

KANSAS

Wildlife & Parks

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On Point

by Mike Hayden



Voice Your Opinion

The mission of the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP) is to conserve and protect Kansas' wildlife and habitats and to provide opportunities for our constituents to use and appreciate those resources. KDWP is a cabinet-level agency, and I administer its day-to-day operations to accomplish its mission. A seven member Wildlife and Parks Commission advises me. The commissioners are appointed by the Governor to serve staggered four year terms. The Commissioners are from various walks of life and geographically represent Kansas. It is a bipartisan board, made up of no more than four members of any one political party, advising me on department planning and policy issues.

The Commission serves as the regulatory body for the department, approving regulations which we administer. The agency and the Commission have a responsibility to Kansas taxpayers and our constituents to conduct business openly and transparently. The Commission holds six public meetings each year, so constituents have opportunities to listen to, learn about and address issues, and to comment on proposed regulations. The meeting locations vary each time and may range from Goodland to Kansas City, from Mankato to Coffeyville.

During the past few years, public participation at Commission meetings has dwindled. Few people have been present to see the Commission in action, ask questions or comment on proposed actions. This trend is disappointing since I know many Kansans are deeply committed to the outdoors and outdoor recre-

ation. I suspect the main causes of the reduction are the demanding schedules of modern life, fewer controversial issues, and changes in how people communicate. While the news media is normally present and reports on the meetings, it does not make up for the missing component: an active and engaged public.

As a result of this waning participation, KDWP staff is researching ways to encourage more public involvement in the decision process. More and more, governments are augmenting traditional public meetings with other means of involvement. Modern technology can provide some options. Among the options we're exploring is live streaming audio and video of Commission meetings over the Internet. As a beginning, we plan to audio-stream the January 2011 Commission meeting in Lawrence. Eventually, we'll add video streaming for future meetings. How much we can use the Internet for Commission meetings depends on where they are held, so we'll need to consider Internet access for future meetings. In the future, it might be possible for the public to participate in real time from the comfort of their homes or offices.

Until the online meeting option is available, Commission meeting dates, locations and times are published in local newspapers and at the KDWP Web site: www.kdwp.state.ks.us. I encourage you to attend a meeting. Your voice is important in helping us fulfill our mission. Use it. ♡

KANSAS

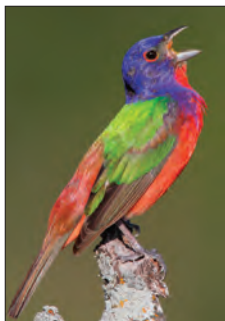
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Like last year's photo issue, the 2011 addition contains a mixture of subjects and featured photographers. You'll recognize the work of department staff such as Mike Blair and Marc Murrell, but you'll also be treated to a different perspective through the lenses of talented freelancers Bob Gress, Jon Blumb and Jim Glenn. Enjoy these images and remember to appreciate the wonderful outdoor resources we are so fortunate to have in Kansas.

Mike Miller
editor



Front Cover: Painted buntings are summer residents of southern and eastern Kansas. This singing male was photographed by Bob Gress. **Back Cover:** A regular Kansas fall day can sometimes be given an exclamation point by a magnificent sunset. Mike Miller snapped this photo in November.



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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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Fly On

Wild birds inspire, awe, and entertain us, and they capture our attention and imagination like no other wild creatures.





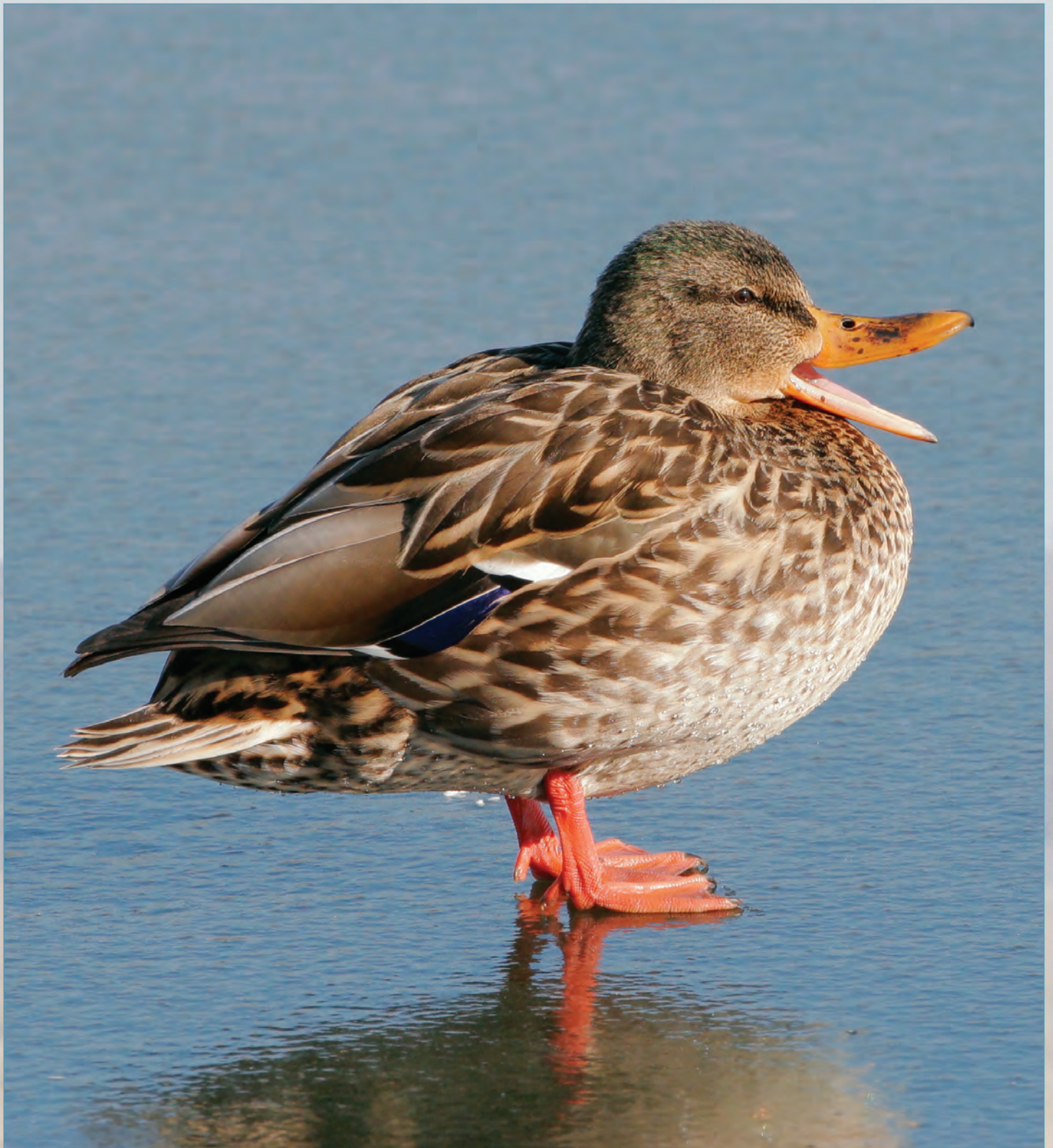
least tern and chick by Bob Gress



black-bellied plover by Bob Gress



mallard by Bob Gress





common goldeneye by Bob Gress

gadwall by Bob Gress





summer tanager by Bob Gress



ruby-throated hummingbird by Bob Gress



rufus hummingbird by Bob Gress



*greater roadrunner eating
thirteen-lined ground squirrel by Jim Glenn*





barn owl by Bob Gress

Fur On

The coyote and its song symbolize the wild prairie, but this intelligent, tough and adaptable canine is foremost a symbol of survival.

coyote by Mike Blair





black-footed ferret by Bob Gress



swift fox by Bob Gress



badger by Bob Gress





coyote by Bob Gress



cottontail rabbit by Jon Blumb



white-tailed deer by Jim Glenn



pronghorns by Mike Blair

mule deer by Mike Blair





jackrabbit by Mike Blair



Fish On

Some anglers are driven to fish and others fish for relaxation, but all are unabashedly proud of their catches.

lake scene by Mike Blair





Kiowa County farm pond by Mike Miller



Pratt County farm pond by Mike Miller



Pratt fishing derby by Mike Miller



Glen Elder crappie by Mike Miller



Milford white bass by Mike Miller



Milford wiper by Mike Miller



Glen Elder crappie fishing by Mike Miller



Pratt County bass by Mike Miller

Gobble On

Seeing fresh turkey tracks will duly enthruse a spring turkey hunter, but let the bird gobble and you better get out of his way .

turkey tracks by Jon Blumb





strutting gobbler by Jon Blumb



box call by Jon Blumb



Connor's first turkeys by Doug Linebaugh



mallard flush by Mike Blair

A large flock of mallards is captured in mid-flight over a field of tall, dry grass. The ducks are scattered across the frame, with some in the foreground and others higher up. Their wings are spread, and their characteristic green heads and brown bodies are visible. The background is a soft-focus field of golden-brown grass.

Quack On

The rush of wings, spray of water and chatter of flushing ducks will always stop a duck hunter in his tracks. But the hunt is often about sharing the blind with good friends — two-legged and four-legged.



sharing breakfast at Cheyenne Bottoms by Mike Miller



winter river hunt by Marc Murrell



skywatcher by Mike Miller

Hunt On

Not everyone appreciates the beauty of the western Kansas prairie, but for those who live to hunt birds behind a good dog, this is paradise.





Hodgeman County pheasant cover by Mike Miller



Edwards County WIHA by Mike Miller



Brittany pup's first point by Mike Miller



Pass It On

We must teach our children about the outdoors, not only for the sake of conservation, but for the sake of our children.



photo courtesy of Manuel Torres



basic wingshooting by Mike Blair



archery instruction by Mike Miller





Pratt fishing derby by Mike Miller



state park fun by Mike Blair



Wilson State Park camp by Mike Blair



fisheries biologists manage more than fish by Mike Blair



Backlash

by Mike Miller

A January Sandhill Tradition

Since I've lived in Pratt, I've developed a deep affection for the sandhill prairie, simply referred to as the sandhills by many, that dominates the northern part of the county. (This physiographic region actually covers a larger area along the Arkansas River where it meanders through the southwestern quarter of Kansas.) In the northwestern corner of Pratt County, there is a wildlife area where I've spent far too much time, and visiting the area in January has become an annual tradition. I wish I could say that it was because I always find a covey or two or that I never fail to take a brace of roosters. I can't. I have done both, but only occasionally. I know some will wonder why then, this has become such a treasured tradition.

The Sandhills Wildlife Area is off the beaten path. They'll get plenty of attention early in the deer and bird seasons, but in January, I'll usually have the 4,000 acres to myself. That's a big plus at this stage in my life.

I know that while I'm there, I won't hear highway noise, people, or a dog bark, unless mine does. In fact, I probably won't even hear a vehicle drive by on the sandy county road. There isn't much traffic out that way in January, and I learned that the hard way after a friend and I got our vehicle stuck. We walked nearly five miles down the road before a local farmer came by and helped us.

I have a history with this land. When I first moved here, 27 years ago, I didn't have contacts with landowners for private land hunting access. I spent hours learning about bowhunting at the Sandhills. There weren't a lot of deer in those days, but it was wild, free and uncrowded. I fell in love.

While the land appears to have never been farmed, there are some tree belts and wooded homestead sites, probably planted in the forties. But mostly, this is native prairie – big and little bluestem, switchgrass, Indiangrass, and sandhill plum thickets. There are quail, pheasants, occasionally lesser prairie chickens,

white-tailed and mule deer, turkeys, many more nongame species, and open space. The sunrises and sunsets are always worth admission. A walk through this country is good for my soul, and if I piddle around long enough I'll always find something of interest; an old animal skull, an intriguing set of tracks in the soft sand, or a shed deer antler.

Like the old Hush Puppies shoe commercial, "my dogs can breathe" while I'm at the Sandhills. Since my first Brittany and I started this tradition 25 years ago, I've tried to make it back each year. I may only make one trip in January, but once counts. I missed the trip for several years when I was without a pointing dog, but I renewed the tradition last January with a new pup. He ran big and bowled his way through the thickets with unrestrained enthusiasm. He pointed his first bobwhite, and I barely managed to scratch it down. It was a fine day.

Early on I hunted the area with a few close friends, but I usually make the January trip with just the dog. It's a leisurely stroll with no pressure to produce. The only conversation will be me talking to the dog or me talking to myself — nothing weird or unhealthy, just thoughts or observations that seem important enough to be said out loud.

I always get some value from each trip. The best is when the dog has performed well, and we've had some success. But I'll always remember earlier trips — a good friend's first deer, an old familiar treestand, or laughing about getting stuck. And there's always the view. One last look over the prairie before calling it a day, inhaling deeply and telling the dog that I've enjoyed his company. Pretty simple, yet hugely important on a personal level. Everyone needs a Sandhills. Selfishly, I hope you find your own, but there's plenty of space here. There's free therapy out there that will ease stress and improve your outlook on life. I've found it in the Sandhills. ♡

