bait. This technique engages the angler in the entire process, from lure action to detecting strikes to setting the hook before the fish spits the lure out. And it works great when winds are calm, but it can be difficult to keep slack out of the line and feel hits if there is a breeze. I have found a solution, and I call it dragging.

I still cast as light of a jig head as I can get away with, especially when fishing rocks or rip-rap. However, rather than holding my rod high like I do under calm conditions, I drop the rod tip to water level. It's not as sensitive this way, but the wind will put too much bow in your line if you hold the rod high. Rather than pop-

ping the jig to give it action, I'll drag it close to the bottom with a slow, sweeping action of the rod. I may give some subtle action to the lure, but my biggest concern is keeping the tube near the bottom and keeping the line tight. Unless the fish are very aggressive, strikes feel different when dragging in windy conditions. Rather than the "tap" you usually feel as the tube falls, you'll often just feel weight when a fish picks up the tube while you're dragging it. I set the hook quickly, and I get best hook sets under these conditions using a superline because it stretches less than mono.

Dragging a tube isn't ideal, but it will get the job done when the wind blows. And it's effective on Kansas smallmouths, largemouths, walleye and white bass.



The Way I See It

WITH TODD WORKMAN

The “Ta-ta, Toe!” Spider

“What happened to your big toe? It looks hideous!” my wife shrieked in horror.

I looked down at my bare feet. The meat on my big toe is sheared away on the outside and the toenail resembles a dark blue shard of glass. The toe looks like a steamroller flattened it.

“Tolio,” I said, matter of factly.

“You mean polio?” she replied.

“Nope. Tolio only attacks the toes, and only a few special people get it”.

My wife guffawed.

“You don’t believe me?” I was incredulous.

“The last time I believed you was when you told me the grain silos outside of Auburn were missile silos. When I repeated that to your dad, you both laughed uncontrollably?”

“I kind of remember,” I said, trying to hide my pride in that little joke. “I also remember the big book you were reading when Dad and I started laughing and I remember it swinging in a lightning-fast arc toward my ear.”

“Served you right,” she snorted. “I’m reading a rather big book now. Want to see it?”

“Nope, but I will tell you the honest-to-gosh true story about my toe,” I said as I began my morbid tale.

I was 11 and my brothers and I were in our weapons development stage. The adults had stripped away anything they perceived as potentially deadly materials, but we still had tree branches and inner tubes – we could build slingshots.

Soon, it became a competition to see who could build the most powerful slingshot, and that was judged by the amount of damage it could do. The best sling shot would hurl the biggest projectile with the maximum amount of force.

Taking a tip from Native Americans, I selected the Osage orange tree for its strength and durability. I began chop-

ping on an Osage branch with my pocket knife, which, because it wouldn’t cut warm butter, was ineffective. That necessitated borrowing dad’s wood saw, hammer, and chisel. After two days of pounding, sawing, and chiseling, I had the classic “Y” slingshot frame.

I confiscated an inner tube from my little brother’s bicycle. He’ll claim I took his good inner tube, but I knew it had a patch. It was only a matter of time before it blew out, so I probably saved him from a tragic crash.

When I was finished, I knew my slingshot was the most powerful. Unfortunately, my spaghetti arms couldn’t pull it back to its full potential. Other boys with less ingenuity but more brawn could generate more power, evidenced by the dents they made in the metal highway sign near our house.

While the sign was a casualty of our slingshots, assassinating bugs was our main purpose. Grasshoppers and crickets were primary targets, but anything that crawled or flew was in danger. Bugs fell in great numbers to our sling shots, and it was bug hunting that led to the permanent deformity of my big toe.

We were using Mom’s ice tea pitcher to flood the holes of wolf spiders. Dangerous business it was, as wolf spiders boil out of their flooded domicile ready for battle. We would either shoot them with our slingshots or catch them in a jar so we could “study” them before turning them loose.

One day, my buddy Tony and I were prowling the vacant lot when he pointed to the ground. “That is the biggest spider hole I’ve seen.”

It was a big hole and no way did I think a spider of that proportion lived there; a gopher or a mole, but certainly no spider. I kept that to myself, though, and acted brave while

laughing and proclaiming, “Yum yum, gimme some.”

“You pour the whole pitcher down the hole and I will arm myself,” I said, using my best old West hero voice. “When that big bug comes out I will smash him with ‘Ole Yeller,’” I said as I yanked out my slingshot and pouched my best-shaped rock.

I heard Tony gasp and looked up to see him drop the pitcher, scream “look out!” as he bolted away. Then I saw it. This beast looked like a black baseball with pipe cleaner legs and had the demeanor of a grizzly bear.

The giant paused at the top of its flooded home and looked at me with all eight eyes. Then it charged. I can still hear its hairy legs whispering through the grass as it bore down on my bare feet.

As the wolf spider closed the gap, I pulled back the inner tube with adrenaline-aided strength and was at full draw when the big spider bared its black fangs. In a panic, I fired, nailing my big toe and missing the spider by two feet. Blood spurting from the wound and I shrieked and hopped, falling over backwards. I just knew that spider was going to bite me in the jugular and I would be a goner.

“Todd got bit! That spider got him! Run for it!” one of my brothers yelled.

After seeing the blood and determining that the spider had taken me down, my “loyal” band of brothers left me to be devoured. When I realized I hadn’t been bitten on the jugular, I got up and saw the spider in the grass where I had crushed it while hopping around like an idiot. I limped home and bandaged my mutilated big toe, wearing the bandage proudly. I was treated like a hero for about a week, but I became old news then Marvin Bottoms was in a bike accident and lost a large piece of skin from his leg. Until now, I have never revealed that my injury was a self-inflicted.

“So,” I turned to my wife, “That is the true story . . .”

Sometime during my tale my wife had crept out. I guess my pain and suffering was too much for her to bear.

Beautiful, But Bane BY IRALEE BARNARD



When outdoors, everyone has been taught that it is wise to use sunscreen and to practice water safety. We also know that fire is to be respected and carefully tended. But some of us are not fully aware that lurking nearby is a plant that deserves our complete attention: *Toxicodendron radicans*. Sound intimidating? It should; it's poison ivy.

Poison ivy is in the cashew family – yes, the same edible nut that many of us enjoy actually contains oil compounds in its shell, which can cause contact dermatitis, or red, irritated skin. The sap in all parts of the poison ivy plant contain the oily resin called urushiol, which on human skin, can cause an immune reaction that produces blisters and an extremely itchy rash lasting about two weeks. Luckily, most animals are not affected by the oil, so Fido should be safe.

Poison ivy is a woody vine that trails along the ground and climbs very high in trees by means of aerial roots along the stems. It is common in just about any habitat, but it is most frequent at woodland edges. Poison ivy has a compound leaf with three pointed leaflets, the margins often toothed or lobed. In late summer, song birds, upland game birds, and turkeys eat the plants then-formed creamy, white berries. In autumn, poison ivy changes disguises again and its leaves turn orange or red.

Many of us have learned the saying, “leaves of three, let it be,” but poison ivy is not the only plant with three leaflets. Look to see if the plant is woody, as this eliminates a lot of other plants with somewhat similar leaves. The box elder tree, when a sapling, is probably most easily confused with poison

ivy. To be certain of what you are looking at, consider referencing a field guide.

There are two species of poison ivy that exist in Kansas: *Toxicodendron radicans*, as mentioned prior, and *Toxicodendron rydbergii*. The latter is found in the western half of Kansas and grows upright forming shrubby thickets, but the leaves are still very recognizable.

Regardless of which species you come into contact with, you'll want to know how to reduce discomfort and quickly. Calamine lotion and cortisone ointments are the standard used for relief, but there are also some folk remedies said to minimize the effects of poison ivy too, like the plant jewelweed found in eastern Kansas. Ultimately, the best approach is a proactive approach and that means learning to recognize poison ivy and avoid contact from the start.

There are select people who will not have a skin reaction after contact with poison ivy, but I don't recommend testing that out. People who ignore this plant can suffer extreme cases of ivy poisoning, potentially needing medical care. If you think you have come into contact with the plant, immediately clean the area with a wet wipe containing alcohol and/or wash with cold water. Then, take a very soapy shower and wash the clothes you were wearing as soon as possible.

Poison ivy is a beautiful, but bane plant, so take the time to recognize it and take proper precautions when heading afield before this woody vine gets its hold on you.



I Spy An Ibis by Dan Witt

Last spring, Curtis Wolf, manager of the Kansas Wetlands Education Center at Cheyenne Bottoms, called and said there was a single white ibis amid a group of white-faced ibis on a wetland north of the education center. I grabbed the camera and joined him to see and photograph that unusual bird. As things go in the birding world, word quickly spread and people came from many places to observe and add a terrific bird to their lists. I couldn't blame them; it was a rare opportunity. We certainly enjoy all the birds that visit, but the rare ones garner special attention.

We have had some strange birds visit the Bottoms over the years. Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism's area manager Karl Grover and district wildlife biologist Charlie Swank keep meticulous records of the visits. A purple gallinule appeared in 1995. In 1996, a gyrfalcon showed up. I

was fortunate to see the roseate spoonbill in 2003, and a brown pelican visited in 2014. I saw that bird while walleye fishing on Wilson Reservoir, so he was still going north. I'm sure there are have been many more.

These aberrations in travel are interesting. A white-fronted goose and a pair of snow geese were still present at the Bottoms in early June, long after they should have left for the north. I suspect they are survivors of the hunting season and just haven't migrated. It is logical that the white ibis hatched in close proximity to the white-faced or glossy ibis, got separated from its parents, and ended up traveling with its cousins. It's also possible that food sources changed, forcing this bird to take a difference travel route. Probably the most logical explanation is that a windstorm blew the bird off course. In fact, there were no cattle egrets in North America until the

1980s. They are native to Africa. Apparently a huge storm blew some into the Caribbean and they have spread northward ever since.

Ibis are spectacular birds. There are three species in North America – white-faced, glossy, and white. Rarely, a scarlet ibis from South America will appear.

I asked my well-traveled birding friend Mike Cooper about his experiences with ibis around the world. His eyes got soft when he recalled red-naped and black-headed ibis in India, sacred ibis, hadada ibis from Africa, and Japanese or crested ibis.

I now had my own ibis experience. There are so many different and interesting species of ibis that you could have an educational program just about ibis of the world. I would sign up – what a treat that would be!





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.

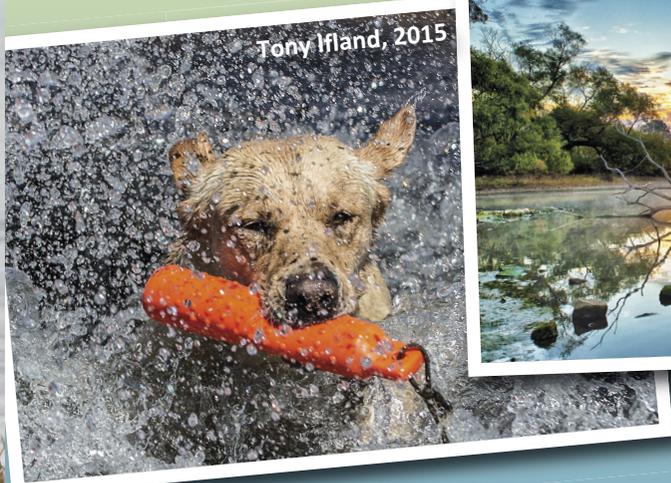
JUDGING

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.

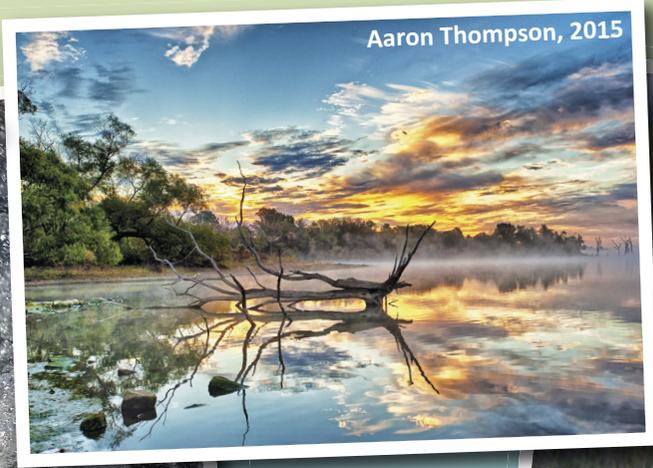
DEADLINE

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 and click "Services," "Publications," "Magazine," then "Wild About Kansas."



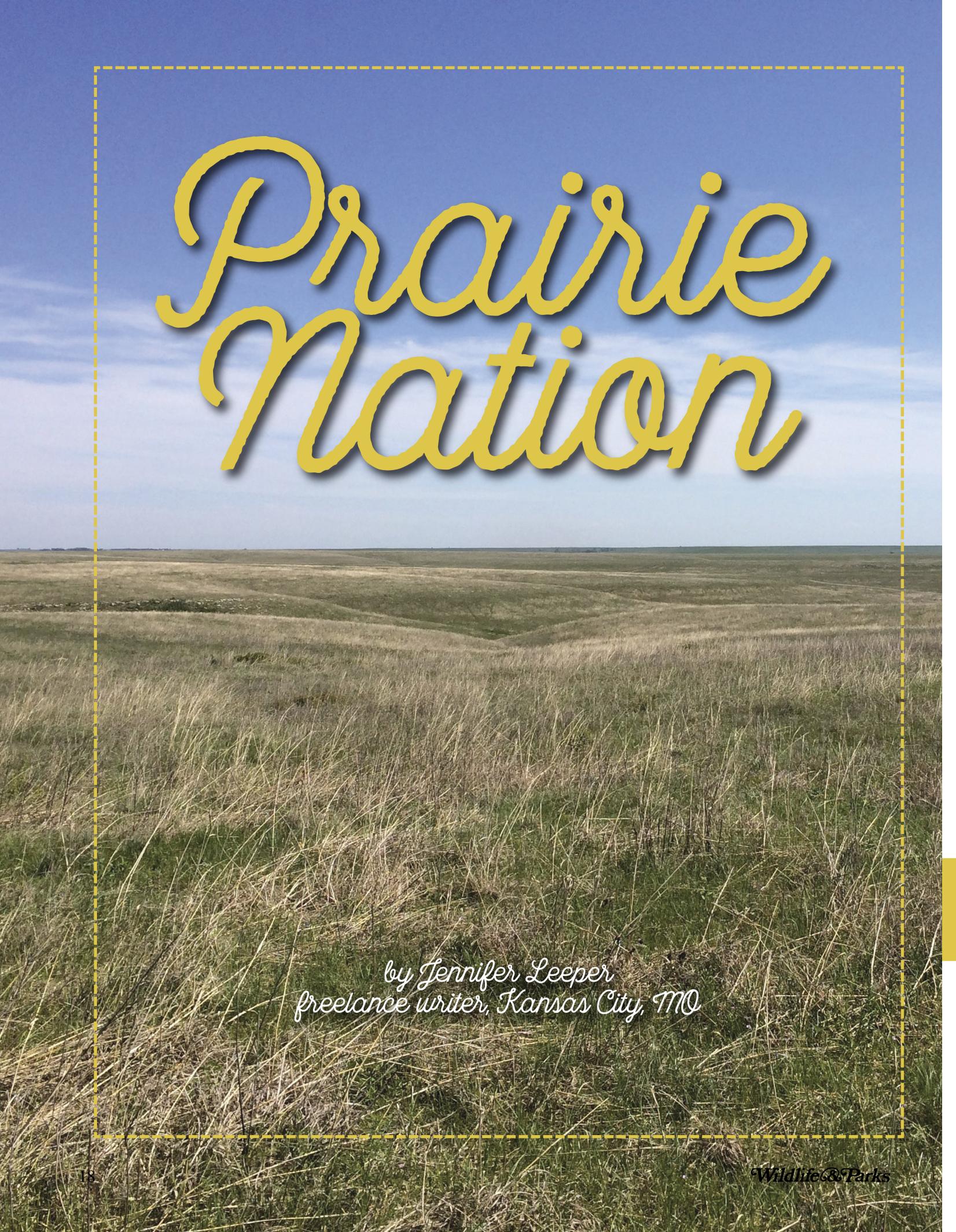
Tony Ifland, 2015



Aaron Thompson, 2015



Tony Pianalto, 2015



Prairie Nation

*by Jennifer Leeper
freelance writer, Kansas City, MO*

As Americans celebrate the 100th anniversary of the U.S. National Park Service (NPS) with mountain ascents, canyon descents, and many other treks into the wilderness, I considered my own commemoration that would be uniquely Kansas: A hike at the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve (TPNP).

Tallgrass prairie once thrived on more than 170 million acres of North American soil, but less than four percent remains today and most of it is in the Kansas Flint Hills, where the TPNP is located. However, the TPNP, near Cottonwood Falls, almost wasn't as private funding fell through in the mid-2000s. If it hadn't been for the intervention of The Nature Conservancy, the 11,000-acre tallgrass preserve probably wouldn't exist today. The Conservancy went a step further and gifted 13 bison from Wind Cave National Park in South Dakota to the preserve. These bison were the first to make their home in the Kansas tallgrass in over a century.

When I signed up for the hike through the Sierra Club, it wouldn't be my first time stepping onto the seemingly endless tallgrass terra. A few years back, on my January birthday, I ventured alone onto a wintry, white-gold canvas that waited for the colors of a warmer season. I was there for the starkness of that season. I had come to be alone, away from the modern world, shrouded in the mysteries of the past frozen in time.

There was no modern visitor center yet, only an old stone ranch house where a single park ranger waited to answer guests' questions. It appeared I was the only tallgrass pilgrim that day. The ranger told me the tour buses weren't running that time of year, but I was welcome to venture out on foot, and maybe, just maybe, I would catch a glimpse of those magnificent creatures, the bison if I was lucky. On the way out he mentioned that I should stay back a good distance if I did happen upon any "woolly bullies" as they were known to charge humans who got too close.

Once the ranch house disappeared from view and a strong, brisk wind folded me in completely, nearly carrying me along, I glimpsed what it must have been like to be the first to explore a new territory. I was a pioneer searching for land to settle, or passing through the tallgrass toward a destination territory. Other than a couple of wiry fences and cattle gates, there was no indication of civilization in any direction. I was absorbed by a moment in our North American history that might have been discarded from our collective recollection had it not been safeguarded.

Then, I saw them. Tiny brown dots in the distance. My initial impulse was to run toward the dots, but I recalled the ranger's warning about the bison's personal space bubble. So, I meandered slightly closer, but the dots moved too, and we continued like this – the pursuer and the pursued – for about half an hour. If I had picked up my pace, I could have easily closed the distance. After all, this might be the last time I had the bison to myself. The preserve could decide to run buses in colder weather, or more visitors could discover the wonders of winter on the tallgrass prairie. I sat in this thought for a few minutes, but resigned myself to a distant admiration. I was fortunate just to share the landscape alone with these formidable plains icons. I watched the brown dots grow smaller and smaller until they disappeared over a hill.

I but returned several more times over the years, hoping for a more intimate gaze, even dragging along my husband en route to the Symphony in the Flint Hills one year. After we adopted our son, we threw him in a pack on our shoulders and I hoped to introduce him to the same transcendent experience I'd had only a few years before, but I was disappointed; no brown dots that trip.

Despite my failed missions, when the Sierra Club hike offer came calling in my email inbox, I couldn't pass up a perfect spring day of watercolor blue sky

"The Conservancy went a step further and gifted 13 bison from Wind Cave National Park in South Dakota to the preserve. These bison were the first to make their home in Kansas tallgrass in over a century."

and green grasses on the preserve. I joined 30 or so Sierra Club hikers emanating the same anticipation I had for witnessing even a tiny ant trail of bison near the horizon.

With the smell of sunscreen being lathered on, and conversation lathered even more thickly, the atmosphere felt almost festive. The group's leader, Travis Robinett, Sierra Club Wakarusa chair and outings coordinator, explained the meaning behind what we were doing in the context of the NPS anniversary. He also, getting down to brass tacks, discussed the possibility of seeing the bison. Robinett echoed what I had learned from the park ranger during my first visit, advising we stay about 150 yards away to be on the safe side, though TPNP literature recommends 125 yards.

We launched onto the rough, gravelly trail, and our caravan quickly thinned out to the length of about an eighth of a mile. I sandwiched somewhere in the middle, settling into an almost sleepy rhythm in the warmth and light breeze fluttering the green and gold grasses. In the lull of this rhythm I became distracted from my objective, escaping into the dreamlike reality of a sky so big that we seemed to move directly into it each time we climbed a chalk-dust hill. Somewhere in my subconscious, there was probably the thought that this time would be it – this time the bison wouldn't elude me.

Sure enough, my objective found me this time, or I should say, he found us. Instead of shrinking from our view, the brown dot inflated until there was no doubt we were in the presence of a great animal. Our own herd quickly cinched together, retrieving cameras and smart phones from packs and pockets and clicking away like prairie paparazzi at the lone bison.

I was starstruck myself.

Travis mentioned that the bison standing before us was the bull and he protected the others who remained out of sight, well behind their captain who navigated them safely through the dry sea of grass.

We waited a few minutes to see whether the bull would retreat, but it didn't. In fact, the bull continued moving toward us, as our group attempted to maintain the 150-yard buffer. A few bold photographers straggled behind to snap photos at the very edge of that range.

If the bull persisted in pushing us back, Travis indicated we would need to turn around. However, an abbreviated hike was certainly worth the chance to see the bison up close, and an alpha bull, no less.

As it was, I needed to part ways with the group and meet my husband and son in Strong City for a Mother's Day lunch, so I left the others to their crossroads – wait it out or go ahead and turn back toward the starting point. I'm not sure what hap-

Bull Sighting





Cow & Calf

pened. I left it a mystery, just as I will leave a mystery the 125 or 150 yards of distance that will most likely always exist between the bison and myself. Mystery only enhances such experiences after all.

I wandered back alone, wholly satisfied in seeing what I had been waiting so long for. My camera carried evidence of the grandeur I had witnessed, and the experience was stored, permanently I hoped, in my own memory space.

Yes, I am admittedly a bison groupie, but even more so I am proud of the fact that these creatures have a protected home and will continue to graze in this home for as long as we are willing to step forward as caretakers. Without this long-range investment in our wild spaces, I might not have been able to return season after season and year after year for a chance to glimpse the bison.

Raised in Kansas, I'm proud to be able to cele-

brate the national anniversary of the protection of our country's wild spaces in the state I claim as my forever home. We are a nation of mountains, canyons, forests, oceans, and yes, we are a prairie nation, too.

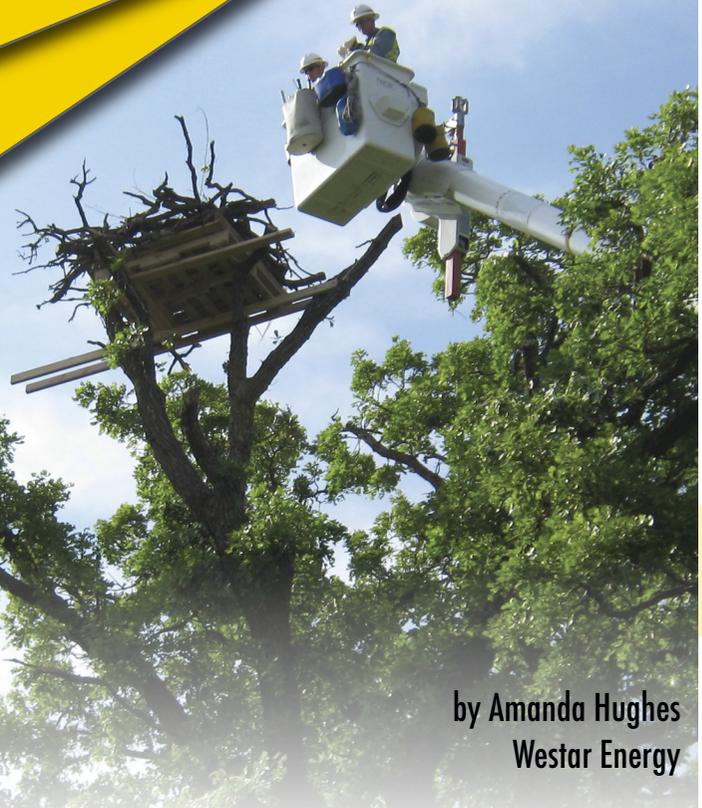
Travis, our hike leader, summed up best the intention behind the commemorative tallgrass hike:

"After so much destruction of the original Tallgrass Prairie, with so little of it left untouched by agriculture and development, the preserve is a wonderfully pure reminder of one of our country's historic landscapes and its ecosystem. The National Parks Service preserves such landscapes across our great nation, allowing us to immerse ourselves into nature just as our ancestors did, and gives people an appreciation not found by looking at a picture or a painting." 🦋

The physiographic region of Kansas known as the Flint Hills is an area of tallgrass prairie that extends nearly 200 miles from near the Nebraska border to Oklahoma. It's 80 miles wide at its widest, just south of the Kansas River. Most of the tallgrass prairie is in private ownership and is maintained and conserved by cattle ranchers. A layer of flint under the soil's surface prevented it from being broken out, unlike other tallgrass prairies in Iowa, Missouri and Illinois, which are going forever.

The Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve provides the public a change to experience the wonders of this unique and amazing ecosystem. The park is 17 miles south of Council Grove on Hwy K-177, and the physical address is 2480B KS Hwy 1577, Strong City, 66896. Trails are open every day except during prescribed burns, and the Visitors Center is open daily, 8:30-4:30. All activities at the preserve are free. Learn more at www.nps.gov/tapr/.

ROOST RESCUE



by Amanda Hughes
Westar Energy

Bald eagles command our attention, and while nesting pairs are becoming more common every year in Kansas, people take note when an active nest is seen. Westar Energy's environmental experts have received many requests to build nest platforms for bald eagles and osprey, but when a wildlife rescue effort is involved, time is of the essence. This was the case when Westar's executive director of Environmental Services, and an organizer of Westar's Green Team, Brad Loveless, received a phone call in May. That phone call eventually brought several agencies together to take on a problem and turn it into an incredible resolution.

On May 11, near Randolph, lightning struck a Sycamore tree that supported an eagles' nest cradling two eaglets. The tree smoldered for two days and on the morning of May 13, one of the tree limbs finally snapped causing the nest to fall to the ground. One eaglet was injured beyond recovery, but the remaining eaglet survived. That's when biologists with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism staff from the Milford Nature Center and several Westar workers responded.

Usually in this type of situation, a Westar pole would be set and a nest would be built on top. However, the land was too congested with trees to get a large pole digger truck and pole into the area. By noon, Loveless had called in a Westar line crew to come up with a creative solution.

"Basically, we had two options," said Loveless. "The seven-week-old eaglet could be raised in captivity, never the best choice for a wild animal, or we

could try to respond quickly enough to reunite this chick with its parents."

Brad Kesl, Westar Energy's director of Division Operations, Manhattan, along with his crew, foreman, Jerome Ellis and journeyman linemen, Joe Rhodd and Dary Roeser, gathered material from the Westar Manhattan Service Center and the local Home Depot, and headed to the site. They brought with them pallets, lumber, wire ties, deck screws and anything else they thought they might need to build a large eagle nest.

"It was important we rebuilt the nest fast, so the eagle parents would return and claim the eaglet," said Loveless. "The linemen did a great job of rounding-up natural materials in a hurry."

The nest needed to be located high up and open to the sky, with no branches hanging over the sanctuary, and in close proximity of the original Sycamore. The linemen decided to retrofit an adjacent burr oak tree with the new nest. They then spent the afternoon using a chain saw to clear an open area and found a perfect fork in the branches to safely hold the weight of the nest; onsite biologists estimated that the nest weighed approximately 2,500



Wildlife & Parks



pounds.

The crew began by attaching 2x4 lumber to the branches, creating a framework for the nest. Pallets were then attached to the framework to hold a platform. Next, the limbs that were removed from the tree (to create open space) were used to build the perimeter of the new nest. Wire ties, deck screws and tie wire were used to secure it all. Once the large limbs were attached, smaller limbs, old sunflower stems and brome grass were added. Finally, the nest, 50-feet off the ground, was complete.

"It was impressive to witness the crew's ingenuity and skill in constructing the nest," said Kesl.

While the nest was being constructed, the eaglet was given food and water and had its beak and talons measured. It also was banded with a silver U.S. Geological Survey band fastened to its right leg and a purple band, which is specific to birds banded in Kansas, secured to its left leg.

Just five hours after Westar crews showed up onsite, Rhodd and Roeser were able to use a bucket truck to lift the 8-pound eaglet to its new home.

"We gave them special instructions on how to release the eaglet," said Michelle McNulty, USFWS biologist. "Once the eaglet was placed into the nest, the guys were smiling ear to ear."

Success! The eaglet was safe in its new home! The linemen and others involved were thrilled at the outcome so far. Now, the only question was if the parents would return. Minutes later, Kesl's team received a call of storms causing outages in another part of Kansas and the Westar linemen set off for what would be a long night of restoring power. But during the night and into the next day, linemen continued to check in with McNulty.

"Kesl and his team took a real interest in the eaglet and its wellbeing," said McNulty. "We never hesitate calling Westar for help. My dad was a lineman for a rural electric company in Colorado, so I know firsthand how much pride they have for a job well done."

Days later, The Manhattan Mercury reported Ryan



Gnagy, a fishing guide, had witnessed at 1:48 p.m., May 15, "an adult eagle leaving its roost, circling around a field and landing in the nest" the Westar linemen built. Nearly two hours later, Gnagy watched the bird take off, circle the nest and land in it again with a fish.

Westar's commitment to the environment can be seen throughout Kansas, especially when part of a team that comes together to protect the environment like the eagle nest emergency.

The Green Team began in 1989 and consists of a Westar employees, retirees and friends who spend their weekends and evenings completing 70 to 90 projects a year, including planting more than 40,000 trees. Collaborating with conservation organizations, agencies and schools to improve habitat, help sensitive species and enhance access to and foster understanding of Kansas' environment are the Green Team's main goals.

"Westar has always had a good environmental ethic," said Loveless. "The Green Team's work gives our volunteers a chance to learn and share their passion for taking care of Kansas. That, in turn, helps us to make better environmental decisions in our jobs every day." ♡



The Steeles' House of Stone

by Ron Kaufman

Information Services Division director, Topeka

In western Kansas, there is a surprising gash in the landscape of Scott County that is both geologically and historically significant. Located about 12 miles north of Scott City, the gash is a canyon formed by the erosive action of Ladder Creek across eons of time. Ladder Creek originates in eastern Colorado and flows into northern Scott County, where it turns northward and joins the Smoky Hill

River in Logan County. By Kansas standards, Ladder Creek Canyon is deep and rugged. The creek cuts down through the Ogallala Formation, creating steep-walled bluffs that line the canyon. The Niobrara Formation forms the canyon floor, which is relatively flat and bordered by yucca, grass and shrub-covered slopes leading upward to the feet of the bluffs. Near the creek, massive cotton-

woods and other trees line the banks. Where the Ogallala and Niobrara formations meet, persistent natural springs emanate from the ground near the canyon floor. These springs play a vital role in the story of the canyon and the lives of the Native Americans and Euro-American settlers who inhabited the canyon over the centuries.

This idyllic landscape is the set-

Pictured: Paul Beckley (seated), with the Steeles, circa 1913.

ting for Lake Scott State Park and one of the most historically significant regions in the state. If the canyon walls could talk, they could unleash a torrent of stories about life in the area beginning long before Kansas was a glimmer in the eyes of early politicians. This story, however, will focus on one pioneer couple, Herbert L. and Eliza J. (Landon) Steele, and the stone house they built in 1894 that still stands today.

The Steeles

The Steeles were among the first permanent settlers in Scott County after it was organized in 1886. Herbert was born in 1859 in East Bloomfield, New York, the first of 11 children. Some 25 years later, his family found their way to Dickinson County. It is unclear when Herbert moved to the Logan/Scott county area, but it may have been in the late 1880s or early 1890s. A brief 1890 newspaper article notes that Herbert was mending timepieces in the area, so he must have lived in the region. Conversely, an article announcing Herbert's death states that he came to Scott County in 1892. There are no records to indicate where Herbert lived between his arrival in the Logan/Scott county area and his marriage to Eliza.

Eliza Landon was born in 1858 in Jonesborough, Tenn. The Landons were living in Missouri in 1880, and land patent records indicate they were in Scott County by 1889. Eliza was a teacher before she married Herbert, having received her second-grade

teaching certificate in 1890. They were married in Scott City in 1892. It is unknown where the Steeles lived between the time of their marriage and when they built their house. Though the couple had three children, none survived their parents.

A House of Stone

In October 1893, Eliza bought the land where their house stands for \$225. It is located on the west side of Ladder Creek upstream from where Lake Scott now sits. At first, the couple lived on this property in a simple dugout built into the east-facing slope east of an unimproved county road. In circa 1894, they "renovated" their dugout and added a floor above it, building the two-level stone house we see today. The original road is now paved and familiar to park visitors as West Scott Lake Drive.

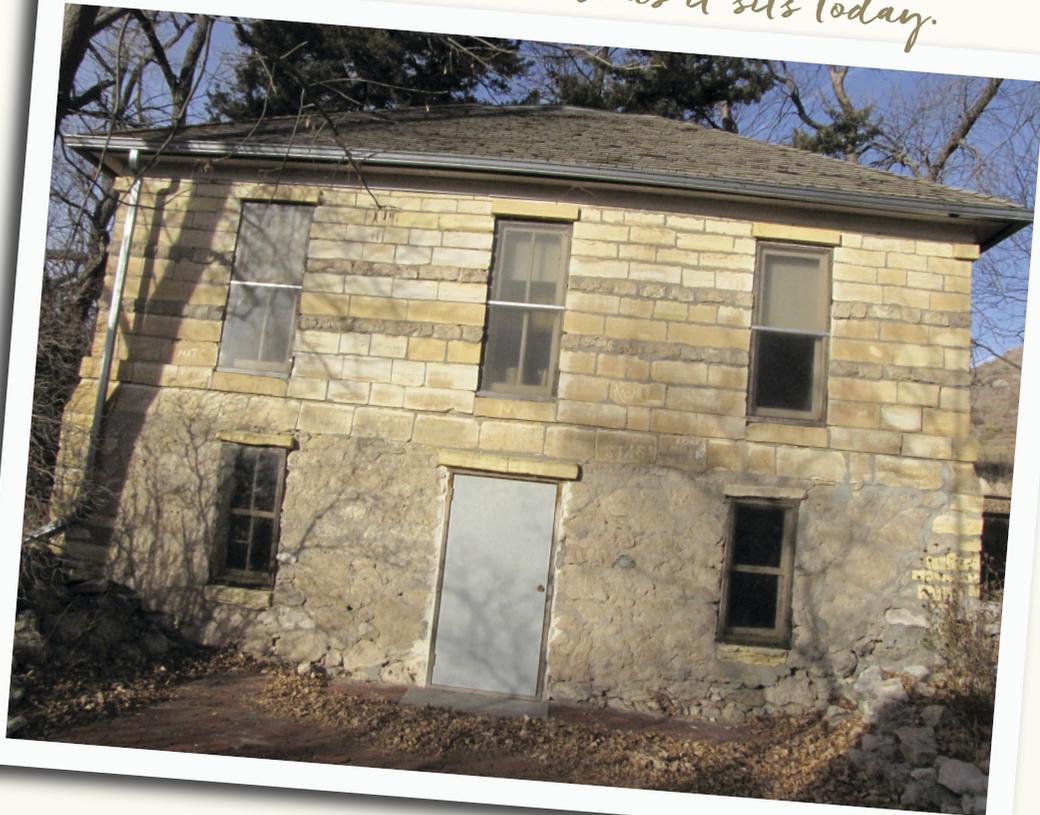
Built of limestone blocks, the house faces west so that the entrance to the main floor is one

story and the east elevation is two stories. The house measures 30 feet long by 30 feet wide; the roof eaves are 25 feet above grade at the rear of the house. The house is topped by a wood-shingled roof. A central brick chimney evident in historic images no longer exists.

Inside, visitors are treated to a glimpse of the Steeles' lives in the early 1900s. The seven-room house has five upper-level rooms, including a parlor and a family living area on the west side, each with a separate front door and two bedrooms on the east side with a walk-in, windowed pantry between them. Continuing to the lower level, the east room was used as a "summer" kitchen where Eliza would can and preserve a variety of fruits and vegetables. This room has a door to the outside through the east wall. The west basement room was Eliza's workroom and where the Steeles repaired tools and other equipment used around the ranch.

The Steeles raised cattle and crops, but gardening was their

Pictured: The Steeles' house as it sits today.





the 1964 designation of a large portion of the canyon as the El Cuartelejo Archeological District National Historic Landmark. In 1922, the Steeles deeded two acres of the El Cuartelejo site to the Kansas Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), so it could be preserved and shared with the public. The land has since been deeded to the Kansas Department of

Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT). The restored foundation of the pueblo can be seen north of the Steele house, along with a monument erected by the DAR in 1925.

Pictured: A glimpse inside what the Steeles' home may have looked like many years ago.

livelihood. They sold fruits and vegetables harvested from their orchard and garden Scott City – either from a horse and buggy or spring wagon and team, as they never owned a motorized vehicle. The garden was east of the house, and the orchard was to the south, (where the park maintenance facility is situated).

The stone springhouse north of their house not only supplied their water but was used to store perishable food items. Across the road west of the house, they built a large barn for horses, milk cows, other livestock, hay, wagons and buggies. North of the barn was a stone chicken house, but the barn and chicken house were demolished long ago.

Eliza tended to a variety of chores, which included cooking, churning butter, washing, sewing, weaving and milking the cows. She also made cheese, hominy,

sauerkraut, jellies and jams, spun wool from their sheep and wove fabric for clothing, rugs and quilts. To supplement their income, Eliza sold some of her creations while Herbert repaired clocks, sewing machines and other small machinery.

History Unearthed

A gentle mound of soil and rocks north of their house drew the Steeles' curiosity, and in 1898 Herbert invited University of Kansas paleontologists to excavate the mound. They found the remains of a seven-room pueblo that archeologists believe to be the location of El Cuartelejo, a Plains Apache village where Taos and Picuris Pueblo Indians lived after fleeing New Mexico in 1664 to escape Spanish rule. Later excavations throughout the canyon revealed evidence of other Native American habitation and led to

A Park is Born

The Steeles' willingness to share the beauty of their land with the general public led to the creation of Lake Scott State Park. Although Herbert was widely considered the county's most cantankerous and well-known character, the couple had long welcomed visitors to enjoy the scenery and El Cuartelejo. In 1925, prompted by the Steeles along with Grover McBride and other local dignitaries, members of the newly-formed Kansas Forestry, Fish and Game Commission (KFFGC) toured the canyon and the Steele farm to see if the area could be developed into a lake and park. In 1927, the Commission began buying 1,280 acres for what became Scott County State Park. In 1928, the Steeles sold 640 acres to the KFFGC for \$18 per acre with the stipulation they be allowed to live in their house rent-free for the remainders of their lives. In

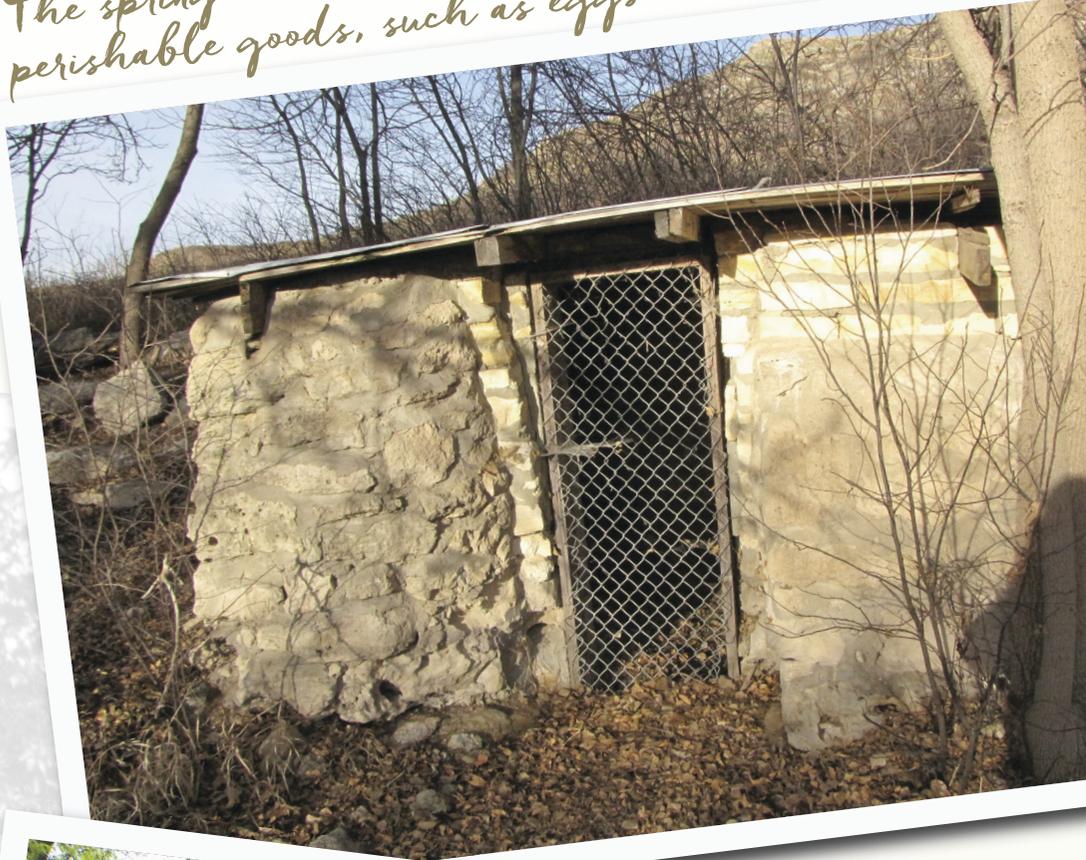
August 1929, a contract was let to build the dam for the 100-acre Lake McBride (now called Lake Scott), and it was completed in May 1930. Herbert passed in September 1929 having never seen the park he was so instrumental in creating. Eliza died in July 1930, a month after the park officially opened.

Shortly after Herbert's death, Scott County residents embarked on a campaign to build a monument to honor the Steeles. Efforts to raise the needed \$4,000 began in January 1930, and the county's school children and many other residents contributed. On June 12, 1930, residents held a celebration of the new park and unveiled the Steele Monument, which still stands on the bluff overlooking the house.

After Eliza passed, maintenance of the Steele House fell to state park staff and dedicated local volunteers. It was quickly put to use as a museum, a function it continues sporadically to this day. The Steele House remains much as it did when built in the 1890s, continuing as a testament to two of the most influential people in Scott County's early history.

In April 2016, the Kansas Historic Sites Board of Review nominated the Steele House to the National Register of Historic Places and listed it in the Register of Historic Kansas Places. The National Park Service will review the nomination and decide if the house will be listed in the National Register. The nomination can be viewed online at www.kshs.org.

The spring house the Steeles' used to cool their perishable goods, such as eggs and milk.



Read any of the descriptions of Kansas state parks and you'll quickly see that most have campsites, many have lakes, several have cabins, and all attract visitors who stay a day, or two, or more.

What's long fascinated me about Prairie Spirit Trail is that it is unique in the state park system: Built on the railbed of the old Leavenworth, Lawrence and Fort Gibson Railroad, it spans nine towns, three counties, includes three county seats, is just a few hundred feet wide and is 52 miles long. And in it, visitors don't stay in one place — at least not for very long. They move through it.

What's also fascinated me, as a journalist, is that although the trail is a means of escaping daily life for a few hours or a few days, it's also a means of getting an up-close glimpse of the daily lives of others as you pass by.

My companions for the trip were my younger son, Jack, age 11, and my older son, Dominic, 15. We would do reconnaissance and then decide whether to return for a longer trip with Hubby in which we could really take time to explore the towns and recreation along the way.

Heading Out

Before going, we visited the Bike Prairie Spirit website, created by Lawrence cyclist Samuel Schimek in 2009 and now maintained by Randy Rasa of Kansas Cyclist. The premier resource for the trail, it describes in linear fashion the towns along the trail, points of interest, distance between stops, and amenities necessary to cyclists, like water, food, and toilets.

Neither son had taken a cycling trip of this magnitude. As a former mountain bike racer who has put some miles in on two wheels, I figured I could





A family tour of Prairie Spirit Trail

Spirit of The Trail

text and photos by Andra Bryan Stefanoni
freelance writer, Pittsburg

make it some distance. But as a mom, caution prevailed, so when my mother volunteered for “sag wagon” duty, we accepted.

She would drive us to the northernmost point — Ottawa, in Franklin County — and drop us there. She’d then drive south on U.S. Highway 59 to predetermined towns along the trail, where she’d wait for us to arrive. At each check-point, we could decide whether we felt we could continue, and we could explore points of interest together. Then, at the trail’s southernmost point — Iola, in Allen County — she would pick us and the bikes up and we’d head home.

We packed a cooler with lots of water, Gatorade, apples, and cheese sticks, and in each of our bikes’ dry bags packed beef jerky, peanut butter sandwiches, and granola bars, as well as the usual bike gear: Extra inner tubes, a tire lever, sunscreen and of course, cell phones.

It was a June day perfect for being outdoors on a bike: Blue sky and sunshine, fluffy white clouds, and a slight cooling breeze out of the north. And it was National Trails Day. But I had a feeling that just about any time of year would be good on this trail. Turns out I was right.

The Ottawa Depot Museum

There are three trailheads in Ottawa, but the official starting point is at the Ottawa Depot Museum two blocks east of the grain elevators on West



Tecumseh Street. This 1888, two-story, passenger train depot includes permanent and traveling exhibits, brochures for area attractions, and trail maps.

We’d like to return to Ottawa and spend more time. Attractively landscaped for summer, it has an

historic Main Street lined with interesting shops and antique stores. We also noted it offers a connection to the Flint Hills Nature Trail. When complete, it will be the longest rail trail in the state and seventh longest in the nation at 117 miles.



But this day, we were focused on the Prairie Spirit Trail, so we headed out with our bikes pointed south, toward Princeton, 9.4 miles away, and then Richmond, another 6.4.

As would be the case for several stretches of the trail, this section of the former rail bed is lined with trees and in many cases is canopied by them. We saw a diverse palette of wildflowers and numerous birds, from indigo buntings to gold finches to scissor-tail flycatchers.

To the right and to the left, fields awash with golden wheat and emerald green corn stretched toward the horizon. Barns and silos added architecture to the landscape. Wooden bridges allowed us to pedal over intermittent creeks and country roads. Occasionally, farmers crossed fields on tractors, and grazing livestock lifted their heads to watch us pedal by. A wild hen turkey saw us and hurried toward the woods.

It was a great feeling to be able to ride with children and not worry at all about traffic. There were benches every mile or two, and the crushed limestone surface and minimal elevation changes meant easy riding even for young legs.

Richmond

It was only fitting that we’d stop in Richmond for a while, established by John Richmond, an agent for the railroad. He donated 40 acres for the townsite in 1870. There are no stoplights and no restaurants, but a crisp American flag on a freshly

painted white building caught our attention just a block from the trail: The Richmond Community Museum.

Inside, volunteers have lovingly assembled, labeled, and preserved artifacts important not just to the town, but to the fabric of American history: A pump organ from 1890, a phonograph from 1920, a purple heart earned by a local serviceman in World War II and ribbons won at a county fair in the 1960s. The most interesting display: A hand-drawn map of every one-room schoolhouse that had once operated in the county.

Garnett

We needed a break, so we loaded the bikes and drove to Garnett, which afforded several fast food choices and a beautifully restored Santa Fe Depot with both indoor restrooms and picnic tables.

But what piqued our interest for a return trip were Lake Garnett and Crystal Lake, both just off the trail, and both of which offer tent camping and fishing. The former also has a swimming pool, go-kart track, shooting range, sand volleyball and



other recreational amenities.

Another item for a future must-see in this area: The Anderson County Prairie Preserve, also known as the Welda Prairie. Purchased by the Nature Conservancy and transferred to the Kansas Biological Survey in 2006, it spans 1,370 acres.

Rested and refreshed, we were ready to hit the trail again.

Colony and Carlyle

These towns, just 5.6 miles apart, are, like several of the others, tiny dots on the map. Despite not

having any tourist attractions, as a fan of Kansas author Max Yoho (“The Revival” and “The Moon Butter Route”), I was interested in Colony. Yoho pedaled his bike around the town as a child in the 1940s, carefully observing small town Midwestern life and later weaving those memories into his novels.

We observed a homeowner tending to fruit trees planted in his back acre. We stopped to take photos of a pile of sparkling blue glass insulators that once kept wires linking telegraphs insulated from the wooden poles that held them aloft. We spied some of the aging poles and insulators still erect along the railbed and imagined what messages and news they might have once carried.

We marveled at the wildflower-dotted rolling hills. And we smiled at the novelty of pedaling below the highway as the trail passed through a concrete tunnel, and at pedaling above two intersecting country roads and a stream via a lengthy bridge.

At Carlyle, we listened as an auctioneer offered up someone’s treasures to the highest bidder a few blocks from the trail. His chant followed us through the trees as we again pointed our bikes south toward our destination: Iola.

We saw a five-lined skink dart across the trail, and in a few more miles, a bobwhite quail.

It was during this final leg that we began reflecting on the diverse biomes we had pedaled through and wondering what the trail would look like in other seasons. I predicted in fall, the sumac bordering some sections will become red lanterns, and the canopy above will turn shades of orange, yellow, and brown. Agricultural growth will yield to agricultural harvest. Clotheslines will become bare, and neighbors will tuck their backyard gardens away for winter.

In winter, the canopy above will be leafless and the views much more open. The landscape will become muted in color and the skies above more likely gray. In spring, vegetation along the trail will





begin budding and blossoming, and landowners will once again be out and about.

Certainly, the number of variables — the season, the type of day, the people and the wildlife that we see and hear — make this trail, this state park, different every single time a rider or runner uses it.

Iola

As in Ottawa and Garnett, the trail inside the Iola city limits is paved. The official trailhead is at Cofachique Park, but the city recently extended the trail slightly more than a mile to Riverside Park, which is where we decided to finish. Had we had the legs and the time, we could have kept cycling south to Humboldt — another 6.5 miles — on the Southwind Rail Trail.

But frozen treats at a nearby Dairy Queen were calling our names, and we wanted to drop by two historical points of interest not far from the trail before heading home: First, the boyhood home of General Frederick Funston. After doing a short stint as a reporter, a trainman, and an adventurer to Alaska in the late 1800s, he joined the U.S. Army, was the commanding officer of Eisenhower, MacArthur, and Pershing, and earned a Medal of Honor. Second, the Old Jail Museum, built of thick limestone walls in 1869 and operated as the Allen County Jail continuously until 1958. It is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Despite being tired and ready for a cool shower, we were a bit sad to say goodbye to the Prairie Spirit Trail. What an amazing day full of living and learning. We will return.

What Others Say

Amber Lucian Tyree, an outdoor enthusiast from Baxter Springs, describes the trail as “beautiful and contemplative,” a place of peace — even the time she was battling a spring snowstorm on the final 15 miles of the Prairie Spirit Trail Ultra Marathon a few years ago.

“It was a swirling white wonderland,” she said. “But those final few miles compose one of my favorite running memories, a mix of beauty and challenge.”

She, too, plans to return for future runs and bicycle trips.

Jenny and Josh Letner, of Indiana, rode the trail last summer, and as avid cyclists, both billed it “a great ride.”

“What stood out the most to me was the absolute solitude on parts of the trail,” Jenny said. “There are sections where you ride through open prairie lands and the area is so remote that it feels like you stepped back in time — no utility poles and other modern distractions. It's really something to experience!” ♡

*How I made the most of the KDWPT
Special Hunts Program*

SEIZE THE HUNT



by Marc Murrell
manager, Great Plains Nature Center, Wichita

Hunting, a tradition often passed down from one generation to the next, is losing its importance in today's world. There are many reasons for the decline in the percentage of our population who hunt, including urbanization, loss of access, time demands, and competing recreational activities. However, hunting still contributes to the quality of our life and revenues from the sale of hunting licenses and permits pay for all of our wildlife conservation programs. Teaching youngsters to hunt and appreciate our wildlife resources might be the most important things we can do to ensure

wildlife are conserved by future generations.

In an effort to reactivate, recruit and retain hunters, the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) initiated the "Pass It On" Program in 2000. Much has happened in the 16 years since the program's inception. Employees from every division within the agency have stepped up to keep the hunting tradition alive and well in the Sunflower State. Many conduct grassroots efforts to provide special hunts, which are unique and one-of-a-kind hunting opportunities for youth, new and even veteran hunters on private, city, state

and federally-owned properties.

Special youth-only seasons were also implemented through Pass It On, too. These seasons are usually held prior to the regular seasons, and allow youth 16 and younger (or 15 and younger in the case of waterfowl) to hunt under adult supervision. During this time hunting pressure is light and public lands are uncrowded, making these seasons perfect for introducing kids to hunting.

The Kansas Special Hunts Program and youth hunting seasons are popular and those who have used them consider them highly beneficial. I'm a huge fan of

both programs and my kids and I have enjoyed them immensely. The outings I've spent with my children during special hunts and youth seasons as an observer and mentor have been some of the most rewarding outdoor experiences of my life. Most recently, I enjoyed a great special hunt with Cody, one of my twin boys. Cody turned 16 last year, so this was our last special youth hunt together.

Cody was fortunate to draw a spot on a special youth deer hunt the last weekend of the firearm deer season at Marion Reservoir. This special hunt has two spots for youth hunters, who must be accompanied by an adult, who may not hunt. Lucky youngsters hunt from blinds on land not open to public hunting.

On the first morning, we attended a brief pre-dawn meeting with friendly KDWPT game warden, Cody Morris, and public land manager, Scott Amos, at the wildlife area office. After a quick safety talk and a check of permits, licenses and equipment, a coin was flipped. The other youth hunter won the toss and that father-son duo picked a portable blind on the east end of the area. Cody and I were

dropped off near a small hay bale-type blind on the west side and we nestled in to wait for legal shooting time.

As shooting time neared, we could see a couple shadowy figures of deer in the distance. However, a cloudy, misty and somewhat hazy start to the morning left us longing for more light to get a good look at anything within range. We could see some does and one decent-sized buck that was likely too far for Cody's shooting ability. We were on full alert as it got lighter.

The highlight of the morning was a beautiful coyote that entertained us for 10 minutes as it "moused" its way along the edge of the timber. Every few seconds it would jump up in the air and come down with all four feet firmly planted in one spot, trying to catch its breakfast. The big coyote meandered by just 40 yards away and we laughed out loud every time it pounced. We never did see it catch anything but gave it props for perseverance.

We left the blind at about 11 a.m. for a lunch break and compared notes with the other father-son pair. They had seen quite a few deer, including a couple nice bucks just out of range. We all hoped the evening would provide opportunities and planned to go back out about 2 p.m.

As Cody and I drove to town for lunch, he put his leather wallet on the console of my truck.

The wallet was a memento of a family trout fishing vacation to Bennett Spring State Park a few years ago. The wallet features the engraved image of a 10-point buck and Cody mentioned he would like to see something like that when we went back for the evening hunt.

"That's got to be good luck, right?" I asked, never imagining we'd see something THAT big. "Maybe you'll get a monster like that one."

We were back in the blind by 2:20 p.m. It was foggy and a light rain was falling. About an hour later deer started to filter out of the timber and Cody and I both took turns with the binoculars looking at them, none had anglers and most too far away to shoot anyway.

I was watching a doe and a button buck about 110 yards away and Cody spied a couple more does at about 140 yards. We were chatting when all of a sudden a HUGE buck came trotting up out of the timber behind the two deer I was watching.

"Oh &\$^@, there's a buck," I said, according to Cody.

He knew from the tone of my voice and slipped-up word choice that it was no ordinary buck. From his vantage point, it took a few seconds for Cody to spot the buck as it followed a doe along the edge of the timber.

Even though I wasn't hunting, my heart rate had already exploded. Cody's breathing became labored as he slowly got his .30-06 up and pointed out the small shooting window. It was dead calm and he was careful not to make any noise. I was trying not to hyperventilate and could barely whisper instructions to Cody as the buck checked out the doe.

Even without optics, the buck's giant rack was easily visible. I put the binoculars on the deer and whispered to Cody to get ready.



The big whitetail stopped for a second, but the button buck was right in front of him.

"Don't shoot now," I told him.

"One of them has to move, Dad!" Cody whispered back.

The big buck did and cleared the other, walking briskly.

"He needs to STOP!" Cody said.

I grunted and the buck paused and turned his massive head toward the sound, his impressive rack towering above like a beautiful painting.

"Take your time and SQUEEZE the trigger," I told Cody. "And shoot when you're ready."

The shot startled me and I drop-kicked the heater we had at our feet (it wasn't on). I tried to get to the window to watch the deer's reaction, but he disappeared in just a couple bounds. We could hear deer running in the timber and we both thought we heard his buck crash just a couple seconds later.

"Oh, I hope I got him!" Cody said, his voice quivering.

We exited the blind and made the short walk to the edge of the timber. Cody found the first sign of a good hit and my hopes soared. The blood trail was heavy and when it turned back to the east, I knew Cody's shot was true. We'd gone only 75 yards or so when he looked back at me with a BIG grin on his face. I looked past him and could see the backside of his buck on the ground.

"Put your hands on him!" I said.

He did and when he lifted its head there was no ground shrinkage of his rack. His buck was a gorgeous 10-pointer with nearly identical five-point sides and a gargantuan body. The massive rack would officially score 170 0/8 typical inches, the exact minimum to qualify for entry into the Boone and Crockett Record Book. The most impressive feature of the rack was its

symmetry. It had only 2 7/8 inches of deductions.

I'm not quite sure who was more excited but we were both ecstatic and hugged and exchanged high-fives. He tagged his big buck and I took plenty of photos with cell phones and cameras. I called

Jason Black, McPherson Valley Wetlands area manager, who was helping that afternoon and told him of Cody's success. Black got nearly excited as I was as we chatted. I heard a rifle shot and told Jason we might have two deer to haul out. That was exactly the case as the other youngster's shot found its mark on a nice buck, too. Jason brought an ATV in and loaded both deer up as we headed back to the trucks.

It wasn't until the next day I noticed Cody's wallet sitting on the dining room table and remembered our conversation the day prior. I picked it up and looked at the deer beautifully sculpted into the leather. Amazingly, it bore a striking resemblance to Cody's buck, one we now have mounted and hanging beside our fireplace. The wallet turned out to be a good omen after all.

The day from start to finish was as perfect as I could have scripted. We had a great time and in the end, Cody got the buck of his dreams, as well as mine. I know for certain as he eases into adulthood here in a few years this hunt will come back to us time and time again. I'm sad to see his youth fade, but feel truly blessed and fortunate to once again share a memorable outdoor experience with one of my kids as this one was indeed one for the ages, thanks to the Special Hunts Program. 🍷



SPECIAL HUNTS PROGRAM

Special hunts are conducted on department lands, Walk-In Hunting Area properties, national wildlife refuges, city and county properties and private land. The number of hunters is limited to ensure a quality experience.

Hunts are offered in the spring and fall. The 2016 spring turkey season had 79 different hunts with a total of 160 individual permits. The application period for those hunts closes at the end of February each year.

The fall seasons provide a wider variety options. For the 2016/2016 seasons more than 500 individual hunts and nearly 900 individual permits will be available.

Special hunts are available by drawing and those interested can apply online. The application process for the 2016-2017 fall/winter hunts will open July 16, 2016 and the deadline first-draw hunts is Aug. 10.

Special deer or turkey hunts do not include deer or turkey permits or tags. All other licenses, stamps and permits must be obtained by successful applicants.

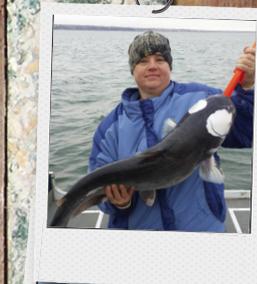
For more information, or to apply for any special hunt drawing, visit www.ksoutdoors.com/hunting/special-hunts-information.

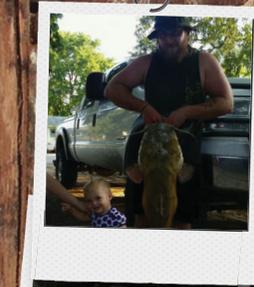
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FEAST YOUR EYES ON
HANDS-DOWN CUTE



ON SOME OF KANSAS' BIGGEST, MOST UNIQUE, AND BEST CATS CAUGHT FROM OUR FRIENDS ON FACEBOOK.

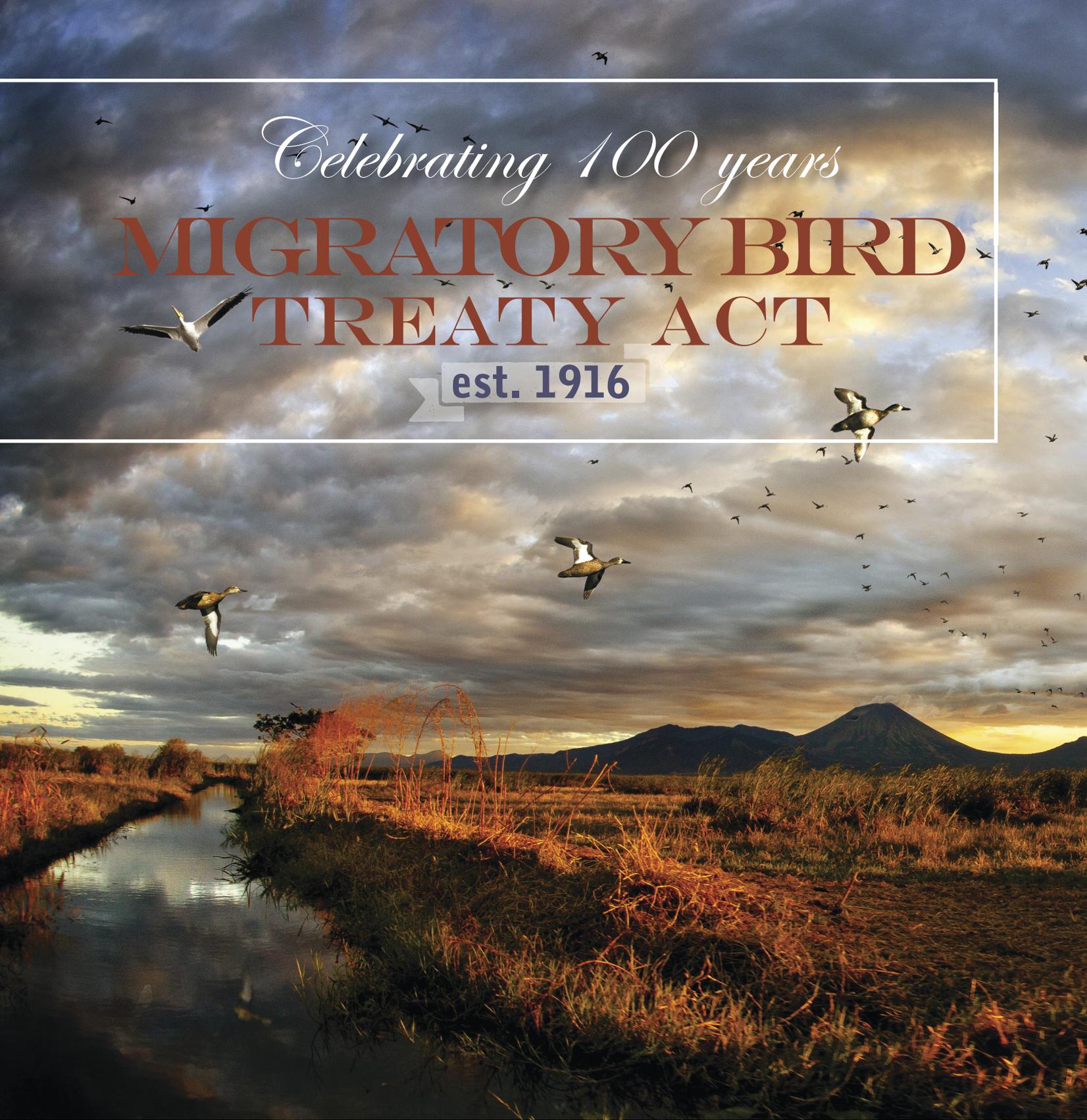




ONE CAT, TWO CAT...

CHANNEL CAT, BLUE CAT...





Celebrating 100 years

MIGRATORY BIRD TREATY ACT

est. 1916

When someone asks “Why are those birds protected?” the answer can often be traced back to historic legislation that occurred 100 years ago. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act was passed by Congress on Aug. 16, 1916. This act, and three amendments that followed, are cornerstones in the conservation of

migratory birds.

Initially titled “Convention Between The United States and Great Britain For The Protection Of Migratory Birds,” the Act was conceived based on the need to manage and conserve birds that crossed state and international borders during annual migra-



tions. This title lists Great Britain because Canada was under British rule at the time. Later amendments included treaties between the U.S. and Mexico, Japan and Russia.

The legislation specifically lists waterfowl (brant, wild ducks, geese and swans), cranes (little brown,

sandhill and whooping), rails (coots, gallinules, sora and others), shorebirds (avocets, curlew, dowitchers, godwits, knots, oyster catchers, phalaropes, plovers, sandpipers, snipe, stilts, surf birds, turnstones, willet, woodcock and yellowlegs), pigeons (doves and wild pigeons), insectivorous birds (bobolinks, catbirds,



“ ... the Act was conceived based on the need to manage and conserve birds that crossed state and international borders during annual migrations.”

chickadees, cuckoos, flickers, flycatchers, grosbeaks, humming birds, kinglets, martins, meadowlarks, nighthawks, bull bats, nut-hatches, orioles, robins, shrikes, swallows, swifts, tanagers, titmice, thrushes, vireos, warblers, wax-wings, whippoorwhills, woodpeckers, and wrens and all other perching birds, which feed entirely or chiefly on insects), and other migratory nongame birds (auks, auklets, bitterns, fulmars, gannets, grebes, guillemots, gulls, herons, jaegers, loons, murrets, petrels, puffins, shearwaters, and terns). The current treaty has a longer list and includes owls, hawks, falcons, and vultures.

This first Act closed hunting of migratory game birds between March 10 and September 1, and it protected all migratory insectivorous and nongame birds year-round. This protection was landmark, coming on the heels of our nation's morbid history of unregulated market hunting that nearly eliminated some species. The Lacey Act of 1900 was the beginning of the end of market hunting but by then, many species were in dire need of protection and conservation.

One goal of the Act was to end the extensive commercial trade in feathers. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, millions of birds were slaughtered for their long plumes, which were desirable fashion accessories. Birds such as snowy egrets were prime targets. The birds were shot in the spring when in breeding plumage, and plumes sold for as much as \$32 per ounce in 1915, the same as the price of gold at the time.

Ducks and geese were killed by the thousands at Cheyenne Bottoms and other Kansas wetlands, packed in barrels and shipped via train to Chicago and other markets in the east. Early wildlife laws did little to protect wildlife because there was no paid enforcement. However, in 1937, Congress passed the

Pittman-Robertson Act (PR), which established an excise tax on long guns and ammunition, and that money was allocated back to the states based on land area and hunting licenses sold. States were collecting fees for licenses, and when PR funds became available, wildlife management agencies with paid game wardens sprang up across the U.S. While hunting regulations were still relatively lax, compliance began to improve.

Today U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff follow the treaty when establishing migratory bird hunting guidelines states use to set hunting seasons and bag limits. The law makes it illegal for anyone to take, possess, import, export, transport, sell, purchase, barter, or offer for sale, purchase, or barter, any migratory bird, or the parts, nests, or eggs of such a bird except under the terms of a valid permit issued pursuant to Federal regulations.

As a result of the protections afforded migratory birds, there are many success stories. Species such as whooping cranes, trumpeter swans and giant Canada geese avoided extinction and continue to migrate through our flyways. Amazingly, giant Canada geese were once feared extinct. Today, their numbers have recovered to the point they may be considered pests in some urban settings.

Of course, maintaining healthy migratory bird populations requires managing critical habitats throughout the flyways, and this will be an ongoing battle. Wetlands, native prairie and a host of other habitat types must be conserved. There is no silver bullet for conservation. It requires regulation; enforcement and compliance; habitat management; and funding, most of which is provided by hunters through the purchase of hunting licenses and state and federal waterfowl stamps. ♡

MIGRATORY BIRD TREATY ACT

est. 1916

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, 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, 2016-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

Species Profile

Gopher Snake

The gopher snake, commonly referred to as a bull snake, is Kansas largest snake species. Adult gopher snakes measure, on average, 37-72 inches long; however, records indicate their growth doesn't always stop there. A female gopher snake found in Harper County measured in at just over 7 feet, while others have been recorded at lengths of 105 inches – that's almost 9 feet!

True to its name, the gopher snake's diet

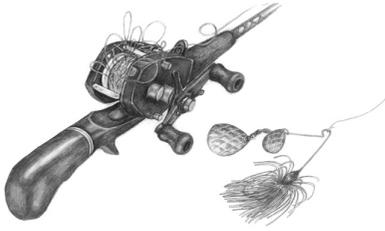
consists largely of rodents – a benefit to grain farmers.

Gopher snakes are most active during the day from May through August; however, it's not uncommon to see them at night.

To identify a gopher snake, look for their large brown and black splotches, a yellowish belly speckled with black, and a yellow-and-black-striped tail.



TRAVIS TAGGART PHOTO



Backlash

WITH MIKE MILLER

Family Ties

I realize more each year that my motivation to be outdoors, to hunt and fish, comes from wanting to be with family. And by family, I mean those I'm related to, as well as a select few that, while not related in blood, I still consider family. And that second group includes several dogs.

Even when I bowhunt, which by its nature is a solitary endeavor, I can't wait to relate what I saw and experienced with my "family." But bowhunting is really the only hunting or fishing activity I'll do alone these days. I'll hunt birds, just my dog and me, and enjoy it as much as if one of my hunting buddies was along, sometimes more. But usually, I hunt and fish with one or two of a select group of people. And as I've matured, those outings have become more about enjoying the company of someone I hold close to my heart than how many birds or fish we bring home. We always work hard to bag some birds or catch some fish, but my enjoyment certainly doesn't hinge on numbers.

Working with the department's hunter recruitment program, Pass It On, I've read several surveys done to find out why people don't hunt or hunt less than they used to. As expected, behavior is dictated by a wide variety of factors, and many were easy to predict: not enough time, other commitments, and lost access to private land. However, there was one common answer I hadn't considered. Fifteen years ago, I didn't expect to learn that our avidity for outdoor recreation is very much influenced by social factors. One of the most common reasons given when hunters are asked why they don't hunt as much as they used to is the loss of a hunting partner – death of a parent, a brother moved away, or a trusted friend became too busy.

I shouldn't have been surprised. The best memories of my youth are of being outdoors with my family. When I was a younger, I focused only on the impending fishing or hunting outing, not fully realizing that spending time with Granddad, Dad, Brad, Rex, or Gene was just as important, maybe more. And I've said this before, but when I reminisce of hunting and fishing trips, I can clearly remember who I was with, how I felt and how much fun we had, but it's rare that I can remember numbers of game or fish taken. Even though it seemed important at the time, killing or catching something really wasn't and isn't. It's part of it, but maybe the least important part.

Thirty years ago, I couldn't imagine my drive to hunt and fish lessening. But I've learned that everything changes in time, and priorities shift as we grow older. When someone says they don't have time to hunt or fish like they used to, what they're saying is that hunting and fishing

aren't as high on their priority list any more. And that's usually because their social circle has changed. That phenomenon isn't unique to hunting and fishing, but I think it surprises us because our feelings about hunting and fishing are deeply personal.

The reason each of us enjoys hunting and fishing is as unique as our fingerprint. But for most of us, the social thread ties us together. The people we routinely hunt and fish with are or become the most important people in our lives. I agree that most of us go through the five stages of being a hunter: Shooter – a beginner wants lots of shooting; Limit – success of a hunt is based on whether a limit is taken; Trophy – a hunter gauges success on the trophy status of the game taken; Method – how a hunter hunts is more important than game taken; and Sportsman – the hunter hunts for the overall experience and companionship of those hunted with. I've witnessed the stages in myself and my friends, but I think throughout the evolution, the social factor was there; I just didn't realize how much it influenced my drive.

A primary motivation for me to hunt this fall will be spending time with my new Lab puppy, Ki. I'm anxious to see how he'll develop, and it's always fun to see the outdoors through new eyes. There's nothing quite like the bond you build with a dog; training, hunting and just having another being along that seems to enjoy it as much as you. I'll also make time to hunt with a few close friends, enjoying the experiences regardless of game killed. It's going to be a good fall.





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