

# KANSAS

*Wildlife & Parks*

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# On Point

by Mike Hayden



## *The Good Old Days*

**W**ith the dust settled and data compiled, the forecast for the 2009 pheasant and quail seasons is outstanding. Overall, we're anticipating a great year, and the forecasters were enthused enough to use the term "early 1980s" as a comparison for pheasant numbers in some areas of northwest Kansas. That's optimistic. (See Page 38 for the complete 2009 Upland Bird Forecast.)

It's interesting how hunters' memories function. We often catalog the good years and erase the bad ones. The best harvest year on record, 1982, has become the benchmark – or often a hunter will mark one of his best seasons, say 1975. Thirty years later, the hunter will reminisce, "I remember when there were hundreds of pheasants in the fields – back in the seventies. Boy, those were the good old days."

Just for fun, I went through some of our small game harvest reports and looked at annual harvest and hunter numbers for pheasants. In the 1960s, the average estimated annual harvest was 603,200 birds. The highest harvest during this decade was 801,000 in 1960. The average number of pheasant hunters each year was 139,000.

In the 1970s, pheasant hunters took an average of 675,200 birds per year. The best year was 1979 when 178,000 hunters harvested 1.25 million pheasants. Pheasant hunter numbers averaged 150,500 this decade.

The eighties were banner years for pheasant hunters in Kansas. Of course 1982 was the best for the decade, and for all time, when hunters took 1.5 million pheasants. The average annual harvest was 903,300, and about 157,000 hunters took to the field each fall. Incidentally, the highest number of hunters on record was also in 1982, when an estimated 195,600 hunters walked the Kansas fields in pursuit of ringnecks. Harvest fell by more than 50 percent from 1983 to 1984 after bird populations plummeted due to severe winter weather.

The 1990s saw hunter numbers fall, and harvests bounced up and down between half a million to three-quarters of a million. Average harvest for the nineties was 695,900 – better than the sixties and seventies. And hunter numbers were similar to the sixties, averaging about 136,000 each year. The best harvest for the nineties was 1999 when hunters took an estimated 824,000 birds.

During the current decade, we've seen one of the lowest annual harvests on record, 426,000 birds in 2001, as well as the best harvest since 1987 – 887,000 in 2007. Harvest that year was better than any harvest from 1957-1977, and there were 20 percent fewer hunters hunting pheasants. Since 2000, an average of 107,000 hunters have taken approximately 673,000 pheasants each year. Last year's harvest dropped to 636,000 birds, but we are optimistic that harvest will rebound nicely this fall.

It's human nature to remember the good years more clearly than the bad. And while we're not approaching harvest numbers seen in the late seventies and early eighties, hunting has been good in recent years. And these could be considered the "good old days" because there are so many other hunting opportunities. Hunters in the early sixties couldn't imagine that Kansas would become a nationally recognized white-tailed deer or turkey hunting state. The first modern deer season was in 1965 and the first fall turkey season wasn't opened until 1981. And today's hunter has access to an additional 1 million acres compared to hunters in any other decade thanks to the Walk-In Hunting Access program.

2009 could be one of those "good years" we store on our brains' hard drives, and I encourage hunters to take advantage. I really think these are the good old days for Kansas hunting. ♡

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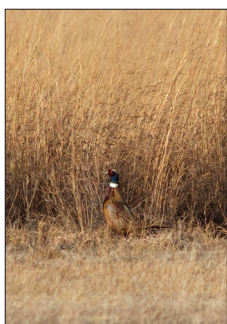


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**Front Cover:** The excellent 2009 Upland Bird Forecast is reason for bird hunters to anxiously anticipate opening day. Mike Blair took this photo. **Back Cover:** While rarely seen because of their elusive and nocturnal habits, bobcats are common in Kansas, and they are a prized quarry for Kansas trappers. Mile Blair photo.



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

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## Letters . . .

### CLIMATE BILL COUNTER

#### Editor:

The article "Climate Change and Conservation" by Ken Brunson (September/October 2009 issue) starts by asking: "There is some disagreement about the climate change issues isn't there?" That statement should be obvious based on a fair evaluation of both sides of the climate change issue.

However, the article goes on to recommend embracing the climate change cap and tax bill because the bill has been sweetened by adding on minor conservation measures. Add-ons do not make bad legislation into good legislation. Suggesting support for a bill that will drastically affect jobs and quality of life because of an inducement of minor conservation improvements is the "what's in it for me" approach that has a proven history of created bloated, costly, and at times very, very bad legislation.

The United States cap and tax climate change bill is a good example of bad legislation. The U. S. bill and Kyoto protocol will combine to cause "carbon leakage," where high-paying manufacturing or energy-related jobs move from the United States to countries such as China and India where the Kyoto protocol allows greenhouse gas generation without any limitations or extra costs. Carbon emissions aren't reduced but simply "leak" to another location in the world. In addition, countries that have no greenhouse limits also have minimal pollution restrictions of any kind. Should we be surprised if the net effect is higher costs and fewer jobs in the United States, and MORE world pollution?

I support wildlife conservation, but conservation improvements should be judged on their own benefits and costs; same goes for the cap/tax and trade bill, and it is bad legislation. As true conservationists and good citizens, we should insure we carefully evaluate an issue before taking - or recommending - a position.

*D. Shaffer  
Niotaze*



## HUNTING *with Wayne Doyle* HERITAGE

### Load Your Brain

The season of the hunter is here – finally! I've spent considerable time over the last few weeks getting ready. Checking decoys, cleaning shotguns, sighting in rifles, double checking the ammo supply, getting the couch potato dog (and me) into reasonable physical condition,

checking maps, renewing permissions, checking bird estimates, and a few other tasks help get me tuned up for The Season. I hope I have not left anything important until the last minute, although I usually do. I know other hunters are following similar rituals.

However, the most important part of preparation could be mental. **Load your brain before you load your gun.** Brush up on gun safety. Practice gun handling. Renew the muscle memory. Load your brain with the four rules of safe gun handling. Think about every hunting incident that you have heard about and think about how it could have been prevented. Remember that the most common incident in Kansas is "swinging on game" (where the shooter swings on a bird, loses awareness of a partner's location and shoots him) and think how to prevent it. If you hunt from a tree stand, always use a fall restraint system. Every fall from a tree stand results in serious injuries or death. Falls are preventable, so prevent them!

While incidents are rare (16 incidents out of two and one-half million hunting days last year), they are life-changing events for both shooter and victim. If you always control the muzzle and keep it pointed in a safe direction, no matter what happens no one is hurt by an unintended discharge.

### No matter how long you have been handling guns, know and live by these rules:

- Always control the muzzle of your firearm.
- Keep your finger off the trigger until ready to fire.
- Treat every firearm as if it was loaded.
- Be sure of your target AND what is beyond it.

And protect yourself. Never hunt with unsafe or unethical people. Life is too short to be ended by the stupidity of someone else. Wear sunglasses or shooting glasses to protect your eyes from stray shot, thorns and branches. Stay hydrated and keep your dog hydrated. Wear sunscreen. Skin cancer is easier to prevent than cure. Watch the weather and stay home if a blizzard threatens. Use common sense about your real physical condition. Your partners won't be happy carrying your carcass back to the vehicle.

It's not rocket science. **Load your brain before you load your gun.**



Sabine's gull with Canada geese

**K**ansas has very few naturally-occurring surface water impoundments. Historically, migrating birds stopped at rivers and lowland marshes. However, today it's hard to imagine our state without the flood control reservoirs constructed decades ago by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation and many state, county and local entities. The addition of that surface water has affected the habits of birds migrating through central North America.

Kansas has several noted wetlands that have existed for scores of years, such as Cheyenne Bottoms, Quivira and a few others, but the creation of permanent water bodies certainly increased the number of birds that stopped for rest in Kansas. During my 18 years working at Wilson Reservoir, I had the opportunity to see the vast number of waterfowl, gulls, loons and grebes that used the area during migration. Water bird numbers increased gradually in early fall, usually peaking in mid-November through December. In mid-winter, when the lake iced over, bird numbers decreased until warmer weather returned. The number of birds swelled in early spring, then tapered off when birds migrated to the breeding grounds of the north.

Kansas reservoirs and surrounding lands provide critical resting and feeding habitat for many species of birds, and many areas are accessible to the public for bird watching and hunting. Some parks and public lands are free and open to the public, and some are fee-based, requiring a permit to enter. Be sure to know which government agency manages the property, as well as the regulations before entering. Permission is required to access any private land in Kansas, whether it's posted or not.

There have been more than 40 species of waterfowl seen in Kansas, along with dozens of other water bird species – most on or near reservoirs. The challenge is to find an unusual species in the flocks of geese, ducks and gulls. Over the last couple of decades, sharp-eyed Kansas birders have added several new species to the state checklist by diligently going to lakes and scanning the flocks. Some of the unique species include whistling duck, brant goose, tufted duck, harlequin duck, three species of scoter, and Barrow's goldeneye.

## BIRD BRAIN

with Mike Rader

### Birding Kansas Reservoirs

Other rare water birds that have been sighted include red-throated and yellow-billed loons, brown pelican, neotropic cormorant, three species of jaeger, black-headed gull, mew gull, Thayer's gull, Iceland gull, both greater and lesser black-back gulls, Sabine's gull and black-legged kittiwake.

I was lucky enough to see a rare visitor from the Asian Pacific several years ago at Wilson Lake. The bird was a long-billed murrelet, one from a group of species known as alcids (which includes puffins). There are only a handful of records of this bird in the U.S. and very few from inland locations. Dozens of birders traveled to Wilson from as far away as central Texas to try to see it. I can't even speculate why it showed up there.

More recently, I found an adult Sabine's gull at the city sewer ponds in Wilson. There are a few records (fewer than 5) each year of this species migrating through Kansas, but they are usually young birds seen at Cheyenne Bottoms or Quivira. Finding an adult on a sewer pond was pretty unusual. I had permission to look at the ponds from the City of Wilson. Birdwatching is allowed on some city properties, such as that of Elkhart in southwest Kansas and probably a few more, but most sewer ponds are posted "no trespassing." Get permission before entering any wastewater treatment or watch from the road.

While reservoirs have many purposes, including flood control, recreation, or even waste-water disposal, the migrating birds they attract is a nice bonus. Weather conditions, such as drought or flooding, can have dramatic effects on these bodies of water, but for now I'm just glad that we have this resource that makes birding more interesting and fun.



Sabine's gull

Mike Rader photos

## Letter . . .

I support your right to express your opinion, evidenced by this letter's appearance. However, in your last sentence, you imply that Ken Brunson has not carefully evaluated this issue because he disagrees with you. In my mind, you don't know enough about Ken or his knowledge to take that position.

*Editor*

### KUDOS TO WIHA

Editor, Open Letter To WIHA Landowners:

Thanks to lifetime Kansas hunting licenses, my son and I have had years and years to enjoy the fantastic hunting opportunities available in Kansas. Some 20-plus years ago when I commanded the ROTC program at Pittsburg State University, I was fortunate enough to know several Kansas landowners who kindly opened their farms and ranches to young Jason and me. Those days are long past. After several relocations, we are now back in the Midwest. We now rely almost exclusively upon the Walk-In Hunting Access areas for hunting in Kansas.

We have successfully hunted white-tails, turkeys, and small game many times. Last year, I was drawn for a Muzzleloader Either Species/Either-Sex Deer permit for Unit 1. I hunted pretty hard during the early season with some sightings but no shots. Regular rifle season was different. I saw several nice mule deer bucks and finally took a smaller but battle-scared buck. That bad boy was fat and delicious.

So this note is just to say "thank you" for what you do for hunters. The access you grant us through the WIHA program is much appreciated. My son and I will continue to treat your property with respect, will clean up after ourselves (and others), and will do our best to follow the rules. Thanks for sharing with us.

Also, Kansas Wildlife & Parks is a great magazine. After we read it, we put in our B&B [bed and breakfast?] where almost every issue has magically disappeared.

*Guy and Jason Thomas  
Tulsa, Oklahoma*

## IT'S THE LAW

*with Kevin Jones*

### Fixing Non-compliance

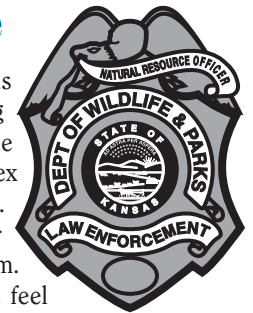
Each year, game wardens, park rangers, and public lands officers issue about 6,000 tickets to people violating wildlife- and park-related laws. The violations cover a wide gamut, ranging from simple regulatory violations to complex investigations, involving multiple defendants and charges. For the most part, the violators are responsible for their actions and the matter is settled through the court system.

However, there are a few individuals who for some reason feel they are not obligated to answer to the charges. They may ignore the ticket, initial appearance in court or, once convicted, even ignore the imposed sentence. Not only does this create a problem for the courts and the department in closing cases, it also shows contempt for our legal system and fairness under the rule of law. The problem can become even more difficult when the violators are from out of state, since Kansas courts can not reach outside the state's jurisdictional boundaries.

Having to deal with exactly this problem, Norton County Attorney Doug Sebelius (and Kansas Wildlife and Parks commissioner) believed something needed to be done to ensure that violators were held accountable for their actions. He drafted legislation and got a bill introduced into the Kansas Legislature that would give the courts a means of addressing the issue of non-compliance with court actions. On July 1, 2008, the bill became law, creating statute 32-1049a.

This law creates a process by which the court can suspend or forfeit a person's licenses, permits, stamps or other department issuances until he satisfies his obligation to the court. The violator can not legally hunt, fish or trap in Kansas. A park entry permit, issued in his name, would no longer be valid, and his ability to purchase new licenses or permits would be blocked. Once he has settled the problem with the court, the department is notified and his privileges will be reinstated, provided those privileges were not revoked in the original court sentence.

Since its enactment, there have been several people who have faced the reality that they can no longer ignore their legal matters. When they tried to buy a license or permit, they were notified that it could not be issued and were advised to contact the department's Law Enforcement Division. After settling their problem with the court, the block was removed in the licensing system and they were able to once again buy licenses and permits. By using the technology of the department's automated licensing system, the courts and the department have found a way to ensure that justice is carried out.



### SHOOTING EQUIPMENT GROWTH

According to a National Sporting Goods Association (NSGA) report, hunting- and firearms-related equipment was the only sporting-goods equipment category to see double-digit sales growth in 2008. Sales rose 16 percent, while overall sporting-goods equipment sales declined 1 percent compared to the previous year. Included in the "hunting and firearms" equipment category are rifles, handguns, shotguns, ammunition, airguns, reloading equipment, paintball, and cutlery. NSGA reported sales in the hunting and firearms category were \$4.6 billion in 2008, up from \$3.9 billion the previous year.

*—Bullet Points*



## HABITAT HELP with Jake George

### Plan Now for Spring Habitat Projects

As we prepare for the long winter ahead, spring wildlife habitat enhancement projects are probably not at the forefront of our thoughts. While it is true that most on-the-ground habitat work is completed in the spring, fall and winter provide an opportune time to develop a habitat management plan for your property. KDWP wildlife biologists are available to work with landowners, providing technical assistance on improving wildlife habitat and guidance regarding both federal and state habitat programs. These programs are designed to offer financial assistance for implementing habitat improvement practices on range or pastureland, cropland, and properties enrolled in the CRP. Sign-up dates, cost share rates and funding decision timelines vary by program. For example, USDA's Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) has a continuous sign-up but normally has a cutoff period early in the spring to allocate funding and still allow time for spring plantings. The currently scheduled application date for funding this round of USDA's WHIP projects is Feb. 5, 2010. Your local wildlife biologist can guide you through the application and planning process for all programs that may be applicable.



State private lands habitat improvement programs allow KDWP biologists and private landowners to work together in the development of habitat management plans. Many plans include cost-sharing on prescribed burning, light disking, food plot establishment, forb/legume interseeding,

and brush removal. Other plans have been developed to provide cost-share for the conversion of farmland to native grass, converting grazing land from cool season grass to warm season grass, hedgerow renovation, wetland development, and deferred grazing on native rangeland. There are also several practices designed to assist landowners with required management activities on land enrolled in the CRP. Depending on local availability, these programs may also loan or rent native grass drills, tree planting machines, weed barrier fabric machines, root plows, drip torches, and portable tanks and sprayers for controlled burns to cooperating landowners.

Whether you intend to apply for financial assistance or would simply like some technical assistance in developing a wildlife friendly management plan for your property, planning ahead allows for timely implementation of practices once spring arrives. Contact KDWP now and get a head start for next spring. Call 620-672-0760 for more information and the name of a KDWP biologist within your area.

## El Dorado State Park Hosts Youth Deer Hunters

Six excited young deer hunters checked into the El Dorado State Park hunt "headquarters," ready to go hunting. For some, this special hunt would be their first opportunity to take a deer.

The third annual El Dorado State Park Youth Deer Hunt is a park tradition, stirring up new hunting passion in area boys and girls. The limited hunt is open to any young hunter, and last year two permanent, handicap-accessible blinds were constructed to accommodate a disabled youngster. At the end of that hunt, there was one proud young hunter who was telling his story to anyone who would listen.

Six names were drawn for this year's hunt. Temperatures were warm, but anticipation was high as the young hunters were instructed on safe hunting before a target practice session with shotguns and the use of slugs. (The hunt is held within the boundaries of El Dorado State Park, so shotguns are the only firearms allowed.) After making sure all participants were comfortable with their shotguns, a clay target shooting session was held to build the confidence of the young hunters.



A guide accompanied each hunter to his or her blind to ensure safety precautions were followed and to ensure compliance with all laws and regulations. By the end of the Saturday evening hunt, a six-point buck had been taken, and by the end of the Sunday morning hunt, a nice doe had been harvested. The other four hunters had opportunities to shoot, but buck fever caused them to miss.

A great time was had by all, including the park ranger staff. In addition to organizing and hosting the hunt, rangers provided an evening cookout and morning breakfast for the hunters and families. The youth were also provided sleeping accommodations in the park's cabins, all permits and licenses, and guns and ammunition.

The El Dorado State Park rangers would like to thank the following donors who made the 2009 Youth Deer Hunt possible: State Bank of Leon, P.D. Morris Family, Blackburn Construction Inc., attorney Doyle E. White Jr, and Tyler Burt.

*- Randy Just, park ranger*

### STAYING IN TOUCH

Editor:

A short note. I left Council Grove in 2003 after living at the lake and enjoying that, as well as other places in Kansas. I received your *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine in the move and did not miss one - a Kansas item that always has beautiful pictures and news and information. My daughter here has sent boxes to soldiers, and in some I have put *Kansas Wildlife & Parks*. Thank you for keeping me in touch with Kansas.

*Dorothy Helferstay  
Linden, Tex.*

### WADER DANGER?

Editor:

I recently received the September/October 2009 issue of *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine. On Page 6, there is an article entitled "Fish Squeezer" along with pictures of two young men in a boat, both wearing hip boots!!

This seems a tragedy about to occur. They should, and you too, know better than to wear hip boots in a boat.

There is an a lot more to be said regarding hip boots. You should run an article about where and when hip boots are acceptable.

*Tom Bush  
Wichita*

Mr. Bush,

I've read the warnings about hip boots or chest waders acting as anchors if an angler falls in. However, the truth is that water in hip boots is the same density as the water outside the hip boots. While in the water, the boots won't sink the wearer. Water in the boots, however, will make getting out more difficult and may require the wearer to remove them or empty them before climbing out or walking. Fisheries biologists live in waders because staying warm and dry, especially in early spring or late fall, is necessary for comfort and survival.

*Editor*

# FISH SQUEEZER

with Tommie Berger

## Safe On The Ice

**I**n winter, the frozen surface of my favorite fishing hole looks more like a tomb than a lake. Of course, there is lots of activity below the ice, but it's not as obvious as it was last July.

Fall air cools surface water, and it becomes heavier, eventually sinking and forcing warmer, less dense, water to the surface. This is called turnover, and the process continues until the whole lake reaches a temperature of 39 degrees. When water freezes at 32 degrees, it is only about 90 percent as heavy as warmer water of the same volume. That is why ice floats and why the water on the bottom of the lake stays 39 degrees all winter.

Water holds twice as much oxygen at 32 degrees as it does at 77 degrees. This added oxygen supply helps fish survive winter, especially when the ice cover prevents oxygen exchange at the surface.

At 32 degrees, ice begins to form along the shoreline and grows until the whole lake is covered. New ice is usually clear, but after a week or two, the ice gets cloudy with gas bubbles from decaying vegetation. As the water cools, lake residents migrate to deeper water near mouths of entering streams and springs. It is similar to the migration that takes place in late spring. These areas, which are coolest in summer, are warmest in the winter. That is why ice fishing is often good on the upper ends of the lake when the ice first forms.

Some species of fish become dormant. Carp force themselves into the mud until they are almost covered; their breathing slows and they appear to be

dead. Fish such as bass and bluegill still continue limited feeding. White bass, stripers, walleye and crappie remain quite active at times and feed a more aggressively than other species.

Fishing is often excellent soon after ice forms, and anglers are anxious to venture out. Every winter there are anglers out on the ice long before I feel it's safe.

I recommend that anglers drill test holes near shore to check the ice as they venture out. Four inches of "good" ice is the minimum thickness for safety. Good ice is made with very cold temperatures and calm winds. Ice made under windy conditions or with fluctuating temperatures may not be safe. Good ice 4 to 6 inches thick is considered safe for foot travel in single file lines. A thickness of 6 to 10 inches should be enough for ATVs and snowmobiles, but we seldom get that thickness of ice in Kansas.

Be aware that even when the ice appears safe, bubbling springs, current, and vegetation like cattails and tree roots can lead to thinner ice - especially if there are a lot of bubbles associated with the weeds. Usually, the smaller ponds freeze first, and it takes longer for the big lakes and reservoirs to freeze solid.

A life jacket, float coat, or floatation coveralls could save your life if you accidentally break through, and they'll certainly help keep you warm while staring at that small round hole. But the bottom line is to use common sense, and if the ice is questionable, don't go.

## Wildscape Donates GPS

Last June, the Kansas Wildscape Foundation donated 30 Garmin eTrex handheld global positioning system (GPS) units to KDWP in support of the Geocache 2009 program. 2008 was the first year for the program, and many park attendees found out about the "treasure hunt" opportunity while at a park but did not have their own GPS units to participate. With the donated units, Wildscape provided "loaners" to eager participants.

For more information on geocaching in Kansas state parks, go online to the KDWP website. From there, click "Other Services/Outdoor Activities/Geocaching."

*-KDWP News*





## What's That Skull?

When hunters are afield in winter, they often come across interesting finds other than their quarry. Animal skulls are among the most common objects of interest, and hunters – and anyone enjoying a day afield exploring – often find themselves scratching their heads or debating with friends the identity of their finds.

If you find an interesting skull or skeleton while afield this winter, bring it home and go online to <http://1kai.dokkyomed.ac.jp/mammal/en/mammal.html>. (Be sure to leave out the “www.”) This is the home of Mammalian Crania Photographic, and it has photographs of mammal skulls, from beaver to weasel. You can search by common or scientific name or use the taxonomic tree. Skulls are shown from six different angles alongside rulers for scale.

Have fun with your kids this winter and

## On The Web with Mark Shoup

## WHAT'S THAT SKULL? HUNT KANSAS

look up that curious skull. The site also provides pictures of the living animals, so you can look at the critter from inside out.

### Hunt Kansas

Hunting season is in full swing, but hunters may still have questions about hunting in the Sunflower State. Most of these questions can be answered by going online to [www.kdwp.state.ks.us](http://www.kdwp.state.ks.us) and clicking “Hunting” at the top of the page.

One of the first things every hunter needs to know before going afield is the cost. What license do you need to pursue your favorite game? Are there any other permits required? Can you purchase what you need over the counter, or is an application necessary?

Answers to these questions often depend on what is being hunted. For example, a hunting license is required to hunt anything in Kansas unless you are a Kansas resident younger than 16 or 65 or older, or if you are hunting on your own land. Upland birds and small game require no other stamps or permits. Waterfowl hunters, however, must also have state and federal waterfowl stamps, as well as a Kansas HIP stamp. Waterfowl hunters who are not required to have a hunting license

do not have to purchase a state waterfowl stamp or HIP stamp, but all waterfowl hunters 16 or older still need a federal waterfowl stamp. All nonresident deer hunters must enter a drawing in April. Resident deer hunters may purchase Any-Season White-tailed Deer permits over the counter, but they must enter a drawing in July to receive a Firearm Either-Species/Either Sex Deer permit, which would allow them to take a mule deer.

All these questions and more are answered on this page and the links within it. For more detailed information, click the “Hunting Regulations” link.

## WAY outside

BY BRUCE COCHRAN



“ I KNOW TOMORROW IS OPENING DAY,  
BUT TRY TO RELAX.”

## ONLINE FURHARVESTER EDUCATION

The Furharvester Education Correspondence Course will no longer be issued and has been replaced with an online course. The online course is currently available free of charge, and instructor-led courses will still be offered.

To take either the online course or an instructor-led course, go to the [www.kdwp.state.ks.us](http://www.kdwp.state.ks.us) and click: “Other-Services/Education/Furharvester.” To choose an instructor-led course, click “Course Schedule.” To take the online course, click “Kansas Furharvester Education online course.” Students will be asked to create an account and will then be sent an email confirming their account along with a link to start the course. Once students have completed all sections of the course, they will take a final test and must score at least 84 percent to be certified. If they fail the test on the first try, they can re-study and re-take the test until they get a passing score. Once the course is complete, students will be issued an official Kansas Furharvester Education certificate that they may print out at home.

—KDWP News



## ROASTED RACCOON

Last winter was a tough trapping year for me. Fur prices were low, but I still wanted to hone my skills and get my kids involved. I didn't get serious about trapping until mid-season when a co-worker sent me an article that appeared in the *Kansas City Star* featuring a furharvester who sold raccoon carcasses to people who enjoyed eating the meat. I did some web research to learn more about preparing raccoon for the table and was surprised at the resources available.

I learned that younger coons were better table fare and to avoid mature male, or boar, coons.

Fortunately, I caught two young coons. I skinned them as I typically would for selling the fur, then remove the head, feet, and tailbone. I was amazed that the carcass resembled a rabbit in shape and flesh color although much larger. Using a pair of game shears, I cut the coon open from between the back legs along the belly,

through the ribs up to the neck. I then carefully remove the entrails and excess fat, then washed the meat thoroughly with cold water. It's important to remove glands from under the armpits and inside back legs. They are small cream-colored bean-shaped masses or appear as a cluster of veins in the joint areas. I soaked the meat in salt water in the refrigerator overnight.

As I was researching raccoon recipes, I looked for a recipe that allowed the natural flavor of the meat to be as prominent as possible for a realistic evaluation. I didn't want to be fooled by lavish barbecue sauces or complicated seasoning mixes covering up potential gaminess. I found a recipe and worked it over a little until I felt confident in trying it.

I was skeptical, but I'll admit it was good. I took some to work that week and most coworkers found it delicious. Most commented it tasted similar to moist roast

beef or dark turkey meat. Parboiling rendered much of the fat from the meat. The remaining fat was not objectionable, as it can be with other game meats, and provided the moist texture of the finished meat. It made me a believer, and I plan to make use of young raccoons I catch in the future.

### ROASTED RACCOON

2 small or 1 medium raccoon  
2 red pepper pods  
2 tbsp lemon juice  
1 tsp salt  
¼ tsp pepper  
1/8 tsp sage  
1 cup water

In a large pot, combine cleaned carcasses and red pepper pods and cover with water. Bring to a boil and reduce heat to a simmer for one hour. Remove the boiled carcasses from the water and place in a roasting pan containing a rack to keep the meat off the bottom. Pour the lemon juice over meat and sprinkle on the salt, pepper, and sage. Add the 1 cup water to the pan. Put cover on roasting pan and bake at 325° for about 2 hours or until brown. Debone and serve.



## FISHIN' with Mike Miller VERTICALITY

Late fall and winter fishing can be outstanding, especially for species such as crappie and white bass. Both crappie and white bass continue to actively feed through the winter, and they tend to congregate in large schools, making fishing a boom or bust venture. But when it booms, it booms.

Fish are cold-blooded creatures, so cold water temperatures mean less activity and even though they actively prey on gizzard shad, they aren't going to chase prey or lures aggressively. The best way to catch them is to fish vertically.

Vertical fishing means locating structure and a specific depth holding fish, then dropping a lure, usually a jig, slab or spoon, to that depth or just above it. The secret is keeping the lure at the right depth – the “strike zone” – as much as possible. Jigging action, raising the lure several feet then letting it free fall back to a taut line may attract attention. The theory

behind this action is that it imitates a shad that is stressed by the cold water temperatures – it flutters up, then settles back down – easy prey for predatory game fish.

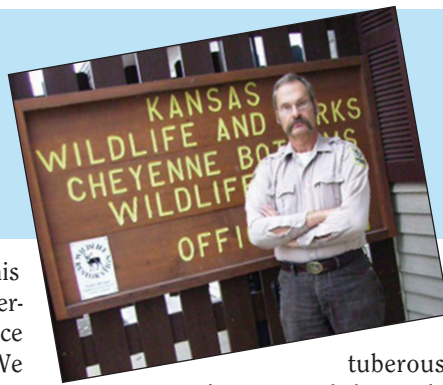
It's not difficult fishing if the wind is calm and the boat operator knows what he's doing. The line needs to be vertical – straight up and down. If the boat moves too much or too quickly, the lure won't be kept at the proper depth and strikes will more difficult to detect. Keeping the line vertical also allows the angler to fish in brush without snagging. You can't fish in brush if the boat drifts.

Tips for successful vertical fishing include using a light, low-stretch line, preferably one of the super lines; water depth should determine the weight of the lure – eighth-ounce or less in less than 15 feet, three-sixteenths or quarter-ounce in deeper water; always hold the lure suspended for up to 30 seconds after jigging it. Most strikes occur while the lure is held motionless. Some anglers advocate tiny lures for finicky winter fish, but don't be afraid to “match the hatch.” Last summer's gizzard shad are probably around 3 inches long, so a 3-inch, pearl-colored Sassy Shad-type plastic body is often the perfect choice. And a large bait can discourage smaller fish from biting. This winter, find your verticality.

# PROFILE:

with Mark Shoup

## KARL GROVER



Karl Grover grew up in North Platte, Neb., camping with his best friend and working summers on a ranch where he had permission to hunt deer, pheasant, and ducks. “It was a neat place to grow up if you were a waterfowl hunter,” Grover relates. “We called it ‘The Points,’ where the North and South Platte rivers joined. It was all marshes and moving water, really fine hunting.”

It’s not surprising that Grover eventually became manager at one of the Midwest’s premier waterfowl hunting areas, but it wasn’t foreordained. After a couple years at North Platte Community College, Grover joined the Army. After the Army, he earned B.S. and M.S. degrees in fish and wildlife management at Montana State University. His masters thesis was a study of osprey on the upper Missouri River.

For the next seven years, he worked part-time jobs, mostly for the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. Two of these years were spent working on an elk study in the Elkhorn Mountains, which Grover describes as “probably the most enjoyable work I did up there. I published an article in the *Journal of Wildlife Management* on that project. To me, that was how you were supposed to get into this field: you design a project, say your going to do this and this and this, and then you go out and collect your information, write it up, and make a contribution.”

In 1986, Grover landed smack in the middle of Kansas as manager of Cheyenne Bottoms. His career was just beginning, and it was a good move.

“You couldn’t find a better crew to work with,” he says without hesitation. “I’m talking law enforcement, biologists, supervisors. Shucks, there would be no reason not to love this place.”

In Grover’s 23 years with KDWP, he has had to deal with two high-profile management issues: overgrowth of cattails and renovation of the water-control structures. Both challenges were overcome, but it took time, and Grover doesn’t take the credit.

“These are things that you just don’t do by yourself,” he explains. “It was a team effort, from folks getting us the equipment we needed to finding equipment operators.”

Still, Grover managed both projects, writing grants, making plans, and overseeing the projects. He often found himself reluctantly at odds with the public over cattails and water levels in the area’s 13,000 acres of wetlands, the pools of which average 1,800 acres. It has been a daunting task, but Grover is philosophical, comparing the situation to drivers impatient with road work but delighted when the highway is completed.

“Some folks have been impatient with things over the years,” he says. “But dealing with it boils down to the way you treat people. If you’re fair and up front with them, don’t hide anything, explain your situation and listen to them and understand where they’re coming from, they’ll be fair with you.”

Initially, the challenge of controlling cattails was doing it without the necessary heavy equipment or manpower. To control

cattails, a pool must be dry. Residual plant material is burned, then the

tuberous roots must be disked several

times. And the pool must be kept dry for a time, or the cattails will come back thick as ever. Once the area obtained large, track-propelled tractors that could handle work in the marsh, pools were kept dry for disking.

Some hunters were unhappy about the dry pools, but not now. The problem is under control to the point that some hunters wish there were more cattails for concealment.

The water control system renovation lasted throughout the 1990s. It required subdividing pools, putting in pump stations, and other work that required holding water from pools while work was being done. The pace of the project dictated waterfowl management for awhile, which required a lot of public-relations work on Grover’s part.

“Now that it’s completed, we’ve got much better control over our water,” Grover explains. “We can control which pools we add water to and reduce the amount of water we have to release. Once we got rid of the cattails and were able to manage pools independently, we could incorporate moist soils into our management strategy. Now, we can pump water into and out of pools to promote the kind of wetland plant growth that produces seeds essential to waterfowl. Shorebirds have also benefited. We’ve got more mudflats than we used to, so shorebird habitat is usually very good in the spring.”

Grover admits that not all of Cheyenne Bottoms’ problems have been solved. The flood of 2007 – when the basin temporarily became the largest lake in the state – damaged dikes and left control structures full of silt. Debris was removed and dikes repaired, but Grover is leaving two large pools dry this year in hopes that next year they can be cleaned up.

“It will require a lot of manpower and equipment, but we will get it done.” The optimist always pops through in a conversation with Grover. When asked about his 23 years managing the Bottoms, he is both modest and grateful.

“I think I made a contribution,” he says. “I think this is a better wetland than when I came, but that’s not my doing. I was just in the right place at the right time. But it was absolutely a good move for me coming here. Even though it was not easy to leave the beauty of Montana, I’ve been blessed to live where I live. My kids learned to love wildlife, and now both work in wildlife-related fields. And they both love sitting in a blind with me, whether ducks are flying or not.

“Yep. Good people to work with, neat area, incredible diversity of wildlife, and the premier waterfowl area in the state,” he adds reflectively. “The weather is king, but you adapt. I’ve learned a lot about the land and people.”

# HUNTING SPOTS

with Marc Murrell

## DEDICATED TO NOVEMBER

The Kansas archery deer opened September 21, an opening day anticipated by dedicated bowhunters ready for the thrill of hunting after a long off-season. However, those searching for big bucks often focus on the month of November.

"I love bowhunting," said Dylan Smith, a 28-year-old fire fighter from Topeka who schedules vacation in November.

Smith killed his first buck with a bow in 2001, a nice 140-class 8-pointer. Over the years he's added even bigger bucks and credits mock scrapes for much of his success. And while his serious hunting is done in November, Smith actually starts making mock scrapes as early as August.

"It's more of a visual as I try to get all the vegetation broke loose and everything cleaned out, but I'm not putting any scents in them then," Smith said.

He'll pick an area based on his stand sites and predominate wind direction and set up a series of scrapes. He focuses on a ridge, funnel area or trail that will appeal to a buck cruising an area scent-checking for does.

"I used to put scrapes pretty much everywhere I hunted, but now I'll try to find that perfect spot where I think a buck would naturally scrape or where I've seen a natural scrape," Smith explained. "I'll look for a really nice tree 20 or 30 yards upwind of where they'll come through on a trail and I'll set the scrape where I've got a good shot."

Once Smith discovers a buck using his scrapes, he'll freshen them with a commercial deer scent weekly in October and more frequently in November. He's found once a buck finds three or four scrapes he's made, the real scrapes start multiplying.



He might put a trail camera on a scrape to see what is happening when he's not there or at night. Once he gets confirmation that a buck is checking a particular scrape, he uses a synthetic scent he says is more of a curiosity.

"You can see a nocturnal buck check that scrape, and if he's not ever running into that deer, he'll start checking them more often and may check them during daylight hours," Smith said of his experiences. "It's almost like you're training them to hunt you and figure out when that 'intruder buck' is coming in to his scrape."

Smith's 2007 buck did exactly that with a couple hours of daylight left. He had a trail camera picture of the buck so he knew it was a pretty good whitetail as it showed one side with 8-points. Although he had his heart set on another buck, he knew this one was too good to pass up.

"The bad thing was it was the first day of my two week scheduled November vacation from the fire department," Smith said of his shoot/don't shoot dilemma. "I had only hunted that stand one other time but the wind was right."

The buck came into the scrape at about 30 yards and worked it. As the buck left, it angled off toward a bean field. With one opening left to shoot the buck, Smith drew his bow and shot. The huge 15-point record-book whitetail fell in its tracks.

"I was pretty excited," Smith said of his trip to the downed deer. "He had a 21-inch inside spread and was everything I thought he was. I stayed pretty calm, but once I walked up to him, I was really excited."



photos courtesy of Dylan Smith

It took a week on the beach with a two-year-old and six-year-old for me to realize how big a classroom the outdoors is. I found it is physically impossible to walk a beach without stopping to pick up shells – and that the waves wash sand out from under you, whether it’s a beach on the Atlantic or Lovewell Reservoir. Wind and water work their magic on any sandy shore.

Those tiny sandy or hard dirt canyons where rivulets carry runoff into the lake or ocean are micro versions of the Grand Canyon, giving an opportunity to teach about wind and water erosion at work. Shorebirds of the Atlantic are cousins of the same birds that skitter over the shores of Kanopolis or Tuttle Creek. Vegetation anchors the dunes at Myrtle Beach the same as it anchors the shoreline at Cheney Reservoir. The species of trees may differ, but the grasses have many similarities. Kids (and adults) build simple or elaborate sand castles on any beach.

Children faced with a sandy beach or an expanse of mud or a jumble of rocks and no restraints (other than basic safety) from adults will soon get past the need for complicated toys. Instead, they will reach deep into their imaginations, lose track of time, and forget limitations. They won’t need batteries or a wi-fi connec-

tion to enjoy themselves. Children (and adults) will find themselves responding to the natural rhythms of life: wind, waves, tides, the undulation of the grasses, the calls of the birds, the movement of the sun and moon. Anxieties melt away and enthusiasm is renewed.

It’s not the location of the outdoor experience that matters; it is the absence of artificial entertainment, such as video games and TV, and the presence of even a tiny piece of wilderness. It grounds us back to the natural world for which we were created. It may be a messy, unstructured, ragged place, but perhaps we need some “messy” in our modern society.

Research has shown that playing in dirt contributes to a child developing a healthy immune system. Walking on natural surfaces as opposed to concrete or asphalt is good for our bodies. Maybe this is why we need to come to parks to interact with nature, to see and experience the “messy” natural environment, where multi-flora roses (regarded as a noxious weed, but nevertheless beautiful) bloom in riotous profusion of creamy scented pink and white. We need to watch fireflies blink throughout real dark, unlit by artificial means. We need to sit in ragged grass under untended trees and feel the earth.

To calm our souls and regain touch with the world that nourishes us, we need to get away from straight concrete lines and square corners and into the ragged, unkempt, messy environment that is real. Whatever the season, make time to connect with nature, and let it connect with you. Nature is calling you at Kansas state parks.

## WILSON RESERVOIR LATEST ZEBRA MUSSEL VICTIM



The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks has confirmed the presence of zebra mussels in Wilson Reservoir. The owner of Marine Specialty in Wilson was working on a boat from Wilson Reservoir when he noticed zebra mussels on the boat hull. He quickly notified KDWP and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) officials about his discovery. KDWP fisheries biologist Tommie Berger soon discovered live zebra mussels in Wilson Reservoir, and marina staff found them attached to other boats at the lake.

Wilson Reservoir is a 9,000-acre impoundment on the Saline River in northcentral Kansas 55 miles west of Salina. This discovery makes Wilson the westernmost zebra mussel-infested water in Kansas. Downstream reservoirs, such as Milford near Junction City, are now at risk for infestation if the mussels are carried in the Saline from Wilson. Because of its westward isolation from other infested waters, Wilson’s infestation is likely the result of transport by lake users.

“This is extremely frustrating because the spread of mussels can be prevented,” said Goeckler, aquatic nuisance species specialist for KDWP. “Other than downstream movement, zebra mussels can only be spread by human movement. All it takes is one irresponsible lake user to transport mussels from an infested lake to another water body. This occurrence is especially troubling because it means zebra mussels are now present in the Saline River and threaten other lakes downstream.”

Three simple steps – clean, drain, and dry – can help prevent the spread of mussels. Anglers and boaters must take these precautions to avoid transporting mussels from infested lakes to other waters: never move fish or water from one body of water to another; empty bait buckets on dry land, not into lakes; inspect boats, trailers, skis, anchors, and all other equipment and remove any visible organisms and vegetation; and wash equipment and boat with hot (140-degree) water or dry for at least five days to remove or kill species that are not visible.

Zebra mussels are native to the Black and Caspian Sea in Europe and were introduced to the Great Lakes from the ballasts of ships in the 1980s. They have now been confirmed in seven Kansas waters, beginning with El Dorado in 2003. Others include Cheney, Winfield City Lake, Marion, Perry, and Lake Afton. Zebra mussels are a problem because they filter water, up to a liter a day, to eat plankton. Filtering may clear the water, but it does NOT clean the water and will often lead to algal blooms that are harmful to people. The clear water can also let UV rays damage fish eggs laid during the spawn. Larval fish and native mussels rely on this same plankton to survive. Zebra mussels also clog pipes by forming colonies inside of the pipes. Nationwide expenditures to control zebra mussels in electric generating plants are estimated at \$145 million/year.

If an individual is caught transporting live zebra mussels in Kansas, they may face up to six months in jail and fines up to \$5,000. More information on zebra mussels and strategies to contain their spread, including an instructive video, is available at the KDWP website, [www.kdwp.state.ks.us](http://www.kdwp.state.ks.us). Click “Fishing/Aquatic Nuisance Species” and then click on the picture of the zebra mussel.

—KDWP News

## Cat Crazy

**THAT'S WILD**  
with Ken Brunson



This edition of “That’s Wild” is actually about what is not wild. I love cats. A long list of house cats from Claude 1, Claude 2, Skeeter, Popcorn, Cosmo, and currently Boy have accompanied me through life. However, when I learned their affect on wildlife, my house cats were confined indoors. Emptying the litter box more often was an easy trade-off compared to the loss of songbirds, lizards, quail and kangaroo rats.

Pet cats allowed to roam freely outdoors are hard enough on wildlife, but many become feral, or “wild,” cats. One of the most disingenuous arguments is that feral house cats are wildlife and deserve relegation and management we provide raccoons and bobcats – real wildlife. Even more alarming is a program called Trap, Neuter, and Return (TNR). In the Sept./Oct. issue of *Audubon* magazine, Ted Williams insightfully explains the counterproductive nature of TNR. This brief space cannot come close to Williams’ accounting of the travesties of TNR, but my purpose is simply to inform you if you haven’t heard of it.

TNR operates under the misconception that a sterile feral cat is no threat because it can’t reproduce. Proponents of TNR spread misinformation that feral cats are not a threat to wild birds and other wildlife. However, the American Bird Conservancy states that an estimated 150

million free-ranging cats kill a half-million birds annually. Considering that each cat could easily kill at least one bird a day, this seems a gross underestimate. Williams’ article leads with an astute accusation: “With something like 150 million free-ranging house cats wreaking havoc on our wildlife, the last thing we need is Americans sustaining them in the wild.”

TNR sustains house cats in the wild. They still kill wildlife, with or without intact reproductive equipment. They kill bobwhite quail, young pheasants, young furbearers and many species of nongame wildlife. I know this from research studies and from my own observations when “Boy” has very infrequently escaped his house confinement.

In his “Incite” article, Williams describes how the “cat people” have an overwhelming emotional appeal, so that once a TNR effort is implemented, it’s impossible to fight. The article also details the massive threats from disease and parasites that feral cats spread to wildlife, other pets, and humans. Williams writes that it is nearly impossible to spay and neuter enough cats to make a dent in the reproductive rate anyway. Organized feeding programs for feral cats are as equally dysfunctional, contributing to the overpopulation problem of feral cats, as well as nuisance skunks, opossums, raccoons and other critters attracted to free handouts.

As Williams acknowledges through interviews with wildlife professionals, at least having non-reproducing feral cats is better than the alternative of having them breed unfettered. However, the problem is that the adoption of TNR is presented as an alternative to more effective control methods for feral cats.

The most effective control method is humane euthanasia, a practice that has traditionally been the common sense approach to reducing the problem. Yes, the “E” word that gets otherwise fairly normal people thinking illogically is much more humane than the slow, agonizing deaths feral cats get from the jaws of a coyote or disease. It is impractical to think that every cat that comes to a humane society building can be effectively neutered and released to either a home or the wild. There simply are too many for placement. It borders on insanity to just let them lose to prey on and be preyed upon by wildlife. Be alert when TNR is proposed for your community. Gather the facts about the negative impacts of feral cats on wildlife from reputable sources such as the Audubon Society and the American Bird Conservancy. Beware and be ready.

## DEER POACHERS HANG HEADS

In Nov. 26, 2008, in response to numerous complaints about deer poaching in Allen County, several KDWP natural resource officers executed a search warrant at a rural residence in the county. During the search, deer heads and other items were seized relating to the illegal take of whitetail deer.

Upon completion of the investigation, 75 counts of wildlife violations were documented on two individuals. Each were charged and pleaded guilty to two counts of criminal hunting, one count of taking/possessing trophy whitetail deer without a permit, one count of taking deer by illegal means, and one count of hunting deer with the aid and use of artificial light.

Patrick T. Cash and Cory D. Culler were each sentenced as follows: 30 days county jail for count criminal hunting and 30 days county jail for count criminal hunting, both counts are suspended for 18-month supervised probation with court services; \$5,000 fine made payable to KDWP Wildlife Restitution Fund; hunting privileges suspended for five years; successful completion of a hunter education class prior to renewal of hunting privileges; publish a letter of apology in the Iola Register and the Kansas Bow Hunters Association; write an essay on hunter ethics and responsibilities for use in educational forums; 100 hours of community service in coordination with KDWP; forfeiture of all illegal property seized by KDWP; and forfeiture of spotlights and a Remington Model 700 .30-06 rifle used illegally in the offenses.

However unfortunate the case, it should be noted that the individuals appeared remorseful for their actions. From a law enforcement point of view, that seems to be a rare occasion.

—Jason Deal, natural resource officer, Yates Center

# Daughter's Buck

by Cassidy Gates



I am a 22-year-old pre-med student, and I have been hunting with my dad since I was six. I have hunted elk, buffalo, pronghorn, waterfowl, upland birds and have even been on an African safari where I shot seven plains game animals. However, as hunting luck would have it, I had never been able to put my crosshairs on a big white-tailed buck. I have passed up several small bucks but being a trophy hunter like my dad, I wanted my first deer to be bigger than his first. I have hunted deer all over Oklahoma and recently hunted in Kansas.

My dad took my boyfriend Brian and me last fall to his Kansas lease with hopes that this would be the year to get a big buck. My boyfriend and I hunted from a tower blind 500 yards from where Dad was hunting. On the first morning out, a big buck was headed my way. I'm only 5 feet, 1 inch tall, so I had to maneuver onto Brian's lap so I could shoot out of the blind. In the process, the noise from a wobbly chair and the barrel of my .270 banging on the side of the blind spooked the big buck. At 45 yards, it would have been an easy shot. I was sick and thought for sure I'd blown my only chance.

As the day wore on, we saw everything but deer, including a opossum, two raccoons, and four coyotes. At mid-day, we ate lunch and took a nap. By 3 p.m., we were back in the blind. It was 40 degrees and extremely windy, so my hopes of getting a buck were dwindling. Being bored, Brian and I whispered back and forth and passed the time eating Gummy Bears and sunflower seeds. Just before dark, we noticed the wind had died and it was quiet. Then Brian, spotted a monster buck.

I didn't see it at first and was grabbing for the binoculars. Brian whispered, "Cassidy, look! He's right there!" I grabbed my rifle and this time, I sat on a pillow, so no maneuvering was necessary. However, once I got the barrel pointed through the blind window, the buck was gone. I knew we hadn't scared it off because we'd been so quiet, but I couldn't see it.

The buck was in CRP, so I thought maybe it had its head down and we couldn't see it in the tall grass. Then I remembered Dad telling me that if a big buck disappeared, we should try to call it back with the grunt call. Brian started blowing the call and sure enough, the buck came right back!

The buck was right on the edge of the treeline about 250 yards away. I instantly started shaking. It was a huge buck, and I was learning exactly what buck fever was like.

I was shaking so bad, I told Brian that I couldn't shoot. Brian encouraged me and knelt so I could use his shoulder as a rest. I put the crosshairs on the buck's shoulder and slowly squeezed the trigger. After the shot, I was still looking through the scope, but I couldn't see the deer. I thought, "Crap. I've missed."

Brian picked out a tree for landmark where the deer was standing when I shot. We didn't know it at the time, but Dad had glimpsed the buck running after the shot, and he thought he heard it crash in the timber.

We crossed the CRP field, and I was almost hyperventilating. I was crying because I was sure I had missed and knew Dad would be disappointed. Brian reassured me that it would only turn out two ways: I would have a monster buck on the ground, or I missed, so I shouldn't worry. As we got the edge of the field, we could see Dad's orange hat and vest as he walked through the timber. It was getting dark quickly, so we started searching. Dad was scanning a large field of green wheat hoping to see the buck laying in it but there was nothing. Then, not even 10 feet from where we were standing, I saw it.

"Dad. There it is. Oh my gosh! It's right there!"

"That thing is a Godzilla!" Dad exclaimed. "Cassidy do you realize what you've shot? Sweetheart, this is definitely going to score way up in the record books."

Dad held the rack, turning it back and forth, admiring it. Then he gave me a long, tight hug. Talk about a father-daughter bonding moment. I started crying out of joy and excitement. I finally did it. After years and years of deerless seasons, I finally felt fulfilled, knowing this year I wasn't going home empty-handed.

I felt extreme triumph but also some remorse. Hunting isn't for everybody, but I hope my story encourages other young girls and women to hunt with the men in their lives so they can experience the joy and fellowship I have felt with the men in my family.

Cassidy's buck field dressed at 240 pounds, and the rack had 16 points and was 23.5 inches inside spread. It scored 180 6/8 net typical, but with more than 14 inches of nontypical points, it scored 195 1/8 nontypical.

# 2009 Sportsmen's

## TURKEY

### 2010 SPRING TURKEY

- Regular Season  
(firearm/archery): April 14 - May 31, 2010
- Archery-Only Season: April 1 - 13, 2010
- Youth/Disabled Season: April 1 - 13, 2010

### 2009 FALL TURKEY:

- Season: Oct. 1-Dec. 1, 2009 and  
Dec. 14-Dec. 31, 2009; and Jan. 11-31, 2010.

## BIG GAME

### DEER:

- Archery: Sept. 21 - Dec. 31, 2009
- Regular Firearm: Dec. 2 - Dec. 13, 2009
- Firearm Extended Whitetail Antlerless Season:  
Jan.1 - Jan.10, 2010 ( Open for Units 4, 5, 6, 7,  
8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 19 only.)
- Archery Extended Whitetail Antlerless Season  
(DMU 19 only): Jan. 4 - Jan. 31, 2010
- Special Extended Firearms White-tailed  
Antlerless Season: Jan.11- Jan.17, 2010  
(Open for unit 7, 8 and 15 only.)

### ELK (residents only)

#### Outside Fort Riley:

- Archery Season: Sept. 21 - Dec. 31, 2009
- Firearm Season: Dec. 2 - Dec. 13, 2009 and Jan.1,  
2010 - March 15, 2010

#### On Fort Riley:

- Firearm Season for Holders of Any-Elk Permits:  
Oct 1 - Dec 31, 2009
- Firearm Second Segment: Nov.1 - Nov 30, 2009
- Firearm Third Segment: Dec.1 - Dec. 31, 2009

## FISHING SEASONS

### TROUT SEASON

- Oct. 15 - April 15, 2010
- Area open: Designated trout waters listed at  
[www.kdwp.state.ks.us](http://www.kdwp.state.ks.us)

## MIGRATORY GAME BIRDS

### DOVE (Mourning, white-winged, Eurasian col- lared, and ringed turtle doves)

- Season: Sept.1 - Oct. 31 and Nov 7-15, 2009
- Daily bag limit: 15
- Possession limit: 30

### EXOTIC DOVE

#### (Eurasian collared and ringed turtle doves only)

- Season: Nov. 20, 2009 - Feb. 28, 2010
- Daily bag limit: No limit
- Possession limit: No limit

### RAIL (Sora and Virginia)

- Season: Sept. 1 - Nov 9, 2009
- Daily bag limit: 25
- Possession limit: 25

### SNIPE

- Season: Sept. 1 - Dec. 16, 2009
- Daily bag limit: 8
- Possession limit: 16

### WOODCOCK

- Season: Oct. 17 - Nov. 30, 2009
- Daily bag limit: 3
- Possession limit: 6

### SANDHILL CRANE

- Season: Nov. 11 - Jan. 7, 2010
- Daily bag limit: 3
- Possession limit: 6

### DUCK

- Season: High Plains:  
Oct. 10 - Jan. 5, 2010 and Jan. 23-31, 2010
- Season: Early Zone:  
Oct. 10 - Dec. 6 and Dec. 19 - Jan. 3, 2010
- Season: Late Zone:  
Oct. 31 - Jan. 3, 2010 and Jan. 23-31, 2010
- Daily bag limit: 5 (consult regulations)
- Possession limit: twice daily bag



# Calendar

## CANADA GEESE

- Season:  
Oct. 31 - Nov. 8 and Nov. 11 - Feb. 14, 2010
- Daily bag limit: 3
- Possession limit: twice daily bag

## WHITE-FRONTED GEESE

- Oct. 31 - Nov. 8, Nov. 11 - Jan. 3, 2010,  
and Feb. 6-14, 2010
- Daily bag limit: 2
- Possession limit: twice daily bag

## LIGHT GEESE

- Oct. 31 - Nov. 8 and Nov. 11 - Feb. 14, 2010
- Daily bag limit: 20
- Possession limit: none

## UPLAND GAME BIRDS

### PHEASANTS

- Season: November 14, 2009 - January 31, 2010
- Youth Season: November 7 - 8, 2009
- Daily bag limit: 4 cocks in regular season, 2 cocks in youth season

### QUAIL

- Season: November 14, 2009 - January 31, 2010
- Youth Season: November 7 - 8, 2009
- Daily Bag Limit Quail: 8 in regular season, 4 in youth season

### PRAIRIE CHICKEN

- Regular Season (East and Northwest zones):  
Nov. 21, 2009 - Jan. 31, 2010
- Regular Season (Southwest Zone):  
Nov. 21, 2009 - Dec. 31, 2009
- Daily Bag Limit: 2 (Southwest Zone 1)
- Possession Limit: twice daily bag

## SMALL GAME ANIMALS

### SQUIRREL

- Season: June 1 - Feb. 28, 2010
- Daily bag limit: 5
- Possession limit: 20

### RABBITS (Cottontail & Jack rabbit)

- Season: All year
- Daily bag limit: 10
- Possession limit: 30

### CROW

- Season: Nov. 10 - March 10, 2010
- Daily bag/Possession Limit: No Limit

## FURBEARER HUNTING & TRAPPING

*NOTE: All furbearer hunting, trapping, and running seasons begin at 12 noon on opening day and close at midnight of closing day.*

- Season: Nov. 18, 2009 - Feb. 15, 2010  
Badger, bobcat, mink, muskrat, opossum, raccoon, swift fox, red fox, gray fox, striped skunk, weasel:

### BEAVER TRAPPING

- Season Dates (statewide):  
Nov. 18, 2009 - March 31, 2010



# FAMILIAR HUNTING

text and photos by Mike Miller  
editor, Pratt

*Retirement didn't mean a recliner in front of the television for these two western Kansans, unless you count sitting in one after a long day of hunting pheasants. Hunting up to 50 days per season keeps their boots worn out and their spirits high.*

Jetmore is a typical farming town in southwest Kansas. Less than 1,000 people call the well-kept post-rock community home. Limestone mined in the county was used for fence posts by early settlers because there were few trees. There are a few trees now, but they still use stone fence posts, and the town is dotted with historic limestone buildings. Life has never been easy in this rugged landscape, but the people who live here are honest and hardworking.

You won't find any strip malls, Barnes and Nobles, or even a traffic light in Jetmore. These people live close to the land and enjoy its treasures, such as pheasant hunting. This is the heart of Kansas' pheasant country, and there's a unique story involving a

couple of transplants. Two men who actually grew up in the same southeastern Kansas town of Cherryvale in the 1950s and ended up in Jetmore in the mid-sixties. They've been there ever since.

Jim Kellenberger and Don McWhirt took different paths to western Kansas, but they've become close friends. Not close friends like those who play bridge on Thursday nights or golf on Sundays. These two are friends who hunt pheasants five or six days each week of the season. They're both retired now, and the pheasants in Hodgeman County aren't safe.

Kellenberger came to Jetmore in 1965 to start work as a game warden for the Kansas Forestry, Fish and Game Commission. McWhirt arrived in 1966 to

assume the position of principal at Jetmore High School. Kellenberger's wife Dee went to work for McWhirt at the school about that time, and the two become reacquainted through various school functions. McWhirt is a few years older than Kellenberger, and they knew of each other back in Cherryvale, but they didn't become close friends until they started hunting together out west.

Each of the men rose through the ranks in their respective careers but managed to stay in Jetmore. McWhirt retired as superintendent of the Jetmore school system in 1992. Kellenberger devoted 38 years of his life to enforcing wildlife laws and spent the last 20 years of his career as a regional law enforce-



Hunting partners Don McWhirt, left, and Jim Kellenberger, ready for a day of hunting. The two have hunted together for more than 40 years, but now that both are retired, they hunt more than 50 days each pheasant season



The fields in Hodgeman County are big, but Kellenberger's long legs and his tireless Lab are up for the challenge. Rather than blindly walking the fields, Kellenberger and McWhirt concentrate on specific areas where they've learned pheasants will mostly likely hold.

ment supervisor, working out of the Dodge City KDWP office.

Both men raised families here, recognizing the value of small western Kansas towns as wholesome, safe places to raise families. You can bet that the kids from both families learned about the outdoors growing up. Fellow game wardens fondly tell of Kellenberger hauling his young boys to the dove field carrying a 5-gallon bucket full of reloaded shotgun shells to keep them supplied.

Over the years, their careers took time away from hunting, but the two still managed to hunt on weekends. And they've hunted just about every game animal that

lives in the county, from deer to doves. But when Kellenberger retired in 2003, these two renewed their dedication and began specializing in pheasant hunting. Each day of the pheasant season usually starts around 8 a.m. at the Kellenberger kitchen table. Coffee is sipped while strategy is discussed, then thermoses are filled, dogs are loaded, and the big decision is which direction they should point the pick up.

When asked about the number of hunting spots they have, both men chuckled. "I have no idea how many landowners Jim and I have permission to hunt on," McWhirt said. "I had nearly all of these farmers in school over the

years, and Jim has worked with them through his law enforcement duties over the years. Let's just say we have plenty of places."

The routine is well grooved. McWhirt always drives. There is a method to this. As McWhirt pulls out of the alley, he nods toward Jim, "Which way?" The truck stops, half-way into the intersection. Kellenberger takes a sip of coffee and thinks. There's no traffic and no hurry.

"You know, we haven't hit the Williams place since opening weekend. There were lots of birds there then. That could be good."

"The grass draw or the old homestead?"

"We'll start in the draw and



Devil is only three years old, but she's already retrieved more roosters than most Labs retrieve in a lifetime. Kellenberger prefers close-working retrievers, often referring to other hunting breeds in colorful terms.





You can tell which of the partners does most of the talking. Here Kellenberger makes a point to KDWP Hunter Education Program coordinator Wayne Doyle about cleaning Berettas. McWhirt patiently waits before the group heads to yet another pheasant hunting spot.

you can drive around to the hill to block the birds that like to run out that west side. Then we'll cross the road to the homestead and you can swing around to the south end and block," Kellenberger proposes. "What do you think about that."

McWhirt nods and turns right onto the street. "I don't know why that wouldn't work."

After a short drive from town, McWhirt pulls into the field drive and Kellenberger reminds him about a telephone pole that he should avoid running into. Apparently an inside joke cut off by McWhirt's curt reply that he knows exactly where the pole is. Kellenberger grins at the passenger as if he'll tell the whole story later,

but he never gets around to it. There are so many stories.

After each walk, the two bicker good naturedly over where to go next. Once the next location has been determined, a hunting story from a past season makes the drive to the next spot go quickly. And spot is much more descriptive than "field." The two have hunted pheasants in these fields enough to know that birds will prefer specific areas, and there's no sense walking the entire field. With only two of them and an occasional guest or two, they couldn't cover the entire field if they wanted to. Usually, Kellenberger strategically loops into the field or draw, hitting the most likely areas. The two are

effective. In fact, it's rare they don't return home by mid-afternoon with birds to clean.

Lunch is also a well-drilled routine. Ritz crackers with homemade pheasant salad spread – tasty and fast. Kellenberger spreads the meat on Ritzs and lays them on the console. Sodas are passed out, a few stories are told, crumbs brushed off the console, and they're off to the next field. No sense wasting daylight.

Some walks are nearly a mile and others are less than 100 yards. Small weed patches that most hunters wouldn't give a second glance are never passed up by these two. Not only are the smaller patches easier for the two to cover, but they hold birds.

McWhirt drops Kellenberger out, barely slowing down. He eases well-past the weed patch, quietly exits the truck and sneaks in closer to wait. There's no talking because it would spook birds and isn't necessary. Some days the birds are there and sometimes, they're not. Persistence eventually pays off.

In the second patch of the morning, several birds flush well ahead of Kellenberger, and several shots ring out near the end of the draw. One unlucky rooster waits too long, and Kellenberger drops it cleanly. The bird would have escaped most hunters, but years of hunting and shooting experience, a special recipe reload and a full choke combine to make Kellenberger deadly out to 60 yards. When he reaches the end of

the draw, Kellenberger's address to McWhirt is a drawn-out, "Welllll?" McWhirt shrugs his shoulders and says, "Not this time." And a whole new banter begins.

It's a well-rehearsed banter that's never taken seriously by either side. Usually it ends with a back-sided compliment like, "day before yesterday, you didn't miss a bird. What's wrong with you today?"

Through 40 years of hunting together, Kellenberger and McWhirt have developed a friendship built with trust and experience. While they are always strategizing about how they'll outsmart pheasants in the next patch, they don't really need to. It's mostly for the benefit of the visitor. They know pretty much what

the other will do before he's done it. There is a comfort level that isn't acknowledged. It's demonstrated day after day. And while pheasants are the preferred quarry, they warm up with dove and duck hunting in September and October.

I have no idea how many pheasants these two have taken in the last five years, but it's more than I'll probably see in my lifetime. But there's more to this than just the number of birds killed. It's about a friendship and an attitude of optimism that represents the people of this land. People who've survived good times and bad. There's no quitting. An attitude reflected in Kellenberger's comment after a long day, "Come back. We're going again tomorrow." ♡



A pretty good day of pheasant hunting shows on the tailgate. McWhirt and Kellenberger impatiently pose before cleaning the birds, and like every other facet of the hunt, bird cleaning is an organized routine with each member of the hunting party assigned a specific task.



Chris Smith, Zach Kesler, Kurt Reed, Rick Cleveland, Steve Mathes, Mark Goldsberry, Rick Stevens

# THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY

text and photo by Troy Brown

*Western Parks Regional Supervisor, Hays*

**Seven Park Managers with a combined  
180+ years of dedicated service**

I know what you're thinking: I'm about to read an article about seven park managers in the western part of the state who consider themselves to be like Clint Eastwood? Or you might be thinking some are good, some are bad, and the others are just plain ugly? Well it's possible that one or two of them—well, honestly, the whole group—may not be “movie-star like,” this article has nothing to do with their appearance. Rather, this article chronicles seven managers who have served the state of Kansas and its citizens for a total of 183 years.

The Parks West Region where these managers work stretches from Lovewell State Park, located in northcentral Kansas near the Nebraska border, to Meade State Park, in southwest Kansas near the Oklahoma border. The park managers are Rick Cleveland (35

years), Lovewell State Park; Kurt Reed (33 years), Glen Elder State Park; Rick Stevens (33 years), Lake Scott State Park; Steve Mathes (32 years), Prairie Dog State Park; Mark Goldsberry (30 years), Lake Meade State Park; Chris Smith (13 years), Cedar Bluff State Park; and Zach Kesler (7 years), Webster State Park.

One hundred eighty three years of experience – wow! You know they have some great stories, as well as some events they would rather forget.

Park managers have duties similar to that of city managers—without the staff, including budget preparation and oversight; personnel management; public relations; equipment, facility, and grounds maintenance (which includes electric, water, and sewer systems); permit, license, and park-related sales;

historic buildings and site administration; construction; development; campground and cabin maintenance and development; special events; presentations; education; advertising; developing and administering contracts; and enforcement of not only Wildlife and Parks regulations but also all Kansas laws such as traffic laws. The responsibilities of the positions are at times overwhelming, and stress is commonplace, but each one of these managers has been able to weather the storm and make a huge difference in the lives of many.

Because these managers have so much experience and gained wisdom, I thought it would be interesting to ask them some questions:

What are the greatest challenges to your position? The responses



were basically the same. The greatest challenges seemed to boil down to never having enough time to accomplish everything they wanted or needed to, to operate and continue to improve upon opportunities with very limited budgets and manpower, keeping up with the ever-changing needs and wants of today's patrons, technology—namely, the Department's online permit and license sales—and doing all of this while trying to balance the time spent with their families.

What has been the most rewarding event or time you have experienced? These answers varied but one recurring theme was watching generations of families grow up and enjoy the parks (One manager recalled a unique experience in which he recovered a lady's wedding ring from an old vault toilet with a fishing pole and hook.)

What is the most difficult time or event that you have experienced? The resounding answer was dealing with the death of patrons, mainly from drowning.

What advice would you offer a prospective manager? One manager stated "the position of park manager is much different than it appears when you're looking from the outside in. There is a tremendous amount of work behind the scenes to maintain and operate a park. It is a high-stress job, and you work hard when everyone else is playing." Another manager said to "be proud of who you are, remember what you were hired to do, and look ahead to where you want to go." Another manager advised "put your health and family first and your job second. Remember it is just a job, and we are all replaceable." Another manager said "a park manager wears many hats and will be forced to deal with many different situations every day. The job can be

thankless, but you will never get bored." This last bit of advice came from another veteran manager who said, "Always remember to keep a hard copy and remember that you have the job that everyone always wanted to have, and they are sure that they could do it better than you." The job is not about the money, it is about your public. Without their support, you have nothing."

As a former park manager myself who has worked with these seven individuals and now supervises them, I can tell you their dedication to the position and citizens is impressive! They take pride in their jobs and understand how important it is to provide the best service possible while doing so with limited budgets and help, while protecting the resource. One of the things that I have truly come to appreciate it is their innovativeness. I compare them, especially the ones who started their careers in the 1970s, to farmers. I grew up on a farm and remember my family making good use of baling wire to make emergency repairs to the machinery. These managers and their staff are responsible for diverse offerings at the parks such as special events like sand castle contests, mud volleyball tournaments, OK Kids activities, ecological meets, Christmas in July, Holiday in Lights, naturalist programs, fishing clinics, special hunts, and chili and barbeque cook offs to name a few. They are also responsible for their parks' diverse offerings such as basketball courts, BMX tracks, archery courses, nature trails, physically challenged and youth fishing ponds, historical sites, playgrounds, and a diverse mix of cabins.

The parks these managers are in charge of have truly benefited over the years, and I want to

acknowledge each manager for their years of service. They are not retiring (yet) but with 180 plus years of experience divided among seven managers, it is only a matter of time. It's only a matter of time before they respond to their last noise complaint, deal with their last electrical outage during 100 degree-plus temperatures, repair their last water leak, make their last traffic stop, work their last summer holiday, get called out for the last time on their day off, sell their last park permit via the online system, and try to figure out one last time how they can make it through another budget year with the budget they were given. Okay, maybe they won't miss those things, but I can assure you they will miss the last time they assist a mother with finding her lost child; help a patron with a locked vehicle; host their last special event; construct their last campground; plant their last tree; teach a child for the last time how to bait a hook; show a child the last time all of the different types of reptiles and insects; give their last presentation to a group of grade school children; hold their last staff meeting, and receive their last compliment from the public about how clean the restrooms are, how knowledgeable and courteous the staff is, and how nice the park looks.

That is the part they will miss, but rather than being sad about leaving, they must remember what they have accomplished, the things they have taught, and the people they have touched over the years. That is what matters the most, so when it is time to turn in their badges, turn over their keys, and let someone else assume the role, they must remember the lives they touched and the difference they made. ♡



Over the last 30 years, the northern bobwhite has declined substantially across most of Kansas and elsewhere throughout its range. There are many reasons that bobwhite numbers have declined, and there is not a single solution that will reverse the trend. This article will briefly describe some of the more significant factors that have contributed to the species decline in Kansas.

# *Bobwhite Future*



by **Jim Pitman**  
*wildlife biologist, Emporia*

photos by **Mike Blair**

**M**any of these factors have also played in major in the bobwhite decline in other parts of the range. Fortunately, there is a concerted effort underway to reverse the downward trend in bobwhite numbers, and I will briefly mention some of the most beneficial things that have already taken place.

In Kansas, the most notable reason for the decline in bobwhite numbers has been the large-scale conversion of land from grassland/shrub communities to woodlands. A comparison of satellite imagery from 1984-2000 found that there had been a 23 percent increase in woodland in the eastern one-third of Kansas during that period. If land use changes from the 1950s to present had been examined, the percent increase in woodlands would have been much greater. This land conversion was not restricted to the eastern one-third of the state but has been the most severe in the Flint Hills and farther eastward. While species such as white-tailed deer, wild turkeys and squirrels

have benefited from this conversion, the bobwhite has not. The conversion from grassland to woodland has resulted in less herbaceous cover for nesting and brood rearing and has also increased the number of perch sites from which avian predators can hunt. Large-scale conversion of grasslands to woodlands has likely been the most important reason grassland wildlife species have declined in Kansas over the last 30-plus years. However, there are many other factors that have substantially contributed to the decline of bobwhites and other grassland wildlife.

The prevalence of annual burning and early intensive grazing in the Kansas Flint Hills has increased substantially over the last 30 years. This range management practice calls for annual spring burning during March or April followed by short-term stocking of livestock at double the season long rate. The livestock aren't on the pasture for the entire grazing season, but this type of management removes all of the residual cover and doesn't allow for sufficient regrowth before most grassland birds begin to nest. Without adequate residual cover, nests are not concealed well enough and are much more susceptible to predation. Annual burning and intensive stocking also eliminates most of the low-growing shrub cover such as plum thickets, which provide necessary pro-

tection for bobwhites. After a few years of this management practice, the diversity and abundance of forbs (a.k.a. the weeds) are also reduced. The seeds produced by those forbs provide an important source of food for many species of grassland wildlife.

Forbs also attract and concentrate insects, which is an even more important function than the food source their seeds provide. Insects are the sole source of food for developing game bird chicks, and when insect abundance declines, so does survival of young game birds. Over the last 30 years, the practice of annual spring burning and early intensive grazing

has become more widespread throughout the Flint Hills and has likely played a key role in the decline of grassland birds in that region.

Throughout the country, there has been a conversion to cleaner farming practices over the last 30 years. Smaller fields have been combined into larger fields, eliminating brushy fencerows and odd areas. The use of herbicides has also increased greatly, and forbs are no longer allowed to grow in and around most agricultural fields. A reduction in forbs has likely meant poorer survival rates of game bird chicks. Additionally, in Kansas, prior to the 1980s most of the wheat crop was grown using a fallow system where fields were left undisturbed for a year after harvest.

*Insects are the sole source of food for developing game bird chicks, and when insect abundance declines, so does survival of young game birds.*



Bobwhite numbers have dropped dramatically in much of the U.S., as well as in eastern parts of Kansas. And while Kansas is still one of the top bobwhite hunting states, programs are in place to reverse the decline through habitat enhancement.

These fallow fields were allowed to grow up with annual forbs providing a source of food and cover for nesting, brood rearing, and protection. Fallow fields were ideal brood cover for game birds because they attracted lots of insects and provided good protective overhead cover.

The wheat fallow system has all but been eliminated in Kansas with most farmers switching to a no-till rotational system. Many of these farmers plant another crop after the wheat is harvested (e.g. soybeans) and those who don't double crop, prevent any growth of forbs by spraying the field with herbicide. This change in farming practice eliminated a substantial habitat component for our upland game birds. Pheasants have undoubtedly suffered the most as a result of this change, but bobwhites were negatively impacted as well.



A variety of factors play a role in the bobwhite's decline, and reversing the trend will require a variety of solutions.

Another major detriment to quail throughout much of its quail range and in the eastern one-third of Kansas has been the conversion of native warm season grasslands to exotic cool season grass. Most of the eastern Kansas grasslands that were native range 30 years ago are now dominated by tall fescue. Tall fescue is a poor grass for upland

game birds because it forms a dense matt of vegetation that is too thick for young chicks to traverse. Additionally, tall fescue usually dominates a pasture and out-competes the other grasses and forbs, leaving a homogeneous stand. Not only is fescue too thick for game birds, but its ability to shade out forbs also has a detrimental impact for the reasons I mentioned previously (i.e. fewer insects and seeds). Furthering the problem is the fact that fescue seeds are a poor source of nutrients and can even be toxic to bobwhites. In



In many areas of the Flint Hills, widespread burning coupled with early intensive grazing leaves little residual cover for grassland birds to nest and rear young in. This management practice impacts quail and prairie chicken numbers.

some parts of the state, our native grasslands have been converted to smooth brome. Smooth brome presents many of the same problems to bobwhites as tall fescue but not quite as severe.

Along with the reductions in habitat quantity and quality, we have seen increases in avian predators and furbearers for a variety of reasons. These increases, coupled with loss of grassland habitats, have meant that more predators now have less area to search for game birds and their offspring. However, an increasing predator population has only played a small role in game bird declines. In areas that still have large amounts of grassland habitats (e.g. south Texas, south-central Kansas, and western Oklahoma) bobwhite numbers have remained strong and have not declined as severely as populations elsewhere within the species' range. Predator numbers in these areas have increased just like everywhere else, but the greater availability of suitable quail habitat has made it more difficult for predators to locate birds and their young. Thus, an increased predator population isn't enough on its own to severely reduce bobwhite populations.

Despite all the things that have been detrimental to bobwhites in Kansas over the last 30 years, the little birds are still hanging around. In fact, bobwhite numbers in southcentral Kansas and far western Kansas have actually been stable or slightly increasing over the last couple of decades. Bobwhite habitats in those regions of the state have only been affected by some of the things I mentioned. In many portions of western Kansas, substantial amounts of cropland have been converted back to grassland via the general sign-up Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The addition of more than 2.5 million acres of grassland to the landscape has been very beneficial to bobwhites and other grassland birds in the western half of the state.

Far fewer acres are enrolled in CRP in eastern Kansas, and the problems I previously described have continued to intensify. As a result, the bobwhite population has continued to decline in eastern Kansas. This



In much of eastern Kansas, the conversion of grassland/shrub communities to woodlands has resulted in more deer and turkeys, but quail numbers have suffered.

*Despite all the things that have been detrimental to bobwhites in Kansas over the last 30 years, the little birds are still hanging around.*

decline has not gone unnoticed, and there are currently some major efforts underway to address it. A national bobwhite recovery plan was written in 2001, and it outlined the changes that were necessary to return bobwhite densities to their 1980 levels. The recovery plan was called the Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative (NBCI). One of the most obvious benefits of the NBCI has been the increased interest in bobwhite restoration among sportsmen, birders, and wildlife agencies. The plan has led to improved cooperation

between these groups, resulting in a greater ability to acquire funding and support for bobwhite restoration. As a result of the NBCI, many state agencies have established step-down plans for targeted management, and populations have increased in many of these focal areas. The NBCI was also the driving force responsible for the Habitat For Upland Birds

Conservation Program (CP-33), which provided funding to restore 250,000 acres of bobwhite habitat within the species' range. In Kansas, there has been nearly 40,000 acres enrolled in the program, and population monitoring indicated that bobwhite density was four times greater on these properties compared to control fields where no habitat improvements were done. There is still much work that needs to be done if we are to reverse the declining trend in bobwhite numbers, but the recent emphasis on bobwhite restoration is beginning to move the needle in the right direction. ♡



# FINISHING TOUCHES

text and photos by Lance Hedges  
*Public Lands regional supervisor, Chanute*

*Trappers who finish their fur spend countless hours skinning, fleshing, stretching, and drying, but the end result is a product they can be proud of and will bring top dollar from a buyer.*

**F**urharvesting through trapping and hunting is alive and well in Kansas. In 2008, the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks sold 6,500 furharvesting licenses, the highest since 1987. While some of this increase in interest can be attributed to high fur prices, a look at the numbers indicates that Kansas residents have long had a tradition of harvesting and selling fur.

Like many outdoor activities such as fishing and hunting, learning the art of furharvesting is best accomplished with the aid of a mentor. Trapping is

a great way to introduce young children to the outdoors. When children are able to go on a trapline, they don't have to sit still or be quiet. If they get cold they can stay in the pickup, and most importantly, it may be the only outdoor activity that one can virtually guarantee the child will get to see a live furbearer up close, and be able to feel the fur of the harvested animal.

And while learning to read sign, use scents and set affective traps is a lifelong journey, for many furharvesters, the harvest is just the beginning. Once

harvested, the fur can be sold in many forms. Many furharvesters sell their fur to their local country buyer "on the carcass." This would be selling the fur while it is still on the animal and would involve no skinning. Sellers utilizing this method can still benefit themselves and receive a higher price by taking care to make sure the fur is clean, free of burrs and stickers, and combed and dry.

Another way to sell the fur is to sell it "green." This means the pelt is removed but nothing further is done. Many furharvesters do this, and again, the best take care to ensure the fur is clean and attractive to the buyer. If the fur buyer only comes to town once a month, this "green" fur can be frozen until the buyer arrives and thawed out just prior to selling. The buyer will want the fur to be thawed so it can be inspected for quality and size.

The final way to market fur is to finish it or "put up." This involves several tools, the furharvester's labor, and stretchers to dry the cleaned pelts.

To put up fur, one doesn't need an elaborate facility, just a dry location. Heat is nice, and most furharvesters would recommend that the location meet Mama's approval. Once the animal is harvested, it needs to be skinned. A skinning gambrel is a device used to hold the animal in the air to make removal of the hide an easier, cleaner task. Different furbearers are finished in specific ways and will need to be skinned appropriately.

"Cased" animals are skinned by splitting the fur along the back of the hind legs and then pulling the fur off, similar to removing a latex glove. Animals that are "cased" include raccoon, muskrat, opossum, skunk, fox,



Learning to trap and finish furs should be learned from a mentor. Youngsters can learn a great deal about wildlife and the outdoors by tagging along on a trapline.

mink, coyote, and bobcat.

"Open" animals are skinned by splitting up the belly from tail to nose. These would include beaver and badger.

Once the animal has been skinned and the tail split, it is combed out with a fur comb to remove any stickers, dirt, and cockleburs. It is then placed on a "fleshing beam." The fleshing beam is a log or board designed to hold the animal to remove the fat, muscle, and gristle from the inside of the hide. A fleshing knife pushes and cuts the mate-

rial away, leaving a clean skin.

The fur is now ready to be placed on the stretcher. This is the final step, but if any holes exist in the fur, they must be sewn prior to placing on the stretcher and drying. Stretchers are most commonly made of wire, but many furharvesters use wooden stretchers. Raccoon, opossum, skunk, and muskrat are dried with the fur on the inside. Fox, mink, coyote and bobcat are dried with the fur to the outside.

The speed of drying depends on the temperature of the room

where the fur is stored. Once dry, the fur is removed from the stretcher and hung with like types of fur to await sale to the fur buyer. Just prior to sale, it is a good idea to wipe the excess oil from the raccoon skin, and comb all fur side out animals.

Proper care of fur, whether selling green, on the carcass, or finishing, ensures a furharvester receives a better price when selling. It is also a matter of pride to know that hard work resulted in a job well done.

Just as the French trappers sold their wares 200 years ago in Trading Post (Kan.), Kansas sportsmen and women continue to harvest and sell fur for an international market. ♡



A gambrel makes skinning a coyote easier. Skinning and finishing fur is a learned skill that many trappers take considerable pride in. It's hard work and won't pay much by the hour, but there is satisfaction that it was done right and the best price was given as a result.

**Author's Note:** I would like to thank Allen, Beth, and Ed Braun of Norton for use of their fur shed for 10 years. Not only did they provide me a great deal of guidance concerning finishing fur, they remain good friends and mentors to me and many other aspiring outdoorsmen.





# The Fur Shed



Most are called “The Fur Shed.” They are depositories of stinky baits and lures, traps, stretchers, animal hides, and a plethora of prehistoric looking tools. The furharvester's second abode. A home full of splendid odors and textures that make even the most skeptical of wives and girlfriends want to take a look.

The fur shed is where the work takes place at the end of the trapline, but many also serve as a gathering place for friends, family, and other trappers. Fur sheds also double as law mower sheds, storage buildings, barns, and yes — basements and garages. Whatever the size and shape of the fur shed, the purpose remains the same. The fur shed is a place to put up fur.

In my travels throughout the state of Kansas, I have been invited into many fur sheds. In Manhattan, my brother Kyle used the basement of his duplex, next to the washer and dryer. In Dodge City, Lowell's fur shed has a carpeted floor. Rob in Parsons and Mark in Garden City use the corner of their garages for fur sheds, and in Garnett, there's a former chicken coop converted to a fur shed. There's Leonard's homemade bunker in Hartford, but my favorite is Allen, Beth, and Ed's, “Fur Shed” in Norton.



The trappers and hunters are the common threads. I admire their desire to take their passion to the next level and prepare a product that they can be proud of. As Stradivarius took great care in his construction of violins, so do many furharvesters take great care in finishing their fur. Finishing fur can be detailed and physical work, but the rewards go beyond obtaining a high price at the time of sale. The reward is deep seated within the sportsman, knowing that he worked hard; and at the end of the day, when his hands are sore and nicked, his eyes are starting to droop, he can look back and know that he did a good job.



# QUAIL CANYON

text and photos by Randy D. Smith

*Kinsley*



Mike Blair photo

*Stress relief for this hunter is a quail hunt on the open prairie of southwest Kansas. Lucky him.*

There are a few fall weekends in southwestern Kansas when the mornings are cold, bright, and still. Invariably, I will use at least one of those crisp, peaceful mornings to visit Quail Canyon. This is not a formal name but one I give for a very special place. It is located on a huge tract of Walk-In Hunting Access land southeast of Minneola and northwest of Ashland. Thousands of acres of pasture are linked together in a patchwork quilt arrangement of

properties. The size of the property limits access, and I seldom run into other hunters when I visit. I don't know the name of the owner or owners of this property but whoever it is deserves a "thank you." I'm certain the ground could have been leased to an outfitter because deer are abundant on the property. The owner chose instead to lease the ground to the state of Kansas for people like me to enjoy its beauty and grandeur. I dedicate this article to

that landowner and thousands of others who have chosen to lease their ground to the Walk-In Hunting Access program. They and the program are greatly appreciated.

On any given weekend from early November through the end of January, I can usually be found working my way through a calm corner of some isolated woods or neighboring stand of CRP grass with a double barrel shotgun and my dog. After a week of endless

committee meetings, tedious telephone calls, stacks of approval requests, and tight deadlines, nothing is more relaxing for me than a quiet quail hunt. I believe that God created quail to set a soft border on a hard edged world for people like me.

I don't hunt quail aggressively. I meander. I casually pass along game trails and filter down pleasant glens, working from one likely spot to the next where a covey might be gathering to explode from beneath my feet. A patch of thickets here, some golden shaded ivy there, I listen to the breeze filtering through the tree tops, feel the tall grass shuffling by my legs, and watch my bird dog as he pursues each passing scent or freezes to point before some subtle movement.

Sometimes, if I'm very lucky, I'll hear the subtle chatter of bobwhites as they scurry along before me.

I like to walk borders and breaks in the early mornings to catch the quail as they sun themselves or prepare to feed on open ground. I walk the grass, and my German shorthair works the open ground next to me.

When a covey flushes, I might shoot and sometimes I might not. Early in the season, when I'm eager to make a batch of quail gravy with cornbread stuffing, I'll probably take a couple if I can. Later, when its cold and there are only a few left to hunt, I'll often pull up my gun, smile at the sight of them careening along the underbrush, and call my dog in to give him a rub on the neck for a

job well done. There is a rhythm and flow to quail shooting that is learned from experience. A quail walk, however, doesn't demand a bird from every covey rise or even a hunt.

I often use a Pedersoli 12-gauge double barrel muzzleloader for quail walks. It is very light at 6 pounds and a joy to carry. Although it reloads much slower than a modern shotgun, it is very effective for upland hunting. I bought the double barrel muzzleloader with my first book royalty check over 15 years ago. It was on sale at Cabela's in Sydney, Neb., back in the Bargain Cave. At the time it was an extravagance, but I've never regretted buying it. It is the perfect choice for a laid back solitary hunt without the pressures or time constraints of other



The author's muzzleloading shotgun doesn't load as fast as a modern cartridge gun, but it's light and shoots accurately. And a trip to Quail Canyon isn't about getting a limit of bobwhites. It's about time spent with a dog in a grand place.

hunters. I can shoot and reload at my leisure. This is not a gun for a quail greedy hunter. It is something to carry and enjoy for its simplicity.

Muzzleloader quail loads shouldn't be heavy. Normally, I'll load only 80 grains of FFg black powder and 1 ¼ ounces of #6 shot. I prefer black powder in sidelock shotguns over the substitute propellants as contamination is not an issue and black powder has more dependable ignition traits. I don't bother with plastic shot collars and usually have modified chokes screwed into both barrels. Modified chokes allow for quicker reloading because it is easier to charge the over-powder and over-shot wads past them. I use standard ¾ inch cushion fiber wads over powder and shot. I split a wad with my thumbnail to use as my over shot card. Recoil is soft and load energy is very efficient.

I have a roomy shoulder bag to carry my goods with a shot snake and brass charger sewn into the shoulder strap. I carry the bag off my right side. I normally carry my powder measure and percussion cap charger dangling from a leather thong that I hold in my teeth when reloading. It takes only a few movements to load and charge a muzzleloader once a shooter is familiar with the most comfortable ways of accessing and managing the various components. With practice, both barrels can be recharged in less than a minute, but I usually take my time.

I've also learned that after shooting any muzzleloader shotgun, I should hold my ground



Hunting with a dog is its own reward. It's sometimes difficult to explain to someone who's never hunted with a dog why that relationship is so important to the satisfaction of the hunt.

and not advance a step until I have recharged the loads. Many quail will not flush with the first, especially in heavy grass or plum thickets. By waiting and reloading quietly, I can often get three or four birds from a single covey with a double barrel muzzleloader.



Solo quail hunts can be as leisurely as the hunter desires. Follow the dog, soak in the sights and learn to slow down.

Most of all I enjoy the sporting challenge of muzzleloading for upland game. There's something about billowing white clouds of smoke and the booming report of a black powder shotgun when it is fired. It provides additional elements of enjoyment to hunting the late season.

The secret to shooting quail is to develop the shooting rhythm I mentioned earlier. When hunting ducks or pheasants, a shooter has the luxury of swinging to target then allowing for distance and lead. A muzzleloader encourages deliberation because there will probably be only one or two shots. A covey rises with a cacophony of wingbeats, with birds breaking in all directions at once. You must be able to get on target quickly and follow through smoothly with your gun barrel on the first bird your eye perceives. If you don't, you'll fail to get off a credible shot before they are gone. I've done it so much that I don't know if I ever



Mike Blair photo

Bobwhites explode in the flush, increasing the hunter's heart rate and unraveling even the coolest customer. Veteran hunters learn to pick a single bird and stay focused on that bird until the shot is taken.

consciously aim the shotgun. I pick a bird, cock the hammers, shoulder, swing through, and fire without ever taking my eyes off him. The second shot shifts to the next bird my mind recognizes. Because I am left eye dominant and right handed, I close my left eye to shoot a rifle but I don't when shooting quail. The whole process becomes a swirl of movement, recognition, pointing, and shooting. It is like learning a new dance step then allowing it to become second nature through practice. God also created quail to be dance partners for people who love hunting wooded canyons.

A good hunting dog makes a

quail walk complete. Not only will a good dog point a covey, it will help find downed birds. My German shorthair is in his second season, so I'm still training him. I've always been a believer that if an owner concentrates on training a pup to mind and follow commands in the first thirty weeks of his life, instinct will do the rest. I like to train with a check line and whistle. I kennel my hunting dogs. When a pup is just weaned and alone for the first time, I always announce myself with a whistle before appearing. I want him to associate the whistle blast with positive reinforcements of food and being handled. This

means that I always keep a dog whistle by the back door to blow before appearing. The pup becomes conditioned to the whistle and will respond positively after only a few days.

I use a 30-foot check line and choke chain to teach him commands. I teach him to stop and heal on command and eventually to stop and go in the direction I point. I always blow the whistle before giving any command or using the check line. During early training, I will be careful to blow the whistle before he comes to the end of the check line. When I call him in, I always teach him to sit to receive praise or a treat. It takes a

consistent regimen of daily training to break a pup in. I spend 40 minutes to an hour working with my dog every night with a couple of sessions each day of every weekend. Within a month, the pup is well-conditioned to the regimentation and within two months, the check line is no longer needed. I had this pup responding very well to whistle and hand commands within 60 days.

I use quail scented throws and later pheasant wings to begin him retrieving and later, pointing. I have a lead-weighted casting rod line with a pheasant wing and a check line to teach him to point. This takes a while. I cast the wing out to get his attention then hold

him with the check line as he approaches. If he rushes in too fast, I jerk the wing away from him. Pups have short attention spans, and I don't run this exercise more than two or three times a night. It takes another 60 days of this lesson to get a pup to point reliably, and I do hunt him in the meantime after he has mastered basic command signals.

It is not rocket science to train a well-bred hunting dog. It takes a commitment to time, patience, and consistency. You must have the personal discipline to work your dog through daily activities. But if you follow these steps and work on a regular schedule, by the second year, you'll have a well-

trained dog that will be a dependable hunting companion for years to come.

My problem with the pup in the canyons is that it is a terrible temptation for him to run too far ahead rather than work back and forth like he does in an open field. I must constantly call him back to keep him from getting too far ahead.

On my last trip to Quail Canyon last season, I didn't find a covey. Just as we entered a pan where the canyon opens out onto open grassland, a pair of prairie chickens exploded from beneath the pup's feet. They were close, and it was an easy shot that I did not take. I decided that there aren't enough prairie chickens in that part of the world and let them fly over a nearby gentle rise.

My dog and I stopped by a lonely windmill so he could get a drink. As I waited in the nearly deafening silence of that plains morning, I just barely heard the chickens we had flushed warbling in the nearby tall grass.

So, when low, cold weather clouds gather over bare branched trees; when the frost glistens on the dawn grass, and there is a touch of fall in the air even at noon; when the geese can be heard making their way south to their winter homes, and the first snow can be expected any week; you'll find me and my dog on our quail walks. They'll continue until the snows, the harsh winter winds, or the end of the hunting season makes it impossible. Until then, I'll be out there enjoying the peace and solitude that a quiet walk down Quail Canyon can provide. After all, the main reason God created quail is that it was such a grand idea. ♡



To the hunter, the land can become as important as the quarry and the act of hunting – sometimes more important. The western prairie often has this effect on hunters.

# 2009

## Upland Bird Forecast



Mike Blair photo

### STATEWIDE SUMMARIES

**PHEASANT** – Due to good production last summer and a relatively mild winter, the number of pheasants going into the 2009 nesting season was slightly higher than in 2008. A cool, wet spring slowed development of the wheat crop, resulting in a later-than-usual harvest. Because many Kansas pheasants nest in green wheat, the timing of wheat harvest plays a big role in the number of young produced each year. The delayed wheat harvest gave hens longer to hatch their nests and rear young. The timing and quantity of early summer precipitation also plays a big role in game bird productivity. Success of nests and survival of young is generally best when rain comes slowly and in near-average amounts during May and June. Most of Kansas' primary pheasant range met that prescription, although few areas did receive heavy rainfall during the nesting and early brood-rearing period. As a result, production was likely below average in portions of Barton, Rice, McPherson, Marion, Reno, Stafford, Republic, Washington, and Cloud counties. Compared to 2008, pheasant numbers will be much improved in northwest Kansas, slightly improved in southwest, north-central, and northeast Kansas, and down in most of southcentral Kansas. The best pheasant populations will be found throughout the western two-thirds of Region 1 and northern portions of Region 3 where the pheasant hunting is expected to be outstanding.



Over the last year, the weather and habitat conditions across Kansas were generally very good for upland game birds. The winter of 2008-2009 was relatively mild with little ice and snow in most regions of the state. These conditions lead to good overwinter survival and strong breeding populations last spring. The summer was relatively cool and moist across the state, which resulted in good conditions for nesting and brood rearing. Kansas has long been a premier destination for upland bird hunters, and that won't change in 2009 with strong game bird populations and more than 1.5 million acres open to public hunting.

**QUAIL** – Going into the breeding season, quail numbers were up nearly 30 percent from last spring across the state. The increases were the result of a mild winter with little ice and snow cover. Vegetative conditions and summer weather were good for nesting and brood rearing in most locations. A few localized events may have hurt quail numbers, but the majority of the state will have much improved quail populations compared to last year. The best quail hunting will be found throughout the central part of the state from the Red Hills northward all the way to the Nebraska line and eastward to the edge of the Flint Hills. Field data and landowner reports from central and northcentral Kansas indicate that populations are higher than they have been in many years in those regions. Compared to last fall, quail numbers will be up substantially in northcentral and northeast Kansas and slightly improved from last year across the remainder of the state.

**PRAIRIE CHICKEN** – Kansas is home to both greater and lesser prairie chickens. Both species require large blocks of native rangeland. Lesser prairie chickens are found in the prairies of westcentral and southwestern Kansas. Greater prairie chickens are found primarily in the tallgrass and mixed grass prairies that occur in the eastern one-third and northern half of the state. The spring prairie chicken lek survey indicated that the lesser prairie chicken breeding population was down from the previous year. This decline was most likely due to poor production in 2008 as a result of the drought that affected much of southwestern Kansas. Nesting conditions for lesser prairie chickens were improved this summer throughout their range due to timely rainfall that occurred in southwest Kansas. It is likely that populations will be up from last year, and the best hunting will be in the central and northern portions of their

range. Greater prairie chicken breeding populations were down this spring in the southern Flint Hills and up farther north and west throughout the Smoky Hills. In the Flint Hills, almost all pastures were burned again this spring, and there was little vegetative cover available during the nesting season. A few small areas within the central Flint Hills were also hit with heavy June rainfall that likely hurt local production. Conditions were good for production throughout most of the northern Flint Hills and the Smoky Hills. The best greater prairie chicken hunting should be found in the northern Flint Hills and westward throughout the Smoky Hills region.



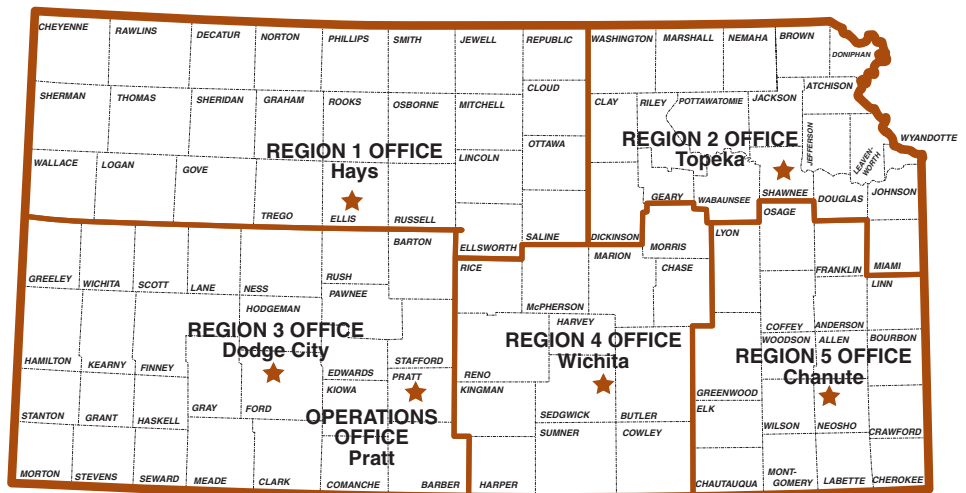
Mike Blair photo

# REGIONAL SUMMARIES

## Region 1 Northwest and Northcentral Kansas

**Pheasant** – The 2009 breeding population was up more than 10 percent from 2008 across Region 1 and at the highest level that has been recorded since spring crowing counts were initiated in 1997. Good habitat conditions and a late wheat harvest meant good production in the region. The exception was in the far northeastern counties within the region where heavy rainfall occurred near the peak of hatching. Pheasant populations in these areas will be lower than the remainder of the region. Some localized populations in the far northwestern portions of the region may be down too as a result of a hail storm that occurred in late July. Pheasant numbers in the eastern one-third of the region will be similar to last year or slightly down. Bird numbers will be up again in most of the central and western counties within the region, and the hunting in that area is expected to be the best it has been since the early 1980s.

**Quail** – The breeding population in Region 1 was up substantially from last year due to good production in 2008 and a mild winter. Vegetative conditions were generally good for nesting and weather was favorable during late June and July when most young quail are produced. As a result, quail numbers across the eastern two-thirds of the region should be much improved over last year and offer some excellent hunting opportunities this fall. Populations in the far western and northwestern reaches of Region 1 are improved, but quail are typically pretty sparse in the far west. This portion of the state is at the fringe of the quail's range, and populations are still recovering



from the deep snow that blanketed the area during January and February of 2007.

**Prairie Chicken** – Prairie chicken populations have expanded in both numbers and range within the region over the past 20 years. The better hunting opportunities will be found in the eastern and central portions of the region in the area known as the Smoky Hills. Spring lek counts in that region were generally up from last spring and nesting conditions were generally good, so there should be some improvement in chicken numbers in that area.

## Region 2 Northeast Kansas

**Pheasant** – Pheasants came through the winter in pretty good shape across Region 2 due to the relatively mild winter. Heavy rainfall that fell in the far northwestern portion of the region this summer negatively impacted production in that area. Elsewhere throughout the region, the conditions for nesting and brood rearing were good. Although numbers will be somewhat improved across most of the

region, the hunting will still probably be only fair because the pheasant population has been down for several years.

**Quail** – Breeding populations were up from the previous year across the region, likely due to good overwinter survival. Habitat conditions and weather were also very good during mid-summer when most quail are produced. As a result, production across Region 2 was very good in 2009 and will result in substantial increases in bobwhite numbers this fall. Field data and local observations indicate that quail numbers are up across the entire region. The better populations will likely be in the western and northern portions of the region where more quail habitat exists. In these portions of the region, there should be some very good hunting opportunities this fall.

**Prairie Chicken** – Greater prairie chickens occur only in the central and western counties of Region 2. Spring counts indicated that the number of birds heading into the nesting season was similar to last year. The heavy June rain that hurt pheasant production in the northwestern portion of the region

## REGIONAL SUMMARIES

probably had a similar effect on chickens. It is likely that chicken numbers across the central and southwestern portions of the region will be up this fall. Chicken numbers in the far northwestern corner of the region will likely be down due to the heavy June rain.

### Region 3 Southwest Kansas

Upland game populations in Region 3 were down substantially last fall in the southwestern portion of the region as a result of the severe drought. Fortunately, a relatively mild winter in that area led to good overwinter survival and timely rains helped to improve habitat conditions for nesting and brood rearing. The same conditions occurred in the northern and northeastern portion of the region where populations were already strong. A late spring snow fall in excess of 20" hit the southeastern portion of the region. The snow cover did not last long, but it may have led to some localized losses. Heavy rainfall that came during mid June negatively impacted game bird production in a few localized areas in the far northeastern portion of the region. In Region 3 there are approximately 149,500 acres of public land and more than 416,000 acres of WIHA enrolled for the upcoming seasons.

**Pheasant** – Spring crowing counts were similar to last year across most of the region but down somewhat in the eastern most counties affected by last spring's snow fall. Production varied con-

siderably across the region from good in far southwest Kansas to very good in the central and northern portions of the region to average or below in the eastern-most counties. Pheasant numbers will be very strong in the central and northern portions of the region offering some of the better hunting in the state. The counties in the far northeastern corner of the region will still offer good hunting, too, because there was



Mike Blair photo

good carry-over of adults from last year. Populations in the far southwestern portion of the region will be improved but the hunting will generally be only fair with better populations occurring in a few localized areas. Pheasant numbers in the southeastern por-

tion of the region will be down somewhat from last year but those counties don't compare with the rest of the region even during good years.

**Quail** – Quail made it through last winter in good shape across most of Region 3. The exception was in the far southeastern portion of the region where an early spring storm dropped more than 20" of snow. Production was good across the region due to good vegetative conditions and timely rains. Quail hunting will be improved in far southwestern Kansas this fall but populations will still be fairly low due to the severe drought that affected the area during the summer of 2008. Quail populations will be very strong in the southcentral, central, and northeastern portions of the region offering some of the best hunting in the state. The number of birds available to hunters in the southeastern counties will be down from last year due to the deep snow that blanketed the area last spring.

**Prairie Chickens** – Most of the prairie chickens in Region 3 are lesser prairie chickens with a few greater prairie chickens in the northcentral and northeastern counties. Counts this spring were down from last year except in the northern portion of the region. Conditions were good for productivity this summer within chicken range in Region 3. Expect prairie chicken numbers to be similar to last year in the southwest portion of Region 3 and improved in the northern counties.

## REGIONAL SUMMARIES



Mike Blair photo

### Region 4 Southcentral Kansas

**Pheasant** – The breeding population was generally similar to last year across the region. Vegetative conditions were good for nesting throughout the region, but mid-summer rainfall hurt production in the northern and northeastern counties. Pheasant numbers in the southwestern portion of the region will be up somewhat, offering some fair hunting opportunities. There will be fewer pheasants in the northwestern and northern portions of the region, and hunting is expected to be poor in those areas this fall. Pheasants are sparse in the eastern reaches of the region even in good years.

**Quail** – The spring breeding population across Region 4 was similar to last year or slightly improved. Production was very good across the region with the exception of the northcentral and northeastern counties where heavy rain fell during the peak of quail hatching. Expect quail hunting to be improved throughout the region except for those areas affected by the heavy mid-summer rains where populations will be down. The best

hunting in the region will be in the western and southwestern portions of Region 4 where good quail hunting opportunities will exist this fall.

**Prairie Chicken** – Greater prairie chickens occur in the northern and easternmost portions of Region 4. Spring counts were generally down in the southeastern portion of Region 4 and similar or improved from last year in the more northern areas. Most of the chicken habitat in the region is burned annually in early spring. These annually burned pastures provide little cover for nesting even when weather is suitable. However, annual burning is much less prevalent in the northern and northeastern portion of the region. Weather conditions in that portion of the region were only fair for production due to some heavy rainfall that occurred during mid- to late June. These rains fell 2-3 weeks after the peak hatching period but probably still had a negative impact on survival of young prairie chickens. Expect the best chicken hunting in Region 4 to be in the northcentral and northeastern counties, and bird numbers in that area will probably be similar to last year.

### Region 5 Southeast Kansas

**Pheasant** – The vast majority of Region 5 is outside of the pheasant range.

**Quail** – The winter was mild across Region 5 resulting in an increase of more than 40 percent to the spring breeding population. Vegetative conditions were very good for nesting. For the first time in three years, the region did not experience heavy rain and flooding during the nesting season, which led to improved production. While production was improved, the hunting will still not be good because quail populations were near record lows heading into the breeding season. Expect hunting to be better than last fall, but quail numbers will still be fairly low across the region.

**Prairie Chickens** – Greater prairie chickens are most abundant in the western and northwestern parts of Region 5. Spring counts were down across most of the region likely due to poor production in 2008. The exception was in the far northwestern counties that missed most of the heavy rains in June 2008. Weather across the region was good for productivity this summer, but most of the pastures in the region were burned again last spring, leaving little suitable cover for nesting. Prairie chicken populations in Region 5 will likely be down from last fall across most of the region. The exception would be in the far northwestern portion of the region where habitat and weather conditions were more favorable. Expect populations to be up somewhat in that area and offer some fair hunting opportunities.



Once this corps of instructors was in place, they needed a place to teach, so they formed Young Hunter Safety, Inc. (YHSI) and convinced the county to lease 25 acres of land just north of Lake Afton for conducting hunter education courses and shooting events, and a public shooting range that is open twice a month. Each year, the group elects a new officer to a group of three who will organized the annual Lake Afton Hunter Education Clinic. The first-year officer serves as chief counselor (Knotts this year) and is in charge of class leaders. The second-year officer serves as head instructor (Jennifer Ritter this year) and is responsible for gathering materials, recruiting instructors, and signing certification cards. The third-year officer (Bill Collier this year), called the “administrator,” oversees facilities, office staff, and trouble-shooting and is the main contact between the group and event sponsors.

On Oct. 3-4, the group celebrated its 35th anniversary by conducting the annual clinic, certifying 903 students over one weekend. Students came from across the state, but about 40 percent were Wichita youth. (Participants have come from Colorado, Nebraska, and Oklahoma, as well.) Smoothly organized and run, the event shows what can be done when dedicated men and women put their heads together.

# HERCULEAN HUNTER ED

text and photos by Mark Shoup

What happens when a group of concerned Kansas hunter education instructors get together to make a difference for Sunflower State youth? Could they form a group that annually conducts the largest hunter education (HE) clinic in North America? Indeed they could.

That’s exactly what happened in 1974, when hunter education instructors in the Wichita area petitioned Sedgwick County for a permanent place to conduct such events. The previous year, the Kansas Legislature had passed a law requiring hunter education certification for anyone born on or after July 1, 1957. The need for instructors was great, so a number of already NRA-certified shooting instructors — including Mike Knotts, Carl Conley, Larry Dilly, Glenn and Francis Protheroe, and others — became Kansas certified hunter education instructors under the tutelage of master instructor Les Sawyer.

Oklahoma, as well.) Smoothly organized and run, the event shows what can be done when dedicated men and women put their heads together.

## Sponsors

*Any event of this scope not only requires cooperation and coordination, but sponsorship is essential. The Lake Afton Hunter Education Clinic has been blessed with many donors. “Donations come from all over,” Collier said. “People always seem willing to help.”*

*Donors for this year include Bluestem Hunting Preserve, which provided the pheasants; New Line Signs, which provided signage for the area; AAA Port-A-John, which provided portable toilets; Associated Lumber of Wichita and Fisher Lumber of Garden Plain, which helped supply lumber; radio station KFDI, which provided ammunition, office supplies, a golf cart and arrangements for advertising; and the Chisholm Trail Antique Gun Association, which provided funding for advertising. Fleet Maintenance and Beaver Express donated food for instructors this year, and groups such as the Young Marines and Cub Scouts sold food for fundraising. Wichita Canteen was the primary food vendor.*

*Any event this large also needs to be prepared for emergencies, and Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Services (RACES) volunteered for duty at the 2009 event. This group of amateur ham radio operators provided weather-watching, communications, and emergency communications for the event.*

"We come from all backgrounds," said Mike Knotts, who was stationed at McConnell Air Force Base when the group formed and is one of the few original members still living. "We've had doctors, lawyers, clergy, teachers, aircraft workers, you name it. But we all came together as brothers and sisters with a will to teach young hunters. This year, we even have two nursing school instructors doing first-aid."

That will has resulted in more than 30,000 students being HE certified in the past 35 years of clinics (not including this year's tally). Approximately 75 volunteer instructors were involved in this year's event, where students rotated through 15 stations: archery, obstacle course, guns and ammo, ethics, conservation, game identification (with live pheasants), boating safety, the 10 commandments of hunting, home safety, loading guns into and out of vehicles, zones of fire, first-aid, survival, wildlife law, and a shooting range, where each student received one-on-one instruction and shot five rounds of .22 rifle ammunition.

After registration and grouping of participants, this year's event started at 9 p.m. with introductions from District Judge Phil Journey, KDWP Assistant Secretary of Operations Keith Sexson, and Sedgwick County Under-sheriff Mike Stover. Following an invocation by minister Wes Decker, the gospel a cappella group "7" sang moving renditions of the National Anthem and

"Home On the Range." Between the two songs, instructors and students released four rooster pheasants.

"Because it was our 35th year, we tried to make the opening ceremonies special," Collier said. After the ceremonies, it was off to the stations.

Divided into 16 groups so that each group received breaks during the day, the students rotated from station to station, one-half hour at each station except ethics and zones of fire, where the students were given a full hour of instruction. The entire group took an hour off for lunch.

"We try to make sure families stay together, as well as groups such as Cub Scouts and any others who want to stay together," said Collier. "We try to accommodate everyone. If kids

have trouble reading, for whatever reason, we will read the test to them. For Spanish-only readers, we have Spanish books and tests, and we can even help disabled students."

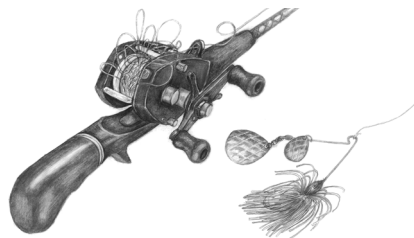
With another successful clinic behind them, YHSI is looking forward to next year. They've already elected new officers, and plans are in the works. If this year's event is any indication, the group will continue providing excellent instruction to large numbers of people who want to enjoy the enriching experience that hunting offers. Hats off to Lake Afton's YHSI for "Passing It On," in spades. ♠

### *Instructor Invitation*

*YHSI invites all Kansas certified hunter education instructors to participate in this event next year. Qualified instructors who are interested should contact Bill Collier at wcollier6@cox.net or Mike Knotts at 316-529-3120.*

More than 900 students participated in the last course at Lake Afton in October, requiring precise organization and the hard work of 75 volunteer Hunter Education instructors.





# Backlash

by Mike Miller

## Optimism of a Puppy

I went and did it. After putting off the inevitable for several years, I brought a Brittany puppy home this summer. My last Brittany has been gone five years, and I have been bravely stating that I needed to start a pointing dog. But bringing a puppy into the house is a big change in lifestyle. Okay – I was being lazy. A puppy is work.

Last summer, I was at a workshop at Ringneck Ranch, near Tipton, and ranch owners Keith and Debra Houghton made sure I knew they had a couple of Brittany puppies available. The Houghtons' hunting operation features a state-of-art kennel that's chock full of Brittanys. I always visit the dogs, and I'm sure Keith and Deb knew I was an easy mark. At several earlier visits, I had resisted the temptation – just barely. I managed to resist during this last visit, as well.

But I spent a little too much time with these puppies before I left. Two litter mates, one orange and white and one liver and white, were left from a litter born in late April. They were both handsome dogs and typical Brittanys – full of energy and eager for attention. I didn't take a pup with me when I left, rationalizing that the Big Black Dog was happy being an only dog and would be jealous if I were to spend time working with a pup (and I was being lazy).

Then Debra called later the next week. She could tell I was weakening and told me she was holding the puppies until I made a decision. She had other people interested. I had talked big about wanting a pup, and Deb had just called my bluff. I hung up and made a list of pros and cons, and the pros came out on top. I visited with my wife, Lisa, and made sure she was on board, then I called Debra back. I told her I would return that Saturday to pick up one of the dogs. Commitment!

Dad rode to the ranch with me, a scenic two-plus-hour drive from Pratt. I was leaning toward the orange and white pup. My first Brittany, Stache, was orange and white and holds a special place in my heart. We arrived in a light rain and abnormally cool temperatures for late July. Debra told us to go over the kennels, play with the pups, and take our time making a decision. It turned out to be an easy one.

Of course, I picked up the orange and white dog, took him outside and plopped a quail wing in front of him. He was appropriately interested. I played with him for while, then brought the liver and white dog



out. This dog was absolutely crazy about the wing. He chased it, retrieved and was generally obsessed with it. When I put it away, I thought he was going to climb into the back of my truck. Dad and I agreed; the pup made the decision for me.

I've always thought the Big Black Dog chose me more than I chose him. And this pup seemed to do the same. After going through the paperwork and vet records with Debra, Dad pointed the pickup south. I put the pup on a pillow at my feet. I had brought a little rope toy and some treats to hold his attention, worried about his reaction to being yanked from the only home he'd known.

I didn't need to be concerned. After just a short acquaintance period with Dad and me, the pup decided he could hang out with us — no problem. I'm always amazed at how quickly a puppy can adapt to such a radically different environment.

And adapt he has. Obviously, living in our home with a big fenced backyard to romp in and a big teddybear of a Lab for a buddy isn't that difficult of a transition, so he's managed to fit in nicely. We call him Trip. Lisa's idea. He's our third Brittany, so she suggested Triple. I made it "Triple Dog Dare" on his registration, which I thought sounded original. He has changed life in our home, but he makes us laugh a lot, and he's *only* run through the sliding screen door three times. I guess it's amazing how we adapt. I can't wait for bird season. ♡

