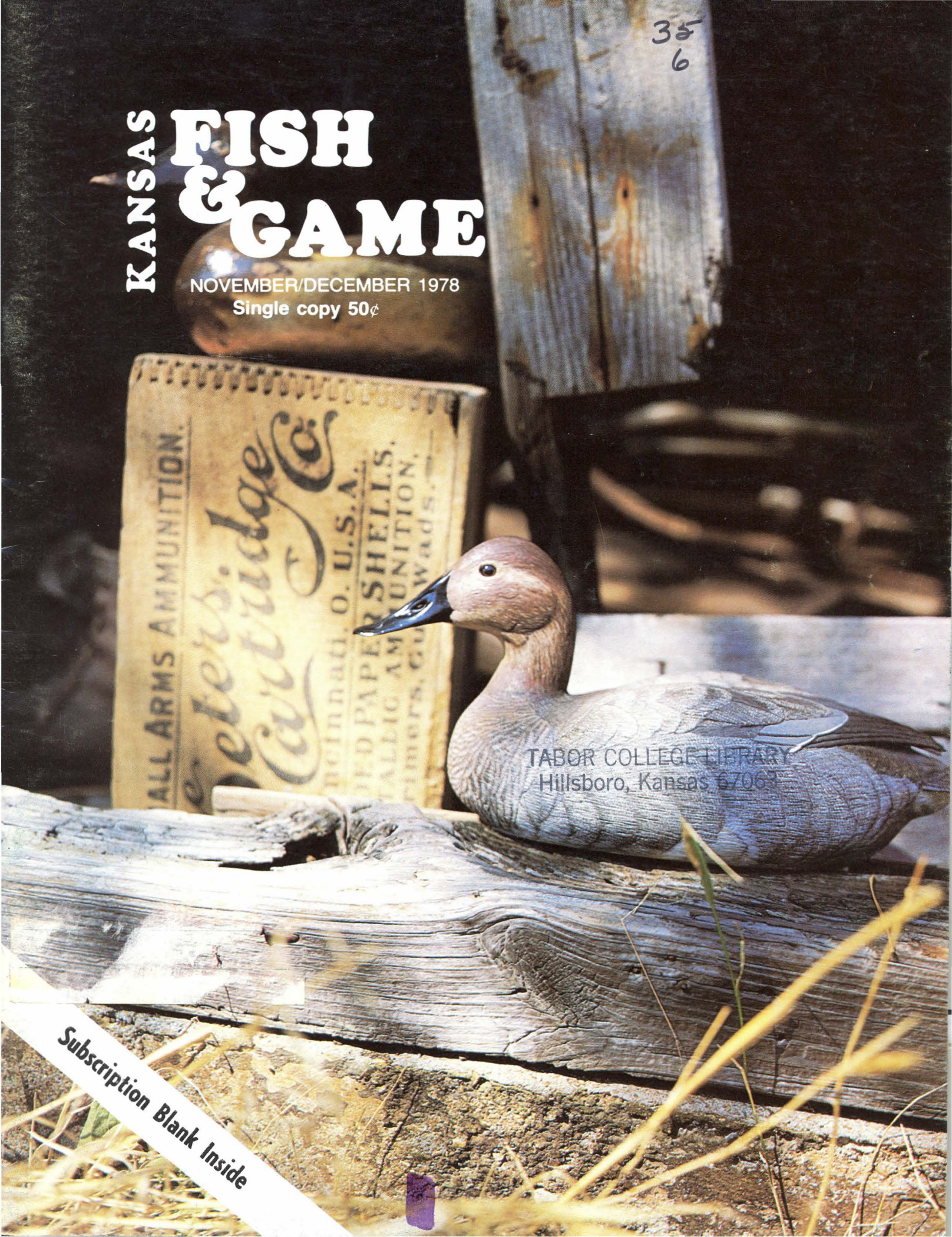
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Cover Credits

Canvasback decoy and bittern by Ken Stiebben

THE HUNTER AS CONSERVATIONIST

Chris Madson

Recently, a mid-day radio announcer in eastern Kansas had as his guest a representative of Ducks Unlimited. The two were promoting an upcoming DU banquet designed to raise money for marsh development and preservation in Canada—the long-standing goal of DU. During their discussion, they repeatedly made the comment that DU money not only benefited the hunter by protecting vital waterfowl breeding habitat but also helped protect the wildlife interests of "conservationists." Neither the host or the DU rep (probably a hunter himself) seemed to see any problem with a distinction between the two.

I'd dismiss the whole incident as a harmless slip if this distinction weren't the cornerstone of the rhetoric of half a dozen major anti-hunting groups. It seems to be an accepted part of the American view of wildlife conservation that a sportsman with a vested interest in abundant wildlife can't possibly be interested in protecting it, even though the future of hunting depends on healthy wildlife populations.

This attitude is beginning to wear a little thin with me. The hunter-conservationist has done more for North American Wildlife than any other group—spent more money, imposed more self-restraints, demanded more professional management. He hasn't looked for any praise for his actions; he recognized a long time back that wildlife management is an integral part of his responsibility as a hunter. He has taken that responsibility seriously.

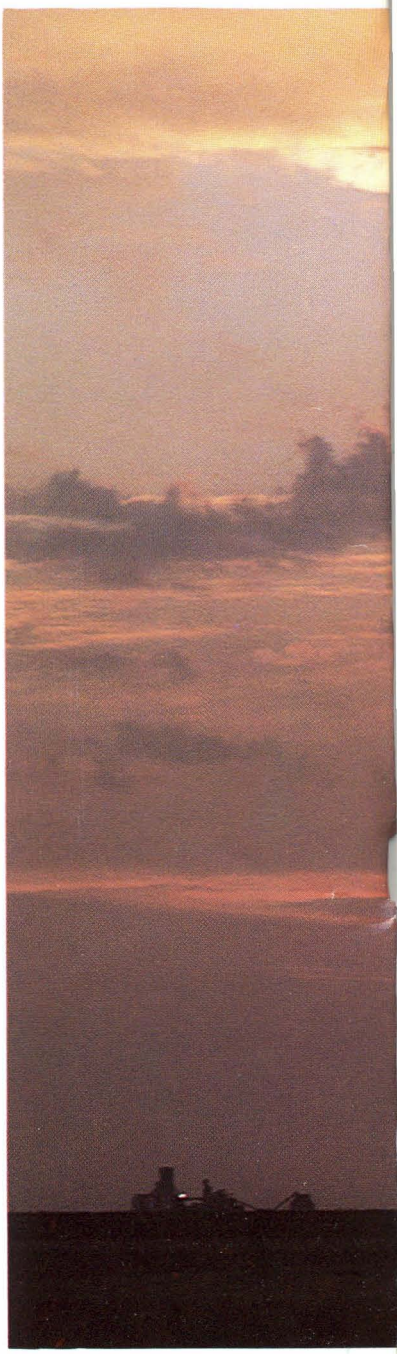
All but a handful of the great American conservationists have been hunters or fishermen. Here are a few names of sportsmen-conservationists: Henry David Thoreau; George Bird Grinnell, founder of the Audubon Society; C. Hart Merriam, founder of the agency that eventually became the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Eliot Coues, a giant in the field of ornithology and a 19th century environmental activist; Gifford Pinchot, founder of the National Forest Service who was instrumental in setting aside 140 million acres of forest land for the public; Teddy Roosevelt; George Perkins Marsh, another 19th century naturalist, scientist, and environmental philosopher; Aldo Leopold, author of *Sand County Almanac* and the man who first expressed the concept of a land ethic; John Lacey, Iowa congressman who introduced bills that eventually protected all wildlife in national parks and stopped interstate commercial dealings in waterfowl. The list is much longer and includes nearly all of the country's best wildlife researchers and environmental thinkers.

Most historians have cited the Sierra Club as the first private group to take up conservation issues on a national scale. Actually, the Boone and Crockett Club began the organized conservation movement in 1887. Membership was limited to 100 big game hunters who were required to adhere to a rigid code of hunter ethics. The club was the first group to defend the nation's first park, Yellowstone, from commercial exploitation and hunting; it led the crusade that eventually outlawed wasteful hunting techniques like night lighting and running deer with hounds; it spearheaded the drive to give the President the power to set aside timber lands in the public interest; and it led the campaign that eventually resulted in protection of the Key deer, an endangered species, and helped pay for a warden and for land acquisition while the federal government tried to get authorization for the deer refuge.

The Boone and Crockett Club's concern for wildlife is far from being exceptional; it simply reflects the concern nearly all hunters have for conservation. About the only difference between conservationists who hunt and those who don't is that sport hunters have been in conservation longer—and have taken it a little more seriously.

Bear in the Air

Night lighting is one of the deer poacher's most effective tools. Fortunately, game protectors have found a tool to counteract the spot light. They keep an eye on illegal deer hunters—from the air.



Bob Mathews

The airplane has given Kansas game protectors a fresh perspective on their work. As a result, the long arm of the law is reaching farther than ever before.

Since 1973, state game protectors have used aerial reconnaissance in an effort to curb illegal night hunting. The effectiveness of the effort has game protectors gleefully anticipating their future airborne assignments.

Game protectors love to make life tough for violators of fish and game laws. An airplane serves that objective handily, for a very simple reason: Nothing works better.

Aerial reconnaissance enables more effective coverage of a much larger chunk of ground than is possible with conventional ground patrols. It makes the game protector's job easier. It enables quicker apprehension of violators. Its very presence serves as a deterrent, due to its growing reputation as a particularly effective enforcement method.

The success of night flying has prompted law enforcement officials in the agency to expand their aerial efforts. Game protectors this year plan to log at least fifty percent more flying time than last year. Officials also are recommending a separate fund be established to provide as much as 400 hours of flying time per year, beginning in 1980. Approval of that recommendation would entail a ten-fold increase in annual flying time over last year's total.

Ken Stiebben

Ken Stiebben

Night flying operations require careful coordination between spotter and ground based game protectors. Routes and ground locations are determined ahead of time, and the airplane and game protectors on the ground are in constant communication by radio. It's a hard system to beat.

Ken Stiebben

Until last year, Fish and Game enforcement officials were cooperating with the Kansas Highway Patrol, which loaned its planes and pilots to the agency for periodic aerial surveillance efforts. But state troopers needed their aircraft for intensive enforcement of the fifty-five mph speed limit. After a budget cut one year ago grounded one of the patrol's three airplanes, game protectors began renting aircraft from commercial air services.

"Night flying began mainly as an experiment," said Frank NeSmith, assistant chief of law enforcement for Fish & Game. "We knew that it had worked well in several other states that had tried it." Many western states, especially, have put aerial surveillance to work to hold down big game poachers. In the process, they have even put the finger on a number of livestock rustling operations.

It also has worked well in Kansas during its limited use in the state. Not once, in the twenty-five or so flights conducted by game protectors during the past five years, has the effort proved futile. Flying resulted in at least one arrest every time the airplane went up.

"It's terribly effective," attests Frank Hendricks, a state game protector who has been involved in virtually all enforcement flying activity. In heavily-wooded areas of northeast Kansas, where Hendricks is based, spotlighting violations occur frequently. Locating and apprehending violators in that terrain is especially difficult when patrolling in a car or pickup with no aerial support.

"After a game protector uses an airplane, he feels a little ineffective without it," Hendricks allows. "Patrolling on the ground and knowing that someone could be spotlighting just a half-mile away is disheartening, but from an airplane an entire county can be covered easily and effectively."

From the air, the poacher's spotlight and his vehicle are easy to see. The beam of a spotlight scanning timber is a poacher's trademark and most effective tool. However, a spotlight is also a semaphore that virtually screams for the attention of a sky-borne game protector with binoculars. Even a small flashlight beam can be scoped from 3,000 feet in the air.

Coordinating the ground teams to apprehend the violators is also easily done. Radio contact allows instant communication between the aircraft and the ground unit nearest the scene of a violation. An airborne spotter can also give a ground vehicle precise directions to the suspect's location, resulting in quicker apprehension. If a violator leaves the scene before a ground unit reaches him, an airplane spotter can follow him all the way home, if necessary.

At least one game protector familiar with the terrain being worked serves as a spotter in the airplane. Two game protectors are teamed in each ground vehicle below, which are spaced about twenty miles apart in a square pattern. Before the plane lifts off the runway, game protectors participating have a good idea where the spotlighting is most likely to occur. Their experience also tells them when most spotlighters will be out. Research on spotlighters has shown that the highest number of illegal deer kills takes place during the two weeks before the opening of the firearms deer season. But night flying is not confined solely to that two-week period, so scheduling of flights takes several other factors into consideration.

"We like to have at least four vehicles on the ground," NeSmith noted. "Conceivably, ten men can concentrate effectively on a 1,600-square-mile area."

Once a violator is spotted from the air, it's only a matter of time before a ground unit apprehends him. That advantage is well illustrated by an incident which occurred last year during a particularly busy night flying effort in north-central Kansas, when a total of

Bob Mathews

Ken Stiebben

eight violators were arrested. The spotter in the airplane sighted yet another violator after busying all ground units. Having no more ground teams available the airborne spotter followed the suspect's car as it headed away from the scene. As the car reached the city limits of a nearby city, he was greeted by a city policeman who had been notified by radio, and one more arrest was made.

Most of the night flying occurs from October through mid-February, when most spotlighting violations occur. When the first frost hits in the fall, jacklighters are generally getting the urge to begin their own illegal hunting season. But spotlighting is apparently as distracting as honest work, which adds to the vulnerability of spotlighters.

"For some reason, spotlighters don't pay much attention to airplanes," NeSmith noted. "Maybe they're inside their car or truck with the heater on and windows up, concentrating on their spotlight, and just not paying attention to what's overhead. Even if they're aware of the aerial reconnaissance work by game protectors they don't know for sure if that airplane up there is one of ours . . . and there is quite a bit of plane traffic over Kansas at night."

The simple fact that airplanes are being used by game protectors is an effective deterrent that promises to become even more effective as the aerial reconnaissance effort expands. If more poachers are aware of the effort, they're probably more aware of the risk they are taking.

Airplanes also are effective during the deer season. A game protector in an airplane can easily see a deer lying in the back of a pickup truck, then call to a ground unit and have the nearest game protector check the hunter to make sure he has taken the deer legally.

Although most enforcement flying is done at night from October through February, it is not confined only to flying at night nor during those months.

Illegal fishermen can be monitored by daytime flights over streams. For example, the hottest part of the day in the hottest part of summer is generally a time for game protectors to watch for hand fishermen. Observing illegal fisherman is simple . . . if an airplane is being used.

"If we're patrolling in a car without an airplane to help us out, we may see a parked car but we have to walk to find the fisherman to check him out, and it's impossible to tell which way he went to do his fishing," Hendricks explained. "But if we have an airplane up there we can easily see the car and likely fishing holes and probably even the fisherman himself. So we can do the job in thirty minutes that two people in a ground unit may not be able to do in several hours."

For that reason, law enforcement officials contend, rental of airplanes is wise use of the money in their budget since their effectiveness is greatly improved with aerial reconnaissance capabilities. The proposed aircraft funding project, recommended to begin in 1980, would allow each region to average at least one flight every ten days. For the sixty-eight game protectors who share responsibility for Kansas' 105 counties, increased use of airplanes in future enforcement operations would be a welcome addition to the force.

Side by side, they could hardly be told apart, yet the mourning dove thrives while the passenger pigeon has faded into extinction. Why?

The Passenger Pigeon

John Madson

They were highly similar—the pointed tails, the general coloration, the swift erratic flight. Although the passenger pigeon was about one-fourth again as large as the mourning dove, with some differences in color, the two were enough alike so that there were later mistaken identifications of mourning doves by observers who had known passenger pigeons well.

They were of the same subfamily although of different genera: the passenger pigeon was of the genus *Ectopistes* while the mourning dove is of *Zenaida.* There is even an old report of the passenger pigeon and mourning dove interbreeding and producing fertile offspring, although this has never been verified. In other words, they were first cousins.

But beyond these similarities, the two cousins began to diverge. Similar as they were, they were distinct birds with basically different life styles. The two species rarely mingled until near the end, when one or two passenger pigeons might be seen with small flocks of mourning doves.

The "pigeon of passage" was a highly social bird that existed in numbers inconceivable to us now. No one knows how many there were at their peak, but some of the best guesstimates put the North American passenger pigeons at between three and five *billion.* In its heyday the passenger pigeon may have made up as much as 40 percent of the total American bird population.

During the migrations of passenger pigeons (the dates were remarkably similar to the mourning dove's) dense canopies of birds would pass for hours. Attempts were made to estimate the numbers of wild pigeons within these vast flights, with results that defy comprehension. A somewhat better grasp of passenger pigeon numbers may be gained from the sizes of their nesting colonies and roosts.

The largest nestings were usually areas that were long and narrow, possibly to ease the problems of arrival and departure of millions of birds. One researcher computed the areas of 47 nesting colonies and came up with an average of 31 square miles—a "typical" nesting that was three miles wide and ten miles long.

The pigeons in such colonies were apparently never really comfortable unless they were crowded. The great ornithologist Alexander Wilson once wrote that he had found the remains of 90 passenger pigeon nests in a single tree at one of the Kentucky colonies. The

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density of nesting persisted all the way to the outside edges of the colony and did not peter out gradually toward the edges. Observers of old nesting sites reported that trees on the extreme edges might have 25 to 50 nests on the side of a tree facing the center of the colony, with no nests on the "outside" part of the tree facing away from the colony.

One of the greatest of all nesting colonies occurred in Wisconsin in 1871, a year when there was a bumper acorn crop. Reliable observers described this immense concentration of birds, which was in the shape of a huge "L." The long arm of the "L" had an average width of six miles and stretched from Black River Falls to Kilbourn, a distance of 75 miles. The short arm reached from Kilbourn toward Wisconsin Rapids for 50 miles, averaging about eight miles in width. There were gaps in this colony, of course, but their number and size could not be determined. However, it has been thought that this may have been almost all of the passenger pigeons in North America at the time—breeding in a colony that covered almost 850 square miles.

Although the roosts were said to be somewhat smaller, they were also thought to be the most impressive feature of the passenger pigeon. The migrant concentrations stayed together during fall and winter, occupying large forests. European bird authorities scoffed at American reports of passenger pigeons alighting atop one another until large tree limbs broke under this weight, but there are many reports by reliable observers of masses of perching pigeons that were compared to swarms of bees.

Audubon claimed to have visited a passenger pigeon roost in Kentucky that was forty miles long and over three miles wide. That may have been an exceptional roost; most were much smaller, but they still strain the imagination. We find old reports on roosts that were "four square miles," "2,500 acres," "five by ten miles."

The reproductive potential was surprisingly low for an animal of such huge numbers. The passenger pigeon apparently laid but one egg each year. The fact that this could result in vast population gains can mean only one thing—that the annual mortality of adults was relatively low. Unlike mourning doves, a passenger pigeon must have had an average life expectancy of several years. During that time it was able to produce an average of at least the two birds that were required to replace the original pair of pigeons.

There were heavy losses, of course. In their roosts and nesting colonies, those teeming hosts of birds must have drawn every predator imaginable. But there are only so many predators of all species—only so many foxes and hawks and weasels—and they hardly made a scratch on the total population of passenger pigeons. But when European man, the master predator, arrived the tide began turning against the pigeons.

One of the greatest disadvantages of the passenger pigeon was that it occurred in such numbers. It attracted attention. No one could be indifferent to those immense migratory flights, or to the autumn and winter roosts, and certainly not to the teeming nesting colonies. And when the millions of young pigeons took wing, another dimension was added. It wasn't a simple matter of winter concentrations with the spring and summer dispersals so typical of waterfowl and many other birds. At about any time of year, the passenger pigeon was the center of attention in its particular landscape.

The great wild pigeon concentrations were irresistible to European newcomers. From almost the first, the birds were netted and shot for food. The huge flocks must have been windfalls for settlers busy with field work and who weren't always great hunters even when they had time to hunt. But anyone could put wild pigeons on the table. They must have been a sort of poor man's chicken.

For a long time this made little real difference. The real havoc was wrought in the last half of the 19th century. Huge numbers of passenger pigeons still existed then, but rapidly expanding settlement was reaching everywhere into the birds' range and creating great gaps in the unbroken fabric of deciduous forest that formed most of the nation's eastern half. Furthermore, a commercial market was developing. Both adult passenger pigeons and squabs were items of trade—in addition to being food for growing numbers of rural families during much of the year.

The birds were taken for market in several ways. Sulphur pots were sometimes burned under roosts to asphyxiate pigeons at night. Or the birds might be captured at night as they roosted in low trees. Large flights of passenger pigeons sometimes flew near the ground and clubs hurled into the massed birds could be surprisingly effective. There were times when a pigeoner could simply stand on the brow of a hill with a long pole and kill birds, especially from flocks of young pigeons not long off the nests. One of the most effective methods was the netting and trapping done by professionals, employing large quantities of bait, elaborate traps, and special "stool pigeons" that were trained to draw wild birds.

The decline of the passenger pigeon became precipitous during the decade of 1870-1880. The species never recovered from the toll that was taken during those ten years. By 1900, for all practical purposes, the passenger pigeon had ceased to exist in the wild. As far

as can be determined, the last wild passenger pigeon in the world was taken in Pike County, Ohio, on March 24, 1900.

It is widely believed that shooting was the main cause of the passenger pigeon's demise. This was surely more deadly on a wide scale than netting and trapping simply because gunners outnumbered the commercial netters so greatly. In flight or on their roosts, the passenger pigeons' habit of massing closely often made it possible for even gunners of poor ability to shoot with spectacular results.

There's little doubt that millions of pigeons were killed by gunners, although the greater damage done by shooters may have been harassment of nesting colonies that kept adult birds away from the nests. It is said that hunting persisted until the last pigeon had vanished and that long after the great roosts no longer existed, small concentrations of birds still drew eager hunters. But unless hunters and hunting have undergone greater changes than we think they have, this is hard to accept. Hunting down the last few individuals of any small game species would be a very considerable task—especially in a time when much of the nation still had a great deal of excellent small game cover and other small game to hunt, and forests still large enough to have provided havens for a remnant population of wild pigeons. Or so it would seem.

The extinction of the passenger pigeon has been attributed more often to disease than to any other cause. This was a favorite theory of Jack Miner, the famous Canadian naturalist who knew and hunted the passenger pigeon when he was a boy in Ohio and Canada. He later wrote:

"In the early 1870s these pigeons migrated through Ohio in countless numbers, I might say in clouds. We came to Canada in '78, and I am sure I have not seen five hundred pigeons since.

"Some people advance the theory that a storm blew them all into the lake. Why, bless your life, there is no lake in America that would hold them all!

"I am firm in my belief that they were exterminated by a contagious disease.

"The last three pigeons I shot, I shot in the fall of 1884. I was then 19 years of age, and have a distinct recollection of what they were like. These birds were all three diseased, and were not over two-thirds the actual size of the healthy passenger pigeon. I took them home, but mother said they were not fit for food."

If it is true that passenger pigeons were snuffed out by disease, what was it? Avian tuberculosis? Trichomoniasis, or "canker"? And if so, why didn't such diseases sweep through the passenger pigeons much earlier—for those diseases were introduced into the New World three centuries ago. Unless, of course, the wild pigeons were weakened in some way by drastic, widespread declines in their habitat.

Whatever the cause of the passenger pigeon's demise, there can be no doubt that the bird became extinct because the adult pigeons were unable to produce enough young to replace losses. And although we will never really know, this was probably the result of more than one factor. There is, however, general agreement that man was responsible in some way for the extinction of the passenger pigeon, and that the catastrophe may have been made inevitable by the unique character of the bird itself.

Our old teacher, the late Professor George Hendrickson of Iowa State University, told his students that there was something about the passing of the wild pigeon that didn't seem to fit with the amount of shooting, netting, or even disease that was known to have occurred. In spite of the pigeon's vast numbers and apparent vigor, the species may have had a fatal weakness. There was a possibility that the bird was "phylogenetically doomed"—that it had gotten top-heavy through specialization and had toppled and crashed when its teeming throngs were undermined by human predation, sudden changes in the native forests, and possibly disease. Whatever the cause, it was obvious that the species lacked the vigor and adaptability to check its slide into extinction.

Aldo Leopold had much the same idea, and this is reflected in his famous comment:

"The pigeon was a biological storm. He was the lightning that played between two opposing potentials of intolerable intensity; the fat of the land and the oxygen of the air. Yearly the feathered tempest roared up, down and across the continent, sucking up the laden fruits of forest and prairie, burning them in a traveling blast of life. Like any other chain reaction, the pigeon could survive no diminution of his own furious intensity. When the pigeoners subtracted from his numbers, and the pioneers chopped gaps in the continuity of his fuel, his flame guttered out with hardly a sputter or even a wisp of smoke."

Ornithologist Oliver L. Austin, Jr., in his "Birds of the World," says:

"Certainly the species' passing is to be mourned, and one cannot but lament the greed and cruelty of the men who contributed to its extinction by exploiting this seemingly inexhaustible natural resource. Yet the biologist realizes that the eventual demise of the Passenger Pigeon was foreordained. It was an ultra-specialized species that showed all the signs of old age, such as its tremendous numbers, which many extinct forms have reached just before their demise . . . The Passenger Pigeon's greatest specialization apparently was in its nesting habits. To be successful the bird had to breed in large colonies. After the last great nesting was bro-

ken up, many birds survived, but they were unable to reproduce in small numbers successfully."

It has been said that "the rise and fall of animal populations behave in this way—the farther the numbers depart from the norm, the stronger the tendency to return to the norm." However, there may be such a thing as a "threshold of survival," below which an animal species is unable to recover. For example, at the turn of the century some elk herds were so small and the elk so widely scattered that they could not breed effectively and maintain enough population momentum to replace natural losses.

Did something like that happen to the passenger pigeon? If so, what was the "survival threshold" of a colonial bird species that may have numbered five *billion* individuals? It is conceivable that even a threshold population of passenger pigeons might have been entirely incompatible with today's agriculture. Our 600 million blackbirds and starlings, spread coast to coast, are more than we want; imagine the effects, say, of 250 million passenger pigeons nesting in colonies in only two or three states. This is pure speculation, of course—but so is the guilt-ridden conviction that if men had been wiser and kinder there would be a place for wild passenger pigeons in today's world.

And so back to the mourning dove—which we know something about.

In the declining years of the wild pigeon there was still a strong market for the birds and their squabs. There was no law to prohibit a switch to the mourning dove as a market replacement for the pigeon, and no reason to think that some market demand wouldn't have gone on. But this did not happen, for it was not practical to hunt either adult mourning doves or their squabs for the market. The scattered nestings of the dove didn't lend themselves to commercial squab-hunting, and the loose flocks of mourning doves were of little interest to professional pigeoners. A market for the doves *might* have existed if those birds had occurred in huge concentrations and had a life style similar to the passenger pigeon's. But that was not the case, then or now.

There were marked differences between the two birds:

(1) The pigeon was a creature of heavy deciduous forests, dependent on such mast as acorns, beechnuts, and chestnuts. Most accounts indicate it was important that those forests be quite extensive. In contrast, the mourning dove is a bird of woodland edges, clearings, open fields, and bare ground. It is highly successful in parts of the West that never saw a passenger pigeon. The mourning dove's range is far more extensive than the passenger pigeon's ever was—simply because the dove is more adaptable to a greater range of conditions.

(2) The passenger pigeon commonly migrated, roosted and bred in immense concentrations. The mourning dove migrates in modest flocks and will gather in feeding flocks, but this is probably due more to the particular purpose or activity rather than any burning social need to gather in large numbers. Doves may also nest in loose "colonies" in some situations, but they are essentially solitary nesters. In short, the mourning dove can take company or leave it.

(3) The passenger pigeon laid but one egg each year, and the maintenance and increase of the pigeon population was contingent on high aggregate nesting success that occurred during a comparatively long lifespan. The mourning dove has a much shorter lifespan, but lays two eggs at a nesting and may nest up to five times in one year.

(4) The mourning dove is not ultra-specialized and shows none of the symptoms of racial "old age" that Dr. Austin mentions. There is every indication that the mourning dove is a vigorous animal with no fatally weak characteristics.

No one will ever know if the passenger pigeon could have survived indefinitely, even if it had managed to exist into recent times. A. W. Schorger, author of "The Passenger Pigeon," comments that the bird's failure to change its habits can't really be laid to "stupidity" without assuming that most surviving birds are a great deal smarter—for that just isn't the case. The fact is many of the other passerine birds chanced to develop a life style that made survival fairly simple after Europeans arrived. "And many game birds may not have adapted all that cleverly," Dr. Schorger notes, "but have been fortunate enough to have survived into the modern era of game management and have been carefully managed and protected in many ways."

The mourning dove was one of those species, and continues to be. Since it did not share the spectacular life style of the passenger pigeon, it did not share the pigeon's spectacular fate. Nor is it likely to, so long as there are people who care—hunters and non-hunters alike.

Dr. Austin concludes:

"Had the Passenger Pigeon been able to nest alone or in small colonies, it might have survived into the age of intelligent game management which was just dawning at the beginning of the 20th Century. Its disappearance, however, gave dramatic force and impetus to the conservation movement, and encouraged intelligent management of our rapidly vanishing wildlife resources. Hence, though it was doubtless on its way out, it went out in a good cause, and much as all regret its passing, it has not been in vain."

□

Web-footed Ringnecks

I broke in on pheasants in the central Iowa corn country. We hunted ringnecks in all the usual places—stubble fields, retired patches of brome grass, fencerows, and brushy ravines. It was rolling country that held on to its waste ground better than many parts of the Corn Belt. There were plenty of birds, and after half a dozen years of tromping after them, I figured that I had seen most pheasant strategies. Then I moved to southern Wisconsin. When the conversation turned to pheasants in mid-October, I started hearing some of the strangest schemes for finding ringnecks I'd ever run across. Otherwise sensible bird hunters continually talked about cattail marshes in reverential tones; some of them even hunted pheasants on the edges of the same wetlands they had staked out for ducks.

I threw in with one of these hunters, more out of desperation than anything else, and was encouraged when we pulled up to a bottomland corn field on opening day. I loaded up and headed for the field, but my partner called me back and suggested working a soggy tract of grass and scattered elm on the other side of the road instead. I grumbled but went along. We came out on the far side about an hour later soaked to the knees with two roosters apiece. It was an eye opener.

Hunters across the northern tier of Midwestern pheasant states have hunted marshes for years. The potholes of Minnesota and the Dakotas are one of the most important cover types in the northern corn and wheat country. The fringe of habitat around these wetlands provides plenty of "edge" where shelter and grain exist within a few feet of each other—an explosive combination for pheasant production and protection.

Farther south in Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas, wetlands aren't as prominent a feature of the landscape,

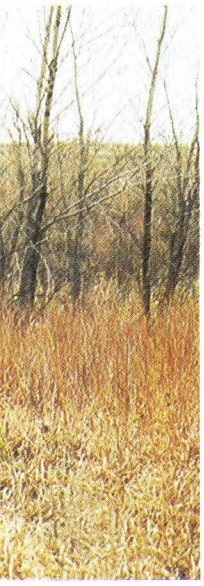
but where a scrap of wet ground has escaped drainage and drought, it is still used by pheasants, especially after the year's broods have grown their flight feathers and can fly from cover to food and back. Many of these birds leave the classic nesting cover along road ditches, shelterbelts, and hay fields in the fall, hurried on their way in may cases by harvest, mowing, or burning. They often gravitate toward water.

One favorite haunt of ringnecks during the hunting season is the brushy edge that grows up on the banks of most streams. Most bottomland cover in Kansas has been pared down to a few yards of cottonwood, willow, and sand plum, but the understory gets plenty of light and is often rank with weeds and native grass—a perfect situation for pheasants, particularly when there is grain stubble nearby. There are often temporary marshes and low spots along these watercourses which are neglected because they bog farm equipment down in the spring. A single patch of cattails in a thick patch of grass usually marks such low ground. The heavy cover there is a good place to look for roosting pheasants early in the day.

Unfortunately, most prairie streams have been channelized in the interest of quick drainage and more efficient crop production and have lost much of their value as wildlife habitat. However, even these remnant gutters support a thin line of goldenrod and native grass along their banks, and their damp bottoms encourage smartweed and barnyard grass. Where there are no shelterbelts or healthy blocks of upland cover, pheasants may duck down into these trenches to escape heavy shooting pressure from hunters working the stubble on either side.

Scraps of cover on irrigation tailwaters may also shelter pheasants. Last fall, two of us came across a shallow puddle on some low ground in a circle of milo. There was no more than a couple of inches of water in the swale, but the mud had been well mixed by the wheels of the passing circle, and the resulting muck-filled ruts made walking next to impossible. We hadn't seen a rooster in two hours of hunting and were getting a little desperate, so we decided to slog out to check the forty-foot patch of shatter cane in the middle. We had just stepped into the cover patch when the pheasants started out the other side, screening their departure with the ten-foot cane. The mud at our feet was covered with tracks. It was a convenient roost for half a dozen birds, right in the middle of a waste milo bonanza and too much trouble for most pheasant hunters to check. Pheasants don't mind getting their feet wet in the early season and will hang out in such weedy corners even when the mud underfoot is bottomless.

Ken Stiebben



Even with accelerating drainage efforts there are corners in grain fields and ravines that aren't cultivated simply because they're too wet. The moisture and neglect combine to produce some fine pheasant habitat.

Ringnecks will take advantage of larger wet areas, too. The upper ends of many Kansas reservoirs support jungles of smartweed, willow, salt cedar, and other brushy cover on low ground, hundreds of acres of almost impenetrable escape habitat. After the first week of the season, most of the pheasants on the public hunting areas around the reservoirs have been pushed off the ridges into these lower tangles of cover. Most hunters are unwilling to believe that the birds have moved and assume that they've all been shot. The roosters down in the brush are happy to let them believe what they like.

Probably the most unexpected piece of pheasant cover is the classic cattail marsh. Ringneck hunters seldom find their way down to one of these permanent marshes, but a duck hunter knows that one of the common sounds on a fall duck marsh at sunrise is the crow of a cock pheasant. Many marshes have high spots that make comfortable hideouts for gunwise roosters. The birds probably find these islands by accident on the way from one feed field to another, but once they start using them, they get to know the contour of the ground better than a Geological Survey surveyor. A friend of mine once stumbled into such a situation on a pheasant hunt in the Dakotas. He was trying a shortcut across a marshy bowl when, without warning, he was up to his crotch in water. Since he was already wet, he decided to wade on across. About fifty yards into the marsh, he waded out of the water into a low rise about fifteen yards on a side. He was half way across the high ground when a rooster jumped to his right. The bird went out low and quiet, but he was too close to get away unobserved and went down in a flurry with the first shot. John got a good mark on him in the cattails, picked him up and fetched him to the bank. His spurs were three-quarters of an inch long; he was rolling in fat, and his crop was stuffed with corn—an old bird who had led a soft life on his island retreat.

Hunting one of these cattail marshes early in the season can be exhausting work. Cattails make tough walking, and deep muck and hummocks of marsh sedge don't simplify matters any. I have heard of hunters who avoid actually walking the marsh by scouting it ahead of time looking for a chance to pass shoot pheasants as they come in from feed fields to roost. Maybe it would work; maybe not. Probably the easiest alternative is to wait for winter. Three inches of black ice paves a wetland, so a hunter can slip quietly through the bullrush and cattail without having to wade. This late in the season, wetlands are more than escape cover for ringnecks; they provide some of the

A wise rooster in the sparse cover along a wetland edge. Later in the season, look for him in the cattails.

Leonard Lee Rue

best winter shelter the birds are likely to find. Marsh vegetation stands up well to the January blizzards that flatten most upland cover. Unless a marshy swale fills up with snow, it will shelter pheasants, sometimes in huge flocks that can put the icing on a long season for the hunter who stumbles into them.

A team of hunters should work close together, probably no more than ten yards apart, and they should make sure to comb the last square foot of grass and cattail. Most pheasants in marshes hold tight because the cover is heavy and they're used to flying in and out of it. The hunters should make an effort to keep quiet. Loud talking or a slammed car door will tip off a savvy late season bird. He'll have his feet under him for a wild flush a hundred yards ahead of an approaching group of shooters. When someone in the party knocks a rooster down, everyone in the group should watch him until he hits the ground. If his head drops and he seems completely unstrung after the first shot, he's probably dead, but if he goes down with his head up and seems to be trying to catch himself, it's wise to hit him again. A crippled pheasant in dense cattails evaporates after he hits the ground. One man should go after the bird while the rest of the party stays put. The motionless hunters can direct the man who's moving, and the triangulation from two or three locations should put him right on the spot.

A good hunting dog is an invaluable asset on a marsh hunt. This is one of the few situations where a pointing dog may have a chance to work ringnecks. The birds hold tight to a point because the density of the cover leaves them little other choice, and a sharp-nosed pointer or setter is a lot more likely than his master to locate them. This isn't work for spaniels or other small dogs. Even in the late season after freeze-up, the going demands a powerful dog with the endurance to break through bulrush, cattail, or cord grass tangles. A big Labrador is a good choice. He has the muscle to handle the cover, and his skill as a retriever comes in handy when a rooster drops in the water or in heavy brush. Although retrievers aren't known for their keen noses, there are quite a few Labs who perform creditably on pheasants. They work close and seem to pick up enough scent to follow a hot ringneck trail.

Pheasants aren't alone in their taste for prairie waterways and marshes. Water seems to gather wildness

the YELLOW Pages

INSIDE:

PUBLIC USE AREAS GROWING

An unprecedented lease agreement between the Fish & Game Commission and a private landowner has added a picturesque 6,100-acre tract of Flint Hills rangeland to Kansas' public hunting areas.

The Bluestem Wildlife Area, located in the rolling pasturelands of eastern Cowley County, is the first tract the agency has ever leased from a private landowner for hunting purposes, according to Don Dick, Fish & Game's supervisor of development and land management. Kent Radcliff, a Dexter rancher, is owner of the property. Under the agreement, the agency will lease the area from October 1 through January 31, with options to renew the agreement in future years.

The area is a prime example of true tallgrass prairie and will primarily appeal to prairie chicken and quail hunters, Dick noted. One large watershed lake and several smaller ponds also provide excellent fishing potential.

The tract lies 22 miles east of Winfield via U.S. 160 and K-38. Commission employees have posted the area for public use and placed directional signs leading to the area. Three parking lots will be constructed on the property. A map of the area will be available from Fish & Game in the near future.

In addition to the Cowley County land, three other areas have been purchased or leased by the agency since January. Included are:

— About 320-acres of woods and grasslands in southern Woodson County, which will serve primarily as a deer, quail, and squirrel hunting area.

— The 2,600-acre La Cygne power plant lake in Linn County, along with about 3,000 acres of land surrounding the lake. The Commission entered a lease agreement in June with two power companies which own the lake and grounds. In addition to the lake's fishing potential, the surrounding grounds will be managed for waterfowl, quail, deer, rabbits, and squirrels.

— The 68-acre Polk Daniels Lake near Howard in Elk County. The agency has leased the lake and 100 acres of surrounding land. The lake, located just east of Howard, will be closed to public fishing until fall of 1979 (tentative) to allow time to rehabilitate and improve the lake and grounds.

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PITTSBURG YOUTH MARKS HUNTER SAFETY MILESTONE

Kansas hunters registered through the Fish & Game administered hunter safety program now number more than 100,000.

Fourteen-year-old Andrew Cezar Foreman, Pittsburg, became the 100,000th student to complete the hunter safety instruction. Gov. Robert F. Bennett congratulated Andy with a special certificate of award during the annual meeting of the Kansas Wildlife Federation, October 14 in Wichita. The youth also was given a nickel-plated air rifle, hunter safety

belt buckle, and hunting knife during the presentation. His certification as a safe hunter represents a major milestone in the Kansas Hunter Safety Program, implemented in 1973 after a new law required all persons born on or after July 1, 1957 to complete the course before obtaining a hunting license. Besides educating young hunters on safe hunting practices, the course is aimed at improving hunter ethics and teaching the basics of wildlife conservation.

Hunting accidents were greatly reduced after the training program went into effect and the program was chosen the best of its kind in North America in 1975. More than 3,300 volunteer instructors throughout the state are involved in training young hunters. Instructors in the class Foreman attended include Dean Powell, David Butler, Frank Papish, Larry Jacobs, Henry Stricklin, Lynn Fields, and Mike Faletti.

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COLORADO STREAM FLOW LAW UPHELD

A U.S. District Court in Colorado has upheld the constitutionality of that state's Stream Flow Preservation Act of 1973, according to the Wildlife Management Institute. The ruling is good news for fish and wildlife resources.

The 1973 Act authorizes the Colorado Water Conservation Board to acquire water rights on rivers and streams "to maintain the natural environment to a reasonable degree". The Board acquired such rights on the Crystal River to protect fish resources threatened by low water levels reportedly caused by excessive diversions for irrigation and other purposes. Water users brought the suit, claiming that the state must divert water out-of-stream in order to establish water rights. The state countered that its constitution does not require diversion be the sole method of appropriation. The court agreed. The decision will be appealed.

The objective of the Stream Flow Preservation Act is to preserve enough water in a river or stream for fish to survive and spawn. The state, however, cannot acquire water by eminent domain or condemning existing water rights. All water rights in the state are administered under a priority system.

The future of the Act still rides on the fate of the upcoming appeal in the state's Supreme Court, a spokesman said. "Without the Act, the state's fisheries would be up the creek without a paddle," he continued. "And pretty soon that creek will be dry." The same could be said for wildlife requiring riparian habitat.

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NORTH DAKOTA WETLANDS ACQUISITIONS CURTAILED

Interior Department programs to acquire wetland habitat for waterfowl in North Dakota will be severely curtailed unless restrictions imposed by the State on such acquisitions are removed, Robert L. Herbst, Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, has announced.

In a letter sent to North Dakota Governor Arthur A. Link on September 22, Herbst said that a law passed in 1977 by the State legislature has left the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with no alternative but to cease acquisition of easements (leases) on wetlands in North Dakota. Herbst also termed "unacceptable" additional restrictions recently imposed by the Governor on fee title acquisitions (outright purchases). He said that the Fish and Wildlife Service would not be able to make any more fee title purchases unless Governor Link removed or did not enforce the new restrictions.

Curtailment of the Fish and Wildlife Service wetlands acquisition program in North Dakota could have significant effects on future numbers of ducks in the United States, according to Service biologists. Six to seven million adult ducks breed in the prairie wetlands of North Dakota and surrounding States each year —

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more than any other area in the country except Alaska. Prairie wetlands, however, are being rapidly destroyed. Recent estimates indicate that some 15 to 20 thousand acres of prairie wetlands are being drained annually in North Dakota, mostly by private landowners.

The Fish and Wildlife Service has not taken any easements on North Dakota wetlands since July 1, 1977, when the State law restricting wetlands acquisitions took effect. Acquisition of easements was halted primarily because of a provision of the law that requires the termination of easements if the landowner dies or sells the land. Under this provision the duration of any easement becomes uncertain and it is therefore impossible to determine fair payment for the land, as required by Federal law. In his letter to Governor Link, Assistant Secretary Herbst said that the Interior Department has decided that the expenditure of duck stamp revenues for wetlands acquisitions under such uncertain conditions would be "an unwise and possibly unlawful use of limited acquisition dollars." Herbst said he would not approve the purchase of easements under these conditions.

Herbst also expressed concern about restrictions that were not included in the 1977 law, but which the Governor has said must be met before he will approve Federal fee acquisition proposals. The Governor's conditions are that the acquisitions must be credited as part of the lands that must be acquired to mitigate the effects on wildlife of the Garrison Diversion Project, and that title to the land will pass to the State if the Garrison Project is not completed by a given date. Herbst said that these restrictions imposed "unreasonable constraints" and that, while the Fish and Wildlife Service would continue to take options on fee acquisitions, no purchases would be made unless the conditions are withdrawn or the purchases receive the Governor's approval without reference to the new conditions.

The Interior Department does not plan to challenge the State's legislation in court, but lawyers for the Department believe that the restrictions will eventually be challenged by other parties because their practical effect is to prohibit private landowners from selling their land to whomever they wish.

The Federal Government is obligated to protect ducks, geese, and other migratory birds and their habitats under treaties with Great Britain (for Canada), Japan, Mexico, and the Soviet Union. Federal law also mandates the protection of migratory birds.

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BIG GAME BIBLE

Anyone interested in our native big game animals will find informative reading in the seventh edition of "North American Big Game". The volume is the seventh records book of a series begun by the Boone and Crockett Club in 1932. It is the first ever to be jointly sponsored by the club and the National Rifle Association, with whom a formal agreement of co-sponsorship of the records keeping was signed in mid-1973.

Included in the book is a list of more than 6,000 individual North American trophies in 31 big game categories, accounts of the history and current operation of the records keeping for big game trophies, photographs of the top trophies in each category, articles by experts on big game related topics, and a special section of full color plates of world record and near-record trophies depicted in the actual locality where they were taken.

It's a book for hunters, game managers, and anyone with a serious interest in our native big game populations. The price of the volume is $25 and correspondence should be addressed to: Sales and Services, National Rifle Association, 1600 Rhode Island Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

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It's The Law.

It was a bizarre turn of events that led to the arrest of a Topeka man recently for illegal fishing.

A July 27 Topeka Daily Capital newspaper article titled "Outlaw Fishing" resulted in the arrest and conviction of one of the featured outlaws.

Pictured in the article, but not showing his face, was Michael C. Corrigan, 27. Corrigan paid a $250 fine and $10 court costs in the District Court of Larry Coursen October 3 after confessing that he performed illegal hand fishing for the photograph that appeared in the story.

Fish & Game Commission Game Protectors, Bill Burlew, Topeka, and Richard Ryan, Lyndon, after seeing the newspaper article and photos, questioned Corrigan on a hunch. They knew of Corrigan's history of fishing violations, the latest three amounting to fines and court costs totalling more than $500.

Game protectors in other parts of the state, meanwhile, were busy with their own violators, including the following:

— Eugene Shufeldt, 39, a rural Edna resident, was assessed a fine of $105 plus court costs for possessing a freshly-killed deer during closed season. Game Protector Harley McDaniel, Columbus, arrested Shufeldt August 24.

— David E. Anderson, 26, a Lyons resident, was arrested for hunting ducks during closed season and hunting with an unplugged gun. Game Protector Mike Smyth arrested Anderson July 17.

— Jeff A. Brobst, 18, Topeka, paid $100 in fines plus court costs for taking a raccoon out of season. He was arrested by Game Protector Jim Hale July 13.

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AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION

As hunting and shooting enthusiasts, we take care of the equipment we use in pursuit of our sport. We keep our guns cleaned and oiled; rifles are carefully sighted in and shotguns patterned to find that elusive pet load. We try to eliminate any possible problems before they occur. Experienced sportsmen extend this habit of preventive maintenance to their personal health by using ear and eye protection when shooting.

Continued and regular exposure to the din of gunfire may eventually cause hearing damage. A 12-gauge shotgun has a momentary sound pressure level higher than a jet airliner on takeoff. The ringing in your ears

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soon disappears, but a tiny bit of damage has been done. Although the relatively few shots fired while hunting probably cause little harm, constant shooting on a target range can cause a gradual and permanent hearing loss that may go unnoticed until it's too late. Even the little .22 rimfire, used in short barreled carbines and handguns, can damage sensitive aural nerves. The wide variety of protection devices available enables every shooter to find a comfortable and effective means of preventing hearing damage. The familiar "muffs" provide excellent protection, though some shooters find them unwieldy at first. Other gunners prefer one of the several types of earplugs. Even a wad of cotton is better than nothing at all.

Though earplugs are usually impractical for the hunter, shooting glasses should be part of every gunner's equipment. In addition to cutting glare and improving target visibility, shooting glasses provide defense against twigs and branches in heavy cover. Skeet shooters should never be without them as protection against flying pieces of broken targets. Many hunting and target enthusiasts own two sets of glasses: one pair with grey or green lenses for bright days and a second pair with yellow or amber lenses for overcast weather. Some companies offer glasses with interchangeable lenses, and new non-glass optics keep weight unbelievably low. When buying shooting glasses, be sure to get high-quality, shatterproof lenses.

The concept of eye and ear protection for shooters lends renewed meaning to the phrase "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Well-known outdoor writer John Madson summed up the situation very well when he said, "I can't say that I like shooting with glasses and the big plastic ear muffs. But, I care even less for the alternatives."

(Reprinted courtesy National Shooting Sports Foundation)

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BATTLE OF THE POLLS

One sure way to arouse the ire of many ardent gun enthusiasts is to call their attention to the results of various national polls which claim that a majority of the American public favors stricter gun controls.

"They're cockeyed," is apt to be the enthusiast's response. "They rigged the questions because they are anti-gun and, anyway, how the heck can you tell anything from such a small sample?"

Gun enthusiasts are likely to reinforce their arguments against the results of the syndicated polls by pointing to one or more surveys sponsored by pro-gun groups purporting to show a diametrically opposite result.

Who is right in this battle of the polls? The syndicated people who say Americans favor more gun controls or the pro-gun groups who say they don't? The answer, paradoxically, is both.

How can this be? Well, it's all in how the questions are asked. The majority of American citizens do not hunt and shoot and don't really know very much about gun control laws. In fact, despite all that has been written on the subject, many hunters and shooters have only sketchy ideas about existing legislation.

In most of the nationally syndicated surveys, respondents are asked relatively simple questions such as: "Are you in favor of or opposed to 'gun control legislation'?" or, "Do you approve or disapprove of registering firearms?"

To the uninitiated, such questions are like asking if the respondents are in favor of motherhood and against sin. Not really knowing what laws now exist in this area, many people are apt to indicate approval of "gun controls".

"After all," they reason, "there is a lot of crime these days and maybe gun controls might help reduce it." As far as registration goes, the thought process of many respondents is: "We register cars, dogs and boats, so

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why not guns?" Thus, when the syndicated pollster says a majority of the public favors more gun controls, he is probably correct, based on the questions he asked.

'Ok,' you ask,'so how can the polls sponsored by pro-gun groups be right, too?' The answer, again, is in how the questions are asked. The polls sponsored by pro-gun groups are more apt to explore the subject in depth. For example, some years ago, one such survey tracked the results of the national polls on answers to the basic questions of "Would you approve or disapprove of gun controls and/or firearms registration?" However, the survey went on to ask respondents to spell out the sort of controls they thought should be enacted. In most cases, their suggestions involved ideas that were already embodied in state or federal laws. In addition, they had little idea of what was involved in most proposals for firearms registration or gun owner licensing. Further, when the details of various gun control proposals were explained to them, most of the people who initially said they approved of more gun controls, changed their minds.

So next time you hear about a poll purporting to reflect public attitudes on an issue such as gun controls, check the questions. To really indicate how people feel about a subject, the pollsters have to make sure those being questioned understand the issue. In the case of gun controls, it seems evident that when people are made aware of the ramifications of most recent proposals, they tend to be opposed to them.

(Reprinted courtesy Remington Arms Company, Inc.)

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U.S., MEXICO PLAN COOPERATIVE VENTURE

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has announced an agreement with the Republic of Mexico to study and manage wildlife common to both countries.

Representatives from Mexico's wildlife agency, the Direccion General de la Fauna Silvestre (DGFS) met with FWS representatives and national conservation groups in Brownsville, Texas, earlier this year to finalize plans. Cooperative projects were established in four major areas: protection of endangered species, management of migratory waterfowl, wildlife research, and law enforcement. At conclusion of the meeting, FWS Director Lynn A. Greenwalt and Ignacio Ibarrola Bejar, director general of the DGFS, signed a protocol outlining joint efforts to be undertaken by the two countries in the coming year. Annual meetings between the wildlife agencies began in 1975 with creation of the U.S.-Mexico Joint Committee on Wildlife Conservation.

Already, the U.S. and Mexico have expanded aerial surveys of wintering waterfowl in Mexico. The U.S. and Canada have long cooperated in summer surveys of ducks and geese to determine nesting success. The increased winter counts help all three countries get a better picture of waterfowl population trends in North America. Data from Mexico is used each year to evaluate previous migratory waterfowl hunting seasons. The DGFS also has agreed to adopt the bird banding system used by the U.S. and Canada, and to send a biologist to the FWS bird banding laboratory in Maryland for training.

In addition, wildlife transplants will continue between the U.S. and Mexico. One of last year's biggest successes involved the transfer of 26 elk from the Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge in Oklahoma to an area in the State of Cohuila. The elk have increased their numbers to 35, and will be released from a temporary enclosure next year.

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HUNTERS SUBJECT TO FEDERAL REGULATIONS

Although individual state wildlife agencies are responsible for establishing game laws for resident non-migratory species, the taking of migratory game birds is governed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. These

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federal regulations involve more than dates and bag limits, and hunters should be aware of some of the lesser-known rules.

For example, shooting birds over baited areas is illegal, as all sportsmen know. However, by federal law, an area is considered baited for 10 days after the removal of the bait; and it is not necessary for hunters to know an area is baited to be in violation. Similarly, the use of live decoys, recorded bird calls or electronically amplified imitation calls is illegal for luring migratory game birds within shotgun range.

A number of outdoor journalists have advocated dressing small game in the field to facilitate cooling and prevent spoilage. While this idea has its merits, it is unlawful to completely dress migratory birds (with the exception of doves and bandtailed pigeons) before removing them from the field. The head or one fully feathered wing must remain attached during transit from one's home or to a commercial packer. Some states require that a fully feathered wing also be left on doves. Check you state's regulations before going afield. Be sure you're familiar with all the laws, both state and federal.

Often a hunter will give part of his bag to friends or have a bird mounted by a taxidermist. In such cases where birds leave the immediate custody of the hunter, the birds must be tagged with the hunter's signature, address, number and species of birds involved and the date they were killed. If the birds are being shipped, this information, plus the name and address of the recipient, must be included.

Waterfowl hunters over 16 years of age are required to carry a signed, valid Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp, commonly called a "duck stamp". The use of non-toxic (steel) shot is now required in many wetlands areas where waterfowl are hunted. These steel shot regulations vary by state, and the state wildlife agency should be contacted for local requirements.

This information highlights the 1978-1979 federal migratory bird regulations and is by no means a complete source. State laws may be more restrictive, and some states require special permits for hunting certain species. Hunters may also encounter additional restrictions on national wildlife refuges and state management areas open to public hunting. Sportsmen should consult state regulations before going afield for any migratory game bird.

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CEREMONIES SEAL U.S.-U.S.S.R. AGREEMENT ON MIGRATORY BIRDS

Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin of the Soviet Union and Under Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior, James A. Joseph, formally exchanged documents Friday, October 13, in a ceremony sealing ratification by their respective countries of a treaty to conserve migratory birds.

The U.S.-U.S.S.R. Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Birds and Their Environment was ratified by the Senate 95-0 in July and notification was received in September that the Soviet government had officially confirmed. The Migratory Bird Convention is a key element of the 1972 U.S.-U.S.S.R. Environmental Agreement.

When fully implemented, Under Secretary Joseph said, the Convention will close the major remaining gap in international protection afforded migratory birds throughout the North American/North Pacific Flyway. It joins bilateral migratory bird treaties between the U.S. and Canada (1916), Mexico (1936), and Japan (1972).

The agreement provides for coordinated action by the United States and the Soviet Union to protect species that migrate between the two countries or that intermingle in common breeding, staging, or wintering sites along the North American/North Pacific Flyway. More than 200 species are listed for protection in an Appendix to the Convention.

The Convention also provides for cooperation in research, banding programs, exchange of scientific information, and management.

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LETTERS to the EDITOR

EDITOR:

I congratulate the editor of KANSAS FISH & GAME Magazine. It is most interesting in respect to the articles and photography it contains. I thoroughly enjoy it and while stationed in Germany it provides a link with home. (Although I get homesick every time I pick it up.)

Soon, much to the dismay of my pregnant wife, my dog and I will board an airplane to make it home for a two-week quail hunting trip around my home in McPherson. It should be quite obvious that my hunting is an important aspect of my life. The article, "A Place to Hunt", by Chris Madson, was excellent in pointing out the need for a good relationship with the farmers who give us the privilege of hunting on their property. Luckily, I have a few of these and I sincerely appreciate the privilege they have given me. Besides improving this relationship with the farmers, it should be our own responsibility in disciplining those that call themselves "sportsmen" while they disobey game laws and disrespect private property by trespassing and/or destroying it. These "sportsmen" should be reported immediately by us, the hunters who wish to keep our privileges. Nothing irritates me more than one of these "hunters" who will actually brag of exceeding limits, taking illegal game, etc., or causing damage to property.

LARRY KAVOURAS
HAHN AB, GERMANY

EDITOR:

The numbers of non-resident hunters in northern portions of the state of Missouri increased dramatically during recent deer hunting seasons and constitute nearly fifty percent of total hunters in some counties. Unfortunately, these increases occurred in counties having little or no public lands. Therefore, private landowners have felt the brunt of this rise in hunting pressure. Reduced quality in hunting and complaints from landowners have resulted from these hunter concentrations. Corresponding concentrations of non-residents have not occurred in other parts of the state.

In an attempt to more evenly distribute non-resident hunters, quotas have been established for the 1978 deer season in the four deer management units where percentages of non-residents have been highest. The quotas established will result in a resident/non-resident ration within these units comparable to the statewide average.

The intent of the regulation is not to eliminate participation of non-resident deer hunters, but to distribute them throughout the state. Non-residents are welcome in the other nineteen units and will, in fact, find more hunting space in the national and state forests in the southern portion of the state.

This regulation may lead to complaints from some sportsmen within your state and I wanted you to know the basis for its implementation.

LARRY R. GALE
MISSOURI DEPT. OF CONSERVATION

around itself, especially on the plains where it is increasingly rare. The right puddle or stream will attract snipe, doves, and teal early in the fall, flights of mallards as the weather turns sharp, quail and even deer after the freeze.

Unfortunately, value for wildlife doesn't translate into profit for the landowner. Farmers began draining wetlands late in the nineteenth century, and as draglines, tilling techniques, and earthmoving machinery have developed, marshes have been melting away at an increasing rate. Of an original 127 million acres of wetland in the United States, only 82 million acres remain, and in much of the Midwest, the loss has been much more complete. North Dakota has lost 52 percent of its original marshland; Iowa biologists estimate that as much as 98 percent of their wetlands has been converted to agricultural uses. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service made a survey in the mid-Sixties that showed wetlands in the northern Midwest slipping away at the rate of 2 percent a year—and they believe the rate has increased since the survey. Losses in Kansas are harder to assess, but elimination of streams and associated habitat may have been as high as 4 percent a year over the last decade.

The statistics are grim, but they still don't reflect the importance of remaining wetlands to prairie wildlife. The late season hunter probably knows best how these scraps of wet ground are used. He wanders down off the upland with his back humped against the wind and his eyes watering to find that most of the wild critters in the surrounding stubble fields have preceded him. The gray howl of the northwester passes unfelt over the sheltered swale, and the hunter becomes aware of cottontail sign in the snow overlaid by the tracery of a covey of bobwhite, and a straight line of pheasant tracks leading into the brush. It's the kind of face-off that has made the ringneck's reputation, one that a numbed shooter loses as often as he wins. The chance for a rematch next season depends on the continued existence of that cover. Let's hope we have the sense to hold onto it.

The value of wetlands as waterfowl habitat is well known. A marsh provides valuable escape cover and winter shelter for a number of other wildlife species including ringnecks, especially when it is closely associated with upland grain fields.

Ken Stiebben

The "Other" Lakes

The Community Lake Assistance Program—better fishing for city and county lakes.

Mike Theurer and Gene McCauley

Kansas is a state rich in water recreation. Water and its surrounding land area furnish a wide range of recreation benefits that include fishing, hunting, swimming, camping, and picnicking. Spring, summer, and fall outdoor recreation centers around the many water types available to Kansans.

In our state there are federal reservoirs, state lakes, farm ponds, streams—and the "other lakes." The "other lakes" are city, county, township or organizational lakes. There are 110 of them, with a total surface area of more than 10,000 acres. Whether they directly serve a town, a county, or a portion of the state, these lakes provide a lot of fishing.

The Fish and Game Commission's fisheries division has worked periodically through the years on this type of impoundment. Before 1975, these services were extremely limited. In 1975, the commission recognized the importance of this valuable fishing resource and initiated the Community Lake Assistance Program. This program is federally funded through the United States Fish and Wildlife Service under the Dingell-Johnson Act. Under this system, the state invests a total amount of money in the program; the following year it is reimbursed up to 75 percent of the total with Dingell-Johnson monies. The federal financing is obtained through various taxes levied on fishing and hunting equipment and is allocated to participating states in shares proportionate to their expenditures.

In the first phase of the program, a community or organization that controls a lake and desires assistance in either the development, operation, or enhancement of it contacts the area fisheries biologist and makes

Ken Stiebben

these desires known.

The second phase is evaluation of the lake. The fish population is sampled with a variety of gear, including traps, gill nets, seines, and electro-fishing units. A representative sample of the fish population is gathered and analyzed to determine species present, body condition of the fish, growth rates—all indicators of the overall health of the existing fish population. Local fishermen may be interviewed to determine the angler success rate. The local angler is a very good source of information. The chemical composition of the water is checked to find out whether a chemical factor limits fish populations in the impoundment. The physical structure is scrutinized—how does the lake's design affect turbidity, weed problems, fish habitat, and fisherman access? All of this information is used to put together a series of recommendations in the form of a management plan.

The management plan and a "Memorandum of Understanding" are presented to the controlling board or organization, in many cases the city council or the county commissioners. The fisheries biologist and the controlling board meet to assure an understanding of the listed recommendations. If the community chooses to enroll in the program, the "Memorandum of Understanding" is signed. This document obligates the Fish and Game Commission to provide an updated management plan and to furnish technical assistance which will enable the community to manage its own lake. After the community and the fisheries biologist reach an agreement on a fish management program, the community puts it into action.

"Community lakes are often plagued with weeds and unbalanced fish populations."

Many communities are sponsoring or financing the construction of community lakes to serve primarily as domestic water sources and only secondarily as water recreation areas. The technical assistance available from commission biologists can prove most beneficial in this situation.

The designers of many older impoundments gave no thought in their planning to features which would enhance the fishery. Many factors affect the development of a productive fishery: size of the lake; its depth, configuration, and shoreline sloping; the fish habitat (standing timber, constructed fish attractors, old rock piers, and rugged bottom terrain); fisherman access (boat ramps, roads, and trails); lake facilities (parking, camping areas, and fishing piers or docks). The fisheries biologist will formulate recommendations to assure a productive fish population and make the lake as usable and pleasing as possible. The main point to remember in developing a new impoundment is to think and plan for the future. It is often too expensive to add to an existing lake a new feature that could have been included in the initial lake design at a reasonable cost. A boat ramp or fishing pier is much less costly when planned into the initial construction.

Community lakes all over the state have many common problems. Often these bodies of water are shallow and weedy with unbalanced fish populations. The weed or "moss" problem is discouraging to local anglers. The weeds interfere with angling, which results in a loss of fisherman interest and a low success rate. An unbalanced fish population has a similar effect on angling. In many cases, the predator populations (normally largemouth bass) have been over-harvested or have died out due to a lack of suitable conditions or habitat. Crappie, bluegill, bullhead, and carp may literally take over the lake; eventually, these species over-populate and become stunted. This results in the total loss of a desirable fish population, making the lake essentially of no benefit to local anglers.

The weed problem can be handled in several ways, depending upon the kinds of aquatic plants present, their density, and the physical aspects of the lake. Plants such as the cattail can be eliminated through mechanical cutting, burning, or application of chemicals. The greatest nuisance, aquatic vegetation (coontail, chara and pond weeds), may be combated by deepening shore-line, applying chemicals, or introducing grass carp. The over-harvest of largemouth bass mentioned earlier can be corrected by a community-enforced largemouth bass length limit. Recommendations may call for the establishment of a 12- to 15-inch length limit (anglers must release all bass between 12 and 15 inches long) or a 15-inch minimum length limit (all bass less than 15 inches are released). This length limit not only produces better bass fishing but also provides larger bluegills for area anglers.

A prime example of the Community Lake Assistance Program in action is Anthony City Lake, located in the south-central part of the state. An over-harvest of largemouth bass resulted in over-population of the lake with carp and drum. This condition, coupled with extreme turbidity, rendered the lake nearly useless to area anglers. Before the water lost its clarity, the lake was almost entirely overgrown with aquatic vegetation.

Fisheries biologists recommended a fish population rehabilitation to the city of Anthony. The lake was drawn down to a low level, then a fish toxicant was applied to rid the basin of undesirable species. Additional recommendations: improve the shoreline by dredging and construct fish attractors and fishing docks; adopt a water level management plan to reduce turbidity; increase fertility and inhibit the growth of aquatic vegetation; construct a rearing pond to enable the city to rear its own channel catfish for release and harvest; stock fish. Once the population is established, the community will conduct a creel census to monitor angler harvest and detect changes in the fish population that may require management attention.

These recommendations looked good to the city of Anthony—They have partially drained the lake and are preparing it for rehabilitation.

Many community lakes do not require this type of total rehabilitation. The management plan covering Altamont City Lake consists of establishment of a bass length limit, stocking of channel catfish, construction of fish habitat, and a special regulation that prohibits the taking of fish with trotline, bankline, or limbline.

Another example is the city of Atchison, which currently has 23 lakes enrolled in CLAP. For their improvement, commission biologists recommended control of aquatic vegetation (chemically and biologically), establishment of a 12- to 15-inch length limit on largemouth bass, and construction of fish

Gene McCauley

Ken Stiebben

Ken Stiebben

"The length limit produces better bass fishing and provides larger bluegill."

attractors. A community participating in the Community Lake Assistance Program will always receive recommendations which are carefully tailored to its own special problems and needs.

The Community Lake Assistance Program is currently being revised to provide even more services to the communities of our state. There are federal and private sources of funding for many of the management costs cities may encounter. The fisheries division is working on a list of these sources and their requirements. Commission biologists are developing a cage-rearing project which will allow a community to raise its own channel catfish in the lake. In many instances, this will eliminate the need for separate rearing ponds.

The Community Lake Assistance Program is a public service aimed at providing better outdoor recreation for Kansas cities and towns. CLAP operates on a simple premise: communities managing their own lakes with Fish and Game Commission assistance.

So, Kansas communities, if you have a lake or are planning to build one, contact us. The result may well be better fishing closer to home.

"There are federal and private funding sources for many management costs."

A history of decoys . . .

Woodshavings and Waterfowl

Chris Madson
Illustrated by Dycie Madson

It's tough to beat a pro at his own game. After a lifetime of experience, he recognizes every approach and knows how to deal with them all. Any amateur who insists on tangling with him is going to have to get used to being shut out. The outcome is no reflection on the amateur's ability—he can't spend all his time practicing—but his choice of opponents doesn't say much for his common sense.

There's not a better description of a duck hunter than an amateur without much common sense who gets shut out a lot, and the pro who does the shutting out is generally a well-rested, well-fed mallard. After all, the mallard has been playing the game all his life, and he was reared by a veteran hen who didn't get back to Canada to breed by being stupid. That hen's lineage goes back to a greenhead who had the good sense to jump early and leave some pre-Columbian Cree waterfowler empty-handed in the cattails. Any duck hunter will know how he must have felt after a long stalk, up to his breechclout in marsh water, watching that mallard fade into the distance. Like most duck hunters, he didn't have the sense to take the experience to heart and give up. He just changed his tactics. He gave up sneaking on ducks and invented a new approach—the decoy.

He made his imitation ducks out of hummocks of clay, stacked rocks, piles of snow, or the skin of the birds themselves. One prehistoric decoy, discovered in Nevada a few years ago, was made out of reeds. It's more than 2000 years old and an excellent likeness of a canvasback. Most Indian blocks weren't nearly as lifelike, but as crude as they often were, they served to educate a heap of ducks over the centuries.

There's no solid evidence that white settlers in America used decoys until the early 1800s. With the numbers of ducks that moved across the continent in those days, there wasn't much need for a decoy spread; the ducks streamed into every marshy corner without any encouragement. And in spite of the abundance of ducks, waterfowling wasn't too popular among early American hunters. To begin with, it made better sense to spend the powder and lead on big game than on ducks. Pioneer shooters were also handicapped by their equipment. The flintlock fowling piece was a wingshooter's nightmare. Its unchoked barrel spread the pattern over half the marsh, reducing its effective range on ducks to twenty yards or so, and the delay between trigger pull and the shot itself made hitting a bird on the fly next to impossible. In addition, the gun's priming was exposed to the elements. It's hard to imagine how a duck hunter using a flintlock could keep his powder dry under normal waterfowling conditions.

Starting with the invention of the waterproof percussion cap, a series of developments through the middle of the 19th century completely revolutionized waterfowling. Shotguns improved steadily, and after 1868 when Fred Kimble invented the choked barrel to tighten patterns, the duck hunter had a killing tool well fitted to his purpose. At the same time, population in the East reached a size that generated heavy demand for wild meat, and the new rail system began to provide quick transportation between gunners and potential markets. With the profit incentive spurring them, duck hunters started looking for ways to improve their efficiency, and they found that one of the best was a good set of decoys.

In the early days of market hunting, the average North American duck was still pretty naive about the deceptions used by waterfowlers. In those days, the black duck, now considered to be one of the wariest of the waterfowl, would sometimes decoy into the floats of fishing nets. The first gunners on the coast of the Bering Sea in Alaska found flocks of sea ducks that were more curious than wild. As the flights of the ducks flew along the beach, the hunters waved their arms and yelled until the ducks swung back to see what the commotion was about. If anyone in the hunting party could point a shotgun, it rained ducks. There are records of flocks of snow geese settling in around shooters' pits in South Dakota stubble fields, not even flinching while gunners killed all they could carry. At the right times during the spring migration, hunters could stand unconcealed at strategic points in the marsh and kill hundreds of ducks as they poured out of the sky.

With trusting waterfowl like these swarming over every wetland, early waterfowlers felt no need to get fancy with their decoys. Most blocks were solid-bodied models roughed out of large blocks of cedar or pine with hatchets. They were little more than floating logs with crude heads attached. Some hunters favored rough silhouettes fastened on each end of a floating crosspiece. The idea was to get a lot of them on the water; it didn't make much difference what they looked like. These simple decoys were tremendously effective along the Atlantic tidewater and down the Mississippi Flyway where market hunting spread as soon as local demand made it profitable, but over the course of twenty years of waterfowling, some of the old timers began to notice a change. One old gaffer, looking back over his gunning days in Iowa in the 1880s, said it simply enough: "Every year, the ducks were just a little harder to get."

It's not surprising. With a pair of canvasbacks selling for $3.00 and a brace of mallards going for $1.50, there was a hunter running a school for wayward waterfowl on every marsh in the country. The slow learners were frozen and shipped to New York or Chicago. There are records of single rail shipments of 500,000 ducks arriving in the Windy City. Over 120,000 ducks were sold out of one prime Arkansas lake in 1894 alone. It's hard to tell whether the survivors of this kind of gunning pressure were smarter than their dead brethren or just lucky enough to escape their mistakes and grow wary, but one thing is certain—the ducks that were left weren't buying the floating log routine.

The decoy maker's responses to the wilder ducks were ingenious. In Illinois, one or two wildfowlers figured that no imitation could measure up to the genuine article. They refined an old Indian technique, the use of real duck skins, and designed light, well-shaped frames for mallard hides. The decoys didn't last long, but the spread sure looked good on the water. One hunter went a step further and embalmed real birds for use in his stool.

The carvers branched out from the traditional canvasback, mallard, and black duck patterns and carved redheads, bluebills, mergansers, goldeneye, scaup, mudhens and wood ducks as well. They experimented with new poses. One eastern hunter wrote that as many as half the decoys in a good spread should be tip-ups. Sleepers, preeners, feeders, even flyers and swimmers were carved and used in an attempt to fool savvy waterfowl. Following this "naturalness" line of reasoning to its logical conclusion, a few hunters began using confidence decoys—replicas of species other than the ones the shooters were after. Gulls, herons, terns, cranes, crows, egrets, bitterns, loons, swans, and geese decoys were all used to lull the suspicions of the approaching quarry.

More than anything else, though, the decoy carver just got better at imitating ducks in wood. His lifelong study of the anatomy and behavior of ducks, spring and fall, was reflected in his decoys. The bodies of these blocks were often simple and the paint schemes stylized, but the heads were perfect portraits with accurate shapes and authentic poses. In many parts of the Midwest, duck hunters spent most summer evenings on the front porch carefully working out the details on the heads of the next fall's decoys, arguing among themselves, as craftsmen will, about the best ways to build and use waterfowl blocks.

Over the course of time and increasing experience, a couple of major differences in opinion developed among carvers. Many, especially those who hunted big water, favored the solid-bodied decoy since its weight helped it cut through waves like a real duck instead of bobbing like a cork. Waterfowlers who worked smaller, quieter water were inclined to favor hollow-bodied blocks, especially when they had to be carried out into the marsh. The hollow-bodies were generally made out of two or three laminations of pine. The three-lamination decoys were quicker to make; they were hollowed out by cutting the center out of the middle board before the decoy was glued together. One of the glue joints in this decoy style usually ran below waterline, a disadvantage since a leak usually developed along the seam. Once water got inside, the decoy rotted out in a year or two. The two-lamination decoys were hollowed out with a gouge and lasted longer because the single joint rode clear of the water.

Another long-standing argument among carvers concerned the shape of the decoy bottom. The oldest styles were round-bottomed, probably because they righted themselves better in roughwater, but many crack duck hunters, especially those who hunted smaller water, felt that a round-bottomed decoy rolled from side to side more than any self-respecting duck ever would. These hunters built their own flat-bottomed models, usually in dabbler patterns. These decoys not only rode the water more like a duck; they floated without going aground in shoal water and shallow marshes where puddle ducks were most likely to be found.

Rigging the decoys was an art in itself. In deep water where long individual anchor lines were likely to get tangled, the old market hunters often tied half a dozen decoys together and anchored them with a common line. Another solution to the same problem was the construction of a simple frame—two boards nailed together at right angles with decoys fastened on the ends of the boards. A few waterfowlers fastened strings of decoys together and used a line to make them swim toward the blind when ducks were coming in. Then there was the enterprising duck hunter who got tired of untangling his anchor lines and—bless his heart!—invented the ring anchor that could be slipped over the decoy's head after the line had been wrapped around its body. It was an arrangement that took a lot of the cussing out of setting decoys for the morning flight.

The old timers designed and cast their anchors carefully so they held without bringing up mud and weeds when they were pulled. Pyramids and cones were favored shapes. One veteran hunter vowed that the mushroom anchor had been invested by a decoy company, not by a practicing waterfowler. The mushroom holds fine, he said, especially in shoal water, but it always comes up dirty.

All the old timers agreed that it was critical to match the color of all rigging to the color of the water and bottom. The hunter isn't often in a position to see white anchor lines, but a flock of approaching ducks can pick them out a quarter of a mile away. Most often, they don't like what they see.

By the time the Migratory Bird Treaty and a corps of dedicated federal agents put an end to waterfowling for profit, the market gunner had invented all the major hunting techniques in use today along with a score of others too effective to be legal. He was a tough, resourceful man, drawn to the marsh more by a love of duck hunting than by the money. He developed the construction and use of decoys into a fine art and left the modern waterfowler with an example of the best and worst traditions in hunting—a deep knowledge of his quarry and a hard-bitten tenacity in the field on one hand, and on the other, a total disregard for the damage done to the resource by decades of merciless gunning.

With the advent of mass-produced decoys and the passing of market hunting, the ranks of the decoy carver thinned out. The few die-hards who have stayed at it since aren't interested as a rule in hand-making a spread of four hundred blocks. Three or four dozen decoys satisfy them, and because they're not interested in numbers, they can afford to take more time with each decoy. The results of their careful work are astonishing. Many contemporary carvers copy feather detail that was neglected in the decoys of the old market-hunting masters.

The old-timers were interested in getting the decoys on the water; they couldn't be bothered with wing tips and carefully carved tails that broke off before a season had passed. To modern carver-hunters, the detail is worth a little extra care. They handle their blocks patiently and often store and carry them in specially designed canvas cases which have a pocket for each decoy. They cast keels and anchors out of lead with rounded edges to avoid marring paint.

They're justifiably sensitive about the paint. Some carvers spend at least as much time on a paint job as they do on the carving itself. They generally hold the decoy by the head and work from the tail forward so that the painted feathers have the proper overlap. The most sophisticated craftsmen try to imitate the texture of the feathers by roughening the surface before painting, going over the wood with a fine-pointed wood burner, or grooving the paint with home-made

tools that look a lot like ladies' hair combs. In a last-ditch effort to make their blocks look realistic for competitions, a few decoy artists have tried to reproduce the fine vermiculation patterns that run through the light colored wing and breast feathers of some drakes, and one or two innovators have even experimented with metal flake paint to achieve the iridescence of some waterfowl plumage.

Whether these fine handmade blocks work better than the assembly line models is a matter of opinion. There are hunters who feel that precisely carved and painted decoys are a waste of effort. According to these gunners, most ducks are well within range before they can pick out fine detail. A majority of experienced hunters, however, put their confidence in spreads of life-like decoys with a variety of patterns and poses.

The effect of such a spread on ducks is a matter of opinion, but the effect on a passing hunter can be undeniably devastating. Jack Musgrove, one of the Midwest's premier decoy carvers, still laughs about a hunter he decoyed in on an Iowa marsh in the '50s. He had set up on the back side of a public hunting area on a weekday, setting two dozen of his decoys on a patch of open water surrounded by cattails. He had killed a couple of mallards out of the morning flight, but the weather had turned sunny and fairly warm and the ducks had stopped flying. Along about eleven o'clock, he saw a movement on the other side of the opening about seventy-five yards from the edge of his spread. He saw a head appear briefly over the top of the cover, pause, then duck quickly down. The new arrival spent the next fifteen minutes working his way through the cattails, checking the decoys every fifteen or twenty yards to make sure they hadn't gotten up. Finally, he made it to a point of cover about thirty yards from the nearest blocks. Jack was still trying to figure what the big stalk was all about, when the shooter poked the muzzle of a 12 gauge pump out of the weeds, drew down on the nearest drake, and proceeded to sluice it with chilled 4's. Jack jumped out of his blind—"And what in the hell do you think YOU'RE DOING?" The hunter looked up wide-eyed, then squinted back at the flock of mallards, still motionless on the pond. According to Jack, "He turned awful red then and slinked off into the cattails. I had to repaint two of those decoys, but you know, I couldn't stay too mad at the guy after he'd paid me the compliment on my spread."

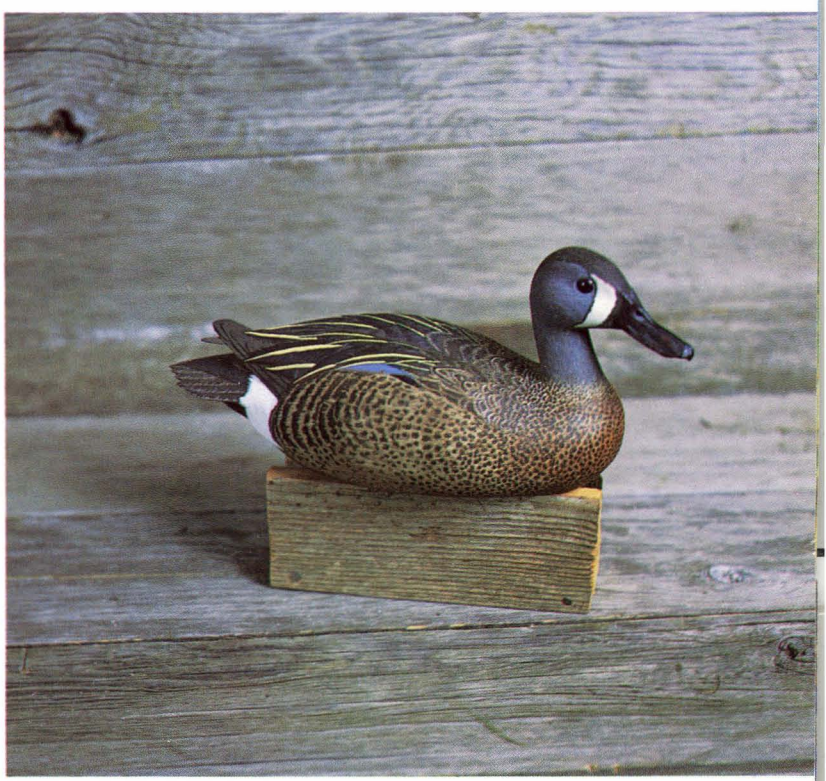
It's been said many times that most hunters, especially duck hunters, enjoy getting ready to hunt as much as the hunt itself. I imagine that's part of the reason there are still decoy carvers, but I wonder if there isn't something more to decoy carving than just trying to stretch the season. There are caves in Europe where members of a much younger human race made images of their quarry—paintings and clay sculptures that caught the grace and power of the now extinct bison, mammoth, and wild ox. Archeologists say this cave art was an attempt on the part of superstitious hunters to cast a spell over the animals they pursued. I wonder. Maybe it would be more accurate to say they were a man's attempt to understand the critters he hunted in much the same way as modern biology students learn plants and animals by drawing them. Certainly the cave paintings reflect the prehistoric artist's deep knowledge of his subject along with a hunter's deep respect for his prey.

Today, a thousand centuries later, the waterfowler picks up a block of sugar pine and tests his own knowledge of his quarry by carving a decoy. For someone whose idea of a duck is the tame Muscovy that pecks at bread in the park, the waterfowler's preoccupation with his prey may seem strange. To the man who has watched wild ducks spiral into the marsh like leaves on a whirlwind, it's a perfectly natural part of his sport. To him, waterfowl are a remnant of an ancient tradition that has refused to die. The carved decoy is one expression of his deep respect and affection for the bird he stalks. In a thousand centuries, how little we've changed.

The Decoy— —

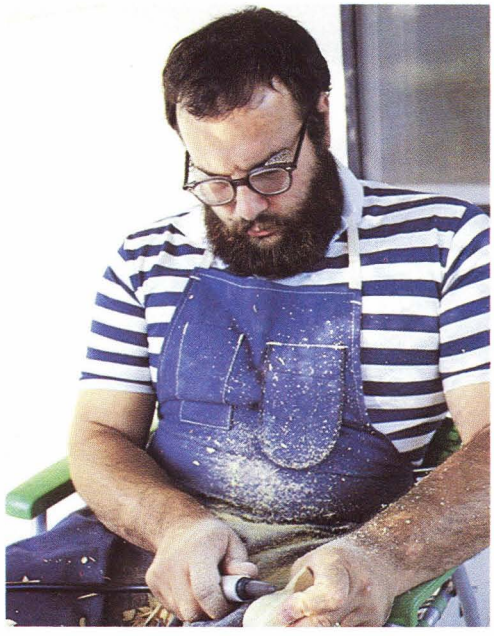
From Marsh to Mantlepiece

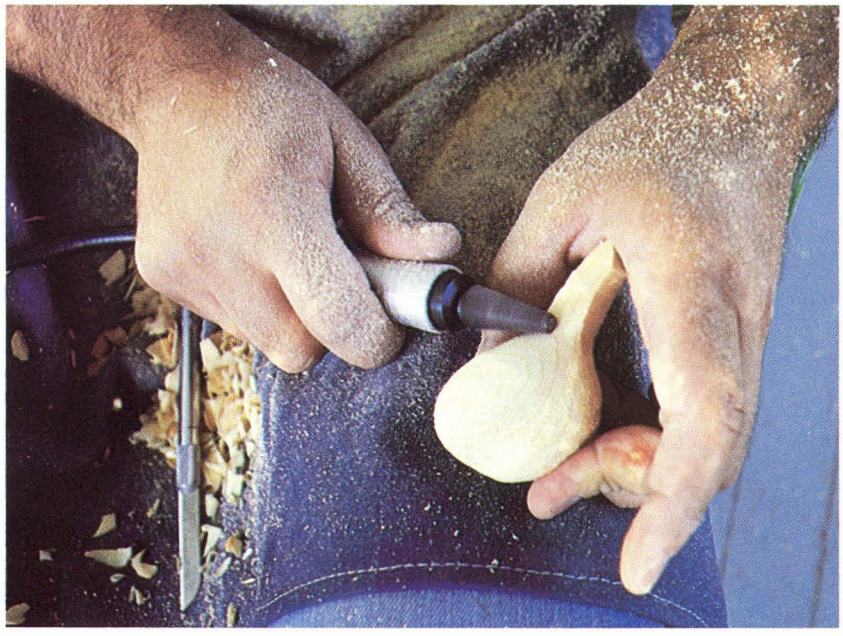
Photography by Ken Stiebben
Decoys by Don Gablehouse



There was a time when most duck hunters were weatherbeaten marsh rats who spent six months out of the year in modest sculling boats stalking waterfowl. They operated out of unpainted wind-blown houses whose backyards dropped off into cattails and marsh muck. They were in the business for food, profit, or both; they had no money for frills and improvised most of their essential equipment.

With the advent of hard-nosed federal wardens and game laws with teeth, most of these subsistence duck hunters passed from the wetlands to be slowly replaced by a new breed—well-heeled, able to afford duck leases, new waders, and custom-made shotguns. These upper crust waterfowlers developed an appreciation for fine craft in their outfits whether or not it





Ken Stiebben

improved their duck killing efficiency. The resource no longer supports the shooting that it once did, and duck hunters are forced to pass a long off-season either distracting themselves with other hobbies or dwelling on the esthetics of their sport. This long year of vicarious duck hunting combined with a little cash has forced decoy carving to grow from a craft into an art.

There are a couple of major divisions among fine decoy carvers today. Some call their art wood sculpture. Generally, these pieces are more delicate and detailed than even the best working decoys. Many wood sculptors began as decoy carvers, worked their way into non-functional waterfowl sculptures, and finally branched out into other wildlife species and abandoned ducks and geese. Many others specialize in producing decorative decoys that are a little less elaborate but are still intended for mantelpieces, not marshes.

Don Gablehouse, pond management biologist for the Fish and Game Commission, carved his first decorative decoy about eight years ago as a Christmas gift for a friend. The result was crude enough by his present standard, but it encouraged him to try again. Within a couple of years, he had a few pieces of work that were good enough to be shown in decoy shows around the Midwest. Like most carvers, however, Don doesn't carve for ribbons. Whether he is entered or not, he comes back from the competitions he attends with a new yardstick for his own work. He retires to his basement with chisels and a piece of clear pine and gets to the heart of the decoy maker's craft—finding the wild bird that's hidden in every block of wood.

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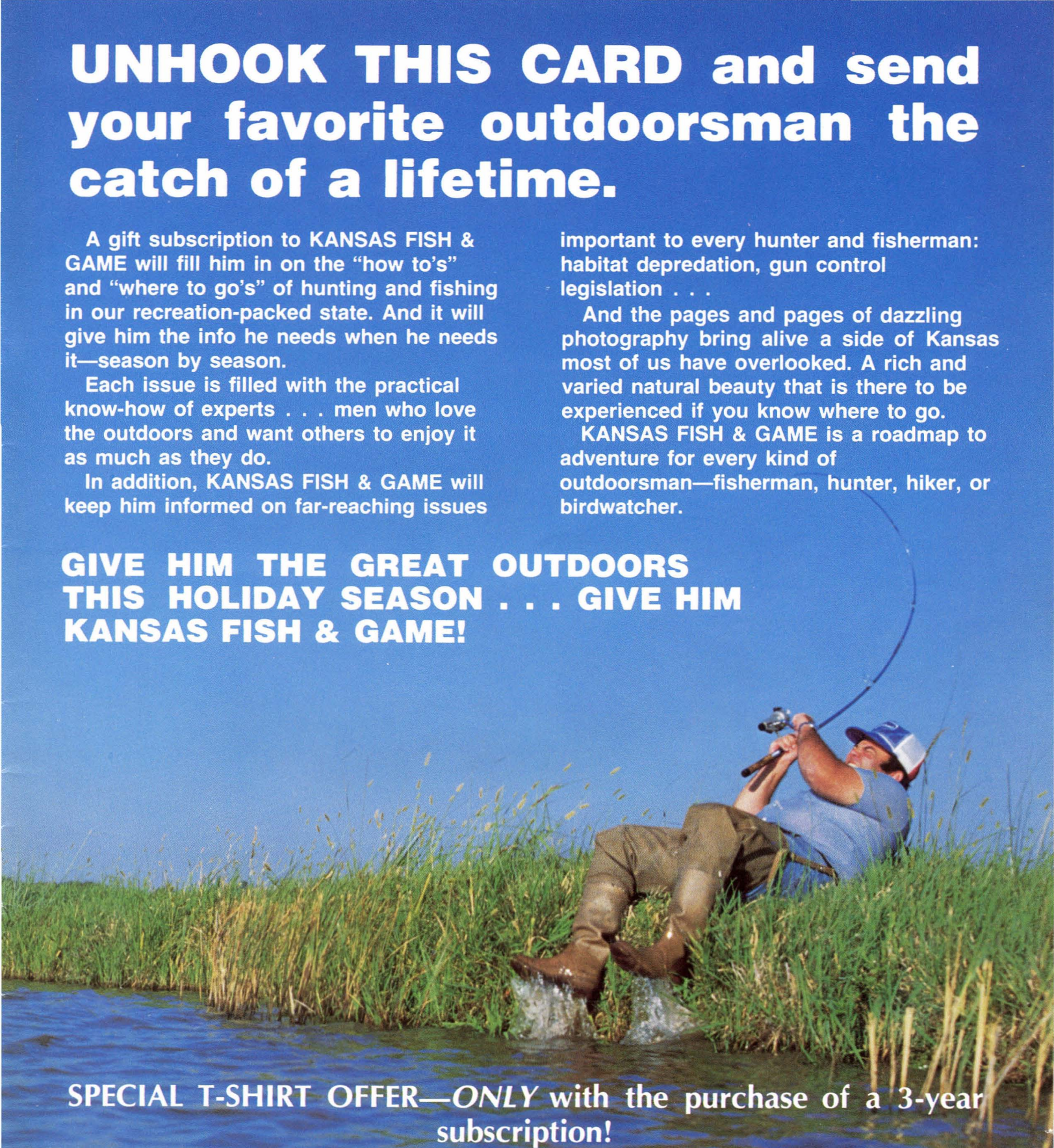

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