

KANSAS

Wildlife & Parks

MAY/JUNE 2015

\$2.75





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Wildlife & Parks

May/June 2015

Vol. 72, No. 3

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Front Cover: Walleye aren't native to Kansas waters, but through stocking, the species has thrived and become an angler favorite. Photo by Eric Engbretson. **Inside Front Cover:** The view of our natural world from a kayak is truly up-close and personal. Kayaks provide an affordable boating option for anglers and water lovers. Photo by Andra Stefanoni.

Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism
Website: ksoutdoors.com
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What I Like About Kansas

May and June are perhaps the best months to be in Kansas, that is if you like fishing, turkey hunting, morel mushrooms, camping in state parks, hiking, biking, riding horse trails, bird watching – you know, outdoor stuff.

Kansas has a long spring turkey season with a generous two-tom limit in most units. The season opens in April and runs through the end of May. It may surprise you to know that we also have one of the best turkey populations in the Midwest, with Eastern birds along our eastern border and Rio Grandes in the west. Our spring hunters also boast an unbelievable harvest success rate of 60 percent. If you're a turkey hunter, Kansas has to be on your bucket list. And I can't think of a better experience than watching and listening to the Kansas woods wake up on a warm May morning as a tom gobbles in the distance.

But it's a tough choice to make because catching slab crappie in one of our reservoirs is also on the "May-to-do list." Kansas' fertile reservoirs produce lots of big crappie year after year, and spring, when the delectable panfish move shallow to spawn, is the best time to catch them. The spawn will usually start in April when the water temperature reaches the 60s in the upper ends of our lakes. As the water warms down the reservoir, the spawn follows. In May, crappie can be found along rocky shorelines in main-lake coves, near shallow brush and down the rip-rap on jetties and dams. The great thing about spring crappie is that you don't need a boat to catch them. Crappie spawn in water as shallow as 2 feet, so shore anglers catch as many or more spring crappie as boat anglers. All you need is a light-action spinning or spincast outfit rigged with 6-pound line, an eighth-ounce jig, and a small float. Minnows work great, too. Don't forget your stringer or fish basket because you'll want to take a mess of crappie home to eat. There's nothing better than fresh fried crappie. That is, unless you add some fresh morel mushrooms to the plate.

Morels can be found just about statewide and begin popping up when the soil temperature warms and a spring rain adds the necessary amount of moisture. While there are many dedicated morel hunters in Kansas – those who guard their secret mushroom spots with ferocity – you don't have to be an expert to find and enjoy them. A good identification book, such as "A Guide To Kansas Mushrooms," available through

KDWPT's Outdoor Store (www.ksoutdoors.com), is handy, and time in the field with an experienced mentor wouldn't hurt. Once you know what you're looking for, morels are easy to identify and can be found around dying elm trees and leafy ground litter along streams and rivers. Fried in butter, they make a perfect side dish for crappie fillets. Good stuff!

May and June are also our best months for catching walleye. After spawning in March, walleye disappear for a time before reappearing on the shallow flats of our reservoirs and lakes. Anglers target these areas, drifting jigs or spinner rigs tipped with night crawlers. I know I said that nothing could beat eating fresh crappie fillets, but walleye fillets are just as good – tasty, white, flaky meat. Walleye aren't native to our lakes, but because of their popularity with anglers, KDWPT fisheries staff work tirelessly through March and April to produce millions of walleye fry and fingerlings for stocking.

Right now is also a great time to fish for bass. This time of year, black bass are shallow and catchable. Largemouths are moving shallow to spawn, and you'll find them in reservoirs, state fishing lakes, community lakes, and the tens of thousands of privately owned farm ponds that dot our countryside.

May and June are great months for birdwatching. KDWPT's resident birdwatching expert and "Bird Brain" column author, Mike Rader, says that more than 200 species of birds can be seen during the month of May in Kansas as they stop to rest while migrating through to nesting areas farther north. June is a great month to view the birds that nest here, as they build nests and raise young.

So, where do you go to have all this outdoor fun in May and June? Your best bet is a nearby Kansas state park. There are 26 state parks scattered throughout the state and most provide convenient access to lakes and reservoirs. All state parks provide a place to camp, hike, bike, watch birds and enjoy some of the best weather of the year. And many parks have renowned mountain bike trails, equestrian campgrounds and trails, and a long laundry list of other great outdoor activities.

I've lived here all my life, but I'm still amazed when I see what Kansas has to offer in outdoor fun. That's what I like about Kansas. You owe it to yourself to take time this spring and summer and experience Kansas outdoors. ♡

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KANSAS WILDLIFE & PARKS (ISSN 0898-6975) is published bimonthly (every other month) by the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism 512 SE 25th Ave., Pratt, KS 67124. Address editorial correspondence to Kansas Wildlife & Parks Magazine, 512 SE 25th Ave., Pratt, KS 67124 (620) 672-5911. Send subscription requests to Kansas Wildlife & Parks Magazine, 512 SE 25th Ave., Pratt, KS 67124. Subscription rate: one year \$12; two years \$20; and three years \$29. Articles in the magazine may be reprinted with permission. Periodical postage paid at Pratt, KS and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Kansas Wildlife & Parks Magazine, PO Box 16325, North Hollywood, CA 91615. For subscription inquiries call toll-free 1-866-672-2145.

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Letters . . .



PILEATED ON THE BLOCK

Editor:

We recently spotted this beauty eating breakfast last weekend! He was really working over the feed block! Thought the *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* might enjoy this!

Michele Bonuchi
Lenexa

KNPS ARTICLE APPRECIATED

Nadia:

We just got our copy of *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine. I read it from front to back. Of course, I especially appreciated the KNPS (Kansas Native Plant Society) article.

I simply wanted to write to thank you and tell you what a wonderful job you did. I admire people who can put information together in such a clear and inspiring way.

Iralee Barnard
Hope

THANKS FOR THE HUNT

Marc,

Thank you so much for what you do! Jag had a wonderful time at the hunt. I can't tell you how grateful I am that you guys do this for these kids, as kids like Jaggar wouldn't have the opportunity to do so otherwise, and it is truly a passion for him. We ate the turkey last night and it was really good! Honestly, better than I was expecting, lol! Again, thank you so much and I really appreciate you

sending the photos!

Also, is he eligible to go on future hunts, both deer and turkey? I didn't know if it was a onetime program or not, let me know!

Thank You.

Kristen Hawley
Wichita

(Ms. Hawley is referring to a youth turkey hunt her son Jaggar participated in. KDWPT's Marc Murrell guided Jaggar.)

BOAT SAFETY BELIEVER

Editor:

Boat safety is very important and needs to be enforced and though about. The article titled "It's The Law: Prepare Boats For Safety," by Kevin Jones (March/April 2014) talked about having the proper safety equipment and boat readiness: a subject that I used to overlook - now one I stress.

A couple of years ago when I had my boat on the water, I was with my brother and his wife. The water was rather rough and white caps were forming higher than the side of the boat. As we reached a certain spot, I began to coast and kill the engine. As I did, my brother leapt out to swim. Due to the waves and our forward motion, it wasn't long and we were about 80 yards away from him before I realized it. As I looked back, I saw the water was beginning to overtake him. I yelled to my sister-in-law, who was now frantic, to find a life jacket. (As I never envisioned this happening, I rarely carried life jackets.) I cranked the boat up and headed back. As we approached him, I threw out an oar to him and extended my hand just in time to pull him up. Since then, I stress the importance of safety equipment. I hope this encourages others to do the same.

Joseph Campbell
Canton

BIRD BRAIN

with Mike Rader

Bird Identification or “What the heck is that?”

The art of bird identification is an enigma. It can be challenging, rewarding, satisfying and frustrating all at the same time. Those of us considered “experts,” or at least “above average” in my case, have put in a tremendous amount of time and effort to increase our skill level in the craft. Obviously, getting more proficient at bird identification does not happen overnight, but there are ways to streamline the process. Technological advances in optics, more complete field guides, better communication systems and smart phones have shortened the learning curve. But in my opinion, the best way to get better is to spend time outside practicing.

I get lots of questions such as “What kind of bird is that in my yard?” or “What’s that weird bird calling from the woods?” Often, the description of the bird or the imitation of the song are such that there is a lot of guesswork on my part. A few won’t believe the bird they saw is relatively common and isn’t from somewhere else across the planet. More often than not, it’s something pretty common.

Here are some tips that could help you or your chosen “expert” identify a bird.

First, look for features that would make a bird different from birds you’re familiar with. Is it bigger than a robin? Is it smaller than a crow? What does its bill look like? There are a number of things that will help narrow it down. Size is relative, so if the bird is by itself, it can be hard to judge, but try to relate it to a bird you know.

Don’t get hung up on color. It may look just like a robin, except for the color, or the color is different than the picture in the ID book. Individual birds can vary in color/shade/hue, depending on the time of year, stage of plumage, and gender. Some birds show white plumage, which is a form of leucism (white feathers). This is a genetic mutation and not true albinism, which is a complete lack of melanin, even in the eyes. Leucism is not common but does occur in several species. Another funny thing about color is that it can change, depending on light conditions, angle of the sun and other factors. Dark or overcast skies make birds look different than full sunlight. Male hummingbirds are a great example of a bird being able to look dull and plain, then adjusting their gorget (throat feathers) to make them almost glow like a tiny beacon in good light. This is part of courtship or defending territory against other hummingbirds.

Even if you lack artistic talent, sketching an unknown bird will help you remember characteristics when you try to describe it or look it up in a field guide. Making notes on the sketch about bill length, leg color and other details will help you provide a more useful description.

The best reference is obviously a photo taken with a camera or phone. If it’s a weird bird that you hear and cannot see, try to record the call. Some birds, such as Carolina wrens, have more than 30 identified calls/songs, so it can be confusing if they make a call you haven’t heard.

Having shared all that, I’ll say this: you can help yourself. With the availability of reasonably-priced optics, high-quality field guides and access to the Internet, you can make the identification without relying on an “expert.” In fact, that’s part of the fun of birdwatching: seeing a bird you’re not familiar with, then doing the research to identify it.

One thing I find folks ignore when they are looking through a field guide is the range maps of where/when species occur. The authors include these maps because a species’ range is a critical piece of information in the identification process. There are obviously exceptions because birds have wings and can show up in unexpected places, but it’s easier to eliminate the common species first instead of assuming something is rare and working backwards.

There are many good field guides available, including Sibley’s, the National Geographic Society, Peterson field guides, and the Kaufman field guide series. I prefer guides with artists’ renderings rather than photos. A photograph is an image of a bird at one moment in time, where as an illustration can show what the bird should look like as a rule. There are always exceptions, such as the Kaufman guide, which has digitally-enhanced photos that highlight the most likely plumages



birds can be seen in. The Crossley guide shows photos of birds in groups with different plumages and in habitats that help in identification. Find a guide you’re comfortable with.

The best way to advance your bird identification skills is to go out and work on them. This can be done with a mentor, with a group of peers, or by yourself. If you are working with a mentor, don’t be afraid to ask questions or make mistakes – we have all done it. Good mentors are patient and willing to help beginners figure out how to identify a species rather than just blurting out the name and moving on to the next thing. It’s fun to see their eyes light up when they go through the process and get it right.

I don’t want to suggest that the calls I get are a waste of time. Sometimes folks don’t have the resources or are truly stumped. I’m happy to help any way I can, so keep calling and reporting birds that you find interesting or think might be unusual. But you never know, you might find a new hobby if you try to solve the mystery yourself.

IT'S THE LAW

with Marvin Jensen



GAME WARDEN QUALIFICATIONS PT. 2

In the March/April issue, the question of what it takes to be a game warden was discussed. This article will discuss the current education requirements, and the new requirements that will be implemented with the next testing event.

Currently, a bachelor's degree in natural resources, or a bachelor's degree with a minimum of 24 hours coursework in natural resources is required for both the Law Enforcement and Park divisions' natural resource officer positions.

However, through evaluating the candidates who have applied, examining their transcripts, as well as the results of testing events, we've come to the conclusion that preferred degrees and coursework requirements for game warden positions need refinement. This change does not impact the qualifications for park ranger positions.

With a few exceptions, future hiring preferences for game warden positions

will be natural resource degrees or degrees that are closely related to the following fields: fisheries, wildlife, conservation ecology/management/biology, biology with field coursework emphasis, environmental ecology, wildlife range management, and wildlife and outdoor enterprise management. There are too many preferred degrees to list them all. However, this list provides a general idea as to what will be preferred education requirements.

Much the same applies for natural resources coursework. Again, it's impossible to list all the coursework, but the following, or coursework similar to the following, will be preferred: ornithology, ichthyology, mammalogy, entomology, limnology, fisheries/wildlife management, parasitology, population biology, wildlife- and fisheries-related ecology courses, conservation-related coursework covering wildlife- and fisheries-related

topics, and range ecology and management.

Degrees and coursework not on the preferred list for game warden positions include animal science, geology, geography, pre-medical, pre-veterinary, pre-dental, microbiology, park and resource management, cellular biology, and human biology.

When applications are screened, the preferred degrees will have selection preference over those not preferred. This doesn't mean that those with non-preferred degrees will be automatically excluded from consideration; however, those candidates could be excluded depending on the number of candidates that have applied and their educational background.

There are exceptions. As long as a minimum requirement of 24 hours of the preferred natural resources coursework is met, any equivalent bachelor's degree will be accepted for consideration.

While this may appear somewhat confusing, seven years of evaluation of our hiring process have led us to initiate this change in minimum requirements. Our commitment to the citizens and sportsmen and women who utilize the natural resource opportunities in Kansas is to hire the best possible candidates to serve as game wardens.

NEW FISH ATTRACTORS

Members of the Hays Bass Anglers Association teamed up with the Salina Bassmasters on Saturday, March 7, 2015, to work on a habitat project at Wilson Lake, which was one of the first lakes in Kansas to receive a new type of habitat structure called the Georgia cube. Traditionally, biologists have used cut trees to create brush piles to attract and hold fish, providing angling hotspots. However, attaching concrete blocks to trees can be labor intensive and time consuming and the trees don't last very long once submerged in the water. These new specially-designed PVC structures are in the shape of a cube 3 feet tall, 4 feet wide, and 4 feet deep. Cost-effective, easy to place and proven in other states, the new structures not only last more than three times longer than natural brush piles, but they also have been shown to hold as many fish as the natural counterpart without affecting water quality.

The project relies on the cooperation of bass fishing club, to help build and sink the structures. About 20 volunteers from the Hays and Salina bass fishing clubs assembled and sank 30 cubes in a coordinated effort on Wilson. The struc-

tures were set together in groups of three to five pods around the lake and marked with GPS coordinates.

"Our clubs are excited to work with fisheries biologists for this project that really targets habitat for black bass in Kansas lakes," said Nate Brown, habitat committee co-chairman for the Hays bass club.

"Our goal is to produce 150-300 of these PVC cubes each year," said Bryan Sowards, KDWP fisheries programs specialist. "For 2015, structures will go in Milford, Wilson, Melvern, El Dorado, and Cedar Bluff, as well as a variety of other community and state fishing lakes." Sowards added the structures will immediately attract fish for angler harvest, but the overall goal is to accumulate enough structures to improve fish populations.

—Steve Hausler, Hays



Steve Hausler photo

BOAT SAFE

with Erika Brooks

Choosing A Life Jacket



The U.S. Coast Guard requires boaters to have approved wearable life jackets on board for every passenger, and children 12 years of age and younger are required to wear them at all times while on a boat in Kansas. Although not required by law, KDWP recommends that all boaters “Wear It!” regardless of age.

Accidents on the water happen too fast to reach for and put on a stowed life jacket. Drowning is still the reported cause of death in three-fourths of all boating fatalities. In 2013, 84 percent of drowning victims in recreational boating accidents were not wearing a life jacket. Still don’t think you need one?

Fortunately, today’s life jackets are much more comfortable, lightweight and stylish than the bulky orange style most boaters are familiar with. Most of today’s life jackets use inflat-

able technologies that are both cool and comfortable, often resembling a pair of suspenders or a belt pack. Some of these even inflate automatically when immersed in water.

There are life jacket styles available for almost any type of boating activity. Here are some things to keep in mind when shopping for a life jacket.

For cruising in an open motorboat, comfort is key. Choose a life jacket you’ll want to wear for an extended period of time. For ages 16 and older, inflatable life jackets are a great option.

For fishing, consider a vest-style life jacket. Try to find one with features such as pockets and clips to replace a traditional fishing vest.

For personal watercraft and water sports, think rugged design. Inherently buoyant light-weight life jackets are often tough, with multiple buckles and clasps to keep them secure after impact with the water.

For hunting and cold weather, full coats and suits might be the way to go. These are also available in camouflage color.

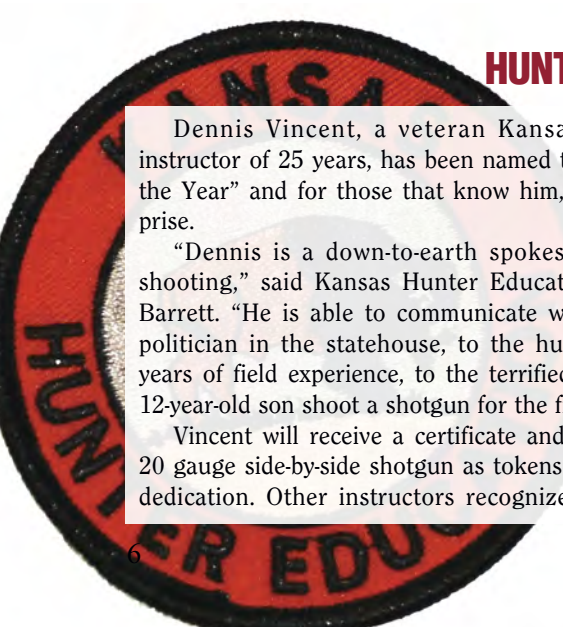
For paddling, purchase a life jacket with large arm openings that allow for ease of movement.

For children, virtually all styles available are sized especially for children. Consider purchasing one with a favorite cartoon character or one with straps for pulling children from the water. High-visibility color schemes are also a smart choice.

For pets, look into life jackets with a handle on top to easily pull your pet out of the water, if needed.

No matter what the activity or style chosen, the most important thing is this: remember to grab a life jacket and “Wear It!”

HUNTER EDUCATION INSTRUCTORS AWARDED FOR EXCELLENCE



Dennis Vincent, a veteran Kansas Hunter Education instructor of 25 years, has been named the “2014 Instructor of the Year” and for those that know him, that comes as no surprise.

“Dennis is a down-to-earth spokesman for hunting and shooting,” said Kansas Hunter Education coordinator, Kent Barrett. “He is able to communicate with everyone from the politician in the statehouse, to the hunting veteran with 30 years of field experience, to the terrified mother watching her 12-year-old son shoot a shotgun for the first time.”

Vincent will receive a certificate and a 2015 CZ Sharp-Tail 20 gauge side-by-side shotgun as tokens of appreciation for his dedication. Other instructors recognized for their exemplary

involvement, performance, and continued dedication to the program include: Marshall Rhea, Region 1; Larry Noell, Region 2; William Kreie, Region 3; Dennis DeLay, Region 4; and Ben Rockers, Region 5.

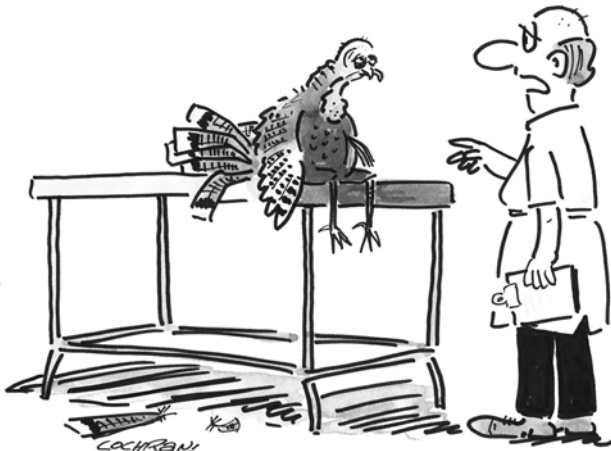
Each regional winner will also receive a certificate of appreciation and a TriStar Viper G2 Synthetic Semi-Automatic 20 gauge shotgun.

For more information on the Hunter Education program and its volunteer instructors, contact program coordinator Kent Barret at kent.barrett@ksoutdoors.com.

To find a Hunter Education class near you, visit ksoutdoors.com and click “Services / Education / Hunter.”

WAY outside

BY BRUCE COCHRAN



"GOBBLE ALL YOU WANT, BUT NO STRUTTING FOR TWO WEEKS"

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS SET NEW PRECEDENT FOR KANSAS DUCKS UNLIMITED

The Prairie View Ducks Unlimited Varsity Chapter has made Kansas Ducks Unlimited history by being the first-ever high school chapter to host an annual spring banquet. The chapter, comprised of more than 70 students and one faculty advisor, held their groundbreaking event March 28 at the 4-H building in Mound City. Attendees enjoyed a dinner catered by K&M BBQ, prize drawings, and a live auction. Items up for grabs included outdoor-themed artwork, decoys, knives, and firearms like a Browning A-5 shotgun, the 2015 Ducks Unlimited Shotgun of the Year.

If you or someone you know is interested in starting a varsity chapter in your area, visit www.ducks.org or call 1-800-45-DUCKS for more information.

HUNTING HERITAGE with Kent Barrett

Traditions: A set of time-honored practices passed on from one generation to another.

I enjoy the holidays because they are periods of time steeped in tradition. The holidays bring up childhood memories and the joy we felt growing up, perhaps in another age and time. Smells of holiday feasts and Christmas goodies can be so strong that we can be instantly transported back to the days of our youth and immersed in memories so real we could swear that we are reliving them. Cherished traditions are powerful stimuli that can evoke memories of activities shared with friends and family long ago. For many of us, the hunt is one of those cherished traditions. Memories of grandfathers, fathers uncles, grandmothers, mothers and aunts along with memories of the hunt, the harvest and the meals that followed can flood over us as the tides.

It seems like every day I am directed to stories of how hunting is being assaulted by the world. Values have changed for those living in urban sprawl as their view of the world has been increasingly influenced by a generation separated from reality, especially that of life and death in the natural world. As people live in their artificially manicured, "back to nature" setting, they can unknowingly accept an artificial view of life. Hunters are often vilified as bloodthirsty killers of everything that moves. Often, these false perceptions of hunters and hunting are unintentionally supported by the media images that were originally intended to promote hunting. This is unfortunate because nothing could be further from the truth.

Hunting is an activity steeped in tradition. Lee Walker, the outreach director for the Virginia Department of Game

and Inland Fisheries has commented, "Hunting is not an activity that you just simply pick up and go out and do. It takes a hunter to make a hunter – people going hunting together and learning how to hunt."

Why would someone choose to hunt? Over time I have determined that it has almost nothing to do with killing! We know that the potential for an animal's death is a necessary requirement for an activity to be a hunt, but it isn't necessary to harvest game for a hunt to be successful. That statement may not make sense to those who do not hunt.

Hunters are many times portrayed as a bloodthirsty, "kill-for kicks" crowd of out of control rednecks. That has never been my experience. Those I have been privileged to hunt with have a regard for life that can only be characterized as reverence. Chris Madsen explained it this way. "Hunting is one of the very best parts of my life. It took me a long time to realize that I don't hunt for 'fun.' I hunt for the joy of being under the open sky, for challenge, for silence, for subsistence given by a wild place."

Everyone hunts for a different reason. But whatever the reason, we must not allow ourselves to be bullied into feeling bad because we choose to interact intimately with nature as a predator in a world where predation is natural.

I hope that your hunting activities this year provided you with ample opportunities to not only cherish but perhaps pass on the traditions of the hunt to someone else. The distance between hunting as a tradition and the extinction of the hunting flame is only one generation. It is up to us who hunt to keep the fires of tradition burning to illuminate the way for those who choose to follow the hunter's path.

Fish Squeezer *Retired but not yet tired*

with Tommie Berger

Start 'Em Young

I recently read two articles, "Start 'Em Young" by Judd Cooney and "Born to Hunt" by Steve Sieben. Both articles mentioned grandpas and fathers who took their sons hunting. My Son Fritz came along later in my life and, unfortunately, his grandpas on both sides of the family were gone before he was born. Oh how I wish he could have known both - they were great mentors to me and formed a lot of my outdoor character. My wife and I made sure Fritz grew up outdoors.

Fritz was born in August of 1996, and my first recollection was taking him fishing at Wilson Reservoir when he was just into the climbing and crawling stage. He was never afraid of water and seemed to be in it every time he was near it. Mom was nervous, even though we had found a small life jacket that fit tubby little Fritz pretty well. He never fell out of the boat, but he did spend a lot of time leaning over splashing in the water. I also found out that he liked to throw things and watch them splash. There are a couple of pairs of pliers, a few lures, and several sets of line clip-pers on the bottom of Wilson Lake courtesy of Fritz. I eventually learned to police the floor of the boat before any fishing outings with him.

Fritz's first hunting adventure was a Comanche County deer hunt. He wasn't quite 14 months old when we went on an early-December firearm hunt. Theresa was after a buck, and I was doe hunting. After the morning sit on a feed field, our tactic was to place Mom in a strategic location and I would walk a draw or river bottom toward her in hopes of moving a buck in her direction. At first, we tried leaving Fritz with Mom but that didn't work - too noisy. So, I simply loaded him up in a backpack child carrier and carried him with me. He'd babble and we'd talk and he'd often sing his favorite song at the time, "Baa, Baa Black Sheep."

I remember shooting at two does that year with Fritz on my back. If I saw a deer,

I'd point it out to him and tell him to be quiet as we stalked closer. He was good about being quiet, but I missed a couple of shots when he would be looking over one shoulder, then shift to the other side for a better view just as I was pulling the trigger. Theresa's favorite memory was when she could hear us coming on a calm morning as Fritz sang his song. But as I got closer, it got quiet and as I eased up to her, she asked, "Where's Fritz?" I turned

Fritz killed his first turkey across the river from our house sitting on my lap when he was 6.

around and she found Fritz fast asleep, slumped low in the backpack.

I recall a fishing outing below the spillway at Wilson when Fritz was 3 or 4. The basin was full of small channel catfish, so Fritz, his mom and I went down to catch 20 or 30 small catfish to stock into a friend's farm pond (This was before ANS regulations.). We took a fish basket and a 5-gallon bucket. We would catch eight or 10 catfish, throw them quickly in the bucket, then dump the bucket into the basket. As the bucket filled with catfish, Fritz stayed busy catching, by hand, the 6- to 10-inch catfish. Mom worried he'd get stuck by the needle-sharp spines, but we had showed him the spines and I wanted him to learn. We fished for an hour or two with Fritz buried in that bucket the whole time and he never once got stuck.

We were using grasshoppers for bait, and Fritz was the bait man. Every time we needed a grasshopper, he would grab one from the narrow-mouthed grasshopper jar. At first, the hoppers were packed in the jar and came out easily. As the numbers dwindled, they got harder to catch. We'll never forget his adamant phrase when he got frustrated, "Hoppers, comed outta der!"

As Fritz grew, I took him with me everywhere. He carried a BB gun on many hunts long before I allowed him to put a BB in it. When he was 4 or 5, we went dove hunting on the edge of a small pond. I took along a few BBs, showed him how to load them, and let him shoot at targets on the pond's edge. He was my bird dog in those days, fetching anything I dropped.

During the fall turkey season, I took Fritz along to get a Thanksgiving bird. We were stalking some birds along a timbered dry creek bottom when I saw a bobcat moving our way. I showed Fritz and we hunkered down to watch. That cat walked toward us and jumped up on a horizontal log maybe 15 yards away. He sat on the log for a short time, then simply jumped off and scurried out of sight. Fritz was speechless.

We continued down the creek to our ambush point and found the 30 or 40 turkeys coming directly toward us. I got Fritz behind a tree so he could see as the event unfolded. As the turkeys came closer, Fritz fidgeted and alerted the birds. But instead of spooking, they were curious and came to within 10 feet. I harvested one of those jakes, and I've never seen a kid so excited after a hunting trip.

Fritz killed his first turkey across the river from our house sitting on my lap when he was 6. He killed his first deer standing in our garden when he was 8, and killed his first buck with a bow when he was 13. He loves to hunt and fish and guess what he wants to be when he grows up? A fisheries biologist. He is attending Kansas State University working toward a dual degree in Fisheries and Wildlife Biology. I hope I'm still alive when the grandkids come. Oh, I'm also writing a book for him, recalling of a lot of my outdoor adventures - it includes these stories, too.

Take those kids hunting and fishing. As Judd Cooney said, "START EM YOUNG!"

I can remember taking the Kansas Hunter Education course in 1974 when I was 9 years old. It was like a rite of passage into the hunting world, and I held on to my hunter education card and accompanying patch like it was gold. While the sewn-on patch likely got tossed when I outgrew my first hunting vest, I still have the original card 40 years later. The mission of the Kansas Hunter Education Program hasn't changed much since then. Instructors still focus on creating safe, responsible, educated and ethical hunters, and give students all the information they need to enjoy hunting and the outdoor world.

To date, the Kansas Hunter Education Program has certified nearly 536,000 students since the program began 42 years ago. The success of the program isn't possible without the support of roughly 1,200 volunteer instructors who donate their time and share their passion for hunting. Many have decades of experience teaching the course and all take pride in seeing students succeed and go on to enjoy hunting.

Although the desired end result has never changed for instructors, there have been several changes related to the Kansas Hunter Education Program requirements, with the first change coming about a decade ago. This allowed any youngster to go hunting, provided they were supervised by an adult without having to complete the course ahead of time. A minimum age to become certified was also established at 11 years old. This option opened the door for kids to get started hunting at an earlier age, and as a father, I took full advantage of it.

My twin boys, Brandon and Cody, were 7 years old the first time they turkey hunted. They sat comfortably between my legs as we leaned against a tree, their gun resting on a set of shooting sticks in front of us. Over the next eight years, they participated in

deer and waterfowl hunting, too. They enjoyed it all and created cherished memories for me and them.

My boys turned 16 last spring so the time had come for them to complete the course in order to buy a hunting license. I chose the Internet-assisted course where they studied and tested online and then participated in a classroom/field day, followed by the final test. The Internet option is also relatively new (versus the standard 10 hours of classroom instruction) and a great way for busy families to complete the course. The boys learned a lot and I was certainly happy to sit through the class again. It was my third time attending as I also went through it with my now 22-year-old daughter, Ashley, when she was 9. Each time I've been amazed at the enthusiasm of the instructors and their efforts to pass on the hunting tradition.



\$300 each to \$440. I'd kept the licenses hidden away for this special occasion and they were thrilled with the gift, especially amazed at the fact that I'd bought them 10 years earlier. I also recently purchased their resident multi-year youth fishing licenses which is a deal at \$42.50 each. This covers their fishing license requirements through the year they turn 21. Their smiles said it all as they stowed their licenses and their Kansas Hunter Education cards in their wallets.

Who knows, maybe they'll hold on to their hunter education cards for the next four decades like I did and be able to share the Kansas Hunter Education Course with their own kids. Regardless, I'm proud to know they'll get to enjoy the great outdoors for years to come. Here's hoping they enjoy it even half as much as I have since I was their age.



When we got home from the day-long hunter education class last March, just days before their 16th birthday, I gave Brandon and Cody an early birthday present. They each received a Kansas lifetime hunting license I'd purchased for them in 2005 when they were 6 years old. It was that year when those licenses increased in price from





Accidental HUNTRESS

WITH NADIA MARJI

TOUGH TOAST TURKEY

YOU KNOW THOSE STORIES ABOUT HUNTERS WHO MANAGE TO FILL THEIR TURKEY TAG WITHIN 15 MINUTES OF SUNRISE? WELL, THIS ISN'T ONE OF THEM.

Eleven hunts. That's how many times I hit the field last spring before I shot "the turkey" I had been eyeballing. Some may call it dedication, others bullheadedness. I suppose it was a little of both.

I set a goal of shooting a mature tom. I'd taken jakes in previous seasons, but I was ready for a big-boy. It was a realistic goal – I had a great hunting spot lined up, ample vacation time, an older bird picked out, and a spring turkey permit ready to be inked. I had everything I needed to get the job done. Little did I know, that job would be a tough one.

Before I get into the nitty-gritty of my spring turkey season, let me explain the title. Growing up, "tough toast" was a phrase commonly used by my mother to let my brother and me know we weren't getting our way. For example, I might have said something like "But Mom, everyone else is wearing them at school! Why can't I?" She would reply, "tough toast." Translated, it meant whatever I wanted wasn't happening. Last turkey season defined "tough toast" for me, at least in the beginning. Luckily I had the foresight to document my hunting experiences. Here are some excerpts:

HUNT 1: Feeling excited! Backpack is equipped with water, box and diaphragm calls, and a roll of Sweetarts. Just sat down and already have to pee. A group of jakes appear out front and stay for a while. I pass, sticking to my goal. No toms appear within range.

HUNT 3: The technical side of my brain is engaged. Brainstorming for any missed opportunities or mistakes in my plan of attack. Decide I've got a good set up and

just need patience. Hear lots of activity behind the blind - turns out to be hens.

HUNT 5: Abandon blind to adjust for new change in their traveling patterns. Set up near treeline just south of the roost. Immediate activity has me confident today is "the" day. Am quickly discovered by a member of the turkeys' frontline — a very snoopy hen. Hunt is over, but I'm still satisfied with my location change.

HUNT 6: Manage to nestle between two bushes for better cover. Coyote appears, attacks my decoys, and flees. The plastic mold must have scared him. Turkeys emerge shortly thereafter, taking an unconventional route. Coyote's presence put hens on full-alert and I'm discovered.

HUNT 8: At this point I'm just trying to justify why I've been suffering through the incessant tingling sensation in my poorly-positioned legs. I accept that sitting still, even as an adult, is difficult for me. Turkeys arrive on schedule and within range again. "The tom" shows, but I don't have clear shot; too many birds in the way.

HUNT 9: Attempted a Hail Mary and decided to hunt from the nearby draw. Turkeys are on the move, so I resort to an army-crawl and move with them for a closer shot. Clothes are soaked and my tushy in the air results in being spotted again.

HUNT 10: In the morning darkness I faintly make out two white stripes. I unknowingly enter the personal bubble of Pepe Le Pew and he doesn't appreciate my presence. I quickly walk backwards and seemingly satisfied with my response, he continues on his way. Lose 10 minutes of time backtracking. Turkeys show, but no tom today. Feeling confused and disappointed.

HUNT 11: Discouraged, I still manage to make it out of bed. Two days left in the season and I'm feeling the pressure. Much-needed affirmation from my mister gives me fuel to give it another go. I hit the draw with plenty of time to spare. Flock wakes and my tom appears. He spots me, but his curiosity of my presence gets the best of him today and he proceeds my direction. I take advantage of the moment, quickly bringing my cheek to stock, and fire. In a blink, I meet my goal. After a couple minutes, I momentarily adjust my "moral standards" and give in for a quick "selfie" to serve as proof of success from my solo hunt. The bird is heavy as I carry him to the truck.



Moral of the story? The right tools, some ingenuity, and a hearty supply of Sweetarts can get you far in life, but perseverance is what will get you to the finish line. That tom was a tough turkey to hunt, but I'm an even tougher hunter for sticking with it. In hunting, as in life, never settle for tough toast

(UNLESS YOUR MOM SAYS SO).

June is National Great Outdoors Month, a bandwagon that most states have jumped upon, including Kansas. Saturday, June 13, is National Get Outdoors Day. How about going camping for the first time? Or maybe the first time in a long time? Many events will take place in Kansas state parks throughout the summer.

Governor Brownback and the KDWP Parks Division will host a Capital Campout on June 5 at Topeka's McClennan Park adjacent to the Governor's mansion. With support from America's State Parks, The Coleman Corporation, the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation, the American Recreation Coalition, and a number of private partners in coordination with federal, state and local agencies, we hope to reprise last year's successful event, designed to get families outside and camping for the first time.

National Trails Day is June 6, so why

not explore some of the many miles of hiking, biking and equestrian trails within Kansas state parks. You can go as short or as long as you want, rugged or easy, on wheels, hoof, or foot.

National Fishing and Boating Week runs June 6-14. Coincidentally, June 6 and 7 are free fishing days in Kansas, where anglers don't need a fishing license to toss in a line (though any other permit requirements are still in effect). Start the day with fishing, engage in boating sports in the afternoon, hike before dinner, then finish the day with s'mores around a campfire.

To help you find your way to or around a park, we have a handy smart phone App called the Pocket Ranger, by ParksbyNature. This App allows you to get directions to a park, download a map for a trail, and even watch weather conditions.

Another initiative in which KDWP

Check out our events page at <http://kdwpt.state.ks.us/State-Parks/Event-Calendar>.

is participating is Get Outdoors Kansas, www.getoutdoorskansas.org. This is an interactive website where folks can find a variety of outdoor events. Users can search the site by location (What's going on within 20 miles of home?), activity (How many marathons are scheduled in Kansas?), date (What's going on next weekend?), or organization (What is the Kansas Trails Council doing?). Modeled off a program in Colorado, the site's goal is to make it easy for people to find things to do outdoors that interest them.

There is no shortage of opportunities to get outside and engage with nature, as well as any number of ways to find those opportunities. Choose your activity, choose a means to find it, and get out in the Great Outdoors!

WOULD YOU TAKE 100 KIDS FISHING?

For the past 20 years, the Tuttle Creek Lake Association (TCLA) has sponsored an event that teaches about 100 kids each year about fishing. This year's Annual Youth Fishing Clinic, to be held May 29-30, marks the 21st year for this outstanding event, which is open to youth age 8-12. The TCLA and the City of Manhattan split the \$3,000 purchase price for 700 to 1,000 harvestable-sized channel catfish that will be stocked in Jerry Dishman Lake in Anneberg Park, 3801 Anderson, Manhattan. A sizable number of these fish are lunkers and will provide real thrills for lucky young anglers. A three-fish limit is in effect for channel catfish during the clinic.

The event begins on Friday evening, May 29, with a two-hour educational/instructional session. Adults must accompany all young anglers at the Friday meeting, as well as at the Saturday fishing experience. After the instructional sessions, a drawing will be held for the kids and then each will receive a goodie bag of other fishing items. The TCLA realizes that this event couldn't happen without the parents' support, so several nice prizes will be drawn for them, too.

Saturday morning starts with donuts donated by Varsity Donuts in Aggieville. Poles are handed out and the fishing starts. Each young angler will receive a rod-and-reel outfit, bait, and even a stringer free of charge. After about an hour

and a half, the catches will be weighed to determine trophy winners. Trophies are given for biggest fish, smallest fish, and heaviest stringer in boy and girl divisions. After all this, the kids are treated to a pizza and soda lunch.

TCLA is funded mostly by donations from businesses, individuals and memorials.

Preregistration is required to attend the clinic. For more information and to register, go to www.tuttlecreek.org.

– Verl Stevens



AT WOODS EDGE

By Andra Bryan Stefanoni

These days, family camping trips see me doing much less work than years past. The reason? My sons, now age 10 and 14, have mastered setting up and taking down their own tent.

I've noticed that now, the same goes for fishing, hiking, hunting, you name it – whatever the outdoor pursuit is, our sons are much more independent now, and that means my husband and I can spend a lot more time enjoying those activities ourselves.

It wasn't always that way. I can recall a time when our first son didn't want to have anything to do with hiking. He was a preschooler, and the idea of simply "walking" through the woods and up and down hills couldn't compete with staying home and playing with plastic dinosaurs and Legos.

So I turned a planned hike at a nearby wilderness area into a scavenger hunt. Using a half-dozen or so index cards, I used a Sharpie marker to neatly print a few very simple words on each – words like, "yellow leaf," "red bird," "pond," and "log." I also drew outlines of each item. They were things I knew we would see, so I could "stack the deck."

Before going, we sat on the couch and I explained what we were going to do. We sounded out the words together. I let my excitement show on my face and in my voice in hopes it would be contagious. Then, I gave him a pint-sized backpack and asked him to help pick out some snacks to take: Beef jerky, trail mix and pumpkin seeds.

Lastly, I put a half-used roll of toilet paper and a plastic zippered bag in the pack with a giggle, whispering conspiratorially that it was "just in case" we had to go to the bathroom in the woods. It sounded exotic, and it completely sealed the deal. He was ready.

As he aged, we armed him with an inexpensive point-and-shoot camera to give him a purpose; to document what he saw, from a box turtle to a hidey-hole that a fox or raccoon might use; And later, a field guide, to begin introducing him to the correct names of what we saw; and a child's plastic compass, to teach him basic orienteering skills.

Those hikes always took a lot longer than they would have if we had left him with a babysitter. We never hiked far. Many times, we'd be lucky if we made it a half-mile and then had to give him a piggy-back ride on the way out.

When our second son joined the family, we invested in a hiking backpack for infants. We also upgraded our first son to a larger backpack so he could begin carrying his own water bottle and other supplies.

Now, our sons don't give a second thought to grabbing their backpacks, jumping in the car with us and heading off on an adventure.

We've used a similar strategy with each outdoor hobby we enjoy. We love to mountain bike, so we invested in a frame-mounted bike seat for a toddler, then a trailer bike that hooked on behind our bikes.

We love to hunt, so we bought our sons pop guns, built duck blinds out of the couch cushions and watched a duck hunting video.

The first few times my husband took them "hunting" for real, he made sure to take along kid-friendly snacks like hot cocoa, granola bars, and string cheese, and he left all expectations of bagging a limit that day at home.

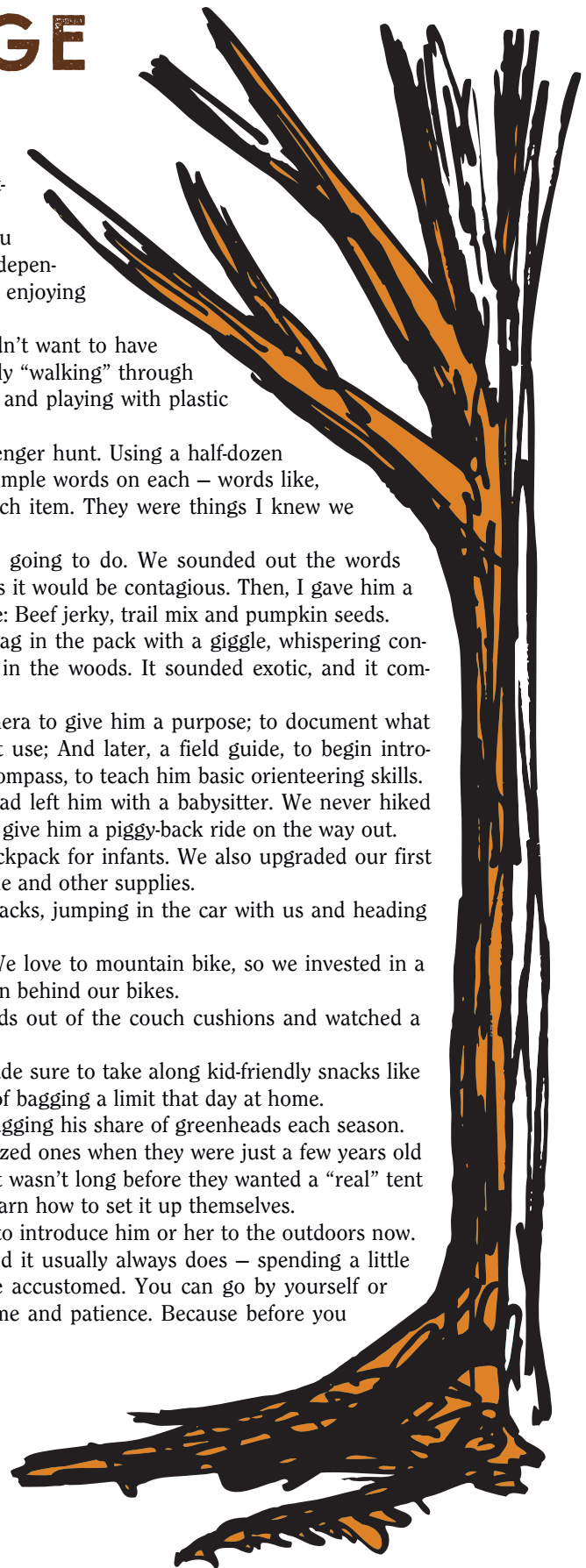
Now, one son has completed hunter education certification and is bagging his share of greenheads each season.

And about that camping tent. We bought our sons their own child-sized ones when they were just a few years old and set them up on rainy days in our living room to read and play in. It wasn't long before they wanted a "real" tent to spend time in in the backyard. And soon after that, they wanted to learn how to set it up themselves.

Don't wait. If you have a child or know a child, begin making plans to introduce him or her to the outdoors now.

Just remember to do it on kid-friendly terms, even if it means – and it usually always does – spending a little more time doing it, and not to the level of adventure to which you're accustomed. You can go by yourself or with your buddies another day. You won't regret the investment of time and patience. Because before you know it, the kids will be all grown up.

Editor's note: Andra Bryan Stefanoni is a lifelong Kansas resident and outdoor enthusiast. Her column, "At Woods Edge," will be a regularly appearing feature in *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine. Contact Stefanoni at andra.stefanoni@gmail.com or on Facebook.





Hearty Fish Tacos



While scrounging through my freezer, I found a couple of packages of catfish fillets and set them out to thaw. This time of year, kids activities often require us to eat processed foods or fast food to keep evening schedules. Finding time to fix the fish became critical during the week as fish has a short life once thawed. My wife suggested she would “throw” something together, and after a quick trip to the store, we were in business. The resulting meal turned out tasty enough to share. It was easy and fast, although the dressing is a little labor intensive.

HEARTY FISH TACOS

- Catfish filets, cleaned and cut into 2- to 3-inch pieces
- Andy's Red Fish Breading
- Flour tortillas, fajita size
- 1 16-ounce bag of shredded coleslaw
- 18-ounce bag shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- 1/4 cup cooked bacon, crumbled
- 1/2 cup Miracle Whip
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 2 tablespoons yellow mustard
- 2/3 cup white vinegar
- 1 1/2 cups canola oil

FISH: Cut fish into pieces 1/2-inch thick and 2-3 inches long. Place 2 cups of Andy's fish breading into container or baggie. Place 4-8 pieces of fish into container and coat all sides with breading. Remove fish, shaking excess breading from fish, and fry in oil.

DRESSING: Mix Miracle Whip, onion powder, sugar, kosher salt, black pepper, mustard, vinegar and oil in a food processor. Pulse until the dressing is smooth.

SLAW MIX: Combine packaged coleslaw mix, cheddar cheese and bacon together. Just before serving, drizzle the desired amount of dressing over the coleslaw mix and stir. Only mix together what you will use at one meal. The dressing will make the slaw soft if mixed and stored in fridge.

ASSEMBLY:

Place three pieces of fish in a tortilla and top with a couple of tablespoons of slaw mix.



FISHIN' with Mike Miller

Catch And Release Always?

I've practiced catch and release when bass fishing for many years. I love to catch a big bass and my theory has been that if you keep the little ones, they'll never get big. And the supposed benefits of catch and release have been ingrained in anglers for 25 years.

If I want fish to eat, I usually try to keep crappie or walleye, reasoning that they taste better. But I wonder if we haven't taken the catch and release doctrine too far. Surely it can be okay to keep a few bass to eat.

I did a little research and learned that harvesting bass is indeed an acceptable practice, especially in farm ponds where angling access is limited. In fact, there are several fishery management options that prescribe harvesting bass of specific sizes. "Producing Fish and Wildlife From Kansas Ponds," is a booklet produced by department biologists in the 1980s. It is in its fourth printing. The book describes how to build, stock and manage a pond in Kansas for maximum fish and wildlife enjoyment.

Without entirely explaining each of the fishery management options, I'll just say that anglers can dictate the kind of fishing they desire in small ponds through harvest. In the all-purpose option, for anglers who want to catch bass longer than 15 inches with consistency, the recommendation is to harvest 30 8- to 12-inch bass per acre per year. Removing the small bass reduces competition and allows remaining bass to grow larger.

If you want to catch big bluegills, the recommendation is for anglers to release all bass shorter than 15 inches and harvest those longer than 15 inches. High densities of 8- to 15-inch bass control bluegill numbers, allowing them to grow larger.

In the "Big Bass Option," anglers are encouraged to harvest 30-50 bass 8-12 inches per acre long per year and 5 12- to 15-inch bass per acre per year. Bass longer than 15 inches should be released.

Bottom line is that it's acceptable, even preferable, to harvest bass, especially from farm ponds where access is controlled. One way to look at it is that the 12- to 14-inchers can be replaced more quickly than that 19-inch, 4-pounder, so keep some of little ones and let the big ones go. They'll taste better anyway.

CASUALTY OF MOWER



I was rummaging in the attic the other day looking for a tackle box when I stumbled across an oil-stained cardboard box crammed with old Tonka dump trucks, loaders and jeeps. I was immediately taken back to my childhood and the hours of fun I had playing in the dirt with those toy trucks.

“What are you doing up there?” yelled the self-appointed master of the house.

“Just sorting through old junk and looking for some fishing stuff,” I innocently replied.

“Why do you have them parked in a straight line?” she asked, sneaking up the ladder. “And did I hear varoom noises?”

“That’s dumb. Why would I be making any noises? Geez you are getting old,” I said.

“Well it’s obvious you are not growing up,” she retorted. “You must have been driving the blue dump truck.”

“I’m not playing with toy trucks!” I barked. “Why would you say that?”

“Because it’s parked outside your chalk parking lines,” she giggled and headed back down the ladder.

That parting shot left her the obvious victor of our skirmish. I thought of a rebuttal but stopped, distracted by a startling discovery: my old toy gun at the bottom of the box. It wasn’t just any gun. It was my fully-automatic laser machine gun with loud speakers. With the push of a small red button, grenades would explode, cannons would fire, land mines would detonate and my treasured toy would let loose a thousand rounds of barrel-melting ordnance. It was the Cadillac of toy guns back when waging war against your neighbor buddies wasn’t politically incorrect.

Growing up, we waged war in the vacant lot next to our house. Head-high grass covered the area except where we had excavated forts and deadfall traps. At first we had no boundaries, but those games lasted too long for our attention span and sometimes a group would wonder off to watch Batman or go fishing. Boundaries shortened skirmish times.

One day after watching “The Green Berets,” my brothers and I decided that the vacant lot was now a rice paddy and we needed Dad’s little green push mower to mow paths through the tall grass. By the last track, the mower started smoking badly.

“I better push this back up to the garage before Dad sees it,” I said.

“Your dad is gonna be at work for four more hours,” said my buddy Tony. “Leave it. The smoke makes it look like a war zone.”

Tony made a good point. All good war movies had smoke, but I was apprehensive. Dad had a sixth sense when it came to his three boys and trouble, and although he was 25 miles away working in a cellophane plant with no windows, I knew

he could not only sense the smoke, but knew that it was coming from his small green push mower, and the identity of the perpetrator, too.

The realism of the smoke won me over and the game was on. In the last skirmish of the day, I took out Mike Evergreen, a kid from up the street, at close range. To avoid giving away my position, I shot him with a low-volume “Bang.” He immediately screamed, flung his gun in the air, thus giving away my position. This was a major breach of war game etiquette. Now several guys were on to me.

“Not fair!” I hissed. “You can’t scream and fling!”

Just then, the gun cracked down on Mike’s head and he went down. A genuine wail of pain came out of his throat and his head bled from a scalp wound. I managed to stop the bleeding with my t-shirt before he got up and stared at my blood-covered shirt.

“Holy cow! You look like you have been shot,” Mike exclaimed.

“Here, rub some of that blood on my shirt so we can both look shot,” he said, even though he was plenty bloody.

Soon we were both covered with splotches of Mike’s blood. About that time, Tony wandered up.

“Hey, the lawnmower is really smoking now,” he said, looking behind me.

“No, Tony,” I said looking over my shoulder. “I think the field is on fire. Now I’m really gonna get it.”

Just as Tony was going to yell fire, I shut him up so we could position ourselves strategically on the road. We would pick off our enemies as they vacated the field.

“The field is on fire!” we screamed. We were just polishing off the last soldiers when Dad’s car squealed around the corner and screeched to a halt. Most dads are skilled at interrogation, but my dad invented the Grand Inquisition.

“Did you call the fire department? Is anybody still in there? Why is there blood all over your shirt? Is that my push mower?”

Knowing the drill, I answered, “No, we didn’t call the fire department. No, the enemy was flushed out and we wiped them out on the road. The blood is from Mike’s head wound. Yes, that was your push mower and I’m amazed you recognized it from what is left.”

Dad had always said that honesty was the best policy, but I immediately began to question that logic after seeing the look on his face. I lost my gun and didn’t get it back until I moved out of the house some 10 or 12 years later.

Just then, my daydream was interrupted by the sound of the garage screen door opening and I knew the enemy was ascending the attic stairs again. I hunkered down behind some boxes and waited. Forty-five years ago, Dad said I had conducted my last ambush – but he was wrong . . .

Note in a Vlasic Pickle Jar

This story was relayed to me by Chuck Nicholson who lives in a cabin at Kanopolis Reservoir. This story starts June 14, 1985 with a boy in Dorrance Kansas. On June 14, 1985 David dropped a Vlasic pickle jar that contained some wheat, a wheat penny and a note into the Smoky Hill River. In the summer of 1995 the jar was found by Chuck's daughter, Stephanie in the "Red Rim" canyon. The contents were intact and the note could still be read. The note requested that the jar be returned to Dorrance. In 2009, Chuck ventured to Dorrance with the jar intending to return it to David. Chuck thought the post office would be the place to start. He asked the postmaster if she knew David. She said he had moved away but his parents still lived just outside town on a farm, although she couldn't give out any information. Chuck went outside and talked with his friend who had tagged along; they weren't sure what to do next. Chuck saw an elderly gentleman walk into the post office and decided to ask him about David as he was leaving. The gentleman knew David's parents and where they lived but advised "you can go there and knock but the Misses won't answer the door." He was right, she didn't answer. Chuck put a note in the jar and left it on the front porch. About a year later, Chuck got the following letter:

Aug 27, 2010

Dear Mr. Nicholson,

First let me introduce myself and explain why I am writing to you this letter. My name is David and I am formerly from a small Kansas town called Dorrance. This letter may seem a bit odd, but it is the final segment of a sequence that started on June 14, 1985 when I apparently dropped a Vlasic pickle jar in the Smokey Hill River.

Last fall (2009) my mother phoned me with the strangest question. Her question was "do you remember putting a jar in the river that contained some wheat, a wheat penny and a note?" When I answered "no," she explained that the aforementioned jar was left by you at my parents' residence with a small note in it explaining how it came into your possession.

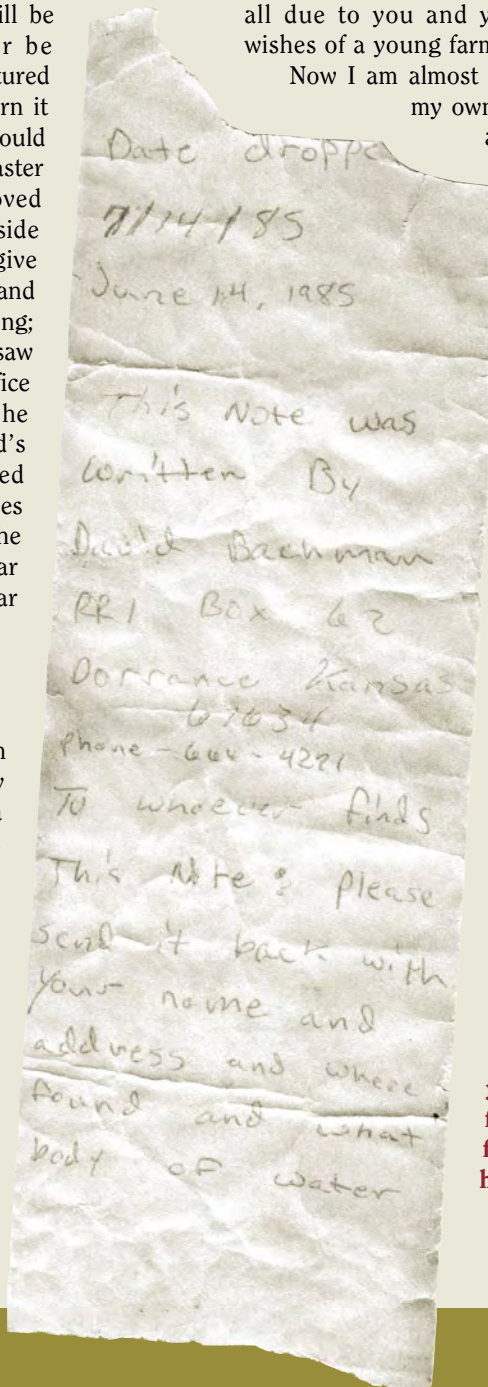
I have no memory of dropping this jar and its contents in the Smokey Hill River, but apparently I did on June 14, 1985 (the note in the jar is still readable and it is clearly my handwriting) and you found the jar in Kanopolis Lake in the summer of 1995 in the Red Rim canyon. Now after 25 years, the journey of this jar and its contents is finally over. I apologize that it has taken me over one year to reply to the note you left in the jar. Life just has a way of pushing things to the side.

Even though I have no recollection of this event, my two brothers remember the incident well. I cannot fully express how amazed I am that not only did you find my jar, but you actually took the time to return it to me as my note requested. I will be holding onto the jar and its contents so that I can pass the tale of this event onto my children. Not often does a person have a story like this one to tell and it is all due to you and your willingness to fulfill the foolish wishes of a young farm boy.

Now I am almost 41 years old and have four children of my own. My two daughters are too old now to appreciate the sense of adventure I had as a young boy, but my two young sons (ages 3 and 1) will hopefully share that same sense of adventure after they are old enough to hear the tale of my Vlasic Pickle Jar.

If you so desire, you are more than welcome to write back and tell me a bit about yourself as well. It would be interesting to continue on with what a small note in 1985 started. Below my signature are my work and home email addresses. If you have access to email and would prefer to write that way, you are welcome to do so.

Sincerely,
David Bachman



Stories like this warm the heart. Chuck is a kind man for fulfilling the wishes of this Kansas farm boy. Chuck is one of 12 kids born on a farm north of Maize Kansas on the Big Arkansas River. Chuck said he used to do the same thing when he was 10-15 years old but he never used a "Vlasic Pickle Jar"! Chuck really enjoyed going to Dorrance to find the young man, that part was an adventure for him. A 30 year story has now come full circle when I contacted David and he sent me a copy of the original note.

—Wendy Bowles
Kanopolis State Park



Show us what makes YOU wild about Kansas!

Photo submissions for the 3rd annual "Wild About Kansas" photo contest are being accepted now through Oct. 23, 2015, and new for 2015, photographers of ALL ages and skill levels can participate.

Participants can submit photos in three categories: wildlife, outdoor recreation or landscapes. There is no fee to enter, and the contest is open to both residents and nonresidents.

"Kansas is a state filled with a plethora of diverse and awe-inspiring natural resources and this contest is just one more way we can continue to appreciate and enjoy them," said associate editor, Nadia Marji.

RULES

Photographers can submit up to three photos. Photos must be taken within the state of Kansas and must be the entrant's original work.

JUDGING

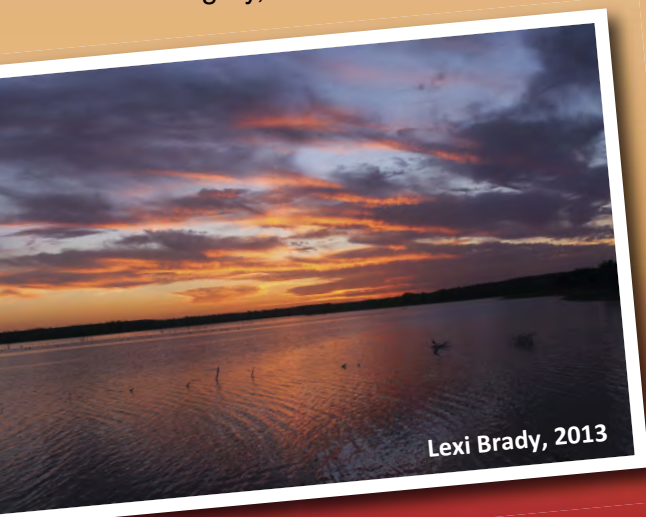
Each photo will be judged on creativity, composition, subject matter, lighting, and the overall sharpness. First, 2nd, and 3rd place prizes will be awarded in each category, as well as one

honorable mention per category. Winners will be featured in the 2016 *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* January/February photo issue.

DEADLINE

Entries must be received no later than **5 p.m. on Oct. 23, 2015**. An entry form must be submitted for each participant. Photo format should be JPEG or TIFF and file size should be not less than 1mb and not more than 5mb.

For more information and entry forms, visit ksoutdoors.com/services, or contact Nadia Marji at nadia.marji@ksoutdoors.com.



Lexi Brady, 2013



Christina Craig, 2014



Christina Craig, 2013

Kanopolis State Park: A Place Full of Wonders

By Iralee Barnard



Each of our state parks is unique and has special attractions. My favorite Kansas state park is in the middle of the state - Kanopolis State Park. The 1,600-acre area boasts rolling prairie, rocky canyons, and so much to see and do. You could spend days there hiking, camping, riding the equestrian trails, biking, and exploring.

You might not be the only one there, though. The canyons are filled with wildlife. I have seen many ducks, eagles, beaver, coyotes, colorful lizards, and vibrant butterflies amid my adventures. I once had a run-in with a hen turkey that jumped onto the trail ahead of me. Standing tall, her head held high, she would not budge regardless of our large size disparity. She was protecting her young (and nearly standing on my toes, to do so!) I could not get around her. She finally made the first move and started to "lead" me down the trail away from her little ones. I, of course, obliged.

Apart from hiking, another activity I always look forward to at Kanopolis is prairie dog watching. The dog town is

always bustling with squeaks and barks.

Whether I'm there to blaze a trail, or be entertained by the native wildlife, every visit to the park involves a search for interesting plants. Horse Thief Canyon Trail is a special place to see a variety of showy wildflowers. It all begins in spring with the tiny western rock jasmine, field pussytoes, and both yellow and purple wood sorrel appearing as early as March, but most often blooming early to mid-April.

Late one May while on a hike with a friend we found ourselves developing deep blue stains on our slacks. Ohio spiderwort was spectacular and abundant that time of year, providing gorgeous sights along the trail, but we didn't realize as we brushed past the beautiful blue flowers they were imparting lasting patches of color on us. Spiderwort gets its name from the long, silken strings of juice produced when a stem is broken. These strings are reminiscent of a spider's web and they are a definite must-see.

Colorful plants still abound even in the heat of the summer. The silvery artemisia, or sage as it is commonly called, is pretty against the deep green grasses. Stickleaf is an interesting plant that grows round and bushy with many brittle branches. It is also referred to as "Velcro leaf" because the whole plant is covered with barbed hairs that attach themselves firmly to almost anything. The orange flowers continue to bloom for a long period.

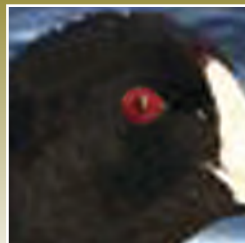
Late in the season yellows dominate the landscape. Golden plumes top the five-foot-tall Indiangrass plants, sunflowers abound, and prairie sunflower, Maximillian, and stiff sunflower provide other eye-catching displays.

When visiting Kanopolis, be sure to bring your camera because photography is another activity to be enjoyed. The image of showy white evening primrose against a red sandstone backdrop is a sight you'll want to share with others.

Apart from your camera, remember to take along a few good field guides, and most importantly, a friend. Kanopolis is never disappointing.



WHAT AM I



Answer to be revealed in the July/August issue.

Clue #1

I make jerky movements with my neck.

Clue #2

I am not a duck.

Clue #3

My name consists of four letters.

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THE ABCS of Walleye Fishing

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

Walleye are popular with anglers in northern states and Canada, but Kansas is on the southern edge of the walleye's range. Fortunately, through stocking, walleye have done well in many impoundments in the Sunflower State. As a result, walleye are often at the top of the angler preference list, particularly this time of year.

Walleye anglers are a dedicated and detail-oriented bunch. Outdoor gear retailers even have walleye-specific catalogs. Many anglers will catch walleye on occasion, but to catch them consistently takes knowledge, experience, work, and attention to detail. Here are the A B Cs that will help you catch more walleye.

A ACCESSABILITY

While most walleye are likely caught by anglers in boats, they can be caught from shore and, in fact, shore anglers might have an advantage once a year. When walleye come in to shallow water to spawn, usually starting in mid-March, bank anglers get their shot along dams and rocky points. While the fish are preoccupied with spawning, they are congregated and available to anglers.

True to their name, walleye have large, light-sensitive eyes and the best fishing is usually under low-light conditions at dawn, dusk and even dark. Eighth- to quarter-ounce jigs tipped with soft plastic, curly-tailed grubs or other minnow-imitating bodies are popular. White, chartreuse and orange are

good color choices. Stick baits, slow-sinking or suspending, are popular, too, and many anglers cast parallel with the shore.

The rest of the year, a boat gives an angler more flexibility and an edge for consistently catching walleye. And no, you don't have to own a \$70,000 fully-equipped walleye rig to catch fish. However, a good trolling motor to control speed and boat position, and good electronics are important tools (GPS is a valuable tool for recording tracks and hotspots). An 18- to 20-foot boat is ideal for handling rough water on windy days, but smaller boats work just fine, as long as an eye is kept on the weather forecast.

Drifting is a common technique used to cover water and find walleye, using a trolling motor to control the drift. Many anglers will drift one way and if the wind speed isn't too high, will turn and use the trolling motor to drag baits back through an area into the wind. This is where the relatively new technology of GPS

shines, recording tracks that can be repeated and guiding an autopilot function on some trolling motors.

ATTITUDE

The best walleye anglers have confidence in their ability to catch fish. Some anglers believe they can catch fish in a mud puddle and they'll fish in one if they think there are walleye in it. The mental aspect of successful fishing, or more appropriately catching, is often overlooked. An angler has to think they've given themselves the best opportunity to catch fish in a given situation on any day on that body of water.

B BAIT

A wide variety of artificial and live baits will catch walleye, depending on the time of year. However, for anglers chasing walleye now, the most common choice is the night crawler. Big, fat, healthy crawlers are best, giving the angler the option to use one whole, or half a crawler.

Serious walleye anglers buy their night crawlers by the "flat," or box, which contains about 500 night crawlers and is more economical than buying a few dozen at a time and ensures they're never out of worms. Night crawlers can be kept for months refrigerated in an insulated container. To keep your supply of night crawlers alive, never return night crawlers taken on a fishing trip to this box. Worms stressed after a day on the boat may die, and it seems contagious.



You don't need a \$70,000 boat to catch walleye, but high quality electronics with GPS capability will definitely help you catch more fish. GPS will help you locate fishing spots and allow you to drift precisely over those spots.



Bottom bouncers rigged with Slow Death hooks or spinners can be very effective. The bottom bouncer keeps your bait just above the bottom where most walleye are caught, and the wire rig won't snag up as often as jigs and other lures.

BOTTOM BOUNCERS

For decades, I caught plenty of walleye using nothing more than a jig-and-night crawler combination. I did this either drifting, or anchored fishing vertically. However, the last half-dozen years or so I've started using bottom bouncers (when moving as they don't work sitting stationary) and my catch rates have increased considerably.

Select the weight of your bottom bouncer using a formula of 1 ounce for every 10 feet of water depth. Contact with the bottom is critical. They also come in different colors, though I've never found color of the bottom bouncer to improve catch rates.

Behind the bottom bouncer I usually run either a spinner or Slow Death rig. There are excellent Youtube videos showing how to tie your own spinners, as well as how the Slow Death rig works (or find the May/June 2012 copy of *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine as I detailed the technique there). The assortment of spinner materials, including beads and blades are mind boggling. Typically, I'll tie a series of beads coupled with one blade (either a Smile Blade, or

metal one) of some sort in a variety of colors and sizes and possibly a small float in chartreuse, pink or orange. I use one or two Gamakatsu, size 4, Octopus hooks on a crawler rig. If I'm catching white bass and wipers on the rig, I'll generally choose a one-hook spinner rig. Two hooks flying around a flopping white bass or wiper are dangerous and sometimes hurt, speaking from experience. I'll typically pull these rigs at .8 mph to 1.4 mph.



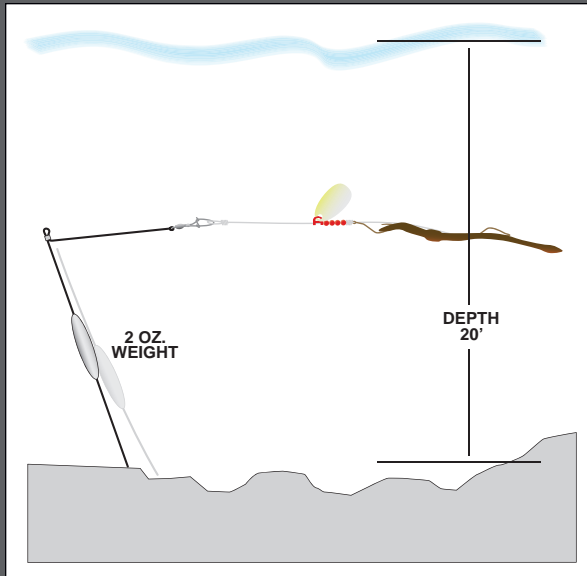
A selection of components allows anglers to build spinner rigs with varying colors and even floats designed to keep a bait in the strike zone.

The bouncer rig is often my third pole (a third-pole permit is \$6.50), and I fish it "dead" in a rod holder when I'm drifting or using the trolling motor. The bouncer is lowered to the bottom at speed and then a few more feet of line is let out to make sure it's maintaining contact with the bottom. I fish two other jig and crawler rigs that I hold. When a fish takes the bottom bouncer bait, I simply pick up the rod and with a deliberate, slow, sweeping motion, set the hook, although many times the fish has already hooked itself.

BEST BETS

In order to catch walleye, you want to fish where you have the best chance for success. Many Kansas lakes have walleye populations but few are self-sustaining. Populations of walleye fluctuate from year to year depending on natural spawn success and survival of walleye stocked in the past. Each year the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) publishes a fishing forecast to point anglers in the right direction for each sport fish species. Anglers can look at the list, compiled through test netting and other sampling by KDWPT fisheries biologists, and figure out which lakes have the best walleye populations, both in terms of quantity and quality.

The best-bets for walleye according to the 2015 *Kansas Fishing Forecast* include, in descending order, Webster, Kirwin, Cedar Bluff, Marion, El Dorado, Cheney, Glen Elder and Wilson reservoirs. Others to keep in mind include Lovewell, Milford and Clinton reservoirs. Other smaller impoundments, as well as waters not on the list, can also produce walleye and shouldn't be excluded just because they didn't make the list. The forecast simply points anglers in the direction for catching the fish they prefer.



A rule of thumb for bottom bouncers is to have one ounce of weight for every 10 feet of water depth. The wire should “bounce” along the bottom.

shallow water and are actively feeding after the rigors of the spawn and a long winter. Food, usually aquatic insect larvae, is available and fish are often caught in 3-15 feet of water.

After the shad hatch and water temperatures rise, fishing can be tougher in July and August. However, many anglers switch to trolling a variety of crankbaits during the summer season. Berkley Flicker shads, as well as other similarly-designed walleye crankbaits, are constructed to run at various depths depending on the model.

Obviously, a variety of factors such as line weight, trolling speed, and amount of line out all play a part in the ability of a crankbait to reach the proper depth. The biggest key is to put out different varieties, and/or colors of crankbaits, on an initial run and see what produces. Often there will be one crankbait that outperforms the others.

CONSISTENCY

Consistently catching walleye may be more difficult than catching any other sport fish species. Anglers who are resourceful, flexible, and learn a variety of methods will catch the most fish.

Successful anglers pay attention to details when a fish is caught. What color was the lure or jig?

How deep was the water? Was the lure being moved up or down a break? Was the boat turning so that the crankbait sank, floated up or stayed neutral? Catching more fish may depend on replicating everything you were doing when you caught the first fish. If the fish quit biting, and you found them again, did they move up or down in the water column or depth? Was there cloud cover or wind blowing, when that happened?

Remembering these details after a day of fishing will come in handy on future walleye fishing trips. You might even consider keeping a fishing journal, noting air and water temperature, barometer reading, depth fish were caught and time of day fish bit the best. On future trips with similar conditions, you’ll know how and where to catch fish. However, the biggest key to catching walleye with consistency is to gain experience by fishing as much as possible. 🎣

C COOKING

You really can’t talk about walleye fishing without mentioning their palatability. There’s little argument these are the tastiest fish that swim and their fillets are firm and white. While I love fried fish, either in Andy’s Yellow or Shore Lunch Original breading, there’s another option my family enjoys just as much, and that’s grilled. It’s simple enough and involves nothing more than coating the fillets with olive oil or vegetable spray and then sprinkling each one with Cavender’s All Purpose Greek Seasoning. The fillet from a 15 to 19-inch fish works well and will cook uniformly (bigger ones should be cut up). Although grilling can be done on open grates, a grilling tray or basket is a better option to keep from losing parts of the fillet. The fillet is only flipped once and done when the meat starts to separate a bit within the fillet.

CALENDAR

The two best months to consistently catch walleye are May and June. Walleye have moved to



The other ABCs of walleye fishing, Ashley (center), Brandon (right) and Cody, hold a nice stringer of walleye caught using a combination of the methods described by the author. Catching stringers like this requires persistence and attention to detail.

by Marc Murrell
manager, Great Plains
Nature Center, Wichita



Steve, Pam and Blaisi Adams

PAYING IT FORWARD

The great outdoors is a wonderful place to get an education, and lessons learned hunting, fishing, and trapping reach far beyond the outdoor world. I believe enjoying these activities, particularly with other family members or mentors, helps a child successfully navigate to the adult world and become a beneficial member of society. I saw a bumper sticker once that said, “Kids That Hunt, Fish and Trap Don’t Mug Little Old Ladies.” While this may be a bold statement with exceptions, in general I think it has merit.

The Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism’s (KDWPT) Pass It On Program began in 2000 as an effort to provide opportunities for kids to learn about hunting. Most kids, if not exposed to it by their mid-teens, are less likely to participate. And with the competition for time and the urbanization of America, getting kids involved in outdoor activities is not easy. Through Pass It On, the department conducts a variety of outdoor skills events and special hunts each year, and while the purpose of the events is to provide kids with fun outdoor experiences, on occasion, true-life lessons emerge.

A young man named Shiv Ghosh came to a KDWPT special turkey hunt in Hutchinson two years ago. The now 12-year-old and his dad, Som, drove nine hours, one way, from Colorado to participate. “We just didn’t have anything like it in Colorado,” Som said. “So I thought it would be a

good opportunity for Shiv to learn about hunting.”

Shiv and his Dad came back again last spring, and although he had some close encounters his first two turkey seasons he didn’t get a bird. Undeterred, the father-son duo made another 18-hour round-trip drive last fall to participate in the Harper County Youth Deer hunt and Shiv managed to fill both of his deer tags with nice does the first night.

“I’ve had a blast in Kansas and I’ve learned so much,” Shiv said.

It was during the first turkey hunt when Shiv and Som first met Steve Adams, the KDWPT district wildlife biologist who helps organize both the turkey and deer hunts. And it was on one of the subsequent hunts when Shiv found out about Blaisi, Steve’s 4-year-old daughter, and the struggles she’s faced in her young life.

“Mr. Adams was going to help with the hunt but got called away because he had to go to the hospital with Blaisi because she was having some problems,” Shiv said.

Steve and Pam Adams’ daughter, Blaisi, was born with Down Syndrome and has battled various health problems since birth. On April 1, 2014, the family was faced with yet another challenge when Blaisi was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia.

“She’s been in the hospital all but a few weeks in the last few months,” Steve said last winter. “It’s been really tough.”

Hello, Shiv was wondering if he could ask you and your network of close friends to visit his website:

<https://sites.google.com/site/rgiveback/home> and support his cause. He is trying to rally his community to come together and show support by giving hope to little Blaisi, a 4-year-old girl who is fighting cancer. Shiv truly believes if everyone does just a little, we can all make a big difference to support Blaisi. Show your support and help little Blaisi beat Leukemia like a ROCK STAR! Thank you for socializing Shiv's cause.

Regards,
Som Ghosh



Shiv and Som Ghosh

Shiv was sympathetic and had an understanding of the situation beyond his years.

"No little girl should have to go through all that," Shiv said. "It's just not fair."

Shiv said he wanted to try to help Blaisi.

"I wanted to do something for her and I thought I'm pretty good at running and I'm doing a 10K soon, so I thought, 'Why don't I do a fundraiser for Blaisi?'" he said. "I think it would be a great way to help her and thank him (Steve) for all that everyone out there did and giving me the hunts.

"It's just the overall thought of helping someone that made me want to do it," he added.

Shiv created a web site that focused on the problems surrounding Blaisi and what he hoped to do to bring attention to her situation so others could help. His dad sent the above note via e-mail to many acquaintances on Shiv's behalf:

Shiv will run the 10K race in Boulder, Colo., on Memorial Day. He's asked people to sponsor him for the race or make a donation with the proceeds going to Blaisi's fund.

"I've never met Blaisi, but we're planning on meeting her really soon," Shiv said. "I want to do this for their family just to show that people pretty far away can still help."

"When I found out what Shiv was doing I was kind of overwhelmed," Steve said. "It's a cool deal as you really don't expect something like that."

Shiv's initiative inspired others, too.

"That's a pretty touching story and speaks highly of Steve's character," said friend and fellow KDWPT employee Brad Odle. "Someone from that far away willing to do great things is amazing and gives me a little hope for society." 🐾

WANT TO HELP BLAISI MAE ADAMS?

Shiv Ghosh's Website

<https://sites.google.com/site/rgiveback/home>

(Please note...the www.bonfirefunds.com link is no longer active).

To make a contribution to help Blaisi and her family, visit

www.gofundme.com/8046k4/donate

To read about Blaisi Mae's "Rock Star" story on Facebook, visit:

<https://www.facebook.com/BlaisiAdams>



By Andra Bryan Stefanoni, *Pittsburg*

Kickin' it in a Kayak

As Becky Gray's kayak glides over the water, her paddles slice the reflection of a cloudless blue sky and transform it into ripples.

She navigates through a narrow, low-water opening and pulls up next to a beaver dam that from any other place on the acreage is invisible and inaccessible.

A feeble frog call — the first of the season — distracts her reverie about the engineering beavers used to construct the dam. After cocking an ear to determine which direction the frog call is coming from, she again plies her paddles and skims across the water.

She floats quietly past a thick stand of cattails, listens again, then catches sight of the frog within them. It isn't moving. It's being eaten — slowly, ever so slowly — by a common garter snake. The feeble call wasn't the frog's first efforts to announce spring had arrived on this

sunny, late-March day. It was a plea for help.

But the plea came too late, and Gray watched as the circle of life continued.

Her use of a kayak allowed her maneuverability, the ability to get close to wildlife that motorized craft can't as easily achieve, and certainly a much better vantage point than anyone standing on the banks.

"Kayaking allows you to go places where others can't go," Gray said. "I can get through little low-water passes that a boat can't get through because a kayak sits up on top of the water more and is much lighter. They're also much quieter — only the sound of your paddle, which isn't much.

"That was a once-in-a-lifetime moment, to see that, and all because I was in the right place at the right time and could get close enough."



Andra Stefanoni photo

Longtime outdoor enthusiast, Becky Gray, enjoys navigating KDWPT's Mined Land Wildlife Area. The area appeals to her because of the still waters, plentiful wildlife sightings, and varied angling opportunities.

Kickin' it in a kayak. It has wonderful alliteration, but kayaking in Kansas might not be something that immediately springs to mind when one thinks of the sporty, colorful watercraft — especially in the southeastern two counties of the state: Cherokee and Crawford counties. There are no whitewater rivers like Colorado or Arkansas, nor crystal clear waters like the Caribbean.

Here, it's agricultural fields lined with hedgerows, bisected with quiet country roads and dotted with barns and haybales.

But look at a Google satellite view of the area and it will make sense: There are hundreds of acres of water. It's all easy to get to. It's a mecca for wildlife. And it's flat, calm water — two features attractive to beginning kayakers.

Four years ago, that's what Pittsburg resident Becky Gray was. When she found two previously-owned kayaks for sale cheap, she knew taking them to strip pits in the state-owned Mined Land Wildlife Area for outings would be much less intimidating than fast-moving rivers, and would allow her to use them much more frequently as the strip pits are just minutes from home.

"It's a great way to unwind at the end of a work day, or on the weekend if I want to spend a lot of time paddling or fishing but not much time driving," she said.

The Mined Land Wildlife Area, owned and operated by the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism, spans 14,500 acres, 1,500 of which are water in the form of strip pits.

Strip Pits

Strip pits, as the locals call them, vary in size from one-quarter of an acre to 50 acres, with depths as shallow as a foot and as deep as 60 feet, owe their existence to coal miners. From the 1920s through 1974, they carved the pits with steam and electric shovels while in search of coal veins.

When the shovels were turned off — some of them, like Big Brutus, right where they stopped working — the miners left, the countryside grew quiet, and the strip pits were left to Mother Nature.

The passage of time would see ecological succession: vegetation grew up and over the spoils, while the pits filled with water and aquatic life took up residence.

As part of the reclamation process, some of the mined land was donated to the state as early as 1926. The Pittsburg and Midway Coal Company made the largest donation of land, totaling more than 8,000 acres, in 1981.

It has become rugged country dotted with more than 200 strip pits, steep-sided hills and dense vege-

tation. Unmined areas are covered with mature bottomland woodland and small crop fields.

Native grass and some cool-season grasses dominate 4,000 acres of the property. The remaining 9,000 acres of land is covered with bur oak, pin oak, walnut, hickory and hackberry with a thick understory of dogwood, green briar, honeysuckle, poison ivy and blackberry.

The land is sought out by all kinds of recreationalists, from hunters to hikers to campers to mushroom and berry pickers. It's also home to wildlife such as white-tailed deer, Eastern turkey, mourning dove, bobwhite quail, fox squirrel, cottontails and waterfowl.



Andra Stefanoni photo

Kayaking can lead to discovering many beautiful sites not easily accessible by other means.

It's a rarity to see kayakers in the strip pits, though, as most recreationalists use motorized jon boats for fishing or photography, or simply stand on the banks. Not Gray.

She, along with family and friends, gets the kayakers out nearly every weekend when the weather is good and the water is high enough. They spend about half of that time on rivers or lakes, and about half the time on the strip pits.

They are nearly always rewarded for their loyalty to the hobby. They count among their wildlife sightings beaver, snakes, turtles, herons, cranes, deer, porcupine, frogs, hawks, bald eagles, dragonflies and damselflies, ducks, egrets and fish.

Elsewhere

Opportunities to use kayakers in Kansas also exist beyond the strip pits in the southeastern corner, note members of the Kansas Canoe and Kayak Association (KCKA). Founded in 1975, the organization is comprised of canoeists, kayakers, and rafters working together to promote river running, education, conservation, access, and paddling related activities.

KCKA member Marcia Endebrock Rozell ranks as her personal favorite "Tuttle Pond." Nicknamed by locals, it's the River Pond below the dam at Tuttle Creek State Park. While paddling there, she's seen bald eagles, turtles, fish and beavers.

Member Andy Boye counts Melvern Lake as the best choice for kayaking.

"You have so many options when you paddle Melvern Lake. It has big open water, many coves both large and small, and if it's windy, you can find protection by paddling up the beautiful Marais de Cygnes River."

Zoe B. Albers says Lake Wilson is a jewel of a lake and a must-do for kayakers, while Fred Graus recommends the Elk River before it dumps into Elk City Lake.

Ready to go?

Kayakers may be used in whitewater or flat, calm water like the strip pits. Ensuring success means finding the right style of kayak for your use, and there are many, including touring kayakers, whitewater kayakers and inflatable kayakers. Recreational kayakers are great for easy days on calm water — the kind of day Gray was having watching the snake devour the frog. They are inexpensive and offer stability for those who are just beginning, wanting to snap photos, or seek to enjoy angling on ponds and lakes. They have a small storage area great for stowing snacks and a camera, and some, like Gray's, come with holes for a fishing rod and hooks to attach a stringer.



Andra Stefanoni photo

Longtime outdoor enthusiast, Becky Gray, enjoys navigating KDWPT's Mined Land Area.

Watch weight when making a purchase, however, as some can be heavy to portage. Also consider whether you're more comfortable in a "sit-in" or "sit-on" style kayak. Sit-on kayakers do not have a closed cockpit, so they're easy to get in and out of. They also provide easier access for gear, as it's all on top with you. In flat water such as the strip pits, there isn't the danger of spray and splashes, and very little chance of tipping over, so not being down in the kayak isn't a big issue.

Learn more about kayakers and kayaking at www.smart-start-kayaking.com/ or from a reputable sporting goods dealer near you. 🐾



AMERICORPS IN ACTION

by Cherie Riffey, *KDWPT AmeriCorps Coordinator*





Luke Nihart was a well-liked park ranger for Tuttle Creek State Park until his untimely passing in 2010.

Because of the impact he had on others, and his love of archery, the range pictured on the left was named in his memory.

KANSAS OUTDOOR AMERICORPS ACTION TEAM

Fifty-five – that’s how many service members, on average, the **Kansas Outdoor AmeriCorps Action Team** is comprised of each year. It’s not a large team by any stretch of the imagination, but don’t let the numbers fool you. This team takes their name to heart and when it comes to needing something done, you can bet they’ll take action.

Members commit to a set amount of hours during their time with AmeriCorps, ranging anywhere from 300 to 1,700 hours. Upon completion of their hours, members are awarded a small sum to be used only for educational expenses at a Title IV school or paying off qualified student loans. The typical AmeriCorps member is a college student completing a degree in park management, natural resource management or other environmental degrees, but members come from all walks of life.

“It’s a great opportunity for these members to get experience in their field of study,” said KDWPT program director Cherie Riffey, “and they are able to get some of the expense of college taken care of in the process.”

The Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) initially teamed up with USDA AmeriCorps Program through the Natural Resource Conservation Service in 1993 as an effort to respond to damage caused by a series of floods that hit the sunflower state that year. State parks and wildlife areas desperately needed help with debris clean-up and facility restoration and outside help was a must. The program officially launched in 1995, but only lasted through 1996. The following year, the federal

program ended for a period. When more severe flooding occurred in 1998, Kansas state parks applied as an independent program for disaster response and environmental restoration. At the time, severe natural disasters were hitting Kansas and surrounding areas every year. Finally in 1999, the Kansas Outdoor AmeriCorps Action Team emerged, taking a leading role in Kansas for disaster response, environmental restoration and education.

Although initially formed as a disaster response program, the Action Team now takes on projects that run the gamut. From helping the environment and improving state park facilities, to giving educational programs and increasing awareness of invasive species, there’s no project where AmeriCorps won’t lend a helping hand.

LUKE NIHART FAMILY ARCHERY RANGE & TOWER

When one of KDWPT’s own, Luke D. Nihart, passed away, you can bet AmeriCorps was there to help. Nihart passed away as a result of an ATV accident in 2010 while working at Tuttle Creek State Park where he served as a park ranger. He was an avid archer and as a way to memorialize Nihart’s passion, an archery range and tower was built in his name.

The project began in 2009 when a local group of archers approached Tuttle Creek State Park staff about constructing an archery area. Nihart enthusiastically embraced the idea. The initial concept was to create a static target area with targets placed every 5 yards from 10 yards to 65 yards, enclosed by a simple fence. One year into planning, the design and scope of the range changed significantly with Nihart’s

Although stationed at state parks and nature centers around the state, Kansas Outdoor AmeriCorps Action Team members regularly travel to help with large-scale projects efforts, including disaster relief from tornadoes.



passing. Discussions quickly changed and plans morphed from a simple range into a shooting complex that would forever memorialize Nihart and his family. The complex would now be called the Luke Nihart Family Archery Range. Many partners emerged including Brooks Yamaha, Star Lumber, Westar and the Green Team, Kansas WildTrust, Friends of Tuttle Creek State Park, Griffith Lumber, Penny's Concrete, Kaw Valley Archery, KDWPT Assistant Secretary Keith Sexson, Schwab-Eaton, and of course, AmeriCorps. The newly-formed partnerships resulted in an expanded firing line, and a covered firing line shelter, developed in part by AmeriCorps members.

Nihart's passion for archery and AmeriCorps' dedication to service continue to pave the way for others. In 2013, a local high school student approached staff about building a youth area on the range for a senior project. AmeriCorps members gladly stepped in. The youth area is now complete with sidewalks, fixed quivers, bow holders and permanent placeholders for some fun 3D critter targets also purchased for the range.

It wasn't long before another project came to fruition. In an effort to accommodate crossbow archers, a 10-foot by 10-foot elevated shooting tower was developed. Westar assisted by setting poles for the tower, and park staff along with AmeriCorps members completed the tower and expanded the fenced area. Sidewalks were also poured and target holders were built below the tower, making the range ADA accessible.

AMERICORPS HELPS HERE, TOO

Disaster Response

When EF-5 tornadoes tragically struck Greensburg in 2007, Joplin, Mo. in 2011, and Moore, Okla. in 2013, AmeriCorps was there to provide relief where possible.

In the days, weeks, and months following each tornado, AmeriCorps members deployed in groups of 8-10. They provided assistance by offering child-care services, clearing debris, operating chainsaws, removing trees, tarping roofs, covering windows, salvaging materials and personal items, sorting supplies, checking in and out other volunteers, rebuilding fences on surrounding farms to help keep cattle in, and even visiting with homeowners needing a friend to talk to.

"Our members were really great with just listening to homeowners and giving them someone to talk to," said Riffey. "A lot of people we found just needed someone to hear their story. It was their way of mentally and emotionally working through what had just happened to them and our team was glad to listen."

First Day Hikes

Sponsored by America's State Parks, the First Day Hikes program offers individuals and families an opportunity to begin the New Year with a guided hike at their local state parks. Most Kansas state parks participate in the annual event, especially those with AmeriCorps members on hand. Since the programs inception two years ago, over 300 people have participated.

"First Day Hikes offer a great way to get outside, exercise, enjoy nature and welcome in the New Year with friends and family," said Riffey. "Members are a great with promoting the hikes, leading them, and even serving hot chocolate and coffee."



AmeriCorps members join hikers at Green Recreational Trail for a 2014 First Day Hike event.

Keep It Clean Kansas

Hosted by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE), KDWPT, and Westar Energy, Keep It Clean Kansas is an annual volunteer state park clean up event. Each year, five select state parks participate in the one-day event, providing people with an opportunity to gain service hours, give back to their community, and enjoy the outdoors. AmeriCorps members are pros at this and gladly provide help by directing volunteers, preparing lunch, cleaning up trash, and recycling items right alongside volunteers.

Some AmeriCorps members have even held contests for volunteers, such as "Most Unique Item Found" and "Most Cans Picked Up" in order to provide some fun and friendly competition.

BECOMING PART OF THE TEAM

The Kansas Outdoor AmeriCorps Action Team is always looking for dedicated members, and you don't have to be in school or be paying off student loans to qualify. Think you can't afford to dedicate much service time? You might be interested to know that members receive a fixed, bi-weekly living allowance that isn't tied to the numbers of hours served. Think you're too old to participate? Individuals 55 or older may become members and transfer their awards to a child, grandchild or even foster child. The only requirements are that members must be at least 17 years of age, a U.S. citizen or permanent resident and have a high school diploma, GED or agree to obtain one prior to using their education award.

If you have an interest in serving on the Kansas Outdoor AmeriCorps Action Team and continuing this legacy of service, contact your local state park office for an application and to schedule an interview, or contact Riffey at (620) 672-5911.

MEMBER HIGHLIGHT

Cameron Staples, Cedar Bluff Reservoir

One of my favorite projects completed as an AmeriCorps member were the Pheasants Forever Dog Carriers used for transporting dogs during hunting activities. The Great Bend Pheasants Forever Chapter received one, double dog carrier made out of recycled oak plywood and was engraved with the Pheasants Forever logo. The Hays Pheasants Forever Chapter received two similar dog carriers, one double and one single. The single one was unique because it was made out of recycled redwood instead of oak plywood to give it a distinctive look. Designing the carriers from beginning to end enhanced my carpentry skills which will aid me in my future career in construction management.



It was a lot of fun to design and build these dog carriers with the employees at CDBP. It was nice to take a short break from our busy schedule to create something different. This project was important to me because of the reason they were created. These dog carriers were donated to the organization for auction at their annual banquets. The money raised for this project at their auctions will help promote pheasant conservation, preserve pheasant habitat, and encourage others to help donate or do their part in the Pheasant Forever organization. Finally, it taught me that the skills that I have learned at my time as an AmeriCorps member can help the surrounding community. After my time as a member, I can continue to build and donate customized projects to help a cause that will impact my local wildlife and community." 🐾

ODD ANGLING

IN KANSAS

By Nadia Marji
Associate Editor, Pratt

Mike Miller
Editor, Pratt

Kansas is known for bucket-mouth bass and meaty crappie, but you may be surprised to know this state also boasts some not-so-traditional fishing opportunities you may want to explore. It could be a prehistoric “spoony” pushing your line to the limits, or a hard-biting channel cat latching on to your arm that gets your adrenaline pumping. Whichever of these forms of fishing you decide to try, one thing is for sure: they’re all odd angling.

PADDLEFISH SNAGGING



When fishing, “snagging” your line is typically considered a bad thing, but when pursuing paddlefish, also known as spoonbills, a snag can be a sign of success. Utilizing massive treble hooks, a paddlefish angler must drag their line perpendicular to the river’s flow to snag the fish somewhere on its body. This method is used because traditional lures won’t catch this plankton-eating fish. They then must reel in the mammoth spoony to shore without freeing the hook. It’s a lofty goal that requires hours of strenuous casting and pulling back, but an encounter with one of these prehistoric-looking fish is well worth the work.

Paddlefish snagging is one of the rarest fishing opportunities Kansas has to offer, not just because there are no other fish like them in the state, but also because so many pieces have to fall into place before a paddlefish angler may find success. First, the season has to be open. Kansas paddlefish season runs March 15-May 15. Next, water temperatures must be around 50-55 degrees. Lastly, you’ll need an increase in river flow in order for these gentle giants to navigate upstream out of reservoirs for the spring spawning run. It’s a lofty goal that sometimes just boils down to luck, but every year anglers make it happen. The lucky angler who caught the current world record paddlefish in Atchinson County, weighing in at 144-lbs, is proof of that.

If you head out this season to try your luck with snagging, be sure to familiarize yourself with the rules and regulations beforehand by consulting the 2015 Kansas Fishing Regulations Summary. Paddlefish may be snagged at any of the following locations: inside Chetopa and Burlington city parks on the Neosho River; on the Neosho River at Iola, downstream from the dam to the city limits; on the Marais des Cygnes River below Osawatometie Dam, downstream to a posted boundary; on the Marais des Cygnes River on the upstream boundary of the

Marais des Cygnes Wildlife Area, downstream to the Kansas-Missouri border; and the Browning Oxbow of the Missouri River (Doniphan County).

The Neosho River at Chetopa is definitely the most popular snagging site in Kansas, but with the right conditions, any of the above listed sites can prove fruitful.

FLOATLINE FISHING



Floatline fishing, or jug fishing, is unique because until just a few years ago, it wasn’t a legal angling method in Kansas. It was legal in other states, and common for Oklahoma anglers to set out dozens of floatlines. In Kansas, floatline fishing is restricted to designated reservoirs, including Council Grove, Elk City, Fall River, Glen Elder, Hillsdale, John Rdmond, Kanopolis, Lovewell, Pomona, Toronto, Tuttle Creek, and Wilson. The season for floatline fishing is July 15-Sept. 15, and anglers are restricted to eight floatlines with two hooks on each. Floatlines, as with trotlines and setlines, may not be set within 150 yards of any dam. The floats must be made of plastic, wood, or foam and shall be closed cell so they are incapable of holding water. Floatlines may be used only from sunrise to sunset and must be under immediate supervision of the angler. All floatlines must be tagged with the angler’s name and address or KDWPT number and must be removed from the water when fishing ceases.

Popular baits for Kansas floatlines include gizzard shad, shad sides, and prepared baits. Floatlines can be weighted with a length of line to keep them anchored or they can be allowed to drift. A long pole with a hook at the end can be handy for snagging the line as the boat drifts by the float.

Floatlines can be very effective on catfish and offer a completely unique type of interactive fishing for Kansas anglers. Just imagine watching the floats bob up and down when fish strike, chasing them down with the boat and bringing in a big catfish, hand-over-hand.

TROUT IN KANSAS?

Trout may be the most beautiful freshwater fish with their vivid color, spots, and speckling. You might consider them unique because of where we normally find them; however, if you're really looking for unique, catch a trout in Kansas!

Trout are not native to any Kansas waters. However, in 1978 they were stocked in the stilling basins at Cedar Bluff and Webster reservoirs, Rocky Ford Fishing area and the River Pond at Tuttle Creek to provide a winter fishing opportunity. Anglers loved catching them and the list of waters receiving winter trout stockings grew steadily to include 39 locations statewide today. Year-round survival has been documented at Unit No. 30 in the Mined Land Wildlife Area, but all other areas are limited to winter fishing.

Beginning when the trout season opens on Nov. 1, more than 160,000 trout are stocked at regular intervals through early April. The season closes April 15, which doesn't mean that anglers can't continue to fish for and catch trout. During the Nov.1-April 15 season, anglers must have a trout stamp to fish for and possess trout at any of the trout locations. Type 1 waters require all anglers fishing to possess a trout stamp. Type 2 waters require only anglers fishing for or possessing trout to have a trout permit. The permit is \$12.50, and is required of all anglers 16 and older. Anglers 15 and younger don't need a permit but can only keep two trout per day. Trout permit holders can keep five trout per day, unless otherwise posted. All resident anglers age 16-74 must all have a fishing license. (Because trout survive year-round at the Unit No. 30 Mined Land lake, anglers must have a trout permit all year.)

Revenues from the sale of trout permits allows the department to purchase catchable-size trout from hatcheries in other states. Most trout stocked are 10-13 inches long, but the contract calls for a percentage of the fish to be larger, so lunkers are caught each winter.

Unlike our warm-water fish, trout are quite active when water temperatures are in the high 30s and 40s, and anglers catch trout using a variety of techniques. Many prefer traditional flycasting equipment, and catch trout on the same flies anglers in the Rocky Mountains might use; gold-ribbed hare's ear nymphs, prince nymphs, wooly buggers, and on occasion, dry flies including Adams, and black gnats. Light spinning gear is also popular with anglers, who cast small spoons, spinners and jigs. And many will use prepared baits such as Berkley Powerbait. Bait is fished under a small float or on the bottom. Long, ultra-light rods and light line is preferred.

HANDFISHING



If you're looking for the next-level-up in fishing, handfishing is it. Also known as "noodling," this equipment-free form of fishing is not for the faint of heart. Luckily, Kansas is one of a handful of states that offer this special season in select areas. With a little prior planning, a good location, and most importantly, some guts, you just might find this is your new favorite adrenaline rush.

Here's how it works. Using their hands as bait, anglers will find a suspected flathead catfish hole, barricade any possible exits the fish might take, stick their arm inside and wait for a bite. If a bite doesn't come, either there isn't a fish inside, or the angler hasn't delved in deep enough. Once a flathead has taken the bait, the angler must act quickly to remove it from its hole – a task easier said than done. These fish will put up a fight and scraps and bruises are inevitable. Adding to the challenge of handfishing, regulations do not allow man-made objects that attract fish, such as a barrel, box, or bathtub to be used. Handfishing anglers are also prohibited from using snorkel or scuba gear. A stringer may be used, but not until the catfish is caught by hand and is at or above the water's surface.

So where's the allure? For some anglers, learning a new form of fishing is incentive enough, but for others, the satisfaction of wrestling a bohemeth flathead to the water's surface by hand is what drives them. Anglers ready to take on the challenge may do so with a special permit in select waters from sunrise to sunset June 15-Aug. 31.

Kansas waters open to handfishing for flathead catfish include: the entire length of the Arkansas River; all federal reservoirs from beyond 150 yards of the dam to the upstream end of the federal property; and the Kansas River from its origin, downstream to its confluence with the Missouri River. Handfishing permits can be obtained for \$27.50 at license vendors or online. Anglers participating in this special season will need to have a handfishing permit in addition to a regular fishing license. ♡



SUMMERTIME SLIME

by **Ron Kaufman**

director, Information Services Division, Topeka

If there are children in your life, you've probably witnessed a hapless adult get slimed with gallons of green goo on one of those kids' television shows. It's all harmless fun – the kids scream with glee while the adult victims cower under the weight of all that goop. Adult observers are left wondering what that stuff is made of and how the sludge-draped patsy manages to wash the green out of their clothes. And, we secretly hope our own kids or grandkids never learn the recipe.

Slime on TV may be harmless fun, but it is quite the opposite if your favorite lake or pond develops a thick, floating, green slurry that covers the water and coats the shoreline. When that happens, you could be witnessing a harmful algal bloom. It's no laughing matter and the recipe for the slime may surprise you.

The slime is often caused by a life form called blue-green algae – but even that is a misnomer. Blue-green algae are actually types of bacteria called cyanobacteria that are common around the world in rivers, lakes, ponds and oceans. They're at the bottom of the food chain, providing nutrients for a ladder of ever-higher life forms like fish, mollusks and crustaceans.

Although blue-green algae are common, they usually remain unseen, in balance with their ecosystem.

Under certain conditions, the bacteria begin to reproduce so rapidly that the population blooms into a slurry that looks like someone spread house paint over the water. The blooms can be a variety of colors, including bright green, blue, brown or red. Some blooms may look like foam or may not be visible at all. Entire lakes can be involved – particularly smaller bodies – or just a portion of a lake. Blooms can appear or disappear quickly, or be moved around a lake by winds, waves or currents.

Health Effects

Even if we can see a bloom, it's what we cannot see that is of greatest concern. The mere presence of blue-green algae is not necessarily cause for alarm, as some species don't produce toxins and aren't considered harmful. However, that cannot be determined for certain without testing the water for the particular species and toxins indicative of harmful algal blooms. When these are present in quantities large enough to create a health risk to people and animals, then a harmful algal bloom is present.

If there are high enough levels of toxins, people and animals can experience ill-effects from swallowing some of the scum, drinking the affected water, through skin contact or by inhaling water spray while swimming, skiing or boating. The most



Consider it nature's warning sign. When water looks like someone has spilled bright blue or green paint on the surface, stay out. Blue-green algae is present in all water and not all of it is toxic.

common signs and symptoms in people include skin irritation, blistering or irritated eyes; respiratory problems such as a sore throat, cough, or difficulty breathing; or intestinal issues such as abdominal pain, vomiting or diarrhea. Earache, headache or other flu-like symptoms may also occur.

Exposure to harmful algal bloom toxins can be more severe for animals, particularly dogs, and may cause death. It is important to keep pets away from the water and any accumulated or dried scum on the shoreline. If an animal is exposed, quickly and thoroughly wash off the lake water and scum with fresh water. Watch for vomiting, diarrhea, general weakness and lethargy, difficulty breathing and convulsions.

If you or your pet becomes ill after exposure to a possible harmful algal bloom, seek medical or veterinary care immediately.

The Recipe

The recipe for a harmful algal bloom is simple and complex at the same time. Simply, the algae need sunlight and an overabundance of nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen. On a more complex level, the sunlight has to penetrate deep enough into the water to spark cell division and warm the water. That usually occurs between April 1 and October 31 when the sun is higher in the sky. The nutrient overload is typically served up by natural and commercial fertilizer runoff from agricultural operations, urban areas, and sewage discharges that are washed into streams and rivers and eventually end up in the lake. Phosphorus is a leading culprit feeding harmful algal blooms. Although warm water tem-

perature plays a role, some harmful algal blooms can persist year-round in small Kansas lakes when the nutrient load is high enough.

When alerted to the possibility of a harmful algal bloom, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) samples public recreational water bodies. One or more samples are collected at locations around the lake where there is the greatest likelihood of public contact with the water, such as docks and beaches. However, it's impossible to monitor all public waters on a daily basis. Kansas State Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory can assist with testing of some private waters. Back at the lab, technicians will examine the sample under a microscope to look for and count the number of harmful algae species in a small portion of the sample. They will also perform a chemical analysis to determine if toxins are present and at what levels.

If the test results meet certain minimum criteria, KDHE will declare either a watch or warning, depending on the concentrations of toxins and algae in the sample. A watch notifies the public that a hazardous condition exists, that the water may be unsafe for people and animals and that water contact is discouraged. Signs should be posted at all public access locations. A warning is a heightened level and signals that conditions are unsafe, water contact should not occur and that all conditions of a watch are in effect. After a bloom fades, toxins may remain in the water because when the algae cells die,



Diana Lehmann with the Kansas Department of Health and Environment studies a water sample containing blue-green algae. Chemical analysis will determine if toxins are present.

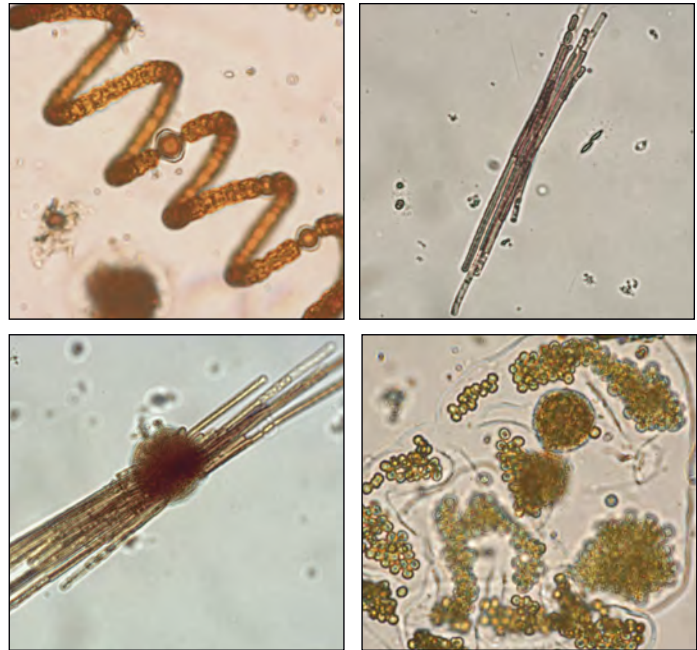
they burst open – releasing their toxins – then settle out of sight to the lower levels of the lake. The lake may look fine, but the toxin level could be high enough to create a public health risk.

KDHE posts harmful algal bloom watches and warnings on its website, notifies local public health officials, physicians and veterinarians, and issues a statewide news release in the case of warnings. The department works closely with officials from the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation and city and county officials to advise the public when a watch or warning is in effect. KDHE doesn't have the authority to close beaches and lakes, but if conditions are serious enough, lake and park managers may choose to do so.

It's impossible to predict when and where a bloom will occur and how long it will last. One thing is certain, though. When a bloom occurs at a popular, heavily-used lake, the results may have serious economic repercussions. The state's largest impoundment, Milford Reservoir north of Junction City, hosts millions of visitors each year. The lake has had several harmful algal blooms, which have reached the warning level and impacted the economy of the region. The 15,700 surface-acre lake is on the Republican River and covers parts of three counties. Its watershed drains nearly 3,800 square miles and includes portions of 11 northcentral Kansas counties, so an ample supply of nutrients flows into the reservoir. The blooms have spurred state park and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers staff to close beaches, and some visitors have cancelled their reservations at lakeside campsites and cabins, as well as area motels and resorts. Anglers and boaters may stay away, too, which further affects sales at the lake's marinas and area retailers. The economic ripple effect of lost revenues has been felt on many levels, as the reservoir is one of the important attractions in the Junction City area.

There is no known effective long-term treatment to prevent harmful algal blooms. Chemicals may be used to temporarily kill the algae, but doing so will release potentially dangerous toxins into the water and new algae cells will replace those killed. The best method is to reduce the inflow of excess nutrients. Although a good rain may help flush a bloom out of a lake, it's often only temporary. The rain also washes more nutrients into the lake from the watershed, further aggravating the nutrient overload.

As you can see, television slime is a lot more fun than real-world, harmful algal bloom slime. We can laugh at the television goop, but only shake our heads and stay away from the real stuff. ♡



Microscopic views of common blue-green algae species found in Kansas waters including anabaena upper left; aphanizomenon upper right and lower left, and microcystis lower right.

What if I See a Bloom?

If you believe you have seen a harmful algal bloom, keep everyone – including pets – away from the water and shoreline debris. If possible, notify the lake manager or park staff. You can also submit a report to KDHE using the Algal Bloom Reporting Form on the KDHE website.

Are Fish Safe to Eat?

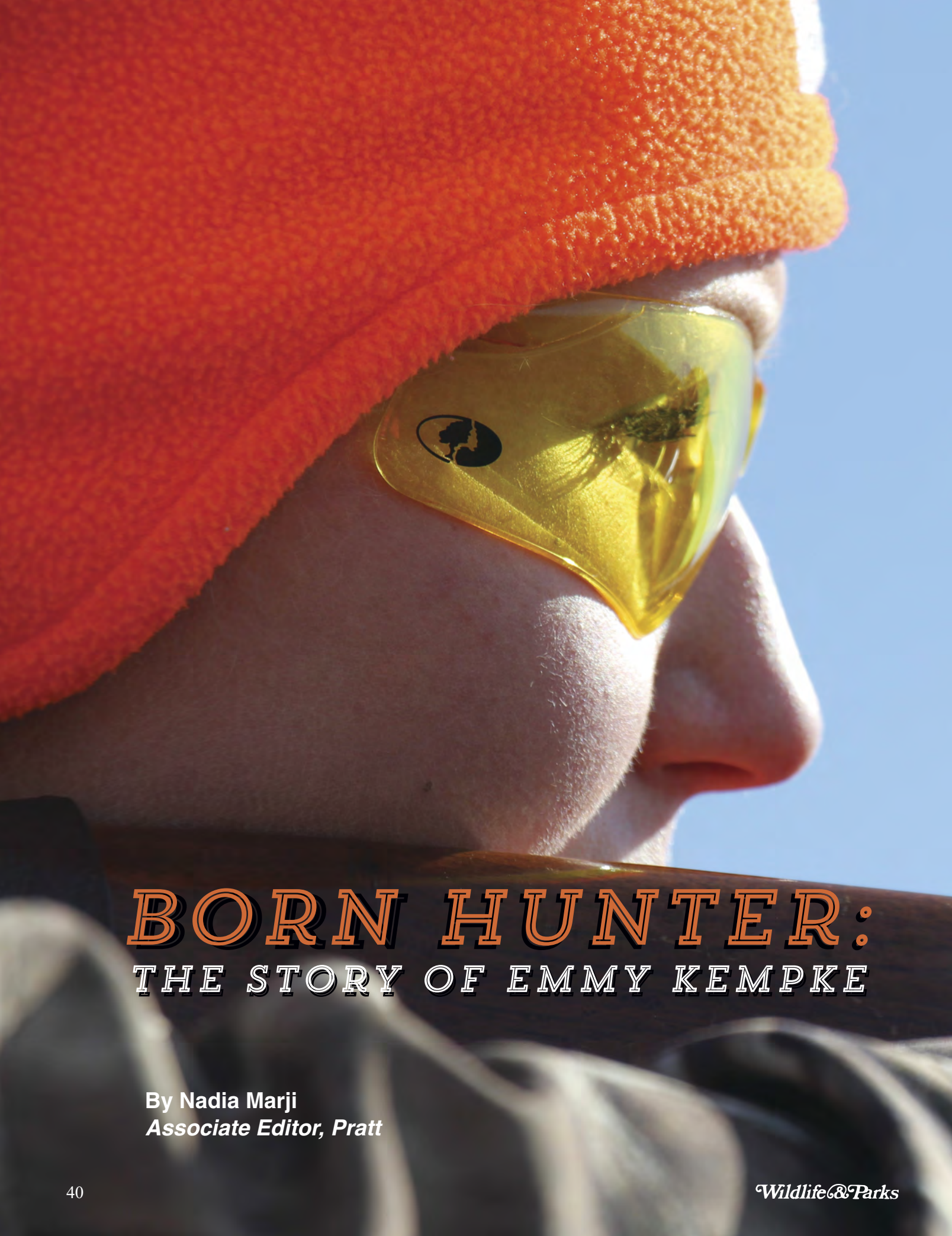
Fish caught during a harmful algal bloom are generally safe to eat, as long as you consume only the fillets and discard the skins and entrails. Use protective gloves or wash your hands thoroughly with fresh water after handling the fish.

Camping and Land-based Recreation

During a watch or warning, it is safe to visit parks and enjoy a variety of land-based outdoor activities.

More Information

You'll find helpful information and the Algal Bloom Reporting Form on the KDHE Harmful Algal Bloom Website - www.kdheks.gov/algae-illness. For updated watches and warnings, you can also call the After Hours Lake Status Hotline at 785-296-1664.



BORN HUNTER:

THE STORY OF EMMY KEMPKE

By Nadia Marji
Associate Editor, Pratt

“HUNTING HAS BEEN A PART OF MY LIFE SINCE I WAS BORN. IT RUNS THROUGH MY VEINS. IT’S ALWAYS BEEN AND WILL ALWAYS BE SOMETHING I DO WITH MY FAMILY.”

In a social media-driven society that sometimes thrives on ridiculing photos of young women with dead game, Emmy Kempke refuses to hide her family’s hunting heritage. A 16 year old Salina native, Kempke is proud to let the world know she comes from a family of hunters.

LEARNING THE RIGHT WAY

As a young girl, Kempke remembers eagerly waiting for her family’s return home from hunts. “I was thrilled when my dad came home with something, even if it wasn’t much.” With two parents who hunted, Kempke learned at an early age that hunting was an activity that could be enjoyed by all.

At the age of seven, Kempke graduated from the role of welcoming party to Dad’s hunting sidekick. It was a promotion she took very seriously, even if it meant she only got to sit and watch from the truck. After a year’s worth of shadowing her dad on hunts, it was time for Kempke to enter the next phase of her hunting education – learning to shoot.

Kempke was 8 years old when she got her first gun – a .22 rifle won at a Ducks Unlimited banquet. Her dad began to teach her the basics and a year later, she was walking fields. Kempke explains that just because she had a gun, doesn’t mean she was “hunting.”

“I carried an unloaded gun in order to get used to carrying the weight, and to help me develop a pattern of how to safely walk with the gun and everyone else,” said Kempke. “By the time I was 11, this was routine for me. It wasn’t until I was 12 and had passed Hunter Education that I carried a loaded gun for any type of hunt.”

Kempke’s careful introduction into firearms was the result of her caring father, Randy. He knew from the start that if his daughter was going to learn how to use firearms, she was going to learn the right way, and that meant exposure to safe gun handling practices and proper education. A 22-year veteran of the Kansas Hunter Education program, Dad isn’t the only mentor in his daughter’s life to be involved in Hunter Education. Several close family friends also instruct, including Angie, a female instructor of 23 years. Kempke plans on following in her footsteps and becoming a Kansas Hunter Education instructor when she meets the age requirement.

KEMPKE’S FIRSTS

At the age of 14, Kempke killed her first birds – a pheasant and quail on Eckman Hunting Preserve. It was a hunt that sparked a deep desire to continue hunting upland game, and just one short year later, Kempke was able to add chukar to her list of birds, as well.



Kempke (left) is pictured here with her father, Randy, and sister, Amy following an upland hunt.

If you asked Kempke today what her favorite upland bird is to hunt, surprisingly enough, she wouldn’t say any of the previously mentioned birds.

“I enjoy prairie chicken hunting the most,” said Kempke. “I like sitting in a field during the early hours of the morning, or just as dusk is setting in, and waiting for the birds to fly in.” Kempke added that the evening hunts provide some great photography opportunities, especially when shooting sunsets. It’s just one more passion of hers that has been realized by being outdoors.

Another outdoor first for Kempke came last June during a NRA Youth Hunter Education Challenge (YHEC).

“Something a lot of people don’t know about me is that I’m the current state champion of the Safety Trail Event,” Kempke proudly stated. An advanced program in outdoor skills and safety training for young hunters, the YHEC events are open only to youth who have completed Hunter Education. The goal of the challenge is to test a young hunter’s skills under simulated hunting conditions. Kempke passed with flying colors.

During the trail challenge, Kempke was tested on her ability to demonstrate safe firearm handling skills at various stations, something that is second



Kempke was one of five youth to participate in an inaugural youth deer hunt this year hosted by the Smoky Hill River Chapter of Pheasants Forever.

Kempke filled her tag on day two of the hunt.

nature for her. Out of 14 competitors, Kempke had the highest score out of all the events, tallying a perfect 300 out of 300. It was a true testament to the instruction and guidance provided by her father so many years before.

AN INTRO TO BIG GAME

As Kempke's outdoor skills continued to flourish, she and her father decided that at the age of 16, it was time she graduated to big game. Thanks to a youth deer hunting event hosted by the Smoky Hill River chapter of Pheasant Forever, Kempke got an opportunity to hunt whitetail during the 2014 firearms season.

Growing up hunting upland game, Kempke found the transition to big game a little harder than expected.

"You have to be in the right place, at the right time, in the right conditions, in order for you to be able to shoot them," said Kempke.

Although her first night out didn't produce a doe, that all changed the next morning when Kempke filled her first deer tag.

"I was excited that I had gotten such a nice doe, said Kempke, "and I loved that my dad was able to be there and watch me shoot it. It made the experience that much more memorable for me."

Since her recent success, Kempke now has aspirations of pursuing more big game.

"If I had the chance, I would like to go on an elk or pronghorn hunt," said Kempke. "I think it would be incredible to experience." She added that she plans to get her first whitetail buck before anything else, though.

BREAKING THE BARRIER

Although she has been exposed to the outdoors her whole life, Kempke realizes she doesn't have a typical upbringing in the sense that most girls today don't hunt.

"They just don't feel the passion I do for it and I don't know why that is," said Kempke. She does, however, believe intimidation may play a part.

"For new hunters, it could just be scary in general," Kempke hypothesizes. "Carrying a loaded weapon, trying to remember the rules of safety, and keeping up with your hunting buddies is hard." Kempke added that although it can take a while to get accustomed to everything, she considers it a fun challenge.

Whether she is rounding a corner trying to flush up pheasants, demonstrating proper firearm handling to younger kids, or pursuing new game of her own, one thing is for certain when it comes to Kempke – she's not stopping.

Apart from upland bird hunting, Kempke's other favorite outdoor activity is frogging.

"Being the night owl that I am, I enjoy being out when nobody else is," said Kempke. "The whole experience is just fun."

A junior, Kempke currently attends school in Ellsworth. When the time comes, she plans to attend Kansas State or Wichita State to pursue a degree in math or science. ♡

2015 Sportsmen's Calendar

SPRING TURKEY:

- **Youth/Persons with disabilities:** April 1-14, 2015
- **Archery:** April 6-14, 2015
- **Firearm:** April 15-May 31, 2015

FALL TURKEY:

- **Season:** Oct. 1-Dec. 1 AND Dec. 14, 2015-Jan. 31, 2016

DEER:

- **Youth/Persons with disabilities:** Sept. 5-13, 2015
- **Archery:** Sept. 14-Dec. 31, 2015
- **Muzzleloader:** Sept. 14-27, 2015
- **Regular Firearm:** Dec. 2-13, 2015
- **Pre-rut whitetail antlerless:** Oct. 10-11, 2015
- **Firearm Extended Whitetail Antlerless Season:**
Jan. 1-3, 2016 (Units 6, 8, 9, 10, 16, and 17)
Jan. 1-10, 2016 (Units 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 11, 12, 13, and 14)
Jan. 1-17, 2016 (Units 10a, 15 and 19)
- **Archery Extended Whitetail Antlerless Season**
Jan. 18-31, 2016 (Unit 19 only)

ANTELOPE

Firearm and muzzleloader application deadline:
June 12, 2015 (residents only)

- **Archery:** Sept. 19-27 AND Oct. 10-31, 2015
- **Muzzleloader:** Sept. 28-Oct. 5, 2015
- **Firearm:** Oct 2-5, 2015

ELK (residents only)

Application deadline for Ft. Riley July 10, 2015

Outside Fort Riley:

- **Muzzleloader:** Sept. 1-30, 2015
- **Archery:** Sept. 14-Dec. 31, 2015
- **Firearm:** Dec. 2-13, 2015 and Jan.1-March 15, 2016

On Fort Riley:

- **Muzzleloader and Archery:** Sept. 1-30, 2015
- **Firearm Season for Holders of Any-Elk Permits:** Oct. 1-Dec. 31, 2015

Antlerless Only:

- **Firearm First Segment:** Oct. 1-30, 2015
- **Firearm Second Segment:** Nov. 1-30, 2015
- **Firearm Third Segment:** Dec. 1-31, 2015

DOVE

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

- **Season:** Sept.1-Oct. 31 and Nov. 7-15, 2015

EXOTIC DOVE

(Eurasian collared and ringed turtle doves only)

- **Season:** Nov. 20, 2015-Feb. 28, 2016

RAIL (Sora and Virginia)

- **Season:** Sept. 1-Nov. 9, 2015

SNIPE

- **Season:** Sept. 1-Dec. 16, 2015

WOODCOCK

- **Season:** Oct. 17-Nov. 30, 2015

SANDHILL CRANE

- **Season:** Nov. 11, 2015-Jan. 7, 2016

GREATER PRAIRIE CHICKEN

- **Early Season (Greater Prairie Chicken Unit):**
Sept. 15-Oct. 15, 2015
- **Regular Season (Greater Prairie Chicken Unit):**
Nov. 21, 2015-Jan. 31, 2016
- (No open season for taking prairie chickens in Southwest Unit)

PHEASANTS

- **Season:** Nov. 14, 2015-Jan. 31, 2016
- **Youth Season:** Nov. 7-8, 2015

QUAIL

- **Season:** Nov. 14, 2015-Jan. 31, 2016
- **Youth Season:** Nov. 7-8, 2015

SQUIRREL

- **Season:** June 1, 2015-Feb. 28, 2016

RABBITS (cottontail & jackrabbit)

- **Season:** All year

CROW

- **Season:** Nov. 10, 2015-March 10, 2016

TRAPPING/HUNTING

- **Season:** Nov. 18, 2015-Feb. 15, 2016
- Badger, bobcat, mink, muskrat, opossum, raccoon, swift fox, red fox, gray fox, striped skunk, weasel.

BEAVER AND OTTER TRAPPING

- **Season:** Nov. 18, 2014-March 31, 2016

RUNNING

- **Season:** March 1-Nov. 8, 2015

FLOATLINE FISHING

- **Season:** July 15-Sept. 15, 2015

HANDFISHING

- **Season:** June 15-Aug. 31, 2015

BULLFROG

- **Season:** July 1-Oct. 31, 2015

Species Profile: OSPREY

This Spring, and during the months of September and October, you may find yourself eyeing an Osprey. These large migrant birds, averaging 3.5 pounds, can often be seen near large bodies of water, rivers, and some farm ponds. Feeding almost exclusively on live fish, Osprey will dive into a body of water, feet first, to catch their prey.

Osprey are most easily identified by their contrasting dark chocolate brown and pearl white feathers, and their bright golden-yellow eyes. It can be difficult to discern between sexes, however females can be identified by a series of brown stripes near their neck.

Next time you see a large dark brown and white bird in the sky, listen for a rapid series of whistles – it just might be an Osprey.



Dan Witt photo



Backlash

by Mike Miller

MORE THAN FISHING TRIPS

Dad and I will take our 23rd Canada fishing trip together this June. My aunt, Dad's sister, will go along, making her third trip with us. Dad and I traveled north to fish for the first time in 1989 and have missed making the trip together just four times since. Dad initiated the first trip, even paying my way because, he said, he'd received an especially generous salary bonus that year. Truth is, I probably couldn't have afforded it on my own then. One of his business associates had recommended a camp in Northwest Ontario and he made reservations for four days of fishing in September.

To some, a fishing trip taken 26 years ago would be ancient history, a vague recollection. My memories are full of details from all of our trips, but many are remembered more clearly by perusing through journals I kept starting with our fourth or fifth trip. However, even though I didn't keep a journal on the first trip, I remember it more clearly than the rest. I had dreamed of fishing in Canada since I was in grade school and had been captivated by articles I'd read in *Outdoor Life*, *Field and Stream* and *Sports Afield*. When Dad suggested that first trip, I'm sure I acted like a 30-year-old fourth grader waking up on Christmas Day.

We made what seemed like a never-ending 1,100-mile drive to Sioux Narrows, Ontario in two days. I'd never been through Minnesota, and I enjoyed the rugged scenery of the last 150 miles before the border. However, it wasn't until we traveled 30 or so miles northwest of Fort Francis, Ontario that I found what I was looking for: vast timbered wilderness and unending water. When a black bear ran across the road in front of us, I knew I was in the "bush." I could hardly contain my excitement.

While we were truly in a remote fishing camp, the fishing didn't live up to our expectations. We fished with guides each day and enjoyed traditional Canadian shore lunches, but fishing in the gin-clear water was tough. However, the Canadian wilderness captured my soul, and has called me back each year since.

The 2015 trip will be especially enjoyable with Aunt Barbara along. She's a late bloomer as far as fishing goes, only discovering how much she enjoys it in recent years. But she truly loves to fish and having her along lets me see the country I've grown to love through "new" eyes. Even though I am completely enamored with the "north country," familiarity can breed complacency. Aunt Barbara's enthusiasm for each of the sights and experiences reminds me how truly unique they are.

About 20 years ago, we started going to a different camp on Lake of the Woods near Nestor Falls. It's not as remote as the first camp, but it lies on a private island, has comfortable cabins and there's a dining lodge where great meals are served. Fishing on our own, it took us a couple of trips to learn the water. We have certain spots we have to return to each year, certain sights we have to see and we've become good friends with the couple who own and run the resort.

It's been a true gift to be able to enjoy the outdoors with my family, and making the trip to Canada each June with Dad has been an amazing life tradition. I know I probably won't fully appreciate what it has meant until we can no longer make the trip together, but I am determined to appreciate each moment and cherish each memory.

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