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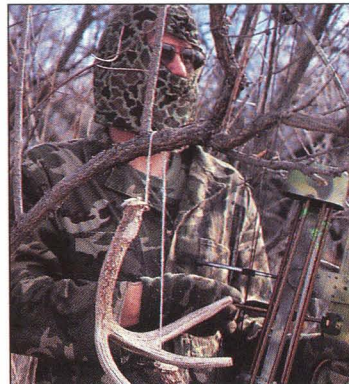
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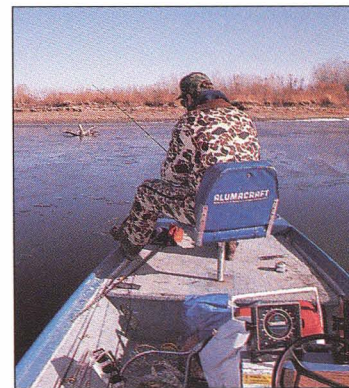
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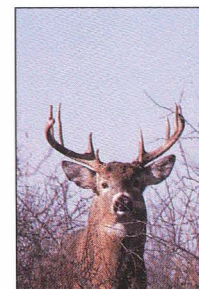
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**About the Cover:** A rutting buck aggressively responded to the rattling horns last November. Mike Blair put down the horns and picked up a camera for the shot—400mm lens, f/11, @1/125 sec. **Back Cover:** Another winter crappie is headed for the livewell. Mike Blair took the shot with a 15mm lens, f/11, @1/125 sec.

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

**Equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from programs described herein is available to all individuals without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, age or handicap. Complaints of discrimination should be sent to Office of the Secretary, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, 900 Jackson St., Suite 502, Topeka, KS 66612.**



## Sad Fall, Good Memories

This fall will be the first in many that I won't be hunting with a wiry, enthusiastic little Brittany. Cancer took my favorite bird dog and loyal companion last summer, and it will be sad to start the bird seasons without him. But this isn't an attempt to immortalize my dog in print or pull tears from sympathetic readers. It's just a record of some good times and the virtues of owning a bird dog.

I called him Stache, short for Mustache Sam; he had orange marks along his upper lip on each side of his nose that looked much like a mustache. I hate cliché dog names, and Mustache was one I'd never heard. Sam was tacked on in memory of my boyhood dog. Stache was pick-of-the-litter, the most outgoing of the eight round-bellied, orange and white, needle-teethed puppies. He was fearless and what you might describe as strung pretty tight.

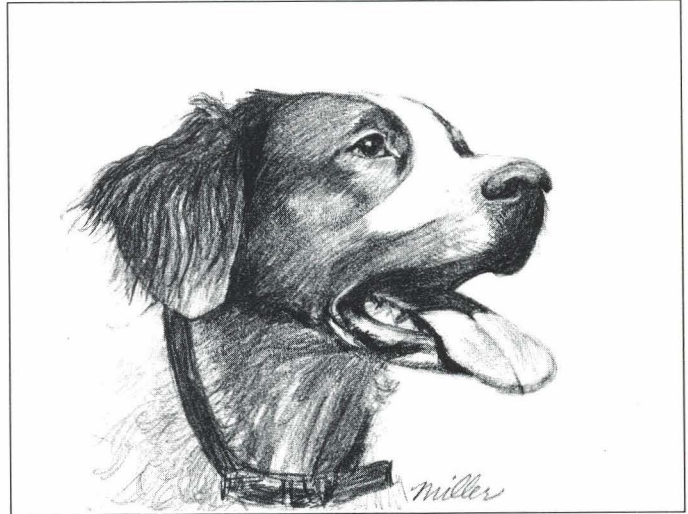
His high-energy attitude was both a problem and a blessing. He was sometimes full-speed and out of control down a row of milo stubble, but he quickly forgot any short-tempered scolding and was ready to get back to business immediately. In the field, all of his energy was easily translated into one desire: That dog truly loved to hunt.

Stache was never a kenneled bird dog that came out only in the fall. He was a constant member of the family, and it hurt to bury him last summer. It really hurt. Still, I won't hesitate to get another puppy. I've heard about men who couldn't bear to get another bird dog, mourning a previous loss. But I'll get another one on the chance it will provide half the enjoyment I received from Stache.

Two hunts stand out from the nine seasons Stache hunted with me. Both of them were "solo" hunts, just me and the dog. Those were the most relaxing because I didn't worry that he'd bust a covey or flush a rooster wild or get too far out for someone else's enjoyment. My most memorable hunt was the very first. I think I was like a nervous father before the first little league game. We'd practiced in the back yard, but I wasn't sure how this 9-month old puppy would react on the opening day of dove season. I was ecstatic after I dropped the first bird. Stache, fidgeting nervously by my side, saw the bird hit the ground. He ran to it, picked it up without hesitation and trotted back, placing the bird in my hand.

I remember bragging to Dad, "I never even got off my stool for the first eight birds I shot." I really was like a proud father that evening. I was relieved and thrilled. The bright-eyed puppy I'd grown so fond of would make a fine hunting dog.

The other trip came during one of Stache's last seasons. We were chasing a pasture covey that had outsmarted us



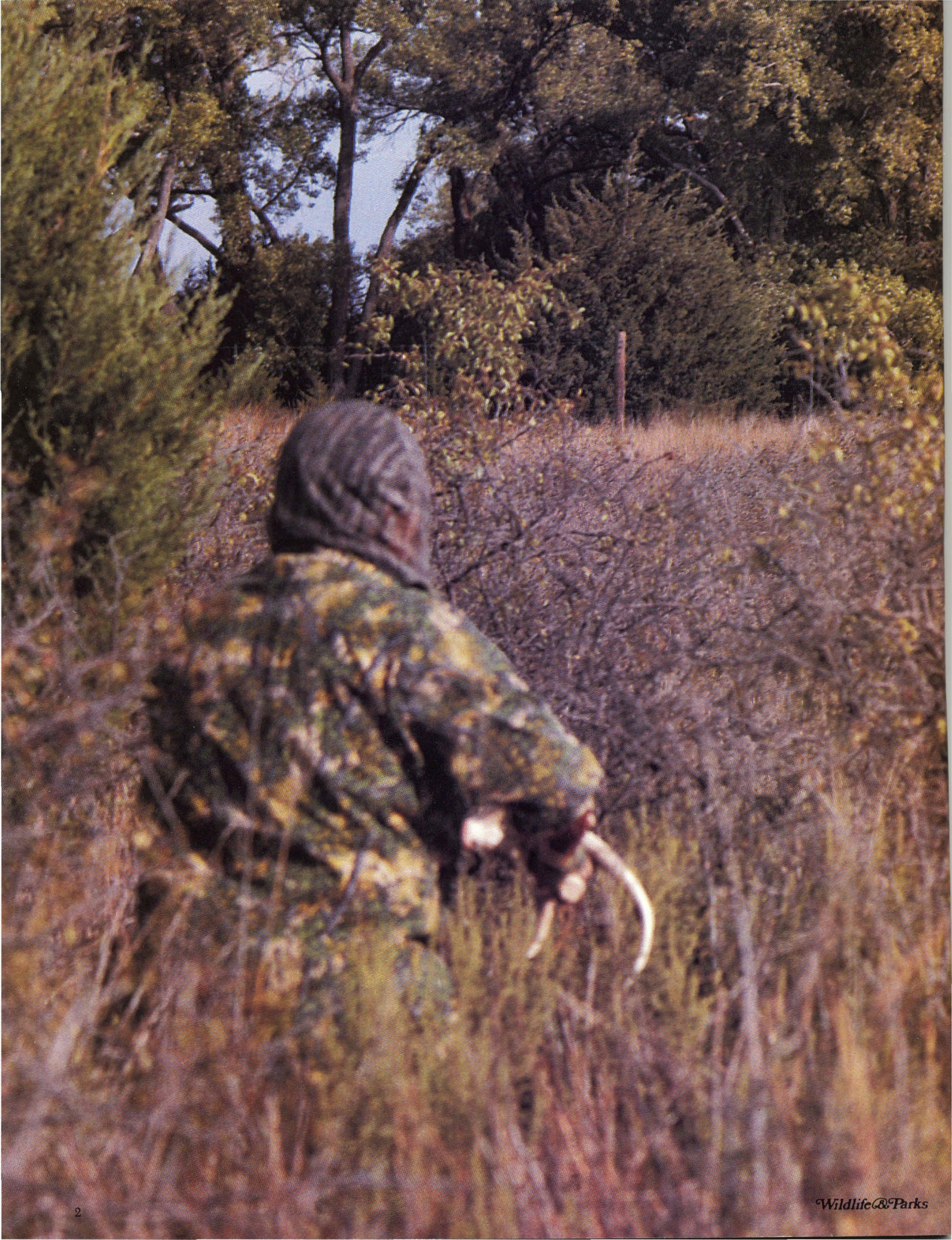
several times that winter. It was the end of January, but the covey was still a strong 20-plus birds. Stache found them, and I knocked down one bird on the rise, then watched to mark the covey down.

Determined to find the birds, I walked a straight line to the mark, several ridges and nearly a half-mile away. As usual, however, the birds had eluded me, and after coaxing Stache to work the hillside several times, I stood and wondered how the covey had disappeared. Stache would have none of this standing around, though, and continued to hunt across the canyon. I patiently watched as he eventually disappeared over the opposite ridge.

When my patience wore off, I yelled, then blew the whistle. No dog. I disgustedly trudged across the canyon and climbed the steep far side. He'd been gone a long time, and I was getting farther from the pick-up with each step. Imagine my shame when I crested the ridge and saw Stache in a rock-solid point. He'd found the birds and dutifully held them while I'd worried about walking an extra half-mile. I managed to knock down another bird, and we headed back toward the truck. It wouldn't be dark for another hour, but after the last point, two birds seemed like enough. I don't really know how long Stache held that point, but I was as proud then as I was on the first dove hunt.

I'll get another puppy, not to replace Stache, but to simply go on. Perhaps Stache's quick recoveries from my scoldings in the field taught me a little. The quicker we get back to business, the fewer opportunities we'll miss.

*Mike Miller*





# Hornswoggle A Buck

text and photos by Mike Blair  
*staff photographer*

*Most hunters try to be as quiet as possible while in the woods, however, the author believes that more noise is better when rattling horns to call deer.*

The wild, crashing run of the buck abruptly ended just 15 yards away. A thick tree trunk hid me from his searching eyes, but that was my only ace. A steady breeze blew my scent toward the buck. My bow lay on the ground at my feet. Even if it were in my hands, the brush was too thick to allow a shot. I gritted my teeth and waited for the deer to bolt.

But the escape never came. Incredibly, the buck stood its ground as I cautiously picked up the bow. Twice I risked a look and both times found the buck staring intently my direction. Several minutes passed before the deer circled my position. Suddenly we stood face to face at seven yards . . .

There was good reason for this strange behavior. Only moments before, I had rattled a pair of antlers in hopes of "calling" a buck. The dramatic appearance of the eight-pointer was so sudden there was no time to lay aside the antlers and reach for the bow. His response, along with similar reactions by four other bucks during the past week, left no doubt that simulating a deer fight is an effective Kansas hunting technique.

Horn rattling involves more than simply banging antlers together. It includes every conceivable action to convince a wary buck that a full-scale deer fight is in progress. It's hard to get used to the idea of deliberately making noise, but that's what this process is all about. The louder it is, the better.

I once watched from my treestand and learned the sounds of fighting deer, as two bucks fought close by. A large buck on his way to a scrape was interrupted by a smaller challenger. When the lesser failed to yield to the big buck's aggressive posturing, the bucks advanced toward each other with hackles raised and necks bowed. The deer circled until only a few feet apart, then charged.

The sound of their impact in the cold, still air was unforgettable. A ringing CLACK merged into the rapid clatter of meshing tines. The larger buck soon gained the advantage and shoved the smaller deer to the ground, scooting it across the frozen meadow. In the struggle, the smaller buck regained its feet, disengaged and high-tailed it for safety.



The author prefers to rattle from a ground blind, believing that sounds of brush moving and limbs breaking are critical to the rattling sequence.

These sounds—pounding hooves straining for control on hard earth, exerted grunting and rattling antlers—created a ruckus that commanded the attention of every living thing within earshot. These are the same sounds a horn rattler must produce.

This fight lasted only a minute. But when two bucks of equal strength

square off, a fight becomes a test of endurance. The initial antler clashing soon gives way to a shoving match. As the contestants trade lunges, they eventually tire and stand panting with antlers intertwined. As soon as one regains strength, the battle continues. This shove-and-rest process may be repeated several times before the loser retreats. Thus, the strongest

bucks are dominant in the breeding cycle.

Any quest for whitetails must take into account wind direction, and this is especially true when rattling. Some bucks charge recklessly to the horns (those that do often have broken antlers, suggesting that they love to fight!) But many more sneak to the fight, circling downwind to scent-check and identify the contestants. Because of this, you should always set up downwind of a buck's expected location. This robs a fooled deer of its primary sense, usually forcing it to approach at close range to observe the "fight." Even if a deer circles, it will probably offer upwind opportunities for a shot before entering the caller's scent stream.

As with all game calling, successful rattling also depends on getting within earshot without spooking your quarry. Commonly, dry leaves in autumn timber make it difficult to sneak to calling sites unnoticed. At such times, dry creeks may afford

quiet routes into deer cover. An excellent rattling situation is a brushy woodlot surrounded by open pastures. The grass affords a quiet approach within earshot of bedded bucks.

Entering at the downwind corner of the woodlot, look for a nearby hiding place that affords concealment, a clear shot, and dead limbs or vegetation to use in the fight sequence. Select brushpiles or trees with grapevines that offer opportunities for lots of noise.

Now, in your mind, construct a fight. Imagine a chased doe entering the woodlot from the pasture. The doe suddenly shatters the stillness by racing through the dry leaves for 30 or 40 yards before pausing to watch for the trailing buck. Soon the buck bursts into the trees as well, also stopping to look. The doe runs in a circle through the trees, and the buck pursues. Suddenly another buck grunts, walking deliberately into the arena of activity. The trailing

buck accepts the challenge, and the fight is on.

With this scenario in mind, I avoid spooking deer with the rhythmic crunch, crunch, crunch of a walking hunter. At the woodland edge, I stomp and mill around. I walk into the dry leaves a few steps, then run to my chosen stand site. If needed, I quickly erect a camouflage drape for a blind (I carry several leaf-flage tarps and clothespins in a shoulder bag for this purpose), pausing to blow a grunt or two on a deer grunt tube. Then, before settling into the blind, I run or walk a short circle in the leaves, concentrating on making the right kind of noise.

I get into the stand, ready my bow and blow a series of deer snorts. Pausing to scuffle the leaves and snap a dry limb, I grunt on the tube. Now it's time to begin the rattling sequence.

I smash the main beams of the antlers together to produce a loud crack, and twist and shake the tines to-



When rattling from a ground blind, thump the antlers on the ground to simulate the sound of struggling hooves. A few snorts and grunts can also add realism to the call and may be needed to fool a big buck.



Rattling downwind of the buck's suspected lair is an obvious requirement, but set up in area that provides a clear shot. As the buck in this photo demonstrates, heavy brush may not detour a buck's route to the call.

gether for 15-30 seconds to produce a series of clattering noises. Then I grind the burs of the antler bases together, while stomping the ground and kicking against dry limbs. I often break wrist-thick limbs during the first sequence, or violently jerk on a grapevine to produce a tremendous commotion in overhead branches. This simulates a frantic shoving match between two large animals paying no attention to where they are going. The first sequence should last for about a minute.

If all this seems overdone, it's because I'm convinced that the secondary noise is actually more important than the antler rattling. Rattling alone doesn't carry far, and besides, it's unnatural. The extra commotion adds realism and alerts deer at much greater distances.

As a wildlife photographer, I've often watched bucks that became alerted to sounds I couldn't hear. The deer would listen intently, sometimes standing stock-still for minutes while facing some unknown interest. Then the buck might suddenly break into a run toward the noise source. I believe these deer were responding to the sounds of other rutting deer.

Every sound in a simulated deer fight should convince a buck that nearby deer are active. Breaking limbs, swishing foliage or a loud commotion in dry leaves should capture a buck's attention. Then the snorts, grunts and rattled antlers identify the source and, hopefully, fool the deer.

During the first rattling sequence and for ten minutes following, carefully watch the surrounding area for an approaching buck. If none shows, the "fight" can be renewed. However, it's now possible that an unseen deer is close by, listening to pinpoint the sound.

The second sequence should be shorter and quieter. Tickling the tines together for a few seconds may be all that's needed to draw the deer into the open. John Wooters, one of America's foremost horn rattlers, reports that a buck will most often appear during or just after the second sequence.

If a third rattling sequence is necessary, it should follow the same pattern as the first. If a buck hasn't responded within 30 minutes, move a quarter mile and try again.



There are differing theories to explain why bucks are drawn to a fight. One is that they are attracted by the possibility of stealing a receptive doe which might have triggered the skirmish. Another maintains that a buck responds to defend its territory from intruders. Whatever, the best horn-rattling locations are near fresh rubs and scrapes. Rutting bucks will be concentrated in these areas and are likely to investigate every deer fight they hear.

Opinions vary about what kind of antlers are best for rattling. Some insist that antlers be fresh to create the right timbre. Some say to soak old antlers before using them. I don't worry about it, using the same pair I cut from a dead buck 12 years ago with good success each season. The only modifications were to blunt and file the sharp tines, remove the brow tines (this helps to avoid hand injuries) and tie the antlers together with a length of cord.

Size of antlers may be important though. Antlers from yearling bucks don't produce the heavy-horned ring that may help entice large deer to a fight. By the same token, the deeper tone of larger antlers may discourage small bucks. The antlers I use are medium-sized and have rattled in everything from spike bucks to those with Boone and Crockett-sized headgear.

Timing is critically important to rattling success. Bucks may fight throughout the rut, and sparring matches are common even in late September after the velvet is shed. But these early shoving matches are engaged in more to help deer learn the size and shape of their antlers, than to establish rank.

Big deer are sometimes rattled effectively in October, but my experience is that early rattling either doesn't work, or actually spooks deer. If you plan to rattle during this period, it's wise to rattle gently. Dispense with the heavy activity and simply tickle the horns together to attract less aggressive deer.

Deer get serious about fighting in November. October's estrus cycle (the third week of October) has set the tone, and mature bucks begin to seriously prepare for the main rut that occurs during the third week of November. Rubs and scrapes are in



Aggressive bucks may come readily to horn rattling. The broken tines on this buck's rack attest to numerous fights.

place by the eighth of the month, though rattling is still marginal. Rattling is most effective between November 12 and 25.

I always carry rattling horns into treestands, and have lured many bucks into range this way. Though it's difficult to add other important sounds already mentioned, scraping the tine tips across bark while rattling in trees seems to help. Be careful about rattling above searching bucks, since the sound may cause them to look up and spot you.




A buck may charge in to the sound of rattling, or it may sneak in downwind. Either way, the potential for a close encounter with your quarry is good, making horn rattling one of the most exciting ways to deer hunt.

At its best, horn rattling is a ground sport. During the peak time, especially during midday hours, I forsake stand hunting in favor of run-and-gun horn rattling. It's even more exciting and successful when team hunting. One rattles, while the shooting partner waits a short distance toward the expected zone of approach. A buck searching for the source of the rattling will not likely notice the waiting shooter.

Rattling works, and it also sometimes provides second and third opportunities for a shot. Many times with a bow and camera, I've rattled deer back into close range after they were spooked away by an errant bow-shot or camera motordrive noise.

Be conscious of safety when using this technique. Wear gloves to prevent hand injuries, and more importantly, watch for other hunters that may be fooled by your mock deer fight. Rattling on heavily hunted public areas is not recommended, due to the danger of shooting accidents.

I'm looking forward to hornswogging a buck again this fall. The deer I mentioned earlier was fooled right into the freezer. After realizing the ruse, the buck whirled and ran 25 yards before stopping for a last incredulous look. The arrow found its mark, perfectly ending one of Kansas' most exciting hunts. 



# Canada Geese Return To Marais des Cygnes: Part 2



**by Karl Karrow**  
*field supervisor, Marais des Cygnes Unit*  
**and Barry Allen**  
*conservation worker, Marais des Cygnes Wildlife Area*  
**photos by Mike Blair**

*In this second article, the authors examine the management of several different populations of geese and their status as well as information about the hunting seasons.*

**F**all concentrations of geese in the Marais des Cygnes (MDC) Valley are typically made up of four separate populations. For management purposes, Canada geese are categorized into populations based on common breeding or wintering grounds, or both. Two populations common in the MDC valley, the Eastern Prairie Population (EPP) and the Tallgrass Prairie Population (TGPP) nest in the arctic and sub-arctic regions of Canada. The other two populations, the migrant restoration geese and the local restoration (resident) geese, nest throughout the middle latitudes of the U.S. Restoration populations typically migrate short distances or remain year-round residents.

The TGPP is comprised of Richardson's and Hutchinson's subspecies of Canadas. The smallest of the subspecies, females average 4<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> pounds and males weigh 6 pounds. This population nests in the arctic, on many islands (including Baffin and South Hampton) and along the western shores of Hudson Bay. Since 1987, the Canadian Wildlife Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have intensified efforts to neckband this population on their breeding grounds. To date, geese banded on Baffin Island have been the only TGPP neckbands observed in the MDC valley.

The EPP is made up of only one subspecies, interior Canada geese. Interiors weigh 7 to 10 pounds and breed in the lowlands along the southwest shores of Hudson Bay in northern Manitoba. We believe this population comprises the largest segment of geese that migrate through the MDC valley. This population migrates through central Manitoba, western Minnesota, Iowa, northcentral Missouri with some birds going as far south as southeast Kansas, southern Missouri and northeast Arkansas.

Migrant restoration geese are generally considered to be "giant" or "maxima" Canadas. Adults weigh 10 to 14 pounds, with a few individuals exceeding 15 pounds. This subspecies originally nested in southern Canada and in the northern half of the U.S. but was removed from most of its breeding range by overharvest and habitat alteration. These birds



Four populations of Canada geese use the Marais des Cygnes Valley. The Goose on the left is a giant restoration bird. On the right is one of the smaller subspecies, belonging to the Tallgrass Prairie Population (TGPP).

have been reintroduced (or restored) to much of their former range and some areas outside the original range. Unfortunately, reintroduction stock has sometimes contained birds of mixed genetic lineage, so, modern "giant" Canadas may have ancestors with bloodlines from several subspecies. Surprisingly, restoration geese have the shortest migration route with many birds wintering north of TGPP and EPP geese. Restoration geese from Manitoba, Minnesota, North and South Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska and Missouri are known to migrate through the MDC valley.

Canada goose population estimates are based on fall and winter surveys done annually since 1969-1970 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other various wildlife agencies. The surveys are done throughout the geographic range of each population. These estimates do not represent the number of geese that migrate through the MDC valley, but do give an indication of the overall status of populations that use the valley. The actual number of geese in the valley is estimated from biweekly counts taken by MDCW staff.

Based on these counts, all four of

the populations that visit the valley have increased. Resident geese are relatively new to the region, and due to their distribution and secretive nature during the nesting season, it's difficult to obtain an accurate population estimate. However, MDCW staff estimate the local population to number more than 2,500. Continental populations for EPP, TGPP and migrant restoration geese have increased from around a half million birds in 1980 to more than 750,000 in recent years.

Harvest regulations in the MDC valley are developed to satisfy defined management objectives which include maintaining the local goose population at or above current numbers; maintaining a large concentration of migrant geese; maximizing recreation opportunity; providing quality hunting; and reducing crop damage on private land.

The MDCW refuge is the only significant refuge area within the MDC valley goose management unit. Unfortunately, the refuge is critically short of large crop fields to provide goose food. Two fields, one 31 acres and another 41 acres, are the only tracts within the refuge suitable for

geese. One of these fields is prone to flooding, and the other is bounded on two sides by private land. Hunting on the private land dissuades birds from landing on the refuge field, and it receives little use during the hunting seasons.

This critical shortage forces geese to rely on private land and portions of the wildlife area open to hunting. Unfortunately, there are few large private crop fields in the valley, and this is where the MDC unit differs from most areas with large concentrations of Canada geese. Typically, major concentrations of geese are found in areas with large, bottomland crop fields that provide ideal feeding opportunities. Geese unable to find safe places to feed, quickly leave the area, so, hunting seasons must be restricted to allow geese to feed undisturbed.

Compounding the harvest management equation is the biological differences between various populations

of Canada geese and variations in fall weather. For example, TGPP birds typically migrate through the valley before many EPP and migrant restoration geese even arrive. In addition, TGPP geese often use different habitat and behave differently than the other populations. Status of different populations may require more restrictive, or more generous, hunting seasons. Mild fall weather may delay migration, while early cold fronts may accelerate movement of geese into the MDC valley. The timing of seasons, habitat characteristics within the refuge and fall weather all influence the effect of hunting regulations.

Canada geese tend to be faithful to migration routes and stop at the same areas each year as long as conditions are suitable. Establishing MDCW as a traditional goose concentration area took years of aggressive management and careful harvest regulation. If this tradition is broken by one or more

years of poor habitat or excessive disturbance, it could take four or more years to recover current goose numbers. This characteristic of Canada geese makes it imperative that seasons be set considering the unique biology of the species.

In addition to the diverse—often conflicting—management objectives, there are a wide variety of users of the Canada goose resource that must also be considered. Each of these groups has expectations for management of this resource. For example, hunters have a much different expectation of goose management than do birdwatchers. And the values and desires of these two groups is much different than those of farmers around MDCW. Even within a specific group, expectations and demands vary widely. For instance, one hunter may want to hunt with little competition from other hunters, while another wants to harvest a goose every time out and doesn't



Hunting was allowed by permit in 1987. The regulations for goose hunting in the Valley have been restrictive so that local flocks wouldn't be depleted and so migrant flocks wouldn't be pushed to another area.



mind encountering other hunters. Yet another hunter desires to harvest a large number of geese during the season.

To assess hunter expectations and attitudes, the department conducts periodic surveys. Questions concerning harvest, access to private land, price of permits, number of days hunted and location of residence are asked. Eighty-five percent of the hunters questioned after the 1990-1991 season were either satisfied or extremely satisfied with the Marais des Cygnes Valley hunt.

Public comments to department staff and commissioners are also considered when analyzing user expectations. One common comment from hunters is that Kansans are penalized with a restrictive season, while Missouri hunters are shooting MDC valley geese just across the state line in a relatively liberal season. However, banding data indicate that this is not the case. Nearly 1,200 Canadas were banded at MDCW during the winters of 1987, 1988 and 1989. We examined reports of bands recovered from September through January because nearly all the bands recovered through these months would be from hunters. Of the 188 bands recovered during hunting months of these three years, only two came from Missouri areas immediately east of MDCW. Only about 1 percent of the birds banded in winter at MDCW fell to hunters just across the state line. In contrast, nearly 90 percent of the band recoveries were from Minnesota.

Summer banding at MDCW produced similar results. Of 73 bands recovered during hunting seasons from female goslings banded at MDCW, only two (less than 3 percent) were from Missouri sites east of MDCW. Thirteen (16 percent) bands from juvenile males were recovered from Missouri sites to the east. The higher number of males is expected as they likely paired with female geese migrating through the valley, and then accompanied these mates to Missouri locations where they were harvested. Of adult geese banded at MDCW during the breeding season, only 1 of 52 recovered (2 percent) was from Missouri east of MDCW.

Setting season dates and regula-



According to surveys, most hunters have been pleased with the first few seasons of goose hunting in the Valley. Regulations have changed in response to hunter preference, changing goose numbers and management goals.



Waterfowl hunting requires significant investment of time, money and equipment, including retrievers. Pleasing all hunters with seasons and regulations as well as properly managing the goose population is a difficult endeavor.



Through the first four seasons, half or more than half of the permitted hunters have taken geese. As numbers of local and migrant geese have increased, so have the number of permits. (Farm buildings in the background appear much closer than they are.)

tions with so many factors to consider is a difficult task, but it was only a few years ago that dark goose hunting wasn't a factor at all in the valley. Prior to 1982 (when the dark goose season was closed in the unit), few Canada geese were harvested in the MDC area. Check station records indicate that only 66 Canadas were harvested on the wildlife area from 1963 through 1981 . . . combined! Private hunting clubs in the valley experienced similar success.

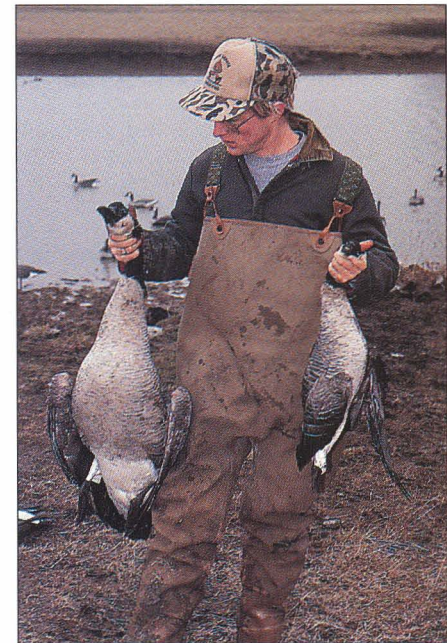
After the restoration program was established, hunting was reopened in 1987 with 100 permits issued by random drawing. Hunters who received a permit were allowed to take one goose during the 23-day season. Hunting was allowed throughout the day, and 40 geese were taken by 88 hunters.

Harvest has steadily increased as the regulations have become more generous. Permit numbers were increased to 300 in the 1988-1989 sea-

son and to 750 for the 1989-1990 season. Unlimited permits were available in 1990, but each of the 1,232 applicants could receive only one permit. Again, all-day hunting was permitted, and 511 geese were harvested. Hunter success was better than 50 percent from 1988 through 1990.

In 1991, the MDC valley unit regulations were again more liberal, allowing unlimited number of hunters two permits each, however, hunting was restricted to half days. As in previous years, the 23-day season was set as late as possible to ensure that good numbers of migrant geese were in the valley, which eases hunting pressure on local birds. However, the late season prevents harvest of many TGPP geese. The season allows four weekends of hunting, but is shorter than the regular dark goose season for areas outside of special hunt units.

The two-geese-per-hunter limit al-



The late season dates allow few of the TGPP geese to be harvested, but this photo shows a restoration bird and a EPP bird.



lowed a maximum number of individuals the opportunity to hunt while keeping the overall harvest within acceptable limits.

Hunting was restricted to half-days because of the limited number of large fields attractive to geese within the units. Hunters could easily occupy all major feed fields, and MDCW managers were concerned that this pressure might drive geese from the area. Hunting was stopped at 1 p.m., allowing geese to feed on fields in the wildlife area and on private land through the afternoon. This, in a sense, created a refuge in time rather than location. Mid-day closures have been used effectively in other states and Canadian provinces, providing several benefits: geese are allowed to feed undisturbed in the afternoon and tend to remain in the area longer; fields that are used in the afternoon are usually visited by at least a few geese the following morning, improving hunting opportunities; and in most instances, harvest rates have improved.

This proved to be true in the MDC unit last year, as harvest increased dramatically compared to previous years. Permits issued totalled 1,996 to 1,115 hunters (not all opted to take two permits). Active hunters took one goose a piece, nearly twice the average for the previous year. This increase exceeded all expectations. Hunting was also more efficient in terms of time spent in the field. In 1990-1991, hunters required an average of 6.1 days in the field for each goose taken. In the 1991-1992, hunters needed only 3.4 days per goose in the bag.

In spite of the relatively conservative nature of this season compared to state-wide regulations, goose numbers in the valley unit declined dramatically through last season. At the beginning of the season MDCW staff estimated 15,000 geese using the wildlife area and 25,000 within the valley unit. Three weeks later, less than half remained.

Future regulations will be established with the same considerations as used in the past including check-station data, waterfowl counts, hunter surveys, goose population trends, migration chronology as well as public input. Frameworks within which the seasons must be set are

provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The short-term future for Canada geese in the Marais des Cygnes Valley looks secure. Population trends of both local and migrant geese are stable or increasing. Local agriculture patterns are likely to remain the same in the next few years, and if harvest regulations are carefully managed, goose hunting in the valley unit can probably be sustained at similar levels.

The biggest impact to Canada geese in the valley will likely be the Marais des Cygnes National Wildlife Refuge. Just last summer, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Nature Conservancy announced the

acquisition of nearly 6,000 acres adjacent to the wildlife area. The closed area of the new refuge combined with the refuge on the wildlife area will provide a significant sanctuary for geese. If the refuge provides adequate crop fields, large concentrations of Canada geese may be sustained even with more liberal hunting regulations.

The Canada goose program in the Marais des Cygnes Valley has so far been successful, and with the establishment of the new refuge, optimism is high. With careful management, large numbers of these impressive birds will continue to grace the waters and sky of this beautiful valley for generations to come. ♡



The sight of a giant Canada with wings set over decoys rushes adrenalin through a waterfowler's system. Through continued success of the management program, more hunters are learning this thrill in the Marais des Cygnes Valley.





# The Milford Nature Center

by Pat Silovsky  
education coordinator

photos by Mike Blair

*Education of our youth is the key to saving our natural resources. The Milford Nature Center provides an exciting learning experience for kids who will someday be able to make wise resource decisions.*

**H**ave you ever tried to get the attention of 50 energetic 8-year-olds during a field trip? It's not an easy task. They run past you as if you were just there to hold up the wall, and you know they're wearing earplugs because nothing you say registers noticeably. Getting their attention can be like climbing Mt. Everest—a monumental task. However, I have discovered a technique that works every time: walk into the room carrying a live snake, and suddenly 100 eyes are locked on your every move.

Children have a natural curiosity about wildlife. It shouldn't really come as a surprise that they will stop and listen when a live animal is presented. In today's urban society, youngsters, and many adults, have few opportunities to see and learn about wildlife. Too often, their experiences and perceptions are the result of watching the dreaded television. The tube has revolutionized our society, but it's certainly no substitute for the real thing. Feeling the smooth, beadlike skin of a kingsnake or being face to face with a bullsnake as it flicks out its tongue has much more impact than seeing video of a snake on a screen.

So, where can people go today to see, touch and learn about wildlife? Wouldn't it be nice if there was an environmental learning center where you could see live animals, models of wildlife and their habitats and learn about these complex systems? There is just such a place. It's called the Milford Nature Center, and it's the Department of Wildlife and Parks' newest and most unique environmental education center. Although dedicated in April 1991 as the Milford Conservation Education Center, the name was recently changed to the Milford Nature Center. While conservation/education more accurately describes the goal to educate people about the needs of wildlife and habitat conservation, the words were not as universally recognized as "nature center" and not the visitor draw we had hoped.

The nature center is 5 miles north of I-70, off exit 295, near Milford Reservoir just outside of Junction City. The center was constructed adjacent to the Milford Fish Hatchery, below the reservoir dam. Both facil-

ities are open to the public Monday through Friday, year-round. Weekend hours are kept from mid-April through mid-October.

Many of the exhibits inside and outside the nature center focus on the importance of habitat. Two large dioramas (displays with habitat and respective wildlife models) are the center's pride and joy. Each diorama is about 350 square feet and combined, these exhibits feature more than 100 species of plants and animals. The aquatic diorama is divided into reservoir life, stream life and pond life. It contains more than 300 hand-painted models of aquatic life including a 40-pound flathead catfish and tiny dragonfly and stonefly nymphs. Taking more than a year to create, this diorama is the most realistic underwater display you will ever see. Just don't ask how many gallons of water it would hold!

The terrestrial diorama features

the wildlife of the prairies, marshes and woodlands. This spectacular exhibit contains roughly 50 species of plants and animals including a lifesize white-tailed deer, bobcat, coyote, Canada goose, muskrat, mouse and more. So convincing is this scene from a crisp, fall day, you can almost hear the honking of the geese as they fly south overhead.

Most of the exhibit work was done by Terry Chase Studios in Cedar Creek, Mo. Specializing in natural science exhibits, the studio has done work all over the world in places like Switzerland, Germany and Australia. Here at home, they have created exhibits for the Smithsonian Institute, The Museum of Natural History, Chicago Field Museum and numerous national park visitor centers as well as many of the nature centers in Missouri.

Other exhibits inside the center focus on hands-on activities for the



The terrestrial diorama provides visitors a look into the intricate relationships of wildlife in a variety of Kansas habitats including woodland, prairie and wetland.



about and understand our surroundings will we care enough to take steps to conserve it.

The center also houses exhibits of the fish hatchery, the sport fish and game birds of Kansas, a wall-sized food chain diagram and a magnificent collection of more than 2,000 antique fishing lures. The collection was donated by Topekan Hope Cheeseman. Cheeseman is the daughter of Pete Cheeseman who began the collection in 1950 after he placed third in a national magazine's "Name The Lure" contest.


A visit to the Nature Center wouldn't be complete without a walk along one of the two nature trails. The Tallgrass Trail, completed last summer, features lakeshore and prairie habitat. A boardwalk and observation dock along this trail have been added recently thanks to a much appreciated donation. The second trail, called Wood Duck Trail, is to be

completed by the end of next summer and will provide visitors with a total of 2 miles of natural-surface hiking trails.

Near the beginning of the Tallgrass Trail is the Watchable Wildlife Area, designed to give people ideas on ways they can improve the wildlife habitat in their own backyards. Everyone benefits from good habitat. The homeowner enjoys and learns observing wildlife, and the wildlife thrives as a result of the improvements.

The nature center presents many special events throughout the year. Eagle Days is offered one weekend in January and features both a live bald eagle and a live golden eagle along with presentations on the eagle nest at Clinton Reservoir and the golden eagle reintroduction program at Wilson Reservoir. Participants also enjoy a guided tour around Milford Reservoir to view the wild bald eagles that spend the winter there. In

1992, about 750 people attended throughout the two-day session. Other programs include fishing clinics, a Christmas Open House and book signing and National Hunting and Fishing Day celebrations in September. It is our goal to expand these events and offer additional programs such as toddler nature hikes, wildflower walks, bird walks, scout badge workshops and more.

This wonderful nature center wouldn't have been possible without the help and dedication of many individuals. Inside the front door is a plaque recognizing more than 100 contributors that made construction possible. These donations are remembered each time a youngster touches the smooth skin of a kingsnake for the first time or looks a red-tailed hawk straight in the eye! 



The nature center is adjacent to the Milford Fish Hatchery, the only warm-water intensive hatchery in the state. Models at the center demonstrate how the hatchery operates, and arrangements can be made for hatchery tours.



# McPherson Valley Wetlands

by Bert Wilson  
unit supervisor, Council Grove

photos by Mike Blair

*Once a great wetland that drew waterfowl hunters from as far as Chicago, parts of the McPherson Valley are being returned to the original soggy state.*

**K**ansas: to nonresidents it is a dry, featureless prairie. Any geography book written before 1900 will describe Kansas as part of what was known as the "Great American Desert." Although the vast prairie encountered by early explorers received less rainfall than the eastern U.S., it was not as dry as accounts described. In fact, wetlands are an integral part of the prairie, and prairie potholes in the Dakotas and Nebraska are critical to the populations of waterfowl in the Central Flyway.

Kansas also has its share of important wetlands. As late as 1919, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Year Book notes Kansas as having 296,000 acres of wetlands "in need of drainage." In the western and central regions of Kansas, a major wetland system consisting of Cheyenne Bottoms, Quivira, the playa lakes and the McPherson Valley provided critical migration and nesting habitat for waterfowl and shorebirds, as well as many other species of wildlife. To-



Starting in 1989, the Department has purchased wetlands from willing sellers in the McPherson Valley. The goal of the program is to acquire a total of 5,200 acres.

day, only Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira National Wildlife Refuge remain viable, although their future is uncertain, and during dry years the wetland habitat provided by these two areas is lost.

Because so many of the state's original wetlands have disappeared, the importance of those remaining has dramatically increased, and emphasis has been placed on maintaining Cheyenne Bottoms, playa lakes and the McPherson Valley Wetlands. Of these three major wetland projects, the McPherson Valley is probably the

least known. In fact, until a few years ago, the valley's wetland system was almost unknown to all but local residents and wildlife biologists.

Historically, the McPherson Valley Wetlands covered an area from central McPherson County through Harvey County to just north of Wichita in Sedgwick County. In McPherson County the wetland system consisted of the Big Basin, two miles west of the city of McPherson; the Little Basin, adjacent to the north shore of Big Basin; and the Chain of Lakes that run from a mile south of Big



An aerial view of the valley demonstrates the lowland's potential for flooding. Before drainage ditches were constructed, the entire wetland covered more than 9,000 acres and included 52 separate wetlands.

Basin to the McPherson County line. These three areas spread over approximately 126 square miles, and, before destruction by ditching and draining, comprised more than 9,000 surface acres of water in 52 separate wetlands. The largest single marsh was the Big Basin which covered 2,000 acres. The other two areas were made up of many smaller marshes ranging in size from 10 acres to 500 acres. With the exception of Inman Lake and Farland Lake, two natural lakes, none of the water bodies were more than 5 feet deep, and most were less than 3 feet deep.

The McPherson Valley Wetlands' importance to a wide variety of wildlife is well documented. Prior to development, the wetland system was a critical resting and feeding stop for spring and fall migrations and also provided nesting habitat for blue-winged teal, mallard, the sora rail and several species of shorebirds. These were the only wetlands in Kansas where the giant Canada goose nested prior the species' near extinction at the turn of the century. Today, 10 species considered threatened or endangered rely on the wetland including the bald eagle, Eastern spotted skunk, Eskimo curlew, least tern, peregrine falcon, piping plover, snowy plover, white-faced ibis and whooping crane.

The valley's wetlands were an important feature during the early settlement of the area. Local residents tell stories of how their grandfathers or great grandfathers used to spend a day shooting on the wetlands and feed their families for a week. Canned duck is still a popular delicacy among many older residents. Market hunting and other such cottage industries developed around the wetlands. Many citizens from the town of Conway derived a portion of their income by guiding hunters from Chicago, St. Louis and Kansas City, who would travel by train for a day to hunt waterfowl on the wetlands.

Water levels in the wetland pools were maintained by natural ridges between the wetland and surrounding creeks, streams and gullies. The Big Basin, for example, maintained a maximum depth of about 6 feet. When inflows caused high water, the excess would drain into Blaze Fork Creek to the south and eventually





Inman lake, above, is the largest natural lake in Kansas and was once a part of a series of natural lakes and wetlands. The Blaze Fork Ditch, below, was constructed in 1911 to drain many of the valley's wetlands for farming.

run into the Little Arkansas River. The Big Basin acted as a natural reservoir, minimizing floods on Blaze Fork Creek.

Changes in the wetlands began in the late 1800s when settlers constructed roads and ditches and began farming the land. These early developments caused some minor localized flooding, but major alterations of the area started in 1911 when John J. Schrag began construction of the Blaze Fork Drainage Ditch. Schrag had purchased some land in the Big Basin a few years earlier and after losing several crops to flooding, he and his neighbors decided to build a ditch that would drain about 2,000 acres of the basin and carry inflows to Blaze Fork Creek. At the time, little was known about the benefits of natural wetlands, and farm land was needed for food production. Similar to the old story of the man who drained the swamp not realizing he would soon be up to his pockets in alligators, the increased volume of water from the ditch emptying into the Blaze Fork Creek caused serious flooding of property downstream. As a result, downstream property owners formed a drainage district and filed a law suit against Schrag in 1923 to force him to plug the ditch and restore the Basin. Although the Mc-







The McPherson Valley wetlands are critical to a variety of species including the American avocet, left, the least sandpiper, above, and the great plains toad, right.



Pherson County District Court ordered the filling in or damming of the ditch, Schrag appealed to the Kansas Supreme Court. The Supreme Court reversed the initial decision, and Schrag was ordered to pay damages to the downstream property owners. After some legal haggling the payment of damages was waved with the agreement that Schrag would dredge and alter Blaze Fork Creek to become the Blaze Fork Ditch which would handle the increased amount of water. As changes to the Blaze Fork Ditch made it more efficient, additional drainage ditches and dikes were constructed to drain more wetlands and eventually resulted in the destruction of the Chain of Lakes.

Today, approximately 500 wetland acres are all that remain of the original 9,000-plus acres. Inman Lake is the only remaining permanently flooded lake and at more than 100 acres (about half of what it was before 1900) is reputed to be the largest natural lake in Kansas. The companion lake, Farland Lake, has been drained. However, not all the effort has been successful. A few small pools and marshes were not affected or were only partially drainable, and numerous areas drain slowly. These remaining wetlands make the area attractive to migrating waterfowl today.

In March of 1989, the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks began a multi-year joint project with Ducks Unlimited to restore the McPherson

Wetlands with the purchase of 160 acres in the Big Basin. The original goal of the project was to purchase 40 to 160 wetland acres from willing sellers each year. In 1990, it was changed to a five-year project as a result of opportunities allowing the acquisition of up to 1,100 acres per year with a final total of 5,200 acres.

To fund the project, a \$240,000 grant from the North American Wetlands Conservation Council was applied for and secured with the help and partnership of Ducks Unlimited, Audubon, Sierra Club, KPL Gas Service Company, Quail Unlimited and many other wildlife organizations and groups. Buying land from willing sellers is the main method of acquisition, however, buying easements and entering into long-term leases are also viable options for restoring and protecting some of the potholes. As each property is brought under the management of the department, funding will be sought for marsh restoration or enhancement.

Since the restoration of a major wetland system such as this is so rare, extensive monitoring of the changes in waterfowl and other wetland animal populations will add to our knowledge of marsh ecology. The first waterfowl surveys began in the

fall of 1990. Waterfowl and shorebird nesting surveys are slated to begin in spring 1992. The Biology Department of McPherson College has several research projects for the wetlands in the planning stages. Because this system will consist of permanent pools, wet season pools and controlled pools, it will serve as a test area for new and innovative management techniques.

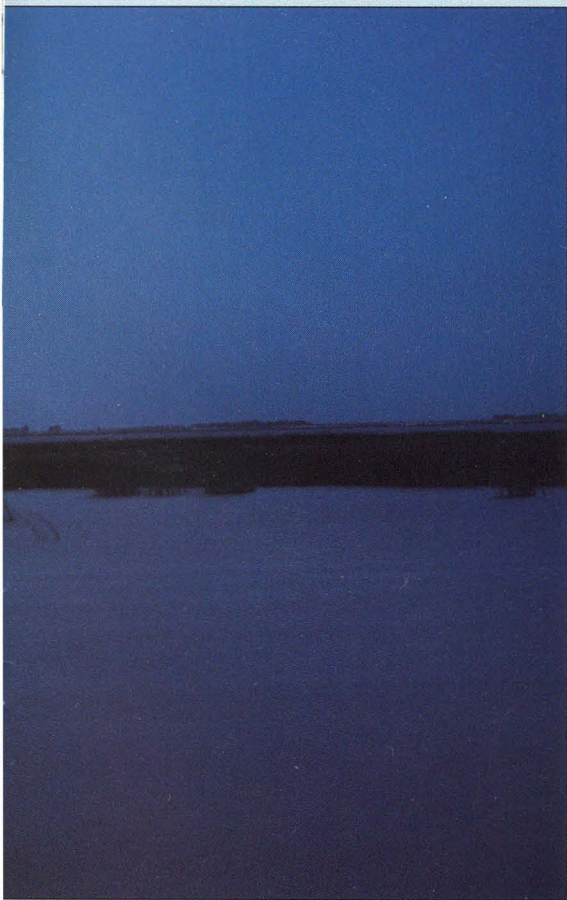
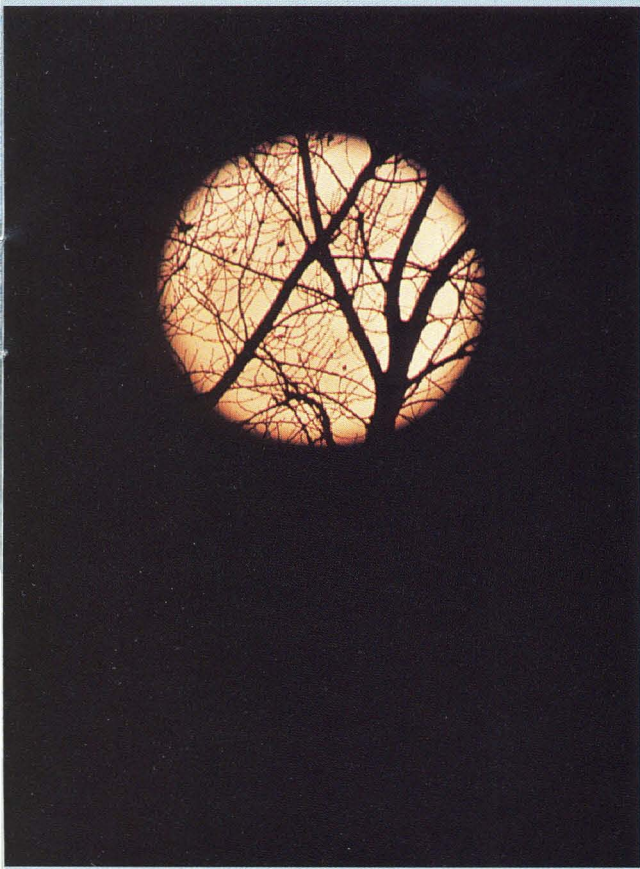
Approximately 67 species of birds, eight species of amphibians, 17 species of reptiles, eight species of fish and 17 species of mammals will be beneficiaries of this restoration and research effort. Other benefits of the restored wetlands will include purification of surface and ground water, and some replenishment of ground water to the aquifer. Of course, the main beneficiaries will be the residents of Kansas, who will enjoy the return of a vital habitat and important part of our natural heritage. We have much to be proud of in the history of our state, however, every generation makes mistakes that future generations must correct. The McPherson Valley Wetlands restoration project offers our generation a rare opportunity to rectify one of those historical mistakes. ♡

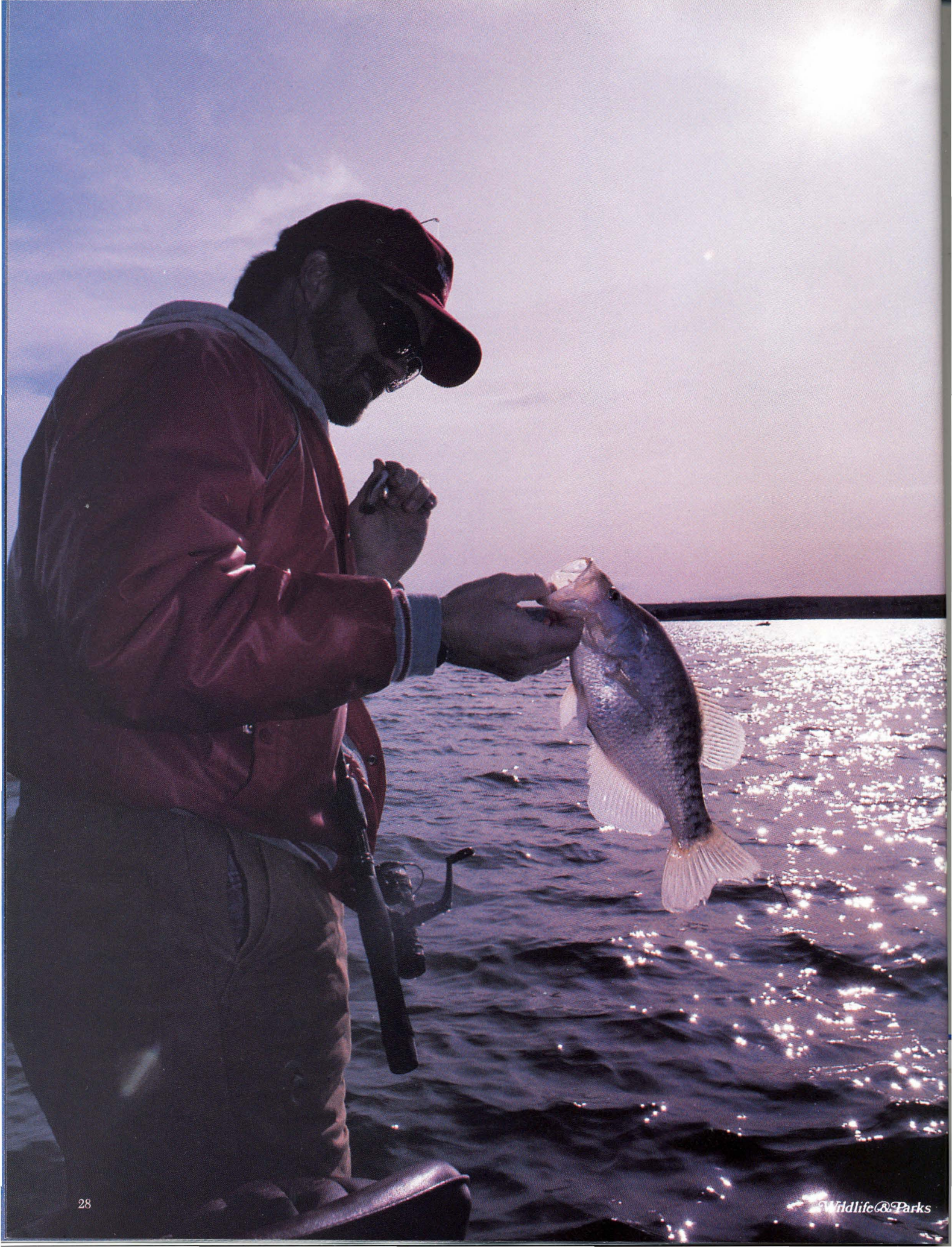
*Gallery* by Mike Blair

*Moon  
Beams*

**Left:** 105mm lens, f/2.8 @ 30 sec. **Below:** 200mm lens, f/4 @ 20 sec. **Right:** 600mm lens, f/4 @ 1/500 sec. **Far right:** 600mm lens, f/5.6 @ 1/125 sec.







# The Cold-water Crappie Connection

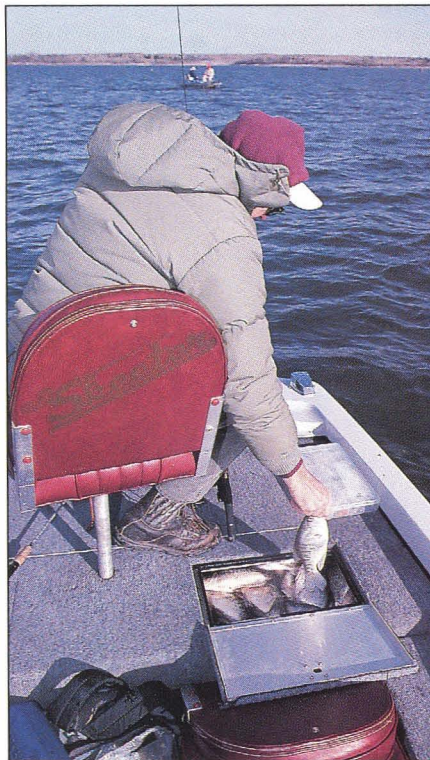
by Mike Miller  
*editor*

photos by Mike Blair

*Mention crappie and most anglers think of spring, but don't miss the boat this winter when some of the year's best crappie fishing can happen.*

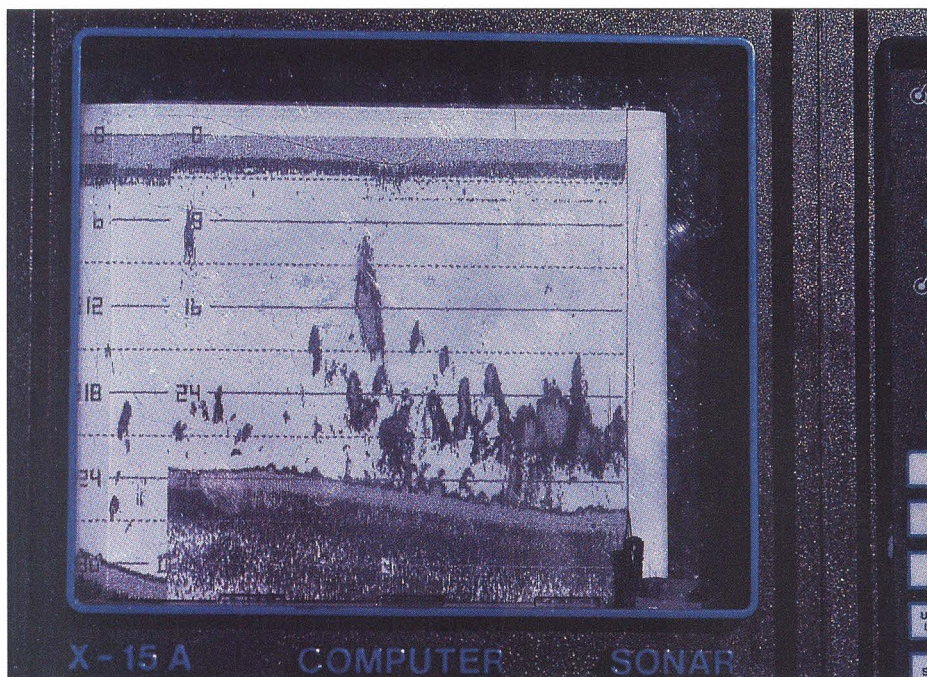
The thin skim of ice prevented us from getting the boat far from idle speed, but even without the ice, any boat speed would have resulted in frost bite. No, idle speed was just fine, if not a little brisk even with gloves and face mask on. We only had to cross one arm of the lake to reach the point where a cluster of boats already gathered. It seemed strange to see any boats at all in early February. But the crappie were biting, and before the day was over, more than 40 boats would be on the water, and most of the anglers would be enjoying fantastic crappie fishing.

Our cold-weather crappie hot spot was one of several northeast Kansas reservoirs that have gained a well-deserved reputation as crappie producers. When the conditions are right, unimaginable numbers of white crappie are produced in the rich waters of these reservoirs. Typically, fishermen wait for the spawn-



ing run in April and May to take advantage of these fish, but recently, a new crappie catching technique has developed. It's likely that a small group of fishermen discovered winter crappie years ago, but knowing a good thing when they found it, they kept it under their stocking caps. That's why on a past cold, late-winter day, you'd see a couple of lonely boats on the lake and wonder what those fools were up to. I know now what they were up to: they were busy filling their livewells with fat white crappie.

There are actually two winter seasons for crappie fishing. They are similar, and can even blend into one long period if the winter is mild and the lake never freezes. The first good winter crappie fishing begins in late fall, after the water temperature cools considerably. Depending on the weather, crappie fishing can get good as early as October, but it's usually November or December. The later



Depth-finding equipment is essential to winter crappie fishing success. However, even a sophisticated paper graph is useless unless you know how to interpret the signals.

season is just after the winter ice thaws in late January or February. Of course the recent string of mild winters we've experienced here in Kansas have made those dates tough to pin down. In fact, during the winter of 1991-1992, few reservoirs ever had any substantial ice. The result was fantastic crappie fishing from November through early March, when unusually warm temperatures broke up the big schools of crappie prematurely.

Big schools of crappie was the secret those few winter fishermen kept so long. Years ago, they probably didn't even realize how many fish they had below them. They only knew the fishing was too good to believe. Today, with modern graph recorders and liquid crystal display units, we can see just how big the crappie schools are. It's not uncommon to find suspended fish, tightly bunched in a school 8 or 10 feet thick and 50 yards long. How many fish a school like that holds is anyone's guess, but it's safe to say a lot.

This gathering of crappie in open water is apparently a winter phenomenon. I've caught crappie in deep water through the summer months, but they're almost always closely associated with brush or other structure. Sometime in late fall, the huge schools form and the fish move out

over deep water. This may be a response to the stress cold water temperature puts on gizzard shad, making them easy marks for all predatory fish. It isn't unusual for the fish to be suspended 25 feet deep in 40 feet of water. They will also associate with structure in the winter, but not nearly as tightly as in the summer.

Depth-finding electronics are in-

valuable to winter crappie fishermen, however, knowing how to use the units you have is more important than the sophistication of the units. A simple flasher is just as effective as a graph in the hands of a fisherman who knows how to interpret the signals. Experience is the best teacher, but always attempt to "read" the information, relating it to the depth, structure and fish.

Just as important as interpreting your depth finder signal is marking the spot once you find it. Throwing out a marker buoy may sound like an obvious task when you find a large school of fish, but be sure to mark anything that looks unusual. You might mark only a portion of a school or submerged tree, and it won't look right. Another pass or two with the boat might reveal a concentration of fish. It can be impossible to put the boat back over a spot without a marker.

Finding wintertime crappie can be as easy as finding the river channel. On other days, the fish will hang close to the ledge at a very specific depth, and sometimes you'll have to find isolated submerged stumps or similar structure to be successful. So, while it's not necessarily easy to catch these winter crappie, it is usually rewarding because when you find active fish, there will be lots of them.



Throw out a marker buoy to mark fish, structure or anything that looks unusual. Then you can graph the spot more thoroughly using the buoy as reference. Don't spend too much time fishing a spot if the fish won't bite. Look for active fish.



On a trip to Council Grove Reservoir last winter, the crappie were easy to find. Graphing along the creek channel in 30 feet of water would eventually turn up a huge school of fish suspended at about 18 feet. But those fish were almost impossible to catch. In past winters, I would have assumed the fish were turned off, but veteran winter crappie fisherman Richard Becker of Pratt knew otherwise. He had worked these fish hard and discovered that when the suspended schools wouldn't hit, fish on the adjacent flats would. We cruised the 15-foot flats along the edge of the channel and eventually found fish, and those fish bit. In the two hours before sundown, we caught fish right on the break, up on the flats and even suspended over the channel. On other winter trips, finding fish on the bottom of the shallower flats always proved more successful than fishing suspended schools in deep water. There were days, however, when the suspended fish hit. On those days, everyone on the lake caught fish.

Another trick that works when suspended fish won't hit is to find a tree stump, brush pile or other stick up on the river channel drop-off. This isolated structure didn't appear to hold large numbers of fish, but those fish were usually cooperative, and often they were larger than average.

Vertical jigging is the best way to catch winter crappie. Fish in cold water generally stay within a narrow depth range or associate with specific structure. By fishing straight down, you can put your jig right on the structure and keep it within a desired depth range. Also, while winter crappie will readily hit your jigs, they are still in frigid water and not as aggressive as they are in warm water. A vertical presentation puts the lure within the fish's strike zone and keeps it there. Drifting, trolling and casting simply can't do this.

A light, sensitive rod and light line will help you catch more fish. On some days, the fish will hit surprisingly hard, but most of the time strikes will be soft. When you're fishing 20 to 30 feet deep, heavy line and tackle won't let you feel light hits.

If there's any chop on the water at



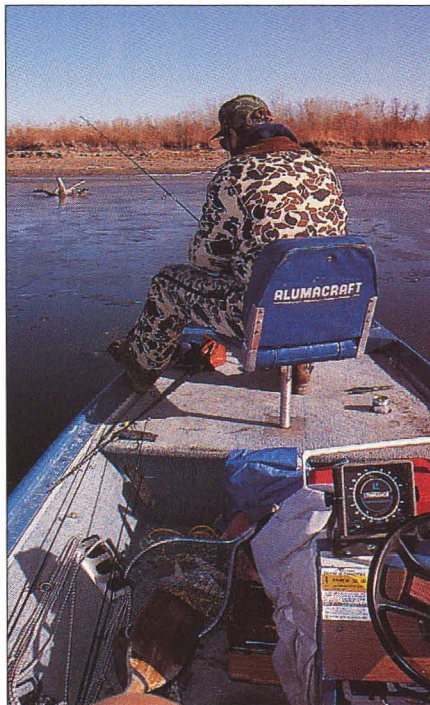
Avid crappie angler Richard Becker, front of the boat, concentrates his winter fishing effort on creek and river channel edges, brush along drop-offs and flats near the channel.

all, you'll want at least an eighth-ounce jig head, maybe more. You need enough weight to keep the line taut and a jig that won't take forever to sink the 20 or so feet. On many days a larger bait seemed to be the best. The gizzard shad are about 3

inches long this time of year and the 2- to 3-inch rubber, shad-type bodies generally were the best producers. The larger baits also caught fewer small crappie which can be pests. There are, however, days when the fish are finicky, and small tube jigs in odd colors such as pink or blue are worth trying.

More important than color or lure size is the depth at which you fish. Fishermen who catch the most fish are those who pay attention and know what depth they're fishing when that first fish hits. One tip is to know how much line is retrieved by a single turn of your reel handle. Simply drop a lure to the floor, hold the rod tip level and turn the handle. You might be surprised to see how far off the floor the lure moves. Remember this distance and you can always put your lure at a specific depth by dropping it to the bottom, then cranking it up a certain number of turns. Some fishermen will mark the line with a marker pen once they find the right depth. Generally, it's best to fish just above the fish, however, there were times when a jig right on the bottom caught most of our fish.

On another winter trip, we were having reasonable luck catching crappie on isolated structure. The fish were somewhat scattered though,



Frigid temperatures are evidenced by the ice visible above. Always wear life jackets or keep them close at hand, and dress in layers for comfortable fishing.

Light line and a sensitive, ultra-light rod are necessary to catch the soft-hitting fish. The more popular lures included the shad-type rubber bodies such as the Sassy Shad.



and it was difficult to keep the boat over the tree stump in 25 feet of water. When those fish quit, we moved to find more active fish and graphed a large hump, or what we thought was an old railroad right-of-way. Even though it was much shallower (14 feet) than the water we'd just been fishing, the bottom line on the graph paper looked like a saw blade; like it was covered with fish. I put the trolling motor in and we slowly worked our way along the edge of the hump. Watching the flasher, I could clearly see fish just off the break, and it looked like fish just off the bottom on the hump itself. Keeping our jigs bouncing along the bottom, we enjoyed furious action for about an hour, catching  $\frac{3}{4}$ -pound to  $1\frac{1}{2}$ -pound crappie. Many of the larger fish were caught right on the bottom.

Winter crappie fishing can be incredible. In fact, it was winter crappie fishing several years ago that put crappie fishermen across the state into an uproar. A photograph appeared in a Topeka newspaper of a large ice chest overflowing with crappie; more than 200 fish. Fishermen were appalled. "No one needs that many fish," they cried. "We need limits or our crappie populations will be decimated."

From those fears a department study was launched to learn what impact fishing had on crappie populations. The results of that study appeared in the article "Clearing The Water On Crappie," in the May/June 1992 issue. Two changes that occurred include a statewide 50-fish crappie creel limit and a 10-inch minimum length limit on Perry, Pomona and Melvern reservoirs. Currently, the length limit appears to have potential to improve the quality of fish caught. The creel limit will have no affect on the crappie fishing.

Winter crappie fishermen must not forget fishing ethics when so many fish can be caught. Take only what you will use, and carefully release fish you don't want or are under the length limit. Gentle release is important in winter fishing, especially when the fish are caught in deep water. If the fish are deeper than 30 feet, bring them up slowly, and they'll be more likely to survive if released.

Ethics are also important when approaching other fishermen on the lake. It's sometimes too much temptation for some fishermen to watch a boat or small group of boats catch fish, and they'll end up crowding in on the spot. Tempers may flair when too much boat traffic or an anchor

dragged through a school of fish ruins the fishing for the guys who found the spot. Give everyone due space and never crowd too close unless invited in. Treat others as you would like to be treated if you were the ones who found the fish.

Cold-weather fishing requires a little common sense to make it safe and comfortable. Always dress about twice as warm as you think you need. Even when the weather is warm and balmy on the shore, it can be quite cold on the water. You can always take off clothes if you're too warm. Life jackets are necessary on any boat outing, but are particularly important in winter fishing. Just minutes in icy water can be deadly, and it deserves the utmost respect. Pay attention to the weather, wind and water and keep your winter fishing safe.

The favorite winter crappie reservoirs have been those in the northeast such as Clinton, Perry, Council Grove, Pomona, Tuttle Creek and Melvern. But don't ignore your favorite lake when the water turns cold and most of the fishermen go home. Sure, some of the observers will laugh and call you a moron for fishing on a freezing winter day, but you can have the last laugh later that night as you chew a sizzling-hot crappie fillet. ♡

# WILD CURRENTS

## letters

Edited by Mark Shoup

### Hawaiian Doves?

Editor:

As a transplanted Kansan in Hawaii, I look forward to KANSAS WILDLIFE AND PARKS magazine to bring me home again, if only for a short time. I read every issue cover to cover, and it makes me homesick for our beautiful state.

In the Sept./Oct. issue's "Nature" section (Page 41), it was stated that doves are in every state except Hawaii. To set the record straight, we have lots of doves here on Maui. No one hunts them, and they have plenty of food and great weather to proliferate. Mongooses and wild cats are their greatest dangers.

Kevin Geary  
Hana on Maui, Hawaii  
(formerly Bonner Springs, Ks.)

Dear Mr. Geary:

Thanks for "setting the record straight." After I received your letter, I decided to do a little checking about hunting in Hawaii. You might be interested to know that on Maui, two species of doves -- spotted (lace-necked) and zebra -- can be legally hunted.

Although I haven't been able to determine their distribution throughout the islands, mourning doves -- the species found in Kansas -- are legally hunted only on the island of Hawaii. --Shoup

### Conservationists Remembered

Editor:

Summer 1992 left the Kansas conservation community without two of its long-time strong advocates. Two Ellsworth County brothers, Bill and Dr. Joe Seitz, passed away, leaving a gap in the network of dedicated citizens who spend their lives and personal resources to protect wild Kansas. Both men are remembered for their strong sense of outdoor ethics.

Bill, who died June 23, was a hunter education instructor from the program's beginning, and he served on the Hunter Education

Advisory Committee in the mid 1980s. He helped rewrite the hunter education student manual and assisted in revision of the program guidelines. He received a Kansas Wildlife Federation award for his efforts in hunter education. While he ran an Ellsworth clothing store, he also managed to be an active member of the local Ducks Unlimited chapter and introduced many area youngsters to sport shooting and hunting.

Dr. Joe Seitz, who died August 17, was a Ducks Unlimited sponsor and a charter member of the local chapter. He helped to organize a local gun club and was active in the local Quail Unlimited organization. Dr. Seitz was well-known as an avid naturalist and bird watcher who shared his passion for the outdoors with area youth.

Bill and Joe will be sorely missed. They leave behind a challenge for other men and women to take up the causes of conservation with equal dedication.

John Svaty  
Ellsworth

### Access Idea

Editor:

I have an idea that may help protect and encourage the sport I love -- upland game bird hunting. I see ever-diminishing opportunities to pursue this great pastime and tradition in Kansas. In addition to mindless urban expansion, the private leasing of hunting land by aggressive, profit-motivated companies is contributing to this sad trend. I fear that Kansas is following in the steps of Texas, where virtually every acre of huntable ground has been privately leased, and hunting privileges are prohibitively expensive.

I propose that Kansas hunters cooperate with the Department of Wildlife and Parks to form a Kansas Upland Hunters Cooperative. This cooperative would serve to greatly increase the amount of hunting land available to the participating public while relieving some of the hunting pressure on existing state lands. The cooperative would be a voluntary program entirely financed by members' annual contributions. Monies would be expended on the annual leasing of private farmlands across

the state, the purchase of selected lands and administrative costs.

Membership would cost perhaps \$75 per year per person (a fraction of private clubs) with some discount for the elderly and young. A membership card would be issued the first year with annual renewals by a small sticker placed on the reverse side. Maps of leased and purchased ground would be made available to members only. Signs would be posted at the entrance to Kansas Cooperative Hunting Lands with access limited to those with current membership cards -- on the honor system with occasional verification by the local warden. I believe at least 5,000 persons (resident and nonresident) would participate in such a program each year. Given this figure, about \$375,000 per year could be raised.

A rough outline of expenditures would be 1) administrative costs, 25 percent or \$93,750; 2) annual land leasing, 50 percent or \$187,500; and 3) annual land purchase, 25 percent or \$93,750.

More than 107,000 acres of hunting land could be made available to members in the first year alone. Ideally, lands would be leased in sizeable tracts ranging from 500 to 2,000 acres each. This would provide members with at least 75 different hunting areas statewide each year, in addition to existing public lands. I believe this would be well worth the \$75 membership fee. Of course, the program could expand greatly with more members.

South Dakota has a similar program that has been very successful. Kansas needs one, too. I would be glad to volunteer my time to such an effort, and I'm sure many other individuals and organizations would, as well.

J. Mark Simmerman  
Mayetta

Dear Mr. Simmerman:

Your Kansas Upland Hunters Cooperative sounds very similar to the Recreational Access Program (RAP) proposed in 1989 by the Department of Wildlife and Parks. However, the department's RAP plan included leasing as much as 300,000 acres of private land in Kansas for a much broader range of outdoor recreational activities, such as small game and big game

hunting, pond and stream fishing, canoeing, hiking, birding and photography.

The proposed annual RAP permit fee was \$25. Although the RAP did not receive legislative funding, the department is still looking for ways to provide more land access for outdoor enthusiasts to pursue their interests. --Doug Sonntag, special administrative assistant, Pratt

## Lifetime Legacy

Editor:

Meet Tyler Lauer, age three months, with his Kansas lifetime license and "Future Hunter" hat. He was born May 11, 1992, and his lifetime license application was mailed on May 15. On June 3, his license was approved.

I am Tyler's grandfather, and I won the



license last March at our annual Cheyenne County Wildlife Inc. banquet. I thought your young readers would enjoy this picture. We also have a Ducks Unlimited Mossberg 20-gauge for when he's old enough. After all, boys and girls like this are the future of hunting and fishing in Kansas.

Tyler joins the rest of the Lauer family in having his Kansas lifetime hunting license. I have one and both my boys do, too.

And thanks for your magazine. You guys sure do a super job on both stories and photos alike.

Roger Lauer  
St. Francis

Dear Mr. Lauer:

Thanks for the picture. It certainly sounds like you and your family are doing your part to enhance and maintain hunting values in Kansas.

By the way, you got a double bargain in purchasing Tyler's lifetime license when you did. While lifetime hunting and fishing licenses are now \$200.50 each, they will go up to \$240.50 on Jan. 1, 1993. (Combination licenses are now \$400.50, but they will go up to \$440 on Jan. 1).

I'm also glad you brought up Cheyenne County Wildlife Inc. To say that they are actively pulling their weight in wildlife conservation is an understatement. Our readers will be interested to know that the group has donated approximately \$18,000 to the department's South Fork Wildlife Area in Cheyenne County. This money will be used to develop an artificial wetland on the area, and will be the cornerstone of a goose restoration project. The organization is also considering sponsorships of other wildlife projects in Cheyenne County, but the scope of their first effort is truly inspiring. --Shoup

## Bird In the Nest

After telling several people about our experience with some robins last summer, I was encouraged to write about it. It all began on a stormy July 4, a Saturday night after the second of three separate storms.

John, my husband, went out to check on a robin nest we had been watching all summer, as he had a feeling the birds might be in trouble. He found the mother and two young chicks on the ground, along with the nest, which had been blown out of the tree. He brought them inside, and we placed them on some towels and tried to warm them with our hands. They were completely soaked, cold and barely moving, and at that point their chances for survival seemed pretty slim. To complicate matters, our electricity had gone off, and we were doing everything by flashlight. I found a concentrated detergent box with a lid, put a towel in the bottom, and we put the birds in it and went to bed.

Next morning to our surprise, the mother was very chipper, pecking on the side of the

box and wanting out. One of the chicks was also in good shape, but the other one didn't make it. Then, John went outside, and although there had been another rain during the night, the nest on the ground was in good shape but rain-soaked.

The next hurdle was drying out the nest with a hair dryer, and then an even bigger problem arose -- getting the nest secured in the tree. John found a green and pink wicker basket, not much bigger than the nest and about three inches high. He put the dried nest in the basket, got on the top rung of a step-ladder that he had put on the pickup bed, and wired the basket and nest in the tree, in the same spot it had been before.

Next, we took the birds outside, and John placed the chick in the nest. Then I handed him the mother, and after showing her where the chick was, he turned her loose. She flew to the top of the tree for a few minutes and then to the ground, losing no time in looking for something to eat. In about two hours, she started feeding the chick.

After a couple days, we saw "Junior" sitting on the edge of the nest. He left the nest but stayed in the tree, moving to various limbs. Once John found him on top of the pickup under the tree, and when he tried to catch him to return him to the tree, we found out he could fly although not very well. John worried about him constantly, checking on his whereabouts quite often. He was hard to see because he was so small, but we always managed to find him because his mother would make a little "klook," perhaps a warning, and by locating her from the sound we could find him nearby.

After several days, her feeding pattern changed. Instead of taking the food directly to Junior, she took it to a different spot in the tree and made a little noise, making him fly to her.

Later, both Junior and mama left that tree and went to one behind the house. We located them one time after that, but have not seen them since. We feel quite fortunate to have been a part of this experience. We can't help but feel that we humans could learn enough to make this a better world just from watching what goes on in the world of nature. We are constantly amazed at the everyday events taking place right under our noses that most people don't take the time to see.

Ethel Mulkey  
LaHarpe

## Lost In the Dark

Last year's Missouri deer season had just begun when two northwest Missouri men located and shot a nice eight-point buck about fifteen miles west of the Missouri-Kansas border near Mound City, Kan. One of the men had grown up in Linn County and was familiar with the area although the men now live in Holt and Kearny, Mo. It was near sunset when they shot the buck, and they left it lay.

Shortly after, two Kansas women came to the pasture to feed cattle. They noticed that the gate to the pasture had been left open, and they found the deer. Immediately, they closed the gate and drove to a neighbor's home to call Mark Johnson, then the local conservation officer. The women told Johnson that the deer had just been killed, then waited at the scene for him to arrive.

What they didn't know was that one of the men was still in the pasture. The men had apparently shot the deer, left, and then returned to drop one man off. It was his job to drag the deer to the road and wait for the other man to pick up his accomplice and their booty. This is a common poaching tactic throughout the state.

When Johnson arrived, they opened the gate and he explained the poaching technique to the women. Then he asked them to leave while he hid in the field and waited, suspecting that there might be someone else in the area. By this time it was dark, so Johnson bided his time. Soon, the driver returned to the scene with a Linn County resident. The men walked up to the deer and began calling their friend's name. Unfortunately for them, while searching for their friend, they found officer Johnson, who was more than happy to help them in their search. In fact, Johnson even called the Linn County Sheriff's Office for help.

It took nearly an hour to find the other Missouri man, almost two miles from the scene. All three men were arrested and taken to Linn County Jail. There, one man confessed to shooting the deer without a permit and out of season. One man also confessed to hunting coyotes earlier without a license. The Missouri men posted bonds of \$613 and forfeited a custom rifle used in the crime. The rifle was a Remington .308 Model 700 with

sporter stock and stainless steel bull barrel and Leupold scope. It was valued at \$1,000. --  
*Shoup*

## Watchable Wildlife

Many public surveys have shown that most people enjoy watching wildlife. Not the least among these are hunters, but many others do not hunt.

Those who enjoy observing animals in their natural settings truly appreciate the relationship between man and wildlife. In many cases, this relationship works to the detriment of wildlife, making conservation of all species more important than ever.

Trips afield to enjoy wildlife observation place many naturalists in a position to become enforcement stewards of our precious wildlife resources. Wildlife watchers sometimes have the opportunity to observe game violations, pollution, littering and vandalism of public areas. As stewards of our natural resources, these people also have an obligation to report such illegal activity to their local conservation officer, sheriff's office or other authority.

The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks maintains a 24-hour free hotline (called Outdoor Alert) for reporting such activity -- 1-800-228-4263. If you witness any wildlife or environmental violations, call this number and give details such as location, time, description of suspects, description and tag number of vehicles involved, and type of violation.

By cooperating with conservation officers, we can provide the additional effort needed to curtail illegal use of our valuable wildlife resources. --*Doug Sonntag, special administrative assistant, Pratt*

## Protestors Sentenced

A district judge in California overturned the appeals of 23 anti-hunting protestors, sentencing them with jail time, fines, probation periods, and more than 700 hours of community service. Protestors were convicted of a variety of charges, including unlawful trespass and obstruction of a public road, after protesting the 1990 Tule elk hunt at the Grizzly Island Wildlife Area.

Sentencing includes probation periods up

to three years, fines to \$385, and restitution to the Department of Fish and Game from \$250 to \$585. Most defendants were further ordered to provide 60 hours of community service. Three were sentenced to jail terms of 20-30 days. --*Proactive Strategies for Fish and Wildlife Management*

## Quail In Bush

Last November, several quail shooters decided to get a jump on the season. On Nov. 11, 1991, conservation officers Glenn Cannizzaro, Tonganoxie, and Bruce Bertwell, Olathe, received a call about "hunters" shooting quail out of season in Leavenworth County. When they arrived at the caller's house, he told them that the men were still in a nearby field.

While the officers were talking to the landowner, a pickup pulled out of the field, headed toward the group, then stopped and backed away over a hill. The officers quickly pursued the truck and overtook it, but when it stopped, a passenger jumped out and ran south along a shelterbelt.

Cannizzaro hit the field in hot pursuit of the runaway suspect while Bertwell retained the other two men in the pickup. Finally, Cannizzaro caught and arrested the running suspect. When asked why he ran, the suspect said that he was a convicted felon and did not want more trouble.

After the officers had all the subjects under control, Bertwell searched the trees and found a vest with several quail in it. The men forfeited \$200 bond and lost their shotguns. --  
*Shoup*

## The Last Dance

Conservation officer Randy Benteman, Cottonwood Falls, recently developed a new law enforcement technique while attending a dance with his wife. While dancing with Mrs. Benteman, a man bragged to her about the details of a deer poaching he had recently committed.

Upon receiving the information from his wife, Benteman conducted an after-the-dance investigation that resulted in the man's arrest on deer poaching charges. At that hour, no amount of two-stepping could help the poacher. --*Doug Sonntag*

## Troubled Wetlands

In the early 1980s, Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area was in trouble. Years of underfunding and declining water flows from area streams had left the 19,000-acre wildlife mecca without marsh habitat in dry years and unable to control flooding in wet ones.

Then people got interested.

By 1990, nearly \$3.3 million -- from federal, state and private sources -- had been raised, and renovation work began that would allow area managers to better manage water in dry years and reduce flooding of nearby landowners in wet ones. Waterfowl, shorebirds and other wildlife -- including endangered whooping cranes and least terns -- would also be helped.

Now a portion of that funding is in jeopardy, and the future of the project is uncertain.

Some members of the Kansas Congressional delegation have persuaded U.S. Department of Interior officials to shelve the most recent Cheyenne Bottoms grant request of \$1.8 million, at least temporarily.

According to the Department of Wildlife and Parks, which manages the area for the State of Kansas, this most recent grant -- combined with state and private money -- would have allowed completion of a functional deep-water storage pool and a distribution system, including two of three major pump stations. Enough water could then be retained and managed to allow the Bottoms to withstand periodic drought.

Although the grant has been shelved for the time being, its final status will not be determined until the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission (MBCC) -- the federal group that must approve such grants -- meets in January. For the project to be considered for funding, Assistant Secretary of Interior Mike Hayden must submit the grant to the Commission. Commission members are Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan, Secretary of Agriculture Edward Madigan, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator William Reilly, Sen. Thad Cochran, Sen. David Pryor, Congressman Dick Schulze and Congressman John Dingell.

In addition to the effort to halt Cheyenne Bottoms funding, some Kansas congressmen may have jeopardized a \$549,000-grant to acquire wetlands in the McPherson Valley. In

a recent letter to Sen. Robert Byrd, chairman of the Senate Appropriates Subcommittee on Interior, Congressman Pat Roberts urged "that no federal funds be provided . . . for land acquisition regarding the McPherson Wetland Restoration Program."

A central issue in the objections to these projects seems to be the fact that The Nature Conservancy (TNC) -- a nonprofit conservation group -- has a grant to purchase land for the project in the area, even though TNC must manage the land for wetlands and shorebirds, and they may not sell it without returning the grant money to the federal government.

According to Roberts, "local [McPherson Valley] residents and organizations have indicated that any federal land acquisition . . . would be met with stiff opposition."

Todd Graeff, Director of Parks and Public Lands for the Department of Wildlife and Parks, disagrees. "We will buy land only from willing sellers, and we have more sellers lined up in the McPherson Valley than we have funds to purchase land.

"When Congress passed the North American Wetlands Conservation Act," Graeff continues, "it recognized that shorebird and waterfowl populations could only be saved by a joint effort of individual citizens; private organizations; and local, state and federal government. As a result, this grant program was set up to encourage public/private partnerships, and that is exactly what we have at Cheyenne Bottoms and the McPherson Wetlands.

"What most people don't realize," adds Graeff, "is that The Nature Conservancy has already put \$1.6 million of its own money -- private money -- into the Cheyenne Bottoms project. No state money has gone to TNC, and the federal government has offered these grants for working together to help pre-

serve one of the continent's last remaining great wetland areas."

Other private partners in these projects include the Kansas Audubon Council, Kansas Ducks Unlimited, Kansas Sierra Club and Quail Unlimited. --Shoup

## Iowa Bans Kansans

In a move that has been expected for some time, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has banned Kansas deer hunters from their annual deer season. A paragraph in Iowa's 1992 deer application explains the regulation and specifically mentions Kansas:

*Deer licenses are not available to residents of states that have a deer season but do not allow Iowa residents to purchase a non-resident deer license. Deer license applications will not be accepted from residents of Kansas or any other state that fits the above criterion.* This does not include Kansans who own land in Iowa, according to Iowa DNR officials.

"This came from the Iowa State Legisla-



ture because we have had reciprocity laws for other things, such as certain fish and furbearer species," explains Dick Bishop, wildlife bureau chief for the Iowa DNR. "We realize that when you haven't issued nonresident big game licenses, your residents are protective. And

we have landowners here with friends and relatives [from many states] who would like to hunt on their land in Iowa." Bishop adds that allowing nonresidents to hunt in Iowa is a good thing, but if Iowans can't hunt in Kansas, the current law will have to stand. "If Kansas changes their law, Iowa, of course, will reciprocate."

In 1990, the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks backed a bill that would have allocated 5 percent of regular firearms permits for nonresident deer hunters. However, that bill was amended to allow 2 percent of the regular season permits. In addition, the law limited those permits to "doe only" permits. Because it is impossible for a hunter to distinguish a doe from a button buck, "doe only" permits are not issued, making the law unworkable.

Although Kansas does allow nonresidents who own 80 acres or more in Kansas to hunt deer on that land, it is the only state with a deer season that does not allow general nonresidents to hunt. --Shoup

## Developers For T&E

In 1991, the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks funded a Kansas State University study to assess Kansans' attitudes toward threatened and endangered (T&E) species. That study of randomly selected residents documented strong public support for T&E species protection: nearly 97 percent support maintaining a list of T&E wildlife; 89 percent support restricting economic development; and almost 96 percent support imposing stiff fines on persons who harm endangered wildlife or their habitats.

Now, more recent studies suggest that T&E species are also supported by those the law is designed to regulate.

Curious about how those directly affected by T&E regulatory protection programs would respond to the same questions, Wildlife and Parks sent a modified version of the questionnaire to those individuals required to obtain T&E permits during the last two years. Permits are required for such activities as bridge building, stream dredging or channelization, dam construction, housing development, utility transfer lines, pipelines, and other activities that would destroy the habitat of threatened or endangered species.

Seventy-two percent of the permittees responded, with surprisingly close agreement to attitudes of the general public.

## Finney Receives Habitat Print

On Aug. 5, a group of representatives of Kansas Ducks Unlimited presented Gov. Joan Finney with a framed print of the 1992 Kansas Waterfowl Habitat Stamp. Traditionally, the governor has received the number one print of the 250-print conservation edition.

The Waterfowl Habitat Stamp Program began in 1987 when the Kansas Legislature passed an act that requires waterfowl hunters to purchase the \$3 stamp. Proceeds from the sale of art associated with the stamp go to Kansas Ducks Unlimited for development of waterfowl habitat in Kansas. During its first five years, the program raised \$466,800 from hunters and collectors. Approximately

\$550,000 was generated from nationwide sale of art prints.

The 1992 Habitat Stamp, which features a pair of canvasback ducks in flight, was created by Jerry Thomas, a Manhattan artist. The publisher for the 1992 stamp is The Finishing Touch, owned by Michael and Ruth Ellen Simpson, Pittsburg. -- Tom Kirker, assistant to the secretary



Consider the following responses:

Do you favor maintaining a state list of threatened and endangered species?

General public -- 97 percent, yes; T&E permittees -- 78 percent, yes

Do you support strict fines for harming T&E species or their habitats?

General public -- 96 percent, yes; T&E permittees -- 71 percent, yes

Do you support protection of critical habitat for T&E species?

General public -- 98 percent, yes; T&E permittees -- 75 percent

Do you support protection of species that are rare in Kansas but abundant elsewhere (peripheral species)?

General public -- 86 percent, yes; T&E permittees -- 52 percent, yes

Do you support restricting economic development to protect T&E species?

General public -- 89 percent, yes; T&E permittees -- 44 percent, yes

In addition to this last question, there is one other area of apparent disagreement. Eighty-six percent of the general public supports protection of rare plants while only 41 percent of T&E permittees support such protection.

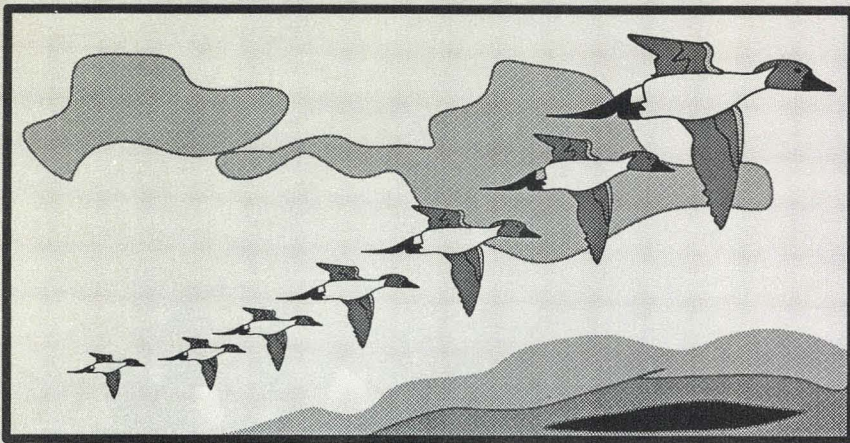
When asked about their opinion of how

well the Department of Wildlife and Parks administers the T&E permit process, 41 percent of permittees said the process is expedient (28 percent said it is prolonged, and 31 percent were neutral). Forty-three percent think permit conditions are reasonable (36 percent said they are unreasonable, and 21 percent were neutral); and 57 percent responded that costs of implementing permits are minor (compared to 27 percent who think they are burdensome and 16 percent who were neutral).

Overall, 44 percent described the agency's T&E protection program as good or excellent; 33 percent said it was fair; and 22 percent described it as poor or deplorable. In general, those who opposed any T&E protection were most critical of Wildlife and Parks' performance.

The Kansas lists of threatened and endangered species and species in need of conservation (SINC) were mandated by the Kansas State Legislature in 1975. The list is reviewed every five years, but species can be petitioned for addition to or deletion at any time.

For a complete copy of this recent survey, contact the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, Environmental Services Section, RR 2, Box 54A, Pratt, KS 67124, (316) 672-5911. --Shoup



Dana Eastes

## Ducks Up 11 Percent

While it's not time to declare that duck populations are booming, recent reports from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife (USFWS) have waterfowl enthusiasts crossing their fingers and hoping for more of the same in coming years. According to the report, "this spring's duck populations in the U.S. and Canada are up 11 percent from 1991," although they are still about 8 percent below the long-term average.

Duck populations began declining in the mid-1970s due to drought and habitat destruction. In fact, the latest figures on ducks and prairie ponds in the northcentral U.S. and southcentral Canada reflect this relationship between waterfowl populations and habitat. Spring ponds in the Canadian prairie increased 12 percent from 1991,

and in the northcentral U.S., ponds increased 17 percent. Both areas remain well below the long-term average for prairie ponds.

Wildlife officials in both countries hope that the end of a long drought and concentrated wetland conservation efforts have reversed the downward trend for ducks. The North American Waterfowl Management Plan -- a partnership of federal and state wildlife agencies, corporations and private individuals in Canada, Mexico and the U.S. -- has raised approximately \$400 million in public and private funds for wetland restoration.

Not only has this helped ducks, it has benefitted dozens of other species, many endangered, that depend upon wetlands.

Some interesting figures on individual duck species include

the following: gadwall are 57 percent above their long-term (1955-91) average; green-winged and blue-winged teal are 14 percent and 15 percent above last year, respectively, and 7 percent and 4 percent above their long-term averages; redheads are up 34 percent from last year, putting them 2 percent above their long-term average. Perhaps the most popular duck -- the mallard -- is up 10 percent from 1991, but it still remains 17 percent below the long-term average.

This is good news for Kansas waterfowl enthusiasts, watchers and hunters alike. Due to heavy summer rains, the state's largest wetlands -- Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area and Quivira National Wildlife Refuge should be loaded with ducks this fall. --Shoup

## Waterfowl Seasons, Bags

At their Aug. 18 meeting in Olathe, the Kansas Wildlife and Parks Commission set waterfowl seasons dates and bag limits for the 1992-93 fall and winter hunting season. For the most part, the new regulations mirror those of recent years.

The duck season will again be split into two zones -- the High Plains and the Low

Plains -- separated by U.S. Highway 283. Each zone will have three hunting segments. In the High Plains Zone, segment one will run Oct. 17-Nov. 8; segment two will run Nov. 21-Dec. 6; and segment three will run Dec. 26-Jan. 6.

In the Low Plains Zone, segment one will run Oct. 31-Nov. 13; segment two will run

Nov. 21-Dec. 6; and segment three will run Dec. 26-Jan. 3.

For bag limits, the point system of previous years was retained. Under the point system, each species is allocated a point value, and the bag limit is 100 points. Redheads, hen mallards, pintails, mottled ducks and hooded mergansers are 100 points each; drake mallards and wood ducks are 50 points each; and all other species are 35 points each. Under the point system, hunters must quit hunting if the first duck they take is a 100-point duck.

In other action, the commission set dark goose season to run Nov. 21-Jan. 24. The daily bag limit is one Canada and one white-fronted goose prior to Dec. 19 and two Canada or one Canada and one white-fronted on or after Dec. 19.

The light goose season will run Oct. 24-Feb. 7. Light goose regulations contain two significant changes this year. First, there will only be one unit -- statewide -- instead of the separate unit in northeast Kansas of previous years. Second, the daily bag limit will be 10 and the possession limit will be 20, double the number of previous years. In recent years, waterfowl biologists throughout the flyway have been concerned about light goose overpopulation and the danger of a resulting population crash.

All these waterfowl possession limits are twice the daily bag limit.

Four areas were also approved for dark goose hunting by permit only. The Marais des Cygnes and the South Flints Hills units have been open under this system for the past few years. This year, however, the Central Flint Hills and Southeast (formerly called the Strip Pits) units are also open for dark goose hunting by permit only. For more information on these hunts, contact the local Wildlife and Parks office or Department of Wildlife and Parks, RR 2, Box 54A, Pratt, KS 67124, (316) 672-5911. --Shoup

## Special Hunts

In an effort to provide exceptional hunting experiences, the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks will again provide several special opportunities in 1992-93. Upland bird species will be the primary quarry, but hunts will also involve rabbits, deer and turkey.

Many of these hunts require special per-



## UNDER CURRENTS

mits. Please contact one of the following offices, or the Pratt office, for additional information.

**Brzon Wildlife Area (WA)** — (6 mi. N, 4 W, Belleville) Upland game, special drawing one day per week throughout the season - one group per day up to four people. Apply: Lovewell Unit Office PO Box 293, Courtland 66939, (913) 753-4305.

**Cheyenne Bottoms WA** — (5 mi E, 5 N of Great Bend) Refuge opens to pheasant hunting from Jan. 23-31, (316) 793-7730.

**El Dorado State Park (SP)** — (2 mi E, 1 N of El Dorado) Handicapped waterfowl blind. Apply: El Dorado State Park, RR 3, Box 29A, El Dorado 67042, (316) 321-7180.

**Finner Game Refuge** — (8 mi N, 3 W of Kalvesta) Open Sept. 1-Jan. 31 by written notice to shotgun and archery only in pastures without buffalo. Apply: Garden City District Office, S. Star Rt., Garden City 67846, (316) 276-8886.

**Glen Elder State Park** Special hunt permit for pheasant, Sat., Sun., Tues. & Thurs. each week from Dec. 21-Jan. 31. Drawing each Monday before the hunt week. Maximum of 10 people hunting each day. Applications mail or phone by 3:00 pm each Monday. Apply: Glen Elder WA, Box 298, Glen Elder 67446, (913) 545-3345.

**Kirwin National Wildlife Refuge** — (15 mi SE of Phillipsburg) Controlled goose hunt, Wednesday & Sunday Apply: Kirwin National Wildlife Refuge, Rt. 1, Kirwin 67644, (913) 543-6673.

**Marais des Cygnes WA** — (5 mi N of Pleasanton) Goose hunting. Apply: Marais des Cygnes WA, Rt. 2, Box 132, Pleasanton 66073, (913) 352-8941.

**Neosho WA, South Area** — (1 mi E St. Paul) One-half day duck hunt. Apply: Neosho Wildlife Area, Rt. 1, St. Paul 66771, (316) 449-2539.

**Sand Hills SP** — (3 mi NE Hutchinson) Quail, pheasant, rabbit hunting, bowhunting deer, fall turkey (archery) Apply: Cheney State Park, Box 167A, RR 1, Cheney 67025 (316) 542-3664.

**Slate Creek Wetlands** — (5 mi S, 2 W Oxford), Quail, pheasant, rabbit, deer, fall turkey, waterfowl (including geese) Apply: El Dorado State Park, RR 3, Box 29A, El Dorado 67042 316 321-7180. --Shoup

## Light In the Marsh



by Mark Shoup

*The clearest indication that we have become alienated from our natural environment is the largely urban sentiment that hunting is intrinsically wrong. . . How can I love the beauty of living things apart from the process that sustains them. Life feeds on life --Richard Nelson*

In the clear, moonless predawn, I stumble through waist-high grass, bags of decoys slapping against my waders. My right shoulder burns from the pinch of decoy bag against fist. My left hand cramps above the weight of my shotgun and a five-gallon bucket filled with lunch, shells, and canteen. The calls around my neck bounce and clack with each step. Penny, my golden retriever, prances happily at my side, glancing up at me from time to time. Occasionally, she edges ahead, but a stern whisper is all it takes to bring her back.

Far ahead, mallards cackle. Wingbeats spray the air somewhere above and behind me. I freeze, quiet my clattering gear and stare at the bottled-up sky. Nothing but stars. But in the east, I see wings crisscrossing the horizon -- black specks that appear and disappear in the purple-orange hue.

I am alone here, without the slightest trace of emptiness in my heart. In this darkness, life rings all around me, *through* me. I can smell it in the cool, moist air lifting off smartweed, bulrush and Indian grass.

By the time I reach pond's edge, the ducks are everywhere. Nearly breathless, I race to unload my gear and begin planting decoys in the water, ducks jetting overhead all the time. I've got to get this done before it gets too light.

Penny is a willing helper in this activity. She dutifully sniffs each decoy -- just making sure -- and bites at the water, not really thirsty but expressing the natural enthusiasm of her breed.

Soon I have a ragged semicircle laid out in

front of my gear. Now for the blind. About ten minutes is all it takes to gather some sticks, brush and tumbleweeds for a good hiding place.

The stage is set. For the next half-hour, I just watch. Ducks pass over, spinning from unknown roost to unknown feeding spot. They check out the decoys. They land in the decoys. I make a game of trying to identify birds in the half-light, and as the curtain rises, I can name a few here and there -- Pintail, Gadwall, Wigeon, Teal, Mallard, even Woody.

The scene is so wild, for a brief moment I can understand how such prairie wetlands must have inspired those aboriginal people who hunted them for thousands of years. Their place in God's scheme must have seemed crystal clear.

A flock of wigeon dive bombs my spread, veers away, turns, and beats directly toward me. At the last moment, they brake in mid-flight -- heads down, wings beating horizontally against the air -- and land in my decoys with an odd, muffled splash like crackling cellophane. With blue-grey bill, white forehead and iridescent green eye mask, the male wigeon is one of my favorite ducks. For five or ten minutes -- time has become meaningless -- I watch them glide and dip among the frozen decoys, so intent upon their own feeding and preening that they are oblivious to their rubber brethren's inertia. Then, without warning, the entire group explodes in a burst of wings and water, and they are gone.

Instinctively, I learn each time I witness such wild events. It's not only an intellectual learning but a physical learning, as well. As I hunt, I experience a relationship *with* nature, not *to* it. I become participant, not just observer, and the experience elevates me, however briefly, above the isolation of modern culture. And now, I am absorbed in the drama of this marsh.

The air is loaded with waterfowl. Penny has begun to whine and fidget, and the sun has just popped over the horizon. It's light enough for positive identification, and a warm jolt of adrenalin steals my breath as a flight of mallards passes overhead, perhaps one hundred yards up, checking out my decoys. The morning is in the bag, but the hunt continues.

## Whites Before the Ice

Kansas reservoirs, especially those in the central part of the state, are legendary for producing big white bass, and winter fishermen can count on some phenomenal catches of big whites coming through the ice. They can't, unfortunately, count on the ice.

A mild Kansas winter may not put enough ice on large reservoirs for safe ice fishing. That's disappointing to the icefishing fanatics, but those who sit at home and pout are missing a great fishing opportunity.

Although avid winter anglers won't openly admit it, whites move into the upper ends of reservoirs long before the ice ever forms. The same areas that produce after the ice is on have often been yielding white bass to a few closed-mouthed boaters for several weeks before the freeze.

Sometime in late November or early December, the water temperature cools enough to severely stress the gizzard shad. The shad move to the warmer water of the creek and river channels but are still easy marks for the big whites. Fishermen have found these feeding whites to be extremely cooperative.

For best results, graph along the edge of the creek or river channel in the upper end of the lake. Look for areas with submerged timber. Ideally, you'll see scattered schools of shad in the upper level of water, with some large, tightly-bunched schools of whites below. Vertically jigging the same slabs and Kastmasters icefishermen use can be deadly on the big whites, and it's not uncommon to see good catches of crappie and an occasional walleye.

You might have to break some ice at the boat ramp to put your boat in the water, and you'll definitely have to wear your insulated coveralls, but you won't have to fight a crowd of fishermen. And a big white bass doubling your rod will make you forget about cold fingertips. Best bets for big winter whites are Glen Elder, Kanopolis, Cedar Bluff, Lovewell, Cheney, El Dorado and John Redmond reservoirs. --Miller

## More Records Fall

Earlier this summer, 10-year-old Philip Williams, Florence, set the state record for saugeye, and eight-year-old Lindsay Smith, Wichita, came within one ounce of setting the

state record for black crappie. Smith's 4-pound, 9-ounce catch was initially thought to be a white crappie, but analysis of photographs revealed that it was a black crappie.

Now three more Kansas state fishing records have been confirmed by the Department of Wildlife and Parks.

On May 17, Kenneth Wagner, Spring Hill, landed a 2.56-pound sauger at Melvern Reservoir. Wagner was using a yellow jig with a rubber body. His catch beat the "old" record of 1.5 pounds established by Craig Athon, Topeka, last summer.

On May 27, Shane Hill of Redfield was jigging in a Crawford County pond when he landed a 1.53-pound redear sunfish. That fish broke the old record, set by Pat Whetzell, Girard, in 1983, by about one ounce.

On June 6, Gregg Lawrence, Minneola, arrowed a 51-pound monster white amur (which is often called a grass carp) at Clark State Fishing Lake. Lawrence's catch beat the 1990 record of 50 pounds, caught by Kendall Fox of Wasilla, Ala., in a farm pond in Cedar Vale.

Anyone who lands a potential state record fish must contact Wildlife and Parks and have it weighed on certified scales before the fish is filleted or frozen. For more information, contact the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, RR 2, Box 54A, Pratt, KS 67124, (316) 672-5911. --Shoup

## Two Fish In One

*The following account comes from Dorothy Taylor, Fort Scott.*

On Friday, May 29, 1992, I was fishing at Lake Fort Scott about 8 p.m. I had my 5-year-old Zebco heavy action rod with a Zebco 33 reel and 10-pound test line.

I baited my hook with half a worm, cast approximately 20 feet from the bank and had the cork set about 4 feet deep. Then I waited hopefully for a fish big enough to keep and fillet.

It was not long before my cork went down. I set the hook and got about three cranks on the reel, and all of a sudden that fish took off running. I thought I would run out of line before it stopped. Then the tug-of-war was on. That fish and I went back and forth trading

line-in and line-out. My rod was bent pretty good when it wasn't "line-in." It looked like the letter "C." Finally, the fish gave up and slowly it let me hoss him in just a little bit at a time. Then it took a little run and let me take it back.

Finally, the struggle eased, and it was a steady take, my favor!



When I got it close enough to see the tail of what I had, we could not believe our eyes. I got it right up to the bank, and a friend stepped in and got a hold on the gills; my husband grabbed it by the lower lip, and they hauled it in.

That fish was a 53-pound flathead catfish, 47 inches long and 35 inches in girth. It took 50-55 minutes to bring it in.

I had another surprise when we cleaned the fish. Inside its stomach was a channel catfish 14 inches long, about 1 1/2 pounds, with my hook in its mouth. That flathead had swallowed my channel catfish tail first. The channel cat had its fins poked through the stomach walls of the flathead, and I got two fish in one catch.

I have only been fishing for two summers and have caught a couple of bass, a 5-pound channel catfish at this lake, and these two fish. I told the bait shop operator, "I got the other half of that worm in my cup. You want me to go get you something?" Dorothy Taylor

## Eyes On OWLS

It's official. OWLS, the Outdoor Wildlife Learning Sites program, is off and running. This brand new program has been creeping along in first gear to ensure that all the pieces are working properly, but now it's ready to fly. Initiated in 1990 with the development of two pilot sites, OWLS is an effort to help schools create outdoor learning laboratories. The Chickadee Checkoff has provided as much as \$2,000 for one OWLS project. Approximately 20 OWLS per year are in the works for the next five years, meaning we should have 100 OWLS in Kansas by 1995.

To date, there have been eight OWLS areas initiated. These include sites in McClouth, Baxter Springs, Onaga, Valley Falls, Goessel, Olathe, Mound City, and one near Wakeeney. At least another 17 sites will be approved this year.

Any school is eligible to receive an OWLS grant. Schools will be selected where OWLS committees have been set up, where maintenance commitments are evident, and where native plants and wetlands are incorporated as features. Other sites that may have room for only a few shrubs, trees and native grasses will also be considered.

Dr. George Potts of Friends University in Wichita is coordinating OWLS efforts for the Department. Dr. Potts has a background in education and the development of outdoor learning laboratories. He is working with KDWP biologists and educators across the state in helping to make OWLS a model program for the nation.

If you or your school may be interested in OWLS, please contact Dr. Potts at 2040 N. Kessler, Wichita, KS 67203, or contact Ken Brunson at Wildlife and Parks' Operations Office. There is a waiting list for OWLS, but the sooner you apply, the sooner you may have an OWLS at your school.

The application process involves these steps:

1. Application is sent in and approved for further consideration or rejected.
2. KDWP district biologist contacts applicant.
3. Applicant submits proposal with assistance from biologist and other technical support.
4. Proposal is approved and grant is

awarded.

5. The OWLS development begins. --Ken Brunson

## Super Hognose Hogtied

On Aug. 23, Kevin Albright was driving north of Harper when he noticed an unusually dark snake crossing the road. Having some interest in snakes, he stopped to investigate what would prove to be the largest eastern hognose snake ever captured in Kansas.

"I thought it was a water snake at first, it was so dark," says Albright. "But when I got to it, it flared up like a cobra and hissed at me. Its mouth was huge, and if I hadn't known what it was, I probably would have been scared to death."

However, Albright, who farms near Harper,

inches long, and it was given to the Museum of Natural History in Lawrence, where it was verified as a record and kept for live display.

When asked why he stopped to check out the snake, Albright's reply is practical.

"I watch for snakes all the time because I don't want to run over bull snakes. They eat a lot of mice. I watch for rattlesnakes, too, but I just caught this one because I knew it was unique."

In fact, many people would not be able to identify a hognose if they saw one. Formerly on the Kansas threatened species list, both eastern and western hognose snakes have now been placed on the state's list of species in need of conservation (SINC). Totally harmless, they eat mostly toads, which they dig with their upturned noses -- one of their most identifying features.

For those willing to study them, hognose snakes are a source fascination and delight. When threatened, a hognose will raise up and flare its neck, just like a cobra, and open its huge mouth wide, hissing. If this tactic doesn't deter harassment, it will commonly curl upside down and play dead. --Shoup



was undaunted. He knew that he had cornered an eastern hognose, often referred to as a "spreading viper" or "spreadhead." He also knew that it was unusually large -- in the 40-inch range -- so he caught it and went home to measure it. The squirming reptile would only allow a rough measurement, but Albright figured it might beat the state record of 42 inches.

He then contacted the Department of Wildlife and Parks' nongame section, and turned the snake over to them. Preliminary measurements indicated the snake was well over 43

## Safe Feed

Poorly stored grains and seeds can become contaminated with fungi and molds that produce mycotoxins --- types of poisons.

Conditions conducive to mold growth are poor ventilation, high humidity and warm temperatures. Any seed or grain eater can become poisoned if the mold has affected its food source. You can safeguard the feed you store for birds by taking the following precautions: 1) store grains and seeds for as short a time as possible; 2) keep grains and seeds in as low a humidity and temperature as is possible; and 3) store seeds and grains in tightly covered cans that are moth- and rodent-proof. -- Wildlife Health News

## Park Friends

A couple of years ago, Buhler resident Dan Ropp saw an article on budget cuts at Sand Hills State Park, and he knew what he had to do. Through a mutual friend of Cheri Miller, the park's conservation worker, Ropp offered his services free of charge.

In the following two summers, Ropp -- a full-time teacher in Hutchinson -- has maintained trails, displays and the office area and generally kept an eye on this grassland gem. And his work was above and beyond the call of duty.

"Dan was to report any problems or vandalism so we could fix it," says, Miller. "He did report problems -- after he had fixed them. He built a bridge, painted restrooms, made brochure boxes, created display boxes for flower beds, sprayed poison ivy, repaired mowers, repaired erosion around restrooms, and worked on boundary signing. One time, he had to cut 14 trees that had fallen across the trail after a storm."

In return, Ropp gets to assist the local biologist with goose banding and quail counts.

So what motivates someone to take a second job without pay? Growing up on a farm near Halstead, Ropp learned to hunt and to understand and appreciate wildlife. He was also familiar with the Sand Hills.

"I've enjoyed many years with wildlife, and I thought it was time to give something back," says Ropp. "As long as they need me, I'll help because I enjoy it and feel a responsibility for helping out." Ropp's labor is not without recognition. In August, Miller presented him with a signed Wildtrust print from the Department of Wildlife and Parks. He also received a letter of appreciation from the Kansas Trails Council and the Kansas Sierra Club and was featured in *Friends of Parks* magazine, published by the National Recreation and Parks Association.

Ropp is not the only public-minded Kansan to come to the aid of Kansas state parks. In fact, "Friends of Parks" is an active Wildlife and Parks program. More involved and comprehensive than "Adopt a Public Land" programs, Friends of Parks offers local groups the opportunity to have a significant impact on their favorite recreation area. At Glen Elder Reservoir, for instance, local citizens formed a nonprofit group -- the Waconda

Heritage Village -- to construct a combination historical museum, interpretive center and reservation shelter. In Cheyenne County, a local Friends group has agreed to build a wetland on a wildlife area recently acquired near St. Francis.

A number of other Friends groups are in the works throughout Kansas.

Private businesses, nonprofit organizations and individuals can become Friends of Parks. For more information, contact the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, Division of Parks and Public Lands, RR 2, Box 54A, Pratt, KS 67124, (316) 672-5911. --Shoup

## Winter Fees, Changes

The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks reminds state park users that all state park fees remain in effect throughout the winter, even though park usage may be down considerably. Fees can be paid at park offices during regular hours, or they can be paid at convenient self pay stations, called "ironrangers," at most state parks.

Remember also that some fees -- including hunting and fishing licenses -- will be higher as of Jan. 1, 1993, although fees for most outdoor activities in the state will remain the same. Key license and permit changes include the following:

### Fee or Permit

Old Price	New Price
<b>(Park-Related fee changes)</b>	
Annual motor vehicle permit	\$19.50
<u>Additional motor vehicle permit</u>	<u>\$4.50</u>
Annual camping permit	29.50
<u>Overnight camping permit</u>	<u>1.50</u>
Utilities	\$3 or \$4
<u>Thirty-day camping permit</u>	<u>\$60</u>
	with utilities
	\$150
<u>Youth group camping permit</u>	<u>\$1.50</u>
Boat registration	\$9
	\$15 (under 16 feet)
	\$2
	<u>\$18 (16 feet and over)</u>
Duplicate boat registration	\$3

	\$5
<b>(Other fee changes)</b>	
Resident hunting license	\$10
<u>Nonresident hunting license</u>	<u>\$50</u>
Nonresident junior hunting license	\$50
<u>General resident elk permit</u>	<u>\$75</u>
Landowner/tenant elk permit	\$37.50
<u>Lifetime hunting license</u>	<u>\$200</u>
Resident fishing license	\$10
<u>Nonresident fishing license</u>	<u>\$25</u>
Lifetime fishing license	\$200
<u>Combination lifetime hunting &amp; fishing license</u>	<u>\$400</u>
Five-day nonresident fishing license	\$10
Controlled shooting area hunting license	\$10
<u>Scientific, educational or exhibition permit</u>	<u>\$5</u>
Duplicate issues	\$3
<u>Vendor bond</u>	<u>\$35</u>

For more information on these fee changes, contact any Wildlife and Parks office. --Shoup

## Habitat Contest Result

Last issue, we reported on the state and national Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Contests. In these contests, youth from groups such as 4-H and Future Farmers of America (FFA) test their abilities to judge what kind of habitat on and around a farm best suits the needs of wildlife. We didn't know the results at the time, but Kansas placed 13th out of 19 teams in the nationals.

Considering the fact that this was only our second year of the competition, we didn't do too badly. Last year, we ranked 13th out of 16 teams.

Team members were Brian Kinzie, Edna; Jeff Spielbusch, Parsons; Shannon Vail, Edna; and Jason Zwahlen, Oswego. --Shoup

By Dana Eastes

## Do **B**adgers **B**urp?

Well, maybe after dining on a prairie dog or two, but you'll never get close enough to find out. You wouldn't want to. Badgers are fierce fighters and will defend themselves if they have to.



Badgers are strong and stocky. They are burrowing animals and are built for digging. The short legs and long, curved claws of the badger make excellent digging tools.

Badgers are active mostly at night. They do not hibernate in the winter.

They eat small rodents, including prairie dogs, pocket gophers, ground squirrels and rabbits, or whatever prey is available.



Badgers are solitary animals. They are found throughout Kansas, but prefer the prairie grassland habitat and are rarely seen in wooded areas.



## Guns and Kids

I read the headline in the *Wichita Eagle*, “Playing With Gun Costs Teen His Life,” and a sinking feeling came over me. Before I read on, I thought, “How could this happen?” The news story explained.

The young boy was an average American teenager respected by his peers. He wasn’t a gang member or criminal, just a good kid who enjoyed life. He had two friends in the house when he retrieved a gun from another room. The gun was loaded, whether he knew it or not. He put the barrel to his head and jokingly pulled the trigger. The gun fired and the life he had to look forward to was gone in an instant. No prom, no graduation, no college, no nothin’.

The next question I asked myself was, “WHY?”

Accidental shootings are on the rise statewide. In 1990, six Kansans under 17 lost their lives playing with firearms. That figure more than doubled in 1991. The incident described earlier was the third accidental shooting death in two weeks involving children in Sedgwick County—more than the total for the last five years. Could these deaths have been prevented? Absolutely.

All accidents can be prevented, but accidental shootings strike an emotional cord, and opinions run strong. Some anti-gun fanatics proclaim that outlawing guns is the answer. I don’t agree. Drugs are illegal but readily accessible to those who want them. Guns would be no different. It’s plain and simple, outlawing guns is not the answer. I believe the answer lies in adult responsibility and the education of today’s youth.

Part of the solution involves the gun owner—taking the responsibility of owning a gun. If you own guns, keep them locked and out of reach of children. Store the gun and ammunition separately, and never keep guns loaded. Even when these precautions are taken, dangerous situations can occur with a curious youngster who has never seen a gun. Educating children about the safe handling of firearms could save lives.

Parents need to teach their children about the consequences of playing with firearms. Instruct them to leave and tell an adult if a friend has a gun or if they find a gun. Show them the destructive power of a firearm. It’s never too early or too late to teach them that guns aren’t toys.

Courses covering firearms safety are offered by 4-H, civic groups, private organizations, city, county and local government. Parents should consider enrolling the entire family in these courses, even if they don’t own a gun.



Dana Eastes illustration

The public school system could take a leading role in gun safety. The National Rifle Association (NRA) offers a publication called “Learn Gun Safety with Eddie Eagle” for elementary-aged kids. Eddie covers potentially dangerous situations through puzzles and games and educates kids in a fun way. Class time to cover the material is about four hours, and the NRA will send instructors for teacher in-service training at no charge. Classroom materials are free the first year and then cost only a nominal fee to cover printing in subsequent years.

This publication was presented to the Wichita Public School system in 1991 and was rejected, supposedly because of its association with the NRA. It’s a shame to think some people can’t put their personal biased attitudes aside for the safety of 25,000 children. This publication won’t bring back the children already lost, but think how many lives it could save in the future.

Guns are here to stay. Millions of Americans enjoy shooting sports—safely. And guns are essential tools in law enforcement and self protection. Perhaps with some practical education about gun safety, we won’t have to read any more tragic headlines about kids and guns.

