

KANSAS

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KANSAS *View*

by Robin Jennison



SENIOR LIFETIME PASS A BARGAIN FOR ALL

Last year at this time, I was considering potential legislation and future funding issues for our department. If you're a hunter or angler of the Baby Boomer Generation, you're probably aware of one of the department-sponsored bills introduced during the last legislative session. Senate Bill 314 proposed doing away with the hunting and fishing license exemptions for Kansans 65 and older. The exemption had been in effect since 1971, and many considered it a deserved privilege. However, when we realized our fastest growing age group of hunters was those over 65, and that our residents are living much longer today than they did in 1971, it appeared the exemption would create a funding shortfall in the near future. On top of that, when these Baby Boomers quit buying licenses, Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Act (WSFR) money that should have come to Kansas was being sent elsewhere. On the surface, removing the exemption seemed like a no-brainer.

However, when you add in the element of emotion, no decision such as this is a no-brainer. Even though we tried to inform hunters and anglers why this was good for Kansas wildlife, we heard from folks who were very much opposed. When we started discussions with legislators, they had also heard from these folks, so compromises were offered. The bill that ultimately passed and was signed into law included changes that made it acceptable. In fact, during the Kansas State Fair, questions about the new law were the most common staff received at the department booth, but few people complained. Most just wanted to know when it takes effect and how much it will cost.

I'm really not surprised at either reaction. Emotional opposition is expected when something is taken away, in this case the exemption. However, hunters and anglers have always paid for wildlife conservation, and I'm not surprised they are stepping up to the plate now. They are why we enjoy the outstanding wildlife resources and outdoor recreation opportunities we have today.


Support for the new law falls right in line with the attitude of our hunters and anglers in 1937 when they pushed congress to pass the Pittman-Robertson Act, which placed

However, hunters and anglers have always paid for wildlife conservation, and I'm not surprised they are stepping up to the plate now.

an excise tax on firearms and ammunition and earmarked it for wildlife conservation. In 1950, sportsmen pushed for passage of the Dingell-Johnson Act, which placed a similar excise tax on fishing tackle and motorboat fuel. Together, the laws are referred to as Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration, or WSFR, and over the past 75 years it has sent more than \$14 billion to states for fish and wildlife management. The amount each state receives each year is based, in part, on the number of hunting and fishing licenses sold annually. So, when a Kansan turned 65 and stopped buying a license, we could no longer count them for federal aid, even though they continued hunting and fishing and contributing to WSFR through equipment purchases.

On Jan. 1, 2013, Kansans age 65-74 are no longer exempt from hunting and fishing license requirements. Those 65 and older will qualify for a Senior Hunting/Fishing Combination Lifetime Pass. The lifetime pass will cost around \$40 and will be valid for the rest of the holder's life. The real kicker is that the department will collect nearly \$25 (at current WSFR figures) in federal aid each year for years to come as a result of that sale. That's a great deal, both for the license buyer and the Kansas wildlife resources.

For those 65 and older who don't want the senior combination pass, annual hunting and fishing licenses will be available for half the regular price; \$9 for an annual hunting or annual fishing license or \$18 for an annual combination license. Those age 75 and older are still exempt from license requirements.

Kansas hunting and fishing recreation is and always has been a user-pay program; those who choose to enjoy our great hunting and fishing opportunities pay for management, facilities, and law enforcement. They also pay when they buy hunting and fishing equipment through WSFR. Since our wildlife and fishery programs receive no State General Fund money, those who choose not to hunt or fish don't pay. That tradition will continue with the passage of SB314, and the future of our hunting and angling opportunities is brighter than ever. 



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Front Cover: Bobcats are reclusive and nocturnal, so they are rarely seen. However, they are common in Kansas. **Back Cover:** The overall upland bird forecast isn't positive, but there is good news for bobwhite quail populations in the Flint Hills, northeast and southeast regions of the state. KDWPT file photos



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Letters . . .

MORE THOUGHTS ON BAITING

Mr. Mike Miller:

I am a Kansas landowner. I have lived and hunted in Kansas all my life. I have hunted turkey and deer almost as long as there has been a season for them. I also have subscribed to *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine for over 30 years and never have I read a letter that concerned me as much as the one from Mr. Ruona in the May/June 2012 issue.

I suspect the issues with Mr. Ruona and his neighbors go much deeper than that of game feeders. His attitude seems very hostile. I'm curious, how does he know so much about his neighbors feeders and where the feeders are located if there is such a strong animus between them? Remember "the man couldn't call his dog much less a turkey, so it's quite obvious he kills his turkeys at the feeder." And "I know the adjacent landowner uses feeders" comments.

Mr. Miller, I find it difficult to see a letter as "thoughtful and well written" when a good bit of it is spent insulting his neighbors and babbling about their inability to hunt. These people are doing nothing illegal. Seems I remember being taught something in Sunday school years ago about "judge not lest ye be judged" and what about "do unto others"?

Anyhow, I completely agree with the idea of banning game feeders on public land. It is obvious that allowing such a practice would only lead to serious conflicts and/or confrontations between hunters. How this would create conflict between landowners I don't understand. Game feeders and food plots are legal in Kansas, and it is an individual's choice whether to use them or not. Just like choosing archery over firearms or choosing recurve over compound, it's up to that individual to choose what they consider ethical or what they are comfortable with.

I realize there are those individuals that go out a few days before season and dump a pile of corn out with the sole purpose of killing something. I am not one of them. However, Mr. Ruona seems to have passed judgment on all of us who use game feed supplementation as part of a comprehensive management program as nothing more than blood thirsty killers bent on wiping out all wildlife in Kansas. Nothing could be

more untrue.

I have been an avid bow hunter for 32 years. During that time I have tried all sorts of things to help increase the odds of harvesting an animal. Scents, lures, calls, decoys, minerals and yes even feed.

I and a few of my neighbors use game feeders. They are part of a quality deer management plan, and our feeders run seven days a week 52 weeks a year, not just during hunting season. This food supplement is there to help ALL the wildlife not just the deer and turkeys. It provides much needed nutrition during difficult times like post rut stress, snow cover, ice, drought and birth stress. It is also a very beneficial tool to aid in judging your wildlife population. It allows you to carefully observe and select which animals if any you want to take from the herd.

Try to look at this from a different perspective. If there is more quality feed available on a consistent basis the wildlife doesn't have to search for nutrition. Less traveling means less chance of poaching and vehicle deaths. It also would mean less grouping up to feed because there are more options available.

Anyone who has spent any time in the deer woods has at some point hunted over or near an active food source. In all my years of hunting, and that of many friends, we have observed that while deer may group up around feed areas, they never line up and feed "nose to nose." They are not cattle, there always seems to be a very definite pecking order. I have watched mature does fight violently for the right of their fawns to feed first on a food plot, oak tree or just about any food source or area they didn't want to share. In fact I've personally witnessed far more deer packed into cedar thickets to escape the weather or simply to bed down than I ever have under a feeder.

Mr. Ruona comments are confusing to me. First he condemns persons who use game feeders, and then suggests he has no problem with hunting over planted crops or food plots. So it's OK for deer to bunch up in cover around crop fields and food plots but not feeders.

I see no difference. You are still providing a food source for game that is created by man, and it is not natural or even native to the area in many cases. Enter invasive plant species!!!

I agree that the spread of disease should always be in primary concern for our sportsman and the wildlife and parks staff. Forty confirmed CWD cases so far is alarming, however it appears from several national health organizations that the jury is still out on the definite cause and transmission of these diseases. One thing they do know is once it is established there is no stopping it. Some states have gone so far as to hire sharpshooters to kill literally hundreds of deer in infection areas with varied success. And Mr. Ruona is worried about ethics and fair chase? Let's be cautious ladies and gentlemen. We don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

I would like to suggest more easily implemented changes to managing our game that I think will have an immediate impact. Let's work to educate the public on the importance of habitat lost and the use of responsible harvest by only taking mature animals. Let's stop selling our big game herd to the highest bidder, big money outfitters who do not live or pay taxes in Kansas. Or maybe move rifle season back to mid-December where it belongs away from the rut. Or better yet, let's join some of our neighbors and eliminate rifle hunting altogether. Even today's in-line muzzleloaders with modern optics are capable of shooting 200 to 300 yards very accurately. Honestly folks, thousands of deer, not 40, fall prey to rifles every year. Ethical? Maybe. Fair chase? Maybe not. It's all in the mind of the beholder. You can't legislate ethics!

Mr. Miller I hope you find my thoughts as well composed as Mr. Ruona's and I would appreciate them being passed on to your biologist as well.

*John Foster
Pittsburg*

Mr. Foster,

I can see you put a lot of thought into your letter, and I respect your position. I agree that there may be hard feelings between Mr. Ruona and his neighbor. My comments about this letter came from his ideas about the ethics of game feeders.

There is evidence that certain diseases can be spread by close contact among deer. Whether that contact is more likely when deer feed from a trough or corn pile or from a food plot is open to debate.

I agree with you 100 percent that we can't legislate or regulate ethics.

Miller

BLUE CATFISH QUESTION

Mike:

I want to know if blue cats are aggressive live baitfish eaters like flatheads. A 40-pound-plus catfish could eat a lot of game fish in the 1- to 2-pound range. How much, if any, impact will these catfish place on walleye, crappie, and bass populations.

The other comment I want to make was it is great to see that those individuals who break regulations for hunting and fishing are being prosecuted. Unfortunately it takes an enormous amount of time and personnel to convict these individuals. I would like to see stronger penalties for this behavior and repeat offenders of regulations. Unfortunately some individuals will not change their lack of respect for nature

and a lifetime ban from fishing or hunting will not affect them. Wildlife improvement (community service) may make them think differently about their violations. You can fine them \$100,000, but if they do not have the means to pay these fines, they get off with little punishment. I do not have a great answer to the problem, but one bad egg can spoil it for the rest. I like bans of licenses, large fines, jail time, and the use of community or habitat improvement service to repay their debt; even if it may take a lifetime to repay their fines for the damage they have done.

Thanks for your great magazine and all those who work with the Kansas Wildlife, Parks and Tourism.

*Jamie Hajny
Glenvil, Neb.*

Mr. Hajny,

Fisheries Section chief Doug Nygren said blue catfish are opportunistic predators and will eat any species of fish they can catch, along with crayfish, freshwater mussels, frogs and other readily available aquatic food sources; some blue catfish have reportedly attacked scuba divers. Catching prey becomes all the more easy if it is already wounded or dead, and blue cats are noted for feeding beneath marauding schools of striped bass in reservoirs or feeding on wounded baitfish that have been washed through dam spillways or power generation turbines.

In talking to blue cat anglers, I've found that most catch them on cut bait, rather than live bait. Most flathead catfish anglers will tell you that you must use live bait to catch flatheads.

Miller

It seemed like we would never get here. Cool temperatures, the threat of frost and the first snow of the season seemed so far away while we endured the long, hot and dry summer. I don't know what this next season has in store for us, but some moisture in the form of rain or snow would be welcomed.

Whatever our conditions, birds adapt and continue to live their lives. The past couple of years have taken a toll on birdlife, but hopefully birds can bounce back when weather and habitat improve. Birdwatchers and hunters are keeping an eye on both. Upland game bird numbers suffered through the drought, but they are resilient and prolific when conditions are good. Waterfowl numbers are exceptionally high this year, with record numbers of birds produced for many species. However, the drought has left them few stopovers in Kansas, so watching or hunting them may be a challenge.

The drying down of critical marshes such as Quivira and Cheyenne Bottoms will impact migratory birds, and I'll be interested to see where wintering populations go when they arrive in our state. I surmise that we will see a major increase in the numbers of waterfowl using reservoirs around the state since they may be the only water for birds to rest and forage on.

I expect that when the annual Christmas Bird Count season arrives, we will find that birds have shifted where they are wintering in Kansas. The dry growing conditions made the production of many grain crops and weed seeds spiral downward, making the areas that did see seed production even more important and crowded. No doubt those areas that experienced extreme drought will hold fewer birds. Winter bird feeding may be more important in being able to see birds and draw them into yards for enjoyment. Providing food and water may attract more birds to yards and towns than



Mike Blair photo

BIRD BRAIN

with Mike Rader

COOL BIRDING

in a typical year (whatever that is), so plan accordingly, and you might be pleasantly surprised with how many species and individuals you see.

Speaking of Christmas Bird Counts, you can learn more about where and when they will occur in Kansas through the Kansas Ornithological Society's website: www.ksbirds.org. The counts usually begin on December 14 and end the second weekend of January, so check them out and contact the compilers if you're interested in participating. It's a great way to learn more about birds and meet people that have a passion for birding.

I had the chance to go to the fall meeting of the Kansas Ornithological Society at Winfield in late September. It was good to see so many friends, talk birds, and listen to outstanding research papers from students of our state. And I got out did a little birdwatching, as well. Juncos were just staring to show up and the influx of fall sparrow and other migrants was just beginning. I was hoping to see the first Harris's sparrow of the year, but it was just too early. The next few weeks will bring our winter resident species down, and I'm really looking forward to getting out and visiting some of my favorite places. Winter is coming!

IT'S THE LAW

with Kevin Jones

TRESPASSING

The months of November and December mark the heart of the hunter's calendar. No other months during the year present the variety of hunting opportunities as these two months. Big game, turkey, small game, furbearer and waterfowl seasons are all open. When hunters and furharvesters go afield on private land, they all have a common requirement: they must have permission from the landowner or person in charge of the land. Kansas has the unique distinction of having the least amount of publicly owned land in the U.S. Less than one percent (actually 0.92 percent) of Kansas land is owned by the state or federal government, and not all of that is accessible for hunting or public access. Therefore, acquiring permission to hunt on privately owned land is very important.

While trespassing occurs throughout the year, it is more prevalent during the fall. Trespassing is not only illegal, it also gives hunters and trappers a bad reputation. Perception can be more important to public opinion than actual fact. So, while the vast majority of hunters and trappers follow the law, actions of a few may influence the public to believe trespassing is a common practice of all who hunt or trap.

There are actually two laws that directly focus on the issue of trespassing for hunters, trappers and anglers. K.S.A. 21-5810, entitled "Criminal hunting," makes it illegal for a person to hunt, trap or fish on the land of another person without having first obtained permission. Under this law, there is no requirement of the landowner to have the property posted or give the violator the opportunity to leave before charges may be filed. The rule is clear: you must have permission from the landowner, or person in charge of the land, before you start hunting or trapping.

The second law, K.S.A. 32-1013 is entitled "Taking wildlife without permission on land posted "by written permission only." As the title implies, a person must have written permission from



the landowner or person in charge of the land before they start hunting or trapping. The law also requires that you have the written permission in your possession. Land can be posted in two ways. First, the land may be posted with a sign stating the written permission requirement. Second, the land may be posted by purple paint marks on posts or trees around the parameter of the property.

Each of these statutes has a provision that allows a person who is licensed to hunt or furharvest and is following or pursuing a wounded animal onto land where they do not have permission to be exempt from the permission requirement. However, if the landowner or person in charge of the land tells that hunter or furharvester to leave the property before the animal is collected, the hunter or furharvester must immediately comply. This exemption must not be abused or it may be taken away.

So what is at stake for someone who is found guilty of trespassing? Well, centuries ago in Europe when the penalties were handed down by the King, it was not uncommon for a person to lose their life. The sentences issued by our courts are not nearly that severe, but depending on the circumstances, the penalty may be a fine of \$1,000 plus court costs, imprisonment in the county jail for 90 days plus suspension of hunting privileges for five or more years. This is the maximum penalty, but it does show that trespassing is a serious issue.

Trespassing is not only illegal, it also gives hunters and trappers a bad reputation.

Getting permission to hunt private land can take time, and you often must earn a landowner's trust before access is given. There are alternatives. The department manages more than 500,000 acres of public wildlife areas open to hunters. Be sure to check the regulations and the area's kiosks for any restrictions that may apply. Another alternative is the Walk-In Hunting Access (WIHA) program. WIHA has more than 1 million acres of private land the department leases and opens to public hunting (trapping is not part of this program and may only occur with the specific permission of the landowner). The *2012 Kansas Hunting Atlas* includes maps showing all these properties and the information you need to know to hunt on them. Information about hunting access can be found on the department's website at www.ksoutdoors.com.

HESKET WINS BOATING LAW ADMINISTRATOR AWARD

On Sept. 12, Major Dan Heskett, boating law administrator for the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism, received the Association of State Boating Law Administrators' (NASBLA) President's Award. NASBLA president Capt. Mike Fields presented Heskett with the award at the association's 53rd annual conference in Mobile, Ala. Heskett was recognized for helping the organization achieve greater uniformity in vessel identification, registration and titling. Heskett has been a passionate chair of

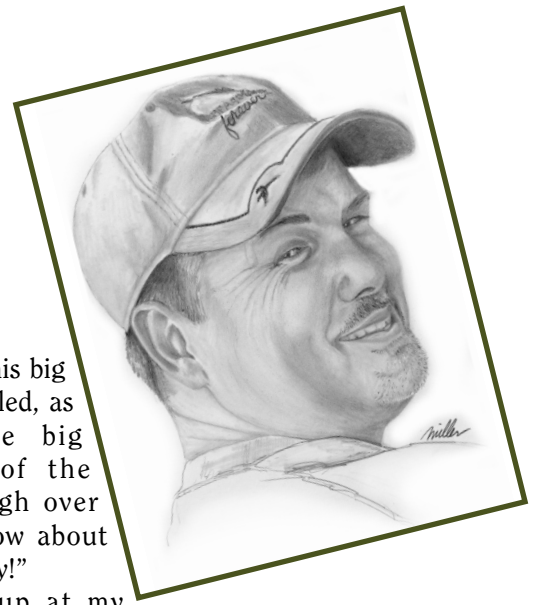
NASBLA's Vessel Identification, Registration and Titling (VIRT) Committee since 2009. With his trademark unique sense of humor, he led the committee through a number of significant projects including: Passage of the Uniform Certificate of Title for Vessels Act with National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws and then adoption of the act as NASBLA's official model act on titling; implementation of the NPRM / Final Rule for Standard Numbering System, the Vessel Identification System

and the Boating Accident Report Database; and publication of the Third Edition of the National Vessel Numbering & Titling Manual

NASBLA is a national nonprofit organization that works to develop public policy for recreational boating safety. NASBLA represents the recreational boating authorities of all 50 states and the U.S. territories.

— KDWPT News

GETTING EVEN



Getting even with somebody is not Biblically sound. It goes against the Golden Rule and is a generally immature way to deal with a conflict – but Dad started it!

It started way back in fifth grade. I had a wonderful garden planted. Big juicy tomatoes and large bush beans grew in plentiful numbers. Sweet corn, radishes, peas, and cucumbers all thrived under my green thumb. I also opted for more exotic plants. I had a good patch of Indian corn, a row of cotton, and a whole fence line of loofah.

My one failure was watermelons. I had a lush, beautiful stand of watermelon vines. The package of seeds claimed that the fruit grew to between 30 and 40 pounds. Despite the healthy vegetation, only small, nondescript fruit grew in the watermelon patch. I would rummage through the vines daily looking for the elusive big one and always came up empty.

One warm afternoon I was watching my daily dose of cartoons when my dad arrived home from work. Dad was a creature of habit. His afternoon routine was to come home from work, grab a saltshaker and a knife and head for the tomato patch out in my garden. There he would pick the biggest, juiciest tomato and pare it into quarter sections and eat it. To interrupt this sequence was to disrupt the most enjoyable part of his day, and the universe as we knew it would turn dark and menacing.

This day was different. Big Daddy came strolling in and stood before me. My mind whirled; Had I left a tool out in the grass? Had I ate his last bowl of chocolate chip ice cream? Had I scraped my teeth on my fork, potentially causing thousands of dollars of dental bills? The list of possible infractions was endless.

“Let’s go out to your garden and have a look around.” This was as unsettling as it was shocking. This broke all the rules of the father/son relationship that we had forged through the years.

I jumped out of the chair and followed Dad to my garden. Dad casually complimented my garden in general and my tomatoes in particular.

“Any big melons yet?”

“Nope”, I replied, “just a lot of vines.” I kicked around in the vines with disgust. “I just don’t understand it.” Suddenly I booted a hidden fruit. A huge, beautiful watermelon lay hidden under a mat of green vines.

“Look at this big baby!” I chortled, as I lofted the big melon out of the vines and high over my head. “How about that Big Daddy!”

I looked up at my prize to admire the underside of it and saw a sticker that said “45¢ per lb.” I looked at Dad, threw it onto the ground and stalked off.

Mom came out, and I heard Dad say, “That might have worked a little too well.”

I was immediately filled with a burning desire to get even. The flood gates were open, and this was a no-holds barred-battle. War had been declared.

I was immediately filled with a burning desire to get even. The flood gates were open and this was a no-holds barred-battle. War had been declared.

The next day, Dad went through his same old routine. I heard him get his knife out of the silverware drawer. I heard the cabinet door slam as he picked up his salt shaker and the back door slammed as he headed toward the garden. I watched from my bed room window as he approached the tomato cages from the south. Raccoons were harder to trap. This was going to be like

taking candy from a baby.

As he bent down to pick up the juiciest tomato in the cage, he suddenly sprung into the air like a surprised house cat. He flung his salt shaker and knife and ran to the house, high stepping like a receiver heading for the end zone and screaming like a girl. He emerged from the house with a shotgun in his hand before mom caught him.

“Honey, that is a stuffed rattlesnake that Todd put out there as a joke, knowing that you are scared to death of snakes.” The striking rattler had been strategically placed by the ripest tomato.

“That’s not funny at all”, he yelled, looking at my bedroom window with malice.

“Maybe that worked just a little too well,” my mom replied with a smirk.

He looked at her and gave her one of those smiles that only went as far as the mouth. He followed Mom into the house, the steam coming out of his ears. He glanced one more time at my room window, pointed his finger at me and shook his head. I knew it was game on from then on.

If you've ever hunted or fished in Kansas during the winter months, you know that the water can get pretty cold. Even boating while the weather is warmer can be considered dangerous if the water temperature is much cooler than the air. As a rule of thumb, if the air and water temperature added together is less than 100 degrees and you fall into the water, you could be looking at a hypothermic situation.

Hypothermia occurs when your body loses heat faster than it can produce it, and cold water robs the body of heat 25 times faster than cold air. When your core body temperature drops below normal (98.6 degrees) you become hypothermic. How you handle the events following a fall into cold water can dramatically improve your chance for survival.

What you should remember is 1-10-1. You generally have one minute to get your breathing under control. The most important thing to remember is not to panic. Next you will have about 10 minutes to self rescue or prepare to be rescued before movement in your extremities becomes difficult. Depending upon the water temperature, you will have about one hour before you will drift into unconsciousness due to hypothermia.

The main risk with a fall into cold water occurs within the first minute of hitting the water. An involuntary gasp occurs when your body encounters the cold water, and this can cause you to breath in a large amount of water which can lead to drowning. After the initial shock, you will experience about one minute of deep and uncontrolled breathing. Being able to calm yourself during this time is a must and if you are wearing a life jacket, it is much easier to keep your head above the water line and keep from breathing in a mouthful of water.

Over the next ten minutes, your blood flow starts to move away from your hands and feet in order to keep the core portion of your body warm. Your body's survival instinct is to keep the vital organs in your core warm and functioning. This affects the nerves and muscles farther away from your core and starts to limit their ability to function. It is during this crucial time that any attempts at self rescue should be made.

Boat SAFE

with Erika Brooks

HYPOTHERMIA



The most important thing to do is get out of the water. Even if your boat is capsized and upside down, crawling onto the part of the boat that is still above water will increase your odds of survival. If you can't get out of the water and are not wearing a life jacket, you will eventually lose the ability to tread water or swim due to the lack of response from your arms and legs.

Keeping your core protected can help keep you conscious

longer, and using the heat escape lessening position (HELP) will keep your core warmer longer. Wearing a life jacket makes HELP easy because you just pull your legs up to your chest and hug your knees. This keeps your body compact and surrounds your chest with protection. If you are in the water with another person or people, you can huddle together and share warmth. Most people will generally have one hour in cold water before they lose consciousness and if you are wearing a life jacket, even if you start to fade, your face will be above the water and you will still be able to breathe.

Always dress for the weather by wearing layers that

can be removed if it gets warmer out, and avoid cotton clothing. Cotton will keep the water trapped by your body instead of wicking it away, and it takes a long time to dry. But if you do end up soaking wet, never remove your clothing and shoes unless you have a dry set to change into. Even though the clothes are cold and wet, they provide insulation and will actually keep you warmer. Understanding how hypothermia affects your body and knowing the 1-10-1 rule, you can increase your chance for survival if you find yourself in cold water. Of course, wearing your life jacket is the most important step you can take to increase your odds of survival, any time of the year.



HUNTING HERITAGE *with Kent Barrett*

MANAGE WITH SCIENCE

We have just experienced another spectacular fall season in Kansas. During these wonderful times, we can appreciate the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation or the Seven Sisters that I wrote about a few issues ago. This model is the envy of the world as it has allowed our wildlife resources an opportunity to rebound to unprecedented levels in our beautiful republic. One of those key elements has been on my mind recently, one that normally doesn't get much of our attention; the seventh sister: Scientific Management.

In our hunter education classes, we teach that science is the properly recognized tool for wildlife management. This can at times be a difficult and painful fact that we are forced to recognize because hunters are by nature an emotional lot. The reasons we choose to hunt are quite personal, and we can get passionate about hunting. This happens when we consider our chosen method of hunting or when we speak about our chosen quarry. Anything that directly affects us and our time in the field will elicit a quick response from our hunting community.

Science is based on fact not conjecture or emotion. Science uses facts to create workable theories of wildlife management that are in the best interest of the species. It is a scientific fact that hunting is a valuable tool to use in the management of wildlife species. Science is the basis for determining the requirements needed to sustain animal life. Science is used to determine car-

rying capacity of the land and other factors necessary to sustain viable populations of the species. Science even takes into account man and man's many and varied activities. So wildlife management must be designed to benefit all the plants and animals in an environment and not just the wildlife.

Laws are the fundamental cornerstones that will regulate hunters' activities in order to ensure that we don't harm the valuable resources that we are so richly blessed with. Laws that establish hunting seasons and bag limits provide all hunters a fair share of the resource while ensuring that only the surplus animals are harvested, thereby leaving enough healthy animals remaining to sustain the population. These laws are based in science and are designed to benefit the entire environment.

So now would be a great time to take our hats off and thank the men and women who do such valuable work in wildlife management here in the state of Kansas. They are the mostly unsung heroes who work so hard for the benefit of our wildlife resources. Wildlife science has an almost unbroken string of successes that has helped wildlife not only to survive, but to thrive for more than 100 years. Many species that were almost unknown in the late 1800s and early 1900s are commonplace even in our most urban settings. This speaks to the success of science in managing wildlife. Many thanks to all of the wildlife professionals across the state.

MISSOURI RIVER BLUE SETS RECORD

After the required 30-day waiting period, the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWP) has officially recognized a 102.8-pound blue catfish as a new state record. Rob Stanley, of Olathe, caught the fish, which bests the former state record blue by more than 8 pounds.

When Stanley hooked into a blue catfish while fishing the Missouri River on August 11, he was pretty sure it was bigger than most he'd caught. Stanley had taken a 70-pounder from the Kansas River earlier in the summer, and this fish was showing his heavy tackle surprising power as it bulldogged in the big river's muddy current.

After a 40-minute battle that required pulling anchor to follow the fish downstream and prevent it from taking all of Stanley's 80-pound-test line from his reel, Stanley and his

boat partner, Brad Kilpatrick, realized the fish wouldn't fit in their over-sized net. They wrestled the monster fish into the boat and immediately weighed it on a digital scale. When it "bottomed-out" the 100-pound scale, Stanley and Kilpatrick knew they had a special fish.

After calling KDWP fisheries biologist Andy Jansen, Stanley kept the big cat in an aerated tank near the river. After weighing the fish on certified scales and species confirmation by Jansen, Stanley released the fish back to the Missouri River.

Stanley caught the new state record blue catfish at 5 a.m. using cut bait (Asian carp caught from the river). The fish was 56.75 inches long and had a girth of 39 inches.

Blue catfish are native to eastern Kansas rivers, and there are historical records of fish weighing more than 100



pounds. However, interest in catching blue catfish has been growing in recent years after Kansas biologists began stocking them into reservoirs. Milford Reservoir, near Junction City, received its first blue catfish stocking in 1990 and has gained a reputation for producing blue cats weighing more than 50 pounds. Some anglers believe the next state record is already swimming in

Milford. Other reservoirs stocked with blue catfish include Tuttle Creek, El Dorado, Clinton, Perry, Melvern, Wilson, Cheney, John Redmond, Kanopolis, Lovewell and Glen Elder. It's too early to tell if blue cats will thrive and grow in other reservoirs the way they have in Milford, but if they do, anglers better hang on to their rods.

— KDWP News



CLEAN RABBIT



beagle owner. Most rabbits I have taken have been when pheasant hunting was slow. Occasionally I will go to the woods specifically to hunt rabbits. I usually get the rabbit fever after a snow that is followed by a sunny day. I just love tracking cottontail rabbits and busting them while sunning in a thicket or catching them hunkered near a clump of vegetation.

Game care after harvest is important with any game, including rabbits. Rabbits are often taken running by shotgun, which can result in unpredictable shot placement. I make an effort to field dress each cottontail shortly after it is retrieved. This can be done with a small pocket knife or by expelling the entrails using a method taught to me by an old rabbit hunter. Without going into too much detail, it starts by squeezing the front shoulders between your palms, working your way down the carcass as far as you can, creating a ball between the back legs. Bring the carcass over your head and whip quickly downward. It may take a couple of tries but once you get the hang of it you'll find it's the best way to field dress cottontails. None of the meat gets exposed to grass,

sticks, dirt, or other game inside your game pouch or vehicle. You also reduce the potential contaminate exposure from internal organs perforated by shot.

Once back home I finish the job by clipping the skin in the middle of the back enough to get a finger from each hand in and just pull. To finish cleaning, I use a knife at the joints, where possible, to reduce bone breakage. Fewer broken bones reduces the chance of getting cut while cleaning and cooking. After a thorough rinse I soak the carcass in cold salt water for a day or so in the refrigerator.

Now my wife loves eating rabbit, but she has this thing with bones. I have to debone the carcass when ready to cook and fry like chicken. Quartering, including the back, is a traditional prepping method for panfrying. Rabbit meat is light in color with a mild flavor. Roll pieces in lightly seasoned flour and fry in fresh oil. This is the best method to reduce overwhelming the natural flavors of the meat.



FISHIN' with Mike Miller

"Lucky" Anglers Use GPS

Most fishing sonar units come with the option of including a global positioning system, or GPS. For under 600 bucks, you can get a state-of-the-art LCD fish locator that also provides GPS mapping, and if you learn to use it, the GPS function might help you catch more fish than the sonar function will.

We call them "fish finders," and we all love to see fish on our sonar unit. It gives us confidence when we drop our lures in the water. However, every angler who's used a sonar fish finder has found fish that wouldn't bite. Just finding fish on the finder doesn't guarantee you've found the sport fish you're looking for or that they'll bite. And some species, such as walleye and catfish, spend so much time right on the bottom, they can be difficult to discern on the finder.

Catch more fish with GPS. Every time you find a spot that holds fish and those fish bite, put in a waypoint. Over time, you'll acquire a selection of waypoints for a lake. Then catching fish can be a matter of elimination. Use your GPS to find a spot marked in your waypoints, check it for fish or drop in a lure or two. If you

don't get any action, go to the next spot. Keep checking, always keeping in mind appropriate water depth and location of baitfish, and you'll eventually find cooperative fish.

We've all been on the lake when the fish just didn't bite. But I'll bet every angler has spent a day not catching fish only to find out that anglers in another part of the lake were successful. No matter how slow the fishing seems, some anglers will catch fish. Having a good supply of "fishing spots" recorded in your GPS will help you be one of the "lucky" anglers.



Call Down the Swans

In 1989, I wrote the first of many one-page columns for this magazine under my byline. Initially entitled "For What It's Worth," the column enjoyed a much longer run as "Undercurrents" in the magazine's "Wild Currents" section. But in that first column, I invoked the first few lines of William Blake's famous poem, "Auguries of Innocence":

To see a world in a grain of sand
And a heaven in a wild flower

I also noted "...the people I work with are friendly, helpful, talented, and hard-working." While I hold this latter sentiment more strongly than ever, the Blake lines have taken on great significance.

Having grown up hunting and fishing near the confluence of the Arkansas River and Pawnee Creek near Larned, I was drawn to this job by a strong sense of idealism about and wonder for the natural world. These emotions would deepen as the dedicated and knowledgeable people within this agency, combined with my own article research, imbued an understanding of nature far beyond what I had coming in or could have gained from any classroom.

My first feature article, "Beauty on the Brink," required researching the natural history of trumpeter swans. I learned that this 5-foot long bird with an 8-foot wingspan and weighing 30 pounds is the largest waterfowl in the world. I learned that their quills were preferred by John James Audubon for writing and that by 1933, only 66 of these magnificent birds remained on Earth. They mate for life but may not breed until they are five years old. But today, happily, the North American trumpeter swan population numbers more than 46,000, many in Alaska and along the Pacific Coast but with thriving populations from Michigan to Montana.

This is a success story I came across repeatedly. It was equally astonishing to learn that most such conservation "miracles" have been funded largely through self-imposed taxes and license fees paid by hunters.

I was also fascinated to learn that shrimp inhabit Kansas waters. Fairy, tadpole, and clam shrimp emerge in seasonal wetlands,

often after years of dormancy. I learned about badgers, bison, catfish, killdeer, waterfowl, owls, eagles, prairie chickens, paddlefish, peregrines, porcupines, pronghorn, turkeys, and so much more. One of my most exciting experiences was hiding in a Gove County blind while both lesser and greater prairie chickens danced on a lek almost within arm's reach.

None of these species would exist without habitat, however, and the agency's many talented biologists taught me that habitat is managed to the benefit of all wildlife species. Articles on backyard wildlife, CRP, the work of fisheries and wildlife biologists, fish hatcheries, tallgrass and shortgrass prairies ecosystems, stargazing, and wetlands enriched my understanding of God's creation. The game wardens who protect these natural resources gained my lasting respect, as did the hunter education, fishing clinic, and wildlife diversity instructors who help instill an appreciation for our natural resources. Many of these folks I have written about in the column that eventually evolved into "Profiles."

This list of gifts would not be complete without mentioning Kansas state park articles. From Cedar Bluff to Crawford, Elk City to Meade, Lake Scott to Webster, I was greeted in every park by a manager whose talents, creativity, and energy amazed me. I say this without exaggeration.

Other fascinating article research drew me into the worlds of L.L. Dyche, the first "warden," or head, of this agency. The famous early silver screen outdoor adventurer Osa Johnson, a Chanute native, carried me from Africa to the South Pacific. An article on the American bison gave me greater understanding of that sad chapter in our nation's relationship with nature, a relationship that I believe has turned around thanks to dedicated men and women like those I so briefly mention here.

But looking back at Blake's poem, I see that I have been shaped by these years in other equally, perhaps more profound ways, by life, love, faith, and outdoor experiences I will never forget. The last two lines of the above stanza reflect my growth the past 24 years:



Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour.

In this time here, my wife, Rose, and I have raised our boys – Logan and Will, now 24 and 21, respectively. Adventures with my sons in the great Kansas outdoors were the subject of many columns. Five-year-old Logan calmly asking as I waded into Pratt County Lake to free the line from his tangled Snoopy rig, "Daddy, are you gonna drown?" Later, a canoe trip when five-year-old Will corrected my identification of an osprey, saying, "No, that's a beach eagle." Rose's garden. All these things inspired my work and drove an intense love for family and the outdoors.

Now the boys are grown, and I have retired. Rose's gardens – both landscape and vegetable – have flourished and continue to give us hours of pleasure. My first week after retirement, I visit my oldest son, Logan, in Michigan where he was doing biological research on a lake near Traverse City. He had already fished trout streams in the area, and I caught a 16-pound king salmon from one.

The day we left, I saw a pair of trumpeter swans rise from the lake, their call echoing our departure. Only an hour, my time here seems. Or eternity in the palm of my hand.

As I write, I prepare a trip to western Kansas to hunt pronghorn. I will leave today, but as my boss and friend Mike Miller reminds me, I have one last deadline. With this I say farewell, dear readers. It has been a great run. I can really say little more of my affection for the people, places, and things that have enriched my life here. I am perhaps proudest of the simple words inscribed on my retirement plaque:

"Mark Shoup: In appreciation for 24 years of meritorious service to the sportsmen of Kansas."

– J. Mark Shoup

HUNTING SPOTS

with Marc Murrell

PROMISE OF A NEW SEASON

If variety is the spice of life, then the outdoors in Kansas in November is smokin' hot. There are tons of things to do, and this month is as good as any for experiencing what the Sunflower State has to offer out-of-doors. The deer rut and upland bird openers draw hunters by the thousands. And while it doesn't have as big a following, the furharvesting season also kicks off in November, too.

Some trappers are hardcore and wait for this opener with the same or more passion as deer or bird hunters. They've been tweaking and preparing equipment for months waiting for the day to start laying steel. It's a year-round passion for some as there's always something to do in a fur shed.

I got into trapping a few years ago and have really enjoyed it, usually taking my twin 13-year-old boys along when they don't have basketball practice. Heck, my 19-year-old daughter home from college break last Christmas tagged along and brought one of her friends on a couple checks, and we experienced some things they'll remember forever. It's as much about getting outdoors with my kids as it is about catching fur. And if I go it alone it's refreshing, too.

Last year marked a couple "firsts" for my limited trapping experiences. I caught more fur than ever before and spent more time doing it due to a mild winter. I caught 46 coons and plenty of skunks and possums, too. I trapped my first muskrats ever and caught eight beavers with several weighing more than 50 pounds. It's always exciting to walk up to a trap location and see you've found success. And I don't know there's anything that compares to walking up to one of your first bobcats as I did last year.

I've always set a couple traps hoping to catch a bobcat but never had any luck. Landowners would tell me of sightings, and I'd find tracks and other sign, too. I read more last year and figured I'd try a few tricks and even a couple unconventional things, too. Both of them worked and resulted in my first two bobcats ever.



My daughter was with me on the first one on New Years Day and we were both tickled. It was a nice 25-pound tom and the landowner was nearly as excited as I was we'd finally caught a cat. The second one was caught a couple weeks later. My boys and I had been out on Sunday and we caught a deer mouse in a dog-proof raccoon trap and one of my boys laughed and said we should put it by our bobcat set nearby. It had been out for five days and nothing had come by or at least checked it out. I took the dead mouse and placed it so just his head was sticking out from under some concrete construction rubble where I had my trap. I jokingly said, "Cats love mice, don't they?" to my boys.

My boys had a basketball game so they

couldn't go on Monday evening's check, and I was hustling after work to get traps checked so I could catch their game. I was talking on my cell phone when I pulled in and saw a big bobcat crouching on the concrete slab when I approached. I hollered into the phone I had to hang up and my heart started racing.

After I got the cat out of the trap, I thought my heart might stop pounding from the excitement of this encounter. Nope. It was well into my boys basketball game an hour later when I finally calmed down. I think it's this kind of experience and sharing others with my kids that has me as excited as ever for November to roll around again this year.

SAVE WITH PARK PASSPORT

Watch for an exciting, money-saving opportunity to arrive in the mail with your vehicle registration packet for 2013. Last year, the Kansas Legislature passed a law that allows Kansas motor vehicle owners to purchase a discounted, non-transferable annual park vehicle permit during the vehicle registration process. When implemented in 2013, the permit will cost \$15.50 and will be valid until the vehicle registration expires a year later.

The regular park vehicle permit is not going away, however. If your vehicle renews later in the year or you don't want to purchase it with your vehicle registration, you can still get your park permit at KDWPT offices and other vendors, including online, for \$25. Daily permits will cost \$5 in 2013, so the annual permit makes even more economic sense. Residents over 65 and those who have a handicapped tag or placard can still get a discounted permit by going to our offices or vendors, saving half of the \$25 regular fee. These regular park permits, including the half-price ones, will expire on December 31 of

each year. Nonresidents may purchase the regular daily or annual permit from KDWPT and license vendors.

We are also working toward integrating our point-of-sale systems to make getting permits and making reservations a seamless process that will be more convenient for our customers and our staff. Watch for news on this as plans develop.

And don't forget to check our website, www.ksoutdoors.com for events going on at your favorite KDWPT location. We have special hunts, trail rides or runs, and other events going on in our parks year-round. Trails are open for getting in shape for hunting season or for just getting away from

the bustle of everyday life. Cabins can be much cozier than tents for hunters wanting to stay close to the field. A stay in a KDWPT cabin can also be a refreshing break from holiday stress. No matter your reason for getting outside, your Kansas State Parks are waiting for you.

When implemented in 2013, the permit will cost \$15.50 and will be valid until the vehicle registration expires a year later.

GRESS ENDS STORIED CAREER

Readers of this magazine are familiar with Bob Gress. His photos have graced our pages for many years, and he is arguably one of the top wildlife photographers in the country. However, more people probably know Gress as the director of the Great Plains Nature Center (GPNC) in Wichita. Unfortunately for the center and its visitors, Gress who is a gifted presenter, unsurpassed naturalist and all-round likeable guy, retired in September.

His career in Kansas began with the Wichita Department of Park and Recreation in 1979 as a naturalist. Soon after, he assumed responsibilities for the city's "Wichita Wild" program. In 1996 Gress became the director of GPNC and the rest, as they say, is history.

But that history is monumental and far-reaching. Over the course of Gress's 33-year career, he impacted several generations of Wichitans with an educational nature message. He's given literally thousands of wildlife education programs

over the years to kids and adults, becoming an icon for all things natural. He's been honored with numerous awards and accolades, and his work in nature education has been a model for many to emulate.

Perhaps Gress's integrity and character are as notable as his professional accomplishments. He piloted the GPNC through some difficult times with professionalism, grace, tact and courtesy to all involved.

Gress's retirement plans include travel, and he and his wife, Mary, are headed to the coast of Maine sometime in the near future. Rest assured, he'll be asked to contribute to the pages of *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine on a more regular basis. And if there's a bright spot to his retirement for all of us who



enjoy his work, it's that he'll be able to devote more time to writing and photography. I'm not sure he can get any more skilled as a photographer, but if he does, better hang on to your hats.

— Marc Murrell

Go With The Flow

with Mark VanScoyoc

Everyone Needs A Symbol

Kansas has many natural symbols we've adopted to embody the character and heritage of our great state. In case you don't know what they are, I'll list them out for you.

- Bird - western meadowlark**
- Flower - sunflower**
- Animal - bison**
- Amphibian - barred tiger salamander**
- Insect - honey bee**
- Reptile - ornate box turtle**
- Tree - cottonwood**
- Soil - harney silt loam**

From my point of view, do you see a category missing? I realize I'm somewhat biased since I deal with them on a regular basis, but Kansas is one of two states that does not have an official state fish. The only other state not having one is Arkansas.

I'll admit that designating a state fish is not as important as education, economic, and social issues. However, such a symbol could have positive effects on educational, economic, and social activities.

From an educational point of view, consider where fish live; clean water is as important to us as it is to aquatic organisms. A state fish could be a perfect educational tool to teach kids about taking care of our water in rivers, streams, reservoirs, lakes and ponds. What's good, or bad, for the fish will affect us, as well. This education applies to all ages, not just school age students.

Economically speaking, fishing is a pastime that people of all ages and walks of life enjoy. Fishing doesn't just generate income from the licenses and permits sold by KDWP, but also through fishing guide services, stores selling tackle and fishing equipment, hotels, gas, food and other goods and services purchased from local businesses.

It's true that the majority of activities associated with fish

involve angling. Many young people have been introduced to nature through fishing. Visit any lake on a nice spring or summer evening, and you'll see boats on the water, lawn chairs lining shorelines and people enjoying themselves.

Selecting a state fish can establish a starting point to increase education about fishing and introduce all ages to freshwater ecology here in Kansas. I know a lot of people watch nature shows, and our kids learn about sharks, lions and other exotic species, but if I were to ask these same kids to name an endangered or threatened fish here in Kansas, I wonder how many could. It's not a criticism. It's a disconnection that all of us are guilty of; one that scientists, fisheries biologists, stream biologists and other educators would like to correct. I'm not suggesting that we make an endangered species our state fish, just that we select a fish species that represents what's important to Kansans as a whole. I have my own favorite fish that I would like to see selected for various reasons. Here are some of the species that have been proposed and their merits.



Channel catfish - common fish caught by anglers, statewide distribution, produced by aqua-culturists, does well in streams, rivers, lakes, ponds, very popular among anglers.

Topeka shiner - threatened species, named for the city near the stream where it was discovered, requires good water quality to survive.

Bluegill - caught by anglers young and old, statewide distribution, thrives in many streams, rivers, lakes, and ponds.

Flathead catfish - found in rivers, streams, and lakes, current world record was caught in Kansas from Elk City Reservoir, statewide distribution.

I welcome readers' thoughts and suggestions of other species they think should be considered and why. Ultimately I believe we should pick a fish that exemplifies and represents the unique and robust aquatic fauna found in Kansas. It should be a species that no other state has designated as their symbol. Most of all it should be one that all Kansans can be proud to call "their" fish.

We're All Teachers

Are you a teacher? You might be a parent, a hunter education instructor, a baseball coach, a presenter of programs, or maybe even just a hunter or angler. I would guess that every one of you is a teacher at some time. When I was asked to put down my occupation, I always put down fisheries biologist or some politically correct term like environmental scientist. But I have come to the conclusion that I am a teacher most of the time even though teachers are supposed to be those who work for a school, college, or university.

I just got back from teaching fishing classes at the Becoming an Outdoors-Woman (BOW) fall conference. Maybe some would interpret what I do as helping women learn how to catch fish, but teaching is the key word. I also just spent several hours assisting the Biology teacher at the local high school prepare kids for an eco-meet. My official title was coach, but I figure that's synonymous with teacher. By the time this article is printed, I will have "coached" my local 4-H archery team at the 4-H State Championship Matches in Topeka. After that, I have agreed to be a "presenter" at the Lincoln County Conservation Day for the local fifth graders. Then comes setting up my fall 4-H archery classes.

As parents, we are all teachers to our children. I believe (certainly hope) that I have taught my son Fritz how to behave properly, instilled good moral values, and hopefully how to feed himself by hunting, fishing, gardening, or even raising a critter or two. I would attest that we often teach without speaking a word. Our actions, emotions, and facial expressions say it all. Unfortunately, when I look at Fritz, I often see my own stubbornness as if I'm looking right into a mirror. He may have learned that too well!

As teachers, our classroom might be a school room, the shoreline of a lake, a boat on the water, the local archery range, or some wild place. I guided Fritz on his first archery elk hunt in Colorado in early September. What a great learning experience

with so many teachable moments. He did not launch an arrow but got to watch a herd of 15-20 elk in a meadow one afternoon, and we stalked our way to within 15-20 yards of elk four different times. He bugled in a small bull that trotted right in to bow range but stood right behind the only two small pine trees in the whole meadow. I hope Fritz will carry those memories with him for the rest of his life.

At BOW, I presented a slide program called Kansas Critters, which includes slides of Kansas fish and wildlife. I give a little life history and hunting or fishing information and told a few stories. This year one of the women approached me after the program, graciously complimented me on my performance and asked this simple question. "How are hunting and fishing a part of wildlife management?" My first impression (incorrect as it turned out) was

I would attest that we often teach without speaking a word. Our actions, emotions, and facial expressions say it all.

that this lady might disapprove of hunting, so I worded my answer carefully. I calmly said that hunting and fishing basically harvest the yearly surplus, that rules and regulations are in place to equitably manage that harvest, and that the money generated by hunting and fishing license fees is used

to manage all wildlife for the benefit of everyone and everything.

Her final comment was, "Well my husband hunts and fishes and brings that stuff home, but I never knew just why he did it. I can tell that you are very passionate about this stuff and that is very infectious!"

Another very valuable teacher moment.

Think about it. Almost every time you go hunting or fishing or even just talk about those topics, you are probably teaching someone in some way. We use words mentors or mentoring a lot these days, as well as the Pass It On message. Our actions when we are out hunting or fishing are always impacting those around us, whether we are alone or in a group.

What we teach today is shaping the hunters, anglers, and voters of tomorrow, and we all need to be aware of that. So, we all need to set a good example, teach the correct message, and feel good that the future of our sports and our recreational enjoyment are going to be there for us, our kids, and our grandkids.

Guiding On Public Land Requires Permit

Beginning with this fall's hunting seasons, commercial guides must have a permit to guide on lands managed or owned by the department. The permit is free and available on the KDWP website, ksoutdoors.com. Click on "Hunting/Applications and Fees/Public Lands." The permit must be specific to the land where guiding takes place. This includes public wildlife areas as well as Walk-In Hunting Access (WIHA) lands.

"Commercial guide" services means any commercial assistance to hunters, including providing any one or more of the following when used in conjunction with or for hunting activities:

pack or riding livestock, transportation other than by commercial carrier, equipment, or facilities.

"Commercial" means that the recipient of the commercial guide services agrees to provide valuable consideration as compensation for the services, which are provided as part of a business relationship. Evidence of a business relationship shall include advertisement of the commercial guide services, written agreement of the terms of payment, or services provided by an employee of a commercial guide service.

— KDWP News

LESSER PRAIRIE CHICKENS SURVEYED

The lesser prairie chicken is an iconic grassland grouse species native to parts of Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, Kansas and Oklahoma. However, long-term population declines have brought state and federal agencies together in an attempt to better manage lesser prairie chickens and their habitats. Through a multi-state collaborative effort, the first statistically-valid, range-wide population estimate for the lesser prairie chicken has been produced, according to the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' (WAFWA) Grassland Initiative. The range-wide lesser prairie chicken population is estimated at 37,170 individuals.

The WAFWA Grassland Initiative collaborated with the Lesser Prairie Chicken Interstate Working Group, which is composed of biologists from state fish and wildlife departments within the range of the species, the Bureau of Land Management, and West Ecosystems, Inc. of Laramie, Wyo., to conduct a large-scale, helicopter-based survey of lesser prairie chicken leks across all five states. Leks are sites that the birds go to every spring for breeding. These surveys occurred from March-May and encompassed more than 300,000 square miles.

Survey results will be the baseline for a range-wide lesser prairie chicken management plan currently being developed by the five state wildlife agencies in collaboration with the WAFWA Grassland Initiative. This plan is expected to be completed by March 2013, and could influence the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) decision on whether or not to designate the lesser prairie chicken as a federally threatened or endangered species. The lesser prairie chicken has been considered a candidate under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) since 1998, and the Service expects to release a proposed rule on the status of

The final survey report is available at:

http://www.wafwa.org/html/aerial_surveys.shtml.

Media Contact:
Bill Van Pelt
(602-717-5066)



the bird under the ESA in November 2012.

While the lesser prairie chicken population estimate may appear low, biologists are encouraged by what they found. The surveys this spring detected several previously unknown leks, despite severe drought conditions across the region last year. They also discovered leks in Kansas beyond what was thought to be the northern limit of the historic range of the species. Lesser prairie chicken numbers have been largely increasing in Kansas for the last 15 years, while populations have declined in parts of the southern portion of the range. Biologists believe this expansion may represent a northward shift in the population of the species caused by climatic conditions associated with changing precipitation patterns.

— KDWPT News

CHAPMAN WINS AOY TITLE

Kansan Brent Chapman has had a phenomenal year as a professional bass fisherman. The Lake Quivira resident started the 2012 season of the Bassmaster Elite Series ranked 58th in the world of bass fishing, according to the BassFan.com World Rankings. He finished the season by taking sixth place in the final event on New York's Oneida Lake on Aug. 23-26 – good enough to land the 2012 Bassmaster Angler of the Year award (AOY), professional bass fishing's most prestigious honor.

The AOY award not only netted Chapman \$100,000 but ensures him of a string of future endorsements. And he has already qualified for the 2013 Bassmaster Classic Tournament, the Super Bowl of bass fishing. That event will be held much closer to home next year, at Grand Lake, Okla.

— KDWPT News

WAY outside

BY BRUCE COCHRAN



"WHAT HAPPENS IN THE FIELD STAYS IN THE FIELD. OK?"

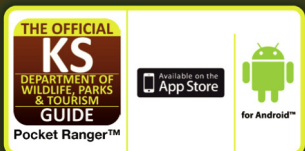
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KDWPT file photo

BOBCAT SCRATCH FEVER

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

Through trapping, this teenager has learned outdoor skills, discipline and the value of hard work. How many high schoolers do you know who would get up at 3 a.m. to run a trapline and make it to school on time?

There are few real boundaries as far as participation in activities like hunting, fishing or trapping are concerned. Whether you're 7 or 70, you can enjoy some facet of the outdoors. But the demographics of those involved, especially those who are avid, will show that most fall somewhere in the middle of the age span. That's why it's refreshing to see a youngster take an all-consuming interest in one of these activities. Usually, it's fishing and occasionally hunting. But the trapping bug is catching, too. And the 18-year-old Wacey Lathers, who recently graduated from high school, is living proof. Lathers spends all his free preparing gear, scouting and trapping. His favorite is chasing bobcats.

"I started trapping when I was 11 years old," Lathers said. "My grandpa told me a story about him trapping when he was young and how he caught his first mink, and it got me interested."

Lathers would tag along with family friends on trapping expeditions and quickly developed a passion for it. His first attempts weren't very successful, but something about it triggered a desire in him to explore the entire experience.

"We didn't have much luck, but as soon as I caught my first coon I was hooked," Lathers said.

The young man jumped into it with both feet. Lathers started reading trapping books and magazines and watching videos. He credits other trappers in his area with providing guidance and instruction, but he figured out the best teacher was experience, so he trapped as

much as possible.

"I didn't have a car or a license, so my dad would take me," Lathers said. "It was a lot of fun."

In just a few short years, Lathers learned a lot. As is the case with many activities, he began to specialize in one area that peaked his interest.

"I really like cat trapping," Lathers said. "When I was younger, the cat prices were really high and I've been hooked ever since. I like the challenge."

He has fond memories of one season in particular with his dad.

"When I was 14 years old, we caught 12 bobcats," Lathers remembers. "We caught a double in one spot and caught four cats in three days so that was really cool."

Once he got his driver's license he could make more sets and spend even more time at it. He admits he didn't play sports in high school because it would cut into his time outdoors. His evenings and weekends were spent running his trap line. Although bobcat trapping is his favorite he doesn't get geared up for that until about late December when bobcat furs are prime.

He begins trapping raccoons when the season opens in mid-November. If you think teenagers are lazy and lack motivation, consider Lather's schedule for the first 10 days of the season last year.

"I'd get up about 3 a.m. and go check my traps in the dark," he said. "It would usually take me at least 3 hours and I'd get back to the house at 6:30 or 7 a.m., and I would have just enough time to shower, eat some breakfast



Each bobcat trap location is set-up meticulously by Lathers so that if a bobcat smells or sees the set it will result in a catch. The trap is bedded solid and then covered with dry dirt and blended in. Sticks are placed around the area leaving the trap pan area open, encouraging the cat to put his foot in a spot that will result in a catch.





The back of Wacey Lather's truck is filled with all kinds of trapping supplies from spare traps to dry dirt. In addition, there are plenty of bones, skulls and the other visual "attractors" that Lathers uses to pique the curiosity of passing bobcats.

and get ready for school."

When asked if he had any trouble staying awake in class he just laughed.

"Not really, but sometimes math got a little boring," he said. "But if I didn't make good grades I couldn't trap."

He's obviously learned the ropes when it comes to raccoons, too. Most of his tactics involve 1 ½ coil-spring traps set in the water and pockets baited with some sort of fish.

"I'd use whatever I had in the freezer," he said. "I had ground-up carp, shad and I'd use a little fish oil, too."

Success was immediate.

"My first check I had 27 coons," Lathers said.

In just nine checks to start the season, he caught 110 raccoons. He sold all his catch on the carcass.

"I'd rather spend my time trapping and out in the woods, rather than skinning and finishing fur," Lathers said.

He said he averaged about \$8 each on his raccoons. Big ones went for about \$10 with medium-sized coons bringing about \$7. Medium and small coons were sold for about \$4 or \$5 each.

Lathers said raccoon movement

slows down with cold weather, so he doesn't do that for too long. That's just fine in his eyes, as it gives him plenty of time to get his bobcat gear tuned up and ready to go. Most years, he'll run 25-30 traps and as many as 45. He's learned what works and sticks with it.

"I use a number three Montana dogless trap," Lathers said. "It's just a personal thing, but I really like it, and it's worked well for me."

He sets on sign, usually scat or tracks, and relies on past years' experience, setting in the same areas where he's had success. Many of his sets are on well-traveled trails, and each is meticulous by design.

"I use some of the western-style cat trapping techniques," Lathers said. "I use a walk-through flat set."

His traps are anchored to drags, usually the top section of an Osage orange tree. He beds the trap and covers it with dry dirt he saved from last summer. It takes a lot of dirt to run traps for several months and he figures he stashes at least 150 gallons annually. He might use some flagging to attract a cat's attention and then he'll use sticks placed strategically so the cat steps on the trap. After adding various lures to tempt a bobcat's nose and curiosity, his set is complete.

Lathers checks his bobcat traps daily as the law requires. And he does this rain, shine, sleet or snow. Sometimes

the weather gets downright miserable, and roads turn to muck.

"You have to have 4-wheel drive or you're stuck to good roads," Lathers said. "And bobcats aren't always on good roads."

Lathers sets bobcat traps each season usually from mid- to late December. He didn't have any cats on his first check the first day last season but found success after day two, when he connected on two nice bobcats. And the first five days of last season's cat line yielded six bobcats. He leaves his traps in place for a couple weeks and then moves them to a new location and repeats the process again after another few weeks.

Lathers' best bobcat year was the 2010-2011 season when he caught 16. The most he got for any one fur was \$100, and he figures he averaged about \$50 for each cat. He's not really in it for the money and enjoys his time outdoors in good weather and bad. Tricking a bobcat is a challenge he truly relishes.

"I spend a lot of long, cold days doing this," he concluded. "You've got to love it to do it this much." 🐾



Lathers knows deer trails are often used by bobcats. When he finds bobcat tracks on a trail, he knows he has an ideal set location.

WHAT IS EHD?

Mark G. Ruder, *research veterinary medical officer,
USDA-Agricultural Research Service, Manhattan;*
Shane Hesting, *wildlife disease coordinator, Emporia;*
Lloyd Fox, *wildlife biologist, Emporia*

Answers to common questions about hemorrhagic disease in white-tailed deer

The drought that gripped Kansas over this past summer plagued both animal and crop agriculture throughout our entire state. While the extreme weather conditions also impacted many wildlife species, none was likely as dramatic as what white-tailed deer faced in eastern Kansas. In addition to having to adapt to high temperatures, poor quality forage and scarce water, our deer populations in the eastern third of the state faced a more ominous challenge, epizootic hemorrhagic disease, or EHD.

Many hunters and wildlife enthusiasts in Kansas have likely heard about this disease over the past couple of years. During the late-summer and early-fall of both 2011 and 2012, there were extensive outbreaks of EHD in parts of central and eastern Kansas. Many landowners, hunters, and others have reported dead or sick deer to KDWPT personnel during these outbreaks, and many concerned citizens have had a lot of questions about this disease. To help clear up some confusion about this complex disease of white-tailed deer, we have compiled a list of common questions and answers.

Q. What's the deal with a parasite killing deer?

A. This disease is not caused by a parasite, but rather a virus; actually, a couple of very closely related viruses: epizootic hemorrhagic disease viruses (EHDV) and bluetongue viruses (BTV). Diseases resulting from these viral infections are referred to as epizootic hemorrhagic disease and bluetongue, respectively. However, in white-tailed deer, EHD and bluetongue are clinically indistinguishable without performing very specific diagnostic tests. So, the term 'hemorrhagic disease' (HD) is commonly used to encompass both diseases. The vast majority of outbreaks in deer are caused by EHDV.

Q. What is a serotype, and what are the known serotypes for these viruses?

A. To complicate the picture more, both EHDV and BTV have multiple serotypes, which are basically different varieties of the viruses. These different serotypes of EHDV and BTV are distinguished by unique proteins on the surface of the virus. Worldwide, there are seven EHDV serotypes and 26 BTV serotypes; however, only three EHDV serotypes and 15 BTV serotypes are known to occur in the United States. The majority of HD outbreaks in white-tailed deer in Kansas, and throughout the US, are caused by EHDV serotype 2.

Q. Is it transmitted by a fly or a mosquito?

A. These viruses are transmitted by *Culicoides* biting midges. These small blood-feeders are only a couple of millimeters long (much smaller than mosquitoes) and are often referred to as "no-see-ums." Only the female biting midges are actually blood-feeders because they require a protein-rich meal in order to produce eggs, which are laid in a variety of muddy bottomlands and banks. After passing through multiple developmental stages, adult midges emerge from these areas and fly off in search of a meal. Midges can become infected with EHDV or BTV when they bite an infected deer and ingest virus that is circulating in the deer's bloodstream. Eventually, the virus travels to the midge's salivary gland, and at that point, the midge can then transmit the virus if it bites another deer. The duration of the midge's life cycle (time from egg to adult) varies, and populations of adult midges can reach very high densities when habitat and weather conditions are favorable. In addition, replication of the virus within the midge is greater at warmer temperatures. These factors likely play a role in spawning large outbreaks, similar to the one we experienced this past summer



Deer sick with EHD often exhibit abnormal behavior. This buck with EHD was found standing in a field in Wilson County during a 2011 outbreak. Deer that are out in the open, are approachable, and lack fear of humans are all signs that suggest the animal is sick. Also, notice the open mouth and protruding tongue, as this animal was struggling to breathe. photo by Bob Funke, KDWPT.

Q. Why are these sick deer usually found in or near water during the summer?

A. It's true that outbreaks often follow waterways, which probably occurs for several reasons: 1) Infected deer often have high fevers, and they may seek water to cool down. 2) Waterways often serve as great deer habitat, offering food, water, cover, and safe travel corridors through more developed areas. Prey species must mask problems in order to evade predation. Sick deer likely seek the seclusion of these waterways and many deer die while trying to recover and remain undetected. 3) During a drought, animals must concentrate around available water sources. Unfortunately, these water sources also happen to be where biting midges are likely breeding. Midges won't stray far from these areas if there are abundant animals present to provide the next blood meal. Since the sole means of virus transmission is through biting midges, the disease only occurs when and where midges are active. Hemorrhagic disease is a late-summer and early-fall disease, with outbreaks occurring July through October. The first hard frost kills the adult midges and brings an end to the outbreak.

Q. Do deer get it by drinking stagnant water?

A. No, but these areas can play an indirect role during some HD outbreaks. Biting midges lay their eggs in nutrient-rich muddy areas, not pools of stagnant water. Considering this, you can begin to understand why many severe HD outbreaks often coincide with drought years. As water lines recede during a drought, water-saturated mud flats are left behind, which are great sites for midges to lay eggs.

Q. What actually kills a deer with hemorrhagic disease? Heart attack? Stroke?

A. To better understand the symptoms of disease and the actual cause of death in HD cases, you must first understand the underlying mechanism of the disease. The virus is deposited in the skin after a bite from an infected midge. The virus begins to replicate in a variety of cells within the deer and eventually makes its way into the blood stream. In white-tailed deer, virus replication within the cells lining the blood vessels (i.e., endothelium) can result in severe damage to the blood vessels throughout the body. The body forms small blood clots to patch all of these damaged areas but the system just can't keep up with the widespread damage. Vessels begin leaking fluid and blood into the surrounding tissues and organs. The internal bleeding (i.e., hemorrhages) seen in deer is what gave this disease its name, hemorrhagic disease. In certain cases, as fluid from the leaking blood vessels fills the lungs, the space around the lungs (pleural cavity), or space around the heart (pericardial sac), death can occur very rapidly by suffocation or cardiac arrest. Other deer may die from drowning after they take to ponds and lakes and become so sick and weak that they can no longer hold their heads above water. However, these animals were likely so sick that they would have died from the disease itself had they not been in the water.

Q. Are there different forms or symptom patterns of HD?

A. Yes, HD has been classified in to three forms: peracute, acute, and chronic, which are in reference to time (e.g., very fast, fast, and slow). The forms are easier to understand if you keep in mind the underlying disease mechanism: damage to the blood vessel lining. The peracute form of HD often involves fluid accumulation in tissues or body cavities (i.e., edema and effusion, respectively) after the vessels begin to leak. These cases may end in death as early as four to five days after infection. The acute form of HD, often referred to as the classical form, is characterized again by edema, but also hemorrhages

throughout the body and hemorrhages and ulcers in the mouth. The hemorrhage occurs because at this point, the deer's ability to form blood clots is diminished and bleeding into tissues becomes more severe. These animals may die seven to 14 days after infection. The chronic form of HD occurs later in the fall and into the winter and is unique in that it isn't an active infection because the virus has been cleared from the body. These deer actually survived the acute form of HD and are now dealing with the consequences of that tissue damage. For instance, the lining of a deer's four-chambered stomach (i.e., the rumen) is commonly damaged by the virus during acute HD. So, as it becomes scarred, the deer is not able to efficiently digest food and absorb nutrients. These animals will appear very thin and often die over the winter from starvation. In addition, hoof abnormalities may occur because the infection can disrupt the growth of the hoof wall. Hunters may know these as fever rings, which are present on all four hooves of previously infected deer that survived. In severe cases, these fever rings result in cracked or sloughed hooves, which lead to bacterial infections and lameness, adding to the malnutrition.



Photo of a deer with EHD taken during a 2011 outbreak in Lyon County. Deer sick with HD are often found in or near water. photo by Shane Hesting, KDWPT

Q. If I see a deer that looks sick, what symptoms should I look for?

A. Most of the clinical signs of HD are a directly or indirectly related to the damage to the blood vessel lining caused by the virus. Common early symptoms include fever, loss of appetite, rough hair coat, lethargy, reddening of skin of sparsely haired areas (ie, around eyes, nose, mouth), and red and bulging conjunctiva (pink part of the eye). Deer with ulcers in their mouth are often salivating, whereas others that have fluid accumulation in the lungs or chest cavity may have difficulty breathing. Keep in mind that these are difficult symptoms to see from a distance in a wild animal, so a good rule of thumb is to keep an eye out for abnormal behavior (Figure 15). When deer are very sick, they are often approachable and some deer may be found down and unable to rise. Animals that fail to flee in the presence of people are severely ill and will likely die. However, even animals that do flee and are perceived to be healthy may still be sick.

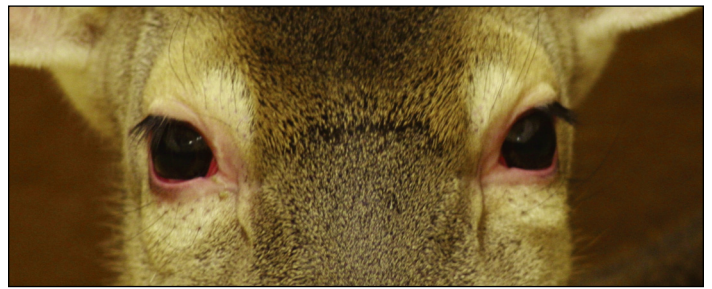
Q. When some deer just seem to fall over dead, why do others in the same population never get sick or survive the disease?

A. The outcome of infection in deer can be highly variable: some deer show no symptoms, some have only mild clinical disease and survive, whereas others suffer from severe disease and die. The reasons behind this variation are complex and not entirely known, but likely involve a variety of virus, deer, and midge-driven factors. For instance, in more northern states, HD outbreaks occur less frequently but it is more likely that they involve severe disease and mortality. In these areas, deer are infrequently exposed to the viruses, so when a virus is introduced it is likely new to the immune systems of the deer. Consequently, most northern deer herds are probably highly susceptible when the virus is introduced, explaining the high mortality.

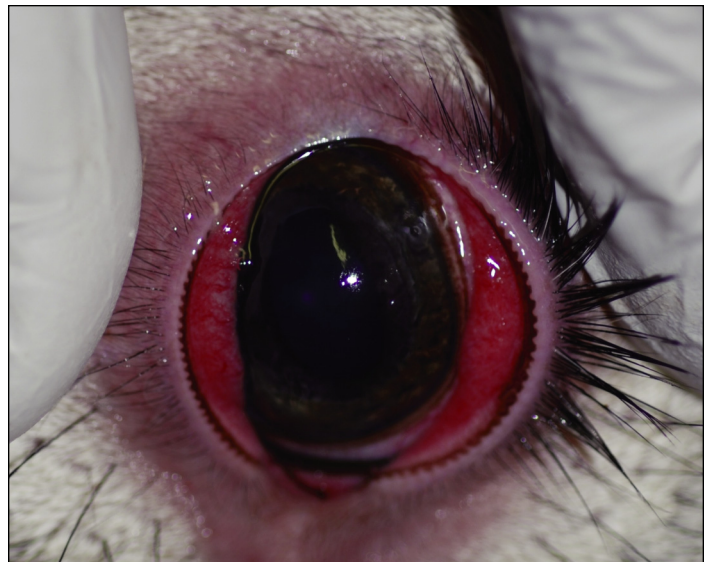
In parts of the southern U.S. where the climate supports larger midge populations for most of the year, HD is reported more frequently, but more animals survive infection or do not get sick at all. In this case, more individuals in southern herds have antibodies against the viruses because of previous exposures, which can serve to protect deer. There is also evidence that different subspecies of white-tailed deer may respond differently to the viruses. It is thought that some southern subspecies have adapted to survive these more frequent viral attacks. The presence of southern subspecies of white-tailed deer in western Kansas may help explain why we don't see much HD in that part of the state.



This trail camera photo was taken in Crawford County during September 2012, at the height of this year's EHD outbreak. Severe EHD outbreaks often occur during years of drought. Notice the receding waterline, exposing transient, water-logged mudflats, which are ideal areas for larval development of the biting midge vector.
photo by Rob Riggan, KDWPT



Common appearance of a deer sick with EHD. Animals frequently have a high fever, decreased activity, and poor appetite. Notice the red and swollen skin around the eyes.
photo by Mark Ruder, USDA-ARS



Red, swollen, and bulging conjunctiva (pink part of the eye) is often observed in deer with the acute form of EHD.
photo by Mark Ruder, USDA-ARS
(printed with permission from Parasites & Vectors)

Q. If I shoot a deer, how do I know if it has EHD and/or is safe to eat?

A. You probably won't know if a deer is infected, especially if it isn't exhibiting obvious signs. During the early deer seasons in September and into October, it is certainly possible that an active HD outbreak could be occurring. By November and December, most deer have either succumbed to infection or have cleared the virus from their bodies and are battling the chronic form of the disease. If the animal appears ill, don't harvest it but instead call KDWPT personnel.

If biologists suspect the animal is sick, it may need to be euthanized and a necropsy (equivalent to an autopsy) will be performed. For biologists and veterinarians, the necropsy may reveal lesions highly suggestive of HD. Tissue samples can then be submitted for testing at the Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study (SCWDS) at the University of Georgia, a long-time partner of KDWPT. Also, if you see suspicious lesions while field dressing the animal, contact KDWPT personnel, who may recommend that you take photos and save tissue samples for testing. Humans do not get infected with EHDV or BTV, and properly cooking meat will destroy the viruses. Although EHDV is not a threat to people, any secondary bacterial infections that result from the viral attack render the meat inedible. KDWPT does not recommend eating the meat of any diseased animal.

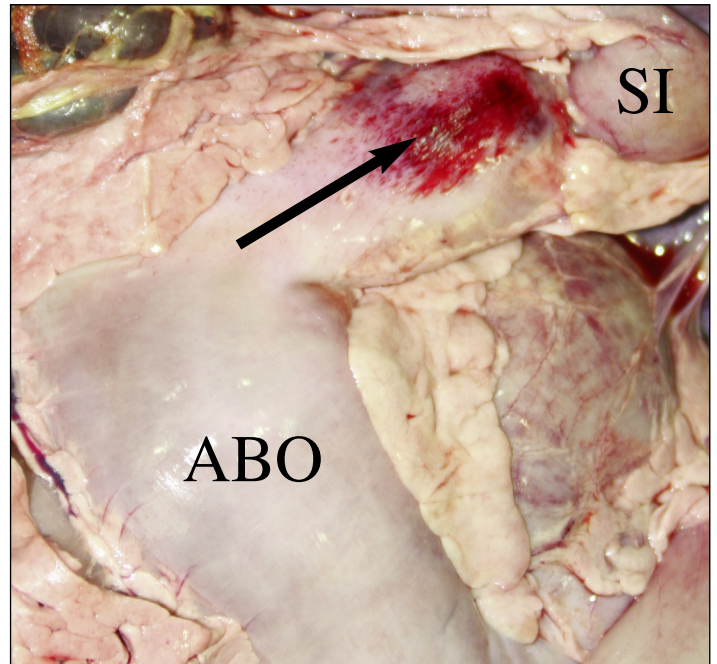
Q. Are older animals more susceptible to HD than younger animals? Are bucks affected more than does?

A. It has not been clearly shown that animals of a certain age or gender are predisposed. It is not uncommon for multiple dead bucks to be found in one area during an outbreak, giving people the perception that they are more susceptible. Deer behavior during the late summer and early fall may have something to do with this perception. Males tend to form small bachelor groups, whereas females tend to stay more isolated with their fawns, which may impact how easy or difficult it is to come across sick and dead deer. However, little is known about how the social stress of these bachelor groups could impact disease susceptibility, so there could be subtle differences in susceptibility to HD that remain unknown.

Q. Are elk and other wildlife affected by hemorrhagic disease?

A. As with many animal species and many infectious diseases, not all infections lead to disease. Many wild ruminants, such as bison, elk, antelope, and deer, become infected with EHDV or BTV,

mount an immune response, and never become ill. These subclinical infections are quite common with EHDV and BTV, especially in species other than white-tailed deer. However, EHD and bluetongue disease do occur in other species. For instance, there are occasional cases of EHD in mule deer, pronghorn, and elk, but these often involve just a small number of animals. Bluetongue has been reported in mule deer, pronghorn, and bighorn sheep, with severe outbreaks occasionally occurring in pronghorn and bighorn sheep. So, while white-tailed deer are highly susceptible to disease, there is some level of risk in other species as well.



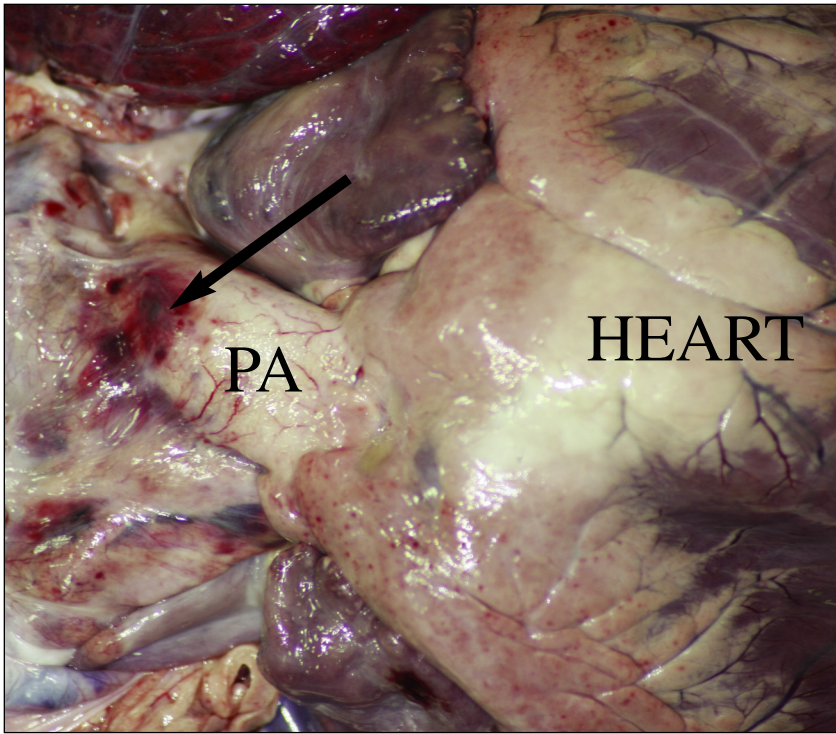
Another classic finding in deer that die from hemorrhagic disease. This photograph shows a hemorrhage on the abomasum (ABO), which is the true glandular stomach in a ruminant. This hemorrhage generally occurs at the end of the abomasum, just before entering the small intestine (SI).

photo by Mark Ruder, USDA-ARS

(printed with permission of Parasites & Vectors)

Q. Are my cattle safe from EHD, and how do I know if my cattle are infected? Are other livestock at risk?

A. Cattle are commonly infected with EHDV, but most infections are inapparent and do not result in obvious disease. For the majority of infected cattle, the virus is eventually cleared from the body and the infection passes undetected by the rancher. However, over the past 60 years, there have been sporadic reports of EHD in cattle in the U.S. Most recently, there were reports of sick cattle from multiple states during extensive EHD outbreaks in deer during 2007 and 2012. In addition, there have been occasional reports of EHD in cattle from other parts of the world. In most of these accounts, relatively



This image shows a classic finding in deer that die from hemorrhagic disease. This photograph of the heart shows a hemorrhage (arrow) on the pulmonary artery (PA), which is the vessel that carries blood from the heart to the lungs. When present, this necropsy finding in a deer is highly suggestive of HD. photo by Mark Ruder, USDA-ARS (printed with permission of Parasites & Vectors)

few animals in a herd showed clinical signs. The most commonly reported symptoms in cattle include fever, lameness, salivation, decreased appetite, and red and swollen conjunctiva. Even when disease occurs, cattle generally recover and fatal infections are rare. If sick cattle are observed during an EHD outbreak in deer and EHD is suspected in cattle, contact your veterinarian. A thorough physical exam should be performed and a whole blood sample submitted to a diagnostic lab to test for the virus. EHD is not a concern for other domestic livestock.

Cattle can also be infected with BTV and while many infections are subclinical, mild disease does occur in some cases. Occasionally, cattle can become severely ill and fatal cases can occur. Certain domestic sheep breeds are highly susceptible to BTV infection and severe disease and death can occur. Recent blue-tongue outbreaks in Europe had widespread impact in cattle and sheep herds, although similar reports from U.S. herds do not commonly occur.

Q. How many deer have died in my area? How many deer have died in the state?

A. This is a very difficult question to answer. When one considers the size of our state and the number of deer present, it is easy to imagine the logistical difficulties and financial cost in determining the

impact of an HD outbreak. While some deer die out in the open or in areas frequented by people, others die in seclusion and are extremely difficult to find. Systematic carcass searches in outbreak areas are one way to figure out how many deer have died; however, this can be complicated by outbreaks spanning large areas involving multiple private tracts of land. KDWPT monitors deer populations using a variety of surveys and other factors. Distance sampling surveys are one technique that allows KDWPT to measure variations in annual deer densities in a local area. These surveys would allow for the detection of large die-offs, but smaller outbreaks would likely go unnoticed. Based on 30 years of data from KDWPT and SCWDS, HD mortality in Kansas occurs predominantly in the eastern part of the state. Reports of HD in western Kansas are extremely rare, so the impact in that part of the state is likely negligible. The reasons for this are likely related to differences in susceptibility between western and eastern deer subspecies, differences in deer density, midge populations, or a combination of factors.

Q. What has it done to the population?

A. The impact of HD to white-tailed deer populations has not been well-documented because it is very difficult to do in wild populations. In fact, only three published studies have attempted to estimate mortality rates in wild deer after an HD outbreak, and rates ranged from just a few individuals to well beyond 20 percent of a herd. Losses in captive white-tailed deer operations have approached 90 percent. In general, higher mortality rates are observed in northern states, as opposed to the southern U.S.

It is important to keep things in perspective. White-tailed deer have been living with this disease for more than a century and although localized population declines certainly occur after a severe HD outbreak, herds generally recover within a few years. Repeated outbreaks in many regions of the U.S. have not limited population growth. White-tailed deer populations have dramatically increased since the early 1900s, when they were nearly killed off from much of their range in the U.S. by overharvest and habitat loss; HD outbreaks did not limit their recovery. However, it is possible that if additional strong mortality factors impact a population, then the rate of recovery after a severe HD outbreak could be slower, or in some scenarios could potentially contribute to long-term declines.

Q. I hunted deer a lot in the 1970s and 1980s and never heard anything about hemorrhagic disease. What has changed?

A. Although there may be changes in the patterns and frequency of disease outbreaks over the past decade or so, HD has occurred regularly throughout much of the U.S. for a long time. Reports of large-scale outbreaks consistent with HD date back to the early 1900s, and probably occurred prior to that. It wasn't until the 1950s and 1960s that the viruses (EHDV and BTV) were discovered to be the cause of this mysterious deer disease. In Kansas, large and highly visible outbreaks historically occur every 3-6 years and don't always blanket such a large geographic area as seen during 2012. There are often intense outbreaks that can be very localized, with adjacent areas remaining unaffected. Also, the fact that there were fewer deer in the 1970s and 1980s probably lowered our ability to detect some outbreaks. These reasons may help explain why even an avid hunter or naturalist may be unaware of outbreaks. The largest and most intense HD outbreaks in Kansas have occurred in 1988, 2002, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2012.

Q. Will KDWPT lower the number of permits available where I hunt because of what EHD has done to the herd?

A. KDWPT monitors deer populations using a variety of surveys and factors. Adjustments in deer permits and seasons may occur when conditions change. The good news is that based on our experience with HD in Kansas, even years with large outbreaks have not been severe enough to cause dramatic changes in permit availability for hunters.

Q. Will KDWPT refund my permit if I do not wish to hunt this year, or will they give me a replacement tag if the deer I shoot has HD?

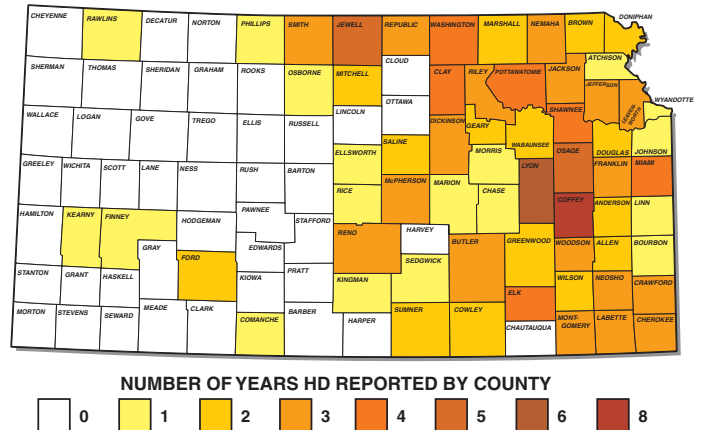
A. The deer permit authorizes the hunter to hunt deer. Changes in deer density between the time you buy a permit and when you go hunting can occur for many reasons other than a disease like HD. Good hunting spots are often located near areas that have suffered HD losses. Previous experiences by deer hunters in Kansas have not shown changes in hunter success rates during years when an HD event was recorded versus years when no HD deaths were reported.

Refunds and replacement deer permits are not issued due to the meat quality of a deer that is killed by a hunter.

Q. Do I need to get a salvage tag to legally possess antlers if I find a dead buck?


A. Dead deer can be salvaged in many cases by obtaining a salvage tag from a KDWPT natural resource officer. If it is believed the deer has been killed illegally, the antlers are repossessed by the officer. Salvage tags should be obtained before moving the animal and/or antlers from the death site. On a side note, salvage tags are also required for those bucks killed by vehicles.

HEMORRHAGIC DISEASE (HD) DISTRIBUTION 1980-2012



Q. What can I do to help prevent this disease from happening?

A. Unfortunately, nothing. For wild animals, infectious diseases are a part of life, just as they are in human populations. It is extremely difficult, expensive, and generally impractical to eradicate a disease in a wildlife population that spans such a wide geographic area. While many people may wonder about vaccines, this is logistically and financially not practical in white-tailed deer. Hemorrhagic disease outbreaks have been occurring for more than a century, and more than likely they will be occurring for many more.

Many people commonly feed and/or bait deer. It is thought that baiting and feeding with certain feeds can impact immune responses in deer, and it also works to bring large numbers of deer together on a small spot on the landscape. This can make it easier on the midges to find and feed on multiple deer. This concentration of deer in one area can also support the transmission of many other infectious diseases. Baiting and feeding is not recommended by KDWPT. 



FIELDS OF DREAMS

text and photos by J. Mark Shoup
associate editor (retired), Pratt

The photo above does not illustrate “crop circles” created by some artistic prankster or a UFO. Rather the patterns were created by a different type of artist; one interested in creating ideal ring-necked pheasant habitat while also making money raising crops. Retired upland bird research biologist, Randy Rodgers, designed a farming system that raises both crops and pheasants.



I grew up in Larned and have hunted pheasants in westcentral Kansas for pushing 50 years, but I have never seen as many birds in one place as I saw last November, when we were in the midst of the worst drought since the 1950s. Bird numbers were sharply down almost everywhere, but not on two Rush County quarters operated by former KDWPT upland bird research biologist Randy Rodgers.

Now retired, Rodgers had a 31-year career with KDWPT, all of that time working out of the Hays Region 1 Office. I had worked with him on numerous projects over the years, including the annual Upland Bird Forecast, published by the agency each September. I would never have forecast that Rodgers and his wife Helen Hands would one day own four parcels of land in Rush County that they manage primarily for wildlife, or that I would have such a good hunt in such a down year. Rodgers saw it all coming.

“It’s been a lifelong dream to own my own land, and fortunately, I have a wife who’s been willing to jump in on this dream, so we have more land than I would have had on my own,” he says. “We saved our pennies as wildlife biologists to make this happen.”

What happened was that money saved became money invested, a nice fund for Rodgers and Hands, a former migratory bird biologist with KDWPT. But that investment was about more than a nest egg for the golden years; it would become a budding wildlife legacy.

About three years before Rodgers retired, a piece of property he liked came up for sale in Rush County.

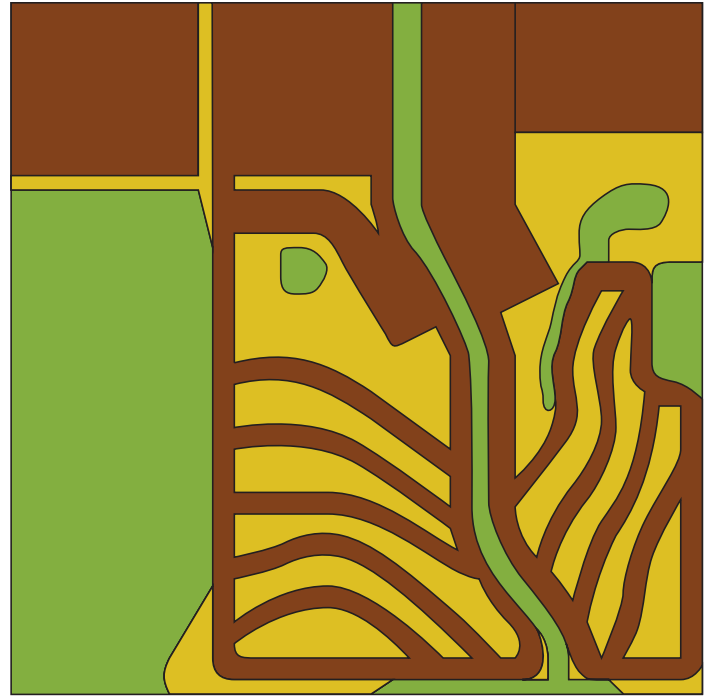
“I remember getting really nervous, thinking someone might buy it before I got the chance,” Rodgers recalls. “I’d gone out to look at it, and I immediately knew it could be a good one. We got that piece and a second about a year-and-a-half later. Subsequently, we’ve gotten two more pieces at auction, 665 acres in four different tracts.”

Rodgers wanted to show what can be done when you manage for wildlife but still want to make a profit. He wanted to manage these properties not only for wildlife but

to address all the soil conservation and water quality issues — incorporating all these elements to create a model for land management. He grassed the terraces, but the main thing he’s done differently is that when he’s put in habitat, it’s generally been within the crop fields. Instead of just grassing the terraces, the cropland is laid out in parallel strips, often a single sprayer-width wide between the terraces.

“Even though when you first look at these tracts, they may seem kind of complicated, they actually farm fairly easily,” he says. “All the cropped areas are designed in multiples of the sprayer width, up to six sprayer widths. We try to keep all of that in parallel, so there’s not a lot of point rows, turn rows, and that sort of thing. Anytime you have a farming pattern like we do, there’s going to be more turning around, but it’s not nearly as complicated as it might look. My tenant’s drill and planter widths fit into this reasonably well, too. I’ve laid out suggested sprayer paths for each field in an attempt to achieve the greatest ease of operation while keeping within the overall design.”

Meticulous in everything he does, Rodgers has created detailed PowerPoint presentations for management of each property. Each begins with a “before” aerial photograph of the property and ends with an “after” shot. In between, he has created graphic illustrations for each step in the transformation of the property, including the original layout of the land, habitat islands and borders, sprayer paths, location of forb-only “brood strips,” addition of shrub thickets, a diversified crop rotation, and where to burn habitat patches when they are bounded by green wheat.



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Clearly laid-out, these presentations outline the entire process and could serve as guidelines for others who might be interested in developing their property in a similar manner. But while Rodgers is idealistic about his land management practices, he’s also a realist.

“I would say first of all that most farmers are not going to want to do anything this intense,” he acknowledges. “We’re not going broke doing this stuff. The federal Conservation Reserve Program has really helped. We’re not getting rich either, but that’s not our intention. The land is doing a lot better than other investments and our tenant farmers are happy to have it. But we’re doing this primarily for wildlife, not maximizing profit.”

Still, Rodgers believes there are a lot of people who either own land to hunt or otherwise recreate but may not know quite how to go about developing their property, who would love to do something like he and Hands have.



“You can actually provide more for wildlife with all this interspersion — which includes cash crops — than you can with a solid block of grass. That’s true for most species of wildlife in farm country, not just pheasants. If a landowner wanted to make a quarter’s worth of habitat ideal for wildlife, they could probably create more birds by spreading that same amount of habitat over a larger area, implementing some of this on several parcels.

“Quail, songbirds, deer, cottontails, and jackrabbits — it’s amazing what we’ve got out there. It’s just unbelievable. Most people put a bunch of food plots out when they want to enhance wildlife. We’ve done just the opposite. We’ve gone from almost totally cropland to, on average, about 40 percent grass. But that habitat is going into critical areas, both in terms of wildlife enhancement and erosion control.”

You might call it “targeted management.” Almost everything’s farmed on the contour, and he’s created a tremendous amount of edge. The three properties where he’s completed the pattern in Rush County now include 26 miles of habitat edges on 426 acres. Of that, about 23 miles are grassland/cropland edges, which are particularly valuable for brood rearing. Once he designs and establishes the

habitat plantings on their newest 239-acre tract, that edge total may approach 40 miles.

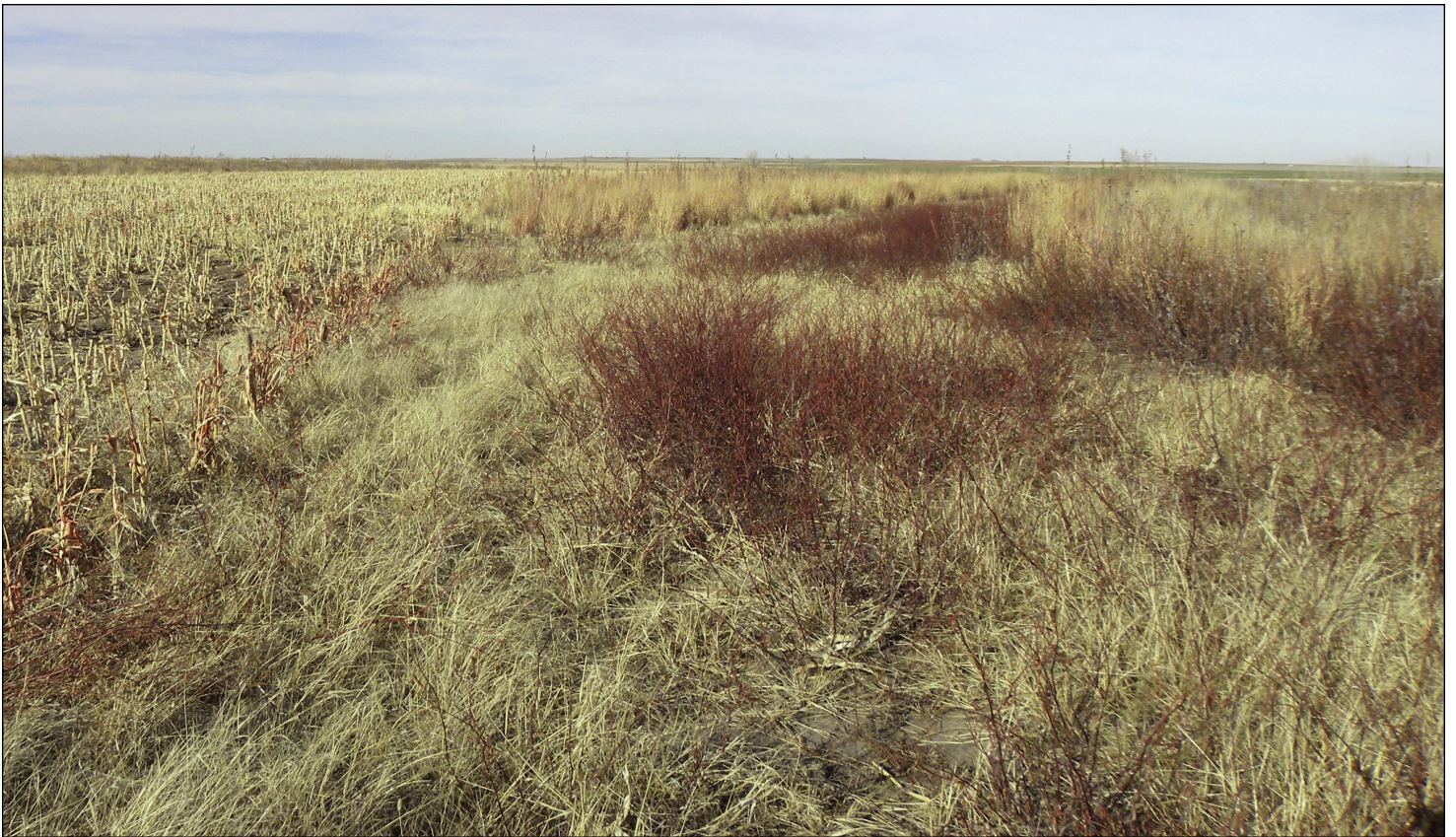
And when it comes to habitat plantings, there’s a little of everything. For example, several varieties of grass/forb mixes provide habitat throughout the pheasant life-cycle. Some is better for winter cover, and some is better for brood rearing. It all contains abundant forbs. Rodgers explains:

“Having the land has allowed me to address all the different aspects of wildlife lifecycles. In one place, we’ve been able to implement the whole picture.”

As KDWPT hunter education instructors teach in the wildlife management section of hunter education courses, wildlife need four things — food, water, cover, and space. Rodgers provides it all. When it comes to space, he talks about “juxtaposition” of these ele-

ments. In other words, not just “is there ample food?” but “where is the food from the cover?” It’s not just that you need X amount of space, but it’s how that space is organized. That’s what these properties provide that you just don’t see in the landscape in general. But there’s more, for both birds and hunters.

“Another thing about our design is that when you’ve got grassland contained within the cropland like we do, you’ve got an almost ready-made firebreak,” Rodgers notes. “This makes management practices such as burning much more convenient. Most of our permanent habitat is surrounded by cropland, which makes burning of those individual patches easier. Placing these strips of grass within the cropland makes management easier and also makes the hunting easier. Not only does it



Rogers has developed a wetland on one of the properties, and the terraces hold some water, where smartweed grows. He’s also planted forb strips in some of the terrace channels and even if they don’t hold water, they provide excellent brood-rearing cover.



The three properties where he's completed the pattern in Rush County now include 26 miles of habitat edges on 426 acres. Of that, about 23 miles are grassland/cropland edges, which are particularly valuable for brood rearing.

produce a lot of wildlife, it holds a lot of wildlife, and it makes it more huntable. The birds don't run out of the field nearly as easily as when it's all connected. They often hold at the edge of the strips, which makes for closer shots. Helen and I are not great shots, but a couple of years ago, we shot 55 roosters, mostly off the same property. Good shooters might have taken many more."

Rodgers' management practices have produced just about everything one could want in terms of wildlife habitat on the mixed-grass plains south of Hays: miles of edge to produce wildlife and abundant forbs to produce food for broods. These practices provide excellent soil conservation, too. The fields experience little runoff because the

flow of most hard rains goes along the terraces, and the terrace ridges and channels are mostly permanent habitat. He's also planted pure-forb strips in the terrace channels. These are the moistest sites on these properties, even if they don't hold water, and provide excellent brood cover.

"Our terrace management makes a difference for both erosion and water quality," he says. "One of our properties has level terraces that hold water where smartweed — an excellent plant for wildlife — thrives. And a wetland we built on that same property is designed to be 42 inches deep, maximum. This was a place that crops had historically been flooded about half the time, so it was a logical place to put a wetland."

Rodgers and Hands have built, and continue to build upon, a bird hunter's paradise and a magnet for wildlife watching year-round. They expect that high-quality habitats, like he and Hands are building, will always be critical for wildlife during weather extremes. But this land is more than just their private refuge. While they plan to enjoy the fruits of their labor for some time to come, they've built something they hope will last. They have a vision of leaving a wildlife legacy for others to enjoy.

"We expect these lands will eventually be available for some form of public access and hunting although we have not decided exactly how we'll do that yet," he explains. "Until we are too old to go ourselves, our land will be


mainly for ourselves, friends, and family. Helen and I love to take friends out, and we frequently have someone else along. But eventually, the land will go to some organization that will carry on good stewardship.”

This is just a brief overview of what one couple — armed with knowledge, will, and a thrifty nature — can do to improve wildlife habitat on private land. It doesn’t show as much how it can be done as that it can be done. And while this is not for every landowner, those who want a great place to hunt or just a wildlife haven should be inspired. You can have a field of dreams for generations to come. The wildlife will definitely come. ♡



Rodgers with the fruits of his labor. He and Hands will eventually make their properties available for some type of public access, hoping the land will go to an organization that will carry on their conservation legacy. Until then, he will keep farming patterns, confusing to some when viewed from above, but making perfect sense to wildlife on the ground.



A man wearing an orange cap and a camouflage jacket is holding a rifle. He is looking down at a black and white dog that is sitting in a field of tall grass. The background is a clear blue sky.

2012 KANSAS UPLAND BIRD FORECAST

The following forecast details breeding population and reproductive success of pheasants, quail, and prairie chicken. Breeding population data were gathered during spring breeding surveys for pheasants (crow counts), quail (whistle counts), and prairie chickens (lek counts). Data for reproductive success were collected during late summer roadside surveys for pheasants and quail. Reproductive success of prairie chickens cannot be easily assessed using the same methods because they generally do not associate with roads like the other game birds.

Two important factors are considered when predicting fall upland bird populations. First is the number of adult birds that survived the previous fall and winter and are considered viable breeders in the spring. The second is the reproductive success of this breeding population. Reproductive success consists of nest success (the number of nests that successfully hatched) and chick survival (the number of chicks recruited into the fall population). For pheasant and quail, annual population turnover is relatively high; therefore, the fall population is more dependent on reproductive success than breeding population levels. For grouse (prairie chickens), annual population turnover is not as rapid although reproductive success is still the major population regulator and important for good hunting.

Kansas experienced extreme drought this past year. Winter weather was mild, but winter precipitation is important for spring vegetation, which can impact

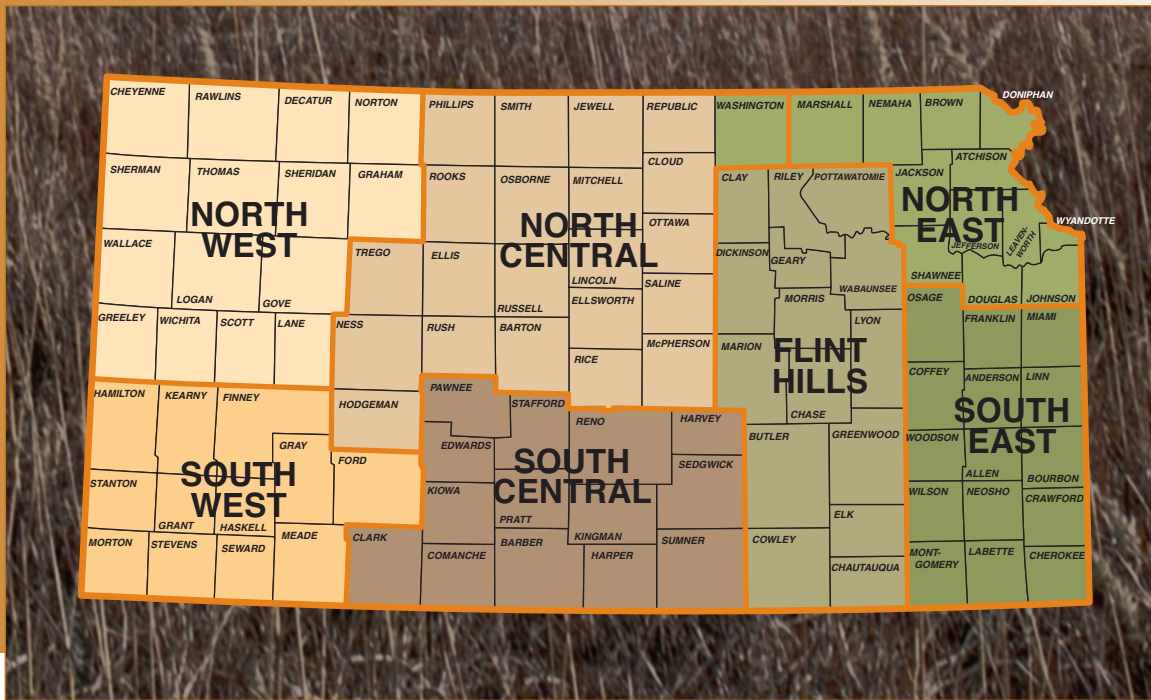
reproductive success, and most of Kansas did not get enough winter precipitation. Pheasant breeding populations showed significant reductions in 2012, especially in primary pheasant range in western Kansas. Spring came early and hot this year, but also included fair spring moisture until early May, when the precipitation stopped, and Kansas experienced record heat and drought through the rest of the reproductive season. Early nesting conditions were generally good for prairie chickens and pheasants. However, the primary nesting habitat for pheasants in western Kansas is winter wheat, and in 2012, Kansas had one of the earliest wheat harvests on record. Wheat harvest can destroy nests and very young broods. The intense heat and lack of rain in June and July resulted in a decrease in brooding cover and insect populations, causing lower chick survival for all upland game birds.

Because of drought, all counties in Kansas were opened to Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) emergency

haying or grazing. Many CRP fields, including Walk In Hunting Areas (WIHA), may be affected. WIHA property is privately-owned land open to the public for hunting access. Kansas has more than 1 million acres of WIHA (atlases available online at ksoutdoors.com or at any license vendor). Often, older stands of CRP grass are in need of disturbance, and haying and grazing can improve habitat for the upcoming breeding season, and may ultimately be beneficial if weather is favorable.

Due to continued drought, Kansas will likely experience a below-average upland game season this fall. For those willing to hunt hard, there will still be pockets with decent bird numbers, especially in the northern Flint Hills and northcentral and northwestern parts of the state. Kansas has approximately 1.5 million acres open to public hunting (wildlife areas and WIHA combined). The regular opening date for the pheasant and quail seasons will be Nov. 10 for the entire state.





NORTHWEST

This region has 11,809 acres of public land and 339,729 acres of WIHA open to hunters this fall.

Pheasant – Spring breeding populations declined almost 50 percent from 2011 to 2012, reducing fall population potential. Early nesting conditions were decent due to good winter wheat growth, but early wheat harvest and severe heat and drought through the summer reduced populations. While this resulted in a significant drop in pheasant numbers, the area will still have the highest densities of pheasants this fall compared to other areas in the state. Some counties — such as Graham, Rawlins, Decatur, and Sherman — showed the relatively-highest densities of pheasants during summer brood surveys. Much of the cover will be reduced compared to previous years due to drought and resulting emergency haying and grazing in CRP fields. Good hunting opportunities will also be reduced compared to recent years, and harvest will likely be below average.

Quail – Populations in this region have been increasing in recent years although the breeding population had a slight decline. This area is at the extreme northwestern edge of bobwhite range in Kansas, and densities are relatively low compared to central Kansas. Some counties — such as Graham, Rawlins, and Decatur — will provide hunting opportunities for quail.

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 central and southeastern portions of the region in native prairies and nearby CRP grasslands. Spring lek counts in that portion of the region were slightly depressed from last year and nesting conditions were only fair this year. Extreme drought likely impaired chick survival.

NORTHCENTRAL

This region has 75,576 acres of public land and 311,182 acres of WIHA open to hunters this fall.

Pheasant – The Smoky Hills breeding population dropped about 40 percent from 2011 to 2012, reducing overall fall population potential. While nesting conditions were fair due to good winter wheat growth, the drought and early wheat harvest impacted the number of young recruited into the fall population. Certain areas had decent brood production, including portions of Mitchell, Rush, Rice, and Cloud counties. Across the region, hunting opportunities will likely be below average. CRP was opened to emergency haying and grazing, reducing available cover.

Quail – Breeding populations increased nearly 60 percent from 2011 to 2012, increasing fall population potential. However, drought conditions were severe, likely impairing nesting and brood success. There are reports of fair quail numbers in certain areas throughout the region. Quail populations in northcentral Kansas are naturally spotty due to habitat characteristics. Some areas, such as Cloud County, showed good potential while other areas in the more western edges of the region did not fare as well.



Prairie Chicken – Greater prairie chickens occur throughout the Smoky Hills in large areas of native rangeland and some CRP. This region includes some of the highest densities and greatest hunting opportunities in the state for greater prairie chickens. Spring counts indicated that numbers were stable or slightly reduce from last year. Rangeland cover is significantly reduced due to drought, which likely impaired production, resulting in reduced fall hunting opportunities.

NORTHEAST

This region has 60,559 acres of public land and 54,170 of WIHA open to hunters this fall.

Pheasant – Spring crow counts this year showed a significant increase in breeding populations of pheasants. While this increase is welcome, this region was nearing all-time lows in 2011. Pheasant densities across the region are still low, especially compared to other areas in western Kansas. Good hunting opportunities will exist in only a few pockets of good habitat.

Quail – Breeding populations stayed relatively the same as last year, and some quail were detected during the summer brood survey. The long-term trend for this region has been declining, largely due to unfavorable weather and degrading habitat. This year saw an increase in populations. Hunting opportunities for quail will be improved this fall compared to recent years in this region. The best areas will likely be in Marshall and Jefferson counties.

Prairie Chickens – Very little prairie chicken range occurs in this region, and opportunities are limited. The best areas are in the western edges of the region, in large areas of native rangeland.

SOUTHEAST

This region has 80,759 acres of public land and 28,047 acres of WIHA open to hunters this fall.

Pheasant – This region is outside the primary pheasant range and has very limited hunting. A few birds can be found in the northwestern portion of the region.

Quail – Breeding populations were relatively stable from 2011 to 2012 for this region although long term trends have been declining. In the last couple years, the quail populations throughout much of the region have been on the increase. Specific counties that showed relatively higher numbers are Coffey, Osage, and Wilson. However, populations remain far below historic levels across the bulk of the region due to extreme habitat degradation.

Prairie Chicken – Greater prairie chickens occur in the central and northwest parts of this region in large areas of native rangeland. Breeding population densities were up nearly 40 percent from last year, and opportunities may increase accordingly. However, populations have been in consistent decline over the long term. Infrequent fire frequency has resulted in woody encroachment of native grasslands in the area, gradually reducing the amount of suitable habitat.



FLINT HILLS

This region has 128,371 acres of public land and 63,069 acres of WIHA open to hunters this fall.

Pheasant – This region is on the eastern edge of pheasant range in Kansas and well outside the primary range. Pheasant densities have always been relatively low throughout the Flint Hills. Spring breeding populations were down nearly 50 percent, and reproduction was limited this summer. The best pheasant hunting will be in the northwestern edge of this region in Marion and Dickinson counties.

Quail – This region contains some of the highest densities of bobwhite in Kansas. The breeding population in this region increased 25 percent compared to 2011, and the long-term trend (since 1998) has been stable do to steadily increasing populations over the last four or five years. High reproductive success was reported in the northern half of this region, and some of the best opportunities for quail hunting

will be found in the northern Flint Hills this year. In the south, Cowley County showed good numbers of quail this summer.

Prairie Chickens – The Flint Hills is the largest intact tallgrass prairie left in North America. It has served as a core habitat for greater prairie chickens for many years. Since the early 1980s, inadequate range burning frequencies have consistently reduced nest success in the area, and prairie chicken numbers have been declining as a result. Because of the drought this spring, many areas that are normally burned annually were left unburned this year. This left more residual grass cover for nesting and brood rearing. There are some good reports of prairie chicken broods, and hunting opportunities will likely increase throughout the region this year.

SOUTHCENTRAL

This region has 19,534 acres of public land and 73,341 acres of WIHA open to hunters this fall.

Pheasant – The breeding population declined about 40 percent from 2011 to 2012. Two years of drought and very poor vegetation conditions resulted in poor reproductive success this year. All summer indices showed a depressed pheasant population in this region, especially compared to other regions. Some of the relatively better counties in this area will be Reno, Pawnee, and Pratt although these counties have not been immune to recent declines. There will likely few good hunting opportunities this fall.

Quail – The breeding population dropped over 30 percent this year from 2011 although long term trends (since 1998) have been stable in this region. This region generally has some of the highest quail densities in Kansas, but prolonged drought and reduced vegetation have caused significant declines in recent years. Counties such as Reno, Pratt, and Stafford will likely have the best opportunities in the region. While populations may be down compared to recent years, this region will continue to provide fair hunting opportunities for quail.



Prairie Chicken – This region is almost entirely occupied by lesser prairie chickens. The breeding population declined nearly 50 percent from 2011 to 2012. Reproductive conditions were not good for the region due to extreme drought and heat for the last two years, and production was limited. The best hunting opportunities will likely be in the sand prairies south of the Arkansas River.

SOUTHWEST

This region has 2,904 acres of public land and 186,943 acres of WIHA open to hunters this fall.

Pheasant – The breeding population plummeted more than 70 percent in this region from 2011 to 2012. Last year was one of the worst on record for pheasant reproduction. However, last fall there was some carry-over roosters (second-year) from a record high season in 2010. Those carry-over birds are mostly gone now, which will hurt hunting opportunities this fall. Although reproduction was slightly

improved from 2011, chick recruitment was still fair to below average this summer due to continued extreme drought conditions. Moreover, there were not enough adult hens in the population yet to make a significant rebound. Generally, hunting opportunity will remain well below average in this region. Haskell and Seward counties showed some improved reproductive success, especially compared to other counties in the region.

Quail – The breeding population in this region tends to be highly variable depending on available moisture and resulting vegetation. The region experienced an increase in breeding populations from 2011 to 2012 although 2011 was a record low for the region. While drought likely held back production, the weather was better than last year, and some reproduction occurred. Indices are still well below average for the region. There will be some quail hunting opportunities in the region although good areas will be sparse.

Prairie Chicken – While breeding populations in the eastern parts of this region were generally stable or increasing, areas of extreme western and southwest portions (Cimarron National Grasslands) saw nearly 30 percent declines last year and 65 percent declines this year. Drought remained extreme in this region, and reproductive success was likely very low. Hunting opportunities in this region will be extremely limited this fall. ♡





text and photos by Andra Bryan Stefanoni
Pittsburg

While some assume it takes a large tract of land to create wildlife habitat, the author and her family have discovered that two acres can become a wildlife oasis and a great place for youngsters to learn about the wild outdoor world.



The moment we became landowners, we began a grand experiment to attract wildlife to our two acres. In February, we will celebrate a milestone: “Woods Edge” will turn 10 years old. In that decade, we’ve added food, water, shelter and adequate space. We’ve counted species. We’ve practiced conservation and land management.

It has taken a little planning, a little trial and error, a lot of elbow grease,

and a fair amount of trying to explain to neighbors who were used to the “golf course look” what we were doing and why. It has been well worth the effort because it has enabled us to pass on our love of all things outdoors to all ages. We’ve hosted groups like the Sperry-Galligar Audubon Society, Zone 6 Garden Club, Pittsburg State University Wildlife Management classes, and every fifth and first grader from a local elementary school.

But the real payoff has been the living laboratory for our two sons right outside our door. They have grown up with pairs of rubber boots on the back steps — and extras for their friends — a bucket of aquatic dip nets at their disposal, a bookshelf of field guides at eye level in the living room, and pairs of binoculars by every window.

As a result, our sons not only feel comfortable outside, they find joy at being in it. They have become eager hunters and anglers, hikers, swimmers and campers. They will be lifelong outdoorsmen. You, too, can find joy in being in the outdoors right in your own backyard — no matter the size or your budget, all it takes is adding four ingredients: Available space, food, water and shelter.

Available space

We always wanted to live near an edge, or a place where two distinct habitats meet. There is scientific evidence that’s where the greatest plant and animal diversity is found. So we chose the last empty lot in a rural subdivision because it offered just that. Although it had no outstanding features of its own — just grass and a handful of oaks and ash trees — it had an edge: a meadow bordered by a riparian corridor. It also had diverse topography: The highest point in the neighborhood and one of the neighborhood’s lowest spots.

On the high spot, we built a modest home with plenty of windows. The low spot was a seasonally wet area that collected the entire neighborhood’s runoff after torrential rains, so it was an easy decision to build a wetland there. We worked with an agent from our local Natural Resources Conservation Service to develop a site plan, and hired earthmoving equipment to scrape away a half-acre of topsoil at a depth of no more than 18 inches. That soil was used to build a levy on the lowest side, and a water control structure allows for the seasonal draining and filling of our wetland.

But we wanted even more diversity, so we overseeded about a quarter of an acre with big and little bluestem, Indian grass, switchgrass and sideoats grama. When it got waist high, we mowed a few paths through it for after-



An open meadow with a split-rail fence provide a site for bluebird nest boxes.

dinner walks. We burn it each February to provide nutrients to the soil and spur growth, and as each year passes, new species appear.

We don't want to spend our summers on the mower, but we do need grass. We have two boys who enjoy pitching tents, flying kites and pick-up games of baseball. So we left about a quarter of an acre of the property as a long meadow — as much for our benefit as for wildlife. As an added bonus, bluebirds love nesting at the edge of such areas because it allows them open space in which to feed on insects. We capitalized on this by erecting five bluebird boxes on our split-rail fence that surrounds our two acres. In return, they eat plenty of mosquitos and provide us brilliant glimpses of bright blue and orange. We've lifted the side doors of the boxes year after year to peek in on the hatching and growth of countless offspring, the majority of which stay year-round.

Food

Planting several China Girl holly bushes has produce berries as a food source, as well as cover. Friends have passed along divided perennials that found a home along our sidewalk and patio, where they provide seeds for gold finches and chickadees and pollen for the bees. A patch of parsley

attracts the caterpillars of swallow-tail butterflies.

Closer to the house, we fill a range of bird feeders with a diverse menu of store-bought seed, from thistle to safflower to suet; tree-mounted corncob feeders and the acorns below the trees provide the squirrels a steady diet. In exchange, we have a great deal of windowsill entertainment.

It didn't take the raptors long to find several excellent perching spots — the split rail fence, a few ash trees at the edge of the wetland, and a couple of towering oaks in the front yard. We hear the screams of a resident red-shouldered hawk each morning and evening, we have captured images of a kestrel enjoying a recent kill, and we have exchanged calls with barred owls just outside our bedroom window. We know that several of these birds of prey enjoy a steady diet of crawdads, as they leave the evidence behind on the fence posts for our sons to find.

An occasional mineral block keeps the deer out of our garden and within a viewing spot we control, and scattered corn provides the wild turkey a treat. When we lose a tree to a disease or storm, we leave the trunk as a nod to the flickers and woodpeckers that enjoy the insects in the loosening bark and decaying wood.

Water

We use a manual control to allow our wetland to slowly drain in late spring, which mimics a naturally occurring wetland. This allows vegetation to grow in the basin through the summer. With the arrival of early fall, we plug the pipe so rains can fill it again. As soon as the temperatures begin to drop and the daylight hours lessen, migrating waterfowl arrive: Teal, followed by pintails, gadwall and

mallards, and through the winter, Canada geese.

In late spring, the wetland provides just the right environment for a chorus of thousands of frogs, for shore birds such as killdeer, for waders like heron and egret, and for aquatic insects like dragonflies.

We do not rely on the wetland alone, however: Birdbaths in our perennial garden provide songbirds with ready drinking water and a bath. Nectar water in three locations provides hummingbirds an energy source from April through September.

Shelter

A brushpile, mature cedar trees, a rock pile, and admiral junipers we planted at the corners of our home provide ample habitat for birds, amphibians, rabbits, insects, and snakes. A wood duck box in the wet-



The wetland is a perfect outdoor classroom, but it serves double duty — a place to practice wearing chest waders in preparation for the upcoming duck season.

land has hatched at least one brood of ducklings.

A happy man-made accident was the wide overhang on our front and back porches. The barn swallows love it; in five years, we have fledged dozens of families of the acrobatic insectivores — all within view of our kitchen table. The parents appear like clockwork each April, spend the spring and summer flying over our wetland and yard clearing it of mosquitoes, and entertain us while feeding their babies.

Although I take hundreds of photographs a year of the wild visitors we have at Woods Edge, I wasn't aware just what an impact converting two acres of mown grass to a wetland, prairie, and gardens had until my oldest son documented it in his science fair project earlier this year. He tallied the number of animal species we had observed — either live or through evidence left behind — and came up with exactly 101. Of those, he determined more than 75 percent likely would not have lived on nor visited this two acres had it remained simply grass.

And, had it remained simply grass, my sons would have had no place to try out their new waders in anticipation of duck hunting season. They wouldn't have been able to practice casting their fly rods in anticipation of



The native grasses are burned each year to promote growth and diversity. Each year, new species appear. Mowed paths create edge and are ideal paths for after-dinner walks.

some trout fishing. And they certainly wouldn't have been able to raise mallards and communicate with them using their duck calls.

So whether you have a postage-stamp sized yard or several acres, consider trying a grand experiment of your own, especially if you have children. All you'll need are food, water, shelter and adequate space. And a pair of rubber boots and field guides might come in handy, too.

Certification

If you manage for wildlife in your backyard, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism would like to recognize you through the Backyard Wildlife Habitat Certification program, which requires only a simple application, some photos, and \$5. The National Wildlife Certification program requires a slightly more in-depth application and \$15. 🐾



For a science-fair project, the author's oldest son counted the species of wildlife observed or identified by evidence left on the two acres — 101, including wild turkeys.

Andra Bryan Stefanoni is an award-winning journalist and outdoorswoman who lives in southeast Kansas with her husband, Brad, a biologist, their two sons, and several pets. Andra and Brad were the first Leopold Education Project coordinators for the state of Kansas, and both worked at the Abernathy Science Education Center teaching outdoor education classes to school children. Andra is now a full-time staff writer for The Joplin Globe and freelance writer for national magazines, which she does mostly from her home office with a view of Woods Edge. Although she's traveled stateside and abroad, she believes her family's native Kansas is one of the most beautiful places of all. Watch future issues of KDWPT Magazine for reports of her family's outdoor Kansas adventures.

Kansas Park Passport A Convenient Savings

by Ron Kaufman

director, Information Services Division, Topeka

Kansans who enjoy visiting the state parks can count on at least two annual rituals – registering their vehicles and buying their annual park permits. Currently, these tasks must be completed on separate occasions, at different locations or online sites, and using separate transactions. If that sounds rather bothersome, you'll be delighted to know it's about to change. Beginning in 2013, it will be easier and cost less for Kansas vehicle owners to buy state park vehicle permits – they'll be able to buy their permits when they register their vehicles.

A law enacted during the 2012 legislative session will enable Kansas motor vehicle owners to buy discounted, non-transferable annual park vehicle permits during their vehicle registration process. The permit will cost \$15.00. County treasurers can elect to add a \$0.50 service fee. The lower-price annual permit will only be available during the vehicle registration process at a motor vehicle registration office or online. The permit will expire when the vehicle registration expires a year later.

The regular state park annual vehicle permit fee will be \$25.00, and the daily vehicle permit fee will be \$5.00, including processing fees. Persons who buy their vehicle permits separately at a Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) office or vendor will have to pay the regular permit prices. Owners of vehicles not registered in Kansas will have to pay the regular price for annual and daily permits.

The law also includes half-price



park permits for residents 65 years of age or older or those with disabilities. The daily or annual park permit fee for a vehicle registered in Kansas by a resident 65 or more years of age or who has a disability and displays a special license plate or placard issued pursuant to state law would be one-half the fee for regular daily or annual vehicle park permits when obtained from KDWPT offices, vendors or online.

Why is this an important change? Well, it's not easy running a state park system when the pool of money to do so is like a pond in a Kansas drought – drying up. Kansas state parks receive modest funding from the state general fund but the amount has dwindled in recent years, resulting in significant setbacks for ongoing operations and maintenance. Park Fee Fund revenues – the Park Fee Fund is used to

operate the state parks – are also strongly influenced by summer weather conditions. KDWPT is striving to be less reliant on state general funds, and the new annual permit will help take away some of the heat – providing a more reliable, consistent revenue stream to stabilize the funding pool.

KDWPT estimates it will see an increase of more than \$1.7 million for the Park Fee Fund, which would offset the loss in state general funding experienced over the last three years. Michigan saw an increase in that state's park fee revenues after implementing a similar program.

So, watch for information early next year about this new service. It will make it more convenient and affordable for Kansans to enjoy our 26 state parks – and help preserve the parks for future generations. ♡

2012 Sportmen's Calendar

TURKEY

2012 FALL TURKEY:

- Season: Oct. 1 - Nov. 27, 2012 and Dec. 10-31, 2012; and Jan. 14-31, 2013.

BIG GAME

DEER:

- Youth/Persons with Disabilities: Sept. 8-16
- Archery: Sept. 17 - Dec. 31, 2012
- Muzzleloader: Sept. 17 - Sept. 30, 2012
- Early Firearm (Subunit 19) Oct. 13-21, 2012
- Regular Firearm: Nov. 28 - Dec. 9, 2012
- Firearm Extended Whitetail Antlerless Season: Jan.1 - Jan. 13, 2013
- Archery Extended Whitetail Antlerless Season (DMU 19 only): Jan. 14 - Jan. 31, 2013
- Special Extended Firearms Whitetail Antlerless Season: Jan. 14 - Jan. 20, 2013 (Open for unit 7, 8 and 15 only.)

ELK (residents only)

Outside Fort Riley:

- Muzzleloader: Sept. 1 - 30, 2012
- Archery: Sept. 17 - Dec. 31, 2012
- Firearm: Nov. 28 - Dec. 9, 2012 and Jan.1 - March 15, 2013

On Fort Riley:

- Muzzleloader and archery: Sept. 1-30, 2012
- Firearm Season for Holders of Any-Elk Permits: Oct. 1 - Dec. 31, 2012
- Antlerless Only
- Firearm First Segment: Oct. 1-31, 2012
- Firearm Second Segment: Nov. 1-30, 2012
- Firearm Third Segment: Dec. 1-31, 2012

Antelope

- Firearm: Oct. 5-8, 2012
- Archery: Sept. 22-30 & Oct. 15-31, 2012
- Muzzleloader: Oct. 1-8, 2012

MIGRATORY GAME BIRDS

DUCK

- Season: High Plains
Oct. 6 - Dec. 30 & Jan 19-27, 2013
- Season: Low Plains Early Zone
Oct. 6 - Dec. 2 & Dec. 15-30
- Season: Low Plains Late Zone
Oct. 27 - Dec. 30 & Jan. 19-27, 2013
- Season: Low Plains Southeast Zone
Nov. 15, 2012- Jan. 27, 2013
- Daily bag limit: 6 (see regulations)

CANADA GEESE (including brant)

- Season: Oct. 27 - Nov. 4 & Nov. 7 - Feb. 10, 2013
- Daily bag limit: 3

WHITE-FRONTED GEESE

- Oct. 27 - Dec. 30 & Feb. 2-10, 2013

LIGHT GEESE

- Season: Oct. 27 - Nov. 4 & Nov. 7 - Feb. 10, 2013
- Daily bag limit: 20
- Conservation order: Feb. 11 - April 30, 2013

YOUTH WATERFOWL

- High Plains and Low Plains Early: Sept. 29-30
- Low Plains Late: Oct. 20-21
- Low Plains Southeast: Nov. 3-4

DOVE (Mourning, white-winged, Eurasian collared, and ringed turtle doves)

- Season: Sept.1 - Oct. 31 and Nov. 3-11, 2012
- Daily bag limit: 15
- Possession limit: 30

EARLY TEAL

- High Plains Season: Sept. 15-23, 2012
- Low Plains Season: Sept. 8-23, 2012
- Daily bag limit: 4
- Possession limit: 8

EXOTIC DOVE

(Eurasian collared and ringed turtle doves only)

- Season: Nov. 20, 2012 - Feb. 28, 2013
- Daily bag limit: No limit
- Possession limit: No limit

2012 Sportmen's Calendar

MIGRATORY GAME BIRDS

RAIL (Sora and Virginia)

- Season: Sept. 1 - Nov. 9, 2012
- Daily bag limit: 25
- Possession limit: 25

SNIPE

- Season: Sept. 1 - Dec. 16, 2012
- Daily bag limit: 8
- Possession limit: 16

WOODCOCK

- Season: Oct. 13 - Nov. 26, 2012
- Daily bag limit: 3
- Possession limit: 6

SANDHILL CRANE

- Season: Nov. 7, 2012 - Jan. 3, 2013
- Daily bag limit: 3
- Possession limit: 6

UPLAND GAME BIRDS

PRAIRIE CHICKEN

- Early Season (East and Northwest units):
Sept. 15 - Oct. 15
- Regular Season (East and Northwest units):
Nov. 17, 2012 - Jan. 31, 2013
- Regular Season (Southwest Unit):
Nov. 17 - Dec. 31, 2012
- Daily Bag Limit: 2 (East and Northwest Units) single species or in combination
1 (Southwest Unit)
- Possession Limit: twice daily bag

PHEASANTS

- Season: Nov. 10, 2012 - Jan. 31, 2013
- Youth Season: Nov. 3-4, 2012
- Daily bag limit: 4 cocks in regular season, 2 cocks in youth season

QUAIL

- Season: Nov. 10, 2012 - Jan. 31, 2013
- Youth Season: Nov. 3 - 4, 2012
- Daily Bag Limit Quail: 8 in regular season, 4 in youth season

FURBEARERS

TRAPPING

- Season: Nov. 14, 2012 - Feb. 15, 2013
Badger, bobcat, mink, muskrat, opossum, raccoon, swift fox, red fox, gray fox, striped skunk, weasel.

RUNNING

- Season: March 1 - Nov. 1, 2012

BEAVER TRAPPING

- Season Dates (statewide):
Nov. 14, 2012 - March 31, 2013

OTTER TRAPPING

• Nov. 14-March 31, 2013, or until the statewide trapping mortality quota of 100 otters is met.

- Season Bag Limit: 2

Each individual who has trapped an otter shall contact KDWP within 24 hours of take, toll-free at 855-778-6887 (RPT-OTTR).

SMALL GAME ANIMALS

SQUIRREL

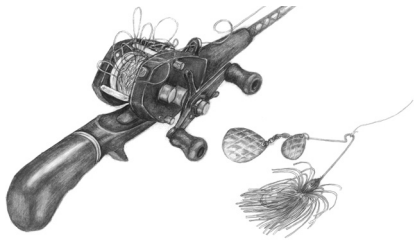
- Season: June 1, 2012 - Feb. 28, 2013
- Daily bag limit: 5
- Possession limit: 20

RABBITS (cottontail & jackrabbit)

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

CROW

- Season: Nov. 10, 2012 - March 10, 2013
- Daily bag/Possession Limit: No Limit



Backlash

by Mike Miller

GRANDDAD'S .22

My shooting experience was limited to my Crossman BB gun before we moved to Greensburg. I was 11 and completely obsessed with fishing, and even though I had spent my life to that point living in large urban areas, I had a strong attraction to hunting. I read every hunting magazine I could get my hands on, and I was mesmerized by my granddad's stories of hunting in Kansas and Colorado. Moving to a small town in southcentral Kansas opened the door to hunting for me.

A part of that move was Mom and Dad coming home. Mom had been born in Greensburg and Dad was born in Haviland. Dad's family still owned land south of Haviland, and when he reconnected with the abandoned homestead where he had lived as a boy, we found a perfect place to plink. I still remember putting my first holes in a tin can with a .22 rifle.

The old bolt-action .22 had always been in my dad's closet next to the canvas and leather case that held his shotgun. The .22's wood stock was stripped bare of stain and varnish – a refinish job Dad hadn't completed. That first winter in Greensburg, I proposed to Dad that refinishing the stock would be a good seventh-grade woodshop project.

"That's a great idea. If you do a good job finishing that stock, the gun will be yours," Dad said.

He then went on to tell me that Granddad had given him the gun. Even back then, that old Wards Westerfield had some age on it, but it was the best rifle in the world as far as I was concerned. Much later in life, I learned that my granddad's brother had given him the gun sometime in the late 1920s to make up for breaking Granddad's eye glasses. I don't know where Granddad's brother got the gun.

I spent what seemed like half a semester sanding the bare wood in shop class. Each time I would take it to Mr. Moore, our shop teacher, for approval, he'd slide his hands over the wood, pull a mechanical pencil from the pocket of his coveralls, then make some pencil marks where it needed more work. Mr. Moore discovered a small crack near the grip, and he showed me how to work wood glue into it before we clamped it tightly together.

Finally, I stained the white pine with a dark walnut stain. Then I spread a satin wax finish over it and pol-



ished it. When I showed it to Dad, he seemed impressed. We reassembled the stock to the barrel and action, and he handed me "my" gun, commenting on how smooth the finish was. I was proud.

I still have the gun. I've hunted some rabbits and squirrels with it over the years, but mostly I just get it out of the gun safe from time to time to remember. I'll notice dust on the scope lenses and wipe them clean before shouldering the rifle. As I peer through scope, I remember my twelfth Christmas. I can actually remember opening that long, narrow present to uncover a Weaver box holding a variable power scope and rings. It wasn't really a surprise. I had asked for a scope, but I was blissfully happy. We had to take the gun to a gunsmith just outside of Rozel so he could machine grooves into the barrel and install the scope. He must have known what he was doing because 40 years later that gun will still drive tacks.

It's one of those old guns that has no market value to speak of. It was built by Mossberg for Montgomery Wards, and it was not an expensive gun at the time. The barrel shows evidence of rust from many years ago, and the crack in the stock still shows. The wood still holds my junior high woodshop class stain and wax, but the bolt action still works smoothly. I'm stuck with it for sentimental reasons, and I'll always treasure it as part of my own hunting heritage. ♡

