

# KANSAS

*Wildlife & Parks*

November/December 2016

\$2.75





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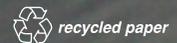
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**Contact the Editors:** [mike.miller@ksoutdoors.com](mailto:mike.miller@ksoutdoors.com) [nadia.reimer@ksoutdoors.com](mailto:nadia.reimer@ksoutdoors.com)





## Good News, Bad News

As the 2016 hunting seasons move into full swing, I've got good news and bad news. First, the bad news: November is only 30 days long. November is one the busiest months of the year for hunters because the deer rut is on, upland bird seasons are open and the waterfowl migration reaches its peak. There simply aren't enough days. The good news is that most hunting seasons run through January.

But there's more good news. While the severe drought we endured for three years began lessening its grip on many areas of the state in 2014, we've seen ample rains, some even record-breaking, in much of the state for the past two years. And this year, we'll enjoy the results of improved habitat and upland bird production as a result of the moisture.

The 2016 Upland Bird Hunting Forecast (Page 38) paints a mostly positive outlook, especially for pheasants and quail. In fact, bobwhite quail populations in the southcentral and southwestern regions of the state may be the best we've seen in decades. Both survey data and anecdotal observations indicate quail have had a very good year.

There will be some areas with very good pheasant hunting, and some with merely improved bird numbers. In areas where the drought hit hardest, populations of breeding birds were so low that recovery is taking longer. And there are always weather events, such as heavy rains and severe thunderstorms that impact poult survival locally. All things considered, it's a good year to be a bird hunter in Kansas.

I've learned there are two kinds of bird hunters. First, there are the diehards who hunt every year no matter the population forecast. They pay attention to the survey reports, but poor forecasts won't keep them away. They come for the experience, the tradition, and the renewal of old friendships, with both people and land. Then there are the more casual bird hunters who plan their trip on the forecast. They may be avid hunters who travel to other states with better reports, or they may enjoy hunting

other species when pheasant and quail populations are low.

Both kinds of bird hunters are important to the Kansas economy, especially to rural communities in Western Kansas. Motels in the small farming towns will be full during the second and third weekends of November. On opening day, local cafes and gas stations will be bustling with activity before the sun shows. Pancake breakfasts treat hunters to camaraderie and full stomachs while raising money for churches and local charities. It's a slice of rural Kansas life near and dear to my heart.

And it's a big deal. Hunters pump more than \$400 million into the Kansas economy each year, and the millions of dollars they spend on food, gas and lodging in November has a major impact on the businesses in rural Kansas.

If you're a hunter, you're simply looking forward to a season where seeing birds will be the norm. And that's really all it takes to make most hunters happy - seeing birds; knowing they're there is important. Harvest is part of the success all hunters strive for, but seeing birds makes everyone happy.

While the forecast is based on science - spring pheasant crow and quail whistle counts, rural mail carrier surveys, brood count surveys, and comparison of historic data - describing to someone what the hunting will be like this fall is relative. When a nonresident asks, the first thing I need to know is if they hunted last year. I can tell them what it will be like compared to last year. I can't tell them how many pheasants they'll see or how many coveys they'll flush. There are too many variables. But for those who hunted through the lean drought years, this year will be gravy. Bird numbers will be better than last year, and much better than the year before that.

I hope you took time this fall to get your dog and yourself in shape. The birds are there, the cover is heavy and there are more than 1 million acres in the Walk-In Hunting Area program. For some of us, it might be a good thing there are only 30 days in November. ♡



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**Staff Writer** Marc Murrell  
**Circulation** Annie Campbell-Fischer

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## Letters to The Editor

### ROOTS

To the Editor,

My six-year-old son pointed out the July / August issue of *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine lying on our kitchen table. For a kid growing up in Alaska, this magazine holds a special allure. The catfish photos especially captivated him. Exotic stuff up here in the land of cold water. As for me, having grown up on a farm near Bucyrus, it's a reminder; good times, childhood, grasshoppers in your jean shorts pocket, of my roots, and my connection to the Midwest. Many thanks.

*Tod H. Marder  
Talkeetna, AK*

### FLOWERING FAN

Kansas Wildlife & Parks,

Here are some pictures of one of the sunflowers that I grew around my garden to help with the wind. Most of the time there's only one head per plant and they're 10-14 feet tall, but this one has 26 heads on it. I stand 6 feet tall.

Thank you for a good magazine. I love to read it.

*Steven Fundenberger  
Lyons, KS*



### A KANSAS THRILL

Attached is a picture of a 47-pound flathead caught by my 6-year-old grandson, Wyatt Sullivan, on a July 3, 2016 fishing trip to Kansas. The fish was caught on a rod and reel in a gravel pit just outside of Topeka. We live in Colorado and don't see fish like this here. The look on his face says it all! What a thrill!

Thanks.

*Jim Sperry  
Thornton, CO*



### A VOTE FOR VULTURES

Dear Mike,

Thanks for featuring Tom Holman's "Only a Mother Could Love" about turkey vultures. We were privileged to see two fledge after watching them grow (and hiss like snakes) all summer in a darkened granary. John Zimmerman, retired professor of ornithology at KSU, considered the turkey vulture his totem animal. I think that was a good choice.

*Dru Clarke  
St. George*

PS My husband gets your magazine but I read it first!

Have something to share? Write the editors at:

*mike.miller@ksoutdoors.com  
nadia.reimer@ksoutdoors.com*

# BIRD BRAIN

WITH MIKE RADER

## Practicing What I Preach

My column is often devoted to describing my favorite places to birdwatch. Recently, I decided to “practice what I preach” and visited one of those favorite spots: the Cimarron National Grasslands in Morton County.

My first stop was near two large playa wetlands along US-56 Highway, near Montezuma, in Gray County. The eastern playa, among wind turbines east of town, held waterfowl and shorebirds, but the larger one west of town was more impressive. The flooded emergent vegetation was teeming with pied-billed grebes, white-faced ibis’ and diving ducks. I even saw a pair of goofy, stripe-headed young grebes. I wanted to stay longer but needed to make Elkhart before sunset.

In Elkhart, I took a quick swing around the city sewer ponds on the northeast side. The city welcomes birders, who are free to drive the lagoon dikes. This is not the case in most places. The Elkhart lagoons always have good numbers of birds and have hosted many rare species over the years. Though I didn’t see anything rare this time, there were nearly 500

ducks on the water. The shelterbelt south of the ponds, across the street from the cemetery, is another great place to bird, so I walked it before dark. There were hundreds of Eurasian collared doves roosting in the trees and hundreds more around the grain elevators and throughout town. There were mourning and white-winged doves around, as well, but the numbers of collared doves was astonishing. Most towns in southwest Kansas have experienced this Eurasian collared dove explosion and it’s been interesting to track. It appears the local predators like having them around, given the number of feather piles I found and Cooper’s hawks I flushed on this trip.

I spent the following Saturday driving the grasslands, looking for mountain plovers and other migrants. I spied a couple of roadrunners, several burrowing owls, and had an exciting encounter with a pair of common ravens. I heard the raven calls from a half-mile away but couldn’t locate them. I drove toward Point of Rocks, a prominent feature of the Grassland landscape along the Cimarron River, stopped next to a small prairie dog town and finally saw them fly

from a small waterhole. They called back and forth to each other and even answered back when I played the sound of a common raven on my phone. As they soared higher and higher, they interacted with a ferruginous hawk hunting prairie dogs. The trio flew at each other, with both species doing some harassing, before tiring of the game and soaring out of sight.

The songbird migration wasn’t happening that weekend, and I saw very few warblers, vireos or other migrants. But I was still in one of the best locations in Kansas to birdwatch, and there was a bonus: the wildflower bloom was spectacular due to recent rains. It just goes to show you can still have great experiences, even when what you are looking for is a little slow.

As winter approaches, the birds won’t stop, so neither should we! Check out the Kansas Ornithological Society website, [www.ksbirds.org](http://www.ksbirds.org), for information on Christmas Bird Counts you can participate in, starting in mid-December. There is always one at the Cimarron Grasslands, as well as more than 45 other locations around the state. We are fortunate to have the wild spaces we have, so get out there and enjoy them!



## WAY outside

BY BRUCE COCHRAN



"OK. WHAT ELSE BESIDES  
BIGGER AND DUMBER FISH?"



## IT'S THE LAW WITH MATT HANVEY

### Case Closed: Michigan Poachers

#### BACKGROUND

**When:** Initial complaint made at approximately 4 p.m., on December 3, 2015

**Where:** Kiowa County

**What:** A landowner has just witnessed a person dressed completely in camouflage shoot a whitetail buck on the landowner's property

**Who:** Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) game wardens and K-9 Unit respond

#### CASE

Upon arrival, game wardens interviewed the witness who informed them the suspect fled on foot into the rugged rangeland. Deputies with the Kiowa County Sheriff's Office, Ford County Sheriff's Office, and troopers with the Kansas Highway Patrol assisted game wardens in establishing a perimeter.

The K-9 quickly located the poached buck, but the suspect remained at large. With darkness falling, game wardens contacted the Kansas Highway Patrol to bring in an airplane. The search came up empty, but game wardens waited it out, knowing the suspect would come out of the canyons eventually.

As the search continued, game wardens and Kiowa County deputies discovered a suspicious vehicle. Occupants stated they were there to pick up hunters. The driver expressed concern because one of the hunters with medical issues wouldn't come out, afraid of the poaching charges. The subjects in the vehicle were detained for poached pheasants and quail located in the vehicle. Shortly after midnight, game wardens located the hunters.

Through interviews with suspects, the case grew from one poached deer to numerous deer poached over several years. The suspects were held in the Kiowa County Jail on bonds totaling \$110,000 while game wardens continued the investigation.

#### CONCLUSION

During the five days following the initial complaint, game wardens executed six search warrants and spent many hours combing the area for additional evidence.

Based on information obtained from the search warrants, officers contacted investigators with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, who then served search warrants on the suspects' residences, seizing several deer heads poached in Kansas from years past.

The suspects were charged in Kansas with numerous current and past wildlife violations and ultimately paid



\$13,216 in fines, restitution and court costs. They lost hunting privileges for five years and forfeited hunting equipment, including guns, deer mounts and the pickup used in the take and transport of the poached deer.

In Michigan, the subjects faced charges for wildlife crimes related to the illegally taken deer in Kansas.

“**Through interviews with suspects, the case grew from one poached deer to numerous deer poached over several years.**”

#### CLOSING THOUGHTS

Teamwork and persistence of the KDWPT game wardens paid off. A case like this, when the wildlife resource is protected and poachers are caught and punished, makes the long hours and time away from family easier for officers to endure.

Kansas game wardens wish to thank all the law enforcement officers and agencies that assisted in this case, including a special thanks to the Kiowa County Sheriff's Office and Kiowa County Attorney.

If you witness a wildlife crime, call your local game warden (phone numbers are listed on Page 49 of the *2016 Kansas Hunting and Furharvesting Regulations Summary*) or contact Operation Game Thief (OGT) at 1-877-426-3843. Reports to OGT can be made anonymously.



# AT WOODS EDGE

WITH ANDRA BRYAN STEFANONI



## Wintertime D-O-G TLC

As I write this, it's early October. The leaves at Woods Edge have not yet started to change, yesterday I heard a few remaining cicadas, and this afternoon a late-migrating hummingbird visited the feeder in front of my home office window.

But by the time you read this, duck season will be in full swing. And that means Hubby, our two sons, me, and our black Lab, Raven, will be spending time in our blind in hopes of bagging some ducks and geese for the dinner table.

We've done all the requisite pre-season preparations: repairing and repainting decoys, ensuring waders and jackets still fit our fast-growing boys, and improving the blind. We practiced our marksmanship with sporting clays. We put boards in the water control structure of our wetland and waited for the rains to come. And we intensified training with young Raven, from water retrieves to, once again, exposing her to the sound of gunfire.

This year, we've added two additional items to our "to-do" list: give Raven a closer examination after every field outing and be aware of conditions that could harm her. These additions were prompted by two medical issues we encountered this year that we'd not experienced with our previous hunting dog.

### ***Limber Tail***

Limber tail is a disorder of the muscles in the tail and usually affects working dogs – pointers, setters, beagles, and Labrador retrievers. The condition can be painful.

It's caused after excessive activity in especially cold water, where dogs use their tails as rudders, or if they've been loafing most of the summer and aren't used to exercise. Traveling in a cage for several hours also can play a role.

You'll know your dog has it if their tail seems stuck to their rear end, seemingly to have lost its wag. It will hang down awkwardly and in some cases, your dog may yelp when they sit or are touched there.

Anti-inflammatory medication from the vet can help, ours told us, plus rest – no matter how tempted you are to get them back in the blind.

Limber tail can be prevented by: setting limits with your dog so they don't push themselves to exhaustion; gradually working your dog into shape rather than hitting the duck blind without a few weeks of warm-up exercises first; avoiding especially cold water; and, when possible, avoiding confining your dog to a crate for long periods. If they must be crated, consider giving them stretching breaks. Lesson learned.

### ***Grass Awns***

While doing a routine cleaning of Raven's teeth early this fall, our vet found an especially inflamed area of her gum and closer inspection revealed the culprit: a grass awn. We'd never heard of it.

After he shared with me the photo he took, Googling the condition answered my questions.

Awns are bristle-like appendages that grow from grasses and have spiky, sharp edges that allow them to spread by sticking to a dog's coat or someone's sock or pant leg, and thereby spread to surrounding areas. I'm sure they're everywhere in the prairie and wetland at Woods Edge, and at our hunting acreage, as well.

Awns can be swallowed by a dog, imbed in their coat or skin to the point they can't be easily removed, inhaled, or lodge in a dog's ears, eyes, or nose.

If your dog exhibits behavior such as excessive licking, pawing at a place on their body, or continuous sneezing, it may be a grass awn, so consider seeing your vet. Trying to remove one yourself can result in part of the awn breaking off and remaining lodged in the dog's tissue. That can lead to inflammation, infection, or the awn migrating further into the dog's body. Some vets have reported that awns have traveled to dogs' lungs, brain, and other vital organs, so don't take the risk.

Luckily, our vet was able to safely remove the one from Raven's mouth, and within a day, the sore wasn't noticeable. The experience taught us how important it is to closely check her body following each of our trips afield at all times of year – not just in the summer for ticks.

Now, Raven is eager to get out and about during what she and Hubby both say is the "greatest season of the year." How about you? Are you ready?

# HUNTING HERITAGE

WITH KENT BARRETT

## Managing Big, Wild Things

I was browsing through the 2016 Ruger catalog the other day when I saw that Ruger has once again offered the No. 1 classic rifle chambered in .275 Rigby. Years ago I was able to purchase my long desired No. 1 International model in 7 X 57, aka the .275 Rigby. But you can't talk about the .275 Rigby without talking about W.D.M. "Karamojo" Bell.

Bell, an African hunter, gained fame during the golden age of African exploration and hunting while using a bolt action .275 Rigby rifle. These early pioneers began what has become the long tradition of safari to the wilds of "the dark continent" in order to hunt Africa's "Big Five" animals. The members of the "Big Five," chosen both for the degree of difficulty in hunting them and amount of danger involved, consist of the African elephant, lion, leopard, cape buffalo and rhinoceros.

Bell, first and foremost a professional ivory hunter, was also an astute student of physics and anatomy. He studied elephant cranial anatomy and bullet composition and determined that a smaller projectile with a solid core construction, travelling at a sufficient velocity, could penetrate an elephant's vital area, causing almost immediate death. A win for both the hunter and the hunted. Though Bell's motivations likely varied greatly from today's ethical, conservation-minded hunter, one thing remains true: no hunter wants to see an animal that's been shot at get away. It's inefficient and more importantly, inhumane. Enter Bell's .275 Rigby rifle.

Prior to this, technology was just not sufficient to allow a hunter to take on an elephant with any real hope of consistent survival. Up till then, mankind's history in Africa

could be mostly summed up as trying to stay the heck out of the way of elephants. When an elephant decides that it doesn't like you, it's in a unique position to do something about it. It can step on you, sit on you, kick you, knock you down with it's trunk, pick you up and throw you through the air. You can't run away. Luckily we don't have to worry about such encounters in Kansas. But Bell understood the risks associated with hunting elephants and took up the challenge anyway, which ended up paying huge dividends for him, in the short term. It made for more efficient hunting.

Bell lived at the beginning of the end of the "golden age" of African safari hunting. He may not have been the only reason for elephants becoming vulnerable, but he was certainly a factor. But even without the ivory trade, I suspect that elephants would still be in trouble today. The biggest threat to almost all animals in the wild is loss of habitat - something that can be seen in every state, including Kansas. For elephants, expanded farming and land development are the two biggest threats and these were going to happen with or without ivory harvests. Today, elephants are still hunted because it is necessary. Healthy elephants must be taken from the wild because there isn't enough food to support them. If you divide food sufficient for 50 elephants among 100 elephants, you will soon have 100 dead elephants. Food for 50 animals means that 50 animals can survive and maintain a proper level of health.

Most people really like the idea of wild elephants and do not wish to see them killed. But even without hunting, the world will eventually run out of elephants if we do nothing to manage them. Animals do a poor job of managing themselves, although nature is quite good at it. But nature uses starvation and disease to manage populations. Starvation and disease are not pretty ways to control animal populations, nor can they be easily controlled. That's where hunters come in. Regardless of whether your big game quarry is 130 pounds or 13,000 pounds, hunters play an important and necessary role in wildlife management that cannot easily be filled by other methods. And that is a part of history to be proud of.

## 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. I eat all kinds of things
2. I've got stripes
3. My name has two "o"s in it

>>> See answer on Page 9.



# Fish Squeezer—Retired, But Not Yet Tired

WITH TOMMIE BERGER

## Just Call Me Teach'



Every year I enjoy teaching classes at the Becoming an Outdoors Woman (BOW) workshop. This fall, I taught Intro to Fishing, On the Water Fishing, and Fish Cleaning and Cooking. My lifetime of experience qualifies me to teach the classes, but every year I'm frustrated by having so much I want to share and too little time to share it.

My love of fishing started when I was four or five. I started out fishing for catfish and carp in the rivers of northeast Kansas. Later, I advanced to banklines on Stranger Creek in Leavenworth County, and then to largemouth bass, crappie, and bluegill. By the time I hit junior high and high school, my fishing expertise and tackle box had both grown greatly.

Then there was college, and wow, did I get my eyes opened. I went to college to be a game warden, but soon found out that a career as a fisheries or wildlife biologist was where I wanted to go; I couldn't get enough.

After graduation, I joined the Blue Valley Bass Club, Riley County Fish and Game Association, and got a job as a fisheries biologist with the Kansas Forestry, Fish, and Game Commission in Manhattan. I began fishing professional bass tournaments in Kansas, bought a bass boat, and fished nearly every reservoir in the state. As my career advanced, I moved to Dodge City and helped form the Boothill Bass

Club and joined the Ford County Sportsman's Club where I still continued to fish tournaments.

So you see, the wealth of fishing knowledge I've accumulated over the past 60 years, makes it difficult to know what "important" stuff I should siphon out in a short class. Every year the challenge arises, and every year I hope I manage to create a few new anglers and teach a few new friends the Berger method of cleaning and cooking fish. Here's a little teaser of what I share with them. If this sounds like something you'd be interested in, sign up for BOW and take my classes next fall.

In Intro to Fishing, I cover common fish species, the types of rods and reels and their advantages, how to tie an improved clinch knot, and casting basics. Then I teach students how to tie on a No. 8 hook, put on a piece of split shot and a bobber, and then I take the women to one of my favorite fishing holes so they can catch fish. As the name says, it's a great "introduction."

On the Water Fishing is applied learning. This class is challenging because one day the fishing is fantastic, and on other days the fish simply don't bite or the wind blows 40 mph as soon as you get on the water. This class used to be taught at Milford Reservoir where guides would be available for BOW participants, but these outings were always at the mercy of the weather and often the fish didn't cooperate. Lately, I've been taking my class to Geary State Fishing Lake, but our luck has been about the same. It's still an important class, nonetheless. After all, it's called "fishing" and not "catching" for a reason. Regardless, this is a great class if you are a hands-on learner and really need to see something done before you can do it yourself.

Then there's Fish Cleaning and Cooking, a great class if you're ready to take that fish from pond to plate. This is a fairly new class of mine, but it has been popular. The most common cooking method I teach is frying, but we do experiment with other methods in the class. As far as cleaning goes, I teach the good old fashioned way first: knocking off scales or skinning the fish if it's a catfish, cutting off the head, removing entrails, and pulling out the fins. I also teach how to clean a fish with an electric knife. Most participants are amazed at how well the electric knife works and I hope some go away from the class with the goal of mastering the technique.

I still love to fish, but I get just as much enjoyment teaching others. Seeing the excitement when someone catches their first fish takes me back to when I discovered fishing and reminds me of why I love it so much.

## Happily Trapped In The Past



Lee Steinmeyer

### Rendezvous

Trappers played an integral part in the settlement of this country. Furs were a valuable commodity and bartered for food, gun powder, firearms and cash. It was a way of life for 200 years.

There are far fewer trappers today, but the ones who practice today are as passionate about their craft. Most states still have trapping conventions, spin-offs of the old rendezvous, and they still draw trappers together like they did in the old days.

Kansas' largest trapping convention is likely the Kansas Fur Harvesters Association's annual rendezvous the first weekend of October. It starts on Friday and runs through Sunday, with most of the activities and seminars held Friday and Saturday. Past sites have

included Yates Center, Seneca and McPherson this year. Vendors come from all over with the latest and greatest trapping and fur finishing equipment, baits, lures and other supplies, giving attendees plenty to look at and talk about.

### Steinmeyer

"I like getting together and seeing everyone and talking trapping," said Lee Steinmeyer.

A well-known Kansas trapper, Steinmeyer, 69, attended the recent convention at McPherson and is a regular attendee of state conventions in Iowa, Missouri, and Nebraska, as well as a couple national trapping conventions. Steinmeyer is quick

to share his decades of trapping experience, and he builds fleshing knives and other trapping equipment he sells. It's a hobby he enjoys and cares to share with others, frequently giving demonstrations on trapping and fur finishing. Most recently, Steinmeyer started teaching at the Fur Takers of America Trapper's College in Indiana.

He's well equipped to teach, too. Steinmeyer has trapped nearly every day of each season since he was 6-years-old and only missed two seasons in that entire time: once due to basic training and the other when he got married.

"It's in my blood," he said. "I love all aspects of it from start to finish."

### Necessity

Wild fur makes up a small percentage of all fur sold as the majority of today's fur comes from

ranching animals, mostly overseas. Regardless of where it comes from, fur is still a commodity, going through ups and downs in the market. Unfortunately for trappers, the prices of many species, other than possibly coyotes, have declined dramatically in the last couple years. It's a sore pill to swallow given the amount of time and effort it takes to trap and finish a fur, but many trappers continue their work, playing a critical role in controlling furbearer populations. Raccoons, skunks, coyotes, foxes and opossums left unchecked can overpopulate, and are more susceptible to diseases such as distemper and rabies, which may result in widespread and dramatic population crashes. Trapping, using today's humane best management practices, can remove problem animals and prevent population peaks and valleys.

### The Chase

I may be biased, but I believe trappers are some of the most knowledgeable outdoorsmen. They know the habits and preferred habitats of their quarry, and which traps, techniques and tactics work on specific species. Trappers must be a detectives of sorts to interpret the sign, a skill that requires years of field experience.

"I love the chase and figuring out how to make that critter step in the exact spot," Steinmeyer said. "It's a lot easier said than done."

Many trappers have a favorite animal they pursue while others are generalists and enjoy it all. Regardless, it's an activity steep in tradition with huge ties to the history of our country. For furharvesters, it's not all bad being trapped in the past.

"What am I?" answers: raccoon

# Life Unpaved

WITH **Nadia Reimer** (and sometimes "Kota")



There's something mysterious, almost otherworldly, about a deer's antlers. These natural, abstract sculptures are both weapon and ornament, powerful yet brittle. From dark brown and ashen, to yellow and ivory, they come in almost as many color variances as we do.

In the peculiar ridges, knobs, peaks, tips, valleys, scrapes, broken bits, worn areas, cracks, and holes - there's a story there. Tales perhaps of battles ostensibly won, others of narrow escapes, evidence of storms weathered, territories claimed, territories lost. Proof of fences traversed, time passed, scars earned. Signs of new growth. Maybe the sign of a last season.

We keep antlers around our homes, our garages, some in baskets, on the floor, some on walls; we keep them to share something, to remember something, perhaps even our own part in the story. But how often do we think about the story already written there, the one before our introduction to the plot took place?

While cleaning the skull of the whitetail I shot last year, I had a lot of time to think about the buck's antlers.

I thought about the other animals the buck may have encountered, the places it may have bedded down, the noises it may have heard. I thought about the other deer the buck lived among. I thought about the trails it may have walked, the places it may have left scent. I wondered if it ever smelled me that day. I wondered about the buck's story.

What might be most fascinating to me is that these antlers, so full of information, are only six months old. They start as soft, living tissue and end up as hardened structures of calcium and phosphorous, only to shed again the next year. And each year, the transformation produces larger and larger results, until nature or circumstance no longer allow for it.

For the bucks whose antlers continue to grow, so does the complexity of their existence. An older buck carrying large antlers is a marked animal - does seek to breed it, rival bucks seek to battle it, hunters seek to kill it. If that isn't the makings of a great story, I don't know what is.

I see an antler and I see a story.

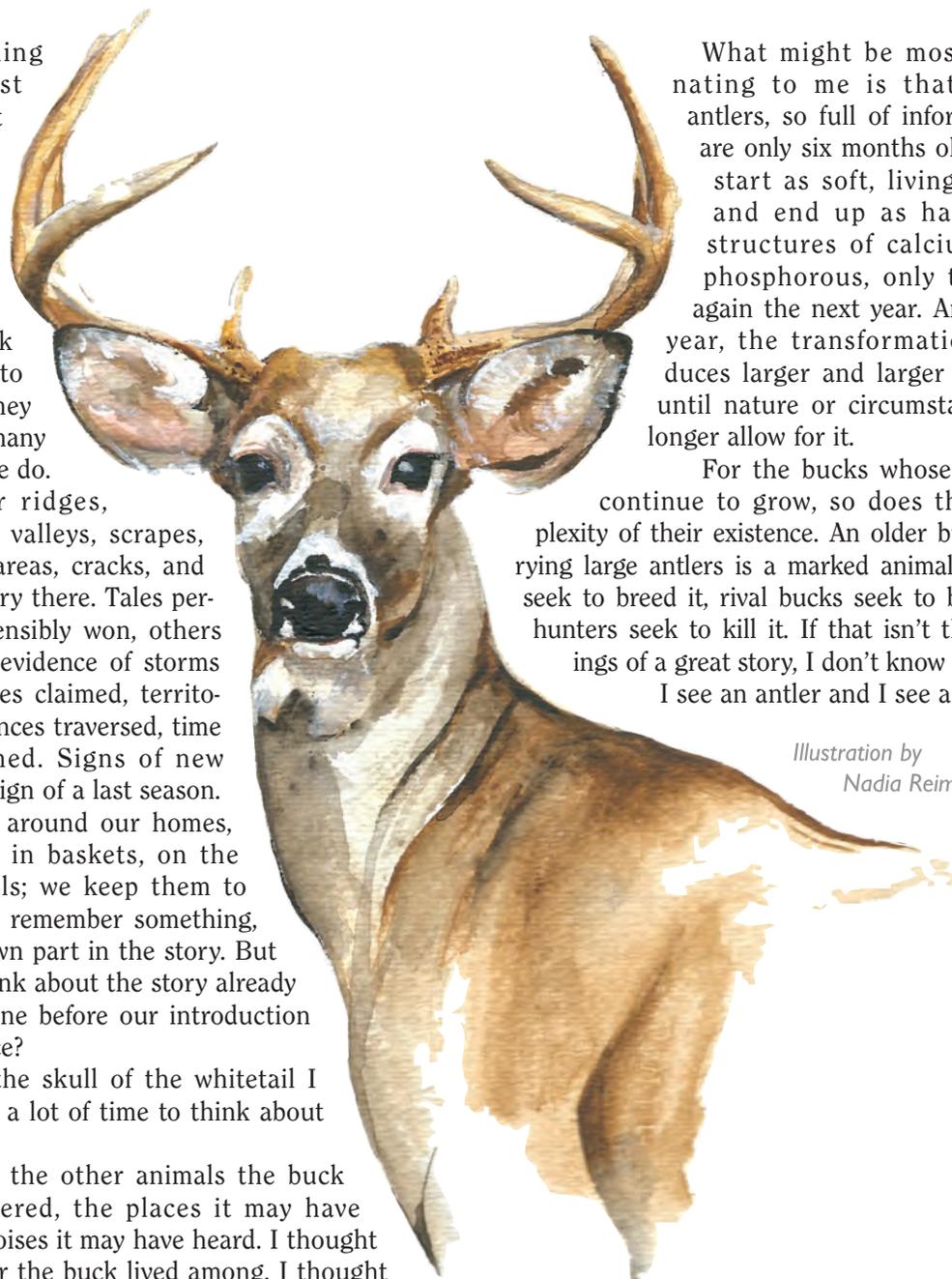


Illustration by  
Nadia Reimer

# Park View

WITH  
KATHY PRITCHETT

## State Parks: Everyone's Backyard

I woke to find fog had crept into the area during the night. The moisture condensed on the window screen appeared as if someone had glued rhinestones to every square. Near the window, honeysuckle bloomed, infusing my morning with its sweet scent. Birds chattered in the nearby trees. It's amazing what we notice when we "disconnect" and find ourselves out-of-doors. A stay at a Kansas state park is the perfect place to do it, too. Just think of them as your own backyard, only you have 26 of them, and each of them is unique.

Fall and winter bring spectacular panoramas of color to our parks as the leaves and grasses react to shorter days. Migratory birds visit, providing opportunities to see species we don't often

encounter - some, harbingers of changing weather. The trill of sand-hill crane calls as they pass over signals winter to me. Bald eagles, an increasingly common sight, often winter around our lakes, usually following the geese and waterfowl.

It's a time of year when all is calm. Trails and campsites see fewer insects, and the hustle and bustle from summertime campers has quieted down. Except for game days near colleges, finding an open site is not a problem in fall and winter.

As we prepare for next year's busy season, offices may be closed a few days at a time. Just give us a call ahead if you need direction on the best place to camp.

If you want to connect with nature through the comfort of a

cabin, just be sure to pack food, towels, toiletries and bed linens. We'll provide the electricity and heat, and most are equipped with bathrooms, microwaves, refrigerators, cook stoves and pans, coffee pots, and basic tableware. This is a state park convenience many hunters have learned about. After all, what better way to end a chilly day in the field than with a shower, hot meal and a restful night's sleep?

Whether you crave a quiet morning as you watch the fog clear off a lake, need an affordable place to call "base camp" near your favorite hunting spot, or just want a reason to light up a bonfire for s'mores one more time, head to a Kansas state park this fall. After all, it really is yours to enjoy.



## SNOW ICE CREAM

"You scream, I scream, we all scream for ice cream!" Even during winter? You bet.

A warm cup of cocoa, blanket and a good movie usually come to mind when winter temperatures

drop into the 20s and the flakes begin to fly.

However, when heavy snowfalls cause school closures and keep us inside, cabin fever can set in. It won't be until the storm breaks and roads are cleared that kids can grab sleds and head to the nearest hills for a day of play. But there is a fun snow activity you can do in the house that is sure to ease cabin fever and it's cheap, fun, and entertaining. Make snow ice cream.

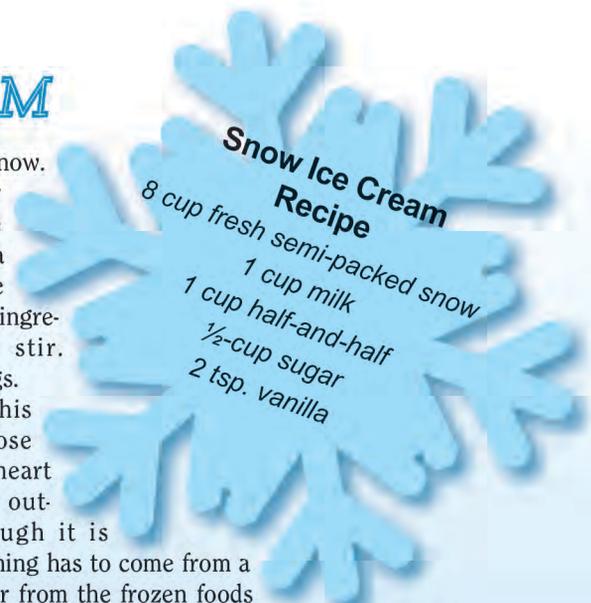
It had been years since I had made snow ice cream, but a heavy snowfall last February prompted my wife and I to introduce it to our kids. We had everything needed on hand to make it and the kids loved it. It was so good, we ended up making two batches.

Put freshly-fallen snow in a mixing bowl. In a separate container, mix the milk, half-and-half and vanilla together.

Pour it over the snow. Sprinkle the sugar on top. Fold the snow, with a spatula or large spoon, mixing the ingredients. Do not stir. Makes four servings.

Recipes like this help kids and those who are kids at heart interact with the outdoors, even though it is simple. Not everything has to come from a box off the shelf or from the frozen foods section of the supermarket. And it might even get them thinking about other things nature provides.

The only ingredient that you might not have on hand is half-and-half, so if the weatherman predicts a snowstorm this winter, add it to your grocery list. You will be in for a treat. Just remember to avoid yellow snow.



## Ever Spotted A Spotted a Skunk?

Once the third most trapped furbearer in our state, the eastern spotted skunk, *Spilogale putorius*, is now a state threatened species. The population has been in decline since the 1930s. From the late 1920s to early 1930s, around 100,000 spotted skunk furs were purchased by Kansas fur buyers annually. This number decreased to less than 1,000 annually in 1955 until the fur harvesting season on the spotted skunk was closed in Kansas in 1977.

Ours is not the only state to experience this decline; this trend has been seen throughout much of the species' range. Unfortunately, because no studies documented the declining population, we don't fully understand what caused this. Many factors have been suggested, including drought, disease, insecticides such as DDT, the shift from small diverse farms to large monocultures, and habitat loss or modification.

In recent years, many states have initiated research and monitoring efforts of the species. One of the best tools used to study this species is actually owned by many outdoorsmen and women: trail cameras. Using a simple bait, such as a can of sardines tacked to a tree, biologists can passively survey many areas of interest over a period of time using trail cameras. The Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) has set out trail cameras hoping to locate and monitor spotted skunk populations, ultimately providing us with valuable information about the species and its habitat.

Reports from the public about roadkill or inadvertent trapping of spotted skunks also provide critical information about the species and its distribution. Every bit of information helps.

As you set out trail cameras or traps this fall, I encourage you to keep an eye out for spotted skunks and report any findings to KDWPT. Location, habitat, date and time of the spotting, and most importantly pictures, are all valuable information.

The last confirmed spotted skunk sighting in Kansas was in 2012 when one was unintentionally trapped. The trapper reported it to the department and it was released unharmed, which is exactly what trappers should do if a spotted skunk is accidentally trapped. Many unconfirmed observations have also been reported to KDWPT over the years, one as recent as 2015. Furbearer Harvest Surveys filled out by randomly-selected hunters and trappers who purchase a furharvester license have uncovered many of these.

Spotted skunks, sometimes called "civet cats," are often confused with the much more common striped skunk. The spotted skunk has a white spot on the forehead, while the striped skunk has a narrow white stripe. The spotted skunk also has interrupted white stripes running down the back, and two stripes running diagonal across the hip, while the striped skunk usually has two bold white stripes down the back. Spotted skunks are also much smaller and more slender than their striped counterpart.

If you suspect you've encountered a spotted skunk, contact the KDWPT Pratt Operations Office at (620) 672-0822 or your local KDWPT office. We can't manage what we don't measure, and we can't measure what we don't see, so be our eyes in the field and let us know if you spot this skunk.





## Winter On The Prairie

BY IRALEE BARNARD

*To the attentive eye, each moment of the year has its own beauty, and in the same field, it beholds, every hour, a picture, which was never seen before, and which will never be seen again.* -Ralph Waldo Emerson

Our favorite places somehow lose their appeal in the winter and many of us are reluctant to venture out. Maybe it's the cold wind, or perhaps the landscape just seems dull and colorless during winter, seeming pleasant only when green and growing. Emerson believed that we are as much touched by the "graces of the winter scenery" as by the "genial influences of summer." Acquiring that "attentive eye" opens all kinds of opportunities to find beauty in any season.

The prairie is dazzling on winter days in its coat of snow or glistening ice. On damp, foggy days, the dry prairie grasses glow in flaming colors. On more than one occasion I have gotten lost in a heavy fog on the open prairie, even when less than half-a-mile from home. And then, when all distant references vanish, to follow the ridge, old buffalo wallows are my only landmarks.

Each walk uncovers more winter secrets. Between the dry prairie grasses, the ground is dotted with leafy rosettes of green pressed flat to the ground - the five-parted leaves of cinquefoil, prairie groundsel, wavy-leaf thistle, yarrow with fern-like leaves, draba, fleabane, and many others. Most of the dried plants are past their prime, but there are still lovely bouquets of heath aster, the large curled leaves of the compassplant, and the deep plum-colored leaves of the ironweed look like jewels when encased in ice. Most beautiful are the luminescent green mosses. Mounds of

*Weissia controversa* cover soil among the grasses and *Mnium cuspidatum* grows on shaded banks. Scattered on open ground are the pretty one inch, tan-orange mushrooms, *Naucoria semiorbicularis* - its name derived from the French "naucum" for "nutshell."

There are other signs of life here, too Meadowlarks and quail fly up out of the grass and hawks glide overhead. On the surface, tracks in mud and snow reveal busy mice, coyotes, deer, bobcat, and raccoon. Another animal leaves evidence of diligent burrowing. I once went out just after a 14-inch snow and to my amazement, several prairie chickens rocketed from beneath the snow in front of me. What unique surprises await when we least expect them.

The bare branches of dormant prairie trees in winter months are quite interesting, too. The cottonwood tree grows tall with deep, furrowed bark. Branches break easily and the resulting cavities create homes for birds and other wildlife. The white bark of sycamore trees is eye-catching along river valleys. In winter, sycamore fruits may be seen still hanging as little tan balls on thin stems from the branches. Great blue herons often choose these trees for nesting sites, sometimes forming large rookeries. And we can't forget about the dark, rugged branches of bur oak, beautiful in winter, as well. Their huge, lobed, dried leaves frequently persist on the branches well into winter, while their large acorns serve as an important food source for wildlife.

These are just a few winter wonders I have come to appreciate. Don't let winter keep you inside. Bundle up and head out to your favorite wild place. You are sure to be rewarded.



# The Way I See It

WITH TODD WORKMAN

## Cerebral Fishing

My neighbor Albert never comes over without calling. He has more PhDs than I have fingers and strict protocols for visiting and being visited.

I was using my trusty pocket knife to remove a fishhook from the thumb of my other neighbor, Bill, when Albert came in unannounced.

"What you doing?" Albert blurted out, startling me into gouging into Bill's thumb deeper than I had planned.

"Watch out you moron," Bill howled at me, "I want the hook out without losing my thumb."

Bill is a mountain of a man with no social graces, and we had been best friends and fishing buddies for several years. But he had a bad habit of hooking himself.

"Hey Todd, let me do that," Albert said. "Holy bovine! You don't have a clue as to how to extract a piscatorial hook."

"What the heck did he say?" Bill worried.

"Albert is a surgeon," I reassured Bill. "He should remove the hook."

Bill looked down into Albert's eyes, "No charge?"

"Of course not," said Albert, as he handed the bloody hook to Bill.

"Well lookey there! Number 22 is out and it didn't hurt a bit. Makes a guy wonder if somebody else didn't know what they was doin'," Bill said, eyeing me accusingly.

"By the way, what did you need, Albert?" I said, changing the subject. "It's not like you to just pop in."

"I apologize, but my wife kicked me out of the house for the day and said I should come over to see if you wanted to go fishing," Albert replied.

Against my better judgment, I went along with it and the three of us were soon sitting in my boat, looking for brush piles I hoped held crappie.

"What you staring at, Al?" Bill

inquired gruffly. Albert had been staring at Bill's face for quite some time, studying it like a medical journal.

"How many teeth do you have left in your mouth, Bill?" Albert inquired.

"Are you makin' fun of me?" Bill said getting redfaced.

"No, of course not. I'm just astounded at the size of your three incisors. I don't think I've seen anyone with teeth that big," Albert said seriously.

Immediately, Bill's demeanor lightened. "They're beauties, ain't they?"

"I'd like to measure them sometime. They could very well be the largest incisors on record," Albert said.

"You mean like Guinness Book of World Records?" Bill asked, intrigued.

"Yes, I suppose so. But I have a theory about teeth and you might be the breakthrough I am looking for," Albert explained.

"Can we just fish for now?" I said. "We'll measure them when we get back," Albert agreed.

When I marked a decent looking brush pile on my sonar unit, Bill and I dropped our lines in the water but Albert, who manned the middle seat, was just sitting there staring first at the locator and then the water.

"Hey Al, you can't catch fish if your line ain't in the water," proclaimed Bill. "This your first time fishing?"

"It is," said Albert. "But I've been reading about it the last few days."

"And you learned they'll jump outta the water onto your hook?" Bill guffawed.

"No," Albert calmly replied.

I watched as he dropped his jig into the water and counted to eight when his rod doubled over. Albert pulled a 14-inch crappie into the boat.

"Beginners luck! Heck, his jig wasn't even close to the bottom," scoffed Bill.

Nine big crappies later, Bill and I

both were getting irritated at Albert's "luck."

"Somebody better tell me what the heck is goin' on around here," said Bill, his face getting red again.

I tried to diffuse the situation.

"Hey Albert, you seem to have something figured out. What's your secret?"

"Okay," Albert chuckled. "I've been studying Langmuir circulations and the thermocline on the locator. Of course, these circulations are wind induced vertical motions of divergence and convergence zones of counterclockwise rotation, resulting in concentrations of zooplankton that attract fish. I'm simply lowering my bait to the proper level in the divergence zone and..."

"I'm not gonna take much more of your five-dollar words" Bill grumbled as he got out of his seat.

"Now wait a second, Bill. I didn't understand either, but I'm sure Albert could simplify it for us," I pleaded.

"Just drop it down about eight feet in between those foam lines you see on the water," Albert replied.

Bill sat back down with a frown, did as Albert instructed and immediately hooked a fat crappie. Over the next hour, the three of us boated our limits using Albert's technique.

"This has been a wonderful day fellas," exclaimed Albert, "thank you for the opportunity."

"Anytime, Dr. Albert," Bill said, clapping him on the back. "And I guarantee you, I will be fishin' them Dangneer circles next time out."

Albert was just getting ready to correct him, when instead he sighed and said, "Call them what you will."

"And when we get back are you going to measure my dentition?" asked Bill

Albert looked at Bill incredulously, then started laughing.

"Talk about a five-dollar word! You've been holding out on me!" Albert chuckled. "Yes, we will measure your teeth, that is, after we take lure number 23 out of your arm and number one out of my ear."

It looked like it would be three in the boat from now on.



with Daren Riedle

# Conservation Conversations

## Home Again

This year has been a homecoming of sorts for me. Born in southeast Kansas, I grew up helping my uncle run cattle and tend oil leases northeast of Sedan during school breaks. For fun, I'd go fishing or walk the creeks looking for critters. In the fall, Dad and I would take our dogs to hunt quail. It was here that I began to develop my love for the outdoors and wildlife. When these early life experiences were combined with stints as a seasonal naturalist at Elk City State Park, my career trajectory was set. However, wanderlust set in after I received my Bachelor of Science degree at Emporia State University and I left the state for nearly two decades.

Travels took me to Oklahoma, Texas, and Arizona, where I found opportunities to apply classroom lessons to real conservation problems. I also had opportunities to work in Sonora, Mexico, South Africa, and most recently, northern India. But I always cherished my visits back to Kansas and often thought of returning home. In 2015, I was offered an ecologist position with the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism, and a few months later was transitioned into the wildlife diversity coordinator position. I've come full circle, stepping into the shoes of my predecessor, Ken Brunson, who, surprisingly, provided funding for my undergraduate research thesis.

My current job is to coordinate conservation efforts for the agency, with a strong focus on keeping common species common, and rare species from becoming endangered. I collaborate with 11 stellar coworkers who make up our Ecological Services Section. Our efforts are guided by Kansas' State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) and our small grants program, which is funded through Chickadee Checkoff.

SWAP was developed to serve as a dynamic document that provides a comprehensive vision for managing Kansas' fish, wildlife, and wildlife habitats. Each state is required to develop a plan to be eligible for federal State Wildlife Grant funds, which fund programs benefiting wildlife, particularly nongame species, and their habitats. Kansas' SWAP was

revised in 2016 and can be viewed at: [ksoutdoors.com/Services/Kansas-SWAP](http://ksoutdoors.com/Services/Kansas-SWAP)

Chickadee Checkoff, established in 1980, is dedicated to the management of the state's threatened and endangered species. The Chickadee Checkoff box appears on the Kansas Individual Tax Forms and provides Kansans a convenient way to contribute to wildlife programs through private donations. These funds have supported projects assessing the status of state threatened and endangered species, as well as major projects funded through State Wildlife Grants. Chickadee Checkoff also helped to complete the Kansas Breeding Bird Atlas and supported the Kansas Amphibian Monitoring Program. More information about the



Chickadee Checkoff program can be found at [ksoutdoors.com/Services/Wildlife-Diversity/Chickadee-Checkoff](http://ksoutdoors.com/Services/Wildlife-Diversity/Chickadee-Checkoff)

Education is also a major component of the Chickadee Checkoff program and I recently had the opportunity to participate in a unique outreach program that received funding from Chickadee Checkoff. I attended a Spider Walk held at the Pratt Green Trails, led by Dr. Dustin Wilgers from McPherson College. Wilgers has been leading walks across the state, providing amazing learning opportunities featuring a much maligned, but truly beneficial group of invertebrates. The event consisted of a hands-on lecture and ended with a night hike to observe these wonderful creatures in their natural environment.

I hope to use this column to highlight exciting and beneficial projects, such as Wilgers' spider walks, made possible through Chickadee Checkoff, as well as activities related to the implementation of SWAP. I hope you enjoy reading it and when tax time comes around, please remember to Check the Chickadee and make your own contribution to wildlife conservation.



## What Can Stop A Duck Hunt

by Dan Witt

It was two years ago when my buddy and I got up early to go hunt mallards at Cheyenne Bottoms. We loaded up, headed out and arrived only to find out we couldn't hunt due to the presence of two whooping cranes in Pool 2. It was a bummer, but like many waterfowl hunters at the Bottoms, we see this as a fairly common occurrence, usually happening more than once each year. They're bad for a duck hunt, but great for photographs. I shot with a different piece of equipment that day.

So why can't a duck hunt take place when whoopers are around? The simple answer is these birds are too precious to be potentially put in a line of fire. Whooping cranes are protected at the state and federal level by the Kansas Nongame and Endangered Species Conservation Act and the Federal Endangered Species Act.

The largest bird in North America, whooping cranes once had a population of just 21 birds in the early 1940s. Estimates now range from 600 to 800 birds, including 160 in captivity. Most of these birds winter on the coast of Texas around Rockport, and it's certainly worth the effort to go down and take the "Crane Tour" there. You can get

beautiful, reasonably close pictures on boats managed by people trained to protect the birds.

Whoopers on the Gulf Coast dine mostly on blue crabs and clams, but whooping cranes' diets also include invertebrates, small vertebrates, and a variety of plant material.

At the Bottoms, Public Lands manager, Karl Grover, and wildlife biologist, Charlie Swank, keep meticulous records of the arrival and departure of whoopers. The earliest a whooping crane has arrived at the Bottoms was in 2000 when two showed up on October 7. The latest arrival was in 1980 on Nov. 4. And the worst year for duck hunters was 1994, when a pair stayed almost a month in October and November. Talk about a rough season.

While there is no way to predict when these birds will show up or how long they will stay, I count it a gift to be able to see and photograph them. But be warned, if you don't have a long lens, you are usually out of luck.

So the next time they're here, I'll be happy to photograph them. And as soon as they leave, I'll be happy for another reason. Happy "shooting."



WITH MIKE MILLER

## FISHIN'

### Don't Trust An Old Knot

*Never trust a man who says he is only a little crooked and that the crookedness is exercised in your interest.* -Theodore Roosevelt

That's pretty solid advice from the 26th President of the United States, and while he was an avid outdoorsman, that quote doesn't have anything to do with fishing. So how about this: "Never trust an old fishing knot," -Mike Miller.

Retie, retie, retie. Those three words are as important to an angler as any three words in the English language, and they refer to retying knots on lures often. All anglers have experimented with various knots to attach their lure to their fishing line. Some may look for the strongest, most dependable knot, while others seek out a knot that is easy to tie.

And there are many knot options to choose from: Fisherman's Knot, Improved Clinch Knot, Palomar Knot, Berkley Knot, Uni Knot, just to name a few. And some knots that work great on monofilament don't work so well with braided or super lines. Each angler must find a dependable knot or two they can tie and have confidence in.

However, no matter which knot they settle on, they must commit to retying it regularly. If you don't believe me, grab a lure that has been fished for several hours without being retied and pull firmly on the line and lure. I'll bet it breaks surprisingly easy.

You'll lose a big fish if you tie a poor knot, but you'll probably lose more fish because of old knots. It's simple: retie. Get into the habit of regularly retying your knots, even if the fishing is good - especially if the fishing is good. It takes only a few seconds to retie and it can be the difference in landing that fish of a lifetime and being disappointed.





WITH ANNIE CAMPBELL-FISCHER

## Trophy Deer? Maybe

Whether someone is looking to put a wholesome source of protein on their table, experience the glory of Mother Nature and her inhabitants, or fulfill a specific outdoor goal, the motivations that beat in the hearts of hunters are varied. Regardless of motivation, deer hunters will agree that Kansas is a top deer hunting destination. Not only do we have an abundant population of deer, our state is well-known for producing trophy-sized bucks, too.

For hunters lucky enough to fill a tag with the buck of a lifetime, it's likely they'll want to have the antlers scored, and rightfully so. Not only does it add to the experience of the hunt, but it is also helpful in seeing how their deer fares among others.

To compare deer, an antler scoring system has been developed, and records are maintained by two national organizations: Boone and Crockett (for deer taken with any equipment) and Pope and Young (for deer taken only with archery equipment). To be considered for their records books, each group has minimum scores for both typical and non-typical whitetail and mule deer. After a deer is scored, hunters can pay a fee to enter their buck with one of the organizations mentioned.

If a deer harvested in Kansas does not meet minimum score requirements for Boone and Crockett or Pope and

Young, the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWP) encourages hunters to enter their score with us.

Here's what you need to know:

- The deer must be legally taken in the state of Kansas.
- After the deer is killed, the hunter must wait a minimum of 60 days until the deer may be scored. This allows for the antlers to dry and guarantees the most accurate measurement.
- After the 60-day period, hunters can have their antlers scored by a certified Boone and Crockett measurer, a certified Pope and Young measurer or certified Kansas measurer. When the score is complete, they can submit a Kansas Trophy Deer Award application.

Certified Kansas measurers are trained to score deer specifically for the Trophy Deer Awards program, and many are KDWP employees. A list of certified Kansas measurers can be found at [www.ksoutdoors.com](http://www.ksoutdoors.com) by clicking "Hunting," "Game, Species, and Records & Scoring," "Deer," then "Trophy Award Program." Certified measurers are listed on the application.

An unofficial Top 20 List for deer in each category can also be found under "Records & Scoring."

There is no charge to enter a Kansas Trophy Deer application and there is no limit to the number of applications a hunter can submit in a lifetime.

To submit your application, mail it to me, Annie Campbell-Fischer, at KDWP, 512 SE 25th Ave. Pratt, KS 67124. Please allow a minimum of two week for processing.

Have a great season, hunters.

### DEER RECORD BOOK MINIMUM SCORES

	KDWP TROPHY CERTIFICATE		POPE & YOUNG (ARCHERY)	BOONE & CROCKETT (FIREARM)
	ARCHERY	FIREARM		
WHITETAIL TYPICAL	115	135	125	170
WHITETAIL NON-TYPICAL	120	150	155	195
MULE DEER TYPICAL	135	150	145	190
MULE DEER NON-TYPICAL	150	185	170	230

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY BENTON BOYD  
FREELANCE WRITER & PHOTOGRAPHER  
OLATHE

# CO

SNAPSH



# WLD SNAPS

PHOTOS AND SNIPPETS OF GOOSE HUNTING IN KANSAS



*"And just as each season begins with so much hope, excitement, and anticipation, each closes with as much reflection, appreciation, and wonder for this gift we have."*



*"With the rising sun, our high spirits were temporarily dampened. The countless thousands of snow geese held little regard for the itinerary we had so carefully planned on their behalf. However, within 30 minutes of legal, we heard the first "honk" and identified the first of what would be an unending stream of Canadas on the horizon."*



*"I am not sure, but I do wonder – how many geese did we see? Were there ten thousand birds that flew over, many circling, working, hovering in layers over us? Was it twice that?"*



*"We capture these moments with photographs. But, I assure you, no piece of equipment will ever catch the magnificence, the magic, the wonder, of watching it happen before your very eyes."*

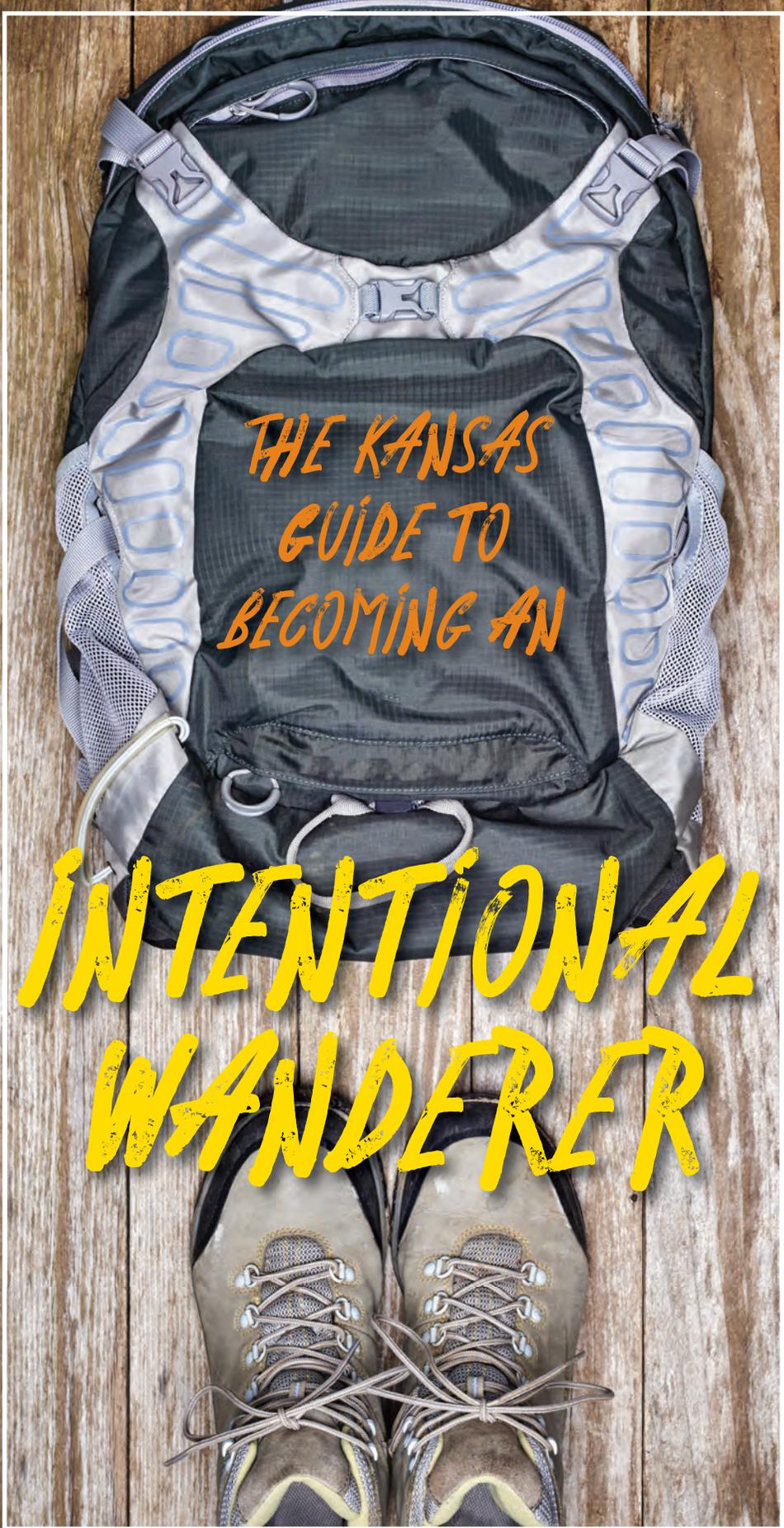


*"One of the best things about our time afield is watching each day awaken and come to life. Or, in other cases, watching dusk quietly, gently usher the day away to slumber."*

*"Among the many blessings to be accounted for, I find my ability to observe and participate in the unveiling of a new day afield, to play my role in the mysterious gift of migration, to be among those most cherished."*



*For more outdoor photos and full stories from Benton Boyd, visit [bentonboyd.com](http://bentonboyd.com).*



*FACTS FOR THE  
SUNFLOWER STATE HIKER:*



**Kansas' Longitude**

94° 38' W  
to  
102° 1' 34" W

**Kansas' Latitude**

37° N TO 40° N

Our state is

**400**

miles east to west

&

**210 MILES SOUTH TO NORTH**

Kansas cover

**82,282**

square miles

**Geographic Center**

*Barton County*

15 miles NE of Great Bend

**Highest Point**

Mount Sunflower

4,039 feet above sea level

**lowest Point**

*VERDIGERIS RIVER*

679 feet below sea level



by **Jennifer Leeper,**  
*freelance writer*  
**Kansas City, Mo.**

# Kansas is a surprise gem for hikers.

**Yep, I said hikers.** The Sunflower State – though technically mountainless – offers bluffs, breaks, badlands, and even canyons perfect for hiking. It's a well-kept secret, but since you're a loyal reader, I'll share with you my hiking Kansas treasure chest of knowledge.

For those new to hiking, preparing for an inaugural trek in Kansas may not be the same as prepping for "fourteeners" (mountain peaks with an elevation of 14,000 feet) in Colorado, but the same rules apply to your couple-of-hours-or-so hike through the relatively flat Flint Hills, or a visit to the "Little Ozarks" in southeast Kansas. In fact, there's nothing "little" about these Ozarks, especially if you underestimate the terrain or lack the right gear or endurance.

## GRAB A MAP

A little online research on the various landscapes of Kansas can give you a good foundation for understanding the physical territory you could encounter during your hike. For example, physiographic maps, such as the one offered through the Kansas Geological Survey, illustrate distinctive regions like the Smoky Hills in north-central Kansas and the High Plains in western Kansas.

Armed with a basic knowledge of Kansas topography, you can decide where to plant your boots first, based on your desired scenery, time, and goals. This is where the real fun begins. But be forewarned, your options may be greater than you think.

Kristin Conard, co-author of *Kansas Trail Guide: The Best Hiking, Biking, and Riding in the Sunflower State*, has a hard time narrowing her choices.

"... I really enjoy the trails at Eisenhower State Park near Melvern Lake, and the Prairie Spirit Trail from Ottawa to Iola is in such good shape and represents so much hard work, and along the way, you get idyllic views of rolling farmland."

George Frazier, author of *The Last Wild Places of Kansas*, tends toward untamed, obscure spots when he explores.

"You're a lucky person if some of your favorite hikes are close to home. My "home trails" are the Billy Mills Trail at Haskell Indian Nations University and the Lawrence River Trails and Kansas River Levee that extend northeast from Lawrence, starting at Bowersock Dam."

Dave Dunford, a long-time member and off-time board member of the Prairie Packers, a Kansas hiking club, prefers trekking around Clinton and Perry lakes.

"I like to hike the trail along Rock Creek at the southwest end of Clinton Reservoir. Really good white bass fishing there during the spring run. Also, really great trails around Perry Reservoir.

"The Woodridge area at Clinton Reservoir is a good place to camp and hike when it gets colder."

Dunford added that Elk City Reservoir is another favorite weekend backpacking adventure of his due to the area's "Many large rock formations and cliffs that you don't expect to see in Kansas."

Still wanting for ideas of where to go? Visit the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism's website, [www.ksoutdoors.com](http://www.ksoutdoors.com), and The Slackpacker's Guide to Hiking Trails & Wilderness Travel at [www.slackpacker.com](http://www.slackpacker.com) and click on "Kansas." Or check out TrailLink by the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy at [www.trailink.com](http://www.trailink.com) where you can enter your city, state, or zip, or a specific trail name.

## GEAR UP

When gearing up for a hike, there are a few questions you'll need answered before you head out: What will the weather be like? Will the terrain be smooth, rocky or somewhere in between? Will the ground be dry or muddy? Weather and trail conditions are two critical factors in selecting what you'll outfit yourself with.

You can fine-tune your preparation for trail conditions by visiting the Community Collaborative Rain, Hail & Snow Network at [www.cocorahs.org](http://www.cocorahs.org). Simply click on "Kansas" for county-by-county information on the possibility or presence of precipitation and comments made about the weather in individual counties.

Beyond clothing, you'll need to think about what time of day you'll be hiking, how steep the terrain may be, and even what you'll carry your goods in. Consider packing a headlamp for early morning and late evening hikes when visibility may be low, especially if you're in new territory. For hikes on rugged terrain, a sturdy hiking stick will give you more leverage and stability. No matter the terrain, outfit yourself with a small backpack to carry your gear in.

Conard suggests choosing gear based on season. “ ... sunscreen and bug spray in late spring, summer, and early fall. Layers from fall to spring.” Conard also advises bringing a trail guide on any hike.

## THE RIGHT FOOT FORWARD

What you put on your feet is a critical part of preparing for your hike. When choosing your “sole mates,” there are typically four basic kinds of hiking footwear to consider:

- **Hiking shoes.** These are lighter than a boot and offer less support but are ideal if you plan to take shorter hikes on less rugged terrain. Many come in waterproof versions, and are even stylish enough to wear back in civilization.



- **Hiking boots.** Designed for longer hikes, heavier pack loads and more rugged terrain, hiking boots provide support for your feet and ankles. This is kind of the middle ground shoe that you can't go wrong with.

- **Backpacking boots.** Taller, stiffer, and often heavier than most hiking boots, backpacking boots are ideal if you're anticipating multiple day hikes, or treks during winter when snow and ice may be at your feet.

Once you've decided which type of shoe or boot is best suited for your needs, find a style and brand that fits your feet. Be picky and take your time. Good fitting boots might be the most critical piece of equipment you'll buy.

## PLAY IT SAFE

Regardless of the time of year, never hike without plenty of water and a general first-aid kit. Consider including in your hiking kit the following:

- Antiseptic towelettes/ alcohol wipes: to disinfect a wound
- Antibiotic ointment: to prevent infection
- Bandages of varying size: for cuts, scrapes, and blisters
- Ibuprofen: for pain and inflammation
- Antihistamine: for allergic reactions and insect bites
- Tweezers: to remove splinters
- Bandana: for applying pressure to a wound, or use in a splint
- Powdered emergency electrolyte drink: for quick hydration



You can never be too cautious when you're outdoors, especially if you're new to hiking or are in an unfamiliar area. If hiking alone, let someone know where you're going and when you plan to return. Take your cell phone and make sure it's fully charged.

## ENERGIZE YOURSELF

First and foremost, stay hydrated. You may be comfortable mid-trek, but keep in mind that thirst and perspiration aren't the only signs of dehydration. If you don't mind toting them, throw one or two (or more) water bottles in your pack. If you're trying to minimize your load, consider using a hydration pack. These are fairly slim packs that have a built-in water bladder, typically with an attached straw that allow you to sip on the go. Sites like [www.backpacker.com](http://www.backpacker.com) provide hydration equipment ratings to help you make your purchasing decision.

If you're planning on a hike that's longer than an hour, throw a few snacks in your pack.  
From energy bars



and gels, to chews and even jellybeans, outdoor adventurers have seemingly endless choices when it comes to selecting their “fuel.” If you’re looking to find the latest and greatest in energy choices, check out the reviews at [www.outdoorgearlab.com](http://www.outdoorgearlab.com). If you’re in to keeping it simple, take food that will keep well in your pack like a peanut butter sandwich, nuts or a banana. They’re inexpensive and portable sources of energy.

## THE PAY OFF

Hiking is good for the body, but it’s probably better for the soul. It connects us to places and can fill voids we didn’t even know were there. From forested hills to badlands, treeless plains, Kansas offers the intentional wanderer variety. Walt Whitman said it best when he wrote: “While I know the standard claim that Yosemite, Niagara Falls, the Upper Yellowstone, and the like afford the greatest natural shows, I am not so sure but that the Prairies and the Plains... last longer, fill the esthetic sense fuller, precede all the rest and make North America’s characteristic landscape.”

## ABOUT THE PRAIRIE PACKERS

Born in the 1970s with only a few members, the Prairie Packers have not only endured, but their ranks have swelled to nearly 600 hikers. Based out of Topeka, they trek all over Kansas and beyond. Activities range from hiking (of course) to kayaking, and cycling. Meeting once a month for dinner in Topeka, members discuss future events and hear the adventures of other outdoor enthusiasts. For more information on the Prairie Packers, visit their Facebook page under “Kansas Prairie Packers” or visit their website at [www.prairiepackers.org](http://www.prairiepackers.org).

# 20 Places For Your First Hike



**SP = State Park**  
**WA = Wildlife Area**  
**SFL = State Fishing Lake**

### Northwest

Steve Mathes Nature Trail, Prairie Dog SP: 1.4 miles  
Coyote Trail, Webster SP: 3 miles  
Agave Nature Trail, Cedar Bluff SP: 5 miles

### Southwest

Eagle Trail, Meade SP: 1.5 miles  
Lake Scott Bridle Trail, Lake Scott SP: 7 miles

### Northcentral

Dakota Trail, Wilson SP: 1 mile  
Split Boulder Trail, Kanopolis SP: 2 miles

### Northeast

Eisenhower Interpretive Trail, Eisenhower SP: .5 miles  
Ah-ke-ta Nature Trail, Pomona SP: .5 miles  
Cedar Ridge Trail- ADA, Tuttle Creek SP: 1 mile  
Pillsbury Crossing (P.C.) Nature Trail, P.C. WA: 2 miles  
Pipeline (Campground) Trail, Milford WA: 3 miles  
Eagle Ridge Trail, Milford WA: 8 miles

### Southcentral

Pond Trail, Sand Hills SP: 1.5 miles  
Rolling Hills, Sand Hills SP: 3.8  
West Side Trail, Cheney SP: 6 miles

### Southeast

Neosho Nature Trail, Neosho SFL: 1 mile  
Casner Creek Trail, Fall River SP: 1.5  
Table Mound Hiking Trail, Elk City SP: 2.8 miles  
Drywood Creek, Crawford SP: 6.8 miles



For a complete list of trails and places to trek in Kansas, visit [ksoutdoors.com](http://ksoutdoors.com) and click “Activities,” then “Hiking, Biking, & Horseback Riding Trails.”



# Covey Roll Call



It's a brisk October morning an hour before sunrise, and you are stumbling through the grass and brush, following directions from a dimly lit GPS unit in your hand. As dawn approaches, an owl calls from a nearby tree and a coyote howls somewhere in the distance, but you pay them little mind. At your destination, you stand silently, straining your ears for a more peculiar and unique sound. Just when you feel like it will never come, you here a distant "koi-lee" and within seconds, echoes of the same call explode in all directions. Scrambling to bring pen to paper, you feverishly record the locations of all the calling birds. In five minutes, it's over. Congratulations, you've just completed a fall bobwhite covey count.

The northern bobwhite quail is arguably the most recognizable game bird in the nation. And although they've fared better in Kansas than in many other states, the species has experienced a long-term population decline across the country. Interestingly, the drought that initially decimated Kansas' upland game birds, subsequently breathed new life into our quail populations due to the ideal habitat created when precipitation returned. This drastic change has resulted in the highest quail densities in the state in many years.

Most people who are familiar with bobwhite quail recognize the spring breeding call of the male, "bob-bob-white," from which the bird's name is derived, but the species produces several other calls. The fall covey call is a social call produced by members of a covey just before sunrise. Some believe it is a greeting among coveys, as if to say "good morning." The call allows coveys to space themselves accordingly within the available habitat, reducing competition for food and cover. This call can be heard from September through winter, but calling peaks in mid-October. It is during this peak calling period that we take the opportunity to survey and estimate fall densities.

A large portion of Kansas' quail management is prioritized to create habitat that will facilitate production during the summer, with an end goal of increasing fall densities. While spring whistle surveys are good at providing information on long-term population trends, they are not well suited to evaluate the impacts of management practices on fall densities. At the Smoky Hills Wildlife Area, fall covey

by Jeffery Prendergast  
*wildlife biologist, Hays*



counts are being used to evaluate a new grazing system, which is designed to increase plant diversity and improve brood cover. Additional projects being considered include evaluating how quail densities react to artificial shrub structure, salt cedar density, and patch burn grazing units.

Fall monitoring protocol has been adopted by the National Bobwhite Technical Committee, a group of more than 100 wildlife professionals from state and federal agencies, universities, and private organizations with a goal of restoring wild populations of bobwhite quail. Fall counts are a portion of the mandatory monitoring required in bobwhite focus areas to meet accepted guidelines. These monitoring results allow us to adjust management practices when necessary and make recommendations to others interested in quail management.

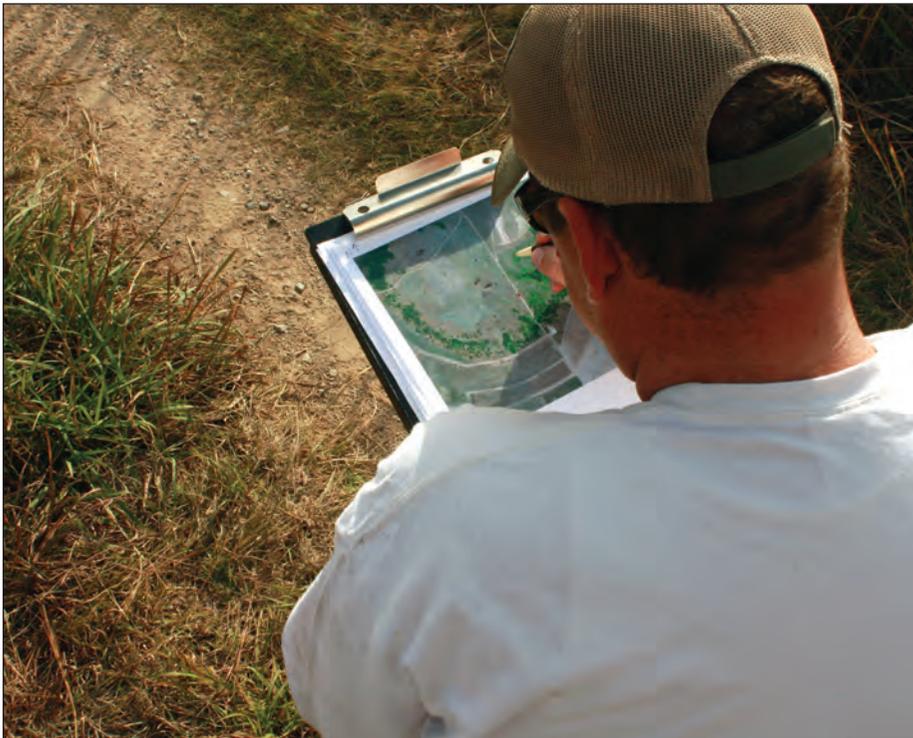
Compared to spring whistle surveys, fall covey counts are more labor intensive and challenging. In the spring, an observer typically listens for whistles during multiple five-minute periods in different loca-

tions and surveying can be completed in 90 minutes, starting one hour before sunrise. This allows an observer to complete many survey points over the course of a morning. In the fall, observers listen for fall covey calls from 45 minutes before sunrise until sunrise and can only complete one survey point per morning because the calling window is short. In designing a fall covey survey, listening points can either be randomly or systematically distributed on the project site, depending on the size and shape of the area, what is under evaluation, and available manpower.

Because researchers have estimated that calling coveys can be heard from 500 meters away, listening points are spaced more than 1,000 meters apart so that surveys are not overlapping. Observers are given a map and asked to estimate the location of the calling birds on the map. By estimating distance, we can correct for different observers' ability to hear the birds and estimate how many coveys were there that were not heard, which is easier said than done.

Unlike spring surveys where males are calling somewhat infrequently – and at times, almost politely taking turns – in fall, quail are calling simultaneously and frequently create a flurry of calls. This can be both exhilarating and frustrating, particularly in years like this where densities are high and as many as eight to 10 coveys may be calling at once. To improve survey accuracy, our biologists go through a training course where they can practice and improve their ability to mark specific locations.

Think you've got it? Well, there's one more factor to add to the mix: not all coveys are created equal. Covey size is affected by a number of factors including year and site. Because of this, covey flushes are required so that average covey size can be estimated for each site. This often means that as soon as the calling dies down, bird dogs are put on the ground and observers storm off to the nearest covey in an



Observers are asked to estimate the location of the calling birds on the map. By estimating distance, staff can correct for different observers' ability to hear the birds and estimate how many coveys were there that were not heard.



attempt to flush the birds. This may sound easy since, theoretically, covey locations were marked on the map. However, almost immediately after they stop calling, coveys quickly move to begin feeding. If you're lucky, you may flush two coveys in a morning, but it's not uncommon to not find any of the birds you just heard calling. If a sufficient number of coveys can't be flushed during the normal survey, additional effort may be required to determine a meaningful average covey size. All covey flushes have to occur before hunting season, so that estimates are not affected by changes in covey size from hunting pressure.

Once the data is collected, we are able to use the coveys counted and average covey size to estimate a density of quail per acre. Tracking changes over time in these density estimates allows us to compare management strategies. However, evaluating success is not as straight forward as "did the number of birds go up or down?" Quail populations are dynamic and go through boom and bust cycles, depending on the amount of habitat and conditions dealt by Mother Nature. If weather is bad and our densities fall, management efforts may still be deemed successful if densities fall less than they would have using alternative practices. Without the monitoring protocol in place, you may assume that you failed your goal when densities fall and abandon your habitat management before realizing its potential. At the end of the Smoky Hills Wildlife Area five-year project, results will help the manager determine whether to continue with the new grazing system or attempt a different management regime.

Ultimately, the fall covey count gives managers an additional tool to evaluate habitat management efforts. Kansas hunters should take pride in this, knowing wildlife managers are using all available tools at their disposal to improve habitat and maximize quail populations. We should feel privileged to live in a place where we can talk about improving from such estimates as five coveys per listening point or even more, when many states in the bobwhite range are lucky to hear even one covey call.



In the fall, observers listen for fall covey calls from 45 minutes before sunrise until sunrise and can only complete one survey point per morning because the calling window is short.

At a recent meeting among quail biologists, it was stated that across all of the national quail focus areas, fall covey count efforts found an average of one covey per listening point. There is a huge national effort, which includes 25 state wildlife agencies, the National Park Service, the Forest Service, and non-government agencies, all working together to improve habitat and reverse the declining population trend. Luckily, here in Kansas you are likely not far from an opportunity to hear a covey waking up and greeting the day.

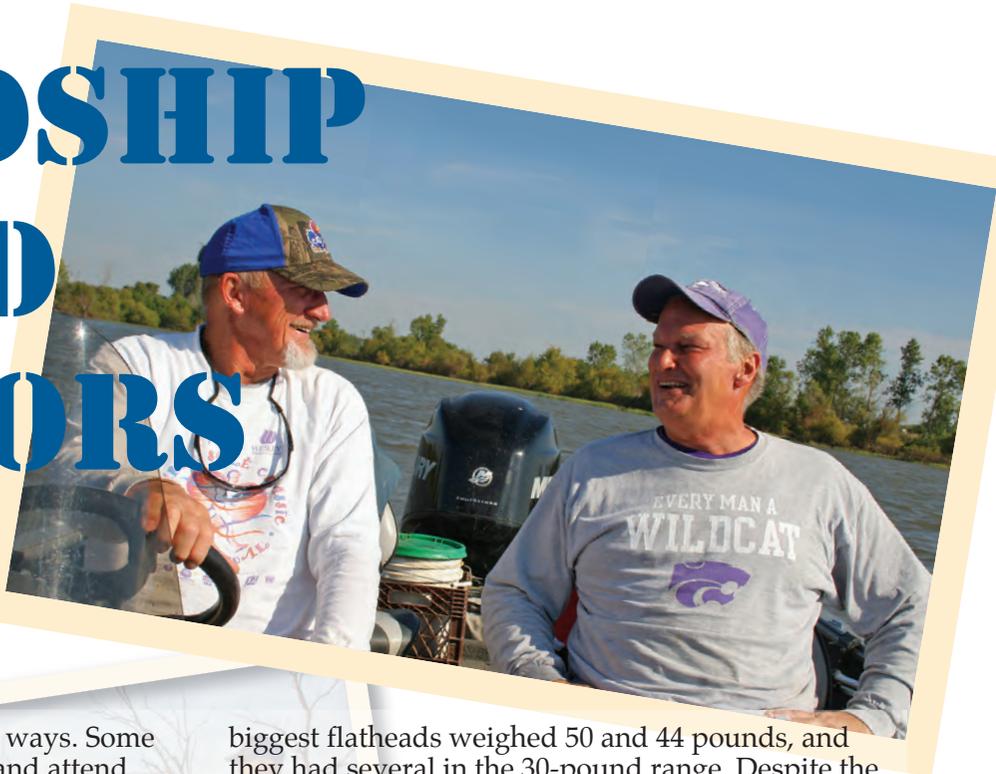
So next time you're up early in the morning sitting in your deer stand, walking to a duck blind, or maybe just enjoying a cup of coffee on the back porch, keep a keen ear for a distant "Koi-lee." When Gentleman Bob says good morning to you, you can say good morning, too. 🦋

To hear fall covey and other bobwhite calls, visit:  
[www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Northern\\_Bobwhite/sounds](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Northern_Bobwhite/sounds)

To see a fall covey survey in action visit:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=pINO\\_OHx-Bw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pINO_OHx-Bw)

# FRIENDSHIP FORGED OUTDOORS

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



Friendships develop in a myriad of ways. Some friendships form when kids grow up and attend school together. Others form later in life. Most are casual, some are short-term, but every once in a while, a friend comes along who lasts a lifetime.

For those in the last category, there's usually a special ingredient that keeps the relationship alive. In the case of Dale Wallace and Gene Brockmeier, that ingredient is the outdoors, and spending time outdoors together has kept them best friends for nearly 50 years.

"I first met Dale in 1969 when I was playing a pick-up basketball game at Butler Community College and this guy came running onto the court, stole the ball and made a behind-the-back shot and kept right on trucking out of the gym," Brockmeier remembers. "I wondered who the hell that was and after I found out, we became friends."

Brockmeier, 64, lives in Rose Hill and Wallace, 65, lives in Cassoday. Despite stints in other southcentral Kansas towns, they've never lived far apart. As young adults, the duo got together outdoors often.

"We did a lot of pheasant and quail hunting then and we duck hunted a lot, too," Brockmeier said.

"We fished the Walnut River with Dale's dad all the time, using bullheads for bait to catch flathead catfish and we had some great times," he added.

"Dale's dad had a knack for catching flatheads and we had a blast doing that when we got the chance."

While reminiscing, the two described their outings nearly in unison, each providing additional tidbits for the other. One memorable outing took place on the river one Friday in April. The pair caught more than 250 pounds of flathead and channel catfish in one night running limblines and trotlines. Their

biggest flatheads weighed 50 and 44 pounds, and they had several in the 30-pound range. Despite the amount of time that's passed, both recalled the details vividly, including the number of channel cats caught that night weighing 8-10 pounds.

After the men started families, most of their time together was relegated to weekends. While hunting and fishing was the excuse to get together, the men used the time to celebrate the good, share the bad, talking of work, marriage, kids and life in general.

"We've been through a lot together with divorces, deaths and everything else," Brockmeier said. "And we've always been there for each other. That's why we've stayed such close friends."

"There's a time to sit down and listen, and a time to give each other "crap" and that's just how we work," he laughed.

In the mid-1980s, the two added bowhunting to their outdoor agenda. They've spent thousands of hours repairing and placing treestands, checking trail cameras, and making landowner contacts. Add the dozens of trips bowhunting together, comparing notes, helping each other track, drag out and field dress deer, and you've added thousands more hours together outdoors.

For the last 15 years, they've embarked on an annual trip to northern Manitoba to fish for lake trout, walleye and northern pike. These annual treks last a week, but they are anticipated for months. They usually take a couple of other friends along for the ride and there's no shortage of fun, fishing, practical jokes and laughter.

No matter the destination, activity, or quarry, there are a couple of constants when these two are together and both are quick to admit it.

"We haven't met a plate of food we didn't like!"

Wallace laughed. "Eating is always good."

Their destinations at area waters or woods often coincide with a visit to a small-town café known for anything from tasty Mexican dishes to homemade pie. Wallace has many on speed dial so he can check on daily specials from the field.

Wallace admits eating is an integral part of their outings whether they visit a restaurant or bring their own food. However, as they've aged, their field meals have become more refined, which means they take eating utensils with them now.

"We always took plenty of food, but we never took plates or utensils," Wallace said. "One time we ate hamburger out of a clam shell using a smaller clam shell as a spoon."

Another constant to their time together is laughter. Practical jokes are often elaborate and may include great expense and effort, featuring everything from awkward attire to signs and specially-made t-shirts.

"We do like to cut up and have a good time," Wallace said.

Last fall that laughter was put on hold when Brockmeier received bad news.

"I was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma the day before trapping season opened last November," he said.

The duo had been looking forward to that trapping season as Wallace had taken up the activity just midway through the previous season. Brockmeier enjoyed tagging along and they both anticipated a full season together, but the cancer changed everything.

"I started treatments immediately," Brockmeier said. "I'd go in every three weeks and the treatment would last all day."

The dosage was aggressive enough to wipe Brockmeier out and keep him homebound for a couple of weeks.

"I'd just get to feeling better and then I'd have to go in again," Brockmeier said. "It was horrible."

Brockmeier missed his time outdoors with his friend, so as soon as he felt up to it, he'd join him on the trapline.

"There was maybe once in that last week before my next treatment where I'd have enough juice to go trapping with Dale and I'd do it," Brockmeier said. "At that time it was the only thing I had to do and I couldn't wait to go if I felt well enough."

"I tried to encourage him whenever I could," Wallace said. "There were times he didn't even want to, or was too weak to get out of the Mule (ATV), but at least he was out there with me and I enjoyed his com-

pany and we had a lot of fun."

Those trapping expeditions were indeed therapeutic for Brockmeier as he and Wallace made many more memories. They caught a bobcat that netted Wallace \$200 when he sold its fur, and took 25 coyotes off of several Flint Hills ranches where landowners were thrilled to have them removed. Throw in a handful of raccoons, opossums and skunks and their second trapping season was successful, both physically and spiritually.

"It really gave me something to look forward to and there was nothing like getting outdoors with Dale and enjoying fresh air," Brockmeier said. "It made me appreciate everything just a little bit more."

Brockmeier's cancer treatments continued through last May and he's now cancer free. Making up for lost time, he and Wallace fished together at least two to three times a week last summer. On these fishing trips they talked of plans for fall hunts and a third season of trapping together. And there was always time to reminisce about the fun they've had outdoors for the last 47 years.

Their work schedules now allow for plenty of camaraderie as Brockmeier joked, "I haven't worked an honest day since I was 45," referring to when he went into business for himself. Wallace retired three years ago, so they can coordinate outings without constraints. Both enjoy the support of their wives.

"We're both married to the best women in the world," Wallace said. "They love us, understand us, and encourage us to do things together outdoors." Their's is a recipe for a successful and gratifying friendship that's stood the test of time.

As Brockmeier put it, "We couldn't ask for a better friendship." ❖







by Andra Bryan Stefanoni

# Talk of Trout

*Kansas' trout stocking program offers prairie anglers the unique opportunity to hook a fresh water icon – trout. From November through April 15, the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism stocks over 30 locations with rainbow trout, and two locations with brown trout – Mined Land Wildlife Area Unit 30 and the Kanopolis Seep Stream. When you talk of fishing in Kansas, you can talk of trout.*



### Fly Woman <<<

Amber Tyree grew up on a farm within sight of Big Brutus and always knew about the strip pits that dotted the countryside surrounding the giant electric shovel. But she didn't really develop a true curiosity about what lived in them until last year when she decided to explore them by kayak.

"Along the way, I noticed the fish seemed to be as curious about me as I am about them," she said. "I've seen gar, carp, bluegill, pumpkinseed, and bass."

Aided by local experts who helped her identify them, Tyree became curious about their life cycles, what water temperatures and depths they prefer, and their diets, among other things.

Then, after a road trip, listening to audio of "A River Runs Through It," Tyree decided to connect with a local fly fishing group, MAKO, to learn the basics of casting and fly tying. She didn't know it then, but Tyree would one day catch fish with her very own hand-tied olive wooly bugger.

As her skills progressed, Tyree was pleasantly surprised to learn that one of the pits she grew up not far from would be the perfect place to land a trout. And so she did.

### The Trout Pit <<<

Stocked with rainbows and browns, the "trout pit," as locals refer to it, is officially called the Mined Land Wildlife Area (MLWA) Area No. 30 Trout Lake.

Parsons resident Kelly Stammer remembers vividly when it was acquired by the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) as part of an 8,000-acre donation by the P&M Coal Company, which operated Brutus. The lake was one of the first created by Brutus, the 16-story tall shovel that is the second largest in the world.

"I watched them turn that pit into a trout pit," Stammer said. "I watched all the people flock to it, throw corn onto the top of the moss beds, and stand there in the heat of the day trying to catch those trout."

That would have been 1986, said KDWPT fisheries biologist Rob Friggeri. The first stocking was 4,100 rainbows from Colorado, which were traded for channel catfish — a practice that continued for eight years. He added that rainbows were also acquired from Wyoming, Utah, and Montana.

These days, trout arrive at the

pit from Crystal Lake Fisheries near Ava, Mo., where for more than 60 years, the Emerson family has been spawning, hatching, and raising their registered strain of rainbows in pure cold Ozark Mountain spring water.

Biologists suspected the cold-water fish would do well in the pit, which at 60 feet deep, is the deepest lake in the MLWA. It also is unique, Friggeri said, in that it does not typically stratify.

During the summer, depths from 20 to 40 feet remain below 70 degrees and have oxygen levels exceeding 4 parts per million — sufficient to maintain a year-round trout fishery.

Back when the stocking first began, Stammer watched, but didn't join in.

"It didn't interest me," he said. "It wasn't until they cleaned it up and made a park out of it, put in a dock, landscaped it, that it began to appeal to me."

In the last eight years or so, Stammer has fished there as often as he can throughout the fall, winter, and early spring.

"January and February is the absolute best time, in my opinion," he said. "When the water is cold up top, I've found they tend to bite better. In the wintertime, they'll hit about anything you throw at them."

For Stammer, that means jigs.

"Anything with a darker color and an orange head," he said.

While he hates to divulge secrets, he did share that he sticks primarily to the south end starting on the west side, sometimes by shore, but often by boat.

"There are so many more fish in that south cove than anywhere else," he said. "And they'll run from 6 to 8 inches up to 6 or 8 pounds."

Stammer has proof: Last January while out with buddies, he reeled in a 7.2 pound rainbow — his 29th of the day.

### Eye On The Prize <<<

Much of the fall, Tyree worked at doing the same. She headed out frequently — as often as days off would allow — with her kayak and fly rod.

"I want to catch one, especially a brown, look him in the eye, admire his coffee bean spots, snap a picture, then paint him into my journal," she said.

And when she does, she doesn't plan to stop — casting for trout has become part of who she is now.

"I feel fortunate to have the Mined Land Area in my 'backyard.' It's quiet, peaceful, and I feel the worries of the world slip away when I'm there," Tyree explained.

### Statewide <<<

That Cherokee County trout lake, or "trout pit," is now one of 33 locations KDWPT stocks with

trout twice a month from November through April.

The statewide stocking program began in 1994, and since then, more than 311,000 trout have been stocked. Each year, that equates to about 16,000, Friggeri said.

From 2003-2005, a few hundred brown trout were stocked; in 2008, another 2,500, and more were added in 2010 and 2011.

At the MLWA where trout can survive all year, a trout permit is required year-round for all anglers 16 and older. Youth 15 and younger can fish for trout without a permit, but their daily creel limit is reduced to two fish. For all other licensed anglers, the daily creel limit is 5 trout, unless posted otherwise. At MLWA Trout Lake, anglers may keep only one brown trout in their five fish limit, and it must be 20 inches long or longer.

Other lakes where a trout permit is required of all anglers during trout season from Nov. 1 to April 15 include Dodge City Lake Charles, Ft. Scott Gun Park Lake, Glen Elder State Park (SP) Pond, Kanopolis Seep Stream, Lake Henry in Clinton SP, Pratt Centennial Pond, Walnut River

Area in El Dorado SP, Willow Lake at Tuttle Creek SP, Webster Stilling Basin, Vic's Lake and Slough Creek in Sedgwick County Park, Topeka Auburndale Park, and Garnett Crystal Lake.

Lakes where a trout permit is required for anglers fishing for or possessing trout during trout season include Sherman County Smoky Gardens Lake, Solomon River between Webster Reservoir Rooks County No. 2 Road, Ft. Riley Cameron Springs, Lake Shawnee - Topeka, Salina Lakewood Lake, Moon Lake on Fort Riley, Scott SP Pond, Hutchinson Dillon Nature Center Pond, Atchison City Lake No. 1, Belleville City Lake, Holton-Elkhorn Lake, Syracuse Sam's Pond, Cimarron Grasslands Pits, Colby Villa High Lake, Great Bend Vet's Lake, and Meade State Fishing Lake.

**For more information about Kansas' trout program, including stocking schedules by region, visit [www.kansasoutdoors.com](http://www.kansasoutdoors.com) and click "Fishing," then "Special Fishing Programs."** <<<



# 2016 UPLAND BIRD



# FORECAST



## LIMITING FACTORS

Two important factors impact fall upland game hunting prospects. First is the number of breeding adult birds available for production in the spring. The second is the reproductive success of the breeding population. Reproductive success consists of nest success (the number of nests that successfully hatch) and chick survival (the number of chicks recruited into the fall population). Annual survival of pheasant and quail is relatively low; therefore, the fall population is more dependent on reproductive success than breeding population levels. For grouse (prairie chickens), reproductive success is still the major population regulator, although greater annual survival helps maintain hunting opportunities during poor conditions.

## METHODS

Breeding population data were gathered during spring breeding surveys for pheasants (crow counts), quail (whistle counts), and prairie chickens (lek counts). Data for reproductive success were collected during late-summer roadside surveys for pheasants and quail. Reproductive success of prairie chickens cannot be easily assessed using the same methods because they generally do not associate with roads like pheasants and quail.

## HABITAT CONDITIONS

Habitat conditions were good to excellent across much of Kansas this year for upland bird production. While early spring was somewhat dry, regular precipitation events occurred across the state, beginning in April and continuing throughout the summer. This produced lush vegetation, both in crop fields and rangeland, and stimulated weed growth, promoting insect emergence and creating good nesting and brood conditions throughout much of the state. While heavy or poorly-timed rainfall can hurt production by reducing nest success and chick survival, the overall population response to the improved cover conditions this year appears to be good. Winter cover conditions will be good, and with so much cover available, hunters may find it challenging to pinpoint birds.

# STATEWIDE SUMMARIES

## PHEASANT

As a result of increased breeding populations and excellent nesting conditions, pheasant hunting this fall is expected to be similar to or improved compared to 2015. The best areas this year will likely be in the Northern High Plains (northwest) and Southern High Plains (southwest) regions. While the 2015 pheasant harvest remained depressed, the average daily bag per hunter was above the 10- and 20-year averages, suggesting we could have supported a near average harvest with greater hunter participation.

Increased production in 2015 led to another significant increase in the breeding pheasant population this year. This included stable or increasing spring populations across all four regions that make up the primary pheasant range. Ample spring moisture created excellent conditions for the 2016 nesting season. As a result of cool and wet spring weather, wheat harvest was delayed and progressed slowly, which typically benefits pheasant production. Despite greatly improved habitat conditions, pheasant densities observed during 2016 summer brood counts were slightly lower than in 2015. However, improved vegetation conditions and extensive rainfall during the survey period produced difficult survey conditions that likely impacted surveyors' ability to detect birds. This is supported by improvements in other measures of production, which suggest there was greater nest success in 2016 than in 2015.

## QUAIL

While bobwhite population increases in the eastern-most regions have not been as dramatic, all regional indices are above long-term averages. Opportunities should remain good statewide, with the best opportunities in the Southcentral Prairies and Southern High Plains regions.

Interestingly, the same drought that crashed our game bird populations can be credited for the excellent quail habitat observed following the drought. The resulting weedy grasslands are ideal for quail production, providing both abundant insects and somewhat open grasslands. As a result, the statewide breeding population of quail increased for the third year in a row and was 23 percent greater than in 2015. This increase was expected, given that increases in 2015 roadside surveys were followed by a relatively mild winter.

Conditions were again good for production across most of the state in 2016. Roadside surveys showed a statewide increase of 45 percent compared to 2015.

## GREATER PRAIRIE CHICKEN

Prairie chicken populations are improved across many regions that contain the necessary habitat. Hunting opportunities should be good throughout the Greater Prairie Chicken Hunting Unit; however, the best opportunities this fall will be in the Smoky Hills Region where populations have been increasing and public access is more readily available.



# REGIONAL OUTLOOKS

## NORTHERN HIGH PLAINS (NORTHWEST)

**Pheasant** – Average daily bags were relatively good last year and with the similar brood survey values and improved production, hunting opportunities should be similar-to-improved throughout most of this region. The highest densities will be found in the northwestern portion and southern tier of counties in the region.

**Quail** – This area is at the extreme northwestern edge of bobwhite range in Kansas and densities are relatively low compared to central Kansas. The best areas will be in the northeastern counties in areas where adequate woody cover is present. Densities on the summer brood count significantly increased this year, but remain the lowest regional density in the state.

**Greater Prairie Chicken** – Populations have expanded in both numbers and range within the region over the past 20 years. Within the area that is still open to prairie chicken harvest, the better hunting opportunities will be found in the northeastern portion of the region in native prairie and nearby CRP grasslands.

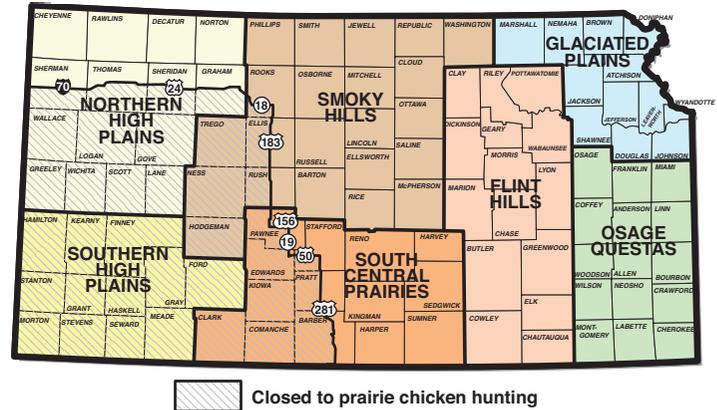
## SMOKY HILLS (NORTHCENTRAL)

**Pheasant** – Hunting should be fair to good this year. The western half of the region contained good densities, and the highest densities were found in the southern tier of counties. Spring breeding populations remained unchanged from 2015. Spring precipitation created good nesting conditions, and measures of production suggest this region had the greatest nest success of any region. Despite improved production, roadside counts decreased by 31 percent compared to 2015.

**Quail** – The northcentral and southcentral portion of this region hold the best quail densities. Reports throughout the region suggest fair to good quail numbers and given the habitat conditions, quail hunting should be good across most of the region.

The spring breeding population increased by 40 percent, and with excellent production conditions this summer, the brood survey increased by 92 percent compared to 2015. Quail populations in north-central Kansas are normally spotty, but they should be more consistent this year.

**Greater Prairie Chicken** – The best hunting will likely be found in the central portion of the region. This region has some of the highest densities and



best hunting opportunities in the state for greater prairie chickens. Improved rangeland conditions resulting from increased precipitation and lower cattle stocking rates following the drought should have positive impacts on densities this fall.

## GLACIATED PLAINS (NORTHEAST)

**Pheasant** – Good hunting opportunities will exist only in pockets of habitat, primarily in the northwestern portion of the region.

Spring crow counts indicated breeding populations remained similar to 2015, but roadside surveys indicated a 47 percent decrease in densities compared to 2015. Pheasant densities in the region are typically low.

**Quail** – Hunting opportunities in the region are expected to be better than last year and the best areas should be in the northwestern portion of the region.

Quail observations on the brood survey doubled this year compared to 2015. This increase comes despite the significant decrease in the spring survey index. While urbanization and succession have deteriorated the habitat and caused long-term population declines, quail densities should be the highest they've been in years.

**Greater Prairie Chicken** – Very little prairie chicken range occurs in this region and opportunities are limited. The most likely opportunities for encounters are in the western edges of the region along the Flint Hills, where large areas of native rangeland exist.

## OSAGE CUESTAS (SOUTHEAST)

**Pheasant** – This region is outside the primary pheasant range and very limited hunting opportunity is available.

**Quail** – Success rates of hunters targeting this area were higher than in western regions in 2015. Areas where birds were found last year should again offer fair hunting opportunities, with the best opportunities in western counties along the Flint Hills and in the southcentral portion of the region.

Though long-term trends have been declining, breeding populations have been steadily increasing in this region and saw another slight increase this year. Production in the region was depressed, likely due to heavy rainfall, particularly in July. Despite poor production, densities from brood surveys remained stable.

**Greater Prairie Chicken** – Greater prairie chickens occur in the central and northwest portions of this region in areas of native rangeland, primarily along the edge of the Flint Hills region. Populations have been in long-term decline.

## FLINT HILLS (EASTCENTRAL)

**Pheasant** – This region is outside the primary range of the pheasant. The best opportunities will be found in the northwest portion of the region. The spring breeding population index remained relatively stable this year, with the summer brood survey indicating a slight decrease in summer densities.

**Quail** – Densities will likely be limited in the core of the Flint Hills where large-scale annual burning and chemical control of shrubs has removed key components of quail habitat. However, the remainder of the Flint Hills should provide good hunting this fall.

A 26 percent increase in the index of breeding bobwhites this spring resulted in a very strong breeding population. Brood surveys indicated densities were similar to or slightly decreased compared to 2015.

**Greater Prairie Chicken** – Hunting will be slightly less productive compared to last year. The annual

burning practice in the core of the Flint Hills has returned, limiting the available nesting cover in the region. As a result, production in the core of the Flint Hills was lower than recently observed.

## SOUTHCENTRAL PRAIRIES (SOUTHCENTRAL)

**Pheasant** – Anecdotal reports and other survey data suggest there are ample birds here, and hunting is expected to be similar to last year. Highest pheasant densities will be in the northwestern portion.

The spring pheasant crow survey index indicated a 21 percent increase from 2015. However, the summer brood survey suggests a slight decrease compared to 2015. Measures of production were slightly lower than last year, likely impacted by the timing of rainfall.

**Quail** – Greatest densities will be found in the southwestern and northcentral portion of the region, but hunting should be good throughout.

The summer brood survey indicated a nearly 94 percent increase in quail density, giving the region the highest quail density this fall. While other regions may have pockets with higher densities, the region's mix of rangeland, CRP, cropland, and woody cover provides more consistent hunting.

**Greater Prairie Chicken** – This region is almost entirely occupied by lesser prairie chickens and areas included in their range are closed to prairie chicken hunting. Greater prairie chickens occur in very limited areas in the northeastern portion of the region.

## SOUTHERN HIGH PLAINS (SOUTHWEST)

**Pheasant** – Hunting should be good in the region, with the highest densities in the central portion of the region. After record lows two years ago, the breeding population continues to increase dramatically, returning to levels observed before the drought. The summer brood survey indicated that densities improved by 73 percent compared to 2015, resulting in the highest densities in the state.

**Quail** – The quail population tends to be variable, but hunting should be good. Highest densities are in the southeastern portion of the region and along riparian corridors or where woody structure is available.

Spring whistle surveys showed greatly improved densities compared to 2015. Widespread, timely precipitation created good conditions for production. Brood survey results indicated a large increase in quail densities. Scaled quail greatly increased in the proportion of observations this year, particularly along the Arkansas River. 



# 2016 SPORTSMEN'S CALENDAR

## SQUIRREL

June 1, 2016-Feb. 28, 2017

## 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

Archery: Sept. 12-Dec. 31, 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

## WOODCOCK

Oct. 15-Nov. 28, 2016

## DUCKS

### High Plains Unit

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

### Low Plains Early Zone

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

### Low Plains Late Zone

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

### Low Plains Southeast Zone

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

Regular Season (Greater Prairie Chicken Unit):

Nov. 19, 2016-Jan. 31, 2017

Southwest Unit: No open season for prairie chickens

## 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

# Ring-necked Pheasant

Kansas' most iconic and sought-after upland quarry isn't from Kansas at all. This Asian transplant made its way to Kansas' open country in 1906 when a reported 3,000 birds were released in 84 of the state's now 105 counties.

Farmlands and open prairie suit this species well, as the ring-necked pheasant's diet consists largely of grains, seeds, plant material, berries, insects, spiders, earthworms, and snails.

A large bird - similar in size to a chicken - pheasants sport a prominent, pointed tail with black barring, sturdy legs, and a full body. Males can be seen from afar thanks to their

characteristic red eye patch, contrasted by an iridescent forest green neck with a single bright white ring, and copper, gold, and chesnut feathering throughout its body. Females on the other hand are far less flashy, with largely brown feathers, buff underparts, and less pronounced scaling throughout.

The next time you hear a loud "caw-cawk!" afield, followed by the intense flapping of wings, turn and see if you can catch a glimpse of this popular farmland symbol.





# Backlash

WITH MIKE MILLER

## Anticipation

If I could use just one word to describe my feelings about hunting this time of year, it would be “anticipation.” The Carly Simon song by the same name and the old Heinz Ketchup commercial with it playing in the background come to mind (I’m know, I’m really dating myself with both references). But that’s what hunting and November are to me – anticipation.

This year, anticipation for the hunting seasons began last March when I picked up Ki, our Lab puppy that is now nine months old and weighs more than 75 pounds. We’ve worked this summer and fall toward Ki’s introduction to hunting and I’m really looking forward to it.

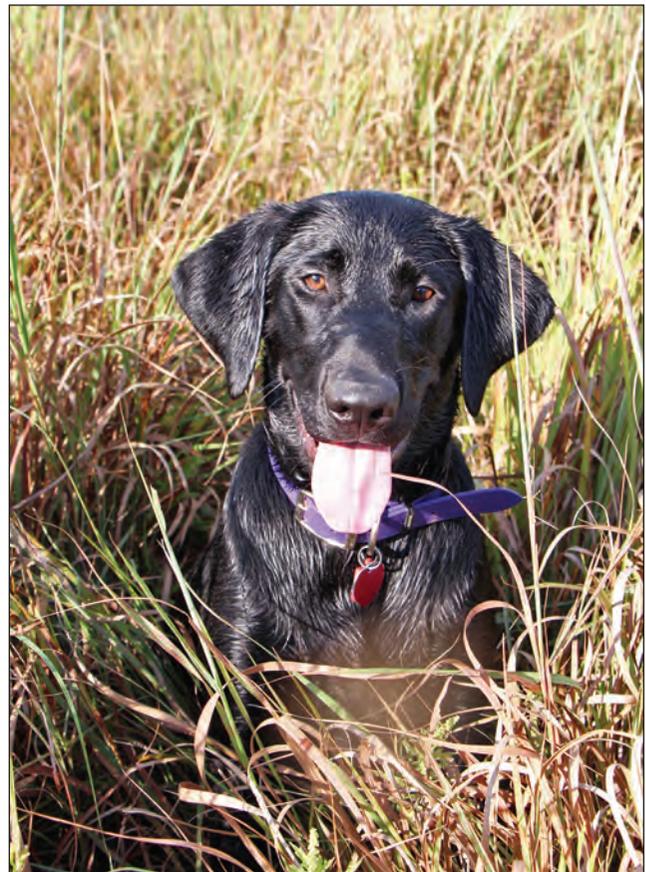
Other anticipation catalysts include scouting trips. Seeing broods of young pheasants on the road while driving to the wetland where Ki and I trained in June had me looking toward November. Seeing pairs of quail along gravel roads and hearing incessant “bob-white” whistles this summer similarly fueled the fire.

I guess stoking my anticipation for the hunting seasons is a family tradition. I remember when I was 12, Dad would load the family in the car after Sunday dinner for a leisurely country drive. Dad would cruise the Kiowa County backroads, passing by fields we’d hunted in the past and would undoubtedly hunt the coming the fall. My sole purpose on the drives was to spot and count pheasants in the fields. I loved it. I remember one Sunday evening counting 99 birds during the hour-long drive. Talk about anticipation!

Today, the official Upland Bird Hunting Forecast fuels my anticipation. After the bird population crash during the drought, this year’s forecast of much improved pheasant and quail numbers has my anticipation off the charts. Pheasants were my introduction to hunting when I was 11, and I’ll always look forward to that season most because of my memories of hunting with Dad and Granddad.

Anticipation causes me to get hunting gear organized, and purchase shotgun shells and neoprene waders long before the seasons open. Preparation is a big part of the overall hunt, and it can be nearly as enjoyable because it feeds anticipation.

But anticipation doesn’t stop when the seasons open. It’s a part of every hunting endeavor. When I sit



in a treestand, the anticipation of a deer walking within bow range keeps me alert and on edge. Hearing duck wings whistle overhead while tossing decoys in the predawn dark has me anticipating sunrise and a successful hunt. And there may be no more intense anticipation than when approaching a dog on point. I’ve never lost the almost child-like jitters, anticipating the flush, a flush I know is coming but I’m never ready for. A rooster pheasant flushing in front of my dog’s nose still flusters me as much today as it did when I was 12. I love the second Saturday in November.

So, now I have Carly Simon’s voice replaying the word anticipation over and over in my head. And as I enjoy the upland bird, deer, and waterfowl seasons, I hope another line from Simon’s song will replace “anticipation”: “these are the good old days.”



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