

KANSAS

Wildlife & Parks

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On Point

by Mike Hayden



Public Land: A Good Investment

Kansas is second to none in the diversity of our fish and wildlife resources; unfortunately, we are also second to last in available public lands. Only Rhode Island, a state 1/70 the size of Kansas, has fewer public acres available. Our state truly needs more public land to serve the recreational needs of our citizens. Looking at our neighboring states, Oklahoma and Nebraska have twice as much public land — Missouri has over six times as many acres.

The Wildlife and Parks Commission recently established a working group to study the need for additional land and examine potential funding mechanisms to acquire more property. While the final report was not available at the time of this printing, the initial recommendations of the working group were as follows:

- The department should develop a long-term land acquisition strategy for wildlife areas and state parks.
- Initial estimates call for an additional 400,000 acres of lands for hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching, and 15,000 acres for state parks.
- Funding for additional wildlife areas would come from the sale of conservation stamps.
- The department should increase efforts to solicit land donations
- Parks funding would come from the state's portion of the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund.

Commissioner Dr. Tom Warner, who is chairing the working group, believes that a more aggressive strategy of land acquisition is essential. "Part of the mission of Wildlife and Parks is to provide outdoor opportunities to all citizens, not just to the folks who can afford to lease private land" says Warner. "I am confident that the sportsmen and women of this state will gladly donate to a program that will ensure public access for future generations of Kansans."

Oklahoma and Nebraska currently have successful conservation stamp programs. Nebraska's program, started in 1977, has raised more than \$31 million and added almost 49,000 acres to their state's wildlife areas. Similar to other dedicated revenue programs such as the state waterfowl stamp which provides money for waterfowl habitat conservation, monies generated from the conservation stamp would be earmarked for acquisition of property.

The Walk-In Hunting Area (WIHA) has helped fill the void of available hunting areas in the state, with more than 900,000 acres enrolled this season. However, this successful

program also has its shortcomings. "WIHA areas are leased short-term, offering no guarantee of future availability," says John Dykes, Chairman of the Commission. "The majority of WIHA tracts are in the western half of the state, away from the urban areas where we desperately need more public acres."

Our department currently accepts property and monetary donations from groups and individuals, but we have not been aggressive enough in soliciting these contributions. As a department head at Kansas State University, Commissioner Warner has assisted the university in acquiring thousands of acres of donated properties. "There is no reason that our success at K-State cannot be duplicated at the statewide level," says Warner. "Whether folks want to take a tax write off or would like their family's land to stay in its natural state, people need to know that Wildlife and Parks is a viable option."

On the parks side, I am sure many folks will question the need for additional property when we are facing difficulties maintaining the areas we currently manage. While we do maintain long-term leases with two federal agencies for the majority of our state park properties, the state actually owns only a few small areas. I would also note that history has proven that economic downturns, and upturns, are cyclical. The working group is not suggesting that we mortgage our future for the sake of acquiring more land, but the fact is our parks host 250 visits per acre, while the national average is 60 visits per acre. With visitation increasing at 12 percent annually, the need is certainly present.

Acquiring public land has not been a high priority in Kansas for some time, but the landscape is changing. As we continue to become a more urbanized society, demand for additional public recreation areas will continue to increase. A recent nationwide study, commissioned by the National Shooting Sports Foundation, found that 63 percent of hunters are finding it more difficult to acquire access in the past five years. Without more quality public areas, this number is destined to increase.

Our department's mission is to conserve and enhance Kansas' natural heritage, its wildlife and habitats, and to provide the public with opportunities for the use and appreciation of our natural resources. In order to fulfill this mission, more public use areas are definitely needed.

The annual photo issue represents a special opportunity to celebrate Kansas' unique beauty. The pictures you see here are often surprise moments encountered on the way to other assignments – the same kind of fleeting glimpses that happen to everyone in everyday experiences. Such moments are always refreshing, delighting us, softening stress, and reminding us that despite circumstances, there is a vast natural order that never changes.

I travel widely, and each new day brings anticipation for what might be seen. Part of my job is to look for gifts that are always before our eyes, but often overlooked. Some have been captured on film. As you consider this issue, realize that its combined pictures represent less than one second of real exposure time. In that context, it's easy to understand the endless drama that surrounds us.

We live in an infinite arena. Don't wait for accidental discovery. Search out secrets in the heat and cold, the sun and rain, and in the natural things our state has to offer. And join me in thanking God for the beauty and mystery of the Kansas Outdoors.

Mike Blair, Photographer




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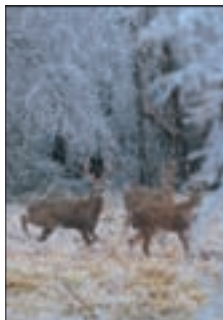
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Front Cover: A rooster pheasant is one of Kansas' wariest and most colorful animals. Mike Blair filmed this spring male with a 600mm, f/8 @ 1/250th sec.

Back Cover: A trio of white-tailed bucks enlivens a winter wonderland near Pittsburg. Mike Blair captured the scene with a 600mm lens, f/4 @ 1/125th sec.



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

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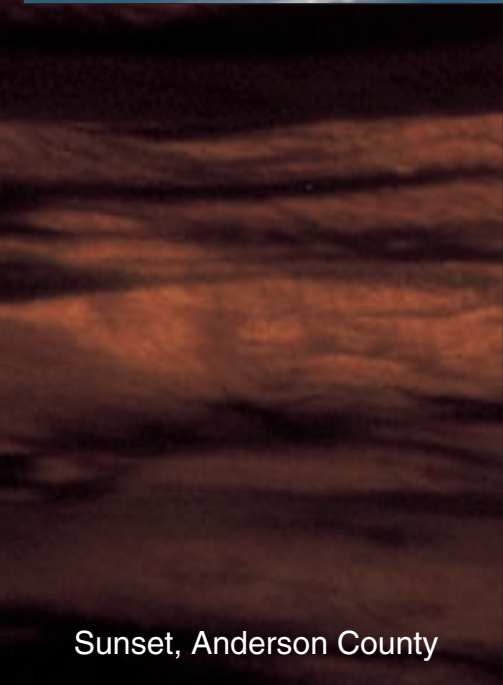
The days come and go, and they say nothing. And if we do not use the gifts they bring, they are carried as silently away.

Ralph Waldo Emerson





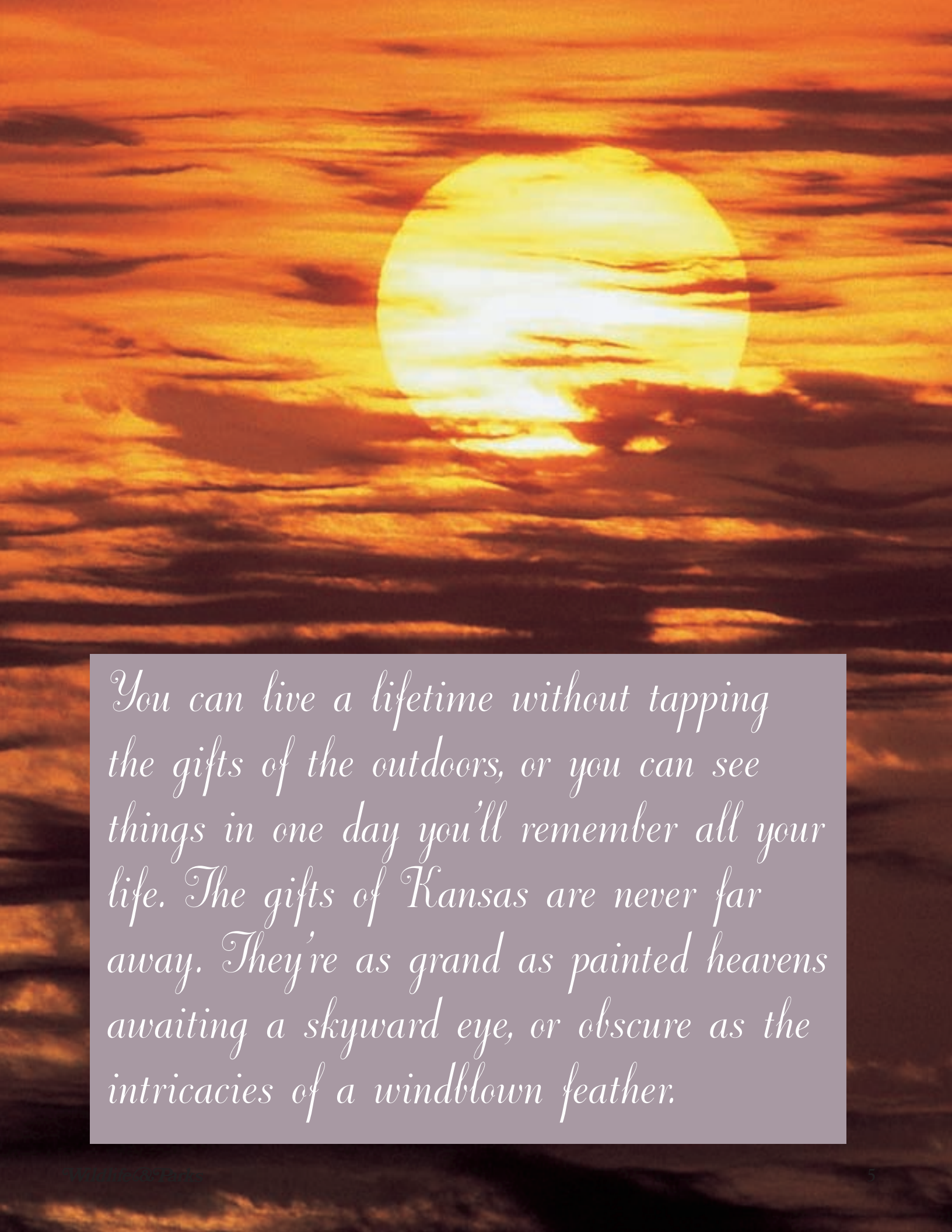
Clouds, Pratt County



Sunset, Anderson County



Lightning, Stafford County



You can live a lifetime without tapping the gifts of the outdoors, or you can see things in one day you'll remember all your life. The gifts of Kansas are never far away. They're as grand as painted heavens awaiting a skyward eye, or obscure as the intricacies of a windblown feather.



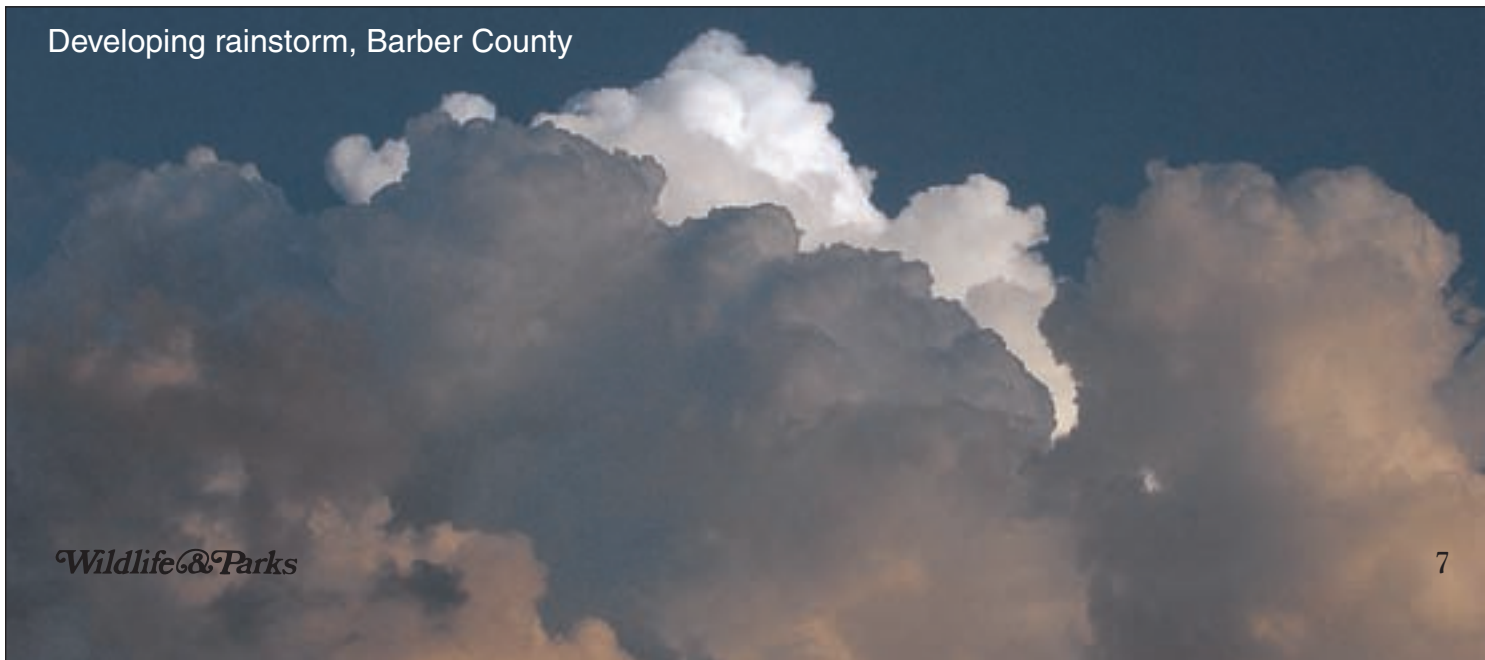
Storm, Pratt County

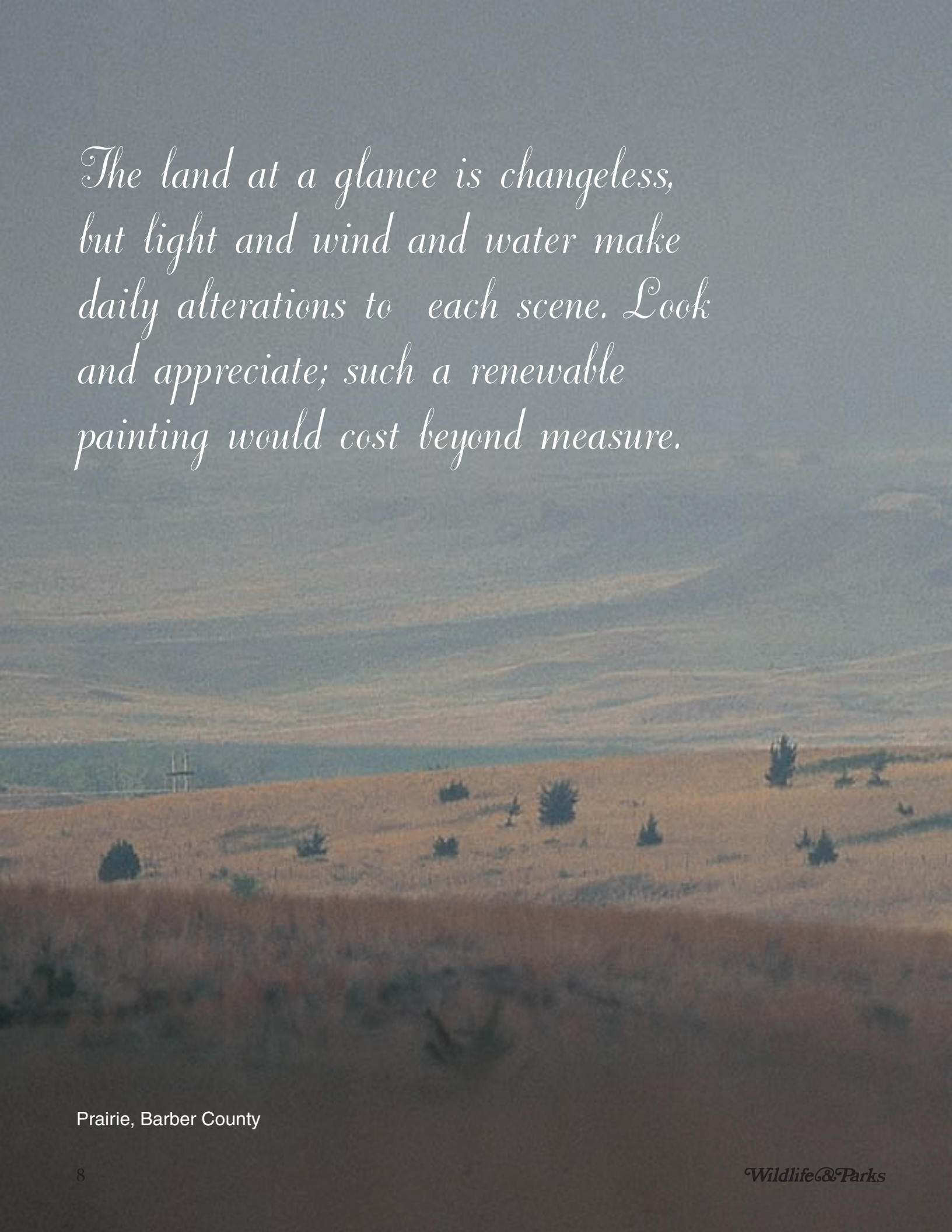




Sunrise, Stafford County

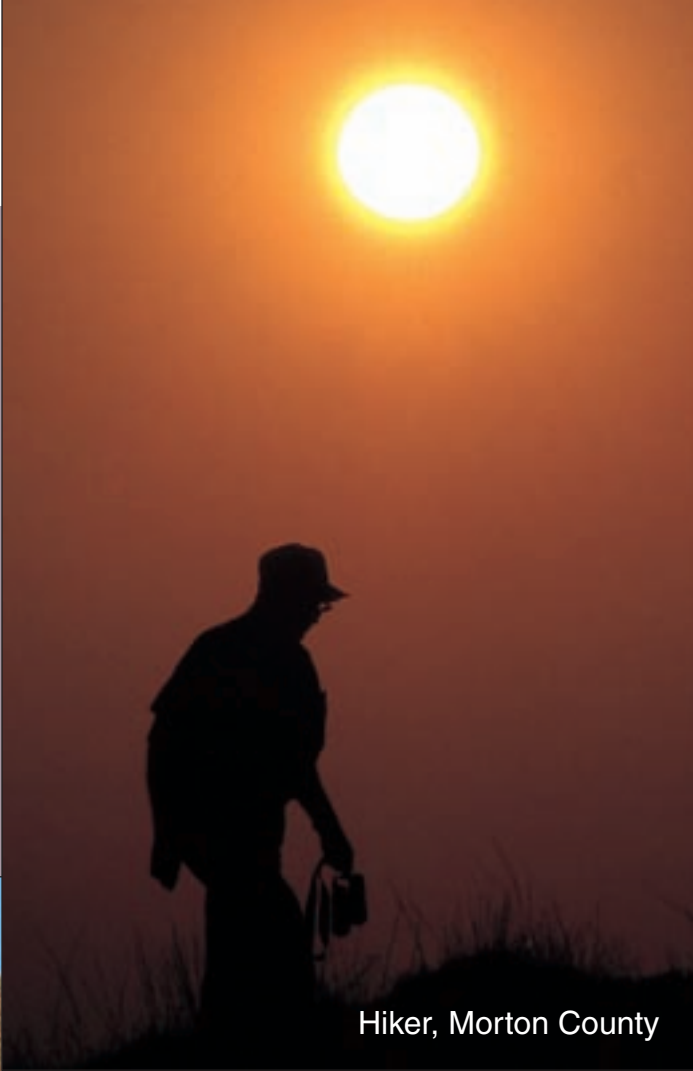
Developing rainstorm, Barber County



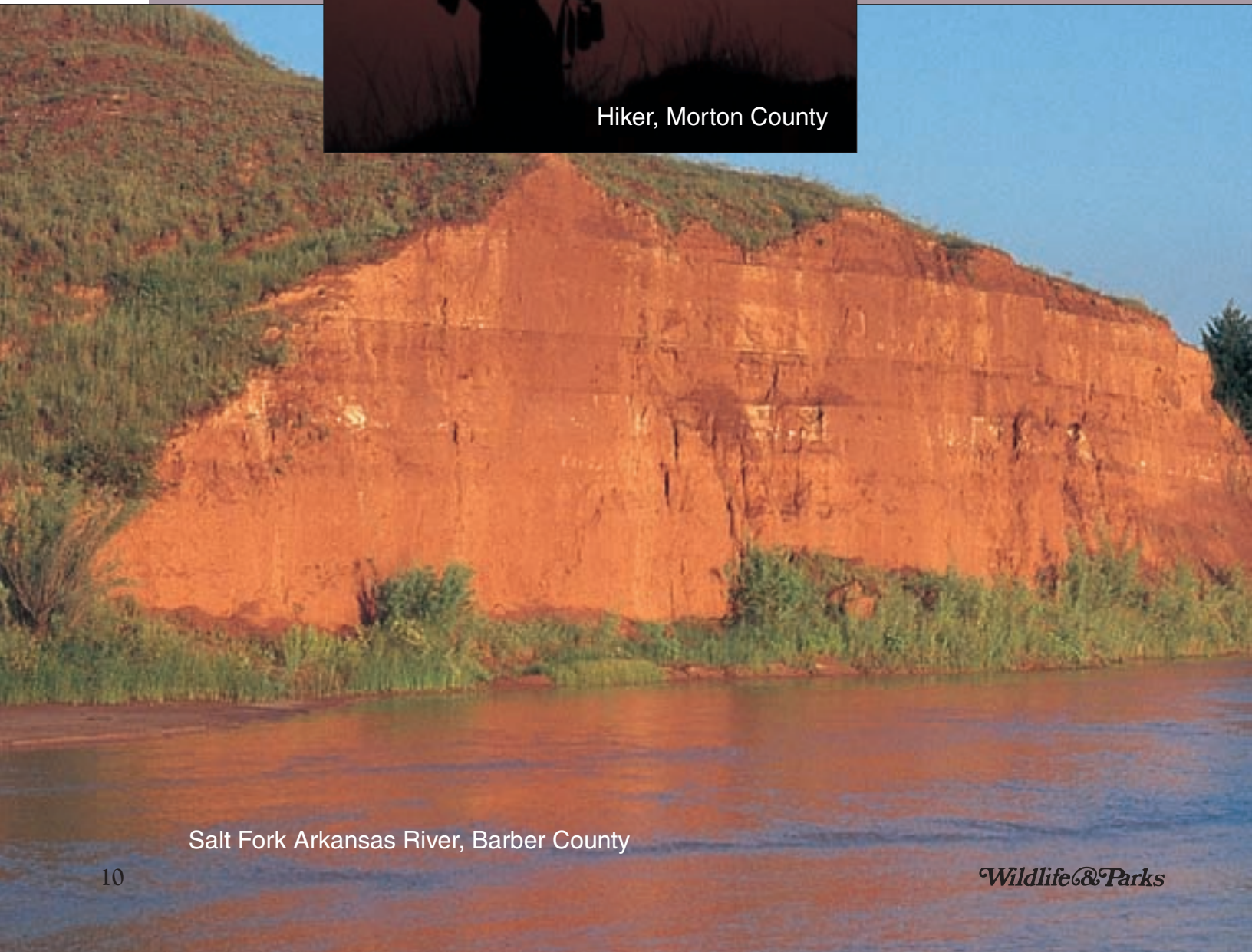


*The land at a glance is changeless,
but light and wind and water make
daily alterations to each scene. Look
and appreciate; such a renewable
painting would cost beyond measure.*





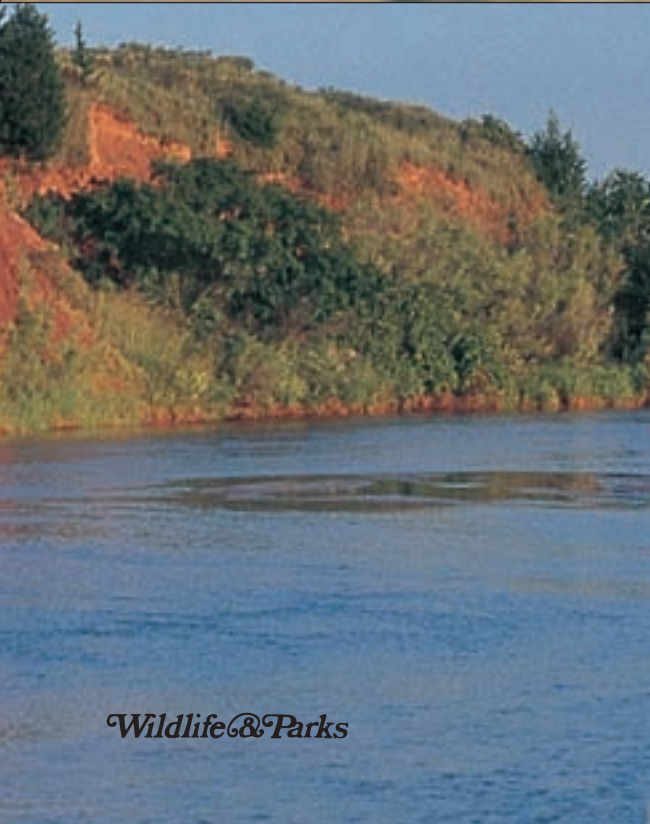
Hiker, Morton County



Salt Fork Arkansas River, Barber County



Fall prairie, Barber County



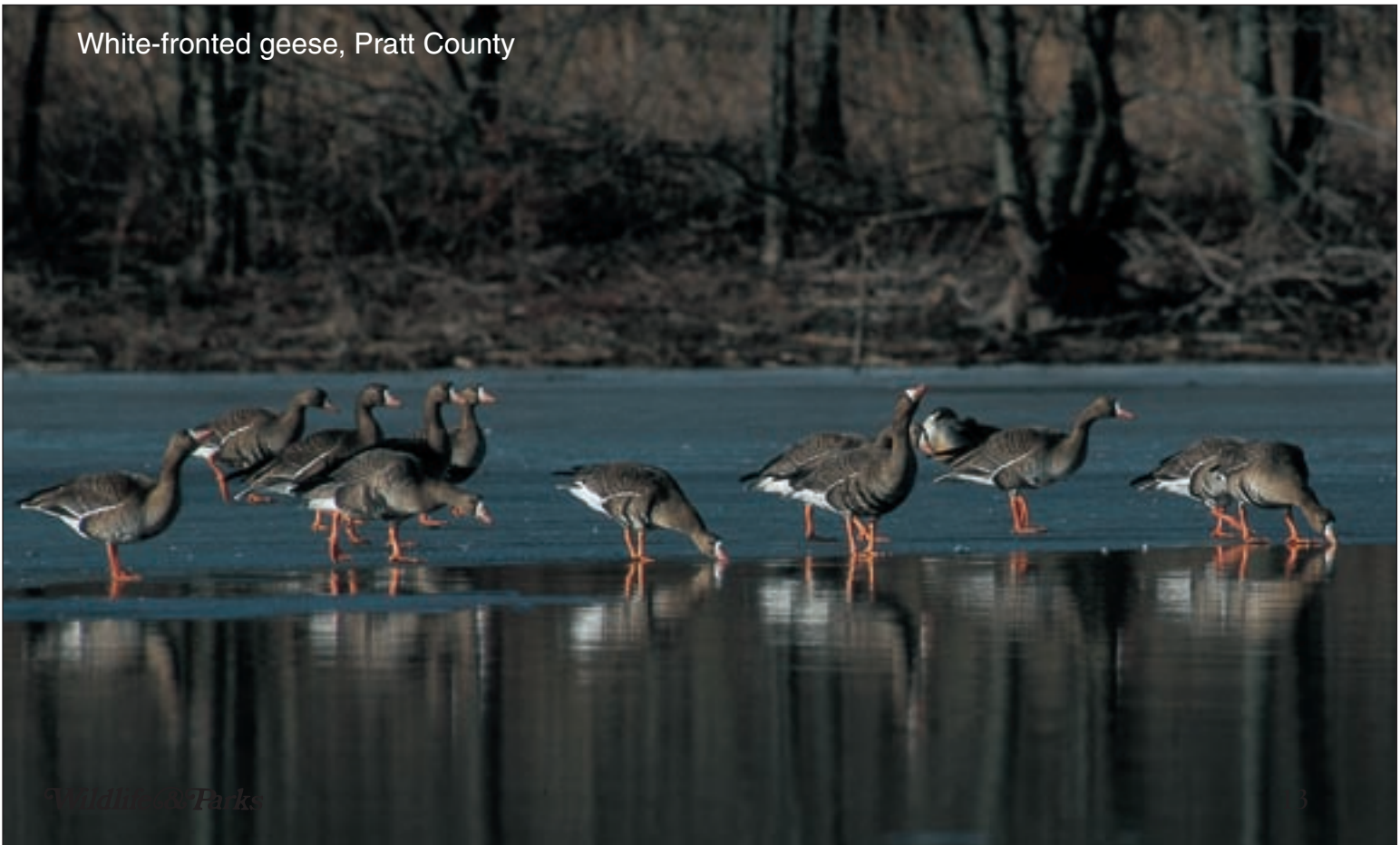
Chalk Pyramids, Grove County



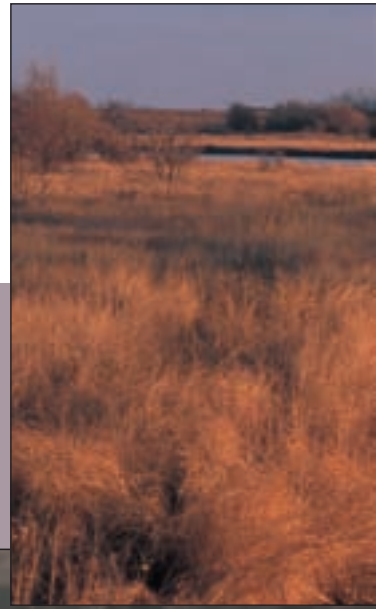
Little Sugar Creek, Lin County

Water is vital to life. From the patter of raindrops to the timeless flow of current, water is a gift to every living thing. It sustains, refreshes, and invites all to play. Too, its liquid mirror is a wonderful contrast to the land's firm lines.

White-fronted geese, Pratt County



Natural spring, Chase County



Great blue heron, Lin County



Ninnescah River, Kingman County



Rainbow, Barber County



Angler, Leavenworth County



White-tailed deer, Barber County

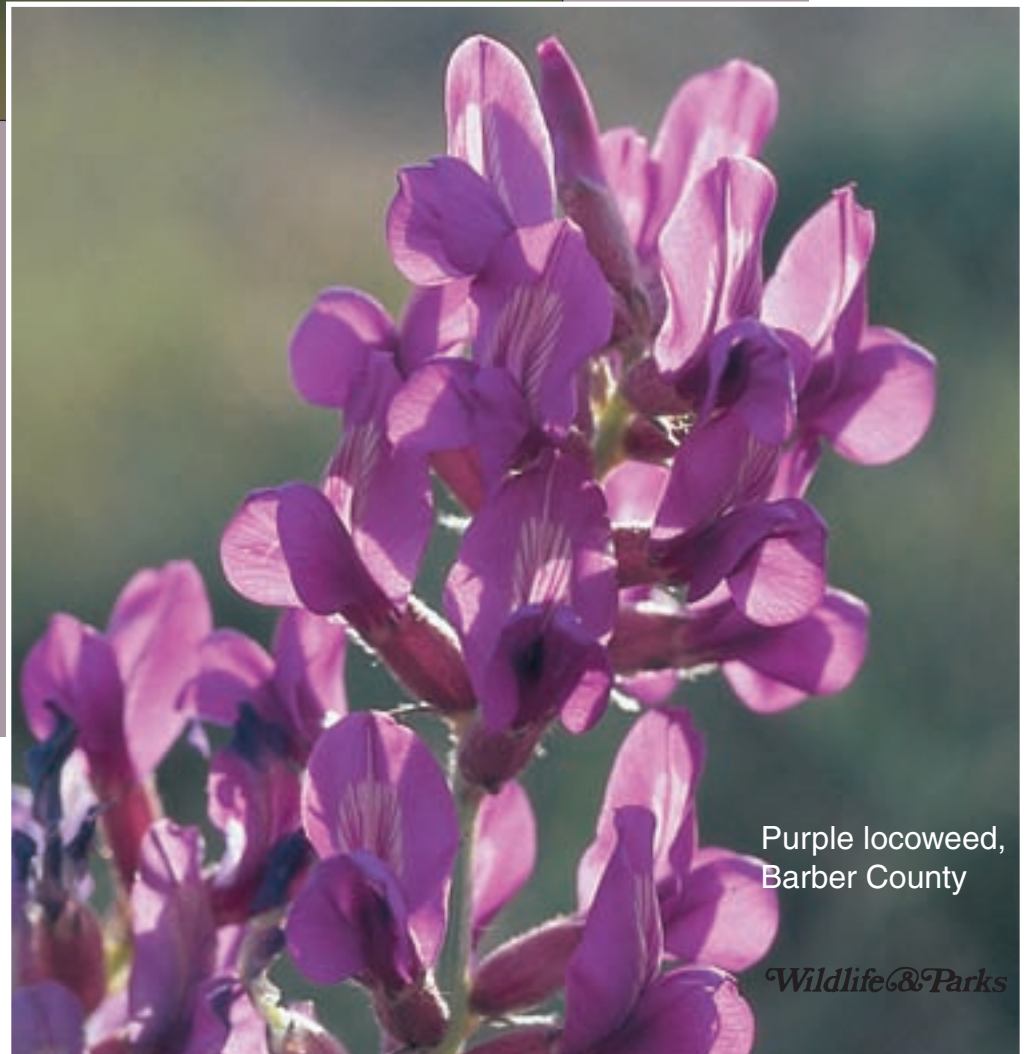
Plants clothe the earth and add endless interest to the landscape. At first thought, color may seem their notable gift. Then one remembers they feed the world and lend shade and shelter. Deeper mysteries of identification and biology draw the seeker into treasures of knowledge.





Wildflowers, Reno County

Swallowtail on gayfeather,
Cherokee County



Purple locoweed,
Barber County

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Wildflowers, Bourbon County

Crabapples, Pratt County



Cactus flower,
Pratt County



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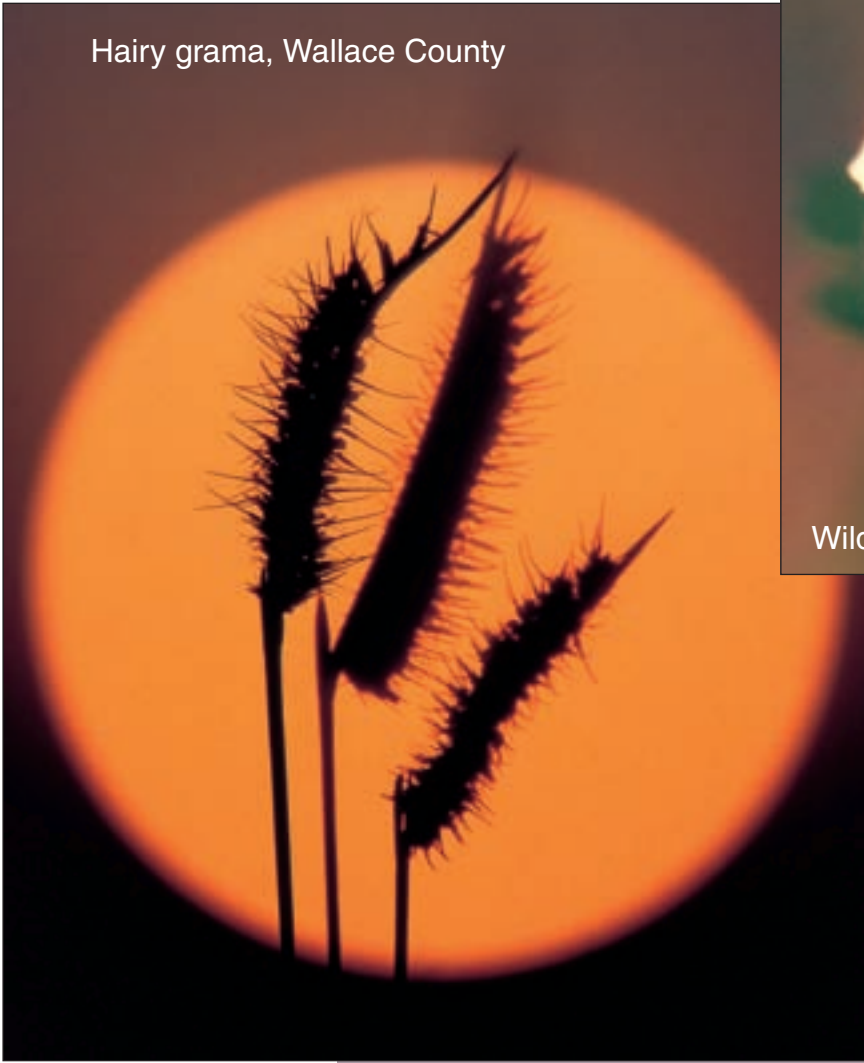
Robin nest, Pratt County



Sunflowers, Lyon County



Hairy grama, Wallace County



Wild geranium, Miami County

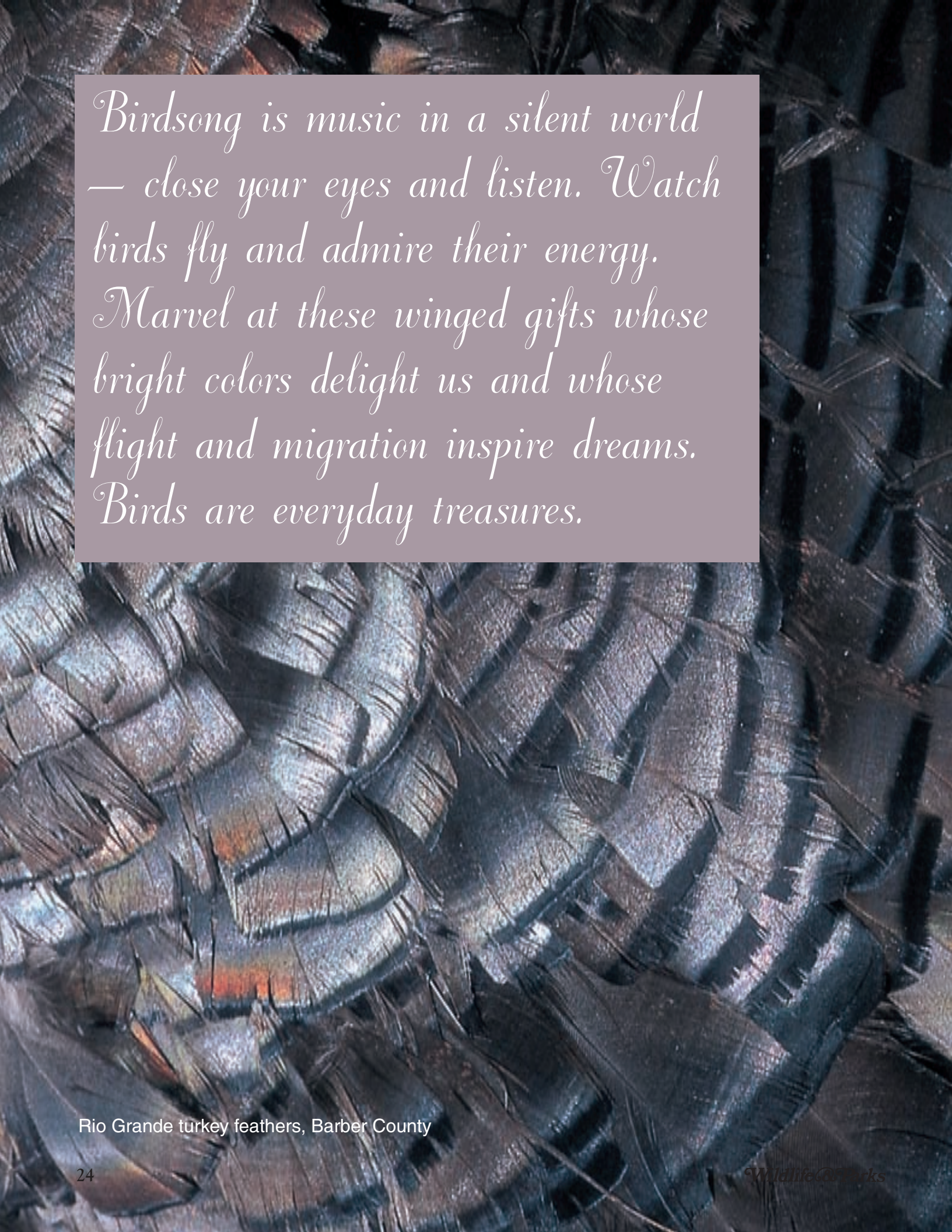




Mushrooms, Lin County



Sycamore bark, Cowley County

A close-up photograph of Rio Grande turkey feathers. The feathers are densely packed and exhibit a complex, iridescent pattern of colors, including deep blues, purples, and hints of orange and red. The texture is highly detailed, showing the individual barbs and the way light reflects off the feather surfaces.

*Birdsong is music in a silent world
— close your eyes and listen. Watch
birds fly and admire their energy.
Marvel at these winged gifts whose
bright colors delight us and whose
flight and migration inspire dreams.
Birds are everyday treasures.*

Rio Grande turkey feathers, Barber County



Bird feeder, Pratt County



Snow geese, Leavenworth County





Burrowing owl,
Pratt County



Bluejay, Bourbon County



Tufted titmouse, Crawford County



Chipping sparrow, Crawford County



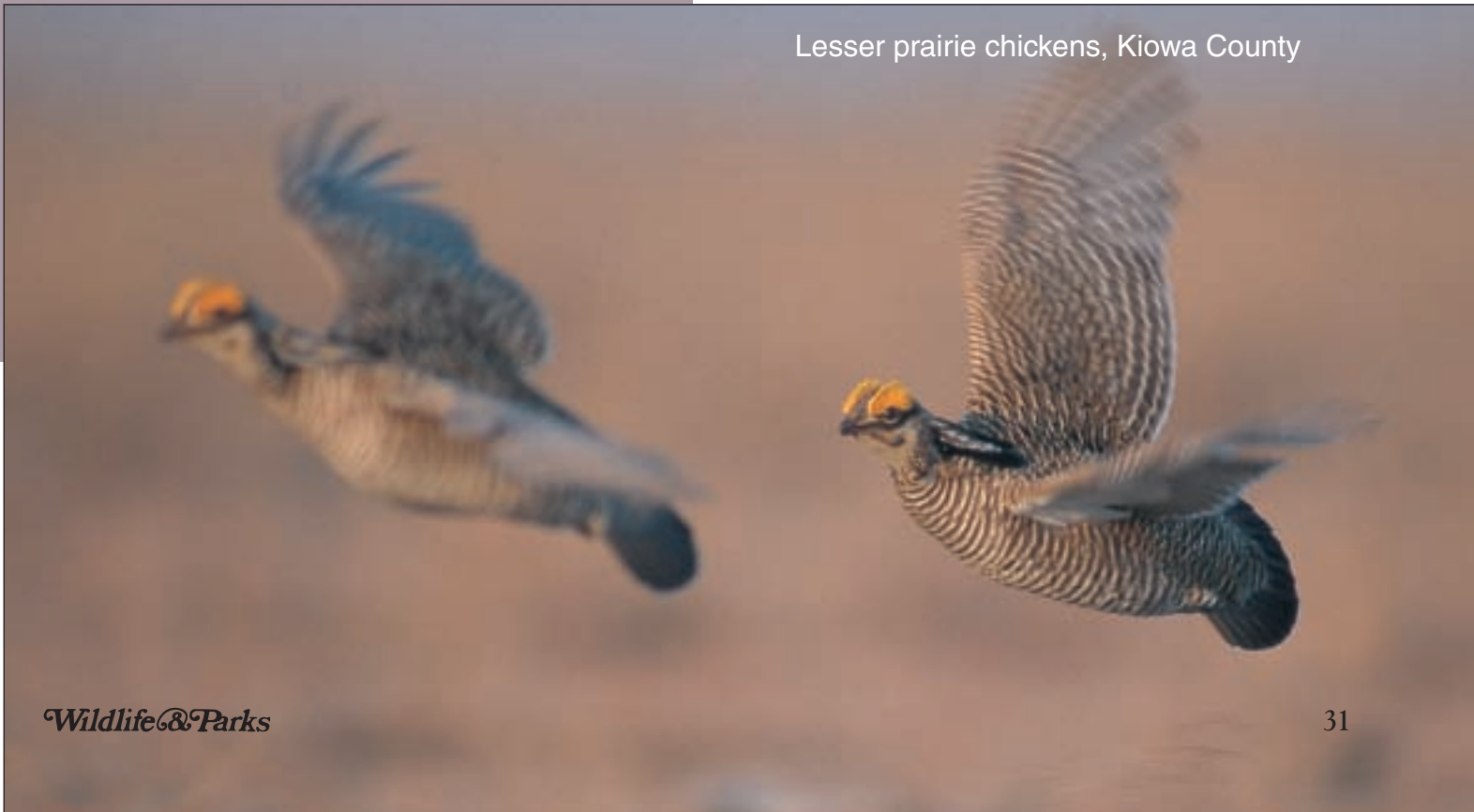
Mallard, Stafford County



Northern harrier, Pratt County



Buffleheads, Pratt County



Lesser prairie chickens, Kiowa County

Rio Grande turkey, Barber County



Western kingbirds, Pratt County





Ring-necked pheasant, McPherson County

White-tailed deer, Crawford County

“Who teaches us more than the beasts of the earth, or makes us wiser than birds of the air?” asked the ancient writer of Job.

Myriad creatures share our space in nearly invisible ways, yet to see and know them is to learn more fully the meaning of life.





Collared lizard, Miami County

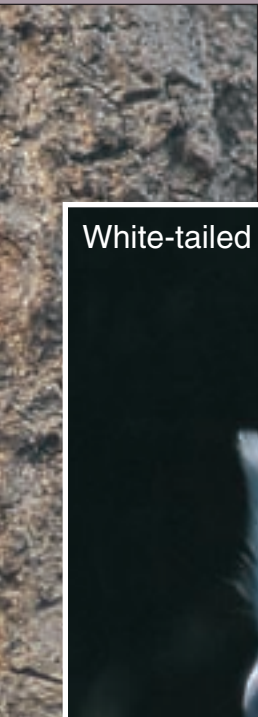


Fox squirrel, Crawford County





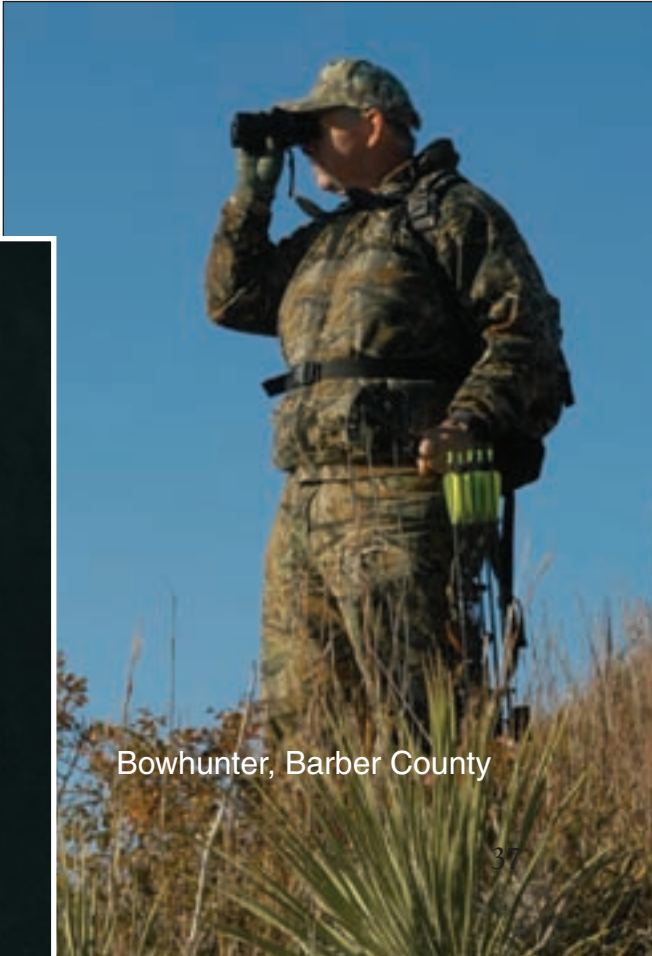
Prairie dogs, Pratt County



White-tailed deer, Crawford County



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Bowhunter, Barber County



Red fox, Pratt County



Raccoon, Pratt County



Cottontail, Pratt County

*Seasons change.
How remarkable are
these quarterly
cycles! Each vista,
each leaf, each living
thing turns according
to timeless rhythms.
Even the climate
flows in stages. The
seasons are surely a
gift to man, pre-
venting monotony
and offering a living
picture of the pas-
sage of life.*



Snowstorm, Pratt County





Icy stream, Lin County





Spring trees, Lin County



Quince, Lin County



Blackberries, Kingman County



Poison-ivy, Crawford County

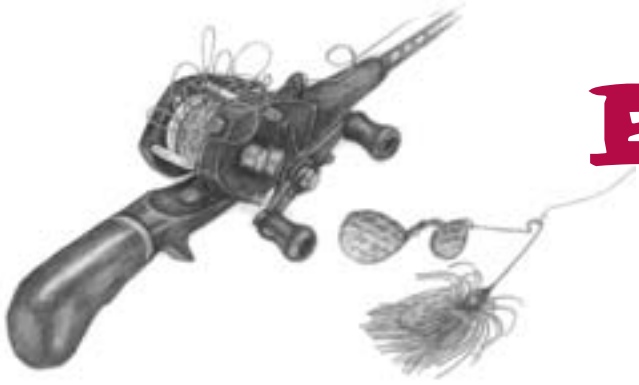


*Gifts surround us in
outdoor Kansas.*

*Seek beauty. It is
always there.*



Bird at sunset, Kiowa County



Backlash

by Mike Miller

Treestand Gremlins

In a bonehead move, I left my best treestand in the tree last year. This is the first treestand I've purchased, and it had a comfortable, padded seat and other fancy amenities. I had always taken it down in late winter, but I got lazy last year.

I really didn't expect it to be much worse for the wear when I checked it before archery deer season. After all, what could happen to an aluminum frame treestand? The straps were sound, as were the buckles. It was safe enough, but there was damage to the stand I couldn't explain.

I pondered the evidence that first evening I hunted from the stand. It was warm and quiet that day, and not many deer were moving. There weren't even any birds to watch. So, I pondered. Some might call it daydreaming, but I was mulling over all the possibilities and searching for plausible explanations.

As the evening wore on, I couldn't get an episode of that old television series "The Twilight Zone." out of my head. It was a long time ago, and it's kind of weird that I remember the episode "Nightmare At 20,000 Feet" which starred William Shatner. He was a recently released mental patient who was the only passenger on a commercial jet flight who could see a gremlin ripping a hole in the plane's wing. That's the kind of gremlin I imagined working on my treestand. I've never seen a gremlin, mind you, so don't jump to conclusions about my mental state. I've just noticed mounting evidence of these gremlins' work in the woods.

I have homemade treestands that I've routinely left up year-round. They are heavy-duty angle iron with 1-inch plywood decks. A heavy chain and boomer keep them in the tree -- pretty much indestructible. But I did notice that several layers of ply-

wood were missing from the bottom of the deck. I figured the glue had just weathered away, but one day as I climbed to the stand, I swear I could see tiny teeth marks. Then I really got to thinking. The damage was on the bottom of the deck. If squirrels were chewing on my treestands, why wouldn't they chew on the top where the wood would be much easier to get at. It was as if whatever was removing the plywood layer by layer didn't want me to know the platform was weakened.

Now I'm pretty sure there are gremlins in the woods that would rather I not be there, or at least want me to be much less comfortable while I'm there. The seat on my store-bought treestand was shredded. All of the camouflage material that covered the foam padding was ripped away, and the foam had been torn away, one tiny bite at a time. I could see the little teeth marks again. The safety belt had been removed from the tree and discarded on the ground.

Yes, I occasionally see squirrels from my tree stands. But what squirrel is going to eat foam rubber. And my aluminum stand is in an old pine tree. I've never seen a fox squirrel in one of the pine trees, and I've always assumed the sap oozing from the bark kept them away. It's just one more bit of evidence pointing to gremlins.

I know what you're thinking and I you're probably right. I've spent a few too many hours alone in a treestand with nothing to occupy my mind but my imagination. And I know that the damage to my treestands was caused by the weather, squirrels, and other sharp-toothed rodents. There are no woods gremlins. . .

You are traveling through another dimension. A dimension of not only sight and sound, but of mind . . .

