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On Point

by Mike Hayden



Treasure In The River

One of the most persistent issues the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks deals with is access for outdoor recreation. In a state that is 97 percent privately owned, most outdoor activities occur on private land. Acquisition is a politically charged, expensive and time-consuming solution, and while the department continually pursues opportunities for more public land, staff have always looked for alternatives. The best examples of these are the Walk-In Hunting Access and the F.I.S.H. programs, where the department pays landowners lease fees to open land and water to hunting and fishing access.

However, another emphasis has been on river access. There are more than 10,000 miles of rivers and streams in Kansas, but with three exceptions, they are privately owned. State law considers the Kansas, Missouri, and Arkansas rivers “navigable,” which means that the river basins between normal high-water lines are public land. KDWP has worked diligently in recent years to develop access points on public land, but there is a need for more.

While the river basins are open to the public, anglers and boaters must have landowner permission to cross private land to get to the river. Throughout the 170 miles of the Kansas River, there are 20 public sites, five of which have been developed since 2003 and two more in the planning stages. Ideally, there would be a put-in/take-out site every five miles, but there are gaps where adjoining land is private. On the Arkansas River, a 100-mile stretch from the Rice/Reno County line to Oxford has 11 sites, and there is a need for more.

A group called the Arkansas River Corridor Access Plan, made up of KDWP, the City of Wichita, Sedgwick County, Reno County, Sumner County, the City of South Hutchinson, the City of Derby, the City of Oxford, and the Arkansas River Coalition, has been working to fund development of a Master Plan

for access to the Arkansas River. One idea is to purchase easements from landowners to provide access points. However, as the group has worked to promote public awareness and support for the project, it has met opposition from some adjacent landowners who fear trespass, vandalism, and littering.

These concerns are common whenever we propose public access. Many said the Walk-In Hunting Access program wouldn't work because of littering and trespass. Today there are more than 1 million acres enrolled in WIHA and problems with littering and trespass have been minimal. When the Prairie Spirit Rail Trail was being developed in eastern Kansas, a very aggressive campaign was waged against it, much of it based on perceived problems with public trail users. Those concerns haven't panned out.

This is not to say that we don't have occasional problems, but complaints are promptly addressed, and enforcement is stepped up on the public lands. We've found that the users who appreciate the program are willing to help police the areas. Generally, the people who want to float and enjoy the Kansas and Arkansas rivers appreciate our natural resources, and they are the first to support conservation efforts. By learning to appreciate the river, its wildlife and the recreational opportunities it provides, users become strong advocates for those resources.

KDWP and all Kansans who love the outdoors must be vigilant in our efforts to provide and promote opportunities to enjoy outdoor recreation. A strong coalition of individuals and organizations that support natural resource issues is important to conservation. By increasing access and enhancing opportunities for Kansans to enjoy our rivers, we step closer to ensuring that future generations will enjoy the same opportunities.

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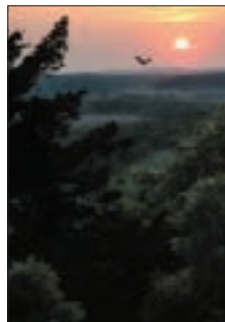
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Front Cover: Blue jays are often on guard for territorial intruders and respond well to recorded calls. Photograph by Mike Blair, 600 mm lens, f/11 @ 1/500th sec. **Back Cover:** Elk City State Park offers beautiful natural opportunities for campers and hikers. Mike Blair filmed this scene with a 55 mm lens, f/16 @ 1/125th sec.



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






TECHNO BIRDING

by Mike Rader
wildlife education coordinator, Pratt

photos by Mike Blair
photographer/associate editor, Pratt

Armed with the latest digital music storage devices and specialized software, serious birders have discovered a new era in bird watching.



A person wearing a brown jacket and a cap is shown in profile, looking through binoculars. They are standing in a natural setting with trees and foliage in the background. The image is partially obscured by a white text box on the left side.

Bird watching, or “birding,” as it’s often called, is one of the fastest growing outdoor hobbies in the U.S. An estimated 50 million Americans claim at least a casual pursuit of watching and identifying birds, with the number of Kansans approaching 1 million. Participants range from the backyard bird enthusiast, who enjoys seeing and hearing common species in plain sight, to hardcore birders who travel great distances to add a rare or new species to their life lists.

Birding is a great excuse to get outside. While some birders are satisfied by looking through panes of glass at the birds using their feeders, others prefer the entire experience of outdoor sights and sounds. But since seeing birds where they live can be difficult, calling can be the best way to get a close-up look. Birds are typically curious about others of their own species and will investigate the source of calls. Many birds defend a territory, so hearing another individual singing nearby is a natural cause for concern.

Many birds also readily respond to a recorded call or whistled imitation of the Eastern screech owl. The call of a screech owl represents a potential threat, and songbirds may participate in “mobbing” behavior to confront the source. In the case of a real owl, songbirds will become very agitated, fly in to find the owl, and then attempt to drive it away. If you play the recorded version or whistle the call, the birds will come to find it, providing close-up views. When they can’t locate a real owl, they usually leave and go about their business.

Knowing bird songs will help a birder be more



Many small songbirds like this painted bunting are difficult to observe not only because they are rare, but also because they inhabit thick foliage. With knowledge of habits and range, birders can sometimes call them into the open for thrilling glimpses.

effective calling, as well as identifying birds in the field. Bird songs can be learned in the field, but a more efficient way is through a growing toolbox of new technologies. It used to be that a birder would study LPs or cassette recordings of songs before going to the field – concentrating on the species likely to be encountered. I know from personal experience that trying to remember these songs in the field can be confusing, especially with groups of birds that have similar or less distinctive songs. Newer technology, such as portable cassette players or boom boxes, allowed birders to take these sound-producing devices with them. However, this was somewhat cumbersome – lugging bulky sound equip-

ment, binoculars, and field guides into the field.

Then, the introduction of compact discs revolutionized birding. The portable CD player was much lighter and made locating desired bird songs easier. Headphones let CD users listen

to recordings in the field, and many players had small external speakers to project songs or owl calls for calling birds.

Fast forward to today. MP3 technology has further enhanced a birder's ability to access bird sounds in the field in a new and exciting way. MP3 is short for "MPEG-1, audio layer 3." It's a digital audio system that's been compressed into a smaller space while maintaining high-quality sound. MP3 files are only a tenth the size of normal computer files and are easily transferred to small audio players. These devices, known as MP3 players or iPods (depending on manufacturer) are becoming increasingly popular with birders. What was invented as a way to store



One technique is to cruise backroads, stopping strategically to call, listen, and watch. It will take some experience to know which birds are attracted to which calls.

large amounts of music has revolutionized field birding.

MP3 players and iPods can be loaded with hundreds of bird sounds for access at a moment's notice when observing or trying to attract birds. A company called BirdJam has developed software that will organize and group bird song recordings, create specialized play lists, strip out name announcements, divide up tracks with more than one species, and even add a variety of data for display on the screen. This software saves a tremendous amount of time over a normal editing process for bird recordings used on the player.

BirdJam software can be purchased preloaded on a new iPod or separately for installment on an MP3 player or iPod. The package also includes a set of compact discs for the *Stokes Field Guide to Bird Songs*. Like the software, these CDs can be purchased preloaded or loaded separately. The full package, including a 30GB iPod, BirdJam software, and seven-CD set of eastern and western bird songs, costs around \$450. Obviously, not every birder can afford this expense, so a smaller 2GB iPod Nano is also offered in a package that sells for about \$350. Buyers can also purchase only what they need to use an

MP3 player they already own. The software alone runs about \$250, or the CD set is approximately \$75. The set-up comes with ear buds (a type of compact headphone), but external speakers and weatherproof carrying case are sold separately.

Chuck Otte, an avid birder from Junction City, bought a package with the iPod Nano unit for his wife, Jaye, as a gift. After using it for about a year, Otte had this to say, "I've used sound reproduction in the field before, but it involved copying records or CDs to a cassette tape and then carrying a pocket tape player around. It worked, but finding one particular call could



Baltimore oriole, female

Being familiar with bird songs will help a birder be more effective calling, as well as identifying birds in the field. Bird songs can be learned in the field, but a more efficient way is through a growing toolbox of new technologies.



Binoculars are traditional birding equipment, and they are necessary. However, when birders combine traditional equipment with digital technology, such as the iPod pictured at right, a new world of possibilities opens up.

take five to 10 minutes. With a digital music device, the same sounds could be found in 15 seconds. With the cassette tape players, I often needed several tapes to get all the calls. With a digital music device, all the CDs you might ever want could be loaded on the same small device."

Otte occasionally does birding programs for schools and youth groups. His MP3 device makes it easy to create a desired play list of bird songs to use in a specific order for a program.

Otte is an experienced and expert field birder and emphasized an important point about using birdsongs to call birds: "We don't like to use (the MP3)

to call birds very often during breeding season. We feel that this can be quite disruptive to the birds. As these devices become more common among birders, I fear they may be overused to the point of causing some nesting birds to abandon their nests or be disrupted to the point of nesting failure."

Too much of a good thing could actually be harmful. When using hi-tech tools like MP3s to enhance the birding experience, don't forget that most things we humans do impact the environment. The use of such devices in moderation, with common sense, and a general respect for nature will ensure exciting and educational experiences without upsetting natural balance.

A similar technology, called Handheld Birds, is available from The National Geographic Society. It is the first mobile interactive field guide for PDAs (personal data assistants). It is a software bundle that is pre-loaded on a Palm Pilot and can be purchased for around \$500. The software can also be bought separately for approximately \$250 and loaded on any PDA. This software includes more than 1,600 bird images and over 650 range maps available at the touch of a button. It contains the same detailed field identification found in the print version of the *National Geographic Society Field Guide to North American Birds*, high quality song and call play-

back features, a comprehensive and searchable database for 867 species, and a checklist function to do trip lists and retrieve detailed sighting information.

I don't think these technologies will soon replace standard, print-version field guides costing around \$25, but some birders will certainly buy them. The digital devices have weaknesses such as problems reading the LCD screens in direct sunlight. Continuing advances will no doubt eventually eliminate this

problem.

Other recent innovations in birding technology include binoculars and spotting scopes with built-in digital cameras, feeder-cams and trail-cams, and a wide array of typical digital camera equipment. I haven't heard how well the new binoculars and scopes work, but it sounds like a promising idea. Feeder-cams are small cameras with remote control, allowing the observer to take photos of birds that are using a bird feeder

or watering device. Trail-cams have been used by biologists and hunters for several years to see what animals are using a particular trail. The cameras are now being used for all sorts of wildlife, including birds, to passively film them around the clock at particular locations.

Digital photography has found a major place in the world of the birder and wildlife watcher as well. Photographers now have the ability to take a multitude of pictures at a rapid



Birds can be quite animated when they approach a call, like this blue jay, especially if the call is a perceived threat, like that of a screech owl. Dedicated birders warn that calls must be used with moderation, and many refuse to call during the breeding/nesting season for fear that the intrusion may cause nest abandonment or nest failure.



house wren

Another traditional piece of birding equipment is the spotting scope, a powerful telescope that allows detailed views of birds. Several years ago, birders fashioned home-made devices to attach digital cameras to their scopes to take interesting photographs and document rare sightings. Today, optical companies are mass producing these adapters at affordable prices.

rate, review them instantaneously, keep the best, and then discard the rest. This idea began with a practice called “digiscoping.” Birders used home-made attachments that placed the lens of a point-and-shoot digital camera to the eyepiece of a spotting scope. Optical companies soon began to massproduce these attachments, specific to brand of camera and the brand of spotting scope. These images have created a revolution in the documentation of bird sightings. Current advancements in the digital camera industry have made this technology more affordable, so many birders are

carrying these handy devices. At this time, photo quality is far less than that afforded by normal camera lenses but even so, digiscoping offers interesting photo opportunities.

Other digital products are being developed to cater to bird watchers. One new product is called the Song Sleuth. It is supposed to identify bird songs in the field. Reports indicate limited success. Laser pointers have recently hit the birding world, with bird tour guides using them to quickly point out birds in dense foliage. And GPS units (global positioning systems) are more common in the

hands of birders now, especially in locating birding destinations and documenting rare sightings or nests accurately.

The technology explosion is also apparent in reporting bird sightings. The use of cellular telephones and the Internet to report sightings have made the birding world more connected and mobile. Many times, I’ve used a cell phone to contact friends about a good sighting or received a call about a rare bird in a remote location. Email bird reports have virtually taken the place of telephone hotlines. Some folks even use a service for Blackberries (handheld portable,

wireless, email devices) that will alert them to bird sightings from an area of their choosing.

Many birders carry FRS (Family Radio Service) radios, set to a specific channel standard around the country. These compact, high-tech walkie-talkies are dependable and useful in a 2- to 10-mile radius and typically don't suffer the interference problems of the old CB radios. Many groups use FRS radios to keep in touch on field trips, easily reporting sightings from miles away. I prefer the model with rechargeable batteries since digital equipment may use only the top 10 percent of power in a battery. (If you take the "dead" batteries from a camera and put them in a flashlight, for example, they will operate effectively for a

long time.)

What does all this mean? Technology has definitely enhanced our ability to watch birds. Many of the items discussed provide a marked advantage over ways of the past. I still consider myself an "old school" birder and will never be able to buy all the new toys. However, as I get older, I realize I can use all the help I can get. In a way, the prospect of having something that will eventually identify everything for me is frightening. The challenge of identifying a

bird through sight, sound, and/or behavior is a large part of the fun.

Bird watching can be great exercise, a way to enjoy the fresh air, and therapeutic to some extent. Use the technology that best fits what you want from this hobby. Many exciting products are out there, and lots of companies are working on that next big thing. Just remember to enjoy birds for what they are – one of the most easily seen and colorful members of our natural world. ♡

More information about the products in this article can be found at: www.birdjam.com, www.nationalgeographic.com, or your local bird product or electronics retail outlet.

ruby-crowned kinglet





Elk City State Park: A Hike In Paradise

by J. Mark Shoup
associate editor, Pratt

photos by Mike Blair

*The picturesque Elk River rolls through the Osage
Questas region of Montgomery County to fill Elk City
Reservoir and provide a stunning backdrop
to Elk City State Park.*

Of all Kansas state parks, Elk City may defy the stereotypical Kansas landscape more than any other. Nestled in steep hillsides of the cross-timbered Osage Questas, the park — 5 miles northwest of Independence in Montgomery County — and its adjoining reservoir, is surrounded by a dense jungle of oak, hickory, walnut, and a variety of other hardwoods. To Elk City State Park manager Chris Hammerschmidt, the area is “reminiscent of westcentral Arkansas,” and the comparison is apt.

Driving to the park, one senses something different about this landscape, but it takes a hike through one of the area’s many trails to feel the full impact of the forest. Steep in places, the trails offer a mini-mountain hiking experience. At one point, you may be strolling through dense thickets of huge, ancient cedars, the forest floor so carpeted with cedar needles that you hardly make a sound. The experience is almost mystical.

At another point, you may find yourself climbing through a stone chute, solid rock jutting high above you on either side. As you exit this natural wonder, your breath is taken away by rocky bluffs and meadows bursting — if it’s late spring — with American columbine and a palette of other wildflowers. A few feet off the trail at many points, you find bluffs to sit and absorb a view of the 4,450-acre lake, surrounded by miles of lush green trees reflected in the shimmering water.

This is tremendous habitat for wildlife, both game and nongame, and it teems with bird life. Least flycatchers, painted buntings, tufted titmouse, pileated woodpeckers, and barred owls are just a few species not normally found throughout much of Kansas. Hummingbirds are one of the most popular species with long-term park visitors, who often hang feeders near their campers for constant entertainment. And it’s not uncommon to see deer and turkey wandering through the campground.



Elk City State Park is noted for its fine trails, attracting avid hikers from across the country. The park itself has four hiking trails: Table Mound Hiking Trail, 2.5 miles long; Green Thumb Nature Trail, 2/3 mile; the 1-mile long Post Oak Self-Guiding Nature Trail; and Squaw Creek Multi-Purpose Trail. In addition, Eagle Rock Mountain Bike Trail (4 miles, near the outlet channel) offers cyclists an opportunity to enjoy their favorite pastime in this scenic setting. Other multi-purpose and exercise trails complement the Elk City trail experience. Each has its own charm and purpose, and combined with the 15-mile Elk River Hiking Trail in the wildlife area, which also offers primitive camping, you have a must-see destination for hikers of every stripe.

“We get a lot of compliments on our trails around the lake,” says Hammerschmidt. “Post Oak, Table Mound, and Elk River Trail have been designated National Recreational Trails under the U.S. Department of Interior’s National Trail System. People come from all over the Midwest just to hike them.”

Hiking, however, is not all that Elk City has to offer. Although it is a relatively small area, the 857-acre park boasts 11 full-service camping sites, 86 water and electricity only campsites, and 53 non-utility campsites. Two shower houses, three boat ramp lanes, two courtesy docks, and a swimming beach provide convenient access to the water. Two dump stations and three shelter-houses help meet



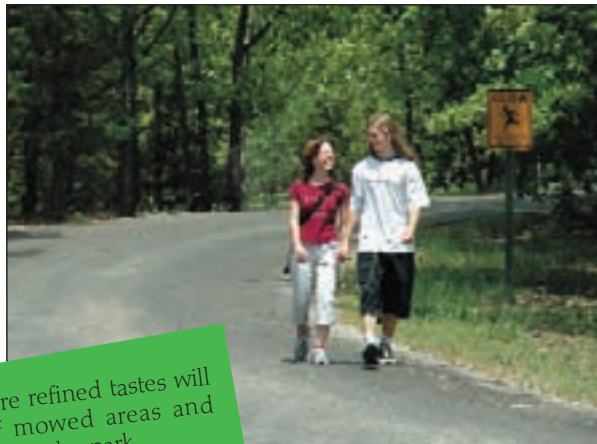
The timbered bluffs surrounding Elk City State Park provide spectacular hiking trails, as well as stunning views of the countryside.

the needs of campers and special event participants. A disc golf course, an exercise trail, horseshoe pits, basketball courts, a kid’s fishing pond, and a sand volleyball court meet the needs of sports-oriented park visitors, and a new fish cleaning station has been installed for anglers.

Elk City Reservoir has much

to offer anglers. The lake and spillway boast some of the best flathead and channel catfishing in the state. In fact, the world record flathead — a 123-pound monster — was caught in Elk City Reservoir in 1998. While spring white bass runs provide exciting action in picturesque Elk River that feeds the lake, flathead,

blue catfish, and crappie are popular species in the spillway below the dam. Hammerschmidt is an avid angler, so to provide additional fishing opportunity, he enlisted help from park volunteers and installed brushpiles in the lake along the park’s shoreline. This has created an excellent crappie fishing opportunity for those who enjoy wading



Those with more refined tastes will find plenty of mowed areas and paved roads inside the park.

or fishing from the shore, where 2-pound crappie are not uncommon during the spring spawning season.

As with other state parks, Elk City conducts special events to attract visitors. With the help of a local friends group — the Pit Crew Park Improvement Team — three special events are conducted each year. One of the park's two free park entrance days is devoted to a springtime OK Kids Day, featuring fishing derbies, archery and shotgun clinics, free lunch, and other special activities for youngsters. A Fourth of July celebration is also conducted annually, but the biggest event of the year bears the unique name of Neewollah, which is Halloween



spelled backwards. This event is actually part of one of the state's largest annual festivals, held in Independence and featuring several days of parades, concerts, musicals, a carnival, and featured entertainment such as this year's Oak Ridge Boys.

The park reserves its second annual free park entrance day

for Saturday of the Neewollah event — held the Friday and Saturday before Halloween. This event begins with a Friday chili cook-off. On Saturday morning, park visitors are treated to a breakfast, followed by craft fairs and a variety of other activities throughout the day. In the evening, a group called the Kan-O-

Kliners serves up a bean feed during an auction of items donated by local businesses and private individuals, the proceeds of which go back to the Pit Crew for future activities. The evening's climax is a traditional Halloween hayrack ride followed by a concert in the park.

In addition to conducting



The new fish cleaning station is just one of the amenities that make Elk City State Park attractive to visitors. The cleaning station features running water, electricity, and a garbage disposal. Elk City Reservoir is popular with white bass, crappie, and catfish anglers.

photo by J. Mark Shoup

events in the park, the Pit Crew maintains a laundry house, sells ice and firewood to campers, and helps with small maintenance activities. Their most recent contribution has been a \$10,000 donation for a new playground set that will be built in the park this year.

New projects are the lifeblood of every state park, and Elk City is no exception. In addition to the playground, a new vault toilet with courtesy dock, a lift station in the campground, and a disabled-accessible fishing dock are planned for this year. In 2006, a tornado destroyed the park's gatehouse, so with help from volunteers, park staff were able to build a new gatehouse complete with a kitchen sink, microwave, refrigerator, bathroom, and heating/air conditioning unit. The new gatehouse opened in May and is manned by camp host volunteers. It also features a wireless internet

receiver that is connected to the state park office through fiber optics. From there, the park is able to provide wireless internet service to campers who may be staying at the park while on business or who just want to check the local weather.

Another vault toilet is planned for 2008, along with an additional shower building and two cabins.

Although the friends group is invaluable, it takes a lot to keep all these facilities in good shape and events running smoothly. Hammerschmidt does this with a staff of four full-time employees: himself, administrative assistant Diane Hight, general repair and maintenance technician Bill Taylor, and park ranger Pat Allen. They operate



In addition to being a great place to ride bikes and relax, Elk City also hosts several special events each year, including the Neewollah celebration in October.

on an annual budget of \$65,000 while entertaining about 83,000 visitors per year and generating \$150,000 from park fees.

As I rode around the park with Hammerschmidt last May, I was struck by the way he keeps a close eye on everything. Anything out of place prompts him to grab his hand-held radio and communicate with other staff, usually Taylor. An unfamiliar car parked near a park volunteer's camper is cause for inquiry. A non-functional water hydrant prompts another walkie-talkie conversation, and the interview pauses while he helps his crew troubleshoot the problem.

He also takes time to enjoy unusual sights or activities in the park. Cobalt Boat Company, with its manufacturing plant in nearby Neodesha, tests their boats on the lake, and he stops to watch them unload a couple of new models and motor off. Flathead anglers below the dam pique his interest, so we have to stop and see how the fish are biting.

It's obvious he enjoys his



Other special events include OK Kids Days and perhaps a rendezvous get-together where folks relive the ways of our ancestors.

Elk City State Parks offers 11 full-service campsites, 86 sites with electricity and water, and 53 primitive sites. The park features two shower houses, three boat ramp lanes, two courtesy docks, a swimming beach, two dump stations and three shelterhouses. The recently-built gatehouse below provides wireless internet to park users.



work. Open, unused space in the park inspires ideas for new facilities such as a driving range and a mini-putt golf course. The fit seems natural.

“I love the parks,” says Hammerschmidt, who has a degree in park and resource management from K-State. “I started here in 1999 as a park ranger, then worked as a natural resource officer in Chautauqua County, but when the park manager job here came open, I had to try for it. I really enjoy staying busy and being out in the park working with the guys.”

Elk City State Park is a beautiful facility that just keeps getting better. Its rugged landscape and wide variety of flora and fauna add a rich texture to the state park experience, and the

staff and volunteers are friendly and helpful. This summer or fall, plan a visit to this most unusual part of Kansas and visit one of our most beautiful parks.

And while you’re there, stop in the park office and view the

fabulous Mickey McDonald insect collection. You’ll be impressed before you ever get to those “happy trails” . . . and be smilin’ until then. 🐞



photo by J. Mark Shoup



Kaw River's

Big Cats

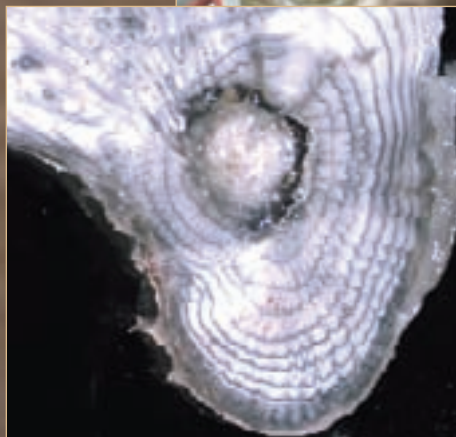
text and photos by Craig Paukert
Kansas Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, Kansas State University

Many eastern Kansas rivers are known for big flathead catfish, but the Kansas River, or Kaw, is usually ranked near the top. Researchers with the K-State Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit decided to learn just how abundant and big the Kaw's cats were.

Flathead catfish are one of the most common sport fish species in Kansas, and they get big. In fact, the world record flathead catfish, which weighed 123 pounds and was 61 inches long, was caught from Elk City Reservoir in 1998. Flatheads are common in rivers and lakes, particularly in the eastern half of the state. They are native to large, slow-moving rivers where they hide and wait near brush and other debris for the next meal. These fish offer a great opportunity for the angler who wants a good meal, or one who is looking for a trophy. When flatheads are the quarry, the Kansas River is a good place to look.

Opportunities to catch large flathead catfish from rivers in Kansas are mostly underutilized. The Kansas River is one of three rivers considered navigable in Kansas, which means the river is public land between the normal high-water marks. Anglers must have landowner permission to cross private land to access the river, or they may access at one of the public access sites. Fortunately for anglers, the Kansas River flows close to metropolitan areas like Kansas City, Lawrence, Topeka, and Manhattan. And although the Kansas River is known for its large flathead catfish, until recently there was little scientific information regarding the population.

Researchers at the Kansas Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit in the Division of Biology at Kansas State University studied the abundance and distri-



Using an electroshocking boat, researchers probed likely looking stretches on the river. When the big flatheads were stunned by the electrical current, they were captured for data collection before being released back to the river. A pectoral spine was removed from each fish so it could be aged. A crosscut view of a spine at left shows the rings that can be counted to determine a fish's age. The biggest fish sampled weighed 55 pounds and the oldest fish sampled was 21 years old.



Researchers collected 977 fish at 462 sites. Each fish was measured, aged, and weighed. From this data, researchers learned about growth rates, population density, and reproductive success of the flatheads.

bution of flatheads in the Kansas River. They looked at abundance, sizes, growth, habitat use, and mortality of flatheads in this large waterway. The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP) funded the project, and results will steer management decisions that will ensure conservation of this valuable resource.

From 2004 to 2006, Andy Makinster, a graduate student at Kansas State University, and Craig Paukert, an assistant professor of biology at Kansas State University (also the assistant leader of Fisheries at the Kansas Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit) researched the Kansas River flathead catfish population. Flathead

specimens were primarily collected by electrofishing, a common technique used to sample fish in rivers, lakes, and streams. This procedure uses electrical current to stun the fish so they can be netted by biologists. Once netted, flatheads were measured, weighed, and tagged. Before each fish was released back to the river, a pectoral spine

was removed for aging.

Researchers collected 977 flathead catfish at 462 sites throughout the Kansas River. Fish were most abundant in reaches from the Johnson County Weir to Topeka, with lower abundance upstream of Topeka. The stretch of river with the most abundant fish was from above Bowersock Dam in Lawrence to Topeka. Adult flathead catfish (16

inches and longer) were two to 10 times more abundant in this area than other reaches, but young catfish (less than 8 inches) were also commonly found. Two to six times more flathead catfish of all sizes were collected in the reach from Bowersock Dam to Topeka compared to other reaches.

Young flathead catfish preferred riprap and other rocky structure. In rocky habitat, abundance of age 1 fish (less than 8 inches) was double that found at mud banks or logjams. However, adult fish abundance was similar among all three habitats. The riprap may be important rearing habitat for young flathead catfish. Although adults are commonly fished for



near logjams, they were still found in other areas.

The study revealed some interesting things about Kansas River flathead catfish. The largest fish sampled was 46 inches long and weighed more than 55 pounds, and the oldest fish was aged at 21 years. However, larger fish are out there. Fish weighing more than 60 pounds are caught almost every year by anglers. The good news is that smaller fish are out there, too. It was common to collect fish less than 2 years old in all river reaches, indicating that the flathead catfish population is healthy and reproducing.

Fastest growth among flatheads was documented in the river's reaches above Bowersock

Dam, where fish reached 15 to 16 inches by age 3. In comparison, flathead catfish below the Johnson County Weir reached only 11.5 inches by age 3. It took fish living below the Johnson County Weir 5 years to grow to a length of 20 inches, whereas it took only 4 years, for fish living in the stretch above the Weir to Topeka to reach the same length. Still, these growth rates are faster than most flathead catfish river populations, which indicates that the Kansas River is a good environment for these fish.

In a study summarizing growth of flathead catfish throughout the U.S., Dr. Tom Kwak at North Carolina State University found that the average length for a river population at

age 3 was 12 inches. By age 5, the average river flathead reached 19 inches. In the Kansas River, the slowest growth areas were about the same as nationwide averages. In fact, of the 19 river populations evaluated in Dr. Kwak's study, the Kansas River growth would have ranked in the upper 25 percent of populations sampled. Fast growth suggests that the Kansas River supplies abundant food and that flatheads grow quickly because of it.

Regulations set by KDWP are important tools to protect and enhance fisheries throughout the state. Common regulations include daily creel limits and length limits. As part of the study, KDWP asked KSU researchers to use a computer-



Biologists were encouraged not only by the growth rates of fish in the Kansas, but also the number of young fish they sampled. The data also identified which river habitats the fish preferred, as well as which stretches of the river were most productive.



A tip-toe fish; a K-State researcher struggles to hold a large Kaw River flathead. Some of the information collected by the project will help the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks set regulations that will conserve this great resource.

simulated model to determine the effect of putting either a 24-inch or a 30-inch minimum length limit on the flathead catfish population in the Kansas River. Because the Kansas River contains many trophy flathead catfish, the option of protecting smaller catfish was studied to determine if it would create a better quality flathead fishery.

Results were surprising. According to the computer simulation, size distribution of flathead catfish in the Kansas River

would not change much as a result of establishing minimum length limits. Because there is not excessive harvest of large fish from the Kansas River currently, length limits would not have any effect.

The caveat is that if harvest increased, a minimum length limit might be necessary to maintain the quality fishery that exists today. Therefore, flathead harvest trends will be monitored by KDWP biologists. If harvest remains constant, length limits

should not be necessary. Regulations can be important management tools, but are counterproductive when not needed.

There is good news for Kansas flathead catfish anglers. The Kansas River flathead catfish population is doing well. Fish are fairly abundant, particularly in the middle reaches, and there appear to be young fish throughout the river. This is important to ensure replacement of natural loss or those harvested by anglers. In addition, these fish

reach larger sizes faster than average, an attribute most catfish anglers will appreciate!

However, there is more to it than that. For management purposes, fast growth with enough young fish coming into the population (recruitment) means that the population is likely sustainable. Think of the population as a conveyor belt. If young fish enter the population at the same rate that fish die (either naturally or harvested), then fish are available at all times. If more fish drop off the belt than come onto it, the flathead population will decline.

If a decline occurs, managers may need to take action to reduce the number of dying fish. This is commonly done by restricting harvest through regu-

lations. Right now, the conveyor belt in the Kansas River has enough fish to indicate stability. Additional regulations to reduce the number or sizes of fish harvested are not needed. However, this could change. Should more anglers start using the Kansas River, the flathead catfish population will be monitored by KDWP biologists to determine if angler harvest takes more than the flathead population can withstand.

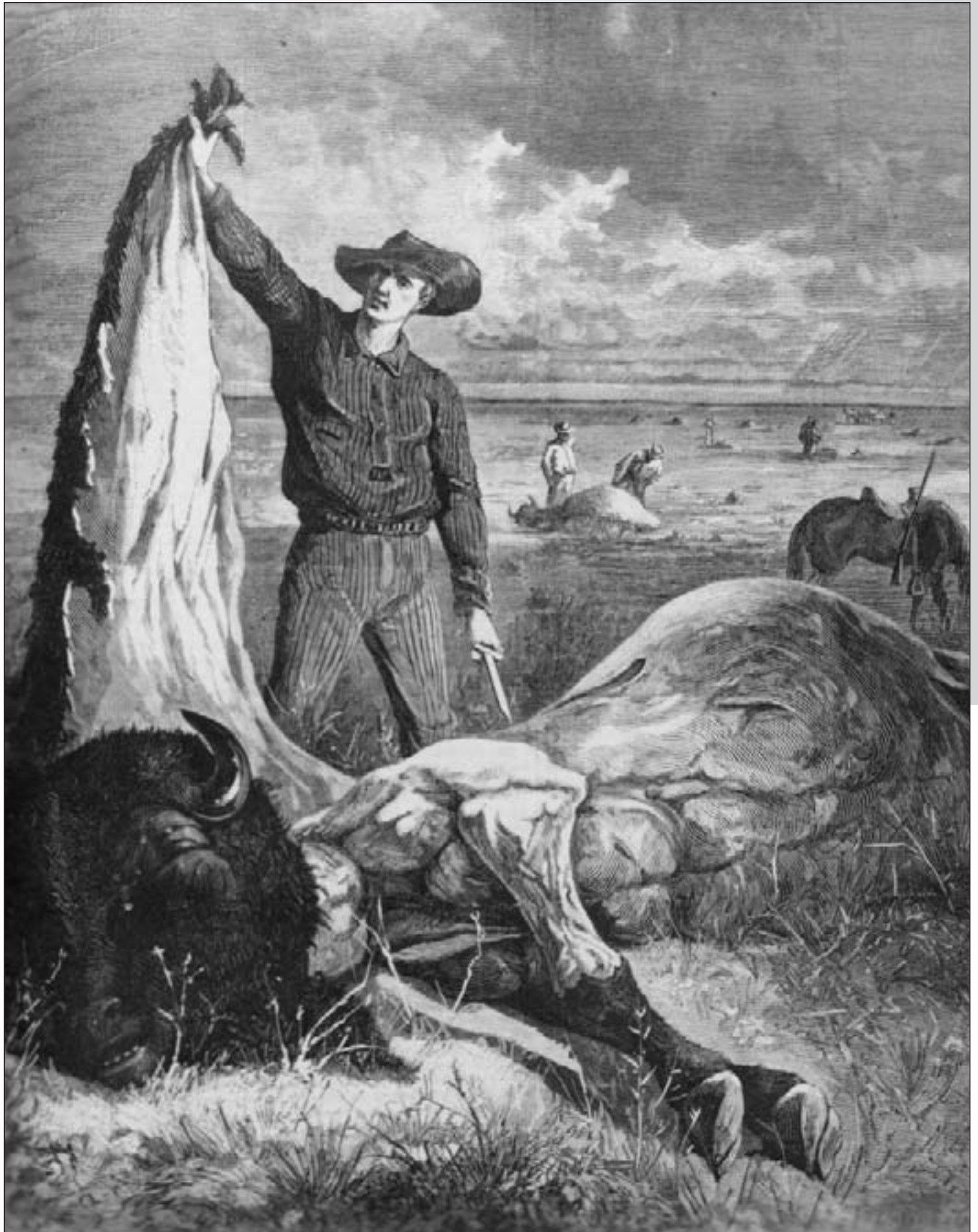
Flathead catfish in the Kansas River are a great resource for Kansans. Flatheads provide a great opportunity for river fishing and are excellent table fare but also allow trophy anglers to try their luck at true potential monsters in North American freshwater. The Kansas

River allows good fishing with little boat traffic.

Like most rivers these days, the Kansas River has water quality issues. Because of water contaminants that accumulate in bottom-feeding fish, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment recommends that Kansas River flathead catfish taken between Bowersock Dam and Eudora not be eaten. This warning is a good indicator that our rivers need attention. Other problems include habitat degradation, mining, and dewatering. When you are out on the river, appreciate and protect the resources we have to conserve them for future generations. ♡



A valuable resource, big flatheads like this might be 20 years old or more. The information gathered provided some insight on population density, growth rates, and reproductive success in this river. The good news for Kansas anglers is that that the flathead population in the Kaw is in excellent shape.



THE LAST BUFFALO

by J. Mark Shoup

photos and illustrations courtesy of the Kansas State Historical Society

"I close my eyes, only for a moment, and the moment's gone"

—musical group Kansas, Dust In the Wind

Like dust in the wind, the millions of buffalo that once roamed North America were nearly extinct. Seemingly unending numbers were depleted to only a few by the end of the 1800s.

My mother tells the story of a picnic she, my father, and some friends enjoyed on a smooth Arkansas River sandbar near Pawnee Rock in the late 1960s. The river was vibrant then, and strolling along its banks, my mother spied what appeared to be a bone sticking up from the packed sand. She tried to pull it up, but it wouldn't budge. Curious, she grabbed a stick and began digging, but the more she dug, the longer and wider the "bone" became. By the time she finally wrenched the stubborn object from the sand, the rest of the picnickers had gathered round to witness a most rare find — an intact American bison skull.

I still have this skull, which experts at Kansas University tell me could be 140 to several thousand years old. Without carbon dating, there's no way to tell. One thing is sure; bison have been a fixture of the Kansas landscape for a long time.

By the early 19th century, single herds of "buffalo" numbered in the millions in Kansas and throughout the Great Plains. (Although the bison is not related to the true buffalo of Africa, Asia, and Australia, it is commonly called a buffalo in this country.) Estimates put the total population at 60 to 100 million animals. No other species of ungulate (hoofed animal) is known to have ever existed in such numbers.

Buffalo were the lifeblood of American Plains Indians, and they hunted them for thousands of years using a variety of techniques. Before the advent of the horse, brought to this country by the Spanish in the late 15th century, natives would often approach buffalo in disguise, bow and arrows in hand. Hides of buffalo or wolves were often employed because the huge quadrupeds were afraid of neither. Once in range, several buffalo could be shot before the herd fled. Spears and



Huge herds of buffalo sustained the Plains Indians, providing food, clothing, shelter and tools. At first, white settlers took buffalo for food, but it became disgustingly common for them to kill many animals, taking only the tongues, which were a delicacy.

atlats were also used to ambush buffalo at water holes and other strategic points. If weapons were in shortage or buffalo were unapproachable, fire was often used to drive large numbers over cliffs, providing the tribe with ample meat for a season. All parts of the animal were eaten or used for clothing, shelter, or tools.

With the arrival of European settlers in the 19th century, buffalo hunting increased. Early trappers killed a few buffalo for

meat, and as settlers streamed to California in the gold rush days, more buffalo were killed along the way. As the first transcontinental railroad made its way through Kansas in the 1860s, buffalo were hunted to feed rail crews. The most famous of these buffalo hunters was William "Buffalo Bill" Cody, who was hired by the Kansas-Pacific Railway to provide meat for laborers. He was paid \$500 a month, a huge salary at that time, and is

reported to have killed 4,280 buffalo in 18 months beginning in 1867.

Other notable buffalo hunters included the likes of Wyatt Earp, Pat Garrett, and Wild Bill Hickock. The weapon of choice was often a .45-70 caliber Sharps rifle.

Market hunting also took a toll during this period, when many "hunters" killed buffalo for the eastern meat market, sometimes just taking their hides and tongues, with the car-

cases left to wolves and other scavengers. Salted buffalo tongues brought 25 cents in Kansas and sold for twice that in eastern markets. Hides brought from 50 cents to \$1.25. Both Indians and white men provided buffalo hides for robes in the eastern market, with Indians accounting for about 100,000 hides a year by 1870, in addition to the animals they killed for their own use.

Even this level of slaughter would likely not have devastated the buffalo. By this time, 100,000 hides a year was about all the market could bear because tanning techniques were not sophisticated enough to keep many hides from deteriorating. Hides tanned by processes available at the time produced a soft, spongy leather with limited use. As late as 1870, this magnificent beast's numbers still remained fairly steady, as described in this account by Col. R. I. Dodge, in *Plains of the Great West*:

"The herd in the Arkansas River through which I passed could not have averaged, at best, over 15 or 20 individuals to the acre but was, from my own observation, not less than 25 miles wide, and from reports of hunters and others it was about five days in passing a given point, or not less than 50 miles deep. From the top of Pawnee Rock, I could see from 6 to 10 miles in almost every direction. This whole vast space was covered with buffalo,

looking at a distance like one compact mass, the visual angle not permitting the ground to be seen. I have seen such a sight a great number of times, but never on so large a scale. If the advancing multitude had been at all points 50 miles in length (as it was known to have been in some places, at least) by 25 miles in width, and still averaged 15 head to the acre, it would have contained the enormous number of 12 million head."

A new tanning process imported from Germany would soon wipe such scenes from the landscape with terrifying, unprecedented speed. This process was adopted in Kansas, and high-quality hides quickly made it to New York. A single hide would bring a week's worth of wages to the average working man, and new hunters streamed into Kansas to take

advantage of the bonanza. With luck, a hunter could make as much as \$50 a day, a fabulous sum.

By 1871, one buyer in Kansas City offered to buy all the hides he could get. The new tanning method also preserved hides in summer, so year-round slaughter began. Hunters, drivers, cooks, and helpers streamed into the plains, and by the winter of 1872, some 20,000 men were involved in the buffalo hide market. While many were unprepared for the rigors of plains life, others were quite successful and refined their hunting methods.

In three years from 1872-1874, white hunters killed an estimated 5 million buffalo in Kansas, and Plains Indians added another 1.2 million for the eastern market. About 6.3 million were killed during this period, and all the large Kansas



There are written records of a herd of a buffalo seen near Pawnee Rock that was estimated at 25 miles wide and more than 50 miles deep. If accurately estimated, the herd could have contained 12 million animals.

herds had been wiped out or driven north, where the hunters soon followed.

Within a year, only the bones of this magnificent creature were scattered across the Kansas plains. Even these would quickly disappear. Industrious plainsmen gathered the bones in huge piles and hauled them to railway stations, where they were shipped east to fertilizer manufacturers. These bone collectors made \$8 to \$12 a ton. As early as 1872, 1.1 million pounds of bones were shipped on the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad. The following year, 2.7 million pounds were shipped, and in 1874, nearly 7 million pounds of buf-

falo bones were sold and shipped east. But this was only the beginning of a short-lived industry. In 1885, one company shipped 200 million pounds of buffalo bones from Montana.

Less than 20 years after the new tanning process had been invented, a single buffalo bone was a rarity on the plains of Kansas. The buffalo were dust in the wind.

The last wild Kansas buffalo was reportedly killed in April of 1887 in Cheyenne County. According to St. Francis historian Tobe Zwegardt, a group of local men on horseback spotted a lone bull on a hill near the banks of Cherry Creek, just a quarter mile from an old encampment where

Indian survivors of the Sand Creek Massacre had taken refuge in 1864.

One of the men wounded the buffalo, and it ran down the creek bank and over a hill, where local rancher S. A. Ferguson felled it with one shot. The great animal crashed to the ground in a cloud of dust and buffalo grass. A natural history phenomenon had been decimated in the blink of an eye, and along with it, the culture of the Great Plains Indians.

In the Great Plains overall, the mighty “plains oxen” — once boasting the greatest herds of wild ungulates on earth — had been reduced to a mere 635 in the wild. Add to that number



When a new tanning process was implemented in the mid-1800s, buffalo hunters began hunting year-round, and buyers bought all the buffalo hides they could get. Between 1872 and 1874, more than 6 million Kansas buffalo were killed for profit.



By 1875, bleached buffalo bones were nearly all that was left, and they were also collected and sold for \$8 to \$12 per ton. In 1874 alone, 7 million pounds of bones were shipped east to fertilizer manufacturers.

those under government protection in Yellowstone National Park and those in captivity, and the number of buffalo remaining in North America in 1889 was 1,091.

In 1849, historian and explorer Francis Parkman wrote the following:

“The buffalo supplies the Indians with the necessities of life; with habitations, food, clothing, beds and fuel, strings for their bows, glue, thread, cordage, trail ropes for their horses, covering for their saddles, vessels to hold water, boats to cross streams, and the means of purchasing all they want from the traders. When the buffalo are extinct, they too must dwindle away.”

The Plains Indian’s relationship with buffalo was more than utilitarian, however.

These nomadic people followed buffalo herds throughout the winter. They knew every aspect of their behavior and natural history. In fact, they were so connected to the buffalo that they believed the animal was a gift from God, and much of their religious beliefs and rituals revolved around the buffalo.

What the Europeans dubbed a “medicine man” was the equivalent of priest and doctor to the Plains Indians. These “holy men” sought visions, which often came in the form of a buffalo. They believed that they could communicate with God through the buffalo by praying to living buffalo or by using ritualistic buffalo parts, frequently a skull. Medicine pouches often included parts of the buffalo. Thus, these great

beasts gave the people of the plains spiritual sustenance as well as physical strength.

It was a symbiotic relationship, as well. After generations of studying and depending upon the buffalo, the Indians understood that buffalo were attracted to new-growth grasslands. To create this new growth, some tribes periodically burnt the prairie, attracting herds of buffalo in the process, a technique used by modern cattle ranchers to this day.

According to the National Bison Association, there are approximately 350,000 buffalo in North America today, most of which are found on private ranches. (Buffalo meat is low in fat and considered by many to rival beef in flavor, and the market for privately-grown buffalo meat is growing.) About 150,000 are managed on public lands. Yellowstone National Park boasts the only genetically-pure wild buffalo — ancestors of the great herds that once roamed North America.

The demise of the American bison changed life for the Indians of the Great Plains forever. Uneducated and not adapted to the white man’s way of living — from farming and ranching to banking and commerce — most had little choice but to relocate to reservations.

The old ways, however, are gone but not forgotten, pounding through the clouds of memory on the hooves of a once-magnificent beast. Only an occasional bone may pop through the sands of time, a reminder of what once was. ♡



Go Native

by Dustin Teasley
graphic designer, Pratt

photos by Mike Blair

Kansas streams provide a variety of interesting fish species that make ideal aquarium residents. Make a family aquarium not only the center of the room but also an educational experience for your children.



Growing up, I was fascinated with aquariums like most kids. On our weekly shopping trips to Salina, I invariably gravitated to the large native-fish aquarium in the Central Mall. I watched, mesmerized by the huge flathead catfish, wipers and other sport fish I dreamt of catching. When I was especially well-behaved, which wasn't very often, we would stop at the local pet shop and check out the exotic and saltwater fish. The 75-gallon saltwater aquarium at the doctor's office even made visits there tolerable for me.

Two years ago, I wanted to get a special present for my son on his first birthday. Most parenting articles recommend visual stimulants for children his age, and I thought an aquarium would be a great gift. At least I hoped it would be, especially since I was as excited about it as I imagined he would be. I spent hours researching the different types of equipment on the internet.

First, I needed to decide on the type of aquarium setup I wanted to build — saltwater or freshwater, tropical or native. Then, decisions

about the size of the tank and kinds of fish to be put in the tank were necessary. Next, vital components such as aeration, filtration, habitats, and types of food needed to be selected. I wanted to ensure I had a well-balanced system that required low maintenance. I was concerned that an unbalanced tank that required lots of attention and maintenance would result in burnout and a loss of interest.

Other factors that I considered when building my son's tank included price, fish availability, and space. Saltwater systems are beautiful, but they are expensive and harder to keep in biological balance, especially for novices. Unbalanced systems can result in the loss of fish, and saltwater fish can cost anywhere from \$15 to several hundred dollars each. Freshwater exotic fish systems are less expensive and provide beautiful fish, but require equipment such as heaters, and unless you have a pet store nearby, keeping your tank stocked with fish can often be difficult. Freshwater native systems are not only less expensive but they can educate about fish living in waters in surrounding areas. Kansas native fish may lack the bright colors and remarkable shapes of exotic or saltwater fish, but they are hearty and most do well in aquariums. I decided that my son's tank would be a 75-gallon system and a centerpiece for the living room, providing entertainment for everyone. Native fish do not require a heater, and I could be easily obtain fish with help of a buddy or two.

Finding components to build a system proved to be easier than I expected. Although the aquariums and stands were cheaper online, shipping charges made online purchase expensive. I purchased the tank and light locally but chose to build the tank stand. The surface is waterproof Formica and has two large storage compartments with watertight bottoms in case of leaks. The compartments hold all of the filtration, aeration, food, and chemical supplies and the doors have child safety locks.

I found other needed components online. Most pet store chains will honor prices given by their online counterparts, and I saved \$75 on my filtration system by shopping online first. The local store honored the lower price. Vital components needed for a tank include a filtration system and an aeration system.

At least two of the three types of filtration methods, mechanical, biological, and chemical, should be used when setting up a system. Mechanical filtration includes filter pads that utilize pores to trap large particles. Biological filtration uses ceramic stones that good bacteria cling to. Healthy store-bought fish can provide a new system with good bacteria. Non-native store-bought fish such as the plecostomus can also help keep surfaces inside the tank clean. The good bacteria renders toxic material in the water harmless, allowing the mechanical or chemical system to remove it. Chemical filtration eliminates nitrates, phosphates, ammonia, and other toxic chemicals that can build up. Special



Natives, such as this killifish make excellent occupants for native aquariums. The vertical barring and neon green band on the tip of the male's tail make this a unique and interesting addition to any setup.

testing strips are available to help determine what harmful build-ups need to be addressed.

Adequate aeration is vital for healthy fish. One or two aerators can be used to provide enough oxygen to the tank. Large bubbles transfer low amounts of dissolved oxygen

(DO) to the water. Aeration stones diffuse air coming from aerators, and smaller bubbles provide higher rates of DO. Over time, the oxygen causes corrosion and clogs the stones as it passes through, which increases the size of the bubbles. You will need to change these



Darters, such as this orangethroat darter, are perfect natives for aquariums. Their bright colors, diversity of species, and hardiness in captivity make them a must. Check regulations governing darters and other families of natives to determine what species can be caught and kept legally.

stones about once every six months or whenever you notice large bubbles in the tank.

Sometimes when starting up a new system, fish become stressed and sick. New fish, low dissolved oxygen, or infrequent filtration maintenance can contribute to this. Fins may start looking ratty, commonly called "fin rot," scum may form on the skin which is commonly called "ick," or algae may form in the tank water. Chemical treatments are available for all of these more common conditions. Keeping treatments on hand for these types of problems can help limit fish losses. Be sure to read all labels on chemicals since some treatments can kill smooth-skinned fish, crustaceans, and mussels. Sea salt, which promotes a healthy "slime coat" that is important to fish, also needs to be added to the water. It helps fish recover faster from disease, temporary toxic build-ups, or stress-induced problems.

If you are building a native freshwater setup, you probably will want to mimic the native environments of these fish. Fancy rocks, treasure chests, sunken ships and colorful plants will make a cool aquarium but would undoubtedly take away from the subtle characteristics of most native fish species. Artificial plants, rocks, logs, and gravel that simulate a native environment are easily found.

Many native species of fish can be used in aquariums. A rule of thumb for the number of fish an aquarium can hold is one inch per gallon of water. For example, a 75-gallon aquarium would safely hold 25 3-inch fish. For



Crayfish are easy to catch and add interest to any aquarium. Youngsters usually love to watch crayfish, which feed on the bottom and act as scavengers. They sometimes are aggressive toward other fish but are great for diversity.

deep bodied fish like sunfish one and one-half gallons per inch of fish is recommended.

Most people call the majority of small fish found in Kansas streams minnows, but only some belong to that group. Kansas streams harbor species such as darters, madtoms, sunfish, and perch, as well as minnows. A good field guide is necessary to identify what species can be collected for an aquarium. Some species found in streams may be illegal to possess either due to an environmental status or by length and creel limits outlined in sport fish regulations. Fish included on threatened, endangered, or species in need of conservation (SINC) lists can be found on the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks website at www.kdwp.state.ks.us or by

calling (620) 672-5911. Length and creel limits that may affect what species of game fish you can possess are listed in the Fishing Regulations Summary. A Kansas fishing license, if applicable, is all that is required to collect legal species.

Collecting methods vary. Some species are large enough to catch with rod and reel. Other species may need to be caught with fish traps or by seining. Sizes of seines or traps are regulated. Check the fishing regulations summary for details or call KDWP. A good tip for seining is to always pull the seine downstream. Most fish swim upstream when disturbed and it's easier on the persons doing the work. Also, you will probably catch more fish along the edges of streams kicking the



This male longear sunfish would make a colorful addition to a native aquarium, but its aggressive nature requires slow introduction to other species to determine if it is suitable for a diverse native community or better off with its own kind.

gravel as you go. Shallow stream sections are best.

Certain species may not be good choices for an aquarium. Flathead catfish, for example, are a fascinating species, but they are effective predators and take a toll on other fish in the aquarium. They are also active mainly at night or when the aquarium lights are off, making them difficult to view. Other aggressive predators include redears, green sunfish, and bluegills, making them poor choices for aquariums, unless they are kept with fish of similar size. The colorful orangespotted sunfish work well with other fish, especially smaller ones. Trial and error will help determine a balance for your tank. If you find a species that just doesn't work well, release it where you caught it. Never

release a fish into any body of water it did not originate from.

Many common stream species are excellent aquarium candidates, including red shiners, emerald shiners, sand shiners, bullhead minnows, mosquitofish, log perch, and very small channel catfish. The more colorful fish species include orangespotted sunfish, plains killifish, orange-throated darters, and slenderhead darters. Mussels and crayfish make an aquarium more dynamic. Regulations should be researched to determine if specific species may be collected. Mussels and crayfish, however, will displace gravel, rocks, and other structures in an aquarium. Attaching foliage, rocks, stumps, and other large decorative objects to the bottom with an aquarium adhesive prior to filling the tank will help minimize this. A thick

layer of gravel in the tank will help accommodate these species.

It will be difficult to feed native fish their natural diets. Fortunately, commercial pellets, flakes, discs, or crumbles will work well. Research each species you are trying to feed to ensure they can survive on commercial fish foods. If you have a variety of species, you will probably want several different types of food. Tiny mosquitofish, for example, spend all of their time feeding from the surface and require small bits of food. I feed these types of fish floating flake food. Larger fish like the orangespotted sunfish use the middle of the water column, so I feed them floating fish pellets. Most fish look up for food and will feed at or near the surface. Crayfish and bottom-dwelling fish, such as the darters, feed well on sinking pellet foods. Mussels will filter nutrients from the water and gravel.

As with all things started with leisurely intentions, building a native fish aquarium became a larger-than-intended project that was not only fun but also educational. It has taught my son and his parents about stream life and our fragile environment. Catching, identifying, and caring for native fish gives them value that fish purchased from a pet store never obtain. It has encouraged us to participate outdoors and value natural resources more. My son and now my daughter will hopefully learn these values and carry them into other things they do throughout life. ♡

Edited by Mark Shoup

FIRST TURKEY

Editor:

This is a picture of my 8-year-old son Brady after he shot his first turkey on April 15 at 8:30 am. He'd been trying to bag one for two years, but his "guide" didn't seem to be too competent. After two hours of me calling and him patiently waiting in our ground blind, he shot the gobbler at about 20 feet after it walked behind a tree long enough for him to raise his gun.

Afterward, when I commented on him shooting it while it was still moving, he said, "The bird looked at me, and I started to grin, so I shot it before he was able to see me smiling."

He shot it with a youth model New England Firearms single-shot 20 gauge on his grandpa's land in Kingman County. The 19.6-pound bird had a beard that measured 8.5 inches and spurs 7/8 inch long. He's pretty proud of the fact that he bested his dad's lifetime record with his first bird.



*Bret Frerichs
Garden Plain*

GREAT KIDS DEER HUNT

Editor:

I went on my first deer hunt last year. The hunt was sponsored by The Wolf Creek Nuclear Operation Corporation and the Wolf Creek Green Team, its mentors, and volunteers.

Getting youngsters involved in hunting was a natural fit for the Green Team (Westar Energy employees who volunteer time to various conservation and environmental education projects). Youth hunters would be provided a

high-quality deer hunt and if successful, their efforts would also help thin the deer herd. The kids would also become more familiar with firearm safety and ethical hunting practices. Wolf Creek employees volunteered to be hunting guides. Additionally, each youth hunter brought along an adult/guardian to share in this special hunting experience.

The Kansas Wildlife Officers' Association bought Either Sex deer permits for all the participants. Doe harvest, in particular, was the objective.

Twelve youth were selected by a random drawing for last year's hunt. To be eligible, the young hunters had to be 12 to 18 years old and never harvested a deer. Also, each had to possess a hunter education certificate and participate in a pre-hunt safety seminar held Nov. 25 on the firing range at the Wolf Creek Generating Station. The range experience gave the kids an opportunity to shoot and sight in the rifles they were going to be using during their hunt.

Blaze orange hats on range day were provided by the Emporia Area Chapter



Photos courtesy of David Peavler, WCNOG Green Team; (Above) guide Chuck Shedd, Robert Gooding, and his grandfather Lawton Boyer; (Upper Right) guide Matt Sunseri, Ashley Cole, and her grandfather Chuck Dunbar, and; (Right) Levi Lenard and father Lewis Lenard.

of Quail Unlimited. Additional hats and blaze orange hunting vests were given to the youth hunters by the Wolf Creek Nuclear Operation Corporation.

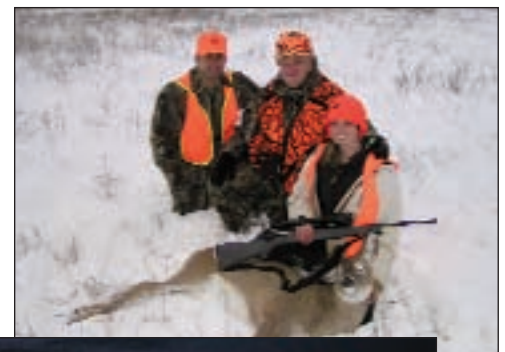
Frigid, 20-degree temperatures greeted the kids Saturday morning, but the skies were clear compared to the snow and sleet a few days earlier. About 20 deer were seen that first morning. Three of the six youth hunters harvested a deer on Saturday. Some of the more experienced guides and mentors thought the full moon allowed deer to feed all night and not move during the day.

A hunter's lunch was served in the reconditioned barn on Wolf Creek's Environmental Education Area. We feasted on grilled hamburgers, BBQ beans, potato salad, and all the fixings.

Successful hunters on Saturday were Ashley Cole, Burlington; Robert Gooding, Garnett; and Levi Lenard, Burlington.

I tip my hat to Dave Peavler, Daniel Haines, Dan Williamson, and the entire Wolf Creek Nuclear Operation Corporation and Green Team for providing the kids and me this enjoyable opportunity.

*Phil Taunton
Emporia*



NO BAG, GREAT HUNT

Editor:

It was with amusement and some limited understanding that I read Mike Miller's article, "The Weather's Fine" (*Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine, Jan./Feb. 2007, Page 45). You must have used my exposure to Kansas weather as the basis for the article, but you left out the fact that some mosquitoes in Kansas are the size of hummingbirds.

After the third attempt in three years, my son, who is 33, and I were successful in drawing deer permits for Unit 12. Endeavoring to make this a truly fair-chase hunt, we decided to hunt WIHA land. To accomplish this, we ventured into Kansas the last weekend in August to scout the WIHA parcels, and here is where our understanding of Kansas weather began. That weekend had temperatures of 105 degrees, with 35-45 mph winds. Our black powder weekend hunts during September had temperatures of 90-95 degrees, extremely dry with 30-35 mph winds.

We failed to harvest a deer in September, so next came the regular rifle season. We arrived Dec. 1, and guess how we were welcomed? Ten to 12 inches of snow, 2-foot drifts, and minus 4 degrees. But the spectacular blue sky had no wind. Although hunting was rough, we had an exceptionally good time. We visited with some of the good people we had made friends with earlier. Although we were hunting on WIHA land, we met and introduced ourselves to several adjacent landowners, stayed in a local motel, dined at the local establishments, and did not meet anyone who was not friendly, as your article states.

Although we were not successful in taking deer, we had a most enjoyable hunting experience. Naturally, our biggest concern now is when we will be successful in drawing another permit because in spite of all the terrible Kansas weather, we plan to come back as soon as possible.

I look forward to future issues of *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine.

Ken Nelson
Clarksville, Arkansas

MOM'S TURKEY

Editor:

Last spring, I'm sitting at home when my brother, Mike, calls to see if I'm going to be around for a little bit. A few minutes later, Mike is on my doorstep along with our Mom, Judy. I could tell they were both pretty excited. The next thing I know, Mike is lifting this nice tom out of the bed of his truck, and Mom is telling me how she got her turkey.

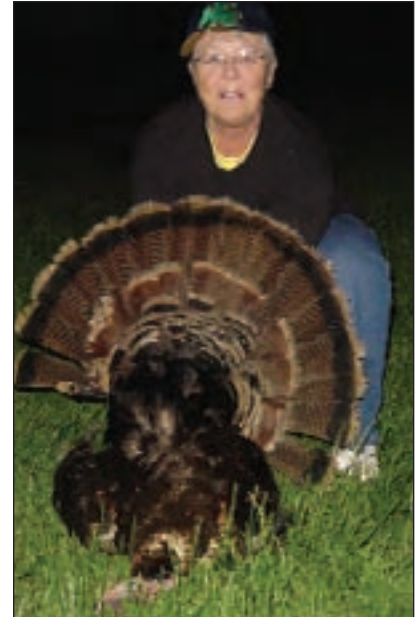
A few weeks ago, Mike asked Mom if she would like to go turkey hunting, so she agreed. Mike had a few locations that were holding birds. There were spots on each property that allowed them to set up in his portable blind. The blind was perfect because it gave Mom a chance to watch the birds work, hid movements, and allowed her to talk with Mike during the hunt. They had been out a few times, and Mom had missed on a jake on her second hunt.

This time was different. They watched a tom strut on the hill a few hundred yards away. He didn't want to come to the call, but a little later another tom crested the hill in full strut and ran off the first tom. The new tom strutted in the last hundred yards to the decoys. At 20 yards, Mike told her to take him when it felt right. In the excitement, Mom forgot to take the gun of safety and was trying to squeeze the trigger with no luck. Mike noticed this and he reached over and clicked it

off. Moments later, Mom let the tom have it. This time her aim was right on as she dropped the bird in its tracks.

This picture here is our family's newest turkey hunter along with her bird. As for the hunter, well our Mom is 66, has 10 kids and 20 grandkids, and was about as excited as humanly possible when she proudly showed off her bird. I'm a little proud of her myself. I know that the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks is always promoting the "Pass it On" program, but maybe KDWP should start a "It's Never Too Late To Get Started Hunting" program.

Eric Flax
Hays



WAY outside

BY BRUCE COCHRAN



"ON A SCALE OF ONE TO FIVE, WITH FIVE BEING THE MOST SATISFACTORY, HOW WOULD YOU RATE TODAY'S FISHING EXPERIENCE?"

POACHER DIES FLEEING

The 2004 deer season opened with both excitement and tragedy. Shortly after 9:30 p.m., I overheard radio traffic about a Greenwood County deputy pursuing a driver who had been spotlighting near the town of Fall River. The deputy, Les Lumley, was requesting assistance because the vehicle he was chasing had blacked out its lights and was running at high speeds in total darkness.

As I headed his direction, I heard Lumley tell dispatch that he had wrecked his patrol car and the spot-lighter had gotten away.

A second deputy, J.J. Smith, soon arrived at Lumley's location. Just a couple hundred yards from the ditch the patrol car was in, he discovered the pickup that Lumley had been chasing, crashed into the timber. In the vehicle was a rifle. A second rifle lay on the pickup's back bumper, but the occupants of the vehicle were gone.

Smith called me on the radio and asked if I had my partner with me. She was, of course. I rarely go to work without her, because my partner is K-9 Chase. Chase is an excellent tracking dog.

This excitement was quickly overshadowed, however, when I heard Smith tell dispatch that a man had been found

dead in the ditch near the wrecked truck. Knowing that Lumley had seen a light held out the passenger window and that there were two rifles at the wreck site, we believed that a second suspect had fled on foot, leaving his now-deceased partner behind.

When I arrived at the scene, Chase and I started a search pattern to pick up the second suspect's track. She soon picked up scent that led down the road away from the spot-lighter's wrecked truck. We followed this track for a little more than a half mile before Chase lost the scent in a farm yard.

The next day, an autopsy was conducted on the deceased suspect, and it was determined that he'd died of a heart attack while fleeing the scene of the wrecked truck on foot. It was also learned that he was a resident of Oklahoma.

Evidence collected from the deceased suspect's cell phone and a check of purchasing records on the two rifles found at the scene that night pointed toward a second suspect who lived roughly two miles from where the spot-lighter's truck was wrecked. To add to the suspicion regarding this second suspect, I knew that natural resource officer Brian Hanzlick, Hoisington, had arrested him for spotlighting in Chautauqua County a couple years earlier.

Nearly a month later, I arranged to

interview the suspect at the Greenwood County Sheriff's Office. After nearly an hour of interviewing, I had received only what were apparently lies and weak excuses. But after I showed the suspect a hat found at the crash site, a style exactly that he wore, he realized that it was better to come clean. In his confession, he stated that he and his now-deceased friend were spotlighting deer, that they intended to shoot a buck, and that they intended to only take the head and leave the carcass to waste.

I issued the suspect tickets for five violations that included spotlighting, hunting deer with the aid of a vehicle, hunting deer after legal hours, hunting deer with an illegal-caliber firearm (.22-250), and hunting deer from a roadway. But before I had time to drive to the court house and file the tickets, I learned the suspect had already called the court and asked to plead guilty.

In part because he had previously been convicted of spotlighting, Magistrate Judge Rebecca Lindamood fined the man \$1,160 for his part in the night's activities. But the violations cost him more than out-of-pocket expenses; the suspect's employer decided the would-be poacher's actions were dishonorable enough to warrant his firing.

—NRO Dan Melson, *Eureka*



WATER SAFETY SUCCESS

With the growing number of recreational boaters on Kansas waters, the advantages of boater education have never been more apparent. As our lakes and rivers become busier and the types of boats more varied, it is increasingly important for boaters to learn safe boating techniques and laws.

The national observance of Safe Boating Week, held last May, was the ideal time for boaters to equip themselves with the knowledge and expertise to ensure a safe and enjoyable boating season. If you didn't participate, it's not too late to be safe. Completing a Kansas Safe Boater course can help reduce the potential for boat accidents and promote safe, responsible, and ethical use of Kansas water resources.

The classroom boating safety course consists of eight hours of classroom instruction in the principles of boating safety. Current class listings are available on the KDWP website, kdwp.state.ks.us. Online classes are also available at www.boat-ed.com and www.boaterexam.com.

Course participants will learn about boat classifications, hull designs, motors, legal requirements for registration and equipment, navigation rules, basic safety regulations, and waterway marking systems. Classes also cover getting underway, preparation, loading, boarding, cruising, docking, anchoring, knots, trailering, courtesy, and maintenance.

Passing a boating education course may also result in a discount for boat or personal watercraft insurance. Participants who successfully complete the course may call the KDWP boater education coordinator at 620-672-0770 to receive a free Safe Boater Kit, which includes a cooler bag, key float, whistle, pocket first aid kit, carabiner light, and other informational items.

—Erika Nighswonger, *boating coordinator, Pratt*

RECORD NUMBER DEER TESTED

The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP) has received test results on samples collected for chronic wasting disease (CWD) testing during the of fall 2006 and January 2007 deer hunting seasons. CWD was not detected in any of the samples collected. KDWP staff collected 2,970 samples from across Kansas, including 2,724 whitetail deer, 225 mule deer, and 15 elk.

CWD has been detected twice in Kansas. The first case, in a Harper County captive elk herd, occurred in 2001. That elk came from a private elk farm in Colorado and was tested as part of an investigation by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Kansas Department of Animal Health (KDAH). Although that herd has been destroyed, KDWP still tests as many free-ranging animals in that area as possible.

The other case of CWD was detected during the 2005 hunting season in a free-ranging white-tailed doe harvested in Cheyenne County, which borders Colorado and Nebraska.

"In a stepped-up surveillance effort, Kansas sampled the highest number of deer in its history this last season," said Dr. Ruby Mosher, a veterinarian and wildlife disease coordinator for KDWP. "Due to the large number of animals tested, KDWP staff are confident that an occurrence of CWD in Kansas would be very rare at this time. Kansas hunters and residents can be assured that the



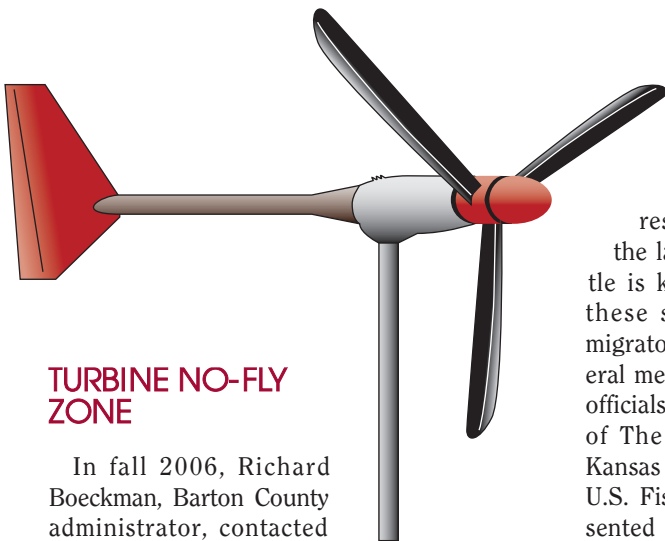
health of our deer herd is robust.

"The results this year, of course, do not mean that CWD no longer exists in Kansas," Mosher continued. "It simply means that CWD was not detected in the samples collected and submitted for testing. Furthermore, no screening test is 100-percent reliable in determining the absence of CWD."

KDWP will send the results of this recent round of testing to all meat lockers, taxidermists, and other contractors who collected samples and information for the agency. In addition, the agency plans to continue CWD testing throughout the summer. These samples will come from vehicle-killed animals and those culled from the herd due to illness or injury.

For more information on CWD in Kansas, phone Mosher at 620-342-0658 or email her at rubym@wp.state.ks.us.

—Shoup



TURBINE NO-FLY ZONE

In fall 2006, Richard Boeckman, Barton County administrator, contacted KDWP requesting information for an upcoming Planning and Zoning Commission meeting about proposed zoning to allow non-commercial wind energy conversion systems (wind turbines) to be constructed near Cheyenne Bottoms. The non-commercial wind turbines proposed in Barton County would be much smaller than the larger commercial structures seen near

Spearville and Montezuma in western Kansas. These smaller units are developed for personal use by rural residents to offset electricity costs.

In contrast to the research being conducted on the larger wind facilities, very little is known about the effects of these smaller wind turbines on migratory birds and bats. After several meetings in which local KDWP officials, along with representatives of The Nature Conservancy, the Kansas Wildlife Federation, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service presented information to the commission, a compromise was made and a proposed 1-mile "no-build zone" and an additional 2- to 3-mile "conditionally permitted zone" was presented to the Barton County commissioners. The proposal was adopted into regulation.

The "no-build zone" establishes a 1-mile buffer surrounding the geologic boundary of Cheyenne Bottoms where wind turbines are not permitted. The

additional 2- to 3-mile "conditionally permitted zone" is an established area that has special permitting requirements where The Nature Conservancy and Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks can provide information on whether a particular site may pose a threat to migratory birds and bats using Cheyenne Bottoms.

This effort among KDWP, wildlife partners, and Barton County is a good first step to integrating renewable energy while protecting this special wetland.

—Great Bend Tribune

CHILD SUPPORT DEBTORS LOSE PRIVILEGE

A bill signed into law by Gov. Kathleen Sebelius last spring will ensure that delinquent child support debtors are not issued licenses or permits by the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks.

House Bill 2393 requires the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services to maintain a quarterly-updated

list of individuals who are delinquent on court-ordered child support. KDWP will receive the electronic files of child support debtors to match against applicants for licenses or permits. HB 2393 also outlines procedures by which individuals may be removed from the list of delinquent child support debtors, reinstating privileges for hunting and fishing licenses and permits.

Lifetime licenses will also be suspended under the law until the debtors who already hold such licenses have their privileges reinstated.

“A parent’s primary responsibility is to support his or her child, but unfortunately we’ve seen some who are failing to uphold that obligation and are not paying child support,” Sebelius said. “If they are not willing to meet this basic duty, they will face repercussions.”

According to the Department of Social

and Rehabilitation Services, this new law will keep Kansas in compliance with the Federal Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, thus preventing the loss of approximately \$36 million in federal child support enforcement funds each year.

—Mathews

PF SPENDS \$34 MILLION

Pheasants Forever (PF) reports that 2006 marked the most successful year in the non-profit conservation organization's 24-year history. During 2006, PF and its quail division, Quail Forever (QF), spent more money on habitat projects and conservation education than any single year prior. It was also the organization's most successful year in forming new chapters.

Last year, PF/QF spent almost \$34 million to complete 23,552 habitat pro-



PHEASANTS
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jects across the nation in 2006, benefiting wildlife on more than 460,000 acres of land. Since the organization's inception in 1982, PF/QF has spent nearly \$200 million to complete 4.4 million acres of habitat work. More than 113,000 of those acres were land acquisition projects. All PF/QF land acquisitions are turned over to the appropriate federal and/or state agency and are now open to public hunting.

In addition to habitat efforts, PF/QF funded 500 youth conservation education events with more than 15,000 participants in 2006, and PF's Leopold Education Project trained more than 1,000 participants.

PF/QF spent nearly 91 cents of every dollar it raised directly on habitat projects and education. The remaining 9 cents was spent primarily on administration and fundraising functions. Last year also marked the organization's most successful year in forming new chapters, when 90 communities responded to this model to form new chapters. QF saw the majority of this growth with 77 chapters formed in 23 different states.

PF/QF empowers local chapters with the responsibility to determine how 100 percent of their locally-raised conservation funds will be spent. This local control allows members to see the fruits of their chapter efforts in their own communities while belonging to a national organization with a voice on federal conservation policy.

—Pheasants Forever

Uniform Rules

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has approved Wildlife Action Plans for all 56 states and territories, marking the final phase of an important step in conservation history. For the first time ever, all state and territorial fish and wildlife agencies have established comprehensive conservation plans that, together, provide a nationwide blueprint of actions to conserve imperiled species and prevent them from becoming threatened or endangered.

Wildlife Action Plans are thorough state-by-state looks at wildlife and the actions needed to ensure their survival. The plans will also allow state and territorial fish and wildlife agencies to continue to receive grants under the State Wildlife Grant program signed by President Bush in 2001.

In order to be eligible for State Wildlife Grant funds, each state fish and wildlife agency was required to complete a wildlife action plan. The plans were developed by biologists, conservationists, landowners, and the general public. The plans were reviewed by a national team that included representatives from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and several state fish and wildlife agencies.

Each plan must provide information on low and declining populations of wildlife and the habitats they require, identify problems impacting these populations, identify needed research and survey efforts to improve conservation, determine priorities, and specify actions. Agencies will revise and update their plans at least once every 10 years.

For more on the Kansas Wildlife Action Plan, go online to wildlifeactionplans.org/kansas.html.

—U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



Youth Take Turkeys

The Council Grove 7th Annual Special Spring Turkey Hunt was conducted on April 7, with great success. Unlike past hunts designed to provide opportunities for disabled and women hunters, this year's hunt accommodated area youth ages 10 to 16. This event paired young hunters, many who had never hunted turkeys, with experienced adults.

Frigid and windy weather greeted 13 youngsters the morning of April 7. Despite the weather, the boys and their guides departed enthusiastically from the warm café where they shared breakfast and discussed strategy before venturing afield in Morris County. Within several hours, eight of the participants had harvested a turkey while several others enjoyed close encounters with their quarry but were unable to harvest. All participants appreciated the opportunity to receive hands-on hunting instruction, hunting gear, and meals.

Volunteers interested in helping with next year's hunt should contact Brent Konen, Council Grove Wildlife Area manager, at 620-767-5900.



—Shoup



HABITAT DEMONSTRATIONS

Quail Unlimited (QU), in cooperation with the KDWP, will conduct a Habitat Techniques Demonstration Day on Wednesday, July 18, at 8:30 a.m. at Hillsdale Wildlife Area, near Paola. The site is U.S. Army Corps of Engineers property managed by the KDWP, an hour away from this year's annual QU convention site in Overland Park.

To answer some of the most common questions QU and KDWP staff receive regarding quail habitat management, the event will feature a "before" habitat management scenario. This scenario more closely resembles that which many landowners are typically facing — natural plant succession resulting in loss of habitat.

Hands-on, how-to demonstrations of different quail

management practices will be offered. Participants will be divided into groups and guided along a demonstration trail to multiple management-practice stations. Equipment and tools will be on site for participants to see first-hand how they work and how to use them, as well as recommended techniques and desired outcomes.

Habitat management topics will be discussed and demonstrated, including edge feathering; invasive tree removal; brush piles; native warm-season grass drill set-up, adjustment, calibration and use; food plots; chain saw safety; wildlife habitat appraisal; strip disking; herbicide application; calibrating hand-held and ATV sprayers; and prescribed burning.

A prescribed burn demonstration is scheduled, weather permitting, following lunch. Lunch will be provided.

Demonstration Day is open to the public, but reservations must be made in advance at www.qu.org/htdd; by phoning Connie Dean at 803-637-5731, ext. 223; or by emailing cdean@qu.org. Cost is \$35 per person whether driving separately or riding the tour bus (limited seating available on a

first-come, first-served reservation basis). Tour buses will leave the Overland Park Convention Center, Courtyard Level, north main entrance at 7:30 a.m. and return at approximately 4 p.m.

Special transportation on-site will be made available for those who have difficulty walking. Prior arrangements must be made by calling Bob Peterson at 417-359-5807.

—Quail Unlimited news

APPRENTICE HUNTING LICENSE

On April 18, Gov. Kathleen Sebelius signed SB 192, a revision of Kansas hunter education requirements that will allow KDWP to establish an apprentice hunting license. The apprentice hunting license will allow persons 16 years and older who have not taken a hunter education course to become apprentice hunters for the remainder of the calendar year in which it is purchased. The apprentice must be accompanied by a licensed adult age 18 or older while hunting.

"The apprentice hunting license is intended to recruit new hunters," says KDWP

statewide hunter education coordinator Wayne Doyle. "It will allow hunters to try hunting before they invest in the time required to take a hunter education course. If they enjoy their experience and want to hunt the following season, they must take hunter education.

"This goes back to the Recruitment and Retention Program that [former KDWP secretary] Steve Williams started," Doyle continues. "We thought that this was one of the efforts needed to remove barriers to hunting, and it's been very successful in other states, including Texas. We modeled our program on theirs."

Data from other states — such as Michigan, Ohio, and Tennessee — reveal that such programs brought nearly 34,000 new hunters, both children and adults, to the field in 2006, and none were involved in an accident. Lawmakers in California, Maine, Nebraska, and Oregon are considering similar legislation.

SB 192 also eliminates the requirement for bowhunter education for youngsters age 12-13.

—Shoup

Every Man Needs a Truck



by Mark Shoup

Like most men, I admit a fondness for pickup trucks. A pickup and the outdoorsman are like Trigger and Roy. The horse may do fine without the cowboy, but the cowboy is lost without the horse. Able to outrace an avalanche and leap the next mountain ridge in the process, a pickup could actually save your life.

I learned to drive with a pickup, a 1951 Studebaker, pea green, which I think was the only color they made. Certainly no beauty, a green hippo with a silver rocket on its nose would be a fair description of the beast. The shocks must have been welded inside, strictly for looks. You could, indeed, see them under the gaping wheel-well covers of this rickety step-side machine. I believe it was designed by the same engineers who invented the Conestoga wagon.

Ol' Green had a shiny floorboard starter and a four-on-the-floor shifter about 4 feet long. You had to double-clutch to shift gears, a prerequisite to reaching top speed of about 50 mph. In fact, you hardly ever used first gear, affectionately known as "granny," because it was so slow a three-year-old riding a tricycle backwards could outrun you until you shifted. Granny was not a useless gear, however. In granny, the Studebaker could rescue a Ford tractor from a quicksand. My dad figured that if I could learn to drive the Studebaker through all four gears, I could drive anything.

But the Studebaker was most useful when Dad and I went camping or on a hunting trip to Wyoming. That's when I learned that every outdoorsman worth his salt needs a pickup. Who wants to throw wild game into the back seat of a car or strap it on the bumper. It's just uncivilized. And when it comes to packing gear, everything from a pup tent to the kitchen sink will fit into the back of a pickup.

I've owned cars, but they never seemed to fit. I bought my third pickup –

a little brown Toyota – when I was working as a carpenter. It was an essential vehicle for such a vocation, but I soon found it could serve a greater purpose than hauling lumber. With a topper, a few strategically crafted boxes, and a mattress, I realized that my camping needs were easily fulfilled. No more sleeping in a tent, and preparation for an overnight trip to the lake was cut in half. On stormy nights when my boys – Logan and Will – were little, we'd sleep in the back of that truck just to hear the sound of rain tapping softly on the metal roof.

As my boys began to grow, we used that truck to hunt, fish, and camp all around our part of the state. I even bought an antique camper – one of those short, rounded jobs that looks like it came right out of a 1940s cartoon – and further enhanced the camping experience. Parked next to a river with my friends, the Redding clan from Larned, it was just a few steps from setlines to campfire to comfortable sleeping quarters. All made possible by a pickup truck.

Now is a good time to add a spoiler to this feel-good story: getting too attached to your pickup can be problematic. Even little boys understand this instinctively. In 1995, my oldest son, Logan, was seven, and my pickup was 15. It was time to sell one, and my wife, Rose, made it clear the pickup was the choice.

Although originally a much smoother-driving truck than the Studebaker, ol' Brown had begun to rattle a bit. Both bumpers were dented. Although I had hand-painted 6-inch black stripes across either side of her hide, rusty lesions still flaked all four fenders. I thought Brown drove just fine, but Rose claimed that what I considered the mellow hum of aging well was a muffler about to fall off.

So one mild spring evening, Logan

and I drove ol' Brown to Wichita. We visited several lots before finding an affordable 1992 Chevy. Logan sat brooding in the dealer's office as I attempted to negotiate, unsuccessfully, a price that was much more to my advantage than to the dealer's. We finally settled, however, and as we pulled away from the lot in the newer, bigger truck and drove west on Highway 54, Logan began to cry.

"What's the matter, Bud," I asked, worried that I had made a big mistake.

"I'll just never forget all the good times we had in that old truck!" he blubbered. I attempted to console him.

"Oh, now Logan, we'll have just as much fun in this one, and there's so much more room."

But he was inconsolable and stared straight ahead, sniffing and wiping his eyes most of the way home. To make things worse, I felt kind of sick to my stomach, like I'd abandoned an old friend and let down my son at the same time.

We came to enjoy the newer truck, however, and took it to Nebraska and all over the back roads of Pratt County. Still, for Logan it was like losing a first love, and the Chevy was never quite the same.

Now speaking of love, how can there be happiness for the outdoorsman without a pickup. When courting, it's axiomatic that one must be prepared to impress one's sweetheart. Nothing is more romantic than a drive in the country, and without a pickup, how are you going to convince your lady love that the mudhole down the road poses no obstacle? Or what could be more romantic than being stuck in the middle of nowhere with the woman you love?

So I rest my case. Whether it's hunting, fishing, camping, or love – essentials of life not necessarily listed in order of importance – every man needs a truck, whether you are single or married. If you're single, what color's your truck? If you are married and don't have a pickup, get one. It is necessary for your physical and spiritual well-being. If your wife objects, tell her about all the things you need to haul for those honey-dos and fix-me-ups around the house.

Later, of course, you'll need a handy list of excuses why they must be put off.

Readi-Lure Tackle Box

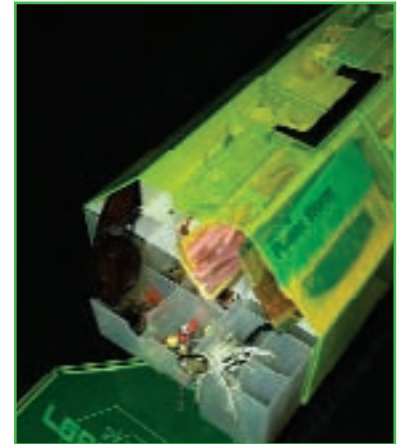
In the Midwest, fishing can be a complicated matter. Many species of game fishes occupy lakes, rivers, and ponds. One day, you're wade-fishing a river for channel cats, and the next, you're boat-fishing for crappie around deep structure. Fly-fishing, bait-casting, and spin-casting all have their own sets of gear that normally require a tackle box for each type. Throw in some gear for helping kids fish with live bait, and it's difficult to find a single storage system to handle it all.

However, the new Readi-Lure tackle box, by Tackle Tech, provides a great solution. The large, transparent box built of tough, lightweight polymer (same material as automobile headlamps) is a broad, octagonal tube divided into 86 compartments and drawers. The box has integrated legs and latches but is stable when rested on any face, including its ends. The see-through box makes locating gear a snap. Each compartment is large enough to store multiple lures but small enough to prevent entanglement as the box is moved or turned over. Stick baits and large plastic worms fit easily into specially-designed compartments. This tackle box is impervious to chemical reactions with rubber, scents, or plastics.

More than any box I've used, the Readi-Lure provides room for all necessary gear. That means I can store hooks, bobbers, and related bait-fishing tackle as well as a full complement of lures and plastics. There's even room for rod holders and sunglasses. I especially like how the Readi-Lure prevents the occasional "upside-down" disasters that can occur with some tackle boxes. The box can be placed on end to save room, and a quick-detachable shoulder strap makes the box easy to carry when walking long distances.

Snap openers make the box accessible from either end. Simply rotate the box until you spot the right tackle, open the end, and you've got instant, tangle-free access to the desired gear. Look for them wherever fishing tackle is sold.

—Blair



Summertime Blues

Think of bluegill, and the image of a kid with a cane pole and bobber may come to mind. However, a select group of anglers know that big bluegills – sometimes called "bulls" or "bream" – represent a truly challenging quarry in Kansas waters. Find the right water conditions while using the right gear, and the large sunfish offer great summer angling fun.

Many Kansas lakes and ponds offer chunky bluegills that average 8 inches. Fish this size provide great table fare and often congregate in large schools, making large numbers easy to catch. But the biggest bluegills and hybrids often become solitary or live in loose congregations with a few other large sunfish. These monsters can reach lengths of 11 to 12 inches and can weigh more than a pound. Not only are big bluegill hard fighters, they are wary, finicky, and deserve the same respect as bigger, more popular game fish.

July and August water temper-

atures drive big sunfish deep. Because bluegill like shade and structure, submerged stumps, deep vegetation, brushpiles, or standing trees provide excellent habitat. In farm ponds, look for the deepest water during hot summer months. Most ponds are not deep, but water depths of 8-15 feet are cool and provide excellent bluegill hangouts. In

lakes, large bluegill may go 20-25 feet deep to find relief from hot summer days.

Most bluegill are probably caught with garden worms, and serious anglers will use crickets and mealworms. However, the biggest bluegills, like most large fish, seem to prefer minnows for dinner. A study of Kansas Master Angler Awards for trophy sunfish shows that most giant bluegills were taken on minnows or minnow-imitation lures. Fishing with minnows where the big bulls live can result in some bragging-sized catches during the summer doldrums.

—Blair



Majestic Monarch

September is the month to look for masses of migrating monarch butterflies in Kansas, but what you plant in the summer can make the difference in whether or not you attract them.

A good way to attract monarchs and help them refuel on their fall migration is to have lots of plants around your home that bloom in September. Asters, sunflowers, goldenrod, and sedum have multiple blossoms to provide the monarchs with nectar they need. And if you have the right habitat nearby, you may get monarchs to roost there overnight.

They cease flying in the evening and look for sheltered sites in trees to cluster together for the night. These sites typically have an easterly exposure, so the monarchs can warm up quickly in the next day's morning sun and resume their migration. These overnight roosts are a smaller scale of what may be seen at their over-wintering sites in Mexico, where acres of trees are so blanketed with butterflies that the branches of trees bend low with their combined weight.

This familiar species has migratory behavior similar to that of birds, which is unique in the insect kingdom. Every monarch east of the Rocky Mountains navigates toward an area of central Mexico to spend the winter. And if that was not amazing enough, consider that the butterflies are operating strictly on instinct. Several generations separate them from the monarchs that went south the previous year, so it's the first trip for all of them. The trigger for their trek south appears to be the declining angle of the sun as the days get shorter, and

this "sun compass" also guides them as they travel.

The monarchs that live north of Kansas begin moving south in late August. As they progress south, local monarchs join them, making the group larger. The observed peak for the Topeka-Kansas City area typically falls around Sept. 22. The peak for the Wichita area is usually around the 27th. On the right day, in the right location, you may look outside and see hundreds or even thousands of monarchs moving in a south-southwesterly direction on their journey to Mexico. However, their movement is strongly affected by prevailing weather patterns, so every year is different in terms of what is actually seen at any given location.

The monarchs head back north again in March, but we seldom see the same ones in Kansas that went south in the previous September. Rather it is their descendants we see instead, and they begin arriving around the second week of April. Because the spring flight north is a dispersal with the purpose of laying eggs on newly-emerging milkweed rather than the mass retreat from winter that occurs in the fall, we do not see large numbers of monarchs in April like we do in September.

For more information on monarch butterflies and their amazing migration, contact the Monarch Watch Program at Kansas University — www.monarchwatch.org.

To find locations where you can go to look for monarchs and other Kansas wildlife, visit the Natural Kansas website at www.naturalkansas.org.

—Jim Mason, naturalist, Great Plains Nature Center, Wichita



Although the screech owl may be one of the smallest owls in Kansas, it has a "song" that could scare the liver out of Dracula. Lasting several seconds in the dead of night, the song is a haunting series of rapid, mournful notes that echoes through the woods. *Birds In Kansas*, by Max Thompson and Charles Ely, calls it "a descending series of whistled, trilling notes (or 'whinny')," but "ghostly" is more accurate.

The bird's appearance, however, is much more benign. Smaller than a pigeon, the screech owl is a charming little bird seldom seen because of its nocturnal habits. (Shortly after dusk, they may be lured to an electronic call playing a recording of its song.) It has yellow eyes and feathery tufts that look like ears. Those who have seen great-horned owls may mistake a screech owl for a baby great-horned.

Screech owls are very adaptable and live throughout Kansas in wooded areas both rural and suburban. They nest in tree cavities and also use artificial nest boxes.

In spring, they lay two to six eggs that require about 26 days to hatch. The female screech owl does most of the incubating, but both parents care for the young after hatching.

In daytime, screech owls remain quiet in the trees, camouflaging themselves and remaining perfectly still if humans or predators are nearby. By night, they feed on mice, insects, snakes, lizards, crayfish, salamanders, and even other birds.

—Shoup

**BOLTON NEW
COMMISSIONER**

Last spring, Gov. Kathleen Sebelius appointed Debra Bolton, Garden City, to the Kansas Wildlife and Parks Commission.

Bolton, an extension specialist with K-State Research and Extension, has been a southwest Kansas resident for 25 years. She holds a bachelor's degree in English from St. Mary of the Plains College, a master's degree in English from Fort Hays State University, and is a doctoral candidate in human ecology at Kansas State University.

She is a former director of the Finney County Community Learning Center and serves as a volunteer tour guide at the Sandsage Bison Range, south of Garden City. Bolton replaces Dr. James Harrington, who relocated from Liberal to Stillwater, Okla. Her appointment to the Commission extends through June 30, 2009.

The seven-member Kansas Wildlife and Parks Commission advises the secretary of the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP) on planning and policy issues. All positions on the commission are appointed by the gover-

nor. Regulations approved by the commission are adopted and administered by the KDWP secretary.

—Mathews

**CALLING ALL
PHOTOGRAPHERS**

Have a great outdoor photo that you would like to see published? Whether the subject is hunting, fishing, state parks, boating, or just beautiful wildlife or scenics, KDWP wants to put your work on display.

Public photo galleries are now being featured online through the KDWP website, www.kdwp.state.ks.us. Just type

"KS Outdoors Photographs" in the search box, then click "KS Outdoors Photographs" to find instructions for submissions and categories for images. The photos will be displayed in five public photo galleries, including "Wildlife," "Hunting," "Fishing," "State Parks," and "Boating."

Selected photos will be posted based on quality and portrayal of the Kansas outdoors experience. Each photo will list the photographer's name and a short caption containing information about the picture.

—Blair

Fish Consumption Advisory

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) and the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP) recommend not eating specified fish or aquatic life from the following locations for the reasons stated:

- the Kansas River from Lawrence (below Bowersock Dam) downstream to Eudora at the confluence of the Wakarusa River for bottom-feeding fish (carp, blue catfish, channel catfish, flathead catfish, freshwater drum, bullheads, sturgeons, buffalos, carpsuckers, and other sucker species) because of PCB levels;
- Horseshoe Lake located in units 22 and 23 of the Mined Lands Wildlife Area (Cherokee County) for all forms of aquatic life, including all fish, because of perchlorate levels;
- the Spring River from the confluence of Center Creek to the Kansas-Oklahoma border (Cherokee County) for shellfish (mussels, clams, and crayfish) because of lead and cadmium levels; and
- Shoal Creek from the Missouri-Kansas border to Empire Lake (Cherokee County) for shellfish because of lead and cadmium levels.

In addition, the agencies recommend a limit of one 8-ounce serving per month, or twelve 8-ounce servings per year, on the consumption of bottom-feeding fish from the following locations due to PCBs:

- the Arkansas River from the Lincoln Street Dam in Wichita downstream to the confluence with Cowskin Creek near Belle Plaine (Sedgwick and Sumner counties); and
- Cow Creek in Hutchinson and downstream to the confluence with the Arkansas River (Reno County).

Due to the average levels of mercury, a limit of one 8-ounce serving per week for adults or one 4-ounce serving per week for children 12 years of age or younger is recommended for any species of fish from the following locations:

- the Little Arkansas River from the Main Street Bridge immediately west of Valley Center to the confluence with the Arkansas River in Wichita (Sedgwick County); and
- the main stem of the Blue River from U.S. 69 Highway to the Kansas-Missouri state line (Johnson County).

The Environmental Protection Agency

(EPA) has issued a national fish consumption advisory for mercury that recommends consuming no more than one 8-ounce serving per week of non-commercial (locally caught) fish. EPA bases this on nationwide average mercury levels in various species of fish but recommends first consideration be given to local advisories. Women who are pregnant or breast feeding should avoid eating large-sized predatory fish such as largemouth bass, or consult their physician. Additional testing for contaminants in fish and other aquatic life will continue on an annual basis.

The advisories assess cancer risk levels using EPA methods. Cancer risk assessment is a method to determine the added increase in cancer levels in a population if fish in the advisory areas are consumed regularly over a 70-year period. Assessments that estimate the increased risk of cancer as greater than one in 100,000 are determined to be unacceptably high-risk levels. Risk assessments for contaminant's assessed as non-carcinogens (mercury, lead, and cadmium) are based on 8-ounce servings for adults and 4-ounce servings for children nine to 18 years of age.

For more information, contact the KDHE at 785-296-5571.

—Shoup

Summer Singers

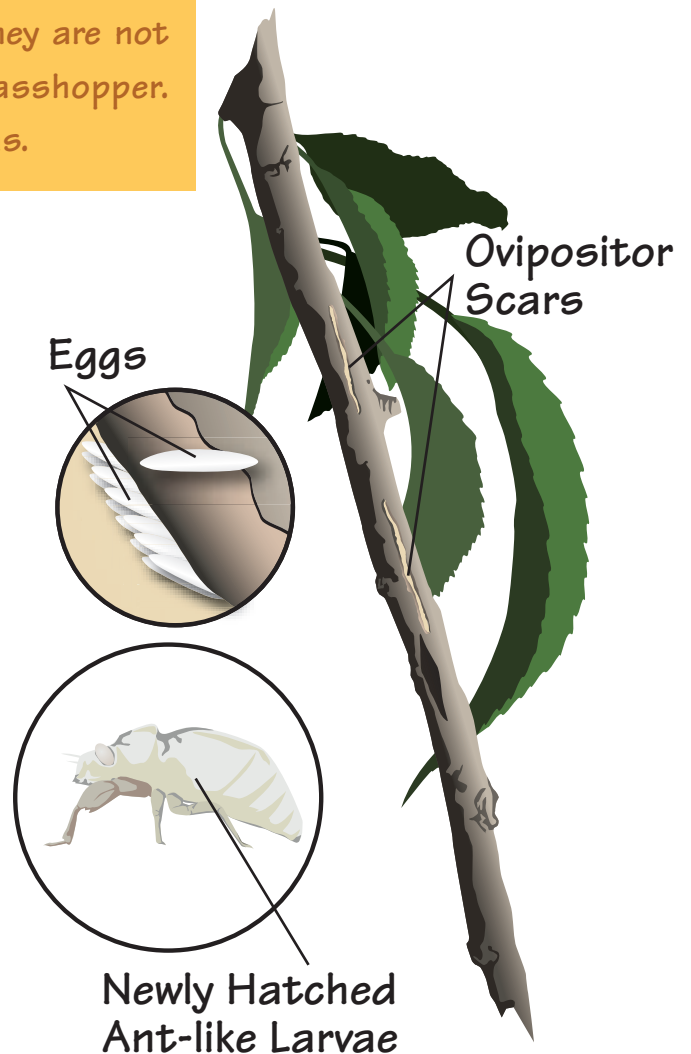


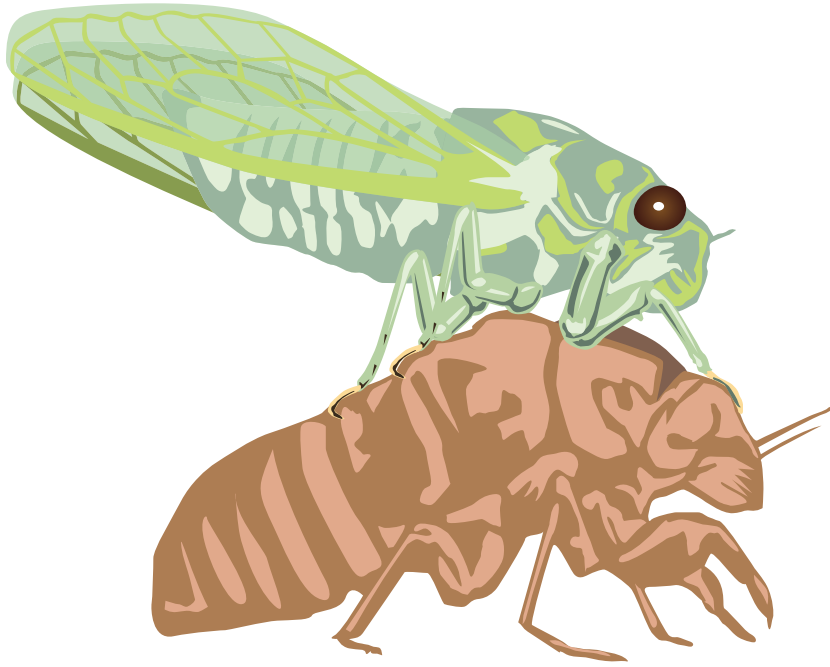
Go outside on a late-summer evening, and all around is a loud “zawee, zawee” sound coming from the trees. What is making all that noise? Most likely, it is your friendly neighborhood cicada. Sometimes called “locusts,” they are not true locusts, which are actually a type of grasshopper. Kansas is home to 17 different species of cicadas.

Cicadas have been in the news lately because of their spectacular hatch in the upper Midwest in late May and June, but these cicadas are different from the ones we see every summer in Kansas. The ones emerging in Illinois, Iowa, Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin this year are 17-year periodic cicadas. (We’ll talk more about them later.)

What is a cicada? A cicada is a relatively large flying insect, often longer than 1 inch, that is closely related to leafhoppers and spittle bugs. They suck tree juices through a beak, and that is how they both eat and drink. They are probably best known for the loud sounds made by the males. Males make this sound by flexing their tymbals, which are drum-like organs found on their abdomens. Females don’t have tymbals, but they may make some clicking noises. Cicadas are also well-known for the brown skins left behind on trees, fence posts, garden stakes and just about anything else when the adult emerges.

A cicada spends a long time underground – in some cases as long as 17 years – before it becomes an adult. Adults live a short time (two to six weeks) as they search for a mate, lay eggs, and die. Eggs are about the size of rice, and the female lays them in a groove she has made in a tree limb. Out of the egg hatches something that looks like a small white ant. The young cicada feeds on the juices from the branch for a time, then it falls to the ground and digs down until it





finds a root to feed on. Here it will stay underground for two to 17 years, depending on the species of cicada.

When it emerges, it will be a nymph. Nymphs climb the nearest tree to shed their skin. Once out of the skin, the adult unfolds its wings by pumping in fluids, and the new skin hardens. If you see one as it emerges, you might think it is an albino because it is white. Wait awhile until the skin hardens, and its color will appear. Once

emerged, life as an adult begins.

Even though there are more than 100 species of cicadas in North America, there are really just two main types of cicadas: periodical cicadas (which belong to the genus *Magicicada*) or annual cicadas (most of these are in the genus *Tibicen*). The name “annual cicadas” might make you think that these cicadas complete their life cycle in just one year, but this is not true. Annual cicadas require several years to develop — any-

where from 2 to 7 years — but because there are overlapping generations, some individuals appear every year. Most annual cicadas (genus *Tibicen*) are large-bodied cicadas with green and brown markings. These are the “dog day” cicadas of late summer and fall.

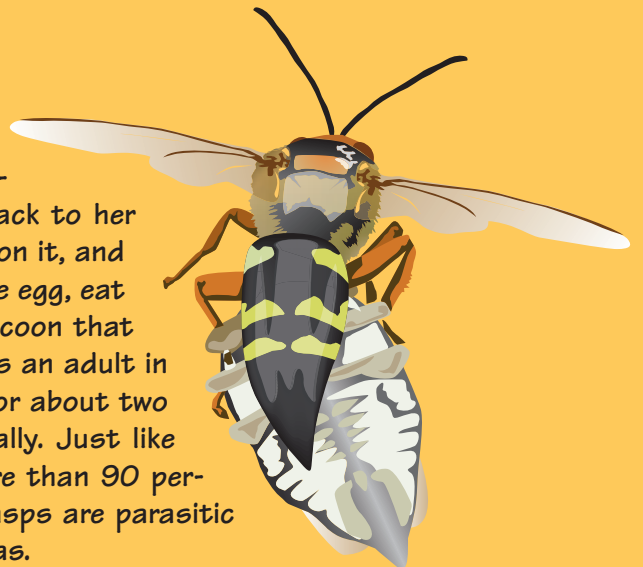
Periodic cicadas are the news-making cicadas because their life cycle is synchronized, meaning that all of a large group called a “brood” mature into adults in the same year. If you think about this, it is truly amazing because periodic cicadas are on a 13-year or 17-year cycle. This is a long time to stay synchronized.

When periodic cicadas emerge, they do so in huge numbers and form much denser groupings than is normal for the annual cicadas. Periodic cicada adults have black bodies and striking red eyes, orange wing veins, and a black “W” near the tips of the forewings. The brood emerging this year in the upper Midwest is numbered Brood XIII. The periodic cicadas in Kansas are in Brood X and will not emerge here until 2015. Be on the lookout then.

Eastern Cicada Killer Wasp

(*Sphecius speciosus*)

Cicadas have enemies. One of its fiercest enemies is the cicada killer wasp. The female cicada killer captures an annual cicada, paralyzes it, and takes it back to her burrow, where she will put it in a nest cell, lay an egg on it, and seal the cell. In a few days, a grub will emerge from the egg, eat the cicada, and over-winter underground in a hard cocoon that it weaves. In the spring, it will pupate, then emerge as an adult in July or August, dig its way to the surface, and live for about two to six weeks. All adult cicada killer wasps die annually. Just like their prey, the cicada, cicada killer wasps spend more than 90 percent of their lives underground as a larvae. These wasps are parasitic and very beneficial for the control they exert on cicadas.





Backlash

by Mike Miller

A Hometown Erased

By the time you read this, the Greensburg tornado will be old news. But it's fresh in my mind as I write. My parents' 80-year-old home valiantly kept most of four walls standing, but they were about all that was left. Mom and Dad spent a week collecting belongings that were salvageable. Most weren't. But my parents couldn't feel sorry for themselves. They only had to glance across the street or down the block to see those who lost much more.

I guess I'm feeling a little sorry for myself, though; my hometown is gone. Every Greensburg landmark has been erased, but my mind's eye will always see it as the idyllic community tucked into the southcentral Kansas farm and ranch land.

I've written often about how fortunate I was to grow up in Greensburg, which I believe has much to do with who I am and what I do. I'll never forget my eleventh summer. With a bike, a fishing pole, and a state fishing lake within easy riding distance, Greensburg was my Utopia. My cousin and I fished away summer mornings, then rode our bikes to Hunter's Drug on Main Street for a cherry coke. Then we pedaled across town to the swimming pool each afternoon. Summer evenings were often spent playing "Capture the Flag" with neighbor kids.

In November, Greensburg became headquarters for an event that would become one of my favorite traditions. Pheasant hunters from across the country filled every motel room in town. I'll never forget the anticipation of my first opening day as I ate early-morning pancakes at the VFW with my dad and a crowd of other hunters. I couldn't have been in a better place. (I realize now that small towns like Greensburg are why hunters return to Kansas each fall; pheasants are just an excuse.)

In my teens, a new mode of transportation expanded our freedom. My buddies and I hunted and fished throughout Kiowa County. We could jump in the car, drive two miles, and be in prime pheasant country. In 10 miles, we were in the rolling grasslands south of town, where we found mule deer, turkeys, quail, lesser prairie chicken, and sapphire farm ponds

teeming with bass, crappie and catfish; truly Utopia for a kid who loves the outdoors.

And while growing up hunting and fishing in rural Kansas helped shape me, my parents are mostly responsible for who I am. But Greensburg provided other wonderful influences: Mrs. Einsel taught seventh-grade English, and she encouraged me to write about my love for hunting and fishing; Mr. Moore, our shop teacher and junior high coach, taught me there are no shortcuts to excellence in football or woodworking; Mr. Neelly always had positive words in social studies class, and our opening-day pheasant hunts started at his family's farm south of Haviland; Coach DeVore made football practice fun, and he taught us to believe in ourselves; Sherman Morford gave me my first summer job painting houses and by example instilled his unwavering work ethic in me; Mr. Montgomery gave me my first bank loan, which helped buy a used, bright red '71 Chevelle Malibu. (Mom and Dad paid for half, and I took the loan for the other half. Mr. Montgomery imposed no minimum payment, so I paid whatever I could come up with each month.) There are many more – aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends; they are the heart of Greensburg, the core of me.

Greensburg residents carry a heavy burden of loss and sorrow, but this tragedy brought people together. The offers of assistance and concern shown by family, friends, neighbors, acquaintances, even complete strangers, have been overwhelming. This incomprehensible force of nature has proven that the most valuable harvest our central-Kansas farmland yields is its people. And I've never been more proud to be from this place, especially as I've listened to and read quotes in the media from residents who survived this storm. Perhaps the town's personality has been best displayed by this year's senior class, most of whom lost not only their school but their homes and belongings. Each young man and young woman has shown courage, compassion, character, and maturity beyond their age. So, with more pride than sorrow, I'll always boast that I'm from Greensburg. ♡

