

# KANSAS

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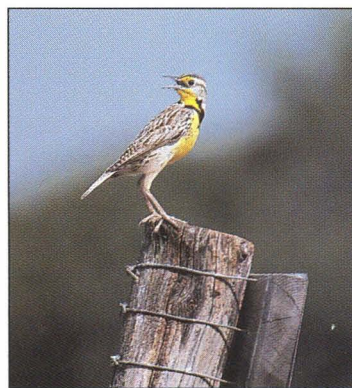
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**Front:** A northern flicker searches for a hidden screech owl. Mike Blair lured the bird with a recorded call and filmed it with a 400 mm lens, f/11 @ 1/125. **Back:** A robin feeds on hawthorne berries prior to a winter storm. Blair shot the scene with a 600 mm lens, f/4 @ 1/125.

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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, sexual preference, religion, 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.**

## A Look Forward



We have all heard the call for a smaller and more efficient government. During the past elections, nearly every incumbent and challenger, in some form, campaigned to limit or reduce the impact of government on people's lives. These are important and admirable goals. Certainly, government agencies fail to properly serve when they exceed public tolerance to be governed.

But what does this mean for outdoor enthusiasts and the natural resources of the State of Kansas. Reducing the role of government doesn't just mean someone else's services and programs. In all likelihood, all parts of government will be affected to varying degrees, including users of Wildlife and Parks properties and services. Over the past several months there has been much discussion and scrutiny of the financial administration of Wildlife and Parks. One point that has become clear in this process is that this agency is either underfunded . . . or it is trying to do too much.

As readers of this magazine, you likely feel as I do, that fish and wildlife management, conservation law enforcement, park operations, boating programs and outdoor education are important and legitimate functions of state government. More than many areas of public administration, users of Wildlife and Parks programs and services pay for their services through user fees. Unfortunately, these fees will not bear the cost of all agency programs — including fisheries, wildlife and park programs.

Part of the difficulty with a fee driven program is the distribution of services. As part of state government, Wildlife and Parks is charged with the responsibility to serve all the people of Kansas. However, the license and permit buying public rightfully demand a return for their investment. To cite a few examples, the department performs environmental reviews of development projects and allows recreational use of state managed lands by unlicensed users all at the expense of the license buying public. True, protecting productive wildlife habitat from damaging development and maintaining public land benefits license buyers. But it also serves everyone else.

There are those who believe that public agencies could provide all the services the public demands if they would use their resources more efficiently. With Wildlife and Parks, our greatest resource is the knowledge and expertise of our employees and salaries comprise the majority of the department budget. As a small state agency of only 406 employees, we make every effort to utilize our staff to the maximum potential. I have initiated a number of internal changes aimed at improving efficiency but resources will only stretch so far. If we are to have less government, there will probably be less government spending. Expectations

regarding the level of services and programs provided by Wildlife and Parks will have to be adjusted — by both license buyers and the general public.

Even with the recent message sent to Washington and every statehouse in the country demanding less government — wildlife, recreation and environmental issues still appear prominently in the polls regarding areas Americans hold as important issues. Somehow, natural resource management agencies must rethink how they will provide services to address public demand with the resources available.

A key part of this process will be to identify what public we are trying to serve and identify their needs. Does Wildlife and Parks serve the license and permit buying public or the entire population of Kansas? We can no longer fund all agency functions with existing user fees. Demands for smaller government conflict with efforts to increase general tax support. What must be done is to examine the mission of the agency and determine the proper role for Wildlife and Parks in fish, wildlife and recreation management in Kansas.

Who will decide the future of natural resource management in the state? As Secretary of Wildlife and Parks, I can influence operations, but the decision does not rest here. Elected officials of Kansas will help determine the allocation of funding and resources reflecting the political and fiscal condition of the state. The license and permit buying public who have supported fish and wildlife programs will be part of the picture, but will not solely determine the role of and direction of the agency.

Ultimately, it will be the prevailing attitudes of Kansans who will determine the future of the public sector in natural resource management. If hunting, fishing and camping opportunities are strong public priorities, they will be important to the majority of Kansans, they will be provided but possibly in different forms than in the past. As the role of government is reduced, privatization will play an ever increasing role.

There will be strong pressures exerted on Kansas' natural resources in the years to come. Urban expansion, agricultural production, environmental quality and other factors will influence Kansan's attitudes towards conservation of fish and wildlife resources and outdoor recreation. One thing is certain, no one individual or group holds the key to the future. It *must* be determined by everyone with a stake in the use and enjoyment of wildlife and outdoor recreation in Kansas.

*Ted Ensley*





# WOODPECKERS IN KANSAS

By Kevin Becker

*conservation worker, Pratt Hatchery*

photos by Mike Blair

***A variety of woodpeckers live in the Kansas woods, some as small as a sparrow and some as big as a crow. Each species is uniquely adapted to life in the trees, and each has its own interesting characteristics.***

Nearly everyone has heard the familiar “rat-a-tat-tat” of a pounding woodpecker. It’s a normal assumption that the bird’s either digging a nest hole or looking for a meal. However, my first encounter with a rather large woodpecker convinced me it was pounding for a much different reason. Two friends and I were staying at a lodge on a remote Ontario lake. We fished hard each day and relished a good night’s sleep. Unfortunately, each morning before dawn we were rudely awakened by a loud, hammering noise on the tin roof of our cabin. After several days, we finally got a glimpse of our unwanted natural alarm clock: a pileated woodpecker. The pileated is large enough and loud enough that it’s hard not to notice, especially when it’s drumming announcement of its territory on your cabin roof. And while it inhabits Kansas, many other, less obvious woodpeckers are also

found here.

Members of the woodpecker family, *Picadae*, have a specialized anatomical structure. The bill of a woodpecker is straight, hard and chisel-like and is used to chop out nest cavities or dig out wood-boring insects. A combination of an especially thick skull, strong muscles in the skull and beak and thin gap between the tough brain membrane and the brain allow the woodpecker to withstand the shock of repeated violent blows. Bristly feathers prevent fine wood chips from entering the nostrils.

While feeding, a woodpecker uses a long, barbed tongue to search out insects. When covered with saliva, the bristly tip of the tongue becomes sticky allowing the bird to catch insects and, in some instances, consume sap. The physiological structure of the worm-like tongue is peculiar in that it can protrude to extraordinary lengths, much longer than the beak itself. The lengthy

extension of the tongue is supported by a hyoid apparatus. This consists of a tongue bone that forks out into two cartilaginous hyoid bones called "horns." The horns curve up over the skull and are attached to the front of the skull or nostrils.

Woodpeckers are proficient climbers because of their short legs and long, sharp claws. Their zygodactyl feet (meaning they have two front toes and two back toes) aid in balancing themselves on trees. They also use their stiff, spiny tail as a prop. The loud, resounding hammering sounds are made when the woodpeckers are foraging for food, performing courtship rituals and claiming territorial dominance. Dead, hollow trees and utility poles are favorites for courtship and territorial drumming because they give more resonance to their drumming.

Mention woodpeckers and most Kansans will think of the red-headed woodpecker. The red-headed woodpecker is a common summer resident but is rarely seen in the winter. It is easily identified by the solid red head, black back, white belly and white wing patch. Commonly seen escalating utility poles for insects, the red-headed woodpecker also eats nuts, eggs, grains and other seeds. Unlike most

of the woodpeckers, the red-headed may be observed catching insects while in flight, resembling the feeding behavior of flycatchers.

Another woodpecker that behaves like a flycatcher is the Lewis' woodpecker. It is often seen sitting on a perch scanning for insects. Once an insect is detected, the woodpecker departs its perch and gracefully glides to snatch its prey. The Lewis' woodpecker has more of a crow-like flight, rather than the undulating motion of most

woodpeckers. Named after the renowned explorer Meriwether Lewis, this woodpecker is a casual transient to western Kansas where it inhabits timbered areas along streams. The Lewis' is more commonly found in the Rocky Mountain states and west to the Pacific Coast. This large, dark woodpecker is characterized by the

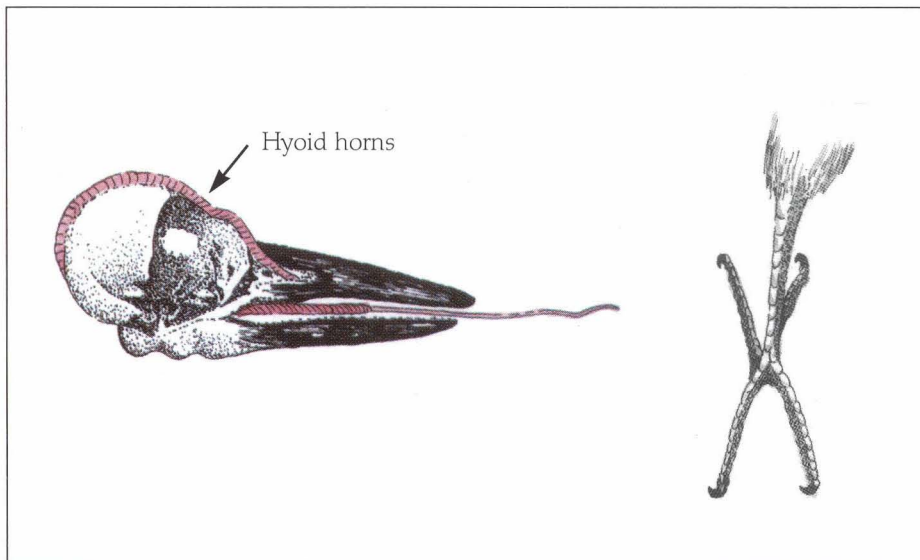


The red-headed woodpecker is easy to recognize and identify, but other, less visible woodpeckers live in Kansas.

fluorescent green appearance on its black back, gray collar, reddish-brown face patch and pinkish belly.

The red-bellied woodpecker is commonly mistaken for the red-headed woodpecker, however the redbelly does not have red over its entire head. This woodpecker is a common year-round Kansas resident, favoring riparian woodlands and urban locales. Population densities are higher in the eastern part of the state. The name is derived from the subtle pinkish tinge on its belly, which is difficult to detect in the field. The redbelly is more easily identified by the zebra-like pattern on its back and its white rump. Males have a red cap and nape, whereas females have a red nape and gray forehead. The redbelly feeds on larvae of tree-boring insects, other insects, fruits, nuts and seeds. It is a common visitor at bird feeders, where it prefers suet and sunflower seeds.

The largest Kansas woodpecker is the pileated, the one that kept me awake in Canada. Sometimes called log-cock, the pileated is similar to the possibly extinct ivory-billed



Dustin Teasley illustration

Physical adaptations allow the woodpecker to withstand violent pounding, and the long tongue, supported by a hyoid, helps the bird catch wood-boring insects. Zygodactyl feet, with two toes in front and two in back, allow the woodpecker to climb vertically.

woodpecker of the southeastern U.S. Pileated woodpeckers are found in the dense hardwood forests of the eastern one-third of Kansas. Approximately the size of a crow, the pileated woodpecker can be identified by its bright red crest, black and white striping on the face, all black body and large white patches on the underside of the wings. Despite its large size, the pileated is a very elusive bird. When approached this woodpecker silently vanishes into the woods, frequently undetected. However, their loud, ringing "Yucka-yucka-yucka" vocalizations indicate their presence. Their sound resembles that of the flickers only much louder. Also, large rectangular excavations in dead trees suggest their existence. In addition to excavating trees for insects, the pileated is also noted as a terrestrial (ground) feeder, foraging for carpenter ants and grubs at the base of trees.

The most terrestrial woodpecker in Kansas, however, is the northern flicker. It can be seen on lawns, pastures, golf courses and woodlots hopping clumsily as it searches for ants and beetle larvae. Its long sticky tongue is used to extract the insects from their nests. Animal and vegetable matter are also consumed when insects aren't available. The flicker is a large



The pileated woodpecker, nearly the size of a crow, is the largest in Kansas.



As this young flicker demonstrates, woodpeckers commonly bore nest cavities in trees. Mature timber stands with dead or dying trees provide ideal nesting habitat.

brownish woodpecker with dark barring and spots on its back. It is the second largest woodpecker in the state. While in its extremely undulating pattern of flight, the white rump patch is conspicuous. The belly is light colored with black spots, and there is a distinct black crescent across the breast.

There are two races of flickers in Kansas. The yellow-shafted flicker, nicknamed the yellow hammer, is the most common flicker in Kansas. The wings and tail have a yellow to gold underlining. Both sexes have a red patch on the nape. The black mustache, found only on the male, is a good sex distinguishing characteristic for birdwatchers and apparently for the birds themselves. In an experiment where a mustache was painted on a female flicker, her mate tried to drive her away from the nest as though she was a male intruder.

The red-shafted flicker is the yellow-shaft's western counterpart. The redshaft has no red patch on its

nape and its wings and tail have an orange to red underlining. The males have a red, rather than black, mustache. The redshaft is not as common as the yellowshaft, visiting Kansas only during the winter.



Flickers are commonly seen hopping in lawns, foraging on ants or grubs.

Many redshaft sightings in the state are probably hybrids between the two races.

Sapsuckers are woodpeckers that specialize in boring holes around tree trunks, allowing the sap to ooze down the trunk. The holes are bored in an orderly fashion, whether vertically or horizontally. The birds then lap up the sap with their brush-like tongues. Once a sap ooze has been created, the sapsucker will continue returning to the mother lode to eat sap as well as the insects attracted to it. Yellow-bellied sapsuckers occur throughout the state but are not common. During the winter months, coniferous woodlots are a preferred food source for sapsuckers. They also inhabit parks and other woodlands.

Adult sapsuckers can be distinguished by their red forehead patch. Males have a red throat and females have a white throat. Both sexes have a black bib on their upper breast and a drab yellow underside. Immatures have a dirty brown appearance without much col-



The yellow-bellied sapsucker leaves a distinct calling card when feeding. The rows of holes are bored so that the tree's sap will ooze. The bird will return and feed on not only the sap but also the variety of insects the sap attracts.

oration. A long white wing patch and white rump are noticeable in all plumages. Yellowbellies are said to be the least vocal of the woodpeckers. Their calls are faint mew, similar to cats. When approached,

they will quickly retreat to the backside of the tree trunk.

Another sapsucker is the yellowbelly's western cousin, the red-naped sapsucker. It is a casual wonderer to the western outskirts of

our state. The male red-naped sapsucker can be differentiated from the yellowbelly by its red nape and completely red throat. The female's throat is mainly red, occasionally with a white chin. The two species' feeding habits are similar.

Typically inhabiting the desert regions of the Southwest U.S., the ladder-backed woodpecker is another uncommon species in Kansas. This small woodpecker is a recorded resident of southwestern Kansas, living in the cottonwoods and willows of the Cimarron River. The ladderback has been sighted in Morton, Hamilton and Clark counties. As the name implies, it has a ladder-like barring across its



Ladder-backed woodpecker



Lewis' woodpecker



Yellow-bellied sapsucker (male)



Hairy woodpecker (male)

Dustin Teasley Illustration

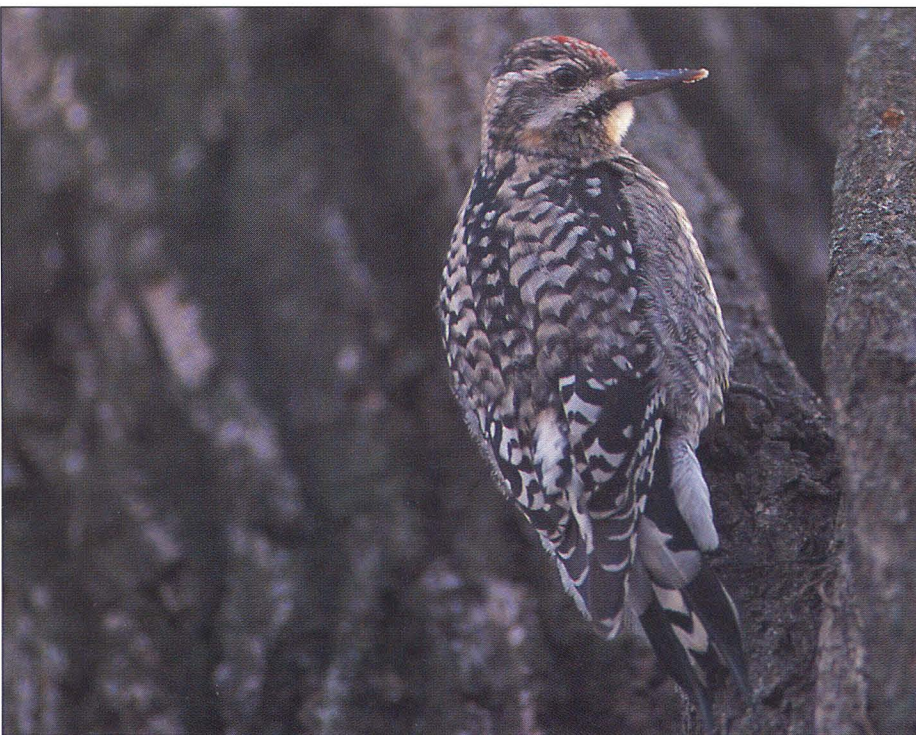




The downy woodpecker is the smallest found in Kansas, measuring just 6 inches from head to tail. It can be quite tolerant of human observers and is commonly seen at bird feeders.

back. Its facial markings are striped in black and drab white. The male has a red cap and a red forehead with black streaks. The female is similar but has a black cap. The ladder-backed woodpecker feeds

primarily on the larvae of wood-boring beetles. It has also been known to eat cactus fruit. Nests are generally constructed in trees, but the ladderback may also fashion a nest cavity in a cactus, yucca stem



The yellow-bellied sapsucker has a brush-like tongue that allows it to lap up sap. The yellowbelly is shy, often retreating to the backside of a tree trunk when approached.

or fence post.

Closely related to the ladderback is the common downy woodpecker. The downy woodpecker and ladderback are the state's smallest woodpeckers, each measuring about 6 inches from head to tail. The downy is considerably more colorful than the ladderback. Named after its fluffy, downy appearance, this black and white, sparrow-sized woodpecker has a white back and small, stubby bill. Its black wings are checkered with white spots. The male has a small red patch on its nape. The downy woodpecker is a resident throughout Kansas, found in woodlots, parks and mature shade trees. Its voice is a dull sounding "pick." This woodpecker is

frequently seen at bird feeders and suet racks. One is usually able to closely approach the downy because of its easy disposition.

Much larger than the downy but similar in demeanor is the hairy woodpecker. This robin-sized bird is more of a forest dweller and is more timid than the downy. It is found statewide but is not as abundant as the downy. Apart from its size, the hairy can be distinguished from the downy by its longer, heavier bill. The outer tail feathers of the hairy are plain white whereas the downy's are white with black bars. The hairy woodpecker's high metallic "peek" can easily be heard echoing through the timber. Insects are this woodpecker's main food supply.

Woodpeckers are very beneficial because they consume many harmful wood-boring insects and their larvae. Like many other species, preservation of critical habitat is important to the woodpeckers' long-term status. So, the next time you're exploring the woods and hear a woodpecker hammering on a dead tree, take note and use these helpful hints to attempt to identify the species. ♡



# BEFORE THE STORM

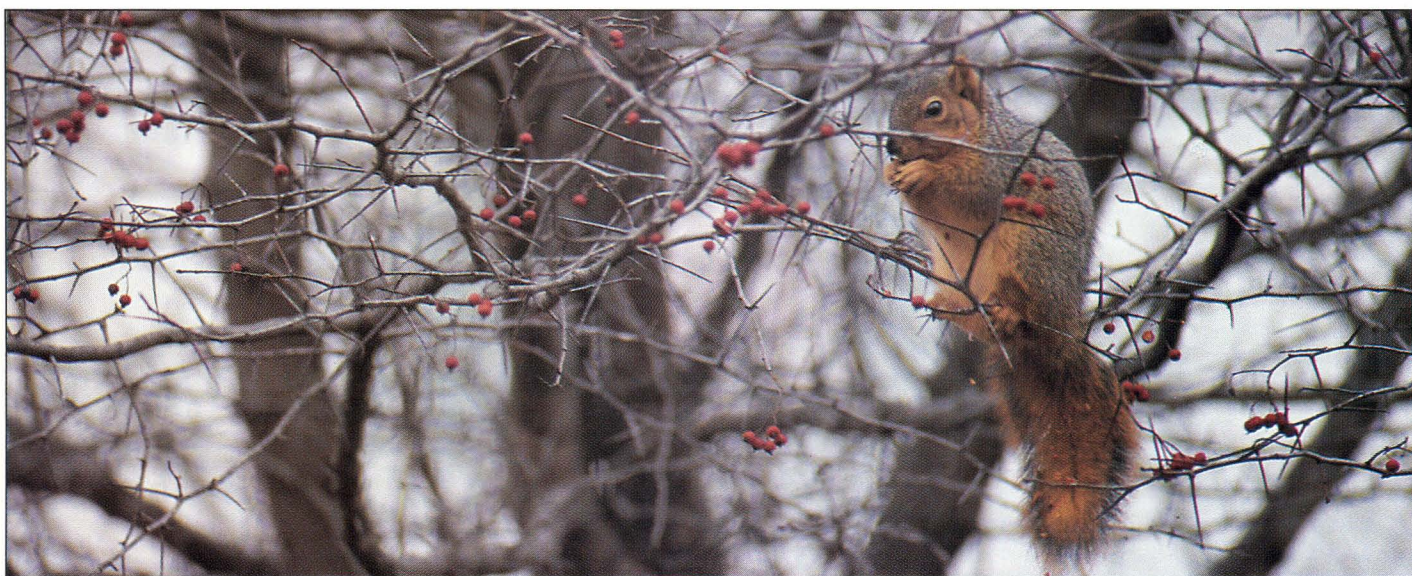
text and photos by Mike Blair





**D**arkness falls early as a winter storm blows out of the north. Afternoon snowfall continues, and high winds produce blizzard-like conditions. Before the night is over, the windchill will drop to 20 degrees below zero. By morning, the land will be locked under frozen snow.

To man, it's just another inconvenience of the season. But to Kansas wildlife, it's a matter of life and death. Birds and mammals will face a crucial test in a bitter environment where there is no escape. And before it's over, the cold will take its toll.





Animals, sensing the change, feed heavily in the hours before the storm. Deer stay long in the open grainfields, retreating to cover only after gorging themselves. Birds loiter at feeders or fruit trees, filling their crops to maximum capacity. Predators stay on the move, taking advantage of the urgent foraging by prey species. Then all grows quiet as the snow accumulates.

There will be no vacancy in dens and nests tonight. Tenants secure them early, lest they be caught in the storm's grip without refuge. Even in shelter, they will require an extra 25 percent energy to stay warm. Cold will force the rapid depletion of fat reserves.

Tomorrow will bring new hardships. Deep snow will cover food supplies and make hunting difficult. In nights to come, many victims will take their final rest. Those who survive this storm will probably face others.





It's a harsh season, a time when nature balances the books and all accounts come due. The surplus of life catered by summer must be pared to the minimum to set things in order for spring. In some wild populations, only two in 10 animals will live to see winter's end. It's the final season — the final safeguard.

But there are always survivors. Somehow nature manages to find the magic balance that keeps populations about even from year to year. And despite winter's hardships on wildlife, the cold season plays a special and necessary role in maintaining the natural environment.





Dustin Teasley illustration

# Hark The Lark

text and photos by Mike Blair  
*staff photographer, Pratt*

***Familiar on the Kansas prairie, the meadowlark is a true grassland symbol. The sight of a meadowlark on a fence post is one that all Kansan's know and love.***

**W**aft. It's a peculiar word, seldom used in conversation. It means to float, to pass across. It's best use may be to describe the eastern meadowlark and a prairie dawn. In the cool hours of semi-darkness, the lonesome song of this handsome bird drifts — wafts — across the land-

scape to greet the morning sun. And it energizes the day.

Along with nodding seedheads and gentle vistas, the eastern meadowlark is a fixture of the prairie. Its bright yellow plumage, boldly marked with a black "V," decorates the fenceposts and lookouts of its grassland home. The meadowlark's

cheerful song is a trademark of Kansas, and its tireless search for insect pests is a summer advantage to farmers.

In some respects, the meadowlark is similar to the bobwhite. Its stout build, walk and flight patterns are somewhat alike. It shares the same habitat. Because of these

things, the meadowlark is sometimes called the marsh quail and has been mistakenly shot as a game bird. It's an expensive mistake; the fine for killing a meadowlark in Kansas is \$50 per bird.

The eastern meadowlark is common in Kansas, where it prefers grassland and pasture situations. It is most abundant in the eastern two-thirds of the state but also shares western Kansas with a related species, the western meadowlark. The two species are nearly identical and hard to tell apart by sight alone. However, the songs are different, and distinguishing. Some hybridization occurs where ranges overlap.

Eastern meadowlarks are probably the most common birds of their preferred habitats. Population studies show an average density of one meadowlark for every seven acres throughout their range — about 91 birds per square mile. However, exceptional habitat may sustain many more. In Kansas, Flint Hills surveys show an average of 288 meadowlarks per square mile. An Illinois study found 266 meadowlarks per square mile in stubble; 205 in meadows; 160 on untilled lands; 143 in pastures; and 131 in wastelands. By comparison, corn fields yielded only 10 birds per square mile, and woodlands yielded none.

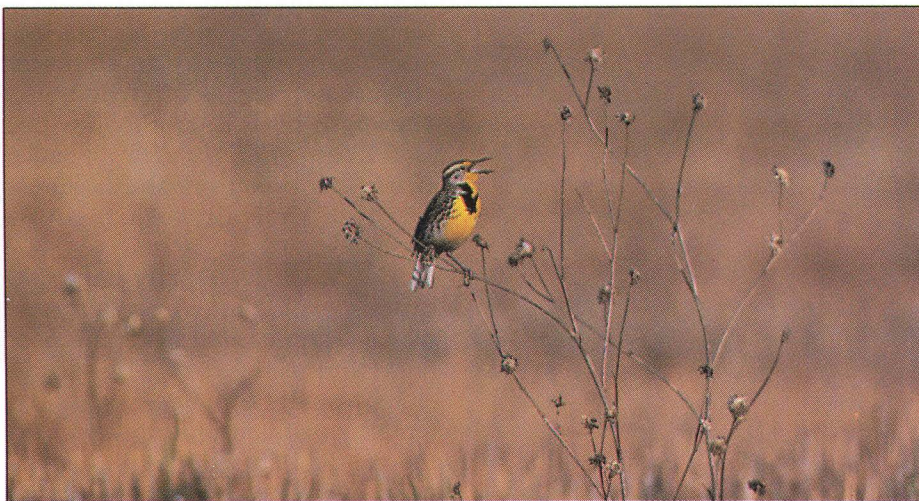
Eastern meadowlarks are winter-



The meadowlark's song is as much a part of the prairie personality as the grass itself. There are actually two subspecies — the eastern (pictured) and western.

hardy, but Kansas birds probably migrate south to Texas and Oklahoma. (Kansas winter residents likely originate in southern Canada and the northern U.S.) Meadowlarks migrate in flocks of up to 100 birds, but migration is seldom noticed. Biologists are

divided on whether it occurs exclusively at night, as many believe, or whether there is also a daytime, hop-scotch feeding pattern that moves a migrating flock at a rate of 2 to 6 miles per hour. Northward migration begins in March, and males appear in large numbers at this time. Older males are first on the breeding grounds. At first, they sing impassively during morning and evening hours, while congregating and feeding together during midday. As females arrive in April though, song becomes vibrant and sustained throughout the day. Now, males fiercely guard their small breeding territories, and give chase at any encroachment. Warnings and threats include competitive songs, posturing and flashing of white tail feathers. Rarely, two males will lock claws and fight savagely in the grass. Usually though, the skirmish involves little more than an animated chase, with the defender breaking off pursuit at the boundaries of its territory.



Meadowlark populations can be quite dense in ideal habitat. For example, an area of the Flint Hills was found to hold 288 meadowlarks per square mile.

Females select a mate, based in large part on the size and quality of territory controlled by a male. Eastern meadowlarks are polygamous, and roughly half the male population will mate with up to three females. In these instances, the breeding territory may be relatively large — 20 acres or more. Males paired with a single female usually control fewer than 10 acres. Female meadowlarks are tolerant of each other, and readily share common feeding grounds. They may nest as close as 50 feet apart.

As mid-April arrives, females build the nests. Often, several nests are worked on at the same time before one is finally chosen. Nest sites usually take advantage of a cow track or other depression in the soil, which the female enlarges by using her bill as a pick and forceps. Then the depression is lined with woven grasses, hair and other fibers shaped into a cup and covered by a dome that hides the nest and sheds

rain.

Eastern meadowlarks lay three to seven eggs, with five being most common in the first clutch. Eggs are white with brown or lavender specks and blotches, especially about the larger end. Incubation commences after the last egg is laid and lasts 14 days. Females do all the incubating, spending 75 percent of each 24-hour period on the nest. Most of their time away from the nest is taken during the hottest hours of midday. While incubating, birds are surprisingly active, listening to and answering songs of the male, feeding on insects that wander near the nest, and turning eggs. One female was observed to turn her eggs five times in one hour.

Cowbirds commonly parasitize meadowlark nests in Kansas, interfering with clutch success. Female cowbirds sneak into the nest while the meadowlark is away, laying one or more eggs to be hatched by the nest's owner. The eggs are sim-

ilar in appearance, though the cowbird's are smaller and more uniformly speckled. Overall, this parasitism reduces meadowlark nesting success.

When eggs hatch, the female remains on the nest several days, brooding the nearly-naked young. The male occasionally helps feed them, but most of the work is done by the female. Insects are fed directly to the nestling birds, or sometimes the parent regurgitates a pre-digested meal into the throat of the nestling.

Young meadowlarks grow quickly, leaving the nest in 12 days, however, as many as 100 daily feeding trips are made by parents during this period, accounting for 5,000 to 7,000 grasshoppers! Other prey items include cutworms, beetles, caterpillars and spiders. The adult rarely returns to the nest with only one insect. Usually its bill is full, to accommodate all the nestlings.

By the ninth day of life, nestling meadowlarks have grown sufficiently to crowd the nest. The dome may be torn apart, and the nest expanded. Any such exposure makes them more vulnerable to predation by grassland mammals, birds and snakes (see sidebar). If direct sunlight penetrates, the youngsters pant violently during midday heat to cool themselves.

Meadowlark chicks can fly by day 11, but oddly, seldom take wing for several days after leaving the nest. Young are fed by the adults for at least two weeks after fledging. The young birds beg for food with a loud feeding call, *tseup, tseup*, which also alerts predators and accounts for high mortality during this phase.

Meadowlarks usually have two broods each year. A second nest may be started within 2 or 3 days of desertion of the first. The second clutch usually contains 4 eggs. The female must continue to help feed the first clutch while building the nest and laying eggs for the second. (In one nest, the author observed a female lay two eggs back into the original nest, before all the first



Meadowlarks nest on the ground, usually in a depression that the birds modify and line with grass and hair, building a dome that hides and shields the young birds.



nestlings were gone.) However, when incubation begins, the male takes charge of caring for the first brood, which are about 3 weeks old at this time.

Gradually the young birds learn to hunt for themselves, becoming independent. They are then chased from the male's territory. They probably do not travel far before September, when they molt to their first winter plumage and assimilate into wintering flocks.

Eastern meadowlarks are sometimes cursed as cropland pests, but studies prove them innocent of this charge. Migrating spring flocks sometimes damage sprouting corn in southern states but seldom disturb grain crops farther north. During the summer growing season, 74 percent of a meadowlark's diet may be composed of insects, particularly those kinds injurious to crops. During late summer, one study showed that 72 percent of the diet consists entirely of grasshoppers, followed by beetles and caterpillars. In winter, diet switches to waste grains and native grassland seeds.

Next time the song of a marsh quail wafts on the breeze, take time to listen. You'll better appreciate this familiar bird, and make a connection with one of Kansas' most common and important wildlife species — the meadowlark.

## INVESTIGATING THE EASTERN MEADOWLARK

by Kevin Church,  
*research biologist, Emporia*  
and Diane Granfors & Loren  
Smith, *Texas Tech University*

The eastern meadowlark evolved in grassland vegetation. Kansas, a prairie state and one of the nation's largest reservoirs of this habitat, represents a haven for meadowlarks and other ground-nesting birds. Although eastern meadowlarks are common and well-known, little is known about the habitat factors that strengthen or weaken breeding success.

In 1990-1991, a study was under-



A study was done to understand how CRP impacted nesting meadowlarks.

taken in Lyon County to determine how changing land-use patterns affect the eastern meadowlark. Though all of Kansas is a "grassland", at least 3 million acres of additional nesting habitat suddenly emerged statewide through the 10-year Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). This habitat, composed of essential native grasses, provided new nesting habitat in what had formerly been cropland unsuitable for nesting. It also offered a different kind of nesting habitat that could be compared with the more typical rangeland sites. The study centered on evaluating potential meadowlark nesting success, given the addi-

tional habitat.

Study sites included equal samples of rangeland and CRP. Rangeland sample sites were burned and grazed, whereas CRP fields were left relatively undisturbed.

To begin the study, a number of meadowlark nests were located. Mistnets, which are traps somewhat like badminton nets that capture flying birds, were placed in various locations of both nesting habitats to capture female meadowlarks. Nightlighting, or shining lights in roosting areas at night, was also used to capture female meadowlarks for study.

Captured females were fitted with tiny radio transmitters, allowing knowledge of their locations at all times. When a female had stayed in the same area for two days, her nest was located, and hatch dates for the eggs predicted. Eggs were checked every third day, except for the late nestling stage when chicks could be forced into fledging prematurely. After fledging, nests were again checked for signs of success, such as feather sheaths, fecal sacs in the nest and enlarged nest bowls.

Location of the nests provided valuable answers to our first question — how CRP compares to more typical rangeland nesting sites.

Meadowlark nest sites require



Graduate students from Texas Tech University and research biologists from the department caught meadowlarks in a mistnet, then attached radio transmitters to the birds.

three elements: growing plants, standing dead plants and plant litter (compacted fallen plants). First, we defined how these occurred on each site. As expected, rangeland sites burned in April and then grazed contained only small amounts of litter or dead standing vegetation. However, rangeland did provide a vigorous regime of short, growing grasses and forbs. By contrast, the unburned CRP sites contained taller green canopy cover, a high percentage of standing dead cover and dense, compacted litter. (For details of methodology, contact the KDWP Investigation Office in Emporia.)

Though meadowlarks nested in both habitats, they were picky about where they built in each. Rangeland nest sites were found specifically where litter cover occurred with moderately tall growing plants. In CRP, nests were found most frequently in areas with standing dead cover.

Changes took place in both study sites within the growing season that also affected meadowlark nesting. Rangeland sites became more favorable for nesting as summer progressed, due to increased grass heights and accumulating litter. At the same time, CRP sites became less favorable, as they turned more rank and lost forb cover due to summer die-off. Trends from early to late summer seemed to suggest a preference for meadowlark nesting in CRP habitat for a first brood, then changing to rangeland sites for the second brood. However, regardless of nest location, habitat didn't seem to impact nest success.

Therefore, we concluded that the addition of CRP grassland acreage is beneficial and complementary to meadowlark nesting in Kansas.

Secondly, we were interested in nest mortality rates during the meadowlark nesting season. Recurring contact with nests provided data about the fate of each.

Our study showed lower success rates (less than 25%) than those previously reported for Eastern meadowlark, which are typically between 30% and 52%. One related Illinois

study (1970) recorded a nest success rate of only 18%, attributed to the high local numbers of predators. We didn't measure predator populations in the study areas, but the same problem may have been responsible for poor success in our study.

We did measure the apparent results of predation in our nests we located. During the incubation stage (1-12 days), this accounted for the loss of about three eggs per day; during the hatch stage (days 13 and 14), predation removed more than 20 chicks per day; and during the brood stage (15-24 days), losses amounted to 7 chicks per day. We hypothesize that predators are alerted to nests by activity, especially during the hatching interval. Causes and occurrence of mortality differed little between CRP and rangeland sites.

These findings led us to believe that meadowlarks in Kansas experience poor nesting success, with as many as three out of four potential chicks lost before fledging.

Learning about nest site preference in the two study areas allowed

us to draw some conclusions about beneficial agricultural management practices that can favor meadowlark nesting success.

Overall, meadowlarks benefitted from CRP management, which eliminates burning and grazing and encourages litter cover. However, burning is well-known as a way to reduce excessive and rank litter while increasing native vegetation and decreasing cool-season grasses. Burning on a three-year cycle maintains the advantages of burning without its disadvantages. This principle is true both for CRP and rangeland applications.

Mowing, a common part of CRP and some pasture management, has some disadvantages from a meadowlark's point of view. The mowing process directly destroys nests and causes some parents to abandon nesting. But this does not mean that mowing and meadowlarks are completely incompatible. By mowing in late July, and spot-mowing to control unwanted weeds, a grasslands manager can have both wildlife and cattle forage. ♡



Receiving equipment allowed researchers to locate nests so that vegetation at the sites could be evaluated, and the success of the nests could be monitored.



# The Call Of The Wild

text and photos by J. Mark Shoup  
*associate editor, Pratt*

***Don Dennis is a hunter, a skilled caller and a craftsman — a perfect combination to build a duck call that sounds as good as it looks.***

**F**or the modern waterfowl hunter, the margin between success and failure can often be measured with the simplest of instruments — a duck or goose call. In fact, the art of calling waterfowl has become so refined that competitions are held nationwide, elevating not only the skill of callers but the

quality of calls.

Don Dennis, of Blue Springs, Mo., is a call maker who has been part of this evolution. He makes no ordinary duck calls. The hand-crafted and finely tuned calls are prized by waterfowlers from California to New York, from Alaska to Texas. A Dennis call is

even honored in Ducks Unlimited's National Headquarters collection in Memphis. They have won three Missouri Open championships, three Missouri state championships, two Kansas state championships, and four Kansas regionals.

This isn't counting the times Dennis has won competitions with

them himself.

But what really makes Dennis calls so special is that they are created by the hands of a hunter. Like a piano tuner or a violin maker, the creator of a wildlife call must be able to play his instrument well, and Dennis can.

"I'm an old mallard hunter," says Dennis. "There's nothing like the action of duck hunting, and calling mallards is my favorite thing."

Born in 1931 in Independence, Mo., Dennis didn't begin hunting ducks until 1946. He and his father had hunted upland game together for some time, but ducks would become their passion. They hunted all types of habitat, from the marshes of Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge near Mound City, Mo., to the backwaters of the Missouri River. Because live decoys had been outlawed more than a decade earlier, calling was a necessity. Unfortunately, neither Dennis or his father knew any good callers at that time.

"My first call was a Stofer," Dennis recalls, "and I had to go around to contests and just listen in order to learn. Dad was always my main hunting partner, so we learned together."

In 1954, after a stint in Korea with the U.S. Army, Dennis thought he would test his skills in calling contests. In his first competition, he finished a respectable fifth. He was hooked, and entered yearly after that.

In 1964, he decided to make his own calls. "I kept complaining that the calls never sounded just like I wanted," says Dennis, "so my wife said, 'Why don't you make

your own?' So I did."

Well, it wasn't quite that simple. He already had a couple of calls made by Arkansas craftsman Chick Major, so Dennis and his wife took a vacation to Stuttgart, Ark., to see if Major would let him watch the call-making process and give him some tips. Major obliged the curious young duck caller.

"I talked to Chick several times and watched him work. Then I came home and bought a lathe." Dennis relates this all in a matter-of-fact tone that suggests anyone could do it. "I didn't know what I was doing at first."

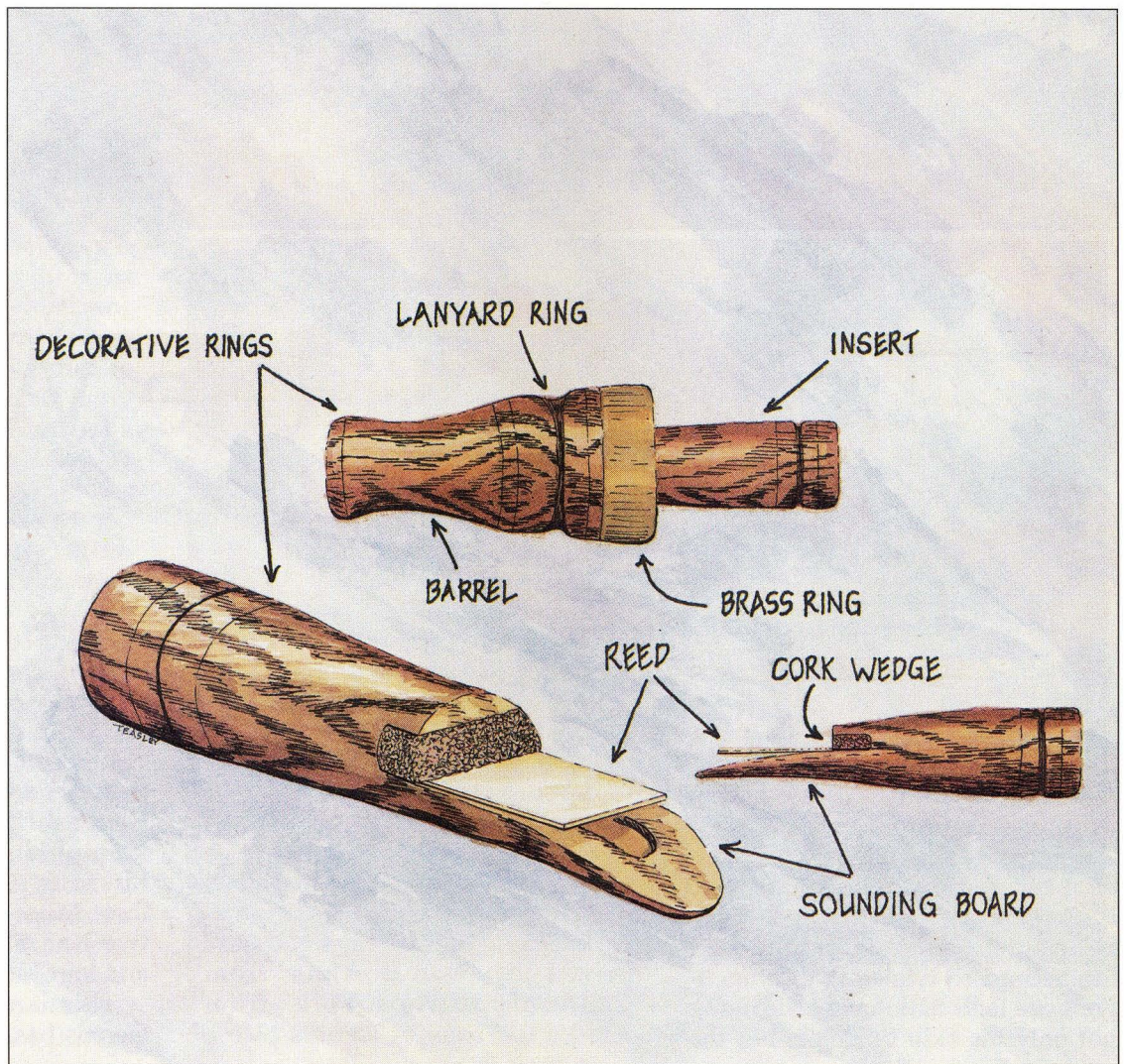
Indeed, that first effort — which still hangs in Dennis' workshop — is a bit crude. The bore is off-center, and it looks as if it could have been carved with a pocket knife.

He learned quickly, however.



Patience, practice, a simple block of wood and some basic tools are required.

One year after that first primitive quacker came off the lathe, a Dennis call won the Missouri State Championship and went to the World Championship in the hands



Dustin Teasley illustration

of Pete Clagett, a Kansas City caller who had won the World's a few years earlier. In the next few years, Dennis — blowing Don Dennis duck calls — earned two regional championships and qualified for the World Championships in Stuttgart four times (1966-69), finishing fifth twice.

So what goes into the making of a championship duck call? In the case of a Don Dennis call, the simple answer is wood, brass, a little cork, and a strip of mylar for the reed. (Dennis originally used hard rubber reeds, but they were too brittle. Some early Dennis calls even employed metal reeds.) Mostly, however, it's years of experience, a deft hand, and a fine ear.

Starting from scratch, Dennis obtains fine hardwoods — walnut, maple (curly and bird's eye), coca



On the lathe the barrel is shaped mostly by eye. Dennis adds decorative cuts as well as a lanyard ring.

bola, cherry, Osage orange, rosewood, ebony, amaranth (purple heart), and even honey locust — and cuts it into rough blocks. The barrel pieces (see illustration) are cut to 1 1/2 x 4 inches with a 5/8-inch hole bored in the middle. The inserts are cut to 1 x 5 inches and left unbored. Working in a small workshop in his backyard, Dennis keeps a number of these rough blanks ready to go at all times.

When it's time to fashion a call, he starts by attaching a barrel blank to the mandrel on his lathe. Then he slides the tool rest in front of the blank, screws it down tight, and

flips the switch on the lathe.

Like most craftsmen's hands, Dennis' are at once broad and delicate, rough and graceful. The wood is a blur as Dennis deftly picks up a gouge like a surgeon grasping a scalpel. To steady his hand, he slides the gouge (which looks like a chisel with a rounded end) on the tool rest

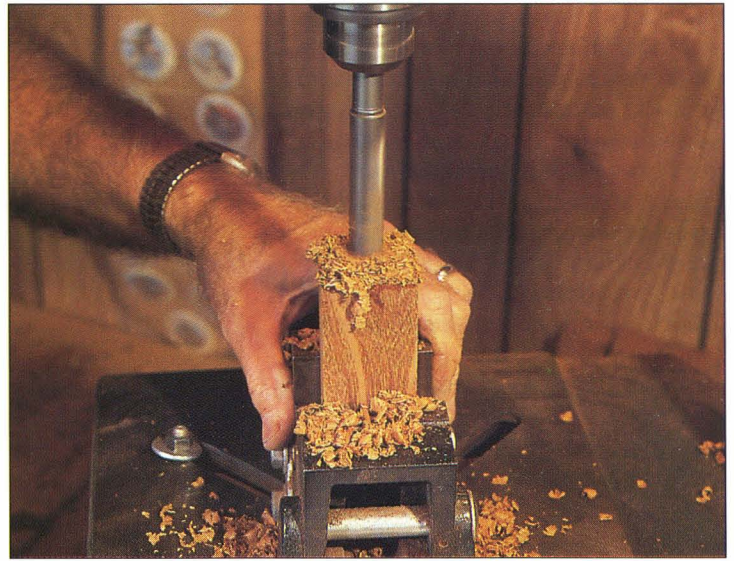
and quickly runs the tool back and forth across the block. Chips fly as the rough block quickly assumes the graceful shape that will one day hang from some lucky hunter's neck.

Although Dennis calls have a readily recognizable symmetry, their shape is created by eye, making each one truly custom.

Once he is satisfied with the barrel's shape, Dennis makes a shallow tenon cut around the insert end of the barrel. Then he sands one end of

a pre-cut brass ring, coats the inside with epoxy, and taps it over the tenon cut. At the point where the ring meets the end of the cut, the fit is perfect. He then sands off the excess brass from the end of the barrel.

Using a wire gauge to mark the spots, Dennis next burns in decorative rings and the lanyard ring with a wire



A hole is drilled in the center of a 1 1/2-inch by 4-inch block of wood to begin making the barrel of a duck call.

stretched across the spinning wood.

To finish the barrel, he sands it on the spinning lathe with 80, 150, and 320 grit emery cloth, then fills any possible flaws in the grain by buffing with colored wood putty. A final polish is buffed on, and the barrel is ready for a partner.

The insert is a bit more complicated. After all, this is the piece that will determine the quality of the call's tone. First, the insert blank is turned on the lathe much like the barrel was, only this piece has a straight taper so it will fit tightly into the barrel. While the insert is still on the lathe, he drills a 1/4-inch hole in the center with a stationary drill bit attached to one end of the lathe. The artisan then quickly removes the insert and does some



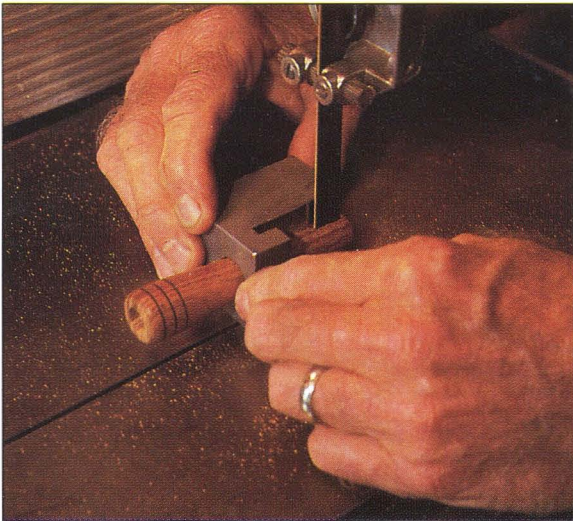
The signature brass ring is added, and the barrel is finely sanded and polished before Dennis starts the insert.

quick boring and gouging that I cannot follow.

I inquire about this maneuver, but the response is cryptic. "Certain things are a secret of the trade."

Now comes the tricky part. The insert is locked in a small stainless steel jig, and he makes a cut about two inches long, lengthwise from the narrow end. Then he crosscuts half of that end off, leaving a 1/4-inch notch for the cork that will hold the reed in place. Now everything rests on the steps that follow.

The tapered end of the insert (which now looks like a half-moon from the end) is clamped on another small jig, called the filing jig. The filing jig leaves part of the insert (the part that will go into the barrel) exposed so that Dennis can



The insert is first shaped on the lathe, then precise cuts are made on the band saw using a jig.

put the jig in a vise and file the insert to a radius that, hopefully, will make a perfect sounding board.

"The radius is the most important part of the call," Dennis explains, "because the reed must lay properly on the sounding board."

After the sounding board is shaped, Dennis cuts a piece of mylar for the reed and a small piece of cork that holds the reed in place. (The mylar is about 1 1/2 inches long and 3/8 inch wide, with the top two corners snipped off at 45-degree angles. The cork is about the size of a pencil eraser.)

Once the reed and cork are in

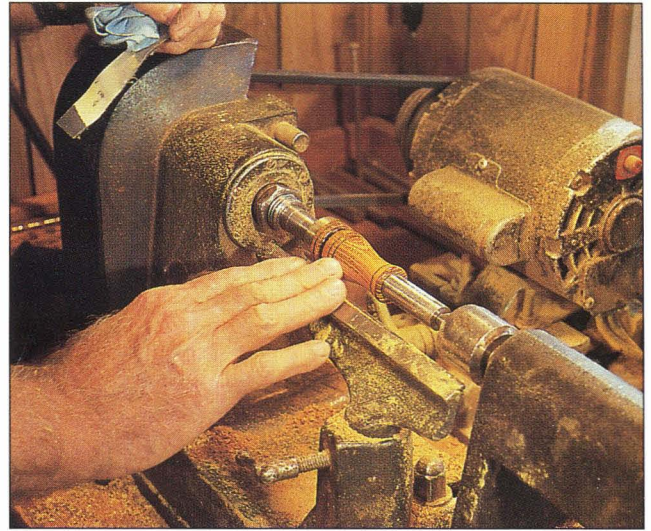
place, it's time to begin the laborious process of tuning the call. With insert pressed into barrel, Dennis' creation looks like a beautiful duck call, but it's anything but a finished product. Grunting audibly, he blows on the instrument, which he calls an Arkansas call — loud hails, soft ones, cackles. Then he pulls it apart, pulls the reed, trims, puts it back together, calls, pulls it apart, files the sounding board, puts it back together, calls some more.

He does this perhaps two dozen times. Every call sounds good to me, but he's not satisfied.

"I can file here, file there, but if it doesn't sound right to me, it goes in the trash," and he pitches the insert in a can under his workbench. "I suppose I have about 20 percent failure. It may sound okay to some people, but it's not a Dennis call."

When a Dennis call does sound right, it gets a fine lacquer finish and is ready for the caller's hand. Once in hand, Dennis has a little advice for the novice.


"If you want to learn to call, get a good call. Everybody blows differently, so it's best to get fitted by the guy who makes the call. Anyway, get a good one, then practice. Tapes are fine, but you've got to practice. Learn different calls — comebacks, feeders, hails, quacks — because they all work at different times."



With the skill of a craftsman, Dennis finely polishes each call before cutting the reed and starting the tuning process.

Other good advice for the beginner, Dennis adds, is to limit your calling.

"A lot of people call too much. Most times, you've got to call to get their attention, then just let them come into you."

Today, duck callers — not just ducks — are coming to Don Dennis. And after 30 years on the assembly line at General Motors' Fairfax Plant in Kansas City, Kan., he is enjoying retirement duck and goose call making at his leisure. The old mallard hunter-cum-craftsman is creating functional works of art that should leave a legacy of quality for generations of waterfowlers to come. 



A strip of mylar is cut for the reed. Hand tuning each call, Dennis will chuck the insert if the right tone can't be found.



## CRP: A Future Of Hope?

by J. Mark Shoup

*associate editor, Pratt*

photos by Mike Blair

### *What does the future hold for what some say is the most successful government farming program ever?*

Imagine, if you will, a government program that would dramatically increase wildlife habitat, reduce soil erosion, and improve water quality, and at the same time increase farm income. Now imagine that this program is administered on a national scale, an area, say, more than twice the size of all national and state wildlife areas combined. Say it is one of the most successful government programs ever established, in terms of meeting, and even exceeding its goals. And now, imagine that the program actually saves the American taxpayer money.

Now add to the fantasy by saying that this program has created what should be, but hasn't always been, a

natural alliance between environmental and farming interests.

Too good to be true, right? Farfetched, right? Well, to bring us all back to Earth, now trying imagining that such a program exists, but there is a strong possibility that the people's elected representatives might decide we can't afford such a program, that it should be scrapped.

"Yes," you say, "that's more like reality."

In fact, it is reality — all of it. It's the reality of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

CRP has provided unparalleled benefit to Kansans and to wildlife throughout the Great Plains and much of the U.S. Still, the majority of U.S. citizens know little or

nothing about the program although many readers of this magazine are familiar with at least some aspects of it. The next time you have a conversation with friends who don't hunt, farm, or are not involved in a conservation group, ask them about CRP. From personal experience, I've found that most folks just don't know about it, even if they express a concern for environmental issues.

To understand the CRP, we need a very brief history of modern farm programs, which began in the 1920s and 30s, culminating with the Agriculture Adjustment Acts of 1933 and 1938. Under these initial programs, farmers were given payments for certain practices that controlled crop production. Farmers got income support, and society got a cheap, abundant food supply. It worked well, but there was an important missing element — conservation.

The first long-term conservation program that required perennial cover on idled acres was created nearly 40 years ago. The Soil Bank Program, administered by U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), lasted from 1956-72 and was similar to CRP. Its primary purpose was to reduce surplus crop inventories. Secondly, conservation practices would increase wildlife habitat and reduce erosion. At one time, 28.7 million acres were enrolled in Soil Bank. Hunters remember this era as a boom time for game, especially pheasants. However, the law was repealed in 1965, and all contracts expired in 1972.

In the 1970s, the price of wheat and other crops skyrocketed, and the need to control commodity prices seemed remote. Crop acres were expanded as fence-row-to-fence-row farming was encouraged. Sadly, soil erosion also increased. By the late seventies and early eighties, soil erosion was worse than in the Dirty Thirties — more than 5 billion tons per year. On-farm losses of soil productivity were estimated at nearly \$1.5 billion annually.

Thus, soil conservation became a

central issue in the 1985 Farm Bill. Although the Administration, believing that the problem was overstated by the press, recommended phasing out USDA's soil conservation programs, Congress disagreed. The problem was deciding what should be emphasized and how a program should be implemented. Overproduction had been a problem in American agriculture for years, but annual set-aside programs had proved costly (and still are) in controlling production, and they provided no wildlife or other conservation benefit. Still, many senators and representatives had reservations about any long-term reserve program. Looking back at the Soil Bank, they were concerned about the loss of conservation benefits once the contracts expired.

While soil erosion, pesticide pollution, and other environmental problems associated with agriculture were increasing, farm program costs were spiralling, and the farm economy was in its worse shape in many years. The need for a link between conservation and commodity policy had become obvious, and Congress added long-term provisions to the 1985 Food Security Act (commonly called the Farm Bill) that encouraged landowners to protect highly erodible land (HEL). CRP was born.

"That's how CRP came about, but how does it work?" you ask. In summary, it works like this. In 1985, the USDA offered the opportunity to bid for the first CRP contracts. Essentially, the program had four goals: 1) control erosion, 2) improve water quality, 3) reduce surplus crops, providing income for farmers through increased commodity prices, and 4) create wildlife habitat. Farmers agreed to put their land in some kind of permanent vegetation for ten years in return for yearly payments on their land and cost sharing to establish the cover. The average contract price was about \$50 per acre per year. Nineteen CRP practices (called CP-1, CP-2, etc.) are now approved, including introduced grasses and legumes (CP-1),



Nearly three million acres are enrolled in CRP in Kansas, and fortunately, from a wildlife management point of view, nearly all of it is planted to native grasses.

native grasses (CP-2), trees (CP-3), and wildlife habitat (CP-4). Farmers are required to establish and maintain the cover throughout the life of the contract. However, provisions were made for haying, grazing, and other uses in times of emergency.

That first year, only 2 million acres were signed up, but the word got out fast. More than 13 million acres were signed the second year, and by the time the final contracts were signed last year, more than 36 million acres had been "retired," 2.9 million in Kansas alone. Only two other states, Texas and North Dakota, have more acres in CRP.

Has the program lived up to its expectations? Without question, the answer is "Yes." Since its inception, CRP has reduced soil erosion by almost 700 million tons annually, 400 million tons in the Great Plains alone. Reduced erosion obviously

means cleaner water because fewer sediments, pesticides, and plant nutrients are washed into our streams and reservoirs, reducing siltation that can destroy important water supplies.

Eliminating the erosion benefits provided by CRP would be a disaster for waterfowl, too, according to Arnold Kruse, habitat management biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in North Dakota, one of the most important duck breeding states in the country.

"We are losing more prairie pot-holes to sedimentation than to drainage," says Kruse, "and North Dakota cannot meet the objectives of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan without CRP."

Crop surpluses have also been reduced by CRP, resulting in increased commodity prices. (Studies show that if CRP is not re-





Native grasses such as this big bluestem are preferred by wildlife managers because they provide good summer and winter cover, and many also provide a food source.

authorized, by the turn of the century, wheat and sorghum prices will drop as much as 36 cents per bushel, barley 53 cents, corn by almost 6 cents, and oats by 17 cents.) In addition, annual payments on CRP meet or exceed the profit that would be gained from crop production. In some areas, more than 20 percent of farmers were able to save their farms through CRP.

Wildlife have already reaped the harvest of CRP because grasslands provide important cover for everything from ducks and songbirds to meadow voles, raptors, fish, and big game. It is estimated that CRP maintained at its current levels will produce as many as 1 million additional ducks each year in the Central Flyway. Pheasant populations in Minnesota, North Dakota, Ohio, and South Dakota have dou-

bled under CRP. Quail have benefitted throughout their range. Songbirds such as lark bunting, grasshopper sparrow, and bobolink have increased from 10 percent to 20 percent.

For all its successes, CRP still has its detractors, and even strong supporters think the program should be revised. The primary objections to CRP involve cost. Annually, CRP costs about \$1.8 billion. Now, you're asking, "If the program costs taxpayers that much, how can you say that it saves us money?" Here's how.

Two thirds of the land in CRP was previously in farm commodity price support programs. According to the Food and Agriculture Policy Research Institute, if that land were not in CRP, it would be costing taxpayers about \$2 billion each year in commodity price support pay-

ments. Annually, that's \$200 million dollars more than the \$1.8 billion-cost of CRP. In Kansas, the savings is about \$9 million annually, according to the USDA's Economic Research Service.

Okay, \$200 million in savings nationwide, \$9 million in Kansas each year. These figures are conservative, too. A report by the Sparks Companies shows a \$105 million annual savings just in Kansas, which holds 14 percent of all CRP acres nationally. If the Sparks figures are used, CRP savings from reduced commodity payments alone is \$750 million annually, \$7.5 billion over the life of the program. Still, even by the most conservative estimates, the costs of the program are more than wiped out by reductions in commodity program payments. The program is in the black.

But this is not taking into account the economic benefits derived from reduced soil erosion, improved water quality, and improved wildlife habitat. Economists with the National Biological Survey in Ft. Collins, Colo., have come up with some fascinating information in this regard. A dollar value can be assigned to soil and water, to the tune of \$4.8 billion over the life of the program. Wildlife benefits, including income from small game and waterfowl hunting and bird-watching, amount to approximately \$8.6 billion over the life of CRP.

This amounts to \$13.4 billion in natural resource benefits of the program. Other estimates are even higher, and none take into account the reduced health risks or benefits to big game hunting and fishing.

So taking the most conservative figures — \$2 billion in commodity payment savings and \$13.4 billion in natural resource benefits — CRP saves the taxpayer \$15.4 billion over its 10-year life, after accounting for the program's initial cost. Name another government program that comes close to this kind of return.

Looking at these figures, it would seem impossible to argue against the program, but arguments are left. For instance, some senators and representatives believe that commodity

price supports should be cut drastically. If that happens, the savings I have outlined for commodity payments would be reduced correspondingly. However, if price supports were reduced — as remote as that may seem — any re-authorized CRP contracts could be reduced by the same percentage, negating arguments to discontinue the program while providing an equal incentive for farmers to stay in CRP.

Another argument, offered by a highly independent farmer friend of mine, goes something like this: "If you pay for the land like we have done with CRP, I think you should own it afterward." While the logic seems solid, it has some weaknesses. It's not as if we have paid farmers for CRP without getting anything in return. As outlined above, the return is considerable, the need is urgent, and there is probably no other acceptable way of getting it. In effect, taxpayers have leased this ground and made money in the process. Literally, it is

a lease on life.

There are also those environmental groups that would switch the emphasis on CRP to water quality programs in more urban states. While this would hold obvious benefits for fisheries and other aquatic life, it would dilute the multiple benefits of the current program, and wildlife in general would suffer. It would amount to robbing Peter to pay Paul.

Some large agri-businesses, exporters and other "middle men," are also against continuing the program because they get paid for each bushel of grain they move. Any program that reduces crop acreage hurts them.

So what's the future of CRP? As of this writing (early November 1994), the answer is "uncertain." While the program has strong support from groups as diverse as the National Audubon Society, Ducks Unlimited, American Farm Bureau, the Wildlife Management Institute, the National Rifle Association, and virtually every state wildlife agency

where CRP land exists, re-authorization is far from given.

Under the 1990 Farm Bill, Secretary of Agriculture Mike Espy has the power to extend contracts signed prior to 1990 for another 10 years. His doing this, however, does not guarantee funding for the contracts. Crop deficiency payments are considered "continuing" programs by Congress, and therefore added to their "baselines" — projected budget needs on which fiscal plans, requests, and appropriations are based. CRP is considered "discretionary" spending, so at this time, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) has not put CRP in its baselines. However, CBO has said it will add CRP if Espy commits to the program by re-authorizing contracts for ten years. Ostensibly, this would continue the program. Espy has extended contracts signed that first year for one additional year, but he has stopped short of CBO's requirement. Unfortunately, he has resigned effective Jan. 1, 1995, so what a lame-duck secretary will

have done by the time this issue of *Kansas Wildlife and Parks* hits the newsstand is anyone's guess. Hopefully, the news is good.

If Espy hasn't acted, the program's future rests entirely on the 1995 Farm Bill, and that could be a difficult battle in times of increasing public pressure to cut government programs. First, Congress must reconsider CRP as continuing spending, as are commodity deficiency payments. Otherwise, future money spent on CRP will have to be taken from other farm programs, most likely deficiency payments. If this happens, the tenuous coalition of CRP supporters will be split along conservation and farm interests.



If the Conservation Reserve Program isn't maintained in some form, much of the land currently in native grass will be returned to crop production, and many of CRP's benefits will be lost.

However, bills have already been introduced that would continue the Conservation Reserve Program. H.R. 4416, introduced by Representatives Peterson (MN) and Roberts (KS), would essentially continue the program as it is. H.R. 3894, introduced by Rep. Bereuter (NE), would allow new contracts, early exit from CRP, and reduced payments for haying and grazing privileges. Senators Conrad (ND) and Daschle (SD) have introduced S. 2437, which would re-authorize CRP for another 10 years. This bill is unique in that it would give wildlife habitat improvement equal emphasis to soil and water quality considerations.

There is considerable backing for other modifications to the program among conservation advocates, who believe that conservation considerations have not been given enough emphasis. About 27 percent of current CRP contracts are not on highly erodible land, and these groups recommend that non-HEL acres be

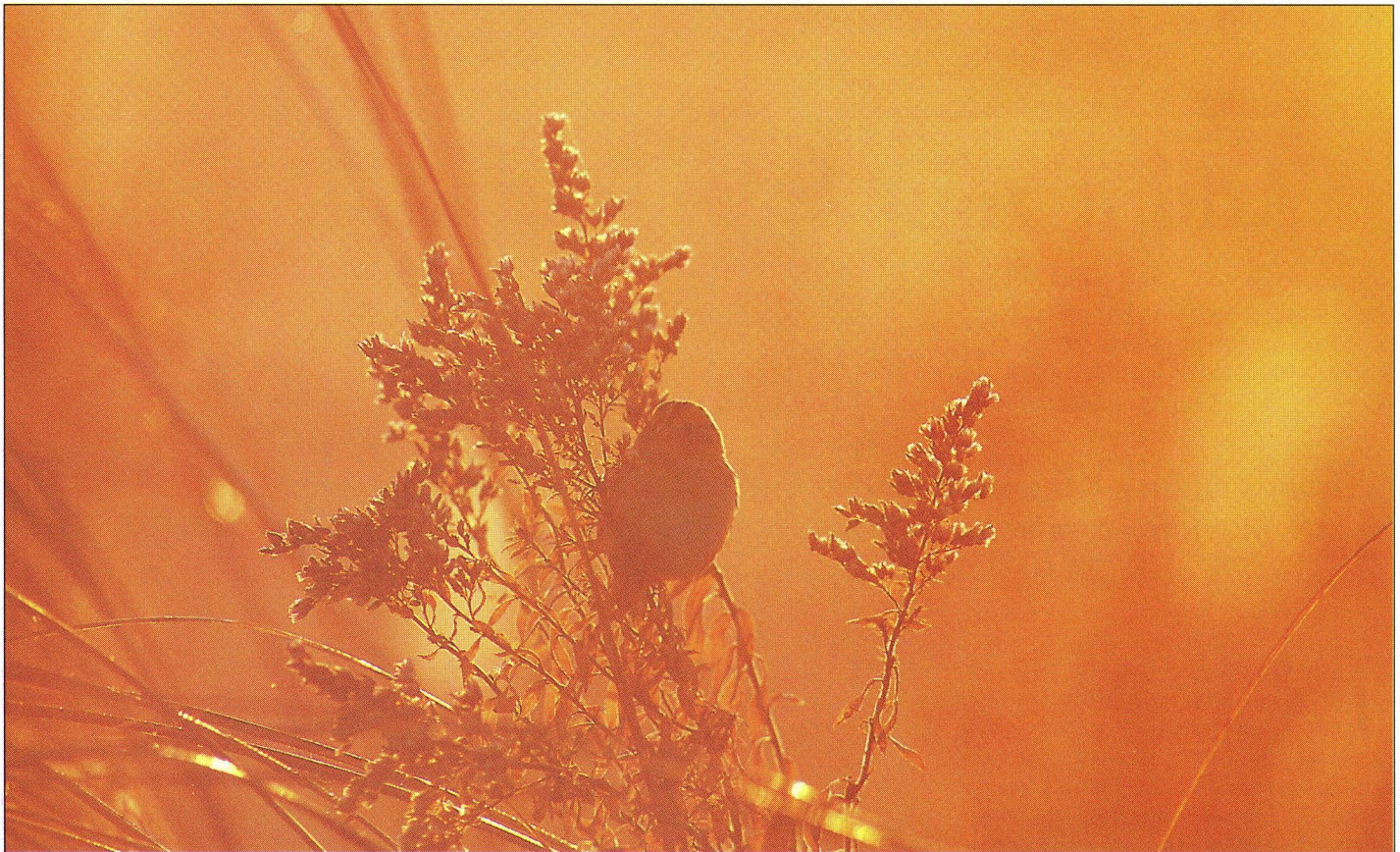
dropped and unsigned HEL be added. Cover type is also an issue. In many areas of the country, exotic vegetation was the primary CRP cover, but most wildlife managers would like to see more native grasses allowed in the program. (Kansas is exceptional in that nearly 2.7 of the state's 2.9 million CRP acres are in native grass.) Wildlife managers also believe they should have some say at the local level in planning and implementation of the program.

The first CRP contracts will expire in 1996, and if the program is not re-authorized by Congress, most acreage will be out of the program by 1999. It is a matter of simple economics that most of that will go back into production. In fact, surveys show that two-thirds of CRP acres will immediately return to commodity crop production when contracts expire. Much of the rest will likely go into intensive uses such as haying and grazing. Most of the soil and water conservation ben-

efits — and nearly all the wildlife benefits — of this ten-year investment will have been lost.

This would hit the taxpayer hard, in terms of lost environmental benefits and increased commodity support payments. It would be disaster for ducks, pheasants, quail, songbirds, raptors, voles, deer, elk, and countless other, less charismatic species. Arnie Kruse puts it this way: "CRP has been good for everything from buffaloes to butterflies."

Despite the already impressive gains, by most estimates, wildlife are just beginning to boom as a result of this multi-faceted program. Hunters, birdwatchers, well, everyone who breathes air and drinks water has profited. Whether this profit will be lost or invested in the future remains to be seen. If thoughtful heads prevail, CRP could become the pride of American domestic policy. ♠





# Adopt Your Favorite Public Land

by Rob Riggan

*conservation worker, Neosho Wildlife Area, St. Paul*

photos by Mike Blair

***Groups all over Kansas are getting involved to make their public lands better. People are providing a valuable work force on the areas, allowing managers to complete projects or build facilities that slim operating budgets might not allow otherwise.***

**I**t was early March, but the weather felt like May. Canada geese were honking in celebration of the warm weather and the disappearance of the last ice on the lake. As I waded out into the water, I couldn't help but notice the enthusiasm of the Boy Scouts at my side, despite the fact that they were

wearing worn-out waders that I'd brought out of retirement for this occasion. Carrying a post driver, wood duck nesting boxes and smiles, we were on a mission to provide nesting habitat for wood ducks at Neosho Wildlife Area in Neosho County. My welcome help this day came as a result of their own dedi-

cation as well as a unique department adoption program.

Adoption is usually voluntary, except in the case of the stray puppy that decided I would adopt him last year. And while we generally associate adoption with children or animals, there is another, entirely different, kind of adoption. In

Kansas we call it Adopt-A-Public-Land Program.

The Adopt-A-Public-Land Program (AAPLP) is a fairly new concept already in practice by various groups around the state. It involves a local group of people who adopt their favorite Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks public land area, including state parks, wildlife areas and state fishing lakes. The group must agree to work a minimum of three days on the area within a year, but the department is flexible as to the days and work involved. According to the group's wishes, interests, abilities and the area's needs, the work could include wildlife habitat improvement, litter removal or maintenance of recreation sites such as trails.

Because most of the people involved in AAPLP are public land users, their work in the program benefits them and any other person who visits the particular area. But

hands on experience and the satisfaction gained from improving a public wildlife area or state park can also be very rewarding. Participating groups are recognized with a sign honoring their volunteer work in the program.

It's encouraging to find people willing to invest the kind of devotion and hard work the program requires. When local Boy Scout Assistant Troop Leader Jack Martinez of Troop No. 8 from Parsons informed me that the group would be camping at Neosho State Fishing Lake the following



After adopting the wildlife area, the scout troop spent its first work day constructing the needed wood duck nesting boxes.

weekend, I took the opportunity to describe AAPLP. That weekend, I found myself giving a short talk to this group of young outdoorsmen. We made a short trail hike and watched a slide show about wildlife and habitat types found near the area. We also discussed AAPLP and its potential. Both the Boy Scouts and their leaders were very enthusiastic, and they voted to adopt the area at that meeting.

I had planted the seeds for the Troop's first project in my talk when I stressed the need for wood duck nesting boxes on the property. In addition to local wood ducks that nest here, we also have released genetically wild wood ducks that were hatched at the Emporia Zoo's waterfowl exhibit.

Neosho State Fishing Lake is surrounded by trees, but few are old, dying trees that could provide nesting sites for the cavity-nesting wood ducks. With plenty of food such as acorns and insects along with ample cover provided by emergent vegetation, the only limiting factor in the area's wood duck production is nesting habitat. We can help by erecting artificial nest boxes.

A plan to help the wood ducks at Neosho SFL was made. Troop No. 8 would build the nesting boxes using materials paid for by the depart-



Working together, the scouts not only helped in a valuable wildlife conservation effort, but they also learned woodworking skills and had a lot of fun.

ment's WILDTRUST program. Twelve nesting boxes were built to exact specifications, and a date in early March was scheduled as a second work day on the wildlife area.

The day was a big success. The troop erected the boxes as well as the "Adopt-A-Public-Land" sign and picked up several bags of trash. Each scout and leader had a chance to work at all three jobs.

In April, the group attacked its third work day. Again the scouts picked up trash, but to diversify their experiences, they opted to help with two controlled burns on the area's native prairie. This beneficial management effort turned out to be educational as well as exciting, as the scouts watched the fire dance to the prepared firebreaks.

In all, the AAPLP has been a great success. Eight of the 12 nesting boxes produced ducklings last summer, and sightings of wood ducks at the lake became a common occurrence to the delight of lake users. The scouts gained valuable knowledge and respect for wildlife and our other natural resources. One scout did his Eagle Scout project on the nest box program while another did his Eagle project on controlled burns. One of the participating scouts is now a freshman in college, working toward a career with the department. Troop No. 8 Scout Master and AAPLP fan Neil



The scouts took special pride in erecting a sign that designated the area as adopted by Troop Number 8. Putting up the sign culminated the troop's final work day.

Hudson adds "If there's anything my boys want to do concerning the outdoors, I'll promote it. I'll keep them in shells, fishing gear or what-

ever it takes because there's nothing I'd rather have them doing. Any time we can have an outdoor learning experience and improve our public lands, this Troop will be interested."

The mutual benefits gained by the wildlife area and the participating group is a common occurrence through this cooperative effort across the state. AAPLP groups have helped at state parks and wildlife areas ravaged by 1993's floods, helped improve trails and other facilities, picked up mountains of trash and enjoyed a satisfying outdoor experience. For more information about Adopt-A-Public-Land Program contact the Parks and Public Lands Division at the Pratt office, (316) 672-5911 or the department office nearest you.



Although putting up nest boxes and helping in a controlled burn were probably more fun, the scouts also put in a lot of hard work picking up trash around the area.

# Wildlife, Parks & What People Want

Rob Manes  
special assistant, Pratt

“Hello. My name is Dave, and I’m calling on behalf of the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks to ask your opinion on various funding methods for wildlife, fishing, boating and park programs. We are not selling anything, and your opinions are entirely confidential. This is an opportunity for you to have input into how Wildlife and Parks spends public funds to manage your natural resources . . .”

Recently, more than 500 Kansans heard that prologue to a 15-minute telephone interview designed to find out what people want from the Department of Wildlife and Parks, as well as how (or if) they want to pay for the wildlife management, park operations and the associated facilities, opportunities and services they demand.

Today there is little tolerance for government agencies that are unable or unwilling to respond to constituents’ needs. The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks and its budgets are relatively tiny and not terribly bureaucratic. It is staffed not with people who simply work for their pay checks, but with qualified professionals who’ve made a life choice to serve the causes of wildlife and outdoor recreation. Stereotypical bureaucrats are few in the department. Still, it isn’t always easy to aim the Wildlife and Parks budget, programs and priorities at what the people want, while keeping focus

on the needs of wildlife resources. Tight budgets (which are largely generated by user fees), small staffs, and increasing demands make it critical that department leaders understand constituencies’ needs.

Last year’s legislative attempt to institute new Wildlife and Parks funding mechanisms would have gone part way toward a solution, but it failed in the State Senate after receiving the approval of the House of Representatives. It was obvious that any future funding proposal would have to be better backed by reliable information about what people want in their wildlife and outdoor recreation programs.

The telephone survey was conducted by one of the nation’s most reputable consultants on natural resource public opinion, Responsive Management of Harrisonburg, Virginia. Highly trained telephone

interviewers carefully extracted respondents’ honest opinions about what the department does, what it should be doing, and how it’s funded.

“Thanks for taking time to answer these questions, sir,” said Dave. “Have you been fishing in the past 12 months?”

“Yes,” said the anonymous respondent, “maybe once, but I got a license, man.”

“Have you been hunting in the past 12 months?” asked the interviewer.

“No. I don’t do too much hunting,” the man replied.

“Would you be interested in going hunting in Kansas?”

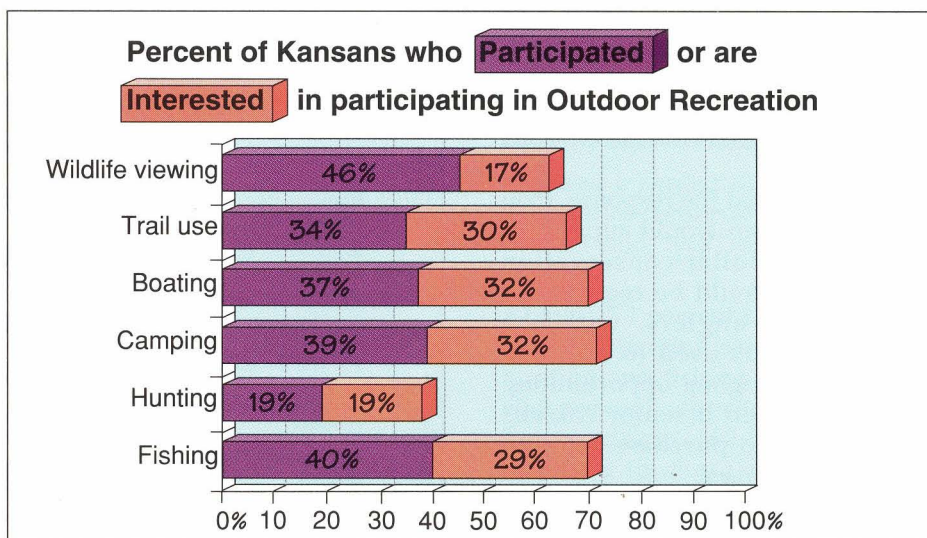
“Probably not. Like I said, I don’t do much hunting,” he responded patiently.

The interview continued over the next few minutes to find out if the man, who had been reached by random phone number selection, participated in other outdoor pastimes — camping, boating, hiking, birdwatching, visiting state parks, wildlife areas and state fishing lakes.

The interviewee said he visited a state park, but he couldn’t identify it by name. So he wasn’t considered a definite park user.

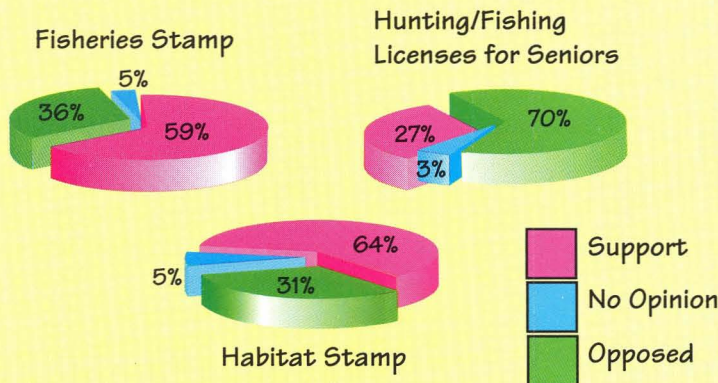
“What was your primary reason for visiting a state park?” inquired Dave.

“I went there mainly to fish,” was the response, “You know, but to camp too, with the kids and the



Dustin Teasley graphic

## Percent of Kansans who support or oppose proposed wildlife funding mechanisms



wife."

Dave pressed pre-designated computer keys to record and tally each response as it was offered.

If the man had said that he didn't use state parks, Dave would have automatically asked a series of questions to identify why.

The questions continued to find out if the respondent visited the department's state fishing lakes or state wildlife areas. They also asked what he used those properties for. Each question was carefully worded to pinpoint the respondent's likes and dislikes, demands and needs regarding department properties.

Next Dave began a series of questions about how wildlife, fisheries, parks, and boating programs are funded. "In general, should funding for Kansas' wildlife and fisheries programs be increased, remain the same, or be decreased?"

"Oh man, let's see . . . probably increased, I guess," the anonymous man replied.

Dave recorded the response, then asked if the man would support or oppose five dollar conservation stamps that would be required of hunters and anglers, with the resulting funds used to improve hunting and angling opportunities. Dave also asked if senior citizens should have to purchase hunting and fishing licenses.

"I don't know . . . No, I don't

think they should have to pay, since they have been all these years."

"Would you strongly or moderately oppose seniors having to pay?" asked Dave, needing to better qualify the response.

"Oh, moderately, I guess," the answer was recorded.

The questionnaire tested the man's support for appropriating more existing general state tax dollars to wildlife and parks. It asked how he felt about increasing park financing — increased entrance fees and camping fees, and higher fees for the best campsites. Senior citizens were again the topic. Should they be charged to use parks?

"Nope. I'd oppose that too," said the interviewee "at least moderately."

The interview turned to boating ". . . should funding for boating programs be increased, remain the same, or be decreased?"

"Remain the same, I 'spose," the man replied.

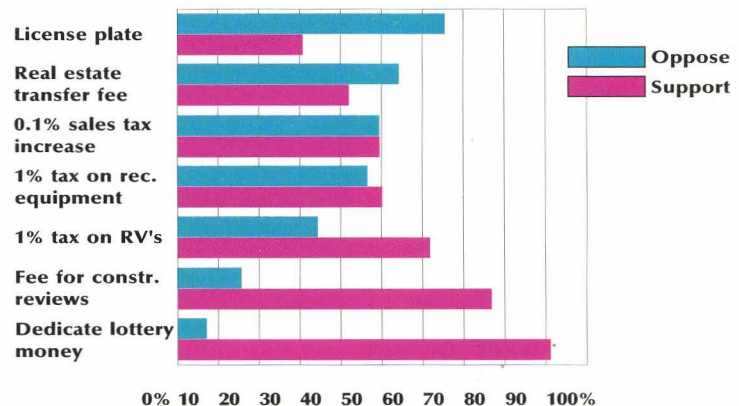
He was asked what boating funds should be spent on — access sites, facilities (such as safety buoys and sewage dump stations), law enforcement, or safety education. He was also asked if he thinks boat registration fees should be raised by three dollars.

Into its tenth minute, the survey tested the man's support for spending on state lakes and wildlife areas, as well as charging fees to use them.

Other mechanisms for financing department programs were tested also — a voluntarily purchased, environmental theme license plate, with each sale yielding \$30 for wildlife causes; a \$50 real estate transfer fee for property transactions; using part of the state lottery revenues for wildlife and parks programs; a one-tenth of one percent increase in the state sales tax; a one percent sales tax on recreational vehicles; a one percent sales tax on outdoor equipment, such as binoculars and bird feeders; and a fee for the department's services in reviewing construction projects to determine if they would damage critical wildlife habitats.

Each time the lengthy questionnaire was presented by one of the dozen or so telephone interviewers, the questions were asked in a dif-

## Kansans' Support and Opposition for Non-license Funding Mechanisms to support Wildlife & Parks Programs





ferent order. This prevents having responses skewed because interviewees grow weary toward the end of the conversation.

Finally, each respondent was asked some standard demographic questions about family income, vehicle ownership, employment status, place of residence, family type, age, and gender.

The tabulated results have provided department decision-makers with a clearer picture of what Kansans need and want from them. At this writing, only the overall summary of all respondents is available. Shortly afterward though, a series of cross-references will be available that allow a look at how

survey to be valid, so you probably didn't get a chance to speak out. How do you compare to the "average" Kansan on these issues? Department leaders would like to hear from you.

Following is a summary of what those 500 people said.

- 39.5 percent said they had been fishing in the past 12 months; 48.2 percent said they were interested in fishing Kansas.
- 18.8 percent said they had been hunting in the past year (That's slightly higher than previously estimated.); almost one-fourth — 23.3 percent said they were interested in hunting in Kansas.

actual percentage of users is something less.

- When asked why they hadn't visited a state park, those non-park users gave many reasons, the most common being that there isn't one conveniently located. Only three people out of 500 said parks were too expensive to use.
- Asked what people used state parks for, respondents most often said they fished (20.4 percent), camped (20.7 percent), or boated (13.6 percent), gathered with family or friends (12.4 percent), or watched wildlife (10.5).
- 40.7 percent said they had visited a state fishing lake or wildlife area in the past year, but 21.6 percent of those couldn't identify the area, so the actual percentage of users is somewhat lower.

• They said they went to the state lakes and wildlife areas most often to fish (35.8 percent), watch wildlife (13.2 percent), boat (10.8 percent), camp (8.8 percent), gather with family and friends (7.4 percent), and hunt (6.4 percent).

• 38.5 percent said funding for park programs should be increased, 45.5 percent remain the same, and 3.6 percent decrease.

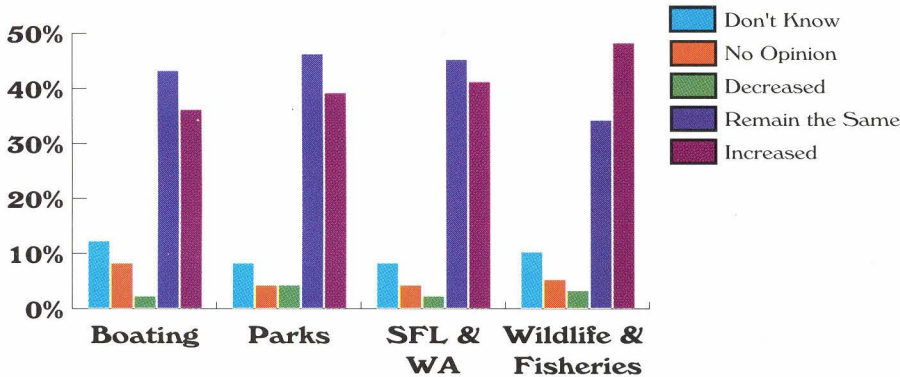
• 48.1 percent said funding for wildlife and fisheries programs should be increased, 33.9 percent said remain the same, and 3.0 percent said decrease.

• 64.3 percent said they would strongly or moderately support a \$5 conservation stamp required of hunters, in addition to the regular hunting license, 30.6 percent strongly or moderately opposed it.

• Asked a similar question about a \$5 fisheries conservation stamp, 58.5 percent said "yes" and 35.8 percent "no."

• Only 27.1 percent said they would support charging senior citizens for hunting and fishing licenses, while 69.9 percent opposed the change. Respondents (62.5) were also opposed to charging seniors for park entrance.

## Opinions about funding Wildlife & Parks programs



different segments of the population — anglers, senior citizens, hunters, park users, boaters and more — feel about each option and question presented. That analysis will provide an understanding of the needs and preferences of those people most affected by each proposed funding mechanism and program.

In addition to the telephone survey, all department employees were asked to fill out a mail survey that asked the same questions. When tabulated, their insightful opinions will influence the shape of future programs and funding for the department.

The laws of statistics prescribe that only 500 Kansans be sampled in order for the results of such a

• 38.9 percent had camped in the past year; 53.3 percent were interested.

• 37.3 percent said they had been boating in the past year; 51 percent of the others said they were interested in boating.

• 34.1 percent had used trails for hiking, biking, or horse riding in the past year; 44.6 percent were interested.

• 45.7 percent had been bird-watching or some other form of wildlife study; 30.9 percent of those who hadn't were interested.

• 58.7 percent said they had visited a state park within a year, but only about 70 percent of those could actually identify a park, so the

- 71.7 percent said they would strongly or moderately support dedicating more of the existing State general tax revenues to state parks, while only 19.2 percent were against it.

- 75.0 percent said they would support increasing daily park entrance fees by a dollar, and 76.8 percent said they would support higher daily camping fees, but only 51.5 percent supported higher annual entrance fees.

- 59.7 percent said they strongly or moderately oppose charging a park entrance fee for each person over 16 years old -- only 37.5 percent liked the idea.

- 65.1 percent said they would support charging more for the best parks and campsites.

- 35.5 percent of the respondents said spending for boating programs should be increased, 43.3 percent remain the same, .8 percent decrease, and 20.4 percent didn't offer an opinion.

- Asked what boating money should be spent on, respondents said safety education was most important (50.3 percent), also law enforcement (20.2 percent) and access sites (12.6 percent).

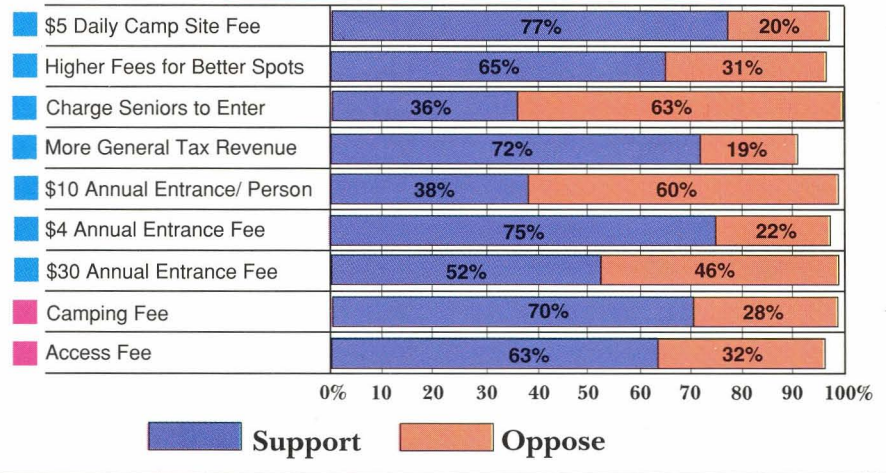
- 81.8 percent said they would support increasing boat registration fees by \$3 for a three-year certificate.

- 40.9 percent said more money is needed for state fishing lakes and wildlife areas, 45.3 percent said funding should remain the same, two percent said decrease, and 11.8 percent offered no opinion.

- 62.9 percent of the respondents said they would strongly or moderately support paying a fee for use of state fishing lakes and wildlife areas, while 32.4 percent didn't like the idea, and 69.7 percent said they would support a \$5 camping fee for these areas.

- Only 11.2 percent said they strongly opposed the institution of a voluntarily purchased environmental theme license plate at a cost

### Funding Mechanisms for Parks and State Fishing Lakes & Wildlife Areas



of \$30 over the regular registration fees, and another 19.8 percent said they would moderately support it. (Even with this small amount of support, the potential for new revenue for wildlife management is significant, as evidenced in other states where such programs have been introduced.)

- Most respondents didn't care for the idea of a \$50 fee on each Kansas real estate transaction — 53.1 percent strongly or moderately opposed it; 41.9 supported the idea.

- There was overwhelming support for dedicating a portion of state lottery funds to wildlife and parks programs, with a total of 90.8 percent strongly or moderately supporting the idea and *almost three-fourths of the respondents saying they strongly supported it.*

- Slightly less than half (48.9 percent) strongly or moderately supported an increase in the state sales tax to fund wildlife and parks programs, an almost equal percentage opposed it.

- Specific sales taxes on recreational vehicles and other recreational equipment received supporting responses of 61.5 percent and 50.3 percent, respectively.

- More than three-fourths (76.8 percent) strongly or moderately supported a \$50 fee for the department's reviews to determine if certain construction projects will

damage critical wildlife habitats.

- 18.8 percent said they owned recreational vehicles.

So that's what Kansans told Wildlife and Parks representatives about themselves. A few items seem highly acceptable to Kansas -- putting more state lottery revenues into Kansas wildlife and parks programs -- increasing daily park entrance and camping fees -- changing entrance and camping fees for state lakes and wildlife areas -- increasing boat registration fees -- putting more State General Fund monies into parks -- and adding a \$5 conservation stamp requirement for hunters.

This survey also revealed some common themes regarding what people want in their outdoor recreation experiences -- better fishing opportunities -- better camping programs and facilities -- better boating programs and facilities -- and programs to benefit and allow use of non-hunted wildlife.

When the responses of specific groups are analyzed, as well as the results of other current survey efforts, additional information will be available to help design the future of the agency — the way it manages the states' great wild resources, the facilities it develops and maintains, and the services it offers the people who enjoy outdoor Kansas.



Edited by Mark Shoup

### CARRIES HER WEIGHT

Editor:

I can't stand to let it go by one more time without saying something about it. I live in Illinois but subscribe to *Kansas Wildlife and Parks*, as well as *Wyoming Wildlife* and *Colorado Outdoors*. As a traveller, I see plenty of these big motor homes, travel trailers, etc. parked at the camping areas and in parks. They're all dolled up with pads and lights.

Now I read in the Sept./Oct. 1994 issue of *Kansas Wildlife and Parks* (Page 33) where John W. Carwell says the free fishing and hunting permits might be canceled for the "poor" old seniors.

Well, why do the seniors think they are any different than anyone else. They sure aren't poor. I'm 65 and my husband is 71, and we are glad to pay our share to keep and maintain our parks and outdoor resources for the next generation, as they will do for their next generation.

I read complaints like this in *Trailer Life* also, and it really makes me mad. My advice is "be glad you can still go, and enjoy it without complaining."

Theresa Long  
Pocahontas, Illinois

### SKINNY PHEASANTS

Editor:

Just finished the first weekend of pheasant season out here in Rush County. We had a pretty good hunt; birds were mostly in unworked wheat stubble with sunflowers, and also in CRP land.

There was one thing about the pheasants that concerned me: their breasts were somewhat shrunken. They reminded me of pheasants that hadn't eaten for three or four days, like we would get snow cover, and they couldn't

feed. However, these birds had wheat and sunflower seeds in their craws, and weather has been perfect for them.

I met another hunter, and I asked him what he thought about the birds, and he said, "I thought they were skinny." So I am not alone on this thought. On Sunday, we got 12 birds, so I weighed each one, and they ranged from 2 7/8 pounds to 2 1/4 pounds.

I've hunted pheasants many years, and this is the first time I've noticed this condition when weather has been good. I thought maybe you could give me a clue as to what may be the problem.

Alex Freidenberger  
Bison

Dear Mr. Freidenberger:

**Actually, the sizes you mention are normal for an adult male pheasant, 2.5 pounds being about average. This is not to say that the birds you took didn't have a leaner look. It is entirely possible that the pheasant population in your area contained a high percentage of juveniles, which would account for this "skinny" look.**

**Just like people, young pheasants are much leaner than the old. Being in my mid-forties, I can attest to this fact with some dismay.**

—Shoup

### MISSING SPIDERS

Editor:

In past years, we have always seen lots of those large, yellow and black garden spiders in our yard in late summer and early autumn. This year, we didn't even see one. Nothing has changed about how we take care of our yard or what grows in it.

Why didn't we see those spiders this year.

Mary Winder  
Troy

Dear Ms. Winder:

**Tough question. The most likely**

**answer is that you didn't see them this year simply because you weren't in the right place at the right time. Another remote possibility is that some unusual weather pattern killed the spiders in your area just at the time they were hatching. Of course, these are guesses.**

**I can say that you were probably seeing one of several species of argiopes, large orb weavers that hang upside down in the center of the web. These striking spiders are common in town and country from the tropics to the temperate zones.**

—Shoup

### SICK FISH

Editor:

Thanks for producing such a quality magazine for Kansans like me who enjoy the outdoors. I have a question concerning the bass population of several of the fairly old Kansas reservoirs, particularly Perry.

I have noticed that many of the keeper-sized and larger bass I have caught the last few years on the upper one-half of the creek arms display varying degrees of cutting, missing scales, and fungal growth on the upper half of their bodies. On the other hand, most of the bass caught on the main lake areas do not have such visible trauma.

As a catch and release angler, I am careful to return all bass quickly to the water, especially those looking less than healthy. I often wonder, however, if my efforts are in vain because the days of those bass are numbered anyway.

Have fisheries biologists or other anglers noticed the same symptoms? If so, is there a known cause, and is it pervasive enough to seriously affect fishing on the upper one-half of the creek arms?

Lee Davidson  
Topeka

Dear Mr. Davidson:

**Thanks for letting us know about your observations. According to Kirk Tjemeland, the Wildlife and Parks fish-**

eries biologist for Perry Reservoir, recent fish samplings show a small percentage of bass with the anomalies you describe. However, these studies were limited, and Tjemeland adds that such anomalies are common in the creeks that fill Perry, with pollution from agriculture and development runoff being one possible cause. Further study would be needed to say for sure.

If you are noticing an abnormal number of such infections in a particular area, it is possible that something is being dumped in that area. In this case, you should contact a local biologist so that more site-specific testing can be run.

Whether the days of the fish you catch are numbered or not depends on the severity of the infection and how much stress they are under.

—Shoup

## NOODLER

Editor:

I am 32 years old, and since the age of 15, I have enjoyed the sport of hand fishing for flathead catfish. Living just a few miles from the Oklahoma border, I get many chances to enjoy this sport. Unlike Kansas, it is legal there.

I have friends who live up north and don't get to enjoy this sport very often. With the May/June issue of *Kansas Wildlife and Parks* not far off, I thought this would be a good time to ask why this sport is not legal in Kansas.

Randy Benton  
Arkansas City

Dear Mr. Benton:

I, too, am a flathead fisherman, and I appreciate your love of this monster of Kansas streams. In my mind, the answer to your question is simple — unfair advantage. Because flatheads may lie at rest for long periods of time between feeding, in a state we might describe as deep sleep, they are particularly vulnerable to hand fishing, even when conventional methods might be unproductive.

Unlike Oklahoma, Kansas considers the flathead a sportfish. Only the blue catfish, whose range is quite limited in Kansas, compares in size. The flathead puts up a great fight on rod and reel, and the truly big ones provide unequaled excitement on bank lines. In addition, they have some of the best-tasting meat of any sportfish, better, I believe, than the popular channel catfish.

Now consider that it takes a flathead 10 or 15 years to put on much size at all, and 20 or 30 years to reach the sizes prized by anglers and (I assume) those who catch them by hand.

For these reasons, we believe that these fish should be protected from take by a method that might result in overharvest of an important sportfish. I would argue that Oklahoma should reconsider their approach to the flathead, not the reverse.

—Shoup

## SNAKE LEVITY

Editor:

I have a farm in southeastern Kansas, and I got a kick out of the comments by a former biology instructor in the Sept./Oct. issue of *Kansas Wildlife and Parks* (Page 33). Neither he or I believe wildlife habitat should be destroyed; nor am I in favor of rattlesnake roundups, but for slightly different reasons.

Habitat destruction is directly proportional to the number of people on a roundup. Add to that the sight of really big timber rattlers, and the destruction sky rockets. In one single encounter, I personally uprooted two trees and one wild rose bush, plowed through one darn good brush pile, and knocked a large chunk of bark out of a big white oak.

Rattlesnake roundups wouldn't work on my place now because it smells so bad around there the flies don't even come around.

Rick McKay  
Kansas City, Kansas

## NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Editor:

Enclosed is a copy of a poem my 11-year-old son wrote about Kansas. Even though he's a Colorado boy, his heart is deeply tied to the Kansas farmland.

That's understandable. His father was born in Norton. His grandparents, Kansas natives, grew up in the beautiful Solomon River basin around Glasco. His aunts, uncles, and cousins all live on farms around the Glasco/Concordia area.

Brandan has "grown up" in Kansas as much as Colorado. The pull to come "home" is deeply embedded in this family. We come back for family visits at Thanksgiving and Memorial Day, and we've even been back to help at harvest.

At these times, my son begs to ride on the tractors and combines. He walks the fields and creek bottoms looking for deer, pheasant, quail, and other Kansas critters. He thrills at the intense thunderstorms and is in awe of the beautiful sunsets. He tries to absorb (as we all do) enough of Kansas to last him until his next visit.

You can take the boy out of Kansas, but you'll never take Kansas out of Brandan. His dad, mom, and sister all feel the same way. We love Colorado, but Kansas has a special pull, deeply embedded in the family roots and way of life we leave back there when we come back to Colorado.

I wish you would consider printing Brandan's poem, an illustration of an 11-year-old's love for the things he cherishes most.

Gerry Pounds  
Colorado Springs

## KANSAS

I want to go back to Kansas  
To see the rolling plains and farm land  
And to hear and ride the tractor  
And see the pheasant fly.  
I want to walk through the lush trees  
And see the bouncing deer  
When they run  
And hear the bucks rub antlers on trees  
And hear the coyote howl at night.

## UNDERCOVER NETS

In recent years, the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks has conducted an undercover investigation of illegal fishermen and fish markets throughout the state, resulting in arrests and fines of criminals in Salina, Garden City, Emporia, and Wichita. In each case, poachers used gill nets to catch game fish in Kansas reservoirs, primarily Cheney, then sold the fish to markets for resale.

Attention to this problem began as early as 1983, when Wildlife and Parks officials received information that illegal netting operations were being conducted at Cheney and Marion reservoirs. In 1986, a burglary investigation at a Wichita fish market uncovered walleye, white bass, and wipers for sale in the market. The owner was cited and paid fines.

However, this did not end the problem. In 1988, Wildlife and Parks received a tip that another Wichita market was selling game fish. About this same time, another informant notified the agency of what appeared to be an illegal netting operation coordinated out of a Wichita residence. Then officials received a call from the State Board of Agriculture health inspector who had discovered game fish for sale in a Salina market.

In 1991, a western Kansas conservation officer received an anonymous call that a market in Garden City was selling game fish that allegedly came from the Wichita area. The officer then contacted the Wildlife and Parks Special Operations Section in Pratt, which had

for some time been accumulating tag numbers, vehicle descriptions, and identities of individuals who were observed illegally netting fish and buying and selling fish in the parking lots of two Wichita markets. Soon, an Emporia market was looped into the investigation.

Special Operations began making buys of game fish from three markets and documenting the buys. The markets in Salina and Emporia soon let undercover officers know that they could order game fish ahead of time.

The investigation continued in late September of 1993, when seven individuals were stopped as they attempted to leave Cheney Reservoir. Each of several vehicles contained gill nets and illegally-taken fish. Uniformed conservation officers had watched the illegal operation that evening and had seen them take the fish. All were taken to the Reno County Jail, and their nets and boats were seized.

In this incident, the poachers were fined \$200. One man spent 30 days in jail.

In late January 1994, the

operation culminated with a "takedown" of three markets and their owners. Several other individuals who were directly or indirectly involved with supplying the illegal fish were also cited. All were found guilty, paid fines ranging from \$100 to \$200, and paid restitution ranging from \$100 to \$800. Some had to do community service.

While this particular investigation is complete, Wildlife and Parks will continue to monitor suspicious activities at state reservoirs and fishing lakes. Not only is market fishing illegal, it is expensive for the state of Kansas, particularly when hybrid fish that do not reproduce are taken.

"Wipers and stripers were in Cheney Reservoir solely through Wildlife and Parks' fish stocking efforts," says department fish culture section chief Jim Beam. "These species will not be replaced through natural fish reproduction but will have to be restocked at a direct cost to Kansas anglers." Other species, such as walleye, are also stocked by the department and may not reproduce quickly. This is the reason for

length and creel limits imposed on law-abiding fishermen. Gill net poachers are unconcerned with such limits, and their activities can have devastating effects on the fish populations in Kansas lakes.

Anyone witnessing illegal poaching or suspicious activities at Kansas lakes should immediately call the department's Outdoor Alert number, 1-800-228-4263. Your identity will remain anonymous.

—Shoup

## \$12,000 EAGLES

A Courtland man has agreed to pay \$12,000 to the Kansas Wildtrust Fund for the deaths of three bald eagles in late 1992. The "contribution" was part of a diversionary agreement filed in U.S. District Court May 18 between the man and the U.S. Attorney's office in Wichita. The three bald eagles were found in a field owned by the man, north of Courtland. He had been charged with the accidental deaths of the eagles, which apparently fed from sheep carcasses illegally laced with the pesticide Furadan.

— Belleville Telescope, June

## Three STRIKES

In April of last year, I [CO Dennis Sharp] received a phone call from the wife of a northeast Finney County landowner. Her husband was following two men in a car who were shooting game birds out of season.

The landowner followed the two until responding units of the Kansas Highway Patrol and Finney County Sheriff's Office could intercept and stop them. Upon arriving at the stop location, I immediately recognized both men. I had either arrested the two myself or assisted in their arrests twice before.

When I checked the subject's vehicle, I

found two mourning doves and a rooster pheasant. The owner of the car said that he had been shooting and that the other man had been driving and retrieving the birds.

For taking doves during closed season, they were charged through the U.S. Magistrate Court in Wichita, where in August they entered a guilty plea to violation of the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Each received a fine of \$750, courts costs of \$75, and suspension of hunting privileges in the U.S. for two years. They were also required to complete a Kansas Hunter Education Course within two years.

—Dennis Sharp, conservation officer,  
Holcomb

## DEER DILEMMAS

The 1994 deer season was the first for non-residents to hunt the state's renowned herd. It was also a year when hopeful applicants found the supply of permits had shrunk – not the first year for reduced permit numbers, but a season when the issue drew more attention than ever before. Certainly, most people who applied, whether residents or not, received permits – maybe not the “any deer” permit they wanted but at least an antlerless deer permit that let them go afield.

But many would-be hunters were left behind, frustrated because the luck of the drawing ignored their passion for the deer chase. Some Kansans were especially disturbed because non-residents were hunting in Kansas while they sat home, permitless.

The single greatest factor confounding 1994 deer permit applicants was the continuing decline in the total number of permits available. The reduction began in the late 1980s, when an all-time high of nearly 58,000 firearms deer permits were allotted. Deer management specialists continuously monitor key population indicators, including deer-vehicle accident numbers, hunter success rates, and crop damage complaints. These and other measures provide reliable information upon which to base the units' permit quotas. By 1990, these sources indicated decreasing deer numbers in most of Kansas. The deer population shrinkage wasn't surprising to Wildlife and

Parks staff. Maintaining deer numbers at levels tolerable to farmers and motorists are among the objectives of deer management, and hunting is a primary tool for achieving these objectives. But when deer are less abundant, so are permits.

The net effect of this is that the total number of available deer permits has been steadily declining in recent years. Unit 1 (in northwest Kansas), for example, had 1,485 regular firearms permits available in 1988 but only 500 in 1994. In all of the firearms deer hunting units except one, there were fewer regular firearms permits last year than six years ago. Only in Unit 18 have permit numbers remained relatively stable. The total allotment of permits in Kansas has fallen from 58,000 in 1988 to slightly more than 48,000 in 1994. While this trend was developing, the number of applicants has continued to increase.

Guaranteed hunt-your-own-land permits, available to owners of 80 acres or more, were eliminated in units 17

and 18 in 1993 and 1994 to protect mule deer populations in those units. Vulnerable to hunters and threatened by prolific whitetail breeding, mule deer numbers in some areas have fallen below objectives. According to Kansas law, in any unit where hunt-own-land permits aren't available, the department must return to the old drawing system that simply sets aside half of the available firearms permits for landowners. Landowners in units 17 and 18 have asked if whitetail-only hunt-own-land permits could be allotted. Deer specialists are considering this and other means to address this situation.

Enter the non-resident deer hunters of 1994. According to law and regulation, non-resident permits are allotted only in units where resident permits were left over after the previous year's drawing. Unfortunately, the rapid decline in deer populations dictated an overall reduction in permits in some units where non-resident permits had already been prescribed by the leftover stipula-

tion. Although only about 700 non-resident hunters purchased permits in 1994 (1,078 permits were authorized), the mere thought of their presence raised the ire of many unsuccessful Kansas applicants, who were wrongly convinced that “their permits were awarded to out-of-staters.”

The fact is that non-resident deer permits were not created by eliminating resident permits. —Manes

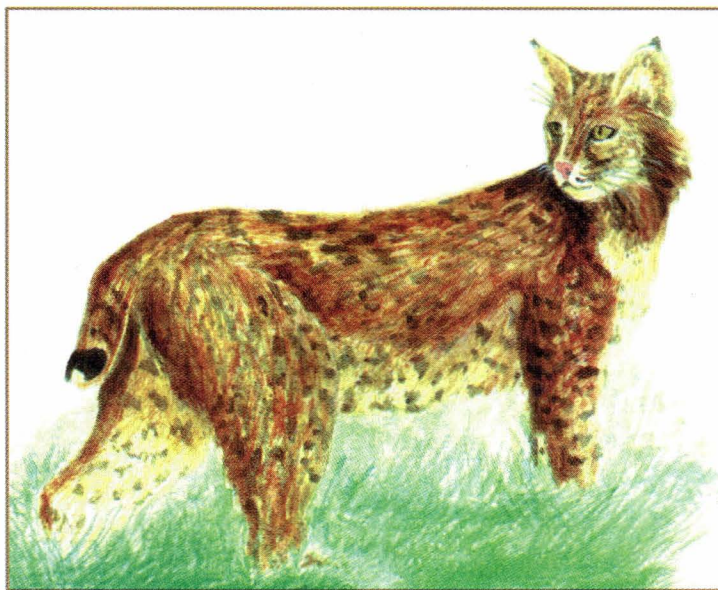
WISCONSIN WINS  
BOBCAT

The Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled last summer in favor of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in a lawsuit over whether the bobcat should be listed as threatened under the state Endangered Species Act and whether the DNR had acted properly in denying a petition to list the bobcat. The animal-rights group Alliance for Animals brought the suit, contending that the WI-DNR did not have sufficient data to determine the bobcat population was not threatened.

The Supreme Court decision supported the DNR, stating “To construe unproven decline as justifying inclusion on the states' list of threatened species would undermine the legislative policy of targeting the DNR's resources to those species proven to be in need of protection.”

This decision may assist other states with challenges of management practices based on professional assessment of best biological data.

—Proactive Strategies



## SUSTAIN THE WEST

In the past, many farmers assumed that dryland wheat production with summer fallow was the most reasonable "sustainable" agriculture for semi-arid western Kansas. Maintaining soil fertility, moisture, and weed control presents a big challenge in the dry climate. The nitrogen fixing legumes and cover crops used in areas of higher rainfall deplete soil moisture for future crops. To irrigate such crops with declining water tables does not pass the test of true sustainability. Thus, sustainable agriculture was perceived as limited in western Kansas.

But in the mid-1980s, a group of farmers in a west central Kansas community took a hard look at what was happening in their communities and on their farms. They saw jobs disappearing and young people moving away. Agricultural inputs were rising in cost, while their share of the market value declined. They also saw their soils becoming hard and more difficult to till and less able to absorb available moisture under conventional chemical practices. And the water available for irrigation that had fed their high yields was increasingly limited.

With its fertile soils, four distinct seasons that break insect cycles, long growing season, and abundant sunshine, western Kansas, they decided, offered excellent possibilities for organic agriculture. For the irrigators, the greater crop diversity that comes with organic practices was a way to reduce dependency on irrigation. They

were already growing some of the best quality wheat in the world and had begun growing some crops with organic methods. Organic markets were growing, they discovered, and offered a timely opportunity.

The result was Heartland Mill, a private company owned by a group of about 65 farmer/stockholders and focusing on the processing, trading, and marketing of certified organic food products. Their first efforts – involving a small grain mill in someone's basement and going to store in local communities to market organically produced wheat flour – yielded \$2,500 in sales.

Today – eight years later – Heartland Mill is a growing company employing 25 local people and boasting more than \$2.4 million in sales in 1993. The main office, oat processing plant, and warehouse are located in Marienthal. About 20 miles away near Scott City, they operate a flour mill.

For the farmers participating, Heartland Mill is the marketing arm of their farms. Heartland concentrates on processing and marketing while farmers concentrate on production. According to Heartland manager Mark Nightengale, most of the growers participate in the federal farm program although some of their crops are not considered feed grains for farm program purposes. Thus, their willingness to try new crops is penalized by the system, as are the strict crop rotations used in organic farming.

Still, farming organically in western Kansas offers an option to ease the transition

to dryland farming, while maintaining higher value production. It may also extend the life of the Ogallala Aquifer by reducing crop water needs. —*Kansas Rural Center's Rural Papers*

## OWLS VS. JOB NOT!

By now, the timber communities of Oregon were supposed to be ghost towns. There was going to be an epidemic of foreclosures, a recession so crippling it would mean "we'll be up to our necks in owls, and every millworker will be out of a job," as President Bush predicted two years ago.

Politicians in both parties agreed. The villain was the northern spotted owl, an endangered bird fond of ancient forests desired by loggers. Restrictions on logging were ordered in 1991 to protect the bird.

But three years into a drastic curtailment of logging in public forests, Oregon, the top timber-producing state, has posted its lowest unemployment rate in a generation, just over 5 percent. [The national average is 5.9.]

What was billed as jobs versus owls has proved to be neither. Instead of using 300-year-old trees from public land to make two-by-fours, mills are relying on wood from tree farms. By early [this year], for the first time in history, high technology will surpass timber as the leading source of jobs in the Beaver State. And timber workers are being retrained for some of those jobs.

Those timber workers who lost their jobs did not become minimum-wage hamburger

flippers, as predicted. They are becoming auto mechanics, accountants, cabinetmakers, and health care workers.

"So many people say this is the best thing to ever happen to them," said Jeff Wilson, a former millworker from the town of Mapleton, who is just finishing his retraining as a community service worker. "It's like the world has opened up."

To be sure, there are pockets of poverty in the smaller, more remote timber towns of Oregon. Places like Sweet Home and Oakridge have lost Main Street businesses as mills have closed. But no county in Oregon has higher unemployment than 7.8 percent. In some rural counties, the rate is about 2 percent.

"Owls versus jobs was just plain false," said Mayor Bill Morrisette of Springfield, which landed a new Sony Corporation factory. "What we've got here is quality of life, and as long as we don't screw that up, we'll always be able to attract people and business." —*The New York Times, Oct. 11, 1994*

## REFUGE HUNTING

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service began new hunting programs on four national wildlife refuges during the 1994-95 season, increasing to 272 the total number of refuges open to hunting

"We will continue to open up new refuges to hunting wherever possible," said Mollie Beattie, the Service's director.

—*Department of Interior release*

## PREVENTIVE Medicine

**Y**ou've had your flu shot, so here's your vaccine against cabin fever: Go fishing! You can't get cabin fever if you don't sit around the cabin feeling sorry for yourself. No, you don't have to cut a hole in the ice although that's perfectly acceptable, even preferable, in my book. If you don't have the nerve or desire to stand on the ice and fish, you can still have some open-water farm pond fun.

Kansas has more than 50,000 farms ponds scattered across the state, most of which are privately owned. Ask for permission to fish this time of year, and you'll probably get some strange looks, but permission is often granted. Again, if the water's frozen, I fully endorse cutting a hole in the ice and fishing; you'll catch fish, too. But if that's not your cup of tea, regular fishing is available. However, you'll need a spring-fed pond.

Fortunately, many grassland farm ponds are spring fed, and that means the water running in is about 55 degrees. Not only can this make icefishing on these ponds unsafe, it often prevents ice from ever forming. This open water means regular fishing. When you've found a suitable pond and received permission to fish, your vaccine is nearly complete.

I know most fishermen believe that fish don't bite during the winter. That's what I used to believe. I'd fished on plenty of warm winter days and never caught more than a shiver. But after I was introduced to icefishing, I realized

that fish will bite in the winter, sometimes better than they do in the summer. It's true that fish are cold-blooded, and the cooler water temperatures slow the fishes' metabolism and makes them much less active than when its warm. But they still eat, and they still bite lures. You just have modify your lure selection as well as your fishing methods.

My first winter farm pond success came quite by accident. My fishing buddy and I had planned a day of ice fishing. My theory was that ice fishing worked when regular fishing didn't because when fishing through a hole in the ice, the lure is held in the same area indefinitely. A sluggish fish can easily catch the lure, whereas a lure cast and retrieved would be difficult for the cold-blooded fish to catch. On that fateful day, however, we reached our pond only to find it completely free of ice. We decided to fish anyway, and to our surprise, we caught bass and crappie, including several bass that weighed more than four pounds.

We caught most of our fish on tiny jigs or spoons, which we'd brought for icefishing. We fished the lures slowly, but more importantly, we concentrated on the area where the spring ran in. The fish were holding in a small part of the pond that was deeper and obviously warmer because of the spring water. Even though the outside temperature was in the 30s and the wind was howling, we caught a bunch of fish casting from the shore.

There are several keys to this winter farm pond fishing. First, it's important to have spring run-in because the warmer water will make the fish more active. It will also keep the pond open unless seriously cold temperatures hit. Fish near the spring, in relatively deep water, and fish **SLOWLY**. If you're

fishing from a boat, fish straight down, jigging the lure rather than casting. If you're fishing from the bank, cast the lure to the deep water, let it sink, then retrieve it just fast enough to keep it off the bottom. A small, light lure can be fished slower than a heavy one, which would simply drag into the pond bottom on a slow retrieve. I think the fish may prefer a small lure, too. You can also fish a small jig under a float. Simply let the bobber drift, relying on wave action to impart the jig's action. Since strikes will be light, don't wait for the bobber to go under; set the hook if it merely twitches to the side slightly.

Wintertime farm pond fishing isn't at all dependable, but when it's good, it's very good. When conditions aren't favorable, you won't get a bite. But it can be a great way to save a day when the ducks aren't flying or you tire of chasing pheasants and quail, and it definitely is preventative medicine for cabin fever.

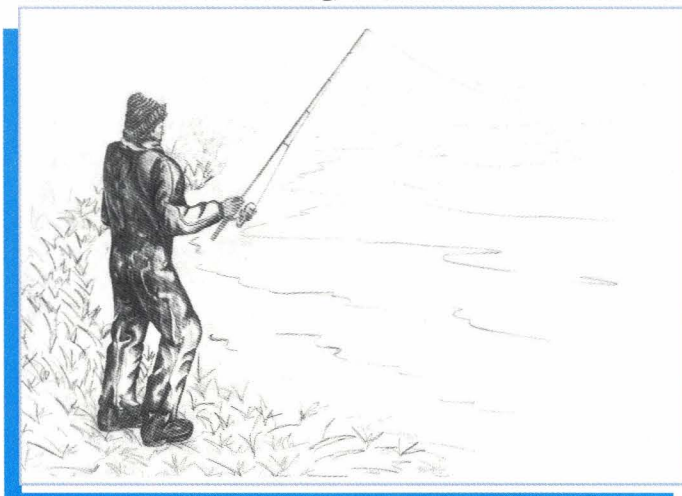
— Miller

## ICEFISHING KEYS

**O**kay, suppose you've got the fishing bug, but as is common in the plains, Old Man Winter has descended on the Sunflower State with a vengeance. As if to make up for lost time, January has brought highs below freezing and lows in the single digits. You may need a booster shot for Miller's vaccine (above). Do not dispare. This is the hard-core fisherman's dream — ice. Lakes and reservoirs in the northern half of the state may be locked in thick layers of ice, and lakes elsewhere are rapidly following suit. Sleds will replace bass boats as fishermen huddle on stools and buckets, staring intently at small holes in the ice.

It may seem insane to some folks, but sitting on a bucket over ice in single-digit weather can yield full creels of crappie, white bass, and stripers.

Proper equipment, of course, is the key to successful icefishing. Always bring more clothing than you think you'll need. In case of emergency, a change of clothes is also advisable, as is a buoyant throw cushion. An ice auger





is the handiest way to cut fishing holes; keep in mind that the law allows only holes 12 inches in diameter or smaller. A ladle will help clear ice chips.

Most anglers build or modify sleds just to pull their gear on the ice, and the proper fishing equipment is also essential.

"A light, sensitive, good-quality rod works great for sensing light strikes," says Kevin Becker, an avid ice fisherman who also works at the Pratt Hatchery. "In cold water, many hits go undetected with heavier rods. A reel with a good drag system is a must for larger species such as white bass and stripers." Becker adds that jigging spoons, rubber-bodied jigs and even live bait work great under the ice.

However, excited icefishermen

should make caution their first rule of thumb. After all, good ice is the first requirement for good ice fishing. Temperatures are near zero for several days are all it takes.

**CAUTION!** Because Kansas weather is so variable, cold spells can be quickly followed by warm days, making even thick ice treacherous. Remember: temperatures near zero for several days.

Once ice has hardened, make some test holes. The ice must be at least four inches thick. Never go near open water or on rivers near even the smallest trickle of current.

Common sense should guide icefishermen in their zeal, but with this booster to Miller's vaccine, cabin fever should be eradicated from the sportsman's winter landscape. —Shoup

## PADDLEFISH STOCKING

In 1994, KDWP stocked 16,918 paddlefish — 3,035 in Tuttle Creek Reservoir and the remainder in Kaw Reservoir, just south of the Kansas border in Oklahoma. The fish, each about 10-12 inches long, were raised at the Milford Hatchery.

Each of the fish had a small coded wire inserted into the bill. As the fish swim upstream to spawn, biologists can scan the bills of fish caught to determine age, stocking date, and other important data.

This is the third year of the program. To date, 45,603 fish have been released, in addition to other stockings in Kaw Reservoir by the Tishomingo Hatchery.

—Shoup

## UNDER CURRENTS

### *Mercy* MEANS HARD CHOICES

by **Ken Brunson**,  
nongame wildlife coordinator

When I was growing up, the term "putting it out of its misery" was commonly accepted and practiced. The bird with a hopelessly mangled wing or the opossum that had been run over and was still alive were unfortunate but likely candidates for being "put down."

I'll never forget the kindness of two huge, burly oil field workers who recently brought me a tiny songbird that couldn't fly. I have seen this kind of compassion so many times and exhibited in so many different people that I'm convinced that, collectively, there is more compassion for animals than for people.

Compassion for animals is admirable, but there can be drawbacks when people fail to distinguish humaneness from selfishness. Some people do not have the courage to see an injured animal "put to sleep" even if it is the most humane thing to do. Some people see nothing wrong with keeping a once-magnificent, but now one-winged hawk in a cage through a daily handout of prepared food. And some people would rather keep a wild pet such as a songbird, squirrel, or raccoon even though the animal could still be given a chance to learn to survive in the wild.

Rationalizations such as "Well, what would have happened if I hadn't saved it in the first place?" are easy, and all too common.

To Andy Rooney-ize, what people need most is a good dose of reality. Most of these situations are natural. Yes, some wildlife parents do kick their offspring out of the nest. Older

nest mates do that also, as do storms. It's all part of mother nature doing her natural, sometimes brutal thing. Nature treats life and death as equals. Most natural deaths are very ugly and completely dispassionate. What is unnatural is our inability to deal with it. So what's so wrong with trying to be more compassionate than mother nature?

(1) It ignores humane reasons to put hopelessly injured animals out of their misery.

(2) It masks selfish motives of those who just want a wildlife pet in spite of the needs of that animal.

(3) It can force agencies and organizations to drain a tremendous amount of precious time and resources on inconsequential wildlife conservation activities or non-endangered wildlife. These critically-needed resources could be put to much better use in saving habitat, catching poachers, and education.

(4) It can pose serious human health risks when dealing with sick, orphaned, or injured wildlife.

It's human nature to want to save a nestling bird fallen in the street or a truly orphaned young raccoon. As a wildlife conservationist, I'm glad to see more people want to save wildlife than to wastefully eradicate it. But constructive compassion ends where selfishness and ignorance begin.

In most cases, these animals should just be left to nature. As a biologist, "putting an animal down," euthanasia, is the toughest thing I ever have to do, and I know of no one who likes doing it. But it is an act of true compassion when it is needed. Next time you drop off a badly injured animal to someone who has to make a very difficult decision, please show some compassion to that person as well.

It was a terribly tough job you just gave them.

## LATE SEASON GEESE

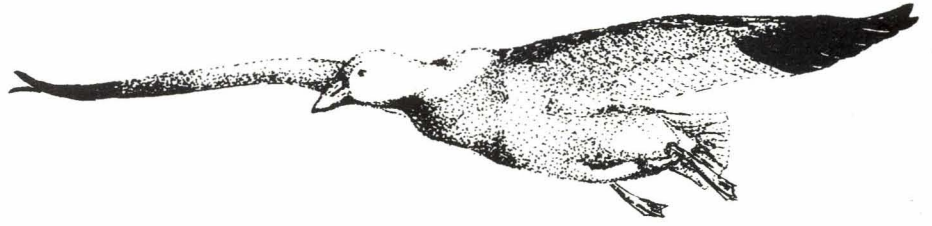
If you are looking for a late season outdoor activity, don't overlook Kansas' January and February goose hunting opportunities. Dark geese may be hunted until January 29, and light goose season runs until February 25 east of Highway K-99 and until February 5 west of K-99. Late season daily bag limits may include 10 light geese and two dark geese (only one white-fronted goose). Dark geese may be found statewide during January and February while light geese normally are found in the eastern third of the state.

John Redman Reservoir, Elk City Reservoir, Perry Reservoir, and the Jeffrey Energy Center are all favorite loafing sites for late season snow geese. Traditionally 10,000 to 50,000 snow geese have also crossed into Kansas from the Iatan Energy Center located in Missouri, east of Atchison. The 1993 floods affected the Iatan birds last season, but they may return this year. This flock feeds into northern Leavenworth, northeast Jefferson, central and eastern Atchison, and southern Doniphan counties.

Snow geese are typically hunted when they fly to corn fields to feed. Veteran snow goose hunters normally spend a day in order to spot where flocks are feeding and then acquire permission to hunt. Almost all hunting opportunities are on private land, so acquiring permission is a must. On the chosen morning, 600 or more white rags are spread in the corn field, and the hunters, dressed in white or corn-stalk camouflage, lie among the rags.

Lucky hunters may see one to ten thousand geese descend from the skies, so it is important to avoid flock shooting. Even with a limit of ten, hunters must be aware that just one careless shot may result in overharvest. Steel No. 2 is the preferred shot when hunting snow geese.

When the birds become decoy shy, hunters often watch feeding flocks all day. Part of a large flock may feed in a



cornfield while the rest of the flock loafs nearby in a soybean field. By acquiring permission on the lands between such flocks, the birds can be pass shot.

Late season dark goose hunting can be found in much of the state. Refuge areas at many of Kansas' reservoirs hold Canada geese through most of the season. Private sand pits and other small refuge areas also serve as loafing areas for Canada geese. As with snow goose hunting, most hunters will watch Canada geese fly to feed both morning and evening, to find where they land. Again, acquiring permission is a must.

Large, shell-type decoys and silhouettes are used to attract these birds. Sometimes just a dozen decoys will do the trick. Still, these birds may be well educated by January, so many hunters will hide 50 to 100 yards downwind from their set-up. Large shot is normally used on Canada geese — steel T's or larger.

Calling geese is a learned art. Going out with experienced callers and buying instructional tapes are both good ways to start. Snow geese communicate with various high-pitched barks and soft grunts, and are fairly easy to imitate.

Canada geese are very vocal and respond well to calling because they are often in small flocks. The primary sound used by large Canada geese is *her-onk*. The start, or *her* part of the call is lower pitched than the finishing note. Callers greet geese with very loud series of *her-onks*. If the birds respond, the same call is softened and quickened. When a flock begins to circle and approach, a feeding call is given, which consists of very fast *her-onks* and some

callers drop the *her* and rapidly and constantly repeat the *onk, onk, onk, onk*.

The July/August 1994 issue of *Ducks Unlimited* magazine (Page 64) contains an excellent article on goose calling. Author Matt Young refers readers to several sources of instructional tapes.

Good luck, and remember to dress for the extreme cold by wearing several layers of clothing.

—Gene Brehm, videographer, Pratt

HUNTERS BOOST KANSAS  
ECONOMY

Supporting goods dealers, motel operators, and service station managers are familiar with the business side of hunting. Retail business booms during pheasant and quail seasons.

Kansas hunters spend \$125-\$130 million per year on trip-related food, lodging, gasoline, hunting equipment, magazine subscriptions, club dues and similar retail purchases. Total retail sales generated by hunters in Kansas tallied \$125.6 million in 1991. Hunters' purchases supported an estimated 4,260 total jobs in Kansas and generated about \$5.7 million in state sales tax.

Most Kansas hunters probably don't give much thought to the economic impact their recreation has in the state, but with good hunting prospects for Kansas' most popular upland bird species this winter, owners and operators of hunting-related businesses are fully aware of the financial benefits of the state's hunting seasons.

—Mathews

## EDUCATION GOES WILD

In 1981, Wildlife and Parks created the Wildlife Education Service Section, with programs that promote understanding and appreciation of wildlife for students K-12.

Essentially, the Wildlife Education Service provides this service through seven different media.

Elementary school booklets provide an integrated approach to developing an appreciation for Kansas wildlife, wetlands, and other natural resources. These materials stress ecological concepts while illustrating how the use of our natural resources affects the status of our wildlife.

"Nature's Notebook," of course, is a two-page section of *Kansas Wildlife and Parks*. A collection of these sections provides educators with information, hands-on activities, games, and puzzles featuring wildlife. The activities

and information foster an awareness of the interdependence of all life and the need for values and behavior that reflect this awareness.

"On T.R.A.C.K.S." provides educators with background information and suggested resources to assist children in developing an understanding and awareness of their natural environment. It is currently distributed at no cost to all elementary teachers and middle and secondary science teachers.

3-D Patterns of Kansas Plants helps children learn to identify local common plant species, plant parts, and their locations with three-dimensional models the children build.

The Pratt Reference Center provides everything from mammal skins and skulls to videos about birds in the schoolyard. A variety of other presentation formats are also available. Topics include ecology, endangered species, dinosaurs, insects, plants, and weather.

The only cost is return postage. The Lenexa Satellite Reference Center is a smaller version of the one in Pratt, except that materials are picked up at the Lenexa Office and returned there.

In-service programs are implemented using Project Wild and Project Aquatic Wild. These nationally-acclaimed educational programs begin with basic concepts about wildlife and integrate learning experiences that emphasize awareness, understanding, and appreciation of wildlife into all curriculum areas. An activity guide with 113 activities is an interdisciplinary, hands-on approach to giving children the decision-making skills needed to ensure and improve the quality of natural resources.

For more information on the Pratt Reference Center, phone (316) 672-5911, ext. 209. For information on the Lenexa Satellite Reference Center, phone (913) 894-9113.

—Shoup

## Eagles!

No species of wildlife represents the spirit of freedom more than the bald eagle; yet, in the early 1970s, experts believed there were fewer than 2,000 eagles in the lower 48 states. There were only 413 nesting pairs documented — none of them in Kansas.

But the number of bald eagles in the U. S. today totals more than 10,000, with approximately 4,000 active nest sites. The recovery has been well documented, but some people may still be unaware that more than 30 eagles have fledged in Kansas since 1989. That was the year eagle nests were discovered in two Sunflower State locations: Clinton Reservoir in the north-east part of the state and Hodgeman County in the southwest.

Success of the Hodgeman County nest was uncertain that first year, but the Clinton eagles successfully raised two eaglets. To help track the successes and failures of Kansas' budding bald eagle population, biologists captured and banded the eaglets, one marked "A" and the other "B." As "A" and "B" matured, the adult eagles at Clinton continued raising and fledging two or three eaglets each year, for a total of 17 eaglets over the six years from 1989 through 1994. The Hodgeman pair has successfully fledged 10 eaglets since 1990.

In 1993, a new nest was discovered at Hillsdale Reservoir; then two more were found in 1994, one at Perry Reservoir and the other at the cooling lake at Wolf Creek Generating Station. What was most gratifying for biologists charting the eagle recovery in Kansas was the discovery that the male bird at the Hillsdale nest was eagle "B" and the male bird at Perry was eagle "A" — the eaglets banded at the initial nest site at Clinton.

In 1994, the five bald eagle nests in the state fledged a total of 12 young birds. That brings the total number of birds fledged in Kansas since the 1989 Clinton nest to 34 eagles.

U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists Dan Mulhern and Mike Watkins have overseen the growth of Kansas' bald eagle populations, with assistance from volunteers Craig Birrell and Eva Willis.

Birrell, a Topeka resident and climbing instructor, serves a unique role in management of the burgeoning eagle population. He climbs to active nests and lowers the eaglets to biologists waiting below to band and measure each nestling. A standard U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service numbered band is placed on the left leg of each young eaglet, and a colored and lettered band is secured to the right leg. These colored bands make visual identification possible from a distance. Once the eaglets are banded and measured, they are returned to the nest unharmed.

There are two excellent locations to observe bald eagle nests in Kansas. The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers at Clinton Reservoir and owners of the Wolf Creek Cooling Lake have established viewing areas where the nest sites can be observed without disturbing the eagles. The best months to view the nests are April through June although wintering eagles can be seen in January and February. Information about the viewing areas and status of nesting eagles can be obtained by calling (913) 843-7665 at Clinton Reservoir, and (316) 364-4168 at Wolf Creek. For more information about eagle viewing, call Jerry Horak at Wildlife and Parks' Emporia Wildlife Investigations Office, (316) 342-0658.

—Mathews

**Trees FOR KANSAS**

In the past year, 4,613 Kansans planted 843,000 trees and shrubs for conservation purposes. Some 525 acres were planted specifically for wildlife habitat, and 1,478 acres for other conservation purposes.

The Kansas Conservation Tree Planting Program, administered by Kansas State and Extension Forestry, offers more than 30 species of low-cost tree and shrub seedlings for such purposes as wildlife habitat, windbreaks, woodlots, erosion control and Christmas tree plantations. Two special bundles of plants are offered in the program. The Wildlife Bundle has 130 plants, sufficient for a 1/4 acre planting; and the Songbird Bundle, with 20 plants, is offered for a more restricted area such as your back yard.

Want to get on the tree-planting bandwagon? You can order immediately to reserve your seedlings for spring planting. For information regarding this program, call Bill Loucks, Tree Planting Program Leader, at (913)537-7050.

—Bill Loucks

**TRAIL DEPOT**

The Garnett City Commission has authorized an agreement between the city and the Kansas Department of Transportation regarding the renovation of Garnett's old Santa Fe Depot as a rest stop on the Prairie Spirit Rail Trail. The depot's advisory board has recommend use of the original waiting room and toilet facilities be renovated into a trail rest station.

The city will also enter into an agreement with the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks regarding the city's use of the adjacent portion of the trail for the renovation project and a maintenance agreement for landscaping the trail in other areas within the city limits.

—Anderson Countian

**REDMOND PADDLEFISH**

Two crews from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service were recently test-netting with a crew from Wildlife and Parks in the Neosho River below John

Redmond Reservoir. In two days, the teams captured seven paddlefish weighing from 24 pounds to 70 pounds. There has been a paddlefish snagging season for years at low-water dams near Osawatomie and Chetopa in southeast Kansas, but the netting results at Redmond might mean there will be a snagging season there in the future.

—Topeka Capitol-Journal

**REID TO WILDSCAPE**

In October, the Kansas Wildscape Foundation — a non-profit fund-raising organization dedicated to wildlife conservation and related issues — selected Jim Reid of Wichita to serve on its board of directors. Reid is The Coleman Company's director of public relations, a position he has held since 1986. He was elected to a three-year term with Wildscape.

Before joining Coleman, Reid was outdoor editor at the Wichita Eagle for 10 years. He had previously taught English and journalism at Maize High

School. Reid is active in several conservation organizations in Kansas and is a member of the Outdoor Writers Association of America. He is a former recipient of the Conservation Communicator of the Year award in Kansas.

With Reid's selection, the Wildscape board consists of 25 civic and business leaders from throughout Kansas. For more information about the foundation, call (913) 843-9453.

—WILDSCAPE release

**FALCON FEST**

The North American Falconers Association held its 1994 annual meeting at the Dodge House Inn in Dodge City on Nov. 20-25. About 400 of the group's 2,500 members, from all across the country, gathered for six days of meetings on the biology, training, health, and conservation of birds of prey, and to hunt with them as well.

Members had a variety of hawks and falcons on hand in a "weathering yard" — a fenced area where the public could view the raptors. Experts were on hand to answer questions, as well, and demonstration flights were conducted using peregrine falcons and other birds of prey.

While most of the group's activities involved hunting with raptors during the day, most evening sessions on raptor training and biology were open to professionals and other interested parties.

Kansas is a popular gathering place for the falconers. Two years ago, the annual meeting was held in Liberal

—Shoup

**DATES TO REMEMBER**

- Jan. 1** — 1994 hunting and fishing licenses expire. Last day of sandhill crane season. Opening of Western Unit beaver trapping.
- Jan. 15** — Last day of dark goose season in permit-only areas.
- Jan. 29** — Last day of dark goose season.
- Jan. 31** — Last day of upland game bird season. Last day of Western Unit furbearer hunting and trapping season.
- Feb. 5** — Last day of Unit 2 (west of K-99) light goose season.
- Feb. 15** — Last day of Eastern Unit furbearer hunting and trapping season. Last day of Western Unit beaver trapping season.
- Feb. 25** — Last day of Unit 1 (east of K-99) light goose season.

—Shoup

by Mark Shoup

# Don't **BUG** Me!

Everybody loves bugs, right? Well, okay, not everybody. And not all bugs. Nobody likes the mosquitoes and flies that bite in summertime. Ticks and chiggers are a real pain, and roaches are just plain creepy. Nobody likes wasps, either, but they make cool nests. Bees are pretty neat, as long as you don't get too close. Water boatmen are fun to watch as they zip across the surface like little aquatic bumper cars.

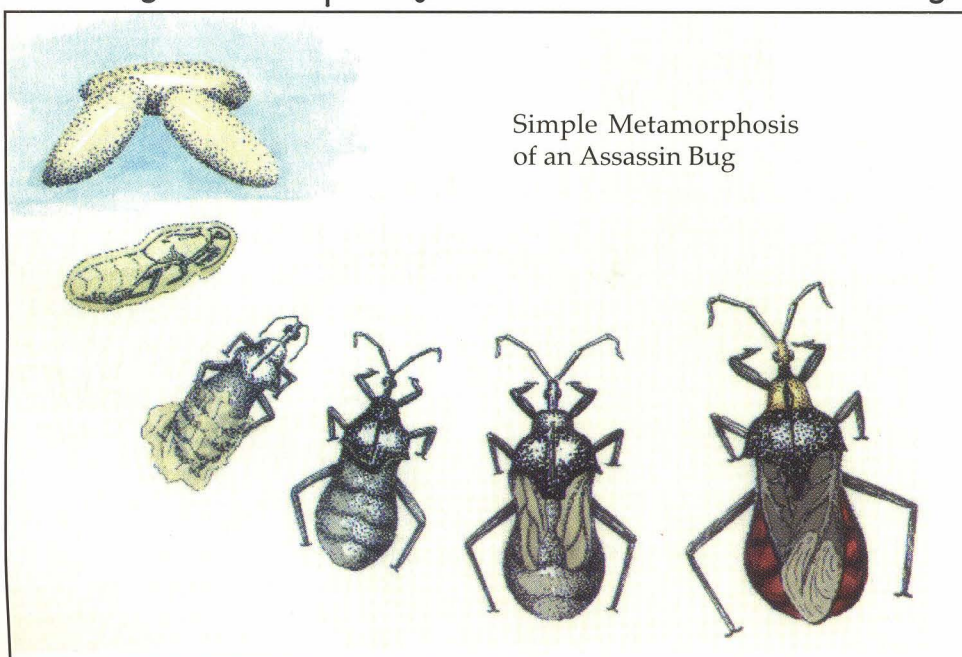
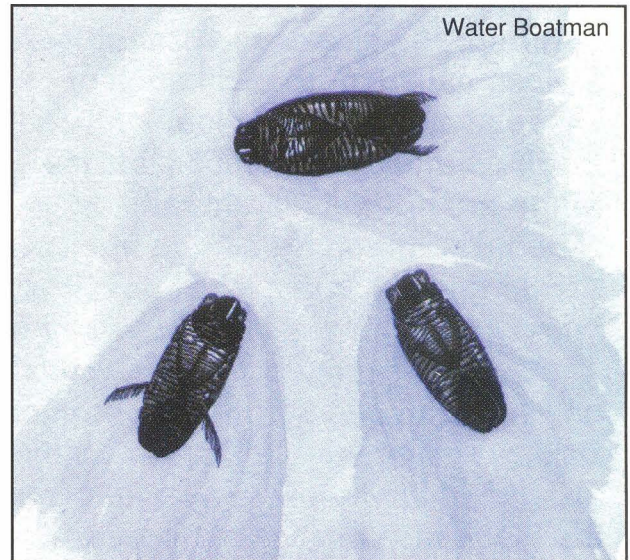
Of course, you could never say an unkind word about butterflies. It would take a hard-core grouch to say, "Don't bug me!" to one of these beautiful "bugs."

However, it would probably surprise you to know that only one of these critters — the water boatman — is really a "bug." Ticks and chiggers are actually eight-legged critters called arachnids. (Arachnids include spiders, scorpions, and daddy longlegs.) Yes, the others are insects, but they are not true bugs.

Scientists who study insects are called entomologists, and they classify true bugs in the order Hemiptera. True bugs have piercing or sucking mouth parts for feeding on plants and prey. The base of their front two wings are leathery while the tips of these wings are membranous, or flimsy, kind of like cellophane. Their two hind wings are completely membranous. When a true bug is at rest, its wings lie flat against its body.

Another characteristic of true bugs is that they go through simple metamorphosis.

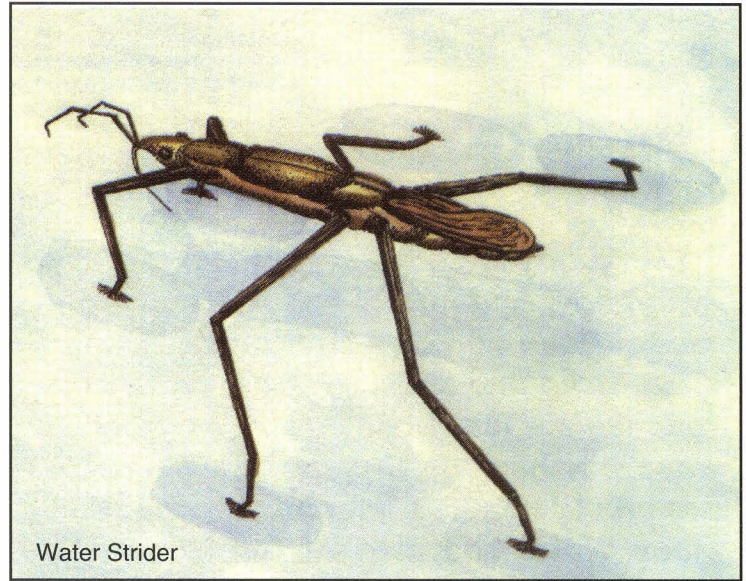
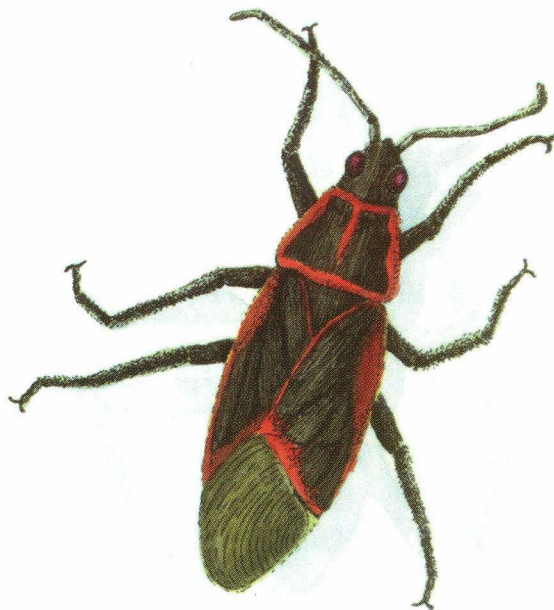
Metamorphosis means change, and most insects change form during their lifetimes. Everyone is familiar with the caterpillar that spins a cocoon and then breaks out as a butterfly. This is called complex metamorphosis.



In simple metamorphosis, true bugs hatch from an egg as a nymph. The nymph has a protective covering called a serosa. Once it sheds this covering, the bug goes through several stages called instars. In each of these stages, the bug looks much like it will as an adult, except that its wings are not yet developed.

Some common true bugs are water striders, stink bugs, leaf bugs, bed bugs, assassin bugs, and chinch bugs.

It's January now, and bugs probably haven't been on your mind too much. Still, you may have noticed a funny-looking bug crawling around your window panes, just hanging out in the house. It's black with orange stripes, and it doesn't seem to do much. Although it can fly, it's easy to catch. It's not really a bother, except that it's there — in your house.



Water Strider

What you've been seeing is the boxelder bug. It comes from a family of bugs called scentless plant bugs. Most scentless plants bugs feed on grass and weeds, but the boxelder's diet consists mostly of box elder tree leaves.

If it likes leaves so much, what's it doing in your house? The answer is simple; it's looking for a place to sleep. The boxelder bug hibernates in winter, and the best place to do that is in a warm place, like your home. In late fall, they seek out places to hibernate, and like magic, they appear in our houses about November.

Boxelder bugs won't really do any damage in your house. You may even find them interesting. But true to their name, they can bug you, especially if you find one next to your toothbrush in the morning.



## Hunting In Bunny Heaven

It's true. I'm easily excited when it comes to hunting and fishing. It doesn't take much to get me so excited I can't eat or sleep. My hunting buddy Lennie knows this, and he takes pleasure in winding me up. However, Lennie usually gets so carried away with his build up that he convinces himself. The result is two grown men acting like 12-year-olds, like the time we went rabbit hunting at "Bunny Heaven."

Lennie and I often talked about going rabbit hunting, but we generally found good excuses not to. "You know, as soon as it snows, we ought to do some rabbit hunting," Lennie said one particularly cold January day. "Yeah," I said. "All we need is 6 inches of snow and our trusty .22s. Maybe we should wait for the temperature to get above zero, though. I'd hate to crack the stock on my old .22. It belonged to my grandad, you know." Lennie nodded understandingly and switched the channel to the football game.

Two days later, it snowed 6 inches. "We ought to go rabbit hunting Saturday," Lennie said. "Um, yeah," I said, remembering the forecast for a *high* temperature of minus 10 degrees. "If I can get out of cleaning the garage. I'd rather go rabbit hunting, but my garage is really dirty . . ."

"You hate to clean your garage," Lennie said, knowing it was time for the pitch. "Besides I know a secret spot that's lousy with rabbits, and nobody's hunted it for years. I like to call it "Bunny Heaven."

He had me hooked. I was forgetting the cold (and my common sense) and trying to remember where that box of .22 shells was. Lennie's pitch even worked on Roy, who is usually much more sensible about these things. So, the three of us, each carrying an armload of clothes, crammed into Lennie's pickup and headed for Bunny Heaven.

"You won't believe this place," Lennie continued as we rode, just in case Roy or I were losing enthusiasm. "The last time I was here, we were checking coyote traps, and rabbits were everywhere. It's probably a good thing Roy only brought his .22 pistol and not his rifle, or else we'd probably get more rabbits than we need," he chuckled.

"When's the last time you were at Bunny Heaven," Roy asked, regaining some of his common sense. "Well, let's see. That would've been when my brother and me were trapping full time, three or four years ago. Why?" Lennie said a little defensively.

"He's got a point, Lennie. You know rabbit popula-



tions can fluctuate a lot in two years," I said as I watched my breath freeze immediately on the windshield.

"Not at this place," Lennie assured. "This place is too good. You guys worry too much."

When we turned in the gate, I had to admit, it looked like Bunny Heaven. A long, wooly shelterbelt ran along one side of a large pasture full of sandhill plum thickets and pockets of thick grass. It had everything but a neon sign flashing "Bunny Heaven."

Lennie could see we were impressed. "Looks pretty good, huh? Better leave the tail gate down — easier to load our rabbits."

It took awhile for the three of us to put on all the clothes we'd brought. Then, like three brown Michelen men, we trudged stiff-leggedly into the snow-packed pasture. With each step, I anticipated rabbits bursting from every plum thicket. For the first 100 yards, we were quiet and intense. But after 2 1/2 hours of forging through snow drifts, getting poked in unmentionable places by thicket thorns and freezing our fannies we'd seen only one high-tailing jackrabbit. Roy and I were ready to string Lennie up. We would have, too, but our fingers were too numb to tie a good noose.

I guess the little boy in me just can't help but get excited at the promise of good fishing or hunting. And Lennie keeps improving his sales pitch, and it keeps working. Just a couple of years ago, Lennie planned a deer camp at a place where a couple of big bucks ("yeeuuge monsters" as Lennie called them) were taken just the year before. Oh well, that's another story . . .

