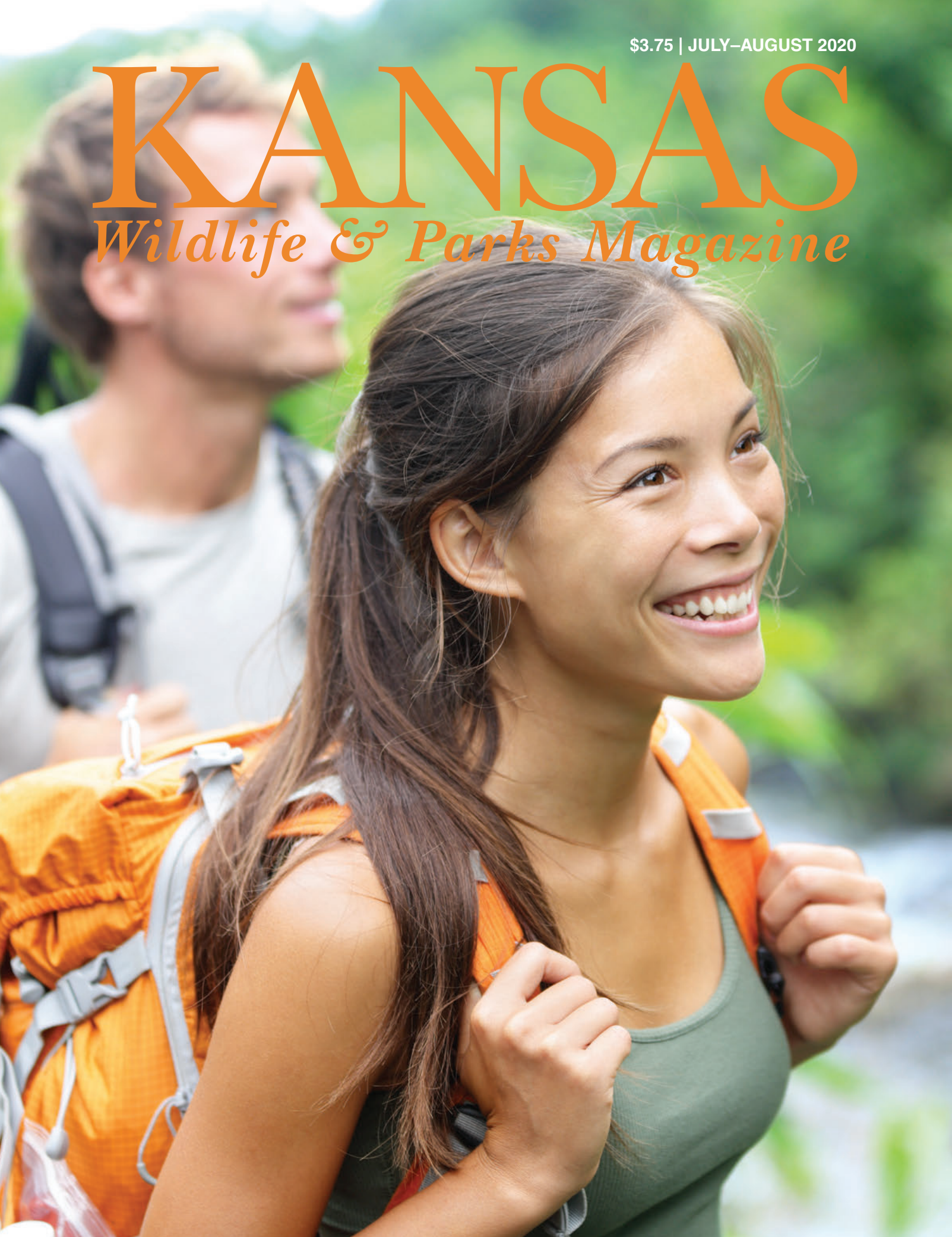


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KANSAS

Wildlife & Parks Magazine





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FRONT COVER Backpacking is catching on in Kansas. Maridav/Shutterstock photo.
INSIDE COVER A young man glides through Wilson Reservoir on a stand-up paddleboard. KDWPT photo.

Editorial Creed: To promote the conservation and wise use of our natural resources, to instill an understanding of our responsibilities to the land.

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While many find things to contest about the COVID-19 pandemic, one word that gets used over and over is undisputable – this is “unprecedented.”

Never in these modern times, when we know so much about disease and are so advanced organizationally, have we faced such a challenge, causing us all to respond in ways we’ve never had to consider before. This has also been true for the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism. It’s true partially because of the way we’ve adjusted to keep our employees and patrons safe from COVID-19, but mainly because of the way you, our customers, have responded. Starting back in March and continuing to today, given all the things that we weren’t allowed to do, very high numbers of you chose to do something that has always been available – fish, hunt, bike, hike, horseback ride, kayak, sail and motorboat in Kansas.

We’ve been unusually busy this spring and early summer and our statistics reflect it. Resident spring turkey permit sales were at their highest levels since 2016 and more than 20 percent above 2019 levels. Our survey data is still coming in, but it’s clear Kansans spent significantly more time pursuing these beautiful birds last spring. Fishing permit purchases jumped 25 percent over the same time last year, before flooding across Kansas

washed out opportunity for many anglers.

And the response at our parks, trails, wildlife areas and campgrounds has been even more impressive! Rebounding from our extended soaking in 2019, and after furiously working to clean up millions of dollars in damages, parks have seen record-setting usage in spring 2020 with a 24 percent increase in park and camping permit sales compared with 2018, which had been our best year ever! COVID-19 caused spring closure of federal campgrounds and facilities at Kansas reservoirs and many municipal parks and trails, which meant that it was never more important for KDWP facilities to be readily available. This was evidenced by our trails extremely high usage and that nearly all of our campgrounds have been full or nearly so since March, all with good social distancing being observed.

We hope that KDWP’s lakes, trails, parks, campgrounds and wildlife areas continue to be a great place for you and your families to spend quality time as we work our way through COVID-19 together. This spring and summer, many have rekindled their love for the Kansas out-of-doors while others have experienced this enjoyment for the first time. When we are through this pandemic, we will be working diligently to keep you coming back again and again. 

Kansas Man Designs Fisheries Program Logo



Jarrett Deen of El Dorado was recently recognized by the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism's Fisheries Division for his artistic talents. Out of 94 qualifying entries, Deen's design was selected as the winner of KDWPT's Walk-In Fishing Access (WIFA) logo contest, earning him \$2,500 and statewide display of his work later this year.

"After four hours of reviewing entries, the Fisheries Access Committee chose Jarrett's logo to represent the newly-renamed Walk-In Fishing Access (WIFA) program," Ely Sprenkle, KDWPT fisheries biologist and committee chair, said. "We had many great entries and it was difficult to narrow the logo down to one. Ultimately, we decided Jarrett's logo best depicted the program and our branding goals."

WIFA, formerly known as KDWPT's Fishing Impoundments and Stream Habitats (FISH) program, was introduced in 1998. It was modeled after KDWPT's highly successful Walk-In Hunting Access (WIHA) program, with the goal of increasing public fishing opportunities in Kansas.

In early 2019, Fisheries Division staff made the decision to rebrand the program in an effort to increase angler awareness and participation, as well as expand the total number of properties enrolled.

Thanks to fishing access programs like WIFA, Kansas anglers are able to enjoy nearly 57 miles of streams, 1,850 acres of private ponds and lakes, and eight river access sites that lead to public fishing that may not have been available otherwise.

For more information on fishing in Kansas, and to buy a license, visit ksoutdoors.com.

Letters To The Editor

Contact the editor: nadia.reimer@ks.gov

Great Article

Nadia,

Thanks so much for the very nice article about Cheney State Park in the May-June edition of the *Kansas Wildlife and Parks Magazine*. I thought it was extremely well written and accurate. You and your staff's efforts are greatly appreciated.

Gregg Greenwood
President, Friends of Cheney Lake, Inc.

KDWPT Donates 2,000 Pounds of Meat to Local Food Banks

In a time when "every little bit helps," the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism's (KDWPT) Public Lands Division has found a big way to help those in need. KDWPT's Public Lands staff donated 2,137 pounds of elk and bison meat to seven food banks across the state. The meat - delivered in five-pound boxes containing 20 one-quarter pound patties each - came from elk and bison herds managed at the Maxwell Wildlife Refuge in Canton and the Sandsage Bison Range near Garden City.

"We typically harvest one to two bison and a few elk annually at Maxwell and Sandsage," Stuart Schrag, Director of KDWPT's Public Lands Division, said. "This helps maintain an optimum herd size for available habitat, which keeps the herds healthy, and allows us to do disease testing. We then have the meat professionally processed and utilize it for education and outreach efforts throughout the year, but this year we decided to donate everything we had. It was our way of helping out our neighbors in need."

As many Kansas food banks experience an increase in demand, donations such as this can go a long way. KDWPT's donated elk and bison will feed approximately 8,500 people.

"We try to have a protein or meat item for every household, but access to meat is difficult," Joe Seitz, Director of Our Daily Bread Food Pantry, a Wichita-based ministry of Catholic Charities, said. "One of these boxes is perfect for a family, so we're very much appreciative of this."

Seitz added that although times can be challenging, he



finds joy in knowing the families they serve will be able to go home and eat.

"I love my job," Seitz said. "We're here to feed people, and any time we can form partnerships like the one we have with KDWPT, it's a good thing."

KDWPT staff who helped deliver the more than 400 boxes of meat statewide included Tom Norman, Manuel Torres, Cliff Peterson, Dustin Mengarelli, Jason Deal, Mike Nyhoff and Schrag.

"I'm continually impressed by the resourcefulness of our staff and our Public Lands Division is no exception," KDWPT Secretary Brad Loveless said. "This effort is a fine example of the many ways our staff continue to find unique solutions to challenging situations, and I'm very proud that this particular solution will benefit Kansas families in need."

BIRD BRAIN

Responsible Birding

with Mike Rader



Shutterstock/Mike Brick

Most of us are tired of the COVID-19 pandemic due to quarantining at home, staying away from work and friends, restrictions on social gatherings or staying six feet from others. It can be stressful to think about and live through, with each person handling it their own way.

As of this writing, restrictions are starting to relax. But, as we have seen many times with this situation, things can quickly change. With that said, some things have remained the same in the months since the introduction of the virus to our country. Birds still exist and contribute to the enrichment of our lives.

One of the few positive by-products of the COVID-19 pandemic has been increased awareness of the outdoors and what it has to offer. A sharp increase in the number of folks watching birds, and other wildlife, has been documented. Several sources state the number of birders increased rapidly, with sales of birding gear, bird houses and bird feeding supplies on the rise, as well. Bird observation, especially locally, can be very fulfilling as it provides an easy way to forget about the problems of the world, and in our own lives, for a little while.

Some of us experienced the disappointment of not being able to go into the field with friends, cancelled birding events, and postponed citizen science projects geared for the collection of bird data. While these changes seem tragic to

the birding community, I think most of us agree that it's better to be cautious in these circumstances. Besides, many birders took the opportunity to become more creative in their approach to the hobby and how they birdwatch with others.

Like many events, the spring Kansas Ornithology Society meeting scheduled in Concordia was postponed, but organizers met virtually via Zoom. Interested participants were given a forum to report the sightings from their own areas, making for a fun and informative activity. Many birders adventured out to locations close to home and either spent time birding alone or with family members. Some even made the effort to coordinate trips with others by following social distancing etiquette, wearing face masks and other personal protective equipment. It's certainly not what we are accustomed to, but it is part of being a responsible citizen. Do I miss travelling the state with friends to see birds? Heck yes! But for now, I think staying local and following local guidelines is a more responsible way to bird watch.

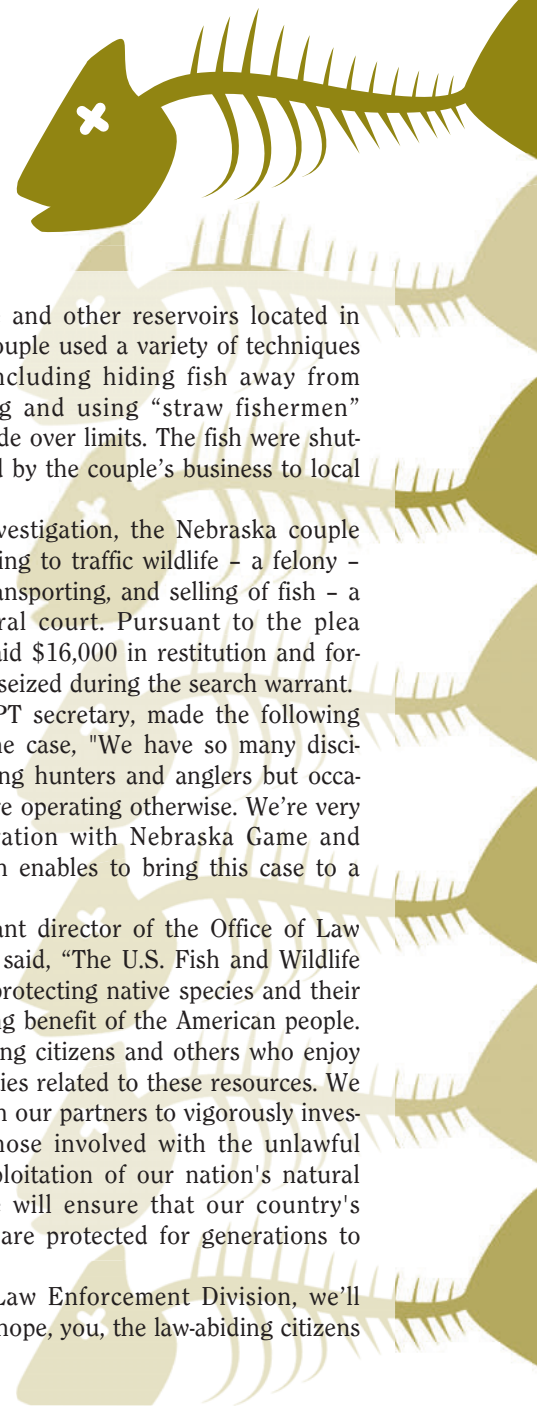
Summer can be a great time to get outside and see what your local birds are doing. I recently took time to just sit and observe bird behavior, rather than rushing around to see how many birds/species I could locate. Birding is relaxing to me most times any way, but this felt different - in sort of a "stop and smell the roses" kind of way.



LAW MATTERS

with Colonel Ott

Over The Limit



During the 2013 and 2014 fishing seasons, officers conducted surveillance and investigations on state reservoirs. They observed probable commercialization - the selling of wild caught game fish.

The activity was first noticed at Glen Elder Reservoir by game warden Landen Cleveland. Game warden Cleveland made multiple observations of individuals from Colorado and Nebraska sleep in their vehicles and fish 24 hours a day over the course of several days. During this process, the individuals would fill multiple large coolers with hundreds of fish, mainly white bass and crappie. Game warden Cleveland shared his observations with the Special Investigation Unit (SIU). At this point, the SIU became involved and provided additional manpower, special tactics and advanced equipment toward surveillance efforts.

After multiple months of surveillance, the SIU and assisting agencies were unfortunately unable to confirm commercialization on the groups from Glen Elder, but they did identify another group that also appeared to be commercializing fish at Kirwin Reservoir. The individuals were observed transferring several large coolers containing large numbers of fish back and forth to boats and vehicles on several occasions. During the physical surveillance period of these subjects, officers used the Mid-States Organized Crime Information Center (MOCIC) to identify additional information. At this point, officers were advised by a MOCIC analyst to contact the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources because they were experiencing the same commercialization issues.

As the investigation progressed - and with some collaboration with Nebraska, Minnesota, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) - SIU developed an approach on how to handle the investigation. Along with the assisting agencies, they were able to determine the couple were selling crappie, white bass and wipers caught from Kirwin

National Wildlife Refuge and other reservoirs located in northwest Kansas. The couple used a variety of techniques to prevent detection, including hiding fish away from where they were fishing and using "straw fishermen" (minors and others) to hide over limits. The fish were shuttled to Nebraska and sold by the couple's business to local customers for profit.

As a result of the investigation, the Nebraska couple pleaded guilty to conspiring to traffic wildlife - a felony - and the illegal taking, transporting, and selling of fish - a misdemeanor - in federal court. Pursuant to the plea agreement, the couple paid \$16,000 in restitution and forfeited their boat and fish seized during the search warrant.

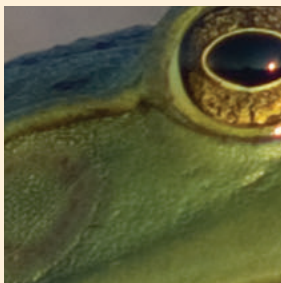
Brad Loveless, KDWPT secretary, made the following comment in regard to the case, "We have so many disciplined resident and visiting hunters and anglers but occasionally find a few that are operating otherwise. We're very thankful for the cooperation with Nebraska Game and Parks and USFWS which enables to bring this case to a close."

Edward Grace, assistant director of the Office of Law Enforcement at USFWS, said, "The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is committed to protecting native species and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. It also deprives law abiding citizens and others who enjoy outdoor recreation activities related to these resources. We will continue to work with our partners to vigorously investigate and apprehend those involved with the unlawful acquisition, sale and exploitation of our nation's natural resources. Together, we will ensure that our country's wildlife and wild places are protected for generations to come."

As for the KDWPT Law Enforcement Division, we'll keep doing our part. We hope, you, the law-abiding citizens of Kansas will, too.

WHAT AM I? ID Challenge

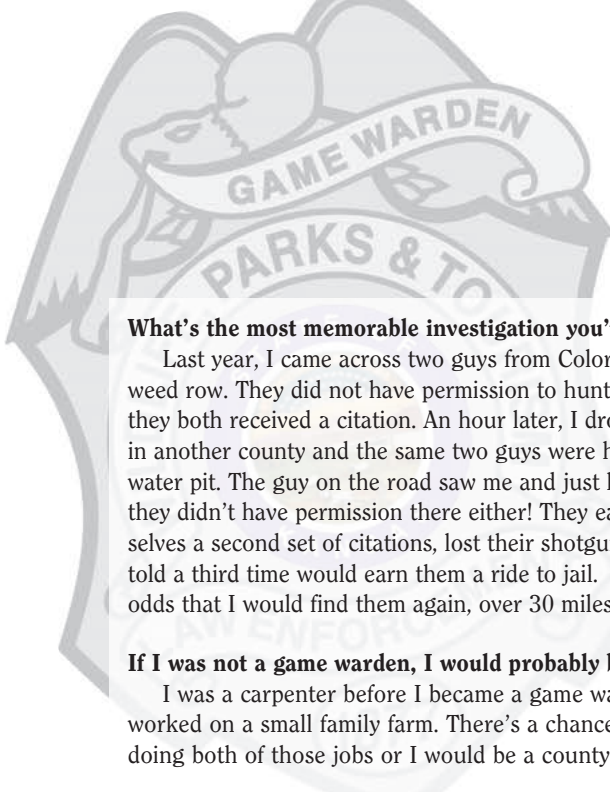
Using only the image and clues below, see if you can figure out this month's mystery species!



Clues:

1. You can hear my call for nearly a mile.
2. I try to eat any critter that will fit in my big mouth.
3. I love water!

>>> See answer on Page 14.



Game Warden Profile

Kelly Lazar - Haskell, Grant & Stanton counties

What's the most memorable investigation you've worked on?

Last year, I came across two guys from Colorado hunting a weed row. They did not have permission to hunt on that land, so they both received a citation. An hour later, I drove over a hill in another county and the same two guys were hunting a tail-water pit. The guy on the road saw me and just hung his head - they didn't have permission there either! They earned themselves a second set of citations, lost their shotguns and were told a third time would earn them a ride to jail. What were the odds that I would find them again, over 30 miles away?

If I was not a game warden, I would probably be...?

I was a carpenter before I became a game warden. I also worked on a small family farm. There's a chance I would still be doing both of those jobs or I would be a county deputy.

What/Who influenced you to become a game warden?

My dad gave me my passion for the outdoors, and I would not have considered this as a career option without him. Once, I saw a kid poach a pheasant. I took down the license plate and called the sheriff's department, but that was not good enough for me. I wanted to help stop this from happening. The next day I set up a meeting with an advisor at the local college; I started classes that next semester.

What is your favorite area in Kansas to hunt or fish?

I absolutely love western Kansas and the wide-open fields.

What's your most embarrassing moment on duty?

My most embarrassing moment probably happened while operating the patrol boat. For the most part I do just fine on the water, and backing the trailer is easy since I grew up on a farm. Putting the boat back on the trailer is another story - especially if there is any sort of a wind from the side. I'm getting better, but I'm sure it's entertaining!



What do most people not know about your patrol area?

There is a lot of history in southwest Kansas. Jedediah S. Smith was thought to have been killed in Grant County near the Wagon Bed Springs on the Santa Fe Trail. People assume the area is flat and there is nothing out here, but once you get off the highway, you'll be amazed at the beauty you will find.



FISHIN'

with Mike Miller

The Family That Fishes

I've written often about how special time spent fishing with my family is to me. I have hundreds of amazing fishing memories, but some of the most vivid were created when we vacationed with my dad's sister's family. We spent many Christmas holidays together, but several summer vacations stand out: one on Round Lake in northern Wisconsin and one at Table Rock Lake in Missouri. Over the years, various members of this clan have continued to fish together, but it had been many years since we'd all been together - until this summer.

Dad, Aunt Barbara, cousin Brad and I had plans for our annual Canada fishing trip this June, but the



pandemic and the closed border cancelled it. My sister Teri came up with an amazing alternative of renting a house on Lake of the Ozarks, and getting everyone together near the water again. Organizing such a trip on short notice required a minor miracle and just two days before we planned to leave, we weren't sure

we'd make it. But it worked.

We had a wonderful time together, and while Granddad and Grandma have been gone a long time, we felt their spirits. More indelible memories were made, and while I wasn't surprised at how much we enjoyed our time together, I did wonder about the glue that binds us.

I've decided it's fishing. Fishing was our excuse to be there, but it was a minor part of the four days. We ate good food, told lots of stories and laughed a lot.

This year provided fodder for stories that will be told over again for years: Carrie's epic morning in the boat, landing three or four fish to everyone else's one; the 15-pound blue catfish Teri reeled in from the dock while everyone panicked and laughed around her; and an early-morning boat ride on water smooth as glass.

We love to fish, but it's not really the fish we are after.



BOAT KANSAS

Paddle Play
with Chelsea Hofmeier

Now more than ever, people are seeking quality time outdoors to escape from the sometimes unnerving realities of the world in which we currently live. Kayaks sold in big box stores have been flying off the shelves, and game wardens have reported seeing more people recreating on Kansas public waterways than they have seen in a long time.

There are many benefits to picking up the hobby of paddling. In the current society of social distancing, it can be a great option to get out of the house while still staying away from groups. Whether it be on a kayak, canoe, or stand up paddleboard (SUP), paddling can do wonders for your health, both physically and mentally. And, paddling can be an environmentally friendly and affordable way to get outside and connect with nature on a different level than you may have previously experienced.

The overwhelming demand for paddlecrafts might be a new phenomenon, but the information you need to paddle safely and legally has not changed. The only required equipment in Kansas, whether you are paddling a canoe, kayak or SUP, is a readily accessible PFD on board for each person, no matter the age. Children 12 and under must wear a personal flotation device (PFD) at all times while on board.

Sounds simple, right?

Unfortunately, the number of paddlers observed on the water every summer without life jackets says otherwise. Although the reason for the lack of proper safety gear is not always known, it will always be our job as public educators to keep the boating community informed on the best boating safety practices. Like your friends and family – we want you to return home safely at the end of the day.

With several million Americans paddling each year, there are an unfortunate number of paddling-related accidents, injuries and fatalities. Many of these incidents involve the lack of proper flotation gear like life jackets. According to data published by the U.S. Coast Guard, 149 people died while participating in paddling activities in 2017. Where cause of death was known in those fatalities, 88 percent died by drowning. Some accidents are unavoidable, but wearing a life jacket can greatly increase your odds of surviving.

A life jacket might be the only item required to go paddling, but some other items that we strongly recommend bringing with you include a whistle, a flashlight or headlamp, water and a communication device. No matter the reason for your newfound interest, now is a great time to get outside and on the water. Just remember to “Wear It Kansas!”

Shutterstock/Svetlana_Okeana



Wildlife & Parks

HUNTING HERITAGE

with Kent Barrett

Ballistic Coefficient

In my last article, I wrote about sectional density, which helps predict bullet penetration into the target.

But how does the bullet fly through the air before reaching the target? Answer: Ballistic coefficient. Ballistic coefficient is a measure of how slippery or streamlined a bullet is and how well it cuts through the air, or its ability to fight drag. The better the bullet performs in these aspects, the faster it flies, the flatter its trajectory, the less it drifts in the wind and the more energy it retains to impact the target.

The ballistic coefficient changes with the shape of the bullet and the speed it is traveling. Sectional density, you may remember, does not. The ballistic coefficient takes into account the sectional density, the bullet weight and diameter, and the bullet shape or form.

The highest ballistic coefficient bullets will be heavy, narrow and have the sleekest form. A spitzer- or pointed-shape bullet is more efficient than a round nose or a flat nose bullet due to

the air being pushed out of the way, which sucks a lot of energy out of the bullet. A boat tail or tapered end on the back of the bullet reduces drag compared to a flat end, though the shape of the back doesn't matter nearly as much as the point on the front. Bullets have changed from the lead round balls shot from muskets to today's mini missiles, all in an effort to reduce drag and improve flight performance.

So, the higher the ballistic coefficient number, the less drag a bullet will experience; therefore, the better it will fly through the air. But does a higher ballistic coefficient mean a better bullet? Not necessarily. Different tasks require different types of bullets. Depending on the required task, the ballistic coefficient may be the last thing a shooter considers.

A slower bullet means a shorter available range, making ballistic coefficient important for hunters. For the bullet to expand reliably, it must retain enough terminal velocity to initiate proper expansion upon impact from a distance.



Shutterstock/joe Stanford

It doesn't really matter inside of 100 yards – accuracy and terminal performance are more important. At 200 yards, doubling a bullet's ballistic coefficient can make a difference. At 300 yards and beyond – in other words, long range shooting – the ballistic coefficient becomes much more significant.

So what difference does all of this make? In addition to knowing their own capabilities, hunters need to pick the right bullet for the job. They also need to know their equipment, what it is capable of doing and most importantly, what they can do with that equipment.

Randy Rodgers and a 41-year Tradition



Spring 2020 brought many changes to our lives due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was also the first time in more than 40 years that retired Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) biologist Randy Rodgers was

unable to complete a prairie chicken lek survey for the department, due to travel restrictions.

Though the former small game specialist retired in 2010, Rodgers continued to complete the Hamilton County lek survey every year since he began them in 1979; this year, 2020, would have been his 42nd year. During this time, Rodgers was able to document lesser prairie chicken population trends through the beginning of the Conservation Reserve Program, intense droughts and changes in grazing practices.

Every spring from mid-March to mid-April, KDWPT staff, along with partners from The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and several other retired biologists, complete prairie chicken lek surveys in 51 counties across the state. The surveys are conducted from designated routes to document population trends of lesser and greater prairie chickens. Rodgers – still active in the prairie chicken research community – presented his observations from the Hamilton County lek survey at the Prairie Grouse Technical Council meeting in Bartlesville, Oklahoma in November 2019. He also taught hunter education classes in Kansas for 40 years. Talk about tradition. –Staff

Butterfly Milkweed | text and photo by Krista Dahlinger

Bright orange flowers seen in the summertime on roadsides, prairies and gardens indicate butterfly milkweed – *Asclepias tuberosa*. There are few orange flowering plants in Kansas, and this one really puts on a colorful show. While *asclepias* is the milkweed genus, the scientific name *tuberosa* describes the thickened taproot that anchors the plant in the soil and stores moisture.

First year butterfly milkweed plants produce only one or two short stems with dark green leaves on alternate sides. Stems are hairy and dark green to red, and occasionally branch out in the upper third of the plant. Leaves are crowded, thick and lance shaped, measuring up to 4 inches long and 1 inch across. Leaf margins are smooth, while leaf surfaces are smooth on top and hairy on the underside. Butterfly milkweed does not spread by rhizomes like common milkweed, but instead reproduces by releasing seeds into the wind. Mature plants in an undisturbed location can grow to a mass 3 feet high and 4 feet across.

The butterfly milkweed's flowers have a five-part symmetry, with five hoods and

five corollas (petals) falling downward. A dozen or more flowers appear on small stalks radiating outward from the top of the main stem in an umbellate, umbrella-shaped pattern. Pollen grains are contained in waxy packages called pollinia, and a pair of pollinia are connected by a filament. Only larger bees and insects are able to carry the sticky pollinia from one flower to the next. While most butterfly milkweed flowers are bright orange, color can range from yellow to deep red.

Butterfly milkweed is found from California to Hudson Bay and east to the Atlantic Ocean. In Kansas, it is found in rocky and sandy soils in the eastern two-thirds of the state, with the orange blooms appearing from June to August. Seed pods are long, spindle-shaped and orient themselves upright so when they become dry and split open in late fall, silky floss attached to each seed disperse them through the wind to new locations.

Milkweed is the only plant family that *Danaus plexippus* and *D. gilippus* – monarch and queen butterflies – use to lay their eggs, and the only plant their caterpillar larva consume. While the plant is not

browsed by other wildlife and is not considered safe for human consumption, small animals may use it for cover. Also, butterfly milkweed sap is clear and not milky as with other milkweed species in Kansas.

The deep tuberous taproot cannot successfully be dug; therefore, transplanting mature plants is not recommended. Growing plants from seed is a more effective method of propagation.

Collect one dried seed pod after it has started to split open. Open the pod inside of a clear bag and separate the seeds from the silky floss – it is surprising how far the silky floss disperses indoors. Place the seeds outdoors in a large deep pot filled with sandy soil over the winter.

To germinate indoors, spread seeds on clean, slightly damp paper towels. Roll the paper towels up and place them in a glass jar in the vegetable drawer of the refrigerator for 30 – 90 days before planting in soil in late March.

Be patient! Butterfly milkweed emerges late in the spring. Let plants grow the first year in a deep container to protect them as they become established, then plant into a sunny flower bed early the following spring.



EVERYTHING OUTDOORS

A Great Place to Be

with Marc Murrell



I'm not sure there's anything positive about the recent COVID-19 situation, but while looking for any bright spot, I saw a sliver of silver lining - friends and families flocked to the outdoors to spend quality time together.

Those involved in the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism's (KDWP) "Pass It On" program often question the reasons for the decline in hunting and fishing participation. It's happening nationwide, but fortunately for Kansas, it's not as drastic as other areas of the country. We often looked at competing interests as a likely culprit for lower numbers of hunters and anglers. Families with kids are busy with travel sports, prom, graduations and other school activities. Summers are also filled with Kansas City Royals baseball games, summer vacations, and the list goes on. These activities are all assumed to be major competitors with time spent outdoors.

When those pastimes weren't an option, or even prohibited in many cases, we realized competing interests do play a major role in how often people recreate outdoors. It didn't take anything other than a quick look at aisle shelves in the fishing department of any local or box fishing store. They were bare. Granted, some of this lower or non-replaced inventory may have been due to shipping constraints, but shelves were picked clean in many instances.

Fishing license sales illustrate the point even further. In April and May 2019, there were 55,797 Kansas fishing licenses sold. During the heart of the pandemic in April and May, 95,466 Kansas fishing licenses sold resulting in a 42 percent increase!

KDWP's Parks, Public Lands, Law Enforcement, Fisheries and Wildlife divisions, as well as regional office staff kept many of their employees on the "essential" list - working with the goal of providing outdoor opportunities for all Kansans. In addition to fishing expeditions, state parks saw an increase in camping visitation. Primitive camping areas and sites that hadn't seen activity in years, were being used by those seeking an enjoyable

outing. Wildlife areas and state fishing lakes were nearly all open for business and bustling with activity; which was important, considering many federal areas closed camping and access opportunities during the same time period.

The increased visitation was noticeable. There were some that grumbled about the congestion at boat ramps, docks, fish cleaning stations and campgrounds - mainly those who previously enjoyed weekdays to themselves. People that were furloughed or working remotely chose to leave the confines of their home for fresh air and relaxation.

Throughout the pandemic and even now as the world begins to open back up, there are generations of families enjoying the great outdoors. It allows bonding time and an enjoyable option countering all the challenges that COVID-19 continues to present.

There were likely some individuals experiencing fishing, hiking, camping and the like for the first time, as evidenced by all the equipment missing from store shelves.



Fishing line, hooks, sinkers, fishing rods and reels were nearly all gone from local and box fishing stores. Even the bait coolers were void of red wigglers and nightcrawlers.

Here's hoping some of those new to the outdoors stick with it and realize the value of these opportunities, even when other activities return. It's more challenging to do both, but it's possible and valuable for emotional and physical health. The outdoors is, indeed, a great place to be.



Writings from a Warden's Daughter

with Annie Campbell-Fischer

On the River

Throughout his career, Dad frequently assisted the sheriff's office rescuing people stranded on the Kansas River. In the early years, all he could offer was his knowledge and time. The sheriff's office had a jet boat designed for shallow water, but the motor would lose power and shut down if too much sand was sucked in. The Kansas River, while formidable for its strong currents, has many shallow, sandy areas that make navigation tricky, especially at night.

Dad isn't sure of the exact date his district received its airboat but he thinks it was around 2009 and he felt it was long overdue because recreational use of the river had increased steadily as boat ramps were constructed between Junction City and Topeka. Dad secured a storage spot for the boat at the sheriff's office substation near Wamego.

While the flat-bottom airboat was a welcomed piece of equipment, it is primarily designed for use in shallow standing water, not the swift-moving currents of a river. So, Dad and the game wardens pushed its limits on the Kansas River as he did one night in the summer of 2016. Dad was sound asleep when a 1 a.m. call from the Pottawatomie County dispatcher woke him, requesting assistance locating individuals last seen drifting in the Kansas River near Belvue. Living five minutes from the Wamego substation, Dad advised he would hook up the airboat and be in route to the Belvue Boat Ramp in 15 minutes. When Dad went 10-8, announcing on the radio he was in service, a familiar voice responded that he would have company on the airboat that night. It was a Sargent with the sheriff's office and a member of their water rescue team. The Sargent's evening shift had just ended and he answered the call to assist Dad.

They met at the boat ramp, arriving to the glow of red and blue lights and twice as many people as would be necessary for the rescue mission. Manhattan Fire Department staff were just launching their rescue boat as Dad readied the department airboat. Dad warned the firemen about the water intake and a rock jetty just upstream below the city of Belvue. Unfortunately, in the dark, they hit the jetty and damaged the prop and lower unit of their boat motor, but the boat was still in service.

Dad and the Sargent launched and motored upstream, scanning the river. Dad piloted the airboat and avoided obstacles while the Sargent manned a hand-held searchlight. They were looking for two individuals who were checking a trotline when their boat capsized. Other members of their party camped on a sandbar had last seen the two drifting down river. About a half-mile upstream and halfway to the last known location of the

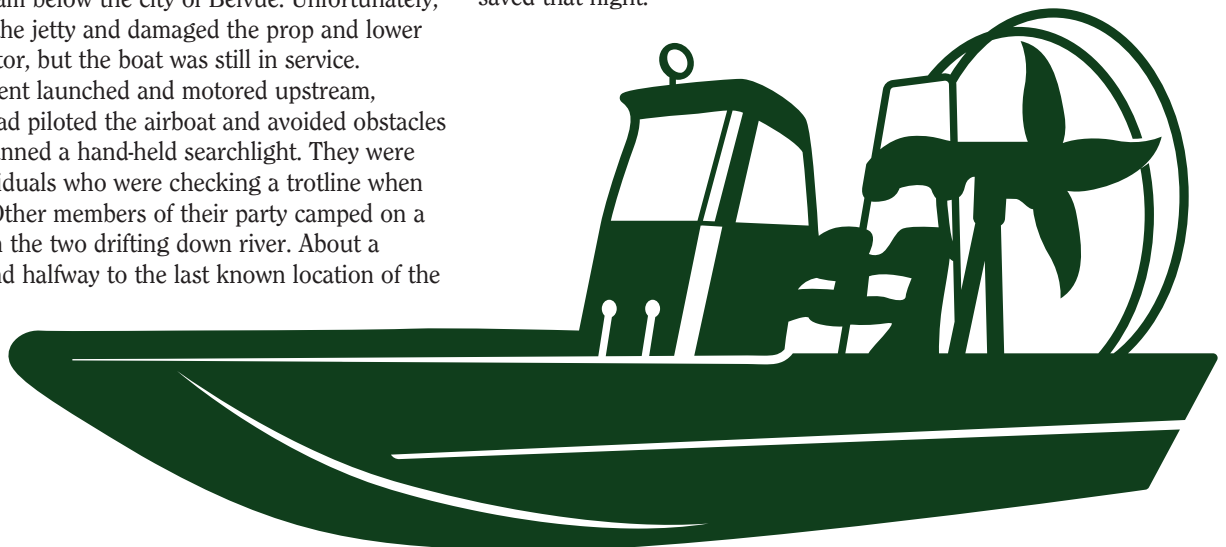
missing men, the Sargent caught movement along the riverbank. At first, he and Dad thought they were seeing branches from an over-hanging tree but as they edged closer, they could see flailing arms. A man was clinging to a small branch, just keeping his head above swiftly flowing water. If he lost his grip on the branch, he would have been pulled down-river to an unknown fate.

Dad and the Sargent planned a "snatch and run" because any pause would push the airboat into the bank and overhanging branches, which could result in damage of the propeller and injury to the man. It was tricky handling the airboat at slow speed in the strong current, but Dad maneuvered the airboat between the riverbank and the man while avoiding the branches. As Dad eased closer, the stoutly-built Sargent "snatched" the man into the boat as Dad punched the accelerator, moving upstream and away from the bank. It could not have gone any better, but Dad knew there was some luck involved and didn't want to try the maneuver again.

The Sargent notified personnel at the ramp they had one man in the boat and were returning to the ramp. Reeking of alcohol and showing signs of hypothermia, the rescued man was fortunate to be alive.

Dad and the Sargent were advised that Manhattan Fire had confirmed contact with the second missing person. Thankfully, no drowning report would be filed that day. The pair headed back upstream to help Manhattan Fire retrieve the remaining members of the fishing party stranded on a mid-river sandbar. Their motorboat was never recovered. The other man they had been searching for had made it back to the sandbar, wet and cold, but alive.

Against Dad's better judgment, camping gear and one member of the stranded party were loaded into the airboat for transport to the ramp downstream. Dad was concerned about overloading the airboat, but he maneuvered it safely to the ramp. In what turned out to be more than a routine "fetch-em off a sandbar" rescue operation, it's likely a man's life was saved that night.





How to Mentor a New Dove Hunter

with Tanna Fanshier

Dove hunting is a great low stakes introduction to hunting that requires little in terms of gear and preparation but goes a long way in impacting a new hunter. Follow these steps between now and the September 1 opener to ensure a great dove season for you and your mentee!

The first step in mentoring a new dove hunter is simply asking them to go! Data shows that one of the top barriers to hunting participation is not having anyone to go with. Don't wait for a potential mentee to approach you; instead, ask them

before taking a hunter education class. Remember, your mentee will likely need guidance on where to purchase their license and required Harvest Information Program (HIP) stamp. A list of license vendors can be found at ksoutdoors.com/License-Permits/Locations-to-Buy-License-Permits. Licenses can also be purchased online and printed at kshuntfishcamp.com, or bought and stored on our free HuntFish KS mobile app.

Handling a firearm for the first time can be intimidating, especially in the field. Do your mentee a favor prior to the season by taking them out for a range day. Shooting sporting clays will likely improve their comfort and confidence and allow you both a few laughs before the big day. If possible, have your mentee practice shooting the same firearm at the range that they plan to hunt with to maintain accuracy and muscle memory.

Next, it's time to study dove behavior, habitat and identification. Don't be afraid to spam your mentee's phone or email with informational videos, articles and other helpful resources. The more informed your mentee is, the more prepared and comfortable they will feel, and the safer they will be. Be sure to go over dove hunting regulations, as well - a copy of the *Kansas Hunting and Furharvesting Regulations Summary* would make a wonderful, no-cost pre-season gift for your mentee.

With all your homework done, it is finally time to scout! Hop in the car with your mentee and look for agricultural areas with standing water and open, clean banks. Check out dove information at ksoutdoors.com, including a dove scouting how-to video, a quick review of season and license information, regulations, research/surveys and more. There, a list of fields managed for public dove hunting is also provided!

As you prepare to finally go on your hunt, consider providing comfort items your mentee may not have thought about. A bucket, earplugs and water bottle will go a long way in making your mentee comfortable. Sitting side-by-side with your mentee will allow for safe, effective communication and a shared view of the mentee's zone of fire.

Don't forget - the best way to celebrate a successful hunt is to clean and cook your harvest. Show your mentee your favorite way to prepare dove and share the locally harvested meat and memories amongst friends.

Good luck to the season's new and returning dove hunters, and a special thank you to those who mentor!



yourself, and remind them that even if they say no, the offer is still on the table. Hunting for the first time can be intimidating, especially to someone with limited firearms experience. Be patient but persistent in offering your support.

Once your mentee has agreed to hunt, be sure to keep them on the right side of the law. Ask your mentee about hunter education and help them get into a class if they haven't already been certified. A list of courses can be found online at ksoutdoors.com/Services/Education/Hunter/Class-Schedule. If your mentee can't get into a class, and is 16 years of age or older, let them know about the apprentice hunting license - a special privilege that allows those who are not hunter education certified to hunt under the direct supervision of a licensed hunter age 18 or older for up to two years



Overlooked White Gold



I follow a few fishing pages on Facebook and I can't help but feel disheartened when people post photos of their first gar catch, only to have their enthusiasm squashed in the comments below.

I've caught a few gar in my life and have always been fascinated by them. My most recent catch occurred while checking a limb line, neck deep in water. Expecting a flathead, I was caught off guard by a thin cylindrical body launching towards me, its snout breaking the water's surface. After regaining my composure, I went back in after my prize – a 35-inch longnose gar!

When it was time to clean it, I used tin snips to cut the

skin down both sides of the dorsal fin from head to tail. I then used my fillet knife along the back until a white rope-like backstrap was removed. Now this, my friends, is overlooked white gold. After rinsing and soaking it in saltwater in the fridge, I decided to make a "faux shrimp." It's an easy and delicious recipe worth trying.



FAUX SHRIMP (GAR)

- 2-4 Gar fillets, nickel-size wide**
- 1 Package shrimp or crawfish boil**
- 1 Qt Water**
- 4 T Butter, melted**
- 1 tsp Garlic Salt**
- 1 Lime**

Cut fillets lengthwise, if needed, to reach nickel-sized width. Then, cut fillets into 1.5-inch pieces. Bring the water and added seasoning to a slow boil.

Drop in fillet pieces and cook until tender. Remove from water and squeeze lime juice over the cooked pieces.

In a small bowl, combined the melted butter and garlic salt. Dip cooked pieces in the butter mixture or pour over meat. Enjoy!

Park View

A Fine Farewell

with Kathy Pritchett

The world has turned upside down since our last issue. None of us expected a pandemic to strike or the massive changes it entailed. However, we have adapted. Kansas state parks have been open for camping, hiking, fishing and all other recreational activities throughout this upheaval. We did have to take precautions, however.

Our offices were closed to walk-in traffic until the Tuesday after Memorial Day. Most are now open. Soap dispensers have been installed or hand sanitizer has been made available in our facilities, which have also initiated more stringent cleaning and disinfecting procedures. Our staff are utilizing personal protective equipment and they maintain proper social distancing wherever possible. But we are open and have seen record crowds as folks enjoyed fresh air and the outdoors.

This is my last column as an employee of the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism. During my 34 years here, I have kept track of hundreds of recreational trail projects, worked the Kansas State Fair and

Equifest booths dozens of times, seen the creation of five new state parks, witnessed the elevation of natural resources to a cabinet level agency, and worked for three amazing state park directors as well as some interim ones. I've worked for three different agencies - the Kansas Fish and Game Commission, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, and the Kansas Department of Wildlife Parks and Tourism - all while in the same building, most while at the same desk.

When I started with the agency, my youngest baby was eight months old. There were two word processors in the building, which were used to build the budget book - the machine itself covered a desktop. The building also housed a mainframe computer. The rest of our work was done on typewriters which thankfully had mostly correcting electrics. Information that had to be transmitted quickly went via fax on thermal printing machines with paper that curled and faded. Most information moved via snail mail, bags and bags of it. We received daily stacks of correspon-



dence to be answered. Data was largely collated by hand. And, my hair was dark without color assistance.

Now, information is transmitted instantly with a click. The machines on our desks, briefcases and pockets can perform more complex calculations than the old mainframe could. With Facebook, Twitter and other new and ever-evolving social media, we communicate with our constituents on an interactive, immediate basis.

Camping has evolved from tents, small trailers and RVs to huge 50-amp trailers with bump-outs that are roomier than my first house. Those who don't like to rough it can "camp" in our many modern cabins, complete with dishes, microwaves, coffee pots (essential) and full bathrooms. Despite those changes, camping still involves s'mores, campfires, fireflies and great memories.

I won't miss getting up for work in all kinds of weather or the occasional 16-hour day. What I will miss is the wonderful people I have been privileged to work with these past 34 years. These people not only include my fellow KDWP employees, but also employees of sister agencies in other states and "my" Feds. They include staff of park and recreation agencies across the state who we've worked with on grants or other projects, members of various boards and some loyal constituents. Some I've lost touch with, some have passed on, but all are memorable. Thanks for the memories, friends.

WAY outside BY BRUCE COCHRAN



“WHAT AM I?” answer: Bullfrogs



It's the time of year for me when snake ID and reptile questions roll in, and I'm always curious what will come my way next.

I was recently interviewed by a news station in Topeka regarding a couple of alligators released in a small stream adjacent to Manhattan. I was asked whether they could live in that environment for any stretch of time. The answer is yes; alligators are generalists, they eat a wide variety of prey and can handle winters similar to what we have been experiencing the last few years in Kansas. I was also asked if they would be a threat to humans or pets. At their current size, which is around 3 to 5 feet, they would not but could become so as they grew.

In my position at KDWPT, it has proven useful to maintain a working knowledge of many exotic species of reptiles, as one never knows what might pop up. Last fall, I received pictures of a rattlesnake observed in someone's yard here in Pratt. The snake turned out to be an eastern black-tailed rattlesnake, whose closest natural populations are in the big bend region of southwest Texas. Obviously, the snake was captured and carried here by someone where it was either released or escaped. Kansas regulations, along with many city and county regulations, currently precludes keeping nonnative venomous snakes as pets. Escaped or released pets can be a source of alien, or introduced species, into a new area. Some species could even be considered a health risk to humans or the environment.

If ever in Topeka, keep an eye open for some quick green lizards. In the 1950s, Italian wall lizards were released or escaped from a commercial animal dealer. They have since become established within the city and can be found in nearby loca-

tions, including Lawrence.

Not all new species sightings are due to intentional releases. Some species are great hitchhikers. The Mediterranean gecko is thought to have originally spread to the U.S. and other countries by stowing away on cargo ships. They have spread throughout the country, including Kansas, by stowing away in luggage and plant shipments; in fact, one of the first places new populations are usually detected are around hotels. Mediterranean geckos are not thought to have any deleterious effects on native species, although this has never been fully researched.

Other hitchhikers, like zebra mussels, can have devastating effects on the environment. This is why most states have strict protocols about cleaning boats and equipment before transferring them between water bodies.

Other reasons for critters moving in is changing climate. Armadillos first

arrived in Texas in the 1880s and have moved as far north as Nebraska. Historically, it was thought that winters in the northern extent of its range would keep armadillos from moving too far north. With milder winters, armadillos have settled in Illinois, Indiana, Kansas and Missouri. In my lifetime, I have also seen species such as white-winged doves, fish crows and black vultures expand their range northward into Kansas.

Good wanderers all share some common traits - they are flexible in adapting to new ecosystems, they reproduce and grow rapidly, and their new environment lacks any natural predators. Some species just have the genetic flexibility to change and adapt.

Cane toads were introduced into Australia in the early 1900s to control insect pests, but that plan backfired. Cane toads are now pests themselves. A recent study found that toads on the

edge of the species' rapidly expanding distribution were physically different than those in the core of their range. If you have ever watched a toad move by making rapid little hops, you will notice toads are not typically long-jumpers like frogs. Toads on the edge of their range in Australia had developed longer legs allowing them to jump farther and move longer distances in a faster amount of time than cane toads within the core of their distribution.

With increasing temperatures and continued shorter and milder winters (as well as humans moving animals around on an ever-increasing basis), it will be interesting to track range shifts and establishment of new and novel species as we move into the future.



GARDEN PATCH WALLEYE

by Michael Pearce, freelance outdoor writer

1 ½ lb. fish fillets, cut into 1" cubes
1 cup ripe, fresh tomatoes, chopped
1 cup olive oil
2 tbs. red wine vinegar
¼ cup green onions, chopped
2 tbs. cilantro, chopped
1 tbs. minced garlic
Salt and pepper

Don't let the simplicity of this recipe fool you. It carries a wonderful variety of great flavors anchored by homegrown tomatoes and walleye.

In a saucepan, combine 2 Tbs. olive oil, tomatoes, green onions, garlic, vinegar, cilantro, salt and pepper, and sauté on medium heat. Heat remaining oil in a frying pan at medium-high. Fry walleye cubes also seasoned with salt and pepper for about one minute.

Spoon the fish cubes into the tomato mixture and cook over medium heat until the fish cubes are flaky and done. Serve over pasta or rice.





2020 Deadline to enter is Oct. 18!

Photo submissions for the 8th annual “Wild About Kansas” photo contest are being accepted now through Oct. 18, 2020. Divided into five categories, participants can submit photos related to:

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

RULES

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

JUDGING

Each photo will be judged on creativity, composition, subject matter, lighting, and the overall sharpness. Photographs from participants under the age of 18 will be placed in a youth division; all others will compete in the adult division. Winning entries will be featured in the 2021 January/February photo issue of *Kansas Wildlife & Parks Magazine*.

HOW TO ENTER

Entries must be submitted no later than **5 p.m. on Oct. 18, 2020**. Photo format should be JPEG or TIFF. All photos must be submitted electronically. Photos that do not meet the minimum file size requirements (1 MB) will NOT be accepted. To enter, visit ksoutdoors.com and click “Publications,” then “2020 Wild About Kansas Photo Contest.”



Robin Dicks, 2019



David Birmingham, 2019



Brea Carroll, 2019

Rx Outdoors

by Michael Pearce
freelance outdoor writer



Buffalo Tracks Nature Trail, Kanopolis State Park

I was in the turkey woods up to an hour earlier than usual this spring. Time spent seated against a big oak in the dark, sipping coffee as I listened to barred owls and honey-sweet cardinal calls seemed as important as getting a gobbler.

One morning, a hot hunt was paused to watch a barrel-bellied doe, heavy with fawns, browse across a frosted meadow. After I took a nice tom, it took nearly an hour to make the normal 10-minute hike to my pickup.

There's also been no rush to land crappie. My fingertips seemed especially sensitive as the fish's energy telegraphed up the line and down the fly rod. Their fillets also never tasted better. That had more to do with the circumstances than some new special recipe or seasoning. My time outdoors has become more medicinal than recreational.

Kansas outdoors heals during stressful times

As I write this, America has been amid a kind of chaos I'd never imagined because of COVID-19. I don't need to go into the details of the stress we've had and the uncertainty we face; we've all lived them.

Like most Americans, I have craved any link to calmer times. I've been one of millions who have found enjoyment and healing in the outdoors. That fact may be one of the few bright spots to come from these otherwise dark times.

While closed in many states, Kansas state parks offered people a nearly endless assortment of ways to safely maintain "social distancing" and sanity. I corresponded with an El Dorado family who experienced why Kanopolis and Wilson state parks rank sky-high nationally for scenic beauty. I saw photos of their beaming kids in the caves and below the tall cliffs at Kanopolis' legendary Buffalo Tracks Nature Trail. They hiked, and soon plan to cycle, atop the rock formations and by crystal-clear waters, on the Switchgrass Trail at Wilson.

Kansas anglers had easy access to more than 200,000 acres of public reservoirs, lakes and rivers. The Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism's (KDWPT) Walk-in Fishing Access (WIFA) program, which leases private waters for public access, had dozens of ponds, lakes, and 40 miles of streams waiting. KDWPT's Community Fishing Assistance Program (CFAP) also leased 230 city or community lakes across the state for free public access.

It is sad unemployment ratios flirted with Great Depression rates. On a positive note, so many parents off work translated into entire households being out-

doors together like we haven't seen in decades. Time outdoors fishing or hiking any of Kansas' 4,000 miles of trails has been both affordable and a great way to bond for households stretching from Atchison to Elkhart.

It's been years since I've seen so many parents walking or cycling with children, both in towns and at state parks; I've noticed nearly all were smiling, too.

Nature never more accommodating


As she often does, it seemed Mother Nature anticipated our needs. Most lakes and reservoirs were back to near normal levels after last year's high water. Mild weather patterns had an unusual abundance of days with "Chamber of Commerce weather," featuring warm temperatures and light breezes. And, day after day people responded. Trails in and around Lawrence carried a lot of well-spaced hikers and birders. Some days it looked like a fleet of kayaks on quiet coves at Clinton State Park. Those who fished often did well.

Last year's extreme high water meant very low angling pressure and high fish survival into fall and winter. Few anglers can remember a better abundance of quality and quantity like they have found the last few months. Many Kansas anglers found winter-pattern crappie angling exceptional beginning in mid-October. It remained good to great through the first two months of the COVID-19 crisis this spring, even with added angling pressure. Fishing the walleye spawn was good at most lakes as it has been fishing for largemouth and smallmouth bass. Facebook fishing pages have been filled with beaming anglers holding hundreds of "P.B." (personal best) fish.

Morel season started a few weeks earlier and lasted a week or two longer than usual. The lack of a jarring hard freeze allowed redbud trees to stay in their lavender best longer than normal, too. More people probably saw them more than most years because scenic country drives were a favored way of getting outside.

Let's not forget

Things will eventually change, however, and time will tighten as people return to normalcy. Restaurants, movie theaters, and sporting venues will again hold thousands who recently turned to the Kansas outdoors.

But I'd like to think Kansans won't forget the recreation and mental relaxation they've recently found outdoors when both were so needed. Here's hoping they hit the trails, waters and woods of Kansas far harder than before our lives became so crazy. 

UNFORTUNATE FLOODING,



Due to many unforeseen events, anglers have drawn to Kansas' aquatic resources in droves, and the fishing has been fantastic. These great angling opportunities didn't come out of nowhere; rather, they materialized, in part, because of a year characterized by floods.

FORTUNATE FISHING

by Jeff Koch, KDWP Fisheries Biologist





Cross Timbers State Park was one of many state parks affected by reservoirs flooding last spring.

The spring and summer fishing season of 2019 was full of superlatives. Unfortunately, Kansas anglers were not talking about successes surrounding the biggest fish, best trips or fullest creels. Rather, most discussions surrounding our aquatic resources were centered around water levels in our state's reservoirs being "the highest I've ever seen" or "the highest ever." A wet fall and winter in 2018 gave way to heavy and untimely rains in the spring of 2019. Runoff events across the state led to many reservoirs increasing to levels that left them unsafe or unusable for recreation.

Milford Reservoir reached a peak of approximately 30 feet high, while Perry Reservoir peaked at a record elevation since it was constructed. Tuttle Creek Reservoir avoided reaching levels seen in 1993 but was still a mind-boggling 60 feet above conservation pool at the beginning of June.

In the short-term, flooded reservoirs not only negatively impacted the users of the resource, but also the infrastructure anglers rely on. Boat ramps submerged by water suffered from ensuing erosion, bathroom facilities were underwater for weeks or months at a time, and access points experienced significant damage. However, last year's floods

had some positive biological impacts anglers are currently enjoying and there's no doubt those benefits will continue to be seen for several years to come.

More nutrients, more food

Reservoir inflows provide nutrients that aquatic systems rely on. At the very base of aquatic food webs lie phosphorus and nitrogen. These nutrients feed phytoplankton, which feed the chain of zooplankton, small fish, and eventually big fish. Everything is built up from the ground floor of nutrients.

Since most of Kansas has extremely fertile watersheds, these runoff events bring large amounts of nutrients into these reservoirs that boost production of food resources in these aquatic food webs. Once nutrients are used by various forms of plankton, several sport and forage fish utilize these tiny organisms.

Perhaps the most important forage fish in Kansas reservoirs is gizzard shad – most predatory fish in large Kansas reservoirs consume shad at some point during their life. Shad are prolific spawners and are packed with nutrition for predatory fish. Shad thrive on newly inundated, nutrient-rich habitats. In response to the abundant flooded habitats during critical periods of

gizzard shad production, catch of gizzard shad in standard fall sampling increased 18 percent statewide in 2019 compared to 2018, which was a more modest water year.

Since shad provide forage for many predatory fish in our reservoirs, increased shad densities allowed walleye, wipers, and white bass to thrive. Body conditions of these species (a measure of how plump a fish is) were approximately 5 percent higher in 2019 compared to 2018. This higher condition provided anglers with a little more pull on their line, but also led to higher over-winter survival and better egg development for healthy spawns in 2020.

Spawning habitat

Many of sport and native fish rely on spring floods to provide high-quality spawning and nursery habitat. Most fish species in Kansas are adapted to river and floodplain systems that historically depended on spring floods to provide access to habitat- and nutrient-rich ephemeral pools. Ideal spawning substrate in our reservoirs generally consists of newly inundated rock or vegetation in the reservoir basin or tributaries that is clear of periphyton – the "goop" on submerged structure.

These clean substrates provide

prime locations for sticky eggs to adhere in areas above the sediment and allow protection from other species that may prey upon newly spawned eggs or fry. A week or two after hatching, the fry no longer have energy reserves from their yolk sac and will need abundant phytoplankton, which thrives in these shallow, warm, nutrient-rich environments.

Perhaps one of the more recent and popular examples of a boom in fish production resulting from high water is the Glen Elder Reservoir crappie population in the early 2010s. Abundant rains and runoff in 2008 flooded terrestrial vegetation and provided excellent conditions for crappie production. In the ensuing years, the crappie population grew into the reservoir and provided a fishery that was renowned throughout the Midwest.

With any luck, the stars will align similarly in Kansas reservoirs during the next few years. Data collected by district fisheries biologists in the fall of 2019 show encouraging trends in emerging crappie populations. In 2018, an average of 15 crappie smaller than four inches were caught per trap net, a gear that can index the crappie population produced during that year. In 2019, trap nets captured nearly 35 of these small crappies per net, indicating great populations are on the horizon.

Crappies aren't the only popular sportfish to benefit from the high water. Fall sampling results indicate production of white bass was excellent statewide in 2019. The catch of age 0 white bass was more than double that of 2018, while catches of age 0 walleye in fall nets were four times higher than 2018.

Lack of fishing pressure

The high-water last spring and summer not only provided excellent habitat for sportfish spawning, recruitment, and foraging, but it also

likely decreased affects of fishing mortality on many populations.

Lack of access and boat ramps dramatically decreased fishing pressure experienced by many fisheries that exhibit high levels of angling mortality, like walleye. Research has shown that anglers can harvest anywhere from 25 to 70 percent of walleye that are of legal length in a year. When this component to annual mortality is absent or negligible in a year, that population surplus carries over to the next year, which created some dynamic fishing in 2020. Although anglers sacrificed success in 2019, many fish that would have been harvested were essentially banked for future fishing.

Western Kansas benefits

While eastern Kansas reservoirs took a beating from persistent rains in 2019, western Kansas reservoirs experienced runoff events that hadn't been seen in more than a decade. Since late spring 2019, Cedar Bluff Reservoir increased in elevation approximately 17 feet while nearly doubling the volume of water held. This represents the largest water level rise at Cedar Bluff in more than a decade, and Cedar Bluff now sits around 10 feet below full conservation pool.

Norton Reservoir is also within 3 feet of conservation pool, as it increased in elevation by approximately 8 feet in the last year. Benefits of nutrient surges and newly inundated habitats certainly will pay dividends in large western Kansas reservoirs, but many small impoundments have received enough water to revitalize fisheries, too. Some of the smaller jewels of western Kansas that have been reinvigorated by the wet weather the last few years include Plainville

The outstanding crappie fishing will be remembered as one silver lining surrounding the "other stuff" that has occurred during a memorable 2020.

Township Lake, Rooks State Fishing Lake, and Logan City Lake.

Promise for the future

Hopefully the promise seen by biologists last fall and this spring is realized in coming years. Biologists will continue to monitor water quality and fish populations to gather information on other considerations with the massive inflows and outflows in our reservoirs. These issues include fish entrainment from reservoirs, sedimentation, excessive nutrient inputs (too many nutrients can be bad, too), and damage to access points and infrastructure.

It's ironic that after the drought of 2012, I wrote an article regarding the silver linings in reservoir fish communities resulting from a severe drought. Now, less than ten years later, I'm writing about the positive biological outcomes after historic floods. The bottom line is that disturbance in aquatic ecosystems can be positive and fish populations often thrive in dynamic systems. Some exciting opportunities were produced in our flooded reservoirs this year and some great fishing certainly awaits Kansas anglers in the next few years. 🐮



THE BIRDS OF SUMMER

by Danny Brown



Ruby-throated Hummingbird

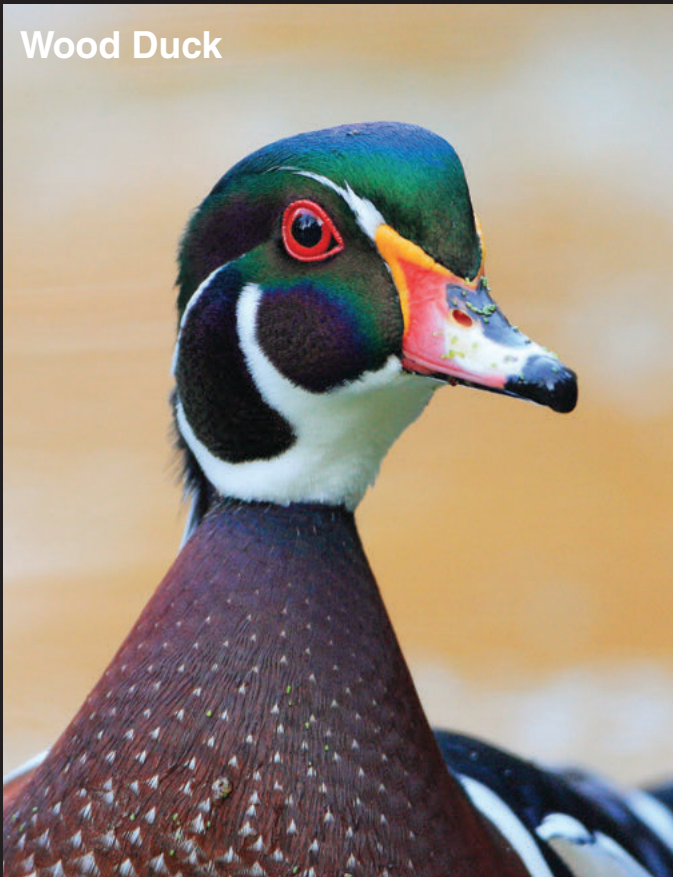
Yellow-breasted Chat



Great Egret



Wood Duck



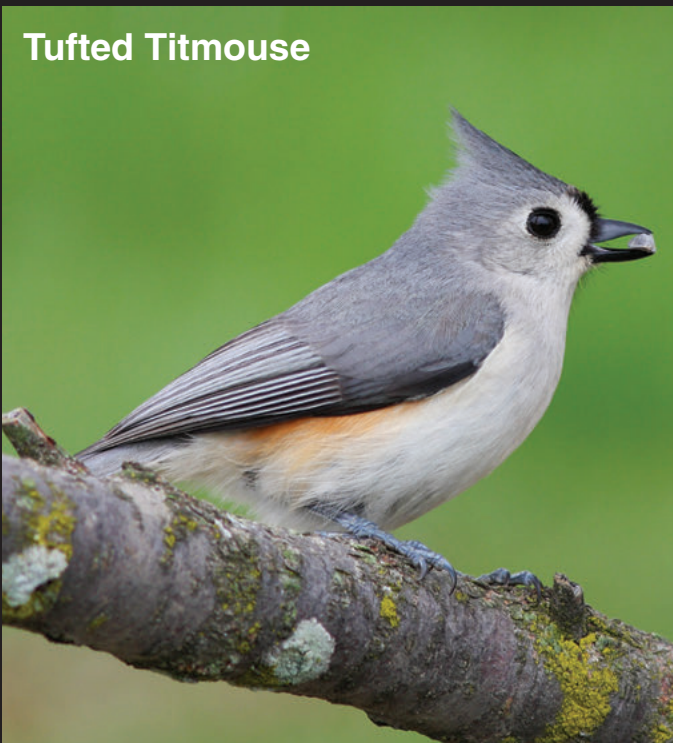
Indigo Bunting



Black-crowned Night-Heron



Tufted Titmouse



Barred Owl



Red-bellied Woodpecker



Red-tailed Hawk



Bald Eagle



The Basics *of* Backpacking



text and photos by Rick McNary
freelance outdoor writer

*Once you put a **backpack** on and take off on a trail, you are taking the path less traveled and are rewarded with sights and sounds reserved only for those willing to make the effort.*

The unique virtue of backpacking compared to other kinds of camping – such as using an RV or tent – is that backpacking requires more physical effort as well as thinking as a minimalist; you take only what you need.

For those who love backpacking, the simplification of life lived out of a pack on your back with the basics of food, water, clothing and shelter connects a person to nature better than any other recreational activity.

Since Kansans only have access to nature through the state park system – unless they have access to private land – camping is generally done with neighbors close by as you share the park with others. While RV and tent camping like that is enjoyable, there are times you truly want to get away from it all and backpacking provides you that opportunity.

There are many joys to discover in backpacking that are simply unlike any other experiences you find in traditional camping. For traditional camping, one typically loads a vehicle with all the necessities like tents, cookers, coolers, and food to stay a few days. Sometimes, the vehicle is bulging with things you think you need to enjoy tent camping, or what some people refer to as “roughing it.” Often, at state park camp sites, electricity and water are available; the idea of roughing it takes a bit of the edge off if you have utilities at the site or nearby. A nice shower house is often close by which provides a restroom, something you quickly notice absent once you take off on a backpacking trail.

However, backpacking assumes you will be doing primitive camping and that term suggests exactly what it is – primitive.

There’s no running water that’s purified, no restroom nearby, no electricity to charge your electronics, and no conveniences of running to the store to grab that bag of marshmallows for s’mores.

That also means there are no cars driving by, no one playing loud music next to you, no distractions from technology – just you and nature enjoying each other. For seasoned backpackers, those are the reasons they strap on the pack and take off hiking – to get away from the norm of our society and enjoy living minimally with nature.

Although I grew up in Kansas, I learned to backpack in the mountains of Idaho and never once considered Kansas a destination for hiking. When my wife and I prepared to spend our honeymoon backpacking, we gave no thought to Kansas. We looked at the Ozarks, the Rockies and even the Appalachian Trail, but did not consider our home state. Looking back, and what we’ve experienced in Kansas since then, we realized we missed hidden beauties all within a two-hour drive of our home rather than a 10-hour drive to some mountain destination.

Kansas offers backpackers the unique combination of stunning scenery and gentler terrain than is typically associated with backpacking in the mountains. For those new to the sport, backpacking in the sunflower state provides an easier entry-point than strapping on a 30-pound pack and hiking difficult terrain at higher elevations with thinner air. Kansas trails offer the beginner an easy way to learn how to backpack and the seasoned veteran easier access to unparalleled beauty.

What to *pack*



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Living minimally with nature is what backpacking is all about. When you stop to consider all of the things needed to keep you alive are going to fit into a pack on your back, suddenly you make decisions based on what you absolutely have to have. Depending on your physical condition, a 30-pound pack is an average weight for a loaded backpack. While that might seem a lot, when you think about a tent, sleeping bag, cooking gear and clothing, all of those things add up quickly. In fact, within the world of backpacking, the lighter and better the product, the more expensive it is.

You can buy a nice heavy, flannel lined, cotton-filled sleeping bag for far less than a super-lightweight goose-down bag that will keep you as warm if not warmer. If you're going out for an overnight hike, you'll tolerate a heavier pack. However, if you are planning a multi-day, several mile trip, then weight of your pack matters.



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1. Backpack

Adjustable frame: The price range reflects the quality of the construction materials as well as the flexibility to adjust to your body style. The better ones are built with the idea that there is no such thing as one size fits all, so they make certain critical parts like the frame height, are adjustable to fit your body style.

Quality belt: The ability to carry a heavy pack a long distance depends on how well you distribute the weight in such a manner that your legs, not your back, are carrying the load. If you're familiar with the neck and back pain from carrying around a day pack that's heavy, rest assured a full backpack with the weight on your legs eliminates that type of strain. In fact, if you experience that type of pain in your neck and back, you're doing it wrong.

2. Tent

The best tents are made for one or two people. Again, this gets back to weight; you want to carry as small of a tent as possible. Although there are an unlimited variety of these, the most important feature is the ability to prevent rain, or snow, from leaking through.

3. Water

No matter where you backpack, drinking pure water is an issue. There are a number of water purifiers available. Of course, boiling water can also make sure any bacteria is killed.

4. Food

Dehydrated or dried meal packages that are easily hydrated are the best options.

5. Sleeping bag and pad

Sleeping bags vary in price and style, but the most important feature to check for is the low temperature for which it is designed to withstand. Aside from being in a tent that leaks, sleeping in a bag rated for 30 degrees when it's 15 degrees makes for a miserable night, as well. A thin pad also helps to separate your body from the ground. The pads are not designed for cushion as much as they are for thermal protection.

6. Cookstove and cookware

While the idea of campfire cooking sounds fun, it's much easier to use the lightweight stoves and cookware made just for backpackers.

7. First Aid

If you are wandering far from civilization, acquiring a good first aid kit is essential.

8. Toiletry

It is important to bury all waste. It's handy to take a little shovel or some other digging instrument and bury the waste and the paper. Please make sure the soap you take is biodegradable.

9. Hiking boots

Backpackers spend a lot of time with extra weight on their feet. Having adequate boots is a must. You can ruin your entire experience by cutting costs on hiking boots.

10. Hiking sticks

Although not essential, hiking sticks provide for greater stability, especially in rough terrain.

11. Camera

Don't forget your camera; because you are choosing a path less traveled, you will have the pleasure of viewing things less seen.

Where to *go*



Elk River Trail

15 miles - moderate

The Elk River Trail at Elk City State Park, located five miles northwest of Independence, has a 15-mile trail often used by backpackers. The first part of the trail wanders through an uncharacteristic rock formation that makes you wonder if you're in Kansas anymore.

Although all trails are graded from easy to moderate to difficult – this one being moderate – the first part of this trek is a bit taxing. This trail, and the one at Perry, are marked with blue to keep you on the trail. This trail wanders around the lake and has some excellent vistas to look from. There are a number of places to pitch your campsite. Water is always available in the lake, of course, but must be boiled or purified before use. However, the lake is not always easy to access because the trail is elevated on limestone bluffs. Learn more at www.getoutdoorskansas.org/trails/elk-river-trail/



Perry Lake Old Military Trail

30 miles – moderate

The Perry Lake/Old Military Trail has often been dubbed the “Little Ozarks.” This trail skates along the perimeter of Perry Lake and courses through a variety of terrain from sloping hillsides in the south to more rugged changes in the north. This heavily wooded Delaware River watershed system is resplendent with various flora and fauna. It can be accessed at numerous points. Learn more at www.getoutdoorskansas.org/trails/perry-lake-hiking-trail/



Flint Hills Trail State Park

117 miles – easy

There's something special about this trail that stirs the imagination that is unique to this historical route. Since it follows, in part, the old Santa Fe Trail, it's easy to imagine what the early pioneers and settlers went through as they made their trek westward. Although the current trail is considerably more improved than it was in the heyday of the late 1800s, the grand sweeping views of the Flint Hills, the densely wooded river bottoms and the limestone remain relatively the same.

The Flint Hills Trails State Park is one of the newest state parks in Kansas and stretches from Osawatomie to Herington. Coursing along an abandoned railroad line, the virtue of this trail is its ease of use and various access points to jump on and off. The trek from Osawatomie to Council Grove is well-maintained and developed. You can expect to encounter people on horses, day-hikers and cyclists along this trail. The stretch from Council Grove to Herington is rather rugged and undeveloped. Learn more at ksoutdoors.com/Services/Flint-Hills-Trail-Project

What to *remember*

Leave no trace - That is the mantra of any serious back-packer – make sure you leave no trace of your visitation. What you pack in, you pack out. I would also add, “Remove anyone else’s trace; haul out what others left behind, too.”

Seasons to backpack - I prefer fall and early spring camping before the ticks and snakes decide to make an appearance. However, the best part of Kansas is that we have all seasons and, as long as you are adequately prepared, camping and hiking are year-round options.

Ticks and snakes - Although you’re not in an area where you have to worry about bears, ticks and snakes are going to be your biggest threat should you camp in the warmer times of the year.

Plan in advance - There are numerous websites and blogs about hiking these trails that can easily be found with a Google search. In addition to these resources, consider joining a social media hiking group and asking for advice; they are a wonderful resource, with “The Kansas Hiking Club” being one of the best.

The best part of backpacking is the entire process, from the moment you begin exploring your options to the moment you store your gear when finished. Perhaps there is no other outdoor activity that requires as much planning, preparation and execution as a backpacking trip and, because of that, the idea of enjoying the journey truly begins when you decide to go. 🐄





SETTL SUCCESS

For as long as most people can remember, anglers have been setting trotlines, limb lines and floatlines to catch big catfish.

Tony Green misses the days when he and friends would run limb lines for big Kansas catfish on humid summer nights. Green, 88, isn't able to do much of that anymore due to his age and health. But oh, the stories he can tell.

When you've spent a lifetime fishing for giant flathead catfish with limb lines and trotlines, you can relate some good tales about the big ones that didn't get away.

"I would go down to some of these packing houses in here in town and fill a five-gallon bucket with fresh beef blood," said Green, who lives in Kansas City, Kan. "I would put sugar on it and let it sit for a week, then it would harden enough to stay on a hook.

"That's about all I used for bait on my limb lines, and I would catch some big ol' flatheads. They could smell blood in the water just like a shark."

Green has many memories of nights when those big cats kept him and his friends busy running their lines. They would fish narrow creeks where tree limbs hung

over the water. Green and his friends would tie stout lines to those branches and dangle their bait several feet down. Then, they would wait for the still of the night. That's when the action started.

"I remember one night when we used a spotlight to find the lines we had baited and a fish had a limb pulled clear underwater," Green recalled. "I tugged on that line and that fish barely moved.

"That's when your heart gets beating. We fought that flathead forever but we finally got him in the boat. Turns out, he weighed 68 pounds."

Kansas fishing, the old-fashioned way. For those such as Green, running lines runs in the family.

His dad did it, and so did his granddad. In their day, you weren't a true cat angler if you didn't put out lines.

"We fished some with rod and reel, but we mostly used limb lines," Green said. "You don't need anything fancy when you do that.

"You just find a good, sturdy limb, a good hook and a weight and the right bait, and you're in business."

W N E



Submitted photo

By Brent Frazee
freelance outdoor writer

The old-fashioned approach

Tales of Kansas anglers catching monstrous fish back in the good old days abound. Historical accounts of flatheads and blues weighing more than 150 pounds are legendary in Kansas. Some of those fish were caught on methods now deemed illegal – for example, those diving underwater and hooking catfish with huge hooks – while others were taken by legal means.

For example, the world-record flathead, 123 pounds, was caught in 1998 by rod and reel in Elk City Reservoir. But veteran limb line, trotline and bank line anglers will tell you there's still a bigger fish out there. And they'll say it with a straight face.

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised if the next world record comes out of the Neosho River," said Nicholas Bess of Hartford, who runs an annual catfish tournament on the river. "There are still some huge flatheads around here.

"Every year, we'll hear stories of someone who had his hands on a giant when he's running trotlines, but he couldn't get it in."

Whether that's just another fish story about the big

one that got away or whether it's the truth, is hard to tell. But Bess has been fishing the Neosho long enough to believe those tales.

He remembers one summer when he, his dad and a cousin caught three flatheads weighing more than 60 pounds each in one run. That same trip, they also wrestled an 82-pounder into the boat.

"That fish filled most of the boat," Bess recalled. "We took pictures, then let (it) go.

"We have a lot of respect for the fish around here. Some of these big flatheads are old. We let them go so they might grow even bigger."

Bess remembers the day he got hooked on running trotlines for monstrous Kansas cats.

"I was just a little guy and a fisherman brought in a flathead that hung down from his chest to the ground," Bess said. "It was longer than I was.

"I remember thinking, 'I want to catch one of those someday.' I'm still trying.

"My personal goal is to catch a flathead weighing more than 100 pounds. I might be dreaming, but I think it can be done."



A shared dream

Plenty of others in little Hartford – a town of 370 residents that sits on the Neosho River in east-central Kansas – have that same dream.

They set lines from spring through summer in hopes of landing a fish big enough to brag about; That's a pretty realistic goal on the Neosho, one of Kansas' best catfish rivers.

Bess and his relatives make trotlines out of stout parachute cord for the main line and stout for the drop lines. Each trotline consists of 25 hooks. They will tie one end to something solid such as a stump or a tree and extend it into the river. Concrete blocks or window weights are often used to anchor the other end.

They'll generally bait those hooks with live bluegill, green sunfish or small bullheads. They like to set their trotlines where shallow and deep water meet.

The best time of the year to set those lines?

"For some reason, graduation weekend is always the best," Bess said. "In general, we do our best when the river is rising, but not really rolling."

The town of Hartford is so crazy about catching big flatheads that Bess and his friend Kyle Graves established a memorial tournament to honor three hunters who died when their duck boat capsized at John Redmond Reservoir in 2010. Proceeds from entry fees go to scholarship funds for students in Hartford.

Now in its 10th year, the tournament allows teams to weigh in catfish caught on either rod and reel or trotlines.

If you want to see big flatheads, check out the weigh-in for one of these events. One year, 15 teams weighed in 1,846.6 pounds of catfish – most of which was later released.

Cats as big as a child

Ron Griffith came up with a good way to prove to his young great nephew how big Kansas catfish can grow. The boy, who was 9 at the time, wanted to go fishing. Griffith responded by saying, "We're going to go out and catch a fish almost as big as you are." The boy, of course, thought Griffith was just telling a fish story. But Griffith delivered on his promise.

On a hot August day last year, they set trotlines in a small creek near Council Grove Reservoir. When they tugged on one of the trotlines, a 63-pound flathead tugged back.

The boy's eyes widened, and his great uncle gave him one of those "Told you so" looks.

Griffith, 60, who lives in Dunlap, should know. He has been running lines on the Neosho River, area creeks and Council Grove Reservoir for most of his life. He watched his dad pull up giant flatheads, and now he is doing the same.

He will bait his lines with bullheads or sunfish, then return to run them in the morning. He usually is greeted by the tug of three to five catfish on each trotline.

"I still get excited when I pull one of the droplines and there's a big swirl," he said. "That's something I never get tired of."

Protecting their image

Though setting trotlines, limb lines and bank lines is almost a way of life in some Kansas towns such as Hartford, it isn't without critics.

Some catfish anglers who use rod and reel criticize anglers who set lines, saying it is not sporting, even though it is a legal method recognized by the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism.


Bess strongly disagrees with the misconception that those who run lines are hurting the resource.

"I challenge anyone who has negative views about running trotlines to come to one of our tournaments," Bess said. "We have the same respect for the fish as anglers who use rod and reel.

"I don't keep big flatheads unless they're hooked deeply. And a lot of other anglers around here are the same way."

Bess also disputes the claims that trotliners unfairly catch too many big catfish.

"A big flathead is an opportunistic feeder," Bess said. "He would rather have one big meal than a lot of small ones.

"He might fill up, then just go sit someplace for a while. It takes a little luck to catch a big one." 

The legal way

• **TROT LINES:** Licensed anglers can have one trotline with no more than 25 hooks in Kansas waters. Trotlines must be anchored with an object weighing at least 25 pounds or attached to an immovable stake or other immovable object. They must be plainly tagged with the angler's name and address or KDWPT number. They also must be checked at least once every 24 hours.

• **LIMB LINES OR BANK LINES:** Kansas anglers can set up to eight lines with no more than two hooks on each one. Again, lines must be marked with the angler's name and address or KDWPT number, and must be checked every 24 hours.

• **RESTRICTIONS:** Trotlines and setlines are not allowed on KDWPT-managed impoundments smaller than 1,201 acres. They also cannot be set within 150 yards of any dam.

Left: David Bess hoists one of the giant flatheads he caught on the Neosho River.

Right: Nicholas Bess is accustomed to putting big flathead catfish on the scales when he fishes the Neosho River.

SOUTHEAST KANSAS NATURE CENTER

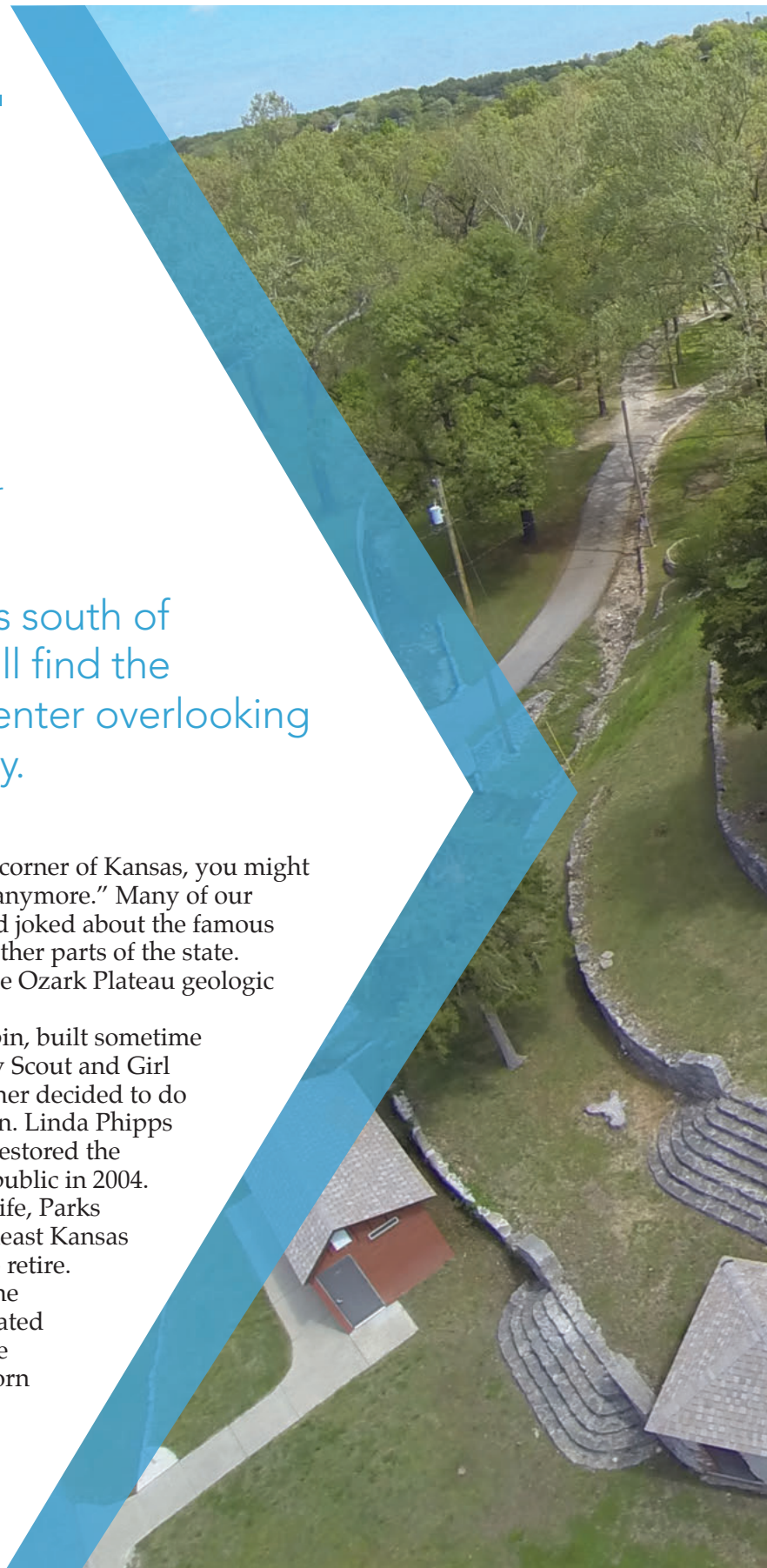
by Jennifer Rader,
Southeast Kansas Nature Center director

Nestled atop a hill two miles south of Galena on Highway 26, you'll find the Southeast Kansas Nature Center overlooking the scenic Shoal Creek valley.

If you find your way to the very southeast corner of Kansas, you might think, "I've got a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore." Many of our visitors from elsewhere in Kansas have indeed joked about the famous line, as it certainly looks different than most other parts of the state. Cherokee County holds the only portion of the Ozark Plateau geologic region in Kansas.

The nature center started out as a scout cabin, built sometime between 1923 and 1933, that hosted many Boy Scout and Girl Scout meetings. Many years later, a local teacher decided to do something about the old, rundown scout cabin. Linda Phipps gathered together numerous volunteers and restored the cabin into a nature center that opened to the public in 2004. In June 2013, the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism took over operation of the Southeast Kansas Nature Center when Ms. Phipps was ready to retire. Schermerhorn Park – the grounds on which the Southeast Kansas Nature Center sits – is operated by the City of Galena, and the property for the park was gifted to them by Edgar Schermerhorn in 1922.

Inside, the Southeast Kansas Nature Center is full of exploration drawers and hands-on activities for children and the young-at-heart. The center features







Left: Schermerhorn Cave is home to several threatened and endangered Kansas species.

Top: The nature center hosts numerous field trips each year.

Bottom: Long-tailed salamanders, can be found near the stream and cave area.

several displays and facts on mostly native flora and fauna that can be found in the region. Visitors can see several live reptiles, amphibians, fishes and invertebrates, as well as different taxidermy mammals and birds. They can also watch local wildlife through the bird-watching window (a one-way window), view an extensive Native American artifact collection, a rock, mineral, fossil collection, put together puzzles, play nature-theme games and observe the live honeybee hive located in the Big Room.

The nature center hosts numerous field trips each year from area schools, church groups, assisted living facilities, scout groups and more. And, programming and activities are

offered throughout the year on a wide range of environmental education topics. While building space is limited, the center makes use of Schermerhorn Park to accommodate larger groups through outdoor activity and hiking opportunities. The nature center is also capable of doing off-site programs when visiting the center and park isn't an option.

As part of the Ozark Plateau, covering only 55 square miles in Kansas, we see a high diversity of plant, animal and fungi life for the state. This small area of Kansas gets an average of 40 inches of precipitation a year, which encourages a wider variety of plants and amphibians than most other areas in Kansas. Over half of the known species of plants in Kansas can be found in Cherokee County, and some are found only in Cherokee County.

We also have about one-third of the Species In Need of Conservation (SINC), threatened and endangered species for the state – the highest number of any region statewide.

Taking a stroll on the Schermerhorn Park trails, you might see eastern chipmunks running along the rock walls found throughout the park or hear the call of Spring Peeper frogs in the woods.

The walls were constructed as part of the Works Progress Administration (later named the Work Projects Administration) founded by Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry Hopkins in 1935, and provide an extra scenic perk, as well a habitat for many park critters. The trails run through an oak/hickory forest featuring unique plants to Kansas such as Flowering Dogwood, Sassafras, Robin's



Right: Many bird species such as green herons can be found frequenting Shoal Creek.

Top: Shoal Creek runs east to west through Schermerhorn Park near the nature center.

Bottom: Director Jennifer Rader and Brandi Petty take measurements on a western rat snake during a workshop.

Plantain and Fourleaf Milkweed. The park is a wonderful place to bird watch, especially during spring migration. Many woodland species, as well as species that like riparian habitat (near a body of water), can be heard and seen here.

Taking the trail to Schermerhorn Cave, visitors might get a rare glimpse at one of three Kansas threatened or endangered species. The cave is comprised of Mississippian Limestone, the oldest surface rock in the state, and includes a spring running down through the park into the much larger Shoal Creek. This stream and cave area are perfect habitat for long-tailed salamanders, cave salamanders and the occasional grotto salamander, all threatened or endangered in Kansas because of lack of habitat elsewhere in the state.

Shoal Creek is an Ozarkian stream that runs east to west through Schermerhorn Park before dumping into the Spring River at Riverton and heading south into Oklahoma. Almost 80 different species of fish are found in this creek, some of which in Kansas can only be found here. Many species of darters, redhorse suckerfish, shiners and more can be seen swimming along the creek. Shoal Creek also holds several species of turtles, including the common map turtle and eastern musk turtle. Remember to tread lightly, clean up after yourself and don't disturb habitat in the park.

The nature center and park are located just a few miles from the Historic Route 66 Highway, another unique feature that just barely comes into Kansas through the Cherokee County towns of Galena, Riverton and Baxter

Springs. Visitors to the area can find all sorts of Route 66-related attractions, such as the Eisler Bros. Old Riverton Store, Cars On the Route in Galena, and the Rainbow Bridge in Baxter Springs. More memorabilia and artifacts related to the route and the area's zinc and lead mining history can be found at the nearby Baxter Springs Heritage Museum and the Galena Mining and Historic Museum.

Consider visiting ksoutdoors.com to plan a trip to the Southeast Kansas Nature Center, and see what makes this area of the state so unique. You, too, may feel you're not in Kansas anymore. 🐮

Squirrel Hunting 101

by Rob McDonald, *Modern Wildman Blog*

Pocketknife

A sharp sturdy pocketknife is all that is needed to clean and dress most small game, such as squirrels and rabbits.

Hunting License

A valid hunting license is required to hunt large and small game, including squirrels, in Kansas for those ages 16 to 74.

Creature Comforts

A hot cup of coffee from a thermos, or your favorite reading material can make your time outdoors more enjoyable.

Mast Trees

Squirrels are plentiful and can be found in a variety of environments. Look for areas with mast producing trees such as oak, walnut, pecan, or even a Kentucky coffeetree. Early in the season, squirrels can be found feeding on green apples, mulberries or blackberries.

Choice of Equipment

Squirrels can be legally hunted using a variety of methods including rimfire rifles, shotguns, muzzleloaders, and archery equipment. The two most popular methods are rimfire .22 rifles and shotguns.

Calling Squirrels

Squirrels can be vocal, social, and territorial. A commercial squirrel call to produce "barks" and "chuckles" can be effective at getting squirrels to come investigate. Tapping coins to imitate the sound of a squirrel cracking a nut is also an effective method.

More Tips & Tricks

For small game hunters, veteran outdoor folk and anyone just looking for outdoor opportunities, the pursuit of squirrels is just the ticket! In Kansas, squirrel season is open for nine months, offering plenty of freedom for hunters to seek out time in the hardwoods. According to Kent Fricke, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism small game biologist, "Squirrel hunting in Kansas is an underutilized bountiful resource." I couldn't agree more.

Hunting squirrels is a time-honored tradition providing incredibly tasty game meat for the table to share with your friends and family. Similar to most types of hunting pursuits, there are proven tactics and tested methods that will help you put a few squirrels in the bag.

The less wind the better. Generally speaking, squirrels move around more when winds are calm. Windy days not only slow squirrel movement in the woods but can make it harder to pick out bushy tails bouncing through the treetops as gusty winds will have the whole tree canopy moving. Some of the best times to be in the woods are before the wind picks up first thing in the morning, or the last few hours of daylight when the wind dies down.

Woods Walk. Creeping along on the shadowy side of a game trail in the hardwoods is a great way to both hone your hunting skills and to bag a few squirrels. Take your time with frequent stops, scan both the tree canopy and the ground for squirrel movement. Rimfire rifles, shotguns, air rifles, and archery equipment are all effective and challenging methods of take for a woods walk hunter.

Sitting and Calling. Squirrels are both social and territorial. Calling squirrels is a great way to coax squirrels into range. Sit near nut mast trees, mulberry trees, or blackberry bushes in their season. Imitating squirrel chatter and barking with a call is a great way to get an inquisitive squirrels attention. An old woodsman trick for calling squirrels is to use coins. Grip a coin in



one hand by wrapping your index finger and thumb around it, cupping your other fingers below. Now, take a second coin in your other hand and tap the first coin to imitate the sound of a squirrel cracking a nut. Pure magic.

Squirrels can be hunted on private and public lands, including KDWP's wildlife areas. Several Walk-in Hunting Areas (WIHA) are open to squirrel hunting, as well; however, make sure to check the WIHA atlas to confirm an area's enrollment period – some areas do not open until September 1 for the fall hunting seasons.

Since the season opening is the first day of June, squirrel hunting is an ideal fit for hunters wanting to fill the off-season void between spring turkey season and the many hunting opportunities available in the fall. Legal methods of take include: rifles, shotguns, archery equipment, muzzleloaders, sling shots, air rifles, and even falconry! The daily bag limit is five squirrels per day with a possession limit of 20. Both red and gray squirrels can be found in Kansas, making squirrel hunting a fantastic opportunity to expand your time outdoors, explore new methods of hunting and provide delicious game meat for the table.

Squirrel Egg Rolls

Prep: 30 min.

Cook: 4-8 hours

Yield: 12 servings

2 Squirrels, cleaned
Salt & pepper
1 Large yellow onion, halved
2 Large carrots, quartered
2 Large celery stalks, halved
2 Cloves minced garlic
1 Quart chicken broth
¼ C chopped red cabbage
¼ C chopped green onion
¼ C chopped cilantro
1 Package wonton wrappers
Small dish of water

Lay cleaned, dressed squirrels in a large slow cooker. Pour in the chicken broth, add the carrots, yellow onion, garlic and celery to braise on high for four to six hours. Salt and pepper to taste. Pick the squirrel meat after braising, and cool. Discard the braised vegetables.



On a flat wonton wrapper, add about 2 teaspoons of picked squirrel meat, a large pinch of red cabbage, a large pinch of green onion, a pinch of cilantro, and a small pinch of minced garlic. Dip your finger into the water dish and dampen the edges of the wonton wrapper to soften and make it easier to fold. Fold the wrapper from corner to corner, then fold in the other two ends. Use a dampened finger to help seal down all the edges.

In a heavy Dutch oven, iron skillet, or deep fryer, heat vegetable or canola oil to 360 degrees. Add in a few egg rolls at a time, trying to avoid crowding the fryer. Fry 2-4 minutes per side, until golden brown, then turn with a fry spider, slotted metal spoon, or tongs. Remove to a wire tray or paper towel to drain, and cool. Serve with soy sauce, hoisin, sweet & sour, mustard or sriracha.

Species Profile: Hognose Snakes

Summer outdoor adventures mean sunshine, fresh air and possible encounters with snakes. Two interesting species you should look for are the western and eastern hognose. Both species have up-turned, or hog-like, snouts used for unearthing their food. Primarily feeding on toads, hognose snakes are equipped with enlarged teeth on the upper back sides of their jaws, allowing them to deflate the toads before swallowing.

Both species can be found throughout most of Kansas. The western hognose makes its home in grasslands and sand prairies where it burrows beneath sandy, loose soil; the eastern hognose prefers prairie river streams and forested areas.

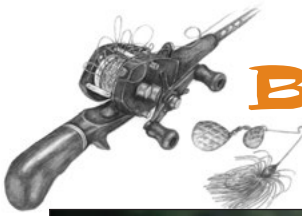
The color and size on the two species differ. The underside of the tail on the western is mostly black, while it is light colored on the eastern. The western hognose snake measures 15 to 25 inches long, while the eastern hognose is a bit longer at 20 to 30 inches. Females for both species are larger than the males.

Female western hognose snakes lay eggs every other year, while the eastern hognose lays eggs once per year.

While not considered aggressive, both species will spread their hoods and hiss loudly when threatened. If that doesn't work, they will flip over on their backs, writhe around and play dead. Predators include large birds and, of course, humans.

All snakes are beneficial to the environment for controlling rodent populations and providing food for other animals. The western and eastern hognose snakes are both Species in Need of Conservation (SINC) and protected by state law.





Backlash

with Nadia Reimer

Afuera Para Todos – “Outdoors For All”



Shutterstock/Andy Dean Photography

Are you familiar with the *Kansas Hunting and Furharvesting Regulations Summary*? If so, you likely can attest to the document’s importance. It contains a wealth of vital information necessary to legally and safely enjoy hunting and furharvesting in Kansas, including season dates, bag limits, special restrictions, species identification, health notices, law enforcement contacts, license and permit fees, and more. Now, one more question for those of you who previously answered “yes.” Can you imagine how difficult it would be to obtain that information if it was written in a language you didn’t understand?

The *Kansas Hunting and Furharvesting Regulations Summary* is currently only offered in English. Now, English is my primary language, I work for the agency that produces the publication, I’m responsible for editing its contents, and yet there are STILL sections that cause me to pause, re-read a line, or seek clarification each year. With nearly every advantage possible at my disposal, the document


remains, at times, somewhat difficult even for me to digest.

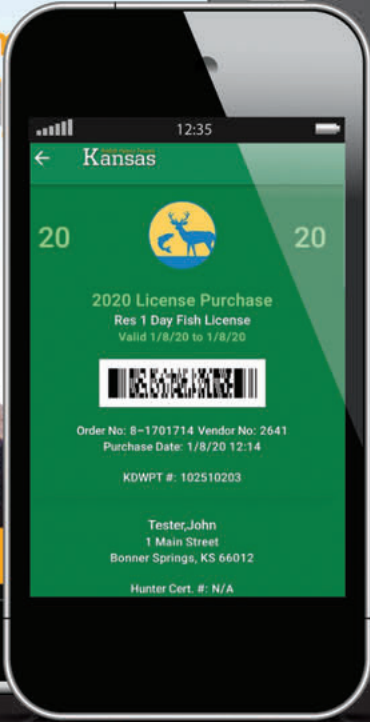
So, what about my fellow hunters – the ones who don’t have subject matter experts on speed dial? Who is ensuring they receive and understand the information they, too, need to legally and safely enjoy hunting and furharvesting in Kansas? For the 85,126 Kansans who designated Spanish as their primary language in the 2015 Census, my answer is embarrassingly, “not us.” Fortunately, I’ll soon have reason to give a different reply.

The Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism -- in partnership with the National Wildlife Federation, Kansas Wildlife Federation, and Kansas Hispanic and Latino American Affairs Commission – is in the process of producing a Spanish-translated version of the *Kansas Hunting and Furharvesting Regulations Summary*. The translated edition will be available beginning this fall, and for tens of thousands of Kansans, it will be the first time they’ve been able to access vital outdoors-related information in a

language they can best understand. The gravity of that hits hard as I put it on paper, and I know I can speak for my colleagues and our agency partners directly involved in this effort when I say, “It’s awesome and it should’ve been done sooner.”

The conservation of Kansas’ natural resources comes at a cost, and it’s no secret that the lion’s share of that tab is footed by hunters and anglers. As our agency continues working toward increasing participation in outdoor recreation – now by way of making vital information more accessible than ever – I can’t help but get excited about what this could mean for natural resource conservation in Kansas.

Gifford Pinchot, the first chief of the U.S. Forest Service, is quoted as saying, “Conservation is the application of common sense to the common problems for the common good.” In my mind, what could be more commonsensical – or more beneficial to the common good – than sharing the information we have with the people who need it most? 



Camp It KS



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