

# KANSAS

*Wildlife & Parks*

MARCH/APRIL 1998

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# The View From Here



by Steve Williams

## Making A Difference

An unfortunate event recently demonstrated a unique network of individuals that play key roles in managing our wildlife resources. Two poachers thoughtlessly killed six trumpeter swans on a watershed near Topeka. While this crime is no worse than any other senseless poaching incident, reaction was emotional. Trumpeter swans were on the verge of extinction at the turn of the century. Through diligent protection and conservation efforts, the population has since recovered to stable levels. They are large, beautiful birds that occasionally migrate through Kansas and may stop and rest on ponds or lakes. The illegal killing outraged Kansans across the state.

The problem with acts of poaching or vandalism, such as this, is that there are rarely witnesses and little evidence except for the bodies of the dead animals. With only 63 conservation officers covering 105 counties in Kansas, it's impossible for law enforcement to monitor these kinds of random acts. Finding and citing these individuals relies on cooperation among law enforcement agencies and help from citizens.

After receiving a report of the dead swans, department conservation officers went to the site and gathered evidence. Since trumpeters are protected by federal regulations, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service agents were notified. Then the event was publicized in an attempt to gain information. Fortunately, in this case, tips were provided, and the responsible individuals were identified. They were fined, guns were confiscated and they were required to make public apologies. The six swans cannot be replaced, but the justice handed down and the publicity generated may prevent a similar event from occurring.

Many wildlife law enforcement cases are made through a similar series of events. Concerned citizens notify officers of violations and, in many cases, provide detailed information about who committed the crimes. Fortunately, poachers like to brag about their crimes.

Another important program for wildlife law enforcement is the Outdoor Alert Hotline. The toll-free number (1 800 228-4263) allows Kansans to report violations anonymously. During working hours, the hotline connects callers with the law enforcement division or the Highway Patrol dispatch. The report can then be quickly relayed to the proper conservation officer, sometimes in time to catch the violators before they've left the scene. In all

cases, the more detailed the information, the better chance the officer will be able to make a case.

Wildlife law enforcement is a daunting task in a state covering more than 80,000 square miles, much of it sparsely populated. Many officers have several counties within their territory, and they simply can't be everywhere at once. It's a simple fact that wildlife law enforcement requires the help of concerned sportsmen and citizens.

And conservation officers do much more than enforce wildlife-related laws. Officers inspect licensed game breeding facilities and controlled shooting areas. They investigate reports of pollution and other environmental threats. They work in their local communities to promote conservation through public programs, hunter and boating education clinics, as well as programs at local grade and high schools. Conservation officers are often the department's first line of contact with the public, providing information about hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation opportunities.

Park rangers are conservation officers who spend much of their time working in state parks. While they also aid in wildlife law enforcement, much of their spring, summer and fall months are spent patrolling state parks. Cases in state parks can range from the obvious state park violations to domestic violence incidents, fights, and rowdy parties. Conservation officers also enforce the boating laws on our public waters, checking boaters for legal requirements, investigating boating accidents, searching for drowning victims, aiding boaters in distress and enforcing boating under the influence regulations.

The men and women in the department's law enforcement division are dedicated to protecting our natural resources. Whenever someone breaks a wildlife-related law, they are stealing opportunities from law-abiding sportsmen and women. If you look the other way, you're contributing to the problem. It's a simple task to pick up the phone and contact your local conservation officer, or dial the Outdoor Alert Hotline. You can make a difference.

*Steve Williams*

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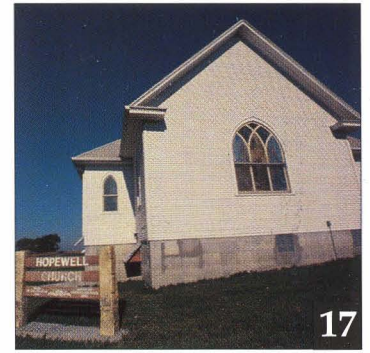
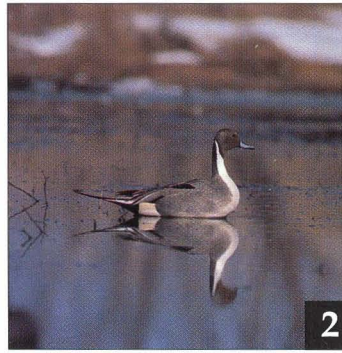
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**About the covers**  
**Front:** A drake and hen pintail grace the sky over Kansas as they make their way north during spring migration. Mike Blair photographed the scene with a 600mm lens, @ f/5.6, 1/500 sec.  
**Back:** Newton resident David Pendry holds a nice Rio Grande gobbler. Marc Murrell shot the scene with a 35-80mm zoom lens, @ f/5.6, 1/125 sec.



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

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# Pinnies

text and photos by Mike Blair  
staff photographer, Pratt

*Enough of winter. Give me a deep blue sky that reaches into space and golden light from a northbound sun. Keep the cold for now — it smells clean and heightens the anticipation. Give me ice-out water lapping at cattails, and fringe willows orange with promise. Then show me the heralds of coming spring, soft whistles from overhead, white flyers in agile chase. Give me a day on the marsh. Give me pintails . . .*



The sounds come from somewhere high, a trill and a peep, a whistle, a whistle. Floating, feinting on the wind, they draw focus until salt-and-pepper specks appear. Dipping and sliding, they turn and climb as if riding some vast and unseen roller coaster. Closer, they're transformed into handsome birds, white knights chasing a dusky lady. Ripping air is choked by a splash as ducks put down in a breathtaking plunge. Pintails have arrived on the marsh.

They sit for a moment, heads

bobbing in courtship display. The males, each beautiful, vie for attention of the young female. All are yearlings, most older birds having earlier paired on the wintering grounds. There is urgency now to find mates, and each migration stop is accented by endless courtship flights. Pintail drakes typically outnumber hens three to two, so that unmated females are surrounded by suitors. Each does his best to win her charms.

The courtship dance is a lovely thing. A drake stretches above the

surface to bow, arching its graceful neck in a nodding fashion while uttering a low whistle. The tail is fanned with central pins pointing skyward. The display lasts only a moment, but is often repeated as each male jockeys for position before the uncommitted hen. Her occasional low quack encourages the group's best efforts.

Then they're off again. The hen jumps from the water and leads a spectacular chase. Pintails, longer and weighing less than other big ducks, are suited to marvelous



In its spring plumage, the pintail drake is one of the most beautiful ducks. Pintails have unusual migration patterns. As if to avoid cold weather, they fly south in early fall but return north in late winter through snow and ice to reach their nesting grounds.



Mature birds usually select mates before the northward migration begins. Most pintails nest in the northern prairie states, Canada, the Arctic and Alaska. Few nest in Kansas.

aerial maneuvers. Their wings are long and narrow, like those of gulls. Wings beat rapidly, and their tips move through a long arc. Due to speed and a slim flight profile, the pintail is regarded as the “grey-

hound of the air.” The nuptial chase is a wondrous illustration of its capabilities.

The hen dips and dodges while her followers match each move. Collisions are not unusual during a

chase, and though these result in nothing worse than momentary loss of aerial balance, position is often forfeited. The game is to stay as close as possible to the hen, and a flying drake may actually grasp her tail feathers in his bill to help hold formation. Missing a tight turn can put the leader in last place.

The nuptial flight often has a stop-and-go quality, caused when a hen hits the brakes to throw off her pursuers. Suitors rock backward to avoid overflight. Wings and tails are dropped, and the long necks are arched vertically for greatest air resistance. When males do this, their breasts flash white in a showy display. The net effect is a beautiful flaring of the whole formation, which lifts and stalls before diving once more in rapid chase.

These flights may last an hour or more, with intermittent short landings for rest. Eventually, the hen chooses a drake and mating occurs. Once a pair is bonded, rejected



Younger birds vie for mates throughout the spring migration. While the courtship flights are spectacular, the more subtle behaviors on the water are also interesting. Here a drake raises off the water and bows its long neck in a graceful display for a hen.



Drakes outnumber hens by at least three to two, so it's common to see several drakes shadowing a single hen. Competition is fierce, and position within the formation is critical. This drake has grabbed the hen's tail feather to maintain his first-place position.

males leave to search elsewhere. The newly formed pair stays together until incubation begins.

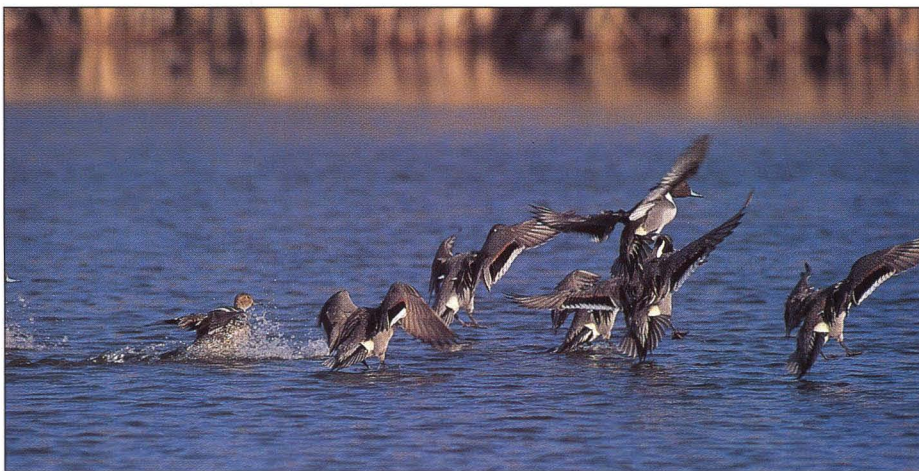
Pintails are something of a paradox in their migration patterns. In fall, they head south early, as if to

avoid cold temperatures. But unlike other cold-sensitive species that are late to return to the breeding grounds, pintails are some of the earliest spring migrants. Pushing against late winter storms, they're

often observed in snow and ice-covered pools on their way to the far north.

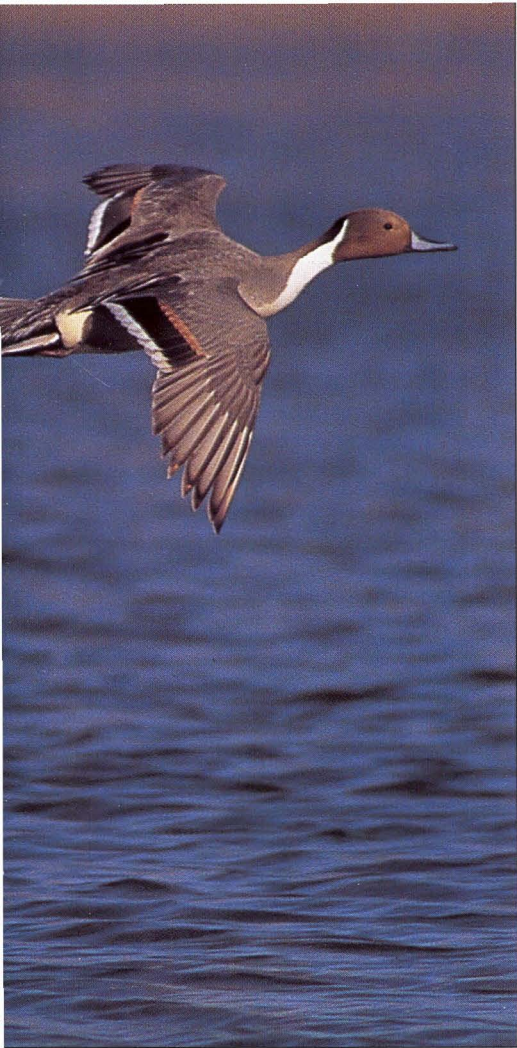
Migration routes are also peculiar. In autumn, many North American pintails migrate toward the southwest, overwintering in California or western Mexico. However, rather than returning by the same routes, a sizable percentage head eastward for a spring migration through the Central Flyway. This counter-clockwise pattern is unusual among ducks.

Fall pintails first appear in Kansas during early September. They peak near the end of October and are mostly gone by mid-December. These birds overwinter on the Gulf Coast or continue to Central America. Preferred winter foods are cereal grains and small invertebrates. Though pintails can cause crop damage, they have an affinity for natural foods and feed



The courtship flights are interrupted by short rests on the water, the drakes still trying to remain as close to the hen as possible. In a few minutes, they are gone.





heavily on millets, nutgrasses and smartweeds, even in the presence of suitable agricultural crops. Unlike mallards, they make little use of waste corn while passing through the Midwest.

Spring migration occurs early, with birds trickling back into Kansas by the first week of February. Migration peaks in early March and ends rather abruptly as anxious birds press onward to nesting sites. The spring migration period is shorter and more intense than the autumn phase. Back-to-back northers sometimes cause spectacular spring buildups in Kansas while pintails wait for favorable winds. However, these concentrations often disappear overnight when the wind turns out of the south.

Pintails nest from the Midwest northward, but the majority nest in Alaska, Canada, and the Arctic. In

these latitudes, breeding pintails average 13 ducks per square mile. In the Dakotas, densities range from 7-10. Kansas pintail nests are rare, with only a few hundred birds thought to nest in the central and western parts of the state.

Nest sites are selected in open areas where vegetation is low or sparse. Unlike other prairie ducks, some pintails nest on bare earth or in stubble fields. Nests are often farther from water than those of other ground-nesting ducks, sometimes as much as a mile away. The nests are scraped into soil and lined with down and grass.

Starting in June at most latitudes, pintails lay from 3-14 eggs. The average nest contains seven or eight. The hen lays an egg every day, usually in early morning. When the clutch is complete, incubation commences. Nesting hens are fearless and tolerate a close approach without flushing. Hatching occurs in 23 days and is usually completed in an eight-hour time span. If a nest is lost, the hen renests several weeks later.

A day after hatching, broods are led to water. Pintails are more prone to guide their young overland than other species and often move from pond to pond as the brood develops. These forays may cover hundreds of yards and place ducklings at risk of predation. However,

the pintail hen aggressively defends its young and draws predators away by feigning injury. Even so, entire broods are sometimes lost.

Young pintails develop quickly, feeding on both plants and animals. Aquatic foods include the roots and shoots of plants, as well as larvae, leeches, minnows, crawfish, tadpoles and insects. As ducklings mature, they feed in the manner of adults, dabbling below the surface while paddling to maintain balance.

Pintails can fly five to eight weeks after hatching. Research suggests that flight occurs earlier in northern latitudes. In Alaska, young pintails fly after 36 days. South Dakota broods reach flight stage in 57 days. Fledgling males and females resemble each other, differing from the coloration of the hen only by small spots that cover the breast and belly. By September, the drake is identifiable and gradually attains its familiar white plumage by mid-winter.

Drake pintails are rarely involved with nesting and rearing young. During this period, males generally retire to molt. Most stay on the northern breeding grounds, but a small percentage make a long flight to the north end of Utah's Great Salt Lake. Tens of thousands of pintail drakes arrive there between June 1 and 10, where they molt into eclipse plumage and spend the summer.



When the pintail migration peaks, usually in early March, courtship flights keep the marsh alive. When back-to-back storms roll in from the north, huge buildups of pintails can occur.



As drakes shadow the hen's every move, she pulls off impressive maneuvers, breaking, turning and diving. Mid-air collisions are common, but fortunately they don't cause injury. When a hen finally selects a mate, the other males leave to find another hen.

This is one of the greatest premolt migrations in the world, but why it occurs is unknown. Special banding studies have shown that the number of pintails arriving to molt at Salt Lake is 27 times greater than that expected by chance.

All adult pintails must renew their flight feathers each year. The molting process takes about four

weeks, during which the birds cannot fly and are particularly wary. Molting is usually accomplished in heavy cover where birds are protected. Hens molt and retain their normal drab coloration while their broods are developing. Drakes lose their elegant white breeding plumage and assume eclipse coloration like that of the hen. This

provides the male with camouflage during the vulnerable flightless period.

Though pintails are commonly seen in Kansas, they have experienced an alarming decline over the past four decades. In 1956, their numbers exceeded 10 million. By 1991, the population dwindled to fewer than 2 million. Since then it has recovered to its current mark of 3.6 million birds. At the same time, other duck species have remained stable or actually increased in population. The question is, Why?

A number of factors have apparently contributed. Many have to do with the pintail's unique nesting and migration habits. Though pintails typically return to the nesting areas where they were raised, they are highly sensitive to habitat changes. During times of drought when potholes are dry, they overfly traditional nesting sites and move farther north. Research has shown that pintails often experience poor nesting success in unfamiliar habitats. If drought is widespread, they don't nest at all.



Pintail numbers plummeted in the early 1980s when drought plagued the nesting areas. As water has returned to the pothole region, pintail numbers have rebounded.

A second problem relates to the natural fertility of the species. Even under normal conditions, pintails have the smallest average clutch size of all dabbling species. Accounting for expected natural mortality, a successful brood brings only five ducklings to flight stage.

Nest site preference is another factor. More than other species of waterfowl, pintails nest in farmland habitats such as roadsides, hay and stubble fields, and fields of growing grain. Burning, mowing, plowing and cultivation directly destroy about half of all pintail nests in farmland situations. Additionally, pintails tend to expose their nests to view, inviting predation by crows, skunks, coyotes, raccoons, and badgers. Further predation results from a tendency to often move ducklings long distances overland. Considering all factors, it is estimated that about one-fourth of nesting pintails annually fail to produce young.

Land use practices over the past several decades have affected pintail production, as has the weather.

Extensive prairie nesting habitat was lost in the 1970s when high wheat prices led to extensive plowing of grasslands for crop conversion. Protracted drought during the 1980s drastically affected pintail production by drying vast areas of prairie wetlands. On the positive side, the Conservation Reserve Program has continued from the mid-1980s, restoring valuable grassland habitat throughout much of breeding range of pintails. Also, organizations like Ducks Unlimited have built a growing base of permanent wetland and nesting habitat through member donations, and duck stamp purchases by hunters have also served to improve habitat conditions.

Hunting has never been considered a real factor in pintail decline, since regulations carefully limited harvest to fall within the expected limits of natural mortality for each year-class. Even so, for political reasons, harvest has see-sawed from a bag limit of 10 pintails per day, to one per day, to the current daily limit of three. Kansas hunters have

a miniscule impact on the species, with a total harvest of only 1,300 pintails in 1996.

Rainfall has made the biggest difference in the recent pintail rebound. Three wet years in the northern Great Plains have dramatically improved nesting success so that pintail numbers are increasing. The breeding population grew 30 percent last year alone, a welcome sign of recovery. Though the species currently remains several million birds short of its target goal set by the North American Waterfowl Plan, there is good reason to be optimistic for the future.

Twenty years of conservation efforts have paid off so that nesting habitat is probably now sufficient to stop the decline of pintail populations even during drought. Hopefully, good rains will continue to help rebuild numbers at an accelerated pace. Either way, the species looks to be out of trouble.

Thankfully, pintails are here to stay. ♡





# Your Chickadee Checkoff

by Ken Brunson

*wildlife diversity coordinator, Pratt*

photos by Mike Blair

***Funded by donations taxpayers make through their state income tax forms, the Chickadee Checkoff has built a history of supporting wildlife programs. Here's what your Chickadee Checkoff money is doing today, as well as what it will do tomorrow.***

**F**or 18 years, the Chickadee Checkoff has been supporting projects to help wildlife. The annual contribution of \$170,000 is relatively meager, but it has been put to many good uses. Donations have been enough to continue many familiar programs, as well as make several humble starts with new programs. This is what your donation to Chickadee Checkoff has helped provide in recent years.

**The Kansas Breeding Bird Atlas**  
Over the last six years, the Chickadee Checkoff has supported

the *Kansas Breeding Bird Atlas* project. This exciting survey enlisted more than 140 volunteer amateur and expert birders to assess which birds were nesting in 760 blocks of land around the state. Even before it has been published, this effort has resulted in many interesting nesting records for Kansas.

#### **Endangered Species Investigations**

Much of the emphasis for endangered species work has been with the more sensitive, river species in southeast Kansas. This includes several freshwater clams that have

declined at alarming rates in recent years. Some are already on the state's Threatened and Endangered List, and others may be heading for it. Research efforts, aided by Chickadee Checkoff funds, are attempting to discover reasons for declines before species have to be listed. Everyone benefits if we can find answers to these problems before conflicts occur.

#### **Eagle Surveys and Projects**

Through cooperation and funding support from Western Resources, Inc., Chickadee Checkoff

has overseen the efforts to reintroduce golden eagles and ospreys to areas of the state not formerly occupied by these birds. Nesting success of bald eagles has been closely monitored, and winter populations have been surveyed to keep abreast of the amazing comeback of these majestic birds.

### OWLS

One of the hallmark projects of the Chickadee Checkoff has been our popular Outdoor Wildlife Learning Sites Program (OWLS). Initiated in 1991, OWLS has been able to support more than 140 outdoor laboratories in schools across Kansas. At a time when environmental education is critical to our youth, OWLS projects give students hands-on approaches to learning about nature.

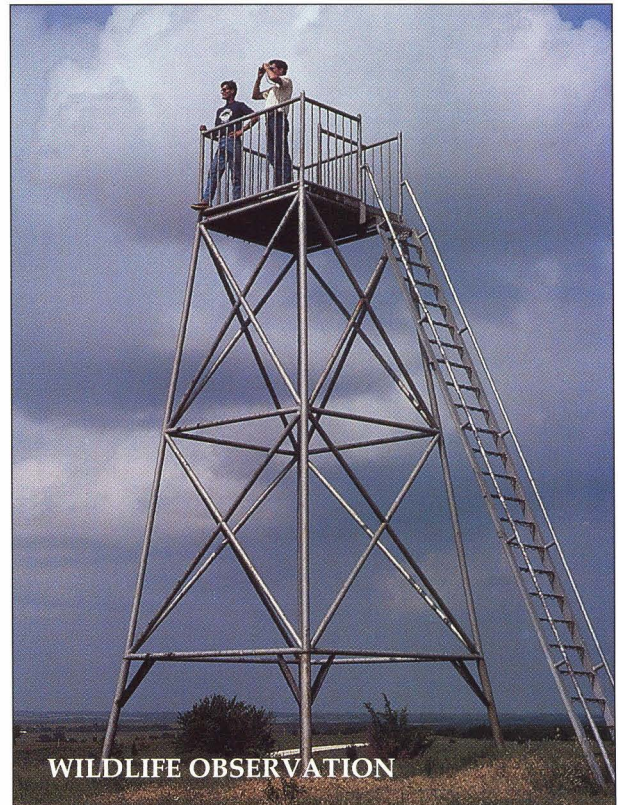
#### New Ideas and The Future Teaming With Wildlife

After Congress passes Teaming With Wildlife (TWW), we could potentially see \$3-\$4 million for wildlife diversity and viewing efforts in Kansas. Chickadee Checkoff money would be used as part of the 25 percent matching funds needed to be eligible for TWW dollars. Major programs and facilities await this grand expansion,

including a visitor center at Cheyenne Bottoms, completion of wetland development and facilities at McPherson Valley Wetlands, and a major wildlife viewing program statewide. The latter program would involve major facilities and accommodations for wildlife viewing on public lands. Features would include trails, viewing towers, interpretive materials and signs, as well as many more personal accommodations for the wildlife viewing public. Major emphasis would be placed on multi-species assessments and planning to keep species from being placed on the endangered species list.

### CROAK

The Chickadee Checkoff is about to launch another great atlas project: *The Call Records of Anurans in Kansas* (CROAK), which will be organized and supervised by herpetologist Joe Collins. On the heels of the tremendously successful *Kansas Breeding*

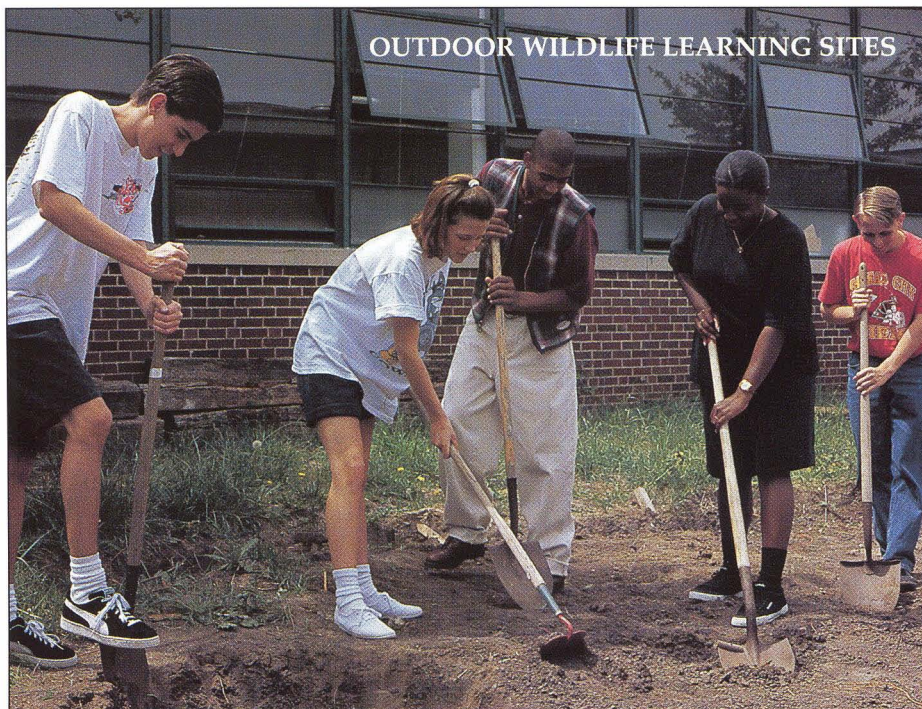


WILDLIFE OBSERVATION

*Bird Atlas* project, Chickadee Checkoff is sponsoring a similar effort for frogs and toads (anurans). However, this effort will be based more on the principles of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Breeding Bird Survey, where pre-selected routes are run annually to census the density and diversity of breeding birds. For amphibians, driving routes of about 15 miles each are being finalized for testing this spring. In addition, a fantastic new tape, *The Calls of Kansas Frogs and Toads*, will be available in early spring. The tape is being produced by Keith Coleman and Collins, and training tapes for atlas volunteers will be available. The tapes should also be a huge hit with schools and naturalists.

#### Kansas Bluebird Association

For three years, Jim Piland of Waldo has been coordinating the Kansas Bluebird Association. With a little help from the Chickadee Checkoff and the blessings of the Kansas Ornithological Society, Piland has been corresponding with bluebird enthusiasts around Kansas. This past bluebird nesting season was tremendously successful with



OUTDOOR WILDLIFE LEARNING SITES



KANSAS BLUEBIRD ASSOCIATION

the highest reported numbers of birds produced yet. Bluebird enthusiasts erected and monitored 1,228 nest boxes on 49 trails in 27 counties, producing 3,215 young eastern bluebirds.

**Partners In Flight**

There are alarming trends in the populations of neo-tropical migratory birds. Some of the problems relate to wintering grounds in South

America, some here in Kansas: Also, some of our resident grassland species have shown declines, while some have obviously benefitted from programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program. Through a contract with the Chickadee Checkoff, Bill Busby of the Kansas Biological Survey has been leading an effort to identify priority species and habitats in Kansas. This effort will continue to expand, and on-the-ground practices that help these species will be identified.

**Conservation Education**

With the help of Teaming With Wildlife, Chickadee Checkoff will support major efforts related to education and interpretation. Several key areas will be emphasized, involving all the groups of animals and some plants such as wildflowers. Butterflies, turtles, snakes, native stream fish, freshwater clams, songbirds and all the rest of nature will get fair treatment. ♡



GOLDEN EAGLE RESTORATION

Mike Blair photo



# Have A Crappie Day

by Mike Miller  
*editor, Pratt*

***Did somebody say the crappie are biting? There's no quicker way to clear a room in Kansas. When news breaks that the crappie are spawning, anglers will beat a path to the lake faster than you can say chartreuse curly-tail jig!***

**K**ansans are crazy about crappie. Like the gold rushes in the 1800s, mere mention of a crappie run will send throngs of Kansas anglers packing to the lakes. Prospectors stake their claims along lake shorelines and begin mining for the precious treasure. Highly valued among anglers, few fresh-

water fish are as tasty as crappie. Anglers dream of hitting the motherlode, where they'll pull in one big slab after another.

According to angler surveys, crappie are among the most sought-after Kansas sport fish. And since crappie are often the most numerous sport fish in many lakes,

creel surveys show that more pounds of crappie are taken from our lakes than any other fish. Many Kansas lakes, especially those in the northeast quarter of the state, have a reputation for providing phenomenal crappie fishing. Although crappie populations are cyclic in any given lake, an angler can usu-



Many Kansas lakes have the potential to produce great crappie fishing. Water level rises in the spring appear to be one of main contributing factors to good fishing.

ally find good crappie fishing in this region.

What is good crappie fishing? Well, Kansas anglers have been spoiled. In 1990s, 50-fish limits of 10- to 12-inch crappie, along with a few 14- to 16-inchers, haven't been uncommon. A keeper-sized crappie is defined by anglers according to the size of fish available, but a 10-inch crappie is generally considered a good keeper. A crappie longer than 12 inches is a slab in anybody's book.

Where is good crappie fishing? It can be just about anywhere. Even a lake that isn't noted for crappie can

produce good or even great crappie fishing in a given year. Research has shown that high water in the spring greatly benefits crappie (see "Clearing The Water On Crappie," by Don Gablehouse, May/June 1992). When the lake level rises in early spring, flooded vegetation provides excellent spawning habitat for not only crappie, but also for their primary food source, gizzard shad.

Optimal spawning conditions can allow crappie to produce huge year classes of young fish. For those fish to survive their first winter and grow to keeper-size, large year

classes of gizzard shad are also required. If sufficient numbers of shad are produced in following years, you can have 10-inch crappie in two or three years and slab-sized crappie in four or five years.

That said, there are still lakes in Kansas that consistently produce good crappie fishing, including Perry, Clinton, Council Grove, Pomona, Melvern, and Tuttle Creek reservoirs. The quality of the fishing will vary from year to year, according to spring weather, fishing pressure and spawning success, but in most years, good crappie fishing can be had at one or more of these lakes.

The very best crappie fishing this spring should be found at Kirwin, Council Grove, Hillsdale, Marion, Webster, Norton, Kanopolis, Tuttle Creek, Perry, and Cedar Bluff reservoirs. Other reservoirs and smaller lakes may not have comparable numbers of crappie, but they can still provide good crappie fishing when the fish gather in shallow water to spawn.

Crappie begin moving shallow when the water temperature reaches the 60s. This usually occurs first around mid-April in the creeks and rivers flowing into reservoirs. Crappie like to spawn on gravel, but they are cover oriented and will usually associate with brush or large rocks such as rip-rap. Look for shallow water near the shoreline with gravel, brush or rocks. In clear lakes, crappie spawn in water 3-5 feet deep. In stained or murky water, crappie may spawn as shallow as 1-2 feet.

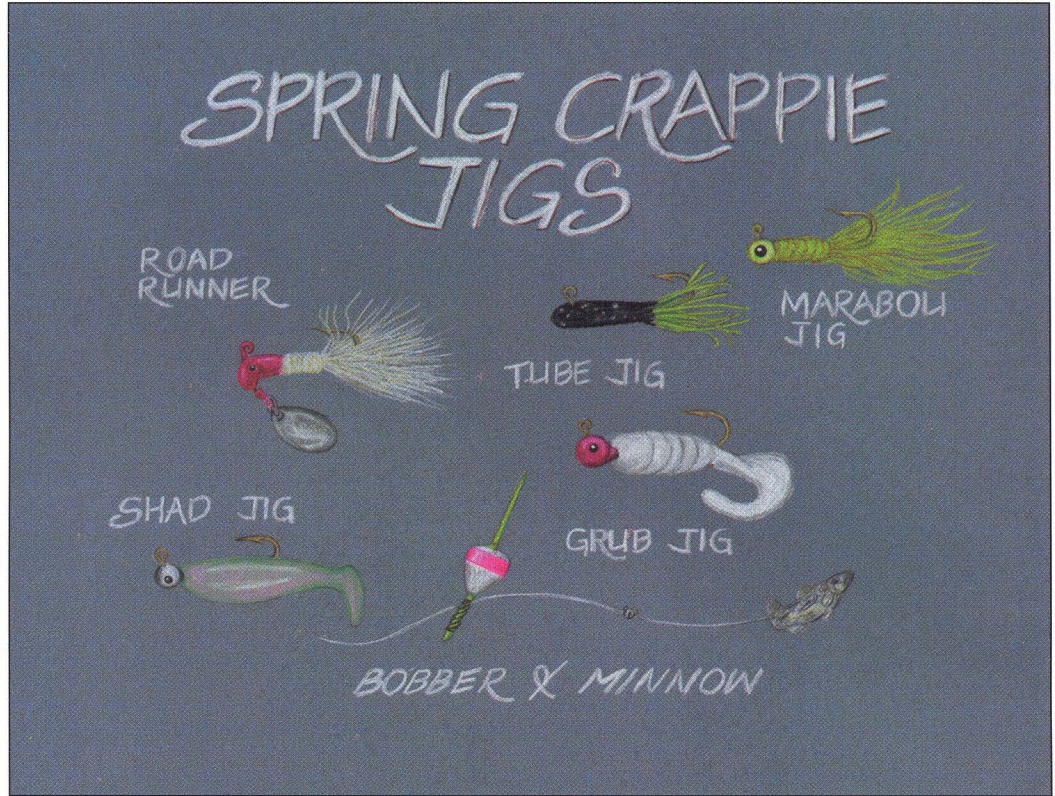
The crappie spawn can last a month, as the water warms farther down the lake. Later in May, search out main-lake shorelines with the right ingredients, such as coves, rip-rap jetties, and finally along the face of the dam.

High water not only benefits crappie, it can also help fishermen by flooding shoreline brush. Crappie will often concentrate in newly flooded vegetation, which is easily accessible to fishermen. However, sudden, extreme water-level changes during the spawn will



usually make the crappie difficult to catch for several days. Ideal fishing conditions occur when the water level rises a few feet prior to the spawn and stays relatively stable for several weeks.

Several presentations will work for spawning crappie, but the best is doodlesocking. An 8-foot flyrod fitted with an ultralight spinning or spincast reel, 4- or 6-pound line and a 1/16 or 1/8-ounce jig are the tools of doodlesocking. The long rod allows the angler to reach likely looking spots without venturing so close that fish are disturbed. Set the amount of line to fish the jig just above the bottom, and drop the jig right beside or even into the brushiest looking spots. Hold the jig steady, then pop it up and down a few times, and finally hold it steady for several seconds. If you don't feel a strike, carefully lift the jig through the brush, reposition it several feet away and repeat the process. Fish will nearly always hit while the jig is falling or holding steady. Keep moving, either wading quietly outside of the brush or carefully



Kansas anglers prefer 1/16- to 1/8-ounce jigs or minnows for spring crappie. Top colors include white, chartreuse, and red/white, pink/white or black/chartreuse combinations.

Dustin Teasley illustration

moving the boat well away from the brush. Doodlesocking can be effective from a boat, but in shallow water, wading will usually produce more fish.

I learned this the hard way on Kanopolis Reservoir several years ago. The lake had risen about 4 feet

above normal, and lots of shoreline trees and brush were flooded with 2-3 feet of water. It was perfect for wading, but I had just purchased a new boat and wanted to spend as much time in it as possible. Stubbornly, I tried to maneuver the boat along the edges of the brush with the trolling motor, and I caught several fish, usually only one from a given location. When the wind finally frustrated me by repeatedly blowing the boat into the brush, I tied up and jumped out. I eased up to a fallen tree and gently dropped my jig into the brush. Bam! The jig had just disappeared and I was fighting a monster slab. I strung this fish, dropped the jig back in the same hole and, Bam! I repeated the process seven times before I moved to another brushy hole. The boat and trolling motor were definitely spooking fish.

If the water's too deep to wade, or you'd rather not stand belly-deep in cool



Marc Murrell photos

Doodlesocking with a flyrod and jig is an effective method when the fish move shallow. The flyrod allows the angler to fish hard-to-reach water without disturbing fish.



It doesn't get much better than this – a warm spring day and mess of fat crappie. Many Kansas reservoirs will provide top-notch crappie fishing in 1998.

water, a jig and bobber system can work. Set the jig a foot or two below the bobber and cast it as close to the brush as possible. Wind and wave action will usually give the jig plenty of action. This technique works best in clear lakes where the crappie are deeper or along a rocky shoreline without a lot of brush. The jig and bobber combo will snag up regularly in brushy spots.

Just about any type of jig will work, but smaller is usually better. I rarely fish with anything larger than

1/8 ounce. Smaller jigs will sometimes be more effective on finicky fish. In clear water, solid colors such as white or chartreuse work well. In murky or muddy water, contrast is the ticket. Try a jig with a red or pink head and a white, chartreuse, or black and chartreuse body.

The old standby minnow and bobber will nearly always catch fish, especially if the fish are inactive because of cooling water or changing water levels. Under these conditions, crappie may not aggress-

sively hit a jig, but if you patiently fish a live minnow, you can have success.

Casting jigs can be effective when crappie congregate along gravelly shorelines, rip-rapped jetties or boat ramps. Hold the boat away from the area and cast a light jig, letting it free fall nearly to the bottom. Then slowly raise the rod tip and let the jig fall back as you make your retrieve. Make your presentation slow, and expect very light hits. This can work especially well when the crappie move up along the face of a dam and are scattered in a wide range of depths.

As the spawn winds down, some of the males will linger in the shallow brush. Eventually, the fish will move away from the banks, but you can still catch them if you can locate standing timber or brushpiles in 10-15 feet of water. If standing timber is visible, drop a jig or jig and minnow along the trees to just above the bottom. Fish slowly, but keep moving until you find fish. This fishing won't be nearly as fast as the action during the spawn. In manmade brushpiles, fish jigs or minnows vertically, just above the brush, holding the boat directly over the brushpile.

There is a statewide daily creel limit of 50 crappie, but keep only what you can use. Big crappie are a valuable resource, and overfishing can be tempting when large numbers of fish are easily caught. Several lakes have a 10-inch minimum length limit, including La Cygne, Melvern, Perry and Pomona. Consult the 1998 Fishing Regulations Summary for length limits and more restrictive creel limits at state and community lakes, and be sure to read the posted regulations at these smaller waters.

For crappie crazies, early spring days pass like molasses until the water finally warms enough to stir crappie. But when you hear word that the crappie are moving shallow, drop everything and stake your claim. Many Kansas lakes will offer some of the best crappie fishing found anywhere in the country this spring. Don't miss it! ♡



# A Tale Of Two Beginnings

by J. Mark Shoup  
*associate editor, Pratt*

photos by Mike Blair

*A group of dedicated people refused to let a historical landmark disappear and, working with the department, raised funds and provided labor to create a unique fixture at Glen Elder State Park*

This is a story with two beginnings. The first happened some 200 years ago when a southern widower named John Foster married a widow named Elizabeth Leslie in Hopewell, South Carolina. Perhaps driven by their religious convictions, the couple had become fed up with slavery, so they packed their bags and two sets of children and moved to Ohio.

The decision must have been a difficult one, as revealed in the name they gave the new Presbyterian Church they helped found in Ohio — Hopewell. A strong affection for roots must surely have lingered in their hearts.

But these were pioneering times, and while places held special meaning in the hearts of men, the

men themselves seldom stayed put. There was a frontier to conquer, and in the early 1870s, the sons of Elizabeth Foster — John and Alexander Leslie — headed for the Great Plains of Kansas in search of land and opportunity. About 10 miles southwest of what is now Beloit, the two men found a new home and, along with other settlers, founded another Presbyterian Church. There is something romantic about one's heritage, and this romantic impulse was apparent even in the hearts of these rugged pioneers when they named their new church "Hopewell."

While the congregation of the Kansas Hopewell Presbyterian Church was formed in 1876, it would be 1888 before they had a

building. It took twelve years to realize the dream. This building would serve the church until 1914 when a new church was built (using much of the wood from the original) to meet the needs of the congregation, which had grown to 183 members.

However, like most small, rural communities in the 20th century, this area felt the impact of urban migration. By 1976, only 35 members remained to organize the church's 100th anniversary. Still, 235 guests from 15 states returned for the celebration, proving that the romance of heritage still dwells in the hearts of men and women.

But the guests would soon be gone, and rural flight would continue. In 1989, the church held its last service.

"That was a bleak day in my memory," says Dr. Sharon Treaster, church member and superintendent of schools for Cawker City, Downs, Glen Elder, and Tipton. "I was married in that church, and my children were baptized there. But the reduced population had led to decreased membership, and the elders decided that they would have the church torn down to prevent vandalism, and a monument would be built to commemorate its existence."

In fact, Treaster was so disturbed by the thought of the church's demise that she decided something needed to be done. She joined forces with Betty Fitzgerald and Arvilla Heiman, who were interested in the church for historical reasons. "I was the emotional one," Treaster quips.

The determined women arranged to meet with Mike Nyhoff, who was at that time supervisor of Wildlife and Parks' Glen Elder Unit. Perhaps, they thought, the church could be moved to



After years of hard work and fund raising, the group was anxious to move the church. However, the great flood of 1993 flooded the park and would have ruined the church had it been in place.

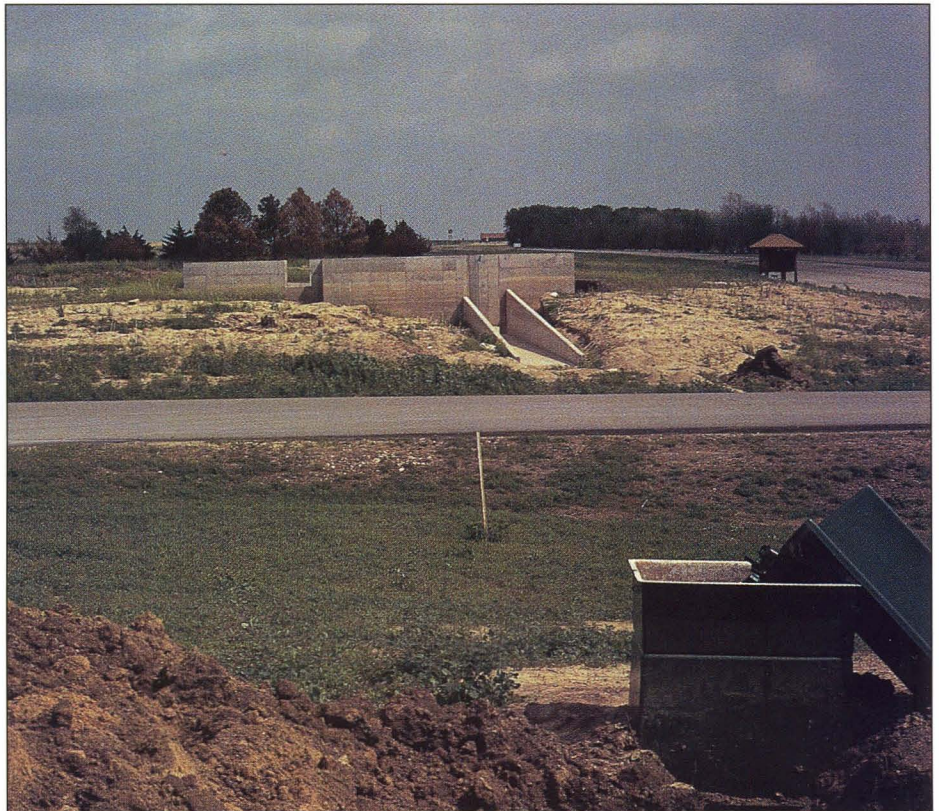
the park.

And this was the second beginning.

"Sharon and Betty came to me with the idea of moving the Hopewell Church to Glen Elder State Park," says Nyhoff. "At the same time, we had about \$7,500 in funds for an enclosed group shelter, but this wasn't nearly sufficient. In effect, we were sitting there with some money we could do nothing with. Their timing was great."

Still, Nyhoff had reservations. He wanted to make sure the building was in good shape and would fit the park's needs, so the entire park staff drove to the church for a tour. "When we got there, we found a building that needed some work on the outside but was beautiful and well kept on the inside," he says. "Everyone agreed that it would be a great addition to the park."

Of course, a project of this scale would be very expensive, and money would have to be raised. Nyhoff suggested that Fitzgerald, Treaster, and Heiman form a friends group, which would operate under the umbrella of Kansas Wildscape. Although this might have been an easier path to travel, the women wanted more independence and control if they were to take on such a project. Instead, they formed their own tax-exempt orga-



Kurt Reed photo

The foundation was poured two years before the church was actually moved. The basement under the church will serve as a meeting room and a storm shelter.

nization.

Of course, great ideas seldom stay small, and the ambitions of this project would grow, as well. In addition to an interest in Indian history, Fitzgerald, who lives in Glen Elder, is an avid equestrian who often rides the shores of Glen Elder

Reservoir. She was aware that the lake covers what was once known as Waconda Springs. Waconda was a 50-foot-diameter mineral spring, a sacred meeting site for Great Plains Indians and later used by whites for treating a variety of physical ailments.

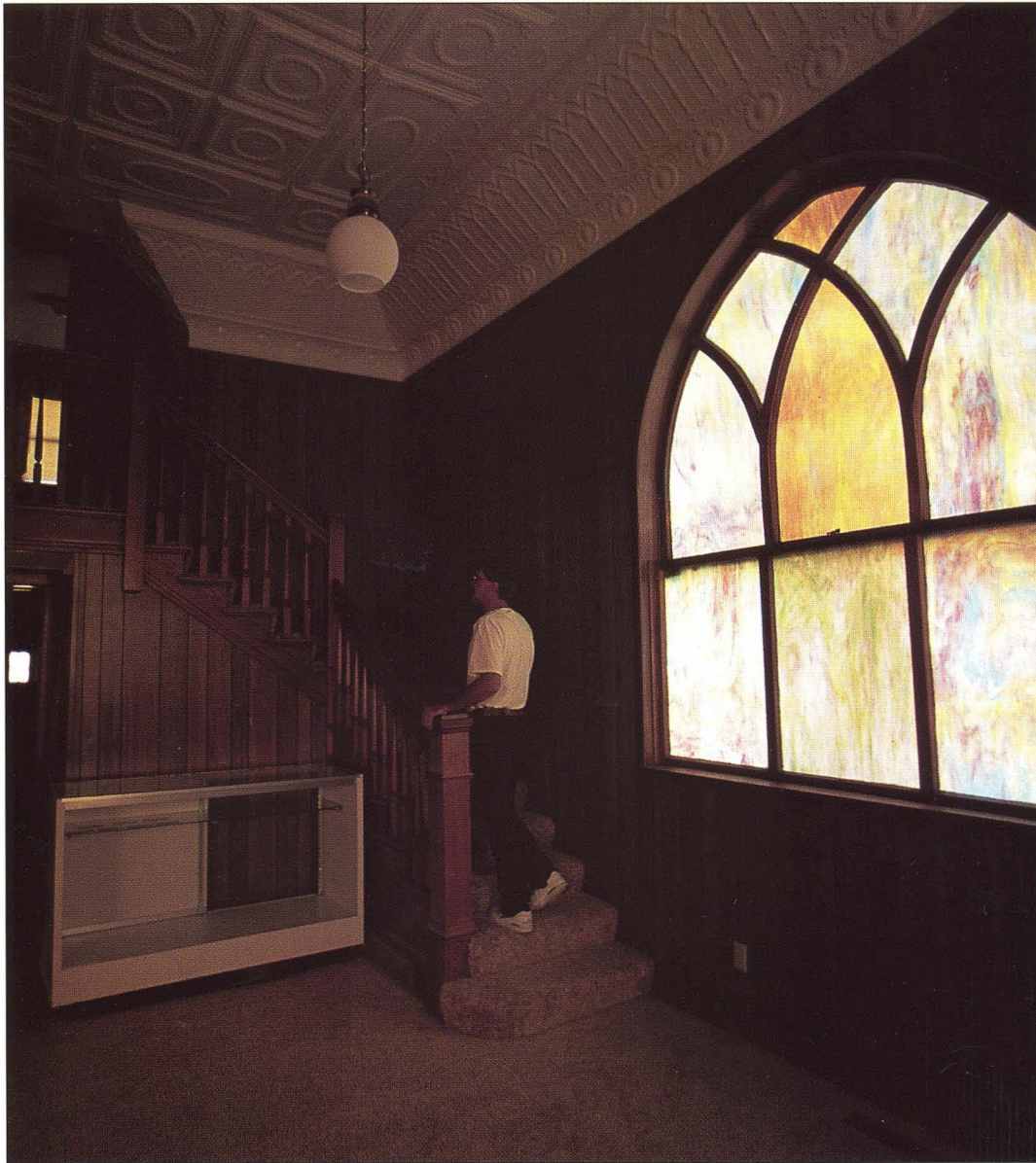
Fitzgerald also knew that a broad coalition of local interests must be forged to solidify their plans. If an Indian lodge and a replica of Waconda Springs were added, this might garner support from folks in Glen Elder. In discussions with Treaster and Heiman, the idea was further expanded to include moving the old Haseltine School, near Cawker City, to get folks in that community interested.

Now the project not only had a greater vision, it (and the tax-exempt group) had a name — Waconda Heritage Village. Officers of the project would be Betty Fitzgerald, president; Warren Inskip, vice president; Sharon Treaster, treasurer; and Jane Mehl, secretary. Kurt Reed, manager of Glen Elder State Park, would act as



Waconda Heritage Village, Inc. photo

The 300,000-pound building was moved 15 miles, the last few across Glen Elder Reservoir's dam. The 80-year-old structure survived the move in good shape.



The interior of the church has been kept in excellent condition over the years. It can be used for group meetings and is also open for Sunday church services through the summer.

state park coordinator for the group.

But first things first. Raising money for the church would be a daunting task in itself. As luck would have it, however, a Glen Elder camping organization, the Post Rock Sams, desperately wanted a storm shelter in the park. So the Waconda Village group agreed to place the church on a basement that could double as a meeting place and shelter, and the Sams put up about \$6,000 seed money to kick off the fund raiser.

More money would follow. The Presbyterian Church's Northcentral

Kansas Presbytery put up \$5,000, and the Hopewell Church elders added another \$8,000. Memberships to the Waconda Village group were sold for \$20 annually. Paul and Helen Mears, who were married in the church in the 1940s, gave \$12,000.

Perhaps the most interesting donation came from the estate of Nettie Treaster, who left \$25,000 for the project. Nettie Treaster was Sharon's aunt and the daughter of John Leslie, one of the brothers who founded the church.

Amazingly, nearly \$58,000 had been raised by 1991. Still, it would

take about \$100,000 in cash and donated labor and materials to complete such a move. In addition, the agreement with the Department of Wildlife and Parks required the group to hold \$20,000 in escrow for maintenance of the church.

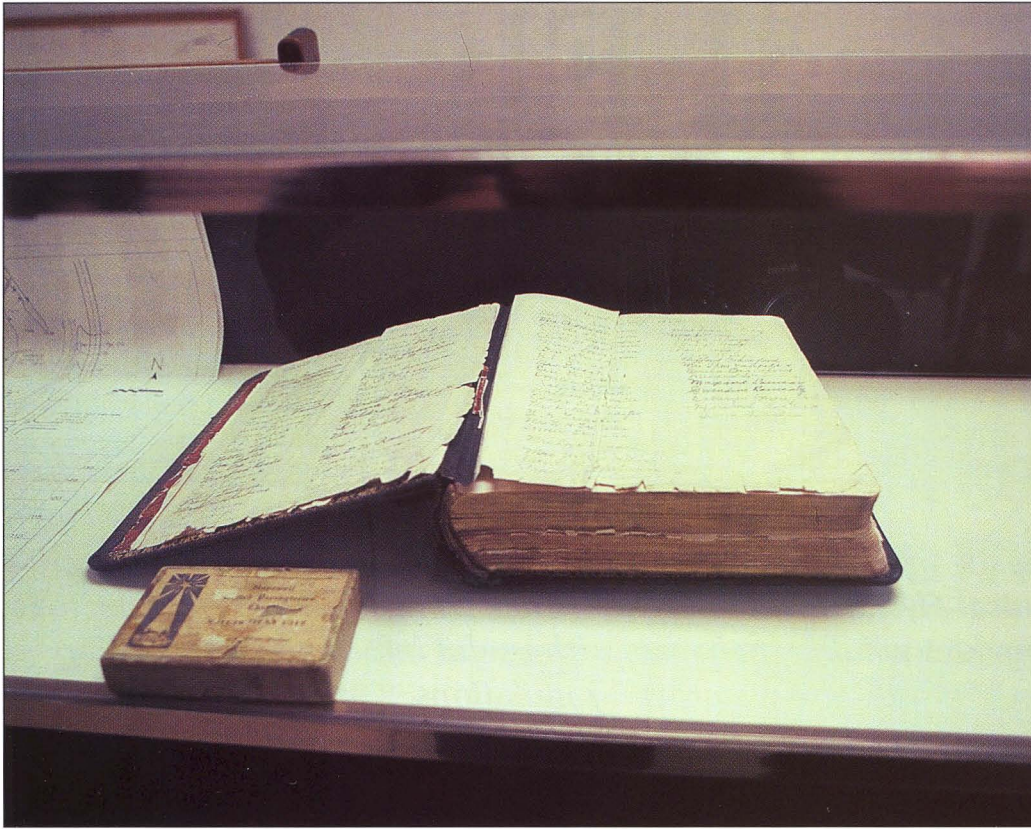
One of the most innovative fund-raising efforts came later that year. Using local cable TV stations and the donated time of local talent, the group raised another \$47,000 through a telethon.

The project was on a roll. In the summer of 1992, ground was broken and the basement poured. After three long years of energy and effort, the project appeared to be gaining momentum. Mother Nature had other ideas.

That same summer, a tornado destroyed the Haseltine School and ripped up a cemetery right behind the Hopewell Church but miraculously left that building intact, except for a single broken window. The Waconda Village group continued fund raising through the following fall and winter, hoping to raise enough to complete the move as soon as possible. Then, in

the summer of 1993, 100-year floods hit the region, raising Glen Elder Reservoir 32 feet. Campgrounds, shower houses, bathrooms, and innumerable trees were destroyed. And the Hopewell Church basement was filled with mud.

Life is full of irony. For four years, the group had struggled with fund raising and meeting state and federal requirements, such as a year-long engineering study to see if the 300,000-pound church could be moved across Glen Elder spillway. At times, it had been frustrating, but if the building had been



While the facility has many modern conveniences, there are reminders of the church's history such as the stained windows and this tattered bible that includes original members' signatures.

moved as soon as they had wished, it would have been destroyed by the flood.

It was fall before water could be released, but by February of 1994, the lake was back to conservation pool. Still, the park was a disaster area, and it was the fall of 1994 before the church could finally be moved. On Nov. 18, 1994, the Hopewell Church made the 15-mile journey to its new home, crossing Glen Elder Dam in surrealistic fashion and coming to rest on the once flood-covered foundation built more than two years earlier.

At the age of 93, Nettie Treaster was present for the move and knew that the church her father helped build would truly escape demolition. She died not long after the move.

Although Waconda Heritage Village members must have breathed a collective sigh of relief, there was still much work to be done. Plumbing, roofing, painting, carpet cleaning, and a variety of other tasks were completed, largely

with volunteer labor. West Plains energy laid electrical lines to the building at their own expense, and students from Northcentral Kansas Technical College, in Beloit, wired the building as a student project. A pulpit, organ, and piano were donated.

Finally, on June 8, 1997, the Hopewell Church was dedicated. The remarkable perseverance of a small group of people has now given Glen Elder State Park a new facility for meetings, family reunions, shelter from storms, and Sunday morning church services during the summer. (In April of 1997, Paul and Helen Mears' granddaughter was married in the church.)

At the dedication ceremony, Kurt Reed expressed the department's appreciation and presented Betty Fitzgerald with a Kansas flag that had once flown over the Kansas Statehouse. "I give Waconda Heritage Village all the credit in the world for making this difficult project happen," says Reed. "Their

commitment and hard work was unbelievable."

The tale will not end here. Moving the Hopewell Church was the realization of a 7-year dream, a unique effort that joined private citizens with state and federal agencies to the benefit of the public and the preservation of a small but honored piece of Kansas history. And Waconda Heritage Village continues its work. It still has responsibility for heating and maintenance of the church. Members may already have shown what imagination, hard work, and patience can accomplish, but they still plan to build the rest of the "village" — including a Pawnee Indian lodge and a replica of Waconda Springs. They also plan to move an abandoned post rock school house to complete the complex. When all is done, it should be like nothing else in the state park system.

This group serves as a model for what can be done when people care deeply enough about their community, their "village." Perhaps their work will inspire other groups to improve state parks across Kansas.

**Note:** Visitors to Glen Elder State Park now have a unique facility to enjoy. The sanctuary seats approximately 150 people, and the basement seats about 60. The church can be reserved for \$40 plus a \$40 damage deposit. The basement alone — which includes restrooms, stove, sink, and tables and chairs — can be rented for \$15. All fees collected go to Waconda Heritage Village, Inc., for maintenance and improvements. For reservation information, phone Glen Elder State Park, (785) 545-3345.

To become a part of the Waconda Village effort, anyone may purchase a yearly membership by sending \$20 to Waconda Heritage Village, Inc., Box 97, Beloit, KS 67420. ♡

# Central Flyway Wing Bee

by Dustin Teasley  
illustrator, Pratt

photos by Mike Blair

*Each February, biologists, wildlife managers and wildlife law enforcement personnel from across the Central Flyway meet to “read” duck wings collected by selected hunters. The event provides wildlife managers with useful information about harvest trends and waterfowl populations.*



Waterfowl hunters have traditionally contributed to wildlife conservation through the purchase of state and federal duck stamps, but each fall, some do even more. With wetland habitat dwindling, research is an important component of waterfowl management. Wet conditions on the duck breeding grounds have resulted in increased duck numbers over the last several years. But when water is lacking or less than favorable conditions exist for breeding ducks, data gathered from waterfowl hunters helps biologists make management decisions.

In 1958, wings from waterfowl taken by hunters were examined to understand the sex, age and species characteristics of the duck harvest. In 1961, this study was expanded nationwide and was a source for sampling large numbers of waterfowl. Goose harvest was sampled the following year. Currently known as the Wing Bee, this survey has grown to one of the most valuable management tools biologists have for waterfowl.

Results from the Wing Bee allow biologists to estimate species, age and sex compositions of harvested waterfowl and are used as an index

for breeding success of many North American waterfowl species. Long-term analysis can also show population trends within a particular species.

The U.S. is divided into four flyways for management purposes: the Atlantic, Mississippi, Central and Pacific. Kansas is located in and is a member of the Central Flyway, which includes 10 states, two provinces and one territory, and in the U.S. extends from Montana and North Dakota south to Texas. The size and location of these flyways is based on the migration routes of the waterfowl themselves. Wing Bees



are conducted in each flyway annually.

The Central Flyway Wing Bee is held in Kansas. Every February, wildlife management personnel from ten states of the Central Flyway as well as personnel of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service gather at the Flint Hills National Wildlife Refuge near Hartford to "read" the duck wings and goose tail feathers.

Assistance from waterfowl hunters is critical to the success of the Wing Bee. Through sale of state and federal duck stamps, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service randomly selects hunters from each flyway to participate. Hunters are asked to provide hunting information, as well as a wing from each duck they harvest and tail feathers from each goose harvested throughout the season. Each year about 1,500 hunters from the Central Flyway take part in this survey, sending in an average of 25,000 duck wings and 5,000 goose tails to the Flint Hills NWR.

After the close of most waterfowl seasons, usually in February, biologists, waterfowl managers, and wildlife law enforcement personnel from across the country gather to analyze the wings and tails. The process of aging and sexing birds by their wings or tail feathers is a time consuming and difficult task. Approximately 40 individuals attend the Central Flyway's Wing Bee in Kansas. Six or seven of these will have just completed a week of intense identification training and serve as checkers, or quality control, for the group.

Although the work of sorting and analyzing the wings and tails is tedious, everyone focuses on the job and works together. Long tables are set up in rows with participants lined along each side. A checker is present at each table to verify the species, age and sex identification. After each wing or tail is identified, the information sent by the hunters, such as



Participants at the Central Flyway Wing Bee meticulously examine wings to identify the species, sex and age. Books and trained personnel are on hand to assist.

location and date of kill, is recorded. By the end of each day, the working area is ankle deep in duck and goose feathers. All the information is then entered into a computer and stored for future analysis. It takes about a week to complete the survey in each flyway.

The many stages of development that waterfowl go through during migration require different methods

of study for determining sex and age. When migration starts, both adult hens and drakes look similar except for their wings. Juveniles' wings change considerably as they travel from breeding grounds in the northern U.S. and Canada to wintering grounds in the southern U.S. and Mexico. For example, young ducks harvested in October in North Dakota will show definite juvenile wing plumage. By the end of their migration, young birds may show prominent adult plumage. Young males that do not have adult plumage may show wing characteristics similar to those of adult females. Closer examination of specific feather development and coloration are required to make a positive distinction between adults and juveniles.

Sex identification, although easier than aging, can sometimes be difficult. Male duck wings are generally



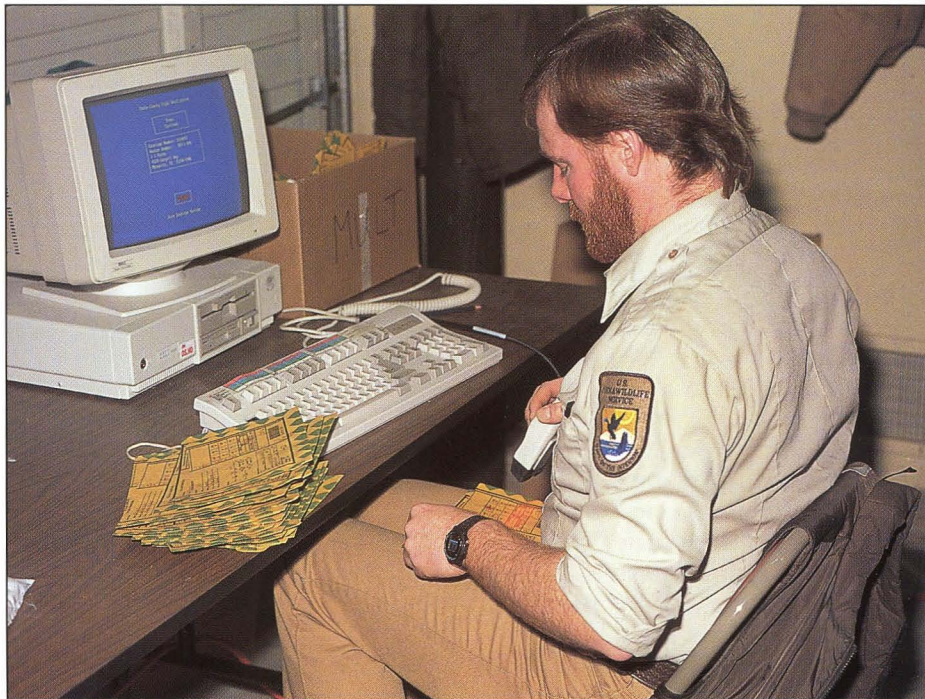
Tables are set with teams and the group begins sorting through more than 25,000 duck wings and 5,000 goose tails.

larger than female wings. In some species, measuring size difference is sufficient to separate sexes. Juvenile birds with undeveloped primary feathers provide invalid data for this type of testing.

Color and pattern differences in wing plumage are also used to distinguish males from females. Some female puddle ducks, such as wigeon, pintails and shovelers, have less colorful wing plumage than males. These characteristics can also help hunters identify drakes from hens in the field.

Diving duck wings are the most difficult to identify. Puddle ducks, which have colors on their covert and speculum wing feathers, can be quickly identified. Diving ducks' wings are mostly black, white and shades of gray. Differences in color placement and wing size help distinguish species and sex.

Goose identification from tail feathers is another tricky process. Obvious color differences can separate some species of geese such as Canadas, whitefronts and snows. Other methods, such as measuring feather lengths, can determine subspecies. Measuring is also used to separate snows from Ross'. Shapes of tail feathers help determine maturity. The sex of a goose cannot



After wings are identified and sorted by species, data sent in by the hunters such as date and location of kill are recorded and stored for further analysis.

be identified by its tail feathers.

Sometimes bird species cross-breed and produce unusual offspring. These rare birds often exhibit characteristics of both species. Hybrid wings are aged and sexed, then categorized in a class of their own called miscellaneous hybrids and saved for later study.

Exotic ducks and geese are sometimes collected, many the result of escapes from zoos or private collections. Storms and dramatic weather changes can also cause shifts in normal migration routes, resulting in unusual harvests within flyways.

Collecting this wealth of information in such a short time is a credit to the people involved, including the participating hunters. Much has been learned about waterfowl populations and migration through this project. And the 40 years of data recorded will help wildlife managers make sound decisions for the future. Surveys such as these are planned for other migratory birds such as rails, snipe and woodcock.

Hunters play an important role in the future of all wildlife and are especially valuable in research projects like the Wing Bee. As we stand at the beginning of a new century, development, human population growth and other threats to wildlife demand that we gather as much information as possible to effectively conserve our natural resources. ♡



Species and age can be determined by examining goose tail feathers, but the sex cannot be distinguished. Data gathered can help managers set season and bag limits.



# Gobblers The Hard Way

by Marc Murrell

*public information officer, The Great Plains Nature Center*

*Drawing a bow at close range without catching the eyes of a wary gobbler is one of hunting's toughest challenges.*

**T**urkey hunting with a shotgun is a challenging adventure. Many things can and will go wrong for the hunter pursuing these wary, sharp-sighted birds. Fortunately, there are days when everything works to perfection — as if you wrote your own script. Such rare hunts are truly rewarding. But turkey hunters with an interest in

archery can increase the difficulty, as well as the reward, with a challenge that is second to none.

Bowhunting turkeys is often an effort in futility, and many hunters give up, knowing that it's much easier with a gun. And it is — no doubt about it. But when everything clicks, there is no greater joy than knowing you've matched primitive

weapon with turkey wits and won.

If you've been successful hunting turkeys with a shotgun, then you're well on your way to accomplishing the same feat with a bow. Basic knowledge about turkey habitat, behavior and calling are necessary, regardless of the weapon. But turkey hunting with a bow requires much closer shots, generally 20

yards or less, and much more movement is required before the shot. Ill-timed movement by the hunter has saved many gobblers.

"I would say turkey hunting with a bow is harder than deer hunting with a bow because getting drawn is more difficult on turkeys," said Gene Brehm, a professional wildlife photographer who's been bowhunting for 34 years. "It's relatively easy if they don't see you and almost impossible if they do."

In recent years Brehm has killed several turkeys with a bow, along with an impressive array elk and whitetails. He believes several factors, including cover, camouflage and decoys, play important roles in drawing your bow undetected on a gobbler.

"Picking a blind so that you can get drawn is more spot specific," said Brehm. "It is very difficult to find that place to get back into cover and be able to have shooting lanes out of that cover."

Brehm says his favorite type of cover is a small group of cedars. He likes to find two trees close together so that he can draw before the turkey steps into his shooting lane. Or a hunter can trim lower branches on a large cedar tree, creating an opening to slip back into.

It's not enough to find the perfect spot to hide if you stand out like a sore thumb. Camouflage may never be more important than during face-to-face encounters at ground level with a bird that relies on eyesight for survival. Be sure to match



Dustin Teasley illustration

Set two hen decoys and one jake decoy in a triangle with the jake about 15 yards away and facing your position. A dominant tom will often approach and face the jake decoy.

your camouflage to the terrain and use complete dress, including gloves, face mask and hat.

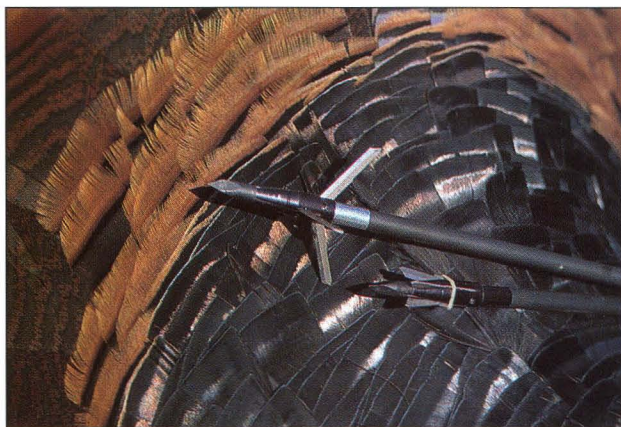
Decoys can provide the bowhunter with a big advantage. Not only do they give a wary tom something other than the hunter to focus on, when arranged strategically, they can help the hunter draw the bow undetected. While most traditional decoys are hens, hunters have begun using a jake and two hen decoys, according to Dave Berkley, president of Feather Flex, a company that manufactures a popular turkey decoy. The trick for bowhunters, Berkley says, is how the decoys are placed.

Berkley recommends placing a jake decoy 10-12 yards away, facing your position. The hen decoys should be placed 7-8 yards away, on either side of the jake, creating a triangle with the jake being the top point, farthest away. A

dominant tom will often walk in between one of the hens and the jake decoy and face the young imposter. There will typically be several opportunities to draw your bow while the tom is facing away.

This set-up worked like a charm for me on my first turkey bowhunt several years ago. With my three-year-old daughter, Ashley and hunting partner, Gary Church, I roosted several birds the night before. Ashley was amused at my feeble attempts at owl hooting but was wide-eyed when she heard the first gobble of her young life. I would try that bird the next morning.

I eased into position well before the sun began to streak the sky. As I walked, the gobbler began its morning wake-up calls with the thunderous, drawn-out gobbles typical of a mature bird. With my decoys set in the recommended triangle, I backed into a large brushpile that offered a near-perfect blind. From its perch 100 yards away, the big tom's gobbles echoed in the still morning air, making the hair on my neck stand and my heart



Marc Murrell photo

Expandable broadheads can be an advantage since turkeys have a very small vital zone.

race. A few soft tree yelps from my slate call got an immediate response. I took some deep breaths.

A shadow of doubt loomed heavy as I heard the incessant yelps and clucks of several hens obviously roosted near my quarry. Shortly, they were out of the tree and yelping seductively, apparently requesting the tom's presence on the ground, too.

I watched as two hens emerged from the timber across the field. The gobbler was following. I continued to yelp as the hens turned to walk away, and my heart sank, figuring the old tom would follow. But some quick cutting and more yelping piqued his interest, and he paraded toward me in full strut.

I put the slate down and switched to a mouth diaphragm call, so I could continue calling with my hands ready on my bow. A few more soft yelps, and the tom closed the gap, strutting and gobbling, stopping occasionally to see if the decoys were impressed. As the bird passed 40 yards away, I was thinking it would have been over quickly if I was carrying my shotgun. But I knew the tom needed to cut that distance at least in half for a good bow shot. The gobbler obliged and walked a line to the hen decoy on my left. I tried my best not to hyperventilate.

I could see the tom's beard dangling well below the breast feathers as it waddled in full strut to the decoy at 15 yards. After displaying for a few seconds, the tom decided to confront the jake decoy. As the bird turned away, its tail fan covering those sharp eyes, I started to draw my bow. Minimizing movement as I drew, the 65-pound draw-weight felt like twice that. The tom turned quartering away at 17 yards, and I settled my 20-yard sight pin just below and behind the point where its wing met the body. I held the pin for a nanosecond before my finger hit the release and sent the arrow on its way. The arrow thudded home to within a feather of my aim, and the huge bird flipped over backward. I looked around in disbelief, half expecting to wake up



Bruce Snelling photo

Successful turkey hunting requires skill, knowledge, experience, patience and a little luck. Many things can go wrong on a bowhunt, and they usually do.

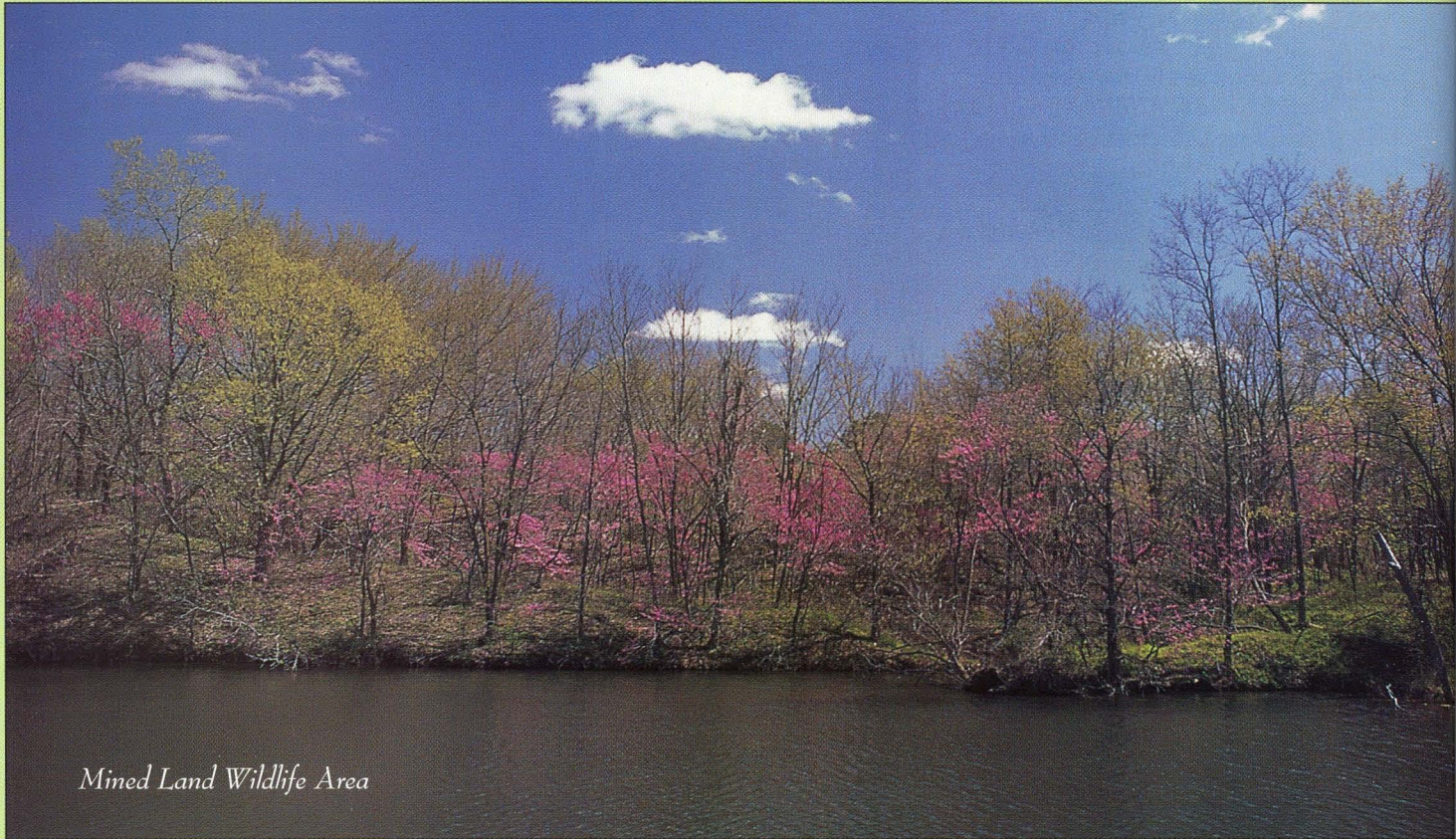
still tucked into a warm bed.

I ran to the bird, still wondering if I might be dreaming. I knelt to admire the 9-inch beard, iridescent tail fan and inch-long spurs before digging my tag from my pocket. I was shaking as I filled out the tag and simply couldn't believe my good fortune. It had been one of those perfect days.

My first turkey with a bow seemed entirely too easy. It wasn't supposed to be that way, and I quickly learned that as I tried to fill my second tag. On two occasions, I had gobblers within 15 yards, and

each time I tried to draw my bow, they disappeared so fast I was left wondering if they weren't figments of my imagination. I still have that tag.

Although turkey hunting with a bow should be considered an "extreme sport" worthy of mention on ESPN X-treme Games, it can be done. Chances are you'll fail more often than not. But when it all comes together, and it will eventually if you're persistent and a little lucky, there's no better game in town. ♡



*Mined Land Wildlife Area*

# *Signs of Spring*

*photos by Mike Blair*



*lesser prairie chicken*



*meadowlark*



*sandhill cranes*

*bobwhite quail*



*blue-winged teal*



Mike Blair photo



# Deer Seasons At Issue

by Lloyd Fox  
*big game project leader, Emporia*

***There has been much discussion about the length of the firearms deer season this past fall. There are emotional opinions on each side of the issue. Here are the facts.***

**A**re Kansas hunters happy with current deer hunting opportunities? Do we need a longer firearms season to increase the harvest of antlerless deer? Would a longer firearms season increase hunter satisfaction? How would a longer season affect non-hunters? These are questions the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks is asking as it evaluates ways of changing the deer seasons and permit quotas. In January 1998, we conducted telephone interviews with 1,831 people. These opinion surveys were designed to obtain unbiased input from hunters and non-hunters.

Deer seasons and permit quotas have always been topics of discus-

sion among hunters. Recently these issues have found their way into the conversations at community coffee shops, meetings of civic organizations, and among people who never hunt deer. In many parts of the country, deer populations are at levels above community tolerance. New directions and efforts may be needed in the future as conditions and opinions change.

Many deer hunters who use firearms would like more days each year to hunt. The firearms season has been 12 days long since 1988. Before that it was nine days, and back in the 1960s, it was a mere five days. About 55 percent of the firearms hunters would prefer a longer season, while 40 percent

favor leaving the season at its current length. Approximately 65 percent of the archery hunters prefer that the firearm season remains the same, with the remainder of that group split between increasing and decreasing the season. Non-deer-hunting rural residents and small game hunters also favor a longer firearms deer season. Approximately 55 percent of both of those groups favored an increase in season length, while 35 percent favored keeping it the same. The remainder of the people in those groups favored a decrease or were undecided.

Just adding days to a season won't ensure happier deer hunters or happier non-hunters. As hunters spend more days hunting, they are less satisfied with their season. This occurs whether the hunter takes a deer or not. Non-hunters, even some people with a strong desire to have the deer herd reduced, are concerned about hunters being in the field. The telephone survey indicated that few people experience an inconvenience because the season was too long, (the samples varied from 2 percent to 15 percent for the various groups). However, longer seasons are an area of concern and one that causes some people to write letters of complaint or make

their concern known in other ways.

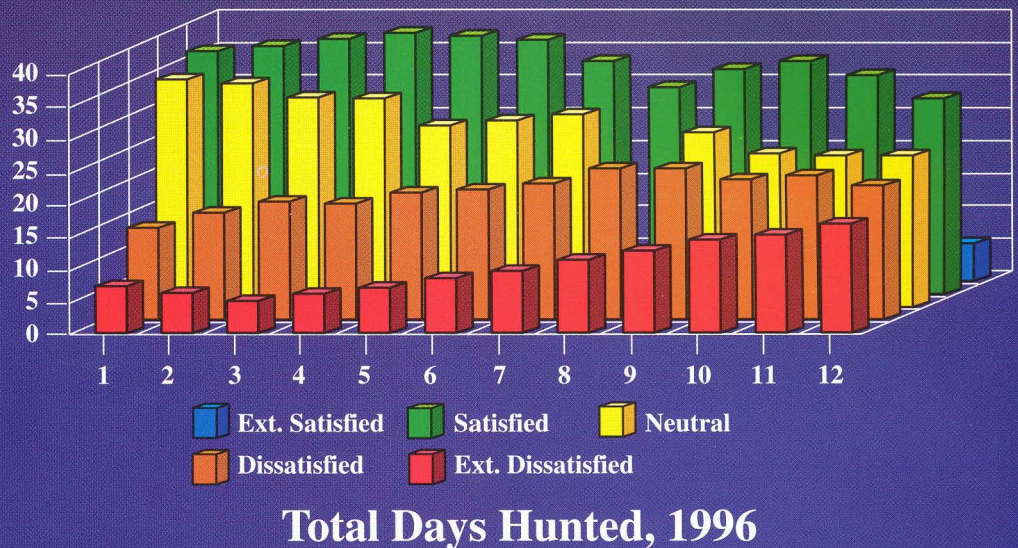
Hunter success per day decreases with each additional day of the season. Deer adjust their movement patterns and avoid hunters. Additional days won't result in proportional increases in harvest. Longer seasons also allow hunters to be more picky with the deer they harvest, the result being a harvest of more bucks, the hunter's preference, versus more antlerless deer, the wildlife manager's preference when dealing with a population expansion.

When it comes to deciding how to increase the deer season lengths, the jury is still out. Nearly 90 percent of the people polled by telephone favored increasing the success rates of deer hunters. That may be difficult since Kansas currently has one of the highest firearm hunter success rates in North America — 60 percent to 70 percent. Most hunters did not favor two separate seasons. Many mentioned that they wouldn't want to draw a permit for the second season.

One option for a longer firearm deer season has been tried in Missouri. Unsuccessful firearms hunters are allowed to hunt during a two-day (weekend) season in January. Only antlerless deer may be taken during that time. More than 80 percent of all groups of hunters and non-hunters in Kansas favored that option. Breaks between hunting seasons allow hunters to identify new movement patterns established by deer after the regular hunting period. When the season reopens, hunters are more successful.

Wildlife managers have long known that public hunting policies were the most reliable and economical method of controlling deer populations. Allocation of the deer resource among hunters is designed

## Season Satisfaction of Unsuccessful Hunters, Based on Total Days They Hunted




to allow equal opportunity to benefit from the resource. During periods of high deer populations after years of steady population growth, it is difficult for some people to imagine overharvesting a deer population. However, humans have the ability to overharvest deer. One consequence of intensive efforts to control deer numbers is what happens after you reach your goal. As we harvest more antlerless deer, we will eventually reach a population where we must decrease permit numbers. Hunters will then be dissatisfied when they are unable to obtain a permit. The other option is buck-only hunting with a resulting drop in the quality of deer harvested by hunters, as well as a drop in the percent of successful hunters. The solution is to ease in and out on harvest pressure, so that people do not expect unrealistic opportunities.

Kansas deer hunters face an obligation to assist in the deer population control. Hunters have traditionally received many benefits from a managed deer herd. As community standards change, the hunters must share the responsi-

bility for maintaining the deer herd at levels within community tolerance.

Landowners, even non-hunting members of society, must also share in the process. Deer do not remain in a small area all of their lives. The deer that causes damage to a farmer's corn field, or is hit by a motorist on the interstate, may spend the hunting season on property 10 miles or more away from those damage sites. Widespread closure of private lands to hunting may contribute to future problems.

The key is cooperation. Landowners need to think about how their land management for deer habitat and deer harvest will affect their neighbors. Hunters must consider their obligation to harvest deer, not only for their own benefit, but as a component in total deer management. The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks is evaluating ways to allow hunters greater flexibility in their deer hunting. Hunters, landowners and non-hunters need to work together in the development and conduct of the resulting plans. 

Edited by Mark Shoup

### FOLLOWS HIS OWN ADVICE

Editor:

Regarding "The View From Here" in the Nov./Dec. 1997 issue of *Kansas Wildlife and Parks* magazine, Secretary Steve Williams should lead by example and follow his own advice as to the taking of an antlerless deer so as to better manage the deer herds. Taking a trophy is fine, but don't tell everyone else to help the herds by taking an antlerless deer and then going for a big buck yourself.

Many of us hunt hard on public land and don't have the special privilege that comes with position to hunt guided on private land. What do you expect from hunters when all they hear is the importance of rack size?

I believe in what you are trying to promote, and I don't mind taking a doe. But the big rack is the thing that the state promotes and what your magazine and now, it seems, the secretary believes is the thing that counts. You seem to be saying, "Do what I say, not what I do."

Sorry to say, but that's the view from here.

Wayne J. Wasson

Dear Mr. Wasson

Your letter makes some very valid points; however, I will try to explain why I disagree with some of your arguments.

Yes, I was fortunate to be given the opportunity to hunt on private land with my son, Matt, and take a nice buck with my any-deer permit. But I also harvested a doe a few days later using a leftover any-deer permit in Unit 12. Last season, I also harvested a doe during firearms season.

My editorial ("Hunters Must Play a Role") was not intended to discourage hunters from taking mature bucks. I was trying to encourage those who do not receive a buck permit to still go out and enjoy the deer hunting experience.

I also promoted the taking of a doe over a young buck, when given the choice.

Trophy bucks get publicity because they are unique. Harvesting a doe or passing on an immature buck may not get headlines, but it is essential in managing our already impressive deer herd.

—Secretary Steve Williams, Topeka

### WHO TAGS THE DEER?

Editor:

I have a question that many people may wonder about concerning deer hunting. On two different years, the following scenario occurred:

Another hunter shot at a doe and broke it's front leg. Later, after we tracked it, I was the one to shoot it and kill it. Again, several years later, another hunter in my family shot a deer in the rear quarter. The deer ran off, and after tracking it, I found a heavy blood trail indicating an artery was cut. Again, I was the one to see the buck doubling back, and I shot it.

Who should tag the deer?

If it is the second person encountering a wounded deer, and they shoot it to put it out of its misery, should this individual not be allowed a second permit?

R.L. Holtz  
St. Louis, Missouri

Dear Mr. Holtz:

There are really no black and white answers to your questions. Each incident where more than one hunter shoots at a deer will be unique. But there is a general rule of thumb that many hunters abide by: If the shot taken by the first hunter would have ultimately been fatal, then that hunter should tag the deer. In an incident where that could not be determined — that is, the first shot did serious damage but can't be determined to be fatal — then the hunters will have to decide who tags it. If the first shot did little damage, I would lean toward the second

hunter tagging the deer. But again, that could be determined through discussion.

The department does not allow a second permit if a hunter kills and tags a wounded deer. If you do not want to tag a wounded deer, you should report such sightings to your local conservation officer, who will dispatch the deer, if necessary.

—Miller

### WHY STOCK LARGEMOUTH?

Editor:

A few months ago, I read an article in the *Topeka Capital-Journal* about plans for Wildlife and Parks to introduce 5,000 largemouth bass each year for five years into Perry Reservoir. Perry is already a top-notch lake for crappie fishermen. Won't the introduction of large numbers of largemouth bass have a bad effect on crappie fishing?

Robert Montgomery  
Topeka

Dear Mr. Montgomery:

We are considering stocking black bass at Perry Reservoir in an effort to improve black bass fishing opportunity there. The stocking effort is part of a larger black bass project that includes habitat construction, length limit modification, and the stocking of yearling fish.

The habitat portion of this project was initiated last summer with more than 160 artificial habitat structures placed in the lake. The local bass chapter has been instrumental in this project and applied for and received a grant to match these structures with \$10,000 worth of additional structures that will be placed in the lake this coming spring or early summer.

This habitat, as you might expect, will be beneficial to all structure-oriented fish, including crappie and black bass.

The length limit on black bass has

been changed to 21 inches in order to protect the few adult bass that remain in the lake.

When Perry was first constructed, it was a very good lake for black bass, crappie, and even walleye. As the lake aged, this changed. It is now known primarily for its crappie, channel catfish and, to a lesser degree, white bass fishing. It is unlikely that we can bring back the quality of black bass the lake originally had, but we may be able to offer more opportunity to another group of anglers that has an interest in management at Perry.

To more directly address your question, the Department of Wildlife and parks values the crappie fishery at Perry and would not intentionally damage that fishery. We feel that stocking a relatively modest number of black bass each year will not have an impact on crappie. Five thousand bass sounds like a lot, but in reality is less than half a fish per acre.

We conduct annual surveys of black bass, shad, and crappie to evaluate trends in the population, and we can assure you that there will be no negative impact on the crappie fishery. Recent surveys indicate that there have been ample shad to provide food for both crappie and black bass. If this changes, we will need to decide if we will continue stockings or adjust the number of fish stocked.

*--Roger Wolfe, regional fisheries and wildlife supervisor, Topeka*

## COWBOYS AND PORCUPINES

Editor:

I'm 75 years young now but worked on a large sheep and cattle ranch back in the late 1930s and 40s east of Wagon Mound, New Mexico, including two mesas and running all the way to the Red River on the head of the Canadian River.

Your porcupine story [*Kansas Wildlife and Parks*, Nov./Dec. 1997, Page 2] was interesting. It reminded me of my experience on this large ranch, which had coyotes, bobcats, porcupines, prairie dogs, prairie rattlers, and dia-

mondbacks. We had help from the government to help get rid of some of these critters. Government officials would come to the ranch and stay for long periods of time. One brought his traps and coyote dogs, but the dogs' feet got so sore trying to run in the rough rocks that they weren't much good. I had to hold them down while he pulled porcupine quills out of their mouths and sides. One mistake, and the dog didn't forget. Porcupines were all over this ranch from one end to the other.

We also had road runners. We would see them often killing a snake. They sure are fast on foot.

I look back after all these years, and it's the best memory of my life.

*Joe M. Lemons  
Syracuse*

## OLD MAGAZINE STILL FRESH

Editor:

It may be late in thanking *Kansas Wildlife and Parks* magazine and the author of the article "Reigning Cats and Dogs" [Jan./Feb. 1992, Page 2], but I think Mr. Lloyd Fox did a more than excellent job. Even though it is an article printed several years ago, I have read it several times, and it continues to be so very interesting and complete in describing some of the habits of our wild animals, especially the bobcats, coyotes, and foxes.

Keep up the good work and thank you for your efforts.

*Kenneth McClintick  
Eureka*

## STAMP STUMPED

Editor:

When I purchased my 1998 hunting license, I pitched my 97 license in the trash not thinking anything about the duck stamps on the back. Later, when I went to purchase the 1998 stamps, I was informed that my 1997 stamps were good until June. Why wouldn't the stamps go from January through December just like the hunting and fish-

ing licenses.

We are instructed to place the stamps on our license, and after the year the license is not valid but the stamps are?

Keep up the good work. I'm a very satisfied Kansas hunter.

*Kyle Headrick  
Wichita*

Kyle,

**Your question about duck stamps is a good one. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service sets their stamp dates to encompass the entire upcoming waterfowl seasons, which begin in September and end in March. The state stamp is designed to conform with the federal one.**

*--Shoup*

## THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

Editor:

Kansas has become one of our favorite places. We often travel across her plains, using the backroads to visit those out-of-the-way places that are so special. We send our boots to Coldwater for repairs, watch sunsets over the Flint Hills, rode out a summer thunderstorm one night north of Council Grove, and hunt quail within her borders. It's always a special time, those moments that we can spend in Kansas; we come every time we can.

Of course, we have continuously enjoyed *Kansas Wildlife and Parks* magazine. It was the back cover of Vol. 55, No. 1 (Jan./Feb. 1998), that prompted this letter.

The photography is great but even more important, Mike Blair was in the right place at the right time. It's the wide open, untrammelled landscape that he captured on film for us to share that is the very most special component of this magazine. With just the slightest imagination, we are instantly there experiencing all that is possible to us, whether bird hunting or racing across the ridges on a fast horse.

Thank you for sharing Kansas with us.

*Ron and Sue Hay  
Knoxville, Tenn.*

**A TEAM EFFORT**

On Aug. 2, 1997, Kanopolis Reservoir U.S. Army Corps of Engineers park rangers contacted Conservation Officer Benny Young and I [Todd Lovin, Wildlife and Parks ranger for Kanopolis State Park] about individuals illegally fishing at the Kanopolis outlet. The Corps rangers told us that another person had contacted their office and told them that he had seen three people

using a cast net and dip net to catch game fish.

The Corps rangers - Larry Smith, Shawn Gruber, and Charles Songberg - had gone to the outlet and watched the three suspects fish with rods and reels and with the nets. They told them that what they were doing was illegal, and when they asked for fishing licenses, only one had one. The men had a 24-inch walleye, a 13-inch saugeye, three catfish, and several carp. Because the walleye and

saugeye were dead, they were seized as evidence. The other fish were released.

The rangers then advised the subjects that they would likely be contacted by Wildlife and Parks law enforcement officers.

By the time the rangers contacted Benny and I, they had prepared typed statements regarding their observations and information from the witness and about the suspects. We contacted the witness who was camping and

obtained a written statement that contained detailed information regarding which fish had been caught with a cast net and which fish had been caught with rod and reel.

Based on all this information, one subject was charged with fishing by illegal means, and the two others were charged with fishing by illegal means and fishing without licenses.

Many times, Wildlife and Parks officers are told about illegal activity, but in few instances do the witnesses gather enough information or report early enough for an officer to take action. In this case, the camper recognized the violations, noted personal descriptions, and reported the violations. The Corps rangers are to be commended for going above and beyond their regular duties to bring this activity to a stop.

In this case, a team effort saved Kanopolis fish from the hands of poachers.

-Todd Lovin,  
park ranger, Lindsborg

**SWAN SONG:  
TWO APOLOGIES**

On Christmas Eve, 1997, Jeremy Brown and Dustin Fisher of Topeka were riding around looking for something to shoot. As they circled a watershed lake south of the city, they spotted a group of rare trumpeter swans that had migrated to the area a week earlier and had attracted the attention of birdwatchers throughout the region.

At what must have appeared a safe distance to the swans, the two men pulled out their rifles and began firing, in violation of both state and federal law. When they were done, six trumpeters lay dead.

Brown and Fisher were caught not long after the incident. In an out-of-court settlement arranged by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Attorney's office, each man was fined \$1,500, and they had to forfeit their rifles. In addition, the two were required to make written apology to the people of Kansas. Here are their letters of apology.

**Brown's apology**

*On the morning of Dec. 29, we were on our way to rabbit hunt. We drove by the watershed. We were just about past it when we could see something moving (the swans) on the bank in the snow. (It was still snowing.) They were out there about 100-120 yards. All we could see were white objects moving in the snow, which we thought were snow geese, so we started shooting at them.*

*Two fell dead and all the others jumped into the water.*

*At this point in time, we realized what they were, and I automatically knew I had made a big mistake. I also know that just because we thought they were snow geese does not justify shooting at them with rifles. You should never even attempt to take a migratory bird with a rifle.*

*I know the media made it look like we knew exactly what we were shooting at when we shot, but we didn't know.*

*I feel bad about what I did, but I can't go back and do it again. I am sorry.*

*I also want to apologize for the bad impression that I might have made people have about waterfowl hunters.*

*I would like to give some advice to anyone who hunts: know exactly what you are shooting at before you shoot, or you could end up in the same predicament I'm in.*

-Jeremy Brown

**Fisher's apology**

*When I killed the swans, I did not realize how big a mistake I had made. Since then, I have felt and seen the consequences that have been brought upon me.*

*I apologize for killing the swans and will regret that day for the rest of my life. I strongly encourage others not to violate any kind of game or protected species law. I have learned my lesson from this mistake, and it will never happen again.*

-Dustin G. Fisher

**EAGLE SHOOTER  
REWARD**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is offering a reward as much as \$1,000 for information leading to the arrest of those responsible for shooting a golden eagle near Marysville. This bird was found Oct. 16, 1997, fatally shot with a rifle, said Conservation Officer Mike Little.

Anyone with information is asked to call Little at (785) 292-4252 or the Fish and Wildlife Service at (316) 788-4474.

-Lawrence Journal-World

**PARKS IN NEED**

More than a year ago, a group of notable Kansans was assembled by the Kansas Wildlife and Parks Commission to answer some difficult questions: How do we infuse new life into a deteriorating state park and outdoor recreation system? How much will it cost? How will we pay for it?

The Commission's Task Force on Outdoor Kansas studied the symptoms: many of our state parks are showing their age. Shower buildings and restrooms are crumbling. Parks employees are strapped by operating budgets too small to adequately maintain deteriorated park facilities.

Based on the Task Force findings, Gov. Bill Graves is recommending about \$10 million in appropriations to fund renovation of state parks. That investment in the park system would be spread over a two- to four-year period and would address a prioritized list of the most urgently needed improvements in all of our parks across the state. This amount would be allocated in addition to the funds the Department of Wildlife and Parks receives each year from the state's general fund.

The department's Parks Division has an annual operating budget of about \$6 million. About \$3 million of that amount comes from fees paid by park users, and \$3 million is allocated from the state's general fund.

Inadequate funding for our state parks has been aggravated by rising costs, flood-related damages, and increasing demands for services and facilities.



**Renovations/Improvements**

Buildings .....	\$1,500,000
Utilities .....	\$650,000
Toilets/Showers .....	\$4,180,000
Camps/Beaches .....	\$3,530,000
Parking Lots .....	\$140,000

**TOTAL PROGRAM COST .....\$10,000,000**

Here are some examples of the critically-needed improvements in state parks:

- replacing a shower house at Cedar Bluff State Park;
- providing adequate utility service to Lovewell State Park camp grounds;
- replacing toilets at Tuttle Creek State Park;
- providing a handicapped-accessible office at Glen Elder State Park;
- replacing collapsing water lines at Clinton State Park;
- repairing the sewage lagoon at Cheney State Park;
- renovating the beach at Milford State Park; and
- similar projects at every state park in Kansas.

Campers, picnickers, youth groups, hikers, anglers, and other Kansans will benefit far into the future with this investment in our state park system. Research has proven that participation in outdoor recreation pursuits improves the mental and physical health of participants.

Notably, youngsters accrue positive changes in their lives through outdoor and interpersonal skills developed by participation in outdoor recreation.

Nearly all Kansans benefit, directly or indirectly, from outdoor recreation in the state. Recreational lands and waters enhance business and property values in adjacent communities and provide an economic stimulus to the state's economy. State park visitors spend more than \$100 million in trip-related purchases from Kansas businesses each year.

Although user fees form the foundation of financial support for state parks, they aren't enough to adequately maintain a resource that provides benefits for all Kansans. Consider these facts:

- Kansas ranks 48th in state spending per capita on parks and recreation.
- Thirty-nine states spend more than double the amount Kansans do on parks and

recreation.

• Fifty percent of the \$3.15 per capita spent on state parks in Kansas is generated by park user fees.

• Kansas state park users generate about \$100 million annually in economic activity in the state through their purchase of fuel, food, equipment, and other items used in park visits, and they contribute about \$6 million annually in state sales taxes on those purchased items.

• Kansas state parks host 5 million to 6 million visitors annually.

• State parks utilize inmate crews, friends groups, National Guard personnel and more than 80,000 volunteer hours per year.

State parks are important, too, for the quality-of-life benefits they provide. They also contribute to community pride and boost the appeal of area communities to new businesses, residents, and visitors. A recent survey documented that 35 percent of Kansas households had visited state parks in the previous 12 months.

Ultimately, the people of Kansas will decide the future of our state parks. There are no easy solutions. The involvement of Kansas citizens, which contributed substantially to the efforts of the Task Force on Outdoor Kansas, will determine what happens now. Perhaps future generations of Kansans will look back with fond appreciation on the 1990s, when their predecessors took the initiative to ensure a rich variety of outdoor experiences in Kansas.

-Miller

## GRIN AND BEAR IT

The bear sank its teeth repeatedly into a mountain homeowner's spongy hot tub lid, crazed by the scent of pretzels and beer. The homeowner bought a new lid. Colorado paid.

Under one of the most liberal game-damage laws in the West, Colorado pays more and more bills like this one when animals follow their instincts. An antique car's roof. Refrigerators. Garage doors. Kitchen cabinets.

As more people move into the mountains - often deep into once-remote forests - the state's annual damage reimbursements have topped \$500,000. Colorado state wildlife officials paid more than \$250,000 in 1997 for bear damage alone, quadruple the amount paid in 1990. Mountain lion damage payments have doubled since 1990, reaching \$119,000 for the second year in a row.

Money used to reimburse property owners comes from license revenues -- from Coloradans [and non-residents] who buy hunting and fishing licenses. Colorado's game-damage reimbursement program, launched in 1951, was designed to help ranchers who lost livestock to wild animals. Payments were made on the condition that ranchers took action to protect their herds from future attacks. Ranchers still collect most of the money.

Yet total payments are increasing rapidly with today's urban-style settlement in the mountains, where development destroys an estimated 50,000 acres of wildlife habitat a year. Multiplying mountain subdivisions mean more and more human-animal encounters

and disruption of animal feeding patterns. Biologists say bears now teach their cubs to forage near homes.

Last year west of Fort Collins, a 500-pound bear broke into 80 campers, trailers, and RVs parked near Crystal Lake. Wildlife officials tranquilized and trapped it, then moved it 80 miles away. But it came back, hooking its claws into door hinges. The state paid more than \$20,000 to reimburse those 80 property owners.

In 1991, lawmakers abolished the authority of wildlife officers to require that homeowners reimbursed for damage take steps to discourage bear damage.

-Denver Post

## PIG PROCESSING

Seaboard Corporation is reportedly looking for a home for a new hog processing plant. Seaboard, the corporate hog company currently raising nearly two million hogs in four southwest Kansas counties as well as the panhandle of Oklahoma, is talking to officials in Garden City and Great Bend, as well as Amarillo, Tex.

Although city officials report that discussions are very preliminary, Seaboard is testing the waters by meeting with farmers and others to explore interest in finishing hogs on contract with them.

According to citizens attending a meeting in Larned, Seaboard hopes to contract with local operators to establish 800 buildings raising more than 2 million hogs a year. They would like the finishing facilities within a 100-mile radius of the possible processing plant, which could significantly increase

the area of the state affected directly by corporate hog production.

Arguing that county votes against swine facilities only apply to sow breeding and nursery facilities, Seaboard is looking at contracting large operations in some counties that have voted against corporate swine facilities.

-Rural Papers

## HOT IDEA

The Pennsylvania Game Commission has added a new twist to the turn-in-poachers hotline concept [called Outdoor Alert in Kansas]. The state legislature established a hotline in that state. The hotline was authorized as part of an act establishing an additional \$200 fine for persons convicted of multiple illegal killing of wildlife. This special penalty would be added to fines levied on those found guilty of wildlife violations.

The \$200 enhanced penalty will be deposited in a special fund from which \$100 of the amount can be paid to the person who provides information leading to a conviction. The remaining \$100 will be used to help offset costs of the hotline.

-PGC News

## UNDOING THE DAMAGE

What once a federal project destroyed, another project seeks to restore. The \$67 million Missouri River Fish and Wildlife Mitigation Project now underway aims to restore more than 2,000 acres between the bluffs of Atchison and the Missouri River back to its long-lost incarnation as fish and

wildlife habitat.

The current project, in an area known as the Benedictine Bottoms, was authorized by Congress in 1986 for the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers to restore a portion of the half-million acres of fish and wildlife habitat in Kansas, Iowa, Missouri, and Nebraska that were destroyed as a result of the Bank Stabilization and Navigation Project on the river from 1912 to 1980.

-Dodge City Daily Globe

## TO THE LANDOWNER

"We need to recognize the landowner as the custodian of public game on all private land, protect him from the irresponsible shooter, and compensate him for putting his land in productive condition. Compensate him either publicly or privately, with either cash, service or protection, for the use of his land and for his labor, on condition that he preserves the game seed and otherwise safeguards the public interest. In short, make a game management partnership enterprise to which the landholder, the sportsman, and the public each contribute appropriate service, and from which each derive appropriate rewards."

-Aldo Leopold, Committee on Game Policy (1930)

## WEB LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

For weekly updates on the park initiative and other state legislative issues of concern to the department in 1998, visit our website at <http://www.state.ks.us> and click on "Legislative Update."

## Paddlefish Snagging

As the days get longer and warmer, thoughts turn to fishing. If this spring is a wet one, Kansas anglers may have some great fishing opportunities. As spring showers cause waters to rise, anglers along some stretches of the Neosho, Marais des Cygnes, and Missouri rivers wait and hope for the spawning migration of paddlefish.

Paddlefish are large prehistoric-looking fish with long snouts called a rostrums. They are plankton eaters. They travel upstream, mouth open, sifting through water and gathering food, rather than looking for prey. Because they can't be caught by traditional means of fishing, paddlefish are the only sportfish in Kansas that can be legally taken by snagging.

Warming springtime waters signal the paddlefish migration. Large concentrations of paddlefish collect below low-water dams, which prevent passage upriver to breeding grounds. They await a rise in the water level to continue their migration upstream. This is the time when anglers cast their lines in hopes of catching one of these giants.

If the waters rise, the 1998 Kansas paddlefish season starts March 15 and runs through May 15. But the start of the season does not necessarily mean the start of migration. Contact local stores and check stations for information on the day-to-day activities of fish in snagging areas.

Although paddlefish snagging seems simple, specific equipment is needed to pursue them. A stiff surf rod 7 to 9 feet long

with spinning reel is needed, along with plenty of 50-pound test line. A stiff rod will pull the rig through the water easier and more quickly than a limber one. Sinkers from 2 to 5 ounces and treble hooks 7/0 and bigger are needed for the rig. Sinker size is determined by how fast the current is flowing and can mean boom or bust for a novice. Watch other anglers and use what they are using.

The weight is tied below the hook about 24 to 36 inches. The rig is then thrown across the river slightly upstream. Quick jerks, a lot of reeling, and patience are all that is needed after that.

Once a fish is hooked, the next trick is landing it. Paddlefish average about 35 pounds but can weigh as much as 80 pounds. Fish of this size can be quite a handful, and other fisherman are always ready to assist.

Each paddlefish landed must be kept - on a tagged stringer - and must also be tagged at a designated check-in station. You have to stop all snagging once you have your daily limit of two paddlefish. These requirements help regulate the number of fish harvested and help monitor populations.

Paddlefish snagging is a sport like no other in Kansas. For the novice, it ranks up there with hunting turkey or deer and has its place in memories of anglers. This year, if conditions are right, could be the year to add a new experience or tradition to your fishing adventures.

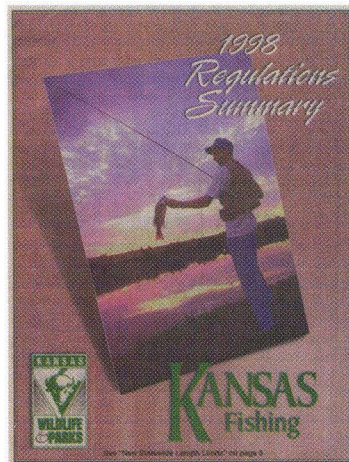
-- Dustin Teasley,  
graphic artist, Pratt

## BOOKLET HIGHLIGHTS NEW REGS

The new Kansas fishing regulations took effect on New Year's Day, and the 1998 *Kansas Fishing Regulations Summary* -- the definitive brochure on Kansas fishing laws and regulations -- is now available wherever licenses are sold.

This free booklet is an essential component of any angler's gear. From possession limits and legal equipment on bait fish and turtles to laws regulating spearfishing, paddlefish snagging, bowfishing, processing and possession of fish, camping on public land, and trout stamps, the *Kansas Fishing Regulations Summary* has it all. Also included are length and creel limits for more than 140 reservoirs, state fishing lakes, and community lakes.

Of special interest to Kansas anglers are new rules on fish length and creel limits. The most dramatic change in several years, these rules include statewide length limits of 15 inches on largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, spotted bass, sauger, saugeye, and walleye.



Statewide creel limits have been in effect for several years, and department biologists feel that doing the same for length limits will help standardize and simplify the regulations while still giving district biologists the option of posting special regulations for any of these species on individual waters. If an angler is fishing a body of water that does not have a length or creel limit for a certain species posted, then the statewide limit applies.

Other new rules for 1998 include removal of a 10-inch crappie length limit at Cedar Bluff Reservoir, imposing a 10-inch crappie length limit at Cheney and La Cygne reservoirs, and changing all 16-inch minimum length limits on channel catfish to 15 inches.

While laws and regulations are emphasized, there is much more to the booklet than what

is and isn't legal. Locations of most of the state's public waters are listed. Hard-to-identify fish such as white bass, striped bass, wiper, walleye, sauger, and saugeye are illustrated, and tips on handling and care of fish are included.

The Kansas Catch and Release Program is also highlighted in the booklet along with the state's Master Angler Program. State fish records, fishing clinics, Becoming an Outdoors Woman, and a listing of all Wildlife and Parks offices complete the booklet.

For more information, phone the Pratt Operations Office, (316) 672-5911, or e-mail [feedback@wp.state.ks.us](mailto:feedback@wp.state.ks.us). You may also find fishing information by visiting the department's website at <http://www.kdwp.state.ks.us>.

--Shoup



## WHITE BASS MOVEMENT

As populations of gizzard shad, the primary food for white bass, grow in Kansas reservoirs, white bass follow. In order to take advantage of these booming populations, the beginning fisherman has to know more than just a little about the life history of the fish, its habits, and preferences.

White bass are short-lived but fast growing. In an average life span of three to four years, the white may reach a weight of 1 to 3 pounds, depending on the availability of food. Occasionally, a fish will outdo all expectations. The state record is 5 pounds, 9 ounces, caught from a Clay County sand pit in 1992 by Jerry Clark,

Clay Center. At this size, the white bass can be a challenge on light tackle, but most fishermen aren't after the white bass because it's a trophy. They're interested in fast action and plenty of fish - two things white bass nearly always supply.

Whites are prodigious spawners. As days lengthen and water temperatures rise in early spring, whites congregate in staging areas under bridges, along rock causeways, and in deep pools at the mouths of rivers and creeks running into reservoirs. Often, thousands of fish will be crowded into small areas where they are vulnerable to the knowing angler. When the water temperature hits 60 degrees, the whites begin to breed.

They are pelagic spawners, releasing

their eggs and fertilizing them in open water. They prefer to breed in rivers and creeks running into reservoirs or along sand and gravel bars or riprap along dams and breakwaters. Just before and during the spawning run - from early April to early May, depending on the weather - is when the white bass is probably most vulnerable to the fisherman.

Some good white bass reservoirs include Fall River, Glen Elder, Kanopolis, Pomona, and Wilson. Other reservoirs may be as good or better than these, depending on the year. [For more info, check out the "Fishing Forecast" on Wildlife and Parks website, <http://www.kdwp.state.ks.us>]

-Tom Bowman, wildlife biologist,  
Wakefield

## To Be A Fisherman



One of a child's great discoveries is that beneath the smooth surface of a lake or pond, are slippery, scaly creatures that bite on hook and line

Fish! There's a certain wonder about them. Unseen except for an occasional ripple, unheard but for a slurping strike deep in the cattails, they lurk in dark water awaiting the offering of a most special kind of person - a fisherman.

To a youngster, a fisherman can be almost anyone. Anybody with a rod and reel who knows the way to the creek is a fisherman. Anyone who can spade a wedge of earth to collect worms, or even a dad who's fresh from the sporting goods store with the uncertain prospect of his own first fishing trip, qualifies. And that's faith.

It's the reason, too, that fishing is made for kids. Only they possess the imagination

that makes fishing a real old-fashioned adventure - the kind that makes chasing grasshoppers through meadow grass an exciting prerequisite to baiting a hook, the kind that leaves Sesame Street forgotten in favor of a ride in a rowboat, or best of all, the kind that lets them know they're growing up and someone believes that they are big enough to be a part of such an important outing.

You remember how it was, don't you? Your first fishing trip when someone special introduced you to what has become a way of life?

For me, it was a graying man and his Oklahoma farm ponds that opened the door to the world of angling. Grandpa always made time to load can poles into his Studebaker pickup, taking dad and me to

the big pond that had the sunken car. We'd stop at the creek crossing to seine minnows and then make our way to the weathered dock where he liked to fish.

He'd unwind fishing lines and set bobbers to the right depth before baiting each hook. Then, making sure I was watching, he'd cover the baits with streams of tobacco juice.

"That'll git 'em," he'd say, handing me a pole. And sure enough . . .

There was nothing like waiting before a spread of colorful bobbers and nothing like it when they danced to the striking fish. The bouncing tip of a fishing pole expanded a boy's world like nothing else could.

All youngsters need a chance like that, a chance to be in the open air, to study the way that ripples spread on water, a chance to wade barefoot in a creek or to turn over rocks in search of crickets. A chance to hear the redwing's conk-a-ree and to watch the birds build their nests in water-side reeds. Or a chance to get to know their dads and granddads in the special way that only fishing allows.

## UNDER CURRENTS

But fishing is sophisticated these days. The roar of an outboard on a reservoir has largely replaced the rowboat on a pond. A glance at a graph recorder instantly tells water depth, bottom structure, and even how many and how large the fish are. Drop an artificial lure into a school of bass and it's a good bet you'll haul in fish. When they quit biting, you head down the lake until you find another school.

It's fun, but it's also science. An it doesn't leave much room for a child's imagination. Somehow, the can pole with a hooked, wiggling worm is still the best way to satisfy a youngster's questions. And it's simple enough to understand.

Want to have some fun this summer? Take a youngster fishing the old-fashioned way. Teach him or her about herons and muskrats and how to catch crawdads for bait. Tell the biggest fish stories you know. Spit some tobacco juice on the hook.

Then sit back and watch the youngster become a fisherman.

-reprinted from *Prairie Chronicles*, by Mike Blair

## PRAIRIE CHICKEN POPULATION SURVEYED

In the lesser prairie chicken range, an index of 1.8 birds per square mile was recorded in a 1997 department survey, about 10 percent lower than 1996. However, this decrease is not statistically significant, according to Randy Rodgers, research biologist, Hays. Some areas saw increases while others declined.

"Except for the Finney Refuge near Garden City, survey routes just south of the Arkansas River increased over 1996," says Rodgers. "This may have been caused by exceptional summer rains in 1996 that broke the drought enough to create good brood habitat."

The Finney Game Refuge remains a concern, however. There were no birds on the Finney Refuge route in 1996, and there was no recovery in 1997, despite improved habitat. This is thought to be due to the loss of lekking tradition on that area.

The Pratt Sandhills Wildlife Area, in northwest Pratt County, did not fare well, either. A severe sum-

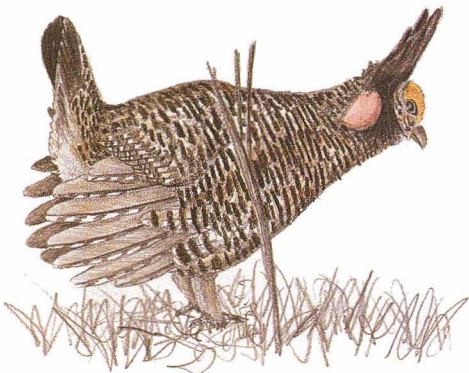
mer hail storm in 1996 was the apparent cause of a 70 percent decline in the population of that area. Declines shown on survey routes in the southwestern tier of Kansas counties may have resulted from a failure of the 1996 rains to come soon enough to produce good habitat for just-hatched chicks.

The greater prairie chicken population in Kansas appears to be doing better. An index of 5.6 birds was reported rangewide, an increase of 28 percent over 1996 although some counties were extremely low in birds.

Reasons for greater prairie chicken declines in some areas are not clear. Some experts suspect that a combination of more annual burning of pastures and early-intensive grazing throughout the Flint Hills may be the causes. The practices, which are becoming more common in greater prairie chicken range, can reduce cover that is critical for reproduction.

Department biologists will continue monitoring prairie chicken populations with another survey this spring.

-Shoup



## DOUBLE DOSE OF SPRING

Spring turkey hunting is a perfect way to break the cabin fever blahs, and if you combine it with early spring bass fishing, you have the complete cure.

Turkey hunting requires a little scouting time in the woods, and like everything else, the more time you commit, the better you become. When spending time in the woods, be quiet. Use your eyes and ears to check out turkey activity. Some hunters like to make a few calls as they scout and listen for gobbler activity in the vicinity. That's fine; just don't over do it. You want the gobbler to eventually come to you, so don't wear out your welcome. As we all know, curiosity killed the cat, and it may help you fool that spring tom.

Once you've located your turkeys, planning and positioning become important in the hunt. Think about what the turkeys are doing at different times of the day and where you want to set up. Take a good look at your possibilities in the daylight. Make sure your lines of fire are open and unobstructed. You may need to customize your setup spot by clearing away limbs or weeds that could impede your shot.

Plan your turkey hunt for morning or evening and know the routes they travel. A decoy or two may help get the open shot you need. Finally, be patient, call sparingly, and enjoy your time in the turkey woods.

But the fun doesn't have to stop with the turkey hunt. After you've hunted in the morning - or if you're waiting for the late afternoon hunt - grab your waders, a bassin' rod, and a spinner bait and head to the nearest pond, state lake, or reservoir for some dandy pre-spawn largemouth bass fishing.

Spring turkey season (April 8-May 17) generally harmonizes with the awakening of largemouth bass fishing in Kansas. (White bass fishing is also good this time of year. See "Fishing.") Artificial lures offered from late morning through mid-afternoon seem to suite the bass just fine. Look for points, drop-offs, creek channels, coves, and natural or man-made structure to hold fish.

Whatever your choice of lure, make sure your hooks are sharp. If they leave a scratch across your thumbnail without much pressure, you're in the ballpark.

Fishing with a spinner bait allows you to cover a lot of water and vary your depths with relative ease in a fairly short time. Some anglers like to add plastic or pork trailers to their spinner baits for extra attraction and better control in the water. Vary the depth of the lure and speed of the retrieval until you locate fish. Then repeat your efforts. Don't leave a spot too quickly; during this time of year, a large number of bass may occupy a relatively small area. Fish an area thoroughly, and the result can be pleasantly surprising.

Finally, practice catch-and-release fishing, especially when fishing pre-spawn bass. (When white bass fishing, keep only what your family can eat.) A good pocket scale, a tape measure, and a camera can capture the nice fish caught during a double-dose day. You'll be encouraging a self-sustaining bass population by allowing released fish to complete their spawning cycle. And there will be more to enjoy in the weeks and months to come.

Looking forward to spring in the outdoors? Try a double dose this year.

-Jim Hayes, terrestrial ecologist, Pratt

## Nesting Sprite

People who watch birds usually have an anecdote about a wren nest. They have been found nesting in pockets of hanging clothes, tin cans, toolboxes, mailboxes, iron pipes, and car bumpers, not to mention bird houses.

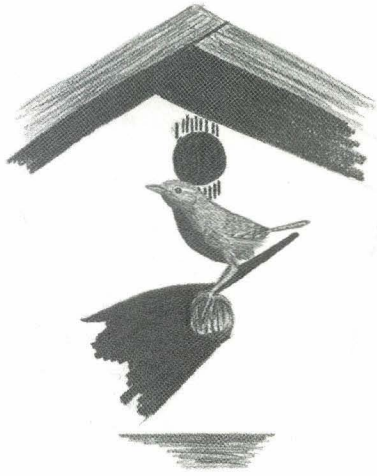
There are four kinds of wrens that nest in Kansas: the house, Carolina, Bewicks, and sedge.

Probably the most recognized of these is the house wren. It is a rusty-brown bird with a buff-colored throat, eyebrow, and eye ring. As its name implies, this is the wren most likely to use constructed birdhouses. Its pleasant, bubbly song is repeated so often it almost becomes monotonous. When a male stakes out a territory to impress a female, he builds dummy nests of sticks in every nearby cavity. The female chooses one to her liking and lays six to eight eggs. For their size, house wrens are very aggressive around the nest.

The largest wren to be found in Kansas is the Carolina. It can be identified by its rufous colored back and long white eyeline. It inhabits open woodlands with some brushy cover and emits a loud ringing song that sounds like *teakettle, teakettle, teakettle*. The nest is built in a tree cavity, in the middle of a brush pile, or in the roots of an upturned tree. A Carolina wren pair remains together on the same area throughout the year, and their song can be heard even in winter.

The Bewick's wren (pronounced like the Buick car) is a more uncommon nester found in open woodlands, hedgerows, and thickets. It can be recognized for its grayish white eyebrows and whitish belly and outer tailfeathers. It frequently flicks or fans its tail and typically nests near the ground in tree cavities, rock crevices, deserted buildings, brush heaps, roots of upturned trees, or nest boxes placed near the ground.

Of the four nesting wrens, the sedge wren is the rarest because of the habitat it chooses. It selects moist meadows for its home. The sedge wren has no light eyebrow but does have a streaked crown and buffy orange flanks. Its frequently-sung song sounds like *tsip, tsip, tsip*,



*trrrrrrrrrrrrup*. Sedge wrens nest later into the summer than most other birds and can be found on their nesting territories through August.

Because wrens are a part of the army of bird life that battles against the legion of insects, they're welcomed by homeowners even if they happen to build their nests in old hats or the pockets of hanging clothes.

—Ed Miller, nongame biologist,  
Independence

## Shorebird Migration

The spring shorebird migration is always a grand sight on major Kansas wetlands. Thirty to 40 species of shorebirds — numbering in the hundreds of thousands — stop to rest and feed while travelling toward northern nesting grounds. Unfortunately, many people who want to witness this event must drive many miles to such places as Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area or Quivira National Wildlife Refuge. Such an investment in time requires planning.

Ideally, such a trip should be planned in advance and scheduled to coincide with the peak of the shorebird migration period. To do this, it is best to call the headquarters offices of these publicly-owned marshes to be sure good numbers of birds have arrived. The Cheyenne Bottoms hotline is (316) 793-7730 and is updated each Friday. The Quivira number is (316) 486 2393. To be sure that you don't miss the rush, start calling to check on the migration no later than the

middle of April.

Internet users can get regular information on shorebird status by subscribing to a chat group on Kansas bird sightings (KSBIRD-L@ksu.edu). For more information on subscribing to this service, e-mail [otte@jc.net](mailto:otte@jc.net). Information on recent rare bird sightings can be obtained by calling the Rare Bird Hotline, (316) 229-2777.

Historically, early migrating shorebirds, such as greater yellowlegs, start arriving in Kansas about the first of April. However a much greater diversity of species can normally be seen during the last two weeks of April. While migration timing varies each year, the third weekend of April can often be a hot time at Kansas wetlands, with a great diversity of species being present. But May can be a good time, as well, when good numbers of later migrants such as Wilson's phalaropes and white-rumped sandpipers visit Kansas.

Beginning birders need at least one good bird identification book. Most experienced birders have two different publications — one with photographs and one with illustrations. While these birds are often approachable, their small size makes binoculars a must. Many serious birders use spotting scopes.

Kansas is one of the best places in the U.S. to view shorebirds. This spring, take advantage of this opportunity. Grab books and binoculars, pack a lunch, and have a fine spring outing, entertainment provided by these fascinating creatures.

—Gene Brehm, videographer, Pratt

## Habitat Corner

It is possible for farmers to shift weed populations away from problem weeds [and help wildlife in the process] by harvesting wild sunflower seed and drilling it with a grass drill into dormant green wheat in late winter. This seed can also be broadcast after wheat growth begins in early spring.

Wild sunflower will not compete with growing wheat, and its growth after harvest can suppress germination of volunteer wheat.

—Randy Rodgers,  
research biologist, Hays

**FREE PARK DAYS**

It's official. Free Park Entrance Days for 1998 will be May 2 and 3. On these two days, anyone can visit any state park without the normally-required vehicle entrance permit.

Free Park Entrance Days offer families and individuals a chance to sample the variety of outdoor recreation that exists in the Sunflower State. Although overnight camping fees remain in effect, the \$4 daily vehicle or \$30 annual park entrance permit is not required to enter state parks during these two days.

Unlike years past, this year's Free Park Entrance Days will NOT coincide with Free Fishing Days, which will be June 6-7. Still, it's the ideal weekend to launch the summer outdoors season. For more information, contact any Wildlife and Parks office.

-Shoup

**BURNING VIDEO AVAILABLE**

While pheasant numbers took an upward swing in most of Kansas' pheasant range in 1997, many people have been disappointed in the long-term effects of CRP grasslands. Randy Rodgers is the pheasant research biologist for the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks. He feels that lack of burning management is partly to blame.

"The native grasses that comprised our CRP planting have a tendency to build up excessive ground litter over time," Rodgers says. "When too much litter is present on

the ground, the cover provided by these grasses becomes almost unusable for all but our largest species of wildlife. Young wildlife, such as pheasant chicks, find these dense mats of grass litter to be virtually impassible. Chicks hatched in dense, unmanaged CRP grasslands find it impossible to follow the hen. They quickly become lost or exhausted and soon die."

The recommended solution to this problem is fire. An occasional controlled burn can open up the grass stand, creating abundant pathways that wildlife can use and also improving the vigor of the grasses.

"Strip discing is a new provision that will allow a co-operator to disc as much as 33 percent of a field," Rogers adds. "Strategically-located disced strips allow a much safer and more manageable burn. It works best to mow the strips that will be fire barriers before you disc them to reduce the amount of combustible material at the fire break."

Your local NRCS agent can help you amend your contract to allow strip discing. To be most productive for wildlife, this tillage should be performed in late February or early March, and the burn should be performed during the last week of March or the first week of April. Be sure to notify your rural fire department on the day you plan to burn. A few Kansas counties require more advanced notice and a burning permit.

By setting a backfire inside the disced firebreak on the downwind side of the field, a wide blackened area is created. Once that is done,

additional fire can be set inside the firebreak around the periphery of the field, eventually reaching the upwind side where a head-fire can be set to complete the burn. To create greater diversity, a fireguard can be disced around half the field, that half burned, and the other half left unburned. One to three years later the second half can be burned.

In this way, some unburned and some recently-burned habitat is always present, meeting both nesting and brood-rearing needs in the same field.

A videotape that details burning management and the techniques of safe burning can be obtained from the Pratt office of the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks by calling (316) 672-5911. Ask for Gene Brehm.

-Gene Brehm,  
videographer, Pratt

**BOWHUNTER INSTRUCTORS NEEDED**

Are you interested in becoming a bowhunter education instructor? The department needs a few good archers to fill this need. The need was created when House Bill 2303 passed the 1997 state legislature, allowing 12- and 13-year-old archers to bowhunt deer but only after completing both hunter education and bowhunter education courses.

Since the passage of the bill, there has been a high demand for the student courses, and a heavy load has been placed on the few certified bowhunter education instructors presently active in the state. These

courses should relieve some of that load and make more courses available to youngsters.

Classes for instructors were held last winter, and others may yet be scheduled if enough potential instructors can be found. The National Bowhunter Education Foundation requires potential instructors to attend both a student-level course and an instructor course but allows potential instructors to take the instructor course first. Responsible bowhunters at least 21 years old who are willing to lend guidance to the youth of their communities are urged to attend a class.

If no classes are available in your area and you would like to become an instructor, phone the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks' bowhunter education coordinator, Gene Brehm, at (316) 672-5911.

-Shoup

**NEW DOCK AT GLEN**

Several local individuals helped Wildlife and Parks with installation of a floating dock at the Boiler Point Area south of Cawker City on Glen Elder Reservoir last year. The new floating dock includes a 24-foot long walkway to a 20-foot long loading dock.

The dock is fully handicapped-accessible. It was taken out for the winter but will be fully-operational this spring. This new addition complements the boat ramp, solar light, and restrooms that have been developed within the last three years.

-Cawker City Ledger

# Home-Grown or Wild, They're all Showoffs



For most people, the first hint of spring can be seen when touches of color suddenly burst onto the grey landscape. It's flower time. In fact, these showy hints of spring are so popular that many people grow them in their yards.

One of the first home-grown flowers to show the face of spring is the crocus. Crocuses can splash the landscape with white, yellow, or purple anytime from mid- or late February through mid-March. They grow from a type of bulb called a **corm**. Bulbs are a kind of like a cross between a root and a



seed. They stay a part of the plant year after year. When the plant goes **dormant** (goes to "sleep") in summer or fall, all the energy from the plant is stored in the bulb.

The dormant bulb needs a cold period -- winter --

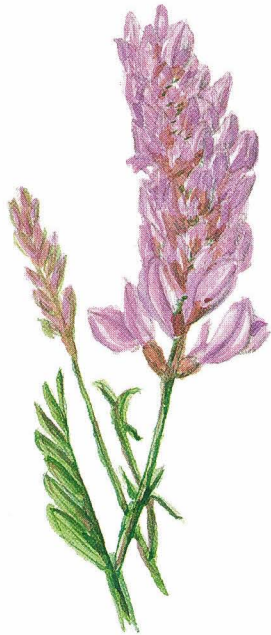
before it can sprout and bloom again. But once the first good thaw comes, crocuses, like other bulb plants, come shooting up from the ground quicker than other plants. This is because they grow from their ready-made source of energy, the bulb.

Although most crocuses are only 4 to 6 inches tall with a 1- to 2-inch flower, they are favorites among flower gardeners because of their early bloom and bright color.

Two other favorites are the daffodil and the tulip. The daffodil (sometimes mistakenly called a buttercup) is known to most people for its flattened petals, called the **corona**, and cup-like inner flower, called the **trumpet**. The most common daffodils are yellow although they come in many colors. Most grow 12 to 18 inches tall with a 2- to 3-inch flower

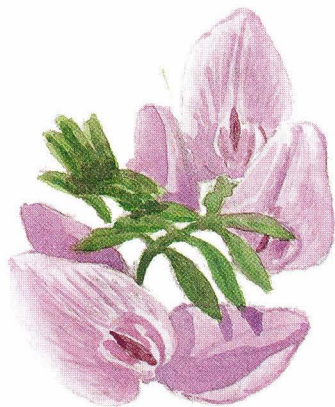
Everyone has drawn pictures of tulips or cut them out of construction paper in school. They are well-known, hearty, and can be grown just about anywhere. They also come in just about every color -- and color combination -- in the rainbow. Among early-blooming home grown flowers, this is probably the favorite.





This spring, look for crocuses, daffodils, and tulips in your neighborhood. They are called **perennial** flowers, meaning they sprout again each year without re-planting. You might even want to go the library and get a book on planting your own bulb garden.

If you like your springtime more on the wild side, take a stroll in the nearest pasture or vacant field. A number of early-blooming wildflowers



come out in March. These plants are not only colorful, they often have colorful names. Lambert crazyweed, ground-plum, spiderwort, and Buckley's beardtongue are just a few.

Lambert crazyweed has a pea-like flower that grows on an 8- to 12-inch stem. The flowers range from bluish-purple to white. This plant is found in drier areas of the state, even in gravelly or rocky soil. As you might guess, crazyweed gets its name from the fact that it is poisonous to livestock.

Horses, cattle, and sheep that eat this plant lose weight and muscle control, become weak, and can act downright crazy. Sick animals have to be removed from pastures with this plant because they become crazyweed addicts!

As its name suggests, ground plum grows close to the ground throughout Kansas. It has tiny green leaflets and small purple flowers that resemble snapdragons. Its fruit is edible and tastes like pea pods.

Spiderwort is another purple flower. This one, however,

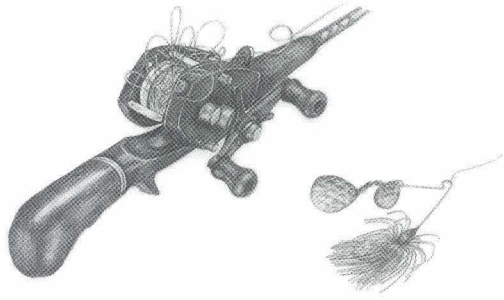
grows on a long, smooth stem that may be more than 3 feet tall. The leaves are long and smooth, too, growing 4 to 14 inches. At the top of the stem, a cluster of purple flowers grows, each with three petals. This plant has an even more colorful name -- "cowslobbers," for mucous-like strings of sap that may hang from its leaves.

Buckley's beardtongue may grow 3 feet tall, as well. However, the last foot or so of this plant may all be purple flowers growing opposite one another on the stem. This flower may not come out until April.

Whether you like to grow them yourself or go on a flower "treasure hunt" with ID book in hand, make this spring an adventure with flowers. Take time to learn more about these springtime beauties.



**Note: Unless you are with an expert, never eat wild plants. Many of them are highly poisonous.**



# Backlash

by Mike Miller

## The Wader Myth

“White bass runnin’ yet?” Lennie asked as he raised a mammoth handful of potato chips to his mouth.

“Nah. I haven’t heard of any good reports. It’s too early,” I answered.

“What about crappie? Surely they’re catching crappie somewhere,” Lennie quizzed as he fished in the chip bag for the last crumbs.

“Haven’t heard of anybody catching crappie, either. But any day now, the fishing is going to bust wide open. I’d better get my waders patched,” I said optimistically.

Lennie took a long swig of soda, wiped his mustache with the back of his hand and changed the subject, “You got any more chips?” He didn’t care about my wader problems because he never wears them. I think he’s too cheap, but then cold water covering my lower extremities affects me more than it does Lennie. I’ve always thought waders would keep me warm and dry, and they have once or twice. But I’m convinced the warm-and-dry idea is mostly myth.

The truth is waders have always been more of a fashion statement for me. Hard of head, I keep buying, patching and getting wet wearing waders. It started with my first pair.

They were hand-me-downs from Granddad — old, weather-cracked hip waders. With one look, a five-year-old could have seen they’d leak like sieves. Being a college student, I couldn’t and besides, they looked good on me. I worked weekends at a gas station, and I tried to fix the leaks with tire patches. There weren’t enough rubber patches in that town.

I wore them anyway. On one occasion, my buddy Pap and I had waded out to a treacherous location below a low-water dam. The white bass were biting, and we stood proudly in the thigh-deep water catching and stringing whites.

“B-b-b-bet all those suckers on the b-b-bank wish they had w-w-waders and could fish out here where we are,” I stuttered smugly to Pap.

“Y-y-y-yeah,” he replied through chattering teeth. “B-b-by the way, c-c-can you see my legs? I haven’t been able to f-f-feel them for a while.”

“Y-y-yep. They’re still there. M-m-m-ust have a leak in your waders, too. M-m-my legs went numb about an hour ago.”

“You look g-g-good, though,” Pap said thoughtfully.

As we started the wade back through the boulder-strewn path to shore, I realized that negotiating current and unseen rocks with numb legs was an outdoor skill I hadn’t learned yet. “T-t-t-oo many p-p-people watching to fall. B-b-be careful,” I thought, so cold I even stuttered in my thoughts.

Suddenly I was neck-deep in cold water, sucking in air like a supercharged vacuum cleaner and uttering unrecognizable, high-pitched sounds between gasps. I floundered pitifully until I found a rock flat enough to stand on. Then, knowing I had a very interested audience, I tried to walk nonchalantly the rest of the way to the bank. Not a chance. I looked like a drunk tight-rope walker, swinging a stringer of white bass in one hand and whipping my fishing pole back and forth with the other, desperately trying to maintain balance.

When I finally made it to the bank, dripping like a wet sheep dog, I glared at the wide-eyed fishermen, daring them to laugh in my face.

“That water cold?” one said with a knowing grin.

“It’s n-n-not too b-b-bad,” I said, as I hefted my stringer of whites to distract him. “But ever since the war, I’ve had trouble with my legs going numb if they get chilled. Makes it hard to walk on those slick rocks,” I lied.

Most of the fishermen snickered politely. Pap didn’t hold back so well, but then he’d just made the same trip without falling. As I whacked him with my rod tip to stop his giggling, I realized I could hear running water. I looked down to see my waders bulging like over-filled inner tubes, water spraying in all directions. I sat on a rock and lifted my legs to dump several gallons of water and the last ounce of my dignity back into the river. Stumbling up the bank to the parking area, it was easy to imagine the roar of laughter that broke out after I was out of earshot.

My quest for leak-proof waders continues. But even when I’ve been fortunate enough to not spring leaks, I’ve found ways to get wet. Even hundred-dollar waders have large holes where your feet go in, and I’ve got a knack of finding water just a fraction too deep. I’ll keep wearing waders, though. They just look so darn good on me — especially right before I step in the water.



