

KANSAS

Wildlife & Parks

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 1997

\$2.75



Second Annual Photo Issue

Back by popular demand. Actually, we did receive many favorable comments about last year's first photo issue, and we've still got a good supply of photos that you've never seen. We hope you enjoy this collection of Kansas outdoor photos, and by all means, let us know what you think. All photos by Mike Blair.

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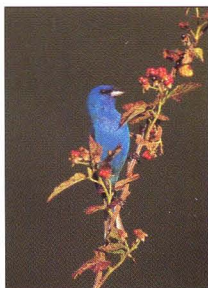
Barbara Theurer

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About the covers



Front: Nothing symbolizes the Kansas prairie like the coyote. As this animal responded to a predator call, Mike Blair photographed it with a 600mm lens, @ f/11, 1/250 sec.
Back: A male indigo bunting strikes a brilliant contrast with ripening blackberries. Blair shot the photo with a 600mm lens, @ f/8, 1/500 sec.



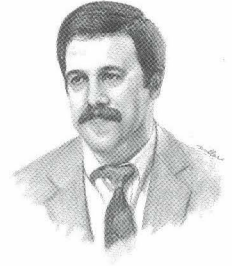
Editorial Creed: To promote the conservation and wise use of our natural resources, to instill an understanding of our responsibilities to the land.

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.



The View From Here

Steve Williams



The Year Ahead

Kansans enjoy a rich natural heritage that is unmatched nationwide, and this special photo issue displays many of those resources we're so proud of. Many images of Kansas landscapes are captured here on film, but many more are in our minds and memories. I hope that as you look through this issue of *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine, you are reminded of a special time when you saw a sunset over waving native grasses on the High Plains, or perhaps camped with your family at a state park. If this first issue of the new year causes you to reflect on the outdoor legacy passed to you through generations, I hope it also causes you to look ahead. What kind of legacy will we leave future generations?

As we prepare for the new year at Wildlife and Parks, we too reflect back on the accomplishments of the past year. Most importantly, the department is glad to be back on track with federal aid reimbursements. Having resolved this problem, we can now begin to concentrate on a long-range plan for department projects. The Walk-In Hunting Area (WIHA) program has proven to be very successful, providing a great deal of additional public hunting access to hunters across the state. Other projects such as the opening of Wolf Creek Lake for public fishing and the refinement of deer management in Kansas, highlighted 1996.

The Commission's Task Force on Outdoor Kansas has completed its review of long-term funding sources which are needed to finance improvements to outdoor recreation facilities and department programs. Various members of the task force met with Gov. Graves last month to present their findings. The task force will continue to work with the legislature as funding plans are finalized.

1997 promises to be a challenging year for the department. Issues such as the El Dorado State Park repayment to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the reclassification of the Prairie Spirit Rail Trail into the state park system quickly rise to the top. We will attempt to update our boating laws so that they are consistent with our peer states, while emphasizing the need for boating education certification in Kansas. The department would also like to expand the popular WIHA program. In a time when government land acquisition is viewed unfavorably,

programs like WIHA make good business sense to the department, tax payers and sportsmen. Also, department staff have already focused on ways to improve customer service and efficiency in all areas.

Moving into the future requires vision, but that vision would be incomplete without public participation. We count on your input to guide the department as we manage the natural resources of this state. Your participation can exist on many different levels. It may be taking a child fishing for the first time or merely a Sunday drive through a state park or wildlife area. It may mean that you support the department through the purchase of an annual hunting license or park permit.

Your commitment can, however, go beyond paying fees or making donations to conservation organizations. Communicating your support for our state's natural resources to your elected officials plays a critical role in resource management. A letter or note or even a telephone call to your legislator can go a long way in preserving our outdoor heritage.

On a local level, you may choose to get involved with Friends Groups, which are responsible for many improvements we see at our state parks. These folks work quietly in the background so that we all enjoy a better outdoor experience. This type of commitment ensures that future generations will enjoy the same outdoor opportunities we tend to take for granted.

As you make your New Year's resolutions, include one to get outdoors and recapture some of the outdoor memories you cherish. Pass on your love of our natural resources and the strong tradition of stewardship to nature to those that will assume this commitment after we're gone. Renewal exists — as the calendar starts over, as springtime gives rebirth and as we focus on getting back to the simpleness of nature. I hope you all have great outdoor experiences in 1997.

Steve Williams



snowy egret

Life is beautiful. Kansas is blessed with a diversity of wildlife that animates the landscape with color and drama. Those who notice are enriched without measure.



common tern



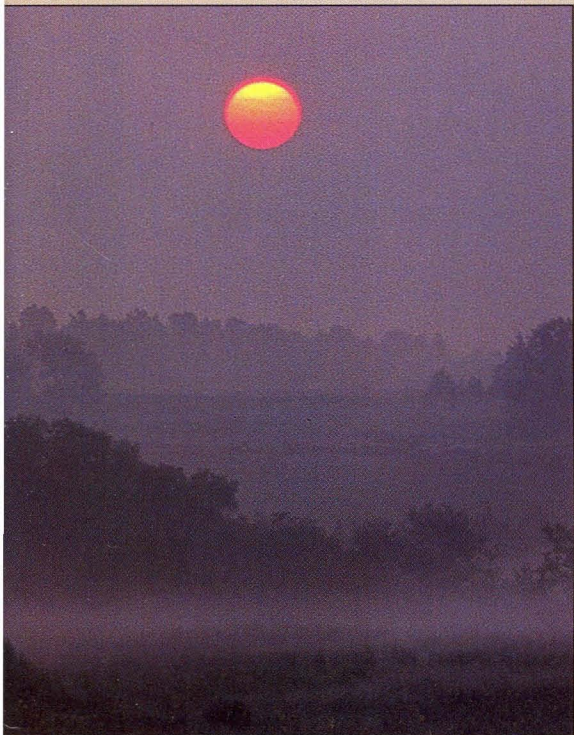
snowy egret



fog over Pratt County



Prairie, Barber County



*Much-reveled and little-known
Earth shrouds herself in barest silk
Motionless, she sighs.
A leaf drops.*

Fog in cedars, Gypsum Hills





Sunburst through clouds

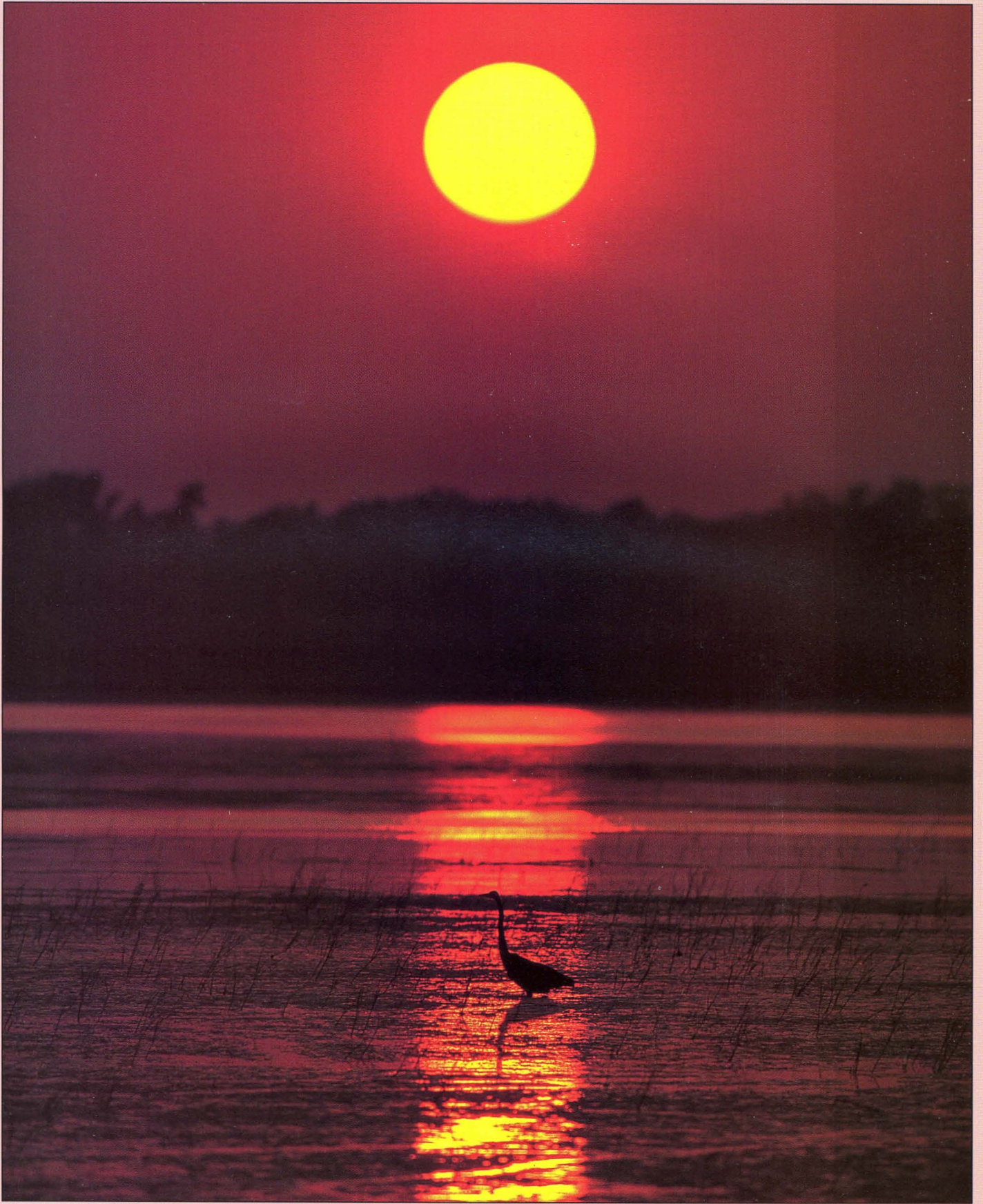
Cloudy or not, Kansas skies are an endless canvas for the Master Painter. No vista is complete without their beauty.



Sundog on high cirrus clouds at daybreak



Sunrise over the
Ninnescah

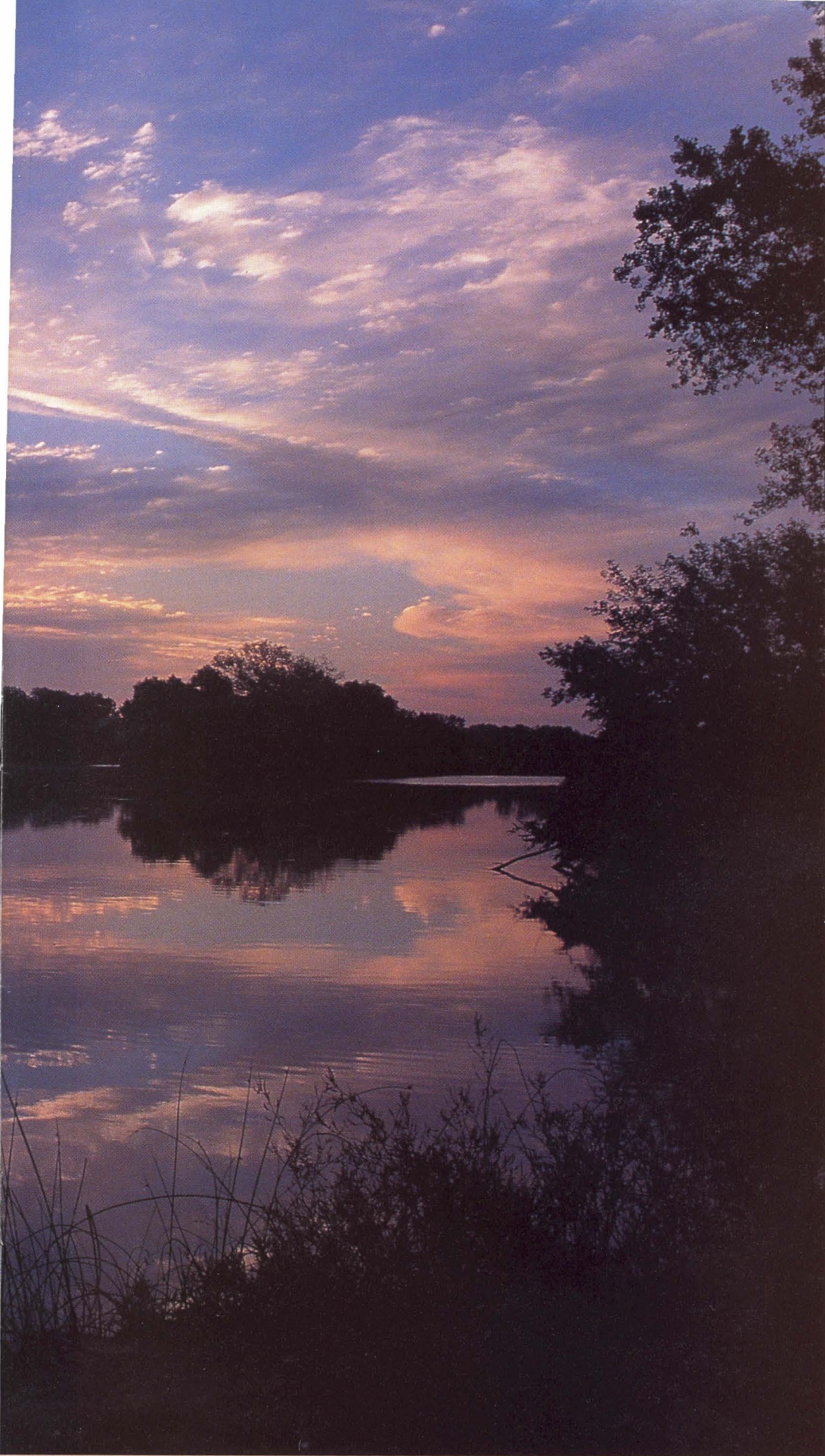


great blue heron



pelican





Beautiful images are fleeting. As light and clouds change, rich colors can lose their glory in a matter of minutes.

Dawn, south fork
Ninnescah River

*Birds hold a special fascination through color and song.
Through them, man learned to fly.*

Eastern meadowlark





common nighthawk against storm front



winter cardinal



Goldfinch



young red-tailed hawk

painter bunting





drake green-winged teal

blue-winged teal

Among birds, ducks are synonymous with changing seasons. Their size and numbers bring to life the wonder of migration.





American wigeons

hen mallard



Autumn foliage is a feast for the eyes. Whether the forests of southeastern Kansas or the shrubs of the high plains, woody plants brighten the October landscape. Green chlorophyll in the leaf breaks down to reveal secondary colors, which are intensified on cool nights as sugars are trapped by dying leaves.



sugar maples



sugar maples

fragrant sumac





smooth sumac



plains beebalm



blackberries





mintleaf beebalm

phlox





white-tailed doe and fawn

barn swallow feeding young





sandhill cranes

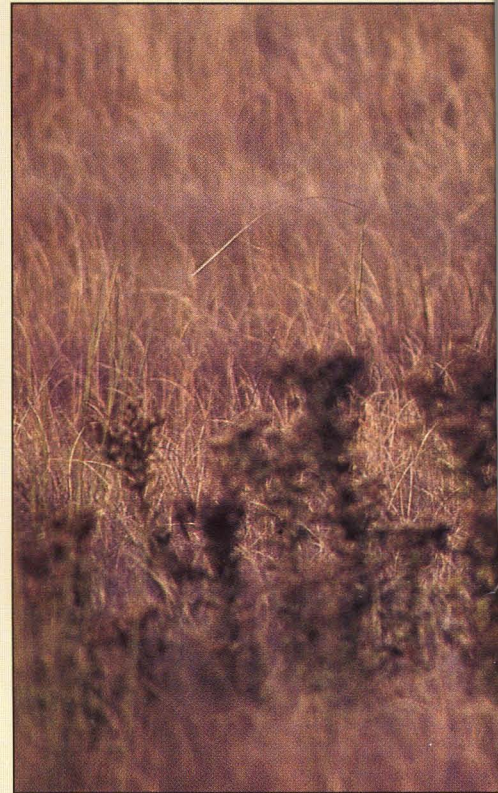


Coyotes embody the spirit of wind-swept prairie and the old west. Close encounters with these wary creatures are thrilling and rare.



bull elk in velvet

Animals two-by-two add another dimension to any wildlife sighting. Groups of animals offer glimpses of social behavior not evident with individuals.





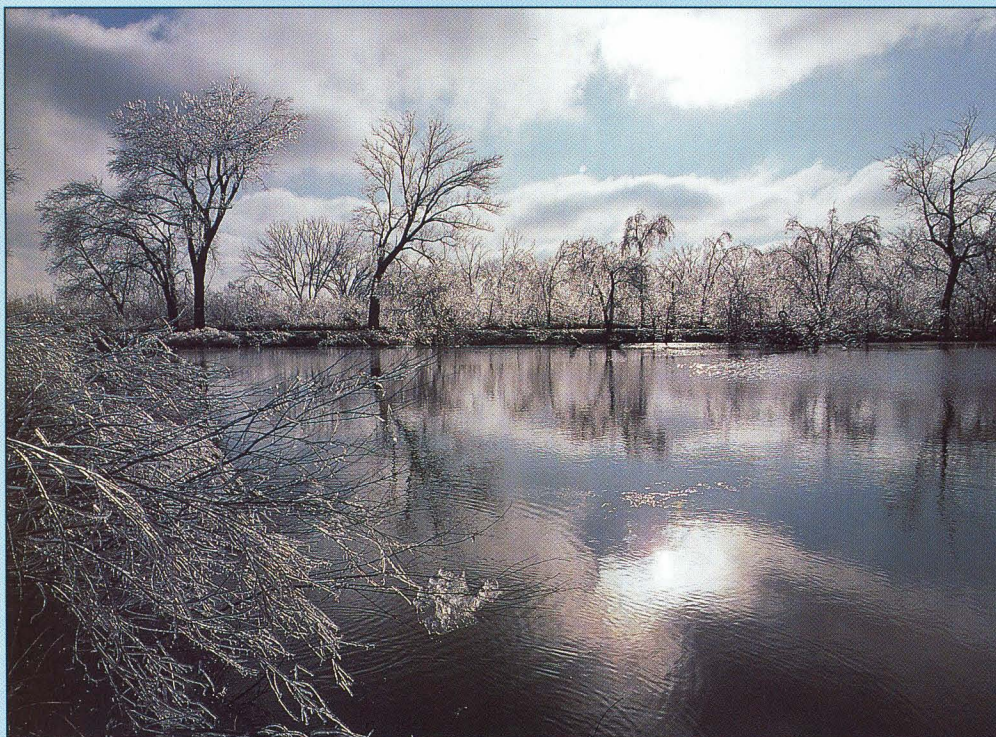
white-tailed doe and fawn



whitetails



icy backwater



ice storm

Winter's bitter conditions sometimes create a wonderland of snow and ice. Braving the cold is worth it to experience the magnificence of the season.



ice on fall foliage



wintering Canada geese, Ninescah River



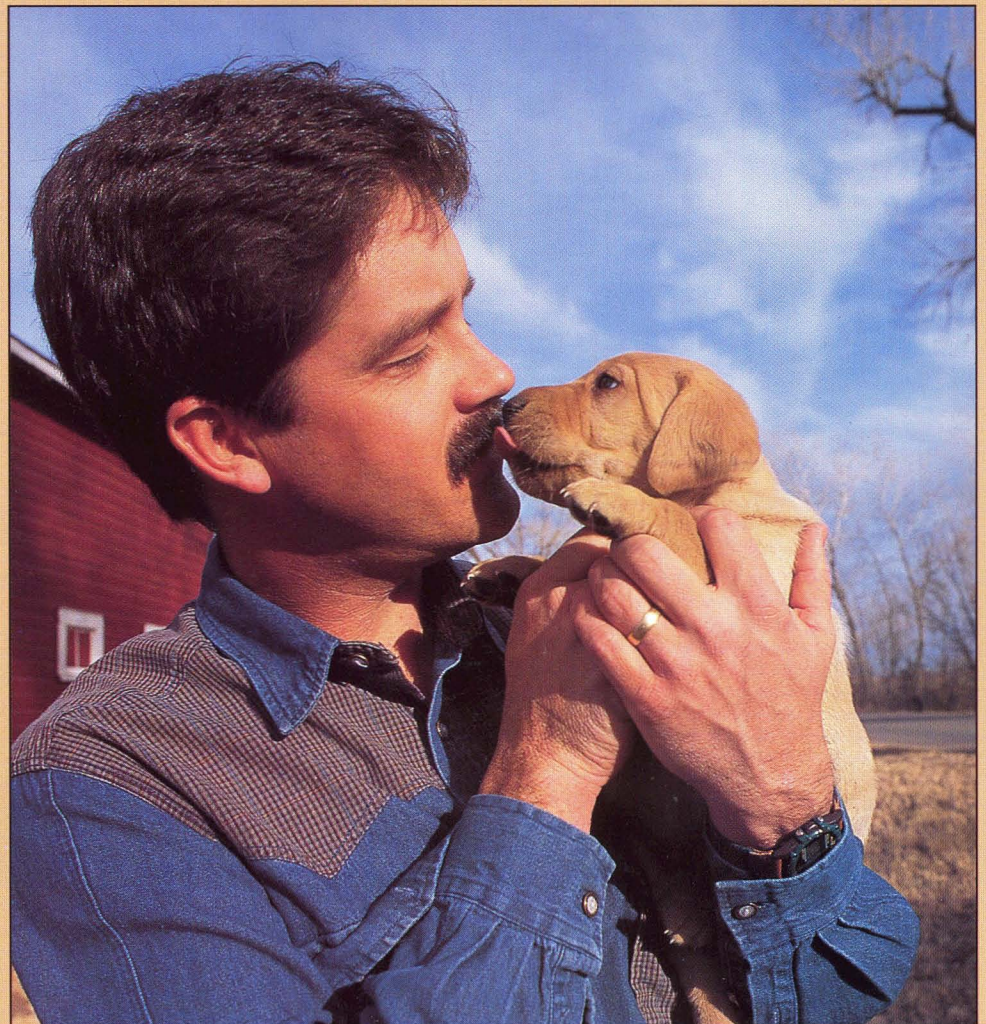




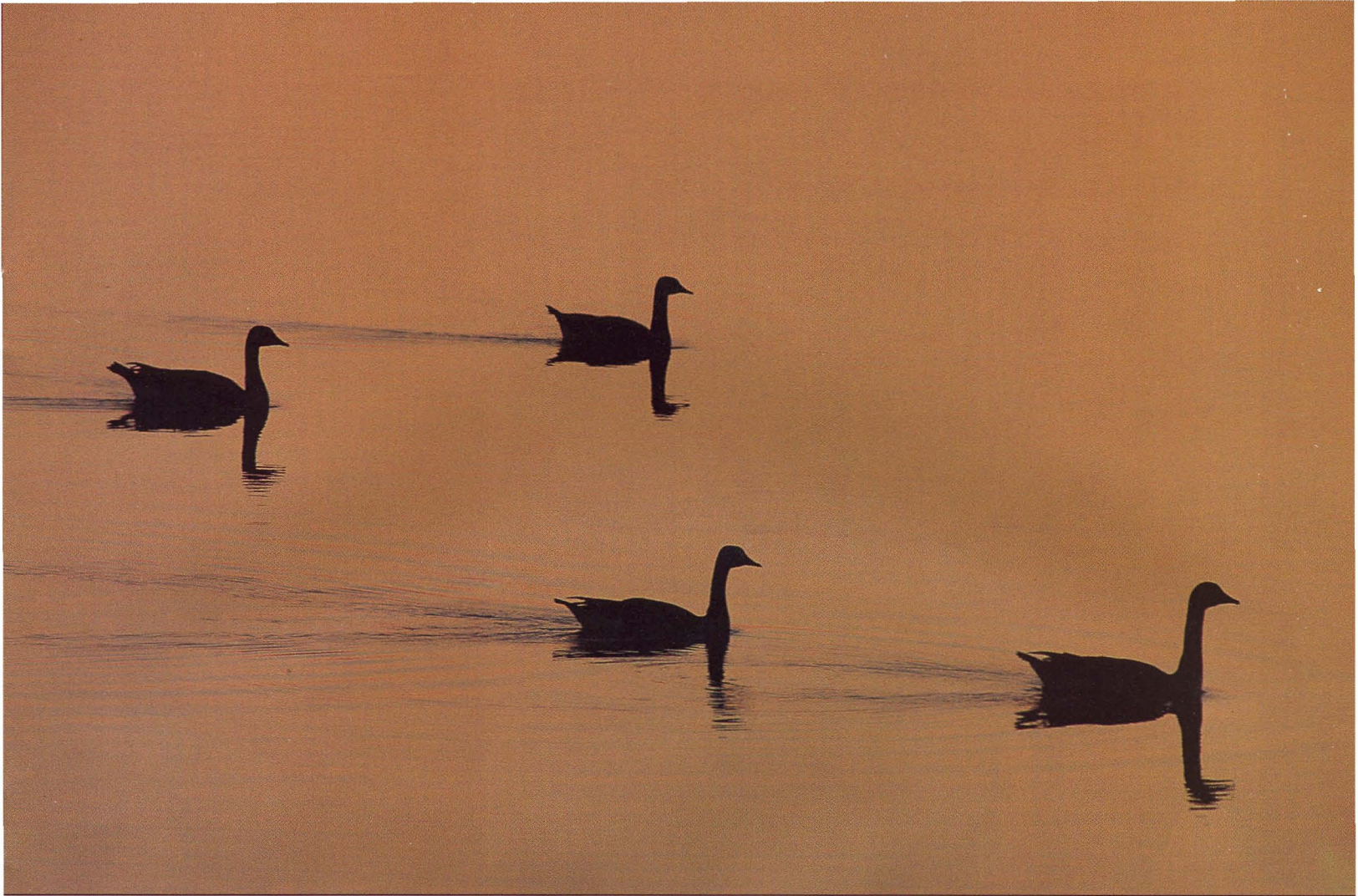
Labrador Retriever puppies and decoys

love at first sight

It's impossible to resist the pure joy and delight of puppies. They are innocence and mischief, affection and orneriness rolled into a pudgy ball of fur. Few things in life can lift our spirits like a puppy.







Canada geese on calm pool at sunset



landing geese





insect damage, sycamore leaf

*A sycamore riddled, the leaf miner has fallen
and disappeared in current,
encased itself in sculpted winter.
Incubating.*

opposite, rippled reflection in winter woods



snow drift



*In Spring, Earth casts her
shroud away.
Life springs from the leafy
humus.
Deep inside the landscape,
an orb weaver labors.
A casket splits, a moth takes
flight.
From a hill, stillness masks
the frenetic drama below us.
Or above.*

spider web with dew



preening Canada goose

floating leaves

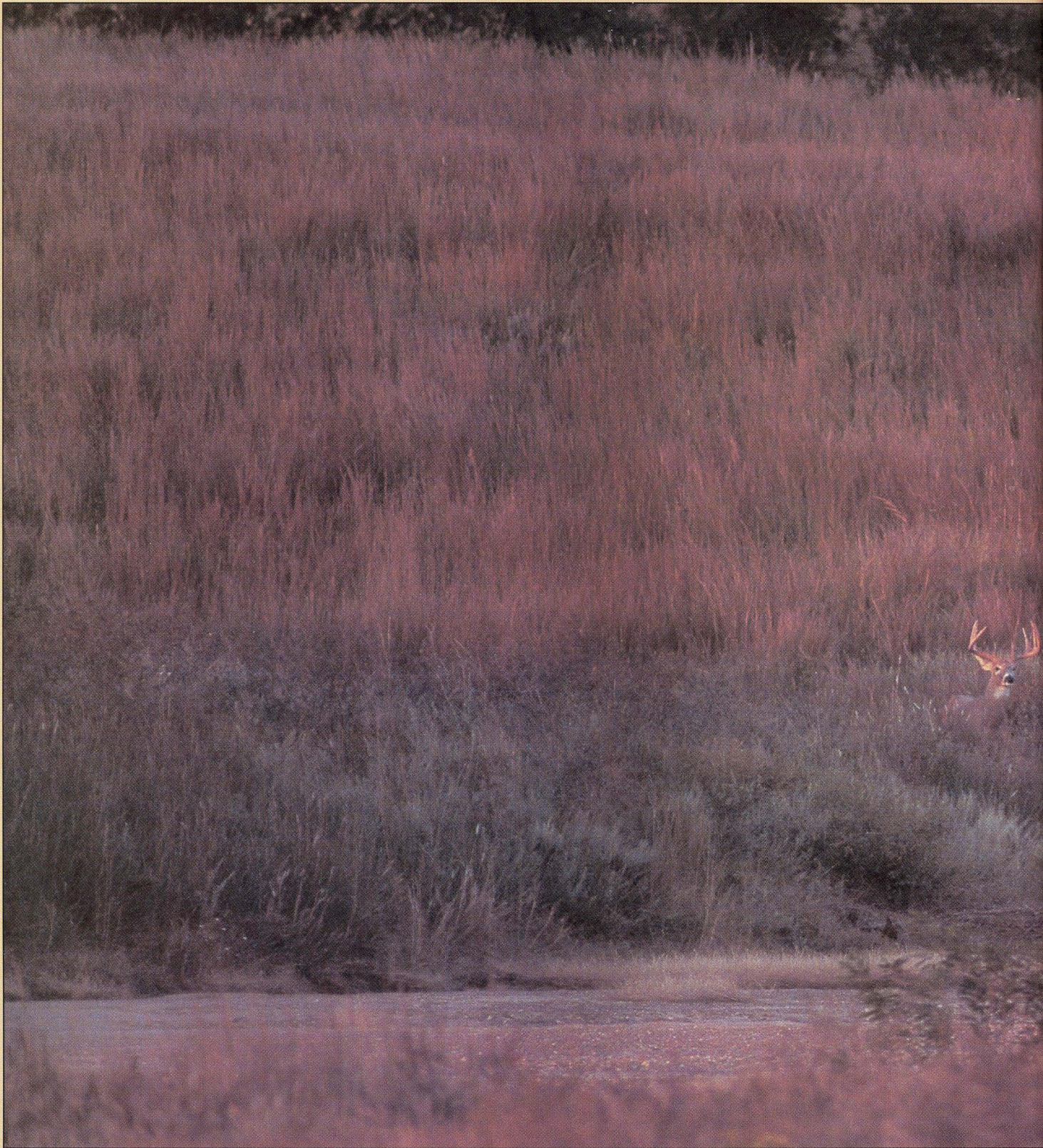


newly hatched ducklings, early morning



resting button buck





white-tailed buck in Barber County



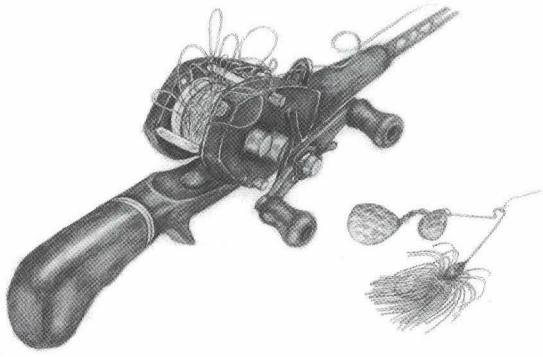
The vast and open habitats may seem at first lifeless to the casual observer, but sit quietly at dawn or dusk and you'll discover a hidden and fascinating community.



feeding jackrabbit

white-tailed fawn with horsefly





Backlash

by Mike Miller

Wildlife Photography Is A Cush Job

Before you get all gushy about the beautiful photographs in this issue, consider this: Mike Blair has a cush job. Oh, he'll tell you of his hardships, sitting in sweltering blinds, getting bit by mosquitoes, dealing with frostbite and spending hours on the road — yeah, yeah, yeah. Big deal. It's a cush job. He spends his days outside photographing wildlife; no phones, no computers, no nitpicking writers.

When the magazine comes out, he gets all the credit. Readers write letter after letter complimenting the photography that appears on our pages. A typical note might go like this: "We love the magazine, especially the photographs. Whatever you're paying Mike Blair, it's not enough . . . blah, blah, blah." (Although I suspected these letter writers might be related to Blair, I've never found proof.)

I know he spends hours in uncomfortable blinds, and I know he drives thousands of miles running down photo tips, usually working more than 40 hours each week. Big deal. The real work is done by the photographer's assistant.

Since our budget won't even allow a part-time photographer's assistant, Blair usually snags some unsuspecting Information & Education Section staff member. He makes it sound like a treat to join him on a shoot — getting out of the office on a beautiful day and all that (and we usually fall for it). But he fails to mention that you'll get to do all the dirty work.

A common assistant's job in spring is hazing waterfowl. Blair will set up in his well-hidden blind near the water, and the assistant is expected to flush ducks from all the mosquito breeding sites within five miles. Easy? Hah, you slog through the mud swatting mosquitoes and deer flies, flushing ducks in your wake, only to have them relight where you've just come from. Back through the mud and cattails you go, flushing the ducks again. Then it's off to another little marsh and a repeat performance. Waterholes may have to be hazed several times to ensure the birds end up in front of Blair's lens.

When the beautiful photos appear in magazine, the photo credit doesn't mention the hazer.

Another fun-sounding assistant's job is that of model. "I need some pictures of an angler with a largemouth bass for an upcoming story. Let's go fishing," he'll say.

Sounds pretty good. But don't be fooled. First, you're expected to actually catch a fish on demand. Then you'll have to tell Blair when and where the fish is going to jump — before it jumps. And whatever you do, don't lose the fish. Entire reputations have been ruined when respected anglers have failed to catch fish on the photo day, or lost the only fish hooked before any photos were snapped.

If the model is lucky enough to actually land a fish, the real work starts. "Hold it right there. No, not so close to your face, a little farther out," Blair will say as he adjusts the aperture or otherwise looks busy with his camera. "Now turn the fish just slightly so the sun glints off it just right. Bend slightly at the waist, arm out. Lean your head back a little. Hold it — gotta change film. What's the matter? You've got a funny look on your face. You have to smile. Is that position uncomfortable? Just a little longer. Move a little closer. Ok, now catch one a little bigger than your lure for some real photos."

Another nasty job is that of gear carrier. Blair will sugar-coat this assignment, knowing that endurance and strength will ultimately be required. "Boy the turkeys are really gobbling. I need someone good with a call to help bring them in close," he'll say, even though he's a proficient caller himself. Up at dawn and on our way, it appears like a great assignment — until Mike begins talking about this new "portable" blind he's trying out. He fails to mention what you're already suspecting — it weighs a ton.

Arriving at the creekbottom, you unload cameras, film, camo tarps, tripods, calls, three decoys and — the blind. It's a long, dark walk to the calling site, and you stumble over logs, step in holes and feel more like a Sherpa than a photographer's assistant. And after that kind of trek with that much gear, you can bet your paycheck that the gobblers will be silent.

"Oh, well," Mike will say in his carefree manner. "At least you got out of the office. We'll try it again next week." (You plan to be busy that day.)

As you enjoy the spectacular photos in this, our second annual photo issue, you can admire Blair's skill with a camera. But give some thought to the real workers behind the photos — the unappreciated and forgotten slaves — I mean assistants.



[A large white rectangular area, likely a placeholder for a label or caption, containing faint, illegible text.]

