

# KANSAS

*Wildlife & Parks Magazine*

FOR HUNTERS, ANGLERS AND OUTDOOR ENTHUSIASTS | \$2.75 | SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2017





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*Wildlife & Parks Magazine*

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**INSIDE FRONT COVER** Few things are more special in the outdoors than the bond between a hunter and a seasoned retriever. Benton Boyd 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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# KANSAS *View*

with Robin Jennison

## Access for Wildlife Management


More than 97 percent of Kansas is privately owned. Kansas is a private land state, and keeping land under private ownership is important to many of our citizens. Coming from a farming and ranching family in Lane County, I understand that sentiment and I support private property rights as much as anyone. However, I also see the need for access to private lands. Private lands access is not just important for the recreation opportunities it can provide but it is essential to our ability to manage the state's wildlife resources. During my tenure as Secretary of Kansas Wildlife, Parks and Tourism, I've heard from Kansans concerned about the future of our outdoor traditions because of lost access to private land and I've talked with landowners concerned about our deer population.

that access for hunting has become a commodity in high demand, and we've seen some dramatic changes. One of those changes has been the competition our resident hunters face for access to hunt from nonresidents.

Department staff have worked diligently to improve access and enhance opportunities. Our public lands offer activities such as hunting and fishing, of course, but they also have mountain biking, hiking, birdwatching, and boating. Public Lands staff have developed the Special Hunts program, which provides more than 500 hunts with limited access on land not normally open to hunting. Competition is low and success is usually high. And of course, Wildlife Division staff continue to enroll landowners into our Walk-in Hunting Access program, which more than doubles the amount of public hunting land at a fraction of the cost of purchasing. All of those efforts still leave a vast majority of Kansas land left out of the mix when it comes to adequately managing the wildlife resource.

When a landowner is experiencing crop damage from deer, the most effective tool to reduce deer numbers is hunting, especially when hunters harvest antlerless deer (does). What we see in many cases, when land is leased, is exclusive access and limited antlerless deer harvest. Large leases can, in effect, create deer sanctuaries. Even if neighboring landowners allow hunting, they can experience damage from deer coming from the leased ground.

Access to land is important for many reasons. Just knowing you have a place to enjoy whatever your outdoor passion is can improve your outlook on life. Kansas has an excellent reputation

for top-notch outdoor recreation, and I want to ensure that reputation is not tarnished by a perception of limited access. I believe we must continue to improve access and enhance opportunities, which is critical to not only preserving our outdoor heritage and maintaining our quality of life, but it will also allow us to manage our wildlife resources at economically, socially and politically acceptable levels. 



Most of us Baby Boomers remember the day when access for hunting was a polite request and handshake away. And 30 years ago, most of us had relatives who still lived on the family farm. Access to private land was easier then. However, in the last 50 years, the Kansas population has become increasingly urban. The number of family farms has decreased by more than 30 percent since 1970. We've lost ties to the rural land, and getting access to private land for recreation can seem like an insurmountable task. Add to that the fact

# Letters To The Editors



good friend to travel with me to Kansas to travel the state for a week such that I can visit these places. I captured his interest by designing a trip centered around geographically and time-wise, the annual migration of Whooping Cranes to Cheyenne Bottoms as he is a high level bird watcher, 600+ species.

But now for the life of me, I cannot find the issue which discussed all those interesting spots in Kansas.

Is there any possibility that you folks can send me another copy of that KS W&P magazine with the article about interesting geographical features of KS...maybe just the article attached to a return email?

Thanks so much for your considering this favor.

We already have airline tickets, so we're coming anyway. Sincerely,

Winston Dixon  
New Bern, NC

## Applause For Camping Issue

Nadia, Mike,

A big "Wow" on the camping issue. Nice theme, well-executed. It was nice to see all the Outdoor Writers of Kansas members who contributed. Loved the cover photo and the one inside.

Brent Frazee  
Parkville, MO

Mr. Winston,

Thanks for reading *Kansas Wildlife & Parks Magazine*. We're happy to keep you informed about the Kansas outdoors. I'm emailing you a PDF version of the article "Corning Kansas," by Jennifer Leeper, which appeared in the May/June 2017 issue. The article illustrates the dramatic differences in the Kansas landscape when you travel from east to west or from south to north. *Kansas Wildlife & Parks Magazine* has been promoting Kansas' unique and amazing landscapes for almost 75 years (we'll celebrate that anniversary next year), attempting to dispel the perception that Kansas is flat and featureless. As you know, Kansas has some amazing physiographic regions to experience if you get off the interstate highways and explore.

Kudos to you for introducing your friend to our great state. I'll go out on a limb and say that if he's a serious birder, Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira National Wildlife Refuge will be the highlights of your trip. Good luck with your travels.

Sincerely,

Mike Miller  
Executive Editor



## Loyal Long Distance Reader

Mr. Miller,

I had the joy of living in Kansas during my early twenties (McPherson and KU grad) but now live in my home state of North Carolina.

I have kept up with the great outdoors of Kansas by ardently reading your magazine over the years and by taking twenty or so quail/ pheasant hunts centered around Comanche county...Sublette and Garden City as well.

In a recent article, you folks featured many of the interesting geographical features of Kansas, some of which I have seen and many which I have not. I have encouraged a

Have something to share?

Write the editors at:  
mike.miller@ks.gov  
nadia.reimer@ks.gov

# BIRD BRAIN

with Mike Rader

## Good Birding To All This Fall

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I love fall! With the dog days of summer behind us, fall brings relief in the form of shorter days, cooler temperatures and an influx of birds to look for. While fall migration starts in late July and August for many species, September and October rank right up there as the best months to go birding in Kansas.

Shorebirds are abundant in early fall, so trips to the state's large marshes can be rewarding. Be sure to pack a field guide because plumages of these species can be confusing. Adult birds with worn-plumage lead the way south and fresh-plumaged juveniles move through later in the season. I still marvel at how young shorebirds hatched in the high Arctic are hard-wired to find their way to wintering grounds in Central and South America with little to no help from their parents.

Many songbirds begin their migration in late August, with peaks for several species in the middle to latter part of September. In October, we have lingering species of migrant songbirds and the first push of migrating sparrows that end up staying in Kansas for the winter, providing a great mix of species to identify. Waterfowl migration begins in August and September with blue-winged teal, with other species showing up later in the fall and early winter.

Kansas birders can capitalize on this migration spectacle at the fall meeting of the Kansas Ornithological

Society, slated for October 6-8 in Junction City this year. This location is just far enough east in the state to feature some of the warblers and other sought-after migrants, and the close proximity of Milford Lake and high-quality marsh habitat at the northern part of the area will provide excellent opportunities to see a wide variety of birds. The gathering consists of a Friday evening social, paper session during the day on Saturday, banquet and awards on Saturday night, and half-day field trips to local birding hotspots culminating the experience on Sunday. More information on this meeting can be found at: [www.ksbirds.org](http://www.ksbirds.org) at the link labeled "2017 Fall KOS Meeting." Organized activities will be held at the county fairgrounds, with ample motels in Junction City for lodging.

Sometime in September, I will do some scouting of my own in the far southwest corner of the state to see what is happening there. It can be an exciting place to look for species many Kansas birders consider unusual or special. It certainly brings back fond memories of past excursions with friends and birding acquaintances, clamoring around Point of Rocks on the Cimarron National Grasslands or making laps around the Elkhart sewer ponds. There are certainly worse ways to spend time, that's for sure.

Grab a guide and get out there - the migration is on.



Shutterstock/Mysuals photo



## 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



## Cover Crops Have Promise *with Wes Sowards*

Wildlife biologists in Kansas face a unique challenge. They're tasked with conserving and enhancing native species and habitats, but with one very important caveat: the wildlife and habitats they are responsible for managing reside on privately-owned land. To add to the challenge, a majority of private landowners rely on income from their land in the form of agriculture and/or livestock. So how do we achieve both objectives? Partnerships. Our Private Lands staff work very closely with landowners to find a common goal that meets both the needs of the farmer or rancher and the needs of the local wildlife. It's not always easy, but it can be done.

A great deal of "wildlife friendly" habitat management practices have originated from farm and ranch lands. Prescribed fire has been used by ranchers for centuries to help sustain healthy rangeland their livelihood depends on. The summer-fallow wheat practice in western Kansas was developed to hold and save moisture within the soil for the next crop to sustain productive yields. This practice, as it was originally developed, created a plethora of annual forbs or wildflowers that provide food for pheasant chicks, thanks to the insects attracted to the plants. While summer-fallowing wheat is not common today, an important new land management practice has begun to spread throughout the Midwest: the use of cover crops in row-crop agricultural production.

Farmers are experimenting planting cocktails of grasses, broadleaf plants and legumes in between cash crops in the spring, summer and fall. And there are a lot of reasons they're doing it, aside from the biological and ecological impacts; including providing supplemental income through harvest of the crop itself, decreased inputs (pesticides and fertilizers), and the potential



grazing component. However, the majority of farmers are planting cover crops to heal their soil biology.

Cover crops have demonstrated a variety of benefits to the biology of the soil, as well as increased water infiltration, reduction of the hard-pan layer produced by years of tillage, and balancing insect ecology to reduce the need for pesticides. Wildlife biologists have seen the benefits to upland game birds, as well. The agriculturally-beneficial insects these practices create provide a food source for upland game birds that, otherwise, would have been absent at critical times for pheasant and quail.

Through the Habitat First program, our biologists have been working with landowners, seed companies, and researchers throughout the state to help

develop ideal cover crop mixes and applications that meet the needs of both the farmer and Kansas' wildlife.

I think a lot of our wildlife biologists are concerned they are pushing beneficial habitat management practices on the farmer and rancher too much, but I also think they sometimes forget that, fortunately, many of the beneficial practices we prescribe were brought to us by farmers and ranchers.

As cover crops continue to grow as a popular agricultural practice, we will continue to study the benefits to the farmer and rancher, as well as the wildlife and habitats. After all, that is the only sustainable model for improving habitat conditions for Kansas' wildlife.



## How to Become a Hunter Ed Instructor

One of the most important preparations a hunter can make before heading afield is the completion of a hunter education class. Kansas statute requires that “Anyone born on or after July 1, 1957, must complete an approved hunter education course before hunting in Kansas.” This requirement has helped Kansas maintain a phenomenal safety record over the last 40-plus years, as hunting continues to be one of the safest outdoor recreational activities .

But Kansas Hunter Education classes don’t just happen. They are the result of dedicated volunteer instructors who set aside their own personal time to provide this training. They travel to course locations, set up their own classrooms and field courses, and many times provide their own teaching aids. While Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) Hunter Education staff do our best to show our appreciation for volunteer instructors and the time and effort they give to this program, we know we can’t do enough to recognize all their extraordinary efforts. Of course, they’re not doing it for the recognition, they do it to ensure students are safe, ethical, knowledgeable and responsible hunters.

Every fall, I get a call from a parent who is having a tough time finding a

hunter education course for their child convenient to their location. While hundreds of courses are offered each fall, there are areas with few instructors. After speaking for a short time about options, I usually pose the question, “Have you ever thought of becoming a volunteer hunter education instructor?” The response is typically, “Yes, but I don’t know how.”



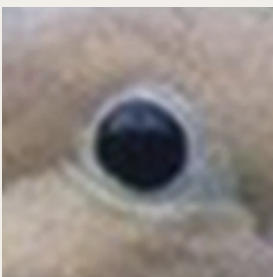
Fortunately, the process has never been easier. A quick visit to the Hunter Education page at ksoutdoors.com (click on Services, then Education, then Hunter) gets everything started. Simply scroll to the bottom of the page and click on the link that reads “How To Become An Instructor.” This will take you to a page that explains in detail what is expected of an instructor and provides a PDF application form. Download the form, fill it out, sign it and return it to us at: KDWPT, ATTN: Hunter Ed, 512 SE 25th Ave., Pratt, KS 67124.

Once we have received your application, you will be contacted, directing you where to complete the online training that covers our policies and procedures. Once you’ve completed the online training, we conduct two background checks, one conducted through KDWPT to check for wildlife violations, and the other conducted through the Kansas Bureau of Investigations. Upon passing the background checks, and after completing the training, you can then be certified as an assistant instructor and begin teaching hunter education with a mentoring instructor. Simple as that.

So, have you considered joining us as a volunteer hunter education instructor?

## 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 am not a pigeon, but we look alike.
2. I come in shades of grey, with black and white.
3. I love flying over sunflower fields.

>>> Answer on Page 13



# Fish Squeezer

with Tommie Berger

## Plastic Fish Habitat

After several years away, I'm back working part time for KDWPT. I guess you could say I wanted "one more cast."

I went out the other day to inspect signs and pick up trash at our F.I.S.H. properties in Lincoln County and they look great full of water. Most ponds were nearly dry a year ago during the drought but now they are full. Many have been stocked with channel catfish, while some still need some bluegill and bass. We've talked about stocking a few with bass this fall or next spring, so keep an eye out. In a couple of years, there will be some really good fishing in those F.I.S.H. ponds.

To my surprise, there wasn't much evidence of fishing activity at a majority of properties I checked, except for the river property just south of Lincoln. I suppose with all the lakes, reservoirs, and ponds full, folks have a variety of places to choose from now. Regardless of traffic, we'll keep busy.

We have been working on artificial fish habitat this summer, putting together Georgia cubes (PVC pipes and corrugated plastic tubes). Sinking them for bass and crappie has been inter-

esting. Some biologists are really excited about this type of habitat, while others still prefer sinking cedar trees with concrete weights or blocks. We put some of the cubes in Stone Lake at Great Bend where the water is extremely clear and they really look good down there. I would like to do a little snorkeling around them to see what fish are using them.

One big advantage of these cubes is that it is almost impossible to get snagged up on them since they are plastic. Scott Waters, district fisheries biologist at Glen Elder, is concentrating the cubes in one cove there to evaluate how much use they get and by what species. I can't wait to see what he finds.

Speaking of finds, after working with the Georgia cubes, I went online and Googled "plastic fish habitat." Holy cow, people are making fish habitat out of everything from plastic barrels or 5-gallon buckets and old plastic tubing, to



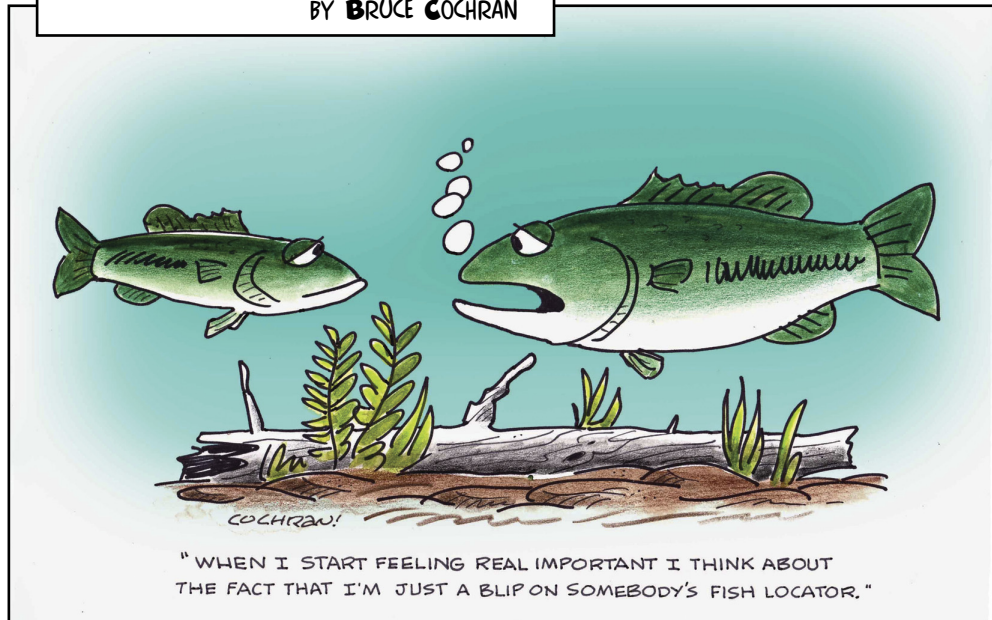
Steve Hausler photo

old plastic lawn furniture (really, just about anything plastic laying around in the garage or behind the shed). It appears the sky really is the limit, because some folks are letting their engineering skills run wild.

If you get out and fish one of these habitats, let us know how it goes. And if you see one in Lincoln County, well, you just might have an idea now of who helped place it.

Yep, I'm still "retired," but not yet tired. Until that time comes, you can find me on the water.

### WAY outside BY BRUCE COCHRAN



"WHEN I START FEELING REAL IMPORTANT I THINK ABOUT THE FACT THAT I'M JUST A BLIP ON SOMEBODY'S FISH LOCATOR."

with Marc Murrell

## The Quirks of Coots



The fall migration: It's a cherished time of year for waterfowl hunters and birdwatchers, alike.

Although most wouldn't consider me your average "bird watcher," I am a birdwatcher, especially when I'm waterfowl hunting. I love the sights, sounds and even the smell of a wetland in the fall and the bird life that abounds is an amazing spectacle.

While I mostly enjoy spotting ducks, other species are entertaining to watch, as well. One of the most intriguing birds to watch is the American coot. Their calls and antics are border-line goofy. They seem to suffer from indecisiveness as they dart this way and that, feeding as they go, or harassing their flock mates - sometimes both, at the same time.

Coots are not ducks, but rather more closely related to sandhill cranes and rails. They don't have webbed feet like ducks, either. Each toe has lobes that deploy as paddles when swimming and fold back when moving forward.

On average, coots will grow to about 15-16 inches in length, have a wingspan of about 2 feet and weigh a couple pounds.

There is one trait that coots share with ducks though: they're tied to water throughout their life. Coots nest on mats of vegetation, usually floating, and have one or two broods per year. There is about 8-12 eggs in each clutch. After approximately 23-25 days, the eggs will hatch and the young leave the nest in just a matter of hours.

Coots spend most of their time foraging for food on intermittent or permanent wetlands, reservoirs and occasionally rivers. They eat mainly aquatic plants like algae, duckweed, eelgrass, wild rice, sedges and others, but will also snatch up the occasional insect, crustacean, snail and even tadpole, given the opportunity.

On wetland complexes like Cheyenne Bottoms, coots raft together, sometimes in groups well into the hundreds. It takes a lot of disturbance to get them airborne, and oftentimes they'll just swim lazily out of the way if a boat passes slowly. But if you do get the chance to see them in flight, grab some popcorn, because it's a show. A coot's take-off can be described with two words: laborious and clumsy. Their takeoff requires a running start and

considerable wing-flapping. It's a lot of work considering once airborne, they usually splash back down at the earliest opportunity.

It's this last characteristic that absolutely baffles me. I can honestly say in my decades of hunting ducks and thousands of hours spent outdoors, I've never seen a flock of migrating coots high overhead like I do other species. I've wondered aloud if they have to take a bus to migrate.

Coots are thought of as inedible, but I've discovered quite the opposite. I shot nine one morning (the limit is 15 during regular duck seasons) over my black Lab, Gator, on a hunt his first season. I don't shoot anything I wouldn't eat so, I prepared a batch of bacon-wrapped coot with a jalapeno slice, kabobbed on the grill, much like I cook teal and doves. The result blew me away. Despite what I've been told, I found coot meat tender and flavorful, with a similar taste to both of the aforementioned species.

Coots are a common early migrant on Kansas wetlands, and early season hunts wouldn't be near as entertaining without them. Now you know they're tasty. Maybe, one of these seasons I'll figure out just how they get from one place to another.



Aside from its beak, the coot's lobed toes also set it apart from other waterfowl. The lobes serve as swimming paddles and allow a coot to wade on floating vegetation.

# Life Unpaved

with Nadia Reimer

## No Pressure, But Be Perfect

---



As hunters, we put a lot of pressure on ourselves to be perfect. Pressure to make the perfect shot at the perfect time on the perfect animal; pressure to have perfect dogs that mind us perfectly and make perfect retrieves. Heck - we even put pressure on ourselves to choose the perfect tree next to the perfect trail so we can have the perfect treestand setup.

We do this knowing “perfect” is a moving target, yet we put pressure on ourselves to strive for it any way. Why?

I think we put this kind of pressure on ourselves for two reasons: first, we know hunting isn’t a team sport, and only we can hold ourselves accountable. Nobody can do it for us. Secondly, we’re passionate. We care, about more things, and more deeply, than the non-hunting world can understand.

We wouldn’t spend countless paychecks year after year on equipment and licenses and permits if we didn’t care deeply about the future of our natural resources. It’s a fact hunters pay for conservation.

We wouldn’t spend months on end loading up dogs, throwing bumpers and dummies, yelling “back” and “over” and “heel” and blowing a whistle until our lip is raw if we didn’t care about our dogs’ success afield as much as our own; it’s their hunt, too.

We wouldn’t spend day after day, allen-wrenches-in-hand, adjusting our sights, researching “how to” videos on YouTube, practicing hitting targets, sometimes missing, just to do it all over again, if we didn’t care about accuracy, ethics, and the animal on the either side of that shot.

But the quest for perfection - albeit an admirable endeavor - should never lead to disappointment. If you’re disappointed when the end result isn’t perfect and you’re not having fun, you’re doing it wrong. Strive for perfect, but don’t expect it.

Instead of putting pressure on ourselves to achieve perfection, why not put pressure on ourselves to realize joy?

Instead of asking ourselves “is this the biggest deer out here?” what if we asked, “could this deer bring me joy?”

Instead of faulting our dogs for whining incessantly all morning in the duck blind just to miss that wigeon drop in only 10 yards away, what if we just enjoyed the fact that our four-legged partner is there and excited to be hunting with us. We know they all go too soon.

I can be the queen of perfectionism. I want it exact and clean and right the first time, and anything less is unacceptable. But the older I get, the more I find that perfect doesn’t equal joy. And isn’t that what we’re all really after - joy?

I hunt because I enjoy it. I have a backyard full of dogs because I enjoy them. I spend money on hunting and fishing and hiking gear because I think it will help me and bring me: you got it, joy. Don’t get so caught up in making everything “perfect” that you forget to enjoy yourself.

This hunting season, strive to find joy, and don’t worry about everything being perfect. The expectation of perfection leads to disappointment, but joy - that’s a target you can hit every time, if you just adjust your sights.

# Park View

with Kathy Pritchett

## Camp Away The Chaos

Summer is over, kids are back in school, and life is chaotic again, except for the occasional weekend. So, no more going to the state park, right? Wrong! When life gets hectic, that's a GREAT reason to pack up the family and get away.

Our parks and campgrounds are open year-round, with tons of events scheduled for the fall. Mountain bike races, marathons and trail rides, suspended during the brutally hot days of July and August, resume with enthusiasm in the fall! Choose one event or make the rounds to attend several - you can never have too much fun at our parks. Check out our events page at ksoutdoors.com to find a list of events.

Some you may not want to miss include the annual Fall River Rendezvous historical reenactment, scheduled for September 30 at Fall River State Park. Enjoy a glimpse into early

1800s America. You'll experience Native American and mountain men encampments, historical traders, a black powder shoot, tomahawk throw, skillet throw for the ladies, and a kids' gold rush. El Dorado State Park will be offering free park entrance during their OK Kids Day on October 7. And lest we forget about camping for the sake of camping.

Camping can be more pleasant in the fall, with more moderate temperatures and fewer bugs. It's also a great time of the year to spot wildlife. Fall bird migration just might afford you a look at a rare bird. Once it gets really cool, though, you'll have to look hard to find snakes.

If you hunt, you can camp or rent a cabin near your hunting area. It will be cool enough to spend time outside your camper and get to know your campground neighbors over s'mores. You might just make new forever friends or pick up some great recipes. In fact,

some of our fall events involve cooking competitions. I can smell them now.

Fall color in our state parks should be especially brilliant this year with the abundant rain most areas have enjoyed this year. The vistas are varied in the 11 physiographic regions of the state, so even if you don't camp, take a drive to the various parks to experience the differences. The Flint Hills offer vastly different scenery than the Osage Cuestas. The Ozark Plateau is a world apart from the High Plains. Thankfully we have parks in all of these areas. Just remember to grab a motor vehicle permit required to enter all Kansas state parks, even if you aren't camping.

Summer may be over, but finding time to enjoy Kansas' state parks doesn't have to be. After all, our best season has just begun.



What's old is new again at the future site of Big Bull Creek Park. As fields were prepped for a winter planting of 500-700 acres of restored prairie grasses this past summer, the largest prairie restoration in the metro area officially began.

Jill Geller, executive director for the Johnson County Park and Recreation District (JCPRD), says Big Bull Creek Park is part of the county's ongoing commitment to prairie restoration.

"Thanks to the dedicated efforts of Matt Garrett, JCPRD's field biologist, we have reintroduced native prairie within existing parks and plan to do so at future park sites, as well."

Garrett said the restoration is not only the largest in the region, but will substantively benefit the water quality of state property at Hillsdale Lake, adjacent to the future 2,000-acre site.

"We're using seven grasses, eight legumes, and 26 species of wildflowers, supplemented with our award-winning volunteer seed collection program," Garrett explained.

## Building a 21st-Century Prairie

by Jennifer Leeper

Volunteers from KC Wildlands, in cooperation with JCPRD staff, collected remnant local ecotype seed to further enrich restoration grasses, wildflower, and legume species with more than 100 additional native plant species, Garrett added.

Led by the JCPRD, Garrett says funding sources for the project include grants through the Partners For Fish and Wildlife Program, Kansas Grazing Lands Coalition, and Hillsdale Lake Watershed Restoration and Protection Program.

Additional restoration partners include the Miami County Conservation District and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Funding from the Kansas City Native Plant Initiative through Monarch Butterfly Conservation is a possibility as well. The Big Bull Creek Park location is in the heart of the monarch migration path and renewed prairie could better support a migrating butterfly population in this area.

Original prairie land is scarce in Johnson County these days, with only .006 percent remaining. According to Garrett, the county was 84 percent prairie in 1850.

Besides enjoyment of renewed native prairie, Big Bull Creek Park will offer camping, hiking, and a variety of other public-use opportunities, as well. The park will extend to the Johnson County line to the south and U.S. Highway 56 at its north boundary.

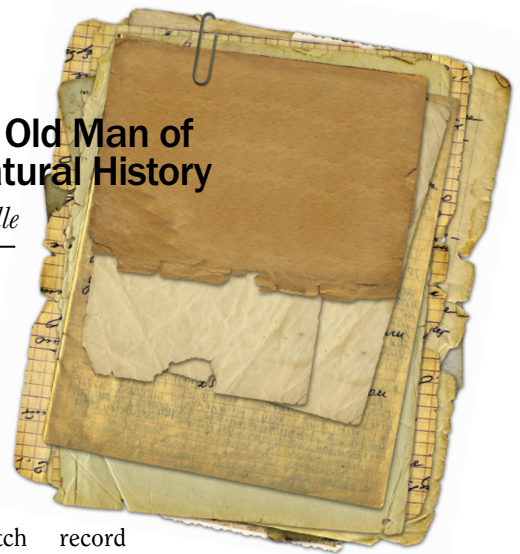
For more information, visit [www.jcprd.com](http://www.jcprd.com).



## Conservation Conversations

### The Grand Old Man of Kansas Natural History

with Daren Riedle



It was May, 1993 when I wrapped up my spring semester at Emporia State University (ESU). I was back home at my parents house in Independence and looking forward to sleeping in for a few days before starting my summer job as a naturalist at Elk City State Park, but my plans were foiled. I was rudely awakened at 5:50 a.m. by a phone call from Paul Shipman, a graduate student at ESU. Shipman brusquely informed me I needed to be back in Emporia by 8 a.m. because we were heading to Lawrence to spend the day afield with Henry Fitch. Little did I know, I was about to be walked into the ground by an 83 year old man, and that this person would have a large influence on my research interests and future career.

Fitch was hired by the University of Kansas (KU) in 1948 to teach ecology and act as superintendent of the newly established KU Natural History Reservation. He thrived in that role, spending more than 50 years studying its inhabitants, producing publications on topics ranging from spiders to small mammals, coyotes and especially, lizards and snakes.

For more than half a century, Fitch

trapped, marked and released snakes, noting population trends as the reservation underwent the process of ecological succession. Within the reservation, croplands, pastures, and prairies were slowly being invaded by trees. Accompanying this plant community succession was a transition of the native fauna. In 1999, Fitch published a book on his 50 consecutive years of field studies on 18 species of snakes – the longest running single-site study for snakes on record. And Fitch kept collecting data for several more years following the publication of his magnum opus. The majority of the work was completed long before computers became in vogue, and much of Fitch’s data is found only in his field journals as they were never entered into a database. Last year, a colleague of Fitch’s from KU, George Pisani, submitted a proposal to the Chickadee Checkoff program for funding to enter all of Fitch’s snake data into a spreadsheet so that it would be available to future researchers. Pisani’s proposal was approved as Fitch’s data undoubtedly provides an invaluable

record on the effects of habitat and climate change on snakes.

Fitch inspired my interest in how the environment influences population growth rates, and working with Pisani as we update the analyses on some of Fitch’s data has truly been an honor. I am also proud that the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism’s Chickadee Checkoff program was integral in making this data available.

I will never forget my first day with Fitch, nor the last time I got to see him. We were sitting at his daughter’s house in Stillwater, Okla. drinking Pigs-Eye Beer and chatting about copperheads. Fitch would pass a year later just shy of his 100th birthday. He truly was the grand old man of Kansas Natural History.



### Thomasson Recognized for Quail Efforts

Public Lands manager Scott Thomasson has been named the National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative’s (NBCI) 2017 Fire Bird Conservation Award winner. This award recognizes individuals, groups or entities that have made significant contributions to bobwhite quail restoration at the state level.

A native Kansan,

Thomasson has worked for the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWP) since 2006. He served as a wildlife biologist technician for two years before moving into his current role as Public Lands manager at Smoky Hills Wildlife Area.

Given the fact that Thomasson’s area of responsibility is largely comprised of native prairie, he has been managing the area primarily for upland birds for the past nine years,

using patch-burn grazing, a new rotational system, and monitoring. But his contributions don’t end there.

Thomasson – who was recently tasked with managing Wilson Wildlife Area in addition to Smoky Hills, bringing his total area of responsibility to 12,800 acres – has also taken on extra duties to benefit his peers. Thomasson helped facilitate a national NBCI fall covey survey training program for KDWP staff, as well as staff from other wildlife agencies. Since this initial training, Thomasson has continued to host annual training for staff and agency partners, further motivating others to implement similar monitoring efforts on their lands.

“Scott’s efforts for this project would be commendable on their own, but given his workload as the sole manager for such a large area shows Scott’s commitment to furthering our scientific knowledge and to making sound management decisions to benefit bobwhites,” said Jeff Prendergast, KDWP small game specialist and state quail coordinator for NBCI. “It is the dedicated service of passionate quail managers like Scott that keeps the fire burning for bobwhites.”



## Catfish Chicharrones

As kids, my sister and I often fought over cooked, crispy catfish tails, likening them to potato chips. So when I came across a blog that promoted using catfish skins to make Chicharrones (typically referring to fried pork rinds), I was interested. If you like fish and you like pork rinds, this is a recipe you should try.

The next time you hook some catfish, keep the skins after cleaning. You can use scaled fish as well, but descale them before you fillet them out to make the job a little easier.

Using a butter knife or spoon, remove as much fat and meat from the skin as possible. Cut the skins into strips and then soak in a salt water solution overnight in the refrigerator.

After soaking, boil the skins in salt water for 3-5 minutes. Remove the skins and pat dry. Once cooled, you can remove any



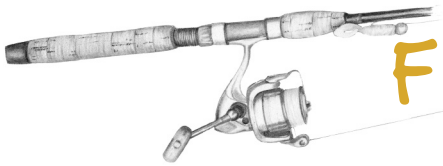
Veronica Teasley photo

remaining fat or meat.

Next, place the skins on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper and put them in an oven at the lowest temperature to dry. Keep the oven door cracked to allow moisture to escape, and turn the pieces at least once while drying. A dehydrator works well, too. Store any skins you don't plan to fry right away in your freezer.

Preheat a pot or fryer of cooking oil to 350 degrees and drop the skins in carefully. They should puff up a little. Cook for around 1 minute or until the bubbling dies down. Using tongs or a slotted metal spoon, pull the skins out and place them over paper towels to drain excess oil. Season immediately with sea salt and your favorite traditional seafood spices. The skins should stay crisp for about a day.

This is a fun and different way to eat Kansas' favorite fish, and when someone asks if you have ever eaten fish skins, you can now say "Yep, and they're pretty good, too!"



## FISHIN'

### New Trick for an Old Dog

with Mike Miller

I talk big about being a versatile angler who's willing to try new lures and learn new techniques but in reality, I hold tightly to my favorite lures and methods. I'm not sure if it's natural stubbornness or just being stuck in a rut. And besides, if something works, why change? Right?

Well, I found a new lure and technique that works better at times than my old favorites. I was reluctant at first because it doesn't look better, but I became interested when I read Brent Frazee's article about Kansan Ned Kehde in the March/April 2017 issue. Kehde has become well-known for his unique finesse angling methods and now has a lure named for him. Still, I was skeptical of the "Ned Rig."

Then at this spring's Outdoor Writers of Kansas conference, Frazee gave Marc Murrell and me some Z-man TRDs and mushroom-head jigs, commonly used to make Ned Rigs. Murrell and I were planning on fishing Coffey County Lake near

Burlington the next day, and Frazee assured us the Ned Rig would work there. He was right.

To ensure our test was "scientific," I started out casting the rocks along the lake's wing dike with my standby tube. Murrell was diligently fishing a Ned Rig - slowly, as Frazee instructed. In the first 20 minutes, he had four or five fish to my one, and I abruptly stopped the experiment and switched to the Ned Rig. We proceeded to catch dozens of wipers, white bass and smallmouth bass in a morning of fishing. I was sold.

The real test came, though, in June when Dad, Aunt Barb and I traveled to Lake of the Woods in Ontario. Would the Ned Rig work on big smallies? You bet it did. I didn't think I would ever give up my favorite smoke-colored tube, but I did. We enjoyed some of the best fishing we've ever had, catching many 16- to 18-inch smallmouths. Thanks Ned (and Brent). You CAN teach an old dog new tricks.



..mouning AM I? answer: "WHAT AM I?"



## The Way I See It

with Todd Workman

As the self-proclaimed leader of our domicile when I was a young boy, the Commandant (my mother) had tasked me with a list of special duties above and beyond my regular chores. She called them “honey-dos,” but I called them indentured servitude and I decided my only option was, of course, to run away.

It was early evening and Dad was working the night shift. I announced to Mom my intentions and told her she couldn’t stop me.

Unlike my previous attempts to run away, this time there was no pre-packed cowboy lunch box waiting for me, or even a “goodbye.” This time I was on my own like the big-boy I thought I was.

I snuck through the house to find where my mother was hiding and found her watching “I Love Lucy.”

“I’m leaving now!” I proclaimed.

“See you,” she waved, without even looking.

I stomped away, and wrapped some soda pop, matches, an enormous amount of Hostess pastries and a flashlight in an old towel. I tied my supplies to a mop handle and headed out the door, making sure she heard me slam it shut.

I walked slowly at first, waiting for Mom to call out my name, but the only person to watch me leave was my little brother.

“Are you coming back?” he asked.

“Nope,” I said.

“Good. I’m taking your army men and hot wheels and telling Mom you took all the Ho Hos and Twinkies,” he snickered.

“Tattle-tale!” I screamed. Just because I was running away forever didn’t mean I wasn’t coming back.

When I reached a nearby corn field, I told myself there was no going back and the grove of trees ahead would be my new home. I used a log for a chair and cleared a spot for a fire. I had plans to build an intimidating fortification, but I needed to get a fire going and some soda pops and Ho Hos down the hatch first. For once, everything was going as planned.

An hour later – after drinking all four of my sodas, and eating six Twinkies and as many Ho Hos – I was beginning to get a bellyache.

As I pondered my next move, I heard the piercing whistle my dad used when he wanted us boys. Because he should have been at work, I came to the ominous conclusion this might have something to do with me running away. Evidently, I hadn’t run away far enough.

I peered out at a small group of men approaching my tree grove.

“Who goes there?” I shouted at my dad and the

## Running Wild

neighbor men, sounding as manly as possible.

“We’ll see what goes where!” my dad barked back. I didn’t understand what he meant, but fully understood his tone. The Punisher was coming for me.

I took off running through the corn stocks towards home, but he caught me about fifty rows out. I got a whopping right then and there. Then I got another one for leaving a campfire unattended.

When we got home, I was about to get another spanking for eating all the snack cakes, but got sick to my stomach before it could happen. Dad observed me getting sick and started dry heaving himself, so my punishment would have to be deferred until he recuperated.

I thought back on that day as I stacked canned goods in our pantry shelf.

“Thinking of running away?” my wife chided.

“Nope, just reorganizing the pantry,” I said.

“I didn’t know we had Ho Hos,” she said excitedly, taking one. “Too bad you can’t eat them anymore since you have to watch your sugar. More for me.”

To which I replied, “They give me a bellyache anyway.”



Shutterstock/Scconomics Illustration



## Wild Orchids *by Iralee Barnard*

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When the thistle tops are fluffy and white and filled with seeds, after the goldenrods have lost their glow, and even the sunflowers and asters have faded, one little flower begins its burst of bloom. Some of the last wild blooms of the year occur in October when the prairie orchid, *Spiranthes cernua*, opens its fragrant white petals.

I'm guessing few Kansas nature enthusiasts know about this little, wild orchid that goes by the common name "nodding ladies' tresses." This is because it can be elusive.

Each ladies' tresses plant usually has two or three smooth and shiny leaves that come up in the spring and soon disappear. Because its leaves are no more than three inches tall, they must gather sun while the grasses are still very short. Later in the fall, when blooming, the plant has no leaves - only a single flower stem 8-12 inches tall, at most.

These plants are unpredictable, too. In some years, they do not flower at all, making the plant near invisible above ground. Other years, they show up in spectacular numbers, seemingly everywhere. It is possible that rainfall in June may have an influence on flowering, so this year the flowers of nodding ladies' tresses could be plentiful.

This wild orchid gets its common name from its twisted flower stalk which was thought to resemble a lady's braided hair. The scientific name, *Spiranthes*, comes from the Greek, *speira* for coil or spiral and *anthos* for flower. It is interesting that the tiny orchid seeds have no endosperm, the food reserve of most seeds. For this reason, the orchid seed cannot germinate without the association of a fungus from which the embryo feeds until it develops roots and green leaves and can live independently.

Although the orchid family is the second largest plant family with 22,000 species worldwide, in Kansas we have only a few, and most, except the genus *Spiranthes*, are found in the extreme eastern part of the state.

Kansas has six species of *Spiranthes*. Nodding ladies' tresses and another, slender ladies' tresses, are our most widespread. This little plant is a true prairie orchid that appears on open grasslands in the eastern two-thirds of Kansas. Reported to flower from August through October, the earliest I have seen them is mid-September, but they are usually showiest in early October.

Nodding ladies' tresses are easiest to spot in prairie hay meadows. When you are out this fall, look for the dainty, white flowers, and get down on your hands and knees to breathe their sweet perfume.



## Smooch: Queen of Retrievers

by Dan Witt

I met Smooch when she was just about 49 days old, just as you are supposed to. She's 13 years young now. My friend, Keith Ritter, got her sister and named her "Bliss." We survived the terrible teens when they ate, chewed or destroyed almost everything in the yard and house. It was amazing to see them go from a dead run to flop down and be sound asleep in two minutes. We did leash, obedience and wing training as best we could, but recognized that our little monsters who slept in the house needed more than we were smart enough to provide, so we elected to send them to school.

The girls loved school. They spent most of their time training for upland game, and honing their obedience skills and whistle stops. Their trainer - who spent most of his time with setters, pointers, and upland dogs - must have been intrigued with the girls because he called one day and wanted to enter them in some puppy field trials. Keith and I decided we wanted to watch. We drove to the trainer's facility and when we arrived, noticed there were two (out of about 20) kennels that had pieces of tin running up the sides. Apparently, Smooch and Bliss learned to climb up and out of their kennels so they could race around the complex, barking their heads off, encouraging the other dogs on the property to join in. This obviously wasn't amusing to anyone except them.

We spent the next several days watching and participating in their training. As a result of this experience, I advise anyone sending a dog for training to go see them, and visit as much as possible. I believe owners need more training than the dogs. It is so easy to ruin good training if you don't learn proper handling; you can't let those pretty eyes and little whine make you relax your procedures, let them break, or

ignore a command. If you are willing to spend the money for training, don't waste it by not learning what your dog has learned. A secure, well-trained dog that knows what you expect from it will be an absolute joy for the short time you get to share with it.

Smooch has been different from my other five Labradors. She bonded with me immediately, and adored my big dog, King Eider, who was her father. They hunted together and separately with me for years until Eider went down. Smooch grieved for Eider, much like I did. We went for walks and she would check the road looking for him. I think we both were, actually.

Several years ago, Duane came from Saskatchewan and brought Smooch's brother, Blitz. It was a new awakening! She immediately moved downstairs with Duane and Blitz and loved her brother just like she loved Eider. She must be a pack dog at heart. When Duane and Blitz went home, Smooch grieved again. This scenario played out for two more years, every time Duane and Blitz left. The third year, I told Duane to take Smooch with him and he did.

Smooch has since retrieved geese in both countries. Duane hunts a LOT up there, and the dogs get to join him in a big way.

Blitz passed just a few months ago, and I'm sure Smooch is feeling the toll. She is graying, and getting a bit unsteady on her feet, but she is patient with Duke, the new puppy that has since invaded her life.

I have said "goodbye" to Smooch several times over the past few years, just in case, but always hoping she would come back for a visit with Duane in the spring and fall.

Now, saying goodbye puts a lump in my throat, because I know one of these "goodbyes" will be the last time I get to hold her face and see our history in her eyes. They just don't live long enough.



Dan Witt photo

## Give Snakes a Chance

with Annie Campbell-Fischer

As much as I enjoy encountering wildlife, snakes have always been on my list of creatures to avoid. For most of my life, I've been afraid of them and considered them gross, creepy and dangerous. I'll admit that growing up I didn't have many encounters with snakes, so most of my fear was based on my imagination gone wild. This was compounded by my unwillingness to try and understand them, too. I already had my mind made about them from an early age and I didn't see any reason to change that.

I've never considered snakes a necessary part of my life, or even nature for that matter, until this past year. I don't know if Mother Nature is trying to tell me something, but I've had more encounters with snakes this past spring and summer than I've ever had. I live in the country and while snakes can be found just about everywhere in Kansas, they seem to be slithering into my yard and near my home in the masses. I met with Daren Riedle, wildlife diversity coordinator for the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (and die-hard snake fan) and asked, "What's going on with all of these snakes at my house?"

Riedle explained that our wet spring brought more plants, seeds and insects – great food sources for rodents. Well, what do I have in my yard? Field mice, a variety of insects and fat country toads. Riedle explained this is perfect dining for snakes. After some more discussion, we determined I also have suitable habitat for snakes, with rocks



here and there and a few water sources. Simply put, I've been inadvertently encouraging my fear to live in my yard! Running a B&B for snakes was NEVER on my bucket list, but here's something I've noticed: Not one of the snakes I've encountered has become the nightmare I've imagined. I have had some "Holy snake!" moments when I've been startled by a snake, but I haven't been bitten, chased or even struck at. In fact, I am probably more likely to hurt myself trying to get away from these generally harmless reptiles than I am to be harmed BY one. It was this realization that made me decide to give snakes a chance.

When I traded my fear in for curiosity, I learned that

there are approximately 41 species of snakes in our state. And while a select few can strike a hazardous blow, most snakes in Kansas are non-venomous. I've been using the handy *A Pocket Guide to Kansas Snakes* to identify snakes that I encounter now, and I've already identified three species (none of which were venomous).

In addition to my identification efforts, I've also started taking pictures of the snakes I see. Little did I know, these pictures can be useful for more than just "show and tell." Riedle told me about HerpMapper – a non-profit organization that gathers and shares information about reptiles and amphibians worldwide. He explained that my snake observations can be part

of a data-collection process that biologists use to examine the biodiversity of snakes across the entire world. Crazy, right?! At [herpmapper.org](http://herpmapper.org), anyone interested in documenting reptiles and amphibian sightings can do so just by creating an account. I know I will.

Fear of the unknown can blind us sometimes, but I'd like to think my fear of snakes has since transformed into appreciation-from-a-distance. I've since learned their eating habits make for great pest control, and that the venom from some snakes is even being studied for medicinal use. So in the end, what might scare me might also save my life someday. For that, I'll be thankful and welcome snakes to my yard anytime.

# Casting Art



The 12-foot long bundle of 2-inch bamboo culms with handwritten Chinese symbols on one end puzzled the man in the shipping department at the hospital. He inspected the bill of lading and discovered Dr. H.R. Kuhns, an Internal Medicine specialist at the hospital, ordered the shipment. He wondered what exactly Dr. Kuhns had in mind for these pieces of bamboo.

"When I ordered the bamboo, they required a commercial shipping address and the hospital was the only one I knew," Kuhns says. "But I forgot to tell my friends in shipping they were coming."

Over the course of the next six months, Kuhns would take the raw bamboo from Tonkin, China, and create one of fly fishing's purest forms of functional art: a split cane bamboo fly rod.

"Shortly after we were married, my wife, Tamsel, and I were camping in Colorado," Kuhns says. "I saw guys fly fishing and decided to try it so I bought the basic gear, took a lesson and caught my first trout a few casts later. The trout wasn't the only thing hooked that day. It's all been downhill, or uphill depending on how you look at it, ever since."

"From the time I began fly fishing, I wanted a



text and photos by Rick McNary

bamboo fly rod. But they were expensive, so I decided to build one myself. I had a woodworking shop in my basement and was determined I could learn how to do it.”

Kuhns spent more than a year researching methods and the history of bamboo rod making. Although certain places in Great Britain claim to be the origin of fly rods made from various wood species, the innovator of the six-sided split cane bamboo rod was an American. In the late 1800s, Hiram Leonard – regarded as the father of the modern fly rod – made four-sided, or quadrate,

rods from various species of wood. He sent one to a sporting goods store in Boston to see if they would carry them and a salesman asked Leonard to consider making them out of bamboo. Leonard assured him he could and began an industry that would flourish until 1950. Along the way, Leonard – an engineer by trade – also invented various rod-building forms that he sold in mail-order catalogs.

However, the shortage of quality bamboo led Leonard to move from a four-sided rod to a six-sided rod. The six-sided rods were more durable and the demand for them grew so quickly that Leonard’s



*Building a split-cane bamboo rod is as much an art form as fishing with one, and Kuhns has built many since the first. He begins the process by splitting the bamboo culm into thin strips about 1/2 inch wide.*

new shop could not keep up with production.

More than 100 years after Leonard built his first six-sided rods, Kuhns was studying techniques and looking for instructions to help him build a rod. He found one book particularly helpful, *The Fundamentals of Building a Bamboo Fly Rod* by George Mayer and Bernard Elser. Then he began stocking his shop with the necessary equipment he would need.

“When I was finally ready, I laid the book on my workbench and literally went page-by-page and followed each of the steps. When the book ended, my first fly rod was done.”

Building a split-cane bamboo rod is as much an art form as fishing with one, and Kuhns has built many since the first. He begins the process by splitting the bamboo culm into thin strips about 1/2 inch wide.

“There are more than 1,500 species of bamboo in the world, but somewhere along the way, a rod builder discovered the best bamboo comes from the region of Tonka, China,” he explained.

Bamboo is a quickly renewable resource and the Tonkin cane is the standard for reliability, strength

and endurance. The emergence of Leonard’s rod in the late 1800s created an industry of custom and mass-produced bamboo fly rods. However, an embargo on China in the 1950s, as well as the advent of fiberglass rods, caused a considerable downturn in the production of bamboo rods.

Once the culm is split into the thin strips, Kuhns begins working the strips with wood chisels and hand planes to eventually shape each piece into a triangulated taper. He then glues six individual triangular strips together to form a section of the rod. Many of the rods he builds are 8 feet long or longer, so the rod will taper from about one-half-inch in diameter at the butt to as thin as a pencil lead at the tip. He varies in creating two-piece or three-piece rods, each section created separately based on mathematical taper calculations.

“I love working with a hand plane that is so sharp it sings. The beauty of building a bamboo rod is that it’s all done by hand tools. I’m using the same technique that all bamboo rod builders before me used.”



Although Kuhns has numerous opportunities to sell his rods, he only builds them as gifts for family and friends. To date, he has made 35.

"It takes me 40 to 50 hours to build a rod, so I have a lot of personal connection with each rod. As I'm building that rod, I'm remembering the times I fished with that person or planning trips in the future where we will fish together. I often pray for the person as I'm building the rod so even that makes it more personal to me."

The way that fly-fishing differs from conventional fishing makes the quality of the rod important. In conventional fishing, the bait or lure is weighted in such a way

that when it is cast, the weight unwinds the line from the reel. Fly-fishing is opposite of that; the weight of the line casts the lure or fly.

*"If you cut a cross-section of a bamboo culm and look closely at the outside, you will notice a layer of little round fibers; those are called power fibers. Those fibers grow the length of the bamboo stalk and the Tonkin cane has the strongest power fibers. That's what makes the rod able to bend in such an arc without snapping."*

Whereas conventional fishing uses lures that replicate small fish to catch bigger fish, fly anglers use imitations of an insect. Although there are exceptions to this, most flies imitate one of the various stages of an insect from a larva to an adult. Some flies are so small that a half dozen will fit on a nickel. Therefore, the fly angler uses the rod to cast the

line with a tiny fly on the end.

Fly rods come in various sizes from the light 2-weight to the sturdy 9-weight. Critical to the max-



*Once the culm is split into thin strips, Kuhns begins working the strips with wood chisels and hand planes to eventually shape each piece into a triangulated taper.*



imum performance of the rod is the need to match the weight of the line to that of the rod, so the lines are calibrated in the same manner.

If you watch someone fly fishing, you'll notice a back-and-forth movement of the rod in the general areas of 10 o'clock to 2 o'clock. In that motion, the fly angler is using their other hand to feed line from the reel through the rod guides to extend the length of the cast. Learning to cast well is critical to the successful presentation of the fly to the targeted fish.

At the end of the fly line is a monofilament leader that is also tapered. The intent is to cast the line in such a way that it unfolds, dropping a fly on the water as if a real fly had gently landed there by itself.

"Every rod I make has a different feel to it because no two pieces of bamboo are the same. Before I go to the water with a new rod, I take it out in my backyard where I have plenty of room to cast. My neighbors thought it was a bit unusual at first

but they've gotten used to me."

In addition to a profession in the healing arts, Kuhns also has a reputation as an excellent nature and wildlife photographer. He admits that the draw of both fly-fishing and building fly rods is the inherent nature of creating art.

"For me, fly fishing is not about catching fish," Kuhns says. "It's about the whole process of artistic creation. The beauty in the gentle arc of a fly line glistening in the sun, carrying a fly to a rising trout still takes my breath away. As I fish, the beauty of God's handiwork, the joy of using a bamboo rod of my own making and the complexity of science going on in the water fills me with wonder."

"Each time I finish a rod and give it to someone, I attach a letter that gives instructions on the care and upkeep. I also encourage people not to hang them on their wall, but to fish them often and fish them hard. I want them to use the rod to create a legacy."



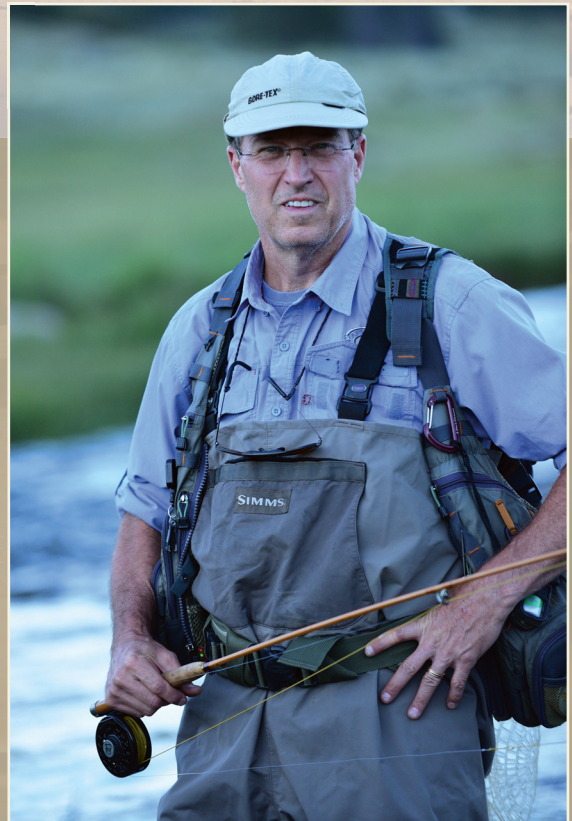


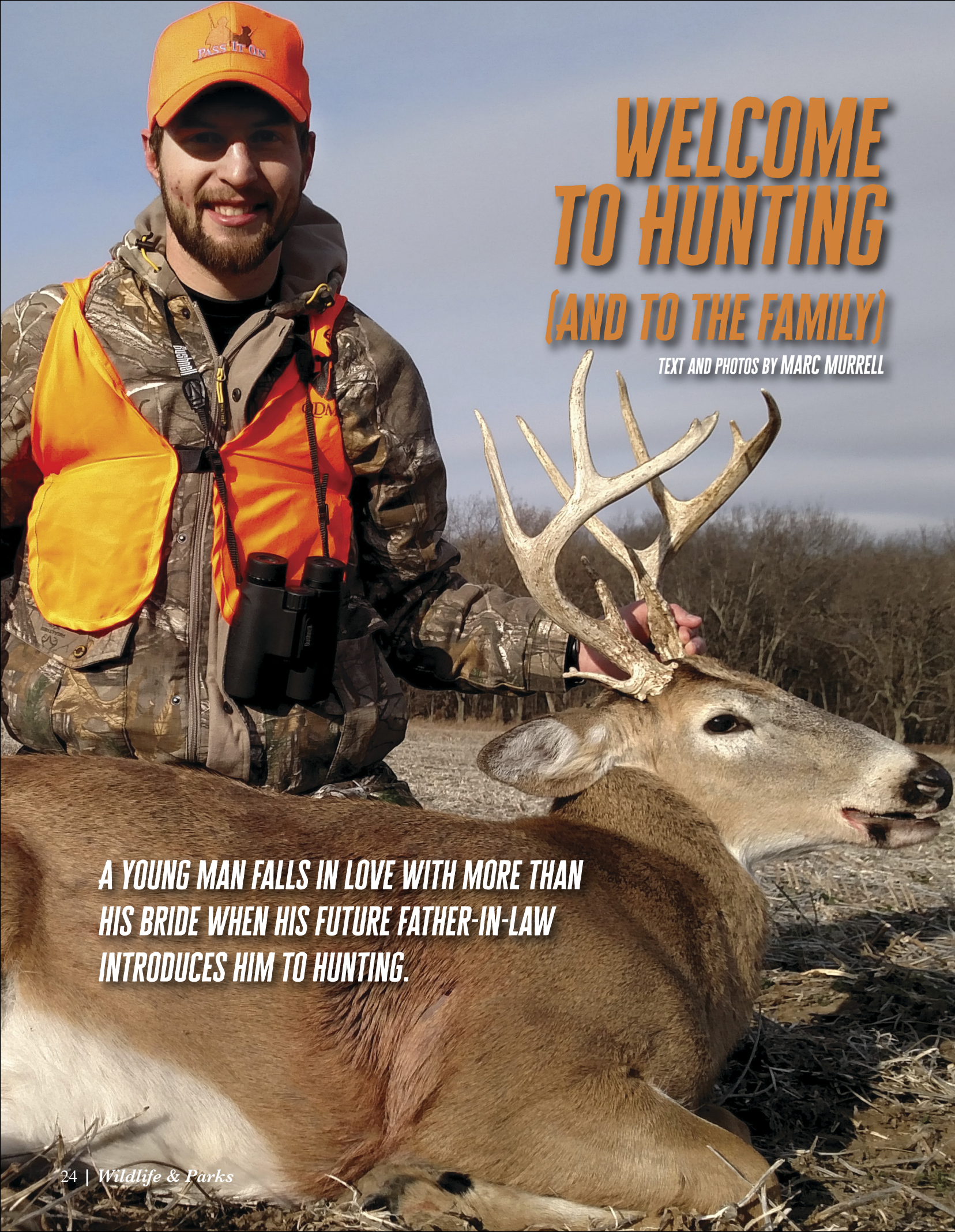
*Kuhns, pictured below, only builds rods as gifts for family and friends. He spends 40 to 50 hours building a rod and though they are truly works of art, he encourages recipients to fish them hard.*

Although Kuhns is typically quiet and reserved, it is easy to engage him in a conversation about fly-fishing. Listening to him talk passionately about a sport he loves, you soon discover he uses a different language than most anglers to describe his sport; he uses the language of an artist. He drops phrases like "the song of a sharpened plane," "the dance of the fly on the water," "the hypnotic rhythm of the cast," "a oneness with nature" and "the elegance of form."

You can often find Kuhns wading in a mountain stream, coaxing a wily old trout out from the depths of a dark pool. Or you might find him in a float tube on a pond in the Flint Hills enticing a largemouth bass with a deer-hair popper. Regardless of where he is, his bamboo rod is often bent in an arc with a fish tugging on the other end.

When he comes out of the water, don't ask him how the fishing was. Instead, ask him about his split bamboo cane fly rod. Who knows; if he takes a liking to you, he just might build you one. 🐃





# WELCOME TO HUNTING (AND TO THE FAMILY)

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY MARC MURRELL

**A YOUNG MAN FALLS IN LOVE WITH MORE THAN HIS BRIDE WHEN HIS FUTURE FATHER-IN-LAW INTRODUCES HIM TO HUNTING.**

**MOST HUNTERS** are introduced to hunting at a young age. But every so often, you'll find someone who discovers their love for the outdoors as an adult. This article is about one lucky hunter who got his first deer a little later than usual, and it all happened because of a girl.

Jake, 26, and Ashley, 24, were set up on somewhat of a blind date a couple years ago by Jake's older sister, Whitney. Whitney's intuition was spot-on, because Jake became my son-in-law on July 1 of this year.

Jake had never hunted prior to dating Ashley, but during their courtship, he listened intently to many of my hunting stories. Though he has family members who hunt, Jake was busy with sports and academics. He played football in college and went on to attain a doctorate degree in physical therapy.

"I always thought it would be cool to go hunting," Jake said. "I tagged along with my dad once when I was 10 or so, but we never really did much of it."

I knew if Jake took to hunting like he took to fishing the first summer he dated Ashley, he'd fall head-over-heels in love with hunting, too.

And he did. I've never seen a budding outdoorsman more anxious to learn about all aspects of hunting or fishing than Jake. And I've relished the opportunity to kick-start his journey into the great outdoors.

Jake hadn't completed Hunter Education, so he took advantage of the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism's apprentice hunting license, which allows hunters 16 or older to get two deferrals of the hunter education requirement. With an apprentice license, the hunter just needs to be under the supervision of a licensed hunter age 18 or older. After two deferrals, the hunter must complete a hunter education course before purchasing

another hunting license. With Jake's busy schedule, starting a full-time job following graduation, and the fact that I would be hunting with him any way, the apprentice license worked perfectly.

We then needed to figure out what kind of equipment Jake would hunt with. I've hunted Kansas whitetails with a compound bow and Jake's was interested in bowhunting, but we were short on free time. Luckily, I had a crossbow that Jake was able to practice with and become proficient with in a short time.

When the archery season opened, we were

set up in a ground blind on a small, beautiful piece of property 15 minutes from my house. Jake's first taste of a hunting adrenaline rush happened only 40 minutes into his first hunt.

"I saw the deer coming from the right and you told me not to move," Jake laughed, recounting the experience with me. "You and Taylor (Jake's close friend who accompanied us) were kind of dozing, and I was trying to get your attention without moving or saying anything."

That close encounter didn't work out, but Jake certainly got his first dose of buck fever.



**JAKE HAD NEVER HUNTED PRIOR TO DATING ASHLEY, BUT DURING THEIR COURTSHIP, HE LISTENED INTENTLY TO MANY OF MY HUNTING STORIES.**

"That was probably the biggest adrenaline rush I've ever had," Jake laughed. "I probably shook for 10 minutes and couldn't stop!"

A second trip to the same spot didn't yield any sightings, but only 40 minutes into legal shooting time on our third trip, Jake's luck suddenly changed.

"I could see this big doe coming towards us

and I got ready," Jake said. "And the adrenaline kicked in again!"

This time, the doe turned broadside and Jake was able to take a shot. The deer mule-kicked and bolted back the way it came.



I'm not sure Jake's feet touched the ground as we walked to where we last saw the doe. Finding blood immediately, I had Jake trail the deer as I shot a video on my phone.

A resounding "YES!" echoed through the woods as Jake approached the deer and knelt beside it. He had made a great shot.

"This is so cool," Jake said.

We enjoyed the moment before I showed Jake how to field dress his first deer. He enthused about

all aspects of the hunt and was anxious to eat venison. He and Ashley enjoyed grilled tenderloins that evening, topping off a great hunt.

Jake still had an Any-season, Either-sex permit and was now more anxious than ever to get back in the field. His new goal was to put his tag on a buck.

## ROUND TWO

I put up a ladder stand for Jake in a tree adjacent to my bowhunting stand and he enjoyed the view from above, compared to the limited view from the ground blind. Jake put in his time, and it became obvious that as easy as his antlerless tag was to fill, his either-sex tag would be more difficult to punch.

We had several hunts where we didn't see anything, and others where nothing but a half-racked 4-pointer was spotted. Jake was just amazed that the small buck never had a clue we were sitting right above him.

On another hunt, Jake eyed a 140-inch 10-pointer walking the edge of the timber, but a shot opportunity never materialized.

Before we knew it, the Kansas rifle season arrived and still no buck. On the last Saturday of the firearm season, I loaned Jake my 30-06 rifle and we set up a ground blind on a property my friend was kind enough to offer up.

We were set up on the edge of a soybean field with a good view in three directions. The first deer we spotted were on the adjacent hillside about 200 yards away.

"Dang, they're does," I whispered to Jake.

"There's a buck behind them!" he said excitedly, looking at them through binoculars.

The buck stood in one spot for several minutes, its antlers obscured by tree branches before breaking into a trot, following one of the does that was walking into the field. Just then, all the does started to cross the field, trotting straight towards us. I whispered to Jake I hoped

they wouldn't get downwind and spook, ruining our chances at the buck.

Three of the does passed within easy bow range. As I watched the

last one disappear, I thought I heard Jake whisper, "There it is!" (referring to the last doe).

But Jake was once again following protocol, not moving a muscle. When I looked past him and saw what "it" was, the buck was standing just 20 yards away, staring straight into the window on Jake's side of the blind. Jake later told me he said, "There

**A RESOUNDING "YES!" ECHOED THROUGH THE WOODS AS JAKE APPROACHED THE DEER AND KNELT BESIDE IT. HE HAD MADE A GREAT SHOT.**

HE is!" trying to get my attention since I hadn't seen the buck cross the field.

I whispered to Jake to get his gun off the shooting sticks and out the side window. He would have to shoot him off-hand. The buck sensed something was amiss and started to walk back toward the hillside a few steps at a time.

Jake moved perfectly and slowly when the buck wasn't looking, and got the gun out the window as the buck took off on a trot. I grunted loudly, stopping the buck broadside at only 30 yards.

"You're going to have to shoot quick," I told Jake. "He's not going to hang around."

Jake squeezed the trigger and the deer bolted, arcing away from us. I told Jake to rack another round. The buck ran full tilt for 100 yards or so, before it started to falter.

"He's stumbling!" said Jake.

When the buck went down, Jake couldn't believe it.

"How long do we have to wait to go get him?" Jake asked, his fingers trembling as if they were playing an invisible piano.

"As soon as you quit jabbering and shaking!" I laughed.

When we got to Jake's buck, his reaction was one I'll never forget. It was indeed a buck any hunter should be proud of.

"I was nervous, excited, and almost holding my breath the whole time," Jake said. "I REALLY didn't want this one to get away. And when you told me

to ease up and get the gun out the other window and shoot, my adrenaline was going crazy again.

"So much so, I didn't even feel the scope crack me across the nose. Then I started bleeding," he laughed.

As Jake field dressed his buck entirely on his own this time, we chatted about the experience and the end of his first deer season. We had worked hard and put in our time, and Jake never got discouraged; he was thrilled about each and every hunt.

"Knowing we put in a lot of time and effort made it even more rewarding, and the close encounters we had really taught me a lot," said Jake. "The times when we wouldn't see deer made me appreciate times when we did even more."

After the close of the season, Jake eventually got a compound bow and has been shooting it in preparation for the upcoming fall. Now, he'll look forward to a new set of "firsts."

He's also getting more of his own gear, and while shed hunting last spring, we picked out a spot where he and Ashley can hunt together. There's little doubt now that Jake is hooked for life.

"I'm a sports fan and a HUGE Nebraska football fan – have been all my life," Jake said. "But I'm almost more excited to go deer hunting than I am to watch Nebraska football and that's saying something!" 🐃



***"YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO SHOOT QUICK," I TOLD JAKE. "HE'S NOT GOING TO HANG AROUND."***

# FALL WIPERPALOOZA

*The magic hour was nearing. The pre-dawn darkness gradually lifted, giving way to an orange sky over Milford Reservoir. For John Eklund and Rick Dykstra, that meant only one thing: it wouldn't be long before schools of aggressive wipers would go on a feeding spree.*



Shad: It's what's for breakfast at Milford Reservoir.

"You find the shad, you find the wipers," said Eklund, an avid wiper fisherman from Salina. "It's as simple as that.

"Sometimes, they'll be up chasing shad right at first light. Other times, it will be when the sun's been out for a while.

"But sometime in this first hour or so, they'll push the baitfish to the surface and just rip through them. That's what we're waiting for."

Dykstra reached for his favorite type of wiper fish finder, his binoculars, and began scanning Milford's surface. When he spotted a school of big gamefish slashing away at baitfish with such ferocity that some

of the baitfish were jumping out of the water in an attempt to escape their predators, it was game on.

"Two o'clock," Dykstra shouted, indicating directions to the fish. "Let's go!"

With that, Eklund pushed the throttle on his boat as far as it would go and the chase began. He cut the big engine before he reached the surfacing fish in an effort not to spook them, then dropped his trolling motor to silently draw closer.

When he was within casting distance of the surface activity, he launched a long cast with a saltwater Chug Bug and began blooping it across the roiled water. It didn't get far, though. A wiper swiped at the oversized

lure, missed it, then came back for a second try. The Chug Bug disappeared in a big swirl, and Eklund felt a jolt at the end of his fishing rod.

"First cast. Not bad," Eklund said as he fought the fish.

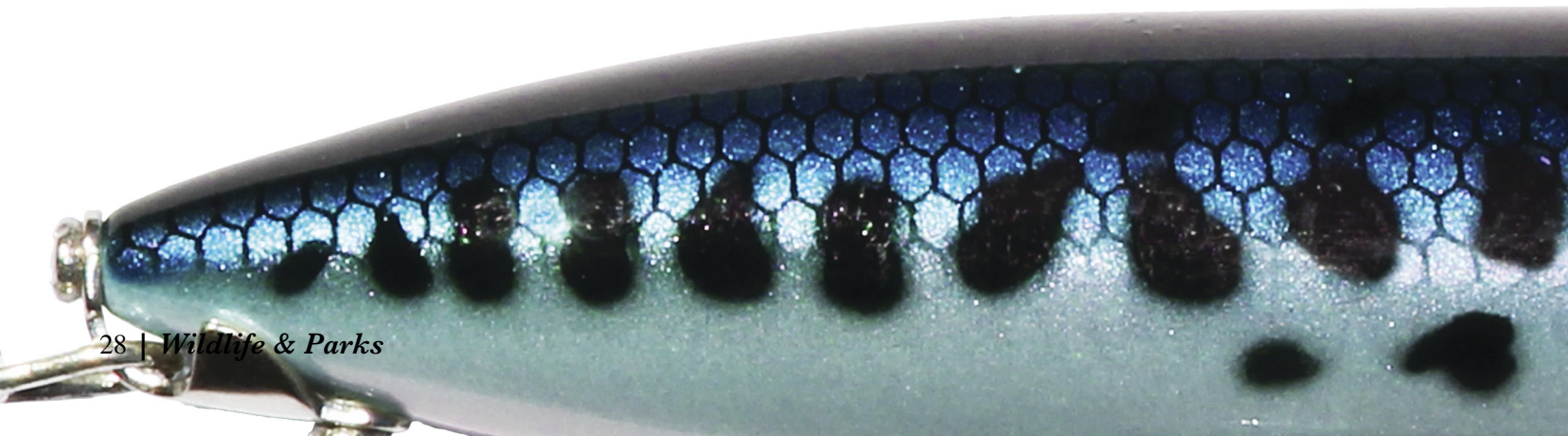
The fight was spirited as the 5-pound wiper stripped out line and made a powerful run. But Eklund swung the fish into the boat, unhooked it as quickly as he could, then cast for more.

Seconds later, he had another. Then Dykstra caught one more.

And just like that, the surface was calm again and the wipers moved on.

## ON the Move

"These wipers are constantly on the move," Eklund said.



# OOZA

text and photos by Brent Frazee



“That’s why you have to get to them in a hurry. You never know how long they’ll stay up.”

Eklund paused and added, “The hard part isn’t catching them. The hard part is finding them.”

Eklund uses sophisticated electronic fish finders to search the reservoir for schools of shad that indicate the wipers are near. But in the early fall, there is a more obvious way to find them: gulls.

When gulls start circling and diving down to feed on shad in one specific stretch of water, Eklund knows there are usually baitfish on top and wipers below them.

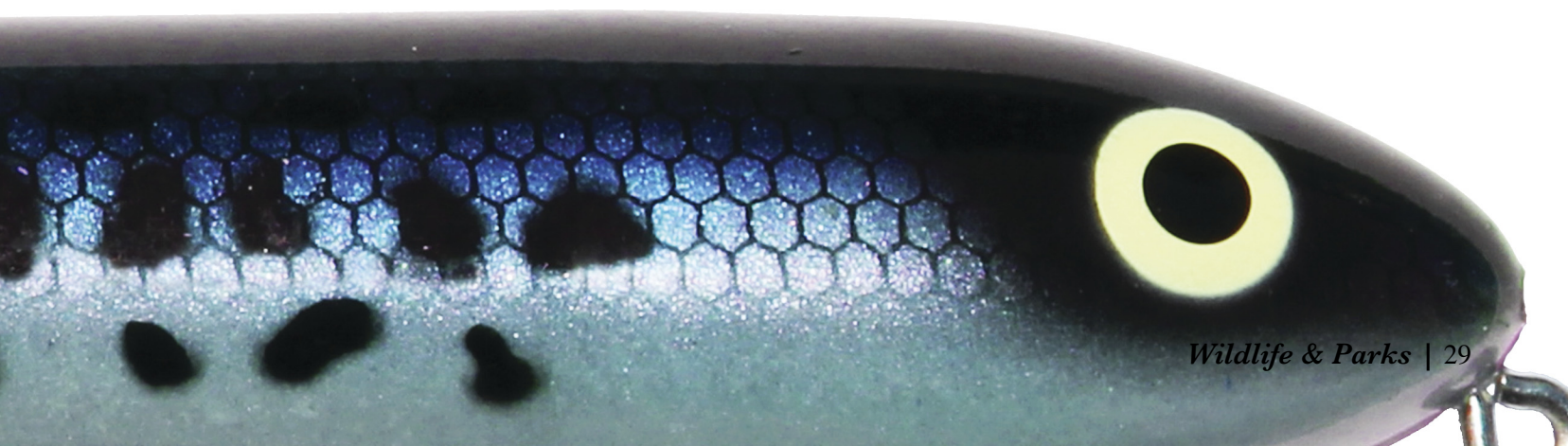
“The shad will get hit from above and below,” Eklund said. “The schools of wipers push them to the surface and the gulls dive down on them from above.”

## Big-game Fishing, Kansas Style

Welcome to the high-paced, fast-action version of big-game fishing in Kansas.

Ever since the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) started stocking the white bass-striper

hybrid at Milford Reservoir in 1990, the species has added an element of excitement to fishing in northeast Kansas. And at no time of the year is that excitement more pronounced than in September and October. As the water starts to cool after a hot summer, schools of wipers go on a feeding rampage, particularly at





*You cross one fish with a mean streak with another that has a bad attitude, and you get a fighter.*



dawn and dusk. During this time, it's not uncommon for anglers to catch and release 20 wipers in one frenzied fishing trip.

Because the hybrids don't spawn naturally, KDWPT stocks the reservoir regularly.

The big predator thrives in the clear, deep water filled with structure such as drop-offs, humps and points. And a ready meal is never far away. Year in and year out, Milford has an outstanding population of gizzard shad.

That successful formula has made Milford one of top wiper reservoirs in Kansas. In fact, data collected from KDWPT fisheries staff indicates Milford as the top body of water in the state for density of wipers in 2017.

The population is so good that the Wildlife, Parks and Tourism Commission is considering a staff



proposal to up the limit from two wipers per day to five.

"We're in a situation now where we have good numbers of wipers and good quality, too," said John Reinke, the KDWPT fisheries biologist who manages Milford. "We have good numbers of fish from 3.5 to 5.5 pounds, but we have bigger ones, too. Last year, we had several 13-pound fish caught."

## Good From the Start

When wipers were first stocked at Milford, it was out of necessity.

"We wanted an additional predator in the reservoir," Reinke said. "We had excess forage at the time, and we needed to keep things in balance.

"The wipers did well at Milford from the start, especially in comparison to other reservoirs that we stocked at the time. They've always been well-suited

for this reservoir."

In the early days, Reinke said, Kansas had to "beg, borrow or steal" wipers from other states' fisheries departments. Fisheries officials would often make trades with other states to obtain wipers.

Today, Kansas no longer has to beg. Managers at the Milford Fish Hatchery have developed methods to cross striper females with white bass males, and are producing large numbers of fry each year.

"We've gone from having to beg other states for wipers to being the one that other states are coming to," Reinke said.

## A Real Meanie

Fisheries biologists call it "hybrid vigor."

It goes something like this. You cross one fish with a mean streak with another that has a bad attitude, and you get a fighter.

The wiper is a perfect example.







*“Fishermen who haven’t caught a wiper don’t know what they’re missing.”*

It strikes with a vengeance. And it fights long and hard, refusing to give up until the bitter end.

“Fishermen who haven’t caught a wiper don’t know what they’re missing,” said Dykstra, convention center manager for Acorns Resort.

Dykstra has fished for wipers at Milford since they were first put in the reservoir.

He has caught them every way from trolling in deep water to fishing with night crawlers. But his favorite method by far is fishing with oversized topwater lures such as Chug Bugs.

“I’ve seen times when a wiper will hit so hard that it will knock the bait clear into the air after missing it,” he said. “Then it will just engulf it when it lands.

“That’ll get your heart beating.” Eklund also has experienced

some heart-testing moments while fishing for wipers.

“One day, I was using a Fluke and I had just reeled it up and had it dangling in the water,” he said. “I turned to do something, and the next thing I knew, a wiper hit that thing and took the rod and reel into the water.”

Dykstra remembers the time he hosted nationally known fisherman Jimmy Houston while Houston was filming for one of his TV shows. Casting one of his trademark Titanium spinnerbaits, Houston caught a fish that he estimated at 17 to 20 pounds. On that same trip, Dykstra landed one that weighed more than 13 pounds.

In the fall, Dykstra and Eklund use stout baitcasting equipment and topwater lures such as big Chug Bugs, Whopper Ploppers, Zara Spooks and buzzbaits cast

into surfacing schools to elicit strikes. They also catch wipers on Chatterbaits and swimbaits.

In the fall, they often look for areas where the wipers will pin the bait in the shallows of a main-lake cut or indentation.

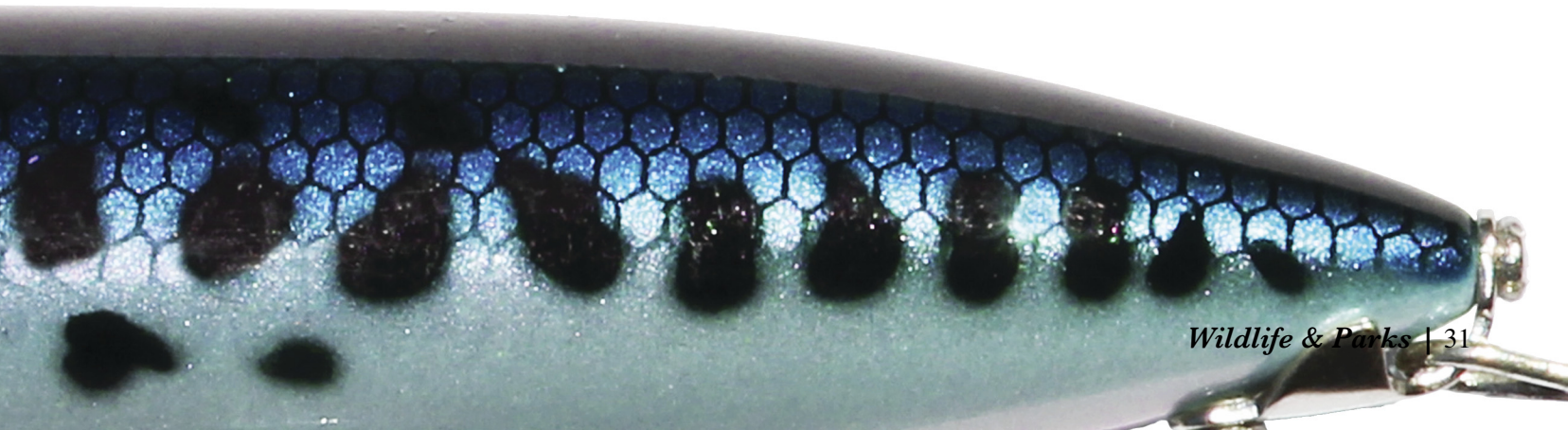
“When you catch a 6- or 7-pound wiper in a foot of water, it’s something you remember,” Dykstra said.

Dykstra experienced that excitement last fall when he followed the gulls to wipers that pinned shad against the riprap along a bridge within sight of the marina at Acorns Resort. He cast a Chatterbait to the shallows, and watched as it was immediately crushed by a healthy wiper.

Nine casts later, he had three more wipers before the action finally died down. All of the fish were released, and Dykstra had memories of another great day of wiper fishing on Milford Reservoir.

“You have to get them when they’re up,” Dykstra said. “It can change in a minute.

“But it’s sure fun while it lasts.” 🐟





# BEYOND THE POPPER

[WHAT TO DO WITH ALL THOSE DOVES]

by Hank Shaw, guest contributor  
photography by Holly A. Heyser

Background photo: Shutterstock/Lisovskaya Natalia

## ABOUT HANK

**Hank Shaw** is behind the award-winning website, “Hunter. Angler. Gardner. Cook.,” and the author of *Buck, Buck, Moose: Recipes and Techniques for Cooking Deer, Elk, Moose, Antelope and Other Antlered Things*; *Duck, Duck, Goose: Recipes and Techniques for Ducks and Geese, both Wild and Domesticated*; and *Hunt, Gather, Cook: Finding the Forgotten Feast*.

A former restaurant cook, his creations have been published in *Food & Wine*, *Petersen’s Hunting*, *Garden & Gun*, *Organic Gardening*, *The Art of Eating*, *Field and Stream*, *Sactown*, *Pheasants Forever* magazine, and *Delta Waterfowl* magazine, among others.

Shaw has also been featured on several television shows, including Andrew Zimmern’s “Bizarre Foods America,” Steve Rinella’s “Meateater,” Mike Rowe’s “Somebody’s Gotta Do It,” and Scott Leysath’s, “The Sporting Chef.”

His latest cookbook, *Pheasant, Quail, Cottontail*, which will cover all aspects of upland bird and small game cookery – including doves – is due out April 2018.

For more from Shaw, visit [honest-food.net](http://honest-food.net).



*Ah, the venerable popper. Jalapeno, cream cheese, a dove breast, bacon, maybe some Italian dressing. It’s a Labor Day classic loved as much for its tradition as for its flavor. But there is life beyond the popper. In fact, I dare to say there are tastier ways to enjoy your doves.*

First off, you really ought to try plucking some. Doves are the easiest birds to pluck by far, with feathers that practically fly off – this is why your dog isn’t overjoyed with the prospect of bringing them back to you; those feathers get stuck in his mouth. Once you get the hang of it, you can pluck a dove in less than two minutes.

Once you have your micro-chickens (which is what they look like), your best bet is to grill them over a hot fire.

But there are even more great possibilities beyond the popper. Try pounding the little breasts flat and making a version of jagerschnitzel. Or dicing them small and putting them into enchiladas. Dang good, and a welcome departure from the usual.

So go ahead. Eat as many poppers as you can on Labor Day. After all, it’s tradition. But afterwards, give these recipes a try. 🐔

## Dove Enchiladas

Prep time: 1 hr

Cook time: 45 min

This is a pretty standard New Mexico green chile sauce, although my addition of epazote is unusual (you can skip it if you want). I prefer to use full-strength, hot Hatch green chiles, but you can also use the mild ones if you want a little less “kick.” If you can’t find New Mexican chiles, try using poblanos or a mix of jalapenos and green bell peppers.

I like corn tortillas for this recipe, and I like to have a little of the edges with no sauce on them, which makes them chewy and a little crunchy – a nice textural difference from the soft rest of the enchilada.

Lastly, grab a bag of “Mexican blend” shredded cheeses if you can. Otherwise, Monterey jack or cheddar are fine.

### GREEN CHILE SAUCE

- 3 tablespoons lard or cooking oil
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 4 garlic cloves, chopped
- 3 tablespoons flour
- 1 1/2 cups chopped roasted green chiles, about a dozen
- 1 teaspoon epazote (*optional*)
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 1/2 teaspoon ground coriander
- 2 1/2 cups dove broth or chicken stock
- Salt (preferably smoked)
- Black pepper to taste

### FILLING

- Meat from 15 doves, about a pound
- Salt (preferably smoked)
- About 1/4 cup green chile sauce (*see above*)



- 6 ounces shredded cheese, divided
- 1 cup minced onion
- 12 6-inch tortillas

1. Prep the green chiles by roasting them.
2. Next, heat the lard (or oil) over medium-high heat and cook the onions until soft, but not brown, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic and cook another minute. Add the flour and cook, stirring often, for 5 minutes. Add the remaining ingredients, stir well and simmer gently for 20 minutes. Then, puree in a blender.
3. Dice the raw dove meat and salt well. Mix with about 1/4 cup of the green chile sauce, about 2 ounces of cheese, and the onion.

4. Heat the tortillas on a comal or other heavy skillet until they blacken and puff up a little. Place them in a tortilla warmer, or stack on a plate and put a bowl over them, and let them steam a few minutes before building the enchiladas.

5. Pour a little green chile sauce into a casserole dish. Take one tortilla and fill it with a little of the filling and roll it up. Place seam side down in the dish. Repeat until you're done. You should get about 15 tortillas in the dish.

6. Pour more green chile sauce over the enchiladas and top with lots of shredded cheese. Bake at 350°F for 25 minutes and serve.

## Grilled Doves a La Mancha

Prep time: 15 min

Cook time: 15 min



This is a really easy dish to make, but you have to have bay leaves, fresh sage, and Spanish smoked paprika (if possible). Many good supermarkets offer it, and you can also buy it online. If you can't find smoked paprika, regular sweet paprika will work.

Eat with your fingers and serve with a Rioja red wine, a California Pinot Noir or an Italian Barbaresco — and a bowl to put the bones in. A simple tomato salad is a good accompaniment, as is a loaf of crusty bread.

Figure on two doves per person for a light lunch or an appetizer, or three to six doves per person for a main course.

– 12 doves (you can also substitute for 4 to 8 squab or teal)

– Kosher salt

– 3 tablespoons olive oil

– 12 bay leaves

– 12 to 24 sage leaves

– About 1/4 cup melted bacon fat (or butter or duck fat)

– Spanish smoked paprika

– Freshly ground black pepper

1. Coat the doves with olive oil and salt them well. Stuff each cavity with sage and a bay leaf.

2. Get your grill hot and clean the grates. Set the doves breast side up and cook them over medium-high heat, with the

grill cover closed, for 6 minutes. Open the grill cover and turn the doves over so the top of the breast is wedged between grill grates. Paint the birds with some bacon fat. Let them cook this way for a minute or two, just to get a little color. Turn the doves on their sides and grill for another minute or two — for each side. Paint with more bacon fat.

3. Dust with the smoked paprika and black pepper and transfer the birds to a platter. Let them rest for 5 minutes before serving.

## Grilled Doves Teriyaki

Prep time: 15 min

Cook time: 15 min



“*Teriyaki is one of the most beloved flavors in the American hunting world, and there is a reason: It is sweet, salty and flavorful all at the same time.*”

Teriyaki is one of the most beloved flavors in the American hunting world, and there is a reason: It is sweet, salty and flavorful all at the same time, and the caramelization you get on something grilled with teriyaki sauce is wonderful.

I add a little extra zip with some sesame oil and black sesame seeds at the end. Sesame oil is easy to find, but the black sesame seeds could be challenging; you can get them in Asian markets. Leave them out or use regular sesame seeds if you'd like.

This recipe calls for homemade teriyaki sauce, which I think is better, but you can of course use a store-bought teriyaki sauce.

- 12 doves (or 4 pigeons)
- 1/4 cup sake
- 1/4 cup mirin (Japanese wine)
- 3 tablespoons soy sauce

- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- sesame oil to coat doves
- sesame seeds (optional)

1. Mix the sake, mirin, soy sauce and sugar in a pot. Heat just to the point where the sugar dissolves. Turn off the heat and let cool. Submerge the birds in the marinade – breast side down – for 4 to 24 hours. About 30 minutes before you plan to cook the birds, take them out and let them come to room temperature.

2. Put the marinade in a small pot and boil it down until it gets syrup-like. Keep warm.

3. Get your grill nice and hot. Scrape down the grates and close the lid. Wet a paper towel with the vegetable oil and, using tongs, wipe down the grill grates. Put the birds breast side up on the grill, close the lid and

cook over high heat for 3-4 minutes. (Up this to 5-6 minutes for pigeon or squab).

4. Open the lid and paint the doves with the reduced marinade. Then, turn them on their sides and paint the exposed side. Continue to grill this way, over high heat with the cover open, for another 1-2 minutes, or until the sides are nicely grilled. Repeat on the other side.

5. Next, turn the doves breast side down on the grill and paint the tops. With the cover still open, grill for another 2-3 minutes, or until the skin is browned.

6. Remove the birds from heat, paint one more time with the marinade, and let cool for 5 minutes. Drizzle a little sesame oil over the birds and sprinkle the sesame seeds on top before serving.

## Dove Schnitzel

Prep time: 20 min

Cook time: 20 min

While this is a dove breast recipe, you can use pretty much any meat you want. Über traditional Germans use veal or pork, but the 18th century origin of jägerschnitzel is venison. What to serve with this? Potatoes are typical, but good bread – or heck, even rice – would be fine. You want something to sop up all that sauce. And a light red wine or a German beer would be what you'd want to drink here.

- Breasts from 12 to 16 doves
- Salt
- 1 to 1.5 pounds chanterelles or other fresh mushrooms, cleaned and roughly chopped
- 1/2 yellow onion, roughly chopped
- 5 tablespoons bacon fat, lard or butter, divided
- Flour for dusting (*optional*)
- 2 tablespoons flour
- 1 cup dove, duck or beef stock
- 1 or 2 tablespoons sour cream
- 2 tablespoons chopped parsley
- Black pepper to taste

1. Place each dove breast between two pieces of plastic wrap and pound until it is

about 1/8 inch thick. Do this firmly, but don't wail on the meat or you will tear it.

2. Set a large frying pan over high heat for 1 minute, then add the mushrooms to the hot, dry pan. Shake them around so they don't stick too much and cook the mushrooms until they give up their water, about 3 or 4 minutes. Add 2 tablespoons of the bacon fat (or lard or butter) and onions, and stir-fry until the onions begin to brown, about 4 minutes. Remove the mushrooms and onions and set aside.

3. Dust the dove breasts in flour if you want to. Add the remaining fat to the pan and let it heat over medium-high heat. Do not let it smoke. Sear the cutlets for 1 minute on the first side. Keep them from curling up with a spatula. Then, flip the cutlets and sear another minute for medium doneness. Remove the cutlets to a plate and put them in an oven set to "warm."

4. Add the 2 tablespoons of flour to the pan and mix with the fat. Turn the heat to medium and let the mixture cook until it is the color of coffee-with-cream. Slowly pour in the stock, plus any juices that have come off the cutlets while they rest. You should have a thick gravy. If it is thin, let this boil down a minute or two. If it is really thick, turn off the heat, wait for the sauce to stop bubbling and stir in the sour cream.

5. Add the mushrooms and onions back to the pan and toss to coat in the sauce. Add salt and black pepper to taste. Pour this over the cutlets, garnish with a little parsley, and serve at once.



# Flint Hills Nature Trail:

## The Future of a Historic Route

text and photos by  
Jennifer Leeper, freelance writer

*Railbanking is defined by the National Trails System Act as a voluntary agreement between a railroad company and a trail agency to use an out-of-service rail corridor as a trail until the railroad might need the corridor again for rail service.*

The National Trails System Act is especially important to Kansans who love to hike, bike or ride trails because such a small percentage of the Sunflower State is open to public recreation. There are numerous rail trails in Kansas, including the Prairie Spirit Rail Trail, operated by the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism, which until recently, was the longest trail in the state at 51 miles. But that title now goes to the Flint Hills Nature Trail (FHNT), which ranks as the seventh longest trail in the nation. When completed, FHNT will be 117 miles long.

Historically, this rail corridor bore the name of the communities it linked along its route: Council Grove, Osage City and Ottawa. It eventually became the Missouri Pacific Railroad, before ending its run in the 1980s.

According to Scott Allen, vice president of the Kanza Rails-Trails Conservancy (KRTC) Board of Directors, while the trail offers outdoor recreation, it also has returned a sense of community for those once linked by rail activity.

“It allows the general population an opportunity to physically connect with other communities along the trail and allows them new avenues to become involved with their community, develop new economic opportunities and experience the beauty the

region has to offer.”

Many of the communities along the trail were born as a result of the railway. “It was their sole reason for existing. The economic impact of removing the rails was devastating,” Allen said. Now, the Flint Hills Nature Trail is reviving traffic between these communities.

Background photo: Shutterstock/Chocoholic's





# Trail History

What would eventually become the Flint Hills Nature Trail was railbanked on July 30, 1997.

“In 1980, Congress deregulated railroad abandonments and many railroads began abandoning low-use lines,” Allen explained. “Legislators were worried about what would happen if demand for rail transportation returned, so in 1983 they passed the National Trails System Act. The act created what is called railbanking, whereby a railroad could free itself of an unprofitable rail line by donating, selling, or leasing the right-of-way to a qualified public or private agency for interim use as a trail.

“Railbanking allows rights-of-way that may have been abandoned to be preserved in case the railroad needs to reactivate the line.”

The right-of-way was initially deeded to Serenata Farms School of Equestrian Arts, and then to the Kansas Horseman Foundation (KHF), according to Allen. However, KHF didn’t develop the trail and abandoned its claim in 2001. According to Doug Walker, president of the KRTC Board of Directors, the KRTC immediately took on management of the trail, developing a 6-mile section around Vassar several years later.

“In 2005-2006, the trail was developed between Osawatomie and Ottawa,” said Walker.

There was no need to promote the concept of the Flint Hills Nature Trail to the State of Kansas.



“During his campaign for Governor in 2010, candidate Brownback said several times that he wanted to ‘Create a network of trails connecting towns like Council Grove to other communities within the region.’ And in late 2011, assistant secretary of Parks and Tourism for the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism, Linda Craghead, asked for a tour of the trail. We toured the trail with her between Council Grove and Bushong. She only had to see it once to be convinced. The beauty of the trail sold itself,” said Walker.

Walker agrees the trail does sell itself.

“To travel the entire trail, you experience the flora and fauna of the eastern woodlands as the trail between Osawatomie and Ottawa follows the Marais des Cygnes River. This section has a tree canopy over much of it with hills and bluffs on one side and the river on the other,” Walker continued. “The farther you travel west, you experience the Flint Hills in all their glory, vast rolling landscapes, rolling hills, plush with native grasses. Overall, it is a remarkable 117-mile trail in which to fully experience the diversity of the Kansas landscape.”

In the wake of the state’s involvement, engineering firms and local contractors have partnered with KRTC to continue trail development. Momentum for development is bolstered by a collective force of 400 volunteer members of KRTC and a 12-member board of directors who are rooted in communities all along the trail.

*(continued on next page)*



## Work-in-Progress

Though the trail technically runs from Osawatomie to Herington, it remains unfinished.

“Ninety-six miles are currently useable,” said Allen. “The section from Council Grove to Herington has not been developed yet.”

Even along the 96 miles of functional trail, there remain bridges that require attention, including the addition of decking and railing – particularly between U.S. Route 75 and Admire.

“We urge caution when riding this section,” added Allen.

Despite being incomplete, the trail has already had a positive impact on tourism.

“At this point, I wouldn’t say that it’s made a measurable difference, but users are coming from farther and farther away to use it as more people learn about it,” said Allen. “Traffic on the sections that have been recently developed by the state has greatly increased, and I’m certain that trend will continue as they develop more sections.”

## How it Ranks

According to Allen, the FHNTI is one of the top 10 longest rail trails in the country, and the KRTC website reports the trail as the longest in the state.

“The goal of the KRTC and KDWPT is to create a trail that rivals the Katy Trail in Missouri and other top rail trails in the country, and the commitment they have shown and work they have done reflects that goal,” Allen said.

## Hike it or Ride it

Only motorized vehicles are prohibited from traversing the Flint Hills Nature Trail.

“The trail is open to anyone on bicycle, foot, or horseback.” Allen added while cyclists make up the bulk of users, it’s not uncommon to see 10-12 horse trailers parked at the trailhead in Rantoul on a given weekend.

“Closer to the towns, local bikers and runners use the trail. And some schools have used it for training their cross-country teams,” said Allen. “It is truly a mixed-use trail.”

## Trail Access

The Flint Hills Nature trail is open 365 days a year, from sunrise to sunset. It passes through many communities between Osawatomie and Herington, including Rantoul, Ottawa, Pomona, Vassar, Osage City, Miller, Admire, Allen, Bushong, and Council Grove, where trail users have starting point options in nearly every connecting community.



## Points of Interest

There are many natural and historical features to enjoy along the Flint Hills Nature Trail. Here are several highlights:

**Osawatomie Railroad Museum** – Visitors can view a replica Union Pacific Depot or find out more about the history of the railroad in Osawatomie.

**Marais des Cygnes River (Marsh of the Swans” River named by French explorers)** – Scenic bluffs bordering the river can be enjoyed along the trail section between Osawatomie and Ottawa.

**Old Depot Museum** – On the National Register of Historic Places, and dating to 1888, this museum offers comprehensive backgrounds on “Bleeding Kansas” and John Brown’s life.

**Jesse James’ Cave** – Though it’s located on private land 2 miles south of Pomona and the trail, the public is welcome to visit this cave rumored to have been a hideout for the infamous outlaw and his gang during the 1860s and 1870s.


**Rattlesnake Hill** – An early rendezvous point for Sac and Fox Indians between 1845-1869, this hill is located on private property north of the trail on the Osage-Franklin county line.

**Hays House** – For those who work up an appetite on the trail, this historic eatery is the oldest restaurant continuously operating west of the Mississippi. It was founded in 1857 by Seth Hays, the first settler in Council Grove and great-grandson of Daniel Boone. Names in Council Grove’s rich history include explorer John C. Fremont, scout Kit Carson, General George Armstrong Custer, and the Kaw Indian chief, Allegawaho, just to name a few.

**Bluestem Prairie** – Located 3 miles east of Herington, this 13-acre swath of tallgrass prairie owned by the KRTC offers nature walks and wildflower viewing to the public.

**Padilla Monument** – A monument to Father Juan de Padilla, the first Christian martyr in the United States, stands in Father Padilla Memorial Park in Herington.

The trail route itself is a remnant of pioneer culture, as it follows the Santa Fe National Historic Trail. It is also part of the American Discovery Trail, which runs coast-to-coast.

The FHNT is the result of collaboration of state agencies, nonprofit organizations and a host of volunteer workers. It is remarkable for many reasons, including its length, the spectacular scenery it affords users and history along its path. A trip to this trail should be at the top of any trail lover’s bucket list. 

**For more information on the Flint Hills Nature Trail, visit [www.kanztrails.org](http://www.kanztrails.org).**

# Hunting With Grandpa Harry

by Rick McNary



Harry adjusted his glasses and read the letter again from his ten-year-old grandson, Ethan. This was Harry's 89th year in the same cabin where he was born, the last 10 of which had been lonely since Gladys passed. But that changed when Ethan came into his life just one year ago.

Ethan had spent the summer with him and, now that it was Thanksgiving, Ethan was due to arrive again at any minute.

*Dear Grandpa Harry,*

*I did like you told me to and got my hunter safety certificate. I told some boys in school about it and they got theirs, too. At first they didn't believe me when I told them that when you were 10 years old your Dad gave you a gun and told you not to come back until you had a deer. Can we go hunting when I come at Thanksgiving?*

*Love, Ethan*

Harry finished the letter, and ambled over to the fireplace where the 1873 Winchester rifle lay suspended over the mantle. He gently ran his fingers over the walnut stock he carved himself after busting it 50 years earlier. He shattered it while wedging it between two rocks - a last ditch effort to keep himself from falling off a steep, icy trail one winter.

He recalled the day his Dad gave him that gun. Just three days after, he carried his first deer back to a proud father and sobbing mother, and it wouldn't be his last. Harry provided meat for his family for nearly 79 years with that old Winchester.

Chauncey, Harry's golden Lab, signaled Ethan's arrival with a wagging tail. Chauncey laid claim to a sweatshirt Ethan left behind on his last visit and now slept with it on his dog bed. He, too, was happy for Ethan's arrival.

"Grandpa Harry!" Ethan shouted. "I'm here!"

Harry made his way outside and chuckled as Chauncey and Ethan wrestled in the new snow.

"Welcome back, Grandson," Harry said.

"When we going hunting, Grandpa? Can we go today?" Ethan asked excitedly.

"Whoa, easy there young fella," Harry chuckled. "Let's get you some grub first and check the guns."

Like a lot of hunters, Harry had a variety of guns. After lunch, he spread them out on the kitchen table for inspection and cleaning.

"Our neighbor says guns should be illegal because they kill people," Ethan said.

"Oh, is that right?" Harry mused. "Ask him if cars should be illegal since they kill people, too. No, Grandson, no gun has ever killed anyone by itself. It's the person with the gun that's the problem, not the gun."

Ethan and Harry spent the rest of the afternoon cleaning guns as Harry shared hunting stories. He wove in lessons about gun safety, sportsmanship, the importance of wildlife management and the qualities that make a man a gentleman. Their visit was already off to a great start.

Ethan was awake and dressed when Harry awoke the next morning, ready to find out which gun Harry would let him use.

Harry, sensing the boy's anticipation, skipped breakfast and dressed for the day. The light from the coal oil lamp cast an amber glow over the room. Harry paused as he saw Ethan's face in the light. Suddenly, Harry was 10-years-old again sitting at the same table ready for his first hunt.

Harry made his way to the fireplace and took down the old Winchester. Ethan, now standing by his side, gazed at the old man and the gun with admiration.

"Are you hunting with that gun, Grandpa?" Ethan asked.

"No, Grandson, not today," Harry said. "I'll never hunt with this gun again."

"Why? You love that gun," Ethan said in disappointment.

"Well, I never hunt with a gun that belongs to someone else," Harry replied.

A single tear formed in one of Harry's eyes as he handed the gun to Ethan.

"It's your gun now," said Harry. "Let's get your first deer."

# Sportsmen's Calendar | 2017

## RUNNING

March 1-Nov. 8, 2017

## SQUIRREL

June 1, 2017-Feb. 28, 2018

## BULLFROG

July 1-Oct. 31, 2017

## RAIL

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

## SNIPE

Sept. 1-Dec. 16, 2017

## MIGRATORY DOVE

Sept. 1-Nov. 29, 2017  
(mourning and white-winged)

## ANTELOPE

Archery: Sept. 23-Oct. 1, 2017 and Oct. 14-31, 2017

Muzzleloader: Oct. 2-9, 2017

Firearm: Oct. 6-9, 2017

## DEER

Youth: Sept. 2-10, 2017

Muzzleloader: Sept. 11-24, 2017

Archery: Sept. 11-Dec. 31, 2017

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

## TEAL

Low Plains: Sept. 9-24, 2017

High Plains: Sept. 16-24, 2017

## GREATER PRAIRIE CHICKEN

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

Regular Season (Greater Prairie Chicken Unit):

Nov. 18, 2017-Jan. 31, 2018

Southwest Unit: No open season for prairie chickens

## FALL TURKEY

Oct. 1-Nov. 28, 2017 and Dec. 11, 2017-Jan. 31, 2018

## WOODCOCK

Oct. 14-Nov. 27, 2017

## DUCKS

High Plains Unit: Oct. 7, 2017-Jan. 1, 2018 and Jan. 20-28, 2018

Low Plains Early Zone: Oct. 7-Dec. 3, 2017 and Dec. 16-31, 2017

Low Plains Late Zone: Oct. 28-Dec. 31, 2017 and Jan. 20-28, 2018

Low Plains Southeast Zone: Nov. 11-Dec. 31, 2017 and Jan. 6-28, 2018

## CANADA GEESE

Oct. 28-29, 2017 and Nov. 8, 2017-Feb. 18, 2018

## WHITE-FRONTED GEESE

Oct. 28-Dec. 31, 2017 and Jan. 27-Feb. 18, 2018

## LIGHT GEESE

Oct. 28-29, 2017 and Nov. 8, 2017-Feb. 18, 2018

Conservation Order: Feb. 19-April 30, 2018



## EXOTIC DOVE

Year-round

(Eurasian collared and ringed turtle doves only)

## TROUT

Nov. 1, 2017-April 15, 2018

## SANDILL CRANE

Nov. 8, 2017-Jan. 4, 2018

## CROW

Nov. 10, 2017-March 10, 2018

## PHEASANT

Youth: Nov. 4-5, 2017

Nov. 11, 2017-Jan. 31, 2018

## QUAIL

Youth: Nov. 4-5, 2017

Nov. 11, 2017-Jan. 31, 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

# Species Profile: **Common Snipe**

These solitary creatures may surprise you. First, you'll be surprised at how long their bills are. Or by the fact that their bills are actually flexible, not rigid. And how sensory organs located near the tip of their bill help them locate their next meal of insects and earthworms.

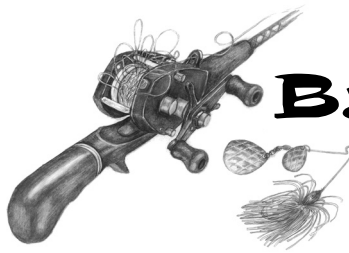
Then, you might be surprised by their flight pattern, as they dart away from you, flying in a zig-zag motion.

Or maybe it's their parenting skills that will surprise you most. After their young have hatched, adult snipes will sometimes split the brood, each parent caring for one or two of the chicks.

The range of noises they make is surprisingly long, too. From grinding "ticks" and startling "skrayt" calls, to the winnowing sounds they make with just their tail, snipe are a one-bird orchestra.

The next time you're in the marsh, surprise your friends and family by being able to identify this neat migratory bird.





# Backlash

with Mike Miller

## Ready or Not, Here We Come

on (twice). Ki enthusiastically retrieved his first ducks that day, but his delivery left much to be desired: he dropped the first one at water's edge and proceeded to dance excitedly around it, nipping feathers from the breast and ignoring my commands to fetch it back up.

On our second morning's hunt, Ki was just as excited and ran circles around us as we walked the 300 yards to the blind, as he had done on the first morning.

However, about half-way there, I lost Ki. I shined my headlamp ahead of us and found him. I could make out two eyes reflecting from inside the duck blind.

He was waiting impatiently, wondering what was taking us so long. He didn't understand shooting hour regulations on the second morning, either.

Ki is still mostly puppy, but that puppy has grown to 83 pounds of pure muscle. We've worked diligently this summer on training, and he loves it. It will be interesting to see how much sticks when the first live bird comes in.

In reality, Ki and I are both works in progress. He's learning what I want from him, and I'm learning how to teach him (and be patient). My past dogs learned basics at home, then by trial and error while hunting. But I don't think that's the best way to train, especially with a high-energy dog. I've read some retriever training books and talked to a trainer or two, but I've made as many mistakes as Ki has. I guess, if I'm patient, mistakes are nothing more than teachable moments. And if I correct mistakes the right way, on both of us, we both learn.

I've said it before, but working with and hunting with a dog strengthens your bond with them exponentially. It's amazing how much more calm and attentive Ki is after we return from training, too.

This dog is full of energy and requires attention and exercise. But I find his optimism refreshing. Each time I prepare to leave the house, Ki waits expectantly at the top of the stairs, just sure I need him to go along. Come this fall, he'll be right. 🐾

Ready or not, my year-and-a-half-old black Lab, Ki, will enter this fall as my full-time hunting dog. He gained some experiences last year, but he was young and raw. Really raw. His enthusiasm, though, was boundless and contagious and a year and a half later, that hasn't ceased.

His first duck hunt was a comedy skit made up of me trying to keep some semblance of control while he whined, lunged and generally went bonkers as ducks landed around us before legal shooting light. I know it was entertaining by the way my hunting partner, Rex, laughed, especially when Ki knocked me off the bucket I was sitting

The Nature  
Conservancy



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



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