

KANSAS

Wildlife & Parks

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2015

\$2.75





KANSAS

Wildlife & Parks

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2015 – VOL. 72, NO. 5

- 2 The Kansas View**.....by Robin Jennison
Funding Hunting, Fishing and Conservation
- 16 Making Sense of Kansas Duck Zones**.....by Marc Murrell
Duck hunting zones allow for optimum hunting opportunity.
- 20 Places to Shoot**.....by Mike Miller
Check out these safe and family-friendly archery and gun ranges.
- 24 Anastin's First Turkey**.....by Dustin Teasley
A winter turkey hunt is a perfect way to introduce a daughter to hunting.
- 28 The Bobcat Chronicles**.....by Matt Peek
A biologist recounts interesting tales involving elusive Kansas bobcats.
- 32 Dove, Dove, Shoot**.....by Nadia Marji
Tyler Reimer downs his first-ever bird, and Bella, the chocolate lab, is most thankful.
- 36 Hunter Surveys Go Modern**.....by Mike Nyhoff
Electronic daily hunt permit system, iSportsman, revolutionizes hunter surveys.
- 40 The Knife Maker**.....by Andra Bryan Stefanoni
Phil Evans made his first knife in 1995. Today, some his work sells for more than \$2,000.
- 44 Species Profile**.....by Nadia Marji
Wigeon
- 45 Backlash**.....by Mike Miller
Fall Traditions

Front Cover: Hunters set harvest records during the early teal season at Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area last year. Mike Miller photo. **Inside Front Cover:** Tyler Reimer waits for a dove to fly within shotgun range on his first hunt. Nadia Marji photo.

Contact the Editor: mike.miller@ksoutdoors.com





Funding Hunting, Fishing and Conservation

If you follow the Kansas Wildlife, Parks and Tourism Commission meetings, you may have heard that department staff made recommendations to raise our license and permit fees. The Commission will vote on fee recommendations at the October 22 meeting in Burlington. No one likes to see prices increase, but regular license fees haven't increased since 2002, and general resident deer and turkey permit fees haven't increased since 1984. It is time for this discussion.

Spending on wildlife and fisheries programs has remained fairly steady in recent years but we've seen the uncommitted balance of the Wildlife Fee Fund begin to shrink. Since 2002, inflation has increased the cost of doing business by 32 percent. To maintain pivotal wildlife and fishery programs listed below, revenues must increase.

The fall Walk-In Hunting Access (WIHA) program opens more than 1 million acres of private land to hunting, and the spring turkey WIHA opened 260,000 acres last year. With 97 percent of Kansas land in private ownership, public hunting access is an important issue. The WIHA program has more than tripled the number of public hunting acres in Kansas. It's a win-win program because the land stays in private ownership, landowners are able to supplement their farm income, and hunters can enjoy planning hunts using an atlas with more than a million acres of possibilities.

In 2015, the FISH program leased 165 farm ponds and 70 miles of streams for public fishing. While department biologists manage fisheries on 24 federal reservoirs, 44 state fishing lakes and 230 community lakes, many Kansas anglers prefer small, rural waters like those in FISH.

The Community Lakes Assistance Program (CFAP) is another program we want to continue to fund. CFAP helps communities manage the fisheries in their lakes and pays them to remove any angler fees. More than 200 community-owned lakes across Kansas are now enrolled in CFAP, providing close-to-home, convenient angling.

Other fisheries programs include the Urban Fishing Program, which stocks catchable-sized fish in 77 urban public waters; the trout program, which stocks trout at more than 30 locations through winter months; and each year our four hatcheries produce 100 million sport fish, which are stocked into Kansas public waters.

Public land managers maintain and enhance wildlife habitat on 367,000 acres of state- and federally-owned land

for optimum hunting, trapping and wildlife watching opportunities.

And while many of our programs emphasize public access, we realize that most wildlife and hunting occurs on private land. To provide large-scale benefits to wildlife, we must work with private landowners to enhance habitat. Our biologists partner with state conservation organizations to help private landowners improve wildlife habitat and they also work closely with the Natural Resource Conservation Service to help deliver wildlife-friendly Farm Bill programs to landowners.

The Southeast Quail Initiative provides cost-share for land-use practices that are beneficial to quail. And in the northwest part of the state, the Pheasant Initiative works with private landowners in a similar fashion.

The Pass It On and Aquatic Education programs provide outdoor skills training, and hunting and fishing experiences to thousands of youngsters each year.

The Wildlife Education Section operates six wildlife education centers across the state and provides Kansas teachers with wildlife education materials and teaching aids. The Archery in the Schools Program has trained archery instructors and provided archery equipment at 250 schools.

The proposed license fees are necessary to continue these programs, as well as to maintain day-to-day services such as law enforcement, information dissemination, and property maintenance. Keeping the Wildlife Fee Fund healthy is important to cash flow at certain times of the year, and ensures excise taxes on hunting and fishing equipment allotted to Kansas through the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration program can be captured.

As you might expect, Kansans who hunt and fish have told us what they think about the proposal. However, the majority who've commented have been supportive. Our wildlife and fish programs are truly user-pay, and our customers have always supported wildlife conservation financially and politically. Many have said they can support fee increases as long as the money is spent the right way. I get that. We owe it to Kansas hunters and anglers to spend the Wildlife Fee Fund responsibly and efficiently. I believe our current wildlife and fishery programs offer fantastic outdoor opportunities, and with the dedication and skill of our entire KDWPT staff, I know we can live up to that expectation. ♡

GOVERNOR
Sam Brownback

COMMISSIONERS
Gerald Lauber, Chairman, *Topeka*
Tom Dill, Vice Chairman, *Salina*
Roger Marshall, M.D., *Great Bend*
Gary Hayzlett, *Lakin*
Aaron Rider, *Columbus*
Harrison Williams, *Wichita*
Emerick Cross, *Kansas City*

ADMINISTRATION
Secretary Robin Jennison
Ass't. Sec./Admin. Todd Workman
Ass't. Sec./Wildlife, Fisheries, Boating Keith Sexson
Ass't. Sec./ Parks and Tourism Linda Craghead
Director of Administrative Svcs. Cindy Livingston
Director of Parks Linda Lanterman
Director of Law Enforcement Kevin Jones
Director of Information Services Ron Kaufman
Chief Legal Counsel Chris Tymeson

MAGAZINE STAFF
Executive Editor Mike Miller
Managing Editor Nadia Marji
Graphic Designer Specialist Dustin Teasley
Staff Writer Marc Murrell
Circulation Teri Simpson

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.

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

Equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from programs described herein is available to all individuals without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, political affiliation, and military or veteran status. Complaints of discrimination should be sent to Office of the Secretary, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism, 1020 S Kansas Ave., Topeka, KS 66612-1327.

Letters to The Editor

A RARE FIND

Editor:

I'm not sure if you're interested in such information, but I came across a white fledgling this summer.

Unfortunately, when I was letting my dogs in from the yard, one dropped it on the porch. Sadly, the fledgling passed away shortly after. Such a shame for a unique bird.

Patty Hammeke, Lewis



KOTA'S GROWING UP

Editor:

Enjoyed seeing Kota on the cover of *Kansas Wildlife & Parks*. She's not a puppy anymore.

Congratulations on the hunt test pass! You could enter her in some field trial derbies for dogs under two years old. Most, if not all, the marks are doubles. Good luck.

Philip Carson, Kansas City

PERFECT TIMING

Editor:

Here is a shot I took at Melvern Lake earlier in August. It was perfect timing with the sign in front. I thought you might enjoy sharing it in the magazine.

Jeremy Maples, McCune

THANK MILFORD MARINA

Editor:

On Page 9 of the July/August *Kansas Wildlife & Parks* magazine, the article on the Cabela's National Championship Walleye Tournament gave accolades to many who helped with this event. However, the owner/operator of the Milford Lake Marina and his family were not mentioned. They provided food, drinks, sandwiches and miscellaneous services crucial to the success of this tournament. Tim Date, his wife Holly, and sons Jason and Jess, deserve a big "thank you" from the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism.

The "blue/green" algae scare has been a detriment to their business for the past three years and they need all the support we can muster. An article in this magazine telling the facts about the algae would be helpful in quelling the fears that most lake goers understand. Your magazine is great and I read it from cover to cover.

Semper-fi,

Jerry Wagor, Milford

Thanks to the Date family for making the Cabela's walleye tournament such a success. Such events require a huge team effort, and some who deserve thanks can be left out. We apologize for that.

Check out Page 30 of the May/June 2015 issue and the article "Summer Slime."

Editor



BIRD BRAIN

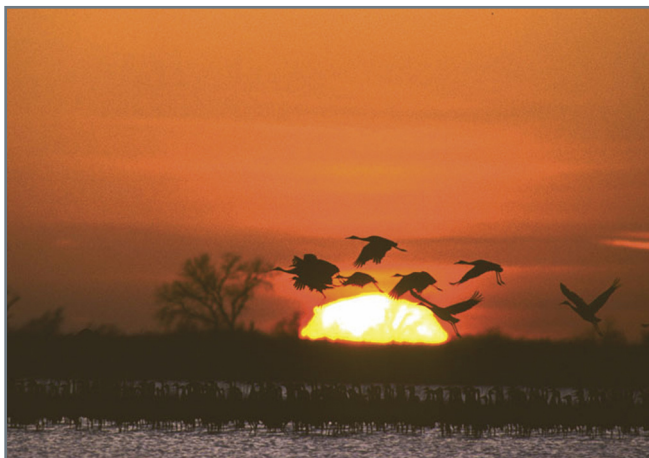
WITH MIKE RADER

Our Friends, the Fall Migrants

September and October are months when a spike in migration occurs in Kansas. Hummingbirds and shorebirds kicked off fall migration in July and August, while the bulk of the songbirds usually wait until late August and September. Waterfowl, such as blue-winged teal, start in late August and early September, with other species ramping up their migration in October and November. Birding in Kansas this time of year can be extremely rewarding, as well as challenging. The identification of adult birds in spring is usually pretty straightforward, with a few exceptions. However in the fall, identification of many species is complicated with dull adults in worn or molting plumage, young-of-the-year juveniles showing bright, fresh plumage and a lot of in-betweens. 'Tis the season to do your homework! Crack open those field guides, download those apps, and prepare yourself before going out - it can certainly save some time and consternation when it comes to bird identification.

Because birds migrate in large numbers throughout our state, you can usually find plenty to look at in any known birding hotspot. Migration for most species is drawn out longer in fall, unlike the "hurry up and get to the breeding grounds" rush of spring. Adults in many species tend to migrate first in fall, with the youngsters following later - sometimes a month or more later. Some birds, like whooping and sandhill cranes, need to be shown how and where to migrate, while young shorebirds are hard-wired to know when to leave and where to go, which is a good thing since their parents depart weeks earlier in most cases. It's always amazing to me how they survive the perils throughout the thousands of miles some species travel.

The marshes of central Kansas, which are in great shape waterwise this year, are great spots to view fall migrants. Cheyenne Bottoms has had plenty of water this summer, so conditions for waterfowl should be excellent. Quivira National Wildlife Refuge water levels have been somewhat lower, creating plenty of shorebird habitat, so this should set



up for a complimentary relationship, as it often does, between the two locations. Plan an extended trip to take in both marshes.

Southwest Kansas has benefitted to some degree with better rains this year, so the habitat in that part of the state, including the Cimarron National Grasslands and abundant playas, should be good, as well.

Many of our public areas at reservoirs, state fishing lakes and other properties provide great access to ideal habitat, too. There are some real gems out there, including Lake Scott State Park in west-central Kansas; Meade State Park and Clark County State Fishing Lake in southwestern Kansas; Neosho Wildlife Area, Woodson State Fishing Lake and Schermerhorn Park in southeast Kansas; and Jamestown Wildlife Area and McPherson State Fishing Lake in central Kansas.

All in all, fall is a great time to get out and bird in Kansas. For those of us with a real passion for birding, the onset of warm (not hot) days, cool nights and the sounds of migrating birds reignites the fire that has been damped since the end



Sandhill Cranes

of spring migration. It makes me think of the skeins of waterfowl and sandhill cranes that will fill the skies very soon, and the return of juncos and other winter sparrows to start that cycle all over again. It would seem that it would get old, seeing the same species that appear in each of the different seasons, but to me, it adds to the excitement and anticipation of when they show up and what odd things will be found this year. Who knows what the next rare bird added to the state checklist might be? A piratic flycatcher is hard to beat!

For those looking to network with other folks interested in birds, birding and bird research, consider attending the 67th annual fall meeting of the Kansas Ornithological Society on the campus of Emporia State University October 2-4. For details, visit www.ksbirds.org.



IT'S THE LAW WITH BJ THURMAN

INVESTIGATIONS UNIT

I was recently driving to Lawrence with my youngest daughter for a family birthday party. She graduated from high school this May. The conversation started out with her college plans, but took a turn that I never expected when she asked me "So what is it you actually do?" She knew I was a game warden and supervised the Investigations Unit but had no idea what I did. It made me think that if she was unaware of what services the investigations unit offered, then most other people probably didn't know either.

Investigations is a specialized unit within the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism's Law Enforcement Division. It was created to control, reduce, and where possible, implement preventive measures against unlawful wildlife resource use. The unit's special emphasis is directed toward identifying, investigating and prosecuting those involved in commercial and major intentional wildlife resource violations. The unit also has the responsibility to provide assistance to regional natural resource officers in specialized areas of law enforcement, as well as other law enforcement agencies, as requested.

"She knew I was a game warden and supervised the Investigations Unit but had no idea what I did."

The Investigations Unit will usually get involved with a case if it meets one or more the criteria: commercialization of wildlife or if threatened or endangered species are involved; high profile cases that involve public figures or controversial topics; multi-jurisdictional cases; and if a field officer starts an investigation and determines the need for the unit.

Duties performed by the Investigations Unit include overt investigations, surveillance, intelligence gathering, miscellaneous requests from other agencies, and covert investigations.

Overt investigations may include interviewing subjects, criminal and commercial record examinations, warrants, special handling and storage of evidence, or other requested assistance from the field.

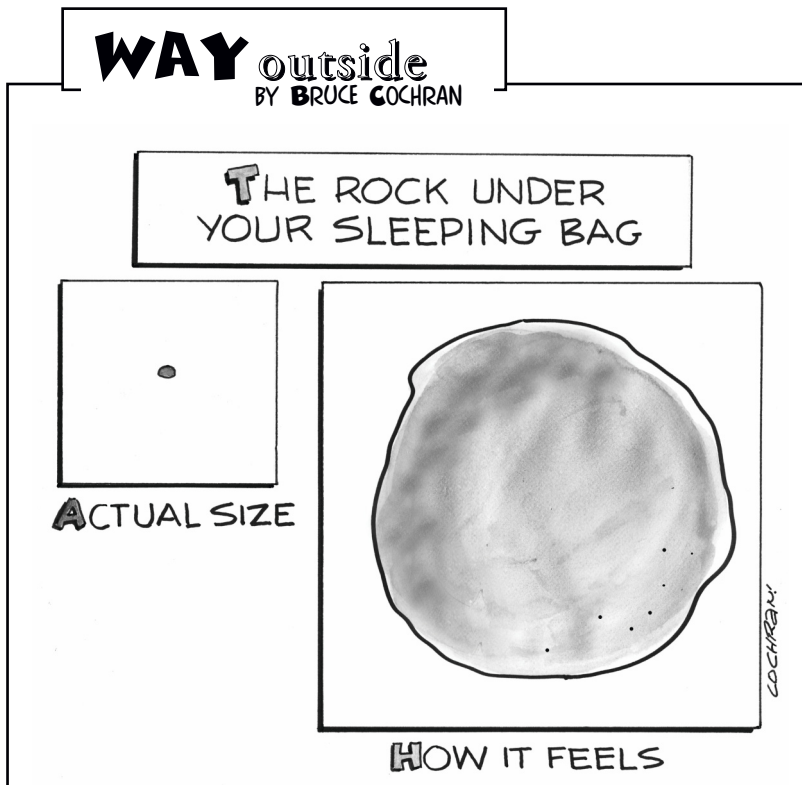
Surveillance efforts are conducted to document the circumstances associated with a violation, generally through observation of criminal activity with specialized equipment.

Intelligence gathering includes the collection, classification, analysis and dissemination of information relating to the criminal activity of individuals, businesses and organizations suspected of illegal consumptive wildlife resource violations.

Officers in the unit also routinely get requests for assistance from wildlife agencies, state agencies or other law enforcement agencies. Requests vary, but more often than not, the Investigations Unit is asked to provide legal or factual information to other agencies, states, or jurisdictions.

The last task the unit performs is covert investigations. This includes any investigation that requires the assumption of a fictitious identity or relies upon the belief that the investigator is someone other than a law enforcement officer. This duty is the one most people associate with the unit, even though it is the most infrequently utilized due to budget, time and manpower constraints.

At the end of the drive, my daughter summed it up in layman's terms when she said, "So you are like the guys on Law and Order and CSI, but only for critters."



AT WOODS EDGE

WITH ANDRA BRYAN STEFANONI

Strange Sights

We've had some unexpected visitors at Woods Edge this summer, but not the kind that arrive by car and overstay their welcome. I'm talking about the non-human kind that are removed from their usual range.

As I floated lazily in our backyard pool on a perfect, blue-sky July day, four Mississippi kites soared above the treetops of our two acres and our neighbor's adjoining two. I shielded my eyes from the afternoon sun to watch them for as long as they were visible from my vantage point.

It was the third time I'd seen them, the second time having been just the evening before on a post-dinner stroll around our wetland.

A week later while doing yard work, I spotted them again, diving and swooping and eventually landing in a dead snag in another neighbor's yard. I shut off the lawn mower and ran for the camera.

Luckily, my camera was just a short reach away when I saw the first gray squirrel arrive at Woods Edge. I snapped one shot just before it scampered away, but later that day, and in days that followed, it was back. On bike rides or evening walks, conversations with neighbors revealed they had seen gray squirrels in their yards, too.

Email exchanges with local Audubon folks and Facebook discussions with members of the Kansas Birding group revealed others had seen Mississippi kites in Crawford County, as well – perhaps the same ones as ours, even, as the area cited was just a mile from our home. Fellow birders wanted to know if we could locate a nest, how many we had seen, and so on.

Following quickly on the heels of the kites and the squirrels were documented bear sightings one county away, in Galena, and near Weir. A couple of bicyclist friends also swear they saw one cross a road a few miles south of Pittsburg.

These sightings prompted a dinner table conversation – or musings, really – on the excitement and curiosity that builds among people when a new species sets up housekeeping in an area it hadn't previously inhabited.

Why are they here? How far from their usual range are they?

In a few years I will have lived nearly half a century in Crawford County. Never did we have any squirrels other than Eastern fox squirrels. The only place I ever saw gray ones – ever – was over the border at my grandmother's home in the Missouri Ozarks. And that is 35 miles away. I just figured Eastern fox squirrels live here, gray squirrels live there, and that's the end of it. What did they do,

anyway, hitch a ride in the back of a truck?

As for kites, years ago when my husband did an internship in Pratt for the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism, they were a common sight – so much so that he responded to numerous calls from residents who were bothered by their dive-bombing tendencies. But that is half a state away from here. A couple hundred miles, at least.

And the bears? Neither of us had seen those before. Heck, we traveled to Alaska last summer with high hopes of photographing one, but no such luck. I'm not a scientist, so I can't speak to why they're here. I do know that we humans get accustomed to seeing the same birds at our feeders and in our trees year after year, and then get thrown for a loop when something new shows up.

But my husband pointed out that ecosystems aren't as static as we think they are.

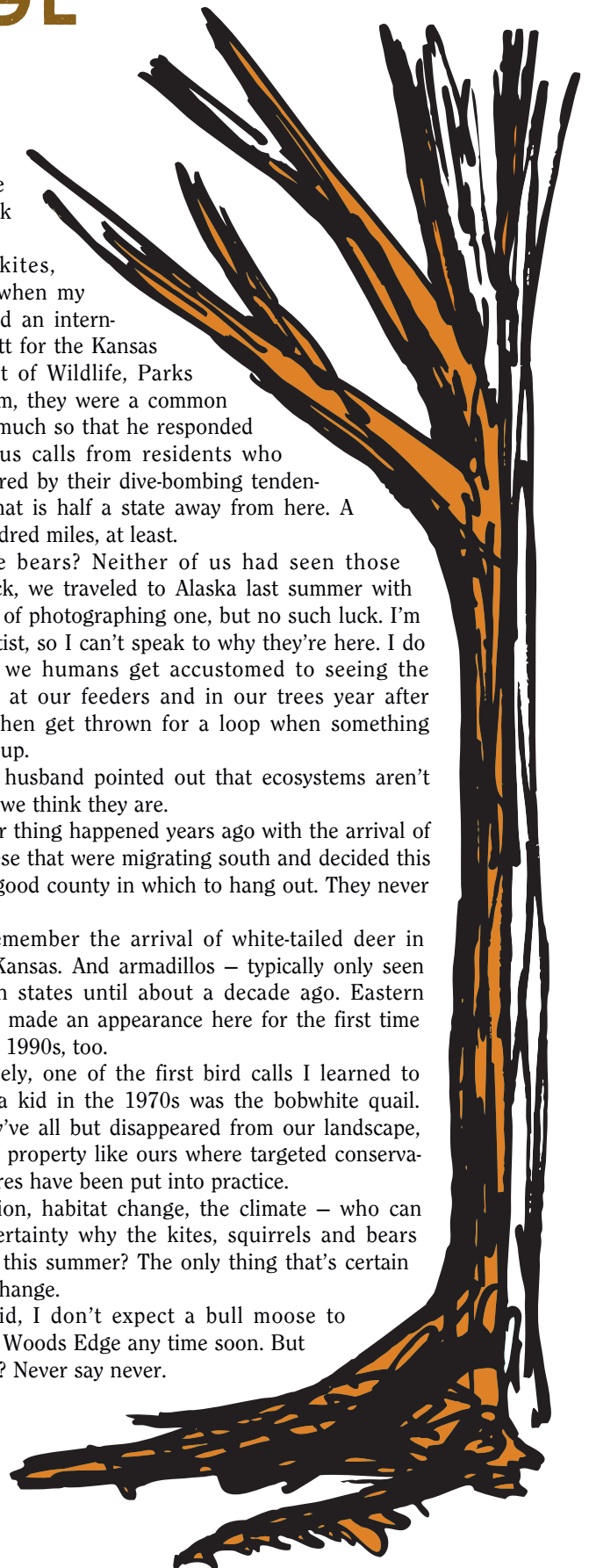
A similar thing happened years ago with the arrival of Canada geese that were migrating south and decided this is a pretty good county in which to hang out. They never left.

We also remember the arrival of white-tailed deer in southeast Kansas. And armadillos – typically only seen in southern states until about a decade ago. Eastern wild turkey made an appearance here for the first time in the early 1990s, too.

Conversely, one of the first bird calls I learned to whistle as a kid in the 1970s was the bobwhite quail. Today, they've all but disappeared from our landscape, save for on property like ours where targeted conservation measures have been put into practice.

Adaptation, habitat change, the climate – who can say with certainty why the kites, squirrels and bears showed up this summer? The only thing that's certain is: Things change.

That said, I don't expect a bull moose to show up at Woods Edge any time soon. But who knows? Never say never.



For more At Woods Edge, visit www.atwoodsedge.net or www.facebook.com/atwoodsedgelife.

Wildlife is a Public Trust

On June 4, 2015 a cjonline.com headline proclaimed “Senate defeats antler bill after short debate.” In the article, Jonathan Shoreman recounts how the government failed to pass legislation designed to change how ownership of wildlife is determined in the state of Kansas. Many people wonder why there was even a debate on this topic and what difference it might make anyway. For those who value the hunting heritage, this topic is extremely important.

Before we delve any deeper, let me give you a little background. For over 13 centuries, wild game animals in England have been considered to be the exclusive property of royalty. This concept of private ownership of game is commonly referred to as the European model of game management. But here in the United States, we enjoy a conservation system unique to the world known as the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. In the North American model, there are seven basic tenets:

- 1. Wildlife is a public trust.**
- 2. We must eliminate markets for wildlife.**
- 3. Allocation of wildlife by law.**
- 4. Hunting opportunity for all.**
- 5. Wildlife must only be killed for legitimate purposes.**
- 6. Wildlife is an international resource.**
- 7. Scientific management of the resource.**

These principles were the work of farsighted hunters who saw the need for action and boldly proposed a change that is now the envy of the world.

In 1842, the United States Supreme Court ruled that wildlife was not owned by individuals but was held as a “public trust.” Hunter and author Jim Posewitz put it simply: “The concept of ‘public trust’ is based on the principle that there are some things so valuable to all of us that they cannot be owned by any individual. In the United States, air, water, fish and wildlife are such common possessions.”

The public has a say in the management of natural resources and the government hires professional wildlife biologists to ensure scientific management of species.

American author and professional hunter, Steven Rinella, has said “We need to be students of American history and

wildlife and know the advantages of our system where the public owns the wildlife. It’s held in public trust, and it’s advantageous to scientifically manage wildlife through hunting.”

It may be time for hunters to come to some hard realizations. For our public wildlife resource to be sustained, it must be shared. To be true to our heritage, we must reject the notion of securing advantages in the hunt for ourselves by denying opportunities to others. While hunting access is a critical factor in continuing the hunting heritage, we can’t allow money to become the dominant criteria for access to the hunt. When we reach the point where killing a “trophy” animal is the only accepted notion of hunting success, it may become difficult for a hunter who fails to accomplish this to maintain a high level of satisfaction with their hunting experience. I teach in my hunter education classes that a unique trait of hunting is the potential of the kill. Without a potential for harvesting an animal, one is not hunting but simply taking a nature walk. But not every successful hunt must end in a kill. The concept of fair chase allows for the occasional harvesting of game by the hunter, while allowing the game animal to generally escape. If there is no chance for the animal to survive, then one is not hunting but simply collecting food. That may be a novel concept to some of our hunting community.

So what is a hunter to do? We are blessed in Kansas with a wealth of hunting opportunities. That may not mean that every year we can harvest a record buck to mount on our wall, but we have many game species and long seasons to be outdoors and enjoy this important heritage.

Now is a good time to start thinking about the upcoming fall and the different options that we have. The game species need not be the same for the thrill and adventure of the hunt to be there. Try something new and feel the adventure of the unknown once again. Don’t feel bad if your quarry escapes your hard work and preparation. That is part of the hunt. Practice more and be better next year.

Our 26th President Theodore Roosevelt once said “The . . . hunter who kills game . . . to sell antlers and other trophies . . . and the rich people, who are content to buy what they have not the skill to get by their own exertion – these are the men who are the real enemies of game.”

We cannot be content to see a dollar value placed on every animal we are permitted to hunt. These animals and their parts are too valuable to be privately owned and belong in the “public trust.” In doing these things, this will continue to be our North American hunting heritage.

Fish Squeezer - *Retired, but not yet fired*

WITH TOMMIE BERGER

The Summer to Fall Transition

September and October are transition months between fishing and hunting. There are still good fishing opportunities, but hunting seasons are here and there is so much to do to get ready.

Even though I'm retired, I seem to be busier than ever. Between 4-H Sportfishing, Becoming an Outdoors-Woman (BOW), Outdoor Adventure Camp, helping with wheat harvest, baseball tournaments, and 4-H Sport Shooting, it's sometimes hard to believe I'm still squeezing in hunting and fishing outings. But I love the flexibility to go fishing or hunting when the weather is right or when the mood strikes me.

A couple of recent fishing trips I fit in are worth remembering. The evening before I left for spring BOW, I went to the river behind my house to catch a few channel catfish for our Fish Cleaning and Cooking classes. I caught three 1- to 3-pound channel cats in about an hour and put them in my 100-gallon water tank. When I went to collect them the next morning, I discovered that raccoons had fished them out and left a trail of blood, tails, and fins leading away from the tank. I panicked, and hurried back down to the river. In an hour, I caught 10 catfish, weighing up to 5 pounds, that went into a cooler and off to BOW. It's nice to have a river running through my back yard.

Later in the summer, after several days of rain, I was getting bored. During a break in the weather, I went up the river to a pool where a large tree had toppled into the upper end. Rather than fish downstream like usual, I decided to cast upstream right below the fallen tree. The first four channel catfish I caught weighed between 2 and 5 pounds. Then I caught a 3-pound flathead. My fish basket was getting full with tails sticking out the top, but I still had half a worm left, so I made one more cast. Almost immediately, I

hooked a fish and 15 minutes later I caught a glimpse of it - a 10-pound flathead. I had to call my son Fritz to help me carry the 30 pounds of fish up the bank and to the house. It was my best river fishing day ever.

“When I went to collect them the next morning, I discovered that raccoons had fished them out and left a trail of blood, tails, and fins leading away from the tank. I panicked, and hurried back down to the river.”

Fast forward to July and I had been so busy, I hadn't fished my favorite watershed pond all summer. Fishing fever was coming on strong, so when a cool snap hit, I headed to the 28-acre pond with bass and crappie gear. By 11 a.m., using a topwater bait, I had caught and released 24 bass, the biggest weighing 4 pounds. When the topwater bite quit, I grabbed my worm rod and began casting to flooded brush in the feeder creek. By mid-afternoon, I had caught another 28 bass, with the biggest weighing a shade over 6 pounds. The last eight bass came from a set of tire structures I had placed in the pond earlier in the spring. With all the bass in the area educated, something was still tapping my worm on every cast. So, I grabbed my spinning rod and pitched a sixteenth-ounce Roadrunner around the sunken tires. I let the lure sink and retrieved it slowly. In 30 minutes, I filled my cooler with 8- to 11-inch crappie. What a fishing day!

Now I'm thinking about upcoming hunting seasons and some of the bowhunting lessons I learned last fall. In

November I was hunting from a ladder stand that I planned to move. After a short morning hunt, seeing only a doe and her two fawns, I climbed down, laid my bow on the ground out of the way, and lowered the stand to the ground. When I looked up, I saw the doe and fawns coming back toward me. They were on the trail that passed about 5 yards from my stand, so I stood still to see how close they would get. Amazingly, they walked right past me and began nibbling on leaves and grass about 15 yards away. While enjoying the show, I heard a snort from the other direction and I turned to see a *really* nice 10-point buck jump the fence. He trotted over to the doe and fawns and they ran toward me, stopping behind my tree just 3 yards away. My bow was still on the ground. To make matters worse, the buck walked over to joined the doe and fawns, standing broadside at 3 yards. Ahh! The moral of that story is to always pick up your bow when you see does coming your way in November.

Another time I was walking down a field edge with sprayed wheat stubble on one side and a disked field on the other. I looked up and saw a buck walking down the field edge toward me. He was probably a two-year-old eight-pointer, and I had seen bigger bucks in the area, but I still stopped to see how close he would get. At 40 yards, he stopped and nibbled on some green wheat, so I drew my bow just to see if I could do it. As I came to full draw, he turned and continued to walk my way. That crazy buck walked within 7 feet before he decided to walk around me. However, as he passed downwind, he caught my scent and turned inside out. The moral of that story is that I should have killed that darned deer so I had a really good story out of it. I didn't and I didn't kill a buck last fall. Could have, should have! Retirement is fun.

Water is Wonderful

Water is a wonderful thing. Obviously, wildlife requires water to survive. For some species, like ducks, geese and shorebirds, water is a necessary element of their habitat.

To be more precise, these birds need water in the form of wetlands to survive, so it's nice when Mother Nature fills them. When she doesn't fill them, it's not good for the birds or those of us who hunt them.

In Kansas over the last couple of years, we had too much dry land and not enough wetland. However, in 2015 many wetlands, rivers and reservoirs received substantial rains and things look good heading into this fall (crossing my fingers as I'm writing this in mid-July), although a few western reservoirs still remain low.

Someone once said that variety was the spice of life. However, to an avid waterfowler who hopes for a good season, water is the spice of life. On our KDWPT-managed wetlands, managers have become adept at capturing, holding and moving water to take advantage of what's available. It's a gamble at times because ideally, wetlands should be dry for part of the year so that cattails and phragmites can be reduced and beneficial plants improved. Then in the fall when rains come or water can be moved, the wetlands are primed and ready for waterfowl.

I guess that's why a wet spring and summer has me optimistic for waterfowl hunting opportunities this fall in places like Cheyenne Bottoms, Neosho, Marais des Cygne, Texas Lake, McPherson Valley Wetlands, and Jamestown wildlife areas. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is forecasting another banner year for duck numbers, and that's the result largely of ample water and ideal pond conditions on the northern U.S. and Canadian nesting areas. These are the duck factories for all flyways and good water conditions there mean more ducks heading south for the winter.



Kansas' water conditions have been a roller coaster of sorts over the last ten years. In 2007, huge fall rains filled Cheyenne Bottoms to into the largest lake in Kansas. But just a few short years later, that same area was void of even a few gallons of water. It's often boom or bust, but I'll take a wetland that's wet any day over the drier option.

DID YOU KNOW?

-It takes 1,008 gallons of water to create 1 gallon of wine.

-It takes 1,799 gallons of water to create 1 pound of beef.

-It takes 3,170 gallons of water to create 1 pound of chocolate.

-It takes 1,321 gallons of water to create 500 sheets of paper.

SEVEN INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT WATER

1. The earth is a closed system, similar to a terrarium, meaning it rarely loses or gains extra matter. The same water that existed on the earth millions of years ago is still present today.
2. Approximately 70-75 percent of the earth's surface is covered by water. However, only 1 percent of this water is available for human use. Ninety-seven percent of the water is saltwater or otherwise undrinkable, and 2 percent is locked up in ice caps or glaciers.
3. Roughly 70 percent of the human body is made-up of water.
4. A gallon of water weighs approximately 8 pounds.
5. The U.S. uses about 346 million gallons of fresh water every day and 80 percent of this is used for irrigation and thermoelectric power.
6. The average person uses 50-100 gallons of water each day, mostly in the bathroom. Flushing the toilet uses the most.
7. A person can live a month without food, but only about a week without water.



Accidental HUNTRESS

WITH NADIA MARJI

Wild Wings & Saucy Things



I've yet to view a fall consumer shopping trends report for any grocery store, but it would be fair to say in any town with hunters, starting in September, there's likely a spike in the number of units sold for three items: bacon, cream cheese, and jalapeno.

Like most hunting seasons, early migrant hunts are built on tradition - a favorite opening day dove spot, a lucky teal whistle, duck camp with friends - but none are probably held as near and dear as the

"bacon-wrapped (insert any legal migratory bird here) popper" recipe. Don't get me wrong, I'm a huge fan of this go-to - it's easy, inexpensive, and tastes great - but every now and then I like to try something new.

If you're looking to change up your flavors this fall, consider ditching the cream cheese and jalapeno and trying one of these not-so-traditional pairings on your grilled meat. You may even convince a non-believer that, yes, these birds really are worth "all that work."

Chipotle Cherry Barbecue Sauce

- 3 C. cherries, pitted
- 1/2 C. lime juice
- 1/3 C. ketchup
- 1/4 C. brown sugar
- 2 chipotle peppers, canned in adobo sauce
- 1 Tbl. adobo sauce
- salt to taste

Stir together ingredients in a medium sauce pan as you bring them to a boil. Reduce heat and let simmer, covered, for 10 minutes. Remove cover and increase heat slightly, cooking for an additional 20 minutes. Stir occasionally. Remove from heat, let cool, then puree in blender or food processor. Spoon over the meat or serve in a dish for dipping and dunking.

Hard Cider Glaze

- 1 bottle hard apple cider
- 3 Tbl. fresh ginger, minced
- 3 Tbl. garlic, minced
- 3 Tbl. soy sauce
- 3 Tbl. rice wine vinegar
- 1 1/2 Tbl. honey
- salt and pepper to taste

Combine all ingredients in a medium sauce pan, bringing to a boil until reduced by half, and thickened. As ingredients cool, glaze will continue to thicken. Brush your birds with the glaze throughout the grilling process, and right before serving.

Spiced Apricot Chutney

- 2 C. dried apricot, chopped
- 2 C. cider vinegar
- 1 C. golden raisins
- 1 C. honey
- 1 small red onion, minced
- 1 Tbl. fresh ginger, minced
- 1 tsp. allspice
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp. ground cloves
- 1/4 tsp. cayenne pepper
- zest and juice of one large lemon

In a large saucepan, combine all ingredients. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, and cover. Let ingredients simmer for 30 minutes, or until thick, while stirring occasionally. Remove from heat and serve warm or chilled.

**Have a not-so-traditional recipe for your birds?
Share it with me at nadia.marji@ksoutdoors.com.**

Park View WITH KATHY PRITCHETT

What Could You Be Missing?

If you didn't go to a Kansas state park this summer, you missed a lot.

You missed the 2015 Country Stampede at Tuttle Creek State Park, which was attended by more than 150,000 people. A host of country icons like Blake Shelton, Sara Evans, Florida-Georgia Line, Travis Tritt, Thomas Rhett, Jarrod Niemann and Luke Bryan performed there. Vendors and a second stage meant there was always something happening, too.

You missed the Capital Campout held at McClennan Park, adjoining the Governor's mansion. Though the evening campout was canceled due to rain, campers began afresh the next morning with paddle boarding, air-rifle shooting, campfire cooking, visits with Smokey and Yogi Bears, breakfast and lunch.

You missed El Dorado State Park's

lantern festival. More than three thousand people registered for the event, and several thousand more came just to watch as the lighted lanterns sailed into the summer evening.

You missed Pomona State Park's personal watercraft races, and El Dorado State Park's free music concerts.

You missed long, lazy summer days on the water and summer nights filled with fireflies and family togetherness.

However, there is still time to catch other events in the parks. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas is partnering with Kansas state parks to promote a healthy lifestyle, which can include outdoor recreation in Kansas State Parks. Events are scheduled at each of our parks for September 26, National Public Lands Day, for this campaign. All state parks will allow free entrance on this day. Check the events calendar at

www.ksoutdoors.com or go to www.getoutdoorskansas.org.

Fall weekends are still busy in the parks, though weekdays after the kids go back to school can be quiet. Some events are scheduled for the fall to avoid the most intense Kansas summer heat. Yet days are often still hot enough that a dip in the lake is refreshing. Fish are still biting and fall hunting seasons are beginning.

State park cabins make excellent hunting base camps, with comfortable beds and climate control, to say nothing of ranges and microwaves and coffee pots. Sitting in a deer stand or duck blind is easier with a hot breakfast and a thermos of coffee to fortify you.

In short, if you haven't been to a Kansas state park this year, you are missing out.

N A T I O N A L W I L D T U R K E Y F E D E R A T I O N

HELP KANSAS SAVE THE HABITAT. SAVE THE HUNT.

Of every dollar raised, 91 cents go to fund the NWTf mission. Your membership and your volunteer hours help the NWTf combat habitat loss and declining hunter numbers. Join today. And recruit others for tomorrow.

SAVING THE HABITAT

The NWTf has objectives to **conserve or enhance 123,000 acres** of habitat within strategically identified focal landscapes. The work is critically important to wild turkeys and other wildlife species in the next 10 years. We will:

1. **Conserve or enhance 105,000 acres** of grassland habitat
2. **Conserve or enhance 10,000 acres** of critical streamside areas
3. **Conserve or enhance 8,000 acres** of forested habitat

HABITAT CONSERVATION ISSUES

Declining forest, grassland and streamside health are threatening wildlife. Landscape changes through invasive species, loss of oak savannah and loss of native grasslands continue to be problems.

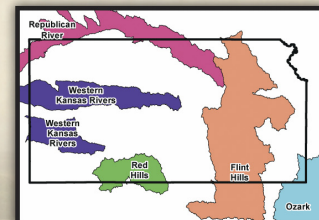
SAVING THE HUNT

1. **Improve public hunting** access to 150,000 acres
2. **Increase hunter education** opportunities
3. **Create hunters**

SAVE THE
HABITAT.
SAVE THE
HUNT.



www.nwtf.org



CALL TO ACTION: Join a team of dedicated outdoorsmen and women committed to conservation. Call NWTf regional staff today:
Regional Director Tyler Kirby • (620) 339-9026 | Conservation Field Supervisor Jared McJunkin • (785) 456-9735

Autumn Surprises in Kansas WITH IRALEE BARNARD



A late summer scene at Sand Hills State Park, near Hutchinson, provides the perfect background for prairie sandreed visible in the foreground.

Fall is when a lot of us look forward to getting outdoors to enjoy the cooler weather and expand our knowledge of Kansas' wild places. There is always something to discover and marvel about. Monarch butterflies and many birds have gathered to move south. Summer greens turn shades of burnt-orange, red, and gold. Even the familiar can suddenly become remarkable.

For example, have you ever noticed the wild grasses in the fall? Grasses are so common, yet they are frequently overlooked. Visit any Kansas state park, state fishing lake or wildlife area and you will be greeted by a variety of truly dazzling prairie grasses. Fall and early winter are the best times to take a stroll through your favorite natural area to view the grasses. It is this time of year when the grasses have grown to great heights and show their most vibrant colors.

Early summer rains set the stage for a spectacular display of wild grasses. By late September, tall seed heads wave in the breeze. One of the tallest is prairie sandreed (*Calamovilfa longifolia*). Growing 6-7 feet tall, sandreed is found on loose sandy soils and dunes where it binds the soil with strong, thick rhizomes. It is an impressive grass with erect, stout stems and huge spreading seed heads.

Sand lovegrass (*Eragrostis trichodes*) is not only excellent as a pasture grass for cattle, but it is highly palatable to deer. It provides good cover for small animals and nesting habitat for upland game birds. It is an attractive plant and can be used in dried arrangements. Both sandreed and sand lovegrass can be seen at Sand Hills State Park near Hutchinson. With plenty of trails that wind through the dunes, you will want to take some time to enjoy your walk and take lots of pictures.

Located on the eastern edge of the Flint Hills is Lyon County State Fishing Lake, north of Emporia. The lake is surrounded by 442 acres containing grasses representative of tallgrass

prairie. Big bluestem is iconic, but many other grasses are found here. If you spot a 3- to 4-foot tall grass with reddish-purple seed heads it is likely purpletop tridens (*Tridens flavus*). One way to be sure is to feel the stem. If it feels sticky or oily, you can be sure it is purpletop, also called "greasegrass" because of this oily substance. Many species of butterfly larva use this grass as food. Birds and small mammals eat the seeds of purpletop.

Prairie threeawn (*Aristida oligantha*) is a native annual grass. Although threeawn is not very useful in rangelands or to wildlife, it serves an ecological purpose. Annual plants colonize bare, eroded, or otherwise disturbed soil. They are the first to move in and can quickly cover the ground, beginning the cycle to repair damaged soil while the desirable perennial grasses take more time to become established. The three 1 1/2-inch long awns bend sharply at the base and fan out from the 1-inch, narrow seed. Look for prairie threeawn along roadsides at Lyon County State Fishing Lake.

On the Solomon River in Rooks County west of Stockton, Webster State Park's rolling hills are covered with mixed grass prairie. Here, sideoats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*) produces forage for deer and pronghorns. The seeds are eaten by pheasants, quail, and doves. This grass is easy to recognize by the oatlike flower spikes that hang mostly from one side of the stem. Its leaves become reddish in late fall.

The silver seed heads on stinkgrass (*Eragrostis cilianensis*) can be attractive, but this grass is weedy. The plants are usually 8-15 inches high. The leaves and flattened spikelets are edged by small, warty glands. These glands give the plants a musty odor. Stinkgrass can be found in disturbed areas of the chalk hills at Webster and is identified by the pitted glands.

Grasses are diverse and as interesting as they are pretty. These are just a few examples. Visit your nearest state park or state fishing lake this fall and take time to enjoy one of Kansas' wonders, the wild prairie grasses.

Iralee received the 2015 "Kansas Notable Book Award" for her book *Field Guide to the Common Grasses of Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska*. Available from the publisher at www.kansaspress.ku.edu.



Turtle Adventures

After summer baseball came to an end, my son, Hunter, broke out his fishing poles. Baseball had taken too much time away from fishing, and on his first outing, he fished nearly all day.

That afternoon, when I went to pick up Hunter, he hooked into something big as I approached. A couple of boys nearby came to help and by the time I made it over, they had hoisted a 15-pound snapping turtle up the bank. Hunter always wanted to clean and eat one, so he begged me to keep it.

It was a cool evening, so I relented and I soon found myself back at the house butchering a snapping turtle, with Hunter and his sister watching curiously. It was slow going since I hadn't cleaned a turtle since I was 16 when my buddy, Jason, and I wrangled one into the trunk of his 1972 VW Bug.

After dispatching the turtle, I carefully removed the head, taking care not to get bitten. The powerful jaws can still react and clamp down even hours after being removed. I then propped it up to drain.

After rinsing the turtle clean, I placed

it on its back and removed the feet, then skinned the legs, neck, and tail. I skinned out the tail except for the last three or four inches.

Once the skin was removed, I used a knife to find the soft tissue connecting the bottom shell to the top and separated the two shells. I then ran the blade along the underside of the bottom shell, easily separating the meat.

Making a wedge-shaped incision on either side of the anus, I then pulled out the internal organs. Next, I cut along the inside of the top shell and removed the legs, neck and tail, and cut the legs at each joint. Using some nippers, I clipped the connective tendons and removed any remaining meat from the shell.

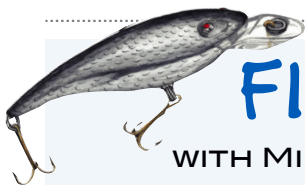
Lastly, I refrigerated the meat in salt water overnight and used the following recipe to cook the turtle the next day.



Fried and Baked Turtle

- 1 snapping turtle, cubed and bone-in
- 3 C. all purpose flour
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. black pepper
- 2 Tbsp. Tony Chachere's® Creole seasoning
- 2 C. milk
- 2 eggs

Combine dry ingredients. In separate bowl, mix egg and milk. Prepare a skillet and deep fryer and preheat oven to 325 degrees. Place an elevated rack in a baking dish and pour in one-half inch of water. The rack must stay above the water. Dredge meat in flour, then egg wash, then flour again. Place in skillet or fryer and brown for two minutes. Once meat has partially cooked, place pieces on elevated rack in dish and cover with aluminum foil. Bake for 90 minutes. Remove from oven and return to skillet or fryer to crisp up coating if desired.



FISHIN'

WITH MIKE MILLER

NOT YOUR GRANDPA'S BRAIDED LINE

Last issue I wrote about the choices anglers have today when spooling with monofilament and super lines. Now, let's look at modern braided lines and fluorocarbon.

Some of the very first fishing lines on the market were braided, using materials such as cotton, linen and silk. Today's braided lines are made of Dacron, Spectra and Dyneema. New braids are durable, supple, have fine diameters, and do not stretch.

I've found braided line to be more

abrasion resistant than the super lines, and I love casting it on a casting reel. Without the stretch of monofilament, braided line allows for good hook sets, especially on long casts or in deep water and it is very sensitive. After using monofilament on my casting reels for years, I have now converted most of them to braided line. It's perfect for casting large lures for pike and muskie in Canada or half-ounce spinner baits to Kansas bass. And it never develops spool memory.

Braided lines in 20- or 30-pound-test will cast like a 6-pound monofilament. They can be hard to break if you get snagged up, though. Other drawbacks of the new braids include the fact that snarls or knots can be almost impossible to untangle because they are so limp. And you must put some mono backing

on your spool because the braid will slip. One final tip: attach lures with a Palomar knot rather than a clinch knot, which won't hold with lines that don't stretch.

Fluorocarbon line is made from polyvinylidene difluoride and is extruded in a single strand similar to nylon monofilament. It is noticeably denser and heavier than monofilament. Advantages of fluorocarbon are that it becomes invisible in the water, it has low stretch and is abrasion resistant. One tradeoff is that fluorocarbon is stiffer than other lines and may be more susceptible to spool memory. It also sinks so it may not be the right line for fishing topwater baits. I often use fluorocarbon lines for leaders with my superlines or braids, especially when fishing in clear water.



The Way I See It

WITH TODD WORKMAN

“Lookie there, Uncle Todd!”

It was one of those beautiful evenings, the orange-stained, cloudless sky still giving off enough light to read my golfing magazine while my nephew Travis was amusing himself exploring the outdoors.

“Lookie there Uncle Todd,” Travis said excitedly. “There is a big turtle by your chair.”

It was just a week before when Travis had greeted me as I pulled into his driveway. He walked toward me in his little coveralls, white t-shirt, and a big grin, saying “Hello there Uncle Todd. Do you want to see my pet turtle?”

Without waiting for an answer, he started to dig in his front overall pocket. A sudden shriek erupted from his mouth and his little right hand shot out of his pocket. Turns out a small ornate box turtle had clamped securely to his thumb. The blood curdling scream was a complete surprise and I clutched my chest to keep my heart inside my rib cage. The small turtle detached from the thumb and was hurtled through the air, landing unscathed in the grass, probably relieved to have escaped its pocket dungeon.

“Travis!” admonished his mom, coming out of the front door with a first aid kit. It’s a maternal reaction that moms have when they hear that shriek. They hear the “injury siren,” reach for the first aid kit, and head for the door.

“How many times must I tell you to not put reptiles in your pockets?” Shaking her head, she put her arm around his shoulder and guided him to the house for bandages and Kool-Aid. Meanwhile, I contemplated the enormous amount of bacteria that must be thriving in the little grubber’s pockets. His pocket had been turned inside out from the hasty extraction and I kicked gingerly at the contents strewn on the

ground. A crawdad pincher was stuck to a half-eaten sucker, a dazed locust and a night crawler, were there too, and all seemed to be covered with a cocktail of worm slime and turtle urine.

Back to present day, “Umph!” was my only response to Travis’ current interruption of my reading. I was trying to discover the secrets to hitting a golf ball straight down the fairway. My current drives resemble a slicing boomerang, with some of them actually rolling back toward me. But out of courtesy, I glanced over the top of my reading glasses, my lawn chair creaking as I followed Travis’ finger to a point at the foot of my chair.

Now mind you, there are 15 species of turtles that inhabit Kansas, but most natives will lump them into one of three categories: box turtles, redears and “SNAPPERS!”

There it was, a large snapping turtle in all of its prehistoric glory, moving toward my leg. How a creature that size got so close to my ankle without me hearing or seeing it is a testament to the poor life style choices of my younger days. I saw the glint in its eye and knew that it had a single-minded purpose: to take a chunk of Todd. With a beller, I toppled over backwards out of my chair and into my wife’s flower garden. At any second, I figured the giant snapping turtle would pounce on my chest and finish me. The turtle hadn’t moved, the commotion causing it to shrink into his shell.

“Oh Uncle Todd, that was so funny! You are scared of a little box turtle,” laughed my impetuous nephew as he slapped his legs in mirth.

“That is not a box turtle, that is a snapping turtle, you little goof,” I said.

“Why do they call it a snapper?” Travis asked.

“Wiggle your little fingers in front

of his face and you’ll find out,” I said with a smirk.

As he approached the turtle to do just that, the Commander in Chief suddenly appeared behind me.

“Why don’t we let Uncle Todd do that instead – it’s such a brilliant suggestion,” my wife said coldly.

“Okay, okay, don’t put your fingers down there. I will show you why they call it a snapper,” I replied.

I retrieved a wooden pole from the garage and stuck it near the grizzled, old turtle’s beak. With lightning quickness, he struck the end of the pole and broke it off. Everybody jumped back.

Travis started crying because he thought I wanted the turtle to bite his hand off and the Commander in Chief started wailing because I unwittingly had used her ornamental curtain rod in the demonstration, as opposed to finishing it as I should have done three months before.

“Now you have to buy me new curtains for all the windows,” the misses said.

It wasn’t my first introduction to the wife’s exponential theorem of damage. In this case, one ruined curtain rod equals 20 new curtain rods and curtains. I checked the math later and it figured out correctly.

“And what in the world happened to my hibiscus garden?” she added.

“The turtle must have done it,” I said.

“I might have believed you if you didn’t have potting soil all over you and hibiscus flowers in your hair,” she replied.

“You look like a girl Uncle Todd,” giggled Travis the traitor.

After being cuffed in the back of the head by both her and Travis, they retreated inside for a snack, leaving me to deal with the turtle. He soon traveled about his business, and except for a stinging at the back of my head, there was nothing left to show for my dangerous wildlife encounter. The Commander in Chief is a sneaky and dangerous creature, but that snapping turtle wasn’t anything to trifle with either.

Ensure Outdoor Traditions Are Passed On

WITH BRIAN SCHAFFER

Living in Kansas, I've come to appreciate the fact that outdoor traditions are rooted deeply in our heritage. Hunting, trapping and fishing have been a way of life for Kansans since long before it became a state in 1861. Last year, nearly 170,000 Kansans took to the field to pursue ducks at Cheyenne Bottoms, pheasants at their grandfather's farm in western Kansas, or white-tailed deer on one of the many scenic wildlife management areas maintained by the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism.

My father was a dedicated outdoorsman, and knowing he wanted to spend time with me, teaching me about hunting and fishing, had a huge impact on my life. Unfortunately, in today's increasingly urban and technology-driven society, many young adults and children never experience the opportunities that ultimately shaped my career and lifestyle.

I encourage every hunter and angler to get someone new involved in the outdoors this year. It could be as simple as taking a youth hunter on an evening dove hunt or sharing a ground blind with a co-worker who shows interest in your hunting stories during lunch break. Passing on knowledge and passion for the outdoors can be one of the most rewarding and enjoyable experiences a seasoned outdoorsman can have.

Through my work as the outreach coordinator for Pheasants Forever, I've had many great opportunities to work with young hunters, but one of my most memorable moments occurred last January. I was fortunate to be invited to assist with a mentored youth deer hunt, hosted by the Ellsworth Smoky Hill River Pheasants Forever chapter. I

accompanied Emmy and her father on the first evening, and we saw several groups of deer but no shots were presented. Things would be different the following morning.

When I met the father-daughter pair in the predawn darkness, the morning greeted us with cool temperatures and bright stars. As we settled into the blind on the final day of the whitetail antlerless season, we were anxious for legal shooting time to arrive. Shortly after a beautiful winter sunrise, Emmy spotted a group of deer moving our way! We went into action to get prepared for her to take a shot. For all of us, the excitement level grew exponentially until the report of her .308 Winchester signaled in a well-placed shot. As we followed the short blood trail to her first deer, I was overwhelmed by excitement and I wasn't even hunting. I can remember back to my first deer to imagine how Emmy felt. Being a small part of this young lady's first successful white-tailed deer hunt is something I will cherish for many years.

As hunters, we must remember that today's young people are our future leaders, teachers, politicians, and conservationists. Sharing Kansas' rich sporting heritage with someone new this fall will not only make a difference in their life, but it will ensure our outdoor traditions continue.

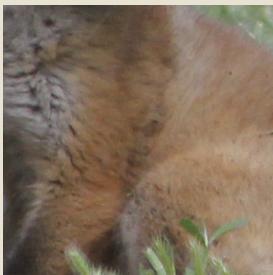
If you have any questions on outreach and education programs in Kansas or how you can get involved, please feel free to contact me at bschaffer@pheasantsforever.org or by telephone at (570) 994-7197.

WHAT AM I



Using only the thumbnail image and clues below, see if you can figure out this month's "What Am I?" species!

Answer to be revealed in the November/December issue.



1. I sleep underground
 2. I've been called "stealthy" and "sly"
 3. There are three types of my kind in Kansas
- What am I?

July/August answer:
Red-eared slider





Marc Murrell photo

Making Sense of Kansas Duck Zones

by Marc Murrell
manager, Great Plains Nature Center
Wichita

After months of public meetings and surveying Kansas duck hunters, department staff are set to propose boundaries for the Low Plains Duck Hunting Zones.

Kansas has a strong waterfowling tradition. Although overall waterfowl hunter numbers have remained steady in recent years, those involved are passionate, dedicated, and look forward to opening morning like a kid looks forward to Christmas. Waterfowlers cherish the moment when they're sitting on their favorite pond, wetland, river or reservoir and the first flock of ducks descends from the heavens. It's a scene etched in the mind of every duck hunter like a scene from a favorite movie.

But for many Kansas duck hunters, that movie doesn't start at the same time each fall, particularly for hunters in the Low Plains Unit. The matinee equivalent would be duck hunters with Low Plains Early Zone opportunities, which typically opens two to three weeks earlier than the evening showing in the Low Plains Late Zone. And then you can toss in the midnight showing of the Southeast Zone, which opens several weeks after that. Add the High Plains Unit option without any zones, and it gets hard to keep track of what opens when.

So why is it so confusing?

"Kansas has a very diverse waterfowl landscape with places like Cheyenne Bottoms, McPherson and Jamestown that are excellent early season spots, versus places like large reservoirs or the southeast part of the state which can provide great late-season hunting opportunities," said Tom Bidrowski, migratory game bird program manager for the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KWPT).

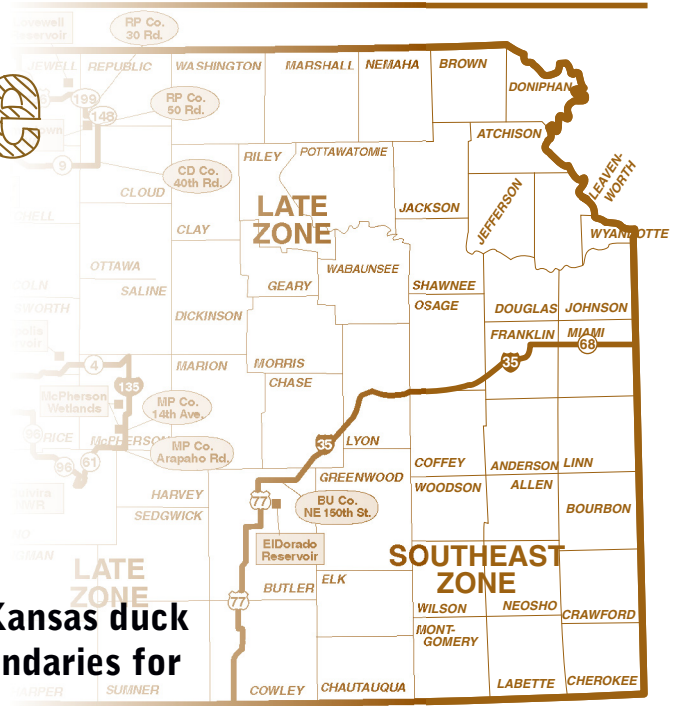
"The zones allow us to spread the season out across the state as we only have a limited number of days through four months of hunting," he added. "We can break those days out to match the best hunting opportunities for a specific area or habitat."

Ducks seasons are managed by biologists from various state and federal agencies throughout their migratory range, but the overall governing agency is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). In collaboration with state agencies, through the flyway system (for more on the Flyway Councils and Federal season process visit

<http://flyways.us>), the USFWS provides a framework of dates and/or bag limit options for all four flyways: Pacific, Central, Mississippi and Atlantic. Each state agency can then pick and choose, with some flexibility, the best options for their area within that framework.

The USFWS allows each state agency to establish up to three areas (zones) within their state to take advantage of available habitat types, migration chronology, weather influence, and duck hunter preferences. Zoning can be confusing, but the main objective is to provide greater opportunity and harvest. And a duck hunter willing to travel an hour or two will enjoy even greater opportunity. There's also a unique opportunity to split dates within these zones, depending on the number of zones a state selects.

While the season dates and duck bag limits are subject to change each year, the zoning boundaries are set in stone for five years. The USFWS considers states' requests to change duck zones and Kansas' is considering



changes to the boundaries that would start with the 2016-2017 season.

"We started this process back in March with our commission meetings and we've discussed it at several additional meetings since then," Bidrowski said. "Final staff recommendations were presented at the August commission meeting, and then we'll have the public hearing on this topic at the October 22 commission meeting for final adoption; however, it will not go into effect until the 2016 season."

In addition to the normal Kansas Wildlife, Parks and Tourism Commission meetings, Bidrowski sought public input at seven public meetings conducted across the state this summer.

"We gave a history and overview of season dates and zones for duck hunting, an overview of why we do it that way, and tried to solicit as much input as we could from those attending," Bidrowski said.

Even though hunter turnout was low (only two people showed up in Dodge City and four people in Erie), Bidrowski added that overall, it was a great opportunity to engage local hunting communities in the discussion.

"The meetings we had near our major waterfowling areas had about a dozen at each one, including Wichita, Great Bend, Hutchinson and Emporia," he said. "It was great meeting hunters and we had some very

good discussions. I was particularly pleased with the turn-out at our Kansas City meeting where we had 40-50 hunters, with most of them being Marais des Cygne hunters, which is probably one of the biggest controversies (as far as boundaries and season dates)," Bidrowski added.

"We do find that a majority of hunters from our past surveys are pretty satisfied with the seasons," he added. "Some have minor tweaks they'd like to see, but overall, I think Kansas does a good job in matching the hunting

"It's a hunter-preference issue and I'm relying on Kansas' hunting communities to voice their desires."

opportunities to the different areas."

Input was also gathered through an online survey, which was sent to more than 10,000 Kansas duck hunters. Bidrowski studied the results and considered any trends or preferences before staff made recommendations to the commission in August.

There were about 37,000 Kansas state waterfowl permits sold last year. Of those, about 26,000 were sold to resident hunters. Most nonresident hunters came from Missouri, followed by Texas, Colorado, Oklahoma and

Louisiana, with remaining states accounting for less than 1 percent each. Forty-nine states (Rhode Island was missing) and three foreign countries were represented in last year's Kansas waterfowl stamp purchases, as well.

"Of that figure, about 15,000 to 20,000 are active duck hunters (hunting one or more times a season) according to our Harvest Information Program survey," Bidrowski said.

Kansas duck hunters still have time to voice their opinions.

"Hunters can provide any feedback about the new boundaries now," Bidrowski said. "They can give their input directly to staff, or to the commission as they won't vote on the changes until the October 22 meeting.

"It's a hunter-preference issue and I'm relying on Kansas' hunting communities to voice their desires," Bidrowski said.

"Some changes might be large-scale, as we've heard the debate about places like Quivira and whether that gets moved to the Low Plains Early Zone or even Southeast Zone," Bidrowski said. "We heard about moving Cedar Bluff Reservoir as it sits right on the High Plains Unit boundary (just east of Highway 283) and for years we've been trying to get it in the High Plains. If we can't do that through requests to the Fish and Wildlife Service, we're looking at re-drawing lines to accommodate Cedar Bluff Reservoir in the Low Plains Late Zone.



Marc Murrell photos



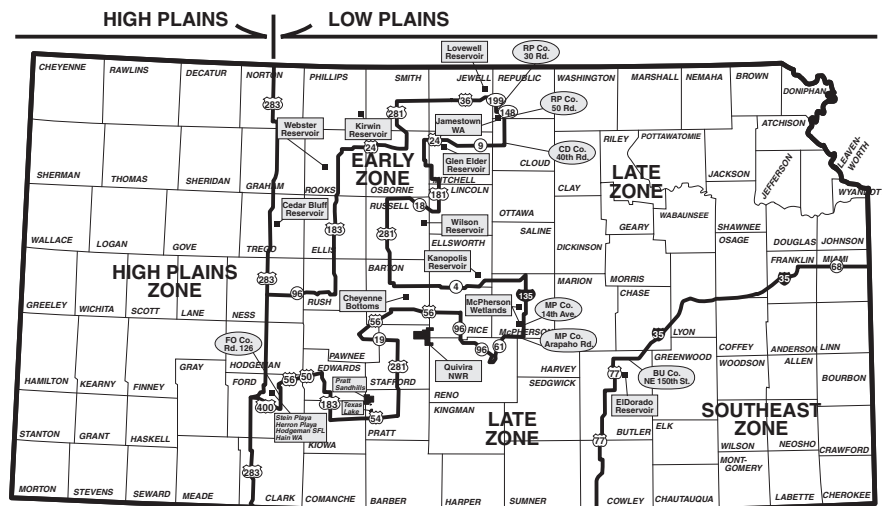
“With the Southeast Zone, there were a lot of possibilities as to what to do, including making it larger or smaller, and in particular, where Marais des Cygne fell out,” Bidrowski added.

Kansas lies in the middle of the Central Flyway, with roughly 30 species of waterfowl migrating through. When Mother Nature cooperates, the Sunflower State boasts some of the best duck hunting in the Great Plains. And it doesn’t matter if you prefer early season migrants like blue-winged teal, gadwalls, wigeons and pintails, or late-season mallards, it’s all here.

The challenge for Bidrowski and his committee is aligning hunter preferences with migration patterns and habitats.

“Kansas waterfowl hunters are just as diverse as Kansas’ waterfowl hunting opportunities,” Bidrowski said. “We typically receive strong, and often conflicting, opinions about seasons. Zones and splits are tools that help serve a broad constituent base. I’m always going to err on the side of caution on the biology of the birds, but there’s flexibility there for hunter preferences. We just don’t make this stuff up, and we try to use science and data to base our decisions on, while at the same time, giving hunters a say since it’s their season.”

For information on the 2015 waterfowl seasons, go to www.ksoutdoors.com. To comment the duck zones, email tom.bidrowski@ksoutdoors.com.



Just before this issue went to press, staff presented this recommendation to the commission for changing the duck zones. The Low Plains Early Zone was adjusted to put Cedar Bluff Reservoir in the Low Plains Late Zone. Other boundaries remained the same.

DUCK ZONES HISTORICAL TIMELINE

1903—First regulated duck hunting season in Kansas

1918—Migratory Bird Treaty Act

1931—Restrictions in seasons in response to Dust Bowl

1931–1971 Seasons fluctuate based on duck populations

1972—Kansas was split into High Plains (west of Highway 283) and Low Plains

1996—Low Plains split into Early Zone (to target early migrants attracted to shallow waters) and Late Zone (align season dates to migration patterns of rivers and large water bodies)

2011—Low Plains split into Early Zone, Late Zone and Southeast Zone (created due to unique hunting opportunities and segment of hunters in this portion of Kansas that prefer later season dates)

INTERESTING DUCK HUNTING FACTS


The average Kansas duck hunter harvests 14 ducks during the season and hunts 7 days

Approximately 184,000 ducks are harvested each season in Kansas

Of the total ducks harvested in Kansas each season on average, 11,000 are divers, 80,000 are non-mallard dabblers (teal, widgeon, pintails, gadwalls) and 92,000 are mallards

The average Kansas duck hunter is less than 30 years old. As a result, most of them have never experienced anything but the Liberal Package Season frameworks and bag limits (in place since 1997)

Sources: Kansas Migratory Game Bird Hunter and Harvest Summary National Duck Hunter Survey 2005 Central Flyway Technical Report



PLACES TO SHOOT

When I think about shooting my bow, shotgun or rifle during the summer preparing for the upcoming fall hunting seasons, four words come to mind: fun, ethics, safety, and success. Everyone who shoots knows that shooting targets is fun, and that could be reason enough to spend time at the range, but the other words can be just as compelling if you're serious about hunting.

FUN. Shooting is a great family recreation, and it can be competitive or friendly. The act of hitting the bullseye with an arrow, keeping a three-shot group tight at 200 yards, or powdering a clay target is just plain fun, but the improvement in your shooting skills you will see with practice sessions can be personally satisfying. Many hunters who enjoy competition spend their summers

competing in 3-D archery shoots, registered trap or sporting clays shoots, or rifle silhouette shoots. While the purpose of practice and competition is to win, the hard work will really pay off this fall. Shooting is also social and getting together with good friends at the gun club or archery range only enhances the fun of shooting.

ETHICS. What does shooting have to do with ethics? Well,



**Hillsdale Shooting Range
Hillsdale State Park**

ethics are obviously personal, so I'll give you my opinion. The more competent you are with your shotgun, rifle, or bow, the more likely you'll make a good, clean shot while hunting. And I consider that to be ethical. There is no law that says you have to possess shooting skill to buy a hunting license, and we have no competency requirements. An ethical hunter knows his or her per-

sonal limits and passes up shots outside of those limits. Time on the range will teach you about your own skills, which shots you are best at and which you have trouble with. You'll also get to know your equipment by spending time on the range, and that segues right into safety.

SAFETY. Being familiar with your firearm or archery equipment will help you be safer in the field.

**BY MIKE MILLER
EXECUTIVE EDITOR,
PRATT**

Loading and unloading procedures, where the safety is located, and safe handling practices should be second nature, meaning you don't have to think about them. That takes practice and repetition. You could learn those things while hunting, but it would take much longer, and with all the potential distractions, you could have an accident in the process. Spending time on the shooting range will teach you about your equipment.

SUCCESS. You could call having fun shooting and hitting targets success, but that's not what this refers to. Developing your shooting skills will no doubt have a huge impact on your success in the field. And success is much more than merely bagging your quarry or bringing home a limit. Success is really the culmination of preparation and attaining a goal. Success in the field is defined differently among hunters. To some, it is harvesting a mature buck they have scouted and hunted for several seasons. To others, success is watching with pride as their young retriever brings in its first duck. Or maybe success is watching the sunrise from your treestand, deer or no deer. However, if you're truly hunting, you're ultimate intention is to bring home wild game meat. Knowing you have prepared properly and have the necessary skill to accomplish the goal only enhances your experiences.

So, I rest my case. Shooting your firearms and archery equipment is fun, safe and will make your hunting experiences more successful and fulfilling. The only problem many of us have is we don't know where we can shoot safely and legally.

The first place to look is the



The Fancy Creek Range at Tuttle Creek State Park offers rifle shooters 20 firing points at 50 and 100 meters. The pistol range offers 10-, 22-, 25- and 50-meter shooting.

“Shooting Ranges” page ksoutdoors.com, which you can find under “Activities” on the top menu. You can search by county location or alphabetical order, and each listing includes a short narrative along with contact information. While some are called clubs, that doesn’t mean they are not open to everyone. Every local gun club I’ve visited has welcomed

newcomers, and most members are willing to help beginners learn. After finding a range, the next step is to introduce yourself and learn more about the facility.

If you can’t find a private range, the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Park and Tourism (KDWPT) has six shooting ranges on public land. Target shooting on public land is restricted to desig-

nated areas because of safety and litter concerns. While most KDWPT ranges offer controlled access on certain days and times, two allow open, unsupervised shooting: the Glen Elder Shooting Range, located 1 mile south of Downs, allows shotgun, pistol and smallbore rifle; the Don Brown Memorial Range, located on the McPherson Wildlife Area near Canton, provides a 100-yard range for pistol, smallbore and high-powered rifle. Shotguns may be patterned but no clay targets are allowed.

The Cheney Lake Shooting Range, located just north of Cheney Lake on Parallel Rd., is open to the public on Fridays and Saturdays, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. and Sundays, 1 p.m.-5 p.m. Certified range officers operate the range, which provides shooting benches, target backers and target tacks. Rifles, pistols and shotgun slugs may be shot on the 100-yard and 25-yard ranges. A free permit is available onsite. The range is ADA accessible and there is a uni-sex vault toilet available.

Fancy Creek Range, located within Tuttle Creek State Park near Randolph, is operated and maintained by the Friends of Fancy Creek Range, and accommodates small-bore and high-powered rifles, as well as handguns. The rifle range has 20 firing points from 50 and 100 meters. The pistol range has nine firing points from 10 and 22 meters. The 50-meter range has 12 firing points from 25 and 50 meters. Shooters can shoot all day for a fee of \$10. Various memberships are available that allow shooters to shoot without paying daily fees or at reduced daily fees. Daily or annual park vehicle permits are required. The range also hosts shooting events throughout the year. Find out more at www.fancycreekrange.org.

Hollister Shooting Range, located in Bourbon County on the Hollister Wildlife Area southwest of Fort Scott, is operated by the Old Fort



Chris Becker photo

The Cheney Lake Shooting Range, like other KDWPT ranges, is operated by a friends group, with members serving as rangemasters on scheduled open days.

Sharpshooters through a friends group agreement. Shooters can pay a daily fee of \$10 and individual and family annual memberships are available for \$20 and \$30 respectively. However, hunters may sight in rifles at no charge during the month of November. Smallbore and high-power rifle shooters can shoot up to 100 yards and there is also trap shooting for \$5 per round. The range is open on Tuesdays and Sundays 3 p.m.-dusk, February-May and October and November. During June, July, August and September, the range is open Tuesdays, 5 p.m.-dusk; Sundays, 3 p.m.-dusk; and Saturdays, 8 a.m.-1 p.m. This range is ADA compliant.

Hillsdale Range and Training Facility, located at Hillsdale State Park in Miami County near Paola, is KDWPT's newest range. This state-of-the-art range provides 20 shooting spots on the 100-yard rifle range, 24 spots on the 50-yard pistol/rimfire rifle range and six shooting spots on a 200-yard range. It also features two combination trap/skeet fields. The daily range fee is \$10, however, shooters under age 16 shoot for free while



Baffles in place at the Fancy Creek Range ensure no rounds leave the range.

under the supervision of a paying adult 18 or older. Annual memberships are available for \$175. A daily or annual park vehicle permit is also required. Normal operating hours are: April-October – Friday, noon-8 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m.-8 p.m.; Sunday, 2 p.m.-8 p.m. ; and November-March – Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.;

Sunday, 2 p.m.-5 p.m. For more information, go to www.hillsdalerange.org.

Soon, shooters will enjoy a range similar to the Hillsdale Range at El Dorado State Park. Construction bids were awarded this summer, and work should begin this fall.

Archery ranges are also located at several state parks and wildlife areas including Lovewell, Clinton, Prairie Dog, Eisenhower, Elk City, Tuttle Creek and El Dorado state parks, the Prairie Center, Shawnee state fishing lake Hunter Education Center, Byron Walker Wildlife Area, and Pratt Operations Office.

Shooting should be a natural step in any pre-hunt preparation. And it might be the most enjoyable step. With more than 80 shooting ranges listed on the KDWPT website, ksoutdoors.com, you should be able to find a range nearby that fits your needs. 🏹



The archery range at El Dorado State Park offers a variety of stations with different shooting distances and a youth range with 3-D targets. A full-service pistol, rifle and shotgun range is scheduled to begin construction this fall.

Anastin's First Turkey

text and photos by Dustin Teasley
graphic designer specialist, Pratt



I had never hunted turkeys until I came to work for the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism in the fall of 1994. That spring, my introduction to turkey hunting was one of the most intense outdoor experiences I ever had. My supervisor, Mike Miller, who mentored me, took some humor from how the morning hunt affected me. I was hooked on that rush.

After that hunt, I put too much emphasis on success and sometimes forgot about enjoying the overall experience. I wanted everyone to feel the excitement of my first turkey hunt. My wife's first turkey a few years later was more of a blunder on my part because of my misplaced priorities. She took a bird, but it was way harder than it needed to be and I am sure she would have enjoyed the whole experience more if we hadn't hunted so hard.

If we're lucky, with age comes wisdom. After a few years of blunders in the woods, I began to realize my priorities were skewed. I needed to focus on

being in the woods and enjoying myself to the point that I wanted to come back time and time again. Now I take things a little slower, I am less intense and have wised up enough to ensure my kids enjoy our hunting outings. Lets face it, they won't want to continue hunting if it's no fun. I try to pick nice days to take them hunting and fishing, even though a limit of ducks is easier when it's cold, blowing and rainy. The hunt will mean more to them if it's comfortable, even if we don't take limits.

When turkey hunting, I look for days not forecast for double-digit wind speeds. I want to hear that gobble on the roost and the spit and drum as they emerge into view from a thicket. I've spent too many days flushing sand out of my eyes and medicating wind-chapped cheeks.

The last couple of years hunting turkeys with my son, Hunter, had been pretty fun. Although we dealt with adverse hunting conditions common to the season, we usually managed to enjoy our hunts. My



A January Saturday with a favorable forecast prompted me to introduce my daughter to turkey hunting. The easy walk and controllable hunting situation made for a pleasant hunt.

The pop-up blind would hide us from the sharp-eyed turkeys and help keep us warm.

Shouldering the gun with the proper sight picture was practiced over and over. I knew in the heat of the moment, things could be overwhelming and practice would increase our odds for success.



daughter, Anastin, who turned 8 this past November, watched her brother and I head to the woods and return with grand stories about our adventures. Two years ago, she began showing an interest in hunting with us. Hunter has wanted to go with me wherever and whenever since he was four. Hunting was as routine as weekly trips to the supermarket. It hadn't been that way with Anastin.

I wanted to encourage Anastin, but my wisdom told me to wait and let it be her decision. She felt as if she was being left out of the fun, and she was right. I knew deer hunting wouldn't be a good first choice, but fall turkey seemed to be a likely opportunity. I had never hunted in the fall for turkeys, so this was going to be new for me, as well. The fall season allows you to harvest toms or hens, so we could harvest any bird that provided a clean shot.

The landowner who gave us permission to hunt had trail camera pictures of turkeys coming through a particular corridor on a regular basis. With a well-

placed blind, I had hopes we would at least see some birds. A weekend in January was open, and Mom was gone for the weekend, so Anastin, Hunter and I planned to go.

Early Saturday morning we walked in and set up our blind. It's a good thing turkeys don't hear very well because we weren't exactly quiet. The blind was crowded with three of us, and I was second-guessing the hunt just 30 minutes into it. I have a tough enough time managing the two of them together in the back seat of the vehicle on short trips, let alone the three of us in similar space for a two-hour hunt. However, the briskness of the morning helped ease the tension as they both huddled around me for warmth. As the sun peaked through the trees, the familiar *kelk-kelk-kelk* of hen turkeys gathering for the day got our attention. As the sun warmed the blind, the sounds of turkeys faded in the distance, and tension returned. One was too hot, one was cold, one couldn't see, and the other wanted a drink. The



Filling out her first tag was rewarding in itself. Pictures followed and memories were captured. A great father/daughter, brother/sister moment. As proud as she was, her father and brother were equally proud.



antics of some squirrels helped pass the time for another hour and I was thinking about cutting the hunt short to help keep things positive; the wisdom kicking in. The turkeys' schedule appeared to be off because they were 30 minutes past due for their appearance.

We drove country roads for the next hour just hanging out and "scouting." I was encouraged when both kids asked if we could go again the next day. I had left our blind set up, which would allow us to sleep an hour later.

The next day dawned the same, crisp and calm. Our squirrels showed up right at first light and started their antics again. As time closed in on when I expected turkeys to show, we reviewed multiple shooting scenarios. Twenty minutes after the squirrels' arrival, something caught their attention and they began to bark.

"Something's coming!" I alerted.

Both kids had already picked up on something

and were quiet as church mice. After a couple of minutes, though, the squirrels settled down and went back to their business. We had also let our guard down when we heard *KELK, KELK, KELK* just outside the blind. Everyone froze. A shadow of a turkey emerged from an overgrown deer trail, catching Anastin off guard. Her gun barrel rested on the tripod but the stock was in her lap. The turkey moved in front of us at about 15 yards, stopped. looked back and yelped as if to tell the others the coast was clear. A winter flock of more than 20 hens soon followed and birds were all around us. The flock relaxed and began to feed. I whispered to Anastin to slowly move the stock of the gun to her shoulder but just as she got it to her shoulder, her head net fell in front of her eyes. She began to panic. I reached behind her and pulled on the head net to clear her vision, then nerves began to kick in. Her breathing became labored and the gun barrel jumped from bird to bird as she tried to figure out which one

The hunt had finished and we began the trip back to the truck with gear and bird in hand. Carrying her own bird back to the truck was important to her. She was proud to have accomplished something she had previously thought impossible. The stories she told about the hunt focused on more than taking a turkey. They were more about the colors in the sunrise, our warm breath looking like smoke in the cold air. One of her favorite parts was stopping at a nearby small town and getting a pop to share while we drove county roads looking for critters.



to shoot. I whispered to her to calm down and focus on a single bird away from the others. Her gun barrel slid like molasses to the far left and steadied up. When her breathing calmed down, I reached up and took the gun off safety. I told her to focus on the bird's head and squeeze the trigger. At the shot, the barrel jumped a little and landed right back into the tripod. I was focused on what she was doing and missed the shot, but I soon caught the flopping of a bird out of the corner of my eye. Anastin pulled her face up off the stock and turned to look at me, wide-eyed and amazed.

"Did you see that!" she said exasperated.

"That was amazing!" she followed up.

Her breathing began to quicken again as if she had held her breath through the whole ordeal.

I reached over and clicked the safety back on and removed the gun from the tripod. Her brother congratulated her over and over and for a moment, the feud between brother and sister was truced. We col-

lected ourselves and exited the blind. Anastin cautiously approached her prize, unsure of what to do. I retrieved her tag from the backpack and we filled it out and tagged the bird. Although it bored her to death, she humored me for the next 30 minutes while I snapped photo after photo. When we were done, she eagerly and proudly accepted the challenge of carrying her bird the quarter-mile back to the truck.

On the ride home she studied her bird and asked many questions about life and death and turkeys. She even texted her mom about the whole adventure. She seemed proud to have taken part in something her brother was so passionate about and seemed to understand why he liked hunting so much. She has already asked to go again this year and in her words, "it doesn't matter what for." I think she may have found the correct priorities sooner than I did. Harvesting game will always be a driving factor in why I hunt, but being with family will always be the priority. Good job sister! 🦃

The **BOBCAT** Chronicles

By **Matt Peek**
wildlife research biologist, Emporia

In almost 15 years as a furbearer biologist, it stands to reason I'd rack up a few stories on the species I've covered. This series of observations, experiences and encounters is my attempt to relay a few of those you might find interesting about one of our most intriguing Kansas furbearers: the bobcat.

The timing is fitting. It is such an elusive species, people may spend years in good rural bobcat habitat without seeing one, and not due to a lack of bobcats. Yet, in late summer and early fall, the reports start rolling in, mostly from urban and suburban areas from people who didn't know we had them; people just kind enough to share a cool sighting, or people who fear for the safety of themselves or their pets.

Bobcats do well in our suburban and even urban landscapes. You may not like that squirrel on your birdfeeder or rabbit in your garden, but they do. Slinking around mainly at night, for most of the year they remain pretty elusive. But your shady lawn or a manicured trail is a lot more comfortable on a hot day than the brushy timber. This is what draws them into the open during the day, and makes them more visible this time of year than any other. And if you're lucky, you might see a family of playful half-grown kittens; what a sight!

I assure callers they should be safe. The only bobcats I've ever known to attack a person were either rabid or inadvertently cornered, like one that was eating cat food on a porch when the owner walked out the door (not in Kansas). Both are extremely rare. I can't give a caller the same assurance about their small pets, especially cats.

I've fielded a handful of calls over the



Bob Gress photo



years from people wondering what the culprit could be when their farm cat population drastically declined in short order, like from 20 down to three in a week. Coyotes will pick off a cat here and there. An owl will take a litter of kittens one at a time, one every night or two. But only bobcats seem to sometimes exhibit such a relentless urge to rid their territory of a colony of farm cats. In the same vein of a wolf killing a coyote or a coyote killing a fox, the motive here is more than just a meal. This combination of territoriality, competition for resources and obtaining food is known as “intraguild predation” to biologists. It doesn’t happen in such an extreme manner all that often, but when I get this call, I know the culprit.

Bobcats can also have a lethal secondhand effect on domestic cats. Some carry a blood-borne parasite called *Cytauxzoon felis* that generally causes them no ill effects, but is debilitating and usually fatal to domestic cats. *Cytauxzoonosis*, or bobcat fever as it’s more commonly known, is spread to domestic cats by ticks, and preventative tick treatments are the best way to protect outdoor cats. I’ve known of several cases in northeast Kansas, but it could occur anywhere in the state.

Speaking of bobcats and domestic cats, I’ve investigated several cases over the years where people had come up with dead cats of various sizes, tail lengths and colors they thought were hybrids of the two. So far, I’ve never seen anything but domestics. Some have been fairly unique, like a Maine coon cat or two, which is a very large breed of domestic, and an occasional Manx cat,

“ Bobcats do well in our suburban and even urban landscapes. You may not like that squirrel on your birdfeeder or rabbit in your garden, but they do. ”

which is a common short-tailed breed of domestic that can cross with long-tailed domestics and produce offspring with various tail lengths. And I’ve also looked at the occasional run-of-the-mill dark tabby.

It may be fair to ask whether it’s even possible. A friendly association between the two is not outside the realm of possibilities. I’ve known of orphaned bobcat kittens raised with domestic cats (typically not legal anymore) that got along fine. But unlike lions and tigers or donkeys and horses, mammalogists don’t even place bobcats and domestics in the same genus (bobcat is *Lynx*, domestics are *Felis*). Selective pairing in captivity may produce mating, but has yet to produce any offspring. There are several written accounts of hybridization with wild bobcats though. The description of some of the kittens is compelling (large feet, tufted ears and belly spots), but physical features alone aren’t

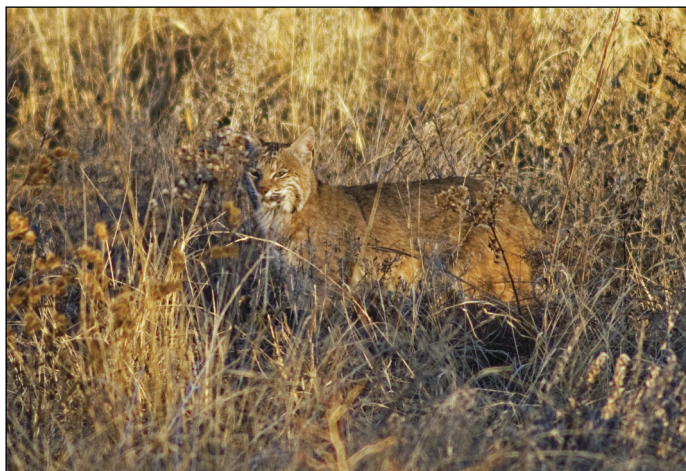
conclusive (there are bobcat-like breeds of domestics, like American bobtail and Pixie-bob), and no cross has never been genetically verified.

Bobcats can cross with lynx, and in 2005 I was contacted by an individual who believed that to be the case with a very unusual looking cat that had been harvested. (Several of Colorado’s lynx have come into Kansas in

the past several years, so it may not be as much of a longshot as you might think!) This cat was a solid reddish color with spotless white underparts. It had ear tufts, which some bobcats do, and the appearance of very large feet, which may have largely been a result of the unusual color pattern. Lab results indicated it was in fact a pure bobcat, but its appearance certainly was an anomaly that I have not seen the likes of since.

I was notified of another unusual color phase of bobcat in 2003. A black bobcat was photographed in a Sumner County corn field during harvest in September, and taken by a furharvester several months later. The opposite of albinism, melanism is the result of excess black pigment called melanin. Melanistic color phases are more common in other species like fox, squirrel and leopard (i.e. black panther). There are several accounts of other black bobcats in scientific literature, but out of over 70,000 bobcats harvested in Kansas since I’ve been the furbearer biologist, I’ve only seen the one.

Ironically, the color phase of bobcat that causes by far the most confusion for people is not uncommon at all. Fur trappers call them “rabbitbacks.” As the name implies, their general dorsal color is dull brown or tan and basi-





Dan Witt photo

cally spotless. A big bobcat only weighs about 30 pounds, but it's not uncommon to misjudge them as substantially larger. Add a solid tan pelt to the misjudged size, and – ok, you know where this is going. Thanks to trail cams and cell phones, I'm able to help properly identify a lot of these rabbit-backs each year. Some photos are distant and/or blurry, while others are perfectly good. Some people just expect bobcats to have obvious spots.

I truly enjoy trying to get to the bottom of these "What type of animal is it?" mysteries. In several instances, buried deer have been reported. A couple that come to mind include a roadkill and an archery kill, which was located the following morning in a corn field, buried so thoroughly in corn stalks, barely a leg was visible. Of course a bigger cat than a bobcat is notorious for burying its prey. The individuals who located these animals promptly contacted us, and we were more than happy to

investigate. When our local natural resources officer drove up to the buried roadkill, a bobcat jumped out of the ditch and ran up a nearby tree. And when the local district wildlife biologist investigated the buried corn field deer, bobcat tracks and claw marks in the ground where it had been clawing debris were prevalent.

Mountain lions are better known for burying their prey because they regularly kill prey that they consume for days, like deer, whereas bobcats primarily prey on smaller animals that make up a single meal, like rabbits or small rodents. I once opened a bobcat stomach that contained 23 mice and 3 rats. It took a little work to piece the rats back together (Hey, I had to do it to see how many there were!) but the mice were each bit cleanly in half near their center. The precision was almost surgical. What an interesting observation, to a biologist anyway!

It may take a little luck, a keen eye, and maybe quite a bit of time in a blind or tree stand, but if you want to know the coolest thing about a bobcat, you need to watch one in a natural setting just doing what bobcats do. It's easy to admire their beauty, their perfect camouflage, and how attuned and inquisitive they are to the sights and sounds of their surroundings. I think what impresses me most is their agility and quickness.

The last one I saw at 50 yards inexplicably turned and stared up at me. I hadn't flinched and was barely breathing. How did it know? One move and it would be gone in a flash. Instead of bolting, a couple of casual steps and the cat melted back into the sparse timber. I knew it was there, but I couldn't find it as it must have made its retreat. I know you may be able to watch them in town out your kitchen window, but when someone says bobcats are elusive, I still have to agree! ♡



DOVE, DOVE, SHOOT

By Nadia Marji, managing editor

One bird. One bird that was eventually swallowed whole by our chocolate lab, Bella, but it was a bird nonetheless. That one bird was all it took to make it a boy's best hunting season yet.

It was Tyler's first kill and the beginnings of what, his father and I hope, will become a lifelong love of hunting. It was just one bird, but it might as well have been a limit with the excitement painted on all of our faces, including Bella's – one bird on the ground meant one thing: Tyler was now a hunter.

Our first-ever family hunt had been planned months in advance. We decided that spring that we would start Tyler out on doves. Weather-wise, September is a great time of the year, little equipment would be needed, and we knew it wouldn't require the silence and stillness that a waterfowl or deer hunt would.

"I don't think you understand how fun this is going to be," Tyler's dad, Jon, said to him, as he loaded the last few items in the truck bed.

"Dad, when can I hunt with you guys?" Dylan, the youngest, interjected.

"Next year Dyl, when you've had a little more shooting practice and can hold that gun up longer," his dad replied.

"Ugh," Dylan said, smiling.

Our eyes turned to the front door, as Tyler appeared, donning his newly-purchased camo hat and

shirt. His face said one thing: he was excited.

The boys and I loaded up in the cab as Jon fetched Bella, the most-experienced dog we had at the time.

Sunflower seeds in hand, and excitement to boot, we were finally on our way.

A short 15-minute drive later, we had arrived.

Setting up near one of the property's small, shallow ponds, Dylan and I set up our chairs and laid the bug spray on thick.

Tyler and his dad were in go-mode, setting up the spread.

"This goes here, right?" Tyler confidently asked his dad as he pieced together the motion dove decoy. "I got it to click."

"Looks good!" Jon said.

A few confidence decoys were clipped on to some nearby stubble, and we were set.

As we sat back in our chairs and settled in for the long haul, we admired the flapping motion decoy. It was a great purchase and a sight to see, because true to form, it began attracting birds in no time.

"Is that a dove?" Tyler asked anxiously, gun in hand.

For a first-time bird hunter, he was quick to pick up on flight movements, but unfortunately he had just been taunted by a swallow. Little did he know, false alarms like this would occur for the better part of a half hour before the real deal would fly by.

"Dad, how do you know when it's a dove?" Tyler inquired.

His father did his best to explain in a way a 10-year-old would understand. Seemingly satisfied with his dad's answer, Tyler nodded, and looked forward again, scouting the skies.

A few doves could be seen in the distance, but none within range. We continued to have visits from curious swallows, and to the delight of Birdy Bella, we had tweety birds galore – even a few blue-winged teal – but still no shootable doves.

In an effort to pass the time, we

resorted to a dinner of ranch flavored sunflower seeds.

"What time do the doves usually come out?" Dylan asked, pouring a handful of seeds. His dad and I both chuckled, simultaneously wishing there was a schedule the birds actually followed.

"They should be coming out any time, bud," his dad replied.

And as if it was magic, sure enough, two doves did.



For a first-time bird hunter, he was quick to pick up on flight movements, but unfortunately he had just been taunted by a swallow.



"DAD!" Tyler exclaimed, tossing his sunflower seeds in attempt to mount his shotgun in time for a shot.

"Get 'em, Ty!" his dad said excitedly.

The birds were long gone by the time the seeds hit the dirt, but it was evident Tyler's hunt was about to heat up.

From then on, everyone remained on alert, even wiggly Dyl.

"I bet I could have shot those," Tyler said in a bittersweet tone.

"I bet you could have, too," his dad replied.

But before we could get too down about the missed birds, Tyler's second chance came.

A dove approached from the south with plenty of time for Jon to warn him.

"Ty, on your left," he said calmly.

"I see it" Tyler whispered back.

Everyone was silent as we watched the bird.

Before I had time to look back at

Tyler to check his gun mount, the unmistakable sound of a shotgun firing echoed through the field.

"Did I get it?" Ty asked.

"I think I saw it fall just over that mound," his dad replied. "Put your gun on safe and I'll grab Bella. We'll go check it out."

While I focused the lens of my camera, I heard a "Woo hoo!" as Jon yelled in excitement. "You did it, bud!"

I could see through my zoom that Tyler was proud and rightfully so. The young bird made for a small, fast target.

His dad hugged him tight and followed up with a high-five, beaming with pride.

Knowing the events unfolding in front of me would never happen again, I looked up from my camera for a few moments to soak it all in. It was the first time I was able to witness one of the boys' major life accomplishments, and as their future stepmother, I felt an overwhelming sense of appreciation that it occurred during our hunt together. After a few seconds, I began clicking away, capturing as many shots as I could. And thank our lucky stars for it, because in all the commotion, one courageous and sneaky lab eyed a yummy opportunity.

Tyler had just set his dove down on the ground, when Bella took it upon herself to have a taste treat. Before we could yell "no," we saw the tailfeathers of a young dove disappear into Bella's mouth.

Unfortunately, another opportunity didn't present itself that evening. Luckily, we had pictures. But the best thing of all? We had made a memory.

In the micro moments it took for his cheek to hug the gun stock, his eyes to zero in on the bird, his body to swing along the bird's flight path, and his index finger to squeeze the trigger, Tyler had become a hunter.

None of us will ever forget that moment, and we're anxious to add new memories this season. 🐾





Hunter Surveys Go Modern

by Mike Nyhoff

Public Lands regional supervisor, Hays

We live in an electronic world of computers and smartphones, where communication is handled with emails, texts and tweets. We even pay bills and bank on-line. Digital tools and digital services permeate every aspect of our modern lives. Yet to some people, it still seems strange to incorporate electronics into our hunting experience.

"I go hunting to escape the modern world and enjoy the peace and quiet of nature," I've heard more than one hunter say. However, few of these hunters are really leaving their technology behind. In fact, for many, it is making our days afield more enjoyable. We buy licenses and permits online where once we had to stand in line; we make motel reservations online when we travel to hunt; we buy equipment from websites that offer better deals than we can get locally; and we track weather and best times to hunt through apps on our phones.

Last September, the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWP) introduced the iSportsman Electronic Daily Hunt Permit System at 14 wildlife management areas (WMAs) across the state. The permits at these WMAs are free, just as they were prior to the implementation of iSportsman, and the information collected has changed little from what was required on handwritten cards. Since the introduction of iSportsman, the process of obtaining a permit, checking in and checking out of an area, and reporting harvest has become more streamlined than ever. Yet, despite these advances and improved efficiency, some sportsmen maintain concerns about the new system and the information they must provide.

Surveying Before iSportsman

For many years, major wetland areas like Cheyenne Bottoms, Marais des Cygnes and Jamestown used in-person interviews to gather information on area hunters, their harvests, and hunting preferences – an antiquated, and costly form of surveying.

Surveying Before iSportsman

Prior to 1990, the same wetland areas even required hunters to check-in personally early in the morning before hunting. Hunting licenses were collected and held until the hunter returned to the station for check-out. Check stations were eventually phased out due to the huge manpower requirement and the inconvenience to hunters. Following that, in order to keep track of participation and harvest, free daily hunt permits





The old daily hunt permit system required hunters to pick up a paper card at an area kiosk, fill out the top part, keep the bottom part to be filled out at the end of the hunt. The iSportsman system is much more convenient and cost-efficient.

were used and the paper cards were available at “iron ranger” kiosks located around the hunting areas. The Kansas iSportsman is merely a more efficient extension of those important efforts, electronically collecting the same information required on the survey cards. The daily hunt permit is a survey to keep track of how many users came to a particular WMA that day, what they were hunting, and what they harvested — vital information needed by area managers in order to continue improving public land opportunities and access.

Recording this information electronically saves manpower and financial resources so they can be spent elsewhere. For hunters, it saves time and hassle so they can spend more time doing hunting and less time and gas driving to physical check-in locations.

Hunter Information: Critical to Good Decision Making

Public land managers wear many different hats and usually work alone. From biologists to mechanics, from firefighters to game wardens, from farmers and

habitat specialists to restroom cleaners and boat dock repairmen, state wildlife department employees work to provide an abundance of wildlife habitat and opportunities. A key part of this effort is conducting wildlife population surveys, including those for waterfowl, shorebirds, cranes, turkeys, crows, deer, furbearers, dove and more. These surveys provide information on how the animals are responding to habitat management and provide insight on what hunters can expect to find when they arrive on the properties. They are critical components of ensuring strong game populations and great hunting opportunities.

So why survey users? People management is also a large part of managing public lands. But with less funding and less manpower to operate with (as in all aspects of government), public land managers must prioritize their work efforts. A large portion of the operations and management budget goes to improve and maintain roads, parking areas, restrooms, shoreline access, signs, boundary markers, special hunts,

DAILY HUNT PERMIT TEXAS LAKE WA

DATE: _____ KDWPT # _____
 NAME: _____
 ADDRESS: _____
 CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____
 VEHICLE TAG: _____ COUNTY: _____

Each hunter must fill out this portion of the Daily Hunt Permit and deposit it in permit box **BEFORE** hunting. **TEXL 254970**

Each hunter must keep this portion of the Daily Hunt Permit on their person while hunting. Fill out and deposit this portion of the permit in permit box within one hour **AFTER** hunting. **TEXL 254970**

DATE: _____

Indicate all species you hunted while on the area by marking the checkbox next to the species name. Place a number that represents the number of each species YOU harvested, even if 0, in the harvested box. For deer and turkeys, indicate whether a male (M) or female (F) was harvested.

SPECIES	HARVESTED
<input type="checkbox"/> Dove	<input type="text"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Ducks	<input type="text"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Geese	<input type="text"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Pheasant	<input type="text"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Quail	<input type="text"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Deer	<input type="text"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Turkey	<input type="text"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Rabbit	<input type="text"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Squirrel	<input type="text"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	<input type="text"/>

PLEASE RATE HUNTING EXPERIENCE ON AREA:
 Poor Fair Good Excellent

etc. Managers need to know what constituents are doing and what their primary interests are in order to better guide decisions in allocating those limited funds and resources. They also need to know what are they hunting and harvesting as a key part of monitoring wildlife populations. As former Public Lands regional supervisor John Silovsky once said, “You can’t manage what you don’t measure.” Managers can’t spend all their time talking to hunters personally, so surveys help fill in the information gaps.

Collecting demographics from hunters helps determine who the hunters are, where they come from, what and when they are hunting and even whether they



Paper daily hunt permit cards sorted and stacked before being entered. Some area managers spent as much as 25 hours a week picking up cards and stocking kiosks.

hunt every year or not. The surveys can also determine which areas are most popular. Harvest survey information gives insight into how successful management efforts are and how successful hunters have been.

Moving Beyond Paper

In 2003, Jamestown Wildlife Area near Concordia implemented the two-part paper card system. Twelve iron rangers were set up around the property so that when hunters arrived each day, they could pick up a card, fill out the top portion with demographic information and the species they intended to hunt. When their hunt was complete, they filled out the bottom portion with the number of animals harvested, number of shots taken, and their satisfaction.

The card permit system was extremely labor intensive. There is cost involved with both systems of obtaining information, but the major benefit of iSportsman is freeing a manager's time to do more field work, which benefits wildlife and improves the recreational opportunities.

Paper cards must be designed and printed. The kiosks, or iron rangers must be built and maintained. Cards need to be stocked and collected from the kiosks. Once collected, the cards are

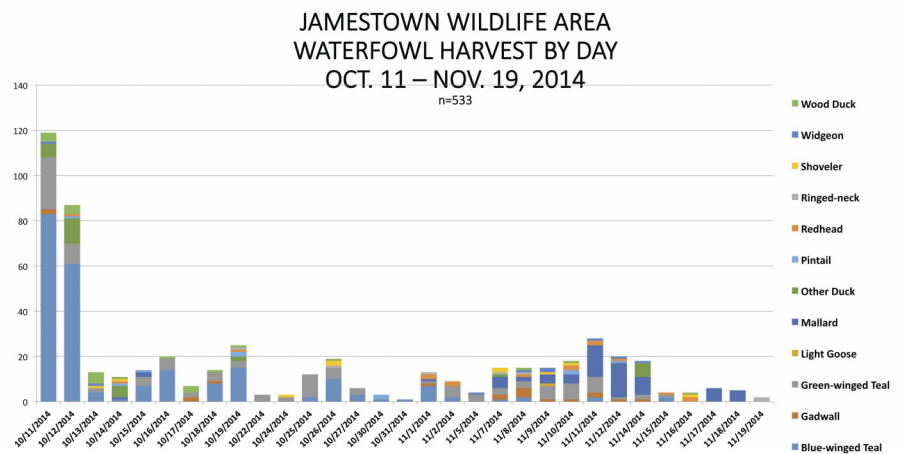
sorted and sent for data entry. After the information is entered into computers, managers must retrieve and analyze the data and then develop reports. The time delay from card collection to report publishing was months. Managers at Jamestown estimate the paper card system cost more than \$6,000 annually, with most of the cost in labor. Approximately 25 hours of employee time is spent weekly stocking, gathering and sorting cards. Hand written cards can be illegible and often, the top or bottom portion of the card wasn't returned to the kiosk.

In early 2014, public lands staff looked into iSportsman, which was being used by Ft. Riley Military Base and several other

military installations in the United States. By summer, bids were taken and a contract was awarded to Applied Sciences and Information Systems, Inc. (AScIS) to develop a program for Kansas. The program went live on August 18, 2014 for use on Cheyenne Bottoms, Clinton, Elwood, Isabel, Jamestown, Kansas River, Lovewell, Lyon State Lake, McPherson Wetlands, Melvern, Milford, Neosho, Slate Creek and Texas Lake. Nine more areas have been added to the list for this fall. They will be Benedictine Bottoms, Bolton, Buck Creek, Buffalo Ranch (Berentz-Dick), Hillsdale, La Cygne, Marais des Cygnes, Perry and Noe Wildlife Areas.

Using the New System

Participants first need to register for an account and set up a password and Personal Identification Number (PIN). The registration requests information such as address, email, phone, etc., the same information that is required for purchase of a hunting license. This provides demographics information but can also be used for visitor safety and emergency contacts. Thousands of hunters use public lands annually. Occasionally there is a need to contact a hunter for a family emergency as well as locating a hunter who may be lost or injured. The



The iSportsman electronic survey system allows land managers to quickly and efficiently collect and analyze data like that shown in the graph above.

emergency contact information on the iSportsman registration will assist managers in locating a hunter. Registrations must be completed online with computer or smart phone. Hunters only need to register once.

Checking in and checking out may be done from computer, smart phone, cell phone, or land-line telephone. Registered hunters can check in as early as the night before from home, motel, or from the car. They will need to enter their User Name and password, choose which property they are hunting, and they are done. After the hunt, visitors Check out by logging in, selecting the property and species hunted. They will then be asked what was harvested. It's as simple as that.

Kansas Hunters Sound Off

Although there are some hunters who dislike the change, David Geiber of Concordia, said, "My son and I used it several times at Jamestown and Lovewell and like it for the convenience. We check in the night before and don't have to search for a survey card kiosk in the morning. The only issue was lack of phone service when we try to check out at the property. But we just wait until we get to a better location and check out then." Geiber used the iSportsman system 21 times last hunting season.

Larry Fry of Great Bend, admits he was strongly against the new system. He was used to the card system and "felt that KDWPT was dragging him into the 20th Century." After registering and a couple of trial check-in attempts, Fry learned it was not a difficult process. Fry and his son check in on home computers the night before if they can. They don't have smartphones, so they use regular cell phones to call the iSportsman system to check out. Larry used the iSportsman system 36 times last hunting season.



The iSportsman electronic survey system allows hunters more time to hunt and a more convenient method of providing survey information.

"It's much easier checking out while sitting in front of my computer, in my warm house, instead of filling out a card at the boat ramp, in the cold, wind and rain," he said.

When asked about the personal information required at registration, Fry says, "I certainly understand the concern about giving up information, but most of it is already available in telephone books and on the internet, so it wasn't a big deal."

Fry wondered about the request for vehicle license plate information, but understood it could be used for enforcement or to locate the hunter in case of emergencies or accidents.

"I love the iSportsman system now that the bugs are worked out," said Rick Tomlinson of Great Bend. "The first couple of weeks were pretty rough."

There were some technical bugs when it was first put into use and the iSportsman team worked closely with KDWPT to correct problems. Tomlinson used a smartphone to check in and check out 29 times at Cheyenne Bottoms

last year.

"I'm not a very tech-savvy guy. I hate computers and cell phones, but this system is easy," said Tomlinson.

There are always those who will try to cheat the system. Tomlinson seen hunters fill out cards and the iSportsman survey with false information.

"I watched a group of hunters at a restaurant one morning fill out the top part of the card, and then complete the hunter survey – before they went hunting," he said. "I wish they realized how important the information is to managers. They're only hurting themselves."

Since Kansas iSportsman went live, 6,252 hunters have registered accounts, 20 percent of whom are nonresidents. From September 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015, approximately 13,500 hunters have checked in to iSportsman. More information can be found at www.kdwpt.isportsman.net.



The Knife Maker

by Andra Stefanoni
Pittsburg

Phil Evans creates high-quality knives that are works of art on a coal-fired forge built in the 1800s.

Over a coal forge that predates 1900, Phil Evans recalls the first knife he ever made.

"It was rough," he said as he pumped air to stoke the flames. "But I was proud of it. I thought it was the best thing in the world."

That was 1995. Today, Evans is a member of the American Bladesmith Society, a graduate of its school of bladesmithing where he learned from master smith Jim Crowell, and has built a home-based business that counts as customers baseball player Adam LaRoche and Duck Dynasty star Willie Robertson.

Earlier this year, Evans was featured in the new History Channel television series, "Forged in Fire."

He's a man keeping alive a centuries-old art rooted in cultures around the world, from China to the British Isles.

Early Days

Historical records show ancient Egyptians were using iron to make swords as early as 3000 B.C. King Tutankhamun's tomb included a dagger. The Celts based an entire culture on iron, using it to make tools and weapons. In China, traditional blades were made of steel, copper and bronze. Smiths in Korea, Japan, India and the Middle East, and Spain also learned techniques for transforming metals into an object used for survival.

After the Industrial Revolution, bladesmithing saw a decline. Steel production improvements meant smiths no longer had to forge it; blades could be machined, instead. Then, cutlery companies began employing mass production. Today, smithing knives is something done by just a handful of master craftsmen, largely as a cottage industry.

Modern conveniences have crept in, too. While many forges still utilize wood and coal as fuel, some use gas. Many smiths still use a hammer and anvil to pound and shape the steel or iron, although others use hydraulic presses and power hammers.

In his home-based forge at the crest of rolling Cherokee County prairie and fields in southeast Kansas, Evans uses both.

Inspiration

His inspiration came from a trip to Silver Dollar City in Branson, Missouri, 20 years ago.

"I wanted a nice hunting knife from a shop there, but I couldn't afford one," he said.

The descendant of several generations of carpenters, including a father who taught building and trades at Columbus High School, Evans also grew up on a farm and was good at fixing machinery.

"I had a file and a grinder, so I decided to try it myself," Evans said.

He saved enough vacation time that he could take two weeks off from work to attend a renowned



Above, bladesmith Phil Evans forges steel that will eventually become a knife blade. Below, Evans shows one of his first creations, a hunting/skinning knife.

bladesmithing school in Washington, Arkansas, in a restored 1824 village, population 200. Evans said it was then that he was bitten by the knife-making bug big-time.

On Jan. 1, Evans took the plunge to become a full-time knifemaker by retiring from a 25-year career with Walmart in Pittsburg. And business is good: He has a four to five month waiting list – almost more than he can handle.

Process

A table of raw materials hint at what Evans uses for knife handles: There's the tip of a wooly mammoth tusk he bartered with a Russian for. There's a Walrus jawbone – surprisingly heavy – and antlers from elk and deer.

His workshop, littered with hammers, files, anvils in every size, and a myriad of antique contraptions, also serves as his office.



Evans shows some of his creations along with some of the materials he'll use for handles. To view more Phill Evans knives visit glenviewforge.com.

The process demands physical strength. Evans, who is 6-foot, 2-inches tall and has thick, muscled arms, must continuously swing a 3-pound hammer. When he needs to move a lot of metal, Evans upgrades to a 5-pounder.

Clang. Clang. Clang, each pound rings out in his workshop – otherwise quiet, save the panting of his old shop dog, Hot Shot.

The process is often lengthy, complicated and tedious, and requires intricate manual dexterity, particularly when making a damascus knife – a remarkably strong blade with unique, swirled patterning.

In May through September, Evans does the bulk of his work in the morning – often opening his workshop as early at 6 a.m. – or in the evening to avoid the heat.

Evans begins by stacking pieces of 15n20 steel with 1084 carbon steel in 11 and 15 alternating layers and tack welds them together.

He heats the stack in a handbuilt forge until it is 2,300 degrees and cherry red – which can take as

long as 45 minutes – then takes it to a 2,400-ton hydraulic press to begin drop-hammering it into a thinner, longer piece.

Evans then cuts the stack into four more sections, re-stacks it, and repeats the process. Eventually the 15 layers will become 60, and then 180.

Next, he moves to a belt grinder, and then to a container of ferric chloride, a solution that attacks the steel, makes it darker, and brings out the design of the etching.

“I could spend an entire day or more just making a blade,” Evans said.

That’s why damascus knives carry a price tag of \$400 to \$2,000.

Evans also turns out Bowie knives, frontier/period knives, and sheaths. His bestseller, however, is a three-and-one-half-inch hunting and skinning knife which runs in the hundreds of dollars, not the thousands.

Sales are primarily through word of mouth, as well as a few modern-day conveniences early bladesmiths also didn’t have: a website and Facebook page.

Journeyman

Next up for Evans is completing his journeyman blacksmith rating, for which he’s already passed the field test. Picking up a two-by-four board and a damascus knife, Evans demonstrated the first part of the challenge:

“I had to chop two of these boards in half,” he says as he begins to chop.

“Then, I had to cut a free hanging, 1-inch sisal rope. And then I had to be able to shave hair off of my arm,” he said.

Evans put down the board to carefully demonstrate the latter of the requirements, and sure enough, tiny hairs fell to the workshop floor. Evans added that lastly, the same knife must be clamped into a vice and bent 90 degrees.

“In a survival situation, they don’t want it to snap off,” he said of the integrity of a knife’s blade.

The second part of the test, which Evans has yet to complete, is building five knives to take to an annual show and put before an elite panel of judges for critique.

“There’s just something about it, the knives, the process, that I love,” he said. “I think I’ve found my niche.”

2015 SPORTSMEN'S CALENDAR

FALL TURKEY

Oct. 1-Dec. 1, 2015 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

Archery: Sept. 19-27 AND Oct. 10-31, 2015

Muzzleloader: Sept. 28-Oct. 5, 2015

Firearm: Oct 2-5, 2015

ELK (residents only)

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 Any-Elk Permit Holders:

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

Sept. 1-Oct. 31 and Nov. 7-15, 2015 (*mourning, white-winged, Eurasian collared, and ringed turtle doves*)

EXOTIC DOVE

Nov. 20, 2015-Feb. 28, 2016 (*Eurasian collared and ringed turtle doves only*)

RAIL

Sept. 1-Nov. 9, 2015 (*Sora and Virginia*)

SNIPE

Sept. 1-Dec. 16, 2015

WOODCOCK

Oct. 17-Nov. 30, 2015

TEAL

HIGH PLAINS ZONE: Sept. 19-27, 2015

LOW PLAINS ZONE: Sept. 12-27, 2015

DUCKS

HIGH PLAINS UNIT

Oct. 10, 2015-Jan. 4, 2016 and Jan. 23-31, 2016

Youth: Oct. 3-4, 2015

DUCKS

LOW PLAINS EARLY ZONE

Oct. 10-Dec. 6, 2015 and Dec. 19, 2015-Jan. 3, 2016

Youth: Oct. 3-4, 2015

LOW PLAINS LATE ZONE

Oct. 31, 2015-Jan. 3, 2016 and Jan. 23-31, 2016

Youth: Oct. 24-25, 2015

LOW PLAINS SOUTHEAST ZONE

Nov. 14, 2015-Jan. 3, 2016 and Jan. 9-31, 2016

Youth: Nov. 7-8, 2015

CANADA GEESE

Oct. 31-Nov. 1, 2015 and Nov. 4, 2015-Feb. 14, 2016

WHITE-FRONTED GEESE

Oct. 31, 2015-Jan. 3, 2016 and Jan. 23-Feb. 14, 2016

LIGHT GEESE

Oct. 31-Nov. 1, 2015 and Nov. 4, 2015-Feb. 14, 2016

SANDHILL CRANE

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

Southwest Unit: No open season for prairie chickens

PHEASANTS

Nov. 14, 2015-Jan. 31, 2016

Youth: Nov. 7-8, 2015

QUAIL

Nov. 14, 2015-Jan. 31, 2016

Youth: Nov. 7-8, 2015

SQUIRREL

June 1, 2015-Feb. 28, 2016

RABBITS

Open year-round (*cottontail and jackrabbit*)

CROW

Nov. 10, 2015-March 10, 2016

TRAPPING/HUNTING

Nov. 18, 2015-Feb. 15, 2016 (*badger, bobcat, mink, muskrat, opossum, raccoon, swift fox, red fox, gray fox, striped skunk, weasel*)

BEAVER & OTTER TRAPPING

Nov. 18, 2015-March 31, 2016

RUNNING

March 1-Nov. 8, 2015

BULLFROG

July 1-Oct. 31, 2015

Species Profile:

American Wigeon

The American wigeon, a dabbling duck, is a common sight in the Central Flyway and in Kansas. Early migrants through the Sunflower State, wigeons can most often be seen during the months of October and November.

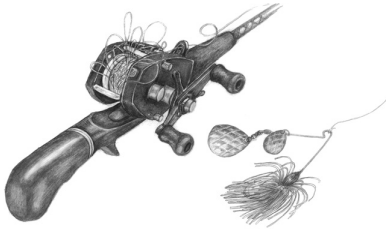
Feeding mostly in shallow waters, wigeons enjoy a steady diet of aquatic plants, along with the occasional snail and small insect. When on land, grass, seeds, and grains are on the menu. Oddly enough, wigeons have been known to steal food

from others, including their counterpart – diving ducks.

Drake and hen wigeons can be identified by their bright, white shoulder patch and light greyish-blue bill. When donning breeding plumage, drakes will showcase an emerald green eye patch and an unmistakable light-colored crown running vertically from their bill to the back of their head.

When in doubt, listen for their distinctive three-part *whew-who-who* whistle.





Backlash

WITH MIKE MILLER

FALL TRADITIONS

I look forward to fall almost as much as I look forward to spring, for obvious reasons to someone who loves to hunt and fish. However, my feelings about the two seasons are different. I look forward to spring because it brings the best fishing of the year, and fishing is my first love. In March, I'm ready for warmer weather and any kind of fishing; I just want to be on the water. And while fall brings cooler temperatures and the start of the hunting seasons, I'm anxious for more than just opening day.

My hunting revolves around strong traditions. And these traditions always involve special people with similar interests and passions, and most involve dogs, as well.

Fall starts with a traditional dove hunt. Years ago, the dove hunt was a social event. A bunch of us met early on opening morning and caravanned to a predetermined hunt location. Doves were almost a bonus to the get-together, but we always wanted enough for a meal. That evening we gathered and feasted on grilled dove breasts, sides and an adult beverage or two. There was a gratifying camaraderie about the event that was just as appealing as the hunting.

Over the years, group members went their separate ways and the gathering died. However, I still yearn for the opening of dove season, though it's usually just me and the dog. And I don't mind that a bit. The memories of those hunts stay with me and draw me to hunt as much as the promise of wing-shooting after a long summer. I'll also honor the evening barbecue, grilling a few dove breasts wrapped with bacon.

Another tradition that has me looking forward to fall involves the early teal season. While years ago, friends and I hunted teal on occasion, the abundance of teal and excellent water conditions in recent years has contributed to the development of another special tradition. I truly cherish teal hunting on Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area with a special group of friends. In fact, I can't think of a hunt or location I enjoy more. There is something magical about watching the big marsh wake up with a couple of trusted friends and a big black dog. Swarms of teal buzzing our decoys are the bonus.

My third tradition is an early-season duck hunt, again with a couple of long-time friends. We don't get together as much as we did when we were younger, so a good portion of the morning is spent visiting and catching up with eyes glued to the sky. Being interrupted by ducks landing in our decoys keeps us in the hunt. However, these early-season outings are usually boom or bust – either we see lots of ducks or none. But I've never once come home disappointed.

My next tradition is to sit in my treestand with bow in hand during the first part of the deer rut. I started bowhunting more than 30 years ago, and learned by trial and error with like-minded friends. In our early seasons, we didn't put our tags on very many deer, but what we lacked in knowledge, we made up for with persistence, hunting from early October through mid-November. We eventually learned to concentrate our efforts in early November when the woods explode with bucks chasing does. We dou-

bled up on our thrills, listening to each others' experiences while driving back to town after hunts. I'm still chasing the adrenaline rush I felt the first time a buck wandered under the tree I was sitting in. And I still feel that twinge of camaraderie for those who helped me learn.

The most time-honored tradition comes on the second Saturday in November when pheasant and quail seasons open. I have a treasure chest of pheasant hunting memories, all blended together into sublime feelings. They are durable memories made so by the special people who helped form them: Dad, Granddad, Gene, Rex, and Brad. And a few special dogs are etched in, as well: Sam, Stache, Trapper, Creede, and Trip. In recent years, cousin Brad and I have chiseled out a fantastic tradition and best friend Rex hosts us on his land and treats us like royalty. Rex and I have hunted together since high school, and we make time for a few outings together each fall. Amazingly, we hunt some of the same haunts we discovered 40 years ago.

The land and location seem to be a bigger part of the hunting traditions than they are for fishing. Returning to special places year after year has become as important to the tradition as the people, game and dogs. I'm not sure why, but I know it's so.

So I sit here in my office, perusing through memories of past hunts, triggered by a cool late-August morning. And I'm daydreaming about the Sandhills, the Bottoms, Gary's 80, Wade's, Rex's hunting lodge and the Fisher Pasture. I can't wait for September.

The Nature
Conservancy®



The Nature Conservancy in Kansas


2420 NW Button Road

Topeka, KS 66618

(785) 233-4400

Visit us online at: nature.org/kansas

Find us on  TNCKansas

 [nature_kansas](https://twitter.com/nature_kansas)

Conservation that works.



TNC

