

KANSAS

Wildlife & Parks

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2002

\$2.75



On Point

by Mike Hayden



Park Funding Shrinking

Our 24 state parks provide a needed respite to many Kansans and travelers to our state. They provide an excellent oasis from our hectic schedules that are normally managed by the clock on the wall, instead of where our minds and hearts long to be. Last year, over 7-million visits were logged in our parks, nearly doubling the average annual attendance over the last ten years. Our parks are not getting larger in size; however, our department is trying to accommodate the increasing use through innovative management and unique amenities, while juggling a decreasing revenue source.

Four state parks — Cedar Bluff, Lovewell, Eisenhower, and El Dorado — now have cabins available for reservation. Some of these cabins are full-service, with a kitchen, running water, and bathroom facilities. Others are primitive with bunks, table, and chairs. All of these cabins have one thing in common: they're full much of the year.

Cabins offer a measure of privacy and convenience that is not otherwise available to many park patrons. They are ideal for family and friends who seek a scenic recreational experience at a budget price. The cabins are also economical for the department, since they are financed and maintained through the generosity of state park Friends Groups. Due to their popularity, the department plans to continue adding cabins to parks across the state.

The demand for group campgrounds is also increasing. These are areas of the park that may be reserved by a large

group of folks for family reunions and other events. All of the necessary facilities are located in close proximity, providing a centralized venue for a wide range of outdoor activities.

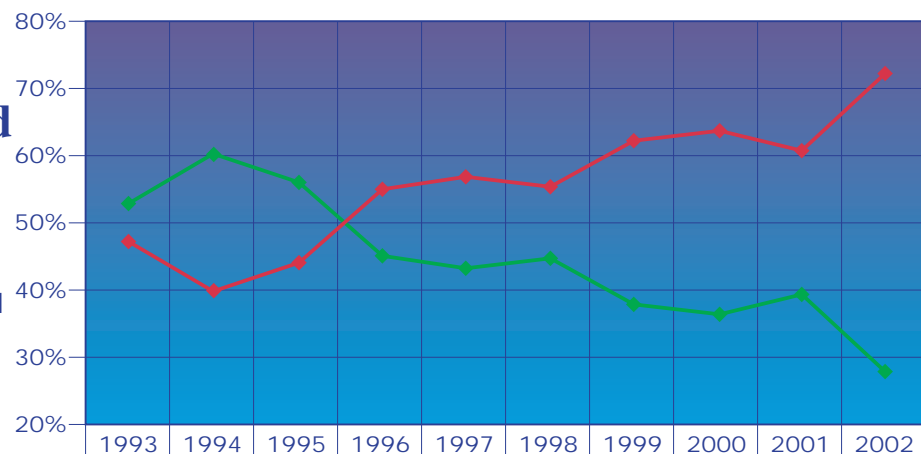
While the list of diverse park patrons is growing (hunters, fishermen, tent-campers, RV-campers, boaters, equestrian enthusiasts, etc.), state financial support is heading the other direction. A decade ago, general tax dollars made up 53 percent of the state park operating budget. This year, state support comprises only 27 percent of the state parks' budget, and may be decreased even further (see graph).

In order to keep our state parks solvent, the Wildlife and Parks Commission is considering our department's recommendation to raise user fees again this year. In these tough economic times, it is truly unfortunate that we are forced to ask our users to contribute even more. However, with state support at an all-time low, the only alternative is to close portions of many parks, or completely close several parks around the state. Neither option is attractive, and we will exhaust every option to keep our state parks open.

Our department will continue to appeal to the Legislature for support of our state parks. I encourage you to also make your feelings known about the importance of the state parks system.

State General Fund vs. State Park User Fees

State General Fund
User Fees



- 1 On Point**
Park Funding Shrinking *by Mike Hayden*
- 2 McPherson Valley Wetlands**
This wildlife area in central Kansas holds rich history. *by Todd Pesch*
- 8 Common Sense Treestand Safety**
Treestands require special safety considerations. *by Gene Brehm*
- 14 What We Know About The Bobwhite In Kansas**
Quail decline drives research. *by Roger Applegate and Christopher K. Williams*
- 19 Listen Up!**
Hearing loss is common among hunters and shooters. *by Mike Blair*
- 22 Beginning Wingshooting**
Tips for teaching new shooters shotgun skills. *by Ed Augustine*
- 25 Safe At Home**
Firearm safety rules for the home. *by Marc Murrell*
- 28 Opening Act**
Dove hunting photo essay. *by Mike Blair*
- 33 Wild Currents**
edited by J. Mark Shoup
- 45 Backlash**
Conscientious Conscious Objector *by Mike Miller*



14

GOVERNOR
Bill Graves

COMMISSIONERS
John Dykes, Chairman, *Shawnee Mission*
Will Carpenter, *Towanda*
John Mickey, *Atwood*
Tom Warner, *Manhattan*
John Fields, *Pittsburg*
Lori Hall, *Salina*
Dr. James Harrington, *Liberal*

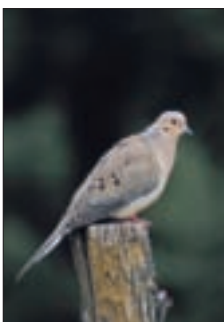
ADMINISTRATION
Secretary Mike Hayden
Ass't. Secretary/Admin. Richard Koerth
Ass't. Secretary/Operations Keith Sexson (acting)
Director of Administrative Svcs. Mike Theurer
Director of Fisheries & Wildlife Joe Kramer
Director of Parks Jerold (Jerry) Hover
Director of Law Enforcement Kevin Jones

MAGAZINE STAFF
Chief of Information and Education
Bob Mathews
Editor Mike Miller
Associate Editor J. Mark Shoup
Illustrator Dustin Teasley
Photographer/Associate Editor Mike Blair
Staff Writer Marc Murrell
Editorial Assistant Bev Aldrich
Circulation Barbara Theurer

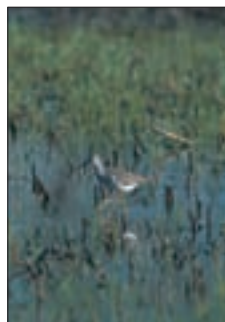
KANSAS WILDLIFE & PARKS (ISSN 0898-6975) is published by the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, 900 Jackson St., Suite 502, Topeka, KS 66612. Address editorial correspondence to Kansas Wildlife & Parks Magazine, 512 SE 25th Ave., Pratt, KS 67124 (620) 672-5911. Send subscription requests to Kansas Wildlife & Parks Magazine, P.O. Box 8059, Red Oak, IA 51591. Subscription rate: one year \$10; two years \$18; and three years \$27. Articles in the magazine may be reprinted with permission. Periodical postage paid at Pratt, KS and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Kansas Wildlife & Parks Magazine, P.O. Box 8059, Red Oak, IA 51591.



2



Front Cover: September doves mark the first Kansas bird hunting season. Mike Blair filmed this scene with a 400 mm lens set at f/8, 1/125th sec. **Back Cover:** A lesser yellowlegs probes the shallows at McPherson Wetlands Wildlife Area. Blair shot the photo with a 600 mm lens set at f/8, 1/500th sec.



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

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

Kansas Department of Wildlife Parks Website
<http://www.kdwp.state.ks.us>
magazine e-mail — mikegm@wp.state.ks.us





McPherson Valley Wetlands



by Todd Pesch
area manager, McPherson
photos by Mike Blair

Once an extensive wetland that stretched from McPherson to just north of Wichita, the McPherson Valley holds a rich waterfowl history. As small portions of the area are restored to wetland habitat, glimpses of the past are evident.

Historically, the McPherson Valley Wetlands formed an important segment of Kansas' natural resources. Originating five miles northwest of McPherson, it covered the landscape for 43 miles in a southeasterly direction to Valley Center. This vast area of natural potholes teemed with local wildlife and provided migrating birds with excellent wetland habitat both spring and fall when normal precipitation occurred. As such, it was a popular hunting ground for Plains Indians,



The McPherson Wetlands are especially attractive to blue-winged teal, which prefer shallow, flooded vegetation as feeding sites. Scattered pools spread hunting pressure and provide top waterfowl hunting opportunities in years with adequate rainfall.

and later for settlers in the area.

An early inventory identified some 5,700 acres of wetlands in McPherson County, but that did not include wetlands smaller than 10 acres in size. It is now believed there were originally 10,000 to

15,000 acres of wetland habitat in this county alone. Including wetlands in the adjacent counties of Reno, Harvey, and Sedgwick, the McPherson Valley Wetlands probably contained a total of 30,000 to 35,000 acres. Most of these were in a

chain of lakes that started south of the area now known as Big Basin and ended north of Wichita. Size of the pools ranged from 25 acres or smaller to about 1,300 acres.

These lakes were remnants of the ancient Smoky Hill River bed, which 5 million years ago lay in a different course than it does today. At that time, the river turned south near modern day Lindsborg and eventually tied into the Arkansas River near Valley Center (now it turns north to Salina and continues east.) This extinct watercourse left a natural lowland no longer fed by the river, but easily replenished in

places by annual rainfall. The result was a lush wetland system highly attractive to wildlife and man alike.

Historically, businessmen from Kansas City, St. Louis, Chicago, and as far away as New York used to ride a train to Conway then catch a



In the early 1900s, the McPherson Valley attracted hunters from across the U.S. The hunters in this photo show the results of a 1913 Thanksgiving Day mallard hunt on Clear Lake. (courtesy photo)



The McPherson Wetlands offers wildlife enthusiasts the chance to observe many interesting species not always present in Kansas, such as the white-faced ibis (left.) As many as 200 bird species have been recorded on the area. Egrets, herons, and a host of waterbirds are usually abundant spring and fall. Migrating waterfowl reach impressive numbers in wet years, with as many as 130,000 ducks and geese present at times. Spring months offer the best viewing, when birds are in full breeding plumage.

horse and buggy for the area's fabulous waterfowl shooting. One article in the Salina newspaper revealed just how good it might have been by reporting a hunt by four sportsmen on the Big Basin northwest of McPherson. The hunters shot from 8 a.m. until noon, taking more than 500 shots and retrieving 262 ducks.

Due to concentrated waterfowl, the McPherson Wetlands were an important area for waterfowl market hunters. Market hunters would hunt with horse and buggy across the north shore of the Big Basin, turn south and end up at the Conway train station with a wagon load of ducks. From there, the ducks were shipped to Kansas City and St. Louis for food. However, as new conservation laws

begin to restrict unlimited waterfowl shooting, market hunting waned. When the daily bag limit dropped to 15 ducks per day, market hunters could no longer make a living, and

that era passed.

Farming became a way of life in the area, and unfortunately, the wetlands were steadily drained for agriculture. Only 3,470



In dry years, area marshes shrink to a fraction of their average size. However, local wildlife continues to use these important resources. Area Manager Todd Pesch regulates water levels in some pools by pumping available water.

acres, about a tenth of the original habitat, remains. Recently, the area was acquired by the Kansas Department of Wildlife & Parks with a goal of improving and conserving this important wetland system. Plans are in progress to restore 5,000 acres of wetlands in

McPherson County alone. The Big Basin development was first to be completed in the summer of 2000. It added 630 acres of marsh habitat to the area's total. Other recent developments include Kubin Marsh (about 65 acres,) and Chain of Lakes (about 30 acres.) Land recently pur-

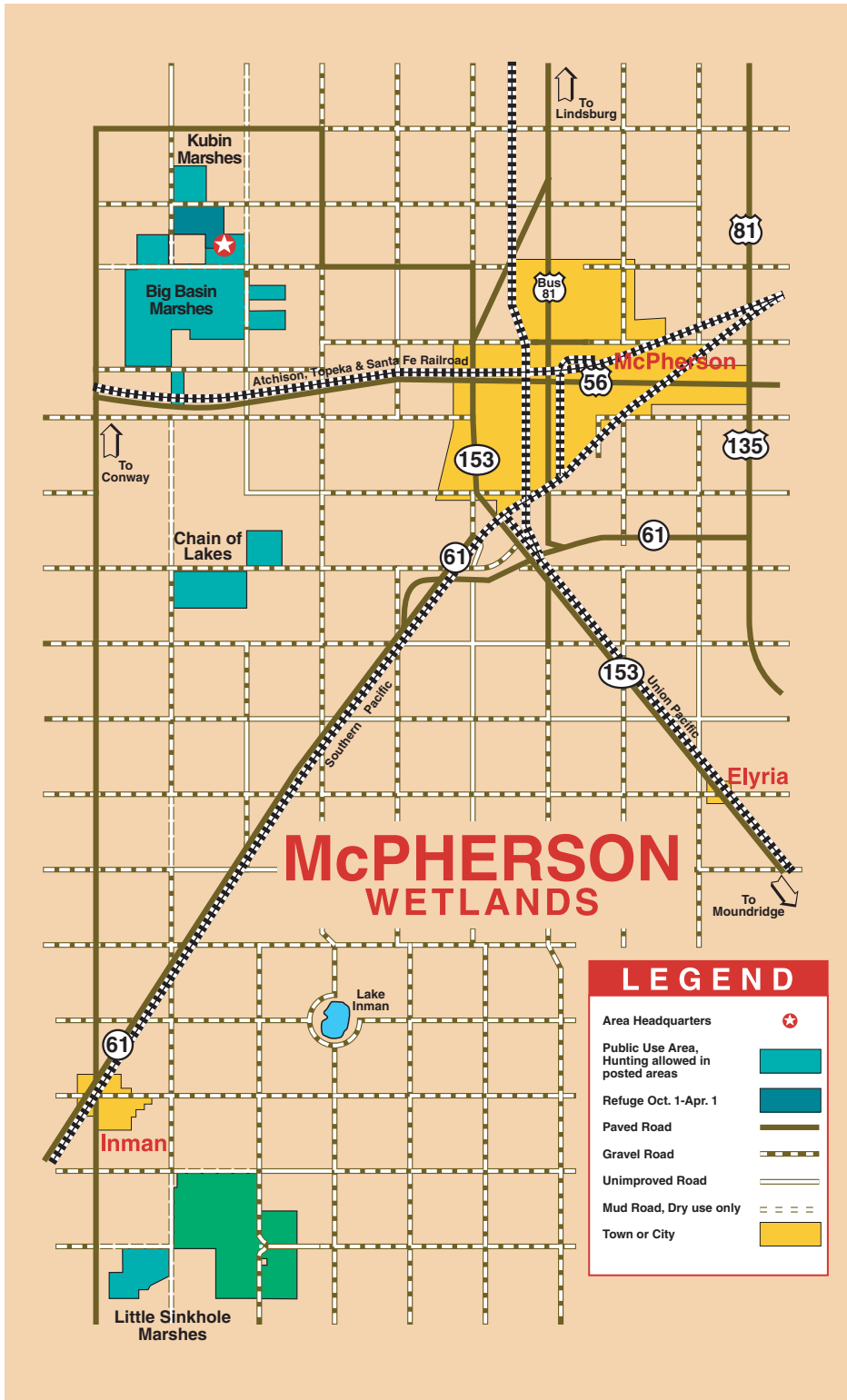
chased from Southwest College is scheduled for restoration this fall, which should entail about 120 acres of marsh habitat. During the summer of 2003, a planned project will restore the Farland Marsh southeast of Inman. This development will total 400 acres.

Activity at McPherson Wetlands has been funded through a series of North American Wetland Conservation Council (NAWCC) grants. The first grant allowed the purchase 1,100 acres and restoration of 300 wetland acres. Grant two allowed the purchase of an additional 333 acres plus development of some marshes like Big Basin Pool 1. Grant three was proposed to purchase 560 acres, with provision to develop another 686 acres within the Big Basin. Plans for phase four should allow the agency to purchase 1,477 acres and restore about 400 in the summer of 2003.

Restoration primarily takes the form of levees, water transfer canals, and pumps capable of delivering 16,000 gallons per minute when surface runoff occurs.

These ambitious projects are making a difference in this valuable area. With the increased development of McPherson Valley Wetlands, bird numbers have risen. More than 200 bird species have been documented, including white-faced ibis, whistling swans, snowy plovers, greater prairie chickens, prairie falcons, and bald eagles. For the first time in 100 years, whooping cranes visited the area in 1995. In the spring of 1997, a total of 83,000 ducks were seen, including 37,000 mallards and 43,000 pintails. Another 53,000 geese were also present.

Recent dry years have been problematic for McPherson Wetlands during duck season. Some fall hunting seasons have seen only a handful of birds when marshes were dry. Since McPherson Wetlands has no active rivers or streams as a water source, the area depends upon rainfall to supply surface water attractive to ducks. When rainfall is absent, the shallow marshes quickly lose their water,





Levees and ditches help move water between pools, adding to habitat as well as aiding management. Upland areas are home to a wealth of wildlife including pheasants, quail, deer, rabbits, and predators. Steel shot is required for all shotgun hunting.

and ducks seek other areas.

However, when rainfall is adequate, good duck hunting is possible. The pothole nature of the marshes allows hunters to spread out and use natural vegetation for camouflage. There are no permanent blinds on the area, allowing waterfowl hunters to set up where wind and water conditions are most favorable. Teal hunting can be particularly good in the shallow marshes during the September season.

As marshland purchase and restoration continues, hunting is expected to become even better in future years. An advantage of the McPherson Wetlands is found in its sprawling nature. Since marshes are spread over a distance of many miles, hunting pressure can be spread over a relatively large area. Combinations of grassy fields interspersed with marsh are attractive to pheasants and quail as well as waterfowl. Cottontail rabbits may also be hunted throughout the area.

A permit is required to hunt the

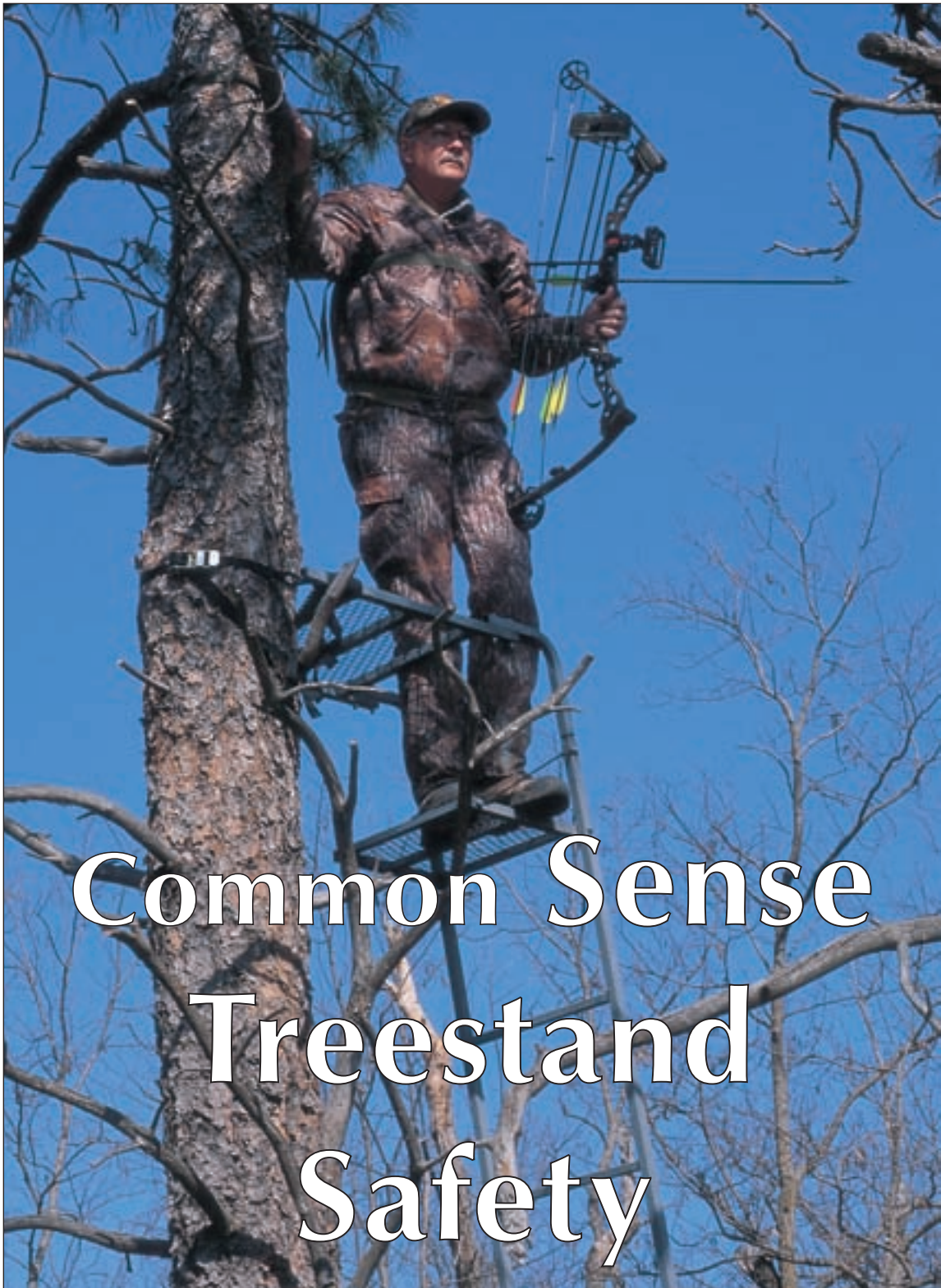
McPherson Wetlands. It is available free of charge at all parking areas. Hunters complete information about their hunt and leave it in special mailboxes at the parking areas. This information helps determine use and harvest success and is useful in developing management plans for the area. All hunting at McPherson Wetlands requires the use of steel shot.

Besides hunting, the McPherson Wetlands offers a fine opportunity to view area wildlife. Especially during spring migrations when hunting seasons are closed, the marshes offer a smorgasbord of bird life presented in their finest breeding colors. Marshland mammals including deer, coyotes, bobcats, muskrats and beavers, as well as small game species, may be seen in the wetland complex. Marshes are accessible by foot or in some cases, roadways. Additionally, a handicapped-accessible photo blind is a permanent feature on the area. Because of viewing distances involved, binoculars or spotting

scopes are recommended for close-up looks at the wetland's varied animal life.

The McPherson Wetlands complex lies within a 50-mile radius of Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area and Quivira National Wildlife Refuge. McPherson Wetlands historically rivaled Cheyenne Bottoms in its importance to waterfowl, and when fully restored, will offer a hunting alternative and supplemental habitat when water availability is limited due to drought, a time when bird concentrations make local disease a potential problem.

The McPherson Wetlands are open to the public year-round, and all areas may be entered on foot. Camping is not available, but accommodations are located a few miles away in McPherson. Plan to hunt or visit this beautiful area for some of Kansas' finest wildlife viewing opportunities. ♡



by Gene Brehm
videographer, Pratt

Kansas white-tailed deer hunters love to hunt from treestands. However, just a moment of carelessness while in the stand can result in serious injury or death.

It was a beautiful October afternoon. The mild Indian summer weather and a full spectrum of autumn colors greeted me as I selected a tree in which to place a treestand. I didn't plan to bowhunt much from this treestand, just observe deer movement in the area. It was to be an observation stand.

I casually placed screw-in tree steps to enable my climb. A safety strap with one band around my chest and the other around the tree's trunk ensured safety as I worked my way up the tree. At 13 or 14 feet, I reached a spot that would accommodate my portable stand. An 8-inch-diameter limb grew from the trunk several feet below the selected spot. It seemed a natural perch on which to stand while securing the portable's chain attachment.

Standing on the branch, I evaluated the view. It was good. Any deer moving within a half-mile would surely be visible from this observation stand. I looked down at a lightly used game trail that passed within ten yards of the tree's base and quickly realized that any deer using the trail would be shielded by the limbs of

one overhanging branch. The branch appeared to be dead. Surely it was brittle and could be pulled and broken from the main tree.

I cautiously inched outward from the trunk, both feet balanced on the seemingly sturdy eight-inch limb. The slack from the safety belt became taunt with my outreached hand only inches from the overhang. I foolishly decided to un-lash the safety strap and, with one hand,

grasp a two-inch diameter limb above my head. Without the restraints of the belt to limit my movements, I inched farther from the trunk. In order to reach the overhang, I casually shifted my weight to my outside foot and simultaneously leaned to grab the dead limb with my free hand.

Suddenly, with no warning, the limb beneath my feet broke cleanly from the trunk. My grip on the limb



Most treestand accidents occur while climbing to and from stands. Tree steps are a convenient way to climb, though improper use can be dangerous. Steps must be screwed correctly into live wood, and a safety harness must be used at all times.



Harnesses are safer than belts because they keep a fallen hunter upright and won't constrict breathing.

above my head was lost instantly, and the realization of my foolishness was punctuated when the brutal forces of gravity, my body's mass, and Mother Earth collided.

I came to rest outstretched, lying on my back. Badly dazed from the impact, I lay motionless, trying to regain mental awareness. My outward lean had caused my body to tumble 180 degrees, and the only reason that I had not landed on my head was an instinctive reaction to draw my body into a fetal position. Sheer luck had allowed me to land on my extreme upper back with my head pulled forward to my chest. As I lay on my back, my mind began to function and to question the extent of my injuries.

I slowly moved one leg and then the other. They both worked, and there seemed to be no pain. My right arm and then my left were similarly tested. Great relief passed through my body as each limb responded on cue. Yet, my mind

was still not relaxed; something else was not right. I wasn't breathing.

At impact, my knees had crashed into my face, the result of my torso being bent violently. Luckily this bend was aligned with the normal flexing axis of the human body and the only abnormal condition, that I could determine, was that my diaphragm and lungs had been so violently compressed that not one square inch of air remained in my chest.

Thirty seconds passed, then 45. Still no air. As my entire body literally screamed for oxygen, a very slight gasping movement stirred in my chest. Ten seconds later there was another, shortly followed by a half breath. Then there was breathing. The sudden relief was overwhelming.

To this day I consider myself one of the luckiest men alive because I was not seriously injured in that fall.

Treestand safety must be taken seriously. Kansans have been permanently paralyzed as a result of falls from trees, and fatalities have been documented. A single moment of carelessness can turn to tragedy.

While there are many aspects of treestand safety, the constant and proper use of a fall restraint belt or harness must lead our discussion. The simplest of these consist of two, two-inch-wide belts with buckles which are connected with a one- to two-foot connecting strap.

Tim Pool, the director of the National Bowhunter Education Foundation, is an expert on the topic of treestand safety.

"Those who hunt from elevated stands should develop an attitude of expecting the worst to happen," says Pool. "They should expect tree steps, tree stands, and certainly tree limbs to fail on them at any moment. It is a rare hunter who has never encountered such mishaps. In fact, one out of three treestand hunters will fall when using an elevated stand sometime during their hunting lifetime."

"The key," Pool continues, "is to always properly wear and be connected to the 'safety net' we call a full restraint device, which is a full-body harness. From the point of leaving the ground to returning again, never, not even for a few seconds, should a hunter be disconnected from his or her fall restraint device."

Pool recommends that those hunters using treestands learn to use and trust their full-body harness as a complete fall restraint system. "By moving the connecting strap



Never climb with equipment in hand. Use a haul rope only after strapping safely into the stand.

that is attached to the tether line of the harness as you climb up and down the tree, you will always be connected to the tree. If a fall should occur, you are attached to the tree reducing possible injuries and preventing you from hitting the ground. Those hunters who expect the unexpected are the people who are prepared and avoid tragedy," Pool concludes.

Those who use simple belt-design fall restraint systems should position the strap just under their arm pits, not around their waists. If such belts are worn too low, the hunter may find himself hanging up-side down since the upper torso is heavier than the lower torso. A belt that tightens around the mid-section can severely restrict breathing, and the victim may have only seconds to right himself before unconsciousness and only minutes before suffocation and death. For this reason, it is wise to keep a knife in an easily accessible pocket. This knife can be used in an emergency to cut free from an improperly positioned belt. Hopefully, the victim can stabilize his or her position before cutting the belt.

Safety harnesses, either the shoulder designs or the full-body harness designs, are considered to be the most desirable fall restraint devices, since these designs prevent any danger from suffocation and are attached in such a way to ensure upright suspension. If you plan to purchase a fall restraint device in the future, choose a harness design instead of a simple belt design.

Attach your fall restraint system to the tree so that there is no slack in the system when you are sitting down. In case of a fall, excess slack can cause tremendous shock. Falls by hunters wearing harnesses have some "cushion," generally considered to be about four inches, resulting from tightening and slippage of the belt or harness and normal stretch of belt and tether material.

For example, a 200-pound man falling 12 inches with a four-inch cushion "weighs" 490 pounds at impact. The same man in a 24-inch



Permanent stands, while convenient, quickly become dangerous. Boards weather and weaken, and nails or screws loosen as branches twist and sway in the wind. Besides the safety issue, permanent stands damage trees and are illegal to use on public areas.

fall with equal cushion "weighs" 692 pounds at impact, and if the fall is 36 inches, the "weight" is 850 pounds. So, get rid of the slack.

A hunter also has several options as to how he or she ascends to a treestand. Screw-in treesteps, ladders, and climbing sticks are some examples. Screw-in steps are more widely used than any other climbing system, yet statistics show that screw-in steps have a higher failure rate.

"If a hunter uses screw-in steps, he or she will have at least one step failure incident," says Tim Pool. "The severity of the incident will depend on the proper use of a fall restraint device. A far safer choice would be to use a ladder system or climbing sticks. Tree steps are an accident waiting to happen, since they are often installed or used improperly and are unpredictable most of the time."

The proper installation of screw-

in steps can reduce the likelihood of failure. First, steps should be screwed into living wood only. Always avoid dead trees. Screw every step into the tree trunk as far as the threads allow. Special precautions should be taken when climbing tree species that produce thick bark layers. Many Kansas bottomlands are lined with cottonwoods, trees famous for their thick, rough bark. When placing tree steps in thick-barked trees, it is wise to reduce the thickness of the bark layer with a hatchet or saw. This

allows the threads of the step to penetrate more deeply into the inner wood. Install each step so that the vertical section of the shank rests against the trunk. If the vertical shank projects outward from the trunk, the step will act as a fulcrum lever and will pull the threads from the wood.

When installing screw-in tree steps, place them on the opposite side of the tree from where the stand will be hung. This will minimize the risk of being "hooked" by the steps if a fall occurs.



Putting a portable treestand up and clearing shooting lanes can be hard work, and this is when many falls occur. A safety harness should be worn at all times.

When using tree steps, maintain three points of contact at all times. Two hands and one foot or two feet and one hand should be in contact with steps at all times. Avoid climbing rapidly. Attempting to move too quickly will reduce your ability to maintain three points of contact. Hopefully this long list of precautions will motivate hunters to purchase the more reliable climbing systems which include ladders and climbing sticks.

No matter what type of climbing system is used, it should be installed in such a manner so that you can step down onto the center of your tree stand. Only do so, however, after you have connected your fall restraint device. Never put yourself in a situation where you must pull yourself up to climb into your treestand.

Be extremely cautious about using limbs to climb to your tree stand. No matter how secure they seem, limbs may break unexpectedly and cause a fall.

The most commonly used type of treestand is the portable treestand. Portable treestands are simply strapped or chained to a tree at the desired height. A climbing system such as screw-in steps or climbing sticks must be used to place the stand and when climbing to and from the stand when hunting. The majority of treestand accidents are associated with the set-up or take-down of this type of treestand. The proper use of the fall restraint systems, previously discussed, would prevent such accidents.

Climbing tree stands are popular in regions of Kansas where trees grow straight with no branching low to the ground. Unlike portable tree stands, climbing stands are their own climbing system. The hunter adjusts the bands or brackets of the stand to fit the tree trunk and simply "inch worms" up the tree. The hunter should be connected to the tree trunk with a fall restraint device at all times when using a climbing tree stand. Always read and follow all instructions that come with the stand.

Ladder stands also incorporate

their own climbing system. There is no question that ladder stands are the safest method by which to hunt from an elevated position. Manufacturers of ladder stands do recommend that three people be present when placing or removing a ladder stand. After leaning the stand against the tree, a stabilizing brace must be firmly attach to the tree. Then, two persons must hold the stand, one on either side of the ladder, while the third person climbs the stand and secures the upper chain or strap attachment. The majority of ladder stand accidents occur during set-up or take-down. A fall-restraint device should always be worn when hunting from a ladder stand.

Hunters who have never used ladder stands question if deer are frightened by the physical presence of the ladder. The only way to answer this concern is to ask hunters familiar with the use of ladder stands. Ladder stand users give answers that vary from, "I've never had a problem" to "I've had deer appear to look at the ladder and follow it up to me. Then they proceeded as normal." The superior safety history of ladder stands suggests that they are worth the slight risk of spooking a deer.

Permanent stands are those which are built in a tree and left there. They are often made of wood or a combination of materials. They are exposed to weather and will deteriorate with time. Also, wind action which causes trees to twist and sway inevitably works loose the nails or screws used to secure such stands. For these reasons, the use of permanent stands is strongly discouraged.

Permanent stands are also subject to use by other hunters. You should never trust a permanent tree stand that was built by someone else. The National Bowhunter Education Foundation discourages building and using permanent stands.

Never climb to or from any type of treestand while carrying your bow, gun, or other equipment. Use a haul line to raise and lower any items that cannot be placed in a



Ladder stands are without question the safest for elevated hunting. However, several people are needed to safely erect or take down a ladder stand.

small backpack. Such a line can be attached to your bow or gun at ground level and then attached to your belt or belt loop. Many hunters permanently attach a haul line to a limb above their stand immediately after placing the stand.

The topic of treestand safety is a serious matter. Taking it seriously may save you from a crippling accident, or it may even save your life. Hunting from a treestand is undoubtedly one of the most popular techniques for hunting white-tailed deer in Kansas, especially for

bowhunters who must get close to game.

Hunters who regularly use tree-stands are encouraged to attend an International Bowhunter Education Program. Class locations and schedules can be obtained by calling (620) 672-5911 and asking for Hunter Education. Class schedules are also posted on the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks website at the address <www.kdwp.state.ks.us>.

Please make good hunting and safe hunting mean the same thing. 🦌



WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT KANSAS BOBWHITES

Roger D. Applegate, *small game project leader, Emporia*
and Christopher K. Williams, *University of Wisconsin*

Long-term declines in Kansas bobwhite numbers have hunters and biologists alarmed. Gradual changes in the landscape and land-use practices are having huge impacts on this popular game bird.

Bobwhite populations have been declining in Kansas for at least 30 years. One possible cause of this decline has been habitat change. In Kansas, one major source of habitat change has been the shifting of farming practices. As we have seen the development of new varieties of crops and tremendous advances in labor-saving machinery, farming operations have become less diversified. Additionally, livestock grazing has intensified. The consequence of these changes has been a decrease in the number of individual farms in Kansas while individual farming operations have increased in size.

As individual farms change their dynamics, habitat has been lost. When farms were small and more diversified, there were more fences to divide ownership and keep livestock out of crops. These many boundaries provided ample cover for wildlife. And every landowner's approach to farming was a little different, and crop rotation assured that a variety of land uses could be found within a relatively small area. Removal of fences to consolidate several farms into a single ownership and facilitate movement of machinery has led to simplification of the landscape.

To help us better understand how habitat could be affecting bobwhites, KDWP, the University of Wisconsin-Madison Department of Wildlife Ecology, and the Wisconsin Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, studied bobwhites on two study areas in the eastern Kansas Osage Plains and Flint Hills from 1991-1996 (See "Understanding Quail Needs" *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* September/October 1997). One of the study areas was predominantly used for grazing, while the other was a mixed agricultural area. Bobwhites were studied on both 7,000-acre areas simultaneously during the

breeding (March-August) and wintering (November-March) periods using radio transmitters and banding. During 1996-1999, additional winter work was conducted on a dozen 640-acre sites within the Osage Plains. The following are summaries of our findings.

Breeding Season Studies

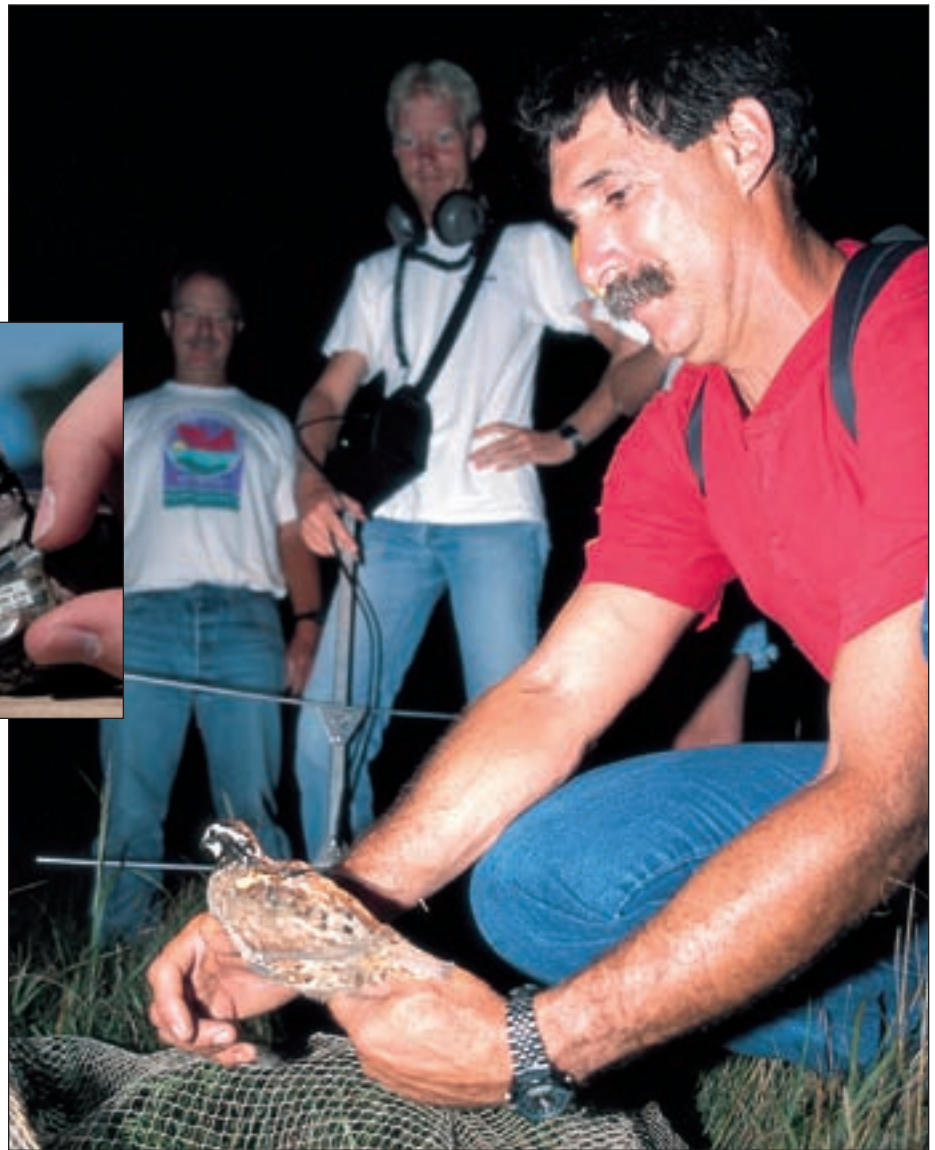
Habitat

The predominant habitat used by bobwhites within the study areas was idle land and pasture, with croplands being least preferred. Idle lands consist of areas that are generally not being used for agriculture such as brushy waterways, go-back fields, and treelines. In addition,

idle lands, pastures, and hayfields were the primary nesting habitat.

Survival

During the breeding season, bobwhite hens that were incubating eggs or raising broods had good survival. Over the entire breeding season, 26 percent of hens in the predominantly cropped area and 36 percent of those in the rangeland area survived. This survival was on par with hen bobwhite survival during the nesting season in other states. Survival of bobwhite males was 26 percent in the cropland and 51 percent in the rangeland areas. Although we did not directly measure brood survival, other observa-



Kansas bobwhites are fitted with radio transmitters so their movements and activities can be monitored. Roosting birds are recaptured at night, using lights and nets.



Kansas bobwhite nest success is good compared to other states. Hen survival during brood months is critical, making ideal habitat all the more important.

tions and wing barrel collections seem to indicate that we are experiencing significant brood mortality prior to opening of the hunting season.

Reproduction

Nest success (of those nests that hatched at least one chick) was 58 percent on the cropland area and 67 percent on the rangeland area. On one area in Mississippi, nest success was only 13 percent, showing that reproduction in Kansas is better.

Winter Studies

Habitat

Our telemetry studies of bobwhites gave us some very important insights into habitat use during winter months. The most important habitats to bobwhites during winter were idle lands and woodlots. Woodlot use increased in the cropland area after agricultural crops were harvested in the fall. Pastures and hayfields generally were not used by bobwhites during fall and winter months on this area. On the rangeland area, idle land use increased after crop harvest.

Bobwhite coveys that inhabited areas with more cropland and pasture had to range over a larger area to find escape cover.

Survival

Adult bobwhite hens had low survival during the hunting season (mid-November-January). However, adult hens survived better on the predominantly crop-

land area than on the rangeland area. Natural mortality of all bobwhites, due to predators and natural causes, was 70 percent on both study areas with an additional 11 percent hunting mortality on the cropland area and 22 percent on the rangeland area. Day hunting raptors, mostly red-tailed hawks, American kestrels, and northern harriers, were the predominant source of natural mortality.

Covey Dynamics

Additional studies focusing on the dynamics of bobwhite coveys were conducted on 12 640-acre study areas. This work demonstrated that observations of pioneer quail managers like Herbert L. Stoddard and Walter Rosene indicating that quail coveys maintained a consistent number of members throughout the season were correct. We found that individuals on our 12 study areas preferred to stay in a covey of 11 members. In fact, coveys of 11 members moved around the habitat less and had much higher survival rates than larger or smaller coveys. Movement, we submit, is the mechanism that allows coveys to regulate their size. Large coveys, those larger than 11 birds, move around and contact coveys that are smaller. Covey membership is changed by this process of movement and contact.

Living in coveys has three advan-



Winter weather and habitat play an important role in the survival of bobwhites. Natural mortality in study areas was 70 percent. Bobwhites move constantly and birds shift between coveys to form groups that average about 11 birds.

tages for bobwhites. First, by huddling together, a group of birds can stay warm during cold winter nights (thermodynamics). Second, because quail need to feed and watch for predators simultaneously, there is benefit to living in a group because while some individuals are feeding, others can be watching for predators (vigilance). Third, a covey of bobwhites flushing to the approach of a predator creates a tremendous disturbance that can confuse the predator and make it difficult to select an individual bird to attack.

Although a small covey (less than 11) tends to feed more quickly and efficiently, it also tends to be less vigilant for predators, has less efficient thermodynamics, and consequently has lower individual survival. As the number of covey members decreases through mortality, the covey moves around the landscape more to find and recruit new members.

Although large coveys (greater than 11) tend to have increased thermodynamics and predator vigilance, they also feed longer and less efficiently. These large coveys move around more, looking for food, and are likely more conspicuous to predators because of the movement. As a result, a large covey tends to have lower individual survival and eventually decreases to a stable size of around 11 birds. Hence, the stable covey size is a trade-off between improved thermodynamics, increased feeding efficiency, reduced movement, increased predator vigilance, and better individual survival.

Flooding

During our field studies in 1998, we measured the impact of flooding on bobwhites inhabiting floodplain compared to upland sites. After 8-inches of rain from October 31 through November 3, and a smaller 1-inch rain on November 30, there was extensive flooding in our study areas. Mortality of bobwhites in the floodplain of the Neosho and Cottonwood Rivers was 22% percent, whereas mortality of those



Hunting accounts for only a small portion of the annual mortality of bobwhites in Kansas. Biologists concentrate on habitat as the key to any future rebound.

living in the uplands of our study area was 2 percent. We estimated the total loss of bobwhite coveys on our study areas was one covey for every 247 acres of floodplain habitat. This mortality was significant because a majority of the best habitat was in the floodplain, and the 1998 flooding was the third significant flooding in the 1990s (1993, 1995, 1998). As of spring 2001, very few quail reoccupied the decimated floodplain area.

The Upshot

Based on our research, these are the recommendations we can make at this time. Some of these recom-



Woody habitat becomes critical to covey survival during severe winter weather.

mendations may be unpalatable as they go counter to many of the best earlier assumptions about bobwhite management. Others are based on our confirmation of earlier knowledge.

Breeding Season

To improve quail populations, we need to promote an increase in suitable brood habitat. Generally, this means increasing weedy fields that provide insect-producing weeds and adjacent dense shrubby cover for hiding. Feeding areas have to be relatively open to facilitate small chick movement. Consequently, increased nesting cover in the form of lightly grazed pastures, old fields, and idle land should be encouraged. Studies in Oklahoma and elsewhere have shown that woody plants are important components of bobwhite nest sites, and these should be encouraged by maintaining old fields and idle lands.

Winter

The most important winter habitat management effort should be developing shrubby escape cover in close proximity to food sources. This should be done along the margins of crop fields as was typical before clean farming took out fence lines and idle lands. This means encouraging a farm landscape that resembles what we had 50-60 years ago.

Most importantly, the landscape must facilitate covey contact. That is, to maximize the number of coveys on the land, we must stop thinking of just improving habitat on our individual back 40, but rather focus on improving everyone's back 40. Small coveys that cannot contact larger coveys are doomed to become extinct. Therefore, we need to focus on a landscape that is not fragmented into small tracts of a few hundred or even a few thousand acres in which quail coveys are subject to extinction. Rather, management should be applied to continuous tracts of land where coveys can exchange membership to promote the highest survival.

On the more pessimistic side, such recommendations may not be possible, or may be possible only in a few very large areas. We are also only making relatively informed guesses on habitat management to improve bobwhite populations. Therefore, we must test how bobwhite populations respond to a variety of habitat practices that have the potential to improve brood survival and increase the density of

coveys, especially those practices available through the Farm Bill programs. We also need to continue to closely examine hunting mortality and its effect on bobwhite populations under the existing landscape conditions we have. Any factor that tends to reduce average covey size on the landscape has the potential to cause the cascading effect of covey extinction.

Flooding

Because flooding in lowlands is a concern, every effort should be made to improve as much upland habitat for bobwhites as possible. In many of our so-called upland situations, the habitat is associated with brushy draws that can also be subjected to flash flooding. In these cases, an effort should be made to expand available riparian cover to provide quail habitat outside of flood-prone areas.

The more we learn about the changing landscape's effect on bobwhites, the more complicated management becomes. Improving habitat and bolstering quail numbers will require extensive cooperative efforts (see sidebar). ♡



Southeast Kansas Quail Initiative

To address long-term quail population declines in the southeastern part of Kansas, traditionally Kansas' top quail region, the department assembled the Southeast Kansas Quail Working Group. The group is made up of individuals from a wide array of organizations and agencies, including Kansas Farm Bureau, the Natural Resource Conservation Service, Pittsburg State University, Kansas State Extension Service, Quail Unlimited, See-Kan R C & D, private landowners, and KDWP. The group has made recommendations that include landowner cost-share programs to develop habitat beneficial to quail.

Currently, the program is operating in Allen, Bourbon, Crawford, and Neosho counties, offering up to \$2,000 per cooperator annually for habitat enhancement work. Examples of enhancements include:

- Replacing fescue with native grass
- Disturbance of stagnant stands of vegetation (strip disking)
- Renovation of mature hedgerows
- Establishing foot plots or leaving some grain unharvested
- Establishment of shrubs
- Prescribed livestock management
- Livestock exclusion from borders and odd areas
- Use of conservation headlands (narrow field perimeters left uncultivated and free of pesticides)
- Meadow management

Department biologists are also working with landowners within a demonstration area to learn more about land-use practices and their effect on quail. Land management techniques that are both beneficial to quail and profitable to farmers will be researched and demonstrated.

For more information about the Southeast Quail Initiative, contact the KDWP office in Chanute, (620) 432-0380, or contact your nearest USDA office.

LISTEN



UP!

text and photos by Mike Blair
associate editor, Pratt

Hearing loss is common among hunters and recreational shooters. Damage done by gunshot noise on unprotected ears is permanent and accumulative.

I was in 7th grade when a mobile hearing test came to our school. Each student was taken into the back of a truck having an array of electronic equipment, instructed to wear a headset, and asked to respond to a series of tones. I heard only a few before silence closed in. I saw the controller turning dials, but there was no sound. The test led to an alarming discovery.

At a young age, I already suffered hearing loss in the high ranges. The audiologist asked some questions and determined that the loss resulted from driving cableless tractors and shooting guns, both of which I did frequently without the aid of hearing protection. I thought I was a goner but have survived nearly five decades hearing most things except the shrill songs of warblers, some insects, and the occasional request to take out the trash. Even so, the experience was a wake-up call.

Hearing loss should be a matter of concern to every hunter or firearms enthusiast, since all gunshots exceed the amount of noise that the ears can safely hear. Sound is measured in decibels (dB,) and each time decibel exposure rises much above 85, damage can occur to the fragile hair cells of the inner ears. The threshold of pain induced by noise is around 140 dB, and the average shotgun blast measures in the 150-160 dB range. A new trend toward ported shotgun barrels or muzzle brakes (which vent gases and reduce recoil) actually increases sound levels by 10 percent or more. Some high-powered rifles and pistols produce reports in the 200 dB range.

Jay Tusten, audiologist for Heartland Hearing Services at the Pratt Regional Medical Center, explains why gunfire is a particularly troublesome culprit in hearing loss. "The 'impact' of noise plays a major part in damaging the inner ear. For instance, constant exposure to 85 dB for an 8-hour period can cause hearing loss, but an explosive sound like a gunshot can severely damage hair cells instantly. The middle ear has a protective reflex

that can reduce the effects of loud sounds, but the reflex is not very effective against gunfire."

Unfortunately, the effects of gunfire on unprotected ears are cumulative and irreversible. With each shot, damage is added. At first, this results in the loss of ability to hear high-pitched sounds, but later cuts into the frequencies normally associated with speech. Tinnitus, a constant and annoying ringing in the ears, is also a common problem resulting from noise-induced ear injury. The question for someone repeatedly exposed to loud noise is not if, but when, the damage occurs. Anyone shooting firearms without ear protection can count on hearing loss as time passes.

"The thing with gunfire is, some folks will shoot a gun without

hearing protection and seem to be fine," says Tusten. "However, loss is occurring. Sensitivity varies among individuals, and it seems that those who suffered ear infections at a young age may be prone to earlier noise-induced hearing loss. But eventually, it always shows up."

Tusten says that a "noise notch" indicating hearing loss in the 3000-6000 Hertz (Hz) frequency range is classic in the hearing tests of shooters. "This mainly affects response to high-pitched sounds," he explains, "but some of the higher-pitched elements of speech reach the 4000-6000 Hz range. At this point, hearing loss can begin to affect understanding of a conversation."

If you tend to dismiss the danger of hearing loss, think again. A surprisingly high number of hunters are affected. A widespread survey conducted by E.A.R., Inc., a company that produces high-end hearing protection devices, found that about 47 percent of active shooters have noticeable hearing loss, 34 percent have tinnitus, and 32 percent have hearing loss great enough to interfere with conversation. "From my experience with hunters, I'm surprised these numbers aren't even higher,"

says Tusten.

Where hearing loss has occurred, hearing aids can be of some value. However, while these amplify sound, they cannot restore the clarity of sound that a person once had. "Digital hearing aids have come a long way," Tusten points out, "but nothing can replace the original equipment."

This makes hearing protection for shooters especially important. Youngsters learning to shoot should always wear ear protectors on the range and in appropriate hunting situations. For older shooters where hearing loss has already occurred, the consistent use of hearing protection is important to stop further damage.

Several types of hearing protection devices are available. These include earplugs, earmuffs, mechanical protectors, and electronic protectors ranging from cheap to expensive. All are better than cotton or tissue paper wadded and placed into the ear canal, which is only slightly better than nothing.

Earplugs and earmuffs are normally static devices that simply block a certain amount of sound from reaching the inner ear. All sound is blocked equally, so that speech or the sound of a rising pheasant is blocked out to the same degree as a shotgun blast. These devices normally eliminate about



Hearing protection is important for all ages, but starting early can prevent hearing loss that plagues nearly half of all shooters today. Several types of protection are available, including the inexpensive ear plugs shown above. Protection is especially important to trap and skeet shooters.





Electronic earmuffs protect hunters from the noisy reports of rifles and shotguns while allowing them to hear normal conversation or approaching game.

20-30 dB. Generally, the earmuffs are more efficient.

Cheap, disposable earplugs (usually made of foam) that expand to fit the ear canal offer about the same level of protection as more expensive custom-molded plugs. However, the custom plugs are usually more comfortable to wear on a long hunt. Where a higher level of protection is needed (for instance, when shooting large-caliber pistols or for sensitive ears,) earplugs can be used together with shooting muffs to block even more sound.

Mechanical noise-filter valve and baffle types of earplugs offer a step up in efficiency. These allow environmental sounds or conversation to be heard about normally, but they cut off loud impulse noises. Their advantage allows a hunter to hear his buddy's stories or approaching game, while offering protection from the sound of a gun blast. Mechanical devices are relatively inexpensive, but their disadvantage lies in a tendency toward

reduced fidelity or sound quality.

Best of all are the electronic hearing protection devices which take the mechanical protectors to a higher level of fidelity. These offer instantaneous peak-clipping shutout of loud impulse sounds, along with excellent transmission of sounds in the normal range. These are available as earplugs or earmuffs from a number of makers in a range of prices. As expected, the best are expensive.

Type of shooting plays a role in potential hearing loss. Target shooters are exposed to greater risk, since they are usually in the close company of other shooters and hear those shots as well as their own. Waterfowl hunting from blinds can be particularly damaging, since hunters sit close together and fire shots in close quarters. Also, pit blinds act as resonance chambers and amplify the sounds of the guns. Dove hunting can be troublesome due to the tendency to fire many shots in a short time. Noise danger

of upland hunting is generally reduced due to less frequent shooting opportunities and greater distance between hunters.

Obviously, the type of hearing protection selected depends on need. A registered trapshooter will probably choose more expensive protection than a twice-a-year bird hunter. However, all shooters will benefit from hearing protection. Once hearing is lost, it can never be regained.

If you're a gun enthusiast, take precautions to cover this important aspect of shooting safety. It's easy to accomplish, and helps save a valuable personal resource already under assault by a noisy world. ♣

SIGNS OF HEARING LOSS

- The first sign of hearing loss may be noticeable in a subconscious effort to turn a "good" ear to a conversation. Interestingly, a right-handed shooter may first notice loss of hearing in the left ear, since it is turned toward the muzzle while aiming a gun (reversed for a left-handed shooter.)
- Slight hearing loss makes it difficult to follow conversation or segregate a particular sound in crowded and noisy situations such as a party, even when there is no trouble hearing one-on-one conversation.
- Hearing loss is often noticed through difficulty understanding someone who is not facing you.
- Trouble determining the direction of a sound often means that one ear suffers more hearing loss than the other.
- A constant ringing or buzzing in the ears is a sign of hearing loss. This is called tinnitus, and ranges from a minor annoyance to a perceived volume that makes it difficult for some to go to sleep in a quiet room.



Beginning Wingshooting

by Ed Augustine
NRA Certified shotgun instructor, Junction City

There's nothing like the thrill of breaking clay targets with a shotgun. With the proper approach, a new shooter can smoking targets soon after the first lesson starts.

Teaching wingshooting to a new shooter begins with understanding. And it's understanding that will take the beginning shooter to success. First, handling firearms safely must be taught. Students must know and understand the basic fundamentals of handling a shotgun safely, as well as loading and unloading the different action types. Muzzle control — keeping the muzzle of the shotgun always pointed in a safe direction — is one of the most important firearms safety fundamentals. Stress to students that inattention to safe gun handling will not be tolerated. It's also a good time to go over range rules, where students who are shooting will stand, where those not shooting will stand, and eye and ear protection requirements.

Then we start with an understanding of ammunition. New shooters should be taught how it's manufactured, how it works, and how to choose the right shotgun shell for the task. For example, large shot and lots of powder aren't required to break a clay target. For beginners, choose a load that says "lite," which probably has about 2 3/4 drams of powder and 1 ounce of No. 8 shot in a 12 gauge. Twenty gauge light loads generally include 3/4 ounces of shot. It's important to select a load that produces little recoil.

Next comes an understanding of how a shotgun works. All action types should be discussed and demonstrated, but for youth or women beginners, a semi-automatic is the best choice. The semi-automatic shotgun reduces recoil by using some of it to eject the spent hull. Semi-autos are versatile and will suit any type of shooting sport.

Now, we need to talk

about gun fit. "Off the shelf," most guns are made to fit an average adult male shooter. The length of pull, or distance from the trigger to the butt of the stock, is about 14 1/4 inches. This is too long for most youth and women shooters. For best results, start them out with a gun that has a length of pull 12 1/2 or 13 inches. Some manufacturers have youth models or you may have to shorten the stock on an adult model shotgun. Youth model guns are also shorter and lighter, making them

easier to hold and swing for small shooters. A gun that fits will allow good form and give the shooter better sight of the target.

Proper form, or shooting position, starts with placement of the feet. Stance is critical, and I think it may be the most overlooked element of form. Think about the foundation of a house. If the basement walls are not plumb, straight, and erect, everything clear up to the chimney will need to be adjusted. For a right-handed shooter, picture



Above the author teaches a student where to place the butt of gun on the shoulder, which is critical to the enjoyment of shooting. Gun mount and stance must be practiced to become natural.



Learning to mount the shotgun properly is the first step (above). Head level, both eyes open, the stock is brought to the cheek, then the shoulder is brought forward. A shooting coach watches the swing and corrects problems immediately to avoid forming bad habits.

a clock on the ground. The left foot should point at 12 o'clock and the right foot at 2 o'clock with about 6 to 8 inches between the heels. The left foot, or 12 o'clock foot, should point to where you plan on breaking the target, or your "zone of fire." It's that simple.

It's important to know whether a new shooter is right or left handed, but eye dominance may be more critical. For wingshooting, a shotgun is pointed, not aimed. The shooter should keep both eyes open and focused on the target at all times. Using both eyes on the target allows the brain to compute distance and speed, which with experience will tell the shooter how much lead is required. A new shooter who shoots right handed but is left eye dominant will surely struggle because the dominant left eye will not be lined up with the barrel.



Someone who's never shot a shotgun before may be better off shooting left handed if they are left eye dominant. It's important to determine eye dominance when teaching wingshooting. To do this have the shooter focus on a distant object with both eyes open and straight ahead. Have them place their finger or thumb directly below the object, again with both eyes open and focused on the object. Now have them close their left eye. If the object stays aligned with their thumb, they are right eye dominant. If the object jumps to the right when the left eye is closed, they are left eye dominant.

Now we've established that our shooter is right handed and right eye dominant. Let's mount the gun. Have the shooter stand straight and

hold their arms out in front of them at shoulder level. Move the left hand to the right elbow and the right hand to the left elbow. Now place the gun on the right shoulder, in the pocket that formed when the arms came up. Remember to keep the arms and elbows level with the shoulders. The butt stock should be on top of the shoulder and the muzzle at 45 degrees. Now ask the shooter to place their cheek on the stock and look down the barrel.

The student should now be asked to place their left hand on the forearm of the gun and the right hand on the grip. Slowly lower the gun to horizontal while asking the student to hunch the right shoulder up a bit. Now lean the student forward slightly at the waist, keeping the gun level, the eyes forward and the jawline parallel with the ground. The left knee should bend slightly, and about 60 percent of the shooter's weight should be on the left, or front, foot. Show the student how the weight-forward stance allows the body to pivot smoothly while swinging the gun. This is the fundamental stance and mount and must be practiced so that it becomes natural.

OK, let's discuss target selection for beginning shooters. We want a target that is fun to shoot at and is easy to hit. Success is everything. Most important is the mental picture of the target and the muzzle when the shot is taken and the target breaks. My choice is an incoming target. In the field, this would be like a dove coming into a pond, or a duck as it prepares to land in the decoys. To obtain this for practice, I use a battery operated, remote controlled trap placed about 60 yards in front of the shooter. The trap is adjusted to toss a target toward the shooter, rising about 20 feet as it travels to land about ten feet in front of the shooter. The shot is called a "blot shot."

Shooting practice can be as simple as hand-thrown clays on the back 40. However, one of the best ways to have beginners breaking targets is to set up a portable target launcher to throw incoming targets (right).



As the target is thrown from the trap, the shooter swings the gun up and under the target until the muzzle “blots “ out the target. The trigger is pulled while the gun is kept swinging and pieces fall to the ground. Some shooters will want to ride, or follow, the target before shooting. Remember, the closer the target gets, the smaller the shot pattern will be. One rule of thumb tells us that as shot leaves the muzzle the pattern spreads out about one inch for each yard that it travels. So three yards is three inches, 20 yards is 20 inches, and 30 yards is 30 inches. Don’t let the shooter wait until the shot gets “righter.” It’s best to shoot as soon as the muzzle blots out the target, everything done in one smooth motion.

Once the shooter has gained some confidence breaking the incomer, have them shoot the same target twice. How can they do that if they broke it? Load two shells for the student and tell them to break the biggest piece of the target with the second shot. We want the student’s eyes searching “out there” for the target or piece. We don’t want a student looking down the barrel or aiming. The idea is to get the student to see the target then move the gun until the muzzle touches the target, then “bang,” success happens. This is kind of


sneaking up on the shooting style called the swing-through method.

The swing-through method is a great way to teach a new shooter to break moving targets. Here’s how it works. If we could hook up a series of cameras and electrical gizmos to the body of a good swing-through shooter, we would see the following sequence of events: As the target is first seen, the shooter starts the gun in motion. Next the shooter starts swinging the gun along the path of the target, from behind it. The shooter must swing faster so than the target is moving in order to catch up to it. At that time, the brain sends a signal to the finger to operate the trigger. It responds while the gun is now pointed ahead of the target. Now, the mechanical things happen in the gun causing the shell to perform its function, all the time the gun is still moving. Finally the shot leaves the muzzle and flies out at about 1,200 feet per second to seek and destroy the target. And again the gun and therefore the muzzle keep swinging on the same plane as the target, following the bird or target all the way to the ground. This takes place in less than the blink of an eye so we really can’t see it happen in real life,



but the gizmos we mentioned earlier could and in fact have recorded all of this. This is just a long way of saying that if we swing to and through the target, lead takes care of itself. Make sense? The faster the target, the faster we must swing. While coaching a shooter, don’t tell them they are shooting behind the target, tell them to swing faster.

Next, bring the trap in to throw going-away targets, but keep them breakable. Don’t let them get too high, just nice, outgoing targets like a quail bursting from cover and streaking away. As the shooter gains confidence, move the shooter to the left, then the right, to get an angle shot. Again the swing-through method comes into play.

One other thing. If you have the good fortune to be with a new shooter when he or she breaks that first target, stop for a moment and retrieve that empty shell. Make a big deal about presenting that shell to them, for it’s truly a trophy and the first of many happy memories to come. 

SAFE AT HOME

text and photos by Marc Murrell
manager, Great Plains Nature Center, Wichita

Tragic home firearm accidents aren't inevitable. They are preventable if gun owners assume responsibility for their firearms and educate their children.

It's a tragic headline. The theme is the same, and always sad. A youngster finds a gun and starts playing with it. The gun is loaded and it fires. The child or a bystander is injured or killed. Such tragedies show no preference for age, race, sex or religion, but when the victim

is a child, the impact is greater. Why do these accidents have to happen? They don't — plain and simple. All careless gun tragedies can be prevented.

More than 30 million Americans enjoy some type of shooting-related recreation using handguns, shot-

guns, and rifles. Many home firearm accidents involve handguns, but any gun is dangerous when handled incorrectly.

Home firearm safety is the responsibility of all gun owners. It should go even beyond that. Everyone, whether they own a gun

or not, should educate their children about what to do if they or one of their friends finds a gun. A child who has never been shown how to handle a gun may be particularly curious if he sees one at a friend's house. After all, what youngster hasn't seen a television hero save the day with a gun? Guns look pretty neat on TV.

According to the National Safety Council, household accidents involving firearms have decreased significantly over the past 20 years. Although this is good news, even one injury or fatality is too many. The National Shooting Sports Foundation offers a brochure called "Firearms Responsibility in the Home," which lists several common-sense guidelines. The rules for safe storage of sporting firearms are simple and easy to follow:

1. Always unload sporting firearms carefully and completely before taking them into the home. Never load a sporting firearm in the home.

2. Always make sure that firearms in your home are securely stored in a location inaccessible to children. Ammunition should be stored in a separate location, locked and also inaccessible to children.


3. Always place firearms in their proper storage location immediately after returning from a hunting trip or a day at the range.

4. Always re-check firearms carefully and completely to confirm they are "still" unloaded when you remove them from storage. Accidents have occurred when a family member has borrowed or loaned a firearm and returned it to storage while it was still loaded.

5. Always remember: It is your responsibility to make certain the firearms in your home are not casually accessible to anyone — especially young people.

The brochure also discusses firearms kept for home security. Some people may feel the need to keep a loaded gun in the home for protection. Special precautions have to be taken in these situations. The firearm should be readily accessible to you, yet inaccessible or inoperative to others. The assumption that guns hidden under the mattress or stashed on the top shelf of a closet are safe and inaccessible to children has proven deadly. Quick-release trigger locks, chamber/cylinder locks or specialized locked cases that can be instantly opened by authorized persons should all be considered to secure a firearm.

Ultimately, the responsibility of home firearm safety lies with the gun owner. But in today's world, many adults don't take this responsibility seriously enough. All parents need to discuss firearm safety with their children. And it's never too early to start. Each time I removed a gun from its locked cabinet in the presence of my young children, I ask them what they should do if they or a friend ever found a gun. Even at a young age, they understand they should not touch the gun and she should tell an adult.

Firearms kept in the home demand complete attention. Precautions must be 100 percent effective. Anything less invites tragedy. 

The National Shooting Sports Foundation has a variety of publications that focus on firearm safety in the home and field which are available for a small fee. They should be required reading for parents and children. The brochures can be obtained by contacting NSSF, Flintlock Ridge Office Center, 11 Mile Hill Rd., Newtown, CT 06470-2359, or call (203) 426-1320.

All home firearms tragedies can be prevented through responsible gun owners and education. All guns should be kept locked away and inaccessible to children. Children should be taught what to do if they or a friend finds and firearm.

Opening Act

text and photos by Mike Blair
associate editor, Pratt

Whistling wings break the lull of a September afternoon. Men and dogs hunker in the sunflowers, eyes searching, pulses quickening. Doves are on the way, and gunfire means the beginning of another season. It's tradition, and despite the heat and dust, it's a happy preview of autumn days to come.







Camouflaged hunters hiding in meager shade wait by a pond for the evening flights. Thirsty doves arrive to dip and roll through patterns of eights. Some fall and some don't. These are not your standard straight-aways; doves are sizzling, tricky targets.





Fifteen birds. That's a limit and sometimes only minutes' worth of shooting. Or, in some years, a week's worth. Doves, abundant as they are, head south quickly as temperatures cool. Timing makes the season. Hunters pray for heat and hope the spell supplies hold out. Shoot three straight, and you think you've got the hang of it. Miss the next six and wish you had tracers.



The whole experience — sweat, the smell of spent shells, a muddy dog with a mouthful of feathers, sore shoulders, a sunset on golden water, a hip pouch heavy with doves, a post-hunt barbecue — these are the trademarks of Kansas dove hunting.

Breathe it in, and dream. Grand upland days lie just ahead . . .



Edited by Mark Shoup

SO MANY QUESTIONS

Editor:

Why did KDWP lead the Kansas people to believe that we were having a record number of car-deer accidents? According to the insurance companies, we were at a 16-year low. Doesn't KDWP research these matters before issuing a statement that a heavy deer harvest is necessary?

This is the first time I can remember we didn't have to fill out a report card attached to the deer tag to send in. How is KDWP supposed to know how many deer were taken? I don't see how they can call everyone by phone to verify the harvest.

I hunt in Unit 3. I have been out here 14 years and hunt in a public hunting area. The deer have never been that plentiful. With unlimited tags, the area was swamped with hunters. The majority of these hunters had five tags in their pockets. There wasn't a spike buck or doe that had a chance of surviving. People were rude and very aggressive to fill that many tags. I never saw so many small bucks taken. It will take years before bucks will be mature again. The local wildlife managers couldn't even keep up with people filling the game tags on public lands. The local residents were outraged at the heavy harvest permitted by KDWP.

In the area I live, most deer accidents happen where people won't let anyone hunt. Some are in areas where there are small-acreage housing areas where the deer are unmolested. Other areas where deer accidents happen are along leased land. Because the landowners can have control over deer tags and lease their land to outfitters, they restrict the harvest of does for more buck production. These same people complain about hitting deer that come off their property. Will KDWP take these areas into account before the next massive harvest?

With the unlimited deer tags issued in

2001, will it increase the out-of-state tags in 2002? I know that a percentage of tags must go to out of state hunters. Was this a political move to increase the number of out of state tags?

I enjoy your articles and the great photography in your magazine. I appreciate your honest answers.

*Daniel Duncan
Buhler*

Dear Mr. Duncan:

Whew. You have a number of questions. I'll try to answer them in order.

First, KDWP never led anyone to believe their were a record high number of deer-vehicle accidents recently. In fact, we put out a news release last winter stating that in 2000, the number of these accidents had actually dropped. According to the Kansas Department of Transportation – which compiles these statistics – this was the first drop in deer-vehicle accidents in 16 years, not a 16-year low, as you state. However, in 1999, there were a record high 10,254 vehicle-deer accidents in the state.

Please keep in mind that deer-vehicle accidents are not the only factor used in determining the number of deer permits. Crop damage complaints, biologists' reports, previous year's harvest, and public tolerance of deer are all taken into consideration.

A sample number of hunters in each unit receive report cards, and we have found that the rate of return is much higher. Experience has shown that this method is much more cost-effective and just as reliable a method as sending every permit holder a survey, then repeatedly trying to contact those who fail to return the survey.

In response to sportsmen's concerns, this coming year, hunters will only be able to use two whitetail antlerless only deer game tags in many units.

Regarding wildlife managers not being able to "keep up with people filling game tags on public lands," it is illegal to use game tags on public land.

If you are saying that people were blatantly disregarding this regulation, I would encourage you and all your friends to turn those violators in. The game tags were designed to help landowners who believe they have too many deer on their property, and that's where they are meant to be used.

I agree that areas where deer are protected are most likely to experience higher rates of deer-vehicle accidents. This is why we encourage landowners to open their property to hunters, and our Walk-In Hunter Access program has helped with this. However, we cannot force a landowner to open his or her property, nor do we have the right to tell them not to lease it.

Our deer biologist has worked with KDOT to identify hot spots of accidents and associated trend data. Because the number of accidents in a unit one year is one determinant of the number of permits available in that unit the next year, these areas are, by default, taken into consideration.

The number of nonresident deer permits offered in 2002 is actually down – from 7,804 in 2001 to 7,581 in 2002.

–Shoup

WHEN DO TURKEYS FLY?

Editor:

Spring turkey season is over, and I have a question. Soon after, hens lay their eggs, which brings up roosting questions. Do hens stay on the ground with their hatchlings or do they leave them to roost in trees? Not sure how old baby turkeys are when they begin flying up to roost in trees. Any info would be helpful.

*Rick Sallee
Leavenworth*

Dear Mr. Salee:

Turkey hens were in fact already nesting by the latter part of March. Every attempt is made to time the opening of the spring turkey hunting season with the second peak of male

gobbling activity. The second peak is the result of most hens already being on a nest and the gobblers getting lonely. The gobbling helps to attract any hens that have not already bred and started nesting. In most years, this event has more to do with day length than any other factor although weather will have day-to-day influences in some instances.

Regarding roosting behavior, hens remain on the ground until poults are able to fly into trees for roosting. Generally poults can get into trees from 9 to 16 days of age. Their very first short flights will take place at around 5 days of age.

—Roger D. Applegate, small game researcher, Emporia

KIDS' KLINIK

Editor:

Last spring, my son and I attended the Fishing Fun Day at the Ellis City Lake. Mr. Lynn Davignon and his staff presented a great clinic, and my son and I learned a lot. We had a fantastic time. I wanted to thank the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, Mr. Davignon, and his staff for their time and talents with us. It was a great start to the Father's Day weekend. Once again, thank you for a great day.

*Eric Flax
Hays*

THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

Editor:

Because of my age (94), I'm unable to renew for another year of your fine magazine. I've surely enjoyed it, but there seems to come a time when a person cannot continue doing what I have done, lo, these many years.

I thank you for all the past years of my enjoyment of your fine magazine.

*Grace Rogers
Auburn*

WIHA WOE

(Editor's Note: The following letter was sent to Tom Bowman, district wildlife biologist, Wakefield, by a landowner who has decided to pull out of the Walk-In Hunter Area program because of the slovenly behavior of a few hunters. The man had 1,200 acres enrolled, which will no longer be available to public hunting because of slobs who call themselves hunters. It illustrates the importance of hunter ethics and responsibility and the need for hunters to police each other if great programs such as WIHA are to continue.)

Dear Tom:

I have decided to terminate the Walk-In Hunting contract; I feel I owe you an explanation:

1) my son is now taking care of the land, and he prefers not to have it in Walk-In Hunting; and

2) I had a bad experience with some hunters last year who had been drinking. I asked them nicely not to shoot all of the quail, but they informed me in very vulgar terms that they had a right because it was posted as "Walk-In Hunting."

Tom, at my age, I didn't do it for the rent but because I thought it was a good program for the state. Also, I know that any problems with Walk-In Hunting are

in the minority, but I don't want to be subjected to that kind of abuse.

*James Cole
Washington*

Dear Mr. Cole:

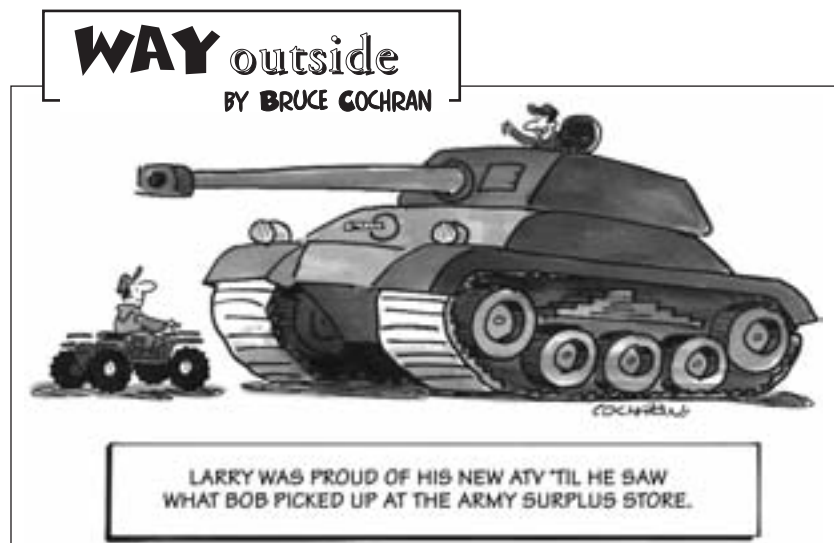
I received your letter stating that you would like to withdraw from the Walk-In Hunting Area program. I wish to thank you for your past years of participation with us.

It is indeed unfortunate that you ran into some bad apples disguising themselves as hunters. It is also unfortunate that you did not get their names or license numbers so that we could have handled the situation. It is people like those you ran into who have caused so much land to be posted. As is often the case, a bad experience with one individual ruins it for everyone else. To my knowledge, we have not had any other instances such as the one you experienced.

I will begin removing the signs in the next few weeks. If you have any other questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to call.

Again, thank you for your participation in the Walk-In Hunting Area program.

—Tom Bowman



Tangled Web

In October, 1999, CO B.J. Thurman, Elkhart, received a tip that a man had illegally killed a mule deer buck near Hill City the previous December and a white-tail buck with a rifle within the city limits of Kansas City in January, 1999. An Overland Park man had accompanied the poacher.

A record check revealed that the poacher had a couple of permits for the 1998-99 season, but neither permit was for the deer reportedly killed.

In December of 1999, the Kansas City Police detained this same man along the Kansas River within the city limits on a complaint that he had trespassed and shot a nine-point whitetail buck from his vehicle. There were also photos in the vehicle showing the man with a dead mule deer buck, a dead whitetail buck, and a dead black bear apparently killed in a western state. The police seized the rifle and cited the man for trespassing and discharging a firearm in the city. He later paid fines and costs totaling \$327.50.

The COs seized the tagged buck and the photos and cited the man for wearing no orange clothing and shooting the buck from his vehicle. After being shown one of photos from his truck, he admitted that he had taken another deer illegally. The COs asked about the deer harvest reports he submitted for the 1998-99 season. He admitted both were false.

They then showed him the photo of him with a mule deer buck. He said that the landowner had shot and tagged the buck and gave it to him.

He said he killed the bear in Washington in August, 1999. He said he had a tag for it and had mailed the hide to a Kansas City, Missouri, taxidermist for mounting.

The man later surrendered the 10-point whitetail antlers from the January, 1999, deer and received two more citations for taking a deer without a valid permit and trespassing.

On Jan. 6, 2000, Thurman spoke with the Overland Park man who had been along on the Hill City hunt in 1998. He repeated what the poacher said about

obtaining the mule deer buck from the landowner.

Thurman requested the assistance of Jim Persson, U.S. Fish and Wildlife special agent. Persson contacted the Missouri taxidermist, who confirmed that he had received the bear hide for mounting without a tag.

In January, 2000, the Kansas City area man pleaded guilty in Wyandotte County Court on four charges relating to the two illegally taken whitetail bucks, paid \$645 in fines and costs and \$75 to the locker plant for the cost of processing the deer that the COs had seized in December 1999. The man lost his rifle, his 2000 hunting license, and his hunting privileges for one year.

Meanwhile, Hill City CO Larry Hastings talked to the Hill City landowner who supposedly gave the 1998 mule deer to the man. He gave Hastings a written statement that the visiting hunter killed the buck and that he, the landowner, illegally transferred his tag to cover the kill. The landowner was charged with illegally transferring his hunt-own-land permit and was placed on diversion. The terms required that he pay \$145 in fines and costs and educate others about the legal use of landowner

deer permits. He was not allowed to hunt deer or even assist other deer hunters for one year.

The Kansas City area man later admitted he killed the 1998 mule deer. He was convicted in Graham County Court and paid \$295 in fines and costs and had another six months hunting privileges revoked.

To complicate matters, his bear had not been tagged and had been mailed across state lines, and his 1999 mule deer was illegally taken and transported from Kansas to Missouri, both violations of the federal Lacey Act. His federal fines totaled \$2,000. The bear mount was forfeited. The taxidermist was charged by the Missouri Department of Conservation for a record-keeping violation and paid \$141.50.

In addition, it was learned that the deer poacher had a past burglary conviction, which prohibited him from possessing a firearm, so he was charged with felony firearms possession. He pleaded guilty, paid \$196 in fines and costs, received a one-year probation, and may not possess a firearm for five more years.

—Bruce Bertwell, conservation officer, Olathe

WATER HEROICS

Last may, a boat was capsized somewhere south of Cottonwood Grove on Kirwin Reservoir. The wind was blowing at 30 mph, and the lake was covered with whitecaps. The local police dispatcher had received a broken cell phone call from a man with the capsized boat, who told them where they were.

Knowing no more except that the water temperature was around 60 degrees and time was of essence, CO Larry Stones, Kirwin, went directly to the north boat ramp near Cottonwood Grove. When he arrived, there was a boat just pulling into the dock, and Stones asked the driver for help.

They took the boat south approximately 400 yards where they could see two men clinging to a dead tree. One was 59 years old, and the other who had fallen in was 62 years old. The wind had caught their 16-foot flat-bottom boat and flipped it. Fortunately, they were beside a large dead tree and were able to get in it and use a cell phone to call 911. The fishermen said it took 20 minutes from the time their boat capsized and they made their 911 call until they were carried back to shore.

Once the men were safe, Stones put his patrol boat on the water and pulled the capsized boat to shore. He also retrieved most of the angler's gear. (The next day, a friend with an underwater camera was able to retrieve what sank.) With a little luck and the help of a dedicated CO and other anglers – and the fact that both victims were wearing life jackets – a tragedy was avoided.

—Shoup

BIRDING TEAM SETS STATE RECORD

On Monday, May 13th, the Big Day team of Mark Robbins, Roger McNeill, and Mike Rader set a new record for number of bird species seen in Kansas for a single 24-hour period. This impressive total breaks the old record of 210 species, set in 2000 by the team of Robbins, Rader, Chris Hobbs, and Sebastian Patti.

The team started at midnight west of Topeka in cool, windy, and cloudy weather, where they tallied several tall-grass prairie species. Pre-dawn, the team made stops at Lawrence, the Baker Wetlands, and Bonner Springs. At dawn, the team was strategically located at Fort Leavenworth, picking up many woodland species

known to be hard to get any farther west. Quick stops at Clinton Lake, Junction City, and Wilson Lake provided more hard-to-get species, before the long trip to the marshes of Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira National Wildlife Refuge.

The grueling trip had lasted more than 22 hours and covered an amazing 596 miles. An astounding 28 species of warblers, 28 species of shorebirds, and 19 species of waterfowl were observed.

The weather was almost perfect after a less than perfect beginning. The 170-plus species on the list by noon spurred the team on, knowing that the old record was definitely within reach. It turned from hope to reality by the end of the day.

The total of 225 species

now ties Kansas with New Jersey for third place in the nation for most species seen in a particular state for a 24-hour period. Only Texas and California have higher Big Day records. The 225 species recorded is also in a tie for sixth place for the most species ever reported on a Big Day in any state.

—Mike Rader, conservation worker, Wilson

ISOLATED WETLAND REPORT

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released a report last spring on the ecology and extent of geographically isolated wetlands of the United States. The report is the first in a planned series of ecological reports, with maps, about important types of wetlands.

The Prairie Pothole region,

known as America's duck factory, represents only one of many different landscapes nationwide that provide invaluable wildlife habitat in their isolated wetlands. The report provides a solid introduction to the basic ecology and geography of these irreplaceable resources.

In desert areas, isolated wetlands provide vital fresh water oases for wildlife and function as stepping stones for migrating birds. Their isolation has promoted the development of unique plant and animal life that is specially adapted to these habitats. Isolated wetlands are also vital for human well being. Many wetlands store rainwater, which reduces flooding and recharges groundwater supplies, in addition to providing habitat for wildlife.

Farm Bill Aids Wildlife

Wildlife conservation and habitat restoration programs received a major boost with record funding levels over the next six years as part of the 2002 Farm Bill signed into law May 13 by President Bush. The bill funds critical conservation programs that help landowners protect and manage millions of acres of habitat for fish and wildlife that in turn are enjoyed by millions of Americans.

Programs like the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) received \$1.5 billion in new funding and saw its acreage cap expanded from 36.4 million acres to 39.2 million. The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) more than doubled its acreage with the addition of 2.3 million acres and funding of \$1.5 billion. The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) grew six-fold to \$360 million, and a new Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP) — with \$254 million in funding — provides restoration or preservation of as much as two million acres of grassland and prairies for wildlife.

All of these programs benefit wild animal populations, both game and non-game species, but of special concern to outdoorsmen and women is the impact these programs will have on restoring and maintaining big game, upland game, and waterfowl populations at strong, harvestable levels.

Many wildlife conservation agencies and organizations worked closely with the Congress in helping to draft the conservation components of the new farm bill through in-depth assessments of regional wildlife habitat needs.

—Wildlife Management Institute



Isolated wetlands, which the report defines as “wetlands with no apparent surface water connection to perennial rivers and streams, estuaries, or the ocean,” have no surface water outlet. Because they are completely surrounded by uplands, they are vulnerable to changes in surrounding land use practices.

The report describes 19 types of isolated wetlands, such as the Nebraska Sandhills wetlands, Delmarva potholes, and Carolina Bay wetlands, and provides ecological profiles of their fish and wildlife conservation values. A series of computer-generated maps in the report depict the potential extent of geographically isolated wetlands in each of 72 selected study areas, designed to provide a cross-section of national conditions. The report indicates that geographically isolated wetlands appeared to be most extensive and abundant in sub-humid to arid regions of the country where precipitation averages less than 24 inches a year.

The report and maps are available on the Internet at <http://wetlands.fws.gov/>.

—U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service

NATURAL RESOURCE LEGACY ALLIANCE ASSEMBLED

The Kansas Natural Resource Legacy Alliance was created in statute during the 2002 legislative session to develop a vision for the future of the state's natural resources. The Alliance will identify current and future natural resource issues confronting Kansas, identify potential impacts associated with these resource issues, and identify interest groups affected by these issues. The Alliance is made up of representatives from the legislative and executive branches of state government, private land-owners, Kansas Farm Bureau, and the Kansas Livestock Association.

The Alliance will hold public meetings across the state to seek citizen input and to provide information to the public. These meetings, along with input from natural resource professionals, will form the basis of the Alliance's goals and priorities, including identifying future funding needs. These outcomes will consider outdoor recreation opportunities, tourism, economic development, natural resource education, fish and wildlife resources, and all facets of

soil and water conservation, and air quality.

In May 2003, the Alliance will submit a preliminary report of its activities and recommendations to the new Kansas governor and the 2003 Legislature, with a final report to follow in December 2003.

The Alliance held their first meeting in Topeka on August 8. Sheila Frahm, former Kansas lieutenant governor and U.S. senator, was elected chairperson, and John Strickler, former KDWP secretary and state forester,

was chosen as vice-chairperson.

For more information about the Alliance, contact the State Conservation Commission at (785) 296-3600, or visit www.kdwp.state.ks.us/alliance/alliance.html.

—Chad Luce, Public Information Officer, Topeka

LIGHTS OFF AT MOTEL 6

One of this country's largest economy hotel chains has entered into an agreement with the nation's largest animal rights organization. Accor Economy Lodging – the parent company of Motel 6, Red Roof Inns, and Studio 6 – is actively promoting two programs of the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), “Pets for Life” and “Disaster Recovery.” Despite its name and common perception, HSUS does not oversee any local animal shelters or societies with similar names.

Accor's director of communications, Gayle Colston Barge, says that the business has “elected to officially contribute to and support” the two HSUS programs. She further stated that it “is proud to support the efforts of the Humane Society of the United States.”

Sportsmen's groups, however, have urged the business to end its promotion of HSUS because of the organization's work to eliminate all hunting, trapping, and most other uses of animals. Despite this request, Accor Economy Lodging did not end its relationship with the animal rights group.

Motel 6, Red Roof Inns, and Studio 6 are affordable motels used by many sportsmen on hunting and fishing trips. Sportsmen and sportswomen can express their opinions regarding Accor Economy Lodging's promotion of the HSUS by writing George Le Mener, President and CEO, Accor Economy Lodging, P. O. Box 809092, Dallas, TX 75380-9092; phoning (972) 386-6161; or faxing (972) 702-5996.

—U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance



Teal Seasons at Bat

Early teal seasons have been set for 2002, as follow. (These dates are subject to change. Check the 2002 Kansas Waterfowl Regulations Summary for more information.)

- Low Plains, East of U.S. 283: Sept. 21-29.
- High Plains, West of U.S. 283: Sept. 21-28.

The early-season proposals were developed after consultation with the Atlantic, Mississippi, Central, and Pacific flyway councils following a review of habitat, population, and harvest information collected throughout North America. The most notable change this year is a proposed reduction from 16 to 9 days (8 in the west) in the September teal season offered in Kansas and other states of the Central and Mississippi flyways.

The daily bag limit is four, and the possession limit is eight. Federal and state duck stamps and HIP stamps are required. They must be signed across the face.

—Shoup

Field of Dreams

Last October, KDWP had the privilege of signing on a new research biologist — Matt Peek, originally from Waverly. Peek will be working as a research biologist out of the Emporia Research and Survey Office and will review and develop projects for pronghorn, elk, and furbearers and assist with the deer program, as well as coordinating Midwest conservation and planning for swift fox, black-tailed prairie dog, and other mammal programs. Technical training and orientation of field personnel and headquarters staff are also among his many duties.

Peek grew up on a small farm in northern Coffey County, where his favorite activities were trapping, hunting, and fishing. He graduated from Waverly High School in 1992. In May of 1996, he graduated from Ottawa University with B.A. in biology, and in 2000, he earned a master of science degree in environmental science from

Emporia State University. His master's thesis included a survey of the attitudes and characteristics of Kansas trappers.

Peek's rural background, as well as his tenacity, prepared him for the field of his dreams.

"As a kid during the furharvesting boom years, I can remember lying in bed at night listening to hounds baying in the timber below the house," he recalls. I remember how the anticipation of riding down to check Dad's coyote traps was almost more than I could stand. By the time I got old enough to really take part in these activities, a lot of people had gotten out, but the ember was lit. Years later, when it came time to really get specific about my career -- I had to pick out something for my master's thesis — the path to furbearers was already paved. And then to have this position come open just a few years later, things couldn't have worked out any better."

Like all good biologists, Peek sees education as the key to success in his field.

"I think it's important that people understand the value of furharvesting in Kansas, both as a wildlife management tool and as an important part of the rural lifestyle," he explains. "With hunting, most Kansans are quick to recognize these benefits, but they're often overlooked with trapping or running hounds, partly because not too many Kansans know an active furharvester. One of the most important and challenging parts of my job will be to elevate the recognition of furharvesting as a beneficial activity.

"Hopefully, our research can be used to dispel some of the myths about trapping," Peek continues. "Our study was designed to test the performance of numerous types of foothold traps for furbearer species in the United States and Canada. It is the largest trap-testing study ever conducted, and will tell us how these traps perform in terms of animal welfare and efficiency."

Peek is a member of The Wildlife Society, the Kansas Fur Harvesters Association, and the National Trappers Association.

—Shoup

Split Dove Season

On June 13, the Kansas Wildlife and Parks Commission approved 2002 early migratory bird seasons at a public meeting at the Ninescah Sailing Association Center at Cheney State Park. Perhaps the most notable action taken at that meeting was the first change in the dove season in modern times — a split season instead of the traditional Sept. 1-Oct. 30 season of 60 days allowed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

This year, dove season will comprise two segments: the first from Sept. 1 through Oct. 27 and the second segment from Nov. 9 through Nov. 11. Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks staff recommended the split season to provide additional dove hunting opportunity for upland bird hunters participating in opening weekend of the state's pheasant and quail season, which opens Nov. 9.

—Mathews

Grasslands Help Ducks

According to a recent study by Ducks Unlimited (DU), nesting ducks are more successful in areas with abundant grassland cover. In 2000 and 2001, DU scientists, led by graduate student Scott Stephens, located the nests of ducks and other grassland birds on 18 study sites in the Missouri Coteau of North Dakota. The scientists monitored the nests throughout the nesting season.

It appears that in areas where grass levels exceed 70 percent, the ducks can hold their own, even in poor years.

In large blocks of native prairie or cover planted for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), ducks have ample room to disperse and hide their nests from predators. In addition, the predator community on grassland-dominated landscapes is largely comprised of coyotes and badgers, which have relatively large home ranges compared to those of smaller predators, such as skunks and foxes.

—Ducks Unlimited News

The Great Rabbit Safari

by Mark Shoup



It's a warm August evening, and the natives are restless at Mole's Elbow (our little 13-acre "ranch"). My youngest son, Will (now 11), is doing the dishes and singing in the loudest mock-operatic voice he can muster, making up the words as he goes (something about Les Miserables.)

Having just finished folding a load of laundry, my 14-year-old son, Logan, has decided the best place to read a book is on the floor right next to the kitchen door where Will labors with his choral gymnastics. I'm in the family room cautiously relaxing.

"Stooopppp iittt!" Logan finally screams, but Will continues his aria, as if being cheered on.

"Wiiiiiii! Stop it! I'm trying to read!" Logan is pleading now. "PLEASE!" That's my signal. If Logan has resorted to saying "please" to his brother, it's time for NATO intervention.

"Okay, boys," I command, "drop what you're doing. The rabbits are out. It's safari time!" I will admit that this is not my usual mode of conflict resolution, but occasionally, I stumble onto solutions short of outright warfare.

This announcement stirs my wife, Rose, from an uncharacteristic detachment that usually says, *Okay, Mark. It's YOUR turn.*

"Ooooo, those rabbits!" she grumbles. "You go get those rabbitssss! They keep invading my garden!"

"Well, Mom, get ready for rabbit stew!" Will chimes.

"I don't know about that," she replies, "but I'll be ready for dead rabbits, that's for sure!" And she charges outside. It's a wonder that a country boy like me married such a gentle, passive city girl like Rose.

So I unlock the safe while Will, ever the musician, sees an opportunity to imi-

tate the Beach Boys, "Come on baby, rabbit safari..." Logan rolls his eyes. He and I are almost out the door when Will wakes from his superstar reverie and follows.

When he catches up, I hand him his ancient Remington Model 6 rolling block .22 cal. single shot. Logan will carry my old Winchester Model 61 pump, and I will keep an eye out for lions and hyenas.

As we creep around the corner of the garage, Rose whistles softly from her flower garden, where she busily waters, and points to the east end of Pigskin Lawn. A little brown bunny is munching a dandelion. Logan gets first shot this time but shoulders the rifle and misses. Warier than most, this bunny flashes his cotton posterior and bounces into a grove of trees named Cedar-Bristle Woods. (About every place at Mole's Elbow has a name, whether it makes sense or not.)

Now it's Will's turn, and he creeps past Mulberry Gulch and around a cedar tree where a rabbit lazes, apparently unconcerned. Will, too, misses, so we decide to wait under a couple of Bradford pears. After an excruciatingly long sit, five minutes, perhaps, the boys are staring at the ground, pulling grass.

Obviously, stalking seems like a better idea, so we head west, past the Ghostly Granary and the Garden of Grief, through Cantaloupe Calamity Corral, around Cowpounder's Pond and Busted Calf Corral, down Monarch Lane and Furball Trail to Gopher Tree Wildlife Area. Even Sand Burr Acres and Goathead Meadow are bunnyless.

"What's up, guys?" I ask. "They're thick when we're not hunting."

"It's like they recognize the guns," Will notes.

"I think they've got scouts," I grumble.

"Dad?" Will asks, changing the subject. "Why don't people eat prairie dogs?"

"I don't know, son. Maybe they taste like rats."

"Well, people eat muskrats. Maybe they eat hedgehogs."

But before I can muster a reply to this exchange, a rabbit materializes at the end of Pigskin Lawn. Will creeps up like Robert Ruark on an African lion, aims, squeezes, and misses by a hair, so to speak.

Now it's Logan's turn. Finally, his aim is true, and we have a rabbit in hand as the sun sets.

"I'm *never* going to shoot a rabbit," Will laments.

"Sure you will, bud. And this year, too. You just need to take a fine bead on 'em and squeeze, don't jerk."

"I know," he answers without much enthusiasm. A tear flows down his cheek.

"Will. It's okay Bud," I say, putting my arm around him. "It takes awhile to learn."

"Yeah, Will," Logan adds. "It took me like 13 times before I got a rabbit."

"But I thought you were ashamed of me," Will laments.

This takes me totally off guard. As children are want to do, I suddenly realize that my coaching has been interpreted as disapproval.

"Oh, Will," I say, putting my forehead on his and wrapping my hand around his neck, "I'm never ashamed of you. I'm proud of you just for getting out there and trying. You did just great. Now let's go clean this critter before it gets dark."

Within minutes, the boys attention is shifted to critter innards, and a whole new area of interest and conversation flourishes. As we walk back to the house in the fading light, Will runs to the house with the freshly-dressed rabbit and pops back out.

"I want to unload the Winchester, Dad," he declares, so I show him how. Daylight is fading over the Garden of Grief. Already, the conversation has turned to tomorrow's adventures, to camping by and swimming in the pond these last waning days of summer, which will be filled with song, as well as the occasional tear.

Youth Team 4th, Kansas Kid National Champ

On July 18, the Kansas Youth Fishing Team fished the Nanticoke Tidal River in Laurel, Delaware, at the Bassmaster Youth National Championships. The river was almost high tide when they blasted off at 7 a.m. It still had about a foot and one-half to go, but by the 3 p.m. weigh-in, it had fallen 4 feet.

Ryan Smith, Will Skucius, and James Hoover brought in the team's 11 keepers for a team weight of 16.75 pounds.

Skucius, of Sterling, had a five-fish limit that weighed 5.96 pounds and was good for fifth place, and Maize resident Smith's five-fish limit that weighed 9.01 pounds earned him the crown of Junior Bassmaster National Champion. Smith beat out a youth from Vermont who had a five-fish limit weighing 8.99 pounds.

In the team events, the top five included the following:

- 1) Team Ontario / Canada took top honors with 21.01;
- 2) Team Delaware took 2nd with 20.32;
- 3) Team New Jersey took 3rd with 17.06;
- 4) Team Kansas took 4th with 16.75; and
- 5) Team Ohio took 5th with 14.08.

All Kansas team members received plaques for 4th place. The kids put the win together on their own because none fished with a boater from their own state.

—Kansas Angler Online

NEW WHITE BASS RECORD

A Peculiar, Missouri, angler has set a new standard for the Kansas white bass record. Marvin Gary was fishing in the Neosho River on April 11 above John Redmond Reservoir when he hooked the 5.67-pound monster. The catch was 20 3/8 inches long with a girth of 18 inches.

Marvin was guided to an apparently special spot by his brother, Greg, who had hauled in a number of big whites there the previous week, so "state record" was definitely in the back of Marvin's mind that day. Despite the odds of such a catch, both brothers began catching big fish - up to four pounds - right away using Road Runner lures.

With a sense of optimism, Marvin, using a borrowed rod and reel, cast as far as he could into the river, and within seconds the lure was hammered by the huge white. When he finally pulled the big fish to the bank, his brother lifted it from the water while Gary held the rod aloft.

Realizing this was the possible state record they had hoped for, the brothers took the fish to the Ottawa Country Mart, where it was weighed on certified scales and did, indeed, prove to be a new state record. All that remained was appli-

cation to KDWP and a waiting period. Both complete, the fish is now officially a Kansas state record.

The previous record was a 5.56-pound white bass taken by Clay Center resident Jeffery Clark in a Clay County sand pit in 1992.

—Shoup

TROUT SEASON ON DECK

On Oct. 15, tens of thousands of rainbow trout will be stocked at approximately 20 locations in the state from October through April. The trout season runs from Oct. 15 through April 15. Anyone fishing for trout in the specially-stocked locations must have an \$10.50 trout stamp. In addition, all residents from 16 through 64 years of age, and nonresidents 16 and older, must have a valid fishing license.

Trout stamps, like fishing licenses, are valid for the current calendar year. Stamps purchased on or after Jan. 1, 2002 are valid through Dec. 31, 2002.

The trout stamp provides funds to purchase the rainbow trout from commercial fish hatcheries. All stocked fish are of catchable size, and many would make any hard-core flyfisherman proud.

The daily creel limit is five trout, and the possession limit is 15. A trout stock-

ing schedule will be posted at www.kdwp.state.ks.us.

Some local communities, such as Topeka and Kansas City, have their own trout stocking programs. Many of these require a fee, but the state trout stamp is not required at those locations. Contact local city and county recreation departments for details on those programs.

—Shoup

COFFEY COUNTY REOPENED

In late April, Coffey County Lake (formerly Wolf Creek Reservoir) reopened for fishing after being closed for security concerns following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, DC.

Fishing should be good through the fall for Kansas anglers who have waited anxiously for the reopening of this blue-ribbon fishing spot, especially those who couldn't make it to the lake last spring.

For inquiries related to fishing at the lake, call the daily lake status hotline, (620) 364-2475. As always, anglers are encouraged to call the hotline before visiting Coffey County Lake. The lake is open from sunrise to sunset.

—Shoup



PHOTOGRAPHS ON INTERNET

Anyone who has ever looked for a picture of an eagle, a duck, or just a kid fishing, can now find what they need in over 2,000 photographs now available via the Internet from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This unique collection of photographs is dedicated solely to fish and wildlife, wildlands, and wildlife conservation efforts. The copyright-free images have been digitized and loaded into a searchable database and are available for downloading in high and low resolutions from the new web site: <http://images.fws.gov>.

The pictures include a comprehensive collection of waterfowl and wildlife species, as well as shots of wildlife habitats. The library also includes unique images of wildlife management and scientific field activities involving a wide variety of species.

For a number of years the

Service has made prints and slides of photos available to the news media, publishers, teachers, and students in order to assist with news stories and projects dealing with wildlife.

"Making these collections available through the Internet will provide better public service and will be more cost-effective and efficient than distributing hard copies of photos," said Robyn Thorson, assistant director of External Affairs for the Service.

The site is searchable by subject, location, and photographer, and the results appear in a grouping of low-resolution thumbnail shots linked to higher resolution files suitable for high quality printing in nominal sizes. The lower resolution is scanned at 150 dots per inch (dpi) suitable for a 5- x 7-inch print, and the bigger file is about 400 dpi and capable of supporting 8- x 10-inch format.

—U.S. Fish & Wildlife Agency

ALLIANCE FOR WETLANDS

The Kansas Wetlands and Riparian Areas Alliance began in 1996 when more than 50 interested businesses, organizations, agencies, and individuals gathered to discuss the means by which they could better provide wetland and riparian education, create a climate for sharing information, and encourage people to implement conservation projects. Six years later, the Alliance consists of more than 100 member organizations and nearly 200 individuals. Their mission: "Ensure the future of wetlands and streams and their adjacent riparian areas as integral parts of the Kansas heritage and landscape."

"Building local partnerships to educate people and to get wetland and riparian area conservation projects completed is the thrust of the Alliance," says Executive Committee Chairman Bob Atchison.

Seven Alliance chapters currently exist in northeast, southeast, and western Kansas — the result of holding seven 1-day stakeholder seminars. The chapters will take responsibility for delivering the Alliance message across more than half of the state's counties. Other seminars are scheduled in coming months in targeted watersheds to establish an even greater level of local involvement in wetland and riparian issues and to broaden the effects of the Alliance's mission across Kansas.

Each chapter develops a plan of action and a list of priority projects. Dozens of

projects have been initiated, ranging from small 1- to 2-acre wetland or riparian-buffer plantings to large, watershed-scale, multiple-landowner efforts affecting miles of stream reach.

The Prairie Wetlands Chapter, for example, recently received funding from the Playa Lakes Joint Venture to support the acquisition of conservation leases on playas in the western third of the state. This project will pay landowners to leave playas lakes idle and to establish permanent buffers around these seasonal wetlands. KDWP has committed to helping to finance these leases as well, and hundreds of playas could be affected.

"We have yet to fully see the benefits derived from the chapters' efforts," says Atchison. "However, interest in wetlands and riparian areas has elevated to heights we hadn't dreamed of six years ago. With the support and funding from groups like the joint venture, we expect to radically improve the Kansas landscape by restoring, enhancing, and protecting these valuable natural resource areas to levels not seen for decades."

For more information, contact Bob Atchison, rural forestry coordinator, Kansas Forest Service, 2610 Clafin Road, Manhattan, Kansas 67506, (785) 532-3310, ratchiso@oz.oznet.ksu.edu; or Tim Christian, coordinator, Kansas Wetlands and Riparian Areas Alliance, P.O. Box 236, McPherson, Kansas 67460, (620) 241-6921, tchristian@kscable.com.

—Tim Christian, Kansas Wetlands and Riparian Areas Alliance



WOODLAND FALL FIELD DAY

Are you wondering when to thin your black walnut plantation? Perhaps you'd like to see more wildlife on your property. Maybe you'd even like to improve your skills at tree identification. How about a pleasant stroll through the woods this fall and a free barbecue lunch?

All of these opportunities and more await those who attend the Kansas Forest Service Fall Field Day scheduled for Wednesday, October 23. The field day will be held just south of Emporia at Roy and Carolyn Turney's Tree Farm. Recognized in 1991 as Outstanding Tree Farmers of the Year, the Turney's place offers a 28-year-old black walnut plantation, and 16-year-old windbreak, wildlife, and native grass plantings. In addition to the Turney's Tree Farm, the neighboring Charles Jacob Trust property will feature another black walnut plantation visit for meeting participants.

Nationally recognized experts in black walnut management will be leading educational sessions during the field day along with our local experts here in Kansas. Dr. Jerry Van Sambeek, USDA Forest Service/University of Missouri, will teach a session on black walnut plantation management and Dr. Jeff Stringer, extension forester, University of Kentucky, will explain crop tree management.

Several different forestry associations will have exhibits set up or information about their organizations available during the field day. These include Tree Farm, Walnut Council, and the Kansas Forest Products associations. Membership or participation in these organizations has the potential to help woodland owners accomplish their management goals. Some forestry-related vendors will also be on hand to advertise their products.

Participants will be divided into two groups. One group will attend sessions at the Turney's Tree Farm while the other group will be bussed to the Charles Jacob Trust property for concur-

rent sessions. The groups will switch locations for the afternoon sessions.

Registration for the field day is as simple as a phone call to the Lyon County Conservation District, (620) 343-2813, ext. 3, or the Kansas Forest Service state office (785) 532-3301. The registration deadline is October 14.

The Kansas Forest Service Fall Field Day is a good time for landowners and land managers to come together and share the unique challenges of growing trees in Kansas. The field day brings together a special group of people who think beyond their own lives and to the legacy they will leave to future generations. Good people, good information, good food, and a walk in the woods. Don't miss it.

—Kansas Forest Service



CWD WEBSITE, INFO

A website kept up-to-date with the latest information about chronic wasting disease (CWD) is now up and running at www.cwd-info.org. Also, the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF) has posted a revised version of its brochure on the subject, with material prepared by The Wildlife Management Institute, available as a printable download at www.nssf.org from the news area of their website. Interested organizations may also email jdicamillo@nssf.org with requests for multiple hard copies or have brochures printed with their organization's logo.

On Wednesday, July 17, Bruce Morrison, assistant administrator for the Wildlife Division of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and a leading expert on CWD, briefed the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus on the potential impacts of the disease, efforts underway to control it, and the latest action by Congress and federal and state agencies to address it. Shortly thereafter, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Department of Interior Appropriations Bill, which includes \$2.7 million for CWD research.

—NSSF's Bullet Points



SCHOOLS MONITOR STREAMS

KDHE has announced a volunteer stream monitoring network in Kansas where teachers, scientists, and students join in a scientific approach to environmental issues. The program, Kansas Surface Water Monitors, or KSWiM, will involve science teachers and students from northeast Kansas in monitoring streams in the Kansas-Lower Republican and Missouri River basins.

Students will be involved in identifying stream-dwelling creatures to assess how the stream is doing. In this way, they will learn how simple aquatic life can speak volumes about a stream's environmental health.

The project will kick off with a June 20 workshop, where teachers from participating schools will receive monitoring instructions, sampling equipment, and guidelines.

Schools will compare streams in two types of watersheds— one that has significant urban runoff and another that has mostly rural runoff. Schools will pair with partner schools in the area to compare results, and a Water Olympics will be held after the first year, where emerging scientists can match wits and skills on biology-related matters.

In addition, the aspiring scientist-ecologists will be encouraged to involve their communities by reporting to local media and community-wide functions.

Workshop space is limited. Persons wanting more information on this venture should contact Phil Brink, KSWiM, KDHE Nonpoint Source Section, (913) 296-4195.

Eligible counties include the following: Atchison, Brown, Clay, Cloud, Douglas, Geary, Jackson, Jefferson, Jewell, Johnson, Leavenworth, Marshall, Nemaha, Pottawatomie, Republic, Riley, Shawnee, Wabaunsee, Washington, and Wyandotte.

—Kansas Department of Health and
Environment

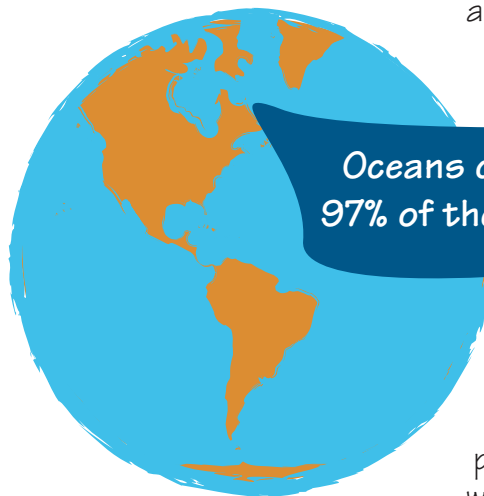
The Water Cycle

Everyone has heard the words “precipitation,” “condensation,” “evaporation,” and “groundwater,” but did you know these are essential elements of the water cycle? They are the results of water moving, collecting in different places, changing from one physical state to another, and absorbing or releasing energy.

You can begin exploring the water cycle at any stage

water — the oceans. Oceans contain about 97 percent of all the water on earth, most of which is in a liquid state.

The movement of ocean water through the water cycle begins when the sun’s energy heats up the ocean’s surface, causing the water molecules to move faster. This rapid movement causes some of the water surface molecules to change from a liquid to a gas — water vapor.



Oceans contain about 97% of the earth's water.

because it has no real beginning or end. We’ll begin with the largest collecting place for

As a vapor, water can travel from lakes or oceans to the atmosphere — a process called evaporation. As water vapor cools, it loses energy and turns into tiny droplets — a process called condensation. In clouds, these water droplets collect on tiny

Forms of Precipitation

Rain



Sleet



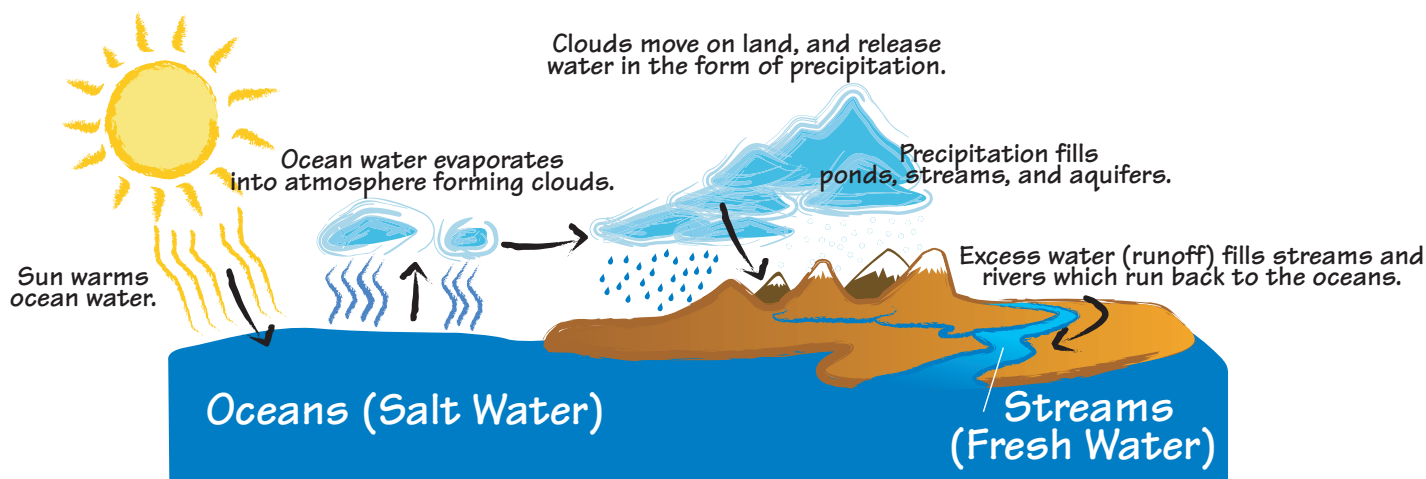
Hail



Snow



dust particles. As they get bigger, the droplets become so heavy that they fall to earth. Depending on how cold the air is, these falling droplets appear in the form of rain, snow, hail, or sleet — a process called pre-



precipitation.

Some precipitation evaporates before reaching the ground. Water that reaches the ground can do many things. In very cold regions, water may be frozen for centuries in icecaps or glaciers. Some precipitation rejoins surface water as it falls into lakes, streams, or oceans. Precipitation reaching the ground in areas where it can stay or become liquid by thawing will either run across the ground until it reaches surface water or soak into the ground and become groundwater, where it will remain for thousands of years unless pumped out by man.

Plants “drink” groundwater through roots, and some of the water remains in the plant until it dies. Most of the water taken in by plants, however, ends up on the leaf surface, where it is exposed to the air and the sun. Water on the leaves evaporates — a process called transpiration. In very humid, hot areas, there can sometimes be enough transpiration that there appears to be a fog above the trees.

All these processes change the state of water and to move it from one place to another — a combination of processes called the water cycle.

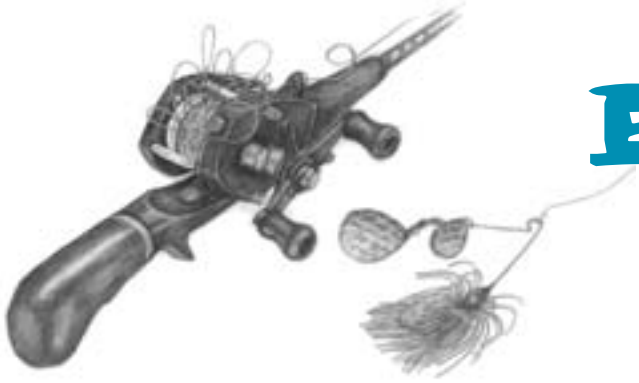
As water soaks into the ground, it may reach a clay layer or solid bedrock where it is trapped and accumulates, filling up the air spaces between soil or gravel particles. The depth underground where groundwater is reached is called the water table. Aquifers are massive pockets of this groundwater, and in drier areas such as western Kansas, aquifers are essential for people.

Kansas sits partially atop the largest supply of fresh groundwater in the world, called the Ogallala Aquifer. The Ogallala lies beneath eight states from South Dakota to Texas. The Kansas portion of the Ogallala is known as the High Plains Aquifer. It is the largest of seven aquifers located within the state. The High Plains Aquifer contains about 245 million acre-feet of water. Just think about it: you could cover an area 2,978 times the size of Kansas (or

68 times the size of the United States) one foot deep with this much water.

We depend heavily upon groundwater for irrigation, drinking, livestock, and industry, but in years with below normal precipitation, groundwater does not recharge as fast as we use it. This problem is compounded because farmers need more irrigation water in dry years.

Since the 1960s, groundwater levels in Kansas have dropped by as much as 200 feet in some areas. The decline during the 1990 was less than for any other decade in the last 40 years because of high rainfall and more conservative irrigation methods, but we seem to be going into another dry cycle. Because all life depends on a ready supply of clean water, it is essential that everyone conserve water whenever possible. If we do our part, the water cycle will always provide the water we need to drink, bath, water our lawns, and grow crops.



Backlash

by Mike Miller

Conscientious Conscience Objector

I love new outdoor gear — new bows, fishing rods, shotguns, and all the accessories. I love it almost as much as my wife loves new clothes. Unfortunately, I have this weird mental defect (which my wife doesn't, by the way). My conscience will sometimes worry itself about the justification of a pending purchase. I have no idea where it comes from, but I'm working on a solution. Let's say I want a new bow. I tell my conscience that I'll sell my old bow to help pay for the new one. I also go into detail about how the new bow is faster, quieter, and that I'll shoot it more accurately. If I can get a couple hundred bucks out of the old bow, buying the new bow will be a cinch. And when I'm done practicing on my conscience, I'll run the story by my wife. Sounds pretty good, doesn't it?

My conscience has stopped buying my story. I have three old bows hanging on nails in a little room off the garage. Two of them hung idle so long the strings broke. Each was to be sold to help pay for its successor. But it doesn't matter now. The two older bows are discontinued models, obsolete, and fairly worthless.

The third old bow isn't really that old. It served me well for the last four years, and it's still relatively modern, technology-wise. It's the one I want to sell to help pay for the new bow, which, by the way, I already have. It was too good of a deal to pass up. Unfortunately, my incentive to sell the old bow dropped dramatically after I purchased the new one. I hung it up and kind of forgot about it.

That is, until I saw this new shotgun. See, I have a really nice shotgun. (Okay — my wife might read this and my conscience is butting in: I have two or three nice shotguns.) But I'm always looking for one that will help my clays scores, and a friend showed me a gun he wanted to sell. It's beautiful. But beauty in shotguns comes with a price, and this shotgun is about twice as pretty as my current gun.

My friend is particularly generous, so he loaned me his gun for a week or two. To justify the purchase, I needed to shoot it well. Never mind that I couldn't put it down when he first showed it to me. Never mind the burl walnut stock and intricate engraving on the receiver. I have to shoot it well. Right?

I shot several hundred targets, and I hit some of them. Not as many as I might have with my old gun, but then, I told myself, the new gun has a different swing weight. It will take some getting used to. So lying awake in bed the other night, I went to work on my stupid conscience. I decided I could sell my old shotgun. Then I can sell my old bow. Like I said it's still relatively current technology-wise. And I have a set of golf clubs, an old chain saw — and another shotgun that has some sentimental value, but I hardly ever shoot it anymore. Let's see, I'm still a little short (you can imagine how pretty the new gun is).

I don't know. Maybe it's more shotgun than I need. An expensive shotgun won't make me a better shooter, and I won't enjoy sporting clays any more than I do now. Where do those dumb thoughts come from anyway?

What the heck. As my friend who's selling the shotgun loves to say, "You only live once." Which is good advice to give when you're trying to sell an expensive shotgun. Besides, even if my conscience won't, I'm sure my wife will understand. My friend's gun is like new, but he'll sell at less than new price. Meaning, according to my wife's logic, I'm really saving money. I couldn't begin to count the money she's saved buying bargain clothes she didn't need. Hmm, I might get a good price for that paper graph I was going to sell to pay for the new liquid crystal graph I bought last year. I know it's in a box on a shelf in the garage somewhere.

