

# KANSAS

*Wildlife & Parks Magazine*

FOR HUNTERS, ANGLERS AND OUTDOOR ENTHUSIASTS | \$2.75 | MAY-JUNE 2017





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**INSIDE FRONT COVER** Northern flickers can be seen throughout Kansas, often near tree trunks or feeding on ants. Jay Miller photo.

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

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We often get questions about why regulations are the way they are. And callers often express some frustration because they didn't know when or why a regulation changed. In this day and age, this should not happen. The Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) puts considerable effort into making the regulation-setting process as public and transparent as possible.

Hunting and fishing regulations are in place for a variety of reasons, but the most important is protecting the natural resource. However, some regulations make hunting and fishing safer, some may spread the harvest out, and others are set in compliance with regional traditions and attitudes about fair chase.

In some southern states, hunting deer with dogs is legal and traditional. Kansans wouldn't think of using hounds to hunt deer. Hunting turkeys with rifles isn't considered fair chase in Kansas, nor is shooting upland birds when they're not in flight.

As much as possible, regulations on seasons and limits are based on science and data gathered through research and surveys. Wildlife are a renewable resource, but harvest must be regulated to ensure sustainability. But our regulations are only as effective as they are accepted and followed by hunters and anglers. Voluntary compliance is necessary because our game wardens cover large territories and we simply can't monitor all outdoor activity. It is important that the public is familiar with and understands regulations.

Gaining acceptance is just one reason we encourage our constituents to be involved in the regulation process. We also rely on public opinion when setting equipment restrictions, seasons, and safe practices. Here's how it works.

Regulations are approved by a seven-member, nonpartisan commission, and commissioners are appointed by the governor for three-year terms, which are staggered. While not required, geographic representation is preferred. The KDWPT Commission meets six times a year at various locations around the state. All meetings are publicized in advance through news releases, the department's website (ksoutdoors.com) and social media. Each meeting begins at 1 p.m. for an afternoon session that recesses at 5 p.m. The evening session convenes at 6:30 p.m. and lasts until business is done. Time is allowed at the beginning of the afternoon and evening


sessions for public comment on items not on the meeting agenda. Public comment is also allowed in all agenda items as they are discussed.

It usually requires at least three meetings for a regulation to be approved. A general recommendation for a new regulation or amendment will first be presented during the Discussion Session, with opportunities for commissioner and public comments. The recommendation, usually in more specific terms, is then presented at a second meeting during the Workshop Session. Again commission and public input is

sought and considered. The final recommendation, which may look the same as when it was first presented or it may be significantly amended due to input, will then be read during the Public Hearing session of the third meeting. Public Hearing items are always scheduled for the evening portions of meetings to accommodate public participation. After discussion and public comments, commissioners vote. Regulations go into effect usually within 60 days.

Complete versions of all regulations can be downloaded from our website, and we produce regulation summaries for fishing, hunting, public lands and state parks. Summaries are available in printed form and may be downloaded. Printed fishing and hunting regulation summaries are distributed throughout the state at all KDWPT offices and wherever licenses are sold. They are also mailed on request.

Future commission meetings are scheduled through January 2018. The next meeting is June 22, 2017 at the George Meyn Community Center in Kansas City. You can find dates and locations for other meetings, as well as information about commissioners and pending regulations on the department website. Click on "KDWPT Commission" on the left-side menu.

Consider attending a commission meeting if you have questions, suggestions or are just curious about the process. You can also watch the meetings, streamed live from our website. Not only will you become more familiar with regulations, but you'll also understand the various factors involved in setting them. 



## Letters To The Editors

### Behemoth Bluegill



Editors,

Walker Eilerts, 8, Sedan. The biggest bluegill I've ever seen not hanging on someone's wall. Thanks for a great magazine.

*The Eilerts Family*

### Merits From Manhattan



Hello from Manhattan,

I just got my March/April issue of *Kansas Wildlife and Parks Magazine*. I think this is the best issue of the magazine I have seen in a long time. I could not put it down. I worked in the garden this morning and then got our mail. I missed lunch with my wife because I was busy reading.

Thank you.

*Spencer Tomb, Manhattan*

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**CORRECTION:** On Page 42 of the March/April issue, a prairie chicken photo was incorrectly credited to photographer Bob Gress. This photo should have been credited to photographer Jay Miller. We apologize for the oversight. See photo below.

*Magazine Staff*



Jay Miller photo

# BIRD BRAIN

Spring Is Our Season

with Mike Rader

Western Kingbird/David Seibel photo



Winter and early spring was difficult all over Kansas, with drier and warmer than normal conditions. Substantial rain was necessary for the areas devastated by fires to recover. The 2016 Anderson Creek fire in Barber and Comanche Counties only recovered as well as it did because of immediate, adequate moisture. With recent, soaking rains this spring, I think we are on the way to recovery with the massive Starbuck fire. Birds, like other wildlife in those areas, will return as habitat comes back.

Great opportunities await Kansas birders this spring. The month of May offers opportunities to observe migrants statewide, and June marks the summer breeding season for most of our resident species. Keep in mind, during summer it will be easier to locate male birds establishing and defending territories than females, as they will become more secretive when nesting and raising young.

Some of my favorite “summertime” birds are kingbirds; common species include eastern kingbirds, with their dark gray (almost black) backs and white breasts; western kingbirds, donning light gray backs and yellow breasts; and scissor-tailed flycatchers, boasting light gray backs, salmon-colored underparts and long, forked tails. A rare species, the Cassin’s kingbird, may only be found regularly in extreme western Kansas. While similar to westerns in plumage, it has a white throat and darker gray upperparts.

All kingbirds are insect-eaters, perching and feeding from

trees, powerlines and fences and catching their food on the fly. They are noisy, alert and conspicuous birds that never fail to entertain. I can recall times as a kid goofing around with them behind my parents’ cafe. They would chase small rocks thrown in the air, thinking they were moths; however, I don’t think they ever caught one!

Scissor-tailed flycatchers and eastern kingbirds tend to be birds of the open countryside, while western kingbirds are often seen in towns, nesting in trees and on power pole transformers. If you are a Kansas City Royals fan, you might see western kingbirds flying down onto the stadium field trying to catch moths. They are entertaining to the crowd and because of the artificial lights, continue to be active well after sundown. Next time you watch a game, see if you can spot them on the wires around home plate and above the first and third baselines.

Male scissor-tailed flycatchers are real stunners in the bird world. I’m kind of jealous of Oklahoma because the scissor-tailed flycatcher is their official “state bird.” I will say though, our state bird’s song is certainly prettier than a scissortail’s.

Really, all the kingbirds are fun to watch. They can be mistaken for a few other flycatchers we have in Kansas, including the great-crowned flycatcher, eastern phoebe and eastern pewee, so keep a watchful eye (and ear). With practice, they are easily identified.



# AT WOODS EDGE

with Andra Bryan Stefanoni

## Mothering And Our Marsh

I'll never again experience the joy of young motherhood and doting on my own babies – those years are past – but every spring I get excited about the chance to once again, for just a while, have new babies to watch at Woods Edge. I'm talking about the winged variety.

Fourteen years ago, the week we moved in, we erected a bluebird box on a fencepost and with our first son, then a toddler, began watching for signs of life. The following year, we added another box. Our bluebird trail now numbers five nest boxes and has fledged dozens of the colorful insect-eaters. We monitor the nests and are able to carefully open the hinged sides to check on them.

The year our second son was born, a pair of barn swallows set up residence under the eave just outside our breakfast nook. As I fed our own new baby, I watched Mama and Daddy Swallow complete a nest (that for the most part, still stands today) and eventually, begin feeding their offspring. Like the bluebird houses, that nest has fledged countless swallows.

Throughout the years as our sons grew, we also had the usual tree nesters – robins, cardinals, hummingbirds, and mockingbirds – and wrens, which have nested in every nook and cranny they could (including atop a camping chair hanging in our garage and in the patio cabinet where we keep grilling supplies!).

But the most mysterious of all have been the wood ducks.

About six years ago, we erected a wood duck box in the center of our backyard wetland. The box was one the local Sperry-Galligar Audubon Society had erected at a park, but had fallen in a storm and was in disrepair. With permission, we salvaged and repaired it and claimed it as our own.

Each spring since, I've been anticipating a pair of ducks nesting in it. And each spring, they have. In late February – about the time we start hearing the

first frog calls – we'll catch sight of a hen or a drake, or sometimes both, swimming near the box.

In early March, Hubby dons his hip waders and treks out to carefully open the hinged door and peek inside. If he sees eggs, he calls to me and I happily grab my camera to wade across and take a photo.

And then, the waiting and the watching begin. On mild evenings after supper, we sit quietly on lawn chairs with our eyes trained on the box. We're sometimes lucky and see the hen

they head off to a safe place – sometimes as far as a mile.

Twice now, I've been in the right place at the right time. The first time, I looked up while taking a basket of laundry to our backyard clothesline to see ducklings swimming behind Mama Duck, who was headed for shore and the nearby woods. I sprinted for my camera. I returned, panting, just in time to snap two shots before they disappeared.

Last summer, as Hubby and I were strolling around the wetland one



Andra Bryan Stefanoni photo

returning from the nearby woods, followed by the drake, who floats on the water for awhile before flying off to roost elsewhere.

As the weather warms and we're outdoors more, we keep an eye out for movement and an ear cocked for the distinct sound of ducklings peeping. Wood ducklings leaving the nest is an event few people see. You must be in the right place at the right time; as soon as they hatch, they plop down out of their tree or nest box, the mother gathers them with a soft whistle, and

evening, we heard peeps in the rushes and duckweed, and I again sprinted for my camera. I returned in time to get photos of ducklings on the water and scurrying across the meadow to the woods. It happened to be my birthday and what a gift to receive!

Interested in watching the Circle of Life up close? Consider installing a wood duck box, bluebird boxes, or providing suitable habitat for bird life on your property. And if you do, keep your eyes open, your ear cocked, and your camera handy.



## Fire: Friend or Foe? *with Wes Sowards*

The recent wildfires across the state have birthed a number of varying emotions and views toward fire on the landscape, many negative. Albeit, the Starbuck Fire that roared through Clark and Comanche counties was extremely dangerous and destructive. I can't imagine what it's like to lose a home, a ranch and livestock, and my heart goes out to those who did. But it's important to remember, not all fire is bad. In a controlled setting, under intense supervision, with proper planning and conditions, fire can be one of the most valuable tools for managing the prairie landscape, especially for wildlife. When a fire is being used in this capacity, it is referred to as a "prescribed fire."

Habitat managers and biologists have used prescribed fire for decades, and for a number of prescriptions. In the east, fire is utilized as a means to set back succession, a natural process by which grasses and wildflowers convert to later successional habitat types such as shrubs, eventually sparse young trees, then ultimately forest. This



severely impacts the habitats of many Kansas wildlife. Greater prairie chickens, for example, rely on early successional habitat types, such as large, unaltered tracts of native rangeland composed of warm-season, native grasses and wildflowers. This native prairie is especially critical not only to prairie chickens, but other ground-nesting birds, as well, during the spring nesting season. When grass stands become too rank, or thick, and trees become more dominant, prairie chicken

nest success and brood survival decline dramatically. Furthermore, trees provide perches for predators, such as hawks, that prey on prairie chickens.

In the west, prescribed summer fires help reduce purple three-awn, a native, cool-season grass, that has invaded native rangeland. Reducing its abundance is important to cattle ranchers and wildlife managers. It is not considered to be good forage for livestock because the awns are sharp, the protein content of the grass is low, and it also provides poor nesting habitat for lesser prairie chickens.

Ideally, fire is used in a patch-burn-graze system where only a portion of a parcel of grazed rangeland is burned and grazed each year. This helps to create a shifting mosaic of habitat types, beneficial and necessary for most ground-nesting upland birds, and other wildlife, while keeping succession at bay.

Fire has been on our landscape for centuries. And while wildfires will inevitably be beyond our control sometimes, rest assured that wildlife habitat managers in Kansas will continue to ensure that any prescribed fire is done under safe and controlled conditions.

## Cub Scouts Craft Nesting Boxes



Banner Creek Lake, in Holton, will soon be the recipient of eight new wood duck nesting boxes thanks to the efforts of Cub Scout Pack 64. The project was a joint effort between the scouts and Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT). Nest box kits, which are cut and prepared by El Dorado Correctional Facility inmates, were purchased by KDWPT and Pack 64 Cub Scouts assembled them. The cub scouts will soon install the boxes at Banner Creek Lake on a variety of dead trees - one of the preferred nesting sites of wood ducks.

Led in part by scoutmaster, Jeff Warner, the scouts intend to monitor and maintain the wood duck boxes, as well as assist KDWPT staff with future wood duck banding efforts at the lake.

*-Tyler Warner, KDWPT district wildlife biologist*



# HUNTING HERITAGE

with Kent Barrett

## What We Do When No One Is Watching

People obey laws for a mix of reasons, I think the most obvious being fear of getting caught and punished. Having said that, I also think most Americans obey laws even when there is almost no chance of getting caught and punished. I think this is because most Americans want to do the right thing and see it as their duty as a responsible citizen. Obviously, not everyone has those aspirations, especially in other parts of the world.

It's my estimation that in some nations, laws are obeyed only when there is a severe enough threat of punishment for breaking the law. If there is no such threat or if the threat is not severe enough, the law may be ignored without a second thought. Why? I think people learn to ignore the laws from the government itself. When people watch their government twist the law, apply it arbitrarily, or ignore it completely, people may believe the law isn't really law, and that if their government isn't bound by the law, people can't be bound either.

President Theodore Roosevelt once said "There are other things much more important than game laws; but it will be a great mistake to imagine . . . that [game laws] would not be beneficial to all our people. Far from game laws being in the interest of the few, they are

emphatically in the interest of the many." These are principles on which the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation is based. This is one of the things that makes America different from other parts of the world, and keeps us a great nation. We understand, for the most part, the importance of having and abiding by laws, and we value our



BoBaa22/Shutterstock

wildlife resources enough to abide by game laws, too.

University of Tennessee Law Professor Glenn Reynolds said "America has been - and for the moment, remains - a high-trust society. In high-trust societies, people extend trust to strangers and follow rules for the most part, even when nobody is watching. In low-trust societies, trust seldom extends beyond close family, and everybody cheats if they can get away with it. High-trust

societies are much nicer places to live than low-trust societies."

One might even be able to add that "when leaders cheat, well, followers follow."

As for Americans, particularly hunters in America, life is still pretty good.

Aldo Leopold once said, "A peculiar virtue in wildlife ethics is that the hunter ordinarily has no gallery to applaud or disapprove of his conduct. Whatever his acts, they are dictated by his own conscience, rather than by a mob of onlookers. It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of this fact." Coach Tony Dungy phrased it this way, "Integrity is what you do when no one is watching. It's doing the right thing all the time, even when it may work to your disadvantage. Integrity is keeping your word. Only you determine your integrity.

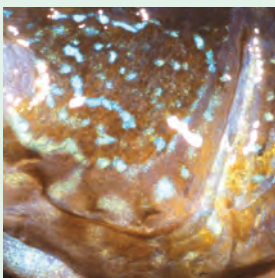
Integrity does not come in degrees - low, medium or high. You either have integrity or you do not."

I'd phrase it this way, "The heart and soul of integrity is the unwritten rule: obedience to the unenforceable."

This spring as we go afield, consider the responsibility that has been entrusted to us in our high-trust society. Let's make decisions guided by integrity.

## WHAT AM I? ID Challenge

Using only the image and clues below, see if you can figure out this month's mystery species!



### Clues:

1. I live in the water
2. My name starts with a color
3. My fins have yellow edges

>>> See answer on Page 13



# Fish Squeezer

with Tommie Berger

## Outdoor Adventure Camp 2017

Sergey Novikov/Shutterstock



Outdoor Adventure Camp (OAC) will be celebrating year 30 this year and I can't help but reflect back on its history. OAC is a camp for 10- to 12-year-olds interested in the outdoors. It's sponsored by the Kansas Wildlife Federation and takes place at the WaShunGa area of Rock Spring 4-H Center near Junction City. This year, camp will be held June 4-9, starting on Sunday afternoon and ending just after lunch on Friday.

When OAC started back in the mid-1980s, the age limit was higher and we found out quickly that we weren't equipped to deal with the situations that can arise with young teenagers. That first camp also exposed the challenges of discipline when spray deodorant and a match were applied to a crawdad on a cabin floor. After that, the age limit was reduced and aerosol sprays were prohibited.

Initially, camp was scheduled for late July/early August. But that time of year was often too hot, leaving campers longing for "air conditioned cabins." So, we moved camp dates to early June. While that presented another challenge - severe weather - overall, it has worked out. We have had years where we have spent several hours in the storm shelter while tornadoes danced across the Flint Hills, and one year my pickup was totaled by a huge tree limb, but there have been many more good years than bad.

In the beginning, we had trouble recruiting volunteer counselors, too. It

can be hard to convince young people to give up a week to spend with the kids. Recently, we've been blessed with a cadre of counselors - past campers who enjoyed their camp experience so much they wanted to come back and help. (Thanks Clay, Shandra, Heath, Victoria, Morgan, Jack, and Phillip) Today, we've got a waiting list of junior counselors wanting to come back and help. Time has been good to us.

A lot of memories have been made at camp. I remember the little guy who insisted that the turkeys we saw going over the hill were ostriches. And the kids who rushed up to me during free time to say one of the kids at the fishing hole hooked a snapping turtle. I ran

down and grabbed that huge snapper by the tail and he must've had his picture taken 50 times. I remember coaching the youngster who hooked a 7-pound-plus channel catfish - our camp record - on how reel it in without breaking the line. And, none of us can forget the four-time fishing contest champion whose famous line was, "Mrs. Berger, Jordan, bluegill!"

It's been a great 30 years. And with that, I would be remiss if I didn't mention sponsors and those who help with instruction every year - the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism, the Milford Nature Center and Hatchery, Kansas State University, Fort Riley Environmental Services, Clay County Conservation District, Outdoor Writers of Kansas, and all of our other volunteers. THANKS for helping get more kids outdoors!

If you're interested in sending your child to OAC 2017, contact us at [bergkwf@wtciweb.com](mailto:bergkwf@wtciweb.com), (785) 524-6112 or (785) 526-7466. Cost to attend is \$325.

### WAY outside BY BRUCE COCHRAN



"WHEN DID YOU FIRST BEGIN TO BELIEVE THAT YOU WERE A TEN POUND BASS?"

# EVERYTHING OUTDOORS

with Marc Murrell

## The Squirrel Slinger

Marc Murrell photos



Practicing shooting during the off-season is a great way to increase your odds of success when hunting seasons open. A skilled shooter will miss less and wound less, which should be every hunter's goal. Wingshooters shoot skeet, trap or sporting clays to improve their skills and deer and small game hunters practice with rifles to determine their effective range and improve their accuracy. Some shooters are naturally gifted, while some must practice and focus to make each shot count. My 19-year-old nephew, Dylan, is a little bit of both, I think.

It's not that Dylan doesn't want to practice, but finding .22 shells over the last few years has been difficult AND expensive, especially for someone his age. I gave him a brick (500) of .22s last Christmas, and even then he was reluctant to use much of his "supply" for practice. So it came as a bit of a surprise when I took Dylan on a hunt last summer and he killed a five-squirrel limit with



as many shells.

Calling squirrels, imitating the call of a squirrel in distress, is a blast and something I've done with Dylan and my boys for the last 8-10 years. Early on, they shot 20-gauge shotguns, but now enjoy the added challenge of a .22 rifle.

On the hunt last summer with Dylan, my first call at 6:15 a.m. sent a squirrel running away, which occasionally happens. Their usual response, though, is to bark and/or come running toward the commotion, making distress sounds for other squirrels to hear. The second squirrel followed the script and Dylan made a nice 25-yard shot. The next one came in even closer and Dylan made a nice off-hand shot, bagging squirrel number two.

We eased down the creek and hit the call a few more times before finally getting another squirrel fired up. Another shot and Dylan was three for three. I thought about mentioning the fact that I've rarely killed five

[LEFT] Early on, Dylan shot a 20-gauge shotgun, but now enjoys the added challenge of a .22 rifle.

[RIGHT] On a hunt last summer, Dylan killed a five-squirrel limit with as many shells.

squirrels with five shots, but opted to just wait and see how it went.

The next call got two squirrels barking and within moments, Dylan shot and the fourth squirrel dropped 15 yards away. I was impressed with Dylan's shooting, especially since we were battling mosquitoes the size of hummingbirds and sweating profusely.

The other squirrel, still barking from across a clearing, finally quieted down as we stopped just inside the timber. I hit the squirrel call again and it came running down the tree. The fifth shot from Dylan's .22 rifle dropped the last of a five-squirrel limit at 7:50 a.m. I couldn't believe it.

It takes discipline and a steady hand to hit something the size of a walnut, particularly on a jittery squirrel that rarely holds still, but Dylan made it look easy. Dylan just smiled when I told him that of all the 5-squirrel limits I'd taken, only a handful had been taken with the same number of shots.

I watched as Dylan cleaned the squirrels. He's getting better and more efficient at that, too, and had them soaking in ice water in no time. As he finished up, he mentioned he was looking forward to a meal of fried squirrel.

I was proud. It's gratifying to mentor a young hunter who takes pride in his skill and quarry. And I think I enjoyed that wonderful morning in the great outdoors as much as he did.

If you're the wife or girlfriend of an avid angler, chances are at some point in the relationship you've glanced at your man's mass o' tackle, rods and reels and asked yourself the dangerous question, "Does he really need ALL that?" Well, if you treasure your Sephora purchases like I do, then the answer should always be a resounding: "Yes! Of course, he needs all that!" Having said that, it doesn't mean you have to accumulate the same amount of equipment in order to be just as good at fishing. When it comes down to it, the equipment necessary to catching fish really is just a rod, a reel, and a hook. (Although, I wouldn't go out using only that.)

Now, you might be asking yourself, "If that's all it takes to catch a fish, then why did you say he needs all that stuff?" Let's go back to the makeup analogy. "Why do we accumulate pallet after pallet of eye-shadow? Or dozens of nail polish bottles?" Lots of reasons! We've kept them over the years because there's still a lot of use left in them, it's something that's fun to us, maybe we found a good deal, certain colors work better at certain times, someone gave it to us, or it-was-really-expensive-and-even-though-we've-never-used-it-we-just-might-one-day. Well, the same justifications could be said for why he has a fishing gear estate worth more than a new vehicle. Regardless of whether we're talking lures or beauty products, there's one thing that's true when it comes to things we collect: they're usually something we're passionate about.

I write this not to "even the playing field," or help out the husbands and boyfriends of the world (although, you gents deserve it and are welcome), but more to dispel the myth that you need a lot of equipment to be efficient at fishing.

When I began working for the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism, I was introduced to a lot of very talented and experienced anglers - some of the best in Kansas, I'm sure. And almost immediately my anxiety grew over all the "stuff" I thought I would need in order to fish like them. Since then, I've learned that's far from the truth, and while, yes, a lot of what they use has a purpose, a lot more of it is just a matter of preference - things they like, not things they NEED to catch fish. And above all, their gear is not what makes them great angler; it's their experience, and that, my friend, doesn't come in packages of 10.

Maybe it's because I hunt more than I fish, that I take a somewhat utilitarian approach to fishing; I rarely pack more than what my small tackle bag can handle and a single rod.

But I figure, my focus should be on keeping my lure in the water and technique, not how many different shades of 1/8-ounce chartreuse jig heads I can accumulate. Sometimes my approach works and I have just what I need, sometimes it doesn't and the fish take the win, but far more often than not, I'm catching fish and always having fun.

In my opinion, as in fishing as it is in life, there's something empowering about not needing much and keeping things simple.

If you're new to fishing and don't know where to start besides a rod and reel, or are just curious what another gal has stashed in her tackle bag, here's my list of tackle bag essentials:

**Round jigheads in 1/8-ounce and 1/16-ounce.** These are really versatile weights and work with a variety of softbaits. I mainly

stick to three colors: chartreuse, hot pink, and white.

**Two-inch grub and baby shad softbaits.** These can serve as the "body" to your jigheads. I keep a mix of silver, pearl, chartreuse, white, and a few glitter options on hand.

**Spinnerbaits.** They'll take up more room in your tackle bag than any other lures, but they're well worth the square footage. I'm stocked with a pearl-white and silver combo, an olive/chartreuse and gold combo, and a chartreuse/orange/yellow and gold combo in 3/8-ounce.

**A weedless, topwater bait.** I carry a small frog imitation, but mice are a great choice, too. If there's a bass in that farm pond, your topwater will find it.

**Roostertails.** These are one my favorite lures! They're easy to use, come in a million colors, and they catch fish. Get stocked with a 1/8 oz, a 1/16 oz, and 1/24 oz to start out.

Bonus lure: **a good crawdad-colored softbait or crankbait.**

**A handtowel.** Because let's be honest, no woman wants to wipe fish slime on her pants.

**Nail clippers.** Biting line with your teeth can be rough on those pearly whites. Don't chance it, just give it a clean clip.

Lastly, **locking needlenose pliers.** These are your best friend when that bait gets swallowed, or you're trying to remove a treble hook from a fiesty bass. Consider grabbing a pair with rubberized handles for a little extra grip.

Oh, and don't forget the hand sanitizer and bugspray!



# Park View

with Kathy Pritchett

## What's On Your Calendar?

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School is out (almost) and the recreation season is upon us! That means it's time to think about road trips, water skiing, camping and s'mores.

Need some help deciding where to go or what to do? Check out our events calendar at [ksoutdoors.com/State-Parks/Event-Calendar](http://ksoutdoors.com/State-Parks/Event-Calendar). Kansas state parks are holding many events in the coming months and there's sure to be one that will interest you. You can also follow us on Facebook or Twitter. In fact, if you have a favorite park, you can even follow that particular park on Facebook.

Events and activities are also available on Get Outdoors Kansas, [www.getoutdoorskansas.org](http://www.getoutdoorskansas.org). Get Outdoors Kansas is an interactive website that allows users to search events by location, activity, date or organization. It can't get easier to find an outdoor recreational opportunity.

To get you started, here are a few events you won't want to miss:

- June is National Great Outdoors

Month, and for good reason. The weather is pleasant and there's fun to be had!

- Free Fishing Days are June 3 and 4 this year.

- National Trails Day, sponsored by the American Hiking Society, is Saturday, June 3.

- June 22-24 marks the Country Stampede mega-event at Tuttle Creek State Park in Manhattan. This country music blowout will feature Alan Jackson, Thomas Rhett, and Big and Rich, among many others on multiple stages. Many fans make attending this party a yearly tradition, so get your tickets early.

Aside from these events, our campgrounds are ready and waiting for you. Due to the popularity of weekends in the parks, favorite sites often book up early, so take advantage of our reservation system to ensure "your" spot is there for you when you want it. Simply go to [www.kshuntfishcamp.com](http://www.kshuntfishcamp.com), [www.reserveamerica.com](http://www.reserveamerica.com) or call one of our park offices.

To help you find your way to or around a park, we have a handy smart phone app called the Pocket Ranger by ParksbyNature. The Pocket Ranger app allows you to get directions to a park, download trail maps and watch weather conditions, among other features. If enabled, your friends can even track your progress on the trails! Check it out to see all it has to offer.

And one last note before you go: Overnight camping is now \$10 per site, per night. To mirror this increase, annual and 14-night camping permits are also a bit higher. A new integrated permitting system now allows us to track usage of annual and 14-night permits, too. If you hold either permit, a reservation will reflect that as a discount at checkout. One thing that hasn't changed, though, is the enthusiasm and friendliness of our staff and volunteers. They are eager to see you! So go ahead, park yourself at a Kansas state park and camp it out this summer. You'll be glad you did.



## FISHIN'

### The Importance of Line

with Mike Miller

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It embarrasses me to admit it, but I have been guilty of being complacent about my fishing line. I know, that's a cardinal sin for any angler, especially one with my experience. But my complacency came from using braided line and super lines, usually attaching monofilament or fluorocarbon leaders. I liked the no-stretch of the braids and super lines and I liked the fact that they didn't get spool memory and could usually be used for several seasons. That led me to keep and use them longer, and I underestimated how important a low-vis leader can be under certain conditions.

I was fishing for crappie and bass on Lake of the Ozarks. When my leader broke off, I tied directly to the super

line, which was old and worn, making it very visible. The water wasn't gin-clear, so I thought I could get away with it. I didn't. While talking to a fishing guide later, he mentioned that the fish we were casting to get a tremendous amount of fishing pressure, and using light monofilament makes a difference. After a morning of not catching much, I hoped that was my problem.

I switched to mono on my casting and spinning reels later that day and immediately caught fish. Having a terminal line that is less visible did make a difference in clear water with high fishing pressure.

With that lesson still burning in my mind, I recently spooled on some 4-pound

test monofilament before fishing for trout in Kansas. I usually don't go lighter than 6-pound, but I decided to try 4-pound. And I think it made a difference. I was able to cast very light spinners and jigs and the trout were cooperative.

I know there are times when the visibility of your fishing line won't make a difference, but I also know there are times when it can. Why take chances? In fact, as manufacturers continue to improve fishing line, it just makes sense to experiment with new lines. If you get into a rut, like me, you may not discover a line that will help you catch more fish. And I'll take all the help I can get.



In early May 2015, I was sitting on the bank of the Sarju River in northern India watching a former turtle poacher and a local teenage boy set gill nets as part of a long-term turtle monitoring project run by the Indian Turtle Conservation Program (ITCP). Fast-forward a couple of hours and I am kneeling on the ground with the ITCP crew weighing, measuring, and marking all the captured turtles while surrounded by a crush of humanity. The residents from the nearby fishing village were very curious about the fat American studying their turtles, so naturally my personal space was invaded far beyond my comfort zone, but I tried to not let it bother me.

While we processed turtles, one of our staff educated the crowd on the importance of turtles and the health of the river the turtles depended on. The curiosity of the residents, the involvement of the local children, and the philosophical changes on the part of the former poacher made the experience exhilarating. While the population data

we were collecting on turtle communities was essential to our conservation efforts, all would be for naught without the support from those who depend on the river for their livelihoods.

After finishing our processing chores, someone produced a smartphone and everyone crowded in for group photos with the crazy American turtle guy. I tell you this story because thinking back to the memories captured on that smartphone got me thinking about how smart phones have changed our lives, and how we can use them to not only create memories, but also contribute to wildlife conservation in our state.

A factor in determining the status of a species is comparing historic and current distribution records. By using smart phones, social media, or the Internet, anyone can now easily contribute wildlife observations to these records. And the great part is, it doesn't matter which database you contribute to, as long as you contribute!

Recording a wildlife observation can be as easy as snapping a picture with

your smart phone and uploading the image to an online database such as iNaturalist, [www.inaturalist.org](http://www.inaturalist.org), which accepts observations for all plants and animals. Another called Herpmapper, [www.herpmapper.org](http://www.herpmapper.org), accepts observations for amphibians and reptiles. All it takes are some field guides to help with identification, a sense of fun and adventure, and getting outside, even if it's just to your local city park. And another bonus is, these databases use the GPS function built into your phone to automatically tag the location of where the photo was taken, so you don't have to worry about location specifics.

Websites such as these have become powerful citizen science tools, substantially boosting the amount of locality data available to state wildlife agencies. So while technology is linked to concepts like "nature deficit disorder" and the decline of childhoods spent outside, it can also be used to enhance our outdoor experiences.

Grab your smartphone and become a citizen scientist today.



## Firecracker Fish

When spring break arrives, my family is ready to fish. But sometimes our enthusiasm is dampened by uncooperative fish or poor weather. Recently, after several unsuccessful crappie trips, I recently took my frustrations out on a bucket-full (ten dozen to be exact) of overpriced worms and headed to the river with my son, Hunter. I was desperate for a meal of fish. First catch was a plump yellow bullhead that reminded me I had forgotten my needle-nosed pliers. Next up were four pan-sized channel catfish. The action continued with a short large-mouth bass, followed by a short smallmouth bass. Things got interesting when Hunter tangled with a 20-inch-plus drum and

I caught a 25-inch channel catfish. I called my wife, Heather, for reinforcements (bait) and suggested fish for supper. However, her enthusiasm for a fish meal was drowned out by my daughter, Anastin's, complaining in the background. It would be hot dogs for Anastin while the rest of us enjoyed our first fresh fish of the spring.

Our luck, and bait, held up, and we caught enough fish to not only do our traditional fish-n-chips meal, but we could try something different, as well. Most of the fish we catch and eat are channel catfish, but my wife wanted to venture into something special with the scaled species. She went to work, searching recipes, pulling a bit from this recipe, a bit from that. She finally formulated a recipe that, when finished, resembled enchiladas in flavor but with a FIERY kick. I stopped at two helpings, but wanted more. I guess I will work harder on catching scaled fish and not overlook the diversity found in the river. Here is a toned-down version of that recipe.

### FIRECRACKER FISH (Heather Teasley)

8 thicker fish fillets from scaled fish (bass, walleye, drum)

- 1 tablespoon mild chili powder
- 1 1/4 teaspoons cumin, divided
- 1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper, divided
- 1/2 teaspoon ground chipotle pepper, divided
- 2 teaspoons onion powder, divided
- 1 1/2 teaspoons sea salt, divided
- 1/2 teaspoon ground pepper
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 tablespoon pickled jalapeno slices
- 1-2 tablespoons canola oil for cooking
- 1 1/2 cups heavy cream
- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 1 small yellow onion
- 1 bell pepper
- juice from 1 lime
- 2 minced garlic cloves
- 1 1/2 cups shredded monterey jack cheese
- 1 package Spanish style rice (or equivalent white rice)

In a small bowl, whisk together heavy cream, sour cream, garlic, 1/4 teaspoon cayenne, 1/4 teaspoon chipotle pepper, 1/4 teaspoon cumin, 1 teaspoon sea salt, 1 teaspoon onion powder until smooth. Then, heat up canola oil in a skillet and cook the onions and bell peppers until soft, then add in the jalapeno slices. Stir the cream mixture into the skillet of onions and peppers, heat through, then set aside.

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

In another small bowl, mix 1 tablespoon chili powder, 1 teaspoon cumin, 1/4 teaspoon cayenne, 1/4 teaspoon chipotle, 1/2 teaspoon salt, 1/2 teaspoon black pepper, juice from one lime and 1 tablespoon olive oil. Brush fish fillets with this mixture covering all sides. Bake fish for 12 minutes in oven preheated to 350 degrees or until fish is moist and flaky.

While baking the fish, grease a 9 x 13 casserole pan and pour in the pepper cream sauce. Sprinkle some monterey jack cheese, then lay the baked fillets on top. Sprinkle more cheese, bake until the cheese melts, then broil 1-2 minutes to finish. Serve over Spanish or white rice.



“WHAT AM I?” answer: green sunfish



# The Way I See It

with Todd Workman

## Bowling For Trouble

“What are you doing?” she asked in a calm voice. After so many pitched battles in the chess match of marriage, her ruse was as thin as tissue.

“Nothing,” I nonchalantly replied.

“I know you are doing something!” she exclaimed, the charade already over. “Anytime it rains and you are forced to stay inside, you do something destructive.”

“I’m just watching television,” I said; which I was, sort of.

“Well, make sure that you do that and only that then,” she snapped. “Don’t do anything stupid.”

Our conversation ended shortly thereafter when I began to think of how she sounded like my mother. She dreaded rainy days, too. When we three boys were cooped up in the house, we were constantly picking on each other. The only thing Mom dreaded more were the times when we went silent, because that’s when we were really up to something.

I was still rather offended by my wife’s accusations as I walked into the living room and picked up my bowling ball, eyeing the pin at the end of the hallway. Here I was minding my own business, watching TV, and she accused me of doing something wrong.

Now, I’ve bowled since I was old enough to walk, but have never mastered the game, so I figured what better time to solve this issue than now. I created a makeshift lane in the hallway with a single pin and throw pillows. I never liked throw pillows anyway, and they made great bumpers against the torque of a 16-pound ball. (I know what you’re thinking, but the way I see it, it’s important for an outdoorsman to be able to entertain himself on days when weather or wives won’t allow him to go outside.)

Momentarily marveling at my ingenuity, I paused just before heaving the ball forward. It whistled down the hallway, right between the pillows, when I realized I threw it a little harder than I should have. The ball rotated faster and faster before striking the pin and blowing right through the fluffy pillow, disappearing into the wall. All that lingered was a thin cloud of sheet rock dust before I heard the ball crash somewhere between the first and second floor.

“Well,” I said aloud, “I did do something stupid.”

Now I had to figure out how to hide the incident from the Commandant. My immediate solution was to hide the damage with a throw pillow, but I know I’d ultimately be found out. I went with it anyway and waited, much like I had on the rainy days of my youth.

My wife came home in a seemingly good mood – that is, until, she stopped mid-hallway.

“What is my pillow doing over here?”

“I thought it looked good there. I saw it on one of those home deco shows,” I bluffed.

“I’ve never heard of that,” she said as she walked to the end of the hall and snatched up the pillow. “What in the world happened?! How did this hole get here?”

Yep. She WAS just like



bomg/Shutterstock

my mother.

I had no alibi, so I really threw her off by telling her the truth.

“You’re kidding me!” she scoffed. “You have got to be kidding me. Tell me you aren’t that stupid!”

“Nope,” I replied. “I am that stupid.”

She shook her head in agreement. “Well, what are you going to do about this?”

Naturally, I replied “I’m going to have to buy a new bowling ball!”



Hiking is a popular activity at many Kansas state parks, and spring is the perfect time to hike these trails and enjoy the early wildflowers that may be found blooming along the paths.

One plant family you will likely encounter on your hike is Malvaceae or the Mallow Family. Cultivated plants in this family – important as fiber, food and ornament – are cotton, okra and hollyhock. This is a large, mostly tropical, plant family represented by 25 species in our state. All share the common features of having five flower petals, plus a distinctive and prominent column of yellow stamens in the center of the flower.

Of our Kansas species, five belong to the genus *Callirhoe*, commonly called “poppymallow,” named after an ocean nymph in Greek mythology. Of these five species, three are rare in Kansas: finger, Bush’s, and tall poppymallow.

In the eastern half of the state, pale poppymallow, *Callirhoe alcaeoides*, occurs on open prairies. Beautiful white-to-pink flowers are clustered at the tips

of sprawling stems. Nectar glands at the base of the flowers attract native bees, and leaves are food for larvae of grey hairstreak butterflies. The triangular leaves are variable, some with scalloped edges and others deeply lobed. Pale poppymallow blooms in May and June and is easily established from seeds. Their fruiting heads, which contain the seeds, are the wedge-shaped sections in the shape of a wheel.

Purple poppymallow, *Callirhoe involucrate*, has deep magenta, cupped flowers that close at night. Leaves are alternate and palmately-lobed. The grey-green plants form mats on the ground, spreading as much as 4 feet. The edible taproot is sweet and starchy. Smoke from the dried root was a treatment for head colds. And as with other members of the Mallow family, leaves of this plant are mucilaginous and can be used to thicken soup. Found in the western three-quarters of Kansas, purple poppymallow plants are drought-tolerant and bloom from April to August in pastures

and along roadsides.

Many other colorful wildflowers greet the hiker on a spring outing – far too many to list here.

For starters, consider taking a 5-mile hike on Five-star Trail in Eisenhower State Park at Melvern Lake. Eisenhower State Park also has Crooked Knee Trail, which covers 17 miles. The trails are mowed grass and well-marked.

Red Cedar Nature Trail at Barber State Fishing Lake is an easy and pleasant 1.5-mile loop that circles the 51-acre lake. Try that one, too.

Maps and other information are available online at [ksoutdoors.com](http://ksoutdoors.com). Simply choose the state park, wildlife area, or fishing area of your choice for details, or visit the trails page by clicking “Activities,” then “Hiking, Biking, & Horseback Riding Trails.”

Grab a wildflower field guide and hit some Kansas trails. Chances are, you’ll find something worth pausing for.



Phyllis Scherich photo



## A Hunt For Hasenpfeffer

by Dan Witt

When I told my friend Mickey about some Kentucky hunters who were coming to Kansas to hunt rabbits, he listened intently. He then got a little misty-eyed while reminiscing about hunting rabbits over beagles with his grandfather.

A native of Kirksville, Mo., Mickey has been in Hoisington managing the construction of the new grade school. Because of the nature of his business, he makes friends wherever he goes and Kansas has been no different. Everyone here likes Mickey, including me. So when I learned of his past, it only made sense to invite him on the rabbit hunt. It was time to make some new hunting memories.

A truck filled with four hunters, and pulling a huge livestock trailer filled with dogs, pulled into my driveway on the eve of our hunt. They uncrated, fed and watered about a dozen beagles before turning in for the night. If you've never been in a crowd of beagles, the only way I can describe it is this: they are enthusiastic, happy and oh-so eager! Really, it's the best kind of chaos.

We met at 7 a.m. the next morning to load the dogs and hit the local coffee spot before heading to a creek bottom bordered with CRP grass. Because it had been so dry, I didn't have high expectations for the dogs' ability to scent rabbits.

Each dog was fitted with a GPS locator and the hunt began. I quickly realized I was wrong about scent conditions because not 50 yards out, the dogs let out the first howling barks. Four white-tailed does shot out of a creek bed and

raced over the hill. It was just the start.

The beagles ferreted out rabbits, one after another. Hunters had to be alert and careful when rabbits were running, dogs were barking, and they've got to hit a streak of lightning in dense cover. The good news is, the dogs bark about 60 miles per hour, but only run about 10 miles per hour, so shots were clear of the dogs.

After watching the action, I noticed there were two patterns for his hunt: Hunters could shoot the rabbit when the dogs "jumped" it, or they could hold tight near where the rabbit was flushed and follow the chase with their ears. Rabbits have small, defined territories, and they often make a loop, returning to the area where they were jumped, and that's when hunters would take them.

The limit for cottontails in Kansas is 10 per hunter, per day. I thought 10 total would be a good number, considering the conditions, but after about six hours of high drama, we had more than 40 rabbits among our group. It was especially surprising because many escaped, and I'm sure there were some that were never discovered.

We came back to town, cared for the dogs, and dressed and packaged a lot of rabbits. If you've never had real Hasenpfeffer or rabbit and gravy for breakfast, you're missing a culinary treat very familiar to beagle hunters!

Yep. Give these happy little dogs a chance and they will keep you busy, and full!

Dan Witt photo





Maybe you're a Master Angler and have been catching big fish for years. Maybe you're a new angler and you've only caught a few fish. Whatever the case, catching a state record fish could be a once-in-a-lifetime experience. It could happen to anyone!

Since the month of May is the most popular month for catching state record fish in Kansas, here is some helpful information on what you can do before you head to the water, and what to do if you think you've caught a state record.

Unlike the Master Angler Awards, which are issued based on length, official state records are held by the heaviest fish. If you've caught a monster, your first step should be to get your fish to a certified scale (scale for legal trade) and have it weighed as soon as possible. **DO NOT** freeze your fish prior to having it weighed.

Depending on where you fish, locating a certified scale might be a challenge. Local grocery stores, lumber yards, hardware stores and butcher shops should all have certified scales, and hopefully willing employees to help you weigh your catch. Locate one before heading out to save on time. The certified weight should be documented, as well as the scale number and the last inspection date of the scale. Of course, you'll probably be taking plenty of pictures with your prized fish, but one thing you cannot forget to do is notify a Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWP) fisheries biologist or regional fisheries supervisor. One of these experts must verify the fish species and sign your application. If there is any question as to what fish species you caught, a tissue sample will be taken. State record

fish applications can be provided by our biologists or downloaded from our website, [ksoutdoors.com](http://ksoutdoors.com) (under "State Fish Records"). You can find a list of our fisheries biologists, as well as current state record fish, on Page 39 of the *2017 Kansas Fishing Regulations Summary*. Once your application has been completed, double check it. Then, select the best color photo of your potential state record and attach it to your application. When your application arrives at my desk in the Information Services Section, it will be stamped "received" and reviewed. It will then be held for 30 days before being officially recognized as a state record.

Our records list fish caught by legal methods, and only the 36 species listed on the KDWP State Record list are eligible. If you're successful in catching a state record, a certificate will be sent to you and your name will be placed on the state record list.

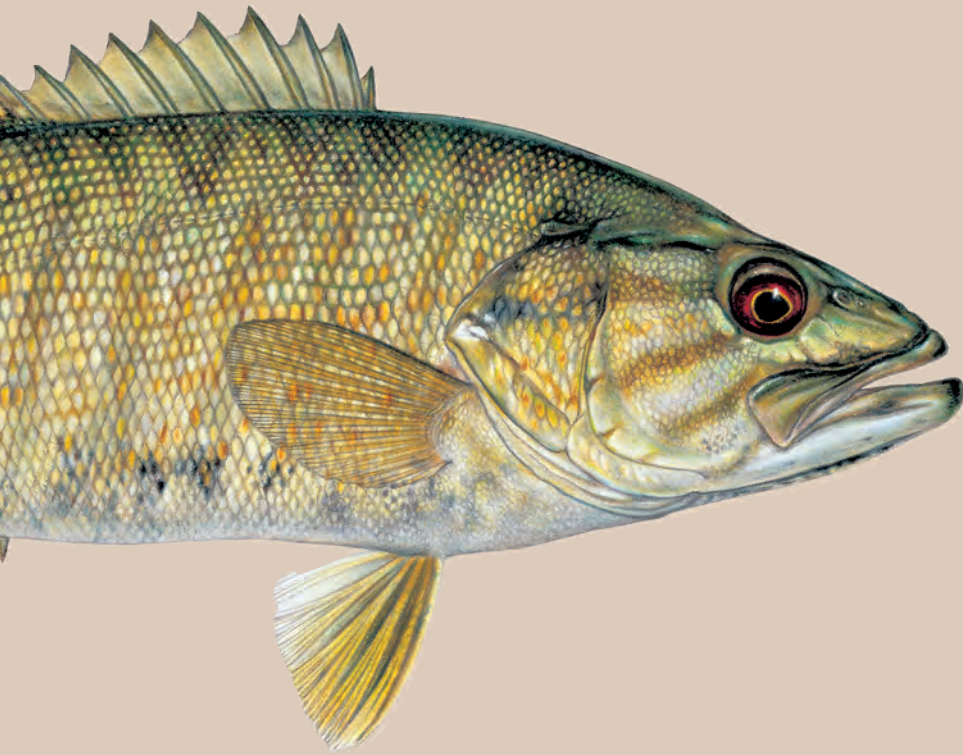
The longest standing record dates back to 1957 when Hazel Fey caught a black crappie from Woodson State Fishing Lake that weighed 4.63 pounds.

Last year's bigmouth buffalo record (62 pounds) is the most recent. When it comes to big fish, Kansas waters are among the best.

The world record paddlefish (144 pounds) and flathead catfish (123 pounds) were both caught in Kansas.

And the state record for my favorite fish, the green sunfish, was set in 1982 (2.36 pounds), and while not recognized, it weighs more than the listed world record.

Whatever your angling goals may be, catching a state record fish would be an exciting and worthwhile achievement.



Joseph Tomelleri illustration

**TEXT AND PHOTOS  
BY BRENT FRAZEE**

**POUND FOR POUND, THE  
HARDEST FIGHTING FISH THAT  
SWIMS IN KANSAS WATERS**

On a brilliant spring day, an angler stops his boat along a rocky bank and launches a long cast. The plastic bait drifts down through the mix of boulders and small rocks, but doesn't get far. A big smallmouth bass darts out of its hiding place and engulfs the crawdad imitation. It makes a powerful run and is hooked, before leaping in the air. A scene from Canada, Minnesota or Wisconsin? Try Kansas.

However unlikely it might sound to anglers from the North Country, the state known for its sunflowers, flat landscape and pheasants is also home to thriving populations of smallmouth bass. That's not to say that Kansas will ever match Canada or the northern states for numbers of smallmouth bass and the lakes where you can catch them. But there's no question that smallmouth bass have found a home in rocky Kansas reservoirs such as Coffey County, Milford, and Glen Elder and are attracting a growing legion of followers.

Hop in the boat. I'll show you.

### **COFFEY COUNTY**

Clyde Holscher will never forget his reaction when he first started fishing Coffey County Lake in eastern Kansas.

"I'm a Kansas boy," he said. "I was like, 'What is this?' I hadn't seen smallmouth bass fishing like this any place."

Holscher remembers the opening ceremony 20 years ago at the 5,090-acre lake, when invited guests got a chance to fish the lake for the first time.

"Everyone came in with wild stories," he said. "If you didn't catch and release 125 smallmouths, you were doing something wrong."

**THERE'S  
NO SUCH THING AS A  
SMALL  
SMALLMOUTH**

That was 20 years ago, and Coffey County Lake – a cooling lake for the Wolf Creek Generating Station – is still producing nationally-known smallmouth bass fishing.

It's not hard to see why. Everywhere you look at Coffey County, there are rocks. Miles of riprap, rocky banks, rock humps, rock points – the kind of habitat that smallmouths absolutely love.

Ask Holscher, a longtime Kansas guide. During the spring months, he constantly takes customers to the rocky reservoir. And they post some eye-opening numbers.

"It's not unusual at all for us to catch 50-plus fish in a day," said Holscher, 67, who lives in Topeka. "When conditions are right, we can have some incredible numbers."

The highest of those numbers came several years ago when Holscher guided a fly fisherman who used a Clouser Minnow and other flies to catch and release 163 fish, mostly smallmouths.

But that's not the norm for Holscher and his clients. Holscher specializes in fishing a Z-Man Zinker Z, a seemingly non-descript plastic stickbait. He cuts that worm in half, attaches it to a light mushroom jig head and uses a slow retrieve to keep it just above the bottom. It is a dynamic smallmouth bass-catcher, Holscher will tell you.

So what makes it so special? The Zinker Z is made of a nearly indestructible, buoyant substance that drifts easily through the water column. Holscher and his clients catch multiple fish on the same bait before they become so tattered they have to be replaced.

The average size smallmouth bass that comes to the boat will be 12 to 14 inches, Holscher said. But he has caught fish much bigger.

Holscher will position his boat a long cast from the riprap when he is looking to get his customers into steady action. But when he is searching for bigger fish, he often will move to mid-lake structures such as humps or drop-offs.

The best fishing often can be found in April, May and early June. By the time the water temperature climbs into the 80s, the action tapers off.

But by that time, Holscher and his clients will have enjoyed some of the best smallmouth bass fishing in the lower Midwest.

"I can't tell you how many times I've had my clients say, 'This fishing is as good as what we had in Canada or Minnesota,'" Holscher shared. "It really is a special place."



Fishing guide Clyde Holscher enjoys catching smallmouth bass from Coffey County Lake, which is listed as Kansas' No. 1 smallmouth lake in the 2017 Fishing Forecast.

## MILFORD RESERVOIR

Rick Dykstra has no trouble pinpointing the exact moment he became hooked on fishing for smallmouth bass at Milford Reservoir.

"I was wading off a point, casting for white bass when I saw these brown fish surfacing right in front of me," said Dykstra, who guides and manages the convention center for Acorns Resort. "I cast in there and caught a 3-pound smallmouth.

"It put up a great fight and it was like I had discovered something new. I wanted to catch more."

Dykstra has caught more. He is considered one of the best smallmouth bass anglers on Milford – the biggest reservoir in Kansas, sitting at 16,000 acres.

From spring through fall, he can be found in his bass boat, casting plastic baits to the rocky shallows of the reservoir in north-east Kansas in hopes of catching a big smallmouth.

Milford is loaded with the brown missiles, he will tell you. And there are some trophies, too.

While Dykstra has caught numerous smallmouths in the 5-pound range, he still has his aspirations set on a fish exceeding the 6-pound mark.

He knows it can happen, too. The state record, a 6.88-pound smallmouth, was caught at Milford in April of 2010. And Dykstra is convinced that other big ones still roam the clear water of the reservoir near Junction City.

He credits Milford's shad-rich environment, abundance of rocky habitat and channel-related structures as playing a big part in Milford's success as a smallmouth reservoir.

"You can have your boat in 30 feet of water and still be just a cast



Avid bass angler Rick Dykstra unhooks a nice Milford Reservoir smallmouth. Dykstra has caught numerous smallmouths weighing 5 pounds from Milford.

away from the bank," Dykstra said. "Smallmouths love places like that."

Dykstra credits his success to a finesse-fishing mindset.

"I used to be close-minded and only threw big stuff," he said. "But now I'll use 6- to 8-pound test line, a spinning rod and small plastics and it's really made a difference."

Dykstra often will start his quest for smallmouths in late March and early April, when he will cast plastic lures such as twister-tail grubs, Flukes or other jerkbaits, tubes and crawdad imitations to the shallows. When the fish move in to spawn, he looks for banks with a mix of gravel and bigger rock and will slowly retrieve lures over the bottom.

Some days, he has outstanding fishing without even launching his boat. Several years ago, he and I fished the riprap near a boat ramp and caught and released 45 smallmouths without even moving.

Later in the season, he will go to small spinnerbaits and top-water baits. But even in the heat of summer, he often will find fish in the shallows, especially in areas where there are big boulders to provide shade for the fish.

His favorite stretch of the reservoir is the lower one-fourth – basically from Rush Creek south – but he says there is good smallmouth fishing throughout the lake where there are rocky banks and structure.

"If you like fishing for smallmouths, Milford is tough to beat," said Dykstra, 60, who lives in Milford. "Year in and year out, we'll have good fishing."

## GLEN ELDER RESERVOIR

Matt Blad labels Glen Elder "a hidden gem" when it comes to smallmouth bass fishing.

The 12,586-acre reservoir in north central Kansas gets hit hard for walleye, crappie and white bass. But smallmouth bass? Not so much.

“Our smallmouth fishing is a diamond in the rough,” said Blad, 42, an avid smallmouth angler who lives in Beloit. “It’s never been very well known for smallmouths, but gradually the word’s getting out.

“When my dad and I guided, we had fishermen travel from as far away as California to fish out here,” said Blad.

Glen Elder’s success story started in the mid-90s, when the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) stocked smallmouths for three years. The fish quickly took hold in the rocky reservoir, building a sizable population on their own.

“Our fisheries biologists are thrilled with the way the smallmouths are doing in Glen Elder,” said Doug Nygren, chief of fisheries for KDWPT. “Over the last 15 years, we’ve really seen that population grow.”

Blad, who once guided on Glen Elder, but now competes in bass tournaments, has been along for much of that ride.

He has seen Glen Elder develop from primarily a largemouth bass fishery to a smallmouth haven.

Blad and his father relish the warm spring days when the smallmouths head to the shallows to spawn. On one such day several years ago, Blad maneuvered his bass boat into the shallows and scanned the bottom, looking for nests that the smallmouths had fanned out.

When he spotted a bright spot, he said, “There’s a nest. And there’s a fish sitting on it.”

He flipped a plastic bait into the clear water

and guided it so that it landed right in the middle of the cleared-out spot. The second it landed, a bass turned on the lure and grabbed it. Blad set the hook and watched as a brown rocket shot out of the water. Seconds later, he had a 2.5-pound smallmouth in hand, and he once again was singing Glen Elder’s praises.

Blad casts plastic crawdad imitations, Senko finesse worms, small jig-and-pig combinations and crankbaits to catch smallmouths.

The northeast section of the reservoir offers the best smallmouth fishing, Blad said. One of his favorite spots is the face of the dam, especially the areas where there are shelves and dropoffs.

“We look for transition areas — places where the bank goes from rock to shale or sandy areas that go to bigger rock,” Blad said.

“During the spawn, areas that have a mix of pebbles and bigger rock seem to hold them better.

“The fishing stays pretty consis-

tent, especially in the spring, if we have normal water conditions,” Blad added.

## OTHERS

Coffey County, Milford and Glen Elder are marquee names in Kansas smallmouth bass fishing, but there are others that provide outstanding smallmouth fishing, as well:

- Melvern Reservoir in eastern Kansas has been one of the state’s hottest smallmouth lakes in recent years. Its population has grown quickly and big fish are now being caught off rocky points and banks.
- El Dorado Reservoir is quickly developing into a quality smallmouth bass fishery. It was originally stocked by KDWPT and now the population is self-supporting.
- Wilson Reservoir in the central part of the state has long been a smallmouth standout. The population dipped when water levels dropped in the midst of the drought, but the population is coming back. 🐻



Hook a smallmouth bass on medium or light tackle, and you have your hands full. No freshwater sport fish fights harder or jumps higher.

A photograph of an open clam shell on a rocky beach. The clam is in the foreground, showing its iridescent interior. The background is a blurred shoreline with a body of water and a clear sky.

Lifelong Kansas journalist and outdoor enthusiast Andra Bryan Stefanoni continues her quest to explore all of Kansas' state parks — this time at **Eisenhower State Park**.



# Ike's Park

Text and photos by Andra Bryan Stefanoni

I love my family. I love my job. I love my home. But there are some times a person just has to get away — away for a few hours, away for a day, to recharge, take a deep breath, and then return to real life.

One week in early March, when I had reached maximum capacity with just about everything, I pointed my car northwest to Eisenhower State Park. It was on my to-visit list as part of my quest to spend time in each of our state parks. It offers something especially appealing to harried individuals who seek solitude: miles of hiking trails, and a lake with miles of shoreline that in early spring, was likely to not yet be busy.

My companions for the trip were not my usual family members; this time, I took a field guide, a pair of binoculars, my journal, camera, a sack lunch, and the one companion I knew would go anywhere I wanted to go and wouldn't care about talking: Raven, our lab.

## Day Tripping

Located on the eastern edge of the Flint Hills, Eisenhower State Park previously was known as Melvern State Park,

but in 1990, the Kansas Legislature approved renaming it to honor the only U.S. President from Kansas. At 1,785 acres, the park graces the north shore of Melvern Lake, a man-made flood control project for the Marais des Cygnes River basin.

Each area of the park is named for something that played a role in Eisenhower's life: Abilene, for his hometown in northcentral Kansas. Blackjack, for John Pershing — a general from neighboring Missouri who served in World War I, then mentored Eisenhower in World War II. Churchill, for the prime minister of Britain during World War II. Doud, for the maiden name of Eisenhower's wife, Mamie. Five Star, for the number of stars Eisenhower earned as a general. West Point, for the school Eisenhower attended. Omaha Beach, for the place U.S. troops invaded under Eisenhower's command during World War II. And Sailboat Beach — perhaps for the sailboat paintings he did?

I was there for a day trip, but should I have wanted to stay longer, there are 186 utility camping sites and five shower houses. Primitive camping can be enjoyed in four areas, and

camping with horses is available in Cowboy Camp and the north loop of West Point Campground. Four cabins, similar to those at other state parks, are also available for visitors. What I really was interested in, though, was something I'd only seen in photos: yurts.

A modern yurt is a portable, round tent stretched over a wood frame and based on a design used by nomads in central Asia. When I arrived at the park office and inquired about the yurts and other interesting features of the park, staff member Terri Neill was happy to jump in my car with keys to a yurt so I could go check one out of the two available for rental.

Located in West Point with a view of the lake, the yurts were just as intriguing on the inside as



the outside. They're perfect for those who want a simple but comfortable and clean place to bunk at night, and don't need amenities like a kitchen or indoor plumbing. A shower house is available nearby, and a water pump just steps from the door. Both yurts have a heating and air conditioning unit.

Neill said the cabins and yurts are rarely empty once camping season begins, and, thanks to shotgun and archery hunting in the undeveloped west side of the park, they're full through late fall, too.

The hunting area at Eisenhower State Park is unique and open to shotgun and archery hunting by written permission. Interested hunters should inquire at the park office. There is also a 9,000-acre public hunting area surrounding the upper portion of Melvern Reservoir.



"We have hunters coming here every fall like clockwork," Neill said. "They come in from Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Florida, Minnesota, Wisconsin, every November. People travel to come stay here. We have a lot to offer."

The same undeveloped area is also open to exploration throughout the year for those interested in hiking and wildlife watching, as well as equestrians seeking to ride the 20-mile

Crooked Knee Horse Trail system. An avid equestrian, Neill grew up on the other side of the lake, still lives there, and rides horses and camps at the park as often as she is able.

"It's a favorite of riders from across the region," she said, pointing out the park's numerous corrals for use by riders. Riders also show up to the annual trail ride each October — a fundraiser for the park that brings in thousands of dollars for amenities.

The trails were calling to me, and with a day made for hiking, I set off with Raven to explore the prairie grasslands common to this area, the lakeshore, and the woodland that separates the two.

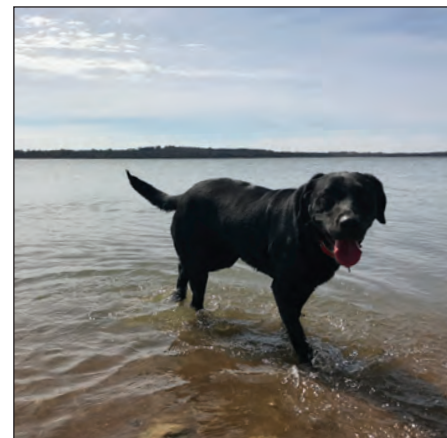
### Finding Solitude

The trails are well marked with frequent orange and blue posts indicating routes, and those that cut through grasslands mowed for ease in traversing them. I chose blue in order to follow the trail along the shoreline; I kept the water to my left on the start of my hike and the water to my right on the return trip.

What I discovered along the way was the solitude I had been seeking. The trail wasn't physically demanding, but had just



enough gradual climbs and rocky areas to make it technically interesting. I stopped every mile or two to wander off the trail and down to the rocky beach to give Raven a chance to get a drink, and eventually stopped for awhile to enjoy my sack lunch with nothing but the sound of songbirds and waves lapping the shore.



Neill had advised me that the first southernmost part of the trail I'd come to afforded a beautiful view of the lake, and that there would be a neat rocky formation carved out on the shore from years of geologic change and erosion. I easily found the spot, and after exploring it, let Raven off her leash for a few moments of splashing in the water, then took off my hiking boots and joined Raven, dipping my tired and hot feet in the cold lake water.

I could have stayed there with my boots off the rest of the day, but needed to find out if there was anything other than the lake and trails that made this park one to visit again. After all, Neill had told me people from Kansas City visit often, and that there are numerous repeat campers year after year.

A drive through each campground revealed playgrounds, a well-stocked kid's fishing pond, an archery trail, a shelter house named for Ike, several awning-covered picnic areas, a boat dock

with eight slips, basketball and volleyball courts, horseshoe pits, and an 18-hole disc golf course.



## Best Kept Secret

At Ike’s General Store, I found Gene Hoyle, who was tending to chores, getting ready for the date he’s been looking forward to since last October: April 1.

“That’s our jump-off date for the season,” he said. “I just love it.”

Hoyle and his wife, Debra, own a home in Emporia, but spring through fall they’re residents of Eisenhower State Park. They volunteer as camp hosts, based out of their RV parked next to Ike’s Store, where they sell flip flops, sunscreen, fishing gear, ice cream, and cold drinks.

“When we took over, this store sold \$2,000 in products each year. Last year, we did \$30,000 in sales,” Hoyle said proudly.

The couple also operates a kayak and canoe rental in a shack next door to the store.

They’re members of Friends of Eisenhower State Park, which Hoyle described as an active group of volunteers focused on raising funds for needful items at the park.

“Our goal has always been to make it better, better, better,” Hoyle said.

They recently purchased a Polaris with a hitch, for example,

so that Hoyle can pull the kayaks and canoes on trailers to the lake when park users rent them.

“For the last five or six years, I hauled them for people in the back of my own truck. The Polaris is a great addition,” Hoyle said.

Six kayaks were available his first year at the park. Now, there are eight kayaks and four canoes, as well as donated items like a croquet set and kneeboards.

“We do a tremendous business in them,” said Hoyle, who added that he is always willing to give tips to users and to help advise first-timers. “People come out and love getting out on the water.”

The Friends Group also paid for water to be installed in the center loop of the Churchill Campground, where it previously was limited to the campsites on the perimeter. And in the future, they’re planning to refresh gravel in campsites.

Others have invested in the park in their own ways, like a man who owns an iron works business in nearby Osage City. He fabricated and installed horse corals at West Point Campground in honor of his dad.

Some return campers make homemade ice cream for ice cream socials, and one man likes to make dutch oven cobbler to share with friends and strangers alike. And a couple with a knack for children, plans scavenger hunts and sidewalk chalk contests, while Hoyle provides push-up popsicles to youth who ride their bikes to the large parking lot in front of Ike’s Store.

Next year, Hoyle said, the Friends group might plan a “drive-in” movie on a projection screen and invite campers to bring not their cars, but lawn chairs.

“There’s a lot of people who put a lot of effort into this park,” he said. “Each one of us — we all feel like, ‘this is MY park.’”

As he talked, I could picture it all – the season starting and people arriving.

“I’ve heard people say, ‘This is the best kept secret in all of Kansas,’” he said as I turned to leave. “It’s such an awesome job when we start seeing people coming back for the season. They’re friends. They’re people we’ve laughed with, joked with. That’s what really makes this park.”

## On future trips to Eisenhower State Park, my to-do list includes:


–Take Raven down to a gravel bar Hoyle described near the day use area. It’s a perfect spot for dogs to swim and not get muddy.

–Try my hand at disc golf. Neill made it sound fun. But I’ll bring extra sunscreen, since it’s in a wide-open spot without a lot of shade.

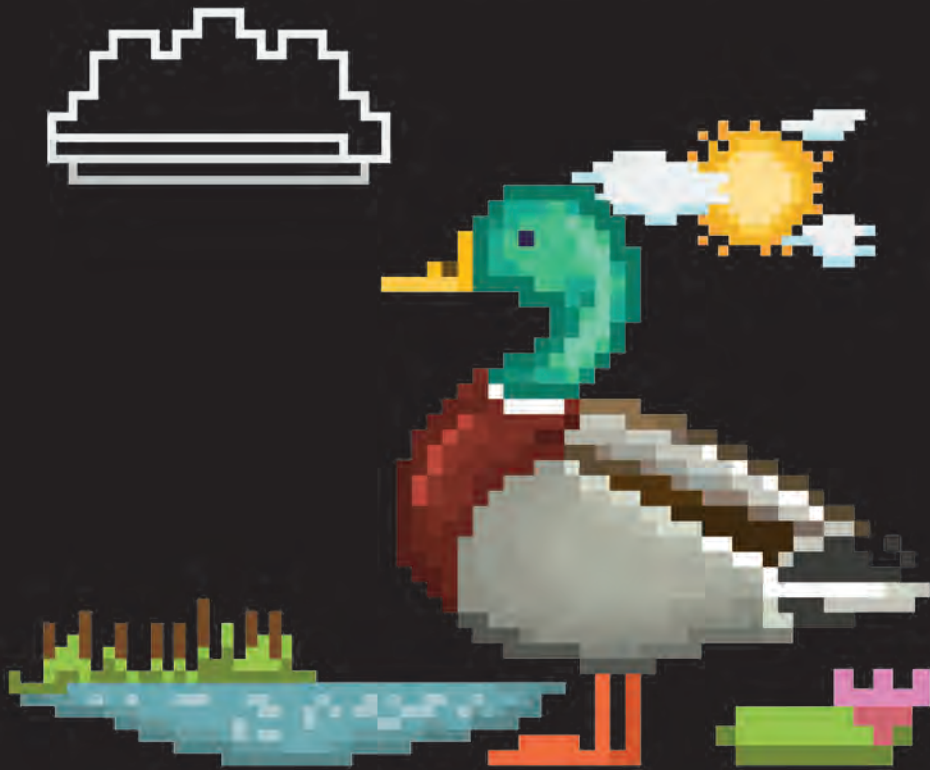
–Bring along my sons and our bows and arrows to try out the archery trail. Perhaps the winner will get an ice cream at Ike’s Store.



## Things To Know

Maps and online reservations for cabins and the yurts can be found at ksoutdoors.com. Since these are popular features of the park, don’t hesitate to make your reservation. They’re well worth it. 

# \* DUCK ID \* CHALLENGE



“Name that duck!”  
LEVEL: EXPERT

Photos by Bob Gress

Spring is the ultimate time to view waterfowl in their most colorful breeding plumage. Think you know your ducks? Take our Duck ID Challenge to see if you have what it takes to be an expert! [See answers on Page 41](#)

A.



B.



C.



D.



E.



F.



G.



H.





I.



J.





A Champion For  
*Conservation*

by Andra Bryan Stefanoni

It's not surprising to those who know James Triplett that he was presented the 2017 Kansas Conservation Champion Award at the 2017 Kansas Natural Resources Conference in January. For more than 30 years, Triplett had his hands in just about every conservation-related activity he could find and he shows no signs of stopping.

Courtesy photo



Triplett (left) poses with Jessica Mounts (middle), Kansas Alliance of Wetlands and Streams (KAWS) executive director, and Brad Loveless (right), director of environmental programs for Westar Energy and KAWS board chairman. The three gathered for a photo after Triplett was presented his award.

Now officially retired from Pittsburg State University's (PSU) Department of Biology, Triplett's still on campus as a professor emeritus and volunteer. Off-campus, he's just as involved.

"As long as I have some ability to persuade, I'll keep doing it," Triplett said. "Why put in the time, the effort, to begin with and then not follow through?"

His interest, as is often the case with conservationists, began in his childhood.

"My grandpa took me fishing on Center Creek, and from the time I was 7 years old until I was about 16, I spent every weekend boating with my stepdad on Shoal Creek," said Triplett of popular spots in his native southwest Missouri. "I loved to fish, so every time the boat stopped, I was out on the banks fishing."

## Starting Out

Triplett, who grew up across the state line in Webb City, Mo., came to PSU on a football scholarship in the early 1960s to play for the now-legendary coach Carnie Smith — the one for whom the football stadium is named.

"Little did I know then that I'd wind up working across the street from the stadium for a good chunk of my life," Triplett said.

Interested in biology, Triplett avoided pre-med and instead turned to the field.

"I don't like people, let alone sick ones," he joked.

His teachers at the time are now well-known names in the field of biology, including Ted Sperry, for whom the university's herbarium and the local Sperry-Galligar Audubon Society chapter are named.

With one of his professors, a 19,000-mile summer research junket across 29 states, Mexico and Canada, camping along creeks and streams and seining for fish, not only conjured up fond memories of childhood, it pointed him in a career direction.

"I was absolutely sold on field work then," Triplett said.

That professor also started the university's museum of ichthyology that Triplett now heads up; some of what they collected and identified on that summer trip is housed in it.

Triplett learned the necessary practical knowledge of being in the field from Bob Hartman, a Kansas Fish and Game Commission fisheries expert whose office was in the same building as the biology department.

During a stint as Hartman's summer aide, Triplett learned how to mend nets and key out species, among other field skills.

"He was a wealth of knowledge," Triplett said.

Hartman went on to become Chief of Research for the Commission in Pratt, while Triplett went on to graduate in 1966, earn a master's in 1968, then serve stateside in the Navy during the Vietnam War.

## Second Time Around

Some years later, after completing a PhD at the University of Kansas and teaching fish and wildlife management at Ohio State, an opening at PSU drew Triplett back to Pittsburg and to the biology department where he began.

That department has had just eight chairs in its 108-year history; Triplett was one, appointed in 1985. It was a position he held for 23 years.

Former students recall him always knowing exactly where to go to find reptiles and amphibians for their herpetology field class — taking them to an out-of-the-way spot in another state, unloading the van, and directing them right to the specimens for which they were looking.



Triplett (left) shows two of his students how to use a depth recorder to map the bottom of University Lake at PSU during his Fisheries Management class in the 1990s.

Others recall that even while in the field studying herpetology or ichthyology, Triplett found a way to introduce water quality and conservation principles.

And some attribute his leadership to helping others go on to make an impact on biology education and conservation.

“He was very supportive of an outreach program at Pitt State,” said Delia Lister, who heads up Nature Reach, an outreach program that utilizes live animals. “He saw the value of it in this part of Kansas, and encouraged Cindy Ford, when he hired her as a faculty member, to develop it.”

Lister said he championed the position for Ford, then others, and eventually her, and helped the program hang on when times were financially tough.

“He’s a huge reason Nature Reach still exists,” Lister said.

“There are people who actually live their lives the way they teach,

Triplett examines a specimen at PSU’s biology department where he now serves as a professor emeritus and volunteer.

and I think he’s one of those people,” added Lister, who had him as an instructor. “He sees the value of taking people out in the field, on trips over spring break or to collect. He gets students excited about being in the field, but he also has academia knowledge, and he knows how to talk to non-scientists — sort of the perfect blend.”

In 2014, Triplett retired. In announcing that retirement, his successor, Dixie Smith, called him “the face of PSU Biology for, well, decades.”

But the faculty, students, and administrators didn’t miss him for long, because he didn’t stray far. Triplett’s version of retirement was not to spend more time on the golf course, but to focus on teaching and working on conservation- and natural resources-related projects for which he has a passion.

He took up residence next door to the biology department, where he still volunteers to curate the museum and lend his expertise to faculty, students, and administrators. Smith, for example, has been able to collaborate with him on a creel survey on Lake Hudson in Oklahoma – a survey which one of her graduate students managed.

“What an adventure, but also how exciting it is to see students grow as they confront and master new situations,” Smith said. “Jim has an enviable history of developing student projects, and it is wonderful to see him continuing that tradition.”



## Beyond The Classroom

Off campus, Triplett's been the chair of the Neosho Basin Advisory Committee since 1985, and in 1986, formed a "council of chairs" from across the state and region.

"We met every year for 20 years and became a pretty significant force in water planning," he said.

Triplett also was appointed to serve on the Governor's Solid Waste Advisory Committee, and has played a key role in the creation and development of the Southeast Kansas Recycling Center, based in Pittsburg, and the Grand Lake Watershed Alliance Foundation in Oklahoma.

On campus, Triplett has been instrumental in the University Sustainability Committee, the Students for Sustainability organization, and the newly-created Bachelor of Integrated Studies in Sustainability, Society, and Resource Management — the first in the state.

"Dr. Triplett has made a huge difference in our campus sustainability efforts just as he has in the entire Four State region," said PSU President Steve Scott, who, like Triplett, attended the university as a student, then became a faculty member and eventually an administrator. "His leadership has contributed to the university being a better steward of the environment both in our curriculum and in our operations."

That leadership includes serving as co-chair of the Tobacco Policy Committee, an effort that led to the campus adopting a tobacco-free policy.

"His commitment to preserving the earth's natural resources has served all of us well, and his contributions will benefit the many generations who follow us," Scott added.

## Walking The Walk

At home, Triplett walks the walk. On nine acres just east of Pittsburg on a quiet lane, he and his wife, Shirley Drew — also a university professor — are trying to make as little impact on the environment as possible.

He will gladly show any visitor who wants to take the time to examine the infrastructure of their modular log home, the inner workings of its sustainability measures.

An enormous solar panel covers the south-facing roof of his large garage/workshop. On the exterior, a meter indicates how much electricity it's generating. He's particularly fond of it, he said, not just for its environmental impact, but because the young man who installed it was among his students in the sustainability program.

That student was so motivated by the program, he began coordinating a new solar panel division at CDL Electric, a locally-owned company.



Andria Bryan Stefanoni photo

Triplett stands outside the home he shares with wife and fellow university professor, Shirley Drew. The dwelling is as low-impact as possible, utilizing solar panels, a ground source heat pump, among other eco-friendly practices.

Triplett also will happily show any visitor their ground source heat pump — a system that has cut their home's heating bill by 42 percent. They recycle, of course, and installed south-facing windows above their wood-burning stove that provide passive solar heat. Triplett designed and built shutters for them that he can adjust to suit the seasonal angle of the sun.

A butterfly garden and bird feeders in view of those windows attract wildlife, and five acres of their "back lot" is planted in native grasses, which they manage with controlled burns.

All that he's done in life, Triplett said, he tries to relate to resource management.

"I think it goes back to my grandpa," he said. "He'd go out to catch those minnows and he'd take me along. Those trips down the creek, spending time with a cane pole, exploring upstream, riffle to riffle — I have a strong affinity for the streams and things that live in the streams, and it became part of my world view. It just makes sense that I'd want to teach others and work to protect it."

Despite still having a schedule that looks to the casual observer equal to that of a person working full-time, Triplett still finds time now and then to fish; he's a big fan of the state-operated trout pit near West Mineral, where he heads frequently with a retired colleague and a canoe.

"I've got to keep close to the water and the fish," he said. "I'd never want to give that up." 🐻



# Cornering Kansas

text and photos by Jennifer Leeper  
freelance writer, Kansas City, Mo.

I have long envied those who were born in Kansas, and even more so, those whose ancestry runs a tight parallel with that of the state's. Since you can't change your roots, I've learned to be satisfied with a deep friendship with this land of high plain; of earth-breaking badland and semi-arid grassland; cave and cliff; and a red, gypsum hill country.

Most recently, I got to know my good friend even better when I explored the four corners of Kansas – from its Ozark Plateau basement in the southeast to its attic of big sky and rugged breaks in the northwest.

staff photo



# Northeast

For the first leg of my “four corners” trip, I followed the Glacial Hills Scenic Byway, running from the intersection of Highway 92 and Highway 7 in Leavenworth, through Atchison, and winding up in Doniphan County, tucking Kansas into the Missouri River. As its scenic byway designation implies, the northeastern slice of Kansas is known for rolling hills created by ancient glaciers. These eventually receded to the north, leaving a fertile landscape, covered today by forested hillsides, golden wheat fields, and lush, green valleys cradling quaint farmsteads.

If you enjoy all variations of charming, pastoral scenery, the Glacial Hills route doesn’t disappoint. From off-the-beaten path bridges passing over lazy streams, to hilltop barns that offer nostalgic vistas, there are plenty of opportunities for vivid photography or a quiet, country drive.

The climactic point of the Scenic Byway happens to be right at the Kansas-Missouri border, in White Cloud, where a man-made lookout perches on one of the many bluffs along the Missouri river. A multi-state expanse of farmland surrounds the

river at all angles. The town’s welcome-sign claim of viewing four states at once (Kansas, Missouri, Iowa and Nebraska) is heavily debated among visitors, however, there is no challenging the beauty of this overlook.



If you enjoy all variations of charming, pastoral scenery, the Glacial Hills route doesn’t disappoint. There are plenty of opportunities for vivid photography or a quiet, country drive.





## Northwest

Top of the world. These words echoed in my mind as I drove through Cheyenne County along Highway 36. It runs east to west, nearly brushing against the Nebraska border. “Top of the world” might seem like an unearned superlative in a state known for flatlands, but Highway 36 lifts travelers higher and higher toward the Colorado border, the land meeting the sky. For this reason, I



chose route 36 instead of Interstate 70 because it cuts through and showcases the most dramatic parts of the high plains, culminating in the Arikaree Breaks. These badlands of Kansas, just outside St. Francis, are where the Sunflower State triangulates with Colorado and Nebraska.

Following a cozy stay at The Spencer House Bed & Breakfast, my gracious innkeepers equipped me with a self-guided tour map of the Arikaree Breaks and I set out on a pristine Saturday morning to photograph the beautifully broken earth. I was transported beyond the stereotype of wheat fields and red barns to a dusty, desert highway in Arizona, my eyes wandering over endless plateaus of canyons.

The Breaks are only a few miles wide, but that’s enough to get lost in a southwestern scene of yucca and prickly pear cactus in every direction, although I was just within minutes of downtown St. Francis. Sprawling for 36 miles, these badlands extend into Colorado to the west, and Rawlins County to the east. The ruggedness of the unpaved, sand and gravel road I followed seemed appropriate given the terrain, and in fact, I was grateful no one had decided to pave it.

Word is mule deer, lesser earless lizards, coyotes, and a wide variety of feathered friends – such as horned larks and vesper sparrows – call the Breaks home. There is even a town of black-tailed prairie dogs, but I remained singularly bewitched by a topography shaped long ago by wind and water. The deposits of sand, clay, and silt particles, known as loess, possibly drifted in from the Nebraska Sand Hills and/or the Platte River System.








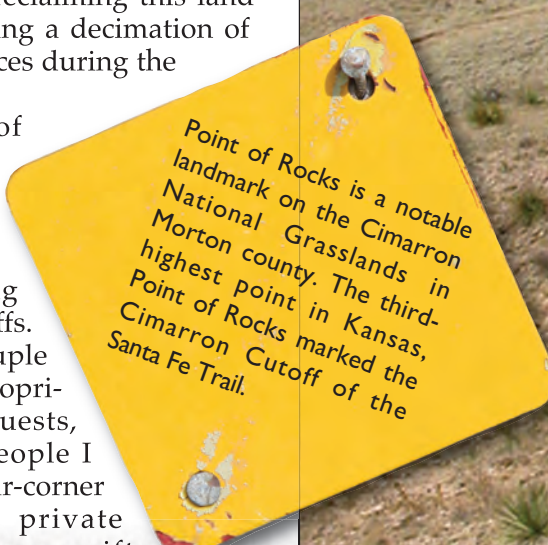
# Southwest

Just as “top of the world” might be an unexpected descriptive for a flatlander state, “Gateway to the Southwest” could also be hard for natives and non-natives alike to embrace. Kansas may represent the epitome of the Midwest in terrain and climate, but the semi-arid Cimarron Grasslands, outside of Elkhart, are at the very least a strong hint of what lies further west, in states such as New Mexico and parts of Colorado.

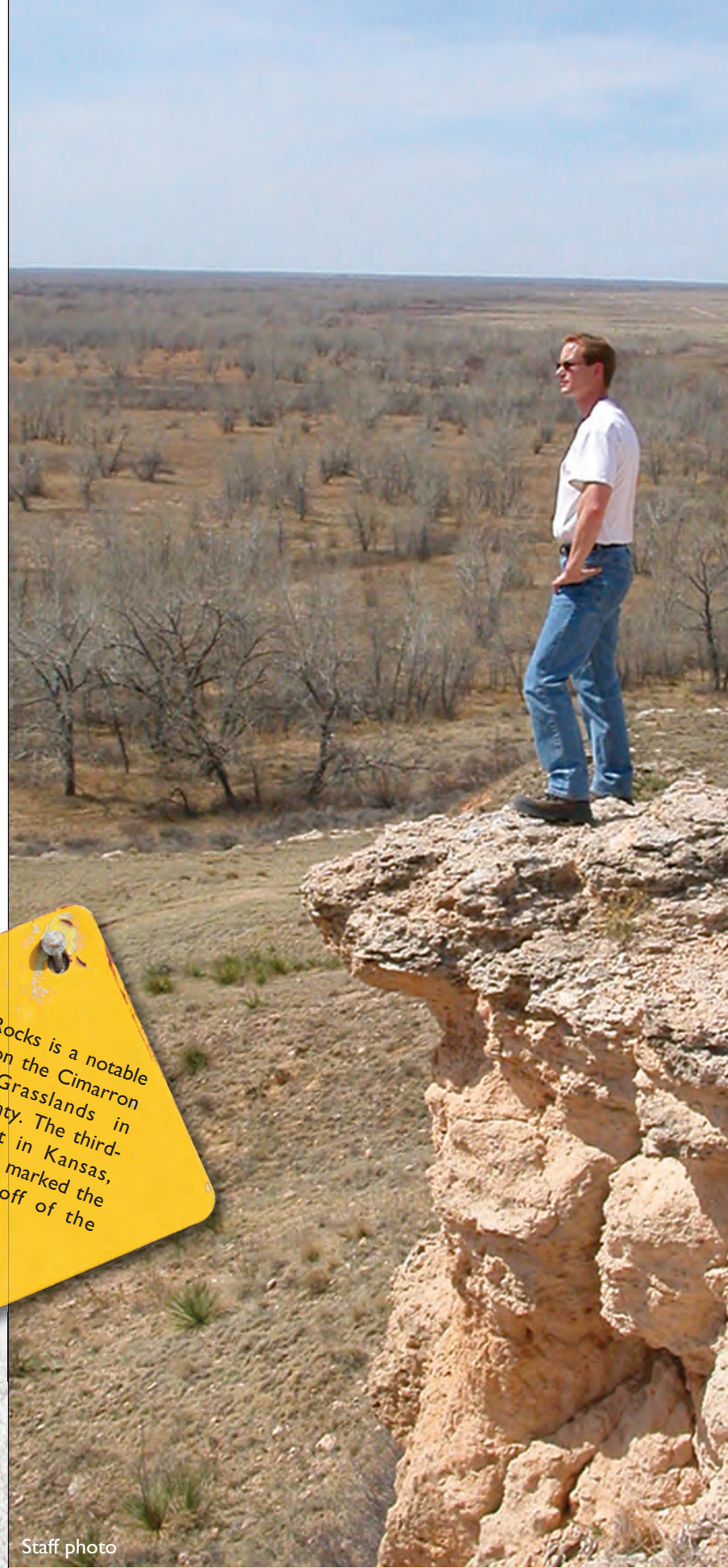


Spanning Morton and Stevens counties, these grasslands are a leftover reminder that the High Plains region was a dusty wasteland less than a century ago. With its prickly coat of yucca and sagebrush, the Cimarron Grasslands includes 108,175 acres of federally protected and managed land. One of only 20 grasslands under the umbrella of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, the government began reclaiming this land in the late 1930s following a decimation of the area’s natural resources during the “Dust Bowl.”

Other than a pack of ATV riders creating their own dust smoke as they whizzed by, I was alone in a brushy, scrubby valley pushing up against a series of cliffs. In fact, except for a couple of bed and breakfast proprietors and other B&B guests, these were the only people I encountered in my four-corner exploration. These private viewings were a gift throughout my journey, allowing me an undisturbed experience of Kansas’ natural bounties.



Point of Rocks is a notable landmark on the Cimarron National Grasslands in Morton county. The third-highest point in Kansas, Point of Rocks marked the Cimarron Cutoff of the Santa Fe Trail.



Staff photo



# Southeast

If the southwestern corner slice of Kansas is the “Gateway to the Southwest,” the southeastern pocket is the cusp of the Ozarks that extend through Missouri and Arkansas, branching into Oklahoma. On a late fall day in November, about a mile outside Galena, a historical mining town located along Route 66, I enjoyed a taste of the Ozark mountain region lying to the east and south. The Schermerhorn Park and Southeast Kansas Nature Center introduced me to a 55-square-mile section of the “Ozarks of Kansas,” or “Little Ozarks,” formed by the Ozark Plateau.

The nature center itself exemplifies the spirit of the topography around it, sitting on a hill, lined with stone ledges, it offers a picturesque overlook of Shoal Creek, which runs beside it and is part of the 32-acre Shoal Creek Wildlife Area. In keeping with the theme of independent exploration I had unintentionally maintained throughout the other three legs of my four-cornered quest, I decided to venture into the park without stopping in at the center. For those who opt for a solo excursion as I did, the park backs

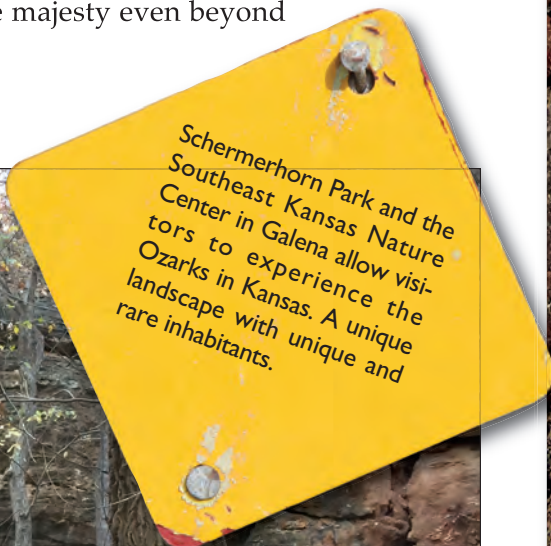


up to the nature center and is very navigable with easy-to-follow signage.

Ascending a heavily forested nature trail that led to a fork, I chose the path that descended toward a clearing where I discovered a wall of Mississippian limestone opening up to the mouth of Schermerhorn Cave. Though much of the cave isn't accessible, it spans nearly half a mile long. I was able to view the cave from a small foot-bridge extending like a tongue from the front of the cave.

A spring flows from the cave, sustaining some rare Kansas amphibians, including grotto salamanders, dark-sided salamanders, cave salamanders and gray-bellied salamanders. This region also features the oldest surface rocks in the state. Fish not found west of the Ozark Plateau can also be observed here.

The Rockies are stunning, and the Grand Canyon elicits universal awe, but the Sunflower State offers a subtle majesty even beyond



the rare river bluff or badland break, in its characteristic wheat fields and cattle pastures, quietly unforgettable in the candy-colored glow of a Kansas sunset, or against the luminous canvas of winter on the plains. I dare you not to notice Kansas. 🐄

## Explore More

It can be hard to hit the highlights of every Kansas corner pocket in one go, so here are several other notable experiences worth having in each region.

In the northeast, visit Benedictine Bottoms Wildlife Area – a rich, wildlife spot, just outside of Atchison, where you can take in even more Missouri River activity, including plenty of scenic bluffs.

Those drawn to breaks and badlands can explore Horse Thief Cave or Devil's Cap, both part of the Arikaree Breaks. Each is included on the self-guided tour, and Devil's Cap offers one of the best views of the Breaks. There are also several spring-fed creeks along the tour, including Plum Creek, Hackberry Creek, Cleveland Run Creek, and Spring Creek.

In the southwest, take in the Cimarron River valley from Points of Rock. For hikers, there are the Murphy and Conestoga trailheads with a Cimarron River Overlook site accessible from both.

In the southeast, take in Elk City Lake. It sits outside of Elk City, about an hour and a half west of Galena. This area is the "gateway to the gateway" as I like to call it. Geologically, Elk City is the start of the Ozarks of Kansas and the lake offers a moderately difficult hiking trail that covers more than 11 miles of Kansas Ozark territory.



“DUCK ID CHALLENGE” answers:  
 A. Goldeneye  
 B. Lesser Scaup  
 C. Ruddy  
 D. Wigeon  
 E. Pintail  
 F. Mallard  
 G. Canvasback  
 H. Ring-necked  
 I. Buffhead  
 J. Gadwall



## Deadline to enter is Oct. 13!

Photo submissions for the 5th annual “Wild About Kansas” photo contest are being accepted now through Oct. 13, 2017. Divided into five categories, participants can submit photos related to:

- Wildlife** (game and nongame animals, primarily mammals, migratory birds, furbearers, etc.)
- Outdoor Recreation** (people participating in recreational activities outdoors, not hunting or fishing)
- Landscapes** (scenery; wildlife may be present, but should not be the sole focus of the image.)
- Other Species** (insects, reptiles, and amphibians)
- Hunting and Fishing** (hunters and anglers; set-up shots following a hunting or fishing trip. Photos with dead game will be accepted, however, “action” shots, or photos taken during the activity will be given preference.)

### RULES

Photographers can submit up to three photos total. Photos must be taken within the state of Kansas and

must be the entrant’s original work. The contest is open to both residents and non-residents of Kansas, and there is no age limit.

### JUDGING

Each photo will be judged on creativity, composition, subject matter, lighting, and the overall sharpness. Photographs from participants under the age of 18 will be placed in a youth division; all others will compete in the adult division. Winning entries will be featured in the 2018 January/February photo issue of *Kansas Wildlife & Parks Magazine*.

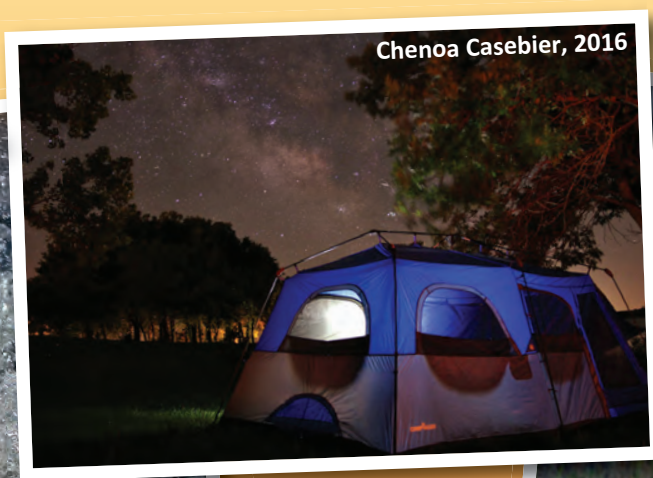
### HOW TO ENTER

Entries must be submitted no later than **5 p.m. on Oct. 13, 2017**. Photo format should be JPEG or TIFF. All photos must be submitted electronically. Photos that do not meet the minimum file size requirements (1 MB) will NOT be accepted.

To enter, visit [ksoutdoors.com](http://ksoutdoors.com) and click “Publications,” then “2017 Wild About Kansas Photo Contest.”



Tony Ifland, 2015



Chenoa Casebier, 2016



Tony Pianalto, 2015

# Sportsmen's Calendar | 2017

## FLOATLINE FISHING

Open year-round

## RABBITS

Open year-round

## RUNNING

March 1-Nov. 8, 2017

## PADDLEFISH SNAGGING

March 15-May 15, 2017

## SPRING TURKEY

Regular Season: April 12-May 31, 2017

## SQUIRREL

June 1, 2017-Feb. 28, 2018

## HANDFISHING

June 15-Aug. 31, 2017

## BULLFROG

July 1-Oct. 31, 2017

## RAIL

Sept. 1-Nov. 9, 2017 (*Sora and Virginia*)

## SNIPE

Sept. 1-Dec. 16, 2017

## DOVE

Sept. 1-Nov. 29, 2017 (*mourning, white-winged, Eurasian collared, and ringed turtle doves*)

## DEER

Youth/Hunters with Disabilities: Sept. 2-10, 2017

Archery: Sept. 11-Dec. 31, 2017

Pre-rut Whitetail Antlerless: Oct. 7-9, 2017

Muzzleloader: Sept. 11-24, 2017

Regular Firearm: Nov. 29-Dec. 10, 2017

Firearm Extended Whitetail Antlerless Season:

Jan. 1 2018 (Units 6, 8, 9, 10, 16, and 17)

Jan. 1-7, 2018 (Units 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 11, 12, 13, and 14)

Jan. 1-14, 2018 (Units 10a, 15 and 19)

Archery Extended Whitetail Antlerless Season:

Jan. 15-31, 2018 (Unit 19 only)

## GREATER PRAIRIE CHICKEN

Greater Prairie Chicken Unit

Early Season: Sept. 15-Oct. 15, 2017

Regular Season

Nov. 18, 2017-Jan. 31, 2018

Southwest Unit: No open season

## FALL TURKEY

Oct. 1-Nov. 28, 2017 AND

Dec. 11, 2017-Jan. 31, 2018

## WOODCOCK

Oct. 14-Nov. 27, 2017

## PHEASANTS

Youth: Nov. 4-5, 2017

Nov. 11, 2017-Jan. 31, 2018

## QUAIL

Youth: Nov. 4-5, 2017

Nov. 11, 2017-Jan. 31, 2018

## SANDHILL CRANE

Nov. 8, 2017-Jan. 4, 2018

## CROW

Nov. 10, 2017-March 10, 2018

## TRAPPING/HUNTING

Nov. 15, 2017-Feb. 15, 2018 (*badger, bobcat, mink, muskrat, opossum, raccoon, swift fox, red fox, gray fox, striped skunk, weasel*)

## BEAVER & OTTER TRAPPING

Nov. 15, 2017-March 31, 2018

## EXOTIC DOVE (Proposed)

Open year-round



# Species Profile: Roadrunner

Roadrunner. Just the name may elicit flashbacks of Wile E. Coyote and the unmistakable “meep-meep” the bird sounded off when antagonizing its pursuer. But in reality, roadrunners likely do more chasing than being chased.

This swift-footed hunter can often be seen running down a variety of lizards, rodents, birds and insects for food. They move quickly, lunging forward in a mad dash to capture prey with their bill.

Roadrunners tend to mate for life and pairs will defend their territory against intruders throughout the year.

While their range doesn't extend much past the southern edge of our state, roadrunners can be found where desert-like areas and open country with sparse plants and trees exist.

When identifying a roadrunner, look for the characteristic long tail, barred feathering, prominent head crest, and multicolored “racing stripe” just behind each eye.



Bob Gress photo



# Backlash On The Water

with Mike Miller

Being on the water is a form of therapy for me. At the very least, it's a path toward relaxation. When I'm in my boat on the water, I usually feel a shroud of contentment fall over me. There were times when I failed to recognize and enjoy it – worrying about where I should fish, if the wind will come up or if that guy revving up his jet ski will get too close. But these days, I usually take a second or two as I pull away from the boat ramp to take some deep breaths, relax and feel fortunate that I'm on the water.

I've always loved and been drawn to water – mostly because of fish and fishing. My earliest memories include creeks, rivers, and lakes. A friend recently mentioned his memory of the sound of a small outboard motor, and suddenly I could smell exhaust from Granddad's little 9.9 hp two-stroke motor. It was instant recall; I could smell the water of a deep, clear Colorado lake, feel the cold aluminum boat seat, and I could see Granddad with his right arm behind him, steering the tiller.

Of course, back in those days, water didn't relax me. It excited me. Water represented fish – I was fascinated by the fact that there could be fish lurking below the surface, and being the optimist, I knew they were there. It's only been recently that I've understood how being near or especially on the water affects me.

It may be most pronounced when I'm pulling away from the isolated gravel ramp and floating dock on Lake of the Woods in northwest Ontario. Dad and I have been making a summer fishing trip there for more than 20 years and we've grown to love the place. On our first trips to this area, I was apprehensive. It's a big lake – nearly a million acres – and with 14,000 islands, it could be easy to get lost. There is also the worry of rocks just under the surface that might damage my prop or lower unit. It took a few years to become familiar and relax.

Now, after completing the 1,000-mile drive, negotiating a truck and boat through Des Moines and Minneapolis traffic, then loading our gear for the two-mile ride to the lodge, I find total relaxation when my boat is floating and I'm in it. As I

slowly cruise away from shore, I take a deep breath and exhale slowly. The low rumble of my four-stroke outboard is barely audible, and I can hear water lapping against the boat's side and the faint call of a distant loon. It's mesmerizing. I have four days of solid fishing ahead of me, and there's no better feeling than that.

It's there for all of us. Kansas has 24 federal reservoirs, 40 state fishing lakes, 200 community lakes, and hundreds of thousands of farm ponds just



waiting for your visit (be sure to get permission to fish private ponds). It's not exactly free; you'll need a fishing license and maybe a state park entrance permit. But it doesn't require an expensive bass boat; a canoe, kayak or even a tube will do the trick. In fact, some of my most relaxing outings have been fishing from a tube. That's truly an "on-the-water" experience.

So if you're looking for a way to forget your troubles and truly relax, buy a boat or kayak and go fishing – and cast, then cast some more, then switch lures, then cast more, cast more... get the picture? Oh, and I've found that it sometimes helps if you start by leaning back in your seat, turn your face to the sky, close your eyes and breathe deeply, then exhale long and slow. Now, you're relaxed. 🐮



# Get outdoors!

[nature.org/kansas](http://nature.org/kansas)

No Wi-Fi  
required.

Chris Helzer photo

